

# **Restoration of Commons through Peoples Institutions: Study on the Process and Impact of the Attappady Wasteland Comprehensive Environmental Conservation project in Kerala, India**

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## **Commons and Peoples Institutions**

In India Watershed and Joint Forest Management programmes created participatory local institutions for regeneration of natural resources like land, water and forest. The local institutions are involved in the implementation of the projects under these programmes and made arrangements for utilisation and sharing of benefits accrued out of natural regeneration. Similarly “Attappady Wasteland Comprehensive Environmental Conservation project” in Kerala state of India has created what is called people’s institutions as local organizations to implement the project and manage the commons. In the process, it has evolved new rules and regulations and access rights and sharing of resources thereby affecting the existing formal and informal arrangements. The project area of Attappady block in Kerala State is characterised by acute poverty and degradation of natural resources. The purpose of the paper is to understand and analyse how the project evolved new institutional arrangements at village level for regeneration, development and management of natural resources and its impact on the existing access rights to commons and present and future benefits for different sections of the society from commons.

## **Profile of Attappady**

Attappady is the biggest block in Kerala with an area of 745.59-sq.km spread over three Panchayats (lowest unit of administration) namely Agali, Pudur and Sholayur. According to the 2001 census, the population of Attappady is 66,171 out of which 36,026 (54.5%) are settlers, 27,121 (41%) tribal and 3,024 (4.5%) are scheduled tribes. However, in 1961 tribals constituted a majority of the population, they had become a minority by 1971 due to the mass influx of settlers from both Kerala and adjoining state of Tamil Nadu. There are 187 tribal hamlets in Attappady (Source: AHADS Hamlet Survey 2002) populated by three tribal groups namely Irula (84 % of total tribal

population), Muduga (10%) and Kurumba (6 %). Tribal hamlets of Attappady are found in all the three panchayats, namely, Agali, Pudur, and Sholayur (see annexure –I).

Attappady is part of the Nilgiri Bio--sphere Reserve in South India which forms a complex topography isolated from other high ranges. The terrain of Attappady is quite undulating, holding a large number of hillocks of varying elevation ranging from 450 meters to 2300 meters above the sea level. Majority of the area falls within the category of land above 35% slope. Rainfall varies considerably in Attappady block, being higher with an annual rainfall of about 3000 mm in the western slopes whereas rain fall in eastern Attappady is less than 1000 mm. Due to deforestation, low depth of soil and barren hills the rainwater on the land has a high run- off speed. The extent of soil erosion in Attappady is one of the highest in the state. The Attappady region is drained by two major rivers, Bhavani and Bharathapuzha. Bhavani basin has three district major sub – basins and Bharathapuzha has two basins.

### **Land, Forest and Tribal**

The relationship between tribals, forest and land in this region changed over a period of time. Attappady is a major forest area in the state, comprising an area of 765 sq. kilometers in Palakkad district in the Malabar region which formed part of the erstwhile Madras Presidency of British India. Till the beginning of the second quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the only inhabitants of the regions were the three hill tribes, namely, Irula, Muduga and Kurumba.

Before the arrival of the British, lands in Malabar were owned by absentee landlords called the '*Jenmis*' whose rights and privileges on land and its cultivators were governed by conventions and customs. The *Jenmis* in general entrusted the task of cultivating the land to local chieftains who, in turn, used to lease out the land to tenants, the actual tillers of the soil. However, the inaccessible forest regions of Attappady remained virtually untouched by the chieftains or their tenants so long as scarcity of cultivable land in the plains did not pose any problem. As a consequence, the tribals enjoyed unlimited freedom to use the forest lands according to their own ways of cultivation, hunting and collection of hill produce.

With the annexation of Malabar with the Madras Presidency of British India towards the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, changes began slowly. The status of the *Jenmis*

underwent a significant change when they were granted by the British, the legal ownership status over their lands in the place of the earlier *jenmom* rights rooted in customs and conventions.

Originally all the three tribes practiced shifting cultivation. While Irulas and Mudugas now practice settled agriculture Kurumbas continue to be shifting – cultivators and food gatherers. In earlier days they had freedom to cut and burn as much area as they could manage for shifting – cultivation. Now they have to take permission from the officials of the forest Department who allots to them patches of land regardless of their choice. The Forest Department allots land (*Kothukadu*) in the name of *Ooru Moopan* (Chieftain); it is he who demarcates plots of each household in the hamlet. He is assisted by *Bhandari* (Treasurer), *Kuruthalai* (Junior Headman), and a *Mannukkaran* (a soil man or an agricultural expert). The role of *Mannukkaran* has dwindled into ritualistic one. When the tribes have shifted to settled agriculture.

