

EMPOWERING PANCHAYATI RAJ

**REKINDLING THE DEVELOPMENT FLAME**  
GRAMA JYOTHI HOLISTIC DEVELOPMENT PROJECT



AJANUR GRAM PANCHAYAT  
KASARAGOD



SANTHIGRAM  
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

**REKINDLING THE DEVELOPMENT FLAME**  
**GRAMA JYOTHI HOLISTIC DEVELOPMENT PROJECT**

*A brief report on the project*

*by*

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## Ajanur Gram Panchayat

The **Ajanur Gram Panchayat** is situated in the west-central part of Kasaragod District at the northern end of Kerala State. It has the lowland bordering the sea, midland consisting of undulating lands, and the forest-clad highland on the extreme east.

The total population of the Panchayat as per the 2001 census is 45,578. Sex ratio is favourable to women with 23,912 women and 21,666 men. There are 8,262 households, 22 wards, and the total area is 2,783 hectares (27.83.sq.kms). There is, however, considerable variation with some of the wards showing the opposite trend.

Religion-wise, Hindus dominate the scene (73.7%), Muslims constituting the next prominent group (25.15) and the Christians forming a marginal minority (1.2%). A notable feature of the Panchayat is the existence of several linguistic groups, including Kannada (2.7%), Urdu (0.5%), Tamil (0.2%) and Malayalam (96.6%).

Most people find livelihood in the agricultural sector, with 1,022 farmers and 2,927 farm workers. Several (1,061) work in the fisheries sector. There are 295 workers in the laterite/granite quarrying sector, while 561 are in the construction sector. Livestock rearing and plantation offer employment to 716, while trade and commerce provide livelihood to 1,884 persons. The transportation and communication sector employs 639 and beedi rolling (mainly Dinesh Beedi) is the main occupation of more than 2,000. Small-scale cottage industries provide work to 2,851 people and other services to 364 people.

Ajanur Gram Panchayat has the distinction of having prepared its 'Panchayat Development History' in 2001.

The Gram Panchayat suffers from a number of developmental constraints, including growing unemployment and social insecurity; low development of the productive sectors (farming, fisheries, industries); low level of educational and cultural development; social and gender inequality; low capacity of the Panchayat institutions. The level of infrastructure development of the Panchayat is relatively low. School dropout is high, especially among girls. There is also the problem of the hardships of linguistic minorities especially the Kannada speaking population.

**Ajanur Gram Panchayat has the distinction of having prepared its 'Panchayat Development History' in 2001.**

Ajanur Panchayat Office



**The mission is to promote participatory people's action for the all round development of the socially, economically, politically and culturally disadvantaged sections of the society.**



## Santhigram

**Santhigram** was founded on 15 August 1987, by a team of socially enlightened youth in and around Chappath in Thiruvananthapuram district.

The philosophy of Santhigram is rooted in the Gandhian vision, that people have the inherent power in them for creating, through voluntary peaceful means, a better society, in which individuals and groups can live in peace, solidarity and creative celebration. It lays great stress on sustainability, people's participation, eco-friendly technologies and lifestyles, as well as gender equity and full employment for all.

The mission of Santhigram consists of promoting participatory people's action for the all round development of the disadvantaged sections of the population, who have been socially, economically, politically and culturally left out and suppressed over centuries.

The main intervention areas of Santhigram include:

- Empowerment of people through Local Self-Governance Institutions
- Conservation of Natural Resources
- Promotion of Holistic Health Care
- Promoting Gender Equality
- Strengthening People's Organisations/Voluntary Organisations for the self-reliance of the villages

Santhigram follows the path of participatory, people-centered, integrated and eco-harmonic development. Specifically, the organisation employs the methods of Participatory Strategic Planning (PSP).

Santhigram's remarkable achievements include its successful interventions in strengthening the Panchayats and in promoting holistic/alternative health care approaches and practices. The role of Santhigram as the partner organisation in the Grama Jyothi Holistic Development Project was to facilitate the processes of the project.

## BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

### 1. A New Dawn

The Grama Jyothi Holistic Development Project, implemented by Ajanur Gram Panchayat served to rekindle the dormant flame in the minds and hearts of the people and their elected representatives for realizing sustainable development of the area.

