

19. 5th Evaluation - ADATS-SCNZ Programme - Lakshmi Raman & Mohan Raj (July 2000)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. BACKGROUND

Gudibanda is a taluk with 81 villages and a population of 36,160 in North Kolar district of Karnataka. The soil cover is fragile, rainfall erratic, and the villages are drought prone. *Ryots* (middle and big peasant families) coexist with Coolies (small and poor peasants) in a peasant economy. The level of poverty is acute because of poor productivity.

ADATS is a secular NGO working since 1977 with 16,000 poor peasant families in 650 villages. ADATS follows a 3-phase intervention strategy in 3-year phases over a 9 year period. Material and non-material inputs are used to organise the Coolie families and build village level Coolie Sangha Units (CSUs).

In Gudibanda, the difference is that this work or Coolie Sangha building runs parallel with activities undertaken under a community sponsorship scheme to support 3,027 children.

At the end of 3 years of work in Gudibanda, ADATS and their northern partner, SCNZ, commissioned Mohan Raj and Lakshmi Raman from Kaizen Surya Associates to review activities and give suggestions for the next 3 year phase of work.

2. THE ADATS/SCNZ PROGRAM

126 men and 83 women staff the program which cover 59 villages and 6,471 families. The villages have been divided into 12 Clusters with 5-7 villages per cluster. The membership is family based and one Member (usually the man) represents the family in the CSU. 72% of children in the working villages are covered.

83% and 73% of children who appeared for the 7th Std and 10th Std public (board) exams passed. This increased to 92% of 7th Std passes in 2000.

Issues and struggles taken up by village CSUs have focussed on the individual, collective and Coolie Sangha-related matters.

Visits to another Extension area, revealed that Gudibanda is a poorer region with less alternatives and more remoteness.

3. CONTRIBUTES/CONSTRAINTS FOR MEMBER INVOLVEMENT

a) The main contribute for Member involvement in the CSU is a feeling of protection that comes with Coolie Sangha identity. Next is children's education.

The main constraint for taking part in CSU activities is fear of socio-political reprisal.

Debts owed to *Ryots* results in contra-pressure which prevents the poor from uniting.

CSU Members and their children have internalised the objectives of the Coolie Sangha, and are not in it solely for material benefits. The program has avoided the creation of dependency through fostering a culture of dignity, self-respect and self-reliance.

b) Members take an active part in the CSU as a whole. Discussions on the Children's Program rank as the most interesting (42%), followed by Mahila Meetings (32%) and general issues not relating to program benefits (7%).

This assessment, provided by the Staff, needs to be studied together with data on attendance at CSU Meetings, which is high at 78%.

The above parallel data indicates that while the involvement of the Members in the statu-

tory functioning of the CSU is good, involvement in specific activities of the CSU such as Children's Program and Mahila Meeting is even better.

The data confirms the relevance and effectiveness of the children's program for the Coolie Sangha building in Gudibanda.

- c) Women involve in Mahila Meetings in the long-term interest of their families. They also appreciate this as a separate space for themselves, one which enjoys status and protection from both, ADATS and the Coolie Sangha.
Menfolk, the double burden of work and domestic duties act as constraints for women from taking a more active part.
- d) Children appreciate the Balakendra which provides an opportunity to complete school and get a job. They have the full support of Coolie families, women in particular, who see the Balakendra as a safe haven for their children. Girls, whose education is perceived as having little value in the Gudibanda socio-economic context, have benefited more. Many girl children who would otherwise have been married off are now attending school, thanks to the program.
- e) CSUs were quickly formed due to the twin focus on Child and Community. The child focus made Members rally round the program. Socio-political awareness was instilled by the concerted inputs of committed program Staff and Coolie Sangha functionaries from other taluks.
- f) The organic flow of collective experience from the ADATS-Coolie Sangha program in other extension areas to the Gudibanda program is also a significant contribute to the effectiveness of the ADATS-SCNZ program.

4. GAPS IN IMPLEMENTATION

Taluk Coolie Sangha meetings are yet to be started, only 3 Balakendra buildings have still to be completed, some villages have dropped out, bank accounts are yet to be opened for two-thirds of the CSUs, and Community Worker withdrawal has been postponed for another year. However, the gaps are not significant to have affected the effectiveness of the program in this first phase.