Till recently, Attappady remained a typical tribal economy, a self – contained, self – sustaining and self – replacing system, isolated from the mainstream of evolution of the Kerala society. The tribal had their own society and economy, their mode of production, distribution, and exchange being governed by a set of laws and kinship relations inextricably related to their social organization, being essentially forest based, their productive economic activities depended mainly upon the direct exploitation of the natural resources through a set of primary operations such as shifting cultivation, hunting, fishing and food gathering.

Even though, the mainstay of their economy was cultivation, the question of who owned the land did not arise among them until recent times. Land was the common property of the tribe and each family cultivated a portion allotted to it by the tribal chief on the basis of family size. Thus, tribal community enjoyed ownership right on land but an individual tribe had only operational right (kunhaman, 1981).

The existence of the tribal economy of Attappady in total isolation from the outside world continued almost till the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when it came into contact with itinerant traders from the plains (Tamil and Canarese Gowndans) who came to obtain various forest produces such as honey, lac, horns and herbs from tribes. Some sections of the tribals like Irulas and Mudugas even began trading products like

baskets, mat and ropes in exchange for sale and condiments. Thus the isolated primitive tribal economy of Attappady began to be gradually opened up, exposing its immense forest wealth to the exploitative world outside.

Migration to Attappady in the 30`s and 40`s was temporary with the objective of commercial and business motives and subsequently, migration became permanent and regular phenomenon. The flow of people from Tamil Nadu strengthened in the early 50`s and they settled in the eastern side of Attappady. While the migration from Kerala become regular in the 60`s and people started settling on the western side of Attappady. As mentioned earlier, the tribals occupied a small area of land and the major portion of the land was in the hands of *Janmis*. The immigrants bought land from the *Janmis* at a nominal price. They illegally purchased lands from tribals at nominal price and also procured tribal land on lease basis there by pushing the tribals from the valleys to the hills. The illegal encroachment on land by the settlers was not limited to cultivable land but extended to vast stretch of forestland as well. Despite the enactment of the Kerala Scheduled Tribe (Restriction of Transfer of Land and Restoration of Alienated land) Act (KST Act 1975) land alienation among the tribals continued. This act clearly states that any type of occupation of tribal land either by sale, lease, mortgage or force after 1960s is illegal and punishable. But, the act came into force only in 1986. Moreover, due to the apathy and lack of interest on the part of the government, the expected result could not achieved.

The process of deforestation in Attappady is closely linked with the large scale immigration of the plainsmen, deforestation which began in the early 1950s has by seventies, assumed alarming proportions. Forest area constituted 82 per cent of the total geographical area of Attappady in 1959. It reduced to 28 per cent in 1971.

The inevitable result of the immigration and the consequent deforestation has been the breaking up of the isolation of the pure subsistence economy of the tribals of Attappady. In the place of the traditional single sector economy, now there is a dual sector economy; (the tribal – sector` and the `settler ` sector`), the `tribal – sector` still confined to the production of primary products is dwindling, whereas the `settler ` sector`, comprising secondary and tertiary sectors, in addition to an advanced agricultural sector, is expanding at the cost of the `tribal sector`.

With the coming of the settlers, land distribution in Attappady has undergone significant changes. Land being the most important productive resource in the area, changes in its distribution are indicative of changes in the relative economic positions of the groups concerned. The pattern of land distribution in Attappady has been turning increasing in favour of non-tribal settlers, tilting the economic balance against the 'natives'.

### **Background of the Eco-restoration Project**

The destruction of the forest in Attappady area reached its highest peak in the 70's with the influx of migrants from the neighboring districts. With the depletion of forest resources the original tribal inhabitants lost their main source of livelihood and pushing them to poverty. Thus in the eighties and nineties the block was characterized by general backwardness, rapid increase in population caused by an influx of settlers in the last decades from within the state and from adjoining state of Tamil Nadu. The ecological degradation resulted from deforestation; soil erosion and drying of local streams affected the agriculture-based economy of the settlers as well. A nationwide study was carried out by the National Wasteland Development Board (NWDB) revealed that Palakkad district – an administrative division within the state of Kerala in India contains the highest proportion of wasteland relative to the geographical area i.e 28,356 ha, and most of these lands are located even within this district in Attappady Block.

