



Dishaa

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The Association for India's Development (AID) Newsletter

The Light Hasn't Gone Out

"The light that shone was no ordinary light," said Nehru, convinced that the Mahatma would live beyond his mortal body. At the turn of the century, Gandhiji is well and alive, as the Sardar Sarovar Dam is being built on the Narmada, lands are being drowned, but not the will of the people, who have become *satyagrahis*, and who have pledged to face the waters from their homes. On 11 August, water came chest-high and several people, led by Medha Patkar, stood courageously in them, turning their cheeks to receive the slaps of injustice, so that the rest of the nation might see that large dams are not the solutions, but the problems themselves. Poor people and poor nations are dis-empowered by them. Self-reliance is lost. The poor surrender their well being to the rich, whose wants further increase.

The Satyagraha began on 20 June, when people of the Narmada Valley put their arrows into the ground and swore "no matter what the attack on us, our hands will not rise to strike." Hundreds of people from all parts of India have joined them. Jacob from Vypin island noted that "all of nature is sacrificing itself to the Narmada. The Mahua tree where we held all our meetings has done the *jal samarpan*. Anita from Kerala, who along with 62 others was arrested on 11 August said, "The police did not rescue us. They rescued themselves."

Starting from many parts of India, people representing a wide range of movements and efforts towards true development in India will travel to Delhi to meet President K.R. Narayanan. As Dadlya Karbhari (Domkhedi) said during the submergence, "This is not the fate of Narmada alone, this is the fate of India."

By virtue of the Fifth Schedule of the Indian Constitution, the President has the responsibility and the authority to intervene in any legislation or decision affecting tribal (adivasi) people of India. Citing the weaknesses of the executive and judiciary branches in matters affecting the poor and downtrodden classes, the groups represented in the March will request the President to visit the Narmada Valley and meet the people who have been sitting in Satyagraha since 20th June, calling for truth in national development.

Many AID volunteers including Ravi, Aravinda, Geeta, Venkatesh, Balaji & Kalpana have been present in the Narmada satyagraha.

Ascending the Himalayas

In the Kumaon range of Central Himalayas, in districts Nainital and Almora are two special development efforts: *Aarohi* and *Sahayog*. Both began in 1991 when Sushil & Oona Sharma and Abhijit Das & Jasodhara, colleagues in Central Himalayan Research & Action Group, started these NGOs in their districts.

Sahayog's efforts in integrated rural development earned Dr. Das a Macarthur Fellowship. Sahayog now provides expert training to other NGO's, especially in health. AID's involvement began when Dr. Abhijit Das spoke to AID MD. We are supporting an AIDS intervention program in the villages which aims at prevention before the region becomes a high-risk zone. *Contd. Pg 4*

Where Women Have No Doctor

Hesperian Foundation's highly acclaimed publication *Where Women Have No Doctor* will soon be available in Tamil, the native language of over 30 million women in India as well as Sri Lanka, Indonesia, and Singapore. Its simple language and illustrations on aspects of women's health and problems give women the knowledge to make informed decisions on their health.

Social status is an important prerequisite for health. Women in India are often regarded as an economic burden, and have low levels of education, autonomy, and income. As a result India is one of the few countries in the world where women do not have a greater life expectancy than men. Improving women's ability to maintain their own health will naturally improve the health of their children. A book like this can serve as a powerful tool for improving the health of an entire community.

AID-Bay Area, working with Tamil Nadu Science Forum and South Vision, received a \$5000 grant from the Hesperian Foundation, to translate and publish the book, expected in April 2000.

Sharat Hegde, San Fransisco

[In Telugu the book has been translated by Dr. Aluri Vijayalakshmi, distributed by Hyderabad Book Trust 1-1-16/10 Jawahar Nagar, HYD 500 020.]

Rarely do we get insight into how a society or even a single village organizes itself for a social transformation. When **M. Balaji Sampath** began to work full time for AID in India, he joined the Tamil Nadu Science Forum (TNSF). The TNSF approach to education, health, women's equality, agriculture and information technology, comes from a basic principle: organize people, they empower themselves. In this profile of TNSF, Balaji shares his insight into this principle put into action in the streets

How it all began...

Arivoli – A People's Movement for Literacy

How will an illiterate person gain confidence that he or she can read and write? Millions around the world may read and write, but this fact makes the task no less daunting. Confidence comes only with actual reading and writing. Confidence never comes in the abstract.

Early 90's witnessed a unique mass-movement in Tamilnadu - the literacy campaign initiated by TNSF. Lakhs of volunteers came forward to teach tens of lakhs for 1-2 hours each day. A huge success in 8 districts, the campaign aimed to make literacy a tool for organizing people. In the post-literacy phase, a small but significant portion of the volunteer base continues to work on a range of village development activities. Special publications and newspapers, libraries and work-based continuing education sustain the confidence of the neo-literate.

Who Knows?

