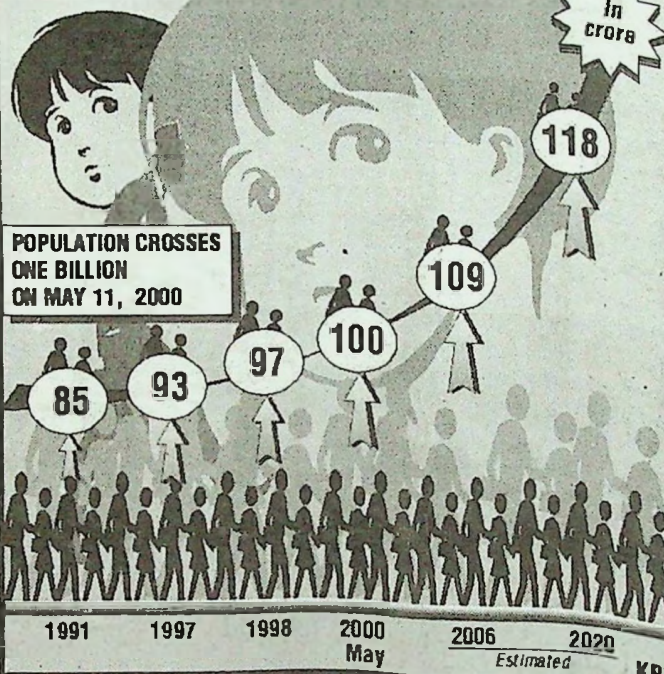


MAY - 2000

News You Can Use a development mediascan

POPULATION EXPLOSION

India's population continues to grow at an alarming rate. In another 25 years India will overtake China to become the world's most populous country.



Time Warner and America Online, two of the biggest communications companies, announced a groundbreaking merger on Monday

The Times of India
May 13, 2000

A monthly publication from
Communication for
Development and Learning

Asthma worse than AIDS

UNITED NATIONS: The World Health Organisation (WHO) has estimated that the human and economic burden associated with asthma surpasses that of AIDS and tuberculosis

2-day seminar
on education
and economy

gender gap in literacy
rove more renal





NEWS YOU CAN USE (NYCU) is a specially formulated development media scan directed to meet the specific information needs of NGOs. Published on a monthly basis, NYCU presents a comprehensive compilation of selected media clippings of news that could be direct use to NGOs working at the grassroot level. This publication can also serve as a ready reckoner for development news on a monthly basis.

NYCU includes a selection of news items/feature/articles/editorials/letters from leading national newspapers and newsmagazines. Each news item carries the source, name of publication and date of publication. The compilation is categorised under appropriate heads with an index for easy reference.

This issue : Rs. 30.00

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Behind each edition.....

We thank our readers for their prompt response in sending us their feedback forms. Some of the comments we received are indeed candid and have added greatly to our own understanding of the 'use value' of an effort of this kind. We also must confess that we are impressed with the response to the number of readers per copy. This in fact, is an important indicator of the actual number of users of this publication, though we must admit that to balance the multi-user copies, there were also those who marked the box stating, 'Only you' !

Despite this initial euphoria to the positive comments, we must declare a sense of defeat. There was one question that we were specifically looking for a response to : *Have you made use of any information compiled in NYCU? If so, in what manner ?* The response that we received has been very general. Specific cases of where the information compiled in these pages has actually helped grassroot-level NGOs work both more efficiently and more effectively, would help us in inviting financial support from agencies – who are positively inclined, but not fully decided.

It is for this reason that we propose to organise a 2-day workshop with the NYCU family to assess the use-value of the current publication and identify specific instances of its use. We will also use this forum for discussion to invite suggestions for improvement as well as establish threads to extend our reach to other rural-based NGOs. These suggestions will then be incorporated into the next 'avataar' of NYCU - in its third year.

Assuming our target community (in this case, target audience) is a mistake that has often proved costly for NGOs. The case of Sahyog in the Almora hills of Uttar Pradesh, which we carry in our pages, holds grim lessons for NGOs who fail to follow democratic processes. The Sahyog case has thrown up other dimensions that have now got entangled to make the issue into an untidy mess.

We are still compiling the reader responses. Readers who have not sent us the feedback are invited to still do so. Because we believe that NYCU has to eventually meet your information needs. And as India celebrates (!) the arrival of the billionth baby, information must find a place in every development agenda.....

Shangon Das Gupta
May 2000

MAY 2000

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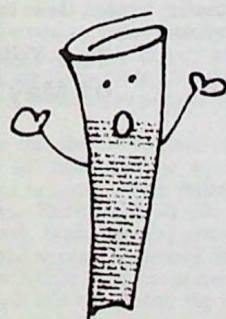
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Watch out for

June 5 th – World Environment Day
June 26 th – International Anti-Drugs Day
June 26 th – International Day in Support of Torture Victims

HIV scare, campaigns fail to promote safe sex

By Roli Srivastava

MUMBAI: Sheena (name changed), a 22-year-old commercial sex worker, gives a simple reason for not telling her clients to use a condom. "Waise bhi marna hi to hai, aaj nahin to kal, phir kyon yeh sab karne ka, (I have to die eventually, then why should I bother?)"

The city's red light areas have witnessed red ribbon campaigns, banners and posters proclaiming slogans like 'Use condoms, avoid AIDS', and visits by celebrities passionately promoting the use of condoms. Apparently these well-meaning campaigns have not had much of an impact on either men who patronise the metropolis' brothels or the commercial sex workers (CSWs); more than 50 per cent of whom are HIV positive.

As per the National Aids Control Organisation (NACO) figures, there were around 7.5 lakh HIV positive cases in 1998 in Maharashtra with the source of infection in most cases being the sexual route. "The number of cases reported are no indicators of the real situation," says Eldred Tellis, a social worker who has been dealing with HIV cases for the past 11 years.

The distribution figures of condoms seem to have had little impact on the situation in red light districts like Kamathipura in central Mumbai. About 600,000 condoms are distributed free every month in the D and E municipal wards where the red light areas are located. But this has failed to curb the situation. For example, as many as 65 per cent of CSWs examined by the Gaurabai Comprehensive Health Care Unit at Kamathipura tested positive.

The low usage of condoms in red light areas is not only because of low levels of awareness about HIV, but also because of high levels of resistance of customers to the use of condoms.

Said a social worker: "Most customers are too drunk to bother about condoms. In any case, they think that HIV is something which always infects others." Also, the CSWs have little choice in the matter. They are totally in the grip of the gharwalis (brothel keepers). The "gharwalis" do not encourage the CSWs to insist on their customers using condoms since they do not want to lose clientele. If a CSW insists that her customer use a

condom, chances are that he will go to another CSW who is not particular about the use of condom. Competition among CSWs is so intense that a CSW insisting on the use of condoms may find herself starving at the end of the day.

"It needs to be understood that it is not the CSW but the client who decides whether a condom is to be used or not. She has virtually no choice in the matter," says Arupa Shukla, project manager at Population Services International (PSI), an NGO. Though lessons on safe sex are diligently given to sex workers by government and non-government organisations it takes an inebriated client or an indifferent "gharwali" to make nonsense of them.

"Another problem is that many of the CSWs and their clients are illiterate and do not know how to use a condom or are careless in its usage," says Pandit Gavitt, community development officer of Asha project, who has been involved with condom promotion activities since 1992.

Mr Tellis notes that it is not merely enough to create awareness about condoms. The need is to translate the awareness into practice. The awareness drives too can make a difference if they are designed properly. As experts point out a properly designed intervention programme is half the battle won. "Such drives need to be implemented by NGOs with grass root contact with sex workers who have a rapport with them," says Dr Subhash Hira, director of AIDS research and control centre. He points out that distributing free condoms in these areas is not the solution. "Such projects sound very easy, but how well is the staff of the NGOs trained to interpret these interventions is what actually determines their effectiveness."

Condom promotion activities are an integral part of all AIDS awareness drives, according to Pramod Nigudkar, deputy director of the Mumbai district AIDS control society. "But condom use means a behaviour change, which has to be brought about with innovative intervention programmes," he notes.

Experts suggest that these programmes should be tailor-made for a particular area as the same blueprint cannot be applied everywhere.

The Times of India
02 May 2000

People's power moulds Naga dream farm

FROM SAMIR KAR
PURKAYASTHA

Dimapur, April 30: The people of Peren and its surrounding villages have embarked upon the task of popularising the concept of development through people's participation by undertaking developmental work themselves.

Nearly 300 villagers are engaged in clearing nearly 3,000 acres of jungle for the proposed Dutingreu ("living spring") farmland project and maintaining and constructing the approach road to the farmland from the main road.

"The basic idea is to revive work culture," said Nagaland health and family welfare minister Neiba Ndong, who has initiated the project.

The task of clearing the entire stretch of hilly land and maintaining the approach road is no mean one. But within a span of a few days, the villagers have cleared almost half the land and made the approach road commutable. "When work is fun, you don't feel the pain. You see, here it's more like a picnic for us. We are working as well as having fun," one of the villagers told this correspondent while shovelling rocks.

Not only villagers, but senior government officials have also contributed their bit in an effort to improve the economic standards of this subdivision, which has been neglected economically by successive governments.

Within these 3,000 acres of land, various types of fruit will be grown. Experts from the Indian

Council of Agricultural Research in Medziphema have already tested the soil and found the topography suitable for mango, litchi, banana and orange plantations.

Sixty-five farmers who have land holdings in this farmland will be the direct beneficiaries. "I think we will have a good market for the produce and it will benefit our farmers economically," Ndong said.

Within the farm there will be a rest house, a swimming pool and picnic spots apart from the orchard. "It will serve the dual purpose of being a farm as well as a tourist spot," the minister said.

The minister said the project is being financed by the district plan fund. During 1999-2000, Rs 8 lakh has been sanctioned for clearing the forest and for maintaining the approach road. However, in future, the minister said he would approach the nodal department of horticulture and tourism if necessary to finance the project.

Another Rs 12 lakh have been earmarked for the project from the district plan fund, the minister said, adding that the amount would be released next year.

Earlier, through people's participation under the district plan fund, several tanks were constructed along the roadsides in and around Peren town and its surrounding villages.

In this hilly area, where there is scarcity of water, especially during winter, these tanks serve as reservoirs.

The Telegraph
01 May 2000

Putting the second sex first

BY RESHMI SENGUPTA

When women's NGOs were formed way back in the late-70s in Kolkata, many women and even a greater number of men were sceptical about their viability and purpose. While men were sure that these organisations foster streaks of friction, women were not even aware that domestic problems could be redressed outside the closet.

Initially dealing with social welfare and development programmes, they were affiliated to political parties and had little to do with women issues. The last few years have registered a change: the cause for their surfacing becoming more brutal than ever.

Nari Nirjatan Pratirodh Mancha, formed in 1983, takes an active role in organising agitations, demonstrations and campaigns against atrocities on women. "Initially we scanned the newspapers to identify cases that needed help. The rape of a minor by the police in Ranchi, was among the first major case we took up. Through campaigns and leaflets, the people were involved and we were successful in creating an awareness among the masses," says Maitreyi Chatterjee, a women's rights activist.

In 1983, while working with slum-dwellers, anti-socials threatened the local women against any involvement with the NNPM. Not affected on their path of justice, they fought for Archana Guha against the government. Archana was arrested in 1997 under the Maintenance of Internal Security Act and tortured for 27 years in the Lalbazaar Police Station by police officer Runu Guha Niyogi.

After aggressive campaigning, the case was moved for a hearing in 1987. The legal procedure was a long-drawn hassle but in 1996 the convict was given exemplary punishment for one year. This achievement by NNPM was applauded but the damage was already done. Archana was paralysed and left traumatised.

Despite the latent anti-women prejudice, recognition was won by several NGOs. NNPM now offers free counselling, legal aid to distressed women and fights for victims of sexual harassment. The attitude of people towards these organisations have undergone a radical change. "Women come for help with their families. They are forthcoming but the mind-set of men has yet to undergo change," says Ms Chatterjee.

However the first generation of this movement for an awareness of equal rights for women was restricted to the middle and upper-middle class. The cases dealt with were primarily of dowry, bride burning and physical violence related to marital discord. Since the mid-80s, a few NGOs even involved victims who had to begin life anew after the battle in their policy-making body. An encouraging move,

this led to a greater participation.

The Durbar Mahila Samanway Committee works with sex-workers and involves them in their awareness campaigns related to sexually transmitted diseases and Aids. "Sex-workers are trapped in a nexus weaved by the client, landlord, police, local clubs and madams. They are exploited to the hilt and treated as anything but human beings. DMSC struggles to make them conscious of their rights," says Ishika Bose, liaison officer of the organisation. They have formed self-regulatory boards comprising doctors, lawyers and sex-workers.

This body checks trafficking, rescues minors and accompanies the police during raids. Further, a cooperative bank for monthly and daily savings has been set up and a Positive Hotline for counselling and legal aid offers strength. Field officer, Surangama Mitra says, "We are struggling to decriminalise the flesh trade and change working conditions. We have set up schools for the young as well as adult learning centres. Middle-aged women out of work participate in social marketing that includes selling contraceptives and increasing awareness of their use among the workers. Doctors check the sex-workers regularly in their clinics."

DMSC has spread its network over the whole country and in the Asia-Pacific region. It works in coordination with many NGOs and there are some 65 centres in West Bengal. Sex-workers are trained as health-educators and research officers. The policy-making body comprises sex-workers in equal strength. They are funded by the Government of England and through donations and subscriptions. "These days NGOs act as a conscience to the government, whereby we create examples that they follow. And while NGOs are flexible, welfare schemes of the government get trapped in bureaucracy," says Indrani Sinha of Sanlaap.

A Kolkata-based NGO, Sanlaap also works with sex-workers and has three shelter homes for children, in the age group of six to 12, for those rescued from trafficking and as drop-in-centres. Corporate houses, individual donors, foreign organisations and the government help with funds.

The reception to these NGOs for the cause of women upliftment has changed. "Earlier these were service-oriented, now they fight for equal rights," says Ms Sinha. The government recognises the contribution of NGOs in improving the socio-economic status of women.

And with their constant effort, it will not take long to register their participation in the country's welfare schemes.

The Asian Age
02 May 2000

Working for a secure life for disabled

THOUGH VISUALLY handicapped, the ordeals of life never impeded him. Today he is working to ensure a brighter future for the disabled.

Mr Pincha, a former Joint Director with Department of Social Welfare, Assam, is busy charting a new direction as the regional manager of the non-governmental organisation, Action Aid.

He came to Jorhat in Assam after completing his schooling from Churu in Rajasthan and studied to become a postgraduate in economics and a lawyer, finally opening the Jorhat Blind Institution where he served as the principal for 19 years.

Mr Pincha, who has taken a loan from the State Government after putting in 22 years of service to work for Action Aid, has his action plan ready to work in the north-east. "Although disability is one component of the entire Action Aid programme, we hope to begin with a detailed study on the disabled of the region, a thing never done before," Mr Pincha said.

Despite being a government servant, his fight with the Government for the right of the disabled is legendary. When he was deprived professionally, he went to court and won a favourable judgement, which saw him to the post of Joint Director, Directorate of Social Welfare.

But his ability to handle all kinds of problem in a huge department like Social Welfare, where he was also the acting director for some time, fetched him the best visually handicapped employees award from the President in 1998.

However, his frustration is growing. "Although the country has more than 70 million disabled persons, there has been a visible lack of political will to help them. The disabled are not organised and we do not constitute a political threat", he lamented.

He is of the view that a large section of the bureaucracy was insensitive to the disabled.

"There are well intentioned people but they are not always aware of how to help the disabled. More importantly, more disabled should be employed in the changed economic scenario prevailing now."

A separate directorate for disabled within the Directorate of Social Welfare should be created, he feels. "There should be some sort of monitoring group at the district level by an NGO for smooth implementation of the Disabled Act," he says. (UNI)

The Hindustan Times
01 May 2000

Literacy weapon to fight poverty

THE Union Budget has placed additional emphasis on elementary education by raising the plan allocation from Rs 2,931 crores to Rs 3,729 crores. Unable to achieve the goal of universalisation of elementary education by 2000, the ministry of human resources development has now set the target of achieving 75 per cent literacy by 2005.

A new department of elementary education and literacy has been created to give a new thrust to these efforts.

The 'Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan' scheme, aimed at enrolling all school-going children by 2003, and expansion of the district primary education programme to cover the remaining districts in Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Orissa and Gujarat have also been envisaged.

India has the largest number of illiterates, despite having the second largest education system in the world after China. Though enrollment data and age-specific literacy rates suggest we have made great strides in expanding the approach to education, the country ranking 132 in the world on the human development index depicts that we have a long way to go. The 1981 census reported that 314 million Indians were illiterate, the 1991 census figures point out the number of illiterates has risen to 325 million — an increase of 2 million per year.

A state subject until the 42nd Amendment in 1977, education got shifted to the

Concurrent List and became the joint responsibility of the state and central governments. The proposed Bill to make elementary education a fundamental right was to have been introduced in the winter session of Parliament last year. Instead of providing good quality education at affordable cost, to bring about social change and social justice, the real responsibility of the State seems to have got diverted. Be it the uninspiring content in curriculum or the most dispiriting manner children are taught, the crux of the matter has a lot to do with typical attitudes and misplaced priorities. Expenditure on education is 3.4 per cent of the GDP against the world average of 4.6 per cent.

A recent study by the Centre of Concern for Child Labour indicates only 32 out of 110 million in the country of school-going age are in schools and the problem being quite severe among girls belonging to the Scheduled Castes and Tribes.

Some estimates suggest that to achieve education for all children globally, over \$7 billion needs to be spent for the next ten years. This is less than the amount spent annually in

the US on cosmetics and ice cream in Europe. Nearly 50 per cent of the population have been deprived of reading or writing. Of the 50 per cent who are able, 25 per cent are dropouts of the eight standard. With the lowest literacy rates in the world, only 62 Indians out of 100 are able to read or write. While 66 out of 100

ensured a marked improvement in facilities but it has had precious little effect on either the percentage of enrolment or the retention of students.

Incentive schemes for popularising education have attracted the students of the weaker sections into schools. As per the Fifth All India Educational Survey, some 1.47 lakh primary schools out of 5.29 lakh, were providing mid-day meals to nearly 136 lakh children; 2.5 lakh schools were providing free uniform to over 110 lakh children and 202 lakh children were getting free text books in 3.13 lakh schools. Recently, the NCERT has evolved a framework for basic school education. The action-oriented policy note, to review school curriculum and make it relevant to life, has

suggested replacement of the yearly exam system with a continuous and comprehensive evolution. Unicef's 'Children's Code Bill' has recommended to the Centre to effect several amendments to the existing provisions for the rights of children including free education for all below the age of 14, schools in each state at a distance of every one-km and

punishment for parents who inhibit their children to avail educational facilities.

Since various studies have found that education has not received the attention it deserves, a coherent policy is imperative to draw children into schools. The focus of education must cover cognitive as well as inter-personal skills and the class-room pedagogy has to be in tune with the cultural context of the pupil. The barriers against girls' education need to be smashed. Besides promoting equality of access of education and opportunity to all, the curriculum necessarily has to be sensitive to the needs of special children including those who come from disadvantaged sections.

As the whole intent of education is to prepare a learner, teachers have to be considered as active partners in the development process. Their working conditions and reward system, especially in private schools, merit improvement to motivate them towards better performance. Proactive HRD practices must aim at giving encouragement to indigenous thinking, innovations and such contributions ought to be highlighted. Above all, it needs to be recognised that education in itself does not avoid poverty but it helps to fight it better. Therefore, it is important to look at education as a central strand to fight poverty.



men can read and write, only 38 out of 100 women can do so. It is lower than in Ghana, Myanmar and Zambia. Especially in Baramer District of Rajasthan, only 17 women out of 100 can read and write.

Eradicating illiteracy continues to remain on the national agenda in a piecemeal fashion. Operation Blackboard, launched during the Eighth Plan, has

Aarti

The Observer
03 May 2000

Cause for concern

The tuberculosis cases have increased in India at a menacing rate in recent years. The country holds the dubious record of having the world's largest TB infected population: a third of the detected global TB patients live here. Naturally, the World Health Organisation has targeted India for its largest anti-TB programme. But India's efforts to combat the return of the deadliest communicable diseases are sadly insufficient. Both the Centre and the States have taken the responsibility in a casual manner. As the parliamentary standing committee dealing with the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare pointed out in its recent report, the money allocated for the National TB Control Programme was seldom spent in full during the past three financial years. This is quite serious a situation. Last year, the Centre had allocated Rs 105 crore for the Revised National TB Control Programme (RNTBCP) launched in 1993-94. The money is disbursed to the States and Union Territories who implement it. But only Rs 95 crore was disbursed. The previous year, only Rs 72 crore was disbursed as against an allocation of Rs 125 crore. The reason: the States have not been able to spend the money received from the Centre. Existing rules do not allow the Centre to make fresh allocations unless the State concerned spent the amount disbursed during the previous financial year. This also raises serious questions whether the States allocate and spend matching amount for the programme. The parliamentary committee, headed by Mr S B Chavan, has not probed this aspect. Nor has the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare given sufficient attention to this.

This raises doubts about the Ministry's assertion that the country would exceed the World Bank project target of covering 350 million people under the programme. Though, according to Ministry records, 131 districts across the country covering 290 million people have been covered under the programme by mid-1999, this may be only a matter of record than being a reality as such. As the committee suggested, at the state-level, the machinery for the implementation of various programmes for control of communicable diseases at the State level is very weak and organised in an ad hoc manner. Often, officers are transferred, giving them no time to implement the programme. It is time the Centre and the States treated these issues with the attention they deserved.

Deccan Herald
03 May 2000

Haryana plans to launch campaign against AIDS

Chandigarh, May 4

A STATE-WIDE awareness campaign would be launched in Haryana to create awakening about AIDS, HIV and sexually transmitted diseases among four lakh students of 9th to 11th classes studying in about 4,000 schools in the State, an official statement said on Friday.

A family health awareness campaign would be launched in all districts of the State from next month to make the people conscious about sexually transmitted diseases and the Government would spend Rs 1.50 crore on this campaign, the statement quoting Director General Health Services, P L Jindal said.

(PTI)

The Hindustan Times
05 May 2000

Tackling child labour

Karnataka Governor V S Rama Devi's lament that many of the laws aimed at checking child labour are not being enforced properly in the State has not come a day too soon. Her statement at a function organised to mark the State-level Anti-Child Labour Day in Bangalore on Sunday that though the menace of child labour is being increasingly practised by the rich class, little is being done to book these "influential violators" is also true. No doubt, there are innumerable laws prohibiting child labour, especially in hazardous manufacturing industries such as match-box, fireworks and glassware units. If laws have failed to check child labour, the reasons are not far to seek. There seems to be no political will to check the menace. Official apathy too has contributed to this malady in no small measure. But then, child labour should also be treated as a major socio-economic problem as economic exploitation of children has been on the rise.

One solution to the problem is the strict implementation of the constitutional provision for free and compulsory primary education to children. Probably the socio-economic conditions of the parents in rural areas might force them make their children work instead of going to schools and this issue is to be tackled in a pragmatic way. The employers of the child workers should be made to bear part of the expenditure towards education inculcated without hampering the earning capacity of child workers. Only then, there might be some improvement in the otherwise disheartening scenario. Public awareness too is a must to eradicate this problem. Every agency, government, public or otherwise, should help implement compulsory primary education for children as also discourage engaging children as labourers.

Deccan Herald
03 May 2000

Ministry disburses Rs 1,300 cr in loans

THE MINISTRY of Social Justice and Empowerment has given out loans worth over Rs 1,300 crores to more than six lakh people belonging to weaker sections of the society. The loans were disbursed through various corporations under the administrative control of

the Ministry.

Disclosing this to the Consultative Committee of Parliament, Union Minister of Social Justice Maneka Gandhi said the corporations were directed to expand their coverage by enhancing the number of Government channelising agencies.

Some of the corporations had commenced the scheme of direct lending to help out the enterprising and needy persons of the weaker sections.

The Pioneer
05 May 2000

Thirsty lands of western India

OVER five crore people across the country have been estimated to be affected so far by the current spell of the drought. In Rajasthan, 26 out of 32 districts are said to be faced with acute scarcity of food and water. The worst drought in a hundred years is faced by Gujarat where water riots have broken out in several districts. A vast majority of the population in Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh and Orissa are in the throes of a severe water crisis. Scarcity of fodder has reportedly hit over scores of milch cattle. The forecast of a deficit monsoon in the entire country is yet another cause for concern.

Relief measures in the form of money to the tune of Rs 954.43 crore have been disbursed and fodder/potable water is being supplied to the affected regions by special trains. District collectors have been directed to take up transportation of drinking water on a priority basis to remote areas where all sources of water have dried up. For meeting the shortage of fodder, the help of non-governmental organisations is being sought. Notwithstanding the Union government's decision to release 20 kg of foodgrains to each family in the drought-affected areas at below-the-poverty-level rates, it apparently needs to be effectively implemented so that such relief reaches the intended beneficiaries.

Though drought is a natural phenomenon, ruthless and large-scale destruction of flora (including forests) and fauna by human beings, as various studies indicate, has contributed considerably to the failure of rains in several places in the country.

Poverty, massive population, mounting air pollution, change in land-use patterns like shifting cultivation and deforestation, unchecked urbanisation, inadequate public health systems, low literacy levels, etc have accelerated the pace of environmental decay. Consequently, its adverse impact on the cropping pattern has been significant. Notably, owing to scanty and untimely rains, many farmers are encouraged to switch from traditional crops to cash crops, with the latter requiring far more water than the former. This has had its effect on the water table. With no fresh water sources, the existing ones are fast depleting.

Primarily, the piece-meal approach of handling the drought — be it supplying fodder to animals and food to the people or releasing money earmarked under the National Calamity Fund scrupulously over the years — has not helped in the long run. More so because, without the active involvement of the people, lack of awareness, foresight, political will and the failure of the state machinery to grapple with it has compounded the situation.

With 70 per cent of the population engaged directly or indirectly in farming and related activities, repeated droughts have affected the country's economy in several ways. Particularly, in agriculture, low yields of crops, the net sown area all-India average hovering at just 43 per cent, is a cause for worry.

Further, the benefits of green revolution have been emphatic only in areas endowed with good rainfall or water resources. Dry land areas which represent nearly 66 per cent of the cultivated area have yet to register increase in agricultural productivity.

Despite foodgrain production having crossed 200 million tonne, 40 per cent of the population who live below the poverty line are the worst affected. Basically, lack of post-harvest management is resulting in wastage of nearly 10 per cent of food products and 30 per cent of horticulture products; foodgrain wasted last year could have easily fed about 118 million people.

Apart from measures to increase national productivity of foodgrains (since the all-India area under cultivation has been going down) reviving dry land farming and reclaiming fallow lands merit consideration. Besides envisaging sustainability in agricultural growth, religious implementation of afforestation programmes, effective watershed management, optimal utilisation of water,

construction of checkdams at catchment areas and maintaining agricultural ponds in drought-prone areas, it is imperative that the community and panchayati raj institutions are empowered to deal with drought at the grassroot level to help change the scenario.

The Observer Aarti
05 May 2000

Adopt 2-kid norm, win incentives, is the new UP government mantra

By Biswajeet Banerjee

LUCKNOW: To lure its employees to adopt the small family norm, the state government has decided to go the way consumer market is going. The mantra is clear: have two children and walk away with a monthly cash incentive.

Those employees/officials who decide not to have more than two children will be paid a monthly incentive based on their salary scale and position. It could range anything from Rs 150 to Rs 580 per month, said a senior government official.

On April 18, the state government issued an order asking employees to adopt the Voluntary Family Planning Project (VFPP) and in return they would be paid an incentive.

"This is a noble attempt of the state government asking its employees to help arrest the population boom," said a senior official of the health department. "The incentive may not be much, but it is a token gesture which government employees should appreciate," he said.

No one is sure as to how much burden this project will have on the state exchequer. "The only thing we know at this point of time is that the incentive will be drawn from the salary head in respective departments," said an official.

VFPP was initially launched in February 23, 1980 at the initiative of the then prime minister Indira Gandhi. The project was, however, shelved in 1996. Two years later the state government decided to re-view this policy and after a thorough review, it was re-launched with retrospective effect.

To be eligible for the incentive, the employee concerned will have to give an affidavit that they do not have more than two children.

And if a third child is born, the employees are supposed to inform their superiors that they were no longer eligible. "We will go by the voluntary declaration of the employee but random checks will be carried out to verify the claims," said the government official.

However, a section of officials is skeptical about this random check. In more than 50 per cent cases, while the employee works in a city, his family members live in villages.

"Who will go to villages to verify the claims? Everything will depend on mutual trust," said an official in the health department.

The government order is, however, silent on the upper age limit up to which the incentive would be applicable.

The Times of India
05 May 2000

Sex workers launch movement to work with freedom and dignity

The effort at Mahabalipuram was to converge diverse little streams into a major national movement. While all that may not be easy, especially with entrenched interests standing in the way, a beginning has certainly been made perhaps towards a wider women's movement, says Shyamala Ashok.

The Times of India
05 May 2000

By Kalpana Jain
The Times of India News Service

MAHABALIPURAM: This tourist haven, where Lord Vishnu vanquished demon king Mahabali in the battle between good and evil, last week witnessed the beginning of another battle by sex workers for working with dignity and freedom from harassment.

Over 200 women, who earn their livelihood as sex workers, came together here to launch a nationwide movement for dignity and personal freedom. They came from different cultures and spoke different tongues, but they were one on the issues: Sex work should be de-criminalised and recognised as any other form of labour. Children of sex workers should have access to good schools and educators who would not discriminate.

Their three-day meeting was the first time that sex workers were joining forces for a wider common cause: NGOs have in the past tried to initiate a movement to protect them against the AIDS virus. Most of those attending the meeting were peer leaders, who would go back to their groups and create awareness.

So, the life of dingy brothels, exploitative madams and hard, forced labour, was put past them. The emphasis was on offering solutions to bring about positive changes. For instance, Sadhana Mukherjee, a sex worker from Calcutta, talked about the co-operatives that have been set up to provide a social safety net for the workers. She has travelled extensively in the last two years or so, and talked of experiences in Los Angeles, Australia and Thailand to convince others that sex work is no different from any other work.

