



Christian Aid/Annanda Farrant

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# Poor women in India now feed the poorest people

**The Deccan Development Society (DDS), supported by Christian Aid, has achieved world-renowned success for its social and agricultural programmes in a drought-prone district of Andhra Pradesh in India.**

DDS' work has enabled 5,000 poor, excluded women to regain control of their own food production, and also to take control of their own media to bring about policy changes at local and state level. Through their collective efforts, they have turned 5,000 acres of fallow and waste land into productive cropland that now feeds not only their own families but 50,000 of the poorest people in their communities as well.

Chandramma Moligeri (pictured above) is one of the oldest women members of a DDS supported sangham (women's group). A dalit, she lives on the margins of Bidekanne village in Andhra Pradesh. Before she joined her sangham group she farmed only 1.5 acres of land. 'We are dalits so we had very little.' Through improving her biodiverse farming methods and growing multiple crops including healthy millets, she has grown her assets to 20 acres of land. 'I am the only person I know who has handed land on to their daughters,' she says. Traditionally, farmers pass on land to their sons only.

India is positioning itself as a player that means serious business on the global stage, but this social and economic development is far from equally distributed. Only a fifth of India's 1.1 billion population are reaping the benefits of rapid economic growth. But the remaining 80 per cent – a

staggering 880 million people – have seen little positive change in their lives or their environments. While the rich have got richer, poverty has become more entrenched. Most of this 80 per cent exist below the 'US\$2 a day' poverty line, but a shocking 370 million among them subsist on less than US\$1 a day.

DDS runs a Community Media Trust in which predominantly illiterate women produce radio and video programmes to educate, raise awareness and campaign on issues such as GM crops, diversified millet-oriented farming, and climate change. Its Christian Aid-funded community radio station Sangham FM started broadcasting in October 2008 and for the first time in India provides a platform for poor people to project their voices on the airwaves. This will help the women of the sanghams to encourage others to campaign for more sustainable methods of farming to address rural poverty across the district and, one day, perhaps across India.



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With the help of DDS, Kamlamma has transformed the rocky waste land given to her by the Indian government and is now growing 28 different crops

