

ADVOCACY IN THE INTERNET AGE

Way Forward for Civil Society

A SOUTH ASIAN REGIONAL WORKSHOP JANUARY 27-30, 2001

Organised by:
Public Affairs Centre, Bangalore
MAHITI, Bangalore
IT for Change, Bangalore

Supported by:
The Asia Foundation, Dhaka

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Workshop Theme

(This theme paper was distributed to all participants prior to the workshop).

Civil Society is increasingly being conceptualized as a `space' between the State (government) and the Market (business) to challenge, contest, confront and collaborate for improving the quality of governance. And advocacy is a widely employed strategy to use that space effectively. Most actors in the civil society arena, have sometime or other, used advocacy as a means to make their interventions more effective and focused. The emerging challenge in the context of the new economy is to tap in to evolving technological frontiers to enhance the potency of existing advocacy strategies and more important, to explore new and innovative modes of advocacy. Already, we could discern the responses to this challenge in the form of increasing use of information technology to enhance social capabilities.

One arena that has emerged as a level playing field is the Internet. Whether one is talking about information regarding the quality of milk, crop inspection standards, databases of importers, global economic indicators, or government spending of politicians, publishing on the Net can effectively augment traditional communication channels. Interestingly, the Net is also today seen as a potent medium for capturing various `voices' which could then be selectively targeted or widely disseminated for impact. The flexibility and spread of the Net is also being effectively used by Civil Society Organizations for advocacy purposes. Submerging the notions of national communities, on-line communities are on the rise today drawn together by politics, ethnicity, gender or social cause. These new actors are increasingly amplifying a new lobbying power to previously silent voices on the global stage.

From a strategic perspective, the global contours of the Internet revolution need to be mediated, adapted and contextualised by CSOs in the South. Adding a new dimension to this is the increasing applications of IT in matters of governance. As the concept of e-government takes clear shape and form, CSOs need to reorient their strategies to negotiate with the state effectively on equal terms. Key challenges looming ahead would include promoting local language applications, developing simple to use and easy to maintain systems and user-friendly software that have capabilities for documentation and databases.

As an exploratory step, it was proposed to organise a small meet of interested CSOs in South Asia in the form of a highly interactive Workshop.

Workshop Objectives

The workshop had five major objectives in focus:

- ***Sensitize the participants to the emerging potential for using the Net as a medium for advocacy***
- ***Facilitate a forum to discuss and share common concerns on the emergent challenges***
- ***Show case a selected spectrum of internet advocacy strategies***
- ***Give the participants a hands-on experience in designing simple internet based campaigns***
- ***Explore options for future networking and resource sharing on a regional basis.***

Workshop Participant Profile

The workshop was limited to senior and middle level functionaries drawn from NGOs and Civil Society Organizations in South Asia (Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka).

Expected Outcomes

- Creating a forum for further debates, discussions and sharing experiences in using the Internet for advocacy purposes
- Exploring a spectrum of Good Practices to identify themes for replicability & adaptability
- Designing & Using email and Web based tools
- Tips to design and run effective Internet based advocacy campaigns based on the learnings from the show cased good practices.

PUBLIC AFFAIRS CENTRE (PAC)

Public Affairs Centre is a not-for-profit non-governmental organisation committed to improving the quality of governance in India. PAC undertakes research studies, provides citizen action support and advisory services, and facilitates networking. Bringing out Report Cards on public services, collaborating with National Governments to make governance more responsive, helping public agencies carry out systemic reforms and designing programmes to bring transparency in the electoral process are some of the major initiatives of PAC.

MAHITI, Bangalore

MAHITI is a voluntary sector organization providing Internet based tools, skills and services to civil society organizations in India; MAHITI's services are spread over four specific domains - networking, advocacy, fundraising, and knowledge sharing.

Information Technology for Change (ITfC)

ITfC is a registered non-profit society based in Bangalore. ITfC consists of a blend of experienced professionals, who have worked in the areas of IT and social work for the past ten to fifteen years. ITfC believes in and works towards an IT paradigm with an ethical niche. ITfC visualizes a society, capable of and comfortable with the effective and innovative use of information technology (IT) as a tool, to further social development goals.

See [ITfC_Dream_And_Vision_Statement.htm](#) for the vision statement of ITfC. More information about ITfC can be seen in the presentation, [ITfC_Presentation_For_Workshop.htm](#)

The Asia Foundation

The Asia Foundation is a private, non-governmental organization dedicated to supporting programs that contribute to a peaceful, prosperous, and open Asia Pacific community. The Foundation works on four broad program areas: governance and law; economic reform and development; womens political participation; and international relations.

For a complete version of the workshop theme paper, see [Theme_paper_for_workshop.htm](#)

WORKSHOP PROCEEDINGS

DAY ONE

I. Inaugural Address

Dr. Samuel Paul, Public Affairs Centre

The Workshop opened with a welcome address by Dr. Samuel Paul, Chairperson, Public Affairs Centre. Dr. Paul stressed on the importance of the role of citizens - especially Civil Society Organisations (CSO) in acting as watchdogs for the effective translation of democratic principles and practices. CSOs have to act on behalf of the public and keep them aware of what they are getting for their vote. Internal vigilance is the cost of having a democratic government.

Dr. Paul highlighted the potency of information as the critical catalyst at the cutting edges. He illustrated this point with two contrasting examples: Fifty-years ago, the term Public Interest Litigation (PIL) was not a part of daily speech. The Constitution was there, the judiciary was there, and lawyers were there. But the knowledge wasnt there. PIL was a new interpretation of the Constitution. It was an individual's right to direct the government to do what it is supposed to do. The judiciary has the power to ask the government to implement a legal demand of any citizen.

