Feminist Experiments and Experiences…

Build, Challenge, Change Technology as Rights of Adolescent Girls

FAT TECH CENTRE EXTERNAL EVALUATION REPORT March 2014

"Mahaul to bannane se banta hai (the context (or social environment) changes if we make the change happen)…I spoke about the problems of early marriage and pregnancy in my village, something no one had ever done before. I am the first girl from my village who came to college and who started working, otherwise everyone is married."

These words by one of the tech centre alumni girls' sums up what this FAT project really stands for…this is a beginning of feminist consciousness through technology, this is the beginning of a young woman's journey of empowerment.

Background

FAT (Feminist Approach to Technology) has been running a program for adolescent girls from underprivileged families (in Delhi) to learn technical skills, while also developing leadership skills and understanding of women's rights since July 2010. A Tech Centre for girls has been operational in Lajpat Nagar, South Delhi since 2010, where, as many as 200 girls have (since its inception) learnt technical skills and worked collectively to understand their rights, and sometimes, also to advocate for themselves within their communities.

FAT approached an external consultant[1] to independently evaluate the operations of the Tech Centre, in order to assess the impact of this project on the lives of adolescent girls and as part of its own mission of using technology to develop feminist consciousness and empowerment.

Objectives

The key objectives of this external evaluation included an assessment of outputs and outcomes; what worked well and what did not (in terms of structure, content and strategies, constituency, outreach, technologies, resourcing and inputs); aspects that need to be re-assessed and those that can be scaled up or replicated; as well as challenges in implementation and overall effectiveness of the project.

Methodology

The evaluation was mainly framed as a qualitative assessment of the Tech Centre, due to the nature of activities and constituency it is targeting, as well as the fact that it's a start up project of a young women's organization. The tools of assessment included a desk based review of organizational reports and proposals, as well as interviews and small group

[1] This evaluation has been conducted by Aanchal Kapur, Founder, Kriti: a development research, praxis and communication team, New Delhi

discussions with organizational and project staff, the adolescent girls' community, other stakeholders and resource persons[2].

This evaluation unfolds as a journey reflecting on the processes of change, challenges and learning, which are shared through key questions and outcomes that stand out from the findings. There is a leadership transition going on in FAT at this time, as the founder has moved out of her role as full timer and is now remotely supporting the organization's operations. In some ways the physical absence of the founder of FAT in the day to day functioning of the organization and the tech centre is forcing the group to systematize, re-organize and structure itself in more than one way, but there is also a certain amount of flux in the way insiders and outsiders are looking at FAT.

Along with the findings of this evaluation are included individual vignettes and responses from the people included in the process. The names of respondents are not included in the quotable quotes respecting confidentiality of their inputs and due to their ongoing partnership with FAT.

Findings

Why a Tech Centre for adolescent girls?

It is considered a universal truth that the way technology is created, administered and distributed, it is very male oriented. The track of technology development is influenced by the fact that men are doing it, the usage is also primarily targeted at men and the content is also mainly oriented towards what men want. This, despite the fact that women form a large part of the workforce in the industry, they are not seen as the torchbearers or the creators, least of all the users. Though some change is now visible, we still have a long way to go before 'technology' and 'women' are used together in one verse.

In this given reality, in July 2010, a young woman in Delhi[3], initiated a process of engaging adolescent girls (primarily from low income and education families) with 'technology', both, as an initiation into accessing and controlling technology and as a tool for developing feminist consciousness. A process by which these girls would not only get an opportunity to claim their rights as young women, but also create paths of social and economic empowerment.

The technology she selected (to start with) was the 'computer'; the girls she included were mostly dropouts from school or those who were going to school but also supporting their families with jobs as domestic workers; the location she based herself in was a low income urban neighborhood. For the girls, the tech centre was defined as a place they would have 'access' to computers that was otherwise denied to them (in schools, with less numbers of computers the boys were the ones who had access; in homes, where computers were available brothers or fathers had access and in public places (cybercentres, libraries) girls could not access computers usually due to mobility restrictions. It was 'easy' to attract girls to a 'free computer class', the parents found it to be a useful (learning or future job) opportunity, and it was not seen as challenging any gender stereotype (and yet, this was to unfold soon after).

For FAT however, from the very beginning, while they used the 'vocabulary' of technology to engage the girls, the objective has been to build a feminist thinking and practice while

[2] See Sample questionnaire and List of Respondents in the Annexure

[3] Gayatri Buragohain is the founder of FAT.

applying a technical skill in their life. This is part of the organizations vision towards engendering technology development and use.

A space of one's own…One of the main ideas that forms the ideological foundation of the tech centre and is in fact, working successfully to a great extent is that, it is a space for the girls to explore their place in the world, their roles as young women and their interactions with society and gender biases. It has been planned as a centre that will impart technical skills but not in isolation, rather it is seen as a platform for empowering young women to claim their rights and their roles in society, challenging and breaking gender stereotypes wherever possible.

The girls are encouraged to talk openly about issues that bother them, whether related to domestic violence, street violence, mobility restrictions, sexuality as well as how they feel about gender based differences in their homes and society. These discussions are helping girls to understand social realities and many of them have gained confidence in venturing outside of their homes, even coming to the tech centre classes, negotiating with parents on significant matters (as much as possible) and taking some independent decisions. The picture is not rosy for all the girls, as some of them are still inhibited or scared to take such steps, and others still face parental, family or community restrictions to live 'within boundaries'.

