



DECCAN DEVELOPMENT SOCIETY

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Press Release

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The **International Red Cross and Red Crescent Society [IFRC]** the **Geneva based global organization** released the **World Disaster Report, 2011** globally last night. In this Report which has Focus on Hunger and Malnutrition, the communities of the Deccan Development Society have received a proud dual recognition. First of all in recognition of their Food Sovereignty programme, the Disaster Report makes a special mention of the DDS communities in a two page box ***Saving Seeds and speaking out: the women of Medak District, Andhra Pradesh.*** This is a resounding acknowledgement on a global platform of the work done by the women sanghams of Deccan Development Society in Medak District of Andhra Pradesh.

The second important recognition is the commissioning of a film to the CMT by IFRC called **Community Conquers Hunger**. That a non literate rural women's group was commissioned a film by an international organization is by itself a rare event. But that the film is also a chronicle of the DDS women's sanghams is a matter of greater pride for all of us.

The DDS Community Media Trust [CMT], a group of non literate rural women, predominantly dalits, has been winning several laurels for its amazing media work over the last decade.

The CMT runs a Women's Video Collective and the first ever community radio of India called *Sangham Radio*. While the Women's Video Collective has been functioning since 1996, the Sangham Radio took up narrowcasting since 1998 and has been on the air since October 2008, broadcasting two hours every day. Both these outfits are managed entirely by women from farming communities.

Last month the In the global competition called “2011 Communication for Social Change Award” held by the University of Brisbane, Australia, in which over 60 competitors “**of exceptional high quality**” from 22 countries participated, the awards panel was “**impressed by the excellent work DDS Community Media Trust is undertaking**”

The latest is the special assignment the received to produce a film on their own communities who despite being from very low income sections of rural Telangana, have abolished hunger from their midst. The commission came from the prestigious Geneva based international organization, IFRC [**International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies**]. In a special ceremony on September 22, 2011, the IFRC screened the film in front of a elite audiences of Delhi who included top diplomats, politicians, academics and the crème de la crème of Delhi citizenry.

The film **Community Conquers Hunger** narrates the inspiring story of the DDS communities and their struggle to become food sovereign over the last two decades. Not in the distant past, their daily confrontation was with starvation and deprivation. Most of their days and nights were spent hungry. A plateful of food was a dream they could never fulfill. This was the reality of thousands of women in the Medak District of Andhra Pradesh, South India, before they organized themselves as *Sanghams* [voluntary associations] of the Deccan Development Society, a voluntary organisation. Once they had come together as *Sanghams*, they never looked back and wrote their present and future with a remarkable self assurance. .

Community Conquers Hunger is the remarkable story of these women from the margins of society, who with a quiet confidence went about banishing hunger from their midst in a span of two decades. From a community of the hungry, they became a community of the plenty. From being food receivers they went on to become food providers. *Community Conquers Hunger* is a chronicle of this fascinating transformation.

A film produced by the rural, non literate women farmers of the *DDS Community Media Trust* for the *International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies*, this 15 minute self portrait of the remarkable community of the Deccan Development Society in Medak District of Andhra Pradesh.

Addressing the media meet Ms Chinna Narsamma, Ms Humnapur Laxamma, Ms Dandu Swaroopamma, Ms Dandu Sooremma, Ms Punyamma and Ms Thammali Manjula, all members of the DDS Community Media Trust explained their work in chronicling the unique achievements of their women’s sanghams of the poor who pre dated the current SHGs by over a decade.

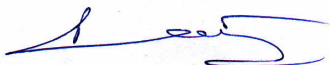
Ms Chinna Narsamma, herself a small farmer and a community filmmaker, who made the film **Community Conquers Hunger**, said that the DDS sanghams were the first group in India to have started 100 days of employment for the poor, which preceded MGNREGA by 20 years. Through this employment programme which they called **Summer Employment**, they brought over 5000 acres of near fallow lands under cultivation, produced more than a million days of employment in 30 villages over a period of ten years and started producing over 20 million kgs of food every year. This was the first step in abandoning hunger in their sanghams.

Ms Zaheerabad Punyamma added that the DDS women's sanghams were also the first groups in AP who started leasing in lands and became the first women's groups to start collective farming groups on these leased lands and produce additional food for their families. In two decades, the DDS sangham women have leased in more than 1000 acres of land and have produced over half a million kgs of food for their groups year after year.

But the most seminal action of the DDS sanghams was the Community Lead Alternative PDS which works in over 100 villages in Medak now. Ms Dandu Swaroopamma, a community filmmaker and a member of the DDS Food Sovereignty trust said that this Alternative PDS programme based on local production, local storage and local distribution has realized community run PDS. The sanghams have brought over 4500 acres of cultivable fallows under cultivation and produce nearly a million kgs or more food every year. They have done poverty mapping of their villages and identified over 10000 families as recipients of their jowar based millet rations. Each family has received a ration card through which they can draw between 10-25 kgs of jowar every month depending on their poverty status. The jowar is sold at 25% of the market price to the identified poor.

Ms Begari Laxmamma, a community filmmaker and a community seed keeper pointed out that all these villages have their own community seed banks from which any farmer can borrow nearly 50-80 seed varieties. Thousands of women in these villages have their own household seed banks and never depend upon outside seeds. Thus these villages have become seed sovereign.

Ms Thammali Manjula, filmmaker and a coordinator of the Community Food Sovereignty programme summed up saying that It is through these measures that the DDS communities have conquered hunger and established a hunger free society. This is the theme that the women of DDS Community Media Trust has portrayed in their film **Community Conquers Hunger**.



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Director