

## Goodwill Investment of a Jalanidhi Community

Muthalamada, a Grama Panchayath in the Palakkad district of Kerala lies in the 'Gap' of the Western Ghats. The Panchayath borders Tamil Nadu on the East and receive around 1200 mm of rainfall a year. Its geographical expanse is 375 sq km and is known for its calendaric regular droughts appearing year after year. The Panchayath has a 5500 strong adivasi community. To the north of the Panchayath lies the Western Ghats chiseled down into a high granite wall, 300 metres high and 23 km long. Long ago in the dim deep distant past, forces of nature removed the Western Ghat mountains here for a gap of 40 km, from the Nelliampathies to the Walayar, thus creating the famous gap in the Western Ghats. The Continuum of Western Ghats for a 1500 km, from Tapthi in Gujarath to the Kanyakumari in the Tamil Nadu is broken only here. Geological wonder that it is, 'the Gap' always brings in the water vapour filled winds to Kerala to give its share of North East Monsoon and thereafter, the hot dry windows to make the entire Palakkadan plains sizzling in the summer.



The Grama Panchayath adopted Jalanidhi Project to solve its drinking water scarcity in 2001. Infact, it has implemented two Jalanidhi programmes here, one exclusively for the Tribals and the other for the general community. During one of my recent visits to the Grama Panchayath, a 'tea shop conversation' opened up one of the community experiences unfolding in the

Muthalamada Grama Panchayath. Pappanchalla, about 2 km from the Chulliyarmedu junction which houses the office of the Grama Panchayth, has organised a Jalanidhi project. The community drinking water supply project has 70 households in it. An open well dug in a low lying area of the locality supplies water to their project. Two large ponds, though not maintained well, stand guard for the open well, assuring it with perennial recharge of water. Generally, the activities of a community water supply project begins and ends with supplying water. But that is not the case with the Pappanchalla Community.



Pappanchalla Overhead Reservoir. Lowest part of the columns supporting the reservoir are joined with brick masonry and enclosed into an office space

Collecting a monthly contribution of Rs.40/member household, the community manages to meet its operation and maintenance cost. The entire money is not spent up every month. They save a surplus. When the surplus came to a few thousands, they decided to invest it. The overhead tank reservoir of their project is just 10 metres off the Chulliarmedu - Pollachi road, and is easily accessible to the public as well as to the members of the community. The lowest portion of the 10 metre high overhead tank was enclosed with a brick wall, converting the space into an office cum store. At the next initiative, the community purchased 50 plastic chairs and 10 folding steel tables, investing a total of Rs.23200. They rent out the chairs and tables for the members of the community and others. They charge, Rs. 1/chair and Rs.10/table from member households. These charges are slightly higher for the non-members - Rs.3/chair and Rs.15/table. Whenever, there are some celebrations or functions where people gather, they take chairs and tables on rent, says the secretary of the water community. “We have made a profit of Rs.1600 in five months after this investment that we made in August 2007. Our next goal is to purchase a set of cooking vessels, plates, glasses etc, so that we

The Pump Operator of the Scheme with the chairs and tables acquired by the community.



can make facility into a full fledged catering support unit, says the secretary to the community samithy, sharing their dream. How did we do it? Our community interaction is fairly good. We regularly meet on the 10<sup>th</sup> day of every month around our office to collect the water cess and discuss matters of concern to our project. With two years of regular community interaction, our relationship and intimacy is growing. We do not compromise on the supply of water. We supply water from 6 to 7.30 in the morning and 5 to 6 in the evening, a total of 2 hours and 30 minutes every day. The leadership responsibilities are rotated each year, so that new members get to learn the business of supplying water and feel the ownership of the project. Our pump was of 2 hp capacity and it was taking longer duration to fill our tank. We consulted experts and purchased a new 5 hp pump and

installed it. It fills our tank faster and has solved our distribution problems”, says the former president of the community scheme. A community of ordinary men and women, all sharing the woeful memories of acute scarcity of water for several years, have put together a community collateral founded on trust and goodwill, giving them immense strength to go forward on the path of sustainability. That is what gives hope to this new model of community based development programmes, in this case, a drinking water project. Pappanchalla Community will continue to write their saga of sustainability, anticipating threats to their project and taking proactive steps to address them, taking informed and balanced decisions that are respected and owned by the community.

