

concept is amazing.

Fr. Felix through his studies and research has designed the three Cs concept. It is proven beyond doubt that early identification, early intervention and three Cs concept of education together can make the total development of the mentally challenged at a faster rate. The three Cs concept holds exceptional promise even as a new tool for elementary education in the educational scenario of the normal children too.

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<sup>2</sup> The term mental retardation was in vogue, at the time of founding the CIMR, to refer to the situation of the mentally challenged persons. The term continues to remain in the name of the organisation.

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## **INNOVATIVE PRACTICES OF COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN SUSTAINING JALANIDHI PROJECT**

**Albert Kuruvila**

Jalanidhi is a programme of the government of Kerala with the financial support from World Bank for providing safe drinking water with the participation of the beneficiaries, that is, the local community, which is formed into a beneficiary group (BG), and the local self-government in rural areas. The project is set up with the government assistance and the community or the BG is expected to operate and maintain it on its own. It has to deal with any problem that arises in the course of maintaining the infrastructure (pipeline, pump and motor, and tank) and distributing water to the beneficiaries. Following are a few cases of how the local community of the beneficiaries resolved the issues that arose in the operation of the jalanidhi project.

### **Sharing Water, the Precious Resource**

The jalanidhi project of the Pullupara BG in Pokottoor panchayat of Malappuram district has 53 member households. There were five households that were not part of the BG of the jalanidhi project in the village. The non-members had their private wells close to the common well of the BG. They complained to the BG that the water level in their wells went down in summer because of the increased pumping from the jalanidhi common well. The five non-members objected to it and tried to make it as a communal issue.

In response to it the BG convened a special meeting of the members to discuss the issue and they accepted that water is a basic necessity for everyone. So they decided to allow the non-members to install their motor pumps in the common well and draw water as an alternative arrangement.

The non-member households then installed their own pumps and started drawing water on a daily basis. So by sharing water, the BG group was able to resolve the issue.

Even though the problem had the chance of developing into a communal issue, the BG with its knowledge was able to solve the issue at zero cost. After the withdrawal of the supporting agency under the jananidhi project the beneficiaries have learned to manage their needs and problems on their own which shows that the project is sustainable and community management is possible. What is unique about the step that was taken by the BG in this village is that it not only ensured social equality but also brought such people who were not the beneficiaries of the jananidhi project into its canvas and made them aware of the usefulness of the project. A venture like this would definitely help in increasing the scope and understanding of the project among the general public. A community crisis can be successfully solved by the joint efforts of its stakeholders. This is a lesson that can be learned from the water sharing action of the Pullupara BG.

### **Optimum Utilisation for Managing Scarcity of Water**

As jananidhi became people's project, along with it came many new innovative practices for the sustainability of the programme in the community. One of those innovations was in regulating the use of water during the time of scarcity. During the summer season, water level in the wells normally goes down or wells become dry. This was a problem faced by the jananidhi BG of Kuzhikattuparambil in the Pokottoor panchayat of Malappuram district. The non-BG members who are residing close to the BG water source found that there was rapid decline in the water level in their private wells due to the pumping of water from the BG well. This led to a small dispute between the BG and non-BG members who requested the BG to resolve the issue.

The BG convened its general body meeting to address the issue and the pump operator came up with a proposal to solve the problem. He suggested reducing the number of days for pumping water from daily to alternate days during summer. The BG accepted the proposal and also introduced three more measures to regulate the use of water. Thus a four fold system of controlling water use during summer was set in place: (i) water to be pumped on alternate days; (ii) time of pumping water to be

reduced to half an hour on the day of pumping; (iii) charges for extra use of water to be doubled (the usual charge for extra use was Rs.25 for 1000 litres; this charge to be made Rs.50 for 1000 litres during summer); (iv) a special mechanism of "stop screw" in the water meter to be installed for controlling the water flow. Through stop screw the speed of the water flow could be regulated especially to decrease the speed to lower areas and to increase the speed in hilly areas.

The BG of Kuzhikattuparambil was very successful in implementing these innovative measures for managing the problem of scarcity of water during the summer season. As a result of the four fold measures, there was reduction in the quantity of water pumped and people learned to use water sparingly. This helped solving the problem of water scarcity during summer. Though the innovative measures brought some inconvenience to the people, there were no complaints as the decisions were participatory and the measures were for the common good of all.

