

0202. 1st Progress Report on the Extensions (Jan 1990)

For the period ending January 1990; ICCO Project No: 923333

Contains data on Adult Literacy Programme (ALP) classes, Training, weekly Meetings, Health and Economic Activities, separately, for the Chickballapur, Chintamani and Siddalaghatta Extension Programmes.

The ADATS/DDS Extension Programmes, which were started in mid 1988, are now 2 years old. ICCO started to support the Coolie Sangha formation activities from April 1989.

Today, these 3 areas cover 43 % of the total population of 160 villages where 3,273 landless and land poor Coolie families have formed CSUs. 62 % of them belong to the scheduled castes, 17 % to intermediary castes, and 21 % to the upper castes. 14 % of these memberships are in the names of Coolie women.

Not all the 3 extensions have reached the same stage of development, but every effort is being made to achieve as uniform a standard as possible by the end of March 1992.

Resume of the 3 ADATS/DDS Extension Programmes

Total	Chickballapur	Chintamani	Siddalaghatta	
30	Clusters	11	9	10
160	Villages covered	57	56	47
4%	Population covered	4%	37%	48%
3,273	Normal Members	1,274	898	1,101
204	Suspended Members	189	15	
103	Cancelled Members	21	78	4
62%	Lower castes	65%	52%	58%
17%	Middle castes	13%	18%	22%
21%	Upper castes	22%	20%	20%
14%	Women Membership	20%	12%	12%
25	Community Workers	8	8	9
161	Village Level Workers	57	57	47
156	Village Health Workers	59	52	45
3	Field Assistants	2	1	
6	Field Workers	2	2	2
1	Desk Worker (Accts)	1		
3	Helpers	2	1	
54%	Male Staff	67	68	57
46%	Female Staff	62	54	47

1. CHICKBALLAPUR EXTENSION PROGRAMME

1.1. Adult Literacy Programme (ALP) classes

The adult literacy effort was a great success in Chickballapur. There were 3 reasons for this. Firstly, achieving mutually agreed upon targets was a condition for the appointment of VLWs. Secondly, 1 adult per Coolie family attending the 5 evenings a week ALP classes was made a condition for giving CSU membership. Thirdly, the DDS staff consciously prevented major side-tracking, insisting that literacy was not just a cover activity or entry point. As always and everywhere, ALP classes have enhanced the political consciousness and self esteem of the learners. Nearly every ALP class tended to tangent into discussions, because of the specially designed material which was used. Such discussions were reserved for the weekly CSU Meetings where very major land, caste, wage and bonded labour issues were successfully undertaken.

These were the 3 main reasons for the success of both, the adult literacy effort as well as Coolie Sangha building at Chickballapur.

Special tests conducted by impartial outsiders show that 75 % of learners from 49 CSUs have acquired enough skills to read a newspaper or notice, and to write simple applications. But these neo-literates find writing to be more difficult than reading. This can improve only through constant touch and practice.

The 1st ALP Book has been completed in 28 villages, and they are well into the 2nd Book. The ALP efforts at Chickballapur will continue for 1 more year. It has been decided that there is no need for any supervision from DDS staff. The weekly visits of the Field Workers is needed only in order to give material support and fresh ideas. They will, however, continue to assess progress through independent tests and evaluations.

More than 1/3 rd the successful ALP learners were Coolie women, but they have not fared as well as the men. In spite of a special campaign to make the VHWs literate, this effort was not successful.

Right from the beginning, a specially designed chart was used to monitor the weekly progress of the ALP classes. This was being filled out at the weekly staff meeting. But for the past 1 year, this task is being performed in the Cluster Meets.

1.2. Training

In May 1988, a senior ADATS staff was sent as Projects Assistant to set up the Chickballapur Extension Programme. Along with 2 well versed Coolie youth who were appointed as Field Workers, they arranged the office logistics, selected the Community Workers who, in turn, selected potential villages and VLWs.

