

## *Innovative Pilot Projects*

### The TELPE: Technology enabling rural governance training in India

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This contribution describes the design of an innovation in pedagogical approach, enabled by technology, for a course targeted to elected representatives of rural government in India. The course titled 'Decentralization to Local Governments' was conducted in the rural Kutch District of Gujarat State in India through multiple modules. The content of the course focused on concepts and practices of decentralized governance. Learners in these areas face socio-economic and formal education deprivation but are rich in their experiential knowledge and indigenous cultures. An innovative multi-modal program design called 'TELPE' was deployed to enable local governance learning to extend beyond the classroom and capture experience, through technology. The use of technology with its associated pedagogical practices created networks of remote rural learner-practitioners. It built communities and enhanced collaboration, sharing and publishing of experiential knowledge, thereby creating a larger learning experience beyond the classroom.

#### **1. Background**

India is over 1.2 billion people with 68.8% living in rural areas<sup>1</sup>. Governance at rural levels is managed through the 3-tier institutions of self-government, called Panchayati Raj<sup>2</sup>, up from the village level to the district. Village government at the grassroots level called the 'Gram Panchayat', comprises member representatives who are directly elected by the village population. The vision of the Panchayati Raj Ministry<sup>3</sup> at Central Government is "To attain decentralised & participatory local self-government through Panchayati Raj Institutions". Building the rural elected representative's capacity to govern through training interventions is a key national agenda involving government as well as non-government actors.

<sup>1</sup> Population data retrieved on July 18, 2013 from Census of India provisional population totals 2011 [http://www.censusindia.gov.in/2011-prov-results/paper2/data\\_files/india/paper2\\_at\\_a\\_glance.pdf](http://www.censusindia.gov.in/2011-prov-results/paper2/data_files/india/paper2_at_a_glance.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Wikipedia entry on Panchayati Raj [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Panchayati\\_raj](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Panchayati_raj)

<sup>3</sup> Vision of the Ministry of Panchayat Raj <http://www.panchayat.gov.in/>

In the year 2006 the Ministry of Panchayati Raj of the Government of India brought out its National Capacity Building Framework (NCBF). The intent of this is wide ranging. It describes the framework for content, strategy, resource persons, scale, scope, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. This raises mammoth challenges. The need arises to train some 2,200,000 elected representatives through an estimated 250 Central level and 31,250 state level resource people.

Critiques of the implementation of National Capacity Building Framework point to deficiencies in hardware, trainers and content. Delivery of training continues to be “supply driven” (Raghunandan, 2012), even if enabled by satellites. Progress could conceivably be made by overcoming hardware, trainer and content deficiencies. However, this alone is unlikely to achieve the dream of the NCBF. The need is for concrete strategies devised to its intent, supported by a new pedagogical design (as mentioned below). The challenge inherent in this cannot be left unattended.

The National Capacity Building Framework prescribes pedagogical approaches and the manner in which training should be handled. The focus is not on information alone, but promoting processes of exploration, discovery and growth, facilitation rather than lecturing, a respect for grassroots experience and native wisdom. It is also on networks, collectives, peer learning, and exposure to best practices. The value of continuous learning, leading to an enhanced sense of self-esteem and confidence is upheld. It is this thrust that calls for a uniquely designed course using a comprehensive pedagogy.

## **2. A Course: decentralisation to local governments (DTLG)**

A course titled ‘Decentralisation To Local Governments’ (DTLG) was created with the support of the Local Governance Initiative South Asia (now renamed Local Governance Initiative & Network) funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation. This course was targeted to rural elected representatives in the western Indian states of Gujarat and Rajasthan. The course focused on concepts and practices of decentralized governance.

Two rounds of the course were run from November 2010 till May 2012. In both states, local non-government organisations (NGOs) contextualised and coordinated the course - Kutch Nav Nirman Abhiyan (KNNA) in Gujarat and the Foundation for Ecological Security (FES) in Rajasthan.

