



QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER VOL. 1 OCT - DEC 2021

# VALAM

Together We Rise



தமிழ்நாடு அரசு

மாட்டு நிறுவனம் | ஊரக வளர்ச்சி மற்றும் ஊராட்சித் துறை

புலன்க்கு நலத்திட்ட உதவிகள் வழங்கும் வி

தலைமை

தமிழ்நாடு அரசு



Point of View



Happy Beneficiaries



Events



Green Biz



Hi-Tech Native

VAAZHNDHU KAATTUVOM PROJECT

# Mission & Vision



## M. Pallavi Baldev, I.A.S.

Chief Executive Officer  
Vaazhndhu Kaattuvom Project, Chennai

### Dear Readers,

I hope that you and your loved ones are well.

We, at the Vaazhndhu Kaattuvom Project (VKP), are happy to launch this quarterly newsletter, Valam. It aims to provide insights into the workings of the project, why it was conceptualised and how it was planned and implemented.

VKP is a World Bank-assisted project, which is built on existing capital and investments made by the Tamil Nadu Pudhu Vaazhvu Project (TNPVP), Tamil Nadu State Rural Livelihoods Mission (TNSRLM) and National Rural Livelihoods Project (NRLP). The objective is to transform people's lives in rural areas through strategies that go beyond poverty alleviation.

The project is implemented in 120 blocks covering 3,994 village panchayats spread across 31 districts of Tamil Nadu.

Entering into the last quarter of 2021, I am filled with hope, joy and gratitude. The challenges we have faced, and where we're today – the significance of it is undeniable.

As a project, VKP has come a long way. From conducting training programmes for beneficiaries and developing opportunities in skilling via Community Skills Schools and Community Farm Schools, to forming new group enterprises and the ambitious State Investment Plan (SIP), which is the penultimate outcome of conducting Participatory Growth Plan (PGP) in every village across project area, we are setting higher standards in implementing strategies to achieve goals of sustainable entrepreneurship, accessible financial linkages and creation of job opportunities.

The enormous impact of the project is evident with the number of lives it has transformed. It reiterates our faith that a well-planned and executed welfare scheme by the state government can indeed benefit its intended end-users.

The relevance of Matching Grant Program (MGP) as a robust financial instrument, cannot be ignored especially

when you consider that there are estimated 4 million MSME units (Individual Enterprises) in Tamil Nadu. Out of this, only 1.8 million are financed with an average loan size of Rs. 3.30 lakh, which falls short of the total requirement of units.

Under the MGP, the project will facilitate financing in partnership with formal Partnering Financial Institutions (PFIs) to women-led Nano/Micro/Small Enterprises in rural/semi-urban areas of the State. As matching grant, VKP will contribute 30% of the total loan financed by the PFI/NBFCs.

Youth Development Centre (YDC) is a novel concept, which is a result of the collaboration between VKP and Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojana (DDUGKY). Its objective is to provide a host of services to migrants from the targeted 120 blocks.

YDC facilitates migrants in accessing core services such as registration of workers, access to immediate housing support, providing key information on schools, hospitals, government schemes, financial and banking services, financial and healthcare counselling, creating link with organised labour market, monitoring pre- and post-placement progress of youth and skilling opportunities, among many others.

Rural areas can thrive on their own if we enable their aspirations with adequate funding, a reasonably competitive and accessible marketplace, and a well-linked infrastructure – all of which have been made available, thanks to VKP. As beneficiaries excel in their respective fields and reach newer heights of success, it is not farfetched an idea that this scheme could be replicated in other States across the country.

That's our fervent hope at VKP – that we build a society marked by sustainable rural growth and development.

## FUNDING AND NETWORKING, BEAUTY IS A SERIOUS BUSINESS



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S. Viji,

Perunkadambanur Panchayat, Nagapattinam Block, Nagapattinam

I am a trained beautician from Rural Self Employment Training Institute (RSETI). I couldn't open a parlour, as I had no funds and no support from family. With Rs. 1 lakh loan from VKP and savings of Rs.2 lakh, I bought everything I needed and opened Mithra Beauty Parlour and Tailoring. Now I have regular customers from Puliyur, Papakovil, Manjakollai, among others. I earn Rs.25,000–30,000/month, and I have also employed a lady for help. I want to install an air-conditioner and store more upscale beauty products. The district team is helping me get bank and credit linkages in this regard.

