

TELLICHERRY SOCIAL SERVICE SOCIETY

Mani Melvetton

INTRODUCTION

Tellicherry Social Service Society (TSSS) is the official social work wing of the archdiocese of Tellicherry (known as Thalassery in the local language), Kerala. This voluntary organisation was established in 1966. TSSS is a registered society managed by an elected board of directors. The Archbishop of Tellicherry is the chief trustee of the society. It has a general body and central committee constituted from the members of community based organisations. In addition, there is a project selection committee consisting of five members from various professions.

TSSS had a very humble beginning in the year 1966. It was under the late Fr. Joseph Madakkassery that TSSS began to have developmental interventions in a full fledged manner. The light ignited by him was continued by the late Fr. Xavier Puthenpurayil and thereafter by Fr. Thomas Pattankulam. Presently TSSS with its manifold activities is led by Fr. Mani Melvetton, the Director and Fr. Thomas Vattamala, the Assistant Director.

Vision and Mission

The vision of the TSSS is to bring about a society of equals founded on divine love, wherein everybody enjoys absolute freedom. Its mission under this vision is holistic development of communities of human beings towards self-reliance with preferential option for the deprived sections. All the activities of TSSS in pursuit of this goal are to be

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characterised by its participatory, holistic and decentralised approach. The strategies in this regard have been promotion and strengthening of community based organisations, social capital mobilisation, taking up pertinent social issues, development of linkages, research and documentation, and capacity building for the staff of TSSS. The sections of the population, that have been identified by TSSS as priority groups for its developmental activities are marginal farmers, women, children and differently abled persons. Tellicherry archdiocese is spread over an agrarian area of 97 per cent marginal farmers who often totally depend on the mercies of nature for cultivation. Hence agricultural development has been an important area of the developmental activities of TSSS. Presently the thrust of its intervention is on sustainable agriculture development through natural resources and their judicious management.

The Approach

Over the years there have been shifts in the approach adopted by TSSS in its activities. It evolved from charity and welfare through community organisation to human rights. In the initial stage of TSSS (1966–1978), charity activities were carried out under the leadership and responsibility of the chancellors of the diocese. The main activity of service to the poor was undertaken through distribution of essential food items mainly with the support of the Catholic Relief Services (CRS).

The second phase (1978-1984) featured the food for work programme coupled with the development of the village level infrastructure facilities. One of the most important features of those days was community responsibility and collective action under the leadership of the local parish priest for the improvement of the basic amenities like roads, culverts and bridges in the remote villages. Accessibility to the villages was one of the major constraints during this period.

The third phase of 1985-2005 was characterised by the promotion of community based organisations (CBOs). Since the latter part of 1980s, initiation and strengthening of village level community organisations became the priority concern of TSSS which focused on self-reliance

and sustainability of the target communities. Village level people's organisations were seen to play the pivotal role in realising the objectives of TSSS. Accordingly, activities were prepared and implemented with people's participation. Since then TSSS has channelled all its social development activities through CBOs.

From 2005 TSSS has been following the human rights based approach in its activities. At a time when human rights violations have become widespread with instances of discrimination and lack of enforcement of laws on human rights ever on the increase, TSSS realised the necessity of adopting a human rights based approach in its developmental interventions.

Malabar Region

The geographical area of the activities of TSSS (i.e. the districts of Kannur and Kasargode) belongs to the Malabar region, the northern part of Kerala. In the 20th century there has been large scale migration into Malabar, which had been part of the Madras Presidency under the British. Migration of people from the erstwhile princely state of Travancore (presently southern Kerala) to Malabar started in 1920s. Majority of the early migrants were small peasant farmers who went to make Malabar their permanent abode. In the beginning it was only an isolated attempt of a few landless enterprising farmers. But gradually farmers with larger portions of land also started settling down in Malabar. The decade of 1941-1951 witnessed the peak of migration into Malabar and the population of Malabar increased by 21.09 per cent during this period. The trend of migration continued up to 1971.