The DTLG Course comprised the following core ‘Local Governance’ classroom training modules taught by Public Governance experts over a seven month period:

1. Prajatantra - Democracy
2. Ayojan ka Adhikar – The Right to Plan
3. Bhavishya – The way ahead

This report describes the need and design for an innovative approach towards technology enabling the first DTLG program, in Kutch District, of Gujarat State.

### **3. Need for innovation**

#### *3.1. The learners*

A demographic profiling by Kutch Nav Nirman Abhiyan (2008) of rural elected representatives in Kutch District, showed about 72% literacy with members largely occupied in agriculture and animal husbandry. About 61% had an annual household income of less than INR 50,000/- (Euro 641 as of exchange rate July 17, 2013). Evidently, the DTLG target learner group of rural elected representatives was drawn from a community that contends with serious socio-economic and formal education deprivation.

Equally, and in contrast, they are rich with the experience of governance and its complexities at the local level. This experiential knowledge is often tacit. At best, it is expressed in training programs during participative discussions. While training has to do with learning some skills and concepts in the classroom, it is deeply connected with experiential learning in the field, on the job. We recognised that this tacit knowledge needs to be unlocked and made explicit in a more lasting way. It needs to then be shared and enriched.

#### *3.2. Role of technology*

Most approaches for the role of technology in governance capacity building in India tend to focus on the use of technology tools for livening up conventional classroom lectures. At other times, technology becomes the administrative mechanism for achieving scale in 'delivering' learning content to remote locations.

In the DTLG course we planned technology to provide the enabling environments, outside the classroom, in the context of experience. It was meant to enlarge the scope of classroom based, teacher focussed, time bound programs, towards a more inclusive and network based, collaborative and continuous learning, for practitioner communities.

#### *3.3. The need for a new pedagogy*

Our rural elected representatives face other challenges. They are dispersed in remote areas and must travel long distances to engage with each other. They lack English language ability and computer literacy. This creates a need. However it also turns the task of capturing local experience and networking remote learner-practitioners through technology, into a riddle. How could this inclusion, of rural governance functionaries into an online continuous learning community, be achieved, within the primary agenda of governance training?

The solution devised was through a strategy and pedagogical design called the Technology Enhanced Learning Process Enabler (TELPE) that was embedded into the DTLG program. It comprised of an additional three modules with a significant fieldwork component. These were targeted at computer literate grassroots NGO

activists. The model conceived was one of a mentored approach as described in the next section.

#### **4. The TELPE. An exposition of its structure and function**

##### *4.1. Two Groups of Learners*

To overcome the challenges described in the earlier section and achieve what was needed in the short span of seven months we devised a mentored model. Therefore the need was to build capacities of two groups of learners. For one, the course built the governance capacity of rural elected representatives. Secondly, it built the capacity of a mentor group called TELPE – the Technology Enhanced Learning Process Enabler.

Accordingly forty five rural elected representatives were selected for governance training from the Kutch district.

The TELPE group was drawn from the local NGO staff. At outset, this staff was experienced in grassroots development in the region. They had rudimentary English, but were literate in the local languages and the national language, Hindi. This staff had basic computer literacy to the extent of operational email accounts, but rarely used the Internet. With their basic computer literacy and grassroots activist experience this NGO staff was poised to be trained further as TELPEs - technology enhanced learning process enablers - for the larger community. They formed the TELPE learner group of sixteen.

##### *4.2. The Model*

Three TELPE modules were devised to precede the three governance modules as shown in Figure 1 below and prepared the TEL ground for the governance learning. All six course modules were about four days in duration. Local governance experts taught the governance content modules. This author designed and conducted the TELPE program. The TELPE participants further prepared the rural elected representatives, during fieldwork, for upcoming governance modules. Hence all participants came into the governance modules with technology exposure.

The focus of the TELPE modules was three fold.

- First, enhancing NGO staff skill levels from basic computer literacy to remote conferencing, online networking and publishing.
- Second, enabling carrying forward this training to rural elected representatives during fieldwork – through schedules, formats, methodologies and training materials.
- Third, ingraining strategies to leverage network environments towards collaboration and sharing outside the classroom – through discussion groups, knowledge searches and online quizzing.

