

Talk with Siddamma

-Sanjeev

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I congratulated her on her award from *Outlook magazine* for speak-out leaders. She said that it was very nice, she thought that it was just an award from a magazine and didn't think that it was be a big deal. Ashok (her son) had accompanied her to Delhi and they were stumped to see such a large ceremony. There were some other social workers, but a lot of press and people too. The awards were given out by Sonia Gandhi who expressed her interest to meet with the Sarpams (Irula's movement) when she comes to TN. The Sarpams and Siddamma were mentioned multiple times in Sonia's speech. Siddamma was very happy with the publicity it got to the Irula's and Bharathi Trust. The only thing a little sad was that there was so much security. The judges and jury for the award included the former governor of TN, commissioner Gill, etc. In his talk commissioner Gill said that the selection of Siddamma given her uncessant work was very clear.

She also received Rs. 60,000 and a statue of a clenched fist (symbol of struggle).

1) Resource Center

Veronica one of the friends of Muriel who had come and volunteered at the resource center for a few weeks had helped build a bund dam to help the rain water accumulate and increase the water table. There is significant water that has accumulated in the ongoing rains.

Working on continuing to find ways to work with the government so far the primary interest has been from the forest department who have given us 150 sapplings to plant. The sapplings are of trees like neem.

We are receiving more interns from Belgium on Nov 4, this time students from the energy department and 2 students from agricultural engineering will be coming to help with the resource center.

I had asked the neighbourhood farmers to donate some local dal and paddy. The farmers said that these will not grow without pesticides. Namalwar had helped prepare organic pesticides with neem. The farmers have been very curious about organic farming and are helping us or dropping in when they can to check the results. The dal and gram planted have had great results so far. Namalwar the agricultural scientist will now be visiting us once every fortnight.

Q: How to you maintain open and accurate documentation?

A: We keep a agricultural journal of what we do and what we use and how much it costs. For the techniques that are successful we can distribute the same as pamphlets to farmers with the information.

We are also creating a video documentary of how we created our medicine for the

soil with neem, cowdung and other local ingredients.

Some of our friends from who had helped with reconstruction after the Gujarat earthquake have come and visited the center. They have offered their help in setting up basic infrastructure with low resources that are locally available.

What is to be done next.

We need to have a detailed survey to understand that needs of the villagers quantitatively. The survey has about 30 questions including what they eat or like to eat to the cultivation system.

Such documentation will take about 3 month of work.

During this survey we will also be looking for the children in the villages who had either dropped out from school or never went to school.

Two bonded laborer families who were released have come forward to volunteer at the resource center - 2 families.

They would like to learn about organic farming and are going to Namalwar's center in chidambram and Nagapatnam for this. They will be initially working with a youth farmer who has received an award from the German govt for his work in organic farming. He has an engineering degree and he decided that he wanted to help the village by leading by example after his success many of the other farmers are following suit and he is helping them in the same.

Q: What is the physical address of the resource center?

A: Koddivalli Post
Gandhinagar
Pallipattu Taluka
Tiruvallur District

2) Irula Updates

Due to heavy rains some of the Irula villages have been flooded they have been relocated with temp accomodation in marriage halls. A few of the children have got colera and they are looking int it.

3) Released Bonded Laborers

Of the 300 families released recently 200 have received certificates from the govt. Relief certificate are used to identify that they were bounded laborers and allows their children to utilize some of the government schemes in time.

Of these 100 families have got relief package. 30 families have purchased a cow. They are being helped by the milk society by the government (Aawin). Aawin is purchase part of the milk the rest is sold within the village. Also 70 families have

been approved to get housing from the government.

The 800 families are in the process of being released. The release package is being processed at the rate of 10-15 families per week. The package put Rs.20,000 in the bank under the women of the household and is deposited in bank. The community will use this to start their livelihoods afresh.

These funds have been deposited $300 \times 20,000 = 60$ lakhs. Many of the people are doing coolie work some of the women have set up an embrodiary.

The primary issue has been children's education. We have been running the make shift school with 2 teachers for 130 children. We really need help for this from asha. Asha has supported us in the begining for Rs. 80,000. The idea was to construct a building, but all we have is a thatched shed. The govt official are not allowing us to have a school as it is a thatched shed. We are trying to having the school whenever the govt officers are not around, we feel quite helpless. We require at least 2-3 lakhs to get the school bulding up. The government will not provide the bulding to start with, they might provide some teachers in time.

Q: What happened to the children who were going stay in hostels.

A: 3 children have come to tiruvallur and joined the govt school. There is no hostel seat available. Has not happened yet and are staying in the Bharathi trust office. They are being provided for here - uniforms and food.

There is very little progress with the school. The children should get access to education.