

17. 4th Evaluation – EZE/Icco's Assessment of Economic Stock-taking Exercise reports (24 Oct 1999)

1. INTRODUCTION

The consortium partners of ADATS (EZE and ICCO) very much appreciate the Coolie Sangha Building Programme in North Kolar District. However, they had the feeling that the economic part of the programme could be strengthened. Hence, they commissioned a so-called economic stocktaking exercise, with the objectives to assess:

1. The economic impact of the programme on individual families and the Coolie Sangha at various levels, including the net additional income, cost savings, increase in assets, access to Government facilities and bank loans, etc. in the past 10 years;
2. The actual and/or potential self-reliance and sustainability of the Coolie Sangha at local, cluster and taluk level.

(For an overview of the main points of attention in this study see the Terms of Reference in part II and III)

The study was carried out by a team consisting of Prof. S. Giriappa (Department of Economics, Mangalore University), Dr. Anita Ravishankar (Department of Sociology, Mangalore University) and Ms. Chandra Kesavan (Freelance consultant from Chennai). Each of the team members looked at different aspects of the Coolie Sangha Building Programme and prepared a report on respectively Economic Aspects (Part I), Sociological Aspects (Part II) and Organisational Impact and Sustainability (Part III).

Although the reports provide a wealth of information on the various aspects of the programme of ADATS, we feel that the reports do not address all the points of attention mentioned in the Terms of Reference in equal detail and mainly focus on the areas in which the programme can be strengthened, whereas the positive aspects need to be read 'between the lines'. In his detailed survey Prof. Giriappa compares the results of the programme between Coolie families in various intervention stages (i.e. formalisation, formation, consolidation, independent) resp. land holding sizes, but it is unfortunately not clear to what extent their situation has improved compared to the past or to non-member families. Dr. Ravishankar provides an overview of some indicators of empowerment identified by the coolies themselves, but her analysis is not substantiated by underlying data. Mrs. Kesavan also mainly relies on qualitative findings and identifies a number of strengths and weaknesses.

In this note EZE and ICCO try to give a more balanced reading of the reports, starting with the positive aspects of the intervention model and subsequently the areas where improvement is possible/necessary.

2. POSITIVE FINDINGS

All three evaluators come in their own wordings to a positive appreciation of the Coolie Sangha Building work. Prof. Girappa concludes that "The Sangha experiment has been like a jump over the rim, the lower caste and poorer members able to leapfrog in the need hierarchy by establishing a social identity. Sangha solidarity as an empowerment, wherever reinforced by adequate asset entitlements has resulted in growth and extension. (...) When compared to many voluntary organisations that are functioning for namesake, the performance of ADATS and BCS requires further reinforcement through increased capital and support." (p. iv).

Dr. Ravishankar concludes that "The stocktaking exercise has revealed certain fundamental strengths of the ADATS experiment, which must now be placed on a stronger and more sus-

tained footing. The present reviewer whole-heartedly endorses the validity of the development model and recommends its continuity. ADATS should continue and reinforce its strong involvement in enabling BCS to develop its vision of an alternative social order into a tangible reality.” (p. vi).

Mrs. Kesavan identifies in a SWOT analysis a number of strengths of the model, including strong sense of belonging in CSUs, systematic asset building for poor, excellent systems and procedures, self financing and self management, and replicability (p. 41). Regarding the self-financing of Coolie Sangha she concludes that “It is really amazing that with a large proportion of members falling under very poor and a conspicuous absence of a savings culture, self-reliance has been achieved to such an extent” (p. vii).

Throughout the three reports a lot of positive findings were mentioned, amongst others:

- the formation of cohesive groups of coolies (= people who do not employ other people) overcoming caste and social barriers, providing them with a strong social conscience and collective sense, skills for problem solving by negotiation and reconciliation, as well as an identity as base for many development initiatives;
- a separate space for women through Mahila Meetings to enable them to discuss common problems, to provide them with certain benefits and powers, and to address practical gender needs and strategic gender interests; this resulted in perceptible changes in gender equations within households and a definite improvement in the health and nutritional status of women;
- enhanced knowledge and awareness of the coolies about their own situation, particularly for women;
- significant coverage of the very poor through various affirmative measures;
- lessening of domestic violence and growing preference for girl children;
- creation of substantial assets in the form of land, animals, houses, equipment, consumer durable, etc.;
- educational opportunities for coolie children, including girls;
- promoting functional literacy of adults through an adult literacy programme, which also provides a platform to bring men and women together;
- access to credit through a Coolie Credit Fund managed by the Coolie Sangha themselves;
- increasing availability and quality of agricultural land through implementation of the Dry Land Development Programme (DLDP), which also promoted higher wages and equal wages between women and men;
- increased diversity of income sources, in addition to labour and crop income;
- enhanced participation of coolies in different social and political arenas, with cases of elected representatives extending support to various Sangha causes, and reduced local level corruption in the execution of development works and in sanction of government loans;
- at macro level the Sanghas manage to cover 99% of their costs, except for the central BCS cost;
- the model introduced in Bagepalli has been replicated successfully in extension areas, and assigning the responsibility to clusters and independent Sanghas make it cost effective and self-replicatory;

