WOMEN IN COMMUNITY COMMUNICATION*

Monitoring Development through Community Media: A Video Intervention by Women Community Producers of Varanasi (UP)

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* WOMEN IN COMMUNITY COMMUNICATION is the title/label under which the projects/research/activities associated with women in community media are undertaken by the UNESCO Chair team.

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IMPORTANT NOTE: All the pictures used in this report are those taken by the WCPs during the UNDP-VV monitoring project and were shared with us along with the videos.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

1. INTRODUCTION

Video Volunteers (VV) completed a program with United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, (UP), where they created a team of 20 Women Community Producers (WCPs) who spent about 14 months documenting and monitoring UNDP's massive programmes of self help groups.

VV engaged in this project with UNDP in order to demonstrate that more funders and development organizations could effectively use community media, especially video, to monitor their developmental initiatives. VV believes in the paradigm of development which articulates that monitoring should mean 'beneficiaries' assessing whether a development agency made an impact in their lives and condition, rather than a development agency studying the 'beneficiaries'.

The UNDP-VV project sought to build a model and create best practices for using community media, especially video, as a monitoring tool for programme managers to gain new insights into the outcomes of their development projects. Through an examination of their own experiences and insights of training and working with the Women Community Producers (WCPs), VV planned to come out with an analysis of the process and a report of what worked and what didn't in the execution of their model.

However, another core question that the larger UNDP-VV project was seeking to address is; what is different about the way in which women analyze a development initiative and its impact on their lives through the use of videos, compared to the documentation by development experts or professional evaluators from the outside.

In the field of community media, comparatively little has been done to analyse community media products to determine if they are different in their content and use when compared to those that have been produced by so-called media and development professional/filmmakers/media producers.

This report has been put together after a review and analysis of the videos produced by the 20 WCPs who were a part of the UNDP-VV project. The endeavour here has been to focus on the outcomes (i.e. videos) of a process of monitoring a development project through the use of community media, especially video.

2. OBJECTIVES

- The chief objective of this research was to carry out a review and analysis of the community media products made by the 20 Women Community Producers (WCPs). The key purpose of the study here is to seek an answer to the research question: "When women monitor their own empowerment using video, what are the characteristics and insights embedded in their videos that are different from those produced by an outsider?"

- A secondary objective of this study was to understand, through a one-on-one interaction with the Women Community Producers (WCPs), their experience of monitoring the UNDP's development initiative. We tried to fathom their construction of the empowerment brought about by the self-help groups project itself as well as by the video intervention for monitoring project. "Was the monitoring process in itself empowering for the women, while also achieving the objective of monitoring?"

3. METHODOLOGY

This study titled "Monitoring Development through Community Media: A Video Intervention by Women Community Producers of Varanasi (UP)" was carried out as part of the 'Women in Community Communication' (WiCC) module of the UNESCO Chair on Community Media, University of Hyderabad. The WiCC component includes/undertakes research activities associated with women in community media.

The research work was carried out in the following stages:
  a) Desk review of documents including six quarterly reports, UNDP Summary Report of project and processes by VV, consolidated data base of field reports, and product descriptions report.
  b) A visit to VV to interview the project head for an understanding of the philosophy and approach of the video intervention.
  c) Theme-wise, qualitative and descriptive analysis of 132 videos produced by the WCPs
  d) In-depth interviews/Focus group discussions with WCPs

What follows in this report is an analysis of 12 different assignments that the WCPs carried out during the project. In each analysis we attempt to cover: 1) what are the insights or main points made by each set of videos? This is done in order to 1) highlight for UNDP the women monitors' key findings; 2) identify what is unique about this set of videos as compared to the approach an outside professional monitor might take; and 3)

provide pointers for how UNDP could use these videos; i.e. whether they should be shown to staff, community women, partners, the wider development sector, etc. and to facilitate what kind of learning. It was our goal that this structure would allow others not associated with the UNDP project (i.e. other development sector workers and researchers) to imagine how such an initiative could add value in other development projects.

4. THE UNDP-VV PROJECT - BACKGROUND

(Based on an interview with Stalin K., co-founder, Video Volunteers (VV); in addition to the quarterly and summary reports of the UNDP-VV intervention made available by VV)

The UNDP-IKEA "Swayaam" Project: The IKEA Foundation has a long history of associating with UNICEF in undertaking development initiatives for children's rights and education in eastern Uttar Pradesh, India since the early 1990s. Realizing the role of women as the nodal person in the family and to percolate progressive changes throughout the community, the scope of these development efforts was gradually broadened to facilitate women empowerment.

Under the umbrella of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and IKEA Foundation, a project was started, called Swayaam, to empower the women of eastern Uttar Pradesh in the social, economic and political spheres. A support of five million Euros was granted for the duration of five years in the course of which several activities were initiated to foster empowerment along these three verticals. In the process, more than 50,000 women were organized and mobilized to form 4,000 self-help groups (SHGs) in 500 villages stretching across three districts of Jaunpur, Bhadoi and Mirzapur. The project was aimed at achieving financial literacy, business skills, local political bases and ultimately empowerment.

Video Volunteers in the UNDP-IKEA "Swayaam" Project: Video Volunteers (VV) joined hands with the UNDP-IKEA Foundation project under a two and a half year contract. The extensive experience of Video Volunteers (VV) with community video and their field work track record initially landed them the offer to work with the Swaayam project. Convinced with the inherent development potential of using tools such as video, photography and mobile technology, Video Volunteers recommended a community-led approach of monitoring the project which in itself is an empowering process.

Twenty rural women community producers (WCPs) were trained by Video Volunteers to use the tools of video and photography to document the achievements and shortcomings of the UNDP program, its effects on the community members and WCPs themselves.

According to Video Volunteers' philosophy, this innovative monitoring approach, which encourages direct and pro-active participation of the community in assessment of the development processes, when clubbed with third party and organisational monitoring, gives a comprehensive picture of the performance of a project.

At VV, the belief is: when the real stakeholders are engaged in monitoring activity, it can reveal the true pulse within the community and document the forthright responses to different components of the development project for determining its accomplishments as well as failures. This internal monitoring by the WCPs, using video, can therefore, serve as the missing link between the findings by developmental experts and the ground realities.

The UNDP-IKEA Foundation "Swayaam" project was aimed at achieving empowerment among women in three crucial spheres, i.e. social, economic and political. For facilitating these developments, specific activities were put into operation. For instance, to achieve social empowerment, the community women were mobilized and organised into SHGs and were encouraged to engage in its functioning regularly. Micro-credit groups and home businesses were promoted in the process. Economic empowerment was sought to be accomplished by imparting livelihood training skills such as carpet making, craft making, papadam making, incense making, etc and helping the women to market their finished products as a collective or co-operative. Attainment of political empowerment focussed on ensuring the participation of the community women in local politics and increasing their awareness about their individual and collective rights.

The role of the WCPs was to monitor the functioning of these projects, capturing its impact on lives of the community members and in the process, to also document the empowering changes in their own lives and the lives of women within the community. To remain true to the UNDP requirement, all video monitoring was done at three levels, namely social, economic and political and the assignments were designed to feed into these goals. Additionally, the changes brought in the lives of the WCPs in the course of their work and also its impact on village society was captured through the assignments. A series of 17 video-based assignments were completed by the WCPs in an attempt to capture visuals of empowerment and of the effectiveness of the development project in different stages over time. These WCPs also carried out still photography assignments in addition to the video recordings, though these have not been studied as systematically for this report as the videos.

Some of the components of the training conducted by Video Volunteers for the Women Community Producers included:
- To introduce WCPs to community video as a tool with potential to bring about change in their village
- To examine what it means to be empowered and how to identify empowerment or lack of it in the context of social, economic and political spheres
- To instruct women how to take good quality photographs and make videos
- To master skill-sets such as interviews, b-rolls and piece to camera
- To build conceptual clarity about their role in the project

- To strengthen the technical trainings in photography and video-making
- To provoke them to analyse their belief systems and their understanding of the society, women rights', violence and freedom
- To facilitate identifying of story ideas and other decisions about the content
- To discuss, evaluate and re-work previous assignments especially their technical aspects
- To conduct community screenings and elicit feedback
- To develop video-editing skills and overcome shortcomings related to shooting in the field, like capturing sound, voice over, mixing and piece to camera
- To ascertain best methods to monitor the working of Mahila Pradhans, i.e., women elected to be Village Heads
- To interact with the Technical Resource Agencies (TRAs) and understand monitoring needs in the sphere of economic empowerment
- To familiarise the WCPs about the indicators of empowerment as articulated by UNDP in order to make it an effective monitoring exercise. The women internalised some the manner in which the project defined empowerment and the monitoring exercises were designed to complement these indicators.

