

EMPOWERING PANCHAYATI RAJ

GIVING WINGS TO COLLECTIVE DREAMS



VADAKARAPATHY AND ERUTHENPATHY
GRAM PANCHAYATS

MAITHRI

GIVING WINGS TO COLLECTIVE DREAMS

A brief report of the project

by

Vadakarapathy and Eruthenpathy Gram Panchayats

Partner Organisation

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PARTNER PANCHAYATS

VADAKARAPATHY AND ERUTHENPATHY GRAM PANCHAYATS

Vadakarapathy and Eruthenpathy Gram Panchayats are situated in the eastern region of the Palakkad district of Kerala State and share the boundary with the State of Tamil Nadu. Majority of the population in these Gram Panchayats depends on agriculture for livelihood. Water scarcity is a major problem faced in these areas. People have to walk long distances to fetch water or depend on 'lorry water supply', especially during summer. Absence of scientific water management practices have made the spending of huge amount of funds on agriculture and allied activities by the Gram Panchayat ineffective.

According to the 2001 Census, the total population of Vadakarapathy Panchayat, living in 5,995 households, in a total area of 52.40.sq.km, is 25,717. Females (12,917) outnumber males (12,800). The sex ratio is advantageous to women (1009). Total literacy of the Panchayat is 70.87 percent. 79.58 percent of men and 62.29 percent of women are literate.

The total population of Eruthenpathy Panchayat, living in 4,403 households, in an area of 38.99 sq. km, is 17,815, as per the 2001 Census. Females have an advantage in terms of numbers: Male (8,791) Female (9,024). The sex ratio is advantageous to women (1027). Total literacy is 69.76 percent. Males (78.84 percent) are ahead of females (60.97 percent) in being literate.

MAITHRI

Maithri, a non-governmental development organisation working in the Palakkad district of Kerala State, was constituted in April 1997. Maithri is rooted in secularism, justice, concern for the weak and marginalised, honesty, voluntarism, and transparency. It is perhaps the first NGOs in the State to have voluntarily subjected to Social Auditing at the Gram Panchayat as well at the district level. Maithri won the best NGO award instituted by Government of Kerala in 1999 for its work in the sphere of renewable energy and energy conservation.

The approaches taken were;

- **Capacity development in local communities:** Maithri activities are focused on forming community groups as a subset of Gram Sabhas and building their capacity. The method of community contracting is adopted in all the works.
- **Convergence:** Maithri has been able to bring about convergence of different agencies and programmes in its activities.
- **Strengthening Panchayati Raj Institutions:** Maithri is trying to strengthen the Local Self Government Institutions (LSGIs) in the context of democratic decentralisation and decentralised planning.

The major areas of intervention:

All the interventions are based on the concept of sustainable development.

- Integrated water resource management;
- Traditional irrigation systems;
- Community managed water supply and sanitation;
- Rain water harvesting;
- Renewable energy;
- Cost-effective building technologies;
- Decentralised planning and strengthening of Panchayathi Raj;
- Education of marginalised sector;
- Environmental education;
- Rural banking.

The core competence areas of Maithri:

- Capacity building and training;
- Community mobilisation;
- Project facilitation;
- Project management;
- Consultancy;
- Action research;
- Technology development;
- Model creation.

I

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The Chittur Block of Palakkad district falls in the Palakkad Gap of the Western Ghats and is a rain shadow region. Eruthenpathy and Vadakarapathy Panchayats, situated in the Chittur Block are the worst drought affected areas in Kerala. The average rainfall is 1196 mm against the State average of 3000 mm.

Most of the areas were irrigated by rain, ponds, and traditional irrigation systems based on two small rivers. But the deforestation of catchments reduced the rivers to become seasonal by the 1980s and now, both of them flow only during the peak of monsoon. The sand mining lowered the river bed as well as the water table. Fragmentation of land and traditional systems consequent to the land reforms in the seventies led to the neglect of ponds. The common property catchments and inflow channels are encroached. Finally, the silted ponds were converted into orchards. A government-sponsored sugar factory functioning since the sixties promoted sugarcane cultivation. Heavy loss forced the factory to shut down by the nineties but by that time the surface water had disappeared together with paddy cultivation.

Instead of large open wells and ponds, bore wells dotted the area. The depth of bore wells increased from 80 ft to 1050 ft during the past 15 years. Only the rich can afford it. Distress sale of land are still going on, now somewhat less, due to the simple fact that most of the title deeds are in the custody of various banks. From 1999 onwards severe variation in rainfall started and the area suffered four droughts since then.

Training to women masons



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NHG meeting at Eruthenpathy



Low literacy, severe poverty and malnutrition and associated health problems have resulted in standard of living much below the famed Kerala average. Factors like border Gram Panchayat, distance from district headquarters, and poor transport and communication facilities have added to the cup of woes. The farmers were deprived of fair prices for products and were exploited by middle men. Exodus of youth to nearby towns coupled with the rising number of debt-ridden farmers threaten the very future of the cultural synthesis of Tamil and Malayalam evolved through centuries.

