ANNUAL REPORT

2007 – 2008

IT for Change

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ACRONYMS

APC	The Association for Progressive Communication
APDIP	Asia-Pacific Development Information Programme
ARC	Administrative Reforms Commission
CBO	Community Based Organization
CCID	Centre for Community Informatics and Development
CIR	Critical Internet Resources
CS	Civil Society
CSDMS	Centre for Science, Development and Media Studies
CSTD	Commission on Science and Technology for Development
ECOSOC	United Nations Economic and Social Council
FOSS or FLOSS	Free/Libre and Open Source Software
GAID	Global Alliance for ICT and Development
GoI	Government of India
GDISP	Gender, Development and Information Society Policy
ICANN	Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
ICT4D or ICTD	Information and Communication Technology for Development
IDRC	International Development Research Centre
IGC	Internet Governance Caucus
IGF	Internet Governance Forum
IT	Information Technology
ITfC	IT for Change
ITU	International Telecommunications Union
IWTC	International Women's Tribune Centre
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MHRD	Minstry for Human Resource Development
MSK	Mahila Samakhya Karnataka
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NMK	Namma Mahiti Kendra
NPISE	National Policy on ICTs in School Education
ONI	Open Net Initiative
RTI	Right to Information
SHG	Self-Help Group
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
WSIS	World Summit on the Information Society

SUMMARY

During 2007-2008, IT for Change has further built on the foundations of our work over the past years. New ICTs are triggering structural changes all around us, in almost all domains of human activity, such that it is generally accepted that we stand at the cusp of what can be called an emerging information society. Such deep social-structural changes hold great promise for, and also pose immense challenges to, the ideals of equity, rights and social justice. In this emerging milieu, IT for Change seeks to promote these progressive values in development through its work in three thematic areas, namely:

- ICT governance and policies
- Socio-development policies in the information society
- Community informatics.

IT for Change works in these areas through developing a progressive discourse, doing policy advocacy, developing networks of like-minded actors and shaping innovations in development processes and systems at the grassroots level.

Issues of ICT governance and policies have significant influence on the nature of the structural changes in the information society, and cannot be left to technologists, or even the domains traditionally involved with technology policy making. ICT policies and ICT governance, especially in this formative phase of an information society, are issues of outstanding social and political importance, which should be subject to thorough social analysis and political engagement. Our work involves shaping and presenting an ICT governance and policy discourse in strongly socio-political terms, especially from the point of view of the global South. It seeks to elucidate the diverse implications of policy and governance alternatives for different people, social classes, groups and countries.

As they have transformed many other areas, new ICTs will inevitably change development practice. Dominant interests have strongly been at work, riding the power of these new technologies to further entrench their own advantages. ICTs are being used to bring in the neoliberal conceptions of development through the technology backdoor. In areas like governance, education, health, livelihood support, community development etc., a new form of 'development practice' (much of ICTD[1] activity falls under this description) is taking root. Most progressive actors in the development field have simply not reacted to this new situation. Their lack of engagement has given dominant interests free play in the new ICTD space, which gravely endangers the future of 'development' and its progressive ethos. IT for Change's response to these challenges involves doing research and theoretical analyses, engaging in policy advocacy and developing networks of actors with common interests. While working in the general area of ICTD theory and practice, our work in the socio-development policy arena focusses specifically on the two sub-themes of governance and gender.

In this formative period of an information society, with ICT and ICT-based process and system innovations taking place at a very rapid pace, it is not possible to effectively act in the areas of discourse shaping and policy advocacy without keeping one's ear attuned to how ICTs are changing actual development practice and its processes/systems. IT for Change has been attempting to engage

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[1]   ICTs for Development

with the transformatory potential of ICTs in rural communities of Karnataka through our field project, *Mahiti Manthana* over the past two years. The project takes a rights-based and citizenship oriented approach, in contrast to the 'consumer' and 'user' oriented approaches that dominate the ICTD landscape in India. Moving ahead, we aim to spread the successes of *Mahiti Manthana* by building synergies with other grassroots organisations through the *Centre for Community Informatics and Development*. Drawing from our field experiences, our future research will contribute to the emerging theoretical approach of community informatics that aims at explaining how community level social systems are transformed through contextualised community ownership of ICTs.

The remainder of this report is chapterised according to the three thematic areas listed above. Each chapter begins with a description and rationale of the theme under consideration, mentioning key issues and challenges, and the objectives that IT for Change seeks to achieve in the area. This is followed by a summary of our achievements, learnings and impact in the period April 2007-March 2008.

ICT GOVERNANCE AND POLICIES

Description and Approach

New ICTs are triggering structural changes all around us, in almost all domains of human activity, such that it is generally accepted that we stand at the cusp of what can be called as an emerging information society. Issues of ICT governance and policies have significant influence on the nature of these structural changes, and cannot be left to technologists, or even the domains traditionally involved with technology policy making. ICT policies and ICT governance, especially in this formative phase of an information society, are issues of outstanding social and political importance, which should be subject to thorough social analysis and political engagements.

IT for Change's work in the thematic area of 'ICT governance and policies' seeks to bring out the social and political importance of ICT governance and policies, especially with regard to development. Two major challenges in this thematic area are:

(1) The area is dominantly cast in 'neutral' technology terms, as consisting of a set of issues implicating 'solutions' which are equally beneficial to all. Dominant economic and political forces strongly encourage such 'neutral' versions of ICT governance and policy discourse, hiding their considerable vested interests behind it, and subtly influencing the discourse to their advantage with their huge resources and existing domination in intellectual-academic and policy fields. The neoliberal design in the ICT governance/ policy arena, as in other arenas, is to thrive in policy vacuums, and this agenda is actively pushed in this arena through working on widespread (and to some extent justified) fears that any kind of policy regime will mean take over of the Internet by statist forces.

(2) The progressives, especially in developing countries, have largely taken an agnostic (in terms of practical uses of ICTs) or positively antagonistic (at the level of social and political discourse) attitude to the new technologies. Correspondingly, they either see them as neutral tools that can be used contextually, if and when appropriate, or as representing another arm of a hegemonistic globalisation. The latter continues to be their primary lens to analyze global economic and political forces, which new ICTs undoubtedly are a part of.

