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# Children speak out through documentary films, theatre

Initiative started by voluntary organisation NalandaWay and UNICEF

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**CHENNAI:** Kumal's father beats his mother every day. When he protests, he is whipped. Because he is only a child, his voice remains unheard.

An initiative started by voluntary organisation NalandaWay and UNICEF could change this situation. The project helps children make their voice heard far and wide through documentary films and theatre. A play was recently staged by children belonging to economically backward families in Villivakkam in Chennai. It addressed alcoholism, sexual harassment and domestic violence.

## Hear hear

Titled 'Mative Idhadhan,' the short play put forth the message: "Listen to us, we have a say." Children wore green face paint and bright orange outfits to capture the attention of the audience. The five-member cast presented the play in classical street theatre format with song and dance sequences.

The play contained capsules of the daily experiences of the players. A girl worries about her parents' decision to marry her off at a young age. A boy is traumatised when his father beats his mother to take her money. A girl is emotionally scarred because of sexual abuse by her uncle.

NalandaWay Director Sriram V. Ayer says that children from the marginalised sections faced such experiences everyday. They must



**HAVING THEIR SAY:** Children from the marginalised communities recently staged a play in Chennai on issues that affect their lives. — PHOTO: R. RAGU

be given a medium to speak out, he says.

The children have so far produced three documentaries.

The films touch on issues that are generally not spoken about but

can affect children. 'Mezhugavathre,' a two-minute documentary, shows two girls going to buy a pack of sanitary napkins from the neighbourhood shop. An idler passes a comment. One of the girls

retaliates by slapping him and the man is silenced.

"How long can we keep quiet? We are not going to take such harassment lightly," says 16-year-old Geetha, who acted in the film. "Af-

ter seeing our film, I hope more and more girls will stand up and raise their voices against harassment," she says. The films will be screened in village festivals, schools and public gatherings.