The type of training given to the Community Workers and VLWs was on cultural actions like singing songs, role plays, street theatre, etc. This was done over a period of 4 months by the President and other senior functionaries of the BAGEPALLI COOLIE SANGHA. At the same time, experienced teachers from the Bagepalli CSUs went out to the Chickballapur villages to train the newly selected VLWs on adult literacy skills. By the end of 1989, proven Coolie Sangha building activities were being implemented in about 50 villages of the taluk. Having done his job, this Projects Assistant left Chickballapur.

In the first 3 months of 1989, just before the ICCO project was sanctioned, the ADATS/DDS Project Director and Executive Assistant conducted a round of participatory discussions for 1 day a week. All the VLWs, Community Workers and Field Workers attended these weekly meetings. The project proposal and budget were thoroughly discussed and everything was made totally transparent. They are encouraged to critically examine the stated ADATS/DDS policies, project objectives and planned activities. Comments and suggestions made by them on the organisational structure, style of functioning, etc. were immediately implemented.

One of the major outcomes of these sessions was the recognition that the type of senior staff support needed at Chickballapur had changed. In April 1989 we appointed a public litigation lawyer who was well versed in imparting para legal and procedural training as Projects Assistant. In October of the same year we appointed a woman Projects Assistant to organise training for Coolie women.

Weekly training were held on para legal matters and civic procedures for both, VLWs and VHWs (this new cadre of women health workers had just been appointed with ICCO funds). Similar training, but on a less intensive scale, were held for elected CSU Representatives. These were followed up with concrete assistance in handling innumerable issues and struggles where the Coolies approached the Mandal Panchayats, taluk offices, police stations, registrar of co-operative societies, etc. to redress their grievances.

The CSI Hospital, Chickballapur, was involved to train the VHWs in 4 weekly sessions of 2 days each on community health and native/herbal medicine. At the end of these theoretical sessions, each and every one of the trained VHWs spent 2 days and nights, in batches of 2, at the CSI Hospital to gain practical experience in handling difficult maternity cases.

The woman Projects Assistant imparted theoretical knowledge to these VHWs on the role and position of women in society, various laws concerning women, government schemes that women could avail the benefit of, etc.

A second round of weekly participatory sessions conducted by the ADATS/DDS Projects Assistant and Executive Assistant have started in November 1990. These will go on till the end of February 1991. This time, the discussions have been on the role of caste and religion on the individual, the gender issue, autonomy, pluralism and democracy, and various other conceptual matters.

The past 2 years' achievements at Chickballapur are being examined in the light of these larger statements of vision that are emerging in the discussions. It was decided that the next 3 year Coolie Sangha Formalisation phase for Chickballapur will be collectively planned by all the village staff, based on their own understanding of needs, and not merely on the 13 years experiences at Bagepalli.

At this stage, the 2 Projects Assistants felt uncomfortable that their contribution as "trainers" to enhance the liaison and community organisation skills of the village level staff was over. Having done a commendable job, they left to start projects of their own.

1.3. CSU Meetings, Cluster Meets and CCS Meetings

All 57 villages have regular CSU Meetings once a week. The quorum for these meetings is 1/3 rd the membership strength of the CSU, and the minutes are recorded in full. In about 18 villages, there is an additional weekly Mahila Meeting where 1 woman from each member Coolie household gets together without any man present. The CSUs are exceptionally strong in the 49 villages where the ALP was a success.

Even a cursory perusal of the CSU Minutes Books reveals many details. One of the many visible achievement of the CSUs is a marked reduction in going to the police stations to settle disputes. Even private family affairs are openly discussed in the CSU Meetings. The role of village touts has been greatly reduced.

Apart from planning, executing and reviewing struggles to get their due share of village amenities from the civic bodies, the Coolies frankly talk about economic difficulties faced by fellow members, and come up with plans to redress them. Minimum wages, contract wages, and the release of bonded labourers are some of the other topics discussed.