Brief Description of the process followed for production videos by WCPs: The 131 videos analysed in this report were organized into 11 different assignments. The process of production, as shared with the researchers by VV was as follows: The VV staff in consultation with UNDP would come up with an assignment approximately every 1-3 months which the VV staff wrote up into an 'assignment brief' for the trainers to transact with the women. The VV video trainers would travel by car out to the field area, and have a day-long meeting with all of the WCP's living in that district (usually between 3-5 women.) During that meeting, the WCPs' work on the previous assignment was reviewed and the next assignment was explained. The women were encouraged to make the assignment their own and give their feedback on it. After this initial field meeting, the women would spend the next month or so working on that assignment on their own in the districts. They would give the footage to the VV editors to edit. The final product for each assignment was always either a set of 20 short videos (one by each woman) or one video that compiled the footage from the 20 different women.

5. PRODUCT ANALYSIS: VIDEOS PRODUCED BY THE WOMEN COMMUNITY PRODUCERS (WCPs)

The endeavour in this section is to focus on analysing the 'products' i.e. the videos produced by the WCPs trained by Video Volunteers for documenting and monitoring UNDP's programmes of self help groups in Varanasi. Our approach to analysing these videos has been to link them back to the process followed during their production, because it is the process that finally determines if the products (videos) have the potential to empower the community by giving them access, agency and voice.

Thus, we have viewed and reviewed 131 videos (of varying duration and broadly under 11 different themes/assignments) and deconstructed them to identify whether or not they reflect the elements that grant any community media its empowerment potential. The analysis focused on whether or not the contents of the videos reflect the distinguishing characteristics that identify a democratic and participatory process. This essentially implies that if and only if the monitoring carried out by the WCPs followed the non-negotiable elements of a participatory community media process, as understood in participatory development practices worldwide, would the video products reflect (embrace/manifest/display/exhibit) insights and issues that are different from those of documentation by external development experts or professional evaluators.

Voices of the People

This set of videos does two things:
1) Brings together the views of women as well as of men who participated in the UNDP project. They express their views on some of the key elements connected with the objectives of the larger initiative.
2) Elicits their opinions on some of the every day practices or norms within the community that may have implications for their assessment of as well as engagement with the project goals.

The Voices of the People set includes the following videos. Each video include people's responses to the following questions:

What is the meaning of empowerment? (women's responses)
Who do you call an empowered woman? (women's responses)
What is the meaning of empowered woman? (men's responses)
Should women wear the veil or not?
Are Self Help Groups helping create women's Empowerment? (men's responses)
How are women becoming empowered under Swayaam? (women's responses)
What is the Functional Literacy Campaign? Is it beneficial? (women's responses)
How do you deal with domestic violence? (women's responses)
Should you beat your child or not?

This group of videos is a good example of how the use of video for monitoring WCPs enabled them to engage 'with' the community. The videos do not simply assess how many SHGs have been formed and thereby the number of women who have been empowered. Instead they go a step further and ask the crucial question of whether or not setting up SHGs is seen as bringing about change in the lives of the women, if yes, what is this change and if the change is actually leading to empowerment.

The videos also look at 'empowerment of women' from the perspective how it is interpreted by the members from the community itself and the different ways in which people articulate or experience it. Assuming that setting up SHGs will automatically lead to women empowerment of the kind that the more radical notions perceive may not be true. Also, the videos are not just about testing what new roles women have taken on but about how they are making an endeavour in this direction, many times not so successfully. The videos shot with men go a step further by highlighting whether or not the women who have participated in this social change project have the support of the family and spouses, and their negotiations with some of the existing boundaries within the community.

The videos (especially about the 'veil' and on beating your child) reveal that the monitoring process does not simply limit itself to indicators defining the agenda of the implementing agency but incorporates an examination of the social realities that may have a direct or indirect influence in determining how the community is engaging with the project. These realities also have an implication for how the success of a project ought to be interpreted given the larger set of beliefs and attitudes within the community. E.g. Women, who were actively engaged with the project, did not necessarily speak against the use of veil. They considered it as a custom of showing respect to elders. However the change got reflected in their not using it while going out for SHG activities.

It was evident that all the videos of this category had been produced with the involvement of people from different segments of the community and included a variety of opinions on the topics as well as the nuanced understanding of the concepts. The level of comfort of most of those being interviewed points towards the fact that they are in conversation with people known to them and not those with whom they may not share any rapport.

While evaluating the major facets of the project, such as empowerment and the success of SHGs, this set of videos effectively reproduces/represents the ground realities that are unique to the community and its possible consequences in accomplishment of project goals.

On the one hand the videos highlight how SHGs and involvement in such collectives has facilitated women to come out of their houses, built their confidence as well as skills, made them more aware of their rights and provided them with means to be self-dependent. On the other hand, the videos also reveal many cases where the project has not taken off or the control is in the hands of the few who are educated. For example, it was clear that the Functional literacy campaign (FLC) component of the project did not do well even though many interviewees (both men and women) expressed that literacy goes a long way in empowering women.

While the objectives of the project stated that it is about social, political and economic empowerment of women, what the videos reveal is that the most important dimension emphasized by women was economic empowerment, i.e., the fact that they could get loan at a lower interest and have more economic autonomy at home. They also mentioned that being able to carry out banking independently and to be able to step out of the house was an empowering experience. Thus the videos prioritised the kind of empowerment that women from financially deprived strata considered most important. Social empowerment was a second concern but no one even touched upon political empowerment. Men were stressing more on the fact that women had more awareness, and that they could now carry out tasks without being dependent on men. Men thought that an empowered woman also looks after her household better.

The ambience of the videos, the fields, people and houses in the background, the domestic animals, the sounds of birds and buffaloes all lend the videos a flavour that it is real and rooted in the community.

The language of the videos is informal, conversational and the interaction is in the local dialect which goes to show that people expressed their views in the idiom that they were familiar with. They also came out with the stories from within the community to explain their position and reflected on why a certain practice (e.g. veil) was prevailing and what were the pros and cons of discontinuing it.

The footage of the videos also brings out some of the deliberation within the community on different issues (e.g. domestic violence) which are reflective in nature. Having got a platform to express their views openly, e.g. in the video on domestic violence, the interviewees analyse not just the different ways in which violence against daughters-in-law as well as some old people happens, but also why it is undesirable.

However, even though everyone unanimously condemned it, and understood that it could lead to injury as well as suicides, no one pro-actively intervened when such instances took place. Also, while domestic violence was considered an anathema, beating up children did not seem to be taken seriously and was considered as a necessity for their disciplined upbringing. This gives insights into the milieu of community life and how some things may never be discussed openly unless provoked. While one kind of violence is condemned, another manifestation of it has social sanction. The product thus showcases the potential of the monitoring process itself to become a means of reflecting on internal concerns and addressing them.

The Voices of the People Video Set may be screened to the community in order to invoke broad-based discussions on issues of empowerment, literacy, domestic violence and using of veil. The videos, produced in local language with members from the community will help people identify with both the issue and the circumstances. This gives more scope for an analysis of the ground realities and possible deliberations for further action. Stories that highlight the success of the initiatives could be a source of inspiration for other women to get organised. The documentation of failures would provide learning about what mistakes to avoid and initiate thinking on approaches.

The videos on 'domestic violence', 'veil', and 'beating your child' provide an understanding of the situation and cultural dynamics within the community. They could become a resource for the organisations planning a development initiative with this group of people. Direct feedback collected from the community may be used to make the implementer and the project staff accountable and overlay false claims if any. The screening of these videos within their own community gives the interviewees a sense of pride and a feeling that their views and opinion matter.

Field Reports

This set of videos brings together:
1) Reports from different villages about functional and dysfunctional SHGs and the reasons why some of the groups are running successfully, while others are breaking down.

2) Reports about the status and outcomes of the different activities that are a part of the Swayaam project e.g. literacy and the various livelihood training workshops

The Field reports include the following videos:

Functional Literacy Drive (3)
Report on dysfunctional Self Help Groups (4)
Report on successful Swaayam Self Help Groups (3)
Report on Swaayam Federation– complaints (3)
Report on TRA Training and Production (13)

For this set of videos, the WCPs carried out field visits to monitor the different components of the project by interacting directly with women who are the so-called beneficiaries. The women who were interviewed engaged in different activities of the project – such as SHG formation, functional literacy campaigns as well as livelihood training workshops – and talk candidly to the camera about the issues, difficulties and challenges they face. The videos also portray the successes where the initiatives are functional and the women are reaping some benefits.

