

EMPOWERING PANCHAYATI RAJ

**EXPERIMENTS IN STRENGTHENING GRAM SABHA**  
LESSONS FROM WAYANAD



**PANAMARAM AND KANIYAMBETTA**  
**GRAM PANCHAYATS**



**RASTA**

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LESSONS FROM WAYANAD**

*A brief report on the project with the same title*

*by*

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Gram Panchayats**

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## PARTNER PANCHAYATS

The programme was carried out two Panchayaths of Wayanad District, Kerala. There were some similarities in them as they were of adjoining. The first project was in Panamaram Panchayat while the second in Kaniyambetta Panchayat. One of the major points of differences was that, in the former, they were at the last year in the office, while the latter has just come into their office.

Both these Panchayaths have a history of over two centuries, represents a fairly the cross section of the district's inhabitants and agricultural practices. Absence of proper physical communication has been a drag on Panchayats development process. The fall in agricultural productivity and prices have serious repercussion on the life of the inhabitants. Tribal culture and their art forms have been on a downward slide, and now both these Panchayats have been trying to revive them.

### PANAMARAM GRAM PANCHAYAT

Panamaram Gram Panchayat is a neighbouring Panchayat of Kaniyambetta. The Panchayat is divided into 18 wards for administrative purpose. The total area of the Panchayat is 80.90 sq Km and it consists of two villages. The population of panamaram Panchayat is lightly above 40,800 of which the majority is engaged in cultivation of various crops like paddy, rubber, coffee, arecanut and pepper. There is considerable presence of tribal families. The inhabitants are mostly small and middle class farmers and they earn their livelihood from cultivation in their nominal land holdings. As the income from their small portion of land is insufficient to meet all their needs they used to work on daily wage in the farms of big farmers and for other construction work.

### KANIYAMBETTA GRAM PANCHAYAT

The Kaniyambetta Panchayat situated at the centre of Wayanad district is part of the Kalpetta Block and was formed in 1962. The population of the Panchayat as per 2001 Census is 29,596. Of this 6,035 are Scheduled Tribes and 768 are Scheduled Castes.

Vast paddy fields and rolling hillocks mark the topography of the Panchayat, which has a total area of 38.77sq.km. The Panchayat is spread over two villages.

The majority of the population are small farmers. Paddy, coffee, pepper, arecanut, coconut, banana, ginger, and rubber are the main crops.

There are two revenue villages, Kaniyambetta and Nadavayal, and 17 wards in the Panchayat in the Vythiri Taluk. It forms part of the Kalpetta Assembly constituency and Kozhikode Parliament constituency.

The literacy level is 73.21 percent. The annual rainfall is estimated at 2,800 mm. About 18% of the families do not have sanitation facilities. They are, however, aware of hygienic practices. Sixty-six percent of the households have access to electricity, while six percent are awaiting connection.

Kaniyambetta is typical of Wayanad with different tribal communities, settlers and migrant people. The migration took place over a period of 100 years. Tribal art and cultural practices were the hallmark of the Panchayat. Their importance has, however, been declining in spite of efforts to revive them.

There are 74 farm ponds (private and public), most of them in a bad condition and hence recommended for renovation under the capacity building phase. Only 54 percent people own a well, while 9 percent depended on neighbours' wells. Public taps and community wells are used by 37 percent people.

There are nine schools and six health institutions in the Panchayat. It has a Krishi Bhavan, a Veterinary Hospital and an Old Age Home. Limited transportation facilities is one of the reasons for the backwardness of the Panchayat.

## RASTA

**RASTA** started its activities in 1984 as a branch of the well known Barefoot College, the Social Work and Research Centre of Tilonia, Rajasthan, with the conviction that the solutions to rural problems lie within the community.

We address the problems of rural people, especially women, indigenous communities and small and marginal farmers like decline of agriculture, rural unemployment, food security, technology gaps in rural development, backwardness of women and tribal communities, water and sanitation, rain water harvesting systems and technologies, conservation of ecosystems, health and decentralised governance. We have also been working to support the widows in the district by providing their children with educational scholarship.

We promote decentralised and participatory approach towards development, through direct participation of the people in planning, implementation, and management of development interventions. It enriches practical knowledge and skills through learning by doing mode of education and facilitates emergence of people's organisations that complement the functions of Panchayati Raj Institutions.

We are situated at Kambalakkad in Wayanad district of Kerala, and have of an administrative block, training and meeting halls, mushroom spawn production laboratory, bio-control laboratory for pathogen detection and production of bio-controls agents, a community seed bank for conservation and propagation of traditional seed varieties, a village Tele centre for dissemination of good agricultural practices, a skill training work centre for providing life skills to unemployed youth, and an audio visual unit for documenting and sharing grassroots level learning. The campus is fully electrified. There is also a 70,000 litter capacity rainwater harvesting system.



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## I PROJECT BACKGROUND

Local self governance has now been recognised world over as the cornerstone of democracy. While the rules and regulations could be learned, it may not necessarily equip the local government with relevant skills to cope with the changes. The members of the Panchayat Committee are key players and their capacity must be enhanced through training to bring about necessary changes.

The report tries to capture some of the finer points of the processes as they evolved. Being process-oriented, building the confidence and trust of all stakeholders was part of the project. Apprehension which clouded the initial phase of the project gradually gave way to optimism. Openness and transparency maintained by RASTA in its dealings opened up fresh avenues for collaborative effort. The continued support from the members of SDC CapDecK and the two Panchayat Committees helped completion of the project on time.

RASTA implemented the projects “Strengthening Decentralised Governance through Capacity Building of Peoples Organisations” in the Panamaram Gram Panchayat during 2004-’05 and “Strengthening of Local Self Governance Through Supportive Intervention in the Agriculture Sector” in the Kaniyambetta Gram Panchayat during 2006-’07. The goal of the project was the overall development of Kaniyambetta Panchayat by adopting various participatory methods in the planning process.



