IT for Change

Annual Report
2008-2009

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Inside...

ACRONYMS

ACM	Association for Computing Machinery
APC	The Association for Progressive Communication
APDIP	Asia-Pacific Development Information Programme
ARC	Administrative Reforms Commission
AWID	Association of Women's Rights in Development
BOOT	Build Own Operate Transfer
CCID	Centre for Community Informatics and Development
CLPS	Computer Learning in Schools Programs
CSC	Common Service Centre
DST	Digital Story Telling
CSTD	Commission on Science and Technology for Development
UNECOSOC	United Nations Economic and Social Council
EU	European Union
FOSS	Free and Open Source Software
GAID	Global Alliance for ICT and Development
GDISP	Gender, Development and Information Society Policies
GoI	Government of India
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
IS	Information Society
ISS	Information Society for the South
IT	Information Technology
ITfC	IT for Change
JoCI	Journal of Community Informatics
ITU	International Telecommunications Union
IWTC	International Women's Tribune Centre
KS	Kelu Sakhi
MAG	Multistakeholder Advisory Group
MC	Management Committee

MM	Mahiti Manthana
MHRD	Ministry of Human Resources Development, Delhi
MSK	Mahila Samakhya, Karnataka
NeGP	National e-Governance Plan
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NMK	Namma Mahiti Kendra
NPISE	National Policy for ICTs in School Education
NREGA	National Rural Employment Guarantee Act
NREGP	National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme
NREGS	National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme
OECD	Organization of Economic Co-Operation and Development
ONI	Open Net Initiative
PSU	Public Sector Units
RDPR	Rural Development and Panchayat Raj
RTI	Right to Information
SVYM	Swami Vivekananda Youth Movement
TMK	Taluk Mahiti Kendra
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCAP	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WSIS	World Summit on the Information Society
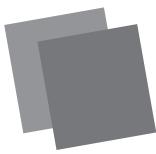
Directors' Report

The year 2008-09 took forward ITfC's journey of seeking conceptual anchors of equity and social justice in the emerging social paradigm underpinned by the new information and communication technologies (ICTs). We created some new pathways and furthered some old ones towards our mission to define the ICT and development (ICTD) arena through the lens of the marginalised. New technologies are the often unsuspected harbingers of a new world order. Unfortunately, the development sector and, particularly, progressive groups, are mostly not equipped to deal with the challenge of influencing the direction of change being shaped by the emerging techno-social models and paradigms. We identify this as a major blindspot in the global struggle towards progressive ideals and addressing this is a task we have set for ourselves.

The year saw the closure of the first cycle of funding for our work, which supported a new organisation struggling with defining itself and its areas of work and influence. We think we have accomplished this basic institutional task quite well. We are now recognised globally, nationally and locally as an institution with a clear set of values and objectives in the area of ICTs, development and social change. This year, we launched two bulletins to periodically disseminate information about our work. We now send out quarterly updates to our networks. We have a strong set of partner networks – and networks are increasingly what Manuel Castells describes as the organisational form of the information society. Especially in our area of work, which is a meta-space connecting to almost all domains – governance, community development, education, health, gender – working through networks is very vital. While we have managed to walk this path and experienced the rewards of this method of making change, especially in the trust that organisations and social movements repose in us, network leadership and management has also been challenging and require the corresponding organisational skills and resource intensity. This context has been further complicated by our choice to work in all three areas of research, advocacy and field projects, while undertaking to stay relatively small and lean.

2008-09 was the year when ITfC's influence really came across strongly in some important policy spaces, not just as yet another actor, but as a key player in the area. We led an advocacy campaign with support of major educationists that had the country's education minister roll back an 'ICT in schools' policy process, which was being driven by the vested interests of major technology vendors. As this report is getting written, a new draft of the policy has been released and we see the distinctive shades of our lobbying efforts in the document. The battle is not fully over, but we are ever so glad that we decided to stand up for a certain politics that has left a clear mark on the new policy draft.

At the global level, we were invited to represent global civil society in many official policy fora - the opening panel of the UN Commission on Science and Technology, the closing panel of the UN Internet Governance Forum; we were also among the few civil society representatives at the OECD meeting on the *Future of the Internet Economy*. Our recognition in these spaces has been part of the inroads we have sought to make in the

legitimisation of development concerns in ICT policy debates. ITfC's leadership in building 'gender in the information society' frameworks was consistently recognised by multiple actors – we were invited to develop the conceptual framework of a proposed grants program of IDRC; we were invited by UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific to provide expert inputs on the 'media and ICT' section of the Beijing +15 review process. Our analytical and conceptual work has also been increasingly validated by academia - we were invited by the Michigan State University to deliver a lecture on ICTD and by the Journal of Community Informatics as guest editor of the Journal's special issue on gender. Our work is being cited by scholars and has been translated in Spanish and Portuguese.

Our impact through advocacy in global policy spaces was emphatic in the UN Internet Governance Forum's annual meeting held this time in Hyderabad, India. We were in some plenary sessions, we organised a few workshops, and played a key role in a number of civil society networks. Earlier, in recognition of our work, the Chair of the Mutistakeholder Advisory Group of the UN-Internet Governance Forum appointed an ITfC member as his *Special Advisor*. Two ITfC members are part of the Strategy Council of UN's Global Alliance for ICTs and Development. This was also the year when we received *Special Consultative Status* with the UN's Economic and Social Council. We are happy to have received such a recognition in just about five years of active existence.

At the national level, ITfC forged close relationships with governmental and non-governmental players interested in a new progressive framework for e-governance in India, playing a catalytic role in evolving a common ground. We will continue along this area of work in the current year, 2009-2010. ITfC was also very active in advocating free and open source software (FOSS) in public education systems and did some pioneering work in establishing FOSSCOMM, a civil society alliance supporting FOSS adoption in India.

This year also saw the wrapping up of our field project *Mahiti Manthana*. The project succeeded in developing some new ways in which new ICTs can be appropriated in development processes, for the empowerment of marginalised sections. The learning from this project has been used in setting up the *Centre for Community Informatics and Development* in Mysore, which is working with new local partners to enable them to assimilate ICTs in ways appropriate to their area and manner of work.

Unfortunately, however, we have been hit by the adverse funding scene with two of our three key funders not able to renew their commitments. Our work in global platforms and as leaders in the global space needs us to mobilise resources that allow us the freedom to be tactical – plunge into advocacy when a need emerges. The luxuries of such funding are not easily available in these times. This is the challenge with which we enter the year 2009. However our work and credibility has opened up spaces for dialogue with local donors and this we see as a positive development within an overall funding context that is not highly responsive to the niche areas in which we work and the particular methodologies we adopt to create impacts. We take the period of our first cycle of funding as formative for the institution that IT for Change set out to be. We have been able to achieve the basic learning, systems and structures to go forward, and what were tentative steps five years back are confident strategic orientations today. The plan is now to shape ITfC as a more formally organised and structured unit to accomplish the tasks we have set for ourselves. To this extent, we stand on institutional crossroads.

IT FOR CHANGE

Project Area

1 Political Economy of the Information Society

Objectives and Scope

Our core work and the lens through which we analyse the information society is the unpacking of the structural dimensions of the emerging techno-social paradigm. In the emerging social order, development encounters a new opportunity structure. Seizing this potential for transformative change, however, requires a deconstruction of the dominant approaches and concepts in relation to ICTs and development. Much of our conceptual work is anchored in this area; we feel that critiques of existing discourse are important but as importantly, we seek to articulate alternatives. We believe that an ethnographic approach – a "going back" to the community – for a grounded insight of the ICTD phenomenon is non-negotiable, but this is meaningful only if we can consistently endeavour to interpret the 'local' through the prism of global political economy.

Our aim thus is to reshape the ICTD discourse for the greatest possible benefit of the currently disadvantaged countries, groups and individuals. We seek to write and publish a 'Southern' perspective, and also engage in the key spaces where discourse is shaped.

Activities and Achievements

1. Engagement in ICTD Policy Spaces

In the past five years we have been active in representing development perspectives in the global governance arena relating to ICTD. The UN Global Alliance for ICTs and Development (GAID) is a platform for policy dialogue for governments, civil society, private sector, the technical and Internet communities and academia. Parminder Jeet Singh's membership in the GAID Strategy Council, the advisory body associated with the UNGAID, was extended. Anita Gurumurthy was also invited to be part of the GAID Strategy Council this year. The membership of a second ITfC representative in the UNGAID is a significant development; it not only allows us to shape the directions of GAID but it is also an indicator of the greater legitimacy of the positions we espouse in regard to policy, of the critiques we bring in of market-led ICTD and of our lobbying for a citizenship-based policy framework. In 2008, GAID invited us to write a framework document on ICTs and Gender. This document titled 'Gender Equality through ICT Access and Appropriation: Taking a Rights-based Approach' explores the meanings of women's empowerment and the policy approaches for gender equality in the information society.

We have engaged in extensive public discussion and debate on the GAID list serve with the GAID secretariat advocating for a clear definition of the roles of the different bodies engaging with the GAID in terms of its governance

structure. We have actively voiced the need for reexamining the role of corporate transnationals in setting development agenda around ICTs, especially at global levels, arguing the contradictions that this poses in terms of developing country interests and for the very process of global policy making. We have also attempted to interrogate the marketisation of ICTD and the casting of marginalised people as "bottom of the pyramid". We will build a momentum around this perspective and influence the Annual Meeting of UNGAID in Monterrey in September 2009.

We have been active vis-a-vis the United Nations Commission on Science and Technology for Development (CSTD), the official body that provides oversight to the ICTD agenda within the UN. In the May 2008 meeting of the CSTD in Geneva, we presented our views on development-oriented policies for an inclusive information society.

