



Protestors stand in the rising waters of river Narmada. Photo from Abhivyakti.

Abhivyakti Media for Development
31-A, Survey No. 8, Kalyani Nagar,
Anandwalli Shivar, Gangapur Road
Nashik 422 013, Maharashtra, India
Telephone and Fax: (91 0253) 346128
E-mail: amdnsk@vsnl.com
Web site: www.abhivyakti.org.in

Nitin Paranjape is the director of Abhivyakti (Expressions), which he co-founded in 1987 in the Indian city of Nashik in Northern Maharashtra, as a vehicle to promote media initiatives for developmental purposes.

It has grown to comprise a staff of 23 and an impressive array of programs. Abhivyakti's main purpose is to "enhance the voice of the voiceless by strengthening the communication resources of developmental actors in the process of empowering the people." It does this through work in four program areas: producing and publishing audio-visual material; disseminating media material and maintaining a resource center; providing training and support for capacity building and media education; and networking and alliance building with other groups.

In sharing his background with the other authors via online dialogue, Nitin expressed the sense of deep connection between personal story and political action. He wrote:

The foremost question before me is not the usual who I am, though I must confess of the struggle to cope with its grip. The question rather is what is the purpose of this existence? It has been uppermost in my life ever since I became conscious of myself in a middle-class family on the move due to compulsion of the job my father had chosen. Being the elder (between two brothers), I was expected to be a role model of sorts, and its pressure perhaps led me to view life differently. Rejecting the normal career paths, I chose social work (now called developmental work) as a profession. . . . In a way, Abhivyakti has shaped me considerably as I got fully involved in shaping its destiny. The initial dream was to produce people-centered video that portrays the reality from their perspective. Soon, the experiences of using video by the activists led to critical reflections and change in gear. We moved on to a holistic

look at communications, and how through our interventions we could strengthen the voices of the voiceless. . . . My interest is in making communication processes nurturing, open and empowering.

India is a nation of tremendous internal contradictions, with a huge commercial cultural industry and high-tech development driving a modernization that coexists with extremely poor and underdeveloped communities. This essay has something to teach that will be of interest to readers in many regions of the world: even when people have very little in the way of material goods, social imagination can still accomplish a great deal.

Small Media, Big Potential!

by Nitin Paranjape

We all remember much better what we have discovered and said ourselves than what others have told us.

ANNE HOPE AND SALLY TIMMEL, "TRAINING FOR TRANSFORMATION:
A HANDBOOK FOR COMMUNITY WORKERS"

She was bubbly, energetic and vivacious, moving gracefully, carrying herself well without showing the torment she was feeling and had perhaps felt since childhood. She was one of several grassroots activists in India engaged in a process of transforming a community. She was participating in a workshop on team building, and in a voice choked with pain, she shared her anguish: the anguish of being dark-complexioned and not feeling beautiful; of not feeling she belonged; of feeling lonely, incompetent and unloved. These feelings had affected her identity and functioning to such an extent that she did not believe in her own beauty. Low self-worth and self-esteem were natural consequences.

She was not alone. In another instance, an active young man who wanted to experiment on his agricultural land was being forced by his family to migrate from his community roots to a distant city to work in a nondescript government office, sacrificing all for security. The youth, whose heart lay in his farm, was woebegone and confused. His future was rudderless.

Many grassroots activists and local workers suffer from this complex phenomenon of not valuing their own resources, abilities and culture. Its historic roots go back to the colonization process and its value system, which eroded and fragmented the traditional cultural order. In effect, cultural domination by the few marginalized and isolated the majority of the Indian society. Treated as objects and disregarded, those on the margins accepted the attitudes and values of the elite, adopting the imposed system as their own. Inability to enact the cultural standards of the elite was interpreted as lack of capacity.

Constant reinforcement of these ideas by the dominant class led to low self-esteem by the marginalized class. Given this history, it would be too reductive to label the devaluing of local resources and perspectives as exclusively an impact of globalization; globalization has simply taken advantage of this longstanding historical reality. By promoting a consumerist and elitist culture, globalization's forces exacerbate this state of affairs. The spread of this global culture has further devalued local cultures' inherent abilities and strengths, resulting in loss of critical reflection and participation in community life and action. Communities can no longer view their problems from their own perspectives, relying on their own creative methods and viewpoints to generate possible solutions. Instead of cherishing a vibrant and interactive culture that values its own experiences, people have become accustomed to viewing life from the galleries. Unable to distinguish between representations and reality, they accept life passively.

