PALM WORKERS

Out of NORAD funded project, we are implementing the project during 2012-13 by organizing palm workers in the form of case study and to build their capacity to revive their traditional source of livelihood by providing nutritious potable and eatable products to the public at large as a matter of food and nutritional security.

The palm workers are living in clusters in the palm groves.

Palm tree workers are involving with family members in the process of extracting, value addition, and direct retail sales and whole sale marketing through middlemen called commission agents of the following products.

1. Palm juice (a kind of soft drink tapped from palm tree)
2. Kallu or Toddy (an intoxicating drink tapped from palm tree having about Four per cent. Alcoholic content which is prohibited for sale in the State of Tamil Nadu alone. In rest of Indian states no prohibition for Taping selling and drinking Toddy.
3. Palm Jaggery (an organic traditional sugar)
4. Palm fruits
5. Palm stick
6. Palm leaves
7. Palm Trunks and other miscellaneous by-products for human livelihoods. Each family consisting of an average of 5 members are able to lead livelihood based on 25 to 35 trees grown in clusters(groves). Men and Women jointly working together. Men are climbing trees. Women are involved processing the above listed palm products.

The villages under this project are three:

1. Peikulam, 2.Subramaniapuram, and3.Panaiyur

Total families are 150. Total population covered in this project is 752 Women 157, Men 162, Children below 14 Years 234 (Girls 119 and boys 115) Among the Elders Education is at 24 per cent. Among the below 14years education is 92 per cent. Among the 14-18 years education is 84 per cent. In this report education means read and write with modest level of understanding in mother tongue (Tamil Language). English is also known; its standard of understanding has not been tested in this
report. However in the continuation of the programme this year 2013-14, the follow up studies and organization further will be done towards building the capacity to enjoy the human right to adequate food among the Palm Workers families.

Locating the project villages.

Note: The three project villages are located in Tuticorin Taluk

The Tamil Nadu Palm Development Board Act 1997 is a legal enactment provides:

1. Vocational training
2. Minimum and basic wages
3. Credit assistance
4. Marketing technology
The provisions of this Act has not been implemented due to Government policy of prohibition of taping, selling and drinking toddy by the Tamil Nadu State Government. While the palm trees which are procuring palm toddy (kallu) an indigenous and organic intoxicating drink having nutritious value is prohibited.

The government policy is apartheid towards palm workers, their families and income earning capacity. Even though palm toddy is prohibited by the Government; the same government is and directly marketing Indian made foreign liquor. Due to the discriminatory public policy adoption, the palm workers are devoid of their traditional income. They are struggling to lift prohibition for the taping, selling and consuming of palm toddy which is traditionally a nutritious stuff with low rate of alcoholic content.

Further in the name of development and generation of alternate energy, the lands where palm groves have grown and provide direct livelihood to the palm workers are being displaced due to developing land acquisition for the purpose of using the palm land for “Wind Mills” to generate electricity and other development projects.

The Palm workers are hardly fighting for their hard right. By means of this project, we filed a Writ Petition in the Madurai Bench of Madras High Court challenging the land acquisition policy and has got a stay order against the government from acquiring the Palm land.

In the Thoothukudi District we are working with palm workers with particular attention towards women and children in the Peikulam, Panaiyur and Subramaniapuram villages.

We conducted one TOT to train and organizing the palm workers on 12.05.2012 at Thoothukudi by selecting 25 leading persons any the palm workers family.

With active participation of these 25 selected participants, we organized community meeting at each village as followers:

17.06.2012 at Peikulam
19.07.2012 at Panaiyur
13.08.2012 at Subramaniapuram
These community meeting we enlarge the space to work with these poor people, protecting nature and live a self earned life to enjoy the fundamental and basic right to feed themselves.

We organized 3 groups of Palm workers in three villages and they are now formed into Palm Workers Co-operative Societies. In the recently held enable to maybe the Palm Workers Co-operative Societies of an target group here get elected. Because of the Writ Petition and the subsequent stay of further proceedings of Palm land acquisition to install Wind Mills in about 2400 acres of land in Subramaniapuram village, Panaiyur village and Kulathur village of Thoothukudi District.

Due to this project the targeted people got relevant information as Palm Development Board and the obligation of the Tamil Nadu State Government to promote vocational training, Credit assistance, marketing technology along with an official recommendation / guarantee for micro credit assistance to promote Palm Industries which is capable of earning Foreign Exchange.