

## A Friend in Need

### Spandana distributes food and school supplies to regions affected by A.P.'s worst floods in recent history

KURNOOL, Oct. 18, 2009 - When Spandana volunteers arrived in the district of Kurnool, the signs of the devastation that had taken place were everywhere. A thick layer of silt covered buildings and automobiles. The dull stench of mildew filled the air. Lorries carried garbage away from the city center. The damage caused by the worst floods in Andhra Pradesh in over 100 years was calamitous, and masses of people in the region were left without food, clean water, or shelter.

Spandana has operated its microfinance program in these regions of Andhra Pradesh for over four years, and many of those who lost their livelihoods in the floods were longtime clients. The company's Managing Director, Ms. Padmaja Reddy, decided to donate Rs. 2.5 crore worth of rice to the victims, in an effort to ease the burden of recovery.

It was early afternoon by the time seventy-five Spandana employees arrived to a police training academy just outside of town to

distribute the food they had brought. Twelve lorries loaded with 5,155 quintals of rice and 350 quintals of red gram daal sat lined up in the shade, while over five hundred women waited for their share – some alone, some with small children, some pregnant. The women had arrived early in



the morning and had waited for hours in the hot sun, desperate for the food that would help sustain their families for the coming month. Many of the families traveled long distances to receive their handout and were slowly rebuilding their lives and homes as the floods receded.

“At first it was chaotic, but soon we managed to arrange the women into queues,” said Syed Shoebullah, an employee stationed at Spandana’s head office in Hyderabad who had come along to help. “They were very appreciative of Spandana’s help. They had waited hours for



this food, and they believed that it was worth the wait.”

A week before, Spandana’s Credit Assistants had handed out coupons good for one 25-kg bag of rice and a portion of daal to all clients at weekly repayment meetings. Now, the women were exchanging those coupons for the food. Spandana was also donating 50,000 notebooks to schools in the area.



Present with Ms. Reddy were Technical Education Minister Mr. Manikya Vara Prasad, Local District Collector Mr. Mukesh Kumar Meena, and several local legislators, who joined Ms. Reddy in addressing the crowds before the food was distributed. All those who spoke extended words of encouragement to those whose lives had been deeply affected by this natural calamity. The Ministers assured the audience that the government would do what it could to help restore normal life.

It took around two hours for the lorries to be emptied, even with five volunteers unloading each one. Police were on hand to help ensure an orderly distribution, and after

receiving their allotment, families began to leave the area and return to their homes.

The waters from the recent floods have receded, but the residents of Kurnool district, along with those of several neighboring districts, will be dealing with the damage caused by the floods for months. While the government of Andhra Pradesh is doing what it can, Spandana realizes that in times of calamity, private institutions like itself are called upon to do what they can to help those who are vulnerable restore their livelihoods.

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