Digital Story Telling

Consultation held by IT for Change
in partnership with
IKM Emergent Research Programme

June 5th, 2008
Pai Viceroy Hotel, Bangalore

Consultation Report

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Executive Summary

The Consultation on Digital Story Telling (DST) was organised by IT for Change (www.ITforChange.net) in collaboration with the IKM Emergent Research Programme (http://ikmemergent.wordpress.com/) in Bangalore, India on 5th June 2008. The Consultation was exploratory in nature, aiming to understand the DST space in India. It brought together Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) practitioners from around India along with researchers from India and other regions.

DST is a medium that allows participants in the communication process to express themselves, relate to their own environment, and create knowledge that serves as a counter to established wisdom, thereby serving as a tool that can help participants articulate and legitimise their own struggles.

The Consultation was an exploratory exercise in mapping the landscape of DST, while identifying some fundamental concepts for future research. Discussion also explored how digitally enabled communication processes can contribute to build a bottom-up development discourse for informing development policies and programmes.

The Consultation opened with participant introductions and brief descriptions of how DST has been incorporated into grassroots interventions. Participants also shared reasons for their participation, which included learning about DST as a medium, sharing experiences on DST, understanding its place in the development discourse, and exploring possibilities for collaboration amongst DST practitioners.

An in-depth exploration of DST followed in the two subsequent sessions, covering a broad cross-section of themes including:

- Context and Definition of DST
- Purpose of DST
- The Digital in DST
- Form of DST
- Roles in DST
- DST and Communities
- Knowledge for Development
- Production Processes

In the penultimate session, break-out groups discussed three overarching themes as identified in earlier discussions – the definition of DST, the relations between the personal and the public, and the story and the storyteller.

The first group felt that it was necessary to let go of the complex task of pinning a single definition onto DST and instead focussed on the practice of DST in serving as a legitimate means of expression for the non-literate. The second group chose to define DST as a process rather than as an artefact, and saw it as a form of development practice. The group also discussed the role of the storyteller and the listeners in the context of DST. The third group interrogated the effect of the digital medium on storytelling, and in corollary, that of the DST practice on the medium.

The concluding session of the workshop outlined future focus areas for DST theory and practice. Participants explored the possibilities for, and potential benefits of, collaboration amongst the larger DST community in India. Of critical importance is continued discussion and debate on defining DST and the roles of various players in DST practice. Consensus was reached on the significance of looking at DST within the larger context of social change. The main areas of collaboration which emerged included training on DST, creation of a collaborative on-line space for DST practitioners to share their work and ideas, research and debate on form and application of DST.

1. Background to the Consultation

The IKM Emergent Research Programme (http://ikmemergent.wordpress.com/about/) seeks to investigate the use of video and other modes of visual expression in the field of development. More specifically, this includes studying DST as a new information artefact co-constructed by development initiatives from around the world. IKM uses these contextually rooted experiences to feed into universal concept building work on communication for development. IT for Change was keen to explore the possibilities inherent in DST to serve as a means for marginalised sections to articulate their contexts, priorities and aspirations. User-friendly video recorders and possibilities of publishing videos online as well as offline have created a new area of work, play and study for further probing. These complementary objectives brought IKM and ITfC together in organising the one-day Consultation on DST in Bangalore.

Given the objectives of the IKM there was an interest to find out how DST relates to international development without necessarily confining the Consultation to international development, or any other specific theme. It was accepted that any theme that is good enough to produce a digital story, is good enough for discussion. The Consultation marked the beginning of a case study with two segments, one in South India and the other in Sri Lanka.

At the Consultation, DST was positioned for discussion with the initial insight that it is a powerful medium and its format allows participants of a local communication process to express themselves, make statements, and evaluate their own environment. The entire Consultation evolved around a key question – What is going on with digital stories? Both organisations recognised that while DST has emerged as powerful grassroots communication medium that captures local realities, in no way must the limitations of the medium be ignored.

The discussions were intended to initiate an open process of dialogue among people who are interested in the local communication process. An understanding of what is going on with digital stories might lead to an exploration of further questions. The Consultation was facilitated in a manner to trigger a planning and exploration phase, rather than immediately springing into action.