In response to the situation of acute poverty and degradation natural resources, the project for an integrated and sustainable eco-development in Attappady wasteland was prepared by the Government of Kerala in 1993 and implemented as the Attappady Wasteland Comprehensive Environmental Conservation Project (AWCECOP) since 1996 with financial support from Japan Bank for International Cooperation, (JBIC) and Rural Development Department, Government of Kerala. To implement the project, Attappady Hills Area Development Society (AHADS) was formed and registered on October 31, 1995 under the Societies Registration Act,1890. The major objective of the project is; “ *Ecological restoration of degraded wastelands of Attappady and development of replicable models of participatory eco-restoration, so as to prevent further degradation and promote a sustainable model of livelihood for the local people (with special emphasis on tribal population) and in harmony with the resource base.*”

## **Main components of the project**

This section of the paper gives brief outline of the project so as to understand the kind of activities carried out by the local organisations created by the project for the eco-restoration of the Attappady area. Broadly speaking, the project consists of two major components and they are (1) Eco restoration and (2) Income generating activities for livelihood security. Under eco restoration there are two sub components. They are Land and water conservation and Water resource development. The following are the sub components of the project:

### **1. Land and water conservation works**

a) Land development in both state forest and private lands (that include contour bunds and trenches with vegetation, terrace walls and check-dams)

b) Bio-mass conservation in the state forest-land with Participatory Forest Management (PFM) approach (that include afforestation, alternative income generating activities and other activities.

c) Agronomic development in private land; including silvi-pasture, fodder and fuel wood plantation, agro- forestry, horticulture plantation and agriculture.

### **2. Water resources development**

Gravity irrigation system, Lift irrigation system, Pond, Tank, Well (dug well and bore well) Drip irrigation system

### **3. Income generating activities**

Alternative income generating activities

Community income generating activities.

## **Participatory People's Institutions**

The project is implanted through what is described by the project as "Peoples Institutions" or Local Organisations like User Associations(UAs), Ooru Vikasana Samithis (OVS) or (Hamlet Development Committee) and Joint Forest Management Committees (JFMC). These institutions are designed to be participatory and also pro-tribal oriented. Local organizations have been formed on the basis of watersheds (Development Units / DUs) and micro water sheds (MWS) as areas of project intervention. In most MWSs an User Association (UA) is formed as basic unit comprising in theory the entire residential population (2 adults per family). Tribal

hamlets in each UA have their own user association called “Oooru Vikasana Samithy” (OVS) or also known as Hamlet Development Committee. In addition, Joint Forest Management Committees (JFMCs) have been formed in a number of UA/MWS areas. In some UA/MWS areas, also income-generating groups (IGA Groups) have been formed. Local Action Groups (LAGs) are formed under UAs a kind of body within UA for implementing AHADS contract works. Not all UAs have formed LAGs, in some (usually smaller) UAs, there is only one main LAGs have been formed (see Annexure-II for details). A brief description of the structure and functions as envisaged by the project will be helpful for understanding the nature of these institutions and how these have been grounded in the implementation of the project. The purpose of the section is to understand how the project and these new institutions affected the relationship between tribals and others with common natural resources like land, water and forest.

#### **A. Users Associations (UA)**

For the purpose of the implantation of the project, the project area is divided into 15 development units (DUs) and DUs are further subdivided into 146 micro-watersheds (MWS). User Associations are constituted in each MWS. Formation of UAs started by AHADS in 1997 and completed in all the 93 MWSs by December 1999. So far 93 UAs have been constituted and registered under the Societies Registration Act 1860, which makes them legal entities. The process of UA formation consisted of various stages and activities: information dissemination and awareness building of the project, UA members enrolment, elections for UA executive members, general training and the registration as society. Bye-laws of the UAs was approved by Government of Kerala.

UA members consist of the people who are residing in the MWS concerned irrespective of social groups, i.e., settlers (other castes), scheduled tribe (ST) or scheduled caste (SC). UA consists of nine members out of which four members should be women and five should be tribal. Annual General Body (GB) meetings will elect 9 Executive Committee (EC members for a period of 2 years (one time extension possible), special GB meetings will sanction financial and other major decisions of the EC which acts for the day to day management of the UA. 5 out of 9 EC members must be STs in most MWSs where the STs constitute the majority of the population (with at

least President or Secretary being a ST, one out of three vice presidents, including the Treasurer shall also be ST). In other MWSs, 4 out of 9 EC members must be STs except for a few UAs with no ST population. 5 out of the 9 EC members should also be females.

