



Making Women's Voices and Votes Count A digital sojourn (2013-2015)

Reflections from the *Prakriye* field centre of IT for Change
July 2015

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Making Women's Voices and Votes Count (2013-2015) is a joint initiative of IT for Change, *Kutch Mahila Vikas Sangathan* and ANANDI, which has focused on leveraging the potential of digital technologies for building a vibrant women's political constituency at the grassroots and a gender-responsive local governance system, across three sites, in the states of Gujarat and Karnataka in India. IT for Change has provided conceptual leadership to the project, and its field centre *Prakriye* has spearheaded the implementation at the Mysore site. *Kutch Mahila Vikas Sangathan* and ANANDI have steered the implementation at Kutch and Bhavnagar, respectively.

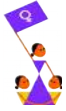
This UN Women Fund for Gender Equality-supported project has reached out to over 135 elected women and over 550 members of women's collectives, across the 3 sites, through the following specific strategies:

- Building an innovative ICT-enabled training model for building elected women's leadership capacities
- Using a combination of face-to-face dialogic meetings, and mobile phone-based IVR networking, for strengthening elected women's linkages to their peers, and to women community leaders and women's collectives in their constituencies
- Creating a new public information architecture at the grassroots to strengthen marginalised women's individual and collective claims-making on state structures, through the setting up of women-run ICT-enabled information centres, in all 3 sites
- Catalysing community-media based campaigns and advocacy, and GIS-enabled participatory mapping and social audits, to bring in an alternative discourse on gender and governance, into the local public sphere

This report is a detailed process documentation of this 2.5 year-long journey at the Mysore site. It brings together the key insights, learnings and reflections from the team members of IT for Change and *Prakriye*, on the project's theory of change, based on their field praxis.

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1. Introduction

“When a word is deprived of its dimension of action, reflection automatically suffers as well; and the word is changed into idle chatter, into verbalism, into an alienated and alienating 'blah'. On the other hand...action for action's sake – negates true praxis”

– Paulo Freire

Theory-building and practice are meaningful only when they are tied together through a process of reflective action – *praxis*. From this standpoint, this report attempts to take stock of the experiences of IT for Change's field centre *Prakriye*, in implementing the *Making Women's Voices and Votes Count* project. In such an assessment, the most crucial element is that of critically evaluating the robustness of the project's central premise – the idea that the dialectic between 'social process' and 'technological affordance' if effectively leveraged, can enable shifts in the associational, informational and communicative power of elected women and their female constituencies. This report proceeds to do this, by systematically reflecting upon the effectiveness of the dialectical techno-social processes initiated by the project, at the Mysore site.

In specific, this report interrogates the extent to which IT for Change's field centre *Prakriye* has harnessed digital artifacts (such as ICT-enabled information centres, community radio, community video, mobile-based informational networking, and GIS-enabled participatory mapping), in creating empowering 'cultures of use'. It is these cultures of use that have been critical to furthering the project's vision – of promoting women's substantive public-political participation, and enhancing the gender-responsiveness of local governance systems.

2. A brief history of Prakriye's work

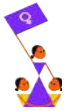
The *Prakriye* field centre in Mysore was set up in 2005 by IT for Change, and was envisioned as a 'Centre for Community Informatics and Development' that would design and implement context-appropriate techno-social systems, for the empowerment of marginalised women and their Community Based Organisations (CBOs), from a rights and citizenship-based perspective. Towards this vision, *Prakriye* started out by working with women's collectives (*sanghas*) of the *Mahila Samakhya*¹ programme in Hunsur and Heggadadevana Kote (H.D.Kote) blocks of Mysore district – regions with high levels of socio-economic deprivation, in the state of Karnataka².

Between 2005-2010, in its work with *Mahila Samakhya sanghas*, *Prakriye* adopted the following strategies:

1. Running a 30-minute weekly radio programme titled *Kelu Sakhi* ('Listen, my friend'), on the local FM channel of the Karnataka State Open University, targeting *Mahila Samakhya sanghas* across the district, by involving them not just as listeners but as content creators. The idea being, the creation of a trans-local dialogic forum that could serve as the '*sanghas*'

1 *Mahila Samakhya* is a pan Indian governmental programme which works towards the education and empowerment of women from socially and economically disadvantaged sections in rural areas, through a collectivisation strategy of mobilising and organising women into village level collectives (locally known as *sanghas*). The programme was operational in Mysore district between 1989 and 2014.

2 Government of Karnataka (2002) High Power Committee for Redressal of Regional Imbalances, Final Report



- own space', while also amplifying women's voice in the local public sphere.
2. Utilising a community video strategy to enhance women's awareness about gender and governance issues; and equipping them with critical perspectives on prevailing gender and social norms.
 3. Setting up community information centres at the village level, owned by local *Mahila Samakhya sanghas*, and operated by young women infomediaries, to enhance marginalised women's access to public information and entitlements, by overcoming the gate-keeping of public information by local elite. Each village information centre was equipped with a computer, mobile Internet, a printer and a digital camera so that it could leverage digital possibilities for accessing information, processing of entitlement application forms and also provide photo studio and DTP services to the local community. The digital equipment was provided on a staggered basis to the centres, as and when the women's collectives crossed crucial steps in their journey of building their capacities to run a community institution.

The reach of these strategies is detailed in **Box 1**.

Box 1. The reach of Prakriye's efforts, during the period 2005-2010

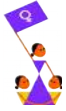
– The FM broadcast of the '*Kelu Sakhi*' programme reached out to over 100 villages in Hunsur and Heggadadevanakote (H.D.Kote) blocks, with a primary listenership base of over 150+ *sanghas* of *Mahila Samakhya*; and a much wider secondary target group extending to women and men listeners from neighbouring districts (Mandya in Karnataka; and Wayanad in Kerala).

– 2 information centres were operational at the village level, in Hunsur block, Hegdakere³ village in Puthur *Gram Panchayat* and Jhalapura village in Chinnapura *Gram Panchayat*. Each centre covered an outreach area of 1-2 kms, reaching out to 3-4 villages in its vicinity. Also, there were 2 information centres operating at the block level, in Hunsur and H.D.Kote. These centres were situated within the offices of the *Mahila Samakhya* block-level Federation, and managed by the Executive Committee of the Federation – comprising of 9 women elected through annual elections, from across all the collectives of the programme, within that block. The block centres were envisaged as key nodes for connecting the village centres to line departments, and it was expected that their role would expand over time, as the number of village centres increased.



– The community video strategy was closely tied to the information centre geographies – and thus, it primarily reached out to 5 *Mahila Samakhya sanghas* associated with the 2 village information centres, and the 9-member Executive Committees of the 2 block level federations. However, at a secondary level, the community video strategy also extended to all the 150+ *Mahila Samakhya sanghas* in the 2 blocks, as the video resources were used by programmatic staff of *Mahila Samakhya* in their numerous trainings and capacity-building efforts.

3 All names (of villages and individuals) have been changed to maintain anonymity.



3. How the evolution of *Prakriye's* work with *Mahila Samakhya sanghas* paved the way, for *Making Women's Voices and Votes Count*

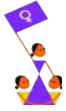
Between 2005-10, as the on-ground work deepened, the *Prakriye* team noticed that the three-pronged strategy of community radio, community video and information centres, was indeed enabling the target group (*dalit* women from economically vulnerable households affiliated to *Mahila Samakhya sanghas*), to acquire the power to assert their voice in the local public sphere and successfully demand, and obtain their individual entitlements from the concerned authorities – line departments at the block level. Also, there were significant status gains for the participating women, within their own households, and in their communities.

However, at the same time, the *Prakriye* team felt that a dent had not been made with respect to *sangha* women's participation in local governance processes – especially in officially mandated forums for citizen-government interactions at the *Gram Panchayat* level. Though some women were attending the *Gram Sabhas* and *Ward Sabhas* convened by their *Gram Panchayats*, and had started recognising the importance of engaging with processes of *Panchayat* decision-making, a groundswell had not been created, with respect to bringing in women's shared agendas and representing women's issues/concerns, before local government bodies.

Increasingly, the team felt that a key strategy for addressing this gap was the enhancement of the linkages between the *Mahila Samakhya sanghas* they were working with, and the elected women representatives in the respective *Panchayat* areas. And a golden opportunity to initiate efforts in this direction seemed to present itself, after the *Panchayat* elections of 2010, when over 70 women leaders successfully came to power across *Gram Panchayats* in Hunsur and H.D.Kote blocks – with strong backing from *Mahila Samakhya sanghas* in their respective constituencies.

Though *Prakriye* had not previously worked with the majority of these 70 *Mahila Samakhya sangha*-backed women leaders, the team members were convinced that the election results were an extremely promising development – as a critical mass of women with vibrant linkages to women's collectives, had come into *Gram Panchayats*. This seemed a potential game-changer for local political cultures, if effectively leveraged, and the team wanted to capitalise on this moment, by extending their ongoing work for the empowerment of *Mahila Samakhya sanghas* into the realm of building a women's political constituency at the grassroots.

Certainly, the *Prakriye* team were well aware of the difficulties in realising this ideal in practice. From their direct field encounters, the team knew that the prevailing cultures of impunity at the *Panchayat* level did not provide a suitable launch-pad for such efforts to promote gender-responsive local governance – and in fact, it was very much possible that women leaders interested in mooting social and gender justice agendas, would be subdued (and even co-opted). Further, the *Prakriye* team recognised that this prevailing political culture was symptomatic of a larger malaise that plagues *Panchayat Raj* institutions in the state. As numerous scholar-practitioners of democratic decentralisation have pointed out, the Karnataka state government has increased financial devolution to *Gram Panchayats*, over the past decade, without concomitant measures for strengthening the powers of participatory sphere institutions such as the *Gram Sabha* and the *Panchayat* sub-committees. Needless to say, this has led to a flourishing “*contractor raj*” system – an unholy nexus of graft and nepotism between local contractors of public works, elected members



of *Panchayats*, and administrative staff – as a result of which the praxis of 'accountable and responsive governance' has been almost completely wiped out⁴.

However, even against this hostile macro-political backdrop, the *Prakriye* team felt that the 70 women who had come to power in *Gram Panchayats* in Hunsur and H.D.Kote, with the support of *Mahila Samakhya sanghas*, could become the heralds of a new gender-responsive local governance culture, if efforts were undertaken in the following areas:

- engaging women's community based organisations (in this specific case, the *Mahila Samakhya sanghas*) in the discourse of claims-making
- promoting dialogue and discussion between elected women and women's collectives from local communities (in this specific case, the *Mahila Samakhya sanghas* who had played a decisive role in the elections), in a manner that enriches deliberative democracy
- enhancing the participation of elected women in formal political processes in a gender-responsive manner
- building an alternative discourse on gender and governance, at the local level

Making Women's Voices and Votes Count offered an opportunity for *Prakriye* to expand the decade-long engagement in Mysore, in these directions. And the initial ideas of the *Prakriye* team, on the specific strategic pathways that could be adopted to initiate work in these areas, are detailed in the subsequent section.

4. The initial ideas of the *Prakriye* team on specific pathways for realising the vision of Making Women's Voices and Votes Count

In 2011-12, when *Making Women's Voices and Votes Count* was on the drawing board, the *Prakriye* team's ideas on the specific strategic pathways that could be adopted at the Mysore site, towards the key project outcomes envisioned, were as follows:

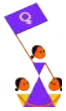


Outcome 1. Increased networking among elected women representatives, and active participation of elected women and women's groups in gender-responsive governance

Pathways initially proposed:

- Creating a trans-local peer learning network of the 70 newly elected women leaders who had come to power with *Mahila Samakhya sangha*-backing, across *panchayats* in Hunsur and H.D.Kote, using the possibilities of mobile phone- based IVR systems.
- Utilising community media-based pedagogic processes to trigger dialogue and deliberation between elected women and *Mahila Samakhya sanghas* in their constituencies; in order to

4 See the work of noted scholar-practitioners such as T.R.Raghuandan, for more details. Also, at the time of writing this report, the proposed amendment to the Karnataka Panchayat Raj Act 1993, seems to offer a ray of hope – as it has some strong measures for enhancing accountability of local government systems, to the citizenry.



shape a shared women's agenda for local governance – which would be then placed before the *Panchayat* through existing citizen forums such as the *Gram Sabha* and *Ward Sabha*, and by pushing for exclusive women-only village assemblies or *Mahila Gram Sabhas*. As these processes would require intense engagement with *Panchayat* bodies and with *sanghas* at the local level, this was planned to be taken up across a smaller area of 7-10 *panchayats* with a subset of 10-12 elected women from the larger group of 70 women leaders. This sub-set was to be termed the 'core group'.



Outcome 2: Enhancing marginalised women's access to entitlements and claims-making

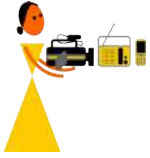
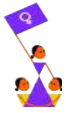
Pathways initially proposed:

– Setting up a critical mass of women-run information centres to enhance marginalised women's access to entitlements.

