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## On cultural policies for the North and South: in conversation with Madhusree Dutta

'Appropriate cultural policies are a necessity in today's world,' according to Madhusree Dutta, an independent filmmaker from India. She is also the executive director of Majlis, a Bombay-based legal-aid organization, which engages in advocacy and awareness programmes for the rights of the marginalized.

Elaborating on her work, Dutta observes that the film medium has benefited greatly from the digital revolution. 'The low costs of compact discs and the growing access to internet in India has made it easier to reach scattered audiences and more feasible for lay persons to get into the fray of non-fiction filmmaking.

In early 2005, Majlis conceptualized and developed a children's digital interactive game, *Spice Adventures*, about multiculturalism in the city of Bombay. The game was created by film professionals, activists and school children, making the activity genuinely participatory and democratic. Dutta explains, "It is important to enter the growing market for these visual media; otherwise our activities will remain marginal."



Still from *Spice Adventures*

While the digital revolution has helped democratize cultural production, globalization has made the work of cultural activists more urgent. At the World Social Forum, which was held in Bombay in 2004, Majlis used the occasion to demonstrate how globalization-induced homogenization often leaves community performers and artists less mobile and disempowered.

To combat this trend, Dutta recommends three distinct millennium policies for artists, community cultural performers and media professionals respectively. 'Each of these has different forces of production and often different audiences, and deserves separate policy initiatives.'

Dutta is of the opinion that there is insufficient patronage for culture and the arts in the Netherlands: 'Artists in this country are in worse shape than in India.' It is this activist's strong conviction that in the quest for a sustainable resolution on culture and development cooperation, the policy to support and promote local artists in the South must be accompanied by similar policies for the North.

*Sudha Rajagopalan*