

Caring for the sick and elderly

On September 8th, 2019, Dr Karan Singh, the Chairman of the Auroville Foundation, inaugurated the Mahalakshmi home for elderly Auroville residents.

When Auroville was founded in 1968, it attracted pioneers from all over the world, mostly youngsters, full of energy. This has changed. An increasing number of middle-aged people now join Auroville, while the youngsters of the early days are showing signs of greying. Of today's population of over 3,000 people, more than 450 are aged 65 or older.

In 2001, a group of Aurovilians started Auroville Health Services (AVHS). Working with the seniors started in 2011 on a small scale: doing shopping, visiting those who had fallen ill, and helping them see a doctor.

Today AVHS runs two homes for the elderly, provides social and medical care to elderly living alone, schedules attendants for any Aurovilian needing hospitalisation, and organises home care for convalescence afterwards.

Another aspect of its service is the Hygiene and Food Safety programme, where a two-member team visits Auroville's schools, restaurants, guesthouses and food processing units to evaluate if standards of cleanliness are being observed and issues hygiene certificates if found in order.

Hospitalisation and home care assistance

Over recent years, the need for care has increased substantially and AVHS has expanded accordingly. Today it has a team of seven members, which includes a doctor, a coordinator, a social worker, office staff and health inspectors. About 14 people are employed as caregivers.

For the past three years AVHS has been getting help from a Swiss volunteer for five months every summer. With her untiring energy and laughter she is a very welcome addition to the team.

Unlike hospitals in the West, which take full care of their patients, Indian hospitals require an attendant to be present to help with the purchase of medicines and clinical supplies, bring meals, interact with hospital staff and make the financial arrangements. After hospitalisation, assisted home care is often needed to help the person recover, to provide post-operative care and emotional support.

Indian hospitals do not provide rehabilitation facilities. Some Aurovilians are able to depend on family and friends to support them, but single Aurovilians do not easily find the assistance they need and have to rely on the goodwill of volunteers from their workplace or community.

Mechtild together with Rebecca coordinates hospital and home care for Auroville. AVHS provides personal assistance, ranging from a few hours a day to 24/7 care, to approximately 30 senior Aurovilians who live either in their own homes, at Marika's senior Home or at Mahalakshmi Home. The main work involves planning the schedules of caregivers and volunteers and visiting the seniors on a daily basis.

A lot of time goes into smoothing the relationship between the seniors and the caregivers. Sometimes it is not harmonious as personalities don't always match: one caregiver may be wonderful for one person, but can be a catastrophe for another.

The assisted living homes

In 2016 AVHS got a gift. Marika, a senior Aurovilian who was working as a homeopath at Pitanga in the Samasti community, passed away. She had wished that her large house be used by the community.



Dr Karan Singh inaugurating the Mahalakshmi Home



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Paula with Prathiba, a resident of Mahalakshmi Home, in the electric three wheeler

Known as the 'Marika Senior Home', it now houses five senior Aurovilians, along with caregivers who are present 24/7. Amarnath, the AVHS doctor, visits twice a day.

At Marika's Home, each Aurovilian has a private room with private bathroom facilities. The common space is used for socialising and meals. Food is brought in and all the shopping is done for the elderly.

That same year, Aurovilian Manfred initiated a project for another home for the elderly. In August 2016 he started building the 'Mahalakshmi Home,' a place for 'assisted living'. While Manfred did most of the fundraising, Dorothee designed the building and oversaw its construction. On September 8th, 2019, Dr Karan Singh, the Chairman of the Auroville Foundation, inaugurated

held concept that 'people come here to build Auroville, not to take rest or retire'. 'Elderly Aurovilians may take life a little easier but very few stop working altogether,' says Paula. 'Most people in their seventies or eighties are very active.'

However, in the coming years, more elderly homes will be required. This does not necessarily mean that they have to be newly constructed. Marika's Senior Home is an example of this approach. 'One Aurovilian has offered her large house when she passes away as a Home for the elderly,' says Mechtild.

There is a lot of support for the work of AVHS. For example, Kinisi recently donated an electric three wheeler which gets used by seniors on their own or is used to transport seniors to different places in Auroville like, for example, to the Matrimandir.

There are a few areas where AVHS cannot be involved. AVHS is not equipped to deal with people who suffer from mental issues. And due to the lack of caregivers, AVHS has to reject homecare requests for non-Aurovilians (guests, volunteers or parents of Aurovilians).

One other area is that of administrative assistance. AVHS recently informed the Auroville Council and Working Committee that an increasing number of elderly require help with their financial affairs and the need to maintain the validity of their passports and visa. 'This is sometimes an extremely complicated and time consuming work, and it takes resources which we would prefer to use for the senior himself/herself,' says the AVHS. 'The situation gets even more complex when it comes to people who are confused. The community will have to find a solution for this,' says Paula.

But she also notes that working with seniors is its own reward. 'It is very inspiring, especially dealing with people who have been in Auroville since the beginning. When you encounter their intensely shining eyes – that's something special.'

In conversation with Carel

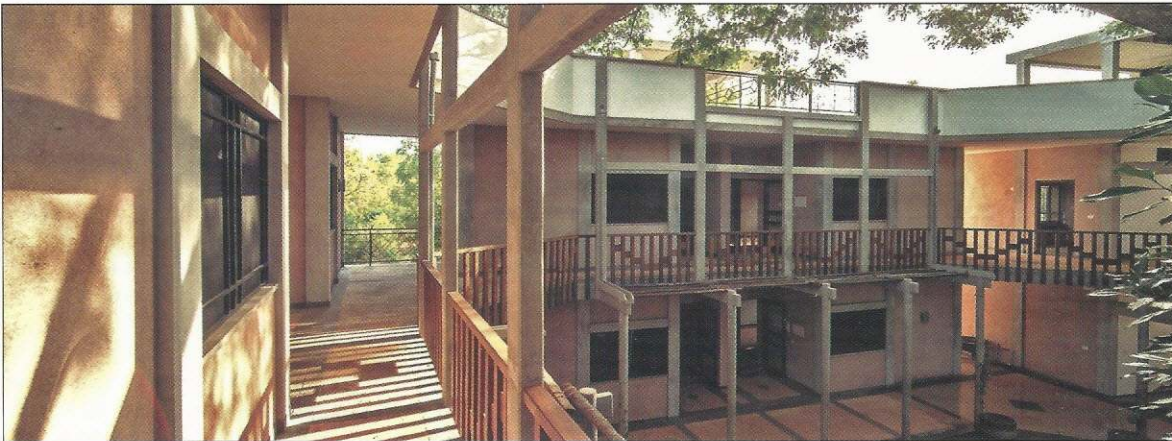
the Mahalakshmi Home.

It has eight units, each with attached bathroom and kitchenette, and three more rooms can be used for convalescence and hospice care. It is intended for seniors who can manage their daily living situation, but may require minimum support. The home has a common dining area and also houses the administrative office of AVHS, overlooked by Rebecca who has been with AVHS since the beginning.

Are elderly people queuing up to get a room in the Mahalakshmi Home? 'Not really,' says Mechtild. 'Many elderly prefer to stay in their own homes and receive the care they need there. But a few expressed the wish to shift to Mahalakshmi Home.'

The absence of a waiting list may also be due to the commonly

Elderly in Auroville	
Aged 65-70	166
Aged 70-80	236
Aged 80-90	30
Aged 90+	4
Total	436



View of Mahalakshmi home

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Universal Basic Income and Auroville

Universal Basic Income (UBI) is a model for providing all citizens with a guaranteed cash allocation, regardless of their income, resources or employment status. The idea has been around for a long time but it has received renewed attention in the past 20 years because its proponents believe it can ameliorate the effects, which are being experienced in many nations, of poverty, growing inequality and the prospect of unemployment due to increased automation.

Several countries, including Canada, Finland and Namibia, have carried out local or regional experiments with basic income or related welfare systems. In India, the Economic Survey of 2016-17 stated that "A just society needs to guarantee to each individual a minimum income which they can count on, and which provides the necessary material foundation for a life with access to basic goods and a life of dignity", and before the recent General Election Rahul Gandhi's Congress Party promised, if elected, a basic income to 250 million of the country's poorest citizens. It would have amounted to Rs 12,000 a month for each family.

Some Aurovilians have also become interested in the concept, and in August six of them attended the 19th World Basic Income Congress in Hyderabad, where Suryamayi, who was one of them, presented on Auroville. Here she explains the concept of UBI and its relevance to and possible application in Auroville.

How did you get interested in UBI?

As I am doing a Ph.D. on Auroville, I have had to look into the research that has already been done on this place. I became very inspired about the potential for research here, given the multiplicity of experimental practices, but was surprised how little of it has actually been done and transmitted beyond Auroville, and how little we are aware of similar experimentation that is being done elsewhere which may be of relevance to us. I thought there was a gap to be bridged; that we could learn something from exchanging about progressive practices with others around the world.

This was the reasoning behind The Bridge, a conference I co-organised for the 50th anniversary, which brought together Aurovilians and outside researchers and experimenters working in similar fields. Before the conference I asked Aurovilians what they thought some of our main challenges were and if they knew of inspiring things happening elsewhere that dealt with similar challenges. A few people mentioned basic income as a movement worth exploring in relationship with Auroville.

Meanwhile, I had read *Utopia for Realists: The Case for a Universal Basic Income* (a book by Rutger Bregman) as part of my PhD, and had been struck by the account of how UBI resulted in individuals pursuing more meaningful work, which I found to be in resonance with the founding conceptions of work in Auroville, of taking up work as a yoga, which, of course, is 'meaningful' in an additional, deeper dimension.