This was envisioned as comprising of two sets of actions:

- setting up 3 new village information centres to be owned and operated by *Mahila Samakhya sanghas* in new geographies *Prakriye* would enter into. Further, the *Prakriye* team felt that these new info-centres should be set up after finalising the core group of 10-12 elected women the project would closely work with, in order to harmonise the info-centre strategy with that of strengthening elected women's linkages to their peers and other women in their communities. For, the idea was to build strong linkages between the women infomediaries and the *Mahila Samakhya sanghas* involved in the operations of the centres, with the elected women of the *Panchayats* in which the info-centres were located.
- working towards expanding the role of the 2 pre-existing village information centres managed by *Mahila Samakhya sanghas* so that, in addition to their role as points for informational access *Prakriye* would enter into and critical learning for marginalised women, they could also function as bridges between women's collectives and local public institutions such as the *Panchayat*, *anganwadi*, Primary Health Centre etc.

The block hubs managed by the Federations of *Mahila Samakhya* were to continue their role of being critical nodes for linking village information centres to line departments and other key institutions at the block level.



Outcome 3. Utilising community media and GIS-enabled participatory mapping for local and institutional advocacy on gender and governance issues

Pathways initially proposed:



GIS-enabled participatory mapping in Dongriwadi Gram Panchayat

– To equip the core group of 10-12 elected women, in adopting community-media based-campaigning and GIS-enabled participatory mapping for local action, on gender and governance issues in their constituencies, with the support of infomediaries and *Mahila Samakhya sanghas* in their geographies.

The subsequent sections of this report document the key reflections of *Prakriye* team members, on the experiences at the Mysore site, of finalising the core group and the operational area of the project; and translating these strategies into concrete work on the ground.

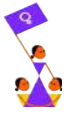
5. *Prakriye's* first forays into Gram Panchayats: The finalisation of the operational area of the project and how the idea of the 'core group' materialised on the ground (January-June 2013)

For the *Prakriye* team, as described in the previous section, the criteria guiding the selection of the operational area of the project, were quite straightforward:

- *Panchayats* in which members of *Mahila Samakhya sanghas* had contested elections and emerged victorious.
- *Panchayats* in which *Mahila Samakhya sanghas* were very strong, and had played a key role in getting active women leaders elected to office.

As the information about the broader set of *Panchayats* from which the 70 *Mahila Samakhya sangha*-backed women leaders had come to power, was available to the *Prakriye* team, the selection of the operational area was essentially a question of identifying the core group of 10-12 elected women from the broader group of 70, that the project would intensively focus on – as the *Panchayats* from which these women hailed from, would be the target of the bulk of the efforts under this project.

To finalise the core group, as it was not possible for the team to interact with all 70 *Mahila Samakhya sangha*-backed leaders who had come to power in the 2010 elections, the *Prakriye* team decided to prepare a shortlist of a few *Panchayats* with strong *Mahila Samakhya sanghas* and elected women leaders with active ties to these *sanghas*, by taking the programmatic staff of *Mahila*



Samakhya into confidence. In addition, the *Prakriye* team strongly felt that work must continue in the 2 *panchayats* in which the 2 preexisting village information centres were located (Puthur and Chinnapura), to maximise synergies.

Taking into account both these imperatives, a shortlist of 7 potential *panchayats* for the intervention was prepared in conjunction with *Mahila Samakhya* staff members.

These 7 *panchayats* included:

- 1) 5 *panchayats* in Hunsur block – Puthur, Chinnapura, Marathawadi, Dongriwadi, Ghadisoge
- 2) 2 *panchayats* in H.D.Kote block – Melgaon and Kamalahalli

Following the preparation of this shortlist, an initial round of visits was carried out to these areas, between January-June 2013, which revealed the following concerns:

5.1 The narrow range of influence of the *Mahila Samakhya* collectives

As all *panchayats* in Karnataka are group *Gram Panchayats*, any project on strengthening elected women and their ties to women's collectives must adopt an approach that targets all wards of a shortlisted *Panchayat*, to be effective. The initial round of visits to these shortlisted *Panchayats* revealed that contrary to the initial expectation of the *Prakriye* team, women's collectives formed under the *Samakhya* programme were active only in small pockets of each of the *Panchayats* identified above, and not in every ward.

5.2 The yawning gap between *Mahila Samakhya sanghas* and the women they helped come to power

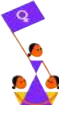
Even within those pockets/wards of the short-listed *Panchayats* where *Mahila Samakhya sanghas* were active, and had played an active role in bringing women into power during the 2010 *Panchayat* elections, the linkages between elected women leaders and *Mahila Samakhya sanghas* were in complete disarray, and there was no evidence of the camaraderie and solidarity, which had previously enabled the women leaders to win the electoral battle. Some of the main insights gleaned from this round of visits are detailed below.

5.2.1 Male family members' active efforts in sabotaging elected women's ties to their *sanghas*

In cases where active women from *Mahila Samakhya sanghas* had come to power with the support of their peers, the *Prakriye* team observed that male family members had actively broken their preexisting linkages to other *sangha women*, after the elections.

As one senior *Mahila Samakhya sangha* leader in Hegdakere village of Puthur *Gram Panchayat* (which also harbors a village information centre initiated by *Prakriye*, prior to this project), put it:

“We elected J-----i to power hoping that she would be someone within the *Panchayat* to whom we could take our *sangha's* issues and concerns, and matters pertaining to our



village. However, what has happened is that after the elections, she does not come at all – her husband does not let her! She doesn't even lie down to sleep in the direction of the information centre'...that is the distance between us!”

This was not surprising, when read against the well-documented trend of political reservation for women dwindling into a mechanism for the local elite to continue their control over *panchayats* – by fielding their wives, or other female members from their kinship and caste group.

5.2.2 Women leaders' imbrication in local *contractor raj*

The team also noted that the fact that local governance had become a high stakes game, entrenched in local “*networks of favours*”, created situations where strong women leaders actively and willingly embraced the mainstream political idiom of entrenched *contractor raj*. In many of the areas the team visited, *Panchayat* seats were popularly viewed as spaces for making money – and many 'wannabes' had sold their lands, to invest in their election campaigns, with the intention of obtaining 'sound returns' on their investment!

For example, as members of a *Mahila Samakhya* collective from Dongriwadi *Panchayat* told a *Prakriye* team member, in a tone of deep resentment:

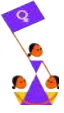
“We had elected B.....a with the hope that finally someone in the *Panchayat* would listen to our issues and concerns.. But as it turns out, all our hopes have been dashed to the ground. Recently, we went to her to argue an entitlement-related request from one of our *sangha* members – and she immediately demanded a cut! We were shocked, and when we questioned her, all she had to say was, “*did I not put money in my election campaign? Who is going to bring it back to me? What should I do about that? And we also didn't know what to do, as she has sold her land to stand for the election.*”

5.2.3 Women furthering existing power structures – the paradoxical workings of patriarchal control

Another fact that was brought home, by these initial round of visits, was the paradoxical workings of patriarchal control, that often led to alliances between strong *sanghas* and local male leaders – such as what transpired in the case of Jhalapura village in Chinnapura *panchayat*.

Jhalapura is a village with which the *Prakriye* team has been engaging with for a long time, and it houses an information centre that was set up prior to *Making Women's Voices and Votes Count*. The *Mahila Samakhya sanghas* here have been extremely vibrant and exhibit tremendous ownership over their village information centre. Some of the key *sangha* leaders in this village have close ties to a local political leader – Rameshanna; and in 2010, when this ward was reserved for women, Rameshanna fielded his wife Roopa. The *Mahila Samakhya sanghas* were more than happy to back her, and enable her to win the elections, though she was clearly (and in fact, willingly) a proxy for her husband – for they were confident that Rameshanna would address their demands, and take up key issues/concerns before other *Panchayat* members!

There were other such instances that the *Prakriye* team encountered in the early months of 2013,



when they were on their round of visits to the shortlisted villages – which highlighted the messy entanglements of women's collectives in mainstream politics.

5.2.4 Clientèlist governance and the pressures on elected women

Another main reason that the *Prakriye* team identified, for the alienation of elected women from local women's collectives, pertained to the everyday manifestations of the prevailing systemic paradigm of clientèlist governance. In the absence of universal social security, and lack of bottom-up local planning, the welfare scheme allocations made by the state exchequer to *Gram Panchayats* usually lack a sound rationale– and in most cases, there are demand-supply mismatches, as a result of which elected members face the ire of disgruntled community members.

In fact, in cases where elected women representatives had come to power with backing from *Mahila Samakhya sanghas*, the team observed that *sangha* members often felt let down by the elected woman leader when she expressed her helplessness to fulfill their entitlement-related demands, due to the vagaries of budgetary allocations – and this was a major factor that led to a rupture in their previously strong and vibrant relationship. As one elected woman representative from Marathawadi *panchayat* expressed to a *Prakriye* team member during these initial interactions in 2013,

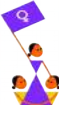
“In our *Gram Panchayat*, when we elected members go to the *Gram Sabha* and *Ward Sabha*, all that people are interested in, is whether they will be allotted benefits under the housing schemes of the state. At least 80 people in our *Panchayat* have raised requests. But we have received budgetary allocations for only 27 houses. Who can we sanction the houses to? And when my *sangha* members also put in their demands, and they get angry, it becomes very difficult. They don't understand our helplessness. Finally, we let the budget lapse!”

5.3 The process finally adopted for the selection of the core group of elected women and the operational area of the project

When the initial round of visits revealed that the preexisting ties between elected women and the *Mahila Samakhya sanghas* that had backed them were very weak, belying initial expectations, the *Prakriye* team considered 2 alternative strategies for the selection of the core group:

1. Continuing the search for identifying the core group, by visiting other *Panchayats* in which *Mahila Samakhya sangha*-backed women leaders had come to power.
2. Selecting elected women from *Panchayats* in which there were other preexisting interventions for strengthening elected women's capacity-building and peer-networking.

Option 1 was rejected by the team as over six months of the project had passed, and there was no guarantee that in other geographies where *sangha*-backed leaders had come to power, their linkages with collectives would be vibrant, as the reasons for these solidarities breaking down were clearly systemic. Therefore, spending more time in searching for new areas to work in, seemed a sub-optimal use of project resources. Also, as the workings of the prevailing Group *Gram Panchayat*



system in Karnataka became clearer to the *Prakriye* team, it was felt that to build a critical mass of elected women, it was more important to work with all elected women leaders from the select geographies (whether initially elected through *Mahila Samakhya sanghas* or not), rather than build a wide, dispersed network of 70 *Mahila Samakhya sangha*-backed leaders across the 2 blocks, as originally planned.

The team then turned to Option 2, by conducting some initial research to identify pre-existing interventions in the area of elected women's capacity-building in Hunsur and H.D.Kote blocks of Mysore district, with whom synergies could be built. This search revealed 2 options:

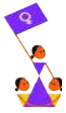
- The *Sampoorna* programme, a joint effort of the Government of Karnataka and UN Women, for the capacity-building of elected women leaders across 100 *Gram Panchayats* in the district; and
- The *Sugrama* network of elected women set up by the Hunger project, focusing on the trans-local networking of elected women representatives, with the intention of building their capacities to negotiate soft power within *Panchayats*, amplify their political voice and forge solidarities – that was active in some pockets of H.D.Kote block.

The *Prakriye* team found both these initiatives commendable, in going beyond mainstream top-down training models for elected women, and taking capacity-building efforts to the block level, and emphasising collaborative learning and peer networking. However, for *Making Women's Voices and Votes Count*, the team felt that a collaboration with either initiative would be limiting – as the project's vision of creating a vibrant women's political constituency at the grassroots required going beyond the capacity-building of elected women and strengthening elected women's peer networks, to building their linkages to women's collectives, women community leaders and/or other marginalised women in their constituencies – an area that neither of the interventions had engaged with.

Having rejected Options 1 and 2, for the *Prakriye team*, the best possible way forward seemed to be that of retaining the 7 *Gram Panchayats* where initial field visits had been made, as the operational area, despite the dearth of linkages between elected women leaders of these *Panchayats* and *Mahila Samakhya sanghas*. Therefore, the *Prakriye* team decided to proceed with the project in these *Panchayats*, by making the following modifications to the concept of the core group:

- The project would intensively engage with all 56 elected women representatives hailing from these 7 *Gram Panchayats* in all its strategies, rather than select a core group of 10-12 women leaders from among them – for it was anticipated that the core group of leaders would emerge through a process of self-selection, over the life of the project.
- The work on building elected women-*sangha* linkages had to be broader than what was originally envisioned, as *Mahila Samakhya sanghas* were not active in all wards of these *Panchayats*. Therefore, the intervention strategies for strengthening linkages between elected women and *sangha* members would include all active *sanghas* from the constituencies of these 56 elected women, and not just those formed under *Mahila Samakhya*.

With this major decision sorted out, the *Prakriye* team began work on the project in right earnest, in these 7 *Gram Panchayats*, in June 2013.



