

Daysof transformative learning



We at Abhivyakti are pleased to share this report detailing our performance of 52 days of facilitating and organizing several workshops in a period of six months. The workshops gave us the opportunity to reach out to diverse audiences and address their learning needs with our unique blend of mixing theoretical inputs with practical skills.

Abhivyakti's relationship with our participants is growing, as we try to understand their position and design capability enhancement learning spaces in their location. The women and the young girls who participated in our workshops benefitted the most as they took on a leadership role in their communities. We are grateful for the support extended to us by the Volkart Foundation to initiate these 52 days of trainings at the Leslie Sawhney Centre. The process was meaningful for us as well as our diverse participant groups, and we hope that the support continues in the future as well.

15 Workshops

326 Participants

268 Women and Girls

Introduction

Abhivyakti Media for Development, a Nasik based organization, has been strengthening the capacities of grassroots organisations and individuals for more than three decades. We at Abhivyakti have initiated a process of developing the potential of individuals and organisations from Maharashtra through capacity building workshops aimed at social transformation. During our journey as media and communication organization, we have shared our knowledge, skills and perspectives with different groups through various capacity building initiatives. Our trainings have been based on the needs expressed by grassroots groups with whom we are in regular contact. For us, as a learning organization, it has been an opportunity to assess our strengths and learn collectively to strengthen our strategies and programmes. For the participants, the workshops have been positive and encouraging, which is the reason for our long experience in this field. Our emphasis on making the learning environment participatory and need-based has given our a unique and cutting-edge flavour. Since last year, we have collaborated with Volkart Foundation, Mumbai to conduct various training programmes for different participant audiences at the Leslie Sawhney Centre, Devlali.

Background

We approached Volkart Foundation in June 2017 with a plan of reaching out to different constituencies such as young girls, NGO functionaries, women leaders, and youth groups. Our aim was to develop the leadership capacities of our participants and make them effective grassroots change-makers who can advocate and facilitate the delivery of quality services to marginalized communities. The proposal was sanctioned for 52 days at the Leslie Sawhney Centre at Devlali near Nashik. We had designed 15 training programmes from October 2017 to April 2018. We completed the trainings in the given period and trained nearly 326 participants. It was hectic period for us as we had to identify and match participants who were interested in the specific training workshops and who could transfer the inputs into necessary actions. As the time-period was short, we went about our planning by contacting different grassroots organizations, our networks and partners, along with institutions and sharing our intent. Due to our many years of institutional presence in Maharashtra, we were able to identify and invite the deserving participants for our training workshops at the Leslie Sawhney Centre. We also had planned the dates in advance and had accordingly booked the training centre after entering into a contract with the Leslie Sawhney Centre. Thus, with meticulous planning and execution we were able to conduct the planned workshops as per schedule.

Our Approach to Training



We have been organizing and facilitating training programs for more than 25 years. Along the way, we have learnt to design and facilitate a workshop which will enable and optimize learning for the participants. Our philosophy of training draws from the methods developed by Paulo Freire, the Brazilian educationist known for his work on developing theory of critical awareness. Our trainings are

always centered around the process of action and reflection. We recognize the potential and energy within each person and each community and build on it to empower them to contribute to the shaping of a society where it is possible for all the people to fulfill their basic human needs. Dialogue is crucial in every aspect of the participatory learning process and of transformation. For years, traditional education and training has been seen as a process of passing on information, from one "person who knows" to those "who do not know". But we know now that this way of teaching has not yielded the required results, nor has it erased the existing social hierarchies. We believe that each person may have valuable knowledge to contribute, and so we need dialogue to draw in the insights of all the participants of our training.

Our training atmosphere is based on the culture of co-learning. It means that we as facilitators provide a framework for critical thinking and reflection. We do this in creative ways by encouraging participants to ask questions and allowing the answers to unfold through participatory exercises and discussions. Hence, the participants, the learners are active in the social construction of knowledge. Knowing the needs as well as the learner's prior knowledge is critical in designing the training sessions. It helps the learners build trust that they are valued and respected, and that their prior knowledge is important part of the building further knowledge. The session flow is developed based on participants' needs and experience. However, it is always challenging to develop this culture of learning which values and is sensitive to the needs of the group. All our training workshops have constantly explored ways to build trust, openness and honesty between the participants and us. We as facilitators are open to their feedback and suggestions as it provides insights to examine our own values and ways of working. Being a facilitator is a continuous learning process and that is what we value the most.