2. Critiques and Alternatives through an 'Information Society for the South' Lens

This is an umbrella project that mainly comprises knowledge production for shaping ICTD discourse. Our premise is that the 'information society' has largely been conceptualised and articulated by dominant forces in terms that have furthered their interests, rather than serve the excluded. We would like to build a body of knowledge critiquing and articulating alternatives that goes into developing a new theory of the information society that focuses on the practical without losing sight of the political. We outline some of our efforts last year in this direction.

Tracing Genealogies - IT for Change Panel at the ICTD2009 Conference

In order to have a presence in the key academic circles in the ICTD arena, we decided to respond to a call for submitting proposals for holding workshops at the 3rd International IEEE/ ACM Conference on Information and Communications Technologies and Development (ICTD2009). Of the various proposals submitted, very few were selected. Our proposal for a workshop titled 'Tracing the Genealogy of ICTD Research: Premises, Predispositions, and Paradoxes of a Field in the Making' was provocative, and challenged the academic community in ICTD to reflect more critically at the very process of knowledge construction in the field. Our proposal examines what visions of development dominate ICTD research; to what extent the issue of power is central to ICTD research; how power is organised among and exercised by different actors within the ICTD research domain; and how the nature of funding of the ICTD research domain, on the one hand, and geopolitical locations of agenda-setting, on the other, potentially influence its form and outcomes.

A Critique of IDRC's 'Open ICT4D'

The International Development Research Center (IDRC) invited an interactive discussion around the concept of 'Openness' in the ICTD field. This debate around 'open' technology paradigms and how they link to outcomes in development arenas is an area that is increasingly gaining ground. We believe that development actors need to engage with the 'openness' agenda – how for instance free and open source software and 'open' connectivity models are relevant to development economics and politics – to ensure that it is not hijacked by techno-fascinated world views. We responded to IDRC's call for a discussion online and argued that the basic imperatives and values of the desired

change towards openness need to be firmly grounded in the traditional space of development and equity. We submitted that 'openness' of the technology paradigm cannot be an end in itself and so, 'openness for what?' needs to be the key line of inquiry.

Papers and Presentations

Some of our writings and presentations this year that we feel contributed to discourse shaping are described below.

The Global Information Society Watch (GISW)

The GISW is a space for collaborative monitoring of the implementation of international (and national) commitments made by governments and international organisations towards the creation of an inclusive information society at the WSIS. A project of APC, a partner we work with on many an issue, this publication has country chapters that benchmark progress made by governments. We have been authoring the India chapter of the GISW since the last year when it was initiated. This year's report surveys the national deployment of ICT infrastructure and implications for development. It gives a detailed analysis of steps which need to be taken to improve ICT connectivity in rural areas. We have looked at the legal and regulatory framework, with special reference to community radio and ICTs in education policies.

ICTD – Is It a New Species of Development?

This paper is based on a lecture delivered by Anita Gurumurthy at the Michigan State University in February 2009. ICTD today is imagined and understood by many through an ideological framework of neo-liberalism and market fundamentalism. The lecture interrogated this hegemonic neo-liberal view and offered communitisation of ICTs as the way forward, to move towards a development oriented and democratic ICTD paradigm.

Rethinking ICTD - 'Back to the Basics'

This paper is based on a presentation made by Parminder Jeet Singh at the 'Global Forum on Access and Connectivity: Innovative Funding for ICT for Development', of the UNGAID, at Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, in May 2008. It critically examines the dominant approach to ICTD, capturing the significance of a rights-based approach, which can provide ICTD a new point of anchor to develop its theory, policy frameworks and practice.

Information Society for the South (ISS) series - Volume 2

The ISS is a cherished project for us, involving the commissioning of papers to scholars and thinkers around ideas and frameworks we collaboratively develop. IT for Change published the second volume in its series, titled 'An Empowerment Approach to Gender Equality in the Information Society: Regional Analyses from Asia'. It is a series of papers with contributions from Angela Kuga Thas, Deborah Wheeler and Mridula Swamy (of ITfC) looking at

Central, West and South Asia respectively and tracing the ICT trajectories for what is happening, what is changing and what meanings of empowerment are emerging. Combining a "marketisation of development critique" with a sociological inquiry of women's subjective experiences in and through digital spaces, the papers collectively articulate the role of social policy in mediating empowerment.

Challenges and Future Plans

ITfC's efforts during the coming year will focus on consolidating our influence on global policy spaces. The global economic crisis has more than established the failure of neo-liberal approaches to deliver on development. Yet, impacting institutional world views is not an easy proposition; even with greater wisdom about markets and their limits, beliefs in 'self-governance' are entrenched, though this really translates into 'privatised governance' that aggravates global governance deficits working against poor nations and marginalised groups. We recognise these challenges and will continue to build on our knowledge frameworks – theorising beyond access, exploring a community informatics approach to issues of connectivity and content, and understanding what participation means in ICTD. Also, the impact of theoretical work is often non-linear. We therefore feel that it would be useful to publish more in mainstream journals.

In the long term, our plan is also to seek an ICTD policy framework for India, and corresponding institutional mechanisms.

Project Area

2

ICT Governance

Objectives and Scope

Much of dominant information society vocabulary and most theoretical frameworks are based on techno-fascinated notions that are ahistorical and apolitical. This is due to the fact that ICT governance and policies are largely left to technologists. The governance of the Internet symbolises this truism. The apolitical process underpinning the evolution of the Internet architecture is a deeply troubling issue; it creates exclusions in the emerging social order that diminish the very propensity of the information society to pave the way for greater equity and social justice. Our work in this area is to ensure that Internet governance, especially in this formative phase of the information society, is subject to thorough social analysis and political engagement and the policies evolving in this area address development concerns. Nationally we are engaged with the policy spaces related to technology governance – open standards, free and open source software and software patents. We engage in advocacy efforts aimed at ensuring that policy in these areas promotes openness and not restrictive knowledge practices.

Activities and Achievements

1. Internet Governance

ITfC considers the techno-social architecture of the Internet as a key determinant of how the contours of the emerging information society will shape up. With a view to safeguard and promote the interests of marginalised sections - who may well be non-users of the Internet today - we engage with civil society networks, contributing to, and often shaping, their agenda, as well as push for development oriented perspectives in global policy spaces. Our specific focus has been on democratising global Internet governance, advocating for policy to preserve the Internet's egalitarian character and challenging the privatised governance mechanisms that dominate this space.

Internet Governance Caucus

The main space of civil society networking is in the civil society Internet Governance Caucus (IGC). IGC is one of the key global civil society groups in the Internet governance arena. ITfC's engagement with this group over the last few years has resulted both, at one level, in breaking an apparent consensus in the group which reflected Northern civil society standpoints, and at another level, rebuilding a new set of perspectives that are more inclusive. A lot of important work was also done in organisation building, with ITfC being one of the two coordinators of IGC, for the last two years. This work included IGC membership related issues, IGC making numerous contributions to various Internet governance processes and sponsoring workshops at the Internet
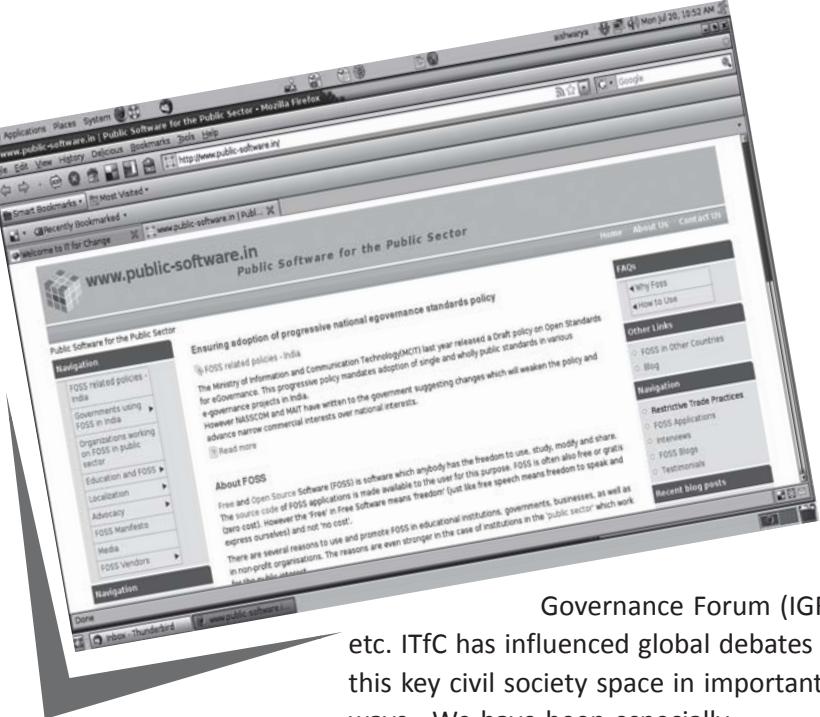
A resource portal for 'FOSS in the public sector', an ITfC project

Governance Forum (IGF) etc. ITfC has influenced global debates in this key civil society space in important ways. We have been especially instrumental in shaping IGC's positions vis a vis the IGF in key areas, which has added credibility to IGC's global profile, while accenting progressive pro-South views.

Internet Governance Forum

The UN Internet Governance Forum is a unique global institution that came into being to address a unique situation – that of developing means and principles for governing a new domain for which typically nation state based governance systems were not adequate. ITfC has kept up a very significant level of engagement with the IGF, directly, and through the platform of IGC. This engagement was both recognised, and enhanced, by the appointment of Parminder Jeet Singh as a *Special Advisor to the Chair* of the Multistakeholder Advisory Group (MAG), which advises the UN Secretary General on IGF related processes. Through this new role, ITfC was able to take advocacy about critical Southern civil society positions into the 'inner circles' of the IGF. We have been instrumental in shaping the agenda of the IGF in many ways.

