

0627. 4th Reply to DLDP Queries (4 May 1993)

ADATS takes on an equally tough line.

We defend our contention that there are no yardsticks to suddenly decide whether financial inputs are too high or low, that the issue is not the archaic one of choosing between the virtues of foreign and Indian funds.

We then go on to question as to whether we have really neglected technical/environmental aspects, or chosen to take a more holistic view of them. We state that it is inevitable that we are going to disagree on the narrow and sectoral manner in which Icco approaches the environment question.

We categorically reject the Watershed Approach as a holistic panacea, but agree to learn specific tricks and techniques.

We also refuse to implement a toned down DLDP as a compromise between the weak and the mighty since such a compromise will be dishonest.

Dear Berry:

Thank you for your letter dated 26 April 1993 which we received the next day by fax through RDT. In the meantime we have also received the ICCO Policy Profile India for 1993-1995.

1. DLDP IN 4 EXTENSION AREAS

Financial inputs

We honestly do not see how you have computed our income for the next years to suddenly sound staggering. The DLDP 2nd Phase project has been completed. The final phase of the CEP envisages one single grant to be placed in Fixed Deposit. Moreover, the moneys are received and spent by different decentralised units of ADATS/DDS who are all managerially competent.

As to the comparison you make with programmes of other agencies in India, we do not know whether the mean is always the best criterion. If that were to be the case, then would not a study of ADATS' per capita expenditure, in the mood of your question, merely be an exercise to determine an upper limit which no one should cross? Is there much purchase in such a negative argument specially when you are implicitly prepared to support an even more costly watershed approach?

Let us look at the absolute figures for Bagepalli taluk to date. The actual foreign input per family can be computed, due to membership fluctuation, at between Rs 9,871 and Rs 18,378. This works out to a per capita investment of between Rs 637 and Rs 1,186.

Total foreign input:	Rs 65,152,428
Number of years:	15½
Total number of families we worked with:	6,600 families
Investment per family:	Rs 9,871
Per capita:	Rs 637
Present strength of the CSUs:	3,545 families
Investment per family:	Rs 18,378
Per capita investment:	Rs 1,186

You have said that foreign contributions are meant to act as a lever to make communities more self-reliant. This is exactly what has happened at Bagepalli. Further you have said that in the long run it can only be a minor source compared to local inputs. We have no disagreement. But how about the many problems we are going to encounter when we actually go about computing these figures?

In our letter of 28 May 1992 we informed you that a total of Rs 9,838,765 was mobilised by 3,400 families in the 4 extension areas in the 1st 3 years of Coolie Sangha building. This works out to a per capita input of Rs 965 per family per annum in an absolutely new area. We are not able to immediately compute the annual amounts directly and indirectly mobilised by the more mature CSUs of Bagepalli from the government, but are certain that it is substantially higher than both, the foreign input as well as what the newer CSUs in the extensions have been able to tap.

But the calculation with regard to local inputs like increased wages from the *Ryots* is far more complicated. Agricultural wages increased from Rs 3 to Rs 20 in the past 8 years. Though we believe that this is a direct result of our work, let us sober the increased wage to Rs 5 (instead of Rs 17) since the overall agriculture wage has settled at Rs 15 even in villages without CSUs. 2 persons per member family working for 100 days a year are therefore able to mobilise an additional Rs 3,000 per capita over and above the general wage rise.

Our own approach to the problem of high costs has been to reduce the number of years needed to build the Coolie Sangha. We have had remarkable success in this regard in the Gulur Area where there are 1,645 normal members in the CSUs and we worked with a total of 2,577 families. EZE has contributed a total of Rs 18,747,080 from September 1986 to date. With a final remittance of DM 210,000 (approximately Rs 3,000,000) we will not need any further investment in Gulur. This works out to a per capita investment of between Rs 1,298 and Rs 2,033 over a period of 6½ years. Though this is a far more intense per capita investment, the actual figures over the total involvement period figures work out to between Rs 8,437 and Rs 13,215 which is considerably less than the overall figure, due to the shorter period of involvement. We cannot definitely guarantee that the same will happen in the 4 extensions areas also. But we will certainly try in a very responsible manner.

Involvement of National Wasteland Development Board

There is no connection between the issue of foreign money/local money and approaching the National Wasteland Development Board for implementing the DLDP. The compromise on the objectives of the DLDP will be through their sectoral insistence on the mechanistic watershed approach without respecting the popular mode of knowledge of the coolies and bypassing all the other objectives of the DLDP. In this context we have also clearly stated that it is far more difficult for an NGO to resist malpractice and bureaucratic pressure than it is for a people's organisation.