2. Participant Profile

Abdul Rehman Pasha
Mr. Pasha is an independent film maker who has directed numerous developmental films. He is also a community radio consultant who has has been NGOs set-up community radio programmes. He is a practioner and a trainer.

Aishwarya Madineni
Aishwarya is a research intern with IT for Change. She is a contributor to the IS-Watch portal at IT for Change and also assists with the research component of their field project, Mahiti Manthana.

Anita Gurumurthy
Anita Gurumurthy is the founding member and executive director of IT for Change, an NGO located in Bangalore, India. At IT for Change, Anita is currently co-coordinator of a research and advocacy project (Information Society for the South) that looks at imperatives for a South-based information society discourse. She is also co-coordinator of IT for Change's UNDP and Government of India supported grassroots project, Mahiti Manthana, which uses ICTs to empower women's collectives.

Ankita Handoo
Ankita is a knowledge management specialist. She works with the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), India. IFAD in India focuses on improving rural poor people's access to economic and social resources. Ankita was interested in learning how DST can be used in their Knowledge management projects.

Aparna Kalley
Aparna is a Project Coordinator for the Mahiti Manthana project, IT for Change, working with the radio and video components on the project. As part of her work in Mahiti Manthana, she scripts radio programs, directs and edits films. She has four years of experience in the development sector. Organisations like Samuha and Hengasara Hakkina Sangha in Karnataka, and Timbaktu Collective in Andhra Pradesh have contributed to Aparna's experience.

Ashish Sen
Ashsish is the Director of Voices – a development communications NGO based in Bangalore. Voices is concerned with community media for social change, in urban and rural areas. Ashish is one of the founder members of the Community Radio Forum of India. Ashish was interested in pursuing the question – can digital spaces provide an equal opportunity for marginalised groups?

Ben Grubb
Ben has worked with DST in South Asia, and has been to 6-7 DST workshops around the Kothmale region in Sri Lanka. He was interested in the technical aspects including FOSS, and alternate distribution methods, mobile viewing etc.

Chandita Mukherjee
Chandita is a documentary filmmaker working with the Comet Media Foundation. Comet Media works with FOSS, digital media, community representation. Its activities involve creating knowledge artefacts

in film and print, distributing knowledge materials, organising workshops and resource festivals.

Chinmayi Arakali
Chinmayi has been with the Mahiti Manthana project of IT for Change since its start in 2005, working mostly with the video component. In the past three years, she has guided and been part of the video team in Mysore that has produced eleven videos for the rural self-help group women that the project works with.

Danielle Martin
Danielle is a graduate student in urban planning at MIT, pursuing an internship with Srishti School of Art and Design. She has done DST facilitation in South America, working mostly with youth.

Deepu
Deepu is a film-maker with Pedestrian Pictures, an activist organisation in Bangalore. They produce films and also hold regular screenings. Deepu wanted to explore the potential for collaboration through the Consultation.

Gurumurthy Kasinathan
Gurumurthy is a founding member of ITfC. He is closely associated with the research, advocacy and field projects of the organisation. Guru also works with the Education Management function at the Azim Premji Foundation. Guru has over 15 years experience in management consulting, and information technology.

Kailash Baariya
Kailash is with Anandi. Anandi's endeavours in rural Gujarat have given voice to marginalised women, helping them demolish gender barriers and build more meaningful lives. Kailash has been using developmental videos as part of her work with Anandi.

Madhu Bhushan
Madhu is a widely respected womens rights activist. She works with Vimochana, Bangalore. Vimochana was started as a response group to violence against women. At the Consultation, Madhu was keen to explore how to use DST and perhaps CR in their work.

Michael David
Michael is with BBC Sinhala. He is also associated with the IKM. He was the project director for the Kothmale Community Radio project. Michael has been a radio producer for more than fifteen years.

Michael (Mike) Powell
Mike is a Director with the IKM. He has been involved in Community regeneration work in Sheffield and in community-based participatory research. Mike has been interested in seeing if the explosion of interest in local communication has any possible linkages with the larger development sector.

Nagina
Nagina works with Vanangana, a grassroots development organisation from Uttar Pradesh, India. Vanangana works largely with women and also with *dalits* and minorities. Vanangana has been working

with the medium of video for years, using it to share the struggles of women from their area.

