

0604. DLDP 2nd Phase Application to Novib (Oct 1990)

Project Application submitted to NOVIB on the need to continue land development works with support to off-farm ventures, non-farm ventures, and petty entrepreneurship

1. APPLICANT ORGANISATION

Agricultural Development & Training Society (ADATS)

2. LEGAL STATUS

Reg. No: 97/78-79 under the Karnataka Societies Registration Act, 1960.

Union Home Ministry No: 094570001 under the Foreign Contributions Regulation Act, 1976.

3. BANKERS

Account No: 3314 with Canara Bank, Bagepalli branch.

4. PROJECT TITLE

SECOND PHASE OF THE DRY LAND DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

5. IMPLEMENTING ORGANISATION

72 village level Coolie Sangha Units (CSUs), 15 Cluster Meets, and the BAGEPALLI COOLIE SANGHA.

6. LONG TERM OBJECTIVES

- To consolidate the thirteen year Coolie Sangha building effort at Bagepalli in order to make the people's organisation a lasting and self-sustaining reality.
- To strengthen village level autonomy and encourage a positive pluralism so that the BAGEPALLI COOLIE SANGHA remains a grass root democratic body representing the aspirations of each and every Member Coolie family.
- To see through an internal rectification whereby the individualistic culture of collectives hitherto fostered by Coolie Sangha building is replaced with a cohesive one of mutual concern for and sharing among individual member Coolies.
- To permit the particular world view of the Coolies articulate as an ideology and express itself as a force that contributes to the reshaping of village society.

7. SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

- To follow up on the BAGEPALLI COOLIE SANGHA's determination to ensure that each and every Member Coolie family has an assured minimum income of Rs 500 a month.
- To follow up the three year DLDP with grass root planned actions to develop irrigation potential on Coolie lands.
- To strengthen related activities in order to find equally compensatory ventures for the landless, near landless, and women headed Coolie households.
- To build infrastructure like work and storage sheds, and to procure common equipment for artisans to be able to remuneratively follow their trades, and for Coolies with less landholding to set up cottage industries.

8. SITUATION IN WHICH THE PROJECT EXISTS

8.1. ADATS' achievements

As a southern NGO which has taken onto itself the mandate of promoting an authentic and independent people's organisation, ADATS is in the final years of its involvement in the Old and CEP Areas (72 villages) of Bagepalli taluk. Let us briefly examine what we have achieved.

The Coolies were conscientised with regard to their semi-feudal socio-political and economic environment, and bourgeois liberal interpretations of these societal realities were used to instil deep aspirations in them. An enlarged unification of the poor, across the caste lines, was effected and the strength in their numbers was used to help them redress their grievances through a process of identifying issues and undertaking struggles.

ADATS' policies of two-organisations, total and exception-less transparency, and the placing of political objectives as primary even in economic projects, along with the practice of grass root planning, monitoring and review of all Coolie Sangha building activities resulted to ensure that nothing was done in a haphazard manner. Discipline and organisation was introduced, managerial and conceptual skills enhanced, and the BAGEPALLI COOLIE SANGHA obtained for itself a felt presence in the taluk. The decision to contribute 10 percent of their earnings, from whatever source, to their Sangha Funds made the financial posterity of the BCS a certainty.

8.2. Questioning these achievements

In a word, like many others of the time, ADATS betted on unity. But the paradoxical enigma that followed can only be understood in dialectical terms.

The collectivity fostered by the Coolie Sangha building process was nothing more than a natural ganging together of the individual aspirations of a people who instinctively knew that they had no chance if they stood alone. What took the form of discipline and united struggle, therefore, was not an abandoning of individual self interest, but rather a convenient alliance forged with each other and with ADATS. It was a peculiar expression of engrossment in self, made possible due to an opportunity presented by the altruistic motive and particular form of ADATS' intervention.

That something very tangible was achieved was not denied. We knew that middle peasant oppression had stopped, that agricultural wages had risen dramatically, and that gender discrimination in wage payment had disappeared with equal wage for equal work. Unjustly lost lands had been got back, and Coolie production had increased. And most important was the feeling that it was all real which one got when sitting at a CSU Meeting, Cluster Meet, or the monthly BCS Meeting.

Neither did we believe that these impressive achievements would not last. We knew that the changes were far too fundamental, at the level of the political economy of the taluk, for them to just wither away. The stabilisation of increased wages even after the artificial intervention in the labour market was over, the revolving of their credit funds even after matching grants from ADATS had stopped, the continuation of the children's Balakendras even after external funding had stopped, were concrete indicators of sustainability.

The questions raised by ADATS and senior BCS functionaries were far deeper ones, and they pertained to whether it was all very different. Whether a totally different political force, capable of countering the existing ones which caused misery and differentiation, had been unleashed. Whether there was a difference per se between Coolie and *Ryot* and if the former

was really a “better person”. And if so, how the Coolie world view or ideology could intervene in village society as an alternate force.