We invited Sarath Davala, who is the president of the India Network for Basic Income, to participate in The Bridge, and make a presentation on basic income. This led to further interest and links being developed between us, and in August he invited me to present on Auroville for the basic income community at the 19th World Basic Income Congress in Hyderabad, and extended an invitation to attend to any Aurovilian interested in learning more about basic income. I was surprised to discover that one of the people who came had actually proposed basic income policy for Auroville when she was in the FAMC so, clearly, the idea has been around for some time.

How can UBI support this deeper relationship to work?

If you are financially constrained, this might play a role in approaching work as yoga: you may not engage in work that you feel called to do, but instead choose work that secures you a certain income.

Do you also think that UBI has the capacity to lessen inequalities in Auroville?

I don't think UBI achieves equality in any society. However, The Mother says that everybody's basic needs should be met in Auroville and I think it can help achieve this, given our economic context.

The Mother said she didn't want there to be an exchange of money in Auroville, so we have tried to meet the basic needs of individuals through the provision of services rather than cash. UBI is

normally cash-based so do you see that as a challenge to introducing it here?

When I invited Sarath to The Bridge I wasn't thinking about introducing UBI in Auroville because I thought it was a very different approach: what we have been developing here is essentially a UBS, Universal Basic Services, model. I do think we should continue to develop this as it works to delink money from the provision of basic needs, and it creates a collective responsibility for the well-being of individuals.

In fact, when I presented Auroville at the 19th World Basic Income Congress I was asked to critique UBI from the perspective of Auroville. Among the things I pointed out are that with UBI you still have to do all this financial decision-making to ensure your economic well-being, whereas many Aurovilians don't have to be so involved in this kind of calculation because of the services provided here. I also pointed out that one has to consider the economic context in which UBI is introduced: the effectiveness will be very different in a capitalist society with high profit margins on basic needs and very few publicly funded services, as compared to a socialist economy. But somebody on my panel, a professor at Oxford, asked: why do we keep pitching Universal Basic Services against Universal Basic Income? Why can't we have both?

However, at a recent Auroville workshop on the topic, one group was discussing whether to decrease the 'kind' component and increase the cash component of our present maintenances, which seems to suggest that they feel the kind component limits their freedom to access what they need.

If you have people who are really financially stressed and they are compelled to purchase products which are more expensive in Auroville than in Pondicherry, or they are in need of products or services that are not available in Auroville, and do not have enough cash to afford these, they will feel constrained. Interestingly, the outcome of the discussion was a proposal to extend bulk purchasing (outside of the community) for collective provisioning purposes, so that we can get more products distributed in Auroville at a cheaper price — like Nandini does for clothing.

At the same time, if they are getting more choices that can be purchased in Auroville with the kind portion of their maintenance, the cash portion will represent more: because they will not be spending that in Auroville, they will be able to keep it for purchases outside. So even without making the UBI in cash I think it will increase the purchasing power of their cash portion.

Another objection to UBI is why give it to the rich? Why not focus the financial help upon the poor, the people who are really in need?

The proponents of UBI insist it should be for everyone as a matter of principle. I'm not yet convinced by that. In Auroville I think it is worth asking this question because A Dream says that the community should provide only for people's basic needs and some people can clearly provide for these already. But some of the Auroville colleagues who came with me to the Basic Income World Congress said that if the richer people in Auroville also received it, maybe they would give it to projects that the communal budget currently doesn't cover, and this would be a good indication of what people in the community want to support.

At what level would you pitch an Auroville UBI?

Among the Aurovilians who came to the Congress were members of the Budget Coordination Committee. They suggested a figure on the basis of the newly introduced "care package", which is calculated to meet an individual's subsistence needs. This is worth about Rs 4,000 a month.

How would this be paid for?

First of all I think we would have to be clear about what we are seeking to address in the Auroville context. Is it people who feel stuck in their current work and don't feel free enough to move, because they would lose their maintenance? Or people with a maintenance, but who still don't have enough to meet their needs? If so, how many does that represent? We would need to do a pilot project to explore this. We hope to have a proposal for a pilot ready by the end of the year.

In terms of funding, in Germany private citizens were invited to commit a monthly amount to the German pilot project, which has been on-going for several years now. If we did a UBI pilot in Auroville, it could be interesting to fund it in a similar way because this would show if as a community we are interested enough in the project to invest in it, as well as address the tensions around wealth inequality that exist within this community.

If the results of the pilot were positive and you decided to implement UBI, have you thought about how it could be funded long-term?

It would depend on the scope of what we want to implement based on the results of the pilot. So if, for example, it was to introduce a UBI in addition to maintenances for the people who feel they need it, and we find that this comprises only a small percentage of our population, then it's a relatively small amount to fund. If we go for something much bigger — for example, allocating maintenances to all Aurovilians de-linked from specific work — we might find that financially it is not possible. But I think you can always tailor some version to what's financially viable.

Basically, for some form of UBI to gain traction in Auroville what seems to be required is a major psychological shift away from assessing and measuring work, and Aurovilians' individual commitment, in terms of hours and its direct contribution to the community coffers.

Absolutely, this is why people have all these knee-jerk reactions to UBI, like 'people won't work anymore'. It requires a completely different idea of what it means to be in community and how we participate. In this context, I think it's important to remember that we are already embodying an alternative in this regard. But we also know there are problems with our present 'system'. Specifically, many people are dissatisfied with the way maintenances are designed and administered, and I think UBI could help us move beyond this.

So are you optimistic about the future of UBI in Auroville?

People may be right when they say we can't assume that what has worked in pilot projects in Finland and elsewhere will work here. But we are not looking at simply applying something that has been done elsewhere without considering the ideals and realities of the Auroville context, and designing it accordingly. Actually, my sense is that some form of UBI could work better here than anywhere else because this is an intentional community and most people are here because they really want to create something new together.

From an interview by Alan



From left: Stephanie, Suryamayi, Inge and Lakshay at the 19th World Basic Income

It's a good point because I think UBI could be useful in the present Auroville context as what is being provided currently through the services does not cover all basic needs and is not enough of a cushion for people to give up or change their work.

So you would see UBI as a supplement to our present services?

Yes, I wouldn't at all see it as replacing them.

If the UBI component is cash, are we not continuing to support a capitalist element in our economy?

This is an overarching criticism of UBI, given that it is a policy that is by and large supported by people who wish to see a systemic change away from a capitalist economy: it uses money, which is a tool of capitalism.

That's why I think concentrating on providing Universal Basic Services in Auroville is much more interesting because that is actually providing an alternative model of socio-economic organisation.

My specific concern with UBI in the Auroville context is that it would be incongruent with the ideal of no exchange of money. At the Congress, I raised this issue, and discovered that according to the Basic Income Earth Network's definition of UBI, it could consist of cash or another medium of exchange, which means that it can be in the form of 'kind' or an Auroville currency. But UBI cannot be allocated for a specific usage, which is what happens now with 'in-kind' contributions in our Maintenances, for the lunch scheme, for example. A core component of a basic income is that people have the freedom to decide how to utilise it.

One of the common objections to giving people a guaranteed basic income is that they would work less or spend it wastefully. What does the experience of UBI pilot projects around the world suggest concerning this reservation?

The pilots show that people don't work less, they even work more. But people confuse universal basic income with a minimum wage. A UBI is much less than a minimum wage (although proponents hope it will one day at least represent a living wage), so it probably wouldn't cause people to stop working, or even to work less. The research shows that people who receive a UBI do not waste their money or spend it on things that destroy them or society — the most common assumption, especially when it comes to the poor. On the contrary, they often use it to improve education opportunities for their children, or to start small enterprises which will make them more prosperous. It's been seen in pilot studies that UBI actually encourages entrepreneurship, because people have a little bit of a cushion to fall back on, so they are more willing to take risks.

By the way, I think there's a difference regarding receiving a Universal Basic Income and receiving social services in the way these are administered in many societies. Regarding the latter, recipients often try to get as many benefits as they can yet they often won't work more because if they do so they may lose those benefits and be financially worse off as a result — this is what's referred to as the 'poverty trap'. UBI avoids that trap because it is not means-tested, and creates a very different psychological response because everybody is getting it, not only those who are considered 'poor'.

Petrichor*

In an article first published on AuroNet, Rishi Walker identifies the causes and possible responses to the present urgent water situation in Auroville.

What follows attempts to demonstrate how the water situation we are in actually came about, and suggests a strategy that addresses the problem at its root cause. Most of what we are told by specialists is reactionary in nature, and I am sure that we can all agree that Auroville ought never to be reactive, but always at the forefront of the new and seemingly impossible. Water cannot be dissociated from the health of the land, the soils and the climate. Tackling the water issue requires more than water reservoirs; it requires changing the climate altogether. And there are not a million ways to do that.

Forest: a terrestrial imperative

Forests are the life-support systems for complex biological life and genetic diversity on Earth. They are the regulators of the climate, the natural design perfected over hundreds of millions of years which relentlessly maximizes the potential of biological life. Old-growth forests are ecosystems which sustain the highest degrees of intelligence, diversity and balance. They are the apex of terrestrial biological evolution; the levels of ecological intricacy and interdependence, and the density of life they harbour, are bewildering.

Moreover, anywhere on Earth where a single woody plant is growing, there either once was a forest, or there will be (once more) a forest. In the tropical belt, the protection of even a tiny piece of land from all forms of human disturbance, especially fire and grazing, will rapidly result in the increase of plant diversity. If the protection of the land can be sustained for a long period of time, then the vegetation will eventually evolve into an evergreen jungle thousands of species rich.