UA objectives do not only comprise the AHADS objectives of eco-restoration and improved living conditions but also other objectives such as: self-sufficiency of members in food, health, housing education, employment, improvement of agricultural production, long-term improvement of living conditions of women and children, comprehensive development of the tribals, empowerment to alleviate “social wrongs” and injustice and to liberate the STs / SCs from exploitation.

UAs are expected to plan, implement and monitor the various activities of AHADS in soil and water conservation, silviculture, afforestation, agro and forest based small scale industries, processing and marketing of raw resources. They are to handle AHADS works contracts, including receiving and procuring materials and equipment, utilization of funds ensuring their transparency (through appointing 3 members as social auditors), construction of structures and their maintenance and repairs, provision of labour for day to day functions, distributions of financial benefits to backward classes and STs and arrange operational procedures for these ends.

UAs main share of funds comes from AHADS but they can also take loans, collect contributions (financially or through crop sharing) and fines from members or donations from voluntary organizations and to make earnings from processing of commodities or leasing out of UA assets. They act as a local development organization so as to build their capacity to attract project funding from other government agencies. The accounts of the UA are jointly administered by the President and the Secretary whereas the Secretary deals with day-to-day management of the UA including financial transactions. The Treasurer is only allowed to handle amounts of less than 100 Rupees but would also assume the functions of the Secretary during his absence.

The other functions of UAs are to organize programmes/ events for awareness of the project etc., publicity and training programmes, organize self-help groups (SHGs)



and voluntary organizations coordinate with NGOs, ensure participation and leadership of women, with priority given to below poverty line (BPL) and ST population.

According to the project authorities it took considerable time to build up UAs in terms of their capacity like skills and knowledge to implement the projects. Another constraint of the project is that of availability of labour as the projects were implemented in lean labour seasons without affecting the livelihood of the people( AHADS project ).

### **B. Ooru Vikasana Samithis (OVS)or Hamlet Development Committee**

While UAs consists of non-tribals and tribals, the *Ooru Vikasana Samithis* (Hamlet Development Committee) consists of only tribals belonging to the particular hamlet concerned. So far 160 *Ooru Vikasana Samithis* are constituted covering 189 tribal hamlets. Hamlet Development package is implemented directly through the OVS. Until recently (end of 2003), the OVSs did not have their own by-law yet and were formed following the UA organizational model (2 adults from each family as members, 9 elected members of the Executive Committee / EC, annual General Body / GB meetings, etc.). The traditional tribal Chief (Moopan) will be ex-officio EC member also. Projects implemented by the OVS are to be placed before the UA for sanctioning.

The new By-law for OVSs names as objectives besides the AHADS Project also total cultural and economical development of the tribals in the hamlets (including construction of water supply systems, toilets, public places, schools, medical centers), planning of projects (agriculture, food grain banks, business and industrial centers), prevent land alienation / buy back alienated tribal land, ensure self-sufficiency in food, social welfare, education, housing, especially for women and children, create long-term, sustainable forms of livelihood, cultivate habit of savings, create awareness and publicity.

OVSs are also expected to receive financial support directly from other government programmes. In contrast to UAs, OVSs should have public general meetings at least quarterly. The rest of the by-laws are modeled much along the UA by-law (9 EC members, 5 of whom to be women, either Chairmen or Secretary being a female, monthly EC meetings, re-election of EC after one term of 2 years possible for a third year). In contrast to the UAs, in the OVSs, it is the Treasurer who should keep all

financial accounts. Also in addition to the traditional tribal Chief (Moopan), also four other traditional leaders will be ex officio members of the EC.

### **C. Joint Forest Management Committee (JFMC)**

The JFMC is open to those who depend on forest and are willing to participate. In most cases, the OVS members are the members of the UA concerned at the same time. Also, JFMC members are the members of the UA and OVS concerned.

