

Acceptance Speech for the 2012 Dharma Seva Award
September 19, 2012

Dr. Vinod Prakash, Founder and President, IDRF

It is my distinct privilege to accept Hindu American Foundation's Dharma Seva Award. It is an honor to be recognized by an organization rooted in the values of pluralism, tolerance, and understanding. IDRF shares those values, as we serve all Indians regardless of faith, sect or creed.

Let me first appreciate the tremendous contributions made by IDRF's magnanimous donors who have enabled us to send over \$25 million in grants since its inception. Second, I would like to thank our partner NGOs in India, who work tirelessly to improve the quality of life of the most vulnerable people. Thank you to our volunteers in the US and to the newest members of our executive team, Rajita and Melissa, who are here with us. Finally, I must express my deepest gratitude to my wife Sarlaji, who has accompanied me on our field visits to interior India. She is also present.

Before founding IDRF, I was involved in several disaster relief efforts in India. I gradually realized that what marginalized Indians need is sustainable development. I took early retirement from The World Bank so that I could devote my full energy to this goal. IDRF has grown significantly over the past 25 years. Initially, we could send only about \$25,000 in grants annually, whereas we are now able to send over \$1 million annually.

IDRF works from Jammu & Kashmir to Kanyakumari and from Arunachal to Gujarat. Just as India's challenges are multi-dimensional, so are our *seva* programs. Our programs range from empowering villagers to fight corruption to supporting mobile medical vans that serve even inaccessible regions.

Let me share a few success stories with you. With IDRF support, one local NGO reduced the birthrate from 33% to 23% in ten villages by teaching women and men about family planning. This program gradually expanded to 65 villages and broadened to include gender parity, business training, and special consideration for people with disabilities. In another example, we worked closely with an NRI to fulfill his dream of having a school in his native village. Initially, the villagers vehemently opposed any school. But today the school is very popular, providing education to 1,000 students from 25 villages. In a third example, IDRF helped organic farmers and women entrepreneurs through the construction of a women's technology center, a center for organic farmers, and most recently, an energy-efficient cafeteria that provides affordable organic food to villagers.

In brief, this has been a spiritual journey for me. I feel that through serving the community I have received much more back – in the form of inner joy. Once again, I express my deep gratitude to HAF for this award. It provides encouragement to the entire IDRF family.