Though land and wage issues are discussed very seriously, they somehow seem to take a second place when compared to discussions on what has to be done for the societal position of Coolies to improve. One gets a distinct impression that the Coolies have been attracted to form their Sanghas not only for reasons of economism and get benefits.

The Field Workers are continually asked for detailed information on the differences between towns and villages, the position of the poor in other societies, etc. As a result, they have to do some serious homework and equip themselves very well to attend CSU Meetings. The member Coolies are also very interested in keeping themselves well informed about overall happenings in the BAGEPALLI COOLIE SANGHA.

Weekly Cluster Meets attended by a VLW, VHW and 3 elected Representatives from each CSU are also a regular feature. The Field Workers compulsorily attend these Cluster Meets. Apart from monitoring the progress of the CSU Meetings and ALP classes, the Cluster Meets

discuss larger issues. Of late, the Cluster Meets have begun to play a role in mediating in inter-CSU affairs.

The Coolies of Chickballapur have expressed a desire to meet every month for their Chickballapur Coolie Sangha (CCS) Meetings. Though 5 such CCS Meetings have been held in 1990, these do not as yet have the regularity and seriousness of the BCS Meetings at Bagepalli.

Once the round of participatory discussion sessions referred to in the earlier paragraph of this report are over, member Coolies will participate in the planning of the next 3 year Coolie Sangha formalisation phase at the CSU, Cluster and CCS levels.

1.4. Health

59 Village Health Workers were selected, 1 by each CSU. In nearly all the cases, these were Coolie women selected due to their personal histories of involvement with fellow women. After being trained, they were given basic medicine kits to cure minor ailments and give first aid. Sick people approach the VHWs for medicines, home remedies, and sometimes to accompany them to the government and CSI hospitals where they are seen as being "well connected". Though the services of these VHWs is only for member Coolie families, others too approach them during emergencies and for assistance in childbirth.

These VHWs are an outspoken lot, and have been instrumental in mobilising Coolie women to come out and participate in all CSU affairs. As many women attend CSU Meetings and ALP classes as men. Though only about 5 % of the Coolie families are women headed, 20 % of CSU memberships are in the names of women.

Though there are separate Mahila Meetings in about 18 villages, these meetings do not act as fora for the women to influence the course of Coolie Sangha developments with their separate perceptions and priorities. In this respect, the Chickballapur women have a lot to learn from Bagepalli.

1.5. Economic activities

Very many economic struggles were taken up by the CSUs. They are in the process of monetising and inventorying all the benefits they have obtained from the Mandal Panchayats, milk societies, co-operative banks, etc. And nearly all this was through struggle.

Coolie Credit Fund (CCF) grants of Rs 2,000 per CSU were given to 37 villages. These amounts were given out for various purposes to their members, and have nearly all been returned. DDS now has to grant an additional Rs 2,000 to keep building up the 37 CCFs. The remaining CSUs are now mature enough to receive and properly utilise their first CCF grants.

Two CSUs are in trouble because they lent out their CCFs for releasing bonded labourers. Now, they don't know how these freed bonded labourers are to repay the interest-free loans. So too with CCF loans given for medical expenses. Now they have realised that everything cannot be done through loans alone. Given their level of poverty, there are some needs that only an outright subsidy activity can take care of.

2. CHINTAMANI EXTENSION PROGRAMME

Though the Chintamani Extension Programme started in June 1988, only 3 of the original clusters have lasted. The effort at the remaining villages bore no fruit. As a result, 3 clusters are 2 years old, 3 are 1 year old, and 3 more are only about 6 months old.

After internal problems resulting from work dishonesty led to the abandoning of so many villages, the then Projects Assistant and 2 Field Workers were asked to own personal responsibility and quit.