## II

### PANAMARAM GRAM PANCHAYAT

The objectives were:

- To increase the participation of people in the Gram Sabha.
- To make people aware of the importance and role of Panchayati Raj Institutions in the developmental scenario.
- To develop the capacity of people's organizations to take up developmental programmes, prioritising the need of the community in an enabling environment.
- To encourage effective participation of women and tribals in Gram Sabhas.
- To provide information on Panchayati Raj governance system and its plan to the marginalized community for enabling them to partake in the process.
- To make the elected members and other stakeholders of the Panchayat aware of their duties, functions and responsibilities.
- To impart knowledge and skills to the community on planning, implementation and monitoring techniques through participatory methodologies.
- To increase the involvement of women in decision making bodies.

***The Panamaram Gram Panchayat project has four major components:***

#### **1. Need assessment cum capacity building at Panchayat and Ward level**

This component addresses collectively aspects like enhancing people's participation, improving the services, formulation of appropriate need based projects etc. By conducting a systematic appraisal and detailed study of the existing issues and problems related to working group, general administration, Gram Sabha, taxation, project planning, implementation, monitoring, evaluation etc. and finding out solutions and strategies to improve the services of the Panchayat. The problems identified are addressed through the trainings and related activities. A study document is published to enable the Panchayat to use it as a guideline for planning future strategy. In order to achieve these objectives the following activities were carried out.

Participatory session with Ward Members were conducted to analyse the problems related to the Gram Sabha, project



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**Case study:**  
**Protest at the office of  
Hon. Dy. Director of  
Panchayats (DDP)  
by Ward Members**

The vacancy of the post of Secretary was not filled for the last few months. The Secretary of nearby Poothadi panchayat was deputed to hold additional charge. But this arrangement was inadequate and created a lot of tensions and problems in the Panchayat. It was in one of the workshops that the suggestion to put pressure on DDP came up. The Ward Members showed their protest in front of the DDP office, Kalpetta on 22<sup>nd</sup> December 2004, demanding the immediate appointment of the Secretary. As a result of the protest the time of availability of the Secretary of Poothadi Panchayat was extended.

planning and implementation and to decide some immediate action plan and future strategies.

A sample survey of Gram Sabha was conducted and 900 samples were covered in 18 wards, using questionnaires that had 100 questions each and 23 people to collect the data. The survey aimed at understanding peoples' awareness about the Panchayati Raj system, the Gram Sabha and assessing the present functioning of the Gram Sabha and the Panchayat. Kudumbashree being very active and spread over the Panchayat, its ADS, CDS representatives were selected for data collection. The project team attended 16 Gram Sabhas and 13 Oorukootams during the period from September to October 2004. Observation and reporting were carried out and a study document was published.

## **2. Capacity building of CBOs for strengthening of the Gram Sabha**

The capacity building training for CBOs was done in a systematic manner by forming a resource team and imparting training on PRI in the field. The members were representatives of ADS, CDS of Kudumbashree, Farmers' Relief Forum, Wayanad Social Service Society and INFARM. A booklet titled 'Athikaram Janagalileyke' (Power unto People) also produced.

The matter covered decentralisation philosophy, power and responsibilities of the Gram Sabha, project planning, duties of the Panchayat, right to information, Ombudsman etc. The resource team further gave trainings to SHGs of their locality. During the course of the training, the problems and training needs of the groups were identified. The training was conducted in sequence so that learning and findings at each level are consolidated and transferred to the next level. Different levels of learning were accommodated for the different sessions with different groups to ensure a smooth flow of required information. Networking of different groups was also facilitated to strengthen Gram Sabha. Once the people exercise their power and rights and participate actively in Gram Sabhas, the process becomes more transparent and need based, leading to a better governance system in the Panchayat. To strengthen the Gram Sabha, the awareness level and responsibilities of the different stakeholders has to be improved. To achieve this, trainings were organised at various levels, for the selected members of micro level organisations like SHGs, Kudumbashree, Farmers Clubs, Youth Clubs etc.

To try a replicable model of the Gram Sabha, a draft plan was prepared and a team of facilitators was selected from

the Panchayat. They were given one-day training on various subjects according to the topic the group had to handle. The major topics covered in the training were agriculture, irrigation, water and soil conservation, women development, animal husbandry, infrastructure development, tribal development, poverty eradication, education and cultural development. A ward level organising committee was constituted and pamphlets, mike announcements, door-to-door campaign etc were used for informing the people.

The model Gram Sabha was attended by 265 people. After the inaugural session, discussions were held in 9 groups, led by trained facilitators. Problems and their possible solutions were listed out and prioritised by the group using cards and charts. It was followed by the plenary session where the report of the group was presented. The Ward Member responded to the reports. The model Gram Sabha was over after the beneficiary list presentation and vote of thanks by the Ward Member.

### 3. Empowerment of tribal groups

Tribal empowerment was to be achieved by building the capacity of tribal promoters who have a decisive role in tribal empowerment and Oorukootams. Having identified the training needs of the tribal promoters, various trainings in skills and Oorukootams were organised. The problems and needs of Oorukootams were identified by using participatory methods like Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA). They were given training on various tribal schemes, Gram Sabhas, Oorukootams etc.

### 4. Gender mainstreaming

One of the core issues addressed through the project was the empowerment of women in the context of decentralised governance. Even though there is allocation of 10% of funds for women's development, utilisation of these funds has not helped improving the status of women. The issue had to be addressed through the capacity-building of women. The main objectives were:

- To increase the participation of women in decision making bodies.
- To build the capacity of women for their active involvement.
- To equip women to make use of the provisions of the Panchayati Raj system.