The second case is of the innovative use of credible information by Civil Society Organisations. Any democratic government should be characterised by speed, interactivity, and transparency. The Report Card (prepared by PAC on the Government) is our evaluation of the performance of the government. We are saying that we elect you, we pay taxes, and so we can grade you.

But for Report Cards to exist, two important factors are needed an independent press and a functional democracy. In the case of PAC, the press carries the findings of the Report Card without fear or favour. Also we do not take government funding, as our *raison d'tre* is unbiased government evaluation. The political set-up is conducive to conducting the study and disseminating the information. On the other hand, in the case of Vietnam, the government uses Report Cards for internal assessment only. The findings are not shared with the public.

Dr. Paul concluded his address by drawing attention to the potential of the new medium of the Internet as a good vehicle to make information available much faster and cheaper. And with technology getting demystified, access to the medium has become much simpler. The emergent challenge is to work out modalities of knowledge sharing, resource pooling and effective networking.

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II. Keynote Session: Global Political Economy at the beginning of the Millennium Challenges for Civil Society

Dr. Narendar Pani, The Times of India

The opening session was a talk by Dr. Narendar Pani, editor, *The Times of India*. Dr. Pani spoke on globalisation and its impact in south Asia at both political and economical levels. He commenced his discussions by making a fervent plea that the interpretation of globalisation should change. Globalisation should not just be seen as a conscious policy decision that the government must chose or reject, but should be viewed as a process. And this process is increasingly being driven by technology. The Internet in this changed paradigm thus assumes a vital role as it presents a visible, user friendly and accessible facet of the new technology.

The Internet redefines time and distance and cuts across national borders. The power of speculation and its impact on developing economies has been witnessed. The knowledge economy or speculation economy is growing. Irrespective of what we do, technology driven aspects impact Indian investments abroad.

However, this shift has major ramifications on the economic, cultural and political spheres in many developing countries. Major MNCs have now started customer services from India. The accents and the environment created are not that of India. Now even the success of Hindi films depends a lot on the overseas market. Often films that fail at home make profits in the overseas market. Local conflicts get international support. During the Babri Masjid unrest (following the demolition of a mosque in northern India), the position that NRIs took was aggressive. There was even funding for the proposed temple structure coming in from abroad. The issue was not confined within India.

Technology increases the scope of reaching out and getting information. This could give rise to conflict. But at the same time the process is too large for anyone to control.

Unrestrained globalisation has its set of problems.

1. In Southeast Asia the failure of markets resulted in a real estate market fall and a consequent fall in currency value. This created an economic crisis in the region.
2. Unfortunately, all the high standards practised by MNCs are confined to first world countries alone. The lowest labour and environmental standards are practised in third world countries like Nike in Vietnam and Indonesia. Their environmental problems are also being exported to developing worlds what was once feared is already happening.
3. When there is no regulation on the amount of capital invested by the national government. India allows less investment than China.

Dr. Pani concluded his discussions with a strategic appeal to shift the focus of advocacy from nations to people. It should not be poor nation versus rich nation but poor of the world against rich of the world. The demand should be for higher labour standards. Perhaps the very technology that is seen as anti-poor could help the poor.

Discussion

One participant pointed out that the big bully tactics that the US was using with India and other developing countries for trade, are in turn replicated by India in the regional context with less stronger countries. Dr. Pani said that even the first world countries were realising that such tactics are redundant and are changing. It was high time India did the same.

III. Overview of Advocacy in the Information Age Challenges for the Development Agenda Dr. Gopakumar, Public Affairs Centre

Dr. Gopakumar of Public Affairs Centre gave a brief overview of advocacy in the information age. He likened the new era to the Chinese word wei-ji, which means both crisis and opportunity.

The news space in the mainstream media for development news is shrinking. Also the mainstream media may be susceptible to market interests. But the Internet out there is a whole new world to get across development issues. The basic development issues being addressed through the new medium of the Internet are environment, human rights, child rights, peace, health & gender, and development. The Internet could be used not only to highlight these issues but to propagate them too. It could be used for fundraising, recruiting, co-ordination of action, joint policy development, awareness building, research, organising boycotts, and e-mail campaigns.

A good example of using the Internet as a powerful advocacy medium is highlighted by the Nike sweatshop expose. The posting of an internal report that highlighted the deplorable labour practices employed by Nike triggered off a global protest. This report was posted on the Corporatewatch website. (This site is a watchdog for MNCs violating laws).

Another example is the power of the Net to subvert national boundaries to advocate common issues. Reaching out is becoming easier. In the case of India and Pakistan, traditional intermediaries are being weaned out with the Indo-Pak exchange website.

There is telemedicine that operates on the principal of gift economy.

An emergent challenge in the new setting is to demystify the technology and make it work for the civil society. Unfortunately, most of the ongoing efforts by CSOs operate in fairly passive recipient modes. There is a lot of downloading, but very few serious efforts at uploading. We can make technology work for us by linking to grassroots with coherent operational plans.

The signs of things to come in IT are very positive. That is the reason we should take it seriously as an opportunity. The speed of that speed of transmission will increase; PCs will be superior. XMLisation will happen that will enable meaningful information sharing and searching, and more sophisticated software will be made.

FOR MORE DETAILS ON THIS PRESENTATION, PLEASE SEE
[Overview_of_Advocacy_in_Internet_Age.htm](#)

IV. Assessment of IT Needs of the Social Sector

M. Vijay Baskar, *ITfC*

ITfC conducted a need assessment on the use of IT in the non-profit sector. The assessment was conducted using the following techniques:

- Questionnaires sent out by snail mail and e-mail (A copy of the questionnaire is available at the end of this report)
- Secondary data or published sources
- Personal communication and consultation

It was found that there is a tremendous excitement about Information Technology within the voluntary sector. But some moot questions remain: How to create an effective demand system? How to make IT work for the voluntary sector?

