



QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER VOL. 2 JAN - MAR 2022

VALAM

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Point
of View



Happy
Beneficiaries



Events



Green
Biz

VAAZHNDHU KAATTUVOM PROJECT

Point of View



M. Pallavi Baldev, I.A.S.

Chief Executive Officer (i/c)
Vaazhndhu Kaattuvom Project, Chennai

Dear Readers,

As we enter the year 2022, we can look forward to new beginnings. With the project name changing to Vaazhndhu Kaattuvom from the Tamil Nadu Rural Transformation Project, we also look forward to new changes on the field. The name has changed but the project's essence remains the same.

The previous year, 2021, was difficult for our beneficiaries, who were still reeling from the after-effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. The project had provided them with technical and financial assistance packages to support their work. Several of the initiatives that began with this assistance are still thriving or have risen to greater heights today.

As we enter this new quarter (January–March 2022), we expect a brighter future for our beneficiaries. They have benefitted tremendously from our several CFS and CSS initiatives. This has allowed them to set up their own enterprises, or become part of groups or collectives. Some of the beneficiaries who participated in the CSS and CFS initiatives have also used their skills to become trainers themselves.

During the quarter January–March 2022, about 384 CSS were formed and 8,651 youth were trained at a cost of about Rs.2.85 crores. Similarly, 959 CFS were formed and 29,159 producers were trained at a cost of Rs.6.46 crores.

The project has also supported enterprises creation, in terms of Enterprise Groups (EGs), Producer Groups (PGs) and Producer

GROUP FORMATION
1,352 PGs, 380 EGs &
20 new PCs

TRAINED
29,159 producers &
8,651 youth

Collectives (PCs). During the quarter, about 1,352 PGs were formed with an outlay of Rs 10.14 crores, 380 EGs were created at an outlay of Rs. 2.85 crores and 20 new PCs were registered under the Companies Act.

The ultimate aim of the project will be that the government can stop its handholding support and the units created can function and sustain by themselves. However, for this we have a long way to go. I am hopeful that the project will provide a good impetus to create a start-up culture in the rural economy that can be self-sustaining in the long run. I am looking forward to seeing a lot more momentum to the Vaazhndhu Kaattuvom project in the coming months.

PRODUCER COLLECTIVE

BIZ IMPROVEMENT BY A RISE IN PRODUCTIVITY



G. Karikalan, Director,
Nachalur Farmer Producer Company, Nangavaram Panchayat, Kulithalai Block, Karur

For an FPO that earned over Rs.1.40 crores in 2020-21, it has very simple and achievable business goals. With Rs.10 lakhs grant from VKP, it bought a rotator, 2 pulverizers, meat mincer (for making amino acid fertilizer) and a flour mill. They also spent Rs.1 lakh on labelling and branding its oils, and created a website www.nfpcl.in. Of course, it requires a lot of improvement but their loyal customers love it! Orders are pouring in from a loyal customer base in Mumbai, Chennai, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Trichy and Coimbatore. The FPO has now submitted a proposal to the district team to link with delivery apps, and partner with other commercial outlets.



SCALING UP PROVES PROFITABLE FOR THIS PG



M. Nirmala, Erayamangalam Farmer Producer Group,
A. Erayamangalam Panchayat, Tiruchengode Block, Namakkal

About 60 women formed a producer group in September 2021. Each owns a coconut farm. By selling for Rs.9 to Rs.12/piece, they earned a profit of Rs.12,000 in January 2022. Thankfully, there's no off-season for coconut. So, there was no dearth of demand. Future plan is to start making chekku oil on a large scale. They received Rs.75,000 as grant from VKP. But it isn't enough to buy machinery, raw materials, rent/buy a place and lock it for production. District team has offered to guide them in business development. Until then, their focus is to become a sustainable enterprise.



SUCCESS SMELLS SWEET FOR THIS ENTERPRISE!



