

0406. 4th Progress Report on the SCNZ Programme (Mar 1999)

1. COMMUNITY ORGANISATION

During this 6 month period, the Gudibanda Programme grew to cover a total of 2,542 families in 60 villages, with the addition of 10 new villages and 493 new families. But an unfortunate incident resulted in 273 Member families suddenly getting cancelled, dropping the strength to 2,134 Member Coolie families.

1.1. The jeep accident

In the last week of October 1998, the ADATS/SCNZ jeep was involved in a tragic road accident, killing 2 motorcyclists. Responding to a phone call, without knowing what exactly had happened, senior ADATS Staff, our Legal Advisor and the Coolie Sangha President rushed from Bagepalli, in another jeep, to investigate and help.

Our political opponents, who were desperately waiting for an opportunity like this, were ready in waiting. They organised a mob to beat up our people and set to fire the Bagepalli jeep (not the one that was involved in the accident!).

Simultaneously, in a pre-planned move, the ADATS/SCNZ Office at Gudibanda was ransacked.

A few local policemen were corrupted by the powers that be to try and scare us. They threatened to book a conspiracy to murder case against the Project Director.

By and large, we were able to contain the situation. Patients were tended to. Coolie Sangha members from as far away as Chintamani rushed to the spot and hundreds of them camped at Gudibanda for the best part of a week. There was representation from very nearly all the 125 Clusters comprising 800 village CSUs! We got the accident jeep released through the Courts and sent it for repair. We got the driver released on bail. Arrangements were made to claim insurance for the 2 jeeps – one for repair costs and the other for total loss.¹ The Project Director called their bluff and refused to take anticipatory bail against the nonsense accusation.

A few weeks later, we deliberately went ahead with a festival on Children's Day and openly declared that we would not be frightened by *Ryot* threats and political intimidation. Under NO circumstance would we desert the Coolies of Gudibanda, we declared.

1.2. Let the Gudibanda staff handle

After our initial direct intervention to contain the crisis, we felt it would be prudent to use the incident to strengthen the nascent people's organisation at Gudibanda itself, rather than merely project the overall strength/presence of ADATS and the Coolie Sangha. So we deliberately took a back seat and let the VLWs, VHWS, TC's and CSU Representatives themselves handle the affair. This turned out to be a good decision. It steeled their resolve to build the Coolie Sangha, and contributed to building a genuine people's organisation which was more than a functional unity needed to implement a project.

But 273 Member families from various village CSUs decided that it was not worth the effort, and got themselves cancelled. Most of these cancellations were scattered across 36 villages (an average of 6-8 families per CSU dropped out), and only 1 village (38 families) chose to disband their unit and opt out of the Coolie Sangha movement *en masse*.

¹ New India Assurance Co. finally settled Rs 27,000 against a repair claim of Rs 38,000 (actual loss Rs 43,000) to the ADATS/SCF account. But they are hedging on the total loss claim which might, at the end of the day, turn out to a loss for the ADATS Consortium account.

- Somenahalli was a newly taken up village where ALP classes and other measures had not sufficiently prepared the Coolies for this kind of opposition. They chose to close down their CSU and drop out *en masse*.
- The Ganganapalli Cluster Community Worker, Gangulappa, was assaulted and prevented from entering the village. When he went to book an atrocity case, the police refused to entertain his complaint.
A *dharna* had to be organised in front of the police station before the Sub Inspector relented. But, as with the so-called mob that attacked our people and set fire to the jeep, Gangulappa's attackers still haven't been arrested by the police, in spite of there being dozens of eye-witnesses to both incidents.
- In Katenahalli, Coolie Sangha building activities were disrupted for almost 3 months by the upper caste Reddys, using the pretext that one of the accident victims hailed from this village.
CSU Members convinced the victim's family that it was an accident and not due to any deliberate design, and succeeded in dividing the opposition. The CSU is now functioning smoothly.

During these months we were unable to take up any new villages. Coolies eyed us with some fear and trepidation. Quite naturally, they were scared to burn bridges with the middle peasants. They were not sure as to what would happen if ADATS failed to live up to its declared promise of holding out against the opposition...

Another 134 got scared. They felt that the might of the *Ryots* and their political touts was too much, especially since our political opponents controlled State power. They have been temporarily suspended from various village CSUs and we hope that they will be brave enough to return. While this has no impact whatsoever on the children's programme – i.e. their children continued to receive benefits, attend government school and *Balakendra*, etc. – we are afraid that they are going to be treated as second rate members when they do choose to come back.

While regular CSU Meetings and Mahila Meetings were interrupted due to these problems, the ones that were held were conducted with a new found intensity and seriousness of purpose.