This sentiment was well taken. "When I was forced to take up the profession, I felt I was committing a sin," said Shabana, who travelled from Sangli in Maharashtra to join this group. "Now, I don't feel so. I'm not making anyone unhappy. In fact, I am looking after my entire family, without stealing or cheating anybody."

"Already collectives of these women are being formed, basic problems are being identified and they are being empowered to protect themselves against HIV," said Shyamala Ashok, who heads Society

for Development Research and Training which has also helped organisations to bring the women here. So in small pockets around the country, with the help of the collec-

tives, the sex workers are addressing various issues: be it condom use by clients, or the issue of children being pushed into prostitution, or women infected with HIV.

Helping disabled march ahead

THE world of Prayelal came to an abrupt end after an accident robbed him of his right leg, or so he thought till a charitable organisation came to his aid. With an artificial leg provided by the All India Marwari Yuva Foundation, Prayelal today trundles a cycle-rickshaw hauling goods and supports a family. He is just one among hundreds who have benefitted by the foundation.

The idea of establishing a charitable organisation to help the kind of Prayelal came when P N A Tharakan, a senior journalist, suggested to one of his friends, belonging to the marwari community, that a part of the community's wealth could be utilised in charity for the benefit of the physically challenged. This is how the National Marwari Foundation came into being with their 'move India vision'. Tharakan now works as an advisor though he does not belong to the community.

"Our trust has resolved not to leave a single disabled grounded", says Anil Jaina, president of the foundation.

With 300 branches, the Siliguri-headquartered trust has undertaken the ambitious project of declaring Assam and Bihar 'disable-free' by 2005 by equipping each physically challenged person with free artificial limb, Jaina claims. Among a variety of social service activities, two notable efforts of the manch are free distribution of artificial limbs

and widening of a fleet of ambulance vehicles for carrying patients to hospitals and transport bodies to the crematoria.

"We used to distribute Jaipur Foot at first but decided to manufacture our own artificial limbs following which our technicians at Siliguri research and development facility came up with the Shakti Foot, an improved and durable version of Jaipur Foot", he says.

"We have no problem with financing these projects as

and get used to them and teams from the manch are conducting periodic camps in different parts of the country to reach the disabled.

The 300 branches of the foundation have fitted over 20,000 limbs and calipers to the disabled. Each limb costs around Rs 1000 but they are provided free of cost. "The Shakti artificial limbs are made up of high density poly ethylene with the foot part fitted with rubber soles to accommodate any kind of body weight, says Narian Singh, a technician working for the foundation.

"With this kind of limb all movement is possible as the foot part is made up of durable rubber so that it compresses according to the body weight, which passes from upper part to the ground", he explains.

Maintenance free, the Shakti limbs are not affected by mud or water, can be used with or without footwear and one of the most flexible and lightest limbs in the world.

"Our basic aim is to eradicate immobility by providing limbs to the needy as a nation cannot march ahead without movement and action. The manch has resolved to remove the feeling of helplessness from the minds of the disabled, who for want of money, due to ignorance or indifferent attitude of people fell condemned by fate to spend the rest of their lives in misery". (PTI)

Yanger Thakkar

The Observer
05 May 2000

Maintenance free, the Shakti limbs are not affected by mud or water, can be used with or without footwear and one of the most flexible and lightest limbs in the world

marwaris are one of the wealthiest communities", Jaina says. Tharakan says that the foundation had offered its service to armed forces during the Kargil conflict to equip crippled soldiers with artificial limbs.

He said that the job of the foundation would not be limited to providing limbs. Efforts are made to ensure that the disabled get over their initial reluctance to use the limbs

Rajasthan must go back to water harvesting

Satyen Mohapatra
New Delhi, May 3

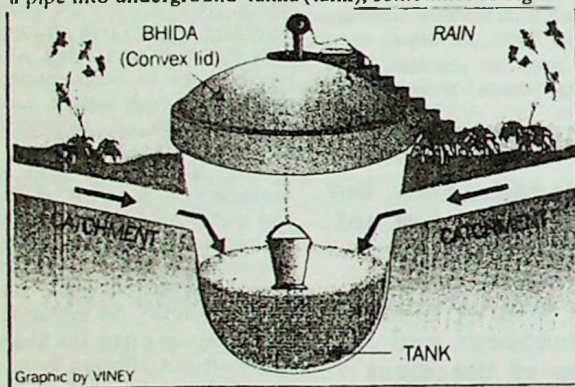
IF TRADITIONAL rainwater harvesting structures had been maintained and encouraged in Rajasthan perhaps the State would have had sufficient water resources to fight the drought.

Interestingly, India has 300 mm more average rain than the world average of 800 mm though a large amount of it is allowed to run into the river and not collected for proper utilisation, say sources at the Centre for Science and Environment.

In Rajasthan, modern methods of piped water supply from rivers had only resulted in people getting totally dependent on it neglecting their traditional systems, which got into disuse.

The government's drive in popularising and going in for more and more deep bore wells for getting water led only to the water table going down, sources say, as very little was done to popularise the need for re charging ground water.

In the desert towns of Rajasthan roof top water harvesting was a common practice. The sloping roofs of the houses were used to collect the rain water which was taken through a pipe into underground 'tanka'(tank), sometimes as big as a



room built in the main house or the courtyard.

Interestingly, the first spell of the rain was not to be collected and be used to clean the roof and the pipes.

This would not only meet the drinking water needs of the household, sometimes rooms would be built next to the tank which would be the coolest in the hot summer.

Another traditional rainwater harvesting system in Rajasthan was the Kund.

It was a simple saucer shaped structure, a circular depression of about 50 feet diameter whose sides were plastered with lime and ash.

As water would naturally flow down to the centre along all the sides, a tank was built at the centre to collect and store the water. A dome shaped cover was given on top known as 'bhida' made from phog plant and plastered with mud.

The kund had two three openings from which rainwater could enter. The water from kunds was strictly used for drinking purposes. The kund system has totally deteriorated today, say sources in the CSE.

According to the CSE, the Government should promote such traditional structures which are life saving at time of drought. The quantum of water which is unleashed through

rains can be gauged from the fact that one hectare of land if it gets just 100 mm rainfall, the yield is 1 million litres of water.

In its own office, the CSE harvests 3.60 lakh litres of rain water annually from its roof by storing and using it to re-charge ground water.

The Hindustan Times
04 May 2000

NGO members held for distributing 'obscene' literature

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, May 5

CHRISTIAN MISSIONARIES are not the only ones under attack in Uttar Pradesh. It is now the turn of NGOs to face the brunt of public ire.

On April 20, 11 members of Sahyog, a society for participatory rural development based in Almora, were taken into police custody on charges of purveying "obscene" literature.

It all stemmed from the fact that about six months ago, the organisation had conducted a survey on AIDS in the region. It had subsequently published a report titled AIDS aur Hum for circulation among other NGOs in the region. A copy of the report was leaked to the local Press.

Since then, there has been a systematic campaign by certain quarters to defame, harass and intimidate members of Sahyog.

Recently, a meeting of Sahyog was disrupted and two workers were beaten up. This was followed by the ransacking of Sahyog's registered office.

When the members of the organisation appealed for police protection, arrest warrants were issued in their names. Five of those held were subsequently released but the six chief office bearers continue to be behind bars. Bail has been refused at least thrice though no criminal charges have been made against the Sahyog members. Local parties are exerting pressure on the local administration not to grant bail. The campaign against Sahyog is reportedly being orchestrated solely by the residents of Almora town. The villagers among whom Sahyog worked are solidly behind the organisation and have even raised a large sum of money for posting bail.

The members of Sahyog have repeatedly apologised for the so-called "obscene language" used in the report.

They said that certain words are unavoidable in a document concerning AIDS but they are ready to apologise if local sentiments have been hurt. This has, however, cut no ice with the protesters, who refuse to spell out what form of apology or recantation will satisfy them. They demand that the NGO be derecognised and its funding stopped.

The Hindustan Times
06 May 2000

Peoples vs human rights in hills

FROM ANAND SOONDAS

Lucknow, May 5: Cutting across religion, caste and political persuasions, people of Almora have come together in castigating an "errant NGO" which dared to point crooked fingers at their moral and sexual ethos.

Earlier this week, in a two-and-half page judgment, the Almora chief judicial magistrate refused bail to five activists of the NGO, Sahyog, on the grounds that its report on AIDS threatened to destroy local peace. The magistrate said the activists might "abscend" if granted bail.

So, Abhijit Dasgupta, his wife Yashodara, Satish, Sunita and Atul are in jail in "protective custody" for the last 15 days. No one is given permission to meet them. Abhijit's eight-year-old daughter Diya, living with a family friend in Lucknow, will move the Allahabad High Court on Monday with a bail petition.

NGOs and civil rights groups, however, allege that in trying to assuage local sentiment, the court and the district administration have trampled on basic human rights.

"It's for their (the jailed activists) own good," justifies Almora district magistrate D.K. Verma. "If they are granted bail and released, they will be lynched by the people. The people are furious, anything can happen."

Sahyog had miffed the locals by its research methodology and the rather explicit report on the AIDS menace in the hill town. It had referred to certain local practices in an unflattering manner.

Explicit language, complete with repeated references to the genitalia and other private parts, had made the 20-page report sound more like a chapter out of a pornographic book. Some parts of the report have gone to the extent of describing homosexual and heterosexual practices as "typical of Almora".

The report also contains "conversations" between lovemaking partners.

When copies of the report were circulated among the residents, embarrassment was followed by anger and then violence. On April 20, nearly 40 volunteers, along with some Sahyog activists, were attacked by the local people.

They were "detained" in rain for more than seven hours, while a woman activist was forced to read out the offending portions, prompting the administration to swing into action. The NGO was banned and some of its activists arrested.

People of Almora are still simmering with discontent. On May 2, a *bandh* was observed in the hill town and nearly 5,000 people gathered on the streets calling for stringent

action against the NGO. All political parties came together on a single platform to condemn the "assault" on the dignity of the "simple hill people".

"How can anyone digest such a report?" asks an enraged Verma. "There are so many things that are utter rubbish." He says the report is not just factually incorrect but also demeaning. Most Almora men work outside the district and so are "potent and possible" carriers of the disease, Verma quotes the report as saying.

"The report says that many from the region join the army, and hence many soldiers might be carrying the disease. The whole Kumaon regiment is very unhappy about it. It is good that they are in prison for some time," adds Verma.

Although lawyers fighting Sahyog's case don't want to comment on the report, they feel it is not right to detain the activists even if they have "printed such an inadmissible thing".

Tulika Srivastava, a professor of Lucknow University and a rights activist, says: "I don't understand the report. But the fact is that bail has to be granted. It is a blatant violation of human rights."

But the question most people from Almora are asking is: "What about the human wrong?"

The Telegraph
06 May 2000

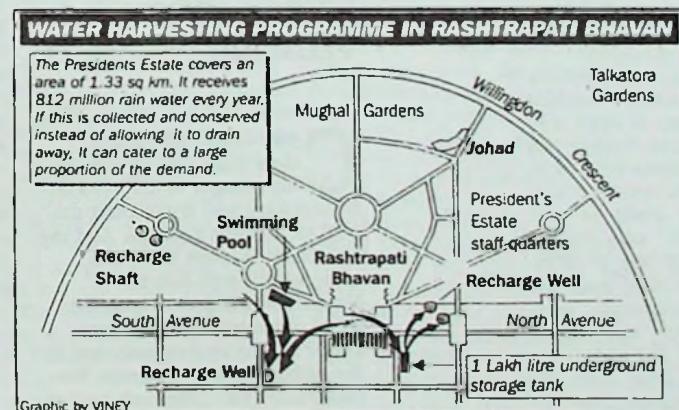
Rashtrapati Bhavan to harvest rainwater

Satyen Mohapatra
New Delhi, May 5

A MAJOR programme of water harvesting is on at the Rashtrapati Bhavan that could serve as an inspiration to the nation regarding the importance of saving rainwater.

The Presidential Estate covering an area of 133 hectares receives water amounting to 812 million litres per year in the form of rainfall. The idea now is to tap this source by capturing all the rainwater that falls on Rashtrapati Bhavan to augment the water requirement of the estate as well as recharge the ground water.

According to sources at the Centre for Science and Environment that developed the plan for water harvesting at Rashtrapati Bhavan, there has been an alarming decline of



ground water levels in the estate.

Following President KR Narayanan attending one of the seminars on water harvesting conducted by environmentalist Anil

Agarwal, Director, Centre for Science and Environment the idea of rain water harvesting at the President's Estate was mooted.

The scheme is being implement-

ed by Central Ground Water Board (CGWB) and Central Public Works Department (CPWD).

Water need of the Rashtrapati Bhavan is very high as besides the President, there are about 7,000 people residing in the Presidential Estate and approximately 3,000 people visit the presidential premises everyday. There are also the Mughal Gardens in the estate, which require a lot of water.

The total demand is about 2 million litres of water per day (730 million litres per year). Presently this demand is met through the New Delhi Municipal Corporation supply and the President's Estate's own borewells. Untreated raw water from the Yamuna river is used for the Mughal Gardens.

The water level has gone down by 2 to 7 meters in the past decade. One well has also run dry.

The Hindustan Times
06 May 2000

Girls on sale

Banchhra tribe, a part of 'vimukta jati', lives in Mandsaur and Neemuch districts of Madhya Pradesh. The young girls of the tribal community are forced into prostitution as soon as they attain puberty. And all this for earning a livelihood.

During the Mughal rule, the women of this region were physically assaulted and thus started a sad tale of women being treated as commodities. Later on girls were bought and sold in the region. Traditionally a farming community, the feudal 'zamindari' system and falling land productivity gradually combined to draw this tribe to prostitution. In modern times, joblessness and poverty gripped the community.

The birth of a girl child becomes a cause for celebration in the tribe. However, celebrations are for other reasons. Out of 3 to 4 girls born in a family, two are pushed into prostitution.

Laxmi, 22, a Banchhra woman, presently doing a nurse's training course in Kasturba Gram at Indore, wants to become a doctor. She says, "As the only earning member of the family, I was sold to a roadside 'dhaba' owner. Later on, I was married to a truck driver. I never went to my in-laws house. Banchhra girls are perennial targets of truck drivers. Ultimately, these girls are left in the lurch."

Laxmi was freed from the pernicious practice by a young, ebullient lady officer working in Department of Women and Child Development. Another Banchhra girl, Babita, 18, who intends to become a lawyer, says, "Girls from about 150 families in my village have been pushed into the flesh trade."

In her study on the tribe, Sadhana Pathak, a journalist, discovered that not all families are dependent on prostitution for a living. Some families are engaged in farming and a few women also do sewing and other related activities. However, dependence on the flesh trade has turned the men into parasites.

"Is not flesh trade, child trafficking and sexual exploitation rampant in our society? Society is some way or the other engaged in humiliating women - be it molestation, rape, abduction or forcible marriage. All the cities, big or small, have red light areas so why defame our community alone?" asks Babita. "Girls of our tribe are pushed into prostitution. Initially, girls forced into this trade are scared when they hear of the traumatic experiences of their elder sisters and aunts. Gradually, they get used to it," she adds.

The local police extort money from the girls and traffickers, and at times, they so-called guardians of law are involved in trafficking.

Consistent efforts need to be made in order to free the Banchhra girls from the malaise of prostitution. Since 1996, these girls are being sent to Kasturba Gram in Indore where they get vocational education.

"Presently the institution has twelve girls from the tribe between 8 to 24 years. They live in hostels along with the girls from mainstream society so that they get integrated," said Pushpa Sinha, Joint Secretary of Kasturba Gram.

The Madhya Pradesh Government launched the 'Nirmal Abhiyan' scheme in Mandsaur intended to free the district from prostitution. During the 'Nirmal Abhiyan' drive officials found that 550 girls were engaged in prostitution. 200 girls were sent to 'Mahila Sudhar Griha' in Indore. The UNICEF has acknowledged that the 'Nirmal Abhiyan' scheme can go a long way in rescuing the girls.

However, the stories are different. Pushpa of Basakheri village, who was married by the 'Abhiyan' says, "The Government got me married. I have the certificate. Do you know what kind of married life I am leading? My husband has left me in the lurch. I have children. My marriage took place on February 10, 1999 at Shirkheri village. After marriage when I went to his house I came to know that he has children from his previous marriage. I was forced to leave his house after 10 days of marriage, as it was difficult to face humiliations. He used to beat me up everyday. Now, I have no other option left to keep my children alive but prostitution."

A change in the attitude can go a long way in ending this inhuman practice. Collaborative efforts should be encouraged to end commodification on women.

CHARKHA FEATURES
Deccan Herald
06 May 2000

Cyber savvy villages

Cyber-cafes and bullock carts exist side by side in the villages of the extremely backward and tribal Dhar district in Madhya Pradesh. And the unlettered farmers there are using e-mail with felicity.

Networked computers have heralded a revolution in the area. Under a pilot project launched in the district, the government has established one cyber-cafe (called *Soochanayalas* or information kiosk) for every 10 villages. Thus now, for a fee of Rs 5, the farmers can get copies of the revenue maps and records within minutes - something for which they had to earlier bribe the *Patwari* and still wait for weeks. Again, for a



small fee, they can know the rates prevailing in the *mandis* at Indore and Mumbai at that instant and decide where to sell their produce. Not only that, if the hand pump at their street corner does not work or the primary school teacher is conspicuous by his absence, they can register a complaint through e-mail. The district collector monitors the complaints on a daily basis and takes corrective action. The computers are connected to a server housed in the district Panchayat office at Dhar. The information kiosks, equipped with a PC, a modem and a printer are being run by matriculate unemployed youths. The government intends to expand the scheme to other districts after studying the pilot project for a year.

-Amrisha Herdenla
Deccan Herald
07 May 2000

Assam on threshold of green revolution

By MANOJ ANAND

Guwahati, May 6: Assam is on the threshold of a green revolution. The shallow tubewell scheme of the state agriculture department has succeeded in mobilising rural farmers to opt for double-cropping for the first time in the state.

The scheme, which envisages installation of 100,000 shallow tubewells all over the state, has achieved a remarkable breakthrough with more than 40,000 tubewells operational within the six months of its announcement.

The result of the STW scheme, which is implemented under the special supervision of the chief minister, Mr Prafulla Kumar Mahanta, is quite visible

throughout the state as most of the paddy fields in the flood prone areas of the state are at present looking lush green with crops of high-yield variety seeds.

Habitually, these paddy fields are not harvested during the summer in Assam.

The scheme is not only going to change the economy of rural Assam, but it has given a new dream to the youth, who are unemployed after completing their education.

Bhabakanta Boro, a beneficiary of the scheme at Bejortari village in Kamrup district, says: "The shallow tubewell has given a fresh lease of life to the farmers who had lost their interest in summer crop. Nowadays, we in our village chopal do not have

time to talk about the Ulfa and NDFB. The talk of the chopal is whose crop is getting better and whose is infected with diseases."

The old man of the village, who has seen several transformations in rural Assam, said the fact that the scheme has managed to affect the villagers' psychology is the most important thing.

"My son, who has passed his higher secondary, is not at all interested in getting a job according to his education. He wants to join me in farming," Mr Boro said while congratulating the department for giving them some scientific knowhow on paddy farming.

A village-level agriculture worker, Khagen Chandra Das of Bortari village, said, "This

scheme has increased our importance as earlier a very small piece of land was under farming. The remaining sizeable chunk of land used to be left idle due to the lack of irrigation facilities during the summer. This is the first summer when not less than 210 hectares of land in my sub-division is being harvested." "We are busy in advising the farmers to protect their crops from various diseases that may affect their crops."

Recently I noticed blast disease in a plot and the farmer was advised to spray pesticides. Now it has been checked," he said, disclosing that a large number of youths are coming forward to take advantage of the STW scheme. As the pumps are not given free of cost, this has made the villagers more responsible as they have to recover the one-third share they invested in buying the pump sets from the government. Another farmer, Biswajit Kalita, says, "We are paying for the tubewell so we make it a point that machine supplied by the supplier should be in good condition." Almost all the farmers in the area agreed this is the first time rural Assam is been feeling motivated to start farming.

"We are hopeful that the government would come out with some similar schemes to enable us to buy tractors or power-tillers in the future on easy instalments," the villagers, said hoping that his voice would reach the government.

The Asian Age
07 May 2000

Model uses biomass to supply power in rural areas

Bangalore, May 6: More than 50 years after Mahatma Gandhi professed his model of village development, a non-resident Indian who is an international power sector expert has developed a concept combining the Gandhian model with modern technology to bring economic development to the country's villages.

Realising that power is the key to economic development in rural areas, Dr H.N. Sharan, former director of Bharat Heavy Electrical Limited, has developed a concept which highlights the need to use renewable energy resources like biomass through IISc's Combustion, Gasification and Propulsion Laboratory.

He has developed gasifiers which are subsequently owned and operated by local villagers to ensure availability of uninterrupted power

supply.

Gasifier comprises a reactor where gas is generated followed by a cooling and cleaning system which cools and cleans gas. The clean combustible gas is available for power generation application.

Biomass is a natural substance like weeds, agriculture and plant residues which stores solar energy by the process of photosynthesis in the presence of sunlight.

Dr Sharan said that after the initial funding to set up gasifiers, the local villagers should be encouraged to adopt the concept of Independent Rural Power Producers to run the plants as a business to ensure sustainability for each village. To achieve that end, Dr Sharan said World Bank funding for rural development through the centre should instead be directly provided to the respective village

councils to ensure minimum wastage of funds.

"The whole power set up will be decentralised and will ensure faster economic development of the rural sector," Dr Sharan said. "In the longer run when the economic development speeds up, the IRPPs can use more reliable and mature renewable energy technologies like wind, mini-hydro, solar energy and biogas, in addition to biomass," he added.

Dr Sharan has set up an IRPP named Decentralised Energy Systems India Pvt Ltd. Desi was formed jointly by Development Alternatives, India's largest international sustainable development NGO, and Dasag, a Swiss engineering company active in renewable energy field. (PTI)

The Asian Age
07 May 2000

"BUT FOR the "sangam" I would not have been alive today", says Naganamma, a widow. And she is not the only one. Innumerable hapless women in Chennai today owe their emancipation, economic independence and progressive views to the Working Women's Forum (WWF) in Mylapore, the "sangam" as these women call it.

The reference here is not to the educated working class or their problems. Down below the economic ladder, at the bottom most rung, is a whole group of working women in the informal sector, who are mere coolies, left uncared for, with no support or social security at the work front. This neglected lot works hard and without respite, at home and out of it, only to earn a pittance and live a life of drudgery.

Lack of education, apathetic government policies, a faulty social system and erroneous beliefs and dogma are the culprits. As a beacon came WWF in 1978. With a membership of 5,91,000 women today in the States of Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka, WWF continues to offer succour for the struggling, impoverished women of the society.

"I am not a feminist... I am a realist who realised that uplifting the woman at the grass root level would alone help society flourish", begins Jaya Arunachalam, the founder-leader of WWF and the force behind the movement. Prioritising the needs of the poor working woman is the basic aim of WWF. When Pattamma, an old woman, and one of the vice-presidents of the forum, explains her area of work with self confidence, one assumes that she has the basic education at least. But no... she has only recently learnt to sign her name in English. Earlier too it was not very different. She could sign her name in Tamil, but could neither read nor write.

It is here that one realises how ingeniously worked out, the structure of WWF is. If an educated social worker goes to the slums and speaks of hygiene, small family norm, mother and child care, literacy or social evils she would only be scoffed at. Having been blessed with everything in life, you are in no position to advise the have-nots, would be the response. But what WWF does is different and hence effective. It trains people from among the poor, the ones who have faced problems and for whom WWF has proved a haven. The forum then sends them to the slums to advise and enlighten their neighbours. This mode of cadre development has had wonderful results. Thus it is that there are group leaders, organisers, supervisors and vice presidents from the same social back-

Hope for the hapless

ground at WWF.

As a first step, small loans at nominal interest rates are given to women to develop their own small business, be it vegetable vending or flower selling. "Even if a woman has not worked before, we train her here to take up a small business of her choice and we provide her with a loan", says Srividya a coordinator, who with three others, helps in the successful running of the show. "As soon as I finished my Masters, I sought employment here by chance and it has been a pleasant accident", says Srividya.

The concept of paid social workers, is another pioneering path laid by WWF. "The women who serve here are paid members", explains Jaya Arunachalam.

Getting back to the subject of loans, the regularity in repayment has been remarkable. The women are glad that WWF has saved them from the clutches of pawn brokers. They feel that it is beneath their dignity to cheat on the forum by not repaying the loan instalments.

Charitable organisations in the U.S., Germany and the Netherlands have helped the forum in several ways. Today WWF's own bank, the Indian Cooperative Network for Women (ICNW) aids in the empowerment of the poor women.

Fullfledged health care is another area of work of WWF. "Our health projects include mother and child care, pre-natal and post-natal care and the overall health of the family. This includes hygiene too. The women's reproductive role has to be regularised, if she is to be productive in other ways and we give great importance to it," says Jaya Arunachalam.

A free hostel for children of the members of WWF is being run at Tambaram. From schooling to health, everything there is taken care of by WWF. "It is a boon for those of us who wish to educate our children, but lack the means", say these women.

Slowly they have been brought into the Health and Life insurance fold too. And for all this the membership fee at WWF is only Rs. 2 a month.

"At every stage we

have to wage a battle to get things done," says Jaya Arunachalam.

Whether it is the evil of female foeticide in Dharmapuri, the tribulations of fisherwomen in Adhiramapatnam,

the turmoils of toy makers in Chennapatnam or the plight of the Devadasis in Bellary, WWF has succeeded in abating their agony and allaying their woes. Women of various religions and castes work in harmony here.

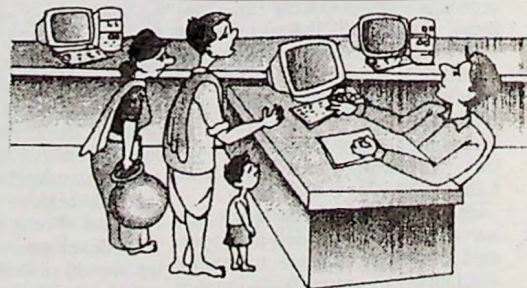
Resistance and opposition come from their own families initially but after other group workers of the area untiringly go and convince the husbands and mothers-in-law about the benefits of WWF, the women face little problem on that score.

The clarity of thought of the women at WWF, their approach to life and their freedom from the shackles of superstition, amaze one as they unfold their past experiences in darkness and hibernation and their radically different present life of optimism and self-reliance today.

"WWF is doing its bit for women in every way. Yet we need more educated young women to help us succeed even further in our pro-poor strategy," says Jaya Arunachalam, who is leaving for the Expo 2000 in Hannover soon, where she has been invited to present the case study of the WWF. Undoubtedly it is a study of a success story of perseverance which has yielded dramatic results, has lighted the lives of many thwarted women and is constantly exploring more avenues to help them.

MALATHI RANGARAJAN
The Hindu
08 May 2000

CYBER CAFE



Can we search the Net for water and download some for drinking?

The Indian Express
07 May 2000

Dealing with drought

OVER five crore people across the country have been estimated to be affected so far by the current spell of worst drought. In Rajasthan, 26 out of 32 districts are said to face acute scarcity of food and water. The worst drought in a hundred years is faced by Gujarat where water riots have broken out in several districts. A vast majority of the population in Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh and Orissa are in the throes of a severe water crisis. Scarcity of fodder has reportedly hit over scores of milch cattle. The forecast of a deficit monsoon in the entire country is yet another cause for concern.

Relief measures in the form of money to the tune of Rs 954.43 crore have been disbursed and fodder/potable water is being supplied to the affected regions by special trains. District Collectors have been directed to take up transportation of drinking water on a priority basis to remote areas where all sources of water have dried up. For meeting the shortage of fodder, the help of Non-Governmental Organisations is being sought. Notwithstanding the Union Government decision to release 20 kg of food grains to each family in the drought-affected areas at below poverty level rates, it apparently needs to be effectively implemented so that such relief reaches the intended beneficiaries.

Though drought is a natural phenomenon, ruthless and largescale destruction of flora (including forests) and fauna by human beings, as various studies indicate, has contributed considerably to the failure of rains in several places in the country. Poverty, massive population, mounting air pollution, change in land use patterns like shifting cultivation and deforestation, unchecked urbanisation, inadequate public health systems, low literacy levels, etc., have accelerated the pace of environmental decay.

Consequently, its adverse impact on the cropping pattern asunder the social fabric, only has been significant. Notably, management planning of appropriate strategies will spell success. rains. many farmers are en-

couraged to switching over from traditional crops to cash crops, and the latter requiring far more water than the former, has had its own effect on the water table. With no fresh water sources, the existing ones are fast depleting.

Primarily, the piece-meal approach of handling the drought - be it supplying fodder to animals and food to the people or releasing money earmarked under the National Calamity Fund scrupulously over the years - has not helped in the long run. More so because, non-involvement of the people, lack of awareness, foresight, political will and the failure of the state machinery to manage the calamity have compounded the situation. With 70 per cent of the population engaged directly or indirectly in farm and such related activities, repeated droughts have affected the national economy in several ways. Particularly in agriculture, low yields of different crops despite high rates of consumption of fertilizers and pesticides is a cause for worry. Further, the benefits of green revolution has been emphatic only in areas endorsed with good rainfall or water resources. Dry land areas which represent nearly 66 per cent of the cultivated area have yet to register increase in agricultural productivity. Despite food grains production having crossed 200 million tonnes, 40 per cent of the population who live below the poverty line are the worst affected. Basically, lack of post-harvest management has been resulting in wastage of nearly 10 per cent of food products and 30 per cent of horticulture products; food grains wasted last year could have easily fed about 118 million people. To reduce the vulnerability of drought on the people and lands, a permanent solution to drought needs to be put in place. With large scale failure of crops, thousands of borewells drying up, shrinking of water table, migration of people, fodder scarcity and rapid worsening of the situation that threaten to tear

asunder the social fabric, only management planning of appropriate strategies will spell success. Apart from the measures to in-

crease national productivity of food grains (since the all-India area under cultivation has been going down) reviving dry land farming and reclaiming fallow lands merit consideration.

Besides envisaging sustainability in agricultural growth, religious implementation of afforestation programmes, effective watershed management, optimal

utilisation of water, construction of check dams at catchment areas and maintaining agricultural ponds in drought-prone areas, it is imperative that the community and Panchayati Raj institutions are empowered to deal with drought at the grassroot level to help change the scenario.