These two factors together have meant that the new ICTs continue to be shaped and governed in a manner that is setting the ground for even stronger entrenchment of interests that are currently dominant, economically and politically, in the emerging structural configuration of an information society.

Our work seeks to meet these two challenges in the following ways:

(1) Shaping and presenting an ICT governance and policy discourse in strongly socio-political terms, especially from the point of view of the global South. It seeks to bring out the different implication of different alternatives of policies and governance on different people, social classes, groups and countries. This involves both challenging the existing discourse of 'technology neutrality', and constructing a new vocabulary and a set of basic premises of an alternative discourse. It must be understood that this is an extremely difficult and intellectually-demanding activity, but is basic to making any real progress towards claiming

the new technologies for a more progressive conception of an information society.

(2) Engaging with existing ICT governance and policy arenas and trying to influence their agenda in progressive directions; while also seeking new governance and policy institutional arrangements that are more democratic and progressive.

(3) Developing coalitions of various actors, within civil society and among governments (especially of the South) for the purpose of the above objectives.

Achievements During 2007-2008

I. Internet Governance

1) Civil Society Internet Governance Caucus (IGC)

- Parminder Jeet Singh of IT for Change is currently serving as the co-coordinator of the Civil Society Internet Governance Caucus (IGC), a position to which he was elected in 2006.
- IGC, the primary global civil society body in the Internet governance space, has been a very active and critical player making civil society contributions to the UN Internet Governance Forum (IGF) discussing and even framing issues relevant to Internet Governance, co-organising workshops at the Annual IGF at Rio de Janerio and contributing to related consultations.
- We have helped in strengthening the voice of IGC and Civil Society (CS) in the Internet Governance discourse and in shaping an emergent rights- and development-based civil society (CS) conceptualisation of this discourse.

2) IGF Consultations at Geneva (early 2007) and Annual IGF at Rio de Janerio (November 2007)

Our specific focus has been on democratising global Internet governance, challenging the privatised governance mechanisms that dominate this space. IT for Change played an active role in highlighting the lacunae within the first IGF at Athens where critical political issues of global Internet governance were not addressed, and therefore played a proactive role in shaping the agenda for IGF Rio.

We organised several workshops at IGF Rio along with some partners, as well as participated as panelists in workshops conducted by other organisations, advocating for progressive positions that are pro-development and pro-South. These positions are described below:

- Public goods model for Internet access
  - Conceptualisation of ICTs not just as commercial or business infrastructure, but also as development infrastructure, with corresponding responsibilities of public provisioning.
  - Going beyond connectivity, and the role of the state and other development agencies, in creating a comprehensive ecosystem which makes connectivity meaningful.
  - This was the first time that access as a public goods model was talked about at the Access Plenary Panel and this was a big step forward for development actors at the IGF.
- Critical Internet Resources (CIRs)

- o The logical infrastructure behind the Internet consists of some unique address systems that are considered as Critical Internet Resources, because without them the Internet just cannot work. Control of this logical infrastrcuture provides a lever for a critical control over many substantive aspects of the Internet, and is thus strongly political. However, the incumbents – US government and the privatised governance system anchoring in the agency called ICANN[2] – have consistently tried to protect their positions of control *inter alia* through claiming that these are merely technical functions with no political significance. Our participation at the IGF strongly contested this position.
  - o We proposed the creation of a domain name space that is by default public domain, in contrast to all existing ones which are by default proprietary. This proposal was made to show how Internet governance systems could be pushing collaborative public interest models on the Internet rather than exclusively market-based ones that exist at present.
- The Dynamic Coalition on Framework of Principles for the Internet
  - o We led a discussion on a proposing a global set of principles which would govern the administration of the Internet. Such universally accepted political principles can guide the development of the Internet in directions of larger public interest, rather than serving dominant interests which directions it is taking at present.
- Mandate of the IGF
  - o IT for Change argued that the IGF should not be treated as an annual conference without resulting in any outcomes contributing to policy processes, which that is its original mandate.
- Cyber-Security
  - o IT for Change pointed out that the definition of security should not be construed or viewed from the point of view of 'state security' itself but should be broader and incorporate notions of security from a people's perspective.

3) Publications

- We were invited to write an article for 'South Bulletin' (December 2007) published by the South Centre titled 'The Internet Governance Forum at Rio: A Southern Perspective'. The South Centre is a key inter-government institution for South-South cooperation, and the bulletin is distributed to high-level officials in developing countries and Geneva-based delegates. This provided us a critical opportunity immediately after IGF Rio to advocate our reflections on a pro-South, pro-development Internet governance.
- We critically reviewed the multi-stakeholder nature of IGF, which has a preference for the politics of representation over that of redistribution, in an article for The Economic and Political Weekly titled 'On the Road to Hyderabad: Internet Governance and Development Agenda' in January 2008.

4) Strategising for IGF 2008 in Hyderabad

- We have been recognised for our active engagement at IGF Athens and Rio, and are collaborating with the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology, Government of India (GoI) towards shaping the agenda of the third annual meeting of the IGF at Hyderabad, India in December 2008.
- We submitted a note to the government on issues that are relevant to Internet governance

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2   Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers

from an Indian perspective, and also actively helped draft an Internet governance questionnaire being distributed by the Ministry to a wide range of stakeholders prior to the IGF. Possible collaboration strategies and mechanisms will be consolidated in the coming months.

II. Open Source Software Policies

Since February 2008, we have started working on a two-year project called FLOSSInclude, funded by the European Union. This initiative, where we are one among eleven organisations from Europe, Latin America, Africa and Asia, aims at spreading FLOSS (free/libre and open source software) and assessing its potential in socio-economic development in developing countries.

- IT for Change's concern in the project will be on the role of public sector agencies in supporting and enabling FLOSS. We will specifically look at the issues and challenges involved in building the ecology for the production and use of FLOSS and the context for a wide scale deployment and use of FLOSS within the public sector agencies in India.
- We will bring out policy papers and undertake networking and advocacy as part of the project.

