

Helping People

One Drop At A Time



Field Report From India

June 12, 2007

Dear Friends,

This update is a little different from what you are used to. Our editor and chief, Cathy Forsberg, took a leave of absence for the June 2007 adventure in India! Although we collaborated on the content of past updates, it was her steady hand that kept the monologue flowing and the updates coming on a regular basis.

A heavy fog at Kennedy airport kept my plane on the ground for over two hours insuring a missed connection in Paris. After a 24 hour setback, I received a very warm welcome from my friend and mentor Haroon Sait upon arriving at one in the morning on Monday the 11th of June. Some mango milkshake and good conversation at Haroon's home made the long journey seem a lot shorter.

June is traditionally a hot month in India and it marks the beginning of the monsoon season where daily deluges of rain are welcome after a long dry spell. Six of the past seven years have seen inadequate monsoons exacerbating the situation of inadequate water supply here in Kolar district. The lack of water has made dramatic shifts in agriculture in this region. There is a shift in the type of crops grown, away from irrigated crops and towards "dry" crops like millet and sorghum that don't require moisture other than the monsoon rains. Rice which was once grown all over the district is now only grown in the few places where water collects naturally in abundance. Rice and other irrigated crops are imported from other parts of the State where there are adequate supplies of water for both irrigation and drinking. This change in growing habits is necessary to insure that whatever water percolates into the groundwater supply is used for drinking purposes.

There is no running water in our workshop. We have to purchase water from private suppliers that is pumped from deep bore wells and delivered in tanker trucks. The water is stored in several 1000 liter tanks placed strategically around the workshop. Water is needed in our manufacturing process to wash the silt out of the granite sand used as a filtering agent. A new cement mixer is now used to wash this sand. This method uses much less water and is easier on the staff than our old hand washing method. The silted waste water is collected in buckets and poured into settlement tanks. After the water clears it is reused in the washing process. Nothing is wasted here. The silt removed from the settlement tanks is put back into the concrete mix when we cast the filters.

We had three meetings in Bangalore. One was with a travel agent to map out some itineraries for travelers interested in a volunteer experience at the workshop. We are developing several programs for visitors depending on how long they can stay in India. We want to make the workshop the

giving

U.S. dollars go a long way in India.....for example:

Adopt A Family: \$ 25
(Donation of one water filter to a needy family who is unable to purchase a filter)

Adopt A School: \$ 100
(Donation of two water filters to a school accompanied by a clean water education program)

Adopt A Village Partnership: \$ 2,500
(Donation of up to 60 filters to a needy village, subsidy of up to 30 filters purchased by villagers, soap & educational program for village children, community steward for one year)

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focus of the trips and we are working on program that gives the volunteer some hands on experience making a filter and then a rare opportunity to go to an Indian village and donate the filter to a needy family. Our expectation is that the volunteer will adopt the family and form a relationship that will continue for years.

We realize that we can't do everything. We need to find partners that have expertise in areas where we are lacking. Our next meeting was with an organization called WaterAid whose expertise is in water and sanitation education. We are seeking guidance from them to enhance our water hygiene educational program. They were very helpful and cooperative and gave us sage advice in this area. Their regional director, George Fernandez, will visit the workshop to see our operation and visit a village where the filters have been installed to see how they are being used and talk to the villagers about their experiences with the filter.

We also met with a NGO (Non Government Organization) called Myrada that started out in the 1970's as an agency that was involved in the resettlement of the Tibetan refugees in India who were driven out of their country by the Chinese. They have since morphed into a rural development agency that supports the villages and small towns with social benefit programs. The Director will also visit the workshop to see if the bio-sand filter will enhance the programs they are already involved with in many villages in Kolar district.

I took the local bus to Kolar this morning after the meeting with Myrada. I was fortunate to get the last seat on the bus. It was a sideways bench seat in front near the driver that I shared with seven other people. The only catch was that the two guys next to me were transporting a windshield for a truck and I got the bowed part in front of me which severely restricted my foot room. I was also forced to help hold it up or else jeopardize my knees. Please don't feel sorry for me. Feel sorry for the next 50 people that got on the bus and had no seat at all! Two skinny guys shared the engine cowling in front of me; at least they got to sit. Because it was a private bus, the more passengers they can squeeze in, the more money they make. But it wasn't the crush of humanity that was overwhelming, it was the heat. Oh I didn't tell you the bus wasn't air conditioned? Thank God the temperature was only in the mid 90's today!

The bus stop in Kolar is less than a quarter mile to the workshop so I walked instead of taking an auto rickshaw because I had left my luggage in Bangalore to be transported the next day. I was greeted with flower garlands and hugs. I met the new staff people. Two of them were familiar faces. One was Lackshman who worked in the aluminum pot factory down the lane that has since closed and the other was Chalapathi, a professional driver who commanded one of our two hired SUV's on last November's trip when we had a small crowd to transport.

I inspected our new delivery vehicle and cement mixers obtained through a Rotary matching grant. To my surprise the vehicle bed is big enough to transport 20 filters and associated filter media in one load. We now have an electric and a diesel powered cement mixer. If the power is off, which is frequently, the diesel mixer can be used.

My biggest surprise came when RamaChandre, our managing director, opened the door to the water testing lab and the counters were chock full of school notebooks. These notebooks will be distributed to all the children in the villages where we have installed filters. This gesture of his is in honor of Cathy being awarded Rotary's "Service Above Self" plaque



for her tireless and unselfish work to better humanity. Of the 1.2 million Rotarians in the world, only 150 are awarded this honor annually. She would never include this paragraph in the field report because that's the way she is. I am beginning to like the editorial license issued to me!

Chalapathi gave me a ride back to my hotel in the new vehicle with Stanley and Raja riding in the truck bed at 6:00pm, closing time for the workshop. We all confirmed our latest cell phone numbers and I lined up breakfast with one of my favorite people, Mrs. Mani, my late cook's wife from my Peace Corps days whose son, Raja is our workshop foreman. I ordered a simple breakfast of upama, (pronounced "oop a ma"), a dish made with roasted farina (cream of wheat) onions, cashew nuts and spices. I learned long ago that if I don't specify something simple, out of the kitchen comes 7 courses from soup to nuts and then some! My intent is to see my friends not gain 5 more pounds!

I was looking forward to a quiet evening at the hotel so I ordered tea and prepared to relax to write this update. When I plugged in my computer adapter the outlet exploded and the lights and fan went out. My hand was covered with black soot but I didn't feel anything but surprise. I went to the hotel manager's office to explain and he sent up the "electrician", a young man who began to probe the outlet holes with a small screwdriver after throwing a breaker to power up my room again. I kept my distance while he plugged in the adapter which exploded again. Thinking my adapter was shot and my computer would be dead weight for the next three weeks I wasn't happy. But not to worry, the electrician pulled off my surge protector plug which apparently had a short in it and everything was working again.

Well that's just a snapshot of my first day and a half in India. If I told you all the stories you wouldn't have to come here and experience it yourselves, would you!

Cathy & Mike

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