Deccan Herald Aarti.
07 May 2000

HP all set to emerge as 'herbal basket'

Jyoti Mahajan

THE LAND of legends and natural beauty, Himachal Pradesh, which has traditionally been a rich repository of medicinal plants, is all set to be the "herbal basket" of the country.

With an increase in the demand for herbal medicine throughout the world, there is a great scope of strengthening qualitative aspects of this indigenous system of medicine.

Keeping in mind that agro-climatic conditions of the State helpful for the diversification of medicinal flora, the State government is sincerely engaged in promoting this system of medicine and giving special emphasis on medicinal plants. For full exploitation of the potential, the State has been divided into four zones - sub-tropical low Shivalik range, mid hill sub-temperate zone, high hill temperate-wet and high hill temperate-dry Alpine zone.

The State government has decided to establish one herbal garden in each zone for the proper diversification and optimum utilisation of the potential. Several steps are afoot for the systematic conservation, development and cultivation of the medicinal plants in the State. A herbal garden have been set up at Jogindernagar in Mandi district where approximately 215 species of medicinal plants are being cultivated.

Besides, three new herbal gardens are being developed at Nehri in Hamirpur district, Panchroo in Shimla district and Rakcham in Kinnaur district.

To ensure people's participation in growing medicinal plants, the State government has launched a unique scheme, "Vanaspati Van-

Jojna". A sum of Rs 8.27 would be spent under this scheme, which would cover more than 5,000 hectare of denudated forest land in Chamba and Kullu districts.

The Forest and Ayurveda departments will jointly formulate a plan to impart training and necessary information to those interested in herbiculture. Training is also being imparted to the locals to help them in identification, cultivation and collection of herbs. The training programme will consist audio-visual aids, field trips and demonstration.

Apart from this, the Himachal Tourism also offers a unique package called "Himalayan Herbal Trek" to unfold the ecstasy of Himalayan medicinal plants.

The Himachal Tourism, Research Institute of Indian Systems of Medicine and Department of Ayurveda have jointly designed the package. During the seven day-long herbal trek, the trekkers, accompanied by specialists, would be able to see the rare medicinal plants in their natural habitats.

One such trek was organized from April 23 to May 1, in which the trekkers started their trip from Jogindernagar and visited the herbarium and herbal garden at Jogindernagar, Urala, Jalsou and Dundhi. These herbal treks provide a rare opportunity for those interested in Himalayan bio-diversity. The trekkers not only have a breathtaking view of the picturesque Himalayan valley, but also learn about the unique cultural heritage of the State.

The Pioneer
08 May 2000

Soul food for street kids

Last Sunday, this paper carried a lead on child prostitutes under the head, *Runaway Giggles*. We were inundated by phone calls and faxes from various NGOs deploring the plight of the children and offering their services. This heartening response prompted us to examine the work of some of the organisations that have been involved in this field, waging a big fight on behalf of these youngsters.

While the Navjeevan Bal Bhavan of Father Koshi runs a night shelter, provides meals and gives informal education, Prema Vihar, the Street Kids' Community Village of Dr S. Manihara in Vijayawada is purely educative. Managed and run by street children, it covers four acres of land. With the sparkling waters of Krishna shimmering in the background, the beautiful and picturesque camp appears straight out of the episodes of *The Rich and Famous*. This is a home for the street children, is an oasis in the middle of their desert-like existence. Ironically, the brain behind this entire project is Matthew Norton nay Sriman Manihara, a British vagabond who became an Indian citizen last week after spending nearly 20 years with the kids. For the man from Manchester, this village where street children are free to do whatever they want, is a dream come true. By his own admission he was once a street child once and it wasn't as though he had been abused at home or his family had broken up. "It was basically my fault", blushes Manihara. "My problem was neither my parents nor my home. It was my school, books and the teachers whom I loathed

and against whom I rebelled." He recalls how he had fled home repeatedly to stay away from school.

"These attempts took him to Paris, from where he was brought back. It also took him around Britain where he joined a group of hippies, got addicted to drugs and even married. But the restlessness again got the better of him and he walked out of his home again to visit America.

After a brief stint as an actor in Hollywood, Manihara landed in Mumbai in 1978 as a tourist curious about India,

its people and it's philosophy.

"Despite having had a taste of street life as a kid in England, I was shocked and surprised at the difficulties Indian kids had to face on the streets in Mumbai. They were far younger than I was when I left home. They had no one to care for

them and no future ahead either," he says. But he wasn't involved in helping them at that point. Then one night Raju, a street kid, brought him another child shaking with cold and fever. He wanted Norton to help the kid. He took care of the boy that night and took him to a doctor next morning. After this, his house became the destination of many other young children. He started teaching them in the morning, giving them incentives like cooking breakfast *khichdi*. Food is a great incentive with these children. A volunteer at the Salaam Balak Trust, an NGO working with children in Delhi, admits its a challenge to get students to attend classes regularly and only the free lunch brings them in.

During 1983 Manihara moved to Pune because many well-wishers felt that he could improve the lot of street children only if they were away from Mumbai. It was here that he started a full

fledged centre for street children. Gradually his network spread and he set up Prema Vihar.

For their part, organisations like the Salaam Balak Trust and Butterfly have done commendable work in the area of rehabilitation. The Trust classifies the children who approach them in two-age groups; the under fives and over. But it mainly concentrates on the latter, as they are generally the ones without any family support system. Children here participate in extracurricular activities. They also take part in theatre activities from time to time and even put up productions. The night shelters at the Trust ensures that those opting for it get better facilities, vis-a-vis lodgings (they stay at the shelter), food and educational facilities.

But life at these shelters is regimented and there are strict rules to be adhered to, the reason most of the street kids generally shy away as they find their freedom on the streets too important to give up.

—With inputs from Omer Farooq

The Pioneer
07 May 2000

Kerala village declared 'litigation free'

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM: Thissur of Varavoor in Kerala has become the first "litigation free" village, thanks to the combined works of law students, district legal services and an NGO, "Jananeethi".

State minister K. Radhakrishnan on Sunday declared the village free of cases at a function held to mark the occasion. He urged the people of Varavoor panchayat to expand the exemplary works so that the rest of the state could follow suit.

Initially the volunteers visited all the 520 houses in the Thissur village and collected details of 264 cases pending. All the cases of civil nature were immediately taken up in a lok adalat.

Barring a couple of criminal cases all the pending cases could be settled through the adalat. The initiators have also formed a five-member "harmony committee" to ensure the village remains free of future litigation.

The Times of India
09 May 2000

A little tact wouldn't hurt

THE CONSTERNATION over the arrest and subsequent denial of bail to the activists associated with Sahayog, an Almora-based NGO working on health-related issues, testifies to the deep divisions within the development community about the style and mode of working of many of our NGOs. At a time when an increasing number of development programmes, particularly those relating to the social sector, seek the participation of NGOs, including those supported by foreign-donor agencies, both the State and wider community response to NGO interventions raise issues which demand serious debate. But first, the background.

Sahayog, as part of its work on reproductive health concerns, had last September prepared a booklet *AIDS aur Hum*. The booklet, designed to enhance the awareness about AIDS, reproduces comments and observations of those interviewed on sexual practices and customs prevalent in the Almora region. The booklet was seen by many as offensive, if not downright pornographic. What many found even more objectionable were sweeping statements about widespread sexual promiscuity and references to the prevalence of homosexuality and incest in the region.

Those who go through the booklet are likely to be disturbed with both the cultural insensitivity and the tendency to pass off stray remarks as social scientific findings. As much as the language deployed or the sweeping generalisations, is the troubling fact of violation of basic ethical norms in reporting what are claimed as 'research' findings. Though much is made in the Foreword about the need to maintain confidentiality, critical when dealing with sensitive issues, it is not difficult at all to identify the villages, and in some cases even the individuals, who participated in the focus group discussions. The resultant public ire comes as no surprise.

And yet, despite accepting the widespread dismay, even anger, at the

'foolishness' of the concerned NGO, it is equally evident that what is termed 'public protest' has been carefully organised and orchestrated. For nearly a month before the offices of Sahayog were attacked, staff roughed up, and leading activists arrested, the local media had been carrying on a campaign against the group, more so the booklet.

It is significant that the entire political spectrum — the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the Congress, the Left, the various groups spearheading the Uttarakhand agitation, other local NGOs, and even leading senior citizens — were clearly ill-disposed towards the group. Once the situations took a grave turn and violence was perpetrated on the NGO, the local administration stepped in, seized the remaining copies of the booklet, arrested Sahayog activists on charges of distributing pornographic material and creating conditions conducive to the disturbance of peace, as also proscribed the organisation.

It is equally significant that though the charges levelled are bailable (Sections 292, 293 and 505 of the IPC), no local lawyer was willing to take up Sahayog's case. Nor did any local NGO, political group or citizen's association decry the heavy-handedness of the administration or the partisan behaviour of the police in not stopping violence. On the contrary, various political leaders demanded that the activists be arrested under the National Security Act! The administration has further expressed its inability to provide protection to the NGO. Reportedly, the landlords concerned have asked Sahayog and its leading lights to vacate their property. The High Court in Allahabad has turned down the bail application. The organisation remains proscribed and its functionaries languish in jail.

How is it that the situation has turned so vicious? Almora, like many of our hill regions, is marked by a high male out-migration, resulting in a distorted male-female ratio, particularly in the reproductive age groups. It is

thus not inconceivable, at least as a working hypothesis, that single male migrants in large cities would contract sexual encounters, possibly with high-risk groups, and may consequently place local populace too at risk. Or that the specific context of those left behind influences their sexual behaviour. The exploration of this thematic however, demands both a sophisticated and ethical research methodology even more if the results are to be reported, not in a specialised journal but in a public education booklet. There is little doubt that Sahayog has badly muffed up.

The complication arises because its specific form of presentation makes it easier for hostile parties to portray the exercise as one of denigrating local culture and populations. And when these exercises are carried out by non-local NGOs, that too with support from foreign foundations, the charges can more easily stick. Sahayog should have realised that a region which has experienced a high degree of mobilisation against 'outsiders' as part of a regional autonomy/statehood movement, is unlikely to take kindly to such characterisations.

Did no one bother to read and vet the booklet before publication and distribution? Without making a case for pre-censorship, surely the research advisory committee, either of the group or of its donors, should have been able to sense that the report needed major modification. Or is it that groups claiming technical proficiency are so enamoured of their skills that they consider elaborate vetting procedures an unnecessary restriction?

Equally important are the issues related to the functioning of many of our NGOs — not just funding, or transparency, but the degree of local accountability. It is alleged that those locally active against Sahayog were already upset with its prior work on local level power structures, in particular how the local social structure is biased against the interests of Dalits and women; that in this latest case they found a 'perfect' excuse to hound the group out. This may well be true, but does not totally explain the widespread hostility. For a group which has been active in the region for over eight years, to have not built up a local support base does reflect badly on it.

For NGOs and voluntary groups
Contd....

Farmers go computer-savvy in remote AP village

From R Akhileshwari
DH News Service

NIZAMABAD (AP), May 8

The only village in Andhra Pradesh to possess a community-owned computer and connected to Internet, is Siddapur, about 45 km from here. Its unique distinction was facilitated by a young, computer-savvy legislator, the vision of the village elders and the cooperative spirit of the community which recognised that its future lay in getting acquainted with the cyber world: the sooner, the better.

The village youth had seen their MLA, K R Suresh Reddy of Congress, use his system. So, after learning of its multi-uses, they decided not to be left behind in the cyber race. Although not a single youngster had ever seen a computer before, they did considerable amount of research, consulted those in the know and convinced the elders that the village should have a computer or it was doomed. As 25-year-old Malliah told DHNS, a computer would be useful for agricultural activities, the community's major economic base.

And Siddapur leapt into an arena into which lesser people have barely begun even to get

acquainted with. Mr Reddy who launched his own website, explained that several other factors also went into the decision. For instance, a lot of men from the village work in the Gulf countries and a computer system would facilitate faster and efficient communication with their families. "It can be the village's instant post office," said Mr Reddy. Besides, the village could easily communicate its grievances and needs to the administration, the MLAs, and even the chief minister. In fact, the villagers sent their first e-mail to Mr Chandrababu Naidu.

It is a different thing that Mr Naidu took two weeks to respond to the message, which is perhaps the first e-mail delay experienced by the villagers.

Mr Malliah said they did not get the e-mail though, as the phone line was down; but they did get to know of the CM's reply through the press.

He believes that the IT connection will help their agricultural activities. "About 99 per cent of us are in agriculture. We can get familiar with new farming techniques which otherwise would take a lot of time and money. We can also know the prices of agricultural commodi-

ties in various markets which will enable us to go to those markets where prices are favourable to us, not just to Nizamabad as we do now, to markets in Maharashtra (which is closer) and even to Bombay."

Being a re-located village (under the Sriramsagar project on the river Godavari), the community has learnt the value of a united, democratic approach to solving their problems and meeting their needs. So the village elders thrashed out the issue at a panchayat meeting. Every family sends a representative to such meetings and a vote is taken. This issue was decided unanimously and the decision was to buy a computer.

But the gram panchayat had no funds for the purchase. No problem. Each family contributed to its cost of Rs 50,000 and worked out a plan to use it.

An IT company of Nizamabad agreed to train the panchayat clerk who will in turn train the village youth in batches on using the computer. Thus the only thing lacking in the village, a computer system, was bought and installed in the Gram Panchayat office. Siddapur's leap into the 21st century makes it an example worth emulating.

Deccan Herald
09 May 2000

NGO workers jailed for issuing AIDS booklet

The Times of India News Service

NEW DELHI: The controversy over the AIDS booklet brought out by an Almora-based NGO is no longer limited to its content. Despite the fact that they have tendered an apology, members of this organisation are being denied bail and other legal recourses as well.

Voluntary organisations here are shocked over the reported handcuffing of the NGO members while being taken to the court. "Locking up the accused without bail or recourse to effective defence, and inciting people to riot are activities which are themselves violative. In any case, the state cannot abdicate its responsibility of protecting human rights in the name of uncontrollable anger of the people," over 30 organisations from around the country said in a signed statement.

AIDS aur Hum, a publication brought out by an Almora-based NGO, Sahayog, had led to violent public protests since sections of this report, which claims to be based on the research findings on the sexual attitudes and behaviour of people of the Uttarakhand region were found offensive by some local groups.

In the aftermath, Sahayog members were arrested under Sections 292, 293 and 505 two sections of IPC dealing with the publication of obscene material and with public mischief. Local lawyers have refused to take up the petition for bail. While women's issues and public health activists are not supporting the language used in the booklet, they are demanding that the law be allowed to take its course and that bail be granted immediately.

The Times of India
10 May 2000

Contd....

foregrounding the importance of local concerns and participation, often in contradistinction to state actors and interventions, Almora-like situations failed in providing adequate protection, to have proscribed the organisation only when it supports our positions, and classify it as chauvinist, reactionary and conspiratorial when directed against us. Both NGOs and their donor and support networks need to understand the importance of engaging with and working through local structures, that is if they believe in democratic processes.

None of the above reservations should, however, be read as an endorsement of the state action. To have failed in providing adequate protection, to have proscribed the organisation, and more generally to have explicitly or implicitly collaborated in the creation of a climate of fear and intimidation, does little to inspire confidence. NGOs are today expected to play a major role in the development process. They can hardly be expected to operate fearlessly and creatively if the environment provides little space for them to articulate their point of view.

HARSH SETHI
The Hindustan Times
07 May 2000

Caution against giving grants to bogus NGOs

By Dillip Chaware

The Times of India News Service

MUMBAI: The estimates committee of the Maharashtra legislature has asked the state government to conduct a thorough investigation into the performance of various non-government organisations (NGOs) before sanctioning grants for AIDS-related projects.

The report of the committee was tabled in the House on the concluding day of the budget session. While commending the work of certain NGOs who did work well, the committee said they needed encouragement and more grants by the government, "but reconsideration was necessary in the case of the NGOs which were non-existent and yet obtained substantial grants against negligible performance or which completed their mission in a short while... Some of the NGOs working against AIDS just put up anti-AIDS stickers in railway trains."

In its exhaustive report, the committee has stated that while it accepted the importance of NGOs in anti-AIDS campaigns, it was unable to understand what type of work was done by many of them. When some of the committee members visited certain places,

they were unable to trace the NGOs and were told that no such organisation was active there. In view of this, the committee wondered whether the NGOs existed only on paper.

It report states that the government does not have any effective control over the NGOs as it does not know how well their performance is or how they spend the grants obtained by them.

Government grants and foreign assistance were available to such NGOs but there was no control over the manner in which these were utilised, the committee lamented.

Emphasising the need of anti-AIDS campaigns time and again, the committee said the government needed to evolve a definite structure to fund and assist the NGOs working in this field.

The committee was informed by the state government authorities that an amount of Rs 26 crore was sanctioned for anti-AIDS programmes for five years beginning 1992-93.

Of this, over Rs 24.47 crore was spent but the expenditure always fell short of the provision. For instance, in 1996-97, only Rs 6.82 crore could be spent from a provi-

sion of Rs 9 crore for the year.

Moreover, the committee discovered that the government had no control over the expenditure although various anti-AIDS programmes were implemented by official agencies.

"It is not at all desirable for a healthy democracy that crores of rupees are spent without any control of the legislature. The government should reform the present rules and procedures so that the expenditure is included in the state budget and thus comes under the scrutiny of the legislature," the committee added.

Taking note of the fact that the anti-AIDS programmes were run through funding by the Union government and the World Bank, the committee has advised the government that it should take AIDS seriously and should make separate budgetary provisions for combating the dreaded disease.

It has strongly recommended that preparations should be made to strengthen rural and municipal hospitals across the state in terms of personnel and equipment with adequate funds by the government so that they can undertake anti-AIDS programmes and render necessary treatment.

The Times of India
09 May 2000

Dalit women struggling to survive with traditional jobs

PRAMILA Devi, a Dalit woman and a mother of seven, ekes out a living by engraving tattoos on the hands of women in Patna. She tattoos flowers, the names of gods or a husband's name, the last sought after by many Hindu women in the belief that after death only tattoos go with them into the other world.

But with changing times and attitudes, traditional Indian occupations like tattooing where Dalit women have found employment for years are slowly going out of fashion. And in their battle against the odds, live, most of them engaged in the women are getting little help from the authorities. "Now I get very few clients who want

tattoos to be engraved on their hands," she says. The trend is certainly worrying for women like her whose husbands do not provide any money for the family and spend all their earnings on liquor instead.

"Very often he comes with drunkards who try to misbehave with me," she says, adding police often ransack huts in the area while claiming to remove squatters. "But where do I go, I have no other place to live," she says.

Shakhpura area in Patna, where some 1,500 Dalit families live, most of them engaged in traditional occupations, is teeming with stories of struggling women. "Modern ways of living

have destroyed our occupations," feels 60-year-old Dhankuri Devi, who is a midwife and also makes a living by giving oil massages to pregnant women. She says nowadays very few women prefer people call a midwife for a delivery and prefer nursing homes instead. She earns Rs 10 for massage and Rs 50-150 as a midwife. "With so many nursing homes cropping up everywhere I get only poor clients who cannot afford hospital charges and therefore very few people come to me nowadays," she says.

But women like her have no skills to switch over to new occupations. "This is my traditional occupation which has

continued for generations. How can I leave this? Even if I opt out who would give me another job?" she asks.

It is not that the state government is doing nothing, but only that the desired effects are not seen. It had identified 58 slums in Patna, intending to construct houses and schools, besides starting a women's co-operative to extend loans to the needy. But most schemes fail. The say Rabri Devi last year had a community hall constructed here, turning it into a school and appointing four teachers to educate slum children. But at the same time slums were removed under an anti-squatter drive throwing them into the streets.

Shivanand Shukla/ IANS

The Observer
10 May 2000

Child marriages still practised in Rajasthan

K S Tomar
Jaipur, May 7

IT WAS a repeat of the scenario of child marriages witnessed one year ago as hundreds of child marriages were solemnised on the auspicious occasion of 'Akhateej' in different districts of Rajasthan, especially in Shekhawati region.

The State Government could not take strict measures to check the recurrence of child marriages which were solemnised under the

garb of being century-old tradition.

The voluntary organisations have miserably failed to create the awareness against this social evil which is spoiling the careers of children. Illiteracy coupled with backwardness could be other factors responsible for the continuation of such social evil in Rajasthan.

The scene was identical everywhere. Hundreds of bridegroom and brides from different villages were brought by the parents and

relatives in their laps who were tied in nuptial knots. Some of the kids were so tired that they slept in the laps of their parents.

One of the villagers said it was a stigma on our society as these children would never understand the meaning of pious relations of 'marriage' when they grow up.

The Govt officials claimed that there was sharp decline in the number of the child marriages this year. District officials were clearly told that offenders must be booked

under the 'Sharda Act' which prohibits solemnising of such marriages in Rajasthan. They said villagers were scared of going to jails hence they refrained from solemnising the child marriages.

Reports from different districts revealed that child marriages were solemnised in large numbers though there was no pump and show due to fear of police. People do not consider such tradition as social evil because it has been continuing since centuries.

The Hindustan Times
08 May 2000

Exaggerate & humiliate

IF MOST "social scientific findings" are taken at face value, India is sitting on an AIDS powder keg. Fortunately, people are not dropping dead even years after the first round of sirens started blaring. Despite such an apocalypse always being postponed, most NGOs insist that the population is under great threat from the disease. As a result, funds are regularly pumped in to fight the "war against AIDS" thereby giving diseases like tuberculosis and cancer (clearly a more serious threat in India) scant attention. One reason for AIDS being on top of every respectable NGO's hit list is that it is a much more "fashionable" disease to fight against than, say, tuberculosis. (After all, who's heard of pinning a red ribbon on your jacket for TB victims?) So Western funds are easier to come by when one is battling a mythicised demon disease than one which never makes it to the panel of experts on the *Oprah Winfrey Show*.

If such exaggerations and generalisations were not bad enough, there is also the fact that most NGOs are insensitive to local cultures. In the most recent case, the Almora-based organisation, Sahayog, had published a booklet to "create awareness" about AIDS in the Uttarakhand region. It made sweeping statements about promiscuity and homosexuality among the local population. The findings made little effort to maintain confidentiality of the individuals who had participated in the discussions related to sexual practices. On the basis of its "research" — which boiled down to interviews and focus group discussions — Sahayog "educated" the people of Almora about their incestuous and homosexual habits.

Sahayog members were arrested for peddling "pornography". The NGO's office has been ransacked and no local lawyer is willing to defend them in court. It is unfortunate that the protests against Sahayog turned ugly. But the public outcry against it is understandable. Villages and individuals are livid that their sexual habits are there for anyone to flip through. There is no doubt that both ethical and scientific considerations were ignored by Sahayog. It would be wise to leave such matters to specialised organisations — or at least see to it that someone is there to check the facts and the way they are presented.

The Hindustan Times
10 May 2000

A billion mutinies

THE ARRIVAL of the billionth Indian on Thursday is less a cause of joy than of embarrassment, even of apprehension. It should make politicians and policy-makers ponder over the reasons for the evident failure of the family planning programme. Though some gains were made, the results are nowhere near being commensurate with the investments and the not inconsiderable effort that was put in. One explanation for the setback is Sanjay Gandhi's ill-conceived attempt to force the pace through the use of coercive methods in the mid-Seventies. For another decade and a half, politicians were fighting shy of even broaching the subject in public.

In the six years since the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in Cairo, efforts have been on to give a new impetus to the programme. The Government's endorsement of the ICPD policy framework for a target-free approach with adequate emphasis on reproductive and health care may have put the programme back on track, but problems remain. The Cairo Declaration implied that the Government would spend much more on maternity and child health care. This is yet to happen. The key role of universalisation of primary education — especially female education — in population control programmes is also not sufficiently reflected in the Government's social sector outlays. But the most serious bottleneck is at the state level where actual implementation is supposed to be done. It is here that most of the mis-targeting and mis-spending of resources take place.

In this respect, the four BIMARU states are the worst performers. While officials fritter away whatever funds are available on building construction and buying of jeeps, dispensaries remain starved of basic facilities and medicines. The control and monitoring mechanisms are so lax that surveys have found that the state family health and welfare workers rarely visit the villages. Kerala's proud example is axiomatic. But the successes achieved by Tamil Nadu and Himachal Pradesh in recent years also show how improved population control goals can be reached by paying closer attention to schooling and health care.

The Hindustan Times
12 May 2000

AIDS and Ignorance

THE mere suspicion of AIDS has made life miserable for a rural couple in Nandanghat village of Burdwan District in West Bengal. Ganesh Mondal was diagnosed as an AIDS patient by a quack, but he claims doctors at Barasat hospital have cleared him of AIDS. The damage was already done. Villagers out of ignorance and fear have made life horrible for the Mondal family, even threatening lynching. Ganesh Mondal, a rickshaw-puller, sticks close to home these days moving around only with police protection. Their electricity was cut, they were allowed to go to the market only after other villagers had finished their shopping. They have sent their children away to their maternal uncle's place, not knowing that AIDS doesn't spread with just physical contact. The issue assumes significance in the light of recent suicide of a family in Aurain village of Pratapgarh district of Uttar Pradesh due to ostracisation because of AIDS. Unless awareness and knowledge regarding this disease are spread, particularly in rural areas, innocent patients will continue to face torture and harassment.

The Observer
10 May 2000

Selling of girl child flourishes in Andhra Pradesh tribal hamlets

The Times of India News Service

DEVARAKONDA (Nalgonda district): Girl babies born to tribal women continue to be innocent victims of greed in the tribal hamlets of Devarakonda mandal, a year after a baby-smuggling-for-adoption racket was exposed. The evil of dowry is responsible for the racket flourishing.

Agents who had kept a low profile since the racket was busted have resurfaced and at least ten girl babies have been sold in different tribal hamlets in the last two months. About a month ago, Hemli of Nakhalagandi is believed to have sold her four-week-old girl baby, something she vehemently denies but the rest of the village whispers about. Hemli says, "Do you think because we are poor we have no honour?"

She claims that the child died, but her story about its death has many loose ends. The baby had a stomach ailment and refused to drink milk. Hemli was advised to take her to a quack because "injections will do no good." She and her husband

came to this town but the child died before she got medical help. They reportedly buried the child near a rivulet on the outskirts of the town and went back.

Others say that Hemli's brother Zemra, a rickshaw puller, arrived with a woman in a car. Hemli, her husband and the baby, went with the woman and returned a few days later without the baby but Rs 10,000 richer. Hemli is furious that reports have appeared in the media and blames Gramya Resource Centre, an NGO which works among the tribals and which had busted the racket last year.

But Wali, another resident of this hamlet, readily admits she sold her six-day-old baby last year. With no land, a husband who is afflicted with TB and six other girls to feed, she sold the child "so that the others could eat." Ramashankar, a Gramya activist, says that women who sold babies were promised five acres of land and a white ration card. Wali says neither promise has been kept, although she got herself sterilised.

However, Hemli does not appear

Unicef for aid funds monitoring

FROM DEBASHIS
BHATTACHARYYA

Bhubaneswar, May 10: A senior United Nations official today called for a greater monitoring of international funds coming into Orissa for rehabilitation of cyclone victims.

Unicef's India representative Alan Court, who was here to meet chief minister Naveen Patnaik and senior officials to take stock of the post-cyclone situation, said world monitoring was necessary to make sure that resources were not misused. The funds should be spent properly and quickly, he added.

Court said the UN was so far "satisfied" with the use of funds.

He said the government stepped in quickly and ordered action whenever relief materials got stolen. But greater vigilance was required, he added. He also hailed the media for keeping an eye on the implementation of projects.

The UN has provided \$18.32 million in relief aid in the wake of the October 29 supercyclone which killed more than 10,000 people and left tens of thousands of homeless in coastal Orissa. The body pledged another \$15 million in food aid as several coastal districts face an acute food crisis because of a huge crop loss. Court said he wanted the red tape cut and faster government decisions. "There are delays that can be avoided, but then, it is easier to criticise a government than understand the constraints it works under," he said.

Court said the UN agencies were drawing up a comprehensive plan to merge rehabilitation with the health and educational projects, especially for women and children. Returning to the pre-cyclone days would not be enough because "even then things had been pretty bad" in the villages, he added.

The biggest challenge facing the UN body, however, is how to restore the livelihood of thousands of people devastated by the cyclone. Though the enormity of the natural disaster has kept Orissa on the aid map, resources are limited and need to be used judiciously, Court added.

The UN headquarters has cleared a \$3,00,000 Food and Agricultural Organisation proposal to provide 53,000 families with agricultural and horticultural inputs to help them survive.

The Telegraph
11 May 2000

to be on the fringe of poverty because her family owns nearly 15 acres of land on which they cultivate maize and castor. Hemli adds to the family income by going to neighbouring Guntur during the cotton-plucking season. And as a member of the Parchuri Jamuna Poddupu Scheme, a self-help group started by Gramya, she could get loans.

And unlike most of the other tribal women who have between seven and ten children, Hemli has only four. Advocate Somanna says that the tribals are in the grip of a trade mentality. He adds that the lack of prosecution—a CID investigation ordered last year is not yet complete—has encouraged the network of brokers to become active again. The baby trade that began in 1997 has replaced another more heinous practice—female infanticide.

The BJP state unit's former vice-president Badiya Naik claims that V. Muniya and his wife Bharati sold their baby daughter in Gajinaya village about a month ago. He says the selling of babies has resumed.

The Times of India
11 May 2000

Project converts street kids into businessmen

By Meenakshi Shedde

MUMBAI: "Mere mitra merese nage nikal gaye," admits Mahendra Kumar Jaiswal. "I've learnt driving, and *saab* will give me a loan to start a business any time. But I prefer to be on the night squad with Project Mainstream and help other street children."

Project Mainstream (PM) is the brainchild of Mahendra Mehta, that aims to transform *taporis* street children into successful businessmen. Says Mr Mehta, "There are about two million street children in Mumbai, among the highest in any city in the world. Their lives are surrounded by crime, prostitution and quick money deals. What we do is teach them the basics of business, so they can make quick money, but legally. While most NGOs working with street children are welfare-oriented, we are a business organisation. Instead of creating parasites, we turn our liabilities into assets."

