

MYRADA

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No.2, Service Road

Domlur Layout

BANGALORE 560 001. INDIA.

☎ : 5353166, 5354457, 5352028, 5358279

Fax : 091 - 80 - 5350982

E-mail : myrada@blr.vsnl.net.in

Website : <http://www.myrada.org>

Kodipuram Village Sanitation Programme

THE EMERGENCE OF THE VILLAGE SANITATION COMMITTEE

A CASE STUDY - MYRADA TALAVADI PROJECT

Ms.Veena Krishnamurthy

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Background :

MYRADA began working in Talavadi Block of Periyar District, Tamil Nadu in 1980. The early eighties saw a thrust on activities related to the development of agriculture and animal husbandry in the area. The activities included the introduction of high-yielding varieties of seeds, application of fertilisers (all of which were supplied free by MYRADA), support for irrigation, and the introduction of cross-bred milch animals. As part of the effort in improving Animal Husbandry activities in the area, MYRADA was instrumental in organising milk producers' co-operative societies, establishing a chilling plant and setting up a milk route for the supply of milk to the Erode Dairy.

In order to have a forum for the discussion of developmental activities, Village Development Associations also were organised at the village level. While this body was intended to be representative of the whole village, what in effect happened was that the meetings were a loose gathering of whoever was interested in attending, some vocal persons with vested interests, casual onlookers etc. It was easy for the more powerful persons to gain a strong foothold in these 'Associations', and often most activities undertaken by MYRADA tended to benefit such persons. MYRADA had taken on the role of an 'implementing agency' rather than a 'facilitating agency' and therefore participatory processes were not very well developed at this stage. Though peoples' groups were organised, they were looked at more as a conduit for programmes rather than as functional institutions that could independently and efficiently manage developmental activities. The late eighties and the nineties saw a clear shift towards participatory processes.

An Introduction to Kodipuram :

Kodipuram village of Talavadi Block has a population of around 800 people. There are 183 families, with a caste-wise break-up as follows:

SC	72
Lingayat	68
Kumbarashetty	18
Shetty	9
Dhobi	10
Muslim	5
Soliga	1

When MYRADA began its activities in the area, all the activities mentioned above were taken up at Kodipuram. A milk sub-collection centre was set up, and also a Village Development Association organised.

In 1986-87, the 'Elephant Trench' Programme was taken up. As Kodipuram lies in a forest area, attacks on crops by wild animals were common. As a preventive measure, a trench (7 feet wide and 6 feet deep) was dug around the village border adjacent to the forests. This labour intensive activity provided employment to a large number of landless and marginal farmers. For the first time, the really poor began to benefit the most.

The Emergence of Self-Help Groups :

It was around this time that small homogeneous groups who tended to work together began to be noticed not only in Kodipuram but also in several other villages where the Elephant Trench Programme was being implemented. The emergence of such groups and their development into self-help groups began to be encouraged by MYRADA. Such self-help groups were encouraged to start savings, and out of the common fund thus set up, to give out small loans to the members for consumption and production.

In Kodipuram, in May 1987, a men's group with 12 persons belonging to the Scheduled Castes was organised. This group also began with savings and lending activities. As these members had contiguous lands, they mooted the idea of having a community well to irrigate all their lands. MYRADA assisted them in digging two irrigation wells - one mobilised under the 'Jeevandhara Scheme' of the Government benefiting 5 of the 12 families, the other well supported by MYRADA funds benefiting the remaining 7 families. They were also assisted in acquiring oil engines and pumpsets. This group acquired the name 'Community Irrigation Farmers Association (CIFA)'.

By March 1988, the wives of these men also wished to form a group and they were organised into the Gnaneswari Mahila Sangha. The primary activity for this group as

well was savings and credit for consumption and small productive activities. These women were assisted with seed capital, livestock enterprises, and major repairs for 9 members' houses.

Emphasis on Self-Help Groups :

During this period (the late eighties), there was a clear emphasis laid by MYRADA on the building up of such groups and working with them. The major reason for this emphasis was the lessons learnt from working with large heterogeneous organisations like the societies and VDAs which appeared to benefit the better off. Most programmes began to be routed through the SHGs, benefiting the group members. In due course of time, (once the milk societies were linked with the Periyar District Milk Cooperatives' Union at Erode, the AH activities taken over by the Dairy, and the Village Development Associations had ceased to exist), the staff began to work exclusively with SHGs. For many staff, this also proved to be an easy way out as they did not have to worry too much about their relationship with other sections of the village.

In Kodipuram, this meant that out of 183 families, focus began to rest on 12 SC families.

By April 1992, even CIFA became defunct. The reasons now are not very clear, but it appears to be that the members lost interest in their group after their request for laying pipelines on their lands was turned down by MYRADA because a lot of money had already been spent on this irrigation programme, and the staff felt that the farmers could now arrange for the pipelines on their own. The situation altered only slightly in August 1992 - that is work began with a few more families - when another women's SHG called 'Lakshmi Mahila Sangha' was organised, but this again was with SCs.