JFMC membership is two adults per UA member family (one of them a woman). General Body and EC composition and meetings are modeled along the UA by-law (9 elected EC members) but with some deviations. Only 3 out of 9 EC members are to be females, and ST proportion is not fixed as such but to be in proportion with their share in the UA membership population (if more than a third of STs, JFMC President to be a ST, if more than 6 ST members of JFMC, 4 to be STs). In contrast to the UAs, the JFMC Secretary would be the concerned AHADS forestry field officer. In addition, one EC member of UA, a representative of a local Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) and the ward member of the village Panchayat would be ex officio members. Also, existing ECs of UAs or OVSs can take over the EC function of a JFMC. JFMCs, apart from an operations fund for implementing the AHADS programmes, have also a core fund for common benefits sharing of members.

Apart from the AHADS Project objective of eco-restoration regarding forest areas the JFMCs also aim at facilitating sustainable and equitable access to forest products (NTFPs) with full participation of local people. In addition JFMCs are to plan, implement and monitor such activities, protect also other forest areas not under JFMC, raise awareness to other villagers.

The membership to OVS is exclusive and in cases of UAs and JFMC it is inclusive. UA members consist of the people who are residing in the MWS area irrespective of social groups, i.e., settlers (other castes), scheduled tribe (ST) or scheduled caste (SC). OVS members are composed of ST people belonging to the hamlet concerned. The JFMC is open to those who depend on forest and are willing to participate. In most cases, the OVS members are the members of the UA concerned at the same time. Also, JFMC members are the members of the UA and OVS concerned.

## **D. Other organizations:**

### Income Generation Activity Groups (IGAG) under UAs

IGA groups of 5-15 members are formed under UAs. They should be BPL members (only one member per family is allowed). For hamlets, OVS members can also form IGA groups. The head of IGS group is called President. Vice president and Secretary (responsible for financial management) are called Convener and joint convener in case of IGA groups.

IGA group members should have equal responsibility for planning, implementing, marketing and sharing of benefits. However, the Convener can pay wages to members or other labourers for carrying out IGA works. IGA group members should contribute membership dues. IGA groups as a society need to contribute 25% of costs for IGA activities, including any loan received (in case of OVS 15%). These contributions can be paid as a combination of cash (minimum 60%) and labour (maximum of 40%). IGA groups should include savings scheme for members (weekly remittance rate). Individual passbooks should be given to members after bank deposit. UA or AHADS should have right to check funds.

### Thaikula Samgams (Mothers Groups)

Formation of Thaikula Samgams (Mothers Groups) has been initiated by WD section of AHADS since 2001 for empowerment of the group through enhancing to participate social activities, as they are generally weak and discriminated in home and society as well. Major social activities that the groups have been participating in are eradication of illicit liquor campaign and AHADS project activities. So far, 111 Thaikula Samgams have been formed. Since 2003-04, the IGA Team has taken initiative for the formation of income generating activities groups (IGA-Gs). The IGA-G is a voluntary group consisting of 10-15 UA/OVS members, who are interested in group activities for income generating.

## **Peoples Institutions as Implementing Bodies**

Three implementing bodies consisting of beneficiaries are entitled to work for the Project on contract basis. viz., UAs, OVSs and JFMCs. Project work in the private land for eco-restoration component is entrusted generally to the UAs and partly to the OVSs,

while the same for additional socio-economic development component is entrusted exclusively to the OVSs. Project work in the state owned forestland is entrusted to the JFMCs as a rule. However, the same is entrusted to the UAs for the area where JFM is not applicable.

As the exceptional cases, Kerala State Construction Corporation and Energy Management Center are entrusted to design and construct the Chavadiyoor Bridge and a mini hydroelectric power generation project, respectively, since any of the UAs and OVSs is incapable of constructing such large scale structures.

### **Impact of the Project: Macro Findings**

There were studies carried out by scholars on the functioning of these institutions and their findings will be of use for collaborating with the findings at two villages selected for the purpose of this paper. One of the findings of the studies is that UAs function mostly as an executing agency for AHADS works contracts, and when there is no work, the interest of the members and capacity of the organization fades away rapidly. Self-sustainable LOs would need some sort of permanent funding or income in order to become sustainable in the long term. The AHADS Project comprises of two components, which could generate this kind of permanent income for the LOs, i.e., the IGA group activity and the wasteland (WL) plantation package.

The largest benefits received as named by beneficiaries were the wasteland and homestead plantation packages (83% and 74% of all UAs) and the forest plantations (54% of UAs).

