

A Field Worker's Diary - Part 28

As part of my field work at Andhra Pradesh Rural Poverty Reduction Project, I had to go to a small hamlet near Bodhanam village in Bellamkonda mandal one evening.

Bodhanam village is in Krishna river catchment area. A stream that joins the Krishna river separates the village and the rest of the world. To go to the village, one had to cross the stream. At the time I reached the village, there was not much water in the stream so I crossed it easily. But by the time I finished setting up a meeting with members of Self Help Groups (SHGs) and explaining programs conducted by our project to them, it had not only gotten really dark but had also started raining. Thinking that I will go back after the rain stops, I continued the meeting and, later, sat back with the women and chit-chatted. However, the rain showed no sign of stopping.

Even the SHG members couldn't go to their houses due to the rain and stayed back at the meeting. A little while later, the members' husbands started coming to the meeting area with umbrellas to take them home. They told me that the rain didn't look like it would let up and that the water in the stream had increased a lot due to the rain water. They opined that I couldn't possibly go back that night and advised me to stay in the village.

Many of the SHG members asked me to come stay at their homes. I decided to stay at the home of the member who had organized the meeting.

She was a mother of three. She stayed in a small house with her husband, children and mother-in-law. After all the other members went back to their homes, she cooked us some dinner. After dinner, I and her children started talking to each other. They were telling me what they were studying, their hobbies, etc. I noticed that the smallest of her children - a 10 year old boy - appeared to be really happy about something. So, I asked him about the reason for his happiness. He told me joyfully that as it was raining hard the stream will be full of storm water; therefore, he need not go to school the next day.

Every time it rains, the children in the village don't go to school. The adults can't go to work. They have to stay in the village, cut off from the rest of the world!

The irony of the matter is, it was not even a big stream. It must be approximately 15 to 20 feet wide. All the problems of the villages would be solved with a small bridge on that stream. Mainly, it would mean that children need not have to stop going to school in the rainy season.

Governments, which tend to boast of building schools and increasing employment opportunities, seemed to have forgotten to improve the most basic infrastructure that makes education and employment accessible to all citizens.

The number of schools has increased. Basic infrastructure in schools has also improved a little bit. Schemes like Mid-day Meal, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, etc., have managed to increase the enrollment in schools. Throughout that night, I kept thinking about this issue and came to a conclusion: To make education accessible to all, especially to children from the poorest of the poor households who live in remote areas like this, a lot more needs to be done.

I asked the villagers who helped me cross the stream in the morning after the storm water decreased, why they didn't ask the government to lay a small bridge here. They said that they had been asking since many years now. But which politician or official would listen to the problems of a village with a vote base of just a hundred households, they stated with acceptance of their fate.

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