



Rebuilding Gujarat

Ten months after the devastating earthquake in Gujarat, NGOs in Gujarat are busy working hard to rebuild the lives of the victims. AID has been actively involved in these long-term rehabilitation efforts that involve building homes, schools and other village infrastructure, while at the same time ensuring that the weaker sections share the benefits.

Reconstruction projects

AID-Boston and AID-Dallas have approved \$6000 to fund a project involving Earthquake safety related training programs and awareness building. *National Council of People's Disaster Preparedness* (NCPDP), an NGO led by Rajendra Desai, has proposed the project. NCPDP has devoted over six years to the rehabilitation of earthquake-affected people in Latur, Maharashtra and Chamoli, Uttaranchal.

Meanwhile, AID chapters at Minneapolis and College Park have approved \$27,000 for a proposal from *Manav Sadhana*, an Ahmedabad based NGO. The project involves construction of 50 *Bhungas* (a traditional mud and straw construction that is earthquake resistant) with toilet facilities.

Livelihood Generation

AID chapters at Charlotte and Raleigh have approved \$21,000 for a project by *Gram Vikas Trust (GVT)* that involves promotion of appropriate agricultural & rural technologies. The proposal involves the reconstruction of approximately 8 villages in the Okhamandal taluka. The focus is to provide livelihood to the villagers, to repair percolation tanks, construct earthen bunds along the fields to prevent salinity ingress, and to promote handicraft activities through women's cooperatives.

Health Care

Trust for Reaching the Unreached (TRU) is focusing on providing primary health care and referral needs in Khadir (Bhachau taluka), Balasar (Rapar taluka) and Maliya (in North Rajkot district). AID chapters at Austin and San Diego have approved an amount of \$15,000 for a proposal from TRU for training local people and various NGO in the area of community health.

- Arti Saxena, AID Dallas



Victims of earthquake living in open tents 3 months after the disaster

Understanding Women's Movements

Kanyakumari district in Tamilnadu, is home to a vibrant women's movement in progress. Last year, I spent 6 months observing the activities of MALAR, a women's organization that has initiated a network of self-help groups (over 1000) involved in micro-credit schemes and adult literacy. The following are some conclusions from my study.

---MALAR is among nearly 50 NGOs in the district who have organized women's based self-help groups. However, MALAR is one of the very few organizations where women from the community are in leadership positions.

---MALAR's groups comprise of women from different castes (including Nairs, Nadars and Dalits), religions (mostly Christian and Hindu) and economic status. The women quite uniformly claimed that caste discrimination has been on the decline for more than two decades, but inter-caste marriages, are very rare. In MALAR's groups, any form of caste discrimination is condemned.

---The self-help groups have significantly reduced bondage to the moneylenders and women's access to these credit schemes is invaluable to their families.

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Father And Son

*A father and a son walking in the sand,
watching the waves caressing the land,
Father looks into his son's young eyes,
Gives him a philosophical smile,*

*My son, what do you want to be,
When you grow up, what will you be,
The son looks back with his deep brown eyes,
And without hesitating replies,
I want to be a movie star, a pilot, a rich man,
An astronaut, a cricketer, a scientist,
Superman, and kill all the bad men.*

*Son, don't you want to be a good man,
An honest man, and a noble man.
He smiles, yes dad I want to be all that.*

*Hey child, tell me what do you see,
When you look around what do you see,
The son shrugs his shoulders with a sigh,
Looks above at the dark red sky,
I see children, children crying,
And people with no soul,
Hunger, poverty, dust and lots of smoke.*

*But my son,
don't you see love, hope, and sacrifice,
Don't you see all of these?
Yes dad, I see dreams, lots of dreams.*

*Dear one, now tell me what will you do,
When you see injustice what will you do,
Dear child, what will you say,
When you see pain what will you say,
Will you stand up and fight like a man,
Or step aside and don't give a damn.
Will you reach out and touch the tears,
or grow cold with each passing year,*

*Someday dad, I will do the right thing,
who knows what tomorrow will bring,
But I promise when I grow up,
I will do the right thing,*

*Now I have grown into a young lad,
I often remember the promise to my old man,
As I watch my footprints
wash away in the sand,
I still question my ability to walk like a man.*

