

Power to Voice
*Field Stories from
Community Video Units
in India*

Q: What is a camera?

A: It's the eyes. —Parul

It's a mouth. —Noor

The camera is
more powerful than
a wedding. —Sneha

— Training notes from Producers'
first day on the job, August 2006

What if the poorest one billion people in the world had their own media industry?

Video Volunteers (VV) envisions a world in which all communities have their own locally relevant and locally produced media that celebrates their culture, voices grass-roots concerns, and stimulates debate to find solutions to endemic problems.

Our mission is to empower the world's poorest citizens to participate in the community media movement so they can right the wrongs they witness and become players in the global media revolution. We provide local people communities with

the journalistic, critical thinking and creative skills they need to generate their own news and information services. VV's models for sustainable, locally-owned media production teach community members to articulate and share their perspectives on the issues that matter to them.

It can take years to teach someone who is non-literate to read and write. But you can teach someone to make a film in a matter of weeks. This is the power of community video.

Our Definition of Community Video:

a form of citizen journalism appropriate for communities with low levels of literacy. It is media that is made in, for and by the local community



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Video Volunteers 2006-09

This publication celebrates the first three years of work in Video Volunteers' Community Video Unit program with collaboration from NGO partners and Community Producers. Together, we have begun to realize the possibilities of sustainable and locally owned media spaces.



ABOUT VIDEO VOLUNTEERS

Roots

Globalization's greatest revolution could be in communications. But in many places, technology is actually widening the gap between rich and poor. Video Volunteers, a New York and India-based non-profit organization, is working to correct this problem.

Since 2003, we have trained more than 150 Community Producers, most of whom are now working full-time in slums and villages. Their short thematic films, called video magazines, have already been seen by more than 200,000 people. Raising questions and spurring conversations are the first critical steps on the road to change.

Our work has been recognized with numerous awards. In 2008, we were one of 19 winners out of 3,000 competitors of the Knight News Challenge, a prestigious journalism award. The same year, we were shortlisted for the International Development Prize of the King Baudouin Foundation of Belgium. Jessica Mayberry, the founder of Video Volunteers, is a Fellow of Echoing Green, an organization that identifies and supports the world's leading social entrepreneurs.

New horizons

We plan to expand our footprint to include projects in Brazil and Kenya. In addition to partnering with some of the

leading organizations in the countries where we are active, we have collaborated with groups such as Witness, the Global Fund for Children, Pangea Day, and MTV Iggy.

Models for social change

We have developed four different media models, which focus on helping communities gather and share critical information:

1. A volunteer program where volunteer filmmakers work with NGOs to train them to produce extremely low-cost media for social change.
2. Creating Community Video Units in partnership with NGOs to provide critical information via screenings every month in 25 villages or slums.
3. Teaching disadvantaged communities to videoblog to a global audience.
4. Training individuals from poor communities to run their own video businesses.

These models all share key elements that we believe will enable community video to reach all corners of the world:

- > solutions-oriented media content
- > local information that viewers can act on
- > community ownership
- > interactions with the mainstream media
- > measurable impact
- > earned income strategies
- > in-depth training so Community Producers can produce high quality media and develop their critical thinking and creativity

A word from the founders of Video Volunteers

If the media will not report on the issues of the poor, one solution is for the poor to make their own media

We came up with the idea of Community Video Units in 2005 as we were driving to Washington D.C. the morning after our first small fundraiser. We had shown videos from a two-month long training session that we organized for NGO staff.

People appreciated the films and could see that the trainees had been empowered by the process. But they asked, "What are these people doing now, a year after they were trained?" We had no choice but to acknowledge that our short-term initiatives were not resulting in a sustained impact.

We realized that we needed to create a program where giving people a voice wasn't a tool to another end (say, health education), but was the central primary mission.

And so we sat in the coffee shop of a gas station by the highway and drew on a napkin the diagram for the CVU model that you see on page 9. Things moved quickly after that. Within six months, we found six NGOs to invest in this idea, and the first CVUs were launched. We are proud that all of the original CVUs are still going strong.

Community video is democratizing the media in the developing world the same way that blogging is in the developed

world. For communities that are decades away from internet connectivity and 100% literacy, blogs are not within reach for now. But video journalism is.

Sometimes the camera itself breaks taboos. Bipin, a young Community Producer from the so-called "Untouchable" caste, was permitted to enter his village temple for the first time in his life simply because he held a camera in his hand.

Sometimes the camera doesn't even have to be on to make a difference – merely the fear of the camera stimulates change – like when the government repaired roads after the Sakshi Media CVU simply said they would start filming (*see page 47*).

Democratizing the media is more than just bringing technology to marginalized people. Rather, it is achieved when communities are able to access and subvert these technologies to create their own content. If the media will not report on the issues of the poor, one solution is for the poor to make their own media.

We believe that access to a voice is a human right. In fact, it is the right that enables all other rights, because if a person cannot speak out about oppression she/he cannot end it. Enjoy reading these chronicles as our journey continues.



Jessica Mayberry



Stalin K.

Video Volunteers is committed to creating a global community media movement.

We hope to train tens of thousands of Community Producers in the field, giving the poor a voice and accelerating social change.

Sincerely,

Jessica Mayberry and Stalin K.

Our ethos

As an organization, Video Volunteers strives to adhere to the following principles:

- To be a south-based organization, with strong global connections;
- To enable local communities to run their own programs;
- To work in a collaborative manner with other NGOs so that we build on the successes of others.

Our development theory

People have the right to speak, rather than be spoken for. VV firmly believes that local people can solve their own problems and that they should be the ones to address them rather than leaving it up to so-called “development experts.” This is the only realistic way to eradicate rights violations on a global scale.

Today, there are countless innovative projects being initiated in less developed

nations by excellent NGOs. But they usually only affect a small number of people, and the ideas and innovations don't spread spontaneously in the community. Why? Because local people don't debate solutions. They don't talk about the projects and what works. They just don't have the information or communications processes to do this. Secondly, funders are not investing in the intellectual development – the ability to tell stories, craft

arguments, research and ask questions – of the poor and under-educated.

So it's no wonder most solutions to poverty haven't been devised by those who actually experience it.

This is why Video Volunteers trains local people as journalists and leaders, and brings community-produced media to hundreds of villages.



The need for community media

Globally, stories from less developed areas are rarely broadcast in the mainstream media.

Locally, villagers and slum dwellers lack platforms to share ideas and find solutions. So the poor cannot lobby the government efficiently, combat corruption, or exercise their franchise properly.

People cannot produce their own stories because they have no training in technology and journalism.

Currently, there is no practical, cost-effective way for knowledge and insights from people at the “base of the pyramid” to be communicated to a nation's leaders or the mainstream media, which means the voices of the poor are excluded from the global decision-making that affects their lives. And democracy suffers.

Our accomplishments to date:

- 15 Community Video Units created
- 150 Producers trained
- 100 Producers working full-time
- 1100 screenings held
- 200,000 people reached through screenings
- 60 video magazines and 50 additional films produced
- 350 villages and slums host regular video screenings
- 2,000 people taking direct action

How Community Video Creates Change

It breaks the literacy barrier;

It communicates in the medium most appealing to people today;

It is the most cost-effective way to reach large numbers of people;

It promotes behavior change by inspiring people with local success stories;

It is a powerful tool in education, fundraising, and advocacy;

It gives a voice to the poor to communicate their needs and knowledge to the outside world;

It provides a platform to demand accountability and transparency from those in power;

It acts as a forum for communities to discuss critical but unspoken social issues;

It encourages people-led development, where the call for change is coming from within the community;

It develops grassroots leaders and communicators;

It provides livelihoods.





ABOUT COMMUNITY VIDEO UNITS

Video Volunteers' main program is setting up Community Video Units (CVUs). The purpose of a CVU is to empower communities to take action, to encourage local government to fulfill its responsibilities, to expand the scale and reach of NGOs and social programs, and to create grassroots leaders.

- > A CVU is a local production unit run by eight community members who are trained in all aspects of video production. They work full-time and receive a salary.
- > Each CVU has digital video cameras, computers for editing, a TV, and a wide screen projector and sound system for outdoor screenings.
- > Producers are trained full-time, on-site for 12-18 months by a professional filmmaker.
- > The CVU produces one video magazine every eight weeks on different social issues.

- > Topics are chosen by an editorial board of community members, the CVU team and the NGO.
- > One video magazine is screened every eight weeks month in 25 villages or *Bastis* (slums).
- > With an average of 200 people at each screening, the film reaches around 5000 people.
- > Villagers see approximately six films a year. The recurring screenings foster participation and ownership by the community.

Video news magazine segments

Community News
Opinion Polls
Success Stories
Case Studies
Legal Tips
Info on Government Programs
Local Culture and Music
Exposés/video raids
Local humor/jokes/skits
Call to Action

CORE PRINCIPLES

Communities taking action

Each film ends with concrete steps for local people to take action.

Financial Sustainability

CVUs are on the path to being self-sustaining and have started making money by producing films for NGOs, training NGO staff and local children in media production, and by selling films to mainstream channels.

Ideally, they will earn enough income to account for 50% of their budget within five years (*see page 20 for more information about financial sustainability*).

Community ownership

In time, the CVUs will be run entirely by the local community.

Local leaders

Journalism training transforms the Producers into strong and articulate leaders.

Voice for Communities

CVUs empower the poor to speak out, challenge the status quo, share knowledge and solutions for positive change.

Scale and reach

The goal is for CVUs to reach twice as many people, bringing the tally up to 10,000 per film. When they do, the cost of bringing a motivating film to one person will be less than a cup of chai.



Each CVU has a handful of Community Producers, who represent 25 nearby villages.

Unearthing hidden talent: finding Community Producers

To select Community Producers, the NGO's field workers publicize the job opening by spreading the word in the villages and slums where they work, and then organize selection workshops. Sometimes more than 100 people come forward to fill eight spots. Producers don't need literacy or education; they need a spark. We're looking for a commitment to effect change as well as

creativity and confidence. At the selection workshops, they are asked to sing songs, put on a short drama or give a speech about something they are passionate about. While building the group of Producers, we are careful to ensure that women make up at least half of the team and that we have representation from the most marginalized groups in the area.

Challenges & themes

COMMUNITY-PRODUCED CONTENT

Creators, not just consumers of content

Why don't we simply try to provide more useful information to the poor through the mainstream media? Why don't we just produce educational documentaries?

