



A South-South project on making local governance work for women

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INDIA: Preliminary Research Analysis

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IT for Change, Bengaluru

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I. Introduction: An Overview of the Theory of Change guiding the project

Section Brief:

The main hypothesis (or the mother hypothesis) guiding the project has been: "The empowering ecologies constituted by digital technologies can enable marginalised women to enhance their active citizenship at the local level, democratizing formal and informal institutions and systems, particularly in the sphere of local governance."

- How did your Intervention Design and strategies interpret this hypothesis at your project site, at the start of the project?

At Mysore, in India, we built on the insights we gained through an earlier initiative.

We wanted to set up info-centres as the 'go-to' place for public information, especially for marginalised women who lack access to governance related information and the knowledge about what may be out there that can make a difference to their lives.

We wanted to build local info-scapes (structures and processes) and info-cultures (practices)– to enable 'sangha' women to shape the emerging informational ecology and claim local communicative spaces to bargain with the power elite

We wished to deepen the ways in which women's collectives connect to panchayats (the self governance tier at the village level). Whereas linking with line departments (central govt) is a relatively direct process of accessing, seeking and reaching claims to those in whose names schemes are made and targets are set by the governmental machinery, getting sanghas to work with local panchayats can be fraught with deeper questions of power. Village panchayats comprise elected members who live in the villages where sanghas exist. The mandate of panchayats as bastions of local democracy but also as vehicles of development is to decentralise planning and local development functions. Engaging with this and working through this micro environment of power is a necessary step in sanghas getting a toe-hold in local governance. Whereas women from collectives do visit panchayats for staking claims, our goal was to see how women could set agenda and shape the standing committees of the panchayat.

We wanted to rejuvenate 2 centres that were already running, and set up new ones. The entire approach needed to work with the specific idiosyncrasies of the sanghas and the local

ecology of power and politics. It was our aim to make the NMK, Namma Mahiti Kendras (Our information Centres) a local institution that was identified with 'woman power'. We also wanted the NMK to be led by a young woman infomediary (sakhi) who can democratise information and also work with sanghas on agenda setting and local action.

The NMK we felt should become schools for democracy, with a feminist face - where, the identity of dalit women would be key to our transformation agenda.

We proceeded from the theoretical standpoint that citizenship in the liberal sense may be inadequate to explain the lifeworlds of rural dalit women and their struggles for rights. Knowing how their encounters with power unfold and how their learning and action processes capture 'resistance from below' is an important first step to therefore build a more situated framework of citizenship. The intervention strategy therefore needed to construct these spaces for learning action and reflection.

We understand the new opportunities of ICTs as enabling new forms of networks, where the local can link to other scales, and through this, transgress the boundaries of disempowering locally confined identities. This was important to us – as a project team that understands how in the current conjuncture the all powerful informational state works through diffuse networks, in public and partly public avatars, that coopts civic spaces. The NMKs were central to the scheme of things here, with computer and connectivity infrastructure (however rudimentary), enabling sakhis to learn from one another and the project team in keeping in touch with ground realities in a very dynamic way.

We wanted to work with the public sphere – bringing through a radio programme partnering women from the project villages – gendered perspectives of governance and democracy. Videos were important in addressing a group of women who were barely literate. It enabled us to also take the discourse of gender power into the community and to public institutions and panchayats, in orienting them to what sanghas and the project were upto.

- How have you interpreted the analytical category of 'women's active citizenship'?

When we started off we had said in our initial research document that as feminist community informatics practitioners, our aim in this action research project is to explore the promise that the newly emerging techno-social spaces offer for reclaiming women's "active citizenship" as a political idea, across three sites in the Global South. Therefore, we had wanted to strengthen women's on-going struggle for substantive equality in the formal structures, institutions and spaces within the State sphere, the public sphere, the sphere of community life, and the sphere of the family, that touch upon their everyday lives. This involves challenging the existing gendered hierarchies, both material and discursive, that structure and operate in the formal and informal sphere of politics, posing a significant challenge to women's emergence as active citizens.

In India, we sought to counter dalit women's double disadvantage and exclusion from the public arena by vesting with them the institutional power that could bring them authority as 'knowers'. The sangha space and women's various journeys as sangha members was a starting point. We then experimented with mechanisms to strengthen the sangha with processes for internal democracy so that 'active citizenship' then translated into an inter-subjective discourse – where individual sangha woman's rights and stakes were interconnected with the collective's vision and power.

We don't claim to have enabled women in attaining this ideal; but the project presented the women we worked with the scope to problematise power – within and without, and we were part of this micro environment through which gender responsive governance was continuously defined and sought.

In the Indian context, the work of scholars like Uma Chakravarty illustrates powerfully how Brahminical patriarchy produces gendered hierarchies where values of the caste system perpetuate through a structure that both rewards and subordinates women. Caste constitutes identity in irrevocable ways, and as we saw through the project, the citizenship question required us to understand and grapple with women's caste identity and affiliation. The power of formal politics – especially political parties – was also very marked in our journey. The structures and history of electoral politics are entrenched in caste and communal divides. Women have come into the public political space in large numbers over the past 20 years, and their assimilation into electoral politics has foregrounded caste unequivocally, and often obscured the gender question. These fractures show up as animosities and quarrels among sangha women, and between sanghas. Thus, the active woman citizen can be conceived as interlocked in complex, everyday power struggles, in which she is also making sense of power and of rights.

We also needed to (and enable the women we worked with) resolve dilemmas in everyday citizenship – sometimes trading time-intensive ethical discussions for pragmatic gains in relation to state and patriarchal power.

We did see the state everywhere in our work – as an ideological apparatus at work, a discourse that is out there and as a here-and-now phenomenon. The sangha itself is born out of a government scheme; some great heroes of the project – sangha women - are also working in government programmes; and the state somehow in its manifestation as a neo-liberal, welfare, networked entity slips in and out of the space of civic politics. The project needed to make sense of it at each step and explore how this complicates questions of ethics in women's active citizenship. Women may challenge the state one day and seek out their local representative as a benefactor of the NMK on another day.

- What are the founding assumptions about the empowering potential of ICTs that have guided your work?

- ICTs are tools, a medium and provide a new architecture for democracy.

- The radio allows a new virtual space for women-centric interpretations of governance and democracy
- Videos enable new forms of dialogue and self reflexivity in women's struggles and own institution building journeys
- The mobile phone allows an unprecedented connectedness that can be used to strengthen collectivity across geographies.
- New cultures of learning and communication are emerging in the wider public sphere – thanks to ICTs. These are social as much as they are technical. These “digital formations” allow us to think laterally about culture and change.
- How we use ICTs can create for women the specific meanings of ICTs.... so, it can be a medium of entertainment and also learning; of personal communication and also of sangha networking etc etc.
- There are both informational and communicative architectures that digital technologies allow us to construct through their affordances – The key properties of decentralised access, simultaneity and interconnection – harnessed in particular ways, can potentially transform power, especially gender power. This needs to be a highly situated endeavour, where the historical context must guide the meaning of ICTs for citizenship. The key properties of digital technologies are also at work in the domains of the state and the market and hence, networked politics has to be understood deeper and a feminist theory of citizenship generated through an analytical framework that accounts for the differential contexts giving rise to differential outcomes.

II. Methodology

Section Brief:

Action Research is popularly understood as a process of progressive problem-solving or as reflexive self-inquiry.

- At your project site, how has your intervention methodology drawn from the tradition of action research?
- How have quantitative and qualitative methods been incorporated into your research design? (Please provide details for months when field work was undertaken for surveys, FGDs, etc).
- What have been the processes that you have followed to ensure 'praxis' – learning-action cycles that continually enrich the intervention?
- How have you managed, or consciously addressed the issue of the imbalance

of power between the researcher and the 'researched' in this project? What have been the ethical dilemmas that you encountered? How have you addressed them?

- What are your ideas for mapping the impact of the intervention – how do you plan to undertake an endline assessment?

We would like to document in greater detail how the project proceeded from the foundational tenets of feminist action research. However, some key processes are highlighted

- Project choices were shaped and co-owned by the women we worked with. (There were dilemmas about 'pushing for results')
- The effort was not merely to make a model work, but to anticipate and be strategic about women's locations and immediate context and our relative distance as outsiders
- The pace of the project was guided by the time availability of women; monetary incentives were not used to buy time
- Everyone in the team and the women in the villages were central to the knowledge creation process, even though two of us took up the task of framework building.

What we have found in our study of existing documentation is that:

Gender intersects with political power in very particular ways reconstituting women's identities as public actors.

We noted that formal and informal power are intertwined – where gender is enacted through caste and political party affiliations.

Technology has come across as a potent, constitutive element in shaping new formations in and through which women become public political actors, legitimate interlocutors of local democracy, and recognised civic actors in the state-citizen sphere. Social power changes through ICTs, and social power can be made to change through guided use of ICTs, as the project's experiences show. The guided use may not imply positive outcomes for women's empowerment. This would be an incorrect inference. As has been shown in research elsewhere, anything that threatens local patriarchy is met with hostility. A patriarchal backlash or subversion is quite likely as well. We will need to go back to the women and reflect on these issues.

Two things are important – debating if and how the citizenship index related questions will be fielded.

Secondly, we need to ask women about the counter-factual – what if the info centre, the video and radio and the mobile based interventions did not exist?

Our reading of the data so far suggests we have some more ground to cover, in order to explain how the guided use of technology shifts women's power relations wrt actors and institutions representing formal and informal power in the local ecology. (Particularly on the communicative power related musings, going back to the community and to the field teams is necessary)

We also need to examine how the continuum of village ecosystems in our context – ATG and HVC where we started 8 to 9 years and ago and BWD and BTM where we started in 2012-13, – present different realities wrt the active citizenship journeys.

It would also be useful to pursue the modelling with the four way quadrants and the citizenship index triangle.

III. Reflections on the Intervention Experience

a. Context analysis

(Note that the baseline in India was not done for the 2 old villages.)

Section Brief:

Drawing upon the baseline survey data, please analyse:

- I. Socio-economic Profile of Project Participants
- II. Nature of local governance systems and institutions and the opportunities they offer, for women's participation. (with literature review on local governance systems and mainstream politics, and on e-governance and e-democracy, in your site)
- III. Women's self-recognition as political actors
- IV. Existing Spaces of association at the local level, which are exclusively for women and
- V. Access, diffusion and use of ICTs.

Please share your analysis on where the project participants stand w.r.t the 'Active Citizenship' Index questions that were identified as questions for comparative analysis across the project sites.

The India project works most closely with women's collectives in 3 villages of Hunsur block (ATG, HVC and BWD) and 1 village of H.D.Kote block (BTM), through its village information centre strategy. Of these 4 villages in Hunsur, 2 were villages (ATG and HVC) that IT for Change had been working prior to the start of the Women-gov project. In these 2 villages, due to the long-standing familiarity and rapport that the IT for Change team has established with the women's collectives, we did not take a quantitative approach to evolve our context analysis of these two villages. Instead, through a qualitative inquiry with the women's collectives and an internal reflection of the team unpacking the specific contextual challenges at these two older villages, we refined our understanding of these contexts. The

specific issues that we encountered in both these villages will be detailed when we flesh out this Report Outline, and we are not going into those issues at this point.

In the two new villages – BWD in Hunsur block and BTM in H.D.Kote – that we started working in as part of the Women-gov project, we did a quantitative survey of almost all the women we decided to work with through the project; focusing on the following dimensions:

- a. Understanding their Socio-economic profile
- b. Their interface with local governance structures, processes and institutions.
- c. Women's self-recognition as political actors
- d. Existing spaces of association that are available exclusively for women, to build their solidarities
- e. Access, diffusion and use of ICTs in these contexts

In toto, 13 women out of the 17 women that we work with in BTM and 37 women out of the 40-odd women we work with in BWD were surveyed.

Sufficient thought needs to go into the endline and how we will cover all 4 villages.

Now we proceed to discuss the key findings from the survey undertaken in BTM and BWD.

Background:

BTM and BWD represent very different universes. This becomes an important aspect in the data analysis.

A short introduction to BTM and BWD is outlined below, before we proceed to discuss the specific findings of the survey.

