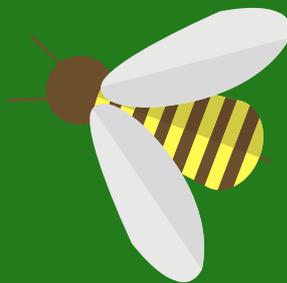


WORKSHOP REPORT

26-27TH FEBRUARY
TATA INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL
SCIENCES, MUMBAI



COLLABORATIVE KNOWLEDGE CREATION: INTERROGATING PROCESSES AND PATTERNS



ORGANISED BY

CORO INDIA
TISS, MUMBAI

SUPPORTED BY

EDELGIVE FOUNDATION

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The workshop was organised by Committee of Resource Organisations (CORO) and Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai



The logistics and reporting on the two-day workshop on "Collective Knowledge Creation: Interrogating Processes and Patterns" was made possible through the support of the Edelgive Foundation.



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WORKSHOP OVERVIEW

A KEY MILESTONE ON CORO'S JOURNEY



As a leading resource organisation in empowering grassroots leaders through collaborative knowledge creation, CORO organised a workshop to bring together other experts in this approach across the academic, cultural, and corporate fields. In partnership with Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) and with support from the Edelgive Foundation, CORO held the workshop at the TISS, Mumbai campus on February 26th and 27th, 2018. A transformative and participatory experience itself, the workshop represented the first step to create an ecosystem of allies and grassroots agents across India who are pioneering people's right to collective knowledge building.

FACTS & FIGURES

82

PARTICIPANTS

18

PRESENTATIONS

12

STATES
REPRESENTED
ACROSS INDIA

THE WORKSHOP BROUGHT TOGETHER EXPERT PRACTITIONERS FROM ACROSS VARIOUS SECTORS:



ACADEMIC



SOCIAL



CULTURAL

THEMATIC SESSIONS

The two days featured 5 sessions, participatory activities, and a performance by CORO's women leaders. The sessions were organised by the following themes:

- **Interrogating Collective Knowledge Building Processes**
- **Participatory Research Methodologies and Pedagogies**
- **Exploring Diverse Voices and Forms of Knowledge Creation**
- **Claiming Rights, Empowerment & Advocacy**
- **Gender, Empowerment & Advocacy**

WORKSHOP BACKGROUND

OUR UNIQUE APPROACH HAS BROUGHT US TO
THE FOREFRONT OF THE FIELD



Since 1989, CORO (Committee of Resource Organisations) has been working towards a society based on equality and justice by empowering leaders from the most marginalised communities to collectively steer social change. CORO's rights-based approach to empowerment includes an organizational philosophy that emphasizes collaborative co-creation of knowledge throughout the process of facilitating social development. From research to implementation to gauging impact to planning the way ahead, CORO centers the community of intervention as the experts in their own empowerment. In this way, the people that CORO work with become skillful leaders fully capable of creating, disseminating, and benefiting from indigenous grassroots knowledge.

Meanwhile, similar participatory knowledge production processes have emerged in other social sector organisations as well as across the academic, developmental, and cultural realms. Inclusive and collaborative knowledge-building and research have even found a place within mainstream policy and research institutions and the corporate sphere. Across this proliferation of approaches, modalities, and perspectives, there is a high degree of cross-fertilization and convergence. Each context poses a unique challenge to creating a truly equal approach that upends hierarchies of power and oppression while ensuring robust knowledge production coincides with high-quality participant engagement. There is much to be explored and understood in these endeavours.

KEY RESOURCE PERSONS



SUJATA KHANDEKAR
CORO INDIA
ORGANISER



LAKSHMI LINGAM
TISS, MUMBAI
ORGANISER



ALEXANDER SCHIEFFER
TRANS4M, GENEVA
PARTNER



RAMA MANI
THEATRE OF
TRANSFORMATION
PARTNER



Sujata Khandekar related CORO's evolution as a community-led grassroots movement, emphasizing, "There is a great deal of wisdom and knowledge within local communities and people – hope, change, inspiration and achievement – but, who is listening? Are we ready to listen?"

