

# Video Volunteers Annual Report of Activities

## April 2009-March 2010

### Directors' Message

This was a great year for Video Volunteers. If you asked me what I thought we accomplished this year, I would sum it up as follows: we succeeded in becoming the largest network of full-time, long-term salaried video producers from slums and villages anywhere in the world. But this is comparing us to other nonprofit community video efforts. How do we hold up in comparison to corporate media companies? Certainly, we do not have nearly as big a video production team as the biggest private channels. But I believe that in the particular rural districts where we have community producers active, we are a greater force than the mainstream stations, who are totally absent. The reporters for TV stations are nearly all based out of the five or six biggest cities. In the longer term, I believe we will be able to do a better job than the mainstream in one area, which is delivering content from rural areas. This is not a priority for the mainstream stations who spend nothing on developing reporting skills in these areas. Our training and the uniqueness of our stories already sets us apart from the low quality work that the mainstream media currently thinks is adequate coverage of the rural areas.

Our other main accomplishment was that we created a replicable model of how to train citizen journalists to produce content that bridges the digital divide. I believe we have succeeded in developing replicable models for enabling people on the other side of the digital divide to work as citizen journalists. In fact, we have succeeded in creating two models that do this, for different audiences and groups of people. The Community Video Unit model is appropriate for organizations wanting to make a deep, long-term impact in a rural community; the "community news service" model that we pioneered this year in our IndiaUnheard program, is a lower cost, more scalable model that would meet the needs of news agencies, TV stations and those interested in how community media can speak to thousands of villages. Both of them succeed in bringing out the voice of rural, unheard communities who previously had no experience or contact with the internet (many had never seen a computer before starting work with us) but who now see their work online regularly. The interest that we have from NGOs to invest in and develop both these models is some evidence that it is a replicable, appropriate model.

I believe we have the most comprehensive and intense model of community media in rural and slum areas. For years, numerous organizations have carried out community media projects that accomplish great things such as creating excellent films and empowering young people and creating concrete, demonstrable impacts in villages. Video Volunteers succeeded in combining the best practices from earlier experiments, and combined them with rigorous systems designed to create community ownership, and in so doing, developed the model of community media in rural and slum areas with the highest degrees of community ownership and permanency within a community.

*Goa, June 2010*

### **Part 2: Progress Report On Key Programs and Activities this year:**

**Community Video Units:** There are currently 15 Community Video Units operating in India which VV has set up and which continue to screen in around 300 villages, generating new content every month. VV this year gave direct training support to 11 of those, ranging from one week full-time workshops plus regular phone support, to full time training. We started one new Community Video

Unit this year, with tea workers in Assam. This is a fascinating project because it is taking place on the tea estates, and the largely Nepali, lower-caste tea workers in India are some of the most oppressed workers in the country. It is also interesting because it is our first corporate-sponsored Community Video Unit, with ICICI Prudential Life Insurance supporting the CVU on tea estates in partnership with the management of the tea estates.

Here's a short video we did this year about the CVU program:

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o3584gJELBI&feature=player\\_embedded](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o3584gJELBI&feature=player_embedded)

**VCU.br:** we undertook a one year program in Brazil focused on videojournalism as a livelihoods option for young people in favelas. Ten young people learned to set up their video businesses, and we are now creating an online toolkit on video and livelihoods that we will share with the dozen or more Brazilian nonprofit media groups that we met there. These groups have huge numbers of youth learning media and community journalism but they hardly focus at all on enabling these youth to earn a living from media. We intend to provide them resources to do so and to continue working in Brazil as a consultant to various media groups there.

