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Participatory content creation: voice, communication, and development

Jo Tacchi, Jerry Watkins, and Kosala Keerthirathne

This article uses the example of a mobile mixed-media platform – a converted three-wheeled auto-rickshaw – in Sri Lanka in order to explore whether and how content-creation activities can enable marginalised communities to have a voice. It draws upon research into participatory content-creation activities conducted in 15 locations across India, Indonesia, Nepal, and Sri Lanka. The main findings are: the need to pay attention to context when thinking about what might be locally appropriate, relevant, and beneficial in terms of participatory content creation; the benefits that can be gained from creatively reaching out to and engaging marginalised groups and encouraging a diversity of voices; the usefulness of locally produced content for generating local debate around local issues; and the benefits of encouraging participation at all stages of content creation, so that content is locally meaningful and might lead to positive social change.

KEY WORDS: Rights; Technology; South Asia

Introduction

In this article, we explore participatory content creation as a tool for communication for development. We focus on the e-Tuktuk initiative in Sri Lanka, which constitutes an unusual example of a mobile mixed-media platform that integrates a laptop, printer, telephone, loudspeakers, and data projector in a three-wheeled auto-rickshaw. The e-Tuktuk supports outreach activities by the Kothmale Community Multimedia Centre (CMC) and its surrounding communities. A range of content creation and distribution activities were researched between 2006 and 2008 at a number of sites as part of the Finding a Voice research project. Our observation of the e-Tuktuk and other participatory content-creation activities emphasises two factors of particular relevance for this article: first, how content-creation activities can enable marginalised communities to have a voice; and second, the need to pay attention to local contexts and related debates during such activities.

These findings are drawn from the research undertaken during Finding a Voice at 15 sites across India, Indonesia, Nepal, and Sri Lanka.¹ The research team investigated how information and communications technology (ICT) and media centres might enable marginalised, disadvantaged communities to be heard in the public sphere. All the research sites offered a basic computer infrastructure and some Internet connectivity. Research sites included telecentres; community multimedia, radio, and video centres; and community library or learning centres.

Every local context differed in terms of local mediascape, communicative ecology, culture, geography, history, and organisational structure. In each of the 15 research sites – including Kothmale CMC – a community member was trained and supported to conduct action–research on content-creation activities undertaken by local communities in collaboration with the research site.

Voice through content creation

Throughout the Finding a Voice research, we observed various examples of participatory content creation involving individuals and communities in the production and distribution of both digital and non-digital content. Participatory content creation is an example of what we call ‘creative engagement’ with ICTs (Tacchi 2008; Watkins and Nair 2008: 77–79). We use this term (creative engagement) in an attempt to move beyond debates about access and digital divides, to relate more closely with issues of use and engagement. For us, it forces a consideration of how digital inclusion can be achieved at the intersection of creative ICT applications and existing community media networks.

Community-based media are well established in many parts of the world, and emergent in many others (Fuller 2007; Lewis and Jones 2006; Pavarala and Malik 2007; Rennie 2006). Sometimes called alternative or participatory, these local forms of media are said to offer voice through pluralism and diversity (in ownership and content); and through encouraging community dialogue and transparency of administration. There are many examples that explore the combination of analogue media with newer digital technologies (Girard 2003; Gumucio Dagron 2001). Rodríguez (2001) proposes that such media can be considered as ‘citizens’ media’ to the extent that ‘ordinary people’ have gained control of media and through this are immersed in the ‘continuous renegotiations of their symbolic environments’. Rodríguez considers citizens’ media to be dynamic and to take many forms – not necessarily direct hands-on participation in the creation of content, but certainly involvement by ordinary people in influencing the content that makes up their mediascape.

The kinds of participatory content-creation activities that were monitored throughout the Finding a Voice project have, in a variety of ways, allowed a range of people – including marginalised individuals and communities – to have a voice within local public spheres. We have previously defined participatory content creation as ‘[c]ontent created after extensive discussions, conversations and decision-making with the target community; and where community group members take on content creation responsibilities according to their capacities and interests’ (Watkins and Nair 2008: 81). This is a deliberately broad and inclusive definition allowing for many forms of participation and content. For example, Saira is a young Muslim woman who has lived all her life in an urban slum and resettlement area in north-east Delhi. Saira wrote, edited, and produced her own multimedia micro-documentary that movingly depicts both the restrictive nature of her position as a young woman in a large family, and her efforts to develop a career for herself. She relates how her social life used to be restricted to rituals, weddings, and family gatherings: ‘I used to think that the life of a woman is confined to these things’. She joined a local ICT centre for women and took up photography and digital editing. Her first micro-documentary about female infanticide won a prize from a university in Delhi and attracted media coverage; and this, she tells us, gave her strength to influence other young women to broaden their horizons ‘so that they can develop different ways of thinking about the outside world’ (Tacchi 2009).