Discussion

This session triggered off a serious discussion as to what was meant by advocacy and how much of it applied to their countries. A series of relevant queries were articulated: What is Internet advocacy? How well and effective can technology be welded in to the conventional and time tested modes of advocacy? Could Internet actually do advocacy? It was agreed after some discussion that Internet advocacy was a means, a tool for advocacy, and not the end. It could mobilise public opinion.

A lot of questions came up on the efficacy of Internet advocacy. Who are we reaching out to with Internet advocacy? Could it influence international opinion? In conventional advocacy till you know someone there is no breakthrough. How does this work?

A participant remarked that Internet campaigns are a good advocacy tool to an extent. But for mobilising grassroots support IT is not of help. But you can make the people you are representing aware of the issues by communicating

information. The communication per se does not require technology but the information has been distilled through the application of technology.

We could learn to use technology creatively. We can explore possibilities, build a knowledge system and not just look at limitations. Someone asked that if you are addressing people who are connected how do you get their interest? How do we know on which website to advertise? One participant said that their organisation had used Internet to raise funds twice. Once they were successful in Rajasthan, but failed in Orissa.

In conclusion, it was decided that Internet doesn't replace traditional methods (campaigning, public awareness, protests) and media (electronic, print, electric media and folk media) but complements them.

Groups wanted to know how much of what was discussed applied to their own countries and their neighbours. They split into country wise groups to prepare impromptu presentations about Internet and advocacy in their countries.

FOR MORE DETAILS ON THIS PRESENTATION, PLEASE SEE
[Assessment of IT needs in the social sector.htm](#)

V. GROUP WORK

Identifying issues, challenges in the South Asian regional context and scope for use of IT in advocacy

The issues the group discussion took under consideration nation-wise were:

1. Assessment of the use of IT in CSOs
2. Facilitating and inhibiting factors
3. Government policies

Nepal

In Nepal audio, video, posters, and street plays are the most common forms of advocacy. The use of Internet in advocacy is not common. Internet is still in the infancy stage. IT awareness among people and technical knowledge is limited. The government IT policy is favourable and donor support for Internet is forthcoming. There are plans to develop fibre optic communications. But expensive net time, limited knowledge among policy makers, and a lack of technical know-how are major drawbacks. Physical support exists but the skill to run operations is lacking. Content language is also a problem. Though the applications are limited by lack of knowledge in English, the momentum is picking up like the use of micro finance software.

Bangladesh

Bangladesh has three Internet service providers and two capacity building IT organisations. But use of net for advocacy is negligible. E-mail is used for communications. In CSOs issue-based e-mail networks (national and international)

are helping in policy development. Approximately 8-10 % of Dhaka-based NGOs have their own websites. But the websites are more for displaying the presence of organisations and not for advocacy.

Taxes are high as services are provided by private sectors. The State has no concrete policy to introduce IT in government sectors. There are resource constraints and lack of knowledge to develop the IT sector. Also there is a need for a focused government policies on IT.

Sri Lanka

In Sri Lanka, most NGOs have websites but they do not update them regularly. E-mail networks and databases are used. There is large e-mail list and a wide database. In rural areas, computer penetration is very limited. War torn Jaffna stands as an exception. Because of the war there are more donations directed to Jaffna. LTTE too has its own website. Urban centres have access to the Internet. Net is the only uncensored news. Though the literacy rate is high, knowledge of English is not widespread. So there is a language barrier. Also infrastructure, like telephone, electricity, is not well developed. Telephone is semi-government owned.

Poverty, general lack of awareness, and conventional wariness about technology do not help. The government policy towards IT is encouraging. Computer education has been made a part of the curriculum and every school has been given a computer. IT schools are being established. There are plans to build an IT University. Private sector is also helping in IT training.

Pakistan

In Pakistan, the social structure and physical infrastructure to access the net have to be developed. Lack of basic education and basic IT education, and lack of infrastructure (hardware, telecommunications) is the cause. Hardware and software is getting cheaper and government policies are easing though. There is a project on for a national database. The corporate sector is interested in promoting IT and is making investments.

CSOs use emails. Due to lack of skills other resources for advocacy are not being exploited.

India

In India, support groups, knowledge bases, networking alliances, and campaigns have been developed on the Internet. But access is limited to urban centres. There is both productive and unproductive use of net. IT ventures like e-governance in Andhra Pradesh, MS Swaminathan Foundation experiment in

Pondicherry, and Maharashtra Milk Corporation are promising. The government encourages IT initiatives and there are no restrictions. There is freedom of expression but without the right to information.

Discussion

It was found that there was no consistency across the regions. The use of Internet is restricted to emails and websites are not being exploited for showcasing causes. Language is also a problem as English is not a commonly used language in the region, hence confining Internet usage to urban, English-speaking users. There is a lack of infrastructure support (telephones, electricity) and hardware resources. Often senior management isn't comfortable with new technology and in some instances haven't heard of it. Though Linux is more compatible to the value systems of the voluntary sector, the knowledge to install and use it doesn't exist and to make people adapt to it will be a new task altogether. In the region, India and Pakistan are quite conversant with IT but still need to find means to make it productive for the development sector.

DAY 2

Day 2 started with presentations of case studies of initiatives that have used IT to further social development. Presentations were made by panellists from across the country.

