



## Save the Country; Build the Country

Over the past 5 years, as volunteers and saathis (full timers) have worked with a number of grassroots organizations in India, AID has recognized the wealth of social, natural, and economic resources that need to be preserved while developing. We have learned to think beyond just supporting projects in education, health and income generation.

### Livelihood struggles and India's Development

A day with any organization working among urban, rural, coastal or forest-dwelling people, opens one's eyes to the life lived by the majority of Indians. While many non-governmental organizations (NGOs) start income generation projects, most poor communities base their livelihoods on natural resources. The most constructive work we can do for a village that depends on, say, fishing, is to help them sustain that livelihood. When a local industry pollutes the sea or mechanical trawlers violate fishing regulations, we need to stand with the fishworkers in defending their livelihood and the coastal environment.

AID supported Community based organizations naturally combine aspects of *sangharsh*, *nirman* and *seva* (struggle, constructive work, and responsible living) in a process of sustainable and just development. They organize to protest



*Grassroots democracy in action: the Desh Bachao, Desh Banao Yatra begins in Kerala, 26 January 2003*

violations, hold public hearings and rallies, and compel elected officials to act by relating their situation to changes in the natural resource policy and Supreme Court judgments.

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## Hundred Block Program Update: Madurai and Thirumangalam

*Volunteering for AID brings many unique learning opportunities. Jayanthi and Karthikeyan (AID Cincinnati), recently visited the Madurai and Thirumangalam blocks where Tamil Nadu Science Forum (TNSF) and AID are working on the Hundred Block Plan.*

The micro-enterprises started by the Tamil Nadu Science Forum (TNSF) in villages around Madurai are thriving now. We wanted to study them to find out if similar schemes could be implemented in Hundred Block Plan (HBP) blocks by AID. After we met AID *Jeevansaathi* Balaji Sampath and TNSF volunteer Ms. Shanti at the Chennai office, we decided to focus on two objectives – to learn about micro-enterprises and to study the health and savings related work in the Thirumangalam HBP block.

In the village of T.Kallipatti, we met Mr. K.Gopalan, a potter who started a small shop with help from Khadi & Village Industries Commission (KVIC). Mr. Gopalan showed us his pottery works, which ranged from household items like *chulha* (stove) to exquisite art forms. He also demonstrated a few techniques for us. Training people in the art of pottery has

become an additional source of income for Mr. Gopalan.

Our next stop was the Gandhi Niketan School, which is also sponsored by KVIC. It provides conventional school education till the grade 12 and vocational training in various skills like weaving, soap making, printing and electrical & electronic appliance repairs. The school trains its students and helps them start their own small businesses.

We then visited the women's training center run by Center for Ecology and Rural Development (CERD) in Sedapatti. Led by Ms. Bhagyam, women learn to make things like detergent, indigo solution, soaps, telephone mats, chair mats, decorative items and manure. These income-generating activities were chosen because they require low investment.

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**AID Volunteers Thank you for your contribution to the One for India campaign.**

## Prevention vs. Cure (continued from page 1)

While afforestation projects easily gain support, what about efforts to prevent deforestation? In fact those proposing either project know that preventing deforestation is even more significant than afforestation, for at stake is an ecosystem and its diversity, not merely a set of trees.

## Save the Country, Build the Country: A Campaign

Most poor communities in India face critical situations in this era of corporate globalization and laissez-faire policies. The lives of 90% of rural India depend on natural resources. Involved in struggles to sustain their livelihoods are farmers, farm-laborers, fishworkers, artisans and factory-workers. Women, tribals, dalits, and minorities are doubly hit. Pollution impacts public health and people lose their homes to remote-control projects.

How can such groups get their message to the wider public? How can their positive achievements in ensuring good governance and sustainable development gain enough momentum to grow into a national movement?

Such questions excite the minds of urban and rural alike, as shown by the tremendous response to the “*Desb Bachao, Desb Banao*” or “Save the Country, Build the Country” campaign taken by the National Alliance of People's Movements (NAPM), comprising numerous people's organizations throughout India. AID has worked with many of the groups leading the campaign, including Save Narmada Movement, National Fishworker's Forum, North East Network, Andhra Pradesh Agricultural Laborers’

Union, Environmental Protection Committee, and the People's Science Networks.