52 Days of Workshops

1. Leadership skills for youth in the North Maharashtra region

The aim was to develop the leadership skills of young change-makers in North Maharashtra region; namely districts of Nashik, Dhule, Nandurbar and Jalgoan. Our past experience has shown us that youth wanted to participate in local governance initiatives, especially in the Gram Panchayat, but were not aware of how to do so. Hence, we incorporated the understanding Panchayati Raj Institutions into our training. This was combined with self-awareness, leadership and media skills. The training program was a mixture of participatory exercises, information sessions, and reflective dialogues. We also provided basic media skills and how to use media for village development. We conducted three such workshops spread over nine days. 69 youth participated in the workshops of which 34 were women. The process of action-reflection on their self and inputs on PRI were much appreciated.

2. Action research skills for girls and young women in ten villages of Nashik district

This workshop was on developing research skills enabling young girls of Nashik district to conduct action research on their own villages. The training included concepts of research and critical thinking, communication skills, interview techniques and building on their own knowledge about the education they received and their own lives. The training equipped the girls, who were shy and silent in the beginning, to become researchers and leaders in their communities. Over 22 days, we facilitated six workshops for the young girls. We were able to train 127 girls, all of whom are now active in their village as 'Shodhinis' (women seekers) and have completed a girls' census and in-depth survey in their villages.

Following the data collection, the girls also learnt the skills of data analysis. Applying this analysis to their own contexts, they understood their reality and the reasons behind some of the issues they

faced. They also drew community maps and analyzed them to understand the how caste and gender dynamics played out in the spatial aspects of their villages. A senior researcher from PUKAR, Mumbai helped the facilitation process in all the workshops.



The aim of the training was to help girl



participants develop an understanding of gender and its various dimensions. The participants came

from ten villages based mostly in the tribal belt of Nashik. The training provided insights and perspectives on the concept of gender, gender discrimination and oppression, and on patriarchy as the systemic root of gender inequality. The concept of patriarchy was also one of the main inputs of this workshop. Girls shared their own low status, instances of sexual harassment and exploitation, and their secondary status in the family and in the village.

The workshop also provided a space to build the psycho-emotive capacities of the girls to deal with sexual violence and gender discrimination, using skills and techniques such as assertive body language, negotiation, and so on. We facilitated two such workshops covering four days and reached out to 69 girls. One of the demands from the girls after the workshop was to conduct similar workshops for the boys of the village and their family members.



4. Leadership skills for elected women representatives in Gram Panchayats

The aim of the workshop was to develop the leadership abilities of elected women representatives (EWRs) of the Gram Panchayats of Nashik region and from different parts of Maharashtra. Again, the emphasis was on providing information on the functioning of local governance institutes and how to increase the participation of village women in matters of local governance. Traditionally, women are not seen or encouraged to show their leadership in the village or in the Gram Panchayat. We demonstrated with examples of village progress where women have taken the leadership role and become active in village affairs. Women also shared their life experiences of subjugation and of how they negotiated and overcame such tough conditions. Such instances proved to be motivating and women learnt from each other's experiences and life stories. They left motivated to claim their right to participate and change the ways of Panchayat functioning. They also understood their working abilities and realized how to reduce gender inequality in local governance.

These workshops were facilitated in association with RSCD, Mumbai, which has more than 15 years of experience in working with elected women representatives from Maharashtra. We facilitated two workshops, one for women of Nashik region and the second for women of other regions of Maharashtra. Two workshops covering 6 days were organized in which 31 elected women leaders participated.



5. Organizational development for grassroots organizations

The aim of this workshop was to understand the identity and functioning of social organisations with special reference to NGOs and community-based organizations (CBOs). We have come across many grassroots functionaries who have been active for many years but are still not aware of the legal and institutional framework of such organizing. Based on this need, we organized the workshop and invited our grassroots partners to participate. The workshop was experiential and encouraged participants to share their experiences.

