

# Engaging Rural Communities in Communication Processes: Lessons from Video Volunteers' India Unheard Program

*Pooja Ichplani*  
*Archna Kumar*  
*Jessica Mayberry*

\* Corresponding e-mail: [poojaicp@yahoo.com](mailto:poojaicp@yahoo.com)

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## Abstract

*Community Video (CV) is participatory and has immense potential to strengthen community communications and amplify the voices of people for their empowerment. By building capacities especially of marginalised community groups, CV endeavours to bring about shifts towards more inclusive communication processes. In various parts of the world, among marginalised community groups, community video initiatives have become instrumental in facilitating micro-level, yet significant changes in communities. The organization Video Volunteers (VV) promotes community media and provides disadvantaged communities with journalistic, critical thinking and creative skills for catalysing change in communities. This paper is based on qualitative research, and seeks to map the range of VV impacts in communities, and provide an in-depth analysis of factors contributing to VV influencing change in communities. Study tools included content analysis of a longitudinal sample of impact videos produced, narratives of community correspondents using the Most Significant Change Technique (MSCT) and interviews with key informants. Using a multi-fold analysis, the paper attempts to gain holistic insights into VV processes. The study maps the key aspects of Video Volunteers as a community media initiative. It also sheds light on engagement of various stakeholders in development processes using the Communication Infrastructure Theory (CIT).*

**Keywords:** collective action, community media, ICTs, most significant change, social change.

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## 1.0 Introduction

Participatory Communication is defined as “a dynamic, interactional, and transformative process of dialogue between people, groups, and institutions that enables people, both collectively and individually, to realize their full potential and be engaged in their own welfare” (Singhal & Rogers, 2001). Its strength lies in the flexibility it offers as it can adopt any form according to certain contextual needs. Hence, it gives people the freedom to set their own agenda for development, based on their felt needs.

Building on the salient aspects of participatory communication, community media have gained momentum worldwide for providing voice to the marginalized. Many people view community media as a dynamic process where communities, rather than institutions, organized around information and communication technologies, take control of their own development and

use communication technologies to do so (Fairbairn, 2009). Also perceived as ‘alternative media’, community media strive to question the hegemony of social and political ideologies popularized by ‘mainstream’ media, as they are small-scale, independent, and non-hierarchical. The discourses and content of alternative media distinctly differ from mainstream media focusing on non-dominant discourses and are considered the third voice between the state and commercial media (Fuchs, 2010). Horizontal in its structure, community media enable change through a set of diverse activities including interpersonal communication, dialogic processes, and advocacy. They merge both media and societal approaches to cater to the issues prevailing in the community that need urgent action for their upliftment (Berrigan, 1979; Lewis, 1993). Further, facilitating community communications and amplifying the voice of the community about issues that concern their lives, community media are seen as effective tools that can contribute to development of communities that they serve (Moitra & Kumar, 2016). Hence, acting as ‘critical media’, they address citizens’ notions of development through objective media structures, organized, managed and controlled by people (Fuchs, 2010). Finally, vibrant participatory media positively influence mainstream media, promote their convergence with community issues (Newman, 2011), resulting in the emergence of a counter public sphere.

Participatory communication hence necessitates innovative use of media that can be locally controlled. Consequently, media-use needs to be alternatively perceived beyond informational purposes to a more people-centric approach in order to address local, sensitive issues in an objective manner to bring about a strategized social change (Liu, 2009). Video has potential to inspire and persuade people to take collective action and ensure that responsive governance is realized (Harris, 2008). Clearly, people are the key element in the process, shifting from passive recipients of media to being mobilised agents of change. Through the use of video, people are able to present the problem the way they perceive it collectively in order to bring about change. However, the process of video production acts as a means for social change, rather than the video itself. In doing so, it unearths the neglected perspectives of complex issues (Shaw, 2012). Thus communication technologies need to be seen not as ‘drivers’ of change but ‘technological tools’, which may provide new potentials for combining the information embedded in the technological systems with creative potentials and knowledge embodied in people. In this context, it is through a set of offline activities, which complement each other, that it is possible to build capacities of local producers for adoption and sustained use of ICTs, mobilizing communities in the process (Moitra, Kumar & Seth, 2018).

Through its processes, community media enhance the experiences and competencies of the community at-large, their structure and capacity eliminate socio-environmental barriers that prevail within them, and enhance environmental support and resource availabilities (Melkote & Steeves, 2015). By providing a platform that cuts across caste and class dynamics, gender differentials and other social inequities, community media instil greater confidence in people to challenge the local power structures whilst raising their issues (Rodriguez, 2001). Although community media are restricted in terms of space and confined to a local area (Carpentier, 2007), penetration of global forces into local contexts has liberated them into a trans-local structure (Howley, 2005). In a globalising world of multiple complexities, community media serve as a forum of the people to share their cultural expressions and views, and their shared identities to the outside world. Termed as ‘glocalization’, the process increases marginalised groups visibility in media spaces by promoting awareness building and sensitization, grievance redress and exposing

corrupt practices (Moitra et al, 2016) and it has contributed to local activism in backward regions (Palmer, 2007).

