

Back from Asmoli !

Visiting our project in the months of February-March was my usual habit during the last 12 years. During this period, in north India, the winter is coming to an end and the weather is pleasant. From April until the end of August, the temperature becomes warmer (it can go up to 45° C !) and without the electricity, it is difficult to stay on for a longer period. However, this year, I was in the project in July-August, an experience altogether different from the other visits...

The public supply of electricity, as I see during the 10 years has not improved, 8 hours of power distribution out of 24. One week during the night and the other week during the day. During the night shift the electricity comes around 10.00 pm. The night shift is mainly useful for farmers, who have to water their agricultural field. Villagers mostly use home made kerosene lamp in the evening for the light. This year, I was surprised to see solar panels in the villages ! I was told that some of the SHG members have



This is Saint-Anthony's School after the rain...
During the monsoon season, the children cannot use the playground because the mud is wet.

taken loan to buy solar panels which will give better possibility for their children to do their study at home. This seemed to be a positive change in the villages !

Early monsoon in India this year was believed to be the heaviest in 80 years. The heavy rain, in the north eastern state of *Uttaranchal* (adjacent to Uttar Pradesh, where Saint-Anthony's School is situated) caused heavy floods. People in that region were caught up in floods which washed away homes, roads



It is always a great pleasure for me to meet students and teachers and discuss the future developments of the school with them.

and bridges. The damage was so extensive that military forces had to be sent to rescue people trapped over these regions and the death toll raised up to 1000.

Having a heavy rain in the early morning means holiday for the school. I was happy to hear that normally it doesn't happen more than twice a year ! On this day, the school bus cannot reach the villages which are flooded, the parents start to call the office staff from 5.00 AM, inquiring about the situation. After the rain the hot sun shows up in the sky and



dries up the villages in few hours time and life is back to normal. The school playground collects the water from the primary section and looks like a big swimming pool after the rain. During the monsoon season, the children cannot use the playground because the mud is wet. When the building construction will be completed, we will have to find a permanent solution to this problem.

August 15 was the 67th Independence day of India, children were eagerly awaiting for this day. Unfortunately it rained a lot that day. The flag was hoist around 9:00 am followed by a beautiful cultural programs prepared by the children and the teachers. After the programs, all were given some snacks and all the staff had lunch together !

Building Construction

You may remember the building plan of the 2nd wing of block « B » of Saint-Antony's School that we published in « ACB News 37 ». Since then, the work has progressed well.

The construction work is given on labour contract (*we provide the materials to the contractor who is in charge of the construction work*). In this way, we make sure that the



We are financing this building work with the collaboration of the BESIX Foundation



The second wing of block «B» (secondary school) is growing fast. The roof casting of the first floor is completed.



The ambiance in the school has changed from last time, children are growing bigger and smarter. They are competent, can stand high and speak well. The first batch is preparing for the Board exams (CBSE) at the end of this academic year.

materials used for the building are of good quality. The architect makes regular site visit and supervise the work. A mason from our side is also on the site to verify if the work is done properly on a daily basis. The staff who take care of the building work told me that this time they are very happy with the performance of the contractor who himself is working on the site with the labourers. If everything goes as planned, the class rooms will be ready for the newcomers in the next academic section.

How far will it take us ?

The *National Bank for agricultural and rural development* (NABARD) promotes the development of the villagers through micro credit programs in rural India. The implementation of these projects are not effective because people who take up these projects do it for their personal benefits and no follow up is done. Due to this reason, NABARD looks out for NGOs who are genuine, who will carry out the programs in the villages and produce better result.

A long time ago, GMVS (*Œuvre des pains India*) had applied for a project in the Asmoli region. Early this year, we finally got the financial sanctioning for this project... not only for Asmoli, but also for Bahjoi ! We didn't apply for a project in the Bahjoi area but the coordinator of NABARD for the region proposed us to start one. The duration of one project is 3

years and during these 3 years, we will have to create 100 SHGs (*Self Help Groups*), link them with the local bank, take loans for the group, return money, etc. The financial assistance that NABARD gives for a project is 9000 euro in three years time. An expected 1200-1400 women (*families*) are expected to benefit from this project.

Bahjoi is 70 km from Asmoli, it is a region consisting of remote villages with majority of the population having neither skills nor land. Proper education for their children, health care, flush toilet, electricity, all these basic facilities are not yet part of their life. Most of the people don't know to read and write, it looks more or less similar to what we found in the area of Dugawar/Asmoli when we started to work here 10 years ago.

We know, because of our experience in the Asmoli region, all the difficulties we will encounter in order to get the confidence of the people living in this new project area. Poor people are kept ignorant and they are suspicious of the outsiders, it takes a long time to make them understand the living conditions they are in and the need for change for a better life.

Our first plan for the starting of this new project was to transfer members of the staff from Asmoli along with some newly appointed people. While discussing this idea, our staff was of the opinion to first train new workers with them for some weeks and later send only them to the new project. The work in the As-

With *Molly*, a team of social workers and two members from the women's group from *Asmoli*, I went to the *Bahjoi* area to have an experience of it. The team gathered some local people and we had a meeting with them to introduce us, to explain our vision to them. We went to our new office hired in the area, met the local bank manager and asked his collaboration.



hope that both of them will start working to develop this region gradually. *Giri* has faced the challenges and he knows what to expect. He has both patience and competence.

One thing he asked us is about his children's education « *Where will I educate my daughter over there ?* ». We didn't answer him yet, but certainly will have to answer that question too as there is no proper school in the area... Build another *Saint-Anthony's School* ?

Marc Valentin

moli region has been going on well, so nobody wanted to disturb the organization.

Following their suggestion, we trained two staff and put them in the *Bahjoi* area. They tried a few months to mobilize the villages without success. Their complains were that, the villagers are illiterate, they don't understand anything and are not interested to do anything new. Example : « *I took one month to teach a young lady to sign 'z', the easiest letter of the alphabet ! When she came to open her bank account, she could not sign properly in the form presented by the bank... I cannot work like this* ».

Also, getting the people aware of their rights and empowering them bring more trouble for those who exploits the right of others. The village leaders, for example, were not interested in supporting us as they want to keep the villagers dependant of them.

Those workers resigned... Without having patience, commitment, nobody can continue to do this task, we cannot count on immediate results. Our experience shows that, only a few can do a good job in this field.

As the next step, *Molly* motivated one of our experienced worker of the *Asmoli* area, *Giri*, to take up the work in *Bahjoi*. He brought a friend of him ready to join and work with him. So, this new arrangement gives us more

Indian rupee plunges

The value of the Indian currency, the rupee, was around 70 for 1 EUR for quite some-



time. It fell to a life time low of 92 for 1 EUR at the end of August ! Hints that the Federal Reserve in the United States may soon shift to a tighter monetary policy have prompted investors to shift their money out of developing countries like India. But the Indian rupee has fallen the fastest in the last month, Investors felt that the Indian economy could be in even deeper trouble because of the accumulating signs of economic distress, slower growth, current-account deficit, higher oil prices and rising inflation in general, etc.

For *Œuvre des pains* it is an opportunity to make « more » with « less ». As you can imagine, regularly we are transferring money to India for the financing of the construction of the new wing of Saint-Anthony's School. In May, for 1000 bricks (5300 rupees) we had to send approximately 76 € but now only 63 € are needed. This is the same for labor and any locally produced items. Of course, petrol, electronics items or any items not produced in India, price remain high.

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