1.3. Coverage as on 31 March 1999

With the cancellation of 273 families, the population coverage at Gudibanda taluk has dropped from 59% to 46% in just 6 months. If the temporarily suspended member families were to return to the fold, this figure will rise to 49%. This goes to show how volatile membership figures are in the early days of Coolie Sangha building, *in spite of all the material benefits being offered*.

In the more mature CSUs, we have seen that membership drops when an emphasis is placed on internal rectification, as opposed to merely fighting the external foe and finding fault with the *Ryots*. We have observed that membership drops when Coolies are asked to enforce a stricter fiscal discipline with proper utilisation and prompt repayment of CCF loans, make an honest declaration of their annual incomes and pay Sangha Tax, etc. We have also seen male Members rebelling when asked to treat their womenfolk on par with men and stop cheating on their wives, respect widows and deserted women, share in domestic work, send their daughters to school, oppose early marriage, etc. They tend to rebel and get cancelled.

But such heavy cancellations in these hardly 2 year old CSUs of Gudibanda only suggests fright of an order that we have not earlier witnessed. Coolies are actually afraid to burn bridges with the *Ryots* and establish an independent identity.

	Last Report	This Report
Number of Villages	50	60
Normal Member Families	2,049	2,134
Temporarily Suspended		134
Cancelled Members	Nil	273
Women Membership	290 (14%)	360 (15%)
Coverage of Village Population	59%	46% <i>(49% including Suspended)</i>

It is the SC/ST (Harijans and Tribals) population of these 60 villages who find the Coolie Sangha most attractive in spite of, or perhaps even because of, the sharp polarisation taking place in village society.. 57% of the total SC/ST population in the region have opted to be in the village CSUs.

They also constitute 62% of the Coolie Sangha strength.

On comparison, only 42% of the middle caste (Muslims, Barbers, Washerfolk, Potters, Blacksmiths, Shepherds, Weavers, etc.) population and 32% of the forward caste (Farmers and Traders) population have opted to be in the Coolie Sangha.

But interestingly, there are more forward caste families (22%) within the Coolie Sangha than middle caste families (16%), in spite of a larger percentage of the former opting to join the people's organisation.

Ethnic Composition of the Normal Members

Member Families	Percent in CSUs	Caste Group	Total Families	Ethnic Coverage
1,322	62%	Scheduled Castes/Tribes	2,334	57%
350	16%	Middle Castes	841	42%
462	22%	Forward Castes	1,468	32%
2,134	100%		4,643²	46%

1.4. Staffing

The Staff strength continued to remain the same, and a noticeable settling down took place. There is a visible growth in feelings of pride, ownership and commitment. Most of the Staff are confidently aware of the larger goals that they are working toward, and their vital contribution to attaining it.

But we had a rather unfortunate incident with one of the Mahila Trainers (the auxiliary nurse/midwife who had opted into the programme from Bagepalli) and she had to leave. Though a replacement was taken on immediately, this means a settling down time and effort, in spite of the new person being from one of the older CSUs of Bagepalli taluk.

The Field Assistant, Area Field Workers and Mahila Trainers continued to go to Cluster Meets every day and following it up with village visits to attend CSU and Mahila Meetings. But FW Krishnappa's villages did suffer when the Mahila Trainer got into a mess and her replacement has not been quite as effective in helping Coolie women pull their acts together.

² In the previous Progress Report we had given a much higher figure. But this time we have not included the village strength of Somenahalli (1,011 families) since this village has, in the meantime, dropped out *en masse*.

1.4.1. FEMINISATION OF A WORK CULTURE

Once again, we entered into the age-old discussion in feminist circles as to whether women-with-problems should be taken on as staff to organise poor women... On the one hand, this is not a very good practice. But on the other hand, where does one find the educated middle class woman-without-problems to come and work for her sisters in distress? Come to think of it, are there women-without-problems, middle class or otherwise? All of us agree that blending the personal with the political is vital in order to attain a gender credibility. But when women staff start doing this, giving room for their desires for security, frustrations and desperation, things get messy and they are not sure as to whether the personal or the political should take the upper hand...

During our weekly Situation Meetings when over 75 of our colleagues get together every Monday morning, we have spent many an agonising hour reflecting on these issues. We realised that most of what we say about poor Coolie women applies with equal force and measure to Harijans, Tribals and Muslims.

In November 1998, members of the ADATS Core Group attended a gender retreat along with 35-40 other development workers and leading Indian feminists. We frankly confessed that the feminisation of a work culture, especially when it comes to giving room for emotions in our work place, was not as easy or aesthetically pleasing as it sounds. Adhering to principles can result in tremendous personal loss, especially in the realm of relationships and emotional stability. If we are to move beyond tokenism, we have to be prepared to go through serious pain and learning.

