

## 0625. 3<sup>rd</sup> Reply to DLDP Queries (30 Mar 1993)

*In this 3<sup>rd</sup> letter, we explain that DLDP and Coolie Sangha Formalisation efforts will complement each other. We then explain how phenomena like land consolidation will have to be steered, and then explain Coolie contribution to the DLDP.*

*The letter ends with a plea that these questions will keep rising in our partnership, and getting final answers should not be used as a reason to delay the sanction of the application.*

Dear Berry:

This is our 3<sup>rd</sup> and final letter in reply to the remaining points raised in your letter of 10 March 1993.

### PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

#### The 2 projects

Rather than draw away from each other, we believe that the ongoing Coolie Sangha Formalisation effort and the DLDP will complement one other extremely well. There are 3 reasons for this.

1. The coolies and we always follow a composite and holistic approach when we make programme choices and plan activities. Since the CSUs all pursue a single logic which flows in a particular direction and stems from a common concern, the manifold activities they undertake are neither disjointed nor haphazard attempts to do too many diverse things at the same time.

Our work with coolie women, for example, is couched in a general gender consciousness and policy of positive discrimination which we developed and articulated. This distinguishes it from being a mere add-on to satisfy a fad. Community organisation is anchored in our faith in democratic practices and democracy itself. It is not just one more *thing* we do to make our efforts appear integrated. The management principles and organisational culture at ADATS are overtly based on meetings and participation. This is a conscious choice born from the belief that meetings are productive and not interruptions to the act of doing. We have no doubt that we will, in the course of implementing the proposed DLDP, achieve the same in the field of environment also.

2. We know that implementing a huge and diverse project like the DLDP is not going to be a cake walk. We know it will mean a lot of hard work. Our capacity for sheer work, at every level, stems from a deep conviction as well as feeling of well being. We are proud of what we have done so far and confident of future achievements. The overwhelming majority of us have no interest other than our work with the coolies. But this does not in any way make us dull or listless.

At the same time we do not delude ourselves that nervous energy alone is enough to achieve things. We do not trust merely a multiplication of already intense efforts to achieve still more. We are intelligent enough to realise that appropriate systems have to be developed and put in place. This is exactly what we have done with regard to the DLDP in the past 1 year.

What makes it very exciting to work in ADATS/DDS is the high degree of organisation which comes from a division of labour as well as excellent prioritisation and management of time and energy. Without the slightest feeling of compartmentalisation everyone really performs in their respective tasks, making it easy for the organisation to take on added responsibilities with a full confidence that the other will not let one down.

We do, of course, have our moments of deep and personal despondency. But humour and emotion play a role in resolving them. This is different from mere coping mechanisms which

only seem to make a person accept causes as unavoidable. Systemic checks within the organisational culture prevent these moments from even temporarily effecting productivity. While all this could perhaps be force fitted under a title of some particular form of management system or the other, the truth is that they are internally evolved without conventional inhibitions (by virtue of our blissful ignorance of matters professional). Whether such internally evolved systems will face stress and depression of the magnitude that your society seems to instil, we honestly do not know. But it serves us well for the moment and our intuition tells us that it will work for quite some time to come.

This management culture has flowed into the Coolie Sangha also. Coolies in each CSU are able to perform multifarious tasks, provided they all fit into the overall logic which they have internalised. They do it with an ease and efficiency which we marvel at. We are glad for this opportunity you have given us to speak of management systems, Berry. Because when we merely describe the outcome of coolie accomplishments we often times simplify them and paint false pictures of the ideal, bordering on the mechanistic. We speak of the ease with which CSUs manage huge CCF moneys or take complicated decisions effecting their lives. At the most, we communicate the process through which they do it.

We speak about the BCS rules, but forget to mention that they do not go about with hand books and user manuals, even if their rich experience with countless precedents lends to the publishing of such books and manuals. We fail to describe the mechanisms with which they deal with ups and downs. We do not normally examine the question of getting suspended or cancelled within these parameters (though pages 27 and 28 of the September 1992 report is a notable exception).

Even the question of relating with non-members, for example, is not dealt with using black and white procedural rules. It is a fine balance of philosophical acceptance, political opportunism and pragmatic considerations, along with an interpretation of the written rule, which produce a CSU outcome.

3. In Bagepalli the DLDP served as a powerful interlude in the middle of fairly mundane, even if largely successful, series of interventions to build Coolie Sanghas. We believe that the extensions could do with a similar intervention at this particular point of time.