INAUGURATION

The workshop was inaugurated by **Prof. Lakshmi Lingam** (TISS), **Sujata Khandekar** (CORO), and **Prof. Alexander Schieffer** (Trans4m.) Prof. Lingam shared the background of the workshop's inception, drawing on her own experience in academia to point out that traditional, and often even participatory, forms of research do not adequately reflect and represent the wisdom and clarity found in communities on the ground.

Prof. Schieffer shared Trans4m's integral approach to knowledge creation through Participatory Action Research processes. He also provided insights into the case of Trans4m's partner organisation Sarvodaya in Sri Lanka, emphasizing the significance of co-creating a wider space for knowledge production in order to bring tangible changes to people, communities and society at large.

Following the inauguration, **Dr. Rama Mani** (Theatre of Transformation Academy) led a participatory activity to introduce the workshop participants to each other. She began the activity with a first-person story of a Nigerian priest who used native plants to bring prosperity to his village. In small groups, participants described their passions as a way of introduction. The activity was concluded by each participant planting a symbolic stone with a single inspirational phrase.



Anwari Khan shared, “We were able to cry while sharing our stories, and hearing Sujata-tai’s story made us realize we are all the same. It made me realize that I also have the confidence to do anything.”

SESSION 1

INTERROGATING COLLECTIVE KNOWLEDGE BUILDING PROCESSES: UNIVERSITY AND COMMUNITY

This session revolved around understanding the context, tools, and limitations that inform the various stages of the knowledge-building process with Prof. Lingam as discussant. The first presentation was “Flipping the Hierarchy of Researcher and Researched” by Sujata Khandekar, **Pallavi Palav & Anwari Khan** (CORO.) Sujata Khandekar had conducted a cooperative, feminist inquiry with 8 co-researchers from a wide variety of social strata that was mutually conceptualized, conducted and analyzed. Pallavi Palav explained that research began as a case study but turned into a mutually-owned project because of core elements of trust, non-threatening attitudes, and openness.

Next was “Communities for conservation and livelihood: A Case Study from Kaigal.” **Sudha Premnath** of Kaigal Conservation discussed the vitality of indigenous knowledge of traditional honey collecting tribal communities in Chittoor to secure sustainability and biodiversity. In the 3rd presentation, “Deliberative Persuasion: An Under-Examined Source of Inequality in Collaborative Knowledge-Building” **Apoorv Avram** and **Aditya Saran** (Thinkinwords) talked about how cultural capital determines rhetorical persuasiveness. In the fourth and final presentation of the first session, **Bhavya Chitranshi** (AUD) and **Mami Pedenti** presented “Eka Nari Sanghathan: Towards a collective journey of transformation” on 5 years of collaborative action research work with Adivasi single women in Raigada, Odisha. Mami Didi described the process of collective labor to cultivate, make, and sell mango pickles that creates economic freedom for the single women.



"Can we use technology to bring awareness, self-empowerment, community building and thus reduce marginalization? We should be creating, collaborating and connecting through technology to turn the tables on knowledge creation," queried Gulumurthy Kasinathan of IT for Change.

SESSION 2

PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES AND PEDAGOGIES

The second session focused on how the hierarchy of powers in educational and research institutions can be reimagined. **Anita Patil-Deshmukh** (PUKAR) was the discussant. In the first presentation of the session, "Collaborative creation of open educational resources by professional learning communities of teachers - experience from Karnataka Government schools," **Radha Narve** talked about her experience as a government school teacher leveraging internet tools and an online community of teachers to build collective knowledge towards better education. **Gulumurthy Kasinathan** (IT for Change) noted the possibilities for new forms of empowering knowledge-creation that technology presents.

Then, **Shashi Shikha** and **Bishaka Mishra** (AUD) presented on "Immersive Research: Building a Perspective towards the Process of Knowing-Relating-Doing" reflecting on the biases present even for supposedly progressive academics. **Bala Krishnamoorthy** (NMIMS) then presented on "Integrating experiential learning into the curriculum - A learning model for environmental education." In the final presentation of the first day, "Thinking of 'gender transformation': Alternatives, possibilities and praxis," **Gurpreet Kaur** posed questions about bringing the political into the private sphere and actualising research praxis. The first day's sessions concluded with a small group discussions of the various topics and running themes found throughout the presentations. The participants reflected on how the mainstream perception of knowledge, research, and praxis can be rethought and restructured.

