

INDIA

Building on Local Forms of Communication



..... The ICT Environment
and Infrastructure



..... How Intermediary
Groups Use
Communication Tools
for Grassroots
Women's Empowerment



..... How Intermediary Groups
View Empowerment and
Communication



..... How Grassroots Women
View Communication Tools
and Empowerment

"I realised that the street play was able
to touch the heart of the viewers...
I think street plays are more useful."

INDIA FGD

MUMBAI

- 1. Stree Mukti Sanghatana
- 2. Vacha
- 3. Majlis

NEW DELHI

- 4. CREA
- 5. Nirantar
- 6. KRITI
- 7. Allaripu
- 8. Charka

DELHI

- 9. North East Network (NEN)

GUJRAT

- 10. Olakh
- 11. Kutch Mahila Vikas Sanghtana

JAIPUR

- 12. Vishakha

KERALA

- 13. Sakhi

BANGALORE

- Women's Voice
- 14. Sampark
- 15. AALI

KOLKATA

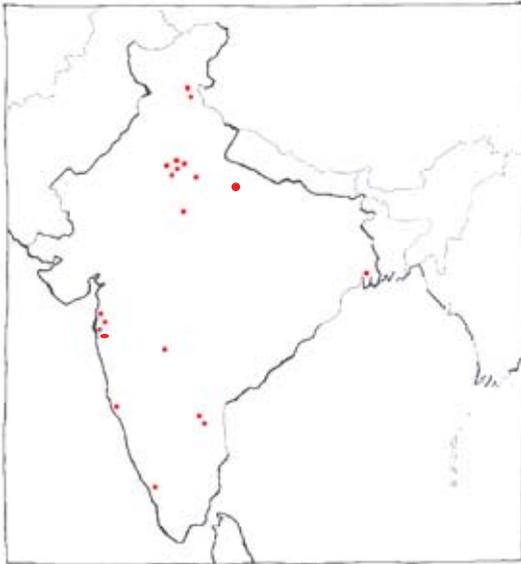
- 16. Swayam
- 17. Sanhita

MAHARASHTRA

- 18. MASUM

GOA

- 19. Bailanjo Sad





CHAPTER 2

THE ICT ENVIRONMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE IN INDIA

A 2007 McKinsey Global Institute study reports that India is forecasted to be the fifth-largest consumer market in the world, following the United States, Japan, China, and the United Kingdom (“India’s middle class”, 2007). Perhaps, this could be attributed to the fact that India has had a large middle class for many years (Varma, 1998). Furthermore, the study predicts that by 2025, India’s middle class alone would form the world’s third-largest country in terms of population, with almost double the population of the United States (“India’s middle class”, 2007).

These celebrations of India’s economic growth are common in recent years. For mainstream media, this growth is significant as the opening of markets has resulted in the consolidation of the media landscape (“3I makes second”, 2007; Srivastava, 2006; Tungate, 2006). Given a large, young market consuming huge amounts of information and entertainment, and a sizable base of information technology professionals, journalists, artists, and filmmakers from which a large volume of IT, entertainment and media export products and services comes, media and ICT in India present a diverse, vibrant and dynamic picture. The current status of the software development and mobile phones in India gives credence to this claim.

However, the divide between India’s rural and urban populations has been pronounced. For instance, inequality has grown faster in the past 15 years than in the past 50 years (Hallinan, 2006). The Human Poverty Index ranks India at 48 out of 95 countries as of 2002 (United Nations Human Development Programme [UNDP], 2005). India’s rural population comprises 71.5% as of 2004 (United Nations Human Development Programme [UNDP], 2006). In recent years, India’s economic growth and rising middle classes have furthered these divisions. While Indian Finance Minister P. Chidambaram

proclaimed the country's leap into modernity in 2006 stating, "Growth will be our mount, equity will be our companion, and social justice will be our destination," independent journalists such as Palagummi Sainath responded to such proclamations with reports of growing rural suicides and poverty (Hallinan, 2006). Also, even as analysts cite India as the fastest growing ICT market in the world today (Gartner, 2005), the reach of these new communication tools has been limited and unevenly diffused.

India is also an educated country, with more than 15,000 colleges and just fewer than 10 million students (Kapu and Mehta, 2004). However, this education is limited in its scope. Adult literacy stands at 65% according to the 2001 Census (male literacy was 75.85% and female literacy 54.16%). However, although this figure presents a significant increase from the 45% literacy rate of 2001, the country still has a considerable literacy-deficient population (Prasad, 2006). A report released in April 2007 by the National University of Educational Planning and Administration in collaboration with the HRD ministry revealed a crisis in primary education that led Human Resource Development (HRD) Minister Arjun Singh to give India one year to improve this sector ("One year", 2007). Some analysts blame this problem in primary education on the allocation of funding to higher education, which has taken a turn towards professional degrees (Altbech, 2005).

These contrasting realities render India's relationship to media and ICTs a dynamic and urgent study. The first part of this literature review will discuss the extent of the access, usage, and participation of each type of media and ICT. The second part will discuss ICTs as used by the social movements for their advocacies.

ACCESS USAGE AND PARTICIPATION BY TOOL

PRESS

The print industry in India, with its long and proud history, has its modern beginnings linked to the struggle for independence from British colonial rule (Srinivasan, 1998). Decades after gaining independence, the print media, as of 2004-2005, boasts of over 60,000 newspapers, the largest number of newspapers in any country in the world. As explained by Jeffrey (1993, as cited in Sonwalkar, 2002), the complexity and development of India's newspaper industry remains unsurpassed in any other country or continent. While in most industrialised countries, the past decade has witnessed a decline in the number and circulation of daily newspapers, this appears to be untrue for India as overall circulation was reported to have increased by 140% in the same decade. The reach of the press, however, is only 57% in urban areas and 24% in rural areas, according to studies like the Indian Readership Survey and the National Readership Survey (Rao, 2003). In addition,

the circulation of newspapers in big cities and metropolitan cities comprise the majority of the total circulation of all newspapers.

These newspapers and periodicals, reflecting the cultural diversity of India, are published in as many as 101 languages and dialects. Hindi is the language most used in publications (25,170), with English coming in second (9,222). Bilingual newspapers (4,083) are the third most numerous followed by Marathi (3,589), Urdu (3,141) and Bengali (3,061). These newspapers enjoy a total circulation of over 130 million copies. Hindi newspapers get the biggest share of total circulation with 57,194,489, followed by the English press with 22,718,958 copies. It is interesting to note that Hindi newspapers only surpassed the English ones in circulation after then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi lost in the 1977 general election. During her administration, she tried to enforce censorship and to muzzle the press (Sonwalkar, 2002). This 'Emergency' period, as it is infamously known, and the subsequent defeat of Gandhi might have led to the increase of regional leaders in national politics, a development that, in turn, spurred the regional language press, particularly those in the Hindi heartlands. Despite the fact that only a small percentage of the population uses English, this small segment is perceived to exercise control over areas that have professional prestige (Kachru, 1968 as cited in Sonwalkar, 2002).

One of the defining characteristics of the Indian press is its freedom. India has one of the freest presses in the world, which evolved as a result of its crucial role in the nation's struggle for independence. Before the nation's independence in 1947, publications became vehicles for protest and a voice for the people as journalists supported the cause. Indeed, press freedom owes its strong roots to this period. Print media are mostly owned and managed by private companies, the bulk of which (78.62%) are family-owned business enterprises (Joseph, 2004; Kohli, 2003). Thus, it has largely avoided state control and restrictions, except during the Emergency rule from 1975 - 1977. But for the most part, the post-Independence state tolerated criticisms and did not stifle the expressions of dissent (Datta-Ray, 1998). However, freedom of the press has ensured free market and intense competition. Publications no longer exist for profit but for survival as well. In order to be viable organisations, news publications could no longer rely on circulation revenues alone. Advertising revenues have gained much importance through the years. Particularly, since the 1990s, Indian media changed structurally, professionally and technologically (Sonwalkar, 2002) and the corporate perspective in journalism strengthened. Editorial practices changed, marketing became a priority, and more attention has been placed on the urban, affluent and 'modern' Indian (Srinivasan, 1998). Thus, at present, the press in India feeds on and is fed by the growing number of elite and middle class and is not fully in sync with the big segment of Indian society that is literacy-deficient.

TELEVISION

India is the world's third largest television market to date. As the television was a government medium of communication until the 1990s, the vision behind utilising it for the development programmes in rural areas was harnessed to the overall vision of development of the Indian state. In a 1995 historical study, Sevanti Ninan notes the impact of the mega serials and the entertainment programmes and advertisements that bound the village people in a common national identity. On the development programmes she notes, "Along with these welcome diversions television in India has also introduced both marginal and prosperous farmers to new farming practices that some have cautiously adopted. It has not, however, made family planning or universal primary education or emancipation of the girl child happen in any significant measure" (Ninan, 1995, p. 67).

The factors of poverty and caste are among the most well-known causes of why television did not reach everyone in rural India, and gender issues played a role as well. Added to this is the lack of regional language programmes as of 1995 (Ninan, 1995). Ninan's work sets the rural and the urban back and forth, revealing the parallel development of television as an entertainment technology, a contributor to the consumerist life style in urban areas, and as an agent in defining nationalism and utilising it as a pedagogic and development tool in the rural areas.

In the 1970s, more television stations were put up in six metropolitan cities. But it was in 1982 that the state-run national TV network, Doordarshan (DD), came into existence and became the sole broadcaster to introduce colored telecasts and to cater to the needs of an ethno-linguistically diverse India. This centralisation was justified as a move for national integration, for economic development and for the maintenance of national identity. Some, however, argued that this justification about the role of television in nation-building and development communication was mere rhetoric that covered up their actual role as state capitalists who were disinclined to give up their monopoly over their revenue-earning ventures (Pashupati, Sun & McDowell, 2003). Television broadcasting remained government-owned.

During the early 1990s, the monopoly of DD was broken when satellite television entered the picture and led to the liberalisation of the market. Transnational broadcasters began to beam shows and programs into Indian homes. By 1998, close to 70 cable and satellite channels made their presence felt in India. They include transnational players like STAR, MTV, Discovery, BBC, CNN, Disney, CNBC and Sony (Thussu, 1999). Doordarshan was compelled to compete with private satellite-to-cable channels such as CNN and Star TV and domestic channels Zee TV and Sun TV by re-launching its channels and forming more ethnic language ones. Some argued that this official tolerance for those transborder services is due more to India's "commitment to economic liberalisation" rather than to external pressure from the international satellite services or to a need to placate the middle

class with its apparent preference for a kind of TV that entertains (McDowell, 1987).

Despite these developments in cable and satellite services, which transformed the face of Indian television, DD continues to be the dominant broadcaster overall, due to the fact that it is the lone terrestrial broadcaster. International satellite-to-cable services transmit their signals from outside the country. In addition, cable operators are “required” to carry three DD channels that naturally led to a wider distribution (Joshi, 1996 as cited in Sinclair and Harrison, 2004). According to DD (2003), there are television sets in more than 81 million homes, covering as many as 436.3 million viewers -- a far cry from the 1.5 million TV homes that existed in 1980 (Chandrasekhar, 1999). Television homes are increasing at a rate of 4 % per annum (IBEF, 2006b).

Although the penetration percentages of cable and satellite TV are low, India remains one of the largest cable television markets in the world, with a subscriber base estimated at more than 30 million (Sinclair & Harrison, 2004). Figures also indicate that the conversion from terrestrial homes to cable and satellite homes is much faster than conversion to TV homes. In spite of initial perceptions of satellite TV being a vehicle for “cultural invasion,” these channels, ironically, helped spur the increase in the number of Indian channels. Transnationals have had to adapt their strategies to suit the Indian market and tastes. Discovery Channel dubs its documentaries into Hindi while BBC World shows ‘India-specific’ programs that include news in Hindi. Television also aided in the rapid growth of media in non-Hindi languages. For instance, Sun TV transmitted more programs in Tamil language; Eenadu channel is in Telugu language; and other major cable channels are in Malayalam and Kannada.

In terms of gender-specific consumer practices, class, caste, and urban-rural divides affect viewer preferences. One 2003 study of rural women’s viewing of satellite television notes that women preferred direct messages, agricultural programmes, national integration programmes, need-based programmes on diet and health, as well as cultural programmes such as folk songs and plays (Agarwal & Kumkum, 2003). In a 1994 Doordarshan viewership survey, in rural situations as well as in urban ones, men and women are attracted by different attributes of television. Seventy-three percent of men expected television to provide news, against only 13% of the women. Both men and women, judging by the picture that emerges from the Doordarshan’s viewership survey, ultimately plumb first for entertainment in the regional language. However, regional news comes a very close second. Furthermore, if the development information is packaged as entertainment or news, receptivity increases greatly (Ninan, 1995).

RADIO

A 2001 study argues that villages in Maharashtra have transitioned from the stage of oral communication into the electronic age of mass communication (Johnson, 2001). This

is a result of radio and television. Societies that were defined and organised by their oral traditions and stories are now being structured and reorganised by a foreign source, through television (Johnson, 2001). In addition, the majority of villagers, literate or not, have access to knowledge and information unobtainable twenty years ago (Johnson, 2001).

Radio and television share a few things in common. They both started out as an experiment for the government. And they were both, until recently, monopolised by the government. However, the radio started much earlier in 1923. In 1927, a private organisation, the Indian Broadcasting Company, began broadcasting on a regular basis. The government then took over broadcasting in 1930 under the Indian State Broadcasting Service which was later renamed to All-India Radio (AIR). The network which started with only six radio stations at the time of Independence, gradually expanded. By the end of 2005, AIR has 222 broadcasting centres consisting of 144 medium-wave transmitters, 54 short wave ones, and 158 FM ones. It has an excellent coverage, with 91.42% geographic coverage and 99.13% population reach. Like the television, All India Radio was meant for developing national consciousness and maintaining national unity. It was also used as a tool to educate the illiterate segments of society, particularly at that time of Independence when the literacy rate was a very low 18%. However, subsequent governments squandered the chance to maximise the medium and AIR became a propaganda tool for whoever was in power at that time (Thussu, 1999). Broadcasters tended to toe the official line and refrained from criticising the government. As such, radio became a key tool for state persuasion and propaganda.

The liberalisation of the economy in the early 1990s also introduced changes in the landscape of radio broadcasting. Moreover, a landmark Supreme Court decision in 1995 ruled that broadcasting should be controlled by the public as different from the Government. This led to a comprehensive national media policy that recommended that broadcasters transmit from within the country, effectively ending the government's monopoly over broadcasting. Thus, radio was opened to private investments. With the privatisation of FM radio stations, broadcasting has changed from a state monopoly to a highly commercialized venture (Thombre, 2000 as cited in Jayaprakash, 2000). Non-government organizations and development agencies wanted to obtain licenses for community radio broadcasting, but policies on such have yet to be formulated, thus putting a dampener on the development of community radio stations in India (Mehta, 1999 in Jayaprakash, 2000). But local radio stations continue to be established because they reach the diverse and remote audiences more effectively. However, these stations have increasingly functioned like commercial radio stations, defeating the concept of community radio (Jayaprakash, 2000).

In November 2006, India's Ministry of Information and Broadcasting opened up the airwaves for community-based FM broadcasting. This new policy would allow a nonprofit organization with minimum three years of registration to apply for permission to engage

in community-based FM programming. India is the first country in South Asia to have a Community Radio Policy separate from that of mainstream radio (Community Radio Network, 2007). In March 2007, Shri S. K. Arora, Secretary of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting of India announced the establishment of 4000 community radio stations over the next few years (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation [UNESCO], 2007). Arora made the announcement during the national consultation on the practice and potential of community radio, which was attended by radio operators at the Indian Institute of Mass Communication (IIMC) (UNESCO, 2007). The consultation meeting was organised by both the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting of India and UNESCO and was attended by over 150 representatives from the government, bilateral agencies, umbrella NGOs, grassroots community workers, and both mainstream media and community radio (UNESCO, 2007).

Overall, the number of radios doubled to approximately 111 million from 1991 to 2002 (Library of Congress, 2004). It remains the cheapest available electronic medium and a popular source of news and entertainment, particularly Bollywood and regional film songs. Based on AIR listenership, it is evident that the radio is more popular in the rural than in the urban areas.

NEW ICTS

According to an International Data Corporation (IDC) study (as cited in IBEF, 2006a), India enjoys the title of the fastest-growing and fourth largest IT market in Asia-Pacific, propelled mainly by exports. The key areas that have contributed significantly to the industry's exports include software and IT-enabled services (ITES)-Business Processing Outsourcing (BPO) sectors. The rising use of computer and the Internet among the public became a defining mark as well of recent times.

SOFTWARE DEVELOPMENT

The Indian economy has benefited much from its software sector. The National Association of Software and Services Companies (NASSCOM) (as cited in UNDP, 2005) estimated that during the periods 1990-2004, the IT software and service exports have been increasing at 50% per year or doubling every 18 to 24 months. In 2004-2005, the exports were valued at US\$17.2 billion, an increase of 34% from US \$12.8 billion in 2003-2004. This sector is recognized as the single biggest contributor to incremental market capitalization in the country (IBEF, 2006a). Also, the ratio of IT software and service revenues to GDP grew from 0.72% in 1997-1998 to 1.81% in 2000-2001 and further grew to 2.64% in 2003-2004. However, its contribution though to the GDP remains small relative to those of agriculture and manufacturing. Presently, IT companies in India are doing business with

120 countries, 90% of which is with USA, Europe and Japan (Singh, 2005).

India has also become a research and development hub for software. For instance, the world's largest search engine, Google, has set up a research and development centre in Bangalore, where leading web portal Yahoo! also undertakes research and development work. IBM has also set up a research laboratory in Delhi and has 70 researchers in India. India's Software Technology Parks in some urban areas provide the necessary infrastructure and telecommunications facilities that allow the export processing of software to be highly productive. One study projects that the employment in the software industry will grow to 2.2 million in 2008 which would then account for 8% of the formal employment in India (UNDP, 2001).

IT-ENABLED SERVICES (ITES) - BUSINESS PROCESSING OUTSOURCING (BPO)

The service sector is the area where the ICT revolution has opened up whole new opportunities for India. Acknowledged as the "outsourcing centre of the world," India has established itself as the preferred global sourcing base in IT-enabled services and Business Processing Outsourcing (BPO). A study by the market firm IDC estimated that India had cornered 70% of the call centre business process outsourcing and the BPO sector witnessed a growth of 70% in 2001-02 and 65% in 2002-2003 (Rao, 2006).

COMPUTER

During 2002-2003, sales of personal computer in India rose 37% to 2.3 million units compared to 1.7 million units sold in the previous year. This steep decrease in the price of PCs has contributed much to the growing Internet use in India. The PC population has continually increased through the years and by 2005, there was already an estimated 14.5 million personal computers. However, the usage of the PCs is still a low 1.34 per 100 people (Singh, 2005).

INTERNET

While Internet in India commenced in the late 1980s with the launching of the Education and Research Network (ERNET), the arrival of the Internet for the ordinary Indian occurred in August 1995 when Videsh Sanchar Nigam Limited (VSNL) launched its gateway services (Nikam, Ganesh & Tamizhchelvan, 2004). Initially, only a few manifested interest in the services, but during the late 1990s, a boom occurred in the number of users, particularly among the youth and business professionals. It is estimated that by the year 2003, the total number of Internet users in India was around 30 million (Rao, 2006). It was

also in the late 1990s that the government allowed for private participation by providing free licenses to 132 private Internet service providers (ISPs) (Singh, 2005). Presently, no restriction exists on the number of service providers. Another policy also permits ISPs to establish international gateways after a security clearance has been granted them. These ISPs can even buy bandwidth from foreign satellites.

An average of 3.4% of the population in larger cities uses the Internet. The usage in smaller cities, particularly in rural areas, and among lower-income groups is much smaller. Close to half of the net users surf at cyber cafes which have been gaining increasing popularity through the years (Flonnet.com, 2004 as cited in Rao, 2003). However, as of 2003, there is only 0.1 Internet cafe per 10,000 people (ISP Association of India as cited in Rao, 2003).

Broadband connections rose 21 times between January 2005 and January 2006 (Kohli-Khandekar, 2007). In a single year, the number surged from 47,000 to 1 million connections (Kohli-Khandekar, 2007). The infrastructure for broadband in India, while not complete, is nearly ready (Kohli-Khandekar, 2007). Several operators have constructed 670,000 route kilometers of optical fibres, which reach into the interiors of the country (Kohli-Khandekar, 2007). The process continues as Bharat Sanchar Nigam Ltd, one of India's largest telecommunications companies, has connected 30,000 of its 35,000 exchanges using optical fibre (Kohli-Khandekar, 2007).

