

## **PEERMADE DEVELOPMENT SOCIETY: A SYNONYM FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

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One of the distinguishing characteristics of democracies in the developing countries is the active presence of voluntarism in pursuit of human development. Voluntarism is the central core of social action in a democratic society. It manifests itself through individuals and organised civil structures such as the non-governmental organisations (NGOs). They may be co-operatives of different types or micro-credit societies outside the governmental bureaucratic machinery. Certain functional advantages enjoyed by the voluntary sector account for its continuance and success. Voluntary organisations are generally community based and capable of providing services at a lower cost. They have the flexibility to develop innovative projects based on local needs and resources in contrast to the standardised form of operation characteristic of governmental programmes.

### **Beginning**

The Peermade Development Society (PDS) is a voluntary organisation engaged in the programme of community development. The PDS was established in the year 1980 and was registered as a non-governmental organisation under the Travancore–Cochin Literary and Charitable Societies Act of 1955. The formal launching of the PDS was the culmination of the long interaction of its founder, Mar Mathew Arackal, the present Bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Kanjirappally, with the people of the High Ranges of Kerala during which he got sensitised to some of the dire predicaments of the people in the area. The Society resolved to cater to the development needs of the tribal people,

*Peermade Development Society: A Synonym for Sustainable Development*

marginal farmers and women and children of the area by undertaking various developmental activities.

The PDS is located at Peermade, in the district of Idukki, Kerala state in India. Peermade is the land of lush green tea plantations, lofty peaks and gushing streams, and is 3500 feet above sea level. The valleys and hills of Peermade are draped in mist all through the year. Peermade is blessed with hectares of green meadows, endless carpet of tea plantations, serene places, rocky patches and nibbling waterfalls. The place had been the destination of the ‘glitterati’ from the times of imperial sway. It served as the summer sojourn for the Travancore princely rulers and as a home away from home for the British. It is in this great place that the PDS was born and brought up.

**The Vision**

The PDS is one of the social service organs of the Diocese of Kanjirappally. It keeps a broad humanitarian outlook by reaching out to the people irrespective of the differences in caste, religion, region, language, sex and age. The virtues of charity and philanthropy are well merged with the principles of development and empowerment in every intervention by the Society. The PDS made its entry in the voluntary sector through tribal welfare and development programmes from an isolated tribal colony - Vanchivayal - in the year 1979. The vision of the Society is *“that they have life and have it abundantly”*. Its goal is derived from this vision statement and is “empowerment of village communities especially the tribals, women, children and the marginal farmers towards sustainable development by conserving and enhancing local resources in order to have fullness of life”. Twenty-five years have gone by, since the PDS assumed its role as a development agency and performed various functions. Right from the beginning to this very moment, the PDS has been committed to form environmentally sustainable communities through implementing social development programmes in a participatory

manner. The activities of the Society have been characterised by professional team work and a leadership pattern that aim at producing self-reliant and empowered communities.

With its genuine efforts to address the rural poor, the PDS has attained high reputation and phenomenal growth. Today it has become one of the largest voluntary organisations in India with a total staff strength of 394 working in four states in southern India. More than two decades of dedicated service, successful implementation of a good number of developmental activities, and increasing support and participation from the people have made the tri-letter PDS, a name synonymous with rural development.

### **Main Areas of Involvement**

The PDS is implementing its programme of sustainable development in four broad areas of development. They are (i) natural resource management, (ii) rural health promotion, (iii) rural technology promotion and (iv) human resource development. A number of activities are undertaken by the PDS in each of these four areas.

### **NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT**

The activities of the PDS in the area of natural resource management have the goal of developing the agricultural economy. It has the specific objective of improving the agricultural production of the marginal farm community. The main programmes in this area include organic farming, watershed management, and sustainable agriculture.