TRANSFORMATIONAL PERFORMANCE

"THE POWER OF WE"

The workshop participants gathered in the evening for a performance by Dr. Rama Mani of Theatre of Transformation Academy and the women leaders of CORO. The performance highlighted the journey of the women from powerless individuals to a powerful collective.

The outdoor amphitheatre at TISS filled with bright cloths and even brighter voices of CORO's women grassroots leaders, speaking their truth in song and story.





The presenters of session 3 from left to right: Rama Mani (Theatre of Transformation,) Rajendra Negi Singh (Henvallvani Community Radio,) Samyukta Shastri (PARI,) Gitali Nayak, Veena Singh & Dhritiman Das (UNICEF-Assam,) Aiman Khan & Apeksha Vora (Nirantar Trust.)

SESSION 3

EXPLORING DIVERSE VOICES AND FORMS OF KNOWLEDGE CREATION

As the discussant for the third session of the workshop, Dr. Mani led the participants in warm-up activity. This session investigated the importance of alternative, non-mainstream mediums and indigenous cultural and linguistic forms for creating and transmitting knowledge. In the first presentation, “Community led change embedded in cultural expressions: A unique initiative from Assam, India,” **Veena Singh** and **Dhritiman Das** of UNICEF India - Assam introduced their initiative to empower and equip Assamese adolescents with traditional cultural performances so that they become effective change agents in their communities. **Gitali Nayak**, who is a youth leader of the Assamese cultural dance initiatives, talked about the positive changes brought in her tea tribe community and demonstrated the dance form with some participant volunteers. Then, **Rajendra Negi Singh** relayed the success story of Henvallvani Community Radio in Uttarakhand despite the many obstacles they faced - from obtaining a license from an adversarial government to building the station at minimal cost to keeping it staffed. In, “Telling the stories of 833 million rural Indians,” **Samyukta Shastri** shared PARI’s (People’s Archive of Rural India) immense project to document the lives and concerns of everyday Indians by being the Archive of the Present and Past and becoming the Textbook of the Future. The final presentation “Using Theatre and Critical Reflection to Understand Young People” by **Apeksha Vora** and **Aiman Khan** (Nirantar Trust) demonstrated the playful, participatory theatre activities they use to work with young people.



In an entertaining dialogue, Mumtaz and Supriya talked about how Right to Pee snowballed into the right to be respected, the right to equality, and the right to exercise one's rights.

SESSION 4

CLAIMING RIGHTS, EMPOWERMENT & ADVOCACY

Prof. Ishita Dey of Ambedkar University Delhi was the discussant for Session 4. Opening the session, **Manish Rajankar, Shalu Jagdish Kolhe & Sarita Dudhram Meshram** shared their work on "Role of Women in Integrated Water Resource Management, the Third Dimension of Management of Malguri Tanks in Bhandara and Gondia Districts." Sarita explained, "Using survey methods, we mapped the biodiversity and status of the lakes before and after the work, and took it to the collector. In this manner, we demanded inclusion." Then, **Vijay Dethé** and **Ramesh Tekam** presented on "Towards Prosperity: Local Governance and Forest Management at Pachgaon." Vijay is from a tribal community in North Maharashtra where most people do not have rights to the land they cultivate. Using the Forest Act, they gained collective ownership of the land and together decided how to allocate and use it. Wrapping up the session, **Mumtaz Shaikh** and **Supriya Jan** of CORO talked about the collective nature of the Right to Pee campaign in their presentation "To Pee or Not to Pee." Supriya pointed out, "We worked through evidence-based advocacy, collaboration with BMC, but used confrontational strategies. Finally, in 2012 the BMC includes toilets for women in the sanitation budget!" Mumtaz shared Right to Pee's long-term vision: to move the campaign from the grassroots into the academic curriculum.



