

SANKALP



Newsletter of the Association for India's Development - State College

Fall 1999

MESSAGE FROM THE EDITORIAL COMMITTEE

It is with great pleasure that we, on behalf of all our volunteers, present "SANKALP", the third issue of the AID - State college newsletter. "SANKALP" means "Solemn Pledge", which we feel best describes our commitment towards bringing about progress in India.

When we look back, we observe with a sense of pride that the AID - State College chapter has come a long way since its inception in 1997. From a volunteer force of just over a dozen students, we are 65 strong.

We have successfully undertaken many innovative fund raising activities such as members volunteering time at concession stands during athletic events and the food festival. The active participation of the community during the food festival and their tremendous interest in all our other activities made us realize that our chapter has evolved from a predominantly student organization to one which includes the community as well.

As part of our continuing efforts to encourage the development process in India, in addition to other projects, we undertook a unique project in which we, along with AID - Bangalore, funded a trip for a group of health workers from Tirupattur to Bangalore.

All these activities would not have been possible were it not for the members of our community and donors who have consistently supported us through all our endeavors, and the ceaseless efforts of all our volunteers.

We hope to sustain the level of enthusiasm that we have generated and continue to grow as individuals and as an organization.

All donations to AID are tax deductible in the USA. Our federal tax ID # is 52-186-3480. Please make your checks payable to AID and mail it to AID, P.O. Box 149, College Park, MD 20741.

Copies of the financial statement can be obtained from the above address. Documents and information pertaining to AID can be obtained from the Secretary of State for the cost of copies and postage.

To learn more about AID please visit the web site at www.aidindia.org

*Want to contact AID Headquarters?
Call (301) 513-0565*

What You Can Do

AID is registered as a non-profit organization in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

* You can contribute to our cause through monthly or one time donations.

* Donate your time and become an AID volunteer.

* Sign up for the AT&T association loyalty program which will automatically pay 5% of your long distance bill to AID at no cost to you.

* Medical Professionals can donate medical equipment and information on preventive health care, AIDS, family planning, etc.

For more information, **contact:**

Priya Nagarajan - 237-5270
Vithal Shirodkar - 237-6480
Ganga Prasad Rao - 862-8473
Raghuram Vadali - 867-6196

Editors:

Soma Nag - 867-0455
Kavitha Nellore - 867-6246
Priya Nagarajan - 237-5270

Please visit the AID - State College web site at calvin.cse.psu.edu/~aid/

Malar : Synonym for Self Reliance

- *Shobana Rani, Nagercoil, enjoys a higher status in her family ever since she redeemed the family jewelry from the bank, by means of a loan from the small savings program in which she participates;*
- *Thanga Leela of Rajakkamangalam hopes to use a similar loan to redeem a coconut tree which she pledged to build her house. (excerpts from The Hindu)*

These two women are a part of MALAR, an acronym for Mahalir Association for Literacy, Awareness and Rights. It is involved in empowerment of women through literacy, awareness and organization, and is a forum where they voice their problems, and foster social and economic support linkages.

Begun in 1995 in Kanyakumari district, Tamil Nadu, MALAR works with groups of women from various social and economic backgrounds who reside in Kanyakumari and Nagercoil. Each group has 20 women who are expected to save a minimum of Rs. 5 per week and to start lending the money to each other after a month of savings. As soon as a group is formed, an account is opened on its behalf in a bank. Today the women who constitute MALAR have saved about Rs. 21 lakhs. The All-India Coordination Committee of SAMATA (a national platform for gender equality) has decided to replicate the MALAR model in over 17 states. Expansion of the savings program to other districts and blocks will need a lot of training materials - books, video modules and people.

The Association for India's Development (AID) sponsored a video production project in collaboration with MALAR. The goal was to document the success of the women's savings group run by MALAR. Balaji Sampath who is with AID India and Kalpana who is with MALAR, coordinated the project in India. TNSF (Tamil Nadu Science Forum) and MALAR will have the right to copy, distribute, sell and circulate the videos in India. The budget for this project totaled \$3600, which was provided by AID - State College and AID - Maryland.

- M.S. Srinivasan

Taste of India

How can we bring local community members, students and well-wishers together for a good cause? The answer apparently is food! "Everybody loves Indian food. Let's have a food festival." This was the response of Haima Varadan - one of our volunteers. Haima was convinced that this was a great fund-raising idea and that the community would actively participate in it.

