

Garden of Hope Reviving Links With the Earth and Ourselves

SWIFT Wash Power Laundry
Vasco, Goa, India

"If you have no relationship with nature, you have no relationship with each other" - J. Krishnamurti

In August 2009, Anyay Rahit Zindagi (ARZ) www.arzindia.org and SWIFT Wash inaugurated their first kitchen garden as a joint project between ARZ and Vanastree (www.vanastree.org), a women farmers' home garden and seed savers collective based in the neighbouring state of Karnataka. The project, funded by Kitchen Gardeners' International (KGI), USA (www.kitchengardeners.org), is located in the 600-sq. metre compound of the SWIFT Wash Power Laundry in the Sancoale Industrial Estate, Goa.

ARZ and Vanastree aimed to provide the SWIFT Wash beneficiaries with gardening skills, a closer connection to nature, a beautiful space to be in, and the therapeutic benefits gained from working closely with the land. In addition, the garden provides a way to recycle the 15,000 liters of wastewater the laundry generates daily.

Vanastree interns came to Goa, after an orientation at the home base in Karnataka, to work at the *Garden of Hope* alongside the women and men volunteers and trainees of the laundry. Participation was done on a rotational system and in close consultation with the ARZ staff and laundry beneficiaries.

In 2009, the septic tank openings were sealed with stone slabs, making them mosquito proof and safe to step on. Between October and December, Lillie Anderson and Niki von Hedeman, interns from the USA, helped initiate the garden. They educated the SWIFT Wash staff on environmental topics such as waste management, recycling and composting. The team dug out decades worth of garbage (plastic, Styrofoam, etc), created garden beds, planted seeds and seedlings, created a garbage separation system and compost pile, hauled out rocks, and created a wastewater management system. Beneficiaries carried on the work between interns' stays. Garden tools were sourced and provided to the laundry, including spades, hoes, forks, rubber baskets, a wheelbarrow, and a set of smaller tools.

Almitra Patel (www.almitrapatel.com) and Ragini Jain, waste management and water treatment experts respectively, also visited the garden in November 2009. They inspected the laundry, septic tanks, settlements tanks, and garden over a 2-day period. Bio-culture solution, supplied by Ragini's company, now helps keep the sludge and odour low for both the septic and settlement tanks. Water

consumption as of March 2010 was down by 20% (reflected in the monthly bill!), and not having to clean out the septic tank has resulted in further savings.

In January 2010, Vanastree sent two more interns, Jaye Cromwell and Erica Palmer, also undergraduate students from the US, to continue garden work and report on the progress. They focused on expanding the vegetable beds to increase growing space and make the garden a more pleasant space to spend time in. Garden workers made good progress and Jaye and Erica reported the vegetables looked wonderful! Several SWIFT Wash beneficiaries took part in the gardening operations, many of them from agricultural backgrounds.

In March 2010, Vanastree interns Matthias Lanz and Katrina Forstner created wall murals in a bamboo shed with SWIFT Wash beneficiaries. Many of the laundry workers had great artistic talent and, most of all, a lot of fun dabbling in colours. Prior to installing the bamboo shed, a smelly pool of wastewater bred mosquitoes rampantly, creating a health hazard and a rather bad sight right at the entrance of the laundry campus. Interns Theo Eliot and Lily also worked at the laundry for a few days during the monsoon of 2010.

In late 2010, using bamboo and tiles, ARZ built a veranda over an open porch that was earlier unusable. The space is now surrounded by plants where people can sit, shaded from the glaring sun, and have a quiet moment or two, get some work done, and view the lush garden beyond.

There continue to be challenges with managing trash, maintaining awareness of garbage separation, recycling laundry water on a time tabled rotation system, and ensuring vegetables beds have clean water from the dryer and not laundry wastewater. Due to the logistical and health issues of irrigating with wastewater, there are fewer vegetables than originally hoped for. Instead, the garden contains an abundance of bananas and ornamental plants that can be irrigated with laundry wastewater. In addition, the high turnover of beneficiaries means that some of the best gardeners have left, and it has been difficult to pass on skills to others. We continue to persist and not give up hope in dealing with some of these issues. It is the *Garden of Hope* after all!

Responses from the beneficiaries vary. Most agree that it is nice to have a clean green-space to come to, to realize how much beauty makes a difference to their lives and how hopeful they are of a better tomorrow. Staff members report that several persons with behavioral problems seem to be more at peace and more alert when working in the garden. Working with the interns also served as a vital way of viewing Westerners differently, especially men. SWIFT Wash beneficiaries viewed interns, not as tourists interested in entertainment and 'services,' but folks who genuinely care about the ill effects tourism fallout and interested in working with affected individuals in a meaningful and deep-rooted way.

Quotes from laundry beneficiaries and ARZ staff:

It was an interesting learning process of cleaning the place, sowing seeds, and watching plants coming up. It was good to share and eat vegetables together.

Shantha

The place turned beautiful after we began working and we also got vegetables to eat.

Renuka Hosmani

We created greenery everywhere. It was also good to be able to control the pollution and dirt around the laundry.

Umesh

It felt good to work in transforming this dump into a garden.

Chumki

It was nice to actually see vegetables grow!

Renuka Madar

We liked working in the shade, being able to talk to each other in the garden while getting work done at the same time.

Renuka Gorkha

It was inspiring to see Western youth having no attitude about manual work and just plunging in. This had a deep impact on our laundry team. I immediately relax when I see blooming flowers however busy or preoccupied I am. It is important that Vanastree continues the garden programme since it will keep the enthusiasm levels high and keep the beneficiaries working more regularly in the garden.

Juliana, ARZ staff

It was good for the beneficiaries to learn teamwork and organize themselves. The campus, turning into a clean, green place has had a positive impact on all of us. The Garden of Hope project has also definitely helped with our overall rehabilitation programme.

Arun Pandey, Founder, ARZ

Vanastree interns admitted that the internship was challenging, but ultimately extremely inspiring and humbling.

In 2010, a local four star Vasco hotel expressed great interest in purchasing herbs grown at the laundry garden. Unfortunately, the extensive time required for laundry activities prevented this venture, as it would require a full time staff member dedicated to the garden. Beneficiaries enthusiastically discussed beginning a nursery as a livelihood opportunity; banana saplings for starters. This was also set aside, since the laundry work is currently top priority and SWIFT Wash is short staffed as it is. However, these positive aspects show that garden activities could provide income opportunities for the beneficiaries.

The benefits of the garden are many and widespread. Both ARZ and Vanastree hope that this partnership continues to be a positive experience for all involved. We intend to bring some of the women gardeners of Vanastree to SWIFT Wash to interact with the beneficiaries.

We believe the Garden of Hope demonstrates the immense potential of the nascent field of gardening therapy in India. We hope to inspire serious studies as well as replications of simple, yet far-reaching, powerful projects.

The project came to a close in late 2010, but Vanastree and ARZ will continue to collaborate, especially if the laundry eventually gets a campus of its own. Till then, the Garden of Hope will continue to be a space for one and all to use and enjoy.

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