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People's Video And Training

by

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PEOPLE'S VIDEO AND TRAINING

By

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Introduction

Communication is very central in the lives of people today - both, the rich and the poor. Technological developments in communication are responsible for making the world a smaller place and it can rightly be said that today is the age of information. The screen based, audio visual medium has gained immense popularity in this information age and is here to stay. The emerging concerns in the screen based technological innovations, which are happening at a very fast pace today, are to make them (the innovations) more interactive, decentralised, participatory, leading to greater involvement and equality amongst people, within and across national borders. This paper focusses on video as a tool for communication.

Today video has become a potent tool which is used by a variety of interest groups for their respective purposes. These interest groups are educational organisations, corporate businesses, government bodies, defence services, political parties, religious groups, magazine publishing houses, advertising agencies, among others. They are well placed to access video equipment, technical people, and resources to produce the kind of video material they want for their specific purposes. All these interest groups are using video to reach their audiences directly in addition to the reach they already have through the mass medium of television. They are creating messages for direct-cast use in

*"Direct-cast" is a positive term coined to cover all the ways of non-transmission use of video, as opposed to broad-cast and transmission.*
classrooms, in campaigns, in meetings, in discussions, in discourses, for mobilising public opinion, for attracting customers to their products, for disseminating information, for motivating personnel, for training and educating cadres, students, personnel, etc., etc. All these are very innovative and exciting uses of video in the hands of people - it is expanding the potential of video as a versatile tool.

Yet all these interest groups represent the elite and well-off sections of society, which is a minority of the population in poor countries. They do not enable ordinary people to use video in their own way for their own purposes. By ordinary people we mean the vast majority of the population which is poor, and is struggling to improve its life situation. Poverty and illiteracy of this majority of the population has lead to lack of self confidence, low self esteem and few educational opportunities for them. Consequently ordinary people have very low exposure to the world of electronic communication, and little or no skills training in handling sophisticated electronic equipment. Thus they are easily excluded from the world of electronic communication including video. However, they are the ones who need to take advantage of the information age to affect their life situations favourably.

Television and People's Video

The mass medium of television is a major communication channel today which reaches large sections of the population in most countries. It is very influential and central in moulding public opinion. Television and video are interlinked in the world of
media. Presently ordinary people in developing countries are linked to the mass medium of television as viewers, as recipients of messages, as research audiences. The questions which arise from this situation are - is it necessary and possible to treat ordinary people as participants and partners in the process of information creation? Why have ordinary people mainly remained viewers, recipients of messages, research audiences, so far in the mass medium of television? What needs to be done to change this situation? This paper attempts to address some of these questions in the framework of training and people's video.

Today the mass medium of TV is centralised and controlled largely by the "experts" - the people who create and disseminate the information and messages to be broadcast. The purpose of the messages created is to impart information, education, and entertainment. By and large

- the messages are created "about the people" and "for the people"
- the messages are created by "experts"
- the centralised agencies through which this information is created are state owned in many poor countries and privately owned in the highly industrialised countries.
- "visibility" is created for those segments of the population who do have this access.
- the issues of the people who have access to the experts and the centralised mode of transmission are included more easily in these messages
- the majority of the population does not have access to the experts and the centralised agencies. Their issues, reality and
priorities do not get easily included in these messages

- lobbying and advocacy efforts by various organisations on behalf of this majority is trying to make a dent in this situation by getting the experts to include their issues in the messages generated for this medium.

The messages produced by the centralised mass medium of TV can be rated on the following aspects to assess their capacity to strengthen the hands of ordinary people.

- does the message portray the reality of ordinary people? Do they identify with the message?
- are ordinary people involved in the creation of the message or is it on their behalf?
- is the information creation process participatory or top-down?
- is there a process of "information creation and action" and "action and information creation" happening on an on-going basis?
- do ordinary people have access to and control of expensive tools like television? Does the message reach the poor?
- does the message help to change the lives of ordinary people for the better?
- does the message strengthen ordinary people to create and transfer power in their hands?

The centralised mass medium of TV has its strengths and limitations in addressing the concerns listed above. Video can provide a people oriented, decentralised, and participatory alternative to the centralised set-up of TV. It can become a tool to strengthen the hands of ordinary people alongwith the mass
medium of TV. The diagram below illustrates this point graphically.