After overcoming her nerves and speaking in front of everyone about her life in Mardapoti, bright young Janki shares a smile with Swarnima.

SESSION 5

GENDER, EMPOWERMENT & ADVOCACY

Sujata Khandekar (CORO) was the discussant for the final session. **Shilpa Vasavada** of Working Group for Women and Land Owners (WGWLO) introduced their work in “Setting up Community of Practice for Legal Empowerment to Secure Land Rights for Women.” **Gavuben** of WGWLO shared her journey from being afraid to talk to police to becoming a changemaker in women’s lives whose very name is now a powerful endorsement in the civil courts. Also from Gujarat, **Neeta Hardiker** and **Guliben Nayak** (ANANDI) presented on “Towards Food Security and Dignity: Collaborative processes of women-led sangathans and ANANDI in Gujarat.” As a survivor of domestic violence, Guliben talked about how the sangathan taught her to be an independent, torch-carrying leader. In the last presentation of the workshop, **Swarnima Kriti** (AUD) shared her work on: “Co-learning Gender - Finding Possibilities of Co-Performance in and through Mardapoti (a village in Chhattisgarh).” **Janki Mandavi**, a youth from Mardapoti, talked about what it was like to work with Swarnima and the other young people in the community on solving water issues.

Vidya Shah, CEO of Edelgive, attended the final sessions of the day and met with the participants over tea. This unique, paradigm-shifting workshop was able to come to fruition thanks to the enthusiastic support of the Edelgive team.



To get everyone alert and active during the reflective activity, budding superstar Gitali once again led the workshop participants in an energetic Assamese dance.

CONCLUSION

Alexander Schieffer led the concluding participatory reflection session. All the participants formed pairs up to exchange their learnings and experiences from the past two days. Then, each participant shared one insight and one challenge the workshop presented with the entire group. The workshop thus concluded by harvesting the fruits of the past two days. Some of the final reflections concerned language and equality. Many participants felt that while language remained a challenge as rapid on-the-spot translations were required in Marathi, English, Hindi, Gujarati, Oriya, Assamese, and tribal dialects, yet this was an environment where all felt equally encouraged to speak and share.

Finally, Prof. Lingam, Prof. Schieffer, and Sujata Khandekar wrapped-up the workshop. They noted that the workshop had succeeded in its primary aim - creating an ecosystem of allies and grassroots agents across India to pioneer collective knowledge creation and enact and sustain societal transformation from the grassroots.

Immediately following the workshop, the grassroots leaders of CORO's Single Women campaign met with Bhavya Chitranshi and Mami Pedenti of the Eka Nari Sangathan single women's collective. Despite coming from opposite ends of the country, the experiences of our single women changemakers of rural Maharashtra and Mami Didi from the forests of Odisha were mirror-image tales of the struggle to achieve dignity and independence as a woman cast out from mainstream society. Mami Didi later shared that of all her experiences leaving her village for the first time to attend this workshop, it was this conversation she would treasure most.



LOOKING AHEAD

JUMPSTARTING OUR VISION TO BECOME THE HUB OF A NETWORK FOR GRASSROOTS-POWERED CHANGE

Rather than an endpoint, CORO's workshop on "Collaborative Knowledge Creation" is a milestone on a journey of deepening our capability as a resource organisation while scaling upwards and outwards. With this workshop, we have taken a leap forward in making a reality of our vision to become the hub of a network for grassroots-powered change. Therefore, like our budding friendship with Eka Nari Sangathan, we will continue strengthening our new bonds with the like-minded individuals and organisations who participated in our workshop. In order to take our vision forward, our goals for the near future include:

- **Releasing a multimedia analysis that highlights the main thematic threads woven throughout the workshop**
- **Creating a book-length publication that features our work and that of selected workshop collaborators who are exemplars in collaborative knowledge building in their field**
- **Collaborating with the researcher-practitioners of Centre for Development Practice at Ambedkar University Delhi who have offered to host the next workshop**
- **Deepening our collaboration with Trans4m and Theatre of Transformation Academy by bringing together 6 organizations spread across the globe who share an aligned view and praxis on knowledge building**