



Dishaa

Dec'02-Feb'03
Issue 34

The Association for India's Development (AID) Newsletter

AID wishes you a happy and prosperous 2003

AID: A Decade of Lessons

Ravi Kuchimanchi founded AID in 1991 while earning his PhD at the University of Maryland. When he started AID, Ravi says, people in the Washington DC area were prejudiced against the discussion of poverty in India in a public forum because they felt that focusing on India's poverty would denigrate the image of India. Posters put up by AID depicting poverty and much needed help would be torn down by the end of the day. Ravi and other "AIDers" came up with innovative ways of building community support. They started putting up large posters and giving small "I care for the poor" tags to donors. Donors and volunteers were encouraged to use the tags to cover the poster. In this way, AID positively influenced the perceptions of many.

From such a start, AID now has a core volunteer base of over 400, is supported by over 10,000 people, and has 35
(cont'd on pg. 3)

Say No! to Dowry

In spite of the 1961 law declaring coerced money and wealth transactions in weddings illegal, and several social and feminist movements publicizing the evil inherent in the practice, India still witnesses horrific perpetration of crimes on women, as a consequence of "inadequate" dowries.
(cont'd on pg. 4)

AID Saathis Win Award for Watershed Work

AID Saathis, Swati Desai and Michael Mazgaonkar, have won an award for their work on watershed management in the Narmada district of Gujarat. The award was given to them by the Development Support Centre in Ahmedabad, an institute for Natural Resource Management.

Michael and Swati are social and environmental activists who have lived and worked near Mozda (an adivasi village in the Narmada district) for over ten years. Their watershed work involves building simple stone *bunds* across fields that sustain run-off rainwater and hence improve agricultural yield. Where stones are not available, they help construct compacted mud bunds. To prevent soil run-off, these mud bunds are strengthened by planting trees.

The villagers initiate most of the activities. When starting the watershed work in a new village, Michael and Swati participate in a meeting and help form the village development group. In the next few meetings, the villagers decide what needs to be done, and recruit more volunteers. Michael and Swati also train the farmers in methods for storing water, conserving water and soil, and calculating the volume of bunds. Following this, they undertake pilot projects with a few farmers. Realizing the benefits, other

(cont'd on pg.2)



One for india
making every One count

the power of **ONE** **Which will it be ?**

dollar a day
day's salary
% of your earnings
day of your week
will it be ?

Association for India's Development supports several grassroots groups in Indian villages, working for community health, education, social justice, income generation, agriculture and more. Donations and volunteers are most needed. During this season of giving make a difference - make One contribution for India at

www.OneForIndia.org
Association for India's Development



In Dishaa:

AID: A Decade of Lessons (pages 1,3)

AID Saathis Win Award (pages 1,2)

Say No! to Dowry (pages 1,4)

Volunteer Voices (page 2)

Projects Approved (page 2)

Volunteer Voices

Who are AID volunteers? What drives them to volunteer with AID? What makes them “tick”? How does AID influence their personal lives?

“Like many Indians that arrive in the US, I wanted to do something for India. Donating to some charity was an option but that wasn’t very satisfying. I started attending AID meetings. Initially, I was at loss as to how I could contribute. It took me almost a year to understand the philosophy of AID and development in the Indian context. I realized that humility is a necessary virtue in giving, and that doing something means a lifelong commitment to learn, adapt and act. There is a lot the giver can learn from the beneficiary. If one goes with an open mind, it is easy to figure out that there is no one formula for attacking problems. One has to be willing to learn from past mistakes and devise new solutions. Volunteering with AID, thus, provides me with a lifelong learning experience.”

– Srihari Dukkipati (AID San Diego)

“As a child I saw children of my age begging on the streets. Questions like “who are these kids...why are they in such a condition?” if heeded, were answered by “don't look at them, ignore them.” It seemed like these questions had no answers. When I was older, I realized there is a stigma attached to these questions. The answer came to me a few months ago, when a friend introduced me to AID. Experiences at AID have made my life richer. For me, AID means Action, for effectively changing the present situation, Interaction, with people to make this change permanent and Dedication, to bring about sustainable social development. Volunteering with AID and visiting different people on our projects, I find myself today as a more disciplined, energetic, and motivated individual.” – Ashwini Dixit (AID Nebraska)

“Initially AID seemed too much for me, sustainable development, *etc.* How would it help? A friend helped me overcome my prejudice, and I started attending AID meetings. I was skeptical and probably even cynical for the first few meetings. However, the positive interaction I had with the rest of the AID members jumpstarted my enthusiasm. The simplicity of AID ensures that anyone who wants to participate gets a chance. It is a place where everyone gets their questions answered and newcomers are always welcome. Finally, there is personal growth as an AID volunteer. You grow into a better person; it is just pure joy, happiness to be a part of AID. “Happiness is a journey, not a destination.” I am still enjoying the journey with AID, rediscovering my love and passion for a country I call my own, India!” – Rajasekhar Jammalamadaka (AID Maryland)

Dishaa is a quarterly publication of the Association for India's Development (AID). Circulation: 5000.