C.Geetha, CEO, Mannvayal Farmer Producer Company Ltd
Sreemadurai Panchayat, Gudalur Block, the Nilgiris

With Rs.10 lakhs grant, this FPO installed a nursery in 2021 where pepper, cardamom, coffee beans, betel nut, mango, jackfruit and banana are grown. With over 4,000 saplings, it raked in Rs. 2.63 lakhs worth of sales between June and September. Rest of the year, it sells flowers – varieties of rose, bougainvillea, chrysanthemum, etc. The collective also extracts coconut oil and processes paddy seeds to sell varieties of rice. A total income of Rs.3 lakhs in 2019 helped them tide over difficult times in 2020. VKP trained them in value-addition, which has enabled the PC to look beyond plants and flowers.



VISIBILITY AND RESPECT, THE MANTRA FOR SUCCESS



P. Periyar, Chettikkadu Farmer Producer Group,
Thaanthaani Panchayat, Aranthaangi Block, Pudukkottai

With Rs.1.50 lakhs, this PG with 100 members bought power weeder, sprayer, seeds and other farming essentials. Renting out this equipment to members earns them Rs.8,000-10,000/year per equipment. Their profit is from the sale at wholesale markets. For instance, the group sold 120 kilos of vegetables for Rs.8,500, for a profit of Rs.1,400-1,750. During lockdowns, it successfully did door-delivery of vegetables in and around the Panchayat. It helped the PG gain visibility and respect.



ACHIEVING ECONOMIES OF SCALE BY COMBINING EFFORTS!



G. Kripa, Vasantham Vazhai Producer Group,
Servaikaranmadam Panchayat, Thoothukudi Block, Thoothukudi

This all-women group with 35 members started in 2021 with a start-up grant of Rs.75,000. They grow banana and turmeric alternatively due to seasonality. Just before Pongal, they sent 35,000 turmeric plants to Andhra and Maharashtra, for Rs.25/piece, with Rs.5 profit. Direct market linkages facilitated by the district team made this possible. Their future plan is on value-addition in both banana and turmeric. This will generate additional income and enable sustainability. They participated in 2-day training in business promotion, sales and marketing, account maintenance, etc. They have been encouraged to form an FPO or join one. The district team has offered to train them in value-addition – in both banana and turmeric – for additional income and sustainability.



ENTERPRISE GROUP SNACKING UP A PROFIT! THIS GROUP SHOWS HOW!



S. Meenakshi, Unavagam Enterprise Group,
Sevarapoondi Panchayat, Chetper Block, Tiruvannamalai

For this group of 20 women, Rs.1.50 lakhs helped them restart their eatery at a busy junction on the Polur-Chennai main road. They run this enterprise in a batch of 5 on a rotational basis. Their earnings per day is Rs,1,000–1,500. It increases during festival time. They also take orders for lunch, beverages and native snack items for meetings and workshops held at the Block Development Office, Government Hospital, Tahsildar Office, and many others. Requests (Rs.3,000–4,000/order) pour in from in and around the Panchayat for auspicious occasions and also from government departments. Rather than scaling up, the group wants to focus on making this a sustainable enterprise.



THEIR SUCCESS STORY IS AS 'ARPUTHAM' AS THEIR PRODUCTS!



**B. Nirmala Devi, Punganur Women's Enterprise Group,
Punganur Panchayat, Manikandam Block, Trichy**

This story begins with 15 women, who started this group in 2021. Their specialty is making pickles, varieties of vadagam, and masala powders. VKP trained them via IB-RSETI to run this enterprise, and gave them Rs.1 lakh grant as start-up fund. Arputham is the name of their brand, which the district team helped in labelling and branding. In 2022, they sent 450 kg of mutton pickle to Bengaluru in batches. All their products are organic. No chemical preservatives/colours used. Their monthly profits has increased from Rs.4,000 initially to Rs.6,000–7,000 currently. Project staff was so impressed with their efforts that they offered another grant of Rs.70,000. The group wants to expand their operations but do not want to rush it. They believe in slow and sustainable progress.



UPSKILLING AND RE-SKILLING HAS EARNED HIM MORE OPPORTUNITIES AND INCOME



Tamilarasan

Thindamangalam village, Omalur block, Salem

He has been making sarees on a loom since he was a young boy. His family owns a power loom, but it was always under repair and the cost of repairing it was high. As he had no knowledge of repairing, he wished to learn the skill himself. VKP conducted a 30-day training in repair and installation of under pick power loom and making saree on the loom. After undergoing training, he undertook installation and repair works in the village and was able to earn Rs. 15,000 per loom repaired. Now, he earns additional income from repair work, in addition to managing his own loom.