Training on Women Empowerment in Panchayati Raj was given in three batches. The topics covered were 1) Gender concepts, 2) Gender needs, 3) Services of various institutions,



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#### **Case Study:** **Ward Level Action Committee**

Inspired by Model Gram Sabha, the people of Kuppathode village decided to set up an Action Committee at ward level. A committee consisting of the trained facilitators of Model Gram Sabha was formed. This Action Committee was made responsible to facilitate the Gram Sabhas in future and to monitor the project undertaken in the ward. The committee had its first meeting just after the Model Gram Sabha. The Ward Member chaired the meeting. It decided to conduct a survey and prepare a ward level development report.



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### Case Studies from Gender Training to Women's Forum

Inspired by the gender training, a group of women decided to form a Women's Forum. The objective of the Forum is to set a platform to discuss the issues of women and seek all possibilities to tackle them collectively

In the first meeting of the Forum the group selected a working committee consisting of 10 women. A general body, advisory body and executive committee were constituted. The objectives, activities, etc were discussed in the meeting. The main activities decided were: formation of discussion forum, awareness classes, women related days celebration, continuing education, skill development training, savings for women development, registering women in employment bureau..etc.

4) Women Component Plan (WCP) 5) Entrepreneurship development programme for women. The classes included group discussions, role-plays, lecturing method etc. The participants were the members of Kudumbashree and SHGs of other NGOs.

### Facilitating Factors

- Consultation, active involvement, participation and co-operation of the Panchayat members, ADS, CDS in the whole process.
- Co-operation of the participants in the data collection.
- Monitoring of data collection and cross checking of data.
- Project presentation and discussion at ADS, CDS meeting.
- Selection of ADS, CDS members to the resource team.
- Rapport established with ADS, CDS members during the data collection.
- House visit and invitation to the INFARM, Farmers' Relief Forum, and youth club members.
- Planning with the CBOs.
- Co-operation of CBOs.
- Interest for future collaboration with CBOs such as linking the group with RASTA, imparting trainings etc.
- Convenience of the participants sought for trainings.
- Selection process (interview, model class taking...) of the resource team.
- Rapport of the resource team members with the groups they represent.
- Trainings and booklet given to resource team members.
- Field level programme co-ordination by the resource team members.
- Monitoring of the training of resource team members by RASTA.
- Evaluation and feedback to the trainers.
- Training of the facilitators of Model Gram Sabha.
- Organising committee selected for Model Gram Sabha.
- Initiatives by the Ward Member for Model Gram Sabha.
- Group discussions and presentations included in the Model Gram Sabha.
- Participatory methods used in the training.
- Some follow up meetings of the participants

### Hindering Factors

- All the members could not participate in the workshop for ward members.

- Incomplete sample survey forms had to be rejected.
- Non-cooperation of male groups, youth clubs etc in the training programme.
- Lack of punctuality of the participants in training.
- Participants' reluctance to take classes voluntarily.
- People's general disinterest towards training.
- Several other programmes of the CBOs coincided.
- Formation of the first batch resource team failed due to the lack of proper planning, strategies and due to its voluntary nature.
- In the second batch of the resource team we failed to involve male members.
- Resource team could not do more field level trainings.
- Non cooperation from some SHGs

### Achievements

- Though only one workshop for ward members was planned, three workshops were organised.
- Positive perspective and improved efficiency in administration by ward members.
- Information gathered about the problems of the Panchayat related to working group, administration and staffing, Gram Sabha, project planning, implementation, monitoring, evaluation, and taxation, resource mobilization etc.
- Increased awareness of ward members on PRI and general administration of the Panchayat.
- Protest in front of the DDP (Deputy Director of Panchayat) office demanding the immediate appointment of the Secretary and thereby extension of service time of Secretary in charge by DDP.
- Task division among the staff to increase the efficiency of service delivery.
- The survey helped to gather data on the awareness of people on PRI, present functioning of the Gram Sabha and people's assessment of the Panchayat.
- ADS, CDS (who collected data) got more information regarding PRI, the present functioning of Gram Sabhas etc.
- A study report on the findings of the survey was published and it was presented in academic institutions and workshops.
- Based on the findings and learning of the workshop a guideline for next governing board was prepared.
- In two stages, 63 members of different CBOs were trained on PRI.



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- A resource team of 23 people on PRI is formed at the Panchayat level.
- Increase in the awareness level of the participants.
- Active participation of the participants of the training by asking questions, challenging misappropriation, demanding their rights...etc in the Gram Sabhas.
- Capacity building of the resource team members.
- Resource team took 13 classes at field level.
- Though some of the resource team members did not take classes, they imparted basic information on PRI in an informal manner.
- Increased awareness on Gram Sabha, its powers and responsibilities for the participants of the class.
- Some of the problems of the Panchayat, CBOs, etc. were identified.
- SHG started prior preparation for Gram Sabha
- Future strategy for the project was developed.
- The programmes were documented.
- A Model Gram Sabha was conducted and it was recorded in the video. As many as 265 people attended the Model Gram Sabha
- A new Model of Gram Sabha was experimented successfully.
- People got an idea about how a Gram Sabha should be function.
- A ward level action committee was formed for the further proceedings of the Gram Sabha. The action committee decided to create a data bank on the developmental needs of the village.
- About 160 women became aware of their status, rights, and women development component in Panchayati Raj, entrepreneurship development programmes, services of various institutions and the means to utilize them.
- Women started using the services of the Panchayat and other institutions effectively.
- A small group of women formed a support forum for women to discuss the problems and possibilities of women and held 2 meetings.