It was when we questioned our achievements in this light that we recognised subtle but alarming trends which suggested that once our external intervention was over, the BAGEPALLI COOLIE SANGHA could very well polarise into becoming just one more conventional political force in the taluk. If that were to happen, then the BCS would pursue identical policies of power and throw up the same type of leadership as the existing ones, and the average Coolie would once again get a raw deal, albeit from her own people.

8.3. Impediments to total participation

We realised that such an eventuality could be avoided only if each and every Member Coolie family effectively participated and contributed to the shaping of the concerns, the emphasis, the agenda, the structures, the checks and the balances of the mass organisation which she held dear as her very own. We also realised that two realities subtly precluded this ideal participation. The first was that the average Coolie found herself estranged in any forum more distanced than the immediate, and this inhibited her effective participation. The second was more difficult to trace and harder to accept, because it had its roots in the concept of leadership itself.

8.4. The role of leadership within the Coolie Sangha

A latent inner quality of conventional leadership, which lay suppressed in a handful of persons from each village, found opportunity for expression when the Coolie Sanghas were being built. Their role in the CSUs was at first charmingly quaint. They were fiercely sincere, gallant, and at the same time aggressive and effective.

ADATS had found it convenient to cultivate them since they were capable of carrying all the Coolies of their villages along. The younger and literate among them had been our natural choices for appointment as Village Level Workers. When the VLWs were withdrawn, some of them got elected as Cluster Secretaries. A few even survived the scrutiny of the organisation and became Field Workers at ADATS.

But the inevitable logic of all leadership, irrespective of which class it is vested in, followed. It subtly dominated to the preclusion of everyone else’s participation, instilling deep feelings of inferiority in others and making them believe that their contribution was neither necessary nor worthwhile. And then it turned ugly and soon recognised no bounds or limits, surpassing in greed and selfishness the worst behaviour of the foulest person “on the other side”.

The fact that they were only a microscopic minority and that the majority were, by and large, very decent did not give us much comfort. We knew that what nagged us was an ominous foreboding which could not be ignored or dismissed. If such traits and elements could surface when the awesome presence of ADATS was still around, it was destined to rule once we withdrew.

The natural reaction of any Voluntary Agency would have been to condemn such excesses and counter this trend by providing a “good leadership” which was supposedly above the temptations of the flesh. Since the occasional manifestations of the problem were so vague and small, it was tempting to dismiss it as inconsequential and do just that. But ADATS and the BCS, already haunted by gnawing questions regarding the future, intuitively knew that this would be a very short-sighted approach, lacking foresight and not lending to sustainability.

When the concept of Leadership itself was in question, condemning a few unfortunates who did not have the upbringing and etiquette to exercise it within prevailing norms of acceptance

was not the answer. Checks and balances had to be internally evolved, and the better person had to be a natural social product of in-built mechanisms within the Coolie Sangha.

8.5. Autonomy and positive pluralism

We realised that village level autonomy, and a positive pluralism which would inevitably flow from out of this autonomy, was the only way by which the average Coolie could contribute to the internal evolution of effective and lasting checks and balances.

Senior ADATS staff and functionaries of the Coolie Sangha decided to initiate an internal rectification process through which the individualistic psyche, which had unintentionally been promoted during Coolie Sangha building, was replaced with one of mutual concern for and sharing among individual Member Coolie family families. The only question was how we were to effect such a massive change in emphasis.

8.6. The formal approval of the BAGEPALLI COOLIE SANGHA and expression of concern for the individual

The last quarter of 1989 saw some of the most horrible anti Coolie Sangha sentiments being violently expressed in the taluk. This resulted in ADATS and the BCS mustering their everything and steeling a collective resolve to fight back with a discipline and determination that had to be seen to be believed. The political struggle which followed had a do or die air about it, and everything miraculously worked out.

In early 1990, when the Coolies were flushed with success, we managed to elicit what turned out to be an impressive show of cohesive Coolie maturity. Rather than sit back to celebrate their hard won peace, they agreed to embark on an internal rectification plan which we suggested.

With the BCS declarations of early 1990 in favour of the individual member Coolie, a formal shift was made from the earlier emphasis on unity at any cost. In this way, a beginning was made to further the Coolie Sangha model, with a wager being placed on the individual Coolie.

Expressing effective concern for Member Coolie family families who were below a certain income level was a natural corollary of this shift in emphasis. It was decided that they should immediately be supported to overcome their physical hardships. And this had to be done by the rest of the Coolies agreeing to endure some degree of personal pain and sacrifice. It was vital that the manner in which financial and economic support was given to the poorest of the poor should clearly be the manifestation of a deeper and more intimate concern.