PM, a charitable trust established in 1994, is funded by a Rs 50 lakh corpus from Rotary International. According to Rotarian-businessman Mehta, it has so far, made 15,000 street children fairly independent. It does this through a range of skill-development activities and micro-loans aimed at quick returns — from the dependable agarbatti-making and driving, to loans for small businesses. It has innovative programmes like training women to be security guards, a music competition to identify talented children who can be coached for better prospects, and an upmarket domestic helpers' course.

Says Mr Mehta, "If it takes Rs 1,500 for a boy's driving course, he can earn a salary of Rs 1,500 by the following month. Nothing is free. We teach them the basics of business and charge for all the courses. We give loans of Rs 5,000, upto Rs 15,000 for a group, for all sorts of enterprises — *vada pao* stalls, a music band, a pickle business, umbrella repair, anything. Our policy is 'payable when able.' Yet our loan recoveries are pretty good — at about 78 per cent."

Staffer Zeenat Bhagat adds, "Our target is the 14-23 age group, and many children are referred to us by other NGOs. About 450 girls from slum communities have benefited from a 15-day course we have for domestic helpers, who get a certifi-

cate from SNTT. They are taught to handle white goods like refrigerators and washing machines, personality development, etiquette and the basics of child care. We also train women in karate and other skills to be security guards in, say, women's colleges, hospitals or department stores. Moreover, we have successfully conducted many programmes in remand homes themselves."

Shravan Shivmath, who was referred to PM by another NGO, now works as their resource person. "I train other street kids to make agarbattis, phenyl and liquid soap. I teach them to distinguish between different kinds of customers and how to bargain accordingly. It is quite an art, especially when dealing with ladies," he says with a grin.

Jaiswal, a former street child who now works with the PM's "night squad," says, "I team up with a colleague who is a Masters in Social

Work, and we roam the city at night, meeting street kids who may be looking for a meal, money, or just a kind word. We visit their usual *addas*, chat about their problems, and depending on their needs, refer them to a hospital or night shelters run by Vatsalya, Amchi Kholi, Support, Anchorage and others, or to suitable NGOs. We tell them about PM's activities, and ask them to be alert and refer new street children to us. "Since I was a street child myself, I can relate to them better," he continues. "When I first came to Mumbai from Varanasi, I tried so hard to make a living, but came to believe that the city wouldn't let you live honestly. Now I work for PM on a salary of Rs 2,000, and it feels very gratifying when the street children call me 'Uncle'."

Mr Mehta himself is so popular an 'Uncle', his grateful wards ensure he has never needed to lose sleep over loan recoveries. "Once we gave some boys a loan that wasn't repaid for three years, but eventually they did repay it. One of them confessed, '*Saab*, we were thinking of not bothering to return it. But we knew that if we gave it back to you, you would give it to some other street child — as we once were — and we felt very bad for keeping it so long.' Everyone has dreams, more so the young. We just help them hang onto their dreams," Mr Mehta says modestly.

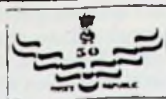
Billionth Indian

The statistical exactitude of the billionth Indian opening her eyes to the world at 5.05 am on Thursday is more in service of symbolism than representation of an actual event. But the reality represented by the baby who was born in New Delhi's Safdarjang hospital is sharper for its symbolism. A born child is a precious addition to the country's human numbers and should be protected, cared for, nurtured and brought up to become a healthy and happy citizen. But herein lies the contradiction of growth and welfare: the very fact that she has to share the limited resources of the country with a billion plus others may make life difficult for her. A birth, which should always be a cause for celebration, becomes also an ominous sign of a deprived future. India has joined China in the club of one billion and, according to projections, will overtake that country by mid-twentyfirst century, with a population of 1.5 billion. Thereafter the population is expected to stabilise but according to present indications every day in the present century will mean a harsh fight for survival and for basic needs for a majority of the billion plus humanity.

India has the distinction of having first started the family welfare programme, after realising the implications of runaway population growth, among the world's developing countries. But from 1952 onwards when the programme was first launched till now, it has gone through many ups and downs and conceptual and methodological changes. The setback suffered by the programme during the compulsory sterilisation drive of the Emergency era has not been overcome even now. The experience of implementing the programmes for five decades has also taught us that reduction of births cannot be an isolated goal but can only be achieved in the context of providing complete health for the family. Improvements in infant and maternal mortality rates, availability of reproductive healthcare services and overall improvement of health and education facilities are crucial factors in the effort to curb the growth of population. The linkages between women's health and education and the success of family welfare plans are well established. The experience of States like Kerala on the one hand and the performance of northern Indian States in this respect provide the contrast between sound and unsound strategies of family welfare plan implementation. The millennial baby, born as the child of a summer morning in the country's teeming capital, should represent the hope of life and at the same time the nation's will to provide a good, healthy and happy life to its people.

Deccan Herald
12 May 2000

The Hindustan Times
10 May 2000



Financial Assistance for Tribal/Folk Art and Culture

The Department of Culture invites applications, under its scheme for Financial Assistance for the Promotion and Dissemination of Tribal/Folk Art and Culture from voluntary organisations/institutions and individuals working in the field of tribal/folk art and culture for specified projects.

The Scheme provides assistance in the following areas:

1. To provide opportunities to tribals to conduct and organise cultural activities including festivals ('Utsavas') in their environment and to ensure continuity of the traditions of tribal art and crafts.
2. To promote and support documentation, research and survey of tribal and folk art, specially those facing threat of extinction as a consequence of rapid development.
3. To integrate the educational system of the State Government in the tribal areas with the cultural traditions of these communities in their respective areas.
4. To disseminate and promote awareness of the richness of tribal/rural culture particularly among the urban people.

Under this Scheme, a maximum assistance of Rs. 2.00 lakhs is available depending upon the nature and scope of the project. The project is to be completed within a span of two years.

The complete application should be sent in the proforma given below to the Under Secretary (PA), Room No. 334, 'C' Wing, Shastri Bhavan, New Delhi-110 001 duly recommended by the concerned Department of the State/U.T. or by the State Academy for Culture by 20.6.2000

PROFORMA +

1. Name of the Organisation/Individual :
2. Address :
3. Registration number of the Organisation :
(copy of the registration certificate to be attached)
4. Permanent Account Number (Income Tax) :
5. Name of the Banker :
6. Bio-data if the applicant, if an individual :
(to be annexed)
7. Organisation's profile including its objectives :
and activities (to be annexed)
8. Title of the project :
9. Project in brief in not more than 150 type-written :
words (not to be annexed).
10. Detailed synopsis of the project (to be annexed):
11. Date of commencement of the project DD MM YY
12. Date of completion of the project DD MM YY
13. Estimated cost of the project Indicate the :
total here and annex the details.
14. Amount of assistance sought from the :
Department of Culture
15. Other sources of finance. This should also :
indicate, among others, assistance received :
from the Department of Culture in the past :
whether under this Scheme or any other Scheme

Date:
Place:

(Signature of the applicant)
Name:
Designation:
Office Stamp:

Note: Please also enclose the following:

- i) Photocopy of the Registration Certificate & Memorandum of Association.
- ii) Income Tax Assessment order.
- iii) Last three years' receipts and payment account and balance sheet with auditor's certificate.
- iv) Photocopy of Utilization Certificate for previous year's grant.
- v) A report of the activities undertaken during the last three years.

N.B. Applications received incomplete or after the last date will not be entertained.

+ Also available on the Website www.indiaculture.org

DEPARTMENT OF CULTURE, GOVERNMENT OF INDIA

The Hindustan Times
12 May 2000



Wellsprings of Hope

IT is the same story every year — around this time, taps dry out, farmers do not have water to drink, let alone water for their crops and animals — there are drought conditions in which the western, central and southern states are worst hit. Then come the monsoons bringing floods in the east with excessive water finding its way into the seas. Meanwhile, debates go on, expert committees are set up which seem to have all the solutions but do nothing substantial in implementing these grand schemes. It is also distressing to find that in this moment of crisis, appeals have to be made to the public for donations to remedy the results of poor management.

We only remember our traditional harvesting systems when there is an acute shortage of water or drought to remind us. Once the rains come, all is forgotten and again complacency sets in till the next crisis. It is all too well known that India has the potential of being self-sufficient in agriculture since it has adequate raw material and other resources. However, it has been unable to provide water and electricity to everyone.

Incredible Obstacles

Our objective, therefore, over the next few years should be to resolve all water problems with proper administration, on a priority basis, and complete all pending water management projects within a stipulated time-frame, even if it necessitates borrowing money. While going hi-tech is all very fine, no amount of this sophisticated know-how from the IT industry can solve the problems of the farmers whose needs of water and electricity are the real issues. To the farmer, his crop, livestock and subsistence is of far greater importance than being IT-savvy and, if hi-tech is to be used constructively, it should be used to monitor how water projects are being managed.

A similar situation existed in the western states of the US in the 1930s — drought conditions were prevalent in the deserts and there was almost no development until the Hoover Dam was constructed. In a matter of five years, Nevada, Arizona, Colorado, California and Mexico not only gained from the benefits of water supplied from Lake Mead (formed as a result of building the dam) but every-

thing else ranging from tourism, agriculture, electricity and water. Besides, the economy also prospered and still continues to do so in this region.

Before the construction of the Hoover Dam, in the summer and early spring, the Colorado often flooded low-lying areas along the route and in the hot, southwestern summer, the flow of the same river would slow down to a trickle making it an unreliable source for irrigation, public and municipal uses. Our situation is quite similar — from the melting snows of the Himalayas to the floods caused by the Brahmaputra in the northeast.

However, it was Herbert Hoover, the 31st President of the United States, who overcame some incredible obstacles before work could start on this great dam — he settled a 25-year water allocation controversy between the representatives of Arizona, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah and Wyoming. Throughout the construction of the dam, Hoover continued to sort out problems relating to engineering, water and power allocation.

In the context, it was the policy of the Bureau of Reclamation in the US to ensure that every available drop of water from the various streams and rivers in the dry southwest US was made available for municipal, agricultural or industrial use. To this end, Hoover Dam and the many other dams which followed were highly successful. Currently, the lower Colorado river provides water to irrigate over 1,000,000 acres in the US and 500,000 acres in Mexico. This dam is the keystone to a delivery system providing water to over 18,000,000 people in Arizona, California and Nevada. It has 17 generators which can produce 2,000 MW of electricity. Mead, and the Hoover Dam can store up to 9.2 trillion gallons of water in its reservoir. It is also a principal source for flood control and electrical power.

Stream Tapping

Our current problems make it necessary to appreciate the potential of rain water harvesting. On a national scale, with the current population, if we assume that the average requirement per person is 100 litres per day and the average rainfall across the country is about 1,100 mm, the annual demand will

be 34,675 billion litres. Each hectare can yield about 11 million litres of rainwater and, therefore, if we harvested only 3.15 million hectares which is about one per cent of India's land area, all household needs can be met.

As early as the third millennium BC, farming communities in Baluchistan impounded rainwater and used it for irrigation. Dams built of stone rubble have been found in Baluchistan and Kutch. Dholavira, a major site of the Indus Valley civilisation had several reservoirs to collect monsoon run-off and also excellent drainage systems.

Some of the answers to this current crisis may lie in the lack of reliance on our own traditions by our communities. Indians, over centuries, developed a range of techniques to harvest every possible form of water, from rainwater, stream and river water as well as flood water. They have tapped water from hill streams or springs known as kuhls carrying a discharge of 15-100 litres per second. In Meghalaya, a 200-year-old system of tapping stream and spring water for irrigating plants by using bamboos still exists.

Water Harvesting

Credit must go to the people of the villages of Rajasthan and particularly Jodhpur, where old water systems still exist and where the traditional system was maintained even after the advent of piped water. Villages which neglected their traditional systems and relied solely on piped water sources faced scarcity under drought conditions. An ironic contrast of water management is that between Jaisalmer and Cherrapunji which get 100 mm and 15,000 mm of rainfall respectively. Jaisalmer had enough water for itself until recent years, while Cherrapunji, the wettest place on earth faces a drinking water shortage. Alwar district, also in Rajasthan, has been successful in harvesting water thereby bringing prosperity to its villages.

Although we have also made dams in the past, no significant dam construction has come about in the last 25 years. While there should be urgent efforts to complete big and small dams, compulsory water harvesting schemes with the participation of villagers have to be set up.

Finally, it must not be forgotten

that a drought in 1987 almost brought down the Union government. Therefore, if the country and the government needs to focus on a single meaningful issue for now, it has to undertake the completion of all water-related projects without any further delays and also emphasise the need to revert to our traditional methods of water harvesting.



By RANJIT NANDA

The Times of India

11 May 2000

Tribal women to set up people's bank in Orissa

Imran Khan

BHUBANESHWAR

THE self-help groups (SHGs) of tribal and rural women are likely to set up people's bank in Orissa on lines of Seva Bank in Gujarat soon.

Encouraged by the SHGs success in the state, the Nabard has decided to help the SHGs in giving a concrete shape to the people's bank. Sources in the Nabard here said that the people's bank was only possible when the SHGs are united and have surplus funds.

"It will be a good move if these SGHs succeed in setting up their bank in the state," sources said.

The SHGs have led to financial independence of rural women who form over 80 per cent of the 2,021 groups refinanced by Nabard during the last fiscal.

The concept of the people's bank emerge following 'Adivasi Mahila Sammilani' held at Rajabati, about 70 km from Bhubaneswar recently.

It was discussed in the Sammilani that the people's bank will be a permanent solution to fight the moneylenders who are very much alive in tribal and rural areas.

The sammilani was organised by the Bhubaneswar-based NGO Centre for Youth and Social Development. About 1000 representatives of 521 SHGs formed by women alone have emerged as the effective tools to create awareness among the women to fight against the money lenders.

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Reviving the gurukul way of learning?

THE days of the ancient gurukul are gone. But some institutes are trying to revive this traditional system of learning, at least conceptually. In a bid to make learning a meaningful exercise, conscious efforts are being made to end the appalling effects of the 'factory model' of education by going back to the roots, by reviving the 'Guru-Shishya Paprampara', by rectifying the adverse student-teacher ratio and introducing training programmes to hone the creative and reasoning skills of students.

There are many offstream schools today imbibing some features of the traditional system, examples of which are the Krishnamurthy Foundation, Abhilasha in Andhra and a few other schools in the Capital. In these schools, each class maintains a minimum number of 20-25 students and there is no pressure of exams up to Class VIII. After that they join conventional schools and undertake the CBSE or other board exams, says Roshan Dalal, writer and former teacher of one such school, The Rishikesh Valley, in Rishikesh.

Jiva, an NGO, has developed a project with a new curriculum inheriting traits of the traditional gurukul system, curriculum comprising new set of standards, assessment methods, materials and training programmes, says educationist Steven Rudolf. Called ICOT (India's Curriculum of Tomorrow), it will comprise a set of detailed graded standards from Classes I to XII that develop the learner's higher order thinking skills, a strong sense of values and pride in Indian culture, he says, adding "the project will initially involve private as well as government schools." Jiva has the tentative support of the ICSE Board and a few states. With over 150 schools already using Jiva learning system for their IT curriculum, about 200 schools would be a realistic number to begin the project of creating a new gurukul system, he says.

But why the need for the gurukul system? Education today mostly creates theoretical knowledge, with students lacking in more horizontal or lateral thinking skills like problem solving, decision-making, and creative thinking. "The gurukul system was set up to teach the basics of education and values to a small group of students. In the industrial age, educators tried to adapt with factory-type of model to schooling packing in more students, as a result of which there are many problems," he says. To confront these challenges the institute is working on two fronts, at the institutional level where a public school with a modest number of students in each class has been set up providing learners with a variety of learning experiences, with emphasis on critical thinking skills. Secondly, working at the macro level by interacting with government agencies, state boards, private schools and their boards.

In today's world the factory model prevails. The vast range of students are studying the theory of a number of topics to a deep degree, usually deeper than is practically necessary, notes Mr Rudolf. The presence of a large number of students in classes, who come from diverse backgrounds, makes it difficult for the teachers to understand their nature and cater to the needs of each learner.

But given the modern scenario how feasible is the concept of adopting the traditional system? "One cannot in principle object to the setting up or revival of the traditional gurukul system but how it is going to perform remains to be seen," says Prof Amrik Singh. The traditional system can be replicated but under new assumptions. Given the objective focus of exams with teachers ignorant of the pupil's abilities due to the existing restraints, there must be an effort to create the modern gurukul treating the school as a vehicle for helping students understand themselves and become productive members of society. "There is a chance for the new age gurukul to come about for which educators have to start thinking differently what education means in this age," argues Mr Rudolf, whose institute has already been hired by Unesco to create an IT policy for

Indian schools. Once a model is established, it will then be easy to replicate the programme, he says noting as the essential curricular components are developed, state boards or individual schools may adopt the programme with minimal efforts. "There are many offstream schools, but how well they function is a different question altogether which remains to be seen," says Mr Dalal.

Lalsram Indira/ PTI
The Observer
12 May 2000

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"In less than a decade of their existence, the SHGs in tribal dominated Koraput, Sundergarh, Mayurbhanj and Keonjhar districts and in Cuttack and Khurda in Coastal belt have grown to include nearly 12,165 women into a strong movement for women emancipation," CYSD coordinator Jagdanand said. He added that the SHGs had become viable alternative for their self-financial independence. □

The Observer
12 May 2000

Child soldiers

OVER 300,000 child soldiers are fighting for national and guerrilla armies across the world, a human rights pressure group revealed. Of them 120,000 child soldiers were deployed in armies across Africa and 75,000 in Asian countries, including Afghanistan, Cambodia, Myanmar and Sri Lanka.



coordinator of the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers (CSUCS) Rory Mungoven said, adding that these child soldiers were under the age of 18. During the East Timor violence last year, children were widely used by militias, he said. "Little attention is given to this problem of child soldiers, although it is widespread", Mungoven said. The CSUCS is

organising a conference in Kathmandu from May 15-18, sponsored by several human rights group and the United Nations Children's Fund. "We hope the conference will add to the movement for a global ban on children under 18 being used in conflicts", he said.

The Observer
13 May 2000

Raindrop by drop

Keerthiseelan, who has done some very impressive water magic, by harvesting the rain in a small tahsil office in Gauribidanur.

How it was done

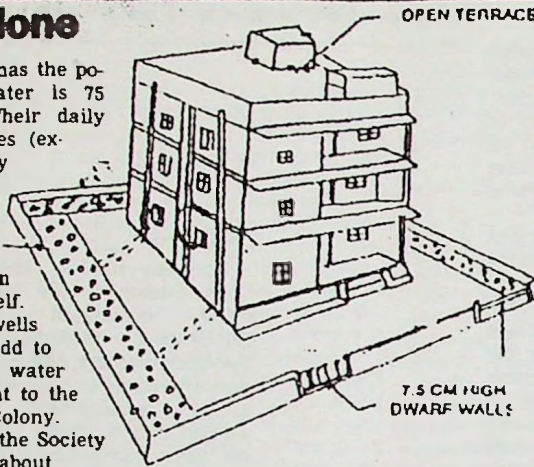
Sena Vihar's total area has the potential for harvesting water is 75 million litres per day. Their daily demand is 90 million litres (excluding gardening) but they are getting only 40 mld today.

The experts told them that after harvesting they would get 75 mld from the rainwater itself. Recharging the four borewells and the open well would add to this store. The excess water recharged would be brought to the grey and arid areas of the Colony.

Though Col. Kanwar, of the Society was initially apprehensive about the expenses involved, was finally enthused into launching this unique experiment in an area which had been declared as "negative" by Central Groundwater Board experts ten years ago!

Reddy and Keerthiseelan also discussed various indigenous ways to recharge the borewells such as preparing a filter bed which would increase the recharge level by 25 per cent. There are seven open areas between buildings, called tod lots (where toddlers can play) which will also be used for recharging groundwater. The 30 feet by 20 feet storing pond which they will dig for storing rainwater, will have a depth of six feet and will be turned into a beautiful garden.

Says Col. Vijaykant "We can even give them a low cost swimming pool for using up excess rainwater, which would cost about Rs 4 lakhs and would be a pleasant alternative to the City's filthy swimming pools." He also points out that the Vihar's present water bills per month come upto Rs 35,000. By adopting rwh, they can save upto Rs 20,000 per month.



Rainwater harvesting through pebble method

thereby increasing its water table impressively, was visibly excited as he toured the huge 14-acre area. Within minutes of studying a map of the area, he and Somshekar Reddy evolved a rough plan. (See box)

Bangalore's water scenario is very grim. Its population of 80 lakhs needs 1,000 mld for domestic uses, and another 1,000 mld for other needs. The present supply is only 750 mld and the shortfall of 100 mld is likely to increase to 135 mld. Over 35 per cent houses in our city do not have piped BWSSB water supply.

The Sena Vihar rwh project is a pioneering effort by the Foundation, which hopes to use it as a launching pad for several more such projects in Karnataka and elsewhere. The Foundation has recommended that the Government should constitute a team consisting of senior government officials, non-governmental organisations, builders, architects and environmentalists to draft a time-bound plan to carry out rwh, which must be adopted for all government buildings, schools, colleges and other institutions.

Says Col Vijaykant, "We must encourage house owners to have open wells and give them incentives to adopt rwh. A draft plan should be made for reviving lakes, ponds and other water bodies. We should also set up an independent lake authority with autonomous status consisting of government officials and members of the public. The government must concentrate on recharging groundwater wells for the next three years and ban digging of any more borewells."

Those who are interested in introducing rwh measures in their homes or communities can contact the EHF at 5308137 and 2997351, or e-mail at ColVijay@yahoo.com.

Ironically, even after the Department of Mines and Geology warned in six recent reports, that not even one borewell should be dug in Karnataka's water-starved areas, the Government has announced more digging of borewells in Belgaum district! It appears as if some people never hear the warning signs while others reap water wisdom from them!

Deccan Herald
12 May 2000

DAKSHA HATHI

Summer's cruel tentacles have been steadily sucking out every drop of water from the huge, sprawling army housing colony, called Sena Vihar, in Kammanahalli. When the dwellers suffered through five waterless days in a row, they decided to collect rainwater from their 15 rooftops in future, instead of staring helplessly at an even more cruel summer next year, and risking a water crisis.

This unique rainwater harvesting project, involving an entire community of 354 flats and 71 independent houses, is the first of its kind in Karnataka. It is being launched by the Environment and Health Foundation (India) with the help of two eminent water management wizards - Dr T Somshekar Reddy, a research fellow at the Indian Institute of Management, and K Keerthiseelan, Scientist 'D' of the Central Ground Water Board.

And what made Sena Vihar take this important step? Says Brigadier A N Suryanarayanan, President, Sena Vihar, HCSL. "We are facing a terrible water crisis. Three of our four borewells are defunct and one open well has completely dried up. The daily water needs of 364 flats

and 71 houses has to be met and we are at our wit's end! I have also read a lot about rainwater harvesting and we are keen to try it out in a small way and later expand to a bigger project."

Says Col Vijaykant, Executive Director, EHF, "It took us six months to convince the Society members, after which we did an extensive study of the sprawling campus which is totally dependent on the Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board for water. Their monthly need is one crore litres and the daily need is three-and-a-half lakh litres. Initially, we will start with water conservation and waste management, recharge all the borewells and the open well, and create a new water tank reservoir, with 15 to 20 lakhs by roof top harvesting, from the nine huge rooftops which this complex has. We are confident that within three years, Sena Vihar will become totally self-sufficient in water and will not be so dependent on the Board."

Incidentally, though they have paid the Board a shockingly large fee of Rs 46.65 lakh, it has not been able to keep up its end of the bargain and the settlement is slowly becoming parched.

Mala, a tiny village tucked into the foothills of the Western Ghats, is Big news too. It is one of nine villages chosen to study biodiversity, discovers K A RAMAKRISHNA MURTHY

In the half golden light of the foothills of the Western Ghats, nestles Mala, a biodiversity-rich tiny village in Karkala taluk. This modest village is one of the nine villages in Karnataka chosen to study biodiversity, also representative of an awesome ecological habitat type — but one of the many villages affected by the establishment of the Kudremukh Iron Ore Company and the Kudremukh National Park.

The Biodiversity Conservation Prioritization Project (BCCP), which aims at registering the information of the man on the street, about the usefulness and conservation of resources in nature, is a special project to create awareness among people. Thus the People's Biodiversity Register Programmes were formulated.

The main aim in registering it is to make folk knowledge and wisdom an important base for monitoring and protecting biodiversity and to benefit sharing with local communities, in the framework of the conservation of biological diversity.

The BCCP in Karnataka is sponsored by the Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore and the Karnataka State Council For Science and Technology. It has been financed by the World Wide Fund (WWF) for Nature, India. People's Biodiversity Register was prepared at Mala village, with the help of villagers, teachers and students at Sri Bhuvendra College, under the Principal Investigator, of the BCCP and the Professor and Head of the Zoology Department, Dr K P Achar. According to him, the serious decline in the traditional knowledge of biodiversity cannot be prevented unless the youth is motivated.

"Current development and conservation paradigms provide little reason for such an interest. We feel that the educational system should teach them much more about nature and biodiversity through first hand observation

and related activities. Considerable interest and dedication is consistently displayed for the study by college students. Knowledge of the use of nature's resources from men and women of various religions, communities, castes and tribes will be enlisted. This knowledge can be confirmed through group discussions and recorded, a record which is maintained in the Grama Panchayat office, which will be available to the public for reference," he said.

In Karnataka, an NGO, the Foundation for Revitalization of Local Health Traditions, estimates that 300 species of medicinal plants are in regular commercial use with the annual value of trade estimates, of Rs 80 crore. But there is only a partial official record of harvests of just 10 species, out of 300 species with the Forest Department.

Nothing at all is known about what is happening to 290 other species. The villagers of Mala know about 30 species of flowering plants. The medicinal herb collectors know about 300 species. People in Mala together know about 350 species of flowering plants.

Mala villagers have identified 193 trees, 169 shrubs, 186 herbs and 77 climber species. They also know about ferns, mosses, algae and lower animal groups. A few people have medicinal knowledge of about 100 plants. The register has compiled several management options for conserving biodiversity. People felt that the species requiring immediate protection are tigers, leopards, lion-tailed macaques, and hornbills. Among medicinal plants, Rauwolfia Serpenina is being ravaged and needs to be protected. The register also recorded knowledgeable individuals who treat them for ailments.

Dr Achar hopes that the People's Biodiversity Register would be accepted by the Government as a tool for participatory development.

**Deccan Herald
12 May 2000**

Six southern rivers to be interlinked

THE UNION Government, in an effort to find long term solution to water crisis, has proposed to bring a legislation to curtail indiscriminate use of ground water. Six southern rivers would be interlinked and the extension of the Indira Gandhi canal were the other projects on the Government's agenda, Union Minister of Water Resources C P Thakur informed the Rajya Sabha on Friday.

Reiterating the Government's commitment to tackle the water crisis on a war footing, Mr Thakur said traditional and modern methods would be extensively used all over the country to retain and conserve water. He also told the House the Government was working on a plan to handle the perennial flood problem in Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal. The officials of the concerned states and the Nepal Government would meet in June in this regard, he added.

Appreciating the concern of the House over the tapping of ground water by the rich farmers and depriving the small and marginal farmers of this precious resource, the minister said a law was on the cards to ensure equitable distribution of water.

Members, cutting across party lines, urged the Government to treat water crisis as an emergency and deal with it accordingly. Most of them were of the view the present drought and water crisis was due to bad water management rather than weather gods. Some of the Elders asked the Government to emulate the example of Israel which had less rainfall and water resources than India but it did not face any water shortage due to effective management.

The Government was asked to rope in non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and local communities to conserve and harvest water in villages and small towns all over the country.

Mr Thakur assured the Elders his ministry was for marrying traditional and modern methods to solve this crisis.

Highlighting the depletion of ground water table in the country, Mr Thakur said the government had formulated a centrally sponsored scheme to assist the states in artificial recharge of ground water at an estimated cost of Rs 101.50 crore. The scheme was at the consultation state in the Planning Commission, he said.

The Government had prepared a national perspective plan for recharge of ground water by utilising surplus monsoon runoff. The Government also proposed to make roof-top rain water harvesting mandatory in Delhi and other cities, the minister said. A Model Bill was circulated to all the states to enable them to enact suitable legislation for regulation and control of ground water development, he added.

The minister also informed the House that a manual on artificial recharge of ground water was circulated to the states for area specific artificial recharge schemes to check the declining trend in ground water.

Members including Suresh Pachauri, Sanjay Nirupam, Praful Patel, Premchand Gupta, R S Kaushik, Margbandhu and Swaraj Kaushal participated in the calling attention regarding depletion of water level in various parts of the country.

Mr Thakur said the main reasons for the decline in water table were rapid pace of urbanisation, increasing demand in agriculture and industrial sectors besides domestic needs. Change in cropping pattern in order to raise water intensive crops had resulted in over-exploitation of ground water in certain areas, the minister said.

