

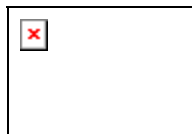
Workshop on "Audio Visual Resources for Development: Moving towards Open Paradigms"



June 15th, 2006
Bangalore

Workshop Report

IT for Change
With HIVOS India
The Association for Progressive Communication
National Institute for Smart Government



IT for Change held a workshop on "Audio Visual Resources for Development: Moving towards Open Paradigms" in Bangalore in June 2006. The workshop was the first step in setting up of a repository of Developmental Audio Visual material. Participants included representatives from NGOs, government departments and filmmakers.

Rationale:

New technology developments have greatly impacted all processes related to audio visual content – production, distribution as well as consumption. All these technology processes are much cheaper today than just a few years back, and much more accessible to common, i.e. non-specialist, users of technology.

The use of AV content in the development arena is seen at two ends. At one end, many NGOs today produce AV development content. However, this content is either for advocacy purposes or for process documentation (for internal use and for funders). In either case, grassroots communities, that are the target group of development interventions, are mostly not the intended audience. Even if some content is made explicitly for the grassroots groups, the production and distribution processes around them are not optimal because these are one-off attempts, lacking scale and sustainability. Mostly, such content have limited viewing within the directly targeted communities, and is hardly ever shared with other similarly placed communities who could also gain from it.

On the other end are numerous participatory video initiatives, where members of the community are encouraged to do their own videos. However, typically, in these cases, the processes for availability of sufficiently rich AV content are not sustained by adding AV content taken from external sources, , which could hugely complement what is developed within the community. Most of these participatory video initiatives have not grown beyond demonstration projects.

We see that development content producers and content users (as a group and not just one-to-one) are not talking to each other. Most content producers implicitly realise that their content is not really mass-consumed by grassroots groups for whom the content is intended, and is mostly accessed by their peers and other intermediary development agencies. Their production and distribution processes therefore remain oriented to these groups.

Similarly, (potential) content users – communities and CBOs, and grassroots NGOs – do not develop the needed elaborate processes of accessing, micro-distributing and viewing of AV content in their development processes, because they 'know' that appropriate AV development content is not available in the quantities that can sustain such processes.

Both sides are right, individually. But taken together the two are wrong. The point therefore is to break this vicious circle. Some content producers have moved into open content paradigms, making their content available free of cost, and legal to copy. Many have tried their own outreach program, including going out and arranging community viewing. But these have had limited impact.

The solution has to be sought by content producers and users collaborating together. On the one hand, more producers need to be guaranteed that their content will reach intended grassroots groups in large numbers, and will only be used for purposes, and in the manner, they agree to. On the other hand, user groups need to be assured that if they invest in AV content viewing related processes, adequate content will always be available freely to sustain these processes.

The workshop was planned in order to attempt a reconciliation of the above chasms. It was designed not only to address issues at a theoretical level but to set off processes of easy and free availability of diverse AV development content to various user groups.

Objectives

The workshop aimed to

1. Initiate a policy dialogue on free sharing of audio visual (AV) development content aimed at grassroots interventions, so that these interventions can be strengthened.
2. Kick-start a process for establishing a centralized hub for all such AV development content that is available for free sharing, in a manner that is easily accessible to NGOs, CBOs and communities that need to access and use such content.

Session 1:

Preliminary Insights from Ongoing Research on Distribution and Sharing Practices with Respect to Audio-Visual Development Content

Anita Gurumurthy of IT for Change presented the idea behind the workshop. ITfC wanted to explore the possibilities for enabling easier access to development content, including through mechanisms that enable easier distribution and sharing. The idea was not to promote any one model but to explore options to achieve the goal of quantum change at the grassroots level.

From ITfC's experience in sourcing content for MM we realized that there is content out there by getting permission is the real challenge. We felt the need to share the notion that AV content made for development should be freely available to the intended audience. This is a supply pushed system and we would like to see it become a demand-pushed system.

So we undertook a research to find out about current practices and spoke to NGOs, media activists and government agencies. Preliminary analysis of the 20 respondents suggests that there is a certain adhoc approach to sharing that people do not examine – in many cases agencies do not know if there is a formal policy or not. We have to examine whether this adhoc approach has some inherent problems:

1. Are we being exclusionary in relying completely on networks of trust?
2. What is the opportunity cost of the lack of institutional / policy response in this case? Are we missing the opportunity to allow for deeper penetration of content through such adhocism?
3. What is the transaction cost of assessing credentials / adhoc processes of sharing?
4. Is it possible to conceive of AV content within a public good framework within non-copyright frames of reference; - Right to information? Right to education? Access to knowledge? Public accountability?

