

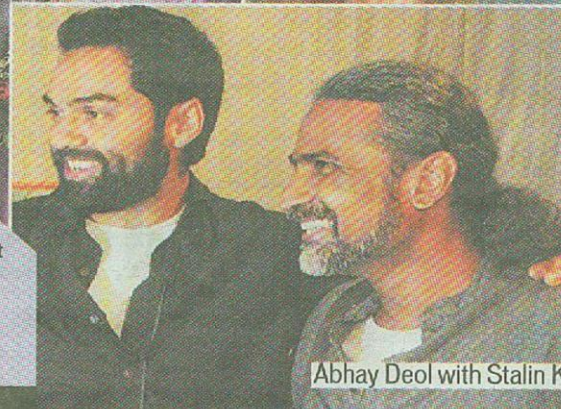
# 'Slum dwellers use TV to bring about change in th

The dream is to democratise Indian media, through documentaries shot by the least asked men



The Video Volunteers at work

Jessica Mayberry



Abhay Deol with Stalin K

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American Jessica Mayberry, 32, and Indian human rights activist Stalin K started Goa-based NGO Video Volunteers (VV) in 2006. Partnering with NGOs across India and receiving funds from an American non-profit organisation, Knight Foundation, they have trained more than a 100 slum dwellers and villagers, so far, to shoot films magazine-style on issues like health, education, sanitation, garbage, AIDS, land rights, electricity, elections and water.

They have set up 15 video community units across eight Indian states, two of which are in Mumbai. Each unit comprises six to 10 people who live in the surrounding slums and villages, and are being trained as producers.

Every six weeks, they create a video on a subject that interests the local community, by interviewing people on camera, on issues that affect them. The films are screened in the villages and slums to inform and empower the people living

Video Volunteers is on the look-out for funds, journalists that wish to mentor its staff, social activists that would make good citizen journalists, and NGOs to partner up with. For more information go to [www.videovolunteers.org](http://www.videovolunteers.org)

there.

So far, more than 2,50,000 people living in Indian slums and villages, many of whom are illiterate, have watched these films.

In Mumbai, two charities, Youth for Unity and Voluntary Action (Yuva) and Akshara, work in partnership with Video Volunteers.

Yuva has made video magazines on subjects ranging from job loss faced by those displaced by the Mumbai Urban Transport Project to Right To Information Act. One film stopped a pilot scheme to privatise water in a Jogeshwhari slum when residents protested after watching the film. Another film on garbage collection led to dustbins being provided in a Malad slum.

Akshara made a film on sexual harassment that led to the creation of a free police helpline for women.

Video Volunteers is now recruit-

ing 40 to 60 community journalists, at least one underprivileged person from each state, and training them to spot and make three-minute news videos, bringing to life real stories from their areas. These will be sent to mainstream TV news channels and websites.

"We are in talks with several TV channels," says Mayberry. "We will decide the content TV channels are interested in and provide the same. We just hope that our journalists eventually become stringers for mainstream news channels." She points out that the poor are generally written about, but are rarely given space to express their ideas. "There is a lack of quality journalism in rural areas. And when you see your own people talking about issues that are their own, it's much more powerful," she points out.

Abhay Deol attended one of the slum screenings a couple of weeks ago. Mayberry says, "Since he is interested in social issues, there was a natural affinity. He will help us popularise our activities."

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