

STORIES OF CHANGE

Women and New Media in the Margins of the
Sri Lankan State



Objective of the research

To study how new media is transforming citizenship practices of women currently in the margins of political and civic life in Sri Lanka



Research questions

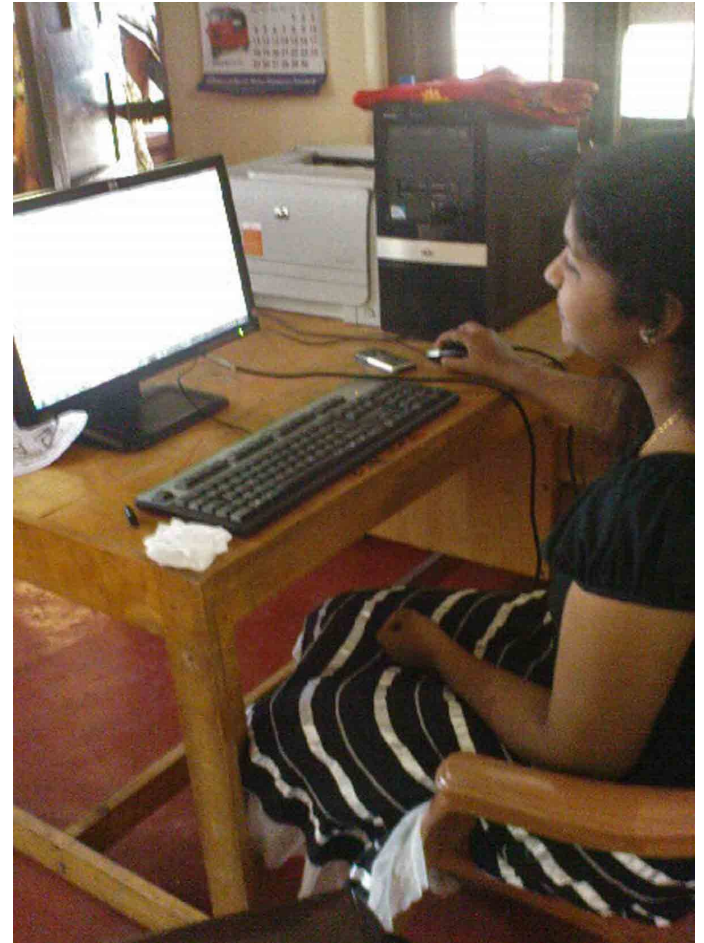
- ▶ Does new media provide a transformative platform for women to exercise their citizenship rights in Sri Lanka?
- ▶ Does new media enable women to renegotiate citizenship rights in their local contexts – such as access to resources, information, decision making bodies?
- ▶ Does new media enable women to contribute to discourses on formal citizenship at local and national levels?
- ▶ How does new media engage with and feed into (and vice versa) main stream media in terms of discourses on women and formal citizenship?



Local Level

Our Media Ourselves

*Creating women's news
from the
margins – engaging in
the public sphere as
active citizens*



Minmini News (Firefly News)

- ▶ A rural women's news network in Batticaloa
- ▶ How rural women engage with new media
- ▶ The transformative potential of new media in terms of access to services and information, informing discourses on governance and citizenship and active engagement with local level decision-making bodies.
- ▶ The real challenges that women face in engaging with new media as well as socio-cultural challenges in terms of becoming active in public space and the potential new media provides to overcome some of these challenges.