One major fallout of this new approach was the losing of contact with the rest of the village. This started to generate resentment in the rest of the village as glaringly brought out in several incidents at Kodipuram.

1. In mid 1991, a Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) training programme was conducted at Talavadi for officials from NCAER (National Council for Applied Economic Research) and SDC (Swiss Development Cooperation). The field exercises for the programme were conducted at Kodipuram. To start with, the exercises raised expectations as the villagers began to think that finally something to benefit the whole village would happen. However as the exercises progressed, it became evident to them that it was just 'training', and in several groups, people lost interest in the exercises half-way and walked off. {One point of interest however is that it was during this PRA that the villagers first expressed a clear need for the sanitation programme for the village as the drainage conditions in the village left much to be desired}.
2. In April 1992, in order to promote non-formal education activities in the Project area, a Jatha was organised. One of the processions was to enter Kodipuram

village but at the entrance itself, the procession was stopped by a group of villagers led by a person of prominence in the village. Their stand, "You people work only with the SCs. There is no need for you to enter our part of the village. Please go straight to the SC colony". The staff tried to reason things out with them, but could not succeed. Rather than generate too much hostility, the procession turned back. (Though a member of a minority community in the village, the leader probably enjoys prominence in the village because he is a big farmer, and many people do go to him for credit. He is also a very aggressive and vocal person).

These disturbing incidents provoked the staff into sitting up and critically examining what was happening. It was evident that in the process of working with and strengthening SHGs, the organisation had alienated itself from the larger village. It was somehow assumed that if one or two groups were organised in a village, then that village was 'covered'. The staff realised that something had to be done to establish a healthy relationship with the whole village not only in Kodipuram, but also in all other villages. Two possibilities that began to be strongly considered were :

- a) More and more groups of the poor could be organised, taking care to see that all sections of the village are covered.***
- b) Activities that would benefit the village as a whole, and in which all villagers could participate, could be taken up.***

KVK Activities

MYRADA Talavadi Project was sanctioned a Krishi Vigyan Kendra in 1991. After the initial teething problems, the KVK activities began to take some definite shape in 1993.

One component of the KVK is the SC/ST programme, an operational research activity aimed at the socio-economic upliftment of 100 SC/ST families. For this activity, 51 SC families were selected from Kodipuram. In order to obtain baseline data about the village and the 51 families, PRA exercises at the village level, and a household survey of the 51 families were conducted. During these exercises and also during the survey, resentment against MYRADA was observed.

The 51 families were organised into a Farm Science Club (for purposes of training and dissemination of technical information) in 1993. They were also subsequently divided into two groups based upon a wealth ranking exercise, to form two Self Help Credit Management Groups - the Karmika Sangha started in February 1994, and the Manteswamy Sangha started in April 1994.

Under the 1993 Frontline Demonstration activity (a national priority programme aimed at the increasing of production and productivity of oilseeds and pulses), 14 farmers from Kodipuram were selected for demonstration of new varieties of groundnut and redgram. Under this activity, critical inputs for the cultivation of crops are provided free. A deliberate attempt was made to select non-SC families. This helped to establish some rapport with non-SC sections of the village.

In May 1993, a mixed caste group (non-SC) called Mahadeswara Sangha was organised.

A Breakthrough :

In January 1994, while some of the staff were travelling on a local bus, among the co-passengers were some of the leader's relatives who began passing unpleasant remarks about MYRADA. For some time the remarks were ignored, but when they began crossing limits of decency (there was also a female staff member), the staff protested. A heated exchange of words followed which, but for the intervention of the other villagers in the bus, would have turned into an exchange of blows.

When this was brought to the notice of the Project Officer, he advised the Sector Officer in charge to visit Kodipuram and have a one-to-one chat with the leader at the latter's residence. The Sector Officer accordingly visited him at his house, and was able to sort

out several misunderstandings. When he finally came out of his house, he had with him a promise of the latter's support in future activities.

Visit of the Additional Collector, Periyar District :

The Additional Collector of Periyar District, who is also the Project Officer (DRDA) visited the Talavadi Project in February 1994. During this visit, he was taken to see a Sanitation Programme being implemented at a village called Neithalapuram, with which he was impressed particularly because the villagers had participated actively. The same evening, he was taken to Kodipuram to attend a meeting of Lakshmi Sangha. Though there was no discussion related to village sanitation during this visit, he had seen for himself the poor sanitary conditions in the village.