All 26 videos bring out one or the other aspect that is unique to the specific village where the video is shot. The attempt is not to focus only on whether the implementation has happened i.e. if the livelihood workshop was held or not or the SHG was set up or not; but an effort is made by the WCPs to go beyond and look at (monitor) whether or not such a training has brought about any change in the lives of the women.

At the same time, everything is not analysed under the binary of success or failure and left there. Each video checks with the women the reasons why something is working for

them and why it is not and also, what should be done to make the project more effective. While in one village, the SHG is not successful because all women are not able to contribute regularly, in the other, it broke down because the 'president' did not return the loan. There is the case of a village where women do not have faith that they will get a good return on their money. While in another village, the women have become so confident that they do not even require an animator to help them to carry out all the functions of their group.

The WPCs, through the video reports on the functional literacy drive, manage to convey the disappointment among women on account of the discontinuation of the initiative after a period of three months. For these women, literacy does not stop with being able to put their signatures. There is an urge among them to learn more, which is being hampered as the staff has ceased to teach due to withdrawal of the project. Thus, a conventional video would probably document the three months that the literacy drive was on and how women learnt to write their names, where as the WCPs were more concerned about such initiatives coming to an end without even achieving the functional literacy levels. The videos also bring in the perspectives of the staff employed by UNDP under this initiative. They express their inability to continue the classes as the component has been pulled out, thus highlighting how some decisions are taken arbitrarily without consulting the stakeholders who are a part of the project.

The videos also track the accomplishments of the project at the micro level. E.g. one video reports about a woman who has started a small business by taking loan from her SHG. There is another video that gives coverage of a protest carried out by members of an SHG against the registered ration shop distributor who indulges in malpractices of overcharging and giving less amounts of grain to the villagers.

Such micro level coverage and access to the day-to-day information within the villages is only possible when the reporter is an insider. The tendency among outsiders would be to scout for 'success stories' and club them together as the achievements of the project. These videos cover these stories as they happen.

The livelihoods training videos are rooted in the context of each village where they are shot. There are villages where women come out openly to say that although the training has been useful and they have picked up skills in incense making, embroidery, natural fibre deigns etc., no opportunities have come their way after the 5-day training where they can work and earn some wages. Those who have been given some reimbursement for their effort during the workshops, also openly speak on camera that the payment is too low to motivate them to attend the workshop. Any other monitoring process would have documented the success of the training workshops and brought out how women picked up these skills enthusiastically. Only the WCPs thought of going to the field to find out what happens after the training is over or to seek answers from the women about their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the training. They also try to find out if the villages have provisions where women can make use of these skills. The videos show the case of carpet making in which almost 1800 women of different villages have been productively recruited after their training.

In all videos, the interviewees express themselves in the local dialect and are sure they would be understood (talking to a person who understands their language) and their concerns as well as stories would be a valuable input to the monitoring process (the WCPs state the purpose of their visit and build confidence in them about the need for their feedback). The questions that the WCPs have sought answers to in the videos are simple and direct and relate to the delivery mechanism of the project. Whether the training was beneficial, if yes; how? If no; why not? How many women got training; how many got employment? What are the wages on offer? Are the women satisfied with the training or not? The women are encouraged to come out with personal accounts that make the picture clear for others to comprehend. This direct form of questioning that is perhaps typical of how communities interact with each other, and gets to the 'heart of the matter' more accurately than the more complex language an outside monitor might use.

Such videos could work as a perfect feedback mechanism for the managers of the project to gauge how the different activities are playing out in the field. They can address some of the issues raised by the by women in the videos to enhance the impact of the project. Also, the success stories could work as an inspiration for other villages to work on similar lines and take control of their own development. Also, when communities do the monitoring, it can go in much more depth – i.e., capturing 26 villages rather than a much smaller group. It would be cost-prohibitive for most development programs to pay for such in depth monitoring by so-called 'professionals.' Thus, we feel that if organizations invest the time and energy into empowering communities to monitor their own programs, in the long run, much more cost-effective and not to mention, in depth and nuanced reporting will occur.

CFO Video

This set consists of a single video which accomplishes the following:
1. Draws out viewpoints of the implementing agencies – i.e., the local NGOs contracted by UNDP to carry out project work who are known as Community Facilitating Organizations or CFOs -- of the UNDP Project about the initiatives they have facilitated under the project, such as, formation of SHGs, encouraging savings in banks, livelihood trainings etc which may aid in the achievement of the larger goal of women empowerment in the social, economic and political spheres.

2. Throws light on the project objectives and the possible benefits of the community women's engagement with the project. Highlights the achievements from the perspective of the supervisors and animators implementing different segments of the project in the three districts of Mirzapur, Sant Ravidas Nagar and Jaunpur.

The accounts of the two supervisors and five animators in this solo CFO video reflect on their approach towards implementing the project. The video clearly tries to understand how those responsible for the implementation of the project carried out their tasks. Was their approach one of deliberating with the community members for arriving at mutually agreeable ways of setting up SHGs and of taking into account the local realities? How did they go about convincing the women about the benefits?

The purpose the video serves is to assess the approach of the implementers. Did they follow a top-down, one-size-fits-all approach to decide on the terms for women participating in forming SHGs and the training needs in the community? Or was the communication transactional in nature, giving scope for women to express their needs and concerns? The accounts of the animators serve as testimonials to the nature of their interaction. They talked in the video about how the women had to be painstakingly convinced regarding the possible benefits of their involvement with the project prior to the start of the different initiatives. It was clear in the video that the implementing staff of the project (except one supervisor) were all men. Being a project meant for women, does this become a drawback for ensuring women participation? Would not women supervisors and animators have an edge over their male counterparts in social sensitivity

and understanding of matters related to women? Questions like this could be generated while screening the video in villages where the project has to be initiated.

The uniqueness of this video lies in the fact that usually the attitudes of the staff are taken as a given and effort is not made to examine whether or not their approach adheres to the spirit of the project. Are they actually effective on the ground? Talking to them on video, not only makes them share their style of operation (which could be a learning experience for others) but also brings forth their failings, if any, to adapt to the participatory and democratic nature in which the project has been conceptualised.

The video also records the staff sharing details about the achievements of community women in the social, economic and political spheres. The animators and supervisors mention in the video that the project contributed positively to the lives of women in the following ways: successful formation of SHGs; generation of savings in banks; availability of low interest loans; increased sense of confidence to talk freely and do things independently; starting of small-scale entrepreneurial ventures; contesting in local government elections; and even winning positions such as Mahila Pradhan, etc. Such videos when screened in villages where the project is yet to take off can prove to be a good starter for sparking off discussions among the community and implementers about how the project may be beneficial for the village. At the same time it could also be used to generate discussions regarding the achievement of project objectives where it has already been implemented, leading to feedback, dialogue and critical reflection.

Some of the recorded claims in the videos can be further investigated to test their authenticity and to make the supervisors accountable. The animators are selected from among the members of the community and are integral both to the project as well as to the community. By documenting their activities and gauging its response and progress, the answerability and responsibility of the implementing staff towards the community gets enforced.

SHG Monitoring Video

This group of video does the following:
1. Documents the functioning of the SHGs comprehensively over a period of time through the accounts of the community women engaged in it.
2. Gauges the engagement and participation of the community women in the functioning of the SHG by gathering their understanding on various initiatives undertaken in the SHGs.
3. Identifies changes in the lives of the women, if any, as perceived by the women themselves after they have joined the SHG.
4. Explores reasons for the success and failure of different SHG groups in the districts belonging to the project area.

The SHG Monitoring set consists of a total of 46 videos divided into three themes, each of which in turn contains videos from different districts as recorded by individual WCPs:

SHG Monitoring	Barsathi (4)
	Bhadoi (4)
Successful SHG Economic	Bhadoi (4)
	Jaunpur (Barsathi) (3)
	Jaunpur (Ramnagar) (5)
	Jaunpur (Rampur) (4)
	Mirzapur (3)
Unsuccessful SHG Women	Bhadoi (4)
	Jaunpur (Barsathi) (3)
	Jaunpur (Ramnagar) (4)
	Jaunpur (Rampur) (5)
	Mirzapur (3)

This set of videos evaluated the functioning of the different SHGs that were set up in the three districts of Bhadoi, Jaunpur and Mirzapur. The videos made it apparent that the monitoring was done in a transparent manner involving the community members throughout the process by affording them the opportunity to speak out their opinions and give personal accounts about how they thought the SHG functioned and whether they benefited from being part of it or not.