Summary

First SMS news sent 20 Jan 2011

71 news items sent over 51 days

1473 msgs sent to 27 persons



News Themes

Flood problems & responses

Women's livelihoods

GBV & child abuse

Women's achievements

Women's activism in Batticaloa

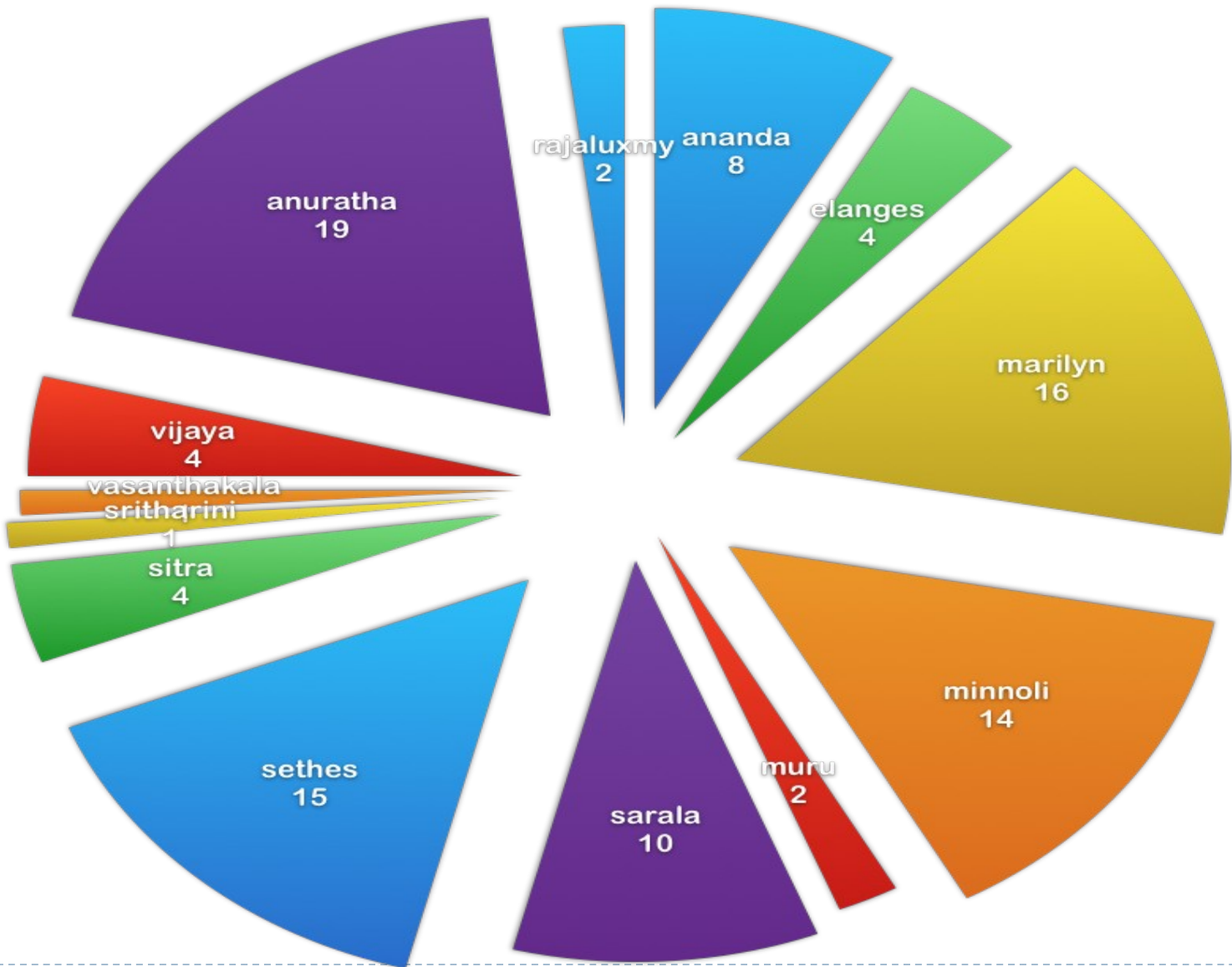
International women's activism

Public services relevant to women

Women's political participation in Sri Lanka

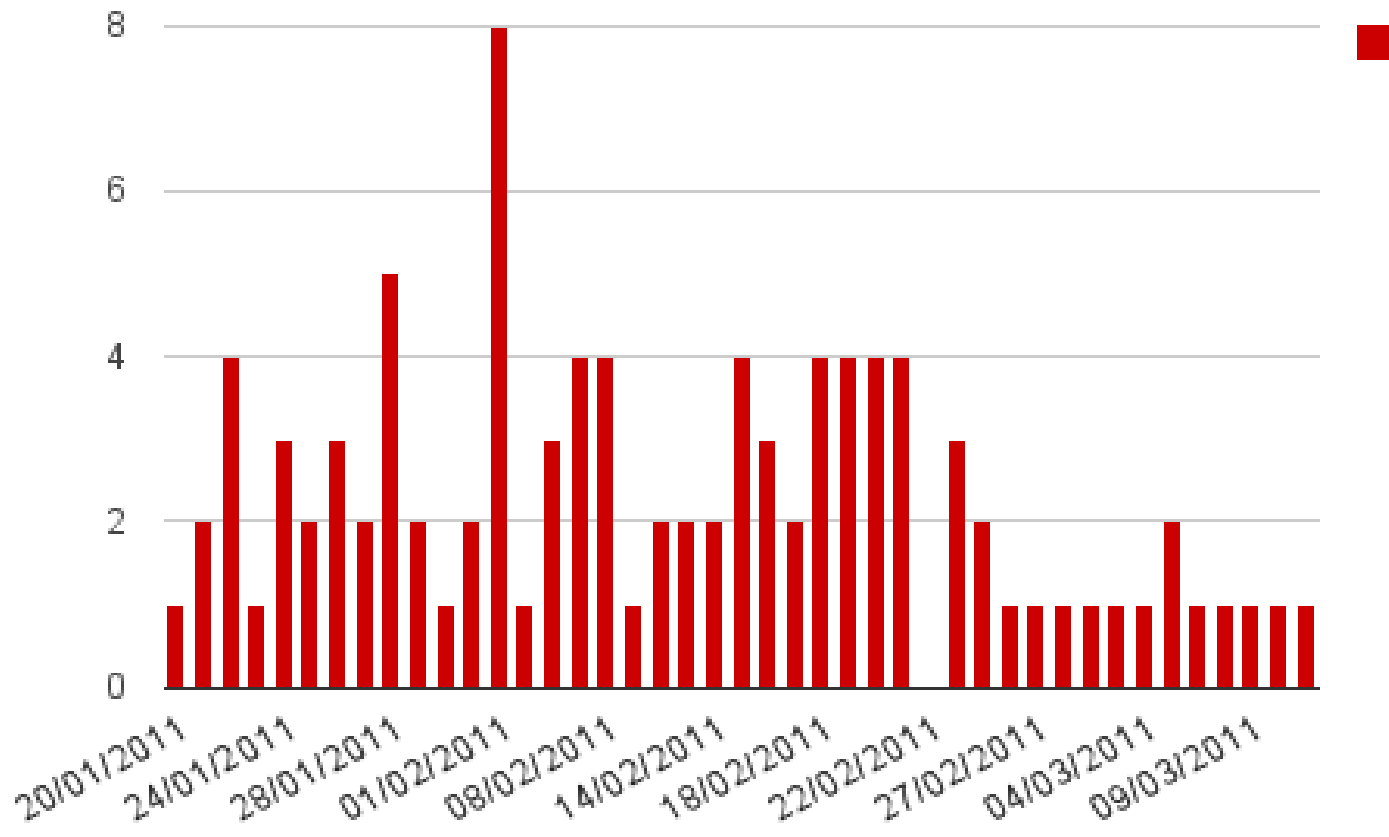


Sources



News inflow to Minmini Seithihal

20 January to 11 March, 2011



Challenges

Minimising risk (flood fears story)

Technical difficulties with incoming SMS

Few people sending in news

Ideas about what is news

Developing consistent editorial approach

Adapting language for SMS



National level

- ▶ The use of new media in a campaign to raise awareness about the importance of women in political participation.
- ▶ *Accessing information from the margins* focuses on the use of new media by women and the impact of new media on women.



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- ▶ New media campaign aimed at raising awareness on the importance of increasing women's participation and representation in mainstream politics, focusing on Local Government election of March 2011.
 - ▶ <http://srilankawomeninpolitics.blogspot.com/>
 - ▶ Observing the effectiveness of the campaign on telecentre users from selected district.
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Responding to ground realities.....

- ▶ The objective of the blog was revised
 - ▶ Developed as a platform that informs the political parties about potential women candidates through individual profiles, interviews, newspaper articles, etc.

The WMC felt it to be of more immediate use to target political parties more likely to access the net aimed at political electioneering.
- ▶ Timeline of the blog was changed
 - ▶ The blog was used solely for the local government election of March 2011 and was discontinued afterwards.



Women and New Media in the Margins of Sri Lanka Focus.....