The BAGEPALLI COOLIE SANGHA intervened to visit all the villages and take stock of the situation soon after ICCO agreed to support this programme. In August 1989, the BCS designated 2 Field Workers to take over the area and set it right. Nominal support was given to them by a senior ADATS staff who had absolutely no experience in Coolie Sangha building, but was willing to pitch in as a temporary measure.

By any standards, these 2 Field Workers have done a remarkable job in bringing Chintamani almost to the same level as Chickballapur. CSUs have stabilised in 56 villages in a taluk where CSU building was effected not just by internal weaknesses in ourselves, but also by the particular peculiarities of the taluk.

At the time of writing this report in January 1991, 2 qualified social workers, a woman and a man, have been appointed to give better support to the Field Workers. For some more time, they will operate from out of Bagepalli. Later, they will have to set up an office at the taluk headquarters.

2.1. Adult Literacy Programme (ALP) classes

The specially designed ALP Books, song books, note books, pens, attendance registers, folding blackboards and petromax lanterns were distributed. Experienced teachers from the Bagepalli CSUs stayed with the VLWs and trained them on the skills needed to teach adults, and the ALP classes were taken up.

But unlike in Chickballapur, the ALP classes were not a success insofar as enhancing literacy skills was concerned. The learners were more interested in the socio-political content of the ALP Book. ALP classes sparked countless discussions where issues were identified and struggles taken up.

Only half the members attended ALP classes. Even these were irregularly conducted for about 3 to 4 evenings a week since the village staff were otherwise preoccupied in following up on issues. Special tests conducted in the 6 older clusters show that only half the learners can read with difficulty. Very few women attended either the classes or the tests.

The reason for this is not hard to find. Chintamani has a reputation for a violent and difficult politics. The field and village staff felt that they had to be very busy, fiercely fighting to defend their right to form CSUs. And Chintamani did not have a serious senior ADATS staff presence as Projects Assistant to advise patience and careful planning.

But the present Field Workers, CWs and VLWs of Chintamani are very sincere. Now that CSUs have been firmly established, they intend taking up adult literacy on a serious footing. While we will fully support their intent, past experience tells us that the results of such a campaign may not be quite as successful, at least in the 27 villages of the 6 older clusters. ALP is an activity that has to be taken up in the very first months of Coolie Sangha formation, and putting the cart before the horse has some serious restrictions.

2.2. Training

Training at Chintamani were not as systematic as in Chickballapur. At the time of setting up the project in mid 1988, the same initial 4 months training was given to the Community Workers and VLWs on cultural actions by the President and other senior functionaries of the BAGEPALLI COOLIE SANGHA. Experienced teachers from the Bagepalli CSUs went out to the Chintamani villages to train the newly selected VLWs on adult literacy skills. But all this went in vain when the project area shifted, abandoning a whole group of villages after about 1 year.

The emphasis of the BAGEPALLI COOLIE SANGHA's contribution shifted to administration because of this crisis. In August 1989 they nominated 2 senior functionaries to work as Field

Workers in Chintamani and from then on BCS involvement somehow got limited to receiving biweekly reports from these new Field Workers.

However, the senior ADATS staff who took nominal charge as Projects Assistant did organise a few training. A VLW training was held for 2 days when practical skills were imparted to write proper minutes of meetings, draft concise and effective petitions, fill out various government prescribed application forms, etc. Another 4 days training was conducted in the beginning of 1990 to teach ALP skills for the new VLWs in the newly selected villages. But these latecomers did not have the benefit of an experienced teacher staying with them for 10 days.

The Chickballapur Projects Assistant conducted an intense 5 days para legal training on civic rules and procedures for VLWs from 7 clusters. But once again, he was not able to follow up with village visits to teach them how to use these skills and knowledge.

The CSI Hospital, Chickballapur, trained the Chintamani VHWs through 4 weekly sessions of 2 days each on community health. But at the end of these sessions, no one sent them to the Hospital in order to gain practical experience. No theoretical training on the role and position of women in society was given.

