

0612. 2nd Progress Report on the VASS DLDP (Feb 2003)

For the 3rd successive year, the rains totally failed in 2002. Every single acre of dry land belonging to both, Coolies as well as Ryots, stayed uncultivated.

As a result the SCNZ/VASS Programme has been able to concentrate on only 1 of its objectives during the past year – to bring Coolies into the mainstream as peasant cultivators. Even this was not an easy task.

No efforts could be made, during this reporting period, to improve subsistence cultivation practices, promote off farm venture, etc. Neither could we do anything to move towards organic farming, community irrigation or dry land horticulture.

1. PROJECT GOAL

- The immediate goal of this 3 year project is to consolidate subsistence agriculture practices on 6,784 acres of land belonging to 2,738 small and poor peasant families in 99 villages, and bring it on par with mainstream *Ryot* cultivation.
- The longer term goal of the total 5 year effort, and beyond, is to help Member Coolie families move toward Sustainable Land Use Practices

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE VASS DLDP

- Bring Coolie Families into the Mainstream of Peasant Cultivation as Tillers and Cultivators
- Improve Subsistence Cultivation Practices, Promote Off-Farm Ventures & Create a Food Security for the Poor
- Establish a Visible & Recognised Role for Coolie women in Domestic Finance and Family Agriculture
- Socio-political & Organisational Strengthening
- Move toward non-chemical farming & Link with urban activists to create a niche market
- Community Irrigation & Dry Land Horticulture

3. REVIEW OF OBJECTIVES

– BRING COOLIE FAMILIES INTO THE MAINSTREAM OF PEASANT CULTIVATION AS TILLERS AND CULTIVATORS

3.1. Starting Problems in Chintamani

The year 2002 started bad. Crops had failed for the 2nd year in a row and there was a general disbelief that dry land cultivation could ever be profitable. Unaware of the underlying apathy, we made DLDP Plans for the same 52 villages where we had worked the previous year, and asked everyone to begin their S&WC works as soon as possible. But there was a dragging of feet. Many CSUs were tardy in declaring their 2001 incomes and paying up Sangha Tax to renew 2002 membership.

For the preceding 2 years, ADATS and the Coolie Sangha were making serious efforts to introduce a Results oriented management culture. Strategic planning was followed with process management and performance measurement. Results would no longer be left to chance, and achievements would be converted into lasting and sustainable accomplishment.

There was a silent protest against these major organisational changes that were being introduced. In the beginning of 2002, we did not fully realise that something was seriously wrong;

that the Chintamani Coolie Sangha was expressing its displeasure through a go-slow on the DLDP programme. Coupled to this mood of protest was a general wariness as to the profitability of dry land farming...

52 DLDP Plans were given out in March 2002, but works did not begin. Some villages politely took the Plans but did not start their works. A few did start working but attendance was low, with disinterested family members forming half hearted work gangs. We felt bitter and frustrated.

Just a couple of months earlier we had revised the DLDP Master Plan for Chintamani and made alterations in the SCNZ/VASS Budget to accommodate more villages, concentrate on labour providing S&WC works, etc. These changes were arrived at after serious discussions at the village level and recorded in our 1st Progress Report dated January 2002. With hindsight, we now realise that these changes were not discussed as thoroughly as they should have been. We had taken S&WC measures as a given, and that no one doubted their validity in combating drought.

It is to their credit that the Coolies of Chintamani refused to immediately convert the DLDP into a mere labour/succour providing activity. They had been so fully involved in drawing up goals and objectives, that they now refused to implement it in a perfunctory manner when they had gnawing doubts about the viability of the project objective – sustainable cultivation and food security.

But hindsight does not work when it is most wanted – it always comes late. We just interpreted their reaction as some sort of a lazy and irresponsible behaviour. That was the extent of our bitterness (*elaborated in para 6.3. of this Progress Report*).

3.2. Soil & Water Conservation (S&WC) Works in Chintamani

13 of the 52 Plans were taken back and SCNZ/VASS resources were used in just 39 villages for 3 months from March to May 2002. DLDP works in these 39 villages were not as good as they should have been. Many were absent from the work gangs and nearly one-half the holdings could not be worked upon by the end of May 2002. Only 51.8% of the reduced allotment was actually utilised.

DLDP Plan & Utilisation – March to May 2002 (SCNZ/VASS funded)

Area Field Worker	Villages	Plan Amount	Utilised
Shankar Reddy	15	1,019,865	568,860
Sreenivasappa	7	325,290	126,075
Amarnath Reddy	8	424,875	230,340
Venkatarayappa	7	335,460	158,445
Laxminarasimhappa	2	89,025	52,995
TOTAL	39	2,194,515	1,136,715

At the same time, when compared to works done in the previous year, the quality of works was quite satisfactory. Quantity was also maintained. An average of 1,242 metres of new contour bunds were built in each village, and this compares favourably with the 1,310 metres average during the previous year. We are convinced that there was no intention to cheat or pass off perfunctory work merely in order to grab wages during lean months.

