
akshara

the newsletter of sankalp—the india literacy focus group at iowa state university

Vol. 2 No. 1

www.stuorg.iastate.edu/lfg

Fall 2002

Welcome to the second year of akshara. Sankalp has been a part of the Indian community at Ames for the past 7 years, and has been contributing to various literacy and development projects in India. One of the primary aims of akshara is to keep you informed of the various activities of Sankalp. The past year has once again reinforced our faith that through our collective efforts, however small, we indeed can bring about a desirable change!

e d i t o r i a l In this issue Murali Subramanian, the former president of Sankalp, reports on the activities of Sankalp over the last year, and describes the various projects you have helped support through your contributions to Sankalp. In a separate article he elaborates on the fund raising activities of Sankalp.

We also have Neeraj, an alumnus of ISU and member of Sankalp, share his views on the vision and mission of this organisation. As a Sankalp patron, you would like to stay informed on how your contributions are utilized and what criteria we use to evaluate the merit of a project to be funded. Rahul, our current president, gives an account of Sankalp's recently developed project evaluation criteria.

Sankalp had the pleasure of hosting Mr. Rangasamy Elango, panchayat

president of Kuthambakkam - a village in the state of Tamil Nadu in India, earlier this year. Mr. Elango described the process of transforming his village into a model village, and the challenges he faced during this process. It is both inspiring and humbling to listen to such frontline social entrepreneurs. To deliver the same experience to our readers, Lakshminarasimhan has presented an excerpt of Mr. Elango's talk here. And for those of you inclined towards taking active participation in Sankalp, we have Yvette's (an ISU alumnus) experience as a Sankalpite, and Aarthi's excitement as a new member! And to add comic relief to this issue, Kamal has commented on the idiosyncrasies of some of the current active members.

We thank you all for your constant encouragement and support in contributing our mite to the development of India. Let us all add one more brick in building our nation.

akshara Editorial Board

looking back: looking ahead

Murali Subramanian

village industry & sustainable economies

Elango Rangasamy (excerpted by Lakshminarasimhan from a talk)

association:action:achievement

Murali Subramanian

meritocracy: how we identify projects

Rahul Marathe

making new connections

Neeraj Koul

an outsider's look inside

Yvette Chin

fundraising : fun raising!

Aarthi Parthasarathy

who's who

Kamal Muthukrishnan

akshara is a newsletter published by **sankalp** (the India Literacy Focus Group) at Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa. The views and opinions expressed in the articles are the authors' own and do not represent the opinion of the Editorial Board of **akshara** or of *sankalp*. Contributions in the form of articles, news, views, or financial contributions to *sankalp* are welcome from interested readers and writers. For more details about *sankalp*, please contact us at sankalp@iastate.edu.

Funded by GSB

C O N T E N T S

looking back : looking ahead

Sankalp is a student-administered, student-based organization that works for the promotion of literacy and livelihood generation in India. Being a predominantly student-run organization has both positives and negatives. On the one hand, every Fall and Spring a number of student-volunteers graduate and move on, and with them Sankalp loses committed volunteers and capable administrators. On the other hand, a constant influx of fresh blood into Sankalp helps keep its ideas fresh and its vision fertile. To capitalize on the energy of its student-volunteers, and spread the message of development amongst our peers are Sankalp's primary objectives. Once a steady flow of students into Sankalp is ensured, managing the organization and raising funds for projects become more amenable tasks. In my opinion, inculcating the worth of contributing towards India's overall development in our peers is probably Sankalp's single greatest goal.

