

NEWSLETTER



April 2021 - June 2021



The past few months have been a real roller coaster ride. The high point was the launch of the Adivasi Innovation Hub, which has been many months in the making. The low point - after having successfully staved off COVID 19 in the first wave, this second wave crept into the community in spite of our best efforts.

Dealing with this became our priority - and all our energies were focused on dealing with this. Once again a coordinated strategy between the AMS, ASHWINI, Vidyodaya, The Shola Trust and ACCORD, in collaboration with the government, allowed us to meet the challenge head-on. And achieve the impossible - 100% vaccination of the community among other things.

ADIVASI INNOVATION HUB



Our first Investment Committee

In mid-April, we had an Investment Committee (IC) meeting comprising our Adivasi team and a few people from Social Venture Partners. It was the first of its kind. A youth group made a pitch to the entire team explaining their idea, with the financial and non-financial support required. This was very new to the community and was facilitated by the AIH support team.



The Adivasi Innovation Hub (AIH) is a unique initiative that evolved after a series of detailed discussions with the community, especially the young people. With inputs from loads of other experts, we designed and launched the AIH. It is an incubator to support micro-enterprises by Adivasi youth. An 'of the Adivasis, for the Adivasis, by the Adivasis dream.

The core idea behind AIH is to enable the community to be economically independent and to change the economic base, which predominantly depends on daily wages. The AIH has already kick-started two Proof of Concepts – Adivasi Aadithya Amaippu, a solar energy enterprise in collaboration with SELCO FOUNDATION and an eco-friendly sanitary cloth pad unit – yet to be christened! Suggestions welcome.

HOW IC WORKED?



The IC was divided into two groups to evaluate both the ideas decide whether they were worth implementing. Interesting perspectives emerged.

Many questions were centred around the production capacities, the team's unity, how their work would benefit the larger community and how they view their future.

The Investment Committee meet was a big leap for us and we see this as a stepping stone to the community engaging closely in microenterprises that get setup. We expect any such milestones in the months to come.

A GLIMPSE OF OUR TWO PROOF OF CONCEPTS



Emerged from ACCORDs discussions with SELCO Foundation, was to explore possibilities of leveraging renewable energy based solutions for locations that didn't have access to the grid. We have 9 young Paniya youth aged between 18 and 23 committed to developing this entire initiative into an enterprise.



We are excited about a new enterprise to produce sustainable menstrual cloth pads being set up in Gudalur. A group of 10 confident, hopeful women came together with a common interest in tailoring and with the idea of developing it as a livelihood opportunity. After many conversations with like minded individuals and organisations, reusable cloth pads emerged as a possible focus. We are grateful to Ecofemme who agreed to be our knowledge partner and to Telstra for supporting us with a Grant for this PoC

WELCOME TO OUR FAMILY!

We are extremely excited to let you all know that we have new members to our AIH family!



Subin Kappala
*Community Engagement
Head*

Subin Kappala comes from Erumad in Gudalur, with an interesting combination of a degree in Zoology and a Masters in Development. In the past, he has worked in the areas of forest conservation and nature preservation. We are excited to have him on board and hope this journey will inspire and excite him. As an adivasi himself we have great hopes for him, as he takes on the role of the Community Engagement Head in AIH.



Murali Menon
Director

Murali Menon has worked in various countries for 3 decades across functions such as sourcing, warehousing, and trading a range of commodities. His last role was as the Regional Head of Coffee - Asia at Louis Dreyfus Company. Here he led a team of 100 people. Murali has now decided to move from the corporate sector to the social sector. We are blessed he discovered us at a time when we desperately need his marketing, management and coffee expertise.



Vijaya Chimban
Accounts & Admin

Vijaya Chimban belongs to the Paniya tribe and comes from Thorapalli. She has graduated with a Bachelor of Commerce and has been trained by ACCORD in maintaining vouchers and ledgers for about 3 years now. She has also been taking care of important AMS related documentation over the years. Her cheerful, smiling disposition is an invaluable asset to the team. She is the point person for AIH for all things admin and accounts.



COVID - 19 SECOND WAVE

We set up a three-tier response system to provide relief for the adivasi communities during the first Phase of COVID and this has been reactivated in the second phase.



TIER 1

A robust network of 200 community volunteers at the grassroots level who monitor their village situation, share daily updates and spread credible information



TIER 2

16 trained adivasi health animators and 12 community animators, facilitating primary health care, other essentials, ensuring access to government relief packages, food supplies, cash relief) and awareness on vaccination



TIER 3

50-bedded Gudalur Adivasi Hospital with 7 doctors (obstetrician, surgeon, family medicine practitioner, dentist and three medical officers), 21 nursing staff, and a psychologist.

COVID - 19 SCREENING DRIVES



Regular health screenings at the village level (through mobile health clinics) by frontline health workers and doctors is being carried on -- this will ensure early detection of COVID but most importantly, also ensure that patients (including pregnant mothers, malnourished children, individuals with TB, sickle cell etc) get the follow-up care and required medicines through the lockdown.

Our animators play a role in mobilising the communities and provide support to the health team during screening drives.

VACCINATION DRIVES

Both we and the district administration realised that very few Adivasis were getting vaccinated. A lot of false messages about vaccination shared on social media, instilled fear among the community. On our recommendation, the administration agreed to launch a special vaccination drive for Adivasis. This led to the launch of a massive village level drive where vaccines are taken to the people, rather than the other way around.

The task of mobilising the community to bring them for vaccination was taken up by our area teams. The villages are informed beforehand about the vaccination schedule and our team ensures that the villagers are present when the vaccination drive is conducted.