Future Plans in the Area of ICT Governance and Policies

- Building a progressive ICT discourse through:
  - Engagement with influential online discussion groups, presenting progressive inputs and gradually building constituencies supporting alternative conceptions.
  - Developing a discourse around a 'rights-based approach' to ICT governance and policies. (This is a development over a political economy lens which we brought to this area in the earlier period. Both these approaches will be continued simultaneously).
  - Building a discourse on public domain over the Internet, and of 'publicness' of the Internet.
  - Engaging in building a discourse on 'open ICT ecology' – in connectivity, software, content and hardware, as well as in applications like search engines, and social networking sites – attempting especially to mainstream it through advocating adoption in the public and development sector.

- Engagements with, and seeking new, institutional spaces for Internet governance and policies.
  - With IGF: Continued, and intensive, engagement to influence its agenda in progressive ways.
  - Seeking new institutional spaces

- Building coalition of actors. This is being done both among civil society actors and with Southern governments.

SOCIO-DEVELOPMENT POLICIES IN THE INFORMATION SOCIETY

Description and Approach

As it has changed the domains of business, entertainment, and social relations and networking, new ICTs will also inevitably change development practice. The real question here is – in which direction this change will go? Will it take forward the neoliberal agenda for development – of marketising development with some special support for extreme destitution, and reducing people and communities to being clients of global mega-business chains; or, will it contribute to making development more participatory, empowering people and communities to make their own choices regarding their individual and collective destinies, and providing stronger structural bases to political and economic systems for greater equality and social justice.

These two opposing directions that theory and practice of development can take are well theorised and need not be laboured upon here. What is significant to note however is that at this cusp of what may be called as the 'information society change' sweeping all sectors of human activity, development can take a turn in either direction, and quickly transform itself. New ICTs can facilitate considerable transformation of development in either direction, depending on how they are constructed and applied. Also, very importantly, it is not possible to just wait-and-watch, for these technologies have such an hyper-efficiency inducing impact that they tend to effect all or most areas whether deliberate directed efforts are taken or not.[3] In this respect, what has been seen regarding mobile phones may only be the first, and a relatively light, wave, that gives evidence of the domination and pervasiveness that these technologies are on the way to exercise.

The main challenges in this area, mirroring those described in the area of ICT governance and policies, are:

- Dominant interests have strongly been at work to ride the power of these new technologies, and further entrench their advantages. In the area of 'development', ICTs are being used to bring in the neoliberal conceptions of development through the technology backdoor. In areas like governance, education, health, livelihood support, community development etc, a new form of 'development practice' is taking root. (Much of ICTD activity belongs to this problematic category). It shows an obsession with user fees, financial sustainability of development interventions (meaning, 'development' should pay for itself), efficiency, private sector involvement and markets, and gives scant consideration to issues of participation, equity, social justice, public investments, and rights and entitlements. Typically, advocates of such kind of ICTD abhor policy, as an element that constrains free and spontaneous activity, and at other times seek its use to institutionalise neoliberal conceptions of development.

- Most progressive actors in the development field have simply not reacted to this new situation. At theoretical and discourse levels they have resisted new ICTs as a hegemonic force, and an ally of neoliberal globalisation, and at practical levels, seen them as neutral

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[3] In asserting that technology-induced changes can be directed by policies, as well as insisting that it is not possible (nor it may be desirable) to entirely ward off technology-led change, we take a position between social- and technology-determinism. Neither extreme view is tenable in the times of such technology avalanche as the present times.

tools that can be used selectively, but considered largely inappropriate for most people and communities in developing countries due to cost and skill factors. Their lack of engagement is also a result of the way ICT discourse remains shrouded in technical terms, almost deliberately. However, this non-engagement has given the dominant interests a free play in the new ICTD space, which holds grave danger to future of 'development' and its progressive ethos.

IT for Change's response to these challenges is in form of doing research and theoretical analyses, doing policy advocacy and developing networks of actors with common interests and progressive outlook. These activities will be done both at global and national levels.

In this thematic area 'socio-development policies in the information society', at one level the engagement will be with what may be called as the general and overall ICTD area and ICTD theory. Beyond this, IT for Change will also work in specific domains of development. In this regard, there are two focus areas of IT for Change's work – governance and gender. In these two focus area, we will explore the full significance of information society changes, from developing frameworks of research and analysis to formulating policy recommendations, and developing advocacy networks. In other areas, the accent will be to work in close partnership with organisations with domain expertise providing them with expertise on the techno-social aspects that impinge on their area of work, and thus contributing to formulating analyses and appropriate policy responses.

I. ICTs for Development (ICTD)

Much of ICTD theory is a global phenomenon, with its birth in global development parleys among developed countries[4], strongly underpinned by global business. It is 'congenitally neo-liberal'[5] and has got entrenched in national systems mostly through donor policies and programmes. However, there is hardly any developing country that has a clear ICTD policy, or even an ICTD policy framework. India too does not have one. Accordingly, the most important space for influencing the ICTD discourse remains the global arena. At the same time, it is required to advocate that developing countries develop a clear progressive ICTD policy framework.

Achievements during 2007-2008

1) United Nations Global Alliance for ICT and Development (UN GAID)

The Global Alliance for Information and Communication Technologies and Development (UN GAID) is an initiative approved by the United Nations Secretary General and was launched in 2006. It seeks to provide a platform for policy dialogue for harnessing ICT for advancing development, and for bringing together the various development actors such as governments, the civil society, private sector, the technical and Internet communities and academia.

- In early 2008, Parminder Jeet Singh was selected for CS membership in the GAID Strategy Council. This allows us critical space for our contributions to shape the future directions of GAID.

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[4] For instance, see 'Okinawa Charter on the Global Information Society', and the DOT Force initiative, and the subsequent UNDP's DOI initiative that it spawned.

[5] 'Gender in the information Society: Emerging issues', UNDP-APDIP

- We will also be inputting into the GAID External Evaluation. The evaluation is scheduled to be completed in time for the meeting of the GAID Steering Committee in May 2008 in Kuala Lumpur.
- We participated in the concerted effort by some CS actors which resulted in changing the Terms of Reference of the evaluation from looking exclusively at activties of GAID's outside partners to actually assessing the progress made by GAID towards the achievement of the six GAID objectives. We believe that this is a critical shift which can ensure that an evaluation critically examines the role and positioing of GAID.
- We have advocated for an annual open consultation for GAID, parallel to the annual IGF open forum meeting. Such a proposal for an annual information society forum was mooted during informal consultations that the Comission on Science and Technology for Development (CSTD) secretariat had with CS in February 2008 in Geneva. We believe that between the IGF and a potential development-oriented information society forum such as the one we are proposing, we can take the objectives and unfinished tasks of WSIS forward along both Internet governance and ICTD, respectively. We are supporting this proposal since it could help bringing GAID more into the UN mainstream.