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## A DISABLED WOMAN'S CLIMB TO INDEPENDENCE



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C. Pazhaniammal,

Alagumalai Panchayat, Pongalur Block, Tiruppur

I have been running this petty shop for 5 years. With disability in both my legs, this was my only source of income. In 2020, when I had to close my shop for several months, I relied on my savings to get me through. But I didn't have enough funds to reopen the shop, as I needed to restock. I applied and received a loan of Rs.15,000 from VKP. I restocked everything and also bought many masala powders, which are more in demand. On an average, I earn Rs.1,000–1,200/day, with Rs.400–500 as profit. It increases during festivals and marriage seasons.

”

## ADAPTING TO MARKET DEMAND, DEVELOPING A SUSTAINABLE ENTERPRISE



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**D. Vijayalakshmi,**

Ponnusangampatti Panchayat, Thuraiyur Block, Trichy

My husband and I were employees at a grocery store in Madurai for 10 years for Rs.10,000/month each. When we lost our jobs, we returned to the village and decided to open a godown instead of a store, as the latter required Rs.15–20 lakh investment. I took a loan for Rs.1 lakh from VKP and rented a godown for Rs.3,000/month, and began our enterprise. Companies like Bambino, Luvit, Parle, etc., deliver their products to our godown. I also store sweets and savouries which are procured on order from shop owners. I have an Omni van that my husband uses for delivery. We deliver to around 10–12 villages in Musiri Taluk (Trichy) itself. We earn Rs.25,000 profit each month. This increases during festival times and marriage season. ”

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## ADDING KIDS' ESSENTIALS INCREASED HER INCOME LEVEL



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**C. Sripriya,**

Melavidayal Panchayat, Valangaiman Block, Tiruvarur

I'm a mother of 2 kids and running this small grocery shop by myself for over 7 years. In 2020, when I had to close my shop for several months, I had to rely on my savings, which dried up quickly. When it was time to reopen my shop, I took Rs.30,000 loan from VKP via my SHG. I restocked everything and also added cleaning liquid, sanitary items and even betel leaves. I also renovated the shop and now earn around Rs.15,000/month. It's higher during festival days and marriage season. Competition is inevitable; you have to constantly find new ways to adapt. That's why I began selling items that appeal to kids – chocolates, biscuits, small toys, sweet bread, etc. ”

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## BECOMING AN ENTREPRENEUR HAS BOOSTED HER CONFIDENCE



Ragasiya,

Inam Reddiapatti Panchayat, Virudhunagar Block, Virudhunagar

As a boy, I was abandoned by my family and ostracised by society. I ran away to Chennai, and soon began working in a textile store. It was a good life. In 2020, when the store downed its shutters, I lost my job and had to return to my village. It was humiliating and I struggled to survive. When I heard about VKP's funding scheme, I applied and received Rs. 1 lakh. I began a wholesale business of saris and textiles. My monthly profits are Rs.8,000–10,000, and it's twice as high during festivals and marriage season. This has given my confidence a much-needed boost!



## FROM A SALARIED EMPLOYEE TO A SUCCESSFUL BUSINESSMAN!



Poovarasana,

Rajagiri Panchayat, Virallimalai Block, Pudukkottai

I worked as a frame-maker for an optical shop in Coimbatore for over 2 years. In 2020, when I lost my job and returned to my village, I decided to open a vegetable shop and wanted to make it into a mobile-unit – as in, sell them on every street in a van. With VKP's loan of Rs.1 lakh, and my savings of Rs.2 lakh, I bought a van and started this enterprise. I make Rs.8,000–10,000/month. During festivals, I make more. Also, in 2021, the district staff helped me get permission from Dept. of Agriculture to sell vegetables on behalf of my panchayat. Earning regular income notwithstanding, this added legitimacy to my business.



## ORGANIC SANITARY NAPKINS MADE AFFORDABLE BY THIS GROUP



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**S. Amsavalli,**

Vetri Enterprise Group, Keezh Paapampaadi Panchayat, Villupuram

We began with 20 women in 2015 to take bulk orders for tailoring. But we didn't know how to get orders. In 2021, we received a grant of Rs.1.50 lakh from VKP. So officers from PLF encouraged us to try another enterprise. That's how we started making sanitary napkins. We bought herbs, blue sheets, bio-belt and other organic raw materials, and began production in July 2021. We make 3,000–4,000 pieces/day. We can produce even 15,000–18,000 pieces within 10-12 days, but we don't know how to get orders, fix market price, etc. For that, VKP has offered to guide us.

