

Helping People

One Drop At A Time



Field Report From India

June 28, 2007

Dear Friends,

Although I am in the homestretch of this trip to India, my calendar is filling up with follow-up chores and dinners at friends' homes and a couple of new agenda items. I always feel like I need more time here to get everything done but I have confidence that our team will follow through on the initiatives we have started this trip. In this country patience is a virtue like no other. Seeds of ideas planted now may take many months or years to bear fruit. I have to suspend my American sense of urgency and downshift to Indian time. Here, the pace of life in the rural areas is marked by the changing seasons and the cycles of the sun and the moon and not the wristwatch.

Saturday the 23rd we drove to the Myrada field office past the town of Bangarpet, about 20 kilometers southwest of Kolar. This area is famous for its gold mines. The mines are now closed because the gold ore is not rich enough to be extracted economically. As a young man I was fortunate enough to go down into the mines to see firsthand how the gold was mined. These mines were vertical shaft mines nearly a mile deep into the earth. Only the gold mines of South Africa are deeper. To reach the final drilling area, I was lowered with one foot in a bucket attached to a rope and a winch the last 100 feet into a chamber that was 120 degrees Fahrenheit. Here, men handled 100 pound hand-held drills with bare feet to drill 2 inch holes into the walls of the shaft. The holes were filled with dynamite, fuses were lit and everyone scrambled out of the area to safety. It was dangerous work and there were many fatalities and injuries in those mines.

We toured a village, Gollahalli, one of two villages that are pilot projects for rainwater harvesting and eco-toilet projects funded by Arghyam. There were about 20 homes that had plastic gutters installed under eaves to catch rainwater. This water is directed to downspouts and finally into 5,000 liter cement storage tanks fitted with a tap for drinking water. A family of four can store a year's supply of drinking water captured in this way. Homes with flat roofs only need down spouts and connecting pipes to capture the water. We thought that our bio-sand filters along with the rainwater harvesting systems were a terrific drinking water solution. We will approach Arghyam to finance a pilot project in another village where the water supply is adequate but contaminated. We felt that these villagers may be overwhelmed with too many new technologies all at once. They need time to adjust to significant changes in their lifestyles. Change comes slow in India.

That evening we went to Bangalore for a meeting with the incoming Rotary Governor of the District which encompasses the Kolar and

giving

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

| | |
|---|-----------------|
| Adopt A Family; (Donation of one water filter to a needy family who is unable to purchase a filter) | \$ 25 |
| Adopt A School; (Donation of two water filters to a school accompanied by a clean water education program) | \$ 100 |
| Adopt A Village Partnership; (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) | \$ 2,500 |

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Bangalore areas. We have a plan, through a matching grant, to supply schools in Bangalore and surrounding areas with approximately 400 bio-sand water filters. We stressed that delivering filters without an educational component would be a lost opportunity to link dirty water and disease. We are working on silk-screening water hygiene messages on the sides of the filter and printing posters to hang on the walls near the filters that tell the story of contaminated water and disease to the children.



Another idea we have is to make a documentary film about our project as a fundraising and informational tool. I called a gentleman, Ranga Reddy, who is the driving force in the village of Chilapanahalli, our first “Adopted” village. I explained to him what we were trying to accomplish and he agreed to meet us in the village. When we arrived he gave us some “tiffin” (a snack) and tea and we discussed how the filters have changed people’s lives. He said the general health of the people is better and personally, he had skin rashes that have disappeared after using the filtered water. I explained that for the documentary we wanted to focus on one family in the village and follow each family member through the day filming their normal routines; we want to tell their story. He agreed to select an appropriate family and we toured the village, randomly stopping to see peoples’ filters and ask them about their health. Everyone seemed satisfied and the filters were all maintained well.

He took us a short distance to a percolation tank, a large area where water accumulates during the monsoon rains. They had just completed an excavation project to de-silt a large area of the tank and improved a sluice for the irrigation of crops for 10 surrounding villages. The idea of these tanks is to collect the monsoon’s rain with a system of berms and check dams so the water has a chance to soak into the ground and replenish groundwater supplies rather than run off in a hurry. In one week they might get 70% of their annual rainfall so it is important to slow the rushing waters down and let them seep into the ground.



The highlight of the week was the dedication ceremony for the “Adopted” village of Digavakote in the township of Chintamani about 50 kilometers north of Kolar. This was a special event for me because the village was sponsored by combining donations in memory of my father who passed away in February. When we arrived at 1:30 in the afternoon, preparations were still underway for the ceremony so I slipped away to walk the lanes of the village and photograph as many of the village scenes as I could without attracting a lot of attention.

This was one of the poorest villages I have seen on my visits to India. Many of the homes had thatched roofs rather than clay tiles and the children looked particularly ragged. The village water came from two bore wells, one at each end of the village. There were 5 storage tanks with taps that were fed by the bore wells. Sewage, like most villages flowed in open trenches to a pond in the lowest part of the village. These trenches were unlined so the subsurface areas were highly contaminated. Some villages line their sewer trenches with stone slabs to prevent seepage. At one end of the village there was a newly constructed Hindu temple that was magnificent. People here are very religious and daily prayer is the norm. Most people, no matter how poor, have a small alter in their homes where prayers and gifts of incense, betel nut or flowers are offered to the Gods.



The ceremony began soon after I returned to the village school that had been decorated for the event. The ceremony began by the host speaker introducing the attending dignitaries one by one. Each dignitary is given a very fragrant flower garland complete with jasmine and citrus petals sewn

onto a string with foil covered bobbles and plastic spacers. The chief guests then light a lamp of camphor replete with several cotton wicks so all the top dogs get to light a wick. Everyone on the dais gives a speech. I usually say something on an impromptu basis in Kannada, the local language, but this event was important to me so I had prepared a speech in English and had RamaChandra, our managing director, translate it to the crowd. I did not mention my Dad in the speech because I thought it would be self indulgent and irrelevant to the villagers. I focused on the courage and the vision of the villagers to adopt this life-saving technology. It is very difficult to convince these villagers to change their way of life so I wanted to congratulate them for trusting us enough to provide them with clean drinking water. It is important that I visit all the villages we Adopt because it gives the villagers confidence in our product. They attach great importance to the filters when someone from so far away comes to these remote villages to promote their use.

We then passed out soap and school notebooks to all the kids, had a prayer ceremony which included the two filters that flanked the dais and retired to the temple grounds where the entire village was fed a snack, picnic style. The snack was called "cho-cho bot" a combination of two roasted farina preparations one sweet and one spicy. It was cooked in giant copper kettles and served on banana leaves, the traditional dinner plate in India.

I am looking forward to many such ceremonies in other villages in the coming years.

Best regards,

Cathy & Mike

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