2) Comission on Science and Technology for Development (CSTD)

CSTD provides the General Assembly and United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) with high-level advice on relevant science and technology issues.

- IT for Change was invited to be part of a panel of experts discussion on e-governance, as a part of the proceedings of the CSTD.

Future Plans

IT for Change's efforts during the next year will focus on influencing the global ICTD discourse. This will be done through engagements with GAID, and CSTD, as well as with global and national ICTD workshops and conferences that we will attend. We will be pushing for a rights-based approach to ICTD, and doing a political economy analysis of ICTD, with focus on issues beyond mere access, in terms of connectivity, to issues of content, equal participation, community informatics and enabling development.

In the long-term, our plan is also to seek an ICTD policy framework for India, and a corresponding institutional mechanism. However, there are no specific plans for this in our next year's work plan. However, some preliminary work in this regard will be undertaken.

II. Governance and Citizenship

The emerging information society provides a new context for citizenship – defined as membership of a political community – and for governance. However, the emerging connectivity infrastructure by itself does not guarantee equality of participation and rights, as connoted by a citizenship status.

In fact, it is possible to rig the connectivity system, actively or by default, to ensure dependence of the peripheries on a dominating centre of strong vested interests. This is being done actively, both through ICT policies, and development and governance policies. Governance represents the formal structures of taking political decisions and implementing them. New ICTs can make them much more participatory and accountable, and also more effective – increasing reach, capacity, personalisation of service etc. However, ICTs can also be, and are being, used for sucking out the political and social content from governance, reducing it into a management system for effective working of a globalised market.

The two opposing directions that 'citizenship and governance' can take as an information society shapes up are quite clear, as in the case of two other thematic areas of IT for Change's work discussed above. To direct changes in the desired progressive directions, we will adopt similar three-pronged strategy as in these other thematic areas – build discourse (and counter the dominant one), develop policy frameworks and recommendations and seek networks and coalitions of like-minded actors.

The challenges in this area are also similar to those of the above two areas. Dominant vested interests are well along in building a discourse and practice in governance (the field of e-governance) as suits their interests. In this discourse, the term 'citizen' is mostly replaced by 'consumer' of governance services. Service delivery is sought to be privatised, and mostly commercialised; and policy-making is a multi-stakeholder activity, which is employed as a term of apology for strong corporate influence on policy-making.

On the other hand, the progressive forces have just not gathered themselves to resist these far-reaching changes. Even as they counter them generally at theoretical levels, they have not engaged with the force and logic of the new ICTs behind these changes. As spoken earlier, the new ICTs have a certain amount of self-propelling and self-establishing force. This makes it necessary, for countering their use by neoliberal ideologies, to present tenable alternatives where the ICTs are used for furthering progressive values in the area of citizenship and governance. This has to be done at the level of discourse and theory, as well as practice on the ground.

(At this stage it is important to highlight, on one hand, the complexity of the situation faced by progressive forces at this important junction of social transition, the emergence of an information society; and on the other hand, its far-reaching significance for almost all progressive ideals. This renders the field of work of 'information society' – especially as spanning from theory and discourse, through advocacy and network building, to practice on the ground – a difficult one, while being impossible to desist from or postpone till greater clarity dawns. IT for Change is in the circumstances struggling with giving the best possible progressive response to the situation. However, it does mean that strategies have to be changed and re-worked in relatively short cycles, which could be because of new lessons, failures and/ or changed situations. Very often, though, it is just the result of inadequate resources, which becomes difficult to spread and/or juggle over the wide span of necessarily connected activities. IT for Change does pull back from any 'information society' area that it finds is being addressed, with some degree of adequateness, by another progressive agency. We also consciously seeks to 'partner-out' every possible activity and competency that can be so dealt with, keeping only core areas to ourselves, for most optimum use of scarce resources. However, the nature of the field, and the urgency as well as the importance of the progressive responses required, is such that it will require IT for Change's work to be supported

with larger amount of funds, which are not tied to any specific activities. We continue to seek such larger and broader support from our funding partners).

Achievements during 2007-2008

Our research and advocacy in this area juxtaposes the recent increasing emphasis on rights- and entitlements-based perspectives of development and on bottom-up democratic processes in the context of development in the South, with the socio-political dynamism in the information society.

- In December 2007, we submitted a paper to the 2nd Indian Administrative Reforms Commission (ARC) on 'Citizen Centric Governance' with recommendations for meaningful and successful e-governance in India. ARC is a significant step in Indian governance reform and e-governance is an undeniably important component of such reform.
- We also made a presentation to the ARC to advocate for a e-governance policy in India to be preceeded and guided by a through political assessment of the govenrance reform opportunities provided by digital technologies.
- We proposed the creation of a scaffolding institutional framework that moves beyond a limiting accent on technological infrastructure and innovation alone to the consideration of systemic redesign possibilities. This is intended as a corrective to the current process of national e-governance plan, where the absence of an overall strategy – rooted in exisitng govenrance reform priorites of India – has meant that issues of technology infrastructure and commercial sustainability have dominated the e-governance discourse.
- We have also been able to develop a network of governance arena actors, including within the governments, who value such alternatives and are keen on exploring them.
- Another research project which we will commence shortly is the Open Net Initiative (ONI) India Project. India has legislated the Right to Information (RTI) Act, which makes it mandatory for the government to make available information connected to its work, to the citizen. This new right to information can only be realised by making information available in a digitised manner. A denial of this information can be tantamount to censorship and this aspect needs to be explored. Positions taken by the government in support of such withholding or non-publishing of public information need to be analysed and government officials engaged with, on such positions, to understand such de-facto censorship.
- Our research comes under the ONI – Asia project which looks at Internet censorship and surveillance in the Asia region from the year 2008 – 2009. The project is being funded by IDRC.