BTM:

This is a village in the Hannuru Gram Panchayat of H.D.Kote taluk. The village owes its name to a particular type of scrub vegetation, the 'bhuktale', that grows abundantly in this region. It has about 40 households.

Social Profile: This is an all-dalit village. The residents are mostly marginal farmers who support themselves with daily wage-labour in the lean season – and they go looking for work either in Hannuru or in the plantations of Coorg, a neighbouring district of Mysore. No resident has over one acre of land – and they mainly grow tobacco, cotton and finger millets.

The birth of the village can be traced to an act of caste violence. About 30-40 years ago, Hannuru was a village with dalit and non-dalit castes, until the Lingayats (upper castes) turned the dalits out. These dalits, who were forced to move away from Hannuru, formed an independent settlement in BTM. Since then, the relationship between the two villages is strained. However, villagers from BTM do go to Hannuru for wage labour in the landowners' fields.

This probably explains the peculiar geography of this settlement – marked by an absence of traditional landmarks such as a village tank, a maidan (the village commons) or a temple. The village does not even have a school. In fact, many people have withdrawn their children from school as they don't have time to accompany the children to the school in the neighbouring village, and they are scared to send children unaccompanied, as a busy stretch of road has to be crossed to reach the school.

BWD:

Location: BWD is a remote village in Hunsur block, that borders the Nagerhole national park. It has around 400 households, and is 25 km away from the block headquarters.

Social Profile: This village has a mixed population, with households from dalit and upper caste groups. Amenities and public institutions such as the dairy, bus shelter, school, anganwadi and temple are all located in the upper caste neighbourhood. There are numerous women's Self Help Groups in the village – in the upper caste and dalit neighbourhoods. There are also other collectives in the village – a young men's group (Ambedkar sangha) and a collective of milk producers (which has men and women members). Agriculture is the main occupation, though landholding patterns are really uneven. Tobacco, corn, lentils and finger millets are the main crops. The village's remoteness and its proximity to the forest makes women's mobility very difficult. IT for Change works with the women's collectives in the dalit neighbourhood of this village.

The key findings from the baseline survey are analysed in the subsequent sections.

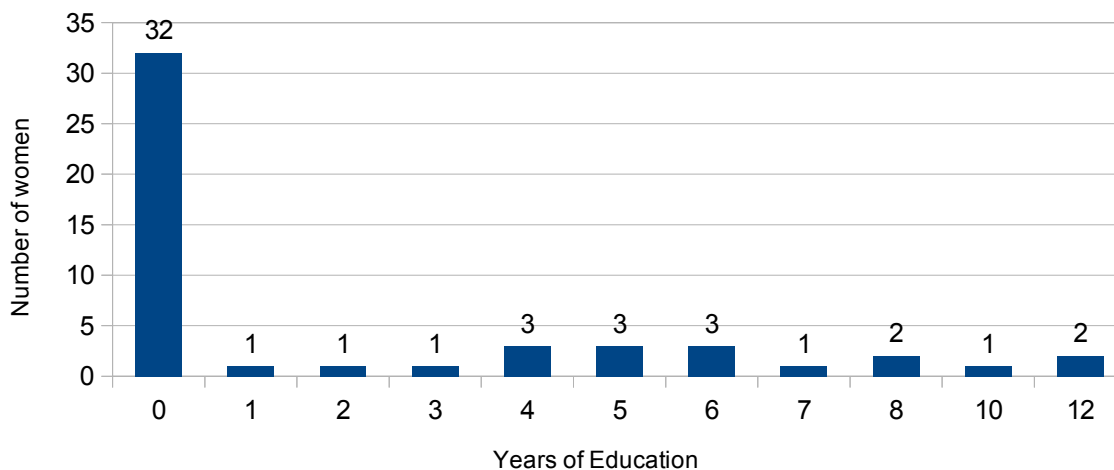
I. Socio-economic profile of project participants:

All the 50 respondents are Hindu. Of the 50, 46 are dalits, 3 are from middle castes and 1 did not reveal her caste. What is interesting to note is that these 3 middle caste women from BWD are all closely affiliated with the women's collective we work with in the dalit neighbourhood of this village – an uncommon phenomenon at the village level. There could be many reasons for this, which need to be explored and understood, but a probable reason is that they are economically as disadvantaged as the dalits.

As Table 1 below demonstrates, 64 percent of the respondents have never gone to school. Only 3 out of the 50 have completed high school. Clearly, levels of textual literacy and formal education are very low among the women we are working with.

Table 1

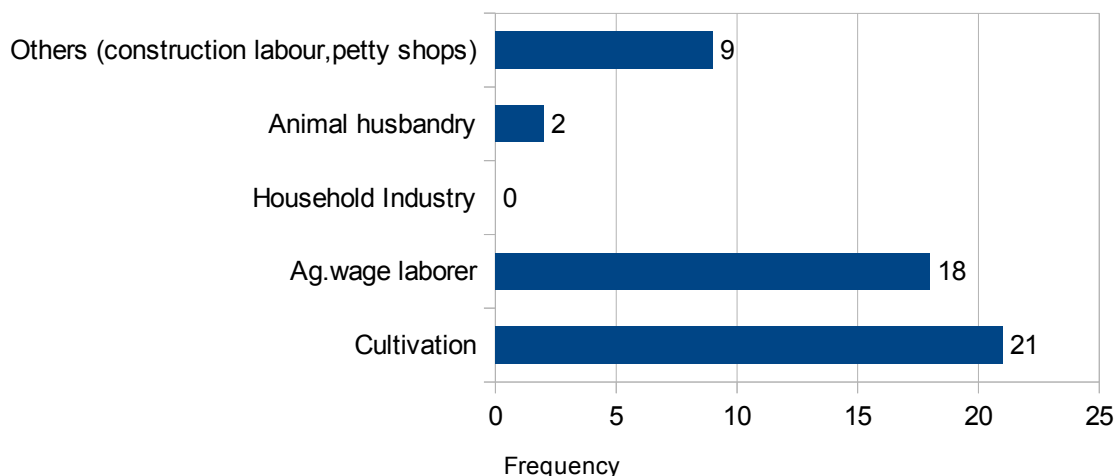
Education Levels



Some idea of the economic profile of the households can be gleaned from Table 2, Table 3, Table 4, and Table 5 below.

Table 2

Main Income generating activity of HH



The survey revealed that cultivation on their own farm and wage labour are main sources of income. Most respondents reported owning very small patches of land (less than 2.5 acres). It may be surmised that many households need to engage in multiple occupations.

Most households are below the poverty line officially determined by the government, and have significantly benefitted from government schemes on rural housing - as revealed by Tables 3 and 4.

Table 3

House Ownership Status

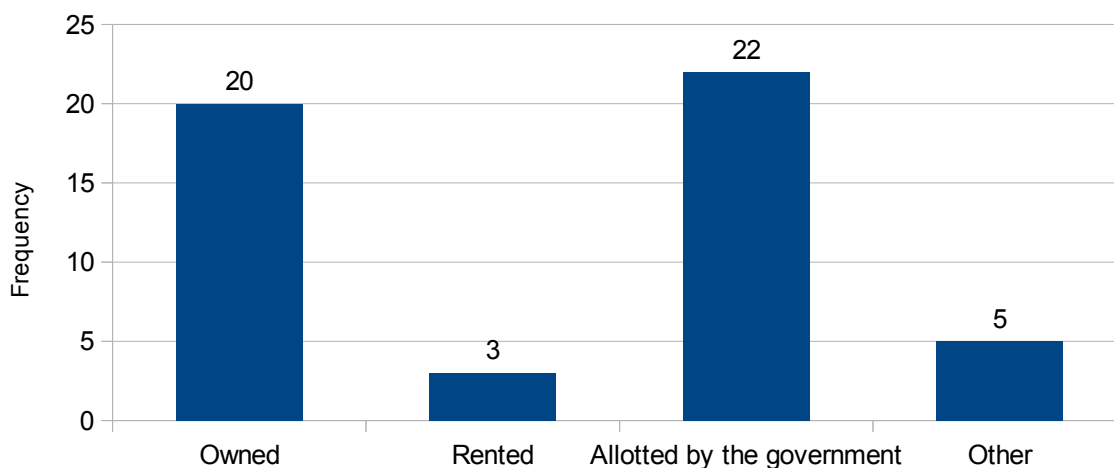
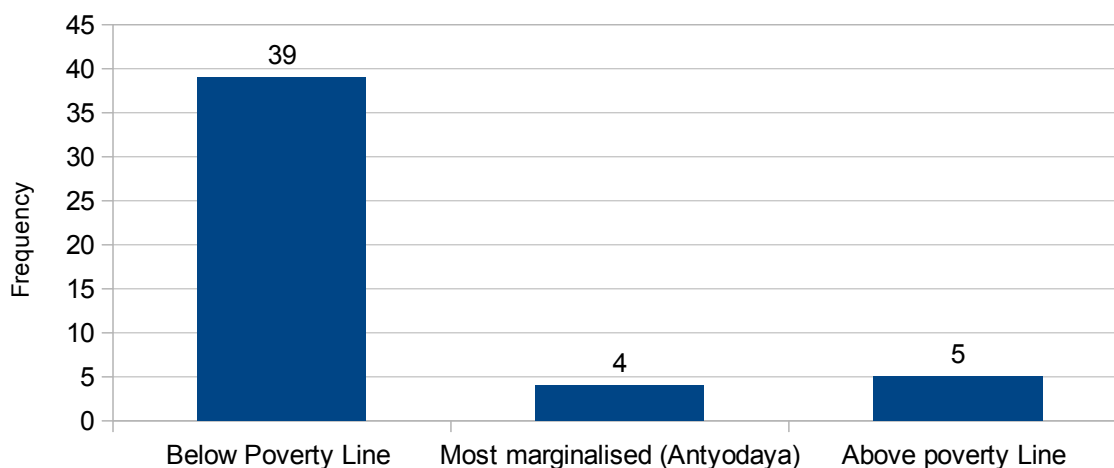


Table 4

Household economic status using Public Distribution System card status as proxy

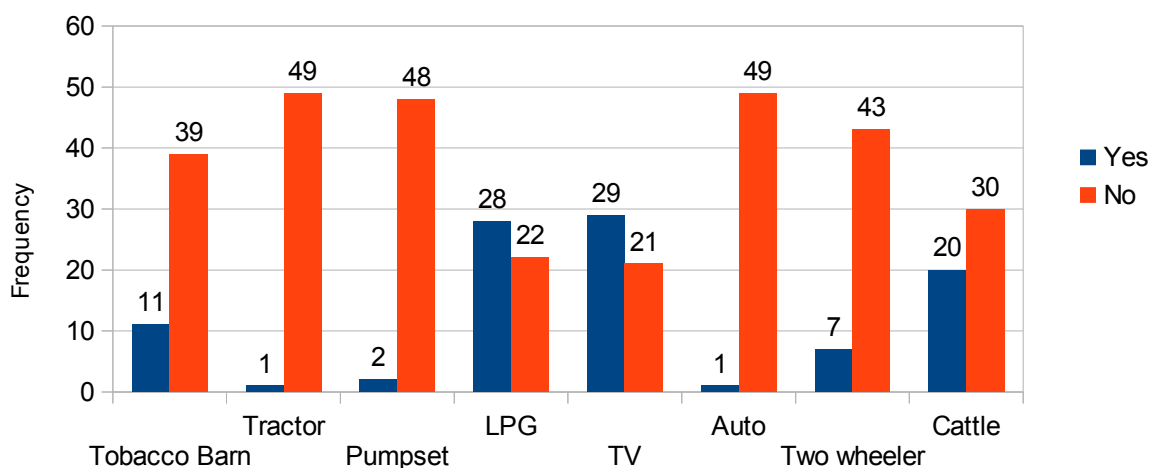


As Table 5 clearly reveals that very few households own expensive assets – such as pump

sets, tractors or two wheelers, indicating that most households are not very well to do.