One World: A good illustration of a campaign site Sunil Abraham, *Mahiti*

Sunil Abraham, of Mahiti made a presentation on the services of oneworld.net. The participants were given a net tour of a variety of socially conscious websites like oneworld, Bretton Woods Project (a watchdog of World Bank), Corporate Watch, ICT, Fantasy World Order and media channel (media on media), however focussing on oneworld and all what it had to offer: Radio programmes that could be downloaded and broadcast free of cost, AIDS information, services like ethical products, jobs, volunteers, news. Oneworld has country-wise news editions also (Africa, Europe, Latin America, south Asia). So you can navigate Oneworld country wise too (See [full_coverage_by_country.htm](#)) . Organisations can enlist in the search engines of these websites.

Discussion

Participants wanted to know how they could attract the attention of a casual browser. And how they could do any advocacy through oneworld's website. Abraham told the participants that oneworld was a listing of campaigns, and not a campaign in itself. But it would be a good idea to get enlisted with it and submit one's organisation on a search engine.

How could one become a member of oneworld? An application form and a partnership agreement is available on their website. The bigger the organisation,

the more it has to pay to become a member. As a partner, your organisation has access to the partner section that offers hosting services and training resources. Many organisations have websites but they are not available on the net because they are not properly registered in search engines.

Click on [One World\oneworld_net_home_page.htm](#) and [oneworld.net_by_topic.htm](#) for more information on oneworld.

Developing Vernacular languages for Effective Content Mr. Prem Anand, Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (CDAC)

One of the biggest obstacles identified on Day 1 was the language barrier in Internet access and use in South Asia. CDAC has software that is compatible with regional languages. Indian languages did not have operating software so CDAC developed vernacular language packages using GIST (Graphics and Intelligence based script technology), ISCII (Indian script code for information interchange) and ISFOC, a font-encoding scheme. All Indian languages are phonetic in nature. CDAC has launched GIST for using mail, Talash, a language search engine, and tools for software application developers like iplugin.

ISM Office is a Windows interface tool that allows you to choose the language you want to use. It costs around Rs.3000. Leap Office (Rs.12,000) is a word editor that gives Indian language applications more meaning with a transliteration dictionary, spell check. SHAILI is a specially designed web component and border application development tool. Iplugin is an Indian language web application development tool that doesn't restrict user in his/her applications. It is a dedicated web application tool and is compatible with Windows 95, 98, NT, and 2000. The display through browser for regional language is difficult that's why special web fonts are needed. You should install the font on your machine.

In the future, CDAC hopes to attain compatibility with universal standards: a tool to create error free documents and effortless viewing of Indian language websites. It only takes static content and interactive web content to build an Indian language website. A free copy of the iLEAP software is available for download. Please see Utilities folder for a free evaluation copy of the iLEAP software).

Discussion

There was a demonstration session to illustrate how the software can be used. The shift key was used for high sounds, example shift A + P forms the Hindi aap (meaning you). Arabic and Urdu fonts are not developed yet as they are right to left. The participants tried out languages from their regions.

Someone wanted to know what happens when you are travelling and using the standard software? Some sites have fonts that automatically download from the

WebPages. Also at www.cdacindia.com you can download free fonts. One language fonts cost Rs. 5000 and all languages cost Rs. 10,000.

A participant suggested that iplug could be included in Netscape and Internet Explorer by approaching them. Just like Flash and some other software no plug in is required.

FOR MORE DETAILS ON THIS PRESENTATION, PLEASE SEE
[Developing_Vernacular_languages_for_Effective_Content.htm](http://www.cdacindia.com/Developing_Vernacular_languages_for_Effective_Content.htm)

Wired Villages: Taking Technology to the Grassroots ***Prof. Subbiah Arunachalam, M.S. Swaminathan Foundation***

The foundation as an experiment has been running knowledge centres in the rural area of Pondicherry for 3 years. 40 per cent of the people here live below poverty line. A seven and a half minutes documentary film Reaching the un-reached was shown, showing the impact of the knowledge centres in these rural areas.

The experiment is to see if Information Technology could become an ally of the poor? In the database of the centres 180 schemes for the poor have been categorised, the prices of paddy, and official below poverty line documents have been entered. The weather for coastal region is available to fisher folk before they go out fishing. Interactive CDs are used to educate by the schools. The centre also maintains local data on doctors and hospitals. The villagers find out timings and availability before venturing out. There is also a TV, reading room, and radio.

Each centre has a reading room and about six computers. The computers are run on solar hybrid power. The telephone is wired and wireless (analogue), voice and data capable. There are three dial-up accounts and PSTN wired lines

It has been found that user-friendly technology is accepted even in rural areas.

Discussion

The experiment interested the participants and there were many questions. To begin with they were keen to know the cost to date and if any services were being charged for. The cost so far has been \$60,000 Canadian. What is the running cost? Mainly the rent and telephone bill are the running costs. It costs less than running a school. The villagers take care of the salary of the volunteers through charges on users. What are future funding plans? The villagers say that they will fund the centre from revenues from the Panchayat, village market, and temple funds.

Who are the volunteers? School children and housewives who have time on hand. At least two people will be there on a nine-hour shift. A local newspaper volunteer has trained villagers to gather information how to go to places and ask for information at bus stand, who is harvesting, who needs workers for house building. They come back and key in the information gathered.

What was the computer training given? How long did it take? In 9 days most of them were able to handle the English keyboard for Word, PowerPoint, Zip and Email.

Has any impact study been conducted? The foundation did a study to see how useful the services were to the villager. The ratings were between 1-5, where 1 was excellent and 5 was bad. All ratings were between 1-2. The aim is to empower the villagers with information. Prof. Arunachalam narrated that once the villagers had come to meet M.S Swaminathan when he was with some visitors. Previously they would have left. But now they did not leave till they met him and got their clarification. This assertion is a form of empowerment.

