

## 0622. Icco's 1<sup>st</sup> Letter on the DLDP (10 Mar 1993)

*Responding after 4 months, Icco asks some fundamental questions with regard to Coolie Sangha Formalisation and Consolidation – whether we are over reacting to the New Economic Policy, whether the planning is participatory, on coverage/drop-out, position of women, and on financial inputs.*

*They also enquire about the capacity of the CSUs to implement the DLDP, question the results in Bagepalli, objectives of the DLDP, and the project implementation plan.*

Dear Mr. Esteves,

Greetings from the ICCO-office. At the outset, we have to apologise for this belated response to the application for a 3 year Dry Land Development Project (DLDP) in the 4 Extension Areas already supported by ICCO through project no. 923333. After we received this proposal on 9 December 1992 we have had several discussions within ICCO as well as with colleagues from NOVIB and EZE about the ongoing programmes of ADATS/DDS in different areas and the new proposals submitted to the funding agencies (in particular, the application requesting NOVIB's support for the final phase in Bagepalli taluk, including an endowment fund for the BCS and skill training for another 400 youth, a copy of which we received through NOVIB). As the DLDP is inter-linked with the ongoing Extension Programme and the lessons from Bagepalli taluk can be useful for the Extension Areas, we have studied several documents which show ADATS' achievements and internal reflections in order to assess the DLDP proposal (including older papers on the ideology and strategy of ADATS, the completion report on the first Extension Programmes, the project application and progress report [September 1992] on the second phase of DLDP, the progress report on Coolie Sangha Consolidation [October 1992], and the proposal for the third phase of Chelur Expansion Programme). This exercise was very rewarding and showed the socio-political, economical and organisational/managerial position of the coolies concerned. Along with a great appreciation for the positive results, the documents and discussions also brought forward many questions, which in some cases are difficult to communicate in writing. In the following we have tried to summarise the main issues, but the list is still rather long. Before going into details about the DLDP proposal, we first want to pay attention to the experiences and plans with regard to the Formalisation and Consolidation phases in Bagepalli taluk. We hope you will regard the questions not as criticism on the direction ADATS/DDS is going, but as basis for mutual discussion and further improvement of our understanding of your work.

### 1. GENERAL POLICY ADATS/DDS: EXPERIENCES AND PLANS AT BAGEPALLI TALUK

#### a. Problem analysis/contextual background

In the project applications for the second phases of the Extension Programmes and the DLDP and the third phase of CEP the wider situation in which the projects exist, is described. Based on the changes in the Indian economy and the rise in fundamentalism you foresee for the rural poor a.o. extra economic coercion, a reduction in basic services, a severe credit squeeze, and a degradation of NGO interventions to new, sectoral forms of charity. The necessary answers would be the promotion of entrepreneurship, skill training for youth, the creation of a safety net, as well as changes in lifestyles and in concepts like leadership, strength and power, as to create real autonomy and democracy based on "better persons". Although we realise that with this brief summary we don't do justice to the complex analysis and resulting strategy for your work, we wonder whether the consequences for the rural poor will be that drastic and fast. Has the situation of the rural poor since 1991 really changed that dramatically – compared to the trends in the 70's and 80's – that the concept of 'time' has got a different mean-

ing and even the most basic amenities will no longer be citizen rights? Is the newly emerging political economy not 'another step' in a process which was already going on for a longer period, and does it legitimate radical changes as completely betting on entrepreneurship, attacking the joint family, and training many youth, without full awareness of the implications of these measures? Do you really consider the New Economic Policy as a watershed, or is it primarily useful as a didactical concept which gives a new impetus to educating the coolies. In other words, are the dimensions of the emerging new order sufficiently clear to justify such radical changes in approach?

#### b. Top-down or participatory planning

Related to this first issue we wonder whether the proposed activities are really the product of grassroots planning, in view of for example the controversy over using the entire CCF capitals, the BCS reluctance to the skill training programme, and the limited time between increasing the CCF capitals and the planned start of the DLDP in the Extension Areas. Does ADATS strike the right balance between top-down and bottom-up planning?