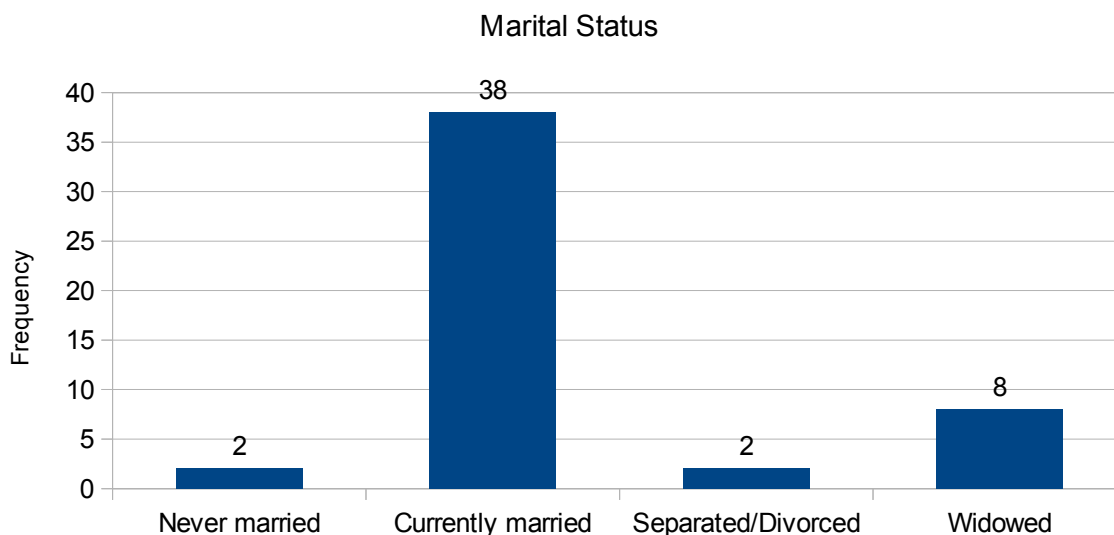
Table 5

Asset Ownership of Households



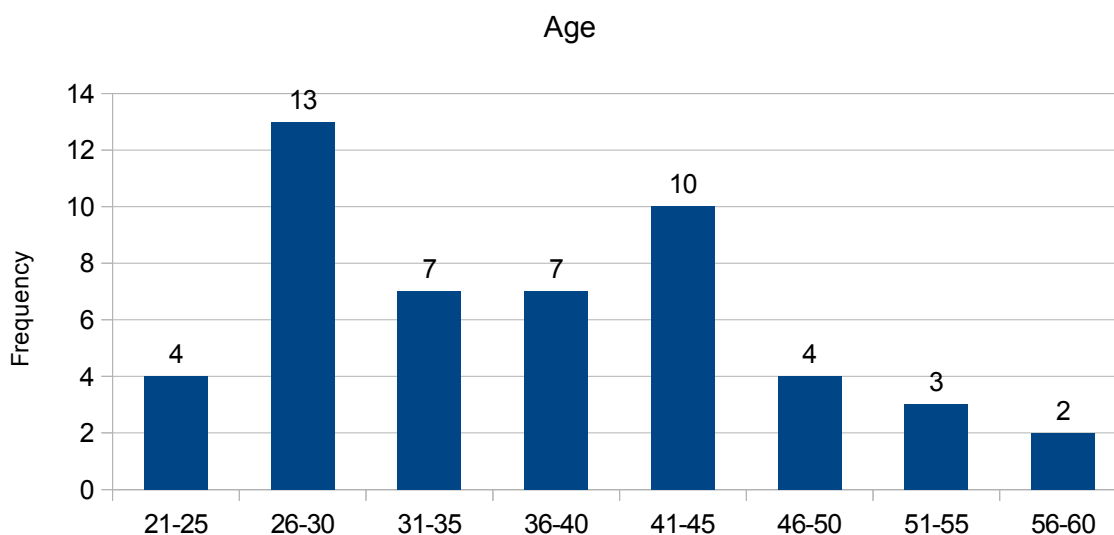
24 % women reported that they were unmarried, separated or widowed, as detailed in Table 6 below. 30 % reported that they were heading the household – a rather high percentage that possibly indicates the need to investigate specific vulnerabilities.

Table 6



Most women are below 45 years of age, as described in Table 7 – the point here being that most women are in the age group considered 'economically productive' by the state.

Table 7



II. Nature of local governance systems and institutions and the opportunities they offer, for women's participation

(a) Extent to which women can access public information

8 out of 50 respondents said they can find information pertaining to government schemes and local government functioning, easily in their own village. 23 said, that such information can be accessed with some difficulty, and 19 say that they can't find this information in their own village. It is important to cross this data with the data about the Marital Status of the respondents to assess if single women encounter an additional disadvantage in accessing public information. This may be relevant also for women who reported they were heads of the households.

The various sources of public information that the 31 women who said that it is possible to find public information at the village level described, are highlighted in Table 8 below.

The collective is reported to play a key role in enabling women's access to public information.

The question on the various sources of public information was a multi-response question and hence it becomes important to notice the patterns in the access of various sources. For example, are the women who rely on the women's collective as a key source of information also the ones more likely to access the Gram Panchayat? Also, are female headed households less likely to access multiple sources of information? Are women who play key office bearer roles in women's collectives more likely to access multiple sources of information? This further analysis is essential, as is the need to trace the responses for BWD and BTM separately – in order to assess the differential micro-environments at both these villages.

We then mapped the extent of ease of accessing various kinds of information. This revealed some interesting insights. Women found general health information far more difficult to access than reproductive health information. Only 12 respondents reported that general health information easy to access, as opposed to 30 respondents who reported that reproductive health related information is easy to access. This could also be because of greater focus on the latter category by the public health care system. Similarly, respondents find information about scholarships easier to access than information abt government schemes implemented by panchayats. Here, it is important to do a further analysis of the data to try and understand if those women who find one category of information difficult to access, also find others difficult.

(b) Women's participation in formal spaces of local governance

The survey revealed that very few women feel that they have adequate opportunities to share their views with the larger society in the formal spaces of governance in their communities. Of the 50 women interviewed, 21 said that they have no such opportunities, 17 said the opportunities available are few and far between, and only 11 said they have adequate opportunities.

The survey revealed that formal spaces of governance seemed to be functioning in a sub-optimal manner– as many women did not know about them, and even those who knew about

them hardly engaged with them. Table 9 gives a better understanding of the extent to which women respondents are aware of the formal and semi-formal local governance forums where issues of public/community interest get discussed, in the 2 villages of BWD and BTM.

Table 9

Women's awareness of formal and semi-formal spaces of governance

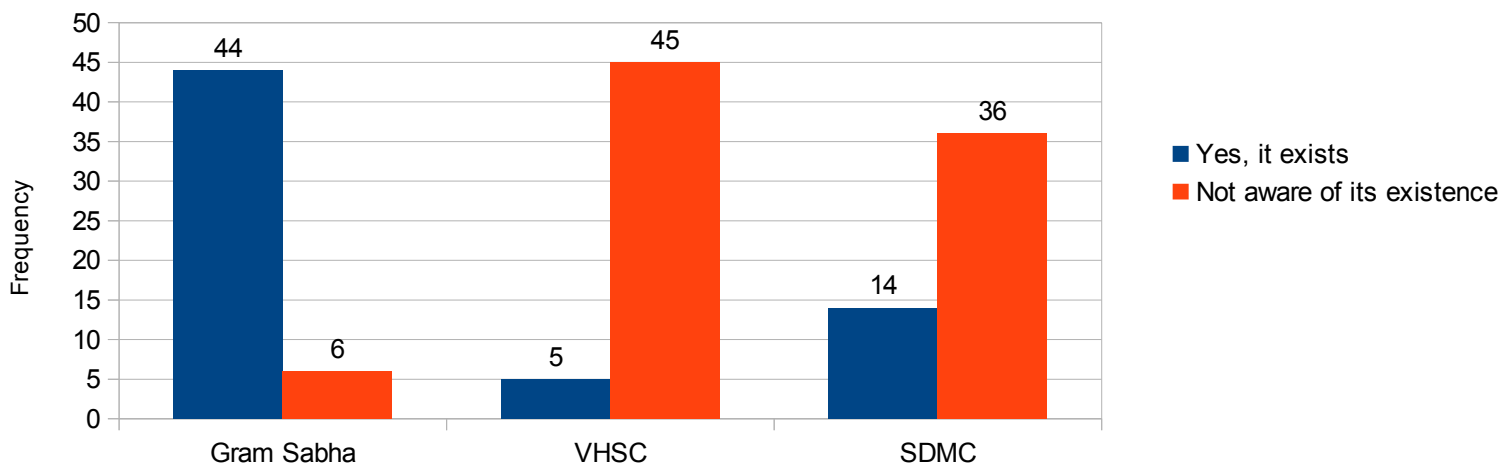


Table 9 reveals that women were aware of the Gram Sabha (the constitutionally mandated village assembly that every Gram Panchayat has to convene) but not very aware of the various legally mandated citizen's forums that the Indian State has mandated the Gram Panchayat to constitute, such as the Village Health and Sanitation Committee and the School Development and Management Committee. This is also because very often, such bodies are constituted only on paper and hardly any local level action takes place.

Out of the 44 women who said that they were aware of the Gram Sabha, 6 said that they always participate, 20 said that they participate sometimes and 18 never participate.

We think that it will become very important to run a correlation analysis to check if whether the women who are actively participating in the Gram Sabha are also holding key leadership roles within their own women's collectives. It is also important to understand who are the women who do not participate – an analysis of the survey data revealed that most non-participating women do not go to the Gram Sabha as they perceive it to be a male space even though none of them mentioned control by husbands as a barrier to their participation. Are single women less likely to go to the local governance forums? This is an analytical question that needs further exploration.

(c) Women's relationship with the Gram Panchayat

Out of the 50 respondents, 13 have visited the Gram Panchayat more than once in the last

six months, 7 have visited the Gram Panchayat once, and 30 have not visited the Gram Panchayat even once, in the past six months.

It becomes very critical for us to examine who these women who are visiting are – are they from female headed households or not? Are they able to access information easily or not?

When we asked the 30 women who have not visited the Gram Panchayat even once in the last 3 months, the following reasons emerged, as indicated in Table 10 below.

Table 10: Reasons why women have not visited the panchayat in the past 6 months

Need did not arise	4
Husband goes	5
No use	7
Only men go	6
Other reasons (Panchayat too far, not enough info, husband disallows, there is no cooperation in the women's collective)	10

The various reasons seem to strongly suggest that many women have stayed away from the Panchayat as they have considered it a male space.

The reasons that made the 20 other women in the sample visit the Panchayat are an interesting mix of women's collectives' related factors, and infrastructural demands of the community, as revealed in Table 11 below.

Table 11: Reasons why women have visited the Gram Panchayat in the past 6 months

Entitlements processing	10
Billing and Tax	7
Regular visits	3
Neighborhood amenities (street light, drain, water supply)	15
Others (elephant menace, employment guarantee scheme related clarification, household level infrastructural issue)	5

We then asked the respondents if the women's collectives that they were a part of, had visited the Gram Panchayat in the past 6 months. To this, 23 said that yes, the collective that

they were a part of had made more than one visit in the past 6 months. 11 said that their collective has made one such visit in the past 6 months. 12 said that no such visit was made and four did not know if their collective had made any such visit.

It becomes crucial to unpack which women's collectives in which village have made such visits, to nuance our understanding of women's associational power in BTM and BWD.