Migration of farmers from Travancore to Malabar region has had its uniqueness. It has been community migration wherein a group of more or less homogenous households along with their close kin migrated to the region with the purpose of improving their economic status through farming. Hence most of them sold away their entire property in the place of origin (with no intention to return) and settled in clusters in

several parts of Malabar. Thus it was planned, permanent and 'settle migration'. As a result the migrants developed a sound mind to withstand the initial hurdles and constraints that they had to face in the new place.

Malabar is divided into three geographical regions: highland, midland and lowland. The highland of Malabar is part of the Western Ghats, known as one of the hotspots of biodiversity (rich in flora and fauna) in the world. The main crops cultivated in this region are pepper, ginger, cinnamon, nutmeg and rubber, besides some food crops needed for daily consumption. The upper portion of the midland slowly developed into estates of tea and coffee. The entire portion of the lowland grows mainly coconut trees and paddy. The coastal belt of the lowland is inhabited by fisher folk. Since the independence the agricultural practice of the region underwent changes from cultivating mixed food crops to mono cash-crops (largely rubber) by the end of the 20th century.

TSSS Intervention for Sustainable Development

In pursuit of its goal of sustainable development, TSSS has been engaged in several activities for the socio-economic development of the people of Kannur and Kasargode districts. The activities can be broadly categorised into five sectors: (1) grassroots level organisation, (2) education/ human resource development, (3) economy, (4) health, (5) family development and (6) development of the differently abled. Various programmes and activities of development have been carried out by TSSS under each of these sectors. Following is the brief account of the activities in these sectors.

I. GRASSROOTS LEVEL ORGANISATION

One of the strategies employed by TSSS in its developmental intervention has been to elicit people's participation through grassroots level organisations. Formation of three such organisations has resulted through the intervention of TSSS. They are (1) credit unions, (2) women's organisations and (3) children's groups.

1. Credit Unions

The scheme of credit unions, called *paraspasara sahaya suhrud sangham*, was started by TSSS in 1985 in different villages of Kannur and Kasargode districts. At present there are 106 sangham units with the total membership of 16304; membership of individual units varies from 50 to 300. Each unit is governed by a democratically elected executive committee. An individual unit covers different wards according to the operational area of the unit. Members in each ward gather once a week in order to discuss and plan the monthly activities of the ward. Meeting of the executive committee of the unit is held every month to evaluate and plan the unit level activities. In order to promote decentralisation and improve the results of the activities, sangham units are organised under 10 federations. Elected representatives from each unit form the executive body of a federation. The executives of the federations meet once a month at the respective regional offices in order to assess and monitor the developmental activities of the units in the area.

The activities of the sanghams include thrift and credit (saving and supply of soft loans), education of the sangham members and others in the community, skill development of the sangham members, implementation of developmental projects and welfare programmes, and campaign against social evils.

Annual general body of the sanghams is held at the central, federation and unit levels. Evaluation of the past activities and planning for the next year take place in the annual meeting. All the sangham units are evaluated and given grades every year on the basis of their financial position, educational activities, social welfare activities, other developmental programmes and general efficiency. The first three sanghams ranked on the basis of this evaluation are given awards every year.

2. Women's Organisations

Despite numerous programmes and campaigns for women empowerment initiated in India, most of the remote areas in India still

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remain untouched by their impact. Women are generally found to have low participation in development activities and other socio-economic spheres. With the objective of pursuing women development, TSSS initiated the programme of organising *mahila seva sanghams* (MSSs) and self-help groups (SHGs) in the rural areas of Kannur and Kasargode districts, its operational area. The MSSs and SHGs of women are organised into federations similar to the suhrud sangams. Presently there are 68 MSSs and 491 SHGs under the 10 federations.