#### c. Coverage/drop-outs

Membership of the CSUs amounts to 27% of the total population in Bagepalli taluk and 45% in the 4 Extension Areas. In Bagepalli 35 CSUs dropped out, presumably due to dissatisfaction with trends in the Coolie Sangha model and/or the inability to follow the rather severe guidelines. However, you foresee that part of these CSUs will come back and membership of the other CSUs will increase (vide e.g. P.3 of the Extension Programme Iind Phase application).

We appreciate the evolution of the Coolie Sangha model from struggle and mass actions towards measures to improve the income position of individual families, as well as the strict internal rectification and self discipline drive of the BCS. We also believe in the concept of an effective minority, which can positively influence the course of developments within the area. However, we can not oversee the influence of the rather extensive non-membership on day-to-day life and psychology of the coolies on village level, e.g. The actual obstructions caused by non-member coolie families gaining from CSU-efforts. How do the CSUs, BCS and ADATS/DDS deal with non-member families resp. with dropped CSUs ((re-)actively, approach, results)?

#### d. Position of women

The positive discrimination in favour of coolie women adopted some 3 years back is an important step towards greater equality between women and men. Although ages of male dominance can not be changed within a fortnight, important achievements are already visible. We believe that ADATS is on the right track, but have some questions regarding the operationalisation. Don't you think there is a danger that through the decentralisation of right to the health budget and the children's programme to the Mahila Meetings again the reproductive tasks of women are stressed, and not their position in decision making bodies, not in (paid) productive situations? We are also anxious to know whether specific women's issues get sufficient attention during CSU and BCS meetings, or whether men consider Mahila Meetings as a legitimisation to discuss only 'community' issues? The serious examination of private inter-personal relationships by women and men is indeed considered a vital step in the right direction.

#### e. Financial inputs

Last but not least, we have serious questions regarding the required financial inputs in the various programmes. In our letter of approval for the second phase of the Extension Pro-

grammes dated 23 July 1992, we already questioned the necessity to fully subsidise the CCFs and the stipends to VHW's, VLW's and Community Workers resp. Cluster Secretaries, as well as the growth in target areas and budget. For the DLDP an additional amount of Rs. 22,14 million is requested, without reference to possible own contributions, government subsidies or bank loans. In addition to the amounts asked for the second phase of DLDP and the final phase of the Chelur Expansion Programme in Bagepalli, a huge financial inflow in a rather short period is foreseen. We wonder whether the CSUs have the capacity to absorb these amounts and whether the managerial abilities of CSUs, BCS and ADATS/DDS have been developed sufficiently to undertake the different projects together. However, the most important question is how to avoid a 'dole-out approach' resp. a 'beggar mentality'? How can one for example 'guarantee' that the thousands of individual coolies and their families personally feel that an endowment fund built up with much foreign funds belong to them? Such a fund can also diminish the impetus for coolies to save, and can reduce their bargaining power vis-à-vis the government, as the last can decide to shift its anti-poverty efforts to 'more needy' people. We also don't know how we have to assess the increase in minimum income needed for decent living from Rs. 500 to Rs. 1.000 per family per month during the preparatory phase of DLDP II in Bagepalli? Moreover, we consider the offering of free space, water, power and machines, as well as short term interest free loans to entrepreneurs who give skill training to youth as rather generous. In other words, can programmes with such high inputs become sustainable?

## 2. DLDP IN 4 EXTENSION AREAS

### a. Strength of CSUs

In your letter dated 4 June 1992 you explain that the coolies themselves accepted that unless there are strong CSUs a wide scale and far reaching project like DLDP cannot be implemented. The proposal ADATS/DDS submitted on 26 November 1992 is rather optimistic about the achievements in the previous 5 Months and is in itself a sign of confidence in the capabilities of the CSUs to implement the project. However, for us the arguments for this conviction are not very clear.

