

## Defining Active citizenship: A background note

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### 1. Introduction

The Mother Hypothesis of the Women-gov project is that digital technologies enable marginalised women to gain **active citizenship** at the local level, democratizing formal and informal institutions and systems, particularly in the sphere of local governance, by creating empowering ecologies constituted by new information & learning processes, new communication processes, new associational processes; and expanded possibilities for collective action. Active citizenship is operationally defined as a composite index comprising informational, associational and communicative power. This document expands this operational definition, including its various parameters and sub-parameters.

### 2. The operational definition of active citizenship used in this project : Some thoughts on Parameters and Sub-parameters

The main parameters of the operational definition of active citizenship are as follows:

#### Parameter 1 : Informational power

Informational power is understood as the power gained from access to information, including information about services and entitlements. It also refers to the power women gain from becoming key interlocutors in the local informational ecology. For example, the power wielded by women leaders, or that of information intermediaries operating community telecentres. Finally, informational power also includes the power that women gain when they acquire the capacity to be producers of information that is sought after by government officials and other groups in the community.

### **Sub-parameters of Parameter 1 narratives**

- Women's access to public information
- Women's participation in local information networks

### **Parameter 2 : Associational power and collective action**

Associational power is understood as the power gained from being a part of collective. This includes the following aspects: the vibrancy and growth of a collective, the capacity of a collective to form cross-linkages and convene public forums as well as its ability to engage in local level action (collective action) such as protest marches and filing joint petitions.

### **Sub-parameters of Parameter 2**

- Strength of women's collectives (including vibrancy, growth, cross-linkages and convening power)
- Capacity for collective action

### **Parameter 3: Communicative power**

Communicative power is defined as the power to shape the mainstream discourse in the public sphere or challenge mainstream discourse, as well as the power to open up an official communication channel (such as giving applications for entitlement seeking) and challenge informal power structures. It also includes the following aspects: the capacity to build critiques of the status-quo, acquiring voice, and building as a strong counter-public.

### **Sub-parameters of Parameter 3**

- Women's presence and participation in the local public sphere
- Women's engagement with informal power structures / local elite wielding authority in the community
- Women's participation in / appropriation of media for content generation processes
- Women coming together to build a counter public (and building a peer based group around the project, that uses technology)

#### **Parameter 4 : 'Winds of change'**

Additionally, we think that it becomes important to map a fourth parameter for which we like to use the term 'Winds of Change'. This is because we feel it is important to capture certain intangible changes at the community, group and individual level which may not be captured through an assessment of how the project enables its target groups to challenge entrenched power structures.

#### **Sub-parameters**

- It is important to understand how local power relations change over the life of the project, but also understand the interplay between macro-level power structures and the operations of power in the immediate life-contexts of the women. This interplay, what we like to call 'Big society power versus embedded power', must be unpacked in order to effectively understand the relationship between 'structure and agency'. This is especially challenging in the network age where networks simultaneously operate as structural constituents, and as actors within structures.
- We also need to track how the women involved in the project occupy positions of 'cognitive authority' within their communities – when other groups in the community start perceiving these women as “people who know what they are talking about”.

#### **Key Dimensions to track:**

We think that key dimensions to track for each of the sub-parameters has to be evolved in a site-specific manner. The following table details out the dimensions we have identified for the India component of the project, along with sources of information for each. We have also specified which dimensions are quantitative and which are qualitative. You will also notice that the table lists out dimensions for only Parameters 1-3 and not for Parameter 4 'Winds of change'. This is because what Parameter 4 hopes to capture is largely intangible, and thus is best captured through overall reflections on the project directions rather than against very specific micro-aspects.

### **3. How can we assess active citizenship?: An illustration from the India site**

Parameters (Informational power)	Dimensions to track, to capture these parameters	Sources of information
Women's access to public information	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Overall trends in information requests at the village and block level information centre (Quantitative and Qualitative)</li> <li>2. The trends in information requests from women at the village and block level information centre (Quantitative and Qualitative)</li> <li>3. <i>Sangha</i><sup>1</sup> women's receptivity to accessing new information (Qualitative)</li> <li>4. Extent to which the village level information centres have fostered women's engagement with other public institutions, especially for claiming entitlements (Qualitative)</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1-2 can be accessed from the information register that <i>sakhis</i><sup>2</sup> (information intermediaries) at the village and block level have been asked to maintain. These registers record details of the visitors to the centre, their socio-economic profile, their information requests, and whether these requests could be effectively answered. Additionally, these registers record visits by external resource persons, local government officials etc. who may come to the centre to interact with the <i>sangha</i> women, or in order to learn more about the work of the centre.</li> <li>• 3-4 can be gauged from information shared by the <i>sakhis</i> during the monthly <i>sakhi</i> sharing meetings with the field team of IT for Change and periodic interviews and Focus Group Discussions with the <i>sangha</i> women involved in the project.</li> </ul>
Women's participation in local information networks (Note – we can explore both the rise to power of the facilitator or community	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Extent to which the information centres have enabled women to bypass informational gate-keeping at the local level (Qualitative)</li> <li>2. Extent to which the information centres have enabled women to challenge and question official data about</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1-2 can be gauged from information shared by the <i>sakhis</i> during the monthly <i>sakhi</i> sharing meetings with the field team of IT for Change and periodic interviews and Focus Group Discussions with the <i>sangha</i> women involved in the project.</li> </ul>