Some of the content produced during the Finding a Voice project was more journalistic: informed by discussions with local communities, addressing community-identified issues, and sometimes resulting in some form of social action. The water supply of a small village

in Uttarakhand (in the foothills of the Himalayas and an hour's walk from the nearest bitumen road) had been unsafe for over 11 years. Hevalvani Samudayik Radio volunteers visited this village and found that safe drinking water was a problem for every family there.² The villagers asked the radio volunteers to help make their voices heard and, in response, Hevalvani recorded the villagers discussing their water problem and how it causes illness. The radio volunteers edited these voices into a programme and played it to the government officer responsible for the water supply in that village. He first denied the problem, and then blamed 'local politics in the village'. This response was also recorded by Hevalvani, who returned to the village with their portable cassette machine and played the officer's response during a village meeting. After listening, the villagers discussed their options. A formal letter of complaint was written and signed by the entire village. The letter was submitted to the relevant government department. After just three days, the village water supply was restored. After 11 years of complaints, one radio programme allowed the voice of the community to be heard in a way that prompted positive action.³

In these ways, one can say that content creation has given voice to marginalised communities. But what do we mean by 'voice'? And does everyone want to have a voice? For this research, we used a broad definition of voice, to incorporate inclusion and participation in social, political, and economic processes, meaning making, autonomy, and expression (Tacchi and Kiran 2008). Lister (2004) defines voice as the right to participate in decision making – in social, economic, cultural, and political life – and as a crucial human and citizenship right. Voice seems to be an appropriate concept to use in the communication-for-development field, since it prevents an easy slide into a discourse that equates information with communication. For example, it is easy to talk about the 'information poor' for whom an injection of information might present a cure. This is, of course, playing with the hypodermic-needle metaphor in communication, and modernisation theory in development, both still prevalent in much communication-for-development practice (Inagaki 2007). A distinction between information and communication, and a focus on the latter is crucial because, as Gumucio Dagron (2006) reminds us, the right to information refers to access, while the right to communication refers to participation along with the appropriation of communication processes and content.

Voice can be used to promote this idea of communication and participation as a right, which implies that having a voice must be linked to being listened to. In effect, voice relates to a right to communicate and participate in the processes and decision making that affect one's life. Participatory content creation can be shown to provide a mechanism to express oneself and participate in social and public spheres. But real life is messy, and a one-size-fits-all approach is unlikely to succeed; context is all important. We have found, through *Finding a Voice* and related research, that a range of factors – including gender, land ownership, employment, and caste – significantly affects the experiences and levels of inclusion and exclusion that people experience, in addition to access to ICTs. The more we look at how low-income groups live and negotiate livelihoods, the more we become aware of the necessity to explore issues of inclusion and exclusion as complex, shifting, and negotiated. Haddon (2004) agrees, arguing that social exclusion is context dependent and not necessarily economics based or equivalent across all domains of a person's life. It involves not only political and civic involvement, but also people's ability to occupy social roles; and may also involve rejection of or lack of interest in communication technologies. In some cases, social exclusions are strategically maintained; for example, to qualify for ration cards or other benefits available to those living below official poverty lines. Research has led us to an understanding of social inclusion and exclusion as negotiated processes rather than a strict binary opposition, and this in turn affects people's interactions with ICT. We return to these issues in the conclusion.

First, we describe in some detail the context of the e-Tuktuk and some examples of participatory content-creation activities.

