

IPS Direct to Your Inbox!

- Global Affairs
- Africa
- Asia-Pacific
 - Afghanistan
 - Iran
- Caribbean
 - Haiti
- Europe
 - Union in Diversity
- Latin America
- Mideast & Mediterranean
 - Iraq
 - Israel/Palestine
- North America
 - Neo-Cons
 - Bush at War
- Development
 - MDGs
 - City Voices
 - Corruption
- Civil Society
- Globalisation
- Environment
 - Energy Crunch
 - Climate Change
 - TierraMérica
- Human Rights
- Health
 - HIV/AIDS
- Indigenous Peoples
- Economy & Trade
- Labour
- Population
 - Reproductive Rights
 - Migration&Refugees
- Arts & Entertainment
- Education
- ExPress Freedom
- Columns
- In Focus
- Readers' Opinions
- Email News
- What is RSS?

INDIA: Media Lessons From Rural Women

By Keya Acharya



BANGALORE, Jul 21 (IPS) - "We don't know how to read or write, but we make our own films," is how Narsamma, 42, a farmer from Pastapur village in Hyderabad, introduces herself and her colleagues.



Rural women reporters prepare to shoot.

Credit:Deccan Development Society

Narsamma is part of the remarkable Community Media Trust(CMT), formed by a group of 17 'dalit' women, the lowest group in India's caste ladder, from Medak district in the Deccan plateau area of southern Andhra Pradesh state.

"The CMT is a response by women with multiple disadvantages of caste, gender and economic status, to the aggressive market globalisation of today", said their former tutor P.V. Sathesh of the Deccan Development Society (DDS) at a presentation by the women for media persons in this city, earlier this month.

The DDS, of which CMT is a branch, has helped 5,000 women from Medak form 'sanghas' or village-level associations that decide their own organically grown, indigenous crops for cultivation, have community banks that buy and store the excess that is then either sold to others, or distributed to the poorest when their crops fail.

"This is a local production, storage and distribution system, a huge exhibit of biodiversity," says Sathesh. Women grow as much as 22 different indigenous crops every year on their one-acre plots.

One of DDS's 'sunshine moments', says Sathesh was some years ago when their sanghas had enough food at a time when the state government of Andhra Pradesh had to borrow food from the central government for its subsidised food distribution system.

The idea of CMT emerged when these dalit women decided that they wanted to communicate with other people by recording the work in their community gene banks and showing them during important seasons.

"We in the CMT are from the DDS's farm-labour sanghas; we learnt how to film while while harvesting and weeding", says Narsamma. "No one from the many TV channels in India comes to the smallest communities to document their knowledge or rituals and culture."

"We save so many varieties of seeds and work on chemical-free agriculture; our knowledge of this are the themes of our films. We are trying ourselves to raise your awareness," says another CMT camerawoman, 40-year-old Lakshamma.

The women, dressed simply, moved with unassuming confidence in a hall full of influential television, film and radio journalists, setting up their tripods and adjusting their video camera lenses.

Sathesh, a one-time television producer for the state-owned channel, Doordarshan, first trained seven women on an experimental basis in 1999, familiarising them with 'the grammar of television'.

Training four days a month, spread over 7 months, the women learnt the parts and operation of a video camcorder, the technicalities of shots and image sizes, plotting camera angles and movement, simple sound-recording techniques, logging and editing shoots and other skills.

" At first we were very scared of these delicate instruments, our hands were used only to sickles", said Narsamma. " But the trainers gave us complete freedom."

" I got married at ten, my husband abandoned me when I was 12 years old and I went to live in a DDS camp," said Kavita, in a short narration of her life. " In five years' time I sat for the school-leaving examinations and then went on to learn videography."

" I now have three children and when I go filming, I take my youngest with me and she is looked after by the other women in the group. This is a sisterhood not seen among urban TV practitioners", commented Kavita.

The Bangalore-branch of the Network of Women in Media (NWMI), a national group of media women, which hosted Kavita and her colleagues, said it was 'inspired' by the CMT.

The women themselves say they have gradually ridden over rural male dismissiveness of their work in India's highly-patriarchal society.

" The women have shown us that literacy is not an essential condition to build skills," said Suchitra Vedanth of 'Mahila Samakhya', an organisation set up by the government of India for women's development.

The CMT has so far shot approximately 100 films on themes dealing with the future of food and farming, lives and livelihoods, women's control over media, the ills of genetically engineered agriculture, water, environment and agricultural biodiversity.