6. Rapport-building with elected women across the 7 Gram Panchayats: Avoiding the trap of being identified as 'that feminist extremist organisation'

The first step in commencing work on *Making Women's Voices and Votes Count*, after the finalisation of the decision on the operational area, was of course, rapport-building with the 56 elected women representatives across the 7 *Panchayats*. For this, there was no easy entry-point that could be leveraged. This was because the *Prakriye* team neither had a partnership with a preexisting network/federation of elected women, and nor could they leverage existing solidarities between elected women and women's collectives/*sanghas*, for the reasons explained above. This meant that the *Prakriye* team members were left with no option other than that of directly initiating contact with elected women in each of the 7 *Panchayat* bodies, in order to introduce them to the project idea, and solicit their participation.

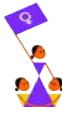
Considering the plethora of trainings and networking forums organised in the Mysore region for elected women, by governmental and civil society agencies, and the resultant '*meeting fatigue*' among elected members, and the deep suspicion and misgivings among elected male members about individuals and groups they viewed to be '*feminist extremists*', the positioning of *Prakriye's* efforts under this project required careful thought. After a lot of deliberation, the team decided to project themselves as a '*technical resource agency*' that had previously used community media-based pedagogies with women's collectives, to strengthen their awareness about government schemes and services, education of girls, management of *sangha* finances, women's health etc. – and who were now looking to extend their work to the area of building the capacities of elected women representatives to effectively perform their role in the *Panchayat*.

Adopting this pitch, the team went on to make an introductory presentation about the project in each of the 7 *Panchayats* – before the entire elected body and the *Panchayat* Development Officer. It must be highlighted here that numerous visits and extensive tactics of individual persuasion had to be adopted before permissions were received from the *Panchayats* to make the initial project presentation. The initial dialogue with *Panchayats* commenced in July 2013; but it took about 6 months for a presentation slot to be allotted. All the project presentations to *Panchayats* happened between December 2013 and January 2014.

In these presentations, the potential of community radio and community video to facilitate a non-textual, peer learning-based approach for building the capacities of elected women was emphasised – and needless to say, the project's vision on leveraging digital technologies to overcome the stranglehold of patriarchal, entrenched networks of favours in *Panchayat Raj structures*, was NOT discussed. Also, at the end of each presentation, the team made an offer to each *Panchayat* body that they were willing to organise trainings on digital photography and the use of Tablet PCs, for all interested members (including men).



Rapport building through Tablet PC training of elected representatives



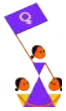
All *Panchayats* took up this offer – and undoubtedly, the attraction of '*the digital*', and the non-confrontational pitch of the initial presentation, were both equally important factors in facilitating this initial buy-in.

These initial interactions were followed up by digital photography trainings and Tablet PC trainings for all interested elected members, in each of the 7 *Panchayats*. Also, it is important to highlight here that the process of rapport-building was an extremely time-consuming exercise. In fact, rather than being a one-time affair, rapport-building turned out to be a process that needed continuous time investment, throughout the project period, due to the high rate of turnover of *Panchayat* Development Officers and *Panchayat* Presidents in the operational area. For details, see **Box 2**.

Box 2. Turnover rates of *Panchayat* Development Officers and Presidents in the operational area

The number of *Panchayat* Development Officers and *Panchayat* Presidents the *Prakriye* team worked with, in the 12 months between January 2014-December 2014, are detailed below:

Panchayat	Number of <i>Panchayat</i> Development Officers the team engaged with (Jan-Dec 2014)	Number of <i>Panchayat</i> Presidents the team engaged with (Jan-Dec 2014)
Puthur	1	1
Chinnapura	3	2
Ghadisoge	3	2
Dongriwadi	1	1
Marathawadi	3	1
Melgaon	2	3
Kamalahalli	2	1



7. The digitally enabled capacity-building efforts in the 7 Panchayats – Subverting the space of 'skills training'

Though the digitally enabled capacity-building efforts were initially pitched as “skills training” before the Panchayat body, the Prakriye team were very clear that their final aim was to introduce debates and discussions on the operations of patriarchal power, within the space of local governance. Therefore, a phased training module comprising the following components, was developed by the team:

Step 1. Technical skills training for elected women and elected men on the following aspects: handling a digital camera, familiarising oneself with the craft of photography (lighting, camera angles, focusing appropriately etc.) and understanding the features of a Tablet PC.

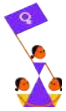
Step 2. Community-media based interactive sessions to introduce gender and governance-related debates to a joint group of elected women and elected men.

It is important to emphasise here that even in Step 1, gender and governance-related aspects were not lost sight of. For instance, in the Tablet PC training, elected women and men were encouraged to watch audio and video clips pertaining to women's participation in Panchayats, that had been preloaded on the Tablet PC being used for the session, as part of familiarising themselves with the various operations of a Tablet PC and navigating across different applications. Similarly, as part of the digital photography training, after all Panchayat members had been trained in handling the basics of the camera, there was a separate session organised only for elected women (a photo-shoot exercise in groups of two), with the underlying intention of opening up a space where they could freely articulate their perspectives on their village and local community. This group exercise consisted of first pairing up the elected women in teams of two, following which each team was asked to go out and take pictures, of persons and things in the village they found interesting, and landmarks in the village that they considered important.



An EWR taking a photo during the digital photography training in Ghadisoge

This exercise not only equipped elected women members to hone their skills in the art and craft of photography, but also opened up discussions on how they could address local governance issues. For example, some participants shot photographs that spoke of the key priorities in their community that they wanted to address (such as the poor condition of the approach road to the village, and the filthy condition of the village drainage system that posed a health hazard) – and in the plenary discussion that followed this photo shoot exercise, such photographs helped in catalysing deliberations around the need for elected women to engage in community development and social welfare. Most importantly, at the end of this exercise, the *Prakriye* team were able to trigger a debate on elected women's equal rights over *Panchayat* assets – using the contextually relevant



example of the *Panchayat* camera as detailed in **Box 3**.

Box 3 Access to the *Panchayat* camera as a symbol for elected women's equal rights over *Panchayat* assets



Elected women learn how to handle the Panchayat camera at Ghadisoge Gram Panchayat

In Karnataka, the Department of Rural Development and *Panchayat Raj* has sanctioned a digital camera to all *Panchayats* – as increasingly, photo documentation has become a compulsory requirement for reporting progress on implementation of schemes. However, mostly, these *Panchayat* cameras tend to be kept under lock and key by elected men, and elected women usually cannot access them. During the digital photography trainings initiated under this project, the *Prakriye* team used access to the *Panchayat* camera, as an entry-point for generating a discussion on the critical need for elected women to assert their equal right over *Panchayat* assets. Following this, some of the participants in the training went on to assert

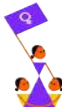
their right to use the *Panchayat* camera before elected men, during meetings of the *Panchayat* body.

In fact, a few months after the training, the *Prakriye* team observed that one elected woman representative – Jaya from Kamalahalli *Panchayat*, was taking the lead in maintaining photo documentation of all official events and programmes at the local level. There certainly is a long way to go for elected women members as far as asserting their equal right to determine the use of *Panchayat* assets is concerned – for to be meaningful, such assertion of control must extend to core matters such as the budget. However, at the same time, it is important to recognise that radical transformations often have humble beginnings – as the old adage goes, *little drops of water make a mighty ocean!*

Step 2 of the training programme consisted of organising video screenings and audio narrow-casting sessions on critical gender and governance issues – such as the importance of elected women's substantive participation in the *Panchayat*, bio-pics about elected women representatives' struggles in entering active public-political life, the importance of girls' and women's autonomy in making personal choices etc. – for the entire *Panchayat* body.

These sessions generated a lot of debate and discussion, and provided an opportunity for the team, to raise the contentious issue of the need for extra support and hand-holding for women in *Panchayats*, with elected male representatives of the *Panchayat*. One of the most frequently heard comments from elected male members during these discussions was, “*why do you focus only on elected women and women's concerns? Don't men have difficulties as well?*”

The *Prakriye* team often countered this argument, by emphasising how elected women face additional challenges when straddling their public and private roles; and by advocating the view that without addressing women's issues, there could be no meaningful village development. More



crucially, elected women members, after viewing inspirational biopics on successful women leaders, often reflected that they could also perform better, if they had greater support on the home front. This provided an opening for the *Prakriye* team to carry on the conversation privately, and motivate them to negotiate with other family members, to overcome household level constraints to their agency, autonomy and mobility. Thus, *skills training* became a subversive strategy for the *Prakriye* team, to open up meaningful conversation around women's participation in local governance processes, with female and male elected members.

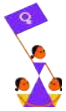
Now, for the crucial question – how successful was this strategy in enabling women members to enhance their participation in *Panchayat* forums and events? Answering this question is somewhat difficult, and we turn to the endline survey conducted with 40 of the 56 elected women in the project area, in March 2015, to explain this further. In the endline survey with elected women representatives, 82.5% of respondents reported that they faced no difficulties in negotiating with their husband and other family members, for traveling to meetings, trainings and other dialogic forums, as part of their public-political role. Though this enhanced mobility for elected women leaders is a positive development, it should not be uncritically celebrated. This is because, in the existing local governance scenario, it may indicate an instrumentalisation of women's leadership for the consolidation of the vested interests of entrenched patriarchal power structures that operate in local politics. The following fact from the endline survey will shed further light on this: –

Of the 40 respondents, 52.5% reported that their husbands play a significant role in determining all decisions they take, as part of their official role; clearly indicating control over women leaders' exercise of political agency. Against this survey finding, it is not far-fetched to conclude that allowing elected women to attend key meetings and training-forums is often a strategy adopted by male family members, for acquiring a greater handle on local affairs, through the new informational networks the elected women access in these spaces. This is a reminder that there is a long march ahead, as far as the task of equipping women leaders to overcome household-level gatekeeping, is concerned.

However, these initial set of trainings enabled the *Prakriye* team to obtain the buy-in of elected male members of the *Panchayat* body, to the project. And capitalising upon this buy-in to convene women-only dialogic forums proved extremely crucial for furthering the project's strategic vision of bringing in women's agenda into formal decision-making processes of the *Panchayat*, as detailed below.



Film screening at a Panchayat general body meeting



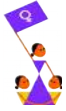
8. Strengthening the linkages between elected women and women's collectives in their constituencies, for the construction of a shared women's agenda in local governance – *Mahila gram sabhas* and 'Networking meetings'



Mahila Gram Sabhas as spaces for dialogue between elected women and women's collectives

As detailed in Section 4, the project envisioned the organising of women-only village assemblies/*Mahila Gram Sabhas*, as an important strategy for the construction of a shared women's agenda for local governance. Therefore, after initial rapport was established with the 7 *Gram Panchayats*, the *Prakriye* team started lobbying with the President and *Panchayat* Development Officer of each *Panchayat*, to convene women-only village assemblies at the ward level. This met with varying responses from the different *Panchayats*.

In Kamalahalli and Dongriwadi *Gram Panchayats*, the *Panchayat* Development Officers were extremely enthusiastic, and readily agreed to convene such assemblies (*Mahila Gram Sabhas*). In fact, they even lobbied with their respective *Panchayat* bodies, to obtain their buy-in to the idea. In Chinnapura, Melgaon and Puthur *panchayats*, the *Panchayat* Development Officers were more skeptical, and the *Prakriye* team had to devote a lot of time to wear down their objections to the idea – and **Box 4** illustrates how this was done in Chinnapura.



Box 4 Community media as a strategy for overcoming resistance of Panchayats to Mahila Gram Sabhas: the case of Chinnapura

Right from the point of entry, rapport-building with the Chinnapura *panchayat* had been an uphill task for the *Prakriye* team. Between December 2013- February 2014, when *Prakriye* started the process of project orientation meetings here, transfer orders were issued to the *Panchayat* Development Officer of Chinnapura, 3 times in 3 months, due to political tussles within the elected body! This meant that after every transfer, the conversation about the project had to be begun anew by the *Prakriye* team.

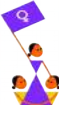
When the current *Panchayat* Development Officer assumed charge, sometime in March 2014, he was initially very skeptical about the project – also because he was worried about the fall-outs of his involvement. Often, such factors become key in the politics between the elected body and the *Panchayat* Development Officer (who is appointed by the state government), and fractures in this relationship affect the *Panchayat* Officer's stability of tenure.

In spite of the *Panchayat* Development Officer's luke-warm response, the *Prakriye* team pursued him determinedly, going often to the meetings he attended at the block level, often waiting for hours together, to speak to him after he finished his work. Meanwhile, in April 2014, he was also appointed as election officer (for the general elections) and instructed to be part of the local level 'Do not sell votes' drive, urging villagers not to trade their votes for money.

Here, the team saw an opportunity to break the ice – they asked him to speak about the issue on the *Kelu Sakhi* radio programme. When he came for the recording, the team also got a chance to introduce other aspects of the radio programme – such as slots in the programme which focused on motivating women to participate in village level forums such as the *Gram Sabha*, encouraging elected women to demonstrate local leadership, providing information on government schemes etc. This enthused him, and he expressed his interest in recording a message for the local communities on the issue of universal sanitation. The team suggested that he could record again for the programme, speaking on this topic.

This interaction and his participation in subsequent recordings for the radio, made him feel that the project would adopt an *alliance-building* rather than an openly *confrontational* approach. He agreed to co-ordinate a conversation with the *panchayat* body on their participation in the digital camera and Tablet PC trainings, as well as organising a *Mahila Gram Sabha* in their jurisdiction. Since then, numerous inroads have been made in this *Panchayat*; in fact, 2 *Mahila Gram Sabhas* have been convened.