Here's why: VV believes that who produces the news is as important as what it says.

Some communities have seen government-sponsored films on health or social issues. Yet, they have never been able to create this material themselves. They have never seen their own people represented on the screen. With our program, the experts who appear in CVU films are from the villages themselves. In each film, the Producers aim to have at least 50 locals appear on camera.

Valuable insights for the world

Local people who live in poverty and have experienced rights violations have certain insights into how to solve a problem that others might not have. For example, Video Volunteers trained a group of women, who'd all been married as children, to make a film.

The women rejected many of the arguments that NGOs usually make to try to stop child marriage, such as calling it "institutionalized child rape." Instead, they



The Community Producers learn to recognize human rights violations and find possible solutions to the issues they are addressing.

came up with a new argument. When a girl is married at such a young age, she never gets to play again. Her childhood is stolen. When this film was shown to a group of development workers, several mentioned that they had never heard that point of view before (see page page 41 for information about the impacts of this project).

We believe that community-produced content will bring out new thoughts and solutions that the whole world can learn from.

Beyond journalism

We want Community Producers to provide useful information as reporters, but also to go beyond journalism – to be activists.

The CVUs approach issues from a rights-based perspective, which some mainstream media outlets would be afraid to take. The Producers are taught about the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. They come to

see that the things that they lack like healthcare, water, sanitation, and education, are actually their legal rights.

Once they've chosen a subject, the Producers are trained to follow research processes in order to be able to:

1. Identify if rights are being violated and what they are. When addressing fundamental problems in society, there usually is some kind of violation.
2. Identify people working on the problem and find possible solutions.

Critical knowledge about rights

We see that giving people information about their human rights or other laws often results in immediate action. After screenings, villagers sometimes say things like, "I did not know there was a minimum wage. I have told my employer and he now gives it to me." And, "I did not know the doctor is supposed to come every day. Now I know what to tell him when I see him next."

Localized and actionable information

Mainstream media outlets try to appeal to a broad demographic. In most cases, they pass on stories that affect only small pockets of the population, especially when it involved trekking into slums, ghettos, or *barrios*. That's why community media is critical; it is often the only way to disseminate relevant information when stories are

highly local. CVUs can also identify the specific actions that people can take to generate immediate results.

A Call to Action from within the community

When a local leader asks people to come together to solve a problem, it is much more likely to be heeded than when an outsider does so. Producers identify community people who have stood up for their rights and ask them to share their success stories. Previously, people may have expected the government to fix everything. Over time, they start to understand that they can solve problems themselves.

Dominic De Souza, director of the NGO Laya, says, "I believe I am slowly seeing a change in mind-set thanks to the CVU."



Apna TV ("Our TV"), a CVU based in Mumbai, starts off their video magazine with a lively montage of regular people announcing to the camera that the unit belongs to them.

Filling a Gap in Mainstream News

According to Pat Mitchell, the former President of PBS, "the global media is controlled by seven families. Some would even say three." This is not good for democracy and our video trainers help new Producers understand this.

Newspaper Analysis

As part of a training exercise, Producers analyze local newspapers. With rulers, they measure how much column space is given to different topics. They are usually shocked to see that almost 90% of their papers are dominated by ads, celebrity gossip, political infighting, crime and other issues that are far removed from their day-to-day lives.

Understanding local media needs

Producers conduct local surveys, asking people what they need information about. Almost all respondents cite health, education, water, and livelihood. They also say their newspapers don't give them information on these issues.

Through these processes, Producers learn that they have two choices: try to reform the mainstream media or make their own. Producers choose the latter.

"We want to tell people that we are creating our own new shows," says Rajeshwari, a Community Producer from Manyam Praja Video in Andhra Pradesh. "Therefore, the issues we cover truly belong to all of us."



THE NETWORK

Community Video Units are set up in partnership with leading NGOs from a range of fields. Here's how it works: the NGO starts a CVU in their region and makes an investment towards equipment, Producer salaries, offices, etc. Video Volunteers matches this contribution by providing training and mentoring, film strategy, impact assessment, and distribution to a wide audience. VV also lays the groundwork for a network of NGOs and CVUs.

In the first few years, CVUs gain ground quickly because they are integrated into an established NGO with a strong foothold. Not only does the NGO have profound

knowledge of the local context, but their staff is rooted in the community. Each NGO has a vision for change for the area and for India as a whole.

So far, 12 NGOs have established CVUs with our support (see page 26 for CVU profiles). Every year, NGO Directors gather for strategy discussions while Producers come together for two weeks of advanced training at our All CVU Meet.

Video Volunteers is committed to expanding this movement and helping as many NGOs as possible deepen their impact through grassroots communications.

More than 200 NGOs have contacted Video Volunteers about starting a Community Video Unit, and our NGO partners have together invested more than \$380,000 of their own funds to support this work – proof that community media is becoming a social movement.

CH
19

A New Online Forum

www.ch19.org

“Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.”

– Article 19 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Video Volunteers set up Channel 19 to provide a space for Community Producers to share their views with the world.

The website features shortened, subtitled versions of the video magazines produced by the CVUs. This platform enables Community Producers and a global audience to connect through community videos. Visitors can read behind the scenes interviews with producers about the making of the films, read stories about impacts on the community, and post questions directly to the filmmakers. Log on today!



VIDEOSHALA COMMUNITY EDUCATIONAL VIDEOS

Videoshala, which means “video school,” is a unique and innovative program that trains community members to produce educational videos. These videos are imbued with the values of diversity, democracy and citizenship and are shown in local schools. Videoshala was started in 2007 as a joint project by Video Volunteers and two Gujarat-based NGOs, Drishti and Udaan.

In the state of Gujarat, there are four Education Community Video Units (E-CVUs) run by four different NGOs. Producers are trained in video production, pedagogy, and children's unique learning needs, to produce films to accompany elements of the curriculum that children find challenging.

So far, 24 videos have been produced about various topics: plants, democracy, religions, and nutrition, among others.

Each film is seen through the prism of citizenship, diversity and democracy. After completing the video, the Producers develop workbooks and games to accompany it. The films are screened to children in 200 schools throughout the state. Teachers have reported that children are now more engaged and have more fun in the classroom.

Skeptics argue that community peo-

ple are not capable of producing their own educational content and that they should leave it up to the experts. We have learned that Community Producers' knowledge of local realities adds remarkable value to school curriculum.

If they are able to create educational materials, what stops them from drafting policy papers or health reports? VV believes nothing can block their path.



Leadership has been described as the ability to tell stories. We take that to heart. The journalism training given to Producers teaches them critical thinking; they learn to ask questions, to analyze and understand problems, to communicate with authority and to inspire.

Community Producers are leaders, not just technicians. After 12 to 18 months of full-time training, they are capable of running the CVU on their own with part-time management support from the NGO. The video trainers are generally young filmmakers who want to make a difference and they undergo an intensive one-month workshop with Video Volunteers. "My classmates have jobs at TV stations. They aren't doing meaningful work," says Anil Kumar, one of our trainers. "I'm so glad I can do something for poor communities."

Training includes

- > Camera operations and video editing on computers
- > Research methods and interview techniques
- > Effective storytelling
- > Human rights orientation on gender, caste, minority rights and other issues
- > Public speaking and activism
- > Sustaining a CVU, including financing and operations
- > Screening, distribution and generating community ownership of the CVU
- > Monitoring and evaluation of the CVU
- > Expanding the CVU into other media like radio, web and new media
- > Using video for advocacy and working with the mainstream media

Video Magazines in 10 Easy Steps

- 1.** Once the Editorial Board selects a subject, the Producers draft a proposal which includes what they want to cover and how they intend to make an impact. The NGO and Video Volunteers provide feedback.
- 2.** The Producers do field research and seek out stories by visiting all the villages in their network.
- 3.** They look for examples of the best and worst scenarios: people who have suffered as a result of the issue, and people who have made a difference by taking action on it.
- 4.** They make an outline of the film and plan their shoots. Each team heads out into the villages to start shooting.
- 5.** Simultaneously, the Producers map out a screening schedule to show the film in their 25 villages. Via SMS or word of mouth, they inform their volunteers in each village so they can publicize the event.
- 6.** They consult with the NGO to see how they will be able support any community members who want to take action.
- 7.** They shoot and edit a rough cut, which is shown to the NGO.

Grassroots Journalists, Local Leaders

The goal of the training is not simply to teach Community Producers to make films. Training them to think critically and express themselves creatively requires a more significant investment. Our training creates community leaders who know how to break down issues and work through problems that their villages are facing.

Learning by doing

After each Video Magazine is completed, the trainees spend between two and six weeks in intense training. The trainer may assign a technical exercise like a visual poem without words, or a cell-phone video. The purpose is to help the Producers develop their own unique voices.

- 8.** The Producers finalize the editing and produce pamphlets or fliers that will be distributed at the screenings to explain further how people can mobilize around the issue.
- 9.** They prepare a presentation that they will use to motivate the public before and after each screening. They rehearse their speeches to gain confidence and plan their strategies to drive home the arguments.
- 10.** Screenings begin! The Producers follow up by connecting people with the tools they need to take action.

Uncharted territory

Through workshops and joint projects, we intend to provide life-long training to these Community Producers. Consequently, we will be providing what is perhaps the most intensive leadership and critical thinking training available to people at the "base of the pyramid."

The challenge lies in the fact that we are moving into uncharted territory, devising training modules so people who may be non-literate can become complex thinkers and problem-solvers.

Sea change

After the screening of their first magazine, Kanu, the video trainer at the Samvad CVU in Ahmedabad, had already noticed that his Producers were markedly different. The topics of their discussions with their parents and their spouses had changed: "How was the Koran written?" or "What was Gandhi's philosophy?"

"Did you ever talk about these things before?" Kanu asked Sofia, a Community Producer. "No, no," she said. "Before we just discussed normal household things."





SCREENINGS COMMUNITY PLATFORMS FOR DIALOGUE

Screenings are the heart and soul of a CVU's work. Often the majority of a village is present, discussing issues that are rarely addressed out in the open. In some instances, the film screenings generate more interest than local government meetings. As a result, town officials sometimes show up at the screenings when they need to share information. CVU screenings have a direct impact on democratic participation and their Calls to Action help people implement real changes.

The CVU could not operate without dedicated volunteers. Community Producers often honor them at the screenings by projecting their photos or making video profiles to say thanks.