A uniform and widespread demonstration of their unity and determination will be made possible through the simultaneous implementation of this project on thousands of acres of land in hundreds of villages. This will contribute not only to quell the opposition but enhance their own self worth. Coolie Sangha building at this stage, when deep cultural interventions are being made (Coolie Sangha Formalisation paper, November 1988), can well do with a reinforcement of coolie values and coolie positions through such visible spectacles like the DLDP.

This takes us back to our 1<sup>st</sup> contention that the DLDP should not be seen as only a sectoral intervention of labour on land since it has a tremendous value in its politicisation.

#### Steering phenomena

We recognise the consolidation of scattered holdings as a process which takes place in wider society when agriculture is given far more seriousness than it gets in semi-feudal peasant economics. We realise that it opens the possibilities for a vast scope of productive inputs.

At Bagepalli it is significant to note that coolies were able to do it before the middle and rich peasants. They thereby took a lead in identifying one of the critical points in the changing political economy. This lead role had far more than economic ramifications and went beyond the mechanical exercise of convenience which it also was. Similarly a significant reduction in the number of landless was yet another hallmark of the Bagepalli DLDP. Both these interlinked phenomena marked an important socio-cultural milestone in the coolies' preparedness

to venture into a new ordering of their lives, which is what the DLDP 2<sup>nd</sup> phase turned out to be. The taking of crop loans to the tune of Rs 1,000 per acre, for example, now has far more value than it seemingly suggests.

ADATS/DDS and the coolies are definitely committed to making statements on the political economies of the 4 extension areas, specially on prevailing agriculture, through the implementation of the DLDP. This learning will take place through together acting on specific situations which arise in the form of issues. As to whether particular phenomena like land consolidation or any other will definitely happen in the extension areas cannot be forecast with precise certainty.

Apart from a frank confession of ignorance on intricacies, the other reason for our hesitance to commit ourselves definitely is that all 4 extensions are not of a uniform description. Within each taluk, except perhaps at Chintamani, there is more than a single pattern. We already suspect that levels of capitalisation in parts of Chickballapur are so high that it might be well nigh impossible to convince non members to swap their plots of land till the Taluk Coolie Sangha gains more in strength and presence. Similarly the land:person ratio in Siddalaghatta is so low that it just may not be feasible to find lands for the landless.

But a definite assurance we can give is that the interests of the landless and land poor will not be glossed over by the CSUs. In the past 1 year pre-project preparatory phase, intense discussions have taken place and a whole lot of specific plans have been made to protect the interests of the landless. In many cases they have found patches of government land for the landless and the entire CSU is helping them in their struggle to get title deeds. In some it is a reservation of CCF capital for the landless to undertake alternate occupations.

#### Coolie contributions

Most CSUs have already decided that 33% of the cost of implements should be paid by the members into their respective Sangha Funds. It is very likely that similar decisions will be made with respect to trees and chullas also.

We have already explained in our first reply of 22 March 1993 that people do actually contribute far more than ADATS/DDS reflects in project applications. Perhaps our budgets give the impression of no other financial participation or contribution forthcoming in a planned project. This is certainly misleading. Though projects are planned and implemented by ADATS/DDS as grants-in-aid, the coolies do not perceive them as such, or even implement them in that manner.

The CCF is a fine example of how, though we give out grants to individual CSUs, member coolies do not look at it as gratis. For them it represents a fund from which they borrow and repay with remarkable punctuality. If after a few years the coolies felt they needed to temporarily enhance their CCFs, we are sure that the BCS would have no hesitance to negotiate a block loan with a commercial bank. We categorically assure you that our 'dole-out approach' does not result in the negative mentality you so rightly fear. This is what we have tried to explain regarding the 2 Organisations approach.

In the present DLDP budget, as we have just said, everything may not be given out free of cost by the CSUs to their members. The "own contribution" that other NGOs may reflect differently will here be in the form of contributions the coolies make to their own Sangha Funds. When we prepared the statements of local funds mobilised by the coolies (28 May 1992 letter), for example, one of the only ways we had to check for exaggerations in figures was to see if there were corroborating contributions to their Sangha Funds.

This obsession to increase Sangha Funds is due to the coolies deep desire for a posterity. It is revealing to see how, even after just a few months of our entry into a new village, the coolies already start talking about how they would manage once ADATS/DDS was no longer there.

This is what has led us, in many an academic circle, to object to the semantic clubbing of credit with savings. We believe that savings is actually linked to feelings of having a future and not to the mechanisms of a credit programme.

This is the real reason why we are reluctant to present anything less than a 100% support budget to our northern partners. One could argue that you are in some ways “overpaying” for the coolies to feel the luxury of themselves having saved. But we do not feel that this is wholly true. Though the Rs 32 million saved up in Sangha Funds at Bagepalli does include contributions of Re 1 per day made from DLDP wages paid with NOVIB and EZE funds, this has neither been the sole impetus for the coolies to save nor does it represent the entire amount saved. In fact, savings from DLDP wages and contributions from CCF loans represent less than 40% of the total amount in their Sangha Funds.