Sankalp's main stated goals include awareness on issues relating to India's development and fund-raising. Ideally, fund raising should be a side issue to awareness. To amplify what I mean, I'd like to quote what I heard in a talk at a recent conference- "There is more value in raising \$10 from 100 people, than raising \$1000 from one person." The 100 people who make the \$10 donation develop, in some measure, a stake in the development of their country. To spread and nurture this participatory feeling of these patrons is just as important as their monetary contribution. Sankalp needs to build these strong bridges with its volunteers, other students, alumni and faculty. Since it has long been acknowledged that grass-root movements are key to restoring India to participatory democracy and social development, involving people should be an important aspect of Sankalp's agenda. There are, however, practical limitations to consider- Sankalp is a small student run organization, and hence needs a measure of efficiency in its fund-raising efforts. In addition, generating funds fast is probably the most tangible way in which Sankalp can contribute towards India's development- the more money raised implies that we can support more needy projects in India. Hence, a practical balance between these goals is necessary for the holistic functioning of Sankalp.

Toward these goals, Sankalp made many strides during the academic year of 2001-02. An orientation/welcome party in September 2001 introduced the new Indian students at ISU to Sankalp, its activities and goals. Around 30 new students and 20 Sankalpites enthusiastically participated in this meet. The current core Sankalp group contains at least 5 new students from last year's welcome party. Many of them are actively involved in all aspects of Sankalp and hold various offices. On October 6th, 2001, Sankalp, in collaboration with SITAR, hosted Aparna Sindoor and her troupe for a dance-drama at Fisher

Theatre. The Committee on Lectures and Student Union Board generously provided the funding for this performance, which attracted an audience of about 500. This dance-drama, titled 'River Rites', depicted the plight and misery of tribals displaced by the construction of the big Narmada river valley dams and succeeded in raising awareness on ecological and cultural consequences arising from big dams and other non-sustainable, large-scale, people-unfriendly projects.

In November of 2001, Sankalp organized an informal session with Dr. Balmurli Natrajan, an assistant professor in Anthropology at ISU, on understanding the meaning, scope and implications of globalization. This very informative session lasted nearly 3 hours, and was useful in helping Sankalpites become more aware of the bigger developmental picture. Plans are very much afoot to organize similar meetings on a regular basis.

In early September this year, we had an opportunity to host Elango Rangasamy for a talk on campus. Elango spoke about his work as a panchayat leader in Kuthambakkam in Tamil Nadu, India, and his efforts in turning it from a village steeped in violence and illicit-liquor brewing to a model village, with food-security, paved roads and well-attended schools. Elango spoke with passion and conviction about replicating this model in villages across the country, of using the panchayat system to change the fates of the village, and restore them to self-sufficiency. A complete article has been devoted, in this newsletter, to Elango's work and his talk in Ames.

In addition to these events, Sankalp conducted two quizzes I.Q. and Inqwizitive over the year, one last summer and one last Fall. Sankalp also continued its participation in city and university sponsored cultural events, including FACES, organized by the city of Ames during October 2001 and Veishea, organized by ISU in April 2002. Newly purchased handicrafts, and a newly designed t-shirt were on sale at these stalls. In addition, new greeting cards and bookmarks were on sale. At the VEISHEA stall, mehndi (henna) tattoos were a popular attraction too. Sankalp plans to continue its active involvement in these cultural events.

Last year marked a big first for Sankalp in fund raising-volunteering for ISU- Cyclone Football games. Sankalp, as an organization, helps with security and ticketing at these games, and in return gets paid hourly for the number of volunteers it brings to each game. A total of \$2,000 was raised from the 6 home games last year. This year Sankalp aims to double that by mobilizing more volunteers for the games. Volunteering for football games

(continued on page 6)

village industry & sustainable economies

The village

I am from Kuthambakkam, a village 35 km from Chennai on the Chennai-Bangalore highway. Until nine years ago this village remained under-developed and very backward. Poverty forced many to turn to brewing illicit liquor for a livelihood, and together these two constituted a very vicious cycle; frequent communal violence worsened the plight of the denizens.

I am one of the very few from this village to have had formal higher education; I am an Electrochemical engineer from the Center for Electrochemical Research Institute (CECRI), Karaikudi, Tamilnadu. I worked in CSIR labs, and my job was very rewarding and satisfying. However, whenever I visited my village I felt a strong urge to contribute to the well being of the village.

