

Prakriye – Centre for Community Informatics and Development

Working for progressive social change in the information society ecosystem entails action at two different levels. On the one hand, development actors need to engage with the governance issues of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) at the macro-level, engaging with governments and policy-makers. On the other hand, they have to work at the local level towards empowering communities through the creation of innovative systems that demonstrate new pathways or show how alternatives to dominant models can be envisioned.

Prakriye – Centre for Community Informatics and Development, IT for Change's (ITfC) field centre in Mysore, works with community-based organisations involved with a broad development agenda, from women's empowerment to livelihood issues. Prakriye explores ways in which new information and communication systems can enable more participatory and effective community development processes, through the capacity building of local partner organisations. The learnings gained from projects are used to both diffuse knowledge about our work and advocate towards community-centric and empowerment-oriented Information and Communication Technology for Development (ICTD) policies.

This year has seen the continuation of our work in the areas of community radio, community video and community computing in our demonstration project among *Mahila Samakhya* Karnataka's (MSK), women's collectives (*sanghas*), initiated through the *Mahiti Manthana* (MM) project in Mysore district, Karnataka. Our work in the area of community informatics and education has been taken forward through the *Kishori Chitrapata* (Images by adolescent girls) project.

Community Radio

During the year 2010-2011, *Kelu Sakhi* (Listen, O Friend!), the '*sangha* radio', explored new formats, campaigns, production processes and ways of engaging with communities.

Until last year, radio programmes were not set up in any defined physical location, but after three years of broadcasting, physical space and time were included in the scenarios, enabling stories to include unusual characters (e.g. men or singing mosquitoes) and to take place across the country. This new process enabled us to 'glamorise' women's mobility as some scenarios were set in the Mysore *Dasara* festival, in the future or at a fair on the top of Malai Madeshvara hill. The campaigns undertaken, such as the *gram panchayat* election, recharging ground water or women's health, were presented through different aspects and formats, in order to engage the audience in diverse ways. The scope of the

Sangha dhvani slot, dedicated to success stories of *sangha* women and *Mahila Samakhya* (MS) personnel, was expanded, and the focus shifted from grand achievements to successes which, however small, have impacted patriarchal structures in subtle and long-lasting ways. The testimonials have since included both techniques to climb trees wearing a *sari* and challenges encountered in becoming a *sangha* member. Additionally, the *kishoris* from the *Kishori Chitrapata* project were given space to voice their reflections and concerns on the radio.

The fourth anniversary broadcast of *Kelu Sakhi* celebrated women in the public sphere, and was well received. Women asked for a repeat broadcast of the programme. Furthermore, the scope for feedback has increased, and we have observed a higher number of responses to our broadcasts from a secondary layer of listeners, i.e. non-MSK *sangha* men and women. Feedback is collected in two ways. At the end of each

broadcast, a mobile number is announced to which women are asked to give a missed call to share their feedback. MSK functionaries also collect feedback during their meetings.

We have shared our experience of community radio, and its possibilities for women's empowerment with different audiences and actors. At the general body meeting of the MSK *Sangha* Federation, we sold radios at a low cost to promote collective listening among *sangha* women. We also facilitated a 'Capacity Building Workshop for Community Radio' organised by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India (GoI) and the Community Radio Forum of India. Breakthrough, a Mangalore-based organisation, visited the project to learn about the sector, and a researcher from the London School of Economics (LSE) chose to study *Kelu Sakhi* for a paper to be published shortly.

We have continued to build the capacities of our partners, including MS personnel about radio production, and *Vikasana*, about the design of a radio strategy. *Vikasana* is a Mandya-based grassroots organisation working with marginalised and minority communities for natural resource management, savings, organic farming and livelihood options. We have also negotiated a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) to create broadcast platforms on the Mysore and Bengaluru *Gyanvani* radio channel for community radio programmes of these organisations for two half-hour slots, one of which will soon be used by *Vikasana*. This MoU marks a formal agreement with the largest open university in the world, recognising the potential and power of community radio for women's empowerment.

Community Video

This year, we shifted our focus to increase the collective viewing of MM videos. With the addition of six new videos, our video content bank now has a total of 22 videos (see Annexure 2 for a list of the videos). Collective video screenings have taken place in various ways. For instance, the Hosavaranchi *Namma Mahiti Kendra* (NMK) *sakhi* organised 29 screenings, which were attended by women from a number of *sanghas*. Community screenings are

organised by *sangha* women and the *Prakriye* team and target the entire community. Over the last year, six community screenings have taken place, and each of them was attended by the majority of people in the villages.