One could also argue that we are still approaching our northern partners to build an endowment, albeit because the arithmetic’s of coolies saving in time has failed. But even this does not dilute the value of coolies contributing to their Sangha Funds.

### Demonstrations

The concept of illustrating desirable agricultural practices has not been sufficiently explained in our project proposal. Please forgive us for this lapse in the document.

We did not mean the demonstration plots to be only patches of land in each village where the quirks and fancies of our agriculturists could be paraded. We already did this with very limited results at Bagepalli. What we meant by demonstrations was a discretionary allocation of Rs 4,000 per village to carry out different environmental actions. As a preparation for this, we wanted the agriculturists to develop close rapport with coolies and their cultivation on the one hand, and enhance their own skills and knowledge of viable alternate environmentally friendly techniques on the other.

Such actions could be of a campaign nature to push home a particular point. They could even be across the board effecting all the coolie holdings of a particular village to illustrate, for example, a better form of ploughing or seeding or whatever. The validity of demonstrating particular techniques on particular fields – new cropping patterns, for example – is not, at the same time, ruled out.

The reason for keeping this allocation loose and discretionary under the broad heading of “demonstration plots” (which had perhaps better be changed to “Demonstrations”) was because of our own admittance of not knowing what exactly we should do. We see a role for outside expertise and this will, in all probability, be introduced through contacts our agriculturists make to enhance their knowledge and skills.

This aspect of the DLDP will be like a technology mission. It has to be perceived as an exciting attempt to come to grips with the ecological soundness question. We were reluctant to do serious pre-project preparatory work in this regard because it would have immediately entailed high salary and travel costs which we were not sure we could absorb. But in spite of this hesitance, we have already appointed an agriculturist and Mario is on the look out for one more Projects Assistant to accompany them.

Projects Assistant has another meaning in our organogram from what we had originally thought when planning the 3 extension programmes in 1988. This is a new post of very senior staff we created about 2 years back to focus on various thematic concerns in Coolie Sangha building like gender, participatory democracy, geopolitical coverage, decentralisation, withdrawal, communal harmony, income and employment generation, etc. With the planned DLDP we decided to add environment to the list of thematic concerns and get one more person to join us.

What we have said about demonstrations applies to the smokeless chullas with an added measure. We did not conceive of the chullas as material targets to execute, but rather as an expression of concern for one of the physical problems faced by coolie women. To us it is important that the entire village wakes up to the fact that there are these concrete problems like collecting water and firewood, cooking, child rearing, etc. which have for long been glossed over as insignificant by male dominated perceptions. We would like to encourage coolie women to make a statement that there are effective solutions to them. Such actions, when performed in isolation, would perhaps serve to re-emphasise the reproductive roles played by women. But in a composite and concerted effort they are indispensable. To us, this was one of the major outcomes of the Vanaja Ramprasad/Peter van der Werff evaluation.

We would therefore have no problems, for example, if a particular Mahila Meeting chose solar cooker boxes or to build bathrooms instead of smokeless chullas, provided of course that due organisational processes of discussions and prior approval took place.

#### Staffing the DLDP

The DLDP Field Workers are specialised and honed staff we have been carrying with us ever since the completion of the DLDP at Bagepalli. The Accounts/Admn wing has been using them to make external payments outside the offices during the implementation of activities like, for example, Project No: 913354. Their only concern during the DLDP will be to make sure that not a single rupee is misused or wasted. There are actually only 3 of them and so one will take responsibility for both, Siddalaghatta as well as Julapalya. This is the reason why we have budgeted for only 3 salaries.

Apart from the 3 Agriculturists, we have planned for no other special staff for the DLDP. Even if we were to find another Projects Assistant, for example, she would not be appointed only for the duration of the DLDP. Instead she would enrich the total human infrastructure of ADATS/DDS.

The special meetings of the work gangs after the completion of each DLDP work will be conducted and minutes recorded by the VLWs. In all probability, these VLWs will be the ones who will be exposed to new ideas and techniques on environment friendly agricultural practices. The Area staff will play a very active role in politicising the DLDP during its implementation as they have already done during the past 1 year pre-project phase. The already existing Extension Workers will, besides assisting and monitoring the CCFs, take on added responsibilities for achieving targets like the smokeless *chullas*, procuring and distributing fruit trees, etc. And very responsible BCS functionaries will always be around to trouble shoot.