### **Organic Farming**

The pioneering efforts of the PDS in promoting organic farming have given a new life to the agriculture sector. It has not just remained at theoretical level, but went deep down applying research and technology options. The expertise of the PDS in organic farming is increasingly in demand from far and near. Within a short span of time the Society could convert thousands of small scale tea growers and spice growers of Idukki district as organic farmers and organise separate consortiums of organic tea growers and spice

growers. The Society's initiative in organic farming may be also seen as a counter movement against degenerative and unaffordable chemical applications and the neo-colonisation trait set in by the multinationals in rural agriculture. The PDS has developed its own cycle of organic farming where the farmer is the centre figure. The products of organic farming are certified as organic by the Skal International, The Netherlands. After the value addition and processing the products are exported through the farmers' consortium which will fetch added income for the farmers. The activities of the PDS in organic farming include vermiculture and vermicompost, tissue culture, bio-control agents, tea production, and export of organic agro-products.

Vermiculture and Vermicompost: The PDS has made good progress in the areas of vermiculture and vermicompost through research oriented experiments as well as propagation/multiplication mission. Farmers are given all technical help in the production of vermicompost and bio-control agents.

Bio-Technology: A modern tissue culture unit, set up by the PDS for mass propagation of plants using bio-technical tools, is functioning in full swing. Tissue culture techniques are used in promoting the cultivation of pepper, vanilla, plantain, banana, and rare and endangered medicinal herbs. Quality seedlings/planting materials are assured to the farmers through the tissue culture lab.

Bio-Control Agents: Biological pest and disease management is very important for a complete agriculture system. The PDS has well equipped laboratories for research, development and multiplication of important biological control agents. Trichoderma, which is a beneficial fungus, is being multiplied in a large scale in the laboratory. For the control of root grub in cardamom, bio-control agents like *Metarhizium* and *Beauveria* are being multiplied in collaboration with the Indian Cardamom Research Institute. Research is also being carried out with beneficial fungus like Vesicular Arbuscular Mycorrhizae (VAM) and other important biological extracts for pest control in spice crops.

Organic Tea Production: The PDS has set up a state of the art modern tea factory that uses the latest machinery and technical know-how to produce the best tea. The Society has already started exporting organic tea produced in the factory to various countries.

Organic Agro-Products and Export Division: The organic agro-products and export division is a new venture of the PDS. This department purchases spices from its certified organic farmers, processes them and exports them. This ensures better income for the farmers. During 2004-05, the organic agro-products and export division exported over 82 metric tons of organic spices valued at Rs 1.67 crore. The organic spices exported during the year are black pepper, black pepper ground, white pepper, white pepper ground, green pepper in brine, ginger ground, turmeric ground, mace, nutmeg, cloves, nutmeg shells, thyme and rosemary. As of now, there are 1476 certified organic farms in the spices project covering an area of 1486.7 hectares. The PDS won the award of the Topmost Exporter of Organic Spices for the year 2002-03 instituted by the Spices Board, Ministry of Commerce, Government of India.

### **Watershed Development Management**

The programme of watershed development management (WDM) has given the PDS new enlightenment. The Society holds the distinction of introducing the concept in this part of the country in the early 1990s with the help of the EEC. The years that followed saw the PDS becoming an authentic body in watershed management and related activities. As far as WDM is concerned, the Society has assumed the roles of promoter, programme implementing agency, support voluntary organisation and resource centre. It is one of the Support Voluntary Organisations (SVO) of the Council for Advancement of People's Action and Rural Technology (CAPART) for the promotion of its watershed development programme in the southern states of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu, and the union territory of Pondichery. The activities under the WDM have produced good results in the conservation of land, water and biomass. The PDS has recently completed two major watershed development programmes covering an area of 13000 hectares in Idukki district.

Other related activities promoted by the PDS include rain water harvesting, check dams and gully plugging for conservation of water, stone and soil bunds for stream bank protection, and provision of safe drinking water.

### **Sustainable Development**

Under the programme of sustainable development the PDS has been undertaking several activities. For increased agricultural production the PDS has a project of scientific agriculture nursery. Another programme of the PDS for sustainable development is that of livestock management, which includes development of poultry and cattle. It also promotes production of fodder for cattle, insurance of cattle and construction of cattle sheds.