Kundrakudi model

During my association with CECRI, we had contributed to the establishment of small-scale cottage industries and large-scale chemical plants in the village of Kundrakudi near Madurai, Tamilnadu. Though both sectors contributed to the economic development of the village, the large chemical plants offered hardly any employment within the village, and no finished products as well. In contrast, the cottage industries were sustainable, provided employment to the locals, and contributed towards improved living standards for the villagers.

Using these lessons, I decided to follow the 'Kundrakudi model' to improve my village. In '94 I quit my job with CSIR and returned to Kuthambakkam. I introduced the National Literacy Mission programme to the village to educate the people, and also started a dairy development project. The next two years I was working on these two projects. By now I realized that to contribute significantly to the upliftment of the village, it would help to possess official executive powers. I contested for the panchayat presidentship under the newly introduced 'Panchayat Raj' system of village governance, and got elected. I won this election at zero campaign cost against powerful opponents, mainly due to the trust the villagers had reposed in me.

Panchayat Raj

With the help of a few others, I charted out the needs of the villagers and drew a five-year plan for its development. Foremost in our agenda was to eradicate illicit liquor brewing. With the help of police and politicians we managed to persuade the brewers to give up illicit liquor brewing in their and the village's better interests. However, this rendered many people jobless and without an income, and they literally manhandled me demanding a solution to their plight. To rehabilitate them, I sought help from the government of Tamilnadu. As a special case, the government provided a sum of Rs. 2 crores

(Rs. 20 million), and entrusted me with the responsibility of coming up with sustainable projects that would provide a means of livelihood to these people and others in the village.

The following year, we used this money for development projects such as laying roads, building rainwater canals, construction of houses and desilting ponds. This provided a job opportunity for many villagers who would otherwise have returned to illicit liquor brewing. The villagers made their own soil-stabilized mud blocks for the construction, which proved highly cost effective. In laying the rainwater canals, we purchased granite waste from the granite industry instead of purchasing gravel from vendors, broke them manually, and used these for construction. Though this cut down the cost of canal construction, it irked people with vested interests. This led to my suspension from panchayat presidentship, on the pretext that I had not followed government norms by failing to invite tenders for purchase of gravel. I was also ordered to deposit a penalty.

Test of time

It was a tough phase in my life even on the personal front. When I was totally disillusioned, I chanced to read "My experiments with Truth" - Mahatma Gandhi's autobiography. Gandhi says (paraphrase): "If you are committed to a cause and you know your means are right, do not buckle down to pressure. Fight it out with your might. Truth triumphs." I took this to heart and decided to fight for justice. I turned to newspapers and declared an open challenge to the government to present the charges against me in front of the villagers, and if they find me guilty I was willing to face any kind of punishment. My reaction made higher officials in the government, who were hitherto in the dark, take note of the whole issue. After a re-evaluation of the case, all charges against me were dropped and I was allowed to perform my duties as the village Panchayat President.

Self-help groups

In order to provide sustainable employment to the villagers and make the village self-reliant, we applied Dr. J. C. Kumarappa's (a Gandhian Economist) school of thought. We studied the consumer demand within the village and to our surprise we determined that the village itself is a big consumer, with a net transaction of Rs. 70 lakh (Rs. 7 million) per month. If this cash flow could be channelized within the village, it would make the village self-reliant and sustainable. Accounting for the needs of the villagers by local small-scale production would not only prevent unnecessary imports from the city, but would provide employment for many villagers.

(continued on page 7)

a true story

Most of Sankalp's activities are geared towards one primary tangible objective - supporting worthy and needy projects in India. During the last year, three projects with differing objectives were supported. Initially, it was Sankalp's policy to fund only those projects that had a strong literacy component in them; that philosophy has changed, as it has become increasingly clear that literacy is probably as much an effect of development as being a tool for development. Literacy projects, especially those that emphasize non-formal, value-based education are important too, but Sankalp feels that having a narrow focus will not adequately serve the purpose of assisting development. As a consequence of this shift in thinking, two of the three projects supported last year did not have a significant literacy component to them.