Is knowledge a thing only specialists possess? Does the scientist, doctor or engineer dictate to the rest of us? Is a farmer dependent on an agricultural scientist for growing her crops? How will she decide if the advice she gets is suited to her crop and her socio-economic situation? Unless she knows, she can easily be manipulated and exploited.

TNSF believes in restructuring knowledge so that the "users" participate on par with specialists. Not that more people should study the profession, but that the subject - medicine, engineering, economics or agriculture - itself needs a major overhaul. It must take cognizance of the knowledge with the people, their own methods for interpreting advice and the ability to question and judge the specialist.

Empowerment: I know how to be healthy, access information, learn new skills, run my enterprise and grow my crops. I can handle most of my problems. Only when I can't solve a problem myself I ask a specialist - for help and guidance, not to take over my life and run it for me.

Restructuring Agriculture and Information Technology

TNSF is also involved in action research programs which look into ways of improving agricultural productivity, soil fertility and water management using locally available materials and labor and very little external inputs. We are also studying the information needs of villagers and developing software and information packages. The program looks into how information and communication technologies need to be restructured if the poor should be able to use it and benefit from it.

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Educate with Confidence!

Education should be fun, interesting & relevant. This will improve learning levels and prevent dropouts. Easier said than done. A boring topic can daunt the child - but bringing the topic to life can daunt the teacher!

How does TNSF help? Developing innovative experiments, teacher-training programs, children's science clubs, teacher-networks, a model school, children's science magazines and books. In an effort to re-write textbooks and make life easier for millions of children, TNSF held public hearings for the state government's "committee on reducing burden on school children."

Next question: how do we increase enrollment and prevent dropouts? TNSF runs tuition centers and non-formal education centers for child-laborers, leading to 5th or 8th class equivalency.

TNSF works not just to replace one textbook by another. The aim is to break the enfeebling notion that education is something *specialists* bestow on people. In a continuously learning society, people educate themselves. Specialists and neoliterates alike discuss ideas and design learning methods and curriculum - forums for exchanging and discussing ideas, educating themselves and each other.



Learning is fun for these kids

Make a **Rupee** donation to AID-India

Please send checks payable to AID-India to:
M. Balaji Sampath
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AID-India is an 80(G) exempt organization in India

Moving Health to People: an action-research project

Balaji has worked closely in developing this program since January '98.

Three years in the field of health have led TNSF to conclude:

- Health requires no doctor. Doctors may cure diseases but their current training often makes them unsuited to focus on ways to prevent illness.
- Top-down planning of health does not work. Each village must have persons with the skills to monitor health status, diagnose and address individual problems, identify community initiatives to prevent diseases and promote good health. Then, a village can plan for its own health.
- Malnutrition causes a large part of ill health in rural areas.
- Malnutrition is caused by several factors – less food, fewer meals; lack of iron, protein, and fat in the food. Behind these factors are poverty and gender discrimination.
- Disease arises from poor sanitation, poor access to health facilities, insufficient rest, etc.

In the long term, these factors require large social changes.

In the short term, we may be able to address the problem by optimizing the resources at hand.

Developing a community health program

We surveyed 120 villages and developed modules to train a village volunteer to:

- ◆ diagnose the causes for malnutrition in an individual child and help the mother to address it, taking into account food pattern, illness, family resources & time constraints
- ◆ provide antenatal and postnatal support to mothers.
- ◆ address gynecological problems, form support structures for women, and help women victims of violence.
- ◆ identify TB patients, to cure simple ailments and to refer more complicated cases to a doctor.

Covering one block

- ❖ Start with a block of 30-60 villages. Train a block resource group -- typically 4-6 full-time village volunteers (women) and interested part-timers (both men and women). This team contacts the *panchayat* and forms a voluntary village health committee in all the villages in the cluster.
- ❖ Each village health committee chooses a local woman as its health activist. The block resource group trains this woman (on the modules mentioned earlier).
- ❖ Block team visits each village regularly, ensuring support for the activist and constant re-training and motivation.
- ❖ A simple register helps keep track of each child, pregnant woman, birth, death and marriage in the village.

After the 2-year training period, one can see a significant improvement in the health status of the village. The input required to continue this program is quite small, and can be raised entirely through local efforts.

Growing beyond... TNSF has started this program in 17 blocks, reaching 700-1000 villages. More volunteer support can help this movement reach more villages more effectively.

Samam - Women's Equality Movement

The literacy campaigns reached lakhs of women - young and old. *Samam* was established to give voice to their urge for equality. A program that took root was savings program. In a typical savings group, 20 women save Rs.20 each every month. This money is circulated within the group as a loan. The loan can be for anything - hospital expenses, tuition fees for children, redeeming ration cards, starting small enterprises.

More than 20,000 women have so far organized such groups. But savings and loans are only the beginning. Weekly meetings, reading neo-literate newspapers, learning new skills, developing leadership abilities, discussing and taking steps to address local problems are much more important. In several villages, these groups have stopped arrack sales, struggled against husbands who beat their wives, taken up the cause of women victims of violence, and even fought against police injustice and inaction.