1.5. Adult Literacy Programme (ALP) Classes

ALP Classes, which went quite well during the previous 6 months, once again took a back seat due to the disturbances.

But everyone now realises how important it is to prepare and condition the new membership using this vital instrument. All the Field Staff have decided to pursue ALP classes with a fresh vigour in the coming 6 months – April to September 1999.

1.6. Training

1.6.1. BALAKENDRA TEACHERS

The 3 internally evolved aims of the *Balakendra*, spelt out in the previous 2 Progress Reports – childhood, girl child and castelessness – was not forgotten for a single moment.

Balakendra Teachers (TC's) continued to attend their monthly training at Bagepalli for 4 days every month. Besides regular training on teaching methods, giving special attention to school drop-outs and never-attended-school children, the Professors from Chickballapur taught the TC's child psychology and explained the damage caused by emotional abuse in the class room.

Teachers were taught to gauge individual children according to their own capabilities and skills and monitor their progress. They were given printed Report Cards to maintain every test/exam result conducted in the *Balakendras*.

1.6.2. WOMEN MEMBERS

5 women CSU Members from each of the 10 new villages were given a 3 day training on the dogmas of the Coolie Sangha. Gender related issues were discussed during these 3 days.

This session was conducted by a senior Mahila Trainer from Siddalaghatta.

1.6.3. VILLAGE LEVEL WORKERS

A 1 day training programme was held for the 10 new Village Level Workers (VLWs). They were briefed about the aims and objectives of the Coolie Sangha and also their responsibilities as VLWs.

This training was conducted by the Gudibanda Field Staff themselves.

1.6.4. AREA STAFF MEETINGS

All 12 Community Workers continue to meet at Gudibanda every Thursday in order to themselves review developments against plans and budgets. Every other week, all the VLWs and VHWS join them. All of them together discuss matters during these fortnightly meetings and assess the situation. Honest self-criticism and self-evaluation are an integral part of the organisational culture at ADATS, and this has seeped into the Gudibanda Staff and functionaries.

1.7. Issues and Struggles

We refused to let the jeep accident incident paralyse our functioning. We realised that a whole lot of families would have pressing problems which we could not dismiss as small or non-priority simply because we had a larger (organisational) issue at hand. The Field Staff continued to remain sensitive to the needs of Member Coolie families and addressed these in full measure. The below list is only a random sampling of some of the issues taken up by the CSUs with the help of our Field Workers and Mahila Trainers.

- The Special Composition Programme (SCP), a benefit programme implemented by the government in very backward villages was denied to Pasupallodu due to political interference despite 25% of the population being landless.
The CSU discussed this issue in the meeting and decided to hold a rally in front of the Gram Panchayat (local government) Office at Hampasandra. All the Members turned up in large numbers from the entire Cluster and locked up the GP office. After 2 days of protests the authorities revoked their earlier order and granted SCP status to this village.
- In Chikka Kurubarahalli, a comparatively new village, Mahila Meetings were not being conducted at all. For about 2 months after the village being taken up, the men-folk were still reluctant to send their women, though they themselves were prompt for CSU Meetings. They even threatened to quit the Sangha *en masse* if Mahila Meetings were insisted upon. The CSUs of the Gavikuntapalli Cluster, to which this village belongs, decided to talk it out with the men. They convinced them that women needed to discuss matters relating to their health, gender discrimination, education and other issues on a separate fora. The Mahila Meetings have begun and a Village Health Worker (VHW) has been appointed.
- Jayamma, daughter of Yerrappa, a CSU Member of Chikkatammanahalli had been married a year ago to Nagaraj from Gujjepalli. Ever since her marriage Jayamma was constantly being harassed by her in-laws who demanded dowry. She returned to her parents house. Nagaraj went along with other villagers from Gujjepalli to Chikkatammanahalli and demanded that she return back. When the villagers from Chikkatammanahalli opposed this move, Nagaraj and the others resorted to violence. A group clash followed and a complaint was lodged at the police station. The CSU got together to decide on a future course of action. According to their suggestion, Gangappa, our Field Worker mediated a compromise between the 2 families and brought about an amicable solution to the issue. Jayamma has since returned to her husband.
- A village ox (an animal anointed as holy and meant to be sacrificed to the village deity) belonging to Yerralakkepalli was run over by a truck on the highway near Beechaganahalli. People from the village penalised the truck driver for Rs 3,000. When the Yerra-

lakkepalli folk heard of the accident and the subsequent payment they rushed to Beechaganahalli and demanded the money back. They were refused the amount and a clash ensued. A complaint was lodged. The two Sanghas interceded. After a lot of arbitration the money was promptly refunded and the issue was closed.

