

## Walking our Talk...



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### Editors

Indira Jena  
Supriya Rao

### NIRNAYA

an indian women's fund  
# 11, Deepthi Apts,  
S.P. Road,  
Secunderabad - 26  
A.P. India

Phone : 91 40 780 5089  
hyd2\_nirnaya@sancharnet.in  
www.nirnaya.org

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Walking for the sole purpose of walking and talking non-stop is possible and relatively easy. Visualizing a goal, putting it into words, giving it a language and style and verbalizing it through 'talk' is difficult. 'Walking this talk' or putting into practice the talk means commitment, belief and passion, towards the goal that must be achieved. This requires a lot of courage and trust.

Nirnaya did the talk and was truly blessed in immediately getting one of the pioneer international women's funds, Mama Cash of The Netherlands to walk the talk along with the founders of Nirnaya.

Starting with this issue, we will be doing a series on our journey, to share with our readers this fantastic experience where we have found fellow travelers who also have the same vision of helping bring about a more balanced society by enhancing opportunities for the marginalized.

We have to first give, in order to convince ourselves about our vision and mission, before we ask, was our premise, to start with. As founders, we gave, though none of the three of us were by any standards wealthy. Mini printed our first set of stationery free of cost, Uma designed a herbal diary and sold copies, the proceeds of which she gave to Nirnaya, and Indira makes cash / kind donations to date from her consultancy income.

Our beginning was based on the belief that 'small is beautiful.' We were committed, passionate and raring to go, but this was not sufficient for us to engage with any orthodox funder-individual or corporate and that is where

Mama Cash stepped in. Our Mama said 'we believe you can pull it off and are willing to grant you some money to see if it works...' In October 1998 Mama Cash gave a seed grant of Rs.6,80,000 to Nirnaya, who in turn helped 5000 marginalized, rural poor women organize themselves into groups and access government and bank programs within a year.

### About Mama Cash...

Mama Cash was founded in 1983 by five women who established it as the first international independent women's funding organization in the world. These five women were Marjan Sax, Dorelies Kraakman, Tania Leon, Patti Slegers and Lida van den Broek. They were all active in the women's movement and passionate about the independence of women. Since its origin, Mama Cash's leaders envisioned it to be a radical funding organization. Therefore, Mama Cash provided leadership to progressive activities and supported their ultramodern projects (Mama Cash) (8).

Mama Cash invests in the future of women across the globe by providing a means for underprivileged and oppressed women to come together with one voice to seek empowerment and control over their own lives and environments. Often finances are a barrier to women's groups striving to end injustice and promote peace. Mama Cash's financial support stimulates courage and unity among a women's group to further its cause, and in doing so, encourages women to foster each other's creativity and leadership (Mama Cash) (1).

Visit [www.mamacash.nl](http://www.mamacash.nl) to know more.

# Summer Camp for Vikasini girls!

The first summer camp of Vikasini Girls School, Addagutta was attended by 20 students for a period of 12 days. It was an enjoyable experience for the children because it fused all their energies into art and craft and creative learning. Everyday the children painted for an hour and a half under the guidance of Mr. Ramesh an artist. Basic rules of grammar,



accepted ways of communicating in English and innovative methods of making Mathematics 'easy to learn' were painstakingly designed and taught by the Vikasini Girl Child Education Trust board members, Ms. Meenakshi Subramaniam and Mrs. V. Malini respectively. The two Nirnaya program volunteers, Madhuri and Srilakshmi worked with the children teaching them to make clay models of fruits and vegetables as well as making friendship bands adorned with stones and beads. It was time well spent and the learning by the children remains to be tested.



## Little women showing mothers the way

The Vikasini Mahila Mandali, self-help group consisting of the mothers of the children of Vikasini school is now an officially registered group. A bank account has been opened for them in the month of June. While talking to Indira Jena, Sandhya Rani, a group member said, "I am very serious about attending the meetings of this group. I came for this one even though my husband tried to stop me. He told me that he wanted his lunch at the time after I was leaving but I told him that he could make it himself because I would have to attend this meeting." The women claimed that their children who were studying in Vikasini had indirectly impacted them with their new gained confidence. They are able to understand and speak in English because of their children's schooling. The tales of these women are amazing and it is unbelievable how social change can occur in so many unanticipated ways!