A month later, when the Project Officer visited the Collectorate at Erode, he was informed by the Additional Collector that there was an amount of Rs.2 lakhs unspent under the DRDA's 'District Decentralised Scheme' which had to be spent before May (within the two month grace period available after the end of the fiscal year). He wanted to know if MYRADA could utilise the amount immediately for any infrastructural activity. The P.O. seized this opportunity and mentioned the possibility of taking up a sanitation programme (drainage) at Kodipuram, in addition to two other programmes but on two conditions - one, that the money for the activity should be given to MYRADA directly and not through the Block Office, and two, that the money should be given before the works are undertaken. The A.C. agreed to both conditions, and quickly the modalities were worked out.

Village Meeting - The Beginning of the Sanitation Programme :

A village meeting was held at Kodipuram on the 25th of March 1994. This meeting was attended by 40-50 people; the staff took pains to ensure that members of all castes including their leaders, were present (the Village Chief, the Ex-Karnam, and the earlier troublesome leader were also present). The villagers were informed about the programme, and their active participation was sought in the planning and implementation of the programme. For the first time, the villagers were receptive and agreed wholeheartedly to participate.

The very next morning, (26th), another meeting was held with the villagers, and a Village Sanitation Committee constituted. Before constituting the Committee, MYRADA staff explained to the villagers the role that the Committee would be expected to play, which was as follows:

- a) To monitor the implementation of the entire programme in order to ensure quality work and people's participation as agreed upon;
- b) To make all necessary payments for the works undertaken, and to assist with purchases.

- c) To establish and supervise a maintenance system after completion of the works.

The villagers were then asked to suggest persons to be on the Committee. It was spontaneously decided that there should be representatives from each 'street', and the following list was quickly drawn up:

Name of Member		Caste
1. Mahadevappa	Lingayat	(Village Chief)
2. Ramachandrappa	"	(Ex- Village Chief)
3. Shivamallappa	"	
4. P.Devappa	"	
5. Eliyas	Muslim	
6. Jayarama Shetty	Shetty	
7. Kalarasa	S.C.	
8. Basavanna	"	
9. Bellaiah	"	
10. Ramaiah	"	
11. Ananthapadmanabhan	Brahmin	Ex-Karnam
12. D.R.Sridhar	MYRADA Staff	

A discussion was next held on the various tasks that would need to be performed, and responsibilities were assigned as follows:

Excavation (Earth Work)	Villagers
Purchase of Size stones & transportation (Committee to help in identifying sources, fix rates etc.)	MYRADA
Purchase of Cement and Transportation	MYRADA
Purchase of Jelly and Transportation	MYRADA
Purchase of Boulders and Transportation	MYRADA & Villagers
Carrying above to work site	Villagers
Masonry and labour wages	MYRADA
Finalising Contracts, Making payments	Committee
Supervision Measurements	Committee
After work Maintenance	Committee

After all this was finalised, a 'Village Transect' was conducted. By this time, the Panchayat Union Engineer also joined in. The whole group walked around the entire village to identify all stretches along which drains were necessary. The first rough

estimate, according to the Union Engineer worked out to over 4 lakhs which was far beyond the available budget. In consultation with the villagers, it was decided that certain stretches which did not immediately need attention could be dropped for the present. It was decided that for the SC colony, a main drain would suffice as the side streets were small and quite flat. The SC members present also appeared to agree.

The U.E. then took back the details of all measurements with him and worked out the plans and estimates. In order to avoid delay, he suggested that the whole works be treated as 14 separate works (with an upper limit of Rs.20,000 each) so that a higher official's sanction would not be required. This done, the final proposal was submitted at the Collectorate on the 29th of March 1994. By mid April, the first installment of Rs.90,000 was released to MYRADA.

Details of Works Undertaken :

Box type drains had to be constructed as this was the only type approved by the Government in Tamil Nadu and for which standard rates of payments were available. This was also the preference of the villagers. The entire excavation work was done free of cost by the villagers, as this was agreed upon as their contribution. This activity was supervised by the Committee which ensured that all the families on each of streets along which drains were to be constructed, contributed labour.

Once excavation was completed, the Committee worked out contracts with masons of nearby villages to take up the construction. The construction works commenced and proceeded smoothly and efficiently with the Committee holding regular review meetings (around 12 meetings in the two month period). During the meetings, the progress of the works was reviewed, a statement of accounts shared with everyone present, plans and decisions made, and based on the estimates worked out, a requisition given to MYRADA for the next installment of money.

Before commencement of the works, an S.B. Account had been opened in the name of the Committee, with Anantapadmanabhan and Sridhar as the Co-signatories. MYRADA kept transferring amounts to this account as per the requisitions submitted by the Committee, throughout the works. The Committee maintained clear accounts, as also minutes of each of the meetings held.

Two of the Committee members - Shivamallappa and Ramachandrappa - did exemplary work. A few members like Eliyas and Jayaram Shetty did not exhibit much enthusiasm, and very often were not even present at meetings. One noteworthy feature was the interest and hard work shown by Mahadevappa, who was not a member of the Committee (he is the Secretary of the Mahadeshwara Sangha). Mahadevappa agreed to help with keeping attendance, maintaining vouchers, making payments etc. and did the same very well throughout.