How are women empowered through the knowledge centres? Though fewer women come, they ask more reaching questions and are concerned with immediate financial opportunities. The women ask questions on health and welfare, alcoholism in men, new economic opportunities. It is compulsory to have women volunteers. There are women who run centres. Men come and ask them for help and this gives them a sense of empowerment, as men have to defer to their better access to information (the price of rice, weather, etc.)

And what about Dalits and other marginalised sections? Though there is no legal validity the villagers have signed an MOU with Dr. Swaminathan that they will not stop Dalits from having access to the centre like everyone else.

Is the Internet used? The Internet is not being used much. Their needs are very local. In sale of goods, middlemen profit is very high. Maybe in the future net will help them to do away with the middlemen.

What about transparency of government through the centre? We stay away from politics as the powerful could feel threatened and put us down.

FOR MORE DETAILS ON THIS PRESENTATION, PLEASE SEE [Wired Villages.htm](#)
The CD also contains the movie MSSRF-Project Story. (you can see it on a multi-media machine)

Bytes for All: A South Asian Web Initiative Fredrik Noronha, bytesforall.org

Fredrick Noronha, a freelance journalist, spoke of the role played by Internet media in development issues and the growth of this media. The divide between rural and urban area is already there so the digital divide cannot create it. Lack of access to communication tools and high illiteracy in rural areas though deepen the divide. In India only 5 out of 1000 have PCs.

Forget about being connected, two-thirds of the world has never made a phone call. The US has more computers than the rest of the world combined. Bulgaria

has more Internet hosts than the whole sub-Saharan Africa, excluding South Africa.

Besides, it is just not who has access to computers but how it is used and for what. Using radio to share information with others. But only Nepal has community radio but the rest of South East Asia does not have it.

The presentation then moved on to the applications in the Net. To begin with a mailing list is a good tool. To get a mailing list started is simple. What is needed for a mailing list to take off? You need a 40-60 critical mass of subscribers and a core team of 2-6 people to keep it going, (maintaining content, keeping the discussions going) and prompt attending to subscribe/unsubscribe.

Email is the fastest growing Internet aspect. Now there are even Indian languages on the net. Simputer (simple computer that is touch screen driven) is soon to be introduced. There are websites, free software, and networking. But will the information revolution help the development sector work? Noronha left that question to the participants to decide.

Discussion

A participant said that learning through the computer without a teacher is an experiment that is already on. (Tarahaat.com) What ever he speaks will come on screen and what ever he/she writes will also appear on screen. In Sri Lanka there is a radio programme where listeners can call in the radio and the radio surfs and then reads back the information to callers.

FOR MORE DETAILS ON THIS PRESENTATION, PLEASE SEE [Bytes_for_All.htm](#)

Digital Divide: Emergent Realities & Resulting Implications for Donor Support

Viji Balakrishnan, National Foundation for India

Viji Balakrishnan's talk was on whether IT is needed to further social causes. The talk made a negative case for facilitating civil society initiatives in using IT applications. The overall picture on the emerging digital divide came out strong, the narrative on civil society's capabilities came out weak.

Discussion

How IT can be used creatively? Megawish Foundation links terminally ill children to the net. This is the use of computers imaginatively. STD revolution happened without any push from NGOs, if market exists it will happen. But the participants seemed dissatisfied with the analogy.

NGOs themselves are divided over the digital divide. Some feel a lot can be achieved through IT, some don't share the optimism. Balakrishnan said that IT rich are different from traditional capitalist and are helpful; they are willing to train.

Balakrishnans lecture was that IT is not needed for social development. FOR MORE DETAILS ON THIS PRESENTATION, PLEASE SEE [Digital_Divide.htm](#)

E-governance

Prasann Thatte, Public Affairs Centre

Prasann Thatte of PAC outlined the e-governance scene in India. E-governance makes governmental transactions possible 24-hours a day within and across government departments, whether government to citizen or government to government. It is an attempt to replace public servants by web-based services. An early success was the railways. In India it has given boost to the Indian IT domestic industry. Baroda, Andhra Pradesh have e-governance. Maharashtra government has tied up with IBM and one thousand schools are equipped with computers.

Areas of e-governance are land records, RTO/vehicle registration, municipal administration, police and traffic control, agriculture and rural development. The obstacles to e-governance are limited access to Internet, issues of security and trust, weak infrastructure, lack of awareness. Some innovative uses were video conferencing in Andhra Pradesh, electric metering and web-based fundraising for education.

Discussion

The audience found it difficult to identify with the nature of e-governance and understand certain technological concepts, though they felt this was something they wanted to know about.

FOR MORE DETAILS ON THIS PRESENTATION, PLEASE SEE [egovernance.htm](#)

Aditya Dev Sood, Bangalore Knowledge Society

Dhar, Madhya Pradesh

Aditya Dev Sood made a short presentation showing the viability of computers and income generation centres in rural areas. Soochanalayas are like knowledge centre where people go to get information. There is a menu of complaints against government, matrimonials, village bazaar, job work /training. They earn about Rs 100-300 a day. There are some 312 such cyber-dhabas.

EVENING TALK

The Information Revolution: Thoughts and perspectives on changing paradigm in knowledge

Dr Sundar Sarukkai, NIAS

Dr Sarukkai of NIAS spoke on the Internet Revolution. He said that he was a theorist as compared to an activist, and was looking at the Information Revolution from the point of view of a thinker than a doer. Dr. Sarukkai began by asking the important question: Why are we talking about an Information Revolution? All our

social and personal acts are based on information like TV guides, railway charts. We are living in an ocean of information. So where is the Revolution?