### Learning and Findings

- Some criteria to be fixed for selecting the resource team members.
- Gram Sabhas need strengthening. People's participation is only namesake and mainly for individual beneficiary schemes.
- It takes time to digest development themes.



- More visuals, role plays, exposure, experiences need to be added in training programmes.
- It is difficult to get people's service voluntarily, especially in training programmes.
- Male groups are reluctant to participate in these kinds of awareness generation programmes. They should be encouraged to participate and made aware of Panchayati Raj system.
- A structure for the key resource team is essential.
- People (both men and women) are not interested in training programmes. So it is difficult to organize a programme.
- Quality of field level training needs to be improved. More visuals have to be included in the trainings.
- Presence of RASTA team members is necessary for the monitoring of the field trainings.
- Most of the women who attended training lacked knowledge about WCP.
- Role-plays and group exercise used in the training were found to be very effective.
- More intensive trainings and exposures needs to be arranged as part of the empowerment programmes.

## 5. Integration of the Project at RASTA

RASTA integrated its other activities with the Panamaram Panchayat Project. They are:

- On the basis of a paper presented at the 2003 Global Water Summit held at New Delhi, 10 government schools of Wayanad district were selected for providing with Rain Water Harvesting Tank (RWH) system and two toilets each with the facilitation of RASTA. One government school under the Panamaram Gram Panchayat was selected for the same.
- RASTA was entrusted with the implementation of the Scented Rice Cultivation Encouraging Scheme in the tribal colonies of Wayanad under the Rashtriya Samvikas Yojana (RSVY) Project of the Ministry of Agriculture. The project aims to increase the production of scented rice by giving a revolving fund of Rs. 5000/- per hectare. The PRA conducted in the Oorukuttoms of Panamaram Gram Panchayat enabled RASTA to identify the beneficiaries from the tribal colonies and the scheme was implemented accordingly.
- Two batches of Panchayat elected representatives from Gujarat visited RASTA. They had an interactions with the elected representatives of Panamaram Gram



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Panchayat and visited Oorukuttoms. The visit provided an opportunity for mutual learning.

The Social Audit of the project was conducted to have the project evaluated by its stakeholders, to assess its impact, to evaluate the approach towards the implementation of the project and to bring clarity to its achievements and failures.

Face to Face programme of candidates and voters during the 2005 Panchayat election: The session deliberated the development perspectives of both. Some political parties were willing to change their manifesto according to the suggestions made by the participants of the session. The findings of the project implemented in the Panchayat were presented to the newly elected Panchayat Committee. Eleven programmes were conducted, 1,184 people participated and 42 candidates took part in them. Newly elected representatives were felicitated which also strengthened the collaboration between the Panchayat and RASTA. A leaflet and the book on Panchayati Raj (Athikaram Janagalileikku) were distributed. Eight of the elected representatives were from RASTA's SHGs

One day training was organised for the centre staff and field staff of RASTA and SHGs on Panchayati Raj. Four staff of RASTA were selected for the district level resource team of Kerala Institute of Local Administration (KILA). They attended the ToT and subject ToT trainings at KILA. They were entrusted with the task of imparting training on PRI to the newly elected representatives of local self-government.

### Concluding Suggestions

The suggestions that emerged in the numerous participatory sessions involving various sections of the Panchayat community, are listed here, theme-wise.

#### Gram Sabha

1. Extra effort should be taken to ensure participation of people from all social and economic classes in the Gram Sabha.
2. Participation in the Gram Sabha should be made a criterion for evaluating SHGs.
3. Gram Sabha should be a topic of discussion in Ayalkkuttoms (NHGs).
4. Self Help Groups of males should be formed. Participation in Gram Sabha should be considered for the grading of NHGs.
5. Awareness sessions should be conducted at school and college levels.



6. A brief and simple description about every project should be provided in the draft plan document, so that it is easily understood by the general public.
7. Implement the decisions taken at the Gram Sabha. Explain the reasons for not implementing any of them at the next Gram Sabha. This would contribute to the credibility of the Gram Sabha.
8. Steps should be taken to ensure participation of officials of transferred institutions in the Gram Sabha. Official circulars should be issued to them for this.

### **Oorukuttom**

1. Identify the issues by holding discussions in the Oorukuttom. Arrangements should be made to present, understand, and record the issues of each Oorukuttom.
2. Printed documents containing details of Tribal Sub Plan should be distributed among the literate tribal people.
3. The Tribal Sub Plan should be prepared only after identifying the issues of each colony through survey and PRA-based analysis. Services of Voluntary Organisations and educational institutions should be utilised for data collection.
4. Implement the decisions of Oorukuttom. Spell out the real reasons for non-execution, if any, to the people in the next Gram Sabha.
5. The ST Promoters must be included in the working groups of Scheduled Castes.
6. Participatory problem analysis workshop with newly elected ward members and ST promoters.
7. Socio economic survey in Oorukuttoms of the Panamaram Panchayat

### **General administration**

1. Provide necessary training to the staff. Utilise the services of institutions like KILA.
2. Combined meetings of the Panchayat committee and officials should be held to analyse the issues.
3. Publish the Citizens' Charter promptly.
4. Utilise the services of the officials of transferred institutions in Plan preparation.

### **Plan implementation, monitoring, evaluation**

1. Ensure attendance of Block and District Panchayat members in the Gram Sabha.
2. Conduct proper study and prioritise programmes and projects.



3. Update the statistical details of the Panchayat with the assistance of educational institutions.

### *Working Groups*

1. The Panchayat members should recognise the significance of the working groups.
2. The status of working groups should be regularly reviewed. Regular absentees should be replaced.
3. Working Groups should function as monitoring committee.

