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The Association for India's Development (AID) Newsletter

What Makes an AID Project Good?

Since 1991 AID has raised awareness and funds from its local volunteer community and supported development activities in Indian villages. Over the years, AID's volunteer communities have grown in number, size, and maturity. How has this contributed to our understanding of development, and our ability to identify good projects?

Honesty, caring and mutual respect lie at the heart of AID's philosophy of development. Volunteers always remain conscious that the communities in the villages where AID supports activities are teaching us and leading the way to a better vision and a better society.

What has all our years of project support and having full time workers in Indian villages for the past 2 years taught us about development?

AID as an opportunity to learn. Think of the projects we support as courses in development. Will we take difficult courses, and learn, or just get a lot of credits for our transcript? We support projects in order to learn, and we learn in order to do projects better. Take a goal like health. We may once have thought only doctors and medicines indicated that the goal was being met. Through projects like Swanirvar in West Bengal, Samuday in Bihar, and seminars by social workers like Dr. Sudarshan of Karnataka, we now look for measures that address social and environmental causes of ill health, and promote gender equality and community participation in developing and implementing programs.

AID Conference '99... a time to listen, learn & plan forward

Questions like the above were explored by 75 AID volunteers from 17 chapters in Cincinnati, 29-31 May. The conference improved communication and knowledge-sharing in AID. Sridevi from Columbia, SC said, "We have a very small chapter. I used to wonder if I am all alone, now I see many people who feel the same way I do. That is inspiring." Discussions on AID Plan, Focus NGOs of AID-India, and direct efforts of AID-India brought to light a growing number of volunteers from many chapters who want to work in India, pursuing various directions in development. AID hopes to see a new fellow or pilot fellow every year.

The conference was a significant step towards the growth of AID as an organization. Conference coordinator Sreelakshmi Ganesan said, "Now chapters are motivated to overcome their inertia and take responsibilities." Hats off to entire Cincinnati chapter for exemplary teamwork!

Murali Narayanaswamy

When I went camping one night...

THERE WERE TWENTY OF US that night at Shenandoah Loft mountains, enjoying ourselves, cooking our food and preparing the tent for the night. It was great when we had dinner and sang songs. 17 of us sat in the tent to chit-chat. Then poured the heavy rains. After some time the water level in the tent started rising (quarter inch to be precise) ... and all our fun came to an end. There we were inside the tent, feeling miserable, with nowhere to go and sleep. What do we do now? This was the fear in all our minds. I was sitting inside and thinking, "Oh how miserable not to have a place to sleep for the night." It was then that I was immediately reminded of our friends in the Narmada Valley who are all going to face the same situation, but at a much bigger scale. Here it is not a quarter of inch of water ... but whole houses are going to be submerged. Here it is not just one night... but the rest of the nights. I then told myself, "It should be our mission to prevent that."

Malini Vittal



AID-State College gave hourly speeches on AID to a captive audience. See pg. 4

What is AID?

Health ...

Environment ...

Mission Impossible

What is impossible? For the government to find land for those it displaces, or for the people to find a government that admits it can't find the land? If we are the government, as in a democracy we should be, and are truthful to ourselves, then really only one of the two is possible.

This question was actually answered by the government in March 1999 when a thousand tribal people of the Narmada valley went to the collector's office in Nandurbar, and asked, "Where is the land?" On the first day the government admitted that in 4 out of 5 places where they had promised relocating, they didn't have clear rights to the land. Of the remaining place, the collector didn't know the name. The government made the people wait outside the office for 2 days before showing them land in Amlī. During these 2 days the collector resigned his charge of relocations and the District Resettlement Officer left town. The people already resettled in Amlī contested the claim that their land was still vacant. The deputy collector admitted what was apparent to all – that there would be no land for resettlement, and no one should move.

Since we are the government, let us be aware that this is what we told people whose homes, farms and communities will be submerged this monsoon. In February 1999 in the Supreme Court we had filed affidavits, saying that we were ready to relocate people even up to 110 m, so why not start with 85? State governments of Maharashtra, MP and Gujarat acted on the behalf of the people – *that is us* – in filing these false affidavits. Not only in the Supreme Court do we ignore the truth. In everyday discussions we have with one other to justify a huge dam, let us remember what the collectors tell the tribal people months before we drown their lands.

In May, pre-monsoon showers fell in the Vindhya and Satpura hills. In Nimghavan I asked, "What will happen when the Narmada rises and its back-waters drown this village?" They said, "We have told the government the entire village is willing to move if they have land. They told us they have none. So we will all face the waters. None of us has moved." As their homes float away in the river, they will be left on the hills for weeks in pouring rain. When the rains end, there will be no timber to rebuild as the government has sold it all.

