

Commutiny  
– The  
Youth  
Collective  
(CYC)

Annual report  
**2009**

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**Dear Friend,**

FY 2009-10 has been quite eventful for Commutiny –The Youth Collective (CYC). While the first year of the Commutiny Learning and Leadership Journey (LLJ) with 25 Commutineers saw a closure on April 30, the second year of the journey launched formally on June 15, 2009 with 20 Commutineers on board. In between these 2 major outcomes, lay the design and implementation of various key processes including review of the performance of Batch 1 Commutineers, design and implementation of objective processes for journey extensions of select Batch 1 Commutineers, mobilization and recruitment of Batch 2 Commutineers, building processes for engaging Batch 1 Commutineers with the larger CYC processes, and setting the Batch 2 Commutineers on path through a 5-day learning event, internship placements and launch of their initiatives.

In the meanwhile, to advocate for creating spaces and strengthening youth work in the country, we consolidated what we are calling the Creative Media and Policy Group (CMPG) – a unit that uses media for advocacy for youth development. In the period, CMPG launched a program titled the Community Media Network (CMN) with participation from 11 organizations represented by 14 members and collaborated with 2 partner organizations to host a grassroots media workshop and a community video workshop. CMPG also completed making a film on Active Citizenship in the period.

In the area of Governance and Management, several key processes were put in place during the reporting period, including review and planning, financial management and administration. Bi-monthly meetings of the Board continued to set directions for the different area's of CYC's work while resources to the tune of 32 Lakhs (Financial and non-financial) were generated to facilitate the growth of CYC. Several Board members continued to play hands-on roles in the reporting period.

In the following pages, we have captured the highlights of FY 2008-09. We hope that through this report, you would get an insight how we are taking steps to make a difference to the field of youth development and citizenship in India.

In faith and goodwill,

Ashraf Patel, Convenor

## **About The Youth Collective**

The Youth collective (CYC) is a group of like minded people with passion and belief in the power of young people to bring about social change. This group, with diverse experiences in the sector, came together to help the development sector take a big leap in mainstreaming youth centric processes.

## **Vision**

Every young person engaged in active citizenship

## **Mission**

Building leadership in youth for effective participation in decision making at all levels and creating youth platforms for social change

## **Objectives**

- To promote a common platform for youth development.
- To develop a bridge between youth and those who influence the destinies of youth (corporate, government, civil society institutions, etc.) through effective use of media, a body of knowledge and research.
- To strengthen youth programming in the sector through offering information, designs, knowledge and think-tank services.

## **Key Activities in the period April 2008 to March 2009**

- Facilitating the growth of young Change-Leaders through LLJ (Communitiny Learning & Leadership Journey)
- Facilitating network, workshops and learning spaces for youth and youth development through CMPG (Communitiny Media and Policy Group)
- Facilitating growth of the Collective

## 1. Commutiny Learning and Leadership Journey (LLJ)

### Closure of LLJ Batch 1 with assessments of personal and project journeys and extensions/closures

The first year of LLJ formally came to a closure on 31 April 2009 with 25 Commuteneers of Batch 1 successfully completing the journey. To celebrate it, a one day closure event was held on 26 July 2009 at New Delhi. While the event brought back endearing recollections of shared time through the year long LLJ, it offered an opportunity to all to present their endeavours and experiences during the journey.

We are happy to share that we were able to complete an intensive review prior to graduation of Batch 1 to evaluate the journeys undertaken by each Commuteneer to become effective changemakers - both at a personal and social front, based on which, CYC offered extended support to 6 Commuteneers for 1 more year, to 3 Commuteneers for 6 more months and extended learning support to 1 Commuteneer for 3 months. 1 Commuteneer was recommended for Pravah's Change Looms programme, which offers recognition to outstanding youth-led organisations and offers guidance for their growth and learning.

In the extended phase, the journeys of the Commuteneers remained entirely self designed and demonstrated both maturity and difficulty. While some Commuteneers intensified their work among their associates and strengthened their planning systems to deal with the challenges, others found their skills limited in these areas. Some Commuteneers demonstrated active networking efforts by reaching out to local resource people, organisations, friends, governments to pitch for their initiatives. Some Commuteneers made efforts to find suitable structures to sustain their initiatives in semi formal forms.