The last annual meeting of the IGF was held in Hyderabad, India and ITfC

contributed to this in many ways, small and big. Two achievements stand out. One is our contribution to the choice of the overall theme of the IGF meeting as 'Internet for All' and another was the inclusion in the agenda of a discussion on the process of 'enhanced cooperation' for developing globally applicable public policy principles for Internet governance. A plenary discussion on 'enhanced cooperation' did take place at the IGF and was almost universally recognised as the main outcome of the IGF meeting in Hyderabad. But for ITfC, such a discussion would not have taken place. Meanwhile, ITfC was also in the lead, along with other civil society groups, to build pressure on getting Internet rights on IGF's agenda. Though IGF Hyderabad did not discuss Internet rights in its main session, building up of this pressure has been useful to get a rights oriented discourse into IGF processes subsequently.

IT for Change also revived the near-defunct coalition on 'Gender and Internet governance' during the Hyderabad IGF, meeting, and developed common advocacy positions. The coalition was able to not only pull together a network of gender activists who showed keenness to engage with Internet governance issues, but was also able to put up a good amount of visibility of gender issues at the normally techno-centred IGF.

ITfC also sought to use the occasion of the meeting of the IGF in India to raise visibility of Internet governance issues among Indian civil society. Most of civil society from the South tends to take the 'commons' and the 'public' nature of the Internet for granted. However, increasing corporatisation and control of the Internet are strongly threatening these fundamental characteristics of the Internet. Therefore, IT for Change along

with five other civil society organisations in India proposed an open letter to the IGF on 'threat to the public-ness and egalitarian character of the Internet' prior to the Hyderabad meeting. The letter exhorted urgent global action to ensure that the public-ness and the egalitarian nature of the Internet are preserved as its essential features. The letter was endorsed by nearly 110 organisations and individuals from around the world and was circulated at the IGF in Hyderabad and presented to the IGF Secretariat.

The OECD Ministerial Meeting

IT for Change was invited to be present at the Organization of Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) Ministerial Meeting on 'The Future of the Internet Economy', a powerful global event on Internet policies. We were invited as one of the few organisations from the global South to present our views at the stakeholders forum in the OECD Ministerial. We presented a paper which questioned the legitimacy of the OECD exercise to evolve a shared policy framework given that the same countries are undermining the more legitimate global policy platforms like IGF as well as the processes like 'enhanced cooperation' for evolving Internet polices that are applicable to the whole world. Furthermore, we were closely involved in preparing the civil society declaration tabled at the OECD, in which we specifically argued for the inclusion of the right of all countries to be present when important global information society policy decisions are being taken, questioning the legitimacy of an OECD forum deciding on Internet policies which by design or default will apply to the whole world.

Challenges in this Area

The lack of engagement of most progressive actors in the development field in Internet governance has given dominant interests a free play in the new ICTD space, which holds grave threats to the future of development discourse and its progressive ethos. It is extremely challenging to counter dominant northern interests without having the support of traditional development actors. For instance, this year the IGF was held in India. Although we were able to get the support of many of India's traditional development actors in terms of endorsing petitions, we were not able to stitch together even an informal coalition which could work to protect southern interests at the IGF. The conceptual work in this area is of a meta level, impacting global justice, and like many issues where geo-political interests exercise unequivocal influence, the ICTD arena is highly contested with meanings and interpretations that arise in the ideologies of multiple actors in the space. While global civil society activism has been evident in relation to powerful global governance institutions in recent years across many an agenda including aid, debt, trade, environment and climate change, the ICT arena poses some unique challenges – there is a governance vacuum in institutional terms with no single global public policy forum addressing technology governance. The IGF is still a dialogic space. Also, the fragmentation of ICT related governance issues - interconnectivity regimes, e-commerce, intellectual property etc across various global institutions - WTO, ITU, WIPO etc – creates enormous difficulties in developing a constituency with a coherent action strategy.

The area is also cast in 'neutral' 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 vested interests behind it, and subtly influencing the discourse to their advantage with their huge resources and existing domination in intellectual-academic and policy arenas.

2. FLOSS Include

This research and advocacy project has a specific focus on the role of public sector agencies in adopting, supporting and enabling FOSS. It looks at the issues and challenges involved in building the ecology for FOSS within public sector agencies in India.

The research we have carried out during the initial part of the project has identified a few key reasons why there is a poor adoption of FOSS in the public sector, despite its clear socio-political and economic benefits – almost complete lack of awareness of FOSS, absence of linkages between the FOSS technical community and the government and the absence of policy support.

As a part of our advocacy and alliance building, ITfC led the formation of the 'National Alliance for promotion of free and open source software' (FOSSCOMM) in February 2009. Some of the initial efforts of this alliance include promoting open standards, challenging anti-competitive practices and advocating for vendor-neutral school curricula. We have also been working on building state-level FOSS alliances in the states of Gujarat and Karnataka. In Karnataka, we are working with the state education department and with members of FOSSCOMM on a pilot project to train government high school teachers on FOSS educational software and GNU/Linux. IT for Change has also launched a web portal (http://public-software.in/) to advocate and promote FOSS, by reaching out to decision makers and staff in government organizations, public sector corporations and NGOs. We have initiated the formation of FOSS focus groups in national ICTD fora like the UNESCO sponsored Solution Exchange.

Along with these alliance building activities, we have have led and participated in various campaigns against software patents, for Open Standards in e-Governance, against exclusive tie-ups of corporate monopolies like Microsoft with state government education departments and engineering universities, which forces government schools and colleges to spend public funds to learn only their proprietary software etc. IT for Change hosted a *FOSS manifesto* which called upon political parties to include support for FOSS in their own election manifestos and sought endorsements, which were then shared with major political parties.

FOSS and education has been an important area of work for us. While governments increasingly tend to agree that FOSS technologies are a better choice for ICT education, they are concerned about capacity building and technical support for large scale FOSS implementations.. Kerala has been a significant success story in this regard, having successfully implemented FOSS in more than 2700 high schools, and currently expanding the program to upper primary schools. Understanding and sharing the reasons behind Kerala's success will help other governments implement FOSS in their ICT education programs. We have conducted a study to understand Kerala's success and are now analysing our findings.

Challenges in this Area

Several challenges to building a FOSS ecology in India include the following:

- Weak linkages between the FOSS technical community and Government due to which, even when governments do want to adopt FOSS, they are unsure of sources for support and capacity building.

- Technical roadblocks including the non-availability of software 'drivers' for different hardware, eg *Nudi*, the 'official' government Kannada software is not Unicode compliant and hence does not fully work on GNU/Linux operating systems.

- FOSS largely lacks policy support in India. FOSS is not merely a 'technology' issue and has significant implications from equity, socio-cultural, economic and political perspectives and hence needs strong public policy support.

- Absence of FOSS in higher education and school-education – Most higher education institutions and schools syllabi only focus on proprietary software applications. As a result most students have little knowledge of FOSS, thereby reducing the number of people with FOSS skills who can be available for FOSS development and support.

Future Plans

With a view to advocating for FOSS in the public sector in South India, we plan to hold a workshop for officials from departments of IT and e-governance from the four southern states in India, PSUs, NGOs, academic institutions and FOSS technical community members.

3. Open Net Initiative – ONI Asia

IT for Change is a part of the *Open Net Initiative – Asia* of International Development Research Centre, Canada, which seeks to study the status of Internet censorship and surveillance in the countries in Asia and advocate for an open Internet. We have interpreted the term 'open' to suggest that the government indulges in implicit censorship by not making freely available to the public, information which is an entitlement of the citizen under the Right to Information Act, especially which already exists in digital form. Also the participation of the large majority of the Indian population requires that information relevant to them be available, of which information about their rights and entitlements would be an important component. Hence the research seeks to understand the causes for the non-publishing by governments of public information on the Internet, as well as the propensities and possibilities of citizens and communities to access such public information when it is available on the Internet and the consequence and implications for Internet 'openness' in terms of its access and participation.

As part of this project, we undertook a research study which explores the role of ICTs in facilitating public participation in welfare programmes. This study was situated in the context of the implementation of the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) in the state of Andhra Pradesh (AP) and explored whether the publishing of relevant public information, which has a direct bearing on social and economic development, on the Internet results in a greater use of the Internet and makes it more relevant to people's lives. The complete operation of National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS) in the state of Andhra Pradesh is backed

by 'end-to-end' digital systems. By making all the data available online, this project has made it easier for NGOs and CBOs to conduct 'social audits' which is mandated by the NREGA as well as enable job seekers and CBOs to get information that helps in employment generation. Our study strongly suggests that participation in the Internet is significantly enhanced by publishing of such relevant information.

Our work in this project has been important in terms bringing a 'positive rights' oriented perspective to conceptualising the 'openness' of the Internet, in terms of access and participation, in a context where 'negative rights' based conceptions dominate.

Challenges in this Area

The need to persuade governments and civil society to accept the notion of censorship to include not making information available on-line and hence of proactively publishing public interest information on the Internet is still a largely unfulfilled one, which the research and advocacy components of the project need to tackle.

Overall Outcomes and Future Plans

There have been very clear gains from our work in technology governance over the past few years. We have also clearly established ourselves as a strong political voice in these spaces – which otherwise often valorise apolitical positions – and also as a voice representing interests of developing countries and marginalised groups. The coalitions we have built have to some extent bridged the gap among technology enthusiasts and traditional development actors. This has helped alter the discourse on technology policy by making public interest, rights and equity essential aims of technology policy.

Since the effort in this area, at the global level, is to forge direct connections between ICT governance and development, we are working to align with global civil society groups like Third World Network who work on issues like intellectual property and development. We will keep up our engagement with institutions involved with Internet governance. At the national level, we plan to use provisions of competition law to ensure 'open ICT' models are preserved and continue our effort to build a coalition of organisations and individuals working for 'open ICTs'.