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## FISHERWOMEN DISCOVERING STRENGTH IN NUMBERS



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**M. Maharani,**

Head, Velmurugan Fish-sellers, Maruthampallam Panchayat, Mayiladuthurai

As fish-sellers, all of us – 5 women – were sustaining well until 2020, when we had no business and income for several months. But with VKP's grant of Rs.1.50 lakh, we were able to buy 15 fish tanks, ice box, annakoodai, sickle, knives, weighing scale and some utensils for us to store the fish and sell door-to-door. We even take them into town and sell them in retail. We each earn Rs.200–250/day but this is possible during summer months only, as our men do not venture out into the sea while it's raining. Due to our experience, we know our customers' needs very well, and also understand the value of functioning together as a single unit. There's definitely strength in numbers.

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## PROFITS DOUBLE, THANKS TO FUNDING ASSISTANCE



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**Betel Leaf Producer Group,**  
Aathur Panchayat, Thoothukudi

VKP's grant of Rs.1.50 lakh during the pandemic breathed life into the business of this group! Demand for their produce has always been high in states like Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, UP, Delhi, West Bengal, Rajasthan. But in 2020, this group with 480 members struggled to survive. Production was nil. Though they were able to sell locally, sale was minimal, and the loss ran to several lakhs. With no end in sight, the unit was about to shut down when the grant from the project gave them hope. Now, their livelihoods have improved, and in the last few months, their profits have doubled too. ”

## RENTING OUT EQUIPMENT ADDS TO THEIR INCOME



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**A. Palanisami,**  
Aandiyagoundanur Farmers Producer Group, Udumalaipet Block, Tiruppur

We have 100 members in this group, most of whom are women. Our produce consists of all kinds of vegetables especially tomatoes, beetroot, chillies, brinjal and some spinach. We sell them wholesale to markets in Udumalai, Pollachi, Oddanchatram, etc. VKP's grant of Rs.1.50 lakh was a timely intervention in 2020 when we were incurring huge losses. We bought power weeder, seed planter, sprayer, fresh cutter and other battery-operated handheld devices. We rent them out to our members and also members of other PGs in the area. In addition to our monthly earnings from selling vegetables, we're able to earn a profit of Rs.500–700/day. ”

## PROCESSING WASTE, REDUCING COST KICKS UP THEIR EARNINGS



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G. Akila,

CEO, Pudukkottai Organic Farmers Producer Collective, Nathampannai Panchayat, Pudukkottai

We make snacks and savouries from organic millets, cereals and rice (white, red and black – each has different varieties), which we directly buy from farmers at a rate that's at least 15–20% higher than the market rate. We make food items, with oils that are made with organic raw materials only. We sell them wholesale to shoppers within the district, and also to other southern states, Delhi, Madhya Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir. In 2020-21, we did Rs.3.33 crore worth of sales. With VKP's grant of Rs.10 lakh, we were able to buy a millet parboiling unit, which increased our production quantity. Before this, we had to travel to Keeranur (30 km away) to boil 1,200 kg of millets and the labour alone would cost Rs.20,000 plus transportation cost. But with the parboiling unit, we can process 5 tonnes for Rs.8,000 as wages. Additionally, rather than waste the extract that comes from processing millets, we turn it into cattle feed and earn from it. Each month, from boiling 50-tonne millets and 20-tonne rice, we'd get 20-tonne bran, from which we earn Rs.1.40 lakh.

”

## THE UPSWING LEARNING CURVE OF A COLLECTIVE



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J.S. Krishnasami,

Chairman, Sangamam Farmers Producer Company, Vellamadai Panchayat, Sarkarsamakulam Block, Coimbatore

With over 900 members (300 women), this PC focused on manufacturing and processing of groundnut oil, coconut oil and gingelly oil into respective marachekku oils, and the extraction of sugar from sugarcane and turn coconuts into kopparai. With Rs.10 lakh grant from VKP, the collective bought a solar dryer. It also opened a retail outlet on Mettupalayam High Road to sell its products. Oil processing is the PC's primary source of income; it has enough skilled labour and the capital to do that. Monthly earnings are Rs.7–8 lakh, out of which 10–15% is profit.