Adivasi Mitra, literally "friends of the tribals", was supported last summer for a 3-year period. Dharmaraju Kakani, one of the founding members of Sankalp, collaborated with Adivasi Mitra on this project and brought it to Sankalp's attention. Adivasi Mitra works with tribals in the villages of Rallagaruvu and Karakaravalasa in Vizag district, Andhra Pradesh, India. Among the many hardships the villagers face is that of inadequate roofing, which results in flooded houses during the heavy monsoons. Under such conditions, it is very natural that shelter is a much bigger priority than literacy. Funds were solicited for purchase of tiles for the houses, and to start a small primary school for the 40 children who live in those villages. While Adivasi Mitra would provide the tiles to the villagers, the villagers would provide the sweat equity in the form of labor and construction. This would also be a mobilizing factor in getting the community to work together, and take ownership of the roofing project. In addition to the sweat equity provided, the villagers were to provide land and labor for the construction of the school. Thus Sankalp would provide the money, Adivasi Mitra would provide the tiles for the roofs and the villagers would provide land for the school and sweat equity towards roofing and school construction. An amount of \$3,200 was requested in the first year, with the bulk of it going towards purchase of tiles, and the remainder for a teacher's salary, and teaching materials; \$800 has been requested in sustaining the school over the next two years. Sankalp disbursed the first installment during June-July of 2001, and has received encouraging feedback from Adivasi Mitra regarding the progress of the project. Most of the households have tiled roofs, the villagers providing the labor for the roofing. The school has also been built with local labor, and 30 children are attending the school, including 10 girls. A local villager is a teacher at the school.

Kotwalwadi Trust, a charitable organization based in Neral, Maharashtra (India) was funded \$1,100 during the Spring of 2002 towards providing hostel facilities for 40 tribal children while they attended high school in Neral.

These tribal children are drawn from the far-flung villages around Neral, where no secondary schools exist. They live in the hostel, administered by the Kotwalwadi trust, while they study in the high school in Neral. Since the children living in the hostel are from poor tribal families, all their expenses towards attending school, from food to fees, are met by the Kotwalwadi trust. Sankalp was asked to help fund daily necessities for these children- mainly uniforms, school bags, umbrellas and books. Although, when seen in isolation, these expenses do not seem to have much of a priority to them, when seen in the bigger picture these expenses are as important as any other since they are basic necessities in the wholesome life of a student. Bearing this in mind, along with the fact that the hostel serves tribals from remote villages, Sankalp decided to fund the project. The hostel has been audited as amongst the best run in the entire state of Maharashtra, and many of its student-alumni have found gainful employment. Many thanks are due to Venkatachalam Thekkemadom, a ISU and Sankalp alumnus, for drawing our attention towards this project.

The most recently funded project is the **Kuthambakkam** initiative, headed by Rangasamy Elango. This project was funded this (2002) summer for \$3,200, towards establishing a groundnut oil-processing unit in the village. This is a one-time capital investment to purchase basic equipment for the processing unit. This unit, along with other micro-industries, will form the backbone for the economy of Kuthambakkam, and ensure that all the consumption needs for the village is met from within the village, and not from the nearby cities. This would generate local employment for the landless villagers, and promote cash flow within the village. This economic model developed by Dr. J. C. Kumarappa in the pre-independence era, has brought about a tremendous change in the prevailing conditions in Kuthambakkam, and promises to be a replicable model. Elango, now the sarpanch, of Kuthambakkam, which is barely 30 km from Chennai (India), believes that using the inbuilt system of panchayats and community leadership holds the key to reinvigorating Indian villages. His model of a sustainable economy, driven by villagers, has motivated and mobilized the community, and the village boasts of schools and internet-active computers. Satisfying the basic food, water, shelter and income generation requirements are prerequisite for any development of the villages, and once these needs are met education will automatically be on the agenda for the villagers. Sankalp members had a first-hand opportunity to learn about these concepts, and the effect of its support when Elango visited Ames in early September 2002.

meritocracy : how we identify projects

With a good number of new promising projects seeking monetary support and the limited availability of funds, a need was felt for evaluating all the projects in an objective and consistent manner. Hence, a new scheme consisting of nine criteria to rank the projects was developed. These criteria are weighted based on their relative importance to Sankalp's goals and the ranking is determined by the weighted average awarded to the project during the evaluation process. The evaluation process itself consists of an extensive discussion of the merits and demerits of the project. The criteria are discussed below.