Her idea came to fruition as the *Taste of India* food festival, held on April 18, 1999 at the Paul Robeson Center Ballroom in Penn State. It featured popular, healthy and home-cooked food from various parts of India that was prepared and donated by 35 families. An equal number of volunteers helped with the event organization and management. The festival attracted over 400 guests and donors who helped the AID chapter raise an estimated \$2600 for future projects.



*A sell out crowd savors delicacies at Taste of India
(Photo: Eshwar D.)*

The success of the event was shown by the enthusiastic response of the guests and the community, increased volunteer participation and team-building, and the funds raised. Said Mrs. Lakshmi Sundaram, a volunteer cook, "I am glad everyone enjoyed the food. I'll be happy to help out next time too." Encouraged by such responses, we have now vowed to make *Taste of India* an annual fund raiser.

- Aniruddha Vaidya

The Narmada Bachao Andolan

On May 17, 1999, the AID - State College chapter hosted a presentation on the Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA), by Aravinda Pillalamarri. About 30 participants attended the presentation, which consisted of the screening of two documentaries followed by a talk and open forum discussion.

The first documentary, 'Narmada Diary' by Simantini Dhuru and Anand Patwardhan, chronicled the agitation against the Sardar Sarovar project (SSP) (the largest of the dams) over a period of five years in the first part of this decade. The dam, when completed is expected to drown 37,000 hectares of fertile land, displace over 200,000 *adivasis*, and cost up to 400 billion rupees. Although the SSP has been hailed as "the lifeline of Gujarat" and a permanent solution to the water problems of Saurashtra and Kutch, the benefits have been overestimated. For example, the Gujarat government's own data show that most of the *talukas* of Saurashtra will not get any water from the SSP. It also fails to take into account water-logging, salinity, destruction of forests, destruction of livelihoods such as those of the fisherfolk, among others.

The documentary highlights the non-violent protest of the movement against the inadequacy of resettlement and rehabilitation programs intended to compensate project affected persons. One of the landmark achievements of the NBA and the indigenous peoples was when the World Bank withdrew funding and pulled out of the SSP in March 1993. As a result of this, the Gujarat government solicited private investment e.g. from sugar mills, to fund the construction of the SSP. This implied the pledging of more benefits from the SSP, which was bound to exacerbate an already worsening situation. Then in May 1995, the NBA successfully petitioned the Supreme Court of India to order a halt to construction. The NBA contended that a number of requisite scientific studies had not been completed, and that the government had failed to resettle displaced people six months prior to the submergence of their land. However, in February 1999, the Supreme Court permitted the Gujarat government to raise the height of the Sardar Sarovar from 80 meters to 85 meters. This decision was made on the basis that rehabilitation measures were ready, and that halting construction would be liable to hamper foreign investment. It took no cognizance whatsoever of

the fact that the resettlement and rehabilitation programs had so far proved to be farcical exercises.

The second documentary 'I Will Report Honestly', produced by AID Fellows, Aravinda Pillalamarri and Ravi Kuchimanchi, focused on the justification of the Supreme Court decision given that the Maharashtra government had filed a false affidavit stating that every displaced family had been given adequate land. It detailed the discussions that Medha Patkar of the NBA had with the Collector and Deputy Collector, respectively, of Nandurbar district (location of Manibeli village), regarding flooding and resettlement measures in view of the Supreme Court sanction. The documentary highlighted the rampant corruption when it revealed that the Narmada Water Disputes Tribunal Award was not being met for those already displaced in the district. At the conclusion of the documentary, we learned that the Deputy Collector who had promised to truthfully report the grievances of the people to the appropriate authorities, was ultimately dismissed.

The discussion following this screening dealt with the issues that had been raised by the documentaries. These encompassed, for example, the costs and benefits of the project, the nexus between those funding the project and its beneficiaries, the struggle of the NBA, the democratic process and the inclusion of people who are affected by development projects, environmental movements worldwide, viable alternatives to large dams, and the perspectives from which development and progress are defined.

After the discussion, the conclusion reached was that the adverse effects of large scale development projects implemented without any environmental considerations or without any input from the people whom they uproot, cannot be exaggerated. The people of the Narmada valley epitomize the movement against such development projects, through non-violent protest and the resolve to sacrifice their lives rather than leave their homes. The injustice of the Supreme Court decision spurred the *Manavadhikar Yatra* or Human Rights March from the villages of the Narmada Valley in Gujarat, Maharashtra, and Madhya Pradesh, all the way to Delhi in April. And so the struggle goes on....

