

AID Conference 2004

Minutes for Session Named Rajasthan Cell

Date: 30th May 2004

Time From: 1:30 pm

To: 2: 30 pm

Minutes Taken By: Madhulika, Kishore

Number of attendees: 16

Audio/Visual Component? No

Speaker/Panelist Names:

1. Rajendra Singh
2. Nishant Jain

Attendees:

Pranav (Houston), Manisha (Boston), Rajendra Singh, Ajit (Cincinnati), Ravi (Dallas), Harsha (Albuquerque), Reena(Tucson), Madhu (Austin), Kishore (Austin), Shailja (Boston), Bala (Austin), Nishant (Austin) and 4 more people.

What they are speaking about:

The creation and objectives of the Rajasthan state cell across AID

Main Presentation:

Nishant started with a introduction about the motivation for people to attend the cell and the motivation behind the formation of the cell itself.

The cell was formed about two months back in April '04. While the motivation dates back to 2 years, in 2002, when Rajendra Singh, Aruna Roy, Shankar Singh were here. Then we were introduced to the state with the Right to Information and Water campaigns.

Interested members as of now: Nishant, Pranav, Tarun, Gautam, Shivani, Vaijanti.

Tarun (College Park) went to Rajasthan last year. Shivani(Ann Arbor) & Gautam(Charlotte) went in the beginning of this year for about 3 weeks. Shivani is in India for an extended period and act as liaison for various Rajasthan groups identified

during the trip. Refer to the AID Twiki page for details on the accomplishments and objectives of the cell.

Till date, AID has 2 important projects in Rajasthan. Seva Samiti (under RIM), BGVS (PUCL) Drought Relief. Details available on the AID Twiki site.

Nishant then requested Rajendra Singh to discuss about issues Rajasthan, evaluate our strengths and suggest what kinds of issue focus should this cell have in the state. The summary of the discussion is as follows

Strengths of Rajasthan:

Rajasthanis take little from nature and give more back to the nature. Use minimal water while putting in a lot of hard work. Essentially, contribute more than it consumes. AID has to have a very focused strategy. The state is large and problems too many. AID has to focus. Start with projects that create a visual impact in a short time. Motivated force can be built around the successes of those projects. There is a scope for a lot of such activities.

Rajasthan perhaps also has a weakest development record after independence – both from locals and the series of the state and central governments. The primary reason being that the people there have loyalties to local state, never to the country. It was largely a consequence of the feudal history of the state. Each feudal state had a hold until the last man. A spirit of the volunteerism never existed in the state.

Most people who inspired volunteerism were from outside Rajasthan. Aruna Roy was from Tamil Nadu and Rajendra Singh himself is from Meerut. Bhairon Singh Shekawat was least supportive of volunteerism.

Nishant - Are all regions in Rajasthan low on volunteerism?

RS - This time is opportunistic for encourage volunteerism. AID can encourage and provide the volunteer base. There is potential. RS was able to demonstrate that through Tarun Bharat Sangh. Historically, Manik Lal Verma (Cabinet Minister) and Hira Lal Sastry (first CM) were honest but arrogant. They couldn't talk to you or listen to you. Both were honest, but couldn't get along together. Hence could not motivate people. Rajasthan still has the potential. If done honestly we can get lot of people together. In fact it is the best place for creating this force now.

Commenting on gender issues directly is very difficult in Rajasthan. It still has a very patriarchic society. So you have work on gender issues subtly. If you work directly, it will not be sustainable and will get uprooted soon. So one has to be creative. Creatively think of indirect ways to empower them, and make them a part of decision-making process.

This is not strategy, but common sense. If you do anything to make women's work easier, they will have the time to spend on other important things and then they will become a part of the decision making process. But if you talk of empowerment, even if you don't do anything you will be uprooted.

This is cultural. It has been ritual that women die from men in the state. And culture takes a long time to change. Don't create tension, create love and solve it. Directly getting to solve their problems won't work. Just create an opportunity. Women of Rajasthan are wise and hard working. RS gave examples of how through TBS' work of water, women have started to go to school, travel the country giving lectures and taking initiative in village water parliaments.

Some potential areas of focus for AID:

1. Create programs that provide increased opportunities for women Although in indirect ways.
2. Poorest of poor, dalits depend on Common Property Resources (CPR). Life sustenance on CPR – so what are they – pastureland, water, ponds. We should try to develop the CPR so that the sense of honor realization comes to those.
3. Ecological and Environmental threat – marble, land and sand mining is there. This is struggle that can't be bypassed while thinking about Rajasthan (Udaipur, Jodhpur, Alwar). But not sure how AID can help in this area. Desertification is also increasing. Araavali rainforest cover has reduced from 60% to 7% since independence. Pre independence, landlords never allowed cutting trees. During independence, they sold all these to contractors once the land ceiling act was enforced. Small trees were cut not for furniture but for building roads. Went on until 1968. 68-74 it slowed down. Rajasthan was the worst hit in this regard. Japan gave lot of money for greening of Araavali. Didn't work out because there was a lot of grazing. Migrating animals was the cause of the failure of this. Environmental issues have lot of risks. If you ask my opinion, AID shouldn't take this up. Land struggle is a complex issue.

To summarize, make an action program so that Rajasthan's women spontaneously get empowerment - this should be our silent agenda. Second, should be common property resource development.

Marble Issue

80% marble comes from Rajasthan. Wherever marble mining happened, water level went down. Water levels won't rise in marbles. But TBS then approached SC, under the wildlife act and not under water issue. 26 Nov, 1986, Ashok Goel (biggest owner of mine owner), in front of Judge attacked RS on his shoulder.

Groups that AID should we work with:

Rajendra Singh said AID should definitely work in Chambal area. Aravali Sansthan - Chaman Singh in Savai Madhopur. 32 daku left dakaiti and are involved in the water work. India Today (10 June, 2001) and Down to earth carried articles about it. Another group, Umeshwar Vikas Mandal, Kishore Sant, used to teach in California. He formed a group of adivasis. He is in Udaipar. Jaipur has Lakshman Singh of Grameen Navyuvak Vikas Mandal. AID will benefit from this organization.

On women's Empowerment through Embroidery and other skill development projects:

RS doesn't see future in it. There is not much that women get out of it. He doesn't see a common unsustainable future. Even as a cooperative, you face competition. Lifespan of handicrafts are way too less. Some of the volunteers quoted Sarvodaya Kendra in Gujarat and Amul as great examples of cooperative system. Rajendra Singh did not agree to this as empowerment projects. This is more work for women. But in the case of water - food comes from milk and crops. Working on these gives women more time and more money. They will decide what to do with their time. There won't be any tension in water work. But in embroidery, there will be more tensions. The rhythm of their work will break.

Manisha - Have things changed in the past towards women in Rajasthan?

RS - There is a slow change. But things change slowly in India.

Nishant concluded the session and asked for volunteers to get more information on <http://www.aidindia.org/twiki>

There is a national water group in Rajasthan. Please contact them they will give you more information on more people working on these projects.