

# **Grassroots comics trainers' workshop**

Guwahati, Assam, India  
September 21 - 27, 2008



**World Comics**

**COMICS  
POWER!**





Grassroots comics are made by using easy instructions and simple techniques. Picture: Sharad Sharma

## Guwahati Grassroots comics trainers' workshop report

The **annual workshop** is a major event in the 2007-08 cooperation project between World Comics India (WCI) and World Comics Finland (WCF). Funding (85%) for the cooperation is granted by the Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, NGO funding.

The **objective** of the workshop in 2008 was to train trainers for different NGOs in the North Eastern States of India. World Comics India has for long made special effort to promote the use of grassroots comics in this area and therefore it was decided to invite participants from the seven states, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, and Tripura.

**Venue and dates:** The workshop was held at the Don Bosco Institute in Khargauli, Guwahati, Assam, October 21-27, 2008.

**Resource persons:** Hanna Azevedo, Art Teacher, (WCF), Leif Packalen, Chairman

(WCF) and Sharad Sharma, Secretary General, (WCI). Interpreter: Ms. Lovita J.R. Morang.

**WCI Seniors:** Four participants (R. Ralte, Debajyoti, Amrith and Lakhindra) were given special advisory tasks in the workshop and formed the "WCI Seniors" –group.



Drawing: Sharad Sharma



*Group work started immediately. Picture: Leif Packalen*

## **Monday, September 22**

Opening of the workshop: Sharad, Leif and Hanna addressed the participants and senior journalist Dileep Chandan from Assam gave a short speech on the media situation in the North Eastern States.

The participants, introduced themselves. See full list in appendix 1.

The two observers, Carol and Vivian, from the Brazilian organization Viracao were introduced. They had observer status, but participated in the workshop. Their participation was funded by outside funds.

The objective and the programme of the one-week workshop were explained. (appendix 2)

The concept of grassroots comics was presented by Leif and Sharad, with a video from Mizoram and a Powerpoint of WCF work in Mozambique.

After this, four working groups were formed and a WCI senior workshop tutor was assigned to each group.

Brahmaputra group – Debajyoti  
Chawlbuk – Ralte  
Experiencia – Amrith  
Kangto – Lakhindra

Sharad guided the groups into choosing themes. Leif taught story writing and division of the story in parts. Hanna did the drawing exercises, Leif and Sharad did the preparations for the visual scripts.

Hanna introduced the idea of a teacher's notebook and all participants started one of their own. The notebook is a tool for the trainers, they will note down what they learned during the day, what was difficult and what was easy, what was worth noting for their own teaching in the future.

By the end of the day all participants had finished their visual scripts.

In the evening the video "Swear by the River" was shown. The video tells about the Girl Child Comics Campaign done by WCI, Vikalp and Dreams on Wheels in Rajasthan in 2006.



*Drawing: Sharad Sharma*





### Tuesday, September 23

Hanna started the day with a drawing exercise mainly on body postures. Lakhindra led a short exercise in facial expressions.

The participants brought their visual scripts for scrutiny. Hanna, Leif and Sharad went through them.

After lunch the participants were ready to start their final artwork. Hanna, Leif or Sharad explained and exercised inking with each participant individually, when (s)he was ready for the final artwork.

All had finished their inking by the end of the day.

Hanna showed pictures and told about her experiences as a grassroots comics teacher in Mozambique. The Brazilian observers, Carol and Vivian, told about how they had used comics in their organisation, Viracao. They showed the comics the Brazilian women had made on the *machismo* issue.



Above left. The artwork was immediately pasted on the wall.

Above right: Amrith displayed comics from his own recent workshop in Assam.

Below: A bag with a comic from Brazil. Pictures: Leif Packalen



Drawing objects -exercise. Picture: Sharad Sharma



Lunch and dinner buffet every day at the Don Bosco Institute. Drawing from Leif Packalen's travel diary.

Wednesday, September 24

The day began with Hanna's exercise "What makes a good teacher?"

After that all comics were photocopied and put up. The critique procedure was explained and the tutors divided into two critique groups. Leif ran the smaller group and Hanna and Sharad led the other.

After lunch the groups went through the training plan in detail with Leif and Sharad. Hanna had a session on the training goals of the WCI Senior group. The session discussed the experiences they had of teachers and of being teachers themselves.

