

Coming to our aid



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Private Circulation Only

Yet another foundation who heard our voice and stepped forward to support us reach a scale up stage was Ford Foundation. Despite all our experience as development consultants / activists we were and are quite green behind the ears when it comes to seeking funds. It took a visit from a Ford representative to clear our impression that an organization needs to have completed at least 10 years to approach large foundations for support. The very foundation we found so daunting proved to be most caring, helping us with putting up a proper project proposal, not letting off their tempers at goof ups in our reporting and accounting methodologies. It has been a fantastic hand holding Ford has done for us and this is the example we follow with our grantees.

The support, contrary to concerns that it might put off local donors, has actually helped us build up our level of credibility and slowly but steadily increase local resource mobilization.

The process of regular information dissemination Ford follows is useful in the sense that it helps us to further disseminate the same to our grantees.

At the end of one visit to the Ford office at Delhi, our two support staff said 'You know where Nirnaya should be? It should become like Ford with this kind of office

Nirnaya cannot grow to that scale in terms of funds or infrastructure but has certainly incorporated Ford's guiding principles seeing them as the core values of a foundation.

An enriching experience

One of the enriching experiences of grant making for Nirnaya has been the case of Bhumika. While the support has been for various studies on women's issues, the manner in which Bhumika has put to use the information and analysis of these studies fulfills the two processes of information dissemination and documentation. The quarterly feminist magazine in Telugu disseminates the information through reader-friendly articles. The documentation is valuable for purposes of comparative studies, research and policymaking.

Ms. Satyavathi acknowledged the pivotal role played by Nirnaya in Bhumika's growth in an interview on TV 9 on Thursday, January 18, 2007. She said that Bhumika reached this stage of growth because of the help extended by Indira Jena. We are also proud that with assured financial support from Nirnaya, Bhumika Women's Collective is fast approaching self-sustainability.

Save the Girl Child!



People talk about the carefree days of childhood filled with laughter and joy little realizing that they belong to a minority. There are millions in this country who have never known the joys of childhood especially if they belong to the endangered species known as the 'Girl Child'. If it sounds like an exaggeration remove the blinkers of conditioning and look around you.

Sarayu an LKG student of Vikasini is like any other child. She missed writing the annual exams last year and therefore could not be promoted to the next class. This year, she once again missed the final exams for LKG. Her distraught mother met Indira and requested for a re-exam. Indira insisted on knowing the reason as to why Sarayu had missed the annual exams for the second consecutive year. The story unfolded. Sarayu's father is an abusive man. On the eve of the exam he flew into one of his rages and doused Sarayu and her sibling with kerosene to set them afire. Sarayu's mother barely managed to escape with both her children. The Fathers Committee of Vikasini Girls School, which was formed in order to deal with extreme situations got to know about this incident the next day and took Sarayu's father to task. The talk turned into an ugly brawl with the men roughing up Sarayu's father. After hearing this unfortunate story Indira saw to it that Sarayu was able to write the exam.

What does this tell us? Firstly, that the girl child continues to be discriminated against. Secondly that if a concerted effort is made at educating people at the grass roots level as Nirmaya does, then a change in mindset is possible. The fact that the Fathers Committee reacted strongly to Sarayu's father's treatment of his daughter is ample evidence of this.

Violence in any form can no longer be treated as a personal or private matter. It is a social issue and all must take a stand against it. Let's stand firm in Nirmaya's fight to 'Save the Girl Child'.

Sheela

LEGAL AID & COUNSELLING

A succour to women in distress

The Legal Aid and Counselling Center has been of tremendous assistance and succour to women in distress. Women in distress can contact the lawyers and take advice over phone. Lawyers from the center go to the women's police stations and help women draft complaints. Apart from this, they also counsel women at the center's office.

Lata* from Kakinada is an unmarried 24 years old graduate. She contacted the Legal Aid Center seeking help to get her share in the family property. Apparently her father and brother were harassing her to get married and go away. Her father threatened her saying that she would not get her share in her grandfather's property. Lata was advised to file a partition case for her share in property even if she left home and lived in a workingwomen's hostel. Lata was told that she would have to obtain a certified copy of the title deed of the land and the house in which her parents lived from the Sub Registrar's office. She could file a suit thereafter. Initially a preliminary decree would be obtained and then the final decree application would be filed based on the preliminary decree. Along with the said application a petition would be filed for appointment of Commissioner by the Court for demarcation of property. Based on the said demarcation the final decree for partition would be passed. Once both these stages were completed, then the execution petition would be filed to receive Lata's share as per the findings in the final decree petition.