**The Pioneer
13 May 2000**

Dispensable daughters

Selling of unwanted baby girls for a few hundred rupees or even for a few bottles of country liquor in the Lambada tandas or hamlets of Nalgonda district in Andhra Pradesh is an open secret. One is met with aggression and flat denial initially. Some persistence, a sympathetic tone and an overt compassionate demeanour melt down the hostility. Then they begin to pour out their woes and eventually justify their act. Savli, a wizened woman of Yalmalmanda tando in the Lambada dominated Devarkonda mandal of Nalgonda district in Andhra Pradesh pointed out Surti, a middle aged woman and wife of a former sarpanch. Surti is a mother of nine girls and one son. She managed to marry off eight girls but the ninth is proving tough. "The boys are asking for Rs one lakh dowry...even this girl wants an employed husband, she too refuses to work as a 'coolie'...what can we do? we can't keep girls in our home unmarried," she said voicing the community's opinion. Life for new born Lambada girls of this region was always uncertain. Poverty was their bane then and so they were killed within a few days of their birth by using various methods. After a market developed for babies for adoption abroad in the last few years, the local people and the educated Lambada men were quick to realise the potential. Now instead of being killed as earlier, the newborn unwanted Lambada girls are sold. "The family earns Rs 30,000 or even Rs 50,000," explained Savli. It was flabbergasting. Girls fetching such a huge amount? The only literate Lambada man in the audience, Ratan Naik, Veterinary Assistant was more clear: by selling the girl, the family saves the burden of paying that amount as dowry. Right now the going rate is Rs 30,000...it could go up to Rs 50,000 who knows? Salki of the same tando was prevented by the local women's NGO from selling her one week-old daughter. She already had three girls and one son. "I have nothing," said Salki. "How can I keep her?" Besides she had incurred a debt of Rs 50,000 for the elder daughter's

marriage which remains unpaid. It is this vicious cycle of poverty, debt and the social evil of dowry being copied in which most Lambada families are trapped in that forces parents to sell their girls. R Shapru Naik, president of the APST employees union traces the rise of the evil of dowry to 1976 when the State government recognised Lambadas as tribals and threw open government jobs under reservation. Economic stability and prestige was assured by men with some education and a government job for girls marrying them and so the system of boys paying a dowry to girls in the community was overturned soon. Mr Naik recalls that his father gave three bulls to his wife's father, paid Rs 45 and bore all the marriage expenses to take the bride home. Today even an illiterate Lambada youth demands and gets Rs 20,000-30,000 as dowry with all marriage expenses paid for by the bride's father. So if a baby girl fetches even Rs 10,000 in the adoption market, the family's expenses for two years are taken care of, he pointed out. It may be recalled when the scandal of sale of girl babies broke out in March 1999, the government acted promptly and raided two so-called NGOs and recovered as many as 200 infants. As their papers were forged or false, the government took charge of the babies and ordered a CID enquiry. Subsequently, 14 babies died in a diarrhoea epidemic. The High Court in a case filed by the two NGOs seeking the custody of the children refused their request and ruled that the government could give out the children in adoption with preference given for in-country, Indian couples. Eight children were restored to their families and the organisation SOS was appointed caretaker for 153 children of whom 30 have been sent to SOS Village in Visakhapatnam. Of the 120 remaining here the adoption of about 100 have been finalised. Is there a way out of this tragic situation? Ms Rukmini Rao of Deccan Development Society that has successfully mobilised the women in the backward Medak district, believes a systematic plan of action is missing in dealing with it. She believes any

plan of development should have women as its core. The essential features of a prospective plan of development should be: recording of all births and deaths in the tandas; activating the health system by insisting the regular visit of ANMs and delivering health to the mother and child; initiating income generation activities preferably through women's self-help groups; launching women's literacy programmes; developing infrastructure and most important, educating the people on sustainable land development that would include water conservation through traditional methods, minimising borewell digging, de-emphasising irrigated crops and propagating sustainable agriculture. "We can change the face of the villages if the government works hand in hand with us," she said.

Parachuri Jamuna, Secretary of Gramya Resource Centre that exposed the sale of girl children and is working in the Lambada tandas of Devarakonda mandal, believes the vicious cycle of debt-rotating economic base of the average Lambada family has to be broken by giving land to the landless and providing employment generation activities. An important segment of the plan should be enhancement of value of the girl child through a relentless campaign. "We have written to the CM to make it part of Janmabhoomi," she said. Education and extending the government scheme of giving Rs 5000 for a girl child would increase a girl's value and take care of the dowry evil also. But has such value enhancement made any inroads into the dowry evil in the rest of the society? Jamuna said there should be a crackdown on dowry. "In desperation we are forced to think that an iron-handed approach is called for..." she said. Nalgonda District Collector V M Manohar Prasad told Sunday Spotlight that the girl child sale should not be seen through the prism of poverty alone but also as a gender discrimination and development issue. While not denying lack of concrete action in tackling the problem, Mr Prasad said a plan of action was being formalised within a month that

would take the experiences of Tamilnadu in fighting the practice of killing girl babies. Emphasis would be placed on education and changing of the mind set. "The Lambadas see a borewell as an instrument of progress, not education." The participation of people and NGOs would be central to the government plan. Whether this heralds a new chapter of cooperation between the government and the people in fighting social evils and fostering all round development at least in this blighted part of AP remains to be seen.

R Akhileshwari
Deccan Herald
14 May 2000

Novel health plan launched

To educate people, especially of the economically weaker sections, to find natural remedies to commonly occurring ailments, the WHO-India has launched 'rational use of drugs programme'. The programme has been named *Dadi Ma Ka Batua* (Granny's First Aid Bag)".

According to a WHO release, the project will save villagers from the 'inconvenience' of visiting far-away health centres, provide cost-effective means of healing, protect them from the overdose of drugs and their side-effects. To survey and list the common ailments and the herbal plant population, 10 villages, five each in Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh, have been selected and would be provided with Ayurveda-based indigenous local therapeutic options.

Arogyadham, JRD Tata Foundation for research in Ayurveda and Yoga sciences, and the The New Way Health Organisation Himalayan Centre, under the guidance of the Delhi Society for the Promotion of the Rational Use of Drugs would form the framework of the project. □

The Observer
13 May 2000

Funds crunch hits NGO's Orissa project

FROM OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Bhubaneswar, May 12: When Milton McCann set up 11 schools in Kalahandi in 1986, he had only one dream — to provide food and education to impoverished tribal children and help them shape a future vastly different from that of their fathers.

Eleven years later, McCann's dream lay shattered when he had to close down these schools due to paucity of funds.

"It was something terrible and very difficult to come to terms with. How can you slam the door on these unfortunate children?" says the Calcutta-based social worker, who was named "Member, Order of the British Empire", for his work among the poor, especially street children.

McCann had to "pack up and leave" in 1997 because foreign funds stopped coming. "I was very sad to leave, but I had no other alternative," says the 68-year-old secretary of the Usthi Foundation, an organisation he set up in collaboration with a Swiss couple in 1977.

Impressed by his work, former chief minister Biju Patnaik gave him 200 acres of land in the Bhawanipatna and Lanjigarh blocks of Kalahandi district.

Before he left Kalahandi "for good" three years ago, McCann returned the land in his possession to the state government and asked another Christian organisation to carry on the work. McCann is now focusing on cyclone relief in Orissa. He said the Usthi Foundation was also running a hospital for tribals in Keonjhar district.

But the social worker is worried that funds will dry up. "I need money to run schools and hospitals. I do not want to relive the Kalahandi experience again," he said. To generate funds, McCann plans to open a diagnostic centre in Bhubaneswar soon.

**The Telegraph
13 May 2000**

Half-Baked Solutions Won't Work

BIG bill-boards and well publicised marches to create awareness on child labour have done precious little to bring back thousands of children from the very many small and cottage units of Firozabad. A survey conducted in 1995-96 estimated that over 21,000 child labourers in the district were engaged in 460 registered factories in the town. The number was three times as many in the unregistered units.

Absence of vocational training programme and indifferent rehabilitation have resulted in the growing number of school drop-outs from some 70-odd primary schools of the district setup for rehabilitation of these children. Extreme indigence has pushed these children into the small industrial units as labourers.

The enrolment figure is fairly high in the primary schools but most drop out before they complete class II, says a report by the 'Disha Project', run by Child Fund India in collaboration with district council of child welfare. Out of the 70 schools currently 65 are functional. Five were closed for want of budgetary support from the local administration, said an official of an NGO.

Vishwamohan Kulshreshtha, secretary of a local NGO said the financial grant his school receives is grossly inadequate. "Even the payment does not come in time".

A flat sum of Rs 800 is given to hire a building for running a school but the minimum rent prevailing in Firozabad today is not less than Rs 1000. NGOs have to bear this extra amount, Kulshreshtha said. Teachers are

paid only a paltry amount of Rs 800 a month and that too irregularly, he said.

The story of withering childhood has a universal theme whether in Firozabad or in Sivakasi, Tamil Nadu or anywhere else in the country — the grinding poverty.

"How will we survive if our children don't work", Chandradevi whose three children assist the family to earn

working children.

Employers in the organised sector are afraid of raid in which a fine of Rs 20,000 is levied for every child spotted working but its growth in the household units is unchecked. "We are aware of children being engaged in household units but it is difficult to prove them as labour. They take advantage of loopholes in the act", said one district official. According to the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, "any work that is not voluntary, that is imposed upon and keeps the child away from the education process, from the joys of childhood or endangers his/ her health falls in the realm of child labour".

According to Gupta stopping of the contract labour supply in the factories will help improve the situation to a great extent. He also mooted community sheds programmes to help people come together and work in community at a common place. He said gas cylinders have been supplied to household units engaged in bangle making to reduce the health risk emanating from kerosene as fuel for the oven.

A senior district official said on condition of anonymity that the situation is not going to improve through these measures. There is a need to give vocational training to children in schools to help them acquire skills in safer professions, he said. The town needs to build up newer avenues of works in environment-friendly industries like packaging industries, he added.

Absence of vocational training programmes and indifferent rehabilitation have resulted in the growing number of school drop-outs from some 70-odd primary schools in Firozabad District setup for rehabilitation of the child labour

its daily bread, asks.

"We know this is not the age for our children to engage in work but compulsion force us to do this. Destiny has little in store for our children". Ghansayam, who has spent almost 35 years in glass and bangles-making, rues.

District magistrate of Firozabad V K Gupta has said a sum of Rs six crores has been collected as fine from employers found engaging in work children below the age of 14 in the last seven years. This amount will be used for running welfare programmes for the families listed for having

(PTI)

**The Observer
15 May 2000**

Social groups join hands to combat AIDS

Press Trust of India

GUWAHATI

ALARMED by the rising incidence of AIDS and HIV infections in the North-East, social organisations working for them have come together to combat the menace collectively.

"In response to the enormous problem of HIV/AIDS in the north-east, a network with focus on advocacy and capacity building has been planned which would consist of a group of organisations in the seven states of the region," said Dr Chiranjeeb Kakoty of North-East Society for the Promotion of Youth and Masses.

Apart from sharing experiences, the organisations will jointly understand and analyse the problems and challenges pertaining

to the issues of HIV/AIDS of the region. "The networking will facilitate the development of programmes, contribute to the process of advocacy and convince policy makers of the need for policy reform and prompt action," said Dr Kakoty.

The networking organisations would also identify, develop and work out appropriate strategies for advocacy and devising working alliance with governments at the regional and state-level.

HIV/AIDS is now visualised as not merely a public health problem but a socio-economic issue in the perspective of the overall development. "The disease raises a unique and difficult set of issues to be addressed by virtue of its primarily sexual route of transmission and the strong ta-

boos that surround these matters in public discourse, between husband and spouse and between parents and their children," said Unicef's communication advisor Doris Grote.

The fatal and devastating consequences to the infected person, the fear and stigma that was associated in the public mind with the infection, creating an open and frank dialogue around these matters in public debate and confronting the fears were the challenges facing India's response to the epidemic, she said. The prevalence levels of HIV are still low in India, but the number of infected individuals is extremely large doubling in the last four years to an estimated 3.5 million.

In Assam alone 13 cases

were reported this year till March of which 12 are male and one female. Additional director of state aids control society Dr P C Misra said that so far 71 people in the state have been affected by AIDS while 295 have tested HIV positive.

In Manipur, the disease is prevalent mostly amongst intravenous drug users which risks spreading to neighbouring states in the north-east and major metropolitan centres. The decision to form a network of organisations was taken at a recent workshop in the north-east held here and an action plan was also worked out. "Exchange of lessons learnt, experiences and the knowledge of best practices and outcomes will contribute to improved programme design, monitoring, documentation, training and research to enhance delivery of interventions," he said.

Dr Kakoty further pointed out that because of the time factor and the existing programmes which were carried out by various organisations, it had been decided that the network, to be effective and sustainable, will take up activities in a manner which will not be a burden to the ongoing programmes. The short term objectives of the organisations would be to involve the community, service providing organisations to have sufficient capacity to increase effectiveness and efficiency, establishment of a state wise resource pool, addressing the identified gaps of existing programmes and gender sensitive programmes. □

The Observer
15 May 2000

Journalists demand probe into working of NGOs

Observer Political Bureau

NEW DELHI

THE Lok Samman Manch, a Delhi-based forum of journalists and intellectuals, has asked the Union Home Minister L K Advani, to order a thorough enquiry into the activities of the NGOs working in several parts of the country.

The Home Minister, in particular, has been asked to look into the affairs of the Almora-based non-government organisation, Sahyog, which by way of publishing a booklet about the "so-called" sexual behaviour of the Uttarakhand people in a "very disgraceful" manner has hurt the local sentiments and their sensibility.

The booklet, *AIDS Aur Hum*, has been brought out by the Almora-based voluntary organisation, Sahyog.

It is said to be a study paper, however it gives "perverted and scandalous" details of the alleged sexual behaviour of the people of Uttarakhand living there or at the outskirts of the Uttarakhand.

Also, the report tries to convince the local people as well as the funding agencies that entire region will be in the grip of AIDS disease if the voluntary agencies were not involved in the protection of the local people, who are supposed to have promiscuous sexual behaviour.

The report reveals the titillating details of so-called conversations in the crudest form of language. The publication has already sparked violent incidents throughout the Uttarakhand region.

The Lok Samman Manch demanded cancellation of the FCRA registration of the Sahyog and closure of its offices in the

entire Uttarakhand region. Besides, the forum has demanded that the guilty (Dr Abhijit Das and his wife Yashodhara Dasgupta, who run the NGO) must not be allowed to restart their activities under some other name.

Rajendra Dhasmana, a senior journalist and social activist, said the purpose would be defeated if the passports of the guilty were not impounded and all accounts of the NGO remain unfrozen.

He said a ban must be put on any future funding to Dr Das and his wife Yashodhara and other active in their voluntary organisation. He said that the humiliation inflicted upon the people of Uttarakhand was also an insult to all working people who go out of their homes to other places to earn their bread. □

The Observer
15 May 2000

All that litter is gold

THIS MIGHT be a case of the Capital, but this dustbin of history syndrome stalks most cities of India. If anything, it proves how societies and its officialdom can create piles of waste and garbage, and leave the rot to its public fate.

The Government of Delhi, stung by the Supreme Court's scathing comments in February that the litter of Delhi's streets was a direct consequence of its own lackadaisical attitude towards the human and material resources at its disposal, put a brand new scheme in place in a matter of weeks.

The city was divided into 12 zones under sanitary inspectors whose precise jurisdiction and phone numbers, both official and residential, were publicised in national dailies. One hundred and thirty-four executive magistrates were authorised to impose fines up to Rs 50 on those who put litter anywhere except in specified receptacles.

Market places were to be dotted with 3,000 yellow bins with green markings. The ordinary citizen's reaction to these moves was one of annoyance or scepticism — he was familiar with the local authorities' penchant for the dramatic and the symbolic, as in the case of a ban on smoking in public places and the periodic reminder to "say no to plastic bags". Two months later, even as the initial lack of enthusiasm would seem justified, scattered groups of Delhiites are struggling to make a difference in the management of waste generated by their professional institutions and residential complexes.

In an alternate programme, the government can emerge as an influential ally in denting the prevalent mindset about handling waste which regards it as a frivolous matter. Instead of being regarded as an instrument of unnecessary force, the government can become a catalyst of change. With each city dweller disposing about 400 gm of waste — food scrap, paper wrappers, polythene covers, broken china, an occasional bandage and mud and leaf waste — the Delhi Government is required to render invisible 800,000 metric tons of garbage every day.

Studies have shown that 54 per cent of total urban waste is produced by residences and 31 per cent by shops and offices. Sixty per cent of all this is bio-degradable and compostable, about 80 per cent of the rest can be sold and ensured entry into the recycling chain.

That waste is wealth in the wrong place became evident to women students of Miranda House in Delhi when they brought clean non-biodegradable waste from home and filled it in separate bags meant for polythene, plastic, paper card-board, glass and metal.

A ragpicker gladly bought 19 of the 20 kgs collected over two days for Rs 48. It was interesting that while cartons in which fast food is sold were acceptable for purchase, tetrapack containers, the thin covers of instant noodles and the increasingly popular thermacol glasses were not.

Clearly, for the litter on Delhi's streets, it is not the careless citizen who is alone responsible. It is also the leeway available to commercial interests in the packaging and the hospitality industry.

In 25 residential colonies, kitchen waste, both vegetarian and non-vegetarian, is put in pits. The widely shared fear of stench was invariably proved to be misplaced. After a pit is filled and sealed for eight months, rich black organic manure becomes available. Where space is a constraint, red earthworms can be used to consume fruit and vegetable waste — 100 gm of worms can eat up to 200 gm of food scrap and turn it into odour free manure in six weeks time. An alternative to worms for aerobic composting is a microbial powder which is indigenously produced and marketed. Should the government decide to shift its priorities from removal of waste to segregation and recycling, the pressure to locate new sites for dumping waste will ease.

There is no alternative to land fills for the 13 per cent of total urban waste which consists of non-degradables such as drain silt and building activity waste. Also, it can focus more effectively on isolating and sanitising bio-medical waste from nursing homes and hospitals which, while constituting the remaining two per cent of urban waste, is a huge environmental hazard if left untreated as it often happens.

Against this background, if the Delhi Government decides to review its February initiative to clean up Delhi, sanitary inspectors and magistrates can become link persons between office-bearers of residents' and traders' associations, professional institutions in their respective areas and NGOs like *Vatavaran* and *Chintan*.

The latter can offer practical help in segregating binning and waste. Instead of distributing largesse to set up eco-clubs, matching grants should be given to not only schools but also colleges for setting up paper recycling units.

The city needs enthusiastic people for this apparently "boring" task. What distinguishes a metropolitan citizen, it is said, is his (or her) willingness to invest time, money and energy to evolve a private solution to a public problem. If there is a water shortage, he will bore a well. If electricity is in short supply, he will get himself an inverter.

In keeping public spaces clean, if a citizen is

approached with imagination and some financial assistance, (but no coercion) he is bound to cooperate. That is, the history of the garbage dumps and mass waste rotting all over the place can be actually turned upside down with creative imagination, collective participation and human will.

URVASHI DHAMIJA
The Hindustan Times
17 May 2000

Rain forests

ONE of the biggest movements to save the environment has begun on the Internet where surfers are requested to just click to save the rain forests. Starting this month at the rain forest site at www.greatergood.com 16.3 square feet of land will be donated for one single click. A group of rotating sponsors has been formed. They will pay for the donations that will be distributed by Nature Conservancy.

So far the non-profit organisation has purchased 200,000 acres of rain forests in Latin America and the Caribbean. The background of the site is equally interesting. The creator of the site, who wishes to remain anonymous, started www.thehungersite.com where one can donate food to poor countries — one and three-fourths of a cup for each click. Since then the site has been deluged. Thus far, an astonishing 55 million users have donated 6,500 tonnes of food at the award-winning site.

Donors can monitor the progress of both the sites where the amount of food given or the extent of rain forest saved is displayed. This apart, there are shopping links where a portion of the total purchase would be sent to those in need, like children facing starvation in Ethiopia. — SNS.

The Statesman
17 May 2000

Shameful practice

There are over seven lakh people categorised as scavengers who carry night soil on their heads in the country and in spite of pious intentions and declarations and various schemes to end this inhuman practice, the practice of manual scavenging still continues in many parts of the country. A recent Parliamentary Standing Committee Report on Urban and Rural Development has made a scathing criticism of the government for not paying enough attention to the scheme to convert dry latrines into water units. The low-cost sanitation scheme (LCS) has hardly made any progress for lack of funds and enthusiasm on the part of the government. The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment has been unable to release adequate funds for the purpose. It is estimated that there are about 72.1 lakh dry latrines in urban areas alone and about Rs 6,057 crore is required for their conversion. But only Rs 5.90 crore was allotted in 1998-99 and no fund has been released in 1999-2000, though there was a budget estimate of Rs 34.65 crore.

The government had once declared that the system of manual scavenging would be put an end to during the Eighth Plan. But even in the Ninth Plan, against the requirement of Rs 6,057 crore, the actual allotment of funds was only Rs 2,600 crore. The inhuman practice therefore continues in many States. Some States do not even have the law which bans the employment of manual scavengers. The programme was dear to Gandhiji's heart and it is a reflection of the unconcern and inhumanity of our society that the practice is not put to an end to. There are no effective rehabilitation and resettlement schemes for those who have been employed in the shameful profession and the caste prejudices, which keep the scavengers outside society, are still strong. Unless the government seriously takes up the programme for eradication of the practice and involve social and non-governmental organisations in the task, it is doubtful whether there will be an early end to this obnoxious practice.

Deccan Herald
17 May 2000

The Indian Express
17 May 2000

Now, even the blind can surf the Internet

Chennai, May 16: The visually handicapped can now operate the computer and surf the Internet thanks to a new software developed by the department of Computer Science Engineering, IIT, Madras.

The multi-lingual software is the fruit of 10 years of research by Computer Science faculty member R Kalyanakrishnan and his students, and promises to make the operators computer literates within a week.

Compatible with Tamilnet

99, the software can also be remodelled or restructured. "This was not created for commercial gains. We want people to benefit free of cost and the software's latest version can be downloaded from the Internet in a month," Kalyanakrishnan said.

In this special software, keyboard input is echoed as speech, letter by letter, word by word, or line by line, or the entire text is read out in the language used for entry. Keyboard controls are provided to help the visually handicapped navigate the screen while editing text.

Inadequate network

The Union Minister of State for Communications, Mr Tapan Sikdar's disclosure that four lakh villages in the country still lack post offices is an eye-opening comment on our development process of the last five decades. There is no denying that the country has made big strides in various fields and achieved much in these years but the disclosure is a reminder that much more needs to be done. India boasts of the largest postal network in the world but it falls short of the need to reach every village and thus every person in the country. The same is the case in other areas like education and healthcare which are the basic services that a caring and responsible state should provide to its citizens. There are lakhs of villages in the country where even elementary schools and primary health clinics do not exist. This is a major constraint on the development of human resources and potential and it is the state which has the resources and responsibility to undertake the task of spreading these services to every part of the country, however remote and inaccessible. The communication network provided by the post offices had an important role in increasing people-to-people contact and catalysing the development process. It is also linked to the level of literacy of the people. It is no surprise that the States where communication, education, and healthcare systems are functioning well are also the leaders in human development.

It is a paradox that while there is talk of harnessing the most modern science and technology in aid of economic and social development, many of the villages in the country are in a primitive stage of development. It is not always possible to ensure even growth and development. But a minimum infrastructure of development should be put in place everywhere, which would help to prevent social and economic conflicts from assuming dangerous proportions. Recently, the government drew up an ambitious scheme to link most of the country's population through e-mail, by providing free e-mail IDs to the people through post offices. The proposal is good but there is first the need to set up post offices where they do not exist now.

Deccan Herald
18 May 2000

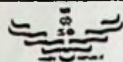
Printouts in Braille format are available in many Indian languages and English. Vidya Vriksha, a training centre for the disabled, offers a free four-day training course for instructors and volunteers from training or service institutes to train the visually handicapped in computers.

The software has been designed to operate in Tamil, Sanskrit, Hindi, Gujarati, Bengali, Gurmukhi (Punjabi), Oriya, Urdu, English, Greek, Sinhala and Japanese languages.

Transliteration and web page designing in these languages is also possible. With more emphasis on Tamil, the team has introduced a search engine in Tamil. This contains a 'text analysis' facility, besides the normal search engine features.

E-mails can be sent as well as read in Indian languages without downloading any particular font or software. The visually challenged can hear the software read-out Internet magazines and news in Tamil.

Tamil Chat site and images of ancient manuscripts and inscriptions with text in different languages are part of this package, which is yet to be named.



Financial Assistance for Research Support to Voluntary Organisations engaged in Cultural Activities

The Government of India, Ministry of Culture, Youth Affairs and Sports, Department of Culture invites applications for financial assistance from Voluntary Organisations engaged in Cultural Activities for the Year 2000-2001.

Under this Scheme, financial assistance is provided for holding of Conferences, Seminars and Symposia on important cultural matters, surveys, pilot projects etc. Organisations which are of All India character or of national fame and have been functioning for at least three years and are registered under the Societies Registration Act (XXI Of 1860) are eligible. Religious institutions, Public libraries, Universities or Schools are not eligible.

Completely documented applications should reach to the Section Officer, A&A Section, Central Secretariat Library Building, 1st Floor, Shastri Bhavan, New Delhi with recommendations of State Government/State Academies on or before 14.6.2000. An advance copy also be sent with the indication of the reference to the State Government/State Academies. Incomplete applications will not be entertained.

FORMAT

Application form for Seminar Grant

1. Name of the Organisation/Institution: _____
2. Address: _____
3. Year of establishment/Registration: _____
4. Objectives of the Organisation: _____
5. Proposed Programme in detail: _____
6. Itemwise budget: _____
7. Date of the Project/Programme/Seminar: _____
8. Grant required: _____
9. Other sources of grant: _____

(Signature of the Applicant
with designation)

Documents to be attached

- A copy of the bye-laws of the Organisation
- A copy of the certificate of registration
- Previous three year's Annual Report with a copy of the balance sheets attested by CA
- Any press clipping regarding previous Conferences/Seminars etc.

DEPARTMENT OF CULTURE, GOVERNMENT OF INDIA

Deccan Herald

18 May 2000

Gujarat NGO to pilot water study

FROM BASANT RAWAT

Ahmedabad, May 17: Vishva Gujarati Samaj, a voluntary organisation, has decided to set up a permanent trust to monitor and guide research in water management.

An expert committee will study problems relating to water scarcity to find a permanent solution to the problem in Saurashtra and north Gujarat, Samaj president Krishnakant Vakharia told *The Telegraph*.

The organisation will provide financial assistance and technical knowhow to local people to recharge wells and promote water harvesting and conservation.

Instead of giving temporary re-

lief, "Vishva Gujarati Samaj wants to provide assistance to people

to find lasting solutions, which include digging of wells. And all financial assistance will be given by Gujarati associations in UK and Africa, too, have promised help. Asked how the Samaj intended to help the drought affected, Vakharia said: "We will help voluntary organisations doing excellent work in rural areas."

Vakharia has appealed to Gujarati associations in 128 countries to liberally donate money to the Samaj for drought relief. Earlier this week, the organisation held a meeting in Mumbai, which was attended by prominent Gujaratis who showed keen interest in providing assistance to the

drought-hit through NGOs.

The president said the Federation of Gujarati Associations of North America has already set up Gujarat Drought Relief Fund. Gujarati associations in UK and

On Monday, the Samaj held a meeting to discuss ways and means to "find a permanent solution" to the water problem. It was attended by noted Gandhian, C. Vaidya, representatives from NGOs and two Gujarati industrialists from Mumbai. They also passed a

resolution, condemning Medha Patkar, who is spearheading an agitation against the Narmada dam.

The Samaj appealed Patkar to appreciate the genuine demands of the people of Saurashtra and north Gujarat and to allow them to use Narmada water.

Mumbai-based industrialist Chandresh Virvadia, who is running a cattle camp in his hometown Radhanpur, said he has been getting an overwhelming response from philanthropists who have donated Rs 1 crore.

Virvadia who was here to attend the meeting says he requires Rs 2 crore to feed 5,500 cattle-heads till monsoon.

The Telegraph
18 May 2000

This Gujarat village found water for all

SHOMA CHAKRABORTY
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

SAMADHIYALA (Rajkot), May 18. — This prosperous village, just 20 km from Rajkot town, has made a name for its excellent water management programme. Here too, things may go wrong. But only if the rain gods play truant for four more months.

A model village with a benevolent dictator driving it to prosperity, Raj-Samadhiyala is developing chinks in its armour. The Aaji river that waters this village and the ones nearby have gone dry. The dam which used to quench the thirst of the whole district as also of Rajkot is a play field for children. The 450 check dams the village had built to stop water from running away and make it seep down to raise the water table have been dry since April last year.

But the village is not overly worried. The water management schemes started by the village sarpanch, Hardevsinh Balwantsinh Jadeja, are paying rich dividends with water available in all taps.

The income of the families here is way above the state average and the neighbourhood is spotlessly clean. The vil-

DRINKING WATER SCHEME

CALCUTTA, May 18 — Help Age India has inaugurated a drinking water scheme in Rajasmand district of Rajasthan for the supply of drinking water to drought-hit victims.

Nearly 20,000 people of 20 villages will benefit from this new water supply scheme. Help Age will contribute 3 per cent of the cost of the water tankers. This NGO — with the help of other local agencies — had already started the second phase of water support programme in the districts of Pali and Barmer districts of Rajasthan. Help Age has already commissioned more than 40 projects in Rajasthan. — SNS

lagers follow a strict penal code laid down by the 11-member development committee. Even littering attracts fine. And the rules, in force for more than two decades now, have kept the crime rate down at zero, the sarpanch claims. A strict disciplinarian, the man is a law unto himself. Even chewing paan masala and littering the village with polybags are banned.

There is enough water in the wells for the animals, but some poor people have already started feeling the pinch of water scarcity. A local potter says that there is enough water for his household needs, but for his professional needs he has to walk to a well at some distance.

Jadeja's schemes, in place since 1978 when he returned to the village after completing his

MA in English, have resulted in obvious all-round prosperity.

A local beggar whom he helped avail government loans in 1990s now owns land, a thriving shop and a big house with a dish on top and two colour TVs. His daughter Gayatri, a standard IX student, wants to be a nurse.

"Ten per cent of the people in each society are mischief-monsters. The best way to combat them is to get together the remaining 90 per cent who are good. Then you can easily curb the law-breakers using their own technique," the modern-day Hammurabi says.

Asked if he had contingency plans for a weak monsoon again, the sarpanch says, "I think it will rain this year".

Many other village-heads come to him to learn water-

harvesting techniques. The village has many fissure rocks which let the water seep down. By building dykes and check dams to trap water, the villagers of Raj-Samadhiyala have made good use of available water since 1986-87. This has recharged the water table in the entire area, and many villages within a four-to-five-km radius have benefited from the scheme.

"But it is a dry, arid zone, declared a desert by the government years ago. Even sub-soil water dries up very fast. If it does not rain this summer, we will have to bore really deep, up to 500 feet. But water may still not be potable," Jadeja says.

But as the village has also checked soil erosion by planting trees, there is no immediate danger. "We are all well-off today," says 70-year-old Narshibhai Dholasiya. "When I was young, there was no security for us in terms of both money as well as thieves and vandals but, today we are very secure and safe. There is no need for us to go looking for jobs if there is a drought. There is enough money to see us through for a while even if the wells dry up," the man, whose wife is a member of the gram sabha, says.

Operation cooperation

Deccan Herald
19 May 2000

Hulgol, a nondescript village, is about 15 kms from Sirsi in Uttara Kannada district. And yet, it is an important centre for a very valid reason: Some 80 years ago a cooperative society was established here for needy farmers from surrounding villages. This village society started in 1919 has even bagged a "model cooperative society in the State" award.

