

Summary of RVSDA Activities (October 2012-July 2013)

This report provides a summary update on the RVSDA Project for the period October 2012 to July 2013. The report focuses on activities undertaken in overall project planning and key areas of activity – natural resource management, institutional strengthening, agriculture, other livelihoods, education and research.

Grassroots Institutional Strengthening

The first *sangha* that was set up in Mandemvaripalle hamlet in June 2009 was consolidated and strengthened which led to the registration of the *sangha* as a Trust. It is now the Sri Gopi Rythu Trust with 14 members all of who are small and marginal farmers and /or pastoralists. The sangha has been working towards making local livelihoods of dairying and pastoralism more sustainable by attempting to produce locally and consume locally, strengthening their links with local markets and asserting their rights over traditional grazing grounds.

The sangha now operates a small business that sells milk and feed and it also maintains a seed bank of indigenous varieties of grains and vegetables. It sells close to 600 litres of milk on a daily basis to the Rishi Valley School, REC and customers in Madanapalle. To ensure that the milk is of a high quality they also produce their own cattle feed from local grains and oilseeds thereby stimulating local production. The sangha also commands the highest price for milk in Madanapalle due to its quality.

A second collective has been formed in Arogyapuram Hamlet with support from FES and the focus of this collective will be to improve livelihoods (focussing primarily on reviving millet and other dryland crops cultivation) through conservation of water resources.

Natural Resource Management

The Central Government supported IWMP programme (Integrated Watershed Management Programme) is in its second year of implementation in the RVSDA. This programme, being implemented by Foundation for Ecological Security (FES) is being monitored by RVEC through its presence on the Advisory Board of the programme. Rainwater harvesting structures, animal water troughs, desilting of water channels, strengthening and consolidation of local institutions such as womens' groups and formation of collectives in various hamlets are some of the activities being undertaken under this programme. Under this programme protection of the commons particularly grazing grounds is being taken up. This is being done through a mapping of common property resources in the area and their registration with the Government.

The Sri Gopi Rythu Trust has successfully protected a hillock (traditional grazing area for 3 hamlets) in its hamlet from fires for 3 successive years. Shrubs and trees of local plant varieties have started appearing from pre-existing rootstocks. School children in the hamlet have also been involved in protection of the hillock from fires.

Forest dependent communities in the area have successfully asserted their community rights of access to the Reserved Forests under the Restoration of Forest Rights Act, 2006. Revised documentation to formally register these rights have been submitted to the Sub-Collector's office for further action.

Conservation of local, indigenous breeds of cattle, poultry, sheep and goat is being taken up by first documenting the various breeds and their phenotypica characteristics in the area.

Agriculture

Production of millets has been stimulated in the RVSDA in the second successive year through distribution of close to 56 kgs of seeds of local millet varieties. This was distributed to a new set of farmers in 2013. In 2012, 85 kgs of millet seeds had been distributed to farmers who saved seeds for the current year. Arrangements for processing of millet grain into rice were made by RVEC to enable the community to integrate millets into their daily diet thereby improving the nutritional security of the community. Promotion of dryland crop cultivation is also aimed at promoting soil moisture and water conservation.

Under the IWMP programme, the State Government has sanctioned a millet dehusking machine. This will be installed in Mandemvaripalle hamlet for use by all residents of the Thettu Panchayat. The machine is likely to be installed by mid-August 2013. Efforts at promoting agroecological practices of farming continue with more farmers expressing interest in moving away from chemical based farming.

Education and Research

As part of capacity building and education efforts in the RVSDA, exposure visits were conducted to an organic cattle feed manufacturing unit in Palamner, millet processing unit in Kadiri and an indigenous cattle dairy in Tamil Nadu.

Capacity building through sharing of experiences is also being facilitated by RVEC. The first district level meeting of small and marginal farmers' groups from K.B.V Puram, V.Kota, and Kurabalakota mandals was held in Kalahasthi to exchange experiences and develop a collective vision and strategy for promotion of traditional livelihoods in a sustainable manner. This was done in collaboration with Anthra, Hyderabad.

To build grassroots capacity in governance and legislation some farmers were selected for a training programme organised by the Government on identification and listing of common lands under the Prohibitory Order Book of the Revenue Department.

Farmers from the RVSDA also participate routinely in meetings on Food Security and Sovereignty organised by the Adivasi Aikya Vedika. This year the meeting held in East Godavari led to the production of a street play on food security and sovereignty.

Dr. Radha Gopalan was invited by MANTHAN-Livelihoods Network based in XIMB, Bhubaneswar (supported by Ford Foundation) to participate in a discussion on the creation of a livelihoods curriculum for management institutions.