### **RURAL HEALTH PROMOTION**

In the area of rural health the PDS is engaged in promoting indigenous medicine and good health habits among the rural population. Two important programmes of this nature are the activities for popularising the use of ayurveda and cultivation of herbal plants.

### **Sahyadri Ayurveda Division**

This is a unit of the PDS that propagates ayurveda and other traditional branches of medicine in true spirit. The concern of the PDS for indigenous health has found great support and encouragement from people. Several activities are undertaken by the ayurveda unit of the PDS. It has an ayurveda community programme participated by 4000 families. The Sahyadri Ayurvedic Pharmaceuticals, which is Good Manufacturing Product (GMP) certified, produces 236 varieties of ayurvedic medicines. Through the self-help groups of the PDS and various other organisations, the Society promotes low cost and harmless practice of ayurveda, holding on to the motto of 'people's health in their own hands'. The Sahyadri Institute of Ayurveda is a state of the art centre for training ayurveda nurses and therapists. The Sahyadri Ayurveda Franchise provides technical expertise and support to set up treatment centres across the globe.

**Herbal Plants**

Propagation of medicinal plants is another activity of the PDS in the promotion of indigenous medicine. Today the PDS has an ethno-medicinal forest, a herbal nursery, and a seed and raw drug museum. Cultivation of medicinal plants is not only useful to the indigenous medicine, but also promotes biodiversity. Medicinal plants cultivated by the PDS include several of the endangered vegetation in the region.

**RURAL TECHNOLOGY PROMOTION**

The PDS has been constantly engaged in enhancing the quality of life of the rural population. It has strived to bring in technology not only in the basic economic and health services, but also in the facilities of day-to-day living. They include low cost housing, smokeless choolah, low cost latrine, solar energy and micro-hydel project. The Technology Resource Centre (TRC) of the PDS looks after the programme of promoting rural technology. The PDS also encourages the micro-level innovations in the promotion and use of rural technology through its Innovators' Technology Development Centre.

**Technology Resource Centre**

The TRC of the PDS works for the development, popularisation and dissemination of appropriate technology in the rural sector. The Society has the expertise and infrastructure to carry out experiments in the areas of organic agriculture, indigenous health, tissue culture and crop biotechnology. The PDS promotes the "land to lab" approach for participatory technology development. As deserving recognition of the Society in this field, the CAPART has approved the PDS as a TRC. The TRC of the PDS gives training to voluntary organisations, model farmers and local farmers of Kerala in organic farming and indigenous health practices.

**Innovators' Technology Development Centre**

Farmers too develop several technologies but they are confined to a certain geographical area. The PDS in collaboration with the National Innovation Foundation and Honey Bee Network, documents and popularises such innovations of farmers in Kerala and

Lakshadeep. Documentation, value addition, standardisation and popularisation of local innovations and exceptional traditional knowledge are being undertaken by the PDS.

## **HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT**

PDS believes that the potentialities of the people have to be enhanced in order to enable them to participate effectively in the developmental programmes. This is especially true of vulnerable groups such as the tribals. Thus the PDS has initiated several programmes of human resource development for the different communities. They include the vocational and entrepreneurial training, and awareness building programmes. The PDS has special programmes of this nature for tribal development and women empowerment.

### **Tribal Development**

Starting its activities in an isolated tribal colony, the PDS expanded its area of operation to cover as many as 20 tribal settlements in Idukki district. The programmes of capacity building and awareness creation have been adopted to enable tribal communities to enhance their potentialities. To this end, strategies like promotion of self-help groups (SHGs), consumer stores, cultivation of medicinal plants with buy back arrangements, collection of organic spices and organic tea leaves from tribal farmers at a price higher than the market rate, awareness campaigns, implementation of watershed development programmes and construction of rain water harvesting tanks are formulated and carried out with the active participation of tribal people.

### **Women Empowerment**

The community development thrust of the PDS was streamlined and given a new direction with the launching of a specially designed Women's Development Department. The positive indication from the part of the government offering special provisions for women in the Panchayat Raj Institutions also acted much in favour of launching the department that places due emphasis on empowerment through capacity building in the first place. About 32000 women have been organised into 1800 SHGs. Skill training programmes like quail farming, rabbit rearing, plant nurseries, soap making, umbrella making, wool knitting, book binding, electronic goods repairing, electric embroidery and



screen printing are frequently conducted. A large number of women participate in these programmes with great confidence. Having obtained legal status and other linkages, the women groups have now started small enterprises and income generation activities under the guidance and support of the PDS.