While these figures paint a very optimistic image of India's access to telecommunications technologies, the total Internet subscriber base of 7.5 million is only 12% of total cable TV homes, or just 10% of mobile phones (Kohli-Khandekar, 2007).

Despite India having a reputation as a major global hub of innovation, the country only ranks 63rd in the Technology Achievement Index (TAI) (UNDP, 2001). The TAI presents data on the performance of 72 countries in creating and diffusing technology and in building a human skills base. It measures eight indicators in 4 dimensions: creation of technology, use of old and new innovations, and the development of a technologically-aware pool of human skill. This low TAI ranking is because the different states in India vary considerably in technological achievement. Moreover, adult illiteracy is still high despite the fact that the country has the world's seventh largest number of scientists and engineers (UNDP, 2001). Based on 2002 figures, the percentage of Internet users in India is only 1.65%. According to Vanita Kohli-Khandekar's 2006 study, comparing India's percentage with the percentage of users in other countries like the U.S., Canada and Australia, the digital divide becomes very much apparent (Kohli-Khandekar, 2006).

TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Initially, the sole provider of telecommunications services was the Department of Telecommunications. But during the 1990s, crucial reforms in telecommunications were

implemented. The mobile phone market and the fixed services market were opened up to private operators in 1992 and 1994, respectively. Then in 1999, the national long distance operations followed suit. The establishment of the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) was critical in the implementation of these reforms. Currently, India has the fifth largest telecommunication network in the world (Singh, 2005) comprised of 49.57 million basic telephone users and 92.52 million mobile phone users. India is the world's fastest growing market for mobile phones. Mobile phones, creating opportunities for society to stay connected, comprise more than half of the phones in the country.

Cellular or mobile telephone services are available in 1,452 Indian cities and towns. The cellular services show a healthy growth as the number of subscribers almost doubles every year. The gross subscriber base of the fixed and mobile services reached 113.07 million at the end of the quarter of July-September 2005, from 104.22 million last June 2005. This was an increase of 8.49% during the quarter (IBEF, 2006c).

Tele-density has also increased from 8.95 in 2004 to 11.32 by the end of December 2005. However, most of the telecom infrastructures are still found in the urban areas. Urban tele-density is 34.77 while rural tele-density is only 1.79. In 2006, urban users numbering over 127 million outnumber the rural users, only numbering over 14 million, by a great margin. However, access to telephones in the villages has improved in the late 1990s through the introduction of the Public Call Office (PCO) run by local shopkeepers. More than 60% of the villages have at least one phone. This also includes over 800,000 Village Public Telephones (VPTs) (DOI, 2001). In 2005, the number of mobile phones succeeded that of landlines (Kohli-Khandekar, 2007).

FILM AND VIDEO

India is the world's largest and most prolific producer of feature films. Approximately 800 to 1,000 films are produced annually, whereas Hollywood produces only half that number (Sridhar & Mattoo, 1997 as cited in Srinivas, 2002). The number of admissions is the highest in the world. In 2004, around 934 films were produced, with more than 3.1 billion admissions. In 2005, there were 1,041 films made - and this figure refers only to the feature films. Presently, the industry is worth about US \$1,256 million and is expected to grow at annual rate of 18% for the next five years (IBEF, 2006b). Despite its early beginnings, prolific nature, and continued success, Indian cinema only attained industry status from the government in 1998-1999. The film business is decentralised and regional cinema holds much importance. The internationally and locally popular, Bollywood films from Bombay produce Hindi-language films. Their popularity extends even to non-Hindi speaking areas, which do not seem to mind the language barrier. According to industry estimates, Hindi-language films in general have a 40% share of the Indian film market (IBEF, 2006c).

Bombay cinema also has a steady market overseas and is being exported. Individual states like Bengal, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Kerala also produce films in their regional languages and are widely consumed in their states and language boundaries but their markets both nationally and internationally are more limited. However, recent trends show that due to the growing popularity of DVDs and the Internet, viewership of regional films may no longer be confined to specific areas (IBEF, 2006b). International films dubbed in local Indian languages are also becoming increasingly popular.

Popular cinema in India attempts to cater to a population highly diverse in terms of language, class, caste, age, religion, gender, educational background, and rural-urban setting. Unlike Hollywood films, which create niche markets and genre films, Indian films typically take on the diversity of the population to ensure its broad appeal (Srinivasan, 2002). The films try to offer something for everyone. They provide song-and-dance sequences, drama, romance, action, comedy, slapstick, and folk humour all at the same time. They are oriented towards group viewing. Indian films are seen to have an integrative function and a role in shaping national public culture.

Even with the strong presence of Hollywood films, Indians have always had a strong appetite for their own movies. However, Indian film industry seems to be experiencing a downturn in recent years. The number of screens available to the billion-strong population is low relative to other countries (IBEF, 2006b). With around 12,000 cinemas that are mostly single-screen (as opposed to multiplex), the average screen density is only 12 screens per a million population. The US and the UK averages are much higher at 117 and 30 screens (per million), respectively (IBEF, 2006b). Moreover, around 60% of the theatres are located in the four Indian southern states of Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Karnataka servicing only 22% of the population. As such, the regional disparity is quite apparent.

In addition, piracy is rampant. Average ticket prices have also gone up. More importantly, people have been shying away from the song-and-dance melodramas that have entertained them for decades. In 2002, in particular, flops were numerous and margins had gone down. A recent report indicated that the influx of Indian films and film music programs on television has contributed greatly to the dwindling attendance of moviegoers. Many channels are largely film-based, thus allowing the people to enjoy the movies within the comforts of their own homes. It could be that television, with its wide array of world cinema features to choose from, could be changing the taste of the public. While television use has increased, cinema has remained the same as of 1997 (Kohli, 2004). Nevertheless, film remains a profitable industry, especially with the sale of TV rights in India and the international cinema and music rights that cater specifically to the diasporic Indians now based or working in the US or United Kingdom (MacKinnon, 2000 as cited in Sinclair & Harrison, 2004). The film industry has increasingly sought out these diasporic viewers, which contributed largely to the expansion of the overseas market. There is also

a huge base for growth in the home video area. India has over five million home video and DVD subscribers. With the current penetration levels, the home video sector presents an exciting area for growth. It is expected to grow over 30% in the next five years (IBEF, 2006b).

FOLK MEDIA/INDIGENOUS PERFORMING ARTS

In India, the role of new media for information dissemination has been a challenge due to many factors such as illiteracy, poverty, non-connectivity in the remote villages as well as social factors such as caste and class (Parekh, 2003). On the other hand, India also has a wealth of methods (traditional and folk) which address people's questions and disseminate information (Parekh, 2003). It is also necessary to know that during the upsurge of social reforms and the ensuing nationalist phase in the colonial period, traditional media were given a dimension of social and political awareness. Art was harnessed to social and political ends (Parekh, 2003). Today, song, dance and theatre or visual arts are very often expected to disseminate some social message (Parekh, 2003).

India is one of the first developing countries to make a directed move to preserve the cultural identity of their indigenous performing arts and bring a sense of functional relevance to them (Lent, 1980). The Indian government in 1954 established a Song and Drama Division as an arm of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting to harness the developmental functions of a variety of performing arts such as drama, dance-drama, puppet shows, folk recitals, folk and tribal plays. It aimed to tap the abundant folk and traditional means of communication in order to create awareness among Indians about the different national programmes that exist, particularly in rural areas (Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 2006b). Presently, the Division has twelve regional centres located in various parts of the country. It has in its roster artists that include folk and traditional ones, and private, registered troupes which are being commissioned to present performances on a variety of developmental issues and to effectively convey messages on themes like national integration and socio-economic schemes. According to the Song and Drama Division website, since this establishment, there has been an average of 36,000 folk performances all over the country. Given the diversity in India, the abundance of traditional art forms in India is no longer surprising. Some examples are puppet plays, *Katha* which is the art of storytelling in a song, spoken word, mime and impersonation, song varieties like Yellama, Bhajan and Kirtan, dance-dramas like Yakshagana, and folk dramas like Jatra, Nautanki, Bhavai, and Tamasha.

Other forms of storytelling exist. The *Harikatha* is a discourse in story and song as told by just one person. Its basic aim is to communicate religious experiences and their social implications. The *Kavi Gan* or the poet's song is a typical folk form in the Negali region which uses impromptu dialogue between two groups of poets. The songs propose

solutions to societal problems such as famine. *Tamasha* is the folk theatre of Maharashtra which uses a harmonious blend of music, drama and dance. *Burra-katha* is the ballad singing popular in Andhra Pradesh. *Burra-katha* performers have chronicled people's activities, customs and social practices, as well as communicated hopes of the future. The Indian government used this folk form to convey messages of self-reliance, cooperative effort, and rural development to rural audiences (Lent, 1980).

Everyday communication forms are also gender and class-specific, a phenomenon not limited to India. A 2003 study on television viewing by rural women demonstrates that the interactions among women are also stratified, in which the rich interact with each other more often than the poor thereby showing higher level of cohesion among the rich as compared to the poor. This is also because there is little gain from each other among the poor as compared to the rich. Structural inequality between the poor (scheduled caste) and the rich (high jatis) is sharp and well demarcated. Means of production are controlled by the high jatis, while scheduled castes are exploited in various forms. However, there is only positional inequality and that too is very prominent among high and intermediate jatis between men and women, whereas there is more equality among scheduled castes between men and women (Agarwal & Kumkum, 2003).

Nagmani Rao's 1995 study makes note of the role of oral communication in grassroots women's organising, arguing that this form of communication is significant in the organising process (Rao, 1995). This involves various forms such as discussion, chatting and sharing experiences. The significance of this must be understood in the context of the expectation of women's silence and relegation to private, rather than public spaces, in comparison to men. Rao traces the experience of talking to women from the initial separate meetings with the grassroots women to the field visits and participating in women's work, to catching up during informal chatting over meals, to the emergence of public meetings and group discussions (Rao, 1995). In the instance wherein a disagreement between women had to be resolved in a village public meeting, the silence of women is contrasted with the later, more private communication of their dissatisfaction with the decision taken in the public meeting (Rao, 1995). This fundamental form of communication played an integral part in the organising process and in the women's everyday lives.

FACTORS AFFECTING COMMUNICATION TOOLS

ECONOMIC

India's focus on economic liberalisation at the start of the 1990s allowed for many of the developments in the different media and ICT sectors to come to fruition. The Economic Policy of 1991 put to end the centralised approach governing many sectors and made possible the deregulation, privatisation and liberalisation of economic

activities, not to mention the strengthening of Westernisation and consumerism. There was streamlining of foreign direct investment process, the opening up of foreign direct investment and ownership of new sectors, and the exemption of the ICT industry from corporate income tax for a few years (Digital Opportunity Initiative [DOI], 2001). The entry of international and domestic players dismantled the state monopolies, opened up the competition, changed the quality of services, and provided more choices to the public. For instance, more television channels in regional languages emerged. More private FM radio channels were offered. Liberalisation of the national and international long distance sector led to the establishment of private companies whose consequent competition has led to the reduction in tariffs (IBEF, 2006c). Such economic reforms have contributed to India's integration into the global economy, particularly through the growth in the export of software and software services.

Presently, India's economy looks bright. According to the IBEF website, India's growth curve has been continually increasing, characterised by an annual growth of 8%, rising foreign exchange reserves, a booming capital market, and a surge in exports. As a result, people's incomes are steadily on the rise leading to increased spending powers. Between 1995 to 2002, close to 100 million people became part of the rich and middle classes. On the average, 30 to 40 million people are joining the middle class every year. The changing economic status can be found not just in class A cities but also in the class B and C cities. This translates to bigger consumption and higher demands for mobile phones, televisions and other products. There has also been an observed increase in demand from television homes to acquire cable connections.

As it is, India already has the world's biggest middle class. A big market like that could hardly be ignored, both by local and international players. Consequently, media, to a significant extent, has taken into consideration the characteristics, aspirations, interests and needs of such a big segment of society in choosing what information they present and how they present these. There have been changes in the content of publications and in the programming of television and radio stations to cater to the changing demographics.

The changing global landscape that has exerted performance pressures on multinational enterprises is a key factor in the high demand for Indian IT services and IT-enabled services. These pressures include the need for reduced costs; reduced risks; high quality infrastructure, and improved quality of service to enhance its competitiveness in the global market. For many of the services that these global corporations require, around 50-90% of the processing can be outsourced, with 70-80% of the costs significantly reduced (Rao, 2003). Given these, the Indian IT and ITES industry, relative to other countries, has been perceived as highly attractive in terms of financial structure, business environment, and people and skills environment (IBEF, 2006).

POLITICAL

Boldly addressing the nation on March 22, 1998, Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee pledged in behalf of the government to strive hard in order to make India a global information Technology power (cited in Nikam, Ganesh, & Tamizhchelvan, 2004). Years later, India continues to move towards becoming a superpower in this era of knowledge revolution. The Government of India has articulated a vision of becoming an information superpower. It is clearly paying attention to the importance and use of IT and creating an environment for the workforce to become involved in information activities. The government is also taking proactive measures to ensure that the policy environment is conducive enough to encourage investments in the different sectors. The state governments have also been proactive in attracting and facilitating investments and are also supportive in the development of special infrastructures. The Government of India had also authored many forward-looking policies that recognise the importance of access in the achievement of the country's economic and social goals.

SOCIO-CULTURAL

In trying to understand the sheer diversity and number of media, whether the traditional folk media or the modern celluloid in India, one only has to look at the marked ethno-linguistic diversity of the population. For instance, the print media is characterised by a large number of players occupying specific geographies. Indian filmmakers also put premium on this diversity when they make films that tries to include all the elements in order to appeal to everyone.

Literacy of the population is likewise a factor to explain some developments in the ICT. Low levels of literacy explain why, despite India's image as a technology-savvy nation and its large pool of scientists and engineers, it still ranks quite low in the Technological Advancement Index. However, there are indications that literacy is improving as well. In 2001, the census found that there was a 13% rise in the number of literate people since the 1991 census (Sonwalkar, 2000). Because of this, the circulation of newspapers is also on the rise. To illustrate, one of the reasons why *Dainik Jagran*, India's leading daily, has been able to sustain its leadership position in the market the last few years is because the number of literates in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Jharkhand – which are *Dainik Jagran* 'baliwicks' – has risen drastically (IBEF, 2006b). Among the literate population, English speakers form a significant proportion, and it is this large pool of English speakers that is considered as one of the key advantages of India, especially in the IT and ITES sector. Global corporations often cite this as one of the reasons why India is a preferred sourcing base.

There have also been some moves towards making new ICTs more accessible, such as One World South Asia's (OWSA) moves towards constructing multilingual web-creation and hosting services in local languages, for use by the non-profit sector (Bhardwaj, 2006).

GENDER SPECIFIC DATA ON ACCESS, USAGE, CONTROL, AND PARTICIPATION

Gender divisions exacerbated by poverty and lack of access to education are also reflected in divides regarding media and information-communication. For example, in addition to the literacy divides discussed above, political participation among women is also considerably lacking in comparison to men (Bhardwaj, 2006). In 2000, there were only 44 women representatives in the Indian governing body known as the Lok Sabha, compared to 499 men (Bhardwaj, 2006).

However, India is one of the countries where women have been able to make their presence felt in highly-skilled work, working as software programmers or computer analysts. Women occupy nearly 20% of the professional jobs in the software industry, although the percentages are higher in Bangalore and Calcutta (Mitter, 2000 as cited in Gurumurthy, 2004). Women comprise 37% of employees in the IT-enabled service sector (Usha, 2003). The gender divides in education and access are made manifest in gender disparities in the skills-levels of IT workers. For instance, the number of women in IT jobs which require more advanced skills, such as engineering and systems analysis, remain low (Usha, 2003).

A 2005 study by Sumit Roy argues that the domination of the workforce by men however is not due to a gender bias, stating that even the early surveys in 1990 do not report any overt discrimination against women in industry. Both these studies have reported that the industry offered a more relaxed and less discriminatory atmosphere of reaching a position of seniority in this industry than others.

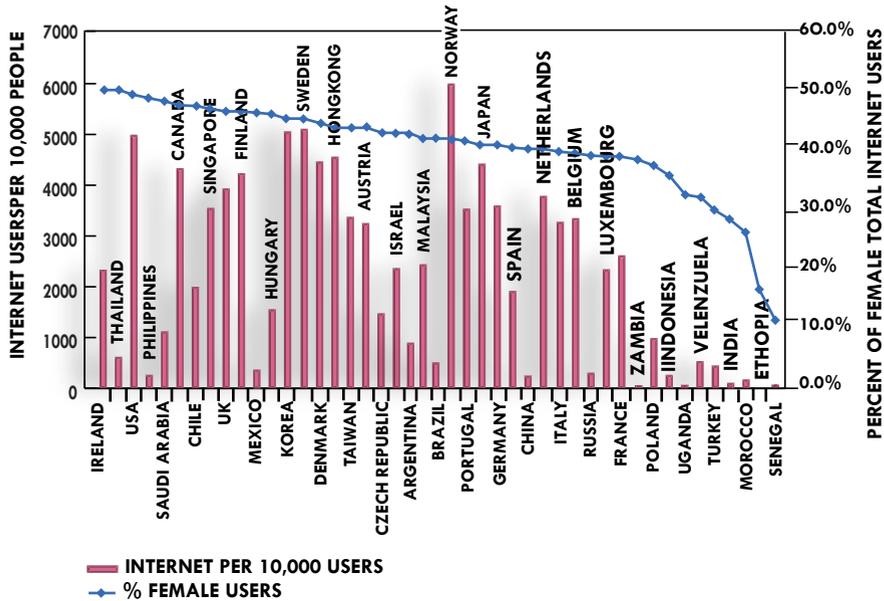
However, the reasons cited in surveys on women's under-achievement reveal that infrastructural and societal discrimination structures women within the workplace—contextual sexism makes its way into an industry that perhaps, is less overtly discriminatory than others. This is due to women's lack of international mobility, due to family commitments, regulations against night work preventing companies from hiring them for round-the clock contracts and the reluctance of some international clients to hire women consultants, especially in the Middle East (Roy, 2005). Nevertheless, Roy believes that the declining dependence of the industry on on-site contracts may remove some biases against women.

In finance and banking sector, he says women employees are increasingly looking at their work in terms of career prospects and are keen on learning new skills and advancing their careers in spite of obstacles and have been organising themselves into unions and separate women's caucuses within and outside unions (Roy, 2005). He affirms this as an important transition as the introduction of information technology is posing critical questions in relation to the impact on the workforce in relation to the prospects of job losses and declining employment levels, pressure for flexibility, changes in job content, increase in insecurity in the workplace and loss of union power, rise the proportion of 'non-bargainable' staff that is those without an automatic right to unionize as compared to 'bargainable staff, and changes in grading and pay, information and control, the autonomy of employees and changes in health and safety conditions (Roy, 2005).

In the print media, there is as yet no current and credible data on women journalists in Indian media (Joseph, 2004). But undoubtedly, the number of Indian women in the mainstream press had reached levels not imagined before. Since early 1990s, female bylines could be seen not just in feature sections of magazines but in editorial and front pages of newspapers as well. There now exists a large number of female staff reporters and copy editors, senior editors, chief reporters, chiefs of bureaus, business and sports journalists, and many others. They also write on a broad range of issues and events that include high-profile subjects such as politics and business. Additionally, the international women's news syndicate Women's Feature Service collaborates with SANGAT, a South Asian initiative on peace, gender and human rights. These bodies collaborate to publish pieces topics such as the Naga Mothers Association and Dalit women's activist Ruth Manorama (Women's Feature Service [WFS], 2005; 2006).

However, not all women in the journalism profession could enjoy these opportunities. There are still major differences in the situation of female journalists across the country. For instance, recruitment of women is still frowned upon in many places and in certain sections of the press. In other cases, a glass ceiling occurs wherein women are kept from occupying the top positions in an organisation, especially newspaper ones, simply because they are women. Also, only a few of them can be found in decision-making positions. For other women, they are more prone to be relegated to assignments that are considered as "ladies beat." Relative to the press, broadcasting seems to be an easier arena for women to break into. Women are certainly visible on the small screen, including news programmes as anchors or correspondents. However, the senior positions are mostly held by men. In the same way, the technical positions such as video editing are areas in which women are a minority.

In terms of media access, one study in the mid-1990s (Batliwala, et al 1998 as cited in Joseph, 2004) found that only 15% of the 1,171 female respondents from some parts of Karnataka reported regularly reading newspapers or magazines. Based on this same study,

FIGURE 1. TOTAL INTERNET USERS AND FEMALE INTERNET USERS, 2003

SOURCE: HUYER AND MILLER, 2003

it was also found that around 55% reported listening to the radio and 27% watched TV programmes at least occasionally. Nearly half of those who reported watching TV said their families do not possess a TV set, a phenomenon known as access without ownership. Of those with access, only 60% reported about being able to watch programs only occasionally while 21% watched once every third day or so. Internet usage, on the other hand, for Indian women is not yet a common thing. Compared to other countries, the percentage of female to total Internet user is quite low (see **Figure 1** as cited in Gurmurthy, 2004).