We then enquired into the reasons for women's collectives' visits to the Panchayat, which revealed that they engage with the Panchayat on a wide variety of reasons:

Table 12: Reasons for women's collectives' visit to the Panchayat in the past 6 months

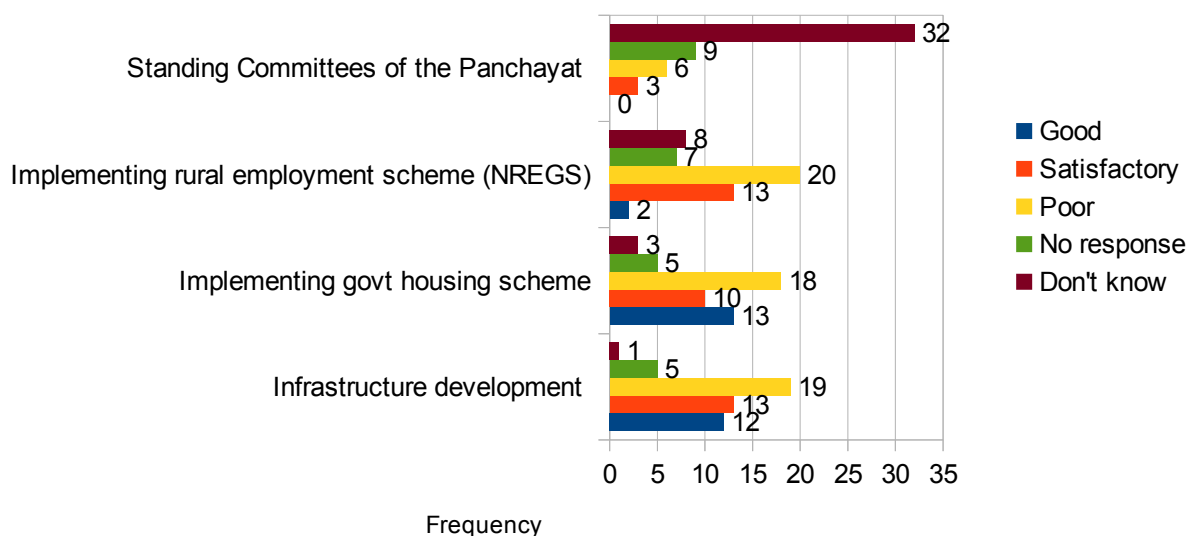
To enable members to process claims	13
Women's collectives' related issue that needed support from the panchayat such as the demand for a building	22
Locality dispute/complaint	8
Village level problem (Street light, water supply)	26
Other reasons	2

To the 34 women who have visited the Panchayat in the last 6 months either on their own, or as part of their activities in the women's collectives, we asked them to rate their experience of visiting the Panchayat. We found out that of the 34 women, 5 did not rate this experience; 5 said the experience was good; 17 said it was satisfactory and only 7 reported that the visit was unsatisfactory.

We then made all 50 women rate the performance of their Panchayat in its governance and local development role, by using the following key issues as proxy, and Table 13 showcases the results:

Table 13

Performance of the Gram Panchayat



Except in the case of standing committees which clearly don't seem to be active at the village level, there is a very mixed picture of the Gram Panchayats that is emerging through the data. For some women, the Panchayats seem to be working, while for others they are just not working. Who is rating the performance of the panchayat as satisfactory and who is rating this as poor? In which category do sangha leaders fall? What about single women? Are the same women giving the same kind of ratings across various issues? What is the difference in the ratings of the BWD and BTM women? These are the second level analyses that become absolutely necessary to further our understanding.

To sum up the key points from this section:

Many women do visit the Panchayat. But it is not clear who does and who does not.. whether the women who visit are the well connected women, with greater linkages that arise out of key leadership positions they hold in the collective, or because of other powerful ties they wield at the local level.

The panchayat is perceived as a male space by those who don't go; and those who go seem to have civic / public concerns mostly.

Women's collectives seem to be fairly well connected with the Panchayat.

Most interestingly, the perception of panchayat performance seems to be polarised so – who

is happy and why, is something we need to unpack.

The Standing Committees don't seem to be effective.

III. Women's self-recognition as political actors

Almost all women see that women can be political agents. There is overwhelming evidence that women see violence and the role of male alcoholism as an issue of injustice / a social issue and not a problem of the private sphere. This is what is revealed by an examination of the data in Tables 14 and 15, enclosed below.

Table 14

What are the kinds of injustice women face in your village?

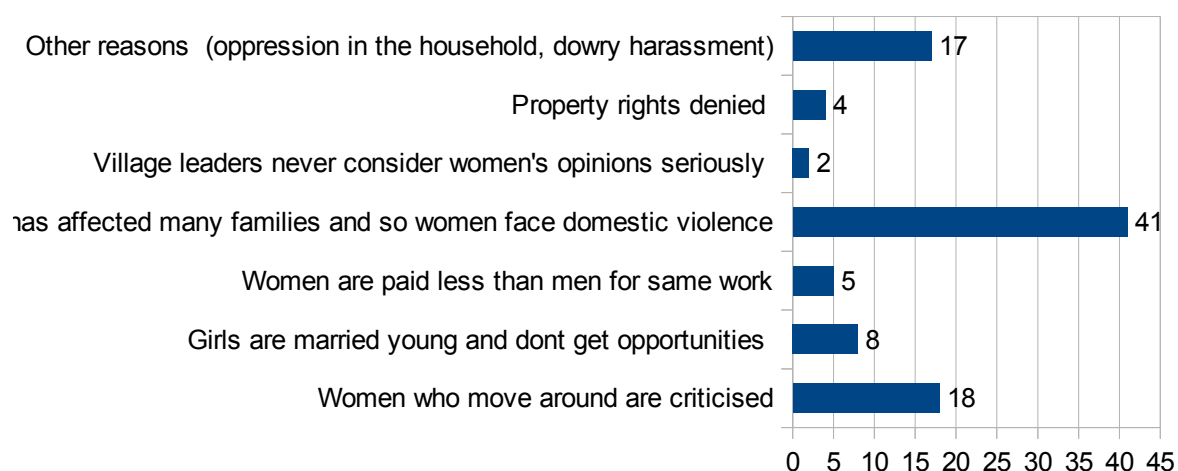
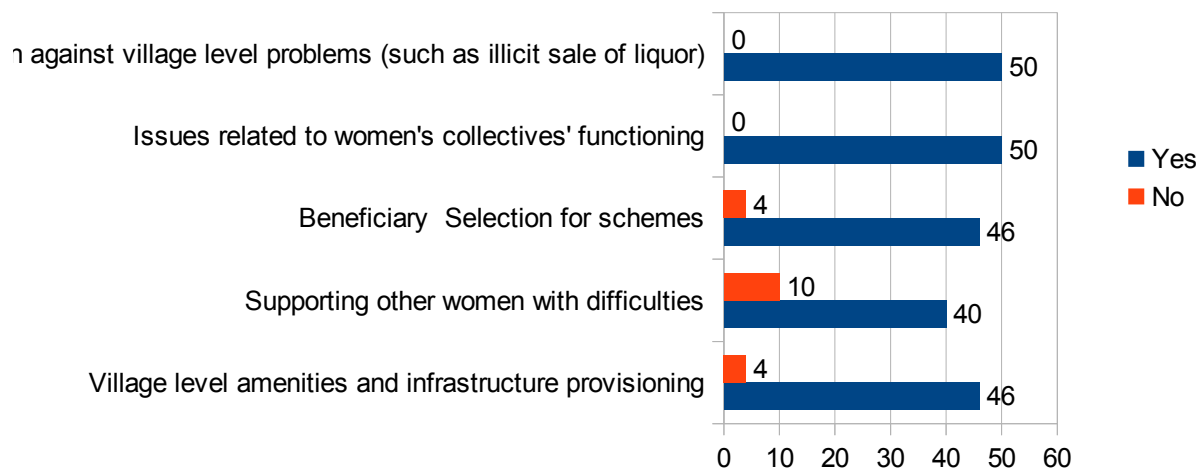


Table 15

Can women engage with the following issues at the village?



The women's collective seems to be an important place for support. About 44 % of the women interviewed consider the women's collective they belong to, as a key space to turn to in times of distress, and also saw the collective as a point of first contact for women in difficulties – whether it be domestic violence or alcohol related abuse at the household level, difficulties in entitlements processing, or a personal financial crisis.

But what remains to be analysed is for whom the women's collective works as a space of support. For, a careful reading of the data suggests that such solidarity is not contested. In fact, 39 of the 50 women said that they had never personally lent support to another woman in distress. This suggests that both in BTM and BWD there are those who seek and find support in the women's collective and others who don't. This may also mean that there are cliques or that in the case of BWD – one women's collective may be more cohesive than another. It seems that the glue is provided by some women (based on their self reporting that they help other women) even though many women do seem to use the women's collective as a vehicle for collective civic action and being part of public events, as revealed by Table 16 below.

Table 16 : Women's collectives as vehicles for collective civic action

Do you engage in the following activities, as a member of a women's collective?	Yes	No	No response
Organising community level events	29	20	1

Raising questions/ seeking clarification in public forums in the community	14	35	1
Organising local level protest and/or campaigns	38	12	0

The survey also revealed that a significant proportion – about one fourth – are actively engaged in formal politics, as Table 17 shows.

Table 17: Extent to which women's collectives are engaged in formal politics

Do you engage in the following activities, as a member of a women's collective?	Yes	No
Listening to speeches or going for events of election candidates	19	31
Campaigning for candidates during election	13	37

IV. Existing Spaces of association at the local level , which are exclusively for women

The survey data indicate that in BTM , there is only one women's collective that has been constituted under the Mahila Samakhya programme. However, in the village of BWD, where multiple women's collectives exist, we notice that women tend to associate themselves with multiple forums. However, women seem to be more actively engaging in Mahila Samakhya Karnataka (MSK) . This may be because women perceive MSK as offering them the opportunity for public and political roles compared to the other forums. Table 18 clearly indicates this extra political edge of Mahila Samakhya collectives, by comparing their activities with that of the second-most popular women's collective in BWD – those formed under another governmental programme, Stree Shakti.

Table 18 : Do the Mahila Samakhya and Stree Shakti women's collectives engage in the following processes?

Process	N =50	N=26
Savings	49	22
Awareness-generation	48	10
Local governance related discussions	48	9
Visiting departments/ Gram Panchayat for processing entitlements of members	43	7
Visiting dept/ Gram Panchayat for community issues	46	11
Raising questions at public forums	33	8
Campaign or protest at the local level	46	6
Campaigning for candidates	15	4

Women's collectives attend events hosted by candidates	9	3
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V. Access, diffusion and use of ICTs.

TV is an important medium of entertainment / leisure. 29 of the 50 respondents surveyed own a TV, and of the remaining 21 who don't, 11 watch TV in the households of the friends, neighbours or relatives.

Radio ownership is very low among the households surveyed. Out of the 50 women interviewed, only 2 own a radio and only 11 said that they access the radio at other spaces outside the home.

80 percent have access to a mobile phone but only 25 percent own their own phone. While calls are made mostly to family members, occasional calls are also made to the members of women's collectives and staff of the Mahila Samakhya programme. Calls for social networking with friends, or for dialogue with officials is not common.

About 40 percent, which is a sizeable number, perceives that the computer is an informational artefact ; even if only 3 out of 50 said they had used a computer.

b. Re-designing intervention strategies

Section Brief:

What kinds of changes were necessitated by contextual factors, to the intervention design? Please describe this experience of tailoring the intervention strategy to accommodate contextual changes, over the past 1.5 years.

This has been covered in other sections..

c. Reflections on utilising ICT strategies for enhancing women's informational, associational and communicative power

Section Brief:

Please reflect on how your intervention strategy has influenced/impacted the following parameters. You will juxtapose with these parameters, the cross-cutting questions of women's political subjectivity as well as the changing context in relation to which, the project directions were steered.