They also use friendly competition to encourage people to step up to the plate. For instance, they might say, "Did you know that after our film last month about alcoholism, the people in the next village got the police to conduct a raid on illegal production? You can try the same thing here."

The townspeople also appreciate hearing news about nearby communities. As one audience member said, "Sometimes we don't even know what's happening in the village next door, but the video programs tell us."

At the screenings, the CVUs work particularly hard to get women to speak because they are often reluctant to address the crowd. It is inspiring to see a young woman hold up a mic for the first time in her life. VV is supporting projects at two CVUs to devise creative strategies to ad-

dress this imbalance. They've determined that having strong female Producers is one of the best tactics for getting women to speak their minds.

Sample Calls to Action

- > "Use traditional crops. We'll show you how."
- > "Join our girls playing teams if you believe girls can play cricket too!"
- > "Keep the electricity company numbers in your cell phone. Complain when the power is out."

DIY Community Film Screenings

Community screenings can be unpredictable, raucous, and sometimes controversial.

People might burst into spontaneous applause, singing, or dancing. In rural areas, these screenings are a real novelty. Sometimes they watch the films twice! In a village an hour outside of Ahmedabad, a major city with 10 multiplexes, 80% of the people surveyed said they were seeing a movie screen for the first time. In cities, it's tougher to engage a very media-saturated audience. One CVU in Mumbai uses creative tactics to get noticed; they feature cameos with famous actors or link up popular events like the cricket World Cup. When all is said and done, no two screenings are alike.



Step 1: Spread the word

Megaphone in hand, the Producers go door to door with local children or musicians to announce the screening. As the crowd gathers, they invite village leaders to speak.

Step 2: Press Play

With the projector connected to the home electricity supply of a generous villager, the video begins. People laugh when they see their own localities on screen. They pull out their cell phones when helpful phone numbers are given out.

Step 3: Discuss

The goal is to engage people in a discussion about the Call to Action. Often, people use the mic to vent frustrations or share their opinions on a range of topics.

Step 4: Get feedback

With only their cell phones to provide light, the Producers hand out feedback forms and note down how many people attended, how many spoke up, and other information to gauge the success of a film and popularity of the CVU.

Screening Report - by Siddharth

Initial frenzy and excitement has waned. Instead, the villagers now realize the seriousness of the screenings. There are people who wait for us to come and show the film, especially the women where the numbers have shown a real increase from screening to screening.

"Because of our films, every house now has a toilet, and the roads have improved. When we go into our community, people say, 'Your film has come in, and the filth has gone out.'"
— Sofiya, Community Producer, Samvad

Challenges & themes

COMMUNITY OWNERSHIP

Power to the people, right on

Many people realize that the typical top down approach to fighting poverty – with bureaucrats and international agencies designing large-scale social programs and then imposing them on millions of poor people – isn't working.

Community ownership is like the Holy Grail for social workers. They dream of the day when citizens will demand, conceptualize, plan and execute programs with minimal outside intervention, which is probably the most sustainable way to address poverty for millions of people.

What does ownership mean?

Our goal is for the CVUs to be owned by the local communities. But what exactly does that mean? Basically, it means that the CVU would be fully financially supported by the community and local people would also manage it. Its future would be guaranteed by the community, and it would be kept alive as an important cultural asset. If anyone ever attempted to shut down the CVU or the money dried up, the communities would be banging on the door saying, "We will not let this happen. This is our media, we need it, and we will do whatever it takes to keep it going."

As Rehana, a Community Producer at the Samvad CVU put it recently, "I got in an auto a while back and the driver said, 'Hey, I recognize you. You're the reporter for the films being made for our area. Great job.'"

"Right now," she said, "the communities know and recognize us. They know we are from here and we represent them. In time, we want them to need us, to know that this is their media, and they have control over what is produced."

What success might look like

Our CVU model allows community ownership to develop. Each unit operates in a small geographic area of only 25 villages or slums. All research, filming, and screenings take place in the same region. The villagers see the Producers constantly and know that they will be coming back next month to represent them, which makes people much more likely to want to get involved. Just as people send in letters to the editor to a local newspaper because they know the paper may print it, people know the Producers will cover an issue if requested.

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Screening feedback

Local vendor is a fan!

CVU: *Samvad*

"I have a vegetable stall close by. I have watched all of your films. I try and help with the screening in our area every month. But I would like to be more involved with your work. If I did not have my shop I would have definitely joined you. Your team is doing a great job."

– *Raj, vegetable vendor*

A new space for women's voices

CVU: *Apna TV*

"A woman said to me at a screening, 'In your first film, I thought this is quite good. The second one was useful and told me new things. Now I feel with the third one that this is a great space for women like me to speak and come forward.'"

– *Saharsh, CVU coordinator*

Spotlighting important issues

CVU: *Manyam Praja Video*

"We made a film about child marriage. I was married as a child and I gave the speech before the film and said we must end this practice. Our whole village was there. Most women were married as children, but they had never discussed this issue before. We usually just talk about prices and problems and what the government is not doing."

–*Latha Gauri, video trainee*



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This is true two-way communication, and it is very different from the government-sponsored awareness-raising documentaries that air on TV throughout the less developed world.

VV's NGO partners agree that the goal is to eventually register each CVU as an independent organization. They do not view the CVUs as mouthpieces for their NGOs; they give them the freedom to address a wide range of issues and develop their own identities.

Concrete contributions

People have a vested interest in seeing their CVU succeed. Many have taken

an active interest in the unit's activities. Some are participating by sharing their stories and struggles; others attend editorial board meetings and offer concrete ideas for new films; still more are organizing their own screenings of films that touched them.

In their 25 villages, CVUs have active volunteers who provide electricity for the projector or whitewash the walls so that Producers don't have to transport a big screen. Some villages have offered to pay for the screenings costs.

Community members often ask for copies of the film so they can show

them to their neighbors; the Producers have gotten the ball rolling and new activists are sprouting up daily.

In time, we expect that community members will start offering to contribute financially to the running of the CVU. They will be helping the CVU expand into other geographic areas and use new technologies, like running radio stations or setting up internet portals for the town.

Increased community ownership is showing us that CVUs can become sustainable and truly participatory venues for social change.

Challenges & themes

FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

Growing the movement with earned income

In a slum in Ahmedabad, a group of women confronted a government official during the monsoons, saying “Look at these gutters, overflowing with waste! We have our own media group and we will get the CVU to come film how you are not doing your job.”

The women approached the CVU with 2000 rupees (\$40 USD) that they had collected and offered to pay the Producers to film the officials.

In the end, the threat of the cameras was more than enough to encourage the officials to fix the gutters, so the money was not needed. But the message was clear, some communities are so desperate for change that they are willing to pay for local media services.

Earned income

Initially, CVUs are supported financially by their NGOs so they can concentrate on training and learning. Once they are up and running, they have been coming up with creative ways to earn income so they can be self-sustaining.



Several raise funds through small community contributions, making wedding videos for slumdweller, hosting videography workshops for young people, shooting for mainstream TV and by renting out their equipment. Producing films for other NGOs is another very effective way for the CVUs to support themselves.

Currently, two CVUs are earning the equivalent of 20 to 40% of their annual operating costs, which hover around \$10,000 USD per year, through a combination of the above strategies.

In the future, some plan to explore local advertising possibilities for government programs, small local businesses,

and possibly larger corporate sponsors. They also plan to operate computer kiosks where people can search the web for important documents, take ID photos, etc.

Partnering with a leading business school

In partnership with the Indian Institute of Management, which is India's leading business school, we are working to develop business plans and marketing strategies for CVUs to help them reach leading television stations and news websites in India. We will also explore how such community video businesses can be supported by microcredit lending.

In 2009, Video Volunteers also part-



Image by Wordcat57

nered with NGOs in Brazil to launch a program that helps individual Producers from *favelas* (Brazilian slums) to develop their own video companies.

But finding a business model for a global community media network is a challenge. Videomakers can charge a relatively high amount for their services, but the costs of production remain high as well. The general public is willing to pay for media, but, as most documentary filmmakers know, audiences line up around the block for the summer's blockbusters, not films about social justice.

Making use of new revenue

Financial sustainability will mean the CVU is no longer dependent on outside funders, which will reduce outside influence in editorial content. Though CVUs do have community editorial boards, the

fact that the program belongs to an NGO does mean that they – and Video Volunteers as well – can influence content.

Solid financial footing will also enable CVUs to expand. For instance, a CVU with significant revenue can take on new Producers, start community radio programs or get another projector and start screening in more areas. Incentivizing Producers, meaning financially rewarding entrepreneurial producers who bring in business for the CVU, may improve production efficiency.

Not compromising on the social mission

There is always the danger that if Producers make more films for outsiders, then they will make fewer films for the community. Additionally, if a CVU is owned by the community, how can

they charge people for their services when these same people are already contributing their time and their stories as volunteers?

These are some contradictions we grapple with as we try to balance the social needs of the program with the need for financial sustainability.

The focus is on long-term sustainability of the project and financial sustainability is only part of the equation. Some people may invest money, creative energies and/or their time

Above all, the most critical factor in maintaining a sustainable program is demand. Survival is dependent on the community needing and wanting the project to continue. We are seeing this happen in spades.



Meet the Producers

In the beginning, they are laborers, mechanics, and housebound women.

After a year and a half of training, they emerge as video makers and local leaders. Our Community Producers undergo a remarkable transformation that re-shapes their lives.

They are not simply video journalists; they are grassroots activists using the power of a compact camera. They are well respected in their villages and slums; they are a source of motivation for their peers.

They are shedding light on people's harsh realities, organizing communities, and empowering locals to take action.

Profile
**ZULEKHA
SAYYED**
Hamari Awaz



Zulekha is an extrovert by nature. This fun-loving 22-year-old wants to be a good editor, and is willing to go to great lengths to capture the perfect shot.

"I was filming in the train, which isn't allowed," she recounted. "The collector came by and asked for my ticket and I showed him my pass. He said, 'Why are you shaking? You have a pass.' But he didn't know that I was shooting illegally."

Growing up in a slum wasn't easy on Zulekha. Her father died when she was young and her mother worked as a maid

to pay for her schooling, earning roughly \$35 a month. The family often went hungry. "I used to pick up things from the roadside to eat," she said.

Starting at the age of 13, Zulekha volunteered at Yuva, the NGO that runs Hamari Awaz. She got involved in the Community Video Unit when she finished school.