At the level of the MSS federation, a forum under the name of *sthree prathikarana vedi* (women's response forum) has been set up in order to ensure women's participation in dealing with social issues. There are 10 such forums – one each in every federation. Its executive committee, consisting of the president and secretary of the MSS federation and 7-9 representatives elected from the MSS federation, coordinates the activities. The forum functions in association with the panchayatiraj institutions in getting women involved in dealing with social issues.

3. Children's Groups

Children are another group for whom organised activities have been undertaken by TSSS. *Balamithras* (children's groups) have been formed with the objective of creating a young generation exemplary in thought, word and deed. Balamithra covers all children irrespective of caste and creed in its activities for developing the social, cultural, educational and intellectual capacities of children. Every balamithra unit has an animator and functions under the guidance of the respective suhrud sangam or MSS.

In order to instil the sense of saving in children, they are helped to open an account in balamithra credit and savings, and are encouraged to deposit Rs. 10 or above in their account every time they come together. When they need money for the purpose of their education, there is the provision to withdraw the money. TSSS also runs the student

empowerment scholarship programme in collaboration with the OutReach of Rajagiri College of Social Sciences, Ernakulam by which 200 children are provided school materials and related services. Another activity organised by TSSSS for children is the *souhrudham* (fellowship) camps. The objective of this activity is to form honest and upright citizens from today's young generation. During the camps interactive classes are given to children in pertinent matters. Souhrudham camps are held in all the 10 regions of the operational area of TSSSS. The camp duration is three days.

II. EDUCATION/HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

The main activities of TSSSS in the area of education and human resource development are skill training and staff capacity building. Various courses in skill training are offered by the centres of TSSSS set up for the same. They are (1) Sanjose computer centre, (2) Bhagawathpada industrial training centre and (3) Sanjose employment and production centre set up by TSSSS. (4) 'The Mentor' unit of TSSSS provides programmes of capacity building. In addition, TSSSS has the programme of capacity building for its own staff.

1. Sanjose Computer Centre

To provide computer education to the common man, TSSSS started the Sanjose Computer Centre at Tellierry. The centre offers various job oriented courses, like graphic designing, computer programming, computer accounting and computer office automation.

2. Bhagawathpada ITC

The Bhagawathpada industrial training centre (ITC) of TSSSS was started at Paisakary in 2000 with the objective of imparting industrial training to the students of the underdeveloped area of northern Kerala. The courses offered at the centre are for (i) electrician, (ii) draughtsman, (iii) plumber and (iv) upholsterer. The centre also has a computer division that offers over 30 C-DAC (Government of India) approved courses.

3. Sanjose Employment and Production Centre

Although the Sanjose employment and production centre was set up as a production unit by TSSSS, an additional activity of the centre is to give training in tailoring and electronic embroidery, each of which is of six months' duration. Two batches of students get trained in tailoring and embroidery every year and all of them find jobs in different establishments.

4. The Mentor

An important human resource development service of TSSSS is 'The Mentor', the training and placement wing. It consists of a group of professionals who function as consultants and training specialists. The Mentor specialises in offering short term courses in skill training in a variety of subjects, such as management, leadership, career planning, personality development, project management and marketing.

For instance, the Mentor offers a certificate course under the name *blom skill*. It is a programme in personality development that combines direct teaching with practical training. Classes, group discussions, role plays, simulations, declamations, participatory topic presentations, group evaluation, book reviews, video counselling etc are part of this training programme.

A noteworthy programme organised by the Mentor this year was the 25 day summer leadership camp under the name *The Flame* for children of the 14-18 age group. The camp gave the children ample exposure in aero-modelling, robotics, horse riding, roller skating, vedic mathematics, communicative English, behavioural therapy, and other similar soft skills. The camp, held at Xavier Institute of Management and Entrepreneurship (XIME), Bangalore, had 60 student participants.