Such uncensored and non-manipulated expressing of views in a language that the women speak gives these videos an edge over those that may require 'video clips' (such as sound bites) that fall into a pre-conceived plot of an external evaluator.

These videos go a long way in establishing the ground realities within the communities that play a crucial role in determining the success and failure rates of any development projects. The present group of videos strongly resonate that factors such as the ability of the SHG to save money, open a bank account on time, deposit money regularly, maintain register regularly and make loans available to the community members were vital and decisive in gaining the trust and acceptability of the community members and make the SHG sustainable in the long run. Such observations could emerge only by continuously tracking the functioning of SHGs and not through one-time visits scheduled for recording. It also emerged that in the videos that, as most community members belonged to financially backward strata, for them, economic stability and financial independence is the first and most prominent sign of development as well as empowerment.

Besides this, specific situations which led to the failure of some SHGs were identified and elaborated by the women such as: non-cooperation and mistrust among the members; irregular meetings held in the group; illiteracy leading to lack of information; doubts about benefits of the project; difficulties in travelling to distant places to attend meetings or to go to bank; irregular visit of the animators; non-payment of loan money or deposits by a few members; instances of stolen group money; etc.

Thus the videos identified not just how many and in which villages the SHGs had become dysfunctional but probed deeper to ascertain the precise reasons why some women opted to discontinue their groups. The videos also become a tool to enforce a sense of accountability on the facilitator as, wherever applicable, the women point out about the facilitators or animators not carrying out their tasks effectively. Thus the videos grant women the agency to analyse and establish the limitations of the project.

The videos captured the monitoring of the functioning of SHGs over a duration of three months and in the process provided an assessment of the sub-phases of the project, specifically livelihood training, money management training, legal rights training, FLC, cluster formation, etc. The views of women were gathered on these initiatives as well as on issues such as their stand on domestic violence, equal rights of women and men, female education, female infanticide and child marriage, which have a direct bearing on the status of women in society. These views expressed by women may not have direct links with the stated objectives of the project, but they provide a basis to analyse the existing social milieu and socialisation among women which may be important for seeking their engagement with the project.

The videos bring forth the change as it has taken place in real-time and portrayed through visuals and word pictures of women and also, a few men. This is important documentary evidence and is valuable for any monitoring process that could as well have been professionally done. Hence, the videos demonstrate that the WCPs are capable of carrying out systematic monitoring as any other documenters. At the same time, the fact that they are from the community adds more value and insights to their videos.

Success stories of women groups who attained economic independence and stability through organised attempts, when shared with the members of the community and others, through screenings of the video, can prove to be a source of motivation for women to organise themselves into groups. Such videos instil a sense of pride and confidence among the women and community who are featured in the video.

The videos open up new spaces for discussion of issues that persist in society and affect the empowerment of women especially in the economic sphere. The screenings can become occasions for mutual learning, sharing, and exchange of ideas and may even foster cooperation and collective action within the community.

The videos also capture the local ethos both in terms of language, dialect and ambience. There were instances while making of these videos when women sang folk songs created by them, thus making the videos not just a space for self-expression but also for identity building within the community.

Making of a Self Help Group& the VV film

This set contains four videos and achieves the following:
1. Documents the step-by-step process carried out by the animators in organising the community women to form new Self Help Groups.
2. Draws out the viewpoints of the animators regarding the functions and role played by the SHGs and its associated initiatives in attainment of women empowerment in the political, social and economic spheres.
3. Elicits in the words of the Women Community Producers (WCPs), the benefits and the changes brought about in their own lives and their community by participating in the video monitoring exercises of the UNDP project.

The Making of a Self Help Group includes of the following videos:

Making Of a Self Help Group
Self Help Groups as a tool for Political Empowerment
Self Help Groups as a tool for Social Empowerment
V.V Film – ENGLISH

This group of videos depicts a range of subjects starting with the gradual process of formation of a new Self Help Group which involves meeting individual members of the community, explaining to them the objectives/ purposes/ needs and benefits in organising into groups; selecting key members such as the president, vice president and treasurer; establishing guidelines and rules for the group to be followed by all the members etc.

The videos also look at whether SHGs can be a tool for women empowerment in the political, social spheres? If yes, how it can be used for this purpose?

The longer video, which is a film by the Video Volunteer staff, is about WCPs, who were trained by them to carry out the video monitoring exercise of the UNDP SHG project. In this, the WCPs speak about the tasks that they undertook, and the changes they have effected in their own lives and that of the community members, through their role as a video monitor.

There is ample evidence in this set of videos that the monitoring process is done along with the community and it is not done to pass an evaluation or judgement on the community. There is a direct participation of the community members throughout the documenting of the different stages of the project and it is they who play the lead role and steer the narration in the video whether it is about the process of formation of the SHG, its associated ventures, or during cluster formation. It is the women who carry out the assessment of the individual as well as the overall components of the project. No external props, prompts or embellishments are used to tell the story. Even the songs are their own.

The videos analyse the project objectives and link them to the ground realities of the people. It is observed that even as the roles of SHGs in social and political empowerment of women are focussed upon, the economic independence generated by the SHGs get a fair amount of mention and attention by them. A much grounded idea of what is meant by development and empowerment as articulated the community members is portrayed in the videos. Moreover, the narrative style of the video provides an inclusive space for the community women to speak in their own dialect while giving their own life accounts as they also sing folk songs written by them on different themes.

The WCPs must have conceptualised how they want to structure their output, but the flexibility of this process gives them the liberty to go with the flow and not necessarily document only what they may have planned to. It is evident from the videos that the community members are given a chance throughout to voice their experiences of engaging with the project and hence are provided a platform to narrate the benefits they have achieved through the project in their own words.

The social evils and detrimental norms within the society which hinder the progress of women such as dowry, child marriage, female infanticide, female literacy etc are identified and addressed in the course of the empowerment training programmes. When this knowledge is combined with awareness of basis legal rights, duties of a responsible citizen, importance of family money management etc., the community members get a larger outlook towards the possibilities of personal as well as community development by using this synthesised information. The focus of the videos on such an analysis and the stumbling blocks identified by the community makes this group of videos a reflective apparatus for the community and also doubles up as a perfect tool for the project managers for understanding the realities on the ground.

When the WCPs speak about the changes in their lives and that of the women in their communities, contrasting it with the earlier situation, it can be an experience that enhances self-esteem, builds confidence, and boosts self-image. It can also be an empowering experience for those watching the videos as there is a lot of positive energy to be derived from the experiences narrated first hand by women themselves.

The videos that project the best practices and success stories of women's groups as recounted by them bring with them a whiff of credibility – when screened among the community members and other groups; they can serve as a motivational tool and also prove to be confidence boosters. The videos of women engaging in group activity and taking their first steps towards empowerment, when captured by the WCPs, enhances collective identity and pride for the individuals and community at large.

The videos provide an evaluation of the various project initiatives and the concerned authorities who facilitate them at a local government level as well. For instance, the Mahila Pradhans are interviewed on separate occasions and timings of their tenure to see if their life has undergone any change after taking up this position; if they have delivered all their promises; and to assess the work they have done for the community welfare. This exercise (more details in another set) will automatically bestow a sense of accountability upon them. It can also open up avenues for critical thinking, dialogue, cooperation and collective action.

Swaayam IVR

This single video does the following:
1. Explains what the Swaayam Interactive Voice Response (IVR) platform is about and its various functions that could cater to the community' needs.
2. Captures the pulse of the men and women through their responses to this new initiatives and also, what they hope to derive from this initiative.

This video about the Swaayam IVR makes clear what it is meant for and how it can help the community members in diverse ways to further their empowerment cause. It can act as an interesting, instructional video.

Interesting because, on the one hand, it has the expert (Director of the Graamvani, Aaditeshwar Seth) speaking about the several in-built segments such as customized project monitoring through IVR; survey and feedback; grievance redressal; community announcements; interactive community mobile radio; community voice forum for local marketing; community news; advertisements etc.. At the same time, the video shows how the community women were trained to use this new technology and their responses to the new technology.

The feedback from both women and men about the IVR captured on video has another advantage. It foregrounds some of gaps that still exist in the project itself that ought to be plugged or addressed, especially those related to the need to voice their concerns directly to UNDP; the need to fight against social evils for bringing about holistic empowerment; and the need for job opportunities to be clubbed with the livelihood training workshops.

