

IFA Presents

Archana 2023

Remembering India's Heritage of Love and Tolerance



It is You, who gave me the senses to experience,
You gave me hands to shape, breath to sing,
And mind to know and dream.
And the little, I create with these gifts,
O' Supreme Lord! It is to You I offer!



Welcome...

A warm welcome to all the supporters and well-wishers of India Friends Association.

IFA took birth exactly 30 years ago. For a community based voluntary organization this has been an incredible journey of achievements and learning. You all are an integral part of this success story and we dedicate this celebration to you and you alone!

A time for celebration is also a time for renewal and for IFA, renewal is a must. Our goals and objectives are clearer than ever. The path forward has become much more defined. The same, however, cannot be said about our human resources.

Some of us have been with the organization from the beginning, many for close to that. That is a long part of a lifetime. Energies are going down and effectiveness is diminishing. Unless there is infusion of new people with fresh energy, IFA faces the risk of losing its spirit and purpose.

We, the core members, take this opportunity to make this urgent call to the community. Please come forward to contribute to the functioning of IFA in whatever way you can. We know there is tremendous talent and expertise out there. There are many ways in which you can make IFA stronger and help it grow. In the coming year, all the IFA core members will be reaching out to the community. We hope to see more of you in the core!

As always, this booklet shares highlights of IFA activities during the past year. Please go through it at your leisure and give us your valuable input.

**India Friends Association
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Archana 2023

Remembering India's Heritage of Love and Tolerance

*"Brothers and Sisters of America..." is how the young Indian ascetic began his address to the World Conference of Religions in Chicago. He spoke about how his nation had sheltered the persecuted and the refugees from all over the world. In doing so, he brought to the world stage, India's civilizational consciousness built over centuries by poets, saints and social reformers who placed love and tolerance at the center of society, epitomized by the concept of **Vasudhaiv Kutumbakam** – the world is one family. The speech received a standing ovation for minutes. The year was 1893 and the speaker would become known to the world as Swami Vivekanand.*

Today, as the war in Europe threatens nuclear annihilation, as poverty and climate catastrophe continue to stalk humanity and as hateful, regressive ideologies spread the world over, we use this year's Archana program to draw upon that very wisdom and seek lessons for our troubled times.

*The stream of such ideas runs continuously through India's history dating back at least to the Buddha whose philosophy evolved from a deeply rooted desire to remove suffering. 2500 years later, his teachings still reverberate throughout the world. The holy Himalayas are littered with colorful prayer flags and stones inscribed with one of Buddha's key teachings – **Om Mani Padme Hum** (the jewel of the heart is compassion).*

Less well understood is the fact that the Indus Valley civilization was a prosperous society that valued commerce and hence sought peace and harmony over war and strife. The great Indian epics too — though centered around violent conflicts — accord critical space to love and compassion. In the Ramayana for example, it is his compassion -- whether in eating Shabari's half eaten fruit or humoring the boatman insisting on cleansing his feet before giving a ride -- that transforms the powerful and righteous prince, a human, to Lord Rama, the divine being. Similarly, loving the divine as the child Krishna, immortalized by the poetry of Surdas or as the mischievous beloved Kanha, by numerous other poets, continues to resonate deeply with the Indian people.

As early as the 6th century, poets and saints in the south of India were re-defining their relationship with the divine in terms of love and devotion. The beautiful maiden Andal, deeply offended the orthodox when — immersed in the love of God — she garlanded the deity with the one she had worn herself. But much to their shock, the Lord would accept no garland except the one worn by Andal, such was the intensity of her love and devotion that would go on to infuse her poetry.

Over the ensuing centuries, Ramaju, Ramanand, Vallabh Acharya, Madhava, Basavanna and many others carried on with this tradition until there was a real flowering of the Bhakti movement all across India. Meera, Tulsidas, Kabir, Nanak, Surdas, Tukaram, Naamdev, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu and numerous others preached the gospel of love and tolerance. They condemned discrimination on the basis of religion, caste and wealth. Many of the saints were themselves from the lower castes such as Dadu Dayal in Gujarat who was a cobbler. It is said that the saint Kanakadas, being from a lower caste, could not enter the Udupi Krishna temple. But his devotion was so profound that the deity shifted position and the outer wall cracked so Kanakadas could have darshan while sitting at the door.

These ideas also found expression in the Islamic tradition in the form of Sufi movement with the essential message: remember God and serve others. India was blessed with many Sufi saints such as Baba Farid, Bulle Shah, Khawja Moin-ud-Din Chisti, Nizam-ud-din Auliya and his famous disciple Amir Khusaru.

In recent times, it was Mahatma Gandhi who adapted these ideas into Ahimsa. Its English meaning, Nonviolence, does not quite do justice to this unique approach towards conflict resolution based on first ensuring the righteousness of one's cause and then respecting the humanity of one's adversary.

We in IFA are fortunate to have this platform to highlight this wonderful legacy of universal brotherhood. We have no doubt it resonates with similar legacies amongst the other great civilizations of the world, since, as best as we know, all spiritual traditions and faiths abound with messages of love and tolerance.

So, here is Archana 2023: From India, A legacy of Love and Tolerance

Archana '23: The Program

Remembering India's Legacy of Love and Tolerance

Invocation

अयं निजः परोवेतिण गणना लघुचेत साम् । उदार चरितानाम् तुण वसुधैव कुटुम्बकम् ॥

The ignorant or narrow minded think of me, mine and not mine, for the broad-minded, the whole world is their own like a family.

सर्वे भवन्तु सुखिनः । सर्वे सन्तु निरामयः ॥ सर्वे भद्राणि पश्यन्तु । मा कश्चित् दुःख भागभवेत् ॥

May all be happy and free from illness, may auspiciousness prevail everywhere, may no one suffer, let there be peace all around!

Music medley

Film songs are where we first learn of love - that soft, sweet, delicate and otherworldly feeling that one would die for. Later, when we are weighted down by the harshness of life, these songs can often bring that magical feeling floating back and fill our hearts with joy, even if for a few moments.

The IFA music medley team invites us to open up our hearts to the notes of love as they bring alive some wonderful love songs from over the years.

Coordinator: Rajendra Deshpande

Vocalists (female): Harneet Kaur, Kareena Kaur, Promita Swamy, Sabah Rahman

Vocalists (male): Aminder (Bablu) Singh, Jairam Agaram, Manoj Khatore, Mantosh Chawla, Prashant Rao, Vikram Gupta

Tabla & Dholak: Samar Das **Bass Guitar:** Rajendra Deshpande **Lead Guitar:** Manoj Khatore

Drums: Justin James **Auxiliary Percussion:** Ketan Desai **Keyboard and Saxophone:** Tom Scharf

Children Dance

The children in this item are dancing in celebration of the flowers, fruit and vegetables that are India's bounty of nature. The little girl is enthralled by the love with which grandma adorns her hair with the sweet-smelling flowers. Excited, she too wants to climb the jamun tree and share the fruit with her friends. The second song is challenging the children to dream big and then work hard to make it happen.

Choreography: Monica Sarin

Participants: Aarna Balla, Aadhya Sarva, Ariya Chauhan, Diya Desai, Jui Jeurkar, Mardav Phade, Mihika Maddula, Myra Chhabra, Narayani Gumaste, Neil Desai, Nihira Vedula, Prisha Patel, Prisha Tumne, Ranjini Vijay, Sahasra Yadavelli, Saisha Goswami, Samaya Parekh, Shreeya Govind, Yashvi Patel

Film Dance

Love is the pivot around which India's films and music revolve. Even as the stories have evolved to reflect the violence and harshness of our times, the music and dances continue to provide the warmth and excitement of love, often as the glue that keeps a film together.

Our teenagers have strung together a medley of some of the most loved songs from all over the country including the global sensation and Oscar winner 'Naatu Naatu'.

Choreography: Ashrita Reddy, Nina Krishnan, Raghav Rapaka, Vian Dhinakaran

Participants: Aayushi Patel, Annika Madhavan, Anushka Rajak, Arnav Magadala, Ashrita Reddy, Ayushmaan Karia, Dhilen Mistry, Gayatri Adapa, Ish Dubey, Keisha Pal, Kiran Nair, Kyra Sharma, Lalitha Chamarty, Manasvi Phade, Nina Krishnan, Pranav Kadiyala, Raghav Rapaka, Rashi Khandare, Rishima Gupta, Rohan Koditala, Ronitt Katkoria, Rooney Chirutha, Riya Agrawal, Sadhika Adicherla, Sahil Sampangi, Saravan Padala, Sharanya Palakodeti, Shrila Karthikeyan, Siya Porwal, Sridershani Anandraj, Veda Bollapalli, Vian Dhinakaran, Yana Seedhar

Unity in Diversity

Saare Jahan se accha, Hindustan hamara, hum bulbulen hain uski, yeh gulsitan hamara (Our Hindustan is the best in the entire world, we are its nightingales and it is the garden where we flourish).

The beauty, richness and permanence of India's civilization owes in large measure to its common people's tolerance and ability to accept differences, despite many challenges. This is illustrated beautifully in this dance as dancers from the four corners of India, seamlessly blend their unique culture in to an energetic and colorful whole connected through the power of love and oneness.

The music track is composed by the living legend Taufiq Hussain Qureshi (brother of Padmashree Dr. Zakir Hussain) and his amazingly talented team of musicians while the iconic performance is choreographed by Humerah Chandani.

Choreography: Humerah Chandani

Participants: Aarifa Merchant, Adi Rapaka, Anubama Athmanathan, Anubala Bose, Archana Maddula, Arsh Chandani, Deepa Alandur Chander, Deepa Narsimhan, Dipali Nirgude, Dolly Jhingan, Ganesh Gopanapalli, Gayatri Krishnana, Humerah Almas, Jayanthi Krishnan, Marshnil Sonavane, Meghana Reddy, Monika Phade, Mrudul Kardak, Mugdha Lonkar, Partha Reddy, Pooja Sharma, Prameela Nalli, Priti Kothavale, Priyali Kardak, Priyanka Gadiyaram, Rathnakar Reddy, Ravali Raju, Reema Kapoor, Richa Gupta, Roop Mannshahia, Samina Sulmaz, Sheeba Kazi, Shekhar Panchapakesan, Shilpa Vishal, Sunita Gangadharmath, Suhas Deobhankar, Sushana Chaudhary, Sweta Patki, Uma Narayanan, Vijay Bheemisetty, Vinod Saxena, Zain Kazi

Raas Leela

Raasleela is the divine connect between Radha and Krishna, celebrating the myriad emotions of love: the tiffs, the mischief, the care and worry, the jealousy and of course, the romance. It is also the story of the eternal bond between Lord Krishna, the embodiment of universal love and his devotees in the form of gopikas.

These varied sentiments of love are wonderfully woven in this beautiful dance drama that takes us back in time as we witness the beautiful gopikas in their vibrant attire pinning for Krishna and mesmerized by his enchanting flute transcend to a different realm.

Choreography: Payal Wadhawan

Participants: Ashima Talwar, Gaganpreet Kaur, Jayashree Harige, Kinnri Jain, Nidhi Sharma, Payal Wadhawan, Radhika Deshpande, Ragini Saxena, Ritu Gupta, Ruchi Sharma, Shivali Singh, Shrijita Shah, Soni Goel, Sonia Tandon, Supriya Kulkarni, Tanveer Kaur, Tina Bhatia

An Eid celebration for all times (Adapted from Munshi Premchand's Hindi story 'Eidgah')

Love between a mother and her child is universal but in India, it is the very foundation of family, indeed of the culture itself. As this rural Indian community from years ago, prepares to celebrate Eid, a mother's love faces some challenges but what about the child?

Cast: Naimabibi (Mother): Payal Wadhawan **Radha (Milkmaid):** Simi Singh Gupta **Haamid (Son):** Arjun Ralhan

Village Ruffian, Chaperon, Hawker-2: (Punit Gupta) **Hawker-1:** Karthik Aiyra

Mansoor: Shivang Sharma **Rafi:** Vikram Lal **Abdul:** Krishna Aiyar **Raza:** Jaysukh Singh Bambra **Girls:** Kiara Singh Gupta and Shaashi Aiyar

Dances choreography: Payal Wadhawan

Music for the Chimta Song: Prashant Rao, Promita Swami, Raj Deshpande, Tom Scharf

Direction: Prithvi R Sharma

Bihu Dance

The festival of Bihu gives a unique identity to the Assamese people. It is a celebration of the changing seasons and each of the three Bihu celebrations marks an important phase in the farming calendar. Bohag or Rongali is at the onset of spring as the farmers prepare the field for cultivation while the next, Kati, is seeking God's blessings for a good crop. The last, Magh Bihu is the grandest celebration at the bountiful harvest.

This Bihu dance with flowing graceful moves and rich red and gold costumes, is performed by our Assamese community.

Choreography: Rita Kataki

Participants: Indrani Goswami, Mridusmita Barman, Pallavi Gogoi, Pokhi Dutta, Purabi Mahanta, Rita Kataki, Swagata Das, Tashneen Zareen

The Giddha

This, another harvest dance, is from the land of five rivers. Typically performed during the sowing and harvesting of crops, it is also performed during other festivals and social occasions. Performed only by women, the Giddha is rooted in Punjab's culture and is believed to be inspired from the ancient ring dance marked by high energy and graceful movements. Bright clothes, rhythmic clapping and traditional folk songs blend in to transform the dance into a spontaneous display of joy.

'Dudh Makhana Naal Pali Jawani, Khandi Nit Malaai, Paase Hattja Jhalema Punjaban Jatti Aayee' (Lovingly raised with milk, butter and daily cream, the Punjabi belle is here now, move over, you rascal!)

Choreography: Sonu (Jaspreet) Bal

Participants: Amarjit Lall, Anu Bala, Anu Sukhija, Benu Kalia, Harneet Kaur, Kareena Kaur, Kashmir Lall, Kuldeep Kaur, Kuljinder Kaur, Navneet Boparai, Ramandeep Kaur, Sarandeep Sidhu, Shaminder Khurana, Sonu Bal, Sukhi Sidhu, Sukhjinder Dhanoa, Zini Joshi.

The Archana Choreographers: A Vote of Thanks!

A program such as this requires an incredible effort. The IFA Core group is responsible for all the aspects from conception to execution. However, there is one group without whom the program just wouldn't be possible and that is our talented choreographers. They not only share their talent in creating the items but also expend vast amounts of energy and time in assembling the team, arranging practices, getting costumes and, of course, in training the participants. Their contribution is very much appreciated!

Archana Programs: Of the Community, By the Community, For the Community

Archana is envisioned to reflect Indian culture and traditions in a manner that relates to the IFA mission. It is a collective effort of volunteers. All participants and artists offer their talents and services free of charge. Many make additional contributions in cash, kind or labor. Everyone buys a ticket. It is never about how much one is required to give but about how much one is willing to give.

The program itself is not about showcasing or advertising talents, even though we have many performers of exceptional quality. Instead, it is about the desire to work collectively for a cause that transcends individual recognition. It is also about ordinary people, working hard to create something that is beautiful and unique.

Rejuvenate India Movement (RIM) - Madhya Pradesh

**The biggest number of malnourished kids globally are in India.*

**Malnutrition is the largest contributor to poverty in India.*

**Not having a household member with at least six years of education is the second largest contributor followed by lack of clean drinking water and child mortality.*

**Madhya Pradesh has the 4th largest number of malnourished kids.*

IFA has been supporting Rejuvenate India Movement (MP) for 10 years. Its focus is on kids' malnutrition, education, women's health and empowerment, and mobilization of government entitlements for the villagers.