He began with the distinction between knowledge and information. The two terms are binary, that is, seemingly independent of each other. Anthropologist Levi Strauss says on the binary mode, that one term always is more important, not just the opposite, and has a lower value. For example man and woman, or black and white. In this instance, knowledge is more privileged than information. Information was not enough to know the deeper truth. Knowledge was needed for that.

Theory generates the knowledge system. Freud in psychology and Marx were able to capture the scholastic imagination because they made grand theories on human behaviour and labour phenomenon respectively. The question is how different is knowledge from information? Given the same set of facts any theory will fit in. Theories are different stories or different knowledge systems.

Besides information is not free of contamination of knowledge. All information is theoretically loaded and has presuppositions. Information is never neutral, or sterile. What is the role of language in information? Language constructs as much as communicates. Newspapers communicate without analysis. So in a way that was the first information revolution. Advertising is another source of information.

What is the revolution? The revolution is that it is the first time in history that knowledge is not prioritised but information is. It is a different worldview. We have an information surplus. We are creating information for informations sake. Grand theories are thrown aside, now we reconstruct the world through computer mechanism. Also one set of information is not enough.

Knowledge has created more information and now there is a surplus. Knowledge can be used to show links between the surplus information we have. It is no coincidence that the Internet uses hyperlinks to lead to more information.

Information is today a mass-produced commodity, a product of the sachet economy. Information revolution has made information a mass commodity. Information Revolution has made soap out of information. And now we are looking at a consumerist model of information distribution. Where there is a surplus there is a need to have strategies to sell the surplus production. One of the strategies is to hook people on low cost products and eventually pass on the costs through higher prices.

In advocacy, the empowerment lies in how one can use information as a social commodity and empower oneself by knowing what it is.

Discussion

What can people in advocacy make of it? Firstly, that there is no neutral plane anyone is standing from. All information is a power position. There is caution of Internet, even in the workshop. We are reacting as consumers, we want to use it.

But consumers should also be producers and construct information that is more effective.

DAY 3

Summation of deliberations so far

Piush Anthony, ITfC

The third day began with the summation of the workshop proceedings of the past two days. The participants felt that the case studies were applicable to India only as the other countries did not have such a developed Internet scene. But they expressed their eagerness to learn more. Some felt that the case studies could be contextualised to their country settings as many of the socio-economical factors of the region were similar. They also wanted to experience the more practical aspects of Internet advocacy and felt the workshop so far had been more theoretical.

PRACTICAL SESSIONS

Simple ways of using Internet for advocacy

Sunil Abraham, Mahiti

The first practical session was to make posters. The posters were to be aimed at people with higher attention threshold and lesser financial threshold. The operating word is shamelessness: you have to sell your message at whatever cost. A good message should be brief but make the point. It follows the elevator speech model where you just have time from the ground floor to the 10th floor to tell a fellow rider about what you do.

First the participants took a good look at the posters and discussed what worked and what did not work in three minutes. All the points were recorded.

The things that participants felt worked were simple expressions, powerful messages, effective words, and language that was easy to read and understand and to the point, example educate your daughter. Graphics, colour combination, typesetting were other things that worked. Lines that left a question, kept one thinking, or had homework built into it were liked. Anything eye-catching that aroused curiosity, but then it should deliver. Global symbols, appealing picture, sense of humour, right amount of text, use catchy slogans, parody, piggy backing on an existing brand, forecasting the future, and no orders and arguments are helpful. People need to be interactive, but what it asks should be simple like buy nothing day.

Things that didnt work were being preachy or repetitive, language that could not be understood, complex messages, not obvious symbolism (in this case it was the cat and tiger), sermonising, loaded with too many meanings, missing message, no

call for action, not enough information, newsletter masquerading as poster and anything that starts an argument.

Summation

What was needed in a good poster was appropriate size depending on purpose, global symbol, and a picture is worth 1000 words, a punch line/call for action, mandatory information.

After this discussion the groups were split into 5 random groups. The group members were people who would have been from another activist cause. But stress here was on technique, not issue. The five groups were:

- Child Trafficking
- Deforestation
- Education
- Human Rights
- Peace

DAY 4

Practical Session

Simple ways of using Internet for advocacy

Sunil Abraham, Mahiti

Internet School, IISC

The last day. Day 4, up till lunch was a practical session at the computer lab. The participants had a busy and interesting time learning customised mail merging, effective websites techniques, electronic posters and other Internet advocacy tools.

Post lunch there was the voting on which posters and email campaigns were the best. Each person was given two votes to dispose of for poster and email. It was a difficult choice to make, going by the slim margins. The poster winner was Team 4 with their Peace in democracy poster. And Team 1 won the email votes for child trafficking.

FOR MORE DETAILS ON THIS PRESENTATION, PLEASE SEE

[An effective message.htm](#)

[mass_personalized_email.htm](#)

[web_posters.htm](#)

GROUP WORK

Looking Ahead

Action plan for the future and feedback on the workshop

Finally we had the feedback session and discussion on plans for the future. Most participants were agreed that the workshop was an excellent initiative. Some were meeting some of the neighbour countries for the first time. The interesting fact was it was an IT conference independently organised by and for third world countries. Countries like Nepal and Bangladesh felt that it was a good IT exposure for them, though many terms were too technical. The theme could have been how to influence state departments to use IT.

A participant said that one has multifaceted expectations from a workshop of this nature. The regional experiences were well reflected and they would like to replicate it in their region. We will try to apply these efforts in our region. Perhaps even have a similar workshop in our region.

What was missing according to some was that there was no participation from other countries. There should have been panellists from other countries. Though it was India centric it opened doors and made them think in that direction. Also the workshop could have had more recreational activities and more advocacy learning. Many found the practical session in the lab too short. More experts should have been brought in to address issues. Also certain resources were not realised like Dr. Sundar talk on Information Revolution which could have been taken further.