This paper evaluates a community media initiative called Video Volunteers (VV), which was established in India in 2003 as a not-for-profit, human rights organisation, with a goal to empower community voices. Technologically, VV works with participatory video as an alternative media tool to create spaces for centre-staging issues of marginalized communities in the most backward and media-dark regions. It provides an alternate media landscape where people from resource-poor communities are trained in producing high quality media content. It works to enable people at grass roots to express themselves freely and depict their concerns based on their own experiences and understandings. Thus, VV creates structures for ‘hyper local journalism’ focusing on issues which are usually neglected by mainstream media. Further by providing opportunities for people to participate in voicing their concerns, VV positions itself as a tool for empowering individuals and communities by building solidarity and challenging existing inequities and power structures. VV’s locally-owned and managed media production teaches people to comprehend, articulate and share their perspectives on issues that matter to them – on a local and a global scale.

In 2010, based on its collective learning from past experiences of ‘media for development’ projects, a new model was devised – *IndiaUnheard*, which is currently being used by VV. By providing a participatory, bottom-up platform it involves non-professionals and builds their capacities in order to bridge gaps between ordinary people and those in positions of power. It especially focuses on centre-staging and amplification of voices of marginalized populations, their issues heard by different stakeholders and their problems addressed. With the help of local producers operating from remote, poverty-stricken districts of many Indian states (Figure 1), Video Volunteers has been able to produce and publish large numbers of stories on themes such as corruption, poverty, caste, education, gender, health, human rights, environment, arts and culture, among others. For their work, VV also provides them with nominal monetary incentives on the production of raw footage of issue videos and achievement of impact with the help of the change process. This also sustains their participation in media activism.

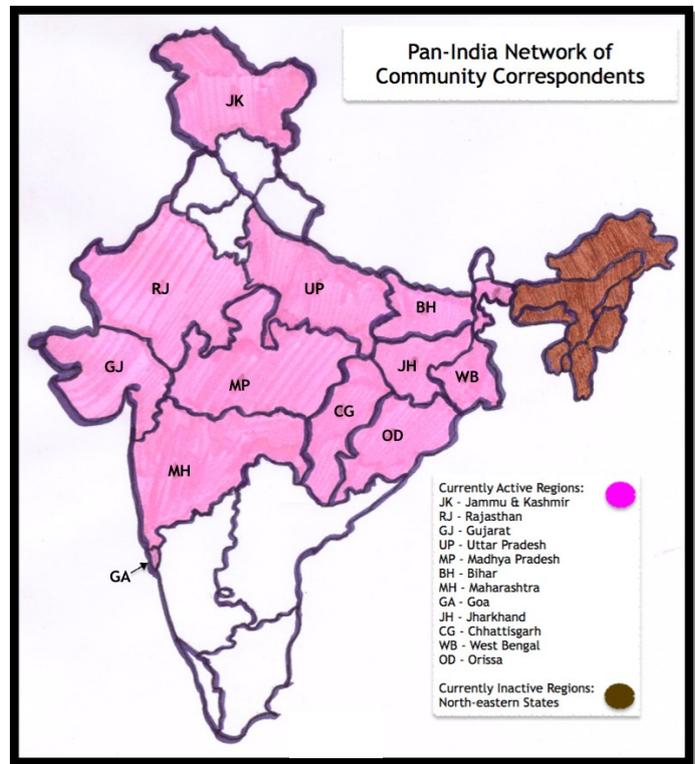


Figure 1. Pan-India Network of Video Volunteers

Local individuals, called Community Correspondents (CCs) are identified from backward, resource-poor communities, and they are trained by technical professionals to conceptualize and produce video stories/magazines about socio-developmental issues prevailing in their communities. Acting as ‘grassroots news reporters’ of sorts, the correspondents, with the help of their video reports, strive to narrate and amplify through various platforms true stories and not some sensationalised, misinterpreted, biased version of the reality. With a training programme

designed in an incremental way, these videographers are envisaged to become, over time, a part of the stringer system of mainstream news organizations and bottom-up journalism (Video Volunteers, 2018).

This research aimed to assess the key aspects of Video Volunteers, which contribute to change with a view to understanding the VV process and its centrality to micro level shifts in the community. For this, we use Integrated Model of Communication for Social Change (Figueroa et al, 2002). Through this study, we also seek to determine the factors that enabled the community correspondents to function smoothly, in addition to their own characteristics. We use Communication Infrastructure Theory (Ball-Rokeach et al, 2001; Kim & Ball-Rokeach, 2006) to map different stakeholders constituting the support system of CCs, which was a significant dynamic that shaped VV's growth.