Some overall reflections on the intervention strategy:

- The intervention strategy can be thought of as encompassing 3 intermeshed layers :
- The Women-gov project has been an intensive exercise in enabling marginalised women to assume public roles, make claims and address the power imbalances in the local governance and institutional ecologies. Our intervention has meant 'going back and forth' between the project's vision (on the guided use of ICTs for women's citizenship and responsive governance), women's priorities (and articulations about what they aspire towards) and contextual factors (the real politik particular to different contexts where we work as well as feasibility of specific ICT pathways). For instance, we did want to work very much with data visualisation, and while we are planning to do this sometime soon, this has come towards the tailend of the project, because we needed to get the centres up and running for women to develop a civic sensibility and a digital aesthetic 'imagine' 'uses' and 'applications' of ICTs.
- the technical aspects comprising context-appropriate ICT possibilities for furthering women's active citizenship journeys – literally, getting the wires and the connectivity going, getting the software code for voice messaging done etc.,
- the social dimensions involving dialogue, negotiation, bargaining, with women and their communities; with our partner – Mahila Samakhya , the umbrella organisation with which the village women are associated; the panchayats, male relatives of women we work with, caste leaders in the village etc, and
- the techno-social processes – entailing new architectures of information, communication and association – as a foundation for new everyday practices and cultures, such as 'collective listening to the radio'; data exchanges between village and hub centers; 'travelling videos' on a tablet for sakhis to carry during their extension village visits etc.
- None of these inputs is purely technical. The technological and social are not dichotomous but their separation may be used as a 'rhetorical device' to understand the processes/ capabilities / practices/ artefacts being introduced in the emerging digitally mediated context.
- In terms of 'intervention', the heart and mind of the project can be traced to a) context-specific actions at the micro-level of the village, b) and a set of broad transversal, organisational processes (undertaken for catalysing a dalit-women centric civic-public ecosystem, with digital elements. (put differently, for catalysing a local citizenship and governance ecology in the project area that would give dalit women, access to and control over digitally-mediated spaces.)c) Knowledge processes – that enabled us to distill insights at different points, undertake research using quantitative and qualitative tools and also put in place an ongoing ethnographic inquiry using feminist principles, to support grounded theory building.
- We now detail the broad, transversal processes and the geographically-situated processes which taken together, will throw light on the project strategy:

a. Transversal processes:

1. Building a strong partnership with Mahila Samakhya

Mahila Samakhya is a government programme that has primarily adopted a collectivisation strategy to work towards the goal of 'education for women's empowerment'. The women's collectives that we work with in Hunsur and H.D.Kote blocks (sub-district units of administration) have emerged out of the Mahila Samakhya programme, that continues to invest in critical education processes with socially and economically marginalised women, on a range of issues – including fighting gender injustice at the local level and promoting women's involvement in local governance institutions at the village level.

Since our primary partners are the women's collectives formed under the Mahila Samakhya Karnataka (MSK) programme, the strategic buy-in of the MSK programmatic staff at the sub-district level, to the priorities and action areas identified under the Women-gov project has been a critical step for ensuring the effectiveness of the intervention.

Considerable amount of energy has been spent in the last two years on identifying common priorities with the Mahila Samakhya staff – such as reaching an agreement on village-specific priority issues for women's collectives to engage with in the project area, brainstorming on ideas for local level action. Also, the project has relied on MSK staff members' goodwill with the women's collectives, to strengthen its on-ground activities.

2. Kelu Sakhi / 'Listen my friend'

IT for Change runs a weekly radio programme that aims at creating a local dialogic forum for women's collectives in the project area of H.D.Kote and Hunsur blocks – by focussing on gender and governance concerns that are identified as critical by the women themselves. Women's collectives from the area are involved in the production of the programme, and they contribute ideas and content – so the radio in some senses, is a way by which sangha women can carve a 'counter-discourse' in the public sphere.

The programme is broadcast every Monday on the Karnataka State Open University FM channel between 9.00 -9.30 pm, as Monday is the day when most women's collectives sit down to do pool in their savings for the sangha micro-credit programme they run locally. This is also because Monday in many places in Mysore is traditionally the day when people take a break from their work on the land, and thus work pressures are slightly lesser.

Though the content primarily comes from the women themselves, the IT for Change team plays a key role both in determining the ethos and in anchoring the planning, editing and getting the 30 minute programme ready for broadcast, every week. The IT for Change team also manages the interface with the broadcaster and follows up on issues such as occasional interruptions in broadcast.

The ethos/ normative framework within which all editorial decisions are made – such as respect for gender equality, foregrounding gender justice, discouraging superstition,

privileging women's dialect over standardised, formal language while scripting the compere script for the programme and so on, is vital to the process.

Finally, the IT for Change team spends a lot of energies in building a culture of 'collective listening' so that there is a physical community comprising some women's collectives in the project area we engage with, even though the radio programme touches the lives of many more people across a wider geography. We have subsidised the cost of radio sets for women's collectives. More recently, we have also encouraged women to listen to FM on their mobiles, knowing that there is a trade off here, and that individual listening may not bring the rewards of post-programme discussion, as in the case of collective listening.

3. Investing in the creation and strengthening of women-run information centres

The Women-gov project builds upon the earlier work of IT for Change in setting up women-run information centres at the village level. At the start of the project, IT for Change had two information centres (hubs) at the block (sub-district) level in Hunsur and H.D.Kote and two information centres at the village level in ATG and HVC villages.

These village information centres are managed by a committee of representatives from local women's collectives, and operated by a young woman infomediary from the local community, who is selected by this Managing Committee. The infomediary's role has been the collection and aggregation of information about government schemes and entitlements, including criteria for beneficiary selection, and ensuring that such information is passed on to marginalised women in the village that the centre is located in, and in nearby villages within a 3 km radius of the centre (also known as 'outreach villages').

As the administrative structure in India routes the flow of public information from the district to the villages via the sub-district level – the sub-district or the block becomes a key node in the local public information ecology. Therefore, when IT for Change had set up the village information centres, it had also set up similar centres at the block level – in Hunsur and H.D.Kote – managed by the block level Federations of the Mahila Samakhya programme, comprising of 9-10 women representatives elected by women's collectives from across all the villages under that block. The infomediary at the block level visits all the major government departments located therein, on a regular basis, and conveys important public information to the members of the Federation – who in turn, take this information to the women's collectives in their own village and neighbouring areas. Also, the infomediary here at the block centre, reaches out to infomediaries at the village centre, to pass on important pieces of information obtained from block government functionaries – that may often get lost, suppressed, obscured, by the functionaries at the village level. The block level infomediary also takes up referrals coming from villages to interface entitlements processing for individual members who may have some difficulty.

Thus, at the start of the Women-gov project, the Mysore site had a nascent alternative networked informational architecture that privileged marginalised women's access to public information. Through this project, the vision was to strengthen this informational

architecture – by setting up more centres at the village level and to strengthen the existing information centres at the village level, to enable a 'critical threshold' to be reached.

Towards this vision, the following steps have been undertaken:

- Setting up 2 new information centres at the village level (more details in the subsequent section on geography-specific intervention measures)
- Strengthening the linkages of the 2 existing village information centres with Gram Panchayats/ village self-governance institutions (more details in the subsequent section on geography-specific intervention measures)
- Enabling all the 4 village information centres to emerge as spaces for citizenship education – where a video and audio resource based pedagogy can help in catalysing ground level discussions on gender and governance. Towards this, all 4 information centres have been provided with a video kit consisting of 25 films made by the IT for change team with inputs from Mahila Samkhya staff, and women's collectives, on various 'gender and governance' concerns; along with an audio bank of short clips from the Kelu Sakhi programme – so that the infomediary can help the women access these material as learning resources on a needs basis.
- Putting in place processes for enabling the block level centres to become critical nodes in this alternative informational architecture by:encouraging regular phone-based problem solving between block level and village level infomediaries, and ensuring that the women who are Federation members of Mahila Samakhya also take some responsibility for ensuring that the information passed on by the block level infomediaries is passed on to other marginalised women in the communities they are a part of. There is a Monthly meeting at the block level where the Federation members, who are also Managing Committee members of the block level information centre, commit to fulfilling certain informational outreach activities, in addition to their supervisory role. Online chats between infomediaries ensures a daily link up across centres.
- Training and capacity building of infomediaries to enable them to become key interlocuters of public information, and key nodes for interfacing with local governance structures, and enabling them to access the informational potential of the Internet, and opening their understanding of digital information architectures. There is also a lot of investment in enabling infomediaries to acquire the capacities to transform the centres into spaces of citizen education, and enable them to play a key role in ideating about and sourcing content for the radio and video. For this, monthly meetings are held in the IT for Change office where all infomediaries come to share their work for that month, and their significant achievements and challenges – the idea is also to promote a culture of peer dialogue among the infomediaries. A weblog platform for the infomediaries has also been set up, for this purpose. Also, as the infomediaries become increasingly acquainted with cyberspace, enabling them to acquire a gendered understanding of the emancipatory possibilities and threats in this space, is an area where the IT for Change team is continually working on.

- Individual mentoring and providing psychological support to the infomediaries is another key area of intervention. This is because most of the infomediaries come from backgrounds of abuse and domestic violence, and they have almost no support structures at the household level to help them deal with the pressures of breaking prevailing gender norms and assuming public roles. Mediating with governance structures has been the prerogative of men. There is one mentor from the IT for Change team, assigned for each infomediary – and these relationships often entail a huge level of emotional investment on both ends and the dividing lines of 'professional' and 'personal' interactions often get blurred.

- Building a trans-local network of geographically dispersed women's collectives in the larger project area, utilising ICT possibilities: This has been an area where a lot of work has gone in. Right from the start, the IT for Change team had interpreted the idea of 'associational power' not only in terms of strengthening the linkages between women's collectives in the same village, or in contiguous villages, but also trans-local networking of geographically dispersed women that could help them emerge as an 'imagined community' of being Mahila Samakhya women, sharing certain common values. This sentiment of course does exist, but the development efforts of the state and micro-finance institutions have resulted in a proliferation of collectivities (the infamous self-help group phenomenon), as a cornerstone strategy for development delivery or capitalist opportunism (as the case may be). As most of the women are not textually literate, social media networking was out of question – even for those women who had access to the Internet because of the information centres. The team then decided to explore mobile phone based networking – considering the moderately high rates of mobile phone diffusion among women, in the project area. The question that initially stumped the team was this – How do you build a voice-based interface that will enable asynchronous informational queries, that email or social media platforms do? A lot of research and discussions with other ICTD practitioners revealed that Interactive Voice Response Systems (IVRS) technology, which essentially uses a telephony platform to mediate human-computer interaction, might offer a good solution to this issue. Taking the help of CG Net Swara, another Indian NGO that has utilised this technology to construct a network of citizen journalists in the conflict-ridden tribal belts of Central India, IT for Change customised an appropriate technical solution that enables the automated broadcast of a single voice message to a large group as well as query-based access of specific information by users on the network. We are still in the early days, and while the social application of the software has reached some maturity and stability, its creative application needs much more work so that we can fully harness its potential to build connections on many different axes.

b. Geography-specific processes to address specific contextual exigencies:

Strengthening the 2 existing village information centres:

- Building the institutional capacity of the centre – as a local institution that goes against conventional norms. The ownership model of the centre has been crucial in this. We have emphasised the role of the dalit women's collective, but also encouraged the collective to be more open to roping in women of other castes and communities into the Managing

Committee (MC). This MC of the centre sets the tone – we facilitate monthly meetings where women place the agenda; we add to this list, if there are issues we want to table, and decisions are made on a range of operational aspects. The forum is also used to provide appropriate feedback to the infomediary on her role and make plans for the month, so that the centre can mature as a women-owned institution. The IT for Change team has had to constantly interface in the monthly meetings, to ensure that the older women who are the Committee members do not bully the young infomediary or abuse their power as new mediators of an emerging, local public information system to capture power in the local communities.

- Enabling the Managing Committee members to handle financial matters that have implications for the sustained functioning of the centres. (to give a specific example – the older information centres offer photocopying and photography services, and the rates they charge are not adequate to cover the costs of the printing cartridge. Pushing the members to get a grasp of the costs and take decisions on rationalising the charges at the centre is one thing we have attempted). Till today, IT for Change supports the operational costs. This amounts to mainly the electricity bill, and the cost of the Internet and equipment maintenance – as in both the older villages, the women's collectives have a government allocated building to carry on their activities, where the centre has been housed.

- Building the confidence of the infomediary and the Managing Committee members to interface with the Gram Panchayat and to regularly participate in local governance forums such as the Gram Sabha and the Ward Sabha.

- Supporting the infomediary and the Managing Committee in their efforts to get more and more local government actors to visit the centre at regular intervals and interact with the women's collectives.

- Opening up the possibilities of constructing community centred data sets through the information centres, in order to enable the women's collectives we work with, to create a strong bargaining tool with the Gram Panchayat, so that women's concerns in local governance processes are acknowledged and responded to. (For example, simple surveys to ascertain eligible beneficiaries or even identification of spurious beneficiaries under schemes for widows or single women or households below the poverty line).