The tutors were reorganized in new groups in order to accommodate the different languages

and the translation needs (languages: English, Hindi, Mizo, Assamese, Bodo and Bangla). The groups chose leaders and divided the learning tasks between the group members. The groups were now prepared for the workshop with the test group starting the next day. They collected the stationeries and were assigned spaces for their workshops.

A few teaching exercises were made and then Hanna guided the participants in updating their teachers' notebooks.

Before dinner Sharad showed pictures from the campaign in Maharajganj (UP) "Handcuffs to rod" against corporal punishment.

*Sharad speaks to the critique group. Picture: Leif Packalen*







The test group arrived, 42 new participants. Drawing: Leif Packalen

Thursday, September 25

The test group arrived. They were 42 persons from Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Nagaland, Tripura, and Assam. They were social workers, media people, mass communication students, teachers, weavers and mushroom growers (for full list see Annex 3).

Leif and Sharad gave a general presentation on the grassroots comics idea, showing video clips from India, Tanzania, and Lebanon. The group was divided into four subgroups, formed largely to make efficient translation. Three groups were in the big hall, one group in the small hall.

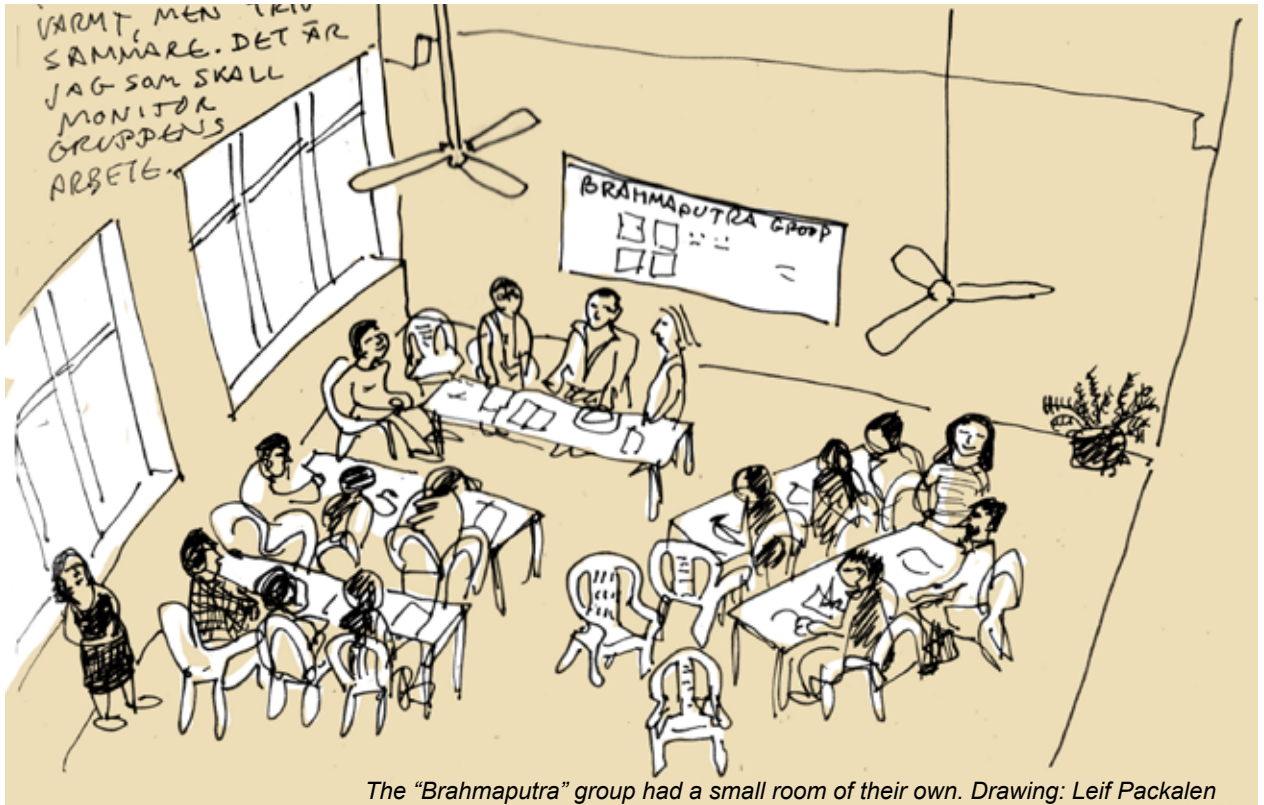
By lunch, the group had their activities already running well. The Brahmaputra group was at the story stage, The Experiencia group had their stories and was now starting with their drawing exercises. The Chawlbuk Group faced problems with a difficult language situation, but had already their stories. The Kangto group had started with drawing exercises and started with the theme after lunch.