At the general body meeting of the MSK federation, we sold 98 video kits, a number which shows the motivation of *sangha* women to organise collective viewing. This initiative enabled us to reach new blocks of the Mysore district, approaching thereby 53 new *sanghas* and 1,060 new *sangha* women. Watching these videos has had several positive impacts on *sangha* women, as for instance the Heggadalli *sangha* women who vowed not to get their daughters married at an early age after watching 'Do I like the groom?', a video where adolescent girls enacted a role-play about the repercussions of early marriage.

The *Prakriye* team has also instituted the 'Friday forum', an initiative where the team explores the finer nuances of film making, to understand the possibilities and strengths of the craft by experimenting with different formats. The forum has created a simple yet valuable understanding of the video medium, evidenced by the articulation of the team.

Community Computing

The *Prakriye* team has continued its work with three village level community telecentres called *Namma Mahiti Kendras* (NMK) (Our Information Centres), at Attiguppe, Hosavaranchi and Bannikuppe villages, and *Taluk Mahiti Kendras* (TMK), at Hunsur and H.D. Kote block centres. NMK and TMK share the same basic guiding principles and NMKs are the foundation on which TMKs have been built.

At the block level, TMKs work at building and maintaining linkages between the community and frontline government departments. This democratic facilitating role has been recognised by a number of government departments, such as the Horticulture Department, Agriculture Department, Fisheries Department and Food and Civil Supplies Department, whose representatives have come to the centres to orient women about available schemes and opportunities. Furthermore, the Hunsur TMK *sakhi*, supported by the *Prakriye* team, has been invited to be a part of the block level committee

In other radio programmes, information is about the world, but in *Kelu Sakhi*, we listen to our information.

Devamma, *sangha* woman
from Attiguppe village,
Mysore district, India

Vidiyal has been collaborating with IT for Change since 2008. We have had a great experience learning from the Mahiti Manthana project, in using ICTs for rural development in collaboration with local people, especially women. We learnt the technologies and strategies adopted in involving the community and their participation. Vidiyal's experience with IT for Change has been very useful.

K. Kamaraj, founder of
Vidiyal, Madurai, India

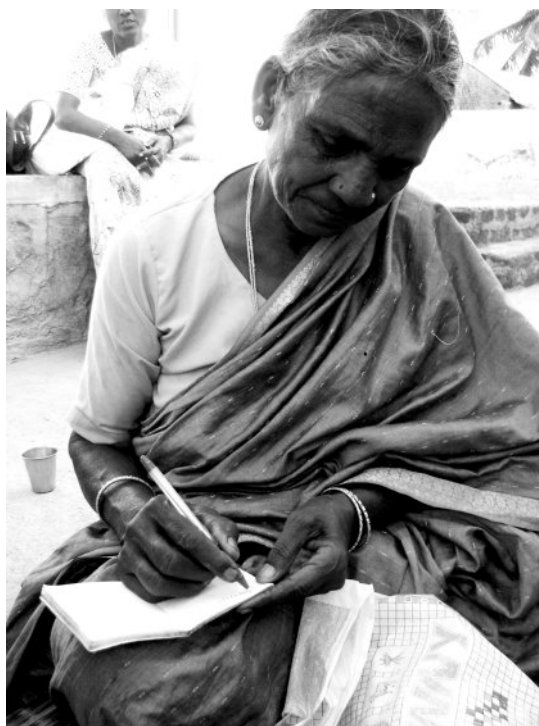
Thanks to the video on the literacy camp in my kit, I was able to motivate all the 16 villages I handle to organise literacy camps. I am very proud to share that all my sangha women are literate.

Ramamani, Cluster Resource Person (Mahila Samakhya Karnataka)

formed by the block education office (BEO) to review the status of education in the block. The Hunsur TMK *sakhis* were successful in convincing the representatives of the Agriculture Department to give free seeds to women even when the land was not registered in their name. Apart from negotiating with the government on behalf of the community, TMKs have also been instrumental in facilitating information access, and the TMK *sakhi* has helped people obtain certificates and other entitlements. The *sakhis* have, on occasion, also been able to assist people beyond their basic informational needs.