Future Plans

The objective of our work under this theme for the next year is to do research and publish papers in the areas of 'governance reforms in India using ICTs', 'new collaborative and open public information systems', and 'ICTs for local development'. We will also do policy advocacy in these areas, especially regarding India's national e-governance plan (NeGP), and develop networks of like-minded actors for knowledge production and advocacy.

III. Gender

Gender-based exclusion is perhaps the most pervasive and common category of social, political and economic exclusion across all societies. As information society transformations take place across social systems, structures and institutions, they impact gender relations in a variety of ways, creating both challenges to, and opportunities for, greater gender equality. Women's movements worldwide have relied on public institutions and systems in their struggle against entrenched patriarchies, while at the same time, taking advantage of the social and economic opportunities that arose with changing times. Information society contexts provide intrinsically democratic and equalising opportunities for gender equality; yet, the specific trajectories of such emancipatory possibilities depend on the specific conditions at the community level that shape women's status, roles and autonomy, and the specific policies at political levels that address issues of rights and empowerment. In this regard, the significance of targeted interventions and policies aimed at positive discrimination in favour of women, in order to give them a head-start within the new institutional ecology of an emerging information society, cannot be overemphasised. On the other hand, from gender equality and women's empowerment standpoints, it is equally important to understand, critique and resist social and institutional changes that weaken women's positions, such as the new forms of patriarchal assertions arising in the digital era and the shrinking of public policy spaces.

An examination of how information society changes impact gender relations, deriving from, and building upon, theories of gender and development, is required for moving towards frameworks that further gender equality in ICT and information society policies.

The basic challenge in this area remains that of non-engagement of most gender activists, and non-framing of the discourse in a vocabulary and in terms of theoretical frameworks and formulations that gender activists are most comfortable with. Due to this reason, the information society phenomenon if at all acknowledged by them is reduced to either being a hegemonic force, or seen in terms of ICTs as a set of neutral tools for contextual use. This has led to absence of any significant initiatives at policy levels, which are required to safeguard women's interest, and further them in the new situations.

Achievements during 2007-2008

In the new information society women face new kinds of exclusions and exploitations. The new scenario brings forth deep structural changes which are strongly gendered, which have only begun to be engaged with but have far-reaching implications for gender equality efforts. In this backdrop, IT for Change aims to understand the challenges and opportunities for gender equality in the emerging information society, and influence policies and practices in the direction of achieving gender equality.

1) Gender, Development and Information Society Policies Network

- In October 2007, a strategy planning workshop of the Gender, Development and Information Society Policies (GDISP) network was held in Bangalore, India, co-organised by IT for Change, the Association for Progressive Communications (APC), the International Women s Tribune Centre (IWTC) and Isis International Manila.
- The workshop served as the inaugural meeting of the network, which had come together in

2006 as a Community of Expertise under the GAID, with the aim of studying the intersecting themes of Gender, Development and Information Society Policies, and channelling the emerging understanding into policy processes at local, national and global levels.

- This inaugural meeting brought together over 30 participants from around the world to conduct a gender analysis of the policy ecology of the information society and the approaches of critical institutional players; evolve an action plan for research and advocacy; and develop the structure and processes that facilitate and strengthen the work of the network.

- The network resolved to find more spaces like the strategy planning workshop to bring together the insights and perspectives of gender advocates from varied streams, with a view to evolving progressive policy approaches to gender and development in the information society deriving from, and reshaping, the larger arena of feminist advocacy on development and rights. IT for Change continues to provide leadership for this global network.

2) Research

- In recognition of our expertise and progressive thinking on gender in the information society, Anita Gurumurthy was invited by the GAID Secretariat to join an ad-hoc group of experts on Connectivity and Access in the Asia/Pacific region, in preparation for the upcoming GAID Global Forum on Access and Connectivity in least developed countries and small islands developing states in Asia/Pacific and innovative financing mechanisms for ICTD in May 2008. She was also asked to contribute a chapter in the report to be jointly tabled at the meeting by ITU and GAID.

- We completed a study on 'Locating Gender in ICTD Projects: Five Cases from India' commissioned by the National Institute for Smart Government (NISG). Based on in-depth case studies, the research came up with an analytical model that can be used to assess ICT policy frameworks as well as project design, implementation and review along gender-inclusive parameters. The study also made meaningful recommendations for adopting a gender-sensitive approach to ICTD projects which will help inform policy frameworks as well as ICTD and gender practice methodologies. It will be shared with policy makers through the National Institute for Smart Government, Hyderabad.

- At the GDISP workshop described above, we also shared a tentative policy framework on gender and information society policies that sought to explore a rights and citizenship based approach to gender and ICT policies.

- Anita Gurumurthy presented a paper titled, 'The local-global connection in the information society: Some tentative formulations around gender, development and social change' at a seminar focussing on 'Gender and work in the global context: Theory and practice'. The seminar was conducted by the London School of Economics in May 2007.

Future Plans

The overall strategy and objectives of IT for Change in this thematic sub-area correspond to those in others areas. They consist in building the discourse, developing policy frameworks, and triggering networks of actors in the area.

IV. Other Areas

Among other areas in the development domain, education has been our strong focus this past year. In the area of education, our objective is to closely associate with the current ICTs and education policy-making process initiated by the GoI, and make sure that: (1) the process remains participatory and open, and appropriately excludes influence of vested and special interests, and (2) the policy framework is based on progressive ideals of equity, rights and social justice in education.

Achievements during 2007-2008

1) National Policy on ICTs in School Education

At the national level, a major effort towards placing the society at the centre of the policy agenda as opposed to the economy was our advocacy effort on the ICTs in school education policy of the GoI. The Indian Ministry for Human Resource Development (MHRD) is in the process of drafting a 'National Policy on ICTs in School Education' (NPISE) for the country. We are applying our analyses of development policy making in the information society to advocate for the NPISE to be based on education perspectives and philosophies, and working towards achieving education aims, while a significant part of the current thinking on this policy appears to be based largely on technological perspectives. From October 2007 to March 2008 we networked with different actors in the education domain – educationists, officers in government, and advocacy organisations working on policy issues.

