



Annual Report VI
April 2016 to March 2017

Into our sixth year—a time of consolidating work and facing new challenges. Lending continuity to the Integrated Learning Programme through the rural youth collective, supporting individual endeavours in sustaining rural livelihoods, forging new networks and sharing knowledge and skills have been our key activities. Faced by the onset of a drought and its impact, we continue to ponder how to address the complex challenges of making the rural and agricultural a viable and meaningful life-world.

Amidst all this, there have been small sparks of hope: Radha, our youth learner, emerging out of her hesitant self to become an active agriculturist and a keen member of the youth group; Nagendra, a shy and diffident young man, committing to work on his one acre of dry land; the formation of the ILP learners into a rural youth collective, and the land at Angarike Maala turning into a beautiful place of land restoration and agricultural biodiversity. Between the vacillations of hope and despair, we have received much support from our neighbours, fellow village residents, friends, and family members. Young persons with talent and commitment have reached out to us and lent us their expertise and skills. We remain grateful to all these people and to those who repose faith in us and our work by supporting us with ideas, resources, and funds. And, we have been heartened to see some of the little children grow with more confidence and gain new creative skills. It has been encouraging to have some youth slowly emerge as leaders and engaged citizens. For our work to grow and for us to contribute to the causes we uphold we must persist longer and harder if the goals of developing alternatives for learning, sharing and living are to be realised.

ACTIVITIES AND PROGRAMMES

INTEGRATED LEARNING PROGRAMME

We initiated the course for the fourth batch in June 2016 and a total of 16 students attended the first few introductory sessions. However, with the onset of the drought, many were compelled by their families to migrate out for jobs or to be employed full-time. As a result the ILP class size dwindled. A request from a Soliga (a local tribal/ adivasi group) leader from the Hanur belt in Chamarajanagar indicated their interest in such courses and after several rounds of discussions, we decided to conduct the ILP course with two separate groups who would have occasional joint sessions. Hence the ILP IV batch consisted of two groups: One group consisting of eight learners (from different caste groups) from Chamarajanagar taluka and those closer to Nagavalli village and another group consisting of 17 Soliga youth learners from the Hanur belt for whom we conducted eight sessions at Hanur itself. The ILP batch IV then consisted of twenty-five learners; eight girls and seventeen boys, with an average age of twenty-one years.



THEMES AND CONTENT

As with the earlier ILP course, this batch was also divided into four key modules: 1. Agriculture and Ecology (2) Social Issues (caste, gender, religion, class, exploitation, consumerism, development) (3) Citizenship (4) General Skills (English, computers and accounts). In addition, the sessions on personality development via theatre and songs continued. This year we also organised a discussion session with the Nagavalli panchayat members. The learners presented data on taps that were leaking in the village and a detailed question and answer session related to the functioning of the panchayat and the civic problems of the village was part of the interaction.

H. Suma's session on accounts was not only about keeping accounts of income, expenditure, and debts but also about thinking about short-term versus long-term goals, how decisions were made, understanding the implications of indebtedness, and planning for various life choices. During the general classes, with an emphasis on current events and developments, we had special sessions on the Kaveri water issue and on demonetization. During both the sessions we noted how rumours and misinformation were circulated in villages and that youths had also internalised these popular ideas and perceptions. In addition, this year, we also supported the development of a 'farm diary' (both hard and e-versions) which could be used to document the learners' cultivation patterns in detail and can be used by them to understand and track their own experiences. For this batch, we also sourced two sets of learning materials from Avehi Abacus (Mumbai) and the sessions on class, exploitation, impact of media, and violence were drawn from these materials.



Vasu takes a class



An accounts session with Suma



Gender sensitisation



Meditation session with Berty Olivera



ILP Students with Panchayat Members



Theatre Practice

JOINT SESSIONS WITH THE ILP NETWORK GROUP

Given the importance of the sessions on millets, we invited all the earlier ILP learners (now members of the network) who were interested in agriculture, to attend the session on millets. Fourteen of them attended all the ten sessions on millets and in addition four of them undertook millet cultivation in their fields.

SUPPORT FOR ILP ALUMNI

We extended financial support to several of the ILP alumni who had started work on their land. However, the drought led to all of them losing their crops, including the millets. Based on this, and given that the boys needed work and financial support, we consented to sending four of the boys to work as 'farm stewards' in different organic farms. In addition to earning a regular income, they will also gain experience and be more confident in engaging with their land.