In the case of Ghadisoge and Gavadegere *panchayats*, the *Prakriye* team could not make any headway. In both these *panchayats*, the *Prakriye* team had to deal with *Panchayat* Development Officers who were facing charges of misappropriation of funds, and did not have any inclination to engage with the demand for the *Mahila Gram Sabha*. In fact, in Ghadisoge, whilst the team was in the middle of this conversation with the *Panchayat* Development Officer, he received a circular from the Department of Women and Child Development, directing him to hold a *Mahila Gram Sabha*, in order to strengthen linkages between women and the local *anganwadis* – with which he had no option but to comply. In fact, he even invited the *Prakriye* team to participate in this forum. The team attended this event, in order to have a more detailed understanding of what this

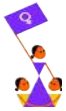


departmental vision of a *Mahila Gram Sabha* entailed. It turned out to be a large gathering of 400 women from across different villages of the *Panchayat*, and various officials expounded upon the idea of 'Safety of Women and Children', from the dais – to a largely passive audience. A far cry indeed, from the dialogic forums envisioned under the project.

However, later on, when *Prakriye* team members suggested to the *Panchayat* Development Officer that a different kind of *Mahila Gram Sabha* – one that allows women to talk and authorities to listen – could be convened, he did not pay heed to this. Instead, he shared his opinion that “one *Mahila Gram Sabha* is enough”.

In short, the *Prakriye* team succeeded in convening *Mahila Gram Sabhas* in the true spirit of the dialogic spaces envisioned under the project, in 5 out of the 7 *Panchayats* – Dongriwadi, Kamalahalli, Puthur, Chinnapura, and Melgaon. In these 5 *Panchayats*, over the project period, 9 *Mahila Gram Sabhas*/women-only village assemblies have been convened, in which 15 elected women representatives and over 40 women's collectives have participated.

These *Mahila Gram Sabhas* were organised at the ward level – and emerged as forums where women's collectives met with their concerned elected woman representative and the *Panchayat* Development Officer, to raise their individual and collective demands. Considering that the linkages between elected women and the local *sanghas* were in shambles in most of these areas, the official *Mahila Gram Sabhas* were made possible only because the *Prakriye* team adopted an innovative strategy to restore interactions and dialogues between elected women and women's collectives, through informal forums convened prior to the *Mahila Gram Sabhas*, in these areas. These informal spaces were termed '*Networking meetings*' by the project team, and more details about them are provided in [Box 5](#).



Box 5. 'Networking meetings': utilising community media-based learning processes to trigger meaningful dialogue between elected women and their constituencies

The idea of 'Networking meeting' as envisioned by the *Prakriye* team involved the creation of a ward-level space for dialogue and deliberation between elected women representatives and their women's collectives, in order to identify shared priorities, issues and concerns, and strategise on how these could be fed into formal decision making processes of the *Gram Panchayat*.

Around 18 such meetings were organised in the project period, across the 5 *Gram Panchayats* where *Panchayat* buy-in had been obtained to the project's imaginary of '*Mahila Gram Sabhas*'. These meetings, held in 18 different wards across the 5 *Panchayats*, brought together elected women representatives from each of these wards with women's collectives in their constituencies.



A networking meeting

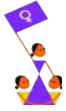
Each networking meeting adopted the following methodology:

1. Briefing from *Prakriye* team members, on the objective of the meeting – that of creating a platform for women's collectives and their female elected member to evolve a shared women's governance agenda.
2. Narrow-casting/ Screening audio-video content highlighting key gender and governance issues (such as the importance of women's participation in *Panchayat* processes, information about schemes of line departments, girls' education, the importance of girls' and women's autonomy in making personal choices etc.) as a strategy for breaking the ice, and facilitating free sharing of women's key issues/concerns.
3. Steering the discussion to facilitate the identification of shared priorities that need to be highlighted in *Panchayat* forums, and motivating women to participate in the *Gram Sabha*, *Ward Sabha* and *Mahila Gram Sabha*.

The method adopted, enabled the facilitators to unpack gender issues through the experiential standpoints of women's *sanghas* and individual women, as well as that of elected women – utilising audio clips and video resources to trigger discussion and dialogue where appropriate. Debates were then facilitated through questions prodding the group to understand women's claims, with a call for principles-based governance and empathy for the specific struggles of their respective female ward members.

Needless to say, the real *politik* of women's participation – the fact that no one was above local corruption and the network of favors – sometimes led to conflicts and bitter exchanges between women and their female ward members. But this too was used as an occasion/pedagogic process for dialogue.

The *Mahila Gram Sabhas*, strengthened by being linked to such a 'networking meetings' strategy, saw women's individual and collective demands, being formally tabled before the *Gram Panchayat*. At the 9 *Mahila Gram Sabhas* convened under the project, the demands raised by women ranged



from discrepancies in the allocation of entitlements under government schemes such as the rural housing scheme and universal sanitation scheme, and malpractices in beneficiary selection processes, to civic issues such as the need for repairs to the drainage system, ineffective solid waste management, the need for repairs to *anganwadi* and school buildings, defective street-lighting, problems in piped water supply etc.

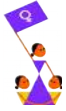
But the crucial question is this: to what extent did these *Mahila Gram Sabhas* succeed in furthering the gender-responsive local governance agenda? To answer this, the report uses a combination of the endline survey findings and the qualitative reflections of *Prakriye* team members.

The endline survey findings reveal that out of the 15 elected women participants in these 9 *Mahila Gram Sabhas*, 14 have played an active role in getting *Panchayat* resolutions passed on key local issues and concerns; and 13 out of the 14 have initiated such resolutions more than once, in their respective *Panchayats*. When the content of the resolutions is examined, it becomes clear that the elected women have taken forward the issues/concerns that were tabled by women's collectives, and other marginalised women in their communities, in the *Mahila Gram Sabhas*.

This is a significant achievement, as otherwise, discussions within the general body meetings of the *Panchayats*, are completely dominated by the politics of beneficiary selection. Thus, the *Mahila Gram Sabhas* have enabled the signification of community issues as women's issues in local governance processes, and also equipped elected women representatives to actively push for these issues, within formal decision-making processes of local government (in an extremely successful manner, as testified to by the data on *panchayat* resolutions). At this juncture, a question may arise – considering that an important dimension of gender-responsive governance consists of opening up spaces for women to question the operations of hegemonic gender orders, have the *Mahila Gram Sabhas* contributed enough to this agenda?

A perusal of the discussions at the *Mahila Gram Sabhas* reveals that though they have enabled the signification of community issues as women's issues, they have not yet enabled the articulation of women's issues as community issues. Though the latter agenda is extremely important, and in time, the hope is that *Mahila Gram Sabha* discussions move in this direction, the former agenda (that is currently the bulk of the substance of these forums) cannot be dismissed as unimportant 'civic issues' pertaining to women's practical needs. As many feminist practitioners have pointed out, the line between women's practical needs and women's strategic interests is rather blurred. For example, the demand for streetlights has in it undertones of women's assertion of their right to unfettered mobility; and the demands questioning beneficiary selection decisions emerge from an inchoate recognition of the unjust treatment of women within the clientelist local governance paradigm.

On the whole, there is strong evidence of the potential of *Mahila Gram Sabhas* in opening up pathways for women to shape local governance agenda-setting, and bring in their key issues/concerns into mainstream public debates. However, this should not result in uncritical celebration of the *Mahila Gram Sabhas*. For, in and of themselves, these dialogic forums may not be able to completely overcome the operations of the 'networks of favours' which hinder the emergence of a truly rights-based governance paradigm – without which the gender-responsive governance agenda cannot be completely realised. This ambivalence is explored further, in **Box 6**.



Box 6. The potential of *Mahila Gram Sabhas* to push the boundaries of the mainstream local governance paradigm, and the limits they come up against – lessons from contrasting the experiences of Kamalahalli and Chinnapura Panchayats

In the *Panchayat* village of Kamalahalli, a *Mahila Gram Sabha* was organised under the *Making Women's Voices and Votes Count* project. The *Panchayat* Development Officer Sunil played an extremely active role in organising this *Mahila Gram Sabha*, and persuaded the *Panchayat* President Vijayalakshmi to be a part of the forum. Vijayalakshmi takes the back seat in *Panchayat* events, as other seasoned political players in the *Panchayat* body tend to dominate her. Therefore, this *Mahila Gram Sabha* helped in creating a formal space where she could respond to women's collectives' demands in her official capacity.

Women raised the following issues: the need for repairs to street lights, the irregularities in the allocation of subsidies under the universal sanitation scheme, and the defunct drainage system. The *Panchayat* Development Officer supported Vijayalakshmi in responding to these concerns, and he also pro-actively pushed for local action to be taken on these issues. Most importantly, the *Mahila Gram Sabha* also helped Bhavana, a very poor woman from the village, in finally realising her 'right to be heard'. Bhavana had been repeatedly and unfairly thwarted by the *Panchayat* body (mainly because she refused to bow in to the demands for bribes), in her attempt to receive allotments under the housing scheme.

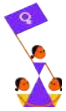
After this *Mahila Gram Sabha*, where she presented her story of repeated injustice at the hands of the elected members, the *Panchayat* Development Officer and the President conducted a spot inspection of her extremely dilapidated house – and in the subsequent *Gram Sabha*, she was selected as a beneficiary under the housing scheme. As she proudly recounted to the *Prakriye* team at a later point, “*I was able to get my house without paying a single rupee to anyone, because of the Mahila Gram Sabha!*”

Chinnapura, on the other hand, presents a very different picture. Two *Mahila Gram Sabhas* were organised in this *Panchayat* in Jhalapura and Kaligere villages. At both these *Sabhas*, women's collectives participated actively and raised a number of issues, ranging from: allotment of subsidies under the universal sanitation scheme, allotment of houses under the state's rural housing programme, job cards under NREGS; to common issues, such as poor condition of the drainage system and need for renovation of the *anganwadi* structure (which is in a dilapidated state). These demands have been taken up by the *panchayat* and are being addressed. In the eyes of the women's collectives therefore, these *Mahila Gram Sabhas* were huge successes.

But there is more here than what meets the eye. At the Jhalapura *Mahila Gram Sabha*, the elected woman representative of the ward did not participate, and her husband represented her! While it is understandable that the *Panchayat* Development Officer did not question this (considering the dynamics between local political leaders and administrative staff at the local level), dealing with the decision of the women's collectives to go ahead with the *Mahila Gram*



The beneficiary of the housing scheme speaks on camera



Sabha despite the absence of the elected woman member, was more difficult for the *Prakriye* team. The team allowed this interaction to take place, as they did not want to dismiss a rare opportunity for women to have an exclusive, official interaction with the *Panchayat* Development Officer and raise their issues and concerns before him. However, the *Prakriye* team was taken aback that in spite of participating in a '*Networking meeting*' the previous week, where the need for the women's collectives to support their elected woman representative in asserting her leadership was discussed, the women's collectives unquestioningly accepted the fact of the elected woman member being represented by her husband, in the formal space of the *Mahila Gram Sabha*, as long as he was willing to address their demands.

In Kaligere village, the limit that the *Prakriye* team found themselves up against, was a different one. Jaya, the elected woman representative from this village, is an extremely articulate and capable leader. And in the 'networking meeting' organised prior to the *Mahila Gram Sabha*, she had motivated and encouraged women's collectives in her village to come and raise their issues in the formal citizen forums of the *Panchayat*. In response to this, a number of women had come to the *Mahila Gram Sabha* – and a couple of women even felt emboldened to speak about the unfair denial of benefits under the rural housing scheme, in spite of their repeated requests to the *Gram Panchayat*. Subsequently, Jaya followed up on these demands, and specifically pursued the case of one poor woman from her ward, who had demanded allotments of benefits under the state housing scheme. In fact, she succeeded in negotiating with other members of the *Panchayat* body, in ensuring that this woman's name was included when the next list of beneficiaries was prepared for the housing scheme.

However, the *Prakriye* team has reason to believe that this was not a clean transaction – and that Jaya had pocketed money to fight on behalf of this woman, even though she was certainly a deserving applicant, and fulfilled all the criteria.

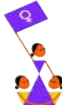
Thus, though 'networking meetings' and '*Mahila Gram Sabhas*' have emerged as spaces that legitimise women's right to be heard, they have not been able to extend their influence to the transactions in the private spaces of the political economy of local governance.

9. Building a peer learning network of elected women representatives across the 7 panchayats



Meeting with elected women representatives

This is an area in which the *Prakriye* team was not able to make much headway during the project period. This is mainly because the project did not ride on a preexisting effort in this area, and also time was insufficient to build a trans-geographic network of elected women across the 7 *Gram Panchayats*. As a huge time investment was required in the processes of rapport-building with the elected bodies of the 7 *Gram Panchayats*, and building (and renewing) linkages of elected women across these *Panchayats*, with the women's collectives in their respective wards, only one meeting



bringing together all elected women from the operational area could be convened in the project period. Clearly, this was not sufficient to sow the seeds of a trans-local learning network where elected women could come together, as representatives of a women's constituency – transcending differences of party affiliations, and caste and class identities – to learn from each other's experiences.