- Nishant, AID

War and Development

The events of Sept 11 and the subsequent war in Afghanistan forces us as AID volunteers to think carefully about the relation between war and development. Seemingly disparate issues, war and development are in fact very closely linked. The modern development paradigm is based on competition and violence. It displaces and destroys the livelihoods millions of people while at the same time concentrating wealth in the hands of a few. It requires exhaustive consumption of the natural resources on the planet. Since the resources on the planet are limited, conflicts between people and nations are inevitable. Violence and war are natural consequences of this paradigm of development. At the same time, wars divert precious resources away from the process of real development. It is estimated that 15% of current military budget of all nations on the planet is sufficient to provide basic amenities to all people on the planet. The actual destruction of lives and infrastructure by war further debilitates the population. The current state of nations like Afghanistan and Iraq gives us an idea of the devastation war can cause in a society.

Real development therefore requires that the adopted development paradigm create an environment conducive to peace. Such a development paradigm has to satisfy two very important criteria – equality and sustainability. Equality means that the resources as well as the power to make decisions are distributed evenly (democracy therefore becomes a prerequisite for equality). Sustainability means that the development paradigm is ecologically sound. In short, true development means restoring our connections with people and with nature.

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--- Capital accessed through the groups is also often used to initiate small self-owned business activities, such as teashops and vegetable vending. Many women work in factories, construction, farms, beedi and cashew factories.

--- Many women prefer to work from home. MALAR has recently introduced soap making business that women can participate in from their homes. In fact, one of the main reasons for the popularity of the self-help groups is because they operate out of women's homes.

--- There are many deterrents to the growth of women's economic activity. The main reasons for this are, violence against women outside home, resistance from an entrenched patriarchal system towards granting economic freedom to women and a generally poor economy.

--- Women almost universally decry the practice of dowry, but with few exceptions, most families give and receive dowry. Rates have risen enormously in the last decade; loans from the self-help group are often used for marriage expenses.

-- Shoba Subramanian, AID Pittsburgh

Adivasis in Maharashtra Take Control

More than a decade of “development” in the “backward” Raigad district, just outside Mumbai, has brought the local adivasis no drinking water, irrigation, school, or healthcare. Worse, the new Mumbai-Pune expressway has displaced several villages, to reduce a four-hour drive by 45 minutes. The communities who narrowly escaped displacement aren’t waiting for the next round of “development”. With activists based in Mumbai, they have begun taking action that is already yielding phenomenal results.

I visited two villages, with Anish Mokashi (physics, IIT) and Mahendra Singh (graduate, TISS) of the Student Action Committee, and a few AIDers. In Dandwadi, a Katkari village of 54 houses, we met the Katkari activists Parshuram, Sonyabuwa, and Vishnu.

In Dandwadi, the villagers pitched in Rs. 40,000 over five months to take morchas to local officials. Their demands: a forest official who had hurled caste abuse at them must apologize; they should get a pipeline to obviate the treacherous walk to get drinking water; and; their right to the local forest should be recognized. Alongside the morchas, they were also setting up a school.

By the time of my visit, the offending forest officer had been removed, they had won the right to protect a large tract of local forest, they were going to receive free saplings of their choice, they had rights to two-thirds of the forest produce, and their school was in session even before the term had begun. Besides, they are already documenting local knowledge of herbs. In Muthachi Thakurwadi, at an impromptu village meeting, the Katkaris updated the Thakurs of these developments.

The next day we visited Muthachi Thakurwadi, a remote village among the Sahyadri peaks. It’s 100 families live by farming for Maratha landowners. These mostly-illiterate Thakurs have been practicing watershed management for at least 50 years! They have secured drinking water with no outside help. They are in the middle of another project to irrigate the fields. This will enable them to phase out their mainstay as alcohol suppliers to the region. No Dandwadi resident has studied up to Class 10, but that doesn’t prevent them from running a school. The teachers teach what they know: Katkari, Marathi, and ecology. Anish teaches math. English, they say, is not necessary until later. The village pooled in money for Parshuram, the main teacher, to visit Krishnamurti schools in AP (no, not Rishi Valley), which served as a model to improvise on. Parshuram’s vision and his passion for the school were truly inspiring. I could not believe it when I heard the news that he died of a snakebite.

The Student Action Committee’s (SAC) expenses are Rs.15,000 per month. It has decided not to register as an organization to avoid legal harassment by officials who resent its effectiveness. Also SAC wants its contributors to believe in its vision. To visit the villages, or to make a personal donation, please e-mail uxa100@psu.edu.