At each stop of the 64-day tour of India, the campaign heard from people's organizations about the role of globalization and communalism in ruining communities' social and economic resources and obstructing prospects for realizing development goals. Groups demonstrated sustainable development successes such as solar and pedal power, water harvesting, and community-driven health and education models. Public meetings, typically attended by a thousand or more, have led to local *Desb Bachao, Desb Banao* committees, which plan to hold regular “*Lok Manch*” (people's forum) activities, such as calling elected officials or candidates for a public dialogue. They will prepare for emergency response if human rights are violated or if natural or livelihood resources are adversely affected. By standing united through the intimidating process of filing police reports, documenting cases and holding public meetings, people can make their voices count against those who would violate their rights. When people's voices count, they are empowered to plan and implement development programs democratically, as the adivasis of Bilgaon, Maharashtra have shown by constructing a 15 kW hydro power project electrifying 12 hamlets in the Satpura hills.

The tour culminated in Lucknow with the *Jan Vikas Sammelan* (People's Development Conference) where the movements endorsed common strategies and agenda, which they hope will shape a national movement.

-- Aravinda & Ravi, AID-India

## Amu Adivasi: Tribal Songs from the Narmada Valley Struggle

Tribal people in all parts of the world have been managing natural resources and sustaining their social, economic and cultural fabric for generations. For many of the problems faced by modern urban-dominated societies, in health, livelihood, food and water security, we find



**“Amu Adivasi: We, indigenous people:” Songs from the Narmada valley keep the struggle alive.**

communities who have been practicing the solutions. Decision-makers, however, are often ignorant of their languages and fail to access their knowledge and experience in forming development plans and policies. The unsustainable development projects that result often displace these very communities. Such is the case of Sardar Sarovar Dam on the river Narmada which will submerge tens of thousands of acres of farms and forest lands, and displace 250 villages, including 55 fully tribal villages.

After the submergence of their villages in the monsoon of 2002, the Adivasis (indigenous people) demanded justice and compensation from the government. While in Mumbai, they took the opportunity to record some of the important songs of the struggle, in Pavri language. This recording, called “*Amu Adivasi*” or “We, Adivasis,” with introduction in Hindi by Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA) activist Medha Patkar and printed English translation, has proved to be a popular educational tool for people new to Pavri language to understand the issues and perspectives voiced by the people in their 17-year long struggle for survival.

-- Aravinda, AID-India

Hear the songs on CD or cassette! Contact [aid@vsnl.com](mailto:aid@vsnl.com)

## Madduvalasa Displaced Legal Aid Center: A Story of a Successful Struggle

Almost two years ago, when AID received a proposal to set up a Legal Aid Cell for the farmers displaced by the construction of the Madduvalasa reservoir on the river Svarnamukhi in Andhra Pradesh, it was a new experience for many volunteers. Many were skeptical. Oustees of a dam were preparing to file writ petitions to get a more just compensation and rehabilitation package.

AID-India had been involved in the struggle of the people of Srikakulam district and had helped them link with similar struggles in the Narmada valley. On two previous occasions, AID had supported legal interventions -- for the struggle of the Onge people in Andaman and Nicobar Islands and for AID-Saathi Leo Saldahna's fight against the Bangalore-Mysore Infrastructure Corridor (BMIC). After countless discussions and with insights from the AID *Jeevan-saathis*, this project was funded by AID in the amount of Rs. 1.01 lakhs for one year. At the time of approval, the project was hailed as a paradigm shift in AID. More and more AIDers were realizing that constructive development is intimately linked to the struggles of common people.

A legal cell based in Rajam (AP) was set up in January

2002 to collect reliable data regarding the extent of displacement and to advise the affected people about their land rights. 150 acres of land in the Kottisa village was disputed, with the government claiming that the land had been donated by the Zamindar (landlord). 75 cases, filed by Dalit and Tribal families with landholdings of around 1 acre, totalling 91 acres of land, were brought to the legal cell. The remaining 49 cases were handed over to local advocates. By September of 2002, these 75 cases were amicably settled in the Lok Adalat in Rajam with the compensation increased from 20% to 60% of their land's value. Though they had the right to demand 100% the people compromised in favor of speedy compensation rather than a lengthy court procedure. The cell closed in December 2002, with the involved advocate looking after the legal affairs for another two months.

The success story of this project has been a great learning experience for all AIDers. The importance of *sangharsh* or struggle in the overall goal of sustainable development is exemplified by this venture. This project also highlights the broadening vision of AID, directed by the wisdom of our full-time grassroots volunteers.

-- Volunteers from AID-Boston, Bay-Area and TAMU.

### Madurai and Thirumangalam --continued from page 1



In Elumalai, we saw the benefits of saving groups. With a contribution of about Rs. 50 a month from the members, these groups are able to financially help each other in times of need. We met the office bearers of nine such groups and their coordinators Ms. Kasturi and Ms. Vijayalakshmi. The monthly group meetings are also a time for social gatherings involving activities like invocation songs, savings and loan discussions,

sharing and solving personal problems, and local news. AID supplied accounting books for these groups.

