Fostering Community Development Through Web/Mobile Based Interaction Platforms: An ICT Enabled Community Support Service

To nudge the tribal communities towards socio-economic development through a need-based Socio-Technical assist - through web / mobile based interaction platforms assisted by a Community Volunteer Force.

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Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has showed us greater opportunity to support local community development, world wide. However, there are relatively few examples of sustained ICT based development network built for tribal and isolated communities.
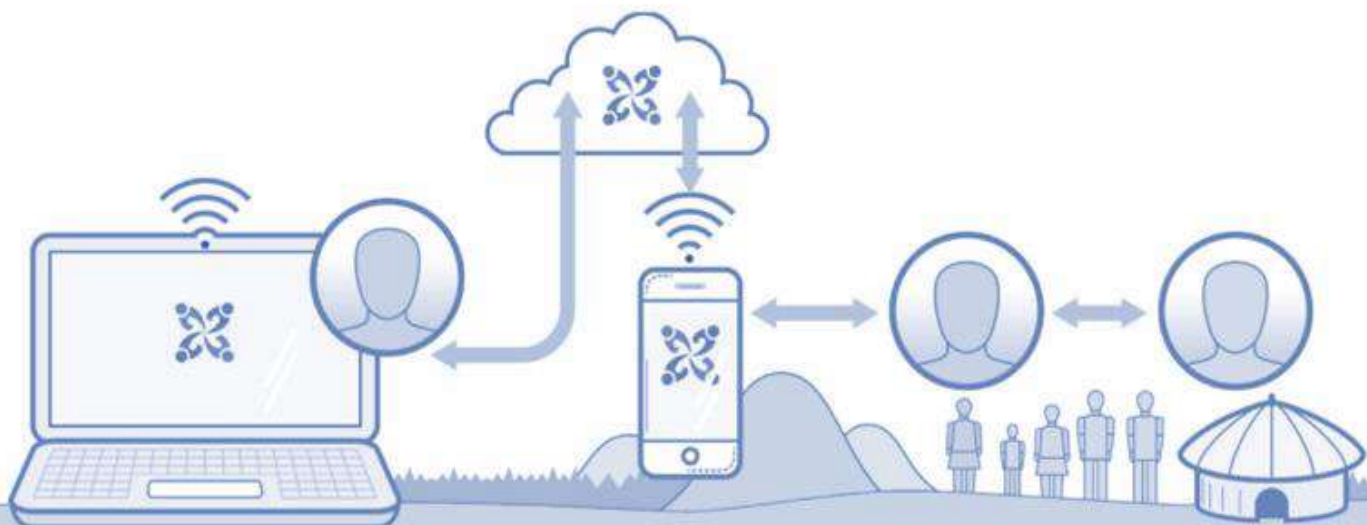
One of the major reason for limited function of ICT based development initiatives is their 'fit' with socio-cultural context.

Implementing livelihood based interventions through web-based community platforms is one such unique approach adopted by Science & Technology Resource Centre, designed to address community concerns and to help development initiatives to reach out to a wider audience in the remote and tribal dominated pockets of the Gadchiroli region. STRC has launched a holistic initiative to create web-based community interaction platforms to address livelihood concerns and generate awareness and provide first hand S & T based solutions to their queries.

These are essentially two-way interaction platforms aimed at providing socio-technical assist for development S & T based solutions assisted by a community volunteer force (local youth). This helps STRC's Core livelihood interventions to reach the far-flung communities.

This intervention is designed to:

- Reach out to tribal and isolated communities for organic development beginning at micro level without disturbing the traditional social fabric to foster healthy linkages with outside world.

- Offers opportunities to the community (farmers, artisans & *vaidus*, etc.) in revenue generating pathways like value addition, small-scale rural enterprises etc.

- This also acts as distant education platform for local youths

The Pilot Study

To assess the feasibility of this initiative, STRC conducted several extensive surveys in selected villages of three Blocks of Gadchiroli. These villages are selected based on the pre-defined parameters such as; community clusters (different resource dependent livelihoods), quality and access to mobile connectivity/ network, types mobile phone use and available natural resources.
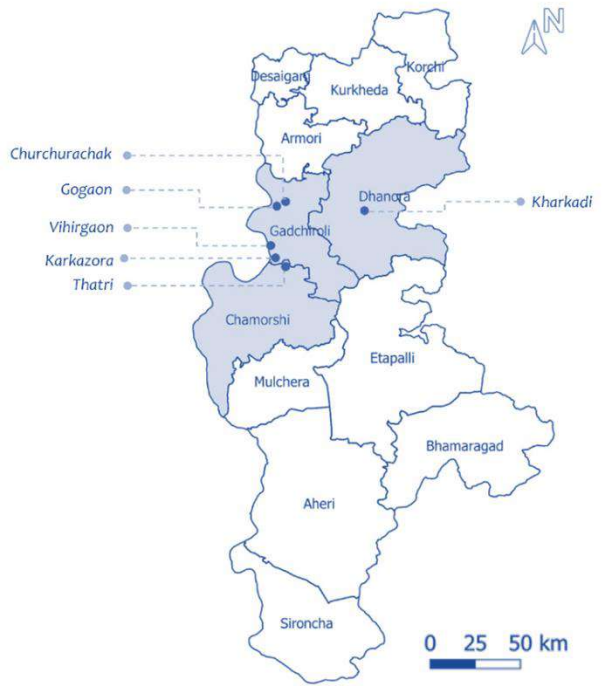
A group of Volunteers were chosen as part of Community Volunteer Force (CVF) to act as Tribal Intermediaries.

