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Context of marginalization of the poor:

Seelampur is situated in the northeastern part of Delhi, the capital city of India. The eastern part of the city is characterized by low-income groups, high population density and poor civic amenities. Seelampur is inhabited primarily by Muslims. It has a high density of population and family incomes are low. The average monthly family income is 60 - 80 USD and the average family

consists of eight members. Within Seelampur the area of Zaffarabad (having approximately 90% Muslim population) stands out as a pocket of extreme urban poverty and immensely poor living conditions.

Lack of opportunities in terms of education and employment also marks life for the people here. Formal education has become quite common and thus enrolment is high but dropping out at different grades is a continuing problem. Without adequate education, the possibility of white-collar jobs remains a distant reality for most boys and women. Most young women have not even completed high school. Usually they drop out of the school after finishing Grade VIII.

In 2003, UNESCO launched a pilot initiative to innovate, research social and technological strategies to put ICTs in the hands of the poor. This seemed a good opportunity in the given context and a Community Centre was set up at Seelampur-Zaffarabad by the Datamation Foundation with the support of UNESCO and Delhi Govt. Datamation Foundation has been working in the community for more than five years now.

The cultural settings:

The towering minarets of numerous mosques in the area are indicators of the role played by religion and the clergy in the lives of the community. Traditional customs still play a powerful role especially with respect to gender. Women are expected to be good housewives, look after their husbands and in-laws, procreate and rake care of children and the house. Education is not considered to be important for them. They are not encouraged to move out of the locality independently and the 'Burqa' (veil) system is prevalent. It may be noted that several studies done in India among other religious communities also suggest very strong gender related norms such as on mobility, marriage and education. Many other traditional practices are also still adhered to like with respect to kinship and arts, handicrafts and learning.

It was considered that for the initiative to make inroads into the lives of the women it may be useful for the ICT centre to be located in their midst. Thus a collaboration was formed with the Babool-Uloom Madrasa. It is a Madrasa (a place of learning) and Masjid (the place where prayer is offered and is also the centre of other religious activities) headed by the Maulana (refers to leader of prayer, Muslim caliph). The Madrasa is not only a place of prayer but also of learning. The Babool-Uloom Madrasa is a religious residential school providing learning to about 200 boys from humble backgrounds. A majority of students aspire to take up advanced religious studies so as to become Imams (teachers).

The Babool- Uloom is also a mosque, where the devout gather five times a day to offer prayers to Allah. Women are not allowed entry into the mosque. However~ they do come to the Maulana for

advice. He arbitrates on social disputes and religious matters. He is also believed to have healing powers.

Permission was sought to start the ICT centre at the Madrasa and for this purpose space was also requested. The factor that played a positive and decisive role was not that the key people viewed ICTs as important but that they felt a strong need to create some opportunities for women in the area. Indeed, it was much later that they began to understand the utility of ICTs.

The ICT center provides an open learning center for women and women. They receive training on computers and Internet and also obtain information on varied topics. Interactive multimedia content is developed and used to support vocational and life-skills training and provide rights-based information on various areas to poor women and women. The marginalised women use ICTs to learn marketable skills and build their awareness of health issues, their rights and livelihood opportunities. In contrast, the Madrasa has its own philosophy, where it seems to isolate itself from the outside world and the teachings have little influence of the outside, changing world. Movement of the students is restricted; there is no radio and no television.

Are Information & Communication Technologies (ICTs) a panacea for poverty eradication?

The phenomenal increase in ICT access has been accompanied by a burgeoning literature on the contribution of ICTs to economic growth, development, and poverty reduction. At the most optimistic, ICTs have been described as the means whereby developing countries can leapfrog over development stages and technology barriers to achieve both economic growth and broad-based development. Other views are less sanguine about attributing direct benefits to ICT and raise concerns that a one-dimensional push for their greater use may increase the dependency of poorer countries, as well as the divide between urban and rural areas, the rich and the poor, and between generations. Thus, while there may well be a link between ICT and poverty reduction, the mechanisms through which the connection takes place are not fully understood. In fact, whatever dimension of welfare change is being considered, the direction of its causal link to ICT is contentious. Problems of reverse causality and spurious correlation that apply to the relationship between any investment in infrastructure and increasing output are of equal relevance to the analysis of the ICT/poverty nexus.

