

Association for India's Development

.....A Glimpse

AID—Facts and Figures



AID Chapters in the US

Facts

Founded: 1991
Chapters in the US: 40
Chapters in India: 4
Number of Volunteers: ~450
Projects Supported: ~200
Indian States Represented: 18
Annual Visit to each Project: 2

Main target areas and some projects supported by AID:

Child education—Platform schools in Orissa

Health—Training camps for workers in rural Assam

Women's empowerment—The Vimukti project

Sustainable development

Alternative technologies – The Bijili Bike

Microcredit enterprises

The Hundred Block Plan—A new people's movement

For more information, please visit us at
<http://www.aidindia.org>

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Association for India's Development

Development in the past century

In the brave new world of the 21st century as we boldly go where no person has gone before, it is time to pause and ask ourselves a few critical questions. Among the many convenient dichotomies that we divide our complex world into, one is particularly relevant, if only because it is seldom questioned – the dichotomy of developing and developed economies. The developed countries have arrived where developing countries aspire and work hard to be. Let us see where development 20th century style has got us – the top 20% of the world's population consumes 86% of all goods and services while the bottom 20% consumes a mere 1.3%. In 1960 the income gap between the top 20% and the bottom 20% of the world's population was 30:1. In 1997, it had risen to 74:1. The decade of globalization (the 1990s) actually saw a decrease in the gross national product of 59 countries mostly in sub-Saharan Africa and eastern Europe. Something, that is in direct contradiction to the free-market mantra.

More figures, this time closer home — every third human being in the world without safe and adequate drinking water is an Indian. Every third person in the world with leprosy is an Indian. Of the over sixteen million tuberculosis cases that exist at any time in the world, 12.7 million are in India. Tens of millions of Indians suffer from malnutrition. Enough already?

Asking the right questions

At AID we believe that the first step towards finding solutions to these problems is to ask the right questions. Is there something wrong with a developing economy if it cannot guarantee food and water to all its people? Should we perhaps work on narrowing the gap between the rich and the poor of the world instead of widening it? The answers to these questions are obvious. What is not so obvious is how we are going to implement those answers and make them a reality. However we proceed, we will have to educate and sensitize our nation's privileged to the realities of their country. This is one of our objectives at AID. The other, of course is guided intervention to improve the ground realities in India by the funding of grassroots developmental programs. At this juncture, we would like to emphasize that we are not a charitable organization in the classical sense. We want people to help themselves by devising their own solutions and use us as a tool in the process.

Interconnected problems – interconnected solutions

We understand that problems of poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, disease, social inequalities, corruption and the dwindling of natural resources reinforce one another. One problem leads to the other and feeds on the other. Therefore the solutions to these problems must be interconnected, just like the problems themselves. AID's vision is to cover both the breadth of the country and the depth of the problems in a holistic manner through:

- Several short-term projects geographically distributed throughout India.
- A deeper long-term involvement in selected efforts. Here the goal is to reach every district or alternate district in India with one such focus effort.

In the next few pages we hope to tell you a little more about our activities in key areas of health, education, sustainable development measures, livelihood generation, women empowerment etc. In all our projects there is vital emphasis on project sustainability in the long-term without interventional aid of any kind. The hope also is to be able to create templates, which can be replicated to suit local needs and conditions by working with like-minded non-governmental organizations.

Literacy and Education—Platform Schools

Location: Railway Platform, Orissa

NGO: Ruchika Social Services Organiza-

At the outset, AID recognizes that Education and Literacy are different. However, the first major step towards an educated society is making a literate one. The following is a brief description of one of the several projects funded by AID in this main focus area.

Question: What would the future of a nation be if children at the tender age of 8 had to make a living of their own?

This prompted Ruchika to start schools on the railway platforms in Bhubaneswar, Orissa to provide the child laborers basic education, make them aware of their rights and educate them.

These schools also serve as a medium of communication to the slum community regarding burning issues of health and hygiene, also help identify and eradicate deadly diseases such as Tuberculosis and leprosy. The teaching method is designed in a non-formal system, with songs, story, drama, puppets, painting and games. The curriculum and syllabus is as for the formal school, in a child-friendly atmosphere. *Clearly, literacy is not the only issue and this reiterates the fact that solutions have to be interconnected.*

Results/Effects

- 180 children enrolled in 6 platform schools.
- 17 children are ready for admission into formal schools.
- 6 children diagnosed with T.B., one cured and others undergoing treatment.