## **2.0 The Research Method**

We undertook a qualitative study to understand Video Volunteers (VV) and its *IndiaUnheard* program. The study endeavoured to map the change the grass roots brought about through VV processes to gain holistic insights about aspects that contribute to change. A sample of seventy impact videos produced in the last three years in Hindi or English were selected (ones which were uploaded on VV's website) and the content was analyzed<sup>1</sup>. A comprehensive content analysis framework was developed to determine the treatment of videos as an advocacy tool, and identify the factors that lead to change. In-depth interviews were conducted face-to-face and telephonically with twenty-six correspondents. Event-based sampling was done for the selection of CCs. All CCs participating in a training program in Delhi were selected. Among these, the majority belonged to rural, low-literate populations with an economically poor background. Key informants were also interviewed to substantiate the data. Data were also collected through significant change stories. These stories were collected using 'Most Significant Change Technique' (Dart & Davies, 2003), and it enabled the community correspondents to share their experiences of association with the video platform along with the changes perceived by them from their participation (Ichplani, 2017)<sup>1</sup>.

## **3.0 Findings**

### **3.1 Content analysis of impact videos**

Through the content analysis of impact videos, the scale of problems addressed was assessed. It was found that communities came together for problems affecting individuals or a small group. 43% of the videos documented a problem that affects a specific group of people within a community, which implies the involvement of those people. Problems often concern the whole village as in 39% of videos, implying a relative ease in mobilisation of people due to their stake in the prevailing problem. 14% of the videos recorded a problem that only a single person

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<sup>1</sup> Sample for content analysis included impact videos (and not primary issue videos) as they document the process of change of which primary issue videos, along with CCs' other advocacy activities are a part.

suffers. Videos focus not only on collective concerns of large groups but also smaller groups and even the individuals. 57% impacts videos were seen to be focusing on such issues. Thus, Video Volunteers as a community media intervention articulates concerns of whose voice is not dominated by number, but by the urgency and severity of the problem.

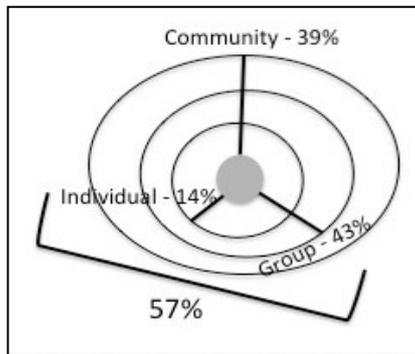


Figure 2. Scale of Problems

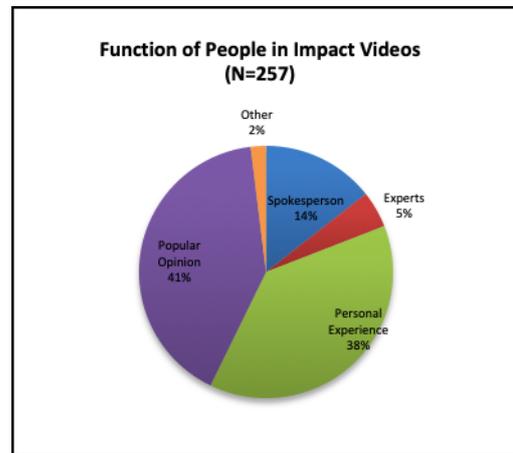


Figure 3. Functions Performed by People

### ***Functions performed by people in Videos***

257 people appeared in 70 videos that were analyzed. Thus on an average, 3 to 4 people appear in each video. 53% males and 47% females appeared in videos. These people were seen to perform a variety of functions. 41% people provided popular opinion i.e. testimonials of the problem and the effects of the CCs video campaign. More than one-third (38%) of the people shared their personal experiences, as they were directly affected by the problem. Few other people (14%) were spokespersons of government officials and village council members. 5% of the people were credible experts such as medical professionals who provided additional information about issues addressed in videos.

Among community-level advocacy activities (Figure 4), most commonly organised were community meetings (69%) to discuss problems prevailing within the community at-large and to bring consensus to a desired plan of action while screening primary videos (37%). To advocate with policy makers/government departments, CCs schedule meetings with government officials (87%) and write formal letters (24%) to concerned personnel. Petitions, filing FIRs were also documented as reinforcements in 9% of the videos, while others (4%) included short film screenings for sensitising people about issue of concern. Other activities included publishing stories on a local, mainstream media platform (19%), and organizing protests and rallies for mass mobilization (6%).

### ***Catalysts for Change***

A variety of catalysts facilitated the change process in communities (Figure 4). Interestingly, in many cases, the specific persons or groups who were earlier a deterrent or a negative factor later recorded a turnaround; CCs' efforts translated them into positive influencers. Support of two groups – government officials and community members – was seen to be integral for accomplishment of CCs' goals and a vital turning point in the catalysing processes. Orienting

government officials to support CCs' efforts was an essential trigger in 59 videos (84%) but 14 videos (20%) showed their negative perspectives and activities inhibiting change, which were altered by the CCs' efforts in only a few cases. Similarly, community members' support of people from both lower and higher caste groups was vital in 52 cases (74%) while the community was a prominent negative factor in 19 videos (27%) and the CCs had to actively orient each one to the desired action for sustained mobilisation. Local leaders (not from the government), such as religious leaders, frontline community workers, among other individual opinion makers, were seen to be negative influencers (29%) and were difficult to convince and rarely supported CCs (1%) in their endeavours. Other positive influencers emerging in the videos were local and mainstream media support (17%) and the support by significant persons and/or groups (27%), which had a positive effect to catalyse change processes in the communities (Figure 5). We next present key aspects emerging from the narratives of correspondents.

