

On Violence.

The events of September 11th have rightly elicited widespread condemnation of terrorism. No cause, howsoever 'noble', can justify the mindless destruction of innocent lives. At the same time, we must also pause to reflect upon the nature of violence and fundamentalism. Why do we only feel outraged by senseless acts of violence in which hundreds or thousands die in an instant? Why don't we feel a sense of outrage when millions are systematically rendered destitute and desperate by an uncaring bureaucracy and political order?

P. Sainath, a noted freelance journalist and author of "Everybody Loves a Good Drought", spoke about the violence of 'market fundamentalism' at the A.I.D Conference in June. He described how tens of millions in rural India are being left to starve, even as millions of tons of so-called 'surplus' food grains rot outside government godowns that are unable to find space to store them. Isn't an uncaring government that chooses to export food grains for earning foreign exchange, even as tens of millions starve within its own borders, guilty of genocide? Why are we still governed

by tens of colonial laws related to communication, land acquisition, forests and water? Where is the genuine commitment to equity and participatory democracy? Isn't the plunder of nature that sustains all life, legitimized as 'development', violence of the worst kind?

These and other questions ought to be uppermost in our minds, and indeed, should be the primary issues of debate in the media. Yet, the mainstream media, with very few exceptions, chooses to merely peddle political trivia and consumerist propaganda. As Arundhati Roy has said, the true crisis we face is a profound crisis of imagination. The cycle of violence that the past few centuries have generated can be readily stopped, and non-violent solutions to the multitude of social and ecological crises, that stare us in our face, can be found if there is widespread commitment to bringing about a culture of informed civil discussions, debate and learning. The barriers are neither technological or financial; and they will disappear if enough of us, especially those who have had privileged opportunities, care enough.

-- Venkatesh Iyer (*vriyer@udel.edu*)

Intolerance is itself a form of violence and an obstacle to the growth of a true democratic spirit.

-- M.K.Gandhi

Watershed Development Program : Surodi Village, Maharashtra

AID-Pittsburgh volunteer Shoba Subramanian visited Surodi village in Maharashtra, in May 2001. She reports on the novel Watershed Development Program implemented by the villagers themselves, with support from AID.

Surodi is located in a very drought prone area of Pune district, with average annual rainfall of only about 300mm. The Watershed Development program is aimed at making water more easily available to this village for the various needs of the inhabitants including agriculture and drinking purposes. Several bunds, both cement and earthen, are either being constructed new or existing ones are being repaired. These bunds will serve to harvest rain water which in turn will recharge groundwater and the wells in the neighborhood. These bunds are located throughout the village so that everyone benefits equally from these bunds. The villagers, with the help of the Sarpanch, will ensure that water is not unfairly appropriated by any section of the village. The village does not grow any water intensive crops. Bajri (pearl millet), jawar (sorghum), onion, moong, some sunflower, and a very limited of wheat are the common crops grown here.

The planning and execution of this project is unique in that the project has been planned, and will be implemented, by the villagers of Surodi themselves, with technical expertise provided by Vidhyan Vagini, an NGO in Pune. All the funds requested from AID is being used to cover the cost of construction material alone. The villagers will volunteer their



A bund to harvest rain water in Surodi village, Maharashtra, constructed as part of the Watershed Development Program.

time and labour in the form of "Shrmadaan". Reports from a resident say that there has been some rainfall recently, and a few existing bunds are already starting to get filled up. This is a big step forward for the villagers of Surodi, who aim to develop their village in an overall manner. They have also started some small savings groups in the village, and have already managed to achieve a complete ban on alcohol consumption by the villagers.

-- Shoba Subramanian (*AID-Pittsburgh*)

News and Notes

A Musical evening in Austin.

A 16-member musical troupe, 'Srishti' from Dallas, regaled an audience of about 175 people at a musical evening hosted by AID-Austin on Sept. 29. There was an audio-visual presentation about AID at the beginning of the event. After an hour and a half of light fusion music including Indian and Western classical, break time saw the audience visit the AID stall buying kurtas, T-shirts etc., and talk to other AID volunteers about AID projects. AID-Austin raised about \$1300 from this event., in support of the Hundred Block Plan. -- *Jyotsna Natarajan (AID-Austin)*

AID-State College joins a Peace Rally

AID-State College was one of 23 organizations represented in a rally to oppose racial profiling and attacks on Muslims and Asians in America in the wake of the September 11 terrorist attacks. The rally took place on September 28, at the Penn State main campus. About 170 people attended the rally. Many speakers dwelt on the peaceful teachings of Christianity and Islam, or of personal losses due to the attacks. AID-State College volunteer Uma Asher presented the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (www.rawa.org) as an example of an organization involved in sustainable peace-building activities, and urged those present to learn more about such organizations and support their peace efforts. -- *Uma Asher (AID-State College)*

AID Open House in Atlanta.

AID-Atlanta held an open house meeting on October 6, 2001 at Emory University, to introduce AID to the large professional and entrepreneurial Indian community in Atlanta. The attendees included faculty and students from the university, and medical doctors. In addition to presenting the goals and mission of AID, we screened "India and Free Trade: A closer look at Bhopal", a video documentary produced by AID volunteer Pavithra Narayanan. This was followed by a discussion on globalization and its effects on India. -- *Pawan Hegde (AID-Atlanta)*

India Beckons '01 in College Park.

AID- College Park and Student's Council of India organized India Beckons '01 on September 30. The event was attended by more than 200 people, including several new volunteers. It started with an India Quiz, and was followed by Anthakshari, a skit, a fashion show the traditional Dandiya, and performance by 'Spandan', a new music band. There was a presentation about the goals, growth and achievements of AID. A stall in the venue displayed information about AID projects, and sold AID kurtas, videos and other merchandise. -- *Rajeev (AID-College Park)*

To get regular updates of AID projects, upcoming events in chapters, and talks by noted social workers, please subscribe to AID News, an e-mail newsletter that goes out about twice a week.. Please send an email to aidnews@aidindia.org.

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Khadi... Love the Good Feeling!

'Education' and 'Development'

AID Bay Area hosted a talk and discussion by Dr. Vinod Raina September 9 at Stanford University. Dr. Raina is the founder of EKLAVYA, a non-profit organization that works on education and rural development in Madhya Pradesh. EKLAVYA is a pioneer in developing alternative school curricula, textbooks and other teaching aids, with an emphasis on tapping the natural creative ability of children in the process of learning. Many schools in Madhya Pradesh have adopted the EKLAVYA model. Dr. Raina is also a co-founder of the All India People's Science Movement (AIPSN), that attempts to empower people to plan and implement their own developmental ideas based on their needs. Besides, he has also been actively involved with people's movements surrounding the Bhopal Gas tragedy, and the construction of dams on the Narmada river.

In the lengthy discussion following his talk, Dr. Raina explained the goals and details of the Hundred Block Plan (HBP) that is being supported by AID. He encouraged AID volunteers to undertake visits to villages in India to interact with people at the grassroots levels. The chapter volunteers also benefited from his valuable suggestions and guidelines on the project review and approval process in AID. The three hour session covered a host of topics including the factors behind the success of developmental policies in Kerala, the government's process of NGO evaluation, the current electoral policies, etc.

-- *Aarthi Rishi (AID Bay Area)*.

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