

ANNUAL REPORT 2019-2020

ప్రగతి
Punarchith



The year ended in March with the Covid-19 lockdown announced on March 24th, 2020. In many ways the pandemic and its implications of a world-wide health emergency and the subsequent economic and social turmoil were not surprising trends. Over the past years, it was concerns such as these - about the fallout of industrial and factory farming, the depredations heaped on ecological resources, and the vulnerability of working classes, especially the rural people - that has engaged us in seeking alternatives and solutions.

For us, it was a time to reckon with what was possible over the past years and to better prepare ourselves and the rural communities we engage with for a future that is fraught with even more uncertainties. It is now more urgent than ever to promote ideas of social justice, ecological sustainability, economic stability, and political accountability. Our programmes seek in many ways to do this but we cannot claim huge success in any significant way.

The road ahead lies with many challenges; of making alternative ideas to mainstream political-economy and culture legitimate; of supporting rural youth to emerge as leaders who can catalyse these ideas, and of persisting despite the tremendous indifference from administrative structures and personnel. In addition, funding for the future seems unreliable and we have, already, been notified by previous supporters that funds may not be assured over the years.

Despite these setbacks, we acknowledge with gratitude all the support we have received from friends, resource persons, family, and some government officials. We are particularly heartened by the interest that some young people have shown in our work and to the joy that was made possible in having visitors appreciate the restoration and beauty of Angarika Maala. Some small glimmers of hope and a possible positive future lies in the restoration and conservation of soil, water and seeds, and in the steady but sure confidence that we see emerging in some of the youth. Added to this are the friendships and support network that we have forged among ourselves as a team and with a large network of visitors, friends, and supporters. We hope to sustain this as a foundation of our work over the years and this will possibly be our lodestar for a future that is marked with uncertainty.

ANGARIKE MAALA

LAND RESTORATION, CONSERVATION AND SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE DEMONSTRATION SITE

The South-West monsoons largely failed and we harvested very little of the mixed crops of green gram, pigeonpea, beans, and cow pea. The coconut trees especially bore the brunt of the drought and several trees had to be culled. The overall growth of the new tree saplings was very limited and we continued to mulch around the tree saplings.

The North-East or returning monsoons were better and the heavy rains of October and November saw the ponds fill up and there was a rise in the water table of the tube-well. We drew on this and set up a new drip irrigation system for the saplings and it was this that provided succour to the tree saplings in the dry months of January to March. From the winter/hingaru cultivation, we reaped a bounty of horsegram and beans, but much of the millets were feasted on by birds which came in large droves to the land, and the production of ragi was limited.

In terms of development of infrastructure, we had the large rain water harvesting ponds lined with granite and initiated the new drip irrigation for the saplings around the bunds. Despite the fence around the land, the number of animal intrusions increased; the crops were now attacked by wild boar, squirrels, peafowl, rats and bandicoot.

The copious North-East monsoons saw a bounteous out-break of a variety of grasses, creepers, and small bushes. Abhisheka Krishnagopal returned to conduct the periodic review of the land and she documented an increase in both biological, faunal and avian varieties on the land. Periodic soil tests indicated an overall improvement in the soil's nitrogen and phosphorous but more micronutrients and humus were needed. Most of the tree saplings were doing better by the end of the year and we were very pleased to see the first fruits of passion fruit, pomegranate, chikko, and ramaphal (a variety of custard apple). The small patch with medicinal plants is also doing well although it requires a lot of maintenance and watering during the dry periods.

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A team visited us from Biome, an organisation that works on water harvesting, and suggested methods for us to revitalise the tube-well. Instead of completely new water harvesting structures, we made a few large pits on the top of the hill and since the North-East monsoons were good, the tube-well water increased. We were surprised to note that the level of the water which was at a depth of 210 feet rose after a few months to 116 feet. We had actually 'grown water' and the team felt very heartened by this. Several others came by and gave us inputs and this included Shivkumarswamy, our organic farmer friend from the district, Anil Kapur, and Dwijendranath Guru, one of our associates.