**CV Camp:** in August 2009, we held a one week conference in Goa on community media, with 130 people in attendance, journalists, students, NGOs and activists, all learning community video alongside and from our Community Video Producers. This was the first ever national event on community video in India, and it went a long way towards our goal of creating a real community video movement, which we feel we have succeeded in doing to an extent in the last two years. There were 250 applications, from 55 different NGOs, for this program. Similarly, more than 100 NGOs put in applications or references for IndiaUnheard (described below), a sign of real enthusiasm on the part of the NGO community for our model of community video. You can read my post about the Camp on IdeaLab here:

<http://www.pbs.org/idealab/2009/08/vvs-community-video-training-c233.html>

**Research on community media sustainability:** We have an 18 month research project with the leading business school in India around making community media sustainable. They are creating business plans and executing them at two of the Community Video Units, and based on that, they will help the other Community Video Units to do the same.

### **Global Fund for Children Girls Media Project:**

In the year 2009, Video Volunteers partnered with Global Fund for Children(GFC) in a pilot project called Videoactive Girls. Under the project, which was a learning initiative of The Nike Foundation's Brain Trust of Practitioners, VV developed a toolkit on how community-based organizations and the adolescent girls they serve can harness, produce and use the power of the visual media to amplify their voices and tell their stories.

The training imparted by VV to the young girls was focused on these three factors

- How to learn the art of digital storytelling
- Developing video production and video-sharing skills
- How to instill and cultivate greater self confidence and self-empowerment in each participant through the learning process.

The project was located in two places: Kolkata where the girls trained came from a local NGO called Sanved and in Hyderabad where the participants were associated with the NGO Mahita.

In both cases the girls had come from a difficult socio-economic background and had experienced several personal tragedies and traumas. It was a tough challenge for the Video Volunteers' trainer to train these girls the intricacies of video production and prepare them to venture outdoor with

cameras and shoot news videos.

However, a specially designed training module was capable of helping restore the girls's self-confidence. So, despite the difficult situations and challenges, these girls made several videos on issues like child marriage, gender bias, the problems of working women, etc. At the completion of the project the participants said, "Our fear is gone now!"

The project at Kolkatta Sanved, which involved formerly trafficked girls, Video Volunteers developed youth media models specifically targeting the needs of underprivileged girls in the developing world. Through Video Volunteers training and the use of video, the girls learned self-expression.

Video Volunteers has also created a toolkit for the Girl Powered Video project, which will be distributed widely this year by the Global Fund for Children and the Nike Foundation-the two organizations promoting the GFC program. The toolkit includes videos, training guides, and documentation of lessons learned from the entire project. We hope this will benefit other organizations in future and inspire the creation of many other youth media projects.

**IndiaUnheard Community News Network:** This program has been a major focus for us since January 2010. You can see the results on [indiaunheard.videovolunteers.org](http://indiaunheard.videovolunteers.org).

We currently have 25 Community Correspondents working across 24 of India's 28 states, producing short web videos of 3-5 minutes each month on ten different social issue themes, using Kodak handycams, which we are distributing on our website [www.indiaunheard.videovolunteers.org](http://www.indiaunheard.videovolunteers.org). We are releasing one video a day there, and on facebook, twitter, and other social networks.

Here's the promo video about the program: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EK24KZoaVms>

About 14 months ago, we began thinking how community video producers could fill a need on the part of the news media for original stories that are "pushed" out of rural areas. Could we create a rural news wire, a kind of grassroots Reuters, where rural poor people could earn a sustainable livelihood by working in the television market? We began to think about the lowest cost way to have people producing news in rural areas on a permanent and ongoing basis. We felt we were the right organization to look into this because two of the areas in which we've become expert are livelihoods, and also ensuring that trainees actually use their skills permanently.

As news agencies close their bureaus and slash what they will pay reporters, the poor can potentially be winners because they can work inexpensively, and they can uncover unique stories told from a perspective that only they have – the perspective of people who have lived through these issues. Rather than have a system where you pay a small number of people large salaries to travel around the country to report on stories, why not have lots of people in those areas trained to gather stories at very low cost? That's the idea for us in creating a rural stringers network. And the opportunity is that there are hardly any stringers in rural India – perhaps only about 600 in the whole country, and all clustered in the cities. Our strategy in the long term is to have one stringer each of India's 600 districts.