5. DEVELOPMENT IMPACT OF THE PROGRAM

- a) Release of Coolies from bondedness to *Ryots* (landlord farmers) and opening up of alternate livelihood avenues.
- b) Extension of the Coolie Sangha identity to Gudibanda taluk and the consequent feeling of safety of Coolie families in this collective identity.
- c) Activation of democratisation processes in Gudibanda, and an increased involvement of Coolie Sangha Members in civic bodies is evidenced by:
 - 18 of 30 candidates who contested the Gram Panchayat elections have won.
 - Successful candidates have become instrumental for villagers to access basic entitlements from government.
 - Farmer's Co-operative Societies and Milk Collection Centres were revived.
 - The functioning of fair price shops has been regularised
 - Government school teachers have been made more accountable.
- d) Land issues have been taken up in some village CSUs.
- e) Special spaces have been created for Coolie women; the forum of Mahila Meetings has addressed problems of individual women, mediated in marital conflicts, helped prevent early marriage of the girl child, and provided petty credit fund for women for use in emergencies (*Vokkaku Sanchi Duddu*).

- f) Enabled a special focus on Coolie children who constitute 72% of the minor population. Also assured continuous education in particular for girl children and enlarged life opportunity for all children.

6. THE FLIP SIDE

- a) After release from bondedness, indirect pressure from the landlords continues, particularly on women. (re)payment of old dues is insisted in the form of crops, sexual favours are expected from Coolie women, and public harassment is resorted to.
- b) Unemployment and the debt trap are the result of irregular rain and cycles of drought and famine. Consequent, land-based livelihoods have a poor viability.
- c) Expectations have been raised by the Coolie Credit Funds (CCFs) to provide alternate solutions. However, all who do not have experience, skills and/or viable propositions to utilise credit opportunities are likely to feel disappointed when they do not automatically become entitled to credit from the CCFs.
- d) Changes following the opening up of the national/state economy are rapid. The National Highway is being widened, an International Airport is being set up at nearby Devanahalli, land-use and land-ownership patterns are changing, and migration to the city are evident and increasing. The Coolie Sangha model must accommodate these changes in a proactive manner.
- e) The Caste identity is constantly pitted against the Coolie Sangha identity.
 - Economic problems that are seen as a consequence are insecurity of livelihoods, indebtedness to and dependence on *Ryots*, lack of local economic alternatives.
 - Social problems that result from this dualism are alcoholism among the Coolie men, lack of safety for women in public spaces and at work, sexual exploitation of Coolie women by the landlords, early marriage of girls, dowry practice in imitation of the dominant castes, domestic violence on and desertion of women, and the low status of women in general.
- f) *Ryots*, in connivance with the government machinery continue to perpetuate problems. Land disputes, exploitative wages direct and subtle oppression can never be fully “solved”.
- g) Future planning has not been done for children who complete schooling.
- h) Malaria is a major health problem, followed by tuberculosis. The fluoride content in drinking water is reportedly very high and causing health problems.

7. ADVANTAGES/DISADVANTAGES OF THE SCNZ LINK POLICY

Coolie families understand “link” in terms of the family’s link to the Coolie Sangha, and not as a new term coined by SCNZ for “sponsorship”. The interpretation and perception of sponsor-link as it exists in the administrative framework of the SCNZ program is not understood at the Coolie Sangha level.

In their common parlance interpretation, the link between Member families and their village CSUs continues to be an effective check and control mechanism. However, ADATS ensures that the child does not suffer due to this check mechanism, which is an integrated internal process of the Coolie Sangha. This is managed through soft norms and procedures that govern actions like suspension/membership, provision/motivation for them to return to the fold, continued minimal assistance to suspended/cancelled Members’ children, etc. The presence/absence of sponsor-link (sponsorship) is not likely to negatively affect the quality and internal content of the program.

Removing the sponsor-link (individual sponsorship), on the other hand, can reduce burden of administrative procedures and release committed Staff to more meaningful work.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

- a) Increase the cohesiveness of the Coolie Sangha by emphasising on issues and struggles. Broader issues of the Coolie community, such as lack of birth certificates, land ownership issues, loan liabilities of members to banks, co-operatives, money lenders, etc. have to be included.

In order to do this, the animation skills of the village level Staff have to be strengthened to help the CSUs themselves solve problems. In other words, strengthening Staff to facilitate the formation of effective communities as opposed to themselves solving problems.

For example:

- Members' voluntary help can be enlisted in the maintenance of the Balakendra premises.
- CSU Members can be encouraged to attend the Gram Sabha meetings.