Before lunch we had a meeting with all tutors and seniors to find out how the work progressed in the groups. There were no major problems.

In the afternoon all groups proceeded up to visual script level. Another meeting was held with the tutors and seniors. All groups had more or less come to the end of the visual script stage, and they were now ready to proceed to the final script stage on Friday morning as also originally planned.

Other comments from the groups: Translations and weak language skills hampered work. Two participants did not know how to write at all and had to be helped a lot. The trainer's notebook had proved very useful for many of the tutors.

The evening was ended with a presentation by Rosamliana Ralte on the experiences of spreading comics in Mizoram.



The "Brahmaputra" group had a small room of their own. Drawing: Leif Packalen

Friday, September 26

All groups went ahead with checking the visual scripts and starting the final artwork. The resource persons gave second opinions on some of the visual scripts, but on the whole, the tutors managed quite well. We held a tutors' meeting before lunch. By lunchtime, most participants had started inking and by the tea break more than half had finished inking.

For those who had finished their comics, Sharad showed the Rajasthan video about the Girl Child Campaign and the "Grassroots Comics in Kashmir" video. Then Leif showed a presentation on Mozambican grassroots comics. The tutors continued to help those who still inked.



We had a stretch break every hour... almost. Picture: Hanna Azevedo

Below: The view at the teabreak was always breathtaking. Picture: Leif Packalen







Above left: Ms. Athe Rhi from Nagaland proudly shows her first comic.

Above right: Sannio Siangshai from Meghalaya.



Left: The comics were scrutinized very closely before the critique session.

Pictures: Sharad Sharma

Meanwhile, Hanna had a session with the tutors and the seniors about:

Learning methods – What was made?  
Content of learning – How did we learn?  
Goal – Did we achieve the results?

We went through the seniors' goals:

1. The results will be achieved. Meaning of comics and power of comics media is understood
2. Teacher gives support, encourages the students and is friendly
3. Enlightenment and change in the students
4. The whole concept can be separated from the details

Hanna talked more about the notebook, that its idea is to support and to improve the teacher. The method is to record each person's own experience, through the understanding of

