

**Basic health services : Where are we?**

Can movements be planned? Here is one attempt that is trying to do exactly this. The Tamilnadu Science Forum and All India People's Science Network recently organized a planning meeting of representatives of people's movements, NGOs and other institutions from across the country as part of their strategy to initiate a nation-wide debate on the health structure in the country.

The idea is to start a process of enquiry where village volunteers find out what health services are available and what has been promised. The results of this enquiry will be used to mobilize people on a very large scale - through cycle rallies, street theater, village, block and district level talks. The plan is to do this in all districts of the country - and in at least in 300 of the 500 districts in a very focused form in at least one entire block (population approximately of 2 lakhs). In December 2000, 5 trains will depart from various parts of the country carrying with them about 2000 district representatives to the national conference at Calcutta and then to the international assembly in Dhaka. This mobilization will be used by the national conference to give a call for change. The mobilization done through this process will be used to simultaneously initiate a number of developmental programs in health, education, enterprises, agriculture and women's rights all over the country.

The hope is that this will lead to a nation-wide movement for change. A 3-day national training workshop to train people to conduct the inquiry will be done in Andhra Pradesh on April 7th, 8th and 9th. To coordinate the entire movement, a National Coordination Committee consisting of about 100 organizations (NGOs and People's movements) was formed at the planning meeting on 9th and 10th January. Other NGOs/people interested in joining in can do so. Contact Balaji Sampath - kb@eth.net or (044) 8266033/4402434 for more information.

**Practicing the Solutions****AID workshop at the Narmada Valley**

-A report by Aravinda Pillalamarri & Ravi Kuchimanchi, aid@ysnl.com

While the media and metropolises frenzied over 2 digits of code or lack thereof, the people of the Narmada Valley, like billions of others who share this humble planet, were ready as always for the challenges of 2000. Volunteers of AID and allied NGOs and movements across India met in the valley to practice the solutions to the problems created by the modes of destructive development dominating the planet today.

**Charkha session in the shade of a tree**

Vimal Bhai from NAPM who wears only what he spins (Only Vimal!) had set up 5 portable charkhas. Five *Jeevanshala* children dedicated themselves to serious learning and by 1<sup>st</sup> Jan they were able to spin without needing any further guidance. Vimal said that bringing the charkha to the Narmada valley was his wish for a long time, and he will follow up by having these children train five more children so as to have a dedicated batch of 10 charkha spinners in the Nimgavhan *Jeevanshala*.

**Bamboo Craft Session**

A wonder tree that grows easily, Bamboo is strong and flexible and its products can outdo plastic and make the environment cleaner and enterprises more rural. Peter from Australia showed us samples of vegetable dyed Bamboo and Sivaram, a tribal craftsman from ADS in Karjat gave hands-on training in making gift items. They invited the valley people including some already skilled in bamboo to ADS for follow-up including vegetable dyeing.

**Savings and Loan Session**

After inquiring about the credit needs in the Narmada valley, Balaji Sampath of AID and TNSF explained how to start savings and loans groups. Vishram, Pravin and Shoba from the Narmada Nav-Nirman team and Dedli Bai and other village leaders exchanged queries during the session. 15-20 women who meet weekly and save Rs. 5-10 per week are key elements. No outside funds are required for this program since the money saved is itself rotated within the women's group as loans. Suryanarayana shared the experience of the Srikakulam groups on how to innovate based on field conditions. Vishram said that he thought he could start 5 groups immediately in the village where he works.

**Education, Energy and Sustainable Development**

Ashok from Vidnyan Vahini had shown science experiments in several *jeevanshalas* in March. Now, with more supplies, the children themselves experimented. Mora and Bhaskar from AID along with Dr. Suhas and *Jeevanshala* teachers introduced the children to new learning toys. Venkatesh and Peter installed a pedal power pump that lifts water at 40 litres per minute to a height of 25 mts on the banks of the Narmada. After consulting with Keshav Bhai and other village workers it was decided to set this pump in Domkhedi since the slope is more gradual there and it can be effectively used to water the fields. Ravi of the Nav Nirman team took the responsibility of utilizing the pump. Sanjay Sangvai led a discussion on sustainable development and the history of the Andolan with some of the first time visitors to the valley.

**Painting & Prizes**

On 1st Jan we awarded small prizes to children who had done well in the various arts and skills taught. Each child led the assembly in a slogan such as "*jeevanshala kunin se? amri se, amri se!*" or "*ladenge, jitenge!*" while accepting the prize. Each of us got a surprise when we boarded the boat to leave - a handmade greeting card, made during the painting session led by Ratti of a UP women's organization.

**The Jungle**

Keval Singh Guruji led a dozen curious folks into the forest to identify medicinal herbs. We just had time to see the local "herbal coffee" bean and remedies for stomach upset, skin problems, scorpion bites, and to drink delicious water directly from a spring.

**Y2K**

On the evening of 31st Dec, AID volunteers and people of many villages discussed the vision of development for the future. City folks described the widely publicized "celebrations" which tended to destroy all natural areas either by direct invasion or extravagant consumption of resources, and cited the

pledge by Minister Uma Bharati to market tourist resorts to NRIs to raise funds for "development." Noorji bhai said that he had no comment on these city celebrations, but he knew that nature is not something we can make, it has come only with God and when it is gone, it is gone. No amount of development can bring it back.