Involving the banks

We are definitely not against the involvement of banks to support productive coolie ventures. We have only said that this should be done in a staged manner if at all we are really sincere about making coolie ventures succeed. The CCFs will do 2 things to better prepare the coolies to approach them with some assurance of success:

- The CCFs will wean first time entrepreneur coolies through the stages of not so viable ventures which will not yield enough profits for both, the coolies as well as the banks, and gradually prepare them to take on enterprises which give higher returns.
- The CCFs will introduce the vital trait of personal fiscal discipline without which coolies will burn their fingers if they directly approach the banks.

NEGLECT OF TECHNICAL/ENVIRONMENTAL ASPECTS

You may of course be right in saying that we have not fully thought through the environmental implications of our interventions. But we never said so in our letter of 23 March. What we said was that we had not thought through the implications of taking stands on international campaigns and global pressure tactics. The implication of that statement was, of

course, that we disagreed with the strategy of unilateral imposition of preconditions as an effective means to save nature.

Yes, we are confident of being able to find a balanced position on the environment question. Just as we have in the past in so many other fields like between material and non material inputs, gender, the role of academicians who accompany activist efforts, etc. etc. No, we have not already found this balance. What we described was the process through which we will attempt to find the balance.

We were never dismissive about the specific technical problems which you had raised. We said that we would be very responsive to these specific issues. But when you question the effectiveness of land improvement measures only carried out on coolie lands, and whether *their lands*, which you have now conveniently dubbed as “*wastelands*”, are suitable for agriculture, and you even go to the extent of wondering whether rainfall will be enough to cultivate both, then we are afraid that we have little in common to discuss.

Because the entire DLDP is a holistic strategy based precisely on this fundamental premise of the coolies themselves translating their dreams and visions through sheer hard labour on their own patches of dry lands. The DLDP is a conviction that this will result in a spin off effort initiated from the bottom-up, reshaping the course of development in favour of the poor.

These are very fundamental and deeply held convictions, quite independent of projects and funding. Changes in ICCO's policy profile cannot make us abandon our faith.

You have very selectively quoted from our completion report on the DLDP 1st Phase and the evaluation report of Vanaja Ramprasad and Peter van der Werff. If you impartially go through our document, you will find an in-built spirit of questioning in us which distinguishes us from an unthinking lot floating from mere physical action to action. The environmental concern was implicitly expressed by us long before it became an NGO fad and we made an honest attempt to come to grips with questions which are not simplistic in nature. The concrete recommendation made by the evaluation team was that everyone could learn a bit from the then just implemented DLDP in Bagepalli. Neither of us intended that you should zone down only on the failure of Agriculturists.

3½ years have now passed since we made those observations. In the meantime, we have not buried the 2 reports. They have got etched into our consciousness and conditioned all our further involvement. The very fact that we contemplated the DLDP as a viable proposition to implement in the 4 extensions should indicate our faith in a strategy which bets on the people.

The DLDP 2nd Phase, as can be seen from our September 1992 progress report, is far more holistic than just a means to promote irrigation, even if irrigation is a component of it. From the DLDP 1st Phase we have realised the value of subsistence agriculture and know that unless the poor dramatically improve their cultivation they face a very insecure future without a land base to absorb the risks inherent in off-farm ventures. Such dramatic improvement has many facets to it and is not restricted to levelling lands, or higher yields or changed contours alone. The final pages of our completion report on the DLDP 1st Phase speaks of these subtle imperatives. An effort like the DLDP 2nd Phase certainly does not have to base its efforts on taking a total watershed into account. It has to instead focus on a community of people who are committed to taking their lives into their own hands and improving themselves.

Nothing that you argue suggests anything with regard to the comparative returns on inputs in either the short or long run unless of course you computed environmental costs using yardsticks that we are totally unaware of and the DLDP, a pro-poor strategy, is already dubbed as an enemy of the planet.

OTHER PENDING QUESTIONS

What more do you want us to say about the 2 projects? We are absolutely certain that the Extension Programmes and the DLDP will be parallel efforts which the coolies and the staff will simultaneously take up with some extra effort and still succeed. We are 100% confident that neither will be compromised in the slightest way. If we tabulate the envisaged actions of the 2 projects – be it the united way of doing things, respecting the position of women, holding of meetings, taking of collective decisions, using CCFs for the landless and later for crop loans, preparedness to face issues and struggle, etc. – there is not a single jarring note to suggest at the 2 are competitive. Processes like land consolidation are outcomes which cannot be definitely guaranteed, but the spirit behind it – a willingness to reorganise more than just scattered holdings into more sensible patterns – is certainly alive in the coolies. And the set-up of the demonstrations is vague because we can, at this stage, only describe a process and not the final product. In the envisaged process sectoral expertise is recognised to be vital, but sectarianism is not accepted as the best way to ensure its input.

But why do you repeat these questions? Is it because you still have some lingering faith in the DLDP? Because such questions are totally redundant in a watershed approach. Let me ask you what the relationship will be between the Extension Programmes which aim at strengthening the poor and steering socio-political processes in their favour and a technical input from outside which only sees the lie of the land and ignores fractions in the people who inhabit it? Will such a relationship be complementary or competitive? Is land consolidation really an issue in attempts that make no differentiation based on patterns of land holding?