Parminder Jeet Singh
Parminder worked for nearly a decade in the government, where he initiated innovative e-governance projects. At ITfC, Parminder is the coordinator of a UNDP-funded field project, which aims to bring new ICTs to disadvantaged rural women, and is co-coordinator of ITfC's research and advocacy project 'Information Society for the South'. Parminder is a member of the Strategy Council of the UN's Global Alliance on ICTs and Development, and a Special Advisor to the Chair of the Multi-stakeholder Advisory Group of the UN's Internet Governance Forum.

Radha Ganesan
Radha is a Technical Advisor for Quest Alliance. She has worked on several educational projects using ICT interventions. She has successfully designed and implemented evaluation plans for several educational programmes in the New York state area. She has experience in designing education/training programmes and courses as well as training curriculum using ICT and blended interventions.

Ramesh Kumar
Ramesh works with Watershed Support Services and Activities Network (WASSAN). WASSAN. started as an informal network and works with women and marginalised sections of the rural India. WASSAN works mainly in the state of Andhra Pradesh, India.

Ramnath Bhat
Ram is a founder member of Maraa. He joined Voices in 2004, and worked there as Media Head. He worked closely with community radio, and was involved in set up and day-to-day running of two community radio stations - *Namma Dhwani*, Kolar and *Kalanjiam Samuga Vanoli*, Nagapattinam.

Roshni Nuggehalli
Roshni is a research associate with IT for Change. At IT for Change, she is working on research frameworks within the Mahiti Manthana project. She is also involved in a study on telecentre initiatives and their corresponding development models from around the country.

Sajan Veniyoor
Sajan was the Resource Person and Moderator for the ICT for Development Community of Solution Exchange, an UN initiative in India. He writes on broadcast issues, and is a founder-member of the Community Radio Forum, India. He is currently with the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting.

Seema Nair
Seema is the Programme Officer of ICT /Media as well as Gender, Women and Development in HIVOS, India. She has worked in areas of journalism, communication development and action research. Previously she worked at UNESCO coordinating Community Media and ICT projects in Asia. Seema wanted to see the current benefits of this format, and how it can be effectively used for distribution.

Shakun
Shakun works with Vimochana, Bangalore. Shakun listens to women who reach out to Vimochana on

issues of violence. She deals with stories that are personal and domestic. Vimochana has been using DST through an initiative called the courts of women.

Smriti Mehra
Smriti is a media artist and faculty with the Srishti School of Art and Design. She works with the marginalised in labour and in urban spaces.

Stalin K.
Stalin is one of the founders of the Drishti Media Collective. Drishti is a leading human rights and development organisation that uses media, communications and the arts to strengthen India's social movements and organisations. Stalin is a founder member of the Community Radio Forum of India.

Sveta Sarda
Sveta is a content editor and translator with Sarai. She works in Cybermohalla as a process chronicler and edits the labs' content for diverse circulation – books, website, blogs, broadsheets, and wall magazines. At present she is working with the various research projects at the Cybermohalla mobile lab. She was part of the editorial collective of the broadsheet series Sarai.txt. Sveta was intersted in finding out what are the different images of the world that emerge from the different sources that we all come from.

Veena Yamini
Veena is a Project Co-ordinator with the Byrraju foundation. The Foundation seeks to build progressive self-reliant rural communities – adopting a holistic approach - by providing services in healthcare, environment, sanitation, primary education, adult literacy and skills development. The Foundation currently works in 200 villages in 6 districts of Andhra Pradesh.

Vinay Sreenivasa
Vinay is a Project Associate with IT for Change. He is part of IT for Change's Bangalore and Mysore teams. In Mysore he works on the community information centres aspect of the Mahiti Manthana project, and is part of a research study on Free and Open Source Software (FOSS) in public institutions at Bangalore.

Vinod Pavarala
Vinod is a Professor of Communication and Dean at the Sarojini Naidu School of Performing Arts, Fine Arts & Communication, University of Hyderabad. His ongoing project, ICT's Development and Democracy examines how access to ICT's to the poor and marginalised could lead to redefining the public sphere. Vinod is a founder member of the Community Radio Forum of India.