The project has brought about some changes in the Panchayat, especially in the attitude of people towards the Gram Sabha and the PRI. The field level training on Gram Sabha did not have wide coverage. It still has a long way to go. Then only we will be able to assess the real impact of the project. We find it often impractical to collect information on the impact of the training programmes and the project. ST promoters are using the right to information, Some of the actions taken by Ward Members such as the protest at DDP office and its result, division of tasks among the staff of the panchayat, trained people's active participation in Gram Sabhas, tribal people having known about the schemes making use of them, women after attending gender training forming a women's forum, study documents about the tribal colonies, Gram Sabha, Oorukuttoms..etc are the achievements of the project. Further, the organisation has well integrated the project. Its attitude and focus on PRIs have undergone a drastic change. Many programmes like Meet the Candidate Programme, organised by the organisation in the context of Panchayati Raj, are examples.

RASTA has to go a long way for the strengthening of CBOs to ensure greater success of the project. More efforts have to be put in for making people aware of the PRI system. So, RASTA plans to conduct various training programmes, interactive sessions and workshops.



## II

# INTERVENTION IN KANIYAMBETTA GRAM PANCHAYAT

The project on “Strengthening of Local Self Governance Through Supportive Intervention in the Agriculture Sector” was implemented in the Kaniyambetta Gram Panchayat during 2006-’07. The goal of the project was the overall development of Kaniyambetta Panchayat by adopting various participatory methods in the planning process.

RASTA team members had prepared the concept paper of the project and presented it at the Panchayat Committee meeting. To reach a conclusion, however, a further session was required in which SDC-CapDeck representatives were also present. The changes in the roles of institutions and the concept and philosophy of the development process were explained in detail. The importance of enhancing the capacities of people’s representatives was given due emphasis and appreciated by all key fuctionaries.

The Panchayat Committee put its stamp of approval on the project. A sub-committee at the Gram Panchayat level was formed to co-coordinate the project activities. A draft action plan was prepared jointly, to be completed in a time-bound manner.

About the same time, the Union Government had announced a new programme viz. the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) to address the challenges of poverty and unemployment. The State Governments were supposed to be solely responsible for its implementation. Many powers and institutions of the State Government were transferred to the local self governments. Thus, the Gram Panchayat came to have a crucial role in implementing NREGA. In Kerala only Wayanad and Palakkad were included in the programme. The Gram Panchayats were to make plans as per the guidelines issued by the State Government. The Gram Panchayat members did not know how to go about with the implementation of the NREGA as it was a newly formulated programme.

The Kaniyambetta Panchayat’s project has five thematic areas of development.

- 1) Preparation of Panchayat Master Plan, Five Year Plan (2007-2012)
- 2) Sustainable Development of Agriculture – introduction of organic farming and promotion of SRI



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- 3) Preparation of Citizens' Charter and awareness programmes on Panchayati Raj
- 4) Women Empowerment
- 5) Formation of Labour bank and NHGs.

The launching of activities was delayed by five months in spite of starting the project in the year 2006. The interruption occurred owing to some local issues and differences of opinion among the Panchayat members in the preliminary phase. Following many rounds of discussion with the Panchayat Committee and with the involvement of other actors, a consensus was reached. The supportive role of RASTA was finally accepted.

During the course of implementation, a number of issues cropped up, which led to delay in completion of the project. Panchayat members belonging to various political parties suffered from the pressure of time management. Their continuous absence caused delay in implementing many crucial decisions on the project. As a result completion of the project within the stipulated time got delayed.

As the project implementation progressed, mutual trust and learning slowly took roots. Training, meeting, and discussion were the key factors that helped in building rapport among various stakeholders. Their capacity improved gradually. As it progressed, the confidence to implement the programme also increased. The committed effort put in by the RASTA staff together with its pressure on the Gram Panchayat through the NHGs helped in completing the assigned task.

### **Watershed based approach for development**

The Kaniyambetta Gram Panchayat formulated a Master Plan based on the plans prepared by the NHGs. It was experiencing depleting groundwater, drought-like situation in the hills, and drinking water scarcity during the pre-monsoon season.

There is excessive runoff and erosion due to erratic, high intensity-short duration type of precipitation, and higher percentage of clay in the soil horizons. Indiscriminate denuding of green cover in the hills, and high intensity cultivation ignoring soil and moisture conservation practices are the factors behind excessive surface runoff and poor infiltration of rainwater into the soil.

### **Participation of Gram Panchayat members in SDC CapDecK / NGO evaluation**

Five Members and the Vice President of Kaniyambetta



Panchayat participated in the review-cum-evaluation meeting conducted by SDC CapDecK. The question hour, which attempted to take a close look at the methods employed by various partner organisations of SDC CapDecK, turned out to be an eye opener for the members. The participatory nature and wide range of issues discussed provided them with an opportunity to see things in the perspective.

The presentation on NREGA was useful to the participants from Kaniyabmetta as Wayanad was chosen for its implementation. The presentation illustrated how the programme departed from the conventional Centrally sponsored schemes. Participants were made aware that they required wide support to execute the programme. Participatory methods adopted by the partner organisations of CapDecK instilled confidence in them.

### Follow-up

The Panchayat Committee was convened where the participants of the SDC CapDecK meeting shared their learning. The role and responsibilities of the Panchayat Committee were defined and an attempt initiated for making an activity plan. Dates were fixed for holding a joint meeting of the Gram Panchayat members and the implementing officers.

The sites were identified in each ward where the work under the NREGA could be carried out. Technical officers, NHG members, and Panchayat members had agreed in principle on the nature of work. A survey was conducted in the identified area to select the beneficiaries of the programme.





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## Launching of NREGP

The State Planning Board was informed of the work hitherto done by the Panchayat and its readiness to start the project. The Panchayat heartily received the news that the State-level inauguration of the NREGP was to be held in the Kaniyambetta Panchayat.