ILP Alumnus Mala, on her land

HOME VISITS

We conducted home visits to all the learners' homes in the Chamarajanagar belt and to only one home in the Hanur belt. Since most of the homes were in scattered hamlets in the Hanur region, we did not find the time to visit all the homes. In the homes that we did visit, the parents were very receptive to our visit and engaged with us. We were also able to discuss the impact of the course on the learners and to note what changes they had made. All the parents appreciated the course and indicated that it had helped their children. The girls' parents appreciated the fact that their girls had become confident.



ILP Learner Manju with his family

MILLET PROGRAMME

Based on our review of the agricultural possibilities in the region and the need for growing millets under the dry grain complex, we decided to promote the cultivation of millets in both the Integrated Learning Programme and through our out-reach activities. The last two decades have seen a loss of these millets in the area (and their replacement with commercial crops such as maize, turmeric, ginger, bananas etc) and given our impetus to revive old and local cultivation patterns and seeds, we decided to promote millets as viable and ecologically sustainable crops. We entered into an MOU with Dr. Dwijendranath Guru of 'The Millet Foundation', Bengaluru, to lend us technical support for a few

years. He designed and developed a 12-day module which was part of the ILP course and consisted of both theory and practical classes. This included sessions on identifying millets, processing and cooking them. Although we did plant six different types of millets in Angarika Maala, most of them dried up as there were absolutely no rains in the winter cultivation season.



Dwiji with ILP Learners in the field

As part of promoting the cultivation, use and sale of millets, we invited K. Abhisheka, a graphic artist, to train our youth and to paint murals of millets on the wall of our resource/learning centre at Nagavalli village. The process of painting the millets murals itself was interesting as the painting sessions drew a crowd of village residents who not only discussed the millets, with elderly residents reminiscing about the millets that they used to cultivate and eat, but also asked questions about

cultivating and using millets. What was started as a mere painting session became a community art transaction and discussion point. We now have strangers dropping in to ask about the availability of millets.



Abhisheka and ILP learners paint millet murals

LAND RESTORATION AND AGRO-BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION

Work continued on the land to make Angarike Maala a site for land restoration and agro-biodiversity conservation. Shivkumarswamy, an organic farmer from the district, has been advising us about processes and inputs for restoring and rejuvenating the land. In addition, U. Ravi Kumar of Mysuru, provides advice on matters related to conservation of the soil and water. Fencing the land stemmed all the grazing and the land saw a variety of wild plants, grass, creepers and flowers grow. Several types of grasses sprouted and helped hold the fragile soil in place. Paying attention to improving the soil in the cultivation patch meant spraying regular amounts of ‘panchagavya’ (concoction made from varied milk products and natural ingredients) to the plants. Periodic testing of the soil indicates that organic matter and basic nutrients have improved in the soil. We also prepared to plant several trees and bought a large variety of saplings of local trees and these are yet to be planted. The pre-South West monsoon season saw us plant a mix of pulses and the harvest was a bounty of about five quintals of pulses (green gram, pigeon pea, red gram, cow pea, sesame) in a little less than three acres of land. Although a leaf rust disease spread in the area and most of the neighbouring farmers lost their crops of pulses, our crops seemed to have withstood this. The quality of grains was very good and since it was our first harvest, we shared much of it with our friends and supporters and sold only about twenty kgs to two different organic food outlets.



