

SAFE-World Project/Initiative Summary

Country: India

Project/Initiative Title: SPEECH, Tamil Nadu

Nos. farmers: 500

Hectares: 409

Agro-Ecological Zone: II

Improvement types

1x	2	3x	4	5x	6x	7x	8	9x
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A. Key Impacts

A1 – Productivity

	Before/Without	After/With	% change
Rice			New Crop
Millet			New Crop

A2 – Impacts on natural capital

Increase in both ground and surface water, leading to extra rice crop

Improved fodder for cattle and increased milk production

Rehabilitation of degraded watershed – new lands under production

D. Contact Point for Project/Initiative

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E. Project Narrative

The Society for People's Education and Economic Change, Tamil Nadu

SPEECH has been working in Kamarajar District of Tamil Nadu since 1986, and has helped to build and strengthen local groups and institutions in 45 villages (Devavaram et al, 1999). The region is known for its acute droughts, erratic monsoons, poor services and entrenched socio-economic and cultural division.

Village institutions have adopted a range of sustainable agriculture approaches to make better use of existing resources. Water harvesting not only brings previously abandoned land into

production, it also means sufficient water can be saved for an additional wet rice crop on the small amount of irrigated lands. Milk cows have been introduced, bringing particular benefits to women and children. Sorghum and millet yields have doubled, and extra crops and fruit and timber trees are being cultivated.

The initial involvement is through the establishment of non-formal education classes. Following discussions, local people choose their own village animators, who then receive training in basic teaching methods, PRA, conflict resolution, songs and stories. They also receive a small honorarium, but essentially remain as farmers or labourers. The animators visit every house, raising the awareness of the common problems faced and the need for effective organisation and participation to resolve them. After a period of discussions, plays and other forms of interaction, local people form a *sangha* or village committee.

Sangha leaders, elected by the members, then attend a 30-day training course spread throughout the year. Key personnel from government organisations and banks are invited to attend and meet the *sangha* leaders. As *sanghas* become more confident, they begin to develop their own capacity, providing for health care, roads, credit and so on. Representatives are elected to a Cluster Level Governing Council, an independent society that provides a platform for local groups to address emerging concerns.

This approach has been successful in the village of Paraikulum. There the villagers have rehabilitated 30 ha of the upper watershed, so bringing severely degraded land under the plough for the first time in 20 years. They have constructed contour bunds and structures for harvesting water. They have dug a well, and have developed new arrangements about how labour is shared by both men and women in maintaining these new technologies. More water percolates into the soil and recharges the wells. Surface water is now better channelled into the tank, which gives villagers a second crop on the irrigated lands. Using only locally available resources, this village of 100 households now produces an extra 100 tonnes of rice every year. At the same time, a group of women runs a nursery for tree seedlings, and keep dairy cows for milk production. Each member saves Rs 10 weekly for a revolving fund to help the whole group.

The novelty of the approach is beginning to be recognised by government. A senior engineer of the Agriculture Department visited Paraikulum. He was surprised to learn about local maintenance, water management, profit sharing and involvement of women. He agreed that it was important to involve farmers before planning any project for them, and so persuaded the District Collector to agree to a training programme in participatory appraisal methods. Now government has made participatory methods a part of their nearby large watershed project, and are paying village motivators from Paraikulum to help them.

Further data for this project is in hard copy format and is not currently available electronically. If you would like further information please contact John Devavaram.