- A consultation was held in Udaipur, Rajasthan with prominent national educationists on the NPISE policy workbook being drafted by a group facilitated by the Global e-Schools Initiative (GeSCI, an outcome of the UN ICT Task Force) and the Centre for Science, Development and Media Studies (CSDMS, an Indian NGO).
- The consultation succeeded in mobilising critical opinion around the MHRD process and established a clear research agenda around the theme of ICTs and education taking off from state-of-the-art research from developing countries including India, and informing the policy-making process with the social justice premises underpinning education policy in India.
- With some desk research, we gave our feedback to the draft policy document and wrote a concept note for discussions around the NPISE.
- We participated in a workshop that brought together different actors within the ongoing policy process organised by the Quest Alliance on the policy theme of e-content in March 2008. We contributed to a substantial rewriting of this theme in policy draft making it significantly more progressive, insisting on open access, open standards and open source for all digital learning resources. We talked of the need to bring in pedagogical perspectives into the documentation, starting with a shift in nomenclature, from e-content to digital learning resources, which is explicitly stated to include ICT tools, devices, applications that can be used by the learner to create learning material.

2) Information Society Watch

The Information Society Watch (ISW, www.is-watch.net) portal is a major advocacy component of IT for Change's ISSP, which seeks to interpret information society developments in relation to the

priorities of the South, with respect to areas including politics, economy, gender and citizenship. ISW seeks to harness the possibilities of ICTs for disseminating and tracking access of outputs, developing learning and knowledge-sharing platforms, and serving as a stand alone online space for advocacy and capacity building. In effect, it seeks to symbolise a discursive space for a progressive information society.

- Since its launch in May 2007, ISW has attracted over 70,000 hits, reflecting its growing status as a repository for resources relating to matters of the information society.
- However, ISW is not simply another news site that publishes links and articles relating to ICTs. From inception, ISW has been unique in its pro-South focus, ranging from analyses of ICT policies in countries in the global South to coverage of new forms of social infrastructure that can bring equality to marginalised groups.
- As both the site and the domain of ICTD have grown, IT for Change has seen the need to provide policymakers, researchers and others with information society resources with a specific focus on local and national developments in India.
- The ISW team will launch ISW-India, a sister site to ISW in April 2008, with a possibility to set up partner sites focusing on other countries in the future.
- The Centre for Community Informatics Research, Development and Training has already expressed interest in collaborating with IT for Change to develop and launch an Information Society Watch for Canada.

Future Plans

We will continue our engagement with the policy making process of the NPISE. We will do some preliminary work to begin exploring issues around ICTs and health, both of policy and practice, and seek out some partners and together frame some key issues, and direction for research and policy advocacy.

For ISW and ISW-India, we plan to send out periodic digests with updates on our website and key information society events and debates. Additionally, we will bring in an interactive element by commissioning and facilitating external blogging and discussions on the webspace.

COMMUNITY INFORMATICS

Description and Approach

This thematic area of IT for Change's work is about making a difference on the ground, in development practice. It seeks to explore how development processes and systems can be made more participatory and effective through ICT-induced transformations, and to build capacity of various grassroots development agencies to employ the transformatory potential of ICTs in their development processes, in an appropriate and contextual manner.

This area of IT for Change's work is also closely connected to all other areas described above. In this formative period of an information society – with ICT- and ICT-based process and system – innovations taking place at a very rapid pace, it is not possible to effectively act in the areas of discourse shaping and policy advocacy without keeping one's ear close to the ground on how ICTs are changing development practice and its processes/ systems.

The time lag between these changes and the need for shaping appropriate theory and policies is so short that typical separation of theory-making, policy advocacy and project implementation competencies and tasks that obtains in the development sector become somewhat untenable. It in this context that IT for Change seeks to span across and work in all these areas, which then cross-influence each other in a dynamic fashion. Added to it is the meta-level nature of our specific area of work and competencies, that provide the techno-social context to all or most domains across the development sector, and which by design requires us to work in partnerships doing only as much as is necessary to push things in the right directions. This conserves organisational energies, and maximises impact by capitalising on experience and established presence of other development actors in their respective areas. (We do however have focus areas of governance and gender where we go the whole hog).

(Such setting of strategic objectives and orientations requires new and evolving organisational and partnership structures, which can present significant challenges that we continue to negotiate and learn lessons from. Partnership challenges may range from the long time required to get across to development agencies as not being an 'IT organisation' but a 'development organisation', to issues of common understanding of organisational objectives, strategies and results with such partners – like funding partners – who have to share plans and results with us).

The above issues regarding partnerships is mentioned here specifically as IT for Change reorients its field projects unit at Mysore from working on one project with Mahila Samakhaya to becoming a broad partnership-based organisation seeking to work with a few NGOs and CBOs with different levels of on-field involvement. The field projects unit of IT for Change will now be restructured and known as 'Centre for Community Informatics and Development' (CCID).

Additionally, the past year also saw us emabarking on an international research study on the systemic implications of ICTs in local development. Details about these activities and achievements are presented in the subsequent sections.

The key challenges in this area are similar to those in other areas. Many organisations as well as government departments have come up with telecentre initiatives modeled on commercial public

communication facilities. Governance and development process reengineering is being tried around these service delivery points-of-presence, on a commercialised basis. Computers and telecentres have by default come to be associated with pay-for-use commercial models, and there are no efforts to build an image and appropriate models of them as community assets, and as a community's space for democratic participation, as for instance done for community radio.

Achievements during 2007-2008

I. *Mahiti Manthana*

Mahiti Manthana project uses radio, video and computer/Internet technologies in a highly contextualised way to empower collectives of disadvantaged rural women to transform local information and communication, governance, education, health and livelihood systems to their benefit and advantage. IT for Change is undertaking the project in partnership with a pan-Indian development agency, Mahila Samakhya Karnataka (MSK), which organises and supports these collectives. The project intends to serve the organisational goals of MSK in a two-fold manner: (a) examining the potential of new technologies for grassroots women's empowerment and (b) enhancing the effectiveness of MSK systems and processes for building and strengthening women's collectives (*sanghas*).