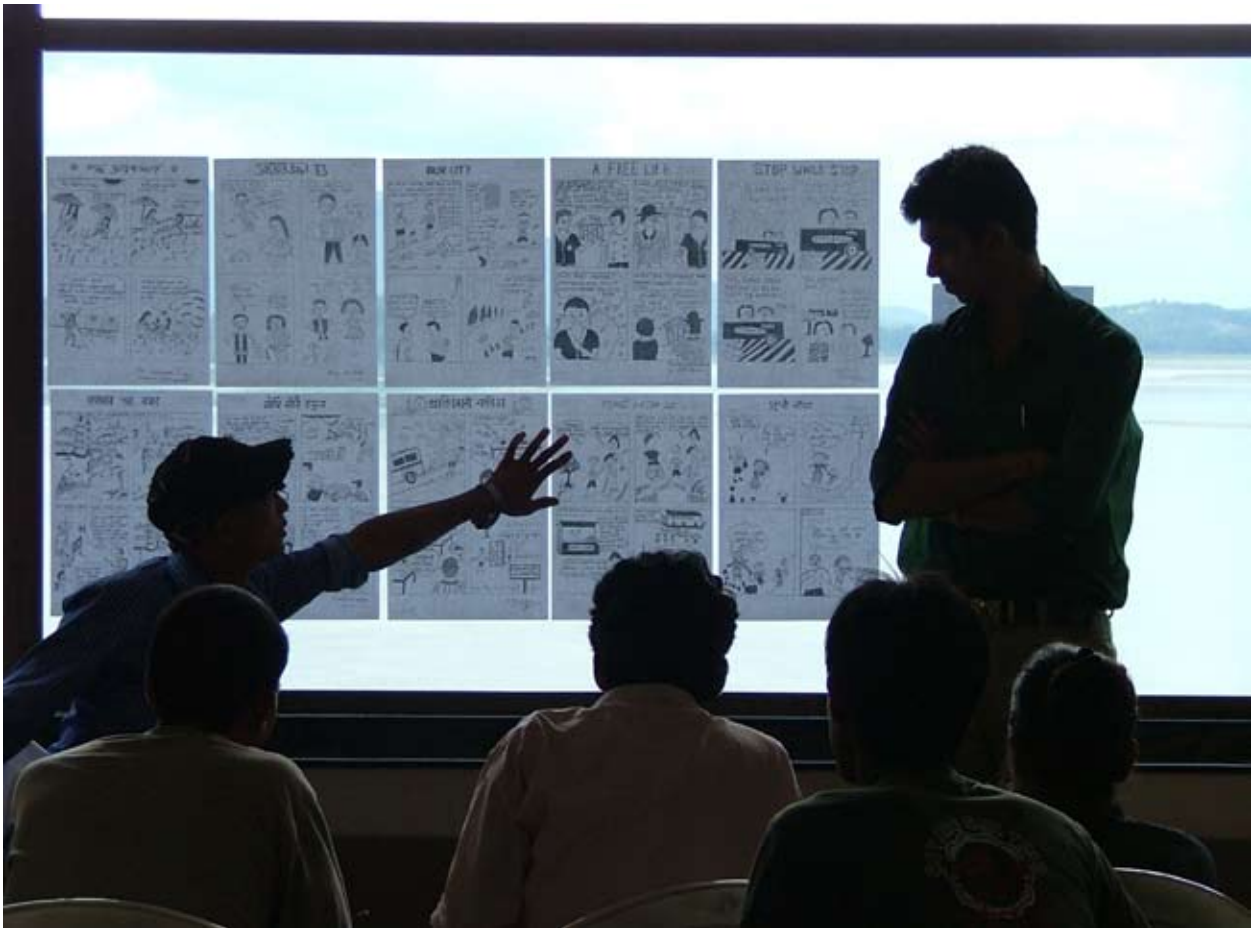
his/her own teaching. When the whole content is understood and internalized through experience, there is certainty and creativity to teach in new and unpredictable situations and challenges. The teachers can easily find solutions to the difficulties. The learning environment is always changing and the teacher must be able to respond to it.

Hanna gave the tutors and seniors advice on drawing exercises: Make at least two drawings per day. The seniors shared their drawing experiences.

Then tutors and seniors had discussion in their groups. They discussed if they achieved their own goals. They also discussed how their relationship was with their students, and if their students had changed. These questions were part of their "what is a good teacher like" task.

By the end of the sessions all comics were finished and sent for photocopying.





*The Experiencia group had their critique session facing the river. Picture: Sharad Sharma*

Saturday, 27 September

The morning started with pasting up the comics and preparing for the critique session. Leif briefed the tutors on the critique techniques. The groups gathered and each participant's comic was reviewed and discussed. This took almost two hours.

After that, Hanna organized the feedback session.

*The questions for everybody to answer were:*

- **What did you like the most?**
- **Was there something that did not work for you?**
- **What more skills would be useful for you?**
- **In the beginning of the workshop you had some expectations and goals. Were they fulfilled?**

Question for the tutors:

**How are you going to use the skill that you have got as a tutor now?**

Answers: - It was complicated to teach when participants used so many different languages and there were some complaints that the

workshop was not well organized from a translation point of view.

- It was difficult to communicate with the test group participants because they didn't express themselves.
- The tutors needed more time to learn the concept of grassroots comics.
- The test group participants felt that the tutors were very supportive to them.
- The notebook was useful to the tutors.
- All wanted more drawing exercises.
- They wanted to know more about World Comics, about its history, how they organize workshops etc.

They liked the evening presentations and said that it was important to share experiences, but in the evening everybody was really tired. Most of them liked all arrangements and had nothing much to complain about. They were grateful for the opportunity to participate in the workshop. Everybody felt they had reached their own goals, some even beyond expectations. The tutors were convinced that they will use their skill as tutor in their own groups.



