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Allaying farmer's woes

Nagapattinam district has got a history of disasters. Cyclones, floods, drought, and then the tsunami... These disasters inflict a heavy loss on life and livelihood. Living conditions of marginalized deteriorate further... the budding generation get engulfed in this situation thus crippling their growth and development. Is not there a solution to this sorry state of affairs? We should help them survive through the disasters rather than helping them survive in the disasters. A significant portion of Nagapattinam community depends on agriculture for its livelihood. The farming population has survived through a series of natural disasters; floods, backwater constantly plague the fertility of their field. The plight of landless labourers is all the more visible. Inconsistency in the jobs marginalizes them further and they migrate to other places to eke out a living. Frequent salination owing to natural causes or due to the effects of shrimp farms makes the farms infertile that force the small farmers sell off their land and look out for other jobs. All these are ripple effects of disaster that constantly plague the farming community in continuing livelihoods. Given the situation, the coping mechanisms of different types of farmers need to be studied in detail and customized packages for their survival should be evolved that would help them stand on their own. Security schemes that encompass insurance, savings, seed banks, saline resistant crops, better marketing avenues, and other ways that relieve farmers from the clutches of middlemen.... should be designed and implemented.

Reviving the traditional practices, capacity building of farmers, creating platform to exchange and learning, promoting linkages between farmers and institution are all viable options for the future. Studying the drainage systems and the pattern of flooding, bringing in a good drainage pattern or reviving the disturbed drainage systems should happen in unison. Identifying the areas where frequent salination happens, improving the reach of irrigation canals should also be a part of the strategy.

A shift from crop based farming system to integrated farming systems approach wherein different systems are integrated to reduce input costs, improve soil fertility and productivity, increase or stabilize the total income of the farms, and increase the risk bearing capacity of the farmers will add value to the farming community. Having known all these things, we should use this window of opportunity to draw together different players - technical as well as social - to bring in a lasting solution for problems that have been troubling the farmers for decades. ■

Former JD Agriculture on NGO Coordination

The former Joint Director of Agriculture, Nagapattinam, Mr. Muthuvel had been supporting NCRC and NGOs in its coordination work during the first year of rehabilitation. In the context of completion of immediate and short term reclamation activities, he shares his experience of working with the NGOs and NCRC.

Soon after the Tsunami devastation, the government announced compensation to the farmers and facilitated the formation of Tsunami farmers' SHG with an aim to distribute the compensation in an equitable manner. Based on the initial crop damage assessment it was decided to give Rs. 2500 per hectare per farmer and later based on the land damage Rs. 6500 per hectare per farmer. Later a land reclamation package was introduced according to which Rs. 12500 worth of inputs like seeds, fertilizers etc would be given, at different stages, per hectare of affected land. The farmer would be responsible to reclaim the land with guidance and support from the government. The ceiling of Rs. 12500 was later raised to Rs. 15000 per hectare. So far all the components have not been distributed and the government has decided to extend the validity of the package for one more year i.e., up to March 2007.

Mr. Muthuvel feels that even though some NGOs started to work in agriculture at the initial stages, this was not known to the government. A few of the NGOs approached and apprised the department on their activities and sought suggestions, but the response was scattered. Only when NCRC started taking a greater role, the activities of all the NGOs working for reclamation became clear - which NGO does what in which area and up to what extent.

He observed that NCRC was instrumental in facilitating NGO-GO coordination. NCRC contributed significantly towards bringing in a concerted effort. ■

National workshop on Disaster Preparedness in Agriculture

Nagapattinam has fertile lands that contribute to the rice bowl of South India. Over the years this land has borne the brunt of regular floods, even droughts, and then the Tsunami. The Tsunami provided the ground for the agriculturists, the scientists and the technocrats to work jointly towards developing a sustainable solution to the farmers' woes.

In Nagapattinam, nearly 8000 hectares of agricultural land, including both cultivated and fallow land, was affected by the Tsunami. The reclamation of these lands has been done through a consultative, comprehensive approach, which includes sustainable traditional practices. 23 NGOs along with NGO Coordination and Resource Centre, worked intensively in the first season to make the affected lands cultivable. This intense work has been successful with almost all farms, which, as per earlier assessments, would not have been cultivable at least for the next three to five years.

One year after rehabilitation, it is worthwhile to consolidate the achievements and learning based on the experiences and also to plan sustainable and proactive measures to reduce the vulnerabilities of the farming community.