- ADATS has introduced sound management and implementation mechanisms and excellent systems to monitor the programme, and the competence, commitment and empathy of the staff have played a critical role in successful intervention.

3. CHALLENGES/WEAKNESSES

The main focus in the three reports is on issues in the model which could be improved. The evaluators propose a comprehensive action plan respectively long lists of recommendation to improve the approach. Important weaknesses that should be addressed are amongst others:

- the big drop-out of families and CSUs due to amongst others internal conflicts and poor leadership, resistance to Sangha tax, mismanagement by office bearers, the strict policy towards overdue, and political tensions, including the barriers for re-entry;
- irregular attendance of CSU and MM meetings and poor rotation in quite a few Sangha, indicating a lack of involvement and a weak base (according to Mrs. Kesavan, while Prof. Giriappa states that the average percentage of the conduct of meetings may work out to around 80%);
- the rather low population coverage by the Sangha due to amongst others distrust, fear of local power groups, lack of motivation and identifying the Sangha with a particular political party may breed a certain degree of exclusivity in the village, adding to conflict, tensions and local envy;
- the limited membership of women in CSUs and their limited representation in management, the low stakeholding in the petty women's fund, the poor land rights for women, and the need for technical mainstreaming of gender issues at organisational level in order to increase the expertise and instruments for operationalising the gender vision;
- inadequate skill formation and leadership training in the adult literacy classes and lack of follow-up;
- identification of Sanghas with a political party, with the danger of unleashing conflicts and use of programme benefits to ensure a vote bank;
- under-utilisation and a low rotation rate of the Coolie Credit Fund (CCF), due to a strict overdue policy, lack of entrepreneurial capacities (especially with the very poor), absence of critical backward and forward linkages (including improved seeds, cattle and crop insurance, storage and processing opportunities, marketing outlets, etc.), and capital inadequacy for certain ventures;
- the declared income for paying Sangha tax is much less than the actual income and the fixed tax percentage is regressive for the very poor;
- besides the age of a Sangha and its financial self-sufficiency additional indicators should be introduced for withdrawal of ADATS, and the role of the NGO after withdrawal should be spelt out more clearly;
- systematic monitoring and supervision of job performance of staff at various levels is desired, as well as feedback mechanisms to institutionalise learning experiences, more gender-related training, and strengthening of second line staff;
- the benefits from major assets like organic farm, Godown, training halls and guest house are very low and should be increased;
- the impressive level of record keeping and on line information system may be supplemented by base line and time series data, quarterly information to assess seasonal variations, and dis-aggregated information on the actual roles of women and men and their

contribution to and benefits from development, as well as the involvement and benefits of the very poor and landless;

4. CONCLUSIONS

The Economic Stocktaking Exercise has resulted in a lot of information on the strengths and weaknesses of the Coolie Sangha Building Programme in North Kolar district. The three reports contain many suggestions and recommendations, which cannot be tackled overnight. The action plan suggested by Prof. Giriappa is rather abstract and needs quite some operationalisation before it can be put in practice. The 8 recommendations of Prof. Giriappa, the 17 recommendations of Mrs. Ravishankar and the 19 recommendations of Mrs. Kesavan need further prioritisation and operationalisation in an action plan for the short and long term.

Although all recommendations are considered important, in our view priority should be given to:

- a more flexible and committed policy towards dropped out CSUs and families;
- improving the functioning of the CCF and the credit absorption capacity of member families by upgradation of traditional economic activities, skill development, adoption of new appropriate technologies, organising backward and forward linkages, etc.;
- further improvement of the gender policy and strategies following the recommendations;
- introduction of an effective monitoring and supervisory system for assessing job performance of the field staff, and a job enrichment (including leadership development) programme for the whole staff.