

Sankalpa Newsletter



Sankalpa is a student organization committed to socio-economic development in India. It continues to grow through untiring actions of a motivated group of individuals with diverse backgrounds who are determined to make a difference.

NIGHTMARE ON 411 WOODY HAYES

KEERTHI T. RAJAMANI



It was a cold depressing Friday in middle of wintry October in Ohio. I labored home from lab after yet another day of misery at work.

It capped off a wretched week of failed experiments interspersed with missed free lunches and raging arguments with the boss. However, this was nothing compared to the events that were going to unfold in the next 12 hours. Just as I settled down to have the 3 day old curry that's been sitting in the rickety old fridge, the phone rings. I usually don't answer the phone from numbers I don't recognize. But today was different. I pick up the phone, listen and let out a massive curse as I hang up. This can't be happening. It's Friday night for crying out loud. **You had the entire week, you can't abandon ship now.** Anxiety was beginning to kick in. I forcibly downed the last few servings of the almost unpalatable curry, make a few calls and go to bed thinking about the impending doom.

It's a filthy mess. There was trash everywhere. It looked like an unannounced hurricane had just swept through the place. With no one to help, I began to clear the debris and move things around. And that's when she appeared, like a ghostly silhouette. If there was one person who I didn't want be around, it was her. As luck would have it, I had to deal with her for the rest of the day. I begrudgingly greet her, secretly wishing how she had broken her leg so I didn't have to put up with her. Just when I thought it couldn't get any worse, there they were the inspectors.

While I was desperately trying to convince everything was clean and safe, a motley gang of kids still hung-over and possibly drunk show up, almost an hour late. We weren't ready. People began to cue up, complaints start to trickle and one guy almost gets into a fight with our guy. It was chaos at the back. Someone had just accidentally set themselves on fire. And suddenly the whole place was on fire. I pass out momentarily. All I could hear was a faint siren. It got extremely loud and I woke up with a violent shudder only to find my alarm blaring mockingly at my ashen face. If you haven't figured out the incoherent rambling, this is what every game day coordinator goes through a night before football fundraiser. At Sankalpa, besides reviewing proposals you also get the opportunity to experience such nightmarish situations. Well, in reality it is nothing close to what I had just described. It does not matter if one were up all night partying or spending the Friday at work, folks show up at 8 AM on Saturday morning just like they do for work without ever complaining. Such is their dedication to serve! And finally nothing comes close to satisfaction than gorging on that greasy pizza from Adriatico's after a soul sapping 12 hour shift, washed down with cold beer and the realization that the experience wasn't a nightmare after all.

About Author: Keerthi is a post-doctoral researcher at the Michigan State University. He was involved in Sankalpa in several leadership roles including President while pursuing his PhD in Neuroscience.

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A YEAR WITH SANKALPA

NEERAJ JOSHI



It all started in the week I landed in Columbus. I heard about Sankalpa from one of the committee member living next door. That and the lure of Indian food being being served led me to attend Sankalpa's welcome meeting. The moment I met Sankalpees there and listened to their motivating ideas it felt good, it felt right. Learning about Sankalpa and its activities made me feel that this was something I'd be interested in. So I decided to volunteer for the the upcoming Football fundraiser since it sounded really fun and believe me it was! That was the first time I got to go to the Horseshoe and see the fans in scarlet and grey cheering. I decided to volunteer on all possible game days but never to eat salted pretzels ever again during my breaks. (Honestly those are the saltiest things I have ever had or perhaps... (P2)

MONEY MATTERS

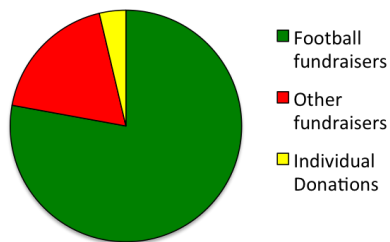
SUSHANT MORE



The first fund-raising activity of Sankalpa took place in 2001 and was fondly called 'Chaat for Charity'. The members sold Bhelpuri at a campus festival and made a respectable profit. The money raised was used towards rehabilitation of Gujarat earthquake victims. Sankalpa has come a long way since our humble beginnings fourteen years ago. The student involvement, the amount of funds raised and the social impact Sankalpa has been able to achieve in India have all steadily increased.