- Even though the Benneparthi VHW Easwaramma was willing, her husband refused to permit their daughter Sudha to be sent to the ADATS training centre for special coaching classes. His pretext was that she had attained puberty. The Mahila Meeting discussed the issue and all the women approached him. They stressed upon the need to educate the girl child and managed to convince him to send Sudha to the classes.
- Due to efforts of the CSUs, 15 houseless Members were sanctioned Janata Houses (built free of cost by the government) under the SCP programme.
- Venkatalaxmi and her two daughters were deserted by her husband as she couldn't conceive a male child. They were left forlorn without a proper roof on their heads. The Battlapalli CSU contributed to put up a make shift hut for them. They took up her cause and approached the Taluk Panchayat and succeeded in getting her a Janata House.
- A teacher at the Polampalli government school was discriminating against children from Eereddipalli because they are of a lower caste. The CSU met the government school headmaster and saw to it that she was immediately replaced.
- The VLW of Somalapuram had an affair with a girl from the same village. The girl became pregnant but he was hesitant to marry her as his parents were against the match. The Mahila Meeting discussed the matter and reproached his parents for trying to ruin an innocent girl's life. ADATS Field Staff were called in to give credibility to their decision. A registered marriage was conducted at the Sub-Registrar's office at Bagepalli.

1.8. Sangha Funds

Sangha Fund collections into their respective village *Hundis* continued during this reporting period. During the past 6 months, an impressive amount was collected from these nascent CSUs, taking the total Sangha Fund collections to Rs 219,501. As per the BCS Rules, this amount has been placed in Fixed Deposit in the name of the Gudibanda Coolie Sangha, to accrue to become a corpus fund for the taluk.

Since individual bank accounts in the names of the respective CSUs have not yet been opened, the entire amount has been credited into the taluk level bank account of the Gudibanda Coolie Sangha. However, each village CSU records its particular collection and these figures are compared and monitored in the Area Staff Meetings.

The ADATS Core Group tried their best to impress upon Canara Bank to open a branch at Gudibanda, but the management seems to be dragging its feet on the matter. We have therefore decided that the 60 CSU, 60 CCF and 12 Cluster bank accounts will be opened with State Bank of Mysore, Gudibanda branch.

2. CHILDREN'S PROGRAMME

2.1. Child Strength

2.1.1. POSITION AS ON 31 MARCH 1999

A total of 2,770 children are being supported by the Gudibanda programme. There are almost as many linked as extra children and the ratio is 1:1.

Girls constitute only 46% of the supported children, but there are more linked girls (52%) than boys (48%). This suggests 2 things:

- There is a gap in the gender sensitivity of the project Staff and Coolies at large, and the Staff are more aware of the need to support the girl child.
- Since only younger children in their primary classes are linked to sponsors in New Zealand, there are more girls in these lower levels of school than in middle and high school.³

	Linked Children	Extra Children	Total	
Boys	665	48%	820	59% 1,485 54%
Girls	724	52%	561	41% 1,285 46%
Total	1,389	50%	1,381	50% 2,770 100%

During the past 6 months, 123 boys and 159 girls were linked to sponsors in New Zealand. Though we had set a target that 75% of Coolie children should go to regular school, so far we have been able to reach only 60%. The sponsorship programme has made continued education a possibility for many children who would otherwise have been forced to drop out due to sheer poverty or forced into daily labour by their parents.

The CSUs are increasingly intervening with the government School Teachers and the system as a whole in their quest for better and quality education for their children. This has been brought about by a new realisation regarding the importance of education in their lives.

- The Chenduru CSU recently demonstrated demanding that government School Teachers give permission for children from Class VII and X to go to the special in-house coaching classes conducted by ADATS. The children themselves, led by their TC, pitched in with a hunger strike. Government School Teachers who had bowed to political pressure to prevent children from attending the ADATS/SCNZ run coaching classes had to quickly relent before the matter got adverse publicity.

The CSUs have managed to decrease the drop-out rate of children aged 11 and above. By and large, parents are no longer forcing their 11 year olds to go and earn an income. Though the results are encouraging, we recognise that there is still a lot to be done – *Balakendra* Teachers are constantly being prodded to bring back drop-out children into the mainstream, using various modes and methods of education.

The CSUs also urge parents not to stop educating the girl child once she has reached puberty. There has been a notable increase this year in the number of girls studying in class VII. This is a delicate area and it will take some time before we get satisfactory results. But delicate or not, we are committed to plunge ahead.

2.1.2. ADDITIONAL CASE HISTORIES

We have been a little erratic in the sending of Case Histories to SCNZ and this has not only been because of the socio-political trouble we had in October 1998.

