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# Moving images

Armed with cameras, children question the status quo in their lives.



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**T**he East Side Story Programme – supported by the UNICEF in association with NalandaWay, a Chennai-based NGO – attempts to give children from marginalized communities a means to express themselves and their needs better. This it does by creating a network of resource centres that offer ten-month training programmes for children aged 14-18 in journalism, theatre, performing arts and media. It will also help distribute the children's works (films, radio programmes and writings) through television, cinema halls, schools, events, radio, newspapers and magazines.

Currently piloted in Krishnagiri district, Tamil Nadu, which is one of the districts identified by UNICEF for its integrated village programme, the teams have already brought out a tabloid magazine called *Thappa rightta* in Tamil.

Recently, three films were screened in Chen-

nai that were researched, written and filmed by the children. The stories were drawn from the everyday experiences of the children and dwelt on issues such as domestic violence, child abuse, problems faced by the girl child, alcoholism and so on.

*Kalvettu* was probably the most hard-hitting film of them all. During the field study the young filmmakers visited child labour schools and talked to the children there.

Sriram V. Iyer, founder and director of NalandaWay, who had accompanied the children to one such school, recalls the meeting with Pramila (10) and her younger brother. One evening their father had threatened to drown the boy in the well if their mother did not give him money for drink. "I could see the rage and tears in his eyes when he narrated this incident. 'I will kill my father when I become big', he said rather firmly," says Sriram. *Kalvettu* tells his story and in the process highlights the condition of child labourers all over the country.

*Mezhuguvathe* shows, in two minutes, a real-life story of how a girl deals with harassment; it is an important film as it shows how much more crude sexual harassment can be in the rural areas.

*Mug-up Mangamma*, the longest at 15 minutes, shows that life isn't all gloom and, though rare and far in between, the children have happy times and certainly know how to have a good time.

The children are selected through talent workshops that are conducted in the communities with the help of panchayats, schools and local NGOs.

"It is important for the stakeholders like the governments, policymakers, NGOs, donors, media and citizens to be aware of problems as a child would perceive them, so that they can implement more reasonable policies," says Sriram, explaining the filmmaking project's objective.

Future plans include setting up eight news bureaus, a centralised studio in Chennai and audio blogging to reach out to children in the six districts of Krishnagiri, Chennai, Cuddalore, Nagapattinam, Kanchipuram and Kanyakumari.

Armed with cameras and continuously questioning the status quo, perhaps these young people might succeed in bringing changes that impact their lives positively.