We invited applications for further support of six months through CYC and 6 of the 10 Commuteneers applied.

We are happy to report that overall, through structured processes, LLJ as a program fostered close exchanges between different groups of youth – across class, caste, gender, religions, regions, languages.... Through this process young people gained understanding about each

### ACHIEVEMENTS OF LLJ YEAR 1

#### Early successes achieved by ComMuteneers Batch 1

The ComMutiny LLJ supported 25 ComMuteneers to launch social initiatives in 12 states of the country in diverse areas. Majority of these projects were conceived and led by youth from within the communities. We are happy to share the early successes of these youth-led initiatives:

- **Governance:** Commuteneers working on issues of governance mobilized communities in rural Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat for enhanced participation in Gram Sabhas, addressed at least 5 Gram Panchayats towards effective implementation of social security schemes, facilitated the positive use of RTI to access planning and financial information enhanced the usage of NREGA, facilitated the formation of 10-15 groups of youth, women, farmers, etc., with at least 10 of them operating as SHGs. Some of them also enhanced the participation of women in their contexts.
- **Education:** Commuteneers worked intensively with over 500 children in West Bengal, Orissa, Jharkhand, Gujarat in areas of peace education, life skills and citizenship education, media literacy, creative expressions of children along with English, Math and Science learning. In Campbell Bay, Nicobar Islands, a ComMuteneer led a local youth group to offer after school support and recreation in a post calamity context to about 400 children through 7 Child Development Centres.
- **Gender:** Two projects related to building an understanding of gender in adolescent girls and their capacities for addressing issues pertaining to it in a village in Madhya Pradesh and a slum in Mumbai, engaged 40 girls intensively and about 200 extensively. One project focused on building confidence and life skills in visually impaired young women and engaged with about 20 women intensively and reached out to over 200 people to build their awareness on the rights of the visually impaired.
- **Environment:** While a range of environmental concerns such as genetically modified seeds, management of waste and rampant chemical farming have found place in the initiatives of different Commuteneers, one Commuteneer has undertaken an organic farming initiative in his native village in Uttar Pradesh.
- **Youth:** ComMuteneer interventions with youth in Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Nagaland have focused on addressing issues of communalism, exploring role of youth in governance and exploring identities, and promoted engagement of youth in citizenship action. These interventions facilitated intensive engagements from over 130 youth, and an outreach to at least 1000 people.

other, and about themselves – they supported each other in developing/enriching their own respective journeys.

The program also facilitated youth to choose change-leadership/development work as their area of commitment, and match it with their personal aspirations. 2 organizations were registered by 2 Commutineers in the very first year, clearly marking it their chosen vocation for life. 2 other Commutineers are also in the process of registering organizations. 2 Commutineers have returned to their native places to work within their communities.

### **Initiation of LLJ Batch 2**

In the period, the Commutiny Learning and Leadership Journey made an entry into year two with a new group of 19 Commutineers coming into this space post a rigorous selection process comprising application, telephonic and face to face assessment processes. Representing deep diversities in terms of region and socio economic backgrounds, the group brought its own flavor of grassroots identities and experience.

Commutineer initiatives and experiments this year focused on engagement with local youth on personal skill building. Some of the key areas of engagement and intervention were facilitating greater self awareness, exploring issues of environment, notions of active citizenship and capacity building on skill deficit areas like English language and computer usage, working towards enhancing learning opportunities for children through joyful methods, engaging with adolescent girls and boys facilitating deeper understandings of self and redefining gender, caste, religion and class identities, motivating and mobilizing youth for greater engagement with local governance and exploring and demonstrating different farming practices.

Batch 2 Commutineers comprises eight women and ten men. Two young women challenging the adversities of belonging to a denotified tribe and a community practicing customary prostitution have become part of the group. Change project areas range from education to communalism to gender equity, community disaster preparedness to youth participation on a range of issues.