To quote shri Cherakkot Kunhikannan, the Panchayat President: "The Grama Jyothi project has opened our eyes. For the first time, we have started seeing our resources - land, soil, water, plants and the people and the promises they hold for the development of the Panchayat. For the first time, we have become optimistic about our future".

Following the recommendations given by the people, the Panchayat has set apart Rs. 10,00,000 in the new budget for reviving organic farming. Decision has also been taken to allocate funds for Jaagratha Samithi as well as the productive sector.

The Grama Jyothi Holistic Development Project was modest, both in terms of time and finance. It was implemented (May 2006-March 2007), with a budget outlay of around Rs. 8,00,000. In terms of coverage of area and population, however, the project was rather large. As regards the outcome, the impacts and possible ripple effects, the endeavor effected a near revolutionary transformation in the enthusiasm of the participants.

### 2. Historical and Conceptual Context

The 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Amendments to the Constitution of India, followed by the enactment of the State Panchayati Raj and Municipal Acts and the launching of People's Plan Campaign, were landmarks in the history of local governance for sustainable local development. There was, however, an anomaly: the local governments fell short of the competencies required in most cases for effectively fulfilling the roles assigned to them. It was the case of extensive constitutional powers and substantial financial resources, unmatched by corresponding management capabilities.

Though a foundation was laid during the People's Plan Campaign, the task of building self-reliant local polities



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Explaining the concept of holistic health care practice as part of health awareness programme



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*“ People did not know what to do with their land. Farming was becoming a losing concern and a forgotten occupation”, said P. Krishnan, Chairman, Working Group for Agriculture: “The exposure to the possibilities of organic farming has ignited the imagination of the people and instilled fresh confidence in them”.*

remains unfinished. The light and fervor generated got diffused, diluted and lost after the Campaign. This situation calls for concerted attempts at recapturing the vision and enthusiasm of the initial years.

People’s self-governance is the essence of Panchayati Raj. It is the ability of people to observe and analyze facts related to the quality of their living, arrive at rational conclusions, make decisions and effectively implement them. The basic process is participatory learning. The relevance and efficacy of the Grama Jyothi Holistic Development Project is to be viewed in this context.

### 3. Genesis and Evolution of the Project

In pursuance of its mission to strengthen Local Self-Governance Institutions (LSGIs), Santhigram, had, a couple of years ago, assisted Madavoor Gram Panchayat in Thiruvananthapuram district in implementing a project on Panchayat level Jaagratha Samithi as part of the SDC-CapDecK Programme. This prompted several Panchayats in the state to approach Santhigram with a request to assist them in the same manner. Santhigram was interested and the Programme CapDecK (Capacity Development for Decentralisation in Kerala), supported by Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) came up with support.

Letters were sent to the interested Panchayats, explaining the mission and experience of Santhigram as well as the purpose and components of the proposed intervention. Ajanur Gram Panchayat was prompt to discuss this matter in its committee and give a positive response.

Exhibition of local products



Several rounds of dialogues and consultations were conducted with members of the Panchayat committee and officials along with the representatives of Socio-Economic Development Society (SEDS), a local Voluntary Organisation in Kasaragod and SDC-CapDecK. Thus evolved the Gram Jyothi project. This was presented before the thematic working groups of the Panchayat for comments. Incorporating their suggestions, the project was finalised and approved by the Panchayat committee.



Participants of social audit

It is to be emphasised that the Panchayat was taken into confidence on each detail of the project and every decision was taken with the concurrence of the Panchayat committee. It was a Panchayat project in the full sense, formulated and implemented by it, to meet the felt needs of the people. Santhigram's role was purely one of facilitation.

### Why Ajanur?

- It was one of the most needy Panchayats in terms of capacity-development.
- The participation of the people was at a very low ebb, especially that of women.
- The functionaries required necessary information, skills as well as motivation.
- The new generation of elected representatives had no experience of participatory micro-planning.
- The Panchayat functionaries exhibited extra-ordinary levels of enthusiasm, openness and receptivity to ideas and willingness to cooperate.
- Ajanur Panchayat was also one of the remotest Panchayats, situated in the northern-most part of the state.



