

[Home \(http://www.southportvisiter.co.uk/\)](http://www.southportvisiter.co.uk/) [News](#)

[\(http://www.southportvisiter.co.uk/southport-news/\)](http://www.southportvisiter.co.uk/southport-news/) [Southport News](#)

[\(http://www.southportvisiter.co.uk/southport-news/southport-southport-news/\)](http://www.southportvisiter.co.uk/southport-news/southport-southport-news/)

Jade Wright visits vital environmental projects funded by Merseyside's generosity

May 17 2011

[\(http://www.southportvisiter.co.uk/environment/envrionmental-news/2011/05/17/\)](http://www.southportvisiter.co.uk/environment/envrionmental-news/2011/05/17/)

by Jade Wright, Midweek Visiter

IT'S the little red envelope that makes a huge difference. This week is Christian Aid week, and around Merseyside people are raising money to help those less fortunate. But where does the money actually go? And for those of us who don't have a fortune to spare, can a small amount really make any difference?

I travelled to India to see for myself the projects that receive your donations. I visited women's co-operative farming projects to see how every penny counts.

India is currently going through massive change. In rural areas, more and more people are turning to organic farming.

It's not a lifestyle choice – it's the only way they have to feed their families. In a country with 1.2 billion mouths to feed, farming is vital. The so-called 'Green Revolution' that started in the 1960s introduced high-input farming all over the country. In many regions it initially increased yields - but at a high cost. In the long term it caused erosion, severe water pollution, and ground water depletion. Now, the intensively farmed land lies barren, and people are having to find a new way. Or, as it happens, a much older one.

Farmers are returning to traditional methods. But this requires education, and funding.

Christian Aid is helping to fund the Deccan Development Society (DDS), a small charity in the Andhra Pradesh region of southern India, which provides micro-loans and education.

In Indian society, there was traditionally a caste system, which divided everyone into a hierarchy. At the bottom there is an underclass, the Dalits. While officially the caste system is now outlawed, Dalits are still excluded from public places and no-one will loan them money – except DDS.

“They cannot go into many shops and temples,” says PV Satheesh, the director of DDS. “They would never be allowed into people's houses. In many areas they are not even permitted to

make eye contact with someone from a higher caste. They would be expected to look at the floor while the other person walks past.”

Satheesh started DDS to help the most marginalised people in society have a voice.

“We looked at society, and the Dalits were the most marginalised group,” says Satheesh. “Then we looked and saw that those in rural areas were suffering more than those in the cities. Dalit women in rural areas were the most marginalised of all.”

DDS work with groups of Dalit women in rural villages, and using money from Christian Aid donations, they provide education and micro-loans to help set up small organic farms and related small businesses.

Laxmamma Begari , 45, was loaned money to buy 2 ½ acres of land. After receiving training, she now works as the seed keeper for her village, Humnapur.

“We had lost our traditional skills,” Laxmamma explains. “Generation after generation had passed down the knowledge of how to farm in the old ways. We passed down seeds from mother to daughter. My mother knew every seed and how to gather and keep it so it would germinate the next year.

“But then the new methods came. We were told to buy packet seeds (the plants from which do not produce seeds for the next year’s sowing) and chemical fertilisers. I worked as a labourer, and the first year the harvest was good. Then years went on and it was worse. They were having to put more fertiliser on the land each year. It got to the point where they were having to use four times the original amount of fertiliser.”

Laxmamma used to work as a casual labourer for farmers. As a single parent Dalit woman with two children and no land of her own, it was the only way to feed her family after her husband walked out. She would earn just two rupees a day (about three pence).

“In those days I had nothing,” she says, looking down at the floor. “I was just an agricultural labourer. I had no land and was a single woman living with my mother. When the costs went up, the farmers couldn’t afford to pay me.

“The green revolution told farmers to only grow one or two crops. But if the weather wasn’t kind to that one crop – if the rains were early or late – then they had nothing. There was a lot of shame. Some farmers committed suicide.”

In the last 10 years in India 250,000 farmers committed suicide.

“Many were ruined,” she continues. “People lost everything. As labourers we had nothing to lose, but we were hungry because there was no work and little food. The green revolution didn’t work. We had to go back to the old ways.”

Laxmamma created a pool of seeds to use in the traditional method. In two years she gathered

82 varieties. She bought a small patch of land to farm so she didn't have to work for landlords.

Each seed has a specific benefit – some will withstand heavy rainfall, some harvest early, some late, some withstand little water.

