

Helping People

One Drop At A Time



Field Report From India

Friday, June 22, 2007

Dear Friends,

TGIF! I am taking the day off to catch up on my personal journal and pause to process all that has happened in the past several days. Last evening, the first of the monsoon rains fell in Kolar. Not the torrential deluge type but a steady, gentle rain that broke the heat and brought with it a cool breeze and hope for a good monsoon after 8 months of dry weather.

Not only is the season changing here in Kolar but also our water filter program is making changes as well. When we began this project, Cathy and I had very low expectations about the success we would have implementing and supporting a project of this magnitude and scope from such a long distance. After our first two weeks in India in November of 2005 we had already exceeded our expectations. We found that instead of a pony we had a racehorse on our hands!

We kept readjusting our expectations and our roles as project initiators to keep up with the success of our project and the depth of the acceptance of the bio-sand filters in this part of India. We knew that we needed help in many areas to keep up with the pace of the project. One of the main objectives on this trip was for me to find NGOs (Non-Government Organizations) to partner with in areas where we do not have the resources to do a first class job.

One area is education. We are partnering with "WaterAid", an excellent organization that is focused on water and sanitation education in India. They have resources that are available to us to ramp-up our knowledge of water borne disease and proper water hygiene.

On Wednesday we had a monthly meeting of our village stewards at the workshop. For those of you who don't know, when we "Adopt" a village, we hire and train a person from the village to go from household to household and see that the filters are functioning properly and that the users are hygienic in their methods of handling and storing the filtered water. Fourteen stewards were at the meeting. It started with testimony from each steward. They tell about how the filters are accepted by the users and the health benefits being realized. Any problems or issues in the village are brought up and discussed. The stewards share information and solutions to problems.

The next phase of the meeting was an audio-visual presentation. We have a water testing lab in the workshop that doubles as a presentation theater, complete with a wall rack for a projector and a table for a laptop. Soumya, our assistant director, has a degree in computer science

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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**South Asia Pure Water Initiative, Inc.
2832 Whitney Avenue,
Hamden CT 06518 USA**



and put on the presentation. We have videos regarding contamination of the water supply and other information from the Center for Affordable Water and Sanitation Technology (CAWST) that we presented. We also showed slide shows of the villages where the filters are installed. Orange soda and biscuits are passed to all participants.

After that we all piled into our delivery truck, Ramachandra's tiny car and a motorcycle and brought everyone, including our workshop staff to a local restaurant. I was a sport and picked up the tab for the 26 people who ate their fill including ice cream for dessert. There were extra charges for additional rice and bottled water so I was set back \$22.00 for the meals! We all returned to the workshop to review the notebooks that each of the stewards keep on the users and paid them their monthly stipends. We then brought them to the bus stop so they could return to their villages. Some of them had two hour bus rides back home and then a long walk from the bus stop to their village.



We want to introduce various health topics relating to clean water and disease at the monthly meetings. This is where WaterAid will come to our rescue. They have health professionals who can deliver this material at our monthly meetings. Our staff and the village stewards can then deliver the messages to the bio-sand filter users and strengthen the link we are trying to forge between clean water and good health.

Through my friend and mentor, Haroon Sait, a prominent citizen of Bangalore, I was able to meet two potential NGO partners that could change our program in a very fundamental way. When we first conceived of our program, our idea was to establish a workshop, make it sustainable and move on to establish another workshop. We soon realized that sustainability was a good theory and a goal to work towards; but it was not practical at the beginning stages of our program. First we need to develop an awareness of the filter and link the idea of dirty water with disease. Only then will the demand for the filters be enough to sustain micro-entrepreneurs who would make and sell filters for a livelihood.



One of the potential partners is Arghyam, an NGO that funds 23 organizations around the country who focus exclusively on clean water projects. We discussed our filters with the program directors and led them through our website to explain the technology and our program in India. We proposed that they come to the workshop and see our operation first hand. If they like our filters, we then suggested that we train their partners in bio-sand filter technology and start workshops all around the country. We would help their partner NGOs with technical support and the sourcing of supplies and materials. They called Ramachandra, our managing director before I even got back to Kolar later that day!