1) Radio

- In January 2008, we had a 1-year anniversary programme for our radio programme, *Kelu Sakhi*. Reaching this milestone for *Kelu Sakhi* is a collaborative achievement that we are very proud of. *Kelu Sakhi* has emerged as a pioneering effort in 'organisational radio' for grassroots development.
- The *sangha* women are now thinking in terms of contributing content to the programmes. A radio workshop was conducted in April 2007 for the *sangha* women and *kishoris*, to improve their capacities and abilities to contribute to programme creation and production.
- Additionally, our Mysore office *sakhis* have undergone intensive formal training sessions in the past year, and informal hands-on sessions, and demonstrate enhanced capacities in editing and handling line-up of the programme content. This training will be continued to fully equip them with the skills they require to run a radio programme.
- At the second project review with the MSK State Office in December 2007, MSK has decided to take concrete steps towards the full-fledged transfer of ownership of the radio component from *Mahiti Manthana*. This is a remarkable achievement of the pilot project and is indicative of the scope for sustainability of ICT for development initiatives when the focus is on integration of these initiatives into systems and processes.
- The emphasis in *Mahiti Manthana* is on the 'collective listening' process wherein *sangha* women listen to these broadcasts as a group and subsequently, discuss and debate what they just heard on radio, also calling back to share feedback and suggest new content. This process has been formally initiated in a few villages enabling the women to discuss issues and programmes at the close of each broadcast. We have also made a film on the collective listening process in one village, and are screening this in other villages to indicate the positives in this mode of listening, learning and sharing. Radio broadcasts have also spurred mobilisation and action, and brought greater legitimacy to women's *sanghas*.

2) Video

- We spent the early part of the year to understand how *sanghas* adapt to the concept of *sangha-shaale*. *Sangha-shaales* are spaces for self-driven, collective learning and will be provided a large number of these videos with appropriate 'help-sheets' of 'how-to' information. Self-driven learning works best when the learning group itself chooses the subject, time and method of learning. This is possible in *sangha-shaales* which have the flexibility to conduct learning sessions independently without necessary reliance on the presence of resource persons, and contains possibilities of alternative learning processes.
- Village *sangha-shaales* were inaugurated in two villages and the *sangha-shaale* entry process has been completed in a few more villages.
- We have started airing video promotion messages on *Kelu Sakhi*, and this is encouraging call-back requests for specific videos from *sangha-shaale* and non *sangha-shaale* villages. This method of announcing videos on *Kelu Sakhi* allows all MSK *sanghas* to access these videos, and also allows them to choose the specific theme that they want to watch, and is a positive stride forward in our video strategy.
- A structural goal of the video component is that the entire video production cycle will be a skill acquired by MSK staff. We believe video can be democratised and NGOs can make videos with quick turnover, while ensuring involvement from the *sangha* women, who are the main target group, and the past year has been significant in this regard. To that end, a capacity building workshop on video for MSK staff was conducted in May 2007.
- Two films have been completed by the MSK Mysore resource persons and two more are in the ideation and production stage. Once these are completed, a good bank of films made by MSK will be available. This is a huge development in terms of skill-building and transfer of ownership of the video component to MSK.
- In terms of impact of the component on women, the indicators are strong. The film on General Body Meeting elections was screened at a new village, and the Mysore MSK staff believes that the screening hastened the election process in the village. After watching the literacy camp video, three new villages have given their names for joining literacy camps. Similarly, the film on village mapping and survey process was screened to the telecentre management committee at two additional villages, and this enabled the women to clearly understand the significance of surveying and mapping. They were easily convinced of its use in their own sanghas and communities.

3) *Namma Mahiti Kendra* (NMK)

- Information and communication activities are ongoing in all the NMKs. Community data collection has been completed in two villages, and a film has been made detailing the full process of the data collection activity in a specific village. The screening of this film in other telecentre villages has highlighted the benefits and encouraged sanghas to take up this activity. which can be used by public service providers for targeting interventions (like health interventions for pregnant women and infants; pension schemes for widows), and to extract accountability for services not provided, by matching data of actual health interventions with those listed in public records obtained through use of Right to Information (RTI), which is happening through linkages with the Primary Health Centres at the village level.
- Major efforts in the past several months were focussed on preparations for setting up *taluk*

hubs. Equipment procurement is completed and two hubs were inaugurated in two *taluks*. The *taluk* level federation members in Mysore took full ownership for the *sakhi* selection, and these selected *sakhis* have been trained in computer applications and briefed on roles and responsibilities. The long-term goal of these efforts is to streamline and coordinate NMK and *taluk* hub processes and systems, thus building synergies in terms of information and communication processes at the MSK level.

- The centres are thus beginning to emerge as the information nodes at the community level, while empowering the *sangha* women through their ownership of this critical structure in the village. The *sangha* women in the NMK villages have begun to demonstrate the positive effects of the intervention through their increased access to knowledge, use of entitlements, action for obtaining their rights, and a heightened sense of being responsible for their own empowerment. Additionally, the NMK *sakhis* are also positioned favourably on their individual paths of empowerment through their extensive involvement with the NMK and sangha ownership processes.

II. Content Commons

- Our faith in the huge potential of ICTs in bringing about a transformative impact in rural disadvantaged settings, amply demonstrated through *Mahiti Manthana*, has motivated us to start a portal, Content Commons (www.content-commons.in), which is a repository of development video content that is open and available for free sharing. It is envisaged as a platform that seeks to collect and distribute development videos in a manner that is easily accessible to NGOs, CBOs and communities for use in their respective activities and organisational processes.
- The films are organised under specific categories, and short snippets of each film are made available with accompanying descriptions and help-sheets. These help-sheets contain appropriate 'how-to' information, and may be used for initiating self-driven learning processes among viewers, especially collectives.
- Our idea is to encourage the use of this video repository to initiate and develop collective learning processes within the community. Currently, Content Commons only has video material, however we soon hope to incorporate audio content as well.

III. The Centre for Community Informatics and Development (CCID)

The future roadmap for our field presence will be realised through our CCID.

- The *Mahiti Manthana* experience illustrates the need to develop appropriate ICTD theory and practice that takes into account not only technology possibilities and their availability, but, more importantly, a keen understanding of techno-social processes that mediate the appropriation of these technologies into local developmental and community systems.
- CCID will aim to provide knowledge support for maximising the opportunities provided by the new ICTs for development, through the development of contextual processes and systems for 'technology appropriation' by communities.
- Specifically, CCID will develop, and contextually test, apply and share, comprehensive ICT strategies and models with an appropriate mix of ICTs – radio, video, telephony, computing and Internet. The accent will not be on specific technologies, but on the associated social and techno-social processes.