Mixing media at Kothmale Community Multimedia Centre

Kothmale Community Multimedia Centre is located near a rural settlement called Riverside, a 45-minute bus ride from the two nearest towns of Gampola and Nawalapitiya, in the hills of Central Province, Sri Lanka.⁴ The area consists mainly of small villages, rice paddies, and tea plantations. The population is a complex ethnic mix, with the majority being Sinhalese (mostly farmers and public servants), and the largest minority being Tamil (mostly tea-plantation workers). The CMC consists of Kothmale Community Radio (started in the late 1980s) and a computer and Internet facility (established in 1999). In the early days of community radio in Sri Lanka – before community stations were established – mobile production teams from regional stations of the state broadcaster, the Sri Lankan Broadcasting Corporation (SLBC), would travel to villages to find out about local issues and bring content back to regional or national radio services for broadcasting. This happened during a large-scale relocation of rural communities due to a major irrigation and hydroelectric project that involved the building of a series of dams along the Mahaweli River. It was felt that radio could be used to ease the relocation, to find out what information people needed, and broadcast content accordingly. These mobile radio units were gradually replaced by local ‘community radio’ stations to provide a more permanent connection with villagers – with Kothmale Community Radio (KCR) being one of them (Pringle and David 2002; Tacchi and Grubb 2007).

The computer and Internet centre was co-located with the radio station to constitute the first UNESCO-supported CMC in the late 1990s. Three public-access computers were set up in a room adjacent to the radio studios, and another placed in the main KCR studio. The idea was to use radio – the most pervasive electronic medium in the area – as a means to deliver information from the World Wide Web, which very few people in the area could access directly. A new content format called ‘Radio Browsing’ was developed for this purpose. Listeners are invited to send in questions; presenters search the Internet for answers. The presenters translate information found in English, provide local context, and broadcast the information to their listeners. In this way, Radio Browsing was designed to enable broader participation in ICT despite barriers of language and access. This constitutes an ‘intermediary’, in that the radio medium and the radio presenter mediate between the Internet and the local population (James 2004). The older and more locally established radio medium provided leverage for the Internet-based medium. The radio presenter translated and edited the information she or he gathered from the Internet.

So-called ‘community radio’ in Sri Lanka is unusual in the fact that it is ‘owned’ by the state broadcaster, rather than by local communities (see also Castells-Talens *et al.* 2009 in this issue). This has prevented radio stations like KCR from becoming independent, and involves many bureaucratic processes that are not conducive to innovation. Nevertheless, over the years, and often through the facilitation and encouragement of the station controller, Kothmale CMC has engaged in other innovative mixed-media experiments, including, for example, a makeshift form of Internet radio:

[through an Internet chat application,] [o]ne of the announcers got very friendly with a Sri Lankan working abroad in Kuwait who wanted to hear what the radio station was playing. He requested a song and an ‘internet radio’ was created by simply bringing the computer microphone into the studio and holding it up to a loudspeaker. A few weeks later, the Sri Lankan at the other end of the chat, again in the Middle East, happened to be working at a naval yard and was able to connect his computer’s sound card to the PA system,

thus broadcasting Kfm [Kothmale Community Radio] to the entire naval installation. (Slater et al. 2002: 47)

The Radio Browsing and Internet radio examples demonstrate innovative ways of reaching audiences both near and far with local content. Their innovative applications of analogue and digital technologies reflect the phenomenon of ‘creative appropriation’, whereby ‘users innovate new functionalities for already existing technologies’ (Feenberg and Bakardjieva 2004: 1).

e-Tuktuk

The e-Tuktuk is a customised auto-rickshaw that transports a laptop, printer, telephone, loudspeakers, and data projector (Tacchi and Grubb 2007). Auto-rickshaws are a common means of public transport in many Asian countries, where they are locally referred to by a variety of names, including ‘tuktuk’, ‘auto’, ‘three-wheeler’, and ‘trishaw’. The e-Tuktuk is a mobile mixed-media platform that serves as an outside broadcast unit for KCR, as well as a mobile telecentre that extends the services of the fixed computer and Internet centre. Internet connection is provided by a code division multiple-access handset.

While conducting action–research as part of the Finding a Voice project in 2007, Keerthirathne observed that the e-Tuktuk is used overwhelmingly as an outside broadcast unit to generate content for regularly broadcast radio programmes on KCR.⁵ The subjects of these programmes range across agriculture, religion, legal advice, and cultural content (see Figure 1). In many cases, villages have requested that the e-Tuktuk visit to report on a communal meeting, a school event, and so on. KCR staff accompany the e-Tuktuk and record interviews and short comments or statements by local people (known as ‘vox pops’), which inform and contribute to radio-programme production. This consists of a mix of live and recorded programming in which the producer will prepare and present the programme using the material gathered using the e-Tuktuk. Listeners can call in live during the broadcast.