Fieldwork and mentoring was an essential part of the design of TELPE. The approach was designed to scale during fieldwork - from the TELPEs to rural elected representatives.

During the three governance modules, learners further saw the use of technology in the form of recorded lectures as well as live video conferences with distant guest lecturers through personal computers and free internet software. They also learned to use a GIS based local planning application - Local Governance Support System- created by the 'K-Link' IT department of Kutch Nav Nirman Abhiyan<sup>4</sup>. Daily evening TEL lab sessions were held to support skill development and content creation.

The approach to technology enabled governance teaching-learning in DTLG is depicted in Figure 1.

#### 4.3. Connected computers

Crucial to the model above was the access to connected computers. Laptops with wireless internet connections were procured to create a 'laptop library'. TELPEs worked with these and lent them out to rural elected representatives, as needed, during fieldwork. Shared access and mobility, by a well thought out protocol, ability to carry anywhere, even into a rural home or under a tree, was critical to the pedagogy.

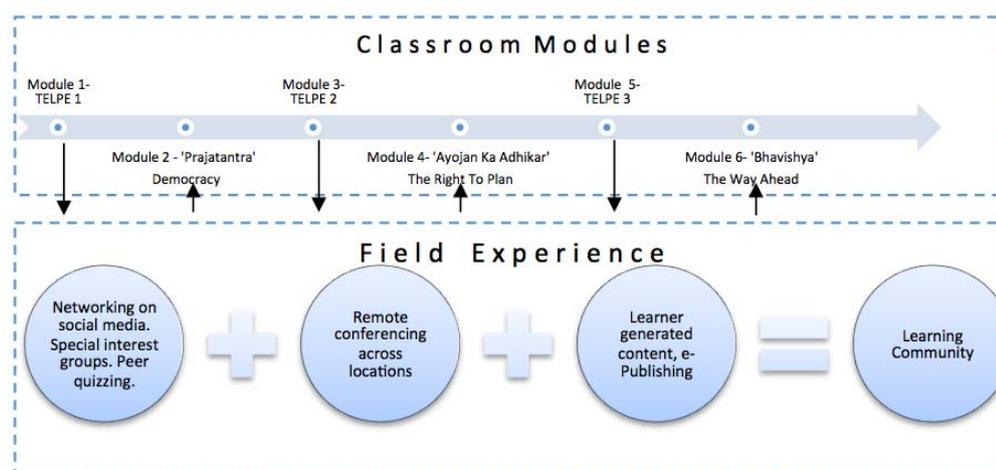


Figure 1. The TELPE modules contribution to the overall DTLG Model

<sup>4</sup> Local Governance Support System 'LGSS' developed by the K-Link <http://lgss.klink.co.in/>



Figure 2. TELPEs & elected representatives during class and fieldwork.

#### 4.4. Mentoring during fieldwork

TELPEs wore two hats, as learners themselves and teachers for the elected representatives during fieldwork (Figure 2). Mentoring during fieldwork was two-fold:

1. Mentoring by TELPEs for elected representatives, to ensure scale up of technology skills – face to face, hands on computers.
2. Mentoring of the TELPEs by this author and others for their own learning and practice - online conferencing and networking.

Schedules, documentation formats and processes were evolved for monitoring and tracking.

## 5. Evaluation

An evaluation of the TELPE modules as well as technology enabled learning aspects of the integrated governance modules is expressed at four levels. These are summarized below:

1. *Learner reaction* – the average rating from participants was at a high 8.5. Qualitative comments show that the program was not only empowering but life-changing as expressed by many. Examples of comments from various learners translated from Hindi:

*“...now, our self-confidence is greatly increased and we have no fear of technology. It feels like I have regained the lost time in my life.”*

*“I have for the first time found an appropriate integration of technology with the processes of the development sector work..”*

*“...closeness of contact has increased, and the mind is ready and eager to learn something new”.*