The result is IndiaUnheard, a community news wire of grassroots reporters – Community Correspondents – who report on community issues to a global web audience, and, starting next month, an Indian TV audience. The community correspondents are an amazingly diverse group, representing 24 of India's 28 states, including a 'village headman', the director of a village primary school, a tribal activist who grew up in India's famous "Save Narmada anti-dam campaign" waged for years against the world bank, a transgender youth from Bangalore, who is perhaps the only

transgender reporter in India, a rural woman agricultural laborer, an afghan migrant who plays for the Indian rugby team, and many other committed social activists. We have nearly every northeast state covered, which we thought was very important because the NorthEast, with its separatist movements, is the part of the country most forgotten from the mainstream.

I have written in the attached appendix about the process of launching IndiaUnheard, and our learnings about appropriate models of using video to bridge the digital divide.

**Mainstream Distribution:** One very positive development is a TV program we will be launching in September in India in partnership with NewsX, one of the English language news stations. We will be jointly creating a 30 minute weekly program featuring 6-8 CC stories plus anchoring by one of our staff members. This will be the first time ever community journalism produced in slums and villages is being broadcast in India on TV.

This is basically a “proof of concept” for us around the idea of a stringer network, and of the whole idea of a replicable model of video production to bridge the digital divide, which is our third “anticipated outcome.” The argument for the stringer network is that media companies could buy stories from community journalists so they can earn a living. NewsX is going to pay Rs. 1500 per video, which is a little more than the Rs. 1500 per story we pay the community journalists, thus showing that the correspondents may be able to, once trained by us fully, support themselves in the market.

### **Part 3: Measurement and Evaluation:**

We continue to track the number of screenings the CVUs have had and the number of attendees there, the number of films they have produced, and the number of producers working. In the past year and a half, four of the CVUs that we chose to work with intensively in this grant period on screening participation doubled the number of screenings they were having, which led to greater community participation in such things as editorial meetings, women’s committees, etc. In other CVUs, the number of screenings have decreased for budget reasons. Some of the CVUs have been running now for four years, and we can make some judgments on the efficiency of the production and screening in our model now: most have settled into a slower, but more sustainable, groove. When we started the CVU program we thought each CVU could make one film a month and have 25 screenings. Now, four years on in the case of the original six that we started in 2006 (of a total of 15 now), we see much more localization, both to the local area and to the needs of the NGOs. Some make fewer magazines because they make more films on specific advocacy purposes of the organizations, or because they make films to make money. Also we have put more of a stress on the process of transferring to community ownership, so with less handholding and push on efficiency from us, things are bound to slow down, but in return, we see greater local management. One thing we do see across the board, however, is more buy in from the community and more community participation as time goes by, which suggests to us that it IS worth it in the longterm to make an investment in a local community’s media. Because one only sees the real payoffs with time.

Here are some impact stories from the Community Video Units from the last several months:

- The CVU Apna Malak Ma, our all Dalit CVU in rural Gujarat with the leading Dalit organization Navsarjan, made a video magazine about the CVU itself and how the CVU can serve the community for organizing purposes. This film inspired women in six villages to form special action groups called ‘Mahila Panch’ or ‘Women’s groups’. All these 6 villages have all-men village councils where women have no say in the village welfare. After forming Mahila Panch they decided to take action on issues that were neglected by men, such as lack of drinking water. They felt men ignored this because it’s women who travel for miles to fetch water everyday. On their own, women in these 6 villages organized protest march, met

district administrative head and finally found solutions to get drinking water, toilets and 100 days' work under the government's rural employment scheme. None of this would have happened without the women community producers becoming the key organizing force for women in their villages.

