

February 17, 2011

Video clippings educate on methods practised elsewhere



All the video clippings are available to the public on www.digitalgreen.org

Giant Leap: Teaching a farmer to shoot with a video camera. Photo: Special Arrangement Visual media leaves a profound impact on viewers.

“Especially for farmers, on seeing it on the screen, they can learn more about different methods, about concepts practised in other regions to improve yield. More so, if the video clippings are shot by farmers themselves, it becomes all the more interesting and farmers are able to instantly connect with it,” says 29-year-old Rikin Gandhi, CEO, Digital Green, an NGO in Delhi.

Mr. Rikin holds degrees from Massachusetts Institute of Technology (Masters in Aeronautical and Astronomical Engineering) and Carnegie Mellon (Bachelors in Computer Science) and chose to work in rural India than in some space programme in the U.S.

Why poverty exists?

“Though immediately after my graduation I thought of joining some space programme, I happened to read about people travelling to space and seeing the earth from high up and

wondering why poverty and war exist on this beautiful planet.

“Many of them after coming back took up work as teachers or farmers in a bid to connect with people. This inspired me to reconsider my desire to do something in this sector,” he says.

A chance visit to India during that time gave him his first exposure to rural India. The exposure as well as the realisation that 60 percent of his native country's population relied on agriculture for livelihood made Mr. Rikin rethink on his goals. He feels that technology can be used to improve the economic well being of farmers in India, and if used properly, can help put an end to poverty.

Mr. Rikin's name recently figured in the prestigious Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) Technology Review list of 35 global innovators called TR 35.

Explaining about Digital Green he says:

“The organisation produces and distributes community-centric, locally relevant videos about good agricultural practices.

Different channels

The videos are then shown to small groups of villagers on laptops, DVDs, village cable networks, and screens.

“These are simple videos starring local farmers that strike a chord with other villagers.

“We are receiving good feedback about this project that shows nearly 70-80 per cent farmers are adopting new ideas as opposed to 10-15 per cent earlier by traditional extension approach.” Till date hundreds of such videos are uploaded on the (website: www.digitalgreen.org). All videos produced are available to the public. The videos are by farmers, of farmers, and for farmers.

Resource persons

A number of NGOs' help the organisation in identifying "resource persons" from the community for producing them and to provide subject-matter expertise for ensuring good quality of the videos.

All the videos are produced by the community. "They identify interesting topics and make short video clips of local farmers and distribute them.

Some members after going back to their farms use pico projectors which are the size of mobile phones to show the clippings to their people," adds Mr. Rikin.

The community members come together on a regular basis for discussing matters such as sowing, nursery raising or weeding based on the season.

"Initially we started working with one NGO outside Bangalore and presently we are now working in four States. We received a grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and we are planning to reach out to a number of villages over a period of three years.

"We want to expand in India and reach out to as many farmers as possible. A technology platform is also being created for farmers to interact with others and ask questions to the experts and we want to scale up this platform. You can access the current platform by calling 1800 103 9111," he adds.

Technology review 35

Selected as an Ashoka fellow and included in the 2010 list of world's young innovators in Technology Review 35, Mr Rikin made Digital Green an independent organisation in 2009, now supported by the Bill Gates Foundation.

Does he still consider going to work in a space programme as a more remunerative option?

He says, "working in a space programme is like getting fifteen minutes of fame, while working for small and marginal farmers and helping transform their lives can always be more meaningful."

For more details readers can contact Mr. Rikin Gandhi at Digital Green Trust, K-2, Second Floor, Green Park Main, New Delhi – 110016, India, email: rikin@digitalgreen.org, Phone: 011-41881037 and 41881038.

web.thehindu@thehindu.co.in Copyright © 2012, The Hindu