-- Uma Asher, AID-State College

Nityanand Jayaraman

AID Bay Area volunteers had an opportunity to meet Nityanand Jayaraman (Nity), an environmental activist with Greenpeace India, on September 14. Nity majored in journalism from Ohio University. He returned to India after a 3-year stint in Hong Kong as an editor, to work as an independent journalist. He got involved in activism through his exposure to NBA and the fish workers’ struggle as a journalist.

An independent journalist by training and vocation, Nity specialized in investigating and reporting environmental crimes. For the past 4 years, he has been working with Greenpeace India, highlighting instances of toxic waste dumping in India. His work, focusing on toxics pollution issues in India, has taken him through many communities devastated by polluting industries. He has gathered enough evidence during his travels to show that a common thread of corporate led globalization links pollution and virtually every other social evil.

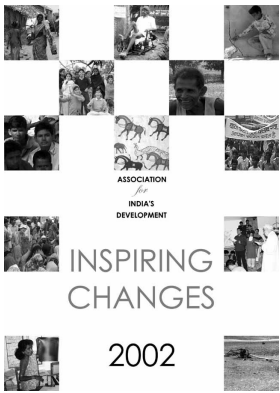
Nity is currently working with Corpwatch (www.corpwatch.org) to develop a platform where Indian struggles can reach out to supporters in industrialized nations. He is interested in mobilizing the Indian community in the U.S and has expressed an interest in working with AID volunteers.

To contact Nity or get more information on his work, please write to nity68@vsnl.com.

-- Aarthi Rishi, AID Bay Area



Thakur children watch the proceedings of the village meeting



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Recent AID Events

Aparna Sindhoor Performance

Aparna Sindhoor and her group from Boston performed their latest production "River Rites" in Pittsburgh on the 3rd of November. This performance was organized by AID Pittsburgh to raise awareness among the local community about the construction of big dams in India across the river Narmada and its impact on the lives of the people, mainly tribals, who live in the river valley. This event also showed AID's solidarity with the people and the activists in the Narmada valley who have been resisting the construction of the dam for years by non-violent means.

Global Rhythms Concert

The Triangle area chapters of AID - NC State (Raleigh), Duke and UNC partnered together to host a concert by the Global Rhythms World Music Ensemble and the Miami University Collegiate Chorale on October 20 at Duke University, North Carolina. This musical extravaganza primarily featured Indian Classical music on Indian percussion instruments playing alongside a Symphony complete with strings, woodwinds, brass and more. The Collegiate Chorale joined the instrumental ensemble for the second half of the show, which included a Romanian folk song, a Gospel and a Tarana. The highlight of the program was a solo performance by 10-year old mridangam prodigy Kiran Pathakota.

Nanga Jenu ,Nanga Karadi , Nanga Ajja

AID-Bay Area volunteers recently had an opportunity to watch the film, 'The Bee, The Bear and The Kuruba' by Dr. Vinod Raja. This film is about Kurubas, the original inhabitants of the forests of Nagarhole and Kakankote in the Western Ghats, Southern India. After the forests were declared as national parks about fifteen years ago, these adivasis were forced out of their ancestral lands. The film builds a moving story about their forced evictions, their struggles, with excellent visuals and articulate interviews with Rajjappa, Chomamma, and other kurubas. It also highlights the clash between the viewpoints of the adivasis and the co-option strategies of the state and modern society. What finally emerges is the issue of survival of not only the Kurubas, but also the forests on which the Kurubas depend.

-- Savita Kini, AID Bay Area

Projects Update

1. Support to AID Saathis Michael and Ravi for the development of a cost effective, small wind turbine that could serve as a viable source of electricity for village households, schools and community centers.
2. Support for twelve monthly pre-marital counseling camps run by Susamwad, a family, marriage and crisis-counseling center that works in the urban slums of Pune.
3. Support for watershed development in the village of Surodi, Ahmednagar district, Maharashtra. The project involves repair of existing bunds and water tanks as well as construction of new earthen and cement bunds. The villagers are executing it with technical assistance from Vigyan Vahini.
4. Continued support to the community based health care program done by Swanirwar, in twenty villages in North 24 Parganas, West Bengal.

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