The drought situation in this region is so grave that it becomes imperative to emphasise the importance of natural resource management of these areas in a decentralised manner to ensure their sustainability.

In this context, the Eruthenpathy and Vadakarapathy Panchayats attempted to find a solution with the support of Maithri and SDC-CapDecK. The project, Local level Natural Resource Management aims at strengthening the Panchayathi Raj process by developing capacities of the grassroot-level organisations to manage their natural resources in a decentralised manner.

The power to control and own the resources must lie with the local community. There is a saying that 'knowledge is power'. The decentralisation process can be strengthened only if the community is capacitated with the knowledge to manage its own resources.

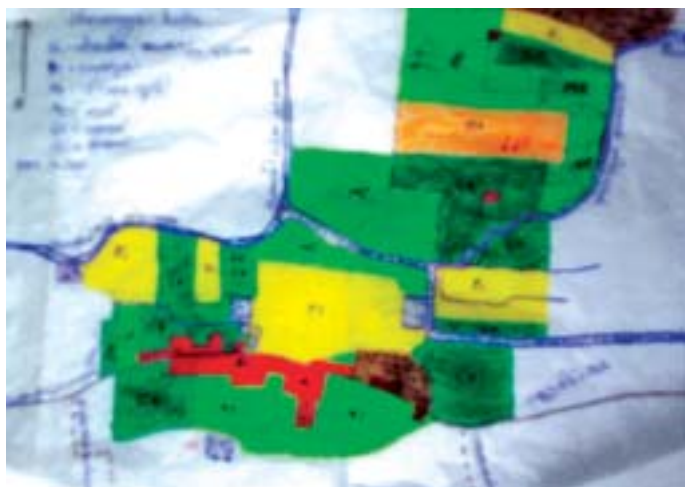


Training for the preparation of water asset plan



Poster exhibition as part of GP level social audit

Resource Map of Devarayan Kotta NHG



II

OBJECTIVES

- To improve the qualitative participation of the community in Gram Sabhas and to develop new institutional models in decentralisation for natural resource management.
- To create awareness among the school children and community-based organisations (CBOs) about the importance of water conservation and natural resource management.
- To capacitate the people to develop suitable projects on water resource management and to get them approved in the Gram Sabhas.
- To enable the community to implement the projects.
- To strengthen the Panchayati Raj process by developing a resource centre in the Panchayat that could act as a permanent set up in future.
- To develop a long-term perspective plan regarding the natural resource management of the area.



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Video shows at NHGs

Training on Panchayati Raj



Exposure visit to Karakulam





III METHODOLOGY

Neighbourhood groups (NHGs) organised as subsets of Gram sabhas are the cutting edge of the intervention. The capacity of these organisations had to be developed to create new models in the process of decentralisation. The Gram Panchayat and the transferred institutions acted as partners in these activities. A methodology was developed for assessing the water balance of an area so that the community could use it for formulating a long-term perspective plan on natural resource management and scientific water management practices. The community-based organisations were given training in creating a database of the area and formulating appropriate measures to tackle the issues related to natural resource management. They were capacitated to implement these measures by finding funds from the Gram Panchayat and other agencies. Awareness about water conservation and management practices were generated through visual aids and interactions with the school children and the community. A resource centre managed by a core team developed through this process in the Gram Panchayat was to co-ordinate the future activities.



Working group meeting at Vadakarapathy

Training on the preparation of water asset plan



IV

MAJOR COMPONENTS

The major components were the following.

1. Planning and implementation of short term Natural Resource Management (NRM) plans;
2. Planning of long term NRM plans;
3. Setting up of a Resource centre;
4. Capacity building of the community to implement the measures;
5. Amudasurabhi;
6. Good practices.

1. Planning and Implementation of Short Term NRM Plans

The NHGs were equipped to prepare local level projects on natural resource management by selecting from a basket of measures and presenting in the Gram Sabhas for their approval for implementation through them.

2. Planning of Long Term NRM Plans

A methodology was developed to assess the water balance of an area to carry out a long-term perspective planning in terms of better scientific management of the natural resources. The database of each of the areas was created with the participation of the community to enable them acquire better knowledge to intervene in the local level issues.

Local level meetings were organised and specific issues were discussed. Resource maps of the NHGs were validated by the community. This process in turn made them knowledgeable about their area. Measurement of the plots was carried out by them and the generation of socio-economic data was also a product of their committed effort. The information enabled them to develop perspective plan of their area. One of the major hindering factors was the team's lack of knowledge base initially, to deal with the specific issues of farmers.