However, the *Prakriye* team did not totally abandon the idea of creating a *Panchayat*-based IVR network – only the direction of the effort was shifted. From the original vision of a trans-local platform for elected women to learn from each other, the IVR network was re-imagined as a *Panchayat*-specific platform for smoothening communication between elected women, elected men and the *Panchayat* Development Officer on the dates of official *Panchayat* events such as *Mahila Gram Sabha*, *Gram Sabha*, *Ward Sabha* and General Body meetings. In specific, the *Prakriye* team took on the task of developing an Open Source IVR meeting-reminder messaging system for all 7 *Panchayats*, and managing this on behalf of the *Panchayat* Development Officers (who are officially entrusted with the responsibility of convening *Panchayat* level meetings).

The *Panchayat* Development Officers have recognised this IVR system as an improvement over the prevailing practice of sending physical notices to all members (especially considering dynamic changes in the dates of many *Panchayat* level meetings) – and some *Panchayat* Development Officers have also started toying with the idea of adopting this IVR system and using it for *Panchayat*-citizen communication as well.

Beyond the life of this project, the *Prakriye* team is keen to work towards building the capacities of these 7 *Panchayats* to appropriate the IVR system; and enhance its functionalities.

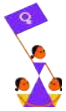
10. Leveraging the power of digitally enabled public information architectures, to enhance marginalised women's access to entitlements

As described in **Section 4**, one of the key strategic directions envisioned under the *Making Women's Voices and Votes Count* project, was the creation of a network of women-run ICT enabled information centres, at the block and village level, for enhancing marginalised women's access to entitlements.

In the project, these centres were envisioned as critical spaces for leaders of women's collectives and elected women representatives, to join forces in:

- furthering marginalised women's claims-making for their entitlements, and
- systematically engaging with public institutions at the local level, such as the *Gram Panchayat*, Primary Health Centre, *anganwadi* etc. to enhance their responsiveness to women's needs and concerns.

For the *Prakriye* team, this has involved building upon the existing information centres strategy, whose genesis goes back to over a decade ago. At this time, village and block level information centres, under a hub-and-spoke model, were set up in Hunsur and H.D.Kote blocks, with the objective of enabling *Mahila Samakhya sanghas* and their block level federations, effectively leverage the potential of digital technologies to further their socio-political and economic empowerment projects. The ownership and control of these information centres was vested with a Managing Committee comprising of representatives of local *Mahila Samakhya sanghas* (for the



village level centres), and the members of the Executive Committee of the *Mahila Samakhya* Federation (for the block level centres). The day to day operations of these centres were managed by a young woman infomediary recruited from the local community, who was trained in using a hybrid strategy of departmental visits, phone-based networking with officials, and governmental websites, for accessing public information from critical sources, overcoming gate-keeping by the local elite; and in the effective dissemination of such information to communities within a 1-2 km radius of the information centres – through monthly outreach visits, audio narrow-casting sessions and video screenings for awareness-generation and local dialogue.

Between 2005-2008, 4 village information centres connected to 2 block level hubs in Hunsur and H.D.Kote were set up. Local ownership was a non-negotiable condition for the *Prakriye* team, and in the ups and downs that accompany institution-building processes, only 2 out of the 4 village information centres and the 2 block level information centres managed to weather the storms successfully, and continue to go strong.

At the start of *Making Women's Voices and Votes Count*, these 4 existing information centres were primarily engaged in public information sourcing and outreach, and assisting members of marginalised groups in entitlements processing. Therefore, the closest governance linkages of these centres were to the line departments at the block level.

At this juncture, the *Prakriye* team wanted to deepen this pre-existing information centre strategy, in the following manner:

– Expanding the reach of the information-centre strategy, by establishing more village information centres on the ground, and by exploring new techno-social opportunities for effective information collection and dissemination (in particular, setting up IVR networks at the community level for targeted information outreach and installing a digitalised MIS for tracking entitlement applications to closure).

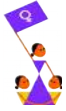
– Transforming the village information centres from spaces that focused on connecting marginalised groups to line departments at the block level, to crucial nodes for strengthening women's collectives' linkages to their elected women representatives, other *Gram Panchayat* members, and local public institutions such as the *anganwadi*, village school, primary health centre etc.



An outreach visit carried out by infomediaries

– Enabling the village information centres to expand their role by becoming spaces for enhancing the institutional capacities of women's collectives for evidence-based dialogue with local government bodies on key gender and governance issues – by supporting them in the creation of digitalised data-sets on local demographics.

The following sections describe the experience of the *Prakriye* team members in pursuing these strategic directions, and the key learnings from the same.



10.1 The establishment of additional village information centres

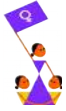
Initially, the *Prakriye* team had planned that the 3 additional village information centres proposed, would follow the institutional model of the preexisting village information centres, and would be completely owned and operated by women's collectives of the *Mahila Samakhya* programme. Therefore, during the initial six months of the project, while making the initial round of visits for the finalisation of the core group and the operational area of the project, the *Prakriye* team was also on the look-out for villages with a high level of information deficit, and with *Mahila Samakhya sanghas* who were enthused by the prospect of running their own information centre. This section describes how the endeavour to set up new information centres, materialised in practice.

10.1.1 The establishment of the Bedekeri information centre: Shaking up entrenched caste structures through the creation of a new public information architecture

As explained in the previous sections, the initial round of visits between January-June 2013, to the 7 shortlisted *Panchayats*, revealed that in the majority of areas, active and vibrant *Mahila Samakhya sanghas* were not present. However, there was one exception – the village of Bedekeri in Ghadisoge *Gram Panchayat*. Bedekeri is a very remote village in Hunsur block, located on the borders of the Nagerhole National Park, with poor road connectivity to the block headquarters. The village is surrounded by tribal settlements. It has 3-4 caste groups ranging from upper caste to *dalit* communities. Historically, tensions between the upper caste and the dalits have been high. All the village amenities (school, dairy, bus shelter and government-run child care centre etc.) are located in the upper caste neighbourhood. The *Prakriye* team's initial round of visits revealed that there were 2 *Mahila Samakhya sanghas* in the *dalit* neighbourhood who were strong and vibrant, and extremely enthused by the proposal of setting up an information centre in their village. The visits also revealed that these 2 *sanghas* enjoyed strong linkages to their local elected woman representative Radhamma, who was an articulate and able leader capable of pushing her constituents' demands, even though the Ghadisoge *Gram Panchayat* she is a part of, is reputed to have extremely hard-boiled *real politik* players.

As part of the initial groundwork for introducing the idea of the information centre to all stakeholders in the village, the *Prakriye* team convened a series of public meetings in which women's collectives and local leaders from the upper caste neighbourhood enthusiastically participated. However, when the *Prakriye* team expressed their firm opinion that the centre could be housed only in the *dalit* neighbourhood, considering the prevailing socio-economic inequalities between the upper caste and *dalit* neighbourhoods of the village, all hell broke loose! There was extreme anger and resistance, and the upper caste women, who were until that point keen to participate in the management and operations of the centre, withdrew their support totally. In fact, one upper caste woman angrily remarked, “*till today, it has been the practice that you [dalits] come to our part of the village for everything...why should we now start coming to your colony?*” and stormed out of the meeting! However, the women of the two *dalit sanghas* stood firm, backed by their elected woman representative Radhamma. With the support of the *dalit* youth group leader Mohan-anna, they rented a house within the *dalit* colony, to house the centre, and commence operations.

In September 2013, the centre was formally inaugurated – a house to locate it had been identified, a



sakhi (young woman infomediary) was recruited from the dalit colony, and a nine member Managing Committee was constituted, comprising of members from the *dalit sanghas*. However, the upper castes continued their opposition, and declared a complete boycott of its operations.

Thus, the centre began its operations in this extremely hostile environment. In spite of this, the *dalit* woman infomediary went on outreach visits – even to the upper-caste neighbourhood. At this point, there were covert attempts from the upper caste men to sabotage the centre – they met *dalit* men in the fields or in the local arrack shop, and casually passed comments on the 'wantonness' of the *dalit* women running the centre. Thus, a number of attempts were made to break the women's resolve by 'breaking their men'. But the women did not lose heart. It was at this point, that the tide turned, as in December 2013-January 2014, the managing committee members of the centre decided that a daily newspaper should be procured by the centre, as no one in the village could access the paper except by procuring it from a neighboring village. Subsequently, the infomediary visited the news paper agent at the block to find out how he could help them in delivering the news paper.

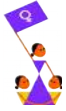
Following this meeting, the infomediary and the women persuaded the agent to hand the newspaper to the drivers of the bus that comes to the village. The bus drivers were open to dropping off the paper at the house closest to the village bus stop. As this house belongs to an upper caste woman who was very unhappy about the establishment of the info-centre in the *dalit* colony, this option seemed to be therefore untenable. However, at this juncture, a young woman from another upper caste household thought that the effort of the infomediary to bring a newspaper into the village was very pertinent and so, volunteered to collect the newspaper and hand it over to the info centre everyday. This was an interesting twist to a near-impasse.

Currently, many upper caste people who went to the neighboring villages for news updates, collect the paper from the infomediary and return it after reading. The youth who always used to read old newspapers are happy to read fresh news. The centre is becoming an information hub for both *dalits* and upper caste members. The infomediary is glad and even proud that she is being treated with respect by the upper caste groups when she visits. Many visitors from this part of the village also come to the centre to avail of various services.

The project's information system thus seems to have created a rupture in the power ecology of the village. Of course, it is not possible to predict if the reaction from the upper caste groups to this challenge will continue to be one of grudging acceptance, as the centre expands its work – and the resilience to fight the opposition from prevailing power structures is one that the Managing Committee must acquire.

10.1.2 Exploring an alternative strategy for setting up information centres: Focusing on *panchayat* buy-in to the idea

With the experiences of setting up the information centre at Bedekeri, between January -September 2013, the *Prakriye* team felt the need for an alternative strategy for the establishment of village information centres. The two reasons for this were: the time constraints of the project; and the difficulties in locating strong *Mahila Samakhya sanghas* on the ground, with vibrant linkages to their elected women representatives. As during this period, the *Prakriye* team had, in parallel,



initiated the process of direct rapport-building with the elected bodies and the *Panchayat* Development Officers of the 7 *Gram Panchayats* in the operational area, it was felt that obtaining the buy-in of elected members to the idea of the information centre, and pushing them to take the lead role in setting up such centres, could be one such route. Needless to say, this was not easy, but the time and energy invested in *Panchayat* rapport-building led to some dividends on this front, at least in 3 cases – in Kamalahalli, Puthur and Donrewadi *Panchayats*. This is detailed below.

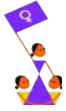
As described in the preceding sections of the Report, in Kamalahalli *Gram Panchayat*, rapport-building was very smooth for the *Prakriye* team members, due to the presence of an extremely supportive and sincere *Panchayat* Development Officer, Sunil. Because of his strong conviction in the transformative potential of the project, he pushed for the participation of elected members in the trainings and capacity-building efforts undertaken by the *Prakriye* team. He also used extensive persuasion to obtain the consent of the *Panchayat* body to the organising of the *Mahila Gram Sabha*. After these initial set of activities, when the *Prakriye* team spoke to him about the information-centre strategy, he was enthused by the prospect of setting up an information centre within the *Panchayat* premises that could act as a help-desk for the citizenry, and a support system for the administrative work of the *Panchayat*.

The *Prakriye* team, on the strength of their rapport with the *Panchayat* Development Officer, and his enthusiasm for the idea, felt that this was a suitable opportunity to try out a new information centre model – one that was housed within the *Panchayat* premises, with members drawn from the *Panchayat* body and women's collectives and other key actors from local public institutions such as ASHA and *anganwadi* workers, and members of the School Development and Management Committee. As Kamalahalli has no *Mahila Samakhya sanghas*, members of the local *Stree Shakti sanghas* in the village were also drawn into the Managing Committee of the centre. A young woman infomediary from the local community was appointed. After negotiating for a space to house the centre within the *Panchayat*, a computer and a mobile Internet connection were provided to her. The centre was formally inaugurated in August 2014.

After the establishment of the Kamalahalli information centre, the *Prakriye* team initiated similar dialogues with other *Panchayats* in the operational area – and the *Panchayat* Development Officer and members of the Puthur *Gram Panchayat* showed much enthusiasm. An information centre under a similar model was set up in February 2015. It is important to highlight here that Hegdakere, one of the villages of the Puthur *Gram Panchayat*, houses one of the preexisting village information centres managed by women's collectives.

Therefore, the decision to set up the *Panchayat* information centre in Puthur was deeply deliberated to determine if it would mean an unnecessary duplication of efforts. The team felt that the distances between the different villages of the *Gram Panchayat* had resulted in a situation where the existing centre in Hegdakere village was not able to match its work to the demand for public information of the entire *Panchayat* – and hence, another centre could be set up in the *Panchayat* village of Puthur, especially as there was keen interest among *Gram Panchayat* members.

