

0116. Coolie Sangha Formalisation Application to Novib (Oct 1988)

Project Application submitted to Novib describes the situation in which the project exists, lists 4 arguments for the need of the project, and details an implementation plan.

1. APPLICANT ORGANISATION:

AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT & TRAINING SOCIETY (ADATS)

ADATS Campus,
Bagepalli 561 207,
Kolar district, Karnataka,
India.

2. LEGAL STATUS:

Reg. No: 97/78-79 under the Karnataka Societies Registration Act, 1960.

UHM No: 094570001 under the Foreign Contributions Regulations Act

3. BANKERS:

A/c No: 3314 with Canara Bank, Bagepalli branch.

4. PROJECT TITLE:

CHELUR EXPANSION PROGRAMME II PHASE
(Coolie Sangha Formalisation)

5. LONG TERM OBJECTIVE:

- To build up a taluk level mass organisation, the Bagepalli Coolie Sangha, that agricultural labourers struggling for their humanisation can identify themselves with.
- To enable the organised labour class to identify themselves with larger national movements, discover and play their historic role in the countryside.

6. SHORT TERM OBJECTIVES:

- To immediately integrate the Coolie Members, CSU Representatives, and Cluster Secretaries of the CEP area as full fledged and accredited members of the BAGEPALLI COOLIE SANGHA with full voting rights.
- To effect the withdrawal of the Community Workers from the central villages of the CEP area and to strengthen the existing ADATS practice of participatory management, so as to ensure that the newly elected Cluster Secretaries, Village Level Workers and CSU Representatives will plan, monitor review and further the material as well as non-material aspects of Coolie Sangha building activities.
- To introduce, through intensified cadre training, meetings, debates and enhanced adult literacy, a richer diversity in the village level Coolie Sangha Units with the total and grass-root participation of all the Member Coolie families in this managing and furthering process.
- To continue to reinforce discrimination for Coolie women, and to set up weekly Mahila Coolie Meetings for Coolie women to separately discuss matters.

- To attempt to develop the Coolies as an effective minority through the continued effecting of a larger unification of an enlarged poor, and the realising of an alliance between the Coolies as a whole and *Ryot* women, with the leadership for the resultant joint actions and struggles that ensue clearly staying within the Coolie Sangha.
- To positively influence village society by projecting values that are particular to the Coolies class, through their entry into local level civic bodies, and the re-defining of concepts of power and leadership.
- To consolidate the Clusters by gap filling in order to increase coverage and benefit the Coolies by encouraging the Coolies to themselves reach out to the odd villages of the CEP area that have been left uncovered in the first three-year phase.
- To intensify the campaign whereby the Coolies save for the posterity of their mass organisation by contributing ten percent of their earnings to their respective Sangha Funds with a clear self financing objective.
- To continue imbibing management skills so that the Coolies are equipped to themselves run their politically subservient alternate credit structure by the end of this three-year phase.
- To withdraw the sixty Village Level Workers at the end of this three-year phase so that there are no ADATS paid workers in the villages of the CEP area where elected Coolie Sangha functionaries will be guided and accompanied by the area Field Assistant and two Field Workers.

7. SITUATION IN WHICH THE PROJECT EXISTS

The Chelur Expansion Programme (CEP), where ADATS started building Coolie Sangha Units (CSUs) in September 1985, is now three years old. Fairly strong CSUs have been built in fifty five villages comprising nine clusters. Five villages of the CEP area have been attached to the older clusters for administrative convenience, since these villages border the older area of 27 villages where ADATS has been working for the past eleven years. The tenth CEP Cluster (Chakwel) comprising 7 villages had to be closed down after a one year nine months involvement due to very particular problems that arose.

These 55 CSUs have a total membership of 1,681 Coolie families which represents 54% of the total population of these villages. Each village has a male Village Level Worker, a female Village Health Worker and a Teacher working full time to build the Coolie Sanghas and implement the various ADATS programmes, projects and activities.