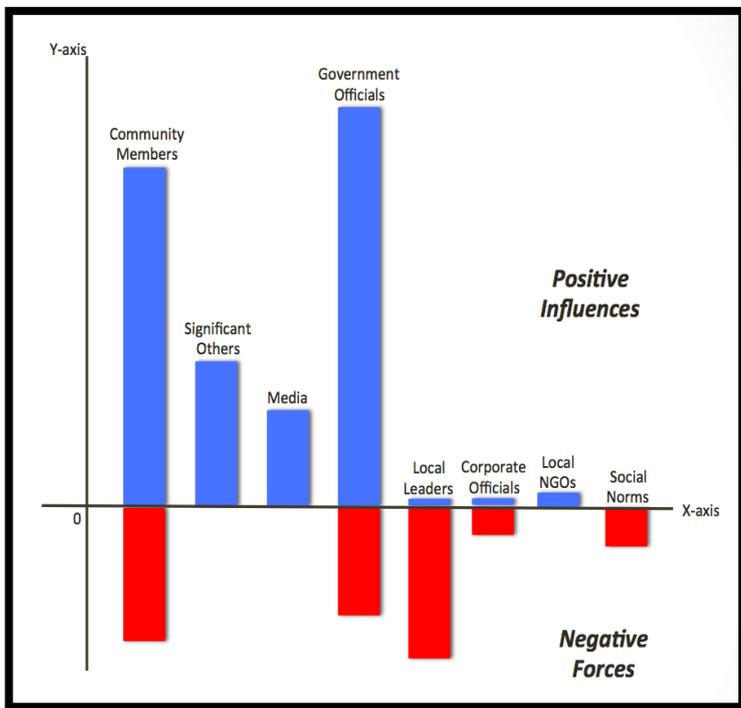


Figure 4. Catalysts for Change

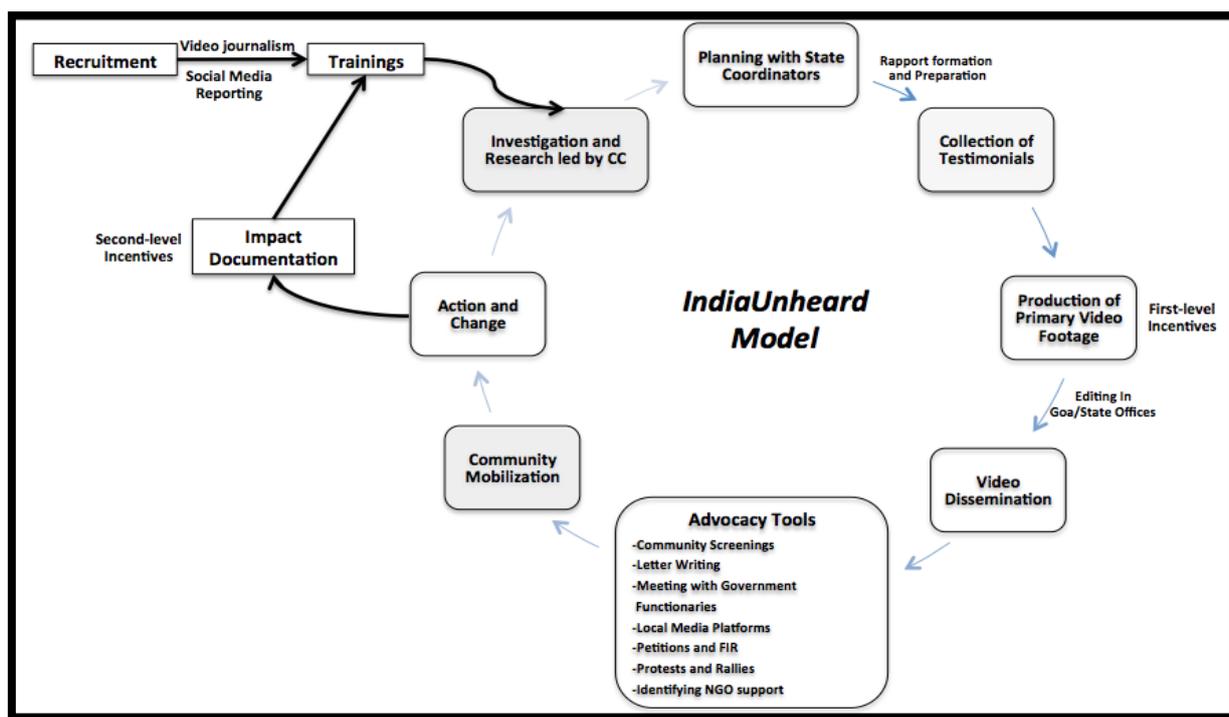


Figure 5. Activities Conducted by Community Correspondents Within *Indiaunheard* Program

### 3.2 Key aspect 1: Community Correspondents

#### ***Desire for Learning***

All correspondents differed in their tendency to accept new ideas. Without reluctance, more receptive individuals seemed to quickly grasp new ideas and new ways of thinking. Those having high desire to learn acted like absorbent sponges. Correspondents acquired a range of skills from video production to in-depth comprehension of issues that surround them, by learning from their mentors and trainers at Video Volunteers. Linked to this was self-reflection as they learnt new things and simultaneously applied their new knowledge to the context and working styles. Meeting other correspondents who perceived similar experiences helped them better understand

and prepare for the future challenges they might face, as well as reflect upon their past mistakes to achieve positive outcomes in the change process.