ICT USAGE BY SOCIAL MOVEMENTS FOR VARIOUS ADVOCACIES IN GENERAL (ICTS BY TYPE/ FORM)

- A community Internet access programme was set up in the Kannakkapura area by NGO Voices of Bangalore for persons with disabilities.
- A village knowledge centre was put up by the MS Swaminathan Research Foundation in their project village in Pondicherry. The center benefits the fishing communities in Veerampatinam in Pondicherry by giving them access to information about wave heights and wind directions in the Bay of Bengal that is being announced through the public address system. The information being broadcast here are first downloaded from a website before being disseminated.

- Foundation of Occupational Development (FOOD) is shaping e-governance initiatives in the area of Tamil Nadu. They also provide CDs on agricultural best practices which could help the local farmers.
- Drishtree has set up a total of 90 Internet kiosks across 5 Indian states as part of the ICT infrastructure.
- Handheld computers were provided by the India healthcare project in Rajasthan to their health workers to reduce data entry and facilitate decision-making.
- The Gyandoot Government-to-Citizen network was a rural community network initiative that aimed to meet the information needs such as agricultural commodity prices in nearby markets and land records, among others.
- Maharashtra has a Geographic Information System (GIS) based disaster management information system to improve resource mobilisation, decision making and situation monitoring.
- Gujarat has IT-enabled machines at the milk collection centres of the Amul Cooperative, which are used to measure butterfat content and to increase the efficiency of payment to farmers. It has reduced the tendency of adding water to the milk to increase its quantity and it has also reduced the time of payments from 10 days to merely minutes.
- Wordlinks has plans to bridge the digital divide by training the secondary school teachers in 125 Indian schools in the classroom applications of IT. They have also provided connectivity, basic computer literacy and professional development training to teachers in Gujarat, Punjab, Delhi, Karnataka, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu.
- SARI has utilised Wireless Local Loop (WLL) technology in deploying telephones and Internet in the villages. They have also linked with content developers and application providers in encouraging a variety of Internet content useful to rural areas. It has also collaborated with the Dhan Foundation for Agricultural Information systems and transactions.
- Tamil Nadu's Nellikuppam has launched a kiosk system of 40 Internet connections in the village. A portal named Indiagrilline.com has been created with the latest weather updates, fertiliser and pesticide stock positions of dealers in the area, among others.
- Warana Wired provides a network of kiosks for information services in agriculture, medicine and education in up to 70 villages around Maharashtra's Warana River.
- The NIIT's Hole in the Wall experiment exposed the children in the slums to the Internet.
- DATPERS provides electronic newsletters on issues related to dalit and tribal people in India and helping to coordinate international human rights campaigns.

FOR EMPOWERING GRASSROOTS WOMEN (ICTS BY TYPE AND FORM)

From this sampling of projects that have involved grassroots women, a majority employed the ICT tools like computer, Internet, software, etc.

- Datamation Foundation set up an ICT centre at the Babool-Ulm-Madrasa, Seelampur in North East Delhi. They provide electronic training modules in CDs to modernise the training of the vocational skills. To date, a total of 40 vocational training and skill-building modules have been provided for and used by the Muslim women in the community.
- Dhan Foundation in South India has experimented with low-cost handheld devices that record transactions and data transfer in their micro-credit programs with poor women. They have initiated the use of the i-Station and DataVision, which are handheld devices that facilitate micro finance activities. The pilot shows that the devices has allowed for increased operational efficiency that reduced the cost and time spent by the poor women's groups in record maintenance.
- Swayam Krishi Sangam in Andhra Pradesh is also using Management Information Systems (MIS) to process the transactions in their local microfinance project. The use of smartcards has reduced the time needed for weekly village meetings when savings and loan transactions occur.
- CoOptions, in cooperation with the local government, has introduced the software solution package called *Mahila Spurthi*. The package provides management solution to self-help women groups. Kiosks have been put up to facilitate fund transfer and management. The venue also helps the women to interact with the banks and coordinate with the government agencies.
- Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) has developed a software that generates customised reports such as membership lists. They have also made software for exhibitions and for shops that generates reports by means of a barcode system.
- A project in Nyala, Jaipur district, Rajasthan also provided smart cards to local cow-owners to computerise transaction at milk collection centers. This ensures prompt payments so that there would not be any issues regarding rightful payments. The project will connect six dairies in Rajasthan state.
- The UNDP conducted the Sustainable Dryland Agriculture by Mahila Sangams, in Andra Pradesh which explores the building of a computerized biodiversity database at the village level. The information will also attempt to maintain gender-disaggregated village database by collecting basic demographic information, land moving patterns and income profiles.
- The Ajit Foundation in Jaipur, in cooperation with the Barefoot College in Tilonia has developed a software labelled Jal-Chitra that facilitates the management of water resources. It uses a geographic information system (GIS) that creates an interactive

water-map of the entire village enabling the community to keep records of water availability. The system also keeps records of water quality testing, estimate water demand, appropriate maintenance work, generate monthly water budgets and even show the amount of need met through the rainwater harvesting system. It has been able to help local institution make more informed decisions regarding their water sources.

- SEWA's Trade Facilitation Centre has met success in its e-Commerce efforts supported by its websites www.banascraft.org, www.kutchcraft.org and www.sewamart.com.
- Foundation of Occupational Development (FOOD) put women in contact with a group of computer operators that provide supportive functions for online selling. The programme helps eliminate the middle person in product selling with India Shop, an online e-commerce network designed to market merchandise made by rural women's groups. This has resulted to greater profit margins by allowing them to obtain higher prices for their products. They also provided broadband Internet access to the community. On the pilot project, the Internet access was provided free of charge and later on was charged a minimal fee.
- The Delhi based Studies in Information Technology Applications (SITA) project provides computer skills training to poor and disadvantaged women. Its aim is to empower women from rural, suburban and urban areas through computer training.
- Tel-Neks was started in May 2001 in Bidadi in South India. It fosters community growth by providing ICT training to semi-rural women.
- Datamation Consultants Pvt. Ltd. provides job opportunities to women from disadvantaged backgrounds upon completion of their IT training.
- N-Logue provides rural ICT solutions. It involves telecentre businesses based on the enterprise model.
- E-SEVA in the West Godavari district seeks to train self-help groups into information intermediaries.

RADIO AND VIDEO

- The Deccan Development Society (DDS) worked with the *dalit* women in Medak district of Andra Pradesh in reclaiming their agricultural knowledge base with the *Rewriting History and Reclaiming Knowledge through Radio and Video*. The project utilised radio and video for its suitability with the poor and non-literate sectors.
- DDS in Hyderabad has set up a community radio station in Machnoor village as well, putting up a 100-watt FM transmitter with a 30 km range. Under the *Women Speak to Women* program of the UNESCO, the groups of *dalit* women that manage the station have recorded over 300 hours of programming on issues pertaining to different matters ranging from women empowerment to indigenous knowledge systems to

local song and drama.

- The Orvakal Mandal Samakhya has put up Mana Radio (Our Radio) in the Orvakal district in Kurnool district in Andhra Pradesh.
- A community radio project has been put up in the Bhuj district by the Kutch Mahila Vikas (KMVS). The programmes are recorded and broadcast in the local Kutchhi dialect.
- SEWA has used video as a tool of women's empowerment since the mid-80's. Its cooperative, VIDEOSEWA, has produced footages of issues on livelihoods of poor women. The videos' primary functions are to motivate, mobilise, organise and train members and to further enhance their organisations. In one of their projects, they utilised a one-way video and two-way radio teleconferencing networks for training rural women managers on water management, child development and financial services.

TELECOMMUNICATION TOOLS

- FOOD in Tamil Nadu India made use of mobile telephones in their Inter-city Marketing Programme. The project has been able to establish a communication network for community based organisations, promoting inter-city direct sales of products made by skilled workers and artisans.

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CHAPTER 3

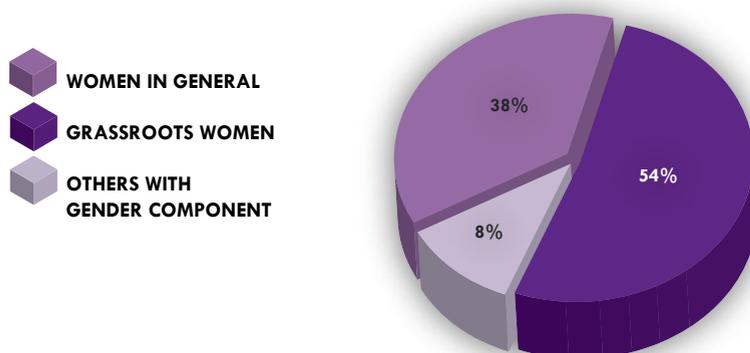
HOW INTERMEDIARY GROUPS USE COMMUNICATION TOOLS FOR GRASSROOTS WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT IN INDIA

A TOTAL of nineteen organisations from India were interviewed for this study. The responses of the key informants were sorted and content analysed. Results are described in this report. For a complete breakdown of the statistics per category, please see the annex.

As with Papua New Guinea, it should be noted that translations are also imperfect and all have multiple responses.

TYPE OF INTERMEDIARY GROUP

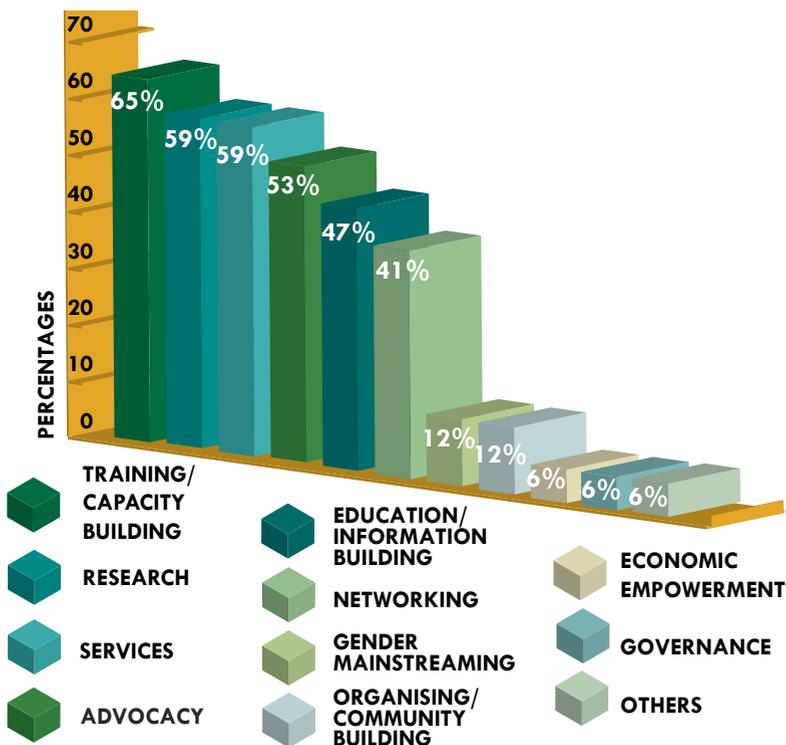
Based on the interview, seven out of thirteen groups (54%) that responded to this question reported that they worked primarily with grassroots women on different issues and concerns. Only five out of the thirteen organisations (or 38%) have broader women beneficiaries outside the grassroots. Only one group (8%) reported that their organisation caters to broader services but includes a gender component. Figure 1 shows the breakdown of groups in terms of beneficiaries.

FIGURE 1. TYPE OF ORGANISATION (BASED ON BENEFICIARIES) (N=13)

MISSION/ THRUST OF THE ORGANISATION

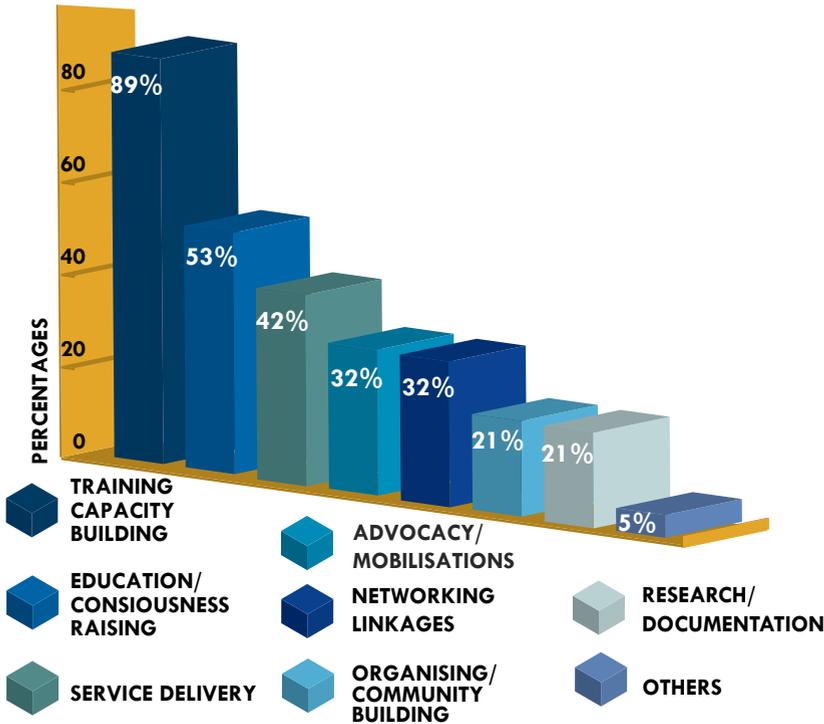
All of the respondent organisations have multiple thrusts and missions. The majority of the organisations (11 groups or 65% of sample) go into training on different issues like reproductive health, HIV/AIDS, savings and credit programmes, conflict resolution, and education. Also most organisations (10 groups or 59%) are resource organisations which provide services to grassroots women, including women's libraries and cultural resource centres. Some even provide resources to other women's organisations in rural areas. With the same frequency (10 groups or 59%), these organisations also pursue research about health and economic statuses. Some organisations conduct feminist research and counselling documentation. A number of organisations are positioned for advocacy (9 groups or 53%), education and information dissemination (8 groups, 47%), and networking (7 groups or 41%). Organising and community building (12%), gender mainstreaming (12%), economic empowerment (6%), governance (6%), and others (6%) were mentioned at least once by an organisation. See Figure 2 for the breakdown according to the mission and thrust of the organisation.

FIGURE 2. MISSION / THRUST OF ORGANISATION (N=17)



STRATEGY IN COMMUNICATING WITH GRASSROOTS WOMEN

The majority of the organisations who were interviewed used training (17 groups or 89% of sample) as a strategy in communicating with grassroots women. Ten groups (53%) mentioned education and consciousness-raising as their strategy. This strategy is followed by service delivery (8 groups or 42%), advocacy and mobilisations (6 groups or 32%), building networks, linkages and coalitions (6 groups or 32%), organising and community building (4 groups or 21%), and research (4 groups or 21%). One group introduced a participatory model in which the community members are actively involved in planning and decision-making. Figure 3 shows the breakdown of strategy in communicating with grassroots women.

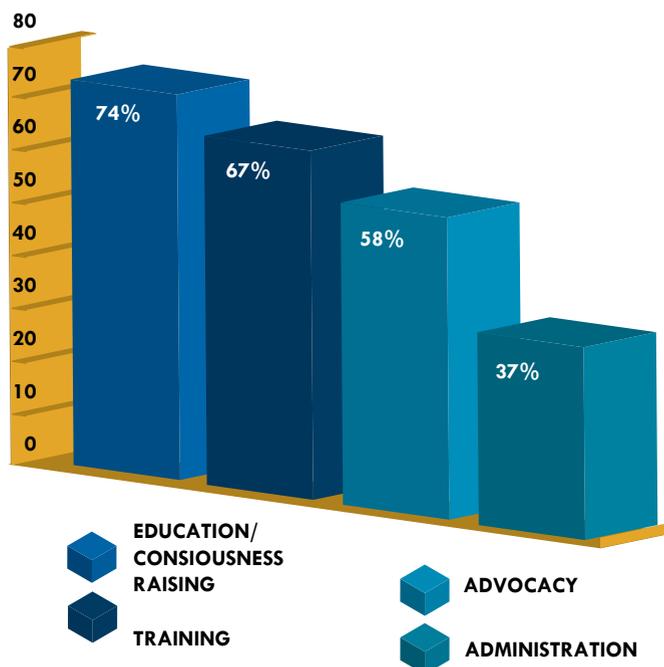
FIGURE 3. STRATEGY IN COMMUNICATING WITH GRASSROOTS WOMEN (N=19)

USES OF COMMUNICATION TOOLS

As for the uses of these communication tools, the top uses cited were for education (74%), training (68%), advocacy (58%), administration (37%), announcements, and research (26%). Networking (16%), other uses (16%), services (16%), governance (11%), economic empowerment (5%), and organising (5%) were mentioned at least once by these organisations. Figure 4 shows the percentages for each use.

Fourteen out of 19 groups answered that the communication tools are mainly used for education and information dissemination. These tools are used to spread ideologies and to initiate discussions among participants in training. Different issues experienced by grassroots women are also disseminated, such as legal rights, violence and health. Since conducting training is the top strategy used by these organisations, most of these tools are used in workshops. See Figure 4 for the percentages for each use.

FIGURE 4. USES OF COMMUNICATION TOOLS (N=19)



COMMUNICATION TOOLS USED BY INTERMEDIARY GROUPS

Theatre was ranked as the top communication tool, as mentioned by all fifteen organisations (100%) This is followed closely by the use of films or videos (95%), other tools (89%) like charts, diaries, bags, paintings and CDs, and music and songs (68%). Intermediary groups also use books (58%), the traditional mode of story-telling or oral communication (58%), posters (58%), and photos (47%) in their work. Together with radio (42%), new ICTs such as the Internet (42%) ranked seventh while the computer (37%) and telecommunications like landline phones ranked as the eighth most-used communication tool utilised by intermediary groups in interacting with the grassroots women. Cellular phones, together with telefax, leaflets, magazines, pamphlets and television, ranked ninth (26%) in the most-used communication tools. See Figure 5 for the breakdown of the top communication tools used by intermediary groups.

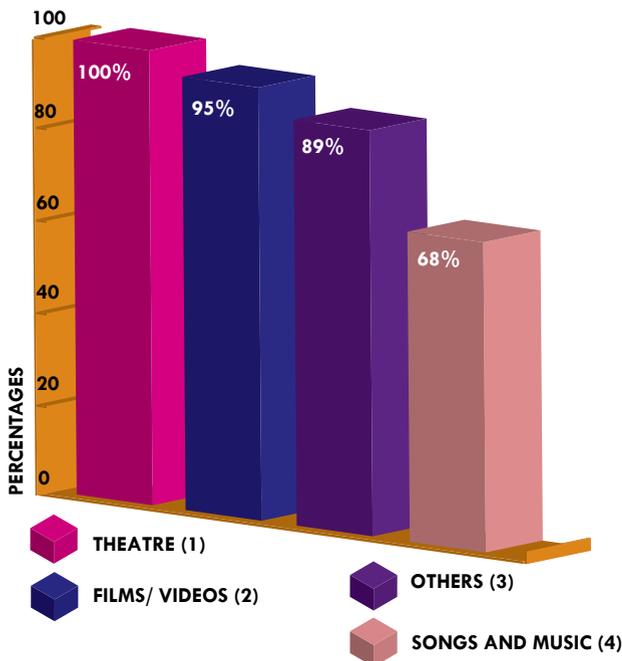
In contrast, only four or less groups used the following communication tools: newsletters (21%), letters (16%), newspapers (16%), overhead projectors (11%), print (11%), puppets (11%), comics (5%), banners (5%), slides (5%), and stickers (5%).

Intermediary groups in India often used theatre in communicating to grassroots women. Theatre or drama is used in training and is preferred because it allows participants to be actively engaged in the issue. One informant shared:

“They themselves made [the] script and they themselves enacted to show the whole problem through the skit and then they showed how this problem could be solved through the map, which they had drawn on the floor with different colours. On the whole process we just facilitated what needs to be highlighted to CAPART evaluator. But the entire presentation of the project was made by themselves we were just standing behind. We were not into any of the scenes in that. At the end of the day, CAPART evaluator acknowledged that ‘your people know everything what the project is all about, they had the whole plan and they were explaining to us, that was, amazing.’”

Another informant reported: “...we use role-plays. We make people do it- we give that particular issue, or particular topic, we explain it orally and make them to dialogue themselves and then come and present to the group.”