A Children's Programme for the government schooling and supplementary education of 1,700 Coolie children is being implemented in these 55 villages. This programme, which began in mid 1986 with ActionAid support, will continue till 1993. All the remaining activities in the CEP area are being supported by NOVIB.

A very serious Adult Literacy Programme was implemented for the first two years in the CEP area. Through this effort, about 1,200 Coolies in the age group of 25 to 40 years were able to acquire basic literacy skills.

A very efficiently designed cadre training syllabus was incorporated into the content and syllabus of this Adult Literacy Programme. Besides, Coolies were brought, in batches, for a series of cadre-training sessions. All the village level staff of ADATS and the CSU Representatives were taken on study/exposure trips. Very many public meetings were held in the CEP area, and a high degree of political consciousness was obtained in the Coolies and their functionaries.

Social and economic issues related to land, wages, sexist and caste discrimination and cases of corruption and cheating were taken up in all the villages of the CEP area. Besides solving these problems, the Coolie struggles that ensued did a lot to unify them and enhance their organisational strength. Coolies were helped with legal aid, aid distress and other non-material support to follow these struggles through. Bonded labourers were released as a result of Coolie struggle and ADATS' legal support, and even *Ryot* women were supported to free themselves. ADATS supported the Coolies in early 1987, in a very major political struggle that shock the electoral equation of the taluk in an irreversible manner.

A massive three year Dry Land Development Project was undertaken from 1987 to give meaningful employment to 1,681 Coolie members for five summer months every year. This programme will develop about 6,000 acres of virgin and under-utilised, highly eroded dry land hugging the hills and belonging to the Member Coolie family families. It will prevent migration and permit regular and day to day Coolie Sangha building activities to continue. The unjust and low wage structure in the CEP area is being positively effected, and the Coolie Sanghas are being strengthened since the project is subservient to political requirements and has very clear non-economic objectives built into it.

An alternate, interest-free credit giving programme which was developed by the Coolies in the older villages was introduced in the CEP area with a high degree of success. A total of 811 Coolie borrowers took loans averaging Rs. 311 to overcome various problems. Crop loans accounted for 28% of these borrowing, rearing livestock 15%, trade 14%, repairing huts 11%, redeeming lost lands through struggles and legal actions 9%, and consumption 14%.

All this has resulted in 55 very strong and viable village level Coolie Sanghas being built up. Very definite and formal systems that include Membership Lists, Suspension and Cancellation procedures, regular and minutes weekly CSU Meeting and Cluster Meets, periodic Review Meets, grass-root planning practices, annual election of three CSU Representatives from every village, procedures to recall their elected functionaries even before the expiry of terms, etc. have been established along with a very high degree of political conscientisation in even the ordinary member Coolies.

Therefore ADATS decided to go ahead as planned and withdraw 7 Community Workers from as many Clusters in September 1988. In another Cluster, we decided that the Community Worker's involvement must continue for one more year. In yet another, we felt that the Community Worker should stay on for at least two more years since the Coolie Sangha Formation formalities were not yet completed due to unforeseen reasons.

8. ARGUMENTATION FOR THE NEED OF THE PROJECT

- In our intervention strategy, Coolie Sangha building activities have been envisaged for a total of nine years. The first three-year involvement, which we term as Coolie Sangha Formation, has just been completed. The process which we have initiated in these villages has to be seen through the next three-year phase of Coolie Sangha Formalisation.

ADATS has just now brought out a paper describing this Formalisation phase, which provides an applicable and guiding theory to evolve relevant strategies for effective action in this three-year phase of our involvement where a higher degree of decentralised participation and a positive pluralism in is envisaged to be achieved. The above mentioned paper which is herein annexed, along with this project application, forms a complete and cohesive document.

- ADATS sees a role for itself to responsibly steer this phased withdrawal in order to achieve a total staff withdrawal by 1991, by when the Coolies of the CEP area will be fully integrated into the BAGEPALLI COOLIE SANGHA. These definite

tasks, which we believe will ensure a genuine democratisation whereby each and every Member Coolie family participates in the running of her or his mass organisation, have been enumerated on pages 2 and 3 of this project application and also in the concluding pages of the paper on Coolie Sangha Formalisation.