1 *Sangha* (which literally means group) is commonly used to refer to Self Help Groups (mainly of women) that have become widespread in rural India, in the last two decades. In this context, they refer to the Self Help Groups formed under the *Mahila Samakhya* programme of the Government of India, with whom IT for Change works with as part of the Women-gov project. *Mahila Samakhya* is a pan Indian programme of the Government of India that aims at mobilising and collectivising rural women belonging to socially and economically disadvantaged groups, with the aim of 'education for empowerment'.

2 *Sakhi* (which literally means friend) refers to the adolescent girls who function as information intermediaries in the village and block information centres run by the women of the *Mahila Samakhya* self help groups, and supported by the field centre of IT for Change, in Mysore district.

<p>leader and for the wider group of women)</p>	<p>their communities (Qualitative)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. Profile of external visitors to the information centres (Quantitative and Qualitative)</li> <li>4. Trends in information requests from government officials, elected representatives or the local political class (Quantitative and Qualitative)</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3-4 can be accessed from the information register that <i>sakhis</i> (information intermediaries) at the village and block level have been asked to maintain.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Parameters (Associational power and collective action)</b></p>	<p><b>Dimensions to track, to capture these parameters</b></p>	<p><b>Sources of information</b></p>
<p>Strength of women's collectives (includes vibrancy, growth, cross-linkages and convening power)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Emergence of new leaders within <i>sanghas</i> (Qualitative)</li> <li>2. Extent to which <i>sanghas</i> have been able to form strong associations, across local spaces (Qualitative)</li> <li>3. Linkages between block level federations and the <i>sanghas</i> at the grassroots level (Qualitative)</li> <li>4. Demonstrated evidence of <i>sanghas</i> convening village level meetings and public forums to address women's issues and/or community level issues (Qualitative)</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1-4 can be gauged from interactions with the staff of the <i>Mahila Samakhya</i> programme, the impressions that the field team of IT for Change builds from field visits, and periodic interviews and Focus Group Discussions with the <i>sangha</i> women involved in the project.</li> </ul>
<p>Collective action</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The collective bargaining capacity of <i>sanghas</i> in the local ecology (Qualitative)</li> <li>2. Demonstrated evidence of <i>sanghas</i> spearheading local level campaigns in their communities (Qualitative)</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1-2 can be gauged from interactions with the staff of the <i>Mahila Samakhya</i> programme, the impressions that the field team of IT for Change builds from field visits, and periodic interviews and Focus Group Discussions with the <i>sangha</i> women involved in the project.</li> </ul>

Parameters (Communicative power)	Dimensions to track, to capture these parameters	Sources of information
<p>Women's presence and participation in the local public sphere (includes the 'participatory sphere' where women are invited to be part of local development monitoring; participation in the <i>gram sabha</i> (village council), engagement with the political class – local government and others, bureaucracy and local institutions. (Note that visits to official spaces for queries are not covered here.. only contestations that challenge or bring women's perspectives to the table, are. The former are covered in informational power. Also, if a</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Extent to which <i>sangha</i> women participate in the <i>gram sabha</i><sup>3</sup> and <i>ward sabha</i><sup>4</sup> (Quantitative)</li> <li>2. Nature of <i>sangha</i> women's participation in the <i>gram sabha</i> and <i>ward sabha</i> (Qualitative)</li> <li>3. Extent to which <i>sangha</i> women participate in the participatory committees at the <i>panchayat</i><sup>5</sup> level (Quantitative)</li> <li>4. Nature of <i>sangha</i> women's involvement in the participatory committees at the <i>panchayat</i> level (Qualitative)</li> <li>5. Nature of <i>sangha</i> women's contestations with elected representatives and other members of the political class (Qualitative)</li> <li>6. Nature of <i>sangha</i> women's contestations with local government officials (Qualitative)</li> </ol> <p><b>Note</b> – 'Nature' - means the process relating to voice,</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 and 3 require concrete data on the numbers of <i>sangha</i> women participating in the village level forums, and we will train the <i>sakhis</i> of the information centres in the project area to collect this data on a three-monthly basis (as that is usually the interval between the village level forums).</li> <li>• 2,4,5 and 6 will be assessed from interactions with the staff of the <i>Mahila Samakhya</i> programme, the impressions that the field team of IT for Change builds from field visits, and periodic interviews and Focus Group Discussions with the <i>sangha</i> women involved in the project.</li> </ul>

3 *Gram Sabha*, which means “Village Council”, refers to the village level electorate – in other words, the body consisting of all registered voters in a village. Indian law ,policy and the resolutions adopted by an Inter-State Ministerial Conference on *Gram Panchayats* in May 1998 require the elected representatives of the *Gram Panchayat* to convene a meeting of the *gram sabha* on a single pre-determined day, at least every quarter, and the approval of the *gram sabha* must be taken before implementing any village level development works that would affect the local population.

