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Programme Experiences

Young Power in Social Action (YPSA) ICT4D Unit - Bangladesh

Summary

Established in 1985, Young Power in Social Action (YPSA) is a voluntary social development organisation whose mission is to engage Bangladesh's economically poor, vulnerable, marginalised youth in bringing about their own and society's sustainable development. YPSA ICT4D [information and communication technology for development] Unit is a stand-alone component of YPSA that was established in October 2004 for the purpose of implementing and coordinating all of YPSA's ICT-focused projects and programmes. These initiatives include Youth led Poverty Reduction through Digital Opportunities (YPRDO), communication activities to raise awareness about ICTs,

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participatory video projects, and research activities. The ultimate goal of ICT4D Unit is to promote the effective and relevant use of ICT as a means of development as well as a human right, in the process hopefully contributing to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the national Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) process.

Main Communication Strategies

YPSA ICT4D Unit uses participatory programming to empower young people to educate and capacitate themselves for their own economic and social development. The Unit works to equip young people with practical skills to access and benefit from ICTs in order to learn more effectively and to participate more fully in a society that is increasingly knowledge-based. The hope is that, empowered with new multimedia skills, young people can use their creativity to express their concerns, leading to greater bargaining power and the ability to make their voices heard in the community.

Set up in March 2003, YPRDO's ICT Resource Centre (Middle Mohadebpur in Sitakund) is the site for training of marginalised rural youth (ages 13 to 25) in ICT skills. Each class in the 3-month-long courses (basic and advanced) lasts an hour and half and has 5 participants; the Centre provides practice facilities after the course to strengthen skills. A coupon-based system is designed to ensure access on the part of the poor, who make up 75% of the participants; the rest pay about 1000 taka for the basic course (which introduces participants to Microsoft Office, typing in English and Bengali, the Internet, email, etc.) and 1400 taka for the advanced course (multimedia training involving Adobe

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Illustrator, Photoshop, CD writing, scanning, etc). A structured syllabus for both levels of the training has been drawn up and a training handbook, which is provided to participants, has been developed. The Centre library has books and magazines on computer education in Bengali, and CD versions of computer magazines in Bengali are also available. An examination at the end of the course assesses learning. Initially, YPRDO signed on BITAN - a non-governmental organisation (NGO) - to provide two professionals to train the students; later, the project appointed a full-time trainer. In addition, an international volunteer was brought on board to give the project team hands-on training in developing and maintaining the hardware and software systems.

The Centre also has a separate room for issue-based discussions, and for organising healthy cultural and recreational activities. The hope is that these disadvantaged young people will move beyond the connections made through participation in the ICT training to build a social platform for overcoming barriers related to gender, caste, and religion through participatory co-curricula and extra-curricula activities (e.g., volunteer service). Every Thursday is recreation day at the Centre. Participants are shown documentary and recreational movies and allowed to play video and computer games. Participants are also encouraged to create and participate in cultural activities like debate competitions and music and drawing programmes.

The project team also conducts awareness activities to introduce people to the social and economic benefits of empowerment through ICTs. The team makes field visits,

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meeting people at their homes and engaging in discussion. (Interviews are also conducted during field visits to support the research process of the project.) Posters and brochures were developed in English and Bengali to spread awareness about ICTs. Group meetings and discussions are usually held in the centre with local youths and adolescents, local youth clubs, and civil society organisations to make them aware of the role of ICTs in their development and poverty reduction. Group meetings are also arranged in YPSA's self-help groups in its remote working areas, in which issues of awareness and gender equality are raised. The project is also planning to introduce other activities like 'Youth & ICT Camp', 'Rural ICT Fair', and a 'Digital Art Competition' in its working areas to increase awareness.

Broadening the scope of digital opportunity beyond computers, YPSA has built a Youth Community Multimedia Centre (CMC) that is managed by disadvantaged rural youth with the organisational back-up of YPSA. The centre is a convergence of radio, television, video, and other ICT applications. It aims to work as a platform for rural disadvantaged youth and adolescents to express their concerns and make themselves heard by the wider community. The participants, at first, develop their capacity in audio, video, and multimedia content creation and programming. They then prepare content for dissemination through the local cable operators (cable casting) and through other media like tape recorders and loud speakers (narrow casting). Based on its experience, YPSA has translated (into Bengali language) and printed a handbook titled "Community Multimedia Centre: How

to get started and keep going". [Click here](#) to learn more about the CMC initiative.

