Tribal community finds a voice through ICTs in Bangladesh

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December 4 2006, Bangladesh:
"We migrated to Sitakund, hundreds of years ago and have sin adjusted to the local Bengali culture. Only a handful of the people in my village now remember songs in our language" say Tripura.

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

The Tripura adivasis (indigenous community) have been living area for over a few centuries. Most of them have no knowledg ancestral history and the wealth of their oral indigenous kn and culture is now lost in time. Out of the seventy families village, only a hand few are literate and almost all work as
because they do not own land. Since they live scatteredly in isolated hills, the community has no access to any kind of cable television or computing technologies.

In January, 2006 the members of this community approached their local CMC partner, (Youth Power in Social Action) to support their request for a Video Compact Disc (VCD). 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's community hall. 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 water; education or health services. Our men are paid lesser wages as Bengali labourers and our women have no social security. It's as if we have no voice in anything whatsoever" commented Rabindra Tripathi, village leader.

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

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

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 in progress.
being supported by UNESCOs International Program for the Dev of Communication (IPDC).

SOURCE: Story contributed by Debobroto Chakraborty (Debu) an Nair of UNESCO. Debu works as a Programme Officer in local p NGO, Young Power in Social Action (YPSA) and can be contacte [EMAIL PROTECTED]

IPDC (International Programme for the Development of Communi a major forum in the UN system designed to develop free and pluralistic media with a global approach to democratic devel

By integrating traditional and new media, community multimed link local and global networks and bring digital tools and n opportunities within the reach of millions, opening new gate information, communication and knowledge.

A community multimedia centre (CMC) combines traditional loc like radio, TV and newspapers, with new technologies, such a computers, internet, photocopiers and digital devices like c audio players.

CMCs are a unique way for poor communities, often in remote areas, to overcome common obstacles to their full and profit of ICTs, including the vast potential knowledge resources of internet and other digital media. UNESCO's global pilot proj CMCs is supported by the Swiss Agency for Development and Co

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