



# SANKALP

Official newsletter of the Association for India's Development  
Penn State / State College chapter

Spring 2001

[www.personal.psu.edu/clubs/aid](http://www.personal.psu.edu/clubs/aid)

## Gujarat earthquake relief and AID

-M. S. Srinivasan

An earthquake measuring 7.9 on the Richter scale hit Gujarat, India, on January 26, 2001. This natural disaster left more than 25,000 people dead and 100,000 wounded. Millions were left homeless. AID chapters all over the world initiated a massive fund raising drive to help the earthquake survivors. So far, AID has collected more than US\$350,000 toward the Gujarat earthquake relief fund. AID State College/Penn State Student chapter raised \$20,000 for the relief fund. People's concern for the earthquake survivors and eagerness to help were beyond words.

During the period immediately following the earthquake, AID released \$52,000 to address the emergency needs such as temporary shelters, food, and blankets for the survivors. This money was routed through nine different non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that are actively working in Gujarat. AID has been working with these NGOs on various developmental projects. The initial relief efforts were focused on the short-term needs of the survivors.

As more and more governmental and non-governmental groups started contributing to the short-term relief efforts and restoration of normalcy in the earthquake hit areas, AID turned its focus to long-term as well as self-sustainable rehabilitation efforts.

Various AID chapters across the country have started reviewing developmental and rehabilitation projects focused on Gujarat. NGOs and AID volunteers working in Gujarat are regularly reporting their field experiences and needs to the AID chapters. This provides the much needed firsthand information to plan the long-term goals and projects. The long-term rehabilitation efforts include employment generation programs, building of schools and day care centers for children, health care facilities, and design and development of safe drinking water supply systems.

However, in short- and long-term programs, the major challenge seems to be the restoration of balance, both social and

psychological, in the society. People are yet to recover from the shock. Of all, children are the worst affected. With no schools and day care centers, there is no activity available for them. Also, the rumors of more such natural disasters hitting the area seem to be keeping the people in a state of fear. People are recuperating from the loss of kith and kin, and in many cases the loss of breadwinners. The structural damages are yet to be assessed.

-contd on page 2

Photo feature of disaster relief on page 4

Contents	
AID video	.....1
AIDers' corner	..... 2
CofferState	..... 2
EclecTicklers	..... 2
Editor's note	.....2
Fundraiser photo feature....	4
Gujarat Earthquake relief....	1
President's note	..... 3
Upcoming events	..... 2

## AID video

- Vamsi Veeramachaneni

At the 2000 AID Conference in Boston, John Mathias, a member of the AID Ann Arbor chapter, discussed his proposal for creating a video showcasing the different facets of AID. His proposal was warmly received and after obtaining funding from several AID chapters, and the University of Michigan he left at the end of June for a two month visit to India. The result is a 30 minute video narrated by John with a wonderful background score of Western and Indian music!

The video starts with attendees of a Community Service Hour at Ann Arbor explaining what AID means to them, the types of projects AID funds, etc. It also includes footage from a fundraiser at Ann Arbor. The rest of the video is shot at various locations in India.

## Calcutta, West Bengal:

The NGO, Swanirvar (which means "self-reliance") was formed by Dr. Sujit Sinha in 1994 after he returned to India from the US. The organization works with a group of about 20 villages 50kms outside Calcutta, West Bengal. In some ways it is a model project - the organization's philosophy explained by Sujit Sinha coincides with AID's belief that a region's problems can only be tackled by addressing all the connected issues of the region together in a holistic manner.

Swanirvar promotes integrated health care without the use of a regular doctor, through community awareness and simple preventive and curative measures. Trained health workers from the same villages manage the programs completely by working in the government health center and visiting each house in the village. They provide simple cures for common ailments, teach women the basics of balanced diet, and help set up

kitchen gardens. They also provide vaccinations for cattle and assist with the installation of low cost toilets. The health program of Swanirvar has been supported by AID for the past 4 years.

Swanirvar's education program prepares pre-primary students for primary school. It also runs some primary schools by itself. The alternative teaching methods teach students about the local community and environment.

The focus on developing local leadership for tackling local problems seems to have paid off! Women's self-help groups have started recently. These savings groups are also used as agents of change, with members teaching their friends what they have learnt to implement in their houses.

-contd on page 3

Take a break...