We had several visitors to the land and special among these was the group of Solega from B.R. Hills who visited the land and recollected their own former landscape and all the resources that it once held. In addition, we had a group of farmers from ICRA visit the land and make suggestions and several groups from Mysuru and Bengaluru visited the land.

ANGARIKE MAALA

LAND RESTORATION,
CONSERVATION AND
SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE
DEMONSTRATION SITE



On December 8th, the whole team along with their family members had an evening picnic on the land and enjoyed the overall ambience and beauty of the place.

Future plans are to initiate construction for some very basic infrastructure at Angarike Maala. We are in contact with an architect and we hope to develop some vernacular and locally-specific architecture that will be suitable for the place.

HOME GARDEN

This year, inspired by their visit and training at Sambhav, Odisha, the team members decided to have mandalas as part of the vegetable garden at the resource centre. A wide variety of beans and greens, and pumpkin, ladies finger, brinjals and radish were planted and then enjoyed by the team. We also experimented by planting a coloured variety of corn and we were happy to see the plants thrive in the land. Several women from Nagavalli joined us and also initiated small vegetable gardens in the homesteads. Some of them returned seeds to us and or shared their produce with us.

Altogether we now have a collection of 52 varieties of vegetable seeds and a few flower seeds in our seed bank. Some of the flowers/petals that were processed and included in teas, jams, chutneys and refreshment drinks were: roselle (pundi), shoeflower/hibiscus, drumsticks, lemon grass, and tulsi.



HOME GARDEN

We had several visitors to the home garden and it included women from Nagavalli, Doddmole and B.R.Hills. A team of scientists from the Tamil Nadu agricultural university visited us and collected several seeds from us. We also organised a special session on seed sharing with women from Vanastree, Sirsi. They shared seeds, recipes and ideas and also planted several vegetables in our garden.

HOME GARDEN

The annual 'Hitala Hita' (strength of the garden) and 'Beeja Baluvali' (seed sharing), an open day when visitors come to see the garden and to exchange seeds and produce was held on October 29th. Sunita Rao, from Vanastree, and Honnur Prakash spoke at the event and Sundramma also addressed the gathering. The importance of retaining and reproducing local varieties of seeds and also cultivating and conserving agricultural land was discussed.



GRAAMA SETHU

This programme received a boost with Sundramma, a trained gender and community specialist, who joined the team in March 2019. With her inputs, we were able to extend work into a total of 12 villages (3 of them in Tumkur district). There are now 12 'preraks' or village motivators who engage with community issues and received an honorarium for 6 days of the month.

The work they do includes promoting social awareness about a range of issues, enhancing the functioning of the village panchayat, encouraging water conservation, garbage segregation, and overall hygiene in their neighbourhoods, and promoting sustainable agriculture.

We were able to get the support of the Dept of Panchayat Raj and Rural Development since a new CEO was appointed.

Collaboration and support from the PDOs in these villages have improved since the conduct of a formal meeting with the CEO and his endorsement of our work. We are now able to reach about 400-420 families in these 12 villages.

The preraks and our team members visited Tumkur district as part of an exposure and training session. They met a few farmers and visited the 'School of Natural Farming' and met several dynamic persons who were conducting training for rural youth. In the Sira area, we acknowledge the support that Chitra Krishnan and Prashanth have been giving to the two preraks and former ILP learners who live there. Yatish and Geeta are doing commendable work in promoting greening endeavours, ecological awareness in schools, and also reclaiming common lands etc.



GRAAMA SETHU



Some of the significant changes that the preraks were able to facilitate in the various villages include initiation of water conservation at the public taps, enhancing access to government schemes for several disadvantaged families, initiating health camps, discussions and meeting with the panchayats to resolve public issues, improving the functioning of the local government schools, and promoting sustainable agriculture in their areas.