(*name changed)

If we are to achieve a richer culture, rich in contrasting values, we must recognize the whole gamut of human potentialities, and so weave a less arbitrary social fabric, one in which each diverse human gift will find a fitting place.

– Margaret Mead

Girl Child Education

Vikasini — more about our little rainbows!

Vikasini's Annual Day celebration was held on March 17, 2007 at Bhaskara Auditorium with fanfare. The Chief Guest was Ms. Suman Kumar, Nirnaya's Board member, well wisher and a generous donor. The theme for the evening was 'Save the Girl Child' which was spoken upon by Ms. Satyavathi, Bhumika Women's Collective. Credit for the sterling performances put up by the children goes to Sam and Dimple who were ably assisted by Lavan. The children's repertoire consisted of dances, drama and games. Ms. Suman Kumar gave away the prizes for the sports events. Ms. Meenakshi Subramaniam, Managing Trustee, VG CET and Ms. Dolly Srivastav, VG CET Board member presented the parents with mementos. The evening came to an end with a vote of thanks by Ms. Annie Mathews. Nirnaya thanks its donors Fila, Andhra Bank Head Office and Canara Bank Circle Office for their donations that made this event possible.

Ms. Sarita Vanka from INDICORPS, USA a fellowship by Indian Americans evinced interest in voluntary work with the Vikasini children after viewing the Vikasini website. Sarita visited the school for the first time on February 19, 2007. Sarita spends time with the students of classes 2, 3, and 4 for an hour between 2 and 3 pm every Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday. The children are enthusiastic about the sessions, which consist of general knowledge, singing, games and extempore speaking.

Come Republic Day, January 26, 2007 and the Vikasini children had assembled at school for the flag



hoisting. Members and office bearers of Rotary Club-Sunrise, our regular donors were in full strength. Mr. Vaman, Past President, hoisted the flag and addressed the students. The Rotarians donated a refrigerator,



steel cupboard, a board with the school's name and two storage units on different visits. They continue to provide milk and Horlicks on a regular basis. Yet another well wisher visited the school and donated a computer to the school. Dr. Uma Chitra, Head of the Department of Nutrition, Ms. Radha Reddy, Lecturer, and thirty –six students from the final year batch of B.Sc. Clinical Nutrition & Dietetics, Kasturba Gandhi College for Women, Secunderabad visited the school in January and distributed high protein snacks prepared by them among the children.

The summer camp started on March 26, 2007 with Mohan, Sheela, Sarita and Usha handling classes in English, Science Practicals, story telling, games, art and craft. Three teachers abruptly left service in mid January. As usual Nirnaya remained unfazed and rose to the occasion. Mr. Mohan Kumar, Projects Officer took over the education project and is doing an admirable job. Ms. Indira Jena spends her spare time teaching at the school. Teachers will be recruited for the new academic year. As parents' meetings have not been held for long, Mohan decided to meet two or three parents especially those of troublesome children every week to sort out problematic behavioral patterns. Despite all the ups and downs, Vikasini still moves on the path to progress!

Rural Development Project

Bridging the gap

India has been hailed as a nation making rapid strides into the computer age. Election campaigns talk about 'India Shining'. Take a peek into reality as Indira and Annie did when they went on an appraisal visit to Dumka, Jharkhand this March. It was a total disconnect from the world that we live in.

Santhali tribals are bone poor and malnourished. They don't have water for cultivation. Practically all the work is highly labor intensive. Whether it is digging wells or ponds or carting coal – it is done manually. There are no roads to the villages or electricity even in small towns and hence no transportation or connectivity. Ask our program volunteers how they commute to the villages – 'by walk.' The distance is anything between 5 to 20 kilometers. Munni Hembram our program volunteer began working for Santhali tribals when she found that outsiders were unscrupulously exploiting them. She recognized the need for a Santhali group wherein Santhals took their own decisions. She conducted a study of land rights and the problems of Santhali women. These women are victims of atrocities, bigamy and are most often deprived of their share in property. Outsiders marry Santhali women, acquire their land, get rid of them and then remarry someone outside the Santhali community.