#### ***Excerpt from interview with Soriya Banu, a Community Correspondent from Maldah, West Bengal***

*“I come from a poverty-stricken family with four members. Still that did not stop me from completing post-secondary education and making Social Work my profession after pursuing Master’s. Today, I am the sole earning member in my family. I work at a local NGO, which works on healthcare and literacy, and involved in giving first aid trainings. Although my parents were not initially supportive of me becoming a CC with Video Volunteers (VV), over time, however, they, along with my community began to rely on me as a means for tackling issues in not only their community but also West Bengal in general. I am not afraid of raising my voice in front of anybody as I have greater awareness about laws, schemes, and entitlements those the people of Maldah and other regions deserve, through VV trainings. My sister aspires to be like me, and has already started learning the basics of camera and video production.”*

#### ***Perseverance***

Usually forced with multiple challenges, CCs’ willingness, desire and persistent struggle to explore and try new approaches to look for solutions was a key aspect that influenced their ability to mobilise the community around the issues. Their ‘not giving up’ attitude filled with optimism and enthusiasm was seen to be critical in their functioning.

#### ***Practical Experiences***

Most Correspondents had a basic understanding about various social issues that prevailed in their communities. However, their past experiences led to a deeper, holistic and richer understanding, which helped CCs use a much more comprehensive and innovative approach. Moreover, this led to a more mature interaction and negotiation with different stakeholders about the multi-layered

#### ***Breaking a 400-year old custom that denied women’s entry in temple***

*The constitution provides equal rights to all, but rural regions still lack gender equality. In Mascoba temple of Pune district’s Veer village, the tradition of banning women from entering had been prevailing for as long as 400 years, as women are considered ‘inferior’ and ‘insignificant’. Understanding the urgency of this issue and being a woman herself going through the same discrimination, Rohini Pawar conducted meetings with several women from different villages. She made a video report addressing the problem, issued press releases in the form of newspaper, and filed petition to the temple authorities with the help of some local NGOs. She, along with numerous women by her side, met with temple authorities to persuade them to break the illogical tradition. During the process, some village elderlies also ridiculed her but that did not hamper her determination. The temple management then consulted village councils and unanimously decided women must be allowed to enter the temple premises without any restrictions. The decision to break a tradition that was accepted by women of all ages was welcomed by all as Rohini made them see the right and wrong, with her constant discussions. And on April 13<sup>th</sup>, 2016, many women came together to enter the temple. The efforts led by the CC struck a victorious blow on Patriarchal norms prevailing in the village.*

problems and also overcoming personal barriers while dealing with issues.

### ***Communication Skills***

Meeting new people, networking, mobilisation and persuasion essentially required Correspondents to have a proficiency in communicating effectively. Video Volunteers realises the need to strengthen these skills; hence, they invest resources in trainings, but still the skills differ in each Correspondent. Through trainings, the Correspondents were able to develop these skills. VV in its trainings focuses upon how to cut across not only gender differentials but also power hierarchies and caste-class dynamics, and communicate with confidence.

### ***Technological Competence***

CCs were using various technologies like mobile phones/internet and their features for performing a range of tasks related to their work. These include shooting video clips, uploading photos and videos, sharing videos, messaging, etc. VV trainings helped them to be technologically competent, quickly network with people, and efficiently devote time and resources. Social media, as a medium of dissemination and awareness, were observed to be key to mobilisation of stakeholders.

### ***Personal Networks & Connectivity***

CCs had a unique support system, which they regularly tapped into and they were provided with a range of support and form critical networks. These include their peer groups who acted as intermediaries for dissemination of information, and also helped further publicise their work or issue. Personal contacts and networks included media persons, government functionaries, NGO persons and local leaders to name a few. These personal networks helped CCs get crucial information, or have meetings with key functionaries, which enabled them to work more effectively.

## **3.3 Key aspect 2: Primary Issue Videos**

In their narratives, CCs outlined characteristics of primary issue videos extremely important in having a direct impact or being able to mobilise people and have some sort of action taken. The presentation of the problem addressed in the video is an aspect that the Correspondents felt was crucial for the emergence of advocacy campaign and impact in the communities.

### ***Concrete Call to Action***

Call to action is a non-accusatory reminder to concerned officials to take the needful action. It is clearly stated at the end of all videos along with a contact number for the viewers to call and pressure them for the same. The assertiveness with which the Correspondents speak their 'pieces to camera' also persuades people to act in a desired way.