The Hon. Chief Minister Shri V S Achuthanandan inaugurated the programme on 15 October 2006. The function was presided over by the Minister of Local Self Governance, Shri Paloli Mohammed Kutty. Smt C M Sarasamma Teacher, President of District Panchayat welcomed the gathering. A report on the present status of NREGP in the district was presented by Smt. Sharmila Mary Joseph, District Collector of Wayanad.

The Chief Minister exhorted the Kaniyambetta Panchayat members and the people to implement the programme successfully and make it a model for poverty alleviation. The Minister for Food and Civil Supplies, Shri C. Divakaran, handed over the first instalment to the Panchayat.



### III

## PLANNING

Planning aims to prepare plans for the development of the Panchayat. The process was kindled at the grassroots level by the formation of Ayalkoottams (Neighbour Hood Groups-NHGs).

The plan has four major components. They are: the Master Plan, the Ward Development Plan, the Tribal Development Plan and NREGP. All these programmes were implemented simultaneously.

### Objectives

1. Ensure people's participation in the planning process of the Gram Panchayat
2. Prepare a Master Plan for the Panchayat
3. Prepare a Ward Development Plan for all wards in the Panchayat.
4. Plan activities under NREGP implementation
5. Ensure involvement of tribal people in the planning process

### Sub-committee meeting

A meeting of the sub-committee was convened to prepare the action plan. All the members were present in the meeting. The sub-committee decided to form Ayalkoottams all over the Panchayat. Besides, the committee directed the ward members to select five volunteers from each ward. These volunteers were to form Ayalkoottams in the wards under the leadership of Panchayat members. The meeting also decided to hold a workshop for the selected volunteers. The topics for the workshop were selected by the committee. They were: NREGP and preparation of byelaw for Ayalkoottams.

### Workshop for volunteers

The Gram Panchayat members, implementing officers, and selected volunteers participated in the workshop. The major theme was planning of NREGP. Shri Vinod Kumar of Maithri, Palakkad, spelt out the details of the programme. He narrated experience of NREGP planning at Vadakarapathy Gram Panchayat in Palakkad district. Several queries raised by the participants were addressed. Shri K B Madan Mohan of SDC CapDeck dwelt upon the theme, 'Role of Ayalkoottams in Planning'. He explained how Ayalkoottams could play a major role in identifying the activities for NREGP.

Dates for formation of Ayalkoottams in all the wards were finalised at the meeting. The boundaries of each Ayalkoottam were fixed tentatively. The volunteers were directed to



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organise meetings of Ayalkoottam. One volunteer was entrusted with the responsibility of overseeing the activities of each Ayalkoottam.

## Formation of Ayalkoottams

The Panchayat Committee decided to form Ayalkoottams in Kaniyambetta Panchayat to ensure people's participation in the planning process. Total number of Ayalkoottams formed came to 110. Each ward had, on an average, six Ayalkoottams. One Ayalkoottam comprised 50-60 households.

## Ward Development Council

The Ward Development Council consisted of two members from each NHG, executive body of the Agro Clinic, Kudumbashree office-bearers, and Oorukuttam (Tribal) representatives. The Principal task of the Development Council is prioritisation and co-ordination of all developmental activities in the ward. Its objectives include assisting the Panchayat members in their duties and creating a public forum for CBOs in the ward. One major drawback of the Development Council was that it had a chairperson but no convener. As the chairperson of Development Council had to shoulder the responsibility of Panchayat member as well, the committee was at the receiving end. Being a Panchayat Member, s/he has to devote considerable time for other tasks as well. The absence of a convener was badly felt.

## Training for Master Plan & NREGP planning

All NHGs/Ayalkoottam volunteers were divided into five groups on ward-basis and each group was provided training for two days on NREGP and Master Plan preparation. The series of training covered 400 persons. All Ayalkoottam executive members, Panchayat members, WDC members, and social workers participated.

A participant of earlier sessions, Shri K G Sahadevan became the Key Resource Person in NREGP planning. He handled the rest of four batches in the training programme. His expertise was utilised by other Panchayats as well in the district.

## Themes of training

The training sessions provided training in the following themes.

- Role of NHGs/Ayalkoottam in Panchayati Raj System
- Master Plan preparation at the NHGs/Ayalkoottam level
- Functions of NHGs/Ayalkoottams
- NREGP planning at NHGs/Ayalkoottam level
- Socio-economic household survey at NHGs/Ayalkoottam level



The major issues discussed in the sessions were the functioning of Ayalkoottam and their intervention in the issues of their respective areas. The office-bearers recommended that the Panchayat should provide space for the smooth functioning of Ayalkoottams. The formats for the Master Plan and household survey were introduced in the training.

### **Achievements**

- Four hundred persons were trained in NREGP planning
- The confidence of Ayalkoottams /NHGs in addressing local issues
- Environmental issues were discussed threadbare
- The concept NREGP reached the grassroots level

### **Ward-level training**

Ward-level training was conducted for members of Ayalkoottam and Ward Development Council as a follow-up. The same topics were discussed briefly in the trainings, which were attended by 850 persons. Dates for Ayalkoottam General Body meeting were fixed during these sessions. The training sessions conducted at the local level were marked by intensive participation of people.

### **Ayalkoottam General Body meeting**

The General Body meetings of Ayalkoottams were convened in all wards as decided at the ward-level training. It had the twin objectives of collecting suggestions for master plan preparation, and conducting household socio-economic survey with the participation of people.

### **Recommendations for the Master Plan**

In the Ayalkoottam General Body, the executive members explained how to conduct household survey at the Ayalkoottam level, consolidate it, and prepare the Master Plan. The Ayalkoottams were divided into four groups and each group was entrusted with a single sector. The groups held deliberations about the sub-sectors of the particular sectors and made their recommendations. The General Body discussed in detail all the recommendations and filled in the format designed for the purpose.