3. Highlights of the Discussions

At the Consultation, after an initial introductory session ('Lets get to know each other'), there were 2 exploratory sessions ('What do we see together?' and 'Could we do something together?') which interrogated DST in three smaller groups. There was a final fourth session which explored the way forward ('What do we do next?'). Rather than summarising discussions session-wise, this report identifies emergent thematic heads from the Consultation and presents highlights under each of these.

3.1 Context and Definition of DST

The broad context of the Consultation was the use of DST for social development, which guided most of the discussions. However there were some voices which sought to look at DST independent of this agenda, and others who sought to position the digital space and the act of story telling as separate. Because of the different backgrounds of the participants, there were also diverse definitions of DST.[1]

The introductory session was followed by an intense debate on the definition of DST. Parminder opined that conceptual clarity on DST and its definition was important since it would give a form to DST. He took the example of community radio, which because of its definition conveys a certain meaning and a set of values. Stalin raised the question of whether the issue of definition is to be approached from the lens of storytellers or from that of distributors. Several participants argued that DST should be viewed within the context of social change. Further, Chandita posited that certain types of stories not acceptable in the realm of social development should be excluded from DST. On the other hand, Deepu was of the opinion that the definition should not lay down any parameters. He argued that in the effort to democratise the medium of DST, there is a need to avoid the attempt to control its form of expression. Vinod felt that we should not agonise over the dictatorship of the definition of DST.

The three small group discussion sessions that followed this open debate decided not to focus on the definition of DST but instead proceed to issues of the purpose and practice of DST.

3.2 Purpose of DST

Since the social development lens of the Consultation was shared by many of the participants, the discussion on the various purposes of DST was framed in larger equity and justice considerations. Considerable debate centred on whether there is a need to look at the issue of purpose at all, whose purposes are being served by incorporating DST into development agenda, and what are the issues of power in the setting of this agenda.

Stalin felt that for storytellers, the personal narrative is very important, and they do not worry about the agenda of the story. Hence, he argued for a lesser focus on the purpose of DST, which is nothing but

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1   Comment: The participants of the workshop were largely from two broad categories - those who are primarily social development actors using DST as a tool for social change, and those who were largely development media actors who produced stories for development. The latter viewed DST more as an end while the former viewed it more as a means to an end. This probably led to the difference in the viewpoints, between the development media actors and social development actors.

digitised story telling. However, other speakers like Parminder and Sajan spoke about the importance of purpose to DST, in terms of both demonstrated and potential purposes. Information sharing was one such demonstrated purpose that Kailash highlighted from her experiences with the medium at Anandi. Anandi recognises the critical significance of drama, audio and video for non-literate groups without other means of collecting information. Similarly, Nagina shared Vanagana's harnessing of the 'reporting' role of DST to highlight the situation of women in various oppressive situations, including violence and discrimination.

Many participants also reflected on their experience with DST as empowering to communities – through the process of story creation and communication of 'unheard' voices through the story. Madhu, for instance, detailed how videos of the personal narratives of women (e.g: dowry victims) help affirm the personal, the subjective and the domestic. These voices are traditionally marginalised in the 'objective' and 'rational' dominant discourse. Aparna recounted stories of women creating radio programmes on the issue of domestic violence. Broadcasting these discussions through digital AV formats affords a strong legitimacy to their voices and struggles. Radha shared an example of how DST has helped teachers become reflective practitioners through the process of viewing videos of their teaching. Vinay felt that since DST could serve an outlet of expression for marginalised communities, it was important to explore the building of a bottom-up development discourse.

The other important angle to the discussion on purpose was – whose purpose? Will a community be able to appropriate the process to create their own stories or does someone create it for them? When a NGO helps a community create a video whose purpose are they serving? Participants agreed that creators and producers of DST bring in their own agenda and their own subjectivities into the process. This suggests that when one sets out to create a digital story, adequate thought is required to identify the purpose it should serve, while also remaining sensitive to the power relations that exist between creator and recipient.

3.3 The Digital in DST

A significant portion of the discussions focused on unraveling the impact of the digital medium on the process of storytelling.

Ram reflected on how the digital form itself assumes a new identity when a story is digitised. Further, digitising content allows story telling to move beyond linearity. Pasha affirmed the dynamic nature of DST, whereby the producer can decide where to stop and start the camera to influence the story. Sveta spoke of how the digital makes it easier to record, creating a 'backbone' that can link different locations, hence making sharing easier. The digital form makes redistribution and dissemination of stories easier, thus improving outreach. Participants also higlighted that increased outreach is accompanied by issues of ownership and contextualisation. Stalin issued a note of caution on the processes of mediation and decision making regarding content creation, which, depending on the actors involved, can potentially be centralising and narrowly reflective of dominant perceptions.

