

AID – INDIA CONFERENCE, BANGALORE: DECEMBER 27-29, 2002

AID-Bangalore hosted the AID-India Annual Conference this year. AID volunteers from various chapters in India and the US, AID Saathis, and representatives from various NGOs got together at the Indian Social Institute, Bangalore from the 27th to the 29th of December. The conference started with active interaction among AID volunteers, and had a number of sessions spanning the various initiatives and campaigns of AID.

TNSF Collaboration - Shanthi, a full time health worker from the Tamil Nadu Science Foundation (TNSF), shared her experiences about how she and the other village health workers tackle such issues as misinformation and superstition. It is a complex task, she said, requiring a social worker to be counselor as well as render health care to malnourished children. AID fellow Balaji updated the conference attendees on the Hundred Block Program (HBP) and its health programs in Tamil Nadu and Bihar. Dinesh Prasad from Bihar gave an update on the health activities in Bihar.

Gender Issues - For society to improve, said Donna Fernandez, women need to have opportunities equal to those of men. Donna Fernandez, who founded Vimochana, has been working in and around Karnataka for the last 17 years defending the rights of women victimized by dowry and domestic violence. Many attendees took the AID no-dowry pledge after hearing an inspiring talk.

Post-traumatic problems in Gujarat - Dr. R. Srinivasa Murthy, Professor of Psychiatry at NIMHANS (National Institute of Mental Health & Neural Science) and an expert on mental health disaster management, worked with victims of the religious strife in Gujarat. He gave a glimpse of the psychosis that has gripped the victims, and advised on the means of helping victims in such situations deal with their fear. Anand Mazgoankar of PSS, Gujarat, explained the background of Gujarat riots.

Education - AID saathi Aruna Ratnam spoke about her recent activities in education focusing on TNSF's Makkal Palli Iyakkam (People's school movement). Kalpana (TNSF) shared her experience with a group of journalism students taken to a village as part of "Covering deprivation" program. Workshops were held on the "joy of learning" experiments. Balaji & Ganesh (TNSF) demonstrated a typical classroom having science experiments and Peeyush demonstrated the science kits for air pressure and optics.

Other NGO Sessions - AID saathis Leo Saldhana (see box), and Aruna Ratnam spoke of their individual projects. Mr. Kiran Kamal Prasad talked about bonded labor and Dalits issues prevailing in Karnataka. L.Kannan presented alternative technologies in micro spinning and K.J. Joy (NBA) discussed restructuring the water sector to make it more equitable and sustainable. There was also workshops on "Global Warming" and "Rural Enterprises" by local experts. Mr. Suryanarayan from GRASS presented his work in the Srikakulam district, AP. A movie was on the nuclear tensions between India and Pakistan was



Arogya Iyakkam (Health Movement) volunteers enact a visit by a health worker to a rural household, at the AID India conference held recently in Bangalore.

followed by a talk by Magsaysay winner Sandeep Pandey (ASHA) on Communalism. There was an exhibition of hand-made products by Dove, TNSF, and, NBA. A graphic representation of villagers who would be displaced by the Narmada dam was strung together in a photo exhibition.

Resolutions - AID volunteers resolved to condemn the violent and blatant communalization of people along religious lines, particularly along Hindu-Muslim lines, by both State and non-State agencies. They also resolved that ALL AID projects will be consistent with secular and democratic values and actively promote communal harmony through cultural, social and economic initiatives. AID forums and media will also be consistent with its secular values and will not allow attempts to misuse these to derail this progressive development agenda.

-- Lavanya, Prasanna & Mashood (AID-Bangalore)

AID Saathi Leo Saldhana & ESG

Leo Saldhana is the coordinator of the Environment Support Group (ESG), a Bangalore based non-profit group that seeks to enable a socially just, ecologically sustainable, economically viable, and culturally vibrant development path. He is currently involved with the International Honors Program (IHP), where Boston University students working with ESG in India are exposed to several aspects of Bangalore and Mysore—the IT sector, culture, history, urban planning as well as the slums. Grassroots connections are vital to Leo and ESG. ESG is now working with the municipal council of Raichur, a mid-sized city in Karnataka, to develop a comprehensive city development plan. From opposing destructive development symbolized by Bangalore-Mysore-Infrastructure-Corridor (BMIC) to designing a comprehensive city plan for Raichur, the ESG is working towards reforming institutions with the active involvement of the local community.