EVENTS AND WORKSHOPS



VKP Signs MoUs with Knowledge Partners

Vaazhndhu Kaattuvom Project (VKP), Chennai, entered into MoUs with Tamil Nadu Agricultural University (TNAU), Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu Veterinary and Animal Science University (TANUVAS), Chennai, Madras School of Social Work (MSSW) and Entrepreneurship Development Institute of India - Tiruchirappalli Agribusiness Incubation Forum (EDII-TABIF). This collaboration would link 'lab to land and land to lab', and help women farmers increase productivity and also reduce input cost in farming livestock and allied sectors.



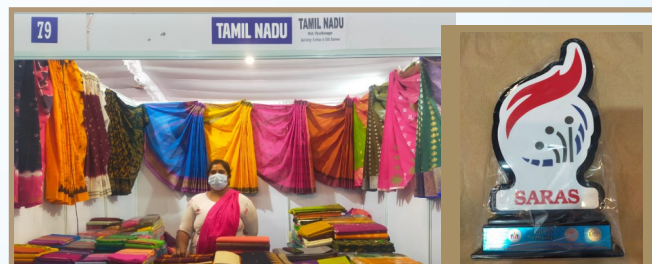
CEO Visits CSS Workshop in Tiruvannamalai

The CEO-VKP, Tmt. Pallavi Baldev I.A.S., visited a Community Skill School (CSS) on Aari embroidery at Inamkariyandhal Panchayat, Thuringapuram Block, and Tiruvannamalai. Classes were held for a month, starting in January, 2022. She interacted with trainees and enquired about their future plans. They said that a few members are planning to form an Enterprise Group.



Telangana Govt's SARAS Shield Awarded to SHG in Virudhunagar

Kasturbai Women's Self Help Group from Virudhunagar was awarded the SARAS Shield by Telangana State Government for their excellent display and sale of goods at the Hyderabad Saras Mela. The group raked in sales worth Rs.4.28 lakhs at the 15-day mela, which concluded on 3 Jan 2022.



Samplings Planted as Part of Women's Day Celebrations

On International Women's day 2022, the Salem district team in association with Horticulture Department contributed towards a green environment by planting 500 saplings and distributing 500 seed balls to a total of 1,000 members in 7 project blocks (Omalur, Tharamangalam, Mechari, Panamarathupatti, Veerapandi, Attur, and Sangagiri). Around 3,000 SHG members participated in this activity.



Workshop to Make Lantana Furniture in Erode

As a part of CSS initiative in Erode, VKP conducted a workshop on making lantana furniture for 30 people from the tribal community in Thalavadi Block. District Collector, Thiru. H. Krishnanunni I.A.S., visited the workshop and interacted with the participants



Start-Up Fund Sanctioned by District Collector in Nagai

Nagapattinam District Collector Dr. Arun Thamburaj I.A.S., sanctioned a start-up fund of Rs.4 lakhs for two beneficiaries at Kollapadu Village in Thalainayaru Block. He also interacted with the beneficiaries involved in mushroom cultivation, black gram and also jute bag making.



Two-Day Capacity Building Programme Held for VKP District and Block Level Staff

VKP conducted a 2-day training programme on capacity building for district and block level staff from all Project districts during Jan 7–8, 2022, to form EG, PG and PC. The project has a vision to create more group enterprises that are sustainable and reliable, so that beneficiaries can have a favourable eco-system to execute their business plan. Activity plan, business plan, resource mobilisation, management and governance were the other topics covered.



Three-Day Training in Entrepreneurship Development at Erode

The district team in Erode conducted a 3-day training programme on Entrepreneurship Development for 35 Skilled Youth Migrant Returnees – all new entrepreneurs from 18 Panchayat, who have repaid their loan in full. It began with a session by an expert from EDII-TN and a team from DIC, on beginning and running an enterprise successfully. It also focused on preparing a business plan, expanding the business, process of availing government welfare schemes and subsidies, following government rules and regulations.