Abhivyakti (Expressions), our media organization in India, was created in 1987 to respond to these conditions through various facets of media. To achieve this, it has not confined itself merely to producing media, but through its various programs has taken the initiative in popularizing media. We work primarily with developmental workers and facilitators, but some of our programs focus on grassroots community members.

Based in Nashik (a fast-growing city north of Mumbai/Bombay, in west central India), Abhivyakti has developmental communication as its main focus, with intervention strategies built around it. In the present climate, where commercial interests dominate space and representation in the mainstream media, it is increasingly unlikely that media policies and programs will be people-oriented. It is in this context that we see a specific role for media and communication. Can media help to strengthen the voice of the voiceless? Is it possible for marginalized people to be heard amidst the turmoil of dominating voices of vested interests?

Our work with media has definitely shown that these things are possible. Our greatest joy is when marginalized people are able to connect with their inner resources and voice their concerns and struggles, when they are able to assert their choice of actions, demanding a life of dignity. It is inspiring to see people break out, creating expressions that spring from their deepest realities. I will always cherish the moment when a group of rural women defied expectations to enact a small role-play demonstrating their woes before bank officials; or when shy girls from a hostel for deprived students banded together to demand from the authorities their right to information. What they wanted was a daily newspaper! Such acts by marginalized communities in the face of adversity and fear kindle our faith in the potential of media to generate a dialogue, stimulating people to facilitate the desired change. Helping to bring about such moments is a challenge, one we have undertaken to fulfill by



Media being tested in a community for its effectiveness. Photo from Abhivayakti.

promoting the right to information, the right to communicate and the right to participate, asserting a community's culture.

Creative use of media in partnership with people helps diverse marginalized voices to be aired and heard within a community. We believe in the power of the media as tools to initiate dialogue between people and developmental actors—activists, facilitators and *animateurs*—on development issues affecting the region. The communication process encourages participation, exchange of perspectives and the creation of an enabling environment that makes it possible for the community to voice its developmental concerns, problems and aspirations. It further enables joint reflection about the historical course of prevalent development practices and about ways to change them through collective action. Media function as tools to bring forth issues of concern, creating platforms for coming together and building long-term relationships. Media can be powerful allies in promoting the empowerment process and popular political consciousness and in creating a base—a launching pad—for governance by the people.

The supporting role of media and communication in development needs to be understood as part of the larger goal of strengthening the voices of the voiceless.

In producing alternative media material that takes cognizance of developmental issues and presents them from a pro-people perspective, in collecting and distributing such alternative forms of expression, in building effective communication capacities of developmental actors and in creating spaces that bring people together and provide opportunities to voice their aspirations,

concerns, needs and problems—in all these ways, we see great potential in developmental communication interventions to empower the people.

Developmental media have functions which, if understood and realized, can accelerate the process of social transformation, breaking the shackles of the one-way communication mode of the mass media. They provide means to engage people in a dialogue, creating an atmosphere conducive to participation, action and possible partnership in the future. They ensure that a process of relationship is initiated between the developmental actor and the people—crucial for sustaining interest, motivation and trust, for people to realize their situation, understand its dynamics and feel confident to act from their own perspectives and vision.

What then are the main strategies of developmental media? As described below, the primary strategies of Abhivyakti's interventions are:

- Production and distribution of alternative images;
- Breaking the culture of silence;
- Strengthening communication resources; and
- Partnerships and alliance building.

PRODUCTION AND DISTRIBUTION OF ALTERNATIVE IMAGES

This strategy means taking cognizance of the diverse realities experienced by marginalized and vulnerable sections of society and promoting cross-cultural exchange. The void that exists in mainstream media in terms of developmental images and perspectives needs to be addressed by producing audio-visual materials that promote the perspectives, problems and aspirations of marginalized people on a regular basis. Systematic efforts must be made to circulate such audio-visual materials so that they are much more widely used by developmental actors, becoming part of public consciousness.

Abhivyakti's aims in audio-visual production carry us in two directions. First, we produce images on video on developmental themes and popular struggles that otherwise rarely find space in the mass media; and second, with active participation of the community, we design innovative low-cost, easy-to-use media material on social issues.

