
Rural Education & Action Development (READ)

Andimadam, Tamil Nadu, India

PROGRESS REPORT

October 1999

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Message from the secretary

Dear friends,

I am happy to present the activities of READ for the past year. The information in this newsletter will demonstrate you that we have made considerable progress in a number of areas. READ has been able to initiate a number of new programs in our villages. We are also getting growing recognition in the field of NGO's. READ has been visited by a number of officials from the government and funding agencies. In addition, a big honor has been bestowed upon READ, as we have recently been elected as NGO-member officer for the Administrative Council of District Rural Development Agency Perambalur for the year 1999-2000.

All these activities of READ could not be successful without the moral and financial support of all our friends and well-wishers. I take this opportunity to thank all of them for their efforts. We hope that all of you will continue your support in the coming year. There is still much work to be done. Together we can continue our progress.

D. Selvam
(Secretary, READ)



*“ The road is long, let's walk together,
The road is difficult, let's help each other
The road is the only one, let's go in love
The road opens before us, let's start now”*

Information about READ is currently also available on the internet. A website has been developed by our USA-based sister organization Sahaya International (see page 5).

Progress report:

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I. Awareness programs.

Although people are generally becoming more aware of politics and the need for education, they are still ignorant in many specific areas, such as environmental and health-related issues, economics, and resource utilization and management. To aware them of these issues, READ has conducted a number of camps and campaigns.

a). Environmental awareness campaign.

With the support of the C.P. Ramasamy Iyer Foundation (Chennai) and the Ministry of Environment and Forest, READ has conducted three campaigns in the villages of Keelneduvai, Thirukkalapur and Vilandai on March 27, 28 and 29, 1999 on the topic “***Keep our water resources clean***”. In addition, on May 4, 5 and 7, 1998, READ had previously conducted two campaigns on “***Conservation and plantation for Environmental protection***” in Andimadam and Keelneduvai. In each village, approximately 50 women, farmers and youth participated in each program. These



Participants of the Environmental awareness campaign are viewing the poster information.

programs had a big impact. As a follow-up, the people of Keelneduvai have started to protect the collection points for drinking water, and they passed a resolution to keep the lake of their village pollution-free.

b). Women Awareness Generation Camp.



From February 22 through 26, 1999, READ organized a Women Awareness Camp. A more detailed summary of the goals and accomplishments of this camp is presented on page 7.

c). HIV/AIDS Awareness to rural women.

Many rural people don't know about HIV and AIDS. In poor rural families, the man usually migrates to nearby cities during the agricultural off-season for coolie work. There, some of them visit commercial sex workers, and contract STD's which they pass on to their wives. Due to the increasing HIV/AIDS epidemic, these men have the risk of becoming HIV-infected. They transmit the HIV virus to their wives, who can pass the virus to their infants. Therefore, an HIV/AIDS awareness camp was conducted in 4 villages, for a total of 238 persons.

d). Child health care awareness.

Because rural people have poor access to health-care institutions and medical advice, their health standards are very poor. In particular, insufficient attention is given to child health, as many infants don't receive proper immunizations or medications against common diseases. This often leads to disability, or in some cases to premature death. For this purpose, a child health care campaign was conducted in 4 villages during

the period June-September. A total of 223 women and mothers participated in this campaign.

e). Child labor eradication.

Children are precious, and they have the right to receive education, health-care, recreation and proper nutrition. But due to poverty, many children are forced into early employment in agriculture, silk weaving, etc., and they lose all their rights. To make people aware of the importance of early education for children, a child labor eradication seminar was conducted in 2 villages; 110 persons participated.

f). Consumer awareness.

Many people are unaware of their rights as consumers, and are therefore often being exploited in many ways. Therefore, READ organized a campaign jointly with the local consumer forum.

f). Health awareness.

As mentioned previously, the level of health awareness among rural people is very low, due to lack of access to health care institutions and medical advice. Yet, health consciousness is vital for everybody. Hence, a camp was organized to inform people on proper nutrition and the prevention and cure of several common diseases. People were made aware of locally available resources and medical consultants, and were advised not to neglect small health problems. This program was conducted in 3 villages, for a total of 163 participants.

II. Community Organization.

a). Women self-help groups.



The “self-help” concept is becoming popular in our area thanks to our efforts in the past year. In addition to the 5 self-help groups that we had previously, this year, an additional 10 new self-help women groups have been promoted, each of them having savings and credit activities. This total of 15 women groups are now functioning in our area with the effort and guidance of READ. For the 5 women groups in Periyakrishnapuram, Vilandai Colony, Vilandai, Thanjovooranchavadi, and Keelnaduvai, a revolving fund for a total amount of Rs 126,000 (approximately 3,000 US dollar) was mobilized from DW CRA (Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas). Each self-help group received Rs 25,000 (approx. 600 US dollars) to expand the credit activities which they had already formed from their own savings. This program is going very well. Thanks to this program, a total of 57 women has received credit to develop economic activities. Money is being used for a variety of purposes, such as the purchase of bullocks, sheep, poultry, goats, sewing machines.

b). Youth movement.

