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1. Introduction

This is a Strategic Review Report prepared for BCS/ADATS, following a workshop held at Bagepalli from 15-17 April 2008.

The review was based on the Strategic Plan (2001 to 2010) adopted by BCS/ADATS during a programme of Management Workshops, beginning with the first workshop in November 2000¹, continuing on a monthly basis till March 2002.

Please see APPENDIX-A for the Session Plan as originally conceived. The modules originally envisioned were:

In hindsight, it would appear that the plan was somewhat ambitious. The following modules could not be completed due to the interest in, and time required for completing the Situation Analysis and SWOT Analysis:

- ❖ Scenario Development – a) Expected Impacts of present project initiative
- ❖ Scenario Development - b) Possible unintended impacts, both positive and negative
- ❖ Reflection on present participatory M&E Process
- ❖ Developing M&E Plan for existing LogFrame, specifically to discuss methodologies for each objective
- ❖ Discussion and Demonstration on some M&E Tools

However, although a formal Workshop Evaluation was not carried out, the Group expressed satisfaction with the process and outputs of the workshop.

2. Reflections on the Vision of BCS/ADATS

The Review began with a reflection on the Vision of BCS/ADATS, which formed part of the Strategic Plan:

“ADATS and the Coolie Sangha share a vision of a community of unified poor, across parochial caste lines and the gender divide, with increased survival capacity in a rapidly changing political economy; with food security ensured by sustainable resource-use practices and economic development; where individuality and person status are established and protected by the community; where Coolie children, especially the girl child, have a childhood, education and a secure future of their choice; where organised Coolies have a political presence and are a power to contend with, without becoming a passive vote bank.”

The detailed notes of the reflections of six groups of participants is attached as APPENDIX-B. The summarised content analysis is presented in the immediately following sections.

Apart from being reflections on the Vision of BCS/ADATS, these notes provide a wealth of material for the Situation Analysis.

¹ Participative Planning, Monitoring & Evaluation Programme for ADATS, Bagepalli - (11/00 to 03/02), Progress Report No.1 for November 2000 Ref. ToR dtd 19 Nov 2000 to IIPL, Issue No. 1 dtd 13 January 2001, 0011REPT/AM



2.1. Caste and Unification of Poor

Probably the most important observation emerging from the reflections is that Caste remains a major reality, particularly in those situations where the Coolie Sangha is unable to exert its direct influence. At a family level, publicly dormant caste identities become prominent, particularly among upper caste members.

It is considered that the change in caste practices is very superficial and not from any conviction that it is good to live in a casteless society. It would seem that religious leaders have made it their full-time work to see that caste identity never disappears.

We cannot help noticing that caste practices survive at an individual level among Coolie Sangha women of all castes despite the influence of institutions like the Mahila Meeting and Women's Fund. It will take considerable time over generations before these caste practices and rituals kept alive by women disappear.

Upper caste practices even within the Coolie Sangha have been transformed into peculiar mutations that pretend to be casteless. Heinous atrocities masquerading as caste-punishments (including rape) that have religious and social sanction have all but disappeared. We have no doubt that children are greatest beneficiaries of diminishing interest in caste divisions.

Caste manipulations are less visible in urban areas, and has all but disappeared in public forums. However, one cannot help observing that this might be an artificial social change, brought about by proactive laws and policies. For example, if the law did not require that 33% of cooks in the mid-day meal scheme in rural schools should be from SC/ST categories, it could never have happened. The disappearance of caste-ascribed occupations, on the other hand, has been influenced by economic forces rather than legislation and enforcement.

Caste remains a powerful influence. The poor are informed differently by caste in feudalism and in democracy. In feudalism, caste is anti poor. In democracy, it is pro-poor because elites among poor can also make money. Sharing state resources does not require an overlay of religion and feudalism. Caste has been democratised with the help of capitalism.

The Coolie Sangha does not allow this to shake its vision of a community of unified poor. This is a non-negotiable aim despite the age-old divisive effects of caste.

2.2. Changing Political Economy

The "Political Economy" is too vast a canvas on which to assess unification across "... caste lines and the gender divide, with increased survival capacity". We need to look at many smaller factors which have an impact on the survival capacity of Coolies. These factors include weather and political leadership.

Changes in the political landscape appear to be cosmetic and superficial. For example, to satisfy the reservation rule for women in Grama Panchayats (Village Local Government), a Harijan woman holds a nominal position while a Reddy landlord holds the reins of power. This does not mean that we can ignore the political process which is the driver of the village economy.