- Creating the ground for visual representation of community data from official sources, to start a dialogue on gendering local governance concerns, with the members of the Managing Committee, and with other significant actors in the village. We would like to use a GIS based presentation that compares official data on the enrolment of boys and girls in schools with data collected on the ground by the centre, on enrolment, girls' toilets and other amenities available in schools. This would be one demonstration of a local datascape that can be immensely useful in starting a dialogue with the School Development and Management Committee – a citizen's forum constituted under the law in each village, to address issues of school development. This is an area where the team has completed a lot of work on building the primary layer of mapping the villages in the blocks we work with, but the second layer of work needs a lot more investment, in terms of using village level maps for context-relevant

data set generation and a verification through household surveys, and finally a public dialogue at the centres.

- Building the centre as a local knowledge space. The centre is an important public access resource for school going children. Its relevance as a space for digital literacy and civic education for the women in the community requires constant reflection and iterative learning-action cycles. The IT for Change team constantly provides inputs to the infomediaries on utilising the audio and video resource bank effectively, and encourages them to produce audio and radio content. This also includes support in technical training in video shooting/ photography – not only to the infomediaries, but also women members the Managing Committee who display interest. Interested members of the Managing Committee are also supported in making films on gender and governance issues. Another idea that we have been exploring is the use of preloaded information and media files on a tablet that the infomediary will carry, on her information outreach visits.

- Continuous handholding and emotional support – Challenging status-quo and building institutions that work for the poor are high risk endeavour. Add to this the potent ingredient of 'destabilising gender power', and you have the predictable prognosis for a long and rocky road. For individuals committed to this process, the personal-professional ceases to be a meaningful divide. Although the women's collectives and the infomediary do have to steer this change on their own by and large, the IT for Change team must be available to trouble shoot. The events that may require intervention can include instances of threats, caste-related squabbles, verbal attacks on the infomediary, and many more. Kinship and relationship rules in the villages also demand that we participate in village events and also be part of the ups and downs of the collectives. The fluid boundaries between MSK's work and our own also create some pressures for the women and the infomediaries, and constant dialogue and clarification of vision, must be done. The project, as a social experiment offers choices for some of us to opt in and out, but for many others it constitutes a fundamental redefinition of life itself.

Setting up two new information centres

- The identification of appropriate villages for setting up two additional information centres was an extremely time-consuming process as our intervention design demands a certain 'readiness' from the women's collectives involved, to successfully bargain with the local power elite and fend off attempts at co-opting the centre. Locating 2 villages where women's collectives had this bargaining power, was an arduous process. The Mahila Samakhya staff's long-standing experience in the area proved very useful in this exercise.

- When the 2 villages of BWD and BTM were finally identified, the team insisted that at every step in the setting up of the centre – from getting the buy-in of local power elite, to identifying a suitable location, to planning the inauguration, women's collectives played the lead role. Facilitating this was an extremely energy intensive process and involved innumerable points of value based decision making.

- Unlike in the older villages, the women's collectives in the 2 newly identified villages do not have any government allocated space where the information centre can be housed. So, IT for Change has also had to support the rent costs as well.

- The investments in building institutional strength are similar to what has been described for the older information centres – only that the processes are far more intensive here, as the centres are still very fragile. We have had women from the new villages visit the older ones on 'learning' trips, and believe that being part of a network of centres can, in the longer term, contribute to some degree of resilience of these centres.

c. Knowledge processes – that enabled us to distill insights at different points, undertake research using quantitative and qualitative tools and also put in place an ongoing ethnographic inquiry using feminist principles, to support grounded theory building. This set of activities has been the backbone of the endeavour. These processes have enlisted time and support from a wide range of people – MC members, infomediaries, team members, and MSK staff. We developed a rigorous schema for ensuring that village stories would be captured and analytical frameworks developed out of conversations and records. The team's blogging, infomediary records, monthly forums with all the infomediaries, and routine generation of Notes from the Field have been cornerstones of our approach to action research. While a few of us did take responsibility for thinking about the theoretical pegs, the research has benefitted from a team-wide knowledge generation process, in teasing out various hypotheses on the run and looking at a theoretical frame on gender and citizenship through the lens of network politics. This is still work in progress, but we do think we understand better the manner in which women discover/ rediscover their political subjectivity in relation to their technological encounters, and how local governance processes buck older systems encapsulating power when new infoscapes and infocultures led by women, begin to take root. These movements are of course not exogenous to local politics but they are key to how continuities and discontinuities mark an emerging local political context. They also signify possible disruptions that may tilt the power balance in favour of marginalised women.

The parameters capture the key hypotheses relating to the use of ICTs, and will be used to build a framework on ICTs and women-centric governance.

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 the the 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

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

Specifically, the following questions must be addressed:

- How are the intervention strategies to enhance women's informational power (such as information centres) impacting the local information ecology and culture? How are processes of governance shaped in this emerging techno-social ecology? What social and institutional factors influence these processes?

The impacts of the India intervention strategy on enhancing women's information power:

(a) Old villages – ATG and HVC

1.The investment of efforts in building the linkages of the Managing Committee members and the infomediary of the ATG and HVC information centres, with the Gram Panchayat has yielded some significant gains in informational power for the women's collectives we work with, in these villages:

- In HVC, the infomediary's persuasion has resulted in an increasing number of the Managing Committee members attending the Ward Sabha regularly. Shortly after the women's participation in this forum increased, the Panchayat members requested the information centre to do a survey at the village level for identifying the list of households which were eligible for receiving grants under a rural sanitation programme for the construction of toilets. Following this, the infomediary generated the list after conducting a household level survey keeping in mind the eligibility criteria of the sanitation scheme – and this list was tabled and accepted in the next Ward Sabha.

- In ATG, the Panchayat has started to treat the information centre as the key node to engage with, for public interest -related decision making processes in local governance. For example, when a recent scheme asking the Panchayat to enable economically disadvantaged individuals to open 'zero balance' bank accounts came through, the Panchayat Development Officer telephoned the information centre and asked the infomediary to help with the identification of beneficiaries. Similarly, when the Panchayat faced a situation where there seemed to be a lot of spurious claims for social security benefits such as old age and widow pensions, it asked the information centre to take up a survey in ATG and the neighbouring village of Siriyur to build the evidence on which beneficiaries were bonafide.

2.These developments in ATG and HVC are clearly an indicator that the information centre is being increasingly seen as an impartial arbiter of public interest, and that it is increasingly gaining recognition as an authoritative source of information in the eyes of the formal government structures.

What makes these developments extremely critical is that traditional networks of power are usually based on privileges obtained from locations in the caste and class structure. The

public-political sphere has always admitted women as change-makers who contribute their voluntary labour to village development, bringing home the micro-finance needed to tide over livelihoods and other crises. The state has gladly validated women's collectivities, using women's labour for development delivery. Radical action by women's groups has without doubt pushed back at male violence and institutional apathy, but formal politics and organised corruption has deepened its networks, using welfare and inclusion schemes as well as local electoral politics as sites for consolidating patriarchal, casteist and class-based power, giving women just about the space needed to obtain their consent in becoming party to these emerging networks of power. The civic-public sphere to deliberate upon value-based politics and governance, is encroached upon by these emerging hyper-political formations.

The powerful are used to obtaining contractual posts in the Gram Panchayat, and then use their proximity to the core decision makers of the Panchayat – the elected representatives – to unfairly influence the outcomes of key processes such as beneficiary selection. For example, previously, in ATG, the 'Water- Man', a contracted employee of the panchayat, whose work was limited to that of maintaining the village pipelines according to the terms of his employment, exerted far greater influence than mandated by his official role. He mediated all exchanges with the village, and selected beneficiaries on behalf of elected members of the Panchayats. The 'Water Man' had become an informal power centre the village. Now that the information centre is emerging as a key node, the 'Water Man' is not taking it quietly, of course – he has had more than a few skirmishes with the infomediary, on pretexts such as her refusal to lend him the centre's camera. But these are the emerging new sites of contestation.

3. Another interesting development in ATG and HVC has been the increase in the capacity of the infomediaries to leverage the networked informational architecture that the project has created, through the block and village information centres it has set up. The following stories from the field are an eloquent testimony to how the alternate informational architecture the project has created has enabled women to build on the power of becoming key players in local information networks:

- During the first year of the Women-gov project, the infomediary at the Hunsur block centre had found out the exact allotment of take-home, food grain allotments for mothers of children between 0-3 years of age, in the government run crèches at the village level – locally known as '*anganwadis*'. She had then shared this information with the infomediaries of the village level centres, who conveyed it to the women in the Managing Committees, who then told the other women in their collectives. Following this, the next time the food grains were distributed in the ATG *anganwadi*, the women beneficiaries, many of whom were also in the women's collectives in the village, started complaining that the full quota had not been provided to them. They then questioned the *anganwadi* teacher – the government employee in charge of the crèche. The teacher tried to explain to them that to begin with, the *anganwadi* had not received the full quota from the state and that there was a shortfall in the allotment, and what she had received from the block office, she had distributed equally among all those eligible for the allotment. Even after this exchange, there was some

tension. In order to clear the air, the *anganwadi* teacher and the women's collectives in the village decided that in the future, the sealed carton containing the individual 'take-home' packets of food grains would be opened only in the presence of the infomediary and the Managing Committee members of the information centre – and that every month, the *anganwadi* teacher would send word as soon as the packets arrived at the centre. This practice continues even now, and has become part of the *anganwadi*'s institutional culture. In fact, nowadays, the infomediary takes photos of the distribution of the foodgrains which the *anganwadi* teacher uses as part of her formal report to her supervisors at the block level.

- How these localised practices of effective governance are connected to the infocentre and its rather rudimentary computing power is an important question to tease out. We at IT for Change have been very curious about the way women running the centre and its infomediary are being acknowledged as legitimate actors in the civic-public sphere, and how the centre is somewhat core to a new authority that the women's collective is being vested with. Data driven governance models cannot produce 'accountable governance' through managerial tools that track bottom-up data or through remote visions of local development conjured up in aggregated infoscapes. The localised infoscape is a vital and foundational link for inclusive governance and deepening democracy. It brings authenticity – the human face – to democratic governance. Driven by women, these local info-scapes and info-cultures subvert women's exclusion from the civic-public sphere. The result may or may not destabilise emerging networks of big power, discussed earlier, but at the very least, it provides a concrete site for reimagining democracy and just governance.

- In HVC village, after the infomediary of the village information centre heard about a new directive of the state government, requiring that extra food grain allotments be made through the *anganwadi* to children belonging to the Scheduled Tribes (historically marginalised social groups who have been guaranteed special protections by the Indian Constitution), she decided to take a few Managing Committee members along, and pay a visit to the local *anganwadi* – to find out if this directive was being implemented. It turned out that the orders were indeed being followed. What is crucial to map here is how the increasing breadth of awareness about the functioning of local government institutions, and the various community institutions through which state schemes are routed, enables the women's collectives to play the role of 'vigilant citizens' who enforce public accountability in the functioning of community level institutions.

- Most importantly, in both ATG and HVC, the Managing Committees of the centres are beginning to realise the power of generating their own data, in order to influence decision making processes at the *Panchayat* level. The information centre's long standing presence, and the Women-gov project's focus on building the centre's linkages with the Gram Panchayat, has enabled women recognise that very often, the Panchayat derives legitimacy for its decisions on allocation of benefits, from government generated data sets – that cannot be challenged by the community. Fudged official records are all too important for powers that be to maintain the status-quo. Therefore, generating their own data sets, which can challenge the narrative the Panchayat uses to justify its decisions, becomes a very

important tactic for women's collectives, to question unfairness and non-transparency in local governance processes.