Editorial team: Nithya Krishnaswamy, Kanishka Lahiri, Srihari Dukkipati (AID-San Diego), V. Lakshmanan, Phani, Vijay K Narayanan.

Email: publications@aidindia.org

AID Saathis Win Award (cont'd from pg. 1)

villagers soon become involved in these construction activities. As a result, the villagers own the work right from the start.

In 2001, they developed watershed activities in the four villages of Mozda, Vedchcha, Nani Singloti and Andu. In these villages, 262 farmers participated in watershed development protecting 280 acres of farmland. The farmers themselves contributed most of the money and labor (*sbramdaan*) to bund construction.



Stone bunds constructed as part of a watershed project led by AID Saathis Michael and Swati in Mozda – an adivasi village in Gujarat

Apart from watershed work, Michael and Swati also organize women's co-operatives that process organically grown pigeon peas (such as tuvar dal), run savings programs, and have established a small dairy of indigenously bred cows. They are also involved in primary healthcare, and are co-founders of Paryavaran Suraksha Samiti (PSS), an NGO involved in providing environmental education to people affected by industrial pollution and bad government policies.

The award recognizes their effort in organizing and motivating the local farmers to provide maximum inputs, with minimal overheads. The award includes a citation and fifty thousand rupees, which will be used to continue the watershed work. ***Congratulations, Michael, Swati & PSS.***

– Nagini Prasad (AID Bangalore)

Recently Approved Projects.

- North East Network (NEN) – Sonitpur Dt., Assam – Sanitation Project – College Park, MD.
- MERDS – Didigul, Tamil Nadu – Vocational training for women – Durham, NC .
- Guriya – Varanasi, UP – Alternative livelihood sources for women in prostitution – Austin, TX.

AID: A Decade of Lessons *(cont'd from pg. 1)*

chapters in the USA, 3 in India, 1 each in the UK and Australia. Initially, AID raised funds for worthy causes. Soon, AID volunteers realized that only well-integrated holistic solutions could address the interconnected causes of poverty in India. As a result, AID now collaborates with a large number of NGOs and People's Movements with the theme of *Sangarsh*, *Nirman* and *Seva* (Struggle, Constructive Work and Responsible Living), learning from them, and evolving with grassroots work in India.

Balaji Sampath (AID Jeevan Saathi) finished his PhD from the University of Maryland and returned to India (the first AIDER to do so full-time) to work on a seed village. In the seed village, social workers work simultaneously to improve education, healthcare, women's rights, child welfare, rural development and vocation skills. While working in villages where the Tamil Nadu Science Foundation (TNSF) was engaged in literacy, healthcare and micro-credit activities, Balaji realized that Indian villagers were quite capable of solving their own problems. He found that successful non-governmental organizations (NGOs) had one thing in common – a large volunteer base consisting mostly of villagers themselves. He also realized that the scale of operations could be made much larger only with the active participation of the villagers. The TNSF, for example, was working in tens of thousands of villages. Without villagers, you could have a small charity. With villager involvement, you could sustain a movement. Balaji advocated that AID move beyond the idea of seed village and concern itself with building self-sustaining movements.



Ravi improvises to teach Math to villagers on an island in Andhra Pradesh

Ravi and Aravinda moved to India in 1998 to help strengthen the collaboration between AID and people's movements. Ravi's work on documenting the errors of dam designers in estimating the submergence zone of the Sardar Sarovar dam has been widely reported. These errors of 3 meters, in surveys claimed by the Government to be accurate to 1 mm, meant that thousands of families who would lose their homes would not be entitled for rehabilitation.

Ravi helped design and build a Pedal Powered Electricity Generator and a 15KW micro-hydel power generator in the Narmada valley with expertise from the People's School of Energy. These projects have brought electricity to many villages for the first time, and in a locally sustainable manner. "Thirty-three adivasi villages in Maharashtra are being submerged by the controversial Sardar Sarovar Dam," Ravi says, "while the rest (of the tribal hamlets in the Satpuda Hills of the Narmada valley) have been told that they will never get electricity as they are too remote!" Kiran Vissa, an avid AIDER, thinks that the scope of such projects and role that engineers can play is enormous. "While engineers have taken flak for pushing gigantic projects like the Sardar Sarovar," he says, "it is heartening to see well-qualified engineers like Ravi diligently working to promote more appropriate and challenging technology."