News and Notes

Festival of India in Dallas

AID - Dallas organized their 4th Annual Festival of India on Dec 21 2002. This annual event was specifically targeted towards children. Around 150 kids and their parents participated in various competitions like Fancy Dress competition, Quiz, Drawing, Lemon Spoon Race and Dance competition. This event was free of any entry fee or participation charge and was sponsored by Texas Instruments and the local Indian Association for North Texas, with generous donations from restaurants and stores in the Dallas-Fort Worth Community for the cause of AID. The theme of this year was Discovery of India for Kids. Volunteers from UT-Dallas and Arlington helped in organizing the event.

-- **Anand Kamannavar, AID Dallas**

Foot soldiers of the biting night

(Aravinda , AID-Mumbai)

"1000 people died of cold this winter"

10 minutes on Star News

Minister says, "too big ... can't handle"

Bihar to Delhi, homeless search blankets

Helpless who believed in the nation's capital.

"And in Parliament ... "

Law passed to enforce patriotism

Punishing disrespect for national anthem and flag

I say, bring down all the flags

Spread them on every body shivering in the streets

Instead of waiting for death.

And punish legislators who disrespect the people.

HBP: Update from TN blocks.

Annasalai, Pudukottai Dist., Tamilnadu

The Annasalai block comprises 40 villages. This block has five full-time health workers. The current efforts in the block is focused on the Arogya Iyakkam Health Program. A detailed survey of pregnant women and infants (in the 0-5 year age group) is now being undertaken in all forty villages. A Village health committee (VHC), comprising the village volunteer, government Anganwadi workers, village health nurse (VHN) and the Panchayat president, report to the full-time volunteers about the current population of pregnant women and infants on a weekly basis. Along with survey activities, full-time volunteers are actively involved in educating people in the village about proper pre-natal and post-natal care through the circulation of health information booklets.

-- **Anand Subramaniam, AID-San Diego**

Thiruthani district, Tamilnadu

Thiruthani district has a very active Savings & Health program, with Mrs.Latha, Ms.Radha & Ms.Saraswathi as block level co-ordinators. The savings program was started in 1999.

Today, there are about 175 Self Help Groups (SHGs) in approximately 150 villages. These SHGs have saved close to Rs.12 lakhs, and distributed loans to the tune of Rs.20 lakhs over the past these five years. These SHG also empower the women and initiate them into tackling the day-to-day atrocities against them as a group. The SHGs have intervened in a dowry case, stopped a child marriage, cleaned up a local pond, a main road, and a pathway to the water pump etc. SHG helps them get loans for small amounts, which they could have never got through banks.

The health program is currently underway in 36 villages. Village level volunteers of the 36 villages (2 per village) have undergone the initial training. Village health committee has been established in most of the villages. Opening of the health registers and weighing the pregnant mothers and kids under two years of age are presently underway. The state level health team has visited this district twice and is monitoring the progress.

-- **Guruprasad Mahalingam (AID-Milwaukee)**

AID Minnesota presents
"Aksharotsav 2003"

An evening of dazzling cultural programs, an entertaining and thought provoking play, and tasty Indian food.

When: Saturday, MARCH 1st, 2003 at 6 P.M.

Where: Theater in the Coffman Memorial Union on the east bank campus of the University of Minnesota.

Tickets: \$10 for general admittance, \$5 for students.

Further details: Please visit <http://www.tc.umn.edu/~aidmn>, or contact Rajamani at (612-617-9377) aidmn@tc.umn.edu.

"Changing Faces - Facing Changes"

The AID 2003 calendar

Featuring breath-taking pictures

from

P. Sainath's collection

This must-have calendar is available now by making a donation of \$10 or more to AID. To order copies for you, friends and family, both in India and outside, please visit the web site: <http://www.aidindia.org/calendar>

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