Livelihood Linkages to Coir Factory for the Differently-abled in Trichy

About 20 visually challenged beneficiaries in Trichy have been given livelihood linkages to a coir factory, thanks to the efforts of the district team. The factory exports tablets of compressed coir waste. Beneficiaries have to fill packets with coir waste and place it on a mat. Each beneficiary will earn Rs.100–200/day. They do not have to leave their homes to do this. Pick-up and delivery of coir waste and all necessary condiments will be done by the factory and sent to a common place where they want to congregate and finish the job.



Ten-Day CSS Training in Making Phenyl, Benzoin, Held at Trichy

A 10-day CSS training was conducted at Podangupatti Panchayat in Trichy. It began on 14 February, 2022. About 35 participants (34 women) are being trained in making incense sticks, phenyl, benzoin, washing powder and candles at RSETI. Around 20 are already part of an EG. The district team will offer technical support and guidance in skill building for the remaining participants to start enterprises. It will also facilitate in forming EGs and provide market linkages.



Thirty Visually Challenged in Trichy Receive Training Materials in Braille

Training materials in braille and a memory card with audio recording for making phenol, soap oil, bleaching powder and incense sticks were handed over to 30 visually challenged beneficiaries in Trichy. As a part of the CSS initiative, the district team had organized a 10-day training programme for them in Manikandam Block. The team had also designed labels for the products, and will soon formulate a plan to market them. A proposal to sell their products in schools has been prepared to be submitted to the Collector.



Forty SPARKs Participate in a Programme on Pulses in Virudhunagar

On World Pulses Day (10 February), VKP-Virudhunagar and KVK organized a programme at KVK premises in Aruppukkottai. It focused on varieties of pulses and their nutritional aspects, seed hardening, inter-crop cultivation, value addition of pulses, seed treatment and soil application. About 40 SPARKs participated in it. A handbook titled 'Pulses Package of Practices' was released by KVK's Regional Director.



Skill Gap Analysis and Apprentice Programme Held at Collectorate Office, Villupuram

One of the ways the project team enables unemployed educated youth to find jobs is via Youth Skill Convergence. Under this initiative, the District Skill Training Office trains candidates and finds them placements, as per their skill sets. On March 2, a Skill Gap Analysis and Apprentice programme was conducted at the Industrial Association Meeting in Collectorate office, Villupuram, in which representatives such as welders, automobile engineers, mechanical engineers, garments factory owners, textile and leather manufacturers, from 22 industries participated.



New EG Formed in Thoothukudi with 18 Women Dairy Farmers

The district team in Thoothukudi mobilized 18 women dairy farmers from Maravanmadam Panchayat into an Enterprise Group. With start-up fund of Rs.75,000 from the project, Shakti Enterprise Group has now opened a centre in Thoothukudi Block to sell milk from indigenous cows. The team has also offered technical support in getting UDYAM registration for the EG, branding and labelling, and other business development services including accounts maintenance, and group management. The centre was inaugurated by Joint Director-Enterprise Ecosystem Development.



Kurumba Women Trained in Traditional Painting Techniques

Under the Community Skill School (CSS) initiative, 30 Kurumba Women from Kizhkothagiri were trained for 20 days in their traditional Kurumba painting techniques (portraying religious rituals, honey gathering expeditions, traditional ways of harvesting and festivals of KURUMBA TRIBES). Each painting and frame is unique and tells a story from their lives. While this has been traditionally practiced by men, women are also being introduced to it to preserve this art form. Steps to market and put these Kurumba paintings in exhibitions are being planned. Further, there is a proposal to form an Enterprise Group of the 30 women.



Trainings to ToT Given by NITTTR

As part of the Community Skill Schools initiative, the VKP in association National Institute of Technical Teachers' Training and Research (NITTTR), Chennai, provided upskilling training on Aari Embroidery to 20 women from 10 districts at Nachimuthu Polytechnic, Pollachi. The participating women will in turn train their peers in their own districts to promote rural enterprises. In addition to this, trainings were given to ToTs on electric trade and vehicle mechanic trades. In total, about 60 beneficiaries from 10 districts benefitted, 20 each under each trade.