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# Workshops, Discussions & Distributions



Across 31 districts where VKP has been implemented, various activities have been held to enable beneficiaries gain maximum benefit from the project. Here's a glimpse of those sessions that were held until December 2021.

## HON'BLE CHIEF MINISTER LAUNCHED CSS & CFS, DISTRIBUTED FUNDING TO EG & PG



Hon'ble Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu Thiru. M.K. Stalin distributed Rs. 79.50 lakh to 106 Producer Groups and Rs.57.75 lakh to 77 Enterprise Groups at the Secretariat in Chennai. Additionally, he launched 23 Community Skill Schools and Community Farm Schools - one of each in 23 districts with an outlay of Rs.23 lakh and Rs.17 lakh respectively. The Chief Minister also distributed 'Skill Training Kit' and 'Farm Tool Kit' to a beneficiary each. In Tiruvallur too, he distributed loans and welfare schemes worth Rs.105 crore to 23,683 members of 1,881 Self Help Groups in the district during an event organised by Tamil Nadu Women's Development Corporation. Of which, 7,994 VKP beneficiaries from 226 units across project area received Rs. 1.83 crore. Soon after the event, funds were distributed for intended SHGs in other districts.

### Training in AC repair and service at Cuddalore



A month-long training programme on repair and service of AC & refrigeration was conducted by INDRSETI at its campus in Cuddalore. Out of the 26 participants, 13 were new beneficiaries mobilised by the district team. After course completion, INDRSETI provided certification to the participants. VKP is in the process of giving them credit linkages.

### Training camp for women on goat rearing at Erode



The district team in Erode and the Department of Animal Husbandry conducted a training camp for a women SHGs on goat rearing in Pungampalli hamlet near Punjaipuliyampatti, Sathyamangalam Block. Veterinarian Dr.Saravanan spoke about the prevention and treatment of diseases in goats, cattle feed management and government-sponsored schemes.

### Seminar on coconut cultivation at Coimbatore



The project team in Coimbatore attended a seminar at the Coconut Research Station in TN Agricultural University, Aliyar Nagar, Pollachi, to commemorate World Coconut Day. Thiru.C.Jayaprakash, DEO-Kovai, held a discussion with Dr.Pranitha, Head, Coconut Research Centre, on coconut business.

## World Bank's virtual meet

The Implementation Support Mission (ISM) virtual meet was conducted by World Bank at the VKP office in Guindy, with an interaction with the State team, headed by Tmt.M.Pallavi Baldev, I.A.S., CEO-VKP. Review meetings assessed the progress of VKP, while measuring the success of activities implemented so far. Recommendations and feedback were welcomed. ISM's goal was to gauge effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, sustainability and benefits and/or impact of the project. A Forward Plan was created by the project team, World Bank and other Technical Support Agencies.



### Training for SPARKs in onion cultivation and its post-harvest at Dindigul



The project team in Dindigul, and Horticulture Department selected 30 SPARKs farmers from Producer Groups and conducted a 3-day training programme in onion cultivation and its post-harvest techniques. Held at KVK Gandhigram, it was conducted to increase productivity. It also enables SPARKs to be Trainer of Trainers (ToT) for their peers in Community Farm School (CFS).

### Krishnagiri SPARKs trained in harvest techniques of mango, guava & lemon



The district team in Krishnagiri, and ICAR-KVK, Elumichangiri, conducted a 5-day training programme from November 8-12 in harvest and post-harvest techniques of mango, guava and lemon cultivation. This was held for 30 SPARKs farmers from Madurai, Cuddalore, Virudhunagar and Krishnagiri, to enable them to become Trainer of Trainers (ToT) for their peers in Community Farm School (CFS).

### Manuals and certificates distributed in Krishnagiri to 30 SPARKs



District Collector Thiru. V. Jayachandra Bhanu Reddy, I.A.S., Krishnagiri, distributed training manuals and certificates to 30 SPARK farmers from Madurai, Cuddalore, Virudhunagar and Krishnagiri. They had participated in a 5-day training programme conducted by the district team in cultivation and harvest techniques of mango, guava and lemon.