Credibility of Non Governmental Organization (NGO): This is undoubtedly the most important criterion to evaluate any project. When an NGO submits the project proposal to Sankalp, the NGO has to be a credible organization so that requisite efforts are put in to obtain the goals stated in the project. If the NGO is not credible, then the whole purpose of funding the project goes in vain. So, Sankalp verifies the credibility of the organization through a network of reliable friends and volunteers in India, or Sankalp members visiting India. In addition, Sankalp solicits projects through its current members and alumni who can vouch for the credibility of the NGO.

Feedback Mechanism: Once the project has been started, the NGO bears the responsibility of completing all tasks mentioned in the project proposal. However, since any system can be improved by a closed loop, obtaining feedback from the NGO is of prime importance. With periodic feedback, Sankalp will be constantly apprised of the progress of the project, and learn about important aspects of the concerned NGO. Most of the time, feedback report is created by the Sankalp volunteers visiting India.

Participation of the Locals: Complete success of any project has to involve the local population being targeted by the project. This will ensure that the project has a sustained effect on the life of the local people. Hence projects where the community participates in its initiation and development will have a greater probability of success than one in which an "outside" NGO carries out the project. Sankalp believes in supporting such organizations that have gathered the confidence and involvement of the locals.

Sustainability: Sankalp prefers to support NGOs for projects that are sustainable so that once a project is supported it is able to take care of its own expenses in the future. That way the project becomes self-reliant and at the same time Sankalp is able to contribute to other deserving projects elsewhere.

Geographic Location: It is more likely that there are more NGOs helping the urban needy than the rural. Hence Sankalp gives preference to projects in remote rural regions than those closer to cities.

Relevance to Education: The limited budget for funding dictates that presently Sankalp cannot work on all aspects of social development. Hence the need to focus on education, as that is one of the important aspects of a developed society. Projects with relevance to education, therefore, have a preference over other projects. However, Sankalp is broadening its focus towards overall social development.

Financial Aspects: This includes everything related to the budget of the project. But chiefly, the administrative expenses of the NGO are evaluated by this criterion. Ideally it is preferred that a major part of the money funded by Sankalp should go towards actual project related work rather than the housekeeping expenses for the NGO. Tighter budgets are preferred for funding.

Dependence on Sankalp: Sankalp believes that fledgling NGOs that do not have a funding network of their own should be preferred for projects rather than funding well-established organizations. However, the credibility of the NGO will also be ascertained to the best possible extent. Hence if the NGO is dependent on Sankalp, it is given a higher preference for funding. This may not hold true for big NGOs, which may have their own resources.

Target Population: This represents the number of people in the region who will be benefited by the project. Here, Sankalp prefers to fund projects with larger 'beneficiary/aid' ratio.

project evaluation

Criteria	Weight
Credibility of NGO	10
Feedback Mechanism	10
Participation of the Locals	8
Sustainability	7
Geographic Location	6
Relevance to Education	6
Financial Aspects	6
Dependence on Sankalp	5
Target Population	4

However, these criteria are just the guiding points used for screening the projects, and the final decision to support is also based on subjective appraisals from the members of Sankalp.

making new connections

On Saturday, August 31, 2002 the auditorium in the IIT campus in Chicago was filled with volunteers from various US based non-profit organizations (NPO's) who converged under the banner of 'Serve India Forum' (SIF) not only to share their vision of a developed and progressive India but also to take concrete steps to achieve this goal. 'Dream with a deadline' and 'Mini Gandhis in every village' were the buzzwords at the conference.

