MICIDA – truly a community development project

By Sunil Laxman, [Asha Volunteer, Project Coordinator for MICDA]

MICIDA is one of those fantastic projects you may never hear about outside of this newsletter, and yet it has made a dramatic difference to the community it works with. It is also a fine example of how Asha can make a big contribution towards achieving socio-economic development.

The organization was founded and is driven by the relentless zeal of Dr. Subbaramaiah. A government medical doctor by profession, his own life story is an inspiration for many. Having grown up in absolute poverty in a family of rural landless laborers, Dr. Subbaramaiah worked incredibly hard to get an education, got scholarships to complete his medical degree, and continued to work in the Chittoor district in Andhra. His desire to make a difference to the poorest and most downtrodden community in the area drove him to form the Mother India Community Development Association (MICDA).

MICIDA started off to fight for the rights of landless laborers in a village some 20 km from the nearest small town, Puttur.
allotment ("patta distribution"). Meanwhile, there was the issue of the children of all these families. With the support of Asha (the Silicon Valley chapter initially, and subsequently the Seattle and Delaware chapters) MICDA decided to start a school for all these children just outside this habitation.

The building of the school was a formidable task. At the time, the village was surrounded by forest, with only a 10 km dirt road leading to it from the highway. Yet, a fine school was constructed there, and during my first site visit (over 7 years ago) I was pleasantly surprised to be welcomed after a tiring journey at a well constructed school with airy, spacious classrooms, a large playing field and a well maintained garden. But teaching the students at the school was far more challenging. Each child (between 150-200 at any given point of time) was a first generation learner, coming from extremely poor, illiterate families that were often broken and had a history of family violence, drunken fathers and even abandoned mothers. It was a challenge for MICDA to even hire well qualified teachers, who had to commute by bus from Puttur or other nearby towns. Yet, right from the start Dr. Subbaramaiah did not want to compromise and insisted on hiring full graduate teachers serious about their profession. The initial years were a struggle, and it was commendable in itself that a number of students passed out of the school (though many dropped out). The youngest children starting grades 1 or 2 in were most promising because they would receive the benefit of 10 years of education at this school. Indeed, this prediction held up, and over the past few years, the results from the school have astounded most locals.

The past 3-4 years have seen fantastic results in the state board exams (grade 10), where all the students who appeared for the examinations have passed. Many have secured “first class” results, and two years ago the school produced the topper for the entire district (in the SC/ST category). This student has now been awarded a scholarship by the state government to study engineering in one of the newly formed Rajiv Gandhi Institutes of Technology. Many other children have now been admitted to local colleges for degree or diploma programs. Given their backgrounds and humble beginnings, the achievement is nothing short of astounding. In this time, the school (with support from Asha) built a kitchen for mid day meals, running water facilities, a proper toilet for the students (a huge boon, particularly for the older girl students), and even a small science laboratory. Meanwhile, the school continues to battle problems, from serious funding crunches to rapid teacher turnover. The school is an attractive destination for new teachers, because it has done so well. But after a year or two of experience here, understandably many of them leave when offered permanent government teacher positions. There remains absolutely no source for local funding, and the school is almost completely reliant on Asha support for functioning. The impact that the MICDA School and the MICDA organization have had on the community is truly beyond measure. A casual glance at just the performance of the school reveals little that is remarkable. But a deeper understanding of the area, the backgrounds of the people there, and the sheer magnitude of problems faced show how much MICDA has achieved here. And it is with projects such as these, located in remote locations far away from the sight of media and cities, that Asha truly continues to make a difference.

“UNITED WE STAND”,
Say THE WOMEN OF THE DESERT

By Eera Mittur [Asha Volunteer]

The Thar Desert, Rajasthan, India. Extreme harsh climates. Severe Scarcity of Water. Isolated from urban areas. Immense stress to look after their households. Lack of family support to stand on their own feet. Taboo that ‘they simply cannot’. Such is the environment surrounding the village women.

And YET, the spirits of these women go with a “UNITED WE STAND” attitude!!

UNITED they built Taankas, or rain-harvested water storages, for other village families.

UNITED they opened fresh vegetable and fruit shops for their village community.

UNITED they participate in village meetings with men folk and voice their concerns.

UNITED they give strength to their girls to go to school and learn.

UNITED they have broken many barriers and taboos cast on them.

UNITED these women STAND!

These village women are given unanimous support by GRAVIS (since 1983) to stay united and enrich their villages.

GRAVIS is an Asha-Seattle project partner since 2008. We fund GRAVIS nearly $10,000 a year so they can support the women of the Thar.

Asha-Seattle currently supports close to 50 projects in 12 Indian states that include one or more schools and cater to the wellbeing of women and children. Asha-Seattle has carefully chosen her projects with the highest integrity, and GRAVIS is one such project.

It is your support to GRAVIS that helps support the women of the Thar. This year 2009 Asha-Seattle has already raised $654,000 out of $925,000; we need $272,000 to ensure every project like GRAVIS continue rendering their support.

I have pledged to support GRAVIS. Will you help me raise $10,000?

Contact me on how to donate (email: emittur.4.actions@gmail.com; name: Eera Mittur)

Support Asha during this giving campaign

Asha partners with grassroots organizations in India working towards empowerment of underprivileged sections of the society. It works in the fields of education, healthcare, livelihood, gender issues & advocating for human-rights.

- Accountable
- Transparent
- Effective
- Zero Overhead
- Focus on Empowerment