FIGURE 5. COMMUNICATION TOOLS USED BY INTERMEDIARY GROUPS (N=19)



Theatre and plays are also used in advocating issues like environment, alcoholism and violence. One informant shared that they used theatre in opposing the oppression of women. In addition, feminist women performed the play as well:

“And we produced a play, in non formal theatre which was jointly evolved by several women’s groups in Mumbai and it was a musical and was written by Dr. Vibhuti Patel who is an economist, she’s a very good writer, especially of women’s songs, and dialogues. The first show was actually performed by feminist women who were active in the Forum against Sex Determination Tests or Forum against Oppression of Women and Vacha. After that first show Vacha performed 25 shows, produced 25 shows. We performed in villages in Maharashtra, all over, on terraces, in compounds, not on the roads – because on roads you attract attention as women and the audience is all male. But this was specially staged in non formal situations...”

Theatre is also for educating people. One organisation shared this experience: “Right from the villages, the woman who after seeing the play- “Shikshanachi gaadi chalali!” (There goes the education vehicle!), said that she will educate her daughter and not make her sit at home, to IAS probationers (at the Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy where probationers of the Indian civil services are trained before joining service) at Mussourie, when we performed there, the reactions we got there, the way they behave, how they become aware of women’s issues, there are many such different experiences.”

One informant shared other insights explaining how their organisation has used theatre right from the start:

“Theatre we have been using right from the beginning. For any issue that we want to take up, even in a situation of conflict we have prepared the adolescent girls and boys right from the script, to perform and to go to various places. We have conducted lots of theatre workshops. Most times they come with the story, these are very contextual stories and then they go and perform these stories and they... the dialogue, only sometimes we take the help of resource people who can give some technical and skill inputs. But we use theatre still today, in any campaign for anything...”

Like theatre, films or videos are also used in training and advocacy. Some films are produced by their organisations while others are borrowed from other organisations. One informant gave an example of how their organisation made a film on violence against women and distributed it throughout India:

“I just want to tell you one more thing, when we worked on Manipur I was very careful that instead of complaining to the UN with the Special Rapporteur on Torture or Violence Against Women that this has happened to Manorama this has happened to...we have made a film and we also had a little CD passed all over India...”

Other communication tools are frequently used by these organisations in communicating with grassroots women. During training, they use charts. For adolescents, the organisations encourage the use of diaries as these can be a very empowering tool. An informant shared:

“We make diaries for adolescents; you know the ones which talk about your own self, think about your own self. At times diaries give information regarding reproductive health, good poetry, good stories, good experiences of different women, how they have challenged the situation. They are very empowering.”

Since these organisations most often employ training as a strategy, they also conduct workshops using a variety of communication tools, such as music or songs, booklets, oral story-telling, photos and posters. Songs and music are used before meetings or workshops to uplift the participants’ spirits. One informant explains:

“[W]e use local songs, Kannada songs, because our staff pick[s] up songs from people. Normally every group meeting, before they start a meeting they have a song. This is mostly, which is related to gods and which is dubbed from movie songs, or the tunes picked up from movie songs.”

Additionally, songs about the women’s movement were also produced and distributed by these organisations:

“Next were songs from women’s movement. This is the time, actually who is that critic, famous... Shanta Gokhale wrote in Times of India that ‘It was good music for a good cause’ we have ourselves for instance taped these songs along with Stree Mukti Sanghatana in somebody’s apartment. But what used to happen was we only listened to our own songs, outside women’s movement the songs could not carry the message. But these songs were always in demand in protest meetings, in sit-ins and trainings. We produced this cassette of songs called Apni Behno Ke Saath (along with our sisters).”

These organisations were also involved in the publication and translation of books. For example, one organisation published a research entitled, *Gender and Reproductive Health: The Last Decade*. Another organisation translates some books into the local language so that people are aware about certain issues while another group initiated a mobile library:

“A mobile library is not just about taking the books to people, but to have lots of dialogue with them. Here too our approach changes according to the situation. So when we go to the slums with our mobile library women come forward to talk about their problems because they get a space to talk. Lots of activities are carried out in a mobile library.”

Oral communication and story-telling are also encouraged in trainings and workshops. This informant shared her experience:

“One was- we called people who narrate stories to conduct a workshop. We conducted this workshop at the village level. And the 5-6 storytellers narrated their stories in open areas and a lot of people came to listen. And automatically there was a discussion on the story, what it says and in this we had no role. Whoever was narrating the story, on its own, in most of the traditional stories the image of the woman was shown in a very different light. And through these stories, the discussion that could be generated on the situation of women or what that story says about women, was in itself a very effective medium, and that too when we had not done a lot of planning.”

Grassroots women have a communication system that is passed through word of mouth such that information from one area is quickly disseminated. An example of this occurred when HIV/AIDS penetrated in one area and stories of what happened were shared. It was beneficial to the intermediary group because it was easy for them to inform people about the virus every time they visit a new area.

Photos and posters are also used in training. One informant shared how one can already discuss many issues and concerns with just one photograph:

“Sometimes just with a photograph we can take an entire training around it. To change the mindset you can just show one photo and ask women to build a story all around it. And that will give you the perception of people, which in reality is completely different than [a] person's story. It is a good medium to have interlinked dialogue and to create awareness and consciousness amongst their own selves.”

With the use of photos, the grassroots women can easily understand the messages. Furthermore, photos are reported to be very effective in cases where some participants are illiterate. Indeed, pictures do paint a thousand words. An informant shared:

“We just show them those pictures and we would ask them to comment on them. So, they get it very fast because they see something happening with the picture and they see something happening, and they would like immediately get what it is, so I found that is really helpful for a training. That is one thing & then we use charts like, For e.g. to tell you the difference between sex and gender, I had prepared a chart on a normal chart paper. Like when you see something, you remember it better, that’s what I feel. So they would remember seeing, it’s written there in big letters what are the differences between sex and gender. So some of them who can read would read that and for the others we would read it out and tell them. But, that’s I think another thing [where] literacy is important. Some places literacy is not there at all. So, there pictures help but when the women are literate at least they can read, even though they are not well read or something but at least they can read.”

Whenever the budget permits, posters are also circulated to advocate issues.

The new ICTs like Internet and the computer ranked seventh and eighth, respectively, among the tools used by intermediary groups. Although not everyone have an access to computers and the Internet, it is perceived to be important since intermediary groups trained grassroots women with these new tools through a computer class or *Schoolnet*.

Along with the Internet, the radio also ranked seventh among the tools most used by intermediary groups. One informant explained how radios are beneficial to the community:

“At the ground level, Charkha has aimed at using this medium within the constraints of government policy by initiating a small programme of Community Radio in Jharkhand. Of course the benefits of using radio as a medium of communication are enormous and I would like to just reiterate these at this point. It is cheap and effective communication medium cutting across literacy barriers. It also has the facility of lending itself to a multitude of languages and dialects which may not form a written script. In another sense it affords an intimacy and privacy in communication through innovative methods like phone-in programmes on a number of issues such as health. In the use of radio, there were a number of options. Programmes could be produced by the community and promoted through listening clubs by narrow-casting. This is ideal for social

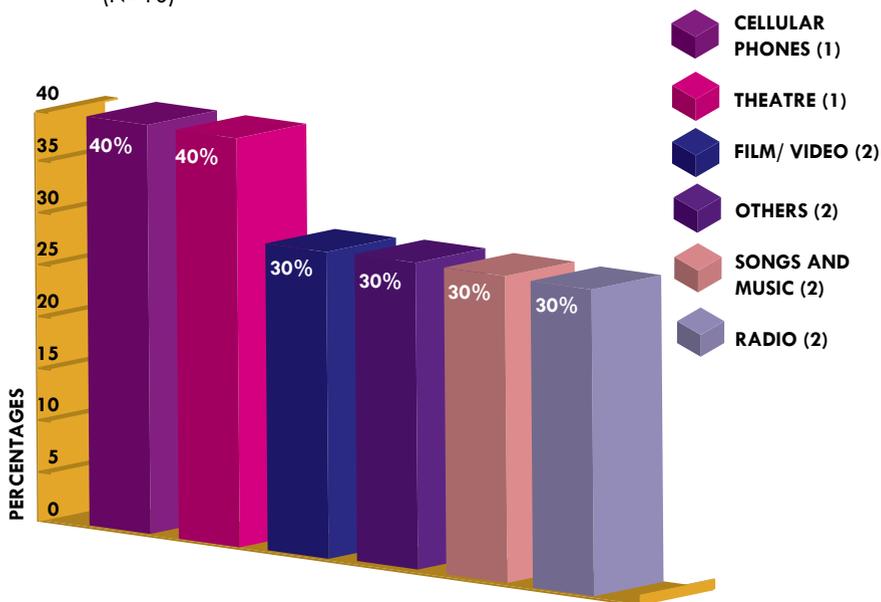
messages within a small radius. Campus Radio is also in existence but was never an option for Charkha since it operates directly with communities not through institutions. In the Jharkhand model, Charkha tried out yet another model which is to use the existing airwaves of All India Radio to air a programme made by the Community and entirely designed and conceptualised by them.”

Cellular phones, newsletters, letters, newspapers, overhead projectors, print materials, puppets, comics, banners, slides, and stickers were mentioned at least once by key informants as a tool that they used in interacting with their beneficiaries.

COMMUNICATION TOOLS MOST ACCESSIBLE TO GRASSROOTS WOMEN

The communication tools most accessible to grassroots women as observed by the intermediary groups are cellular phones (40%) and theatre (40%). This is followed closely by films or videos (30%), other tools (30%), radio (30%), and music and songs (30%). Fax, letters, magazines, newsletters, photos, posters, puppets, stickers, and TV had been mentioned at least once by these organisations. Figure 6 shows these tools and their respective percentages. Note that only ten groups answered this question.

FIGURE 6. COMMUNICATION MOST TOOLS ACCESSIBLE TO GRASSROOTS WOMEN (N=10)



Because theatre, films and videos are the most used communication tools for these intermediary groups, these tools are also made accessible to grassroots women. These tools reach large audiences. Short films like documentaries are shown during workshops while survivors of violence, who are now actors, write their own plays and perform in different places. An informant shared:

“So we usually use documentaries if we are doing short programmes. But when we have long workshops then we take feature films also. Then we have a theatre group, where survivors who have been with us over time they have become part of that group. So they write their own plays and they perform. That is something that we use. We take them to different places to perform.”

Chart sheets and clip charts are made accessible to women during workshops while the radio is most accessible to grassroots women in remote villages. Intermediary groups use the radio in contacting, announcing, and advocating issues. Radio also seemed to be the cheapest medium used in remote villages. An informant explained:

“And in remote villages, the easiest and cheapest mode is radio. So as far as mass communication in Kutchh is concerned, I would say radio and if we talk of KMVS work or the core campaign activity, then whichever, wherever applicable, we use that. For mass communication in Kutchh, there is only radio. Working by buying air time, seems to be a bit costly. But if the government policy is such that every community has its own community radio licence, then it can be the cheapest and also [the] most effective medium.”

Because music and songs are used in theatre and played on community radio, they are also made accessible to grassroots women. Other tools accessible to grassroots women as reported by the intermediary groups are fax, letters, magazines, photos, posters, puppets, stickers and the TV.

COMMUNICATIONS TOOLS LEAST ACCESSIBLE TO GRASSROOTS WOMEN

The new ICTs (Internet technology and the computer) are still seen to be the least accessible tools for grassroots women. The Internet was mentioned five times (56%) while the computer was mentioned four times (44%) out of the nine organisations that responded to this query. Radio (33%), TV (22%), and cellular phones (22%) were also mentioned. Leaflets, pamphlets, and posters were mentioned at least once by these intermediary groups. Figure 7 shows the graph of the least accessible tools used by grassroots women. Note that only nine groups answered this question.

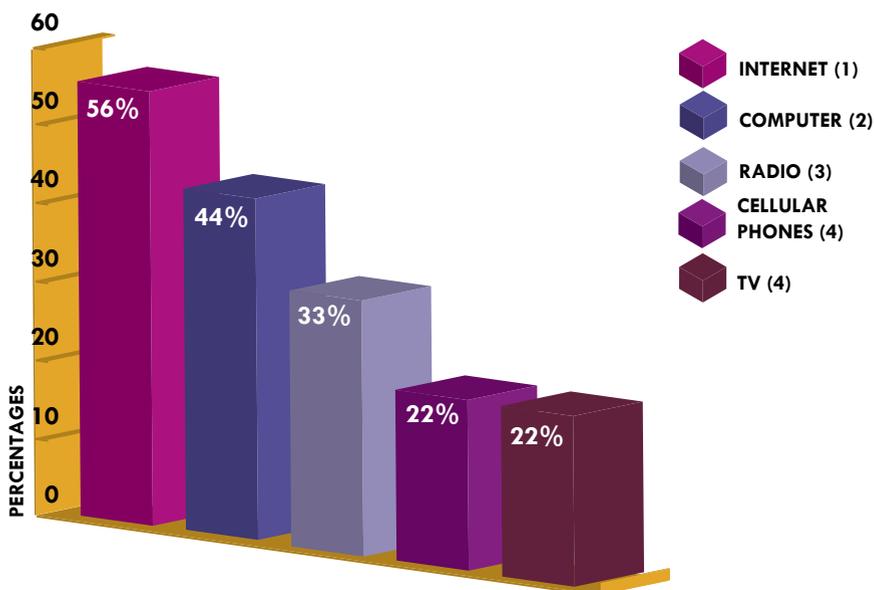
Computers are scarce and there is no Internet access in most villages. Some participants of the training still do not have email addresses, as reported by one informant:

“I don't think they have access to the Net. Ya, because these organisations... some of them have but like these, the participants of this training, all of them didn't have an email id. So we had to communicate with them through letters, post cards...”

It appears that organisations only use computers and Internet technology for administrative purposes. They use it for their office and nothing else. Through these tools, the groups browse, send e-mail and communicate with other organisations, but not directly with grassroots women.

Although radios are used to contact women in remote villages, it is rarely used when organisations need to pay to promote their work. This is also true for TVs. Organisations rarely use these tools for advertisements because of the costs entailed in utilising them. Aside from cost issues, one informant reported that not all places have community televisions and that women do not have time to watch television.

FIGURE 7. COMMUNICATION TOOLS LEAST ACCESSIBLE TO GRASSROOTS WOMEN (N=9)



MOST EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION TOOLS AND REASONS WHY THE TOOLS WERE EFFECTIVE

Theatre (71%) is ranked as the most effective tool as reported by 17 intermediary groups. See Figure 8 for the most effective tools and Figure 9 for the reasons why these tools were deemed effective. One informant shared her views in doing theatre with the sex workers: “Very, very effective! After every performance the conversation, people chat, ask questions, sex workers themselves answer– very effective.” Theatre also allows the use of other types of tools like music, songs, puppets and posters. Because of this, it is very effective as explained by one informant. “We prefer the traditional one. Particularly the street theatre, it worked very well actually. Songs, local songs, picking up the local songs, it makes more effective.”

More importantly, theatre is deemed effective because it tackles tradition and is culturally appropriate (44%). One informant gave an example:

“Take the case of the wandering minstrels of Rajasthan called ‘Manganiyars’. Sanjoy Ghose borrowed from their art and used their vibrant performances to travel within local communities and spread social messages. They were transformed into a communication team while retaining the traditional aspects of their art. In this new form they became the ‘Gaavaniyars’ (or those who sing unlike the Maanganiyars who are those who beg after their performances). Using their own repertoire and with creative inputs from theatre artists or others in the social field this medium can be very effective. Within the traditional lore, messages on health, gender bias, superstition and many others can be woven in.”

Also, doing theatre provides therapy and empowerment to these grassroots women. One informant shared the whole process:

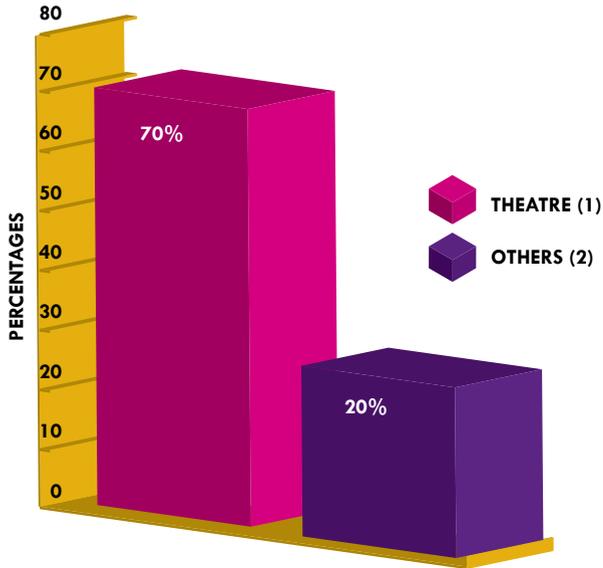
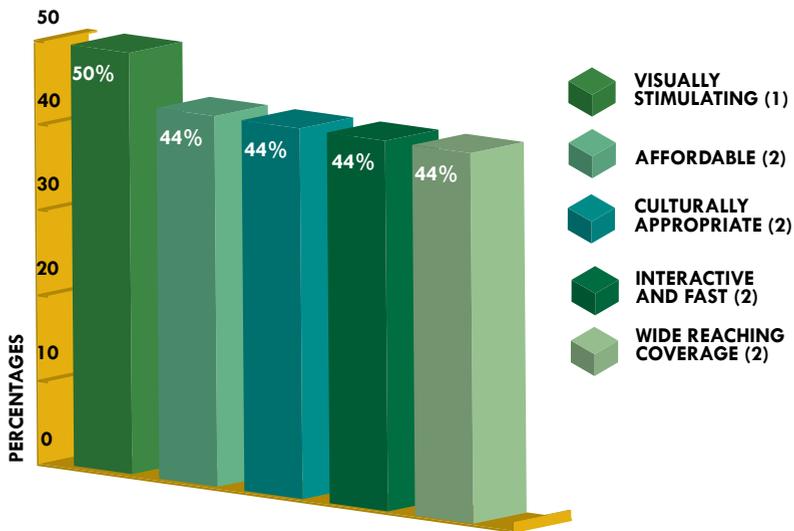
“You see the advantage of the theatre is. I would talk of the process. What it does is it creates a space which as I said, we had introduced it at WDP, Mahila Samakhya and many other women’s programmes that we go. I know, in my heart, these women would never actually go to become actors. They would not be performers. But what is important for me is the fact that they get this space where they can jump, scream, shout, something they have never been allowed to do in their lives. Secondly, it’s a non-judgmental space – and it’s where there are no mistakes, nothing is right, nothing is wrong. So this kind of freedom that women experience – men also experience. But I think, it is far more important; for me it is more important for women to go through this experience of free

expression, of exploring their body, their voice and of coming together with so many women where they find so many things that were deep inside them were there deep inside so many women. So this kind of togetherness this camaraderie that emerges I think these are very, very precious and important things. And in theatre workshop they come through fun. The learning comes through a lot of enjoyment. And I think it stays with them, a lot of inhibitions break, they gain a lot of confidence, they become more connected with their bodies and more confident about their own articulation, their own expressions and I think it affects lives in that sense.“

Another organisation even used psychodramatic methods in their training and workshops. The informant shared:

“So another person scolded him in the play itself, ‘hey, what are you saying?!’ So you get an opportunity to rectify your mistake there and then and the message also reached the people that we are talking about having fun on the level of happiness and enjoyment. So the same discussion, by interrupting it in between or by showing something, we always try to bring about an open discussion about what the others understand or what is their view. Many times the people who are trying to evoke this are part of the community. So if 1 among 5 persons sitting there, answer, then the others feel that they can give the answers too and thus they are motivated. Or many times, the character emerges from the audience and reaches the stage or the play itself gets down from the stage and goes in among them, or 5 people sitting at different places along with the audience deliver their dialogues from there itself. So many times, we have tried to generate discussions and ultimately after every show we have always talked a lot with the people. Many times it has so happened that we finished our programme in half or one hour, but the discussion has gone on till 12, midnight. After that they said, do something for us again. So it is very advantageous at that level, it is never just a show or a performance.”

The effectiveness of theatre as a communication tool also appears to be rooted in the lasting impact (28%) that it provides to those who participate in or watch it.

FIGURE 8. MOST EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION TOOLS (N=17)**FIGURE 9.** REASONS WHY A TOOL IS EFFECTIVE (N=18)

Theatre is followed by other tools (29%) and then by film (24%), Internet technology (24%), oral or story-telling (24%), and radio (24%). Other tools like paintings or *phads* are

also seen as effective tools. One informant shared, "we have had another thing i.e. colorful banner paintings ... through which the messages...we write captions also but the picture also speak... the drawing, the painting, speaks for itself."

Films or videos are frequently used in training and issue awareness and are seen to be effective because of their visually stimulating qualities (50%) and wide reaching coverage. One informant reported:

"I am telling you, at an average, our films, eventually 5-6 thousand people watch and I do believe that our films change them, those 5-6 thousand people much more substantially than any of the Bollywood film can. But the problem is 5-6 thousand and one film is not enough."