### **Capacity building of Change Leaders**

The LLJ Batch 2 came together in June in a 6 day experiential event at Jhaltola, Uttarakhand between 3 - 8 June 2009, which was also attended by 13 Commutineers from Batch 1 as facilitators. The event included sessions to facilitate deeper self enquiry and sharing, a series of sessions for experiential understanding of group dynamics and processes and discussions to together derive and establish group processes and norms for the LLJ. Other key components to build capacities of the new Commutineers included sessions on using a systems approach for conducting needs analysis to strengthen the foundations and designs of proposed projects and sessions on sustainable development to facilitate sharing and strengthening of Commutineers' perspectives on development.

Taking into cognizance that LLJ is equally a journey for supporting positive self as well as social transformation, this year too we structured our reporting and planning tools to include aspects of self and project and supported Commutineers to undertake detailed planning for their journeys.

Developing over last batch's understandings vis a vis the need for learning throughout the LLJ process, this year the Commutineers were encouraged to undertake learning exposures at relevant points in the journey. The choice of internship venues this year demonstrated a high degree of diversity.

This year, during the experiential event at Jhaltola, the batch of Commutineers democratically elected a small core group of six Commutineers. Keeping in mind the need to enhance camaraderie and instill ownership for the

LLJ program, the first meeting of this core group was held in September 2009. The main objective of the meeting was to encourage the core group to participate actively in the formulation of their own role, functions and responsibilities. The first task before the core group was the organization of the mid-term event, which they were to host.

Between November 9-12, 2009, a 4 day Mid Term Learning and Sharing event was organized. The Event held at Futane Farm, a live demonstration of the organic farming and living with nature philosophy for several years, was conceptualized and executed by a Core group of Commutineers. This year, the thematic exploration of the space was on Active Citizenship and sessions ranging from spirituality to grassroots activism added sharp new dimensions to the detailed sharing and discussions of Commutineer journeys. For mid-point stock taking, the event created a space for an elaborate feedback process. Nitin Paranjpe and Mohit Satyanand, members of the team leading the Impact Assessment of SRTT's grant to CYC also participated in the event and engaged with various participants. At the midterm event, a new core group was also constituted through a process of nomination and election.

In keeping with the design of the program to offer close facilitation to Commutineers, this year too we sourced facilitators from the CYC collective and team. CYC members, who were to take on the roles of facilitators, were happy to match their choices with those of the Commutineers.

#### **Members of the Core Group 1:**

Afaq Ullah  
Aarti Bedi  
Joshua Hishey  
Sangeeta Maurya  
Naveen Vasudevan  
Nirupama Sarathy

#### **Members of the Core Group 2:**

Afaq Ullah  
Joshua Hishey  
Ismail Abdul Sharif  
Naveen Jhalaria  
Nirupama Sarathy  
Smita Sen

## **2. Creative Media & Policy Group (CMPG)**

### **Launch of Commutiny Media Network**

In the reporting period, CMPG's the most significant achievement of CMPG lay in conceptualizing and launching the Commutiny Media Network (CMN) in order to:

- strengthen capacities of youth, youth facilitators and young activists to identify existing spaces in the media and use diverse media effectively to express their concerns and voices; and
- generate media products that can be used to make a planned intervention to improve media coverage on issues of import especially to youth.

To launch the network, CMPG built partnerships with 11 voluntary organizations across India, each of which nominated one/two personnel to join the network as 'Media Associates'. In the reporting period, the Commutiny Media Network (CMN) was formally launched as a shared-values network in Delhi through a consultation from 29th November – 1st December, in which fourteen media associates and the CYC team arrived at the formal norms, values and agenda for the network. At the end of the consultation, the group together decided that CMN would

- bring forward youth perspectives and voices on grassroots' issues towards a rigorous and meaningful process of social change.
- visibilise youth initiatives to offer encouragement for further initiatives by young people
- generate meaningful dialog between youth and civil society
- develop progressive perspectives through youth expressions.

3 Commutineers Wangshikokhla Jamir from Batch 1 and Smita Sen and Naveen Jhalaria from Batch 2) also joined this network space on invitation of CYC, making CYC the 12th partner organization in the network.

In the reporting period, the Commutiny Media Associates started creating a variety of Media products including articles, video and comics and sharing these amongst the Commutiny Media Associates, their own communities and the partner organisations.