In other words, the primary reflex of the Earth is the shielding of the ground by vegetation. For only once the ground is thus protected with a carpet of photosynthesizing and carbon-fixing biomass can an environment wealthy and stable enough to sustain complex life-forms be created. In the tropical belt where available solar energy is the highest on Earth, closed-canopy evergreen jungle is the inherent identity of the land.

Forests are models of efficiency

Indeed, no other landscape on Earth as effectively capitalizes on the two basic life-inputs on Earth: solar energy and precipitation. When a forest has reached a state of maturity, it becomes a model of energetic and hydric efficiency: close to zero energy from the sun is wasted and lost through heat, and none of the rain is wasted, neither through runoff nor evaporation. In terms of efficiency therefore, every non-photosynthesizing surface of barren ground is, no pun intended, rock-bottom.

Consequently, maintaining a minimum ratio of forest cover to non-forest cover is indispensable to prevent a cascade of ecological and hydric degradation to ensue.

The photosynthesizing capacity of the land evolves in parallel with its water-storage capacity. An energetically efficient piece of land is hydrologically efficient too. The land therefore incrementally expands its hydric capital through the growth of biomass, becoming ever-more resilient to climatic extremes. The forest system biodiversity grows until reaching a theoretical state of climax, wherein the biomass per unit of surface of land has reached a maximum. The climax forest is therefore land on which the highest possible amount of water is contained in a regularized and stable manner.

Water and the climate, two sides of the same coin

The water situation cannot be isolated from the general environmental and climatic contexts on Earth. They are the expressions of the same problem: too many heat radiating and evaporating surfaces on Earth, and hugely insufficient photosynthesizing and percolating ones. The massive over-consumption of water is not the cause of our troubles, but rather it is a terminal stage of a long, drawn-out parasitic disease. Insufficient recharge is a far more significant, and old, cause.

By changing the climate, one can expand the hydric capital of the land. Water scarcity is the outcome of thousands of years of global deforestation and the systematic replacement of closed-canopy jungle with grasslands, fields and other highly

impervious surfaces. In India, this biological and hydric depletion is millenniums old. The drying-up process began with the first extensive felling of the trees and continued with the relentless burning down of forests for agriculture and grazing, resulting in a steady erosion of the hydric capital that had been created over millions of years. The entire climate was changed once the peninsula was denuded beyond a certain point. The vicious cycle of degeneration began once losses of biomass (therefore water) were significant enough to eat away at the biological (therefore hydric) capital of the land, creating a state of structural deficiency. The depletion of biomass outpaced its production. Microclimates were annihilated. The land became ever-more vulnerable to a deregulated climate, deprived henceforth of its quintessential natural regulator.

Vegetation corresponds to the above-ground hydric capital which is inseparable from the subterranean water aquifers. It is a single dynamic body, the forest representing the dynamic outer membrane constantly maximizing every available input, regularizing the hydrologic cycle so as to minimize losses of moisture from the overall system. It is just that the depletion of this hydric capital began from the top-down, and today, we find ourselves drilling hundreds of meters into the ground in search of the last drops of sweet water.

Unless we recreate sufficient surfaces of land covered with protected forest, we will not be able to replenish the aquifers nor be able to change the climate. The health of our aquifers is directly connected with the health of our watersheds. And the health of our watersheds is directly correlated with the health and extent of the forests on them. And our climate is the result of the extent and quality of our forests.

The Auroville context

It is self-evident that Auroville should represent a model for our local brothers, for India and the world, to follow. Attempting to solve the water crisis today without looking at drastically increasing the recharge of the first and second aquifers is perpetuating the status-quo. The problem must be solved at its origin, and the origin of the water crisis is degraded watersheds with hugely insufficient forest cover.

Until every piece of Auroville land is capable of holding and storing the biggest rains of the century, it is awfully wrong to look at capital-intensive works of engineering seeking to do quite the opposite of what needs to be done: our specialists are suggesting that many moneys be spent in increasing run-off and collecting it in ponds and reservoirs to be subsequently utilized for our consumption. The argument of course is that all the good work that we (who is actually doing this work?) do in recharging the water aquifers is annulled by the short-sighted habits of our local agriculturist brethren. Therefore, we are told, let us collect the water and save it for us instead.

Well, such a strategy does not address the problem at its source; it is reactionary and therefore I tend to think it has no place in Auroville.

Moreover, the only lands of Auroville which are actually recharging any rainwater are those managed by the Forest Group. All the rest are unable to hold even average, gentle rains. And yet, our forests are threatened relentlessly from within by our own self-proclaimed mayors and planners, and from without by the boundless greed of speculators and land owners.

Unfortunately, the question of water in Auroville cannot be decorticated without addressing urban planning. There is no politics here; this is about looking at facts and realities without any lenses or blinkers. The hydrogeological reality of the Auroville plateau does not match with the design and land-usages of the Master Plan.

If everyone would now focus on increasing surface runoff in order to set it aside for their own use, the water situation would be worsened to a point of sheer catastrophe. If the general strategy in India and the rest of the world facing water shortages is one of harvesting rainwater and centralizing the dwindling resource in increasingly artificial systems, then one can rather confidently predict civil war, the salinization and drying-up of aquifers, structural drought and flooding. For such a strategy implies doing the exact opposite of what not just Auroville urgently needs to do, but the entire human population too: change the climate on Earth.

Suggestions: maximize percolation, minimize evaporation

The first thing to do is to set a target of reaching 100% infiltration on all Auroville lands and to immediately stop erosion and massively reduce runoff. Our only water-input comes from rains, and the majority of the rainwater comes down in high intensities. The present state of our watersheds is such that we are not able to capitalize on above-average rains, which are simply wasted through runoff and massive evaporation.

This implies establishing land-use plans at the scale of the plateau's watersheds. The management objective should be: maximization of percolation and minimization of evaporation. This principle of management should apply for all types of land-use, from dense human habitat, to agriculture and to forest. At the scale of the watershed, the overall objective should be the capture and storage of the biggest century rain (1m in 24h) without generating any erosion. For most Auroville lands, that represents about a ten-fold leap in hydrologic effectiveness.

To do that, unfortunately, one must look literally and figuratively beyond the circles, and make adjustments where required and based on topography and hydro-geology.

Ideally, all the ravines should be identified as sensitive hydrologic zones and be protected on either side by a band of evergreen forest at least as wide as the width of the ravine, twice when

possible. These ravines and their buffers should be densely planted with evergreen trees and then left entirely undisturbed.

To the extent possible, the ridges of the plateau should be covered by bands of protected evergreen forest.

The sensitive recharge areas of the plateau, such as the pebble outcrops which feed the first aquifer, should be set aside and managed as protected evergreen forest.

The existing patches of forest under the Forest Group's administration should be recognized as vital recharge zones, energy-efficient and carbon-fixing land-units. They need to be protected for posterity and the efforts of their stewards in establishing a closed-evergreen canopy should be supported by our institutions of governance.

Forest corridors between fragmented forest patches should be created, and a general movement of forest extension northward on the Rayapudupakkam, Aprampet and Mathur watersheds should be set in motion. That area represents the last chance of creating a contiguous forest large enough to establish a micro-climate in the Auroville region and effectively increase recharge of the aquifer in the long-term. Similarly, an extension of forest cover on the pebble-outcrops to the south of the plateau, linking the Ashram lands on the shores of Ousteri, would do wonders. Collaboration with the

Ashram in managing that sensitive hydro-geologic area would be great, given the amount of land under their ownership.

In our denser habitat zones, ornamental plants requiring abundant watering, as well as lawns, should be replaced by local drought-resistant shrubs and trees. If planted appropriately around each building complex, all the rainwater unable to percolate because of the impervious surfaces would be able to infiltrate through densely planted percolation groves. Evergreen shade should be created over the largest surfaces possible. By doing that, micro-climates could be created; temperatures would be strongly reduced and moisture-content in the soil generally increased.

Finally, one could suggest the following to Varuna: for a renewable period of three years, Aurovilians will pay the totality of their electricity bills and the equivalent of the 2018 electricity subsidy should instead be spent on land purchase for reforestation and water conservation every year.

Conclusion

Once our watersheds are able to incrementally expand their hydric-capital, then locally and in certain cases, one could practice certain forms of water harvesting. For water harvesting as we have seen is quite the opposite of water conservation. In the latter, the objective is the regularization of the climate and the creation of a resilient environment with healthy hydric reserves. In the former, it is the extraction of a dwindling resource for human ends.

This is, however, not just an Auroville task. The re-greening of the planet and especially the tropical belt is an indispensable step that our species will have to take. Of all places on Earth, Auroville should not repeat history and replicate old systems of thought. It should pave the way for the future, and the future will be one of massive watershed restoration and reforestation throughout the globe, because without that, there simply won't be any future. It is an existentialist imperative.

Forests are in fact water. That is a determinism on this planet of ours. The sooner we accept that, the better off the next decades will be for this spiritual undertaking that is Auroville, and therefore for the whole world.

If we began today, we could change the climate on Earth radically in a couple of decades. And that work needs to be started right here in good-old Auroville.

Rishi Walker

Rishi Walker was born in Auroville, studied in the French Lycée in Pondicherry and went to college in Aix en Provence, France, from where he graduated in 2008. He became steward of Kamataru Forest in the Auroville Greenbelt in 2014.

* Petrarch is the smell the first drops of rain make on dry ground.