Access to Technology…It is important to note that technology is not independent in itself, but develops in a certain way due to its environment. Thus, by creating a positive nexus between adolescent girls and technology, FAT is making inroads into engendering technology in the long run. In fact, this is the mission of the tech centre – to build technical skills among girls, but also to critique and change the way technology looks at women and the way they look at technology.

The tech centre was envisaged as a place where young girls would gain technical knowledge and skills including computers, mobile repairs, electrical works, camera, film making and be introduced to handling day to day utility oriented technology. In the last three years however, it is seen more as a 'computer centre' especially at the entrant level and for the families of the girls – and a skill that will give them a job immediately after.

The question that the FAT team is asking is 'Are we doing anything different?' and the answer to this interestingly lies in the process and methodology that is unfolding, the experiences that are emerging and the girls that are becoming 'young feminists' due to this 'space of their own'.

There is also a lot of effort being put in to introduce the girls to other technical skills, be it the camera (for photography and film making) or radio (for creating audio materials). For example, some of the girls who learnt still photography during a workshop at the tech centre took the initiative to utilize and strengthen this skill during the One Billion Rising campaign in several slums of Delhi and NCR in February 2013. Similarly, an audio recording was made on some critical issues of concern around violence against women, introducing them to the power of 'sound' and 'voice'. The recent VOW (Voices of Women Media) and FAT project stands out as a success story in the expanse of initiating other technologies into the lives of these young women. Over a period of four weeks, the project trained 25 girls to learn film making and produce (with support from the resource person) a short documentary film on the situation of toilets in their community, as the first output and then independently develop a second film output covering the interactions with their community as audience to the film.

The long term vision is to offer several technical fields within the centre, much of which will dependent on the demand and supply chain that FAT is able to create like it has done with

the ‘computer’ and the ‘camera’ already. The important thing however is to guard against ‘trying to do everything or anything available’, in order to prevent dilution of the vision and mission of FAT. Sporadic and one-off workshops on any and every technical field will not help, it is important for FAT to identify key technical skill areas that it wants to offer and develop over a period of 2-3 years at a time in order to create a sustainable and structured design for what the tech centre offers in terms of technology. There is a need to clarify the objective of the tech centre further before it offers multiple technical skills. If the objective is not to build skills for job creation, but to use technology to empower young women it is possible that, over time, there may be a sense of disappointment and disillusionment that sets in among those who come to the centre or graduate from it. Since the takeaways are more ‘social’, attitudinal and behavioral, the impact will be different for different girls. Some girls will want to take away more than such change in themselves from the centre, and that will imply real and useful skills.

The tech centre understands that engaging these girls with new technologies does not imply that they will have personal access and control over them, e.g. many do not have personal computers or cameras and can’t imagine even having one. However, FAT sees ‘access’ in terms of knowledge and skill over a technology as a beginning in the process of challenging the denial and restrictions on girls in technical fields.

The need for human and financial resources is urgent if the tech centre has to develop as a full-fledged space offering many different technical skills to adolescent girls. The centre will also have to determine if the course it offers will be ‘single technology’ focused or ‘multiple technology’ focused for a batch of girls, alternatively it can offer different technical skills for different batches of girls. These will have to be informed decisions and a needs assessment/ survey would be useful before introducing other technical fields of learning.

Course and Content framework…The starting objective of the tech centre course is basic computer literacy but with content that is socially oriented, and includes the following:

- Basics of running a computer
- How to browse the internet
- How to write a document
- How to make a presentation
- How to use social media products
- Topics for writing a project – through community based interviews, computer research
- Submission of a printed written project

The course is an initiation into awareness about and learning a technology and the environment in which it operates. The focus is on developing skills in the everyday application of this technology in day to day life, both, as a machine and through the software and content reach it offers. The unique part of this training is that the computer skill is being used to output a content that is relevant to the lives of the young women (through the projects), and in the process, they are also gaining skills to negotiate with their family and community about issues that are important for them and society.

As it evolved, non-technical content has also been included in the learning process, with discussions on gender and safe spaces, on sexuality and personal freedom, on day to day problems and other issues that the girls wanted to share and talk about.

Creative learning tools have been brought in, such as dance workshops, theatre classes, exposure visits to other NGOs and community events, photography and film making. All of this

content and methods was introduced gradually and based on available resource persons and opportunities and demands from the girls, in order to keep their interest and connection with the Tech Centre's format.

There have been several lessons learnt from the way the course has evolved, in terms of numbers of girls, the actual content and learning process, external inputs, infrastructure and the kind of skills that the girls have acquired.

The numbers of girls coming to the Tech Centre have increased gradually (today a total of 60 girls are attending the centre) and so have the demands on the Tech Centre. This has implied the need to formalize the learning curriculum which is not organized systematically and is still quite informal. In fact the curriculum is not structured in terms of input and output, and needs an immediate re-creation so that the learning is more coherent and formalized. This will also add discipline in the learning process, both, from the perspective of the trainers/ teachers and the learners, which is currently lacking in some ways. While it is important for the Tech Centre to keep intact the sense of space, comfort and camaraderie that it exuberates, some sort of formalization needs to also come into the learning processes which sometimes seem to border on friendship and social networking time rather than an organized 'class' – a code of conduct could be developed to fulfill this gap.