The workshop ranged from providing theoretical inputs on understanding organizations - its environment, purpose, functioning, governance, legal framework, management issues, human resources, financial management and administration. The workshop was spread over four days and was attended by 19 grassroots functionaries of which 6 were women. External experts like Noshir Dadrawala from Centre for Advancement of Philanthropy, Mumbai and Mohan Survey from VSP were invited to share their experiences and insights.

6. Documentary and short film-making

The aim of the workshop was to develop the skills of documentary and short film-making amongst youth and grassroots functionaries. The skills were related to all aspects of film-making ranging from history of documentaries, script writing, video camera, direction, audio, editing and post production. The emphasis was on the aim of making the film, its purpose and its target audience. The inputs were interspersed with viewing good documentaries and discussing the ways in which they are made. An expert camera person and a director were invited to share their perspectives.



The participants went through the learning-by-doing methodology where they made a short-duration film on topic of interest. Three films were made by the participants on issues of plastic, process of brick-making, and on the Leslie Sawhney Centre. The films were later screened for a larger audience. This workshop was for 7 days, and was attended by 11 participants from mostly Nashik, Mumbai and Marathwada regions of Maharashtra.



Outcome of the Workshops

We have divided this section into two parts. One includes immediate feedback after the workshop and the other consists of a wider but more diffuse benefit of the workshops to the organization and community of the participants.

Immediate Feedback

Overall, the feedback has been positive. Participants have liked our approach, the open and secure atmosphere, the emphasis on learning and on the action-reflection process. The thematic content of each workshop was appreciated. The facilities made available by Leslie Sawhney Centre and by Abhivyakti were also praised. We give below the feedback from the participants from each workshop:

1. Leadership skills for youth in Nashik region

The participants were mostly from rural Maharashtra, interested in applying their contribution to village development. The inputs on Panchayat Raj functioning and how they could participate in it were the most valued. The sessions on self and leadership which were facilitated with simulation exercises created space for youth to share their experiences of not being taken seriously by village leaders, questions on their identity and low self-esteem, and other personal struggles were discussed with care and consideration. It allowed them to gradually value their own selves irrespective of their background. Here the emphasis on personal and inter-personal issues were given respect and time which meant sometimes the process 'slowed up' but allowed free flow of thoughts, exchanges and valuing each other's views. The participants were very happy to be themselves, and that they could talk of matters related to their own and community development. They recognized there are so many challenges and it is their responsibility to find creative solution for their empowerment and that of the community. These workshops helped them to feel confident to raise their issues or inner questions in front of local authority or concern persons.

Action research skills for girls and young women in ten villages of Nashik District

A majority of girls felt satisfied by the research inputs they received. It created a space for them to be away from what they term as a 'closed environment' where their worth was not valued and where they are merely seen as a liability. The two-part workshops, one on understanding research and the second on analyzing data and learning critical skills were liberating, allowing them to speak, perhaps for the first time, in front of others who valued and respected their opinions. They gradually began to take responsibility of the research process in their villages. Because of the open and trusting environment of the workshop, the girls were able to develop the tools of research on their own. Their doubts were not about themselves but in the hindering family and village environment. Some girls opined that their families would not allow them to go out of their homes so often as required by the

research process, some said that their parents were thinking of getting them married them without their consent, some talked about the sexual harassment from boys of their village.

Despite the hurdles expressed, most of the girls were 'research-ready' as could be seen by the Census and Survey data they had collected. In the survey analysis workshop, we selected a few girls as 'Research Champions' and designed the workshop to develop several of their competencies like computing, drawing cross-tables, analyzing the data, comparing it with their contexts, writing and articulating it before a larger audience, answering questions were some of the immediate benefits of the research analysis workshops. In these workshops, the girls got an opportunity to learn and work on the computers, which they acknowledged as a valuable skill.