We suggested that caste, landlessness and women headed households be the criteria for identifying such families. But after serious deliberations, the Coolies instead arrived at Rs 6,000 as being the annual income a family would need in order to merely feed themselves. They decided that each CSU would make a list of all those who had monthly incomes of less than Rs 500, and that the CCF capitals in their respective CSUs would be reserved for these families for the next three years. The remaining Members would temporarily forfeit their right to take interest free loans.

ADATS gave some categorical assurances to the BCS. Firstly, that this betting on the individual would be seen as the second stage, a furthering, of the Coolie Sangha model and not as an apology for the earlier emphasis on unity. Secondly, that ADATS would continue to work with the Coolie Sangha; that the elected functionaries would neither be bypassed nor would we begin to directly deal with individual Coolies. And thirdly, in spite of initial frustrations which were bound to be there, the decentralisation experiment would not be dismissed as being a compromise on manageability or unity.

All these declarations, however, should be understood as the formality which gave the shift in emphasis a sanction. The real shift, however, was not quite as smooth or easy as we shall see in the following pages. But before that, we should look into why the Coolies chose the CCFs as the instrument for implementing their plan.

8.7. The CCFs as instruments for implementing this plan

A closer look at the functioning of these alternate credit forums reveals that it is the total and unreserved transparency with regard to the member Coolies' financial privacy which permits the CCFs to function effectively. When a Member Coolie family asks for a loan, she cannot hold anything back. Unless it is a full and frank sharing, the chances are that her application will be rejected. And after approval, all her fellow members continue to show an interest in utilisation and repayment.

Consequently, decisions as to who should get a loan, and whether it has been properly utilised, tend to get shaded by the particular perception and prioritisation of each CSU. Each village CCF had therefore developed a particular form and content which was as an uninfluenced expression of their own political will.

Since the efforts now planned were not intended as an exhibition of ADATS' compassion for the poorest of the poor, but instead an opportunity for the Member Coolie families to themselves mutually express such concerns towards one another, they considered their CCFs to be best suited as instruments for implementing a plan which demanded a total transparency.

Choosing the CCFs as the median for accepting our suggestion was the Representatives way of grabbing the opportunity to give maximum autonomy to their respective CSUs. This would permit them to pluralistically project their multifarious interpretations on the topic. Later, when each CSU actually embarked on the making of these lists, their pluralistic feelings on the relative definitions of poverty found full and diverse expression.

ADATS also realised that enlightened self interest would have played a major role. In spite of all their altruism, it could not have escaped the Coolies' attention that we would realise that their CCFs did not have sufficient capital to implement such a grand plan aimed at poverty alleviation. They would have known that ADATS would search for resources to increase the capitals of their CCFs, and once the initial borrowers paid back, there would be more money which they could all utilise.

We realised that the poorest of the poor would need a lot of push and pressure to come out of the accumulated burden of years of absolute poverty. The various anti-poverty schemes of the government, even if they were sincere, had miserably failed because of their ridiculous attempt to reach out to the individual poor in village situations that they had little understanding of. If pressure to utilise properly, even if it was in order to ensure prompt repayment, could provide the props that ensured the success of schemes undertaken by the poor, we did not have any moral or ethical objection to such an enlightened self interest which found a place and priority for others.

ADATS declared that if the Coolies would exhibit largess, we would find the resources to enhance the capitals of their CCFs. A follow up phase of the DLDP provided an excellent opportunity to do precisely this.

8.8. Mahila Meetings

One of the immediate outcomes of these BCS Meetings was the introduction of regular Mahila Meetings in each CSU from March 1990 onwards. We believe that what the Coolies really wanted was to ensure the total involvement and full participation of the entire families in the shaping of the Coolie Sangha. They felt that Mahila Meetings would give the women a

sense of identification and belonging in the Sangha, and this would make the CSUs more whole and complete. That women needed to separately meet, discuss their problems and develop their individual potential was only an incidental objective in the minds of the Coolies. The reason for this is not hard to find. Women's issues had been tackled effectively and with a great deal of success in the Coolie Sangha. Coolie men had stood by them in scores of village level wage struggles when the women demanded equal wage for equal work. The practice of women working hard the whole day and humbly handing over all their earnings to their husbands had totally vanished in most villages. Wife beating had almost fully stopped and no Member Coolie family dared to regard the thrashing of his wife as his private and personal affair. Though "women without a man's support" (a euphemism for widows and deserted women) constituted only 5 % of the Member Coolie family population, CSU Memberships in the names of women were four times that figure. They just could not see what the women had to discuss about in separate meetings.

ADATS' insisted that perhaps these women "who had no problems at all" would still like to have a forum to separately discuss whatever, and that perhaps their contribution to the Coolie Sangha could possibly be unique and worthwhile. Since nearly one half of the quorum of an average BCS Meeting are women, it was easy for us to push for a division.