3. Resource Centre

One resource centre each was developed in both the Panchayats to act as co-ordinating, supporting, and information disseminating agencies for the Gram Panchayats, with their financial assistance. The data on temperature, humidity, rainfall, wind velocity, and soil permeability are being monitored since then. Thus database



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Amudasurabhi project presentation at Eruthenpathy GP



A social audit meeting at Vadakarapathy



Presenting the Amudasurabhi project in Villunni Gram Sabha (Eruthenpathy GP)



Renovation of earthen channels by NHG, Vadakarapathy

of the areas was generated through the resource centre. The validation and up gradation of resource map is a continuous process. A team of volunteers from the local area emerged with a capacity to understand the value of the process and data. This core team emerged through a series of activities in the Gram Panchayats is spearheading the activities at community level.

4. Capacity Building

The whole effort was to shift the focus from project oriented approach to process oriented one. Community volunteers acquired new skills in participatory learning and action through various interactions and trainings. Then they initiated learning processes in the community involving almost all the households in the area.

The new learning processes were covering natural resources, climatic change, participatory learning techniques, estimation and measurement of needy works, preparation of accounts and work management and social auditing.

5. Amudasurabhi

The project entered the final stage with a new title - Amudasurabhi. It is a Tamil name which has its roots in the Tamil classics. Amudasurabhi is a boon given to a young hapless girl by the Gods. By virtue of Amudasurabhi, she could wish for whatever she needed – water, food, hearth, health, wealth, and happiness. The symbolism of accepting the name for the project is obvious. Various activities done under this programme are detailed below.

AGRICULTURE

1. Sustainable Agriculture

The programme was aimed at carrying out comprehensive development of an area using the people's institutions by collecting resources from various agencies. For example, in Devarayan Kotta, forty-eight families of the hundred acre area joined together to build a model on sustainable farming known as Jaivagramam (organic village).

The location of Jaivagramam, Devarayan Kotta village, is in the 12th and 13th wards of Vadakarapathy Panchayat. A NHG (Devarayan Kotta) formed and capacitated under the Amudasurabhi programme is now trying to transform it into a model village which is self-sufficient, sustainable in agriculture and natural resource management. This is by pooling resources and funds from various quarters. The administrative and part of implementation costs of this initiative were supported by Svaraj/Oxfam India.

The **objectives** are:

1. To establish hamlets/villages which follow only sustainable farming practices.
2. To build a strong, knowledge base at the community level on sustainable farming and to disseminate the same for replication at the wider community and society levels.

The major **activities** are:

1. **Developing a Seed Bank:** The farmers collected locally available seeds of paddy, ground nut, ladies finger and leafy vegetables from the NHG members.
2. **Experiments in Paddy:** Farmers stopped the use of chemical fertilisers and instead started using organic manures. With the higher than expected returns, the area under paddy cultivation increased to 15 acres from 5 acres within a year. Currently no farmer is applying chemical fertilisers and pesticides.
3. **Use of Navadhanya (nine seed grains):** After harvesting, seeds of nine grains including various types of pulses and leafy vegetables were planted. The process is expected to recover the fertility of the soil.
4. **Vegetables:** The experiment was extended to vegetables as well. Many farmers are willing to join the organic mode of farming owing to its success.
5. **Drip Irrigation:** The discussions about Jaivagramam led also to introduction of drip irrigation for farming. Farmers estimated that on account of drip irrigation, they were able to save 80,000 to 100,000 litres of water in a season. The fund for this was mobilised from the Gram Panchayat.
6. **Vermi Compost Production:** Consequent to stopping the use of chemical fertilisers, various types of organic manures were used, among them vermi compost being a major item. With the support of the Panchayat, four compost pits were made in the village.
7. **Renovation of Water Canals:** The canals which remained unused for over two decades were renovated under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS) and the Gram Panchayat. A total 125 work days were required to cover a length of 1.5 km. This ensured sufficient availability of water for the next season.
8. **Revamping Fallow Land:** A variety of trees like gooseberry, bamboo, and sappotta were planted to revamp the barren land. Agriculture department and forest department helped them in this effort.
9. **Bio fencing:** The leafy bio fence is a protection to the farm and household plots of many farmers. It provides cattle feed and green manure for the field.
10. **Construction of High Efficiency Choolas:** With the help of the state level agency for renewable energy (ANERT), people were trained from the locality and



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Seed bank inauguration by Mr. Veluswami, GP Member, Vadakarapathy



Organic rice cultivation at Jaivagramam



Tank constructed by women masons in Eruthenpathy



Renovation of earthen channels under NREGS, Vadakarapathy

- installed high efficiency choolas in the houses.
- 11. **Construction of Check Dam:** With monetary support from the Ground Water Department, a check dam was built across the stream known as Kadachal. The dam can store around 640,000 litres of water during June-December.
- 12. **Total Sanitation:** The support of the Panchayat was availed for constructing sanitary latrines for all those who did not have them.
- 13. **Capacity Building:** The Jaivagramam project laid much emphasis on capacity building. Training was provided on organic farming, budding and grafting skills, plant protection and nursery management, waste management, and masonry.

2. Comprehensive Plan for Water Management

The Panchayat and community leaders were given training on participatory techniques in natural resource management, ultimately cascading down to the community creating an unprecedented awareness about water management issues.