● Most importantly, emphasis will be placed on organisational processes and the community's information and communication processes and how these can be transformed to enhance the effectiveness of various development activities, and specifically, to shift power relationships in favour of groups that are disadvantaged and marginalised.

IV. ICTs for Participatory Local Development

We are currently undertaking a research project supported by UNDP on 'ICTs for Participatory Local Development'. This project forms part of a bigger UNDP project on 'Use of ICT to Foster Participatory Local Development and Support the Achievement of the MDGs: Identification of Options, Challenges, and Ways Forward'. The basic premise of the project is that in the context of decentralisation and increased impact of global changes at the local level, local governments are called upon to perform various tasks that go beyond their traditional role. The project envisages that applying ICTs will enhance the effectiveness of local governments in responding to various issues. Specifically, the aim is to contribute to UN's Millenium Development Goals (MDG) localisation interventions, address the challenges and leverage opportunities to facilitate effective mainstreaming of ICTs.

● The sub-project of IT for Change attempts to contribute to the objectives of the UNDP project by firstly, mapping selected initiatives that integrate or hold possibilities to integrate ICTs in a systemic manner to help promote local development, and secondly, proposing a concrete set of suggestions to enable a more systemic application of ICTs in local development.
● The research, which is currently underway, involves detailed case studies of at least two ICTD initiatives each from five countries in the global South (Asia, South America and Africa)/developing world.
● The India-based case studies are being undertaken by IT for Change. For the remaining four country studies, we are working with local researchers or organisations. On the basis of the insights from the study a toolkit will be prepared that will serve as a roadmap for future ICT initiatives aimed at local development to be shared and refined at an international workshop in late-2008.

Future Plans in the Area of Community Informatics

CCID will seek to emphasise the community aspect and ownership of ICTs, using models of community radio, community videos, and community computing. With the ICTD term being found somewhat problematic, as argued earlier, in this thematic area of practice we use the term 'community informatics' which signifies both the required community centrality and the requirement for a 'systemic' application of ICTs in the given information and communication architecture for best outcomes.

CCID will experiment with and develop learning on new development processes and systems using ICTs that can be contextually evolved and employed by different development agencies. For this purpose CCID will work in partnership with a few community development agencies − in different areas, health, gender, livelihoods,

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youth etc. – to both build their capacities to incorporate new processes using ICTs and learn lessons through these experimentations. CCID will develop a rich body of knowledge as well as effective processes of knowledge sharing in this area. Specific opportunities like community radio, community video, community computing, digital story telling, participatory information systems, mobile based systems and processes etc will be explored, documented and shared by the CCID.

CCID will be oriented towards demonstrating possibilities and its knowledge outputs will feed into theory-building and policy activities of IT for Change. On the nature of relationship and division of work/ competencies with partners we will experiment with a couple of different 'templates', where our involvement will range from at-length capacity building to very intensive field presence helping shape and drive local community processes. (These two points corresponds with organisational/ partnership-related strategies and challenges listed earlier in this section.)

The objectives sought to be achieved over the next year are to set up the CCID organisation with appropriate knowledge management and partnership management processes and competencies; build new partnership for community informatics activity; build capacity of NGOs and CBOs in this field; generate knowledge for cross-application in practice as well as for theory and policy advocacy.

Some possible indicators are; number and extent of partnerships built; level of networking and interactions among the partnership group; number of documents on community informatics processes; number and quality of participation in workshops, and ensuing networking.

ORGANISATION BUILDING

At the organisational level, IT for Change was able to change considerably less than we hoped for. On the other hand, to acquit ourselves honourably, we learnt a tremendous amount about the complex requirements of the kind of effects and impacts that IT for Change aims to cause and the manner in which it seeks to organise itself and its ecology, for this purpose. It must also be mentioned that as an institution, we find ourselves now in the 'middle phase' – not a start-up but not mature enough yet – and inextricably situated within some ongoing and cyclical institutional challenges, which in some ways are also characteristic of the non-profit sector itself and its relationship with its larger ecology of influence. Some insights and learnings are worth mentioning as we struggled to build our team at IT for Change. It is difficult to get good researchers in the area of the intersection of technology studies and development studies. However, our approach has so centrally been premised on getting this connection right, in a balanced way, that it is difficult to compromise on this issue. Getting the right people is made more difficult by the fact that information society thinking and theory, more so in the case of the South, is so incipient, that one has a very small pool to choose from. At the same time, it requires the highest research and intellectual caliber (including, significantly, a very high degree of 'intellectual' risk-taking ability) which is not easy to find, nor groom. We have made significant gains on this but they have not been enough at all.

The requirement of exceptional people is made more acute because of the need to produce analytical outputs that can challenge problematic notions from a Southern point of view. Prolific work is being done in the information society arena in the North, which is highly resourced. The 'counter-discourse' has to emerge often with rapid speed, responding to things as they happen. This is further complicated because intellectual activity and quick-footed advocacy have to go hand in hand, which calls for a mix of good capabilities at theoretical formulations as well as tactical astuteness. Within the organisation, the same people need to be doing both, and as said, within very short cycles, of what has been called, to quote a somewhat out-of-fashion term, 'Internet-time'.

In the area of our work, settled notions of what is writing and research in development space, and what is advocacy, are transforming a lot. So much writing takes place on emails in e-lists that they could be pulled together into a few (very good and useful) books. The context and imperative of much of such 'email activity' is such that the writing is both of good and 'preservable' quality, and gets the right impact over a huge, instant and focused readership, more than books mostly get today. Similarly, much of IT for Change's advocacy consists of events that get formed in cyberspace, and requires immediate commitments of large amounts of time and other resources, but with great likely impact; organising a quick civil society response to a key Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) event with great potential to influence global policy, or just a letter to the UN Secretary General over something which could possibly be influenced with a good set of signatories organised over e-lists and emails. All of these kinds of things have happened, and do happen quite often, in IT for Change's regular work.

We are still only beginning to get a fix on what kind of organisational structures and systems, and what kind of people, are needed to be adequate to the goals, and to the methods of reaching them that we have set for ourselves. It may require making considerable structural changes in the way IT for Change is organised, something which we will need to discuss and hone further.