Staff Capacity Building

TSSSS gives utmost importance to its human resources. The members of the central and regional staff are given ample opportunities

for enrichment through programmes of training and exposure visits. There is an 18-member central resource team that receives inputs every two months under the guidance of eminent national and state level trainers. The central team in turn reaches out to the regions to offer quality training to the members of the CBOs.

Special training is given to staff personnel to whom specialised tasks are assigned. For example, for disaster management TSSSS has a specially trained *vigilant force*. The 101-member vigilat force was formed by TSSSS in 2007. Its members have been given special training in life-saving techniques, first aid and cardio pulmonary respiration (CPR), and mitigation measures and disaster preparedness. A recent action that has been undertaken by the TSSSS disaster vigilat force was at Ayyankunnu (Kannur district) where due to incessant rain and landslide an entire road was washed away. The TSSSS disaster vigilat force in collaboration with the local people made an alternative motorable road in three days.

III. ECONOMY/AGRICULTURE

Several activities and services are undertaken by TSSSS for improving the economic situation of the people, especially the marginal farmers engaged in agriculture. They can be broadly categorised into (a) economic enterprises and (b) programmes for farmers.

The economic enterprises include (1) the entrepreneurship and livelihood development programme and the entrepreneurial production units set up by TSSSS, viz. (2) the Sanjose employment and production centre, (3) the Aiswarya curry powder unit, and (4) the Cashew processing unit. The major farmer-oriented programmes of TSSSS include those of (5) natural resource management, (6) the Farmers' Emancipation Five Year Programme and (7) the Malabar Farm Fest.

1. Entrepreneurship and Livelihood Development Programme

TSSSS has been operating the entrepreneurship and livelihood development programme (ELDP) in order to empower the low income

groups and the unemployed to undertake viable micro enterprises and income generating activities which in turn provide supplementary income to meet the changing needs of the time. Several services are provided under the ELDP, such as escort service wing, marketing wing, direct bank linkages, micro finance, interest-free loan, rolling fund and 12 community shops.

The motto of the ELDP is to tone down expenditure, increase earnings, safeguard health and be eco-friendly. Household items of daily use, such as detergents and soaps are made and sold locally. The most interesting point about this is that these items can be made at home at a cost of about 25 per cent of their existing market price. With the messages of toning down expenditure and increasing earnings in an eco-friendly manner TSSSS annually conducts ELDP training in an average of 50 villages and trains an average of 50 persons in each village.

2. Sanjose Employment and Production Centre

The Sanjose employment and production centre was started in 1978 with the objective of giving training to girls and creating job opportunities for the poor women irrespective of caste and creed. The centre now makes the following products: (i) *matha umbrellas* of 32 different types and sizes, (ii) *madona books* of various sizes and pages, (iii) *mareena envelopes* of three different sizes, and (iv) *madona fashion and ready makes*, which include *churidar*, *midi*, *nighty*, *pillow cover*, *cushion cover*, *bed sheet*, *table cloth*, etc. (v) The *angel hall* of the centre makes holy host, garlands, flowers, crown and bouquet.

3. Aiswarya Curry Powder Unit

The Aiswarya curry powder unit was started by TSSSS at Nellikampoli in Kannur district and is run exclusively by women. It provides job to 12 women. Some of the items made at the unit are red chilli powder, coriander powder, meat masala, sambar powder, rasam powder, pickle powder and turmeric powder. They are marketed in the operational area of TSSSS.

4. Cashew Processing Unit

With the objective of helping marginal cashew farmers and unemployed women, a cashew processing unit was started by TSSS at Kunnoth, Kannur district with the collaboration of Manos Unidas, Spain. Currently 90 women and 10 men are employed in this unit. The product of the unit is exported and sold in domestic market.