The simple fact that Critical Internet Resources (CIR) is now a fully accepted subject of discussion for the IGF, goes also back to Parminder's never ending critical questions with regard to Enhanced Co-operation (EC) & CIR.

Wolfgang Kleinwächter, University of Aarhus and Ex Co-Coordinator of IGC

Project Area

3

Community Informatics

Objectives and Scope

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 can be made more participatory and effective through new information and communication systems and to build the capacity of various grassroots development agencies to employ the transformatory potential of ICTs in an appropriate and contextual manner. This area of IT for Change's work also has a decisive influence on our research hypotheses and advocacy. In this formative period of an information society it is not possible to effectively act in the areas of discourse shaping and policy advocacy without staying close to the ground where ICTs are changing development practice and its processes.

Activities and Achievements

1. *Mahiti Manthana* – Our Partnership with Mahila Samakhya, Karnataka

Mahiti Manthana , is a multi-pronged ICT strategy using radio, video and telecentres towards a contextual, convergent and technology-mediated social change process. The project is embedded within Mahila Samakhya Karnataka (MSK), a development intervention of the Government of India that seeks to empower disadvantaged rural women. The project components include: *Kelu Sakhi* ('Listen, My Friend'), a weekly radio programme catering to *sangha* women in different villages across Mysore district, over a geographic area of 6,268 square kilometres; inexpensive videos produced locally and iteratively on a wide range of development and gender issues; and *Namma Mahiti Kendras* ('Our Information Centres'), oriented to strengthening community information

processes and building linkages with external institutions.

Over the past year, the project's demonstration of the impact of ICTs has encouraged even greater ownership of the project by Mahila Samakhya Karnataka (MSK) and the *sanghas*. This was for us a big and important milestone, which has helped us in handing over the project in a phased manner to MSK.

Radio

Kelu Sakhi has been on air for more than 100 weeks now. This reporting period saw a deeper engagement with radio. *Sangha* women have shared that they value the recognition which comes from being a part of *Kelu Sakhi*.

Women have started using *Kelu Sakhi* as a tool to address local governance issues. They give feedback over the phone and pose questions to other *sangha* members. This is a trend that is

A local video being made by the field team with MSK sangha women.

source software and this for us has been a big move to walk the talk in terms of the coherence we seek between the technological and social philosophies underscoring our work in development.

Video

MSK is increasingly seeing the potential of video. Many of MSK's staff across all levels have come up with ideas and many of these have translated into actual video material.

increasing the dialogue over various issues like *gram sabha*, entitlements, corruption, dysfunctionality of local institutions etc. Based on the mandate set by MSK and inspired by the process advocated by KS, many new *sanghas* have started listening to KS as a group. This is starting to help them in thinking of KS as a locally available resource which they can use. *Sangha* women have access to specific information which is contextualised, and this has helped them look at the areas of priority for MSK in a new way. For instance Information through radio on 'why vaccination?' or 'why NREGA?' has rejuvenated the action around health and rights. Post-training, MSK's Cluster Resource Persons (CRPs, their field representatives) have organised recordings at village level regularly. CRPs have also done recordings at village level which was edited and broadcast. The assimilation by MSK of the new skill is a good indicator of how MSK perceives the relevance of *Mahiti Manthana.*

We have been able to see a wider impact through secondary and tertiary listenership. Men call in and speak animatedly about having enjoyed stories of community level action and leadership of the women from their family. We have started editing programmes using open

Videos have become highly accessible to *sanghas*. The technology does not intimidate women any more. Thayamma, one of the *sangha* women represented her block in a country level meeting held in Delhi. This journey prompted her to request for video shoot training since she wanted to capture her exciting trip for sharing with other *sangha* women. She learnt to do a rudimentary shoot easily and her video has encouraged many women to learn video shooting. About 120 screenings have happened so far. Women have started to request for village level screenings and at the village level, their status is changing because they have access to videos. Men in the community have started asking them about videos and expressed an interest to see and learn new things.

We have made video profiles of government departments which have enabled *sangha* women and the community to have easy access to information about the objectives of each front line department. We decided to help CRPs with visual content which helps either plug a gap in knowledge or to give a new methodology for opening up discussions. Hence a video kit consisting of the various films and help sheets has been created and distributed

amongst CRPs. They have been facilitating more than 20 screenings a month.

A community screening process was also initiated by us this year; this is steered by *sangha* women in many villages. *Sangha* women take pride in organising this event. This process allows women to demonstrate their work as change agents in front of the community. These screenings are aiding in creating an image of the *sangha* as a social institution that provides critical information for the community.

Namma Mahiti Kendra

Mahiti Manthana has 5 village level *Namma Mahiti Kendra*s. These centers directly address MSK's vision of making each MSK *Sangha* into a resource group for the village. These village level centers are complemented by 2 *Taluk Mahiti Kendras* (TMK) at the taluk level. Each NMK is managed by a management committee(MC) of 9 women from the *sanghas* in the village. The MC appoints a young woman, generally from the same village to operate the centre.

NMK related outreach has been systematised. MC members along with the *sakhi* go for a day long campaign to nearby villages and speak in detail about their *Namma Mahiti Kendra* and the services and information available. This process successfully advertises the *Namma Mahiti Kendra*, builds recognition for MSK *Sangha* women in other villages, gives village communities information needed to change their quality of life and expands the group of villages benefiting from the *Namma Mahiti Kendra*.

In some *Namma Mahiti Kendra* villages, women have decided to attend the *gram sabha* as a collective and they now take

the *sakhi* along to take notes of the proceedings. Their collective has become a pressure group in the meeting and there is more transparency in the decision making, in allotment of facilities etc. at the village level. Women from *Attiguppe Namma Mahiti Kendra* are strategising for the sustainability of their centre. They want to have a corpus amount to plan for the future. They are pooling in Rs.25 per head per month towards the same. This practice is being discussed by other *Namma Mahiti Kendra* villages and many are willing to do the same.

In an interesting development, middlemen have started to approach the MC members to offer support! Village leaders who were resistant to the idea of a women owned information center in the village are also making efforts to be in the good books of *sangha* women. Recognition that these women mediate change and cannot be ignored is evident. *Sangha* women have been asked to participate in many community level events. From *Taluk Hub*s, on an average in a month, 25-30 applications are given to various departments; widow pension, old age pension, senior citizen identity card and so on. The *Namma Mahiti Kendra* gets information regularly from 20 departments of the Block. Each NMK disseminates the department information to roughly 5 – 7 villages every month.

We found your presentation and the visit to the village to be a highlight of our field trip, providing so many insights into issues that we have discussed in the classroom - but now allowing us direct evidence and interaction.

Richard Heeks, University of Manchester, UK

Mahiti Manthana

Mahiti Manthana, our partnership project with Mahila Samakhya, Karnataka (MSK) uses ICTs to support MSK's empowerment processes

Empowerment through Access to information

Information with respect to the six core areas of MSK's work – legal awareness, education, health, self-reliance, panchayat raj and banking – from government departments about entitlements and rights and subsequent strategies adopted by different sanghas to deal with issues are slowly and steadily making a difference, bringing in positive shifts in the thought processes of women. Women now understand that departments have an obligation to give them their entitlements and they have a 'right' to claim these. The *Namma Mahiti Kendra* has been instrumental in this changed understanding of their status. Women understand that they have a right to equal wages and they should claim it. Even in terms of empowerment in their relationships at home, there is a difference. *Sangha* women understand that they should not shield the abuse they go through at home and the collective has a responsibility towards the well being of its members. In *Chamanahalli Hundi*, one of the *sangha* members was getting beaten up by her drunken husband on a regular basis. Her peers wanted to stop this but were feeling helpless since she was not sharing her status with them openly. One member suggested that we do a feature on humour series in *Kelu Sakhi* on domestic violence. This feature was aired twice and the strategy was to make the husband listen to it. The issue of domestic violence is now being discussed more openly in the s*angha*.

Participation in Local Governance and Collective Monitoring of Public Services

Through radio, video and the *Namma Mahiti Kendra* strategies, there is an increase in the number of women who are aware of local governance structures and their accountability to people. Women are aware of departmental obligations to them as citizens. Women talk about issues pertaining to basic needs and the role of panchayats, share their successes as panchayat members, share their views at the *gram sabha*, and they discuss the strategies for being visible and vocal when men/department officials intimidate them.

Impact on the Community

Kelu Sakhi has emerged as a powerful space for legitimising the identity of MSK *sangha* women. This has an effect on the way men look at this space. We get calls from men who introduce themselves as 'husband of so and so *sangha* member' or 'son of so and so *sangha* member', a small but deep reversal in the social norms around identity and identification; normally women introduce themselves as wives and daughters! In villages where community screenings have happened, community members are enthused towards viewing and are asking *sangha* women to organise more screenings, also suggesting specific issues as well.

If *Mahiti Manthana* has impacted any one area decisively, it is in the affirmation of the idea of a collective space for women that is their own. Women are gaining in confidence to answer questions which come from many quarters of the community such as 'why they need to learn to be literate now'. *Sakhi*, who is a young woman of the village, has been a role model for other young women in the village. Many young women have been able to persuade parents to let them seek employment outside the village.

Mahiti Manthana Exit Strategy

MSK and IT for Change have started the process to enable the methods and systems of *Mahiti Manthana* to be taken over in phases. We have committed to supporting this transition and the state office leadership of MSK has assured us support in the process of enabling the pilot to be integrated more systemically into the organisational framework. The hand-over of skills and capacities is already in progress. In an effort to do a phased handover, along with the state office leadership, extensive capacity building events are planned for the coming year as well as new processes of co-ownership of components initiated. We have been conducting capacity building programs to hand over radio and video. Trainings included the handling of recording equipment and also programme productions aspects. As far as video is concerned, training programs have been conducted on ideation, preparation and direction and on facilitating screenings. This year almost all *Namma Mahiti Kendra* activities and the logistics were planned by MSK.