The survey also indicates that pricing in itself is not a concern but it is important to factor in the user in the pricing decisions is critical. So for development material it is critical for there to be a frequent examination of the intended audience. It seems particularly ironic when a film that cost a lot to make is not given free because it was expensive to make – should the aim not be to get an extensive distribution rather than to rely on the revenue from the film to justify its creation.

The question of what the goals of distribution are need to be raised frequently. We have to make a choice between working with the piracy model and institutionalizing sharing. Revenue model for NGO's has to be balanced against penetration of content.

There is a limited sense of ownership of the AV content and so the rules of sharing have to be reconstituted. Government organizations were more willing to share – as long as they get attribution and have the final copy. NGOs seem more concerned about the legality of sharing

We believe that it is imperative to recognize the importance of resource allocation and see that adequate content is necessary to influence habits. It is not enough to create you should have a good distribution and penetration policy also as it all part of a whole. We have to identify the bottlenecks for sharing and formulate strategies for distribution that eliminate them.

Achal Prabhala of the Alternate Law Forum addressed the question what *is* a copyright? An exclusive set of rights granted by the law for a limited time for the expression of an idea. It is important to know that there is a distinction between rights *owners* and rights *holders*. WTO has served to globalize the primacy of copyrights and this has led to issues especially in the field of medicine.

Technology has facilitated using and accessing and sharing of audio-visual material. IT has also underlined that we do not create alone. The shared nature of creativity has also caused concerns about plagiarism and misuse. The case of Kavya Viswanathan has been well publicized.

Public funds does not always translate into public gains and it is important to address the question of who gets access and if government agencies and filmmakers are doing their part in creating access.

FOSS is nice but a legal frame work is important. The principle behind copy left is that rights are important for sharing. It allows sharing while acknowledging the creator's original context.

What is the government's participation in the Intellectual Property debate? Public funds should be equated with public responsibility. Let us take the example of pricing of medicines. There is a focus on access in debates on pricing of medicine and that focus is necessary for AV material made for Development and creative people can do a lot to ensure this.

Session II

Content Sharing – Perspectives of AV Content Producers

Geeta Narayanan of Srishti School of Art, Design and Technology moderated the session.

Chandita Mukherjee of Comet Media Foundation spoke about what the media should do. A creator bridges the gap between vision and audience. With development media the focus is on the making itself. New technology allows a lot of flexibility in allowing even a single person to deal with all aspects of production. However, it is critical to have a shared understanding and a common set of conventions in distribution. Analyze, discuss, dialogue with content is critical with distribution of content otherwise it will be passive viewing. It will be interesting to think in terms of developmental content fitting within popular media frameworks to increase popularity of development content. Chandita disagrees with the model of development media as a lamp being lighted in the darkness as this implies an unenlightened audience. The audience is aware and capable of thinking for themselves and this is something that has to be acknowledged in all AV strategy.

In the discussion following the presentation, Pankaj Gupta of IDRC raised concerns about the vision and point of view of poor people being represented by middle class filmmakers. There was also a debate about whether developmental content should be presented in a 'sophisticated' package.

Anita Gurumurthy felt that there is some knowledge that cannot be created by communities and that the cutting-edge paradigm can be facilitated by communities. IT for Change does not believe in hierarchies of creation.

There are educational films that may supplement a text book and films as stand alone AV resources. The categories of films and ideas of reality need to be examined and understood.

Deepa Dhanraj, an independent filmmaker, argued that film makers have limited rights and the contracts with funding agencies have to be looked at anew. Even though filmmakers create the content they do not always get to decide when and where the films will be screened and it is a reality that sometimes with changing political climate, films don't even see the light of day.

At the distribution end, there are several details that the filmmaker cannot control. The way things get pulled out of context, even when the intentions are good, distorts the film makers message. There is no institutional mechanism to deal with this. And this can be disastrous if the film is used by hate-mongering groups.

Following the presentations there was a discussion about the right of paternity and the right of integrity. The **Legacy of Malthus** was an example of Deepa having used films in the BBC archive to portray Robert McNamara in an unflattering light. The concern is that this can be done with other film archives also. Using film clips without context is a problem that worries filmmakers when there is talk of open use of content.

Vandita Sharma of Education Development Centre (EDC) spoke from a funders' perspective. Technology Tools for Training and Teaching called the T4 project of the EDC has commissioned lots of AV material. The issues in AV content have been affordability of technology; regional cultural content; language; relevance to target audience; replicability and dissemination and preparedness for scaling-up. The programme was itself created by teachers.