Changes in the political economy can be bifurcated into political change and economic change.



2.2.1. Political Change

Without doubt the most important political change we have witnessed is the way the Coolies have been transformed from an uninformed people excluded from political processes, to an astute political force which cannot be taken for granted. It is not only the sheer range and volume of information that has increased, but the thirst for “good” information that has increased

There has been a definite reduction in the role of political touts and village leaders who used to manipulate the Coolies at election time. The selection of candidates for elections has become a well orchestrated process with the Coolies in the driver’s seat.

Politics is no longer viewed as some alien activity that is pursued in the corridors of power in Bangalore. It is now viewed as a legitimate and powerful means to leverage resources for economic development. If the community is unaware of and unmotivated about its rights and entitlements, it is impossible to use the political system to its full intended advantage. Capital is essential in post-feudal agriculture but would be out of reach for Coolies without political power. “Only politics can save you when there is a 3 year crop failure”.

In the past the emphasis was on respect and power, status and ego (My word counts). For example, if I have the right contacts and political clout, I can save the life of my mother who has been admitted in M.S. Ramaiah Hospital and requires an operation that costs Rs.15,000. The same contact and clout ensures that I get full entitlement at a Public Distribution System (PDS) Shop. Without political power to back it up, the Sangha is impotent.

It is not correct to assume that political parties once had vote-banks. It was the village feudal leaders controlled who controlled vote-banks made up of their agricultural labourers. Political parties bought off these leaders who ensured that all the votes in the area of control were diverted to the buyer. Today this is no longer possible because of the information revolution. Political parties that choose candidates without consulting voters can be sure of losing the contest.

The sheer volume of accurate and relevant information available on political issues, schemes, laws, entitlements etc. makes it impossible to treat us as a vote bank. The opposition is not happy about making information widely available... this “empowerment” stands in the way of machinations of all political parties & leaders including “our own” Congress Party.

2.2.2. Economic Change

As for the most obvious economic change, the Coolies have learnt to earn their livelihoods from a wide range of diversified economic activity. This has resulted in reduced risk on account of dependence on agriculture wages and the pursuit of new business opportunities for increased wages and incomes.

Economic activities including agriculture are no longer driven by custom and practice. People have learnt to select economic activities on the basis of economic consideration rather than what they have always done. “You no longer have to plant a crop because you have to plant a crop”

Economic development has taken place because complete dependence on agriculture has reduced. Information has emerged as an important factor of production which supports investment in off-farm and non-farm enterprises.

Coolie youth who have had an education no longer want to work on land. They have access to city jobs and a number of credit sources such as *Sthree Sakthi*.



2.3. Food Security

Previously the food requirement of an entire village was met by production within that village. This production was dependent on erratic weather and subsistence cultivation without the required agricultural inputs and timely application of labour. This has changed to cash crops and non-agricultural income.

The implication of the shift to cash crops is that people who once grew their own food now depend on the Public Distribution System. This has meant that the scrutiny on its proper functioning has increased.

Today even Middle Peasants (Between the Landlord and the Coolie) face a severe food crisis because they have turned to inorganic interventions which are costly and highly risky. As a result Middle Peasant families are also dependent on fair price shops and the PDS like the Coolie Families.

Incomes of youth employed in the city are now flowing into the rural area thus improving food security.

2.4. Girl Child, Education & Secure Future of Choice

Situation of Girl Child drastically improved especially where they have been to school. Elsewhere atrocious practices continue.

Attitudes towards and treatment of the Girl Child are clear indicators of project accomplishments as far as its major social objectives are concerned.

The project's focus on children has resulted in focus on the Girl Child. The results have been very impressive.

We have many cases where Family Planning Operations have been carried out after just one daughter.

Education does not automatically result in future of own choice. More pragmatic interventions (post education) are required

If the position of the Girl Child position has improved, the Government should get full credit for this. At present 92% of school-age children are retained in school.

2.5. Individuality and Person Status

The Coolies were denied an individual identity at the hands of the feudal lords and upper-caste members. The functioning of the Coolie Sangha and weakening of upper-caste oppression has helped the development of individual identity. Prior to this, Coolies were not even accorded the status of human beings. It took the strength of the Group to give us status.