Prior to the formation of the three self help groups in Rangamattiya village, the Santhals were in the clutches of the moneylender. Initially no one trusted Munni when she talked about small savings but when the first savings group was perceived as successful, others followed suit. This money is used in the time of illness and bank loans are availed for cultivation and purchase of livestock. The formation of groups has made people aware of their rights. The members have learnt how to write their names and realized the importance of sending their children to school. Thanks to the efforts of the group, there is a school in the village. The terrain is rocky, roads are just being laid and access to the village is difficult.



Scarcity of water makes pumps an absolute necessity for cultivation. A pump costs Rs. 20000/- and the banks are willing to give subsidy loans for the purpose. Pump sets are hired for Rs.40/- per hour hence it works out to Rs.200/- per day with Rs. 120/- for fuel. For example, the pump set has to be used at least four times in the course of cultivation of wheat, which spans ninety days.

There are twenty-five families in the Baliyakuda village. The SHG has been to the Block Office to apply for labor cards and has opened an account with the bank. They have received red cards (ration cards for families below the poverty line), availed of loan facilities to purchase goats and pigs and cultivate wheat and mustard. The villagers have built their own houses. Each family has five bighas of land with title deeds. There are no roads, drinking water or even ponds. The SHG has been pressurizing the Block Office to dig a pond. Apart from providing water this would also generate income, as the government would have to pay wages for the manual labor done.

Paralegal training was held on Domestic Violence Act and Right To Information Act for twenty participants chosen from the groups at Maanav Sanstha by Father Suleman and Louis Murundi. Munni plans to work in two panchayats namely Bartali and Ghasipur, which have ten villages each. A random survey of 500 houses has to be first conducted. Future plans include

WORKSHOPS & SEMINARS



Paralegal Training (PLT)–Part 1, Smart Growth Training Series was held on March 3, 2007 at the Smart Growth Training Centre, Secunderabad. The facilitator was Annie S. Mathews, Executive Director, Nirnaya. The training imparted was a combination of paralegal work with a feminist approach and elucidation on the differentiation between counselling and compromise combined with practical steps to tackle problems. PRR and PLT are part of the Smart Growth Capacity Building Program supported by Mama Cash, The Netherlands. Sheela S. Mathews represented Nirnaya at a seminar

on 'Rural Development – Alternative Policies & Programs' organized by the Federation of A.P. Chambers of Commerce & Industry (FAPCCI) on Thursday, February 15, 2007. The daylong seminar dealt with various aspects of rural development with reference to Panchayat Raj. Indira Jena and Annie Mathews participated in the regional meeting of the Asian Network of Women's Funds in Katmandu from 12th – 14th March. The meeting helped each of the Asian funds present their progress, the good practices that accelerated this progress and the challenges.



The Peer Review Reflection (PRR) Phase II, Smart Growth Training Series was held on January 24-26, 2007 at Smart Growth Training Centre, Secunderabad for Nirnaya's grantees. The facilitator Dr. Sujatha Rita combined steps of the Smart Growth and MTC methodologies in order to gauge the work achieved and goals accomplished through assessment of shifts in indicators for the goal that is social change. PRR is a three-year program starting August 2006.

land rights, development of seed banks, preparation of compost pits, ensuring land rights, cultivation of lands, accessing government schemes and bank loans for cultivation and livestock. Indira held a capacity building session for the members of Munni's staff.

It is apparent that the government is doing developmental work but the region's development is lagging behind by about two hundred years. For

example, the government lays roads but there are no vehicles to commute on these roads. Most of the day is spent in walking miles and miles for simple chores. Nirnaya facilitates access to government schemes for the people and creates awareness among them of their rights and schemes available for their betterment. Thus Nirnaya plays a pivotal role by bridging the gap between the region's backwardness and governmental development.