The participants liked the case studies. Even though e-governance was too complicated. It introduced a new concept. Last, but not the least everyone loved the hospitality especially the efforts put in by the two Workshop Assistants Chaitra and Gayatri.

The following were proposed for future action:

- Launch an alliance to communicate further use of IT in the development sector for regional advocacy
- Discussion for a on identified issues (see below)
- NGOs website for south Asia, a report card for NGO
- Database for NGOs in south Asia. Volunteers would maintain the websites

Discussion Issues

The following were identified:

Issue leaders (based on issues that are stronger in a particular region)

Country leaders

Dairy on development issues

List of the Discussion Fora Moderators

1. 1. Child Rights

CWCS, CEDAR, BNWLA (Bangladesh), INSEC (Nepal)

2. 2. Environment

ESDO (Bangladesh), LEAD (Pakistan)

3. 3. Human Rights
INSEC (Nepal), SPA (Sri Lanka)

4. 4. Health
CWCS Sahyog

5. 5. Political Rights
NPC

6. 6. Women Rights
BNWLA (Bangladesh)

Mahiti offered information, support service, and a soon to be coming tool update website for the participants free of cost. ITfC will co-ordinate the discussion fora on its web-site, and the issue leaders will moderate content on the discussions

A CD is being designed to be given to the participants consisting of the following utilities:

- ☐ Contact Information (participants and resource person)
- ☐ Copy of this report
- ☐ Acrobat Adobe Reader
- ☐ I-leap light version for accessing vernacular packages
- ☐ Scanned image of Posters made during the group
- ☐ Pages from oneworld.org
- ☐ Pages from Bytesforall
- ☐ Movie on Wired Village produced by the (MSSRF)
- ☐ Slides used for all the presentations
- ☐ Other Utilities

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Participant Feedback

FEEDBACK FORM

This form is meant for getting a systematic feedback from you on the various aspects of the workshop. Your feedback will help us improve the quality of

subsequent workshops. Barring statements 3,6,9,16,19,20 and 21, please give suitable ratings to all the statements on a scale of 1 to 5, where:

Rating Stands for

- 1 Strongly Agree
- 2 Agree
- 3 No Comment / Cant Say
- 4 Disagree
- 5 Strongly Disagree

Facilitation & moderation:

- 1 1 The facilitation / moderation was highly effective in:
 - ◆ initiating a discussion: *50% agreed; 25% disagreed; 25% did not comment*
 - ◆ wrapping up and summarizing the discussion: *65% agreed; 20% disagreed; 15% did not comment*
 - ◆ introducing the speakers/ participants: *80% agreed; 20% did not comment*
 - ◆ preventing the discussion from straying off: *20% agreed; 40% disagreed; 40% did not comment*

Sessions:

- 2 The sessions were excessively long.: *30% agreed; 25% disagreed; 45% did not comment*
- 3 The following sessions were too long/ short :

Long	Short
a. Case presentations (50%)	a. Practical Sessions (40%)

- 4 Too many breaks were provided between discussions: *100% disagreed*
 The lectures were pitched at a comfortable level: *48% agreed; 10% disagreed; 42% did not comment*

6 Examples cited during lectures were:

- (a) (a) Adequate Yes (100%) / No
- (b) (b) Relevant Yes (80%) / No (20%)
- (c) Improved my understanding of the concept Yes (90%) / No (10%)

7 Slides/ transparencies shown during lectures:

- ◆ distracted the attention: *15% agreed; 70% disagreed; 15% did not comment*
- ◆ aided the understanding/ were highly illustrative: *75% agreed; 15% disagreed; 10% did not comment*
- ◆ were interestingly designed: *65% agreed; 15% disagreed; 20% did not comment*

- ◆ were easily readable: *90% agreed; 10% did not comment*
- 8 Adequate time was allotted for questions and answers: 70% agreed; 10% disagreed; 20% did not comment
- 9 **9** I found question time too long/ short in these sessions (specify day & slot):
No responses obtained

Group Tasks & Exercises:

- 10 The practicals gave enough experience of Internet-based advocacy tools: 40% agreed; 60% disagreed

Instructors:

- 11 The instructors gave sufficient personal attention to each participant. *50% agreed; 20% disagreed; 30% did not comment*
- 12 The instructors were good at handling of questions and doubts. *60% agreed; 10% disagreed; 30% did not comment*
- 13 The instructors were good at simplifying the technical portions. *70% agreed; 20% disagreed; 10% did not comment*
- 14 The instructors were accessible for informal discussions. *65% agreed; 35% did not comment*

Learning:

- 15 After the workshop, I have a better understanding of advocacy concepts: 60% agreed; 25% disagreed; 15% did not comment
- 16 The part(s) of the workshop contents I now feel most confident about are (tick as applicable):
 - ◆ Conceptual inputs
 - ◆ Practical inputs
 - ◆ Both *65%*
 - ◆ None
- 17 **17** The workshop has equipped me well in making interventions in the areas that are of interest to my organization. *75% agreed; 10% disagreed; 15% did not comment*
- 18 I got enough opportunity to interact with other participants. 100% agreed
- 19 Following are the sessions I found most useful:**
 - a. a. Practical sessions
 - b. b. Key note session
 - c. c. Conceptual overview
 - d. d. Case study Wired Village
 - e. e. Case Study Bytesforall
 - f. f. Talk on Information Revolution

- g. g. Case study Development of vernacular content
- h. h. E-governance (one participant)

20 Following are the sessions I found least useful:

- a. a. Case study Digital Divide - space for clarifications; Subject quite complex
- b. b. E-governance (only relevant for India)