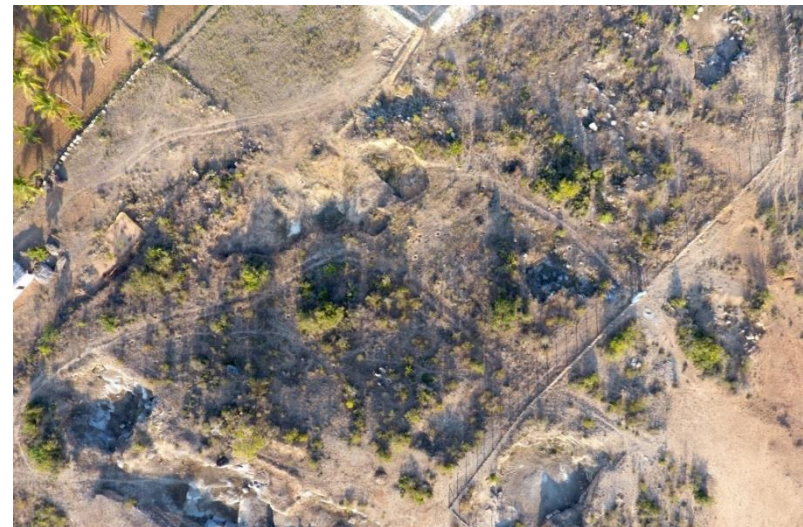
Cultivation of mixed crops



Village women harvest green gram



Badri and Muthu with Advisor, Ravi Kumar



Aerial view of land under drought; Janu 2017

The hopes that the first cultivation season had brought were dashed with the failure of the North-East monsoon. Although we spent a significant amount of money, time and energy preparing the land, the lack of rains meant that all the plants wilted. By December 2016, the land was bare and looked stricken and we built a temporary nursery to house the tree saplings that were not planted. At the end of March 2017, much of the upper regions looked bare with only the shrubs left. Since the cultivated portion was mulched, the coconut trees withstood the drought well.

HOME GARDEN PROGRAMME

Sunita Rao continued to take sessions on home gardening and the garden at our learning centre was further developed into a demonstration site. This year we added a small patch of medicinal plants that were brought from B.R. Hills and were considered to be viable in the area. In September, Sunita organised a demonstration for a micro-irrigation kit (which did not work due to poor quality of the donated kit - but got the students thinking about micro and drip irrigation as an option for their home gardens and crops) and also supervised the utilisation of the kitchen waste water into the back garden. The home garden at Nagavalli continued to produce a bounty of greens and vegetables but was not as productive as the previous years since the water supply was inadequate. Manorama Joshi and Shamala Hegde of Vanastree joined Sunita to provide sessions on preparing local and organic pesticides and in preparing home-made food items using home garden produce. This was part of the inter-community exchange programme (between home gardeners from Sirsi and the youth in Chamarajanagar district) to

encourage knowledge transfer between generations. As before, Veerabhadranaika and K. Mutturaju spent considerable time working in the garden, maintaining it, producing compost and organic fertilisers and pesticides, processing and conserving the seeds etc. A small seed bank has also been initiated and Sunita Rao and H. Suma have documented it in detail. A few women from Nagavalli village have come forward to develop their own home gardens and we have shared seeds with them and the others who wanted to cultivate vegetables in their fields.



Home Garden Session with Sunita Rao



Food Processing Session

CHILDREN'S PROGRAMME

The children's programme continued with regular Saturday sessions consisting of creative activities, games and basic reading and comprehension. About twenty-five children are regular and another fifteen come in periodically. This year, observing that some of the children were malnourished we did a home visit and spoke to their parents about their children's diets and the need to provide ragi instead of only rice. We had identified five hearing impaired children and we approached their parents with information as to how these children could be helped by one of the agencies. Only one family considered the help and all the others expected only 'pension' to be paid for having physically

challenged children. We also had a meeting with parents, and eighteen parents attended the meet and appreciated that their children were learning new skills and were attending the creative learning classes. They also requested us to give tuitions for their children (which we declined). The theme for the summer children's camp was puppetry with waste materials and was led by Lalita Manjunath and K. Abhisheka. The children made puppets from waste materials, learned some songs, made presentations around their puppets and also learned the skills of coordination, cooperation, and creative work. Based on a request from the Headmistress of the local government primary school, our team spent time preparing the children for a cultural programme on August 15th. The event was a big success with the children performing several skits, plays, dances and singing varied folk songs (instead of only dancing to film music). For the coming year, we hope to sustain these activities and to also encourage more independent reading and writing.