"I feel that nobody should have a life like mine," she tells the camera in her video profile on the Channel 19 website.

"But if you get one like this, then you should become a Producer at Hamari Awaz so you can spend your life learning happily like me."

She pauses for a second and then says with a big smile, "I give all my love to you."

"I had never touched a computer before coming here, even though I'd done my BA and MA. There are no computers in colleges for people like me. Here, I feel like this is our equipment so I feel confident using it."

— *Rehana, Samvad*

"I see my face in the mirror. I never thought I'd see it on a screen."

— *Chinna, Manyam Praja Video*

"In my area, people see me as a kind of a news reporter. They think, 'This girl does some really good work, she goes to an office, brings a camera, and is seen in a film.' So yes, I am a little famous here."

— *Jayasheela, Hamari Awaaz*

Profile

NOOR MOHD
Sakshi Media



Noor has a passion for media. He wants to do something different. He wants to dedicate his life to social work. He wants to change the system with a video magazine.

As the youngest of seven children, he was brought up in Panchmahal, Gujarat. His father is a rickshaw driver. Before joining the Sakshi CVU, he worked as an insurance agent.

In 2002, Hindu-Muslim tensions escalated and riots broke out, ripping Gujarat apart. At the time, Noor was in 10th grade. He was not happy with the way the events were covered by the press.

"The media coverage left a very bad impression on me," he said. Noor decided to take matters into his own hands and resolved to become a media activist.

"I wanted media that would guide people on a truthful path," he explained. "At Sakshi Media, we tell untold stories. We cover the community's struggles and successes."

Being a Community Producer has had a positive effect on his life. "My friends appreciate me and admire my work," he said. "I am learning something new every day."



"I'm the youngest of eleven girls in my family. Before I was in the CVU I just worked at home like my sisters. I didn't know anything about social work, but now I can do things for society."

— Neeru, Apna Malak Ma

Profile

RATHNA KUMARI
Manyam Praja Video



Growing up in an extremely rural area where farming is one of the few options, Rathna Kumari did domestic work and was employed as a home nurse.

When she became a Community Producer at Manyam Praja Video, her life turned around. "I now know how to make films with the camera," she said.

Rathna is motivated to perfect her craft. She wants to be able to live independently and earn her own money.

But she's not thrilled about public speaking; the idea of addressing the crowds at screenings terrifies Rathna: she's shy. Given the choice, she would prefer to focus on camera or editing.

Ratna is very inquisitive by nature and hopes to become a skilled editor.

She is curious about many things, such as the graphics that are displayed when the editing software launches: "Why is there a horse when you open Adobe? What does it signify?"

"I find editing very difficult because it is all in English," she said. "But I think that is why I want to know it so well."

"My family has seen all my films and they feel proud of me. There is no one like me in my village."

— Prabhakar, Manyam Praja Video

"If we don't change ourselves, nothing will change. People here blame it on others but we have to change it."

— Yashodra, Apna TV

"I used to be a house painter. Never in my wildest dreams did I imagine that one day I would be in this kind of a set up (working for a CVU)."

— Zakhir, Samvad

"The first time we went to the village, people were shy to speak. But now when we visit they all want to speak!"

— Rajeshwari, Manyam Praja Video





CVU PROFILES

From the parched desert in Rajasthan to the foothills of the Himalayas, India is a mixed bag of people and culture. With more than a billion people and 1600 local dialects, each pocket of the country has its own cuisine, festivals, and culture.

Our 15 NGO partners are scattered across the nation, from the largest slum in Asia to remote tribal villages, and reflect India's incredible diversity.

We strive to ensure that the most-underrepresented voices have an outlet through the CVU.

Collectively, the Community Producers are 25% Dalit ("lower" caste), 25% Muslim, and 25% Tribal (aboriginal people). More than half of the Community Producers are women.

Each NGO has a different area of focus, including water, education, "lower" caste rights, aboriginal rights and gender.



Community Video Units Across India

Though they are spread across six states of India, Community Producers feel connected to each other. They regroup annually at the All-CVU Meet, which is our intensive training camp. Many of them have developed deep friendships and stay in touch via SMS (text messaging). Collectively, the Producers have clout. They told Video Volunteers: "We want the CVUs to have their own channel!" In response, we created ch19.org, our online channel that showcases their videos. It's not a TV station yet, but it's a step in the right direction.

Apna TV

NGO: Akshara
Mumbai, Maharashtra

Apna TV's Community Producers are working to bring issues from Mumbai's slums to audiences across the metropolis. The CVU is run by Akshara, a resource center which strives to improve the lives of women.

They currently have 12 Producers, four of which have been working for three years and have become trainers themselves. They are training eight new Producers who are female students from low-income areas.

Akshara works to create citywide media campaigns for issues like women's empowerment, domestic violence, and sexual harassment. They screen their films in colleges and slum areas in order to build a bridge between the youth from these two social classes.

They often recruit Producers with a background in street theater because they are lively and engaging on camera, which helps these films to compete in Mumbai's highly competitive media landscape. They also use innovative devices like cameo appearances by Bollywood celebrities and docu-dramas to draw audiences in.

"Mumbai is the center of the largest film

Producers from Apna TV / "Our TV" >





Producers from Apna Malak Ma / "In Our Land"

industry in the world," says Nandita Shah, Akshara's director. "But all the films talk about the same thing." She started the CVU to see if they can make alternative media part of the mainstream, and thereby, "really change perspectives on a large scale."

The Mumbai government has a reputation for corruption, in which politicians make lofty promises they never follow through on. The public was desperate for information about keeping their officials accountable. In 2007, the CVU produced a magazine about elections, which generated significant interest in the slums. People even organized their own inde-

pendent screenings. The film outlined steps they could take to ensure that their leaders are serving their needs.

More than 15 media outlets in Mumbai picked up the story and talked about how Apna TV was helping people in the slums become government watchdogs.

"Mumbai is the center of the largest film industry in the world. But all the films talk about the same thing."

— Nandita Shah, Director of Akshara

Apna Malak Ma

NGO: Navsarjan Trust
Surendranagar District, Gujarat

Apna Malak Ma, or "In our land," aims to create a dialogue between "upper" and "lower" castes in a fractured part of Gujarat.

Their team is composed entirely of "lower" caste Dalits, who are victims of such profound prejudice that they were once referred to as "Untouchables." (It is common practice for tea stalls in rural India to maintain two sets of cups based on this division. Many "upper" castes would refuse to drink from a "lower" caste's cup.)

The CVU is operated by Navsarjan Trust, which is a leading human rights organization working with Dalits in over 3000 villages in Gujarat.

Navsarjan chose to situate the CVU in the 25 villages that had seen the most caste violence during the previous year. In these areas, Dalits had been harassed or beaten for marrying people from "higher" castes or for daring to run for local government.

The AMM Producers fiercely reject prejudice and are willing to assist all community members. However, in keeping with their NGO's tradition, any "upper" caste villager who asks for their help must drink a cup of water from their hands, and thereby signify their willingness to break caste taboos. Some cannot do it.

"When I look to the future, I see non-Dalits speaking out against caste in our films, saying, 'I will not tolerate Untouchability; I will not practice it.'"

— Manjula Pradeep, Director of Navsarjan

At the screenings in the center of these feudal villages, the residents will see a young Dalit girl up on the screen, projected at twice her size, giving solutions for everyone – including the "upper" castes – to solve serious local problems.

This symbolic act goes a long way in addressing age-old discrimination. It also sends the message to audiences that Dalits can be strong leaders who can benefit the entire society.

AMM has helped bridge the gap between social groups. Communication had completely broken down, with minimal interaction between the different classes. At the village screenings, you will now see Dalits and non-Dalits sitting together for perhaps the first time ever in that village (see page 37 for the full story).

"In these villages, the same five families have controlled everything for centuries," says Navsarjan Director Manjula Pradeep. "The power relations are deeply ingrained, but the Community Video Unit provides an alternative perspective on who can be a leader."



Producers from Manyam Praja Video / "Forest People's Video"

Manyam Praja Video

NGO: Laya
East Ghodavari District, Andhra Pradesh

Manyam Praja Video is promoted by the NGO Laya. Since 1989, Laya has been working with the Adivasis of Eastern Andhra – the so-called Tribals of India, the subcontinent's original inhabitants. This all-Tribal Community Video Unit raises awareness about the culture and rights of India's first people and works in an extremely isolated rural area that is largely devoid of other media, be it newspapers or television.

Since some of their villages are only connected via dirt tracks, many people are seeing a big screen for the first time at a Manyam screening. Newspapers only reach the area about once a week, and so Manyam Praja Video provides critical information that often stirs people to act.

"We never knew what happened in villages even close by," says one villager.

Many Tribal groups often live without roads or health care. Many get by on subsistence agriculture in a mostly cashless economy.

Laya helps them secure access to land, water and forests, which they are legally



entitled to. The NGO is currently running programs for micro-credit, health, sustainable agriculture and legal aid in 105 villages. Most of the Producers in Manyam still work on their family farms, and the CVU team is bigger than most so they can accommodate the Producers' long trips home during the harvest.

"Women in our area don't speak up," says Vishwamma, a Community Producer who has only done two years of schooling. "But when they see that there are women speaking on camera and shooting, and that they are all girls from their own area, they will also feel inspired to do something."

Hamari Awaaz

**NGO: Yuva
Mumbai, Maharashtra**

Hamari Awaaz works to ensure that slum residents are included in discussions about the future of Mumbai, which is one of the fastest growing cities on the planet.

The CVU is supported by Yuva, an organization working with slum dwellers for 25 years to help them formulate their own action plans and secure their right to housing. They have been organizing people to fight against the city's continuous cycle of forced evictions, in which the government razes the shanties of thou-

< *Producers from Hamari Awaaz / "Our Voice"*



Producers from Sakshi Media / "Witness Media"

sands of people to make way for new developments.

Remarkably, even people beyond Mumbai's city limits have started paying attention to their work. The CVU was invited to produce a film as part of Listen Up!, a youth media project in New York. Jaysheela, one the Producers, made a 10-minute film about her work in the CVU that will be broadcast on mainstream TV in the US.

"When I participated in Listen up!, I realized for the first time that there were people who would be interested in my life, growing up in a slum. At first it made me laugh, but now I know what happens here is important," she recounts.

