

## **Bharat Nirman Volunteers (BNVs) take the cake**

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### **❖ Who are Bharat Nirman Volunteers ?**

A Bharat Nirman Volunteer (BNV) is an individual who comes voluntarily from a rural household to act as an organic link between a group of families and host of various line departments with a purpose to ensure the unreached households to access benefits under various government sponsored programmes. In other words, they are “the last mile human connectivity between programmes and the unreached”.

### **❖ Why Bharat Nirman Volunteers ?**

Government of India and the State Governments concerned have been implementing various welfare and development programmes for over many decades, however many evaluation studies have shown the gaps in implementation of the programmes affecting the delivery of benefits to the intended BPL families. The delivery mechanisms placed at different levels are limited in size and the

inadequate time to reach out to the targeted rural households also make the schemes reach not only untimely but also undeserving.. Therefore, in order to provide the human face at the last mile connectivity with the rural households, it is envisaged to use the potential youth in the name of Bharat Nirman Volunteers (BNVs) to create awareness about all welfare and development programmes among rural households for better planning and quality implementation of programmes with transparency and accountability.

### ❖ Why should they work voluntarily ?

Over a period of time, rural fabric has suffered a unhemmable tear due to factors like mushrooming of local power groups, lack of unity among various communities, lack of awareness about issues concerning them, indifference of the service delivery sectors, nepotism , corruption, lack of awareness about procedural aspects of programme implementation, etc. Therefore, the benefits of different government programmes are not reaching the poor deserving households. Therefore, participation of rural families in the process of planning and implementation of various welfare and development programmes is found to be inadequate. Therefore, voluntary involvement of villagers themselves, particularly youth was found necessary for the following reasons.

- ❖ Youth is looking for opportunities to participate in socio-economic change
- ❖ Village development means development of their own households, therefore, they see their role
- ❖ Since they are from the same village, their work gets them a word of praise

- ❖ Some of them unemployed find working in a group enjoyable and appreciative until they get employed and may even leave the village
- ❖ Volunteerism gives self-respect and recognition
- ❖ BNVs found perceptible change in their personality/attitudes
- ❖ In the event of achieving any milestones, the feeling that “we did it” gives enormous self-esteem
- ❖ APARD found every volunteer genuinely interested in enhancing the quality of living in his/her village

## ❖ How did AMR-APARD build the cadre of Bharat Nirman Volunteers across the state ?

APARD has been getting reports of incredible achievements of BNVs from various monitoring sources. APARD had been successfully documenting them, too. In order to sustain their enthusiasm and initial momentum triggered by a very carefully crafted training programme, they were asked to participate in a videoconference along with their sarpanches and facilitators on 01-08-2011.

All the 22 districts and their BNVs have participated to share their achievements with indefinable enthusiasm. A videoconference that was originally scheduled for two hours was compelled to be stretched to 3 hours, but still there were some BNVs who were found dissatisfied as their achievements were not fully narrated.

In the presentation of the volunteers from the twenty two districts of Andhra Pradesh, trained at APARD, and involved in the planning and development of their respective villages, there was a stunning vision of the revelation of a huge promise and immense hope from/in the AP experiment of scaling up the Cheeded experiment to seventy eight gram

panchayats, This was the loud message that was beamed in the Video conference with the BNVs of the 22 districts held from the Video conferencing facility at APARD. In every one of these villages, there are trained BNVs, ranging between twenty to fifty depending on the size of the Gram Panchayat and all of them within two to three months of their training have great stories of achievements to share.

The training that emphasized values and morality coupled with the objectives of all the development schemes of the govt has triggered their imagination to several of the social ills afflicting their communities from ages like alcoholism to migration to school drop outs to issues of the rural economy and issues of governance and planning. The way in which they put to good use the institutions of the gram sabha, gram panchayat and the instruments of committees for resolving issues amicably and in a disciplined and planned manner was amazing, nay unimaginable. They went to the extent of confronting the entrenched power structures and brought them to fall in line with their development agenda.

Village after village reported that they had cleaned up the streets, removed garbage, cleaned up tanks, laid out approach roads through shramdan and at times with their own hard earned money contributed. Some of them identified destitute families with single women headed households with dependents for whom the PDS rice was insufficient. The volunteers contributed the deficit amount of rice to each of these families to ensure they had three meals every day. In one of the villages, the Committee constituted by the Volunteers confronted the local politician who had been occupying the govt built community hall and was using it as his personal cattle shed and dung cake fuel storage house. They managed to retrieve the building. The politician got it cleaned, painted and handed it over to the Community. For the last twenty three years nobody could get that building back to the community despite several

efforts of the successive gram panchayats' office bearers, says the present Sarpanch.

Several of the volunteers are planning to set up alternative sources of energy for lighting up their villages seeking funds from govt schemes. Some are planning for solar street lighting and some even for solar cookers and lighting even for their homes. Long standing disputes between various sections in the village have been resolved and amity restored.

In some gram panchayats political supporters of such diverse political hues of different political parties were made to toe the development agenda set up by the BNVs from plans arrived at in wards sabhas and gram sabhas conducted for identifying the needs of the habitations. The BNVs have managed to get all the departments at the mandal level to respond to the unfulfilled requests of the community. Several of them have got the administration to identify and notify place for burial grounds, play grounds and some got the buses to ply to their villages. Almost all the villages are reporting efforts to weed out belt shops (liquor vending shops) and many have succeeded in closing them down. Some have banned the sale of pan and ghutka in the village shops. Many reported a 100 % ISLs coverage.

Many have approached the administration for construction of drainage lines. One of the villages has included individual soak pits for every household as it's goal and they are confident of achieving it shortly. In some villages open air libraries are commissioned. The magazines and newspapers are kept in a small room until the evening and they are brought to the choupal built around a tree in the evening when a large group enjoys silent reading. After they finish for the day the material is put back in the room by a BNV incharge of the task.

All the BNVs are instilled with "volunteerism" in the APARD's training program facilitated by resource persons as varied as

psychologists from Osmania University , Brahma Kumaries, the Lead India Foundation started by Abdul Kalam ,the former President of India, veteran activist journalists active and progressive sarpanches and of course our own faculty at APARD.

The most important dimension of this experiment is that all these volunteers get no financial support or honoraria from any source whatsoever. On the contrary, they spend their own money for expenses to give contributions to various causes as and when required. They have proved that village communities are not dormant nor are they incapable of solving their problems nor afraid of facing up to the power brokers' thuggery. They have amply proved that they can actualize the long unfulfilled dreams of their community that would surely lead to improve the quality of living in rural Andhra Pradesh. One incredible development APARD noticed is the healthy working relationships that emerged between the elected representatives and BNVs contrary to the earlier apprehensions of conflicts and confrontations.

The journey so far is only with commas and looking forward to hear a longer list from BNVs,

The APARD team.