We had agreed with SCNZ that we would regularly send 50 Case Histories every month from June 1998 to February 1999. Though we have crossed the target of 450, this has been done in fits and starts, causing problems of resource mobilisation. We sincerely apologise for the trouble caused.

Date	Number of Case Histories sent	Villages	(of them, new villages)

³ We will further corroborate this suggestion later in this Progress Report

1 June 1998	50	16	
8 September 1998	50	9	(3)
8 October 1998	100	20	(5)
16 December 1998	75	7	(5)
19 February 1999	45	22	
21 March 1999	112	6	(6)
25 March 1999	50	4	(3)
Total	482		(22)

The main reason for this was that with the taking up on new villages, the actual preparation of Case Histories took a back seat. Even when there were children who could readily be linked from a particular village, we were a bit skeptical about linking them till we were certain about the stability of the CSU.

Apart from the unexpected membership cancellations we faced during this reporting period (fortunately this did not result in the cancellation of too many linked children), most cancellations of linked children occurred in villages which were taken up in haste, 2 years back at the start of the programme. In the previous Progress Report we had mentioned that we would wait for 2-3 months before linking any child from a new village. Practical prudence made us wait for 4-5 months...

2.2. Class-wise Break-up as on 31 March 1999⁴

Village	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX	X	Total
Somalapura	3	2	4	2	4	4	3	1	1	0	24
Chinnapalli	8	6	8	11	7	7	6	2	2	0	57
Karaganatham-											
manahalli	8	5	9	8	4	6	3	3	2	0	48
Brahmanarahalli	12	11	6	6	11	8	4	9	3	1	71
Ullodu	9	3	3	6	2	4	3	5	0	0	35
Ninchinabandapalli	5	4	4	2	6	6	5	6	0	1	39
Chowtathimannahalli	6	5	4	4	2	3	6	1	0	1	32
Bogenahalli	20	11	9	18	5	12	4	1	4	0	84
Minchanahalli	18	3	4	6	8	6	10	5	2	6	68
Dodda Kurubarhalli	24	8	5	3	2	3	1	1	0	0	47
Chikkathamanahalli	8	8	4	7	7	7	3	5	0	0	49
Koppukatenahalli	5	2	1	2	0	0	3	0	1	0	14
Sadashivanahalli	5	3	3	4	5	0	0	0	0	0	20
Eereddipalli	7	6	7	9	4	0	2	2	0	0	37
Giddapanahalli	5	4	3	3	2	1	2	1	0	0	21
Jayanthi Grama	5	2	11	3	2	7	4	0	0	0	34
Singanapalli	4	3	4	2	3	2	2	1	0	0	21
Yerralakkepalli	17	12	9	7	4	2	4	0	0	0	55
Chinnappalli	27	13	4	8	2	3	1	2	0	0	60

⁴ These figures have been provided every year in order to be able to study Attrition Rates at a later date

Ganganapalli	7	6	8	6	6	6	6	9	1	3	58
Jambigemaradahalli	9	6	6	9	9	9	9	9	2	4	72
Chintakayilapalli	6	4	2	2	3	1	4	1	2	1	26
Doddanancherla	11	10	3	4	2	1	2	2	0	0	35
Kalvagaddapalli	3	8	8	7	9	9	5	1	1	1	52
Katepalli	5	0	5	7	4	7	1	2	0	0	31
Chenduru	18	27	18	28	14	13	12	9	2	4	145
Korepalli	13	8	7	9	11	15	10	6	2	2	83
Dhumakuntapalli	6	9	3	3	7	7	6	3	3	3	50
Gandhamnagepalli	0	4	4	2	4	6	2	2	1	0	25
Thatlapalli	12	2	5	4	4	2	2	1	0	0	32
Maravapalli	2	1	3	2	4	1	4	0	3	0	20
Obannagaripalli	3	3	3	0	3	2	0	1	1	1	17
Adinarayananapalli	3	5	3	2	3	5	3	0	2	2	28
Benneparthi	6	3	2	3	7	3	6	2	1	0	33
Kadapalli	9	8	13	17	17	10	16	8	5	0	103
Pulsanavoddu	2	4	2	2	1	2	1	0	1	0	15
Gundlahalli	3	2	5	4	7	1	1	3	0	2	28
Yerrapalli	5	6	4	6	9	12	6	3	1	1	53
Gavikuntapalli	11	7	8	5	4	4	4	5	4	5	57
Kondavulapalli	8	10	7	4	6	4	3	3	0	0	45
Dapparthi	15	9	12	10	8	6	6	5	2	1	74
Beechaganapalli	7	8	4	5	3	6	5	0	0	0	38
Chikka Kurubarahalli	3	3	12	5	3	1	4	0	0	0	31
Bathalapalli	7	2	1	10	2	3	3	0	0	2	30
Lakkepalli	16	3	15	8	15	16	1	6	1	3	84
Pasupaloddu	11	5	5	6	4	2	2	2	0	1	38
Kondireddipalli	5	7	9	7	3	8	5	2	0	0	46
Masapalli	6	6	3	3	4	2	4	2	0	0	30
Upparahalli	12	3	5	4	6	4	2	1	0	0	37
Yellodu	10	13	16	14	14	6	7	1	1	1	83
Ambapura	7	3	4	6	3	4	1	1	1	0	30
Kambalapalli	7	4	12	7	12	4	3	2	0	0	51
Bulsandra	10	8	3	3	4	3	2	0	1	0	34
Kondireddipalli	18	5	6	1	1	8	2	1	0	0	42
Sakulavarapalli	12	4	1	3	3	4	8	2	1	1	39
Devareddipalli	10	8	3	0	4	4	9	0	1	1	40
Gantamvaripalli	8	5	4	4	7	1	2	0	1	0	32
Haleperesandra	22	7	7	6	5	7	6	5	5	0	70
Gaggilaralahalli	14	11	8	6	9	16	4	6	2	0	76
Jeeganahalli	10	3	10	1	5	6	4	1	1	0	41