Comparison of S&WC Works Carried out in 2001 and in the 1st Phase of 2002

	March to May 2001	March to May 2002	Measurement Unit
Villages	52	39	
New Bunds	68,165	48,444	Metres
Repair to Bunds	8,694	-	Metres
Ravine & Gully Check	60	2,101 m ¹	Number
Cleared Pebbles & Boulders	1,060	544	Acres
Retention Walls	2,049	-	Metres
Virgin Land Cleared	147	31	Acres

3.3. S&WC Plans for other Taluks

In the meantime, reaction in the other taluks was quite the opposite. There was a genuine enthusiasm and belief that working on dry landholdings would indeed reduce soil erosion and prepare their fields to retain rainwater a little while longer. This would, in turn, increase soil moisture and give standing crops a better chance to survive the dry spell. In short they considered S&WC works as useful and beneficial. Moreover, most of the other taluks were seriously considering changing from risky and rainfall dependent Field Crops to a more hardy and perennial Tree Cropping (tamarind and mangoes).

We had stretched our Consortium budget to the limit and were cash strapped. We could not meet the terrific demand for DLDP Plans. So we decided to use the remaining SCNZ/VASS resources to give out DLDP Plans to neighbouring villages in Siddalaghatta and Chickbalapur taluks. We would reimburse SCNZ/VASS as soon as the Consortium cash flow improved.

This is why, though we had spent only Rs 2.26 million in 2001 plus another Rs 1.13 million in the first half of 2002, our 30 September 2002 Financial Report showed an expenditure of Rs 5.14 million. The difference of Rs 1.75 million is the amount of SCNZ/VASS moneys diverted to the other taluks from March to May 2002. As we shall see in the following paragraph, more than 91% of this amount was reimbursed a few months later.

3.4. 2nd Phase of S&WC Works in Chintamani

In June/July 2002 disaster struck with a vengeance. It was as if nature had taken revenge on their overt cleverness, grumbling and evil foreboding. The rains totally failed. Not a single acre of dry land was ploughed or planted in the taluk. Rich and poor alike watched in stunned disbelief. By now the Chintamani Coolies were more than prepared to go along with the collective wisdom of the Coolie Sangha.

Immediately following visits by representatives of EZE and Icco, an additional 3 months of DLDP works were undertaken from October to December 2002. Rs 1.61 million worth of Consortium funds were spent to implement this 2nd 3 month phase in 73 SCNZ/VASS villages of Chintamani.

¹ Wrongly recorded in metres instead of number of gully checks

DLDP Plan & Utilisation – October to December 2002 (Consortium funded)

Area Field Worker	Villages	Plan		Completed	
		Works	Allotment	Completed	Paid
Shankar Reddy	19	580	732,465	380	443,970
Sreenivasappa	17	401	479,265	285	362,685
Amarnath Reddy	24	621	689,655	440	519,285
Venkatarayappa	13	312	385,665	245	283,530
TOTAL	73	1,914	2,287,050	1,350	1,609,470

This time, very impressive works were carried out by far more village CSUs.

Actual S&WC Works Carried out in 2001 and 2002

	March to May 2001	March to May 2002	October to Dec 2002	TOTAL TO DATE	Measurement Unit
Villages	52	39	73		
New Bunds	68,165	48,444	53,783	170,392	Metres
Repair to Bunds	8,694	-	462	9,156	Metres
Field Bunds	-	-	15,423	15,423	Metres
Ravine & Gully Check	60	(2,101 m)	159	2,320	Number
Cleared Pebbles & Boulders	1,060	544	579	2,183	Acres
Retention Walls	2,049	-	668	2717	Metres
Diversion Channels	-	-	5,307	5,307	Metres
Virgin Land Cleared	147	31	-	178	Acres
Built Paths/Roads	-	-	348	348	Metres
Farm Ponds	-	-	9	9	Number
Deepened Wells	-	-	3	3	Number
Wasted Works	-	-	178	178	Acres

3.5. Silt Hauling

Silt hauling was taken up in 34 villages which did not receive DLDP Plans. In April and May 2002, a total of 1,165 acres were treated with silt, spending an average of Rs 375 on each acre of land as tractor hire. This takes the programme Total to 1,871 acres in 46 villages.

Tractors were hired from friendly *Ryots* to haul alluvial silt onto Coolie lands, with voluntary labour from Member families.

The Chintamani Coolies considered this a useful activity. At the same time when 13 village CSUs were silently rebelling against S&WC works, Member Coolies from another 34 villages worked under the burning sun, day after day, loading tractors and spreading silt onto their fields, with absolutely no wage payment from ADATS.

3.6. De-silting Tanks

During the 2nd round of DLDP works from October to December 2002, no silt hauling was done. Instead Member families were encouraged to work on government drought relief works which consisted of, in the main, de-silting the dried up irrigation tank beds.