# Land development for Tribals in Orissa

The one-year programme on Agricultural Land Development for Tribal women supported by Nirnaya in Deogarh district of Orissa has been a great success! The area is dominated by tribal population and the community is subjected to much exploitation by local landowners. Most of them constitute landless labour who migrate to the neighbouring districts in search of alternate livelihood options. Our grantee, JEETA's endeavor is to enable the tribal population restore land and traditional agricultural practices which are familiar and economically available to them. This involves empowering women to gain control over their land and economy through negotiation with the local government officials (tehsildars) for pattas (land entitlements) from the encroached land and land development through techniques of bio-farming and indigenous farming methods. In addition, JEETA has formed women's self-help groups that aim at food security through development of grain banks and seed banks to help them during periods of crisis.

Today after a full year's support, there are many achievements to celebrate! To mention a few- 80% of mothers and children have been immunized through

through sensitization and induction into the Safe Motherhood and Child Survival Programme in 4 gram panchayats, the land of 42 tribal families has been developed using indigenous methods, 23-grain banks and 5 indigenous banks have been established



for 20 villages and the women in self help groups have negotiated successfully for undertaking local construction contracts, something they would have never dared to do a year ago!

## Surging ahead with Vikasini Girl Child Education Trust

Vikasini Girl Child Education Trust became a registered body in August 2006 in order to take the girl child education program to as many places in India as possible. Despite their full time jobs and busy schedules the board of trustees has been steadily working towards making it fully functional as an independent institution. Today their efforts have duly culminated in the emergence of the trust as an autonomous body with its separate headquarters in Secunderabad. In addition, one of the board members will take on the responsibility of the overall program coordination to oversee the regular functioning of the two Vikasini schools in Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh and simultaneously enhance resource mobilization and review of the scope of establishing more such schools in other regions. A Vision 2020 has also been formulated and the future of Vikasini speaks of endless possibilities!

## What Awareness Can Do!

Ever since the legal awareness program had been conducted at Kurnool in December 2005, the effect has been rippling! Padmavathi (name changed) is the only supporting member of a family that is steeped in economic crisis. Her sister was abandoned by her husband because she could not pay up the dowry demanded by his family. Regardless of repeated pleas, Padmavathi and her sister found no respite. The sister's husband went ahead and married another woman and challenged the two sisters to do whatever they liked, he couldn't care less! Padmavathi then remembered the legal awareness session that she had attended six months earlier, with no idea that it could ever come to her rescue! She approached the advocate who had conducted the session. With the appropriate legal advice, Padmavathi's sister has now petitioned in the court for maintenance from her husband. The litigation is in process but it has given the two women enormous hope and vision. There are hundreds of women in the area who face domestic violence, dowry harassment and abandonment without any inkling of what to do in these situations. Truly, the light of one candle can pave way for others to be lit up as well!

# A Rupee for your thoughts!

Shamshallapur is located in the border region of Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka and comprises a population that's mainly Dalit. The people speak Kannada but for all official purposes they have to use Telugu. Their difficult geographical location, obscure cultural mix and caste identity renders them unacceptable by mainstream society and the community has always been struggling with poverty. Nirnaya, in keeping with its principle of reaching out to the most remote and neglected communities, started supporting the community-based women's groups comprised of Dalit and Muslim women in the area. Two women's self help groups with 15 members each have been formed and these have been facilitated to access bank loans for running small-scale economic enterprises. The groups have a strong sense of unity and trust. It was upon their suggestion that Nirnaya extended loans to select members for livestock management and procurement of milch animals.

*At the end of six months of receiving the loan, Lakshmmamma said "I am able to see money in my hands at the end of the day." Narsamma said "I used to make do with one meal a day, now I have two meals thanks to the loan and the income I get from it."*

Today, the women who go all the way to Bidar in Karnataka to sell milk have been able to increase their selling price by one rupee to Rs. 9 per litre. This raise means much more than a mere economic victory, it meant that the women had

become confident enough to stand up together and collectively bargain for that raise. At first the buyers rejected their demand. But the women did not give up.

*"We did not sell the milk for 4 days - we consumed it at home. The buyers waited, thinking we would break down. But when they saw that we remained firm on our stand, they gave in and offered to raise the rate by one rupee."*



Over a span of two years this is a long way they have come. The role Nirnaya played was in involving these women in all of its capacity building programs. This is the effect of the 'Making the Case' exercise that was adapted and taken to Nirnaya's grantees by Dr. Sujatha Rita who innovatively adapted the original tool crafted by Women's Funding Network, USA. Now the women are even talking about setting up a milk-cooperative!

## Introspection

Despite providing training in tailoring and the opportunity of employment in an export oriented company for women from the poorest families of Altaf nagar slum in Hubli, Karnataka, it was observed that economic opportunities were not sufficient to bring about a qualitative change in the lives of these women. In the case of two young women, the fathers preferred that the family go hungry to bed rather than send them out to work! Affus Women's Welfare Association took up the major role of counseling the families and to some extent change their stereotypical notions about women's role in society. The persistent efforts proved fruitful and the women are now allowed to work at the factory! These situations bring into focus the fact that attitudinal changes and economic changes must complement each other. It also goes to prove that change makers must take on a more proactive role to bring about a holistic difference.