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Inauguration of data collection



Panchayat President

## II

# PROJECT STRUCTURE AND COMPONENTS

## 1. Objectives

The project was oriented to the following four objectives:

- To enable the Gram Panchayat to prepare by the end of March 2007 a well-thought out and realistic Master Plan for incorporating into the 11<sup>th</sup> Plan.
- To enable the Panchayat to conduct participatory studies about the development problems and needs of the Panchayat as well as local resources.
- To facilitate the formation and effective functioning of the Panchayat level and Ward level Jaagratha Samithies, with a view to ensuring the security of women and speed up the development of the Panchayat.
- To help the Panchayat to revive sustainable agricultural practices among the farmers and thus resolve the knotty problem of stagnation faced by the agriculture sector.

## 2. Key Concerns and Components

The project focused on three themes:

- Panchayat Plan Formulation
- Women's Development
- Agricultural Development

Under these themes, several programs were conducted, including studies and surveys, consultations, formation of Jaagratha Samithi (committee for protection of women's security and rights) and agricultural development.

Preparation of the Master Plan, naturally, involved a wide range of activities/processes. The core of the processes can be summarised as participatory learning and decision-making. Building the capacities for this in the participants was the role and responsibility of the support organisation.

## 3. Stakeholders and Support Groups

The stakeholders included, apart from the Panchayat, Santhigram and SEDS, groups and institutions within the Panchayat, such as Kudumbashree, women's neighborhood self-help groups with their various federated structures like Area Development Society (ADS) and Community

Development Society (CDS), Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) workers, farmers, Krishi Bhavan (Agriculture Office), Primary Health Centre (PHC) and schools.

Supportive roles were played by the Kanhangad Block Panchayat, Police officers, Taluk Industries Development Office and Soil Survey Department. Several institutions rendered support services, including, Grameena Padana Kendram (assistance in conducting resource mapping), ADHWANA – Kerala Forum of Partners in functional vocational training (conducting Entrepreneurship Development Programme - EDP), SAHAYI- Center for Collective Learning and Action (training in participatory rural appraisal-PRA and participatory monitoring and evaluation-PME), Loyola College of Social Sciences (data entry and analysis) and BIRED- Bellikoth Institute of Rural Entrepreneurship Development (venue for EDP).

#### 4. Management Approach and Organisational Structure

Participatory approach was adopted in the management of the project. A team composed of the Panchayat President, Vice-President, Secretary, Chairpersons of the Standing Committee on Development and Welfare, Chairperson of Agricultural Working Group and Director of Santhigram was in charge of implementation and monitoring of the project. They were assisted by a team of 30-member Panchayat level Resource Team (PRT), including members of various subject committees and Panchayat members. Three Program Committees were constituted to coordinate the activities under the main four programmatic areas of:

- Master Plan Preparation
- Women's Development
- Formation and Facilitation of Jaagratha Samithi
- Agricultural Development

Under each of these, there were ward-level sub-committees, including Ward-level Study Team (WST) and Ward-level Resource Team (WRT) to assist in the implementation. The programs/activities were conducted simultaneously.



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*Devi Raveendran, former Panchayat President and Chairperson of Standing committee on Development, was emphatic that “the Grama Jyothi Holistic Development Project has been a watershed in the history of the Panchayat, in terms of opening a new chapter in the life of women. The establishment of Jaagratha Samithi has become a great blessing for women. Now they feel emboldened that there is an outfit, which will stand by them. One by one, women are coming out of their hiding place and expressing their real self”.*



*M. Govindan,  
the Panchayat  
Secretary:  
“ It is a new  
beginning, a new  
dawn. With all those  
hectic meetings,  
lively discussions  
and deliberations,  
we were back in the  
good old days of the  
People’s Plan  
Campaign, which  
gave the Panchayat  
the vision and the  
fire to fulfill its  
responsibilities to  
the people. The  
battery had started  
getting weak and  
the Panchayat was  
getting distanced  
from the people. We  
needed a recharging  
and that is what the  
Grama Jyothi  
Holistic  
Development  
Project has done”.*

### III

## ACTIVITIES / PROCESSES

### 1. Environment Creation

Creating a conducive environment was the first priority. This was achieved through various means, including building meaningful contacts, dialogue in formal as well as non-formal settings with cross sections of the people, particularly with people’s organisations/groups like the Kudumbashree neighborhood groups, and the Panchayat functionaries, and consultation with institutions concerned and other important stakeholders, such as the implementing officers of the Panchayat, including the agricultural officer, veterinary doctor, medical officer and school authorities. The challenge was to motivate them to take the effort seriously and play their roles wholeheartedly.

