

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

Ganini - 'Computer Power' transforms Tamil Nadu's Villages

For more than a year now, AID has collaborated with the Tamil Nadu Science Forum (TNSF) to open rural computer education/information centers. AID has been procuring both new and old computer parts in the US, and shipping them to India through volunteers. The AID team in India assembles these parts along with other locally procured parts, into full-fledged computers and takes them to the target villages to establish the centers. Each center charges a small fee for teaching computer skills. The fee is used to support the local youth who manage these centers and also maintain the computers. So far, ten such computer centers have been started across Tamil Nadu, with 22 computers assembled from donated components, besides other computers sponsored by local donors. About 800 students have benefited so far, and several more centers are planned for the near future.

There is an increasing need for computer literacy in India's rural areas. Compared to the traditional vocational training centers, the computer centers offer a refreshing alternative. Apart from providing computer skills and education, the centers also train the villagers in radio- and TV-repair, motor winding and maintenance of other electronic and electrical equipment used in rural areas. Some computer centers also serve as information centers – providing, in native language, the latest

developments in pest management, animal husbandry, soil and water management, health care, accounting software, etc. Some of these packages are still being developed and, once ready, can be replicated in all centers. The aim of these centers is to empower the villagers by giving them easy access to information.



The Ganini center in Latheri offers training in radio and TV repair, and basic electronics, besides computer literacy.

People willing to donate working computer parts, and/or carry parts from the US to India may contact this author by email at kb@eth.net. A detailed report on the Ganini Computer Education and Village Information Centers, along with more images of some of these centers, is at the web-site <http://www.aidindia.org/aip/sn/ganini>.

--Balaji Sampath (AID-Chennai)



Should Free Trade be at the Cost of a Free People?

Outside the U.S. Trade Representatives office in Washington DC on April 13, 2001, hundreds of protestors chanted "FTAA, No way!" and "Pills cost pennies, greed costs lives." They had identified a concrete example of mortality that would only increase under the global trade regime. By extending corporate rule, NAFTA-style, to 34 nations of North and South America, government public health programs would fall under the control of pharmaceutical corporations' profit motives. For instance, what would become of Brazil's much acclaimed generic drugs program, which provides low-cost drugs, even for AIDS patients, thus shattering the myth that poor nations are unable to provide health for of all its citizens?

From April 19-21, I marched in Quebec along with people from across the Americas. Our numbers

peaked at 50,000, as workers from labor unions across Canada joined the protest against the Summit of the Americas and its Free Trade Area of the Americas. The most violent sight in Quebec was the 'perimeter', a three-meter fence enclosing an area of 5 sq. km. Delegates to the Summit had to be stolen into the convention hall by helicopter, but the perimeter did not save them from the noxious gases unleashed by the police to quell the demonstration, as the spring breeze carried the gases right back into the hall. Braving tear gas, water canons and rubber bullets, the protestors raised issues common to farmers and working classes around the world.

Every day, more and more natural resource-based communities are being rapidly deprived of access to forest wealth such as barks, roots, shoots and herbs. Will the medicines prepared from this forest wealth be

packaged, privatized and patented by powerful private interests and their profit margins “protected” by Free Trade “agreements”? More and more people are seeing the light of the matter. -- *L. S. Aravinda (AID-Mumbai)*

News and Notes

AID-Maryland hosts Amjad Ali Khan

AID-Maryland organized a concert by the sarod maestro Amjad Ali Khan on April 22, in College Park, MD. He was accompanied by Bikram Ghosh on the tabla. The concert, attended by more than 850 people, included a presentation about the vision and projects of AID. A stall in the venue sold merchandise made by survivors of the earthquake in Gujarat. The proceeds from the concert will go to supporting projects in the Hundred Block Plan. The event was covered by correspondents from Doordarshan, the Washington Post, Challo.com and the local press. Upcoming concerts of Amjad Ali Khan to be organized by AID chapters include: Portland (July 29), San Diego (Aug 11), San Francisco (Aug 18) and Cincinnati (Aug 25). --*Pushpa Achanta (AID-India)*

‘Taste of India’ -- A Whiff of Spices, a Dash of AID
 “Taste of India”, the annual food festival organized by AID-State College, PA, was held this year on April 15. In the morning, AID volunteers across State College collected food prepared by the local community. This year, the theme of the food festival was ‘street fair’, and there were streamers and Hindi film posters pasted all over Alumni Hall in the Hetzel Union building. There were five food stalls featuring delicacies from across India. There was also a handicraft stall selling artifacts produced by the trainees at the Academy for Development Sciences (ADS) at Karjat, Maharashtra. The event was very successful in spreading awareness about AID. --*Krishnan Viswanathan (AID-State College)*

Elections to the AID Executive Board

AID will elect three new members to its Executive Board (EB), to fill the vacancies arising out of the end of the tenure of existing members. The posts that the new members will fill are Chapter and Volunteer Coordinator, Projects Coordinator, and Administration Coordinator. The elections to these posts will be held in all AID chapters during the weekend of May 11-12. The new EB members will assume responsibilities at the AID Conference in Maryland. --*Nigamanth (AID-Columbus)*

Learning and Building

AID, with more than 400 volunteers in 25 chapters spread across the US, is a group of dynamic individuals engaged in a variety of activities. Driven by a diverse, and sometimes conflicting set of ideas and motivations, how then do we keep AID a focused and effective organization? Enter AID Conference 2001!



The 10th Annual AID Conference will be held during the Memorial Day weekend (May 26-28), at its place of birth, College Park, MD. Over 100 volunteers and supporters of AID from all over the US are expected to come together at this conference.

Conference 2001 has two themes – learning and building. Experts in development issues (see the list of Invited Speakers) will share their experiences and provide an atmosphere to discuss various development issues. Discussions are planned on a many topics including community health, people’s science movements, women’s issues, agriculture and WTO, and alternative energy. AID volunteers will also discuss organizational issues and build on existing initiatives in AID, including the AIPSN 100 Blocks program, inter-chapter communication and the efficient handling of administrative tasks.

Invited Speakers

- *Today’s issues in Indian agriculture, and the impact of globalization*, **P. Sainath** – well-known journalist and analyst of rural poverty issues, author of the book ‘Everybody Loves a Good Drought’.
- *Grassroots empowerment through People’s Science Movements*, **Dr. Sundar Raman** – coordinator of Tamil Nadu Science Forum (TNSF), a national leader of All India People’s Science Network (AIPSN), initiates and promotes block-level grassroots development efforts.
- *Women’s rights and issues*, **Mallika Dutt** – founder of Sakhi, a N.Y.-based South Asian women’s rights group, and Breakthrough, which produced the album voicing women’s dreams, *Man ke Manjeere*.
- *Community Health initiatives in India*, **Dr. Thelma Narayan** – Coordinator of Community Health Cell in Bangalore, one of the leaders of the People’s Health Assembly 2000 campaign.

More information about AID Conference 2001, the various sessions, and the invited speakers, is available at the conference web-site <http://www.aidindia.org/conf2001/>.

--*Kirankumar Vissa (AID-Maryland)*

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AID relies solely on your contributions to fund community development projects in India. AID volunteers work hard to put funds to optimal use in project and awareness work. Every project is visited and monitored. All donors receive monthly updates of our projects and activities. To obtain a copy of the current financial statement please write to AID. Documents and information pertaining to AID can be obtained from the Secretary of State for the cost of copies and postage.