

GLOBAL RESEARCH
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Participatory filmmaking with rural communities in India

Film-maker Christine Cornea and Research Associate Alexandra Smith travelled to India in March 2020 to create a series of short films about food and nutrition for the CHIRAG research project. These films will be used to support the development of a virtual knowledge centre, managed and shared by the communities for knowledge exchange about food diversity and sustainable practices.

What is the CHIRAG project?

The CHIRAG project (Creative Hub for Innovation and Reciprocal Research and Action for Gender Equality) is funded by the UK Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF), through the UEA's [Global Research Translation Award \(GRTA\)](#). The Indian research partners are working with communities to study nutrition, health and wellbeing to generate practical knowledge. This knowledge will be shared through an innovative digital hub, hosting video podcasts, creative writing, interviews, films and other tools.



Building skills for longer term objectives

This GCRF funded project aims to build capacity in local communities by delivering training for local people to develop a wide range of skills. Christine and Alex delivered two-day filmmaking training sessions to different communities in two Indian states, Bihar and Odisha. The sessions focused on aspects of short documentary recording including narrative and structure, visualising documentary shots, framing and camera movement, and technical skills for using a GoPro kit. These technical sessions were followed by story boarding exercises, enable community groups to plan their films. Christine commented that the participants were *"really keen to learn about how they could make short documentary films. We were struck by their enthusiasm and ability to grasp certain concepts and skills so quickly. Honestly, they were a joy to teach"*.

Films created by communities, for communities

After two days of training, the community groups launched into filming. A group of young participants chose to create a short-film about *Chaitra Parab* - a local festival celebrating the start of mango season. Other groups focused on the practices of foraging for different food items. Interviewees, mainly women, elderly men and children, highlighted that forest food items play an important role in their diet and raised topics of concern for the communities, including climate change, reduced forest cover and access to land and resources.



One of the interviews focused on the Mahula flower (*Madhuca latifolia*), a minor forest product that is a rich source of glucose and fructose. Interviewees talked about the social, religious and cultural significance of the Mahula, how they collect, store and sell the flowers, and how different parts of the process are undertaken by men and women.

Another interview was filmed in a plantation of Eucalyptus trees and focused on the changing gender dynamics due to a shift in plantation practice, enabling women's engagement at work, but also presenting problems with child care and women's control over decision making in terms of land use.



The short films created by the local communities will be shared on the digital hub, where sustainable food practices and knowledge can be shared within and between communities.

Christine Cornea is a Senior Lecturer in the School of Art, Media and American Studies at UEA, and Alex Smith is a Research Associate. Blog written by Elettra Spadola, GRTA Project Administrator at UEA.



The CHIRAG Project is funded by the UEA's Global Research Translation Award (GRTA), a £1.36 million project to help tackle health, nutrition, education and environment issues in developing countries. The funding comes from the UK government's Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF), which seeks to fast-track promising research findings into real-world solutions. The Project Partners are PRADAN, Kalinga Institute for Social Sciences and Gram Vaani.

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