The task was time-consuming and required skills of patient listening and imaginative persuasion; but the trouble was worth, since, by and by, all the concerned individuals and institutions were won over in accepting the concept of the innovative endeavor. The credit goes to them as well as to the organisers/facilitators that the very positive environment and spirit of collective responsibility and collaboration persisted till the very end of the project, with perhaps the exception of the Agricultural Department, which kept an un-edifying aloofness in between.

### 2. Participatory Studies

With a view to providing the input for participatory learning, reflection and decision-making, a number of participatory studies were conducted. These included a door-to door socio-economic survey, group discussions, consultations, resource

Social audit group discussion



mapping, soil survey and an investigation into the farming scenario of the Panchayat. Each study had its team, which was given intensive training in the methods to be adopted during the study. The finalisations of the reports were followed by presentations and discussions at different levels, before giving shape to the final reports. The Panchayat has published all the reports.

### a. Socio-Economic Survey

A team of 66 persons including members of the Panchayat Resource Team (PRT), Ward Study Team (WST), leaders of Kudumbashree neighborhood groups, worked for 15 days and gathered basic data of 7,629 households. The data were scrutinised and consolidated at the ward level within 10 days. The ward-level reports were discussed in the Gram Sabhas and other forums before approval by the Panchayat. The final report was published in Malayalam and English.

### b. Gender Status Study

Ward-level committees were formed for the study and the members were given training. Focus Group Discussions (FGD) were conducted to analyse the present status of women in 22 wards of the Panchayat and generate primary data. The secondary data were collected from documents. The data were analyzed at ward level. The study team used to come together to evaluate the study, clear difficulties and prepare reports. After completing the data generation process through FGDs, interviews and case studies, the final report was prepared.

### c. Resource Mapping

As part of the integrated participatory rural appraisal, a resource mapping exercise was conducted, in collaboration with the Land Use Board and the Grameena Patana Kendram (one of the partner organisations of the SDC-CapDeck Programme).

A team of 110 volunteers, composed of the selected members of PRT, WST and students, who had completed the land survey course, were given a two-day training. The work was done in 15 days. The maps prepared by the team depicted the Panchayat assets, land use patterns, water sources etc. A resource map re-plotting camp was held at the Panchayat level and final resource maps were prepared.

### d. Soil Survey

Another study conducted in connection with the preparation of Master Plan was a study on the agricultural sector by the



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Soil Survey Department, of the types of soil and land resources of the Panchayat.

This study has served to provide the details of the various types of soils found in the Panchayat and to identify the problems and solutions connected with the improvement of agriculture.

### 3. Main Findings of the Studies

- The male-female ratio of the Panchayat is favourable to women in the case of 17 wards, while the remaining wards show the opposite trend. There are also indications of reverse trends in the 0-6 age group.
- Majority of the men work as wage labourers. A large number of people are employed in the Gulf (from 1,085 families). Unemployment is widespread. A large section of the adult women (38.5%) are unemployed.
- The crops preferred for cultivation in order of priority are coconut, areca-nut, paddy, pepper, cashew-nut, banana, etc. The vast majority are small or marginal holders. Paddy cultivation is declining by the year. Paddy fields are converted to plantations of coconut, areca-nut and banana or house sites. There are 146 major and minor ponds in the Panchayat. Of the 5,577 wells, 1,357 go dry during the summer. A lot of land (144.66 hectares) lies barren. Of this, 36.56 hectares are fit for farming. It is difficult to get workers for agricultural operations, since they are lured by better wages in other sectors.
- Quite a number of households (17.1%) have no electricity connection. A significant number of families (11.97%) have no toilet facilities and 15.3% have no ration cards. Some (0.4%) are homeless.
- The highest expenditure of most families is for food. Education and health care are the next highest expenditure heads. For several families (121) the highest expenditure is for repaying loans.
- The vast majority of families are indebted. Most of the loans were taken for housing. This is followed by treatment and marriage. Very few people take loans for farming. The majority depend on banks for loans. Almost half are not able to make repayment on time.
- Only a few families (17.4%) have received assistance from governments, including the local government/ Panchayat.
- The most widespread disease is diarrhoeal disease (during the period of the study). It is followed by chicken pox and jaundice. The method of treatment preferred by most is modern medicine, followed by



A senior agriculture labourer being felicitated by the President

ayurveda. Majority of deaths are due to old age, heart attacks and cancer. Cancer is widespread (the contributing factors may be endosulfan used in the near by cashew plantations, pollution from beedi-industry, tobacco cultivation etc.). Many children (12.3%) are not covered under the national immunization program. Alcoholism is somewhat widespread. Some are addicted to drugs.