Despite the e-Tuktuk’s ability to reach remote villages, Keerthirathne uncovered the persistent exclusion of some communities from CMC activities – particularly Tamil communities. Through interviews with CMC users, he examined the factors affecting community participation, and found that:

- Approximately 80 per cent of CMC users were Sinhalese-speaking youth (aged 10–20);
- 85 per cent of users come from nearby villages within 5 km;
- The CMC’s hilltop location is a significant barrier to community participation; access is via infrequent public and private bus services;
- 90 per cent of users had first come to the CMC following a recommendation by friends or family.

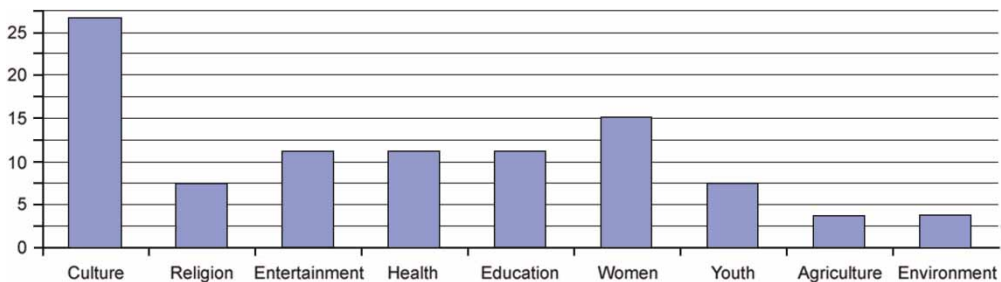


Figure 1: Individual programme themes as a percentage of overall e-Tuktuk programming activity, August–October 2007

A very clear finding was that the majority Sinhalese population participated, especially young people living close by or on the bus routes to the two closest towns. Keerthirathne recorded very little involvement in CMC activities by marginalised Tamil communities, even those within easy walking distance. The majority of Tamil communities in the area live and work on tea estates. One of these tea estates is only 500 m from the CMC, yet there was no participation from these people.

In order to explore this further, he travelled in the e-Tuktuk to one of the nearby Tamil tea estates to find out what kinds of issues the estate workers faced in their daily lives, whether they listened to Kothmale Community Radio, or knew about the CMC. He was accompanied by Prithviraj Pavitheran, a Tamil radio producer and presenter who had been working at KCR for a number of years. Neither of them had visited this community before and they found thirty old tea-estate line houses in very poor condition. These used to belong to a private estate, but in the late 1970s a government department had bought the estate land to relocate families from areas affected by the dam construction. This community was somehow forgotten, left without secure or steady employment, and with no one to take care of their houses. The most urgent problem was drinking water: the villagers had access to only one open, dirty water tank.

Over the next few weeks, Keerthirathne and Pavitheran visited the estate a few more times and used the e-Tuktuk's facilities to make a radio programme and a multimedia micro-documentary about these issues. They broadcast the radio programme on KCR, and played the micro-documentary at other tea-estate communities in the area, which were unaware of the predicament of the community they had first visited. Through screening and playing the micro-documentary and radio programme to these communities, they in turn discussed their own local issues, and Keerthirathne was able to explore further the reasons for the lack of participation from Tamil people in the Kothmale CMC. Eventually, when the local Lions Club heard about the plight of the tea estate featured in the content, it offered to help to purchase a new water tank for the forgotten community. Keerthirathne reflected that the facilities the e-Tuktuk provided had allowed the CMC team to play the radio programme to the Tamil tea estate through its loudspeakers, as well as screen the micro-documentary using its projector. This was important because he found that few of the members of this community had a radio. These activities raised awareness of local issues that otherwise would have remained hidden, even between tea-estate communities. This example shows how staff of the CMC and radio played a role in highlighting local needs which were then met by a local charity. The involvement of local people in strengthening their own appreciation of their rights and their ability to claim them is less evident in this example, and below we explore how this might be achieved by closer and more consistent involvement in the processes of media-content production.

Content creation and local contexts

Keerthirathne's research found that the vast majority of e-Tuktuk activities were biased towards the creation of live and recorded radio content. This was demonstrated in a more detailed survey of e-Tuktuk equipment usage as a percentage of overall e-Tuktuk activity between August and October 2007 (Figure 2).

The audio mixer and microphones were both commonly used. Although the laptop was the most used item, it was rarely used in conjunction with the scanner, printer, projector, and CDMA WLL (code division multiple access, wireless local loop) handset.

