



Community – The Youth Collective

Annual Report 2008-2009

Dear Friend,

That there are two Indias is by now a cliché. Around every corner India's duality stares us in the face. Rich – poor, urban – rural, employed – unemployed, landed – landless..In the Indian growth narrative all these have been getting their share of attention. Possibly many of these remain unresolved because one more of the stories of two Indias has yet to be heard. This is the story of two Indias viewed by different lenses – one of the youth and the other of the 'elders'. Two different visions almost. According to us it's a dichotomy that needs bridging desperately, this divide between generations. We have a large body of youth - who if the 'elders' are to be believed - have yet to fully comprehend the enlightened vision of India that came about with its independence, let alone become a part of shaping it. And mostly the 'elders' view this vast body of youth to be at best 'consumers' or 'workers' for the cause.

Everybody is talking of the demographic advantage of India. A country which is likely to have the largest set of young people in the coming decades. The youth population in the age group of 15- 35 was 35.5 crores as reported in the 2001 census. The share of the youth population in India's total population is estimated to be already 35 %.

The challenge before us is to ensure that this huge cohort becomes a vibrant, constructive force that shapes a more just, equitable and non violent world. This can happen when suitable investment is made in the development of youth in all spheres such that they can take on different roles along their life cycle to become better students, lovers, workers, parents, entrepreneurs, community leaders, role models. Also youth development cannot be looked at in isolation of the larger social issues that surround young people and further shape their identity, Their participation in decision making to influence these at all levels is key.

However youth development is greatly impeded by the way different sections of society view young people. Even youth themselves have an incomplete realization of their own potential and possibility in our country today. The following stakeholder analysis indicates some of the felt gaps that might come in the way of youth leading positive social change in India:

Stakeholder	Felt Gap
Youth	Incomplete sense of identity, Superficial self awareness, poor appreciation of Win Win attitude, inappropriate resources for pursuing self development and social change initiatives, lack of support in terms of recognition of their successes.
NGOs	Inadequate understanding of youth development processes, tendency to view youth as instruments of social change rather than as change agents
Government	Little space for youth participation in decision making, government policy making platforms.

<i>Stakeholder</i>	<i>Felt Gap</i>
	Youth development not embedded within different sector policies.
Market	Youth seen mostly as 'consumers' or 'employees'
Media	Lopsided representation of youth in the media, unexciting programming for youth

The Youth and Civil Society Portfolio of SRTT and Pravah organized a couple of consultations in 2006 to develop strategies for strengthening youth development. Simply looking at the number of young people we were talking about, it was clear that no one organization could begin to think of impacting all of the gaps identified above. To make any significant difference to this scenario it was felt that many different people and organizations with diverse experience were needed to work together collaboratively to put in place strategies for change. The idea of the Youth Collective was thus born.

Today, it is with great pleasure we bring to you this report, where we have captured the highlights of the period of the last one year. 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.

Accomplishments in the period April 2008 to March 2009

- Growth of 25 young Change-Leaders
- Workshops and Learning Spaces for youth and youth development
- Resource development for youth and youth development
- Growth of the Collective

Growth of 25 young Change-Leaders

To make social change processes youth led, the Collective in FY 2008-09 focused on creating common platforms where young people could discover their identities and realize their potentials as change leaders. Hence, the Collective launched a flagship program titled Commutiny to inspire and support young people to transform into youth leaders for social change.

Commutiny is a one to three year-long program that would support young people to strengthen their passion for creating a better world, ignite change within their own selves and lead social change on their own terms. Through this program, which includes concrete learning, action components, and a stipend, the collective seeks to unleash the potential of youth run and youth led social initiatives. Through selecting young people with diverse change ideas as fellows, Commutiny is encouraging youth led social action at multiple levels.

Under this program, CYC in 2008-09 offered support and mentorship to 25 Change Leaders/fellows (referred to as Commutineers) to work on issues that concern them and at the level that inspires them.

After a robust search and selection process, the formal journey commenced from May 1, 2008. The first phase of the journey was designed to ensure that the Commutineers sharpen their learnings further on the issue that their proposed projects focus on. Hence, they were facilitated to focus on gaining relevant knowledge or skills through participating in workshops, movements, or taking up internships in NGOs.