Even prior to the current era of widespread mobile telephony and Internet usage, a causal relationship between telecommunications infrastructure and economic output was identified using data from the 21 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries. This relationship has also been found for mobile telephony and data from 113 countries over a 20-year period, which showed that a 1 per cent increase in the telecommunications penetration rate leads to a 0.03 per cent increase in gross domestic product (GDP) (Torero and von Braun, 2006).2 This positive correlation between ICT and economic growth extends to the developing world

through direct expenditure on ICT infrastructure and services, as well as through its economic multipliers. Mobile network suppliers are estimated to have invested more than 90 billion dollars in Africa, and in some countries they are now the most profitable enterprises as well as significant generators of employment. Telecommunication revenue and expenditures presently contribute an average of 7 per cent of the GDP in many African economies, while investment in communications has reached about 5 per cent of the total investment spending on the continent. The expansion of ICT globally has also had upstream impacts through their components and manufacture. Gold, tantalum, tin, and tungsten are used in the manufacture of mobile phones and other ICT devices, while cobalt is an important component used in the batteries to power them. Zambia and the Democratic Republic of Congo supply the raw material used for more than half of the world's lithium-ion rechargeable batteries.

(Source: Julian May, Edith Adera UN Chroncile)

ICT can also have broader developmental impact and are powerful tools for empowerment and income generation, as well as for increasing access to education and other social services. Mobile telephones have been found to assist businesses in the informal economy by helping them attract additional business, and a well-known example of mobile phone usage among fishers in the state of Kerala, India, has shown the benefits to both producers and consumers through improved information and better functioning markets (Jensen, 2007).3 Other studies go further to point out that the role of ICTs is not limited to promoting growth, but also includes non-income dimensions of development, such as empowerment and security including opportunities for e-governance and improved accountability.

For ICTs to establish their appropriateness, an overall evaluation is necessary. In an ideal world, universal access to information would create global information society yet the mode of interpretation will depend on the culture and traditions of the people and societies. A study (Ryckeghem 1995) shows how information technology and culture interact, wherein culture provides the condition for interpreting the utility of information technology. It is also believed that some 'cultural beliefs' are a hindrance to the adoption of ICTs though the reverse maybe true in many cases. Computers are a product of industrialized civilization nor from this particular cultural context. Yet the endeavor in community-based interventions has been to be sensitive to cultural differences which were also the point of departure for the present initiative. The decision to set up the ICT centre in the annexe (one room) of the Madrasa gave it immediate legitimacy Appreciating the socio-cultural scenario and the importance of the Masjid and Maulana in the lives of the community helped to harmonies that with the technological tools.

In today's information age of globalization, computerization, Internet and virtual world, there are fears that the global media is fast promoting a global monoculture that denies diverse socio-cultural realities. It is felt that this process of globalization may swamp the not so strong cultures. English is the predominant language of the information age. The majority of the material on the Internet is from the developed and industrialized countries. Thus, there are fears that the local cultures would be eroded so the tendency is to further isolate themselves.

The global village is not global for most of the world's poor nor simply because technology is not available to them but because with or without these technologies the poor are likely to remain marginalized from the benefits of society if they are excluded from the benefits of over-all development. Apart from this is the issue of language and content because of which even if computers may be physically available they may continue to be 'out of reach' in crucial ways.

Thus, the Seelampur intervention was located within this fraught relationship between the modern-global and the traditional. There is an interesting contrast between the possibilities of globalised culture that the computer/Internet represents while being at a place that fiercely protects the local culture. What have been the experiences?

From all information sources it has been proven that gender inequality in education is extreme. Girls are less likely to access school, to remain in school or enjoy positive achievements in education. Yet it has been proven conclusively that innovative and well-designed educational models targeted towards young women and girls enable them to claim their legitimate rights and realize their fullest potential. In Seelampur, the primary school drop rate out amongst young girls and adult women is 65%.

ICT adaptations for Education & Poverty alleviation:

The Datamation Foundation and UNESCO wanted to provide appropriate ICT enabled support mechanism viz. capacity-building, marketing and financial linkage for the women engaged in informal sector of the economy encompassing small and petty businesses. Moreover ICTs could help overcome Muslim women's perpetual cycle of lack of basic education, poverty, social exclusion and low bargaining power by building their capacities and vocational skills.