Every year, hundreds of people from different countries come to volunteer in different activities in Auroville. They come to hone their skills or learn something new, and to experience the diversity, freedom and innovativeness of this unusual place. Above all, they come to learn more about themselves and what they want to do with their lives.

Auroville provides a unique opportunity for both inner and outer growth. Many volunteers are so moved by the experience that they often return for visits or become involved with Auroville associations in their home countries. Some even stay on or return to become Aurovilians.

Yet Auroville remains a challenging environment, particularly for those encountering it for the first time. Some volunteers, it is true, sail smoothly through the difficulties but others find it difficult to adjust not only to the climate but also to Auroville's unique (dis)organization and very different culture. In fact, there is a feeling that Auroville could do more to help and support them in this challenging transition, as well as validate and embrace them for what they bring to the community. For while they have come to learn, they also make free offer of their considerable energy and idealism.

In this issue, we hear from some of them about their experiences, we learn about Savi, the Auroville organization that processes volunteer enquiries and supports them once they are here, and we reflect upon why their status remains somewhat ambiguous and what the community could do to integrate them more fully and open-heartedly.

The experience of long term volunteers

Auroville receives a minimum of 300 volunteers per year from more than 30 nationalities and this number is increasing every year. An official volunteer (registered with Savi) works at least 24 hours per week in one occupation from 120 work positions available in Auroville. There are a wide variety of jobs in farms, gardens, forests, education, therapy centres and yoga studios, among many others. As Sara Sponza of Savi put it, "Volunteering opportunities in Auroville are as diverse as Auroville itself".

Here three long term volunteers talk about how they feel welcomed in Auroville and how they see themselves being part of the larger community:

Vivekan (30) is an Indian-French youth who has worked at WasteLess since July 2018. He has a bachelor's degree in Psychology and a master's degree in Evolutionary Anthropology.

Svenja (29) is a German youth who has worked at Udavi School since 2016. She is a Special Needs Educator.

Jazz (30) is a Belgium youth who has worked at Sadhana Forest for two years. He has studied Linguistics, Literature, Religious and Buddhist studies, among other things.

How did you end up in Auroville?

Vivekan: My father was connected with Auroville in the 1970's - 1980's. I grew up in France surrounded by Sri Aurobindo's and Mother's books. My mother is Tamil, so I often used to come to India as a kid. The connection has always been there. I came to do research for Aikiyam School a few years back. I didn't think of volunteering at that time, but the desire of doing environmental work in India grew in me. A few months after, my girlfriend came for a visit and started her internship in Auroville. Soon I found WasteLess, so it was the confirmation for both of us that we wanted to stay for at least one year.

Svenja: I came three years ago with the Weltwaerts Programme, which brings German youth to experience Auroville and work here for one year. We were a group of approximately 13 people and everything was well organised so I didn't feel so lost when I arrived.

Jazz: I came two and half years ago for one month the first time. I felt really touched by Sadhana Forest so I made plans to come back to volunteer. I wanted to live in community, so I quit my job and came.

How has it been for you volunteering in Auroville in comparison with working elsewhere?

Vivekan: It is easy to take initiatives and to start projects, and I find people to be very supportive in this respect. There are also many interesting projects going on and people running them are always in need of extra help so I find that sometimes it is hard to stay focused on one thing and not get scattered. You need to channel your energy correctly to avoid getting overwhelmed. Auroville gives me the space to explore myself through my outer work and in that sense it is like no other place where I have worked.

Svenja: I had a very difficult time at the beginning: the first six months of the project were tough and I suffered. I was living in the same school where I was working and I felt I didn't have any privacy at all. I felt very uncomfortable. I was also writing my master's thesis in parallel with my volunteering and



Volunteers and young Aurovilians work together at the Joy of Impermanence project

I had a professional crisis. I thought I didn't want to become a teacher anymore. I received support from my boyfriend at that time, who I met here. Then I started painting and that really changed my experience as well. So, in general, my Auroville experience has been one of evolving from a crisis to an inner growing. This is not something I've been experiencing in Germany. I've been coming and going from Germany for the past years, but the environment has not really supported me there, so I'm glad I'm here.

Jazz: This is the place where I can evolve, learn and just be who I am. In Sadhana Forest we are not working in a conventional way, we are doing Seva, which is selfless service. Seva is calling you to do something "material" but in a conscious way, integrating all different aspects of life, so you can become sustainable in all levels.

Do you feel your work is valued and supported by the community? How is your volunteer status helping or limiting you in manifesting your aspirations?

Vivekan: This is the place where I can do my work and so far no one is making things difficult. It has been open doors for me from the beginning. In my unit I found true mentors, so when I started with them I thought "I'm not making any money, and it is not that easy to adapt to many things here, but the amount of things that I'm learning are invaluable". In this sense it was beneficial. I do feel, though, that as a volunteer you can sometimes feel "under", because you don't have much say in how things work. You are not here to give ideas, you are here to give your energy and time, and I think naturally humans expect something in return.

Svenja: I don't have an official status of volunteer now, but when I had I received support materially. I was provided with housing, food and extra money from the programme that I was part of so the financial aspect wasn't a problem back then. However, now that I keep coming back and thinking about staying longer this has become a big subject to address.

Jazz: I'm getting food and room and I don't have to worry about clothes (as we have a free store). I feel the founders of my unit are like supportive parents, I can come to them to talk about anything. In a general perspective I do feel appreciated being a volunteer. For example, I've never been to any doctor before without paying. This only happened to me in the Auroville Health Centre and I found it amazing.

I also feel much more value when I don't work for money. When I'm doing something as a volunteer and I'm not paid for it, I'm doing it because I really want to. Every day I make conscious choices and find meaning in my activities, as I'm obliged to reflect on the deeper motivations of everything I do.

Do you feel integrated or do you feel segregated from the larger community?

Vivekan: I've been welcomed here and haven't had any major problem so far. I feel quite integrated, especially through my Tamil background and by taking part in various activities around the campus. But I do think even though events and places are designed to facilitate interactions between volunteers and the rest of the community, this is not necessarily happening. I noticed, for example, that I mostly meet other volunteers and Newcomers.

Maybe some Aurovilians don't invest much time in creating friendship with volunteers because they perceive them as coming and going, and they may have their own preconceptions as well, putting volunteers in the same category as visitors or ecotourists. However, there are some great exceptions and I was lucky to meet some of them right from the beginning.

Svenja: I think this is a very good place to learn if you are open to do so. In that sense everybody is willing to receive and welcome you when you want to help in some project.

Jazz: I feel at home. I don't see any separation or lack of integration.

How do you manage financially since you are not paid for volunteering?

Vivekan: Fortunately I never had financial problems when I was volunteering the first year. I self-managed. After I prolonged my volunteering in Auroville my unit offered me a small stipend which played a part in my decision to stay. Not only did it help to cover some of my basic expenses, but I also felt more reciprocated and part of the team this way since the exchange seemed more balanced.

Svenja: Since my volunteer programme ended, I've been going back to Germany to work and save money to be able to live here. I can't live with my savings much longer and I don't want to go back to Germany soon so I have to figure out a way.

Jazz: I manage by simplifying my life. I have some savings still, but I know at some point they will run out. Then I will see, but I don't worry. I have trust: If the divine wants me to continue to do something here, it will provide.

Can Auroville welcome volunteers in a better way? If so, how?

Vivekan: Yes, in equality of prices. I don't know why volunteers have to pay more than Newcomers and Aurovilians for things like food. Is it because the community really needs the money or is it just to show some difference? Because you do feel very different when you are not being paid for what you do, and then on top of that you have to pay more than those who sometimes don't do so much as you do.

It would also be useful to have something like a pool of mentors for volunteers who you could meet with once in a while.

Svenja: Perhaps free housing could be provided for a certain number of volunteers working full time, and volunteers should not have to pay the Auroville contribution.

Jazz: If people want to come and volunteer they will do, but I can mention that as a volunteer it took me a while before I met people who had been living here from many years, so it would be really good to reinforce this interaction, maybe in the same line as the Savi Volunteer Programme.

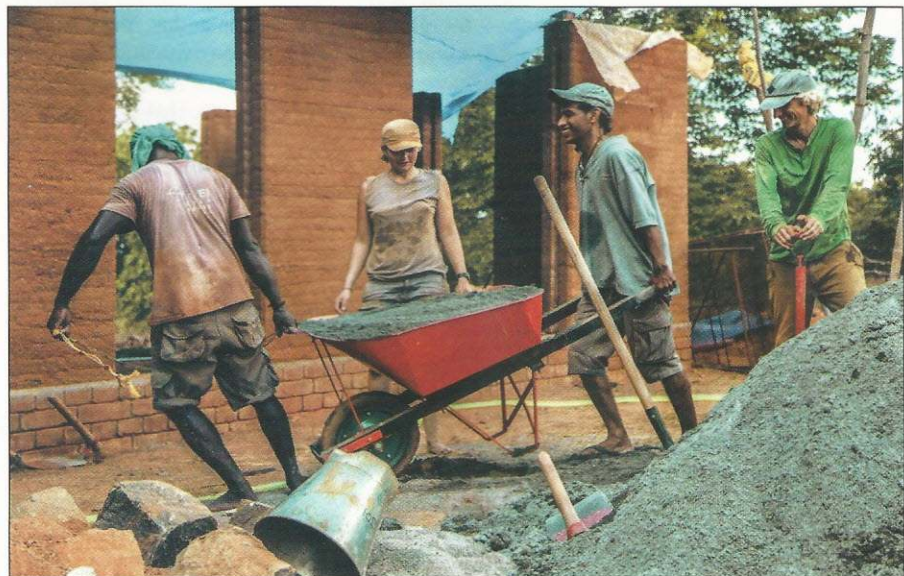
Do you have plans to become an Aurovillian?