## AIDers' corner

As always AIDers have reached milestones in their professional and personal lives. Congratulations are due, to our volunteers who have successfully completed their academic endeavors at Penn State.

**Malati** (State College) got engaged to **Rajesh** (Bay area).

**Indrani** (State College) got engaged to **Siddharth** (Pittsburgh).

**Krishnan** (State College) married **Ratna** (Mumbai) on February 14, 2001 in Mumbai.

**Ajey** successfully defended his doctoral dissertation and moved to New York for his new job.

**Sameer** has accepted the offer of doctoral program by University of Colorado, Boulder beginning Fall 2001.

**Uma** has successfully passed the candidacy examination in the Department of History.

## EclecticTcklers

•When a problem gets too complicated for the physicists, they hand the problem to the chemists.

When a problem gets too complicated for the chemists, it is handed over to the biologists.

And when biologists think it is too complicated, they give the problem to the sociologists.

•The primary function of the design engineer is to make things difficult for the fabricator and impossible for the serviceman.

•The trouble with the profession of income-tax inspectors is that 90% of its members give the rest a bad name.

•A bartender is just a pharmacist with a limited inventory.

•When you walk into the classroom and say good morning...

When they say good morning back, it's Freshmen.

When they put their newspapers down and open their books, it's Sophomores.

When they look up so they can see the instructor over the tops of the newspapers, it's juniors.

When they put their feet up on the desks and keep reading, it's seniors.

When they write it down, it's graduate students.

## Election update

Malati Raghunath was elected as treasurer of our chapter effective February 11, 2001.

## Upcoming events

1. AID-Penn State conducts the annual election for the offices of the executive committee on April 22, 2001

2. The annual AID conference commemorating the 10-year anniversary of AID, will be held in College Park, MD, May 26-28, 2001. [www.aidindia.org/conf2001](http://www.aidindia.org/conf2001)

## CofferState - the treasury update

-Malati Raghunath

As part of the decentralization process of AID, the Treasury operations now have three zonal headquarters. These are Maryland (Zone 1), Pittsburgh (Zone 2) and Bay Area (Zone 3). AID-State College is part of Zone 2.

AID - Penn State/State College raised \$17,677.87 in aid of the Gujarat earthquake survivors.

In addition, contributions from

- |                          |           |
|--------------------------|-----------|
| 1. Lock Haven University | \$ 200.00 |
| 2. Connecticut College   | \$3300.00 |

Our regular fund-raising continued -

- |   |           |
|---|-----------|
| 1. Creamery stall at Bryce- Jordan Center (upto March 2001) | \$2611.00 |
|---|-----------|

AID-Penn State in Spring 2001 has pledged

- |            |           |
|------------|-----------|
| 1. HBP     | \$6000.00 |
| 2. Vimukti | \$3500.00 |

## Editor's note

The devastating earthquake that occurred in India with its epicenter in the western state of Gujarat caused catastrophic damage to life and property. AID-Penn State rallied to support the survivors by conducting fundraising activities on and off campus including a musical concert. The concert featured Raaga, the carnatic music ensemble of State College and Big Sameer and the Baaja Company, an impromptu congregation of talented light musicians comprising students and community members.

The community of State College was extremely supportive in donating generously toward the cause.

Such generosity reaffirms our belief in working for a better future. This is evidenced by the video documentation of activities of AID, the details of which are reported in this issue by Vamsi.

This issue is being released at the much awaited food festival. I sincerely hope that this newsletter serves to introduce our activities to those of you who are participating in the food festival.

- Bhagavathi Ramamurthy

*contd from page 1*

## Earthquake survivors' rehabilitation

AID projects are trying to address the rehabilitation efforts from various angles. Having gained the people's confidence through short-term efforts, the next step for AID would be to involve the survivors in the planning and execution of rehabilitation efforts. These efforts range from the construction of infrastructure to providing of counseling to the survivors. Thus, a holistic approach is needed in project planning and execution.

AID realizes the completion of the rehabilitation efforts is a continual process that will take time, money, and more importantly, the unwavering support of volunteers and donors. AID is always open to your involvement. AID ensures 100 percent of your contribution reaches the needy people. More details on Gujarat earthquake relief efforts and other developmental projects from the past and present can be found in [www.aidindia.org](http://www.aidindia.org).