Sewing For Supplemental Income



Kids Having Hot Midday Meal



Old House



New Housing Provided by Government



The **RIM MP Model** consists of recruiting a young person from each village – a **Samaj Shilpi** – who is supported by local volunteers - 10 to 15 **FOM** (Friends of the Movement). This **FOM** network is provided training on issues faced by the community and how to mobilize available government entitlements for the benefit of the villagers. It also includes helping villagers get employment under **NREGA**.

RIM MP leverages its effort by nurturing existing **Women Self Help Groups (SHGs)** with a current enrollment of **4200 women**. **SHGs** play a crucial role in getting its members small loans to start microenterprises and helping **RIM MP** ensure that kids go to school, get wholesome, hot midday meals, and receive regular health checkups.

Significant ongoing successes have led to a steady expansion from the initial 10 villages to 140 villages in 2021 to **377 Panchayats in 2022 (188, primary & 189 peripheral)** spread over **5 Blocks in 3 Districts in central Madhya Pradesh**. To date major progress has been made – **more than doubling of the outreach – potentially affecting over 500,000 people** versus 200,000 in 2021 with about the same annual budget as in the prior year. This is possible because of having significantly fewer paid staff of only 5 Samaj Shilpis and 5 Soochna Shilpis – under the direction of the State Coordinator – **and a much larger FOM network of over 2250 volunteers!** Widespread use of mobile phones and WhatsApp is now routine, significantly facilitating and enhancing effectiveness of the overall process.

At midyear **RIM MP** and its **FOM** network had directly helped over 14,000 villagers receiving significant benefits in areas such as health/hygiene, employment, pensions, new housing, and construction of toilets. **Additionally, 23,000 school going kids were receiving a daily hot mid-day meal out of 46,000 kids eligible under the program. These numbers are at mid-year point, and expected to significantly increase by year-end.**

~ In Memory of Om Gupta (Dedicated IFA Sewak) ~
 ~ Geeta ~ Sally & Sam ~ Michelle & Jay ~ Leena & Sanjay
 ~ Terese ~ Kappy & Jeff ~ Vijaya & S. Rao ~



Drip Irrigation for Organic farming



Supporting Microbusiness

RIM MP cost benefit numbers continue to be very impressive. In the first 9 months of the fiscal year 2022-2023, this project is showing a benefit of more than Rs.50 per Rs.1 of IFA support!

Plans for the Next Fiscal Year, 2023-2024: A Major Expansion



The proposal for 2023-2024 envisions radiating out and continuing program expansion to **722 Panchayats in 10 Districts**, (250 primary, 472 peripheral) from the current 377 Panchayats in 3 Districts (188 primary, 189 peripheral). Some of the new districts are 200-350 km away. **Detailed field analyses undertaken early in the next fiscal year will determine the mix of the targeted population and potential challenges.**

The proposed program model envisions 10 Samaj Shilpis (SS) under the direction of the Program Manager. Each SS will recruit 10-15 volunteers in each of the 250 Primary Panchayats as Friends of the Movement (FOM) **resulting in a total membership of about 3500.** As before this network will be trained extensively to ensure delivery of benefits and government entitlements to 25,000 - 30,000 villagers.

Work to expand from the current (large circle) to the smaller circles.

Despite the distances and other challenges, the project is expected to achieve a benefit to cost ratio of more than 25 to 1.

Two areas with major potential will receive serious attention: -

- **Build on the 2022-2023 success of FOMs elected to Sarpanch, Panch in the local Panchayats.** Ensure increased participation and deeper engagement of village communities in local Gram Sabhas and serving on different committees.
- **Federate FOMs and SHGs to formalize their growing functions and accomplishments in the original 3 districts.** These Federations could become major building blocks towards sustainability with minimal oversight. It would allow the Samaj Shilpis to expend their maximum effort in the new districts.

-- IFA Liaison: Kailash & Rajni Narayan

Love is the law of life: all love is expansion, all selfishness is contraction.
 Love is therefore the only law of life. He who loves lives, he who is selfish is dying.
 Therefore love for love's sake, because it is law of life, just as you breathe to live.

Swami Vivekananda

With Best Compliments From:
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Sugarcane cutters: Organizing an exploited community Maharashtra Fellowship (Jeewan Rathod)

Deep in the Beed district of Maharashtra, a Banajara community has made sugarcane cutting its main livelihood, at least for the 5-6 months in the year that this work is available. Since the work nearby is limited, they migrate every year to other parts of Maharashtra or Karnataka. They earn equivalent of around 3 dollars for up to 16 hours of work, have no social security, and no facilities at work. They have to leave their children at home whose education is very unsatisfactory as the government schools are dysfunctional or non-existent and the private schools are beyond their reach. Lastly, when the cutting season is over, they have little means of livelihood. Alcoholism, crime, and other maladies stalk them.

It is with this background that IFA has chosen its newest Fellow, Jeewan Rathod, in the Majalgaon taluka of Beed district. Belonging to the same community, Jeewan was able to get education and received an MA degree. He chose to dedicate his life for the upliftment of his community and has established an organization, **Shramik Ustod Kaamgar Sangathana**, that also functions as a union. It has a current membership of 5,000.

Main interventions

Better wages: Improved to Rs. 273 per person for a ton of sugarcane cut, hauled, and loaded which is 12 to 16 hours of work. The government funded MGNREGA wage is Rs. 240 for 8 hours of work with a one hour break! The Sangathan is striving to increase wages by linking them to hours.

Insurance: The work is hazardous and a worker losing a limb or life can be catastrophic for the family. They have managed to increase the life/injury insurance from 1 to 3 lakh rupees. Around 2,000 workers have gotten insurance so far. It was to be funded by Rs. 20 per ton of the workers labor with the state and the sugarcane industry chipping in Rs. 10 each. However so far, the government has reneged and the money is coming out of the workers wages. They are striving to change that and also to raise the insurance to 10 lakh rupees. Jeewan provides critical help in obtaining the insurance benefits if a tragedy occurs.

Education: Having seen the benefits of education, Jeewan is very keen to help educate the children of his community. He runs a primary school with local donations and help from organizations such as Asha for Education. It has around 100 students. He is working with the community and the government to establish hostels for the children when their parents migrate for work. Two hostels have already been set up.

Alternative livelihoods (MGNREGA promotion):

- Bavadis (wells) constructed: 15 at Rs. 300,000 each
- Shet tal (Ponds) constructed: 6 at Rs. 400,000 each
- Silk worm breeding plants: 20 at Rs. 400,000 each

Farmers groups: Small scale farmers are being organized for innovative and organic farming for moving away from the debt trap of the cash crops. Presently they have 4 farmer groups of 12 each.

Future Plans (expectation for the next three years):

- Expand the Sangathana from 6 to 30 villages and 6,000 members with direct benefit to 2000 families
- Awareness of NREGA in 30 villages with benefits to 1,200 families
- Expand the school to cover 15 villages and 170 students
- Expand the Farmer Groups to 12 with 150 farmers.

IFA member Prithvi Sharma visited this work in January of 2023 and was impressed by the significant gains made by the work of a single individual. Jeewan is excited about the IFA Fellowship and has already made significant progress. He is constrained by lack of additional workers and is grooming some promising local youth for leadership role. IFA will definitely consider providing additional Fellowship support if the work progresses well and if suitable candidates are found.

-- IFA Liaison: Hema and Rakesh Bansal



Jeewan with families who have received NREGA help



One of the frequent meetings with the State Sugar Board to lobby for the sugar cutters



Farmer owned organic daal (pulses) mill established with Jeewan's assistance

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Empowering Women In Karnataka Fellowship: Harini Shetty (Mangaluru)

Harini Shetty is a self-driven social activist with focus on women empowerment. As an IFA Fellow, she started working primarily for the upliftment of widows and single destitute women in Mangalore city. The target population now also includes working women from the unorganized sector, sex workers, adolescent girls, children and senior citizens. Her major efforts are directed towards helping them access government aided relief programs such as Widow Pension, Sandhya Suraksha, etc. A very important component of her work is building the capacity of women who get elected as municipal councilors. Such women, though willing and in a position to work for the benefit of women, are often not sufficiently informed or knowledgeable. She also provides moral support and counseling for such women who face many societal pressures and insecurities.

In her work Harini reaches out to volunteers from various walks of life, NGOs and the local government.

2022-23 Update

No	Main work	Total No to-date	22-23
1	Pensions sanctioned	61	-
2	Single women study	297	-
3	Cases handled	238+24	50+9 Follow-up
4	Programs (gender related)	-	138 programs
5	People reached through these programs	-	3,618 people
6	People reached through other programs	-	5,000 people approximately



Training on gender empowerment by Harini at Bandasale



Lawyer Deepa explaining the Domestic Violence Act 2005



Visiting home for the differently abled and senior citizens



Harini doing book release of 'Vesheyara Kathe-vyathe' by B M Rohini. Harini enabled her to contact sex workers in South Kanara district for writing the book.

--IFA Liaison: Asha Rao

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Kashmir Fellowships: Promoting Livelihoods and Protecting the Environment

Shaikh Ghulam Rasool, Lubna Qadri, Gulzar Ahmed, Shagufta Assad, Zahoor Rather, Shamim Shah, Naveed Bukhtiyar

Dr. Shaikh Ghulam Rasool, a physician by training, was deeply moved by the poverty he witnessed across Kashmir while working with a mobile medical clinic. In 2014, he left the practice of medicine and dedicated himself to the upliftment of the people of Kashmir. IFA's support for Dr. Rasool began that same year and has grown to support 7 Fellows in the region that drive the commensurate expansion in scope and breadth of initiatives since inception. The work has persisted despite challenges stemming from regional political instability, impacts of Covid, and loss of Internet connectivity following the abrogation of Article 370 etc.

Key goals

- Tosa Maidan Liberation and Rehabilitation including Community Driven Adventure and Rural Tourism (CDART)
- Conservation of the Environment through Plantation Drives and other means
- Livelihood Preservation (Wular Lake)
- Preservation of Forests and other Natural Resources through Implementation of the Forest Rights Act ("FRA" Act)
- Raising awareness of the Right to Information Act ("RTI" Act) and providing training in how to file appeals

Challenges continue to be extreme gender gaps with no education and work opportunities for women, corporate interests displacing the rights of indigenous communities, political unrest leading to lack of trust in the Government, and the ravages of the pandemic.

Tosa Maidan:

Initial work focused on liberating the picturesque meadow Tosa Maidan from being used as a firing range by the Indian army and then rehabilitating residents of the 52 villages surrounding the Maidan. The work has since spread to include a large area of Jammu and Kashmir as well as Ladakh. This population largely consists of tribal people, many being forest dwellers and nomadic tribes. A broad spectrum of initiatives targets critical areas such as education of children, promotion of local economy through CDART, tree plantation drives to restore forests depleted by firing range practices, nature conservation education, vocational training for women and youth, raising of awareness of government schemes (MGNREGA etc.), fighting corruption through RTI, and protection of indigenous forest rights through a coalition among others.

Wular Lake:

The Wular Lake, the largest freshwater lake in Asia includes about 70 villages with majority of the population being fishers. Since the liberation of Tosa Maidan, work has focused on livelihood generation, raising awareness among the people of the Forest Rights Act, environment conservation, education of children, and promotion of local self-governance. The group is working to protect the livelihoods of the local communities including about 15,000 fishers thus staving off the competing commercial interests of several large corporations who have entered the fray. Key activities are driving education and unionization of fishers at the village, block, and district level and promoting efforts to link to a national fisheries initiative sponsored by ICAN and another IFA supported NGO, Disha.

Adventure and Rural Tourism: Government finances additional infrastructure building costs in 2022

16 villages were declared by the Government as Rural Tourism villages during 2022. When a village is declared a Rural Tourism Village, the Government develops the infrastructure in that village to support tourism. Any group of local citizens that joins the Government's initiative to create infrastructure receives Rs. 10 lakhs to develop that infrastructure. An additional grant of Rs. 1 lakh is given by the Government to families that want to offer their homes for visiting tourists to stay but need additional funding to upgrade their homes to provide reasonable comfort for tourists.



Tourists pause for a moment during a bike trek through the strikingly scenic Kashmir Valley – photo taken in Sukhnag



Tourists enjoying a picnic on the grounds of Tosa Maidan. It is now 8 years since the local community has had access to Tosa Maidan to promote tourism and for use as grazing grounds for sheep

Tosa Maidan: Accomplishments during 2022

An additional 2,000 families have revived their pastoral practice in 2022 ever since Tosa Maidan became freely available as a grazing ground for livestock. Tourism has increased significantly with more than 60,000 families now earning a livelihood directly or indirectly through the surge in tourism. During 2022, 300+ trekker groups, averaging about 20 people, were hosted by the local community. Locals who benefited directly from tourism were the guides, ponywallas, food sellers and transporters such as cab drivers. The 8-year anniversary of Tosa Maidan being returned to the local community was celebrated on August 26th, 2022. See photograph above. The extension of the home stay scheme to Tosa Maidan in 2022 enabled more than 500 home-stays in this area.

Conservation: Plantation Drives continue in 2022 and build momentum

The School for Rural Development and Environment (SRDE) continued to hold plantation drives in 2022 – one was held in Mujipathri, Budgam. After the completion of this drive, follow-up meetings were held with the Sarpanch and other community stakeholders to drive home the importance of tree planting for healing of the environment and to request their active cooperation in this initiative.



A plantation initiative in progress



Taking advantage of World Environment Day to underscore the importance of planting more trees

Forest Rights for the Forest Dwellers

Securing rights under the FRA is now a major goal of Dr. Shaikh and his colleagues. It has become critical due to the push for major development in the area that is disenfranchising the mostly SC and ST forest dwellers and is also leading to massive environmental damage with fast degradation and loss of forests and other natural resources. They have conducted over 15 awareness campaigns and have put together the Forest Rights Coalition – J&K that brings together 9 groups representing various NGOs and indigenous peoples' organizations.

The photograph on the right shows an awareness campaign in progress.



The Forest Rights Campaigns: A 2022 Success Story to report from Tral

In Tral, about 1,000 tribal families were given an ultimatum by the Forest Department to leave the land that had been in their families for over 300 years. The tribals approached the Forest Rights Coalition – J&K, which organized a strong protest before the District Administration. The eviction order was reversed. Land-claims, with appropriate supporting documentation were filed with the District Administration and are now being reviewed for final approval.

Right to Information (RTI) Accomplishments in 2022

SRDE filed 65 RTI Appeals and 11 First Appeals, seeking information on work performed and asking for an accounting of how resources were utilized. This year's accomplishment carried forward the energy from the previous year.

A significant accomplishment in 2022 was the launch of a new RTI related initiative - the Saturday Legal Clinic. As the name indicates, it operates weekly on Saturday and serves two major functions:

1. to train students in the process of filing RTI appeals and the navigation of the system once the appeal has been filed. More than 90 students were trained in the process of filing RTI appeals during 2022.
2. to answer questions from people who have already filed an RTI appeal and need guidance to progress their appeal through the system. This is a great service to people who need active guidance with bringing their case to a successful conclusion.

-- IFA Liaison: Monisha and Prashant Rao

Dr. Anish Puri and Dr. Jovhan Jilbert
Clove Dental - General Dentistry
2107 Pickwick Dr. Camarillo, CA 93010
805.445.1333

When our farmers can't feed themselves

(During 2021 about 7 farmers in Maharashtra woke up daily and decided they were worth more dead than alive to their family.)

