

The Association for India's Development (AID) Monthly Newsletter

Location: Bilgaon

"Where is that," you may ask. "And what is it about Bilgaon that it features on this newsletter?"

Bilgaon is a small tribal village of just over hundred families in the Nandurbar district in Maharashtra. The village has never seen electricity. The nearest point on the national grid is Dhadgaon, about 12 km away. Bilgaon is a place where life virtually stops after sunset, except for a few kerosene lamps here and there. Until very recently, there was little hope of this changing anytime soon.

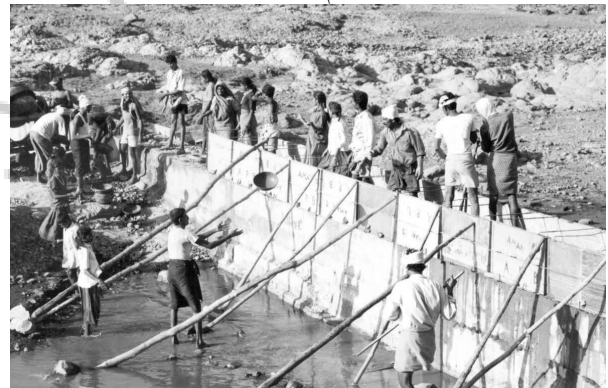
While AID was working on the pedal power generators in the Narmada valley, Anil and Madhu of People's School of Energy (PSE, a group of young engineers working on alternative energy) were setting up a 300 Watt micro-hydel project on a small rivulet in Domkhedi. The people of Bilgaon saw the Domkhedi project and approached PSE to set up a similar generator on the river Udai. This was in September 2000. A few surveys and Bijli Samiti meetings later, about 300 adivasi households in Bilgaon and the neighboring village Maal are excited at the prospect of electricity in their villages. The 15KW project will also provide electricity to a 300-student school in the vicinity.

The turbine is being manufactured in Bangalore. The villagers are contributing 1500 human days as "Shramdaan" (volunteered labor) for the construction of the check-dam and the canal. The

villagers are hopeful to see their hamlets electrified by the end of this monsoon.

From lighting a hamlet, we are taking a big step towards lighting up two entire villages! Micro-scale dams like these provide a safe source of electricity without any large-scale human displacement or environmental costs. Five AID chapters (Ann Arbor, Austin, Maryland, San Diego and Texas A&M) are involved in this unique community initiated effort. *(As of this writing, the construction of the check dam is complete and work on the canal is nearing completion. The installation of the distribution system is expected to be complete by the first week of September.)*

--Vivek (AID-Texas A&M University.)



"Saathi haath badhaana" (Lend me your hand, my companion). Villagers of Bilgaon actively volunteering in the construction of the check dam.

"Anti-development or True Development?" asks AID Saathi Leo Saldanha.

Environment Support Group (ESG), Bangalore founded by AID Saathi Leo Saldanha, has worked on environmental and social justice issues in Karnataka since 1996. The issues include questioning the rationale of the Cogentrix Power Plant and the Engelhard Highland Pigment Factory (for making pigments for U.S. dollar bills) in the ecologically sensitive Dakshin Kannada district; the Dandeli Mini-Hydel Project where a dam was almost built as per Ernst & Young's plagiarized Environmental Impact Assessment, the issue of mining and tribal access in Kudremukh National Park, and the controversial "Enron" of road development: the Bangalore Mysore Infrastructure Corridor (BMIC).

ESG is currently working on the Raichur 'Community Access' urban planning project, an upcoming 'Environmental law training' for judges, and

'Experiential environmental education' for school children. There is also solid waste management initiative involving Pourakarmikas (PKs, solid waste workers) in training households to segregate waste, thus promoting respect for PKs who are mostly Dalits. A short film 'Nagara Nyrmalya' has been produced, which addresses waste segregation and caste/class barrier issues. This film is available from ESG.

ESG believes in working to influence environmental decision-making authorities in a positive manner rather than antagonizing them in the process of bringing about change. The focus is to reform existing processes by questioning them and suggesting improvements. The issues of 'right to information' and 'public participation in decision-making' are emphasized.

Since Nandi Infrastructure Corridor Enterprises,

the promoters of BMIC, have stated that this project will begin shortly, ESG has conducted extensive analyses of its legal and financial aspects. A recent press release issued by ESG questioned the need for BMIC (which



Massive police presence at the BMIC "public hearing" in July '00. Anyone questioning the project was assaulted by the police and arrested on the order of the Deputy Commissioner, Bangalore Urban. Not one panel member intervened. The National Human Rights Commission has taken up the case.

costs Rs. 2000 crore and consumes 21,000 acres of land), when the state government had earlier planned to widen the existing road between Bangalore and Mysore (requiring Rs. 330 crore and 65 acres of land) and double the railway tracks (at a cost of Rs. 280 crore, using primarily railway land) earlier.

ESG's work is sometimes misconstrued as being "anti-development". However, I must concur with Leo Saldanha, coordinator of ESG: "True development for me is about providing people the freedom to make choices, the benefits of which they will realize without curtailing or inhibiting other people's rights."

For more information or to purchase the film, contact:
<http://www.altindia.net/esg/index.htm> or email:
ese@bgl.vsnl.net.in --Navini Prasad. (AID-Bangalore.)

Recently Approved Projects.

- Schools in ten Kondh tribal villages in Madugula Mandal, to foster leadership; Vizag dt., AP. *Bay Area*
- GREEN foundation, formation of farmer's groups, seed banks, conservation of bio-diversity; Thally block, border between Karnataka/TN. *Bay Area.*

Healthcare for the survivors of the Gujarat Earthquake

The Trust for Reaching the Unreached (TRU), an NGO based in Baroda, has been undertaking long-term rehabilitation efforts in Kutch district after the earthquake. TRU's expertise in development programs in the Panchmahals district over the last 20 years, particularly in community health, has enabled them to work towards physical and social rehabilitation of the earthquake survivors. The healthcare program focuses on providing psychological support to children, adolescents and women.

TRU has set up five mobile health centers in the areas of Rapar and Bhachau. In each center, a multi-purpose worker holds a health clinic every week. Senior volunteers from the PanchMahals project are placed to work here on deputation to provide healthcare services to these five centers. The patients are then referred to the visiting pediatrician and community physician. The major challenge faced by TRU is the treatment of numerous cases of eye infections (conjunctivitis) caused by the dust and the salt in the high velocity winds.

Apart from providing curative care, TRU is promoting basic health care knowledge as part of its

long-term strategy. It conducts intensive training sessions for the community health volunteers so that they may access immunization services, and ensure that the government primary health care center performs its duties and activities. The community health volunteers are also trained to recognize many commonly occurring health problems and their cure, and to recognize symptoms of severe diseases.

In addition to health care, TRU is also actively involved in reconstruction activities, and has built around 200 semi-permanent shelters. They have embarked on a few other projects to provide safe drinking water, and have constructed a check dam in Sirani Vandh village. TRU plans to continue their activities in Kutch for a few more months, based on the overwhelming enthusiasm and response from the local community. AID has been supporting the earthquake rehabilitation efforts of TRU. Besides, AID also collaborated with NAAO (an Austin-based organization that independently raised funds after the Gujarat earthquake) to provide financial support to TRU.

-- Ravishankar Arunachalam (AID-Austin)

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