Number of Survey Conducted N=14

Respondents N=104

Gadchiroli, Dhanora and Chamorshi Block of Gadchiroli Distrct

Selected Villages

Gadchiroli Block
- ✓ Churchura Chak
- ✓ Gogaon
- ✓ Vihirgaon
- ✓ Karkazora

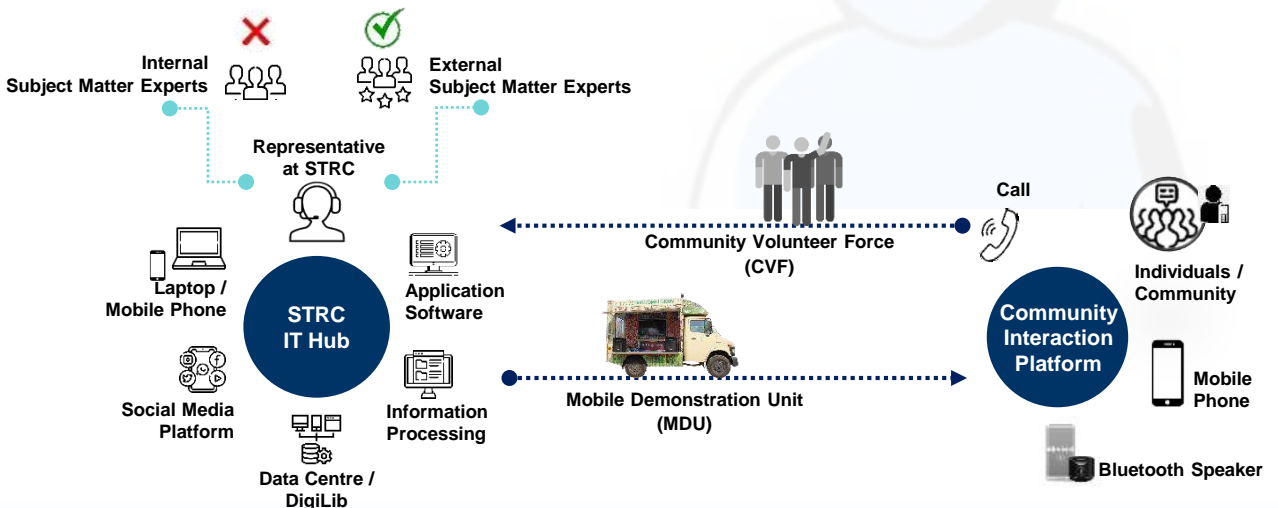**Dhanora Block**
- ✓ Kharkadi

Chamorshi Block
- ✓ Thatri

Community's livelihood concerns are interpreted, carefully articulated and recorded (at the IT Hub- STRC) through the interaction platforms with assistance from the community volunteer force. STRC makes effort to provide preliminary solutions to queries/ concerns at STRC (in-house expertise) along with support from a panel of experts on board. External experts act as an advisory, non-permanent need-based scientific expert group to provide remote support. Need based hand-holding support is provided on ground through physical interactions, wherever feasible along with Mobile Demonstration Unit sessions at the community end.

During this pilot exercise, Community Volunteer Force played an important role in facilitating the process and created a lot of interaction opportunities with communities.

STRC followed the following implementation mechanism:

As per the above mechanism STRC conducted 09 Session in 04 villages of Gadchiroli District through different mode of interaction (audio call, video call and Focus Group Discussion) to check the effectiveness of the process. As situation demands some of the sessions executed through External Subject Expert Assistance.

The ICT enabled web/mobile based sessions were conducted on following themes:

- Advance Aquaculture Practices
- Basics of Aquaculture
- Disease & Pest Management in Paddy
- Linking farmers to the PM Kisan Yojna
- Introduction of Bamboo Craft & Livelihood

Community Space

STRC facilitated Virtual Support (Direct/ through Subject Expertise Assistance), facilitating development solutions in form of Low-Cost Technology Transfer/ Package of Practices, Hands-on support in Physical Mode and also enabled Community Volunteer Force to bring more communication interaction platform.

The Way Forward

The pilot initiative has shown us potential opportunity

- To extend the STRC's Livelihood intervention and reach to a wider geography and audience.
- To introduce new activities, low-cost technologies services, for awareness, workshops and trainings programs in rural and tribal areas to empower local communities.
- To create opportunities for farmers, bamboo artisans, rural entrepreneurs, fish farmers, NTFP collectors, Poultry and, Goatery farmers, etc. to sustain and improve their livelihoods.