

Community radio helps rural women make informed choices



Radio station aims to make behavioural changes within families

With the elections fast approaching, two women in Vizhunthamavadi, a village 23 km away from Nagapattinam have taken up the task of helping rural women take informed decisions and familiarise them with the VVPAT (Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail) machines through their community radio - Kalanjiam Samuha Vanoli 90.8.

“We saw that most election-related information that a family receives is through a male member, so we started focusing on disseminating information for women through women. Through our programmes, we make sure that not only women but also their families know their rights as voters and can demand them,” says Ranjeeda, station manager and radio jockey.

Set up in 2008, the first-of-its kind in Tamil Nadu, the radio station which was set up in a paddy field, began working along with fisherfolk, farmers, women, and the disabled, on the heels of the 2006 tsunami for information and dissemination of relief and rehabilitation. Soon, the radio began taking up cultural, health and women’s issues and also conducting workshops and training programmes. Now, Aparna Shukla, a former journalist and an SBI Youth for India fellow who took on the role of a director and Ms. Ranjeeda, run the show.

Apart from broadcasting programmes such as ‘What is NOTA,’ ‘How to choose a candidate’ and ‘Facilities on the National Voter Service Portal (NVSP) website,’ the radio station is also hoping to make behavioural changes within families when it comes to decision making on whom to vote for. “Our village usually has a high voter turnout, but there is lacuna in the system, as in the approach of choosing a candidate, women's participation, awareness programmes, apart from other booth- level facilities for the disabled,” says Ms. Aparna. They have begun conducting mock elections, training the people on how to use EVMs, VVPAT machines to ensure their vote has been cast without any error.

Kanaga, 19, a first-time-voter from Vadugoor says the radio programme made her realise the importance of voting. “I heard about NOTA from a friend and realised that the youth needs to stand accountable instead of blaming others for everything that is wrong in our country.” Meanwhile, Durga, who learnt about CVigil through the radio programme, says, “I have heard about several malpractices during elections, and candidates handing out money in exchange for votes. When I heard CVigil App helps you report these cases, I was really happy that something can be done about it safely. I’ll surely tell others about it.”

The radio station, after recovering from Cyclone Gaja when its structure was partially destroyed, has started a new initiative called ‘Voice of the Vulnerable’ to train young women in reporting.