- Soma Nag

To learn more about this issue, please visit the 'Friends of the River Narmada' web site at www.narmada.org

Only a Genius Can Keep India Poor

On April 22, 1999, Dr. B.V. Parameswara Rao, a renowned social worker who has spent over 30 years in villages in India, addressed a gathering of Penn State students, faculty and members of the community. His inspiring talk titled 'Only a Genius Can Keep India Poor' addressed the reasons for poverty in India, and challenged the audience to initiate a 'second freedom movement' to rediscover the genius which India was several centuries ago. Using anecdotes, he demonstrated how the genius which was earlier present in self-contained village societies has now transformed itself into a subversive force.

According to Dr. Rao, there are seven facets of poverty which form a vicious cycle and afflict India. These are bodily (the poverty of health), mental (the poverty of education), economic, social (breakdown of social systems), cultural (forgotten culture; living in harmony with nature), political (the poverty of good, clean leadership), and spiritual poverty. To effect change it is necessary to attack and break this 'poverty cycle'. In this context, he narrated his experience of founding the Bhagvatula Charitable Trust (BCT), and implementing projects such as the setting up of village schools, a salt-manufacturing cooperative, women's saving programs, shrimp farming, afforestation, adult literacy and health care. He said that the most important lesson which he learned was that village folk have to learn to help themselves. The key to success lies in their active participation and involvement, and so the external provision of funds without internalization of the concept of development by villagers would have an adverse impact.

Dr. Rao stated that although organizations viz. the BCT have had limited success, by themselves they may be unable to bring about positive change that will rescue India from the disastrous path which it is currently on. Instead, a sort of 'second freedom



Dr. Rao enjoys a moment on the Old Main lawn
(Photo: A. Vaidya)

movement' by the masses is necessary. This needs a common purpose, a large number of people to take a step together, beyond what they may be currently doing. For example, he asked the audience to visualize how Mahatma Gandhi rallied the nation together around a simple concept such as that of making their own salt, and challenged the Salt Tax as part of the freedom movement. Dr. Rao challenged the youth of the present day to similarly initiate and participate in a movement towards making change a reality. He exhorted them to commit 24 minutes a day, 2 hours a week or 15 days a year toward this end.

About 80 people attended the talk, which was followed by a question and answer session. A group of about 30 made a personal commitment to participate in this movement.

- Aniruddha Vaidya

The AID U.S. Conference

During May 29 - 31, 1999, the AID - Cincinnati chapter hosted the AID U.S. Conference. The purpose of the conference was to :

- bring together all volunteers of AID - U.S. chapters to discuss progress on the AID plan, assess project support, determine what we have learned, what we are doing effectively, and in which directions we want to concentrate more effort
- foster a feeling of belonging among volunteers, by improving interaction and participation within chapters, across chapters, and with AID headquarters
- meet eminent social workers, share their experiences and gain motivation
- learn about AID - India's efforts and development

***The conference proceedings are available at :
<http://www.eecs.uc.edu/~sganesan/aid/conf99/>***

- Vithal Shirodkar

The Joy of Doing

On March 27, 1999, 40 women, 7 children and 5 AID volunteers walked through Cubbon Park, one of Bangalore's city parks. All of these women were literacy, healthcare and/or savings group volunteers working at the village or district levels (with TNSF) in Kandhili Block in Tamil Nadu. They spend a lot of their time in meeting with each individual family in the village, prescribe basic health guidelines for child nutrition, pregnant women and common problems afflicting women.

The group had come for a two day visit to Bangalore, a unique project funded by AID - State College, as a first attempt by AID to bring village volunteers to cities. The request for arranging the trip to Bangalore came from these village volunteers themselves, when they were asked by AID volunteers what they would like AID - Bangalore to do for them. Most of them had barely ventured outside their villages and at best have visited Tirupattur, a town about 5-6 kilometers from their villages. We felt that this trip would be a much-needed break for these hard-working volunteers. They would get a chance to see and experience a big city in India and would give Bangalore AID volunteers a chance to meet all the village volunteers.



Tirupattur health volunteers at the Vidhan Soudha, Bangalore
(Photo : AID Bangalore)

The trip went off well. They visited the ISKCON temple, the Visweswaraya Science & Technology museum, walked through Cubbon Park and saw the Vidhan Soudha. The little kids (seven of them) who had accompanied the women, were given toys (gifted by AID-North Carolina). Saturday ended with a

trip to the Musical Fountain.