Several of these films have been broadcast as news items on national television channels.

The women now hold a corpus of of approximately 35,000 (US dollars), have built their own administrative wing in the DDS offices with their earnings and also use their income for further training.

The CMT does not sell its films on a commercial basis, but earns money from collaborative projects with various organisations worldwide.

A CMT film on Bt cotton became a research tool against the multinational firm, Monsanto's earlier poor forays into genetically engineered (GE) cotton agriculture in Andhra Pradesh, compelling the government to ban the

Donate Now

Human Rights / Poverty / Peace and Security

U.S. ELECTIONS 2008

- ▶ [US/IRAQ: McCain Knee-Capped by Al-Maliki](#)
- ▶ [POLITICS-US: McCain Gets Religion](#)
- ▶ [POLITICS-US: Doves Outnumber Hawks in Jewish Community](#)
- ▶ [Q&A: "Iran Won't Wait for Obama to Talk to U.S."](#)
- ▶ [POLITICS-US: Obama Takes Offensive in Foreign Policy Speech](#)

[More >>](#)

Reality Check

Missing the Millennium Development Goals?

- ▶ [CLIMATE CHANGE: Wetlands Loss Fuelling CO2 Feedback Loop](#)
- ▶ [TRADE-AFRICA: Senegal and South Africa Moving Closer?](#)
- ▶ [NORWAY: Make Africa's Tragedies Comic](#)
- ▶ [INDIA: Media Lessons From Rural Women](#)
- ▶ [TRADE: WTO Prescribes More Liberalisation](#)
- ▶ [Q&A: "Reproductive Rights Can Overcome the Conservative Wave"](#)
- ▶ [ZIMBABWE: "Companies Cutting Ties Will Hit Average Person Most"](#)
- ▶ [HEALTH: Activists Hail US Senate Approval of Major AIDS Bill](#)
- ▶ [DEVELOPMENT: U.S. Sliding By Nearly Every Measure](#)
- ▶ [DEVELOPMENT: Progress on Water, Less on Sanitation](#)

[More >>](#)

Digg This Story!

Share this story

[RSS FEED](#)

ADVERTISEMENT

company's seeds for a time.

A group of four camerapersons have also travelled to many countries, interacting with rural communities practicing indigenous agriculture in places like Peru and Indonesia, and have had their films translated into French, German, Spanish, Swahili, Bahasa and Thai.

Their latest film, 'A Disaster in Sarch of Success', on GE agriculture, funded by the Evangelisher Entwicklungsdienst, Germany and the International Institute of Environment and Development, Britain, was launched at Convention on Biological Diversity meet in May 2008 in Bonn.

In Bangalore the CMT launched a multimedia presentation of 12 video films on rural images and food sovereignty in south India, sponsored by the International Institute of Environment and Development, London.

The films are technically impressive, have substantial content put forward in a simple, but powerful message of biodiversity conservation.

This unique women's media group is now waiting for the government of India's impending license to take its community radio, in existence for nearly a decade as narrowcast broadcasts for its own sanghas.

"As long as they have confidence in themselves, this media house will continue", says Satheesh with equal confidence.

(END/2008)

[Send your comments to the editor](#)

-  News Feeds
RSS/XML
-  Make IPS
News your
homepage!
-  Free Email
Newsletters
-  IPS Mobile
-  Text Only

ADVERTISEMENT

<p>Invest in Agriculture Now 4 Ways To Invest And Profit – Plus 1 "Secret" Ag Pick. Free Report.</p>	<p>Indian Statistics / Data Explore India socio-economic data Most comprehensive India statistics</p>
---	--

Ads by Google



Find the best match in your community

Join Free




READ IN IPSNEWS.NET >>

ECONOMY, TRADE & FINANCE



▶ **TRADE: Cloudy Skies for Doha**
[More >>](#)

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES



▶ **Q&A: "Guam Remains Functionally a US Colony"**
[More >>](#)

DEATH PENALTY - STOP THE KILLING



▶ **DEATH PENALTY- MALAYSIA: Delays Put Execution Under Scrutiny**
[More >>](#)

[Contact Us](#) | [About Us](#) | [Subscription](#) | [News in RSS](#) | [Email News](#) | [Mobile](#) | [Text Only](#)
Copyright © 2008 IPS-Inter Press Service. All rights reserved.