Challenges in this Area and Future Plans

MSK Mysore went through upheavals of change in leadership twice in Mysore . They also had new recruitments for the position of CRPs. So there were 10 – 15 new staff members.

NMK *sakhis* are usually younger women. Invariably, after these women pick up the required work skills and they start travelling outside the village, there is a lot of pressure from the family to discontinue work or get married. These developments are not new to empowerment related interventions; we have tried to work with and even dialogue with the community around such social norms and taboos on women's freedoms. Yet, at the project

management level we have had to contend with less than desirable speed for the institutionalisation of a truly innovative idea like the *Namma Mahiti Kendra*, that is built on women's leadership role in social change. While we have had intensive discussions, attempting to reconcile impact indicators with grassroot realities, the project ethos has invariably swung towards allowing women's empowerment and gender related change to evolve organically and as a terrain of debate and dialogue at the community level; we have refused to succumb to expediency by recruiting men who can lead these new and radical processes of change. We will take *Mahiti Manthana* to the next level, and introduce new ideas – working with the MSK *kishoris* (adolescent girls) on video, expanding the reach of NMKs and enabling *Kelu Sakhi* to be a highly decentralised and MSK-led activity.

2. Centre for Community Informatics and Development

Mahiti Manthana has strengthened the belief that it is vital that grass roots organisations that work closely with communities engage with ICTs and redefine the culture of ICT use, in new empowering ways. Creating different development models of ICT usage in the midst of mainstream commercial usage of ICTs is the need of the hour. To challenge mainstream notions about marginalised sections that invariably stereotype and adopt formulaic approaches with respect to the poor and socially disadvantaged, real and relevant ways have to be found. Addressing these larger challenges in the ICT ecology we felt requires a institutional alternative. Towards this end, we have envisioned a 'socio-technical resource group' - Centre for Community Informatics and Development (CCID) - to support

> It is wonderful that you are putting ICTs in the hands of women. If you give it to women, the possibilities are more.
>
> *R.K. Maiti, Joint Secretary, RDPR Department, Govt. of West Bengal*

What is Namma Mahiti Kendra (NMK)?

- Community Information Center for Empowerment – NOT a center for a set of e-services
- Agency to make structural sh... community's Information a... Communication architect...
- Equitable with respect to... access and sharing

We have framed a critique of the dominant telecentre model which is market-driven and efficiency oriented, by bringing back equity, social justice and participation as central themes of ICTD.
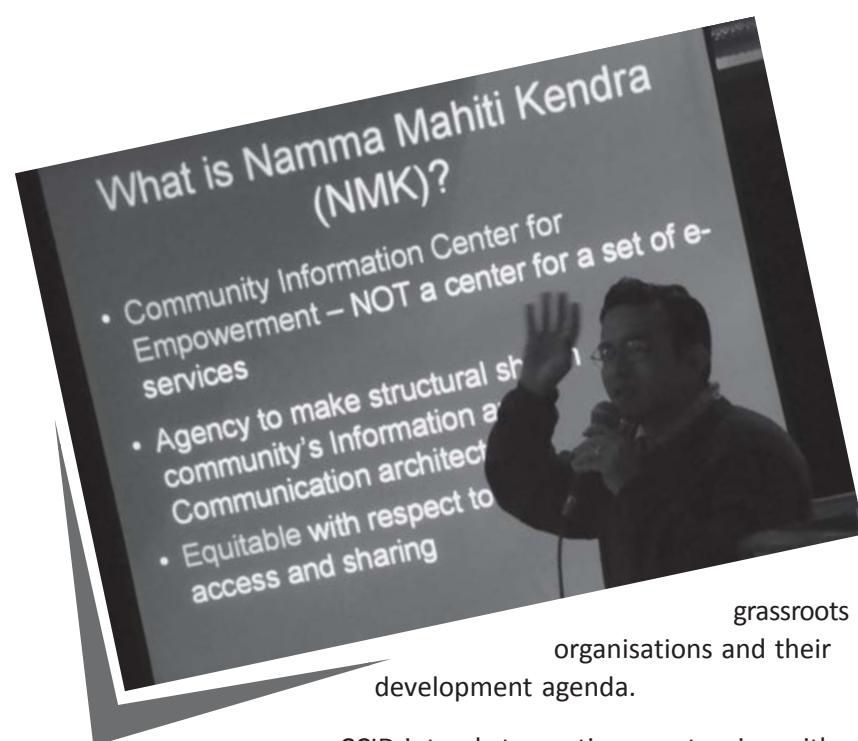
grassroots organisations and their development agenda.

CCID intends to continue partnering with MSK and take *Mahiti Manthana* to the next level. MSK is keen to be associated further with the initiative and they are making space for new process innovations. We had a soft launch of CCID in mid 2008, through a workshop for grassroots NGOs, to share with them what informatics means in community development. Twenty one NGOs from Mysore and Mandya districts participated in the two day dialogue over the state of the art in ICTD and the need for grassroots organisations to effectively engage in shaping the ICTD discourse. Two NGOs who showed keen interest to engage further were Vikasana and Swami Vivekananda Youth Movement and we are now working with them in strengthening their information and communication methods and systems. Vikasana is a 25 year old grassroots NGO, which works in urban and rural areas of Mandya. They have more than 400 urban and rural self help groups. They have also formed collectives of organic farmers and men's self helf groups. We have started off with a series of capacity building programmes on radio and are currently exploring a broadcast slot with Karnataka State Open University (KSOU) for them to be on air. With Swami

Vivekananda Youth Movement (SVYM),also a 25 year old NGO which works in community based health and education initiatives, we will work to support an agenda that addresses issues of a predominantly tribal population.

Challenges in this Area and Future Plans

Most of the staff in the partner organisations have been initially skeptical about ICTs and their effectiveness in the developmental arena. We have had to work with these mind set related aspects. At the same time, those who do see an opportunity in ICTs find it difficult to integrate ICTs into their work processes; the adoption of new systems of work, especially through ICTs require time investments for moving along the learning curve into a new level of organisational effectiveness. Finding the space and time to make this shift happen is not easy for local organisations. CCID recognises this "Catch 22", and like in the case of MSK, we believe that for NGOs the proof of the *payasa* is in the eating. With more organisations adopting, indigenising and contextualising ICTs for their development goals, the organisational resource deployment will gradually see a shift towards blending techno-social processes with core development agenda.

Through CCID, we propose to start a new project on ICTs that catalyses institutional responsiveness at the local level through women's leadership and action. A new action research project that explores 'open and transparent' governance at the panchayat level through ICTs is being thought through. CCID will continue to support Mahila Samakhya, Karnataka and look at upscaling possibilities.

3. An Exploratory Workshop on Digital Story Telling

A Consultation on Digital Story Telling (DST) was organised by IT for Change in collaboration with the IKM Emergent Research Programme in Bangalore in June 2008. The Consultation was exploratory in nature, aiming to understand the DST space in India and brought together ICT practitioners from around India along with researchers from India and other regions.

DST is a medium that allows participants in the communication process to express themselves, relate to their own environment, and create knowledge that serves as a counter to established wisdom, thereby serving as a tool that can help participants articulate and legitimise their own struggles. The Consultation was an exploratory exercise in mapping the landscape, while identifying some fundamental concepts for future research. The consultation also explored how digitally enabled communication processes can contribute to build a bottom-up development discourse for informing development policies and programmes.

The concluding session of the workshop outlined future focus areas for DST theory and practice. Participants explored the possibilities for, and potential benefits of, collaboration amongst the larger DST community in India. Of critical importance is continued discussion and debate on defining DST and the roles of various players in DST practice. Consensus was reached on the significance of looking at DST within the larger context of social change. The main areas of collaboration which emerged included training on DST, creation of a collaborative on-line space for DST practitioners to share their work and ideas, research and debate on the form

and application of DST that is rooted in development practice.

4. Interrogating 'Development' in ICTD: A Research Study based on Case Studies from India

This research study sought to critique large-scale telecentre projects in India and suggest an alternative development model for Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) deployment. Based on a market approach, most 'community ICT access' or telecentre interventions in India have pursued financial viability ignoring basic development concerns. The primary goal of this study was to empirically assess this approach and build alternatives.

The research relied on qualitative methods through interviews and observation, since a few of telecentre projects studied were in their formative stages and data on quantitative outcomes is difficult to obtain. The output of the study is in the form a detailed research report analysing the different approaches to telecentre- and ICT-based services development in India, and their outcomes in terms of developmental objectives. The study also generated a set of policy recommendations to central and state government agencies for developing the telecentre infrastructure into a mainstream machinery for development delivery, as well for building locally empowering knowledge systems, social networks and media.

The study has proved to be a timely and an appropriate influence on the public policy efforts led by IT for Change in ICTD to include disadvantaged groups and to promote empowering uses of new ICTs to further social justice goals. A short paper on one of the case studies was accepted at the 12th National Conference on e-governance in India organised by the Department of Information Technology.

Congrats, this is a great project. It is important how you have established local issues at the core of all your work. And a lot of time has been spent on that, and then slowly technology has been weaved in. The mistake a lot of interventions make is that they start with the technology.

*Prof. Shaun Pather,
Cape Town Peninsula
University,
South Africa*

IT for Change was also invited to present findings from this research study and lessons from our ongoing advocacy in this area at a conference of national NGOs in the state of Gujarat. As resource persons for one session, we shared insights from the telecentre research study to help improve ICT-led development strategies of the various NGO participants and root them in normative models of development as analysed through the case studies.