The tragedy of these government works was that no arrangements were made to haul the excavated silt to far away, contour banded fields. As a result, farmers took them in a *hopscotch*

manner and dumped them on nearby sloped fields which were not protected against soil erosion. With the very first rains all this silt is bound to dissolve into a muddy sludge a flow back into the very tanks that were de-silted.

The still greater tragedy is that everything goes during a drought. No one bothers to apply common sense and look into technical feasibility. The very same Chintamani Coolie Sangha which took such a mature stand vis-à-vis the DLDP, refusing to dilute its objectives, was not in a position to influence government behaviour.

3.7. Plan Utilisation

Convincing Coolie families to work on their own lands and strive for independence from middle peasant exploitation is extremely difficult. Therefore, for the 2nd year running, we continue to measure the percent of DLDP Plans utilised as a rough proxy indicator of our objective to burn bridges with the *Ryots* and bring small and poor peasants into the mainstream of peasant cultivation.

The 1st round of DLDP works saw a utilisation pattern of 51.8%

By the time we implemented the 2nd round of DLDP works in Chintamani taluk, our new monitoring system was in place. So it is possible to give even more accurate figures. 70% of the planned works could be completed. It would have been much higher, but for the fact that Plans were generated (based on the DLDP Master Plan) for a period of 5-6 months while actual works were carried out for only 3 months.

Though both figures show an improvement over the previous year, we have to take into account the helplessness of the population during a severe drought. Member Coolie families worked unusually hard because they were really scared. All the lands around them were barren during the peak agricultural season, and this did not portend well. As already explained, we had a difficult time convincing them that subsistence agriculture could still be a profitable venture.

3.8. Is this a Sound Strategy to Tackle Drought?

Soil & Water Conservation structures are long term investments made on dry lands, aimed at reducing soil erosion and increasing the rainwater retention capacity of individual fields within a watershed. Increased soil moisture supports a crop stand and helps it tide over a reasonable dry spell.

The ecological debate on whether contour bunds, retention walls, diversion channels, farm ponds and the like actually stop soil erosion is never ending, confused with extremely complex measurements. Similarly the argument as to whether rainwater can really be prevented from eventually flowing to the ocean. But at a practical level, it has been convincingly demonstrated that, after some years, soil moisture increases and crop yields do improve.²

ADATS has been supporting the village CSUs to use their functional unity to implement the DLDP for the past 17 years. Since most Coolie holdings were barren or under-cultivated, and also because virgin soils were less depleted than heavily cultivated fields, there were dramatic initial increases in yields. These dramatic increases quickly stabilised to sub-regional averages.

Long before a plateau effect set in through the over exploitation of dry lands, ADATS encouraged the Coolies to adopt environmentally friendly measures that respect the carrying capacity of top soils.

² The axiom of being approximately right than precisely wrong is, by now, widely used to justify the watershed approach

- Mono-cropping has been resisted and Coolies are encouraged to revert to the age old practice of inter-cultivating commercial, food and fodder crops on alternating rows.
- Chemical fertilizers are limited to ½ bag of di-ammonium phosphate per acre since the availability of farm yard manures is extremely limited due to low biomass.
- Green manuring is attempted whenever we have early rains before June.
- Alluvial silt from the tank bunds is hauled onto Coolie fields to improve soil structure.
- Deep ploughing is taken up, once every 3-4 years, to turn the top soil.
- The use of pesticides is completely discouraged.
- Severely degraded saline patches are converted into community woodlots. Natural regeneration is encouraged through a protection of steep slopes.
- Grasses and shrubs are allowed to grow on the contour bunds in spite of field mice problems. *Agave* fencing is encouraged. Goats are discouraged and sheep rearing promoted.
- DLDP works are deliberately staggered in particular villages, with gaps given for soils to recuperate and natural filling take place, instead of adopting the cut and fill method.

But the 3 measures that we consider most important are:

- A high level of self-help and volunteerism that is consciously promoted by keeping DLDP wages to the barest minimum (just about enough to support body and soul) even when prevailing wage rates are 2-3 times higher.
- Permanent S&WC structures (stone bunds instead of mud bunds, etc.) created through an uncompromising adherence to quality.
- Coolie women consciously and deliberately included as decision makers in agriculture at the family level.

The problem with any watershed approach is that it is a long term solution to a very serious environmental problem of desertification. It is not the quick and easy road to make a fast buck, and thereby clashes with mainstream aspirations. It is a strategy that involves, to a degree, a blind leap of faith into a promised future. Even those who make serious choices are entitled to occasional bouts of self doubt and depression.

This is precisely what happened. We are certain that the mood has passed and every single family is back in the grind. But our commitment to process documentation compels us to record all that happened during an eventful year in the history of Coolie Sangha building at Chintamani taluk.