Problems with the SC Colony

In spite of members of the SC Colony being present during the initial planning exercise, at the very beginning of the implementation itself, they began expressing dissatisfaction because a few stretches inside their Colony had been left out. (These incidentally were not the same stretches as had been deliberately left out during the planning; these stretches had never been pointed out). On the 20th of April, a separate meeting was held with the SCs where MYRADA staff assured them that the matter would be looked into after completion of the programme, and if possible taken up with MYRADA funds, as it was too late at this stage to be included under the DRDA activity. A map was also quickly drawn up and an estimate made. The SCs however were adamant and insisted that their stretches be taken up first because there was no guarantee that they would be taken up later.

While excavation on all stretches was completed, the SC part had not even been started. When the Committee pulled them up during a meeting on 26th April, the SC representatives simply stated that there was no point having the main drain without the side drains. At this point, MYRADA firmly told them that there was no question of taking up their work unless the work that had already been started was completed.

After this, they began to participate but continued to create problems -complaints, small delays etc. Finally, the Project Officer himself had a meeting with them where they were asked to clearly express what their problems were. When directly confronted like this, most of their grievances turned out to be imaginary ones. Having cleared the air, the P.O. once again assured them that the stretches pointed out by them would be taken up after the DRDA works were completed. After this meeting, the SC members started to behave in a more responsible and mature manner.

A few delays were also encountered during the implementation because materials were in short supply in the market and also transportation had to be across the State border. The DRDA part of the work was finally completed on 28th June 1994 after which the stretches in the SC area were taken up. At this juncture, a new problem arose.

Due to technical reasons, it was decided that the drains from the SC area would be connected to the drain on Doddahatti Street which was a Lingayat Street (See map - Annexure). The Lingayats refused to allow this! MYRADA decided not to have anything to do with this new problem - it was just made clear at a Committee meeting that technically what was feasible had been suggested but if the villagers had objections to that, they were welcome to arrive at their own solutions, (a drain in any other direction would have been against gravity), but any additional funds required would have to be raised on their own. The Committee members then discussed this among themselves, and managed to convince the Doddahatti Street people to allow the SC area drain to join theirs. Once this was sorted out, the new drains were also completed. The amount saved out of the funds sanctioned by DRDA was utilised for these additional

works; in addition to this amount, Rs.5000 from the KVK SC/ST programme was utilised.

In May, the DRDA transferred the II and III installments of money (together) to MYRADA. After completion of all the works, the DRDA settled the bills with MYRADA according to the standard rates available with them. This amounted to a little more than had actually been spent, which meant that the Committee had undertaken the work at costs lower than standard official rates. From the savings, MYRADA transferred Rs.5000 to the Committee as 'maintenance fund'.

<u>Details of Work Undertaken</u>	
Total Length of Drains	: 761 metres
Total Cost	: Rs. 249,595
People's Contribution	: Rs. 17,685
DRDA Contribution	: Rs. 215,782
MYRADA / KVK	: Rs. 16,128

The Additional Collector visited Kodipuram for the second time, when the work was almost completed. He walked round the village inspecting the work, held informal discussions with people, and also held a formal meeting with the Village Sanitation Committee members.

Maintenance of the Drainage System :

Initially, it was decided that 2 persons (one for the SC Colony and one for the other areas) would be employed for the maintenance of the drainage system. To pay for the wages, Rs.2/- would be collected from each family of the areas concerned. This arrangement soon ran into problems. The person engaged to clean the drains (belonging to the Dhobi community) in the non-SC area was threatened with ostracization by his community because he was taking up such a lowly job. Afraid of this, he promptly backed out.

Following this, the Committee contacted a scavenger at Talavadi to come in regularly and clean all the drains. This has been done once already. In the meanwhile, with the onset of monsoons, the rains have been taking care of the problem. It is to be seen how this arrangement works out in the long run.

Evolution of the Village Sanitation Committee into the Village Development Council :

The Committee's role in the management of the programme proved to be very effective and it was realised that it could provide a good forum for the discussion and

management of a variety of issues and activities concerning the whole village. The Additional Block Development Officer who attended one of the Committee meetings had a discussion with the Committee about the new 'Family Credit Plan' scheme launched by the Government (along the lines of IRDP). He requested the Committee to assist in the selection of eligible families. Following this, at another meeting, the Committee conducted a very effective Wealth Ranking exercise of the village - the process was so thorough that the ABDO who was initially sceptical was clearly surprised and impressed towards the end. The Family Credit Plan scheme became one of the points of discussion at the meetings from then on.

The Committee is now referred to as the 'Village Development Council'.