Let us work together for a better world!!

from those books...

contd from page 1

### The video

With just 5 workers, Swanirvar is not only providing the village with the needed health facilities, but is also increasing the confidence in the villagers that they can take initiative and leadership to tackle their problems.

Bhubaneshwar, Orissa :

It is a strange but necessary concept for working children in India. Platform schools run by Ruchika, reach children working on railway platforms as shoeshine boys, coolies (porters), seat grabbers, etc. The immediate goal is providing education right on the platform. Everyday teachers take their "trunk" of tricks and engage these young minds in a child-friendly gathering.

*...(the video) shows the different ways in which people can contribute to AID.*

The teacher prepares a daily work program to impart education through songs, stories, dramas, puppets, paintings and games. While most of the teaching is necessarily verbal, the curriculum roughly corresponds to the Orissa school syllabus and indeed 25% of the total students have been admitted to regular schools. Many join vocational schools too.

The children all get cleaned up and are served lunch after the daily lessons. The children all get cleaned up and are served lunch after the daily lessons.

Narmada Valley, Gujarat:

NBA does not accept foreign contributions but is always ready to welcome new volunteers. AID Fellows Ravi Kuchimanchi and Aravinda Pillalamarri spend part of their time with the NBA. Much has been written about the struggle taking place in this beautiful

river valley. Instead of trying to compress all the information about the struggle into a 5 minute shot, John has wisely elected to show a sequence of scenes of Ravi explaining the flawed estimates of the authorities, Aravinda teaching children who have spent their entire lives in the shadow of the agitation, Medha Patkar addressing a group of activists, Ravi using the pedal power generator that provides light at their meetings, etc.

Chennai, Tamil Nadu:

Balaji explains the goal of Hundred Block Plan, which is to carry out in a planned sequence the different health, literacy, and savings programs that have been tested out in a model setting by Tamil Nadu Science Forum and other organizations. The overall aim being, development of skills in people so that they can participate in local planning.

The video shows health workers recording details of births in a village, classes in progress at a school where alternative teaching methods using games and songs are employed, people using computers as part of the Ganini computer program, and an interview with Mala, a 21yr old running a women's-only savings group.

The video concludes by showing the different ways in which people can contribute to AID.

#### Officers for 2000-2001

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### President's note

-Kavitha Nellore

One afternoon, I heard two students having a discussion about AID, in the CATA bus. They were talking about the food festival, and one of them was explaining that AID funds developmental projects in India. The other one immediately recalled that we raised funds for the Gujarat earthquake relief...and the discussion went on. Sitting there, I felt elated, because it looked like we had been successful in reaching the goals that we had set at the beginning of my term as president. We wanted to reach out to more people on and off campus, recruit more volunteers and let them know what AID is all about.

When I think about the activities that we undertook this year, one thing stands out the most, probably because of my close involvement in coordinating the effort. Jayashree Sonti, our faculty advisor, initiated the idea of AID volunteering time at the Bryce Jordan Center Creamery stand. We felt that this was a good idea to meet our commitment to the Hundred Block Plan and after 3 months of volunteering at the BJC, we were able to raise ~\$4500. Thanks are due to all those who worked at the BJC, especially those who joined us during the volunteer drive.

It was heartwarming to see the students and community in State College rising to help victims of the Gujarat earthquake. After a two-week campaign, which ended with a music concert, we managed to raise over \$17000, thanks to the generous contributions. The students and community of Connecticut College, New London contributed \$3,300 to the fund-raiser. Having heard about AID's efforts, they decided to channelize their contributions through us because of our grassroots approach to the relief process. I would like to thank the fund raisers of Connecticut College for trusting us.

Last, but not the least, I am really grateful to all the volunteers, who are helping us in organizing the food festival. The response to the food fest has been terrific, and we hope to continue doing our best every year.

For all those who trusted me, and gave me an opportunity to lead this organization for an year, I hope I haven't let you down. Thank you all very much. Its been a great year!

come, join AID.

Earthquake disaster relief fund raiser - Photo feature



Top left: l to r: Srinivasan, Chandrasekhar, Latha, Prabhakar in the rendition of a vocal recital by Latha.

Top: l to r: Srinivasan, Prabhakar, Chandrasekhar, Latha in a violin recital by Prabhakar

Raghu, Andrew, Anu, Ajey and Sameer (top), Antani, Sastry, Andrew and Ajey (right), of the Big Sameer and the Baaja band rendering popular Hindi film songs.

