

Through the lens of deprived children

Staff Reporter

CHENNAI: What stories will children from the marginalised communities tell if they were reporters working on issues that affected their world?

An initiative to help them capture their concerns on film, launched on Friday, might hold the answer.

Joint venture

The project called 'East Side Story' is a joint venture of voluntary organisation NalandaWay and UNICEF. It is a network of news bureaus where children aged 12-18 research, write and shoot documentary-style films that could serve as tools for social change.

Three films released

Three short films were released to mark the launch of 'East Side Story.' 'Kalvetra' is the story of an eight-year-old boy filled with anger against his alcoholic father who ill-treats the family.

The film was made by a group of children, from economically and socially weak backgrounds, in Krishnagiri district.

Commending the children, Santhosh Babu, Collector of Krishnagiri district, said the administration would soon come up with a computerised database of children not in schools. Funds from Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and other projects would be used to help families enrol the children in schools, he said.

Ready to face challenges

'Mezhuguvarthee', a two-minute film, talks of the harassment young girls face. "We have become braver after our theatre workshops. We are prepared to face any consequences," said Sowmya and Geetha, who are part of the eight-girl team that made Mezhuguvarthee.

'Mug-up Mangamma', the third short film, was made by children from Chennai. A light-hearted feature, it shows how schoolteachers need to make lessons fun if children are expected to understand and remember them.

Changing outlook

Cecilio Adorna, UNICEF Country Office Representative, said similar work by children in other countries had helped to "change the outlook of government." A war-free world would emerge only if children's right to participate was upheld, he said.

N. Ram, Editor-in-Chief, *The Hindu*, stressed the need to improve foundational level education in India.

Although legislation for free and compulsory education existed, the problem was in the implementation, he noted.

He described children's films as "powerful media tools" that would tell the truth.

To cover tsunami-hit

NalandaWay founder Sriram V. Ayer said the 'East Side Story' project would be expanded to the tsunami-affected districts, and the short films screened on TV channels, at village festivals and in public functions to promote awareness on children's concerns.

The former Chief Secretary for Tamil Nadu, T.V. Venkataraman, was among those who participated.