A section of our research study was adapted for integration into a tool-kit on ICTs for Local Development being prepared by the Association for Progressive Communications (APC).

Overall Outcomes

An important outcome in this area of work has been that through our field projects and research, we have effectively countered dominant ICTD models. Many ICTD interventions today still take a technology-side or supply-side approach pursuing the imperative of providing connectivity and access, software, content and applications; even those which look at the social side do so in terms of the 'individual beneficiary', and thus the accent on the concept of 'services' provided through the use of ICTs. Other approaches have looked at the centrality of the processes of information and communication in ICTD projects. Information for development approaches – as a tentative generic category – have seen ICTD projects primarily as providing useful information at the local levels that helps people, and aids development activity. The accent is mostly still individual-oriented. These dominant approaches do not adequately account for structural changes that ICTs can bring in practically to all local social systems – governance, social-relationships, public services like education, health, livelihoods, etc.

What we have managed to achieve through our work – both grassroots practice and research is that we have begun to establish in ICTD discourse, privileging of the following concepts that build a new transformative ICTD theory - (1)collectives and 'commons' at the local level, (2) technology appropriation through indigenised innovations and (3) ICTs as building blocks for systemic-structural changes. The concept of collective is an important notion in approaches to development, as 'commons' is in 'progressive' ICT discourse, even though its implication in terms of the local ICTD community does not seem to have been explored. The term 'appropriation' as against 'access' to technologies and their 'use' implies that it is not just about reaching out to 'technology' or 'services' as they are available but about shaping and owning technologies as well as their innumerable contextual possibilities that ICTs opens up. Through our field work and the research based on the same, we have shown that ICTs can be appropriated in development processes, in a way that were empowering to marginalised sections. Our work on telecentres has helped us frame a critique of the dominant telecentre model which has a market-driven and efficiency enhancing approach by bringing back equity, social justice and participation as central themes of ICTD.

Another significant outcome is the learning we have had through our field projects. CCID has emerged as a natural fallout of our learnings around integrating ICTD approaches into grassroots organisational processes. We are hopeful that the modest but sure-footed beginning we have made in institutionalising community informatics as a field of development practice will be more widely understood and accepted.

Project Area

4

Governance

Objectives and Scope

IT for Change's engagement with the Government of India's e-governance policies was on two major themes – 'Drivers of governance reform in the Information Society' and 'Community-generated information versus public institutional data'. On the former theme, we are critically examining the National e-governance Plan (NeGP) of India. Our systematic inquiry and action vis-à-vis the NeGP is ongoing, encompassing institutional and civil society engagements. On the second theme relating to public institutional data, we have framed our advocacy within new architectural principles for public information afforded by the Right to Information (RTI) Act and other public welfare initiatives like the National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme (NREGP). These developments, we have argued, necessitate a public 'supply-side' push – so that they open up new possibilities for citizen and community information bases that can become relevant to community monitoring, institutional accountability and governance reform processes.

This workshop was the first time we could discuss real issues about e-governance and about the NeGP.

K.T. Arasu, AID India

Activities and Achievements

1. Research Study on Participatory Local Development and ICTs

The Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) for Poverty Reduction Programme of the Poverty Group of United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), New York, commissioned IT for Change to undertake a research study about initiatives in the global south that provide directions for embedding ICTs in local development systems and processes. An international research team is now working with us on the project from Brazil, Philippines, South Africa and Uganda. To look at the preliminary findings of this inter-country research and discuss ICTD models that can combine a systems approach more associated with techno-managerial viewpoints, to values of local-ness and

participation, typical of development discourse, we organised an international workshop on 'ICTs for Participatory Local Development: Exploring a Systemic Approach' in Bangalore, India in December 2008. The workshop brought together around 20-25 researchers, policy makers and other actors in the area of local development and ICTs for development (ICTD).

Relatively technical issues and concepts like information systems, telecentres, technology platforms like sms, etc, were examined at the workshop from a strongly development and social viewpoint, to understand the various possibilities of new techno-social underpinnings for local development activities. The invited experts, policy makers and practitioners commented on the research drafts. We will work further on this project to develop a customisable

Nikhil De from MKSS at our workshop on ICTs for Participatory Local Development

IT FOR CHANGE

roadmap and toolkit on local development and ICTs for policy makers and practitioners.

The NREGP Case Study

Within the inter-country research framework, ITfC is currently undertaking an analysis of the National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme to examine the role of ICT in the program's implementation including in local planning and social audits. The study covered structured and unstructured discussions with the three community based organisations, one network working across different *mandals* (sub-district administrative unit in Andhra Pradesh),a state level NGO working on the NREGP, state level officials including Secretary, Rural Development and Panchayat Raj (RDPR) department, district and mandal-level government officials and NREGP wage-earners across 2 *mandals*.

The resulting information from this research study was the basis for one of the India case studies for the workshop (mentioned above). Additionally, it also informs our ongoing work with the Open Net Initiative (ONI). It was observed, for example, that increased availability of relevant information does, in fact, lead

to increased usage of that information predominantly by community based organisations (CBOs). Based on this case study, we are embarking on a more in depth study of the social auditing process dimensions in NREGP.

We also propose to undertake other case studies to finalise the India chapter and subsequently, to write up the report and the toolkit for UNDP.

Papers and Presentations

- ITfC submitted a detailed report to the Administrative Reforms Commission on 'Recommendations for Meaningful and Successful E-governance in India'.After a face-to-face meeting with the 2nd Indian Administrative Reforms Commission (ARC), we revised this paper and submitted a final version in June 2008 with a strong accent on policy recommendations, framed within the larger e-governance context of the country. ARC reports are significant documents for Indian governance reform and e-governance is an undeniably important component of such a reform.

- A paper "Building an Alternative E-Governance Model: Lessons from e-Gram in Gujarat" by Roshni Kishore Nuggehalli was published as a part of the compendium produced by the Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances, Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and pensions, Government of India. This compendium was produced as part of the 12th National Conference on e-Governance, held in Goa, in February 2009.

- A paper titled "Digital Inclusion Policies – Some Lessons from India"

was also written for APC to illustrate India's experience with policies for digital inclusion. This case study looks at a range of initiatives in India including an analysis of the ambitious Common Service Centers (CSCs) scheme of the National e-Governance Plan. It looks at the challenges faced by the scheme in ensuring the delivery of development services in a socially inclusive manner using this infrastructure.

Overall Outcomes and Future Plans

Our work on governance has over the years has earned us credibility not only with the government, but also with key social movements and NGOs. The deliberations in the workshop on Local Participatory Development were widely acclaimed for the involved nature of discussions and the fact that state actors, social movements and NGOs could articulate their perspectives about e-governance and look at what course corrections would benefit the more fundamental political project of democratic governance. We have also been able to make conceptual headway on what the interlinkages between governance, citizenship and people's participation are from the vantage of social justice and equity. The findings from our NREGP study in Andhra Pradesh give us a sound basis for our advocacy in promoting a role for community monitoring through a people's information system. We have also consciously engaged with national platforms like the UNDP-UNESCO Solution Exchange India mailing lists to share our perspectives and engage with policy makers and practitioners.

On our course in exploring governance related linkages to ICTs and development, we have gathered insights about what the notion of 'open government' would

be. We intend to flesh out this idea and get into a more intensive research process – preferably an action research endeavour. It is important that the government led processes towards an ICT enabled open architecture of governance are supported under a common theoretical policy and programmatic framework. Additionally, these processes need to be connected to and developed in sync with community based initiatives, thus shaping a whole new set of infrastructure and processes for governance and citizenship in India. The concept paper we have developed on this idea examines the experience in the area of 'open government' from other countries. It also posits an overarching theoretical framework, while offering policy and programmatic directions for governance reform.

In the meanwhile we shall continue our critical analysis of NeGP, assessing the impact of the Common Service Centers (CSC) that have been set up by the Department of IT across the country. This will be a research project to examine the ways in which the CSC initiative, in terms of its design and implementation, addresses local development priorities and citizen-state interface.

T.R.Raghunandan, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Panchayati Raj, GoI at our workshop on ICTs for Participatory Local Development

Project Area

Gender

Objectives and Scope

Our work on gender and ICTs mainly focuses on theory-building and policy research adopting a pro-south feminist approach. The transformative opportunities provided by new technologies for changes to local gender order are fascinating. However, positive outcomes for gender equality are not likely to obtain without due cognizance of the power structures that in fact intertwine in the political economy of development across global, national, local, and community levels. How do we frame the meanings of new ICTs and how policy frameworks can enable a transformative change through ICTs are critical questions that we have sought to address. We have sought to build a theoretical framework of gender and the information society that problematises women's citizenship in the changing social order. Our research and advocacy have critiqued market-based approaches in policy making – globally and nationally - and we have pushed for new frameworks based on citizenship and rights-based approaches.

Activities and Achievements

1. Conceptual Framework for IDRC's Grants Program

IDRC approached IT for Change to build a framework for a proposed grants program for Asia on gender. In the reporting period, substantial work was done in writing this concept note, sharing it with feminist thinkers and scholars, many of them not engaged in this area, and ideating with IDRC on how an Asia level research network can be initiated that takes on board a critical, constructivist approach to gender in the information society. The note identifies four threads of feminist inquiry and flags hypotheses around these – the local public sphere, local governance, global governance of ICTs and a new global justice agenda. We will develop this paper for publishing and provide conceptual leadership to trips program, with research partners in Asia.

2. Journal of Community Informatics - Special Issue on Gender

IT for Change was invited by the editor of the Journal of Community Informatics to guest-edit a special issue on gender and community informatics. The Journal of Community Informatics (JoCI) is a focal point for the communication of research to a global network of academics, community informatics practitioners and national and multi-lateral policy makers. The responses to the call for papers has been very good and we look forward to taking this process into the coming year. For us, the intersection between gender and community informatics has been intimately linked to our experiences with *Mahiti Manthana*. The special issue of the JoCI promises to hold a lot of learning for us in this emerging field of inquiry. We also think it is a privilege to be part of this knowledge building

process and inflect it with the values and frameworks we hold dear.