- Almost half the population is not covered under women's self-help group system.
- The majority feels that dowry practice is very common. Dowry is more prevalent among Muslims than Hindus. Marriage celebrations are extravagant. The majority is against inter caste marriage. However, there are several cases of inter caste marriage. Parents are overly anxious about the security of girls and want to give them in marriage as early as possible. For inability to give dowry several women remain unmarried. Early marriage of girls prevents them from pursuing their educational ambitions.
- Women have no freedom to use their income. Alcoholism of men is the biggest cause of suffering for women. The number of widows is very high and many of them are destitute. A high proportion (15%) of women in the Panchayat are abandoned by husbands. There are cases of women, separated from their husbands, due to atrocities. There are several unwed mothers in the Panchayat. Women are afraid to come out and speak up for fear of reprisal from men. Younger women tend to be more conscious and assertive of their rights.
- The Primary Health Centre still promotes woman-centered family planning methods.
- The majority of women have participated in the Gram Sabha at one time or another; however, their participation is confined to attendance and not in decision-making.

#### 4. Vision and Mission Building

A vision-building workshop was conducted in which all the Panchayat members and officials participated. The aim was to prepare the Panchayat committee for formulating plans for the integrated development of the Panchayat.

#### 5. Approach Paper

Following the vision-building workshop, a draft Approach Paper was formulated, which was again discussed in a workshop. The participants were divided into two groups:



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An elderly folk singer  
being felicitated



Productive sector and Service sector. They discussed in detail the present problems, the reasons and the suggestions for improvement in the respective sectors. The draft Approach Paper was reformulated for further discussion in the forthcoming Gram Sabhas.

The ward-level reports were consolidated at the Panchayat level incorporating the findings of the socio-economic survey, resource mapping, soil survey, gender status study and the study on agriculture. This report was placed before the Panchayat Committee for approval, and later before a cross section of the main stakeholders.

## 6. Empowerment of Kudumbashree ADS/CDS

With a view to strengthening the Kudumbashree and making the ADS/CDS structures more vibrant, a number of programs were conducted for enabling the Kudumbashree members to develop proper vision as well as to strengthen their solidarity.

## 7. Jaagratha Samithi Formation

The term Jaagratha Samithi literally means a Vigilance Committee. These committees act as a quasi-judicial mechanism from the Panchayat Ward-level upwards to protect the rights of women and girl children. They are also envisaged for mainstreaming gender in the decentralisation process in Kerala, leading to qualitative strengthening of the status of women in the society. Built on the principles of gender equity and justice, the Jaagratha Samithi proactively, as well as in response to complaints, takes steps to ensure safety and security of women addressing matters that violate women's rights.

The Grama Jyothi Holistic Development project facilitated the Ajanur Gram Panchayat to become the first Panchayat in Kasaragod district to launch the functioning of Jaagratha Samithi, when it was inaugurated on 2 October 2006. This was followed by the formation of Ward-level Jaagratha Samithies.

So far, six cases have been registered with the Jaagratha Samithi: Wife beating (one case), causing physical injury to members of the family including children after getting drunk (one case); mysterious deaths (two cases), not providing subsistence allowance (one case) and unfair treatment of employees (one case). In one case, the police arrested the culprit and the family members were shifted to a safe place. The police are investigating the cases of mysterious deaths, while the case of unjust treatment in



Social audit- Group discussion

work has been referred to the labor officer. The cases of wife beating and not providing subsistence allowance are still pending with the Jaagratha Samithi.

## 8. Counseling and Information Centre

A Counseling Center under TAHA (Trafficking and HIV/AIDS) Project has been opened in the Panchayat. The main purpose of the facility is to prevent trafficking of women, rehabilitate those who have been victims of trafficking, as well as prevent the occurrence of diseases like HIV/AIDS.