Economically successful women from SHG

This single video does the following:
1. Portrays, through interviews with women, the wide range of economic activities that they engaged in after becoming members of SHGs, and how they utilized the loans available to them.
2. Describes the changes in the lives of some of the women after joining the SHGs, such as becoming economically independent, confident, and self-reliant.

This video as the title "Economically successful women from SHGs" suggests, brings together stories of the economic benefits that the women have derived from their association with the SHGs project. The women themselves express how the project has strengthened them in the economic realm. The first hand testimonies by the women from different villages recorded by the WCPs, along with the details of the SHGs that they

belong to, lend credibility to the potential of the SHG project in bringing about change in the lives of women.

The accounts of the women in the videos make it evident that majority of them belong to the economically strained strata and hence saving money on their own, and starting their own entrepreneurial ventures was a distant dream for them. Therefore, while speaking of their own life changes after joining the SHGs, the prime sentiment that gets amplified throughout the video is the sense of achievement that they could save money and get access to easy loans, which enabled them to start their own businesses and livelihood ventures such as tailoring centre, sewing class, vegetable shops, repair shops, retail shops etc. The shots of the women faithfully engaged in these activities as they speak to the camera, show that the WCPs have endeavoured to check out and substantiate the claims made by these women that they got 'fayada' (benefit) from the project.

The self-narrative style of presentation shot within the everyday life settings of the women – alive with background noises of people, animals, wind and rain – or with members of their SHG prompting them gives a touch of rootedness and reliability to the videos. The voices of the real stakeholders in the videos make them powerful as it is an evaluation by the members of the community about the functioning of project based on their life experiences. So the video refrains from passing a judgement, based on some pre-determined measures, about the success the project. It is the women themselves who narrate whether the project was beneficial to them or not and how.

This video is fundamentally in the form of a compilation of success stories of women who benefited from the project and hence feel more self-reliant and confident about taking care of themselves as well as their families' requirements. When shared with women through community screenings, the video has the potential to be a confidence booster and also serve as a motivation for others to join in the SHGs. It can also open up a space for discussions with the achievers who can be the role models for other women.

<u>Swatantra (Independent) Videos</u>

This set of videos accomplishes the following:
1. Documents how the women associated with the SHGs have become knowledgeable about their rights within their households and society at large and how they organize themselves to fight against atrocities and violations of their individual and collective rights.
2. Gives voice to women who have been victims of hostilities such as domestic violence, harassment at husband's home, abandonment, etc. to articulate their individual concerns.
3. Highlights (through accounts by affected women) instances of violations of the collective rights of community such as: lack of civic amenities like safe drinking water; improper functioning of the primary schools; non-availability of benefits from government development schemes; and non-availability of ration cards, widow pensions, or BPL cards etc.
4. Portrays the success stories of women who have managed to alter their lives by being part of the SHGs through becoming financially stable, self reliant, independent, and empowered.

The Swatantra Videos consists of three series (district wise), each of which consists of videos made independently by the WCPs on issues of their choice:

Bhadoi	Swatantra Anjana Yadav	
	Swatantra Devaki Saroj	
	Swatantra Kesa Devi	
	Swatantra Uzma Tabassum	
Jaunpur	Barsathi	Swatantra Babita Maurya
		Swatantra Chandrakala
		Swatantra Sanju Patel
	Ramnagar	Swatantra Munni Patel
		Swatantra Sadhana Shrivastava
		Swatantra Saroja Devi
		Swatantra Usha Patel
	Rampur	Swatantra Anita Devi Rai
		Swatantra Gayatri Devi
		Swatantra Meera Patel
Mirzapur	Swatantra Anita Bharati	
	Swatantra Baby Gupta	
	Swatantra Rajkumari	
	Swatantra Savita Saroj	

This group of videos is about women power and about building solidarities. It documents the collective action of the women involved in the SHGs in seeking their individual rights as well as the shared rights of the community.

The videos document various instances of gender injustices and atrocities against women such as domestic violence, and its various manifestations – harassment in husband's home, abandonment by the husband and in-laws, not giving maintenance expenses for wife and children, ill-treatment by drunken husband, verbal and physical abuse etc. Such an intervention into the personal spheres of women within the community may not have been possible if the evaluators were outsiders.

The personal accounts by affected women make a strong case that such behaviour was undesirable and cannot be tolerated any more, even as they highlight the empowering impact of the project. While on the one hand the videos are a tool to showcase the community women's realization of their rights, they also become a potent tool to shame the perpetrators.

The focus of the process of formation of SHGs was also on social empowerment. The women were motivated to collectively deliberate on the different sorts of disempowering situations within their family and the society and find ways to address them. The 'Swatantra' videos not only reflect the monitoring of this aspect of the project but themselves become a tool for such social empowerment.

The videos, on the one hand convincingly portray the practices that exist in the communities, which affect the status of women and their empowerment adversely. Then, they go a step further and provide a platform for the victimized women to express their woes. As these are sensitive and personal issues, the women may otherwise have never mustered the courage to speak out for the fear of social stigma and abandonment. The videos make it obvious that the evaluation process, where the WCPs examine the empowerment and transformation potential of the project, became a channel for women to create community consciousness and seek collective action by the community women to fight for women's issues.

This group of videos featured the success stories as conveyed by members of different SHGs. Some of the videos in this set also consist of recreated scenes that highlight how being part of the SHGs gives women access to numerous benefits that can make them self-dependent. Whether it is about the availability of easy low interest loans; or about livelihood opportunities such as handicrafts, utility products using natural fibre etc.; or about small-scale entrepreneurial ventures like vegetable selling; the evaluation and monitoring of how various SHGs function is carried out with the full involvement of and deliberations with the women themselves. It is they who come up with the stories of impact as well as the evidence of change, thereby contributing to the credibility quotient of the monitoring exercise.

Some of the videos explicitly project how civic rights of the community at large are often violated by the local government authorities and other officials who take advantage of the illiteracy and ignorance of the community members. The videos thus become a

mouthpiece of the community to voice their concerns using their own unique narratives and stating the consequences these violations have on their lives.

The videos that record the grievance of community members regarding improper functioning of primary schools; the irregular availability of the teachers; non-availability of BPL cards to avail benefits of government schemes; non-payment of widow pension; inefficient functioning of the Mahila Pradhans; etc. serve as a rich resource for project managers to address some of these issues for enhancing the effectiveness of the project. They can serve as documentary evidence to negotiate with authorities for the rights of the people. Such in-depth understanding and coverage is possible only by those who identify with the concerns themselves, and have to deal with them in their own lives too.

The WCPs covered the protests organised by women about the rights of the community, as they take place. The value of such videos lies in using them to put pressure on the authorities to deliver. The videos thus command a sense accountability of the local authorities to the community members. As a monitoring tool, the videos indicate the increased levels of awareness within the community, and especially among women, about their legal rights, thus revealing the significance of the political empowerment training conducted as a part of the UNDP project which has led the community to seek it's rights as a collective. A good example, indeed, of videos that may be used for advocacy.

The success stories of individual women and groups, when screened in their own communities and in others, serve to inculcate a sense of pride in the women involved and also could also act as confidence builder for others. The videos, like some in other sets, open up communication spaces for discussing issues faced by the women in society and social norms that inhibit their empowerment to elicit multiple perspectives on this crucial objective of the project.

The videos also document and identify the changes that women want in their own lives and how they would be willing to work in a collective manner towards achieving them.

This can serve as a valuable feedback for the project implementers to make it more inclusive by incorporating the ideas and aspirations of the women in their decision making about the project goals. The familiar life settings of the locale, the local contexts, dialects, mannerism, customs and even the songs add to the strength of the videos as a tool for generating internal deliberations on critical issues.

Federation Draft Films

This group of videos accomplishes the following:
1. Draws out the processes involved in formation of cluster groups and federation.
2. Explores the awareness level and understanding about the federation among the community women belonging to the different SHGs by gathering their views on it.
3. Documents the trainings on federation formation where benefits of forming this united body are explained in great detail.

The Federation Draft Films includes the following videos:

Creation of federation (English)
Federation Awareness
Federation

This group of videos showcases the overall participative process of the formation of federation and presents the community women's understanding about this united body and its benefits. There is sufficient evidence in the videos to suggest that in all stages of the federation formation (i.e. the meetings held in SHGs; grading of SHGs to ensure its qualification to contest in cluster elections; the election of one woman per village to become members of the cluster groups; and the final election itself), the members of the communities were addressed and encouraged to participate. Hence a documentary endorsement that the UNDP project was participatory not just on paper but in reality as well.