A few success stories

- *S.Mohanty*: Platform dweller, who joined the school in 1993, and later went on to pass High School Board examination in II division.
- *Debaraj*: Presently working with Ruchika, he was picked up as an abandoned vagabond, holds a bachelors degree.



A platform school in session

A few excerpts from an AID volunteer's project visit:

"They were about 25 children there and they seemed quite attentive to what the teacher was telling them, through the occasional (fairly deafening) rumble of the passing train and the consequent outpour of passengers... the teacher's hope was that at least some of them would go on to regular school..."

"...the teacher was most energetic and motivated; she had been with Ruchika for eight years now. She was showing them a plant (no more than a sapling, recently uprooted from a nearby crack in the platform) explaining its various features and showing them how it gets its nourishment..."

AID received a proposal to fund the platform schools and after review, we have provided financial assistance to run 6 of the 12 schools. The rest are funded by Global Fund for Children.

"Vision without action is a daydream, action without a vision is a nightmare"- Japanese proverb

Health

Location: Dharikathi, Assam

NGO: North East Network



On many occasions, people are saved in a medical emergency because they get to the hospital in time. Ask an E.R. doctor and the response is often, “If you had been a few seconds late, you probably wouldn't have seen him alive...”

However, deep down in Dharikathi, Assam the nearest Public Health Center (PHC) is 7 km away. People walk or bicycle there and this PHC doesn't have adequate medical supplies. Moreover, the residents (~26% tribal) of this area are not well educated especially with regard to health issues. At the PHC doctors who are supposed to practice daily make only occasional appearances.

The government machinery has totally failed in providing essential services.

- 80% of people's health cost's are borne individually in India.
- Only 20% of India's hospital beds are in rural areas where 80% of Indians live

NEN, which has a long history of grassroots work, conducted a survey of general health of 126 women. The results of the survey showed that the some women had serious health problems while most of them suffered from anemia/ general weakness.

Proper background research always helps in coming up with answers to existing problems.

This prompted NEN to conduct two health camps. The success of this initiative led them to build a Health Center. They held training camps for prospective health workers, which taught them, among other things:

- Basics of first aid, nutrition, child care and immunization
- Family planning techniques
- Handling of medicines and maintaining records

Health workers who are trained by NEN, would:

- Run the health center.
- Adopt preventive measures against seasonal illnesses such as gastro-enteritis and malaria.
- Educate the women and men about general health care, personal and civic hygiene by conducting workshops
- Build rapport with the Medical officer on the PHC

AID received a proposal to meet with the expenses of medical equipment for the Health center and stipends and travel costs for the workers. This project was funded after review and when an AID volunteer visited in early 2001, a positive feedback was obtained. Eventually, this project also aims at broader health goals and to draw more young people to dedicate time and energy to community welfare.



A Health Camp in Action

Women Empowerment

Location: Raichur, Karnataka

NGO: Vimukti

The literacy rate in Raichur district of the state of Karnataka stands at a dismally low figure of about 33%. Within this if one looks at literacy figures for Dalits (one of the lowest and most underprivileged sections of Indian society) and women the situation appears to be all the more critical (literacy rate among Dalits is ~22%, and that of Dalit women, less than 10%). The Social Action Cell of the NGO, VIMUKTI has been working in twelve villages of Manvi Taluka in Raichur district with the motto of liberation and empowerment of the Marginalized. One of their projects in Raichur has been funded by AID-Raleigh in collaboration with AID-State College.

The situation here is quite dismal. Child marriages still happen. The only employment available - i.e. agricultural labor earns only 15 rupees per day for 4 to 5 months in a year. Domestic violence goes unabated. There is no organization of Dalit women in the villages so far. E.Premdas, a VIMUKTI worker reports –

“...we have begun organizing women in villages, regular meetings with them in view of a women's collective in the area. At the moment we have moved into 12 villages, mobilizing and organizing. The response has been good....We have been able to reach the most un-reached villages... women gather to discuss their problems, issues, they learn songs, sing songs; some have learnt to write their names. Many participated in some rallies. Two of the women contested the Gram Panchayat (village council) elections so far and won recently.”

A notable achievement for the cause of Dalit women empowerment occurred here when a corrupt, local, Primary Health Cell doctor was taken to task by the women themselves. Premdas describes the incident:



Victorious Vimukti women after confronting their corrupt doctor.

“We were mobilizing women on access to state resources. The Primary Health Cell doctor who could not be found when they went 3 or 4 times, finally made them give bribe... the women confronted the doctor with a dharna (agitation) before the PHC. They demanded that the bribe taken be returned in two-fold. The second part as fine and compensation for their loss of wages, ticket fare, etc...the doctor had to surrender. He had taken Rs.488 as bribe and he returned Rs.976. He apologized to them and promised them that he would not ask for money again....The confidence of women was overwhelming.”