The awareness was further strengthened and consolidated by the interventions under the Western Ghat Development Programme, NABARD watershed programme, National Calamity Relief Fund activities, and the Gram Panchayats own watershed programme. In all the instances, the community played the pivotal role in visualising and implementing the programmes.

When NREGS was launched in the Panchayats, people were eager to tap the potential. Community groups were organised in each locality and interactions and training were organised on various aspects of NREGS and its operation.

Later, the community teams surveyed the land holdings and worked out various watershed measures possible under NREGS and appropriate for the area. These findings were tabulated at ward and Panchayat-level, making a comprehensive plan. Estimates were prepared by the community and presented in the Gram Sabhas. These programmes are currently being implemented by NREGS.

The methodology was presented and validated at a State-level workshop organised by Kerala Institute for Local Administration (KILA) and SDC-CapDeck in Thiruvananthapuram. Scaling up of the methodology across the two NREGP districts, however, did not materialise due to various issues. But when Kaniyampatta Gram Panchayat took a lead role in NREGS, the methodology was replicated successfully with the active involvement of an NGO partner of SDC-CapDeck programme; RASTA in Wayanad.

When Erimayur Gram Panchayat in Palakkad district lagged behind in NREGS, the process was replicated there adding depth and speed to the programme. Later, Perumatty Panchayat in Palakkad too is attempting to adopt the methodology. A team of volunteers and community leaders emerged in the Gram Panchayat through these interventions who are now taking these processes forward.

RURAL HABITAT

3. Cost Effective Housing

Houses were constructed for 27 families included in different projects. A team comprising the Panchayat member and an activist visited the entire area and chose a design based on the number of members in a household, interest of the members, space availability, and sanctioned amount. Use of cost effective technologies in house construction led to generating trust among the people and a team of skilled workers.

4. Community Water Quality Monitoring

The water sources in the Panchayats are becoming more contaminated day by day. People who are experiencing difficulty in getting drinking water are not at all aware of the quality of the water. The aim of the programme was to motivate and build capacity among the local people to test the water from different sources and initiate measures to reduce the pollution of water sources .

Training was provided to the community volunteers on testing of water quality, water quality problems, its consequences and remedial measures. Water from common water sources were collected and tested by the trained volunteers in all wards, in the presence of the people and ward member. The results were published in each area. It was realised that if proper training is given, water quality test can be conducted by common people. A facility to continuously do this was added to the Panchayat resource centre.

5. Programme on Sanitation

Film shows and classes were conducted in various parts of the Panchayat as part of this programme. Beneficiaries were made aware of the drawbacks of the deep-pit latrines and the advantages of rural pan which require less quantity of water for flushing. With the full support of the beneficiaries, 20 model latrines were constructed at a cost of Rs 2000 per unit.

6. Renewable Energy Programmes

With the help of the state level agency for renewable energy (ANERT), trained local people had installed house hold level



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Construction of a house using cost-effective technology, Vadakarapathy



Training to community volunteers on water quality



Eravattappara rock water harvesting system built by NHG using NGDP funds



Orientation to community education volunteers



Training to health volunteers

and community level, low fuel demanding and high efficiency choolas in Vadakarapathy and Eruthenpathy Panchayats.

HEALTH

7. Community Health Monitoring System

As part of the programme, 30 volunteers were selected from various NHGs. Training programmes were organised for the volunteers. The doctors and staff from the Primary Health Centre were the main resource persons in this effort. These volunteers were linked to Primary Health Centre (PHC) and Sub-centres. Data about aged, chronically ill, physically disabled, and mentally challenged was collected. Film exhibitions were organised on water quality, water born diseases, hygiene and sanitation at the NHG level.

EDUCATION

8. Community Education Centres

Community education centres were initiated as part of a comprehensive education programme, including studies about learning disability, problems faced by high school children, support for educationally and economically backward children, involvement of community and Gram Panchayat in the education process and programme.

Several meetings of Panchayat Working Group, Village Education Committee, and Parent Teacher Association (PTAs) were organised together with few training programmes. Special camps were conducted for educationally backward children during the vacations. While counselling programmes were organised for the SSLC students, learning disability clinics were arranged for teachers.

Video shows, quiz, painting, and essay writing competitions were organised with the core theme of natural resources involving the whole children of the Panchayat. The cream among the children that emerged through the activities were provided further exposure through summer camps organised with the support of the Department of Forests in the Silent Valley National Park.

The camp members interacted with the community on various developmental issues of day-to-day life like scarcity of fuel, water, and hike in the energy charges. They formed groups and studied these problems using standard research methodologies. These reports were later published and widely circulated.

Through these programmes a team of students and young people emerged, who were interested in the developmental

issues of the Gram Panchayat and in giving proper educational support to the school going children.

This development further crystallised into community education centres. The local community decided that further support is required for the school going children. One of the household provides space where the children can get together in the evenings. They also provide light and minimum furniture. One of the better educated youth, usually a graduate or post-graduate student, volunteers to help the children's learning during the evenings. The entire set-up is purely voluntary. Eighteen such centres catering to the needs of 320 children are being run in the last two years, in this manner.