The cooperative society was formed at Hulgol, an important centre for many villages like Sonda, Arasapura, Bhairumbe and Bommanahalli. The region is known locally as Thotada Seeme.

Some progressive farmers and freedom fighters from nearby villages in Sirsi taluk, started the society with a subscription of Rs 5 per member. Today this bustling farmers' society functions from its computerised administrative building, built in 1965, at Bhairumbe, next to Hulgol.

Originally, the society's basic objective was to help needy farmers under heavy debts, caused by recurring crop losses and high interests paid on outstanding debts. It was to keep poor farmers away from greedy money lenders and land-grabbers. Gradually, with a growing membership and the changing needs of farmers, the society further expanded its service activities.

"Ours is not a credit cooperative society but a service society concerned about members' family welfare as a whole. Health, education, marriage, marketing of crop yields, banking, we have various welfare schemes for our members," says M R Hegde, secretary of the society.

To make available quality goods at reasonable rates to farmers near their village, the society runs provision and hardware shops besides its administrative office at Bhairumbe. The villagers can buy provisions, farming tools on cash or credit basis. It saves time and money, for the farmers need not go to Sirsi, which is located about 10 to 20 kms from their villages.

The society has provided about Rs 6.5 crore for cultivation and other loans to its members, in 1999. And under the 'Vidya Sree' and 'Vadhu Sree' compul-

sory deposits scheme, about five crore has been collected to take care of their children's education and marriage. In addition to their 2,000-odd members, there are about 800 shareholders in the society. Among the members are landless agricultural labourers, artisans, women and backward class groups.

Apart from loans at low interest rates, which enable farmers to get better crops using quality seeds, manure and improved farming techniques, the society takes the marketing responsibility to help farmers get better rates for their crops.

The members having delivered their crops to the society, after the harvest for disposal at the market in Sirsi, collect their shares from sales, either on the same day or on the next day.

The society runs a flour mill and an oil mill at Bhairumbe for the local farmers. There is also a drier machine to dry coconut and cardamom, which are to be preserved in good condition till its use or sale.

The Hulgol Service society maintains some 200 gobar gas units in nearby villages with technical assistance from the khadi and village employment commissioner.

The Society's service activities include clearing members' water, phone and power bills, supply of vessels, pandals and chairs for functions, offering emergency loans during a death in the family and many other such programmes and schemes.

"We invest our personal touch and rapport into our work. The members often bring us their family or personal problems. It may be a family dispute, a domestic problem or something which has no relevance to the work expected of a credit society. But ours is a village society which has retained the same membership for two to three generations, ever since our society started 80 years ago, that is 26 years before Independence. It is mutual faith and the cooperative spirit shown by the members which makes our Society different," claims N M Hegde, president.

**S V UPENDRA
CHARYA**

16 NGOs lose ministerial sanctions

Sanjay Singh
New Delhi

THE HUMAN Resource Development Ministry has stopped grants to Gandhi Peace Foundation, Bharatiya Vidya Bhawan, Vivekanand Nidhi and at least 13 other non-governmental organisations (NGOs) for their failure to submit utilisation certificates to the ministry. These organisations were categorised as the one which were engaged in strengthening culture and value in education.

The annual report published by the HRD Ministry says despite repeated reminders these NGOs did not submit audited accounts reports or utilisation certificates to the ministry.

They also did not forward any reasons for that. The ministry therefore decided that no further grants will be sanctioned to them.

Gandhi Peace Foundation, New Delhi, for instance was given Rs 3.5 lakh for strengthening culture and value in education in 1996-97. The HRD ministry was subsequently not informed of as to how the amount was spent.

A Gandhi Peace Foundation functionary, however, claimed that they did not take grants from the Government. They had other sources of funding thus the Government contention of stopping grants to the foundation was not tenable.

Grants to the Delhi based AJAET was stopped on same grounds and the report says "no further grant has been sanctioned" due to "audited accounts or utilisation certificate were not received from the agencies concerned in spite of repeated reminders". But the appendix III indicates that Rs 1.73 lakh were given to AJAET for a project on music and

sports to reduce dropout. Calcutta based Vivekanand Nidhi is another such NGO. It has been given Rs 1.53 lakh grant last year to undertake yoga project.

The ministry gave Rs 1.04 lakh to Bharatiya Vidya Bhawan, Chandigarh; Akhil Bharatiya Mega Svargiya Samiti, Maharashtra, was given Rs 4.97 lakh; Krishak Vikas Samiti was given Rs Rs 2.33 lakh.

Grants to other NGOs which received it in 1997-98 were stopped up on same pretext. Such NGOs include Thakur Hariprasad Institute of Research, KJ Somaiya Bharatiya Sanskrit Peetham, Sirsa Education Society, AJAET and DISHA.

The ministry, however, chose another set of 21 NGOs, including SANKALP, SPIC-MACAY, Young Envoys International, Citizenship Dev, IIRC, CP Ramaswamy Iyer Foundation, Uttpal Dutt Foundation on International Theatre Studies, to place under same category — strengthening culture and value in education and were given grants preceding financial year.

The grants are given to them for undertaking projects for activities ranging from lecture performance-cum-workshop, value based living through art and culture, teachers training, seminar, education in theatre making, classical dance to revive folk arts in schools.

The recently circulated National Curriculum Framework for School Education defines value education as the one which should help eliminate obscurantism, religious fanaticism, violence, superstition, fatalism, nurturing contents essential to national identity and India's common cultural heritage.

**The Pioneer
19 May 2000**

A BILLION DOLLAR QUESTION FOR OUR FAMILY PLANNERS!

Sanjay Singh

IF SOMEONE were to tell you that the money allocated for population programmes are grossly under-utilised in our country, for years and years together — I'm sure you would shake your head in disbelief. One probably anticipates paucity of funds in Government programmes, but certainly not this. The birth of India's billionth baby last week, underlined the population scenario of the country, but it is a lesser worry, than that of funds to the same being left untouched.

While the Government made tall claims of family planning and welfare measures, the department did not even utilise the Budgetary provisions under various heads. Even in critical areas like reproductive and child health project, or social marketing of Nirodh, money over hundreds of crores remained unspent, year after year.

The latest report of Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) says, "persistent large unspent provisions were indicative of the unrealistic Budgetary assumptions by the department and its failure to take into account, the trend of disbursements of the preceding years". This has been pointed out in the previous two reports, but no remedial action was taken by the department to avoid the large unspent money earmarked for various projects.

In the year 1998-99 for instance, the gross unspent provision was Rs 310.54 crore, but the department tried to offset that with an excess disbursement of Rs 204.31 crore, under various other heads. Even then it could not spend Rs 106.23 crore from what was allotted to it under Budgetary provisions.

Take the "Reproductive and Child Health" (RCH) project, which was started with the need to re-orient the family planning programme and broaden its canvas. Having named it as it has been, the RCH aims to broaden the scope of the scheme — covering family planning, apart from maternity and child welfare, immunisation, safe motherhood, adolescent education, reproductive tract infection, sexually transmitted infections, sexual awareness, and male responsibility.

Budgetary provisions were made for this vital project under three different heads. Under the major head numbered as 2211, total provisions for the preceding

year amounted to Rs 563 crore - the department, however, could spend only 448 crore, and the rest remained unspent. The same applied to two other heads of RCH where crores of rupees could be spent, because of slow progress in the project.

The National Institute of Health and Family Welfare had so much of unspent balance of last year available to it, that it could not spend from the fresh Budgetary provisions made to it.

The official reason for unspent provision in areas like free supply of family planning material and family welfare programmes run by the Ministries like Defence and Railways - was lesser supply by the firms due to sample failure and lesser demand by different states and ministries.

For taking population control measures amongst people belonging to lower income group, the government provided Rs 70 crore for "social marketing of Nirodh" but the money amounting to more than a quarter of the total amount, remained unspent. The reason given was "less demand from distributing companies, non-receipt of stores, and non-submission of bills by the distributors".

Another important aspect in popularising family planning measures was the involvement of voluntary agencies. The Government allocated over 8 crore rupees, but the department could spend only half of it. By the official explanation offered, it seems that NGOs have lost interest in the programme. "Receipt of fewer proposals from voluntary organisations, lesser activity undertaken due to economy instructions and PVOH scheme implemented with US aid, came to end during 1998-99", was cited as the reason.

Selected area programmes, including India Population Project, taken up by different states with financial assistance from external funding agencies like the World Bank, UNFPA, DANIDA and Overseas Development Agency - have the aim of reducing maternal and child mortality, morbidity and birth rates. Under the project, manpower skill were to be upgraded through training, programme management and construction of institutional building for service delivery and

training. During last year, the unspent provisions of the project are as high as 38 and 71 per cent.

However, there is one instance when the Government gave an additional grant of 88 lakh to International Institute of

Population Science, Mumbai, without prior approval of Parliament, thus attracting provisions of "New Instrument Service".

The Pioneer

19 May 2000

3 rural women take tips from IIM

Ahmedabad, May 19: Time: Morning 7 O' Clock.

Place: Agriculture Produce Market Committee, Ahmedabad.

It is a great mess. Hundreds of trucks loaded with tonnes of vegetables are lined up in queue. Inside the market, the air is even more scarce. It is a huge trading ring of 400 shops. Crores of rupees are transacted in hours. At any point of time, 50,000 men scream, shout, gesticulate, argue and finally strike day's deals.

It is a madhouse. But Dinaben Parmar - the lone woman in the ring - is a no-nonsense person. She stands confidently in this men's domain. Her other two colleagues sit in their recently rented small shop. Labhuben supervises the operations while Ushaben holds the cash-box. The three describe it "a fight against all-odds" - a fight which has demolished one of the male bastions in grassroots-economics in the country for the first time.

After a protracted battle with the State government, the market administrative body and then a strong lobby of middlemen, the three women have been courageously pushing through their agenda of "fair trade" under the banner of their cooperative - Gujarat Rajya Mahila Sewa Sahakari Sangh for almost six months.

The basic idea behind this was to prevent the vegetable growers - mainly poor farmers - and the vendors from huge financial losses as the middlemen and traders heavily manipulated the market committee like stocks in the share market. The cooperative has its own strong membership of about 21,000 growers.

After incurring heavy losses initially, this cooperative sought help of country's best management brains at Indian Institute of Management to suggest some remedies.

And today, the cooperative has been strictly toeing the line showed by the IIM. But this has not made all the things easier for the women who are managing the shop out in the trading ring round the clock in turns.

For the three women, the struggle with their men counterparts started from day one. "They take every opportunity to make us feel that we cannot survive in this trade. Right from parking rows of trucks in front of our shop to painting

"Beware of these women."

The Indian Express
20 May 2000

Eco meet in B'lore from August 12

DH News Service

BANGALORE, May 17 Programme for Environmental Awareness in Schools (PEAS) is organising the third National Environment Conference in Bangalore from August 12 to 15 in which around 2000 students from different parts of the country will participate.

The conference with the theme 'We can make the difference' aims at educating children on various environmental issues with political solutions and down-to-earth action plans.

Talking to reporters here, PEAS National Chairman Dr Ken R Gnanakan said the four-day conference which would be held that campus of Bishop Cotton Girls School feature a march on the opening day with children assembling in front Vidhana Soudha to present their agenda.

The theme would be covered through talks by eminent environmentalist including Bittu Sehgal, Suresh Heblikar and Arundathi Roy and discussions by the children.

An eco-mela is being set up which would be open for Bangalore schools right through the conference. Children are putting together exhibits made out of waste during the conference. The PEAS is hoping that children will go back challenged to be better eco-conscious citizens, and long term change will result in their own communities. It is also hoped that teachers will be challenged to integrate environmental awareness into all their teaching and that schools will be challenged to become eco-conscious models in society, said Dr Ken.

The first conference was held at Delhi in 1996 and the second at Mumbai in 1998.

**Deccan Herald
18 May 2000**

**Deccan Herald
20 May 2000**

Desilting tanks with a difference

DH News Service

BANGALORE, May 19 Grama Vikasa, an NGO in the drought-prone Kolar district, has set an example to the government by desilting the tanks with the help of man power alone, without employing earth movers.

Grama Vikasa, situated in onnasettahalli, a remote village in Mulbagal taluk of Kolar district, has taken up this novel experiment to demonstrate to the government, which has taken up a scheme to desilt thousands of tanks by using earth movers, that it can be done by making use of the abundantly available manpower.

Established in 1979, the NGO has desilted eight tanks in the taluk till now by involving villagers and it is in the process of desilting another three tanks

whereas the government's scheme is yet to make a head-way.

Mr M V N Rau, the Executive Director of Grama Vikasa, says that tanks can be desilted at a very low cost by making use of the villagers instead of spending so much of money on the earth movers. Citing the example of Doddathammanahalli tank, he says, "The organisation is spending only 7 lakh for desilting the tank whereas the government would have spent at least 25 lakh for the same work." Explaining the experiment, he says that loans are provided to the villagers through the self-help groups of Grama Vikasa and the money will be judiciously used by the villagers themselves. The project not only provides employment to the under-employed people of the respective villages, but also ensures that the money that is

spent on the project remains within the villages itself as the villagers themselves are workers.

The villagers get employment for several months, get fertile soil for their land apart from getting their tank desilted. But, all that they have to pay for these benefits is just 25 per cent of the amount spent on the project, says Mr Rau. If the loan is provided from a bank, then the organisation takes care of the interest and the villagers will have to repay the loan. The experiment, which aims at making the villages self-reliant, has started showing results, but the villagers are yet to reap the rich dividends for their efforts as rains have failed in the last two seasons, he points out. Grama Vikasa, which works in more than 130 villages of three taluks in Kolar district, has plans of covering all tanks in Mulbagal taluk.

SEWA to rescue women relief workers of Gujarat

By Leena Misra

AHMEDABAD: Dahiben, a skilled craftswoman of a drought-affected village in Santalpur taluka of Banaskantha district walked eight kilometres to pawn two silver pots, an heirloom passed down from her grandmother, to pay off the overdue land tax so that she could participate in the government's relief work.

Pawn-brokers paid her a pittance, but the amount qualified her to work in the relief sites. The dextrous Dahiben turned to spade from needlework. The state government's decision to pay double the wages to pregnant women unable to work at relief sites in drought-affected areas may just be one ray of hope for the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) which has been advocating cases like that of Dahiben.

SEWA developed an action plan to provide these women with employment opportunities covering the drought-affected areas of Surendranagar, Kutch, Patan and Banaskantha districts over a 90-day period from (April 2000 to

July 2000). The arrangement is to have the women create an embroidered sample and then deposit it at SEWA's 'craft sample bank'. "We then ask them to create an exact replica from the raw material which SEWA provides and put it up for sale so that the original design does not fade away," says SEWA founder Ela Bhatt.

"Women tend to trade off the samples and even their jewellery in times of drought which we plan to check," observes SEWA general secretary Reema Nanavaty.

In the two-day sale of the embroidery work done by over 3,000 women from Banaskantha and Kutch, the first of which was held at Ms Bhatt's home, SEWA collected nearly Rs 2 lakhs and launched the 'SEWA fights drought' project. "First I thought my place should not be used commercially, then I decided that before asking others, let me begin from here," Ms Bhatt told TOI.

Beginning with a working capital of Rs 50 lakhs, SEWA found it difficult to spend on marketing, but the state government's allocation of Rs 1.5 crore for the project made things easier, said Ms Bhatt explaining the delay in the initiative. Besides, the Gujarat Water Supply and Sewerage Board has also approved 500 roof-water harvesting schemes by SEWA, "where the people in the drought-affected area would dig their own tanks and save on labour," Ms Nanavaty said.

According to a SEWA estimate, 90 per cent of the workforce in the government-sponsored relief work, focused on digging of pits to collect rain water, comprised women. "Of these 10,000 SEWA members are highly skilled artisans spread over six talukas and 56 villages," Ms Nanavaty said.

At SEWA, besides embroidering they would be trained in masonry, sewing and plantation to raise nurseries. "Can you imagine these dextrous fingers digging?" Ms Bhatt said, adding, "We have insisted that the government make this a permanent plan in all drought and famine relief operations to spare women from relief sites."

SEWA thus helps the women

Contd...

SAVE THE MOTHER TO SAVE THE CHILD

The Hindustan Times
21 May 2000

FORGET THE fact that India's population has crossed the billion mark. What we should definitely mourn is that every day around 330 Indian women die in pregnancy or childbirth. Worse, adequate nutrition during growing years and pregnancy, and medical care during childbirth, are all we need to prevent most of these deaths.

India's maternal mortality rate is among the world's highest. Indeed, it is risky becoming a mother in India, more so if one is poor and malnourished. Norway is the safest among the 106 countries listed by Save the Children in its *State of the World's Mothers 2000*; Canada and Australia follow it. The US and Switzerland tie for the fourth position. India ranks 85th; the African country of Niger is at the bottom — one woman in nine dies in pregnancy or childbirth there, compared to one in 7,300 in Norway.

The report says that the health of mothers and children is inextricably intertwined; female education and access to, and use of, family planning services make a vital difference. It also notes that national wealth alone does not guarantee the welfare of mothers and children, as even in wealthy countries there are pockets where women and children fare badly.

The top 10 countries did well both on the women's health and education front — each had a female literacy rate of over 90 per cent and the lifetime risk of a woman dying in childbirth was less than one in 3,000. Also, infant mortality ranged from four to eight per 1,000 live births.

With one in every 22 women dying in childbirth, with over half the country's population illiterate and 115 as the mortality rate for infants, India has to go a long way before it can catch with others.

Further, the White Ribbon Alliance, working for safe motherhood in India, says 80 per cent of all maternal deaths here are due to the following six reasons — hemorrhage, eclampsia, obstructed labour, sepsis, unsafe abortions and anaemia. Most of these can be treated in hospital but, unfortunately, only 25 per cent of all deliveries in India take recourse to medical facility. In rural India, it's a

mere fraction of all deliveries. For every woman who dies at least 30 develop a chronic health problem. No wonder, their babies themselves stand a poor chance of survival. The lesson is: Look after the mother to save the child.

Abolish child labour

AT A recent NGO-media meet arranged by the Inter UN Agency Group on Child Labour, it was clear that child labour is moving from factories into homes. This change has made it difficult to tackle the problem, agreed NGO activists and journalists, as the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986, excludes from its ambit those who work from home and are doing contractual labour.

The law prohibits employment of children below 14 years of age in specified hazardous occupations and processes. In December 1996, the Supreme Court ordered withdrawal of children from hazardous occupations and the constitution of a welfare fund for them; it also regulated working conditions in non-hazardous occupations.

Journalist Dr Asha Krishnakumar narrated how children working in factories in Sivakasi were tutored to cite their age as 14 even though they were 10 years old. Employers procure false medical certificates to justify the claim. When photographer Anita Khemka went to Sivakasi on assignment, she made it a point to ask them whether or not they enjoyed their work. The unanimous answer: No; they all also wanted to study.

NGO representatives felt that all forms of child labour should be eliminated. Since only 112 million out of 203 million children in the school-going age are actually in schools, it means the remaining 91 million are potential child labourers.

In June 1999, India became party to an International Labour Organisation Convention for eliminating the worst forms of child labour. The convention comes into force in November 2000. This means India will have to recognise that children are those who are under 18 years — and not under 14 years as it currently exists in India — establish monitoring mechanisms and ensure effective rehabilitation of child labourers.

Shree Venkatram

P&G ties up with UNICEF

MUMBAI, May 19 (DHNS)

Procter & Gamble India has tied up with UNICEF to launch 'Project Poshan', a special programme aimed at combating the crisis of malnutrition in India. It has targeted a minimum of Rs 50 lakh every year for the next three years.

Project Poshan will support three projects. One is the adolescent girls initiative in Mumbai which will provide education to adolescent girls on health problems and intake of the right kind of nutrients including micronutrients like iron and folic acid.

The second is a women's parenting network in Chennai to provide information on good care for women during pregnancy and the third consists of day-care projects in Jaipur through increased nutrient intake.

Deccan Herald
20 May 2000

Contd....

produce the samples, market them and also help them maintain the original motifs. The sale features items with small applique motifs on cushion covers and kurtas ranging between Rs 10 and Rs 200, and will be hosted at residential societies in Paldi, Maninagar, Satellite, Ghatlodia, Ambawadi, Manekbag and Bopal areas in Ahmedabad.

"Besides, we also plan to host them in Mumbai, Vadodara and Rajkot," says Ms Bhatt.

The women started working on May 2, 2000 and have been assured an earning of Rs 40 daily, similar to the relief wages. As many as 16,000 women are likely to be involved in this. "Our biggest concern is that the women have to leave their children unattended, so we wanted something they could do at home," she said.

The Times of India
18 May 2000

THE Guinness Book has no mention of it, but Majuli in the Brahmaputra due north of Jorhat in upper Assam is supposed to be the world's biggest river island.

A sub-division of Jorhat district, the island is home to a number of famous Vaishnav Sattras, or monasteries, which are repositories of Assam's traditional Sattriya culture, including the Sattriya dance, now trying for recognition as a classical Indian dance form, and Sattriya theatre (bhaona).

But the flood-prone island is under constant threat from the mighty Brahmaputra with erosion taking a heavy toll of its area. It has been estimated that erosion has reduced the area of the island from 1,200 sq km in 1950 to just about 800 sq km at present.

Now Majuli is likely to get a new lease of life, once the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) declares it a World Heritage Site.

A team of experts from the

Island in the stream

National Museum, New Delhi, recently visited the island to gather details about its cultural heritage.

It will prepare a report on the Vaishnav Sattras and submit it to the Centre for forwarding to UNESCO for approval.

Once Majuli is declared a World Heritage Site, UNESCO is expected to release funds for the development of the island. The bulk of these funds will go into preservation and restoration of the many Sattras which dot the island, some dating

back to the 16th century, as well as ancient manuscripts and artefacts stored in them.

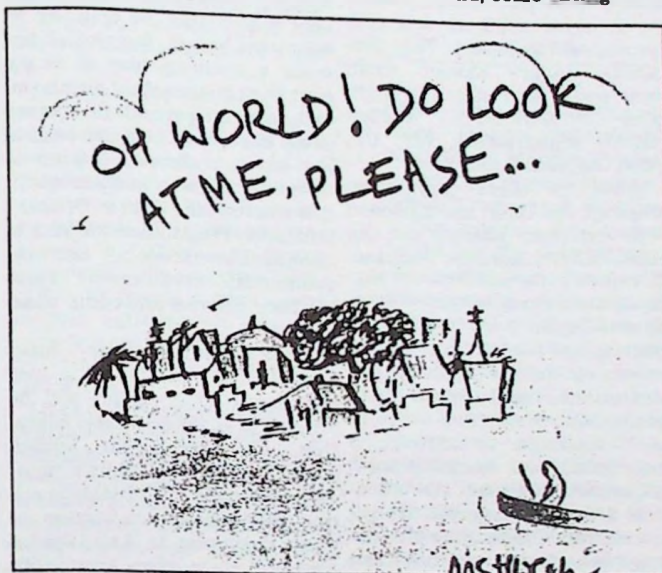
Floods have already destroyed many of these manuscripts and artefacts. A couple of years back, a Central team visited the island and recommended that it be declared a World Heritage Site.

The Majuli Island Protection and Development Council, of which Rajya Sabha member Dr Arun Sarma is president, had made a similar proposal, but nothing much came out of it.

Floods have also ruined much of the roads on the island. Assam Governor Lt Gen (retd) S K Sinha, during a recent visit to the island, could not visit all the Sattras due to bad road conditions. The Army has been trying to repair the damaged roads, with a grant of Rs 7.5 lakh from the Jorhat district administration.

Majuli, incidentally, was where social worker Sanjoy Ghosh was kidnapped and killed by ULFA militants some years back.

— Utpal Bordoloi



Cost Effective

It was a kinder, gentler face of multinational companies that we saw when five of them recently joined a UN initiative to slash prices for drugs to treat HIV-related infections. Pharmaceutical giant Glaxo has reduced its drug prices by a whopping 85 per cent, bringing its fixed dose combination therapy drug down from Rs 710 a day to Rs 88. Though HIV has no known cure, those who have contracted the virus can live healthy and productive lives for a considerable period of time if they are able to combat the infections which attack their depressed immune systems. Drugs have already been found effective in reducing the chances of mother-to-child transmission. Indian companies, to their credit, have been marketing HIV combination therapy drugs at less than a fourth of the cost of those sold in the US. However, for a majority of Indian patients, the drug still remains out of reach. The multinationals' price reduction will further impact on the Indian market and this is good news for those infected with the virus. The spread of HIV is of particular concern in India which is witnessing the terrifying phenomenon of the virus appearing in combination with relatively common ailments — earlier tuberculosis and lately kala-azar, a disease prevalent largely in the north. The cunning virus is able to mutate itself and become ever more drug resistant as the fight against it continues. For long, we in India have accused the West and donor agencies of exaggerating the threat of HIV in India — the country is poised to

become the AIDS capital of the world in the not too distant future.

Indeed, non-government agencies working in the field of HIV/AIDS have been accused of subverting our culture which is often mistaken treated as an inherent barrier against unsafe sexual practices. Recently, an NGO couple was arrested and booked under the harsh National Security Act for bringing out a booklet documenting risky sexual behaviour and its relation to the spread of HIV based on real life experiences. Statistics tell a frightening story — the virus has been growing at an alarming rate, from 2.5 per 1,000 in 1986 to 17 in 1996. The virus normally attacks those in their prime which can have catastrophic socio-economic consequences. In Africa which is facing the brunt of the epidemic, many regions no longer have young people leaving the elderly to look after the very young. In India, despite the ambitious AIDS control programme, officialdom is yet to take the issue seriously. Policy alone does not ensure protection from HIV. Apart from unsafe sexual practices, contaminated blood and infected hypodermic needles encourage the spread of the virus. Cheaper drugs alone cannot fight the vicious virus, people must know how to protect themselves. This requires a comprehensive information, education and communication campaign along with the strengthening of general health services. Alongside, societal support systems have to be set up for those infected; such people often find themselves treated as outcasts who are physically and emotionally isolated. An epidemic which is spreading at such a rapid rate has to be combated on a war footing. The price reduction is valuable ammunition in this battle.

The Times of India
22 May 2000

A forgotten promise ?

TEN years after the *Education for All* promise, India has a 12 percent jump in literacy to boast about. But the pledge wrapped in the *Education for All* goal remains elusive, even if one overlooks the low qualifying test for literacy in this country.

It may be recalled that a decade ago, representatives from 155 countries and 150 organisations pledged to provide education for all by the year 2000. This still-elusive promise came at a meeting held in Jomtien, Thailand.

But the 'nineties which saw a revolution in communications and information technologies, galloping globalisation, and the collapse of the East Bloc, also saw the collapse of financial markets, the spread of HIV/AIDS and increasing poverty and ethnic conflict. Many of those governments which made the *Education for All* pledge might be too embarrassed to recall it, having clearly failed in this attempt.

At Jomtien, the statesmen had then pledged: "Every person — child, youth and adult — shall be able to benefit from educational opportunities designed to meet their basic learning needs". Some weeks back, the World Education Forum met again in Dakar, Senegal to take stock of how far Planet Earth had come in meeting this goal.

UNDP, the United Nations Development Programme, evaluated India's achievements in a cautiously polite sounding tone. It said: "Ten years after Jomtien... India has significant achievements to show in the area of education... Recent surveys on literacy rates indicate major progress in the 90s. National Sample Survey Estimates say literacy has increased by 12 per cent in a period of six years from 52.21 per cent in 1991 to 64.20% in 1997." So, in the polite world of international fora, even if India didn't win, she didn't lose! Several UN agencies — including the UNDP, UNICEF, UNESCO, UNFPA and the International Labour Organisation — are backing the Indian government's attempt to meet its *Education for All* commitment, said the UNDP.

According to UNDP, a US\$20

million Support to Community-based Primary Education (SCOPE) programme focuses on children who are marginalised by the formal education system. Specially working children, tribals and Scheduled Castes, minorities, disabled children, and children in remote areas. This programme covers blocks, small towns and urban slums in eight states — Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, MP, UP, Orissa, Rajasthan and Bihar.

"Girls of these population groupings are often marginalised to the extreme," pointed out the UNDP. SCOPE aims at enhancing capacity for community participation in effective school management. It also tries to boost the performance of primary school teachers for the use of interactive, child-centered and gender-sensitive methods of teaching in multi-grade classroom. In addition, it wants to address "social factors" that adversely affect the attendance and performance of school-age children. One wishes that the village school girls and boys can feel a difference in their school room from this.

UNDP, rather cautiously, points to India's failings on the education front. Gender, regional, sectional and caste disparities continue to "plague India's progress in the goal of universalisation of elementary education". Besides, a "significant proportion" of students continue to drop out due to socio-economic and cultural factors and also due to a shortage of teachers, unsatisfactory quality of education, or a lack of adequate infrastructure.

"India is home for more than 300 million illiterates," says the UNDP. It points out that even though the enrolment of girls has grown at a much faster rate than for boys in the last decade, the gap continues to be large. There are only six girls for every eight boys sitting on school benches.

Even if the size of India's total enrolment in schools has been impressive, population growth in the last few decades has also been high. "Comparison with the total population in the school-going age shows that several million children are still outside the fold of primary schooling," notes the

UNDP.

Elsewhere, Asian countries are forging ahead, say the reports. China and Indonesia are close to achieving full primary enrolment. Both countries have raised their literacy rates to 83.9 and 98 per cent respectively. By doubling its education budget, Bangladesh has made a quantum leap of 19 per cent in primary school enrolment and over 25 percent in literacy (from 35 per cent to 61 per cent) in less than a decade! Quality is becoming an issue in India too. In this country, the District Primary Education Programme is trying to decentralise schools, increase community involvement, raise teachers' salaries and equip classrooms.

Thai Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai says that under a new law, every Thai citizen will be entitled to 12 years of basic education, and adds that human resources are his country's "most valuable assets". South Asia is getting the dubious distinction of being compared to Sub-Saharan Africa. One in every four South Asian children is out of school, and adult literacy stands at 56 per cent in the region. "Much of the Asian paradox can be traced to investment, or lack of it, in basic education," says the World Education Forum (WEF).

WEF makes some interesting points that give us food for thought:

- During school hours, in the teeming cities of the Third World, children can be seen shining shoes, washing cars, pushing trolleys or collecting refuse.