Ravi Kuchimanchi (aid@vsnl.com)

Tell Friends and Family about AID India! When you see a good movie, do you tell your friends in India? Chances are they will be as eager as you to take part in a good cause!

Please ask your family and friends to send checks in favor of AID-India. **AID India accepts rupees only.**

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Anna Nagar, Chennai 600 040 INDIA

As the waters rise ...

Chronicle of a Satyagraha

18 February Supreme Court allows Gujarat to add 4.7 m, raising height of Sardar Sarovar Dam to 85 m.

1 March "Last Holi in Dhomkedi." Visitors and press witness tribal music and dance in observance of Holi, the festival of life. People from 50 villages meet and resolve to struggle nonviolently against the decision to submerge their villages.

15-17 March Villagers of Nandurbar district meet the Collector to ask "Where is the land?" Statement signed by village and urban witnesses, as well as 7 hour video record prove that no land is available. Terms of Narmada Tribunal Award are not met.

24 March AID-India volunteers take science experiments to Jeevanshalas of Narmada, and talk to villagers preparing to march to Delhi.

1 – 9 April *Manavadbikar Yatra* (Human Rights March) from all Narmada Valley villages to Delhi.

10 April Maneka Gandhi appoints independent committee to review project & rehabilitation.

12 April PM denies formation of review committee.

10 –18 April Nimad villagers fast in Maheshwar. AID & 133 international NGOs endorse campaign.

18 April German MNC's pull out of Maheshwar dam due to human rights campaign.

7 May Govt. seeks permission to raise dam height to 90 m. Permission not granted for now.

24 May *Outlook* "The Greater Common Good" essay on Narmada by Arundhati Roy.

17-20 May Contour survey to measure submergence levels in Sikka, Nimghavan, Badwani, Jalsindhi, and Domkhedi. Depending on rain levels, partial and total submergence this monsoon.

4 June *Frontline* "The Human Cost of Dams"

20 - 28 June Satyagraha begins. People vow to remain on lands throughout monsoon.

28 June March from Domkedi (Maharashtra) to Jalsindhi (MP) on opposite bank of Narmada.

What can we do?

Write letters expressing dissatisfaction at the rehabilitation of SSP affected people, and concern for those facing submergence. Call for justice & complete review of SSP. Write to: Maneka Gandhi, Minister of Social Justice; CMs of Maharashtra, MP & Gujarat; & PM of India.

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Human rights ...

Education ...

Vocation ...

Alternatives in water and power

Speaking at the AID-India conference, Former Secretary of Water Resources Prof. Ramaswamy Iyer emphasized the need to implement, research and document small scale, sustainable ways of harvesting water and generating energy. Some of these are assessed in Center for Science and Environment's path-breaking "Citizen's Report on the Environment," a call to action in itself with the title *Dying Wisdom: Rise and Decline of India's Traditional Water Harvesting Systems*. Local community and NGO efforts have demonstrated the success of small-scale systems and the potential for conserving water and energy.

World Commission on Dams is reviewing submissions on the effects of large dams and alternatives in water and power. AID approved supporting work in India to present information to this commission, holding various workshops and building a long term network among the people and NGOs with a wealth of experience and knowledge in water management. This is part of a worldwide effort of people's groups and NGOs to organize results of their work in a way that can have impact at the policy level – both locally and globally. Meetings and research in India will be coordinated by Medha Patkar, one of the 12 commissioners to WCD, and recipient of numerous prestigious awards including Right Livelihood Award, Goldman Environmental Medal and Dinanath Mangeshkar Award.

Updates on this work, provided by the South Asian Network on Dams, Rivers & People are at

<http://www.sit.wisc.edu/~aid/dams/sandrp>

Knock, knock ... who's there in AID-Chennai?

Last month AID volunteers in Chennai surveyed IITM students door to door. What are they up to now?

The first batch of computers from AID-US came recently and we started work on them. We have also formed a committee to procure, assemble and install computer hardware for the Tamil Nadu Science Forum's Ganini Computer Centers in villages. Profits from the computer work will support health, savings and library programs for the poorest in the villages covered. We are 1½ years old and we can see the future holds a lot for us. We have built a coherent team, proved our capacity to go to villages week after week, and raise awareness in the city. We are trying to match new volunteers with tasks and hope the coming year will bring out more in us.

What's new in the Tamil Nadu villages?

