

Annual Report to the Auroville Foundation -- 2002-03

Auroville Village Action Group

Auroville Village Action Group (AVAG) is the human resource development unit of the Foundation. Focussing on development of villages in the Auroville area, it presently reaches out to some 75 villages and their dalit hamlets in the south eastern section of Vanur Block, and the Oulagaret Commune of Pondicherry Union Territory. AVAG is comprised of Aurovilians, trained social workers, and most importantly, young people from the local villages who are trained as community animators.

AVAG acts as a catalyst for village organisation by involving villagers in their own community organisation through a network of Women's Sangams, Youth Groups, Village Planning Councils and Parent-Teacher Associations. This community organisation work is carried out in the dalit settlements of each village as a separate entity, as well as in the caste village. At all AVAG programmes all groups meet together with no caste distinction and talk, eat and work together. This is putting the Auroville Ideal of Human Unity into practical effect at the grassroots level.

AVAG employs about 45 people from the villages, teaches over 1500 village children in various educational programmes, and interacts through clubs and village projects with another 3000 village leaders, youth and women.

Consciousness raising training of local young people forms the basis for people's participation in the improvement of village life.

AVAG witnessed an exponential growth in this year. Particularly in achieving increased people's participation and thereby social sustainability. The most noteworthy achievement of this period was the formation of the Men's Federation that successfully spearheaded a number of initiatives for the men's groups. The Women's Federation too played an important role by taking complete responsibility for the implementation of the project's objectives. Both the Men and the Women's Federation have taken important steps towards reducing gender and caste bias.

All major activities were carried out fulfilling the stated objectives. In this period 23 new village groups (9 women's groups and 14 men's groups) in villages came forward to build the capacity of their communities and to manage their own development priorities. The savings and credit scheme of women's groups continued to show a phenomenal growth rate. The "Udhayam Women's Federation," the savings federation set up last year surpassed itself by taking responsibility not just for the savings scheme but also for other women's issues. The primary education project, PEP was adopted in 2 new village school. Due to the initiative shown by Panchayat leaders, contrary to earlier expectations, this year Village Councils have been formed in several villages and are performing well.

In keeping with the project needs, training in development work was offered to a total of 11 trainees with the objective of recruiting them as staff later. As increasing individual development and social awareness is the cornerstone of AVAG's development programme, a number of workshops and seminars were also conducted for project beneficiaries. AVAG groups again distinguished themselves this year by implementing a number of governmental and non-governmental projects.

AVAG is happy to note that all of last year's targets for change regarding improved performance have been satisfactorily met. For AVAG, witnessing the growth towards gender equality, caste equity, and increased responsibility by the people themselves has been the greatest reward.

This year's activities have included:

- ✍ Recruitment and training of 2 new Community Officers.
- ✍ Regular meetings in the villages of 35 Youth Clubs, 95 Women's Clubs, 30 PTAs, 10 Village Councils.
- ✍ Expansion of the programme into 4 new villages.
- ✍ Three weeks of 2-day summer camps for 700 children.
- ✍ Celebration of Annual Youth Day for nearly 600 youth.
- ✍ Celebration of Annual Women's Day for nearly 1800 women.
- ✍ Regular cluster meeting of representatives of neighbouring women's groups and men's groups.
- ✍ Organising 20 exchange visits between dalit and non-dalit clubs.
- ✍ Monthly seminars and workshops for representatives of all the groups.
- ✍ Growth of Savings and Credit Programme with village women (annual savings of nearly Rs. 9 lakhs, with Rs.20 lakhs circulating among members as loans on their own savings).
- ✍ Starting of Savings and Credit Programme for men.
- ✍ Planning and participation in 97 "Microprojects" and 119 "Work Camps" (ranging from cleaning village streets, deepening wells, to leveling roads and improvements to the school building). Nearly 50% of the total expenses were met by the village groups.
- ✍ Sending supplementary teachers to 30 Panchayat schools, including taking children on study trips to Pondicherry, Chennai and Auroville, exchange programmes, cultural performance programmes.
- ✍ Training of drop out girls in vocational skills and character building at Life Education Centre.
- ✍ Development of educational materials for village schools at Isai Ambalam School, while educating some 120 village children from 2 to 14.
- ✍ Legal Counselling Cell for the village women to help them get social-justice.
- ✍ Organising 2 Blood donation camps in association with JIPMER hospital.
- ✍ Conducting 2 Eye camps and 26 General Health Check-ups with the help of Pondicherry Institute of Medical Sciences (PIMS).
- ✍ Formation of the Udhayam Men's Federation.
- ✍ Strengthening and expansion of the Udhayam Women's Federation, with the ultimate aim of making this organisation totally independent.
- ✍ Hosting 2 meetings with the newly elected village leaders to discuss with them the importance of Village Councils and to request their support for AVAG's activities.
- ✍ Formation of 9 new Village Councils.
- ✍ Socio-economic surveys done in 11 villages.
- ✍ Construction of 45 houses for SHG members in 8 villages under government's Rural Housing Loan Cum Subsidy Scheme.
- ✍ Income Generation Programme started in 9 more villages.