

The Concept of Community Video

Introduction:

Abhivyakti's Community video evolved as a natural progression of our work from being the expert to co-creator as we believed that it was possible to learn and co-create together. Our philosophy was rooted in the belief that access to technology was easy, and the need to narrate a story was present in each one of us. This led us to think of ways to make marginalised communities partner us in telling their own stories through video. The idea of community video that is film by the people, for the people and of the people was born few years ago. The marginalised communities had the potential to create and share their stories. The problems faced by these communities are basically about survival in hostile conditions and exclusion. From the scarcity of resources, unemployment, preserving their culture, their struggle is intense, and is noticed neither by the authorities nor by the larger civil society. The challenge is giving visibility to the social apathy faced by the marginalised communities to enable them to communicate their stories and demand for social justice. Even the spaces to speak out their problems have shrunk. In such a context, it becomes imperative to give visibility to the basic issues of survival faced by vulnerable communities through their own words and images.

The technology of video film-making is not new but we introduced it believing that it is an empowering process for the marginalised communities to learn and tell their own stories. The shift was from us as experts/outsideers to them as co-creators. We think the weight of the story and the issue multiplies considerably if the story is narrated by the community itself. Our methodology was a process of dialogue, capacity building, collaboration and support. Stories emerged through intense workshop, conveyed and advocated by the community itself. The process is intense as the members learn to turn the issue into a script, shoot the required scenes, edit it and make a final copy through their own efforts.

The process of community video tries to shift the balance to such communities and empowers them to become creators themselves. It also enables them to take the video to the civil society in innovative ways to disseminate in public spaces and engage in dialogue with various audiences. This self-advocacy by identifying the issue, learning and producing a film, and generating dialogue with the external world is a decisive process of leadership development, deepening democracy and active citizenship.

What is our aim?

Our aim is to build the capacities of grassroots groups/marginalized communities to share their struggles and dreams through the process of community video. We identify such grassroots groups/communities around Maharashtra and through the process of participatory methodology train them in scripting, shooting, and editing videos in a phased manner over a period of time. This enables them to create and convey their video stories before the civil society in public screenings.

Favourable climate:

We believe that the some factors like the current political climate is favourable towards using ICT material. Social media is becoming the main driver to deliver messages directly from the grassroots to the Government. The technology has become accessible. A smart phone can capture and record

images which can be made into a strong message. Most of the people have now access to such devices. People are adopting and embracing these technology-driven changes without fuss. The demand is rising. There is also a policy initiative to research into the digital divide and take steps to bridge it. The target group too is not averse to learning new technologies or using it to their benefit as our experiences of the current project show. The marginalised people see hope and empowerment in using it. Their behaviour is favourably disposed towards learning even difficult task of editing on a computer. Groups like rag-picker women who were illiterates learnt editing a video film on computer. Lastly, we now have a methodology of using community video for generating awareness and community actions.

We have successfully facilitated many such films and their screenings have enabled the relevant authorities to become aware of the diverse problems that abound in such communities. We have worked with women rag-pickers of Nashik who collect trash from the streets and who are usually branded as thieves. They were able to make a film and convey their anguish, succeeded in erasing this stigma from their collective identity. When the civil society members – including the police – saw the film, there was an intense dialogue wherein the women rag-pickers were able to advocate their plight and the authorities were compelled to take due cognizance. In other instance, a slum community came together in Nashik to clean an old contaminated well, and make its water available to the members for cleaning and other purposes. It made the members realise the power they have to solve their own issues without completely depending on external authorities for providing services.

We have also observed that while the film-making aspect is critical, it leads to several other important processes within the community and its external engagements. Overall, it is an empowering process as it enables leadership, the confidence to voice concerns, and enhances self-respect and collective spirit. The storytelling is not a one-time process. The community continues to meet, dialogue, and voice other issues, and other community producers step in to take the lead. Community video triggers many small actions which move from video story-telling to other serious issues through networking with advocacy groups and NGOs who join in to ensure justice and development.

The methodology –

We follow a simple process. The focus and emphasis is on partnership as our role is that of an enabler, of facilitation, of learning, of dialoguing, providing knowledge inputs, devising strategies for actions.

- **Preparatory phase:**

We spend considerable time in partnering with a local grassroots groups who work directly with the marginalised communities. We then meet with local members which has a good balance of gender, age and caste variables. We spend considerable amount of time with the chosen members talking about their village, and ask them to identify issues, which is close to the community and which the community wants to address. The process helps to build and strengthen relationships and also understand each other better. Community members who are interested in learning the media production start showing keen interest. By end of three to four months, members of the community who are interested are informed about the process and the content of the phased workshops on video film-making.

- **Workshop on learning scripting and video shooting**

The identified participants are invited for a five days' workshop at Nashik where we are based, to develop skills on the concept of community video. This involves development discourse, methods of story-telling, how to work on the research on the social issue, develop ideas and then translate that into script, and learn techniques of video camera, practice shooting, learn to interview, record sound and capture images on video. By the end of the workshop the participants gain confidence and know-how of video film-making and they are ready with a draft version of the script.