Emphasis was given to regeneration of agri-ecosystem by treating the hills for collecting, harvesting, and conserving rainwater in *situ*. Coupled with this, importance was given to paddy cultivation, and reduction in the intrusion of non-traditional crops into the croplands and wetlands. Once the recommendations were collated, the Panchayat Committee approached RASTA for preparing a Master Plan by consolidating the Plans from each ward.



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## IV

### PREPARATION OF MASTER PLAN

The proposal was ambitious, as the Gram Panchayat had just succeeded in forming 110 Neighbour Hood Groups across the Panchayat. The Master Plan of the Gram Panchayat for the next five years had its roots in the NHG plans, which were later consolidated at ward level. Each of the identified watersheds were to have clusters of NHGs to implement the activities. The first set of activities pertained to land treatment. That would ensure utilisation of the funds and support of NREGP in implementing all incidental activities allowed in the project.

#### Joint meet of Panchayat Committee and officials

A combined sitting of members of the Panchayat Committee and officials of the line departments was held. The deliberations resulted in the decision to form a Core Team to guide the Gram Panchayat in implementing NREGP. Representatives of all political parties were included in the team, thus ensuring their wholehearted support.

#### Ayalkoottam formation

The Gram Panchayat decided to form Ward Development Councils and NHGs at the ward level. The responsibility was entrusted with each Panchayat Ward Member. It was decided that the Member would identify and nominate five volunteers from each ward.

The volunteers were given with training on the formation of NHGs and NREGP plans. It also focused on the preparation



of byelaw for NHGs. Dates were fixed for the formation of Ayalkoottams. The entire lot of NHGs were formed within 10 days, ensuring due representation to all households. While forming an NHG, geographical features of the wards were also taken into consideration. Each group had 50-70 households. An executive committee was constituted comprising seven members and two members were selected for the Ward Development Council.

### Joint visit to Palakkad

As the NREGP work was progressing in the Panchayat as per the plans, a visit to Palakkad district was organised. The Gram Panchayat Members, technical staff, and RASTA's team reached Maithri, and met Shri Vinod, Executive Director and staff members, to learn about the implementation strategy adopted by them.

The team spent the first half of the day holding discussions with the Maithri team. The deliberations centred on how the NREGP work was implemented in the Panchayat and the strategy adopted by them. The practice that caught the attention of the visitors was that of check measurements and getting them countersigned by competent technical personnel. The other points of common interest were: the tools used for the work; who paid or how the fee was collected when it was purchased by the Panchayat; day-to-day supervision with ADS; how the check measurement was taken on a daily basis etc. The visitors were satisfied with the explanation given by the Maithri staff.

Subsequent to the visit, the team members compared the situations prevailing in Palakkad and Kaniyambetta. In Wayanad, people seemed to have evinced more interest in the work, as agriculture was their mainstay. Support was forthcoming from the community to finish the work in time. The visit gave the team members new insights and greater confidence in the work that was already going on.



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## V

# SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE

The prime objective of the component was to promote sustainable agriculture in the Kaniyambetta Panchayat. The activities were the following:

1. Setting up of demonstration units of Madagascar Rice Cultivation methods
2. Establishment of a web-based Agro Information System
3. Skill training in new agriculture operations
4. Seed collection and exchange Mela
5. Preparation of a directory of organic farmers in the Panchayat

A sub-committee with five elected members was constituted for executing Sustainable Development of Agriculture. The sub-committee was responsible for planning and implementing the project. The chairperson of the Development Standing Committee was made the chairperson of the panel.

## Activities

### *Web Based Agro Information System and Centre*

Farmers are often not provided information about the latest and best practices in agriculture unlike their counterparts in other fields. They have no access to advanced information system as well. The internet-based agro information centre proposed to equip farmers to access the advanced and relevant information on good practices and current trends in the agriculture field.

A Web Based Agro Information System was developed for the farmers in the Panchayat in the local language, Malayalam. The content was prepared following discussions with the farmers. A visual-based database was prepared on rain fall pattern, market trends, information about traders, details of organic certification, and control of pests and diseases. Moreover, it contained information on good practices, organic farming, general forum for farmers to raise their doubts and seek clarifications, through questions passed on to the web. Farmers were encouraged to use digital photos, particularly in the case of prevailing crop disease. They could be sent to the forum of experts connected to the net.

The Web Based Agro information Centre was installed in the premises of RASTA. Farmers could come and use the

system. The President of the Gram Panchayat inaugurated the centre and handed it over to the farmers.

### *Promotion of Madagascar Rice Cultivation*

Rice cultivation in Wayanad has come down drastically as it became less profitable. Madagascar System of Rice Intensification was a method of cultivations tested successfully. The system was highly productive, less expensive, and less laborious. As part of the project, model units were established in all wards of the Panchayat. The project support was limited to training and technical assistance.

The Panchayat committee allocated funds for establishing demonstration units. This step encouraged the farmers to adopt Madagascar cultivation. The sub-committee decided to collect application from the farmers who were interested. Many farmers, who did not own paddy field, applied without realising what Madagascar cultivation was all about. Twenty three farmers were selected at the Gram Sabha meeting.

The sub-committee assigned the the task of implementing this scheme to the Agriculture Officer. The list of beneficiaries was finalised by the Agriculture Officer after detailed scrutiny. The financial support too was routed through the Agriculture Office.

Training was provided to the 23 farmers according to the action plan. Two topics were covered in the session. The first session discussed organic farming. The second session dwelt on Madagascar way of Cultivation.

The research wing of RASTA prepared a leaflet on Madagascar Cultivation, with details of expenses and estimated profit. This was distributed among the farmers.

