

Inspiring rural youth and children

The idea of the ‘Grassroots Video Festival’ came from the vision to involve and inspire the rural people particularly the grassroots youth leaders and children and to convey basic information which are not mentioned in the text book for ‘new leadership development’.



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Black scenes

Countrywide 459 blasts in 63 districts within 30 minutes at August 17, 2005 has made a black scene in history of Bangladesh. This terrorism mostly involve misguided grassroots youth who are innocent believers and have no clear concept about the modern world, faith and life style. General finding is that this incidence is not the cause but the result. It happened because we could not educate and train the youth generation as universal minded as to encounter fanaticism, hateism and prejudices at last to ignorance. The grassroots reality is that majority of rural people don't have minimum access to basic



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life information; the youth and children grow up without knowing and live high risk of invisible conflict (sometime exposed) of HIV as well as other degradation of human values.

In Bangladesh, the mainstream media events are mostly held in cities and are arranged according to the city people like and demand, with commercial and entertainment approach. Here majority grassroots people are back of scenes, or, in some case represented as hero of disaster,

poverty and literacy. This stereotypical presentation also have been damely followed by the international media which together influences negatively and abstract the development process. Along with the negative aspects every society has positive cultural power and historical heritage which can advance and unite the whole nation unpresidently. Mostly media forget this sense while representing lives and stories of developing countries like Bangladesh. Power of culture and communal spirit can easily rise up by proper media presentation that can procede us despartely towards true freedom, peace, unity and happiness breaking through all the borders.

The idea of the ‘Grassroots Video Festival’ came from the vision to involve and inspire the rural people particularly the grassroots youth leaders and children. The motivation of the festival is to convey basic information which are not mentioned in the text book for ‘new leadership development’. The theme of the festival was ‘Unite Us’ which comes from the patriotic slogan, ‘Unity Saving the People, Unity Saving the Nation’.

The festival

With huge participation of the students and youth, Bangladesh 1st Grassroots Educational Video Festival –2005 (<http://www.festival.unnayannet.org>) was held at Muktagacha and Kushtia, from 23-30 August, 2005. The first phase of the festival was held from 23 – 25 August 2005 at three colleges of Muktagacha. In Khushitia, it was held at Doulotpur Shilpokola Academy, Zilla Porishod Auditorium and Police Line College. Here along with the

video show, 'Youth leadership and development' related workshop and cultural event were held.

Twenty-two documentaries collected from different countries had been screened in the festival which were contributed by - TVE Asia Pacific, BCCP, Youth Channel, ULTRALAB, Drik, Pluralism, UNDP, SEHD, Out Of Focus, WITNESS, Steps Towards Development and UNICEF - Bangladesh. The festival covered the issues of MDGs, human rights, Tsunami, acid violence, child rights, HIV/AIDS, Youth leadership, trafficking, environment, gender equality, small arms issues, etc. The documentaries on HIV/AIDS, acid victim, and Tsunami were highly appreciated. During show, evaluation form, festival sticker and postcard on 'Truth Taking Project' were distributed to the audience. Request has come to include the documentaries on the social problems and issues particularly on drug abuse, gender equality, global culture, etc., in the next year. The documentaries of the festival 2005 would be screened in 'Rights and Development Convention 2005' at Chittagong in Bangladesh on 25-27 November.

The festival proved that such kind of grassroots media event would surely advance the sustaining development and participatory process, and would help the unprivileged grassroots youth and children to meet with the today's world.

Specifically the vision of the festival was to make a small step to inform the grassroots youth who don't have minimum access to basic information. Even they don't know about Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and basic human rights; but whole world including Bangladesh are going with the millennium targets 2015 to make a povertyless 'new world'. Is it possible without giving priority and equal opportunity to majority grassroots people's



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participation in development process to achieve the goals? Five years for MDGs and 50 years for Universal Human Rights Declaration have already passed but still now more than 95 percent Bangladeshi don't know MDGs and/or rights.

The experiences

As festival coordinator, I am very impressed and moved to see the huge participation and cooperation of grassroots people. I understand that this festival is beyond the educational curriculum and provides



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the much needed ICT and development education to the grassroots youth. However, visual and multimedia presentations are effective for quick understanding and result. In the region, there is no such community media centre, or knowledge centre or tale centre. Children and youth are learning with struggle by their own initiatives. Privileged are winning in the competition. As a result, the digital divide, information and opportunity gap are becoming sharper, which are not favourable for the future leadership and development. I believe a small 'Grassroots Media Centre' can make bridge and open the gate for access to information and opportunities for local people.

To arrange the festival 2005, I knocked many doors for a small grant but without result. At last with self-finance, Machizo's volunteer contribution, and local partnership with SETU and Borno we organised the festival in two districts which have been made pillar to arrange the festival every year. Within limited time and resources, we organised the festival and it was highly appreciated by audience and local civil society. For the following years, any kind of contribution from similar minded organisation and individual would be highly appreciated. My commitment in the year 2006 will be to organise the festival more widely and go forward with highest spirit to establish an ideal community based youth media centre.

In the way, UnnayanNet nowadays is making efforts and doing advocacy to establish an alternative, 'Grassroots Youth Media Centre (UnnayanNet Info Centre)' which will profoundly contribute to 'new leadership, new development' that will help to establish harmonious and peaceful information society, and to expand the ownership of modern technology and global information system to rural and disadvantaged people by solving the digital divide properly. (One InfoCenter in One Village – <http://bangladesh.takingitglobal.org/express/panorama/article.html?ContentID=4494>)

As a part of the initiative and in order to get better results, in the early 2006 UnnayanNet will organise workshop 'Introducing ICT and Global Information to Grassroots Youth for New Leadership Development'. It is planned to expand this festival in the whole Bangladesh through the partners and stockholders of UnnayanNet. ■