

What happened at the AID Conference '99?

For many AID volunteers who were present, the highlight of 1999 came at the beginning of the year. As for those from other groups, Sanjay Sangvai of Narmada Bachao Andolan summed it up best in his note to AID volunteers.

The conference started on the New Year's day, fittingly enough spent in villages of the Nemeli block – an exposure to TNSF volunteers and their work. Then, it was back to Chennai for two full days of “conferencing” on the IIT campus on Jan. 2nd and Jan. 3rd. To whet your appetite here are some highlights.

- ♦ Heartening diversity among the 80-100 people attendees – apart from volunteers of such varied groups as AID, TNSF, NBA, BCT, NAPM, Abhijaan, Samuday and Asha, there were professors and students from IIT, a former Union Secretary, a school teacher, an American social worker, a retired railway official, a journalist from Minnesota, and several more.
- ♦ First (non-electronic!) meeting of several AID volunteers of India and U.S.
- ♦ Fully no-plastic, no-paper lunch, tea and refreshments on both days.
- ♦ Detailed sessions with Tamil Nadu Science Forum and Narmada Bachao Andolan to understand and further build our interaction.
- ♦ Screening of *Narmada Diary* followed by lively discussion.
- ♦ Focus on “Personal Development” as a requisite for the larger development.



Listening to Dr. Parameswara Rao, BCT

Sanjay Sangvai – “The AID conference was a very positive development and I found the colleagues - whom should I name? - so full of energy, ideas and a sense of commitment, openness. Also, one would be invariably envious about the camaraderie and warm relations all of you share.”

You are no doubt eager to know more! For videos of the conference, contact sivaram@aoe.vt.edu And watch out for the proceedings!

Kudos to Ravi, Aravinda and all AID Chennai volunteers for the excellent organization

AID in Saarang-99

Students from all over India converge at *Saarang*, the week-long annual festival of IIT-Chennai. This provided the forum for us in AID-Chennai to reach out for volunteers and ideas. We had three activities – an awareness stall, a cleanliness drive and a skit with a message. A heart-warming response came from 150 people who expressed willingness to work with us. The response from Saarang-99 should translate to rapid growth of the AID movement in Chennai. - Venkat

Snippets

Invitation to Holi! To be celebrated in the Narmada valley in unique fashion by the tribal people, at village Domkhedi/Nimgavhan on Mar. 2nd. All friends welcome. Requested to reach Baroda by Mar. 1st. (0265) 382 232.

Supreme Court Hearing Amidst optimistic preparations for Holi, their future is uncertain. The final hearing on the Sardar Sarovar project started on Jan. 27th.

AID helps! Asha Jadeja, Ph.D. student from California, will now assist Medha Patkar for a year in her World Commission of Dams (WCD) work, thus helping the Narmada movement too. WCD has agreed to pay her salary. This was possible through Aravinda's initiative.

AID Grocery Bags sell: Designed by AID volunteers, made in the villages of BCT (A.P.) and carrying the slogan *Say No to Plastic Bags*, AID bags have sold rapidly in India. Now they are available in the U.S. – contact AID!

United We Sit: This excellent training and information booklet on the TNSF savings program *MALAR*, was made possible by original cartoons from Sandeep Rao, and design and editing by Balaji based on the Tamil version.

Mark your Calendar

Apr. 25th: AID India Concert. *Jugalbandi* by Dr. L. Subramanian on violin and Grammy Award winning Pt. Vishwa Mohan Bhatt on *Mohan Veena* at Tawes Theatre, U. of MD, College Park. Contact (301) 513-0565, tickets@aidindia.org. E-ticketing available.

Apr. 15th – Aug.: Tour of U.S. by Dr. Parameswara Rao, noted social worker, founder of BCT in A.P.

June: 3 week volunteer camp with training by Medha Patkar. Contact aravinda@unforgettable.com

Vanavasi Ashram Trust: primary school for tribal children

A project visit report by Shrinaath & Ramaniyam of AID-Boston, Dec 1998

The AID-supported Vanavasi school is built partially of brick and mud, partially of bamboo with thatched roofs and mud floors. Of the four 15' x 15' rooms, one is an office-cum-library and in the rest, the five classes are run using thatched dividers. Cots and mats made by the kids and parents from bamboo sticks and leaves furnish the hostels. Beyond the playground is a small, cultivated field. We later learned that paddy, pulses, *sevatha payiru* and tapioca are cultivated in small quantities in a co-operative effort by the teachers, children and parents, to partially satisfy the children's food needs. We also saw craft-work and drawings made by the children.

After dinner, the kids spent an hour studying with one Petromax light for about 30 kids – it was a moving sight. We realized there's no electricity here despite representations by the people and talk by the government. Next morning, we found that the villagers had designed a crude piping system that brought water from a stream at a higher altitude, after the well water was found unreliable. Their traditional vocations were hunting and wood gathering – made illegal when these forest regions were “nationalized” and “leased” to business houses.

At the regular morning assembly, the students sang patriotic songs and took an oath to speak the truth always. The classes went full swing. After a special treat of a cultural program by the kids, we bid farewell to them. At the door on the train, enjoying the beautiful Kerala coastline again, we thought- "What a great way that was to begin our vacation!"

Visit to a prospective project

A 4-hour journey from Hyderabad took us to Narayankhed in Medak district, the site of *Swayam Krishi* (SKS). Their project aims to administer a savings and loan program for women and implement community-development programs through Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) technique which uses group activities to enable villagers communicate their problems.

5 women form each group and each woman pools Rs.6 a week into a common account. About ten groups make a village Sangam.. On our trip to a nearby Harijan village we met 5 women from the savings program, most of who had bought goats with their loans. SKS worker Sandhya Rani seemed to connect well with the women and impressed us with her grasp of PRA techniques, using which the women could calculate the weekly repayments.

So far they had an impressive repayment record of 100%. Sometimes, group members contribute to make up for a member who could not pay her part, showing their sense of community. I was impressed with the project director Vikram Akula's ability to find good people to work with, and with the success of his project so far.

Srinivas Krowidy, first time in India after joining the projects team at MD, finds time on his 10 day trip. SKS is an organization which AID is considering for future support.



An orderly move from morning assembly, the student leader leads

Completing the Circle: Using Recycled Paper

This newsletter is printed on recycled paper. As we expand our vision of the scope of “development,” we realize the importance of not perpetuating processes that cause poverty in the world. Reduce-Reuse-Recycle is part of this. The next step is to use recycled products wherever possible – what we put in the recycling bin is

Local Artistes perform for AID in Pittsburgh

Jan. 29th. AID-Pittsburgh organized "Natya Geetanjali- An evening of Indian classical music and dance" which featured Kuchipudi and Bharatanatyam by Rajya and Vijay Palaparty and a carnatic vocal performance by Ragavan Manian, disciple of Dr. Balamuralikrishna. Good publicity brought a sizeable audience that enjoyed a wonderful performance! The artistes performed free and local sponsors covered the audiovisual costs. Besides good revenue from ticket and food sales, we also received donations. A web-site for helping concert preparations is planned. All in all, the concert was a

Annual Receipts for 1998 donations were mailed on Feb 10th! If you don't receive yours, please contact us at (301) 513-0565, or treasury@aidindia.org

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