

Online vote:

The following austinasha poll is now closed. Here are the final results:

POLL QUESTION: Asha Austin supports the funding requirement for immediate electricity needs of the farming community neighboring the Resource Center. Asha Austin supports the disbursal of Rs.6000x8 farmers = Rs. 48,000 for the electricity connection charges.

(Details of the request is at :

<http://www.ashanet.org/projects/document-view.php?id=6660>) (Poll closes on Wednesday, 12/12/2007 at 10:00 P.M) (We have been discussing the request in the last two meetings (02/12/2007, 09/12/2007) and in a conference call. Minutes of all discussions have been posted on the groups. Please read up on all available information before the vote. If you have any concerns/questions please let "Savitha Sridharan" <savitha.sridharan@gmail.com> or "santhosh padmanabhan" <santhosh.padmanabhan@gmail.com> know.)

CHOICES AND RESULTS

- Yes, 10 votes, 100.00%
- No, 0 votes, 0.00%

QnA with Siddamma:

1. The Land was given by the government. Why can't they give Electricity or Water ?

Many policies have been put forth in the past to help poor farmers. But, correct implementation is an issue. In most cases getting electricity connection involves a 5-6 year wait and substantial bribes. The policies of the government though instrumented as pro-poor end up favoring vested interests in implementation. For e.g. Bonded labor has been abolished for years now. Even a few days back we got news about irulas being released from bonded labor in brick kilns at Kanchipuram district.

2. The 6K we are paying per farmer, does this involve installation charges and tariff also ? What about the monthly or usage rate ? Is the free electricity scheme announced by the Andhra government related to this ?

The Rs 6K amount is only installation and one time. i.e. there are no further costs or tariffs involved. Again, in policy there might be a lot provided. But, implementation is non-trivial. In this case this is the installation charges awarded for SC/ST farmers for a new 'agriculture' connection.

(Note: The free electricity policy announced by AP govt. as researched on internet does have new connection charges - <http://aptranscorp.com/citchar.html>)

3. What were the farmers doing before they decided to do farming now ?

Quarry workers, shephard, coconut grove care taker, Brick kiln worker, coolies, taxi driver.

4. When did they get the land ? Why didn't they start earlier ?

They got the land 20 years back under a scheme for SC/ST. No electricity and access to water. A few of them tried in small patches. The land also needed leveling and lot of investment required. Now, they have confidence and support from resource center (knowhow, manure etc.) , electricity and water (also check dams).

5. Will they be trained in Resource Center ?

Yes. They will be working with us. We will be providing the organic manure, they will be part of seed bank and will interact with us constantly to know more nuances of organic farming. We are constantly looking to get more and more farmers to work with us. We plan to reach out to atleast 200 farming families in nearby villages in the coming years.

6. How urgent is this funds requirement ? How have you paid for it now ?

We have paid for it now from another funding pool. We need to reimburse the pool before Dec 30 because it will result in auditing problems and we might need to take loans outside until we find support. So, knowing a decision before end of December would be helpful.

7. We can approve the funds for the electric poles for the farmers but are they going to get the loans to build the bore wells?

Getting the electricity connection is the 'pre-requisite' for any loan application – with government or otherwise. They have already prepared papers to get government sanctioned loans under the 'Indramma yojana'. This loan is approved by the BDO (Block Development Officer) in the Chittoor district (the farmers' land comes under that jurisdiction.). The loan amount will cover the cost involved in buying motors, leveling land etc. They are confident of getting this approved now given that the electricity connections have been allotted.

Having the electricity connection also opens up other options -i.e. any loan for agriculture purposes can now have the supporting document showing that this land is going to be cultivated using an agricultural electricity connection.

8. Why should we give the money rather than they get loans for it all? Have they approached any micro finance agencies?

There is no scheme or any option private or government that gives loans to set up electricity connections. These 20 years they have NOT been able to get a loan for this purpose.

9. What happens if they don't cultivate the land right now?

There is a possibility that the government can confiscate government allotted land. i.e. The government allotted these lands under the SC/ST scheme. If the farmers don't cultivate it, the government has a legal standing to take back the land.

10. Does having electricity connection show that they are going to cultivate the land?

Yes, in some sense. Because, its the main pre-requisite for any agricultural loan application. It also means that the Electricity department recognizes them as owners of agricultural land that they plan on cultivating.

11. Is the government loan at 0% interest?

No. Unfortunately, there is no special attention for the poor and needy farmers. The government loans also come at an interest rate. We can give you more information later.

QnA/Discussion from Meeting held on Dec 9th:

Santhosh gave an overview on Siddama and her work and the agrarian crisis right now in India.

Talked about the resource center and what they do. For example they don't use chemical fertilizer. They provide organic manure to farmers.

The current proposal is to fund electric installation for 8 farmers. These farmers own lands neighboring to the resource center. Resource center is on the border of Andhra and Tamilnadu. These farmers are in the Andhra Pradesh state. Some of these farmers are currently working on other jobs like coolies, shepherds, coconut grove care taker, brick kiln workers, taxi drivers. However these people now want to use the lands for farming but need electricity.

They need electricity before they can proceed to get water and the land ready for planting. The 8 farmers need 6000 per farmer to install the poles.

Some questions:

We can approve the funds for the electric poles for the farmers but are they going to get the loans to build the bore wells? Why should we give the money rather than they get loans for it all? Have they approached any micro finance agencies?

Discussion on our project partners use of money..using money from one pool to fund another.

Action item - Get the pending concerns answered and organize and on-line poll for everyone to attend.

QnA/Discussion from Meeting held on Dec 2nd:

-Background on Bharathi Trust and Siddamma fellowship by Savitha and Santhosh

-Quarry work in Balasamudram district in Chittur, AP

.Siddamma noticed some quarry work in the hills near resource center

.Lands donated by AP govt to SC/ST Irula people

.Boulder rolled down the hills onto the land, could have been potentially fatal

.Quarry owner denies this happening, even though Siddamma recorded it on her phone camera

.Siddamma trying to raise awareness in the local community, find if the quarry is legal or not, filing an RTI application to find such data

.Asha Austin also planning to file an RTI for the same

.Farmers need to level the land, need electricity for farming

.AP govt provides commercial electricity connections to farmers at a subsidised rate of Rs.6000 per family

.Siddamma trying to raise these funds for 8 families. Total need= $8 \times 6000 = \text{Rs } 48,000$

.Asst. Engineer who can set up these connections is only in power till March, so Siddamma trying to get this work done by then.

.Siddamma was wondering if this could be taken up as a proposal with Austin. Right now, Siddamma is funding this through her own funds from other sources

.Asst. engineer estimated 16 poles per connection, instruments for wiring etc, giving a total estimate of roughly Rs.6000

Questions:

What was the situation before this i.e. before they got the land?

Out of the 10 families, 3 of them were quarry workers, 2 were farmers in the neighboring region. Basically none of them were living off the land before this.

Concerns:

.Probably not feasible as a loan since Siddamma said it'll take at least a couple of years for them to start making profits. May be difficult to follow up with different aspects of Siddamma's work

Things to follow up with Siddamma:

.Try to get some photos

.Arrange for conference call