

The Economic Times – Madras Plus – 27 July 2006

2 THURSDAY 27, July, 2006 MADRAS PLUS

# All Our Children...

**CHILD'S PLAY**  
LAKSHMY VENKITESWARAN



*If kids were given a camera to tell their story, what images would we see? UNICEF gives us a glimpse...*

Every child has the right to good health, education, equality and protection," says Cecilia Adams, country representative, UNICEF. "When countries like Columbia and China can give way for children to voice their opinions through CCTV, why hasn't India joined the band? Unfortunately, we use and abuse them and don't give enough credit to their aptitude and intellect. Because if we did, there would be fewer wars and lesser problems," he explains. Despite an over-crowded hall and a late beginning, Sam Sida Story, a UNICEF supported initiative, in association with the Chennai based NGO, NalandaWay, kicked off with a bang, with the thematic play, 'Master' which dealt with issues such as child marriage, child sexual abuse and so on from the children's perspective. It also showcased three short films - Kolvetu, Methuganther and Magup Managanama, which were researched and written by children aged 12 to 16 years on issues that are important to them. Kolvetu is a story of an eight-year old boy who vows to kill his father when he becomes a police officer. Methuganther is about a girl's take on harassment and the last, Magup Managanama, is a light-hearted version of the influence of films and media on learning amongst school-going children.

East Side Story is a project aimed at the development of children from backward sections of society in which children are able to give expression to their problems like domestic violence, child abuse, alcoholism etc. Krishnagar was recognised as the most backward district in terms of social and economic indicators. "There are about 8,887 child labourers in my district alone. It is one of the 18 districts in India that are the most underdeveloped," rues Sambash Babu, District Collector, Krishnagar District. "We have the funding, almost Rs.25,000 crore, to take care of children's problems. But where is the money going? What is the reason that is keeping kids to going to school? Through this project, we are hoping to bring about a community focus, something like gaurav sabhas, which keep track of the number of kids going to school and also make them come back to school." Till now, 12,878 - jeevakeyali in Krishnagar district have been provided with computers and other data management software to enable this objective. There are also plans to involve tsunami-affected children from Coimbatore, Nagapattinam, etc. in a programme. He hopes that the endeavour will help them understand children's problems better and enable them in their overall development.

"How sensitive are we to children?" asks Srikrishna Agan, founder, NalandaWay. "We are so overwhelmed by our capacity to give solutions, we don't listen to our kids anymore. So, as a part of this development programme, we've been busy in identifying promising children from marginal and disadvantaged communities and nurture them to be successful in their lives."

It is, indeed, a shame that a developing nation like India is ranked the sixth most dangerous (in the world) for children to live. Hopefully, initiatives like these should be able to increase awareness level and help children grow into successful adults. "But we can't do it alone. It has come from every one of us, in the way we report our own children or their friends," signs off Srini