Urja Foundation, Wardha (Maharashtra)

For the past several years, Urja Foundation, under the leadership of Nootan Malvi, has worked with women farmers, mostly widows of farmers who have committed suicide as well as with divorced and deserted women in the rural areas of Wardha district. The work primarily involves helping them secure aid through various Govt. schemes such as Niradhar Yojana, National Food Security Act, and Mahatma Phule Arogya Yojana. In addition, Urja also invests in empowering younger widows and younger women below the poverty line through vocational training. They believe in finding solutions that will have long reaching impact: their approach includes raising awareness among the farmers about alternatives to suicide and organizing them to advocate for better agrarian policies.

As Urja's activities have become better known in the area, many more women are approaching them for help. Their work is based on: -

1. **Help in securing aid through Govt. schemes for farmers' widows**
2. **Help in obtaining Ration cards**
3. **Education**
4. **Housing**
5. **Health**

For 2022, the 2nd year of IFA involvement, IFA increased monthly support to Rs 50k from Rs 25k (in 2021). Urja now employs 5 social workers and is active in 79 villages (from 3 workers and 30 villages in 2021). In 2021, Urja's goal was to help 20 women per month. With the doubling of funding in 2022, Nootan believes Urja are more than doubling the number of women helped per month, which is now at 60 women per month.

Urja's social workers work around 20 days per month. **They hold meetings in villages** with about 10-15 attendees, with about 40% of attendees willing to accept assistance. Gathering information, filling out forms, sometimes accompanying the applicant to various centers is a very slow, inefficient process. Urja also provides travel assistance, if necessary. They also held masonry and organic farming training sessions and assisted villagers with bank accounts, savings schemes, education scholarships and Aadhar card applications.



The table below shows the number of people who received benefits under various schemes with IFA's support. The lower numbers for 2022 are due to the fact that a lot of approvals were granted during December 2021 due to the impending elections! Many of these benefits actually materialized in 2023.

Period	Pension	House	Job card	Health	Ration Cards	Bal Sangopan
Jan-Dec 2021	83	127	283	317	106	92
Jan-Dec 2022	120	135	127	222	53	66



Just the housing alone (Rs.90,000 each) generates a significant benefit by leveraging our support at over \$20 for \$1 support provided.

-- IFA Liaison: Mrudula and Prashant Joshi

~ Compliments of Swaroop Mishra and colleagues at T-Mobile (Bellevue, WA) ~

Save the River, Save the Fish, Save the Fishers Preserving Livelihoods: Disha (West Bengal)

India has a vast 8000 km coastline, encompassing 2.02 million square km of special economic zones in the marine sector. This doesn't even begin to include the 196,000 km stretch of rivers and canals. With the vast array of water bodies, there are unsurprisingly, many millions involved in the fishing industry. 6 million to be exact with 4 million fish workers inland and 2 million marine workers. With 4 to 5 dependents per worker, that translates to **24-30 million people who depend on the fisheries for survival**. Due to their dependence on the water, these traditional communities have a deep organic relationship with the water and truly are the primary custodians of maintaining these water bodies. After all, good fish require good water! However large-scale industrial fishing policies threaten to destroy their livelihood and have a detrimental impact on the environment.

Examples of these destructive policies are: --

- Ecological destruction of water sources through removal and conversion of mangrove forests to various agricultural, aquacultural, and tourism alternatives and needless urbanization. Mangroves are essential to stem the ocean waves, prevent intrusion of salt water, hold the soil together and contain polluting sources to maintain the quality and quantity of fish
- Fish Conservation. Ironically, these policies restrict fishing for months at a time, leaving the fisher people destitute and the waters uncared for.
- Blocking access to fishing under the guise of sanctuaries and conservation. Both designations require unnecessary and often corrupt bureaucratic license requirements.

DISHA is an NGO that has been working in West Bengal for over 25 years. IFA has been supporting DISHA in its programs in fisheries to help develop self-empowerment of the small and marginalized fishing communities through community capacity building. Activities are undertaken in collaboration with the existing national network - National Platform for Small Scale Fish Workers (NPSSFW) and its affiliates with a focus on the small-scale fish workers organizations in West Bengal, namely Dakshinbanga Matsyajibi Forum (DMF) and Uttarbanga Matsyajibi Forum (UMF).

2022 Update **Policy level interventions**

Draft Indian Marine Fisheries Bill 2021 (2021-22) – The opposition of NPSSFW to the this bill continued with deputations, dharnas, mass signature campaigns and sending of protest letters. As a result the Government of India could not table the bill in the parliament for four consecutive sessions from June 2021 till date.

WTO Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies (June, 2022) - NPSSFW called the agreement a deal between plunderers of marine fish resources and rejected the final agreement on fisheries subsidies reached in the WTO Ministerial Negotiations at Geneva in June 2022.

Prevention of entry of Indian mechanized fishing boats into Bangladesh (August 2022) - NPSSFW brought to the notice of the concerned ministries that there have been regular illegal intrusions in Bangladesh waters by the large mechanized fishing boats, sailing from Indian harbors in West Bengal. These boats are responsible for overfishing and destructive fishing resulting in severe depletion of fish resources in Indian waters. Now they are resorting to the same illegal ventures in Bangladesh violating the IMBL (International Maritime Boundary Line). This has serious implications for our security and our relationship with Bangladesh. The concerned ministries have been requested to initiate immediate and effective measures.

Draft Coastal Aquaculture (Amendment) Bill 2022 (August 2022) – The Platform protested this to point out that this would promote intensive coastal shrimp aquaculture, which would be detrimental for biodiversity and environment.

Issue based Interventions

Dharna of Fishing Communities of Andaman at Port Blair (November 2021) – NPSSFW brought to the notice of the Director of Fisheries in Port Blair some of the long-standing demands of small-scale fishers of South Andaman and requested the administration to take immediate action.

Government of Kerala was urged to Stop Construction of Vizhinjam Port (August 2022) due to the ecological disaster, widespread erosion and resulting destruction of livelihood of the coastal communities.

Faulty and unjust installation of ONGC and Reliance pipelines in East Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh (April 2022) – As a result the sub-aqueous sand dunes were altered resulting in unnatural disposition of sand at the mouth of the Gaderu Canal, thereby blocking the passage. NPSSFW supported the agitating fish workers and pushed for the opening of the passage by dredging about 3kms of the mouth of Gaderu Canal.



Supported Struggle to save the natural resources and livelihood of fishers in Loktak Lake, Manipur (May, 2022)

Support to the fisher union's protest against installation of AHOY Marina on the mouth of Zuari River, Goa (June, 2022)

-As a result the project has been scrapped by the National Green Tribunal.

National Campaigns

Campaign for Small Scale Fishers and Fish Farmers Right to Sustainable Access to Water Bodies and Fish Resources: The core concept has been developed and workshops held on the campaign in different parts of the country.

Campaign continued Against the Draft Indian Marine Fisheries Bill 2021

Organizational Activities

Outreach: There have been significant outreach to new areas in Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Manipur, Bihar, Andhra Pradesh and Rajasthan. Regular networking continues with organization in Assam, Tripura, Manipur, Jharkhand, Odisha, West Bengal, Kerala, Goa, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and Kashmir, A&N.

Networking: National Council Web Meeting (October 2021), East Zone Regional Meeting (22-23 October 2021 in Kolkata), North-East Regional Meeting (18-19 December 2021 in Imphal, Manipur), South Zone Regional Meeting (7-9 June 2022 in Chennai), West Zone Regional Meeting (21 and 22 July, 2022 in Goa). National Council Meeting (November, 2021), National Council of NPSSFW on 19 - 20 November 2021 in New Delhi.



Participation in the People's Summit at Glasgow CoP-26 Climate Conference (November, 2021) - Alongside the official COP26 event, a People's Summit was held in the city of Glasgow. NPSSFW attended the Climate Strike, as well as the People's Summit, including an event to represent fish workers from India at a panel on the 8th of November.

Documentation Centre: DISHA's Delhi office has been renovated by the landlord very recently. Valuable support from IFA towards the infrastructure has been received. Two tables, one laptop and the internet connection have been setup. More materials will be purchased and / or installed within a short period. Resources for engaging personnel for running the documentation Centre in Delhi are being sought. ActionAid has verbally agreed to provide some funds for the personnel. Hopefully the Centre will start functioning from January 2023.

State Highlights

Andhra Pradesh and Manipur

More than 500 acres of mangroves are being cut down in Godavari River estuary near Gogulmattam in the district of East Godavari ostensibly for construction of hatcheries or food processing units. The Democratic Traditional Fishers Workers Forum (DTFWF) of Andhra Pradesh is protesting this destruction of the fishing ground and the ecology of the region.

Loktak lake, a recognized Ramsar site and a wetland of international importance, is already threatened by a Hydel Project and Ichthai Dam. The state government was going to introduce water sports and cage culture fisheries. All Loktak Lake Area Fishers Union of Manipur (ALLAFUM) raised vehement protest and moved the High Court. **The High Court's order of 25th February 2022 prohibited all development/construction works in and around Loktak Lake without permission of the Court**



Tamil Nadu

The coastal panchayat level opposition to the Indian Marine Fishing Bill 2021 continued. The campaign even influenced the state government to oppose the Bill. On the behest of NPSSFW a number of groups in Tamil Nadu came together to form a Tamil Nadu platform of small-scale fishing communities affiliated to NPSSFW.

Kerala

The small-scale fishers' organization, Swathanthra Malsya Thozhilali Federation, joined the struggle against the Vizhinjam port owned by Adani throughout Kerala. SMTF also launched campaign against IMFB 2021 and the state government opposed the Bill.



West Bengal

DMF added 2381 new members while UMF added 600 in the last one year. Union activities have spread to new areas like Balagarh in Hooghly district, Kaliaganj-II & III in Malda district, and in Alipurduar district. The year saw a wide range of activities relating to Cooperatives, SHGs, Occupational Trainings, Leadership Trainings, Provision for Substitute livelihood, Compensation to the families of tiger victims of Sundarban, Fishing rights in forests and border areas, rejuvenation of rivers etc.

DMF gets NGT orders for dismantling of Amlamethi Resort: In a landmark judgement passed on 23.12.2021 in the case filed by DMF in the matter of illegal and ecocidal construction of a tourist resort at Amlamethi in Sundarban, the NGT ordered stoppage of all construction, derided the District Magistrate as incompetent and irresponsible and asked the police authorities to take action.

[HTTPS://WWW.NEWSCLICK.IN/MAMATA-BANERJEE-GOVT-IDENTIFYING-OWNER-ILLEGAL-RESORT-SUNDERBANS](https://www.newsclick.in/mamata-banerjee-govt-identifying-owner-illegal-resort-sunderbans)

Protest on sinking of fly ash laden ships: Frequent capsizes of ships with hazardous fly ash badly hit the ecology of Hooghly River estuary including Sundarban affecting the livelihood of thousands of fishers. On November 3, 2021, a fly ash laden ship MV Banglar Shakti toppled 300 meters from Ghoramara island near Sagar Island. About 700 tons of fly ash was submerged in the Hooghly River. DMF approached all concerned authorities, requesting them to take out the submerged as quickly as possible. A deputation was organized to the Haldia Port Authorities.



Interventions to Facilitate Access to Credit: DMF and UMF successfully lobbied for the extension of KCC (Kisan Credit Card) facilities (low interest loan of up to Rs. 2 lakhs) for fishers and worked to facilitate access of small-scale fish workers to the same.

Enforcement of 61 Day Marine Fishing Ban: DMF protested Government inaction against unscrupulous fishers found fishing in the ban period and also demanded livelihood support of Rs. 5,000/- per month for every fish worker during the ban period.

Accident Insurance for fishers (April 2022): After a struggle of more than four years by DMF the Government of West Bengal has restarted the accident insurance scheme for marine fishers. DMF is demanding its extension for all fishers.

Supported Ramsai fishers fight against pollution of River Jaldhaka: More than 150 fishermen in Ramsai of Maynaguri block of Jalpaiguri district are fighting against contamination by the waste water of Jadavpur Tea estate.

Opposed construction of Check dam on River Atrayee at Balurghat, Dakshin Dinajpur (January, 2022): UMF opposed the construction of the Check dam as it would severely affect the fish stock of the river.

Demand for proper market facilities at Maynaguri: UMF and Maynaguri Bajar Samabay Samiti jointly placed their demands to the Jalpaiguri Zilla Parishad to develop the Maynaguri Market for proper accommodation of Fish and other vendors.

An Estimate of Fishers' Access to Govt Schemes:

Registered their Aadhar card with the WB Fisheries Department: **More than 5000**

Applied new inland I-card: **2280**

Received the cards: **1726**

Boat registration forms submitted: **1080**

Registrations done: **115**

Boat license renewed: **745**

KCC applications submitted: **240**

MJCC applications submitted: **2100**

-- IFA Liaison: Siddharth Dasgupta

Empowering Unorganized Workers Nationwide

Rajasthan Fellowship: Prabhat Sinha

In our times marked by the plethora of state welfare schemes, it is easy to forget that the humane and dignified way to end poverty is by providing everyone an opportunity to earn a living. Equally important is to see that those who work are adequately compensated. At a time when even the organized workers are facing cuts in wages and job security, the conditions of the unorganized that constitute over 90% of India's workforce are dire. These are the very workers who have faced the most hardship during the pandemic years.

The Fellowship

Prabhat Sinha was born in Bihar but migrated to Punjab at an early age following in the footsteps of the migrant laborers. After years of fighting on their behalf in Punjab and the adjoining areas, he finally settled in Rajasthan and was instrumental in the establishment of the Rajasthan Mazdoor Kisan Union. IFA support, beginning in 2013, was a major milestone for him. Assured of personal stability he was able to galvanize the union throughout Rajasthan. RMKU is now helping secure benefits to thousands of workers in MNREGA, construction, mining, loading and unloading (hamals) as well as small farmers, women and the tribal community. He has since embarked on a nationwide campaign to empower unorganized workers to fight for better wages, social security, pension, health and other benefits.

National Network of Unorganized Workers

Presently, Prabhat has taken up the challenge to create a national platform of unorganized workers in association with the Indian Community Activists Network, a fellow organization in India that promotes self-governance and pro poor economic policies. He has been traveling all across the country meeting with local activists and organizing district and state level committees. So far such organization have taken shape in 11 districts of Rajasthan, 8 districts of Jharkhand and 3 of Madhya Pradesh. Overall, 12 states are being targeted and the plans are to complete organizing in the 2022-23-time frame.