The videos that record the women's awareness, familiarity and opinion about the federation, act as an authentic measure to gauge their comprehension about the process and their judgement about its benefits. Some women go over the specific benefits of forming federation in the videos. The women talk about how it could give them more bargaining power for their rights; more collaborative voice; enhanced means to start profitable co-operatives; greater access to government schemes, and all this, if they

standing united. Such videos that explain things from the community members point of view would go down better during trainings and orientation that the talk by experts.

There are also women in the videos whose lack of comprehension about the federations hints at the extra effort that needs to be put in by the animators to get all community members on board about the activities related to federation. The documenting of the entire federation forming process and its implications for village-level SHGs is a good learning process, in accessible language, for those keen on being a part of the federation.

For example, for any SHGs to be a member in the federation, it must score a minimum of 15 points or above out of a total of 25. These points are based on such characteristics as – Does the SHG have a bank account; does it maintain savings regularly; are at least half of its members literate; etc. This evaluation, carried out by the animators along with the community members is also documented by the WCPs. The grading process documented in the video, works as an assessment of the functioning of the SHGs. It also reflects the awareness level of its members. So those groups that obtained a good grading are in a way celebrated and serve as a motivation for others.

The videos in documenting the various stages of the creation of federation reflect the deliberations that took place between different SHGs members, animators, support staff and other implementing staff of the project. Diverse benefits of the federation were explained and community members were convinced beyond any reasonable doubts to ensure wholehearted participation of the SHG members. The SHG members while expressing their understanding of federation spoke uninhibitedly in their own dialects, used examples as to how it can be applied to benefit their lives directly and even sang songs that they had created. The videos thus capture the essence of the process; it's relevance for the community; along with the reasons for its acceptance or disapproval by the women – all of which is rich data for the project managers and for use in other federation building sites.

These videos go a long way in establishing the democratic nature of this phase of the project. However, the videos reveal that he trainers and animators addressing the community women were, in majority of the cases, men. Though, it is not reasonable to assume that men are inept to deal with women empowerment issues, it may be useful to allow for an equal number of women also to be engaged for such activities.

These videos can also serve as a motivational tool to encourage the unsuccessful SHGs and others not involved to be part of the initiative. The show of strength in the numbers of women who wanted to be a part of this exercise goes to show the popularity and faith in the project and the need for such initiatives.

UNDP Impact Video

This group of videos does the following:
1. Provides examples of three women who have benefited from the UNDP project and have achieved empowerment in the spheres of the economic, political and social.
2. Draws out accounts of these successful SHG women regarding their experiences in being part of the project and the changes it has brought in their lives.

The UNDP Impact video includes the following videos:

Economic
Political
Social

This set of videos tells three success stories of women who have been associated with the SHGs project in the three different focus areas of the project – social, economic and political. It is their version of how they have experienced empowerment and the change that has come about in their lives. These videos are a good example of role model videos that may be used to support of the project.

While making comparative statements about their life circumstances before and after joining the SHGs, these women openly addressed the obstacles they had to overcome to participate in the project. They plainly mention facts such as family members placing

restrictions on women stepping outside their homes; instances of domestic violence; even financial crunch at home; non-availability of job cards etc.

The issues outlined by these three concern most women within these communities and so the videos foreground the various social realities that women deal with on a day-to-day basis, which has an immense influence upon their empowerment status and also their participation in the project. It is only through a complete understanding of the social dynamics within which the women live that any development project can work and be sustained in the long run.

The video on economic achievements of joining the SHG showcases how an ordinary community woman managed to reach the position of a master trainer in UNDP livelihood program and how she now envisages to train other women in different SHGs and even start her own company. Likewise, the video on political empowerment depicts the success story of a community woman who became politically aware of her own rights and that of her community's and went ahead to get elected as the Ward Member. These two videos serve the twin purposes of exhibiting the potential of UNDP project to other women to elicit their participation and of encouraging t hose who are making good progress by boosting their confidence, giving them a sense of identity and self- pride.

In the specific case of the woman who was a victim of domestic violence, the video makes clear through her statement that when her fellow SHG members came to know about this violence, they displayed solidarity with her and confronted her husband which made him change his ways. This video, if screened, can serve as a motivation for other SHGs to collectively take up women's issues

in a pro-active manner. At the same time, it provides an evaluation of the functioning of the SHGs in terms of their stand related to women's issues.

This group of video gives a platform to women to share their positive life experiences of associating with the SHGs in their own language and also allows them to define how they think such empowerment may be attained. Such elaborate personal accounts could only be a product of some patience and continuous monitoring by the WCPs with whom the women could interact without inhibition or fear.

Mahila Pradhan Monitoring

This group of videos does the following:
1. Draws out the opinions of the Mahila Pradhans about the changes that have taken place in their lives after they were elected into this position.
2. Documents the range of community welfare activities that they managed to carry out within their tenure.

The Mahila Pradhan Monitoring includes the following 19 videos (essentially one by each WCP):

Barsathi	Babita Maurya
	Chandrakala Vishwakarma
	Sanju Patel
Bhadoi	Anjana Yadav
	Devaki Saroj
	Kesha Devi
	Uzma Tabassum
Mirzapur	Anita Bharati
	Baby Gupta Mahila Panchayat Member
	Rajkumari
Ramnagar	Munni Patel
	Sadhana Shrivastava
	Saroja Devi
	Usha Patel
Rampur	Anita Devi Rai
	Gayatri Devi
	Geeta Devi
	Meera Patel

This collection of videos gathers the viewpoints and accounts of Mahila Pradhans from different districts of the project area in an attempt to document the changes that have occurred in their lives, if any, after they took up this position and also the developmental activities they have carried out during their term.

Most Mahila Pradhans expressed that their experience as a Pradhan and a member of the SHG has enriched them and has brought about changes in their lives such as being able to step out of their houses and carry out tasks like going to the block, the bank, the homes of community members, and wherever else their presence is required. They feel it was a learning opportunity; they are more knowledgeable about what is happening around them, how to confidently converse with different people, what problems are affecting the community, and what are the various beneficial government schemes that can benefit the people, etc.

Therefore, as a first step, the videos provide a platform which enables Mahila Pradhans from different villages to share their personal experiences, achievements and welfare initiatives that they have carried out or are planning to undertake in the future. Such a compilation of the success stories of Mahila Pradhans who have managed to exercise their responsibilities effectively, gives a boost to the concept of women's participation in the political and developmental activities and must be carried out regularly so that there is more women who come to contest for these positions.

Such videos, apart from monitoring and highlighting the work being done by Mahila Pradhans also gives a firsthand information about what it entails to be in this position. Coming from the Pradhans themselves, the videos do not just reflect their understanding of their responsibilities, but also can act as a guide for others. For example the videos together make it clear that a Mahila Pradhan must look into developmental initiatives

such as facilitating the availability of ration cards, BPL cards, Aawas allotments, widow pension and pension for the disabled persons.

They must also ensure that proper infrastructure within the village by following up on construction of roads, drainages, canals, latrines in schools and homes, and wells. It is also their responsibility to look into the cleaning of rivers and providing pump sets for irrigation; ensuring job opportunities through MGNREGA job guarantee scheme of Government of India; ensuring that schools function properly and that provision of mid-day meals is carried out successfully; etc.

By capturing this footage, some of the claims made by the Mahila Pradhans may also be verified. Thereby, these videos enable to make their functioning more transparent as well as accountable. This is a good example of how video may be used by the community members to monitor the activities of their elected representatives, which may/may not be a direct objective of a developmental project.

A community screening of these videos would spread awareness about the activities carried out by the Pradhans and engage community members in evaluating it. Where the Pradhan addressed the needs of the community members, the videos help boost confidence and security among people. If there are Pradahns who only trade false assurances, the videos can motivate the people to approach them and demand their rights. Another unique aspect about these videos is that they have followed up the changes in the lives of Mahila Pradhans as well as those affected by them over a period of two months thus, documents the change as it happens. The video documentation seems to have become a reason for some Pradhans to sit up and take notice and probably become pro-active.

6. IN CONVERSATION WITH WOMEN COMMUNITY PRODUCERS (WCPs)

The WCPs (Kesa, Anjana, Anita and Usha) with Purnima from VV and the research team (Lauella and Kanchan) at Lucknow

In order to understand the experience of the Women Community Producers (WCPs) in monitoring the UNDP project using a video, we met four WCPs at a workshop in Lucknow (UP). We discussed with them at length about the UNDP-SHG project implemented in their villages; the role of Video Volunteers (VV) in the project; how they got involved in the monitoring through community media initiative; their training; and their ideas about why it's important that women from within the community should monitor a developmental project.