5. Natural Resource Management

Natural resource management is a thrust area of TSSS. Watershed development has been an important programme of TSSS in pursuit of natural resource management. A number of watershed projects have been completed over the years and several projects are under way. Currently TSSS has 12 micro watersheds as part of the integrated watershed development programme with the support of Andheri Hilfe, Germany and BMZ (Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development of Germany). Six of these watersheds are in Kannur district while the other six are in Kasaragode district. In addition, there are four watersheds in Ulickal panchayath of Kannur district under the Western Ghat Development Programme (WGDP) of the Government of India. The main components of the watershed projects are: contour stone bunds, contour trenches, gully plugging, spring development, rain water harvesting, well protection and well recharge.

6. Farmers' Emancipation Five Year Programme

TSSS launched the Farmers' Emancipation Five Year Programme for the marginal farmers of Kannur and Kasaragode districts in 2008 and ends in 2012. The programme has been conceived in the context of the global concerns of food security and climate change, and in consideration of the fact that a major part of the target population of TSSS is marginal farmers who are faced with severe setbacks in agricultural activities. Over the years food sovereignty became a distant dream with the shift from food crops to cash crops in cultivation. Food safety was jeopardised by the indiscriminate use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides. So TSSS felt the need to empower farmers towards rejuvenation of agriculture

and thereby assuring the survival of farmers through promotion of sustainable agriculture practices.

The specific objectives of the farmers' emancipation five-year programme are: (i) to promote sustainable agriculture practices that ensure survival of farmers and rejuvenation of agriculture, which implies the process of effective management of basic resources like soil, water, air and biodiversity with a view to assuring food, health and economic securities; (ii) to capacitate 5000 marginal farmer families to ensure their food sovereignty, which puts the aspirations and needs of those who produce, distribute and consume food at the heart of food systems and policies rather than the demands of markets and corporations; (iii) to assure social recognition to women for their involvement in agricultural practices through empowering women farmers; and (iv) to generate positive attitude among the general public especially youth and children towards agriculture.

7. Malabar Farm Fest: *Polika 2010*

As part of the Farmers' Emancipation Five Year Programme, TSSS and the AIR (All India Radio) Kannur organised an event called the Malabar Farm Fest - POLIKA 2010 during 22-24 January 2010 at Kannur Town Square in collaboration with Du Care Foods, INDOCERT (Indian Organic Certification Agency), INFAM (Indian Farmers' Movement) and Foundation for Organic Agriculture and Rural Development. The objective of the programme was to uphold the importance of agriculture and to recognise the role of farmer in relation to food safety and security. Society in general must be made to realise that the healthy survival of humans depends on the survival of farmers and their successful performance in agriculture. Everyone's sustenance irrespective of nation, religion or political affinity depends on the sustenance of the farmer as he/she is the ultimate food producer. Hence survival of farmers is akin to survival of humanity. This was the thrust of the Malabar Farm Fest - Polika 2010. Each day over 10,000 people participated in the programme. Together with the exhibition there were seminars, workshops, honouring of farmers of best practices, sharing of experiences by farmers, quiz competitions and cultural shows. The fest

awakened the general public to the global issue of food security and thereby urging them to adopt appropriate measures locally.

IV. HEALTH SERVICES

Health care is another sphere of TSSSS activities. TSSSS has been constantly involved in promoting the health of individuals and families at the grassroots level and maintaining a clean and hygienic environment for healthy human living. Three notable programmes of TSSSS in this context are those of (1) health insurance, (2) HIV/AIDS and (3) awareness campaign. (4) A programme in mental health for the mentally ill is also carried out by TSSSS.

1. Universal Health Insurance

At a time when 40 per cent of the earnings of a commoner is spent on medical expenses, the financial burden it inflicts on the poor and low income groups is alarming. In order to allay this situation, TSSSS introduced the universal health insurance scheme (*viswa arogya padhathi*) in collaboration with the United India Insurance Co. Ltd. This scheme covers death and permanent disability arising from accidents along with financial support for hospitalised treatment. The scheme which was introduced in October 2008 has nearly 3000 membership at present.