The prevalent use of the e-Tuktuk as a radio outside-broadcast unit also influenced the extent of participation in content creation by local communities. This is because KCR has worked for years with the notion of its staff going into villages, finding out what issues villagers have, and

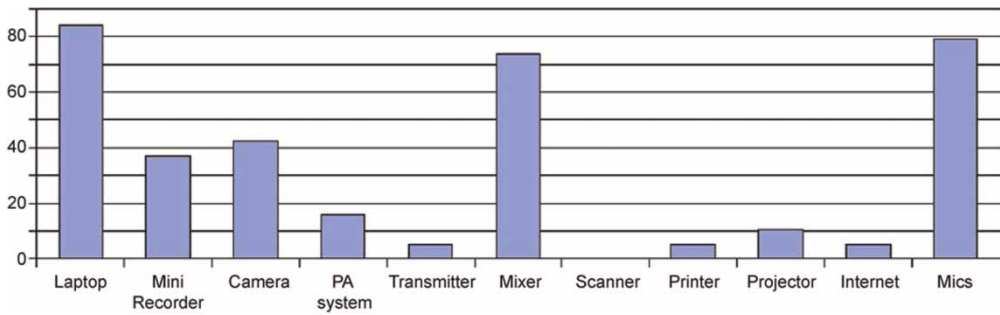


Figure 2: e-Tuktuk equipment usage as a percentage of overall e-Tuktuk activity, August–October 2007

making programmes about those issues. Keerthirathne was interested to explore whether KCR and CMC staff might use the e-Tuktuk more to experiment with participation throughout the content-creation process. As both the Hevalvani and Kothmale tea-estate examples show, the radio-production process followed was the collection of interviews and vox pops from the community, which were then edited into a programme. To some extent, this process reflects standard practice by radio journalists throughout the world; yet it can also present examples of citizens' media as defined by Rodríguez (2001), in that the concept for the programmes originated with the community, not with the producer. In the Hevalvani example, the community itself took action, with help from the radio volunteers, to protest and demand their rights. In the Kothmale tea-estate example, the radio and CMC staff acted on behalf of local people to demonstrate an urgent need, to which local charity responded. In Kothmale, it was also noted that participatory content creation was restricted to the initial stage of production: the communities involved did not actually make or distribute the content. Based on his earlier research, Keerthirathne had already identified lack of engagement between CMC and Tamil communities as a problem, and he now looked for ways to go beyond the radio-production model in order to achieve community participation throughout the content-creation process, using the e-Tuktuk platform.

In response to these findings, the e-Tuktuk was dispatched to another nearby Tamil community. The plan was to use the e-Tuktuk's presence in the community to promote participation in CMC activities, specifically information technology (IT) training. It was hoped that a Tamil-speaking IT trainer could be recruited and trained through this process. A group of nine people aged 16–28 years was invited to the CMC to learn IT skills, but not through the more familiar route of office-application training. Rather, the six females and three males were taught digital storytelling skills including photography, audio recording, and video editing. It was felt that this form of creative engagement through participatory content creation would be more interesting and relevant to the lives of the Tamil youths, who could use ICT creatively to express their personal lives. The first digital stories made by the trainees were about their experiences of the CMC, but subsequent stories were based on issues that they felt needed to be explored and discussed in their communities, including alcoholism and domestic violence.

Once involved with digital storytelling, the Tamil youth group was encouraged to learn about the Internet and become involved in radio production. Many of the participants who visited the CMC at weekends to make their digital stories also started to come during the week to surf Tamil-language websites. The finished digital stories were screened to the families and friends of the youth group using the e-Tuktuk's loudspeakers and projector. The digital storytelling programme had quickly achieved an end-to-end participatory content-creation process through creative engagement. Although numerous issues challenge the sustainability of the

e-Tuktuk, it is worth noting that Kothmale CMC was a pilot for the UNESCO-supported Community Multimedia Centre programme, now active across Africa and Asia.⁶