The tech centre course duration is also very unstructured as of now, with no formal process of entry and exit (or passing out), nor any system of monitoring drop outs, ongoing trainees from a previous batch or mid-course entrants.

The availability of sufficient computers and physical space for a conducive learning environment has been challenging at the start. However, with support from Intel, the tech centre now has enough computers to cater to the numbers of girls taking the course; and though the physical space is accommodating there is a need for some demarcation with other activities going on at FAT for the sake of improving concentration and structure of the course.

Apart from the founder and volunteers of FAT who lent their technical expertise in the workshops for the girls at the start in 2010, subsequently the teaching staff at the tech centre has, been informally organized and learning on the job. This includes some of the girls who have attended the course and then started coming back to teach students of the next batch, usually as volunteers as they have the time out of school hours and find this a useful way to spend it.

3 batches a day

12:30-2:00 pm: College going, school dropouts, unemployed girls

2:00-3:30 pm: Younger girls (6-8th standard)

3:30-5:00 pm: Older girls (9th-12th standard)

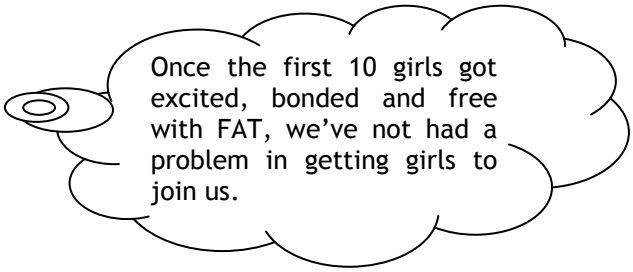
Weekly Timetable

The weekly timetable of the course has changed from time to time depending on the availability of resource persons, numbers of girls and the kind of interest shown by the girls in learning specific subjects. The tech centre has also organized workshops around dance, theatre, sexuality, gender, etc from time to time, which has meant some change in the routine timetable.

For the first two years, the course timetable mostly included 2 days for computer classes, 1 day for science, 1 day for Maths, 1 day for theatre/ dance or any other issue based input and 1 day for English/ movie screening. Since the past one year however, no classes are being held for Maths and Science, instead there are English and Camera classes. This change is due

to non-availability of teachers in those subjects and demand for new learning opportunities by the girls. There is also some flexibility in this structure based on new or external inputs available from time to time due to NGO partnerships or visits of resource persons.

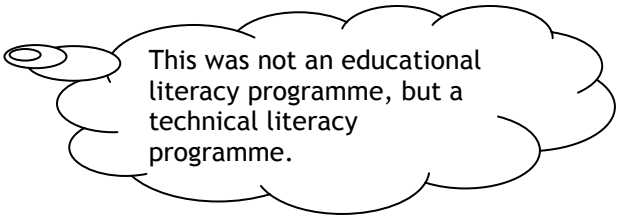
ON Participation and Outreach



The numbers of girls enrolling in the Tech Centre has been growing very fast and this is due to 'word of mouth' by those who are already at the centre. This has meant that FAT's role in outreach has become limited (earlier regular *basti* visits were used for outreach) as it 'banks' on its alumni to inspire and tell other girls to join the centre – a peer to peer approach which is working successfully. Interestingly, the FAT team had to 'convince' parents of most girls to send them to the centre when it began, but this has changed gradually as parents are giving them permission to join the centre when they see their peers gaining from it.

The profile includes girls in the age group of 11-25, with the majority between 15-21 years, most being school students but some also collegiate. The girls are coming from neighboring low income colonies in South Delhi like Jal Vihar, Shrinivaspuri, Gaddi and Zamrudpur.

One of the challenges has been that the tech centre was planned as being open to under-privileged girls. The first batch constituted of (domestic worker) girls from the Tamil migrant community but they could not 'read'. Soon, the FAT team realized that it was very difficult for such girls to work on the computer and so they tried to teach them to read and write but that was neither easy nor possible to achieve. FAT then decided to focus its constituency to include girls studying in government schools and dropouts between 6th and 12th standard. This constituency is working well and there is a huge amount of interest among girls not only in the neighborhood that the tech centre reaches out to, but other areas in Delhi as well.



GirlSpeak…ON learning and expectations from the Tech centre

The fact that the tech centre is a space for gaining knowledge, learning a skill, making friends, and self-discovery makes it a dream come true for most of the adolescent girls who come here. It is a platform that is opening up many pathways for these girls, whether personally in developing an identity of their own, educationally or professionally as they find themselves a source of income and making a career.

There are several desires and expectations that the girls have once they start this FAT journey – they want more out of the course in their technical expertise, they want support to study further so that they can strengthen what they have learnt at the tech centre, they want more time with the technology so that it can be utilized for getting a job. The fact that the course is 'free' makes it easy to join, but in order to make their learnt skills effective for a work environment there are financial implications which many girls cannot take on.

At the same time, the girls recognize the value of the 'organization' that is FAT and that the tech centre is not just a 'computer or tuition center', as they are learning about their 'rights and aspirations', and getting a lot of social and emotional support here that they can't imagine getting anywhere else even in their homes.