Madhu highlighted the opening up of public spheres for the marginalised through DST, as evident in an anecdote she shared about an abused woman engaging with the digital medium. The visual medium is an extremely powerful means to challenge worldviews. Stalin recounted the process of filming

Kailash's first flight to Bangalore to attend the Consultation, which Chinmayi raised as an important point of departure for interrogating the impact of the digital medium on a story. Kailash would perhaps go home and orally recount the story of her first flight to her friends, but the DST process makes her story more inclusive by reaching out to more people than a narrative. Yamini further highlighted that the visual medium presented in digital format mitigates the language barrier, since visuals can communicate and connect with viewers who may have no knowledge of the language of the audio. Given the fact that communities can create their own digital stories, Ashish argued for an interrogation of how DST can provide an equal opportunity for marginalised groups to raise their voice. These observations reinforced what was expressed earlier – that the digital (whether radio broadcast or video) legitimises the voices of engaging with it. However Aparna supported a concern raised earlier about counter-productive legitimacy, for instance, if someone shoots a video of a child marriage, the potential for the strengthening of this negative stereotype exists.

Anita conceptualised that the digital is a mediating factor between the personal and the public – a contextual yet complex issue requiring further exploration. DST provides significant opportunities for inclusivity and empowerment. Distortion of the visual message is, however, a real danger, and shared principles and values need to be determined, to ensure DST remains true to development and social justice goals.

3.4 Form of DST

The Consultation provided a platform for discussing and beginning to collectively evolve a shared, yet dynamic 'form' of DST.

Participants viewed DST as a process and also as a product, where the production process is as useful as the product. Sharing from her North American experience, Danielle affirmed that the idea of DST was to create a product in the end, as well as benefit from the process of making it. From the perspective of Vimochana, Madhu positioned storytelling not only as a form but also as a very powerful process with an inherent message. Vimochana uses DST for affirming the personal, the subjective, the domestic, all of which are marginalised in the supposedly neutral dominant discourse. Anita argued that the digital platform has certain affordances that allow empowerment, encompassing the entire trajectory of creation, consumption, and dissemination, which makes DST much more than just a product. This point was well illustrated by Kailash and Nagina, who both spoke of how the stories they produce are co-constructed by incorporating the feedback from the community after initial screenings. This potential for shaping DST into a form that is dynamic, participatory and iterative can become truly empowering for the community.

Chandita pointed to the low cost and effort involved in reproducing digital media as a facilitative factor to further the process of viewing and listening. Anita added that while narrative and story telling have traditionally been contextually located and situated, DST through its dynamic form can address questions of inclusion/exclusion that span across geographies. Participants reached a shared understanding on the digital mediating between the public and private, creating new spaces for empowerment.

Vinod flagged an important difference between traditional story telling with its primarily fictional

connotations, and DST, which straddles both fact and fiction. DST thus enables different audience reactions, adding to the range of interpretations. Pasha pointed out that DST is largely a subjective process since the film-maker gets her own ideas into the film she makes. Reflecting on the meaning conveyed by DST, Sveta raised the important question of whether the meaning of a film is a priori or whether it is created it during its viewing. These topics led to the question of disjunctures being created between traditional story telling and DST.

3.5 Roles in DST

Another theme of debate considered ways in which the digital mediation and form of story telling impacts the storyteller, the viewers(s) and their roles and relationships.

Shakun unpacked the differences between traditional story telling where story tellers and listeners share a direct relationship, and DST where the two actors are removed from each other in time and place. She pointed out that in this new scenario, the story teller does not have control over who listens; while listeners are faced with having to negotiate new formats for responding and reacting. This is in contrast to oral story telling with its conventional cues, nods, eye-contact, etc. Chandita argued that since DST allows for easy re-telling of stories – unlike traditional story telling – questions of control and rights need to be considered in addition to issues of private and public narrative. Vinod compared the celebration of producers and filmmakers in the West, with the Indian experience where very few grassroots digital story tellers consider themselves as filmmakers, and instead focus on the collective, both in terms of production and viewing.