This year, a youth movement was organized in Keelneduvai with 15 juveniles, with the aim of using this group to activate community development. This group is now collaborating with respective officials of the government to develop their area with a proper road, a reading room facility, and a water facility.

III. Training programs.

a). Typewriting program.

With the support of a grant from the Central Social Welfare Board, a vocational training program on type-writing and secretarial skills was conducted for 25 girls in READ’s training center this year. At the end of the course, these trainees were sent for the government technical examination, and 4 girls passed this test; READ has coached the candidates who failed to reappear for examination in July 99.



Our type-writing trainees at work.

b). Tailoring and embroidery program.

A paid training course on tailoring and embroidery is being given to 32 girls, to provide them with vocational skills for self-employment. Cutting, stitching, simple machine-sewing and garment production skills are being taught. This course is being offered every year.



c). TRYSEM training.

In addition to the trainees who pay a small tuition fee for the tailoring and embroidery courses, a government's training grant under the TRYSEM (Training of Youth for Self-Employment) program was awarded to READ to train 5 poor women in tailoring. Although this 1-year program expired in December 1998, READ is continuing this program to a new set of 10 trainees by offering them a waiver of tuition.

d). Handmade greeting cards training & production.

Forty-one girls are trained in this handicraft training and production program, which is also a source of income for READ to support our other activities. The cards are being sold in the USA, Belgium, Sweden and Ireland by the family and friends of Koen Van Rompay.

IV. Institutional programs.

a). Mother Theresa Standard English School.



Rural areas lack standard, good-quality education. To fulfill this need, READ has started the above-mentioned schools in 2 villages, Periyakrishnapuram and Thirakulappur during the past year. These schools continue their services to provide education to poor children. The Periyakrishnapuram school has currently 9 children, while 28 children are studying in Thirukkalapur. Three teachers and one aya are employed by READ for this purpose.

b). Educational aid.

READ has provided educational tools, notebooks, and stationary to the children in these above-mentioned schools: notebooks. This raises their interest in education, and reduces the educational and financial burden on their parents.



c). Computer course.

READ is proposing to offer a professional computer course to educate rural youth. A computer had been offered by Dr. Koen Van Rompay (USA) for this purpose. Although this computer was originally provided for organizational and communication purposes to the READ office, this computer will also be used for the course.

d). Crèche.

To facilitate the working women who go out for coolie work, a crèche was started and is currently being operated in Thirukkalapur village. This crèche serves simultaneously as a daycare center as well as a behavioral education center for the children.

V. General activities.

a). Staff training.

Every year, a program is organized to strengthen and reinforce the capacities of the READ staff, so that they will further improve the performance of their activities in their respective areas. This year, a two-day training program was organized for all the staff of READ.

b). Network development.

To add strength to READ and to better reach the rural areas with the concept of common development, a network meeting was organized among common interest NGO's in our Perambalur District. This network is currently in its initial stages, and will continue to build common activities in the coming year.



The READ staff members

VI. Visitors.

- Mr. Palaniyappan, Welfare Officer of the Tamil Nadu Social Welfare Board visited READ on August 24, 1998, and he inspected the vocational training program.
- On April 10, 1999, the Additional Block Devel-



READ currently has a sister organization in California (USA), with the name of "Sahaya International". This non-profit organization has been started in recent months by Dr. Koen Van Rompay and his friends and colleagues. Sahaya International aims at improving the socio-economic and educational conditions in developing countries, especially India. **Sahaya International** will help READ with fundraising activities in the USA and Europe, and will assist READ in submitting project proposals to other funding agencies. We all look forward to this productive collaboration. Please visit our website at www.sahaya.org.

opment Officer (ABDO), Mukkiya Sevika (Extension officer of Social Welfare) and Gram Sevika (village women worker) - both from the Block Development Office of the State government- inspected READ and the 5 self-help women groups promoted by READ, to assess their functioning and to release the revolving fund mentioned above.