A monitoring committee was formed with the Agriculture Officer as Team Leader and staff from RASTA as members. They conducted regular visits to the fields and gave the farmers appropriate advice.

As many of the farmers were doing Madagascar cultivation for the first time, a workshop was organised to identify their problems and difficulties.

The traditional high quality seeds were becoming extinct. No adequate system was in place to protect or conserve them. The project wanted to address this issue and proposed seed collection by holding Seed Exchange Mela.

The sub-committee fixed a date for holding the Seed



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Exchange *Mela*. Invitation was extended through the NHGs. SHGs were also invited to the event. Majority of the participants were women. Sixteen varieties of seeds which was slowly disappearing for quite some time, were been brought to the fair.

In spite of many farmers turning to organic farming, they were facing acute shortage of quality manure, bio control agents, and bio fertiliser. The project proposed production of bio control agents and bio fertilisers. Necessary information on the methods of applications in the field was widely disseminated.

A Directory of Organic Farmers was prepared using details collected from the Agricultural Office. The data were collected through door-to-door visit. The directory contains the details of area and types of cultivation, types of bio fertiliser and bio pesticides, information on traditional seeds and methods of cultivation.

A handbook on organic farming was prepared by the Research Officer of RASTA, Shri C K Vishnudas. It was titled, *Jaivakrishiyilekku Marumbol* and was distributed among the farmers in the Panchayat.



## VI

### WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

This project has women empowerment as one of its prime concerns, to help them advance socially and economically. It had two components: 1. Formation of Jaagratha Samithi (Vigilance Committee) at Ward level and Panchayat level, 2. Introduction of PME system in SHGs/ Kudumbashree.

Jaagratha Samithi (Vigilance Committee) is a concept put forward by the Kerala State Women's Commission to ensure social security of women in every Panchayat.

A sub-committee on Women Empowerment was formed at the Panchayat Committee meeting. It consisted of four members with the Welfare Standing Committee chairperson as the leader. The Action Plan for implementing the component was prepared by the sub-committee.

A workshop was conducted on Jaagratha Samithi. Elected members of the Panchayat, Panchayat-level implementing officers, and Community Development Society members of Kudumbashree and Anganawadi workers in the Panchayat were the participants. Shri K B Madan Mohan of SDC CapDeck handled the session which dealt with the structure and legal status of Jaagratha Samithi.

Thereafter the Panchayat Jaagratha Samithi was formed. But the Ward Jaagratha Samithis could not be formed owing to the inability of Kudumbashree executive members to spare time for that.



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## VII

### SOCIAL AUDIT

Towards the end of the project, a Social Audit was conducted on 10 May 2007. It was attended by representatives of Ayalkoottam, Ward Development Council, Core Team, SDC CapDeck, RASTA, implementing officers, social workers, political party leaders, Anganwadi workers, and Panchayat members.

The President of the Gram Panchayat, Shri Moyin Kadavan admitted that the project helped the Panchayat in planning the developmental activities more effectively. He added that formation of Ayalkoottams ensured people's participation in the planning process. He found the proposals under the NREGP and the Master plan highly useful and helped the Panchayat initiate action for the NREGP in the district.

All physical outputs of the project like Master Plan, Ward Vikasana Rekha, Directory of Organic Farmers, Citizens' Charter, handbooks and leaflets, and the Project Proposal for Kaniyambetta Panchayat prepared by RASTA were released on the occasion.

Identified needs of people at the ward level were consolidated into Ward Development Plan (Vikasana Rekha). All Development Plans were handed over to the Panchayat for publication.

A Citizens' Charter containing details of the services provided by various institutions in the Panchayat was prepared.

The Directory of Organic Farmers with information regarding personal details, modes of cultivation, types of fertilisers, pesticides, and seeds used for cultivation.

The following publications were brought out: 1. *Turn to Organic Farming*, on methods of organic farming, 2. *Adhikaram Jangalileku* (Decentralisation of Power) on Panchayati Raj, 3. A leaflet on Madagascar cultivation.

An integrated development project proposal, *Proposal for Reviving Ecosystems to Enhance Sustainability on Farm Front*, was prepared for the Panchayat.

The summary of social audit findings is provided below.

#### Planning

1. NHG meetings were not held regularly.
2. Supervision of NREGP should have been entrusted with the NHGs since they were involved in NREGP planning.



3. The Panchayat Committee should ensure implementation of all activities proposed in the Master Plan.
4. The formulation of Master Plan and Ward Development Plan with people's participation proved very useful.

### **Sustainable Agriculture**

1. The merits of Madagascar way of cultivation were appreciated by paddy cultivators.
2. Panchayat and Krishi Bhavan should look into the reasons why Agro clinics were not functioning properly.
3. Farmers found training and awareness programmes on agriculture useful.
4. Model organic plots should have been developed as part of the project.
5. The manner of organising and implementing activities was effective.

### **Women Empowerment**

1. The PME training given to women SHGs helped them to assess themselves and improve group performance.
2. Formation of Jaagratha Samithi was useful for women.
3. Kudumbashree co-operation was negligible.
4. Jaagratha Samithi should have been formed at the ward level.

### **Awareness programme and Citizens' Charter**

1. Environment education should be provided to all schoolchildren in the Panchayat.
2. Handbook on Panchayati Raj would be useful to the common people.
3. Children's Gram sabha was effective in educating the children.

### **Conclusion**

SDC CapDeck, which has been supporting initiatives in promoting the process of decentralisation, assisted the project. As part of it, the grassroots-level organisations and Neighbourhood Groups (NHGs), were promoted through collaborative effort. Their presence and active participation in the process helped in energising the Gram Panchayat to accept more pro active roles.

## 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.