### **Tackling Misuse of Water**

The jananidhi water is meant for the purpose of household use only. The BG of Vattakaitha in Maruthonkara panchayat of Kozhikode district faced a problem in this regard. Out of the 28 households in the BG, eight of them used water for agricultural purpose. Since most of the households in the BG are residing on the higher elevation with lower output of water, drawing water for agricultural purpose created scarcity in the availability of drinking water for most of BG members. Hence there was a need to address the problem immediately.

The BG convened an urgent general body meeting for discussing the issue. After discussion with those involved in using water for agricultural purpose, the BG unanimously decided to introduce certain measures to stop the misuse of water. As a punitive action, the eight households, that were using water for agricultural purpose, were informed that their supply of water would be stopped for six days. They accepted the action without raising any protest since they understood that they made a mistake and it was against the common interests of the BG. The BG also decided to impose heavy fines along with stopping the supply of water for misuse of water in future. The Vattakaitha BG was successful in the steps taken to tackle the problem of misuse of water.

## Reducing the Operational Costs

The jalanidhi project beneficiaries of the Aachy Priyadarsini colony in Puthupady panchayat of Kozhikode district are daily wage workers who found it difficult to meet the operational costs of the project. There are 63 members in the Aachy Priyadarsini BG and they collect Rs.20 from each member on a monthly basis for meeting the operational and maintenance expenses. Following are the items of expenditure met from this amount of 20 rupees: Rs.5 for membership fee, Re.1 for the BG federation and the remaining Rs.14 for maintenance including the salary of the pump operator and electricity charges. But the BG members were finding it difficult to meet the expenses, especially the electricity charges. One option in this situation was to increase the user fees. Since all the BG members are daily wage workers, they could not afford more money to pay the electricity bill. So the BG members were forced to find an alternative measure to reduce the electricity bill.

In order to reduce the electricity bill, the BG members decided to strictly enforce the norm of restricting the use of water to household purpose. In addition, they took the decision to reduce the time of pumping water from one hour to 40 minutes a day (i.e., from 6.00 to 6.20 in the morning and from 5.30 to 5.50 in the evening). They opted for these timings for the convenience of daily wage workers. They kept a log book to record the timings of pumping water each day and the electricity meter readings in correspondence with it. In this way they were able to reduce the electricity consumption.

By this innovative practice, the BG could reduce the amount of the electricity bill from Rs.8-10 to Rs.3 -3.50 per day. This meant a reduction in the electricity bill from Rs.250-300 to Rs.90-130 per month. So over a period of six months, the BG members were able to save nearly Rs.1000. This is a big amount as far the BG is concerned. Thus this innovation of the BG has been a cost effective mechanism to meet the increasing operational cost, instead of raising user fees or imposing fine. The innovative action produced other desirable results too, viz. better distribution of water to all BG members and convenient timing for daily wage workers for collecting water.

## Community Participation in Maintenance

The jalanidhi project of Dhahasamani BG in the Puthupady panchayat of Kozhikode district has 46 households. The source of water

identified for the Dhahasamani project is an open well and the BG is pumping the water to an overhead tank for distribution. The individual connections are taken from this common tank. The tank has to be cleaned every month in order to get safe and clean drinking water. An innovative practice has been adopted by the BG for cleaning the common water tank.

During the commissioning of the project, the BG decided to clean the tank every month by assigning the task to the member households. Instead of employing workers for cleaning, the BG decided to have the tank cleaned by the user households in rotation on a monthly basis. The BG stipulated the deadline of 2<sup>nd</sup> day of every month to clean the tank. If a household is not able to clean the tank within the stipulated time, an amount of Rs.50 is charged on the household as fee for the cleaning work. The pump operator supervises the cleaning. Irrespective of the level of the financial background, all the members of the BG have accepted the system and have been ready to clean their tank without fail.

As a result of the practice each individual household became responsible for cleaning and maintaining the tank and this helped them have the feeling that the project is their own. There is no need to have cleaners or find more money to maintain the tank. The tank cleaning in this manner is a social levelling process where all member households are treated equally and have the same responsibility in maintaining their project infrastructure. This also resulted in raising the accountability of the BG members. The Dhahasamani BG has shown that participation is an important element in keeping a community project alive and sustainable.