- READ has submitted an application to The Tamilnadu Women Development Corporation, Chennai for funding for skill training programs. On April 16, 1999, this corporation sent a team to visit and assess the functioning of READ and the 5 women self-help groups. This team included 1) the marketing manager of this corporation, 2). the project officer of the Pudukottai District Rural Development Agency, 3) the project officer of the Trichy District Rural Development Agency, and an NGO chief from Salem. All were very positive about their visit to READ.
- On June 9, 1999, officials from the District Rural Development Agency, Perambalur, came to inspect READ to assess its training capacity, to allot funds for the sewing and other training program under the TRYSEM (Training for Rural Youth Self Employment) scheme (see above).
- On June 19, 1998, Mr. Pelle Wallin and his family - Gittan (wife), Jesper (son), and Anna (Jesper's girlfriend)- all from Sweden, came to

visit READ and its activities. Mr. Pelle is a teacher in Sweden, and he befriended Mr. Selvam while he was working in another NGO. Mr. Pelle and his family presented crayons, balls, pencils and stickers to our school children. READ cherished this family's warm visit.



Koen Van Rompay during his visit to READ

- Dr. Koen Van Rompay (California, USA) visited READ on November 11-13, 1998. The first 2 days, he made field visits to our elementary schools and the women groups in their respective villages. On the third day, he met with the READ committee members to discuss plans for further development and fund-raising efforts (see information on Sahaya International).

One of our current plans: a school for disabled children.

During their service activities in the villages, our READ staff members observed that children with physical or mental disabilities are neglected and don't receive proper care by their communities and their parents. We decided to try to do something to improve the conditions of these children. As a first step, READ has conducted a survey through the government Balwadi caretakers who work in these villages in our service area. This survey has identified approximately 30 mentally disabled children in different age groups and with varying degrees of disability. These children are among the most neglected children in this area. READ is currently exploring the possibility to start a special school for these children, and to initiate community-based rehabilitation programs for the children that live too far to be able to attend this school. We also want to study the existing conditions of these disabled children, and the cause of their disability, in the hope that this knowledge can be used in the coming years to provide better care and early health intervention to rural children to prevent the development of a disability or to provide better and earlier rehabilitation of the children with a disability. READ can undertake this program only if we find adequate funding.

Women Awareness Generation Camp (February 22-26, 1999)

From February 22 to 26, 1999, READ conducted a 5-day Women Awareness Camp at their building. This camp was sponsored by the Tamil Nadu Social Welfare Board, Madras (Chennai). A total of 25 women, ranging in age between 18 and 35 and coming from 5 different villages, participated in this program.

The main theme of the camp was "Women are not subordinate creatures but they have their role



Participants discussing their problems and issues.

in social development".

Based on this main theme, a number of topics were presented by a number of speakers and discussed with the participants. In addition, the participants were also divided into 5 small groups of 5 members each, to discuss the women's conditions and the problems. The following problems were identified during these discussions:

- Rural women are totally unaware and ignorant of happenings around them.
- The cultural, social and religious systems restrict women's education, economic independence, and political and social participation.
- Male dominance is very common.
- Women are accustomed to subordination.
- Atrocities against women are very common, particularly sexual harassment and assault.
- Education of girls is given little importance. Many girls are forced to drop out of school before they complete school education.
- Women are not organized.

- Women do not intend to get involved in economic and political activities.
- They seldomly use natural resources that are available in their village for their own development.
- They are unaware of governmental welfare programs that are designed for them.
- They are unaware of the concept of self-help programs.

To combat these problems in each of their villages, the participants have drawn an action plan to be implemented in the near future.

The Action Plan has the following principles:

- The women must get organized in their respective villages.
- The Self-help concept -Savings & Credit activity- has to be practised more intensively.
- Parents should be encouraged to allow their girls to study and at least complete school education.
- The girls who have already dropped out of school should be encouraged to complete their education through private studies.
- Villagers should meet frequently to discuss how to curb the unwanted cultural, social and religious restrictions on women's education.
- We should voice against atrocities towards women.
- Women should make use of government welfare programs, particularly those aimed at the development of micro-enterprises.
- Women should participate in all village development and political activities.
- Everybody should work together to abolish female subordination and male dominance.
- Marriages of young girls should be restricted.

The camp was concluded with the resolution that a follow-up camp will be organized during the month of April, to review the progress of the Action Plan in the respective villages of the participants.



A selection of the many designs of embroidered greeting cards produced by the trainees at READ.