Following are the salient features of this scheme. The premium amount is different for BPL (below poverty line) and APL (above poverty line) families. The premium for a single person is Rs.165 for BPL and Rs.365 for APL. Premium for a family of five members is Rs.248 for BPL and Rs.548 for APL; for a family of seven it is Rs.330 and Rs.730 for BPL and APL respectively. Claim for death/disability through accident is Rs.25,000. Reimbursement for hospital treatment is up to Rs.30,000 per year.

2. HIV/AIDS Programme

AIDS may perhaps be considered as the most dangerous health issue of mankind, because of its not only fatal consequences but also

accompanying social ostracism. The HIV/AIDS programme of TSSSS has the objective of reducing the incidence of HIV/AIDS while improving the quality of life of the people affected by HIV/AIDS and living with their families. The activities for them include awareness programme, medical camps, care and support workshop to families, travel support to CD4 test centre, EDP (Entrepreneurship Development Programme) training, nutrition support care kit distribution, educational programme for HIV positive children, formation of their SHGs, training to peer educators, referral services to high risk category of patients, recreational club for women, teenage motivation camps, and youth seminars. The activities are financially supported by the Catholic Relief Services. In addition, there is a comprehensive paediatric care and support programme sponsored by the Clinton Foundation.

3. Health Awareness Campaign

'Red Alert' and 'Quit Flu' were two mega health awareness campaigns organised by TSSSS in 2008 and 2009. The goal of the campaigns was to prevent and manage epidemics like chikungunya in Kerala by creating awareness among the public and establishing linkage between the governmental and non-governmental sectors. The campaign was organised at different settings. (i) Activities at the level of the general public included road shows, street corner meetings, rallies, leaflet distribution, posters, street plays and distribution of mosquito nets. (ii) At the school level programmes of awareness building, such as seminars, talks and debates were organised for school students. (iii) At the village level, campaign was organised in 200 villages under the banner of *grama arogya shree* with the collaboration of SHGs, PHCs (primary health centres), clubs, businessmen, educational institutions, and other local bodies. (iv) Five medical camps were organised with the objective of the holistic health of the residents of Kannur and Kasargode districts for early detection and referral services to the infected.

4. Programme for the Mentally Ill

The programme of TSSSS for persons with mental illness is organised in collaboration with the Action on Disability and Development

(ADD) India. It is implemented at Eruvessy and Naduvil panchayats of Kannur district. So far 160 persons with mental illness have been identified from these panchayats of whom 48 were given direct medical help. TSSS animators visit the families of the mentally ill and impart awareness classes to them and to their community. Various income generation programmes, like goat and cattle rearing, and piggy, are also introduced for their self-reliance and integration into the mainstream of society. Two regular monthly medical camps with free medicines - one at Chemperi and the other at Karuvanchal - are conducted for the mentally ill.

Another programme for the mentally ill is that of the “mind mend.” It is an integrated programme initiated in Kannur district by TSSS in collaboration with the DMHP (District Mental Health Programme) Kannur and Swabhimani Trust Kannur, in order to turn Kannur into a mental-health friendly district. Workshops and training programmes are arranged for all the stakeholders on a regular basis.

V. FAMILY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

TSSS has a family development programme for bringing about the holistic development of the family. There are two categories of family development programme, viz. (1) welfare services and (2) family counselling.

1. Family Welfare Services

TSSS runs the “regular beneficiary scheme” with the support from the “Save a Family Plan, India.” Under this activity, presently 366 poor families regardless of caste, creed or political affiliation get financial support every month for education of children, commencement of income generation programmes and EDPs. Second, under the *kudumbodharana padhathi* (family development scheme) of the TSSS, very poor families of the parishes within the archdiocese of Tellierry are given financial assistance for five years. The amount for disbursement under the scheme is mobilised from the parishes within the archdiocese.