- Income and expenditure generating programmes and service activities like the Children's Programme, the Coolie Credit Fund and the Dry Land Development Project undertaken in the villages of the CEP area have to be accompanied for some more years. Though it is very definitely and realistically envisaged that projects like the Coolie Credit Fund will be run by the Coolies themselves after a few more years, the presence of ADATS staff is needed for some more time in order to imbibe the necessary management skills, and to continue facilitating a "learning by doing" process for three more years.
- Though it is a very serious, definite and time targeted objective that the Coolies themselves self-finance their organisational expenses, including the support of their functionaries, this is neither immediately possible nor advisable as at this moment.

The fund raising campaign is, in quantitative terms, very nascent and their Sangha Funds are not sufficient to meet all the expenses needed to run the Coolie Sangha in the CEP area - be these meeting costs, or the paying of stipends and allowances to their full-time workers and elected functionaries.

On the other hand, we do not believe it advisable that the Cluster Secretaries, even if elected by and having a direct mandate from the Coolies themselves, be entirely free of ADATS' control and discipline for at least three more years. We believe that we have a definite role to ensure that the newly elected functionaries of the Coolie Sangha do not hijack the nascent mass organisation till the Coolies develop checks and controls to guarantee their accountability.

9. PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

9.1. Integration into the BAGEPALLI COOLIE SANGHA

All the Coolie Members, CSU Representatives and Cluster Secretaries of the CEP area will immediately be integrated as full fledged and accredited members of the BAGEPALLI COOLIE SANGHA with full voting rights. The organisational elections in March/April 1989, where three Representatives from each of the sixty CSUs and nine Cluster Secretaries from the CEP area will be chosen, will be held under the supervision of the BCS President and Executive Committee. ADATS will not nominate anyone to fill these posts without a contest. This will have far reaching consequences. It will mean that these elected Coolie functionaries from the CEP area will, for example, contest for the post of BCS Secretary on May Day 1989. In the 18 member strong BCS Executive Committee which will comprise of 6 Cluster Secretaries from the older area, 9 from the CEP area, the Secretary, Treasurer and President, the CEP Cluster Secretaries will form the largest single block. They will thereby be in a position to exercise a tremendous influence on the shaping of the policies and direction of the taluk level apex co-ordinating body.

9.2. Participatory Management Practices

The prevailing ADATS practice of participatory management whereby the staff themselves draw up their job descriptions, set the parameters for their work, etc. will be further strengthened with an invitation to the newly elected Cluster Secretaries and CSU Representatives to join in the process.

Planning, monitoring and review skills of the newly elected functionaries from the CEP area will be consciously developed through formal training as well as a “learning by doing” process. We believe that this will enable them to contribute in a special and particular way to the shaping, determining and planning of the material as well as non-material aspects and inputs of Coolie Sangha building.

As a first and immediate step in this direction, this project application along with its complementary paper on Coolie Sangha Formalisation will be thoroughly discussed, deepened and enriched at the central, cluster and village levels. All ADATS village staff and Coolie Sangha functionaries from the CEP area will not only familiarise themselves with the planned efforts, but also personally recognise the envisaged objectives as goals that they have contributed to the making of.

On the last day of August 1988, we already initiated this process with a seminar organised for the CEP Village Level Workers, who are all local youth who will stay on in their respective villages for the next three years. They evolved their own “job descriptions” for the next three years, and this included the internal rectification of their CSUs, political education, fostering unity, involving Coolie women, enhancing vigil, entering civic bodies, fighting a newly emerging form of casteism (reverse discrimination by the Harijans within the CSUs), gap filling, wages, and Sangha funds. This kind of a profound identification of self imposed tasks was uniquely socio-politically oriented and left no doubts in our minds as to why they had chosen work in ADATS.