Vivekan: I feel it is a big decision which is not in my hands for now. I don't need the status, for now Auroville is where I can learn and do my work best.

Svenja: I really like it here, but I'm not completely ready to choose yet.

Jazz: Yes, it is on my mind.

From an interview by Valentina



Volunteers at the Joy of Impermanence project

The work of Savi

Savi - meaning 'key' in Tamil - is the official service in charge of organising and facilitating the interaction between volunteers and Auroville units. People who work a minimum of 2 months are considered Long Term Volunteers, and if they are foreigners and wish to stay for 6 months or more, they need a special letter issued by the Auroville Foundation that will provide them with an Entry Visa.

Volunteers must stay in an official Auroville accommodation, either homestays or guesthouses or in Auroville Housing, like youth projects or house sitting, and it is mandatory for them to register at the Town Hall and to receive an Aurocard in Financial Service, among other formalities.

The Savi team currently consists of six people and is working hard, not only in managing the increasing demand for volunteering opportunities, coordinating the necessary letters and documents, but also in being the intermediary with the units and keeping the website updated. It also guides volunteers in what sometimes can be an overwhelming experience, especially for people coming here for the very first time.

Savi receives between 15-70 email requests per day from people who want to come and work in Auroville. Some of them are Indian nationals who want paid jobs, something Auroville does not provide for volunteers, so Savi has to explain this to them each time.

Sara Sponza, the general coordinator of Savi, has been working there for six years. Among other tasks, she is in charge of problem solving and public relations, and she also organises the Volunteer Introduction Program (VIP). Here she answers some questions.

Why was Savi established?

Savi was born 13 years ago as a need to give a framework to people that wish to contribute actively in Auroville, so they can be identified and Auroville can support them. Before Savi existed, people who wanted to volunteer would wander around, and Aurovilians in units sometimes didn't have the attention or time to connect with them, so we became the bridge in between. People now have an easier access to information regarding Units/Services that are looking for help, and can approach them with more ease. Savi is like a window through which individuals from all over the world and India can have a first under-



The Savi Team (back row from left to right) : Sivakumar, Sara, Dominique, Manojkumar. Front: Pranshula, Saranya, Boomi.

standing of Auroville activities and the diversity they can find here.

Practically, in what ways do Auroville and the Auroville units support volunteers?

There is affordable accommodation for volunteers in Auroville. Some examples are Mitra hostel, La Maison des Jeunes and Celebration. As a volunteer you also receive a 20% refund of your Guest Contribution at Financial Service after 2 months of work. Some Guest Houses may also give an additional discount.

There is also a general agreement that workshops, activities, therapies and treatments will provide 50% discounts for volunteers, and there are a few restaurants providing benefits as well, but it is up to each unit to decide this.

We recommend to the unit holders to pay at least the volunteer contribution - which is Rs 900 - and the lunch scheme at Solar Kitchen or other places. If they can also support accommodation expenses that makes a great difference, as this is one of the main challenges for volunteers. In any case, when volunteers come here they have to agree to be self-sufficient and provide for themselves.

Some volunteers feel that they are treated as "free workers".

We explain to the units that volunteering is not an opportunity to take advantage of those who want to come here to work, and they usually understand this. The only time when this can be a problem is in the case of the internships - more likely involving Indian university students - as some units can demand too much from interns which are dependent on receiving their mentor's signature.

Besides the material aspect, do volunteers have a hard time adapting to Auroville? Can Savi help them on an emotional-psychological level if this should prove necessary?

It is true that Auroville can be unsettling for volunteers, especially at the beginning.

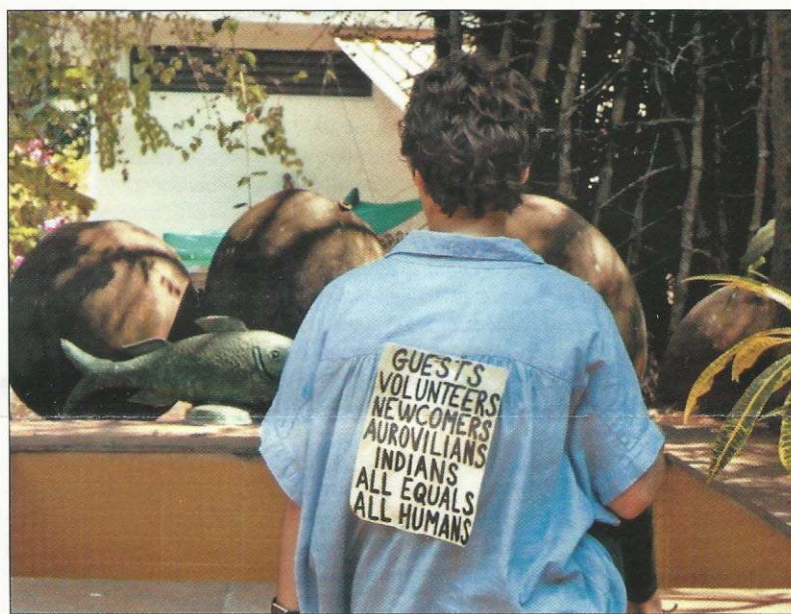
Often volunteers have problems regarding accommodation and money, but if they have an emotional crisis they will probably leave. Some of them come to us with tears in their eyes. We try to remind them that it is ok to feel lost, and that solutions are available, but there is an ingredient in the "Auroville soup" that may be just too much for some of them to grasp. Sometimes they have been in contact with us for several months and when they come they can't bear the vibration of the place, so they go.

We meet volunteers once in a while and we guide them, but they have a mentor at work who is seeing them every day, so this is the person responsible for supervising their work and supporting the volunteer as much as possible in other ways.

In case there is a problem with the unit where the volunteer is working, we can help them move elsewhere, but we don't have the means to do more than that.

The volunteer programme is a much-appreciated initiative of Savi. What is it about?

We noticed a while ago the need for volunteers to have a deeper understanding of Auroville, as they are very much concentrated in their work but curious about it, so we created this four-day programme to give a little introduction or glimpse of what Auroville is. They wouldn't have had this chance otherwise. We introduce



Volunteer statistics

Savi receives around 300 volunteers per year from 30+ nationalities. This number is increasing every year.

In the past 3 years, Indian volunteers increased by 15% while foreign volunteers increased by 24%.

The majority of volunteers are in their 20's.

	Indian Citizens			Foreigners (6 months +)		
	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total
2016	78	94	172	44	60	104
2017	95	92	187	68	41	109
2018	85	113	198	78	51	129
2019 till 15/09	97	90	195	40	40	80

Indian Citizens (volunteering from 2 months to 1 year)

	20s	30s	40s	50s +
2018	124	48	21	5
2019	121	42	26	6

French Service Civique in Auroville

Many of you know that the German volunteer service *Weltwärts* has been sending young German citizens to Auroville since 2008. And now, thanks to two Aurovilians - Lison and Dominique - the French *Service Civique* is offering their youth the same beautiful opportunity!

Like Germany, and other countries of the world, France has finally taken the initiative to engage young people in a serious process of exploring potential career paths via volunteering, no longer considering it a pretext for not studying. Numerous scientific studies have shown that a well-managed experience of volunteering has a significant impact on academic decision-making: a more informed choice, a more conscious decision. France has long been reluctant to let its youth explore the world instead of progressing immediately to higher education once they finish high school, for fear of losing the country's potential in human resources. But, seeing such programmes benefiting other nations, the French government created its own in 2010. The *Service Civique* (Civic Service) includes missions of general interest in France and abroad, from 6 to 12 months, for French citizens between the ages of 16 and 25. This initiative is crucial in these troubled and uncertain times, in which young people are struggling to find clarity and purpose in what they ought to do in life.

In Auroville, it was with the arrival of Lison, a young French kinesiologist, in 2016, that the adventure of *Service Civique* began in our community. Lison had decided to come and volunteer in Auroville for a year, after finishing her studies. Not having the means to support herself without an income, she inquired as to whether there were government grants to support her in doing so. She heard about the *Service Civique*, and managed to convince the French Government that her volunteering mission in Auroville, at Oli School, could qualify for their programme. This meant she was eligible for the financial support it offers: travel and living costs.

Then Dominique, a French citizen working at Savi, took the initiative of formalizing this agreement, and the opportunity to extend it to other units in Auroville that received volunteers. This required complex communications with the French government, and it was only after months of email exchanges - drafting, correcting and adjusting precise vocabulary for a formal agreement - that Dominique managed to validate four Auroville-based *Service Civique* missions for the year 2017-2018. In this first year, we had the pleasure of welcoming seven volunteers for twelve months. Our supervising team of Aurovilians - Michael, Tushita, and Chloe - learned to follow and facilitate the progress of these young people. This journey had ups and downs, imperfections, mistakes, failures, and readjustments - but also revelations, achievements, strong moments, of

realisation, and delight: a true adventure of consciousness and joy.

From this experience, we have learned, and grown. Seven missions have been validated for 2018-2019, and nine volunteers were selected after a process that received 250 applications! These young French citizens are among us today: one group arrived in early September, the other in early October 2018. Apolline, Hélène, Hugo, Inès, Marie, Mathilde, Méline, Pénélope and Quentin have been volunteering in our community for a year, and work respectively with Auroville Child Development, Aquadyn, Pavilion of France, Thamarai, Oli School, YouthLink, and Aikiyam School. They all understand the special context in which they are immersed, and are ready to live this adventure of consciousness. Four of them left already at the end of their mission, but five of them decided to stay: Apolline, Marie, Mathilde, Méline and Quentin. They are extending their stay for one more year, and who knows, maybe will they become Newcomers.