HONNERU : RURAL YOUTH COLLECTIVE

Despite several forms of reorganisation and orientation sessions the number of youth engaged in production and economic activity did not increase. The earlier members, about six of them, continued to make soaps and process many of the produce for sales. The idea of running a cooperative and being responsible for one is yet to set in among the youth. Most expect only payment for the hours or day that they put in but do not want extra responsibility.

Some of the products such as the chutney powders, snacks and cloth bags are in demand and we need to see how the production can be streamlined. We will be consulting with some entrepreneurs to get a better sense of how to support this endeavour and promote it as a form of rural enterprise. Two additional training programmes were organised for this group. Both were upgradation of skills and inputs for the hand-made soap making.

Huda Masood from Bengaluru and Antonis Breskas took these sessions at different times. The team organised sales in Chamarajanagar, Mysuru, Kodagu and Bengaluru apart from sales that were conducted during events held at Nagavalli.

Since Mahalakshmi, the former ILP student, who was anchoring the Honneru work has gone on maternity leave, we have recruited Manuja Priya, another of our ILP alumnus to take over the responsibilities.



CHILDREN'S PROGRAMME

This programme continues with its key activity being the Saturday program for children in the Nagavalli area. About 62 children are regular attendees and many of them have learnt new songs and some art work (which they take home).

This year we also introduced the children to gardening and initiated a small garden for them. Some of them have taken seeds home and are growing vegetables there.

In the summer, we had a one-day orientation programme for youth who were preparing to finish high school. Ms. Indumathi came from Mysuru and conducted sessions for the youth. Both career options and the availability of scholarships were discussed with them.

We will continue the programme for the children and also see how to support the older girls who are often prevented by their parents from attending these sessions.

One little girl, Gundu, aged about 10 years, passed away from subacute encephalitis. Punarchith provided funds for her medical and food support for the four months that she lived after her diagnosis.

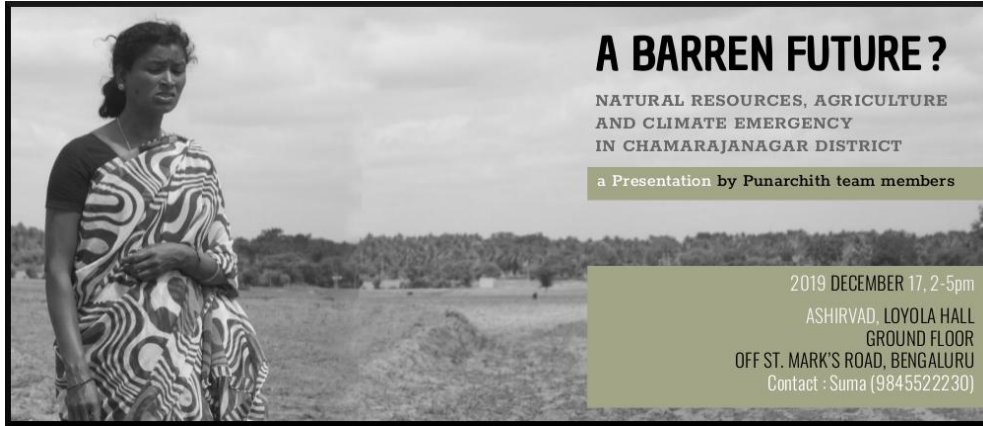


CHILDREN'S PROGRAMME



As part of the summer camp, we had Dr. Anu Joy of TIFR, Hyderabad, and Ms. Nagaveni of Creative School, Bengaluru, came in to conduct the three-day camp. The activities included making and using a foldscope (a small microscope), identifying features of natural materials, and also asking questions. Ms Nagaveni taught the children several art works, including making paper clocks etc.