"We always hear that when a girl gets access over a technology like a computer or a mobile phone she will 'misuse it'…they will only be talking to boys or going on facebook. So parents and brothers de-motivate girls from using any technology unless it's in their control. But we are learning about the feminist approach to technology, we are understanding the inequalities in the field of technology and why all these obstacles are presented before girls, we are learning about feminism and ourselves. We are here because this learning is important for us even if we get married and do home chores, even if we do not take up a job."

"I used to even feel scared in crossing the road…in talking to boys, even to my father. Its not like that anymore. I have also made many friends here at the tech centre, it's a very nice place."

"We have learnt a lot of new things in the sessions on eve-teasing, safety during sex, and understanding what it means to be a boy and a girl. Nobody has ever told us or any other girl in our family about these issues and we are learning a lot which is very important for us."

"Earlier I used to feel scared to even touch a mouse! Now I know how to operate the computer but I could not get a job because I had not learnt excel, now I am learning the camera and hope that I will get a job after that - but I will need to learn photoshop."

"A computer is something very big for us, something we could not imagine we could learn. But after coming here, the fear has gone."

"Now, I can speak for myself…earlier I could not vocalize. I face problems directly now..I am no longer silent when it is about me, my mother and my sister. I stopped my father from beating…I don't feel scared anymore."

"I want to become a teacher, because I learn more when I teach like at the tech centre."

"Awareness is important and our focus is not committing a job, but girls who are inclined should have more options available due to the training."

"My mother is very supportive of my coming to the tech centre…that is why I have been able to get out of the house."

"The tech centre should offer an advanced course beyond the basic course taught here so that the girls can achieve their goals. It is not easy to learn after going out of the centre due to lack of family support especially financially. Then the girls have to go back to the same boring routine life."

"Teaching and learning, both are going on side by side. I am living life openly and fully after coming here, it's an amazing experience."

ON Family and Community responses

Through visits to the homes and communities where the girls come from, an attempt is made to elicit the feedback of parents to the participation of these young women in the tech centre. Most mothers (who work as domestics) are happy with the fact that their daughters don't have to work like them and have a safe space to go to, learn something and its free, but they are also concerned that the girls have started negotiating and rebelling at the family level! While some fathers are encouraging their daughters to engage with the tech centre, many feel that they are getting 'spoilt' due to the exposure and freedom they are getting at the tech centre.

Though initially FAT focused on reaching out to parents and families for enlisting girls in the tech centre, this is not the case anymore. Some parent-teacher meetings are still held but these are of the enrolled girls and are sporadically organized.

For some of the girls who have been working as domestic workers, the benefits of coming to the tech centre have to be weighed against the loss of income as they use that time to be at the centre. This is not easy especially if families expect their daughters to be gainfully employed after learning at the tech centre.

The FAT team needs to take attention to this feedback and make sure that the channels of communication with the families and communities are open, both, for sustaining the existing batches and ensuring that new girls are not stopped by other parents who may hear of such concerns from their families.

The FAT team can also organize annual get together for the alumni and their parents to felicitate, share and celebrate girl's empowerment, including recognizing parents who have helped their daughters further their dream either in continuing the course, taking up a job or in any other way.

ON Human Resourcing

The tech centre has from its inception been staffed with young women from low income and marginalized backgrounds. The number of people on its staff has grown from one administrative cum programme support member and the founder as full timers, for the first year along with board members, volunteers and friends of FAT sharing much of the programmatic responsibilities.

Among the current team members at FAT, the coordinator is a young woman whose growth from an administrative to a programmatic one is reflective of a flat structure organization and one that believes in the principle of leadership and capacity building from the ground level. This form of 'wo'management[4] (if successful in the long run) has the potential of making FAT stand out in the field of human resource and organizational development with respect to women's rights as well as creating rights based employability for women.

Gradually, FAT introduced an internship option for interested girls from their tech centre course as a form of creating skills and employability within FAT. This model is working quite successfully and today, FAT has two such girls working as full time interns and supporting the work at the tech centre (as trainers and support staff). Other girls volunteer their time in fulfilling many other administrative and supportive activities with the trainee girls.

[4] The use of the term 'wo'management is an attempt at changing the gender biased vocabulary that has become part of our written and spoken word. (Aanchal Kapur, Organizational development and Social Change, Kriti team, 2009)

A process of leadership building among the girls has the potential of creating a constant supply of staff for meeting the organization's needs, from administrative to tech centre teaching staff. For other programmatic interventions and specialized inputs, a mentoring approach will help build and retain professional associates for FAT over a long period of time. This implies the need to develop a set of human resource principles and guidelines, that may include opportunities for updating staff skills, exposure and learning on the job with partner organizations and workshops as well as retreats which can help enhance team work.

Though FAT has constituted a board with members representing different skills and issues that the organization is built around, it finds that their involvement and advise is only restricted to meetings and the organization is not gaining from their expertise on a regular basis. A step in the direction of creating an advisory board is in process with the hope that the members can play a more direct and pro-active role in the operations of the organization, specially its tech centre advocacy and networking.