### 4-month training course for 35 candidates by DDU-GKY at Tirunelveli



As a part of VKP's convergence programme, 35 candidates Underwent a 4-month training course in housekeeping, and also repairing & servicing of air conditioners, washing machines and refrigerators at Tirunelveli. 12 are from Nanguneri Block - a project area. Conducted by DDU-GKY for over 2 months at the National Engineering College, the course has both theory and hands-on practical classes. Candidates have job assurance after course completion.

### Training for 35 SPARKs at Tenkasi in dairy farming and vermicompost, 22 were women



As a part of Community Farm School (CFS), the district team in Tenkasi, and trainer Dr.Renganathan from RSETI, conducted a 10-day training programme in dairy farming and preparation of vermicomposting (fertiliser made from worms). Farmers were requested to bring their own cow milk to test for protein and fat levels. This also enabled the trainer to detect diseases that attack cows. The sessions highlighted cattle-feed management, discussed ways to increase milk production and also safeguard cattle from diseases. Out of 35 SPARKs (22 women) who participated so far, the district team will select 3 to 4 farmers with pre-set criteria, and enable them to become Trainer of Trainers (ToT) for their peers in CFS.

# TRAINING IN BANANA CULTIVATION & VALUE-ADDITION FOR SPARKs AT TNAU, TRICHY



The district team conducted a 3-day training programme on banana cultivation and value-addition for SPARKs at Tamil Nadu Agricultural University, Trichy. District Collector Thiru. S.Sivasu I.A.S. visited the exhibition stalls of products made by TNAU and other entrepreneurs. All 33 participants were given certificates and also taken on an exposure visit to the FPO-based banana processing unit in Thottiyam Block.

## Certificates distributed to 57 women beneficiaries in Nagapattinam



District Collector Dr. Arun Thamburaj I.A.S., distributed certificates to 57 women beneficiaries, who participated in a training camp held at IOB-RSETI, Nagapattinam. Organised by the district team, 22 women were trained in tailoring, and the remaining in mushroom cultivation. The Collector also gave a DD of Rs.1.50 lakh to individual entrepreneurs, and encouraged the project team to form Enterprise Groups (tailoring) and Producer Groups (mushroom).

## Refresher training programme in Chennai for project staff from across districts



One-day refresher training to all project staff was conducted in 3 batches in October 2021 at Chennai. This refresher training included orientation, action plan, preparation and presentation by districts. Topics covered were guidelines issued for formulating PG, EG, PC, Community Skill Schools, Community Farm Schools, and also Environment & Social Management Framework.



## World Bank's virtual visit to Trichy concluded week-long review meeting

The World Bank conducted its review meeting with VKP for 4 days in October 2021. The objective of this virtual meet was to assess progress of the project in the last one year, primarily focusing on the new initiatives such as Community Skills School, Community Farm Schools, Matching Grant Program and Youth Development Centres, amongst others. Senior staff of World Bank reviewed compliance of project activities with the fiduciary, safeguards policies, and legal covenants of the project.



## Training programme for residents of The Banyan

A training programme on masala powder preparation for the residents of The Banyan in Thiruporur Block, Kovalam, was organised by the project team in Chengalpattu. The Banyan is an NGO that provides services for homeless persons with mental illness in the city. There were 16 participants, 10 of whom are mentally challenged. The rest are employees at the NGO, who will be responsible for marketing and branding of the product. Other than train beneficiaries, VKP will provide them funding and enable access to bank credit linkages to form an Enterprise Group.



### Awareness camp in Dindigul on availing funding via government schemes

An awareness camp on availing financial assistance/benefits under government schemes was held for individual entrepreneurs at the DIC office, Dindigul. Out of 169 participants from across the district, 93 were new entrepreneurs from 7 project blocks. Jointly organised by DIC and the district team, it explained the details about schemes like NEEDS (New Entrepreneur-Entrepreneurship Development Scheme), PMEGP (PM's Employment Generation Programme) & UYEGP (Unemployed Youth Employment Generation Programme).



### Training for 30 beneficiaries at Coimbatore on CCTV installation by RSETI

A 2-week training in August 2021 on CCTV installation was held by RSETI at its campus in Coimbatore. 30 participants are taught theory and also given hands-on training in this course. 13 of them are new entrepreneurs mobilised by the district team and the rest of the participants were by RSETI.



### 35 women in Krishnagiri trained in tailoring

RSETI trained 35 women in tailoring at the VPRC building in Pannandhur Village, Krishnagiri. Participants are all new entrepreneurs, who were mobilised by the district team from Kaveripattanam Block. After 30-day training, they were initiated into the project and given funding for their respective enterprises.