### ***Production Values***

Production values included Pieces to Camera, i.e. signing in and signing off, sequencing, framing, controlling background noise, and so on. When these values were adhered to, it led the videos to clearly convey the ideas and have an impact on the audiences so as to mobilise them. Although

VV has a centralised editing team, quality of the raw footage shot by the CC only made the final editing more powerful.

### **Articulation by Stakeholders**

An integral aspect was the articulations of stakeholders captured by the correspondents in the videos, especially the afflicted parties/groups. Forceful, clear articulations were keys to the video quality. CCs had an adverse impact on audiences where these were lacking in quality and focus. It helped in emotionally binding the viewers to the video, as they actually watch people belonging to their own community, suffering from similar problems.

The approach used by Video Volunteers in production of primary issue videos lies parallel to the salient features of Solutions Journalism where people outside the mainstream suggest responses to social problems. Along with the objective reporting of different socio-development issues, VV trains its correspondents to provide resolutions to problems in the form of concrete call to action. CCs also ensure to follow-up on issues. This increases the interest of community audiences or ‘spectators’. They become more likely to not only share and seek related information but engage in the process of change by rising to their potential as ‘spect-actors’ to influence the state to act and resolve the issues (Wenzel et al, 2016; Boal, 2008).

### **3.4 Key aspect 3: Community Dialogue**

Community Correspondents find a good story to cover by being alert and attentive to the events in and around their village. During the process, they are required to be more social and interactive with their community. This step has been referred to as ‘research’ by Video Volunteers. They are clear about the story in their mind and triangulate the facts before filming it. It is crucial to report an issue with complete objectivity since there may be conflicts in the opinion of different people within the same village.

#### **Dialogue During Pre-Production**

Stories repeatedly focused on the constant interpersonal communication (IPC) that the correspondents engaged in with different stakeholders. IPC enabled CCs to develop a rapport as well as trust with them. Building of trust led to self-disclosure, and they revealed the intricacy of the problem or the aspects not commonly known. This placed

#### **Bringing social taboos into public sphere: Sanjay Kumar shares the plight of two sisters in UP**

*“There was a 14-year old girl who was HIV positive and was being badly treated by the community due to the taboo, as they still treated HIV-AIDS patients with stigma. They forgot that the little girl suffering from fatal disease had no wrongdoing, hence they avoided talking to her, or letting their children play with her, and so on. They did not even come forward to support her living after both her parents died of AIDS. When I researched, I found out that she had been born that way. Her mother was a homemaker and her father was a truck driver. He used to travel for many days, and he had sexual relations with another woman. He came back, and Sita was conceived. Both parents died around the age of 40, leaving Sita and her younger sister (healthy) alone. They were taken to their Mamaji’s (Uncle) house. I made a video on this issue demanding a source of livelihood for the girls, and proper care and vaccination for Sita. When I screened it and held a meeting for my fellow community members, it gave me a chance to not only listen to their feelings about the situation but also share the correct information about HIV. Gradually, the community was able to come together to help her in any way they could. The whole process took 1.5 years and I could achieve a three-level impact including provision of a sort of livelihood for two little girls, breaking of taboo of HIV in the village, and the whole community raised its voice for justice for two girls. This is significant because of the fact that it touches upon a very sensitive issue, but now they understand it better with the AIDS day celebrated in the village annually.”*

CC in an advantageous position and they could easily negotiate with different stakeholders with greater precision to influence their beliefs and opinions about the aspects that mattered most to them.

### ***Screenings and Discussions***

Occasionally, the videos are screened in the community to trigger a discourse. It is an important post-production step since the real story begins after the video is produced as that is when the correspondents take up the role of activists and change makers. This marks the beginning of an advocacy campaign. They use the video as a visual evidence of the problem prevailing in the community to push the authorities to change. With such strong evidence, it usually becomes difficult for the concerned functionaries to turn a blind eye. These screenings are held at a common place in the village, and the organization provides the needful assistance to set it up. Most common screening venues include community halls, religious institutions, schools, any community residence, or during the Panchayat meetings. They are held via mobiles, tablets, laptops or even projectors (for large-scale screenings). VV also reimburses small costs of screenings with Rs500/-. However, screenings are not always necessary for the change to take place. If the correspondent is not able to organise a screening that does not mean s/he has not made efforts. It is not the screening that counts, but CC's efforts to initiate a dialogue about the specific issues within the community. This was validated by content analysis as well. Further, all produced videos are uploaded on a VV website and on its YouTube channel, publicly accessible for everyone.

Screenings are usually followed by discussions with the community spectators to find a mutual ground in identifying plausible ways (beneficial to all) to redress a problem. It is to be noted that there is never a single solution to resolve an issue; hence it is critical to weigh the pros and cons of all listed aspects before advocating it further to other stakeholders such as the government.

