

NIRNAYA

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A STEP FORWARD ...

Our doubts are traitors...
Making us lose the good...
We might often win...
By fearing to attempt!

During the last three months, Nirnaya has witnessed the unleashing of great potential among its grantees, be it the young students of Vikasini Girls School, the tribal women of Denkanikottai, Tamil Nadu or the differently-abled women in Sangareddy, Andhra Pradesh. This has provided

a great boost to the conviction of the organization and will hopefully do the same for all those who have stood by our side and those who wish to extend their support to us.



How the potter moulds her clay!

Little Narmada was very irregular to school. Upon questioning, her classmates told their teacher that she had been playing marbles and 'gilli danda' for money, with the boys in the area. Upon hearing this intriguing story of a six-year old girl gambling, our Managing Trustee decided that the child's energy and her ability to focus and target things could be channelized in a manner that could come to her aid instead of leading her into trouble. She urged the school staff to introduce carom competitions for the children and use non-monetary prizes as incentives. Ever since, Narmada has been consistent in winning all the competitions! Perhaps Narmada was a catalyst for change in Vikasini because today there is talk of introducing sports such as cricket for all the children in the school.

One step for Zubedda and a great leap for differently abled women!

On the 29th of August, Zubedda, the program volunteer for the differently abled women's group, took thirty such women for a meeting with the collector of Medak district in Andhra Pradesh. This culminated in the awarding of twenty five thousand rupees each under the Indira Awas Yojana (IAY) scheme to eight differently abled women, for the purpose of constructing houses on the pieces of land held by them. This event also much drew media coverage from the Hyderabad city based channel 'C' which telecast interviews of five of these women. For Zubedda, who is herself differently abled, this is a great step forward in empowering women with disabilities and voicing their rights.

Pillars of Vikasini

- Ms. Gitanjali Mishra, AGM Hyderabad Zonal Office, Region 2 and Mr. Norman Isaac, Manager, St. John's Road branch, State Bank of India, Secunderabad distributed school uniforms at Vikasini Girls School, Addagutta, Secunderabad on the 1st of July. Eleven playschool girls got their school dresses and this seems to have rid them of their 'first time school trauma' since their tear-drenched cheeks were wreathed in bright happy smiles.
- Rotary Club of Secunderabad West contributed towards the supply of the health drink- 'Horlicks', while Ms. Urmila Subbarao committed a regular monthly donation for the supply of milk for all the children.
- State Bank Staff College Ladies Association visited the school on the 8th of August, and after distributing coloring books, crayons and paint sets for all the children, spent some time interacting with them.



- Nirnaya took the initiative of introducing first in class badges and stars for maintaining school rules and punctuality. This has been received extremely well by the children who are all now keen to be the proud owners of such badges!

"I was telling around 10 of the students a story from ESOPs Fables on a Saturday afternoon in which featured a stepmother - and it was insightful to hear the comments from each one of them - 'all stepmother are bad...' 'My father tells he will bring us stepmother because he doesn't like our mother...' I told him I will take to police...' 'Why fathers have to beat mothers...?' And so on..."

- Indira Jena

Vikasini Girls School in Altafnagar, Old Hubli, Karnataka is the second school supported by Nirnaya in order to help girls from the economically deprived sections of society access education at the primary level. Twenty girls aged three to four years gained admission into playschool on August 4, 2005. While Nirnaya supports the uniforms, salaries, schoolroom rent and some minimum furniture as well teaching material, contributions in kind and service have started coming in from various sources - Farida Khan and Wahida Begum both fashion designers, made the uniforms and a local doctor has committed to conducting weekly medical check ups for the children, while Akshaya Patra Foundation supplies the midday meal. Mrs.



Asha Bharat, President, Gujarati Mahila Mandal has collected and donated some toys. Affus Women's Welfare Association, which is supervising the running of this school, is organizing a felicitation program for the same. The families'

contribution is footwear for the children. In this area a homogenous Muslim community exists where there are many single mothers. The women's income source is through bidi-rolling and domestic work both of which are low paying. There was initial resistance from the community due to the apprehension that the children would be kidnapped and sold in the 'Gulf,' but these fears were allayed at the inaugural meeting. The Akshaya Patra Foundation program head, Sri Yudhishtira Krishna Dasa inaugurated the school.