## CAPACITY BUILDING

- **Smart Growth**

In March, Nirnaya conducted the 2-day Smart Growth workshop amongst its staff, with the telephonic guidance of Ellen Sprenger an independent consultant and board member of the Women's Funding Network (WFN), USA. The Smart Growth tool was used for the capacity building of the members of the International Network of Women's Funds. The purpose was to help members understand their organizational position and future direction with the able collaboration of WFN and Mama Cash, Netherlands. For the Nirnaya board, advisory council and staff, the exercise provided an understanding of organizational growth in the historical context. In the concluding session in May 2006 Ellen Sprenger helped the two Nirnaya representatives Indira and Shamala do critical a reflection on what its accomplishments and sensitive areas were and from thereon pitch its future direction.

- **Peer Assessment**

As part of Nirnaya's capacity building program, a peer assessment activity in February 2006 was supported where our grantee, MJK in Bihar conducted a program review of our project in Jharkhand. There were two benefits from the report submitted by MJK to Nirnaya – the primary purpose of appraising the project impact and receiving feedback was served and it was also useful in evaluating MJK's assessment and documentation skills.

Our Hubli program volunteer Wahida begum visited the working area of Ramesh our Shamshallapur program volunteer in May 2006. Being able to speak the language of the community in the village brought forth many interesting aspects, ideas, and successes of the women in the village. Being absolutely elated with the rich exchange Wahida expressed her preparedness to make a



monthly visit and so help the community move ahead faster. According to her report the members of the Ambedkar Mahila Podupu Sangam and the Goutam Buddha Mahila Podupu Sangam have been benefiting tremendously through the loan given by Nirnaya. Some women like Ratnamma, Gundamma, Sharnamma and Tuljamma purchased 4 goats each with a loan of Rs. 5000. Once the goats produce kids, the women retain the female kids and sell off the male kids for Rs. 1000- 1200 each. They say that they are earning quite a bit of money from this and may not need a loan again!

- **Shifts at Nirnaya**

In keeping with the future trajectory spelt out at Nirnaya's formation day, a second line leadership was put in place by May. Shirley Thomas Theckel (Joint Director – Programs) is being mentored by Indira to take on the Executive Director's position a year from now and Shamala Rao as the other Joint Director is responsible for Administration and Finance. Systematic functioning through fortnightly staff presentations on work done are being encouraged with a view to building communication skills, promoting inter-program exchange, resulting in an overall and comprehensive understanding of the programmatic work. Weekly staff meetings have been made mandatory to support intra-office communication, project updates and feedback.

*It's important to remember that feminism is no longer a group of organizations or leaders. It's the expectations that parents have for their daughters, and their sons, too. It's the way we talk about and treat one another. It's who makes the money and who makes the compromises and who makes the dinner. It's a state of mind. It's the way we live now.*

— Anna Quindlen

# Peace and Empowerment!

The establishment of the Vikasini Girls School at Hubli, Karnataka in August 2005 ignited a desire among the women of the Altaf nagar slum to also learn something that could perhaps give them better livelihoods and improve the quality of their lives. Nirnaya's grantee in Karnataka, Affus Women's Welfare Association then carried out some informal market research to see if there was some kind of vocational training that could bring with it chances of immediate employment for the women. With Nirnaya's support, their hopes were realized in the form of a 1 year training course in tailoring for a group of 30 women aged 18- 27 years, only one of whom had managed, through all odds, to study up to class 12. The rest had barely managed it to class 3 or 4. After 7 months of training, Farida Khan from AWWA carried out negotiations with Hubli Apparels Limited. As a result, 8 women have been chosen as trainees for the company! They will be paid a monthly stipend of Rs.1200 during the training period. Upon successful completion of this, they will be absorbed into the export-oriented company and will receive a good salary along with other benefits like provident fund. This is coming a long way from inconsistent daily wage labour of Rs. 20 to 30.

This is of great significance for Nirnaya's proactive peace building process since Hubli is a place with a history of communal conflicts and riots. Nirnaya believes that long-term proactive peace building efforts are the solution to such recurrent tensions. It also believes that women are the builders of peace and harmony. In pursuance of this belief Nirnaya supports education, skills enhancement and income generation opportunities for women and girls in conflict prone pockets of the country. Nirnaya hopes the commitment and enthusiasm of women like Farida and Wahida from AWWA will ensure that communal conflicts in the area remain history.