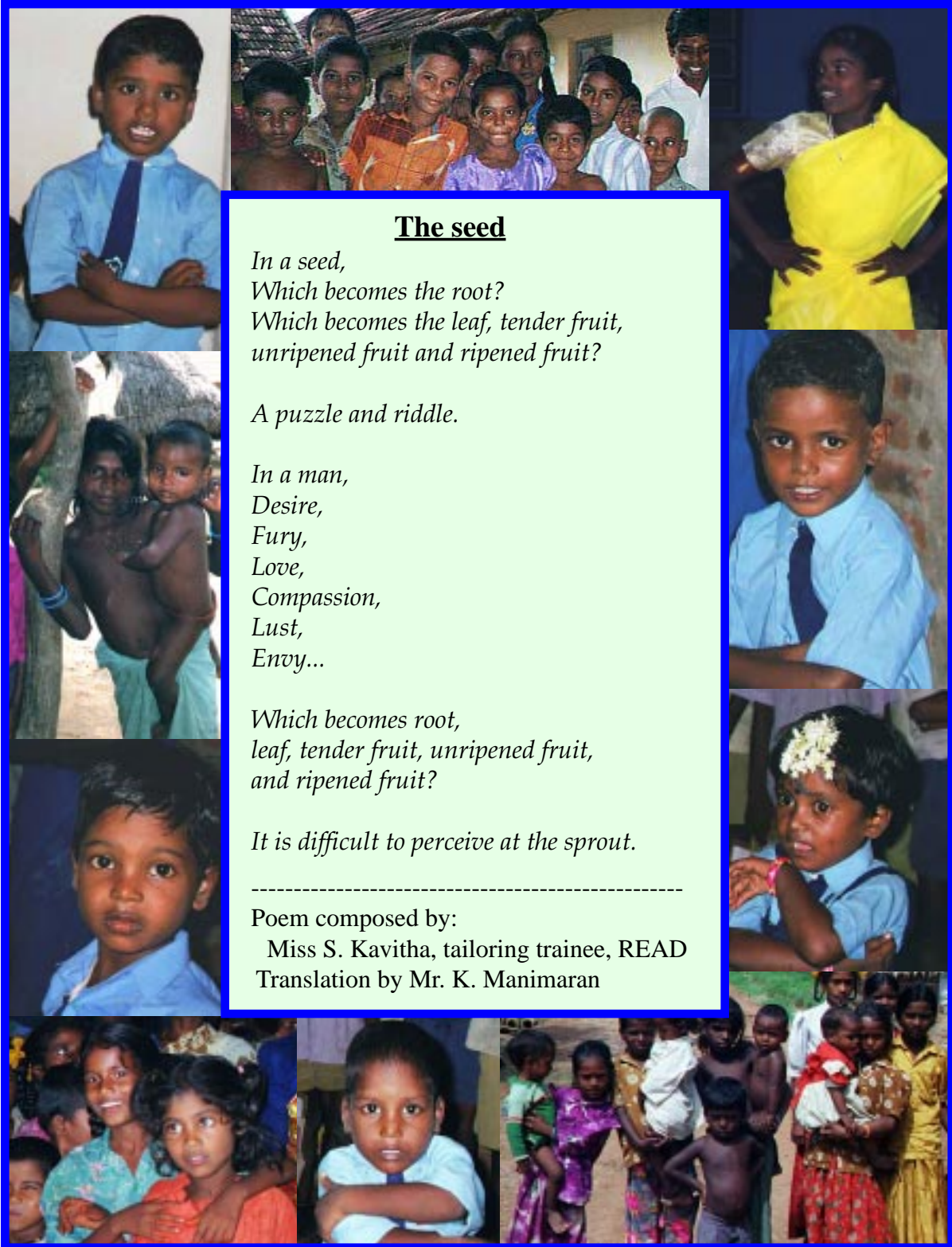
READ thanks the many people who have been involved in supporting our activities by buying our cards! Please know that each of you is making a difference! We can't make it without you!

READ likes to extend their heartfelt thanks especially to everybody who is volunteering time in our fundraising activities (especially by selling our hand-made greeting cards), and to all who have made extra donations of money or toys. Among many others, this list of people includes (in random order):

Pastor Filip Deploige, Joyce and Heidi Henley, Raman Singh, Dharampaul Saini, Autar Singh, Danielle and Laura Burns, Chris Hudnall, Trish Devine, Linda Starr, Nancy Aguirre, Michelle Allegria-Hartman, Kristina Abel, Marta Marthas, the family Van Rompay-Beets, Elly De Schrijver, families De Cock & Le Grande, Greta Van Dooren, Hilde and Ronny Darden, Anita & Wiza Van de Kerkhof, Yvonne Van Rompay, Juliette Smans, Hilda Henrickx, Mr. and Mrs. Claes, the family Dillard-Telm, and the directors of Sahaya International.

We all hope to meet you in person some day!

A few snapshots...



The seed

*In a seed,
Which becomes the root?
Which becomes the leaf, tender fruit,
unripened fruit and ripened fruit?*

A puzzle and riddle.

*In a man,
Desire,
Fury,
Love,
Compassion,
Lust,
Envy...*

*Which becomes root,
leaf, tender fruit, unripened fruit,
and ripened fruit?*

It is difficult to perceive at the sprout.

Poem composed by:
Miss S. Kavitha, tailoring trainee, READ
Translation by Mr. K. Manimaran