As office-bearers in the Sangha, Coolies acquire person status & individual status. Our experience is that such status established through the Sangha is immediately corrupted by political touts, contractors and agents. Those who were lured by such temptations and left the sangha lost "whatever little they had"...

2.6. Concluding Comments on BCS/ADATS Vision

The vision we developed in 2001 remains relevant and not one word needs to be changed. The vision cannot change as it inspires us to struggle... if we make changes, from where will we get the energy to struggle?



3. Reflections on the BCS/ADATS Mission

The participants reflected on the BCS/ADATS Mission in the first session on 16 April 2008. The Mission as articulated in 2001 is:

ADATS/Coolie Sangha is committed to the unification and organisation of the poor in their struggle for freedom from social oppression and the realisation of a human identity, dignity and citizen status.

Please see APPENDIX-C for detailed notes on the outputs of the six groups of participants.

3.1. Expansion of Membership

Membership is used as a reliable and robust indicator of the Mission achievement. However, boosting membership growth has not been easy and the participants give a rating of 65 to 70% for successful enrolment of members.

The main problem appears to be one of “opportunistic membership”, where new members join only for benefits without any interest in the ideology for which ADATS stands. This is partly due to the competition between field workers who persuade families to join without proper induction, just to improve their own performance figures. Some families join the Coolie Sangha to solve a specific family problem.

Field workers are seen to enrol members with false promises and inadequate disclosure of conditions for benefits. For example, to qualify for child scholarships it is necessary to have two years of continuous membership. When the member realises that the benefit requires this qualification, it lead to a disappointed exit from membership.

It is seen that upper caste members are getting elected as Coolie Sangha functionaries, which is a source of concern, as it means that a platform dedicated to victims of caste oppression is being taken over by the erstwhile oppressors.

When old members drop out, no attempt is made to find out why they are not re-entering.

Income Declaration continues to be a problem and suggests that “Sangha Tax” or member subscription, based on annual income is at the heart of the membership problem.

3.2. Control of Local Government (Grama Panchayat)

Gaining control of the Grama Panchayats is one of the key strategies of the BCS in the achievement of its mission. The participants rate achievement with a score of 70% because there is a feeling that they are able to get their candidates elected but lose control over them after that because a well established system takes over.

After getting elected to the Grama Panchayat with the support of the Coolie Sangha, members invariably get corrupted and realize too late that it was not their personal qualities but their Coolie Sangha mass-base which elevated them to power.

Sometimes CSUs are unable to understand why political parties approach them and offer a seat on their ticket. In fact this is done only to fill a reserve quota and is an indirect method of capturing a vote bank.

A solid sense of citizenry is rapidly developing, although there are specific problems in specific areas. For example, the feudal background in Chintamani has caused some instability when compared with Bagepalli.



3.3. Status of Women

While performance is given a relatively high rating of 80%, it is felt that women appear to be unable to use opportunities created for them to acquire and exercise authority.

Although women are accorded respect and status at the Sangha level, there is no difference in their treatment at home. They are “treated like dirt at family level”. This erodes their self-confidence and consequently their performance at the Sangha drops.

At least some of the women functionaries (VHWs, Cheque Signatories & WC Members) act irresponsibly while discharging their duties. This weakens women as a whole.

Over the years, the use of veto power [by women], which is intended to give women control over CCF decisions has eroded.

3.4. Coolie Credit Fund (CCF) Performance

CCF Performance is given a rating of 50 to 60% which is just above average. It is felt that borrowers are “Unnecessarily dishonest in stating loan purpose”.

The performance of the CCF could improve considerably if ADATS staff does a better job of loan appraisals including borrower capacity and quality of meeting where the loan was passed. The follow-up on loan utilisation by staff is quite unsatisfactory at present.

It is a matter of concern that loans are taken with group guarantee but repayments become a purely private and personal affair.

3.5. Women's Fund

Despite the creation of a dedicated “Women's Fund” its application and use is far from satisfactory as seen from the performance rating of 20 to 40%. The Mahila Meeting is prompt in releasing Women's Fund but very weak in monitoring & support.

Poor beneficiary selection appears to be a serious problem.

It is seen that when the Sangha tries to help a single woman, either her husband who had discarded her suddenly re-appears or some strange man claims a relationship and appears on the scene.

It has not been entirely unknown for ADATS staff to extract sexual favours from women beneficiaries of Women's Fund.



4. Major Changes in the Work Environment

Internally the BCS/ADATS has become result-oriented and has learnt to use the Logical Framework Approach and computerised data. Results have now replaced rhetoric.