Another informant shared how a film's ability to catch a person's attention renders it effective:

"I think effective audio-visual is very important. Audio-visual catches you. They catch you immediately. It gives you freedom to take what you want to take. It brings a lot of diversity. You know when you show one film and carry the discussion you get a very different perception sometimes even the ones which you have not noticed. And it depends on the person - where he is coming or what is affecting him or her. So I feel it's very effective..."

Face to face communication appears to be also effective for some organisations as long as it is relevant to the local situations. One informant shared:

"No, no pamphlets are useful, posters are useful but when I look at it at different levels I feel that talking directly is very good in public hearing etc. but in the same line I think the most effective would be if your talk is very relevant and it actually exemplifies the local situations."

Stories were also perceived as effective media based on its ability to generate discussions:

"One was- we called people who narrate stories to conduct a workshop. We conducted this workshop at the village level. And the 5-6 storytellers narrated their stories in open areas and a lot of people came to listen. And automatically there was a discussion on the story, what it says and in this we had no role. Whoever was narrating the story, on its own, in most of the traditional stories the image of the woman was shown in a very different light. And through these stories, the discussion that could be generated on the situation of women or what

that story says about women, was in itself a very effective medium...”

Word of mouth was also perceived as fast (44%), thus making it an effective tool. Information comes and gets disseminated quickly. Some groups also worked with grassroots women who are illiterate, in which case word of mouth is the main system that is effective in delivering the message.

Intermediary groups also found radio effective because it can reach wide (44%) and remote areas while maintaining affordability (44%). One informant shared:

“To reach them, radio is more useful. And even for the fisher folk along the coast, who go into the sea. And in remote villages, the easiest and cheapest mode is radio.” Another informant added, “Of course the benefits of using radio as a medium of communication are enormous and I would like to just reiterate these at this point. It is cheap and effective communication medium cutting across literacy barriers. It also has the facility of lending itself to a multitude of languages and dialects which may not form a written script. In another sense it affords an intimacy and privacy in communication through innovative methods like phone-in programmes on a number of issues such as health.”

The Internet was also perceived as an effective tool, but only in interacting with different intermediary groups and not with grassroots women. In one protest campaign, it was e-mail that mobilised organisations. An informant described:

“Yes and that was the first email campaign, in fact, in recorded history from India. And it was very, very effective. Now of course we have all got email-fatigue (laughs) those days we did not have it. It was very effective and NHRC (Human Rights Commission) had to give an order – it was due to that email! We didn’t even have a memorandum. People in Bangalore got together, on the strength of the email, made a memorandum, sent it to NHRC, NHRC on that memorandum gave an order, we were not even as a group involved. So it was very, very effective! And that has kept us in the global space. I think email has just changed our lives – tremendously. That’s what happened – from Sangli we went global! We just missed Maharashtra and national level totally! (laughs) That’s what email does! We have used email very effectively. (Long pause) I mean it was that email that got Aalochanaa and MASUM and all these people together with 30 organisations in Pune!”

Cellular phones (18%) appear to be most effective tools in reaching people. One informant shared, “A mobile phone is the most effective communication tool we have now

because it is on your body all the time! (laughs) So you are on call all the time. There is a problem in the community, within seconds, everybody knows.” Like the word of mouth, mobile phones disseminate information quickly.

The visually stimulating qualities (50%) of plays, films and banners were the primary reasons why the groups decided to utilise these tools. This is followed by affordability (44%) as manifested in inexpensive radios and cellular prepaid cards. Wide reaching coverage (44%), cultural appropriateness (44%), and interactivity and speed (44%) are also qualities that make a tool effective. This is followed by other reasons (39%), lasting impact (28%), and clear target focus (22%), as manifested in theatre, films and story-telling. A tool is also considered effective if it is in written form, easy to set-up and attuned to the training and literacy levels of the target audience.

LEAST EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION TOOLS AND REASONS WHY THE TOOLS WERE INEFFECTIVE

Figure 10 shows the least effective communication tools as reported by seven organisations while Figure 11 shows the reasons why these tools were considered ineffective. Showing films or videos was mentioned by two groups (29%) as ineffective. This was due to the absence of electricity in the location and other set-up problems (31%). Posters (29%) were also found ineffective because it is not affordable (46%). The Internet, newspapers, and theatre were mentioned once by an organisation.

FIGURE 10. LEAST EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION TOOLS (N=7)

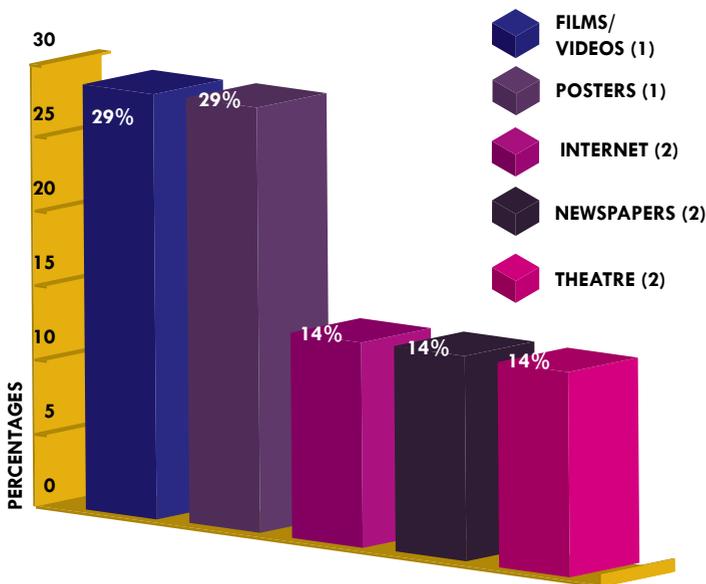
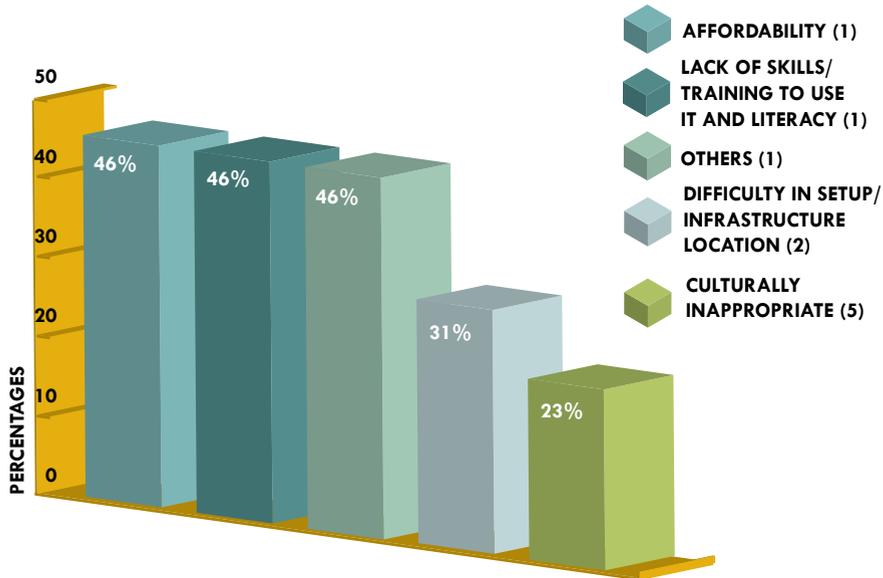


FIGURE 11. REASONS WHY A TOOL IS INEFFECTIVE (N=13)

The majority (46%) of the organisations mentioned that these tools were ineffective because of the following reasons: lack of skills, training and literacy, other reasons (46%), and cultural inappropriateness (46%). The Internet, newspapers and posters are considered ineffective because there are many grassroots women who cannot read and write. Six of the 13 organisations (44%) mentioned that these tools were ineffective because they were not affordable for them. Similarly, posters require a great deal of financial resources for printing. Producing a play can also be financially expensive at times. Limited coverage (15%), diffused target focus (8%), being boring and un-interactive (8%), and being in written form (8%) were also reasons mentioned by these intermediary groups regarding a tool's ineffectiveness.

ANNEX

COMPLETE SUMMARY OF FIGURES

Notes:

- Most have multiple responses
- There were 19 organisations interviewed for this country.

TABLE 1. TYPE OF ORGANISATION (N=13)

Type	f	%
1. Grassroots women	7	54
2. Women in general	5	38
3. Others with gender component	1	8

TABLE 2. MISSION / THRUST OF ORGANISATION (N=17)

Mission/ Thrust	f	%
1. Training	11	65
2. Research	10	59
3. Services	10	59
4. Advocacy	9	53
5. Education	8	47
6. Networking	7	41
7. Gender mainstreaming	2	12
8. Organising	2	12
9. Economic empowerment	1	6
10. Governance	1	6
11. Others	1	6

TABLE 3. STRATEGY IN COMMUNICATING WITH BENEFICIARIES (N=19)

Strategy	f	%
1. Training	17	89
2. Education	10	53
3. Services	8	42
4. Advocacy	6	32
5. Networking	6	32
6. Organising	4	21
7. Research	4	21
8. Others	1	5

TABLE 4. USES OF COMMUNICATION TOOLS (N=9)

Uses	f	%
1. Education	14	74
2. Training	13	68
3. Advocacy	11	58
4. Administration	7	37
5. Announcements	5	26
6. Research	5	26
7. Networking	3	16
8. Others	3	16
9. Services	3	16
10. Governance	2	11
11. Economic empowerment	1	5
12. Organising	1	5

TABLE 5. COMMUNICATION TOOLS USED
BY INTERMEDIARY GROUPS (N=19)

Tools	f	/ %
1. Theatre	19	100
2. Film	18	95
3. Others	17	89
4. Music / Song	13	68
5. Book	11	58
6. Oral / Story-telling	11	58
7. Posters	11	58
8. Photos	9	47
9. Internet	8	42
10. Radio	8	42
11. Computers	7	37
12. Landline phones	7	37
13. Cellular phones	5	26
14. Fax	5	26
15. Leaflets	5	26
16. Magazines	5	26
17. Pamphlets	5	26
18. TV	5	26
19. Newsletters	4	21
20. Letters	3	16
21. Newspapers	3	16
22. OHP	2	11
23. Print	2	11
24. Puppet	2	11
25. Slide Shows	2	11
26. Comics	1	5
27. Placards/ Banners	1	5
28. Stickers	1	5

**TABLE 6. COMMUNICATION TOOLS MOST ACCESSIBLE
TO GRASSROOTS WOMEN (N=10)**

Tools	f	%
1. Cellular phones	4	40
2. Theatre	4	40
3. Film	3	30
4. Others	3	30
5. Radio	3	30
6. Song	3	30
7. Fax	1	10
8. Letters	1	10
9. Magazines	1	10
11. Newsletters	1	10
12. Photos	1	10
13. Posters	1	10
14. Puppets	1	10
15. Stickers	1	10
16. TV	1	10

**TABLE 7. COMMUNICATION TOOLS LEAST ACCESSIBLE
TO GRASSROOTS WOMEN (N=9)**

Tools	f	%
1. Internet	5	56
2. Computers	4	44
3. Radio	3	33
4. TV	2	22
5. Cellular phones	2	22
6. Leaflets	1	11
7. Pamphlets	1	11
8. Posters	1	11

TABLE 8. MOST EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION TOOLS (N=17)

Tools	f	%
1. Theatre	12	71
2. Others	5	29
3. Film	4	24
4. Oral	4	24
5. Song and Music	4	24
6. Radio	4	24
7. Internet	4	24
8. Cellular	3	18
9. Book	2	12
10. Newspapers	2	12
11. Placards / Banners	2	12
12. Posters	2	12
13. Computers	1	6
14. Photos	1	6
15. Print	1	8
16. TV	1	8

TABLE 9. REASONS WHY A COMMUNICATION TOOL IS CONSIDERED MOST EFFECTIVE (N=18)

Reasons	f	%
1. Visually stimulating	9	50
2. Affordable	8	44
3. Culturally appropriate	8	44
4. Interactive and Fast	8	44
5. Wide reaching coverage	8	44
6. Others	7	39
7. Lasting impact	5	28
8. Clear target focus	4	22
9. Written form	2	11
10. Easy to set-up/ Infrastructure / Locations	1	6
11. Training and Literacy	1	6

TABLE 10. LEAST EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION TOOLS (N=7)

Tools	f / %
1. Film	2 29
2. Posters	2 29
3. Internet	1 14
4. Newspapers	1 14
5. Theatre	1 14

TABLE 11. REASONS WHY A COMMUNICATION TOOL IS CONSIDERED LEAST EFFECTIVE (N=13)

Reasons	f / %
1. Affordability	6 46
2. Lack of skills/ Training to use it and Literacy	6 46
3. Others	6 46
4. Difficulty in Set-up/ Infrastructure/ Location	4 31
5. Culturally inappropriate	3 23
6. Limited coverage	2 15
7. Diffused Target Focus	1 8
8. Not interactive and boring	1 8
9. Written Form	1 8

CHAPTER 4

HOW INTERMEDIARY GROUPS VIEW EMPOWERMENT AND COMMUNICATION TOOLS IN INDIA

EMPOWERMENT

India's Key Informant Interviews emphasised rights. Many interviewees also attached empowerment to decision-making, perhaps because women are often disadvantaged in a culture of arranged marriages, dowry payments, bride killings (*Sati*) and inheritance issues. Thus, the right to free choice becomes a highly valued commodity.

Many of the feminist groups also viewed empowerment as changing the ideology of marriage as the ultimate goal for women. They also cited feminism as key to empowerment, defining feminism as the knowledge of and struggle against women's oppression.

Many intermediary groups also believed that in order for women to be empowered, they must infiltrate and appropriate power housed mainly among the male, rich, and higher castes.

In terms of communication tools, the KIIs emphasise song, theatre, and puppetry as effective media for conveying information and values. They cite interactivity as the reason for these media's effectiveness. The various groups also recognised the potential of the Internet, but also stated the necessity to combat the pornography and alienation that comes with it. Informants also expressed this sentiment in relation to television, which they framed as sensationalised and meaningless.

ECONOMIC INDEPENDENCE

The following groups see empowerment as empowering women economically. Kutch Mahila Vikas Sanghata (KMVS) views empowerment in terms of strengthening the rural women's economic means through capacity-building. Co-sponsored by intermediary groups such as Janvikas, Gujarat State Handicraft Development Agency and District Rural Development Agency, KMVS initiates programmes that delve into natural resource management, handicraft development, education, savings and credits activities, legal aid, and local self-governance.

Similarly, Sampark's mission is to expand the capacity of poor and vulnerable people, especially women, thus improving their lives by primarily increasing their income-earning ability. They also engage in training inputs and trainer programmes. Sampark has also set up a project called *Sampurna* in the rural villages of Koppal. They plan to develop micro-credit modules which are localised according to the situations in Koppal, in view of the need to make them more relevant to the community.

Sampark also supports intermediary groups, cooperatives and women's self-help and informal groups which conduct income-generating activities (IGA) as well as enterprise development and gender-related activities. The groups also teach women to be more responsible in handling their finances by asking them to make contributions, since learning about financial investments makes the women realise their money's value. This is because Sampark believes that part of fostering economic independence involves teaching the women how to budget their own money, including money allocated their children's education: "If it's their own money, they take more responsibility. If it is for somebody else's money and they just close their eyes and say why we should take responsibility."

Another group, Sakhi, also tries to empower women by fostering much-needed economic literacy. Part of this empowerment is teaching women the meanings of technical concepts such as "financial sanctions" (FS) and "technical sanctions" (TS). Sakhi educates in these areas because the group noted that women often did not understand these terms when men use them. The group makes the information easier to understand through simplification.

Majlis believes that economic poverty often results in intellectual poverty. As such, they believe in fostering critical thinking. The ability to produce one's own films is also a form of empowerment. Hence, the group is glad to report that though they still rely on foreign funding agencies for their larger projects, they are slowly growing more capable of producing smaller films on their own.

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY

Majlis conducts a programme on legal rights. They work in the field of legal activism by initiating public campaigns and training programmes, publishing resources, and producing cultural events. The organisation maintains two centres, one for issues legal and the other for cultural concerns.

The legal centre aims to participate in the process of evolving feminist and human rights jurisprudence. The instruments of action are advocacy, legal literacy endeavours, and public campaigns on related issues. Also, they provide legal expertise to disadvantaged litigants in order to make the legal machinery more accessible to them. Sakhi also empowers women by informing them about laws for the prevention of violence. They also distribute a leaflet on laws that are immediately relevant.

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Sakhi states that it is unfortunate that women do not want to go into politics. “They want to know how to write a project, how to get money, how to execute projects,” they report, but state that women are less interested in the intricacies of politics. This sometimes creates confrontation with parties, because the women are not schooled in their ways: “So elected women mostly have frictions with parties because they give her a seat [...] and make her a candidate and put up with her for five years and then drop her.”

Nirantar agrees that women’s voices have remained unheard in politics, and this has directly impacted media:

“When the Lok Sabha elections happened two years ago, they did not want to report on it, not that because they felt the readers did not want to read about it, they were just very scared. ... They did not even know which party had what symbol. You know formal politics. And that they are so out of it, this whole area of politics.”

Stree Mukti Sanghatana (SMS or Women’s Liberation Organisation) also tries to bring about change through transforming the Maharashtra state or municipality policies. When they achieved these policy changes, the group was disappointed to see that the government was uninterested in implementing the policy effectively among the people. They noted that if the “government would have just taken the help of all the NGOs to frame the policy, it would have been much more successful.” They also observe that the government has not fully accessed the help of the women’s organisations; therefore, both groups have problems implementing the policy. This is unfortunate because SMS also believes that organisations cannot solve all issues by demonstrations and strikes as they believe that it is also valid to

sit down with the government and work out the issues through negotiation, a process one can achieve without the state's co-optation.

Vishakha also encourages meetings with the government in order to discuss the communities' problems at the block level. They believe in incorporating these initiatives with the work of larger mobilisation efforts and the women's movement.

KMVS also strives to hold government and non-government bodies accountable to the development process. They create spaces for dialogue between rural women and government bodies, observing that some women are already exercising their rights in their own localities.

COMMUNITY ORGANISING / SOLIDARITY BUILDING

Many women's intermediary groups in India define coming together and fighting against common injustice as empowering.

Vishakha, for example, is a voluntary organisation working for women's empowerment, education, health, and literacy, as well as the rights of children in the state of Rajasthan. Its primary aim has been to work in the area of women's development and child rights, striving towards the goal of equity through community participation. They also work to liberate women from Sati (self-immolation of the widow on the husband's pyre), child marriages, land grabbing, and direct violence. They encourage both individual and collective action. For example, in rural areas where they have worked, when a woman is beaten, her fellow women neighbours also come out to stop the violence, not only helping the woman by sheltering her in their homes, but going as far as talking to the husband and their in-laws.

Vishakha also provides avenues for meetings between government and rural women. They also set up libraries, women's groups, youth clubs and various forums. In addition, they facilitate health workshops and clinics. Not only do the clinics treat people, they also educate about the causes and preventions of particular ailments. The group also runs women's protection cells in more or less ten districts in collaboration with the police and other local organisations.

Furthermore, Vishakha talks to the community, the FIR, the husband, the police, or wherever there is an *anganwaadi* (pre-primary schools run by the government) to create an environment where women are free to choose the life that they want to live.

Additionally, Vishakha tries to aid women who are victims of land-grabbing. Many widowed women who are "property illiterates" come to them, ejected from their homes. This, they reason, is why child marriages are more disadvantageous for girls. While the institution is problematic for both sexes, the lack of knowledge on property rights makes leaving marriages more difficult for girls than it is for boys.

Vishakha also believes that uniting and sharing experiences leads to actions and solutions. Thus, they create spaces and opportunities where such sharing can take place.

These spaces take the form of fairs and women's gatherings, where participants can give each other comfort by relating their experiences. In some places, there have also been training programmes aimed towards raising consciousness and converting ideas into action.

The group Sampark also promotes solidarity and capacity-building by providing training and communication materials for these activities, which aims to empower society through education and livelihood activities. They also empower the women and their staff to "build their own capacity."

Likewise, Crea believes in empowerment through collaboration and unification. For example, through their collaboration with eight other organisations, they compelled Sarah Jones to perform in India for the first time. In their community-based leadership programmes, they also work with fifteen organisations from four states, represented by two members from each organisation. They meet about five times a year, either through trainings, or through retreats, meetings, and conferences. They aim for the women in these conferences to implement what they learn at the individual, organisational, and community levels, although not all of these women are necessarily heads of organisations.