4 The *Ward sabha* is a *Gram sabha* meeting on a smaller scale. In *Gram Panchayats* which have many wards and hence, a huge population, public assemblies are conducted in every ward of the *panchayat*, prior to the *Gram sabha* meeting to enable everyone to participate substantively in village level decision making processes.

5 This is the lowest tier of governance and administration in the quasi-federal Indian system, which is situated at the village level. Tremendous fiscal and administrative powers were devolved from the State Governments to the panchayats by the Central Government of India, through the enactment of the 73<sup>rd</sup> amendment to the Constituion of India in 1992. However, in practice, the devolution of powers to Gram Panchayats has been broached with reluctance by State Governments.

<p>women's group is acting as a group in local contestations, explicitly identifying its collective as the actor, this is mapped under associational power)</p>	<p>engagement and agenda setting / substantive participation</p>	
<p>Women's engagement with informal power structures / local elite wielding authority in the community. (We imagine community as lived space where even 'own men' and men of higher social classes need to be engaged with for gender based negotiations)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Extent to which <i>sangha</i> women are able to question local power-elite in their communities (Qualitative)</li> <li>2. Extent to which <i>sangha</i> women are able to strategically negotiate with the informal power structures in their communities, and challenge dominant discourses about women's roles(Qualitative)</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 and 2 will be assessed from interactions with the staff of the <i>Mahila Samakhya</i> programme, the impressions that the field team of IT for Change builds from field visits, and periodic interviews and Focus Group Discussions with the <i>sangha</i> women involved in the project.</li> </ul>
<p>Women's participation in / appropriation of media for content generation processes (including ownership dynamics – For example, mobile platforms may be limiting and come with some features that women fit themselves into, whereas in the case of radio content, women have the opportunity to broadcast programmes from their own radio stations.)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Number of <i>sanghas</i> engaged in collective listening in the project villages (Quantitative)</li> <li>2. Number of <i>sangha</i> women from project villages who have contributed to creation of <i>Kelu Sakhi</i><sup>6</sup> content (Quantitative)</li> <li>3. Number of feedback calls from <i>sangha</i> women in project villages, to the <i>Kelu Sakhi</i> programme (Quantitative)</li> <li>4. Substantive concerns emerging in the feedback calls from <i>sangha</i> women in project villages (Qualitative)</li> <li>5. Number of <i>sangha</i> women who have participated in creation of videos/short films from the project villages (Quantitative)</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1-10 will be assessed through the field diaries that are maintained regularly by the members of the field team of IT for Change.</li> </ul>

6 *Kelu Sakhi* which means “Listen, my friend” is a weekly radio programme that is broadcasted over the Karnataka State Open University FM channel in Mysore, between 9.00-9.30 P.M every Monday. The programme, produced by IT for Change, reaches out to women who are part of the *Mahila Samakhya* self help groups, in their idiom, and is an attempt at carving out an alternate public sphere that enables rural, *dalit* women to speak their concerns.

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6. Requests from <i>sangha</i> women in the project villages for video screenings (Quantitative and Qualitative)</li> <li>7. Requests received from <i>sangha</i> women in the project villages for specific video content to be produced/ ideas on content (Qualitative)</li> <li>8. <i>Sangha</i> women's patterns of use of the mobile phone (Qualitative)</li> <li>9. <i>Sangha</i> women's awareness about computers (Qualitative)</li> <li>10. <i>Sangha</i> women's awareness about digital photography and videography (Qualitative)</li> </ol> <p>Note – In the Brazil and South Africa context, it may be important to assess women's use of the Internet, and their participation in photography workshops etc.</p>	
<p>Women coming together to build a counter public (and building a peer based group around the project that uses technology)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Extent to which sangha women's critical awareness of their everyday life context is enhanced by <i>Kelu Sakhi</i> and the videos (Qualitative)</li> <li>2. Extent to which sangha women use <i>Kelu Sakhi</i> and videos to construct counter-narratives about gender roles and women's status in communities (Qualitative)</li> <li>3. Extent to which <i>sangha</i> women use any of the digital spaces opened up by the project (<i>Kelu Sakhi</i>, videos, SMS networks) to further their peer-learning processes – for example, collectively listening to the radio programme and discussing and debating the contents(Qualitative)</li> </ol>	<p>1-3 will be assessed from interactions with the staff of the <i>Mahila Samakhya</i> programme, the impressions that the field team of IT for Change builds from field visits, and periodic interviews and Focus Group Discussions with the <i>sangha</i> women involved in the project.</p>