Along these lines, since 2002 YPSA's Development Initiative for Social Change (DISC) Programme has been offering training in Participatory Video (PV) that is designed to enable youth in Sitakund to make participatory videos on local issues. PV is a scriptless video or a video narrative created through a process in which young creators decide what issues they wish to document and share, carrying out the filming and screening in an interactive way with other participants (e.g. community members/ group members). It is meant to be a tool for telling their stories, sharing their knowledge, expressing their problems, demanding their rights, and suggesting ways forward. Following a 4-month-long training, participants have produced videos on issues such as the rights of the indigenous people of Sitakund, women's empowerment, disability, the fisher folk communities of Sitakund, food rights, and ICT4D.

The project not only provides access to digital tools but also examines and learns from its experience to understand the actual impact of introducing ICTs for development in a new socio-economic and cultural context. Research themes include: 1) How do the different media fit into the lives of youth and their communication networks? 2) How do ICTs fit with the plans and aspirations of the youth of Sitakund? 3) How do ICTs support youth rights to information and communication, enabling them to voice their concerns and shape their own policies? Research methods include social mapping, in-depth interviews, user feedback questionnaire forms,

observation and field notes, and diary writing on specific topics.

To learn more about recent and ongoing projects, such as YPSA ICT4D's participation in UNESCO's International Program for the Development of Communication (IPDC) project and in Actionaid's Reflect & ICTs initiative, please visit the [YPSA ICT4D Unit website](#).

Development Issues

Youth, Technology, Economic Development, Gender Equity.

Key Points

YPSA states that Bangladesh has only 1.5 computers for every thousand people. The organisation opted to centre its ICT activities in Sitakund, an area (population approx. 275,000) that the organisation claims is lacking in basic infrastructure like communication, primary education, and health. 85% of total villages and 65% of total households here have electricity. Typically, television and radio penetration is limited to the middle-class and rich households, with the majority of residents lacking in means of recreation. 86% of men and 21% of women are employed. Agriculture is the main source of livelihood, but most of the indigenous people do not have land of their own. Fishing as a source of livelihood is turning out to be unprofitable. The literacy rate is 41.1%; just over half of children have access to primary education, while very few children from the indigenous population attend school. YPSA reports poor facilities at the local health centres and lack of health care among the fisher folk community.

According to YPSA, the youth community

makes up half of the world's population. With a view to creating worldwide awareness about this youth community and ensuring youth participation in development programmes, in 1978 the UN General Assembly declared 1985 as International Youth Year. Inspired by this resolution, some socially conscious young people associated with the society of Sitakund Upazilla in Chittagong District began to motivate and organise the youth community in order to establish a development organisation. The initial objective was to train youth in ICT skills that would lead them to employment. Although the project has reportedly provided marginalised youth with more marketable skills, organisers explain that the market remains small and largely inaccessible. Nonetheless, YPSA claims that participants generally have a greater practical understanding of the world of computers and ICTs and with it greater confidence to face the challenge of earning a living.

As of December 2004, YPSA was working with a total of 60,000 disadvantaged families. In addition to the ICT4D initiatives described above, YPSA organises programmes in the areas of institution building, livelihood, governance, health, education, the environment, micro finance and micro enterprise, human resource development, disaster management, networking, and research, advocacy and publication.

In 1998, YPSA was represented in the United Nations (UN) World Youth Forum & Festival in Portugal. YPSA was awarded the International Youth Peace Prize (IYPP) 1999. YPRDO has also been featured on Danida's "Good ICT Practices" website;

[click here](#) to read the case study.

Partners

Funders include Actionaid Bangladesh and UNESCO.

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Source

Posting to the bytesforall_readers list server on August 27 2004 ([click here to access the archives](#)); emails from Debobroto Chakraborty to The Communication Initiative on November 26 2004 and September 20 2006; and [YPSA website](#) on September 7 2006.

*Placed on the Communication Initiative site
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