21 Suggestions for Improvement:

- a. a. More time for practical sessions
- b. b. More resource persons from other countries
- c. c. Better selection of speakers
- d. d. More participatory pedagogy
- e. e. Be careful not to over-load sessions
- f. f. Better selection of candidates

Logistical Arrangements
LEVEL OF SATISFACTION

	VH	H	I	L	VL	
Accommodation		45%	55%	----	----	
Communication facilities		45%	30%	10%	15%	----
Food & Refreshments	60%	30%	10%	----	----	
Supply of Necessary Information		40%	50%	5%	5%	----
Courteousness/ Behavior of Staff		80%	15%	5%	----	----
Other facilities	60%	30%	5%	5%	----	

Code

Stands for

VH	Very High Satisfaction	H	High satisfaction
I	Indifferent / Cant Say		
L	Low satisfaction	VL	Very Low satisfaction

Thanks!

INVITE WITH NEED ASSESSMENT QUESTIONNAIRE

ITfC is conducting a continuing Need Assessment of the NGO sector with respect to Information Technology. The objective of this assessment is to identify needs as felt by the sector, so that intervention is from their perspective, rather than from a purely technology oriented perspective. A questionnaire has been framed to collect information on the experiences and expectations of each NGO with respect to Information Technology and the Internet. The objective of this is to provide us information on what NGOs are looking for and enable ITfC to offer specific programs to meet these requirements.

TO SEE CLICK [Invite_with_Need_Assessment_Questionnaire.htm](#)

Please fill up and email it to ITfC and also pass it on to other NGOs that you are in touch with.

Workshop Schedule

Duration 26th January 2001 30th January 2001

Venue National Institute of Advanced Studies (NIAS),
Indian Institute of Science (IISc.) Campus,
Mathikere, Bangalore 560 012. **Tel 91 80 334 4351**

Day	Activity	Time
DAY 0 26 th Jan Friday		
	Introductory session on workshop agenda - Presentation and discussions Participant Introductions	6 to 8 p.m.
Day 1 27 th Jan Saturday		
Morning	Welcome address: Dr Samuel Paul, Chairman, Public Affairs Centre -Bangalore	9.00 a.m. 9.45 a.m.
	Opening session: Global Political Economy at the beginning of the millennium Challenges for Civil Society by Dr. Narendar Pani, Times of India	9.45 a.m. 10.45 a.m.
	Tea	10.45 - 11.00
Mid morning	Overview of Advocacy in the Information Age Challenges for the Development Agenda by Dr. K. Gopakumar, Public Affairs Centre Session 2: Assessment of IT needs of the Social Sector Presentation and discussion of ITfC survey findings Mr. M. Vijay Baskar, ITfC	11.00 12.00 12.00 - 1.00
	Lunch	1.00 2.00
Afternoon	Group Work: Identifying issues, challenges within the South Asian regional context and the scope for use of IT in addressing these	2.00-4.00
Evening	Shopping Time	Start at 4.00
Pre- dinner	Brief presentation on PAC, Mahiti, ITfC and Asia Foundation	

Day 02 28 th Jan Sunday		
Morning	Case studies of initiatives that have used IT to further social development (presentations by panelists from across the country)	9.00
	Assessing a campaign site (One World) Mr. Sunil Abraham, Mahiti	10.00
	Developing Vernacular programmes - Mr. Prem Anand, Centre for Development of Advanced Computing	10.00 11.00
	Commentators / Moderators: Mr. Gopinath, Charity Aid Foundation, Mr. Ashish Sen, VOICES	
	Tea	11.00 11.30
Mid -Morning	Wired Village Prof. Subbiah Arunachalam, MS Swaminathan Research Foundation	11.30 12.30
	Discussions Raising Issues	12.30
	Commentators / Moderators: Mr. Gopinath, Consultant, Mr. Ashish Sen, Voices	1.00
	Lunch	1.00 2.00
Afternoon	Case studies continued	
	Digital Divide Project Ms. Viji Balakrishnan, National Foundation for India	2.00 3.00
	A South Asian Resource Site (Bytes for all) Mr. Fredrik Noronha	3.00 4.00
	Commentators/Moderators: Ms. Seema M	
	Tea	4.00 4.30
	E-Governance Mr. Prasann Thatte , Public Affairs Centre	4.30 5.30
	Discussions Raising Issues	5.30 6.00
	Commentators/Moderators: Ms. Seema	
Evening	Evening Talk The Information Revolution thoughts and perspectives on changing paradigms in knowledge by Dr. Sundar Sarukkai, NIAS	7.30-8.30

Day 03 29 th Jan Monday		
Morning	Session Summation of deliberations so far by Piush Antony, ITfC	9.00 9.30
	Practical Session Simple ways of using Internet for advocacy Mr. Sunil Abraham, Mahiti	9.30 3.30
Afternoon	Visit to IT Park Session Infosys Technologies, Infosys City, Electronic city	3.30-6.30
Day 04 30 th Jan Tuesday		
Morning	Practical session (at Internet School, IISc.) Simple ways of using Internet for advocacy - Electronic posters; Mass personalised e- mailing; Effective Web sites by Mr. Sunil Abraham, Mahiti	9.00 1.00
Afternoon	Group Work Action Plans for future	2.00 4.00
Evening	Evaluation of the Workshop & Valediction	4.00 - 5.00

Photographs

See the sub folder Photos for the photographs taken during the workshop.

POST WORKSHOP PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK

See sub folder-post workshop participant feedback.

FREE SOFTWARE

The following are the free software available in this CD

- 1 1 iLEAP
- 2 2 Adobe
- 3 3 Get Right