Area Total:	548	361	361	346	329	312	249	152	64	48	2,770
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2.3. The Girl Child in School

We give below the same class-wise break-up of children in school, but with a different emphasis.

	Primary School (Class I to IV)	Middle School (Class V to VII)	High School (Class VII to X)	Total
Boys	795	49%	501	56%
Girls	821	51%	389	44%
Total	1,616	100%	890	100%
	58%	32%	10%	100%

58% of the supported children are in Primary classes, 32% in Middle and only 10% in High school. But girls are not divided in this same proportion. As mentioned earlier in this Progress Report, only 46% of the supported children are girls. But girls outweigh (51%) the boys in primary classes. Their numbers drop to 44% in middle school and once again to 28% in high school. This is not a healthy sign. It shows that girls are kept back home to do domestic chores and get married, once they cross 12-13 years of age (VII Std.).

All the Gudibanda Staff are committed to monitor these girl child figures in this manner and strive for a sex parity *at all 3 levels of schooling*.

2.4. Children not in school

Initially we thought that children who had dropped out from school could be given the same study books as other children. But when we made a study of how much they could fathom, we were shocked to find that they had even forgotten their basics. *Balakendra* Teachers were given extra tasks to teach these and other children who had never had any schooling at all. A review was made after 2 months and it was decided to provide these children with non-formal study material published by the government.

Government of India's proposal to start non-formal education for children in the age group of 6-14 through the National Council of Education Research and Training (NCERT) has been taken up in Malur taluk of Kolar district. The professors from Chickballapur initiated the *Balakendra* Teachers on the above said teaching material. These books were given to us free of cost by the Block Education Officer in Gudibanda.

Non-formal Education (NFE) works in 4 semesters for 2 years. Once every 6 months children are evaluated and, depending on their achievement, they are given the next semester books. After 2 years, children of school-going age can either merge with the mainstream or face their examinations privately. A total of 53 dropout/never-attended-school children have taken up this course. We have provided *Balakendra* Teachers with Progress Cards to keep track of their development.

2.5. Construction

2.5.1. BALAKENDRA BUILDINGS

15 villages acquired land for the construction of *Balakendras*. Of these, 8 CSUs were able to convince their respective Gram Panchayats (local government) to allot subsidised sites. In addition to the average of Rs 4,000 given by ADATS, the Coolies added their own contributions ranging from Rs 1,000 to Rs 4,000 per village CSU. These voluntary contributions of

the Member Coolies was necessary to give a sense of belonging. We also noticed a renewed interest in the happenings of the night school after they shelled out their contributions.

As mentioned in the previous Progress Report, it was decided to build square *Balakendra* buildings measuring 20 feet x 20 feet, with tiled roofs. Work commenced in 10 villages where there was a dire need for the Coolie Sangha's own buildings to conduct the every evening activities for supported children.

The sense of ownership that was promoted by their contributing to the land cost came in very useful. Our initial attempts at centralised supervision did not work out too well. Instead, when each CSU chose its own masons and work gangs, progress speeded up. We centralised only the fabrication works and electrification. Stone and brick masonry, plastering, flooring and finishing were taken care of by the CSUs themselves. Each and every Member Coolie family took pride to contribute as much labour/supervision/advice as they could to make their building better than the others!

The cost per *Balakendra* building went up to a little over Rs 80,000 each, against the budgeted amount of Rs 75,000. Even with such a large and generous contribution from the Coolies, in spite of carefully worked out economy in the design (2 architects helped us), and though there was hardly any wastage in material, the cost per square foot crossed Rs 200.