Finally, *Gram Panchayats* in the close vicinity of the block hubs at Hunsur and H.D.Kote, were also introduced to the idea of village information centres by the *Prakriye* team, even if they were not part of the operational area initially shortlisted. The Donrewadi *Gram Panchayat*, adjacent to the H.D.Kote block hub, was approached as part of one such effort – and the *Prakriye* team found that the President and Vice President of the elected body were extremely interested in the idea, and they



wanted to initiate such a centre in Chinginwadi village from which both of them hail. The *Prakriye* team then began a series of discussions in Chinginwadi village, with multiple stakeholders – women's collectives of the *Stree Shakti* programme, village leaders, local *anganwadi* workers and members of the Milk Producers Cooperative Society. The team succeeded in obtaining a space, free of cost, to house the information centre – part of an old building of the Department of Education that is currently being rented by the Milk Producers Cooperative Society and the *anganwadi*.

The *Panchayat* president and members of the School Development and Managing Committee worked towards restoring the electric connection to this building, and the centre was inaugurated in January 2015. The Managing Committee of this centre is drawn from representatives of the women's collectives in the village, and members of the Milk Producers Cooperative Society.

10.2 Community ownership models explored by the project, for village information centres

In total, 4 additional village information centres were set up by the *Prakriye* team, under the following community ownership models:

(a) Information centre managed by *Mahila Samakhya* women's collectives, similar to the preexisting model operational at Hegdakere and Jhalapura:

Under this model, an information centre was set up at Bedekeri village of Ghadisoge *Gram Panchayat*, in September 2013.

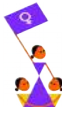
(b) Information centre managed by representatives from local collectives other than *Mahila Samakhya*:

Under this model, an information centre with representatives of local women's collectives of *Stree Shakti* scheme and Milk Producers' Cooperative Society was set up in Chinginwadi village of Donrewadi *Gram Panchayat*, in January 2015.

(c) Information centre housed within the *Panchayat* and managed by representatives of local women's collectives of *Stree Shakti* scheme, elected women and elected men representatives of *Panchayat*, members of School Development and Management Committee, ASHA, *anganwadi* worker:

Under this model, an information centre was set up in Kamalahalli *Gram Panchayat* in August 2014 and in Puthur *Gram Panchayat*, in February 2015.

The *Prakriye* team, over the project period, have been able to assess the relative advantages and disadvantages of a women's collective-based information centre model (such as a. and b.) when compared to the *Panchayat*-based model (such as c.), and have come to the conclusion that both models serve different purposes. While the women's collective-based model, as a space outside the immediate power tussles of electoral politics, has its advantages, when it comes to catalysing local action demanding accountability from *Gram Panchayats* and local government institutions, the



Panchayat model can be extremely useful in opening up the space of *Gram Panchayats* to women – for the location of an infocentre operated by a young woman infomediary within the *Panchayat* premises goes a long way in breaking the prevailing stereotype of the *Panchayat* being a male bastion; and also, it opens up non-confrontational routes to demanding redress for women's issues and concerns, from the *Panchayat* body.

Also, it is important to recognise that the challenges to be surmounted to ensure institutional vibrancy are different in both the models, and require different strategies. While in the women's collective-based model, the challenge is one of resisting the sabotaging of the centre's activities by the local power elite and help the collective leadership navigate inter-personal differences, in the *Panchayat*-based model, it is to prevent the capture of the centre by the local power elite. **Box 7** illustrates this in greater detail by highlighting the challenges faced by the Hegdakere, Jhalapura and Kamalahalli information centres.

Box 7. Challenges faced in different village information centre models: case studies of Hegdakere, Jhalapura and Kamalahalli centres

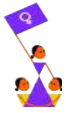
The ever-present threat of elite capture: The case of the Hegdakere information centre

Hegdakere village in Puthur *Panchayat* houses a village information centre owned and operated by *Mahila Samakhya sanghas*, since 2006. In mid 2013, a farmer's club was started under a recent organic farming initiative of the Government of Karnataka. This club needed a space to meet every Monday for their weekly training with the local agricultural extension worker, and they approached the Managing Committee members of the centre for permission to use the premises. The women in the Managing Committee agreed, as there is a prevailing practice of renting out the centre's premises for village functions – especially as meeting space in the village, is scarce. After a few weeks, when the women demanded the rent from the Farmers' Club, they refused to pay, stating that the centre's existence was thanks to the *Gram Panchayat*, and that it is the common property of the village! Some powerful leaders of the village are also members of the Club. So, although the women in the Managing Committee feared that a the Club could try to take over the building completely, they were unwilling to risk an open confrontation with them. This uneasy situation prevails, and for now, the women's collectives are continuing their activities at the centre.

The case of the Hegdakere information centre is illustrative of a 'clear and present danger' that any bottom-up institution-building effort faces – one which makes the question of long-term sustainability even more difficult, as women, by themselves, may not have the bargaining power and social capital to fight local elite networks.

Managing the tensions between individual leaders and collectives: the case of the Jhalapura centre

The Jhalapura information centre, managed by *Mahila Samakhya* women's collectives, was set up in 2006. At this point, the village had only one *Mahila Samakhya sangha*, with a strong leader, Smitha, who played an active role in mobilising local support for the establishment and operations of the centre. Since then, 2 other *sanghas* were formed by the *Mahila Samakhya* programme in this village, and as they were also keen to participate in the activities of the centre, their representatives



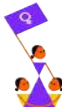
were included in the Managing Committee. However, the revenue from the information centre (its monthly earnings from photocopying and digital photography services for the village community) continued to be managed by Smitha along with the savings of her *sangha*, and no separate account was opened for the information centre. This was never a problem, until late 2013, when the building where the centre is located, tottered on the brink of collapse – as there were numerous repairs required.

Following this, in January 2014, all the 3 *sanghas* came together to discuss what could be done. Smitha demanded that the estimated cost for the repairs be split 3-ways between the 3 *sanghas*. The other 2 *sanghas* demanded that they wanted to first see the records of how much money was available from the existing earnings of the centre being managed by Smitha's collective, and that they could then accordingly decide the contributions to be collected. This demand was perceived as a personal insult by Smitha. In the war of words that ensued, she told the other 2 *sanghas* that if this was the stance they were taking, there was no way forward, for, the centre had been built by her *sangha*, and she and her peers did not need to account anything about the centre to anyone as they were the actual owners. She even demanded that the 2 other *sanghas* pay a monthly rent to her *sangha*, for using the centre's premises for their weekly savings meetings! This led to the estrangement of the other *sanghas* from the information centre, and Managing Committee meetings had to be repeatedly postponed due to the lack of a quorum. The building became more dilapidated, and the infomediary really feared for her safety and that of the equipment. When it seemed that there was no way out of this impasse, the *Prakriye* team intervened by bringing in a *Mahila Samakhya* programme staff member who had played a lead role in the formation of all 3 *sanghas* involved in this fight. At the meeting that was organised in the presence of this *Mahila Samakhya* staff member, all the 3 *sanghas* turned up as all of them wanted to present their side of the story. In the discussion that followed, what emerged was that Smitha had taken a unilateral step in demanding rent from the other 2 *sanghas*, without consulting her peers in her *sangha*. She had to back down from her stance. However, her collective stood behind her decision in not wanting to open discussions about the financial accounts of the previous years – probably out of a sense of obligation to not completely contradict their leader. The other *sanghas* compromised – and it was decided that from this point onwards, in the future, accounts about the centre would be shared every month.

As a result of this experience, the *Prakriye* team adopted a firm policy of re-constituting the Managing Committee of the *sangha*-managed information centres once in 3 years, to ensure that some voices are not marginalised in the working of the politics of representation; and to prevent the consolidation of existing power inequalities between and among *sanghas* associated with the information centres.

The tight-rope work of navigating entrenched networks of favours: the case of the information centre at Kamalahalli

One of the main challenges faced by the information centre located in Kamalahalli *panchayat*, has been dealing with the entrenched networks of favours. Initially, the infomediary of the centre shared with the all visitors that the entitlements-processing at the information centre was free of all charges. Inspired by this, when community members would get their applications filled by her and go up to the block level, they would find themselves faced with a demand for 'commission' (bribe) from the Village Accountant at the block level office of the Revenue Department. On returning to the village, they would express their angry disappointment at the infomediary, leading to a lot of conflicts. Finally, the infomediary brought this up at a recent Managing Committee meeting, and



the *Panchayat* Development Officer assured her that he would follow up this matter through informal channels, so that block level officials did not demand bribes from the applicants who come from the Kamalahalli information centre. This issue of fighting entrenched networks of corruption will be an ongoing one for the centre – and informal routes may often have to be adopted, till such time that the centre strengthens its linkages with local *sanghas*; following which a stronger, local politics of dissent can be led by women, who the *Prakriye* team can then back.

Elected members within Kamalahalli *Panchayat* have close alliances with local contractors and corruption is deep-rooted although often visible only in the undercurrents. In fact, one elected woman representative is the wife of a local contractor. Oppositional tactics may lead to a severe backlash and the closure of the centre – and hence, dealing with entrenched systemic corruption will continue to be a tight-rope walk.

10.3 Techno-social innovations used by the information centres to strengthen their information outreach, harness the power of digital data-sets in claims-making, and enhance learning-action processes of *sanghas*

The key techno-social innovations the project introduced in the information centres, to enable them to expand their reach and their linkages with local institutions, are detailed below.

1. A digital MIS for effective tracking of entitlement applications to closure: At all information centres (except Donrewadi and Puthur centres which are brand-new), a digital MIS has been installed to enable the infomediaries to track their work, and to bring in more systemisation into their monthly planning processes.

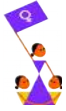
This digital MIS has helped the infomediaries easily identify pending items that need to be tracked to closure – such as outstanding applications – to ensure that key processes such as follow-ups, are not inadvertently dropped. MIS based patterns are also discussed at monthly meetings, for new direction setting.

2. The mobile opportunity for trans-local, targeted public information outreach: The information centres have been equipped with an Open Source IVR system through which the infomediaries can send targeted voice messages (pertaining to information on new schemes, public health alerts, agriculture and dairy-related information, reminders about dates of crucial citizen forums such as the *Gram Sabha* etc.) to women and men in the local community.

Considering the stark reality of the low levels of ownership and control of mobile phones among women⁵, this strategy has been supplemented by monthly outreach visits to the various villages within a 1-2 km radius of each centre. During these visits, the infomediary interacts with members of various groups in the village, and addresses their queries, focusing especially on women's collectives.

Initially, the *Prakriye* team members created and sent messages on behalf of the infomediaries

⁵ In 2012, a survey that the *Prakriye* team carried out with 50 women in the operational area of the field centre, as part of another research study, revealed that though over 40% of the respondents were from households which had mobiles, only 25% had a phone that they completely owned.



whose role was limited to enrolling women from the community on the phone database of the IVR system, and assisting in the creation of 'user groups' (segmenting users and sending messages based on information needs and interests). However, supported by the *Prakriye* team, infomediaries have now started composing the content of the messages on their own, and managing the recording and voice-blast system as well. They are at various stages in the process of IVR-related skill-building.

As of December 2014⁶, 8 agriculture-related messages, 16 health related messages, 14 messages related to government schemes and services and information about *Panchayat* functioning, and 9 messages announcing dates of *Panchayat* forums such as *gram sabha* and *mahila gram sabhas*, have been sent through this IVR network, reaching out to over 270 women in the community⁷. Some examples of the messages sent on this IVR network, are provided in **Box 8** below.

Box 8. Messages shared on the public information IVR network: Some examples

- “Greetings to everyone! The Department of Animal Husbandry is vaccinating cattle against Foot and Mouth disease. Get your cows and sheep vaccinated. Goodbye...”
- “Greetings to everyone! Isn't it true that you go to the fields for defecation? Because of that, without your knowledge, germs get into your body and give you dysentery and many such diseases. But if you have a toilet in your house, you will always enjoy good health.”

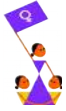
3. Utilising the power of local data to authenticate claims-making by vulnerable groups:

In the project period, the village information centres at Hegdakere, Jhalapura and Bedekeri have initiated a number of 'quick and dirty' surveys in response to the demand for evidence-based decision making that arose in citizen-government interactions, especially at the *Gram Sabha*. Surveys have been undertaken in areas such as identifying the number of pending job card applications in a village; households whose subsidy allotments under the universal sanitation scheme for the construction of toilets are outstanding; irregularities in the allocation of old age pensions, etc. These processes have helped the information centre emerge as a public interest arbitrator – recognised by all groups in the village as an institution rooted in the norms of social and gender justice, that can rise above the factionalism of interest-based politics and furnish 'authentic' information. In these surveys, the infomediaries have taken the lead and the women's collectives have provided some support. The idea is that in the long run, the collectives internalise the capacities to collect and analyse community data, and use data-based argumentation in their claims-making processes. On this front, a lot more time and effort is required.