There is also an effort being made to engage external volunteers with the tech centre, as they bring with them new ideas and skills and fulfill the staff deficit in small organizations like FAT. In order for a constant supply chain of such supportive human resources, the organization will have to engage with college level departments as well as corporate that create employee time for contributing to the social sector.

> *"I had no experience in talking to people. I was interested in becoming an actor or a dance choreographer. My parents have been very resistant to this job as they feel it's making me aware of my rights and I have started negotiating for myself at home. I started with supporting administrative and kitchen work at FAT, then helping at the tech centre in interviewing girls and assisting Gayatri in conducting the course.*
>
> *One year later, I was taking care of accounts and coordinating the tech centre. I was conducting the tech centre classes, meeting parents of the girls in the community either to enroll new girls or to handle any conflicts and resistance from them, interacting with NGOs and resource persons to organize workshops for the girls and handling any other necessary tasks.*
>
> *Today, I am handling the tech centre on my own without the founder. Ofcourse this was not possible without learning from Gayatri who guides and handholds me."*

The tech centre and FAT staff is growing organically from its own interventions and providing a platform for (otherwise unemployable) young women to learn on the job and find their livelihood options. This is a case of social and economic empowerment processes going hand in hand.

ON Partnerships

Several efforts have been made by the tech centre staff to reach out to women's organizations, NGOs, artists, film makers and other experts in different fields with the objective of building working partnerships that can help it achieve its objectives towards the adolescent girls.

These efforts have not resulted in the kind of partnerships that FAT envisaged especially from women's rights organizations. There are many reasons for this, some at the level of FAT's

positioning as a feminist organization and also due to the pre-occupations of other (especially bigger and established) organizations with their 'own' projects and lack of interest in sharing and networking with young organizations like FAT.

However, several individual partnerships (especially with board members, volunteers and friends of FAT) have been useful for what they've offered as also one-off organizational collaborations – for example, the WASH India workshop on hygiene and other information and myths related to menstruation; the gender and sexuality inputs by Nandini Rao; the theatre workshops by Shruti Sharma and Deepu Sood; the singing and talking sessions with Savitaji from Saheli; the camera workshops by Kavita Dasgupta; sessions on patriarchy by a group called 'My Fight with Patriarchy'; sessions on hardware and internet security by Hassath, etc. The girls have also had the chance to interact with international volunteers who have shared knowledge and time with them, also adding to a sense of 'privilege' of knowing such people from the perspective of their families.

However, it is those that are developing in the long term that FAT is looking forward to most. One among these is the partnership with the YP Foundation, which has involved workshops on sexuality – experiences that have become eye openers and given them a lot of knowledge and confidence to understand their body and their sexuality. Similarly, FAT is keen to bring in other long term partnerships to support the tech centre's mission and these are being explored gradually.

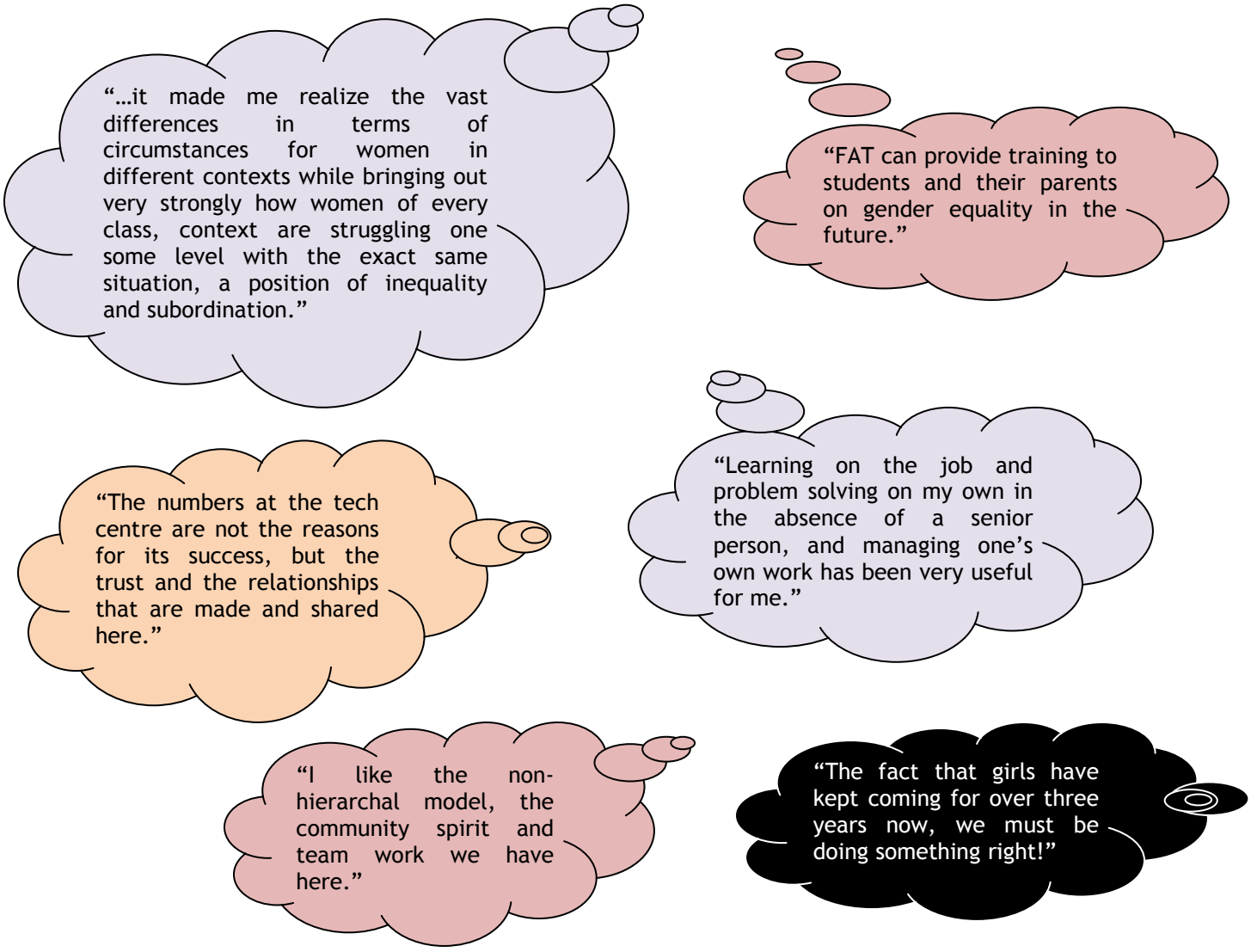
My personal takeaways…staff, board members, volunteers and partners