And since the 5th of September 2019, we have the pleasure to welcome 15 new ones! They just started their mission in Auroville, and are all very excited and curious about the transformation they are going to go through. If you happen to meet one of them, they would be very happy to hear about your story.

Michael, Tushita, and Chloe
The French Service Civique Team, Auroville.

A young volunteer's experience

Auroville's diversity is undoubtedly its greatest strength. Whether it is Aurovilians, Newcomers, Friends of Auroville or volunteers, they are mostly exceptional people who came from the four corners of the world to make the Auroville that we know today - a cultural *gloubiboulga* bubbling with a desire for unity, self-discovery and spirituality. Everyone is looking for something, everyone has their own motivation and everyone has their own definition. This makes the place exceptional, since in fact, the only limit in Auroville is the one we impose on ourselves. But it is also the diversity of activities and opportunities that makes Auroville so incredible. And if something is not available, it is up to you to launch it.

I think I initially tended to idealise Auroville and the people who live there. Now that I am fully settled in Auroville, I can say that I only saw its utopia from the outside. In a way, Auroville reminds us that nothing is perfect and that cohabitation is sometimes a source of tension. I thought that childish issues were already resolved because the people are smart enough not to argue about them. But in the end, that's not what matters. What matters is that we try to ease these tensions that we try to do better next time. It is this hunger for human progress that makes the place so attractive to me.

Quentin

Quentin has been volunteering for a year at YouthLink as part of the French Service Civique programme.

Welcoming Volunteers: do we have the right attitude?

My name is Maël. I was born in Auroville in 1994 and was partially raised here – the other part of my education happened in France. I am now settling back in Auroville.

During my study of Social Anthropology, I wrote a masters' thesis on Auroville based on a six-month fieldwork during which I had been in contact with a lot of volunteers, thanks mainly to 'La Maison des Jeunes' which mainly hosts 'Savi' Volunteers, where I was living then. Today, many of them – as well as new arrivals – are good friends. Although I am a 'child of Auroville', I also feel very close to volunteers and Newcomers, perhaps because I've spent half of my life outside of Auroville. Feeling that I'm more or less sitting in the middle, if not on both chairs, I felt a call to share my perspectives.

Auroville is an inspiring dream, isn't it? Year after year, our community attracts an increasing number of volunteers from all around the world. Auroville is seen as a platform to explore oneself, to progress and grow, while contributing to an extraordinary human experiment. And in fact, whatever reasons brought us here, we are all in essence 'voluntary workers of Auroville'. This also applies to our volunteers. We are here to dedicate our time and energy towards the making of 'the City of Dawn'.

Nevertheless, it seems to me that with our different statuses – Aurovilians, Newcomers or volunteers – come different ways of being considered by the collective. Some freshly arrived volunteers even voice a perceived feeling of injustice.

So what is it that creates this feeling? Could it be linked with the inner attitude that we, as residents of Auroville, have when it comes to welcoming and integrating these new 'voluntary workers of Auroville'?

Perhaps this investigatory journey could start with a very simple question: for many of us who actually don't know a lot of volunteers, how do we imagine them? Do we imagine them as being in resonance with our values, or totally disconnected from what makes the core of Auroville? Do we imagine them as dedicated and hard-working, or as lazy and profiteering? Do we envisage them as explorers of the new consciousness, or as relics of the 'old world'?

Given our diversity, I assume there are many answers to the above questions. But there is another very important one we need to consider first: what are the beliefs we hold about ourselves?

Several Aurovilians, to my knowledge, are here for a new kind of adventure. Auroville stands for the birth of a new species, the 'Supramental', and many of us came to dare this journey into the unexpected. But while many consider that we're far from being there, just having this somewhat far-fetched goal can also create quite some expectations, and build a lot of ego in us. Being born in Auroville, I know very well the pride and ego that partially comes from the feeling of somehow being a 'chosen one'. We perceive Auroville as being different from what we commonly call the 'old world', which tends to create a slight feeling of superiority that may carry over into our relation with volunteers. After all, don't they come from this outside reality that many have chosen to leave behind? And on top of that, aren't most of them strangers to the writings of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo – and thus living in a somehow parallel world?

In other words, through our limited lenses we tend to focus on what we perceive as the differences rather than on what unites us. Our pedestal and our beliefs tend to distort our perspective: we create a gap where there is none.

Because of this perceived difference, volunteers tend to be treated differently from residents, creating in some of them a feeling of injustice.

For example, while volunteers are voluntarily offering their services, in many cases not much is given in return. Many of the Auroville units where volunteers work do not cover their basic costs such as transport, lunch scheme, contribution to Auroville (900 Rs monthly, mandatory for all registered volunteers) and shelter. In restaurants, shops and workshops, volunteers do not necessarily have access to the same discount as Aurovilians. Moreover, some of our 'youth hostels' which are meant to offer housing solutions to long-term volunteers at cost price actually function as business units. It is no wonder, then, that some volunteers feel a sense of injustice: in addition to being considered 'free labour', they are also being used by some Aurovilians to make money.

Another very important contributor to this feeling of injustice is the unequal access allowed to the Matrimandir and its gardens. While Newcomers can access both at the same times as Aurovilians, volunteers are asked to come at guests' timings. Only if they are able to justify that their working hours are not compatible with guests' timings and that nevertheless they had been going there regularly for the last couple of months – which is a paradox – can they apply for a pass which gives them access at another specific slot. Many volunteers are not aware that a process exists for them to get such a pass, and some of them feel discouraged to access the Matrimandir, even though they have a long-ing for it.

If we really perceived volunteers as being part of us, would equal access to the 'Soul of Auroville' ever be put in question?

Of course, these are generalisations. Many units treat their volunteers with utmost care and respect. Among other inspiring projects, 'La Maison des Jeunes' provides housing solutions at cost price. Some volunteers do not experience any feelings of injustice but feel privileged to be in Auroville, a place that offers them so many opportunities for self-growth and acquiring new skills. Moreover, one could say that Auroville offers to everyone – volunteers included – what is needed for their growth and progress.

Yet we cannot brush the concerns of those who feel disadvantaged under the carpet. Rather we can welcome these feelings as opportunities to grow as a collective and explore ways to support each other while creating a common field of oneness, togetherness and unity.

Above all, we are invited to remind ourselves that we all came here as volunteers in some sense, and that it was the beginning of a long journey into a deeper understanding and appreciation of this unique place. We all know we still have very far to go in realizing our individual and collective ideals. But why can we not, out of humility rather than ego, offer the same understanding and opportunity to today's volunteers, some of whom may also be embarking, or even far advanced, upon the same path that we are walking?

Maël

We can't achieve human unity with segregation

It is a common feeling – and I would dare say almost a fact now – that when you decide to open up to Auroville and embrace the challenge of living here, you become very busy. Not only with outer work, but also with active inner work. This is not only the case for Aurovilians and Newcomers, but everyone who decides to be part of this unique experiment, including official and unofficial volunteers.

I've taken a few volunteer jobs in my life in different countries. A couple of years ago I volunteered for a month in a small spiritual community in Portugal. I wasn't paid for my work, but housing and food was provided along with free access to all the activities of the project, the main purpose of which was to wake up from the illusion of the ego. In that sense it was similar to Auroville's aspiration of human unity, but on a much smaller and simple scale: we were no more than 20 people, all volunteers in a project founded and host by a couple.

We would have meditations together every day, we would gather to talk very often about our inner and outer process, and we would observe the ego movements in all our interactions while working at our different tasks. The work was exhausting not only on the physical but also on the emotional level, as we discussed every feeling, situation or event that seemed to be coming from ego movements. It required a lot of discipline and patience, but at the same time it was so amazing and beautiful to feel the deep intimacy that was shared between all of us, a bunch of strangers from different nationalities and ages living together trying to feel this no-separation. For that entire month we became like a family. The very point of being there was to internalize this truth: we are all part of the same family.

The experienced passed, but the sweet feeling remained. Since I came here, I've been wondering if it is possible to create that safe space and deep connection on a much bigger and more complex scale in Auroville.

I find the situation here much more complex than volunteering anywhere else. The unconventional organisation of Auroville makes it difficult to understand and, hence, to adapt to. This reality is combined with the normal human adaptation process that you face when you are new in a place (regarding culture, weather, language, food, etc.) and the difficulties that you may have to deal with regarding housing and an unguaranteed financial future. But, as I experienced, that may not even be the main issue for many volunteers. The main issue is the non-

material difficulty of dealing with yourself from inside, of going inwards and navigating the deep waters of your consciousness (or unconsciousness). Much emotional intelligence has to be learned. The entire process asks you to become your own individual pillar, which is actually a highly spiritual aim in itself.

Obviously, the individual responsibility comes first, and somehow this is what the energy of Auroville is forcing us to do: to become self-sustainable adults on every level. The volunteers – as everyone else – need to live whatever plan Auroville and The Divine has for them, and each individual is responsible to surrender to that. But that doesn't mean Auroville can't, as a collective and through conscious organisational decisions, improve the conditions and prepare a gentler ground for people of goodwill to come and work here.

For example, some volunteers feel they are treated and looked upon as free labour and not really integrated into the rest of the community as peers. They are in a kind of a middle ground: one foot in, one foot out, not tourists but not considered part of Auroville. This is reflected in the regulations for them: they have discounts on some things, they pay visitors prices on many others. They can access workshops and treatments in some places with a 50% discount, but cannot attend other events or classes because they are considered as visitors.