Another initiative proposed by the *Prakriye* team as part of the project, was the creation of a systematic, household-level digitalised data-set, tracking key socio-economic dimensions, for all villages associated with each information centre. The idea behind this is that such a data-set can enable information centres to proactively raise questions/issues pertaining to vulnerable groups who have been left out in beneficiary selection processes. They would also take up larger issues of social justice and gender justice such as high drop-out rate among adolescent girls or rise in cases of non-receipt of old-age pensions on a timely basis, before the *Panchayat*. Also, this is part of the larger

⁶ Project reports are prepared on a six-monthly basis, and hence December 2014 report has the latest stats.

⁷ Many of these mobile phones are shared by women with other household members.



effort to shift the culture of claims-making from the emotive to evidence-based, by empowering community members to generate their own 'evidence' that challenges the 'truth claims' of official data.

Currently, this survey has been completed in Jhalapura and Bedekeri villages by the infomediaries, and the next steps of creating the digitalised data-base, and scaling up the survey to other areas, and training the infomediaries to analyse the data and use their findings to plan their future work, are underway. Time will be invested beyond the project period, if required.

4. Information centres as hubs for community media-based learning-action processes of *sanghas*

The specific ways in which community radio and community video were utilised to transform info-centres into digital libraries for strengthening *sangha* learning-action processes are described below.

Community radio:

From 2006 to mid 2014⁸, in partnership with Karnataka State Open University, *Prakriye* ran a community radio for *sangha* women, through a half hour slot, twice a week. It was broadcast on the *Gyan Vani* FM channel. The broadcasts were aligned to the project goals in the past couple of years, enabling women to claim their rightful space in the local public sphere. The weekly broadcast, called *Kelu Sakhi* (*listen, my friend*) featured content sourced from the *sanghas*, in the geographies where the information centres are operational. The infomediaries were also trained in recording content for the programme.



An infomediary recording content for the community radio programme 'Kelu Sakhi'

Through a variety of innovative formats, the radio programme helped in creating an “imagined community” of women's collectives and their leaders, across the project area.

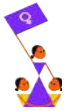
The programmes involved the following formats:

- group interviews with *sanghas* on their achievements,
- interviews with key elected women leaders who had emerged as key public actors after long struggles in their households and their immediate communities,
- songs celebrating women's collective strength and solidarity,
- informational interviews with government officials at the block level

All of these were tied together by a compere script featuring female and male characters challenging stereotypes and including women from diverse communities, from a fictional village, speaking the local dialect.

At all information centres, the *Prakriye* team instituted a process of “collective listening”, that

⁸ In September 2014, all *Gyan vani* channels were taken off air by All India Radio, for non payment of dues by IGNOU.



involved *sanghas* coming to the information centre to listen to the 30 minute broadcast, so that they could share their reflections on the content of the programme. This could then trigger peer-learning processes on key gender and governance issues.

Between January and March 2014, the *Prakriye* team ran an 8-week series on women's participation in local governance forums, bringing not just strong women leaders but also *Panchayat* Development Officers from the project area and faculty of the State Institute of Rural Development, on air. This certainly played a role in enhancing the participation of women in the *Mahila Gram Sabhas* and dialogic meetings between women's collectives and elected women, organised during this period.

Unfortunately, owing to a political impasse between the open university and All India Radio, the broadcasts on *Gyan Vani*, came to a standstill, across all stations, in the country, in October 2014⁹ – throwing the radio strategy off gear. This adverse development in the macro-context, has dampened the impact of the community radio strategy. But the *Prakriye* team has rallied by pushing the pedal on audio narrow-casting, at the info centres.

Community video

All information centres have been provided with a content bank of video resources created by the *Prakriye* team (those produced prior to the project as well as those produced during the project period) and infomediaries have been encouraged to screen these resources on appropriate occasions, individually before visitors to the information centres; and collectively, during *sangha* meetings that are held in these centres.

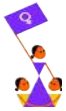
The video bank of resources has content on a range of thematic areas, such as:



Community video resources were created by the *Prakriye* team according to identified needs in the community

- inspirational stories of strong and vibrant women leaders from among the EWRs in the operational area of the project
- edited footage of *Mahila gram sabhas* and networking meetings that can serve as useful pointers for guiding women's collectives' reflections on the need to work with their elected women representatives, and the importance of civil dialogue, even when there are differences and disagreements on issues/concerns.
- achievements of *sanghas* from neighbouring villages, in collectively taking on local power elite
- discursive videos that challenge prevailing gender norms such as the normalisation of the gendered division of labour and restriction of girls' autonomy in making life choices.

9 <http://www.deccanherald.com/content/437262/all-india-radio-stops-airing.html>



Additionally, the infomediaries were trained in community video content creation processes, but the project period was not adequate to enable them to become video content creators in their own right.

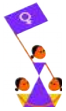
10.4 The info-centres' linkages in the local village ecology

Linkages with Gram Panchayats: The infomediaries of all village information centres were directed to routinise visits to their *Panchayats*, and to establish phone calls to their respective *Panchayat* Development Officers. Also, whenever networking meetings were conducted by the *Prakriye* team in information centre geographies, the infomediary was invited as a strategy of building linkages between the infomediary and elected women representatives.

Over time, in the older village information centres of Hegdakere and Jhalapura, the lukewarm response of the *Panchayats* transformed into a vibrant relationship! Currently, infomediaries of these centres receive advance notice of *Gram Sabhas* and *Ward Sabhas* and are allotted official slots to share information about their work in these forums; PDOs pro-actively telephone them when new welfare schemes are on the anvil; elected women representatives refer entitlement-seekers to these centres. In fact, in Hegdakere, the *Panchayat* requested the infomediary to undertake a survey of old age pensioners in the village, to identify leakages in the scheme. Over time, it is expected that the infocentres will expand their *Panchayat* linkages to include the standing committees and sub-committees (Village Health and Sanitation Committee, School Management Committee, Social Justice Committee etc.), and work with *Panchayat* members and citizens on these committees, for strengthening their performance.

In the newer women's collective-managed village information centres, more time is required to strengthen the *Panchayat* connections. In Kamalahalli, as the Managing Committee has *Panchayat* representatives, rapport-building was easier; though as described in the previous section, the challenge is really one of identifying the right strategy for occasions when *Panchayat* members have to be confronted by the centre.

Linkages with other local public institutions: In Hegdakere and Jhalapura, the Managing Committees of the information centres undertake regular visits to the *anganwadis* and local school to inspect the allotment of food grain rations, and the preparation of the mid-day meal. Also, in both villages, the infomediaries of the centres work in conjunction with ASHA workers and the local Primary Health Centre to organise health camps, blood tests etc. In fact, in Jhalapura, the *anganwadi* worker sends a note to the info-centre before she goes on leave, and in Hegdakere, the *anganwadi* worker invites the Managing Committee to oversee the opening of food grain packets received from the block level, to document first-level issues in the supply of rations to the *anganwadi*. In the long run, it is hoped that women's collectives associated with these centres, acquire the institutional capacities to undertake a systematic audit of the functioning of these institutions, and challenge them when required. As in the case of linkages with the *Gram Panchayat*, the newer information centres have a long way to go in terms of building their linkages with local institutions such as the school, the *anganwadi* and the Primary Health Centre, as the time available in the project period was not adequate.



10.5 Investing in infomediary capacity-building



Capacity- building session for infomediaries

As the infomediaries were pivotal to the information centre strategy, a lot of time and energy of the *Prakriye* team was spent on building their capacities. Towards this, the *Prakriye* team organised monthly capacity building sessions for all infomediaries associated with the project, to equip them in the effective use of techno-social strategies for public information sourcing, information dissemination, and community media production and outreach. These sessions were designed as 2-day residential programmes, as the idea was also to provide spaces for peer dialogue, where infomediaries could have frank discussions on the key issues and challenges they encountered in the

performance of their role, such as:

- the burden of economic responsibility, and the threat of domestic violence, at the household level
- heckling and harassment from community members on outreach visits, especially upper caste groups (as the majority of infomediaries are dalit)
- tantrums of disgruntled beneficiaries
- bullying by women in the Managing Committee

Additionally, each infomediary was assigned a mentor from the *Prakriye* team who would provide her ongoing guidance and support in her work, especially in the time period between the capacity-building meetings.

More details about the infomediary capacity-building efforts undertaken by *Prakriye*, are detailed in **Box 8**.

Box 8. The elements of the monthly infomediary capacity-building programmes, organised by the *Prakriye* team

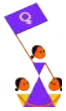
1. Enhancing infomediary capacity to source public information from various sources :

To ensure that infomediaries are able to source and triangulate information about government schemes and services effectively, at every capacity building meeting, the infomediaries were given assignments in this area, which were then reviewed in the subsequent meeting.

Some examples of assignments:

- writing a note on the salient features of the Bhagyalakshmi scheme of the Government of Karnataka,
- making a list of the salient schemes of the Department of Social Welfare,
- identifying the criteria for availing of the benefits of the Jan Dhan scheme, etc.

The intention behind these assignments was that in order to complete them, infomediaries would



have to scan governmental websites and newspapers, undertake visits to the departments or contact department officials on the phone, etc., honing their information sourcing capabilities in the process.

2. Enabling the infomediaries to acquire critical perspectives on gender and governance issues:

One session at each of the capacity-building meetings was earmarked for sharing audio and video resources with infomediaries, on topics such as the importance of women's participation in the *Panchayat* and the challenges encountered by women in public life; and raw footage of *Ward Sabha*, *Gram Sabha* and *Mahila Gram Sabha* proceedings generated by the project team in response to *Panchayat* requests.

As part of these sessions, the infomediaries were asked to review the content they had watched or listened to, and share their reflections and thoughts. The discussions thus catalysed, focused on equipping infomediaries to develop critical perspectives on gender issues, and women's participation in public-political life.

3. Equipping the infomediaries in effectively utilising the power of data, in their work:

The capacity-building sessions also focused on training infomediaries in effectively utilising the digital MIS developed as part of the project, for recording the work of the centres w.r.t info-sourcing, info-outreach, and applications-processing. This was not just in terms of recording entries in appropriate cells of the MIS, but in terms of honing their skills to analytically decipher key trends from the monthly data.

4. Facilitating peer learning:

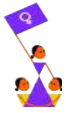
Supporting peer learning and interaction with respect to discussing everyday challenges encountered by infomediaries, was another important area of focus for the capacity-building sessions. This included giving space for infomediaries to discuss issues such as dealing with rude and patronising remark from officials, and community members; lack of support from Managing Committee members for outreach visits, and so on. As part of fostering this peer learning culture, at every capacity-building meeting, each infomediary was given time to share the key highlights of her work in the past month, as well as flag key issues/challenges on which she needed advice/suggestions from her peers.

5. Technical skills:

This included sessions on Internet browsing, voice recording and editing audio content, shooting video footage and editing the same, using the MIS and the Open Source IVR software. These trainings were received with great enthusiasm by the infomediaries.

6. Exposure visits:

The infomediaries were taken to the 'Mysore Dasara' exhibition to learn about new schemes, new scientific innovations, and the possibilities of creating low-cost IEC (Information, Education and Communication) materials from the various stalls of line departments, NGOs and other public institutions. Though the information centres do not work on a commercial model, the *Prakriye* team felt that it was useful for the infomediaries to learn the importance of client-centric communication from corporate Customer Relationship Management teams. Therefore, an exposure visit was arranged to the office of IDEA-Cellular, and infomediaries reported that the tips received in this visit, have helped them in enhancing their confidence in their interactions with communities.



10.6 The extent of reach of the information centres

A perusal of the monthly MIS maintained by the information centres reveals that each information centre receives an average of 20-30 visitors every month, and covers 150 community members through its outreach efforts. Between 6-8 applications for entitlements are processed every month per information centre. The applications mainly pertain to applications for UID card (*Aadhar*), caste and income certificates, entitlements under agriculture schemes, rural housing schemes, universal sanitation schemes, pensions and other benefits of the Department of Social Welfare.

The qualitative reports of their work, shared by the infomediaries at the monthly capacity-building sessions, reveal that the information centres have played an extremely critical role in enabling women and marginalised community members access their rightful entitlements from the state. It is important to highlight here that information centres have not just opened up access to welfare schemes for individuals, but also supported marginalised women in demanding accountability and responsiveness from public institutions such as the local Primary Health Centre, and the Fair Price Shop, as illustrated by the stories in **Box 9**.

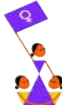
Box 9. Role of the information centres in supporting women's demands for responsiveness and accountability from local public institutions: insights from stories from the field

Making the local Primary Health Centre sensitive to community priorities in scheduling outreach services: A story from Hegdakere

In late 2013, Vandana, the village level Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) and Management Committee member of the village information centre in Hegdakere village, attended a health department meeting at the local Primary Health Centre. The ophthalmologist ('eye doctor' in local parlance) happened to be visiting and he told all the ASHAs present that they could ask people from their villages to visit the health centre, any time that day, as it was the day of his scheduled visit. Vandana pointed out that it was not possible for people to put aside their tasks at such short notice, and come to the health centre without any prior notice. She said that if the doctor was willing, the Hegdakere information centre would take the responsibility of organising an eye camp. She proposed that she would inform the doctor in advance so that he could plan the visit. The doctor agreed. Subsequently, the information centre organised the camp about 10 days later. 60 villagers, many of whom were senior citizens, attended. The *sangha* women and the infomediary, and of course Vandana herself, consider the fact that they got the 'eye doctor' to their village, as one of the big successes of the information centre.