The evolution of roles and relationships between story tellers, listeners and viewers needs to kept in mind when producing any DST material. Also, the questions of control, privacy and rights need to be dealt with when a framework of ethics for DST is being discussed

3.6 DST and Communities

A large number of the participants working with marginalised communities had already used DST in their work. They brought this wide experience to the Consultation, informing discussions on how communities perceive DST, the potential for empowerment in DST, and awareness of inherent dangers.

Vinod's experience in community radio revealed that media technologies appropriated by marginalised communities tend to redefine notions of democracy and citizenship. Yamini affirmed this point by highlighting Byrraju Foundation's work with community media production towards making development more participatory. Chandita posited that grassroots practitioners must engage with DST to harness this mode of expression in its entirety. Anita raised the question of how practitioners can decide if a community is ready to produce its own content, and how to actually make communities ready for content production. In response to these complex issues, Parminder argued that the intersection of local communication processes and DST needs to be interrogated and nuanced.

Kailash shared her experiences of screening films in the communities Anandi works with. Video screenings at night attract 300-400 people, and are organised inspite of opposition from certain political

elements and vested interests. After watching the actual video for thirty minutes, people spend an hour or more discussing the video and also critiquing it, hence contributing to it. In this powerful process of the collective, Kailash warned that the individual can get oppressed. An interesting comparison was provided by Danielle while describing her work with youth in the US, where the format of DST encouraged agency in youth and helped them engage in conversations with the larger community. Chandita mentioned that although some commercial producers use video to make quick money, they actually contribute to the local community by preserving local dialects and talents. Roshni posited that DST can produce fissures within the social fabric, providing an opportunity for shifting norms and accepted power struggles towards more inclusive.

3.7 Knowledge for Development

A primary goal of the IKM programme is to improve development practice by promoting change in the way the development sector approaches the selection, management and use of knowledge in the formation and implementation of its policies and programmes. This is based on the premise that Northern development organisations often lack adequate knowledge of the Southern realities that they seek to change, and also of the perceptions of those realities by local populations and by local intellectuals. In light of this, IKM invests in Southern knowledge production of all types and origins, including that of the DST process initiated at the Bangalore DST Consultation. Knowledge development hence was framed within this context of the IKM, and additionally through an educational lens.

Michael David talked about an IKM sub-group focus on the processes of local communication, while Mike Powell expressed interest in identifying explosions of engagement in local communication and in understanding ways to make linkages amongst these nodes. Anita spoke of IT for Change interest in the politics of knowledge, and knowledge linkages to the question of development and making change happen. Radha expressed an interest in education and film, and in exploring how DST can lend itself to the learning and the learning process in the formal and non-formal process. Guru also expressed a desire to understand what DST means for transfer of knowledge in a formal school environment.

3.8 Production Processes

As practitioners, Yamini, Chinmayi, Aparna, Nagina and Kailash shared details of their DST production processes.

In the communities Kailash works in, dramas are very popular, and Anandi developed these dramas into stories. She detailed the extensive production process undertaken by Anandi where videos are screened for a group of viewers, feedback is taken, and the story is reshaped. This is then screened again and the cycle repeats till a certain level of completeness is reached, making feedback an important part of any story. Anandi also makes songs of collective problems like corruption, right to food, etc. and disseminates them. She narrated that since DST takes the form of drama, audio and video, it is meaningful in the Anandi context of working with non-literates who have no other modes of access to information.

Nagina shared that one purpose of Vanangana's story telling is to report on the situation of women subject to violence, discrimination etc. DST builds awareness of the condition of a particular form of oppression, and engages with people in a first-hand way. Stories are collected from different areas and brought together to be cast as a narrative, with fabric used to represent illustrations. Multiple narratives are woven together, and a dialogue is begun through this method. Puppets and photography are other tools that are used. Vanangana does not use any single fixed story, and instead engages in extensive co-construction.

4. Breakout Groups

4.1 Group One

This group initially spent some time discussing the definition of DST, and attempted to navigate through the divergent views. Seeing that dwelling on the definition of DST was proving to be a hindrance in discussing its potential, the group decided not to attempt defining DST at this stage.

