

# AID Conference 2004

## ***Minutes for Issue Cells (General)***

**Date:** 05/29/04 2:15-3:40pm

**Minutes Taken By:** Rajesh

**Number of attendees:** 110

**Speaker/Panelist Names:** Mokshay

**What they are speaking about:** Issue cells in AID – structuring our thought and action

Motivations include the need to build capacity for ourselves as AIDers. It is important to articulate AID's choices and position on issues. "*Chintan*" is important in addition to *Sangharsh*, *Seva* and *Nirman*.

Precursors to the issue cells are groups like Aid-women, Gujarat focus, Water and Northeast issues. Sustainability of such groups depends on the ability to translate into actionable items and maintaining focused volunteer interests. There are unique circumstances and opportunities for each cell. In the longer term there is a question of quality versus quantity. We should take care not to spread ourselves too thin by forming an unmanageable number of groups.

Groups should be accountable to the larger AID body. It is very important to document learning of cells. The cell should work coherently with other groups and not in isolation. Developing cells needs to be consistent with projects, regional cells and fundraising processes. Focused chapter involvement in cells is needed to be more effective.

Volunteers from across AID spoke briefly about the different cell initiatives.

### **Adivasi Cell: Shailja Pathania**

Tribal population is distributed all over India. The cell development will be in two phases with some overlap. As part of Phase I, which is the learning process, AID has contacted some NGOs working with Tribal issues in India. During Phase II, which will be the implementation and contribution part, AID will develop resource materials for NGOs and bridge gaps between environmentalists and Adivasi rights groups. Phase II is subject to revision based on Phase I maturity.

### **Water Cell: Chandrika Ramanujam**

First, we need to clearly understand the National Water Policy. Significant research will be done to identify alternatives to unsustainable water managements. If necessary campaigns against such programs will be carried out to promote sustainable use of water resources. The Water cell will work closely with grassroots organizations and other issue and region cells. We will also study and critically analyze the interlinking of rivers. Research part of program is complete. A booklet on interlinking of rivers has been brought out. We will also study water privatization and learn how the water policy translates from national to state levels.

### **AID women and AID Human Rights: Vijayanti Gupta**

Women and human rights are at the core of many other issues. We need to strategize on how to bring forward issues of women and human rights issues in existing projects. AID Saathi expertise needs to be better tapped. The group needs some help for web development. HBP will be used to understand women issues and sensitize people on these issues. So far the group has done the

anti-dowry campaign and HBP plan to understand women's reproductive rights. There is a plan to initiate and facilitate discussion on HIV/AIDS within AID and in HBP projects. We need to better understand gender issues and research inheritance laws. The AID\_women Yahoo groups mailing list, dowry skits, plays, songs, talks, regions/issues cells and workshops will be used to sensitize and spread the word on Womens issues and Human rights.

### **ICJB for Bhopal: Ryan**

AID is a major partner of ICJB (International Coalition for Justice in Bhopal) in Bhopal issues. There has been a very significant amount of attention by media on Bhopal now than ever before since the disaster itself. Several educational events by AID have raised awareness on college campuses around the country. A new generation of American and Indian citizens are now getting involved. About a dozen AID chapters are involved in Students for Bhopal campaign. The Bhopal cell will discuss where we go from here. Second Circuit Court of Appeals has ruled that it can issue a ruling on Bhopal against Dow and force them to clean up the site if and only if the Indian Government and the Madhya Pradesh Governments do not have any objections to it.

### **Spirituality: Amit Basole**

Interaction between religion and development will be discussed from two angles. The first aspects is the negative effects of religious intolerance and religious pluralism. The second is the focus on spiritual aspects to counter excessive materialism (economic pluralism). Personal growth and change are necessary for social change. Choices and personal conduct need to be borne out of compassion and regard for all life. Opinion pieces and articles on aid forums on practical issues will be discussed.

### **Andhra Pradesh Cell: Suresh Madhu**

AID has funded over 26 projects in AP. The biggest issues are the Telangana movement, the Feudal system, land issues, vision 2020 programs, etc. AP is the largest receiver of world bank loans among Indian states. There is a major disconnect between World Bank intentions and the reality on the ground. Srihari and Samyukta have analyzed a lot of information on various projects in AP. The conclusions will be presented in the AP cell. Directions for the next few units of time will also be discussed.

### **Gujarat and Rajasthan Cells: Gautam**

AID Gujarat has covered Gujarat extensively with the earthquake funds. The issues in Gujarat are coastal salinity problem, advancing desertification in Gujarat, large industrialized beds interspersed with acute poverty, water crisis, forced displacement, ecological destruction, communal tensions and gender imbalance. We have partnered with lots of NGOs which gives us a good base of resources to work with. Significant portion of Gujarati people in the US send money to saffron wing. Short and long term goals will be set in the cell meeting. Brief update on key projects will be provided. Volunteers needed for many aspects including web development. A good example of the importance of documenting on the web: Anandi an NGO that San Diego worked with was discovered by Time magazine via AID's website.

In Rajasthan the MKSS connection is very important and useful. MKSS doesn't accept foreign funds but several other things can be done. Rajasthan is part of Bimaru belt where AID has no presence. We can start from scratch in Rajasthan. The following items need to be discussed: how to focus on tribal poor, bonded labourers in stone mines, feudal oppression, conflict between national forests and tribal land especially at a time when the state is aiming for industrialization, the widespread ecological destruction, issue of tourism versus displacement. We also need to actively fight the conversion of tribals by Sangh Parivar.

In the cell meeting, we will take stock of projects that have been visited so far. There is lot of potential in Rajasthan especially because of ties with MKSS and Rajendra Singh. AID needs to step up.

### **NE Cell: Anand and Tulika**

AID has hardly any projects in the Northeast. People in NE are generally neglected by rest of India. Sanjay Hazarika's visit and Anand's visit to the NE catalyzed the formation of the NE cell. An IIT Guwahati AID chapter has also been created. Evolving strategy, current NE cell initiatives and projects including the "Ship of Hope" project and how everyone can contribute to the NE cell will be discussed at the cell meeting.

### **TN cell: Govind**

One of the goals is to structure our future efforts in TN so that they can complement each other. We also want to see if we can modify incoming projects to see if we can have a coherent approach in TN. AID has been working in TN for 12 years. We have networked with many NGOs and have presence in almost every district in TN along with a strong and active chapter in Chennai. AID should not take on independent projects in TN. We should coax all NGOs to work towards a common bigger goal/agenda. We can use this as a model for similar development work in other states. This should also act as a pathway for other non-AID organizations like Tamil Sangam to channel funds for TN projects.

### **Microcredit and Health: Kalpana**

Microcredit and health issues are very important in HBP but there is no cell for these aspects. However, another cell is not needed. Existing regional cells can incorporate this into their efforts. The health campaign of AIPSN in almost every state has resulted in a strong network of NGOs and trade unions who are fighting with the Government to enforce primary health care for everyone. PHCs in many places are corrupt or are being privatized. There is a need for focused study on health issues, PHCs etc. For instance, if a pamphlet is being circulated, follow the pamphlet through and study its effects on the end user.

Bank officials and Governments can use loans as a carrot to divert attention away from women's issues. We need to read up on politics of microcredit and understand such issues. Guatam gave a call for study on such issues in Gujarat and Rajasthan cell.

### **Education cell: Balaji**

Chandrika spent 3 months in Tanjore to study math curriculum in schools. Same template is being used by others for primary math education. AID has been working on education for quite some time. We need to structure these efforts and hence need a cell.

Finally Priya Ranjan reviewed some material already available on various issues/regions that cells can use.