3.9. DLDP Staff

The Agriculturist and Field Workers visited works during their actual implementation. They checked attendance registers and gave technical advice. After completing each work, they measured the actual work done. These measurements were recorded into our database using the newly developed ADATS/Coolie Sangha Intranet. After that, Accounts Staff went to the same fields and made DLDP wage payments on the spot, directly to each participating family.

Our new monitoring software calculated the average time between the work finish date and final visit by a Field Worker as 3 days. But the average time between this final visit and actual payment by ADATS Accounts Staff was a disappointing 13 days. We have to work hard to improve these efficiency figures. And also to give some basic agriculture training to the Accounts Staff since they find it frustrating to visit all the work spots merely in order to do clerical work.

4. REVIEW OF OBJECTIVES

– IMPROVE SUBSISTENCE CULTIVATION PRACTICES, PROMOTE OFF-FARM VENTURES & CREATE A FOOD SECURITY FOR THE POOR

In spite of all the initial problems and apathy that we faced, and rains totally failing for the 3rd successive year with 100% of dry lands remaining uncultivated, we were not totally paralysed.

When making the customer demand baseline, Member families identified a total of 2,070 agriculture related problems that they wanted to take action on. In spite of their best efforts they were able to get only 31% Results.

Acceptable Results were obtained on items that the Coolies had some control over.

- 87 families with limited sources of irrigation changed to irrigated dry crops (*48% Results*).
- Village CSUs voluntarily ploughed and seeded the holdings of 158 destitute families (*55%*).
- 19 families got proper title deeds from the government (*50%*).
- Of those who did manage to raise a crop, 148 families insured their crops (*58%*).
- 175 cattle owners paid up their premium to insure sheep, cows and bullocks (*77%*).

Limited success plagued attempts that were dependent on the weather.

- Only 36 families planted mango saplings which later withered (*4% Results*).
- Only 21 Coolies dared to take crop loans from their CCFs (*16%*).
- Not a single family availed government subsidies since these were cancelled due to the drought.

In spite of a low Success rate, overall Failure rate is limited to 22% because Member Coolies want to carry over line items to the next baseline.

- To this date, 687 families refuse to acknowledge their failure in planting tamarind and mango saplings. They have already pitted their fields, with no monetary assistance from ADATS, and want to plant saplings with the next rains in 2003.

Extract from the Chintamani Monsoon Agenda 2002

Qty	Action Item	Desired Results	No Action	Under Action	CSU Reject	Govt Reject	Failed	Success	
181	Change crop (wet lands)	ID crop planted		27			67	87	48%
5	Collect and give seeds	Seeds given					5		
31	Get subsidies from government	Benefits got					31		
890	Plant tamarind/mango	Saplings planted	30	687	9		128	36	4%
285	Plough and cultivate	Crop planted	18	15	12		82	158	55%
26	Send for agriculture training	Sent for training					25	1	4%
133	Give Crop Loans	CCF released		28	35		49	21	16%
227	Insure cattle	Premium paid		42	0	2	8	175	77%
254	Insure crops	Premium paid	4	10		29	63	148	58%
38	Get proper title deeds	Title obtained		3		13	3	19	50%
2,070			52	812	56	44	461	645	
			3%	39%	3%	2%	22%	31%	

Outright failure Total to 22%, and 5% have been rejected by their respective village CSUs or the government authorities. 39% of line items (like the planting of tamarind and mango saplings, for example) will be carried over to the next baseline, Summer Agenda 2003, which is presently being finalised in all the villages.

5. REVIEW OF OBJECTIVES

– ESTABLISH A VISIBLE & RECOGNISED ROLE FOR COOLIE WOMEN IN DOMESTIC FINANCE AND FAMILY AGRICULTURE

5.1. Women's Issues

Not just due to drought, but also as a result of innate patriarchy, women's issues were not treated with the seriousness they deserved. Success rate on baseline items identified by Coolie women was extremely low at a mere 21%.

- A large number of families agreed to transfer their properties in the joint names of husbands and wives. The village CSUs decided to familiarise themselves with procedures by actually transferring 350 test cases. Only 6 families succeeded. Legal and bureaucratic hurdles placed by patriarchal structures thwarted their efforts. Without actually refusing, officials created silly excuses to put off the registration of properties in joint names.
- In the case of 35 outright transfer of entire properties (house and land) the system was stumped. Authorities had no choice but to transfer 32 properties in the names of

women. But these have not been reflected as Success since the registered papers are yet to be got.

- Only 1 out of 15 widows succeeded in getting a regular pension from the government.
- Mahila Meetings were more or less successful in counselling 11 families, and stopping domestic violence in 18 more. 3 husband-wife problems appear to be quite hopeless and divorce seems to be the only solution.

But these are not static problems. It is a sad fact that these issues do not have permanent solutions. Situations can just as easily revert back. So there was much discussion as to whether they should be recorded as Successes. We intervened with the suggestion that if the Mahila Meeting was satisfied for the moment, this should be interpreted as Success.