It is important to create demand-driven content and involve the audience in the developmental stages. Dissemination being an important step, we have to give appropriate training and support and also set up systems of feedback and support. Content is meaningful only if you provide free access.

In response to Stalin's question about censorship, Vandita said that EDC does not censor. The contract provides the framework and that is the only guideline they work with in the production and screening of their AV material.

Session III:

AV Development Content – User Communities' Perspective

Nupur Basu of NDTV moderated the session and spoke about needing a roadmap for the AV medium as she was introducing the panel.

Shankar Jagannathan of the Azim Premji Foundation shared the experiences of his organization is using ICT to further their educational outreach efforts.

How do you reach an audience when you have content and why is there no proliferation of content to reflect reduced production cost? Target audience has to be visualized. Peripheral costs are still high and that is the reason for lack of proliferation.

There has been measurable impact of computers in education on children in rural Tamil Nadu. One of our challenges is making material approved by teachers and enjoyed by students. The challenge of making AV content that is exciting to different age groups. It is also important to localize content. And this does not mean merely changing a name or place but make it truly relevant to the target audience.

Technology has been a good way for reaching some information to girls because some issues that teachers have had problems with has been handled more impersonally through the computers. Children in 48 schools in Karnataka are currently involved in creating content and there is spirit of excitement and increased participation in the programme.

Suchitra Vedanth of Mahila Samakhya Karnataka (MSK) spoke of the Mahiti Manthana project that they are partnering with IT for Change. MSK has been working since 1989 – working in empowering women and it has been getting more heavily into girl child education.

MSK is eager to use the impact of ICTs in their goals of women's empowerment; they believe that it can be very effective. The process has been exciting. Focus of MSK is on helping women seek their rights. The telecentre becomes a tool for this. MSK have not used too much AV material so far but sees that it can be a useful tool where the audience is illiterate or neo-literate. This experimental project has allayed our concerns and showed us the potential of ICT for women's empowerment. The access to usage is an important emphasis of the project.

J.P. Solomon of Maya spoke of the revenue model of NGOs making films for money. The discord between the organization's idea and filmmakers' agenda prompted Maya to start their own film making unit. It is not easy to make good quality movies.

The issue of just making the rushes available is not like making java beans or code language available. There are parts of rushes that are sensitive and parts that are not; how open are they to make their rushes to other people. I think that giving rushes is not just the issue but they have to be logged and it is a complicated process.

Distribution is not a matter of one organization's intent but a matter of using a wider and centralized platform for attracting different groups of people.

K.V.R. Tagore – Commissioner, Dept. of Information, Government of Karnataka, represented the government experiences in trying to use Audio Visual material for Development activities. Government tries active distribution. Getting films that actually attract the audience is a challenge. People come after the newsreel and prefer TV serials to even very good developmental films. Government as the source is also seen as suspect.

Getting money is a challenge and generating public interest is a challenge. Distribution is a problem. Government does have some mechanisms though and it can help an NGO which has a good film to distribute.

There are some basic rules for the kind of films that government agencies can commission. Government in power cannot be just glorified; award winning film makers and set budget are there that have to be used.

An IT hub has been started by the Department of Information. We want to create a knowledge centre. Demand will decide what is the necessary information that we need to make available there. Government policy on dissemination is that it does not say do not copy. The idea is to leave CDs there so that people can access them. We will stock AV material from whomsoever it is available.

J.P. Solomon expressed concern that making government in charge of the hub can make it an unnecessarily bureaucratic process during the question-answer session that followed the presentation.

Azim Premji foundation allows copying for non commercial use but does feel that it is important to make sure that a third party is not profiting from the material.

Stalin emphasized that censorship is a concern for all kinds of films that are viewed in public spaces.

Session IV:

Open Content Paradigms – The Revolution that Development Communication has been Waiting for?

Ashish Sen of Voices introduced the panel by saying that open content paradigms is a matter of inclusion, ownership and a matter we have to approach as consumers *and* producers of content.

Lawrence Liang of the Alternate Law Forum talks about copyright and censorship; shoot, share and create. It is important to understand that notion of new media and the prosumer: the producer and consumer. The spirit of new media is about tinkering out of curiosity. The notion of public good is redefined in the context of global media.

Nigeria's distribution model of no theatres and producing 1200 films is an interesting phenomenon. They have a distribution system that allows this apparent contradiction. This has strong implications for developmental media. We do not need to have places to screen to make screenings happen.