By September 2008 most Commutineers begun their project implementation. Rapport building and familiarization exercises in chosen communities, introducing themselves to relevant institutions, organizations, collecting and studying relevant background literature were key features of initial months.

November and December witnessed more intense activity with many events being organized, intensified interactions with chosen communities, greater mobilization of local and other resources, regularizing documentation of key activities etc. Among the many interesting developments within the project journeys is the emergence of collaborative experiments, where Commutineers working on similar project areas/ living in proximity have linked to provide resource support to each other in various project activities.

A key process that was developed in the reporting period and implemented by CYC was the facilitation (mentoring) process, wherein all CYC Members voluntarily committed to facilitate the Fellowship journey for 1-2 Fellows round the year through providing them with online mentoring and need-based support. Through the CYC Facilitation Process, majority CYC members remained in touch with the Commutiny Fellows they agreed to mentor, and helped them undergo and process their exposure to other organizations, sharpen their project idea post their internship/exposure phase and facilitate the fellows to incorporate relevant learnings from this phase into their projects, provide specific inputs on project components, discuss progress and bottlenecks and suggest strategies etc.

November onwards, the CYC facilitators also started to visit the Commutineer project sites with the objective of understanding closely the Commutineer's life space and appraising the Commutineer's project movement. These visits offered the facilitators opportunity to offer elaborate inputs and to assess the person and project for subsequent extension within the Commutiny Learning and Leadership journey.

CYC in the period also encouraged Commutineers to select 'Theme Guides', who it envisaged as people with expertise in the Commutineer's project/issue area.

In the reporting period, Amrita Patwardhan, Dr. Anita Patil-Deshmukh, Durba Ghose and Nayan Patel offered Championship for the Commutiny Learning and Leadership Journey. The Champions supported the core group of Commutineers to organize the Post Internship Learning Event in August 2008 and subsequently in conceptualizing the Youth Festival plan. The Champions also engaged in providing overall support to the Commutiny Learning and Leadership Journey process.

While most journeys progressed with zest and witnessed growth, a few remained slow and not clear in direction. Efforts to strengthen the perspective and the initiatives with such Commutineers has been made and are continuing to be made by CYC facilitators and from the Secretariat in different ways.

In the current year, Commutiny was positioned as a fellowship program. This positioning was taken up for review in the period, and going forward, it was decided that the program would be titled The Commutiny Learning and Leadership Journey.

Workshops and Learning Spaces for youth and youth development

LEARNING EVENT



To initiate a process to enhance Commutineers' leadership abilities and participation in CYC processes, in the period, CYC facilitated a core group of 7 Commutineers to organize a Learning and Sharing event. The Event was held between 10-14 August, 2008 at Sukhtawa Village in Madhya Pradesh, and was conceptualized and executed by a Core group of Commutineers with support from the Commutiny Champions.

The event offered a high point for all Commutineers coming back from their internships and became a venue for rich exchange of information and learnings from internships with various organizations, movements and individuals across the country. The organizers had designed the event in a way that offered formal spaces for mutual exchange of ideas/thoughts and skills, and informal spaces to screen films or enjoy a bonfire evening.



In the workshop, a key session on 'self and transformative work' helped all to individually and collectively reflect on the beginnings of their 'mutinies within' and the needs for sustaining energy, belief and concerted work in directions assumed. A thought provoking session on 'Politics of Change and Politics for Change' by renowned social activist, Sunil Bhai from the Tawa Matsya Sangh and Samajwadi Janparishad helped generate new resolve towards working at the grassroots among the Commutineers. A detailed discussion to review the current processes in the Commutiny Journey was also facilitated in the workshop. The need for strengthening group communication was shared here and ways to do it were identified.



Prior to the event, CYC facilitated a full-fledged democratic process of election/selection to get core group of Commutineers to organize the workshop. The members of this Core group were Akshaya, Ankit, Gopal, Krati, Sayonika, Sudebi, Zaid, Amrita, Anita, Nayan, Durba. To plan the event, the core group first met at Ahmedabad on June 6th -7th, 2008.