The project also wanted to test if ICTs could play an enabling role in empowering the Muslim women to deal with age-old social problems such as the denial of equal status to the women in the society, dependence on the family for all decisions ranging from various personal decisions viz. reproductive rights, career and vocational options.

Towards this end effective multi-media training, learning and counseling materials in empowerment; basic literacy and vocational skills enhancement were deployed.

The Foundation developed over 65 self-paced, interactive multi-media empowerment and skills development CDs. In-built evaluation procedures were integrated in the CDs. The CDs ranged from health, nutrition, life-skill topics; apart from empowerment; rights, duties and responsibilities of the women; life skills, adolescence, confidence-building and personality development. Consolidating on the 'innate' design, arts, crafts and workmanship most people including those of Seelampur possess; the project deployed over 40 different skills and vocational modules ranging from tailoring, embroider, candle making, liquid soap, management of courier and tiffin centres, stationary items, paper bags etc. The Foundation enabled formation of the Self-Help Groups after the women had completed the learning on the modules. Multi-stakeholder workshops were conducted for exploring mutual synergies and linkages.

The Foundation also identified commercial opportunities for the beneficiaries of the project. Participation in various exhibitions, events apart from direct marketing of the arts and crafts produced by Seelampur women was organized. A portal www.seelampurmart.org has been set up for the marketing of Seelampur arts, crafts and services. Payment gateway, fulfillment, order servicing have been activated.

ICT as a platform for Govt. entitlements delivery:

Recognizing the potential of ICTs as a crucial change-agent as well as due to the dire need for the roll-out of large scale public services delivery in Seelampur; the Delhi Govt. mooted the idea of partnership under the Mission Convergence Programme (Samajik Suvidha Sangam) http://www.delhi.gov.in/wps/wcm/connect/doit_dcwest/DCWest/Home/Mission+Convergence for making Seelampur as one of the Gender Resource Centres.

Gender Resource Centres-Suvidha Kendras (GRC-SKs) serve as first point of contact for the community under Mission Convergence. These structures have been set up by the government in partnership with the civil society organizations (CSOs) to reach out to people and take government programmes to communities. GRC-SKs have been setup in areas having vulnerable families based on poverty mapping exercise with a mandate to cater to 15000-20000 households (approx... population of 100000). Besides assisting in availing entitlements, these centers work towards Social, Economic and Legal empowerment of women by interventions in the area of Legal Rights, Economic initiatives-skill building, microenterprises and entrepreneurship development and health.

The need for making women as the focus to facilitate the process of change and empowerment was a learning borne out of previous experience of successful public private partnership programmes

for community outreach. Seelampur GRC-SKs acts as a single window and first point of contact for information and facilitation for improved access to the welfare services/ entitlements to the vulnerable and needy; having the following objectives:

- To act as a catalyst for making Delhi safe for women through social legal and economic empowerment
- To improve Health of women
- To impart skill for specific trades and to provide forward and backward linkages enabling women to be a part of productive work force to obtain good remuneration.
- To provide facilities with linkages for school drop outs to return to mainstream and to provide non-formal functional literacy
- To establish a mechanism for linking existing government schemes for women and to enable women to access it better.
- To raise awareness on issue of relevance and provide legal literacy about women rights.
- To set up a documentation center which acts as a clearing house for information of women and works towards a system of affiliation of the organization working on the same issue.

How the ICT intervention has adapted to cultural values and given women a `voice'..

It was felt necessary to embed the project in the community taking into account the existing cultural values. Concrete actions are being taken to preserve the local oral culture and propagate the same. For culture to grow, it must be active, contextual and social. ICTs such as videos, TV and multi-media computer software that combine text, sound and colourful images, are used to provide media for expression acting as facilitator.

Seelampur women create their own content:

Early enough in the project, it was evident the ICTs have given to the women of a "voice" for expression. Belonging to conservative families; women are not expected to move about in public especially unsorted and without "pardah"; the role of ICTs in providing a "voice" for their expression and creativity is undisputed.
The community ventured forward for a holy rendition of "Quran-Sharif" when the CMC Centre started. The women started first with designs—sharp, colorful designs have been created from their socio-cultural context—applying Paint Brush. Once they got exposed to the multi-media capability of the computers especially the recording features; they started enthusiastically recording:

****Naat:** Religious songs sung for the Prophet

****Ghazals:** Melodies of love, solitude, companionship and friendship

****Sher-Shairi**: Rhythm melodies on variety of topics
Barring Fridays observed as “Jumma” as per tradition; the women have been singing and recording their renditions uninhibitedly.