Apart from assisting other developmental groups in producing their audio-visual material, we produce and circulate our own quarterly video magazine entitled *Satyachitra* (*True Stories*), featuring stories, struggles, issues, projects and protests of people fighting for their rights. The idea is to produce such images from a pro-people perspective and bring them to the forefront. *Satyachitra* provides an impetus for discussion, creates linkages and often gives evidence straight from protest sites which would otherwise be hard to visualize. It triggers interest and generates enthusiasm for causes, for example, our video on the "Save the Narmada" campaign. It depicts several months of

peaceful resistance and agitation launched by activists and villagers in protest against the government's decision to raise the height of the Sardar Sarovar Dam on the river Narmada, thereby submerging many villages, displacing thousands of villagers and destroying the ecosystem.

The *Satyagraha* (a combination of the Hindi words for “truth” and “firmness,” coined by Mahatma Gandhi to describe nonviolent resistance) was launched when the monsoons started in 1999 as a protest against this inhumane decision. The video shows the struggle of the villagers of the Narmada valley, who on several occasions defied the swirling waters of the river as it entered their villages to fight for their lives and their environment, standing in the cold rising water as their mark of protest.

The video magazine also serves as a networking device, filling a void in the sharing of information, perspectives and experiences among groups involved in development work. In the hectic pace of work, visual presentations of movements and their action-strategies help developmental actors to reflect on and understand social issues. Resources developed by social organizations—for example a folk play on the issues surrounding a watershed program excerpted in one issue of *Satyachitra*—evoke considerable interest. More important, as in the watershed-program case, it led to profitable exchange, sharing and networking among organizers. Another inspiring story we covered dealt with rural women of Chandwad town (near Nashik) who eagerly came forward to embrace technological know-how, collectively building a water tank on their own in order to overcome the acute water shortage in their village.

Our second aim—designing innovative low-cost media—equips developmental actors with easy-to-carry, -use and -modify material such as puppet kits, flannel story (sometimes called “flannel board”), flip charts and posters. Such modest media materials have great potential to get the message across, but because guidelines are often lacking for effective use, they are not employed as widely as could be. We have learned that if such materials are packaged into kits with instructions and accompanied by demonstrations of their utility, their use increases rapidly. This accessibility also enlarges the motivation of grassroots workers to develop such media on their own. In essence, these activities apply the principles of appropriate technology to communications. We actively encourage this practice of locally produced audio-visual material, providing training and assistance as needed.

However, the idea of people facilitating their expression in concrete forms is not yet widely understood in our region. Toward this end, we made a small beginning that was amply rewarded. While working in the tribal Ashram Schools (residential schools run by the government), we tried out various media forms that would stimulate students' learning in a classroom situation.

We hit on the idea of a “wall paper,” inviting students to pen their ideas and illustrations on a theme related to school life. The bimonthly paper, controlled solely by the students themselves, aimed at stimulating the students’ thinking and creating a space for their expression in a free and nonthreatening atmosphere. The wall paper opened avenues of expression hitherto untapped or suppressed. Students wrote with feeling and concern about their plight in the school. Their world suddenly opened up with such participation and intensity that their voices carried even to the authorities against whom they were raised, who then became more alert and cautious.

The initiation of the wall paper and the opportunities it presented to students should be seen in context. The tribal students residing in these schools live in fear of authorities and under conditions not conducive to learning. In such government-run schools, communication between students and teachers and among students themselves is restrictive and not very stimulating to creativity. A majority of the students contributed to the wall paper venture. But for some, it seemed at first more like an examination than an independent project; quite a few copied, merely following others. They were either unwilling to try being original or were afraid of the consequences of opening up with their honest views.

Yet on the issue of the quality of food served by the school, many (without disclosing their identities) wrote about corruption, unhygienic food, the inadequate quantity of nourishment provided and other malpractices. It created quite a stir. The nonteaching staff involved in food storage, preparation and distribution were naturally upset. Their union at the district level took up the matter for investigation. The wall paper thus acted as a link between the students and the authorities.

The wall paper is a good example of a medium which carried the often neglected voices of vulnerable children, directly communicating their views and feelings to the external world. The wall paper truly represents a fine example of democratic media by the students, of the students and for the students. It provided tribal children with an opportunity to create their own messages without any pressures from school authorities. It was also a vehicle for exchanging thoughts with other students from different schools, thus binding them together as a cohesive group capable of finding answers to some of their common woes and miseries.