In addition to the weekly CSU Meetings, one woman from each Member Coolie family started meeting on a fixed day every week, without a single man present. The only exception was the Village Level Worker who had to record their discussions in the Mahila Minutes Book. In many villages where they could find a literate woman to do this, they dispensed with even this exception.

The first two months saw a lot of problems with drunken men disturbing the meetings, husbands threatening to abandon their wives, etc. Though their Representatives had grudgingly accepted the idea of separate meetings for women in the BCS Meetings, this did not mean that all the menfolk were happy about it in the CSUs. In more than a dozen villages, the personality of ADATS had to be forcefully pushed to the forefront in order to help the women set up their Mahila Meetings.

Once the women succeeded in making a political statement that they had a right to meet separately, they soon ran out of topics to discuss. On the one hand, their forum was too new to give the type of moral support which is required to discuss deeper and more intimate matters at the level of opinions and feelings. On the other hand, there was a limit to the number of times they could indignantly declare to each other that they had a right to meet! ADATS bailed out the Mahila Meetings with the decentralised health budget, the children's programme, and the Vokkaku Sanchi Duddu.

8.9. Decentralising the health budget

For nearly 12 years, ADATS had been operating a referral health budget for sick Coolies recommended by their CSUs. We assisted them with subsidies to fill out their prescriptions, go to major hospitals, etc. ADATS had also appointed Village Health Workers (VHWs) in each village. Though this service provided a vital support to the Coolies, specially when they were pitched against the Ryots, it had a charitable and benevolent tone to it. Not only did we find it distasteful, but it often acted as an impediment to our personal involvement in the other more important work. Playing god, deciding who should be cured and who should be left to die, was not an activity which we found very congenial to Coolie Sangha building.

We found a perfect solution to our dilemma. We offered to decentralise the health budget and give it to the Mahila Meetings. Whatever contributions that ADATS received from donor partners for health would henceforth be transferred to the Clusters. They could be spent by the Mahila Meetings on preventive, curative or referral health, and VHWs could henceforth

report to their respective Mahila Meetings who would decide on and pay their stipends. We assured them that there would be absolutely no interference from ADATS whatsoever.

The men immediately reacted negatively, citing three reasons for their opposition. The first was that they would be stuck with a fixed budget based on the each Cluster's Membership strength while there was no guarantee that the patterns of illness would be the same in each Cluster (some of the hospitalisation bills that ADATS used to subsidise ran into thousands of rupees). The second was that their playing god would earn them more curses from those who were refused assistance than praise from the ones who benefited, whereas ADATS was distanced enough for this to not cause any harm to the unity of the CSUs. And the third reason was that the Mahila Meetings were neither qualified nor experienced to handle such a delicate and major responsibility.

But the women were game to our offer and the health budget got decentralised in May 1990. In a short span of hardly six months, the women have started providing health services that are at least on par with what ADATS doled out to the Coolies. In some fields like controlling wasteful expenditure and the plugging of leakage, the Mahila Meetings are doing a far better job.

Today, the Mahila Meetings are an accepted part of the Coolie Sangha scenario in all the villages with CSUs. Though the decentralisation of the health budget has helped, by no means do they confine themselves to health issues alone. Many Mahila Meetings have taken up issues like corruption at the fair price shops, alcoholism, etc.

What has happened is that Coolie women, though they have always been contributing to the Coolie Sangha, have finally got an exclusive forum of their very own to articulate their feelings and opinions. And the decentralised health budget gives them an activity through which they can act upon these interpretations and prioritisation of situations. As a result, their participation is no more in the background, it is clearly visible.

There are indicators, as we are about to see in the children's programme, which suggest that Coolie women are going to contribute with their particular nature of feminism to a reshaping of the Coolie Sangha. Our hope is that this will lead on to a subtle replacing of the concept of leadership with representation, and of power with strength.

8.10. Children's Programme

At about the same time that the Mahila Meetings were set up, ADATS decided, for various reasons, that the CSUs should participate even more in the running of the ActionAid supported Children's Programme. This is an every day activity wherein 2,000 Coolie children in the CEP Area are supported with books, clothes, fees and tuition to attend government schools, and Balakendras are held every evening in order to give them a proper childhood.

Perhaps because this activity pertained exclusively to children, it was natural that the Mahila Meetings took on the responsibility for running the Children's Programme in their respective CSUs. They immediately made some sweeping changes. They decided that Coolie children should not be the concern of only their parents, and that the entire CSU should play an active role in the upbringing of children.

They decided that the Balakendra Teacher should henceforth be selected and paid for by all the Member Coolie family families and not by ADATS. Irrespective of whether a family had a child benefiting from the programme or not, they had to contribute Rs 5 every month towards the salary of the Teacher. The criterion for selection of Teachers changed from formal qualification (wherein a lot of *Ryot* youth had hitherto been appointed) to concern for children.