The major portion of the discussion focussed on representing DST as a product and as an artefact that serves well in supporting developmental initiatives. The group looked at how DST can be used as evidence, and the implications of this positioning. Additionally, by bringing communication into the public domain, DST serves to legitimise personal struggles. Since it is a medium that does not involve the written word, DST has emerged as an alternate form of expression for the non-literate citizens.

4.2 Group Two

Unlike the other two groups, this group focussed on the definition of DST. The group also dwelt on the story telling aspects of DST, including the role of the story teller. This group presented DST in the vocabulary of a process rather than as an artefact.

Since DST is a practice, this group felt the need to debate and define DST. The group opined that for DST to exist as a form, there needs to be widespread appropriation of the technology. Practitioners have the responsibility of raising awareness on the demonstrated and potential use and misuse of technology in their areas of work. The group also felt that we should be pushing for DST as a form of local communication.

The group discussed how technology has the potential to not only enhance story telling but to also mediate the process of story telling itself. Just like in traditional story telling, even in DST the role of the story teller is of critical importance, and has the responsibility of deciding the audience. They reasoned that unless the story teller is deeply implicated in the story telling process, the process cannot be referred to as DST.

4.3 Group Three

The group did not focus on the definition of DST but examined its process, potential areas of evolution and some dangers.

The group argued for greater interrogation into how the digital affects the story and how the practice affects the medium. They questioned whether DST as a format can represent a larger community, moving beyond the individual. If the context is appropriately considered, DST has the potential to bring out an issue pertaining to the community through the story.

In terms of potential evolution, the group felt that DST allows for easy integration with other media. They also stressed the need for exploring any potential associations with the community radio

movement in India. DST encourages inclusiveness, while also easily allowing for misrepresentation. Because of the flexible production process of DST, the group felt that it was worth exploring the idea of an alternative 'YouTube'. This initiative would run into challenges of language, dialects, control and moderation.

Since DST can be easily appropriated by communities, the use of DST can be somewhat 'laissez faire'. And in light of this fact, it is important to avoid uses of DST that create or deepen hierarchies or fissures within communities.

5. Opportunities and Ideas for Future Collaboration

In the concluding session, participants were requested to list down any ideas they had for future collaboration. This session produced rich and varied insights. Because of the evolving nature of DST, collaboration can provide critical contributions and significant value to theory and practice.

Participants identified three areas with scope for maximum collaboration:

5.1 Training

DST in India is presently practiced only by a few NGOs but DST can be potentially used by almost all NGOs in their work. Expectedly, NGOs that are not already using digital media will need some hand-holding on aspects of the production cycle. Additionally, a holistic understanding of the influence of social contexts on DST will be another area requiring capacity building for NGOs new to DST.

Some suggested ideas for collaboration in training are –
- Use of digital media equipment
- Production training
- Translating existing training resources into Indian languages
- Training on the use of FOSS in DST
- Preparation of training kits in Indian languages (inclusive of notes, handouts, softwares, evaluation forms)

One aspect that merits considerable attention is the availability of training resources in Indian languages. A lot of grassroots NGOs have field workers who are more comfortable in Indian languages than in English and if the goal is to have DST appropriated by grassroots practitioners, then it is imperative to make training accessible to them.

Another aspect that needs to be emphasised in training and dissemination is the demystifcation of technology. There are lot of myths surrounding technology – that it can be appropriated only by people who are highly skilled or knowledgeable about technology, that the costs are always very prohibitive for practitioners etc. Almost all the DST practitioners in India have been successful in training 'non-experts' (people with no prior exposure to technology) to start using digital media for production. For e.g, the *dalit* women in the radio programme of Deccan Development Society or the field workers in *Namma Dhwani* radio programme of VOICES, all independently produce programmes. Clearly the importance of demystification of technologies cannot be overemphasised for DST to be effectively used by grassroots workers and communities.

Participants expressed a willingness to work together and help other organisations in capacity building for DST. The imperative is to coordinate and organise the coming together of practitioners for capacity building efforts. Building a working group of practitioners will provide NGOs seeking training with an accessible resource base that is split across different practitioners.

5.2 Creation of a Shareable Online Resource Pool for DST Practitioners

A significant number of participants asked for a sharable online resource pool. The resource pool would include completed digital stories as well as resources used for the production of DST and training of practitioners.