3. Understanding gender for adolescent girls

The gender workshop was an eye opener for many girls from the rural and the tribal villages of Nashik. As some of the simulation exercises were designed being sensitive their experience of sexual exploitation, the safe environment drew their repressed feelings into the open. Some of the facilitators also shared their own suffering of being women which created an enabling learning environment for all. The girls also became emotional, and vented their feelings of being alone, vulnerable and worthless. This relaxed them further they saw that they were not alone, and this was the common aspect which they shared with the collective. The girls shared that they now understood their life better and reasons for their low status. They felt inspired by 'true-life' stories shown of acid victims which further motivated them towards action. The girls from the village of Tilloli near Dindori in Nashik district shared their readiness to talk with boys of their village on gender equality. Some of the facilitators shared they felt 'light' after sharing their own suppressed experience of sexual exploitation.

4. Leadership skills for elected women representatives (EWRs) in Gram Panchayats

Earlier, the rural women despite of their role as 'leaders' felt marginalized in the context of leadership, communication, and other matters at the local level. These workshops helped them to better understand the concept of Panchayat Raj Institutions, its functioning and role of women in local governance. They realized their own strengths and potential while listening to others. The simulation exercises, where their own anxieties and fears came out in open, encouraged them to share valuable life experiences where they felt vulnerable and inadequate.



The collective sharing of their inadequacies openly allowed a feeling of relaxation. They understood the value of positive and constructive thoughts as the key to their self-worth and leadership. They expressed satisfaction on realizing this connection. The inputs on PRI were like opening the unexplored possibilities. They shared their experiences of PRI functioning where they were not recognized as worthy leaders. The facilitator's vast experience in dealing with local governance issues helped the women leaders to understand the scope of their role, and how they could strengthen their own leadership in the future. The women wanted to know more of PRI functioning and how women could participate freely. Perhaps, an advanced workshop on PRI and women's leadership could be one of the future workshops. Participants felt satisfied on attending the workshop, some of whom expressed that initially it seemed difficult given the long distance of travelling to the venue.

5. Organizational development for grassroots organizations

The participants were happy to know the different aspects of an organisation, especially those related to the social sector where there were so many issues of confusion over identity. The session on understanding the context (organizational environment) was tough to process, however the participants realized its importance as their strategy of impacting their target group was dependent on how well they analysed and understood the dynamics of their environment. The internal components of an organization like strategy, systems, mission, management style, human resources and culture was another session where they analysed their own organization and realized their own strengths and weaknesses. This was very helpful to those who were engaged in running the organizations or were involved in senior positions.

The workshop was very heavy for those participants who wanted to start an NGO, but they valued its importance. One senior woman wanting to start a Cancer Support organization felt that she had moved ahead in terms of her own plans of starting an organization. The grassroots organizations from



Marathwada felt they needed more inputs especially on writing proposals.

The session by Noshir from CAP, Mumbai was effective in removing confusions about legal matters concerning NGOs, about taxes and compliances, and which was the best instrument for registration.

6. Documentary film-making

The participants were thoroughly engaged and expressed satisfaction about the workshop process, inputs and its practical focus. They said they liked working on the films and were thrilled with the result of their efforts - the final film. Some of the theoretical aspects of scripting or direction were tough to process but once the practicals started they felt at home. The participants also learnt on negotiating with the external agencies as in the case with the group who were making a film on brick-making. One group experimented with the form, mixing documentary style with fiction, and found it interesting but difficult to execute as the interaction and the group dynamics was not easy. The group from Nanded, 'Sanskruti Savardhan Mandal' who had come with the expectations of learning to make documentaries for their own organization, expressed confidence on the inputs received on every aspect of film-making. The group who made the one on Leslie Sawhney Centre was extremely happy that the short film was liked by the staff of Leslie Sawhney Centre.

Broader Outcomes



As part of our endeavor to keep abreast of what the participants of our workshops have taken back to their real world and what they have applied in their own lives or organizations, we spoke to a few to understand the larger outcomes of our training programs. We give below a few of those outcomes:

1. Leadership skills for youth in Nashik region

Yashoda Waghere from Nashik is actively engaged in village level work like organizing the women of her village, listening to their problems like of sewage, water scarcity, etc. and takes it up in the Gram Panchayat meetings. Being a Sarpanch, she is not afraid of other 'dynamics' and boldly tries to solve the issues. Her rapport has increased with villagers. She also motivates women to participate in the Gram Sabha.