Urban Slum Development Project

Towards a life of dignity and self-sufficiency

As a step towards empowerment, Faizunnisa our program volunteer in Kurnool encouraged five enthusiastic women to undergo paralegal training based on the Criminal Procedure Code. The training was provided by Nirnaya and imparted by a local advocate V. Nagalakshmi Devi at Nirnaya office at Khadakpura, Kurnool on January 13, 2007. Faizunnisa along with four other women from Kurnool attended the daylong Paralegal Training - Part 1 conducted by Nirnaya on March 3, 2007 at the Smart Growth Training Centre, Secunderabad. Syeda Faizunnisa is among the twenty chosen by the State Government to provide Family Counselling at the civil courts

Faizunnisa took the dress making trainees on an exposure visit to the textile factory near by. Most of the tailoring students are from the Muslim community. Faizunnisa is confident that she can acquire sewing machines for Rs.250/- each for these students from the Minority Commission and the BC Commission. The women attending this course require the skills training, as their incomes do not exceed Rs.900/- per month. The men don't work and they take away the women's earnings. The women have to support at least 3 children and themselves in the said amount. Being uneducated and unskilled, the main work of these women is rolling beedis or small unfiltered Indian cigarettes. Women are unprotected while performing these tasks thereby being susceptible to lung infections and T.B. Once they take up a contract, they have to complete the target at any cost.

A classic example of self-sufficiency attained is that of Hazira Bi who was the sole earning member of her family. She took a loan for the business of selling chicken. It was doing well till the avian flu struck India. The purchase of chickens stopped and Hazira Bi was in dire difficulty and could not repay the loan. It was then suggested by Faizunnisa that she make chicken fritters and sell them since hotels were doing brisk business selling chicken fritters.

Hazira Bi started making chicken fritters and selling them. She makes a good living from the sale, and this is now her primary source of income; she sells chickens only on Sunday.

One of the cases of domestic violence solved by Faizunnisa and her team of paralegal workers is that of Ratna*. Ratna from Mahbubnagar got married at the young age of 14 years. After a year, her in-laws began to harass her for dowry. Her in-laws did not take care of her when she conceived nor would they let her go to her natal home. As a result, she did not get the required nutritional intake. After delivery, when her health deteriorated rapidly, her in-laws left her at her parents' home. Ratna's haemoglobin level dropped to below 5% and the doctors gave her four hours to live. The paralegal trainees got wind of the situation and went to visit her. They organized for a blood transfusion, which saved Ratna's life. After Ratna recovered, her in-laws, her parents and elders met under the aegis of the five paralegal trainees, the program volunteer and coordinator. The medical reports were brought as evidence and an explanation sought from the in-laws. With the evidence staring at their faces, the in-laws were convinced by the paralegal team that they had acted against the law and were liable for prosecution. Ratna's in-laws and husband apologized for past misdemeanors and promised to take care of



Ratna. An agreement was executed, the copy of which is kept at the Nirnaya office.

Annie S. Mathews undertook an appraisal visit on February 15, 2007. M. Mubina Bi the field coordinator of the different self-help groups apprised Annie of the work being carried out as well as future plans.

(*name changed)

One region one voice ... Diverse cultures...

The first regional meeting of the Asian Women's Funds sponsored by Mama Cash, The Netherlands took place in the Tewa premises, in Katmandu, Nepal on March 12th and 13th with representatives from HER Fund (Hong Kong), Mones (Mongolia), Nirnaya (India) and of course the host fund Tewa (Nepal). Aparna Nayampalli and Preeti Kirbat from Mama Cash as well as the International Network of Women' Funds executive director Tina Thiart and board member Marketa Hronkova also participated and provided valuable ideas and insights.



The updates from each fund followed by candid discussions on challenges revealed the common threads that wove the Asian region together and reinforced the need for solidarity, information sharing and collective action wherever practically possible.

When indeed shall we learn that we are all related one to the other, that we are all members of one body?

– Helen Keller

The fight for rights continues

Rural Development Council (RDC) and Aaranya Irular Federation sent a joint petition in January to the Collector on behalf of the Kodagarai village, Dodamanchi Panchayat for allotment of a burial ground. The Collector sanctioned seven acres of land for the burial ground and a separate study center for the tribal residential school. The Aaranya Irular Federation became a registered body under the Societies Act on March 3, 2007. The newly elected executive members took charge.

RDC has decided to fight the government's allotment of two acres of land in Krishnagiri district, mainly Denkanikottai Taluk and Kelamangalam Block. This allotment of land has not reached the real beneficiaries who live below the poverty line. There are plans afoot to hold a daylong dharna at the Collector's office.

The organization celebrated International Women's Day on March 22nd where 1200 Irula community women participated and community representatives from various parts of Tamilnadu gathered. The discussion focused on the latest Forest Bill of 2005. The members gathered on the occasion expressed solidarity in lobbying for the legislation to get implemented and so address their issues.

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

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