The wall paper also acted like a window to the outside world, creating awareness about the neglected world of the Ashram Schools—not just about their problems, but also about their ways and beliefs that are often ignored and sidelined. In their own language, expressed in their own way, perhaps for the first time, they communicated directly with the external world. The activities involved in producing the wall paper were themselves steps toward

empowering the students and enhancing their self-esteem. Finally, one sees in this small example the potential for reversing the trend in the flow of information. Having been mere receivers, as both students and tribal people, this process gave the young people the chance to become creators and also providers of information on various themes of importance to their lives and to the outside world.

The value of alternative media like those we use at Abhivyakti lies in their low cost and ease. Most of these media forms are made from locally available resources and are easy to produce and use, requiring no sophisticated technical knowledge. Puppet shows, a popular medium with any audience, create drama, movement and action commenting on sensitive issues affecting the community. Fabrication requires little more than cloth, plastic balls, socks and other such ordinary items. Flannel story, another effective medium, requires only a length of flannel or even a blanket on which visuals backed with velvet (flocked) paper are displayed. The hairy surface of the flannel and the roughness of the velvet paper create static energy that enables the visuals to be stuck temporarily onto the flannel. To tell a story, the visuals are removed and stuck back in different positions, and this movement, accompanied by the animated voice of the presenter (our grassroots worker!), creates a dynamism that appeals to the multiple senses of the audience. Similarly, a story may be narrated using flip charts made from colored illustrations on chart paper. Innovative methods enhance the flip chart's value. For example, movement is possible in this two-dimensional medium, adding an element of surprise: a slit in the chart paper allows cutout figures to be easily moved across the surface of the paper while the narrator tells the story.

Although posters are commonly used, their effectiveness is often lost when community members with low literacy levels cannot easily understand their message. As posters are simply put in place to be viewed, they cannot be compared to other group media where an organizer makes a presentation to a group interacting with the media. Cultural habits in rural Indian communities are geared toward attending performances more than viewing visuals or written messages. It is essential to learn such culturally relevant information and to keep it in mind while producing and designing media for the community. From our experience of dissemination, it can be said that media and their presenters make a potent combination in catalyzing dialogue with the community. This clearly puts the responsibility on the presenter for making the media relevant.

Alternative media try to follow the approach of Paulo Freire, the Brazilian educator, in developing critical awareness among the audience. Freire called such media "codes" or "problem-posing materials," the aim of which is to

Behind the scenes of a puppet show presentation. Photo from Abhivyakti.



stimulate discussions in community contexts. Such media—puppet shows, flannel stories, flip charts, posters, simple booklets, stories and audio cassettes—are basically tools to reach out to marginalized communities, initiating dialogue with the people. The idea is to choose a local experience and create media around it. People from marginalized communities rarely value their own experiences, let alone their expertise, leaving them as mere spectators instead of actors in their own worlds. Members of one of the tribal communities in Murbad (in Thane District, south of Mumbai) watched the entire rushes—raw footage—of the video shoot of their program for three hours in complete silence without getting bored. The explanation is that it featured their own images and their voices, which they were seeing in this medium for the first time. Rather than using alien experiences, we believe it is essential to depict people’s own stories and experiences so that they are valued and valorized.

Another notable characteristic of low-cost media is the ease with which community members can produce such things. We believe that the production process itself is empowering. Both the choice of subject and treatment and the tasks of production create involvement that stimulates participation and use, as was the case with the Ashram Schools wall paper. This lesson has been brought home again and again in our experience working with grassroots groups. We have observed much more spirited enthusiasm for and use of media campaigns in which activists were involved in the design of the material than in those dealing with equally important issues where there was no similar involvement.



Puppet show.
Photo from Abhivyakti.

As the content of these low-cost media forms is local in nature, the issue of their circulation to others is complex. The question is this: do we have to circulate them? Not all media need to be seen merely as products, an assumption that we have internalized unconsciously from the influence of the market on our lives. Low-cost media forms are subjective in nature and deal with a particular context. They exist for a specific purpose: to stimulate dialogue and create opportunities for people to learn about their own reality. Another characteristic is that these media are most effective with small groups, which is why they are also called group media. Yet it is a loss when such media are banished to some obscure corner after their immediate purpose has been accomplished. In giving such media a continuing life, we give them visibility and character rooted in specific cultures, and this recognition is enormously important.

