

THE DALE VIEW: EFFORT IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT

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INTRODUCTION

The abysmal living conditions of the village community of Punalal in the district of Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala (India) paved way for the birth of the rural development project, 'The Dale View'. Its goal has been to provide training, education and guidance to the poverty-stricken community so that in course of time it would become self-reliant. With this mission in mind the Dale View was started in 1978. Ever since the beginning, the Dale View has been striving to improve the life of the rural community with various activities. It was the worthwhile goal of the Dale View that epitomises its growth and success in the field of rural development. The philosophy and practice of the Dale View inculcated into its development initiatives have helped the people mould their destiny. The steady strides of the Dale View have made the project stronger and created deeper impacts in the lives of the rural people.

The Dale View is a secular non-governmental organisation (NGO), membership of which is open to all. The general body of the organisation, which consists of philanthropic minded and selfless individuals and representatives from the village groups, is responsible for planning and implementing the different programmes. The organisation is managed by a 13 member executive committee elected from among the general body. The organisation follows democratic and participatory method of decision making and upholds transparency and accountability at all levels. With the advent of

decentralisation of power and decision making at different levels the Dale View could effectively introduce and implement participatory development methods at the grassroots level. It could knit a strong linkage with the Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs) and thereby facilitate the development activities of the government as well.

With the modest beginning in the village community of Punalal, the Dale View has expanded its activities and coverage of areas over the years. Although the programmes of the Dale View have been concentrated in the districts of Thiruvananthapuram, Kollam and Idduki in Kerala, its activities of training and networking have crossed the geographical boundaries and have made distances shrink. Today its activities are expanded to other districts of Kerala and the neighbouring state of Tamilnadu.

In pursuance of its goal, the Dale View has been engaged in various activities of rural development. Its major activities have been in the fields of education, health and services for the disadvantaged sections of the society (viz. women, people with disability, and scheduled castes and tribes). Another important activity of the Dale View has been participation in the Western Ghat Development Programme (WGDP). Some of the local environmental issues (viz. roof water harvesting, solid waste management and smokeless *choola*) have also been the concern of the Dale View. Conducting training programmes for various client groups has been yet another activity of the Dale View.

EDUCATION

The Dale View believes that education is the doorstep to all development. It helps mould the minds of people and produce better citizens. The Dale View thus has always given much emphasis to education, both formal and informal. It has been involved in the education of both children and adults. It runs formal schools and pre-school programme, and offers degree and diploma courses.

The Dale View Schools

The Dale View runs upper primary schools at Punalal and Kattakada. About 1500 students pursue their education at the schools. In view of the growing demand of children belonging to this remote

area for further schooling, application for upgrading them to high schools has already been made.

The Dale View school occupies the status of a "People's School" since it functions with the wholehearted participation of the parents and local people. The government of Kerala provides only recognition to the school without any financial aid. It is the parents who support the daily management of the school. The school gives employment to around 75 qualified unemployed youth. The Parent/Teacher Association works hard to maintain the academic standard and to undertake the necessary renovation of the school infrastructure. The school management takes special interest to train teachers and mothers of children to respond creatively to the changing scenario of the boom in information technology. The Mothers' forum meets every month and discusses with teachers their concerns about the development of their children.

The Government of Kerala has selected the Dale View schools for its scheme of providing better education to selected students from the scheduled castes and tribes (SC and ST). The scheme was initiated with 10 SC/ST students. During the last academic year the scheme was enhanced to cover 72 SC and 14 ST students. This is an indication of the recognition given to the Dale View school and appreciation for the teachers and parents who have been working hard for the educational improvement of the children entrusted to their care.

Extra-curricular Activities

The students of the Dale View School have been quite active in various co-curricular and extra-curricular activities. They have won prizes in competitions at local and district levels. Some of the competitions of successful participation include the Arts Festival at the district level, Arts and Cultural Programmes conducted by Nedumangad Sub-district, Malayala Manorama cultural programme, Sathyan Memmorial Cultural meet, competitions organised by the Gandhi Darsan, Science Talent Exhibition conducted at Sub-district level, drawing and painting competitions conducted by the Somasekharan Nair Memmorial Trust held at the Christian College, Kattakkada.

Students of the Dale View School have been sensitised to the environmental issues through various programmes, such as tree plantation and vegetable gardening. Environment cleanliness is an important value that is inculcated to the students of the school. The students are regularly engaged in the work of cleaning the surroundings of the school.