Salient Accomplishments of 2022

राजस्थान सरकार
श्रम विभाग

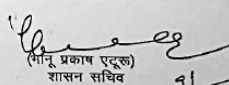
क्रमांक 15(2)असंगठित/खान/विधि/श्रम/2022 पार्ट 1/14032 दिनांक 16.05.2022

-: आदेश :-

खान श्रमिकों के लिए कल्याणकारी गतिविधियों की कमी होने के कारण खान श्रमिकों के कल्याण हेतु सुझाव देने बाबत निम्नानुसार खान श्रमिक कल्याण बोर्ड का गठन किया जाता है :-

(अ)	राज्य सरकार द्वारा मनोनीत	- अध्यक्ष
(ब)	राज्य सरकार द्वारा मनोनीत	- उपाध्यक्ष
(ग)	राजकीय विभागों के प्रतिनिधि-	
1	अतिरिक्त मुख्य सचिव/प्रमुख शासन सचिव, खान एवं पैट्रोलियम विभाग	- सदस्य
2	प्रमुख शासन सचिव, वित्त विभाग	- सदस्य
3	प्रमुख शासन सचिव, उद्योग एवं वाणिज्य विभाग	- सदस्य
4	प्रमुख शासन सचिव, निचिस्ता एवं स्वास्थ्य विभाग	- सदस्य
5	प्रमुख शासन सचिव, वन, पर्यावरण एवं जलवायु परिवर्तन विभाग	- सदस्य
6	शासन सचिव, श्रम एवं नियोजन विभाग	- सदस्य
7	शासन सचिव, सामाजिक न्याय एवं अधिकारिता विभाग	- सदस्य
(द)	गैर सरकारी सदस्य (राज्य सरकार द्वारा मनोनीत)	- सदस्य (5)
	श्रम आयुक्त, श्रम विभाग, राजस्थान, जयपुर	- सदस्य (पदेन)

खान श्रमिक कल्याण बोर्ड का कार्यकाल 03 वर्ष का होगा तथा बोर्ड खान क्षेत्र में कार्यरत श्रमिकों की समस्याओं, सिलिकोसिस पीडित श्रमिकों के कल्याण, खान श्रमिकों की सुरक्षा, अन्य कल्याणकारी गतिविधियों, अन्य कोई कार्य राज्य सरकार द्वारा आदेशित किया जायेगा, आदि पर विचार विमर्श कर सुझाव देगा। बोर्ड के संचालन व वित्तीय व्यवस्था उपरोक्त विभिन्न राजकीय प्रतिनिधियों द्वारा विचार विमर्श कर की जायेगी।


 (श्री प्रकाश एदरू)
 शासन सचिव
 श्रम, कारखाना एवं शौचालय,
 ईएसआई विभाग राजस्थान, जयपुर।

	Activity	Nos.
1	Mine workers got tested for Silicosis	300
2	Mining dept. made aware of illegal mining on the river bank resulting in the areas being marked inaccessible to mining	
3	Workers registered with the Govt. Labor Portal	1000
4	Farmer grants under the CM Krushak Saathi Yojna	300
5	Helped set up the Worker Security Center in Chittorgarh Workers got financial help	460
	Workers 'at work' abuse incidents resolved via mediation	107
6	Widow and disability pension for men/women in 9 districts	284
7	Residential plots to deserving family units	1084
8	Farmers enrolled in the PM Crop Insurance Scheme	3400

After years of struggle, the Rajasthan Government last year conceded the union's demands to set up a Mining Workers Welfare Board. Although the board has many govt. functionaries, it has significant non-government presence and the union is looking at this as a huge milestone in improving working conditions in the mines as well as for their general welfare.



Meeting Construction workers in Pratapgarh



Prabhat visited the rain hit areas and submitted a memorandum to the Collector about their problems.

-- IFA Liaison: Maninder Madan

STRENGTHENING MNREGA: A Powerful Tool for Rural Empowerment Bihar Fellowship-1: Brahmanand Rishidev

***Prevent Starvation *Create Employment *Strengthen Local Economy *Build Local Infrastructure *Prevent migration**

India's Budget for the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act in 2021 was Rs. 98,000 (Around \$12.9 billion or more than \$15,000 for every village). It is a huge commitment with immense potential to transform the rural landscape and make a major dent in the endemic poverty. Effective implementation of the act is crucial and even though it has improved, Rahul Gandhi's lament that no more than 15% of welfare benefits reach the intended recipients, remains very much relevant. Making people aware of the scheme and then helping them cross the various hoops to eventually derive benefits is a major task. This is where Fellows such as Brahmanand are playing a crucial role.

Brahmanand works with Jan Jagaran Shakti Sangathan, an activist organization in the Araria area of northeast Bihar. Laborers, landless farmers, students and youth comprise this 18000 strong organization that covers 85 panchayats and 250 villages in Araria, Katihar and Saharsa districts. Main focus of his work is ensuring entitlements such as ration cards, old age pension, MNREGA and related issues in the Raniganj block of Araria district.



A demonstration organized by Brahmanand about development of rural enterprises and livelihoods



Community outreach using musical performance (Brahmanand is in the center)

2023-23 Update

	Benefits	Numbers applied	Numbers approved
1	MNREGA Work	1000	500
2	Housing benefits		65
3	New ration cards for marginalized families	643	390
4	Pensions	40	30
5	General relief	2000	
6	Health institutional support/Health	100	

-- IFA Liaison: Ramchandra Prasad

Secretary, National Campaign for People's Right to Information Delhi Fellowship: Ashok Kumar

IFA has provided Fellowship for the NCPRI secretary for around 20 years. Having evolved during the campaign for the RTI Act, NCPRI monitors progress, promotes awareness and opposing efforts to dilute it. It is also a common source platform for national movements for food security, pensions, social security and MNREGA including NAPM, MKSS, Satark Nagarik Sangthan and others.

Weekly News Digests:

One of Ashok's main tasks is to prepare a weekly news digest of RTI related events, news items and reporting from newspapers, social media and other sources. These are made widely available. Each weekly newsletter is typically a digest of 40 to 50 such items.

Meetings, Conferences and Lectures

NCPRI hosts frequent sessions of national interest that the secretary helps arrange. Ashok is an active member of many national civil society organizations including NAPM, ICAN, Right to Food Campaign and Pension Parishad. In addition **Ashok holds weekly meeting in the working class communities (bastis) all around Delhi to promote and facilitate the use of RTI in their lives.**



-- IFA Liaison: Prithvi Sharma

Jharkhand Fellowship: Ensuring Rural Livelihoods with MNREGA

James Herenj, Convener, Jharkhand MNREGA Watch
Gram Swaraj Mazdoor Sangh

MNREGA Watch

MNREGA is a national jobs program against rural poverty, starvation and destitution. It has proved particularly critical during the disruption caused by the Covid-10 Pandemic. The MNREGA Watch is a set up of activist units whose goal is to monitor the program and ensure that it is reaching intended beneficiaries. It consists of a state-level coordinating body and block-level units doing everyday MNREGA work throughout the State. It is part of a national network the *NREGA Sanghrsh Morcha*. Each State has its own Watch and James is the convener for the State of Jharkhand. The block-level units are known as “*Sahayata Kendras*”. They are usually made up of two or three volunteers who do the day-to-day monitoring work as well as solve problems that come up in the administration of the MNREGA work assignments and **ensure that:**

- Workers get paid within 15 days of having performed the work and if timely payment does not happen, that workers are compensated for more than their actual wages for work performed
- Pregnant women under MNREGA receive maternity benefits in the form of wages paid out without having to perform work
- Job seekers who are denied work are paid unemployment compensation
- A muster roll is made available at work sites well on time. Absence of the muster roll at a work site before work begins create problems – workers who begin working later have difficulty proving that they did any work for a work site
- Work entitlements are provided for unskilled laborers and their families
- Job Card IDs are provided to tribals and adivasis
- Social audits are initiated to ensure that MNREGA work is carried out inclusively, fairly and in line with each village’s annual plan for MNREGA. Social audits involve the review of MNREGA schemes that are active as well as those that have been abandoned. They look for irregularities such as the misappropriation of funds and report findings to the panchayats. It includes pursuing follow-up action such as making sure that funds misappropriated are recovered through disciplinary action.

James’ role in MNREGA Watch as the Convener

- Offer guidance and solutions to problems encountered on the ground by *Sahayata Kendras*.
- Take problems in MNREGA implementation to the State Government and press for their intervention and action.
- Highlight problems with the workings of the MNREGA in newspapers and social media. This includes interviews with the newspapers and uploading videos of his comments and analysis on YouTube. He also uses Twitter and Facebook to reach a wider audience so that there is greater public awareness of deficiencies and irregularities in MNREGA.
- Another critical role of the Convener is to participate in a broader coalition of all activist movements joining hands with various activists, even those outside the ambit of MNREGA, so as to provide strength in numbers as well as contributing to a broader perspective on MNREGA.



James Herenj (4th from right), along with other activists, submitting a request for action to Chief Minister Hemant Soren. To his right is the economist Jean Dreze, Professor at Ranchi University, the prime architect of the MNREGA act of 2005. Prof. Dreze has been the driving force behind the concept of the Sahayata Kendra.



James leading the MNREGA Day March in Manika



Women’s rally demanding an increased female police presence at the Manika police station

2022 accomplishments of the NREGA Sahayata Kendra, Manika (James' base of work)
2022-23 Update

	Activity	Number	Results
1	Applications to register previously unregistered people into the MNREGA system	60	Approved in time
2	Applications for registered people to be assigned MNREGA work	746	Obtained in time
3	Applications submitted demanding payment delayed for work already done	144	Obtained in time
4	Applications submitted under the National Food Security Act (NFSA)	159	Mostly approved, see Note below*
*Note: NFSA applications can involve complex situations such as the issuance of Primary Household cards that take more time for the administration to respond. But other than such cases, most applications are approved timely.			

Successful Campaign for MNREGA worker widows: 3 widows receives compensation

Regulations enacted by Jharkhand State under the MNREGA Act provided that if a MNREGA worker is between the age of 18 and 65 years, works for a minimum of 15 days in the financial year that he dies, his next of kin would be paid compensation in the amount of Rs. 30,000. However, the experience of MNREGA activists has been that energetic follow-up with the State Government is needed to make this happen. The determined pursuit of this issue by Jharkhand MNREGA activists ensured that the State Government paid Rs. 30,000 as compensation to three qualified widows - Smt. Tetri Devi, widow of Basdev Singh, Subhaagiya Devi, and another widow from Bariatu village, all during the 2022 year.

Effective activism by MNREGA activists results in changes to three important State policies

- The payment rate for MNREGA workers was raised, during 2022, from Rs. 210 per day to Rs. 237 per day.
- In order to provide food grains to deprived families per the National Food Security Act, 2013, the Jharkhand Government launched the Jharkhand State Food Security Scheme, in which 2 million new members were added.
- The State also launched, the CM's Sarvajana Pension Yojana, in order to provide pension payments to needy families.



Successful campaigning for Policy changes is extensively covered in the print news media as well as social media.



James addressing local women in Manika on joining hands to stand up for their rights.

Gramsabha Empowerment: 16 Forest Dwellers get land-owning rights on Jan 16th 2022

James is one of several IFA Fellows who are working to empower the rural Gramsabhas to exercise their rights under India's Forest Rights Act and demand control over local natural resources. Obtaining land-owning rights for the forest dwellers is a major objective of the FRA. Unfortunately, the govt. has failed to implement the law and forest dwellers all over India are suffering due to inability to earn their living from working on their land. 2022 was a successful year for this issue – 16 families submitted proper evidence under the FRA and were issued, on January 16th, 2022, land-owning rights. **The photograph below shows the 16 family representatives proudly holding the land-owning documents they received.**



-- IFA Liaison: Sai Chandavarkar

Empowering the most Vulnerable Qamarjahan in Uttar Pradesh

Rural poverty is highly prevalent in the heartland of India. Qamar Jahan, a woman social worker from Banaras, is one of the founding members of **KHUDAI KHIDMATGAR** and a member of its national core committee. This is an organization that has resurrected the independence struggle era humanitarian organization founded by Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan also known as the Frontier Gandhi.

Qamarjahan works for women empowerment, unorganized labor, communal harmony, domestic violence, and participation in government schemes in over 20 villages in Chirgaon and Cholapur blocks of Banaras. Her area includes poor sections of society and an environment where males work out of station and females work as laborers, in cattle rearing and domestic work. Every month for a minimum of 15 days she visits all villages, has discussions with women, works to create awareness, provides training and learning for women, actively takes part in dharna, rally and protest against injustice and oppression. She meets government officials for the welfare of the weaker section of society.

2022 Achievements

- * 300 women from Phulpur, Sultanpur, Patrwaan, Barai, Tofapur, Garhsaar got new Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MNREGA) cards, entitling them to employment for 200 days at INR 213 per day
- * 65 women got old age pension at INR 400 per month
- * 25 women got widow pension at INR 300 per month
- * She helped 25 women for legal aid in domestic violence and dowry cases
- * She helped 15 women get PWD pensions at INR 1,000 per month and certificate of 40% disability
- * She provided 40 girls INR 51,000 under Nirdhan Kanya Yojana

Recent Activity

- * Women's day on 11 March 2022 in Damodarpur
- * Workshop for women empowerment on 1 May 2022 with 75 women participating
- * Iftaar party on 30 April 2022 for communal harmony in Nakheekhat with all religions
- * Holi celebration on 22 March 2022
- * Meeting with government officials regarding women's harassment on 13 April 2022
- * Rally of Samvidhaan Bachao Beti Bachao in solidarity with Bilqees Bano in Rajghat Banaras on 15 December 2022
- * Women's Day on 17 March 2023 where 300 women participated about various issues

**Marching
for women's
empowerment
under ICAN
banner**



**MNREGA
work**



**Women's day rally and gathering Collective weddings under the Chief
Minister Scheme**

Future Plans

- Establish a women's library and Mahila Chetna Kendra (Women's Awareness Center)
- Expand work to 10 new villages

-- IFA Liaison: Siddharth Dasgupta

**Do you want to invest passively in real estate?
Do you want to get all the tax benefits associated with real estate investing?
Contact Vaibhav Puranik, CEO, Old Money Capital
Request a call at oldmoneycapital.com**

Money Matters

As of December 31, 2022

Disbursements		Collections		Expenses	
Fellowships/Projects (Total: \$197,753)		Archana 2022	\$223,671	Archana 2022	\$23,480
Rural Poor Empowerment: Brahmanand Rishidev, Archana Singh, Mahendra Yadav, Raman Ji, Satish Kumar (Bihar) Kashinath Bagali, Prabhugaouda Patil, S.A. Makkabi (Karnataka) Om Prakash Tiwari (Madhya Pradesh) Jeewan Rathod (Maharashtra) Firoz Khan (Rajasthan) Arvind Murti Gupta (Uttar Pradesh)	\$54,298	Bank Interest	\$300	Donor Appreciation	\$1,308
Urban Poor Empowerment: Parwati Barthwal, Prakash Kumar (Delhi); R. Manohar (Karnataka); Prabhat Sinha (Rajasthan); Meenu Sur (Uttar Pradesh);	\$11,438	Total Collections	\$223,971	Administrative	\$2,652
Women's Empowerment: Harini Shetty (Karnataka) Urja Foundation (Maharashtra) Anil Jain (Rajasthan); Qamar Jahan Bano Hasmi, Urmila Devi (Uttar Pradesh)	\$26,820			Total Expenses	\$27,440
Dalit Empowerment: K. B. Obalesh, Siddharth Joshi (Karnataka)	\$5,580	Account Balances (as of 12/31/2022)			
Tribals Empowerment: Dr. Leena Gupta, Nandu Bhai Rathwa, (Gujarat) Hemant Das, James Hereni, Poonam Kumari, Savita Devi, Lukas Korwa (Jharkhand); Gulzar Ahmed Dar, Naveed Bukhtiar, Shaikh Gulam Rasool (Kashmir); Giridhari Patra (Odisha); Gramshree, (Rajasthan)	\$46,241	Reserve Accounts		Operating Accounts	
Fishers' Empowerment: DISHA (West Bengal) Shanim Ahmed Shah (Kashmir)	\$48,373	Chase: \$188,700		Chase: \$223,429	
All other fellowships: Ravi Chopra (Uttarakhand); Ashok Kumar (Delhi)	\$5,003	SBI: \$29,109		SBI: \$9,781	
		Total Reserve: \$217,809		Total Operating: \$233,210	
		Total Balance: \$451,019			
		<p>Bulk of the overhead is related to the annual Archana fundraiser and the donor appreciation event. Other than these expenses, pretty much everything else is covered voluntarily. The participants perform free and in fact spend their own money on costumes and props. Everyone (performers, volunteers, sewaks, sahayaks) contribute financially by donating additional funds. This is only possible because of the spirit of Archana and IFA. This strong community support is our main asset for which we are profoundly grateful.</p>			

*****2023 IFA STARS*****

IFA is proud to share the list of donations from our large family. These are truly IFA stars. No donation is small since, while the amounts may be determined by individual circumstances, the giving itself reflects the faith in IFA goals and the integrity of the organization.