We have tried two things to promote activists' awareness of media in developmental work. First, in order to increase visibility of alternative and group media, we have chosen a few experiences and folk stories which have universal appeal and emotional content. We have produced media kits about these in quantity and have tried to distribute them accompanied by demonstrations and sometimes more intensive training. Second, understanding that such alternative media are seldom preserved, we have begun to collect a variety of these forms, classifying them and establishing a media resource center that stores them, with the aim of acting as a clearinghouse to promote awareness and use. Our attempts have been fairly successful and we hope to accelerate their pace through networking.

BREAKING THE CULTURE OF SILENCE

Abhivyakti's experience of the past 10 years' collaboration with other groups, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and educational institutes has taught us that space for developmental media exists, but it is often obscured. The influence of dominant or mainstream media has overwhelmed alternative or developmental media. Organizers and facilitators—the actual users of such media material—have an uneven relationship with these media due to the absence of permanent network structures and channels for reaching out. The commercial media more than anything else stimulate the consumption needs of the audience, but developmental media propose a much more demanding relationship because their purpose is pedagogic, requiring systematic use. Even though producing media for development doesn't require high technology and vast funds, getting these products used is really the sore point. Efforts have to be taken to organize wider dissemination, screening and exhibition so that vital information can be shared with people who are thus motivated to participate in dialogue.

People are used to the culture of silence. Their inhibition about voicing their views limits their social participation. Alternative and group media attempt to defeat this inhibition. Developmental media must be seen in a context and serve a purpose, a strategy or program, functioning as part of an overall plan or campaign. Such media tools are not effective if used in isolation, but media used by a motivated and skilled developmental actor (whether an activist, facilitator or community animator) builds social awareness, stimulates people to critically examine their realities and inspires a collective spirit for desired action. The advantages of alternative communications media lie in their adaptability, enabling a good communicator to carry audience members to a new awareness of their own environment, stimulate them to perceive their own roles and influence them toward bringing about the desired impact. Further, alternative and group media's effectiveness lies in their two-way communication approach and three-cornered framework: addressing issues of concern to the audience; showing that the answers can be sought and found by audience members themselves; and showing that the audience must control implementation of solutions to ensure the desired results.

Abhivyakti's work stresses the values of participation, dignity, open communication, importance of local resources and equality in decision making, leading toward empowerment. The use of media in this process of empowerment depends largely on the link-person between the media and the people—the development actor—on whose shoulders lies responsibility for initiating the process. A great deal therefore depends on the capabilities and perspectives of these link-people and their organizations. This is an area of weakness that needs to be addressed.

Our experience indicates that not many NGOs or developmental actors are properly oriented toward alternative and group media use. Often they lack faith in their effectiveness. For example, our motivational video on the fight of tribal people against corrupt forest officials was shown one evening in a tribal village. The next day, the village was visited by a petty forest official who demanded his “dues” and got away with it. The tribal people did not protest. Later we discovered that the activist who had shown the video had failed to initiate a discussion after the screening of its relevance to local people’s experience with their forest, thus losing an opportunity to strengthen the confidence of the tribal villagers.

As this demonstrates, in order to promote pedagogical use of media for empowerment, strengthening the skills and resources of developmental actors assumes significance. Workshops and other training methods have become the principal tools at our disposal to achieve these aims of shaping and building the perspectives and expanding the capacities of developmental actors.

STRENGTHENING COMMUNICATION RESOURCES

Capacity building involves strengthening the communication and media resources of developmental and grassroots actors. Effective communication is the key to understanding and building relationships with varied constituencies in the process of empowering individuals, collectives and communities.

Along with structured training, our methods also include field-testing, video feedback and group work and opportunities to reflect on experiences. The emphasis is on promoting learning through participation, interaction, sharing and the use of multiple sensory approaches to cater to different learning styles.

For the past five years, since we initiated training programs to expand use of media for development purposes, the experience has been mutually gratifying for both the participating developmental actors and ourselves. The thrust of our program has been in two directions: first, understanding developmental media philosophy and imparting low-cost and alternative media production skills; and second, strengthening the communications perspective and skills of developmental actors.

This second dimension has evolved gradually, guided by our belief that society is characterized by the domination of a powerful few who control vast resources and knowledge and channel the flow of communication in keeping with their interests and to their own benefit. This structure hardly favors those who are vulnerable and marginalized, those with meager or no resources who are largely unorganized. The majority of the marginalized have rich inner resources and knowledge but do not value them, becoming mere receivers of the messages others create. One way we acted on this

Participants at a training workshop in low-cost media. Photo from Abhivyakti.



understanding was by organizing training programs for developmental actors, parents, teachers and community leaders to learn new skills, attitudes, insights and knowledge. Our educational process creates an opportunity for sharing and interaction, leading to introspection concerning our selves and our behavior and inspiring change. Bringing about social change through alternative development processes entails informing, mobilizing and organizing people to stand up for their rights so that they can identify, articulate and struggle to achieve their fundamental right to lives of dignity and freedom.