Although their partners are independent organisations who get to decide what trainings they want, Crea also makes sure that sexuality rights are on the agenda, thus creating their niche. They are also a part of the "Global Dialogues on Human Rights," whose meetings have addressed violence against women, social movements and women's human rights, sexuality, and inter-generational conversations. They also conduct one-week trainings wherein the institute demystifies the UN systems, critiquing and appropriating them, while also examining people within the country who use rights-based approaches.

For Kriti, it is important that we recognise that communities have the right to make decisions and to take control of their lives, including everything surrounding it - livelihood, education and access to natural resources. They see that the ability to recognise the power to change as lying within us is also empowering.

Sakhi also empowers women by providing social awareness and social understanding, bringing women together, and by encouraging the realisation of their common identities and struggles. They cite communication as integral to these processes. They regularly interact with their partners through seminars, workshops and capacity-building programmes.

Similarly, for Charkha, forming groups and networking with other similar groups, allows people to uplift their lives and find a place of dignity in society. When women come together, they can give each other a sense of support and security while fighting for their rights under existing government programmes, demanding their entitlements, and setting new targets for themselves. For example, in Chakra's work in gender and development, there have been many moves towards the rights of widows such as pensions, education of their children and, in a more subtle context, acceptance within their communities.

Sangram, which works with sex workers, also believes that the collective in and of itself is an extremely powerful system of empowerment: “Once you are a part of the collective, you are part of the collective decision-making, once you are part of the collective planning, you are part of the collective negotiations.” The group believes that this can be a very empowering process. Being part of a collective is also important for the minority, since it makes them feel more confident to question society: “Who said I’m bad, who said I’m evil? Who said being in a multiple sex-partnership is wrong? Who said, multiple sex-partnership within a commercial context is bad? Who said *dhandaa* (business) is bad?” Together, the collective can also interrogate injustice in the society.

The Association for Advocacy and Legal Initiatives (AALI) is another organisation that believes that networking is crucial for empowerment. AALI is an advocacy group working with various state and non-state organisations for programmes or campaigns. They also serve as a resource centre, organising trainings, meetings, consultations and conferences.

INDIVIDUAL AGENCY/ SELF-TRANSFORMATION EMPOWERMENT AS AN ON-GOING PROCESS

For Kriti, the process and the end-goal are both important in the path to empowerment. The process involves looking back and re-analysing assumptions. They believe that since “underpinnings have to be empowering as well,” empowerment must always be in dialogue with those you want to influence.

Kriti believes that one is empowered if one internalises and surrounds oneself with one’s knowledge. They believe women have been empowered if they continue to use the symbols reminding them of their empowerment. To facilitate this, they use the postcards and stickers that were given to them by the group: “that some women have actually written down the songs sung in the workshop and continued to sing them and share them with others, to me it would mean that the information has been empowering.”

RECOGNISING WOMEN’S INHERENT VALUE

Alarippu also believes that empowerment lies in women taking charge of their own bodies. It involves making women realise that their body and their health should be their first and foremost priority. For example, they state that a wife should realise that her first responsibility is to herself, not her husband. Therefore, in order to make an effective difference, the group must address the culturally ingrained values opposing their ideas.

BECOMING MORE EXPRESSIVE AND CONFIDENT

Sampark also sees empowerment as bringing out people's confidence. It is also realised in making women more comfortable to speak in public. When they have confidence, it is a sign that they have internalised the information, so whether it is knowledge about agriculture, or how to approach a bank and bargain for a loan, the women would be able to talk and negotiate with the other party. Sampark facilitates this empowerment by rehearsing with the women, simulating the situation with the banker, and doing role-plays that concern money. The group believes that role-playing serves a key role in making the women more confident, whereas before, they relate that the women would not even dare to enter a bank.

Nirantar also believes that the mere creation of a space for women to voice out their concerns and express themselves is quite important. That is why they also produce a newsletter (*Janee Patrika*), since they believe that "getting women to write news or write their own stories is a way of them putting their world, their issues on paper and making their writing accessible to a much wider audience."

Charkha believes that empowerment lies in giving women the strength to question their lot in society. It makes them interrogate why the mainstream has always marginalised them. This change in attitude, they believe, makes all the difference. When they go to a health facility, for example, no longer do they feel shame about their condition: "So from going there with the feeling 'I'm sorry, but I've got STD' they then narrate how the women go in with a more confident attitude instead. They go in and say, listen I've an STD, give me the treatment."

Swayam believes that enjoyment and fun are also part of the empowering process. They believe that it is important for them to create a space where women can relax, dance, laugh and let go. After Swayam's intervention ends, the friendships that were forged continue.

MAKING THEIR OWN CHOICES

Sakhi also believes that "empowerment is a process where women can control all aspects of their life. It is a process where women are capacitated, so that they are able to make informed choices, and are able to take control of whatever decisions they make in life."

AALI also agrees that empowerment lies in helping women understand the various issues affecting them so that they can make their own decisions regarding them. They focus on the right to choose in all domains of society. They emphasise choice because "that is the ultimate aim. That women be empowered to decide what they want in life." For example, they do this by educating women about the rights of people to choose their partners, as in the case of arranged marriages.

Alarippu also believes that women's empowerment lies in gaining control over themselves, their lives and their destinies. The group also believes that empowerment means women breaking the limits that society and they themselves have placed upon them. Empowerment also means confidence, courage and self-assurance. Aside from making informed decisions and exercising their free will, it also involves the women themselves deciding how much they want to change or remain the same. Empowering women means opening up their options and making transformation possible.

BECOMING INDEPENDENT

AALI also believes that empowerment lies in independence. In their experience, the grassroots are empowered when they stop depending too much on the group and cease to need them. They stop asking for help and instead become the ones who offer assistance. They believe that at this point, women already have the knowledge and the capacity, "not only to help themselves," but also to help the other women in the area.

Vishaka believes that informing and educating women are key factors to bringing about transformation. They believe that every child, even daughters, should exercise their rights. They provide literacy trainings and other activities to increase women's self-awareness. The group views education as a factor in improving women's marriages. They also feel that education makes women more independent and able to make their own decisions.

MOTIVATING LEADERSHIP

Crea aims to empower women by enhancing their leadership and access to their rights by focusing on issues of sexuality, reproductive health and violence against women. They emphasise human rights and promote women's leadership. Their programmes aim to bring about new voices and new leaders. Often conducted in collaboration with TARSHI, their projects also highlight marginalised issues such as sexuality.

SOCIETAL TRANSFORMATION

KMVS sees empowerment as transforming society and realises that this is a long-term goal. They also view empowerment as making society more receptive to more women taking a stand and taking leadership positions in organisations, with men respecting and accepting the decisions they make.

Moreover, transforming society should also be rooted in transforming traditional beliefs about women. KMVS believes that in order to empower society, infiltrating discourses that frame their reality is also crucial. For instance, they give the example of everyday knowledge that vilify women, such as proverbs, or the belief that a woman causes

quarreling and dispute among men: “Rand,’ that is a bad woman or a widow. It is said that because of her there are fights- blood and violence between men.” These proverbs often frame expectations and position women into certain roles. They believe that to change society’s negative view of women, it is therefore necessary to work on the proverbs found in the community and replace them with other, more constructive, positive proverbs and views about women. They accomplish this by disseminating positive stories and a serial of proverbs over the radio.

In the same way, Nirantar sees empowerment “as a process as to how you can change relationships of power and within gender relations.” Sampark also believes that to truly empower women in the long term, changes in system and mindset are necessary within the community.

Societal transformation also entails incorporating women’s perspectives into the public discourse. As such, Charkha seeks to highlight women writers’ perspectives by urging them to write regarding issues of peace and development, particularly through their Media Fellowship programmes in Jammu and Kashmir. They believe that it is imperative that on all issues, the perspectives of women emerge and become part of public discourse. It means women “opening themselves out to the wider world and discover[ing] many answers which had earlier eluded them,” especially through the use of mainstream media like articles, comic strips and radio programs.

EMPOWERING INFORMATION

Ten themes emerged on the meaning of empowering information among Indian intermediary groups. Information is empowering when it is [1] accessible or suitable to the community, [2] accurate or based on research from the ground, [3] transformative or leads to change, [4] by means of interactive dialogue; [5] useful, [6] based on trust, [7] updated, [8] based on continuity and repetition, [9] involves the people, and [10] builds on existing discourses.

- 1. Accessible or suitable to the community**
- 2. Accurate or based on research from the ground**
- 3. Transformative or leads to change**
- 4. By means of interactive dialogue**
- 5. Useful**
- 6. Based on trust**
- 7. Updated**
- 8. Based on continuity and repetition**
- 9. Involves the people**
- 10. Builds on existing discourses**

ACCURATE UPDATED

Vishakha believes that empowering information is updated information. This happens especially when one works closely with the community and is in constant communication with them. In this way, the information just comes to you “on its own.” They believe that the community sees their group as a field centre where they can report the events: “So if something has happened in a village, by that day or the next day morning we find out about it, one way or another.”

RESEARCHED

Stree Mukti Sanghatana (SMS or Women’s Liberation Organisation) also believes that record-keeping and proper documentation is crucial, though these skills are precisely what the movement lacks and overlooks: “In spite of doing such a variety of things and so much work, we have no records—how many performances, what was done, how many people worked, old diaries have to be opened to see who all worked.” Moreover, keeping accounts is important for future researches, as well as to determine the group’s impact on society: “Research is very important in a movement, and we shouldn’t underestimate it.”

BASED ON THE GROUND

Charkha also believes that empowering information avoids sensationalising the suffering of others for media mileage. They observed that even the brightest and most talented journalist approaches the subject from the outside. They believe that empowering information truly comes about when a person embedded in the community writes about the issues and concerns facing the people there. “For the grassroots writer,” they contend, “it is an extension of the life he/she is living, it is not merely a subject of interest.” The group’s aim is to highlight these voices: “Charkha tries to bring out this hidden voice which speaks not only of pain or neglect but equally of positive community efforts and innovations at the community level to bring about change.” For Charkha, empowering information should not just be about the pain and the anguish of the community but should also be about providing positive stories that inspire the grassroots.

BASED ON DIALOGUE

Vishakha also believes that empowering information should begin with asking the community and the grassroots women about the kind of development they desire. It involves considering their opinions on what forms of development deserve priority, whether roads, electricity, water, or education.

Charkha also views communication as a two-way process: “it’s not about getting information from the grassroots and making it available to the national mainstream and then it stops. It has to percolate both ways.”

Nirantar also believes that empowering communication is two-way communication. They believe women should also be able to take part in meaning-making and selecting the kind of information included in the group’s documents.

Sakhi also believes that feedback from the community is important. The group values the evaluations they get from the participants, and finds it very useful. It provides a way to measure their impact to their partners and shows them whether the trainings they’ve given have been useful. The feedbacks also show the group what should be further clarified and what should be elaborated on for succeeding trainings.

Vacha, a women’s group involved in social research and action, believes that empowering information is an interactive process and depends on the willpower and readiness of the women receiving the information.

Kriti also believes that getting feedback from the community is crucial. Moreover, the group also believes that it is crucial that intermediary groups not just disseminate information, but also analyse how recipients use this information, whether it is doing the grassroots any good, or it is just an exercise in futility.

BASED ON TRUST

Sakhi also believes that information is empowering only if there is trust during its dissemination, agreeing that “nothing that can replace the relationship that evolves through one to one communication.” They also believe that this trust is borne out of listening to each other: “People believe in you, listen to you, if they know that you are true and you are with them and for them.” NEN also agrees that the community will only really listen “if they trust you.”

ACCESSIBLE

EASILY UNDERSTANDABLE

Many intermediary groups also believe that empowering information should be accessible, easily used and understood. For example, part of Sanhita’s project was translating part of the Vishakha judgement on sexual harassment into Hindi. They then disseminated this to women workers and employers.

Sakhi believes that empowering information is phrased in a language that the people can easily understand. Because of this belief, they make sure tools such as posters give clear and direct messages.

AAI also believes that empowering information should be in Hindi, the language of the community. However, this poses a challenge for them since most of their training materials are in English and translation is time-consuming. However, they believe that it is necessary for them to learn Hindi, since “Hindi is really important if you want to work with those people.”

Crea also believes that knowledge should not be limited to a select few, but rather open to all. Therefore, Crea undertakes translations of their sexuality and rights institute programmes from English to Hindi.

SIMPLE

Crea also believes that it is important to make sure that information is presented in a simplified manner such that information is not overly theoretical, academic and unattainable. It should be in a demystified language that people from the communities could understand. “Frankly,” they assert, “I don’t want to read a sentence which tells me that you are dealing with Foucauldian notion of power.”

ENDURING AND REPETITIVE

Charkha also believes that people have to be exposed to empowering information consistently in order for it to take effect. This involves continuous engagements, trainings and capacity-building activities.

Vishakha also believes that women suffering from violence should not obtain only temporary relief or remedies. Women should examine and analyse the sources of their problems. Empowering information is about connecting with grassroots women and continuously talking to them so that:

“[W]hatever she is thinking, understanding and whatever she wants to do, to strengthen that and to connect it again and again to the discourse on gender and patriarchy so that she can see that this is not only her problem, it is a larger issue, so that she can make the micro and macro connections.”

SUITABLE TO THE GROUP AND THE CONTEXT

Bailanjo Sad agrees that empowering information should be based on common ground, but also believes that such information must account for cultural differences; for example, different groups’ particular experiences of patriarchy. They also see the need to be sensitive to the different aspects of subjectivity apart from gender, such as class and caste.

Bailanjo Sad also believes that it is important to involve the local people in the process. They emphasise the need to strike a better bond and accomplish this through skits. This is because they believe that the medium has to be personalised to be successful. For example, if they did a similar campaign on prenatal sex determination, they argue, “it would have been a terrible failure in the colleges if it involved just CDs.” They further state, “We custom-make it and see how we could involve local people. We did skits everywhere, but we varied it as we did it in a different place.” They tailored their acts this way because interaction and speaking in the local language is crucial.

BUILT ON EXISTING DISCOURSES

KMVS also believes that in order to empower society, infiltrating discourses that frame reality is crucial. For example, their work countering existing misogynist proverbs and everyday beliefs about women aims to transform existing discourses.

CREA, a new organisation with just over five years in existence, also recognises the importance of building on what existed before.

Kriti also believes that there is a dire need to build on the work found on the ground level, rather than creating an information “overload” by continually introducing new technology, which the grassroots find alien and alienating.

PRACTICAL AND TRANSFORMATIVE

USEFUL

Sakhi, a feminist organisation which believes that knowledge is power, empowers women by giving them information and the tools for feminist analysis. To aid this, Sakhi maintains a library with 4000 books on gender and related issues, as well as a documentation centre with a number of journals, newspaper clippings, reports, posters, and videos.

Both civilians and women in positions of power view the group as a resource centre. Various people call on the organisation when they wish to know more details about a subject. The group also points people in the right direction regarding complaints about graft, corruption, or other crimes. It also informs people about shelters or centres for the elderly or those afflicted with HIV/AIDS.

Sakhi also believes that people should know about the factors that affect their day to day realities, so that they can understand, analyse and control what happens to their source of livelihood. They believe, for example, that fishermen should know about the sea: “If livelihood is the basic issue, then they should know basically all about the situation they live in and how they can analyse and control it.”

Stree Mukti Sanghatana (SMS) also believes that empowering information is not just a simple regurgitation of information, but rather, involves showing people how to “use this

information in their lives.” They therefore try to provide not just information, but skills that demonstrate how to implement this information in everyday life. For example, SMS also believes that empowering information is something that could help women to choose a marriage partner wisely.

Sanhita also agrees that empowering information must be useful. For example, in the directory they have produced for UNIFEM, they provided information which would be crucial to women during crisis situations – the number for counselling facilities, legal aid, and the kinds of shelters available. They distribute these directories among all government agencies, as well as to police *thanas* (stations), educational institutions, intermediary groups, development workers, and concerned individuals.

AALI also provides women with useful information regarding the law, which helps empower them so they can protect their rights.

Charkha believes that empowering information is both useful and available. It gives individuals an awareness of their participation in the “larger whole, the information world, and the media.”

BASED ON A DESIRE TO LEARN

Alarippu believes that empowering information begins with creating the desire in the person to seek out the information, educating the people of their need to be aware, and inciting their curiosity. Charkha believes that empowering information is also about “training or orienting them to the possibilities and setting them on the road to become independent seekers of information, as well as generators of information.” Additionally, they view empowering information as prompting people’s curiosity. Therefore, they weave information together in a way that is interesting for the recipients: “It’s whatever makes them want to ask questions and engage.”

LEADS TO CHANGE

Vishakha believes that in order to provide empowering information, one must first deal with negative prejudices. They relate that when they first entered urban and rural communities, for instance, their group was branded as being “anti-male.” This image is difficult to change once formed. Their image was also tainted when they talked to women with negative reputations, such as with women in prostitution. However, the group believes that one has to first examine the problem before one can incite change.

The group Stree Mukti Sanghatana (Women’s Liberation Organisation) also believes that empowering information should address the issue of human rights insensitivity as well as the menace of violence against women. As long as these are not addressed, the group believes that creating safe spaces and comfort zones will not help.

AALI also believes that one's capacity to regurgitate information or patronise what is said in the training is not the only way to gauge empowering information. Other ways include looking at how it affects and transforms one's life. For example, they tell the story of a woman in a training who echoed everything that was being said about gender inequalities, agreeing with everything. "As soon as she came out from the training however," they remarked, "she had a Ghugat (veil) on her face."

FOSTERS INDEPENDENCE

The group, Vacha, is aware that since the unit of the family controls not only the woman's sexuality but also her education, it is possible that many of them will stop schooling by the second or eighth grade. This is why they appeal to the woman's own willpower to keep learning. As such, they try to familiarise women with sources of this learning. In the simple act of teaching the women to use the English-Hindi dictionary, for example, they are already helping them read the names on an electoral list or find a train, or look at a reservation, or read the telephone directory. They also teach women literacy by showing them how to use tools such as the Internet, cameras and tape recorders. The group also tries to take the women on fieldtrips to a factory, a zoo, museums, and a science centre.

CRITICAL

Sakhi also believes that people are often taught that to be good, one has to be a martyr, tolerating injustice and simply conforming to society's standards. They present an alternative to this by providing information that truly empowers, teaching the community to be more critical instead.

Majlis also believes that empowering information is not just a matter of literacy. It lies in developing the critical faculties of women and in encouraging the women to come together and share their ideas and feelings.

LEADS TO AGENCY

The North East Network (NEN) group believes that empowering information makes women confident. Learning something new also changes women so much so that it brings about a change in lifestyle, in the women's thoughts, in their dress, and in their behaviour. The women become more positive and progressive. It also encourages healthy questioning of society, so that if their partners are asked "why aren't you married..." they know how to answer with an enlightened view, saying that marriage is not a woman's ultimate goal.

Alarippu also agrees with this notion of empowering information as that which opens up peoples' options and choices. They cite the case of three women in Kanpur who

committed suicide because they were told that there was no money for their dowry. The group believes that if a different set of values and information reached them, they wouldn't have felt so hopeless and incapable. Empowering information shows people that there are always alternatives. These women could have gotten an education in order to earn money for the dowry. They could also have been told that staying unmarried would be an acceptable choice. NEN believes that empowering information is about opening up windows and possibilities.

Vishakha also believes that empowering information brings about change in women's actions. The group therefore tries to merge information, action, and community-building along with literacy programmes. Developing such programmes around 50-65 villages, they hope to empower these women by encouraging them to express themselves in government, in their villages or in their homes. Empowering information is also about maximising the women's agency and opportunities.

For Charkha, empowering information also brings about transformation in the community's environment and lives. It also leads to greater confidence and leadership abilities.

Crea also believes that empowering information involves enhancing the leadership capacities of women, enabling them to articulate, demand and access their rights by focusing on issues of sexuality, reproductive rights, violence against women, sexual rights and the broader issue of women's human rights.

Crea also believes that empowering information gives the women themselves the power to decide. It challenges violence against women and heterosexism. It also enables the women themselves to choose what they want to do with the information and power given to them.

EMPOWERING TOOLS

COMMUNICATION TOOLS IN GENERAL

"ALL MEDIA ARE NECESSARY"

The majority of the intermediary groups believed that there is a need to use all media and to have a channel for women to find and express their voices. For this, they believed that all media are necessary. They also expressed the wish, as with Bailanjo Sad, to develop projects which use tools that are not so much dependent on funding. They are therefore concerned with finding accessible and self-sustaining tools. As the group Bailanjo Sad articulates, they are looking for tools "which are cheaper [...] like if women can give expression through... a *fugadi*, I mean there the funds don't determine it but the fact that, that is the medium through which women can best express their concerns and make their voices reach out further."