Program Updates

Program Related Investment

- State Bank of India Hyderabad Zonal Office, Region 2 sanctioned the loan for onward lending to self-help groups supported by Nirnaya and it was a significant step for Nirnaya on August 13, 2005. The preliminary identification of groups, assessment of the members' capacity to take up or scale up micro enterprises had been carried out by the local Nirnaya program volunteer, Faizunnisa Begum and disbursement of the loans by Indira Jena took place on August 18, 2005. In all ninety nine women availed of loans on this day and the local media gave the event extensive coverage. Most of the women were already into some kind of micro-enterprise



and were going to scale up the same. The activities were varied - like small grocery stores, fruit, flower, vegetable vending, production and sale of women's wear from undergarments to embroidered outfits, etc. Some of the groups are homogenous Hindu, dalit or Muslim groups while one or two are mixed community groups.

- As a result of the revolving fund given to the Irula women's self help groups in Denkanikottai, Krishnagiri district, Tamilnadu, two of the groups were able to participate in the auction of non-timber forest produce. The subsequent sale of this fetched the members a significant profit and has taken their self-confidence to new heights.

Rural Development Project

- The zari zardosi training center at Holtikotti, a remote village in Dharwar, Karnataka being supervised by Nirnaya's program volunteer Wahida Begum has developed well and out of the twenty young women who



are undergoing training at least fourteen have developed good skills in the art. There are efforts on by Wahida Begum to get the women a good market linkage.

- The agricultural development project for tribal women in Deogarh district, Orissa has achieved much so far. This includes - access to loans for three women's self help groups from three villages with forty six members, storage of six quintals and forty kilos of paddy in their grain bank as food security, collection of a hundred and thirty kilos of sixteen varieties of indigenous seeds as an attempt to revive traditional agricultural practices and set up a seed bank, development of sixteen compost pits, land entitlement for seven tribal women and completion of land development work over twenty two acres by twenty-two of the total forty two families.
- In the Dumka region of Jharkand, there has occurred an overall growth that has resulted in a reduction in the rate of migration in the region. Today the Santhali tribal women are able to sign their names and readily agree to send their children to school. Animators are working along with Anganwadi workers in immunization programs for children. The Animators collect medicines from Anganwadi workers in their respective villages and distribute the same among pregnant women and

Program Updates

children. Agricultural activities are in full swing and this constitutes one of the most important reasons for decrease in migration. The three self-help groups in the region have now been linked up with the district bank and are in anticipation of receiving bank loans so that they may start small businesses.

- Seven groups of women of Kodagarai hill villages, Krishnagiri District, falling under the Rural Development Council banner in Tamil Nadu have been sanctioned a loan of Rupees four lakhs and forty thousand by the District Collector. This loan has been subsidized at the rate of fifty percent under the Tamil Nadu Adi Dravida Corporation subsidized loan scheme. Out of the Rupees one lakh grant that Nirnaya had made for the revolving fund, Rupees ninety thousand has been repaid and passed on as a new revolving fund to seven self-help groups.

An Eye-Opener!

As poverty begins to stifle more and more people, there is also occurring a simultaneous surge in the consciousness of people. On the 4th of July, the Irula tribals of Krishnagiri District, Tamil Nadu who are a living demonstration of hunger and poverty, asserted their opinion against poverty by wearing the white bands in alliance with the Global Call to Action Against Poverty (GCAP)¹. This campaign, carried out under the auspices of the Rural Development Council, supported by Nirnaya, was so powerful that it not only drew the attention but also provided vital information to the local media, which was unaware of the burgeoning alliance committed towards ending poverty. What is even more remarkable about this demonstration carried out by the Irulas is that they responded to an international call for advocacy against poverty, from an area that is so difficult to access because of its remote location in the Perumalai hills.