In February 2010, a meeting of the network was held in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh. The workshop cum consultation had 16 participants and was attended by journalists from local as well as national media. Post the event, the way forward for CMN was strategized on the basis of the learning from the past.

### **Capacity building of Youth, Youth Facilitators and Media Associates**

As part of strengthening the media skills of youth and youth facilitators and to help build skills of the Commutiny Media Network Associates, CMPG organized three grassroots media workshops in the reporting period. The workshops, organised in partnership with leading groups working in development communications and select resource persons from CYC, helped the participants to effectively harness the nuances of message and medium.

The three workshops that were organised were:

#### **Grassroots Media For Social Change – A workshop On 'Comics For Change'**

As one of the initial initiatives in the way of developing creative resources for facilitating citizenship, CPMG partnered with Learning Voyages – Pravah and World Comics India to organize a ‘Comics for Change Workshop’ in Delhi from April 12-17, 2009. The workshop sought to build capacities of change-leaders in using comics as a tool for social communication. 11 Youth Facilitators from India, Nepal and Pakistan participated in the workshop. The workshop was led by Sharad Sharma, a grassroots media activist, Leif Packalen, Founder, World Comics and Ashraf Patel, Convenor, CYC.

The workshop included a three day direct training, which was followed by the participants then doing the same course on a test group over two and half days. Finally the workshop ended with an action plan for designing an active citizenship campaign. The inspiring work of World Comics across the world was shared through films and photographs, which gave the group the larger picture.

CYC, World Comics India and Pravah Learning Voyages came together in Delhi between 27th and 31st July 2009 to offer the second program for youth facilitators, media associates and Commutineers who wish to apply the power and potential of comics to promote active citizenship among youth.

Twenty two participants attended the Comics For Change workshop and twenty two comic booklets and twenty two wall comic posters were created on various issues of concern by the participants of this workshop. An initial batch of 200 copies each of these products were made and distributed by CYC to take youth concerns and views to a larger audience.

We are happy to share that post training, the participants conducted eight grassroots comics workshops in their respective locations, supported by various partner organizations of CYC. They have also directly and indirectly created over a hundred comic products and anchored three grassroots campaigns using wall posters. The participants of the workshop were also invited to strengthen the Commutiny Media network.

#### **VIDEO POWER WORKSHOP: Learning nuances of video journalism**

Drishti Media & Commutiny – The Youth Collective came together to design and offer a program for youth activists and youth facilitators who wish to apply the power and potential of video to promote active citizenship among youth. The course was organized over eight days in two chunks; between 5th & 8th September and 5th & 8th October 2009. The workshop, which was open to participation from youth activists and youth facilitators, was attended by twenty young grassroots activist comprising Commutineers, representatives from NGOs and media associates of CYC.

After attending this program, the participants were able to conceptualize, shoot and create videos using basic equipment as well as conduct a grassroots video workshop for youth.

Wangshikokhla Jamir, a Batch 1 Commutineer who took part in the workshop, has since been organizing similar workshops in her own community in Nagaland. An excerpt from her email follows:

*"I really had a great time and learning during the grassroots comic workshop and this year I am interested to start this grass-root comic Nagaland chapter and as a part of my project to sensitize community on different issues. I already had a meeting with the existing cluster groups and we are organizing the first grass-root comic workshop on 18th May to 20th May '09. We are planning to link up with the media to bring out pertinent comic characters to educate and provide punch-lines and deemed necessary."*

Fourteen short films were created by the participants of this workshop, highlighting diverse issues of concern ranging from gender, urban poverty, livelihoods, to personal experiences that reflect a social topic. A compilation DVD of these videos was created and 100 copies were shared under Copyleft domain.

We are happy to report that three participants of this workshop conducted follow up grassroots video workshops in their communities. Further, over a dozen new videos were created directly by the participants of this course. The participants of the workshop were also invited to strengthen the Commutiny Media network.

### **MEDIA POWER WORKSHOP: Orientation on the Vidushak perspective of storytelling**

The underlying spirit of this initiative is 'Make me laugh and I'm with you'.