Searching and retrieving content for personal needs:
The women have been searching for English newspaper sites in the computer (web-site) since they get usually Hindi papers at home. Since there is a keen desire amongst the women to learn English; they have been searching the internet for different sites to learn English. The women have been expressing themselves in Hindi and Urdu by writing in Roman letters.

Searching and retrieving content for ODL:

Since most of the participating women from the community have not even completed their upper primary education; there is a keen desire amongst the women to complete their basic secondary education; by open distance learning. Consequently the women access various Distance Learning sites such as the National Institute of Open Learning (NIOS) www.nios.org ; or for the ones who have completed their school education and are desirous of enrolling themselves for the Graduation; admissions and learning sites such as the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), Manipal-Sikkim Open University, Mysore University, Annamalai University are very popular. The e-Government and e-Leaning opportunities offered by these Education sites to the Seelampur women; are helping the women get over their `school drop-out’ stigma very rapidly.

Searching and retrieving health content:

In the wake of epidemics such as Viral, Dengue fever and other Diseases there is a good interest amongst the women to retrieve various health sites.

Using alternate channels of communications:

For elderly women with large families, access to the ICT center has been limited. To overcome this, the vocational and skills enhancement modules were telecast over the cable network.

The combination of video and community’s own recording has enabled the community to learn the process of holding camera efficiently for recording purposes apart from observing the process of

editing and mixing of the audio-cum-video; therefore the women have started feeling motivated enough to participate in the production of their own multimedia modules.

Usage of off-the shelf Digital content:

The response of the community to the off-the shelf Digital content prepared in advance by the Datamation Foundation in below thematic areas has been very positive.

The topics of digital content have ranged from women's empowerment to legal rights and issues; apart from skills enhancement and income generation. Health and education have been primary contributing factors towards the empowerment of the women.

It was observed that the women were keen to acquire certain vocational skills while learning to handle computers. The packages, with a voice-over option in both English and Hindi, include candle making, liquid soap and phenyl making, henna application and designs, making of soft toys and rag dolls, tailoring etc. also, based on their traditional skills (such as handicrafts) many new avenues are being explored to make these women have a means for an independent income. Many of the women eagerly desire to have an independent source of income after coming to the centre and also, to be able to support or help their families financially.

The learning of local art and handicraft is being encouraged in the process of learning computers. The women bring local traditional designs and patterns of embroidery to the centre. These are computerized through the process of scanning or digital photography. Then these pictures are modified, improved and more innovative designs are developed with various colour combinations. Some of the participants download various patterns from the Internet and then evolve their own designs using traditional and modern tools as base.

Web marketing for the arts and crafts of Seelampur and Government services & entitlements….

With the help of the community, a portal www.seelampurmart.org has been established for marketing arts and crafts made by the women. The portal provides forward-backward market linkages by providing direct access of the portal to the producers. The producers of arts and crafts can register themselves at the portal; showcasing their products with their pricing. The portal administrators subsequently would approve inclusion or otherwise of their products in the portal. There have been brisk sale of the arts and crafts from the portal. The women have been encouraged to access the portal themselves directly for knowing pending orders and how these orders can be served. Entire back end supply-chain management for processing the order is gradually getting transferred to the women.

Education leads to Opportunities for Capacity-building and Employment:

Disadvantaged women of Seelampur area with handicaps in education and training have benefited from opportunities in the IT labour market, if they can master basic aspects of computer use and maintenance. Such training in basics outside the formal education system is an area that some organizations have tried to explore. We have also tried to link the training initiatives to the employment market, learning from earlier experiences that ICTs don't materialize in real terms for poor women. However we have experienced that the outcomes of the convergence of gender and class bias and gender-based discrimination at all institutional levels - the household, the community, the market, and the state - imply that for women, work opportunities in the mainstream are hard to come by, even after acquiring the requisite skills.

To enable the benefits of IT to trickle down to poor women, the larger institutional framework of the IT industry has to make spaces for the poor in general, and poor women in particular. A more pro-active policy in public and private institutions towards induction and mentoring of socially disadvantaged women is required.