Yesterday we took a "Road Trip" to Anantapur, a town in the neighboring state of Andhra Pradesh. I arose at 4:45 to be ready by 5:45. We rented a SUV and driver from Kolar that picked me up along with Ramachandra and we headed for Bangalore to pick up Haroon and his long time Spanish friend Ignosio Turro Sole who worked in Anantapur for 24 years. Ignosio now splits his time between working with people afflicted with leprosy in Bangalore and his home and sweetheart, Antonia in Spain near Barcelona. He speaks English and Telegu, a south Indian language with very musical Spanish accent.

We drove five hours to the offices of the Rural Development Trust (RDT), an NGO that is legendary in India and Spain because of its founder, Father Vincente Ferrer. This man is the "Father Teresa" of India. He has

worked in India for 40 years building hospitals, clinics, schools and water projects with support from all over the world. He was so successful when he began as a young priest in Maharashtra State that the local politicians got jealous and revoked his visa and sent him back to Spain. Upon hearing this, the prime minister of India and the government of Andhra Pradesh sent him a letter, requesting his return and granted him a large tract of land in the poorest region of the State to continue his mission.

Haroon goes a long way back with Father. When King Juan Carlos of Spain's sister (I think that makes her a Duchess) came to India years ago, Haroon, an international chef, was called from Bangalore to cook for her during her 4 days in Anantapur. They hit it off and Haroon invited the Duchess to Bangalore. The story goes that the Duchess had a young son who was very mischievous. On their trip to Bangalore, the child saw a puddle on the side of the road that he insisted on playing in. So the whole entourage of vehicles and dignitaries pulled off the side of the road so the kid could play in the puddle!

Astonishing is the only word I can find to describe Father's work. We joined him and Sister Ann for lunch at his home and I got to sit next to this gentle and humble octogenarian at the table. His old friend Haroon sat on his other side. His body is frail but his mind is full of fire and imagination. We discussed politics and he reminisced about Hubert Humphrey, a man he befriended on one of his trips to the US. He berated Arnold Schwarzenegger for his "English Only" stance for public schools in California. He thinks that Americans are afraid they will "loose" their country to Spanish speaking people.

When I told him about the bio-sand filter, he was all ears. He said "we need thousands, when can you bring them". I explained that one of his project engineers (he has 35 civil engineers on staff for his housing and check-dam projects alone!) could come to Kolar to see our facility and spend time in the villages to see how the filters worked in the field. Then, if the engineer approves, we can help them establish a manufacturing facility locally. He seemed pleased.

We took photos, said our goodbyes and went on to tour a couple of their water projects. One project took hospital wastewater and treated it in lined plant beds, planted with 3 species of plants that naturally extract pollutants. The water is then sand filtered and treated with UV light to kill any remaining bacteria. Finally, the resulting water is used to irrigate crops. Solid waste from the hospital is burned in a special medical incinerator.

We had tea with the project engineers and went on our way, another 5 hours of driving back and reached Kolar just before midnight. We had a great time with Ignosio playfully addressing Ramachandra, Haroon and myself as the Professor, the Captain and the Doctor. We also accomplished our mission of forming the beginnings of a partnership with the RDT.

Whenever I am in Kolar, although I am only an honorary Rotary member, I am always welcome at the meetings of the Rotary Club of Kolar. Wednesday night was president's night at the club meeting which means there is local entertainment, dignitaries make speeches, gifts and awards are presented and finally a meal is served about 10:00pm. I was shocked and honored when my name was called to receive the community service award for our bio-sand filter project. I was showered with gifts; a garland, a shawl, a fruit basket and a glass trophy! Hopefully my suitcase will stretch enough to accommodate everything but the fruit.



I also took part in a ceremony to pin Ramachandra with the "Listen With Your Heart" pin from incoming District Governor Ernie Louise from the southern Connecticut Rotary district 7980. Governor elect Ernie is a big supporter of the bio-sand filter project so it was an honor to make that connection between the two Rotarians.

Best regards,

Cathy & Mike

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