- The Mahila Meetings have conducted 5 choice marriages, rejected the request of 1 girl, and failed in 2 cases where their parents' will prevailed. 6 marriages still have to be solemnised in simple ceremonies.
- Only 72 community bathrooms and 6 smokeless *Chullas* could be built, and the Results were 57% and 75% respectively. Because of the drought, there was a paucity of funds at all levels – with the government, with individual families, and also with the CSUs. The building of 49 community bathrooms will be carried over to the next baseline (i.e. the Summer Agenda 2003).

Extract from the Chintamani Monsoon Agenda 2002

Qty	Action Item	Desired Results	No Action	Under Action	CSU Reject	Govt Reject	Failed	Success	
350	Transfer as joint property	Family property registered in joint name of husband and wife		337	2		5	6	2%
35	Transfer to wife's name	Family property registered in wife's name		32			3		
9	Apply for Widow Pension	Application submitted		6	2		1		
6	Follow up Pension Application	Money reaches beneficiary		5				1	17%
14	Counsel husband/wife problem	Mahila Meeting satisfied		3				11	79%
18	Stop Domestic Violence	Mahila Meeting satisfied						18	100%
11	Help a young girl in a choice marriage	Marriage conducted		5			2	4	36%
3	Conduct simple Marriage	Marriage conducted		1	1			1	33%
127	Build Community Bathrooms	Bathrooms being used	1	49		3	2	72	57%
8	Build Smokeless <i>Chullas</i>	<i>Chullas</i> being used					2	6	75%

3	Open an Savings Bank Account	Account opened						3	100%
584			1	438	5	3	15	122	21%
				75%	1%	1%	3%	21%	

Though Coolie men did not place any direct obstacles, neither were they overtly upset when women's property right issues were scuttled. Unlike in other taluks, the Chintamani Coolie Sangha did not organise any huge demonstrations or struggles against the establishment. This is a reflection on women also, since they are the ones who failed to leverage support.

ADATS, as well as senior functionaries of the Coolie Sangha, are quite disappointed. We feel justified in using the weight of the Coolie Sangha to do some arm-twisting and force the issue. We will aim at cajoling a large number of husbands to give up their entire title rights in favour of wives. A detailed strategy is yet to be worked out.

5.2. Children's Issues

Far better Results were got when tackling problems related to child care. The Monsoon Agenda '02 (July to December 2002) identified 880 individual problems. Of these, 563 were solved giving a success rate of 64%.

A large number of issues like arranging special tuitions, starting *Balakendras* with their own funds, admitting to college, giving clothes, sending for skill training etc. were still Under Action as on 31 December 2002. Many of these line items have successfully been acted upon in the past 2 months.

Qty	Action Item	Desired Results	No Action	Under Action	CSU Reject	Govt Reject	Failed	Success	
3	Apply for a New Anganwadi	Application Submitted		2				1	33%
1	Solve Anganwadi Problems	Problem Solved						1	100%
2	Solve Govt Teacher Problem	Teaching Starts						2	100%
79	Arrange Special Tuitions	Tuitions Started		43	1		1	34	43%
36	Contest School Betterment Committee	Seats Won			1	2	5	28	78%
18	Start Balakendra with Sangha Funds	Bk Teacher appointed		10				8	44%
59	Admit in College/Diploma	Child Enrolled	1	14	2		2	40	68%
95	Re-admit Drop-out Child	Enrolled in School	1	2	3	2	10	77	81%
51	Get a Hostel Seat	Seat Got		2		7	2	40	78%
160	Get School Bus Pass	Passes Got	5	7			8	140	88%
40	Give Children Clothes	Clothes Distributed		28			12		
88	Collect Food Grains for Child	Grains Given		22				66	75%
62	Send for Computer Training	Sent for Training		26	1		14	21	34%

93	Arrange Skill Training for Child	Sent for Training	2	35			11	45	48%
22	Arrange for Jobs	Jobs Got		4	5		1	12	55%
71	LIC Kids Saving Scheme	Premium Paid	4	15			4	48	68%
880			13	210	13	11	70	563	
			1%	24%	1%	1%	8%	64%	

6. REVIEW OF OBJECTIVES – SOCIO-POLITICAL & ORGANISATIONAL STRENGTHENING

6.1. Drop in Tax Paid Membership

There wasn't that massive increase in Membership that we had predicted in February 2002. While there was a record number of families who declared their annual incomes for the year 2001, the number of families who actually paid up their Sangha Tax and renewed membership in the months following the writing of the 1st SCNZ/VASS Progress Report took a serious dip.

Income for Year	No of Families who Declared their Incomes	Average Income Declared (Rupees)	Sangha Tax for Year	No of Families who Paid up Sangha Tax	Average Sangha Tax paid (Rupees)
1995	538	3,569	1996	489	290
1996	739	3,009	1997	685	142
1997	753	3,288	1998	634	173
1998	2,509	2,938	1999	2,040	208
1999	2,331	2,473	2000	2,025	175
2000	5,754	2,684 ³	2001	4,716	129
2001	5,878	6,253	2002	4,040	175
2002	5,001	4,095	2003	3,623	204

The situation is now showing signs of recovery at the time of writing this 2nd Progress Report, not in terms of absolute numbers, but in the average Tax paid within the stipulated deadline of 28 February 2003 .