All 10 *Balakendra* buildings have been completed and we are awaiting the New Zealand High Commissioner to India, His Excellency, Mr. Adrian Simcock, to open 2 of them on 30 March 1999. John Bowis and Beverley Turnbull of SCNZ will open 4 more *Balakendra* buildings on 28 and 29 March 1999.

2.5.2. GUDIBANDA CAMPUS

Similarly, the *Prajakendra* (meeting/training hall measuring 20 feet x 40 feet), common kitchen, store room and overhead water tank are all ready at the Gudibanda campus. Once again, we are awaiting His Excellency, Mr. Adrian Simcock, to open the campus on 30 March 1999.

In the last month of this reporting period, all the Coolie Sangha Members and Gudibanda Staff approached us and said that they would like to beautify the campus (the rough land was extremely uneven and with a very poor soil cover). They requested ADATS to provide non-labour costs like stones, bricks, haulage costs, plants, etc. We agreed and spent a total of Rs 84,291 from our general fund to build stone bunds, build parapets, terrace the fields, lay a road, plant flower beds, lawn and a green wall.

The sense of community that this fostered was truly astonishing! Village after village literally poured into the campus every single day to clear stones, dig pits for tree planting, prepare flower beds, dig up hard earth and plant a lawn, etc. etc. Even the material suppliers, fabricators and electricians started acting like responsible stake holders! We were carefully sensitive to this feeling of ownership that was welling up, and decided to take each and every single advice! Every little detail has been designed with care by the Coolies themselves, in order to accommodate thousands of children who would come into the campus several times every year, and hundreds of CSU Representatives who would come for their 2 days Taluk Coolie Sangha Meetings every single month. ADATS decided that we would add a mid-day meal and endless cups of tea to our contribution!

The building/beautification of the Gudibanda Campus had another welcome outcome. The Campus is located in the midst of very poor families, mostly Muslims, Harijans and Tribals. Many of them had worked as casual labourers with the masons, and nearly all of them had stood around the perimeter and watched the year go by... In the last week of this reporting period, soon after sunset, hundreds of women, Hindus and Muslims alike, trooped into the almost completed *Prajakendra* and declared that they too would like to form a CSU and

would henceforth meet every Thursday night for their Mahila Meeting! They made it a point to emphasise that they had NOT taken their husbands' permission and had not, in fact, even cooked their meals before coming!

Here again, we had made an arithmetic mistake in the 1998-99 budget and typed in Rs 200,000 for a 20 feet x 40 feet *Prajakendra*, instead of the required Rs 400,000. In spite of this, and with a large and generous support from the ADATS general fund, we have been able to complete the building within Rs 300,000.

2.6. Other Activities

2.6.1. MONTHLY TESTS AND MID-TERM EXAM

Periodical tests are conducted for children on their academic progress as well as on general topics that *Balakendra* Teachers cover after their training. These mock tests prepare children for the tension of the exam hall. Generally Coolie children who undergo these tests fare better and are better equipped than their *Ryot* counterparts.

2.6.2. INTENSIVE COACHING CLASSES AND PROBLEMS FACED

Children from the VII and X Std face a public Board Examination – i.e. their class teachers cannot simply promote them to the next higher Std. without assessing actual learning levels. This acts as a barrier for Coolie children who are nearly all 1st Generation – i.e. their parents are not schooled and cannot help out. Schools are either ill-equipped, or do not have the requisite number of teachers, or are not motivated to prepare poor children to face these Board examinations.

So the ADATS/SCNZ programme arranges intensive in-house coaching for about 2 months, just before the commencement of Board examinations. 6 temporary Teachers conduct these classes during the day, and one of them stays back in the night for general supervision and to help children needing extra attention. Last year we had a success rate of 80% - i.e. 8 out of every 10 children who attended the special coaching passed.

This year, due to pressure from the powers that be, many government School Teachers refused to let their VII students attend. They threatened that if any child missed regular classes, they would not be allowed to come back to the school and sit for the exams! This threat made many parents withdraw their children from the ADATS coaching classes.⁵

- In Chowdathimmanahalli village, the *Balakendra* Teacher and VII Std children went on a hunger strike till the parents turned against the government School Teacher and forced him to give their children permission to attend the ADATS coaching.
- When the Deputy Director of Public Instruction (the government officer in charge of a district) heard about this problem, he issued a stern warning to the Block Education Officers that all government School Teachers should be grateful to and co-operate with the ADATS/SCNZ scheme – not oppose it.

The Zilla Panchayat President, though herself a member of the opposition party, also issued a written notice to all BEOs that they should co-operate!