Puppetry Sessions



Saturday session with R. Rajappa



Performing Folk Dances at the government primary school

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HONNERU

RURAL YOUTH COLLECTIVE

The ILP alumni have been meeting regularly at the learning centre. Based on discussions, we have encouraged them to form a collective and they have chosen to call themselves 'Honneru' ('first plough') Rural Youth Collective. The objectives of the collective are to act as a network for the group, conduct community level activities and also form a cooperative production unit. They have received training in soap-making from Huda Masood and H. Suma has advised them about keeping accounts.. Regular batches of soaps (body, dish wash and laundry) are now being made at the centre and are sold in Mysuru and Bengaluru. The group also participated in the annual 'Malnad Mela' organised by Vanastree in Bengaluru. They sold cloth bags, soaps, and produce and also enjoyed meeting various other groups. One of the girls, Nagaveni, who has a physically challenged brother and is unable to leave the house for work, was supported to purchase a sewing machine and PUNARCHITH facilitated her training. She now makes cloth bags which are sold through the collective and also does regular tailoring in the village. The profit from the sale of these products is now credited to the collective and plans are to enlarge their economic activities to include other value-added production. The challenge is for them to be organised, to engage in production activities that will facilitate a rural-rural economy and to also participate in collective work that facilitates community well-being.



Honneru stall at Malnad Mela

‘SPONSOR A FIELD’

Based on the fact that the drought was persisting and many youth were not able to sustain themselves on their lands, we decided to solicit funds to support some youth and local persons for the next cultivation season. Requests were sent out to a close network of friends and we were happy to receive a positive response. A total of twenty-two persons sponsored fields and we received a total of Rs. 4.20 lakhs. With this, we plan to initiate sustainable agricultural work in the fields of some of the youth from our ILP course and to extend this support to a few people in the Nagavalli area. We identified two young widows and four other small cultivators to extend the support to. The coming year and the agricultural season will tell us how the programme pans out.

ADVOCACY AND OUT-REACH ACTIVITIES

We engaged in several out-reach activities over the year. In May 2016, we conducted a three-day summer workshop (Yuva Chetana) for youth between the ages of 16-18 years. We had fifteen boys and girls attend the course and the sessions consisted of modules on self-confidence, communication, environmental awareness, social issues, using the library, and reading. The sessions on songs and theatre were enjoyed by all. Based on a request from the local unit of Mobility India, we had a one-day programme for them at our learning centre in Nagavalli. Twenty-four physically challenged persons visited us and we were heartened to see how enthusiastic and engaged they were. At a request by Keystone Foundation, Niligiris, we conducted three days of orientation for Soliga youth in the Punanjur belt. Our team members also participated in the day-long ‘Youth Programme’ organised by Samvada at Tumakuru and our ILP youth met several groups of youth from various parts of Karnataka and engaged ideas, songs, and experiences. Faculty and students from Tsuru University, Japan, visited us for a day and interacted with the ILP learners. PUNARCHITH team members participated in the discussions held at the Tribal welfare department about educational issues faced by tribal youth. A presentation on the Integrated Learning Programme was also made at the annual WATIS partners’ meet in Bengaluru. In June, Sreedevi and Usha from Thanal, an organisation that works on issues of land rights, organic agriculture etc, spent two days at Nagavalli and re-worked their manuscript on the ‘save the rice’ campaign.

RESEARCH

A key theme that the team decided to engage in relates to better understanding the formation and impact of the drought in the region. Although Chamarajanagar district is known to be a drought-prone district, the impact of the drought since August 2016 leaves us, and the others around us, with a sense of futility and frustration. Perhaps, what has become our biggest concern is the extent to which the new commercial/capitalised agriculture draws on new technologies to deny the ecological fragility of the region. Despite loss of agricultural production, new welfare measures such as the free grain schemes mean that there is no extant starvation in most households and the opportunity of migrating to cities and new construction sites have enabled a large number of rural unemployed persons to find work at these sites. Remittances and non-agricultural income buffer the work, income and grain shortage that droughts impose. Yet, drought also imposed various other hardships and deprivations which need to be documented and studied. While rainfall patterns (timing and quantity) had changed, local agricultural patterns still largely followed the old cycle. Agriculturists needed to better understand changing, especially global warming trends. At a macro level, governmental drought relief machinery consisted primarily of addressing water stress or deficits by promoting large scale irrigation and drinking water schemes (thereby eroding local water management practices). In addition, a new water economy consisting of entrepreneurs who provide equipment to drill bore wells and the sale of bore-well water for both agricultural and domestic purposes has gained hold and largely accounts for further degrading the ecological conditions of the region. We decided to study the drought at these multiple levels

and to also share the findings with the local people and with others from outside the district. A detailed report and essays for the press and local usage will be developed over the coming months. In January 2017, Arati Kumar-Rao, an environment photographer, spent two days with us and took photographs of abandoned or uncultivated land and the area under drought.