9.3. Total involvement of Coolie Members

A fuller involvement of the Member Coolie families in this management process will necessarily result in diversity. ADATS has the wisdom to recognise diversity as separate from differences. The resultant fluidity in the village level Coolie Sanghas is recognised as healthy and something to be preserved, instead of being trampled upon into a uniform conformity to abstract standards. The direction providing role that ADATS will play is to prevent this pluralism from degenerating into license for liberalism.

Such an active promotion of diversification in the structure and functioning of the mass organisation will demand a very difficult ADATS involvement in this coming three-year phase. Our promotional and facilitating responses will have to be particular and peculiar to each village, making the job very tedious and laborious.

9.4. Positive Discrimination in favour of Coolie Women

This is a result of conscious ADATS policy adopted about three years back, when we decided that though the concerns of women were not just a “separate problem” that needed “special attention”, it was necessary to focus attention on the fact that the general clubbing of women into the movement could easily degenerate into a liberal paying of lip sympathy, superficially claiming that the Coolie Sangha was gender-free. The position and problems of Coolie women, we believe, needs to be repeatedly and emphatically refocused over and over again, till the gender-free characteristic of the Coolie Sangha naturally and openly projects itself in each and every field of even the Coolies’ personal and private lives.

Though the Adult Literacy classes have been conducted, for example, for both women and men, we believe that it is necessary to re-conduct them, once again, only for women. Though we can theoretically claim that women and men have equal right to represent their families as Coolie Members, it is necessary to ourselves identify Coolie families where women take more than an average burden of management and specially invite them to be members in the place of their husbands. Similarly, we believe that the reservation made for women of one

seat from each village level Coolie Sangha in the election for CSU Representatives has to continue till more than one woman per CSU start getting elected.

DLDP wages will continue, everywhere possible, to be paid to Coolie women instead of men. The *Giriraja* chicken programme will have only women beneficiaries. Only ladies bicycles will be bought by ADATS. Women will be appointed at senior positions even if this creates more “practical problems” and “compromises on efficiency”. And in our writings, ADATS will continue to use she to also mean he.

9.5. & 9.6. The Developing of an Effective Minority

This concept has been elaborately explained in our recent paper entitled “Furthering the Coolie Sangha Model of Development.” It pre-supposes that though the rural poor are demographically an absolute majority in the village populations, our experience in even the older villages with strong Coolie Sanghas shows that not more than 40 percent of the Coolies organise themselves into a mass organisation with serious consequences and clout. Therefore the mere extending of the model of neighbouring villages and taluks will not result in the Coolies becoming a majority that wields determining power.

Yet, by their sheer numbers, a disciplined group of organised people can positively influence the prevailing practice as well as course of societal development. To arrive at a quantum definition of a geo-politically viable area coverage, it is necessary to keep on extending till this definition is obtained. In other words, the Coolies will become an effective minority in village society the moment they are capable of and thereby actually do re-shape the normative base of village society through a projection of their own values that are peculiar and particular to their class characteristic. These Coolies values, we believe, are based on a recognition of the need to preserve justice and morality, even when the rest of society interprets such a pursuit as unrealistic and even naive.

It is not ADATS alone, even if with our northern partners, who have a role in this effecting of a geopolitical coverage. We believe that the organised Coolies, without leaving their respective villages, can all put one foot forward. This will result in a great stride that will take us towards a larger area coverage. Coolies in the CEP area will do this by giving effective expression to what the Coolie Sangha really means. That it is not just a self-centred strategy for Coolie development alone, but an empowering of the Coolie class in order to re-define concepts of power, leadership, attitudes towards women, minorities, contemporary political practices, etc.

To do this, and also in so doing, they will strike alliances with other suffering and exploited sections in the villages, including *Ryot* women. Their strategy will involve the identification of more general issues demanding a larger struggle, the entering and influencing of local level civic bodies including the Mandal Panchayats, the Primary Land Development Bank, Co-operative Societies, etc.