Pre-school Programme

The working women of the rural areas face great problems in looking after their infants as there are no pre-school facilities available in the rural areas and that they have to work to make both ends meet. In view of this a crèche and a balawadi are run by the Dale View, which provide day care to children of working and ailing women. It goes to the credit of the Dale View that the Bala Sevika Trainees from the Bala Sevika Training Institute, Thiruvananthapuram were placed for a one-month block level training at the Dale View. They highly appreciated the exposure at the crèche, balawadi, LKG and UKG sections of the Dale View School.

Degree Programme

The Dale View has moved into the field of higher education too with the establishment of the Dale View College of Pharmacy and Research Centre in the year 2003. It was started with the principal aim of imparting quality education in pharmacy to the students of the surrounding areas. The Dale View College of Pharmacy and Research Centre is approved by AICTE and the Pharmacy Council, and is affiliated to the University of Kerala. The college offers a four-year degree programme in pharmacy. The college admits 60 students per year and currently students of the first batch are completing the third year.

Over and above the professional education, the Dale View College of Pharmacy and Research Centre is engaged in research on natural drug formulations, production and marketing of standardised herbal drugs and pharmaceuticals. The college has a full-fledged laboratory with all facilities, qualified faculty and research workers. The college conducts research on the products made out of medicinal plants and herbs cultivated by the dalits and poor farmers.

Diploma Programme

The Dale View has started a College of Para Medical Sciences in the year 2005 with the objective of training personnel for the rural health care system. Presently the college offers the Diploma in Health Inspector Course. Plans are being made to offer the following three para medical courses: Diploma in Medical Laboratory Technology, Diploma in Clinical Psychology and Hospital Assistance Diploma.

HEALTH

Health is another important area of the activities of the Dale View. Accepting that 'health is wealth', the Dale View adopts a holistic approach in the field of health. The main activities of the Dale View in the field of health are promotion of indigenous medicine, treatment of drug addicts and prevention of HIV/AIDS.

Indigenous Medicine

Efforts are made to promote the indigenous medicine of Ayurveda and naturopathy. During 2002-04 the Dale View conducted 42 health camps wherein about 2,640 people participated. Another activity of the Dale View in the field of health has been training of the members of the self-help groups (SHGs) to preserve and cultivate indigenous herbs of medicinal value and to use them for the cure of many diseases. Awareness programmes on sanitation and use of water have also been conducted, especially for the rural masses.

Treatment of Drug-addiction

Drug addiction or drug abuse is a problem that is the cause of many broken families. The number of substance abusers in India is on the increase. Treatment given to the addicts not only improves their own lives but also brings joy, peace and happiness to their families. The Dale View treats and rehabilitates people addicted to drugs. In dealing with the problem, the drug de-addiction centre of the Dale View provides individual and group counselling and family therapy with the minimum use of medicine. The patients admitted to the centre are given a course of 21 days of residential treatment in three phases, each consisting of seven days. Detoxification, psychotherapy and social reorientation are the treatment in the first, second and third phases respectively.

In view of the increasing demand from the community the 15-bed centre was expanded to 30-bed centre from August 2001. More than 60 per cent of the patients who get the treatment become fully free from addiction. This indeed is a great achievement. Most of the patients who undergo treatment at the Dale View de-addiction centre are able to lead a happy and successful life. The patients currently at the de-addiction centre have come from the districts of Thiruvananthapuram, Kollam, Pathanamthitta, Alapuzha, Ernakulam, Trissur and Kozhikode in Kerala, and Kanyakumari and Thirunelveli in Tamilnadu.

HIV/AIDS Prevention

AIDS has turned out to be a grave problem affecting the human race. There aren't any effective curative measures that can be looked upon to deal with the problem. HIV infection creates problem to not only the individual concerned but also the family and society at large. The misunderstanding and misconceptions of the ordinary human beings regarding HIV and AIDS add to the problem as far as prevention and rehabilitation are concerned.

The problem of HIV/AIDS is related to substance abuse in so far as drug taken through injection is one of the ways of contracting HIV infection. The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of India has recently taken the decision to add the component of HIV/AIDS prevention to its ongoing programme of prevention of drug abuse in the country in collaboration with the National AIDS Control Organisation, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India. The Dale View has been selected by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment to take up this AIDS prevention programme.

The Dale View is now engaged in several activities in pursuance of the objective of the AIDS control programme of the Government of India. They include field level awareness programmes on basic health issues related to sexuality, HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases, counselling, small group meetings, and facilitation of referrals. Several awareness camps have been conducted through *mahila mandals*, arts and sports clubs, family councils, and schools and colleges. Sex workers are an important group that is covered in this activity.