Hamari Awaaz screens in several slum areas, but there is a strong focus on Dharavi, the largest slum in Asia, where over 1 million people live in less than a square mile. The government has been slowly demolishing homes in order to put up high rises. Sometimes they compensate the residents, sometimes they don't. And most slum dwellers will say they have no idea what the plans are.

"The TV reporters never come to the slums. We are the only local reporters here."

— Zulekha, Community Producer,
Hamari Awaaz

This urban "renewal" project and the Dharavi slum are two hot topics worldwide, especially after the film *Slumdog Millionaire* brought attention to the area. Yet, readers of Western newspapers are generally more informed about the government's plans than the people who live there. The CVU was formed expressly to tackle this problem.

"The TV reporters never come to the slums," says Producer Zulekha. "They only come when something like a bomb blast happens. We are the only local reporters here. So, community media is necessary."

Sakshi Media

**NGO: Yuvshakti
Panchmahal District, Gujarat**

The Producers from Sakshi Media witnessed terrible violence in Gujarat in 2002, when communal riots led to the deaths of more than 2000 Muslims. Panchmahal District was the hardest hit area in the state. In the aftermath, the relationships between Hindus and Muslims seemed beyond repair.

Despite yesterday's troubles, the NGO Yuvshakti was able to build a team of Muslim and Hindu Producers to unite them around their common development challenges. Yuvshakti is a youth movement which involves both communities working creatively and constructively together.

The CVU steers clear of politically sensitive topics and instead tries to focus on common problems like jobs and education. But nonetheless, because they operate in such a politically tense area, outdoor screenings have been sabotaged by corrupt local politicians who didn't like the message the CVU projected of Hindus and Muslims working together.

In the only act of violence to date against a CVU, the Community Producers were assaulted at a screening one night. Bruised but not defeated, the CVU decided to organize youth-led screening groups to show films indoors. In time, they hope to take out loans to develop a self-sustaining screening club for films about social issues (and some Bollywood films), which will in turn provide young people with new job opportunities.

Samvad

**NGO: Saath
Ahmedabad, Gujarat**

The Samvad Community Video Unit is committed to providing critical information on basic amenities and services to slum dwellers in the city of Ahmedabad.

Samvad works under the umbrella of Saath, an NGO focused on bringing infrastructure to thousands of slum residents through a network of women-led community-based organizations. Saath also offers microcredit, health and job-training programs, allowing women and young people to be financially self-sufficient.

"The CVU has been very effective for Saath as we have been able to reach a

mass of people," says Chinmayee, one of the leaders of Saath. "On a regular basis, we can publicize the positive changes that are taking place in slums."

The CVU Producers at Samvad are seen as real leaders by the community. As Tarun says, "It's easier for us than other media people because they know us as and we are their neighbors. So they give us access easily."

Samvad is well on its way to achieving financial sustainability through a number of income generating activities: they screen educational programs for companies like Sesame Street; they train other NGOs to use video; they make films for non-profits like Handicap International; and they run a popular children's video workshop. In one of those workshops, the children made a video about the need for playgrounds and then lobbied the local government and other city schools to construct one.

According to Chinmayee, the CVU is the most effective way for the NGO to communicate with people. Slum dwellers are often intimidated by one-on-one interactions because they feel like they can't express themselves properly due to lack of education. "Through the video medium they overcome this fear and then they exhibit new confidence," she says. "They feel the CVU is their own."

< *Producers from Samvad / "Dialogue"*



EMERGING CVUS

Every year, Video Volunteers aims to start several new Community Video Units with different leading NGOs. Expanding in such a way will enable our network to start making an impact on the mainstream media. A single CVU sends ripples through the community, but a large network with 100s of Producers creates waves of change.

Hamaru Raibar

**NGO: Himalayan Institute Hospital
Trust
Dehra Dun, Uttarakhand**

Nestled in the beautiful Doon valley of the state of Uttarakhand, Hamaru Raibar was started in January 2008 as an initiative of the Himalayan Institute Hospital Trust (HIHT).

The Rural Development Institute of HIHT has been working on issues like health, sanitation, livelihood, and education since

1991. The CVU was formed to complement the campaigns that HIHT focuses on and cover other issues as well.

Marwar Media

**NGO: Jal Bhagirathi Foundation
Jodhpur, Rajasthan**

Marwar Media works in one of the toughest environments of any CVU – the extremely conservative and drought-prone villages of Rajasthan. It was started in partnership with the NGO Jal Bhagirathi

Foundation (JBF) that works on the issue of water, in an environment where women have to walk hours each day to get enough water for their families to drink. JBF also focuses on the issue of governance and the CVU fits into their strategy for expanding village-level democracy.

Rajasthan is one of the most feudal places in India, and so a real challenge here is getting women to come forward to work in the CVU. In fact, some of the female Producers were married off at a very young age. Marwar Media therefore concentrates a lot of attention on strengthening women's participation in the CVU.

Chetana TV

**NGO: Byrraju Foundation
East and West Godhavari Districts,
Andhra Pradesh**

Byrraju Foundation and Media Lab Asia have started eight Community Video Centers serving 64 villages with a team of 16 Producers, with two Producers per center. Their videos are primarily distributed on local cable networks and laptop screenings. VV and Byrraju are preparing the Producers to produce a half-hour cable broadcast every day about the issues of rural women and children. They use cutting edge technology to bring these communications tools into rural villages. At one Chetana TV center, the Producers can speak via live, high-resolution video-conferencing to trainers in the main city. It holds great promise for how high-quality training can reach very rural areas.





IMPACTS ON COMMUNITIES

Encouraging local people to take action.

The first step in changing the way people behave is to change the way they think. If a village needs drinking water, one solution would be to build a well. However, a more sustainable strategy would be to encourage 1000 people to demand clean water and get ten wells built that way.

Impacts & impact assessment

Screenings result in impacts in the following way: once people are informed about possible solutions, they can start to organize. They lobby their government. Often times, the government has no choice but to respond to the mounting public pressure and fix the problem. Every video magazine has led to an impact of some kind.

Each film ends with a concrete Call to Action so people can take the lead in their own development. Producers return to the villages each month to find out how many people have exercised their rights. As explained on page 17, they also tabulate screening data: How many people attended? How many people stayed for the discussion? Did participation increase or decrease since last month?

The fact that we can demonstrate the concrete impact and the reach of each video has greatly increased people's confidence in community media as a tool for social change.

ESCAPING THE DEBT TRAP *Credit Societies* by Manyam Praja

"Once upon a time, all tribal villages here were self-sufficient," the narrator explains in Manyam Praja Video's magazine on Credit Societies. She continues, saying, "This situation changed when moneylenders entered the village."

In remote parts of Andhra Pradesh, there is hardly any entrepreneurship; farming is the only option. In between harvests, food becomes scarce and families are forced to take loans from moneylenders who charge exorbitant rates. Some families are indebted for generations. "We are regularly threatened by the moneylender," one man recounts. "We are forced to sell our produce to him."



For their magazine on Credit Societies, Community Producers from Mayam Praja interviewed Venkateshwarlu Miriyala and his family, who are now working as laborers on the land they once owned. "We eat a little and repay our loan," he says from his home in Andhra Pradesh.

Sitting crossed legged with his wife and children by his side, Venkateshwarlu Miriyala from the village of Giniyash explains why they can't escape the debt cycle.

One year they borrowed money, but lost their crop. The debt kept increasing and they were left with nothing. "We are just like other people. We also want to wear nice clothes," he says. "All we have left now are debts."

The community producers introduced the Manyam Seema Bank, which is operated by Laya, the NGO that runs Manyam Pra-

ja Video. The bank's secretary explained how people can access their equitable loans. The film also described government lending programs, which charge reasonable rates.

Participation in Laya's credit society jumped significantly after the film was screened in 18 villages in June 2007. Villagers successfully accessed government loans after learning about the opportunities from the video. With this new knowledge, they are refusing to pay extra interest to the exploitative lenders.

IMPACTS *in brief*

JOB SKILLS'R'US

Dreams

by Apna TV

Apna TV urged young people to follow their dreams in their first video magazine. They captured young people in slums who were not earning a lot of money but found careers that they were passionate about, such as a female rickshaw driver, a day care teacher, and a dance troupe. After being featured in the film, a young rickshaw driver got a record deal from a local company, enabling him to reach his goal of being a professional musician and performing poetry.

REDEVELOPING SLUMS

Slum infrastructure

by Samvad

The gutters, roads and public toilets in the Ahmedabad slums were horrendous. The government tried to kick-start a program to address the situation. As part of the program, people were required to make a small financial contribution. The fliers that the officials distributed weren't enough to convince people to invest. Nobody was signing up. Samvad made a film explaining why it was worthwhile, and finally, after many years, people started enrolling in large numbers. Thanks to the film, the infrastructure has greatly improved.



For years, the woman pictured above has been paid a pittance for her work as a farm laborer because she didn't know what the minimum wage was. When the Producers at Apna Malak Ma interviewed her, her employer also wanted to speak: "I also didn't know there was a minimum wage," he said. "Now, I promise to always pay my workers the minimum wage." This was an interesting example of how the desire to look good on camera can encourage positive changes in unexpected places.

BREAKING CASTE BARRIERS

BPL List and "Upper" Castes

By Apna Malak Ma

The Below Poverty Line card, which provides those living under the poverty line with subsidized food and rations, is a highly coveted piece of paper in rural India.

But there is widespread corruption in the system and many undeserving people have the cards while the poorest are left out. The video magazine discusses who is eligible for the card, what to do if you don't have one, and what the minimum wage is (see *image above*).

After screening a magazine about BPL cards, the CVU received requests for help from 900 villagers who were wrongfully left out of the scheme. The response was overwhelming. One young boy was so inspired that he helped file 100 applications.

The Producers were also committed to the process. They made sure that everyone knew how to fill out the forms and for those who couldn't do it, they did it for them.

Manjibhai, the coordinator of the CVU, frequently speaks out against the mis-

treatment of "lower" caste Dalits in the villages. Because of his activism, he has dealt with his fair share of aggression from "upper" castes.

One day, he was sitting in Apna Malak Ma's office when an "upper" caste man wearing a blue turban, which is worn by the caste that has traditionally been most antagonistic toward Dalits, walked in.

"Manji," the man said, "I've never been in this office before. But I heard you were helping people with BPL cards and I wanted more information."