As with the decentralised health budget, they are doing a good job in ensuring that the children attend school regularly, benefits from ADATS reach them on time and are utilised properly, etc. But their real goal seems to be something subtle that cannot be materially measured. We get a feeling that the women are, together working at an intuitive level, attempting at a still more cohesive unification of all the Member Coolie family families, using children as a focal point.

That the decision to start the Mahila Meetings in order to ensure the effective participation of all the family members and help overcome that feeling of estrangement in larger forums, was fully vindicated within a few months when they made a gentle, yet scathing, criticism on the limitations of the CCFs.

8.11. Vokkaku Sanchi Duddu

In the July 1990 BCS Meeting, women took the floor and presented their case as to how the CCFs had miserably failed to live up to their objective of providing timely credit in order to strengthen the Coolies.

First came their gory presentation of the reality:

It is when our husbands are not at home and we suddenly need to buy medicines for a sick child... When the fresh rations which have just come to the fair price shop have to be quickly bought before the cunning merchant claims that everything is sold out... When we wake up in a panic about the well-being of a husband who has gone to some nearby town in search of work and we know that we just have to go out and search... These were some of the times when we women have to approach the Ryots for a hand loan of a few rupees which we promise to repay in a few days, but never can...

Though many spoke in the third person, the examples they gave were far too vivid to be anything other than the painful narration of personal experiences. The men were shocked to suddenly discover the torment and harassment the women went through. And ADATS was filled with a deep sense of shame for having been so insensitive as to not have known.

Then came the criticism:

How can you claim that the CCFs pursue a political objective, they asked, when the real credit needs of the Coolies are not even understood? How can you fight with someone for better wages in the daytime, when circumstances force your wife to sleep with him in the night?

And finally, the solution:

What we women normally do is that we go to one another in times of crisis. Each woman digs into her Vokkaku Sanchi and comes up with some loose change and odd notes. Four or five of us are sometimes able to together solve the pressing needs of one woman. But our Vokkaku Sanchi Duddu is not enough. It needs to be enhanced.

The BCS Meeting decided that Rs 1,000 from each village CCF would immediately be given out to the Mahila Meetings. No formal accounts would be maintained as to how the Mahila Meetings used these moneys - as hand loans or as grants - was entirely the affair of each Mahila Meeting. No man would ask them to report on its status, and any man who tried to pry into it, or used his wife to get money from the Vokkaku Sanchi Duddu would immediately have his membership removed.

The moneys were given out, and the Mahila Meetings started using this discretionary fund of theirs to solve day to day problems, but minutes pertaining to this are not recorded. Two whole CSUs got themselves suspended for violating the BCS strictures on male interference. While the suspension was revoked in one of these CSUs, the other is still on at this time of writing.

Apart from trying to solve a very practical problem of sexual exploitation that the Coolie women had silently endured for all these years, this episode proved that Coolie women do have problems that were particular to them, and no man dares deny this any more. Their right to meet separately got fully established.

8.12. The *Nirupeda* lists

In April 1990 the CSUs started making lists of who they considered to be the poorest of the poor - those who did not even have two meals a day. In most of the villages, the discussions were very mature and the Coolies not only came up with lists of persons who they considered needed support, but also with very sensible schemes as to what activities they could take up to augment their low incomes. A total of 884 families have been identified by the Coolies as deserving support.

When making these lists of people and activities, the CSUs even took into account the profoundly delicate question of whether at all it was possible for a particular family to embark on some activity which would benefit them. Families with only elderly people or chronically sick persons, and those who just could not be meaningfully supported for whatever reason were gently told that nothing could be done for them. And this was done in a manner whereby they did not feel deserted or neglected.

But in nearly half a dozen villages, the Coolies were not able to exhibit the largess required to make their lists. They just could not arrive at their lists in spite of threats and curses hurled at them in the Cluster Meets, and mediation efforts by CSU Representatives from the surrounding villages. The ADATS field staff had to personally intervene, but we are not convinced that the project can be successfully implemented in these villages since the Coolies have either not understood or do not share its objective.

9. ARGUMENTATION FOR THE NEED OF THE PROJECT

9.1. The first phase of the Dry Land Development Project was implemented with a full realisation that the massive dose of capital being injected into the local economy would result in an artificial interference on the labour market. It was an explicit and overriding objective, carefully borne in mind at every stage of the DLDP, that the political economy of the region had to be effected in a manner calculated to positively benefit the Coolies. In the changing socio-economic scenario, which ADATS termed as the capitalisation of agriculture, the Coolies had to enter into altered realities with greater dignity and enhanced bargaining power.