Says Mita Deshpande, a VIMUKTI activist, “With a deeper analysis what we have found is that the Dalit community and women in particular, are denied access to resources, ownership and control over them. Be it natural resources, or the government facilities, education etc. any opportunity is taken away from them. This is one of the main reasons why they still remain poor, without basic infrastructure, basic facilities of health, education, etc.” As the part of the economic empowerment process VIMUKTI wants to work out strategies to make access, control and ownership of Dalits and Dalit women over natural resources possible. The idea is to make the little plots of land that the Dalits have, more productive, to mobilize Dalit women to get land for lease so that they cultivate as owners and have food security.

This project has been funded by AID for 6 months and the second round of funding is being reviewed. For more details, please visit: <http://www.personal.psu.edu/clubs/aid/home/projects/vimukti/main.htm>

Alternative Technologies—Bijili Bike

tech·nic [ˈtek-nik] *n.* - a method of accomplishing a desired aim

The three broad goals of any *alternative technic* are to provide for subsistence needs (water, health, food etc), to provide sustainable livelihoods and to enable the better exercise of democracy. What can be sustained, through the responsible use of knowledge, is a high standard of subsistence and not an open-ended “high standard of living”. It is the latter goal that is touted by development enthusiasts, with total disregard to social costs and ecological limits.

Alternative technic basics

- Ecologically sustainable
- Low cost
- Easily replicable
- Use **ONLY** indigenous parts
- Maximize local skill sets
- Contextually appropriate

Bijili Bike – an alternative technic

A country’s progress is measured not only by how much it produces but also how equally it distributes and how careful it is in saving, conserving and reducing consumption. Renewable alternatives, which produce energy in a decentralized way, put us on the path of true progress. By reducing the consumer-producer distance we automatically achieve more equitable distribution of benefits and costs. An illustrative alternative technic is the Bijili Bike developed by AID-Mumbai in collaboration with IIT-Mumbai.

The Bijili Bike is a device, which converts power generated by pedaling into electricity. It can generate around 35-45 W of power, which can also be stored in a battery for later use. The cost of a Bijili Bike is Rs.8000 (\$175) including the material, battery, light source and assembly. *And it can be put together in a cycle shop using only indigenous parts.*

Owing to the centralized nature of grid electricity, even in the new millennium there are tens of thousands of villages living in the dark. Where there is no electricity the Bijili Bike is an ideal alternative. Fifteen minutes of pedaling during the day can light up a compact fluorescent light for an hour in the night. A few turns on this *exercycle* (see photo) and you can run a radio for an entire evening. AID has developed and tested the Pedal Generator in 7 village schools in the Narmada Valley since June 2000 and they have been a big success. To find out how you can sponsor a Bijili Bike visit



Bijili Bike—Pedal Power generator

http://www.aidindia.org/hq/projects/illus/pedal_contribute.htm

Alternative media - Genuine democracy is not possible unless people are able to communicate with each other on an equal basis. Conventional media do not adequately reflect the voices and concerns of the vast majority of Indians and hence the need for alternative media, to facilitate the information exchange between people in the villages. AID is currently investigating several alternatives such as community radio and satellite phones. Community radio has been very effective in Nepal and Sri Lanka, yet has not been given legal status in India.

Microcredit and Poverty Alleviation

All economies rely on the financial intermediaries to transfer resources from savers to borrowers. In market economies, this function is performed by commercial banks and the capital markets. But in many developing countries, capital markets are still in a rudimentary stage, and commercial banks are reluctant to lend to the poor largely because of the lack of collateral and high transaction costs. The poor borrow relatively small amounts. The processing and supervision of lending to them consumes administrative costs that are disproportionate to the amount of lending. These words can be found in the United Nations report on the role of Microcredit in poverty eradication.

The Microcredit system is an emerging solution to the problem of disbursing small loans to the poor, an extension of small loans to entrepreneurs too poor to qualify for traditional bank loans. It has proven an effective and popular measure in the ongoing struggle against poverty, enabling those without access to lending institutions to borrow at bank rates, and start small business.