The field of Carbon Emission Reduction projects has ushered in a new vista with huge potential. This area is under study at present with some bio-gas and horticulture projects.

There are instances of Coolie Youth bringing new ideas into the Coolie Sangha. There are also cases of Coolie Youth taking part in Coolie Sangha struggles.

Forced migration does not happen any more.

4.1. Women's Status

Despite the status accorded to women in the Coolie Sangha structures, women's status has not improved in the home.

Village women are learning to organise and manage their homes like urban housewives and have begun to use convenience products and services. Women now have many small business opportunities before them and are subjected to less domestic work and drudgery.

The BCS has been promoting the registration of property in the name of women, as property ownership is associated with social status. However, this has not been an entirely successful drive and has been given a low performance rating of 20%

The main reasons cited are:

- ❖ Heavy expenses (Stamp Duty, Registration Charges)
- ❖ Husbands themselves don't have proper titles. Property is still in the name of other family members
- ❖ No umbrella laws to encourage this
- ❖ Macho interpretation of existing laws (by officials) prevail in such transfers

4.2. Coolie Youth

While the BCS has traditionally had programmes for Coolie men, Coolie women and Coolie children, Coolie Youth have not formally been considered as a separate category.

“Neither ADATS Staff nor the Coolie Sangha has bothered about youth as a category”

There has been a change in this stance with the start-up of a “Youth Meeting” by the BCS/ADATS.



4.2.1. Aspirations of Coolie Youth

Coolie Youth have begun showing an interest in the Coolie Sangha and trying to understand its history. They are now seeking membership in the Coolie Sangha and showing an interest to take leadership roles.

Some youth are interested in local job opportunities and there is a general move towards breaking out of caste-ascribed occupations. Spoken English and life-skills are seen to be essential for moving out of such occupations.

The youth are actively being wooed by the Yuva Sena as part of the BJP strategy.

4.2.2. Segmentation of Coolie Youth

“Youth” is not a single, monolithic category. The table below shows the various segmentations and the participants’ estimate of the usefulness of these segments for the Coolie Sangha:

CATEGORY	SC/ST	Middle	Upper
1. School Finished and now in City Jobs	V. Useful	+/-	Very Selfish
2. School Finished and in Village – Positive	+/-	Useful for Sangha	Very Few
3. School Finished and in Village – Negative	Spoil their lives	Try to spoil Sangha, mostly fail. Sangha does not trust them	
4. School Dropout in Village - Employed	Normal Members		
5. Youth in Mofussil Colleges			

There are educated youth, uneducated youth, those who remain in villages and those who go to cities. Youth in city jobs have a good impact on CS. The SC/ST Youth support their family in at least 75% of cases. This is a higher rate than in the case of upper caste youth.

Youth who have dropped out of school and remain in the village are good for the CS. They have no opportunity to be bad. Touts don’t want them. They are already involved in economic pursuits. As parents get old, these youth become CS members. Youth in city jobs will never become members.

The BCS/ADATS will be preparing a strategic plan for the Youth to incorporate this source of energy into the organisation.



5. SWOT Analysis

The SWOT Analysis was first carried out in 2001 for the BCS/ADATS Strategic Review. The exercise was repeated at this Strategic Review to understand what new opportunities and threats face the organisation today.

The exercise was conducted in two parts. In the first part, the six groups were asked to list what they perceived to be the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

In the second part, the internal environment (Strengths and Weaknesses) were matched against the external environment (Opportunities and Threats) to see how Strengths can be used to take advantage of opportunities and overcome Threats.

5.1. Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities & Threats

The table below shows the elements listed by the participants in six groups and then integrated:

