

In 2009, The Village Project – called ‘Empowering Rural India’ – was initiated, where we decided to “adopt” one village at a time and work with them with the objective of eradicating poverty and unemployment through a three-pronged strategy – Education, Infrastructure and Empowerment. Each of these components requires us to work from scratch, since the villages we choose are extremely rudimentary in their development.

The focus of our work over the last three years has been a village called ‘Kumbharghar’ situated 3 hours outside the city of Mumbai. This village is what is referred to as an ‘adivasi wadi’ populated by local tribal people. The facilities at this village were basic at best; there were very few solid brick houses, most of the others being stick and mud huts.

The plan for Kumbharghar was initially to provide the village with the basics of sanitation and housing. Work began on construction of a toilet block for the village, with the cement-bricks being made by our students from scratch. Our students work tirelessly, but as the work progressed, we realized that a large amount of manpower would be needed to finish the work.

Given that our project goals for the village tied in nicely with the UN Millennium Development Objectives as well as the RoundSquare IDEALS, the Kumbharghar site became the site for the December 2011 Regional RoundSquare Service Project, with seven schools from India and the Middle-East participating. The level of engagement of each participant was immense and we were able to complete the block of toilets during the project.

The success of the Regional project showed us that we were ready for bigger things. With that in mind, we ramped up the work in Kumbharghar. We began working on sustainable architecture in the form of ‘stabilised mud bricks’ and began work on building houses for the villagers. As we fine-tuned the process of making the mud-bricks, we were able to work faster and more efficiently. The houses stood the test of time and weather, braving the monsoons with no damage.

The next step was building a school so that we could provide education to the students of the village. This would be a massive undertaking, requiring thousands of bricks to be made and hours of work from digging the foundation and laying the walls, laying the bricks and so on. The size of the project was bigger than anything else we had undertaken previously, which is why we were thrilled when the RoundSquare decided to partner with us for their December 2013 International Service project. We had students from Peru, South Africa, Australia, Canada, Germany & India.