About the positive or negative experience with the AHADS Project, in general, more positive answers were given than negative ones by the respondents. 39% emphasized the benefits of the works and income provided by the project, and another 25% felt that their living conditions have improved and poverty was reduced, yet another 11% mentioned also the enhanced social status (particularly of women) provided by the elected offices open to everyone and the sincere participatory approach empowering local decision making. At the same time, dissatisfaction was expressed regarding the temporary/irregular wages of the local labour and short-term, non-permanent/sustainable nature of the employment.

At present the main project benefit for people's livelihood continues to be the local labour component of works creating mandays and wages for major parts of the beneficiary population in many MWSs. The project has contributed largely to a temporary relief of poverty throughout Attappady. Beneficiaries have benefited from increased nutrition and health status, increased affordability of education and health services, some savings and acquisition of durable assets and a higher standard of living in general associated with the project.

Many families have in the past project phase abstained from planting the WL package on their private wasteland, because of incorrect information and irrational fears about the project. Particularly ST population who has a long and sad history of land alienation by outsiders encroaching on their tribal lands, have deeply rooted fears about lending their land to any outside or government agency.

However, plantation of tree crops and IGA activities are the two most vital assets of the project with the potential to generate long term income enhancing the sustainability of the local organisations created.

The main benefits experienced by the people so far are the so called daily wages (mandays) created through execution of works contracts in soil/water and biomass conservation (wasteland, agronomic/homestead packages). In addition, some UAs have benefited from IGAs started recently. The creation of mandays through AHADS works in most UAs is considered the major socio-economic benefit for the local population today. The findings of these studies confirm with the findings at two villages selected in different regions of the project area.

### **Evolving of Common Property Resources regime: Field Evidences**

Two villages studied are from two regions i.e. Vattalaki from eastern part and Swarnagatha from western part of Attappady block. The Vattalaki village is one of the hamlets of the Sholayur Gram Panchayat. It consists of around 100 households with mixed population tribes and settlers from Tamil Nadu. Swarnagatha village in Pudur Panchayat is an exclusively tribal settlement of around 40 households.

As part of the project, AHADS has formed User Association, OVS and JFMC in the both villages stating the reasons of ecological degradation and ensuring livelihood support. In the beginning the selection of office bearers were done by consensus on a

particular candidate through raising of hands. In 94-95 there was a survey by AHADS regarding the total area including agricultural land, waste land and area under forest. While UA and OVS is a registered body JFMC is not registered body. Elections to these bodies are conducted two years back in 2003.

The process of activities of AHADS at village level which generated employment are digging of pits in all the areas including private area, planting of saplings, making of bunds in JFMC and Watershed area, manuring of the plants and protection through watchers. Along with these activities, check dams have been constructed as part of watershed activities.

According to local representatives from both villages across different sections and associations there is a similar view that the project has generated lot employment and employment opportunities. The situation before the initiation of the project was one of distress migration and degradation of natural resources. Through the generation of jobs, the project has prevented people from migrating neighboring Tamil Nadu to work as wage labour in brick kilns and as workers in neighbouring Coimbatore textile mills. The employment generation of the project had another effect that is increase in wage labour. While the private land holders even now pay Rs 30 for men and 25 for women whereas the project pays Rs. 100 and Rs 80 for men and women respectively. According to Chinna Thottan in Pudur Panchayat area, tribals do not go to the lands of settlers for work because now they get more income and the settlers now get labour from Tamil Nadu to work in their lands. Thus the works on commons has given more freedom for tribals to decide to work on others lands.

Some of the representatives visibly felt that there is rise in water levels across the village and all the more in the valley area. The cultivation area also increased and also more diversification like banana, turmeric and sugarcane and some of them are long term stretching up to one year and water consuming. There is an increase in the number of bore-wells particularly in the lower part of watersheds and the water gets pumped up to the hills particularly to cultivate banana.

Another visible impact in the area is the increase in the ground water levels. The persons with bore-wells and having lands in low lying areas gained from the project activities since most of the areas in Attappady are undulating. The project has given

different advantages to different locations. Local respondents in Pudur area -where small streams are flowing- said that the water is available even in summer in the streams for cultivation and for consumption for cattle and humans. The cropping pattern shifted from less water consuming to water intensive crops like banana.

It was observed by respondents that there is reduction in wastelands and now there is a hope of doing cultivation and earlier people in the village used to go to Coimbatore. According to tribal leader, Murugasen, the tribals have gained only terms of wages and since most of the lands are in the upper reaches of the hills, increase in ground water levels benefit the lower portion of hills where generally non-tribals own the lands.