- b) Encourage common concerns to be brought from the CSU to the Cluster level. CCF utilisation in the context of Members' backlog of outside personal indebtedness, migration, land alienation, etc. have to be thoroughly discussed in the Cluster Meets. CSUs should not treat these only as isolated problems of individual Members.

- c) Mahila Meetings should be kept as exclusive fora of Coolie women and male Staff members should be told to keep out of them. Recording of minutes of Mahila Meetings in simple fashion can well be done by the Mahila Trainers, literate Members, women teachers or one of the functionally literate girls in the community..

It is important for women to have their own "spaces" for learning to deal with one another and the Mahila Meeting should be seen as "their" space. There is much need for women to have the opportunity for learning in areas like understanding self and others, naming and analysing issues, dealing with conflict, prioritising, risk taking, decision making, improving group maintenance skills. In short, developing their leadership potential. Such exclusive spaces for women are an essential ingredient in their empowerment process.

The presence of men often constrains women from acting and testing their own potential, to the extent of "de-skilling themselves" in mixed gender contexts.

This process is what gets constrained by the presence of men, even if with good intentions.

- d) Facilitate the CSUs to meet women Members' strategic gender needs. Women can fulfil their membership role only when domestic work is shared and other commitments/constraints are recognised and dealt with.

A continuous and planned monitoring of the strength of women in the CSUs, and adopting a strategy which promotes equality between men and women is what is needed.

- e) The Balakendra program has proved its effectiveness and relevance by meeting planned objectives, both from the perspectives of the child as well as the Coolie Sangha. However for a better utilisation of the investments and costs, and also within a larger vision of the aim of education, the scope of Balakendra should be expanded and broadbased as "Learning Centres for the Coolie Community as a whole".

Options such as mainstream educational opportunities for drop-outs and non-school goers, choice of continuing education, particularly for women, utilisation of distance education provisions for the adults, etc. need to be explored.

Balakendra Teachers should be involved in all educational (teaching/learning/sharing) activities of the CSUs, including their own continuing education.

- f) Suspension /cancellation of the CSU Members is not an isolated problem. It has to be viewed as a manifestation of many causes and contributes such as the rapidly changing global forces and their ramifications into the lives of communities and individuals. The result is seen in terms of migration, occupation changes, value changes, lifestyle choices, behaviour changes, political equations between and among groups at local levels. These cannot have immediate solutions.
- The Coolie Sangha has, in the wisdom born of long experience, identified this as a crucial issue and constituted Cells to examine this problem in the other taluks. Recommendations of these Cells must be taken into account with regard to Gudibanda as preventive measures.
- g) The practice of automatically starting the CCFs in 3 year old CSUs has to be changed. Besides age of the CSU, other factors like credit capacity of individuals/group have to be assessed by the Field Staff before introducing the CCFs.

9. A UNIQUE INITIATIVE

SCNZ has made a very pioneering and bold directional change in policy for community development sponsorship with the Child as the continuing core concern. ADATS, for its part, is the only organisation in South India which has been consistently and successfully working within caste-class perspectives for community organisation and development for the past 23 years. The ADATS-SCNZ program is a unique initiative in community development using sponsorship. The uniqueness of this program stems from the synergy of idea, initiative, and experience that both partners have brought to this program.

The uniqueness and success of the program in Gudibanda is basically because of the choice of partnership between SCNZ and ADATS. This analysis is based on the evaluators' own work and experience of development approaches and community organisation strategies of various NGOs in South India over the past 2 decades. It is also based on "hands on" experience and involvement with sponsorship programs of Action Aid, Aide et Action, CCF(Inc.), SCF-UK, and Kindernothilfe, and (recently) CCF(GB).

10. GROWTH PROSPECTS OF THE PROGRAM

The Gudibanda program which has successfully completed the Formation phase has the potential to move into its Formalisation and Consolidation phases. However, in terms of coverage (children, villages and Coolie presence) an optimal seems to have been reached in the taluk. In terms of the socio-economic development of the Coolie community, since the environment is comparable with that of the neighbouring Extensions where the Coolie Sangha has been promoted, the quantum of inputs needs to keep in line with the other Extensions. However, in the larger interests of the Coolie Sangha as a political organisation of the Coolies, the evaluation team identifies the following growth prospects for the program:

- a. Geographic extension of the program into adjacent taluks where gaps need to be filled – i.e. where Coolie Sangha building activities have not been taken up with other support, i.e. expansion of the program over the existing levels
- b. Development of the Balakendras as Learning Centres over and beyond immediate needs of children in the program.

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