### 20 members of a mushroom PG given training in Nagapattinam

VKP-Nagapattinam organised a training camp for 20 members of the Mullai Mushroom Producer Group in Sangamangalam Panchayat. The 2-day camp took place at ICAR-KVK in Sikkal and focused on mushroom cultivation, seed production, disease management and marketing, and other related topics.



### Sanitary Napkin production training for 33 women in Salem

A 13-day training programme on making sanitary napkins was held in August 2021 at Government School in Puliampatti Panchayat, Omalur Block, Salem. Jointly organised by district team & INDSETI, all 33 participants were given bank credit linkages by the project team to form an EG.

# Dignitaries visited Tenkasi for field inspection and to review schemes

Hon'ble Minister Thiru. KR Periyakaruppan, Department of Rural Development Tamil Nadu, Dr. K.Gopal, I.A.S., Principal Secretary to Government-RD, and Tmt. M. Pallavi Baldev I.A.S., CEO-VKP and MD-TNSRLM, visited Tenkasi in July 2021 for field inspection, and reviewed schemes available in the rural development department. The Hon'ble Minister distributed Rs.22.35 lakh to 94 project beneficiaries and conducted a Dept. review meeting. Thiru. Praveen. P. Nair, I.A.S., Director-RD & PR, District Collector Thiru. S. Gopal Sundararaj I.A.S, Thiru. E. Raja, MLA, Sankarankoil Assembly, Dr. T. Sadan Thirumalaikumar, MLA, Vasudevanallur Assembly, Thiru. N. Saravanan, PD-DRDA, Tmt. P. Vijayalakshmi, PD-TNSRLM, and Thiru. V. Premkumar, DEO-VKP, along with all BDOs, district staff from VKP and TNSRLM participated in the meeting.



## Webinar on TAHDO schemes for beneficiaries in Erode



VKP-Erode organised a webinar on the schemes of TAHDO (TN Adi Dravidar Housing and Development Corporation). Orientation on convergence discussed various TAHDCO schemes available and how project beneficiaries can avail them. Several queries and doubts on the application process were cleared by A.Ananda Mohan, Assistant, TAHDCO. Ms.G.Jayanthi, District General Manager, TAHDO Erode, was the special guest. Beneficiaries from the SC/ST community within the project area, all staff from the Block and DPMU also participated.

## RSETI's 2-day training & certification programme in Dharmapuri



National Academy of RUDSETI conducted 'Domain Skill Trainers' - a 2-day training cum certification programme - organised by the Indian Bank RSETI, Dharmapuri. Dr. R.Vaithyanathan I.A.S., Additional Collector Development, Dharmapuri, Thiru. Bipul Chandra Saha, National Director of RSETIs, Thiru. R.R.Singh, Controller Assessment and Certification, National Academy of RUDSETI, Thiru. Joseph Anandh Raj, Assistant Controller of TN, and Thiru. M.Ganesh Kumar, Associate Chief Operating Officer (Jobs & Skills), VKP participated in this programme.

## Capacity building exercise held for producer groups in Krishnagiri



VKP-Krishnagiri organised a capacity building exercise for Enhancing Productivity of existing Producer Groups through Comb Honey. A ready-to-eat honey without the loss of nutrients and royal jelly, comb honey can be cultured to any dimensions and shapes. It can be consumed readily without any need for processing. And it has high market value. 30 farmer producer groups expressed their interest in using comb honey methods in their bee-keeping practices.

## Convergence meet held with all department heads in Tiruvannamalai



A convergence meeting with all departments heads was held across the State. Spearheaded by VKP and TNSRLM, under the chairmanship of District Collector Mr.B.Murugesh, I.A.S., HoDs of several departments such as Agriculture, Horticulture, DIC, Animal Husbandry, Agri Engineering participated in the meeting to discuss and plan for convergence initiatives. In Tiruvannamalai, the session focused on the number of schemes available in every department, and how project beneficiaries could avail them. Additional Collector /Project Director DRDA, PD TNSRLM, AE District Industries Center, DEO-VKP, Tiruvannamalai, and respective Joint Directors of Agri Engineering, Agriculture, Horticulture and Animal Husbandry, participated.