## Araria Model Village, Bihar

Nirnaya's grantee, Mahila Jagaran Kendra has begun its project of developing a model village at Bhargaavan and Paikpar villages in Araria district of Bihar. Mahila Jagaran Kendra is working out a comprehensive strategy to bring about attitudinal changes towards gender relations within the village and subsequently make it a 'model village', which can be replicated at other places as well. With Nirnaya's support, the organization began its work in September 2005 by conducting a baseline survey and investigating the socio-demographic situation of families in the area. The next attempt comprised forming 11 member committees of dedicated women at ward, village, block and district levels. MJK has also networked with the Block Development Officer to create awareness about the various governmental schemes available for the villagers. With regularized meetings of women and adolescent girls' groups, a sense of collective strength as well the courage to question the male-female status quo in the village has arisen. At

village gatherings and panchayat meetings, the issue of women's representation in the panchayat body is being avidly discussed. A Violence Against Women committee in Bhargaavan village has been formed to stop atrocities against women. In February, a two-day session on personality development, report writing skills, understanding the process of group formation and methods to increase participation levels was held for the staff and volunteers as a capacity building exercise. On 8th March, International Women's Day, for the first time, a campaign for women's equality was successfully conducted by the people of Araria!

*Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that has.*

— Margaret Mead,  
American Cultural Anthropologist

## Women survivors of Tsunami

The giant tsunami waves have affected the livelihoods of 6,45,000 families or about 3.2 million people in Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh and Pondichery (Report by Asian Development Bank). The report provided by the National Alliance of Women (NAWO), states that women have been worst affected by the disaster and continued to be victims of post-disaster occurrences. With the support of Nirnaya, NAWO rendered relief and rehabilitation in the village of Dooming Kuppam, Mylapore block, Chennai district. Nirnaya's grant towards rehabilitation of tsunami victims was able to support 60 women to undertake self-employment facilities by giving them Rs. 2000/- each. Three groups of 20 members each have been formed and these are being encouraged to repay the loan gradually so that the benefit of the loan may reach others as well. These women have also been provided with a platform to discuss their problems as women and as workers on a monthly basis.

## CONFERENCES/ MEETINGS/ SEMINARS/ VISITS

- Second Annual Meeting of Asian Network of Women's Funds, April 17-18, 2006, Hyderabad, India: facilitated by Supriya Rao and attended by Shamala Rao, Indira Jena.
- Global Philanthropy Forum, April 3-5, 2006, Washington DC, USA: Participation by Indira Jena. Presentation by Ms. Indira Jena on 'Women and Girls: Next Generation Leaders' as co-panelist on April 3rd and 'Meet the Social Entrepreneurs segment on April 4th at same forum. Global Fund for Women, USA sponsored the participation. Special thanks to Rachel Humphrey of the Global Fund for Women for facilitating Indira's presentations.
- Annual Conference of Women's Funding Network, May 4-6 2006, Pittsburgh, USA: attended by Indira Jena and Shamala Rao.
- Smart Growth Training & Sharing session, May 3, 2006, Pittsburg, USA: attended by Indira Jena and Shamala Rao.
- Meeting of International Network of Women's Funds, May 7, 2006, Pittsburg, USA: attended by Indira Jena and Shamala Rao.
- Evaluation conducted by Give India on behalf of Global Giving, USA: participation by Indira Jena, Shirley Thomas, K. Mohan and S. Faizunnissa on May 17, 2006

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- Mrs. Radha Ruckmani and Mrs. Shirley Thomas for extending their services towards the Formation Day celebrations.

## ANWF

In April 2006, Nirnaya successfully sponsored, organized and hosted the Second Annual Meeting of the Asian Network of Women's Funds at Kamat Lingapur Hotel, Hyderabad. This is a significant achievement for Nirnaya and has positive implications on its growing capacity as a fundraising and grant making organization. The ANWF joint publication featuring information on the status of Asian women and the present member funds' successful strategies was finalized at this meeting. Tewa from Nepal and Mones from Mongolia were represented at this meeting. The joint publication (sponsored by the INWF) was subsequently formally launched by Emilienne de Leon co chair of the INWE, Kavita Ramdas, President of Global Fund for Women and Astrid Aarfges, and Programs coordinator, Mama Cash at the INWF meeting in Pittsburg on May 6, 2006.



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# NIRNAYA

# 11, Deepthi Apartments, S.P. Road, Secunderabad - 26, A.P India.

Phone : 91-40-27805089 Fax: 91-40-27717305

E-mail: hyd2\_nirnaya@sancharnet.in [www.nirnaya.org](http://www.nirnaya.org)

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