![Diagram of Media of TV]

**Mass Medium of TV**
- Centralised
- Message - one to many
- One way communication
- Expert oriented
- State or elite owned

**People's Video**
- Decentralised
- Message - many to many
- Two way communication
- People oriented
- People owned
- Participatory

**Involving Ordinary People in Video**

How does one reach ordinary people? Several different kinds of organisations involved in development activities are working to improve the existing situation of poverty and illiteracy for the majority of the population in developing countries. They are attempting to involve ordinary people and get their active participation to change their (the people's) life situation favourably. These efforts at reaching ordinary people can be categorised as:

- through development programmes of government
- through the mass media itself
- through educational organisations
- through non governmental organisations, people's organisations and their activities
- through the development efforts of the corporate world of business
- through the business activities of various corporate entities
- through the political parties and their various units
- through religious organisations
All these different approaches to involving ordinary people have been using video in some way or the other to create more effectiveness in their work. These experiences with using video can be described as:

- organisations own TV and VCR
- organisations use videos made by other organisations to show to the people they work with for creating awareness, for consciousness raising, for motivating, for orienting them, etc.
- organisations invite independent video/film producers to make videos on their work and the people they work with
- state owned television and/or other video producers go to some of these organisations to make programmes on their work and issues of the people they work with
- organisations lobby and influence state owned television to include the reality of the people they work with in the programmes made by them
- organisations develop alternate TV channels
- organisations own video camera and are experimenting with it
- organisations make their own video programmes themselves for direct-cast and broad-cast use by themselves

The experiences of the mass medium of TV and those of using video with people can be positioned on a spectrum ranging from people as recipients/beneficiaries of messages on the one extreme to people as active participants in creating messages on the other extreme, as shown below.

| People as recipients/beneficiaries of messages | People as active participants in creating messages |
People's Video and Training

If ordinary people should and have to create space for themselves in the world of video (like all other interest groups have been able to do), then more and more intensive and systematic efforts are needed at the 'active participants in creating messages' end of the spectrum. "People's video" is the emerging trend for making this a reality. This essentially means training ordinary people in an organisational/collective context to use video equipment and make programmes on their issues themselves. People also have to learn to use the information created through such programmes to change and influence their life situations favourably.

People's video trainings have to be conducted as part of adult education efforts to reach the present adult population of ordinary people. Alternative opportunities have to be created for them as ordinary people do not get opportunity to attend degree and diploma courses in video easily. Attempts have already been made at conducting such trainings in people's video, and the author has been directly involved in some of them. The following observations are being made from this experience base.

The trainings organised for enabling people to produce their own video programmes/messages would be useful and relevant when they incorporate the following components/modules:

- on being a video producer
- technical skills of handling video equipment
- direct cast use of video programmes
- meaning of an alternative in video
The trainings should be participatory and aimed at demystification of technology, skills transfer, exchange of skills, and capacity building. Learning, sharing, exploring, experiencing, analysing together should be an integral part of the trainings. The trainings should also create access to video equipment. The background of the participants and their group size will determine the duration of the trainings.

Such trainings can initiate the process of making people's video a reality. The mass media broadcast mode of TV is getting on-going sustenance in the form of constant updating of facilities, new exposure and experience, new entrants being trained at various institutes and being inducted into its system of functioning. The people's video, direct-cast mode also needs similar on-going sustenance if it is to take roots and strengthen the hands of ordinary people to create a niche for themselves in the field of electronic communication. The trainings for people's video have to be designed and followed-up in this context.

A systematic effort will be needed to reach increasing numbers of people. Programmes which train participants directly will evolve into training of trainers programmes to achieve a multiplier
effect for reaching more people. The trainers will also develop from ordinary people after sometime to make the training effort truly owned by people.

Training-learning materials for making these trainings effective need to be developed on a very large scale. Presently there is very little such material readily available. Language, regional and cultural context, literacy level of the participants are special concerns to be addressed in developing the training-learning materials. Similarly, very few documented case studies and examples of the effectiveness/limitations of people's video initiatives are available presently. A serious effort to document these experiences would contribute a lot in building confidence and credibility to spread the message of people's video to more and more people. It will enthuse people to be involved in such efforts themselves.

The pedagogies for conducting people's video trainings also need to be developed more intensively to cater to the needs of literate and illiterate populations, male and female, young and adult populations, poor and middle class populations, rural and urban populations across regions and cultures.

Some of the pedagogies used presently are
- hands-experience
- experiential learning
- demonstrations
- sharing information and experiences
- case studies
- small group and large group discussion
- lectures
- role plays
- field projects
- making video productions and using them during training
- critiquing video productions made during training
- practice
- exposure - dialogue exchange programmes

This is not an exhaustive list and more pedagogies will evolve by doing further trainings and as people's video needs get crystallised more clearly. The presently used pedagogies also need to be developed far more rigorously to become effective methods of training-learning in people's video.