## 9. Panchayat Souvenir and Jaagratha Samithi Manual

A souvenir titled 'Ajanur Vision 2020', incorporating the summaries of various study reports and project activity reports as well as guidelines for the management of Jaagratha Samithi, was published as part of the project.

## 10. FGDs on Agricultural Development

Focus Group Discussions (FGD) were conducted in all the wards to analyse the problems and to identify the challenges in the agricultural sector in the context of Watershed Development. The deliberations in the FGDs, involving the study team members, selected farmers and PRT members, and officials of the Agriculture Department were helpful for formulating an agricultural policy suited to the Ajanur Gram Panchayat.

## 11. Trainings/Workshops/Seminars

With a view to maintaining a learning environment as well as to refine the skills and competence of the project personnel, numerous trainings/workshops/ were conducted during the project (Annexure 1). All the trainings/capacity building interventions were need-based and result-oriented and the trained personnel made effective use of their newly acquired competence in their respective areas of work and responsibilities, such as conducting socio-economic survey and gender status study.



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FGD in progress

## IV

# ACHIEVEMENTS AND CONSTRAINTS

### 1. Achievements

The project inputs and processes have generated a large number of positive results. A glance over the important ones:

- Collection of basic socio-economic data of 7,629 households in the Panchayat.
- Resource maps, indicating the assets, land use, water sources etc. prepared.
- Land types and usage map prepared with the help of the Soil Survey Organisation.
- The Panchayat formulated 'The Approach Paper on the Eleventh Five Year Plan'.
- The Panchayat Committee has prepared the annual budget, taking into consideration the findings and recommendations of the studies.
- Guidelines for an integrated citizens' charter was prepared for the use of the Panchayat Committee for improving the functioning of the institutions transferred to the Panchayat and models have been provided for issuing orders based on the decisions of the Panchayat Committee.
- Women's status study report and suggestions for improving the status published.
- Jaagratha Samithies formed at the Panchayat as well as ward level and made functional.
- Gender sensitive and pro-woman attitudes have been promoted in the Panchayat.
- Counseling facilities were arranged on the third Fridays of all the months, in partnership with the TAHA project.
- Published a report on the status of farming with suggestions for improvement.



Validating the resource map

Review meeting in session



- Organic farming practices, including organic composting have been revived.
- An association of organic farmers formed at the ward and Panchayat levels.
- Fellowship and solidarity among the farmers have been strengthened through innovative actions such as Gramotsav/village fair.
- Rural entrepreneurship and micro-enterprise have been developed.
- The management capacity of the Panchayat members enhanced.
- A team of leaders with conceptual and practical skills as well as leadership qualities evolved in the Panchayat.
- A working cordial relationship has been established among various stakeholder agencies, including the Panchayat committee, SEDS, Santhigram and local social activists.
- The experience of the project had very positive impact on all the major stakeholders, particularly Santhigram and SEDS, in addition, of course the Panchayat. For Santhigram, it was yet another experience of working with an LSGI. This experience helped the organisation to build on its understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the PRIs (Panchayat Raj Institutions), its dynamics and mechanisms. Definite improvement was observed in the organisation's communication and documentation skills. Encouraged by the very positive impacts, Santhigram has taken up the mission of motivating other voluntary organisations to take up the challenge of strengthening the Panchayats and several organisations have expressed their interest in the work. As far as SEDS is concerned, this was its first involvement in a major project. The conceptual and management skills of the organisation have definitely improved.

## 2. Enabling Factors

- The enthusiasm and commitment of the Panchayat President and his team.
- The understanding and cooperation among the line departments, transferred institutions and the Panchayat.
- The sense of mission and commitment of the voluntary organisations/NGOs.
- The conceptual clarity and facilitation provided by Santhigram.
- The knowledge and experience mediated by SDC-CapDeck through workshops, discussions and exposure visits.
- One of the strengths of the project was the very cordial,



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Training on Gender and  
Development



trusting, mutually enriching relationship that was maintained throughout between the Panchayat and Santhigram. This dynamic relationship of discovering and appreciating each other kept improving as time went by and remains strong and vibrant even after the completion of the project. If the beginning, as it always happens, was marked by some amount of suspicion and hesitation on both sides, this was cleared in course of time, so that a trusting and transparent rapport evolved and persisted till the end.

### 3. Hindering Factors

The project faced a number of constraints and hardships too. Given below are some of them, along with the remedial action taken to overcome them.