3. Advocacy in ICT Policy Spaces

We have continued to feel the need to engage in ICT related global platforms to represent the standpoint of marginalised women. At the AWID conference in South Africa in September, we called for a meeting of the *Feminist Network on Gender, Development and Information Society Policies* (GDISP), a loose coalition that we initiated after WSIS, to discuss strategies for the IGF at Hyderabad. In November, at the IGF, we were at the forefront of the gender based lobbying, and through the Dynamic Coalition on Gender, affiliated to the IGF, we mobilised women's groups. We also gave leadership and led the drafting process to submit a statement to the IGF addressing access to the Internet, concerns about diversity, women's privacy and security, and the democratic deficit of existing global policy processes and urging a rights-based approach to Internet Governance that addresses both women's 'negative' as well as 'positive' rights. With the UNGAID, the ICTD policy dialogue forum, we have continued to be constantly engaged in many ways – contributing through expert group consultations and leading their discussion on gender.

We have continued to nurture existing partnerships and build new ones with women's groups globally. We supported a one day event organised by the Association for Progressive Communications (APC) and Isis International-Manila in July 2008 on the topic of 'Gender Networking and Advocacy in the Context of the UN World Summit on the Information Society'. The event was a reflection around gender-related advocacy on information society agenda.

We have had a very supportive partner in the UNESCO Chair for Women and ICTs Latin America. We have also built linkages with Sulabatsu, a research network of feminists in Latin America. Along with these organisations and groups we have proposed a workshop for the fourth meeting of the IGF, which will take place in Egypt, in November 2009. The workshop will seek to examine through a gendered lens the multi-faceted ways in which the Internet mediates citizenship online and offline.

4. Breakthroughs – Linking up with 'Old' Feminist Agenda

In order to bring our information society framework closer to Indian feminist debates and spaces, we made a conscious effort to associate ourselves with and expand our work on gender to include the issue of violence against women. The Sakhi-Jagori Consultation on 'New Technologies and New Forms of Violence against Women and Girls' that took place in Trivandrum, Kerala, in March 2009 was a space that opened up for us to work together with a wider and veteran group of feminists to examine the emerging discourse around around violence and privacy in digital spaces. Our participation in this space coincides with a willingness we see in the wider context of the women's movement in India to look at the information society agenda more critically and as an agenda to own up. We made a strong impact at the Sakhi-Jagori consultation urging that understanding digital dangers requires us to grasp the wider socio-political shifts through ICTs, which in many ways are also empowering. We presented a nuanced analysis of the shifting categories of the public and private spheres, and the need for a fresh

feminist analysis of the same.

The later part of the year also saw us being invited by UNESCAP to revisit Section J of the Beijing Platform for Action on media and ICTs and also provide expert inputs into the issue of violence against women, for the upcoming Asia-Pacific intergovernmental meeting in Bangkok for a +15 review of the Beijing Platform. This was a significant milestone for us; to be able to shape mainstream feminist agenda-setting processes where there is an open recognition of the need to factor in a distinct developing country feminist perspective on ICTs.

Our work on gender was also recognised by academic institutions of repute and we were invited by IDS Sussex to be part of a panel discussion on gender and governance, to speak on e-governance and Internet governance and through these analytical fields, examine the concept of participation. We see the expansion of our work in this direction as critical to build the discursive space for the information society agenda and to kindle dialogues across feminist spaces and movements that incorporate the information society lens.

Translation of an IT for Change publication - 'Gender Equality through ICT Access and Appropriation: Taking a Rights-based Approach' into Portuguese

Papers and Presentations

- For the UNGAID we wrote a document titled 'Gender Equality through ICT Access and Appropriation: Taking a Rights-based Approach' which laid out an alternative way to think about access, beyond market mediated technology diffusion. A Portuguese version of this paper has appeared in the first volume of 'PoliTICs' a newsletter of NUPEF - the Center for Research, Studies and Training of the Information Network for the Third Sector, Brazil in July 2008.

- At the AWID Forum, we used the citizenship framework that we have been working on to analyse the communication rights movement from a gender perspective through a presentation at the session on "Power, Politics and the Internet" organised by APC.

- PLAN International asked us to do a chapter on ICTs and the Empowerment of Girls for a forthcoming publication entitled 'Because I am a Girl'. This paper unpacks some typical myths about ICTs, gender and empowerment.

Challenges and Future Plans

A key challenge in this area is framework building. We have been doggedly pursuing a theoretical framework on gender and the information society that is rooted in the vast and eloquent body of work on gender and development, while building from the many fields of enquiry in Northern feminist work

around new technologies. In this endeavour, the balancing act between inter-disciplinary engagements with gender and development, gender and governance, women's human rights, women and media etc, and bold steps into constructing a feminist grand theory in this domain pulls us in different directions. Undertaking research along with mobilising civil society actors and lobbying in policy spaces also spreads our internal resources thin, but we do know that this is a typical feminist dilemma. Learning and doing need to be intertwined. Further, global spaces also show enormous resistance in embracing gender related agenda that are progressive. Articulating feminist concerns in relation to Internet governance is challenging enough; the glib treatment of gender in these spaces is also demoralising. Thus while staying connected with feminist groups and building dialogues around shared agenda is an emerging priority, some key focus areas for the upcoming year are outlined below:

Qualitative Research on Mahiti Manthana

 While we have had detailed documentation processes and ongoing exercises to learn through *Mahiti Manthana* what ICTs mean for women's empowerment, in the coming year we will undertake systematic and methodologically rigorous research around the appropriation of ICTs by poor women and the impact of this on their collective learning and action, identity building and solidarity.

Journal of Community Informatics

The coming year will see the special issue of JoCI on gender taken to completion.

Rolling out the Research Network in Asia on Gender and Citizenship

The IDRC Grants Program will begin in 2009. We will invest considerable energies in developing the processes and systems to disseminate information about and build the profile of this network and kickstart the research activities in Asia. We hope to be able to broaden and reframe feminist research agenda through this initiative.

Project Area

6

ICT in Education

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Objectives and Scope

It is well known that the public education system has a crucial role in developing an informed and responsible citizenry, as well as in working for the larger goals of social harmony and economic wellbeing. The aims of education in our national curricular frameworks emphasise the agency of the teacher in such development. Towards this, the public education system has developed structures and processes that seek to safeguard the the public interest and the common good in curricular design and transaction. Yet when it comes to the issue of the role of ICTs in education, these values are often given the go-by. Our work in the area of ICTs in Education has been to reclaim and restore the philosophical issues framing the debates in education. And when we were confronted with a national policy process in this arena, we came in actively to give leadership to civil society response to the process.

Activities and Achievements

1. Advocacy around the NPISE

The Ministry of Human Resources Development (MHRD) has initiated a process formulating a 'National Policy for ICTs in School Education' (NPISE) and in 2007 formed a group that consisted almost entirely of government officials and large technology vendors. The policy group had almost no representation from the strong Indian education community that straddles academic institutions and civil society organisations. The influence of technology vendors, many of who are near monopolies in their spaces was reflected in the policy draft itself, which was completely out of sync with India's educational aims and philosophies and appeared instead to further their vested interests. Aspects of collaborative and decentralised content creation, primacy

of the role of the teacher, open access and open source paradigms were completely missed out. High focus on centralised content creation, massive ICT literacy training of teachers to implement pre-packaged content, focus on technological issues and inadequate understanding of educational contexts and aims suggested the document was more a blueprint for the large technology vendors to 'supply' ICT services to government schools in India which can be seen as the 'largest ICT market' in the world.

ITfC worked closely educationists across the country, on this issue to work out common position on the issue and advocate with MHRD to rollback the process of privatisation of policy making. As a part of this, ITfC co-organised with other eminent educational institutions, a workshop at NCERT, where educationists

debated the principles of NPISE and possibilities of ICTs in school education. The workshop report as well as 'short discussion papers' that participants wrote on different themes of NPISE - elementary education, teacher education, education administration, and a subsequent note on 'Non-negotiable principles for NPISE' were shared with MHRD. These substantive documents also bust any myth that developmental actors are not competent to participate in ICT design, requiring that the space be handed over to vendors and technology enthusiasts.

ITfC also discussed the issue with bureaucrats within MHRD, members of national bodies such as the NCERT, National Knowledge Commission, Planning Commission etc. A significant blow for keeping public interest as the prime driving principle in policy making and keeping private vendors out of policy making groups came in the form of a ministerial directive to the bureaucracy, to that effect. ITfC extensively engaged with media during this period and Times of India, Outlook and Indian Express carried the views of eminent educationists on reversing the privatising of policy making. These articles did have a significant impact on public opinion as well as on the bureaucracy leading the process.

The second aspect of privatisation concerns the large scale adoption of BOOT (Build Own Operate Transfer, a version of Public Private Partnerships) models in Computer Learning in Schools (CLPS). While the creation of educational material and training of teachers is usually handled in-house by the government school system, in the case of CLPS, both activities are usually handed over to private vendors. This has two serious problems. Firstly, the integration

of the CLP into the regular curriculum of the school suffers, since the training is implemented by a resource person from the vendor, who is not part of the school and whose efforts are treated as stand-alone by both the teachers and the school as well as by the vendor. Such segregation of the learning process makes computer learning a superficial and irrelevant (de-linked from regular curriculum) process and leads to the failure of CLPS, both to impact learning processes and outcomes during the BOOT period as well as to sustain the program beyond the BOOT period.