Currently, majority of Sankalpa funds come through volunteering at the football

2013 Funds Distribution



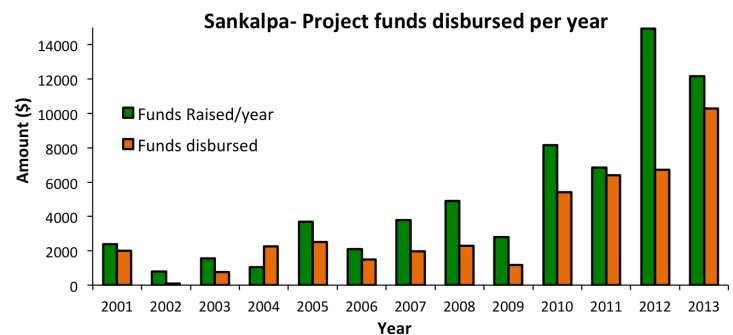
stadium at OSU. Sankalpa volunteers work at a food stall at the OSU stadium on game days. An amount proportional to sales is credited to Sankalpa's account. Till date, Sankalpa has disbursed \$47,462 towards developmental projects in India. Since its inception, Sankalpa has funded

Sankalpa's Fundraisers (Clockwise): 1. Henna tattoos at the Columbus International Festival. 2. Preparing Gujia for ISA-Holi event. 3. Painting fundraiser- a collaboration with FABI-GSO. 4. Raghu Dixit concert- fundraiser in collaboration with AID. 5. Football Fundraiser. 6. Stall at COBCA's Durga Puja.



a total of 36 projects in diverse geographical areas across the country. With a relatively small amount of money Sankalpa has been able to touch many lives. Last year alone, Sankalpa contributed \$10,285 for developmental work, which was the highest amount for a single year so far. Though Sankalpa has grown over the years, it has remained true to its original mission of identifying and supporting small grassroots level projects that envision simple, yet sustainable solutions to existing problems faced by communities. Impressed by the dedication of Sankalpa volunteers and the impact Sankalpa has been able to achieve, many donors have generously contributed monetarily for Sankalpa's cause. We would like to take

this opportunity to thank all our donors! In order to promote individual donations, Sankalpa soon plans to apply for 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status.



At present, the wire transfer fees and other related bank charges constitute a major chunk of Sankalpa's miscellaneous expenses. Past Sankalpa members are now well established in India and there is a momentum for initiating a Sankalpa chapter in India! This will curtail bank charges, streamline funds transfers... (P3)



Neeraj at a football fundraiser (above) and at the Sankalpa stall during OSU-Dandiya (below).



A year with Sankalpa (contd. from P1)

...would have!) It was also fun selling items at Sankalpa stalls at OSU-Dandiya, Durga Pooja and Columbus International Festival.

As my involvement in these fundraising activities increased, I also started getting curious about where all these raised funds go. And so after a few fundraisers, I also got involved in project review and fund disbursement activities. I started attending the biweekly meetings to learn about projects funded through Sankalpa. Soon I was reviewing a project proposal for training rural women in garment making. I learnt many useful things interacting with the organization. I have

made some good friends and nice memories at OSU through Sankalpa. I would certainly recommend all the freshers to check out how good it feels doing good (than just being good if you think you are). It's a strong bond that has developed. As I remember hearing in the welcome meeting- "Once a Sankalpee, always a Sankalpee!" I will continue to stay in touch and be involved in Sankalpa in any capacity possible.

About Author: Neeraj has been an enthusiastic member of Sankalpa since 2013. He has a Masters in Industrial and Systems Engineering from OSU.

THIS TRIP BACK HOME CHANGED MY LIFE!

SANTOSH PITLA



They say everything happens for a reason, I usually don't believe in it but was forced to do

so after my accidental trip to India in March 2014. At the beginning of this year I had to go back to India because of some visa issues and was not sure when I would return to the US. However, I was excited about the trip back home and wanted to make the most of it. I got an

Ananthapur district is one of the driest regions of Andhra Pradesh with scanty rainfall. The fact that the villagers know nothing other than farming makes it even more challenging for envisioning an improved life. There is no other source of income for villagers except the income from farming. The farmers I met were a motivated bunch and were looking for opportunities to improve their lives and the productivity of the village as a whole.

Sankalpa funded a project in 2013 on good agricultural practices through RALHWS under the supervision of Mr. Sanjeevu, President of the NGO. I saw the funds working and impacting multiple villages and hundreds of farmer families. One of the successes of the project was the setup of a vermicompost bin that

villages. Interacting with farmers and talking to Mr. Sanjeevu motivated me to start my own initiative called "Vision Model Villages - Give Back and Pay Forward". As a part of this initiative I was able to raise approx. \$1000 through my friends who wanted to give back. This initiative has been able to fund three different projects so far. The first one involved setting up a Chemical Sprayer Cooperative with two sprayers.

With this Co-op, farmers can borrow a sprayer for chemical spraying at a small cost of Rs. 20 (approx. 40 cents). The sprayers are going to reduce the cost of production for the farmers while allowing them to spray their fields in a timely manner. Another important project that we were able to fund was training for the farmers in seed purification. The success of the project was evident as farmer families, volunteer farmers, agricultural scientists from universities and agricultural officers of the district came together for the program.

My association with Sankalpa helped me identify Mr. Sanjeevu, who has dedicated 30 of years of his life to developing villages across Ananthapur district. Collaborating with such an individual can make a real difference in the lives of farmer families in India. I hope to continue this effort of giving back and paying forward for the progress of Indian villages.