TOOLS HAVE ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES

Many intermediary groups have also expressed their desire to use or create films, seeing this medium's influence, but have expressed difficulty finding money to fund their projects. Many groups therefore, turn to direct communication, and see its value despite the availability of more modern forms of communication. Theatre, songs, puppetry and the like are also used, given that these traditional forms still hold power over the grassroots women's consciousness and psyche. They evoke emotions and incite connection and identification. Many also see that films and other easily replicable media have a wide reach, and therefore a big potential to empower more people, but they also acknowledge that as a trade-off for this replicability, the participatory and focused aspect of a medium such as theatre or songs for example, are sacrificed. As Majlis has explained:

“Now, reproducible means you can reproduce in many languages, you can send it over, doesn't make money. I know only postage will cost you. It's true. But at the same time that doesn't have the kind of participation that a live performance which you call a traditional communication tools, may have, because if you are singing, if it's a singing session, then at the end of it the woman may sing a few lines with you and that has a completely different impact. So it is difficult to say.”

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT BEHIND THE TOOLS

Like Majlis, many intermediary groups have also emphasised the need to look at the context behind the tools: “What you need to weigh is that in a particular situation, in a particular language in a particular context, which tool or which language works better? That needs to be assessed every time.” Charkha, for example, does not use media in the sensitive issue of sex work, as they've discovered that it has incited police raids. As such, they only use media when they identify certain problems and issues and would like to draw public attention to them.

Similarly, AALI explains that the media's effect, impact, and accessibility also depends on class, age, and gender:

“I mean, it actually depends [...] because the technology might make a difference for a certain group of people, for a certain, if I may use the word certain 'class of people' [...] I mean, if you talk about these, the most lower income groups, everything is different for them but if you talk about the middle income or the higher income groups, it might because they don't have, they have, the other women have their own issues to look into and they have their own worries

and everything.”

AALI adds that even for privileged women who have access to technology, access to new ICTs does not necessarily mean they are empowered. Even for educated women, it still does not mean that they’ve broken out of the patriarchal hegemony and have real agency in their lives:

“We have seen women, the well-educated women who have access to every thing in the world, have access to technology; still, [...] I would not call them empowered because they are like any other women. I mean, they are in the houses, they don’t know what is right or wrong for them. They won’t be able to make their own decisions; they will depend for everything on others. So I think, it is very individual. I won’t be able to categorise it. I don’t think, I would be able to categorise because I have seen these women, they are well educated, they are earning so much, but ultimately they are, they don’t, I don’t think they are empowered at all.”

“IT’S IN THE PROCESS NOT THE TOOL”

It is also believed that the process itself is empowering and not necessarily the technology or the tool. As Swayam explains: “[W]omen have to first find their voices for themselves. Then they narrate their stories. Technology cannot be one of the ways for empowerment.” They explain, for example that when they started the theatre group, “the theatre group didn’t emerge from just anywhere. We didn’t say one day let’s take theatre and use it. It came out of a process, right? [...] It could be a very empowering thing, but on its own no. But yes, as a part of a process.” What Swayam finds empowering in the process in particular is explained in the following statement: “The way we put together [the lives of] different women who then go back, document their own lives and then come back. That process in itself is very empowering.”

INTERROGATING THE END OF TECHNOLOGY

Kriti believes that the process of using communication tools must be interrogated, otherwise one runs the risk of just overwhelming the grassroots:

“I think we are creating an over burdening and we [are] just falling into the trap of a globalised economy of creating the market for the technology. And I think it’s personally, very problematic.”

As such, Kriti believes that the use of technology should always be self-reflexive. Kriti also believes that people constantly need to ask themselves regarding the ends towards

which the technology is used for. According to them “how to use it effectively that is the question: what kind of materials are you putting on these ICT? Is that information going to create change in the thought process, in action on the ground? I don’t think so. I would say that providing technology is just one thing and what that technology is going to offer is another thing.”

Kriti is also wary of new ICTs because, although they enable people to be efficient, they are also alienating. Kriti believes that intermediary groups cannot simply provide the technology and leave it at that. It is important to guide the people in regards to how to use it for their empowerment.

Moreover, certain intermediary groups, believe that the feminist movement in India is not maximising the potential power of media and new ICTs. In a world where you can reach so many people with just a single advertisement, Stree Mukti Sanghatana feels that activists fall short of maximising the media to reach a large number of people:

“Because, electronic media has brought about a revolution, and I feel we are somewhere falling short in making use of this revolution to spread our message. It was discussed even in women’s commissions that there should be a separate channel for women, but that has still not happened, women’s commissions etc. have been there for so many years now...”

Charkha, who believes that the poor are poor not only in terms of material poverty but also in terms of information poverty, also feels that it is unfortunate that the disadvantaged lack access to this resource for bettering their lives. This is especially true, they argue, in a world where vast amounts of information are readily available to many.

Swayam also believes that women’s needs in terms of media “have never been articulated.” Their desire to learn English has been expressed, but not their need to use the new forms of ICTs. Swayam also believes that access to tools “is a matter of priority,” especially when dealing with women who are struggling to make ends meet. Some women also come to them suffering from violence or recovering from violence, for example, so helping them move away from that situation is their foremost concern. Only after they attend to their primary needs can they think about issues like providing access to the media.

Women’s illiteracy also affects their access to the media. Men sometimes mock women for preferring uncritical and “unlearned” print materials, such as serialised novels found in magazines as compared to men reading the news, whose language is inaccessible for these women.

Additionally, there are cases wherein brothers have to accompany their sisters for access to the computers. As Alarippu reports, “a girl would only go to learn the computer

only if her brother accompanies her.”

TOOLS MUST BE ENJOYABLE AND INSPIRING

Crea also believes that part of making new information engaging is ensuring that the participants enjoy the materials as well. Their training formats are made in such a way that the participants are given guided questions and then are made to report back to the class. Crea is especially involved with forging new alternative and creative ways of being. In order to make learning more enjoyable and challenging, they also work in a non-linear way.

Vacha also tries to “implant seeds” so that they can teach the women to write a new story and re-envision their dreams. Through songs for example, they encourage the women to feel good about themselves and enjoy the message of empowerment and transformation that they are giving. For example, they adapted a song from the Chun Chun that read, “*Munna (boy) will play the drum and the lion will dance.*” They then varied the lyrics to read: “*Munni (girl) will play the drum and the lioness will dance.*” They reported that this made the girls eyes light up and identify more with the song, feeling better about themselves. Another new line from their song goes: “*Daughter, I am a daughter, I will become a star. I will become a star; I will become your support*”

By implanting these seed ideas, the group believes they are also encouraging the women to continue studying and fight for their right to education.

POSITIVE ASPECTS OF COMMUNICATION TOOLS

Vacha, however, believes that media serve their purpose as long as they promote women’s rights, health and education. Kriti tries to address the need for a more positive representation of the women in the media by producing media with various groups. They narrate how “[t]he process of producing them has been empowering in a sense that, “O.K, we can show domestic violence without showing the women beaten up.”

Charkha, an NGO spearheading media initiatives to empower the rural, marginalised and vulnerable people, believes that empowering information raises awareness about people’s rights, including that of gender, education, health, and employment. The group believes that communication tools open up the women’s otherwise constricted world. The group also believes that through the media, people get a sense of different worlds. There is also a belief among the groups that communication tools can bring about a change or revolution.

Through the media, Alarippu believes that “whole communities’ caste identity can be transformed.” Swayam also believes that the use of media creates a “ripple effect.” They feel that those who really want to communicate actively seek it out, so by enabling them to use these tools, you are also giving them the means for their advocacy. They describe:

“I’ve seen people travel that path and are gradually transformed from ordinary community workers, to become communicators. [...] Essentially they are seeking it themselves, one just needs to point the direction. And those people, I find, that they tend to view that benefit not just as a personal gain but as a social gain, they want to carry their community with them. So they want to, they are keen to link up to programmes and projects which would bring the benefits of this to the others in the community. So it’s a... it’s a kind of a ripple, you know.”

Charkha also believes that communication tools are one way “to reach powers that be.” They believe that “ICTs are the way to go,” and that people need ICTs to move forward. Proficiency in ICT also builds confidence as Majlis has observed in the group that they trained to make short films.

ORAL COMMUNICATION

Many Indian intermediary groups believe that two-way, face-to-face communication is still the most effective and most empowering mode of communication. They hold trainings, meetings and consultations in this fashion, believing that interactive participation and feedback is crucial.

THEATRE AND PERFORMING ARTS

Some traditional practices counter the tenet of women’s empowerment. The group Bailanjo Sad, for example, was formed through protests against the representation of Goan women as sex symbols to promote tourism during the carnival.

Nonetheless, many other intermediary groups also use traditional tools, incorporating street theatre or local songs into their advocacy, believing that building on tradition makes the message all the more powerful. Moreover, they reason that this makes it more enjoyable and memorable. One of these groups is Sampark. Kriti also believes that “we are going back to traditional knowledge systems.”

THEATRE

Crea uses theatre and film showings to ensure that people also find their Education Advocacy enjoyable and engaging.

Alarippu also stages plays for children of both genders that incorporate gender issues and model positive behaviour, such as generosity towards one’s siblings. They performed it

in Delhi, Rajasthan, and Uttaranchal and were happy to report that:

“[I]t worked very well in Delhi, and also in Rajasthan as far as I have heard the response was very good...The audience was really engaged with what was shown. One girl even came up to them to say how touched she was with the brother’s generosity to his sister in the play... Recently we did it in Haryana in Gurgaon the girls loved it.”

The group also performed with Nautanki in educational settings. They believed that it was important for the group to perform for girls in colleges because Nautanki is otherwise considered vulgar, thus interacting with women and discussing the plays with them is a way to counter this negative stigma. In one of their plays, instead of the negatively constructed female character dying at the end, they suggested a different ending with a more feminist twist.

Against the typical Hindu ending, they suggested that both the sisters in the play see through the man and that they both turn away from him. With some hesitation, the group performed the ending, doubtful if the audience was ready for it. Alarippu, however, suggested that “times have changed” and new twists should be explored.

The Nautanki group belongs from the Bediya caste, which is composed of singers and performers. They are looked down upon in society because according to Alarippu’s narration of historical accounts, whenever they set up Kothas in cities, because the players are unmarried, upper class men would often get involved with them and leave them pregnant and without any support. Because of this difficulty, they sometimes go into sex work.

They relate that this is unfortunate, since these are very talented women gifted in the arts of singing and dancing. So, the group worked with them on pieces which they have performed in schools, giving the women performers a new experience. This is something which the group would like to further explore, given further support, since it unravels India’s rich heritage, a living culture which “should not just be put in a closet and classified into a category but continued and learned from.”

PUPPETRY

Puppetry is also used to facilitate discussion, as with Vishaka. They narrate that they use puppet shows, moving from one place to another, allowing this to incite dialogue after the show reaches its peak. Men and some women participate in the open discussions, and the more curious among them will follow the show to the next house when it moves. The group believes that this is a kind of screening process in which they identify those who are

really interested in the topic:

“A team will go to everyone’s house and talk a little bit about what was discussed the earlier night, how it was etc. So such people can be identified who are keen and want to go ahead with all this, who liked it, or who are against it, both ways.”

PRINT MEDIA

BOOKS

Crea believes that despite the built-in resistance against reading, it is still important to give students some readings, perhaps to encourage its acceptance. They are also providing valuable information through a training manual in Hindi regarding violence against women. They also send out articles and use it to facilitate discussions.

Women in Vacha were pleased to see how literacy is slowly increasing. They were very excited to see girls reading a newspaper in the public reading room.

Vishaka also relates how they have used books to earn the trust of the community and start a dialogue. By allowing the community to bring back books from their resource centre, they engaged the community. They also sat with the community to read them stories.

NEWSPAPERS AND MAGAZINES

Sakhi also relates that many women do not read newspapers, even though “a lot of major debates happen in these magazines or journals. There are those intellectual kind[s] of journals, but ordinary women do not read it.” In addition, they observe how men make fun of women because they always read ‘M’ publications, as noted above; these are cheap, accessible publications like *Malayala Manorama* and *Manglam*, which carry serialised novels. They also narrate how most of the women may not read certain magazines like *Mathrubhoomi*, *Kaumudi*, and *Malaylam*, which have more intellectual debates: “The language used in such journals is something that ordinary women will not understand; so that itself is a problem. So many women still do not read that kind of information, even if it is interesting.”

Nirantar is also proud of certain publications which a group of women brought out. The paper challenges gender relations, entering an otherwise very male-dominated and upper-caste dominated territory. They also wish to call on publications to privilege the local news without being limited by it, since they believe this is valid and important.

FILM/VIDEO

Sakhi would like to use video because they see it as an effective tool. Getting the financial backing to support these endeavours, however, is always a problem.

Sampark also uses the medium to initiate dialogue and attract people into coming to their discussion. First, they show a popular movie, and then, they follow it up with the documentary. “Otherwise,” they note, “...they don’t come.” Sampark has also talked to three or so filmmakers about creating videos about the different activities they do in the field, but they do not have the grants to produce these films.

Majlis also relates that there are politics in looking at old footage, because many people do not have access to it. NDTV, for example, owns the footage of the Babri Masjid demolition and charges people an expensive price to see it. This is also the case for Mahatma Gandhi’s funeral, to which the Film Division has the rights. This is an important issue, because the group believes that the footage should be available for everybody: “It should be sold for five rupees per CD for people to watch and people to know. It should not be treated as a rare footage. It’s national.” In answer to this, the group has started to collect footage which will be made available to all fellow filmmakers, as well as anyone who wants to teach, shoot, and show video images. The group aims to have a library one day, but since the project will take infrastructure and personnel, it operates at a very modest scale at the moment.

Majlis has also struck a deal with certain communities, lending equipment and teaching them how to construct their own film. They would make the film, while the footage would belong to Majlis. This empowers the community by making them more confident: “It will be a group activity. It will be in the name of the group. And all the footage will be ours. So that will be from your eyes, your life!” Majlis made a film about domestic violence using these skills.

TELEVISION

Majlis is critical of Indian television and the information it gives out. They relate how television generates useless entertainment and tainted politics. It also feeds people the wrong information, and often serves commercial ends.

Sanhita believes that this is unfortunate, since TV has a wide reach and a strong potential to reach out to people in a way that no intermediary group has. Tiny slots on TV which aren’t on primetime are not very effective. The group believes in being critical of television, even as one engages and dialogues with them: “We do gender critique and we have dialogue with them, we provide orientation, we also learn about their programmes and their outreach.”

RADIO

KMVS conducted a survey and discovered that women listened more to the radio than men do and that they get to listen especially when the men are away. They observed that the most effective programmes are they ones that make women feel that that “this is my programme, it has something to do with my culture, I am the one talking.” Aside from connecting to the viewers, songs are also prevalent in the programmes, since Indian culture is very musical.

In their community radio, they allow the grassroots who are not educated to have a voice and argue with them. Through this, they allow the participants to introduce their localities’ distinct culture: “The local touch also comes in.”

KMVS also believes in the power of radio to persuade people. To illustrate, when they killed off Parma, a well-known radio serial character, people believed she really died; listeners even called the station to ask where the funeral was so they could attend.

COMPUTER AND INTERNET

Swayam believes that even if the Internet is supposed to bring people closer, it alienates them all the more in some ways. Especially for people who have many tasks in front of the computer, such as writing articles, researching, writing to donors, writing proposals, or e-mailing, they state that using the computer is an isolating process.

Swayam recognises its value, however in terms of efficiency and connectivity: “you can be in touch with people across the world , 24 hours a day, at any point of time. So those advantages are definitely there.”

Charkha also believes that new ICTs are “the way to go,” such that their use becomes one way of moving forward. It increases connectivity at least to a degree, when electricity is available.

For Charkha, the Internet moreover has been very effective in connecting them with the global movement on sex work. They instigated the first email protest group, with a very effective email campaign. They also related how the first email campaign in recorded history originated from India, proving to be highly effective and changing their lives tremendously:

“That’s what email does! We have used email very effectively. I mean it was that email that got Aalochanaa and MASUM and all these people together with 30 organisations in Pune who came together and really helped push that protest to a logical conclusion very much in our favour!”

Kriti believes that email must be taught to the grassroots youth, who will be excited and enthusiastic with the new technologies. It could also be used to encourage them to continue their education and training.

Stree Mukti Sanghatana's main discussions and meetings all happen on chat and email. Realising its importance, the group also recently launched their website.

Nirantar believes that although the Internet has enabled a very efficient connection, it has also cut down on interpersonal connection. They observe that people hardly meet anymore. In some ways, it has also removed the passion and emotions involved in activism, as in the case of signing an online petition wherein people tend to think "[O]kay you are doing activism, you signed an online petition, you have done your bit of it." The group believes that "there is also an emotional kind of involvement which you just cannot just whip up by saying that okay, I endorse this petition."

Vacha also has to see to it that girls get special time with the Internet. One must make sure that women get access to the technology too. Otherwise, based on their experience with their youth activities in the slums, they noted that only boys can be seen accessing the Internet, sometimes going to pornography sites.

CHAPTER 5
HOW GRASSROOTS WOMEN VIEW
COMMUNICATION TOOLS & EMPOWERMENT IN INDIA

FGD INTERMEDIARY GROUP PROFILE

The **North East Network (NEN)** was conceived with the conviction that women's collective and decisive action can pave the way for societal progress. NEN came into being during the mobilisation process for the Beijing Conference, wherein for the first time, grassroots women of North East India, were mobilised around crucial issues, by the founding members of NEN. Various commitments were made to the different women's groups of the Northeastern region and in 1995, NEN got registered under the Societies Registration Act of 1896 to carry on these commitments.

NEN is situated at a historical juncture where there is tremendous interest in the development of the hitherto marginalised North East Region, and where people of the region themselves are articulating their visions of societal change. NEN believes that women's collective action will bring about and contribute positively to this societal change. It is committed to gender justice and strives to prioritise gender issues, change perspectives of the women of the region from needs to rights, and ensure the framing of just gender policies.

The North East Network (NEN) is a women's organisation in the north-east of India. The organisation advocates gender justice, aiming to transform the development perspectives of its region from needs into rights.

NEN is involved with capacity building, training and exposure on issues such as reproductive health and rights, violence against women, natural resource management and gender. As a networking organisation, they have forged linkages between national and

international women's organisations. Further, they have been engaged in peace initiatives and conflict resolution in the region via direct advocacy, as well as through development programs that provide meaningful activities for the youth.

One of NEN's ongoing activities is women's economic enhancement through handloom weaving, a practice present in most households in Assam. Approximately 95% of families in the area weave for use within the home. However, in the past, weaving has not been a major source of income for these households. NEN aims to organise and train the women to transform this traditional craft into a source of livelihood, thus developing women leaders who can take over the coordination activities from the NEN staff.

"The best way to spread education isn't through books or lectures, but through experience."

- NEN FGD participant

Street plays, puppet theatre, drum playing, and home visits— all are traditional forms of communication and all are effective methods of education in both urban and rural India. The women of the North East Network shared stories from a variety of perspectives, detailing their approaches to organising and the tools that they utilised. Though the women mentioned many methods of reaching out to communities, the common thread throughout their techniques was the importance of immediacy in their interactions. This immediacy was manifest not only in the forms of media and communication, but also in the ways in which the women engaged the communities. Personal contact and familiarity with both the members of the organisation and their tools for education were integral components in the efficacy of the women's campaigns, and therefore, in the women's own empowerment as well.

KNOW YOUR NEIGHBORS

The need for personal connection arises several times throughout the discussion. For example, in approaching the community, building trust was of utmost importance: "First of all we started to work in our own village. Then we started going to different villages and thus the entire area has become familiar to us. Likewise they trust us...This is how the confidence was built." This is no easy task, as when these women activists were often greeted with apprehension. Using a direct approach could mean getting beaten up, one participant comments. Therefore, it is essential to have the support of the members of the community. According to a woman participant, although leaders aren't always helpful,

their assistance is essential. Another participant advises, “First know people in the village, only then enter.”

Organising meetings isn’t always helpful, as only a few villagers attend. Therefore, the women activists interact with the villagers in a very intimate setting such as the villagers’ own homes. Moving door to door, the women enter each home and provide education about more sanitary household maintenance. Trained in methods for improving sanitation, the women activists would sit with people in their own households, though according to them, it’s sometimes “difficult to sit in foul conditions” but “we have to be sympathetic. By interaction, we understand them. We decide [a] strategy based on what we gather from the people.” Additionally, the women activists themselves would perform intimate household tasks:

“We have to cut their nails, going to each household and thus cleaned them. The courtyards and roads in the villages were too bad. We have to clean them and sweep them ourselves. Even we have sunned their clothes etc. ourselves. Garbage drums were brought by us. This is done by going from door to door.”