STRENGTH	WEAKNESS	OPPORTUNITY	THREAT
1. Loyal & Committed Membership	1. Fluctuating Membership	1. Learning from DLDP for EGA	1. Vote getting split on caste lines
2. Political recognition	2. Inability to make GP members accountable	2. Leveraging Govt. Funds	2. Family pressure on active coolie women
3. Women protecting their health	3. Some villages have no Sangha Funds	3. Access to Policy Makers	3. Corruption by mainstream forces
4. Visible assets of Organisation		4. Commercial Carbon Moneys & CDM	4. Obstruction by Govt. Officials
5. Strong village Male & Female cadre	5. Turnover of village functionaries	5. New factories & jobs in project area (National Highway, Bangalore International Airport etc.)	5. Drought – continuous and extended
6. Volume of Sangha Funds	6. Lack of specialised staff	6. Chance to change land use practices	6. Heavy fluctuation in cash crop prices
7. Good 2-way and bottom-up flow of information	7. Inadequate political/ GP Coverage – Population Coverage		7. BJP come to power at state level
8. Result oriented management system	8. Lack of Management Staff		
9. Good databank and MIS	9. Inability to meet legitimate member demands		
10. Information on wider development	10. Staff covering up problems/ mistakes		
11. Identity & Respect	11. Rituals & Superstitions		
12. Openness & Transparency	12. Lack of vital documents with members (Voter ID, Land Documents)		
13. Functional Unity in Village CS	13. Irregular village meetings		
14. Learning Organisation	14. Citizen status not fully obtained		
15. Good Donor Partners	15. Youth not involved		
16. Track Record of Success			
17. Firmly Rooted Ideology			



5.1.1. Notes on Weaknesses

Weakness: 1. Fluctuating Membership

This is due to about 15% newly formed sanghas. What is the tolerance level at which we should get alarmed?

Weakness: 3. Some villages have less Sangha Funds

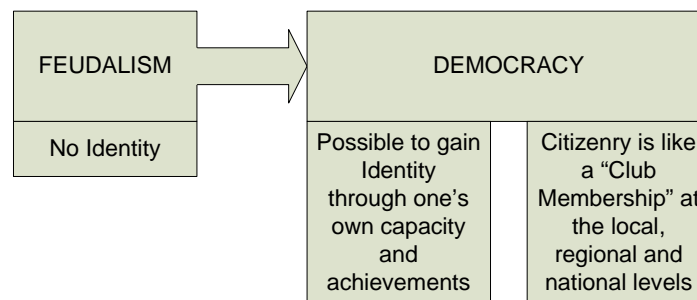
This situation is due to uneven ages of village CSUs. Top-up grants used to level disparities in Sangha Fund availability has been discontinued.

We need to devise processes to make new members remain in the organisation on for the required minimum period of 2 years?

For Chintamani – 122 out of 500 functioning villages (Bagepalli 150) which represents 25% of area of operations, local body electoral politics NOT on their agenda. Sangha has been co-opted by warring problem

5.1.2. Citizen Status

There was a brief discussion on Citizen Status. Ram presented the following model which traces the growth of identity in the transition from feudalism to democracy:



Citizenship is membership in a society, community, (originally a city or town but now usually a country) and carries with it rights to political participation; a person having such membership is a citizen. The term Active Citizenship implies working towards the betterment of one's community through economic participation, public service, volunteer work, and other such efforts to improve life for all citizens².

BCS/ADATS has realised the need for ensuring that all members have the identification and other evidences required to prove that they are citizens and can participate in political processes and welfare programmes of the Government.

² <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Citizenship>

5.2. Derivation of Strategic Priorities

In a rigorous exercise, the workshop participants derived their Strategic Priorities systematically, based on the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats they had identified.

		Internal Environment	
		STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
External Environment	OPPORTUNITIES	<p><u>INVEST</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ensure transparent and honest implementation of EGA, using our 23 year long experience under the total control of respective work gangs 2. Capture PRI Bodies through electoral contest 3. Ensure corruption-free delivery of State Welfare Resources 4. Develop more pro-poor CDM Projects 5. Facilitate the induction of large-scale manufacturing units and industrial capital in CS Villages through Coolie Sangha Strategic Partnerships 6. Leverage carbon resources for large scale shift from field crops to tree crops 	<p><u>DECIDE</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Obtain citizen vital documents for each individual in Coolie Sangha 2. Expand existing credit programmes within CS (CCFR, WF etc.) into full-fledged Livelihood Programmes (Management & Technical); and appoint specialised and management staff to provide fresh impetus and technical guidance
	THREATS	<p><u>DEFEND</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Each Village CSU will evaluate rituals and customs to determine whether it is divisive or unifying practice 2. Take direct action against politicians and caste leaders who split voters on caste lines 3. Ensure accountability of CS Winners in PRI and prevent their being co-opted 4. Use political clout of CS and allies to keep Government officials under check 	<p><u>DAMAGE CONTROL/DIVEST</u></p>

SWOT analysis is not a one-time exercise. It is an integral part of the organisation's strategy and must be periodically revisited to assess external and internal changes on the road to goal achievement.