At the village level, the NMKs act as community information centres, owned and run by women, and working for women's empowerment. They aim at creating more equitable ways and processes for information access and sharing for the community by changing the existing information and communication architecture.

At the MSK general body meeting, Puttamma from Masage village (Mysore district, India) signs her name instead of using her thumb-print following her training at the literacy camp



Communities that NMKs cater to are the NMK villages and 4-5 outreach villages, which are within walking distance of the *sakhi* (2-3 kilometres). During 2010-11, the *sakhis'* visits to village households to ask people about their information needs, became monthly. This increased frequency opened up new requests and

increased the number of people visiting the centres. The process was piloted in the NMK villages, but it has now spread to outreach villages. To maximise the *sakhis'* visits in outreach villages and publicise the NMK outreach programme, *Prakriye* initiated a mapping process through which a *sakhi*, helped by local youth, drew a map of the village, including information such as common resources, infrastructure and caste break-up. A growing number of women, men, adolescents girls and boys, as well as Auxiliary Nurse Midwife (ANM) from the local primary health centre, come to the centre for their various information needs (see Annexure 3 for statistics about the visitors to NMKs). Further, the *sakhi* from Hosavaranchi has started a mobile-based service where outreach community members get a missed call when the *sakhi* has relevant information for them. The *sakhis'* efficiency is affected by external actors, and indifferent officials can sometimes delay the provision of information.

Community Information and Education

During 2010-11, our intensive engagement with out-of-school adolescent girls in the villages of Attiguppe and Hosavaranchi for the *Kishori Chitrapata* project grew into a fulfilling journey for both us, as facilitators of change, and the *kishoris*, as participants in a learning sphere that encouraged not just individual understanding but also the building of a spirited collective.

Supported by UNICEF, the project started in 2009, in partnership with MSK and *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* (SSA). Through innovative uses of video, radio and computing technologies, the *kishoris* are encouraged, individually and collectively, to explore, question and redefine their social and cultural context. Through this process, they are also encouraged to achieve the larger purpose of education – the ability to creatively negotiate one's life in order to fulfil one's potential and aspirations. Two learning nodes were established at the two villages where MSK *sangha* women were successfully managing the NMKs. The Managing Committee (MC) of the NMKs, consisting of *sangha* women representatives from many *sanghas* in the village, agreed to take up the responsibility of supporting and nurturing the *kishoris*. They were equally crucial in negotiating with the parents of

interested *kishoris* and campaigning for the training itself. In both villages, the NMK *sakhis* did a baseline survey of all the adolescent girls in the village, after which we met each of them, their parents and the village elders, and community leaders to get a go-ahead for the training. The technology learning started with photography and the digital camera, through which the girls explored their village.

Technology and Social Training

The photography training ended with an exhibition of the best photographs of the *kishoris* for the village communities, which the *sangha* women helped organise. Men, women and children came together and were impressed by how beautifully their villages were represented. Even though some were sceptical, parents of *kishoris* were proud of their daughters' skills. The exhibition was a celebration and an occasion for *kishoris* from the two villages to interact. In Attiguppe, the exhibition was followed by the screening of a film which captured the *kishoris*' experience of learning photography and exploring their village life through the camera lens. Following the photography training, video camera training commenced. New *kishoris* were trained and mentored by older participants and within a few months, all the girls had learnt basic photo and video skills, from interview and audio-recording techniques to team work and production processes, proving the effectiveness of peer learning processes which positively impact the self-esteem of both learners and teachers. Many of the programmes they recorded were broadcast on the *Kelu Sakhi* programme. They then learnt computer basics with great enthusiasm.

Along with the technology training, a central objective of the project was curriculum building, in order to enable the *kishoris* to learn and explore subjects and issues that directly contribute to their empowerment. This was undertaken with a gender sensitive approach geared towards self and peer learning, local context and emphasising the power of participatory technology. The finalised curriculum themes included the strength of the collective, identity, patriarchy, livelihood options for *kishoris*, knowing your village, *gram panchayat*, marriage and the ideal school from the *kishoris*' point of view. Other key subjects



The *kishoris* dressed in saris for the Kishori Habba, a festival they wished to organise to launch the second part of the trainings (Halevaranchi village, Mysore district, India)

were also introduced, such as articulating the body image in their minds and being aware of the influences that condition it, understanding adolescence, facing challenges and informed problem solving and decision making.