Other questions that come up are the inherent incompatibility in the ICCO Policy Profile India where you have consciously chosen to approach environment in a very narrow and sectoral manner through the inclusion of big farmers. We do not find this stand compatible with most else that you say like empowerment of women. How do you reconcile your own acceptance of our effective minority approach with such a stand? It is inevitable that we are going to disagree on the environment question. How are you going to deal with this disagreement?

POSSIBLE FOLLOW-UP

If ICCO is open to examining its stand on the watershed approach and you feel that coolie attempts to improve their subsistence agriculture may not be so anti-environment after all, then it may be good to go ahead with a study in order to understand the comparative advantages of both approaches. A perfunctory exercise with preconditions attached will be of no value to anyone. You may interpret our rejection of the watershed approach as a bias or foregone conclusion. But this is not totally true. We are willing to learn new techniques and selectively introduce them in a more holistic approach. It is the totality and pretended compositeness of the approach per se that we reject.

At another level, we wonder how anyone can relate to coolies and really hear what they are saying except through together implementing what they have so passionately planned, keeping a space for your participation as a partner. The language of sectoral specialists and the manner of coolie contribution to a dialogue are bound to be very different. It is largely by *doing* that coolies show and expose their knowledge. The study you propose has the inherent limitation that the coolies can be browbeaten with supposed facts, figures and arguments that they will have no way to verify. Done in the present mood of resolving an *either this* and an *or else* we wonder if the exercise is going to be worthwhile. The involvement of sectoral experts as advisers giving a Third Opinion to an ongoing DLDP, on the other hand, would have entirely different and positive results.

But that requires courage and faith on ICCO's part. Faith to believe that ADATS/DDS and the Coolie Sangha are mature enough to react to serious suggestions as adults, and courage to make an exception to your own self imposed policy profile.

Our only request to you, NOVIB and EZE is that this should not be included in the Terms of Reference of the proposed evaluation. Because a study of this kind will be conducted by technical experts who may not be able to get a holistic picture of ADATS/DDS and the Coolie Sangha building process. Even if such specialists are included in a larger evaluation team, they could very easily set the entire exercise on an overtly critical downward spin of "finding fault on the environmental front". Such an exercise may not be useful for anyone in the long run.

CONCLUSION

We have discussed your letter with everyone at the 4 Extensions, staff as well as functionaries. The BCS Meeting of May 1993 has also deliberated on it. Our reaction is as follows:

- The DLDP, as envisaged by us, will play an important role in building CSUs.
- The watershed management approach will vitiate the very fundamentals of Coolie Sangha building and is therefore not an acceptable alternative.
- We will still be able to build the Coolie Sangha without the DLDP if there is no solution to the dilemma between us.
- We do not want to implement a toned down DLDP with preconditions in 1993 because we cannot promise to be fair and impartial in the proposed comparative study between the DLDP and watershed approach.

The reasons for our stand are 2 fold. Firstly, the idea of working on all the adjacent lands, belonging to coolies as well as *Ryots*, is not acceptable to any of us. Secondly, the coolies feel that the watershed approach has nothing to offer their lands and is based on a total rejection of both, their knowledge as well as their attempts at subsistence farming.

Coolies readily agree that they may have seen only bad projects, but do not see how a more sincere implementing agency will be able to improve upon the content of something like watershed management. It is possible that certain specific tricks and techniques from the watershed approach can be learnt by them to enhance their skills to themselves work on their own lands, but they reject the approach per se.

We wish to express our thanks for the time and effort you have put into processing this application. And we would also like to record our appreciation for your having searched for a temporary option. Please do not interpret our rejection of the compromise you suggest as a sign of arrogance. It is just that we do not believe that we will be honest in our relationship to accept such a compromise.

2. PHASE II EXTENSION PROGRAMMES (92333)

We do not agree with your reading of the progress report. We remember that you have earlier also had this problem with our not glossing over problems, stating failures, analysing the reasons and finding the strength to go ahead. To us that would not just be dishonest but also reduce the exercise of making reports to a mere formality.

Please give us some time to respond to the other questions you have raised regarding the initial resistance from the women, on children and the women staff's own perception of their future since these will require rather elaborate replies.

3. INFRASTRUCTURE/COMMUNITY CENTRES (913354)

We have requested EZE to help us build 8 *more* staff quarters and *additional* facilities at the Chintamani campus if they agree to support our work in 100 more villages because we will

have to take on 8 more staff members. We will send the final reports as soon as the 31 March audit is over and then perhaps you will realise that we have not asked EZE to step in to complete a project which we had contracted with ICCO.

With every best wishes, I remain,
yours sincerely,

Ram Esteves