Villagers counsel young mothers on nutrition in the Arogya Iyakkam project

Balaji played a leading role in extending a TNSF health initiative, the *Arogya Iyakkam*, to more than 40 blocks in Tamil Nadu and Bihar. The UNICEF, in its Innovations Report, named this initiative one of the "10 most innovative programs in the world". Balaji's experience with TNSF taught him the difference in scale between a charity and a movement. He has rigorously pushed AID to think "big", to involve local communities and to approach development holistically. Ravi and Balaji demonstrate what the energy and resources of the highly educated can achieve when aimed at efforts to benefit the most needy.

AID's accomplishments over the last decade are just a beginning. Far more can be achieved through the involvement of more people. AID volunteers meet every weekend in Community Service Hours (CSHs) in cities across USA and India, reviewing and working on projects, learning from social workers, spreading awareness through skits, newsletters *etc.* Volunteers visit projects and movements on a regular basis. To locate the AID chapter nearest to you, please visit <http://www.aidindia.org>.

– V. Lakshmanan and Rahul Gudla

Say No! to Dowry *(cont'd from pg. 1)*

Obvious and subtle forms of dowry demands continue to terrorize Indian women and their families.

Recently, AID took a step to revamp the anti-dowry movement that has existed in sporadic forms at different times in the past. What is different this time? We decided to start the action by questioning our own lives and taking individual stands against dowry first, and then consolidating such personal efforts into a social movement.

A close inspection of dowry in modern Indian society reveals two interesting points:

- Dowry "rates" are inter-linked between economic and social strata. Those at the top of the 'social ladder' : NRIs and "professional elites" (e.g., doctors, IAS officers, engineers, MBAs) command exorbitant rates, which in turn determine the prices that the larger middle class, and even the village people settle for.
- A gradual shift towards consumerism has given a new dimension to the problem. Begetting a "son" and extorting dowry from the bride's family at the son's wedding are instruments to acquire "material goods".

An Appeal to Ethics: AID's "Say NO to Dowry" campaign urges individuals to pledge neither to take nor give dowry. The simple wording of the pledge gives an individual the following options:

- To commit to act in an individual's life;
- To reach out to ones immediate proximity, amongst family, siblings, relatives and friends;
- To take a stand against dowry whenever one encounters a situation, at the level of adopting it as a social struggle.

The pledge is supported by an extensively researched document that answers frequently asked questions about dowry: its definition, legal and social options that exist for victims and those who wish to take a stand, how people can participate to eradicate dowry, etc. The pledge, launched at the 2002 AID conference received overwhelming support from many people. More than 350 people have signed it.

What YOU can do:

- *Sign the pledge* to demonstrate solidarity;
- *Propagate D-free weddings* using the D-free logo, banners,

flyers, sample D-free wedding cards and posters made available by us on the internet;

- *Donate* to an organization that fights dowry to mark a marriage or a wedding anniversary;
- Help us *design banners, posters, flyers, D-free wedding cards* promoting the "Say NO to dowry" campaign;
- If you are an artist, *use your art* as a medium to voice solidarity;
- *Share your personal experiences* to inspire others.

Resources: The pledge and campaign materials are available on the Internet at the India Together website (<http://www.indiatogether.org/women/dowry>) as well as at (<http://www.aidindia.org/nodowry>). A play recently staged by AID called "Hum Apke Hain Kaun", based on real life stories and events on dowry, is available for \$5.00 on videotape (for copies, contact Arvind Raghavan, arvind_rag@yahoo.com). For further information on the "Say No to Dowry" campaign, contact Vaijayanti Gupta (vaijayantig@yahoo.com) or Padmapriya Jagannathan (paddy_jagan@hotmail.com).

– Vaijayanti Gupta (AID Maryland)

"Changing Faces...Facing Changes!" The AID 2003 Calendar



The AID 2003 calendar features a photo-essay by **award winning journalist P. Sainath** on the contribution of rural women to India's social and economic fabric. **Get your copy NOW!** Contact your local AID chapter, or visit <http://www.aidindia.org/calendar>, or send email to calendar@aidindia.org.

When you see a good movie, don't you talk to your friends about it? **Tell your Friends and Family about AID!**
Chances are they will be as eager as you to take part in a good cause!

95% of AID funds come from individuals like you. Please donate generously.

Yes! I would like to make a tax-deductible donation in the amount of

\$50 \$100 \$300 Other _____

I would like ___% to support full time workers through Fellowships Fund.

Name _____ Phone: _____

Address _____

City _____ State ___ Zip _____ Email: _____

To donate by Credit Card, please call
1-(888) TALK-2-AID .

Please send Checks payable to AID to:
AID

P.O. Box 4801,
Mountain View, CA 94040-0801
<http://www.aidindia.org>

AID is a registered 501(c)(3) organization with Tax ID No. 52-186 3480. To obtain a copy of the financial statement please write to AID. Documents and information pertaining to AID can be obtained from the Secretary of State for the cost of copies and postage.

Email: Info@aidindia.org