## Villupuram Collector participated in World Youth Skill Day celebrations



Thiru. D. Mohan I.A.S., District Collector of Villupuram visited the Rural Self Employment Training Institute (RSETI) there and participated in the 'World Youth Skill Day' celebrations jointly organised by RSETI and VKP. A training course on Mobile Phone Service for candidates identified via PGP was inaugurated. The Collector visited the RSETI bazaar, where handicraft products made by youth trained by VKP & RSETI were being sold. He also interacted with youth who are being trained in Aari embroidery at RSETI. Deputy Collector (Training), Lead Bank Manager, DEO-VKP and Director-RSETI participated in the event.

# Growing with Tribes Atop a Hill

**A revenue-generation model can be successfully implemented and also sustained within the tribal community. Jestin Pauls, CEO of a producer collective at Aadhimalai, The Nilgiris, explains how**

According to statistics available at the TN Forest Department, there are 36 tribes and sub-tribes in the State. Most of them are cultivators, agriculture labourers or dependent on forests for their livelihood. Their socio-cultural life revolves around nature.

The Nilgiris is no stranger to the tribal communities, who benefit, both socially and economically, from several government-sponsored welfare schemes. One of which is Vaazhndhu Kaattuvom Project (VKP), which generously funded a Producer Collective in this hill-station, specifically for the number of the communities and regions it covers, and the enterprises it supports.

A grant of Rs.10 lakh in July 2021 enabled the Aadhimalai Pazhangudiyinar Producer Company Ltd (APPCL) to construct a millet-processing centre at Banglapadikai.

## Formation of APPCL

APPCL has 1,609 shareholders from 209 villages covering 6 regions - Arakod, Hassanur, Coonoor, Kotagiri, Konavakarai and Pillur.

Incubated by the Keystone Foundation, an NGO, in April 2013, APPCL was initiated to encourage traditional organic food farming, handicrafts, livestock rearing, sustainable harvest of forest produce, and conservation of natural resources.

APPCL is wholly owned by the indigenous communities, one of the first of its kind at a national level. Jestin Pauls, CEO, APPCL, explains how this came about. "I had worked on a project for the NGO when I first met members of this community," he recalls. But Pauls faced a challenge. Traditional livelihoods of these communities involved cultivating coffee, pepper, silk cotton, millets, pulses, cereals, spices and fruits. They also gathered honey, shikakai, gooseberry, soap nuts, forest herbs and occasionally phoenix leaves (depending on the season) from the adjacent forest.

"But it was done in individual pockets. There was no sharing of labour, knowledge, investment and revenue. It created a serious lacuna in market intervention, logistics and enterprise building," explains Pauls. "There was a need to provide a fair price, eliminate market fluctuations and ensure continuous marketing of the produce."

Convincing the community to work together was difficult initially. "Each tribe was insular and there was a lack of communication between them," he adds. "For instance, they worked relentlessly in getting pure wild honey but had no means to sell their produce. They'd pour it in small bottles found in their homes & sell them at very low profit margins. So despite the high-quality of products, revenue was abysmal."

## Entrepreneurship model

So an entrepreneurship model was introduced and very soon, a processing centre

was established in Semmannarai in the mid-90s. The community was trained to hygienically pack and label honey, and use beeswax to make candles and soaps.

"This revenue-generating model helped them understand how to add value to their produce. So they began bringing in pepper, cloves, coffee etc from their respective farms. Word spread slowly. But we knew processing of this produce from over 200 villages at one centre was impossible," points out Pauls.

More processing centres were established at different places - Banglapadikai, Pillur, Pudukad and Hassanur. "We began focusing on tribal communities within the Nilgiris Biosphere Reserve (NBR) - covering a few parts of Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Karnataka. This increased revenue and profits. Since the goal was to empower the community, we initiated the shareholders concept. Only eligibility criteria was that he/she should be a producer from the community," he avers.

For marketing, Last Forest Enterprises was roped in, which buys 60% of the produce from APPCL. Products are sold on its website - [www.lastforest.in](http://www.lastforest.in). Bulk sales are also undertaken.

## VKP funding

While the world continues to reel under the onslaught of Covid-19, the tribal community at APPCL was one of the hardest hit. They lost their only source of income.

"APPCL had already incurred a loss of Rs. 22 lakh in 2019-20. The pandemic-induced lockdown worsened it. We approached VKP and applied for a grant. That's how a millet processing centre came about," says Pauls.