The participant are also shown different genres of films, and they get chance to discuss their concerns amongst each other. The participants work on their ideas, and learn to present it before the group. Emphasis is on hands-on learning process where the participants are given ample time to familiarise themselves with the video equipment – camera, mike, cables, etc.

The learning is slow, however due to motivation the participants get over their anxiety of handling technology (camera) and take tentative steps towards handling the camera and writing. Writing ideas into script is again difficult and requires patience and hand-holding to take it to another level. But from experience we can say that eventually rough scripts are formulated. Based on the script and ideas, participants then go into their communities to shoot. This is an important and crucial aspect of learning video. Community members have set ways of looking at their own members. So when a familiar woman or youth member is seen with a camera or recording an interview, it is a new experience. Empowering for the video maker as it adds to the identity and for the rest of the community it shows the hope of change. A few of our young women film-makers also faced threat and ridicule. That however, added to the determination of making the films. Abhivyakti team members keep track of the progress through phone and also by accompanying the participants during the research and shooting. The accompaniment by Abhivyakti team enables dialogue and clarifications regarding the video shooting. If any additional material is needed or re-shooting is required then that too is suggested. Shooting on locations, conducting the interviews of fellow community members and officials contributes to the confidence and empowerment.

A week-long learning journey

In the second phase of the workshop the participants travel to two/three cities to expose them to styles and perspectives of other film-makers and to visit a few studios where editing and recording is available. The participants get an opportunity to dialogue with film makers, listen to their struggles and ideas and also share their own views about films and social issues for change, learn new trends and techniques. This dialogue is an important learning process to broaden their horizons and help them to reflect on their reasons to make films. Besides the dialogue, the participants get an opportunity to visit cultural spaces and other interesting events for exposure. By end of this process, the participants have enhanced confidence, clarity about their ideas, issue to be depicted and the script development.

- **Workshop on learning post-production**

After ensuring that the shooting has been completed in their respective areas, the participants are invited for the final workshop to learn how to put film together on an editing console. Each participant learns about the techniques of editing, recording sound, sound mixing, and other technical aspects. In this workshop the participants are able to operate on the editing machine and get a first-hand experience, and are able to edit and complete their films. A lot of hand-holding is needed due to the inexperience of working on computers.

Again, the focus is on enabling participants to learn the craft of editing, sound recording and post-production work of video film-making. As the work is done on computers this process is a challenge to make the learning simple. Individual time is given to enable the participant to get over their anxiety about equipment. However, this stage has not resulted in participants becoming comfortable with the editing process and will require more time and practice from the participants. Most of the community video films that have been completed have been because the Abhivyakti team guided the process until the end.

We have been able to assist in developing more than fifteen community videos until now. The issues covered are – water crisis in a village, corruption, problems of folk artists, housing, quality of food grains distributed through PDS, identity of rag-pickers, among other issues.

- **Final stage – dissemination and advocacy**

The last and the most important part of the process is to facilitate the dissemination of the video films whereby the participants are able to show/exhibit their films before their audience and conduct after-show discussions on the issue and explore the possibility of initiating actions. We have been able to use the films for reaching out to the community members as well as government authorities. The two-way process of the dialogue after the screening of the film is critical to realise the potential of action. The film acts as a starting point of the issue to be addressed while the dialogue initiated by the video maker/activist acts to take the issue further. The dialogue also enables the community to think collectively about their situation, analyse the reasons and understand their situation. We have found this useful to stimulate the community to believe in its collective power to think and act for larger benefits to them. As the stories of community video unfold before us, it is reassuring to see how the means of community video galvanises the community towards desired action. The cleaning of a community well in Phule Nagar slum in Nashik is a good example. The well was filled with trash over the years and its water had become contaminated. The well which was used once had become useless. Once the community decided to clean it in a community video initiative, it didn't take long for the community to clean it. The joy and the feeling of becoming productive was the high point for the community members as they celebrated together their triumph. Similarly, the different actions by the community whether in

unearthing corruption or getting good quality ration have demonstrated the power of acting together for a larger cause. The transformation of individuals and in some cases of the community is a pointer to various possibilities. It might take time to achieve their goals, but ultimately will lead towards to change.

Conclusion

The community video process has many important lessons. There is no doubt about its transformative potential and examples from our experience has shown it. The opportunity to the community members create their own meaning through the film-making and later through its use is in itself an empowering process. While making a film is not the prime purpose, community video facilitates many things – it brings the community together, it urges them to think together, it also brings community dynamics to the fore. The way in which all this get resolved, sometimes into concrete actions is the way, we believe towards community organisation and its conscientisation. Many communities believe that there is a way possible in face of apathy and hopelessness.