The essentials of a microcredit self-help group are as follows:

- a small group of villagers get together and contribute a fixed amount of their savings on a regular basis
- the accumulated savings form a common fund from which members of the group can borrow money at reasonable interest rates
- mutual trust ensures that defaulting does not occur frequently

Let us look at a microcredit initiative of the Tamil Nadu Science Foundation (TNSF) and AID. In the MALAR program in Kanyakumari (a town at the southern-most tip of India), 20 women meet once a week, save Rs. 5/week, deposit savings in the nearest branch of any nationalized bank, and every month withdraw an amount to lend among themselves, for any kind of purpose be it consumption, economic, medical. How can these women manage to save money when even daily sustenance is a problem? We have learned that women have always saved, whether in the knot of the sari, or some corner of the household.



Malar Self-Help Group (SHG)

What MALAR provides is the opportunity for saving safely, and earning 12% at the end of the 5 years. Here the women know their savings are safe whereas in the past many have saved with money lenders and have often been swindled. The account is managed by three people, the president, secretary and treasurer. These three women are also members of the savings group so

all the women know the only way their money will be lost is if these three all leave the village – this will never happen. Money lender interest rates are 60-120% year. The MALAR interest rate is 24% per annum. Every month the women decide to whom to give the loan. The loan can be accessed at any time the 20 decide to meet. No questions about why it is needed are asked. It can be for consumption, wedding, school fees, anything. In the beginning we noticed that most of the loans were for immediate consumption expenses. But after 3 years we have noticed a shift towards borrowing for investment, e.g. to open a business.

Microfinance programs are currently being promoted as a key strategy for simultaneously addressing both poverty alleviation and women's empowerment. Microfinance programmes targeting women have been a welcome corrective to previous neglect of women's productive role.

A New People's Movement—The Hundred Blocks Plan

In the last few pages we have tried to describe some of the efforts supported by AID in various areas of grassroots development including primary education, health education, livelihood generation etc. At this point one may feel- yes, these efforts are good for what they achieve, but don't we need a much larger, more concerted attempt at trying to solve these interconnected problems? An attempt that simultaneously tackles these issues, all over the country, at the level of a single village or a group of villages.

The Hundred Block Plan, an initiative of the All India People's Science Network (AIPSN), supported by AID and ASHA, is one such attempt. It is, what is termed a people's movement. How do you start a grassroots people's movement? And why would you want to start one? In the words of Balaji Sampath, an AID fellow, "*If we want serious social change, we HAVE to work with People's Movements.*" Why? People's movements unlike NGOs have strong local volunteer bases. Instead of a bunch of (admittedly well-meaning) outsiders deciding what is good and what is bad, the people affected by developmental projects themselves get to decide on what needs developing and what doesn't. A large motivated local volunteer base united by a common ideology is often the characteristic of a people's movement. And as such it stands a much better chance of effecting real social change of the kind we need to improve upon those statistics we keep reading (and glossing over).

The first steps...

A block, in India, consists of about 100-150 villages. A district has about 7-15 blocks. The various state-based organizations of the AIPSN have a base in over 300 districts. This wide base is being used to organize programs that address the issues of poverty and quality of life in a self-reliant and sustainable manner in over a 100 blocks. The basic ideas behind the HBP initiative are the following

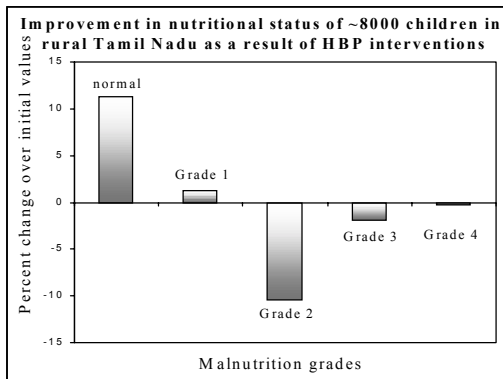


A child being weighed as part of the Arogya Iyakkam program.

- Mobilize a large local volunteer base (up to 10 people in a village and of that village).
- Implement block (comprising ~20-30 villages) level developmental initiatives in areas of primary concern such as health, education and savings and income generation.
- These block level initiatives (which are kept low cost) will then serve as models for replication in many blocks all over the country.
- Get the governments involved in the developmental programs since lasting social change will require state participation as much as people's participation.

But enough generalities! Lets look at some real programs implemented over the past few years as a part of the Hundred Blocks Plan. Under the health initiative of the HBP and UNICEF funding, the *Arogya Iyakkam* program was initiated by the Tamil Nadu Science Forum, in May 1999 in 7 blocks in 387 villages of Tamil Nadu. Improving health was the program's primary concern with an emphasis on child-care. In the little over two years since the program started it has achieved considerable success in improving health of children under 5 years of age. Child malnutrition was made the major index of health and each child was weighed periodically in order to measure his/her progress.