A subtler but even more dangerous process of this privatisation is that, the traditional processes to ensure that the content and transaction are designed to meet educational aims is missing under the BOOT model. Under the name of CLPS and CALCs, often poor quality and dubious educational content is forced on schools. Most programs are restricted to teaching office automation applications without connecting this in any manner to the learning processes and content. The BOOT models focus on the vendor faculty teaching the students directly, with less or no focus on teacher capacity building.

2. Research to Bolster our Advocacy

ITfC did a study of the Kerala CLPS, IT@Schools, which has a very different design and implementation. The program focuses heavily on teacher capacity building, covering all teachers. Teachers are able not only to use the computers for their own use and learning, but also install and upgrade software and provide basic hardware troubleshooting as well. Thus the teacher is the primary pillar of the program. Thus significant funding, which in the BOOT model, flows to vendors, is deployed for teacher training and in-house hardware procurement and

"When vendors sign MoUs, govt see it as philanthrophy - sadly, that's not true"

Outlook magazine, quoting Gurmurthy from IT for Change on the NPISE controversy

maintenance. Kerala has also opted for Free and Open Source Software (FOSS), saving the costs of software purchases and upgrades. It has also moved from ICT literacy to ICT enabled learning in a big way across upper primary and high

schools, using several FOSS educational packages. ITfC plans over the coming year to advocate the several superior features of the Kerala CLPS design and implementation in computer learning and aided learning to MHRD and other states,

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Key Principles of ITfC advocacy on NPISE

Process

1. Policy-making should be anchored in public institutions and be clearly led by public interest. This area has a huge danger of vested interests subverting the process directly or indirectly.

2. Widespread and open consultations involving all groups, especially those who are working in the field of education is essential

Substance

1. An ICT in School Education is an education policy (a curricular policy) and not a technology policy

2. ICTs have the potential to significantly damage the education system if they are used to further centralise authority (by dumping hardware, proprietary software and 'quality' content on teachers without even consulting them), treating teachers and schools as mere consumers of ICT technologies. Great care is required to design the policy for the use of ICTs in ways that can promote local collaborative processes amongst teachers and teacher educators, including supporting curriculum development, building networks etc. Such detailing requires a deep understanding of the Indian education context, goals and challenges. Hence, though ICTs are capable of strengthening both centralised as well as decentralised structures and processes, the policy should strongly support and emphasise the latter. Equity and participation are very important principles and they require local / decentralised processes and decision making. While support structures indeed have a role in facilitating decentralisation, they should avoid pushing top-down processes.

3. ICTs in education should not be limited to schools alone. Teachers should also have the capacity to create digital resource material and help their students to also create such material based on their experiences. This includes also the capacity to adapt existing material and contextualise it (simpler in case of digital content). The teacher should be seen as a co-constructor of learning material and experiences, not as an 'end user' or as an 'implementer' of pre-designed material. The very process of such creation can be emancipating and empowering. This process can also addresses the goal of local curriculum development.

4. We should therefore see ICT in Education as the application and use of ICT tools across the entire education system – schools, teacher education, education administration, vocational education, distance learning etc for systemic change.

and re-look at adopting BOOT models that are ineffective and wasteful. ITfC along with other civil society groups, is working with the education department of the Government of Karnataka, to implement some of the learnings from the Kerala IT@Schools program in the latter's own ICT@Schools program for government high schools, beginning with capacity building of teachers on the GNU/Linux platform and educational software freely available on the same.

3. Network-building in a New Space

As a part of our work, ITfC has invested significant time and energies in building alliances amongst diverse actors in the development space, including educationists across the country, Free Software advocates, Public access and RTI activists, grassroot organisations, using both physical and virtual spaces. The mailing list of the alliance of educationists to reflect on ICT in education issues has served as a peer learning and networking space (http://groups.google.com/group/ict-education-india?hl=en) , as has the mailing list of civil society organisations advocating for FOSS in India (http://lists.fosscom.in/pipermail/network-fosscom.in/). The former seeks to engage educationists on ICTs while the latter seeks to move FOSS from being seen as a 'technology' issue to one of equity and social justice, as well as new method of production in society.

Challenges and Future Plans

As society gets increasingly digitised, the need to include ICT

literacy and ICT supported learning becomes more critical. However the private interests of large technology vendors who see ICT in schools as a huge market for their products, is a serious threat that can distort educational processes in our schools. These vested interests would seek that the policy support the learning of specific hardware, software products and content created in a centralized manner by vendors, whereas the biggest potential benefits from ICTs in education would come from the collaborative and decentralized co-creation of learning material using software that is also freely customizable as per local needs.

ITfC will also develop perspective papers drawing from our ongoing research on ICT programs in Kerala and other states, highlighting research based pedagogical insights that should influence policy in this space.

We will continue to network with educationists and development actors across the country, to advocate for a progressive policy that can support teacher professional development, local content creation, universal access, integrating ICT capacity building within teacher pre-service and in-service training etc.

This is a very positive development and one hopes that this case can be cited and similar advocacy processes be followed in other sectors, particularly in the areas of urban water and energy planning, where again private vendors are invited to frame policy.

Indira Jayaraman, Visiting Faculty, TISS, Mumbai

7 Financials

IT for Change - Consolidated Balance Sheet as on 31ˢᵗ March, 2009

Liabilities	Rs.	Assets	Rs.
General Fund	3,367,062	Fixed Assets	193,824
Asset Fund	720,923	Current Assets, Loans and Advances	9,445,281
Advance Account	5,753,824	Receivables	585,418
Sundry Payables	382,715		
	10,224,523		**10,224,523**

IT for Change - Consolidated Income and Expenditure for the year ended 31ˢᵗ March, 2009

Expenditure	Rs.	Income	Rs.
Establishment Costs	7,466,391	Funds Received	13,084,850
Operating Costs	4,273,310	Institutional Charges Received	242,000
Administration Costs	1,464,557	Other Income	790,017
Depreciation	175,571	Excess of Expenditure over Income	161,211
Excess of Income over expenditure	898,249		
	14,278,078		**14,278,078**

Schedule of Funds Received and Utilised during the year 2008-09

Funder-Project	Project Description	Opening Balance	Funds Received	Funds Utilized-Capital	Funds Utilized-Revenue	Closing Balance
UNDP-LD	ICT's for Participatory Local Development	966,473	2,164,118	33,300	2,230,706	866,585
FORD-ISSP	Information Society for South Project	704,976	2,980,219	-	2,051,301	1,633,894
IDRC-ISSP	Information Society for South Project	2,046,823	1,286,701	43,950	2,036,833	1,252,741
HIVOS-ISSP	Information Society for South Project	2,350,893	-	63,613	1,775,913	511,367
HIVOS-ISSP	Information Society for South Project-Phase 2	-	309,849	-	-	309,849
Gender Caucus-WSIS	Gender at World Summit on the Information Society	21,630	-	-	21,630	-
NISG-CRU	Community Radio Unit	-	2,700,000	-	2,253,826	446,174
EU-FLOSS INCLUDE	Free/Libre/Open Source Software in public sector	-	1,326,336	-	701,063	625,273
IDRC- ONI	Open Net Initiative	-	602,255	-	494,315	107,940
UNIFEM	Gender in the Information Society	166,301	-	-	166,301	-
Total		**6,257,096**	**11,369,478**	**140,863**	**11,731,888**	**5753824**

Director's Report on Financial Statements

ITfC received funding of Rs 11.37 million during the year adding to the opening balance of 6.26 million; of this Rs 11.68 million was spent and a balance of Rs 5.75 million has been carried forward towards ongoing activities. Most of this and the ITfC general fund amounting to Rs 3.3 million are held as term deposits which amount to Rs 8.29 million.

The funding sources are reasonably diversified, with Ford Foundation (USA), IDRC (Canada), European Union, Government of India – UNDP (India) sharing most of the funding for the year. New funders include UNICEF for the CCID, Mysore and HIVOS for ISSP Phase II support. While the funding support is adequate for 2009-10 for the research and advocacy programs, Sir Dorab Tata Trust and Ford Foundation (India) have indicated possible support for CCID projects.

IT for Change (ITfC) is a non-profit organisation located in Bangalore, India.

IT for Change envisions a society capable of, and comfortable with, innovative and effective use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) as a means to further the goals of progressive social change. We believe that the changes brought about by ICTs in our social milieu are far-reaching and of a structural nature, connoting the advent of what may be called an information society. Correspondingly, progressive engagements with this phenomenon have to adequately address structural and systemic issues at a deeper level.

IT for Change strongly believes that an equitable information society can flourish only through inclusive and informed debate, involving not merely actors from the technology arena but all actors in the development arena, especially from the South. Current information society and 'ICTs for development' or ICTD approaches predominantly represent Northern realities and perspectives, tending to favour market-fundamentalist thinking and valorising technology per se. They seldom transcend efficiency parameters, and fail to integrate fundamental ethical cornerstones of development like participation, social justice and equity. IT for Change perceives its role as a catalyst of change, initiating and engaging in debates on the emerging information society and ICTD domains, and foregrounding social and political perspectives and realities that are currently sidelined.

IT for Change champions change through its wide-ranging research and advocacy activities. In addition, the organisation demonstrates innovative ICT possibilities in actual developmental situations through its field projects, which involve partnerships with community-based organisations and grassroots NGOs. These projects are consciously designed to examine the theory and enrich the conceptual framework of the information society and the ICTD discourse. At the same time, the field projects arise out of our theoretical understanding and work in this area, including of changes that are occurring in the broader context of developmental activity. Countering stereotyped notions of technologies and 'bandwagon' approaches to ICTD, our ICT strategies aim to work towards technological possibilities that go beyond tokenism to address complex issues of social change and infuse development processes with new vibrancies.

IT for Change is in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations.

IT for Change
Bangalore,
India

July 2009

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