Participants envisaged the online resource developing in the following ways –

- A wiki page to share learnings and experiences
- A blog / website/ internet space where the following can be shared
    - Definitions of DST
    - Experiences, learnings of digital story tellers
    - Digital stories
    - DST trainer guides

Currently there exists no forum in India exclusively for DST practitioners. There are mailing lists for community radio practitioners, but that does not include filmmakers or people use use films for development. Creation of such a resource pool will lead to wider dissemination of the content produced and will also help in sharing the learnings and resource materials.

There are however some portals which can fill in this space, for instance the Content Commons portal (www.Content-Commons.in) developed by IT for Change. This portal allows for sharing of radio and video programmes, and short clips are uploaded for viewing. Full videos are available on request, and sharing of Copy-Left videos and audio programmes is encouraged.

5.3 Research and Dialogue on DST Practice, Purpose, Meaning, Ethics and Nature of the Form

The purpose of the Consultation was to explore DST, and many pertinent questions were raised and debated. Should a definition of DST exclude certain types of films? What is the impact of DST on communities? How are questions of ownership and rights resolved in a context where reproduction and replication is easily done? Being an evolving format, DST requires a lot more research and dialogue into practice, impact and the nature of the form itself.

Some of the ideas suggested were –

- Writing a brief note on the definition of DST definition and its scope
- Collaborative research at the levels of theory and practice
- Documenting the production and use of DST to date in India
- Working together on an assessment of
    - Policy issues
    - Ethical guidelines
    - Potential relevance to 'development'
    - Workshops on issues for development organisations/ NGOs

5.4 Expanding the Reach of DST

Participants expressed the need to expand the current scope of DST practice and theory to engage with a wider range of grassroots practitioners. Practitioners felt that DST can be really useful in social development and hence if we can get more people to use DST , it will help reach our collective developmental goals. Participants also expressed that DST can be a very useful tool in getting things out into the public sphere.

Some of the ideas expressed were –
- Collaborating with the community radio forum of India
- Creating an alternate you-tube to share developmental films and audio content

Annexure – Consultation Design

Consultation on Digital Story Telling and Local Communication Processes
June 5th, 2008, Bangalore

IKM Project and IT for Change

User-friendly video recorders and possibilities of publishing videos online as well as offline have created a new area of work, play and study that is sufficiently interesting to be further probed.

What is going on within this space?

That would be the key question that be raised at the Bangalore Consultation on Digital Story Telling as well as the Colombo Consultation that will follow.

The Consultation will be attended by people who make digital stories, people who would like to study them and people who would like to use them.

While the Consultation acknowledges that digital story telling is a powerful tool of communication in no way would the limitations of the medium be ignored. The Consultation needs to be seen as the beginning of an open process of dialogue among people who are interested in the local communication process rather than a group of people who are dedicated to promote digital story telling among other tools of communication.

Given the objectives of the IKM Project (http://ikmemergent.wordpress.com) there is obviously a interest to find out how digital story telling relates to international development but there is no need to confine the Consultation to international development, or any other specific theme. In other words it is accepted that any theme that is good enough to produce a digital story, is good enough for discussion.

The Consultation marks the beginning of a case study that would probably have two segments one in South India and the other in Sri Lanka. It is perceived that digital story telling has emerged as powerful grassroots communication medium that captures local realities. However we need to be sure for ourselves the correctness of this perception.

Digital story telling has been positioned for discussion with the initial insight that it is a powerful medium and format that allows participants of a local communication process to express themselves, make statements, and evaluate their own environment.

The entire Consultation evolves around a key question - What isgoing on with digital stories? An understanding to what is going on with digital stories might lead to an exploration of further questions. The Consultation will be facilitated in a manner to trigger a planning and exploration phase, rather than immediately springing into action.

Session Design

Session One: Lets get to know each other

Each participant will be requested to introduce himself/herself and talk about their work, and perceptions on the medium and format.

Session Two: What do we see together?

What trends, commonalities, and differences do we see in our work described in Session One.

Session Three: Could we do something together?

Are there common spaces that we could work in collaboration or do we move on from here treading our own paths.

Session Four: What do we do next?

Time lines - Responsibilities - Logistics etc.