## Haritha BG

Another case of community participation in the maintenance of the jalanidhi project is that of the Haritha BG in the Koodaranji panchayat of Kozhikode district. The Haritha BG has a membership of 20 households. What is unique about this BG is that there is no special pump operator for the project. All the member households operate the pump in turn. The responsibility of one household for operating the pump is for one month.

At the inception of the project itself, the member families reached the consensus that each one of them would take up the one-month pump operation in turn. When asked why they had reached such a consensus, the following is the reason they gave. In those days, their electricity bill (per

family) was rupees fifty, and so they couldn't afford to pay a pump operator as well. If they wanted to appoint a pump operator, they needed to charge another fifty rupees per member as user fee. It was not possible due to the financial backwardness of BG members. So the alternative was to operate the pump by the BG itself. The system adopted by the Haritha BG not only reduced the cost of operating the project, but also provided the BG members the opportunity to acquire the technical skill of pump operation.

The system is functioning very well. So far there has been no problem or dispute regarding pump operation and all the 20 families are more than willing to do their part. Each family is required to spend only one and a half hours every morning for pumping water. Also this arrangement is bringing women to the forefront as both men and women in every household are made to operate the pump. Thus participation of all members in the operation of project is ensured. The relationship among the members has also improved. Responsibility on the maintenance and repair of the assets is delegated to all members. And it is being done effectively. All the members take responsibility of regular follow up. Peer pressure, instead of penal action, is functioning to ensure the consistently successful operation of the system.

### **Palathully: Children's Saving Scheme**

When the jalanidhi project was handed over to the Sathyadhara BG of Koduvally panchayat in Kozhikode district, the BG had to find the resources to meet the cost of operating and maintaining the project (pump and pump house, electricity charges for pumping water, distribution lines, etc.). The monthly charges worked out to be Rs.40-60 per household. Majority of the families of the 38 member BG belonged to the below-poverty-line group and most of them were daily wage workers. In response to this problem the BG decided on an innovative savings scheme called "palathully." Children were actively involved in this scheme.

There are nearly 75 children in the 38 BG families. All the 38 families are having children. Children in the age group of 10-15 years were encouraged to participate in the programme. Thus in the beginning 30 children were ready to participate in the programme. All the BG families wholeheartedly accepted the idea. A special box was made by the BG for each of the children. Each child was supposed to deposit at least Rs.2 in the

box everyday. Those families which do not have a child in the 10-15 age group also agreed to have a special box and deposit Rs.2 in the box everyday. At the end of the month each family was able to save Rs.60 which is usually the expenditure for operating the jalanidhi project. The amount of money collected by children in this manner is handed over to the BG secretary for adding it to the fund of the BG. The palathully scheme not only generated the much need funds for running the jalanidhi project, but also instilled in the children a sense of responsibility. What a 10 year old boy who participates in the scheme said is ample evidence of it: "eating too much candy is not good for teeth; it is better that we use the money for water." The palathully scheme initiated by the Sathyadhara BG of Koduvally panchayat is a commendable innovation.

### **Corpus Creation**

Another innovative experiment in fund raising was undertaken by the Eranjimal BG of Koothali panchayat in Kozhikode district. The BG foresaw unexpected expenditure in the maintenance of the jalanidhi project, such as for well, pump and pump house, motor, distribution lines etc. In their general body meeting, the BG members decided to set up a corpus fund to meet the unexpected expenses. The BG has 27 member households. All of them decided to collect Rs.2000 from each household irrespective of the economic condition. The BG set up a deadline of three months to remit the amount so as to help the economically weak families. The BG also gave an option to pay the amount in instalments. So finally the BG was able to collect a total amount of Rs.54,000. The BG deposited the money in its bank account. In order to give salary to the pump operator, the BG is collecting Rs.30 from the 27 member families every month.

Another important aspect of this scheme of fund creation is that the BG is using the corpus fund for micro credit purpose. From the collected money the BG members can take loans up to Rs.5000 for their individual emergency needs. The BG is charging an interest rate of 7-8 per cent according to the financial condition of the member households. The interest is added to the principal amount of the corpus. The BG in its general body meeting takes the decision on sanctioning the loan, the tenure of loan and the interest rate. The innovative practice adopted by the Eranjimal BG not only contributes to the long-term sustainability of the jalanidhi project, but also functions as a micro credit scheme to help the members in their personal emergencies.

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