Above and below: The market area near Ankurjyoti Club. Picture: Leif Packalen

After the feedback session, the comics were made ready for field testing, i.e. to take them out in the community to show to people. We assembled in the Ankurjyoti Cricket Club and went to the nearby market. The participants showed the comics to shopkeepers and residents of houses, explained about the workshop and asked the house- and shopowners for permission to paste up the comics. The comics were put up on the walls and immediately created discussion in the market.

For the participants it was very important to get genuine community response to their own comics.



The participants get feedback on their comics. Pictures: Sharad Sharma



After the distribution we all assembled for final discussions. There was a discussion on forming an informal network of comics tutors/activists in the North Eastern States, probably coordinated by the University of Guwahati, Dept of Mass Communications. (HoD Abhijit Bora and Lecturer Chandan Kumar Goswami).

The certificates were distributed to the fresh tutors and a round of speeches started. The

participants marveled how much they had learnt during the week and how they had made the transition from workshop participants to workshop tutor. Especially the notebook system for tutors seemed to have had a great impact on the trainers (and Seniors), as it had generated a lot of discussion and insight into what teaching others really means.



*Above: The group photograph was arranged outside the Ankurjyoti Cricket Club.*

*Picture: Leif Packalen*

*Left: Sharad Sharma was interviewed by some Mass Communication students from the Guwahati University.*

*Picture: Leif Packalen*





Drawing: Leif Packalen

The workshop ended with dinner and singing. In the evening a new song was born: *Comics Power will heal the world* (with a rap: a4-size a4-size, photocopy photocopy, inking process inking process, four panels four frames four panels four frames, make it black make it black, less text less text). The rap can be seen on YouTube, the video is called "Comics Power Rap"



Above: A participant, drawn by Hanna Azevedo.

Left: Ms. Rose Rekha Dukim, Nagaland. Picture: Sharad Sharma.

Sunday, September 28

All participants departed from the Don Bosco Institute after breakfast. Hanna, Leif and Sharad left for Delhi.

Monday, September 29

Leif and Sharad worked in the WCI office, finalizing reports and working on lists and other documentation of the workshop as well as preparing for the Wednesday workshop in the Lady Irwin College.



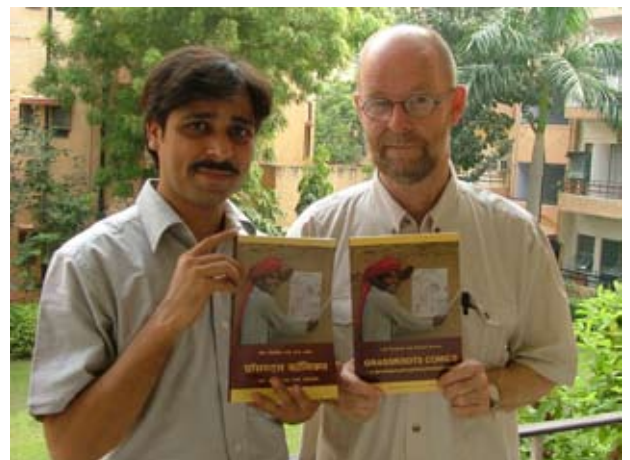


*Workshop at Lady Irwin College. Drawing from Leif's travel diary.*

Tuesday, September 30

Meeting at the Embassy with First Secretary Ms. Sanna Selin and PR-Officer Ms. Menaakshi Mahajan. We briefed them on the cooperation between WCI and WCF.

The Hindi version of the book "Grassroots Comics – a development communication tool", by Leif Packalen and Sharad Sharma was launched at the Finnish Embassy at a function hosted by the Ambassador, Mr. Asko Numminen.



*Sharad Sharma and Leif Packalen with the Hindi and English versions of the book Grassroots Comics- a development communication tool" Picture: Rajeev Sharma.*

Wednesday, October 1

Hanna, Leif and Sharad went to the Lady Irwin College at the Delhi University and had a full-day workshop with 30 female mass communication students, who were at a Development Communication course at the university. The students made comics on college sanitation, junk food, global warming, Valentine Day and girls' education. Sharad will run further workshops in the College in December 2008. The cooperation is headed by Ms. Aparna Khanna.