Right through this drive, we worked closely with the government at the District Level, the Block level and the Primary Health Centre. A slow start ground to a halt with the non-availability of vaccines. Repeated representations resulted in the government allocating special vaccines for the tribals. This was followed by the Chief Minister announcing that he wanted ALL tribals of the Nilgiris to be vaccinated. This set off a frenzied drive to vaccinate over 10000 people in a matter of two weeks! Our entire team rose to the challenge and worked closely with the local PHCs to ensure a smooth and effective vaccination programme.

Every day we would send a list of villages to the Block medical officer who would accordingly inform the concerned PHCs and dispatch the necessary vaccines to them.



We would like to place on record our deep appreciation to the entire Health team of the Government, especially the staff of the PHCa who worked tirelessly, often late into the night to ensure that by June end we successfully achieved the impossible - 100% vaccination of all those eligible.

CRISIS COMMUNICATION CENTER



A small team of Paniya youth who have shown interest in photography and videography readily came forward to support COVID-19 relief operations. They camped at Gudalur and set up a Covid Crisis Centre. They are in constant touch with the community health volunteers to check if people have symptoms or other health emergencies at their villages - this enables us to detect needs early on. They also call patients who have been tested positive to keep track of their health status.

They have developed a number of videos and audio messages in Adivasi languages to create awareness about COVID-19 precautions and vaccinations.

FOOD RESPONSE

The rations from PDS become available in the first week of each month and the community exhausts the rations in two weeks. Post that, they generally buy the required rations for the coming weeks. Given the lockdown and the community being cut out from daily wages, we anticipated food support that the community might need. We arranged for dry and wet rations to be distributed to the communities.

We are distributing the food rations as and when the demand for the same arises. We saw requests coming in from village elders who have not been able to go for daily wages, villages that have been isolated due to positive cases in that village and from families that do not have ration cards.



A DAY IN THE LIFE OF AREA TEAMS

During vaccination, area teams - animators, health animators, education coordinators and area secretaries worked closely together day in and day out - often in pelting rain. They coaxed, cajoled and convinced everyone to participate in the vaccination and screening drives. Here's what a day looks like in their own words.



Our work starts well before the V-day! Mobilising the community requires the entire area team's efforts. So we coordinate our roles accordingly. The day before vaccination, we go to the scheduled villages. We talk to the families personally and ask them to be available at their homes the next day. If not, they might go to work and miss their shots. Based on the availability and allocation of vaccines in the respective PHCs, we are able to vaccinate people in about 2-3 villages in a day.

Come vaccination day, we start off at 8 AM. We remind people yet again, about the scheduled arrival time of the PHC team. We ask them to keep their identity cards ready so the process can move faster. By the time we reach all the scheduled villages, it's usually 11 AM. The medical team then starts their drive at about 11.30 AM. It takes around one to two hours at most in each village.

We have our own list of the people in respective villages and we keep a track of who all have been vaccinated, alongside government officials taking records.

After the vaccination drive is completed for the day, the area team meets again. We recheck our lists to ensure no one has been missed out. We also make a list of villages that need to be vaccinated next. We Whatsapp these updates to the Taluk centre and to the rest of our team.

After this long day, we go back home. We call up other area teams and ask them for updates from their villages. We share our experiences with them, what worked and what didn't.

Karunakaran, Animator - Pattavayal area



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When I went to the ration shop, I saw a few adivasis from Odadamvayal. I asked them how they were there and if they were not scared of COVID. They replied saying that they had gotten their vaccine and they are comparatively much more confident now. But they will continue to take precautions. This made me happy.

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Suresh, Animator - Srimadurai area

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There is fear sometimes when it comes to vaccination. In few villages like Theppakaadu, people believe that their gods will protect them. But when they see other villagers being confident and take up the vaccines, they get motivated as well to get vaccinated.

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TA Barathan, Animator - Erumad area



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Youth have been of great help during the vaccination phase. When we went to vaccinate in Vellichal, we were there to ensure that the PHC team reached the village. It was the youth who mobilised their entire village, prepared the list and made sure everyone in the village were vaccinated.

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OUR PRAYERS AND CONDOLENCES

We have some sad news to share with everyone



We are saddened to report Francis Guntipilly who was a member of the first ACCORD Board passed away. - Weakened by COVID, he succumbed to a cardiac arrest. He was 72 and served as an ACCORD Board member over a number of years.

He was a social worker and has done exemplary work in Anekal, Mundgod, Bangalore and other parts of Karnataka. We knew him as a man who was imbued by a spirit of compassion and a heart devoted to the poor and defenceless. He was a constant source of support and encouragement to all of us at ACCORD. May his soul rest in peace

A letter from us....

It has been a tumultuous three months. Most of it dominated by our COVID response. But as you can see this didn't stop us from getting AIH off the ground, recruiting new people and continuing to constantly respond to the community's needs – both short term and long term. While we had to put on hold all the village meetings, the youth meetings and our own team meetings – our work continued with the same vigour as always.

Through these difficult and unpredictable times, we drew strength from a variety of sources.

First of all, from the community who responded with faith and trust. Our amazing team on the ground pulled out all the stops and proved the value of our 35 plus years of work here in Gudalur. The support team backed our area teams and the community every step of the way. The committed officers of the government stepped out of their conventional roles and trekked from village to village often on foot. But, behind it all, our supporters came forward with all kinds of help both in cash and kind to keep us going. Many of you called in asking how we were and wishing us well. This meant the world to us, like having an arm around the shoulder.

A big thank you from the bottom of our hearts!

*To know more on how you can support, write to us at
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Adivasi
Munnetra
Sangam