"I have gained a sense of positivity and inspiration from interacting with these girls. For example, in the sessions on opening up a computer's hardware, the girls' experience of seeing, touching and understanding the role of each part – letting go of their fears and touching what was until then unreachable!"

"The sheer energy and spirit of these girls has been strengthening and has reaffirmed my faith in humankind."

"The tech centre is breaking the myth that a computer course will get one a job…there are many more opportunities that are opening up from here. At the same time, many girls have got computer based or other office jobs due to this course."

"The cross-cutting of the computer education with the social education has been a great strategy that has worked for FAT. Given their school work and household responsibilities, getting time to go to a place to discuss issues of gender, inequality, violence, etc would have absolutely been taboo."



Gaps and Challenges

- Organized conceptual inputs needed on gender every month, so that there is a progressive scale of learning on developing a gender lens towards society.
- Creating a course curriculum with compulsory subjects and optional subjects is the need of the hour, both, technology related and those related to gender and society. The curriculum should have specific guidelines for teaching, including a feminist learning pedagogy and participatory tools of training, activities for course work, both theoretical and practical. This curriculum should be fielded for a complete course life-cycle with ongoing systems of monitoring learning and assessing feedback from the students and the teachers – this should be defined in monthly or quarterly formats. Mid-term changes in the course curriculum should be made only if necessary and an annual review mechanism should be followed to make any additions, deletions to the curriculum, including a review of the curriculum by an external expert. Along with class room learning, the curriculum should also incorporate field based exposure visits to other
- The course should be conducted by teachers and trainers who have defined areas of expertise and experience, and clearly structured plans for the inputs they make. A training of trainers could be a useful methodology for enhancing the knowledge and skills in fielding the curriculum and building a common understanding of the feminist

pedagogy to be followed in the tech centre. The current model of voluntary and unpaid teachers is not sustainable in terms of creating a streamlined tech centre curriculum or course delivery (method and timetable).

- There is a need for continuity of classes viz. a time table that has a built in pattern of flexible classes (as needed), rather than being random as they are currently –implying that new or additional inputs are included in the course time depending on available ideas and resources. It is important to note that for a constituency like adolescent girls with limited or no exposure to many areas, everything will look and be useful. However, this affects the structure of the tech centre course and has a potential of creating confusing patterns both, of instruction and impact on the girls' learning process.
- The staffing pattern needs attention, as the multi-tasking model of teacher cum coordinator cum administrator cum counselor cum friend and peer will inevitable have a burn out stage and can also affect the impact of the tech centre in terms of how the girls relate to and interact with the staff. In fact, there is already a level of work burden and confusion in roles that comes into play in the running of the tech centre. Some level of staff and participant boundaries may also be necessary, without undermining the flat non-hierarchical structure of organizational functioning which is an asset.
- Lack of systematic documentation of day to day processes and outcomes – this has implied that the organization does not have ready data and statistics of the number and profile of girls at the centre per course duration, nor of dropouts and those who finally complete the course; there is no detailed record of actual classes (and their content) held per day through the course duration unless it's a planned external input. The course structure and time line seems to be loose off and there is fluidity in the course duration between 6 – 12 months in real terms for a batch, while another new batch begins and almost merges with the older one or vice-versa.
- Ongoing supervision of inputs, learning and outputs is very important for ongoing documentation and strengthening the tangible impact of the tech centre, in terms of knowledge, skills, attitudes and behavior of the adolescent girls. An overall monitoring and evaluation framework across all levels of functioning may be useful for greater accountability, legitimacy and achievement of goals.
- The tech centre staff has to handle some typical adolescent problems like the girls taking permission to attend the centre but instead meeting boyfriends or going shopping etc. The girls also personal problems with the staff, either individual or family related, etc who try and resolve them through counseling efforts with the girls or conflict resolution with parents on a case to case basis. However, this form of 'narrative healing' is not enough and there is a need to have an in-house counselor who can support the girls more holistically. The tech centre also sees the need to identify and set up other links for supporting the girls, for example, in cases of domestic violence, for shelters, legal support, with child rights organizations etc.
- The tech centre needs to organize ongoing outreach and mobilization activities to create a sustainable and long term affect at the individual and family level, for attracting new entrants, supporting alumni and creating a credible face in the community for the future. There is limited follow-up and links with the families of the girls coming to the centre, which implies that while the girls have 'agency', they are not backed up by FAT vis-à-vis dealing with the impact that their empowerment has in

their communities (both positive and negative). The inflow and outflow of girls into the tech centre needs to be managed better, and the dependency on the default of existing batches of girls to introduce the tech centre to new ones needs to be monitored closely.