Using 4 parameters (*years under the Sangha Tax regime, number of stable Members, average Tax per Member, and average Tax per CSU*) our new software tracks Sangha Tax performance of 250 villages and 6,966 families who have participated in this Process. It has rated the villages as under:

Sangha Tax Performance in Chintamani taluk (25 February 2003)

	Villages	
Excellent	19	8%
Very Good	41	16%
Good	74	30%
Not Good	116	46%

³ There is an inverse correlation between crop failure and incomes declared. A good crop does not necessarily translate into increased cash income for the poor. Member families do not monetise food grains and pulses got through their subsistence cultivation when declaring annual incomes. Migration during drought, on the other hand, gives an increased cash income.

6.2. Socio-political Presence in the Taluk

Using 4 different parameters (*tax age of the CSU, coverage of the Coolie class, coverage of village population, and caste variety in the membership*) we can calculate the overall strength and influence of individual village CSUs. The overall socio-political Presence of the Coolie Sangha in Chintamani taluk is 31%, with a potential to grow to 56%.

- Psephologists consider a presence of 35% the magic number. This means that the 3,623 Member families, with an average coverage of 29% of their respective village populations, are just 4 percentage points short of making an indelible impression on electoral outcomes on their own, without any opportunistic alliances.
- The Coolie Sangha is 19 percentage points short of absolute socio-political power, but can grow to 56% if all the Cancelled Member families and dropped out CSUs return to the fold.

This presence still creates an enviable sub-Taluk influence, as shown in the below table, with contiguous geographic belts falling under the electoral influence of the Coolie Sangha.

Presence Rating in Chintamani taluk (25 February 2003)

	Villages	
Excellent	92	37%
Very Good	28	11%
Good	10	4%
Not Good	120	48%

6.3. Resistance to Directional Changes in the Chintamani Coolie Sangha

The 1st SCNZ/VASS Progress Report summarised the organisation development exercise we undertook, 10 year Strategic Plan finalised in April 2001, training to increase facilitation skills, customer centricity, process reengineering, and baselines made through customer demand surveys in every village. These are further detailed in various Consortium and Gudibanda Progress Reports.

While there was an enthusiastic acceptance of the new directional changes in all other taluks, there was considerable resistance from Staff and functionaries in Chintamani. They considered it unnecessary to abandon proven socio-political strategies that resulted in an overall strengthening of the Coolie caste-class. Results orientation and customer centricity, they felt, were an unwarranted imposition.

Partly this was because of spectacular achievements made through socio-political rhetoric in an extremely difficult political economy. Chintamani taluk has a infamous reputation for extreme feudal oppression and total domination by 2 leading families. The Coolie Sangha had, by and large, cut them down to size. Even our arch adversaries give full credit to ADATS and the Coolie Sangha, and admit that this has not happened due to any general democratisation of the countryside. Why then, our Chintamani Staff and functionaries asked with seeming justification, should they take a risk with altered strategies borrowed from the world of business and management?

We replied with the sound argument of Sustainability. It would be folly to believe that spectacular achievements would automatically get converted into lasting accomplishments. Altered power balances could revert back to stark oppression and ugly reprisal once the cadre's zeal and member euphoria slackened. It was far more important to build lasting structures that could be managed by ordinary people, all by themselves.

The other, more distasteful reason for this resistance was a particular type of complacency that had crept into our cadre at Chintamani. A malaise that corrupts the cadre of any socio-politically powerful mass organisations, creating a *coterie* of sorts and distancing itself from ordinary Member families.

Senior functionaries of the Coolie Sangha clearly saw it as their task to reign in the cadre and not let them get away with hijacking the membership for personal benefit.⁴ They took the moral stand to promote genuine grassroots democracy. Staff and functionaries were prevented from merely maintaining an appearance of strength in order to prop their own positions of power and privilege.

Once again with the benefit of hindsight, we now realise that it was a calculated risk. We should have realised that there would be a solid tug of war before the ones who were to be the ultimate gainers, ordinary Member Coolie families, would risk taking sides. Till then it was bound to be a rough ride.

6.4. Using their Functional Unity

In spite of all these internal problems, the CSUs did not slacken their influence in wider society. A summary of Results obtained in the Monsoon Agenda '02 indicates the level of activities that were undertaken from July to December 2002.

