

Human Development Project Site Selection 1975 Maliwada Village, Maharashtra State, India

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As remembered by Marilyn Crocker, April 2025

In 1975 the ICA launched a global program to initiate 24 Human Development Projects across the world, one in every time-zone. This multi-year process was intended to establish model examples of how a local community anywhere could mobilize its residents to renew and recreate socio-economic foundations toward realizing their collective hopes and dreams. My husband and I were assigned to the consult leadership team charged with facilitating a grassroots-based development plan for the first eight Projects. Our team of international staff would arrive in each country a week ahead of the planning consultation for set up and baseline data collection. When needed, we would make a separate trip well in advance, to help national ICA staff with site selection.

The first projects, *Majuro*, Marshall Islands (September 1974), *Oombulgurri*, WA, Australia (September 1974) and *Kawangware*, Nairobi, Kenya (November 1974) already had ICA staff on location and an extensive local support network when the Consult Team arrived. However, the third project, in India required us to partner with Mumbai-based ICA staff in selecting the site for an integrated socioeconomic Human Development Project site in Maharashtra State.

India-based expatriate and national staff had explored potential villages prior to the Consult Team's arrival, and had prioritized *Maliwada*, a farming village of 2000 residents, scattered in five neighborhood clusters, on the Deccan Plateau. Once known as the "gardeners' village", it had supplied food for the populace of the 14th century capital of India, temporarily relocated from Delhi to nearby Daulatabad. Maliwada aptly met the site selection criteria the ICA set forth for model Human Development Projects.

It was located just off a major highway leading to the city of Aurungabad¹, then known as a "rising industrial princess". It was in proximity to both the Ellora and Ajunta Caves and Daulatabad Fort², popular tourist destinations. These factors assured its **visibility** as a pilot development demonstration. Maliwada was populated by a mix of Hindu, Muslim and Buddhist residents -- Brahmin landowners, small shopkeepers and *harijan* sweepers -- and so was **inclusive** of the class and residual caste realities that represented one of India's rural development gifts and challenges. Then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's advocacy for village renewal as a way to stem the rural population exodus flooding urban areas provided strong **national support** for the project. Maharashtra's then Chief Minister Chavan had given his approval, ensuring **state permission**. All that remained before Maliwada became the official pilot site of a Human Development Project was the **approval and commitment of the local residents** to both the concept of self-development and full participation in it.

¹ Aurungabad was renamed Sambhaji Nagar in 2022.

² Daulatabad Fort is currently known as Devgiri, its original name meaning "home of the Gods."

Early one September afternoon in 1975 we arrived in the village. Most members of our site selection team were not fluent in either Mahrati (the state dialect) or Hindi (the national language), so our Indian colleague, Vinod Parekh, translated for the group. Although Vinod and other staff members had visited with village leaders on several prior occasions, the site selection team arrived that day without a specific appointment. After being welcomed by village leaders, we were taken on a guided tour through the village to observe the condition of housing, roads and public buildings; drainage, sanitation and water systems; health and education services; agriculture and local industry.

What we beheld was a dusty and destitute setting, lacking even the most basic amenities. Homes were mud huts with thatched roofs and dung covered floors. An opening in the roof allowed the escape of smoke from cooking and heating fires, fueled by dried water buffalo and cow dung. We wound up our tour in front of the crumbling foundation of what had once been a sultan's home during the "days of glory era" when Maliwada fed thousands residing in the nearby royal palace, **Deogiri**, (which in translation means "place of God"), now known secularly as Daulatabad Fort. The moated fort, built on a 200 meter high conical granite rock formation, rising majestically in the distance, was a constant reminder of a once glorious past when the *nulla bunds* (water catchment structures), now in disrepair, effectively harvested the rainfall and fed a lush green countryside in Maliwada.

As the team stood in the hot sun, before the architectural ruins of a previous era, a resident hauled a bedframe out of his home and urged some of us to sit down. More residents gathered around. Another neighbor arrived with a chipped and very stained cup filled with steaming chai and water buffalo milk, and offered us a drink. Vinod set the example by pouring a portion of the liquid from the cup into the saucer, sipping it, and then passing the cup and used saucer along to the next person.

The conversation moved to the team's key agenda item which was to determine the **residents' readiness** to participate in a development project. Vinod phrased the question, "*What are your hopes and dreams for this village in the future?*" At first there was silence, but then an old man, bearing a faded scarlet turban, pointed to an animal lazily grazing nearby and responded, "See that jackass over there? That's about how people here think about their future."

I was stunned. Could such an abandonment of hope be possibly true?

Slowly other villagers spoke up, cautiously offering their specific hopes: electricity; better transportation to Aurangabad and other towns and cities; a pre-school and expanded primary; new industry; improved farming techniques; rebuilding the irrigation system; a health center; better sanitation; expanded access to drinking water.

Vinod inquired, "*Is this community willing to work together to renew itself?*" Many of the younger men responded affirmatively: "*Yes. The village has many intentions and the people will work hard if given a chance, some resources and some guidance.*" Others chimed in, agreeing and adding comments. Then after a period of silence, the head of the *Gram Panchayat*, the

leadership body of the village, agreed that leaders would meet that evening, consider this possibility and make a final decision about beginning a Human Development Project. The elderly man wearing the scarlet turban, whose name we later learned was Chokibaba, stood, smiled and said, “Good. Finally, our village cares again.”

Three months later we returned to conduct a week-long planning consultation with over 100 villagers who represented an authentic cross-section of the Maliwada population, many of whom had never interacted with each other before. A year after that our team returned to help staff the first Human Development Training School for leaders from four neighboring villages who had decided to launch development projects in their communities, informed by the Maliwada model. One of those was Sevagram, Mahatma Gandhi’s home village.