We also endeavoured to learn from the WCPs what they considered as the factors that made monitoring by women different from the one carried out by an outside expert. They also shared with us some insights about the content of the videos and the use they could be put to. We were especially keen to fathom their notions of empowerment and how the WCPs thought such an initiative had brought about a change in their lives, if any.

The four WCPs we interviewed included:

1. **Anjana Yadav**: From village Daswatpur in district Bhadoi, 28 years, belongs to Ahir community, OBC. She is married with three children. Her husband works at a hospital in Mumbai. Her family is involved in agriculture, but her interests lie in social work. She has done her BA.

2. **Kesa Devi**: From Kasiyapur village in district Bhadoi, 32 years, belongs to the Bhind caste. She is married and has four children. Her husband was working with an NGO and then later UNDP. Though traditionally their family was engaged in agriculture, now they jointly do other work as well. She has completed her inter college (12th) education.

3. **Usha Patel**: From Buddhipur village in district Jaunpur, 37 years. She is married and has two children. Her family members were engaged in the UNDP project so that paved the way for her. She stays in a joint family. Her family is engaged in jobs such as AC repair and garage work. She has completed her inter college (12th) education. She reasoned that as there were no higher education institutions in the village, she had to stop her studies after her inter college.

4. **Anita Bharti**: From Munwa village in district Mirzapur. 28 years, belongs to the Harijan community. She is married and has two children. Her husband has completed his MA and is associated with NGO. Her whole family is into agriculture, but now they are also doing social work alongside. She has completed her inter college (12th) education.

UNDP project and the role of Video Volunteers (VV): The four WCPs whom we interviewed had been involved with the UNDP project either as 'animators' or as 'mahila monitor' before being selected by VV for video training. The animators are women who help form the SHGs in the villages; they talk to women about the importance of cultivating saving habits, opening bank accounts and the need for the women to join SHGs. Street plays are conducted in the process and the animators facilitate selection of the president, secretary and treasurer for each SHG. The work of mahila monitor is to record the execution of the UNDP project and performance of animators and other staff and report back to the UNDP. For instance, when the animators go on field to set the SHGs and carry on related activities, it is the mahila monitor's duty to check if the animators are doing a good job. However, this monitoring work did not use videos and the assessments were submitted in written format. The WCPs who were selected for the video monitoring of the VV project were those who had watched it being implemented from close quarters and were familiar with its agenda. The WCPs told us that their selection of by VV was, to an extent, based on their levels of motivation and confidence, their analytical skills, and how well they could articulate the local situation.

The VV monitoring initiative and 'Saksham' training: According to Anjana, the main purpose of making videos was to see if the functioning of the project was done properly and didn't just remain on the papers. On a personal note, she added their (WCPs) aim while doing videos was to empower women from the domination of men. She felt that this aim is achieved when they show the videos produced by them to other women.

She and the other WCPs were first taught photography, followed by videography which included lessons on how to capture videos, functioning of the camera, different frames etc. For Usha, in addition to the training regarding the use of the tool (the camera), the sensitisation about monitoring itself and the role played by WCPs was of immense value. She felt it her responsibility to evaluate aspects such as the social, economic and political empowerment of women along with capturing the functional delivery of the project. In the process, different kinds of local issues inhibiting the objectives of the project, such as dowry, domestic violence and corruption also got revealed. Kesha sited videos on mid-day meal in schools and Mahila Pradhans as particular examples of effective videos that reflect some of the disempowering visuals and realities.

However, video making wasn't always an easy experience for the WCPs. For Anita, it didn't come naturally to her and she couldn't grasp much of the technical details initially. She thought handling video cameras was meant for men alone. But she kept at it and, "finally I succeeded," she claimed with pride, "Now it has become almost a toy in our hands."

Once the assignment (topic) was given to a WCP, how to approach and cover it was determined by the WCPs themselves. As the perspectives were localised, the coverage was done differently by each WCP, clarified Kesa. The videos once shot were handed over to the VV team who edited them.

Ground realities and some challenges: The WCPs encountered difficulties during production as people being shot would be suspicious of what use this video would be put to. Some people mistook the WCPs for the press and felt it is an investigative operation and refused to co-operate. Anita and Kesa both faced situations where, "the people of the community where we monitor initially used to stare at us and question, why are you holding a camera? But these responses did not deter us at all and we continued the filming."

The analysis shared with us by the WCPs was that the community is always resistant to any new change or development because it is different from what they are used to. They do not like to look forward and accept change readily. So, to overcome that, "it is always important to socialise with them first and state our purpose."

With experience and persistence, they gradually overcame some of the initial challenges and learnt that, "community is our strength," and "if we introduce ourselves to the people of the community, they would talk about themselves and slowly get over their inhibition to be a part of our video." Anjana explained that she motivated the community members by highlighting the positive benefits of documenting their activity, and being part of the videos. She emphasised on how the videos would contribute towards the collective development of the villages.

All the four WCPs we interacted with said that their families supported and encouraged their work. Usha shared with us her version where she said that her mom-in-law supported her and felt that it was an achievement that she managed to get a job even though her own son was unable to. However, there was stiff opposition from other relatives who felt that social work was not meant for women, "I had to ride my cycle to reach far off places, which they felt was unfeminine." Through all this, her mother-in law supported her.

Factors that made their monitoring different: Anjana Yadav was very clear that since they are a part of the villages, when the WCPs monitor, the people talk openly to them compared to outsiders. Even if they have to monitor villages other than their own, the WCPs are still accepted as they belong to the same region, religion and caste, "Our language and dialect are the same as that of the community." She felt that, outsiders would have to first build trust among the people, which could be time consuming. She also reasoned that the people remain unresponsive to outsiders as they will leave after their work is complete. But the WCPs would always be available and can be easily approached to solve people's problems.

Kesa observed that when men make videos, women will not open up completely to them. However, they will talk about the most sensitive of issues such as domestic violence, dowry abuse etc to the WCPs. Therefore, it is important that women be involved in the monitoring process. This, she said, was especially true in case of this project which is meant for women.

Usha and Anita reasoned that from their own experience of carrying out monitoring, it had become clear that women must be the ones engaging in monitoring. But, they felt that this must be done on a sustained basis so that the issues and ground realities portrayed in the videos are addressed and more women as well as project managers are able to benefit from all the learning documented in the videos.

One assignment that all the four WCPs felt had been particularly constructive during their monitoring and stood out as an example of something only the women from within the community could have undertaken was their documenting of the roles of Mahila Pradhans in different villages. Several facts, concerns and local realities surfaced during this assignment. The WCPs managed to capture on video, the Mahila Pradhans who had no idea about their jobs as the husbands were in control with little or no power vested in them. WCPs got visuals of Mahila Pradhans who were uneducated, not used to stepping out of their houses, and admitted that they would only sign in places where asked to, and the rest would be handled by the men in the family. The husbands of some of the Mahila Pradhans allowed the WCPs to meet them only as they were from the same village. While there was a case where the husband insisted that the WCP interview only him, there was another Mahila Pradhan who actively showed the WCPs around the village pointing to all the work that she had done.

Video content and their uses/benefits: According to Anjana, due to the stories captured by their videos, many changes had come about in the villages. For example, the video on improper functioning of schools led to four to five schools providing mid-day meals to students and some even regularising classes taken by teachers. Many families obtained their BPL cards following screening of videos on this issue, she revealed.

As another example of an assignment that was effective, she cited the video on 'why should a woman wear veil?' as it generated a debate on the pros and cons of such a practice from the point of view of a woman, the family and society. A similar insightful and self-reflective discussion was generated within the community when the WCPs carried out an assignment on the concept of empowerment in which both women and men were asked who according to them is an 'empowered' woman. According to Anjana, the recordings reflected how many of the men were actually in favour of women becoming empowered and self-dependent, which reflected on a positive impact, in a sense of the project.

Kesa gave the example of videos about domestic violence, "When we make videos about the issue, the people who perpetuate the violence get scared and that may be the first step towards stopping such violence." There have been instances according to her where affected women have reported stopping of drunken abuses by their husbands and getting slightly more respect from their in-laws because of the videos. Usha talked of how when unsuccessful SHG videos were made, the people involved become aware of their short comings which worked as an eye opener. The videos which we made were then also screened and discussions generated to find solutions.

Anita pointed out that the documenting of livelihood trainings in some of the villages worked as an inspiration for women in other places, "some even took a resolve to start one such initiative in their own village after watching the screening." Usha mentioned that while doing some of her video recordings where women were narrating their problems, they kept expressing their vows till their throat dried up.