As a first step, different stakeholders will be coming together on August 3-4, 2006 for a two-day workshop on 'disaster preparedness in agriculture'. This would be a platform for sharing and learning for the stakeholders of all the vulnerable states facing similar disasters for the past decade or more. National and state-level policy makers in disaster resource management & agriculture will share their inputs & plans on the subject. Best practices from Orissa and the Northeast will be presented during the workshop.

The workshop, a joint venture of NCRC, NGOs working here in Nagapattinam and Concern Worldwide has the following objectives:

- To collectively address the two main disasters related to agriculture – salinity & flooding in Nagapattinam district; To sensitize Government / NGOs / INGOs and farmers to mainstream disaster proofing interventions in agriculture; To influence developmental agencies in implementing effective policies and adopting best practices towards addressing the impact of salinity & flood in agriculture.

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Interview with Mr. Marimuthu, MLA, CPI(M), Nagapattinam Constituency

The core group of NGOs working with Children in Nagapattinam organized “meet the electoral candidate programme” on 29th of April 2006. 625 children from 5 taluks of Nagapattinam district had a face to face discussion with the two electoral candidates and presented various development needs of the children. They presented their electoral manifesto with demands related to their rights on compulsory education, infrastructure facilities in school, filling up vacancies of teachers, and allotting financial assistance for children’s education. The meeting was organized to mark occasion of the anti-child Labour Day. Mr. Marimuthu, the DMK alliance candidate from Nagapattinam constituency, who received the children’s manifesto, won the assembly seat. Now, two months on from the result of the election, NCRC conducted an interview with Mr. Marimuthu to find out if the manifesto he received prior to the election has in any way influenced his plans ahead for the children of Nagapattinam.



Mr. Marimuthu receiving the children’s manifesto

On Children’s Manifesto All the expectations of the children presented in the manifesto are very fair. My wish is that they all have to be fulfilled by the strenuous effort of the government.

Concerns/problems faced by children of Nagapattinam The problems faced by the children in our district are aplenty. Parent’s capacity to educate the children is one of the main problems here. For the past three consecutive years, natural calamities have severely affected the income of the villagers that has made people incapable of spending on education.

Plans ahead The party (Communist Marxist Party) had sent ten Lakh rupees towards tsunami relief in Nagapattinam. We are also constructing a school in Kameswaram which will be opened next month. I am planning to spend money from the MLA fund mainly on constructing more educational institutions that would aim at providing free education, and secondly, I am going to request the ONGC (Oil and Natural Gas Corporation) and CPCL (Chennai Petroleum Corporation Ltd) - the crude oil corporations

functioning in the district -to sponsor computer and modern facilities for the government schools.

On NGOs work The NGO’s work in the post tsunami relief and rehabilitation has been phenomenal. Without NGOs our district would not have returned to normalcy within a short while.

The MLA also expressed his dissatisfaction over the slow pace of work in shelter construction. A year and a half is on from the tsunami devastation and majority of the affected people have not

received their houses to live. He feels that if the government had taken up the responsibility, the work could have been completed in time since it could have exerted pressure on its workers to finish things on time. The affected people housed in temporary shelters have been vulnerable to floods, fire etc. and the government needs to constantly provide compensation. The situation has to change. The construction process should be accelerated.

The MLA feels that the NGOs working here should join hands with institutions/clubs/welfare societies functioning in the district like the Red Cross, Lions Club etc. to address common issues in the district and he expressed his willingness to facilitate such joint forums. ■

National workshop on disaster preparedness in agriculture
- contd...from page 2

Expected outcomes of the workshop

Vulnerability mapping of the coastal Nagapattinam district on disasters related to agriculture; Possibility of introducing crop diversification through favourable changes in cropping pattern; Incorporating lessons learnt from best practices through sharing experiences at national level; Consolidating interventions related to salinity / flood; Mainstreaming these interventions in NGO / Government programmes; Sensitize and influence government / donor organization to fund for irrigation / drainage infrastructure improvements to address both salinity and floods.

40 to 50 participants are expected to participate in the workshop. ■

Lending a helping hand

When Mr. Palani and Ramkumar, the coordinators of NCRC village information centre shared their idea of contributing to the relief for the earthquake victims in Indonesia, the energetic youth in the villages of Kollidam and Sirkali block of Nagapattinam did not have a second thought about it; they said “we should do it”. Thus started a campaign by the tsunami affected people for the earthquake affected in Indonesia.... Around 50 youngsters from the tsunami affected villages of Kollidan and Sirkali block of Nagapattinam went around collecting fund for the victims of the earthquake that killed around 600 people on 28th May, 2006 in Indonesia. The youngsters from the villages moved around nine neighboring villages from 31st of May to 2nd of June and pooled Rs.11, 000 from the community.