I think this kind of treatment is not just unwelcoming but also impractical for a place that needs more youth and has the ambitious goal to grow up to 50,000 residents.

There are many different statuses in Auroville – Volunteer, pre-Newcomer, Newcomer, Friend of Auroville, Aurovillian, Children of Aurovilians, workers. On the one hand, it is necessary to label, to organise, and each status was born from a need, but at the same time we can get trapped, attached to the label and we can use it to separate what is not in nature separated. In the end we cannot achieve human unity under a human segregation system, can we?

The sense of commitment, adventure and service of the volunteer who comes to Auroville is at least strong enough that he/she decided to give up many other possibilities and a much more materialistic life outside to contribute to this experiment.

So does someone who comes here to join the work that Auroville is doing for humanity really belong to the outside world? Isn't that how all the pioneers ended up here in the first place?

Valentina

HUMAN RESOURCES

Finding meaningful work in Auroville

Work is a central pillar of the Aurovillian experience and can be one of its most gratifying aspects. The Mother wrote that "To live in Auroville means to do the Yoga of work. So all Aurovilians must take up a work and do it as Yoga." Today, before an individual can even begin their Newcomer process, they must secure a place (or places) of work and make a full-time commitment. But with over 250 commercial units and services in Auroville, it can be quite challenging to navigate the work scene and find an appropriate and meaningful opportunity. This can become even more complex if a person is in need of a maintenance, the monthly amount given in return for work to cover basic living expenses.

Introducing the new Human Resource Initiative

A recent project, the Human Resource Initiative (HRI), aims to address the gap between the work opportunities within Auroville and the individuals qualified to take them up. The idea originated with Stephanie and Angelo while they were working on the Funds and Assets Management Committee (FAMC). They put together a proposal for a comprehensive Auroville-wide human resources service and presented it to the FAMC, Budget Coordination Committee (BCC), and Auroville Council. In fact, a similar concept for a human resource department had already been presented by the Exploring Prosperity team, a group which is exploring ways to realign Auroville to The Mother's vision.

Angelo and Stephanie's proposal outlined a service which would

interface with work seekers to evaluate their skill sets and work preferences, and then match them with suitable work opportunities in Auroville. The service would also survey the community to create a "resource pool" that could be deployed in Auroville units, services, schools, farm/ forests, and working groups. And in the long run, if certain skills were in short supply, the service would assist in vocational training for work seekers.

Sadly, HRI did not get the budget it had requested, which could have covered the maintenances for HR staff and offered the potential to organize skills development training for work seekers in Auroville.

But faced with such a pressing community need for HR services, Stephanie and Angelo decided to launch the HRI nonetheless. They were joined by Newcomers Joel and Sivakumar and Aurovillian Siv who had HR experience, and they announced the new service in March 2019. They first reached out to YouthLink to learn about the work that had already been done in connecting youth with work opportunities. The HRI team then started corresponding with various Auroville units and services to present the HRI initiative and its work placement services.

Today, those searching for a new work opportunity can write to the HRI team to be matched with an opening corresponding to their skills, aspirations, availability and needs. Each applicant is asked to fill out an online form that gathers information about their experience, qualifications, and skills, enabling the team to discern the objectives and aptitudes of the individual. Next, the team meets with the applicant for a 30 to 45 minute interview to gather any further data that might not

have come through in the form. The HRI team can compare this profile with the requirements that have been submitted for work positions at units and services.

Once the HRI team finds a potential match between a work position and a work seeker, they present the option anonymously to each party. If there is interest on both sides, they are made known to one another.

The team notes that the number of work positions that they receive has increased from those formerly publicized in the weekly community bulletin *News & Notes* and on the intranet forum AuroNet. "Some units have said that they haven't wanted to post their work positions publicly because they don't want to deal with a wave of responses or to reject the applications of Aurovilians," says Stephanie. "So the response to HRI has been really positive."

So far, HRI has been able to place 11 people in positions in Auroville, and have 16 additional applicants in process. They also keep a database of all the applicants that they profile, in case an ideal opportunity comes up later. "Some people apply with very particular skills, and we may not have an opportunity for them right away," explains Stephanie.

HRI also offers counselling. This takes the form of encouraging a recently placed applicant to persevere in their work or advising a work seeker to build new professional skills. With additional support, HRI hopes to expand this to offering workshops for work seekers to build high-demand skills.

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Twice Upon a Time in Auroville

In September there was a special photography exhibition in Citadines Art Gallery. Aurovilian photographer Marco Saroldi took archive photos of the early days of Auroville by Dominique Darr and matched them with photos he had taken recently.

"It began with a project for Outreach Media", explains Marco. "I had taken photographs of people working joyfully in the new Joy of Impermanence community, and I was immediately reminded of the spirit of the original pioneers. So I selected about ten pictures of the pioneers from the Auroville Archives and put them together with the Joy of Impermanence photos, then published them on the Outreach Media website."

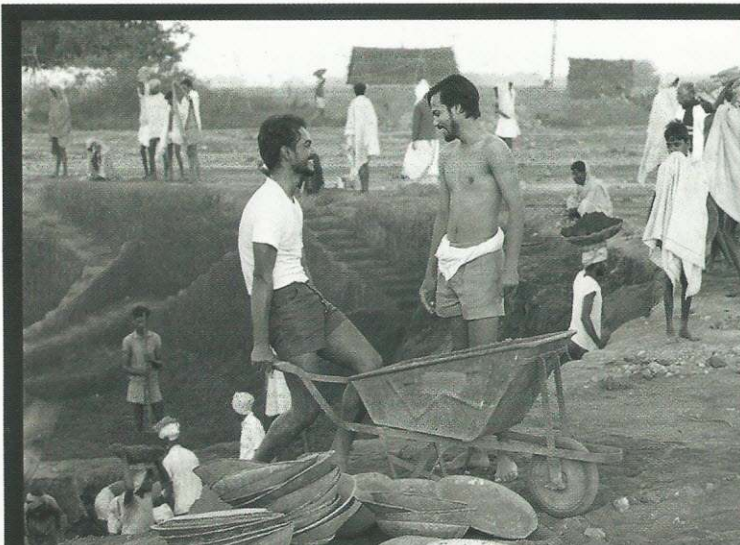
He knew that many early photographs had been taken by Dominique Darr and these were archived in Citadines. He'd also seen Olivier Barot's new photographic book on Auroville which had been brought out for the 50th anniversary, "So I wondered, what if I took the same photos today? What would we see? How would the places change? And how would these new landscapes be peopled?"

The exhibition features 27 pairs of photos, the pioneer black and white photos of Dominique juxtaposed with recent colour images of Marco. Sometimes the link between the pairs is geographic, sometimes thematic or by mood.

At first sight, the juxtaposition of past and present seems to lead to rather obvious conclusions. There are strong contrasts, as in the image of the early sand road in a desert set contrasted with today's urbanized high road in Kulpalayam village; there are similarities, evidenced by people working joyfully together on the Matrimandir excavation and the Joy of Impermanence project; and there is development, illustrated by the juxtaposition of the stark birth image taken in a simple Utility hut with the recent founding ceremony of the Morning Star birthing centre.

The past as it emerges through Dominique's images seems to be represented by simplicity, scarcity, raw energy, wide vistas and individuality, while Marco's present seems to be one of abundance, diversity and community.

Yet, on closer inspection, the images elude such a simplistic 'balance sheet' type of interpretation. For while the pioneers inhabited a stark landscape and possessed very little in comparison with the Aurovilians of today, they had an intensity and an ability to create



Matrimandir Excavation, 1972



Joy of Impermanence, 2019

Earth, Sweat and Joy

something beautiful out of almost nothing - a Matrimandir, a painting, a living sculpture - as Dominique's images of the Amphitheatre workers or the Forecomers' pioneer artists attest. Today, it is true that there is more of everything - people, colour, diversity, opportunity - but Marco's photos sometimes suggest that something has also been lost.

For example, 'Tea Break' contrasts the casual harmony of workers, both Aurovilian and employees, drinking tea together in the early 1970s with the bored and isolated figures taking a break during a recent meeting at the Unity Pavilion. 'Past simple, present continuous' pairs an image of an early lesson in a simple hut with a modern art lesson in a well-appointed art room, yet whereas in the former the young students are keenly surrounding the teacher, in the latter the material abundance seems accompanied by a certain diminution of aspiration, of intensity, in the students.

Perhaps the strongest contrast between past and future is provided by 'Hidden Object', in which Dominique's stark image of the urn in an empty landscape is juxtaposed to Marco's shot from the 50th Anniversary bonfire where the urn is submerged, completely hidden, by camera-touting tourists.

For Marco, there are no 'winners' here. "If I look at the images I don't like either situation. Dominique's urn shot makes me feel sad, it's like a monument lost in the desert, but in my 50th image Auroville is a

typical touristic place: I counted 29 cameras in the 50 or 60 people crowded around the urn!"

In other words, as Marco's partner, Dominique, wrote in the exhibition introduction, "Rather than a balance sheet, it is a subtle game with an underlying question." She explains, "You can't make a simple judgement about the past and the present, it is much more complex." These images force us not only to re-evaluate the past, but also the present; the gains, the losses, the inspiring continuities, the new possibilities.

Moreover, the nature of development is often different today. The 'Building the Lotus' pairing juxtaposes work on the early Matrimandir construction with a recent meditation around the lotus pond beneath the structure, seeming to indicate that while the earlier emphasis was on the transformation of the physical landscape now there is more time for inner work to be done.