Though it may sound insignificant, this was a remarkable gesture. In a place where discrimination and prejudice has been ingrained for centuries, it is a big deal for a person who thinks of himself as "upper" caste to approach a Dalit organization. Manji says that in his 14 years of activism, an "upper" caste person has never asked him for help.

From the very beginning, the CVU's goal was to work with all castes. Manji realized that the strategy was working. Soon after, non-Dalits started coming to editorial board meetings and attending their screenings.

Traditionally, "upper" and "lower" castes wouldn't dare sit together. That soon changed. "Look at them sitting in the same space," Manji points out. "This would be unimaginable a few years ago."

Though the "lower" castes still sat on the ground, while the others had chairs, Manji



A shopkeeper shares her best wishes for Eid and Diwali in Samvad's Communal Harmony magazine, which helped bridge divisions between Hindus and Muslims in Gujarat.

is optimistic that it won't always be like that. "In a few years time, I am sure we will see Dalits sitting on chairs too," he says.

HINDUS AND MUSLIMS UNITE *Communal Harmony* by Samvad

In 2002, the state of Gujarat erupted into riots as tensions between Hindus and Muslims mounted. Violent mobs roamed from town to town. Neighbors were pitted against each other. The state was set ablaze and 2000 Muslims were massacred.

Post-violence, Hindus and Muslims in Gujarat had few chances to interact. They had separate schools, separate neighborhoods, and separate lives. Samvad's Community Producers were severely marked by these experiences. In their second video magazine, they wanted to bring down the barriers.

The Producers wanted to show that the two groups had the same values and concerns, but that fear kept them apart. In the film, they traced the production cycle of a box of sweets. Who makes the boxes? Who mixes the ingredients?

Who sells the finished product? It was a collaborative effort between Hindus and Muslims.

Since this was probably the first film that people had seen about the riots, the issue was very sensitive. They couldn't address the atrocities head on. Instead, they used footage of a cockfight as a metaphor for the government manipulation that led to the riots.

The filmmakers used two religious festivals to bring the community together. They featured local people wishing each other well. "Warm greetings on Eid and Diwali to all Hindu and Muslim brethren," one woman says.

To encourage both groups to attend, Samvad held a screening in a wasteland between their ghettos. They set up a sheet between the groups so people from both communities would feel at ease. When the post-screening discussion began, the divider came down. People spoke up for the first time about the need for peace. Several audience members said they were seeing the humanity in the other community for the first time. They took turns wishing each other the best for their festivals.

"I brought my friend to see the film. He doesn't like Muslims," said Tarun, a Samvad Producer. "During the film he turned to me and said, 'you must be paying them. Muslims don't look and act so good.' Though he saw Muslims every day, he had heard them for the first time in our film," he said.

"Though he saw Muslims every day, he had heard them for the first time in our film."

The producers themselves also overcame challenges. They became a cohesive unit of filmmakers working together toward a common goal. One Muslim Community Producer said that after making the film, she has the courage to visit Hindu-dominated areas, which would have intimidated her in the past.

In a lineup with his fellow Producers, Tarun takes the microphone and tells the camera how they have celebrated each other's festivals. "Even now, we stand as one before you," he says, adding, "Our lives have changed and so will yours."

INITIATING LAND TRANSFERS *Land Rights* by Apna Malak Ma

For the 770 million rural poor in India, it's tough to escape the cycle of poverty if you don't own land. There's more to land than physically having a plot to call your own; it's intrinsically linked to social and economic status.

After India's independence in 1947, a land reformation movement attempted to re-distribute land among the landless. Due to the hierarchy of India's caste system, many Dalits were excluded from the process because "upper" castes used loopholes and aggressive tactics to

maintain their holdings. Today, most of the cultivatable land is in the hands of the "upper" castes. There have been many uprisings, but little real change.

Aapna Malak Ma's fourth video magazine focused on the NGO Navsarjan's land campaign, which was working to redistribute land to Dalits in hundreds of villages. After all, the law states that if you are landless, the government has an obligation provide you with land.

The campaign faced two challenges. Dalits were afraid to file land applications because they feared that the "upper" castes – whose land they would be given – might resort to violence. Secondly, they rarely received a large enough number of applications from a single village for the government to initiate a land transfer process.

Dalits were afraid to file land applications because they feared that the "upper" castes – whose land they would be given – might resort to violence.

The Land Rights magazine provided the villagers with legal advice about the entire process and featured interviews with "upper" castes who supported the redistribution of plots.

The film also highlighted the support system that Navsarjan offers, including a

IMPACTS in brief

ABSENT DOCS CHECK IN *Health* by Sakshi Media

Doctor absenteeism at rural health clinics is rampant in India. Most doctors also run private clinics in the cities where they charge much higher rates, so they have little incentive to venture into small towns.

When Sakshi Media made a magazine about health, they informed the villagers in the film that the law requires the village doctor to be present every day. For years, doctors violated this rule so flagrantly that people never thought it might be against the law. When people informed the village doctor about the law, the doctors started coming on time in four villages.

MEASLY CROWDS PLUMP UP *Elections* by Apna Malak Ma

Annual village meetings, known as *Gram Sabhas*, usually drew measly crowds of just a handful of villagers. After Apna Malak Ma's magazine on elections exposed inherent corruption in the system and demonstrated how to choose electoral candidates, attendance shot up 700%. Villages started participating more enthusiastically in local government affairs.



Manyam Praja Video gave viewers the straight facts in their video magazine about malaria. They also urged the audience to “speak out strongly” if officials visit their village.

wing of lawyers who provide legal advice. Armed with this knowledge, people are then empowered to file claims and to fight for their rights under the law.

After screening the film, a new land movement was born. 750 villagers filed reports of land rights violations with the help of the NGO staff. They weren't registering as individuals, but as a group.

The sheer volume of applications forced the government to reopen the system.

DEBUNKING MALARIA MYTHS *Malaria*

by Manyam Praja Video

Manyam Praja Video debunked myths about malaria in their first video magazine. People should receive their results within three days – not the customary two weeks to 1 month. By that time, people were often gravely ill (though their results eventually came back falsely “negative”). With this new information, villagers started demanding that their test results be processed

quickly from the government health clinic, which started to work more efficiently.

The film also documented submerged houses during the monsoon; stagnant water allows malaria to spread more quickly. Upon seeing the film, government officials ensured that the water was cleared from the affected villages.

A CLEAN SLATE *Garbage*

by Hamari Awaaz

The garbage in Mumbai's slums is so overwhelming that Hamari Awaaz decided to bring the problem to light. They filmed the cycle of trash collection and celebrated the contribution of the rag pickers and recyclers who play a key role in removing waste. At screenings, they urged people to demand waste bins in their area and to file Right to Information petitions to find out why the government was skirting responsibility.

In response to the film, community members successfully lobbied the local government to start providing bins in some areas, but still others were left in the lurch.

So the CVU tried a new strategy: enlisting the help of the mainstream media. The Producers teamed up with CNN-IBN (India's CNN). Through the station's citizen journalism program, their crew accompanied the Producers into the field and filmed the lack of proper waste disposal mechanisms in one slum. The following day, waste bins arrived. It was a remarkable success.

RESTORING POWER *Electricity*

By Manyam Praja Video

In four villages, local leaders had erected electricity poles during election time to try to sway votes in their favor. Once elected, the officials never provided any electricity.

For their film on electricity, Manyam Praja Video's Producers did some digging. During their research, they discovered that the government is required by law to provide power to areas with at least 1000 people.

They reported their findings to the community through their video magazine. In response, some viewers organized a rally in front of the Electricity Department and the government was spurred to act. In one village, which was without electricity for three years after a major cyclone swept through town, the power was restored within a week.

More importantly, people started to believe that they had the power to change their government. The actions of one village also inspired people in other villages to speak out about their lack of electricity.

TRANSFORMATION & HEALING *Child marriage*

A pilot project by Video Volunteers

In 2005, Video Volunteers worked with a group of 11 women who had been married as children in rural Andhra Pradesh to produce a pilot magazine.



A Producer, who was married herself at 14, talks to a man about why he married off his daughter at such a young age. He ends the interview by saying he regrets the decision, which is quite a brave admittance coming from a man who is a respected village elder. This scene exemplifies the way community video can encourage people to do a little soul searching and confront touchy subjects they usually avoid.

The women started by spending two days in the villages for research. Upon returning, they sat in a circle and the unbelievable stories they had uncovered.

This experience underlined the way local people can access information that journalists would never find.

At the screening of the film, Latha, a Producer, stood up and said, “I was

married at 15. I've never spoken about it in my life, and all the pain it caused, though you know what I went through and that I had to leave my husband. Let us please for the first time ever in this village talk about this problem.”

Latha endured physical abuse at the hands of her husband. The whole village knew the torture she'd been through but had never addressed it. Until now.



IMPACTS ON GOVERNANCE

Shining a light on corruption and keeping government officials accountable.

The camera can either be a weapon, exposing corruption, or it can be a bridge-building tool for local government officials who are disconnected from residents.

The CVUs operate on the premise that people who know their rights are much more likely to exercise those rights. The videos provide basic legal information, advice on government schemes, and even simple tips like the location of a local government agency.

Armed with this knowledge, citizens have the courage to lobby with authority on their own. The government, in turn, is much more likely to carry out its functions properly and improve the quality of its services because people are watching. Therefore, community video can strengthen democracy by fighting corruption and by encouraging local people to participate in governance.

CLEANING UP THEIR ACT *Fluorosis* by Apna Malak Ma

In the town of Limbdi, the government had done nothing to protect the villagers from contaminated drinking water. Many were suffering from severe joint aches and tooth decay as a result of fluorosis, an illness caused by excessive ingestion of fluoride through water or food.

The Community Producers at Apna Malak Ma took up the cause. They made a film to explain why everyone's teeth were yellow. A nearby chemical plant was polluting the water and spreading water borne diseases.

The film was projected in the center of their village to a crowd of about 600 people from surrounding areas. People were outraged. In the middle of the discussion after the film, two jeeploads of government officials arrived. Out they came, saying, "Hello, hello! We have an announcement. We are going to fix the water treatment plant, and by next week you will have clean water again."

The authorities had heard that the film was being made and realized they finally had to do something. They agreed to

After the film, two jeeploads of government officials arrived, saying, "Hello, hello! We have an announcement."



The Producers at Apna Malak Ma tried to interview the District Health Officer for their story on fluorosis. "We need the information," they said. He got up and walked away from the camera. But eventually, the government was forced to change their ways.

re-open a water treatment plant, which would bring clean water to the community.