Of course, monetary contribution is just one aspect of how friends contribute to India Friends Association. There is an inordinate amount of volunteer effort, from the production of Archana to soliciting funds, accounting, social media management, monitoring the work in India and all the other necessary functions of the organization. *So a collective salute to all of us from all of us!!*

(\$25000 and above)

Sharma, Surekha & Prithvi

The Orinoco Foundation (Anita Vora)

(\$10000 to \$24999)

Garg, Usha & Pradeep

Sahai, Pragati & Amit

Infinity International Processing Services, Inc

(\$5000 to \$9999)

Karkare, Kritika & Subhash
Kaushik, Dhana & Vidyasagar
Mittal, Aman

Narayan, Rajni & Kailash
Rao, Monisha & Prashant
Sharma, Saarika & John Reed

Singh, Karandeep & Harpreet Kaur
Talwar, Kay & Ashok
TOArts

(\$2500 to \$4999)

Aggarwal, Madhvi & Anil
Ahuja, Jaki & Arun

Bajaj, Anita & Jagmohan
Gandhi, Saumil
Joshi, Mrudula & Prashant

Master, Vandana & Kaushik
Sharma, Monidipa & Tarun

(\$1000 to \$2499)

Alamelu, Seetha & Ram
Bajaj, Rashmi & Girish
Balachandran, Kalyani & Madhavan
Dasgupta, Rati & Siddharth
Dharia, Kirit
India Community Center (Shubha & Sanjiv Jain)
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Narayan, Ale & Manu
Narayan, Neera & Randhir
Patel, Preeti & Ashok
Pepper, Neal
Prathikanti, Radha
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Rao, Asha & Ajit

Rao, Lindsey & Krishna
Sachdev, Shakun & Raj
Sahai, Jyoti & Rajeshwar
Saxena, Ragini & Vinod
Saxena, Varun & Marisa Gardner
Shah, Fahim
Sonawane, Nitin
Sudan, Madhu
Ubhayakar, Jayalata & Shivadev
Vora, Anita & Vikram

(\$500 to \$999)

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Bansal, Rakesh & Hema Tarachandani
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Grover, Neeru & Rajeev
Gupta, Anjum
Jain, Dolly & Sunir
Jindal, Achla
Joshi, Shima & Satish
Master, Aashini & Spandan Daftary
Master, MJ & Hemal
Mathur, Meenakshi & Bimal
Puri, Radhika & Shalabh
Rao, Geeta & Vikram
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Saxena, Sonali & Shishir
Shah, Pallavi & Bhadresh
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Shah, Ushma & Dr. Ravindra Verma
Sidhu, Sukhi & Bhalinder
Soitkar, Suchita & Vinay
Tandon, Kamla & Srijang Lal
Tandon, Shobha & Jawahar
Thakkar, Irma & Ushakant
Tiku, Sushma & Shiban
Ullal, Jyoti & Vivek

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Barkataki, Cathy & Prasanta
Boparai, Navreet & Gurpreet
Bose, Anubala & Naveen Dhinakaran
Chess, Gloria & Ron
Dar, Irani & Samar

Deshpande, Rohini & Rajendra
Dhanoo, Sukhjinder & Baghel
Dhawan, Ashok
Ferguson, Billie & James
Goel, Abha & Deepak
Grim, Keith

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Gupta, Geeta
Gupta, Leena & Sanjay
Gupta, Michelle & Jayant
Gupta, Sally & Sameer
Gupte, Manas & Suhas Deobhankar

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Joshi, Zini & Atul
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Kohli, Promila & Parmod
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Madan, Mini & Ken
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Adapa, Narashimha
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Agarwal, Megha & Kaushal
Agarwal, Vineet & Soni Goel
Agrahar, Kshama & Sachin
Aiyar, Jessica & Kartik
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Ash, Jennifer
Athmanathan, Anubama
Bahadur, Indu & Avinash
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Gumaste, Krishna
Gupta, Bharti & Vinay
Gupta, Richa & Naveen
Gupta, Ritu & Devender

Mannshahia, Roop & Harvinder
Mettu, Sudhakar
Mystic Bottle Studio (Paul)
Narang, Kiran & Yash
Nunna, Komali & Mal
Pallavur, Narayan
Patki, Sweta & Yatin
Paulson, Kathleen & Jeffrey Heath
Phade, Monika & Chaitanya

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Harmon, Christi
Jain, Kinnri & Pankaj
James, Justin
Jayashree & Sudheendra
Jhingan, Dolly & Ashish
Kadiyala, Madhulatha
Kalia, Benu & Atul
Kalle, Mamata & Hemchandra
Kamath, Udaya & Ramadas
Kapoor, Reema
Kardak, Priyali & Vivek
Karthikeyan, Sujatha
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Khurana, Shaminder & Sewak
Kochhar, Tanveer & Kavneet Singh
Koditala, Shirisha & Ram
Kondagari, Tina & Siddharth
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Krishnan, Gayathri
Krishnan, Jayanthi
Kulkarni, Supriya & Sanjay
Kumar, Anubala & Ricky
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Lad, Purvi & Ankur
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Rehman, Sabah & Delshad
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Sampangi, Vijaya
Sarathy, Shalini & Vijay
Sarva, Vikram & Swathi PJ
Scharf, Thomas
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Shah, Ashwin
Shah, Neha
Shah, Rashmi & Satish
Shah, Unnati & Bhairav Kaushik Parekh
Shanker, Anusha & Pratik Ahuja
Sharma, Nidhi & Sameer
Sharma, Pooja & Sandeep Chhabra
Sharma, Ruchi & Puneet
Sharma, Sumeet & Shivali Singh
Singh, Kuldeep & Maninder
Singh, Kuljinder & Harpreet
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Sonavane, Marshnil & Manan Goswami
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Soninke, Minal
Sood, Riju
Soundarajan, Govind & Nithya Sitara-
mane
Sulmaz, Samina & Pervez
Swamy, Promita & Nikhil
Tadavarthy, Prameela & S Murthi
Talwar, Ashima & Bharat
Tandon, Sonia & Amit Jain
Tullberg, Terri
Tumne, Mugdha & Pushkraj
Vissa, Madhavi
Wadhawan, Payal & Kuldeep Ralhan
Yadav, Hema

Strengthening Rural Economy in Chhattisgarh: Gramshree Value Addition to Forest Produce

Gramshree is an NGO focused on activating local people, mainly women, who are often from very disadvantaged social groups (tribal people in particular) to be more economically self-sufficient. This is accomplished by adding income from processing of their abundant forest produce. This group succeeded in helping around 700 families of the **Grashiya** and **Bhil** tribes in 30 villages outside Udaipur and Rajsamand districts of Rajasthan. Encouraged by the success of this project (which now has taken a legal shape in the form of “Vandhan Shakti Mahila Producer Company”), Gramshree decided to continue and spread their work to communities in Chhattisgarh, where forest produce of custard apple, tamarind, Jamun and mango are abundant.

Main goal: Improving incomes by processing of Tamarind, Custard apple, Jamun and dry Mango.

Organizing: Main mode is the formation of producer companies of women who are its shareholders. Self Help Groups are also organized for education/training.

Economic benefits:

1. Better prices for the produce, more money to villagers by sale of processed item.
2. Additional employment in the processing units.
3. Upliftment, both with learning new skills and better Incomes.



Happy members of a successful Producers Group

Chhattisgarh Tamarind Intervention: Started in January 2022.

Tamarind collection units were set up in 9 villages with 11 centers, where seeded Tamarind was directly purchased from the community. This has helped more than 60 families to get a higher price of Tamarind, Rs 25 per kg compared to Rs15 per kg during this season previously. Gramshree established 2 processing units at the village level where de-seeding process was done. Around 25 to 30 women worked in the processing unit and for the first time these women learnt about cleanliness required in the Tamarind processing.



Manual de-seeding under strictly hygienic conditions



Scooping of pulp

Impact at the community level:

- No of collection centers established: 11
- No of processing centers established:
- No of women wage days created: 30
- Total wages paid: Rs 67,534
- Amount received by the community for sale of Tamarind: Rs 3,69,984.
- Number of Tribal families/ Women benefited directly from the sale of Tamarind: 60.

Plan for Jan-December, 2023:

- Procurement of 50,000 Kg of Seeded Tamarind; will yield 30,000 kg de-seeded Tamarind
- Packaging in 250-gm, 500 gm and 1 kg packs. Expected to benefit 250 families.

Custard Apple Intervention: pulp processing started in October, 2022 ending on November 23, 2022.

- Finalization of venue for processing of Custard Apple pulp and getting one year agreement.
- Procurement/ Purchase of following critical machine and equipment:
 - o Blast Freeze (Capacity of blasting 200 Kg of pulp on daily basis)
 - o 3 Deep Freezers (500 Liter Capacity Each)
 - o 1- Pulper (De-seeding Machine, Capacity 50 Kg per hour)
 - o 250 Fruit Crates
 - o Weighing Machine – 2 Big and 2 Small
 - o Sealing Machine
 - o Packaging Material
- Formation of 12 Producer Groups & finalization of 12 villages for opening of the fruit collection centers.
- 12 women were selected and trained as collection Centerin- Charge for purchase of custard apple at the villages level. Farmers have received average rate of Rs 21/ Kg compared to Rs 5-8/ Kg in past years.
- Gramshree Value chain expert Mr. Vikas Bundela from Rajasthan provided training to all the staff on different aspect of food processing (30 women were trained).
- Gramshree team has visited Hyderabad and Bangalore to explore the market. Gramshree sales team is in continuous touch with different buyers. Most of the buyers have shown interest and are looking for a sample.



Women workers at the Kanker Processing Unit

- **Quantity of Custard Apple Purchased: 11,785 kg**
- **No. of families benefit through sale of fruit: 10**
- **Amount received by families from sale of fruit: Rs 2,58,032.**
- **Amount received by Women as labour till date: Rs 57,870.**
- **Total Pulp Manufactured: 2,650 kg**

Leveraging of IFA Support:

IFA support was instrumental in getting this project going in Udaipur and is now supporting the start and setup in Chhattisgarh. Gramshree has successfully received additional funding of Rs 15 Lakhs from the Nudge foundation.



David Robinson, an IFA supporter and member of the Orinico foundation visited the Gramshree project last winter and was extremely impressed by their work. Here he is seen with the Producer Group Members on the left and visiting a wheat plot with the Gramshree head, Rakesh Gupta.

-- IFA Liaison: Anita Bajaj

**Compliments of India Community Center @ Simi Valley Mandir
Dr. Shubha Jain & Dr. Sanjeev Jain
1925 Royal Avenue, Simi Valley, CA 93065**

Empowering the most Vulnerable: Urmila Devi Vishwakarma in Uttar Pradesh

Rural poverty is highly prevalent in the heartland of India. Working in Mirzapur district of UP, Urmila Devi is at the very center of it. Her work focuses on organizing workers at the lowest level of society for better wages and better working conditions. She also educates people about opportunities for education, health and employment through government programs. Mirzapur is a mountainous area marked by extreme disparity of income. It is also heavily affected by Naxalism. IFA has supported Urmila since 2016.

Target groups

- *Stone quarry workers
- *Wood cutters and others living off forest produce
- *MNREGA workers and their families
- *Children and adolescent girls

Urmila works in 20 villages and 35 towns. Her work impacts 1000 workers. Of these 300 are directly linked to her organization (**Khadan Mazdoor Union – Quarry Laborers Union**). She also works with about 400 NREGA women workers and 150 young girls.

2022-2023 Highlights

Her work involves Dalits, Mushahars (extremely under resourced migrants from Mushahar areas of western Bihar), and under resourced women in Mirzapur district. She visits villages and localities, meets with local authorities, organizes rallies and protests, and make people aware of their rights (MNREGA, workers cards, ration cards, fertilizers, etc.) and facilities, conducts workshops on specific observances (e.g. International Woman’s Day, Gandhiji’s birthday, Rakshabandhan), and disseminates information (health programs for children, etc.). This past year her work was spread out over 20 villages and impacted ~2,000 villagers. Notable achievements include getting work for women, admitting children to schools, getting needed medicine to 150 laborers, getting labor cards, Ayushman Bharat cards, pensions for women, Aadhar cards for Mushahar families, rations. In addition to the select 20 villages, she has added 5 new villages with 500 additional people in her work area. Below are some pictures of her work in action.



*Urmila Devi with two faces of women’s empowerment: -
Women with their labor cards and youth group on International Women’s Day*

-- IFA Liaison: Siddharth Dasgupta

Tragedy of the Kosi Flood Plain: Making a Difference

Bihar Fellowships: Mahendra Yadav, Raman Singh, Archana Singh and Satish Suman

Background

There is a swath of land in eastern Bihar, which is home to some of the poorest people in India. It is not a barren land and there is plenty of water, only there is just too much of it. The principal author of this tragedy is a river, the Kosi, but it has plenty of help from human errors and mismanagement. Kosi carries water from some of the highest peaks in the world including The Mount Everest. In its lower courses, it descends steeply down the Shivalik range, cutting through its softer, older rocks. Thus, it enters the plains with an enormous load of silt, one of the heaviest of any river in the world. And it is ready to dump it at the least bit of an obstacle.

Man's Attempt to Tame the Wild Kosi

Through the hundred or so miles that it travels from Nepal down to its merging with the Ganga, Kosi changes course repeatedly and violently, moving as much as half a kilometer per year and breaking up in as many as a dozen streams. For centuries, people have co-existed with Kosi, managing through its repeated floods but also benefiting from the rich soil of the alluvial plain so created. But in the 1950's, the politicians decided that Kosi had to be tamed. They built a barrage at its entry in to India followed that by a series of embankments, shackling the river from its stretch of up to 100 miles to a narrow corridor down, in certain places, to a mere 7 km.

Nature Strikes Back: The Unintended Consequences

From here on it is a story of poor planning, broken promises and shoddy implementation. The most devastating blow occurred in August 2008. Rising rapidly due to heavy rains and a riverbed raised high due to heavy silting, the Kosi broke out of its eastern embankment and rushed down through a channel it had abandoned years ago. As much as 93% of its water followed this route, plunging a vast area into complete chaos. Such floods - and they are occurring repeatedly - are only one of the many unintended consequences of the Kosi project. Heavy silting, for example, has so raised the narrow river plain that the water is seeping, waterlogging the areas outside the embankments, and thus negating the very benefits of the original project. But most damning is the ongoing catastrophe in the lives of the over two million people stuck between the two embankments, left to the mercy of a callous state machinery and a wild river raging to break its shackles.



Fellowship and the Nature of Work

This is the background for the work being done by IFA Fellow Mahendra Yadav. After finishing his masters in Ancient history from Gorakhpur University, Mahendra dedicated his life in service of the marginalized communities. He has worked for RTI, MNREGA



and earlier received a Fellowship from AID, a US organization similar to IFA. The work centers on organizing villagers of the inter-embankment region to expose corruption and ensure proper implementation of flood relief and rehabilitation. These are mostly SC/ST communities living in dire circumstances. Mahendra leads a loose network of around 50 volunteers working in the districts of Supaul and Madhepura via an unregistered organization, **Kosi Nav Nirman Manch**. While they directly work in a dozen or so villages, thousands of workers, farmers, women and youth are connected with the organization. The impact of this work extends to all the 380 villages in the Kosi inter-embankment region. They have no institutional support and make do with contributions from friends and well wishers. IFA granted a Fellowship to Mahendra in 2018 and one year later the other three Fellowships were added. The result is a solid network of grassroots activists that is striving to bring empowerment to two million people.