In some ways, of course, the way we respond to the images is very subjective. For some of the early pioneers, Dominique's images may evoke a simpler time of greater fraternity, while latecomers may shudder at the starkness of those early landscapes and the primitive living conditions. Yet, as Marco points out, "You can't say it's better or worse today, it's just different. In the past maybe there was more cohesion, and it was less complicated. There were the wide perspectives, the simplicity, but nowadays there are more opportunities and people can play basketball under a wonderful structure in New Creation. In some ways it is better now but then you have to breathe all the pollution on the roads. In the past you feel there were times when people were more open, it was really an adventure, whereas now people come here because it's a beautiful place. Yet every day they still have to struggle with something, so this has not changed."

Marco clarifies, however, that he is not primarily interested in making social commentary. "I selected these images for their aesthetic quality, not because they 'say' something. When I choose my own photos I select the ones where the colours are vibrant, the people beautiful. I like people dancing round a fire rather than people crying!"

It's a timely reminder that this exhibition is not only thought-provoking but also an aesthetic experience in which Dominique's unique visual documentary of the early years is beautifully complemented by Marco's remarkable eye for colour and composition.

Alan



The Urn 1973



The Urn 2019

Hidden Object

HUMAN RESOURCES

Finding meaningful work in Auroville

continued from page 6

Connections and the Human Resources Team

HRI is not the first team to undertake the responsibility of finding work for Aurovilians and Newcomers. A service called Connections was started in 2000 by Don, Hans, Jaya, and Paulien to proactively match work vacancies with people capable of filling them. The team worked out of Bharat Nivas and responded to the growing community and the need for a concerted effort to build the city at every level.

As the team evolved over the years, Connections eventually took a less formal approach to this task. Rather than focusing on past experience and training, the team began to take a more intuitive approach to connecting people within the community. With the interconnected nature of the Auroville community as well as its size, this method worked well.

The Connections service thus evolved to provide informal support and eventually closed around 2012 after the departure of key members to other fields of work. Meanwhile,

the Human Resources Team, a separate group that coordinates city service maintenances and other community-supported maintenances, continued to offer assistance for finding work within the services. However, word of mouth and limited public announcements became the primary mode for both publicizing and finding work positions - until the founding of the HRI.

An optimistic future for work in Auroville

The energy and vision of the new HRI team is infectious. Despite all of them holding other work responsibilities in Auroville, the team approaches the communication-heavy work with dedication and endeavours to always promptly reply to inquiries.

"We are making information more open to everyone, to make it clear when there's a work opportunity," Angelo explains. "Otherwise, it is unfair for Newcomers and people without a social network." Even long-time Aurovilians have been taking advantage of the service to branch out into areas where they may not have contacts.

Hilary

PASSINGS

Riju Bukov

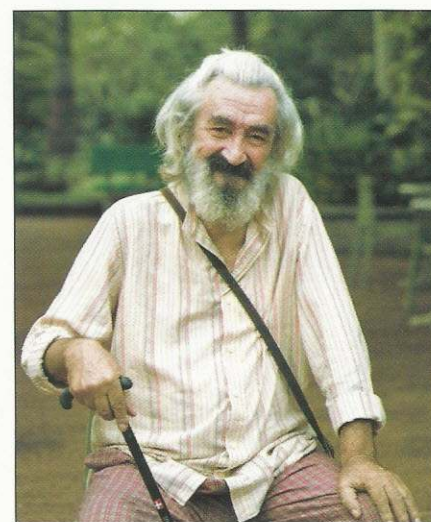
Riju Anatoly Bukov left his body in Marika's House at 10:30am on September 22nd. Having grappled with a weak heart for many years, a massive stroke proved to be too much. After a few days at PIMS, he returned to Marika's. He would have been 75 in a few days' time.

Before discovering Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, Riju, born in the Ukraine, was actively involved in the Odessa art world as a playwright, director, poet, sculptor and painter with a clear call towards spirituality. He gradually started translating their works ('The Mother' and 'Sunlit Path') and visited Auroville in 1991 for the first time. In 1995 he arrived for good, inspiring quite a few friends from Ukraine to follow his lead.

Having lived in various places, Riju soon ended up in Aspiration where he built himself a small house. Functioning as an assistant at Savitri Bhavan for some time, he mainly worked from home, translating, writing, sculpting and sharpening his philosophical understanding by daily getting deeper into *The Life Divine* which was his stronghold. The sincerity of his yoga helped him deal with personal problems that came his way, and many of the Russian-speaking community revered him for his deep insight into Sri Aurobindo's philosophy. The Sri Aurobindo Ashram published several compilations in Russian that include his name.

Since February 2018, Riju stayed at Marika's where he fully enjoyed his days. His daughter Christina, a skilled puppeteer who gave several puppet performances when here, and granddaughter Darya, visited him there as in recent years.

Riju's remains were cremated at Auroville's mandapam on September 25th.



Climate strike and clean-up day in Auroville

On Saturday 21st September, as part of the Global Climate Strikes and World Clean-Up day, Auroville youth organized events to address challenges related to plastic consumption and the consequences of climate change, such as rising sea levels. Over 300 volunteers participated in events such as a litter clean-up, plastic waste brand audit, art installations and a climate strike solidarity photo.

The threat of climate change and its consequences are no longer debatable, the "science has been crystal clear for the last 30 years" as Greta Thunberg put it in her UN speech. Carbon dioxide is at an "unprecedented" level, the highest observed in the past 800,000 years. The impacts will be devastating and are already visible.

Our planet is facing its 6th mass extinction with species disappearing at a rate 1,000 to 10,000 times faster than the natural rate of extinction according to the World Wildlife Fund. By 2050, 30-50% of the species on this planet could be gone forever. Apart from this, we will all face rising sea levels, more frequent and powerful cyclones, water shortages and severe food insecurity.

Tara (19), a dynamic young Aurovilian who inspired these events says, "Thinking of the future scares and saddens me, and I want to make sure that I do everything in my power to make it better. There is so much beauty in this world but time is running out. Deep down in my heart, I know we still have the choice to make a difference – but we need to work together".

4 million concerned citizens in 163 countries were part of these protests and in Auroville, Tara wanted to inspire events with a difference.

The morning consisted of a city wide clean-up with over 300 volunteers, while the afternoon was spent diligently sorting and weighting the collected plastic waste, completing a brand audit and setting up art installations in public places.

The global climate strikes coincided with World Clean-Up day and intersecting these two movements is the massive issue of plastics. Globally we produce over 300 million tons of plastic each year according to World Watch, and we are only recycling an average of 9% of this waste. According to the Centre for Science and Environment in Delhi, India's plastic production is growing at 2.5 times the rate of GDP growth in India. "We're seeing more and more plastic in our waste stream and littered across our landscapes" says Ribhu, Auroville resident and co-founder of WasteLess. "Many brands have switched to plastics and place the responsibility and burden of waste management solely on consumers and the government", he goes on to say. This was a driving force for WasteLess to register for a 'global brand audit' organized by Break Free From Plastic.

The main clean-up event was organized by nine groups including Auroville Clean-Up group, Eco Service, Let's Talk Trash, Mohanam Youth Space, Upcycling Studio, Upasana, WasteLess, Waste Without Borders and Zero Waste Auroville.



Collecting the waste

A total of 1,126 kilos of waste was collected but the largest volume was certainly plastics. The brand audit team of 35 volunteers, led by Vivek from WasteLess, carefully studied each piece of plastic and noted the brand, parent company, material and local recyclability. A total of 1,753 plastic items were studied and a whopping 79% are non-recyclable plastics, often comprised of multiple layers (like chip or biscuit packets). This audit showed that 10 brands are responsible for 40% of plastic litter collected. Pepsi was leading the way in plastic pollution followed closely by Britannia, Perfetti, Mondelez, ITC, Coca Cola, Parle, Nestle and, in last place, two local brands Rusi (milk packets) and Aachi (spice and pickle sachets).

"Brand audits are our way of gathering evidence to hold corporations accountable for plastic that is not manageable or that may be recyclable but is ending up where it shouldn't be. If

we only clean plastic up, it will keep coming back," says Sybil Bullock from the Break Free From Plastic Brand Audit Coordination team who has been very impressed with citizen science participation from organizations and communities around the world.

Global problems like climate change and plastic pollution are massive and to "diffuse the doomsday prognosis with playfulness and humour" Johnny, an inspiring long-time resident of Auroville, wanted to create a powerful photoshopped image. "We are not only drowning in rising sea levels but also in our own consumer extravagance. There are many small gestures and incremental adjustments that we can make to begin to feel less helpless and more a part of the solution." Acting alone doesn't make any sense – we need to be together and in solidarity rise up to solve the greatest challenges that have ever faced humanity!

The WasteLess Team



Collecting a decaying bag



Doing the plastic brand audit

FASHION

Freestore Fashion Show



PHOTO COURTESY SERENA AURORA

Saturdays are usually busy days around Solar Kitchen. People are rushing to get their weekend shopping at PTDC, or a quick coffee at La Terrace, or finding a new item at Freestore. On Saturday, 14th of September that was not possible as Freestore was closed for the public. Inside, kids and adults, organized by Nadia and her team, were getting ready for this year's Freestore Fashion Show and dressing up in the wildest creations. To the sound of African drummers, the doors finally opened and models of all ages, sexes and sizes posed, waved and smiled as they modelled costumes made up of materials from the Freestore. The costumes ranged from pretty princess, weird monster and devils to women's fashion, with some courageous dads fooling around with wigs and handbags. It was great fun and should definitely become an annual event.

Julietta

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