As a result, agricultural wages rose dramatically, the position of Coolie women was greatly strengthened, and Coolie production showed a manifold increase. Even more impressive was the twin developments that took place in the Coolie Sangha. While on the one hand it proved to have developed into an effective instrument for protecting the socio-economic interests of the Coolies in a wider context, it simultaneously developed a deep maturity and capacity for introspection.

All this would not have been possible if a narrow sectarian approach had been taken to dry land development and the question had been reduced to mere technicalities. A holistic approach, finding a real place of pride for even the landless in an activity that ostentatiously deals with only the physical aspects of the terra firma, is what enabled the DLDP to succeed to the measure that it did.

Therefore the emphasis being given to the landless, near landless, and women headed households in this proposed second phase of the project is wholly justified. They have a role in performing ancillary and related activities without which, in many intricate ways, the dry land farming practices of the land owning Coolies will suffer.

9.2. Having thus argued, we have to hasten to add that ADATS does not believe that good politics alone will fill stomachs. While technology should not be perceived as being value free and techniques cannot be allowed to dictate strategies, this does not mean that there is no room for responsible, holistic and non threatening technologies.

For reasons elaborated in the Completion Report on the DLDP, it was not possible to introduce better techniques for increasing the productivity of Coolie lands. But now that their lands are cleared and levelled, this can now be attempted with a fair assurance of success.

While proven dry land farming practices have a definite role in further increasing the productivity of Coolie lands, they also have to go in for practices like sericulture and the growing of vegetables - sacred prerogatives of the *Ryots* for the past ten years.

9.3. The most vital technology in a perpetually drought prone region like Bagepalli is irrigation. Having a piece of irrigated land can mean the difference between having to migrate every summer in search of work, or staying on in the village. It can mean the strength to sustain increased daily wage rates even in the worst drought.

The ground water table under *Ryot* lands, which are located closest to the village, is invariably over exploited through open and tube wells. But since they own all the lands under the village irrigation tanks, they are able to survive drought.

But the Coolies, who own the distant lands that hug the slopes of hills, sit on a variety of untapped water sources. The Coolies tap natural hill springs and streams in order to irrigate small patches of commonly owned lands where they grow a coarse paddy which has no market value but is vital for Coolie nutrition, maintain farm ponds alongside the hill ravines in order to supplement a dry crop when the rains fail, etc.

Open wells, and in some cases even deep bore wells, for groups of Coolies will give them the wherewithal to sustain the societal gains they have achieved vis-à-vis the *Ryots*. Unlike in most situations where community wells have failed, the CSUs are now strong enough to ensure that collective water sharing ventures succeed.

9.4. In March 1988, when commenting on the functional divisions of labour which were emerging, we spoke about the need to perform a higher and deeper role. We went beyond the cliché and started examining the societal dynamics of responsible Voluntary Agency withdrawal from an area. We understood withdrawal to be more than a mere mechanical action of physical distancing. Eight months later, in November 1988, ADATS suggested that this role was to shape and safeguard the normative values of the Coolie Sangha as unique and particular to a world view which was their own.

Irrespective of how latent or intense the ideology of a people is, it can, at least temporarily, be undermined and reshaped to reflect the prevalent views and current interests of the political force in vogue. In the undercurrent of several sub cultures that are at play at this stage of Coolie Sangha development in Bagepalli, their emerging societal interpretation could, unless fostered, get lost and miss its opportunity to contribute.

The most powerful argument in favour of this project is, therefore, that something exciting has been unleashed by the years of work in Bagepalli, and especially by the first phase of the DLDP. This process has to be actively supported and seen through in order to give ADATS and the BCS a chance to prove that the Coolies have something different to offer village society.

10. PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

10.1. The pre-project phase when CSU level plans were drawn up

The pre-project phase, which has been described in some detail in the preceding pages, is the most vital element of project implementation. It is at this stage that ADATS unequivocally conveys to the Coolies that the emphasis is as much on processes that are engendered, as on products.

ADATS will, under no circumstances, deviate from the lists of beneficiaries that each CSU has arrived at. The till now practised policy of treating the Coolie Sangha (as opposed to individual Coolies) as the only beneficiary that ADATS deals with will be strictly adhered to while implementing this follow-up project.

Each village level CSU has come up with specific plans to improve irrigation potential. These include the consolidation of their small holdings into single and contiguous plots (through the mutual exchange of their lands), the digging of open wells, drilling of bore wells, lift irrigation from streams and rivulets, etc.

They have also made detailed lists of Member Coolie family families whose incomes are less than Rs 500 a month and indicated what has to be done for each such family to augment their incomes to levels where they can at least feed themselves. These include the rearing of sheep, pigs and buffaloes, maintaining bullock carts, enhancing the skills of artisans and providing them with better tools, providing working capital for those who can trade in hides, vegetables, etc. and supporting small cottage industries like basket making and the weaving of mats.

