

Helping People

One Drop At A Time

Field Report From India



November 20, 2010

Dear Friends,

In India rarely does anything go as planned and more often than not what happens is the unexpected rather than the expected. This trip is no exception. After attending a Rotary district event on the night of November 13th where we were honored with a plaque for our clean water efforts, we spent the night in Bangalore. Our plan was to pick up Melinda, a water and sanitation engineer from the Centre for Affordable Water and Sanitation (CAWST) based in Calgary Canada and then drive to Kolar where she would help to enhance our program as a consulting expert.

Ten minutes from the airport we were involved in a traffic accident with two boys on a motorcycle. The boys wound up in the hospital and Rama Chandre's car was not drivable. We had a frightening moment with a hostile crowd that gathered around the accident. Fortunately the police arrived quickly from a nearby substation and we were able to move the car onto a side road. We spent the next three hours at the police station while paperwork was filled out and negotiations with the motorcycle owner took place.

We called Melinda and asked her to proceed to a hotel in Bangalore and that we would join her later that evening. In India it is good to find humor in even the most tragic situations. It keeps you sane and focused. After our three hour wait we called a taxi cab to take us to the Bangalore hotel. We were about to transfer our luggage when we realized the driver was missing. After several inquiries we learned that the police substation had an ultra-modern police vehicle with sophisticated cameras and video recording equipment. The problem was no one at the substation had a driver's license. They had "borrowed" our taxi driver to move the vehicle to the nearest intersection where they would spend the next few hours stopping vehicles and collecting fines for various infractions. After 15 minutes we spotted the driver jogging up the road back towards his taxi.

We spent the next two days analyzing our program to find better and more efficient ways to deliver clean water. Through our discussions we realized that we are victims of our own success. We have thousands of water filters in the field but the same support staff as when we started the program. We need to redirect some of our efforts towards follow up to insure that the filters we have in the field are being used and are working properly. We also need some middle



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

Adopt A Family: \$ 32
Donation of one water filter to a needy family who is unable to purchase a filter.

Adopt A Village Partnership: \$ 3,000
Provides up to 90 filters to needy households in a village. Each family (i.e. partner) must pay a small portion of the cost of each household filter (approx. \$5.00); the remaining cost is paid by the sponsor. Soap and educational program for village children, donated water filters for schools and child care centers, community steward for one year period. Sponsor name is painted on the side of each filter.

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management help to coordinate the efforts between the factory and the field.

At the tail end of Melinda's visit we drove to Shishu Mandir, a school financed by a German organization that cherry picks the most disadvantaged children from the surrounding villages and gives them a first class education. They also give back to the villages by supporting the children's families and participating in some village development projects. We have teamed up with this organization to provide water filters to the surrounding villages. We made a field trip to one of those villages named Battarahalli nearby. We visited several homes and found some problems with some of the filters and took corrective action. This visit further supports the notion that we need to focus more on our follow up efforts.

The next evening we visited the home of Basha, Mike's friend from the Peace Corps days. It happened to be the Muslim festival of sacrifice (Eid al-Adha) that day and the skin and hide of a freshly slaughtered sheep was laying near the house door. The tradition on this day is to give one-third of the meat to charity, one third to relatives and one-third is kept by the family.

Basha's youngest daughter, Sameena, was ill and on her way to the doctor with Basha's wife when we arrived. They had on their black burkas, covered from head to toe, the traditional garb of women in public among some Muslim sects. Basha looked tired but his two year old granddaughter kept him in good spirits. The love is obvious; grandchildren are spoiled wherever you are in the world. His eldest daughter, Farhana, served us dinner on a mat on the floor. In India traditionally meals are eaten on the floor, sitting cross legged and using only the right hand as a utensil. Of course we had mutton biriyani with chutney, yogurt mixed with onions and chilies, the traditional accompaniment to that dish. After dinner we distributed gifts for the family. A stuffed monkey with a banana was a hit with little Zuha, the grandchild. It was sweet to reconnect with a friend of 40 years even if only for a couple of hours once a year.

Today, Saturday, is the day before we leave India, and a very special one at that. Today we dedicated the village of Hodalavadi, a quiet rural oasis about 3 miles from Kolar. This village is sponsored through our "Adopt-a-Village" program which is a cost sharing partnership between a sponsor in the US and the village. We supply up to 90 filters to needy families in the village, filters for the village schools and sanitation and hygiene education. We also hire a community steward from the village and train him or her in the proper use and maintenance of the filters and they in turn pass the information on the villagers.

We drove to the grammar school and parked our vehicle. The children came out from the classroom as a man began to play a drum. We marched through the village creating quite a stir. We took



photographs and stopped along the way to look at different points of interest, the water tank, the temple, narrow lanes and the multitude of domesticated animals that populate the village. We took photographs of people along the route and made our way back to the school. To begin the open air dedication ceremony, four children sang a song in the courtyard of the school. There were several short speeches by the dignitaries at the head table. The assembled villagers sat on the ground and on several school benches that had been arranged for them in the courtyard. The next event was a dramatic demonstration of the filter by one of our staff, Anganelu, who explained how the filter worked and then poured muddy water into the filter. He filled a glass with the muddy water and filled another glass with the filtered water for comparison, sparkling and clean, which he drank.

We then passed out hand soap and school notebooks to the children. Small cups of a spicy warm milk drink and biscuits were served as refreshments. After the event more villagers approached us wanting filters for their homes. We gladly added their names to the list of beneficiaries. This is quite common in the villages. Introducing something new in a timeless place can be quite challenging. People are wary because they are often taken advantage of due to their lack of sophistication and education. “Seeing is believing” so we won the villagers over with our low-tech, natural filter.

We have had many highs and lows on this trip, and will be leaving emotionally drained but satisfied with the progress and direction of the program. One of the most gratifying outcomes of this trip was to learn that filter production has begun outside Mumbai and in two areas around Calcutta. We have provided training and encouragement as well as donations to these groups over the past couple of years and now the trees are bearing fruit!

Cathy and Mike

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Taste The Healthy Difference