Trainings were organised several times for the volunteers and the leading children. These interactions helped to evolve a clear cut methodology consisting of discussions, debates, presentations, and small projects based on the philosophy of self-help and facilitation of learning instead of the typical tuition centre. Small library, newspapers and periodicals, and interactive CDs were organised at each centre, with the support of Svaraj/Oxfam India and donations fund set up by Maithri.

The interactive, explorative way of learning about the immediate environment and school curriculum is taken forward and is titled Mazhavillu (Rainbow) and extended to two more Panchayats, i.e., Muthalamada and Kannadi.

The community education centres are now named as 'Water and Children' programme and scaled up to involve 210 tribal children in Muthalamada Gram Panchayat. The support to financially backward children for higher education is being continued with the support of donors organised by Maithri and the Gram Panchayats.

STATUS STUDY

9. Women Status Study

Vadakarapathy Panchayat steeped in poverty has very poor health indicators. The birth rate of the Panchayat is 15.5 percent, child mortality is 2 percent, and maternal mortality is 1 percent. The women status study was aimed at understanding the pathetic state of women and to initiate a process for improvement in increasing the income, raising the educational levels, and making progress in the health-socio-political aspects.

Sample households (250) were chosen from 100 Ayalkoottams / NHGs of the 16 wards of the Panchayat. Information was collected from Panchayat schools, Krishi Bhavan, Health Centre, sub centre, veterinary hospital, and



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Survey of challenged women in Eruthenpathy



Survey of challenged women in Eruthenpathy



Survey of challenged women in Eruthenpathy



Data consolidation of water asset plan

Anganawadis to know whether the services offered were women friendly or not.

Information was collected through Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) as well. The age of most of the widows was above 45 years. SC/ST women reported that untouchability still prevailed in the workplace.

Apart from the general educational backwardness, women suffered otherwise also. About 60 percent of them worked in the agricultural field. Due to low level of education, finding a job for women was a tough task. The gradual collapse of agricultural activity made the employment situation in the Panchayat worse. Only nine percent of women were provided with some kind of employment training. Women manual labourers were facing discrimination in wage payment. Often, over exertion was causing uterus-related health problems. Only few women had access to assets. 12.8 percent women possessed house and 2.4 percent possessed land.

The study gathered data on women's savings, borrowings and the source of their loans. The participation of women in decision making was inquired into and found that only 28.51 percent of them could take decisions on their own.

The earlier practice of marrying girls early was on the wane except in the Muslim community. However, it was found that in the process of fixing marriage alliances, there was no involvement of women in expressing their preferences and priorities. It was also reported that only 14.45 percent did not give gold as dowry during the marriage. Only 18.75 percent were found to have not demanded dowry.

The health aspects of women, brought out by the survey, were least inspiring. The low level of priority accorded to women's health in the family was shocking. The quality of health services available to the women also leaves much to be desired.

Most of the women were least literate about their sexual health. Majority of the respondents reported problems in their sexual life. Lack of toilets in public places posed a major health hazard to the women. Since the women of the project area were backward – socially, economically, and educationally - violence against them is also proportionately high. However, the figures showed that women were connected to the media to some extent: Newspaper - 15 percent; radio – 56 percent; television – 59 percent. Most of the TV watching is devoted to serials and movie watching. News and agricultural programmes occupied the least preference.

SOCIAL WELFARE

10. Assistance for Implementing Social Welfare Programmes

Detailed socio-economic survey was conducted in 200 NHGs in the Vadakarapathy and Eruthenpathy Panchayats. NHGs were convened and identified 528 deserving beneficiaries who are eligible for various social security schemes. Applications were submitted to the Gram Panchayat under the initiative of the NHG leaders and follow-up work was carried out promptly.

11. Scheme to Support Destitute Women, Abandoned Women, Young Widows and Divorcees

The survey of beneficiaries was led by a team comprising ward member, Kudumbashree ADS, and NHGs. Necessary training was provided to them about the survey and the process of selection. They identified 378 such vulnerable women through the NHGs. The project was formulated as per the requirements of the women who were identified through surveys. Then the project was submitted to Kudumbashree which agreed to implement it through the CDS and sanctioned funds for it.

12. Assistance for Implementing the Ashraya Programme for Destitute

As per the directives of the Kudumbashree Mission, 90 destitute families were identified by the ward member, Kudumbashree ADS and NHGs. A Panchayat led programme to address their problems and to raise their quality of living was designed at a cost of Rs 7,274,000. All of the beneficiaries having health problems were taken to the PHC for check up and medical tests. Those who were referred from there were taken to Medical colleges and other health institutions for better care. Apart from health care, a system for distribution of food articles, dress and education support is also in place.

13. Monetary Support for Destitute

Funds were raised under the leadership of the Panchayat from philanthropic persons for providing assistance to the needy for education and medical treatment.

LOCAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

14. Monetary Support for the Rural Poor for Income Generation

Money was lent to individuals of the NHGs for productive purposes. Money was collected without interest from well wishers and made available to the needy.



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The first house built for destitutes using cost effective technologies in Eruthenpathy



Pond renovation work under progress at Chinnari in Vadakarapathy

15. Project Formulation and Support to the SC/ST Sections for Income Generation

Collectives were formed for 13 self employment ventures in two Panchayats. Assistance was provided to them for identifying the local specific trades, developing the projects and submitting the same to the District Planning Committee. Now funds are being made available to these groups from different schemes like WGDP, NABARD, Sericulture Board and Employment Exchange to materialise their plans.

16. Support for the Implementation of Watershed Works

Support was provided for carrying out water recharge measures under various programmes in Vadakarapathy and Eruthenpathy Panchayats. All of these works were implemented by trained NHGs. The programmes under these are several.

17. Kerala Vikasana Padhathi – Watershed works

Watershed management activities were conducted utilising the Plan Funds and beneficiary contribution. NHGs prepared projects for watershed management of each area, submitted them in the Gram Sabha and obtained approval. The works were implemented by 44 such NHGs. An amount of about Rs 10 lakhs was handled and implemented by the groups themselves.

18. Soil and Water Conservation Model Construction in School and Gram Panchayat Compound

With the support of PTA, students, and the Panchayat members, models of water recharge measures were created in school and Panchayat compound.

19. Western Ghat Development Programme

Watershed works in two watersheds in Vadakarapathy Panchayat -Nedungattuchalla and Valiyakalliyambara and one watershed in Eruthenpathy Panchayat-Mangapallam were carried out with the participation of the local people. Fund handling and project implementation were institutionalised through the NHGs in the watershed. Under this Programme, the NHGs handled about Rs 100 lakhs.

Another achievement is in the case of work rates. Pond desilting is an example for this. Under community management, the NHGs did these works at a rate which is one third of the PWD rates.

20. NABARD Watershed Development Programme

When NABARD announced a special package of watershed programme for the District, four watersheds are selected

from these Gram Panchayats. NABARD also agreed to continue with the set up of NHGs for programme implementation and the work is progressing well.

DEVELOPMENT OF PARTICIPATORY TOOLS

21. Water Budgeting

Water budgeting was one of the major components of this effort. By developing a resource map of the area, assessing the various crops and water sources and collecting weather data like rain, humidity, wind velocity and evaporation; budgeting of water at a given locality was attempted. For evapo-transpiration secondary data was used. One major problem was the correct assessment of ground water availability. The area has unconfined aquifers and secondary data of sufficient accuracy was not available. Despite this, software developed gave excellent results and acted as an educational tool for the public. It was so sensitive on aspects like the addition of ponds, run off reduction, drip irrigation, humidity, temperature, and crop substitution that a change will result in the output graph of the water balance in a given area, thus, convincing the local people.

22. Tool for Environmental Impact Assessment

When Panchayat projects are formulated, it is necessary to look into the impact of the project on the environment. This tool is a compact manual which consists of hands on exercises, examples and a scoring sheet to assess the impact. Separate marks are given for impact on earth, water, atmosphere, flora and fauna. There is also space for alternate suggestions. Depending on the score the project can be accepted, modified or rejected.

Community Education centre in Eruthenpathy



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Renovated pond at Pudarimedu,
Eruthenpathy, funded by WGDP



V

GOOD PRACTICES

The inventive grassroots-level initiatives in the Vadakarapathy and Eruthenpathy Gram Panchayats lent new dimensions to the development discourse. Some of the interventions are worth emulating. They are discussed in detail below.

1. Neighbourhood Groups

The NHGs formed under the chairmanship of ward member as a subset of Gram Sabha was the major component in this approach. These groups were formed by one male and female members from all of the families in that geographical area and have bye laws, memorandum of understanding, bank accounts and an executive committee of 1 year period. These groups are functioning with the recognition of Gram Panchayat board. They do have the responsibilities and rights assigned by the Gram Panchayat board to form local development plans, resource mobilisation and implementation of the projects.



Group work in PRA training

2. PRA Tools

A significant hallmark of the programme was the systematic application of a PRA tool – the problem tree – in NHG-level meetings. The ‘seed’ of all problem trees were drought. Several meetings and serious debates took place in the community when many causes for drought were identified by the community. Many had a possible solution at the local level. In fact this process made the implementation of watershed measures smooth in a substantial manner. Many who had encroached, willingly returned the channels and the water rights of ponds to the community.



Cultural programme during the training programme

3. Appropriate Capacity Building Efforts

The capacity building efforts were of novel in nature. The trainings were decided as the need was raised by the community / Gram Panchayat, the techniques were always participatory, but even then the special techniques were developed according to local culture, literacy, language, theme etc. Another aspect is the nature of resource persons. Most of them were from the local Panchayat institutions and voluntary organisations. They took effort to learn from various sources and internalised the knowledge so as to suit the local conditions. The training was not an end in itself. Since the training need came from a special context, invariably the trainees went back, initiated a participative process at the community level which later fulfilled some specific need of the community.