The idea of SIF was born in July 2001 to promote interaction and cooperation between various U.S. based non-profit organizations (NPOs) working towards development in India. In the words of Guha Balasubramaniam (IDS), the coordinator and chief-architect of SIF 2002, "The purpose of SIF is to be an open forum rather than an umbrella organization. This, in turn, will promote close-knit and valuable partnerships across these organizations and network parallel efforts for development work in India." Currently SIF has more than hundred volunteers belonging to thirty different organizations. More Information about SIF can be obtained by visiting the web site at www.serveindiaforum.net

Sankalp has been involved with SIF right from its conception. Sankalp worked closely with the organizers to make sure that the SIF 2002 conference was a success. At SIF 2002 Sankalp was represented by Murali, Rahul, Subbu, Dinesh, and Neeraj. Sankalp set up a booth where it displayed the various projects it has supported till date. The conference provided Sankalp volunteers a forum to discuss some of the challenges faced by a student-organization like Sankalp with experienced volunteers from other organizations and explore solutions to them. One of the concrete solutions that came out of these discussions was to provide a means for the Sankalp alumni to continue to play an active role in the working of the organization. Neeraj has decided to take a lead in this matter and if you want more details or want to be a part of this network he can be contacted at

kaul_neeraj@yahoo.com

SIF 2002 was spread over three days with over seventy delegates from twenty NPOs participating in it. These NPOs had wide ranges of focuses ranging from literacy, socio-economic development, women's rights, community banking, and tobacco prevention to supporting local communities to protect rivers and watersheds. The conference featured workshops on project evaluation, fund raising, activism and corruption. Concrete action items were evolved from these workshops. One of the consensus action items was to pressurize the government of India to increase the education budget from two to four percent. D.P Prakash (ASHA) took the lead in setting up and coordinating various focus teams to concentrate on these issues. The delegates also took a pledge to fight corruption by signing a token zero rupee note and promising neither to accept nor give bribes.

The guest speakers at the conference were Dr. Sudarshan and Mr. Elango. Dr. Sudarshan talked about the need for all the various organizations to work together to rejuvenate India. Mr. Elango made an inspiring presentation speech on how he transformed Kuthambakkam, one of the most backwards villages in Tamil Nadu, into a model village through Panchayat Raj and the local village economy. Mr. Elango hopes to transform the face of the country by replicating this experiment through every village in the country and is in the process of setting up a Panchayat academy to train village leaders.

The delegates felt that the conference was a huge success. Quoting Rahul (Sankalp), "The conference gave me an opportunity to interact with people who have worked at the grass roots, and draw inspiration." The delegates aim to meet once every year to continue their association and take stock of work done.

S I F 2 0 0 2

... looking ahead

(continued from page 2)

promises to be an assured way of raising funds for Sankalp. In addition to all the organized events and volunteering, Sankalp continued with its coin and can collection, faculty outreach and alumni outreach as means of raising funds. In the coming year, these activities will be the focus of renewed attention.

In addition to raising funds, evaluating suitable projects to support and obtaining feedback on projects, Sankalp also participated in two conferences the previous year- Manthan, a regional conference of NGOs held in Madison, Wisconsin in August, 2001, and the first Serve India Forum conference, held in Chicago in August-September,

2002. Both these conferences aimed at improving collaborations between NGOs working towards the betterment of India. Sankalp played a key role in the organization and execution of the Serve India Forum conference.

With a young and dynamic cabinet in place for the current year, a growing volunteer base, and new projects and fund raising opportunities, Sankalp is poised to capitalize on the hard work of its dedicated volunteers over the last seven years. Help Sankalp, by helping us identify and evaluate projects, and by making periodic donations. Your help and support is encouragement for us, and remember, every little does make a difference.

an outsider's look inside

My association with Sankalp happened entirely by accident. I never intended to belong to any organization with the exception of humane societies that promote animal welfare (an incredible number of people find it incongruous that being a non-vegetarian and engaged in active animal research, I should feel for their cause; but that's a story I'll save for a more relevant publication). In any case, back to Sankalp.

