

Story of SURSARDHAM Starts from NOVI MI USA

On 26th Jan. 2001 a big earthquake jolted the Kutch in Gujarat India. We were in Orissa, and we were about to end our trip in India. We shorten our other programs and decided to visit the area before we returned to USA. What we saw was well known. It changed our thinking forever and we realized that difference between the victims and us is only we have roof over our head and they not only lost roof but hope as well. We decided to do some thing with our limited resources; we decided to help at least one family. How to select that family was a big question, as we had no direct contact with any grieved family.

We knew Manav Kalyan Trust (MKT). We contacted Mr. Lallu Bhai Desai Managing Trustee of MKT. Lucky for us he was in search of tents for victims, was unable to get them quickly. It became clear to us we may be able to get these tents from Pilakhua in UP. He wanted to buy 100 we added 4 from our side and sent 104 tents to Kutch in two weeks time. This was a short-term solution for housing needs.

Our dream of helping one family with a permanent home was not fulfilled, back in USA people in various cities collected lot of money but did not have first hand eyewitness account. We filled that gap and again contacted MKT but as they were busy in helping victims did not reply for few months and in the mean time we decided to help hundred people and filled one demand for it with agencies that collected money. My Civil Engineering training became handy as I can design; calculate the cost of an earthquake resistance home. Our initial effort did not bear any results but our persistence paid in long run. After eight months MKT was also approached by some residents of Kedia Nagar in Rapar sub division of Kutch District. They had bought a piece of land near by and wanted to get away from congested place where they lost their homes. With a stroke of luck India Development and Relief Fund (IDRF) accepted our proposal for 100 homes village and sanctioned \$50,000. But condition was I should act as Project Director and stay there in India. We committed our selves Umesh as Project Director and Rashmi as Project Coordinator.

Back in USA we researched and found a similar scheme is under review for Turkey Earthquake of 2000 by Prof Jan Wampler an Architect by profession, of MIT Cambridge MA. We were frequently traveling to Boston to see our newborn Grand Daughter Meghan. We took advantage of this and had quite a good exchange of ideas with Dr. Wampler about what we wanted and how we wanted to make a change in life of earthquake victims with a difference.

As we were preparing to go to India and take charge of the project we got some monetary help from our family and friends as well, from Rotary Club of Novi, and Active Fiends of The Homeless (AFOTH). In last week of Jan 2002 we went there, our design was rejected in subsequent meeting with villagers, we agreed as they will be living in these homes and hence homes had be of their liking, but we saw that design should be earthquake resistant. Agreeable plan was made and a blue print of homes layout was developed and approved, it took quite a while from our point of view but in Indian context it was done as quickly as possible; in 6weeks. The Ground breaking was done in March end. It was decided once money had been allotted for various activities MKT would look after routine supervisions, as we had no knowledge of local language, customs of Gujarat. But bank A/c will have Umesh as cosigner with MKT's Teja Bhai. Villagers became 114 instead of original 100 promised but MKT said we should not worry about it, as they will adjust from their overhead cost of 5%. We stayed in India almost 83 days and visited some other social work contacts in many states.

We got quite a shock when estimate of home came to our notice. It was costing some \$1700 per house and we had only \$500 to give them. As these people lost not only their homes but also their livelihood as well, Government grant was not uniform and will be available in five installments and calculation was based on the damage to the houses. These people can come up with some labor portion of estimate, which is quite high about \$700. But to our surprise we got help from unknown quarters Discipleship Center of Delhi were looking for a project of 100 homes and wanted to help to the tune of \$500 for concrete and blocks for walls. We convinced them as home are joint together there will be saving in wall as they are shared walls. And they agreed to do the all 114 homes.

Unique ness about this project are, many but to mention few here would not be out of place. The money we are giving to victims will be returned to village fund in ten years and money thus collected will be used to start new ventures. Start few companies like water supply and construction company electric company to take care of maintenance, supply electricity to village. Homes are all in the joint names of husband and wife. There will be 100% employment with in village. There will be a library, school, and daycare for children, primary health care center, yoga center for health etc. Solar street lights, solar Chula (cooker) for everybody, desalination stilts for water purifications. By the way various Government departments or research organizations with in Gujarat already promised all these things. Even central Government home ministry dept. had promised help in building roads, school, community building and water supply. We have to make project reports and cost estimates and come up with subsidy money and or 10% of total costs of the various projects. (This is our present need for more money). Lot of meetings was done separately with women man and children to gauge their needs so that these can be incorporated in plans. By the way our son in celebrating his daughter's birth with the villagers donated money to take care of children park equipments.

At present 114 homes are fully completed. By the way we have promised five years of our time for the cause of Sursardham infrastructure and train the folks to run their own affairs afterwards if villagers are willing. Even now we do things differently. We only provide guidance, direction information, and talk to authorities on their behalf villagers themselves have to do every thing else. So far we have collected and spent \$119,000 equivalent in Indian rupees and US dollars. **For other infra structure we will need additional minimum of 150,000 dollars. Excluding villagers labor cost. We had so far have commitment from people about \$ 40,000.**

Work for second stage started on 17th July 2003. As we got a grant from Net Scout company of Massachusetts and matching grant from IDRF again for Street lights and solar chulas. We will get there with the help of god unforeseen hand and persons like you. Construction of Community hall and Rain Water storage tank started on 8/12/03 which will be costing us 11,00,000 Rs. (about \$26,000) and will be complete before 12/31/303.

We were fortunate to meet twice with the Chief Minister (CEO) of Gujarat State during our April-June 2003 trip and he also promised us help for road and school and water line from the Narmada which luckily passes through our land. As he promised to visit our village during first quarter of 2004, Government Machinery will expedite our request for various projects like road, water connection. Water tank can also be constructed at Sursardham. 6 Street Lights were already sanctioned for Sursardham and rest 14 will be done this year by GEDA. Street Names are all decided and paints color for outside walls and inside plaster which we could not do before because of lack of funds, soon going to be completed with generous help of our son, brother and IDRF matching funds and friends like you.

The story is not complete yet and it can not be completed by us as it could be further written and will be revised many times in future by us and residents of Sursardham together and of course your input who are reading this will be most valuable in terms of help be it financial, emotional or suggestive. Hence your input in any form will be valuable and will be evaluated and adopted if is consented by residents.

To Be Continued.....

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