4. Enabling Environment

All of the concerned, SDC-CapDeck, Gram Panchayats, Community, NGOs and other agencies together were able to create an environment where people were able to visualise, plan and execute a number of dreams. The true capacity to achieve this was acquired by the community because of this enabling environment.

5. Convergence

The SDC-CapDeck programme was an umbrella programme. This programme triggered a number of concrete activities with an expenditure amounting to crores of rupees. Several of them will continue in the immediate future as well. A large number of agencies – governmental and non governmental – and individuals contributed to this effort. The programme was able to generate interventions worth almost 10 times of the SDC-CapDeck project costs, during the period in an integrated manner.

6. Social Auditing

Social audit of Maithri's activities in the project specific as well as general contexts were done in August 2005 and again in September 2007. All the processes before and after the Social audit took about one month. These are the steps:

Report Preparation

It was the first step in the whole process. The staff and Trust members involved in various activities of Maithri met on last week of August. The purpose of the meeting was to prepare the reports of the various projects/programmes facilitated/ implemented by Maithri. A critical evaluation of each project /programme was necessary for that. A format containing 15 point criteria was developed in that meeting. Individuals who were involved in the programmes were given the responsibility of preparing the concerned report. After one week the members met again and presented the reports. Suggestions and opinions of other members were

GP president distributing uniforms to children using the donation fund



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Amudasurabhi project
presentation at Eruthenpathy GP



incorporated in each of the reports. Rather than a mere report preparation session, it helped the organisation for an internal evaluation.

Preparation of Posters

Based on the reports posters were prepared for each project. The Project objectives, methodology, funds and expenditure, achievements, failures, people worked there, etc. were put on a display. Organisational details, statement of expenditure for the year 2006-2007 etc were also made into posters. Details of all bank accounts operated by Maithri - balance on each account, account number etc. were the part of posters.

Poster Exhibition and Discussion at Gram Panchayat level



Ward development council meeting at Eruthenpathy

All of the projects done by Maithri in different Gram Panchayats were put in to public scrutiny. The Public were invited to come, discuss and comment. The Gram Panchayat members, beneficiaries of the projects, general public and officials from the transferred institutions in the Gram Panchayat were informed about the poster exhibition at an earlier date. On the exhibition day, a book was kept at the hall where the participants wrote their opinions and suggestions. The participants were keen on knowing the details of projects done in their own Gram Panchayat and also took interest in the works in other Gram Panchayats. At the end of the day there were discussions which were lead by Gram Panchayat Presidents/Members. This type of meetings took place in 4 Gram Panchayats in Palakkad where Maithri is deeply involved.

Sharing of Information with Interested Public and Other Organisations



Training on PRA

The reports about each project, reports of Panchayat level exhibitions etc were circulated among the interested public, panel members and other organisations by E-mail. They also sent back their suggestions and opinions which were incorporated in future activities and reports.

Field Visit of Some of the Panel Members

Some of the panel members, who expressed their interest to visit the field, were taken into the field where Maithri is working and interacted with the local community.

Culmination Meeting at Palakkad on 23rd September 2007

Later, the process in the Gram Panchayats was repeated in

a one day programme organised at Palakkad in front of media and eminent citizens. In this full day event, the posters were exhibited and in the initial hours in the morning the participants went through the posters. Representatives from Gram Panchayat board, members of NHGs, beneficiaries of various projects, representatives from various developmental organisations, and funding agencies participated in the event. Cards were given to them to express their opinions and suggestions. These cards were displayed publicly. In the next sessions, 3 panels -media, Gram Panchayats and citizen's panel reviewed Maithri and put forward their suggestions. In the media panel, representatives from the newspapers participated. The participants in the Gram Panchayat panel were Gram Panchayat Presidents and Members from various Panchayats where Maithri have worked. In the third panel writers, representatives from developmental organisations and institutions participated. They reviewed Maithri's 6 aspects- organisational structure, staff, work, funding, practices and objectives. In each of the topic each panel member expressed their opinions and gave their suggestions. The participants were also given opportunity to express their opinions in between the panel discussions.

Follow up Activities

After the meeting on September 23, two sessions- one half day and one two day took place internally .In these meetings the opinions and suggestions which were raised in the social audit process were discussed in detail. Decisions were taken accordingly. The report of the actions taken was circulated to the social audit team and to the public who gave their valuable suggestions.

Gram Sabha at Villunni, Eruthenpathy



Unique Experience

Sanctioned amount for renovation of two ponds (Thondekkad and Aryankulambu) was Rs 5,20,000. Total expenditure incurred on the work was Rs 3,37,412. The balance amount was refunded to the Government by the Beneficiary Committee



Training on Panchayati Raj



Children's programme at Eruthenpathy

VI

ACHIEVEMENTS, OBSTACLES AND LESSONS LEARNED

The major achievements of the programme are listed below.