The WCPs felt that the advantage of video is that one can see the visuals that reflect the ground reality as it is, "Video cannot lie."

Change in their lives, if any: The enthusiastic and motivated Anjana was quick to express how the video making role as a WCP had brought about a change in her. She said that had not even thought about what the concepts such as social, economic and political empowerment meant before this. Also, she had never had the occasion to meet the Pradhans of the villages before. Now, as a WCP, she could go in person and talk to Pradhans confidently and even question them on issues if any discrepancies were observed in their official functioning.

When asked if some of these changes may be reversed, once the project has come to an end, she retorted that it is not possible, because, "she, like many other WCPs, now have the courage to talk freely to any officials like block development officers and even secretaries to fight for/seek their rights."

Anita revealed that before being trained as a video monitor, she had never interacted with Brahmin Pradhans – "they would not have let us into their homes. Now, on seeing us with cameras, they assume that we are officials from the block and treat us with respect and caution."

Usha clarified that once you are part of the WCP group, all are equal. She also described how video work that involved interviewing different people like project manager and officials gave her self-confidence and courage, "when I travel with my camera and bag I have noticed I get a special status everywhere and people have a new found respect for me." The video project has given her a sense of her rights and the courage to, "even interview Shree Mayawati if an opportunity presents itself."

"Before working as a video monitor, no one knew of me. Now I cover ten villages and have become known among the people. Initially, I couldn't even talk to anyone face to face because of lack of confidence. Now look at me, I have travelled all alone from Bhadoi to Lucknow with only an address to guide me," expresses Kesa.

When asked about their idea of empowerment, Usha tried to explain to us first how she thought women are always subjugated and dominated by men:

After marriage, a woman must apply sindhur on her forehead, must wear a nose ring and cover her face with a veil. They pierce her ears and nose also at a young age. These are the makings of domination of women by men. The marital status of a woman is shown through these signs. Do you see a married man bearing any sign/ symbol which sets him apart from a single man? No.

Hence, she articulated further, "Empowerment is about making women aware of their rights. Most women are like frogs in a well, not aware of the happenings of the outside world. They are stuck in places and are hence restricted. Empowerment can make them conscious of their strengths and possibilities of a better life."

Kesa and Anitha endorsed what Usha said and pointed towards the reality that it is crucial that women know their rights and become "saksham"/ capable. In that way the 'empowerment' objective of the UNDP as well as the VV project "has brought light into the lives of women."

Kesa also mentioned the pragmatic aspect od making these videos, "this initiative has led to our own financial development. This is our job which provides us with money and also earns respect for us in our own families. Looking at our personal success stories, other families are also encouraging their women to engage in such work/ development."

7. OBSERVATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

I. Through an analysis of the videos produced by Women Community Producers (WPCs) of Varanasi trained by Video Volunteers for the purpose of monitoring the UNDP development project, it is evident that such a community-driven initiative ensures that monitoring is carried out 'with' the community not 'on' the community. The videos reflect that the monitoring process followed by the WPCs engaged the community in all stages of project i.e. documentation, monitoring and evaluation. This may often not be the case in professional documentary-making or conventional monitoring processes, many of which tend to treat people as objects of study rather than active, cognising subjects.

II. The videos reveal how during the monitoring process, there was an effort to understand the diverse perspectives on development as well as empowerment as articulated by the community members themselves. Their interpretations were rooted in the context of their own lives and experiences. The idea was not to jump the gun and assert dominant, westernised and individualistic notions of development or empowerment that would be alien in a communitarian context.

III. The videos by the WPCs make it amply clear that in determining what is to be monitored, there was a negotiation between the agenda of the implementing agency and the need to focus on local issues not feeding directly into the deliverables but providing indirect insights into some of the outcomes of the project. The content of the videos is a good mix of both types of insights. For example, the WPCs went beyond simply ascertaining whether or not the SHGs were set up or how many workshops were held. The videos pursued the crucial question if the involvement with the SHGs or acquiring training brought about any change in the lives of the women and did they experience self-reliance or considered themselves empowered. Did they speak out out and fight for their rights and entitlements those in power?

IV. The videos by the WCPs mirror multiple perspectives on every issue that they have covered. This is owing to the fact that the interviewees belong to different segments within the community. The design of the assignments by the VV trainers ensured that the WPCs gather footage, which enabled a dynamic exchange of ideas so that the videos were an amalgamation of the range of diverse opinions on issues within the community as they were gathered through the participation of members from all sections within the community while monitoring the different components within the development project. The videos capture the ambience,

sentiments and unique realities expressed by people from different backgrounds that give an insight into where from their standpoint is emerging.

V. The videos realistically identify the challenges faced during the project as well as the shortcomings/drawbacks of the project. At the same time, everything is not analysed under the binary of success or failure and left there. Each video checks with the women the reasons why something is working for them and why it is not and also, what should be done to make the project more effective.

VI. The videos have recorded the dynamic process of social change as it takes place. No external props, prompts or embellishments are used to tell the story. Even the songs are from within the community. The WCPs have taken the liberty to go with the flow and not be tied down to a pre-determined structure for carrying out the monitoring or video-making. This flexibility lends itself to richer and more diverse coverage in sync with the actual goings-on within the community.

VII. As it is palpable from the videos, all of them have been produced with the open and candid involvement of people from different segments of the community with a view to gather nuanced opinions on diverse aspects of the project. The footage bears testimony to the fact that the members of the community were comfortable talking to and expressing their view to their peers. They spoke out openly without inhibition using the vocabulary and language they are familiar with. Also, the videos track the project at the micro level. Such in-depth coverage and intimate access to the people as well as commonplace information within the villages is only possible when the reporter is an insider and not someone who may not share any commonality of culture, language or context.

VIII. The local flavour of the community is embedded in the content, treatment, styles and narrative of the videos. They stand out as products enriched with elements of local culture, language and dialect of the community. The ambience of the videos – with fields, people, shelters, domestic animals in the background; and the sounds of birds, buffaloes, wind and rain – all lend the videos a flavour that it is real and rooted in the community. The language of the videos is local, informal, and conversational. The interaction is in the local dialect and people expressed their views in the idiom that they were familiar with.

IX. The videos have been produced in local language with the participation of the community. There are testimonies by the immediate stakeholders and an evaluation by the members of the community. This enhances the credibility as well as the authenticity quotient of the videos. Those watching the videos identify with

the issues, people as well as the circumstances. Those making the videos as well as those featured in them easily become role models as they are from within the same community. If they can do it, why can't we?

X. The videos adopt a story-telling approach that probably stems from the oral traditions within communities. When women recount their success stories or speak about the changes in their lives, it can be enthusing experience for those watching the videos. Also, the video-making process goes a long way in enhancing the self-esteem and confidence of those narrating their experiences. The videos of group activities and of women taking their first steps towards empowerment promote collective identity and pride of the community at large.

XI. It was observed that the videos portray ground realities that are unique to a specific community or village and their possible consequences in accomplishment of the stated objectives of the project. Such videos come out as starkly different from those by an outsider that may automatically attribute the failure of an initiative to the apathy of the community members.

XII. The video compilation of the stories of Mahila Pradhans is a unique set among the videos produced by the WCPs. First, the videos empower the Mahila Pradhans by giving them a platform to speak about their vision and come out to show the work they have carried out. Second, the videos record the responsibilities that come with this position which can be a learning experience for other women. Third, they inspire more women to contest for these positions. Fourth, the videos compel the pradhans to be answerable for all the promises that they have made on camera.

XIII. The videos by the WCPs also manage to look into the personal spheres of women and document the various instances of injustices against them. These views expressed by women provide a basis to analyse the existing social milieu and socialisation among women which may be important for analysisng their engagement with the project. Such elaborate personal accounts could only be a product of patience and continuous monitoring by the WCPs with whom the women could interact without inhibition or fear.

XIV. The narrative and interactive approach adopted by the videos with creatively captured stories and powerful testimonies ensures that they could act as a catalyst to initiate community-led reflection and propel a self-motivated process of horizontal communication. This collaborative learning space could lead to collective action by different stakeholders and even project implementers.

XV. The community-led monitoring of the development project enables a mechanism whereby the project implementers as well as trainers and staff become accountable to the so-called beneficiaries. The videos can serve as documentary evidence to negotiate with authorities for the rights of the people without any intimidation of the community members. The videos thus become a mouthpiece of the community to voice their concerns using their own unique narratives.