#### CONCLUSION

It will definitely be a good idea to include the questions raised in your letter in the Terms of Reference of the proposed evaluation. Even before realising that you had marked a copy of your letter to Julia and Toon, we have already sent copies of our first 2 replies to them and to M.K. Bhat of NOVIB's Bangalore Consultancy Office. Perhaps they could go through both, the questions you have raised as well as our responses to pick out points on which we would all benefit from a Third Opinion. It certainly makes sense to extend the evaluation to the entire area of operation of ADATS/DDS.

However, we do not think it necessary to postpone a decision on the DLDP application till the outcome of the evaluation. We feel that the DLDP is not all that new an idea or experience which needs to await another opinion. When sharing their doubts and questions, NOVIB and EZE would surely also have shared their positive experiences with the DLDP which they respectively supported, specially since these positive feelings have already been corroborated by an independent evaluation commissioned by them.

We can quite see the need for seeking an opinion on something so new and innovative, at least for ADATS, as withdrawal and the creation of an endowment fund for the people's organisation. We can also appreciate ICCO's interest in the matter because this is going to be added on to the implementation technology of Coolie Sangha building as a penultimate step. But we really do not see the need to link your decision on the DLDP to the evaluation.

In the last lines of our previous letter we said that the coolies took the postponement of the DLDP very well. We refuse to use the old "pressure from the people" argument even now. But will you please bear with us while we share our thinking on the matter:

A solid and responsible 1 year preparatory phase has already been put in after we ascertained that ICCO had no fundamental objection to supporting an activity like the DLDP. A postponement will definitely cast doubts on the coolies' ability to take mature decisions. We implore you to see this as subtly different from the inherent danger in grassroots planning exercises which we and the coolies recognise and readily accept.

Running the DLDP for even 2-3 months this year will enhance the credibility of the coolies in the eyes of "others" specially since the prolonged planning exercises have been widely publicised. In fact many from the neutral population, including sympathetic officials, are looking forward to the outcome of what they consider a very novel and exciting exercise.

Starting the DLDP in the months of May or June will automatically force the CSUs to begin works on barren and uncultivated lands belonging to the poorest of the poor since the holdings of the slightly better off will have to be prepared for cropping. This will be a stronger political statement in favour of the poorest than any hoarse shouting. Moreover, the first pre-ploughing showers in the months of June/July will loosen the soil and make work easier.

In spite of all their protestations to the contrary saying that they quite expected a delay, et al, we know that the coolies are deeply disappointed and none of them had made concrete arrangements like seasonal migration to tide over this summer. It will be good to reciprocate their inherent decency with a matching largess.

We rest our case, trusting your fairness.

2 Taluk Coolie Sangha Meetings, 2 Situation Meetings, a special 2 days session with all the staff of the 4 extensions, a fruitful session with Dr. Nath and yet another with Dr. Bhat have all gone through your letter of 10 March and our replies. Apart from claiming a popular mandate for what we have said, we also thank you for the opportunity we got to so thoroughly reflect on so many matters deeply concerning all of us.

#### PHASE II EXTENSION PROGRAMME (923333)

In the meantime you would have received our progress report for the 13 month period February 1992 to March 1993 which clubs activities of both Project Nos: 893105 as well as 923333.

Dr. Nath has already started giving us a Third Opinion and we have had 2 very good sessions with him on 24 March at Bangalore. He will be visiting us some time in May to spend time with the BCS functionaries. M.K. Bhat has kindly agreed to give his guidance through this crucial year on political questions connected to withdrawal, and we will be meeting with Anil Chaudhary of PRIA in Delhi between 5-9 April.

As we explained over the phone, we require the software under the AT&T UNIX System V Release 3.2 operating system for 12 simultaneous users under as many terminals. UNIX is a multi-user operating system, totally different from DOS and Windows. We need the actual software and not just a license to legalise its use. Thank you very much for the debit note for the 2 Tata Sierras which we will now book in our accounts.

**OLDER PROJECTS (893105 & 913354)**

Please let us know if you want us to truncate the progress report sent on 10 March to meet the Ministry requirement. You may be aware of our request to EZE to help upgrade facilities at the Chintamani campus. We have included this item in our application to extend to another 100 villages in Chintamani from July 1993. Pradeep is preparing the financial reports for all the projects. Do you need another narrative report for Project No: 913354?

We are anxiously awaiting your reply. Perhaps you could spare us the agony of waiting and cable when you reach a decision regarding the DLDP. It goes without saying that we are very interested in knowing your reaction to everything else contained in these 3 letters.

With every best wishes, I remain,  
yours sincerely,

**Ram Esteves**