10.2. ADATS to scrutinise and support these plans

ADATS has already begun to carefully study these CSU plans, obtain expert and technical advice wherever necessary, and help the Coolies to make realistic budgets for each planned activity. This is being done in a totally transparent and de-mystified manner and the Coolies are being encouraged to question the experts on the feasibility of their advice.

It has become quite a problem to identify outside expertise on comprehensive subjects like dry land farming, animal husbandry marketing and skill training. Unless these people are capable of gauging the situation holistically, their expertise is of little value to us. But in purely technical fields like irrigation and engineering, we have fared much better. Using our gut senses, we have been able to render fairly impressive advice on most of the plans drawn up by the Coolies.

Once the figures are arrived at and we have a positive indication from the NOVIB, ADATS will compare resources against requirements and help the Coolies to make their cash flow charts. These will indicate how much capital each village can expect in their respective CCFs. They can then decide as to how many of their plans they can undertake in the first year, how many in the second year (with the amounts repaid by the first year borrowers), etc.

This exercise will be separately carried out in the 17 Cluster Meets and the final ratification of budgets and allocations will take place in the monthly BCS Meetings.

10.3. Open wells, bore wells and lift irrigation projects

Each CSU has selected a patch of land which they believe can benefit from investment on irrigation. Often these selections are based on the advice of elderly Coolies who have an intimate knowledge of the terrain, an old well which had caved in many years back, etc. These selections are, wherever necessary, being double checked by qualified geologists. Most of the Member Coolie families having some land in these patches is also an important con-

sideration. Wherever this has not been possible, they have actually re-divided their holdings to ensure that all the Member Coolie families have at least some share.

In some villages, the Coolies have holdings next to perennial rivulets and streams. Here they have planned lift irrigation schemes and obtained the help of engineers to determine what horse power pumping set they would require, the length and quality of pipes, construction of mid way storage tanks, etc.

In yet other villages, where there is absolutely no ground water potential, lands have been exchanged in order to consolidate fragmented pieces into slightly larger and more viable holdings. Here the Coolies wish to pursue improved dry land cropping practices, including a change in their cropping pattern, the growing of dry land mulberry for sericulture, etc.

ADATS has advised the Coolies against the sinking of deep bore wells, and to dig open wells wherever possible. They have agreed to go in for tube wells only in cases where there is abundant ground water, but their holdings are very limited (like when Coolie lands are situated at the tail end of the command area of a tank and too much land will be taken up by an open well).

We estimate that the cost of each such irrigation project undertaken by a CSU will be in the range of Rs 50,000 to Rs 70,000, depending on the water table and terrain.

10.4. Plans to augment the incomes of the poorest members

The 72 CSUs have made a list of 884 Member Coolie family families whose annual incomes are less than Rs 6,000. This represents a little over 38 % of the total membership of these villages.

These 884 families have then been divided into six categories depending on the severity of their problem, and they have estimated that the 50 poorest among them will require an interest free loan investment of Rs 6,000, the next 140 would require Rs 5,000 each, etc., while the last 35 families who are on the border line would require only Rs 1,000 each. They have conservatively estimated that they would require about Rs 30 lakhs in order to implement the total plan.

| Category | Number | Amount |
|-------------------------------|--------|---------------------|
| less than Rs 1,000 | | Rs 300,000 |
| between Rs 1,001 and Rs 2,000 | 140 | Rs 700,000 |
| between Rs 2,001 and Rs 3,000 | 238 | Rs 952,000 |
| between Rs 3,001 and Rs 4,000 | 243 | Rs 729,000 |
| between Rs 4,001 and Rs 5,000 | | Rs 356,000 |
| between Rs 5,001 and Rs 6,000 | | Rs 35,000 |
| Total | | Rs 3,072,000 |

Here are some examples of the plans that the CSUs have come up with:

- A sheep unit consisting of 10 ewes and 1 ram would cost about Rs 5,500 in order to produce an annual income of Rs 2,500 through the sale of five of the eight lambs a year. Keeping Rs 1,000 back every year for their consumption, the family would be able to repay the CCF in about four years and at the same time retain an increased flock.
- The cost of 4 sows, 1 boar and feed for the first year would cost Rs 3,700 and give an annual income which will enable them to clear the entire loan in two years.
- A pair of bullocks and a cart, with fodder for the first six months, would cost Rs 8,500 and give a daily income of Rs 40 for at least 15 days a month. Repay-

ing a quarter of this income to the CCF will help the family clear their loan in a little more than 4 years.

- Trading in leather, vegetables and other petty items will require working capitals ranging from Rs 1,000 to Rs 3,000 and earn incomes of Rs 250 to Rs 400 a month.

All these figures sound very tempting and attractive, seeming to reduce the problem of poverty alleviation to an easily solvable one. The catch in these plans, however, is that there are two vital prerequisites for their success. The first is that the borrowers must be prepared to enterprise, and the second is that they must understand a cash economy. Both these are alien to the Coolies.