“The response was positive,” says Mr. Muthukumar, Coordinator of RACE, one of the 50 volunteers. “Half of the fishing community we encountered knew of the disaster and helped immediately. Half were not aware knew helped immediately of the earthquake. Around one third of them did help after we spoke to them and explained the situation. There were many lessons the youngsters learnt from the experience of collecting money. “It was mostly the people who had little have given more. The women fish vendors, for that matter, were the most generous of all. It was motivating for all of us in the collection camp, says S. Palanisamy, volunteer.

The fifty youngsters formed three groups and pulled out all the stops all the day long in the hot sun. One boy in the group got his slippers torn; yet, he kept going and was happy to walk bare footed for the cause of the victims.

They received some very encouraging responses (see Box). However some people were also indifferent. They acted as if they are sleeping and never noticed the volunteers. Some used abusive and irrespective words. Many were suspicious about the money reaching the affected. Some even questioned in whose name the fund was collected. Some offered their old clothes, instead of money

The volunteers learnt a few lessons from the experience. They learnt to take both the positive as well as the abusive responses in a balanced way. “In many occasions we were getting on our nerves

after hearing the impolite response from the people. But we kept to our cool. We thanked all.”

The collected amount will be handed over to the collector soon and based on his suggestion the money will be routed to the victims. ■

In Pazhayar village, a lady, who is a fish vendor, was having food when the team visited her. Hearing about the disaster from the volunteers she started sobbing and said, “I was floating in the water following the tsunami. Now I am hearing people got trapped under the ruins of the big structures...I should help them. She contributed Rs.50.

A man who had been inebriated was reluctant to offer any money. The wife argued “what kind of man are you? Were you not helped when you were helpless?” And she contributed some money. Some people who didn't have money at hand even borrowed from the neighbours and gave.

An old lady helped to collect money from many other house. A boy aged 8 years, who was affected by the tsunami, carried the collection box in the entire village.



People's Toilet

The occupants of the ITI campus temporary shelter in Nagapattinam are getting used to the 'one rupee toilet' system maintained by the community. Called 'people's toilet', the system is in operation for the last one month, i.e., from May 2006 onwards. The initial row of toilets put up in January 2005 along with the temporary sheds, got dilapidated, ran out of water and failed to ensure security for the ladies.

Slowly people stopped using these toilets.

Seeing the situation, EXNORA, supported by USAID, pitched in and constructed a row of new 15 toilets, in place of the the previous ones. Before this, the approvals and cooperation from panchayat representatives was secured. It was decided that SHG women members would be responsible to coordinate maintenance of the toilet. Municipality staff responsible for the upkeep of temporary shelter helps the SHG members in maintaining the toilets-

in cleaning and maintaining the daily registers. The municipality staff would be available between 6 a.m and 12 p.m in the morning and between 2 p.m and 6 p.m. in the evening.

Altogether there are 15 toilets – 8 for ladies and 7 for gents. Of the 624 houses on the campus, families from 70 houses use the new toilets while the rest of the families keep using other old toilets located elsewhere in the campus.

A 1000 litre sintex tank ensures availability of water throughout the day. The Municipality fills in the tank twice a day and drains the septic tank once in three days; sprays pesticides to ward off mosquitoes.

The SHG collects one rupee per family per day towards the maintenance of the toilets. Three

women SHG members take care of this in turns. They help the municipality staff in cleaning as well as make sure that all the required cleaning agents are available.

The collected amount is deposited in a bank account every month. One part of the amount is used for maintaining the toilets, i.e., on the repair of taps, over head tank, buying cleaning agents (if not provided by the municipality) and the other part goes to the SHG account. A small part of the amount is given to the municipality staff towards refreshment expenses.

The SHG members say 'now it is very clean and good' and we feel proud of doing this.

'Namma oooru nallatharikanam (our village

should be good) that is why we took up the responsibility. The SHG members said that some people question about the money being collected and spent but the others understand how it is being spent.