On Sunday they went to the Bannerghatta National Park. After the outing they demonstrated the use of a slide projector (funded and given by AID - Milwaukee) to the volunteers and gave it to them for use in the villages. The projector will be used by them to show slides on healthcare and general information of interest to villagers. The trip ended on Sunday afternoon with a visit to a large, shopping (inexpensive) area in Bangalore.

The budget for the visit was approximately Rs.19,000. AID - State College provided funding for \$400 (Rs. 17,000). AID - Bangalore contributed Rs. 2000. Each of the village volunteers contributed Rs.10 to the trip, which essentially covered her expenses to and from her village to Tirupattur, the common meeting and dispersing point for all the volunteers. It was a good experience for AID-Bangalore, to work with three chapters in the US, AID - State College for the trip itself, AID - Milwaukee for the slide projector and AID - North Carolina for the toys.

- Ramani Hariharan (AID - Bangalore)

Time Is Money

In Fall 1998, members of the AID - State College chapter tried a novel method of raising funds. Dr. Vasundara Varadan suggested that working at concession stands during athletic events at Penn State would be an effective way of bringing in money to AID. Bob Byers was approached, and he kindly obliged by permitting us to work at concession stands run by him.

AID members and their families volunteered their time and effort at these stands during women's soccer, women's volleyball, and football. These events raised a total of \$1000. It involved very little overhead and is a good manifestation of the spirit of true volunteerism, where members contributed to the cause of AID through their effort and commitment.

This activity served the dual purpose of raising funds and promoting a healthy interchange between AID volunteers and the local population. The enthusiasm and efficiency of the volunteers have prompted us to try and make this a regular fund raising event.

- Priya Nagarajan

To volunteer for this event, please contact Priya at pxn121@psu.edu

The Tamil Nadu Science Forum Library Movement

The Tamil Nadu Science Forum (TNSF), a well known people's movement has initiated a library program in approximately 50 blocks (1500-2000 villages) in Tamil Nadu. TNSF, which was started in 1980 as a forum for scientists is no stranger to the field of education. Inspired by the success of literacy campaigns in Kerala, TNSF successfully spearheaded a similar movement, Arivoli, in many districts of Tamil Nadu.

After the Arivoli experience TNSF realized there was a lack of good, affordable Tamil books for neo-literates and children. It was a great opportunity to tap the market while simultaneously promoting books which would serve as a learning tool. The idea behind the program is simple and self sustaining. Initially, a TNSF volunteer tries to excite interest among the villagers for a library by means of an informal session with books and story telling. A response of ten-twenty villagers is sufficient to form a village library, which can then register with the central office for a payment of Rs. 10. A one time registration fee of Rs. 10 and a monthly payment of Rs. 2 per member helps the village library to order books from the main office. For the initial round, to help encourage the movement, the libraries get a free one year subscription to *Thulir* (a children's science magazine), *Magalir Sinthanai* (women's magazine) and *Arivu-Thendral* (neo-literate newspaper).

Every 6 months, the libraries have to send Rs. 120 and the center will send them a new set of books worth Rs. 200. In addition to this minimum package, the center will also send them catalogues of books, from which they can order more books (by an extra payment).

The packages will be standardized - they will contain about 30 books - 20 story books (each with about 2-3 stories), 4-5 books on educational topics (like health, natural resource management, legal issues for women etc.) and 4-5 books on enterprise skills (animal husbandry, sericulture, etc.).

The total expenditure for the first six months is Rs.397,500 of which AID is funding Rs.127,500. The remaining cost is covered by villagers contributions, Centre for Ecology and Rural Development (the research and development wing of TNSF) and other organizations. AID funds will be used for subscribing

to *Thulir* for one year and the purchase of five health books. The project was jointly reviewed by AID - State College and AID - Boston, with each contributing fifty per cent of the total funds.

- Hema Swaminathan

Upcoming Reports

- Interview with Dr. M.P. Parameswaran of KSSP
- AID book purchase and library project
- National Association for the Blind - Karnataka's Community Based Rehabilitation Project
- Formation of Narmada action group by interested volunteers
- Publicity workshop for AID volunteers
- Concession stands at forthcoming athletic events

These will be featured in the next newsletter.

Are you interested in learning more about AID?

Yes! You can make a difference. You are welcome to join us. There is no membership fee.

We meet every alternate Wednesday at 5.45 pm in 119 Boucke.

For more information, please contact any of the AID volunteers listed on the cover page of this newsletter.