*“What I learned through the TELPE Program I had never even imagined in my life...”.*

*“I am able to take the views/ideas of other people...I can share...due to this I do not repeat the same mistake and can change my strategy...I consider this training as a goldmine for me...I am no longer alone.”*

2. *Learning* - tests were conducted to assess the skills and knowhow on technology platforms for which participants were trained.
3. *Behaviour* - application of the skills learned can be seen through three means.
  - o The TELPEs created visual training manuals for their elected representatives to carry forward the training.
  - o A quiz question bank of hundreds of questions on local and national governance was created by peers in an online networked group.
  - o The TELPEs and elected representatives together, in collaborative groups, developed five websites that represent their local knowledge from Gram Panchayat clusters and communities.

All these products of learning were examined by trainers as well as peers.

4. *Results*– an external evaluation of organisational impact now would be useful. However, when we completed the course, we had a differently empowered organisation in the Kutch Nav Nirman Abhiyan.
  - o First, we had a highly motivated cadre of TELPEs to enable continuity of technology enabled learning to other governance practitioners in Kutch.
  - o Second, online networked communities were self-organised and grew further to include elected representatives, grassroots workers, policy makers and resource persons.
  - o Third, experiential information and knowledge was shared rapidly between remote corners of the country.
  - o Fourth, special interest groups converged online around governance issues and peer quizzing.
  - o And fifth, knowhow was built for e-conferencing, allowing rural communities to access e-lectures from distant external resource people.

In the most tangible output, five community created and managed websites representing clusters of villages, were built for local knowledge sharing, dissemination

and advocacy. These continue and have the potential to become live platforms for a changing presence<sup>5</sup>.

## **6. Discussion**

### *6.1. Orchestration*

In the present context, the challenge is for the role of faculty. It must go beyond instructional design to orchestration. “Orchestration expands instructional design” (Dillenbourg, 2011). Multiple learning activities span physical and digital spaces for a diverse group of learners. Teaching faculty need a planned and deliberate approach to leveraging the TELPE cadre, the network spaces as well as the learner communities created, to enhance and strengthen all learning activity. To name a few:

- Designing and integrating specific activities to making governance knowledge explicit on e-spaces.
- A planned use of remote conferencing for governance teaching and troubleshooting.
- A more predictable involvement of governance faculty on the online community for discussions.

Similarly, host NGOs could benefit to orchestrate learning activities using the knowhow, even beyond course limits and timelines. If the full potential of continuous learning is to be achieved it is necessary to prioritise a role for a Learning Manager/Mentor. This would enable a focus on sustaining, in fact growing, the communities of local governance learner-practitioners.

### *6.2. National Agenda*

It is obvious that this course focussed on small numbers in the context of the monumental challenges facing capacity building in the nation today. However if value is seen in its pedagogical relevance then an exploration on scale pilots could perhaps leverage the exponential benefits of riding on the network effect and the reach of the Internet.

Additionally, although the DTLG course focussed on content related to local self-governance, it would be worth the experiment to see if the TELPE strategy, methodology and pedagogy could be implemented in other non-formal adult learning contexts, domains and sectors, for rural development in India.

<sup>5</sup> <http://setupanchayat.wordpress.com/>; <http://bannipachchham.wordpress.com/>  
<http://anjarpanchayat.wordpress.com/>; <http://raparpanchayat.wordpress.com/>;  
<http://kutchmahilamanch.wordpress.com/>

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The course included a number of invited guest faculty and experts.

The 'TELPE' conceived, designed and executed by the Technology and Learning practice of consulting firm 'Aquarians Management Consultancy (P) Ltd', India.

The TELPE approach presented at invited conferences including the UNDP CDLW Bangkok 2012 & UNDP Consultation on Peer Learning Methodology for Strengthening Local Governance, New Delhi 2012. Also reported in the 20th anniversary report titled - 'Towards Holistic Panchayat Raj' - by an expert committee constituted by Government of India Ministry of Panchayati Raj, 2013.

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