Main Components of Work

- Organize villagers to pressure the Govt. for proper relief and rehabilitation of the inter-embankment residents
- Supplemental primary education via volunteer schools (**Jeevanshalas**)
- Support better income and better, cheaper inputs for small farmers via a Producer Company
- Pressure the Govt. against tax levy on struggling farmers of the basin
- Direct relief for flood victims and during the Covid-19 pandemic

2022-23 Update

There are various activities taking place in Koshi, Bihar. Jalanchal Farmers Producer Company is empowering farmers by providing fair-priced quality seeds and promoting sustainable farming practices. Koshi Jeevan Shala is providing education to hundreds of children in seven locations, despite facing challenges caused by floods. Women's and Youth Activities in Koshi are empowering women and young people by organizing workshops, seminars, and sports events. The recent activities in Koshi have focused on relief work for flood victims, raising awareness about prominent issues, and participating in ICAN work. Bihar fellows' participation in ICAN work reflects its commitment to social and environmental justice issues and building a more just and equitable society.



(L) NEWS article about Koshi Women Fight for Justice. (R) Medha Patkar enlightening the Mahapanchayat.

Jalanchal Farmers Producer Company

Jalanchal Farmers Producer Company has been a boon for 400 farmers who have been struggling to obtain quality seeds and fertilizers at a fair price. With its help, these farmers have been able to save Rs. 5 lakh and also receive quality seeds that have enabled them to produce high-quality crops. The company's focus on organic and natural farming has also inspired many farmers to switch to these sustainable farming practices. The mobile soil tester site set up by the company has been a game-changer, enabling farmers to test the quality of their soil and make informed decisions about the crops they grow. Overall, the company has been a valuable resource for farmers, promoting sustainable farming practices and empowering them to achieve better yields and profits.

Koshi Jeevan Shala

Koshi Jeevan Shala has been making a significant impact on education in Bihar, despite facing several challenges due to the devastating floods caused by the Kosi River. The school is currently running in seven locations, providing education to hundreds of children who would otherwise not have access to quality education. In May, the school organized a sports camp for 150 school children, which provided them with an opportunity to engage in physical activity and develop important skills. The visit of MLA Prof. Chandrasher, who is now the education minister, is a testament to the school's success and the impact it has made on the education sector. The coverage by BBC and NDTV news channels has brought much-needed attention to the school's condition and the challenges it faces due to the floods. Despite these challenges, Koshi Jeevan Shala remains committed to providing quality education to children and ensuring that they have a bright future ahead of them.



QR code to access BBC Report on Koshi Jeevan Shala.



Women's and Youth Activities

The Women's and Youth Activities being undertaken in Koshi have been instrumental in empowering women and young people in the region. The Koshi Women's Forum has played a significant role in organizing leadership development workshops and seminars aimed at enhancing the leadership skills of women. On Women's Day, the forum organized a seminar on the topic "Women of Koshi in 75 years of independence," which was well-attended and received a positive response from the community. Additionally, the launch of the girls' hockey team has been a game-changer, giving young girls the opportunity to develop self-confidence and participate in sports, while also protecting them from unwanted attention from boys. The youth club and library have also been a great resource for young people, with over 20 youth benefiting from the resources provided on a daily basis, particularly in connecting with peers and preparing for competitive exams. These initiatives have been crucial in building a more inclusive and empowered community in Koshi, one that values the contributions and potential of all its members, regardless of gender or age.



The recent activities in Koshi have focused on various issues affecting the community, including relief work for flood victims, land ownership disputes, and raising awareness about important issues in the legislative assembly. The two-day Satyagraha held on 14th and 15th February 2022 resulted in the district officer asking the district disaster in-charge to expedite the process of payment of house damage money and provide assistance for the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana. However, after waiting for months with no resolution to the issue, a public interest litigation was filed in Patna High Court (CWJC 7429/2022). Relief work for flood victims has been ongoing, with relief material distributed to 300 people and relief kits provided to those whose houses have been destroyed.



Flood relief materials being distributed by the Koshi Manch



8th Kisan Jagruti Mahapanchayat

Additionally, efforts have been made to raise awareness about the questions of flood victims in the legislative assembly and to provide flood alert forecasts through WhatsApp messages. The organization of the 8th historical Kisan Jagruti Mahapanchayat was a major event attended by more than 2000 people, with guest social workers such as Medha Patkar, Arvind Murthy, and Nutan Malvi in attendance.

Another important development has been the participation of fellows in ICAN work. The fellows collaborated with various groups of the ICAN organization and participated in a meeting held in Wardha. The participation in ICAN work reflects its commitment to social and environmental justice issues, and its desire to collaborate with like-minded organizations. The public hearing held in the region, with the participation of social workers, reporters, and local social workers, is an excellent example of efforts raised for awareness about important issues affecting the community. These activities demonstrate the commitment to making a positive difference in the lives of its citizens and building a more just and equitable society.

-- IFA Liaison: Chaitanya Phade

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Rural Empowerment: Karnataka Fellowships

Dharwad based Samaj Parivartan Samudaya (SPS) under S. R. Hiremath has been an IFA partner since 2005. Currently we are supporting the following three Fellows – Kashinath Bagali, Prabhugouda Patil and S.A. Makkabi, independently. Their work complements each other and promotes the same objectives championed by SPS: utilization of various Government Development Programs like the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), Government Scheme like the Krishi Bhagya Yojna, women empowerment through Self-Help Groups (SHGs), along with creating awareness of the need for protecting natural resources including Jal, Jungle, Jameen, Khaneej and Beej. The work undertaken under MGNREGA is road construction, housing, and de-silting; also provide housing for SC and ST rural workers under Ambedkar Ashray Yojana.



*Kasinath Bagli
(Beladadi Gram
Panchayat, Gadag
district)*



*Prabhugouda Patil
(Havanagi & Chatnalli
Gram Panchayats, Haveri
district)*



*S A Makkabi
(Kadakol Gram
Panchayat, Gadag
district)*

Key Interventions in 2022

Livelihoods

- Makkabi enabled 155 new families to get job cards and 625 families got work for 52 days.
- Prabhugouda enabled 322 families to get job cards and 275 families got work for 35 days.
- Kasinath enabled 195 families to get job cards and 97 families got work for 45 days.



(i) Meeting of SHG women members, (ii) & (iii) MGNREGA work in Havanagi Gram Panchayat

Creating Awareness and training

- Create awareness among the people about education, health, employment, environment restoration and proper utilization of the Rs.21,000 crore set aside by the Supreme Court of India for the restoration of the mining impacted Bellary district; selected 11 Gram Panchayats in Bellary district and working with core committee group.
- Organized environmental training programs for schoolchildren, formed Village Forest Committees in Beladadi village for protection of natural resources and medicinal plant area of Kappatagudda. Created awareness among the farmers and Ayurvedic Doctors for rejuvenation of the forest area.
- Training programs for women about the concept of SHG, accounting, bookkeeping, and MGNREGA.

Women Empowerment

SPS Fellows promote women Self Help Groups (SHGs) and train them in accounting, bookkeeping, how to approach banks for loans, subsidies, and link small savings with the Grameen banks. The SHG women are self-employed, using income generating activities like selling vegetables, sheep and goat rearing, and tailoring. The women also work under the MGNREGA scheme.

- Makkabi formed 14 new SHGs in Kadakol Gram Panchayath. Led 7 SHGs (74 women), total savings of Rs. 5,55,791
- Prabhugouda formed 25 new SHGs in Chatanalli. Led 6 SHGs (101 women), total savings: Rs. 1,81,850
- Kashinath led 20 SHGs (127 women), total savings: Rs. 10,92,965

Women Involvement in Village Governance

SPS Fellows also urged SHG women members to attend the Gram Sabha meetings:

- Due to SHG members' involvement in Beladadi Gram Panchayat, the SC, ST colonies got good roads, street lights and food grains from the Ration shop; 10 families were able to get Ambedkar Ashray Yojana houses.

Organized Campaigns:

- **Samaj Parivartan Satyagrah Yatra** [Koodalsangam (Bagalkote district) to Freedom Park, Bengaluru, January 2 to 11], was organized in conjunction with the Karnataka chapter of the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM). SKM is the national-level farmers' group whose protests led to the Union Govt repealing three pro-corporate and anti-farmer laws of 2020.
- The main goal of the Yatra was to highlight Karnataka farmers' issues, who are campaigning for the following: (i) a guarantee that farmers' produce would be procured, and that the price paid for this produce would be the Minimum Support Price (MSP)

recommended by the Swaminathan Commission, (ii) increasing the number of MNREGA days from 100 to 200 days, and (iii) increasing wage rates in the near future for MNREGA workers.

- A second more long-term goal of the Yatra was to raise awareness of the need for transformative social change, so that the toiling people (e.g., farmers, farm laborers, Dalits, women, organized and unorganized workers) can live with dignity and in prosperity.



SPS leader Shri S R Hiremath with Sh. Rakesh Tikait and other leaders of the Farmers Movement (L)



On January 6, 2023, Jatha came to Prabhugouda's Haveri district - nearly 250 women and men were involved in the Jatha and made it successful.



JanaAndolanagala Maha Maitri (JMM) Jatha. The latter is a statewide movement for pro-people, pro-farmers and pro-poor policies that are in line with the directive principles of the Indian Constitution. **On January 5, 2023, Jatha came to Kashinath's Gadag district - nearly 200 people were involved in the Jatha and they submitted a memorandum to DC Gadad.**

-- IFA Liaison: Ragini Saxena

*If you assume that there is no hope,
You guarantee that there will be no hope.
If you assume that there is an instinct for freedom, that there are opportunities to change things,
There is a chance you may contribute to making a better world. That is your choice.*

Noam Chomsky

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Cardiovascular Services, Oxnard
(805) 604-1824**

Supporting Livelihoods: Empowering the Waste Pickers of India Delhi Fellowships: Prakash Kumar and Parwati Barthwal

Prakash Kumar and Parwati Barthwal are two committed social activists who work as a team. They have been supported by IFA since 2008 (Prakash) and 2010 (Parwati). Prakash has extensive experience in the field of development from grass-root level work to policy making. He started his work with mobilization of Delhi waste pickers in the 2002, and later extended to head-load workers. His work is mainly focused on different clusters of waste pickers and some agricultural markets of Delhi where a large number of head-load workers work. He is the founding President of the **Kachara Kamgar Union** (a collective of Delhi waste pickers) and Gen. Secretary of the **Rashtriya Hamal Panchayat Evam Anya Asangathit Kamgar Union** (an all India collective of unorganized workers). He has been receiving the IFA fellowship since 2008. **Parwati** has been working for empowerment of the community women, marginalized children and waste pickers for the last twenty-one years. Her focus has been child education and formation of Self-Help Groups (S.H.G). Their work includes awareness generation, capacity building, organization building as well as mobilization and advocacy by liaising with policy makers and by creating pressure in the streets.

2022-23 Update

Parwati Barthwal



Protection of housing rights: Hundreds of houses in the slum areas of Delhi are being demolished. An order was issued last year for the eviction of five settlements of Rangpuri Pahari located under Parwati's work area. She worked hard by submitting an appeal in the Delhi High Court, and by averting the danger of evictions and demolitions temporarily. She continues to work towards educating the waste pickers of their housing rights and providing them with updates on future possible upcoming evictions.



Legal Aid Camp: Parwati organized a legal aid camp at one of the Waste pickers' dwellings in New Delhi in which representatives of the Social Legal Information Center, advocates, and social workers participated. They spoke about the adverse impact of child marriage, child labor, information on Human Rights, Bonded Labor Act, Domestic Violence Act, violence at workplace, workers' rights, and social security.

Skills Development Training: Parwati helped enroll some of the youth from the waste pickers community at the local N.I.I.T. training center where they are doing 3-month courses on basic Computer Training, Logistics handling, Spoken English and Accounting. The Institute also provides placement services to them to get employment. She gave information to about 200 youth from different dwellings out of which 75 youth have completed their courses.



Dengue-Malaria Prevention Initiative: With the help of the local Malaria Department, Parwati conducted awareness meetings at various waste pickers dwellings and made sure the dwellings got sprayed to prevent the spread of Dengue-Malaria. The community members were also educated about following preventative measures against dengue-malaria.



-- IFA Liaison: Zini Joshi

Supporting Livelihoods: Empowering the Waste Pickers of India
Delhi Fellowship-2
Prakash Kumar

For workers at Azadpur Mandi, a headload of worries

Paid per sack and without social security benefits, they are at the mercy of traders and commission agents

NIKHIL M BABU
NEW DELHI

It is past 9 p.m. and dozens of headload workers, including Shambhu Rai, 52, are sitting in small groups around fires to cook their dinner inside a large shed in Azadpur Mandi. Many others are getting ready to spend the night at the shed, next to hundreds of sacks of onions.

In 2015, Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal had told the National Hamaal Panchayat (NHP) that he would "enact fast" a legislation to provide social security to headload workers, but it is yet to happen. Though a draft Bill - to give benefits such as insurance cover, overtime charges, weekly day off, safe working space and provident fund



the past 24 years, but I cannot get registered with the AFMC as I'm not attached to any commission agent."

"We have to struggle to increase our wages by even 50 paise per bag," said Bhas Muni, 42, who has been working at the fruit market for 25 years and is also not part of any union. Several other workers said increasing the

Media Coverage of Plight of Waste Workers: Prakash Kumar helped facilitate coverage of hardships faced by waste pickers in mainstream media. He facilitated visits from a journalist from The Hindu (a reputed national daily newspaper) to Azadpur Mandi (one of the waste pickers' dwellings) in the month of July 2022. The journalist wrote an article on the plight of waste workers which was published in the Hindu newspaper in August 2022. Highlighting plights, challenges and other issues of marginalized workers through media is an effective strategy to pressurize policy makers to take corrective measures to address social issues faced by workers.

Helping Save dwellings from Demolition: Five slums of Rangpuri Pahari areas were facing the eviction drive in April 2022. Prakash & Parwati helped slum dwellers in filing a writ petition with the Hon'ble Delhi High Court. As a response to their petition, the Hon'ble Court placed a stay on eviction of the slums.

Participation in an Agitation of MGNREGA Workers: The National MGNREGA Watch, which is a PAN India network of the activists and organization working with agricultural workers, had staged an agitation in August 2022 in Delhi. The agitation was held to protest against prevalent irregularities such as delayed payments to workers, non-payments and rampant corruption. Prakash Kumar participated in the agitation to extend his solidarity towards the workers' struggles.

R.T.I. Applications: Prakash Kumar had filed five more R.T.I. applications with Municipal Corporation of Delhi (M.C.D.) and had sought information regarding solid waste management and status of implementation of welfare schemes for waste pickers of Delhi. Unfortunately, the municipal officials did not comply with their responsibilities and did not provide the desired information. Prakash will be pursuing this issue by filing another round of applications in the coming months.