Further, given the present market-dominated state favored by globalization, alienation and isolation of the poor are on the rise. Individualism and consumption patterns favoring a materialistic lifestyle are emerging, devaluing local initiatives and efforts. The root of social relations lies in communication practices. The communication process prevalent at present is biased toward the dominant and powerful; this hegemonic approach tends to disempower people. Its impact can be traced in structures and institutions from the family, schools and communities to many NGOs.

The need for an open, just and democratic form of communication that would lead to the lasting ties and relationships needed for pro-people development processes cannot be overemphasized. It becomes imperative, therefore, to put communication on the agenda and give it the attention it deserves.

The role of our training here is to encourage sharing of views and experiences guided by a facilitator in an atmosphere conducive to reflection and learning. Essentially, by focusing on crucial aspects of the communication process, we

encourage participants to view themselves not as resourceless, but as sources of information, wisdom and knowledge. This approach values participation and exchange for participants' own learning. Dialogue, interaction and sharing lead to collective learning. Recognizing participants' own contributions and worth to the collective spirit, the process instills or reinforces a sense of empowerment. Feedback from numerous participants has indicated that the training provides much-needed space to reflect upon their resources, their communication styles, their organizations and the steps they have taken to create change in themselves and in their organizations.

However, one palpable countervailing trend has been a decline in confidence, self-belief and critical abilities among activists, a major crisis that needs to be confronted, as it affects their identity and functioning, with impacts upon not only the process but the community as well. One of the major reasons lies in the inability of formal schooling to instill values of self-belief and empower students' expression in their own cultural language and idioms. Communities fed a daily diet of mushy soap operas, stereotypical serials and advertisements need strong local currents to uphold their cultural perspectives. It is difficult to create and defend a belief system that can survive the continuous onslaught of consumerist culture. Promoting alternative modes of production and pro-people values is fraught with immense struggle and demands conviction. It is imperative that the carriers of alternative value systems are able to withstand opposing influences by appreciating their own cause, creativity and commitment. This shift in individual consciousness will in turn motivate and strengthen our collective endeavor to counter the forces of globalization.

But is this possible? Can alternative cultural products that highlight local issues, often emerging from people themselves, be sustainable? Our hope is that such practices motivate people to think of themselves as valuable resources, second to none, and to assert their right to produce their own forms of media, disseminating them for wider appreciation and benefit. If this succeeds, it will point the way for diverse cultures to exist and flourish in the future. Right now, success depends on activists themselves, who are suffering a sort of identity crisis, promoting an enabling and healthy culture that values their own dignity and worth.

PARTNERSHIPS AND ALLIANCE BUILDING

Our efforts to create distribution channels for developmental media are still in the early stages. We have decided to collaborate with a few developmental organizations in our region, where we have been able to undertake a formal networking process among such groups. The networking organizations have come together to work on the issues confronting the region with the aim of facilitating effective collective functioning. The network, built on the foundation of three years' partnership, is based on democratic communication processes, motivating partner organizations to use media in their work, thus enhancing the capacities of their activists in media production and dissemination, and in critical analysis of mass-media influence. As this networking has proceeded, the issues of the region more and more find their way into our productions, particularly our video magazine, *Satyachitra*. As we have featured issues such as scarcity of water and malnutrition and highlighted activists' views and innovative approaches, viewership and circulation have expanded, and regional problems, voices and collective initiative and spirit have found a vehicle. We see this as an alternative to the structural distortions that exist in mass communication systems, an opportunity to present images of the other reality that is experienced by the majority of the populace but which is often ignored and bypassed.

We see the emergence of the network—its opportunities to learn and understand differences, share meaning and perspectives, and the relationships it enables—as creating a force that challenges established exploitative practices. Our aim is to learn from experience, striving to enhance communication processes and strengthen cultural practices that herald a better community life. These are part of the challenge we have accepted: to develop systemic media and communication strategies and interventions, supporting cultural practitioners in becoming more conscious and effective. Through these efforts, we find endless possibilities for reaching people and helping to empower them.