- ▶ Working through the WMC project, we recognised a wider space/environment in which women were engaging with New Media
- ▶ Review of literature carried out for the State of the Art document
- ▶ Meetings and interviews with organisations working on ICTs and with women using IT in designated telecentres



In Brief

- ▶ Use of New Media by women
 - ▶ Survey conducted by Information and Communication Technology Agency (ICTA), to be published this year.
 - ▶ More than 50% of Nenasala users are women
- ▶ Impact of New Media on women
 - ▶ Women telecentre operators and the nexus to majority users being women
 - ▶ Small and medium business stemming from the training received at Nenasala



Exploring gender dimensions within the telecentre initiative

- ▶ Nenasala
 - ▶ Telecentres set up by the government agency ICTA
- ▶ Currently 604 Nenasala are active in various parts of the country
- ▶ Also used as infrastructure for the Sarvodaya Telecentre Family Project but function independently of the projects



- ▶ Scanning
- ▶ Printing
- ▶ E-channeling
- ▶ Photo copying
- ▶ Computer training
- ▶ Selling mobile phone cards
- ▶ Blank CD selling and writing
- ▶ Laminating and binding
- ▶ Internet services, E-mail
- ▶ Downloading data and information
- ▶ Telephone calls and fax (local & international)

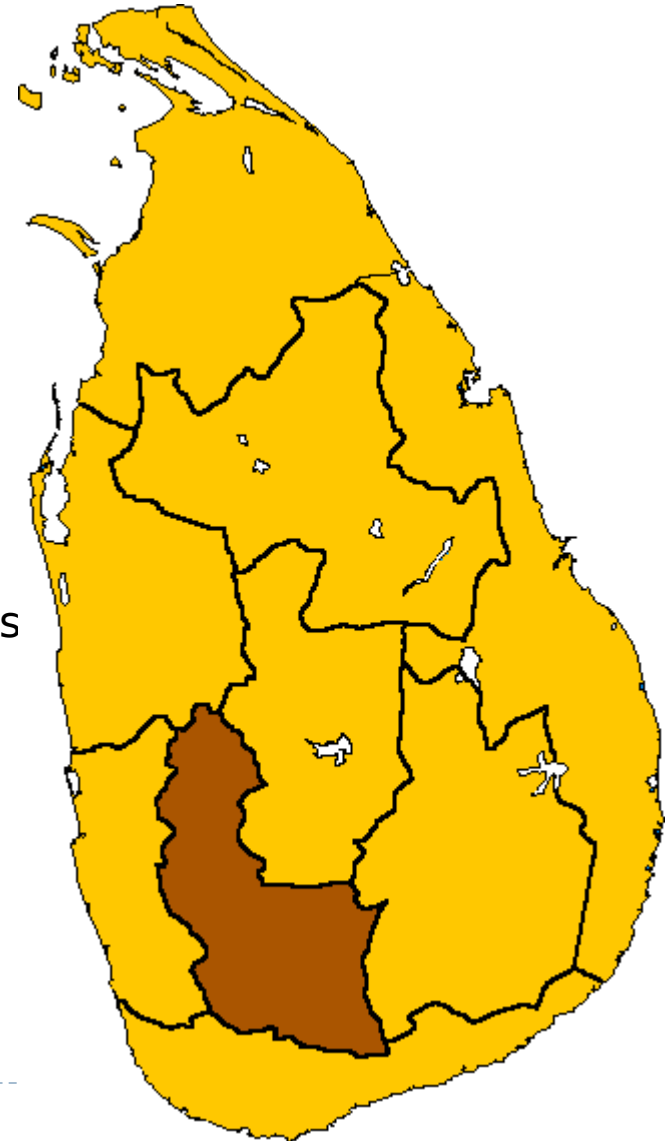


Project	Description
Plantation Women's Development Society	Establishing an information center for empowerment of women
CPA	IT training for grassroot CSOs. Newsletters developed by the community using unicode.
Rajarata Nenasala	e-Commerce - establishing marketing channel for small businesses
Woman & Child Development Foundation	Use of ICTs in improving markets for local coir products. Enhancing tourism industry through improving ICT literacy of community engaged in tourism and in developing websites for small hotels/ rest houses
Nenasala e-Savi Samaja Sanwardana Ayathanaya (Godakawela Nenasala)	Capacity building of women entrepreneurs Information on products of women entrepreneurs published on e-commerce sites.
Nenasala Sooriyawewa	Vehicle, driver and equipment ready. Mobile library going to selected areas as per the given time