During my time at Iowa State University, Sankalp pinged in and out of my consciousness when they organized fund-raisers and other programs through the academic year. I didn't delve into any of these events being concerned primarily with the completion of my program of study and moving on with my life. As my time in Ames rolled on, I happened to become acquainted with people who are active members of Sankalp. It was mostly through their involvement and commitment to the

organization that I was drawn in, though I must admit, it was the quiz that was the clincher. Organized in the summer of 2001 as a fund-raiser for Sankalp's literacy efforts in India, it proved to be immensely entertaining and increased my awareness of the group and its commendable efforts in an informal setting.

I never got around to formally joining the group but was fortunate to participate in some of the activities as a "volunteer" of sorts. From the perspective of someone who's commitment-shy, I found the flexibility and openness of the group very accommodating and encourage other people to try volunteering if they do not wish to make a formal commitment. The experience can be rewarding but more than the reward, it can be interesting and educational (if you're a classic rock aficionado, you must check out the group's unofficial get-togethers). At the very least, you would have expanded your repertoire of life's experiences.

village industry ...

(continued from page 3)

We started several 'self-help' groups to run mini-industries including soap making industry, groundnut-oil processing unit, food processing units, cattle feed processing units and dairy industry. I would like to mention here that Sankalp provided financial assistance to set up the groundnut-oil processing unit. These groups cater to the needs of people within the village and the closed circuit economy makes them self-sustaining. In addition, groups trained at processing leather, jute and other industrial raw material, and making handicrafts, bring in external revenue to the village.

In addition to improving the working lot, we have made school a friendlier place for children. In India, many village schools have moderate infrastructure and human resources. In spite of this, there are a very high number of dropouts. In addition, most parents being illiterate or uneducated and teachers being malevolent, children are not attracted towards education. We learnt that food-security is a bigger concern than education, and once communities are food-stable and have steady incomes, education is automatically taken care of. Now at Kuthambakkam, kind and encouraging teachers make learning an enjoyable experience for children. There are internet enabled computers in the village, and computer-assisted education is also being experimented with.

Future goals

In the past decade, Kuthambakkam has come a long way from being an underdeveloped village rife with communal violence. With an economically stable household and a sense of social security, the villagers live in mutual harmony. The next five years we plan to

focus on improving land utilization and regeneration, education and cultural activities. We plan to extend the microeconomy network to include about 10 neighboring villages. This would not only benefit other villages, but also stabilize the system.

Today Kuthambakkam is a testimony to the power of the Gandhian school of economics; we believe every other village in the country could replicate this success story. Towards this, we intend to form a 'Panchayat Academy' at Kuthambakkam where panchayat leaders from various parts of India can visit, learn about the various aspects of village development, and adapt similar techniques to suit their local needs, thus causing a ripple effect. The key to the success of Kuthambakkam is the trust people had in my leadership and their total commitment to the development of the village. This underscores the fact that such initiatives will be fruitful only when a local leader takes active interest with utmost commitment. We hope the Panchayat Academy will serve the needs of such people and help transform India into a developed nation in the near future.

(This article is an excerpt from the talk by Elango Rangasamy given at Iowa State University. Any misrepresentation is the responsibility of the excerpter)

Elango Rangasamy, a recipient of the Ashoka Fellowship, is the current village sarpanch of Kuthambakkam in Tamil Nadu. He was also, recently, invited by the US government to visit the country to learn about transparency and accountability in governments.

a true story

fund-raising : fun raising!