- The same CVU made an education video where the call to action was for migrants to demand better education for their children. Every family in these villages migrates to look for work outside their villages for 3-4 months of the year, and during this time their children don't go to school because they don't know how to enroll their children part time. After the screening, the villagers took part in discussions and formed Village Education Committees which got them special migration cards that would help them get their children admitted to a school near their worksite during migration.
- The Community Video Unit, Samvad, which works in the slums of Ahmedabad, made a health video on tobacco addiction. The Chief Health Officer, Ahmedabad watched this video and found it so informative, he hired the CVU to screen the film in 40 primary and middle schools run by the state government of Gujarat in the city. Through these screens, over five thousand students learnt of tobacco addiction and how it affects human health. For each screening, the CVU was paid Rs 500, so the CVU earned around \$500 in total on this project. This was an important milestone for this CVU to get buy in and earned income from the local government, and more such projects have come their way from the local government since then.
- The Hamari Awaaz CVU (meaning "Our Voice") working in the slums of Mumbai, made a film on the groundbreaking new "Right to Information" act passed by the Indian government. Though every Indian citizen now has the legal right to access information on any government functioning of any government office, the poor rarely file RTI petitions because they don't know how to complete the process, which is actually quite simple. After watching this CVU film, slum residents learned about the existence of the act, and how to submit RTI applications and demand information. They chose to exercise this right to find out about why garbage disposal was not happening in their slums. They got an immediate response from the government, and now after this first experience of filing an RTI feel confident to use it again to address other issues in the community.

Regarding metrics for IndiaUnheard, and for the videos made by the Community Video Units which we post on ch19.org: we are currently creating a system to organize all the metrics. We are able to measure number of facebook fans, twitter followers, hits on our site, youtube viewers of the full videos, people subscribing to our newsletter, success of our google adgrants campaigns, and the viewings of our videos on other platforms. We have an intern working on putting together this plan and are reaching out to various people more expert than us in measuring success online to create the plan. One challenge is figuring out how to do the comparisons, and finding benchmarks of success. As of two days ago, the 67 IndiaUnheard videos we have made have had 14,702 views (only fully watching the video counts as a view.)

The website for IndiaUnheard has only been live since May 1<sup>st</sup> and we've not yet done our big promotion push of it which we plan to do in the next two months. We are also working on a promotion plan, which will involve systematically reaching out one-by-one to a huge number of journalists, bloggers, NGOs and like-minded media groups. We delayed extensive promotion until there was a lot of content on the site.

## **Part 4: Marketing and Communications**

All of our press is enclosed as an attachment. We had several major articles this year in Indian press, including a front page story on the Hindustan Times weekend magazine, a story in Femina magazine (like Indian vogue) and several more related to the launch of IndiaUnheard. A famous Indian cinema actor named Abhay Deol has come on as VV's celebrity ambassador and that has gotten us a lot of press as he mentions us in his press conversations. For the first time, this year we hired a communications director and she has been building relationships with press and that seems to be working. Our new board chair, Davia Temin, who runs a PR and crisis management business, has bought us a package of 20 press releases for the year on PR Newswire, and her staff is working closely with us to start issuing press releases. I'm excited about this, because this will also attract press to using our community videos as a resource.

This year, one VV staffer was made a TED Fellow and also named an "outstanding young person" by an organization called the Junior Chamber, which will take me on a five day speaking tour in Japan. She was also a speaker at ENVISION, a conference put on by the New York Times, UN Communications department, and the Independent Filmmakers Project. Perhaps most significantly, we were the featured community media organization at WSIS (World Summit of the Information Society) where we conducted a very popular workshop and did some of the videography for the event using our model of production. These kinds of opportunities are crucial for us currently in our networking and in building our reputation, amongst a community interested in social entrepreneurship. However, we need to widen our base. For instance, I think we should do a pitch to get on the radar of all nonprofits and foundations that work internationally, because if these groups know about our model they will turn to us when they want to do something creative with their communications.

## **Part 5: Diversity and Demographics**

Out of a staff of eleven, we have three who are of European decent (two Americans and one Englishwoman) and eight who are Indian. We are a woman-led and woman-founded organization. We have six women and five men on staff. Among our Indian staff, five out of eight are members of Indian minorities, meaning Tribal, Dalit and Christian.

Diversity is extremely important to us. We try to impelement the same policies in our organization as we do in our projects. Our projects must be at least 50% female, and have achieved very high levels of diversity – we are 25% tribal, 25% Dalit, 25% muslim.