The best part about these groups is that they are fully self-sustaining and need no external financial support. Using these groups, we are integrating health, libraries and other support activities for women to build a vibrant women's movement.

Standing up to be counted...

TNSF also takes stands on various issues that affect the poor and organizes public opinion through newspaper articles, mass rally, demonstrations, speeches and debates on the issue. TNSF takes a stand against communalism, nuclear weapons, big industries, vested interests and multi-nationals that destroy the living habitat and livelihood of the poor.

TNSF is a Focus NGO of AID-India. To get directly involved in TNSF, contact:

M. Balaji Sampath & K. Kalpana
SF-7 Asmana Apartments,
58/1 Kalakshetra Road,
Thiruvanmiyur, Chennai -600 041
Phone: +91 44 8266033

bsampath@eng.umd.edu, kalpa@vsnl.com

Quarterly Project Update

Mangalore: Education, leadership camp, & vocational training in Koraga Tribal community. (\$1900).

New Delhi: Pre-school education, after-school & adult learning in Ashok Bindu slum. *Arpana*. (\$2750).

Tamil Nadu: Equipping village libraries - health books and science journals for 1500 libraries- for health and science awareness as well as encouragement to neo-literates. *Tamil Nadu Science Forum*. (\$3050).

West Bengal: Publication of teacher training journal *Asmita*, with a target circulation of 6000 teachers in rural areas. *Vikramshila Foundation*. (\$3500).

Kumaon, UP: HIV/AIDS intervention through street plays, adolescent clubs, women's meetings and awareness material. *Sabayog*. (\$2500).

Orissa: Microcredit co-operative network of 110 groups in Nawrangpur, Khurda, Bhubaneshwar districts. *Abhikaar*. (\$9000).

Satoli, UP: Forest conservation, herbs initiative and elementary school program. *Aarohi*. (\$4600)

Mumbai: Developing alternative energy through pedal power project at IIT Mumbai. *AID India* (\$600)

Mark your Calendar

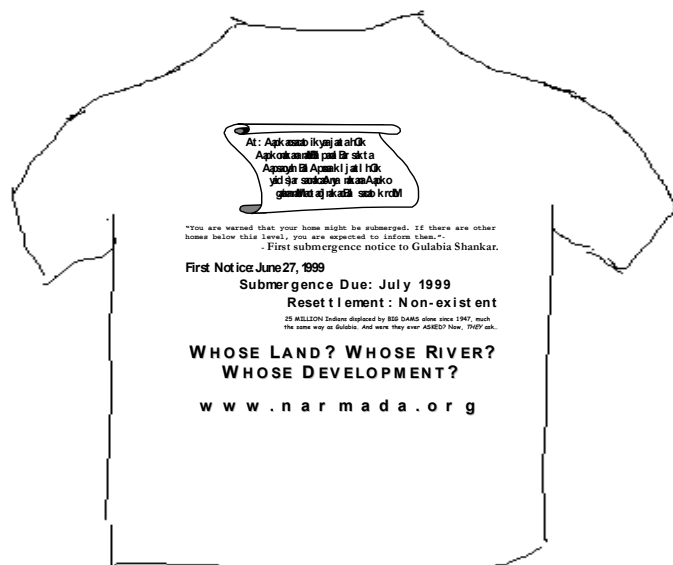
Sept 12, College Park, MD: General Body Meeting, New Volunteer Welcome. *Preeti: pud@wam.umd.edu*, (301) 614-2921.

Oct 2, Blacksburg, VA: AID Dinner at Old Dominion Hall. *pramod@vt.edu*. (540) 961-7255

Oct 15, 16, Ann Arbor, MI: India Day Celebrations and Gandhi Service Day. *priya@umich.edu*

Himalayas and Aarohi... (Contd from Pg 1)

Aarohi is among the few groups actively working to conserve the Central Himalayan forests. Villages are now organized to protect common land and promote afforestation. AID is supporting a project in natural resource management that aims at more control for villagers over forests and income generation for women.



Voicing the issues: Wear AID's Narmada Tshirt!
XL, L, M: Available in the US and India. Order now..

Koraga Education and Development Project

Karnataka's Dakshin Kannada District, in spite of having a high literacy rate and good standard of living, has a tribal population of 12000 to whom Independence has no relevance. Of these, the Koraga tribals are the most vulnerable. Jana Shikshana Trust aims to achieve integrated development of the Koraga tribal people through education and organization, in accord with their culture and values.

Through village and taluk level *sanghas*, people will train in leadership, public speaking, and knowledge of government machinery. For children and youth, formal, non-formal and open schooling will combine academic topics with vocational skills such as bamboo craft, bee keeping, mushroom cultivation, backyard poultry, tailoring, and coir rope making. Older Koragas use herbal medicine to cure many of their minor ailments. Through a herbal medicine center, youth will be trained in this practice.

Most significant about this project is the self-reliant, non-institutional and participatory approach to empowerment.
Sreelakshmi Ganeshan, Cincinnati

<http://www.aidindia.org>

US: info@aidindia.org

India: aid@vsnl.com

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