CLIMATE CHANGE RESEARCH & ADVOCACY



Based on two years of research in the district and a compilation of data from other sources and organisations (thanks to support from Prof. Vinod Gaur, and Prof. Laurent Ruiz), we compiled a presentation on "Natural Resource Depletion, Agriculture and Climate Change in Chamarajanagar Dt".

Siddharth Joshi compiled and finalised the data from various sources and Ratheesh Pisharody and Vinod Sebastian helped make the infographics and the visuals for the presentation. We did pilot presentations at Nagavalli for our ILP youth and local farmers.



Later, we had presentations at nine other places and these included

- two in Bengaluru (at IISc, and at Ashirvad),
- to the District Collector and the officers of the key departments at Chamarajanagar,
- to members of the Rotary Club at Chamarajanagar
- to members of the Soliga Abhivridhi Sangha at B.R. Hills (organised by Samira Agnihotri)
- to the former M.P. of Chamarajanagar, Dhruva Narayana
- and to two different farmers' organisations at our resource centre in Nagavalli.

CLIMATE CHANGE RESEARCH & ADVOCACY

In all of these, the discussants consented to the gravity of the issues of resource depletion and agricultural deceleration in the district. But, most were not open to either disengaging from chemical agriculture or taking to collective efforts to conserve natural resources.

The District Commissioner, Ms. Kaveri, attempted to engage with us and was keen on putting together some activities to address the issues but she was transferred. So, we need to represent the work to the new D.C and also see in what ways we can take the details of the study to a larger audience.

TRAINING & TEAM DEVELOPMENT

Members of the team attended various training sessions:

- ◆ Mahalakshmi and Sundramma attended sessions on women's counselling organised by HID forum, Bengaluru.
- ◆ Muthuraju attended a one-day workshop on rainwater harvesting organised at the district office.
- ◆ Samira Agnihotri attended a day-long discussion on climate change which was organised by SAPACC.
- ◆ Vanastree organised a ten-day permaculture course (January 13 to 22nd, 2020) at Huthina Betta, Sirsi. Apart from Sunita Rao and Santhosh, who organised the course, Suma and Vasavi attended the programme. It was conducted by Mark Garrett and we shared details of our work with him and received several new ideas. Later, Antonis Breskas, an intern from Greece, also visited us at Nagavalli and demonstrated the making of hot compost, no-dig raised bed, and seed conservation to the team members. We have now implemented several of the permaculture principles in the land and at the home garden.
- ◆ Sunita Rao and Antonis Breskas also visited Sambhav, the farm cum training centre run by Sabarmatee at Odisha and spent a few days there.

A. R. Vasavi held the M.N.Srinivas Visiting Chair at the Institute for Social and Economic Change, Bengaluru, for a period of 12 weeks. As part of this she delivered a series of lectures at the institute.

In addition, she presented papers at the IIT Delhi, ATREE (Bengaluru), CMCA, Bengaluru, University of Hyderabad, and participated in various skype and web-based presentations for different universities and groups.

Sunita Rao gave a talk on food and seed conservation at the Indian Institute of World Culture in Bengaluru.

P. Veerabhadranaika presented a paper on the state of Adivasis and their education at the national meet on Adivasis and their education held at the Open University, Mysuru, and was a discussant at the V-Lead, Mysuru meet on education.

Samira Agnihotri organised and conducted a preconference module for rural youth as part of the annual Student Conference on Conservation Science (SCCS-Bng) which was held at NCBS, Bengaluru.

She also continues to collaborate with Aung Si (a linguist) towards documenting the language and traditional knowledge of the Solega people.

RESOURCE PERSONS

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UMA and Team, Biome, Bengaluru

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TRUSTEES

KALA SUNDER
C. BALACHANDRAN
A. R. VASAVI

We are happy to announce that
Dr. NAGARJUN, a general physician
who practices in Chamarajanagar town
has consented to being a trustee.

CORE TEAM MEMBERS

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MAHENDRA N.
MANUJA PRIYA
H. SUMA
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