

MAKE A DIFFERENCE: ADOPT-A-VILLAGE

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"India's future lies in her villages." -- Mahatma Gandhi

An individual can make a tremendous difference in the lives of many in India by adopting a village.

While a majority of the NRI's hail from villages and would like to do their part to bring progress to villages in our state and country; they have concerns about the proper use of money, execution and long term sustainability of the project.

It's a fact that many development projects need proper funding. These projects can be made successful by matching funds from the Government (70/30) and establishing a reliable, transparent and competent autonomous body with professional management for the proper execution and long term viability of projects.

Here are some statistics:

- India has nearly 700,000 villages.
- Three out of four Indians and about 77 percent of the poor live in villages.
- Forty percent in India live below the property line.
- 319 million Indians live on less than a dollar a day.
- The adult literacy rate is 61 percent.
- The infant mortality rate is 56 per 1,000 live births.
- Traditional sources of livelihood are under threat for the rural poor.
- The majority of the population have no access to safe drinking water and sanitation.

Yet the rural / urban disparity continues to grow. While modern, urban India has become an IT power house with a booming economy; the real Bharath - rural India exists with 700 million people unable to escape grinding poverty.

Fifty to 60 percent of children under three years of age in rural India are malnourished, while 15 to 20 percent of Delhi children are over-nourished and obese. Infants and children in rural India suffer from high mortality and morbidity, while their mothers struggle with poor maternal health indicators. There are regular bouts of epidemics in certain areas, many due to poor sanitation and lack of access to potable water.

The government does not have enough resources to address these problems. Top- down, civil administration may not be responsive to the needs at the village level.

The need of the day?

A grassroots, sustainable scheme with village buy-in. It is important to engage the local government and villagers for long-term program sustainability.

Providing basic necessities such as clean drinking water, sanitation, cooking energy, primary education, basic medical care, vocational training and employment is our priority. Educating and empowering women / mothers and improving child health is important as well.

Safe Drinking Water

A majority of the rural population has no access to clean water. About 50 percent of all villages in India do not have any source of protected drinking water.

Pathogens in water are the primary reason for water-borne disease / illnesses. By some estimates nearly 90 percent of India's water is polluted. About 1.5 million Indian children under the age of five die every year from water-borne diseases.

In Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, an estimated 150 children die each day from diarrhea alone. This is a polluted water-death that is totally preventable. An estimated 62 million people in India are seriously affected by fluoride contamination. The extent of fluoride contamination of water is widespread across the states. In Telangana state, Nalgonda district is the worst affected.

The Naandi Foundation has developed a Community-based Safe Drinking Water System – CSWS. This is a model in which the community owns and manages the water purification plant, but charges users a small fee for clean water.

The system for water purification is simple, relatively inexpensive and easy to administer and maintain. A combination of technologies will be used to rid brackish water of pathogens, particulates and dissolved impurities especially fluoride and salinity. Ultraviolet technology from Berkeley, CA, kills the pathogens and uses surface water where there is more bacterial contamination of water. A Tata project uses the popular reverse osmosis technology to remove chemical and fluoride contamination.

Each system has a 1,000 liter-per-hour capacity and will cost approximately INR 5 lakhs to install, serving a population range of 3,000-7,000 folks. Larger populations need a higher capacity system capable of processing 2,000 liters of water per hour.

This project will be a shared investment between the village panchayat, state government and NRI/donor base. The local panchayat will provide the land and water source - lake, river or well and an employee will operate and manage the system, assisted by two helpers. Purified water will be made available to the villagers for a nominal 10-15 paise per litre (One rupee for 12-15 litres). Periodic quality control will be performed and water samples sent to an approved laboratory. The annual maintenance contract will be with the plant supplier. Villagers have to collect the water from the plant. Arrangements can be made for home delivery via rickshaw/auto rickshaw for additional cost. Villagers needed to be educated about drinking safe, clean water

Sanitation

700 million Indians have no access to toilets. The government is planning to provide individual toilets for every family living below the poverty line. Villagers need to be educated about personal hygiene and make behavioral changes in order to eliminate open defecation. Modi government is working hard on promoting hygiene (Sach bharaath). Sulabh international (www.sulabhinternational.org) has developed low-cost toilets that use very little water.

Waste Management

The right disposal of waste is one of the major problems in India. Improper waste disposal creates unhygienic conditions, pollutes the environment and results in outbreaks of vector-borne diseases.

We will equip each village with tricycle rickshaws whose only purpose is waste collection and removal. The tricycle rickshaws will have two compartments to collect organic and recyclable wastes separately. A campaign to carry out segregation of wastes at source and collection of segregated wastes from households will be set in motion. Establishing a village-level vermicomposting unit will mitigate the organic wastes collected from the entire village. Demarcation of dumping areas with provision of dumping wastes separately will be undertaken. Farmers and individuals will be encouraged to establish individual vermicomposting units.

With the support of panchayats and NRIs the goal is to make this program self-sustainable.

Dhobi Ghat

Villagers need to be provided with a proper, hygienic place with clean, running water for washing and drying their clothes. The idea is to construct open, laundry-washing places sized according to the village population. A nominal charge for use of the facility will cover employee salaries and ensure proper maintenance.