SERVICES FOR THE DISADVANTAGED

The disadvantaged section of the society has been a priority group for the activities of the Dale View. The Dale View has selected three groups for its services for the disadvantaged, viz. women, people with disability, and scheduled castes and tribes.

Empowerment of Women

Women form an integral part of the family and society. Empowerment of women in every respect is essential in a civilised and developed society. Empowerment of women means transformation of women that can bring about changes in the family and the society as a whole. As a process contributing to social development, empowerment of women would include activities for education and awareness, skill up-gradation, self-reliance, and ability to undertake collective efforts for common cause. The Dale View has been striving to create a self-reliant, women friendly society where women can think and make decisions, act and interact with others, earn and be involved in development process on equal terms with men individually and collectively. More than 23,500 women participated actively in, and benefited from the development programmes of the Dale View during the year 2004-2005. The subject matter of the training programmes conducted during the year were identification of viable income generation programmes, management of micro enterprises, marketing techniques, management of savings and credit programmes, accounting and book keeping, leadership, participatory planning and monitoring and evaluation.

Organisational Structure: Programmes for the empowerment of women are carried out through the SHGs, each of which consists of 10-20 women. In order to coordinate the activities of the different SHGs, a federation of the SHGs, *Samyuktha* has been set up. Five to seven SHGs constitute a micro level organisation (MLO), and the different MLOs form the *Samyuktha*. Last year the *Samyuktha* was registered as an independent body, and became a separate branch of the All India Women's Conference. The formation of the *Samyuktha* has facilitated a uniform system of management and book keeping. It has also assisted the SHGs to work for their common goals by improving

their strength through unity. Training programmes have become easier and more effective. A critical evaluation of each SHG has become possible through comparative studies. Effective guidance for the functioning of the SHGs has become possible. The economic and political empowerment of the members of the SHGs is now made the responsibility of the *Samyuktha*. During the year 2004-05, 70 new SHGs with 1200 fresh members have been formed.

The Dale View, through its SHGs, has been successful in inspiring village women to come out of their homes and work for the betterment of themselves and the society as a whole. Their experience in the SHGs helped them acquire leadership and administrative capabilities. Many of the women who successfully assumed political leadership in the PRIs have been enabled to perform their functions to the satisfaction of the society. The Dale View can take credit for the remarkable performance of these women in so far as its programmes provided them the requisite exposure, knowledge and skills.

Credit Programme: The Dale View has introduced a micro credit programme as part of their goal of women's empowerment. This is especially meant to not only raise the economic status of illiterate village women but also save them from the exploitation of the moneylenders who charge exorbitant rates of interest. Under the micro credit programme loan is given at reasonable rate of interest to initiate micro enterprises. Loans ranging from Rs.2500 to Rs.10000 are provided to women to start income generation programmes. The micro credit programme of the Dale View has the special objective of economic empowerment and independence of the women, and functions through the SHGs. Micro enterprises, that were sponsored by the Dale View included curry powder unit, bookbinding unit and a provision store. Financial assistance was provided to 200 women for income generation programmes. A total amount of rupees 10 lakh was disbursed to women as loan.

Programmes for People with Disability

The Dale View believes that every individual is capable of performing some task or other. Persons with disabilities may not be able to perform certain tasks but they may be able to perform other tasks like anyone else. There is therefore a need to identify the functional capabilities of an individual, especially in the case of a

person with some form of disability. Identifying these capacities of the individuals is necessary to improve their potentials. Since the term 'rehabilitation', often used in the case of persons with disability, connotes positive and constructive approach the emphasis should be on abilities rather than disabilities.

The Dale View has undertaken many programmes of community-based rehabilitation of the disabled that enable them to be an integral part of the society and make them self-dependent. They include training programmes and assistance for self-employment. The SHGs of people with disabilities are formed with five members each and vocational training is provided to them through the SHGs. As a part of the rehabilitation programme, loans are provided to the disabled under the CBR programme to start their own income generating units, such as cycle repairing and lending, telephone booths, handicrafts etc. A sum of Rs.3.5 lakh was disbursed for starting income generating activities with the assistance of REHASWISS as revolving fund in the year 2004-05. During this period 50 persons with disabilities were assisted to set up income-generating units. The formation of the SHGs facilitated emotional strengthening of the disabled and provided them a forum for accessing the government services.