Most media efforts concentrate on 'what' of the message and not so much on the 'how' of its crafting and encoding. Nowadays media – particularly TV - debates quickly degenerate into a logjam where debaters and audiences tend to fall along established polarized positions. While acknowledging the importance of fact based communication that uses logic and rationality as its primary modes of arguing a case, COMMUTINY - THE YOUTH COLLECTIVE wishes to consciously position itself as the Vidushak (Court Jester) of old Sanskrit plays, allowing it to preempt such typical logjams and dead-ends and try to open new windows of opportunities in serious social debate.

Most people will pinpoint the Vidushak's right to speak his mind as one of his salient characteristics allowing him greater editorial independence than others. He is both advisor and critic, counselor and influencer. Besides, for younger audiences, any mention of social or 'serious' communication appears as relentless 'preaching'. We need relief.

The Vidushak's quicksilver qualities are equally difficult to pin down, though never beyond definition. The jester also has humor at his disposal. He can soften the blow of a critical comment in a way that prevents a dignified personage from losing face. Humor is the great diffuser of tense situations.

CYC in the period also offered a program for youth media activists who wish to apply the power of media to promote youth development across India. Arjun Shekhar and Ravi Gulati facilitated the workshop that took place in Delhi between 29th November and 1 December 2009.

The workshop was attended by fourteen Commutiny Media Associates, and this is where the Commutiny Media Network was formally launched.

In the workshop, the participants were introduced to different ways of writing, including the 'Vidushak' way of storytelling where serious issues can be highlighted without being scathing, and gained perspectives on different issues of importance to youth.

### **Building focus on youth and development in media**

With commitment to enhance the image of coverage of youth-led social action in the media, in the reporting period, CYC facilitated 2 Listening Spaces with NDTV and The Hindu. We are happy to report that in the period NDTV featured a Commutineer as a young hero in a series of spots it did to celebrate youth citizenship action and the latter published an article about CYC. In the period CYC also built focus on the social issues that the ComMutineers are addressing through publishing a number of articles on these in Jansatta (newspaper) and After break (periodical). In the period the existing Commutiny website ([www.commutiny.in](http://www.commutiny.in)) was updated regularly.

## **Institutional Growth of CYC**

### **Governance and organisational capacity building**

The reporting period saw the membership of CYC as having 14 active members, who participated in CYC's activities. 6 Board meetings have been held during the period. Overall, 2/3 members of CYC remained consistently active and engaged in the reporting period.

In the reporting period, an impact assessment exercise was conducted by external Consultants of CYC's work since last two years. The final report of the same is awaited. Six monthly review processes were also undertaken for current team members.

During this period, the following people held key roles in the organization at the executive level:

- Ashraf Patel continued to play the incubation support role at CYC on behalf of Pravah.
- Chanchal Sinha joined as the Executive Director in the period.
- Durba Ghose continued to play the role of Resource Mobilization Facilitator on a part time basis.
- Rama Rao Vedula continued as Facilitator - Community Learning and Leadership Journey.
- Manak Matiyani joined as Associate Coordinator – LLJ in the period as Irfanullah Farooqi moved out.
- Kuber Sharma joined as a full-time facilitator in the period as Joe Athiyali moved out.
- Yasmeen Khan joined to support the Secretariat in administration and account functions while Rajesh Saxena moved out.
- Bipin Chandra Chaturvedi, a journalist focusing on several grassroots issues, completed his short term assignment with CYC.
- Two interns were engaged to support the current programme needs.

### **Finance and Resource generation**

In the reporting period, CYC focused more on resource generation following 5 broad strategies which are:

- Resource generation through partnerships with grantmaking agencies.
- Resource generation through strategic partnerships
- Overheads subsidization for CYC through engaging interns and volunteers.
- Resource generation through engaging CYC board members to donate time for various projects.
- Facilitation of ComMutineer-led efforts for resource generation.

We are happy to share that in the reporting period, CYC has successfully gained commitment to receive resources from 2 organisations, namely DKA (an organization based in Austria) and India Development Services (an organization based in USA).

In the reporting period, the CYC Board members volunteered an estimated 100 days in different activities of CYC, effectively raising over Rs. 5,00,000 in kind.