- While the digital revolution offers real opportunities for education, the fact is that information and communication technology is a costly investment. There is still much to be said for using a mix of appropriate technologies — including the less costly "old reliables", radio and TV. Interestingly, because of India's uncertain attitude towards opening up radio to the non-profit sector, proposals to open community radio stations from educational institutions like Shantiniketan, National Law School of India, Jamia Milia and IGNOU are gathering dust or have been discouraged from coming up

or not approved as yet.

- Education is the single most important means to fight poverty; no country has ever succeeded in overcoming poverty without education. Education should reach the unreached. Enhancing learning improves the quality of life.

- The concept of 'learning throughout life' has replaced the traditional distinction between the school years and what comes after. Adaptability and flexibility are the new survival skills, essential to meet the challenges of a rapidly changing world.

- Basic education is a moving target. Most countries have chosen to restrict the definition to primary schooling and adult literacy. But in many others, it now encompasses not only early childhood care and education but also junior secondary schooling and even full secondary education.

- Poverty is the most important single factor explaining failure or inability to meet target goals set by governments.

South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa have been singled out for presenting "a much more serious challenge than world averages imply and require particular attention if *Education for All* is to be achieved".

FREDERICK NORONHA
Deccan Herald
22 May 2000

NGOs rally for Sahyog

• **NEW DELHI (UNI):** Over 200 social activists held a protest demonstration on Friday at the Uttar Pradesh Bhavan here to demand the release of four Almora-based Sahyog activists who had been detained under the National Security Act for publishing a controversial booklet on AIDS.

Joining the demonstrators, comprising NGOs and women's groups, eminent journalist and Rajya Sabha member Kuldip Nayar said he had written a letter to the home minister, saying that the move was unjust and violative of the rule of law.

The Telegraph
20 May 2000

Farmers can now cultivate the computer

Frederick Noronha

Pondicherry

CAN THE information technology (IT) revolution help the Indian farmer battle the vagaries of nature and the resultant drought and floods?

Yes, say computer scientists, pointing to what's already happening both in India and other pockets of the globe.

"In some parts of Jammu and Kashmir, farmers are already monitoring their fields by sitting at home. We have imported sophisticated equipment from Austria for this purpose," said Dattatraya S Vhatkar of the Chandigarh-based Central Scientific Instruments Organisation.

At a southern regional conference of computer professionals here, it was also pointed out that IT can be used for managing the farmer's timetable, crop scheduling, insect and rodent control, marketing and even water management.

Agricultural professionals using IT are expected to play an "increasingly important role" in crop production in the years ahead, it is felt. Hence, educational institutions need to modify their curriculums to train students and professionals in inter-disciplinary approaches to precision agriculture, experts said.

India now has its own agriculture portals, including Web sites like www.ikisan.com which offers information both in English and Telugu languages. Other sites are also offering information aimed primarily at the farmer.

"We should not immediately start worrying about the cost of the technology for now," suggested Jugalkishor Agarwal, chairman of the Computer Society

of India's division for IT applications.

Mr Aggarwal, formerly with Jawaharlal Nehru Agricultural University of Jabalpur, pointed out, "When the transistor was invented, it was costlier than gold. But once into mass production, costs fell."

Other examples of use of IT in farms have also been coming in from within the country and elsewhere in the developing world.

Sandhya Shenoy of the National Academy of Agricultural Research Management in Hyderabad has created 'A Gateway to Indian Agriculture'. The site gives information on animal sciences, crop sciences, agribusiness, fisheries, home science, horticulture, natural resources and sustainable agriculture.

Links to agriculture-related organisations worldwide, programmes, publications and libraries, and pages on weather, agricultural issues and policies, gender issues, infotech and human resources are part of the site at <http://web.aces.uiuc.edu/aim/diglib/india>.

Reports from Maharashtra said the state government has plans to link 40,000 villages with a specially developed software package for farmers. Farmers are being promised a unique package -- Agronet -- which aims to provide them with the latest information on agriculture, including cropping pattern.

A voluntary organisation in Rajasthan, the Ajit Foundation, some time ago announced that it had written software programmes called 'SimTanka' and 'SimTalab' that would help villagers calculate the amount of water they could expect in their tanks and ponds based on simulations and past records of the area. IANS

The Pioneer
21 May 2000

MP HDRs to focus on human development

Sanjay Sharma

BHOPAL

NOW village-level human development reports (HDRs) will be prepared in Madhya Pradesh with a view to create a human development movement at grassroots.

This exercise, the sources said, would create information base for panchayats to focus on human development. According to him the powers at the helm want to focus on building people and people's institutions instead of the state and its appendages and it is inclined to change the governance structure in such a manner as to facilitate people's action. The present day technology affords us the means to reduce disparity, the sources were of the view, and the human development strategy needs to leverage the information technology to close this gap. "We need to heed the warning about increasing distance between the knows and the know-nets, a senior official said.

"By generating human development reports at the village level, we hope to generate local action as well as demand for the government funds to go into human development areas," another official said adding that village level HD reports would provide necessary direction to the district level planning starting from next year in the state.

After second round of the panchayat elections all the panchs and sarpanchs have committed themselves to an agenda centred on human development. The village level HD report would cover education, health and livelihood security of the people in each panchayat. And with the government mission on Community Health, it is also likely to create health reports.

All relevant data, the sources

said, had already been collected during recently concluded Gram Sampark Abhiyan in Madhya Pradesh. Also appropriate computer software has also been developed for documentation of village resources inventories and the same would be used in preparing village level HDRs.

It may be pointed out here that Madhya Pradesh brought out the first National Human Development Report in the world, in 1995, consciously focusing on shortcomings. It was a major step towards strategy shift in seeing the people of the state as solution.

First, Panchayat raj system was created in the state and further it was complemented through Mission on development priorities. Out of five lakh elected panchayat representatives over — one-third are women. The HDR helped in mobilising collective action for education, health, and livelihood security. The second HDR issued in 1998 too was as much a report on government achievements as a report on its failures. In the intervening period, 26 thousand education guarantee schools were created with community participation providing schooling facility to every habitation.

Besides, in over 20 thousand villages, Jan Swastha Rakshaks were made available to strengthen rural health care. Regeneration and management of natural resources were entrusted to community in 8,400 villages under Wateshej Mission and in another 1,200 under Joint Forest Management Programme. And last but not least, the people engaged in forest produce collection have been turned into owners from wage labourers. To cap it all, the state government has substantially increased its allocation to human development sector. □

The Observer
23 May 2000

For crying out loud selectively

Vimala Ramachandran

It is indeed very difficult to understand the hysterical over-reaction of the Uttarakhand leaders to the admitted mistakes of Sahayog. What started off as a reaction to some poor quality research and an insensitive publication has now snowballed into a major political campaign. Why are so-called reasonable and respected leaders of Uttarakhand lobbying for detaining the four Sahayog activists even after they have publicly apologised and withdrawn the publication? Why are they insisting on detaining the four activists under the National Security Act? How have these people threatened the security of the country?

While it is rather difficult to rationally explain the motives behind this witch hunt, the only plausible explanation could be that the Uttarakhand leaders are just looking for a cause to prove their legitimacy. Each one is shrieking louder than the other in order to be heard and prove they are the true guardians of the culture and tradition of the people. It is the same people who cry out when the police violate the human rights of their activists. This is indeed a tragic story.

This is not the first time that this has happened in India. Over 30 odd years we have seen the selective use of the instruments of human rights by political activists. The civil rights community in India is sadly divided along party and ideological lines. As a result, the universal value of the rule of law and the restrained use of draconian legislation is not appreciated. The same people who have in the past criticised MISA, DIR and NSA are today lobbying to hold four development workers under the same act.

Many of them are highly respected national leaders who have been in the forefront of a peoples movement. Take the JP. Till recently they were the loudest champions of civil and human rights. During the now infamous Emergency, they argued for equality before law of RSS cadres and Naxalites. Why then is the Government silent over the Sahayog issue? Is the Congress party, BSP, Samajwadi Party—they all seem more concerned about the inevitable election once Uttaranchal comes into being. Human rights of a few activists really do not matter.

What about the larger NGO community? Granted Sahayog's research study is of poor quality. We all agree that sex and equality are sensitive issues and grassroots organisations should first learn to read the pulse of the people. Most people admit that heady international networking sometimes alienates development workers from ground realities. But how does this justify arresting and holding them under the National Security Act? Today it is Sahayog, tomorrow it may be some other organisation working on the environment or coming in conflict with local timber smugglers!

Where are the erstwhile Chipko movement leaders, the prominent organisations working on environment education, the school programmes, primary education, retired civil servants with considerable influence and so on? One would have thought that these people would speak out against invoking the NSA. Many of them are silently supporting the demand to detain the activists under NSA. Many are even angry with the outsiders who have defiled the hills. Their language is reminiscent of the global resurgence of ethnic cleans-

ing. And this, more than anything else, is tragic.

The Sahayog issue is caught between the Uttarakhand movement, insider-outsider rhetoric, guardians of local culture, competing development activists and political opportunists. It is unfortunate that in the process the country has forgotten the basic human rights of a group of people howsoever foolish they may have been. It is time the larger human rights and development community stood up against such opportunistic interpretation of national security.

The Pioneer
23 May 2000

High rate of unregistered births in India

THE LACK of birth certificate public participation.

He further pointed out five states namely, Uttar Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan which should be given more attention in terms of birth registration. He emphasised on educating the bureaucracy in this area.

Addressing the attendants Ms Ellen raised the issue of lack of legal identity to the children owing to the absence of Birth Certificate, which according to her was essential for their entry into responsible citizenship.

The meeting is being jointly organised by PLAN International (India Chapter), Office of Registrar General, India and UNICEF India.

The panelists for the function were Roger Brazen, Country Director, PLAN International India, JK Banthia, Registrar General, India, Ellen Mouravieff, Convenor UNICEF Working Group of Unregistered Children, Donal Keane, Regional Director PLAN International, Erma Manoncourt, Deputy Director UNICEF, India, ID Swami, Deepali Khanna, President PLAN International and Sharmila Tagore, a member of PLAN.

The Conference is aimed at formulating a set of recommendations in regards to reaching the goal of complete Birth registration.

Speaking at the occasion Mr Banthia said that the problem of Birth Registration could only be treated properly through collective effort, of the Government, Non Governmental Organisations (NGO's) and other private and public institutions. He called for a greater

public participation. He further pointed out five states namely, Uttar Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan which should be given more attention in terms of birth registration. He emphasised on educating the bureaucracy in this area.

Addressing the attendants Ms Ellen raised the issue of lack of legal identity to the children owing to the absence of Birth Certificate, which according to her was essential for their entry into responsible citizenship.

Endorsing her views Mr Donal said that the right of children to have their birth certificates was fundamental to all the rights, for without it they could not avail the rights such as - right to profession and they would be more vulnerable to exploitation. Pointing out the rapid introduction of Information Technology, he said that more persons may lack access to various services, in the absence of birth certificates. Whereas another speaker raised the gender issue casting shadow over the registration of girl child's.

Addressing the people, the Minister of State, Mr Swami informed that in India an estimated 70,000 births took place every day and an estimated 28,000 did not get registered. He also said that this had a greater bearing on the implementation of various Government programmes due to it being based on wrong demographic statistics.

The Pioneer
25 May 2000

A Water Miracle

By Sadhana Pathak

CHIPYA, a small village with a population of 1,000 people nestled in the hills of Barod tehsil in Shajapur district of Madhya Pradesh, has turned into an oasis through a water conservation miracle. Earlier, it was a desolate place with low-rainfall as wells had dried up and cattle perished. Milk became a rare commodity in the village. Concerted efforts of villagers assisted by Lok Kalyan Parishad, an NGO, has qualitatively changed the life of the villagers. Rural watershed work was made possible under the Rajiv Gandhi Mission for Watershed Development (RGMWD).

Now, the village has plenty of water all through the year round and productivity of land has



Can we get a few seeds for the water harvesting crop?

increased by three-fold. Milk production has doubled in the village. To achieve all the success assiduous efforts were put backed by ingenious planning.

Earlier it was known as 'Chhipya,' where criminal activities like loot, plunder, theft and duping were the order of the day. It was full out of the poverty and joblessness. Surrounded by rocky hills, the village was a safe haven for criminals to hide along with the booty so it was named 'Chhipya' (a hideout) which later on changed into Chipya.

Coupled with government's obduracy were severe ecological problems. The soil condition of Chipya was such that it was sparsely vegetated, could sustain very poor crops, was severely eroded, and contributed to enormous runoff and soil loss. Enormous runoff and soil loss resulted in sharp decrease in groundwater level. Just three years back barren fields, thorny shrubs dotted the vast steep sloppy terrain and dried-up wells abounded the village.

Surface runoff from monsoon rains was sufficient, but it immediately gushed down the sloppy terrain eroding the soil and made furrows underneath its torrents. Due to land's reduced water retention capacity, the soil became gritty and rocks were denuded. Decreased groundwater level caused scarcity of water in wells, ponds and hand-pumps of the village. Water scarcity crept the village with numerous problems. As agriculture was riddled with uncertainty, the villagers kept herds of livestock to minimise risk. These cattle were allowed to graze in the rocky hills. Year-round grazing in limited areas with no seasonal respite led to severe erosion, low grass production and poor quality crop.

With agriculture giving no returns, the villagers migrated annually for jobs or worked as agricultural labourers on others' land. Villagers continued their efforts to explore all possible solutions to their problems, either by raising embankments or by constructing water channels, but it all proved futile.

Chipya's transformation was a part of larger process of cyclic mode of sustainable development started by the Lok Kalyan Parishad (LKP) in 1996. The villagers began to store water.

Various meetings were held by LKP with the villagers on the steps to be taken for a watershed management system. A village watershed committee was formed. The panel consisted for the chairpersons of the user groups, self-help groups and women's groups. At least one-third members of the watershed committee were women.

The first phase was to stop soil erosion, increase groundwater level and create jobs for villagers. The villagers felt motivated to involve themselves in storing water. Based on the principals of equity and participatory democracy areas were earmarked for developmental activities. All over the arid hills abounding the village pits measuring one metre long and half metre wide having half metre depth were dug. Trenches were dug at a distance of 3-4 metres from each other. An earthen dam was constructed in Chipiya to hold back the rainwater and stone embankments were raised to stop the soil erosion.

In the second phase the stress was on biomass afforestation. Trees like tamarind, *Bassia latifolia* (Mahua), *Butea frondosa* (Palash), *Caesalpinia bonducella* (Karanj), Corinda (Maraunda), custard apple (Shareefa), *Neem acacia* (Subabool), bamboo and mango were planted in the village.

As the saplings grew, grass started increasing dramatically. Lush vegetation stopped soil erosion and was also an income to the watershed committee. Villagers constructed three water harvesting structure at the foot of the hills surrounding the village.

Earlier, 27 out of the 200 families in the village had an annual income of over Rs 12,000. The

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Signature campaign against nuclear weaponisation

The Bangalore Platform Against Nuclear Weaponisation will launch an all India movement on June 10 to collect 5,000 signatures and to oppose the nuclear weaponisation programme of the Indian Government incurring huge expenses without any tangible results.

Speaking to reporters on the campaign to be launched by the fora, Indian Institute of Science Professor D P Sen Gupta said that about Rs 5,000 crore was spent every year on the nuclear programme when priority areas were starving of funds. India needed to improve areas like health, education and food to give better living conditions to the millions of rural population. The danger of shortage of water and electricity was looming large over the country. When all these important areas needed funds, a sum of about Rs 5,000 crore was spent every year on the nuclear programme he pointed out.

Replying to a question on the nation's security, Prof Gupta said there was no logic in the argument. If countries like Bangladesh and Sri Lanka started asking the same question and produce nuclear bombs just for the sake of their deterrent, what would happen to the people of these countries.

India's claim of nuclear capability is 'hollow' he said. 'We are 20 years behind the Chinese technology and about 50 years against France and USA in the same area. Is it possible for India to continue the race to compete with China?' he quipped.

He said his organisation is in touch with other like-minded organisations to mobilise national and international support against the arms race.

Deccan Herald
25 May 2000

WHO embarks on global anti-smoking drive

IPS

Mexico City

THE INTERNATIONAL drive against cigarette smoking will turn a new corner in October when the World Health Organisation (WHO) opens its first-ever public hearings on global tobacco control.

Those invited to appear before this hearing at the WHO's Geneva headquarters include medical experts, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) tobacco farmers and the tobacco industry. "This is an historic opportunity for everyone, including those in the tobacco industry, to present their views on a major public issue that is of great concern to us," said Dr Gro Harlem Brundtland, the WHO's Director-General.

According to a WHO Press release, the hearings on October 12 and 13 are part of the international body's effort to seek a wider spectrum of opinion as it tries to secure support for the Framework

Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) -- the world's first public health convention that attempts to address such concerns as tobacco advertising and promotion, agricultural diversification of tobacco plantations, cigarette smuggling, taxes and subsidies.

The FCTC, which was unveiled last May at the World Health Assembly, has been welcomed by health experts and the anti-smoking lobby as a necessary legal instrument to curb smoking and take on the powerful tobacco industry.

"It is clear that there is enormous support for participation in the process," admitted Heather Selin, an advisor at the Pan American Health Organisation's department on prevention and control of tobacco use.

But while they wait for the FCTC to make a further dent in the global cigarette habit, the anti-smoking lobby has a reason to feel happy about its achievements so far. This month, the Washington DC-based Worldwatch Institute

(WWI) revealed in a report that the world was turning away from smoking.

"After a century-long build-up in cigarette smoking, the world is turning away from cigarettes following the US lead. In 1999 cigarettes smoked per person in the United States fell by a staggering eight per cent and for the world as a whole by more than three per cent," declared the report, titled "World Kicking the Cigarette Habit".

The drop in the United States has been significant over the last two decades, it added, where the number of cigarettes smoked per person annually fell from a high of 2,810 in 1980 to 1,633 in 1999, a decline of 42 per cent.

World-wide, on the other hand, there has been an 11 per cent fall over the last 10 years, from a high of 1,027 cigarettes smoked per person annually in 1990 to 915 in 1999.

What impressed WWI were the declines in nearly all the major cigarette consuming countries,

"including such bastions of smoking as France, China and Japan." Quoting the US Department of Agriculture's world tobacco database, the report noted that the number of cigarettes smoked per person in France annually had dropped 19 per cent since peaking in 1985, eight per cent in China since 1990, and four per cent in Japan since 1992.

In the United States, the drop in smoking has been attributed to a number of reasons -- a growing awareness about the health-damaging effects of smoking, rising cigarette prices, rising cigarette taxes, aggressive anti-smoking campaigns and a decline in the social acceptability of smoking.

"Ironically, the land that gave the world tobacco is now leading it a way from tobacco," the report, authored by Lester Brown of WWI, remarked. In Europe, the stand taken by the European Union regarding cigarette advertising on television and radio has contributed to the shift, it added.

World Bank sanctions \$500 m loan to India

The World Bank today agreed to provide a 500 million dollar loan to India for funding four major projects in social, health and infrastructural sectors.

Four agreements were signed here recently for this purpose by the World Bank Country Director Edwin Lim and Economic Affairs Joint Secretary R S Sharma.

The four projects, aided by the World Bank, include the crucial 150 million dollar power sector restructuring in Uttar Pradesh.

The other three projects are World Bank's concessional International Development Assistance (IDA) worth 143 million dollar for immunisation and polio eradication in eight states, poverty alleviation in Rajasthan (100 million dollars) and a project for development of health system in Uttar Pradesh (110 million dollars).

The 150 million dollar loan from International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) -- a soft loan window of the World Bank -- for Uttar Pradesh

Power Restructuring is aimed at implementing the reform programme, reduction of the critical bottlenecks in the power system and building support among key stakeholders for power sector reforms.

The financial support is for augmenting the transmission system; strengthening the sub-transmission and distribution system and improving of the metering system.

Also it intends to give technical assistance to UP in implementing the power sector reform projects and to assist in the institutional development in the regulatory commission.

The 142 million dollar IDA credit for immunisation and polio eradication programme will be implemented in eight states of Assam, Bihar, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal.

The project will be implemented over a period of three years and aims at eradicating polio and reduce vaccine preventable diseases by strengthening India's immunisation project.

Deccan Herald
22 May 2000

The Pioneer
23 May 2000

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remaining survived on an annual income of less than Rs 6000. Today, the situation is different. Villagers grow wheat, gram, soyabean, maize, jawar, bajra, masoor, moong, urad, mustard, arhar, sesame, groundnut, cotton and linseed. Vegetables like bottle gourd, cucurbitaceous (turai), ladyfinger, brinjal, pumpkin, green chilly, spinach, tomato and French beans are being grown.

Watershed committee has set up a watershed development fund in which 10 per cent of the money given to the committee is deposited. The fund is meant for the maintenance of the watershed. After the MP Government withdraws the REGMWD, the village watershed committee will become the owner of the development fund. To make it more participatory, there is a system of public contribution during the development phase in the form of labour. Just as in Chipya the savings from voluntary donations in the development fund has touched Rs 1,19,000. The money is used for welfare activities in the village.

The villagers now guard their trees and grass and are leaving no leaf unturned to keep their watershed programme going.

— Charkha Features
The Indian Express
23 May 2000

World Bank and water crises in India

By Vandana Shiva

Building insurance against drought should be the highest environmental priority in India. However, World Bank development "aid" has contributed to the increased occurrence of drought and desertification, and a growing water crisis. The World Bank is now using the crisis it has created to propose privatisation of water resources and their management. This will further intensify the water scarcity and related water conflicts.

In Gujarat ground water is obtained from a depth of 1,500-1,800 feet leaving shallow aquifers and surface storage systems like tanks, dams and rivers empty. The State used to be the land of tanks and wells. In the 1930s, 78 per cent of the irrigation needs were met by wells.

Intensive irrigation shifted and water-use technology from open wells to tube wells, financed by aid agencies. India now has more than 17 million energised wells. The World Bank has played a major role in promoting non-sustainable ground water exploitation which is the most significant aspect of the water crisis in India.

For example, the present water crisis in Gujarat is a product of a World Bank recipe for dealing with the 1985-86 water crisis. In 1985-86, potable water was being supplied to Gujarat by special trains, tankers, camels and bullock carts. The Government's crash programme in 1985-86 to provide drinking water, estimated to have cost nearly Rs. 86 crore, has left the problem as acute as ever. New sources dried up, and the 4,000 tube wells dug ran dry. The Government was then ready to spend another Rs. 93 crores on long distance transfer and on more tube wells. Gujarat also had World Bank-aided water supply project of Rs. 136 crores, but both technology inputs and financial inputs are failing in providing water in the face of depletion of water sources themselves.

The water famine in the 1980s in Maharashtra was also a creation of the World Bank.

Traditionally, ground water extraction in Maharashtra has come mainly from open dugwells. Fifty-nine per cent of the State has been irrigated by groundwater through 9.39 lakhs of open dugwells. Ninety-three per cent of Maharashtra is made up of hard rocks consisting of the Deccan Trap. Recharge here is slow because the storage space for groundwater is developed through secondary features like joints, weathering, fissuring and so on. All these features do not occur in uniform fashion, in depth or lateral extent. In the Deccan Trap, therefore there is nothing like a subsoil water-table. Water is stored in joints and bedding planes and is recharged locally. This seriously limits the availability and recharge of groundwater, a limit which new technologies of water exploitation have tried to overcome by digging deeper and using more power for the withdrawal of water.

In the World Bank logic of market efficiency, water used for "Water Parks" for the entertainment of the rich in Gujarat has higher value than the needs of pastoralists. Water wasted on flowers or shrimps is a "higher productivity use" than "low value" use for growing millets for food security and quenching the thirst of the poor who have no purchasing power. Or the poor will create purchasing power by bartering their very lives as in the case of kidney sales by poor farmers in Andhra Pradesh to finance deep tubewells.

These are recipes for conversion of water into a tradeable commodity rather than a life support base. Privatisation will aggravate the water crisis, because given the inequalities between the rich and the poor, industry and agriculture, urban and rural, water markets will take the water from the poor to the rich, from impoverished rural areas to af-

fluent urban enclaves. It will also lead to over exploitation of water, because when access to water is determined by the market and purchasing power and long distance trade and transport and not by limits of renewability, the water cycle and people's water rights will be systematically violated and the crisis will deepen. Local community management is a precondition for both conservation and equitable use.

Privatisation not the answer

The World Bank privatisation proposals do pay lip service to local level institutions, but convert the local community from common property owners to "water users", and equate local people's institutions with the private sector. The World Bank also refers to NGOs and private sector in the same category, indicating that the role of NGOs is viewed in the context of privatisation.

Ignoring limits of water availability and the conservation imperative, the Bank recommends a shift from "supply-oriented" to "demand oriented" approach. Demands of the economically powerful will therefore override the needs of the poor and the limits of nature. Partial application of this logic through World Bank lending is at the root of the present crisis. Full implementation of the logic of privatisation will not reverse the crisis, it will aggravate it.

Privatisation is not the answer to the water crisis because it will strengthen the very ecological and political processes which have brought it about. The water crisis has been created by ignoring the ecology of the water cycle and the politics of water democracy.

While commons are based on inalienability of shared rights derived from use, privatisation is based on tradeability of private property. The assumption that alienability is more conducive to conservation is derived from the

false association of price with value.

Sustainable use of water resources depends on the maintenance of the water cycle. This requires that water use technologies and land use technologies respect the limits put by nature. Intensive irrigation from deep ground water sources can create an illusion that nature can be outwitted and her limits transgressed. But a few years of extraction of ground water reserves for water-intensive crops can create a water famine which destroys the very possibility of agriculture as witnessed in Gujarat, Rajasthan and Andhra Pradesh. The ecological imperative is to shift to cropping patterns that respect the water endowment of the ecosystem. Food security depends on water security, and maximising food security in the context of water scarcity implies maximising nutrition per unit water use. Flowers, shrimps, hybrid seeds, would then reflect low productivity value rather than the high productivity claimed in World Bank's trade liberalisation logic.

Democratic use of water resources is based on democratic community control over water, to prevent its over exploitation and ensure its equitable sharing so that no member of the community, especially women, children and the poor are denied their entitlement to water. A water democracy requires that water be managed as common and not as the private property of those with economic power who sell this vital resource as a commodity to the poor and hence deprive weaker sections of society of their water rights.

Privatisation is derived from the word 'private' which means to deprive. The World Bank water privatisation reforms are an organised theft of water from the poor. This theft should not be allowed. (The author is Director, Research Foundation for Science, Technology and Ecology, New Delhi).

The Hindu
26 May 2000

The Indian Express
23 May 2000

Scheme for the handicapped: Shimla - In a move to refurbish its social image and perk up the State's concern for the underprivileged, the State Himachal Pradesh Government here has drawn up an ambitious plan to rehabilitate the handicap in the State. For this various schemes and programmes like providing incentives to those marrying the handicapped, providing relief allowance to them, offering hearing aids etc at concessional rates and giving financial assistance to set up small ventures of their own, have been undertaken.

• UNI

Govt indifference hits FP programme

Tiruchi, May 25: A six-bed sterilisation ward along with necessary equipment and jeep has been lying unused for two years at Manpathai Medu in Manaparati taluk in Tiruchi district due to the Union Ministry of Health drawing up a totally impractical family welfare scheme.

It all started when the Vaiyampatti based Socio-Cultural Awakening Movement (SAM), an NGO, approached the Ministry of Family Welfare for a population control related project. The ministry through a letter (No.W./1043/156/93) dated March 31, 1994 sanctioned a first instalment of Rs.5.33 lakh of the total project cost of Rs.6.62 lakh for setting up a six-bed sterilisation ward with operation theatre to handle family planning cases. The project's annual target was 450 sterilisations, 400 medical termination of pregnancies (MTP), 200 intra-uterine device (IUD) insertions and distribution of oral pills to 600 women.

SAM built a hospital building at Manpandaimedu for the project, but it was only then that their real problems started. This was because the scheme did not include many essentials for medical work. Though the district health authorities were approached to allow doctors of the Vaiyampatti and Kadavur PHCs to perform FP operations at this unit, doctors demanded a minimum of six cases if they were to come.

Another problem was that though the project target was fixed for the first year, making the operation theatre germ-free through culture tests took up six months. The project provided a vehicle and salary for the driver but no allowance was made for fuel or maintenance. Similarly, an anesthetist was not included though it was essential in FP operations. Doctors refused to operate till this was rectified.

SAM founder V Jawahar Arumugam also found the project sans field staff. He discovered that each FP case operated in its premises cost nearly Rs.2,500, including motivation, drugs, doctors fees and cost of stay for a minimum four days till stitches were removed.

Meanwhile, the one-year project period ended and the Health Ministry citing non-achievement of target demanded refund of the project's first instalment of Rs.5.33 lakh though the NGO by then had spent nearly double the amount.

SAM in a series of letters to the ministry pleaded for extension of the project period placing on record the various problems and also suggested that the ministry send a monitor to oversee the project and suggest solutions to problems which cropped up at various times. Instead, the ministry approached the District Collector through the State Government to ensure refund of the project cost.

The Indian Express
26 May 2000

India among nations having maximum female illiteracy

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, May 24

FOUR SOUTH Asian countries — Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Nepal — account for the largest number of out-of-school girls and illiterate women. This fact was brought to light here by UNESCO's representative in India, Prof. Moegiadi, today.

Addressing a national workshop on "State Policies on Incentive Schemes in Primary Schools and their Contribution to Girls' Participation", jointly organised by NCERT and UNESCO, he said, "Though progress has been made, we are all aware that according to the 1991 census of India, we have 50.2 per cent literacy, and now, according to the latest information we have, 64 per cent literacy rate. It is estimated that in near future, it can be 70-80 percent."

He said it is a worldwide trend to invest more resources to educate children, at least till basic education and primary and elementary education levels.

That is why many countries in the world give education top priority and give special attention in the national development plan as part of the overall national strategy. He said some researches had revealed that educating girls and women brings a lot of benefits, increase family income and result in late marriages.

Early marriages disturb the school environment and also disturb retention of children in school, he said.

Prof. Moegiadi said that after a discussion with NCERT, UNESCO has agreed to give at least four incentives - mid-day meals, free uniform, free textbooks and attendance scholarship - for girls, and see the impact of these independent variables on enrolments, not only to attract girls but also to retain them in schools till they reach the graduation stage.

The girl's participation at the primary stage is known to be low and has been of concern of the policy makers and educational administrators.