Destruction of forests started according to locals that when the area of Attappady was under the control of Madras Presidency a province under the British Government, contractors were given an area of forest as block for cutting of big trees. *Janmis* also destroyed forest for the purpose of coals and firewood. When there was severe drought during the early seventies, local people themselves started cutting forests. The relationship of tribal with the forest has changed over the years. Earlier the access to forest including firewood, forest products like honey, bamboo was not controlled or regulated. According to him when the forest resources were plenty and the demand was minimal, tribal looked at forest as source of livelihood. They have not felt that they are destroying the forest which needs protection but only as source of use.

The project has made minimal impact on lands located on ridges. According local informants these lands are incidentally owned by tribals. As of now concern of tribal is on wages than on their own lands which are any way located in the ridges and of poor quality.

AHADS project has denied the access of the cattle to wastelands under plantation and regeneration and also forests lands are denied access by wire fences. One of the JFMC leaders said this has reduced the cattle population particularly among tribals.

Some of the tribals are apprehensive of the differential impact of the project on tribals and others. Once the project comes to an end, the lands of the non-tribals will be better off in terms of soil condition and water levels, they would be able to continue their

cultivation and the tribals have to depend on them for wages as the case was earlier. The situation gets worse for tribes as their traditional access to forests and wasteland now blocked by new regulations evolved by the project.

The advantage of local organisations are that people have the right to elect their representatives once in two years and also have the right to remove them in case of misuse of money. The process is that once in three months, the representatives are to submit the income and expenditure to the general body of UA/JFMC. People select their own auditors among themselves for checking up the account. In case of discrepancy and misuse in accounts, the amount is declared as “cash in hand” and asked to pay the money and have to step down from the posts. However, there are limitations of Local Organisations as evolved by AHADS. It only gives money to local organisation for implementing the project but the accounts of income and expenditure of the projects implemented in the village are kept with AHADS. It only gives work but not estimates. The tree species are decided by the project not according to local demand though it may be commercial in nature not according to conservation regime evolved by the project.

## **Conclusion**

The project evolved new institutional arrangements like UAs, OVSs and JFMCs at village level for regeneration, development and management of natural resources. The already declining traditional arrangements for management of natural resources like Moopan (village Chief) got absorbed into new arrangements like OVS and other posts like soil and agricultural experts became irrelevant because of the project having the experts and other changes in agriculture. The project made impact, as evident from macro level studies and findings from two villages in terms of income and wage increase among tribals and consequent reduction in distress migration. Though there are no studies to support at macro level of the findings in two villages that there is an increase in cropping areas and as well as commercial and water intensive crops like banana, sugarcane, increase in lift irrigation and rising of water tables,

Local organizations are evolved to develop commons by the project to develop and manage natural resources are limited to implementing the project. The participatory approach is to ensure that all the sections particularly tribals participate in the process



of the project. There is very limited role for these organizations on the impact of the project. The distribution and impact of the benefits of the project varies on different sections of the people in terms of increase in wages, income, cropping area, and water levels. It has given long term advantages to people who own lands in the valleys. It also changed the traditional access arrangements for tribals like grazing of cattle in wastelands and forests thereby affecting their livelihood.

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## Annexure – I

### PROJECT AREA PROFILE (ATTAPPADY BLOCK)

Geographical area	745 sq.km
Forest land	444 sq.km
Private land	301 sq.km
Waste land	507 sq.km
Development unit	15
Micro watershed	146
Human inhabited micro watershed	93
User associations	93
Ooru Vikasana Samithi (Hamlet development committee)	160
Total Population (1991)	62,033
Tribal Population (1991)	24,227

## Annexure -II : Overview of AHADS Local Organizations

<b>No. of Local Organizations</b>	<b>2000/01</b>	<b>2001/02</b>	<b>2002/03</b>	<b>2003/04</b>
UAs Formed	93	93	93	93
UA Members	26119	26119*	26119**	23781***
LAGs Formed	96	110	152	180
OVS Formed	164	164	164	164
OVS Members	18317	18317	18317	18317
JFMCs Formed	16	24	29	29
JFMCs Members	1884	3214	3771**	4567**
IGAGs Formed			54	102
TKS Formed			72	111
TKS Members			1233	1970

\* Source: AHADS

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