Info-centres as 'watch-dogs' that monitor the local *anganwadi*: Another story from Hegdakere village

In Hegdakere village, in early 2013, the women's collectives running the information centre observed that at the village *anganwadi*, there were repeated shortfalls in the distribution of food grain rations to pregnant women and mothers of children below 5 years of age (that was a part of the supplementary nutrition drive of the government). They questioned the *anganwadi* worker and helper regarding this. The explanation they received was that this was because of shortfalls in the supply of grains from the block level. Subsequently, a new practice was initiated at the *anganwadi* – that of opening the sealed food-grain packets, received from the block level, only in the presence of the infomediary and the Managing Committee members of the information centre. In other words, the *anganwadi* has recognised the information centre as a legitimate community institution that has a right to raise questions on the quality of public services, at the local level.



How the mobile phone was used as a 'force-multiplier' by the infomediary of the Hunsur block centre: A story from Malgandi village

Malgandi is a village whose women's collectives are closely in touch with the block information centre at Hunsur. In mid 2013, when a few women from this village visited the information centre, the casual conversation that ensued between them and the infomediary revealed that the local Fair Price Shop Owner in the village was charging a disproportionate amount of money, for food-grains, in spite of a government directive that all Below Poverty Line households had to be provided their monthly quota of rice at Rs 1/ per kilogram, through the Public Distribution System. The infomediary immediately telephoned the Food Inspector of Hunsur block (the designated officer to monitor Fair Price Shops), before the women, and explained to him the situation in Malgandi village. The Food Inspector told the infomediary that she should share his phone number with the concerned women, and they should call him next time they encountered this problem at their Fair Price Shop. That month, armed with this information, when the women went to get their monthly rations, they found that the owner's wife was managing the shop as he had gone out. When she named the usual price, the women challenged her saying that they now knew the law, and what she was demanding was unfair. She backed down, and gave the women their allotted quota of grains, at the lawful price. The women collected their grains and went away. Later on, they were scolded by their husbands who felt that it was risky to have angered the politically-connected Fair Price Shop owner. They thought it wise for their wives to have quietly paid the price he asked. The following month, when the women went for their rations, they were met by the angry owner who threatened to cut off their supply of grains. These words angered one of the women present, and she dialed the Food Inspector's number on her mobile phone, and handed the phone over to the shop owner. Needless to say, he received a warning and a ticking off – and has since then been toeing the line.

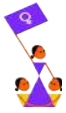
Another strategy that has been used by the information centres to expand their reach, has been the organising of 'info-melas' at block and village levels. 2 info-melas were organised in Hunsur and H.D.Kote blocks, and 2 in Kamalahalli and Bedekeri *panchayat* villages. Each block info-mela received around 700 visitors; and over 50 visitors attended the village info-melas.

These info-melas were intended as local awareness generation events for women's collectives, on the new possibilities that technologies offer for furthering women's struggles on the ground – for entitlements, for information and for public accountability. A lot of thought went into designing the layout and the various "stalls" of the info-fair. Each info-mela had the following 8 stalls:

1. Registration desk
2. Features of the mobile phone
3. Features of the Tablet PC
4. An introduction to the *Kelu Sakhi* radio programme
5. Sourcing information about government schemes and services, and the news, from the Internet



Demonstration of the use of a tablet in the Hunsur infomela



6. Community video
7. Digital learning resources for girls and boys
8. Introduction to the work of the community information centres

11. Local advocacy to challenge entrenched power structures at the Panchayat level

As detailed in **Section 5**, considering that women's collectives in the operational area were not very strong, and as linkages between women's collectives and elected women were very weak, in the limited time available, the *Prakriye* team could not initiate large scale actions on gender and governance issues, as originally envisioned.

However, the *Prakriye* team succeeded in leveraging the potential of GIS-enabled participatory mapping in triggering leaps of faith, by transforming a “known” into “known-known”(common knowledge)¹⁰ – to shake up existing relations of power in the local governance eco-system, through a GIS-enabled participatory mapping exercise carried out in Kamalahalli *panchayat*. The subsequent section describes this experience in greater detail.

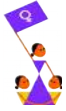
11.1 Kamalahalli Panchayat: Power of data forces Panchayat members to address irregularities in the allotment of subsidies under a rural sanitation scheme

In February 2014, a *Mahila Gram Sabha* was organised in Kamalahalli, as part of which the women's collectives in the village, raised critical concerns to their President and Panchayat Development Officer – key among which was irregularities and undue delays in the allocation of subsidies under the universal sanitation programme. The *Panchayat* Development Officer suggested that a survey of all household toilets constructed under the universal sanitation programme be carried out, in order to identify irregularities in subsidy allocation. *Prakriye* offered to conduct a GIS-enabled participatory mapping exercise for this, and this offer was accepted.

The subsequent survey of all 433 households of Kamalahalli village revealed that 262 have toilets constructed under the rural sanitation scheme. However, only 101 households out of these have received the full amount of the subsidy. Based on the survey and interactions with community members, the *Prakriye* team understood that the messy situation was due to some *Panchayat* members promising toilet subsidies to community members, for bribes, without a proper reconnaissance of the eligibility criteria for beneficiary selection. This resulted in a situation where many applicants who did not meet the beneficiary selection criteria of the scheme, went ahead and constructed toilets, after paying the 'cut' their ward member asked for, with the promise of release of the subsidy at the earliest.

To take this forward, the *Prakriye* team knew that the next move had to be done very carefully as women's collectives are not strong in this village, and there would not be adequate community support for an open confrontation with the *Panchayat* about the corruption in the implementation of the universal sanitation scheme. Therefore, they adopted the following strategy.

10 <http://www.giswatch.org/en/womens-rights-gender/tracing-impact-icts-social-and-political-participation-women>



The *Prakriye* team collected data on household level subsidy receipts, that was collected through the survey, and plotted it on a map of the village using GIS technology. This digital map was then presented before the entire *Panchayat* body. As soon as the map was projected, there was a heated debate between various *Panchayat* members, with members of Kamalahalli ward being at the receiving end of allegations of corruption and non-performance of duties, by other members. The fact of irregularities in subsidy allocation was shared knowledge; what the GIS presentation succeeded in doing was transforming it from a diffuse piece of gossip into a hard fact, a truth-claim that had to be responded to. Using this discussion on the importance of accountability in the discharge of subsidies as an entry point, the *Prakriye* team proposed that a similar exercise also be carried out in the neighbouring village of Kutnur, (as there were similar allegations from the community), and that the Kamalahalli and Kutnur findings be shared at a meeting with the entire electorate of both these villages. While the *Panchayat* members agreed in principle to the idea, and a similar mapping exercise was carried out in Kutnur, the *Panchayat* has been repeatedly postponing the date for the presentation of the findings by the *Prakriye* team before the entire electorate.

On the side, the *Prakriye* team has observed that the elected members of both Kamalahalli and Kutnur *Panchayats* have been working at a feverish pace to get the irregularities in subsidy allocation sorted out, by using a special provision for relaxing beneficiary selection criteria that is available at the *taluk panchayat* level. It seems that the *Panchayat* members want to schedule the wider community meeting after they sort these issues out. Though it may be argued that this exercise has not struck the heart of entrenched corruption in scheme implementation; it must be acknowledged that the fear of an expose is strong enough to drive elected members to take remedial action on an issue they had hitherto been ignoring. It is also to be acknowledged that where women's collectives and CBOs lack the political capital to confront entrenched power structures openly, such alternative routes may be useful counter-tactics to shift the status quo.

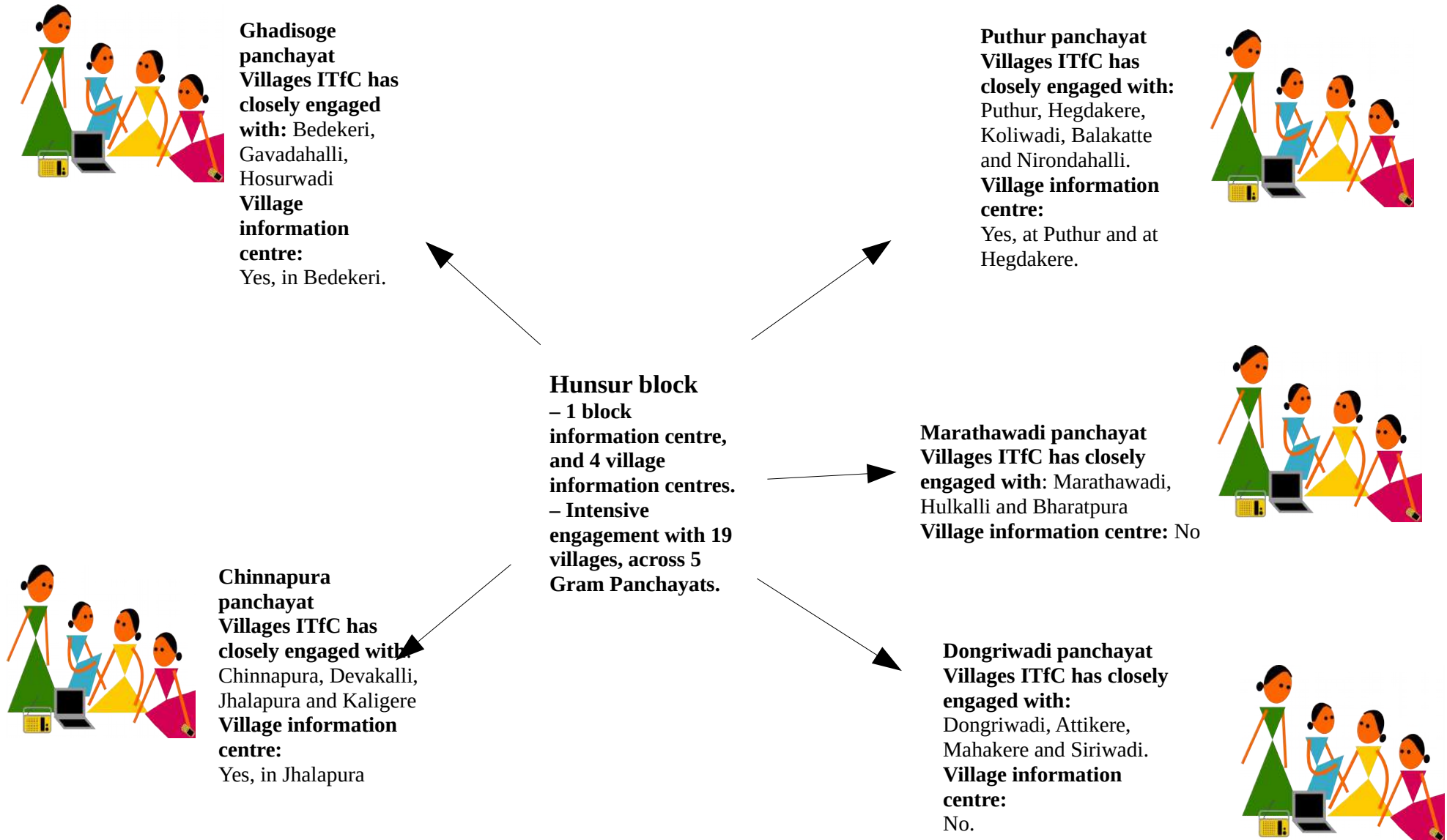
12. Conclusion

On the whole, the experience at the *Prakriye site* has revealed useful pointers for the design and implementation of efforts in the following areas:

- Implementing an innovative ICT-enabled capacity building model for elected members that illustrates how an alternate training paradigm that is demand-based, and peer learning-focused can be constructed.
- Leveraging hybrid strategies for building elected women's linkages with women's collectives at the local level, to shape a shared women's agenda for local governance.
- Creating an alternative public information architecture that enhances marginalised women's claims-making (utilising techno-social possibilities such as IVR-based informational networks; community media for learning-dialogues; digitalised data sets and GIS-enabled participatory mapping for evidence-based dialogue with local government).

13. Annexure 1: A diagrammatic representation of the operational area of *Making Women's Voices and Votes Count*, in Mysore district

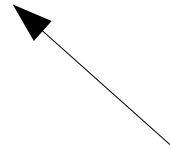
1a. Hunsur block



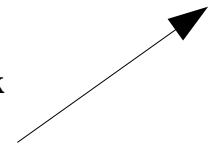
2.3.1.2 H.D.Kote block



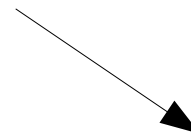
Kamalahalli panchayat
Villages ITfC has closely engaged with:
Kamalahalli, Belahaadi, Kutnur, and Mahakere.
Village information centre: Yes, at Kamalahalli



H.D.Kote block
– 1 block information centre, and 2 village information centres
– Intensive engagement with 8 villages, across 3 Panchayats



Donrewadi panchayat
Villages ITfC has closely engaged with: Chinginwadi
Village information centre: Yes, one in Chinginwadi.



Melgaon panchayat
Villages ITfC has closely engaged with: Melgaon, Rajapura, Katteguppe
Village information centre:No