### b. Results in Bagepalli

The listing of the broader gains obtained from the first phase of the DLDP in Bagepalli shows remarkable achievements in material betterment, changed attitudes and production relations, but we have the feeling that not all the questions raised in the completion report of 1990 have been answered yet. For example, it is not clear whether the increase in coolie production will last, what type of crops are sustainable, which part of their income they get from their own fields, and what the contribution of DLDP was vis-à-vis the activities under the 'regular' programme.

### c. Objectives of DLDP

Maybe our most important question is related to a possible 'dualism' in objectives of the Dry Land Development Project. The objectives of the project are mainly described as to increase the land value and production of the coolies on the one hand, as a temporal intervention in the labour market to increase the worth of agricultural labour and to ensure equal wages for women and men on the other hand. The coolies themselves can indicate what needs to be done on their lands and, if necessary, can get the advice of agriculturists.

We can imagine that some basic works can be done on micro level. However, for more sustainable effects on a longer term an integrated watershed approach is necessary, in which all the land holders in a watershed are involved. For example, if during the planning of soil and water conservation measures the effects on neighbouring lands are not taken into account,

erosion will be concentrated in certain areas, with the danger that the created infrastructure to protect the soil will be damaged. Moreover, if not all plans of the people with land in a specific watershed are taken into consideration, investments in irrigation can become counter-productive. Also, the cultivation of wastelands is sometimes questionable, as they can have an important role in water conservation, which benefits the coolie lands downstream. Although a lot of knowledge is available with the coolies themselves, they may not always be the best to decide what has to be done on their land (vide the difficulties of the agriculturists to offer innovative advice in the DLDP 1<sup>st</sup> Phase, cf. Completion report p. 16). Short term increases in production may cause a gradual reduction in soil fertility, and make more extensive investments in the future necessary. So, the massive labour input will undoubtedly increase the value and yields from the lands, but may not be optimal from a long term economical and environmental point of view. This dilemma between short term land improvement and poverty alleviation vis-à-vis long term economical benefits and environmental soundness does in our view get insufficient attention in the proposal.

#### d. Project implementation

Regarding the way the programme will be implemented we have the following questions:

How does the implementation of the DLDP affect the ongoing Extension Programmes (923333) and how does ADATS avoid the danger that both programmes draw away too much attention from each other?

In the first and second phase of the DLDP in Bagepalli taluk scattered holdings of the coolies have been and will be consolidated into single, contiguous plots. Is this way of reorganisation of assets also planned in the Extension Areas and how are differences like soil characteristics, groundwater level, etc. taken into account? Moreover, do landless families also have a chance to get some land?

All the coolie families will be provided with basic tools and each Work Gang will get common implements. Also, fuel and fruit trees and smokeless chullas will be supplied. We wonder whether all these facilities have to be given free of costs (as also is the case with the facilities to set up cottage industries in DLDP Phase II), whereas they can be considered as investments which in future will produce additional income or less expenditure. We understand that the coolies may not be able to raise the full amounts, but part of it could be considered as loan and for some activities government grants and/or bank loans are available.

Regarding the demonstration plots we wonder whether they are needed in every village; whose land will be used; who will provide the labour; what will be done with the yields; what will be done with the plots after the DLDP is over, etc.

Also, the necessary staff strength is not clear for us. ADATS/DDS plans to appoint 4 Field Workers (vide p.12, whereas in the budget only 3 are mentioned) and 3 agriculturists, but we ask ourselves if it is not possible to use some staff from the ongoing programme in the Extension areas and/or the DLDP in Bagepalli taluk

#### e. Conclusion

As you can understand from the a.m. questions, we have several doubts regarding the proposed set up of the Dry Land Development Project, which are primarily related to the ecological soundness in the longer run, the manifold activities of CSUs, BCS and ADATS/DDS, the absorption capacity of the target families, and the high external financial inputs involved.

From NOVIB and EZE we have understood that an evaluation of the work of ADATS in Bagepalli taluk has been planned in the middle of 1993. If you agree, we would like to extend this evaluation also to the Extension Areas and to include the a.m. questions in the Terms of Reference. We kindly ask you to indicate whether you agree with this suggestion.....

(the rest of this letter is on routine administrative matters)

With kind regards,

Yours sincerely,

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