Engendering Technology…towards Rights of Adolescent Girls

The Tech Centre intervention is one of its kind and new in many ways, with the organization learning by doing, and this has meant a lot of experiments and experiences.

The Tech Centre is the flagship program of FAT, its core functional programme and characterizes the philosophy of what FAT essentially stands for. It is a platform with equal opportunity for young women from marginalized and low income communities to engage with technology in a non-threatening and non-hierarchical environment. In fact, the tech centre works as a double edged 'chip', providing access to technology in a free, unbiased and open environment, and inducing a gender sensitive thought process among young girls in the age group of 11 to 25 years.

As the tech centre stands today, the content of what FAT wants to inculcate is predominant and, as a by-product, the girls are learning the technical skills. While this model is working well, it would be useful for FAT to think through the kind of expectations it is creating and how it will deal with them in the long run.

For some, this may not be what the tech centre stands for, whether its potential funders, partners or even the girls, therefore FAT needs to create a more solid framework to justify its model. Alternatively, if FAT is able to balance and structure the inputs and outputs expected, it could develop as a unique social and livelihood initiative in the field of adolescent girls' rights.

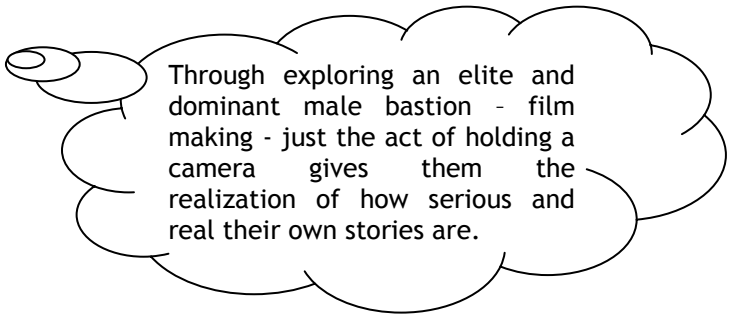
For example, many questions have been raised about access vs. ownership of technologies that the girls' are being introduced to, from the inside and outside of the tech centre. These questions will remain unless FAT's decides to create a vertical that may offer personal use or ownership options for the girls to tap, either within the centre or through a collaborative with some other company or agency. In the social and economic milieu that the tech centre is operating, the question of ownership is related both to gender differences and affordability by families and girl's. While FAT hopes to gradually empower the girls to challenge the gender biases, the economic question can perhaps be answered if the tech centre can also offer computers and other technology products either on a hire and use basis or on a personal purchase (with old and new product options) basis– a equipment or multi-media sub-centre.

Similarly, many of the girls are interested in taking up jobs after they have completed the tech centre course, some in the technical field and others are happy to take on any job they get. From the perspective of a social sector organization, FAT is playing a very important role in generating gender and rights based thinking among a constituency of young people who would otherwise be restricted to life as domestic workers at home or for other households, or be married off. These girls could easily form the next generation of women's rights workers in organizations and communities working on such issues. FAT could consider partnerships with interested agencies that could help with placements in the social sector or create its own vertical for such placements. While it is clear that the tech centre is not running so that girls can find jobs, however, by default it is creating employability and that too around feminist thinking which should be utilized efficiently in the mission for social change.

The fact that the tech centre is opening up the world to these girls, there is a certain level of accountability that emerges by default, especially where the girls want to take their learning and skill to another level. FAT would need to look at these concerns and the emerging possibilities urgently, in order to build sustainability of the opportunities it is providing at the tech centre.

Several strategies applied in the tech centre have worked positively for FAT to achieve its mission until now. Many volunteers have engaged with the tech centre in their individual and professional capacity since its inception. These have included technical experts, women activists, film makers, photographers, students, etc. It is this spirit of volunteerism and inspired collaboration that has given the tech centre and its girls the power to continue amidst many constraints – financial, human resource related and social. The process of giving has also been one of taking from the girls in terms of learning, energy and experience.

The organization sees technology as the way forward to help the girls amplify their voices for their rights as young women, as citizens and members of marginalized communities to bring about change in society. They could do this through the use of new technologies and multi-media products, in written or audio-visual formats. The process has been initiated, with the radio programme and Apna Haq - the film and photographs as communication material by the adolescent girls. However, there is also a lot of other written and art work that has been created by the girls over the last three and a half years, which as a practice should be collated to create useful rights based resources. A carefully planned strategy of sharing and disseminating the learning and communication materials from the tech centre would be important as a resource sharing exercise within the women's movement and social sector.