This new stage of training started with the *Kishori Habba* (*kishori* festival), a celebration the girls themselves asked for, during which both *kishoris* and the project team were dressed in *saris*. After drawing a coloured *rangoli* in front of the centre, singing and dancing, we shared a meal of assorted sweets and snacks from the *kishoris*' homes. The team then enacted short role-plays about the imagined ideal future of each of the *kishoris* in five years, after which the *kishoris* took an oath to enthusiastically participate in the training. Such small festive events go a long way in keeping the group spirit alive.

In order for *kishoris* from the two project villages to interact, and for us to conduct intensive training sessions on important subjects, we organised three visits to Mysore city, where *Prakriye* is located. The girls had a chance to tour the city, and discuss, during the training sessions, the challenges faced by adolescent girls in various cultures, from Afghanistan to South Africa, and the initiatives undertaken across the world to empower adolescent girls during the training sessions. Negotiating with *kishoris*' parents was at first difficult but became easier for subsequent visits as parents saw the positive effects on

I never thought that I am beautiful till today because I compared myself with the ones (women) on television. I am going to look at myself in the mirror differently from now on.

Asha, one of our *kishoris*

Strength of the collective

This training module introduced the *kishoris* of the *Kishori Chitrapata* (Images by adolescent girls) project, to the concept of a collective, generating reflections about why people form collectives, the advantages of forming/being part of a collective, the achievements of collectives in their own villages, as well as the challenges faced and ways to overcome them.

"Why must we interview the men about sanghas, what do they know about it?"

After interviewing three men from different castes, the *kishoris* were pleasantly surprised to find out that the men in the village knew of the women's collective and had a very positive impression of them.

"I never knew that the sangha women were responsible for getting the bus to our village. I always assumed it must be the village leader or the panchayat president"

By the end of the training, the *kishoris* realised the many achievements of the *sanghas*, such as covering an old well to prevent accidents, getting garbage removed from the school, and building drains in two of the village streets. The *kishoris* researched, scripted, enacted, shot and directed a play based on the *sangha's* achievement of getting a bus to the village.

The *kishoris* also explored and identified the elements of an ideal *sangha*, as well as the various challenges a *sangha* faces, imagining and articulating hypothetical creative solutions.

The Friday classes have helped a lot in increasing the confidence levels of the girls. The girls are usually very inhibited in other classes. If the Kishori Chitrapata project had not happened, only five girls would have achieved an appreciable confidence level.

Bhavya, Mahila Shikshana Kendra teacher, Hunsur block, Mysore district, India, in an interview conducted by researchers from UNICEF

their daughters. As Reeta's mother said when her daughter brought back gifts for the family: "My daughter is a different person now. She not only managed to bring gifts for everyone with the money I gave her, but brought back some of the money unspent as well".

Mahila Shikshana Kendra

Acting on a suggestion by SSA and UNICEF, we opened a third node in Hunsur block (Mysore district) in the *Mahila Shikshana Kendra* (MS Kendra). This residential bridge school for out-of-school adolescent girls is managed and run by MSK. Training modules were redesigned for larger groups and the girls successfully learnt the basics of photography, digital camera and video camera through constructivist learning exercises. In November 2010, the students of MS Kendra participated in the *kishori mela* organised by MSK at Periyapatna block (Mysore district) where the *kishoris'* photos and video skills were much admired.

Successes and Challenges

Throughout the project, we were reminded of the vulnerability of the group we were working with. The *kishoris* are located in a social context that is marred by caste, violence against women and the confinement of young girls to the home for several reasons, for assisting in household chores to matters of reputation. We have had to continually devise creative ways by which to fend off these threats and work towards empowerment and learning. Added to these socio-cultural and patriarchal concerns is the additional element of adolescent emotionalities. Older *kishoris* missed training sessions because of a sense of rejection; they felt attention was diverted to new *kishoris*.

The *sangha* has proven to be a robust support system in designing strategies to combat the various challenges, with the NMK *sakhi* being a positive and supporting role model for the *kishoris*, and because of the project staff's sensitivity to the local context. When drop-out rates increased because the girls were getting married early, the MC members of the NMK acted as local anchors of the project by campaigning among the parents of outreach villages, conducting meetings and taking responsibility for their daughters' safety. Unfortunately, for different reasons, some challenges were not overcome – for instance, the training at the Attiguppe node had to be halted as our negotiations could not achieve new enrolments.