Creative engagement through intermediaries

Both Hevalvani Samudayik Radio and Kothmale CMC demonstrate how participatory content creation can be used to optimise ICT initiatives and promote voice. Both initiatives strive to go beyond the provision of Internet access and office-application training: they have adapted their systems and equipment to reach out and creatively engage marginalised communities through content-creation activities, and generate community dialogue and debate. In so doing, they can be seen to provide previously ignored communities with a voice. Much of the effectiveness of these creative engagements can be attributed to an understanding that access to ICT does not automatically lead to access to useful and useable information and voice; both organisations have used intermediaries to interface with communities. In the case of Hevalvani, radio volunteers capture and distribute content between peripheral villages and the centre; Kothmale CMC producers, presenters, and volunteers work to create programmes and training courses that are relevant to the community. In terms of providing access to information, Rice and co-workers propose the importance of gatekeepers 'as intermediaries between a subculture and more general societal information resources' (Rice *et al.* 2001: 27). They suggest that this kind of interaction occurs when messages (visual, text, audio, and others) 'are extended, expanded, or enhanced technologically by media, or interpersonally by human intermediaries' (Rice *et al.* 2001: 64). Access requires not simply physical proximity, but an understanding of the culture of information systems, the rules that govern information technology, and its potential. We might say that access to ICT, certainly for fully engaged citizens, requires a degree of digital literacy that includes the ability to produce as well as consume information and content.

The examples provided in this article demonstrate how intermediaries can be used to go beyond Rice and co-workers' enhanced information-transfer model to become the grassroots interface of a complex socio-technical communication system. James (2004) puts forward a new paradigm for making digital technology relevant and appropriate in rural areas, with the mixing of new and traditional media, and the use of intermediaries at its core. We found clearly in our research for *Finding a Voice* that the basic idea of intermediaries – while it has great potential to link communities to technology and media – nonetheless can prove to be highly problematic. The social and political contexts in which the technological or human intermediaries operate shape the processes that emerge. For example, in a telecentre in Indonesia, the worker employed to link local farmers' groups to the local telecentre found all of his efforts dashed because the local 'host' of the telecentre was unpopular and not trusted (Baulch 2008). Equally, those appointed as an intermediary might be recruited from higher caste or class groups and so fail to adequately connect with marginalised communities. Local power relations and inequalities can simply serve to reinforce existing power dynamics, or shift them in ways that benefit neither the wider community, nor the most marginalised. This emphasises the need to pay close attention to local contexts and power dynamics, and recognise that any introduction of new technologies and media will happen in richly layered social and political contexts, with or without intermediaries. Nevertheless, and drawing upon research from across the whole range of initiatives involved in *Finding a Voice*, we can offer some observations of positive effects of intermediaries, both technological and human. By focusing on participatory content creation, we are beginning to understand the processes of communication at the community level through the production of content, distributed through mixed media and human and technical intermediaries. Indeed, we have observed many examples where participatory content creation has

encouraged meaningful communication through the production of locally created content in ways that are sensitive to as well as shaped by local contexts.

Individuals and communities participated in content-creation activities to the extent that their personal time, abilities, and desires allowed. Some communities and organisations, such as the Hevalvani example, developed content-creation processes that incorporated participation at key points, and which relied on the discussions and debates that the content facilitated to deliver wider impact. Others, such as the Kothmale CMC example, attempted to develop processes that encouraged end-to-end participation, not only in the creation of content, but also in the decision making surrounding what content should be made and what should be done with it. Again, discussion and debate arising as a result of the content was seen as a positive social outcome. The experience of Finding a Voice has taught us that participatory content creation can be an effective mechanism for participatory development. It does not, however, escape the many challenges and barriers that other forms of participatory development face.

In our consideration of 'voice', if we are concerned with the ability to express oneself and participate in social and public spheres, and if this is considered a fundamental right, then it impacts on how we think about the role of ICT and media in development. Our argument is that participatory content creation can be an effective mechanism for development with a rights-based agenda. The level of participation, and its function (as with participatory approaches more generally) is open to a variety of interpretations and applications. Ultimately, if people are able to find a voice through community-based media initiatives, but those voices are not in some way contributing to positive social change or to the processes and decisions that affect the speaker's life, then having a voice is of little use to a development agenda. This is not to say that self-expression alone cannot prove highly beneficial; inspirational stories can affect the lives of others, as did Saira's micro-documentary discussed previously.