Case Study 1

Nenasala Godakawela

- ▶ Sabaragamuwa province
- ▶ Woman telecentre operator
- ▶ Majority women users
- ▶ Questionnaire
- ▶ Nenasala courses
- ▶ Other initiatives
 - ▶ Translation of wikipedia articles into Sinhala





Nenasala e-Savi Samaja Sanwardana Ayathanaya

- ▶ Capacity building of women entrepreneurs through e-commerce
- ▶ Handicraft Lanka
<http://www.handicraftlanka.com/>
(currently being revamped)





Case Study 2

- ▶ IT training for grassroots CSOs
 - ▶ Sinhala Tamil Rural Women's Network, Nuwaraeliya
- ▶ Newsletters developed by the community using unicode
- ▶ Out of the 38 participants, 24 were women
- ▶ Received comprehensive training on computer skills, web based communication skills and newsletter writing

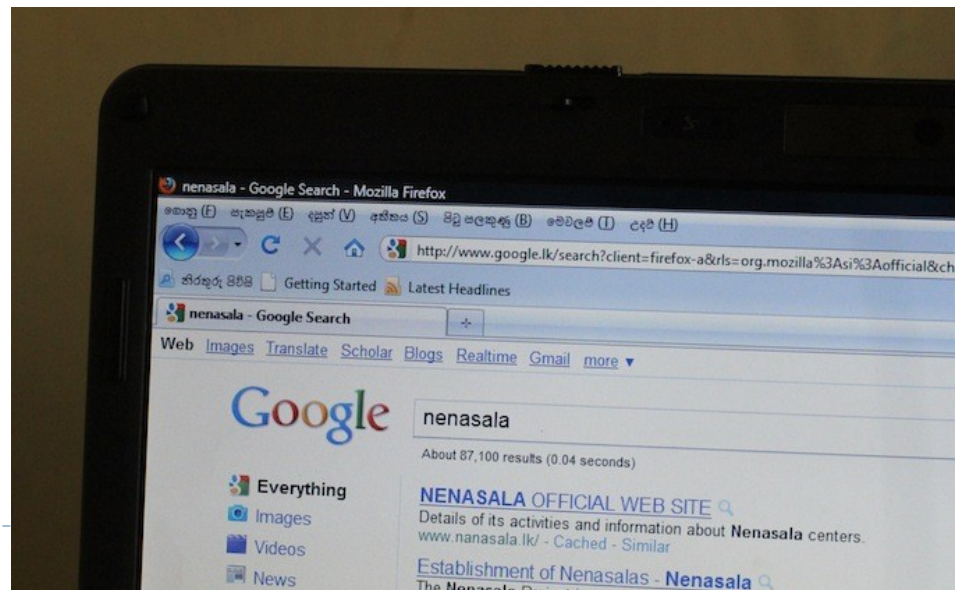


- ▶ Introduced the concept of Citizen Journalism to the participants and got them actively involved in citizen reporting.
- ▶ At the workshops, participants wrote their own news pieces and stories to the Vikalpa Citizen Journalism website <http://www.vikalpa.org>
- ▶ Some of the workshop participants keep on sending their community news and stories to Vikalpa.
- ▶ They have been included in the list of the provincial reporters Vikalpa and are constantly contacted for news and articles about the issues pertaining to their communities.



Challenges

- ▶ Lack of a focus on women users and gendered aspects in access to ICT on a national level
- ▶ Issue of language – most telecentres operate entirely in Sinhala or Tamil which has posed difficulty when conducting interviews, surveys, etc.



Next Phase

- ▶ Gender audit of local language blogs
- ▶ Survey of local language bloggers to determine whether their citizenship practices have been transformed due to the use of new media
- ▶ Survey of women entrepreneurs who use ICTs to conduct small and medium businesses
 - ▶ Nenasala users who complete the introductory course are encouraged to obtain the national qualification (NVQ) from the Vocational Training Authority