Summary of Results obtained in the Monsoon Agenda '02 at Chintamani taluk

Qty	Category	No Action	Under Action	CSU Reject	Govt Reject	Failed	Success	
2,052	Agriculture	52	812	74	44	425	645	31%
880	Child Care	13	210	13	11	70	563	64%
452	Business Opportunities	10	208	13	1	61	159	35%
191	Justice	5	83	33		1	69	36%
280	Old Age	5	146	7	3	18	101	36%
223	Health	1	22	3		32	165	74%
584	Women in Family	4	438	5	3	15	119	20%
813	Civic Benefits	37	366	11	7	20	372	46%
23	Safety Net		17	1		2	3	13%

7. COOLIE LANDS & THE DLDP

7.1. Pattern of Land Holding

3,623 small and poor peasant families in Chintamani taluk, who have paid up their Sangha Tax and renewed their membership for the year 2003, own a total of 11,836 acres of land. 90% of this is rain-fed dry land, 8% are irrigated by tanks and the remaining by bore wells and open wells.

10% of these families are landless and another 13% own more than 5 acres of dry land. All are land poor agricultural labourers, totally dependent on a non-viable subsistence cultivation for their food security.

⁴ This has to be read in a broader perspective of power and privilege. We have to quickly assert that there has not been a single case of theft or cheating at Chintamani.

Pattern of Land Holding in Chintamani taluk (as on 25 February 2003)

Families	Percent	Land Holding
352	10%	Landless
234	6%	0.1 to 1 acre
915	25%	1.1 to 2 acres
730	20%	2.1 to 3 acres
564	16%	3.1 to 4 acres
344	9%	4.1 to 5 acres
484	13%	Over 5 acres
3,623	100%	

7.2. The Agricultural Calendar for a Coolie family

The traditional crop on dry lands is groundnut, inter-cultivated with alternating rows of non-commercial pulses, lentils, oilseeds and fodder crops. Cash from the sale of groundnuts, food grains grown on a Coolie's holdings, plus wage earnings from *Ryot* lands, are enough for 2-3 months of subsistence living, from about January through March. This is also the time when their own non-commercial crops come to harvest. The last 3 months of summer are hell, and most able bodied men are forced to migrate.

Women, children and the aged stay back, tending to their homes and grazing the odd cattle that they own against severe odds of shrinking grasslands and depleting water holes.

With the onset of monsoon rains in June/July, Coolie men return to their villages to till their own lands and, more importantly, earn a wage income from *Ryot* lands. This lasts for 2-2½ months till about mid September. After that the demand for labour drops with only occasional calls for de-weeding. But most Coolies cannot temporarily migrate for these 2-3 months since their own crops are also on the fields. In December/January, demand for labour peaks once again since the pulling out of groundnuts from the earth is very labour intensive.

But for the last 3 years, the situation has been terrible. In the year 2000 average yields were less than 50%. It dropped to 20% in 2001. Last year, the dry lands were left completely barren.

7.3. Soil & Water Conservation Works DONE

Over the past 4-5 years, Rs 9.96 million worth of S&WC works have been done on 9,492 acres of Coolie lands in Chintamani taluk. Half this investment has been made under the current programme, the SCNZ/VASS Programme where have spent Rs 5.1 million on S&WC works and another Rs 0.37 million on silt hauling.

One able bodied person from each Member Coolie family forms a work gang. They descend on each other's holdings according to a prepared DLDP Plan which allocates a fixed number of work days to each holding. Soil and water conservation (S&WC) works are carried out on these holdings in order to reduce soil migration and increase the rainwater retention capacity of the fields.

The below table summarises the number of years of work carried out thus far on the holdings of more than 5,000 families in about 200 villages. It must be noted that these are not figures for only those landholdings of families who today stand as Normal in the rolls of the village CSUs.

Years of S&WC Works DONE in Chintamani taluk (as on 25 February 2003)

Acres	Percent	Years of S&WC Works Done	Value in Rupees
3,401	36%	1 year	1,530,450
2,321	24%	2 years	2,088,900
1,865	20%	3 years	2,517,750
1,118	12%	4 years	2,012,400
695	7%	5 years	1,563,750
92	1%	6 years	248,400
6,492 acres	100%		9,957,600

7.4. Soil & Water Conservation Works NEEDED

As soon as a Coolie family joins the village CSU, all their landholdings⁵ are immediately surveyed by our Agriculturists and entered into the database. This data includes the extent in acres, title in whose name the land stands, source of irrigation, gradient, quality of contour bunds, number of years of S&WC works already carried out on the holding, and an estimate of the number of years of further work needed.

Every year, as soon as DLDP works are completed, the number of years of work done is increased by 1, and the number of years needed is reduced by 1. This re-worked data is then taken to the village where all the Members together visit each field, along with our Agriculturist, in order to verify that the information is correct.

Based on this annual and established practice we estimate that, as of today, 24% of the holdings of Normal Member families in currently functioning village CSUs do not need any more S&WC investments. As a result of our earlier work, their fields are protected against erosion and the chances of rainwater seeping into the top soil and supporting crop growth has increased. In other words, these fields are as good as adjacent fields of richer farmers.

On the remaining holdings we need to make a total investment of Rs 7.55 million over the next 5 years.