Girish Patale from Nandurbar is now highly motivated about his leadership. He is a member of the Resource Group of the Gram Panchayat, and actively participates in village development work. He has also benefitted from the media inputs and is now actively considering using the media in his work with villagers.

Srikant Walvi is also motivated and is serious about his own leadership. He has started meeting people especially from marginalized groups and encourages them to narrate their problems. He helps people with their issues of house repair and maintenance, ration card, etc. and brings them to the Gram Panchayat. Also, he tells encourages the villagers to participate in the Gram Sabhas. Due to his support, many have started attending the Gram Sabha and participating in it.

Yogita Walvi also understood the importance of taking initiative after the workshop. She now actively works with women of her village. She encourages them to participate in the village decision-making. She tries to listen to their woes and helps in their family matters as well. She has motivated several women to speak in the Gram Sabha, where they have identified the issue of alcohol and are now trying to make the village alcohol-free. She is also started to organize the women into a 'sanghatana' (collective).

2. Action research skills for girls and young women in ten villages of Nashik district

The Girls are now active as 'Shodhinis' in their own village. They have successfully conducted the Census of nearly 1000 girls, collected data in a detailed survey of nearly 350 girls on issues of education, livelihoods, empowerment, and health. They have also made community maps of their villages. They have started speaking in their families about negotiating to delay early marriages. The girls have started discussing such issues in their groups and are thinking of ways to find a long-lasting and collective solution. They are in constant touch with Abhivyakti and narrate their problems without feeling dejected. They want to solve such problems on their own. Such is their motivation.

In three villages, the girls took initiative and with Abhivyakti's help, they have started a small library exclusively for girls and women. The Shodhini Libraries are becoming Community Learning Centres where the girls meet often to discuss, read, and catch up on their lives.

Some girls who were married at an early age even after resisting their disapproval have convinced their husbands and in-laws to let them continue with participating in the Action-Research workshops. This has been a challenging task as their new village is not near and yet three girls have managed to convince their husbands and participate in the workshops!

Girls take their education seriously. Some are thinking of alternative livelihoods. Abhivyakti is also thinking of how we can provide non-traditional and sustainable livelihoods for girls in the future. A few girls who were forced to drop out of formal education have now decided to continue their education by taking admission again.

3. Understanding gender for adolescent and young girls

Girls of Boripada village after attending the gender workshop became aware of the sexual harassment they faced in their workplace. They have now decided to take action on this, having now realized that they have the power to stop such practices. The Abhivyakti team is helping them to address this issue and make demands for safe working spaces for girls and young women.

Girls from Brahmanwade village under the initiative of Anjana Dive went to their PHC to demand the supply of sanitary napkins. She had learnt from her peers that such facility is available in local PHCs. Her demand was not successful, but she has not given up. Such examples are many where girls are showing exemplary leadership and have taken several initiatives to talk of their problems within their families, and sometimes even in the Gram Panchayats.

Girls of all the villages have expressed that they have become more vocal about their opinions in their families, often at the risk of reprimand from the parents, particularly the father. However, they have continued their struggle of dialogue citing comparisons with their male siblings in the family. In the village Gameshgaon, the girls who had taken the responsibility of managing the newly started Shodhini Library were confronted by some men about how would they deal with aggressive boys who would trouble them during library hours. The girls replied that they were not afraid and would handle the boys if they tried to harass them. This was positively received by the Gram Panchayat members who decided to support the girls by stating that they would take severe action against the boys if they trouble the girls.