¹ *The Global Call to Action Against Poverty (GCAP) is an unprecedented international mobilization of development agencies, faith groups, trade unions, campaigns and other organizations committed to making the leaders of 189 countries live up to their promises of making a breakthrough on poverty, through the Millennium Development Goals agreed upon in the 2000 U.N. Millennium Summit. Support to this cause is demonstrated through wearing a white band at selected events throughout the year.*

Paint-Out

The Vikasini Benefit Paint-Out Program was organised on the 20th August 2005 at YMCA hall, Narayanguda, Hyderabad. International School, Shaikpet and Brilliant Grammar High School, Narayanguda participated in the event. In all thirty two children had participated alongwith Vikasini Girls School Mr. Manzoor Hussain, textile designer and painter presented the theme "Your Favorite Festival" to the children and declared the event open by helping one of the Vikasini Girls School students to start transforming her ideas into a colorful painting.



Urban Slum Development Project

- The urban slum development project is going on well in Kurnool and Chilakaluripeta. In Kurnool there is a desire among the women in groups to find strategies for addressing their gender specific issues. The assumption within Nirnaya that the groups were just into income generation has been overridden, with the women getting ready to attend awareness camps on how to strategize and find freedom from the violence and oppression that they believed had no solution.
- Samudraveni, Nirnaya's program volunteer in Chilakaluripeta is steadily going about building and strengthening the savings and credit groups. She simultaneously ensures that the five women who had availed of loans are carrying on their micro enterprises. The repayment so far is punctual. On 30th August, ten women were given a loan of Rs. 5000/- each by Nirnaya as part of the onward lending program sanctioned by State Bank of India.

Program Updates

- The mothers of the Vikasini school girls decided at the parents meet on August 11th to start savings and credit groups and thirty-three women started it right on August 12th. The hope is that they will explore the idea of starting a thrift and credit co operative as a measure to supplement the family income

Human Resource Development

Faizunnissa in Kurnool, A.P. made a giant leap from vocational training in zari-zardosi embroidery to human resource development through developing a gender perspective. A two-day training, "Understanding Gender" was organized at Hotel Jayashree, Kurnool on the 20th and 21st September. Ms. K. Sathyavathi, head of Bhumika (Nirnaya grantee) conducted the training. It was such an unusual 'happening' that some local political leaders became suspicious that the thirty odd women from the slums were being held captive as a vote bank for the forthcoming municipal elections! The local and regional television channels covered the program and interviews with some of the participants.

Literature on Women's Development Issues

Bhumika Women's Center which publishes a monthly

feminist magazine in Telugu, held a Telugu poetry and story writing competition for young women writing on women. Being a regular funding partner, Nirnaya made a special grant for this initiative as well. The competition and awards function took place in August 2005. It was encouraging to hear some extracts of the award winning poems and stories. Bhumika's



initiative in organizing such a program is in pursuance of its mission of visibilizing women's writings in Telugu since more than a decade now. Indira Jena represented Nirnaya and gave away the prizes on August 31st at the Sundarayya Vignana Kendram, Hyderabad.

Conferences / Meetings / Seminars / Visits

- First meeting of Asian women's funds at Ulan Bator, Mongolia: July 11th and 12th : attended by Indira Jena, Lalita Missal, G. Vasantha Kumari.
- First board / advisory council meeting for financial year 2005-06: August 27th at Secunderabad : attended by B. Rajamani, K. Sandhya Reddy, Suman Kumar, Gitanjali Mishra, Urmila Subbarao and Indira Jena.
- Conference on 'Micro-finance: The Way Ahead' held on August 6th at the International School of Business: attended by G. Vasantha Kumari, senior projects associate
- The 9th meeting of the India - EU Roundtable Conference- 'Meetings and Interaction with Civil Society Representatives' held on 20th September : attended by Indira Jena and program officer (Communications), Radha Ruckmani.



- Visit of Kavita Ramdas President, Global Fund for Women, USA to Nirnaya on July 10.