### **Micro Enterprise Development**

The PDS has undertaken a Micro Enterprise Development programme as a strategy for creating viable and sustainable self-employment opportunities in rural areas. Provision of credit alone will not lead to the emergence of a viable self-employment programme. It requires the identification and development of the inherent entrepreneurial competencies in the potential entrepreneurs. Keeping this in mind the PDS has been undertaking a series of rural entrepreneurship development programmes in collaboration with the Programme Implementing Agency of the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD), Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC), District Industries Centre (DIC) etc.

### **OTHER PROGRAMMES**

In addition to the various activities in the major four areas of its operation, the PDS has been involved in several other developmental activities for enhancing the quality of life of the rural population. They include family counselling, insurance scheme, research and documentation, and consultancy service.

#### **Family Counselling Centre**

The Family Counselling Centre of the PDS at Kattappana in Idukki district renders service to several families. Everyday many visit this centre and receive support and guidance. The centre provides professional help of doctors, counsellors and social workers. This centre rendered service to a total of 912 persons in the year 2004-05.

#### **Insurance Scheme**

The PDS has launched an insurance scheme. It is a joint venture of the PDS and the New India Assurance Co. Ltd. to provide medical assistance, personal accident coverage and fire insurance to the families in the operational area of the PDS. This programme covers the entire family and has proved to be very helpful to the people.

### **Research and Documentation**

In 1990 the PDS was recognised as a “Centre of Excellence” by the Department of Science and Technology, Ministry of Science and Technology, Government of India and has been receiving core support from the department since then. The PDS conducts research in agriculture, ayurveda, animal husbandry and anthropology.

### **Consultancy Services**

The PDS has been rendering consultancy services to several voluntary organisations and government departments in the areas of watershed development, housing and sanitation, micro-finance, research and documentation, ayurveda, animal husbandry, and organic farming.

### **RECOGNITIONS FOR PDS**

Competence of the PDS as both an implementing agency and a resource centre in the area of rural development has been duly acknowledged by different national and state level agencies concerned with rural development. The CAPART has recognised the PDS as the Support Voluntary Organisation (SVO) for watershed development programme for the southern states, and as the Technology Resource Centre (TRC) and Facilitation Centre for the state of Kerala. The Department of Science and Technology, Government of India has conferred the status of “Centre of Excellence” on PDS in 1990 and has been giving core support grant to the Society. The PDS also holds the distinction of being the Programme Implementing Agency for the watershed development management and agro-forestry programmes in the district of Idukki. The Rashtriya Mahila Khosh, a national

credit agency under the Department of Women and Child Development, Government of India, has appointed the PDS as the nodal agency for its women's micro credit programme for the eastern districts of Kerala. The National Innovation Foundation, Government of India has recognised the PDS as a regional collaborator and included the Society in the Honey Bee Network programme. The PDS is the Programme Implementing Agency of the NABARD for conducting the Rural Entrepreneurship Development Programme in Idukki district. The PDS has been recognised as a Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation by the Department of Science and Technology, Government of India. Khadi and Village Industries Commission has approved the PDS as an Extension Centre under the Bio Manure Programme. The Department of Industries and Commerce, Government of Kerala has selected the PDS to conduct Entrepreneurship Development Programme (EDP) for the beneficiaries of the Government sponsored Prime Minister's Rozgar Yojana (PMRY) in Idukki district. The PDS is the first NGO in Kerala state to host the Kerala Science Congress in association with the Kerala State Council for Science, Technology and Environment, and Department of Science and Technology, Government of India.

The PDS is a voluntary organisation working with the marginal farmers and the rural poor for their total development. There are very few organisations in India with so many multi disciplinary activities aimed at rural development. Its professional approach together with the commitment to rural development makes this organisation a unique one.

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