The process of empowerment starts when a marginalized community has access to a technological tool, along with control to tell their own story – like in the film making project, going beyond learning the skill. This is the chance to use the technology to articulate their ideas, concerns and advocate for their rights as members of a marginalized community. This is the arena of FAT's support in the coming future, to go beyond the classroom to the community and other national and international platforms. A critical mass of socially and technologically empowered girls will make way for many more such interventions in the country. The tech centre could thus become an activism hub for adolescent girls from marginalized and low income communities.

Many of the girls have started negotiating on important decisions related to their life and choices, this marks a crucial step in their journey of empowerment. There is an interesting dynamic in operation with respect to the way that boys in their peer groups and their brothers are seeing these girls and their abilities to use computers and camera's, almost aspiring for similar opportunities. For the girls themselves it is a matter of huge pride and confidence as access to such technology was earlier non-existent or limited for them – many gender based barriers are being broken. The girls are now depending on the internet, not on their brothers and parents to make decisions about their lives, for example filling in forms for further education or courses etc and this gives them a big boost in confidence. When fear changes to confidence, when they start asking hard questions not only at the centre, but also at home…there is a meeting of expectations in terms of the tech centre output!

Using technical language, the hardware and software of the Tech Centre is working hand in hand to build, challenge and change technology in favour of rights of adolescent girls, and this is only a beginning. The new interventions by FAT's tech centre such as school workshops on women scientists, robotics, engineering and science and technology and why girls are alienated from these subjects; the STEM project as well as the planned Women and Tech fest and corporate engagements are ways in which FAT is unfolding the tech centre's long term vision.

Finally, this evaluation needs to be located in the understanding that the process of girls' empowerment is long and complex, the outputs are often small, but significant, and feminist consciousness is not an 'output' that can be achieved with a 'project injection'. FAT understands this very well and must not give it up in the face of donor or other reporting pressures from the external environment nor in the hurry of scaling up and replicating. In order for FAT to achieve its larger goal of engaging feminist thought with technology and making a difference in the whole body of creation, utilization and dissemination of technology these would be significant sacrifices!

Annexure

List of Respondents

Former and current Adolescent girls at the tech centre: Shabnam, Rekha, Renu, Baby, Indira, Amina,

- Small group discussion with girls at the tech centre
- Asha Tiwari, Coordinator, FAT
- Shambhavi Singh, Programme Associate, FAT
- Gayatri Buragohain, Founder, FAT
- Mansi Virmani, former Programme Associate, FAT
- Tapinder Singh, YP Foundation
- Pooja Pant, VOW
- Hassath, Board member
- Ram Sasmal, Board member
- Rita Banerjee, Board member
- Kavita Dasgupta, Board member

List of People contacted/ tried to reach (regretted responses due to time constraints, limited involvement/ no response)

- Monisha Behal, Board Member
- Simrita Gopal Singh, Board Member
- Nandini Rao, Volunteer
- Indira Pancholi, Azad Foundation
- Madhubala, Jagori
- Lisa Hodges
- Lokesh
- Mrs Srinivas
- Piyush

FAT Tech Centre External Evaluation

This is a sample set of questions that were used in interviews, questionnaires and discussions with the respondents of the FAT evaluation. Additional and specific questions were also fielded for people in particular roles and responsibilities.

Name:

Associated with FAT since/upto when:

Associated with FAT in what capacity:

1. What, in your opinion does the FAT Tech Centre stand for?
2. What was the key reason for you to associate with the FAT Tech Centre? What was/ is the nature of partnership (content, input/ relationship, time duration)?
3. Has this engagement met your expectations and if so, in what way?
4. Have you been witness to visible changes in attitudes and behaviour of the tech centre students through the processes you were part of? Can you share any specific examples, positive and not so positive (if any).
5. What have been your learning's as a resource person/ partner, from the Tech Centre engagement? Please share any specific examples that reflect on the Tech Centre's impact?
6. Do you think technology is an effective tool to engage with young marginalized women on social and gender issues? How do you see the tech centre generating a feminist consciousness among its key constituency of young women?
7. Do you think the FAT Tech Centre overall content and design/ methodology is effective and appealing to reach large numbers of young women and of what type? Please share your insights.
8. What has been the most relevant and effective strategy of the Tech Centre from a feminist perspective? What has worked and why?
9. Is the Tech Centre organizational structure in line with its objectives and strategy? Is the staff competent and sufficient to meet its mission and goals?
10. Do you think the Tech Centre model is unique and if so, in what way?
11. Is the Tech Centre sufficiently resourced (in terms of space, technology and finances) to meet its mission? What are the areas you see as challenging to raise resources on and why?
12. What are the gaps (if any) in the way that the Tech Centre functions and how do you think these can be strengthened?
13. What specific issues and strategies would you like the Tech Centre to focus on in the future and why?
14. Would you like to continue your engagement with the Tech Centre in the future and in what areas would you like to contribute/ partner, directly or indirectly?

15. Has the involvement/ partnership affected you in any way personally and professionally? Any particular takeaways from this involvement.

Please note that your comments and feedback will be confidential and not shared with members of FAT or anyone else.

Thank you for your time and support to the FAT Tech Centre external evaluation.