Years of S&WC Works NEEDED in Chintamani taluk (as on 25 February 2003)

Acres	Percent	Years of S&WC Works Needed	Value in Rupees
2,545	24%	No Work Needed	
2,583	24%	1 years	1,162,350
3,277	31%	2 years	2,949,300
1,882	18%	3 years	2,540,700
194	2%	4 years	349,200
244	2%	5 years	549,000
10,695 acres	100%		7,550,550

⁵ A Member family owning 2.5 acres, for example, could well have 3 different holdings.

7.5. DLDP Master Plan

Translated into a Master Plan, the above figures give a year wise break-up of investments needed to bring ALL Coolie landholdings to an acceptable level. The bulk of this investment is needed, in a tapering manner, over 3 years, starting 2003.⁶

DLDP Master Plan for Chintamani (25 February 2003)

Area FW	Land Owners	Acres	This Year (2003)	2 nd Year (2004)	3 rd Year (2005)	4 th Year (2006)	5 th Year (2007)
Shankar Reddy	1,050	3,329	2,395	1,757	635	81	46
Sreenivasappa	1,742	2,377	1,628	1,101	366	89	52
Amarnath Reddy	2,598	2,793	2,506	1,591	674	219	139
Venkatarayappa	3,276	2,226	1,652	1,149	646	49	7
Acres	8,666	10,725	8,181	5,598	2,320	438	244
Rupees			3,681,279	2,518,933	1,044,067	197,167	109,800

The only problem with this Master Plan is that it reflects the needs of only those 3,623 tax paid Member families who stand as Normal in the functioning village CSUs as on today. If and when others choose to pay Sangha Tax and return to the folds of the Coolie Sangha, the figures will immediately increase. If and when, for example, 1,000 Coolie families return to their CSUs, requirements will increase by another 28%.

8. PLANS FOR 2003

8.1. Current DLDP Plan for 2003

At the time of writing this Progress Report in February 2003, we have already made the current year's DLDP Plan for Rs 3.56 million and given it out to a total of 103 villages in Chintamani taluk. With an improved utilisation rate of about 90% we expect that the total amount spent on wage payments will be about Rs 3.2 million over the next 3-4 months.

Current Year (2003) DLDP Plan

Area Field Worker	Villages	Works	Allotment
Shankar Reddy	32	845	1,075,095
Sreenivasappa	22	468	671,820
Amarnath Reddy	27	861	1,120,245
Venkatarayappa	22	493	691,845
Total	103	2,667	3,559,005

8.2. Budget Realisation

As on 25 February 2003, we have spent 64% of the 3 year SCNZ/VASS Budget. Over the next 10 months, before the project is officially closed on 31 December 2003, we will spend

⁶ The thumb of rule formula used is 30 person-days of labour investment per acre @ a daily wage of Rs 15.

another Rs 3.35 million on wage payments for S&WC works and Rs 100,000 on salaries and transport.

In the event of any shortfall, ADATS Consortium funds will be used to complete this year's DLDP works.

Budget Realisation as on 25 February 2003

	3 Year SCNZ/VASS DLDP Budget	Spent to Date (Apr 2000 to Feb 2003)		2003 Budget
Tools & Implements	230,725	130,725	57%	
Soil & Water Conservation Works	8,467,722	5,236,293	62%	3,350,031
Silt Haul	292,494	371,244	127%	
Salaries & Transport	468,000	270,649	58%	100,000
	9,458,941	6,008,911	64%	3,450,031

8.3. Receipts & Payments

Rs 5.94 million has already been received towards the project. Along with bank interest earned, the total receipts stand at Rs 6.03 million.

Receipts & Payments for the period 1 April 2000 to 25 February 2003

	Receipts	Payments
Grants & Donations	5,944,518	
Interest	38,437	
Programme Expenses		6,008,911
Closing Balance Bank		23,577
Total	6,032,488	6,032,488

9. CHALLENGES FACED & LESSONS LEARNT

Finally, a quick recap of challenges faced and lessons learnt.

- We need to develop a keener sensibility to sense when a cadre is dissatisfied, and prevent neglect from negatively impacting the entire membership.
- Though it was a passing mood that Member families have, by and large got over, we still need to get rid of apathy by highlighting examples of success/determination in the other taluks.
Inter-CSU and inter-taluk Coolie communication needs to be enhanced.
- Long term benefits need to be projected more realistically without getting carried away with dramatic short term results, especially when all of us have a fairly good working knowledge of the drought cycle.
The shift to tree cropping, needs to be more proactively supported with common irrigation arrangements, subsidies, etc.
- A full utilisation of the DLDP Plan should be ensured in each and every village CSU.
- A study of the drought cycle indicates that the rains may be good and timely this year. We need to encourage Member families to cultivate all their holdings with adequate crop loans and other support.
- A special focus and support needs to be given to women's issues identified in the base-lines

- The Coolie Credit Funds (CCFs) should be used to promote more off farm ventures for more members.