Finally, the ADATS/DDS Project Director and Executive Assistant themselves took charge of affairs at Chintamani and started conducting the weekly staff meetings. In January 1991 we have appointed 2 qualified social workers, a woman and a man, as Projects Assistants.

2.3. CSU Meetings and Cluster Meets

44 villages in Chintamani have very good CSU Meetings, 3 are just okay, and 9 are too new to be anything more than nominal affairs.

Most CSU discussions are on land and wage issues sparked off by the ALP classes. The CSUs have succeeded in getting titles for lands, cutting off contractors, getting old age and widow pensions sanctioned, and in extracting civic amenities.

Larger political, ideological and conceptual issues are not discussed in the CSU Meetings, simply because no one has raised them. But there is a major exception. The member Coolies of Chintamani are very particular about the posterity of their CSUs. They contribute Re 1 a month as membership fees into bank accounts specially opened for this purpose, and contribute 10 % of their earnings, from whatever source, to their Sangha Fund! Considering the risks they are taking by cutting patron-client bridges, it is not very surprising that this is the most important practice they have learnt from the more organised Coolies of Bagepalli!

Cluster Meets are held in all the 9 central villages with a stubborn regularity. All 3 elected Representatives, the VHW and VLW from each CSU attend these meetings. Roll calls are rarely taken because attendance is usually 100 %. It is the determination of these Cluster Meets which has kept the extension programme going in spite of the ineptness of ADATS and the DDS.

The Coolies of Chintamani have still not felt the need for a monthly taluk level apex meeting. But on May Day 1990, when the 3 older clusters were less than 2 years old, they collected moneys and held 2 Coolie Pandaga that were well on par with the ones held at Bagepalli.

2.4. Health

52 Village Health Workers were selected, 1 by each CSU. But the men played a major part in their selection since the post was interpreted as just a way by which to get certain health benefits from DDS. As a result, nearly half the VHWs in Chintamani are not highly motivated.

After being trained, they too were given basic medicine kits to cure minor ailments and render first aid. But they are not able to assist in conducting deliveries because they did not get practical exposure at a hospital. In Chintamani, the medicines provided by these VHWs is only for member Coolie families, because of the strict vertical divisions of the villages on faction lines.

Only a handful of these VHWs are outspoken. Since they were a minority, they were not able to mobilise Coolie women to come out and participate in CSU affairs. On the other hand, they were afraid of being branded by the rest of the Chintamani staff and therefore kept quiet. Due to certain early developments at this extension programme, the 2 Field Workers were reluctant to interfere in this state of affairs. It was only after the Project Director and Executive Assistant took over that frank discussions on the role of women staff was initiated at Chintamani.

In a series of meetings with the VHWs, it was decided that though they had started off as puppets, they needn't remain so. They could break their inhibitions, even if this meant some very real physical and emotional pain.

14 VHWs started Mahila Meetings in their respective Coolie Sanghas, simply in order to ascertain their right to get the women to meet separately. CSU memberships in women's names rose to 12 %. In 2 villages where there was a staff problem, the VHWs took over as VLWs. All the VHWs have gone out on 3 day tours, in batches of 15, in order to see the world. We still have a long way to go in Chintamani, but are confident of reaching there and beyond.

2.5. Economic activities

Far more economic struggles were taken up by the CSUs of Chintamani than in any other extension programme area. They were successful in some, and not quite in others.

Coolie Credit Fund grants of Rs 2,000 per CSU were given to only 19 villages. These amounts were given out for various purposes to their members, and repayment has been 100 %. Most borrowers have taken interest-free loans from their CSUs for crop loans, as working capital to weave mats, and a host of other reasons.

DDS now has to grant an additional Rs 2,000 to keep building up these 19 CCFs. About 25 more CSUs are now mature enough to receive and properly utilise their first CCF grants.