For years TNSF has worked in a small scale in different areas of development – health in 180 villages, savings movement for 9000 women, animal husbandry,

Guidebooks for the village worker

Working in the field has revealed that some models of village development work better than others. M. Balaji Sampath has followed these books in health and savings programs with Tamil Nadu Science Forum (TNSF).

United We Sit. A cartoon book on a women's savings and credit movement in Kanyakumari district (where 9000 poor women have saved Rs. 40 lakhs in 3 years). A clearly written guide for starting a similar program in any Indian district. Rs. 40 India, US\$7 abroad
Authors: Kalpana and Franco (TNSF).
Cartoonist: Sandeep Rao (AID).

Between Living and Surviving. Reviews current health problems and policy, depicts impact at village level in clear text and cartoon format. Reflects solid insight into field situations. Rs 30 in India, US\$5 abroad.
Author: Dr. Sundararaman (TNSF).
Cartoonist: Basheer (Fineline).

6 Health Guidebooks: Launching a health campaign? Must-reads: *Health Campaign Guidebook, Women and Child Health, Mass-Communication Booklet (with Women and Child Health), First Level Curative Care, Communicable Diseases, First Aid*. Rs. 400 in India, US \$40 abroad.

Costs include shipping. Make checks payable to Science Publications and send to:

K. Kalpana, 72 Spurtank Road, 2A
Chetpet, Chennai 600 031

Before sending checks, inform: kalpa@vsnl.com

education, water-management and information technology. Now TNSF is planning to develop 50 blocks, reaching out to 1500 villages. After an initial training period of 1½ – 2 years, programs such as health, education, savings, and libraries aim to run without external funding. Countless village volunteers have already started the program in 17 blocks (630 villages). These community efforts aim to raise the social consciousness on health and the status of women.

The role of AID: Computer donations from AID-US and hardware-assembling support from AID Chennai play a crucial role in generating the income to sustain these programs. AID Chennai volunteers are also training to work along with the villagers in block-level teams. Special skills – cartooning, translations, software – are something that AID can gear up to. New programs in Agriculture, Enterprises and Information technology are still in the experimental stages.

M. Balaji Sampath & K. Kalpana (bsampath@eng.umd.edu)

* Quarterly Project Update *

Keeping in mind the interconnected nature of the problems facing India, AID initiates, identifies and supports projects in the areas of literacy and education, health care, vocational training, rural credit, and environment.

Approved:

Ruchika Social Services, Orissa: Non formal education for children working on six railway platforms (\$3700).

Vivekananda Girijana Kalyana Kendra, Karnataka: Forestry course (vocational) for tribal high school students (\$3750).

Karra Society for Rural Action, Bihar: Primary health care, non-formal education & vocational training in Ranchi (\$2980).

Uttarkhand Earthquake Relief Fund: Shelter and food security for recent victims of Chamoli earthquake(\$3000).

HOPE, TN: Vocational training, ending child labor (\$2300)

* Projects with All-India scope *

World Commission on Dams: Research and meetings on the effects of large dams and alternatives in India (\$5000).

Health Videos: \$800 to cover additional expenses in translation of health videos from WHO (began in 1998)

* Projects Under consideration *

Sarvajan Kalyan Samiti, UP Reproductive and child health in 4 slums of Allahabad.

Vikramshila Education Research Society: Curriculum development and teacher training in West Bengal, Assam, UP, Bihar, Orissa, Bangladesh and Nepal.

Environment Support Group: Research & advocacy for local communities resisting environmentally destructive projects.

Adhikar, Orissa: Federation of rural savings groups.

Visit a project this summer for AID! *Getting to know the people and places is an essential part of AID's support to projects. Can you help? Contact Vajjayanti at guptav@vam.umd.edu to find out which*

**A Taste of India**

How can we bring local community members, students and well-wishers together for a good cause? The answer apparently is food! "Everybody loves Indian food. Let's have a food-festival." was the response of Haimavathi Varadan – a young volunteer at AID-State College. Haima, a community insider, was convinced that this was a great fund-raising idea and that it would receive welcome participation of the community.

So on 18th April, Penn State University campus saw the "Taste of India" food-festival. It featured popular, healthy and home-cooked food from various parts of India, prepared and donated by 35 families, and enjoyed by a sold-out crowd of 400. Said Ms. Lakshmi Sundaram, a volunteer cook, "I am glad everyone enjoyed the food. I'll be happy to help out next time too." Enthused by such responses, Haima and other AID-State College volunteers have vowed to make "Taste of India" an annual event.

Aniruddha Vaidya, State College, PA

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