Education leads to Opportunities for Self-employment:

Self-employment through ICTs is another area has been seen as an income-earning possibility for the poor women of Seelampur. The tele-centre business, which is based on the enterprise model, has been amply demonstrated by organizations like n-Logue that provide rural ICT solutions. The scope for such enterprises has to be exploited in the Project so that poor women can benefit from the business opportunities that ICTs offer.

One of the areas worth replicating is the Village Pay Phones project of the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh is an example is this area that has received a lot of attention. In the late 1990s, the Bank started to lend money to women to buy cellular phones. Typically they borrowed the equivalent of US$350 to buy the phones and sell telephones services to villagers. A pilot program involving 300 villages revealed that women were earning about US$700 per year after covering all their costs, more than twice the per capital annual income in Bangladesh. Currently, there are more than 20,000 village phones in operation and many more are expected online soon. One of the conditions of participation in the project was that husbands sign over ownership of property to their wives, thus creating protection for women should their husbands decide to appropriate the resource from their small business1.

Concluding observations:

These small steps lead to changing relationships, practices, and adapting of old values to new situations as also assist in poverty alleviation. As we go along, these seemingly small changes may

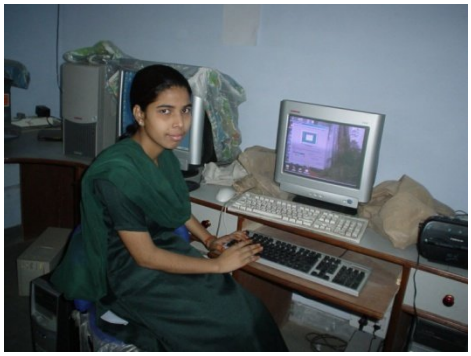
go on to impact poverty and other human development indicators. The Seelampur experience shows that while every effort is being made to respect the local culture, the project is also impinging on the participants and the stakeholders, making them think and act a little differently.

The initiative has shown that ICTs, ODL and e-Governance can be utilized to understand, preserve, and share cultural heritage apart from enhancing living standards and income generation since ICT drive exposure that builds confidence in the women due to which they are able to articulate their opinions better. The Seelampur Community ICT initiative has been an interesting learning experience for the community as also for the project ream.

Increase in income: Above 22% women of Seelampur have got some increase in their income after they have completed their vocational courses while 21% sometimes get some work of stitching or they save money by stitching the clothes of their family members so the increase in their income is not definite.

Replication:

The model of the project has been replicated in various parts of India; as well as in other South-Asian countries viz. Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Pakistan. The project has been showcased at the World Summit on Information Society www.itu.int/wsis and selected for replication in a few Sub-Saharan and East African countries.

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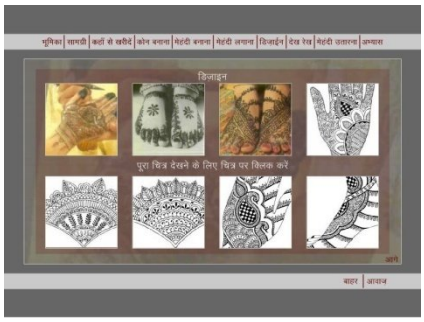
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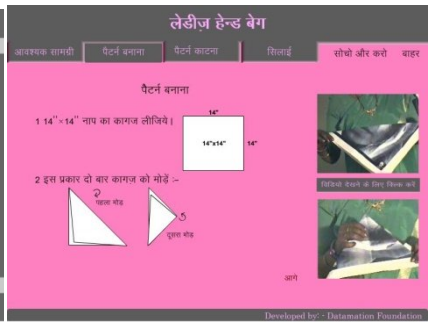
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Developed by:- Datamation Foundation


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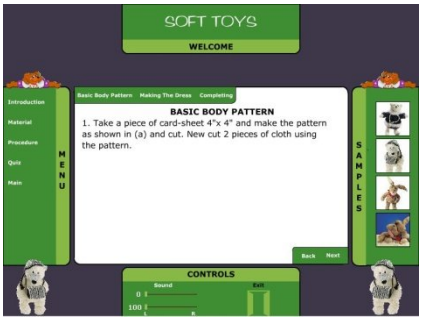
SOFT TOYS
WELCOME
MENU
SAMPLES
BASIC BODY PATTERN
1. Take a piece of card-sheet 4"x 4" and make the pattern as shown in (a) and cut. New cut 2 pieces of cloth using the pattern.
CONTROLS


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