### Visit to damsite, rehabilitation sites, organic farm

We visited the village of Mokhdi, just a stone's throw from the damsite and the first village to be submerged by SSP. We talked to the people who have returned to Mokhdi after years of trying to survive in resettlement sites. We proceeded from there to two R&R sites – Vasana and Pancholi. In Vasana the families had no land for cultivation (the land they were given is in a rehab site in another location and of poor quality). Asked about the Desai committee, people felt extremely let down – it was just another eyewash. These people had walked all the way to the main road to meet the committee member, who was not able to reach the site due to monsoon. Some families are thinking of returning to the Narmada valley.

We went along with bright red flowers of the *gongura* plant to Dharendra Bhai's organic farm where we saw how much one can do in just 2 acres. There were plants and trees in every inch of the land along with solar cooker, windmill, bio gas plant and other energy saving devices. They gave us a refreshing pink drink made of these flowers from Narmada that they powdered and packaged.

### Ring in the New

New Year's eve saw singing, dancing and skits that sketched the events of the year that was. Amidst solidarity of various groups and continuation of Nirman and struggle, the New Year zeroed in on us. Some saw their dreams, others sang around an open fire till 2 am. Medha didi of course was having round-the-clock meetings between friendly appearances! On New Year's Day *jeevanshala* children released small leaf oil lamps into the Narmada and together we declared,

**"Navla Varha Dui Hazaar, Amra Gaon Me Amu Sarkar!"**

(We govern in our villages.... in the year 2000!)

*We thank Suhas tai, Medha didi, Geetha, Keval Singh and other Jeevanshala teachers and workers, Ghanshyam bhai and crew from Nimad for the excellent arrangements in the valley, the NBA Baroda and Kevadia offices for the coordination & arranging the bus through a tough terrain*

### Plan the new year with AID-India desktop calendar 2000!

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### AID UPDATES

- A 100-block plan : Balaji teamed up with AIPSM is setting the ground to use the village volunteer base of the literacy movements for health and savings activities.
- Suryanarayana has started 5 new savings groups in Srikakulam and is planning to further these efforts.
- Bhaskar reports on the Rajahmundry school in the Godavari islands where a hut has been constructed for children.
- Abhiyaan and Jagrithi: AID MD has approved 2 projects reviewed by AID-Blacksburg, AID-Bay Area and AID-Dallas for Orissa Cyclone relief and reconstruction.

### News and Events

**Socio-Economic Development: A Grassroots Perspective**  
In order to initiate a dialogue within the student community on the idea of development, AID-Boston is hosting a series of seminars at MIT. The focus of the seminars is on grass-roots organizations and people's movements. The first session was a collective discussion to understand the diverse notions of 'development', critical areas for change and the agents for intervention. This set the stage for the following sessions on 'holistic' approaches to development and the challenges of socio-political change.

*What is development?* - Thu Jan 13

*Towards Holistic Development: Case Studies* - Thu Jan 20

*Challenges of Socio-political Change: Case Studies* - Thu Jan 27

More information at <http://www.media.mit.edu/~nitin/aid/iap>

### Fund-Raiser for Orissa Cyclone Relief

AID Pittsburgh Chapter will be organizing ARPAN (An Offering of Relief) – an afternoon of Dance and Music at 2:30pm, Sunday, 6 February 2000, McConomy Auditorium, Carnegie Mellon University, Pittsburgh. The event features an Odissi dance recital by Sreyashi Dey & Raag Ras by Charu Collur and Nidrita Mitra-Singh.

More information at <http://www.andrew.cmu.edu/~aid/concert>

**AID-Dallas** is organizing a *Fundraising/Awareness event* - India Fest on March 12th.

**AID Portland** chapter is organizing a fund raiser on Mar. 4th, 2000 in Portland. The event is going to be an evening of Indian Classical dance and traditional Indian dinner. Dr. Jayanthi Raman is a very well known artist in the local community. Contact [srividhya.venkataraman@intel.com](mailto:srividhya.venkataraman@intel.com)

**AID** will be mailing the annual receipts by the end of January

**Association for India's Development** (US and UK) and **AID-India** rely solely on your contribution to support developmental projects in India. Please donate generously. To send money for Orissa relief via AID, please make a note saying Orissa Relief Fund in the memo area of the check. If you would like to contribute by credit card, please call (301) 513 0565.

Visit <http://www.aidindia.org> or email [info@aidindia.org](mailto:info@aidindia.org) for more information.

- USA (Tax ID no. 52-1863480). Credit card (call 301-513-0565) or Check (in favor of AID to Association for India's development) to AID, P.O. Box 149, College Park, MD 20741.
- Family and Friends in India? Remind them to donate to AID India, (has 80-G), C2 Ratna Apts, AH 250, Shanti Colony, Anna Nagar, Chennai 600 040.
- Send Checks in favor of AID-UK to Usha Kuchimanchi, 206 Fairwater Drive, Woodley, Reading, England, RG5 3JF