Thursday, October 2

Leif and Sharad had a meeting in the WCI office, finalized this report, shared pictures and videoclips and updated the program for Sharad's upcoming visit to Finland.

Leif left in the evening for Helsinki. Hanna stayed on in India for another week and had a meeting with the group Goenkar Changemakers, which is running comics workshops in Goa.

## Conclusion note:

The objective of the workshop was fulfilled as there were participants from all seven states and new comic tutoring capacity was made available in the Northeastern States. For the participants and for the future work of WCI in the NE, it was important to have the interaction of people from all the seven states and create a joint platform, grassroots comics, for further activities.

We also learnt that it is possible to run a ToT-workshop in six days (normally we calculate with nine or ten days). There are, however, problems with a fast-tempo workshop, as the tutors have a bit too much to take in at one go, and there is no slow and steady building up of their confidence.

Vantaa, Delhi, Helsinki, November 27, 2008



Sharad...



Leif Packalen



Hanna Azevedo

## Post-workshop activities:

### Sonapur, Assam

The Mushroom Development Foundation (MDF) had three participants in the comics



The MDF and SAKKS group at the Sonapur market. Third from left is Pranjal Baruah, MDF's General Secretary. Picture: MDF

workshop. They immediately put their new skills to use and made a set of comics on how to use paddy straw for mushroom cultivation and other issues of importance. The comics were received with enthusiasm when they were distributed in the Sonapur Saturday market in cooperation with a local organisation, Sonapur Anchalik Kathfulla Krishi Samity (SAKKS). The two organisations plan to make a permanent notice board for these comics in the Saturday market.

### Panjim, Goa

Hanna stayed on in India for another week and met the group Goenkar Changemakers in Goa. The meeting was held in their local meeting point, the Kala Academy in Panjim.

In the meeting they exchanged ideas and experiences about teaching grassroots comics and discussed teaching materials. Hanna told them about her work in World Comics Finland and of the Guwahati workshop. The Goenkar group told about their work in Goa. They had many questions about how to teach children and adults. Hanna also gave her views on what makes a group strong, what they can learn from each other and how they could develop their group work.

The Goenkar group didn't have any workshop during that week, in which Hanna could participate.



The Goenkar Changemakers group met with Hanna in Panjim, Goa. Picture: Leo Azevedo.





## **WORLD COMICS FINLAND**

**World Comics- Finland** was founded by comics artists and aid activists in 1997. It has members and affiliates in a worldwide network. The main common interests are:

- **local comics as an information tool in development and human rights work**
- **local comics as a mirror of culture**
- **comics as a medium for self-expression in small and alternative groups** (e.g. immigrants)

World Comics arranges lectures, exhibitions, courses and comics workshops in Finland and abroad. We have had cooperation with organisations in Tanzania, Mozambique, Lebanon, Morocco and India. We have also invited comics artists from Tanzania, Ghana, Nigeria, Cuba, Iran and India to Finland and presented their work there.

Comics that are created outside the mainstream genres are of special interest to us. In our workshops we concentrate mainly on training NGO-activists to make limited-edition, low-cost comics with copying machines. These comics are called grassroots comics.

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## **WORLD COMICS INDIA**

World Comics India (WCI) is a collective of artists, media persons, social activists and grassroots journalists. WCI has emerged from a wide variety of backgrounds to formulate a social movement that identifies comics as a powerful tool to perpetuate social change.

WCI has worked with educational institutes, media persons and NGOs/grassroots organisations on several different issues.

WCI conducts workshops in India, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Pakistan, UK, Finland, Africa and Brazil, centering upon issues like gender-equity, alcoholism, education and health.

The workshops have made effective use of comics as a communication tool and imparted skills to women panchayat functionaries and activists.

-These Grassroots Comics are not limited to the workshop halls or for children's amusement but have been instrumental to develop campaigns on issues like infanticide, girl child rights, paedophilia and corporal punishment.

-The comics have also been converted into strip and supplied to newspapers, which is a good example of placing first voices of people into mainstream media.

-WCI has printed comics' anthologies, bulletins, reports, posters and manuals.

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