SPECIAL MOMENTS

Independence Day Celebrations

Freedom is the ability to exercise choices. It is the right to a choice between child labor and an education that fortifies you. It is the right to choose between violence and peace. It is the right to be free of hunger. It is the right that ought to be yours just because you are human. It is right that only we can give to our society and ourselves because society is merely a reflection

towards the acknowledgement of this and the celebration of Independence Day on August 15 was a celebration of the right of the girl child to be free of forced labor and restore her dignity as a human being. The regular Vikasini donors who are an integral part of every endeavor of Vikasini attended the program. Dr. Saraswati Puranik an eminent educationist and regular donor to Vikasini unfurled the national flag. Members of Rotary Club, Secunderabad West and Lioness



of our very own state. We do not exist as isolated units in society but constitute inter-related parts of the same whole. This is simply to state that poverty and child labor are not something that "they" live with, "we" are an intrinsic part of it.

The establishment of Vikasini school by Nirnaya was a step

Club participated in the celebrations while also contributing to it through the provision of breakfast and prizes for the children who contributed through their hard work and spirit which manifested in a delightful, thought-provoking play. The consistent and carefully planned efforts of the staff of Vikasini and Nirnaya in organization and conduction of the program also contributed greatly to the success of the event.

"A ship in port is safe, but that is not what ships are for. Sail out to sea and do new things."

Rear Admiral Dr. Grace Hopper (1906-1992), the Computer scientist who invented COBOL

88- Day Women's Rights Campaign

(10 Dec 2005- 8 March 2006)



In the face of increasing violence against women, Nirnaya along with other supporters of women's causes has pledged to highlight the significance of women's rights. Since 10th December is Human Rights Day and 8th March is Women's Day, this 88-day campaign is intended to bridge the gap between the two to indicate that violation of the woman on the basis of her gender is as much a violation of her rights as a human being. It is asked of anyone who understands this violation and supports the issue of women's rights as human rights, to participate by contributing a rupee a day for the 88 days that come in between Human Rights Day and Women's Day. This money will be forwarded to women's organizations working at the grassroots levels for conducting awareness generation campaigns on the social and legal rights of women.

Teacher's Day Celebrations

On September 5th, the students of Vikasini celebrated Teachers' Day with great gusto! There was a lot of secret planning which included preparing dance numbers and songs by students from every class without the knowledge of their teachers. When the day finally arrived, the children were bursting with excitement. Many of them brought flowers for their teachers. The Nirnaya staff, which had conspired along with the students to surprise the teachers on teachers' day, joined the celebrations by bringing a huge cake, gifts for the teachers and organized games for them. For the children, this celebration was the first of its kind and helped them express their love and gratitude for the teachers who have helped them cross many milestones.

"There is now overwhelming evidence that women's empowerment, through schooling, employment opportunities and economic development has the most far-reaching effect in improving the lives of all- men, women and children"

Amartya Sen

Nobel laureate (Economics)

Introspection

Bringing about change is not as smooth as it seems. Economic empowerment needs to be accompanied by change in social attitudes. It requires great conviction, courage and persistence. Nirnaya was confronted by an incident of suicide by a bright young 'differently abled' woman who was pursuing her graduate studies in Rajupet village of Thiparthi mandal of Nalgonda district in Andhra Pradesh. It was found that any questions regarding the death of young women were being evaded by the community members. However there is a general feeling acknowledged by us all at Nirnaya and the program volunteers, that women with disability are viewed by society as a double burden both because of their gender and because of their disability. Such women are viewed as better to be disposed off with rather than continue to exist as an eyesore in society. Nirnaya dealt with this challenge by organizing a discussion with the local program volunteer Janaki and the Sangareddy, Medak district volunteer Zubbeda, both of who are differently abled. A three-hour discussion ended with a decision that Zubbeda would visit the particular village accompanied by Janaki. The extensive visit to Janaki's working area took place between August 3 - 5 and a debriefing session with Nirnaya took place on August 6, 2005. The session revealed that there was another member in the group whose mother was threatening to kill her. This woman was being supported by Nirnaya to run a small shop. Her mother would drink and beat her up badly. Therefore, despite finding a ray of hope in the economic independence that she'd found, there was much lacking in the social change that was envisaged for her. It was felt that there is need for training of the self-help groups in the area, which Zubbeda and Janaki would jointly do. This peer counseling and training will hopefully produce positive results in improving the self-image of the differently abled women as well as create a better space for them in the community.

Donations to Nirnaya are exempted from tax under Section 80G of the IT Act, 1961.

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