For example, the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) that guarantees 100 days of work to every rural household applying for work under this scheme, is a very crucial social security scheme for rural, dalit households in the areas we work in. Under this scheme, all the wage seekers from a single household have to submit a single application to the Gram Panchayat – and they will then receive a Job Card with their names and photographs affixed. The Panchayat is then supposed to initiate a process of community level planning to identify key village level public works to be undertaken (which fall within a list of works sanctioned by the Central Government). After this Plan of Action is finalised with approval from the block level, the Panchayat is supposed to initiate these works and ensure that at least one applicant from every household that requested for employment under the scheme, gets wage-work for 100 days, through these works. The Job Card becomes a critical document for wage-seeking households to demand their right to employment. There is always the risk that the Panchayat may subvert the scheme by hiring a contractor who uses machinery rather than manual labour to complete the works; and many times, that the Panchayat may fail to initiate any works at all. In both ATG and HVC, many households do not have job cards. For some, this is because their applications have not been processed; for others, it is because they are not very aware of the provisions of this scheme. We have found that in both ATG and HVC, the Managing Committee members have independently initiated a household survey of job cards, as the first step in educating the local community about their rights under the employment guarantee scheme; and generating a data set to question the *Panchayat's* unexplained delays in processing job card applications.

- We must mention here that it would be a grave error to assume that because the information centres improve the bargaining power of the women in the Managing Committee, they also enable women to automatically become empowered political agents who further the democratic ideal. In the case of the Job cards, there is much at stake for informal and formal powers waiting to make their big bucks. Individual women may also use their status as members of the MC of the infocentre, to garner personal gains. Setting agenda for action therefore has required us to unravel the individual interests of many a woman, and keep up the dialogue through the collective. Women may not also want to rally around an issue, sensing that it would open up risks they know cannot be countered. We have not been able to therefore take up the Job cards issue beyond a simple - "lets-try-to-get-everyone-to-have-Job card" - agenda. Touching the actual implementation of the scheme and its expenditure is beyond the collective resilience of the MC of the centre at this point in time. (In many parts of India, activists exposing irregularities in the NREGA scheme have been killed in broad day light.)

- We have also seen cases where the strong women in the Managing Committee have not allowed a second line leadership to emerge; and sometimes we have seen women intimidate the infomediary into filling forms for ineligible applicants. This new centralisation of power at the information centres also happens in more benign ways. For example, in ATG, the

woman who plays the key role in the Managing Committee is also the Accredited Social Health Activist at the village level – a grassroots level worker of the public health programme of the Indian State. The infomediary has been selected as a member of the Village Health and Sanitation Committee – a Citizens' forum whose mandate is to examine the implementation of community health schemes and the functioning of village level health programmes. So far, both women have been utilising their power as 'nodes' that enable the information centre to intersect with other key local governance processes, in very public-spirited ways, that furthers the vision of inclusive governance. However, what will be the implications of such centralisation in the long run? How can we ensure that there are in-built checks to prevent centralisation of power and the hijacking of the democratic spirit of the information centres? One such way is to ensure that the Managing Committees are not permanent, by putting a rotational system in place – which we have been focusing on in ATG and HVC. This has been difficult, as very often, women's collectives themselves want the very active women leaders to continue for another term – and this had happened in both places. Enabling women to make key status gains, and enhance their power, and yet ensure that such power does not lead to the rise of new structures of domination at the local level, is a continuing challenge we grapple with.

New villages – BWD and BTM

1. Firstly, in both these villages, the women's collectives instinctively felt that the information centre would be useful to their collective journeys. The computer represents an object of aspiration and although its utility is unclear, women have seen it in public offices and know it as a resource that brings power and authority. Therefore, they were rather determined to ensure that the centre was set up, despite the many hurdles they encountered in the process.

-In BWD, a village which has upper, middle and dalit castes, all amenities and village infrastructure have always been located in the non-dalit neighbourhood. When the IT for Change team initially entered the village, all groups in the community, including informal leaders, seemed to largely favour the idea of the information centre. When we shared with the village community our pre-condition that the centre had to be housed in the dalit neighbourhood, and run by dalit women, we faced a lot of resistance from the upper caste communities. In fact, the upper caste women's collective which was present at the meeting where this announcement was made, staged a walk-out, ominously remarking: "Let us see how you will run this centre." In spite of threats and stiff opposition from the upper caste groups, the IT for Change team went ahead with setting up the information centre in the dalit neighbourhood in BWD. The upper castes then adopted a strategy of 'boycott' and pretended to carry on with life as if no such infrastructure exists in their village. They did not attend the inauguration of the centre, and withdrew themselves completely from all its activities. However, their gaze was constantly on the centre, and as they keenly followed the centre's activities. The men from the upper caste areas of the village mocked at the dalit men, provoking them with stray remarks about their inability to rein in their women, and keep them in check. This led to fights and strains within dalit households. In spite of all these barriers, the women found a space, negotiated the advance, and started the centre,

and found an infomediary from their own community. Recently, they have even negotiated with the shop-owner of the neighboring village that is better connected as it houses the Gram Panchayat office, to receive the daily newspaper on their behalf, so that men from the dalit community can collect the day's newspaper when they go for wage labour. The infomediary has also begun her outreach activities in the upper caste neighbourhood.

- There are similar insights that the case of the BTM information centre offers. BTM is an all-dalit village of about 30-40 households that are extremely economically disadvantaged, with no livelihood security. This village has no bus services, and no anganwadi facility. There is a single women's collective constituted by the Mahila Samakhya programme that has about 17 members. As the women are extremely economically disadvantaged, their struggle for their daily living leaves them with very little time for investing in other community level activities. In spite of this, they have tried to participate in all the block level programmes and events of Mahila Samakhya. The collective displays a great sense of unity and common purpose.

Also, BTM has a deeply troubled relationship with Hannuru, its neighbouring village that also houses the Gram Panchayat that both these villages fall under. Hannuru is a Lingayat dominated village. Though Lingayatism is a sect whose origins can be traced to the progressive, reform-based theology of the 12th century AD Bhakti movement in Karnataka, Lingayats are very much in the midst of contemporary caste struggles – and consider themselves way superior to dalits in the caste hierarchy. About 30-40 years ago, Hannuru was a village with dalit and non-dalit castes, until the Lingayats turned the dalits out. These dalits, who were forced to move away from Hannuru, formed an independent settlement in BTM. Since then, the two villages have shared a strained relationship, though residents of BTM do go to Hannuru for wage labour.

After their long struggle to find a suitable space to house the information centre, when the centre was finally set up, the BTM women's collective organised an inaugural celebration – to which they invited key government officials from the block level, and Mahila Samakhya staff. Uninvited, on the day of the inaugural celebration, a powerful Lingayat leader from Hannuru – in fact, a former member of the Block level panchayat body – came to BTM to congratulate the women, having heard of the information centre, as news about it was spreading by word of mouth! This was a significant symbolic victory for the dalit women – a way of getting back at the old injustice meted out to them as dalits, and to demonstrate to their men that the women's collective had done what the men had not managed to do, in all these years – to build the standing of their community. Public roles that bring status have been recognised in empowerment literature to trigger new gender equations within the household and in the community. The information centre represents a rather coveted public space, carrying a credibility for its connection to governance and local public institutions. As discussed earlier, the very idea of such a space defies the social order that maintains the status-quo.

Secondly, in BTM and BWD, women have become attuned to the possibilities of generating their own data sets to question mainstream decision making processes, especially after the

Prakriye team scheduled an exposure visit for them to the information centre at HVC. In BWD, the Managing Committee of the information centre has initiated a pensions survey to identify if all deserving individuals have been covered under the local safety security net. Similarly, in BTM, the Managing Committee of the information centre has initiated a job card survey of all the households at the village level.

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

1. Associational life – as a civic-public ideal – is the corner stone of democracy. The India intervention strategy has focused on strengthening the 'translocal networking' of geographically dispersed women's collectives in the project area, to enhance their 'bridging' social capital; as well as on the in-group ties, solidarities and 'bonding' social capital within women's collectives. The rise of neo-liberal individualism and the growth of the 'development market place' has instrumentalised collectivisation and collective claims making. It has inverted the logic of a progressive politics of identity, rather successfully divesting the act of coming together as women with shared histories of its life-giving, life-sustaining, political content. It has given vote-bank politics a new lease of life and bottom of the pyramid economic models ready takers for unscrupulous and unregulated micro-finance. Addressing this erosion and keeping a communitarian vision and sense of purpose alive has been important to the project.

2. The project has invested a lot of effort in creating platforms for the Managing Committees of the old and new information centres to interact with each other. For example, the project facilitated separate exposure visits for the BTM and BWD Managing Committees to the HVC information centre. Each of these exposure visits was not just an opportunity where the institutional norms and values guiding the functioning of the village information centre were shared by the women's collectives of the older centre. They were also the key space for the women of both villages to connect over their shared experiences of struggles against local patriarchal and caste structures, and discuss the various challenges that their respective collectives had surmounted, over the years. Connecting, with a sense of renewed purpose gave the MSK collectives of both BWD and BTM the strength to take on the teething troubles of setting up their centre . As beautifully captured by one woman from BTM who went to HVC, *"After visiting you, I feel that even if we have to set up our centre in a shed by*

the road-side, we should still run it!"

3. Also, the project created another platform for the Managing Committees of the two older information centres to interact with each other, in order to ideate, and evolve a shared vision for building the futures of these centres. A meeting to bring together the Managing Committees of ATG and HVC is an extremely difficult proposition as there are numerous logistical challenges : the villages are very far from each other even if they are in the same block; and considering the multiple priorities that the two sets of women are constantly juggling, it is a tall order to fix a meeting date and time that all can agree upon. Finally, the IT for Change team organised such a meeting in its Mysore office in mid 2013. The Managing Committee members of both ATG and HVC spent an entire day in Mysore, recounting their specific experiences of setting up and managing the information centres; as well as mutually ideating on the future directions the centres should take. Some of the ideas the women came up with, are shared here:
- a. The centre should effectively utilise government and other websites to collect relevant public information that have implications for the daily lives of women.
 - b. The centre should receive notices of all public meetings called by the Gram Panchayat, and Managing Committee members must participate in all such meetings.
 - c. It would be good for the Managing Committee members and other women in the community to get trained in photography, video-filming and recording radio programmes to present their own perspectives on gender and governance issues.
 - d. IT for Change must facilitate an arrangement whereby there can be expert phone-ins at scheduled times for community members to seek redressal for specific problems they encounter.

As can be seen from the earlier sections detailing the intervention strategy, some of these suggestions have fed into the plan of action of the IT for Change team while others are long-term ideas that we have to work towards.

Connectivity in the context of digitally mediated networks may not be a virtue in and of itself. In fact, the Internet itself has, ironically over time become a connectivity framework that has contributed to new models of capitalist consolidation. The networks that emerge through a hybrid model such as the architecture being discussed here, portend hope for a new platform politics. They offer women who are socially marginalised, the material power to set public agenda, be heard in public spaces as legitimate citizens; and develop organisational practices that are appropriate to their own ways of learning, knowing and acting. The centrality of the digital here is still nascent and a milestone in the horizon. But the digital is present everywhere – as telephony, as a video, as a website, as data about a scheme – giving collectives a new associational grammar.

4. There have also been numerous efforts by the IT for Change team to build linkages between the women's collectives in the outreach villages of each information centre with the women's collectives who belong to the village where the information centre is housed. A few such meetings have happened at ATG, such as one instance where the women's collectives from the outreach villages came to attend discussions between Gram Panchayat

members and women in the community, organised by the Managing Committee of the ATG information centre. However, as outreach villages are somewhat distant in case of all information centres, and women often do not have the time to spare from their chores to walk upto to the centre and back again to their villages, these attempts have not taken off very well. This is an area where the Interactive Voice Response System described earlier offers immense possibilities.

5. Another area that the IT for Change team has focused on, in the older and the newer information centres, is to ensure that the ties between different women's collectives at the village level are strengthened. The dominant trend in the project context has been a mushrooming of women's collectives, especially Savings and Micro-Credit groups at the village level. Reaching out to all these collectives and not just to those formed under the Mahila Samakhya programme, is key for building women's associational power, on the ground. Towards this, during the reconstitution of the Managing Committee in the older information centres, IT for Change has urged for broad-basing the Committee's constitution to include women from collectives other than those formed under the Mahila Samakhya programme. There has been some resistance to this by the women themselves, though Mahila Samakhya staff are quite supportive of this move. This is because of inter-group feuds and rivalries. Also, many collectives tend to get formed along caste lines – and inviting other collectives to the Managing Committees often means closer interaction with women from another caste, an idea that is often resisted. Similarly, strengthening the ties between women's collectives and the elected women representatives at the village level is another area that seems key, but is one where IT for Change is still intensifying its engagement.
6. The IT for Change team has been working towards the strengthening of trans-local ties of geographically dispersed women's collectives in the project area by utilising the weekly radio programme, *Kelu Sakhi*, as a dialogic forum for peer solidarities. A key learning for us in the Women-gov project was that this potential of the radio programme can be harnessed only by bringing in strong, a strong geographic association that can make listeners feel that *"this village the programme refers to, and the characters who appear in the programme, could well be my village and the women I know"*.