About author: Santosh is an Assistant Professor at University of Nebraska-Lincoln. He started working with Sankalpa during his post-doc at OSU and has continued his role as a Sankalpee recruiting new members and reviewing project proposals.



Santosh interacting with farmers of Raghavampalli and Thambapuram village, Andhra Pradesh, India. Making a list of questions, comments and thoughts of the villagers on current and future developmental initiatives

opportunity to visit some villages that allowed me to do what I always wanted to do, interact with farmers and listen to the pressing issues hindering farm productivity and quality of life.

I went to Raghavampalli village in Ananthapur District, Andhra Pradesh to visit a beneficiary of Sankalpa. My ultimate objective of the trip was to compile a report on the progress of the project that Sankalpa funded and evaluate the utilization of funds. I soon realized that I got more than what I bargained for, never thought I would find myself in the middle of hundreds of farmers who were enthusiastic and motivated to improve their quality of life despite the challenging situation.

they are actively using to generate compost. This compost was used as fertilizer on the farms. The vermicomposting bin is saving around Rs.2500 (approx. \$40) in fertilizer costs every cropping season for the farmers of Raghavampalli village. This is one of the best examples of a sustainable solution coming to fruition. This is exactly what Sankalpa expects to see from its beneficiaries and is always interested in supporting projects of this nature moving forward.

After seeing Sankalpa's small yet impactful funds working for the benefit of farmer families in India, I realized the importance of a dollar and how small dollar amounts can change the lives in

Money Matters (contd. from P2)

...from US to India and highly facilitate monitoring of existing and future projects. It seems like the most exciting days lie ahead of us and hope that more people join us to help make a difference!

About Author: Sushant is a PhD candidate in Physics who acted as Treasurer for Sankalpa in the academic year 2013-14. He continues as project coordinator in 2014-15.



From left to right: 1. Vermicompost bin. 2. Mr. Sanjeevu holding final product of vermicomposting. 3. Sprayer from the cooperative in action. 4. Seed purification training program.

PARTICIPATE, SHAPE AND BENEFIT

IZQUEIRDO D.C.

Every citizen of India is a stakeholder in its governance. Public participation is a critical aspect of democracy. This form of participatory democracy ensures transparency and accountability and has seen success in many countries like England, South Africa and the EU. Policy makers rely on public opinion to draft, shape and prepare a bill before it is passed into a law. The legislative process of creating a new law begins with identifying an issue, formulating the bill and debating and discussing its merits, before being put to vote. As part of this process a lawmaker who introduces a bill in the parliament needs to publish the draft bill in the official gazette and invite the public for discussion, although he is not statutorily obliged. Since there is no statutory mandate it robs the general public of voicing their opinion on issues that directly affect them. I am obliged to mention that there have been instances where the public has successfully voiced their opinion and effected changes in legislation however those cases are disproportionately outweighed by legislations that are passed without enough scrutiny.

I will offer one example of how public participation in a legislative process can affect transparency and efficiency. A case in point in favor of public participation is the formulation and the subsequent passing of the right to information act. Unsurprisingly, this bill was not drafted by an elected lawmaker but by a public interest group called National Campaign for People's Right to Information (NCPRI). The organization is represented by a cross

section of society, from social activists to academics and civil servants. The bill was drafted in 1996 and finally introduced in the parliament in 2002. This bill was a weakened version of the original draft proposed by NCPRI; however sustained pressures from several civil society groups lead the parliamentary panel overseeing this bill to invite members of the public for consultation. Subsequent discussions that ensued resulted in the acceptance of most amendments and lead to the passage of the bill in its current form. Had the public not engaged a watered down version of the bill would have passed rendering it essentially less effective.

Unfortunately there are numerous other bills of vital significance to the citizenry that have passed with minimum transparency and outrageous degree of impudence on part of the government. Participation is not restricted to citizens living in India. As part of the Indian diaspora, individuals like us can also actively engage in voicing our opinions on issues that interest us. Websites such as prsindia.org, which by the way keeps track of all the bills tabled in the parliament, provide an excellent forum for discussion and debate. Controversies surrounding recently passed bills such as the biotechnology regulatory authority of India bill, jan lokpal bill and the land acquisition and resettlement bill have highlighted the need for openness, transparency and accountability. As such mandating citizen engagement in the legislative process will improve governance and credibility that is so lacking in our democratic system.

CALENDAR

2014 Fundraising Schedule		
Date	Event	Volunteer hours
Sept	vs. Virginia	4PM - 12AM
Sept	vs. Kent State	8AM - 4PM
Sept	vs. Cincinnati	2PM - 10PM
Oct 18	vs. Rutgers	11:30 AM - 7:30PM
Nov 01	vs. Illinois	4PM - 12AM
Nov 22	vs. Indiana	TBA
Nov 29	vs. Michigan	TBA

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