



## Promoting Local Debate



Ms. Thillaiyamma, President of the Women's Development Foundation, Akkaraipattu, presents at a forum discussion to more than 30 journalists on Gender Issues and Media at the Kalmunai East Media House

Internews' Regional Media Initiative, funded by USAID / OTI, provides training and resources for local journalists to cover issues in their communities. The Initiative includes:

- Establishing local Media Houses as institutions providing training, production, and resource support for journalists across ethnic lines in the east and south
- Providing training and production support to other regional journalists through Colombo-based activities
- Providing grants and training to independent producers, with a focus on community coverage

Provincial journalists are key to providing information on issues affecting their communities. But opportunities for professional development, and a chance to engage in crucial debates, are often limited.

Internews is facilitating discussion between journalists and local experts on key areas, to promote debate and help deepen local media coverage. Regular discussion forums hosted by invited resource people, give journalists a chance to explore issues in-depth. Over 12 forums so far have included:

- Media and the Prevention of Terrorism Act
- Gender Issues and Media
- Reporting on Mental Health and Trauma
- Reporting on Migrant Worker issues
- Media and Globalization
- Media Law, including defamation and libel

For journalists, these events are a chance to get comprehensive information often unfamiliar areas. 'The forum discussion was very helpful,' said Harichandran, one of the few journalists still working in Batticaloa. '[It] made me realize how we can better cover stories on a range of issues.'

Discussion forums are organized by Internews' Media Houses, located in the East and South of Sri Lanka. Several resource persons come from local institutions, including Universities, Chambers of Commerce, and local civil society organizations. Others are brought from partner institutions like the Sri Lanka Press Institute, based in Colombo.

'Women are facing many difficulties...but journalists are not covering their issues,' says Ms. Thillaiyamma, President of the Women's Development Foundation in Akkaraipattu and invited resource person. 'This kind of forum discussion is helpful for us to...encourage journalists to cover women's issues in a comprehensive manner, and discuss how to do this.'

Forum issues are frequently covered in the Real Voices, the Media Houses' flagship radio program, which is broadcast to local audiences.