1. Waxing and waning of co-operation from the Agriculture Officer and Krishi Bhavan.	The expertise of other professionals was ensured with the help of Panchayat Committee, working group, farmers and Kudumbashree, regular interaction with Krishi Bhavan.
2. Low participation of farmers in the programs.	Extra efforts were made to identify and induct interested farmers, through programs, such as Haritha Mitram.
3. Lack of trained personnel.	Training was arranged and the service of professionals was ensured.
4. Low interest of ICDS Supervisor.	The Kudumbashree members and Anganawadi workers were given active roles in the project.
5. Lack of support from men.	Extra efforts were made to elicit higher participation of men.
6. The project implementation lagged behind, as a result of the pre-occupations of the Panchayat related to the Golden Jubilee celebrations of the formation of Kerala State.	This was not fully resolved.

## V

### GOOD PRACTICES

The Grama Jyothi Holistic Development Project of Ajanur Panchayat has generated a number of inspiring good practices, worthy of emulation.

#### 1. Organic Farmers' Association

One such good practice is the formation and promotion of a farmers' outfit called 'Ajanur Panchayat Jaiva Karshaka Samithi' (Ajanur Panchayat Organic Farmers Association). It is a novel type of people's organisational entity, combining the resources of the farmers and the governance role of the Panchayat. It was initiated as a follow-up of the findings and recommendations of the studies. The Association is structured at the Ward and Panchayat levels. Members are enrolled at the ward-level, from among whom a 7-11 member ward-level Executive Committee is constituted, with the ward elected member as the Patron.

The Panchayat level General Council is formed, consisting of two members each from the 22 wards. This General Council elects a 16 member Panchayat level Executive Committee in which the Panchayat nominees are also members. This committee elects a 5-member team of office-bearers. Women are given 40 percent reservation at all levels and the bye-law insists that either the President or the Secretary should be a woman. Scheduled caste and scheduled tribe representation is ensured through nomination by the Panchayat.

The main purpose/goal of the organisation, formulated through group learning and decision making sessions, has been defined as " to promote collective action in the farming sector, so as to enable the people to lead a healthy and creative life and become a responsible and committed community. "This goal is to be attained through interventions to conserve, protect, improve and make judicious/optimum, environmentally as well as equitable use of the natural resources of soil, water, bio-mass etc.

#### 2. Social Audit

Another good practice is social audit/community evaluation conducted towards the close of the project. It was a novel experience for every one in the Panchayat and served to buttress people's participation and sense of ownership. In addition, it also generated a number of suggestions for improvement.



REKINDLING  
THE DEVELOPMENT FLAME



Agriculture working group chairman being felicitated



An organic kitchen product

Social audit was conducted on 27 April 2007 under the leadership of the Panchayat committee. More than 150 people attended the program. It started with the introductory remarks on the nature, objectives and methodology of social audit. This was followed by presentation of a brief report of the project. The participants were then divided into groups for studying and discussing the report including the financial statements and accounts, copies of which were distributed to all. The groups made a thorough analysis and presented their comments and suggestions in the plenary session.

### 3. Harita Mitram

A third good practice was the launching of 'Harita Mitram', a forum for women interested in bio-farming.

Haritha Mitram was proposed to enhance the activities of Karshaka Samithies (Farmers' Association) and thereby increase vegetable and paddy cultivation and promote organic kitchen gardening by every household. It was planned to be implemented with the co-operation of the neighborhood groups and under the technical guidance and leadership of 'Krishi Bhavan' (Agricultural office). Though a decision was taken to give a six-month training based on the syllabus prepared by the Agriculture University to 100 selected farmers, it could not be implemented due to lack of co-operation from the officials of Krishi Bhavan. However, taking into account the interest of the farmers and the views of the Panchayat Committee and the Working Group on agriculture, training was given to the selected farmers. This has given an opportunity to the farmers to learn the methods including the organic farming, use of bio-fertilizers and pesticides in their farms.

### 4. Gramotsavam

Marking the conclusion of the Grama Jyothi Project, a Gramotsavam / Farmers get together and agricultural fair was organised on 27<sup>th</sup> April 2007. After the inauguration, the participants had an opportunity to visit the exhibition of village products, medicinal plants, books etc, as well as the acupressure medical camp, organised by Santhigram Holistic Health Care and Research Center (SHCRC). The program, first of its kind in the Panchayat, served to cement solidarity among the farmers and provide the much needed fillip to organic farming.