9.7. Gap Filling

In the first three years of our involvement, quite a few villages were left untouched by Coolie Sangha building operations. As a result, a lot of gaps were left in our coverage. This has had serious negative consequences when the Coolies attempted to enter the Mandal Panchayats in early 1987, during subsequent wage strikes, etc. There easily are ten such villages with a substantial Coolie population that need to be taken up in this coming three-year phase.

It will be the collective responsibility of the respective Cluster Meets (a total of 37 local Coolies, for example, comprising the Cluster Secretary, eighteen CSU Representatives, six Village Level Workers, six Village Health Workers and six Teachers) to go into these villages

and convince the Coolies there to form Coolie Sanghas. ADATS responses will be confined to paying the salaries of the new village level staff who will be selected by and answerable to the Cluster Meets, providing facilities, and the including of these newly joined Coolies in our list of beneficiaries.

Coolies will get a chance to re-affirm their faith in the Coolie Sangha through the advocacy of the model as something positive and desirable to their neighbours. This will prove to be very necessary to fight a complacency which is bound to set in once external forces of repression and subjugation have been tamed.

We foresee that this will once again contribute to a positive plurality in the Coolie Sangha Formalisation phase since there will be an uneven level of organisational maturity and development in the CEP area. This, we believe, is not only inevitable but also healthy.

ADATS' ability to, and even the very nature of response will be sharpened because of an overlap of developments and the uneven levels of evolution and maturity within the movement, even in one single geographic area. This will prevent a uniform and standard promotional and facilitating response which can easily miss the complexity of the situation and result in a mere repetition of our earlier three years' involvement.

9.8. Sangha Funds

The rather lofty call given by ADATS asking the Coolies to contribute ten percent of their earnings, from whatever source, to the respective units of their Coolie Sangha was, besides being a very serious solution offered for their organisational posterity, also symbolic in nature. It is based on the principle of the indivisibility between the concepts of participation, self-confidence and sustainability on the one hand, with self-financing on the other.

The situation today is that member Coolies, by and large, contribute only a tenth of their income which they receive from ADATS as direct benefits. There is a general reluctance to similarly contribute from their other sources of private income. Every year, after the harvest, they make a voluntary contribution that has no proportionate bearing to their yields. And from higher daily wages earned from the peasants as a result of ADATS inspired Coolie struggle there is hardly any Sangha Fund contributions being generated.

Enclosed, we have given a statement of Sangha Fund collection status as on 6th October 1988 wherein it is shown that the Coolies have collected

Rs 3,57,596 from the older 27 villages where we have worked for the past eleven years (It must be noted, however, that the call to contribute to their Sangha Funds was given only in March 1987.)

Rs 2,46,832 from the CEP area where we have worked for the past three years, and

Rs 86,412 from the GEP area where we have worked for the past two years.

This situation has to be radically changed these coming three years through education and persuasion. Sangha Fund contributions that we presently compute at representing only 3 percent of the total Coolie earnings have to rise towards the target of 10 percent.

9.9. Coolie Credit Fund

This project, not to be confused with Sangha Funds, is a fund built up with grants from ADATS in order to provide the Coolies with interest-free credit for their petty productive and consumption purposes. Enclosed please find annexures that give details on the build up and performance of this Coolie Credit Fund (CCF) Project in the CEP area.

ADATS will continue, in this next three-year phase of involvement in the CEP area, to gradually build up the village level CCFs to targets of Rs. 500 per member Coolie. In this process, the self-confidence and managerial ability of the Coolies to manage the project by themselves after the target have been reached will also be built up.

9.10 Withdrawal of the CEP Village Level Workers by end 1991

By the end of this three-year phase of Coolie Sangha Formalisation in the CEP area, all the sixty Village Level Workers will also be withdrawn. At that time, only the Teachers and Village Health Workers will remain to manage the children's programme in the CEP area.

At that time, the elected CSU Representatives will take the place of the withdrawn Village Level Workers in the same holistic sense as the elected Cluster Secretaries are now envisaged to replace the withdrawn Community Workers. We will also, at that time, bring out a paper on the next three-year phase of Coolie Sangha Consolidation.