Programmes for Scheduled Castes and Tribes

Another area of concern of the Dale View is the development of the backward classes. In order to bring them to the mainstream special attention is given to the schooling of the children from these communities with the financial grant from the government. In addition to its scheme of schooling of the children from scheduled castes and tribes, the Dale View runs a government recognised Technical Training School of Tailoring/Garment Making and provides stipend to the trainees from these disadvantaged communities. A number of persons who received training under this scheme have been able to start micro enterprises through micro credit.

Tribal Development: The Dale View has been actively involved in the programmes for the development of the tribal community. With the help of the Integrated Tribal Development Programme (ITDP), Nedumangad, 50 young men and women of tribal community were given a six months' training in bamboo and reed work in 2004-05. Another training programme was conducted in cultivation of medicinal

plants, in which 200 tribals participated. A seven days' participatory training programme was also conducted with assistance from the World Bank through the Tropical Botanical Garden Research Institute (TBGRI), Palode.

WESTERN GHAT DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

The Dale View has been undertaking different activities under the general scheme of the WGDP. Three main categories of activities, viz. watershed development, agriculture and animal husbandry, and income generation enterprises have been carried out under the WGDP.

Watershed Development

The Dale View was entrusted with the responsibility of implementing the integral development of Athiyara watershed under the WGDP. In the year 2004-05 watershed development activities at Pineal sub-water shed area were undertaken by the Dale View. The total area of the programme being covered is 780 hectares and the duration of the project is five years. The Dale View has been actively involved in the functioning of the Watershed Consultation Committee. The Committee, consisting of the representatives of various government departments (like soil conservation, dairy, agriculture, planning, and PRIs), beneficiaries of the watershed programme and the Dale View, has been providing technical support to the watershed development activities.

Various sustainable development activities have been undertaken by the Dale View in the selected areas of the watershed. The major activities involved in the watershed development programme are campaign for watershed development, soil conservation and maintenance of water sources.

Campaign: Several activities have been undertaken by the Dale View in order to spread awareness about the WGDP through watershed development and to get the people involved in the process. One of the strategies was to conduct group meetings at different locations within the watershed. The Dale View has prepared a booklet "*Neerthada Vikasanam*" with the support of experts. The booklet clarifies the concept of watershed-based development and the role of people in the process. Activities of the Dale View for water conservation included programmes of awareness generation on the importance of conserving

water, training on management of waste water, protection of springs, improvement of ponds and springs, and renovation of wells.

The Dale View has been resolute to make the development intervention at Athiyara a participatory process for sustainable development with the active involvement of the people. In order to achieve this objective the Dale View has formed grassroots level organisations such as SHGs and CBOs (community-based organisations).

Soil Conservation: The major soil conservation activities implemented by the Dale View were biological protection of stream banks with reeds, cane, bamboo, etc., construction of pits, trenches, check dams and gully controls, construction of stone pitched contour bunds, platforms, terracing, running bunds, shoulder bunds, etc.

Maintenance of Water Sources: As part of watershed management, several activities have been undertaken by the Dale View for the maintenance of stream, ponds and wells. Streams have been deepened by removing the mud from them and thus making the water of these streams useful for household purposes. In order to prevent mud from falling into the streams again side roads (foot paths) along these streams have been made stronger by appropriate maintenance work. Assistance was given to families to maintain their existing wells for safe drinking water. Roof water tanks were constructed for saving and stocking water for the period of scarcity. Another activity for utilising the available natural sources of water for drinking and other household purposes was deepening of natural ponds.

Agriculture and Animal Husbandry

Under agricultural development programme, assistance was given for kitchen gardening, cultivation of fruit trees, minor tubers and tree plantation. Seedlings of teak and *mahagani* trees developed in the Dale View farm and different types of bamboo developed by the TBGRI were distributed to people. In addition farmers were encouraged to adopt organic farming for banana cultivation.

Activities in the area of dairy development included providing assistance for constructing modern cattle-shed, cultivating fodder grass (which also helped prevention of soil erosion) and cow rearing. Under poultry development programme assistance has been given for

backyard poultry farm. New varieties of chicks are supplied. People are provided the necessary training and other supportive facilities through poultry farm, dairy unit, goat and pig units established in the centre of the Dale View.

Income Generation Programmes

With the support of Planning and Economic Affairs Department of the Government of Kerala, assistance is given to start income generation programmes. They include bee and pig rearing, and food processing. The high vegetation of the area offers good scope for bee keeping. The Dale View provided training and assistance to rear bees, and to collect and preserve honey. Good breed pigs are distributed to the farmers for setting up pig rearing units. Food processing is found to be one of the activities, which can be undertaken profitably in these areas with relatively small investment.

