

Economic Alternatives for Surrendered Poachers in Nilambur Forest , Kerala. A new project initiated by Saathi-Mumbai.

About Saathi

Saathi is a six year old Mumbai based NGO addressing issues of homelessness with a specific focus on Runaway Boys and Girls. The various facets of the adolescent's life while they face challenges of survival are addressed by the organization, be it economic alternatives, housing alternatives, health, education, and rebuilding connections with self, family and society at large.

Building on its collective experience last year Saathi also initiated a project in Gujarat facilitating coping skills of young children after the series of violence that they had experienced. The organisation has also played a key role as a resource organisation for the State of Maharashtra for the Campaign on Quality Institutional Care and Alternatives for Children where issues related to children in institutions and community based alternatives were being discussed and networking facilitated between grassroot organisations and the Government.

Exploring new avenues, applying learnings and sharing experiences have been core values with Saathi. We are now in the process of relating our experiences with the young people we work with to a new group (surrendered poachers) in a forest zone in Kerala. This is going to be a pilot project for one year where Saathi will offer consultancy in setting up the programme and during that phase all the involved partners will get more clarity on role specifications and the need for an NGO presence in this model. This model is addressing key issues of conservation and employment generation and the linkages between the two.

A Background note about Nilambur

Nilambur is famous for its teak forests. The area is also blessed with the presence of all types of forests like Tropical forests, Evergreen forests, Bamboo forests and Grass Lands and all these areas are rich in bio-diversity both in terms of Flora and Fauna. It is for this reason that the Western Ghats (which includes the Nilambur region) has been declared as one of the 18 mega bio-diversity hot spots by IUCN. There exists a long history of scientific forest management here for more than a century, with the oldest teak plantation in the world-The Conolly's Plot. Due to economic depression in the area these forests have been subject to poaching.

Geographic Location:

Nilambur town is situated north of Calicut , on the Bangalore Ooty road. The area forms a valley surrounded by hills. On the western side is the Waynad forest, the eastern side touches the Silent Valley National Park and on the northern side lies the Mukkuruthi Wild Life Sanctuary and Muthumulai Forest Area.

Rationale of the Project

The Nilambur area is rich in valuable teak. The pressures of large populations and extreme poverty have led to people illegally felling timber resulting in losses of crores of rupees and damaging the ecology of the area. In the past few years the range of criminal offences connected to poaching have varied from 350 to 900 annually. It is expected that once the livelihood needs of regular timber

smugglers are taken care of it will result in these numbers dropping drastically. About 150 such people have already surrendered before the Forest department in the last few months and have shown a motivation to try and look at other options for themselves. As per a Central Government directive, these people along with other stake holders have already been organized into 3 Vana Samrakshana Samithies. And these VSS units are organized under a nodal agency called the Nilambur North Forest Development Agency. This body will act as a resource mobilization unit tapping both the Government and private sectors for funds for the conservation and development of forests with the participation of local stakeholders.

Objectives of the Project

- 1.To tap the huge eco-tourism potential of the Nilambur forest area with private participation.
- 2.To wean away regular timber smugglers into sustainable and legal ways of livelihood.
- 3.To explore possibilities of training these ex-poachers to become tourist guides thus building on some of their existing skills.
- 4.To generate employment / income generation opportunities for the local population.
- 5.To conduct training programmes for these people and facilitate entrepreneurship.
- 6.To demonstrate a model whereby responsible development and eco-sensitive tourism can flourish with partnerships between the Government, NGOs and Private companies.
- 7.To preserve the local heritage in the face of depressed economics and outside forces.

Activities Planned

This is going to be a Pilot Project for a period of one year.

From the group of 150 surrendered people, 40 will be selected for the first batch of training. The training will be conducted for a period of two months. The range of issues in relation to self, their environment and potential alternatives will be explored. At least 100 people will be reached out to during this project.

An orientation will first be given to clarify expectations and purpose of this training. A module will evolve out of this. Eventually one hopes to develop teams of tourist guides and tribal forest guards whose role will be to keep a watch on other illegal activities in the forest. The first phase of the project involves facilitating a trial trek scheduled for April 1st week, to be organized by the local VSS members under the guidance of the Forest department.

Partners in the Project

This project will be conducted jointly by Inheritance India (a private company associated with issues of conservation), the Forest Department, the local organizations (VSS) and Saathi.

Funds Required

Initial Rs 25,000 – Rs 50,000 for exposure trips for the teams and sample treks.

Phased Rs 8 lakhs to begin with.

Budget Estimate:

Period of the Project: April 2003 to March 2004

These are projected figures that we see evolving over a period of one year.

Sr no.	Component	Cost	Total	Head Total
	Programme Expenses			
1.	Trial Treks and initial pre-training visit	25,000 x 2 trips	50,000	
2.	Training Programme Material costs	10,000 X 2 programmes	20,000	
3.	Stipend to participants @ 3000 per person	3000 x 100 persons	3,00,000	
4.	Food and accomodation	actuals	3,00,000	
5.	Seed money for income Generation activities	actuals	25,000	
6.	Seed money for job placement/ vocational training/ loans	actuals	25,000	
7.	Documentation and Research activities	2000 x 12	24,000	7,44,000
8.	Administration	2000 x 12	24,000	
9.	Office support Computer, internet		50,000	
10.	Transport and travel		1,00,000	1,74,000
	Renumeration			
11.	Project Head-part	4000 x 12	48,000	
12.	Project Coordinator-part	6000 x 12	72,000	
13.	Regional Coordinator	8000 x 12	96,000	
14.	Regional staff 2 persons	6000 x 12	72,000	
15.	Consultants	Honorarium	50,000	3,38,000
16.	To Saathi for account and administration support	@ 2 %	25,000	
17.	Contingency		25,000	50,000
	Total in Rs			13,06,000