People are happy with the facilities available and are ready to pay for it. They feel that if the municipality ensures enough supply of water they would pay more to also have a bathroom. The people who use it felt it very clean and secure and said '*oru roopa koduthalum parvayillai , suthamayirikkum*' (do not mind paying one rupee since it is neat and clean). ■



NGO profile - Kudumbam

The NGO kudumbam (*Kudumbam* in Tamil means family) was registered as a legal body in 1982. It has been involving in sustainable agriculture for the last 22 years. Kudumbam is facilitating the Tamilnadu chapter of a network called LEISA - Low External Input for sustainable Agriculture that promotes organic agriculture involving 10,000 farmers, 82 Field Executives, 82 Sangam Animators, 9 district coordinators, 9 district secretaries, 82 NGOs and 20 staff at the coordinating service cell in the state.

Since 1990, the LEISA -network has been working for the sustainable development of farmers who lack resources, involving them in sustainable agricultural activities. Kudumbam - LEISA Network has got 9 coordinating offices in 9 districts of Tamil Nadu and a coordinating secretariat at Tiruchirappalli, which is 100 kms from the tsunami affected area. Besides, Kudumbam has established 3 field offices in Nagapattinam with 3 field level co-ordinators. It also has a board of consultants drawn from the department of agriculture and animal husbandry. This team equips the field staff, evolve a participatory plan of action and consistently monitor the process through collective evaluation and monitoring systems.

Milestones 1990 to 1993 – Creating awareness on the ill effects of Green Revolution; **1994 to 2000** – Integrated Pest Management (IPM) and Farmers Field School (FFS) were facilitated in 82 villages in Tamil Nadu. Initiated one year certificate course in ecological agriculture. In 1997, Save Traditional Seed Yatra was organized from Chennai to Kanyakumari covering a distance of 1000 kms in 30 days. In 1998 LEISA network facilitated a participatory study in 100 villages and organized a state level conference where 5000 farmers from all over the state participated. **After 2000** - In 2002, Kudumbam was a part of the PAN-AP Team at the World Food Summit to focus on Food Security and Food Sovereignty. In 2003, played a major role in facilitating Sustainable Agriculture Network in Bangladesh. In 2004, together with PAN-AP facilitated the Indian Caravan on Food Security and Sovereignty from 1st to 30th September 2004.

In Nagapattinam Kudumbam covers 35 villages and the following activities were carried out in the immediate relief and reconstruction phase.

During the relief phase Kudumbam's activities included construction of Temporary Shelters, Distribution of Family Utilities - Clothes, utensils, mat, bed sheets, agriculture tools, carpentry tools, table & bench for Schools.



Clean, de-silted canal

In the rehabilitation phase, Kudumbam has been involving in reclamation of agriculture lands - clearing canals, ponds, digging new ponds, pumping out salt water from farm ponds. Kudumbam, in this phase, has also established an Agro Input service center and fodder banks. Other activities of Kudumbam include: Distribution of Children School Bags & Kits, Green Manure Production, Revolving Fund, Small Entrepreneurship for Women (200 women), Orientation & Follow up Training for Field Staff, Construction of community Center, community toilets, drinking water tanks, training centres, tuition centres, Training on building Technology and sustainable Agriculture, Establishment of Tree Nursery, Promoting alternative medicines, Siddha Mud brick training and production, training on products in palm leaf, Saline resistant seed distribution and multiplication and Sponsorship for girl children on studies

Kudumbam is publishing a vernacular Tamil bimonthly Magazine called *Pasunthalir* (tender leaf) based on its experiences with the farming community. It is also conducting a correspondence course on Ecological Agriculture for farmers and NGO field staff.

Kudumbam can be contacted at: No. 4/23, Pillayar Koil Street, Kadambadi, Nagapattinam. Email: kudumbam_ngt@yahoo.com ■

Events roundup - June

Workshop on 'Appropriate Technologies in Sanitation'

2 June 2006

This workshop was organized jointly by UNICEF, TNTRC, CRS and NCRC at the Main Conference Hall of the Collectorate in Nagapattinam. The highlights of the workshop: Ms. Annie George, CEO, NCRC made a presentation on water and sanitation in Nagapattinam that included an assessment study findings on the conditions of both temporary as well as permanent shelters in Nagapattinam. Dr. Vyjayanthi of UNICEF made a presentation on shelter based waste management system. Ms. Anna of CRS presented a study on water quality in Nagapattinam, Kanya Kumari and Cuddalore and a detailed presentation on DEWATS. Mr. Subbaraman of SCOPE, Trichy did presentation on ECOSAN (dry pit compost). Mr. Balakrishnan, Executive Engineer, TWAD explained the plans of the government on water and sanitation in permanent shelters.