ADATS realises that the Coolies, who have only just come out of a semi-feudal political economy where even the payment of wages was in kind, will find it very difficult to grasp these prerequisites. Entrepreneurship is very different from hard labour. It requires specially developed managerial and conceptual skills which enable one to plan ahead and deal with market forces. The cash economy is cruel and unsparing, having none of the cushion that even the harshest of feudal realities had as safety nets for the poor in the midst of intricate patron-client structures.

10.5. The role of ADATS executive staff

The executive staff of ADATS who will accompany this project comprises of, besides the Executive Assistant, an Extension Worker, three Field Workers and a Veterinarian.

This accompaniment role which ADATS has implicitly undertaken onto itself in even daring to contemplate such a plan, is an un-enviuous one. It requires very mature political skills to wean the Coolies away from earlier practices and to responsibly steer them into the temperamental whirlwind that even we cannot claim to fully understand, which is what the market economy is. The technical input of outside experts pales into insignificance when compared to the effort that the executive staff of ADATS have to put in.

Following the organogram that we have developed, executive and field will be kept separate. Just as the field staff had an independent role in motivating the CSUs to have come so far and develop the grass root plans, the executive staff will now have to accompany each and every single borrower to ensure that she doesn't burn her fingers. The Coolies have to be helped to plan properly, and this has to start with a monetising of each and every item of their income and expenditure. As we have already seen in the earlier pages, this is very alien to present day Coolie practices.

10.6. Support to artisans

In about 25 villages, the Coolies have come up with plans to set up cottage industries like basket and mat weaving, making bricks, the setting up small tanneries, and rearing silk worms. Apart from working capital, they need sheds to work in, stock raw material, equipment, and finished goods, etc. Groups of Coolies will also need some common equipment (apart from personal implements which they will buy with CCF loans) like shearers, rearing stands, etc. These are capital costs which will generate substantial employment, but no single group of Coolies will be able to make such investments and repay from out of their earnings.

ADATS therefore proposes to build work and storage sheds at an average cost of Rs 30,000 per village, and use a disposition fund to purchase common equipment.

10.7. Monitoring utilisation and repayment

The 72 village level CCFs will be instruments for implementing this project. Therefore the rules pertaining to the CCF will be adhered to with regard to the taking of loans, utilisation, as well as repayment. The same procedure for monitoring the CCFs, which have been well established over the years, will be used by the Coolies to monitor this project.

Though the list of beneficiaries has already been drawn up by the CSUs, individual borrowers will still have to formally apply for interest-free loans from their respective CCFs, decide on how much of their new income they want to keep aside for their expenses, and agree to a repayment schedule. A quorum of two-third the strength of each CSU will deliberate on these requests and then decide. All the Member Coolie families will have an active and effective role in supervising utilisation and repayment.

These same rules will apply when a group of Coolies collectively take a loan for an irrigation project. They will have to repay the CCFs in about five annual instalments after a repayment holiday of one year.

Since the proper utilisation and prompt repayment of the initial borrowers will determine the continuation of the project, a strong social control will be exercised over them by the rest of the member Coolies. The inherent danger in this is that real support, like for example the re-scheduling of repayment dates to help a particular borrower accrue maximum benefit, may be overlooked by the CSUs in their anxiety to “stick to the plan”. ADATS has a special role to ensure that the project is not reduced to a mere mechanical procedure whereby loans are given out and promptly returned.

To achieve this, ADATS will continue to closely monitor the CCFs not only to study trends and draw overall inferences, but also in order to closely watch the performance of individual borrowers. The OnLine computerisation of all our Coolie Sangha building activities makes this very easily possible even when we are talking about thousands of different loans, each given out on different terms and conditions, for different purposes, and with different repayment schedules.

11. PROJECT BUDGET

| | | |
|---------------|---|---------------------|
| 1. | Grants to be given to 72 village CCFs in order to enable them to implement their poverty alleviation plans: | 3,072,000 |
| 2. | Grants to be given to 50 village CCFs in order to enable them to take up irrigation projects: | 3,000,000 |
| 3. | Cost of building 25 work and storage sheds for artisans to collectively rear sericulture, set up cottage industries, etc. | 750,000 |
| 4. | Disposition funds for procuring common equipment for use by groups of artisan Coolies | 250,000 |
| 5. | Disposition funds to gain expert advice, travel, experiment and demonstrate new techniques, etc. | 200,000 |
| 6. | Salaries of one Extension Worker, 1 Veterinarian and 3 Field Workers for 3 years: | 288,000 |
| 7. | Fuel and maintenance cost of 3 scooters for 3 years: | 162,000 |
| 8. | Administrative and overhead costs For 3 years: | 150,000 |
| Total: | | Rs 7,872,000 |