Training programmes have been conducted on watershed management, formation of SHGs and cooperatives, monitoring and documentation of the programmes, kitchen gardening, cattle rearing, floriculture and horticulture, and micro enterprises such as soap making, paper bag making, weaving, bee rearing, vermin compost, fodder cultivation, etc.

ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

In addition to the activities of environmental concern under the WGDP, the Dale View has been involved in several environmental issues in the rural community. The main activities in this field are roof water harvesting, solid waste management and smokeless *choola*.

Roof Water Harvesting

Kerala, known as God's own country, was self-sufficient in water. But the indiscriminate clearing of forest and consequent changes in the rhythm of monsoons have led to water scarcity in Kerala. Today rainwater harvesting has been accepted as one of the means of dealing with the scarcity of water. The Dale View has been involved in this activity too. The Dale View has constructed ten roof-water harvesting *Ferrow* cement tanks during year 2004-05 in the district of Thiruvananthapuram. The Dale view is involved in the project of the Council for Advancement of People's Action and Rural Technology

(CAPART) for constructing 150 roof-water harvesting tanks in district of Thiruvananthapuram.

Solid Waste Management

Solid waste is a major environmental issue. The Dale View has conducted 21 awareness classes on solid waste disposal and 15 demonstration programmes on this subject. The Dale View has also distributed verms for starting 82 vermi compost units. The role of bio-gas plant in the disposal of solid waste is also being popularised.

Smokeless Choola

Another developmental activity undertaken by the Dale View is the supply of smokeless *choolas* at subsidised rates in collaboration with the Agency for Non-Conventional Energy and Rural Technology (ANERT) and the WGDC. These *choolas* are intended for dealing with environmental issues of conservation of fuel (firewood) and control of pollution.

TRAINING PROGRAMMES

Training is considered essential for the development of all aspects of human potentials. The Dale View assumed the role of a facilitator, guide and resource person at all times to improve the human capacities. The Learning Resource Centre of the Dale View has been offering training programmes as one of its activities. The centre has been providing managerial, livelihood and technical training and facilitating internship programmes.

Internship Programme

Various educational institutions have selected the Dale View as their resource centre for internship programme of their students. This is recognition of the work done by the Dale View in the fields of health, agriculture, education and other development activities. The students stay at the Dale View and learn by experience community-based practical activities. The institutions that have selected the Dale View for placing their students on internship programme include Department of Community Medicine, Medical College, Thiruvananthapuram, Agriculture College, Vellayani, Departments of Sociology and Social Work, universities of Kerala, Mahatma Gandhi, Kaladi and Madurai Kamaraj, College for Teacher Education, Holback

Seminarium, Denmark, and Bala Sevika Training Institute, Thiruvananthapuram.

The Dale View has been functioning as a resource agency for training personnel of other organisations in micro credit programme in matters such as formation and management of SHGs, financial management, book keeping, etc.

Livelihood Training

The resource centre of the Dale View also provides training to people in their livelihood pursuits in animal husbandry (poultry rearing and goat breeding), agriculture (organic farming, production of organic manure, group farming, floriculture and agricultural nursery), small enterprises (soap making, paper bag manufacturing, weaving and bee rearing) and local resource management (rainwater harvesting, protection of natural springs and use of non-conventional energy).

Staff Training

Faculty improvement and skill development programmes are essential to the staff to make their knowledge and skills up-to-date. The Dale View places much importance to this aspect and grabs every opportunity to provide training to its staff. Whenever possible, the staff are sent for various training programmes and seminars conducted by the government and NGOs.

CONCLUSION

“Small drops of water can form an ocean”. This vision of development through participatory process prompted the Dale View to assume the role of a facilitator, guide and resource agent in developmental activities. In this effort the Dale View could collaborate with government and non-government agencies, both national and international. Working with grassroots level people's groups, PRIs and other development actors has been significant in planning and implementation of the different programmes.

The Dale View has been working for the realisation of the dreams of the exploited and downtrodden masses in the rural areas. The participatory approach adopted by it in the development process could

effect transformation in the attitudes and living conditions of the people. The focus of this development process has been the human being. The goal of the programme of development has been to free the human beings from dehumanising conditions and to empower them to lead a meaningful life. With the committed service of its staff and the substantial support of the government and non-government agencies, national and international organisations, and individuals the Dale View has been able to achieve its success in the field of rural development.