The NGOs sought clarifications on different options available for Nagapattinam. It was decided to hold block level meetings of NGOs, government engineers and NCRC to chart out plan of action for Nagapattinam district.

Around 40 NGO representatives attended the workshop apart from participants from NCRC, UNICEF, TNTRC and CRS.



Children core group meeting

16 June, 2006

The core group on Children met at the Front office of the Collectorate and discussed the following key issues: Identifying the drop outs Raising fund for helping more poor children for their education. The meeting decided to: Strengthen the core group and the following steps would be taken towards this. A total of 15 NGOs would officially form the members of the core group committee. NGOs that fail to attend three consecutive meetings would lose the privilege of the membership without notification. Children representatives from across the district, nearly 7 would be pooled in the core group committee. Organize a workshop for children on 24th June. The workshop is aimed to form a parliament comprising children facilitating 'Ministers Conference' during the quarterly holidays. Representatives from 6 NGOs, apart from NCRC participated the meeting.

Shelter progress review

17 June 2006

The new District Collector of Nagapattinam, Mr. Tenkasi S. Jawahar IAS, called for a meeting to take stock of the progress in shelter construction by NGOs. The meeting began with a brief presentation by Mr. Vivekanandan, the CEO of SIFFS on shelter updates in Nagapattinam. The presentation covered the following: The milestones in shelter construction. No. of NGOs and the no. of sites where the construction is happening - 51 NGOs working in 109 sites. The total number of houses to be constructed - 17, 677. Issues on water and sanitation with NCRC assessment study as the background. Overall concerns in construction that hamper the process.

Following this, the District Collector reviewed the status of reconstruction in the district site by site and set some action points that would be followed up in the next review meeting.

Besides the NGO representatives, the Block Development Officers, government site engineers and officials of Tamilnadu Water and Drainage Board and Electricity board, Special Deputy Collector, Project Officer- DRDA, Deputy Collector- Relief and Rehab also attended the meeting.

The review meetings held on the following weeks i.e., on 23rd and 30th June 2006 took stock of the progress against what had been agreed during the

previous review. The collector highlighted the need to start all the pending constructions and reminded the NGOs of the clause in the MoU that authorizes the government to sever the contract of non-performing NGOs.

Meeting with NGOs on disaster preparedness in agriculture

23 June, 2006

The agriculture review meeting held with NGOs at NCRC Front Office, Collectorate, Nagapattinam on 23rd June held exclusive discussions on conducting a national level workshop on disaster preparedness in agriculture in Nagapattinam. It was tentatively decided to hold the workshop on 17 and 18th July 2006. The workshop will invite prominent resource persons in agriculture from across India including the government and agriculture planning commission. The meeting also discussed the agriculture plans of NGOs working in Nagapattinam, capacity building and participation of the community in NGO's work.

Workshop on children parliament

24 June, 2006

A workshop on children parliament for the children representative from villages across Nagapattinam

was organised by NCRC at Spiritual Centre, Tarangambadi. 36 representatives from 22 NGOs working for children in the Tsunami affected villages of Nagapattinam and 34 Children from the affected areas attended the meeting. Resource persons from CREATE, SNEHA, REAL PLAN and NCRC spoke on the purpose of children parliament, roles and responsibilities of minister and the process of election and how to conduct children parliament. Towards the end exclusive group discussions were held with children and NGOs separately on the expectations of children and about the formation of children's parliament in the villages where NGOs are working. ■



Book Review

Reducing risk of disaster in our communities

Author: Paul Venton and Bob Hansford

Editor: Rachel Blackman

Publisher: Tearfund, 100 Church Road, Teddington, TW11 8QE, UK Tel: +44 (0)20 8977 9144 E-mail: roots@tearfund.org Web: www.tearfund.org/tilz

The author says that the most effective way to reduce disaster risk is to work with local people to identify and analyse their vulnerabilities and capacities, and to develop and implement an action plan. This book looks at one method that can be used to achieve this. This methodology is called **Participatory Assessment of Disaster Risk (PADR)**.

This book contains case studies showing how this process has made a positive difference to people's lives. This book starts by considering disasters from a Christian perspective. It then looks at some disaster theory and outlines PADR as one way of reducing disaster risk.



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NGO Coordination and Resource Centre, No. 31, South Palpannaichery, Mahalakshmi Nagar, Nagapattinam

Ph: 04365 252618/252681