Prakash sharing the Mathadi model of workers welfare with Rajasthan Labor Commissioner



Prakash leading training of the Mathadi model of with a group in Jodhpur, Rajasthan



Prakash meeting the Patron of the Mathadi model and his mentor, Dr. Bada Adhav in Pune



Leading ICAN's Public Dialogue with workers and RWA in Vasant Kunj, Delhi on May Day 2022

-- IFA Liaison: Zini Joshi

Manual Scavenging: Eradication and Rehabilitation

Karnataka Fellowships: K B Obalesh, Siddharth Joshi

Manual Scavenging – the practice of cleaning and removing human waste – has existed in India for a long time. Even though it was outlawed in 1993 and then again in 2013 (Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act or PEMSR), hundreds of thousands of people still engage in this activity out of necessity. These sanitation workers (Safai Karmacharis) mostly come from the lowest rungs of the age-old caste system. They face severe systemic discrimination and haven't had access to education or opportunities for employment in any other profession for generations.

In 2017 IFA started fellowship for Dr. K.B. Obalesh who is engaged in organizing these Safai Karmacharis and advocating for their rights and rehabilitation in the state of Karnataka. The number of manual scavengers in the state has been estimated to be in the range of 55,000 to 330,000 (depending on the source of information). These people have no savings, no job security, and no future. Most of them are engaged as temporary contract workers with very low wages and work in hazardous conditions. Many deaths are regularly reported as a result of their unsafe work conditions. Two additional Fellowships were subsequently provided to expand this work. One of them, Padma M was recently granted support by another organization.

The group follows a multipronged approach: -

- Creating awareness of PEMSR amongst the public as well as amongst those still engaged in this practice
- Helping the manual scavengers obtain financial and other benefits
- Helping them obtain alternative employment

They work through the community based unregistered platform, **Safaikarmachari Kavalu Samithi and Thamate**, a registered organization that provided administrative support and mobilizes information and resources.

2022-23 Update

Presently, they have presence in 22 Karnataka districts but are working most intensely in 14 districts (7 more than last year). In 2022, a total of 1905 new manual scavengers were identified for rehabilitation.

Awareness Building:

In January, 2022, Govt of Karnataka formed a state level manual scavengers survey committee and nominated Dr. Obalesh as a member at state level for giving orientation on standard operating procedures for survey committee members and officials.



Mass Awareness program on PEMSR ACT 2013



July 1st Indefinite protest in front of the district collectors' office

Organizing:

18 new Community Based Monitoring Groups (CBMG) were formed from the districts of Kolar, Tumkur and Bengaluru rural district. 130 new SK/MS members were given orientation on PEMSR ACT and rehabilitation entitlements.

Alternative Employment Model:

In Kolar district, 10 rural manual scavengers received interest free loans from the Small-Scale Sustainable Infrastructure Development Fund to start employment in animal husbandry, small business, selling vegetables, etc. The loans are already being repaid.

Direct Benefits:

- 450 applications were submitted to Karnataka Safaikarmachari Development corporation for alternative employment loans of which 234 got sanctioned for Rs.50, 000/ each for **Total benefit of Rs. 1.17,00000 in Tumkur district only**

Other funding sources:

In 2022, Thamate garnered support from the Azim Premji Foundation to the tune of Rs. 2.5 Crores (over 5 years). This has allowed them to open an office in Bengaluru and increase the activity on behalf of the Safai Karmacharis. In 2023 they are also planning to distribute 350 – 400 bags of rations and 1500 books to school children through funds raised from local sources.



350 school bags Distributed for Bheema Shales children



Obalesh with Karnataka Chief Minister and other ministers

Looking ahead:

- The group plans to continue the rehabilitation of manual scavengers (plan to rehabilitate 300 MS in 2023).
- They plan to register a PIL in the Supreme Court for non-compliance of the PEMSR Act with the help of Center for Policy Research, Bangalore.
- They plan to conduct an informal sanitation workers survey with the support of Safaikarmachari commission, Govt of Karnataka in collaboration with National Law school of University Bangalore
- IFA is planning to support one more fellowship for these activities in another state (most likely Tamil Nadu) in order to expand our support of Dalit Empowerment

-- IFA Liaison: Subhash Karkare

Empowering Domestic Workers in Kanpur, UP
Fellowship: Meenu Sur

Meenu Sur is one of our newer IFA Fellows with an extensive background in the Social Services sector and has worked on many projects in Uttar Pradesh for the past 30 years.

She is the Founder and General Secretary of the Gharelu Mahila Kamgar (domestic women workers) Union, the largest union in Uttar Pradesh (UP) and as such has made great strides in advocating for the rights of unorganized workers in Kanpur. Main goals are to ensure that they receive at least a minimum wage and also benefits such as paid leave.



Her work has benefitted about 15,000 members, the majority of them women from the Dalit and other marginalized communities. A large part of this work is to get these workers registered with Kanpur's Labor Department. They get ID cards and are ensured that in the event of death, the surviving family get substantial monetary compensation from the UP Government. Another part of Meenu Sur's work is ensuring that the Right to Education (RTE) Act is properly enforced. This Act aims to provide accessible, free, and mandatory education to all children. **It includes a mandate that calls for 25% of seats in private schools to be reserved for students from disadvantaged and weaker sections of society.** It also mandates a Rs. 5000 deposit to the account of every student comprising the 25% to cover the cost of books, uniforms, tuition, and supplies. Unfortunately, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the UP Government has not remitted the Rs. 5000 for the last three years despite Rs. 350 crores being available to the government. As a result, families are being forced to take loans to send their children to school. Meenu Sur is raising demands, with the support of union members, to get these funds released. COVID times also resulted in a switch to online learning and therefore Meenu Sur has put in significant efforts to advocate that all students in Kanpur are allotted smartphones.



Representation by Meenu Sur at the Education Ministry in Lucknow to for the 3-year worth of funds to deserving students not remitted due to COVID-19.



Meenu Sur holding monthly meetings for the Gharaelu Mahila Kamgar Union.

-- IFA Liaison: Sonali Saxena

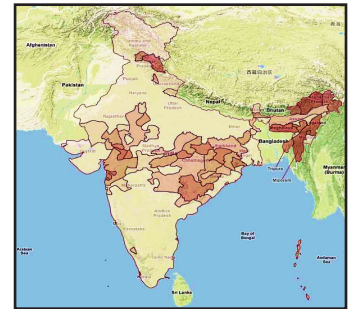
TRIBAL EMPOWERMENT: Jharkhand Fellowships

(HEMANT DAS, LUKAS KORWA, POONAM DEVI, SAVITA DEVI)

Background

Tribals, as the indigenous people are commonly called, constitute as much as 9% India's population and are spread across the breadth of the subcontinent. Over millennia, they have lived in relative peace, content to follow their life style in the abundance of nature.

This self-sustaining, self-sufficient way of life has been threatened by modern India's quest for land, minerals and other natural resources. While this is destroying their livelihood, there is little in return by way of genuine development. As a result, in spite of providing so much of nation's wealth, the people of these areas remain mired in poverty. Popular resistance has been met with ruthless force. The resultant upheaval has wrought tremendous suffering of which the Maoist insurgency is just the most glaring manifestation.



IFA Fellowships

IFA supports several fellows working for the benefit of these tribal communities in many states. In Jharkhand IFA is supporting Hemant Das whose fellowship was started in 2017. Surekha and Prithvi visited Hemant in November of 2019 and since then three additional Fellows have been added to the team. Hemant Das is a social worker with many years of experience. Since becoming an IFA Fellow in 2017, he has devoted himself exclusively to organizing the Jharkhand Mazdoor Kisan Union in Latehar, Palamu and Gadhwa districts.

The Challenges

Many of the tribals in this area have been agriculturists with ample land who grow a multitude of crops. The state has declared them encroachers, forcing them to produce all kinds of documents to prove their ownership, a daunting task for these mostly illiterate communities. And even when they fully comply, the elusive *patta* (title) remains a mirage. Ironically, the state machinery that procrastinates so callously in complying with law (the Forest Rights Act) is relentless in using its power to harass, hurt and impoverish these people. Lacking the '*patta*' they are jailed for tilling land that should lawfully be theirs! It is ironic that with so much poverty and so few means of employment, the system is so intent on uprooting people who are making a living without any handouts.

A Role for the Jharkhand Mazdoor Kisan Union

Getting the '*patta*' is a major task for anyone working for the welfare of tribal people. While there are several non-governmental organizations in the area their impact has been minimal since they often end up representing themselves rather than the people. This is where Hemant's pioneering efforts in organizing JMKS have brought great relief. The people met by the IFA members showed tremendous trust and hope in the ability of the Union (JMKU). The union works for many marginalized communities including:

*Forest dwellers

*Small-scale fishers

*Small and marginal farmers

The union functions from a modest one-room office in Hemant's Daltonganj home. Members pay monthly dues of Rs. 20 or so. Some make additional contributions. The funds are utilized for the legal costs and to support a part time staff for secretarial and fieldwork. The union cultivates the support of many **professionals particularly from the lawyer community** since humanitarian work on such scale cannot take place without a **network of fellow travellers**.

2022-23 Update

The year 2022 has been a year of organizational expansion and consolidation for the union.

- Union has been strengthened politically.
- Increase in activity by the volunteers and villagers after the leadership workshops were conducted
- Reduction in harassment by civil servants
- Increase in the Gramsabha awareness of government schemes

- 2021-22: JMKU membership was 5,159
- 2022-23: JMKU membership at 6,377
- 73 Applications for land rights from 3 village
- Around 700 MNREGA job cards issued.
- Overall, more than 36,000 direct/indirect beneficiaries from JMKU activities

Forest Rights (Individual and Community)

Awareness meetings were conducted in several villages to spread messages of unity against the tyranny. The public representatives are sometimes misleading those who submit the claim form, but the union urged people to be united against atrocities. During these programs, the journalists made a significant contribution. The union provided legal aid to those fighting for forest rights.

Gramsabha Jagrukta Abhiyan In conjunction with ICAN (Indian Community Activists Network), this group has taken up a campaign to promote strengthening of the rural gramsabhas so as to fully materialize the concept of local self-governance envisioned by Gandhiji as a 'Village Republic' and enshrined in the Indian Constitution via the Panchayati Raj amendment.

The JMKU union is in constant dialogue with the local organizations to spread awareness of Gramsabha from grassroots level to the national level. Cultural organizations, writing organizations and community organizations active at the local level are included in these discussions. In addition, several street plays are being conducted for awareness and a web series in Hindi (Discovery of

Swaraj) is being produced with the help of several local cultural and professional groups. The episodes are available on YouTube (<https://youtu.be/eiqoNO-ji70>)



Fellow Hemant Das (right) meeting with villagers regarding awareness of Community Forest Rights



Gram Sabha Awareness Journey from grassroots level to National Level

Campaign to fight Famine: Every 3 to 4 years the Palamu region is affected by famine. It is a rain shadow region and as the land is uneven there is very less retention of water. There are no assertive actions being taken to combat this situation. Every time an attempt was made to bring systematic changes, the union was confronted with corruption practices and not much progress could be made. The Gramsabha is not familiar with these. Keeping these things in mind, the JMKU organized several sit-in meetings and workshops throughout the year with the help of regional activists to sensitize the Panchayat officials to the problems due to famine.



Meetings with the Panchayat to bring awareness related to famine and potential counter-measures



Gathering of locals and union workers to inspire them for the campaign against famine

Primitive Tribes Convention: In the memory of Tribal leader Uma Shankar Baiga, JMKU conducted a gathering for awareness of tribal rights. Focus was on teaching people to be united against injustice and educating children about their culture heritage and awareness about the ongoing schemes and constitutional rights. This convention had a strong participation of more than 400 women and men. It was decided to hold an agitation to seek Government's attention to run the ration, pension and housing scheme in a sustainable manner and to continue until the claim of land rights is achieved.



Hemant addressing the Convention

Organizational Empowerment, Training for Government schemes and Legal awareness:

A one-day training was organized to create awareness about Government initiatives like Ration and Pension schemes, development schemes as per provision of Panchayat Raj Act and related laws. MGNREGA was also discussed in detail. The workshop was attended by 30 people from 10 villages. The attendees were given responsibility to spread the same message in their villages. To drive Organizational Empowerment within JMKU a **membership drive** was conducted. The JMKU union invited new members by educating them on the union's purpose. For developing leadership skills among new members, a **two-day leadership development training program** was conducted in Palamu, Gadhwa and Latehar districts. The participants were given social media training as well.



Hemant Das explained that per JMKU our freedom without Swaraj is incomplete and for that it is necessary to strengthen the village government so the members of the Gram Sabha can exercise their constitutional rights including the right to prepare their own rural development plan for their village and implement it according to the collective decision. A strong village can solve almost 70% of the problems. IFA fellows Savita, Lukas and Poonam motivated the audience by narrating many successful stories and inspired people to actively participate in JMKU activities. After the training, the participants organized sit-ins in their respective areas and told the villagers about the programs. They urged the villagers to participate actively to prevent the administrative officers from acting arbitrarily and depriving the community of the expected benefits.

-- IFA Liaison: Suhas and Manas Gupte

Uttar Pradesh Fellowship-1: Arvind Murti

Engaging local communities to create a Vibrant and Participatory Democracy

Arvind Murti is a social activist with a strong passion and commitment to bringing about positive social change by intimately and organically connecting to the local communities. Arvind's work ranges from education and livelihood-preservation to RTI and social upliftment to name a few. He has also exposed corruption in the education system using tools such as RTI very effectively. Arvind enjoys a great rapport with diverse communities and has the confidence of doctors, lawyers, journalists and other activists in the region. His deep sense of empathy for the underprivileged is evident from the large amount of time and energy he spends in disseminating information about beneficial government policies to people who are economically backward or socially oppressed. He works closely with government officials, acting as a bridge between them and the people they serve by helping ensure that well meaning policies are implemented appropriately in practice and being a voice of the people by providing feedback to the officials. His actions and interventions impact people way beyond the immediate area of his work.



IFA has been supporting Arvind since 2007. During this time he has grown vastly in stature as a well-known and highly respected social activist in Uttar Pradesh. Besides his own work, he is routinely called upon to help during nationwide campaigns of people's movements. Below is a glimpse of the work that Arvind has been involved in recently.

2022-23 Update

Since being chosen as the Northern Zonal Coordinator of the Indian Community Activists Network (ICAN) Arvind's work now includes extensive traveling to meet activists and organize activities. Yet, he remains committed to helping his community in a variety of ways.

1. Anti-Corruption Activities



Anti-corruption work includes public hearings on NREGA, Ration (PDS) and similar government schemes to ensure that the right candidates receive benefits. This photo shows Arvind standing with the disabled Babulal Navik who, (along with his wife Archana who is blind) was surviving without ration card or pension until he attended this hearing and was then helped to obtain both.