Volunteering for off-field services by Sankalp members during football matches at Ames is one effective way to raise money for funding developmental projects in India. Many new Indian students volunteered for the match between Cyclones of Iowa State University and Jay Hawks of Kansas University. It was a different experience for the freshers who were new to the game. The match was held on a Saturday morning. The day before the game, Sankalp committee members explained the football-volunteering activities. The venue and the time of arrival were decided in the meeting. Early next morning, the students gathered enthusiastically to volunteer and thus actively participate in generating funds for Sankalp. After arriving at Jack Trice stadium, the volunteers were split into two groups. One group was assigned the duty of collecting tickets and greeting people at the entrance- 'ticketing'; the other group helped the fans find their respective seats in the pavilion - 'ushering'. Friends who knew the rules of the game explained them to the rest. It was very interesting to watch the zeal and support of the aficionados. The day

was hot, but it was mellowed down by the enthusiasm displayed by one and all. The sound system and the scoreboard caught our eyes. The school band welcomed the visiting team and the spectators. It displayed the American spirit of playing the gracious host. The teams were introduced; Cyclones won the toss and opted for offense. The offense, defense and the special teams clashed against one another. During half time, the school band of both teams gave an impeccable performance of wonderful music for the spectators to enjoy. In addition the cheerleaders of both teams gave some superb dance numbers. The crowd was wonderful and supported their home team with great zeal. The Jay Hawks played tirelessly. Finally the game ended with the Cyclones outscoring the Jay Hawks 45 to 3. The day ended with a pizza party at Pizza Hut, which was a well-deserved treat for all the volunteers. It was indeed a great opportunity for the new comers to meet more people, enjoy the football game, go out for pizza as a group and most important of all, to enjoy working for a good cause.

who's who

Murali : At last this major 'networking hub' is being shutdown by the new office bearers. Owns the 'Ames taxi' and transports a lot of grad students free of charge. To say the truth he's the man for the people, of the people and by the people (being really nice here).

Dinesh: Claims to be a Canadian although he is from the outskirts of Mumbai. Spends nearly half his stipend on hair care. Extremely talented in maintaining accounts (has explored every nook & cranny of Excel spreadsheets) which qualifies him as the new treasurer for Sankalp.

Abu: Known for his amazing driving skills. Has already given many demos in parking lots and railroad crossings. As the ex-project co-coordinator for Sankalp, he has a lot of new projects in ISU that are just waiting for funding.

Anil: Physical properties- This element is acid resistant, corrosion resistant and stable under extreme conditions. He has served Sankalp diligently for 6 whole years but still refuses to leave ISU. His famous lines "its okay man....." and "sochta hun yaaaarrrrr".

Vidya: The new vice president of Sankalp. Very strict and disciplined in any activity she takes charge of - hence the name 'Major Vidya'. Known for the amazingly scary looks she gives when people aren't obedient.

Nataraj: The official 'coin and can collection coordinator' of Sankalp also known for his good marketing skills. Always plays a vital role in boosting the handicrafts sale in Sankalp booths. Unfortunately he would fall sick with 'Saturday morning fever' every time Sankalp needed volunteers for football games.

Rahul: Looks like a calm, silent and composed kid... but truly a silent killer. He is the new diligent president for Sankalp and hopes to expand fundraising activities so that Sankalp can undertake more projects in the forthcoming years. Has improved his 'networking' talents based on the ex-president's advice.

LN: Though he didn't accept any new posts in Sankalp, he's the man behind every major activity. A sincere and committed guy he is known for his 'short speeches'.

Aditya: An ardent follower of Swami Vivekananda. He is trying to track Vivekananda's supposed visit to Ames (Welch Avenue) through the resources available in ISU library. A systematic worker who executes every activity based upon the 'physical stress' involved.

Subbu: Has played an active role in every Sankalp meeting though he usually misses the first 10 minutes. The new project coordinator is a man of big ideas, but rarely expresses his views!

Mamatha: One of the most sincere members of Sankalp, she is the brain behind all the Sankalp quizzes.

Kamal: The main author of these snippets, we had to sneak in something about him. A regular Schumi, he can drive with his eyes closed. Responsible for a lot of unexplained crop lines in rural Illinois. Also been called "oooh aaah handsome" by the women of Ames. Notorious for his sound-effects, used to liberal effect to irritate people. Too many nicknames to list here too!

s n i p p e t s