What Needs to be Done

The overall readiness in non governmental organisations, people's organisations, as well as other organisations which reach ordinary people, is presently quite low to take up people's video trainings in a big way. They do want to have access to and learn to make and use their own video programmes but there is apprehension on several counts such as the expensive video equipment needed and how it can be obtained, about lack of facilities like electricity, air conditioning and space, about safety and maintenance of delicate equipment as well its insurance, about administrative overheads to maintain a video unit, about illiteracy of the people, about a long and intensive follow-up of the training in skills and capacity building. Such apprehensions deter organisations from getting involved in people's video. There is
also the feeling that video communications is divergent from the main task of the organisation and does not warrant spending so much effort on video training and follow-up. They feel it is easier to ask some video producer to come and make programmes for them when they want to use video in their work.

Given this situation, several preparatory efforts are needed to build up the readiness of these organisations to take up people's video. These include

1) sensitisation efforts through workshops, meetings, and discussions with members and representatives of non governmental organisations, people's organisations, and other organisations to understand the potential of people's video in their work and in strengthening the hands of ordinary people.

2) sensitising funding agencies to develop a people's video component in their funding strategy so that organisations feel reassured about the availability of facilities and resources for initiating people's video in their work. Availability of resources such as space, trained people, equipment and its maintenance, transport, etc. are major concerns in the minds of organisations.

3) actual trainings to be conducted with the representatives of non governmental organisations, people's organisations, and other organisations. Someone or some organisation/s in the field of communications have to plan and offer such trainings within countries and across countries regularly and on a large scale.

4) after the trainings are conducted in intensive modules, there is need for serious and systematic follow-up with the trainees and their organisations, to help them through the various teething
troubles that will arise in setting up video units (teams) in their respective organisations. There would be need for refresher trainings and advanced trainings also as part of the follow-up. This learning process is a continuous, on-going one and video is also a teacher by itself to quite an extent.

5) When several organisations working with people are producing their own video programmes and using them in direct-cast mode, some form of networking between them will be very useful. Over a period of time, the strength of the networks developed will be proportionate to the strength of their members. Networking will become increasingly relevant in the fast changing world of electronic communications, to deal with issues of time and space. Direct-cast mode will also need quick access to programmes made by people's video groups in other places (regions, countries) - such exchange can be facilitated by networking. Advocacy and lobbying efforts on various issues which come up through people's struggles (in which video becomes an input) will gain momentum through networking. New networks of people's video groups will develop and links will also get made with existing networks on other issues such as environment, health, education, credit, income generation, housing, water, childcare, social issues etc.

Communications is a slow, gradual, supportive process which appears invisible on the face of it but its effects and impact are visible over time in the work of an organisation. Many organisations involved in development work do have some or other communications activities as part of their on-going work. However, communications is still seen as a supportive activity, as
secondary to the primary work of the organisation. In fact, it is often given low priority in terms of attention and resources of the organisation. While embarking on people's video, it is very important for the organisation to have clarity of vision - why does it want to go in for video training and what does it understand by people's video and video as a development tool. Such clarity will be necessary for giving due time and effort to the new activity that will develop in the organisation after the video training is over.

**Development Communication**

Development communication includes a variety of methods, both traditional and modern, ranging from music, songs, dance, dialogue, meetings, drama, posters, pamphlets, newspapers/wall newspapers/newsletters/magazines, theatre, puppetry, megaphone/microphone, audio tape, slides, photographs, radio, compact disc, film, television, video, computer, satellite, which are all complementary to each other for strengthening the hands of ordinary people. Video is only one of the methods used in development communication and can form part of an overall communications thrust or strategy in the work of organisations involved in such development work. Such work usually has an element of influencing public policies in favour of the poor and deprived sections of the population. Considerable amount of lobbying and advocacy efforts are done to actually influence any particular public policy. Several of the communication methods listed above are used for influencing public policies along with doing other on-going development activities. In the
sphere of influencing public policies, video has an advantage over other communication methods in that it can bring alive in a graphic and vivid way the issues of the people to policy makers who may be located in places which are physically distant from where the people are. Video can be replayed for several different audiences and the same audience can also view it several times. It allows people to put forth their point of view in their own language and manner, in their own settings, and create a direct communication link with the policy makers.

People's video has immense potential which needs to be explored to the full. It has the power and capacity to enhance communications amongst ordinary people and with the outside world. It can become the common person's tool and play a very effective role in development and people oriented communication.
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