The coaching went ahead after a very uncertain start. 116 VII Std. (48 girls and 68 boys) and 25 X Std. (4 girls and 21 boys) children attended. Coaching could be held for only 30 days for VII Std. children due to the late start. But X Std. children got the benefit of a full 2 months coaching.

⁵ X Std. children could not be similarly threatened since they did not have to go back to school ever again, and so were not at the mercy of their government School Teachers.

Children attended this year's coaching with a zest. After all, it was the fruit of their hard earned struggle. They played games in the evenings, cornered each and every visitor to teach them new songs, and generally had a whale of a time without any Temporary Teacher having to enforce discipline. The Temporary Teachers also excelled themselves and slaved away in the available time. For them, it was a matter of pride since they had challenged and taken on the entire system! Having observed them twice over the past 2 years, we are absolutely convinced that these young unemployed persons from Bagepalli, once they get do get regular jobs, are going to be wonderful teachers.

Tests were conducted every week and a mock exam, on lines similar to the final exam, was also conducted. 81 of the 116 VII Std. children passed the mock exam – 70% pass rate. X Std. children fared better with 23 of the 25 passing – 92%.

Final exams for the VII Std have just got over at the time of writing this Progress Report. We compared the final examination question paper with our mock paper and were delighted to know that 53% to 63% of the questions were identical! The VII Std results will be out very soon and we are all waiting with fingers crossed.

Kannada	58% same final exam questions as our mock exam paper
English	55%
Hindi	53%
Maths	60%
Science	62%
Social Studies	63%

X Std exams started on the 24th of this month and are still going on at the time of writing this Progress Report, but we are already sure that Coolie children will fare well.

2.6.3. CHILDREN'S DAY

The intention to celebrate Children's Day is to give an opportunity for children from all the villages to meet at the taluk level and participate in games, cultural activities, show their talents, be sportive and most important of all to get to know one another and to make friends. On November 14th 1998 they together made a pledge to encourage children who had dropped-out of school and unfortunate children who had never been to school, to attend the *Balakendras* in the evenings and have at least a non-formal education. This promise has been kept and about 53 of these children have taken up this course.

1998-99 Children's Day brought together more than 2,000 children from 50 villages.

Children played, drew, danced, enacted plays, sang and participated in various other events. Boys and girls were given equal importance. The organisers (VLWs, VHVs and TC's) were advised not to separate girls and boys during these events – be it sports or other activities. To our surprise, girls had borrowed short pants from their brothers and friends to play games! This was something they would never have thought of doing in their schools or villages!

2.6.4. SPORTS AND LIBRARY MATERIAL

Cricket sets and volley ball nets were bought along with other sports and play material for the new villages. More library books, reference books, and books on environment were added to the existing ones. New villages were supplied with iron trunks and cupboards to store these material. As no libraries are available to village children, these books have become an invaluable asset to them. Children of non-Sangha Members too make use of the books to increase their knowledge on any aspect – be it science, religion or general knowledge.

2.6.5. ASSESSING INDIVIDUAL CHILDREN

Balakendra Teachers have been trained to keenly observe each child and prepare case studies recording physical development like height and weight, the child's initiative and inclination, social interaction, and emotional development. Parents are enlightened about their children's development. Other than the CSU & Mahila Meetings, parents now have to meet every Sunday evenings in the *Balakendra* along with their children and the Teacher. We have found this very beneficial as parents' involvement in the *Balakendra* activities from time to time helps discover inexpensive and innovative education techniques. Unlike adults, children through informal talks and other group activities, easily pick up much more. *Balakendras* serve as a means to an end and not an end in themselves.

3. COOLIE WOMEN

3.1. Mahila Meetings

As already mentioned, Mahila Meetings went well in about half the villages, but were effected by staff turnover in the other half. In spite of this, the Area Field Worker and concerned VHWS did their best to keep things going.

3.2. Vokkaku Sanchi Duddu (VSD)

In the last week of November, Maggie Thomas conducted a 3-day meeting and review session for the 24 villages first initiated to the concept of Sanghas, to analyse the progress of Mahila Meetings during the last year. The *Vokkaku Sanchi Duddu* was also increased from Rs 1,000 to Rs 2,000 in each of these villages.

3.3. Health

A 3-day First-Aid training programme was conducted for our VHWS in February 1999. The ADATS Health Worker was in charge of this programme. The VHWS were divided into 2 batches of 25 each and trained in 2 consecutive weeks. Emphasis was laid on dealing with snake, scorpion and dog bite victims, poisoning, drowning, shock and burn treatment.

In June last year we conducted a camp to diagnose prolapsed uterus cases. 23 such cases were detected of which 8 were severe. These were treated at MS Ramaiah Hospital in Bangalore in February-March 1999.