A New People's Movement—The Hundred Blocks Plan



The figure on the left shows the result of analyzing weighing statistics of over 8000 children from 197 villages over the course of 1.5 years (carried out as shown in the photo). The number of Normal Children went up from 36.25% to 46.69% - an increase of 10.5% in one year! Supporting analysis showed that this was primarily a result of decreasing the number of children in Grades 3, 4 and 5 (i.e. the more malnourished children).

Education Initiatives

In July 2002 the Tamil Nadu Science Forum, launched a very interesting program called the Makkal Palli Iyakkam (People's School Movement). The idea behind the program is organizing the local communities to use government schools after school hours for community learning needs. This will hopefully make use of schools an additional 25-40 hours every week. The program includes enrolling all children in schools and monitoring and preventing dropouts and also evening classes for adults.

Where to from here ?

The HBP is commitment intensive, not cost-intensive. Most PSMs do not accept external funding that may create dependency. The emphasis is on self-reliance and sustainability. AID, in agreement with this invests in building human capital and not just pumping funds into projects. Needless to say, this is just the bare beginning. And two pages far from suffice to convey the enthusiasm and excitement we at AID feel for the HBP. We want to see the plan grow and encompass a hundred blocks...maybe even more. We want to see these first improvements in our villages replicated again and again...and again. We hope that the idea captures your imagination as much as it does ours. And that you decide to contribute, in your own way, small or big, to this growing new people's movement. A movement that aspires to nothing less than social transformation at the level that really needs to be transformed. It is only appropriate that an individual as deeply committed to the HBP as Balaji Sampath should have the last word – *"It's time to think BIG..."*

In May 2002 "Arogya Iyakkam" was selected as one of the 10 best programs in the world, by UNICEF.

For more information about the Hundred Block Plan,
please visit

<http://www.aidindia.org/aipsn>

The Future Begins Now—Are you ready to pitch in ?

An interesting story tells of a person who was patiently throwing starfish that were washed ashore by the tide, back into the sea to save their lives. There were thousands of them and an onlooker laughed at him and asked, *“Hey, there are so many of them. What difference can you possibly make?”* The man picked up another starfish and threw it back to safety and said, *“It certainly made a difference to that one.”* As AID volunteers, we probably identify with this story and realize that we should strive to keep doing whatever we are presently doing, however small it may seem, as it all adds up towards the common goal. In Gandhi’s words, *“Whatever we do may seem insignificant, but it is important that we do it.”*

AID, since 1991 has grown to its current size of 40 chapters, more than 450 active volunteers and four full-time workers in India. Although these are important milestones in the growth of any organization, we do not measure our success based only on money raised or the number of chapters started. Our main focus is “Impact”. Whatever we do should have an impact on society. To us this would be a much better measure of what AID has done rather than say the amount of money disbursed through projects or the number of volunteers enlisted.

The task ahead of us is enormous and sometimes daunting. The primary mode of AID attempting to solve problems in India is funding developmental projects. As AID firmly believes that the solutions should be interconnected, we should make sure that the projects address a multitude of issues, rather than just one. Effective project review would mean understanding the problem the NGO wants to solve and coming up with a solution to the problem ourselves and to see if the NGO has the same ideas. In essence, finding the right answers to the right questions. However, we should realize that some solutions cannot be implemented universally as what works in Kerala might not work in Assam. (This could be due to dynamics operating at the project site.) A project visit, among other things should be aimed at understanding the local issues, and this would on most occasions give us an insight. Creating awareness among our volunteers and the society we live in, wherever we are, is vital to any social movement.

AID is a democratic set-up, each and every one of us is AID and AID is each and every one of us. AID works on a plan that has evolved after a lot of thought and discussion. This plan is not rigid and will evolve with lessons learnt from successes and failures. On occasions when we find differences among ourselves, we should sort them out by recalling our initial plan.

In a country of more than a billion people, the government is the most effective tool for any change. Eventually, we need to get government-level interventions since we cannot replace its role. For now, we can try to create models for the government to replicate. We foresee a bright future with more chapters being started and more volunteers being involved. We look forward to improve whatever we are doing as individuals and as a community. We hope you will contribute in your own unique way and become a part of this movement for change.

*“There are two types of people who will tell you
that you cannot make a difference in this world.
Those who are afraid to try and
those who are afraid that you will succeed”- Ray Goforth*



Association for India's Development
Asking the important questions....