The next day in Thirumangalam we met Ms. Pandiselvi, who manages 40 villages along with one volunteer per village and one full-time coordinator per ten villages. The health project includes various activities like training, surveys, counseling, raising awareness among the local community.

Our first stop was the Chinnavadagarai colony. Here we met Mrs. Panchavarnam, who during her two-time tenure as a member of the village council, was instrumental in bringing basic amenities to the village. We met the HBP beneficiaries here and learnt about the corresponding health project.

We then took a bus to Vaahaikulam village where the coordinator Premalatha and volunteers convened a meeting with the village people belonging to health and savings groups. The project here is still in its infancy -- the surveys are over, but the actual program is yet to start. The surveys indicate that motivating people to save might be a more difficult task compared to bringing about awareness on health related issues.

-- Jayanthi & Karthikeyan -- AID, Cincinnati.

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We welcome you to the Annual AID Conference, this year at AID-Pittsburgh from May 24-26, 2003. For details, please visit <http://andrew.cmu.edu/~aid/Conf2003/> or email Madhavi ([vuppalapatim@yahoo.com](mailto:vuppalapatim@yahoo.com))

## Me, myself and non-violence

When was the last time you were angry? Or, took ten paper napkins at a restaurant (they cost you nothing anyway) and threw them away? Or, indulged in malicious gossip, or harbored feelings of hatred towards someone? A moment's reflection will reveal that these are all forms of violence we perpetrate -- against our own selves and against our environment -- a very personal violence. It is very easy to condemn tyrants, but how often do we point the same finger at ourselves, and weed out our own internal evils?

Mahatma Gandhi, who led his country to independence from British rule, writes in his *Hind Swaraj* (a book found easily in any college library): "If it wasn't the British it would have been someone else -- it is a problem with the Indians," he said. "The British are ruling India because we *let them rule India*." What Gandhi did in India, and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. did in the US was to use non-violence as an effective method for social change.

Non-violence is just as (in fact, probably even more) effective in causing *personal change*. How? Each of these social circumstances is a reflection of our inner worlds. Just as Gandhi organized his country-folk into a non-cooperation movement against their rulers, we can choose not to cooperate with the negative impulses that cause us to commit acts of physical and emotional violence in our lives.

What about the environment? The first thing that struck me was my wasteful lifestyle, which harms the environment in ways that I don't realize. At fast food counters I'd pick up a wad of paper napkins, use just one and throw the rest away. I would get coffee in a paper cup instead of taking my mug to be filled every time. I would waste paper, stationery, electricity, etc. The list is endless. But not everyone lives this way. In his book *Voluntary Simplicity*, Duane Elgin describes individuals who have consciously chosen against this lifestyle, simplifying wherever possible.

It is too easy to extrapolate and say that *anything* we do is violent towards something or someone! But this doesn't justify doing nothing at all - each person then, must find his or her own balance. If I do my bit by using things less wastefully, someone else might find their satisfaction in community service. And yet others might participate in an anti-war rally and campaign against social injustice.

Gandhi was not a man of many talents nor was he perfect; when he was asked what his message to the world was, he simply replied, "My life is my message". He didn't just preach non-violence -- he lived it. I hope we can live it too, in our own ways.

-- Arun Sripati, AID-JHU

Arun is helping organize a series of events titled "Season for Non-violence" at the Johns Hopkins University Homewood campus. More information is available at <http://www.jhu.edu/snv>

### ONE FOR INDIA

Our second annual 'One For India' fund-raiser (Jan '03) raised more than \$65,000 to support developmental initiatives in India during 2003. 440 people from across the US contributed generously at the campaign website <http://www.oneforindia.org/> or sent in their checks to AID PO Boxes. Many people took the opportunity to learn about AID projects and campaigns and the work of our *Saathis*.

We sincerely appreciate our donors' readiness to share in the challenges and responsibilities to which we commit ourselves together.

-- AID Volunteers

### RECENTLY APPROVED PROJECTS

- Rajasthan Drought Relief: Austin, Milwaukee, Atlanta and College Park chapters approve funds for immediate relief. Projects for long-term relief are being considered.
- Soil and Water Conservation in Juna Mozda: AID-Duke decides to support this project by AID-Saathis Michael and Swati.
- AID Atlanta approves a project by Exnora Green Cross, Vellore for sustainable eco-friendly solutions to improve the local environment.

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      \$500      Other \_\_\_\_\_

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

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