### **3.5 Key aspect 4: Collective Action**

With support from community members, CCs put second level efforts to mobilise policy makers and government officials. The stories highlighted that formal communications are acknowledged by the state and bind the officials to support CCs and their requests in implementation of their activities. Usually, a large number of people partake in the process to break power hierarchies; it enables the Correspondents-led community to have their own voice. Their collective views form inroads in the largely closed structures. CCs in their narratives reiterated the importance of repeated communications for making formal systems to take their credence for the existence of the problem. This ensures minimum delay in problem resolution and its finality depends on the way these officials are approached by the CCs. Hierarchy of power structure is followed by the CCs, which enables the problem to be addressed at the lower level authorities, but it may prevent the higher authorities from getting involved at all. Other reinforcements include local media, social media, online petitions like change.org, protests or rallies, and so on. Social media remains a valuable supporting approach as the networks formed through them reduce time-space barriers and form new mechanisms of creating linkages for leveraging support from different stakeholders.

### ***Letter Writing***

The correspondents are required to motivate community members to write an application demanding needful action. This may be written by the CCs also, but the testimonials remain from the afflicted community itself. It is only due to this letter that the officials are persuaded to take an action for the betterment of the community, because it vividly describes not only the problem affecting them but also a possible way to resolve the same.

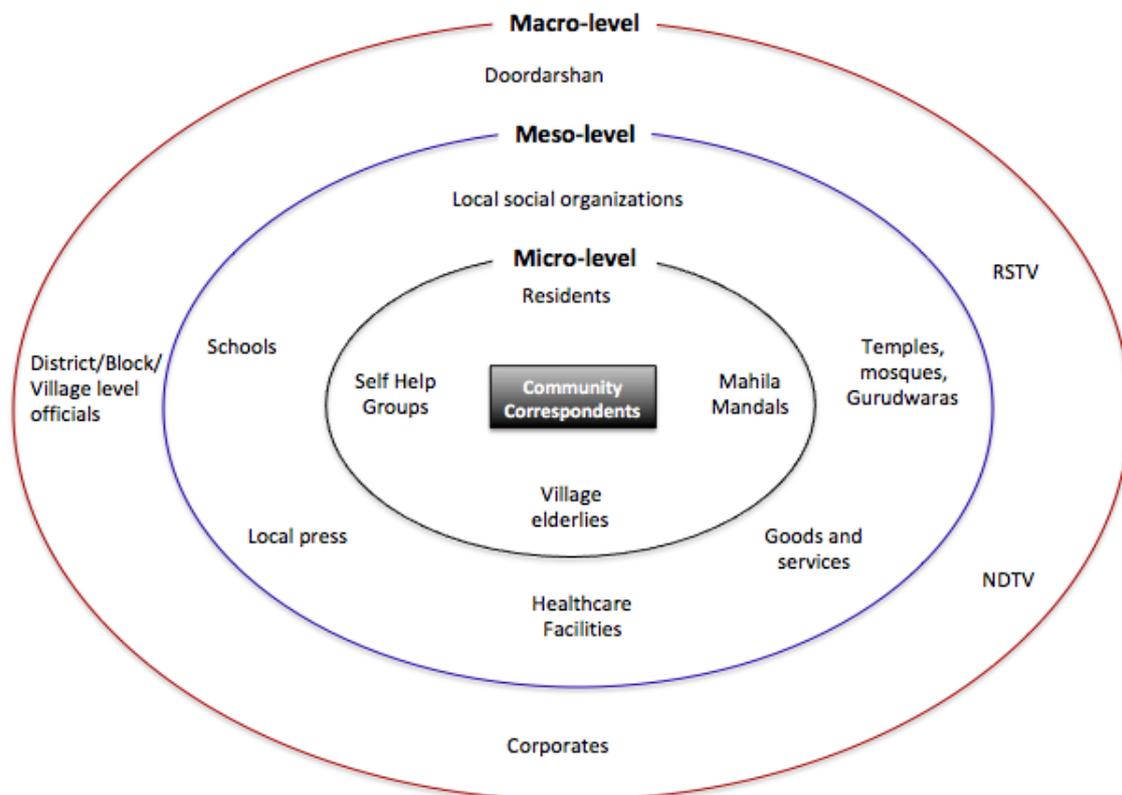
## **4.0 Discussion**

Integrated Model of Communication for Social Change builds a symmetrical pattern in the relationship between participants and information-sharing leading to a change. Community members interact with each other in order to bring about a change in their own behaviour or lives. The change anticipated with such a process of communication is intended to overall develop a community (Figueroa et al, 2002). This paper highlights four key aspects interrelated to each other contributing to change – community correspondents, primary-issue videos, community dialogue and collective action – emerging from narratives. They have complementary functions, i.e. rarely is the case when all four reach their highest potential. At times, it might be only one or two of the aforementioned aspects actually making an impact. Some Community Correspondents might not be well-versed with the ethics of video production, but that cannot challenge their determination to bring a change in their communities. Strengths of one or two components overpower the weaknesses of others. This interplay of catalysts transfigures the negative forces into positive influences, which is indispensable for the larger societal impact. Content analysis reiterates community dialogue – through discussions and meeting officials – to be the most essential trigger. This implies community video is not merely a technological tool, and emphasis must be given on the process factors prior to and post video production.