KABIR KI KHOJ – A WORKSHOP ON THE APPLICATION OF KABIR'S PHILOSOPHIES IN THE REAL WORLD AND THE WORLD OF SOCIAL ACTION

In order to develop creative resources for facilitating citizenship, CYC held a Kabir immersion workshop in Delhi from September 23-26, 2008. 12 Commutineers from 8 states participated in it. The process of learning was through video footage, audio records and anecdotal narration. The workshop was led by Shabnam Virmani, a film maker who has made a series of 4 films on Kabir, and Ravi Gulati, a CYC member.

The workshop was designed to help youth make the connect between Kabir's words and our day-to-day acts, the social, spiritual and political choices; to create an opportunity for immersion, provocation, reflection and perhaps, revelation; to self-interrogate and to question the boundaries of our identity. A series of discussions with CRC Champions Rustam Vania, Ravi Gulati, Arjun Shekhar, Vartika Jaini and Ashraf Patel followed by intense engagement by Ravi Gulati, who took on the key executive role to work with Shabnam Virmani for this project, ensured a high quality design of the workshop.

The Learning Process was started with "Why Kabir – his relevance today", followed by Kabir in modern day India and beyond. Video and audio clips of Kabir sung in different regions enhanced the understanding. The sessions were followed by a discussion of one's own take on Kabir and his poetry.

The workshop contributed in exploring and facilitating the understanding of :

- Resisting the label - cultural identity and how it can lead to divisiveness Oral tradition as a means of preserving a philosophy versus the printed text.
- Caste differences – do they still exist around us.
- Secularism
- Direct versus mediated experience – can book knowledge compare with actual experience?
- Historical context of Kabir - legend versus history
- Poetry as counter-culture

A set of discussions took place in this period with Rajiv Gandhi National Institute for Youth Development to develop a curriculum around Kabir Ki Khoj, for their courses. This dialogue needs to develop further. In the coming months, a Facilitators' Program on 'Kabir, Identity and Active Citizenship' will be developed to take this work forward.

WRITING WORKSHOP TO BUILD CAPACITIES OF COMMUTINEERS

In the reporting period, CYC organized a writing workshop on November 20, 2008 in New Delhi. This workshop was organized to help orient Commutineers towards media issues and develop their writing skills for making meaningful contribution in the youth sector through writing.

The format of the workshop included:

- Introduction to media / feature writing
- Importance of style and perspective, and
- Knowing the media from within.

Apart from CYC members who came in as trainers, Tarun Bose, a freelance media consultant, led the day-long session as an external resource person.

Few responses from participants:

"While most of the understanding of style, narrative and point of view comes from within and is usually natural, it was good to talk about it so you understood how important it was. The exercises we did were also interesting as it gave a glimpse into different shades that each one of us carries."

"The workshop went well and so many new things came during the discussions. It clears my doubts on style and personality which actually force us to stuck in particular form or pattern. I will definitely try some new styles to see my own strength of writings."

AIKOTAAN: A YOUTH-LED YOUTH FESTIVAL TO CELEBRATE ' YOUTH AS CHANGEMAKERS'

In February 2009, with seed support and guidance from CYC, the core group of 14 Commutineers organized the youth festival to advocate for youth participation and discuss and debate on the issues they identified as suitable, namely, Identities, Environment, Education & Learning, Globalization & Youth, Citizenship & Governance. In this festival, Commutineers brought two to eight youth from her/his own region as participants, thus promoting youth participation further, and strengthening a common youth identity that is non-sectarian and positive.

150 persons participated in the festival, including 105 youth, women and men coming from different parts of the country and Kolkata besides 24 ComMutineers, 6 CYC members, 4 CYC team members. The group of youth included 47 participants invited by Commutineers from their own project areas - rural and urban; 45 young people came in as self sponsored participants from far and near. 13 young people came in as invited artistes, including two music bands and dancers while many others came in as local volunteers to support the festival.