निजी स्कूलों की मनमानी को लेकर अभिभाक मंच में सौपा ज्ञापन

स्वतंत्र घेतना

मऊ। सोमवार को अभिभाक मंच ने अपनी नव सूची मांगों को लेकर सिटी मजिस्ट्रेट को ज्ञापन सौंपकर जनवाद में मान्यता प्राप्त गैर मान्यता प्राप्त निजी विद्यालय बढ़ी संख्या में सवालित हो रहे हैं। लेकिन किसी भी निजी विद्यालय द्वारा 12 सितंबर 2018 को पारित हुए शूल्क विनियमन अधिनियम 2018 का अनुपालन सुनिश्चित नहीं किया जा रहा है। जबकि इस संबंध में जिला विद्यालय निरीक्षक को दो बार लिखित रूप से मांग की गई थी परंतु निजी स्कूलों पर कोई दोस कार्रवाई नहीं की गई। इसलिए अभिभाक मंच मांग किया कि 13 अप्रैल 2021 से नूतन शिक्षण सत्र 2021-22 प्रारंभ होने जा रहा है। लेकिन किसी भी निजी विद्यालय की वेबसाइट और सूचना पट पर पाठ्य पुस्तकों की सूची जारी नहीं की गई है जबकि शिक्षण सत्र प्रारंभ होने



के 90 दिन पूर्व पाठ्य पुस्तकों की सूची विद्यालय की वेबसाइट और सूचना पट पर प्रकाशित हो जानी चाहिए (जिले के किसी भी विद्यालय ने वेबसाइट पर पाठ्य पुस्तकों की सूची नहीं डाली है। शूल्क विनियमन अधिनियम 2018 के अनुसार शिक्षण सत्र प्रारंभ होने से 60 दिन पूर्व विद्यालय की वेबसाइट और सूचना पट पर शूल्क का विवरण प्रस्तुत किया जाना अति आवश्यक है। जो किसी भी विद्यालयों द्वारा नहीं किया गया है। ज्ञापन सौंपने में अमरेश कुमार सिंह, अरविंद मुर्ति, यशोम अखार, मोहम्मद शारिक, जयप्रकाश सिंह यादव, संतोष यादव शामिल रहे।

2. Labor Reforms and Worker Empowerment:



Leading the Bihar Sammelan of Unorganized/Migrant workers



Leading a Lucknow State Workshop on Labor Reforms, Land Acquisition Act, etc. Act

3. Social Activities



(T) Addressing Baliya rally in support of jailed reporters who exposed the nexus in getting exam papers leaks.
(B) Conducting a self defence workshop for young girls



(R) Addressing Gandhi Jayanti Rally for Communal Harmony (B) With two construction workers (Vinod Lal and Lal Bihari) of Ratanpura (Mau), UP, after helping them get free cataract surgery

4. Organizational Activities



With Prashant Bhushan in support of democratic rights



With Medha Patkar at the Kisan Mazdoor Panchayat in Kosi, Bihar



With Farmers' Campaign leader Rakesh Tikait in Kisan Panchayat at Manduri, Azamgarh, UP



5. Gramsabha Jagrukta Abhiyan:

Arvind is leading this ICAN Campaign for making rural communities aware of the practice of Gramswaraj as envisioned by Mahatma Gandhi and as laid out in India's Panchayati Raj Act. While high in intention the act has failed to achieved the desired results due to lack of implementation as the entrenched parties see this as a threat to their power. The campaign involves traveling, holding meeting and other interactions with grassroots activists as well as the people in general. This is being done in stages, starting with U.P in 2023 and then moving to other states including Jharkhand, Bihar and Gujarat.

--IFA Liaison: Prithvi R Sharma

Preserving Livelihoods and Forests: Community Based Sustainable Harvesting of Resources

Gujarat fellowships: Dr. Leena Gupta, Nandubhai Rathwa

'Development' and Tribal Cultures

Tribal cultures are at the receiving end of the onslaught of the modern "development" paradigm in India. An example of this conflict can be seen in the Chhota Udepur region in Gujarat that has a large indigenous population. Rathwas are a major tribal community living in the steep hills of the Aravalis. They have a rich holistic culture based on living in harmony with nature. Their life-philosophy makes no separation between religious beliefs and the way of living.

This community has faced the same malady that has affected most of the tribal areas - inroads of mainstream culture, flight to cities and socio-political manipulation by political parties and vested interests. Unlike many other tribal communities, the Rathwas have been agriculturists for a long time and many have land rights based on the Forest Rights Act. Unfortunately, the adoption of profit oriented (hence non-sustainable) agriculture has inevitably led to large-scale degradation of their agricultural assets particularly due to soil erosion. The result is diminishing returns that demoralize the younger generation who are unaware of their natural riches. This adds to the lure of jobs in the big cities.

To counter all these influences, there is a vigorous movement to resist the inroads of mainstream culture and to sustain the richness of Rathwa culture. This combines well with the work being spearheaded by Dr. Leena to harvest resources for the benefit of the local community as opposed to remote corporations and to do that in a sustainable way. This entails harmoniously combining the practices that have sustained these communities for centuries with the best that modern science offers. Raising awareness of traditional practices is critical, since many tribals themselves are oblivious to the richness of their own tribal heritage.

The Fellows

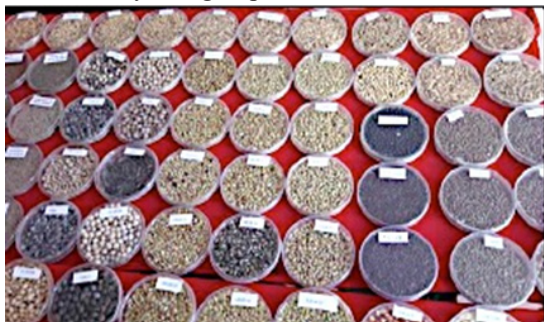
"Community based action research" is how Dr. Leena defines her work, which combines activism with scholarship. She got her PhD in Ecology and Ethno Biology from Bhavnagar University. Leena brings in a unique perspective with her zeal for social justice, the scientific approach and community oriented sustainable development. In the past, Leena has worked with many NGOs in the field of natural resource preservation and livelihood development. The base for all these activities is the AAJ (Adivasi Jan Utthan Trust) ashram in the village of Bhekadiya which started 35 years ago as a hostel for local tribal children and has now grown into a much-admired community organization. AAJ is entirely supported by voluntary efforts. The IFA fellowship allows Dr. Leena to be a lynchpin between multiple activities going on under the banner of AAJ in various states such as Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, and Uttarakhand.

Nature of Work

Her work is focused on developing a model for ecologically sustainable development. It puts her at the center of the clash between modernity and tradition. The cornerstone of this work is organizing people around the awareness of their rich natural resources and making them realize how their prosperity, both in the short-term as well as in the long-term, depends more on preserving their rich natural resources rather than abandoning them for work in the big cities. Working together for the good of the community comes natural to this movement. This approach is seen clearly in the push for collective ownership as opposed to individual ownership and management of land and forests. It is also known as Community Forest Rights as compared to Individual Forest Rights.

Salient Activities

- Educating, organizing and mobilizing tribal villages for obtaining Community Forest Rights under India's Forest Rights Act for preserving their livelihoods and for sustaining natural resources
- Raising incomes by food processing and marketing
- Bringing awareness of the richness of local resources and promoting diets and health treatments accordingly
- Preserving indigenous food varieties with seed banks
- Health care centers including care home for mentally disabled
- Children and youth groups



Varieties of indigenously grown grains being developed as a seed bank



Leena demonstrating use of indigenous medicinal riches

2022-23 Update

The Numbers:

	Activity	Nos.	Td
1	Check dams built	16	80
2	Kankrej cows distributed to needy farmers in Bhekadiya	100	
3	Kuccha road build by the local community in Jhamli	10 kms	
4	Seeds of local varieties collected for the Adivasi Culture Meet	30 kg	
5	Plants planted on the boundaries of check dams	10000	
6	Farmers undertaking organic farming in 17 villages	59	

7) In November 2022, as an input for COP 27 that took place in Egypt, a process was undertaken with children of Bhekadiya and Kanalva. The report of this process was sent to the UN Headquarters at Geneva, with copies to UNICEF offices at Delhi and Gandhinagar.

8) After the 4 States Adivasi Convention where 7-8 lakh adivasis attended, the Central government deputed a team to follow up on why the recognition of Forest Rights claims was making such slow progress. Tribals from 10 villages presented their issues namely that only dried wood, gum, water, and fish catch were allowed but the protection, development and management rights were not. The committee was also told that new claims had not been allowed. An order to give form (त्र) was given so new claims regarding community Forest rights could be filled out.

9) As a follow up of the Mahayatra, Government appointed Ram Singh Rathva an ex-MP of Chhota Udepur District as the Chairman of TRIFED as a result of him submitting the report of the Mahayatra in January 2020 to the India Govt. Following this, a group of 1,450 women from 58 villages was formed with the intention of training these women in the collection of forest produce and the making of nutritious food based on forest produce.

Two major events took place in 2022:



30 kg of seeds of local varieties were collected for saving and distribution



Local varieties of various plants were planted and displayed



1) **The Kudrati Darshan Mela (Nature Festival)** was attended by more than 800 tribal people and a total of Rs 80,870/- was spent by the people of the region for this mela. Two children from the 9th Standard, Ramiben and Paresh bhai of Kanalva coordinated the proceedings. The activities at the mela included discussion on nature philosophy and lessons to be learnt about the same from the Vedas. A report on the treatment of livestock attacked by lumpy virus during COVID was also shared.

The use of local from herbal remedies proved very effective in controlling the lumpy virus disease. None of the livestock treated by

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these local remedies died, though there were many cattle deaths in other villages. Awareness was spread of the value of local foods including millets like jowar, bajra, bhedi, bunti, kodu, ragi, malan, dangar, kathod which require less water and are relatively disease free.

A model of Fenai Hill Watershed development was made by the children for the mela to explain its importance in the culture and life of the residents. Local varieties of plants found in the region were planted in the model to explain their importance. Models of Adivasi life prepared in mud were also displayed. Cottage industry for production of brooms, rope, wood-work, tailoring, ambar charkha, Earthen vessels were also displayed.

Parikrama of the Fenai Hill forest for protection and prevention of forest fires. A total of Rs 32,060/- was spent on the parikrama program which was collected locally with some contribution from the AAJ supporters.



2. Tribal Convention

Dr. Leena and her team helped conduct a Tribal Convention for Adivasis at Hamirparaa, Bhakadiya from January 13th through January 15th, 2023. About 8 Lakh Adivaasi delegates from the four neighboring States of Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Gujarat attended.

The issues discussed were:

1. **Adivasi Culture:** Need to develop societies where Livelihoods, Biodiversity and Nature are protected
2. **Realization of the potential** of the Natural Resources to protect and sustain dignified Livelihoods
3. **Empowerment of local governance** / Gramsabha empowerment, **Tribal medicine** and conservation of medicinal plants
4. **Awareness about the nutritional and health value** of local foods
5. **Development of University education** facilities for Adivasis **Protection from spread of forest fires** and forest Mafia from destruction of the forests.



IFA Fellow Nandubhai Rathwa at the Tribal Convention

Fenai Rewakhand Biodiversity Federation members (member villages) contributed at every level through cash, kind, time, planning & management (before, during & after), etc. A total of Rs Two lakhs was collected in cash from member villages and more than 60000 Kg of raw food materials were collected in kind for the convention."

-- IFA Liaison: Vivek Dabholkar

Project Visits by an IFA Friend (David Robinson)

Orinico Foundation has been a generous supporter of IFA work for several years. Last winter, one of their members, David Robinson, took the trouble to visit India and travel for several days covering two important projects in Rajasthan and West Bengal. Anita Bajaj helped to arrange his visit. She requested him to share his impressions.

It was a privilege earlier this month to be able to visit two projects supported by India Friends Association, Gramshree in Rajasthan and DISHA in West Bengal. Though very different, the projects are having a huge impact on people's lives. In Rajasthan, tribal groups face a range of problems: climate change, mining and logging have left the forests stripped off the means to support traditional livelihoods, forcing tribals to settle in the valleys where a few arable crops like maize and wheat barely sustain subsistence, are deficient in nutrients, and are vulnerable to more extreme weather. The use of chemical fertilizers wears out the soil leading to falling crop yields over time. The menfolk often leave to become wage laborers in the cities leaving wives and older relatives to tend small farms. Middlemen and money lenders prey on the communities extracting much of surplus value created. The Gramshree activists work to empower the women farmers, forming producer groups who sell crops directly to the market. The introduction of new crops diversifies away from arable crops, and the fields are now full of nutritious and more valuable cauliflower, aubergine, tomatoes, and chilies. Farmers are learning how to farm sustainably, substituting chemical fertilizers with 'natural' alternatives from livestock. As a result of these interventions, crop yields are rising and the incomes of the few hundred families targeted by the Gramshree initiatives have doubled and, in some instances, tripled in just three years. New processing centers will make a pulp from local fruit to be sold directly to food and ice-cream makers in Udaipur. Beyond these huge economic advances, it was inspiring to see a community of women uniting to work together for a better future. After the field visits, I attended a women's day celebration held at the field office in one of the villages. The women united in chanting "power to women" and then rose to dance and celebrate their individuality, no longer in the shadows, and no longer as just 'someone's wife'. They celebrated their collective identity as an empowered population who had joined forces to overcome the challenges they face.

In the Sundarbans, a mangrove forest area south-east of Calcutta, home to one of India's largest tiger reservations, a group of activists with Trade Union backgrounds are encouraging residents, including many women, to take on the government and fight for rights that are often denied. Fishermen in Sundarbans have been forced into marginal areas, including the tiger reservations, because fishing grounds in the sea and open waters have been depleted by industrial trawler fleets, and pollution from the rivers which feed into the delta; methyl-mercury levels found in the local fish are 2-3 times the level determined to be safe by the WHO. Pollution and development of 'holiday' resorts threaten the mangrove swamps and even the tigers' own habitat. The wives of fishermen are being organized to fight for compensation for their husbands' death and injury in accidents at sea and from tiger attacks, which are estimated to have killed 3,500 people over the last ten years. These brave and determined "tiger widows" are often ostracized by their communities and families: to have lost a husband to attacks by tigers, seen as incarnations of the forest gods, is viewed as a particular curse in local culture. The government also turns its back on the families, denying them compensation because fishing in or near the tiger reservation is illegal. It is inspiring to see the activists at work and witness the women's response. In a meeting with a group of "tiger widows", grit was etched on the women's faces. The activists have won several landmark court cases which have forced the government to change its policy on compensating fishermen generally and those killed in the tiger reservations, in particular. The activists are agitating for more balanced development of the areas' resources and for the state government to do something about the pollution.

In conclusion, what I had not anticipated is the extent that the projects supported by India Friends Association promote environmental conservation, a cause whose importance to humanity cannot be overstated. What, one asks, is the use of economic development, if the result is soil deficient in nutrients, hills stripped bare of vegetation and the seas empty of fish? The initiatives show how, with carefully calibrated interventions, people can prosper and at the same time keep their environment clean and sustainably productive.



David Robinson joined in the Women's Day Celebrations with the Gramshree group. Here he is seen addressing the gathering as well as being a part of it!



IFA's MISSION

To help catalyze the empowerment of India's underprivileged and marginalized communities.

1. IFA will accomplish its mission by encouraging, facilitating and channeling the contributions – financial or otherwise – of Indian Americans and others towards building an egalitarian and prosperous India.
2. The recipients of IFA aid will be individuals, groups or grassroots organizations that are engaged in the process of improving the lives of the poor through collective action, using peaceful and democratic means.
3. The ultimate beneficiaries of all such IFA supported activities must be the poor and the underprivileged of India.
4. Activities chosen for IFA support will be those that:
 - Are directed towards communities rather than individuals
 - Aim to understand and attack the root causes of poverty
 - Have the most lasting and widespread impact
 - Have conscious strategy or approach towards self-sufficiency
5. During times of major calamities – in India, the US or elsewhere - IFA may choose to help the victims by functioning as a conduit for aid collected by specific, separate fund-raising activities.
6. All the functions of IFA will be conducted in accordance with its bylaws that are designed to be open, inclusive, nonpartisan and fully democratic.

*“Philanthropy is commendable,
but it must not cause the philanthropist to overlook
the circumstances of economic injustice
that make philanthropy necessary”*

~ Martin Luther King, Jr.

For comments and additional information, please visit our website at:

Indiafriendsassociation.org



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