Team members also continued to work on their independent research work. P. Veerabhadranaika worked on getting his research on Ashramshalas and the state of elementary education among Adivasis into a book. A.R.Vasavi also continued to work on themes related to agricultural issues, education and sociology of India.

TEAM DEVELOPMENT AND ORIENTATION

H.Mutturaju and Mahadevamma (one of the ILP students) were selected to participate in the youth work training offered by Samvada in Bengaluru. In April 2016, all the team members took time off for a team retreat and discussed PUNARCHITH's work, experiences, and the way forward. The team also visited Gudalur and spent a day with members of Vidyodaya school and shared their experiences of working with tribal youth. In December, team members along with the ILP youth spent two days at Navadharshanam, an organic farm and centre for alternative ideas and which is outside Bengaluru city. The team learned about alternative architecture, dry-land organic farming, social and local afforestation practices. In January 2017, team members visited Bijapur district and observed varied dry-land agricultural practices and then went on to Sirsi

where they discussed future plans and programmes for PUNARCHITH. We also requested Janardhan Kesargadde to conduct a detailed and critical overview of PUNARCHITH's work. He met with all the team members, and had discussions with some of the learners, their parents, trustees and resource persons and submitted a detailed report with suggestions for future work.

FUTURE WORK

Our future work will focus on consolidating and interlinking all the key programmes and in involving the ILP youth to emerge as local leaders/catalysts and also as possible members of the team. Based on reviews and advice, plans are to make the 'Integrated Learning Programme' into a residential one thereby enabling youth from other districts of the state to also enrol in the course. Efforts to mobilise funds from foundations and philanthropists from India for the course have not been successful and we now plan to apply for an FCRA so that we can be eligible to receive foreign funds. Given that we have now completed six years of work and the team, its orientation and network with resource persons and rapport with local communities have consolidated, we are in the process of launching a dual language (Kannada and English) website with a blog. The core team will also be expanded to include some of the key resource persons. Overall, we feel a sense of satisfaction about the work that we have undertaken and are confident that we can face some of the challenges with alacrity, commitment, and a collective spirit.

TRUSTEES

Kala Sunder
K. Venkataraju
A.R.Vasavi
Harish Narasappa

CORE TEAM

P. Veerabhadranaika
Sunita Rao
H. Mutturaju
H. Suma
M. Mahalakshmi
R. Rajappa
A.R.Vasavi

AUDITORS

G.N. Ananthavardhana and Associates, Mysuru

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K . ABHISHEKA
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KOKILA DESHPANDE

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Huda Masood (soap making)
Venkatesh Madhusudan (sports)
Lalita Manjunath (creative activities for children)
K. Abhisheka (graphic arts and design)
U.Ravi Kumar (land restoration and water management)
Berty Olivera (theatre and personality development)
Janardhan Kesargadde (community mobilisation)
Kirana Kumari (gender sensitisation)
Manorama Joshi (home gardening)
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Purnima Gauthron

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1. Sharada and Ratheesh Pisharody
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4. Ravishankar B.T
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6. Suma H
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8. Anna Joseph
9. Dr.Saramma Joseph
10. Thirthakar Ghosh
11. Satish Hanumant
12. Veena Shankarlingappa
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16. Krishna Gopala
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19. Rajathesh R
20. Bhuvanalakshmi
21. Meena Ramakrishna
22. Suchitra Balasubramanyam
23. Ravi Balasubramanyam
24. Nalini S. Rajasekhar
25. Anjali Mullati
26. Srilakshmi N.G.
27. Deepak Muddibande and Ashvini Kadambi
28. Lalita N
29. Sugirtha Mangaiya
30. Rekha Jayakrishnan
31. Rebecca Mammen John
32. Rina Das
33. Sarath and Kiran Kumar G



PUNARCHITH LEARNING CENTRE

Nagavalli Village, B.R.Hills Road
Chamarajanagar District, Karnataka-571342
Web: punarchith.org
Email: punarchithcollective@gmail.com

Registration: CRJ-4-00028-2011-12 dated 09/11/2011

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