- A resource centre financed by the Gram Panchayat was set up in Vadakarapathy for creating a database of the area and to monitor the weather data.
- A local resource team was developed who are capable of intervening in the project planning efforts of the Gram Panchayat.
- A methodology was developed to assess the 'water balance' of the area and prepare a long-term perspective plan for natural resource management.
- The project was extended to the entire Gram Panchayat in Vadakarapathy.
- Short-term measures on natural resource management were implemented by the NHGs with funds mobilised from the Gram Panchayat.
- An awareness was created in the community on managing own natural resources, water and land, to a considerable extent.
- The public participation in the Gram Sabhas improved to a great extent.
- School children were given opportunity to learn about the problems of the Gram Panchayat in sectors like health, energy, and water, through community surveys and focused group discussions. Twenty-two studies were completed by the children and were presented before the Gram Panchayat.

Cleaning programme by health volunteers



- Awareness about natural resource management, water-borne diseases, and hygiene was generated among the common people and the school children by organising video shows and school-level competitions.
- The community was sensitised to realise that managing their own resources was a political and cultural activity rather than an economic requirement.
- The Gram Panchayat received greater recognition in the community.
- The community was capacitated in developing own plans and get them approved by the Gram Sabhas.
- Capacity building of the NHG members on Panchayathi Raj process, project planning, implementation, accounts, participatory monitoring, resource mapping and PRA; enabled them to implement the projects in a transparent and efficient manner.
- NHGs provided real democratic space in decision making for the people.
- Women of the NHGs came to the forefront and intervened in the financial as well as the implementation aspects of the works.
- The community was able to ensure transparency in the implementation of the projects and thereby more credibility.

Benefits to Maithri

- Better insight about the significance of the process.
- Confidence and capacity of the organisation improved.
- Staff efficiency registered improvement.
- Gram Panchayat-centred approach was brought into the activities.

Training on organic farming



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Obstacles

- Lack of access to local knowledge in the natural resource management.
- Time lag at the beginning of the project.
- Staff turnover affected the smooth implementation of the project.
- Lack of spirit of internalisation of the project on the part of the staff members.

Lessons learned

- Significance of Gram Panchayat-NGO partnership.
- To utilise the possibilities of the Gram Panchayat institutions.
- The importance of people's knowledge and capacities in development.
- The importance of developing a local resource team in the Panchayat.
- The importance of nurturing personal contacts with the community.
- The need to foresee the human resources requirement of the project.

Training on soap making at Devarayan Kotta



VII

CONCLUSION

The Vadakarapathy and Eruthenpathy Panchayats were, for years, on the brink of drought. One of the root causes of drought identified by most of the communities was climatic change. Innovative solutions are yet to make an impact. To raise resources for such efforts, the NHGs approached the Gram Panchayats, governmental agencies and other institutions with definite programmes.

A team of volunteers and community leaders emerged in the Gram Panchayats through these interventions and they are now taking these processes forward. In the crucible of NHGs, people were able to explore the un-mined potential of the community initiatives. The coming together of community-based organisations, Gram Panchayats and other agencies like NGOs is a pointer to the infinite possibilities that could spur the decentralised development process to greater heights.



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Children's programme at Vadakarapathy



SDC CapDeck

The Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) is Switzerland's international cooperation agency, under the Swiss Ministry of Foreign Affairs. SDC supports sustainable development and seeks to improve the living conditions and quality of life of disadvantaged people in the South and East.

In India, starting with technical collaboration in livestock improvement in Kerala in 1963, SDC progressively expanded its activities to other geographical areas and to other fields such as natural resource management, rural finance and employment, rural energy and housing, decentralisation and local governance, empowerment and social justice, human and institutional strengthening and humanitarian aid.

SDC has been cooperating in these fields with a variety of partners, notably community based and non-governmental organisations, research and education institutions, central, state and local governments.

The Programme on Capacity Development for Decentralisation in Kerala (CapDeck) of SDC was conceptualised to support capacity building for the democratic decentralisation process in Kerala.

As part of this, SDC collaborates mainly with the Kerala Institute of Local Administration (KILA). Starting with support for the transition from a campaign mode of capacity building to an institutionalised form, the KILA-CapDeck project developed a decentralised training system under the leadership of KILA and platforms for sharing of experiences on decentralisation and for co-ordination of activities.

The CapDeck Programme also supports people-driven and people-centred decentralised democratic governance by empowering the citizens and their democratic bodies to play a more pro-active role in local development. Strengthening Gram Sabhas, developing Panchayats as real institutions of local governance, motivating Community Based Organisations (CBOs) and other institutions for strengthening Panchayati Raj, mainstreaming gender in decentralisation and empowering the marginalised through Panchayati Raj, form the broad framework on which the local initiatives under the CapDeck's Panchayati Raj Empowerment component are designed and implemented. These interventions are carried out through Panchayats, NGOs, academic institutions, local government associations, Kudumbashree, State Women's Commission and other civil society organisations.