Our program empowers governments to take action, but also people. At the same screening, the Producers asked the villagers if they would contribute to the maintenance of this filtration system. They had been asked in the past but never agreed. This time they did. And so today because of a video, 3000 people have safe drinking water.

WATER IS A HUMAN RIGHT **Water** by Hamari Awaaz

In Mumbai's slums, clean drinking water is hard to come by. Women are often forced to walk great distances with enormous water jugs on their heads. Some people complain that their water is heavily polluted and unfit for consumption. Even the most fortunate residents only have running water for a few hours before the flow is interrupted.

The atmosphere became heated; the people were well-informed and were demanding answers.

In their video magazine about water, the Community Producers at Hamari Awaaz alerted the public about the municipal government's plan to privatize the water supply.

The staff at Yuva, the NGO that runs the CVU, started a campaign against this new measure, which would see the poor paying more for their water than even the middle class. Access to water is a human right and Yuva contends that the poor should not be forced to pay for it, especially when the government can solve the problem by improving management and addressing the endemic corruption in the system.

In the end, the film effectively tripled the amount of participation in Yuva's anti-privatization campaign. While screenings were still taking place, the government organized a town hall meeting with representatives of the foreign companies who would take control of the supply. A huge crowd of concerned citizens showed up to voice their concerns.

As the meeting progressed, community members began interrupting the speakers with questions inspired by the information provided in the film. "How much will we have to pay?" they asked. The atmosphere became heated; the people were well-informed and were demanding answers.



When people in Mumbai's slums found out through Hamari Awaaz's video magazine that they had a guaranteed right to water, they took a stand against the government's attempts to force them to pay exorbitant fees for water. The government backed down.

And they won. The government was forced to change their policy. They announced that they would halt the privatization. They also increased the water supply in two slums, and guaranteed 24-hour water access in one area.

The government was forced to change their policy. They announced that they would halt the privatization.

STAMPING OUT HARASSMENT **Sexual harassment** by Apna TV

"No excuse!" says a young lady to the camera, pointing her finger at the audience. In Apna TV's fifth video magazine, men and women speak out about sexual harassment in Mumbai.

Apna TV's NGO, Akshara, works to empower youth to take a stand against gender discrimination. Referred to as

IMPACTS *in brief*

Basic infrastructure by Manyam Praja Video

Though rural Andra Pradesh is a lush area, many villagers don't get proper drinking water from the government's borewells. Unfortunately, most of the wells are not dug to the proper depth. The CVU's film told villagers exactly how deep the government should be digging. They also explained how to petition the authorities to make repairs. In response to the film the government kicked into high gear and repaired the borewells in many of the villages.

Violence against women by Samvad

When Samvad screened a film about domestic violence, angry men pulled the plug on the projector. "You will create trouble in our homes!" they argued. Not surprisingly, women reacted differently. Many of them came forward to ask for help over the following weeks, often approaching Producers or NGO staff in private. They didn't know which government services were available to them as battered women. Samvad helped 15 women separate from their husbands or file cases of abuse.



Elections by Apna TV

Video magazines often serve as platforms to provide the public with important information. In the above clip, Hindi film star Rahul Bose makes an appearance in Apna TV's film about elections. "Casting your vote is just the first step," he says, adding that, "We need to come together to keep a firm eye on our representatives."

"eve teasing," this behavior has become a serious issue in recent years.

Though the commuter trains have a special compartment reserved for women only, the fear of being harassed discourages many girls from going out. Their mobility is severely restricted.

The film alerts viewers to the fact that there is one sexual harassment case every three hours, and one rape case every six hours. The Community Producers also talk to groups of men and women on the

streets to understand why the issue is so widespread. Young women share their experiences and members of the public denounce these intimidating acts.

On camera, the filmmakers impart the message that girls should not take these things without a fight. When they are harassed, they can use words to fight back.

Once the video was finished, Apna TV's Community Producers, Akshara and some local NGOs organized a screening for

One little video magazine made the government perk up their ears. The officials stopped turning a blind eye and were responsive to the campaigners' suggestions.

approximately 100 policemen. They wanted to pressure the government to start a dedicated line that women could call if they were harassed.

After seeing the film, the police were impressed. They agreed to create the helpline, which is reachable on any phone in Mumbai by dialing "103." Within the first two months, more than 80 calls were made to the help line and nine cases were registered.

But the campaign didn't just end with getting the authorities on their side. The magazine also became a part of a kit, which will be used in workshops at 500 colleges under Mumbai University. The film and the campaign were also featured on numerous television stations.

One little video magazine made the government perk up their ears. The officials stopped turning a blind eye and were responsive to the campaigners' suggestions.

They put into place a practical measure, which will lead to real change on the ground.

IMPACTS *in brief*

Sanitation by Apna Malak Ma

When "lower" caste villagers in Limbdi started getting sick, they approached the CVU for help. The run off from toilets at a nearby hotel was polluting their fields.

The Community Producers at Apna Mala Ma took out their cameras and started filming. Then, the CVU and the villagers filed a petition with the government.

The hotel owner and his gang of "upper" castes came en masse to an editorial meeting at the CVU and threatened everyone present. But the villagers refused to stand down. The CVU's petition to the government was successful, and the hotel owner was forced to tear down his toilets and build new ones.

Interestingly, the hotel owner now supports the CVU, and invited them for a feast at the hotel. The Producers are committed to being a bridge between "upper" and "lower" castes, and their work seems to be paying off.

The hotel owner and his gang of "upper" castes came en masse to an editorial meeting at the CVU and threatened everyone present.

Infrastructure by Sakshi Media

During monsoon months, many CVUs make videos on issues related to basic infrastructure because people want to know what to do about very heavy rainfall and electricity outages. To inform villages about how to respond to flooding, the Producers at Sakshi Media filmed a washed out road — the only road connecting several villages — and captured

interviews with villagers who said it had been destroyed for many weeks.

The day after the shoot, the Producers returned to the area and government bulldozers were already at work on the repairs. "You tell your people we're fixing it!" the officials told them. The authorities also announced that they would allocate 300,000 rupees (approximately \$7000 USD) for long-term road repair in the area. The road is now fixed.



Sometimes the CVU can make an impact before the film is even edited. The government reacted quickly and fixed this road the day after the Producers at Sakshi Media had been there with their cameras.



Sofiya, who set the record straight in the ration shops magazine, is one of the most fearless Producers. She comes from a conservative Muslim family. Her husband now respects her because he sees how people come to her for help and advice. Sofiya has earned enough money to be the first woman in her slum to own a motorbike.

FAIR PRICES AT RATION SHOPS *Ration Shops* by Samvad

When people living in Ahmedabad's slums spoke out about systemic corruption at the ration shops, Samvad's Producers took notice. Residents are entitled to purchase 5 liters of subsidized kerosene for cooking each month. Instead, the shops were giving out four liters and the shopkeepers were pocketing the extra cash.

The video captures this corruption for all to see. As women emerge after purchasing kerosene, Community Producer Sofiya asks them, "How many liters did you pay

for?" "Five liters", the women answer. With a measuring jug, Sofiya checks the quantity. In most cases, the women's bottles contained at least 20% less than what they paid for.

After the film was screened, the community sprung into action. Young people stood outside of the shops and ensured that each resident was given the correct amount. The government conducted raids of the shops to stamp out the corruption. The government ordered the shops to reduce their rates, benefiting 200,000 people. The message is simple: when people have information, they can solve their problems on their own.

Impacts on NGOs

Expanding the scale and reach of social programs.

Screenings draw large crowds – on an average night, between 200 and 300 people, which is sometimes the majority of a village. The CVU, with its ability to spread messages to large groups of people, is an effective parallel strategy for our NGO partners. Many organizations have invested in our programs because they enable them to listen to the community more closely and increase participation in their programs.

Livelihood By Samvad

Rehana, a Producer at Samvad, used to go door to door, telling people about their NGO Saath's job training center. "I might talk to only a couple dozen people in an afternoon," she says.

The CVU decided to produce a video magazine to publicize the program, which helps young people in the slums gain skills to become waiters, call center agents, or supermarket clerks, among other things. All of a sudden, enrolment in Saath's program jumped 150%. "The film is much more efficient," Rehana contends. "We get 70 people expressing interest on a given night."

Reflections from a Community Producer

"Don't you belong to this village? Don't you know what we need?"

On April 27, 2009, we showed people in my village a video magazine about handicrafts. We played it on a laptop. We ensured that everything was on course and decided to initiate a discussion after the film.

As usual, I asked the women who were there if there were any other issues that Chetana TV needed to address. "Don't you belong to this village?" one woman asked. "Don't you know what we need?" That was the starting point of a shift in my strategy as a Community Producer. I realized that making video magazines and showing them to women in the village might only help raise awareness. But do they help empower these women? What is the role of these documentaries I am making? Why am I doing this? I know I have to ask myself these questions repeatedly.

Acute shortage of water is a problem in my village, and this problem rears its ugly head every summer. I too have been experiencing this for several years. The women at the screening told me they wanted me to make a video about water and find a solution.

I was confused. Am I here in the village to make documentaries, screen them and conduct focus groups? Who am I to find



What is the role of these documentaries I am making? Why am I doing this?

solutions? I am not a member of the *panchayat* (local elected village government) and only they can really address this problem. But I can make a movie about it and create awareness. Oh, awareness! Awareness about acute water shortage? Don't the villagers know about it?

I started to document the way that women from my village suffer due to lack of water. I filmed them standing in line for hours to take a few drops back home, because the flow of the water is so limited. I figured out who needs to be made aware of this: the *panchayat*.

I went to the *gram panchayat* office and showed the footage to the *sarpanch*, the leader. After noting details on the

number of hours the taps should be on, the number of families that the taps cater to, and the schedule of when the water should flow, I left the *sarpanch* to report back to the women.

I gave them the details. After an analysis, we realized that some wealthier people are using motors to fill their overhead water tanks. So, no water reaches the poorer hamlets.

The next day, I went to the *sarpanch* to talk him. "Go. Go and shoot," he said to me. "You told me they didn't have water. So, we are digging bore wells."

I went back to the hamlet and filmed the bore wells being dug. I'm happy because now we will have better water supply. It's not the solution I was expecting, but it's a good solution. I'll keep my camera rolling.

