

DAIS – Indo-Portuguese Service Project in Hassachipatti



Two students from the Core Team of **Empowering Rural India** – Mark Fernandez and Sanjana Purker – were in Hassachipatti with six students from St. Dominic's International School, Portugal from 29 – 31 October, 2011 for the DAIS Service Programme with the Village Development Project. The three day trip to Matheran was the first half of the service project for the Portuguese students and was a very productive and fruitful one.

The visitors were apprehensive at first but were, nonetheless, very enthusiastic about getting some good hard work done and did not take long to acclimatize themselves to their new surroundings. They worked on the path leading to the village on the first and the last day. The aim was to construct a concrete path so that it is easier for the villagers to use it during the monsoons.



Some students mixed the cement and carried it with the help of a human chain to a spot where some of the other students took over.



The mason demonstrated how to pour the cement to cover the rocks evenly and everybody took turns at smoothing it out with the help of a few tools. The enthusiasm of the Portuguese students was so infectious that even the young children from the village volunteered to help. Their assistance was received with much delight by everyone.

Day 2 was a grueling one where the students trekked down to the village to work on the computer laboratory for the villagers. They worked on building the walls of the laboratory with bricks and cement. Majority of the work involved lifting bricks from the bags to the site and then cementing them using the simple tools provided or even resorting to using one's good old hands out of sheer enthusiasm!



One group was in charge of ensuring a steady supply of bricks; another had to arrange these bricks in piles so that they could be easily accessed by the bricklayers; a third had to constantly refill the cement and the last group had to lay the bricks. Of course, they switched roles periodically so that all of them were trained in construction skills.

In three days, they managed to complete five large steps along the path down to Hassachipatti and the four walls of the computer laboratory to about four feet. The Portuguese students were fascinated with the flora and fauna, especially the monkeys, and were extremely receptive to Indian culture. They even managed to make a few new friends from the village, joining them in climbing up trees and swinging from the branches!

Here's what Sanjana and Mark had to say --

Though the work was tiring, it was also rewarding. Working through the blazing heat of the day without any break and that, too, at a job that none of us have ever done before was a very enriching experience. It offered us a window through which we could catch a glimpse into the lives of the underprivileged.

----- Sanjana

The sense of gratitude for the cushy life that we now enjoy and the empathy we felt towards the tough lives that so many of our compatriots experience, will prevent us from isolating ourselves in our air- conditioned ivory towers and motivate us to make a difference.

----- Mark