

July 2007 Update on India Project

Following on from the initial report on our Indian village project, funded by our 2006 profit distribution, we are pleased to provide clients with an update on the building work. Before we do, a recap on the project.

Project Description

The project has two main objectives:

- a) To create a small tribal village on the tribal-owned tea plantation by building at least 12 houses for landless Adivasi families who will be employed on the estate.*
- b) Developing an Animal Husbandry programme that will enable the plantation to go organic.*

March 2007

7 Months after our visit we received the first update on the project from the Project Director, Stan Thekaekara. The delay was mainly due to the weather conditions in late 2006, which restricted access to the site for some months. Rather than edit the reports we received, we thought it better to simply use Stan's own words, inserting his images as appropriate....



The plantation overview



The site is ready

The work on the houses has begun in right earnest. Two close friends - Subhash an architect and Yogananda a structural engineer - who have been associated with our work for many years have helped us with the design and will be guiding us through the entire construction.

K.T. Subramanian, who manages the estate, is in charge of the whole project. He is assisted by committee of representatives from the different areas - it is their responsibility to ensure that we procure the best materials, negotiate proper work contracts, prices etc. Manoharan and I are also on this committee.

One of the first things that was decided was that the entire work would be done by a team of tribal masons who were trained by ACCORD (see www.adivasi.net) some years ago and now are a very professional and capable groups. This way a lot of the money spent will remain within the community. We are also using this opportunity to train a few more masons as part of the vocational training project of the school.



The Architect & Engineer



Leveling the Site

The basic building material that we are using is stabilised mud block or soil cement blocks. This is a technology developed years ago by the Indian Institute of Science as a low cost low energy building material and one that we have used a lot in many of our buildings.

The advantage of this is that it is labour intensive (again this is produced by another team of tribals who have been trained in the technology); it is sun dried and so does not require fuel to fire it and finally it is very weather resistant and so the walls do not require cement plastering which is a huge saving. Apart from all this it looks good!!



Making the Bricks – by hand!!!



The Bricks are ready

The roof will be tiles. We will be using a steel frame (though we would have preferred wood) because we have a serious termite problem in the estate and in most parts of Gudalur.

We plan to build 12 houses and a community centre with proper sanitation, drainage and an electrical fence around the village - because of the elephants!! We are exploring the possibility of installing a water turbine to generate electricity. Once the houses have come up and people have moved in we will put up the cattle sheds. We decided to wait primarily because the people will have to decide whether they want a common shed or individual sheds or a mix of both.

As for the progress - we have finished leveling the sites for all 12 houses and the community centre. The foundation of 4 houses up to the plinth level has been completed. Most of the mud blocks required have already been made. We aim to complete at least four if not more houses and the foundations of all the other houses by June before the rains begin.

The community centre for the village will be taken up after that. Work is progressing much faster than I anticipated. Having our tribal team undertake the work makes a huge difference, as they are as enthusiastic about it as we are and therefore work really hard.

Will keep you posted as the work develops.

With very warm regards

*Stan Thekaekara
Director
Just Change, India
Visiting Fellow, Skoll Centre for Social Entrepreneurship
Said Business School, Oxford University*

June 2007 – more from Stan

Let me take this opportunity to thank you once again for your generosity. I have no doubt that this project will make a huge difference to the way the estate is managed.

It is some time since we have been in touch. I am happy to say that the roof has gone up on four of the 12 houses. Foundations for another 2 have been completed. We will probably have to stop the work for the next 3 months as the monsoon is setting in. Having decided to build all 12 houses with our adivasi construction team has meant that the work goes more slowly but we have the advantage of being assured of quality. I have attached pictures of the 4 houses (one is a twin house).



A room with a view



A Twin House

This week we will be interviewing the families who are likely to stay on the plantation.

With warm regards and thanks once again for your support.

Stan and the Team

Summary

As you can see, the building work is progressing and it will not be long before the first families are able to move in to the new houses. We expect to receive further updates towards the end of 2007, once the rainy season has passed and building work has recommenced.

Further updates will be made available as soon as we receive more information and photos from Stan and the team.

All of us at Ethical Investors Group are so proud to be associated with the project, and once again we thank our clients for choosing us as their financial adviser.

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