Nagai Dist. Collector Flags off Exhibition for VKP Beneficiaries as part of Govt's Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav

In order to commemorate Govt's Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav, Nagapattinam District Collector Dr. Arun Thamburaj I.A.S., flagged off an exhibition to promote and sell beneficiaries' products, during March 19–25, 2022. Five groups supported by Project namely Narmatha Enterprise Group, Akkaraipettai, Royal Enterprise Group, North Poigainallur, Mariyal Enterprise Group, South Poigainallur Panchayat, Sri Seethalamman Enterprise Group, Pappakoil Panchayat and Thiruvaidaimaruthoor Mushroom Producer Group, all participated in this event. Value-added products such as mushroom soup, snacks items, palm sugar and palm products, cloth bags and dry fish were exhibited. Nearly 3,200 people visited this sangamam.





Plant Clinics

- A potential tool for technical service delivery and build agri-business in Producer Collectives

According to an estimate of Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in 2015, up to 25% of annual production loss was due to disease and pests in India. Timely diagnosis of various problems (pest, disease, nutritional deficiencies) is necessary to minimize production losses. To address these gaps, community-based Plant Clinics were established in Tamil Nadu in 2012 by M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF) in partnership with the Centre for Agriculture and Bioscience International (CABI).

Plant Clinic model

Plant Clinic is an innovative, farmer-friendly agricultural extension model that has been piloted by MSSRF in Tamil Nadu, Odisha and Maharashtra, in 2012. Plant Clinic is tablet-mediated extension system conducted in a common location at a village twice a month for the small and marginal farmers by trained plant doctors. These doctors are agricultural extension officers and progressive farmers who diagnose pests and diseases of the affected crops and provide appropriate recommendations.

The minimum necessary tools for conducting the plant clinics are a laptop and a digital microscope to support in accurate diagnosis of the issue as well as train the farmers on what is the pest/disease/any other issues. Here, a microscope (with a magnification of 300x) is used for diagnosing the exact problem in the crop. Farmers are able to view the tiny pests and symptoms of diseases, projected through laptop or a projector.

Timely advice by the plant doctors enables the farmers to reduce losses or even increase crop yield. The plant doctor also shares information on preventive measures that help the farmers select appropriate disease-resistant crop varieties, source clean planting material, use additional inputs and change labour practices. Farmers are also educated to distinguish between symptoms caused by insects, diseases, and nutrient deficiencies, and to understand the harmful effects of red-labelled/banned pesticides, pest resurgence, resistant to pesticides.

Through the Plant Clinics, an array of technological solutions which are nationally and internationally permissible, ecologically safe, and environmentally sustainable for mitigating crop loss and enhancing plant health, are given to farmers.

MSSRF's outreach in Plant Clinics

MSSRF currently runs 41 Plant Clinics covering 210 villages in Tamil Nadu, Puducherry, Assam, Odisha and Kerala. At present, 38 trained plant doctors including 19 women are conducting the plant clinic sessions. Till March 2020, 2,462 Plant Clinic sessions conducted, 39,377 farmers including 6,612 women farmers received advisories from the plant doctors. So far 34,479 samples analysed and provided recommendations to the farmers.

Key Results

A specific outcome study indicates that

- About 40% of the farmers after visiting the plant clinic shifted the pest management practices from complete chemicals to IPM practices.
- Farmers are practicing a combination of preventive methods and bio inputs.
- Reduction in input cost up to 55–65%
- 45% of the farmers realized reduction in economic loss during production process.
- 56% of farmers realized increased income between Rs. 10,000 to 150,00 per Ha
- Knowledge enhancement among farmers on plant health is visible and has led to behavioural changes.
- Farmers have improved negotiation capacity with Agro -input dealers due to their increased knowledge on agro-chemicals.

Under the Covid-19 pandemic context, due to the lock down and travel restriction conditions, online plant clinics were tested and fine-tuned . This ensured continuous access to pest-management-advisories to farmers to adopt scientific knowledge-based management practices.

Relevance to VKP's work: We introduced this Plant Clinic concept through Farmer Producer Organization as one of the services to its shareholders to provide timely and quality advisory services. Further, to accelerate the FPO's agribusiness potential in terms of inputs such as seeds (right variety), agro-chemicals and biological inputs, the advisories from the Plant Clinics was used as a strategy. More importantly, in this pandemic context, farmers' access to reliable and demand-based plant health diagnosis and advisories can be ensured through on-line/virtual mode.

As a way forward, we plan to take up this initiative among select PCs in different districts in the state and would like to partner with VKP promoted PCs in this initiative.





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