– Savitri Enugapalli
Community Producer, Chetana TV

Challenges & themes

DEMOCRATIZING THE MAINSTREAM

The people formerly known as the audience

In the words of NYU journalism professor Jay Rosen, today's emerging journalists are "the people formerly known as the audience."

In the last two decades, the number of cable television stations has grown exponentially. Thanks to internet search engines, it is easier than ever to find documentaries from around the world.

Even mainstream news networks are jumping on the bandwagon. CNN's iReport is a user-generated site for stories that are unedited and unfiltered and India's CNN-IBN has a citizen journalism program on which CVU videos have appeared.

During the crisis following Iran's June 2009 elections, middle class Iranians

with internet connections were able to overcome the government's media blackout, and TV networks around the world were broadcasting citizen-generated pictures, video and blog reports. The citizen journalism currently emerging from major cities is now a critical source of information for the mainstream news.

The hunger for content is palpable. Video Volunteers believes that this presents a great opportunity for our Community Producers to speak up and speak out to a wide audience about their experiences.

Many platforms, but no diversity

New distribution platforms are popping up on a daily basis. Through blogs, podcasting, participatory news sites, email newsletters, online forums and social media networks, people are seemingly more connected than ever before.

With the dawn of the Internet, it's easy to assume that voices and perspectives from around the world are now flowing freely. But that's not happening.

Most of the sources are white middle class males from Western countries, whereas the rest – the underrepresented people from villages and farms and hill stations in less developed countries – are left out of the conversation.

A lot of the focus is on funding and

creating new ways for people to exchange knowledge, but there is little investment in training poor and marginalized people to produce content or use these tools. The new platforms lack diversity, which is not just bad for entertainment, but also for democracy.

Partnerships already in place

VV was started with a secondary mission of "democratizing the mainstream media" with more voices from the global South, which is an ambitious goal. But we believe it's possible.

Once we have several hundred Producers in India, we hope to create formal partnerships with the mainstream media. At that point, we will be representing a large geographic area, with many teams in the field, and high quality content.

Video Volunteers could produce a video series by commission for a news outlet. Or we could act as stringers, delivering content from hard to reach rural areas.

We have early indicators that this strategy will work. So far, our Producers' work has featured on MTV Iggy, Current TV, CNN IBN.com, Nickelodeon, and the global broadcast Pangea Day, amongst others. In nearly all cases, the TV stations

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Media giant weighs in

"In recent years the media has been guilty of ignoring the darker side of society in India. We go to slums just if there is a big crime story, but there is much less hard news done there about the social crises these places are facing. At CNN-IBN we have made huge efforts to bring the nation of India together with citizen journalism and so if we were to get a video of public interest and of reasonable quality then we would use it."

– RAJDEEP SARDESAI, Editor-in-Chief, CNN-IBN

(quoted in an article about Video Volunteers in the *Hindustan Times*, March 30, 2009)

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have been willing to pay for this content.

Possibilities & challenges

Community Video Units have incredible market potential because they operate in rural areas where TV stations don't have reporters. They have access to great stories, they offer different perspectives because they are more familiar with the issues, and they charge less than an urban "professional" would.

A community journalist in rural India needs around \$2000 a year to support her/his family and purchase equipment.

They can earn this income by selling a handful of short videos to TV stations or websites.

But there are huge hurdles to overcome. Like most "base of the pyramid" social ventures, our global media network will face issues of production quality, efficiency and turn-around time. *(For more information about confronting these challenges, please see page 55.)*

Producers working together

Some questions remain: can the network of CVUs become financially sustainable through partnerships with the mainstream? Can VV, acting as the hub

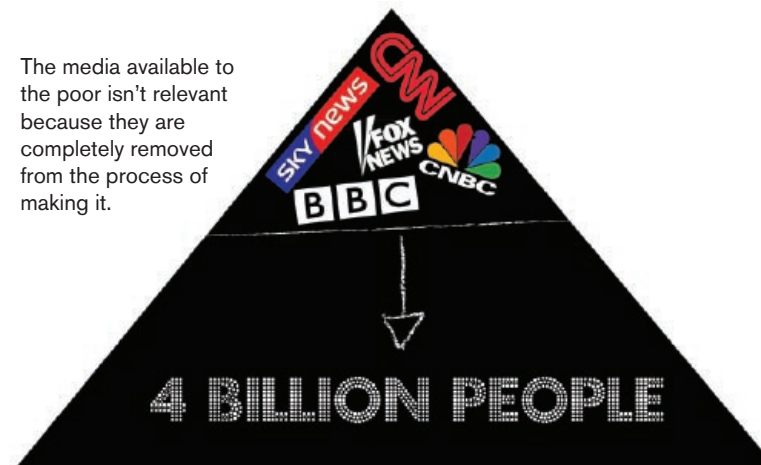
of this network and in partnership with other media nonprofits, create robust partnerships with mainstream stations given their relative lack of interest in stories about poverty?

Can all the community media organizations, of which VV is just one, work together to create a kind of CNN or BBC for the world's poorest 1 billion people?

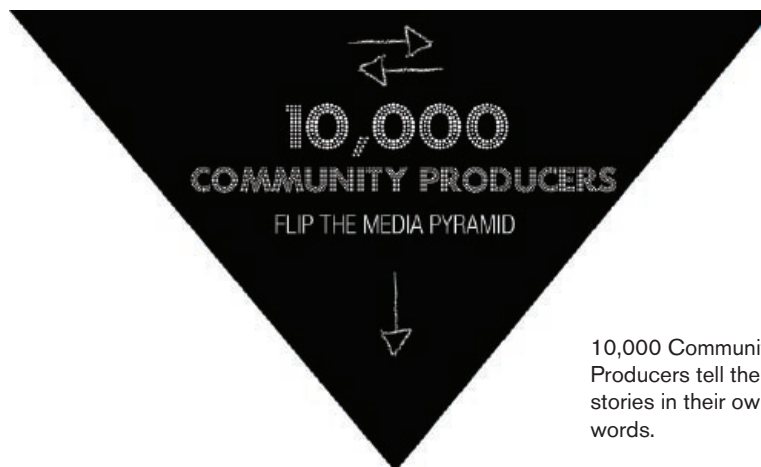
By this, we don't mean a traditional television network. Rather, we mean a large network of Community Producers from poor communities who highlight their stories and implant them on the local and global consciousness.

Current mainstream model

The media available to the poor isn't relevant because they are completely removed from the process of making it.



Our goal: a participatory news model



More media giants speak

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"Once the users take control, they never give it back."

— Dave Winer, one of the founders of blogging

"[It's] the audience who doesn't want to just sit there but to take part, debate, create, communicate, share."

— Mark Thompson, Director General of the BBC, talking about the "active audience."

"The users are deciding what the point of their engagement will be — what application, what device, what time, what place."

— Tom Curley, CEO of the Associated Press

"Traditional journalism is the outside looking in. Citizen journalism is the inside looking out."

— Mitch Gelman, former Senior Vice President and Senior Executive Producer of CNN.com

THE BEGINNING OF A GLOBAL COMMUNITY MEDIA NETWORK

Every voice counts. Every person matters. Video Volunteers is working to ensure that citizens around the world are included in the global decision-making process.



Our network of Community Producers, with 100 people from slums and villages currently working as video Producers, is already one of the largest media-producing organizations in India, rivaling some national-level TV stations in terms of the number of full-time video journalists.

Our future

In 2002, the World Bank asked 20,000 people living on less than a dollar a day to identify the greatest hurdles to their advancement. Above money and above other basic needs, the number one need identified by the poorest of the poor was access to a voice. Source: Consultations with the Poor, World Bank, 2002

Going from 100 to 10,000 Community Producers

We are on a quest to identify the most scalable model of community video, one that will enable the creation of a media industry for people at the “base of the pyramid.”

We will focus on:

- > Finding even lower cost models of training community producers so that training 10,000 Community Producers is a realistic possibility;
- > Developing business models for community video, such as increasing advertising revenue, helping Community Producers start small businesses, and selling content to the mainstream media;
- > Supporting NGOs by helping them integrate community media into their work. We believe change will happen faster if every NGO harnesses new technologies to enable them to involve the poor in creating and leading development programs;
- > Developing the world’s most comprehensive training to empower people with little formal education to become journalists, to develop creativity, and to be articulate;
- > Expanding the network of Community Producers from India to other countries;

- > Harnessing new technologies such as cell phones and the internet to bring stories from underrepresented parts of the world to global audiences;
- > Integrating older technologies such as community radio, in which our team has extensive experience, into our training programs;
- > Creating partnerships with mainstream television companies to create revenue to train ever more Community Producers;
- > Using community video content to enable the poor to advocate directly with local and national governments, and international agencies;
- > Creating alliances with other media non-profits and journalism schools to advocate with the public and the government for policies that enable the poor to be heard.

Our long-term vision: a voice for all

Imagine if every session of the United Nation’s General Assembly started with a video report in which people brought their own solutions and own knowledge to the global decision-making process.

Imagine turning on the television and seeing a farmer reporting from drought-stricken northern Kenya, or a young mother from a *favela* in Rio de Janeiro interviewing her neighbors about domestic

violence.

Imagine if every village and every slum in the world was capable of creating and broadcasting information and inspiration.

Gone will be the days when the rich speak on behalf of the poor and the West speaks on behalf of the global South. And our understanding of the world will be that much deeper.

With a global community media network, people will be able to use cell phone videos to expose corruption and hold local officials accountable. Communities will be able to debate and discuss solutions to their own problems, because they own and control their their own media. The poor will have a voice.

There are a million ways that you can support, and be part of the community media movement. To get involved with Video Volunteers, contact us. We’d love to hear from you.

The media is a mass medium.
We need a mass of people to change it.

This is what I've wanted to do all my life, and after tonight's experience my resolve to bring about a change in society has been strengthened even more.

Apna TV in Cheta Camp

When we went there he had gathered a great crowd who sat through the screening and we had a great discussion with them. Many young people took an oath that they will definitely vote this time.

We have found a great volunteer in Farid and have decided to include Cheta Camp as one of our permanent 25 screening areas.

mason, truck driver, diamond polisher,
labourer, farmer, mother, house painter,
tailor, box maker, teacher, seamstress,
student, social worker

Showing a new way through video magazines.

I'll be like this, only powerful.
And making films.

I see myself having a lot of insight, wisdom, knowing what people want and what their problems are. I'll be doing this work.

"IN MY WHOLE LIFE,
my village has never been in the newspaper."

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