Providing these basic needs requires example, rather than dictation. “From the beginning,” one participant explained, “we teach them by action, not just by writing and reading, the way we teach our children. That’s why we sun clothes.” Though, as one woman reports, “One should work according to the needs of specific places, so door to door isn’t always effective.” When it is appropriate, using the method helps give the women “information on the problems of each individual.” The rapport established helped some women villagers to entrust the organisations with reproductive health information they would not normally share with a doctor, out of embarrassment. The trust built is integral to the success, even to the very establishment, of these women’s projects.

STREET PLAYS

In addition to bringing progressive ideas into the communities’ domestic spaces, the women also take progressive ideas into their public spaces, in the form of street theatre. This popular form of entertainment and education is the most effective form for reaching the women’s intended audiences. One of the major reasons for the medium’s value is its immediacy, both in terms of the content’s ability to elicit emotional responses from viewers, and in terms of the form. Through its public setting, passers-by become unwitting audience members: “Street play, street means Rasta (Road) and different kind of people come there.”

Due to its reliance on performance, rather than reading, the street play works for those who are literacy deficient: “Our main communication medium of working is street

plays. As our work is slum-area oriented and people in that area are illiterate, we use street plays as a medium of communication.” Another FGD participant recalls, “At the Shillong workshop, Anurita and others took part in a play to show VAW. We understood it instantly.” Beyond literacy issues, the street play is an effective medium of communication because it reaches the audience on an emotional level, a response that the FGD participants find productive. One woman recalled a particular play shown on International Women’s Day, saying:

“The street plays can get the message across more than a lecture or a meeting. Because on [the] 8th of March on International Women’s Day, Tezpur Mohila Samiti presented a street play titled, ‘DUKHOR UTSAV’. There were many Adivasi women because Dhekiajuli town is surrounded by tea gardens. These women were weeping. Seeing them crying, I realised that the street play was able to touch the heart of the viewers. Meeting could not have done that. So I think street plays are more useful.”

Unlike the more formal, informational formats of the lecture or the meeting, the street play elicits a deeply felt, emotional response that is “useful.” Likewise, another participant reports:

“Recently we had a big workshop on street play and she (Binota) had mentioned that people were crying, it is the same one which was shown in different areas and everywhere people were crying because most of the participants were women, and who were victims of violence themselves. In our legal call there are some cases of great cruelty and has happened in real life. So we gave them the theme from these cases and also asked them to include their own sufferings to develop the story of the play. I’ve no doubt that it has touched the heart of the viewers. We received tremendous response, great response indeed.”

Linked to the suffering of the audience’s and players’ actual lives, the emotional immediacy of the street play encourages a response that has proven conducive to the women’s goals of generating discussion on relevant topics. It is perhaps for this reason, that the street play is considered more effective than other, newer forms of information-communication technologies.

SONG, DANCE, GAMES

Some street performances integrate music, dance, and songs as well: “We combine dance along with our songs. For instance, we don’t [just] stand and sing, we also make

different gestures and body expression.” Another participant recalls, “When we do street plays all of us have the Dhol (drum) which is the main instrument. There is Tal (cymbals) too.” Seeing women pounding the Dhol, which is traditionally reserved for men, sends a bold statement about gender equity. Like the street play, these forms are traditional, evoking their long histories and conventions when displayed. They are useful tools for turning viewers’ expectations around their heads. Once again, immediacy is a key component. “Suppose,” one participant suggests, “the language is ours and we sing like BIYA NAAM based on the issue we focus. We make the people move active (involve).”

Games also provide another related performance genre that enables audience interaction. “One game I liked most was about goats and tigers,” one woman remembers. “They showed us this game...It made us understand our situation. So, I have felt something and understood the game. I liked it very much. That was a game only, but through the game we learned something.”

Like the door to door campaigns, the street performances worked because of their intimacy and immediacy. This occurred to an unexpected degree at times, when viewers thought that the events being performed were real:

“Our Mahila Samaj held a medical camp and there was a street play on first aid. It was supposed to be an accident and how to provide first aid at that moment. It was done so well, and it was held before the town hospital and there was blood stains, etc. The acting was quite true to life. Different persons came and joined the act. So the play was just right and suitable to teach about first aid....That street play was enacted many years ago, but the memory of the event is still there in my mind. We really enjoyed that first aid show done by the doctors. It was like real. Every one present thought it was true and screamed for medical help for the ‘victim.’”

The close interaction between the performance and the audience rendered the play resonant for years to come.

TELEVISION, RADIO, AND CINEMA

This interactive quality of street plays, music, dance, and games appears to be missing from forms like television and radio, according to some participants in the FGD. “Yes, there are [is] information,” one woman concedes, “but watching TV or listening to radio is just one side of the matter.” Referring to the focus group itself, a face-to-face interaction, she comments, “Now we can see you, we can see her, we can see around. Then we came to know what is right and how it is done. So, we can know about everything. But we cannot know all that just by watching TV.” Similarly, another FGD participant argues, “Information is

there [on TV], but we have seen it from outside, not from inside, and only we can have only a partial view." Television leaves the women feeling like outsiders rather than interactors, with only limited access to its information.

Though the women admit that viewers can call radio programmes via telephones, they maintain the superiority of the street play in involving its viewers, saying, "When Tezpur Radio Station broadcasts a programme, they get response, reactions from listeners through phone calls, but street plays are different because one can get feedback then and there."

In addition to the immediacy of the audiences' feedback, the women question the validity of the programmes themselves: "These days there are numerous programmes in TV. How many phone calls are genuine? Some of the names of places mentioned, I doubt whether the people indeed live there."

Beyond these problems with the format of the medium, the women cite logistical problems as well: "As for TV, there are areas where there is hardly any supply of electricity. To own a TV means spending money, which many do not have." In terms of people's access to the radio, the FGD participants had mixed views. One woman said,

"Very few listen to the radio. Even if they have they would rather listen to songs and mostly film songs. Whenever there are discussions on health, people at once switched off the radio. So we think field visits are important when we talk directly they understand clearly. Street plays are also good."

Another woman also reported:

"They do have radio, in which case one only needs to listen. Therefore, there is no need to have special time. The work is carried on while listening to the radio. Radio means a lot. Radio's popularity is slightly above that of TV, newspapers, etc. Not everyone has phones. A lot of replies can be received through the phone. Therefore radio is slightly above the other media."

Though this woman concedes radio's potential value, she maintains, "The best medium is the street play." While radio does provide an efficient means for multi-tasking, allowing both work and listening to take place simultaneously, listeners often choose the content for leisure, rather than for education.

VCDs are often used to show films; however, this medium also lacks the desired immediacy. As one participant recounts, "It is quite nice to watch them [films]. We get knowledge and information. We enjoy it more because we talk on those particular issues... Exposure visits are so good, it can be even better. In films it is not like not practical. It is not like exposure. We want that." Though this participant prefers exposure, saying life isn't

parallel to the films, other women wanted to avoid the parallels between cinematic and everyday realities:

“I do not see films. Because any time in my room I see cinema-like acts. Most of the times there are sighs and cries, and cases of violence. I do not like to see and when I watch it on the screen it disturbs me, I lose sleep at night. That is the reason I don’t often watch pictures.”

For both participants, cinema is not the best tool for empowerment. While they approach the medium from different angles, they still frame their comments around issues of immediacy and the ability to immerse the viewer. Likewise, language is another factor in the efficacy of the tool.

PRINT AND LANGUAGE

While the women mention print, the problems with literacy exclude print as a viable option, though many women mention the use of leaflets to accompany other forms of communication, such as musical performances. “Very few read papers,” one woman states. When discussing the need for interaction and experience, another woman explains, “One cannot just write a letter on a paper. There is no such facility.”

Though print journalism is not a viable option for the grassroots, one participant points out

“There are a lot of educated people whose mentality has not changed. They have received education but it has not made them really aware or sensitive. In this respect, the newspaper could be very effective. If the journalists could be made aware, then through their writings they can create impact which leads to development of attitude and conduct.”

More important than this, the language of communication is extremely important. For example, one woman translated the Guidebook of Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative into Assamese. These differences in language make the songs and dances effective means of communicating across linguist borders: “There are many different communities among us. Our language is Bengali, which is used in different districts. The problems of different districts are focused through the festival of folk dances.” The language is a necessary means of identification: “In our area even today, the Assamese also have kept their culture alive... So we use the language to present our theme. The true used is also from our Assamese culture.”

Because India encompasses vast numbers of cultures and languages, acknowledging cultural and linguistic specificity is essential for communication.

INTERNET AND PHONES

While the participants view the theatre, music, radio, television and film as ways of reaching out to potential audiences/constituents, other forms of media are more often used for administrative purposes. Many of the women cited some experience with computers and mobile phones. For administration of the organisation, it is efficiency, rather than face-to-face contact and personal interaction, that takes precedence. "Work can be done easily with phone connections," one woman remarks, but laments, "It is true but when connectivity fails, no work can be done." Another woman states the benefits of the phone, remembering:

"Earlier on there was no telephone as such. One had to come from a great distance. Now whatever progress is there, I have been able to go quite far. How to go to shops to give products, or how to keep contacts with businessmen, how to do the job quickly, respond to query on design or colour, without losing time and with minimum effort one can make contacts."

The women recognised the potential of the Internet, citing its ability to give information to the organisation, who can then disseminate it more widely:

"We can share information with rural people. The various aspects of law, etc. can be shared with them. It is not possible to buy all kinds of media. So, we can collect different information from different organisations through the Internet. Then we can give the information to the rural people."

Another useful aspect of the Internet is its perceived universality. Unlike the street play, whose success can vary according to rural or urban context, "Whether it is in rural or urban context, we can use this medium in the same way." However, the women acknowledge the steep learning curve necessary for implementing the tool:

"Then we will have to start from the very beginning. We shall have to start teaching again. Computer training is a must. Besides that the general public will have to learn from the alphabet onwards...In the present circumstances it is not suitable."

The women describe the computer as a useful tool, but for the time being, its utility is projected into the future.

THE VALUE OF INTERACTION AND IMMERSION

As the women told stories of their struggles to reach the communities they serve, two main narratives emerged to frame their successes: the intimate, personal, and experiential qualities of face-to-face interactions and the emotional effect of the medium on its audiences. Both factors appear to be grounded on the immediacy of a communication tool and on its specificity to the context in which it takes place. As such, these two factors appear to represent the major reasons why a particular communication tool is considered preferable and effective.

CHAPTER 6

INDIA SYNTHESIS

CONTENT SYNTHESIS

- A total of 19 organisations from India were interviewed for this study. Based on the interview, 54% reported that they worked primarily with grassroots women in different issues and concerns, 38% have broader women beneficiaries outside the grassroots and one group (8%) reported that their organisation caters to broader services but also includes a gender component. The majority of the organisations (65%) go into training on different issues while 59% are resource organisations that provide services and even financial support to grassroots women. Also, some (59%) pursued research. A number of organisations are positioned for advocacy (53%), education and information dissemination (47%), and networking (41%). Training (89%) and education as consciousness raising (53%) are the strategies most used in communicating with grassroots women used by majority of the organisations. As for the uses of these tools, the top uses were for education (74%), training (68%), advocacy (58%), administration (37%) announcements and research (26%).
- Theatre is the top communication tool, as mentioned by all 19 organisations. Theatre is used in training and is preferred because it allows participants to be actively engaged on the issue. Theatre and plays are also used in educating people and advocating issues. Theatre is closely followed by the use of films or videos (95%), other tools (89%) like charts, diaries, bags and paintings, and CDs, music and songs (68%). Intermediary

groups also use books (58%), traditional mode of story-telling or oral communication (58%), posters (58%), and photos (47%). Together with radio (42%), new ICTs such as the Internet ranked seventh while the computer and telecommunications like landline phones (37%) ranked as the eighth most-used communication tool by intermediary groups in interacting with the grassroots women. Cellular phones (26%) ranked ninth in the most-used communication tool together with telefax, leaflets, magazines, pamphlets, and the television.

- The tools most accessible to grassroots women as observed by the intermediary groups are cellular phones (40%) and theatre (40%). This is followed closely by films or videos (30%), other tools (30%), radio (30%), and music and songs (30%). The new ICTs (Internet technology and computer) are still seen to be the least accessible tools for grassroots women. Computers are scarce, and there is no Internet access in most villages.
- Theatre (71%) is the most effective ICT as reported by 17 intermediary groups. Theatre tackles tradition and is culturally appropriate (44%), provides therapy and empowerment (44%), and provides lasting impact (44%). Theatre is followed by other tools (29%) -- paintings or *phads* are seen as effective tools -- and then by film (24%), Internet technology (24%), oral or story-telling (24%), and radio (24%). Visually stimulating qualities (50%) of plays, films, and banners was the number one reason why they decided to use these communication tools. This is followed by affordability (44%), wide reaching coverage (44%), and interactivity and speed (44%).
- Showing films or videos was mentioned by two groups (29%) as ineffective. This was due to the absence of electricity in the location and also because of set-up problems (31%). Posters (29%) were also found ineffective because they are not affordable (46%). Generally, most (46%) of the organisations mentioned that these communication tools were ineffective because of the lack of skills, training and literacy, other reasons (46%), and cultural inappropriateness (46%). The Internet, newspapers, and posters are also ineffective because there are many grassroots women who cannot read and write.

THEMATIC SYNTHESIS

5 main themes emerged on the meaning of empowerment for intermediary groups in India: [1] economic independence, [2] political participation, [3] community organising or solidarity-building, [4] individual agency or self-transformation, and [5] societal transformation.

- **Economic independence** was primarily viewed in terms of the intermediary groups' activities towards strengthening women's economic means or income-earning ability.
- **Political participation** was regarded in terms of the groups' numerous and varied activities focused on legal rights. Specifically mentioned was the initiative of informing women of laws preventing violence. Activities were not gender-specific and among those cited include negotiating with government regarding community issues, demanding government and non-government accountability to the development process, and creating spaces for dialogue between communities and government bodies.
- **Community-organising and solidarity-building** in India was described as women becoming part of a collective with common identities and shared struggles. Characteristic of this community-organising and solidarity-building are endeavors that allow women to fight for their rights, to fight against common injustices, and to put an end to domestic violence.
- **Individual agency or self-transformation** consists of the following dimensions: (1) self-worth/awareness (e.g., prioritising her self), (2) personality (e.g., develops confidence and courage), (3) expression (e.g., is able to talk and negotiate), (4) independence/freedom, (5) control (e.g., makes her own decisions, controls her own life, takes charge of her own body), and (6) rights/society (gives her own perspective on issues, becomes a leader, and questions society's marginalisation of women).
- Finally, **societal transformation** involved infiltrating discourses and everyday knowledge that vilify or speak ill of women in India. Specifically, this points to transforming traditional beliefs about women and incorporating women's perspectives into the public discourse.

WHEN IS INFORMATION EMPOWERING?

Ten themes emerged on the meaning of empowering information among Indian intermediary groups. Information is empowering when it is [1] accessible or suitable to the community, [2] accurate or based on research from the ground, [3] transformative or leads to change, [4] by means of interactive dialogue, [5] useful, [6] based on trust, [7] updated, [8] based on continuity and repetition, [9] involves the people, and [10] builds on existing discourses.

WHEN ARE COMMUNICATION TOOLS EMPOWERING?

Communication Tools In General. In summary, a theme that emerged among intermediary groups in India is that all communication tools are necessary and that each

tool has its own advantages and disadvantages. However, intermediary groups remained in search of communication tools that are accessible and self-sustaining for grassroots women and communities. Intermediary groups were highly critical of the use of communication tools, pointing to the need to examine why a particular tool is used. In effect, there appears to be a need to constantly ask “for what end or purpose?” They also highlighted the need to understand the context wherein communication tools are utilised, implying that a specific tool may work best for a particular context. For instance, a specific tool may be most suitable for a specific group given its relevant characteristics such as class, age, and gender. Some noted how women’s illiteracy, vis-à-vis men, affects their use of communication tools. For example, women do not read the news or use the computer as much as men. Some intermediary groups expressed that it is not the tool but rather the process that is crucial to empowerment. There remained a belief that tools can bring about change and revolution.

The main themes on the empowering potential of **Traditional Communication Tools** are outlined by tool:

- **Oral Communication** - two-way face-to-face communication is most empowering because of the interactive participation and feedback.
- **Theatre and Performing Arts** - theatre, songs, puppetry are empowering because they are powerful in grassroots women’s consciousness as they build on tradition – evoking emotions, inciting connections, facilitating interactions, and making a unique impact (of the different modes of performing arts, **theatre, songs, and puppetry** were mentioned).
- **Print Media** – the use of print media (specifically newspaper) is a problem as women do not read them; the use of books can engage the community and start a dialogue (of the different types of print media, **newspapers and books** were mentioned).
- **Film/Video** - film/video, given its wide reach and replicability, can be empowering but appears to lose on the participatory process present in traditional communication tools; film is used to initiate dialogue; most empowering when produced by the community themselves.
- **Television (TV)** - television, despite its wide reach which translates to empowering potential, is not accessible to intermediary groups and generates useless entertainment often for commercial ends.
- **Radio** - radio can reach grassroots women as women listen more to the radio as compared to men.
- **Telecommunications** – (not mentioned)

The main themes on the empowering potential of **New ICTs** are as follows:

- **Cellphone** - (not mentioned)
- **Computer and Internet** - **new ICTs** are valued by **intermediary groups** for their efficiency and connectivity (e.g., email campaigns) but they are also seen as alienating and isolating as they cut personal interaction and remove the passion in activism; they are also not necessarily empowering to women who use them; though intermediary groups recognise the unfortunate situation of grassroots women's lack of access to **new ICTs**, access to these new media can only come after they are able to access their basic needs; there is a belief that feminist groups are not maximising the use of **new ICTs** and that making **new ICTs** accessible to people is the way forward.

As a whole, **oral communication** was considered by intermediary groups in India as most empowering for grassroots women because it allows for interactive participation in the communication process. **Theatre and performing arts** was also considered empowering. **Theatre** was cited as having a unique impact given its link to tradition, making it culturally-appropriate for grassroots women in India. In addition, **theatre** evokes emotion and facilitates interaction. **Film, TV, and radio** were *potentially* empowering given their wide reach. On the other hand, print **media** was not considered empowering. **Telecommunications** was not cited at all.

Vis-à-vis **new ICTs**, the **traditional communication tools**, in terms of **oral communication** and **theatre**, were considered more empowering for grassroots women. Though the **computer and Internet** were valued by intermediary groups for advancing their own work, the **new ICTs'** utility in empowering grassroots women at present was not as expressed. Though there is a belief that making **new ICTs** accessible to people is the way forward, access to basic needs remains primary. Among the **new ICTs**, the **cellphone** was not mentioned. At present, intermediary groups in India find **traditional communication tools** more empowering for grassroots women compared to **new ICTs**.

FGD SYNTHESIS

Based on the FGD held with the North East Network members, face to face interaction remains to be the most effective medium for community development work as they mentioned the importance of immediacy in their advocacy work. The women participants also mentioned the need to acknowledge the multiplicity of audiences in one's communication work. Given the challenge of communicating with audiences with different languages, the women point towards cultural arts, such as theatre, songs and puppetry, as enabling them to overcome this language barrier. Meetings are perceived as less effective and less personal given low attendance in these events. An effective way

of communicating with beneficiaries is to meet and communicate with them in intimate settings such as their own homes. For them, effective learning is learning that touches people on an emotional level, which was deemed available through the intimate, personal, and experiential qualities of face-to-face interactions.

Important factors that intermediary groups need to take into account in carrying out their grassroots advocacy work pertain to the need to establish trust and confidence with the people and the need to address the literacy deficiency among the grassroots.

While acknowledging the usefulness of new ICTs, the participants emphasised the limited character of this usefulness by citing that new ICTs are more useful in addressing the administrative concerns of the organisations and in communicating outside of immediate community spaces. According to them, new ICTs do not generate discussions and requires a steep learning curve, with their utility considered as something for the future.

For the participants, empowerment is embodied in learning through interaction with others. For instance, personal contact and familiarity with both the members of the organisation and their tools for education were integral components in the efficacy of the women's campaigns, and therefore, in the women's own empowerment as well.

India

COMMUNICATION EXPERIENCE

- Multiple audiences
- Language barrier overcome
- Thorough & less personal
- Lectures less personal
- Effective learning tools

IMPACT OF INTERMEDIARY GROUP

- Importance of building trust & confidence
- Addressing literacy deficiency

VIEWS OF NEW ICTS

- Useful for ADMIN
- Appropriate for outside
- Community
- Content delivery & discussion
- Deep learning curve
- Something for the future

NOTIONS OF EMBODIMENT

LEARNING THROUGH INTERACTION WITH OTHERS



FGD



WHAT IS EMBODIMENT?

INTEGRATIONS TO EMBODIMENTING WHEN.....

1. Accessible
2. Accurate
3. Transformative
4. Thorough dialogues
5. Useful
6. Updated
7. Trust
8. Repentful
9. Involves
10. Partic. on existing association