3. SIDDALAGHATTA EXTENSION PROGRAMME

This extension programme was started late, in May 1989. Villages were taken up in 2 stages. 26 villages of Julapalya (Bagepalli taluk) were first taken up because we felt that we could not enter into Siddalaghatta taluk without covering this last part of Bagepalli. A year later, when 16 of these villages had fairly stable CSUs, 21 more villages in Siddalaghatta taluk were added.

3.1. Adult Literacy Programme (ALP) classes

As everywhere, ALP was the first Coolie Sangha building activity which was taken up in the first 26 villages in mid 1989. Teaching and learning material was supplied, training given, and the classes started.

Yet, the VLWs did not conduct regular ALP classes, and the learners too were not concerned. They kept citing violent opposition from the middle peasants as the main reason for their slackness. Though we were very sympathetic in the beginning, they cried wolf once too often and we began to suspect sheer laziness and a lack of sincerity.

This resulted in a very large turnover of VLWs. We replaced 3 of the 4 Community Workers with Coolie youth from the older villages, who had worked as VLWs in their native villages.

After that there has been a general improvement in Coolie Sangha building activities, but ALP classes are still not regular.

6 months back, 21 more villages in Siddalaghatta taluk were taken up. In these villages, the ALP classes were a success from the very beginning. More women than men attend the classes, and everything is running smoothly with minimum supervision.

3.2. Training

The same initial training was given to the Community Workers and VLWs as at Chickbalapur and Chintamani. They were taught to use cultural actions like singing songs, role plays, street theatre, etc. At Julapalya, the BCS President's and other senior functionaries' contribution was, in fact, more intense. Very many experienced teachers from the Bagepalli CSUs went out to the Julapalya villages to train the newly selected VLWs on adult literacy skills.

VLWs were given special 2 days training on how to write proper minutes, draft petitions, etc. But they still are not half as efficient as the other VLWs. After our crackdown, things improved tremendously, but much more has still to be done in terms of imparting skills and knowledge.

The Village Health Workers were trained for only 2 days on community health. They have not yet been sent to CSI Hospital for an exposure.

3.3. CSU Meetings and Cluster Meets

Regular CSU meetings are being held in 16 of the older villages (Julapalya). Very major land issues have been discussed and tackled by the Coolies. Membership lists have been made, but detailed socio-economic surveys have not yet been conducted. As yet, these villages only have selected (not elected) Representatives. Regular Cluster Meets have started only 1 month back.

In the 21 new villages, CSU Meetings are very regular. Many issues are being identified and discussed in these meetings. Plans are made to mobilise local funds and obtain their due share of civic facilities from the Mandal Panchayats. Nominal Cluster Meets have started, but these are actually weekly cluster-wise meetings of the village staff. Though Representatives have not been elected, interested Coolies attend these meetings.

3.4. Health

VHWs have been appointed in all the villages. But in the older villages, they have been selected by the Community Workers and VLWs, and not through any responsible discussions by all the member Coolies. They all work very sincerely, giving out medicines, rendering first aid, taking patients to the government PHCs, etc.

In the older villages, they have not yet been successful in motivating other women to come forward. But in the 21 newer villages, the VHWs have done an excellent job in this regard. 16 % of CSU memberships in the names of Coolie women, more than 50 % women attendance at the ALP classes are some concrete indicators of their effectivity.

3.5. Economic activities

DDS has given out Coolie Credit Fund grants of Rs 2,000 only to 8 villages in the older Julapalya area. 3 to 4 member Coolies per CSU have, in turn, taken interest-free loans mainly for crop loans. Repayment has been 100%. Now, other borrowers want to take the moneys out again, mainly for petty trade. At the time of writing this report, 8 more CSUs have stabilised and can receive CCF grants from DDS.

In the 21 newer villages of Siddalaghatta, no CCF grants have been given. But the Coolies have been exposed to what the CCF is all about. There is an impressive mobilisation of local funds and civic services from banks and Mandals through issues and struggles.