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Another family welfare programme of TSSS is the group wedding of deprived women. Since 2007 TSSS has been arranging group wedding of deprived women. When media and people in general tend to highlight posh life styles and luxurious extravaganzas particularly on occasions such as wedding, the pains borne by the poor in their strife to find a bit of gold or a little amount of money to meet the expenses of their daughter’s wedding, remains a naked reality. It is in this context that TSSS came out with the concept of *samohavivaham* (group wedding) wherein financial support amounting to Rs.50,000 is given to deprived women, selected by the CBOs of TSSS, towards their wedding expenses. In the selection of women special consideration is given to daughters of widows, the chronically ill, the mentally challenged and the like. The marriage rites are conducted as per the religious beliefs of the individual couple and the couples come together for a common reception. The number of women who received financial support under this scheme was 10 in 2007-2008, 20 in 2008-2009 and 25 in 2009-2010. It is interesting to note that the entire amount for this programme (the gift of Rs.50,000 to each couple and the expenses of the reception on the common wedding day) was realised through the social capital mobilisation of the TSSS central team and its CBO leaders.

2. Family Counselling Centre

Family Counselling Centre, started by TSSS in 1993 with the support of the Central Social Welfare Board, offers free counselling to family members with the objective of providing preventive, curative and rehabilitative services, especially in respect to women and children. The centre renders its services also to the family court, *lok-adalath*, *mahila mandiram* (short stay home for women), *anganwadis* of the ICDS (integrated child development services), and school students and their parents. The centre has two full time professionally qualified counsellors.

VI. PROGRAMME FOR THE DIFFERENTLY ABLED

TSSS has its own programmes for the differently abled persons or those who are physically or mentally challenged. Services for the differently abled include (1) financial assistance, (2) “oasis” cultural

meet of the differently abled and (3) *snehatheeram* for creating opportunity for marriage.

1. Financial Assistance

Under this programme for the differently abled, poor children and youth below 25 years, who are physically or mentally challenged are given financial support for education, treatment and income generation activities. Assistance is also given to children having multi sensorial disabilities, autism and cerebral palsy. TSSS runs this programme with the financial assistance from Stichting Lilitane Fonds (SLF). SLF, whose head office is in the Netherlands and national office in Secunderabad, has been a cordial partner of TSSS since 1992.

2. Oasis Cultural Meet

Since 2007 TSSS has been organising the annual “Oasis” – a mega cultural meet of the physically challenged. From 2010 it has become a mega meet of both the physically and mentally challenged. Every year more than 1000 physically challenged persons have been coming together along with their family members to have a day of relaxation, oneness and enhanced sense of belongingness and self-esteem. This idea of a cultural meet of the physically challenged, irrespective of age, sex or religious affiliation, evolved out of the realisation by TSSS that people are craving for that flicker of love which can bring about an iota of respite, nay an *oasis* of relief in their hustle and bustle-filled lives.

The activities of the meet include exhibition of art by the physically and mentally challenged; free distribution of wheelchair, crutches, artificial limbs, water beds and other accessories; group psychotherapy and counselling for the physically and mentally challenged; question hour that provides information on government schemes for the physically and mentally challenged; cultural show by the physically and mentally challenged; assistance for the education and treatment of the physically and mentally challenged children; marriage bureau of the physically and mentally challenged; fellowship meal; and offer of gift kits for the physically and mentally challenged comrades.

3. Snehatheeram

Snehatheeram (love-shore) is a programme for the physically challenged persons who wish to enter into married life. Very often marriage of a physically challenged person becomes difficult. Fully aware of this reality, TSSS has created a platform for interaction and family-to-family interface of the disabled. This full-day programme, which is announced well in advance through media, is attended by unmarried physically challenged persons and their families from all over the state and also from outside the state. The programme, which first started in 2008, has a session on “the differently abled and marriage.” In the last *snehatheeram*, there were 54 differently abled participants who looked for new rays of hope for a family life just like everyone else. Thereafter four marriages took place, which means that eight of the participants benefitted from the programme to commence married life.