As well as helping Laxamma, the DDS investment has helped the fragile local economy. The seeds are kept in special baskets. These are made by Narsamma Erakololla, a grandmother in a nearby village.

“Before this, nobody cared for us and nobody would give us a loan,” says Narsamma, 65, referring to the caste system. “Nobody trusted us, even in the village. There were 10 families like us and altogether we got a cash loan from DDS of 20,000 rupees (£275) between us to weave baskets and pay back the loan. We have made so many grain baskets to help women in the villages near here to store seeds. This means that we can send our grandchildren to school.”

Narsamma can make four baskets a day. The materials cost 10 rupees (14p) and she sells them for 20 rupees (28p). She makes 50p a day, and from that, she is able to make repayments.

In a country where 50 pence a day is a good wage, it's easy to see how the money we put in those little red envelopes can go a long way. A loan of less than £30 to Narsamma's family has made all the difference. I feel ashamed, as I realise I probably waste that much every week on lunches and cups of coffee.

“Because we were very regular with our loan repayments we got the loans without paying interest,” says Narsamma, proudly. “It would be too difficult to even imagine life without access to those loans. I cannot say thank you enough.”

From around the web: (javascript:void(0))

[How to Fake a Clean House \(http://www.realsimple.com/home-organizing/cleaning/fake-clean-house-0000000001136/index.html\)](http://www.realsimple.com/home-organizing/cleaning/fake-clean-house-0000000001136/index.html) *(RealSimple.com)*

[9 Creative Gifts for Holiday Hosts \(http://www.realsimple.com/holidays-entertaining/gifts/hostess-gifts/10-creative-gifts-for-holiday-hosts-0000000048638/index.html\)](http://www.realsimple.com/holidays-entertaining/gifts/hostess-gifts/10-creative-gifts-for-holiday-hosts-0000000048638/index.html) *(RealSimple.com)*

[Look and Feel Great with Homemade Beauty Treatments \(http://couponshoebox.com/tips/look-and-feel-great-with-homemade-beauty-treatments/\)](http://couponshoebox.com/tips/look-and-feel-great-with-homemade-beauty-treatments/) *(Coupon Shoe Box)*

[Restaurants in Gulf Shores, AL \(http://traveltips.usatoday.com/restaurants-gulf-shores-al-28053.html\)](http://traveltips.usatoday.com/restaurants-gulf-shores-al-28053.html) *(USA Today)*

[How to Get Rid of Cigarette Smoke Fast \(http://www.ehow.com/how_7439858_rid-cigarette-smoke-fast.html\)](http://www.ehow.com/how_7439858_rid-cigarette-smoke-fast.html) *(eHow)*

You might also be interested in:

[Southport FC: Southport FC praying for reprieve after being relegated on goal difference](#)

(<http://www.southportvisiter.co.uk/southport-sport/southport-fc/2011/05/04/southport-fc-praying-for-reprieve-after-being-relegated-on-goal-difference-101022-28627119/>) *(Southport Visitor.co.uk)*

Southport News: Southport Food & Drink Festival 2011: full list of events

(<http://www.southportvisiter.co.uk/southport-news/southport-southport-news/2011/05/13/southport-food-drink-festival-2011-full-list-of-events-101022-28685101/>) *(Southport Visitor.co.uk)*

Southport News: 135 posts under threat at Southport College

(<http://www.southportvisiter.co.uk/southport-news/southport-southport-news/2011/05/13/135-posts-under-threat-at-southport-college-101022-28685047/>) *(Southport Visitor.co.uk)*

Everton FC News: Everton FC boss David Moyes confident on new Marouane Fellaini deal

(<http://www.liverpooldailynews.co.uk/everton-fc/everton-fc-news/2011/05/14/everton-fc-boss-david-moyes-confident-on-new-marouane-fellaini-deal-92534-28693265/>) *(Liverpool Daily Post.co.uk)*

Liverpool Local News: Hollyoaks stars hope to clean up at British Soap Awards

(<http://www.liverpoolecho.co.uk/liverpool-news/local-news/2011/05/14/hollyoaks-stars-hope-to-clean-up-at-british-soap-awards-100252-28692110/>) *(Liverpool Echo.co.uk)*

(<http://ad.uk.doubleclick.net/click;h=v8/3b09/0/0/%2a/q;44306;0-0;0;26738418;31-1/1;0/0/0;~aopt=2/1/9/0;~sscs=%3f>)