Funeral Shelters/Graveyards

A clean, serene environment to send off a loved one in a respectable manner is very important. Unfortunately, in many parts of India, cemeteries and graveyards are poorly maintained and very unhygienic. Building a funeral shelter with basic amenities such as a family gathering place, clean bathrooms and toilets will be helpful. Periodic trash disposal, maintaining proper hygiene and good landscaping is also necessary. There is also a need for a body freezer for preserving the dead body at the shelter, until all the distant relatives can come.

Mahaprasthanam - Guntur Graveyard has done all of this successfully and has become a model program for the entire region.

Community Centre

Villagers need a gathering place for social and cultural activities including wedding ceremonies.

The government can provide land and offer 70 percent of the funding for building construction. The other 30 percent can come from donors / NRIs. The building will be named after the main donor or his parents.

The function hall will have a nice, visible stage with good audio-visual system and will be equipped with a hygienic kitchen, dishwashing area and clean bathrooms and toilets. Safe, clean drinking water will be provided. A nominal charge for the use of the facility will take care of employee salaries and facility maintenance.

Health Care

Prevention is the best cure: it saves lives and saves money. The plan is to provide basic medical care for villagers by establishing a primary health care center staffed by a qualified doctor holding an MBBS degree or a Physician Assistant (P.A.), full-time auxiliary nurse and midwife (ANM). The clinic will have at least 20 essential medications. There will be a nominal charge of INR 5. Health care workers will be properly trained to provide medical care to rural populations.

A private partnership between the public and the government is needed to combat child malnutrition. We need to improve the nutritional status of mothers and children. The maternal and neonatal mortality can be decreased by providing proper prenatal care at Anganwadi Centers. All children will be properly immunized.

Government school children will have annual physicals and periodic vision, hearing and dental checkups. Proper medical records will be maintained for each child. Children will be educated about personal hygiene and provided with safe drinking water and hygienic toilets. Schools will have a hygienic cooking place and children will be provided with a midday school meal that is high protein and nutritious. The villagers will be educated about the dangers of smoking (lung cancer), chewing tobacco / gutkha (throat cancer) and drinking alcohol. Farmers will be educated about the proper use fertilizers and insecticides.

Child Education

With help from the unemployed, local youth, we need to provide after-school learning support for students in government schools. This ensures that children understand key learning concepts through further explanation and practice. Studies have shown that learning level test scores were significantly higher among students who received academic support than those who did not (Michael and Susan Dell Foundation, www.msdf.org). Teachers in government schools need further training to improve teaching capabilities. Special focus should be given to English and Mathematics.

It is important to educate farmers about the importance of sending their children to school instead of putting them to work in the fields. Preventing childhood labor and ensuring a solid education for every child is our goal. With this in mind, we need to pay special attention to girls ensuring they complete at least 10 years of schooling. NRIs can provide furniture, computers, LCD projectors, science laboratory supplies, library books, uniforms, shoes and bags. They can also sponsor the salary for a teacher who can teach English and mathematics (Project Nanhi Kali, www.nanhikali.org).

Livelihoods

Unemployed youth can receive training and become skilled workers. Vocational training centers can train the young men and women in various trades so they can find gainful employment. They can be trained as auto mechanics, plumbers, electricians, skilled construction workers and basic computer operators. Women can be trained in tailoring, housekeeping, embroidery and other professions. To arrest the migration of educated villagers to cities, call centers and business process outsourcing (BPO) facilities can be established in rural areas so they can be close to their parents and relatives (Byrraju Foundation, www.byrrajufoundation.org).

Naandi Pride School in Pune recruits semi-educated youth (18-26) from socially and economically deprived families who have studied till at least 9th grade and passed the school's screening aptitude and interest test. They receive training in information technology enabled services (ITES), retail sales, hospitality, crafts and the like. This technological training combined with the grooming of professional skills, spoken English, computer literacy and life skills helps them find corporate jobs (Naandi Foundation, www.naandi.org).

Farmers well fare

Farmers need to be educated about proper use of fertilizers and pesticides as prolonged exposure to these sprays can lead to various health problems. Personal protective equipment such as wearing face masks, and gloves can easily prevent such exposure and protect the farmers health. Green seeker helps in effective distribution of fertilizers like urea and reduce the cost to farmers on urea usage and protect the environment(TANA Foundation). Farmers can receive training in such areas as soil testing, organic farming techniques, vermiculture, conversion of farm and domestic waste into organic compost. The government needs to provide hardworking farmers with crop insurance and guaranteed prices, so they are protected from natural calamities. This in turn will help prevent farmer suicides.

One Village at a Time.

NRIs can adopt the village they hail from originally and make a significant contribution towards its development. There is a real will and desire on the part of governments, both at the state and the center to work with NRIs and NGOs to bring development to rural India.

There are more NGOs today in India that are professionally run, transparent and accountable, which reach all parts of India and deliver a variety of services, than in the past. There are more

millionaires in India and the United States today and the number of people taking on philanthropic activities in India is only growing.

The tripartite model - where 30 percent of funding for the project comes from the NRI and the other 70 percent comes from the government, while planning, execution and maintenance is taken on by a reputable NGO - will only contribute to the development of rural India.

There is no instant solution for rural India's myriad problems. But by adopting one village at a time and working with the government and NGOs, NRIs can make a difference. Over time, an improved village could lead to an improved region, state and country.

While diagnosing disease, Hippocrates (460-370 BC) took into consideration season, climate, agriculture, nutrition and customs. He also took into account the cleanliness of the house and city, purity of water, personal and public hygiene.