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[dfaresource] Tripura tribal community in Bangladesh finds a voice (UNESCO Community Media & ICT |

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Community Media & ICT News (December 2006, Issue 1)

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Tripura tribal community in Bangladesh finds a voice

"We migrated to Sitakund, hundreds of years ago and have since adjusted to the local Bengali culture. Only a handful of the elderly people in my village now remember songs in our language" says Lakshmi Tripura.

These were the reactions that staff of the Youth Community Multimedia Centre (YCMC) Sitakund encountered when they visited the village of the indigenous community's called Choto Kumira Tripura Para, situated 14 kms from the Chittagong city in Sitakund upazilla, Bangladesh. The YCMC uses the local cable network for content dissemination reaching about 1200 households.

The Tripura adivasis (indigenous community) have been living in this area for over a few centuries. Most of them have no knowledge of their ancestral

history and the wealth of their oral indigenous knowledge and culture is now lost in time. Out of the seventy families in this village, only a hand few are literate and almost all work as labourers because they do not own land. Since they live scatteredly in remote isolated hills, the community has no access to any kind of media like cable television or computing technologies.

In January, 2006 the members of this community approached local NGO and CMC partner, (Youth Power in Social Action) to support them with a television. They also approached the Chairman of the Sitakund Municipality with the request for a Video Compact Disc (VCD) player. They fundraised within their community and came up with the money to buy a diesel generator.

On a weekly basis now, they borrow local programmes produced by volunteers of CMC Sitakund and watch it in their community school. Recording and broadcasting programmes is the first step towards preserving a culture that is soon disappearing. 'Though we are citizens of this country we have no civic rights. No government service ever reaches our doorstep. We have no source of pure drinking water; education or health services. Our men are paid lesser than the Bengali labourers and our women have no social security. It's like we have no voice in anything whatsoever' commented Rabindra Tripura, the village leader.

As part of its mission the Youth CMC has taken the initiative to partner with the indigenous communities. Lakshmi Tripura, the school teacher from Choto Kumira Tripura Para joined the CMC management committee as secretary to ensure that his community uses the CMC facility to voice their concerns. In a recently held sustainability workshop by UNESCO, they formed an action plan to develop a series of audio-visual documentaries on their problems, needs and concerns which they plan on using as an advocacy tool. Cable broadcasts and narrowcasting of these programmes will sensitise the local civil society and thus build public opinion in favour of their issues.

'We have no wealth, nor power or respect, what was the use of taking birth in this world'- this was the literal translation of the indigenous song performed by an elderly singer - one of the last remaining indigenous artist of Sitakund. "Now we need to see if new media technologies can play a role in transforming this situation and how".

The Youth CMC in Sitakund developed out of a UNESCO supported cross-cutting theme project on ICT innovations for poverty reduction. The establishment of the community multimedia centre is currently being supported by UNESCO's International Program for the Development of Communication (IPDC).

Story contributed by Debobroto Chakraborty (Debu) and Seema Nair of UNESCO.

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IPDC - International Programme for the Development of Communication is a major forum in the UN system designed to develop free and pluralistic media with a global approach to democratic development.

By integrating traditional and new media, community multimedia centers link local and global networks and bring digital tools and new opportunities within the reach of millions, opening new gateways to information, communication and knowledge. A community multimedia centre (CMC) combines traditional local media, like radio, TV and newspapers, with new technologies, such as computers, internet, photocopiers and digital devices like cameras and audio players. CMCs are a unique way for poor communities, often in remote rural areas, to overcome common obstacles to their full and profitable use of ICTs, including the vast potential knowledge resources of the internet and other digital media. UNESCO's global pilot project with CMCs is supported by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation

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