Further, community level efforts help the CCs centre-stage the issues and mobilise the community around them while advocacy efforts with people from government and other organisations help build pressure on them especially with increased community level awareness and support to the CCs. Efforts at both levels are synergistic in mobilising different stakeholders and triggering change in the community. Convergence of various media forms such as mass media, print media, and social media in both pre-production and post-production processes of community media enable wider reach and large-scale mobilisation, also overcoming the geographic boundaries. The community gets an opportunity to re-examine the issues through the perspective of the afflicted individuals as presented by the correspondent in the video. Deleuze and Guattari (1988) related community media to a rhizome, *“Unlike trees or their roots, the rhizome connects any point to any other point.”* No community media organization can function in isolation, and it thrives by seeking support from other media methods, which complement its processes and together they fill voids by establishing linkages. Similarly, VV is surrounded with a dense network of civil society organisations and social movements. Therefore, it often plays the role of catalyst to provide the network with a platform to act collectively and bring consensus on what their sense of development is.

Mapping the kernels of Video Volunteers’ IndiaUnheard programme as a community-owned media model provides insights for structuring of community media organisations. These are

interspersed with micro and macro contexts — media landscapes, challenges of empowerment of stakeholders, people’s mobilization, and collective action — by evolving a transformational system of media practice and the emergence of a robust counter public sphere. In this regard, Communication Infrastructure Theory (CIT) offers a framework for understanding aspects of Video Volunteers influencing processes of change through their activities. It is a social ecological theory that explains civic engagement in heterogeneous communities. Using the theory we seek to delineate critical aspects influencing the success achieved through VVs IndiaUnheard programme at different levels. CIT comprises of a mix of interrelated components in its three-tier storytelling network at micro-, meso-, and macro-level with an underlying communication action context, which in case of Video Volunteers constitute CCs at the core (as depicted in Figure 6).



**Figure 6.** Communication Action Context comprising of micro-, meso-, and macro-level reinforcements

*Micro-level actors* are residents within the interpersonal networks who share stories with each other about their everyday lives. These people belong to their neighbourhoods and constitute their reference networks. Highly knowledgeable about community structures and dynamics, Community Correspondents are not only individuals who have the ‘know how’ of community, but also possess a curiosity or desire to learn. They are highly enthusiastic and persuasive, hence are able to link and connect people within (and outside of) community, along with their social skills and self-confidence, which also helps them seek solutions to prevailing problems. Collectively, CCs along with residents and influential groups of community are the most immediate members taking over the communication action.

*Meso-level actors* include community-based organisations and community-oriented media whose stories tend to focus on a particular area or a group. These actors include internal small-scale organisations working towards community welfare and local media organisations functioning to raise issues concerning the people living in the community, which enable CCs to

gain another perspective to the story and provide support to them in their efforts to resolve prevailing problems. Secondary stakeholders such as schools, religious organizations, ration shops, healthcare facilities, etc. are a few examples. Interestingly, these may be afflicted by the problem, or may act as an inducer of the problem.

Finally, *macro-level agents* in the larger surrounding environment include large-scale mass media organisations and other institutions that tell stories about an entire city, a region, or the country as a whole. For instance, IndiaUnheard used to produce 30-minutes programmes to be aired on Doordarshan (India's National Broadcaster) in Jharkhand, Maharashtra, Bihar, Chhattisgarh and Uttar Pradesh. Until November 2016, 50 such episodes found space on the public media platform. More recently VV has forged partnership with private channel NDTV, which is currently its main paid broadcast and training partner. Also, authoritative government officials in certain organizations become other macro-level supporters of VV as they attempt to resolve an issue.

Thus Video Volunteers, by emphasizing pre- and post-production activities and multilevel advocacy campaign, achieves micro-level shifts. Production of quality videos reflective of community realities and consequently the mobilisation of communities remains crucial for such changes. Further VVs strategy of separating video production and editing, and enabling Correspondents to focus on the former has helped balance the onerous challenge to maintain video quality and enhance community mobilization.

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## **Authors**

Pooja Ichplani, *Researcher, Center for Communication and Change - India (An Affiliate of Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, Center for Communication Programs).*



Pooja Ichplani is a Gold Medalist (2017) in M.Sc. Development Communication and Extension, which she pursued from Lady Irwin College, University of Delhi, New Delhi, India. Her areas of interest include community media, health communication, gender and human rights.

Archana Kumar, Ph. D., *Associate Professor, Department of Development Communication and Extension, Lady Irwin College, University of Delhi.*



Dr Kumar has been with the department for nearly 30 years. She teaches papers in Communication for Development, Gender, Sustainable Development, Research Methods and Programme Development & Evaluation. Her areas of interest include monitoring and evaluation of communication for social change programmes and initiatives.

Jessica Mayberry, *Founding Director, Video Volunteers.*



Jessica is a Fellow of Ashoka, TED and Echoing Green. She has also been recognised as an Architect of the Future by the Waldzell Insitute of Austria, and as an “Outstanding Young Person” by the Junior Chamber International Osaka. She holds a degree in Modern History and Modern Languages from Oxford University. Her passion for social entrepreneurship and activism when she trained marginalized women in video production as a William J. Clinton Fellow of the American India Foundation.

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