

Bharati Integrated Rural Development Society (BIRDS)

Bharati Integrated Rural Development Society (BIRDS) is a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) registered under Societies Registration Act 21 of 1860, in the year 1991. Its registration number is 262/-1, dated Nov. 28, 1991. It is also registered under Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) of 1976, on May 16, 1994. It has Income Tax (IT) exemption under Sections 12A and 80G.

The objectives of BIRDS, as listed in its bylaws are:

- 1) To educate the rural poor through formal and non-formal education.
- 2) To act as a liaison between the Indian and State of Andhra governments and the rural poor and to inform the rural poor about various governmental programs intended to help them.
- 3) To provide opportunities for the development of village artisans.
- 4) To undertake land-based projects for the benefit of small and marginal farmers.
- 5) To establish homes for the aged, child laborers, widows, and the disabled.
- 6) To undertake women' welfare programs.
- 7) To organize self-help groups for poor women to help them achieve economic independence.
- 8) To improve the health conditions of the rural poor.
- 9) To provide a low cost housing program for the poor.
- 10) To preserve the environment in targeted areas.
- 11) To promote sustainable agriculture programs and organic farming systems.

BIRDS came into existence with the initiative of its founder and current Executive Director, V. Paul Raja Rao, who has been working with the poorest of the poor in Kurnool District of Andhra Pradesh since 1985. Grass-roots work began first in Midthur mandal, one of the most backward and remote areas in the district which was receiving no voluntary service organization. Over the past 28 years, BIRDS has received continual recognition for its good work and is one of the leading NGOs in the district today.

BIRDS began by working with meager funds raised mainly from personal savings and small donations until 1994. It started with an annual budget of 40,000 rupees (\$800 US) and in 2004 had grown to an annual budget of 120,000,000 rupees (\$2,400,000 US).

In 2001, construction began on a training center "farm" near the village of Muthyalapadu, an hour southeast of the city of Nandyal where the BIRDS office is situated. A well was drilled on the property and small thatched roof open-air buildings were built for trainings, staff, and visitors, while construction began on a two story stucco administration/training building. Buildings that followed have included a two-story hostel for guests and trainees,

a dining hall/kitchen, a health clinic, two boarding homes for destitute children, and a small chapel.

The two Boarding Homes at BIRDS (one for boys and one for girls) provide room, board, medical care, and adult guidance for children who are orphaned or whose extended family cannot care for them. Approximately 200 children live at BIRDS at a time, attending school on campus, and learning to hope in the future, thanks to the sponsorship of donors in the US. Annual sponsorship for one student for a year is now \$240.

Following the sudden loss of funding and teachers in several village schools, on June 14, 2010 BIRDS opened a school for over 900 children ages PreK thru 10th class. Meeting initially in existing structures on campus, BIRDS completed a new high school building in 2012. Staffing of teachers and assistants at the school often comes from retired educators and others who are willing to work for less than other public schools will pay.

More recent community empowerment programs have included a well-water management programs, strategic pilot program on Adaption to Climate Change, Safe utilization of pesticides trainings, and a seed bank for farmers of native seeds which will generate their own seeds for future planting.

Teams of visitors from St. Mark Presbyterian Church, Portland, and the United Presbyterian Church of Albany, Oregon and other friends have traveled to the BIRDS training center often to partner with BIRDS in their efforts. Team projects have included medical and dental clinics in villages, trainings for Community Health Care workers, English Language tutoring for children, dry compost toilet building, trainings in depression and alcoholism, soap making and other cottage industry workshops, computer technology, water purification, and even cleaning the white wash off an old church. Team members live in the hostel at BIRDS which now has private baths and even air conditioning (when the electricity is on!). Over the years, close to 30 different people have made the journey to India from Oregon Churches. There are always opportunities for interested and able bodied folks to join with the teams.

For more information about BIRDS and photos of their children and programs please visit, www.birds-india.com, the US Website for East Coast sponsors. Also, please feel free to contact The Rev. Dr. Barbara Campbell with any questions at bjcam33@gmail.com or 503-504-3340.