Resources development for youth and youth development

To bridge the gap created by inadequate research and documentation in the area of youth development, CYC anchored/participated in a range of initiatives in the period. Four CYC members, Arjun Shekhar, Ravi Gulati, Rustam Vania and Vartika Jaini took on championship of these initiatives, with Ashraf Patel offering facilitative support. Following are the descriptions of the key activities in this area in the reporting period:

PARTICIPATION AND COLLABORATION TO CREATE A YOUTH DEVELOPMENT INDEX (YDI)

In the reporting period, CYC participated in an initiative to construct a national youth development index. This initiative has been taken up by RGNIYD (Rajiv Gandhi National Institute of Youth Development) and TISS (Tata Institute of Social Science), and Ashraf Patel attended first attended the consultation in Mumbai as a representative of CYC. However, she proactively engaged with the organizers and the meeting progressed with CYC collaborating with TISS to hold a youth consultation on YDI in Delhi in June. CYC also participated in the NGO consultation around the development of YDI in Sriperambudur in July 2008.

ARTICLES TO BUILD KNOWLEDGE AND HIGHLIGHT ISSUES

In the period, to create greater knowledge about the wider canvas of public debates and advocacy on the social issues that Commutineers are working on, CYC commissioned write-up on the following six issues flagging their key debates:

- Organic farming.
- Sex-workers rights.
- Forest Rights.
- Gender issues.
- Draconian laws.
- Issues of de-notified tribes in Gujarat.

A number of these write-ups were published in Hindi dailies.

Further, CYC announced a Travel and Write Program for the Commutineers in October 2008 to support them to identify, explore and write about their peers and the issues they are working on. Under this program, four Commutineers visited projects of other Commutineers and wrote pieces on their experiences with their peers.

ONLINE PRESENCE BUILDING

In the period, CYC launched the Commutiny website with the dual intent of building the knowledge of youth social action through sharing with the larger world about the Commutineers, their projects and their journeys, as well as share information about the program to attract more young people into the space. Further, to focus its energies into interventions and engagements in areas that

could create more visible space for youth related issues in society, CYC launched an online youth feature service in the period and shared 7 youth-related articles.

LISTENING SPACES WITH JOURNALISTS

As an effort to understand the media and the media needs on youth programs, and as an opportunity for the media to understand and interact with organizations working with/on youth, CYC organized two Listening Spaces with 5 journalists from NDTV and The Hindu journalists. These were essentially meetings with journalists in small groups, keeping it informal and discussing to understand each other and also to explore how CYC could 'influence', suggest or contribute on programs / content on youth.

Institutional Growth of CYC

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

CYC registered itself as a Trust in the reporting period with 14 Founder Trustees.

After much deliberation the Collective named itself Commutiny – The Youth Collective, while renaming the Fellowship Programme, The Commutiny Learning and Leadership Journey.

In the assessment of governance and management of CYC, we are happy to report that strong systems of regular meetings and online communication have ensured that the CYC members are proactively inputting into the various initiatives that CYC is undertaking. Some members are also playing larger roles as anchors of specific programs and processes.

In the reporting period, 6 Board meetings were held, which took the agenda of CYC forward in leaps. Other than these, over 6 Champions' meetings were held separately, which contributed towards the institutional growth of CYC.

The Secretariat found shape in the reporting period with the rental of an office space for CYC.

Administrative and accounting systems have been strengthened. A document outlining key admin, accounting and HR policies has been developed. Periodic work sharing and review systems across teams have been established.

DEVELOPMENT OF TEAM

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

Ashraf Patel continued to play the incubation support role at CYC on behalf of Pravah in collaboration with the team below.

Durba Ghose moved from being the key facilitator of the Commutiny Learning and Leadership Journey as well as supporting the incubation of Commutiny on behalf of Pravah to playing the role of Resource Mobilization Facilitator on a part time basis w.e.f. November 2008. She had earlier expressed an inability to take up the Executive Director's position.

Rama Rao Vedula joined in July 2008 as Facilitator - Commutiny Learning and Leadership Journey and is holding the additional charge of Administration and Finance.

Joe Athialy, who also joined in July 2008, continued in his capacity as CRC Facilitator on a part time basis.

Irfan Farooqi continued in the capacity of Associate Coordinator. In respect to building people's capacities, Irfan Farooqi was sent for training in Instruction Design and Facilitation skills in the reporting period.

Bipin Chandra Chaturvedi, a journalist focusing on several grassroots issues, came in as a consultant for a short term assignment to CYC.

In the reporting period, the administration and account functions were set up through an understanding built with the accounting firm Adeesh Mehra Associates. Mr Rajesh Saxena started supporting the Secretariat on behalf of the firm.