At the start of the Women-gov project, there were very few specific geographic referents in the 30 minute programme. The various slots that constituted the programme - discussions with women's collectives on issues ranging from personal reminiscences to their civic engagement, interviews with leaders of women's collectives on their key achievements, expert slots where community health practitioners, government officials and others gave a five minute info-byte, announcements from Mahila Samakhya staff on upcoming block level and district level events and programmes - focused on issues common to all *Mahila Samakhya* collectives in the Hunsur and H.D.Kote region. We did not pay much attention to the geographies of the project. But over time, we realised that adding that specific locational marker in the programming – whether it be a reference to the wild elephants that strayed into the crop fields into the script as a reflection of the everyday struggles of the women in BWD, or a story about the information centres, goes a long way in enabling the women the project intensively works with, in relating to the radio as a trans-local dialogic forum.

It is of course true that the broadcast reaches over four blocks of Mysore district, and the listenership base is not just confined to the areas of intensive field work by the IT for Change team. However, we have wanted that this fact should not distract us from the primary purpose of the radio – which is to ensure that it is a space for the women that we work with most closely. This is possible only through careful programming choices – which of course, means that more and more content should be produced with the women from the specific geographies we intensively work in. The first step to move towards this, has been the training of the infomediaries to enable them to emerge as effective content producers at the local level.

7. Just as we have invested efforts at the production end to open up the dialogic potential of radio, we have focussed on working towards creating a culture of collective listening among the women's collectives of the villages where the information centres are housed, and in the outreach villages. We notice these efforts are starting to pay off. Even the 2 new villages have started to regularly listen to the radio programme.

8. The impacts of the radio strategy in enabling women to assert their associational power, are very tricky to assess. This is because motivation from hearing another woman on radio, or listening to an expert talk about some local governance process, may be one of many factors that trigger concerted action on the ground, and attributions may be hard to trace. For example, in HVC, it was after the start of the Women-gov project that the Managing Committee members and other women's collectives started going regularly to the Ward Sabha. Part of this was because the infomediary was persuading them, convinced as she was by the need to engage with the Ward Sabha, because of her discussions and dialogue at the monthly sharing meetings with other infomediaries at the IT for Change office. However, this was also the time when we ran a month long feature on the need for women to participate in local governance forums such as the Ward Sabha. Some women from the village had also called and provided feedback that this set of programmes were very interesting. It may be hard to lay a finger on the extent to which the radio strategy was key in triggering women's collectives in HVC to regularly engage with the Ward Sabha, but ideas do shape action, and to the extent that women feel a sense of ownership over their media platforms, their public actions may well draw inspiration from ideas discussed on the radio. There have been other such instances – for example, soon after they heard a radio broadcast where the compere script essayed a scenario where women's collectives were preparing to organise Independence Day celebrations, women in ATG did this on the ground.

9. The project's community video strategy has strengthened solidarities among members of women's collectives. Information centres are equipped with video resources. Infomediaries screen films regularly. Discussions following such screenings cover issues pertaining to women's solidarity at the grassroots level, the shared condition of patriarchal oppression, and actual stories of what collectives managed to pull off, in response to adversarial conditions. The idea is also to encourage women's collectives, especially members of the Managing Committee, to regularly access these resources and have dialogues and discussions among themselves, on the issues such video resources throw up.

It must also be mentioned here that there have been instances when the video has been key in nudging the women's collectives to exercise their convening power for some local level action. For example, in early 2013, the IT for Change team and a staff member from Mahila Samakhya had gone to Lakkankoppalu – an outreach village of the ATG information centre, on a casual visit, as part of doing a status check on the effectiveness of information outreach efforts of the centre. At that time, there was a discussion around how the women's collectives from Lakkankoppalu had gone to the Primary Health Centre jointly, to test for anemia. The test results had shown that many of them had a very low haemoglobin count. The Mahila Samakhya staff member suggested that the women should come together on a full moon night convenient for all the members of the collective, for a potluck. Each one could cook one dish rich in iron, and then all of them could meet under the moonlight for a feast! The idea of a 'Moonlight Dinner' was received with great enthusiasm. IT for Change chipped in and offered to make a film on this event. This film was made, and has since been shown to other women's collectives in contiguous villages. For the women's collectives who watched the film, the potential of this event to strengthen solidarities, struck a chord, and they have also indicated their keenness in regularising such an activity in their villages. The hard parts of collective action presuppose the soft parts of convivial association. Amplifying this, through the video, creates the space to introduce non-instrumental, commons oriented approaches to association.

10. The capacity of women's collectives to exert their convening power and organise local action is tied to the way they navigate their multiple affiliations. Caste and political party membership are at the root of power struggles. At HVC for example, we find it extremely difficult to get the women of the Managing Committee to work together, during the monthly meetings at the centre. Time and again, we have observed how caste feuds and rivalries spill over into the proceedings as individual women vie for greater power within the collective. How women can relate to each other across caste and other factionalisms, would be an important milestone in the long haul for creating a women's governance agenda. Connecting with elected women in the local context is something we feel is vital to this process.

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)

In specific, the following question must be addressed:

-How and under what conditions can the democratisation of local communicative spaces /public sphere enable marginalised women to articulate their interests and shape the agenda of local governance?

1. Carving out a safe space for enabling women to emerge as a counter-public that can challenge the hegemonic discourse dominating discussions and debates on all issues, including that of women and local governance, is crucial. The community media strategy of the project has sought to address this need.
2. The community media strategy places the question of enhancing women's communicative power at the heart of all its decisions – whether pertaining to content production, broadcast, or screenings, and the shaping of future directions of the strategy.
3. Initially, in order to ensure that acquiring the technical skills for producing community radio and video content does not come in the way of women's interest and willingness to engage with these media for voicing their perspectives, we focused on involving the women more in content ideation rather than the actual production processes. We also focussed on creating a culture of video and radio based learning and critical reflection. (Hence, the efforts to also carve out the information centre as a digital library as discussed earlier). The past 2 years have really witnessed a maturing of the video-based learning and reflection culture in the older information centres, especially in ATG. It has become a common practice now for women to demand particular content resources on their visits to the centre, or in the course of some discussion during the meetings of the collectives. Also, the infomediary at this centre has become especially adept at introducing women to radio content in appropriate ways, when she goes on her outreach visits to the neighbouring villages. Some stories of the impact of this shift in communicative cultures, find their way back to us. For example, in ATG, the infomediary played a video filmed by the IT for Change team on the importance of girls going to school. One of the women watching the film recognised a girl who had spoken in this film as a girl from her own village who had dropped out recently. She went back and spoke to the girl's father, who then persuaded his daughter to re-join school. Many such stories do not find their way back to us – for such dialogue and debate are starting to become organically embedded in the local communicative culture.
4. In the two new villages of BTM and BWD, the efforts at building such an alternative communicative culture are still nascent. But our experience so far suggests that women are increasingly becoming attuned and receptive to the alternative discourses communicative media opens us. In fact, the community video strategy played a key role in convincing the women of BTM and BWD that they too could set up an information centre. In BWD, after introducing the idea of the information centre, the team played a film on the work of the Village Information Centres that were already operational in ATG and HVC. The film had

testimonies from the Managing Committee members, other members of women's collectives, the infomediary and men from the community. Then, one of the women said, *"Well, we too can run the centre.. I know these women from HVC. I have met them at block level events. If women like them can run these centres, even we can."*

5. In the older villages, we also increasingly witness an increasing interest in understanding the technical skills involved in photography and community video, among the women we work with. Women have increasingly shared how they would like to be trained in these skills. One woman from ATG has shot two films – on the 'Nutrition Day'¹ celebrations organised in her village and on the rights of entitlement-claimants under the *Sakala/ Guarantee of Services to Citizens Act* enacted by the Karnataka State Government in 2011. Both films are on the editing table at this point.

6. Similar requests have been raised by the Federation members who manage the block level information centre, and we have trained 13 of them in digital photography. The women who have been trained in digital photography are confidently utilising their skills with the camera to document their experiences of participating in local governance forums. We are beginning to make inroads into panchayats, to persuade them to work with us on gender responsive governance. Taking cameras to elected women in these panchayats, we use 'play' to build rapport with the elected women.

7. The films and the audio content have made their way to many many places. They are accessed in a decentralised manner. Kelu Sakhi is broadcast on Mondays, and we receive feedback calls from far and wide. Various clips from the programme have been archived with a simple taxonomy (health, law, scheme rules, etc) to help infomediaries to share them on-demand. The audio and video content have travelled widely, shared on tablets, on pen drives and CDs to panchayats and other NGOs

8. Communicative power hinges on ownership of media platforms. The radio, video and more recently, our efforts to introduce a voice based messaging service – are all part of the communicative ecology of women in the project that privileges voices and perspectives rarely heard in the public arena. These media platforms – interwoven into the learning-action processes of the project provide the pedagogic architecture for "boundary crossing". Exploring new possibilities and new roles through radio and video, women forge a communications community – articulating ideas, creating new representations, mentoring and being mentored, – transcending literacy barriers. The Kelu Sakhi radio programme and the innumerable videos circulating in this community, contribute to women's learning, and the making of their identity and agency. The communicative sphere, thus created, is a not only an intragroup device but also a signifier of new power. For women participating in the radio and video, it is part of what goes to making them public-political actors.

IV. Reflections on creating empowering ICT ecologies – Synthesising

¹ An awareness-building event on reproductive and child health for which funding support is available from the State, if community members are willing to take the initiative for organising the same.

Research Insights

Section Brief:

In this Section, we would like you to address the following questions based not just on experiences from your site, but also from your knowledge of the work in the other project sites, to facilitate our discussions in February 2013 for evolving a Synthesis Framework. (*We understand that this Section can be rather sketchy at this stage, but we urge you to pen down your thoughts to facilitate the research consolidation process.*)

ICTs provide an opportunity to expand women's "choice and agency" (Kleine 2011)-- but in practice, there are limitations that arise out of the interplay between macro-level power structures and the Foucauldian micro-physics of power in the current context where we are witnessing new imbrications of the technological, social and cultural realms of life (or as some scholars would put it, in the 'network society' context).

- **What conceptual connections seem to emerge between gender, digital technologies/ digital spaces and women's citizenship?**
- **What frameworks of ICT practice and policy can engender governance regimes that work for marginalised women?**

The effort of the project has generated many insights on women's citizenship. By no means can these be reduced to put technology in the hands of women and lo and behold, you will have empowerment.

We saw power operating at different levels – the women we worked with had to confront violence on a daily basis. After the much awaited inauguration of the centre at BWD, just a couple of days later, one of the key women leaders died. She had had a bad marriage, and we knew that her husband was habitually abusive. The case was declared a suicide and closed. Our actions may or may not have been the last straw, but we were clearly treading on highly gendered terrain. We have witnessed political parties disrupt our meetings and dismiss the women, asking men to assemble and distributing money! Where women's access to and control over resources, and their public participation is involved, the outcomes are unpredictable – women's solidarities are under constant pressure, and unless these are preserved from erosion, political agenda setting may mirror dominant patterns, where networks of favour and patronage subsume everyone into deals. ICT based approaches can potentially bring new resources, new authority, new networks, safe spaces and learning sites for women's collectives – but they need to be firmly embedded in value based process. This is the critical challenge. The digital is not a given – it has its unique DNA for different contexts. It creates hybrid spaces – that are highly localised, with meanings particular to the women's whose active agency and political actions, we have sought to strengthen. Some directions for policy :

- e-gov - The woman and the beneficiary / data and the human being
- Learning and civic-public infrastructure
- Community radio licenses
- Digital literacy programmes

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