Why millets? Why not another centre for honey and other products? "Around 10 years back, the tribal community cultivated and consumed millets. Over time, their eating habits changed, and so did their farming-pattern," he explains. "But last year, they lost their jobs and were sitting at home idle. So some seeds were distributed and their interest in millet cultivation made a come-back."

This, however, posed another challenge. To de-husk and process it, the community had to go to Hassanur or Erode. It was a logistical nightmare. With VKP's funding, a millet-processing centre at Banglapadikai helped the community in reducing operational and transportation costs.

"Usually, the community produces only around 200 kg of millets each year. But thanks to the grant, APPCL now produces over 4 tonnes. If you include all the tribal communities in the Nilgiris, we expect it to rise up to 80 tonnes/year," smiles Pauls.



# Promote Entrepreneurship in Agriculture

S.V. MURUGAN

The farming community in Tamil Nadu is at the cross roads of development despite agriculture becoming more challenging and less remunerative. Pressures of high land input costs, labour costs, high credit compounded by low farm gate prices and high risks are pushing farmers to abandon the sector entirely, and migrate to nearby towns and cities as construction workers, domestic help, daily wage labourers.

Inclusive growth is only possible when agriculture growth is achieved and shared across the country. Sustainability has become an important challenge in the area of food production.

Considering this, it has become a priority for the government to focus on the development of agriculture and agri-based industries, and promote the concept of 'Agripreneurship'.

## What is Agripreneurship?

Agripreneurship is the process of adopting new methods, processes, techniques in agriculture or the allied sectors of agriculture, for better output and economic earnings. An agripreneur is an innovator, who drives change in rural economy, by adopting innovative ideas in agriculture and allied sectors.

## Opportunities

Basically, the opportunities are at Input stage, Farming stage, Value Chain, Output Processing and Marketing and other related services.

Agriculture process needs different kinds of inputs like seeds, fertilisers, pesticides and farming technology. There are excellent opportunities for entrepreneurial process in the areas like bio-pesticides, bio-fertilisers, vermi-compost, testing and amending soil.

Further, there is a lot scope in the area of agri tech PR, where small and marginal farmers who cannot afford to purchase hi-tech machines can aggregate to open hiring centres for common use. Hence, there is a need for low cost machines for the purpose of small scale farming.

In the post-harvest stage, there are opportunities in the areas of value chain, output processing and marketing. The changes happening in supply chain management of agriculture produce are opening doors for new businesses. Agri products processing units are booming up. There are opportunities in the area of distribution and logistics.

Agri-related service is another area for the promotion of agripreneurship. These services include procurement of seeds, fertilisers, pesticides etc, and distribution at village level, providing agri tech equipment like multifunction harvesting machines, tractors, sprayers etc on lease, offering technical services like soil testing, plant protection, weed control, installation and maintenance of irrigation facilities, transportation and storage of agri products.



## Suggestions

- Promote entrepreneurial culture among the people in rural areas
- Conduct area-specific technical training programmes and entrepreneurial education for the rural youth
- Improve infrastructural facilities in rural areas
- Identify agri-allied areas of business to promote entrepreneurial activity
- Create development fund to support agri-related start-ups
- Establish agricultural incubation centers
- Extend financial and marketing support through Farmer Producer companies
- Provide risk cover to the agripreneurs from the unexpected crisis
- Extend subsidies, incentives, etc.

## Challenges

- Poor infrastructure and communication facilities.
- Poor entrepreneurial culture.
- Talent migration from rural to urban areas.
- Poor technology and lack of knowledge in using farm equipment.
- Warehousing difficulties and high cost of logistics.
- Lack of market information, destabilised prices for agriculture products, uneven demand, influence of local mediators, among others.

(The writer is Director of National Agro Foundation)



# Business Prosperity



## VAAZHNDHU KAATTUVOM PROJECT

Department of Rural Development and Panchayat Raj

5th Floor, Tamil Nadu Small Industries Development Corporation Limited,  
Thiru Vi Ka Industrial Estate, Chennai 600 032

(044) 434 43200 | [tnrtpstate@gmail.com](mailto:tnrtpstate@gmail.com) | [www.tnrtp.org](http://www.tnrtp.org)

[f](#) VaazhndhuKaattuvom [@](#) VaazhndhuKaattuvom [t](#) tn\_rtp