The Hindustan Times
25 May 2000

Swiss model for waste water utilisation

A Swiss waste water treatment agency today suggested a new model of ecological engineering for Bellandur lake to shift focus from waste water treatment to waste water utilisation.

Participating in a discussion organised by Bellandur Action Committee here today, Dr Johannes Heeb of the Switzerland-based Seecon International Limited, a waste water treatment agency said that the model proposes purification through constructed wetlands, utilisation of

waste water by aquacultures and source reduction by composting. This creates a new perspective for the poorer parts of the world and a means for sustainable development, he said. Explaining the advantages of constructed wetlands, Dr Heeb said it can be built in small units with a minimum of machinery without hi-tech engineering and is easy to maintain. The constructed wetlands will help in regeneration of ground-water and promote eco-agriculture besides production of eco-friendly building material. Presently, over 4,000 constructed wetlands are in operation in Europe, he added.

Deccan Herald
25 May 2000

They have defined the art of disability management

The Times of India
26 May 2000

By B. Pradeep Nair
The Times of India News Service

BANGALORE: They are an embodiment of an inimitable spirit—tirelessly crusading for a cause. S. Ramakrishnan and S. Shankara Raman have defined the art of disability management by nursing to success the Amar Seva Sangam, which runs a number of institutions for the handicapped in Ayikudy village in south Tamil Nadu.

From a small beginning with just seven children in the village in 1991, the Sangam now reaches 4,809 disabled people in more than 330 villages in four blocks and around Ayikudy. The spectacular growth prompted the governments of Australia and Japan to chip in with aid.

Way back in 1975, as a spirited 21-year-old student of engineering, Ramakrishnan was in Bangalore for a usual recruitment interview, when he met with an accident rendering him a paraplegic. At a hospital in Kiree, Pune, he lay convinced about the worthlessness of life which he wanted to be extinguished some way or the other. But his doctor Amarjit Singh Chahal, an orthopaedic surgeon, injected a new meaning to his life. He told him, "Never ask: why me? Ask: why not me?"

In 1981, back in his home village of Ayikudy, 70 km from Tirunelveli, Ramakrishnan, who had realised that his intellect was as sharp as it's always been,

founded the Sangam and named it after the doctor.

Shankara Raman, though afflicted by muscular dystrophy since childhood and confined to a wheel-chair, was having a lucrative career as a successful chartered accountant when in 1992 he came to know about the Sangam. The opportunities at Ayikudy prompted him to join hands with Ramakrishnan and together they have propelled the institution to greater heights.

"In villages only physical abilities are important, unlike in cities where intellectual empowerment can overcome physical disability," says Ramakrishnan explaining the problems of development in villages. "The moment we approach them for rehabilitation, they ask: Do we have to pay?"

There is a school with 564 students, located on land contributed by Ramakrishnan's family, with classes from nursery to Std VIII. Children get training in computer operation, basic mechanism of radio and TV, first-aid, book binding, tailoring, calliper training etc. Camps are conducted every fortnight to detect polio. There are 36 children under residential care and 25 under day care at the Home for the Disabled. The 25-acre campus also has a full-fledged rehabilitation centre, a medical testing unit and a public library.

"We have been able to turn Ayikudy into a valley for the disabled thanks to the patronage from Union and state governments, industry, charitable organisations and the public," says Ramakrishnan.

Sahyog members

ALLAHABAD, May 25. — Allahabad High Court today granted bail to three members of social organisation, Sahyog, who were detained in jail in connection with an FIR lodged against them for allegedly depicting the hill people of Uttar Pradesh as "sex objects" in the book *AIDS Aur Hum*. — PTI

The Statesman
26 May 2000

Wall magazine on youth awareness

Chennai, May 25: Chief Minister M Karunanidhi today released a wall magazine 'Nammal Mudiym' (we can do it) being published on Monday by the Youth Welfare and Sports Development department of the State Government to create awareness among youth.

The first copy was received by Youth Welfare Minister Pongalur N Palanisamy. The department Secretary and Secretary of Chief Minister's Secretariat K Ashok Vardhan Shetty was present. — ENS

The Indian Express
26 May 2000

UN steps against child exploitation

UNITED NATIONS, May 26 (PTI)

The UN general Assembly has adopted without vote two measures to protect children from exploitation and their use in hostilities between the warring groups. The measures, option protocols, are appended to the 1999 Convention on the Rights of Child and any member state which has ratified or signed the

Convention could sign them, diplomatic sources said today.

One protocol asks the state parties to take all feasible steps, including legal, to prevent recruitment of persons under 18 years in the armed forces and forbid their use during hostilities. The other protocol binds the states to make sexual offences against children criminal or penal offences.

Deccan Herald
27 May 2000

Now disabled too can 'net' a gain

By SREELATHA MENON

New Delhi, May 26: India's first website concerning the employment of disabled people called NCPEDP.org, has been launched with a call for debate on whether there should be a quota for jobs for disabled in the private sector.

The site started by the NGO National Centre for Promotion of Employment for Disabled

People which has Sonia Gandhi as its chairperson says that the Disability Act offers vague incentives to those private companies which offer five per cent of their jobs to the disabled. But the Act does not specify the proposed incentives.

And minus any pressure, the corporate sector on its own has totally ignored the issue, it says pointing out that neither

CII, nor FICCI or ASSOCHAM or PHDCC have spelt out till date as to what their policy on disability is.

The debate on the topic will be featured on the site's interactive online forum this month, spokesperson Rama Chari said. The results of the debate will be present to the Government.

Speaking on the issue, Chari pointed out the findings of the

NCPEDP-conducted study in 1999, of the top 100 corporates.

The average percentage of employees with disabilities was a dismal 0.4 % while those in the public sector was 0.54% and in the private sector was 0.28%.

The MNCs most of whom are from countries with strict quotas for disabled employed just .05 per cent in India, the study had found.

The Indian Express
27 May 2000

Shared experience

KERALA and Rajasthan have absolutely nothing in common. One is green and wet; the other is barren and parched. One is 100 per cent literate; the other has the lowest literacy rate in the country. Yet, in April an extraordinary convergence of hearts and minds took place between men and women from these two States.

The occasion was a meeting to look at ways to empower *gram sabhas* in the panchayati raj system. What brought the convergence between people from two such disparate states was their shared experience in trying to draw maximum benefits from decentralised systems of governance.

In Kerala, the Panchayati Raj system has been closely integrated into the system of governance. As a result, 40 per cent of all development funds are now with the panchayats. This is no mean amount, it is over Rs. 1000 crores. Furthermore, panchayats are entitled to half of all taxes that are collected like professional tax, entertainment tax, land tax etc. This means that panchayats in Kerala are not just implementing existing programmes but can actually initiate their own programmes with these funds.

Panchayat office bearers are also full-time people who are paid adequately. For instance, a *Sarpanch* is paid Rs. 3,500 per month. In contrast, a *Sarpanch* in Rajasthan gets only Rs. 400 per month. While the former has an office and support staff, the latter must operate without any such inputs. If the performance of the two individuals is different, it is hardly a surprise.

But what Rajasthan has, and Kerala does not, is an indigenous, locally-based vibrant campaign for the right to information that has given a new life and meaning to *gram sabhas*. Initiated by the Devdungr-based Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS), the campaign has now moved into a particularly relevant phase with its latest *Jan Sunwai* (public hearing) which was conducted in Bhim panchayat, in Rajamanand district on April 3.

Although MKSS has conducted several *Jan Sunwais* in different parts of Rajasthan, the Bhim *Jan Sunwai* was significant for a number of reasons. Bhim is one of the largest panchayats in the state. The occasion took place a few months after the Rajasthan gov-

ernment issued an ordinance institutionalising the principle of the *Jan Sunwai* – that is the right of the citizen to conduct a social audit of developmental expenditure. The law now gives this right to all adults in a ward sabha, which is a sub-unit of the gram sabha. The powers vested in the Ward Sabha are stated thus in the relevant section of the Rajasthan ordinance: "Getting information on the detailed estimates of works proposed to be taken in the area of the ward sabha; exercising social audit in all works implemented in the area of the ward sabha and awarding utilisation and completion certificates for such works."

The change in the law has also tackled the question of quorum which in the past allowed the more powerful castes to hijack the *gram sabhas*. Now the quorum requires that scheduled castes and tribes, and backward classes as well as women members must be present in proportion to their population in the ward panchayat.

The Bhim *Jan Sunwai* brought into focus, for the first time, the issue of minimum wages on government works. The relevance of what emerged from it is of particular significance at the moment given that large parts of Rajasthan are reeling under drought and the government has to create employment for people so that they can earn enough to subsist.

The Rajasthan government has only recently raised the minimum wage to Rs. 60 per day. Yet the majority of the people employed in government work programmes testified that they had received barely Rs. 10 to 15 per day. Apart from low payment, the *Jan Sunwai* brought out the well-known racket of putting fictitious names on muster roles – even of people who are dead – and then pocketing those wages. Furthermore, people were paid a small amount on the excuse that they did not put in the full amount of work expected of them. This is another well-known tactic for pocketing government funds allocated for employment programmes.

The people from Kerala, and from other states, who were part of the self-learning process initiated by the MKSS in Bhim, were struck by the fearless manner in which people, including women, came forward and asked questions of the officials. For instance, Gowri, a *Sarpanch* from Kerala, said she had noticed that women covered their heads in

Rajasthan. Yet, they asked questions during the *Jan Sunwai* without any fear or embarrassment.

By creating a process where these questions can be raised in a public arena, the space for subterfuge or for hiding the facts is reduced. Furthermore, now that the government has actually sanctioned the process, the officials do not have any excuse to keep back the information.

Yet, several participants in the *Jan Sunwai* from surrounding villages complained that even after all this it is not easy. Babu Lal from Bhilwara district, for instance, says that although he is glad the government has changed the law, he wonders who will implement and enforce the law. "When we ask for information, we don't get it. We are told, why do you want to know? You will create obstacles in the process of development." He confirmed that even in his village, people are rarely paid more than Rs. 20 a day for work in government schemes.

On their part, the Rajasthanis villagers were fascinated with the Kerala experiment of devolving real power to the panchayats. They followed closely the process that culminated in village level planning which has now been institutionalised. They also heard about the process of setting up neighbourhood committees as even the wards in Kerala are too large for real participation of all the members.

It is clear from the two extremes of experiences in the panchayati raj system that each state has to develop its own models based on its particularities. But what is already emerging from the peer learning processes that civil society groups have set in motion in different states, is that the right to information is an absolutely central need to give any real meaning to this decentralised form of government. Unless people are given the right to ask information, and officials are forced to be accountable, village level governance will remain a concept only on paper. A social audit of the kind conducted in the Bhim panchayat is a model for the process of accountability that can be institutionalised within the framework of the panchayati raj system.

Also, *gram sabhas* should not be occasions when gram sevak narrate the different government programmes that the panchayat is implementing. Instead, as in Kerala, panchayats have to be given adequate autonomy to generate their own programmes through untied funds that are disbursed. The fear that such funds will be misused may be justi-

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Hold it, do we know what we want?

◆ By ANIL AGARWAL

IN the last few weeks since the media storm on drought hit our politicians, several of them have made statements regarding the importance of a community-based rainwater harvesting strategy to drought-proof the country. The first statement came from the rural development minister, Sunderlal Patwa, that the government will gradually replace a government-oriented rural water supply programme by a people-oriented, decentralised and demand-driven programme.

Equally heartening are reports of people themselves beginning to promote rainwater harvesting, especially in Gujarat. A voluntary Lakhota Jal Sanchay Abhiyan Samiti has collected money from the residents of Jamnagar town to desilt the huge Lakhota Lake constructed by the former royal family. Under the leadership of the Swaminarayan gurukul in Rajkot, foundation stones were laid for check dams in more than 15 villages in just five days around the middle of April. In Ahmedabad city itself, the Khadia Itihas Samiti has completed a survey of the underground water tanks (*tanka*) that were traditionally built in each house to harvest roof-top rainwater and is planning a campaign to revive them.

These developments show that community-based rainwater harvesting may well become a widely adopted paradigm in the years to come both in the urban and rural areas – a fortunate result of the current drinking water crisis created by last

year's monsoon failure. But the question is. Will this all lead to effective results, especially in the rural context?

Building water harvesting structures is a very easy task, but building an effective structure which starts off a process of self-management in village communities is a much more difficult. This is possible only if each structure is the result of a cooperative social process. Water is a strange natural resource: it can unite a community as easily as it can divide it. Therefore, it is essential that a strong social process precede each structure to build what economists call the "social capital".

This is an area where the track-record of government agencies is literally non-existent. In other words, the good intentions of state and Central officials to husband their water resources are as much a cause of worry as of applause. Fixed annual targets will prove to be a total disaster: money literally going down the drain. At least the first two years of any water harvesting programme will have to be spent on social mobilisation and getting the community to recognise the importance of water harvesting. The whole community will have to be involved by making each section – from the landed to the landless and women's groups – appreciate the benefits it will derive from the exercise.

It is for this reason that water harvesting works best when combined with watershed development. It is in the nature of structures to benefit mainly those who have land leaving the landless without any benefits and therefore alienated from the exercise. But development of watersheds to conserve both water and soil not only increases soil and water con-

servation and leaf and grass production on what are usually common lands, which can greatly benefit landless households, but also increases the life and effectiveness of the structures that benefit the landed. Contractors must be totally kept out and all wage benefits should go to the landless.

Nothing works better than when villagers see all this in actual practice. For this purpose, it is important to have funds to take interested villagers to see villages where such principles are being observed and how water harvesting has changed their lives. All this means that the progress in the first few years will be slow. But the experience shows that, replications comes very rapidly once "the idea" catches on.

Management experts always point out that "God is in the details". Politicians will have to make sure the culture of rigid and inflexible government rules is changed to fit the rules of social mobilisation. And as government officials are not social workers, all this will happen only if they hand over to the work to NGOs with a track record, howsoever few they might be, and wait patiently for results to come, or they themselves oversee the implementation of the programme.

Otherwise the result will be a lot of wasted mud, bricks and mortar and alienated people, with water still elusive and the concept of water harvesting getting a bad name.

The Indian Express
25 May 2000

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fied. But if the social audit is also institutionalised, then the opportunities for misuse are reduced as the gram sabha becomes more vigilant. These are the two important points that emerge from the experiences of *gram sabhas* in Kerala and Rajasthan.

The Hindu
KALPANA SHARMA, 28 May 2000

Development fails to touch rural India

By Our Correspondent

New Delhi, May 28: Globalisation has stalled poverty reduction in developing countries including India, the International Fund for Agricultural Development said in its annual report for 1999. Social impact of decentralisation, Asian markets crisis and sudden devaluation of currencies were reflected in increasing poverty, inequalities in income, declining levels of public and welfare expenditure.

India's high economic growth in recent decades has had no perceptible impact on rural poverty

levels and income inequality has risen, the report said, citing growing disparity in economic growth rates between areas within the country as the main reason. Despite improvement in infant mortality rates, life expectancy at birth and adult literacy rates, India still suffers from very low human development aspects like the human development index, gender development index and gender empowerment index, it said.

Stating that the level of deprivation was inadequately indicated by poverty statistics based on income figures, IFAD said 80 per cent of the rural population in

India had caloric intakes below the 2,400 calories per adult recommended which was much higher than 37 per cent below the poverty line.

In 1993-94, 30 per cent of the country's population consumed less than 1,700 calories per day

IFAD REPORT

and of that 10 per cent consumed less than 1,300 calories per day.

"Upland dwellers, indigenous population, ethnic minorities, landless, rural youth and women are being bypassed by economic growth and development."

"The goal should be to promote a culture in which service providers are responsive to demands of the poor; efficiency, transparency and accountability are integral to the provision and targeting of public goods and services and rural poor people, through participation in local democratic process, contribute to decision making and influence how resources are used for their benefit," IFAD said.

Objectives of the report were to empower tribal grassroots associations and users groups to plan, implement and manage their own development activities and promote activities that generate sustainable increase in production and productivity of land and water resources. Generating alternate sources of income outside agriculture, particularly for the landless, and improving quality of life and income of marginal groups through sustainable natural resources management should be given priority, IFAD added.

The principle beneficiaries are tribal households in Bihar and Madhya Pradesh. Special attention is being paid to marginal households and groups in the process of being marginalised — women, the landless, hill cultivators and tribal groups classified primitive by the government.

The Asian Age
29 May 2000

Haryana village going online with first cyber cafe

Rewari (Narnaul), May 28

DISTRICT MOHINDERGARH is all set to launch its first village cyber cafe in Haryana.

Nangal Choudhary, one of the remotest villages of Haryana, will host the village Internet Centre developed as a cyber cafe, Mr V. Raja Sekhar, Deputy Commissioner Mohindergarh, said here yesterday in a Press conference.

The village, he said, is located at the southern hinges of the State, and will boast of the first ever village website of Haryana.

The website is already uploaded on the Internet and is available at <http://nangalchoudhary.com>.

This percolation of Information Technology in the backward area of the State awaits a formal launch soon, he said.

The Deputy Commissioner said that the project which has been established at the busy Nangal village junction, is offering services, such as, Internet browsing, e-mail access, image and document scanning, optical character reading,

computer, fax, word processing and desktop publishing.

The project is planned to offer highly inexpensive hands-on training to the people.

The launch would benefit the area in developing computer culture and literacy, apart from offering computer services, he disclosed.

He further said that efforts were being made to inform rural masses about the importance of Information Technology.

The panchayats, which were funding the project, were enthusiastic about the new project, he said.

In its bid to provide quality and potable water to the rural masses, the Agriculture Department of the District Administration of Mohindergarh district had purchased a resistivity meter.

The resistivity meter is the latest equipment to carry out tests on groundwater, up to the depth of 1,600 feet, Mr V. Raja Sekhar, informed mediapersons here yesterday.

He said the latest technique will

not only save time, energy and money of the farmers, but also help them to get potable water for their consumption.

The resistivity meter, he said, was purchased by the District Rural Development Agency at a cost of Rs. 1.05 lakh under the watershed scheme.

The Deputy Commissioner has advised the public in general and the farmers in particular to avail this facility, provided by the district administration. This facility, he informed, will be available free of cost.

Women's emancipation: The Deputy Commissioner, Mohindergarh, has directed all the concerned officers not to entertain relatives of the women elected to the panchayats, panchayat samities, zila parishad and municipal or local bodies.

In most of the cases, the Deputy Commissioner said the husbands, sons, or other relatives have started appearing and replacing the elected women, and the very purpose of emancipation of women was defeated.

He warned that any woman representative can be accompanied by her husband or son, but cannot be replaced by them.

The Hindustan Times
29 May 2000

A quiet revolution

IT is a lazy hot afternoon. After a back breaking round of harvesting in the fields and having fed the hungry hordes at home, about 30 women of Parati village, are gathered together in the shade of a thatched roof. They are discussing a problem that has refused to go away for almost a year now. Naseema Khatun a 14-year-old in the village has become an unwed mother and women are discussing strategies to get her married to her seducer. A few minutes later Naseema herself walks in hesitantly her newborn cradling in the crook of her arms. This is the agenda of the village Mahila Samooch today.

Parati is no different from the millions of villages in the country. Tucked away behind folds of ten kilometres of dirt track off the Muzzafarpur Sitamarhi highway in North Bihar it is part of the Bochahan block of Muzzafarpur district, a block distinguished for a mere four per cent literacy among lower caste women.

Swaying fields of ripe gold wheat hide the grinding poverty that lurks in the mean dark huts. No electricity wires to slice the open expanse of the sky here. A couple of whitewashed brick-and-mortar houses provide a stark contrast to the 200 odd mud huts sprawled haphazardly around in small cluster, every cluster meant for a particular caste. Most of the population here is landless.

Dusadh, Musahar, Mallah, Ravidas, Muslims all live in similar conditions of poor hygiene, disease and poverty in deeply segregated tolas. The village is Muslim dominated, and like Muslims everywhere in the sub-continent they too are divided along caste lines. The upper caste Muslims here are Julahas or weavers, the lower caste are Kanwaris.

And yet Parati is one of those obscure villages where stagnation is giving way to change. Caste barriers are lowering and sharing a meal among members of different castes is no longer unheard of. The Bihar Education Project (BEP) launched in 1993 in the Muzzafarpur district has begun to have its impact here.

Amazingly Naseema was not banished from the village. She

was not even beaten up. She has not been subjected to taunts of children and neighbours. The village has not declared a social boycott of her family. And the miracle does not end here. The women of the village are behind her, nurturing her little baby and determined to fight for her rights.

No, moral values have not changed drastically. Nobody is talking about Naseema's right to her own body or respecting her decision to have a child out of wedlock. They only want what they perceive to be justice - marriage with the young man who took advantage of her poverty and gullibility.

Naseema's story is a familiar one. The second daughter of seven children of a landless family, she went to work at Anwar-ul Haq's as a domestic help. Haq lives in a pucca house in the village and three bighas of land qualify him as the landlord in this community of the landless. The budding adolescent was either forced into sex by the 22-year-old son of the family, Mohammad Nasrullah, or seduced with promises of marriage. Naseema herself is reluctant to divulge details of the beginning of the affair. "He asked me to keep it a secret. He promised to marry me", she says tears flowing freely.

Six months later she was pregnant by three months and the secret was out. Luckily for Naseema, Mahila Samakhya an integral part of BEP had by then been active for over a year in Parati. Literally meaning education for equality Mahila Samakhya with the stated aim of empowering women lays particular emphasis on low caste and poor women. Naseema's mother Najmoom not convinced of the utility of the Mahila Samooch organised under Mahila Samakhya was then not a member of this small group. But in her moment of crisis she rushed to the Samooch, joined it and placed her predicament before it.

"I did not beat her. Her father did not raise his hands either. What had happened was irreversible. I just wanted to know what to do," says Najmoom.

The Samooch after several rounds of discussions resolved

against abortion and in favour of asking Anwar-ul Haq to agree to a marriage between Nasrullah and Naseema.

With the newfound strength of sisterhood the Samooch summoned Anwar-ul Haq and his family to the meeting. Twice the summons went out with no response. Faced with his stubborn refusal and the fact that the errant Nasrullah had fled the village, women appealed to the elders.

Surprisingly men agreed to intervene along the lines that women were suggesting. An all male panchayat of the village including the local Maulvi then took matters into their hands. Haq finally agreed to negotiate. On September 6, 1999, Anwarul-Haq and Naseema's father signed an agreement to the effect that by September 21, Naseema and Nasrullah would be married "in court". Fourteen witnesses signed the agreement. "The agreement was signed on a stamp paper" asserts Maulvi Mohd Kasim. The stamp paper in this case is a plain paper with two revenue stamps stuck at the bottom of the text, each one overwritten by the signature of Haq and Naseema's father.

Why a court marriage and not a Nikah? "A court marriage is more pucca", says Zaibunnessa, a member of the Samooch. "We insisted on it so that they don't easily divorce her afterwards". The Samakhya has indeed spawned some awareness of laws of the land.

However the marriage has remained a dream. In sheer frustration Naseema's family finally filed a case of rape against Nasrullah. In any case Naseema, then only 13, was three years under the legal age of consent and sex with her was statutory rape. He was arrested, refused bail by a judicial magistrate at Muzzafarpur and spent nearly two months in judicial custody until finally granted bail by the Patna High Court recently.

Haq refuses to talk about the case. His brother Abdul Rahool chooses to cast aspersions on the girl. "She has lost morals. Besides they are Kanwaris and we are Julahas, and they are trying to lay the blame on my nephew for

upward mobility," he declares. And what does he have to say about the signed agreement? "There is no agreement. Our signatures were forged on the paper," he asserts in the face of a mob of villagers shouting at him, that his nephew had fathered Naseema's child. "Had these two been in love they would have eloped and got married" he screams back.

"If it is not love it must be a crime then," intervenes Santwana Bharati, member core team district BEP and a lawyer by training. "A simple DNA test can prove whose baby Naseema has had." This stuns Rahool. "Okay, it is a crime. Let my nephew pay for it. Let him go to prison for 40 years. But this marriage won't take place", he says stubbornly.

Marriage with Nasrullah seems difficult if not impossible. With a charge of rape and a few weeks of incarceration behind him the chances of Nasrullah coming round are bleak indeed. Her story is far from ended.

Naseema has no illusions. "They want Rs. 80,000 as dowry. I know it and my parents cannot afford it," she wails. The Samooch has got wind that the Haqs have found a match for Nasrullah and wonder if they should tell the prospective bride's family about the unfortunate Naseema. Will that prevent the match? By now Naseema has had enough. She is crying quietly, talking about suicide. Women get busy diverting her attention, asking her to think of the child she has borne, some one takes away the poor mite patting him to sleep. The meeting is at an end.

The effect it can have on Mahila Samakhya in nearby villages is a subject nobody wants to talk about now. Surprisingly there is little condemnation of Naseema in neighbouring villages. Ramdulari Devi, of the Chamukh village close by clucks in sympathy. "That man must be forced to marry her." Mehrun Khatun of Bhusanhi village is angry at the attitude of the Haqs. "He made Naseema his laundi (mistress). Now he should make her his rani. Only then can the poor girl hold her head high."

But not everyone is willing to condone Naseema. Even in Parati village the consensus in her favour is beginning to show signs of strain. "This is what Jagjagi

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Sudden Govt. interest in water harvesting baffles NGOs

By Gargi Parsai

NEW DELHI, MAY 27. The sudden splurge of official funds to promote rainwater harvesting and watershed programmes following the recent drought in Gujarat and Rajasthan has left the voluntary agencies cold. "Till today no step has been taken to combine Government agencies (work) and people's participation in watershed management," noted social worker, Mr. Anna Hazare, told *The Hindu* on the sidelines of a National Conference on Rainwater Harvesting.

"The village must be taken as the pivot and care should be taken to maintain ecological and social balance. Indiscriminate number of tube wells have resulted in severe depletion of ground water resources. I have urged the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, to convene a meeting of people involved in rainwater harvesting for a policy on it," he said.

"It is great what you (the Government) are thinking now, but it is not good enough," echoed noted environmentalist, Mr. Anil Agarwal, of the Centre for Science and Environment at an open forum organised by his Centre. His scepticism arose from the Government penchant for fixed targets and setting up committees, "by them for them". "Unless communities are mobilised, made aware and involved, the whole exercise could prove disastrous," he said.

"Please do not interfere," this is our only request to the Government, said Mr. Rajinder Singh, an NGO credited with greening vil-

lages in Rajasthan's Alwar district. "The voluntary sector is active in watershed programmes. But if the Government were to take over, then nothing better will happen than the Government coming and claiming ownership and contracting out rights for fishing and so on," he said.

Water resources expert and economist, Mr. H.M. Desarda, lashed out at the engineers and technicians in the Government who had a mindset that was impregnable. "The usual Government approach of pumping in more and more money is no solution. By all reckoning the allocation made for drinking water supply schemes as well as employment-linked watershed development programmes is quite sizeable. Even then if the situation is horrific, the real reasons are: indifference, negligence and corruption."

"Though politicians, right from the Prime Minister to Chief Ministers, MPs and MLAs have talked about the need for rainwater harvesting, in reality they don't have the time or the interest to get down to the actual task. As it is a labour intensive and community-centred process, most politicians do not have much interest in it. Also, because this calls for actual presence and involvement at village level."

The CSE deputy director, Ms. Sunita Narain, said, "the statements of various politicians and government officials about promoting community-based water harvesting is a cause for worry as much as it is for applause."

Making a presentation on water

harvesting, Mr. Agarwal pointed to the spurt in Government statements on the subject. The first statement came from the Rural Development Minister, Mr. Sunderlal Patwa, with an increase in the budget for drinking water from Rs. 1,800 crores last year to Rs. 1,960 crores, 20 per cent of which would be allocated to States which undertake community-based management.

Next came a statement from the Prime Minister in Parliament that there would be greater emphasis on rainwater harvesting.

Then the Urban Development Minister, Mr. Jagmohan, declared that the existing building bye-laws would be modified to make rainwater harvesting mandatory.

The fourth statement came from the Water Resources Minister, Mr. C. P. Thakur, who announced a huge sum of Rs. 55 crores to promote rainwater harvesting. The Gujarat Chief Minister, Mr. Keshubhai Patel announced the construction of 10,000 check dams while his Andhra Pradesh counterpart, Mr. N. Chandrababu Naidu, promised huge sums of money for watershed projects.

Topping it all is the glaring example of the Rashtrapati Bhavan, where the CSE finds itself tied up in bureaucratic red tape in trying to put up water harvesting structures since last year!

**The Hindu
28 May 2000**

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does. Girls are going astray with all these new fangled things" says Nusarat, striking a discordant note in the *Samooch*. There are enough voices to disagree with her.

"Remember it did not happen in the *Jagjagi*. It happened before the *Jagjagi* started" reminds Zaibunnessa.

The *Jagjagi* or literacy cum awareness programme was only begun in October 1999, after Naseema was already pregnant.

Two kinds of *Jagjagis* are run under the supervision of Mahila Samakhya. *Bal Jagjagi* is meant for children in the three to nine year group and *Jagjagi* for those above nine. The *Samooch* appoints "*Sahelis*" to teach at *Jagjagi* centres and also has the right to sack her if it finds her unsatisfactory. The *saheli* of the *Bal Jagjagi* at Parati is a bright eyed Vibha, a Musahar girl who attended a nine-month residential course in literacy, hygiene, nutrition, and basic legal awareness at Muzaffarpur.

It is a happy day for Vibha. Her wedding date has just been fixed. She walks into the *Samooch* meeting waving what looks like a letter in her hand. Actually it is an invitation to her wedding that she has written herself. She does not blush as the invitation is read out aloud. "Isn't that just great? I have written it myself." Vibha seeks compliments from everyone.

Vibha is only 15, a neo literate and full of plans for the future. "Mine will be a child marriage. But I can't help it. My children won't have to go through it I promise," Vibha says brimming with confidence and smiling with happiness at the same time. She symbolises the changing face of rural Bihar, straining to be free yet a prisoner of old values that bind her family, hoping for a better future for her progeny and striving to make the best of the present. Transition is slow but it is making itself felt in Parati.

**Anjali Deshpande
Deccan Herald
28 May 2000**

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Communication for Development and Learning (CDL) is a Bangalore-based non-profit voluntary organisation working to integrate communication more effectively into the development process. Realising the importance of working closely with the mainstream media, CDL works closely with professional journalists to ensure that issues related to social justice and development are given a planned and sustained exposure in the media.

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