4. Leadership skills for elected women representatives (EWRs) in Gram Panchayats



Manisha Gangode from Kochargoan village is active in her village as a 'Madhyam Sakhi'. She was shy and passive earlier but now has gained confidence in herself and has started working for the benefit of the women. She now understands the importance of attending Gram Sabha and is encouraging other women to attend the Gram Sabha. Earlier, she did not take her leadership

seriously especially of discussing issues of PESA, GPDP, schemes, budgets with others but now does so with ease. She also has to travel to other villages in her role as Madhyam Sakhi which her parents, particularly her mother, was not very supportive. Manisha was able to convince her mother and travelled to Dahegoan village on her own and now manages to do so regularly. Kavita Bhondwe is physically challenged and is also the Sarpanch of her village Dahegoan. Earlier, she didn't know of her role and neither was she very effective. After attending the workshop on women's leadership, she learnt a lot about Gram Panchayat functioning - of GPDP, budgets, PESA, schemes, etc. and has started applying this knowledge in her functioning and has managed to take up several issues on her own insistence. One particular issue was that the villagers were not getting ration card easily from the authorities. Kavita took efforts to understand the severity of the problem and decided to take the matter with the local BDO and the Tehsildar. After several meetings with the officials, she was able to solve the issue of ration card for the villagers. She is very satisfied with this success and also that she has gained the trust of her villagers. They have

Several women have started talking with each other and learning from their initiatives. They have started a WhatsApp group and are active in discussing their role and actions.

Women are also expressing their willingness to attend advance or other interesting capacity building workshops. They have also told us that are now sure of sending other women to participate in our workshops.

5. Organizational development for grassroots organizations

Savita Jadhav from Lok Nirnay is now aware of the need to develop her own organization further. She is keenly applying the knowledge she gained to her organization by trying to become aware of her context and its dynamics with more clarity.

Kavita is taking steps to register her organization on cancer care. She has already formulated the plan and next steps. She has been meeting



the concerned people working on cancer cure and care.

Dr Seema from Pune is keen to start her own organization working for village development near Pune. She has the proposal ready and within next three months will be applying for registration.

6. Documentary film-making

The participants from 'Sanskruti Savardhan Mandal', Nanded have informed us that they have made a film on one of the programs of their organization. They were also active in taking a lead role in another film on agriculture. They submitted three films in the Yes Bank Foundation's competition held recently in Mumbai where their two films were selected.

Another participant is inspired to write and has written a detailed story on the plight of farmers. He has also started documenting events with zeal and discipline. He has also taken up the issue of water clogging in the local lake and is documenting it on video which he wants to make into a documentary film.

The young person from Mumbai who works with youth has started documenting the activities with youth on video. He wants to make a film on the changes happening in the community due to their work.

A young girl participant, a Shodhini, is now editing a film on her experiences of being a Shodhini and conducting Action-Research.



Summary of the Workshops

No	Name of workshop	Days	Number of workshops	Total Participants		
				Men	Women	Total
1	Leadership skills for youth in Nashik region	9	3	35	34	69
2	Action research skills for girls and young women in ten villages of Nashik District	22	6	0	127	127
3	Understanding gender for adolescent girls	4	2	0	69	69
4	Leadership skills for elected women representatives (EWRs) in Gram Panchayats (village councils)	6	2	0	31	31
5	Organizational development for grassroots organisations	4	1	13	6	19
6	Documentary film-making for youth	7	1	10	1	11
	Total	52	15	58	268	326

Challenges

There were many challenges while implementing the workshops at the Leslie Sawhney Centre. One of the main hurdles was shortage of time in mobilizing participants as the workshops were lined up one after the other. Due to limited resources allotted for such task, we had to rely on our own contacts and past relationships to share the information of the workshops. In some workshops such as the Documentary Film Making one, we had to work with fewer participants than expected as there was no time or resources to undertake adequate pre-workshop mobilization and promotion. Often, the task fell on the project coordinators who also doubled up as the workshop planners and facilitators.

Conclusion

We are satisfied with our performance of conducting 52 days of facilitating and organizing several workshops in a period of six months. The workshops gave us lot of satisfaction as we were able to reach out to the needs of the participants with our unique blend of mixing theoretical inputs with practical application. We also were able to satisfy the learning demands of our participants. Our relationship with most of the participants is growing, as we try to understand their position and application in their location. The women and the young girls benefitted the most as they embarked on a new journey in their respective communities, which going by the tradition of our society is not easy.

We are grateful for the support extended by the Volkart Foundation to initiate the 52 days of training at the Leslie Sawhney Centre, which was meaningful for both us and the diverse participants and hope that the support continues in the future as well.