However, there have been enough positive indicators to keep us motivated, as the stories below reflect.

- When she first came into training, Pallavi (Attiguppe village) hardly spoke and told us that she had a low perception of herself. As the training progressed, she grew into a self-confident and cheerful girl who found a job at Hunsur, which required her to photograph people coming to get their identity/ration cards.
- Gowri (Halevaranchi village) managed to negotiate with her family and her groom to postpone her wedding by four months, which has enabled her to continue attending the training.
- Reeta (Hosavaranchi village) could not easily read or write as she had dropped out of school after seventh standard. Today, she

makes an effort to read and regularly volunteers to write, requesting others to correct her.

- Tara, the NMK *sakhi* of Hosavaranchi village, had to get married to a school teacher in North Karnataka. Through negotiations with her family and her groom, she stayed at her mother's house to complete the training and keep her job as a *sakhi*, before joining her husband.
- Even though it was peak agricultural labour season, Kavita (Halevaranchi village) convinced her mother to let her go to the training and said she would then happily help her the rest of the week, without complaining. Her mother let her go.

During the year, a number of resources were created. The *kishoris* from the three learning nodes have produced many short video clips and audio recordings, covering topics as diverse as folk songs, women's work, *gram panchayat* elections, intelligent ways of negotiating, the age of marriage and the strength of the collective. Most of these programmes have been aired on the *Kelu Sakhi* radio programme. Through two films, *Camera Kannalli Nan Kanasu* (My dream in the eye of the camera) and *Camera, Naavu, Nammooru* (We, Our village and the Camera), the *Prakriye* team tried to capture the Attiguppe and Hosavaranchi *kishoris'* experiences of learning to use the digital camera and explore their village through photography. The training manuals of each module on the basics of digital photography, video and audio are available in Kannada, as are training videos about the basics of photography.

Technologies, such as audio recording and video shooting, have allowed for the creation of a comfortable space for discussion and reflection. Due to their technology skills and training, the *kishoris* have been able to ask *sangha* women about the history and achievements of their collective; family and friends about themselves, their expectations, likes and dislikes, as well as many villagers about topics ranging from the importance of forests to their impressions about *sanghas*. Video role-plays have proven to be very effective in enabling the *kishoris* to act out the desired outcomes of their life situations, engaging with complex reflections linking their own experiences to the issues discussed. Stories, games and role-

playing have been very effective in conveying complex messages. We had the opportunity to share our experiences and learnings from the project in response to a call for papers from UNESCO and Plan India for the South Asian Conference on 'Responding to the

Needs of Out of School Adolescents – Experiences of South Asian Countries'. Our paper is accessible on www.ITforChange.net/SolEx_gender_KC. In order to collaboratively create and share the learnings from the project, we also created a wiki page: www.public-software.in/KCwiki/index.php/KC-Learnings:Community_portal.

Looking Ahead

Prakriye is in the process of consolidating the learning generated and thus re-envisioning its role as a one-of-its-kind link between organisations and their development goals at the district, state and national level. The coming year will see the hand-holding of the *Vikasana* radio broadcast for the communities *Vikasana* works with. We will also continue the work with the *kishoris* on curriculum development. With continued strategic and creative interventions, we intend to focus on documenting the learnings and insights from the *Kishori Chitrapata* project, as well as editing the videos shot by the *kishoris*, which will be screened in the villages. The *Kishori Chitrapata* project engages with a combination of important issues – an empowered women's collective nurturing young adolescents to become the next generation of empowered women; contextualised learning through technologies; and a sensitive visual media that captures all these experiences. We hope to find ways and means to sustain this experiment, while developing different models based on project learnings for up-scaling pilots within the domain of education.



Starting the Kishori Habba by drawing a colourful rangoli (Halevaranchi village, Mysore district, India)

My most memorable moment was when on the first day of training, I thought to myself that I cannot take photos; it is not something I can easily learn. And, the very next moment, they put a camera in my hands. I took photos of a rose and my friends that day.

Shalini, a 10th standard student of Mahila Shikshana Kendra, Hunsur block, Mysore district, India