The dangers of living in a copyrighted world is that collaborative production is hard; open content allows that kind of joint production.

Let us look at the economics of documentary films – how much money is truly made from royalty? You can restrict the use to non-commercial use through your license and ensure that nobody else is benefiting from your work and still manage to share with Development agencies.

Open content does not mean absence of copyright just a redefinition of it to optimize distribution. There has to be a balance between the rights of creators/producers and users.

Deepu of Pedestrian Pictures felt that there is no issue of documentary films not being shared. Footage is shared on a relationship basis and there is no mechanism for sharing footage. Every footage works within a political context and without the context the footage becomes irrelevant. If there is no funding from royalty then alternative funding or sponsorship becomes an important question. A responsible alternative distribution system will have to address the issues of an economic basis for it to be easily accepted. How do we create a sustainable way of ensuring that filmmakers are able to afford the distribution model?

Pedestrian Pictures also believes in the validity of Piracy as a way of distributing AV material. It is an anti-authoritarian act that subverts the idea of copyrights. And there is a communication attached to piracy.

Abdul Rehman Pasha of IT for Change shared the details of the organization's Mahiti Manthana project. Mahiti Manthana is being implemented with MSK and the project goals are carefully aligned with MSK's vision and agenda. Our Audio Visual material production is based on the monthly targets of MSK as we want to use the material to increase the reach of their message. There have been video screenings of our material and sourced AV content – we give metadata so as to make it available for other agencies. The power of the AV medium draws the attention of the target community. We believe this will be further aided by localized programming. It will also be good to give tools of creation and editing to the community.

Stalin of Drishti Media, Arts and Human Rights spoke about their philosophy filming and screening. They find that there is no question of seeking an audience as there is always one there for every film that is made. We do not use Creative Commons and share only where there is friendship and trust. Coming from Gujarat we have seen disaster tourism and people who seek to profit by selling footage of disasters. This is unacceptable and makes us share only where there is a history of trust.

Our focus as media activists has been on helping community's make videos of themselves thought the Video Volunteers project. Censorship is a big concern for us as all public screening are supposed to have a certificate from the Censor Board. We are against this on principle and are interested in exploring licensing options that deal with this issue.

In the debate following the panelists presentation, Parminder Jeet Singh of IT for Change stressed the importance of open content in creating a process *within* the system. While there are ways to circumvent copyright laws by ignoring them, legalizing sharing will enable an open and free atmosphere that will greatly benefit the target audience of all development films.

Session V:

The Way Ahead – Putting Your Money Where Your Mouth Is

The last panel of the day was co-ordinated by **Parminder Jeet Singh** and with representatives from earlier panels, the session sought to explore the path forward.

Achal Prabhala floated a few proposals to explore what kind of sharing will work. He wanted to examine what kind of footage or film will be easily shareable. Filmmakers he felt need to negotiate different kinds of rights with commissioning agencies.

Deepa spoke of the responsibility of government agencies who spend a lot of money and feels that there should be increased accountability.

Parminder clarified that the idea of a centralized hub does not have to be a physical space and it does not have to have one ownership. Let us get together the NGOs and codify what has been made and proceed from there.

Participants from the Department of Information spoke about their films, the focus of the films and their methodology of screening.

The session concluded with the understanding that, while there are concerns among filmmakers about misuse of footage and about censorship, it is important to strategize and pick focus issues and to guarantee the breadth and depth of impact we should move towards an open paradigm for sharing of Development related AV material.

Outcomes of the workshop

The workshop did manage to achieve its objectives – open up a dialogue between actors in the AV content arena, and discuss the possibilities for a mechanism to share content with grassroots groups. The most critical outcome was that the group gathered was able to take away at the end of the day, the fact that there are choices available for copyrighting content other than through conventional options.

From our point of view, we were able to address the following

- Get actors in the content domain with somewhat conflicting approaches and worldviews, to talk to each other – on their perceptions, concerns, and what they feel are solutions wrt reach of developmental AV content to users.
- Make headway with state agencies and departments on new possibilities - for sharing information, disseminating content, and in commissioning AV content to film-makers. There was considerable enthusiasm at the government end and from the department of Information and Broadcasting, to education, rural development and women and child, for 'learning' and working together towards a common mechanism that could enable easy access of content.
- Move towards a buy-in for a content aggregation effort to have an online repository of open content. IT for Change said it would initiate this effort and sought cooperation from all those present at the workshop.