## VI

# LEARNINGS AND CONCLUSION

### 1. Learnings

- There is a wealth of basic goodness and enthusiasm among the people and the people's representatives. This is pronounced among the women, particularly those from the disadvantaged sections. However, there is lack of proper orientation, mobilisation and capacity, particularly a lack of vision/clarity about the long-term goals and systematic approach for addressing the basic issues.
- A major obstacle to sustainable solutions is the state of divisiveness of the village population, on various lines.
- Male domination and male insensitivity as well as lethargy of the community in relation to this are too deep-rooted to be overcome through simplistic and short-lived solutions. Sustained interventions are necessary to maintain the gains made and break fresh ground in the path of equitable and creative gender relations and interactions.
- The formation of the Jaagratha Samithi has generated a lot of hope and expectations among women. These hopes will be belied unless the Jaagratha Samithi is activated and is enabled to address the burning issues of women's security.
- The creative role of secular, non-governmental and non-party voluntary organisations is increasing by the day. The local governments can do a lot to promote such voluntarism at the local level.

Cultural programme in Gramotsavam



REKINDLING  
THE DEVELOPMENT FLAME



Input session on Social audit



Gramotsavam

- Several opportunities are opening up, such as the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, which if linked to the Panchayat innovations like the Organic Farmers' Association, are capable of generating lasting changes in the agrarian sector.
- The Organic Farmers' Association has the potential of being transformed into a people's movement capable of leading the Panchayat along the path of total development through the development of agriculture.
- The quality of leadership, probably, is the single most important factor underlying successful interventions. Enlightened and committed leadership has no substitute and is a rare phenomenon.
- We have not yet fully lost the battle for protecting the environment and conserving the holistic indigenous ethos. It is still possible to recapture the lost ground and build a green future on the reclaimed values, provided the local governments make it their primary mission. We should concentrate on proactive interventions, reaping, where possible, the advantages offered by the global market.
- A breakthrough achieved, thanks to the project, is regarding the relevance and efficacy of social audit. If conducted properly, it can become an excellent tool and opportunity for experiential learning, both for the Panchayat committee and the people.
- The issues of administrative reforms need to be immediately addressed to ensure that the nascent flame of awakening in the Panchayat does not die out, but is kept alive.

Ajanur Panchayat Committee meeting in session



## Annexure 1

### Trainings/Workshops/Seminars

Sl. No.	Programmes	Duration	No. of Participants
1.	Planning workshop for Panchayat Committee	One day	23
2.	Training for the Panchayat Study Team	Two days	44
3.	Training for the Panchayat Resource Team	Two days	32
4.	Training for the Ward-level Study Team	One day	86
5.	Training for the Resource Mapping Team	Two days	110
6.	Workshop on Vision and Mission building for Panchayat Members and Officials	One day	30
7.	Discussion on Draft Approach Paper	One day	30
8.	Training on Report Writing	One day	40
9.	Block level Workshop on 11th Five Year Plan	Two days	81
10.	Consultation on Women's Development	One day	18
11.	Training for Gender Status Study Team	Two days	34
12.	Discussion of Draft Report of Gender Status Study	One day	50
13.	Ward-level Jaagratha Samithi Trainings for Women	22 days	784
14.	Inauguration of Jaagratha Samithi	One day	600
15.	Gender and Legal Training	4 days	82
16.	Legal Awareness Programme (22 ward)	22 days	82
17.	Training for Members of study Team on Agriculture	Two days	27
18.	Discussion of Draft Report of Agricultural study	One day	15
19.	Seminar on Organic Kitchen Gardening	Two days	45
20.	Discussion on Watershed Development	One day	45
21.	Sharing on Organic Farming	One day	82
22.	Workshop on Agro-industries	One day	53
23.	Seminar on Organic Vegetable Gardening	One day	38
24.	Consultation on Organic Farmers Association	One day	30
25.	Women's Seminar on Harita Mitram	One day	104
26.	Entrepreneurship Development Programme (EDP)	5 days	22
27.	Symposium on Sustainable Agriculture	One day	25
28.	Consultation of Panchayat Committee, Implementing Officers and Study Team Members	One day	43
29.	Study Tour	One day	18

## 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.