Conclusion

Our research on content creation leads us to agree with a view of 'participation' as a dynamic concept (White 1996), whose meaning and relevance changes from place to place and over time. It therefore needs to be understood in context. While participation has become mainstreamed in development discourse, critics question the many and various uses and abuses of the concept (Cooke and Kothari 2001; Rahnema 1992). Participation is nowadays a methodological prerequisite for development projects, having achieved the status of a 'buzzword' (according to Leal 2007) that has lost its original meaning of grassroots resistance and transformation. It is often a means to development rather than an end; despite its promise, participation is often 'top-down' (Bailur 2007; Michener 1998; White 1996). Without wanting to gloss over justified concerns with the application of the concept of participation in development discourse and practice, we nevertheless want to stress our concern with voice and by extension participation, in terms of popular agency, citizenship, and governance (Hickey and Mohan 2004), and meaning making and expression. This reaches beyond the situation where participation and voice are offered and required by development agencies, which are then often unable or unwilling to deliver participation in any extended or meaningful way in terms of challenging the terms of development itself, and processes of decision making.

Dialogue, debate, the two-way flow of information, and the co-creation of knowledge are regularly put forward as important pieces of the development jigsaw, and intrinsic to the idea of participatory development – as evidenced in the processes promoted for the development of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) and the World Bank's insistence that the strategic use of communication tools and concepts is essential to its success.⁷ This acknowledges a move away – in rhetoric at least – from vertical models of communication and

development to horizontal models; in other words, a shift from sending messages to providing an opportunity for people to ask questions (Deane 2004). The partners in Finding a Voice came together to think about and experiment with content-creation processes that could fit into and build upon communication networks that already existed locally, or create new ones, to engage ordinary people in the communication and co-creation of knowledge.

The 2006 World Congress on Communication for Development (WCCD) made recommendations (to policy makers) based on an understanding that communication is a major pillar for development and social change. The recommendations contained in the Rome Consensus place community participation and ownership by the excluded at the heart of communication for development:

Communication for Development is a social process based on dialogue using a broad range of tools and methods. It is also about seeking change at different levels including listening, building trust, sharing knowledge and skills, building policies, debating and learning for sustained and meaningful change. It is not public relations or corporate communication. (WCCD 2007)

Arguably, communication is promoted here as an objective of development in itself: communication empowers people; enables dialogue and expression; raises awareness of social and structural problems; and promotes self-reflection. While the WCCD is just one of the forums in recent years that has promoted horizontal models of communication (others include the UN roundtables on communication for development), confusion remains over appropriate approaches and implementation techniques. At the same time, there is a growing call for the local production of content, spurred on by new communications technologies and the affordances (that is, opportunities and possibilities) they present; and a long-held concern among community-based media practitioners and proponents with promoting a diversity of voices. To risk stating the obvious, there is real potential for thinking about participatory content creation as a mechanism for participatory development within a framework of community or citizens' media.

The main things we have learned from our research in this area are:

- The need to pay attention to context when thinking about what might be locally appropriate, relevant, and beneficial in terms of participatory content creation;
- The benefits that can be gained from creatively reaching out to and engaging marginalised groups and encouraging a diversity of voices;
- The usefulness of locally produced content for generating local debate around local issues; and,
- The benefits of encouraging participation at all stages of content creation, so that content is locally meaningful and might lead to positive social change.

Notes

1. The Finding a Voice project (LP0561848) was funded from 2006 to 2009 by the Australian Research Council in collaboration with UNESCO and UNDP (www.findingavoice.org).
2. Hevalvani Samudayik Radio practises what in South Asia is called 'narrowcasting'. They do not have a broadcasting licence (though they are currently applying for one). They make a radio programme and record it on a cassette tape. They carry this tape and a player to a village, and play the programme to a gathered crowd. Discussions follow, and through this the radio volunteers get ideas for future programme topics. They make recordings of the people, to use in future programmes.
3. From Finding a Voice field notes and report by Atul Sharma, local researcher, and Ravita Jugran, volunteer at Hevalvani Samudayik Radio.

4. CMCs are a model promoted, supported, and researched by UNESCO. They generally combine community radio with community telecentre facilities (computers with Internet and e-mail, telephone, fax, and photocopying services) and are promoted as encouraging local language and participation. See www.unesco.org/webworld/cmc.
5. Keerthirathne first visited the CMC as a schoolboy when it was new in 1999 after hearing about it on Kothmale Community Radio. It was here that he first learned about computers, the Internet, and web design. He visited the CMC as much as he could after school and during holidays.
6. See www.unesco.org/webworld/cmc.
7. go.worldbank.org/5MVCV3J87S0. It is important to note that the PRSPs have been heavily criticised for reinforcing existing structures and politics of representation (see Gould 2005).

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