Fellowship Siddamma

Annual Review for April 2021 – May 2022
Budget Proposal for 2022-23
Asha Austin

June 21, 2022
Background

- Asha supported various projects with Siddamma since 2004 and Asha Fellow since 2005
- Social worker and activist: worked extensively to empower the Irula Tribe and Unorganized Labor
- Instrumental in the release of bonded laborers from rice mills in the Red Hills area
- Community resource center created by Siddamma promotes use of natural/organic cultivation systems and traditional seeds. She has trained 1000s of local farmers and students on traditional/organic farming practices
- Created coops, social programs and advocacy programs
- Provides education to children, women and farmers through Bharathi Trust (since 1990)
- Awarded Trafficking in Persons Hero – 2006

Projects Page
# Kari Siddamma

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- Irula Rights, Integration, & Empowerment
- Labor Rights
- Women Empowerment
- Organic Farming
- Dispute Resolution
- Tsunami
- Cyclones
- COVID
Mission and Vision

- **Mission of the Fellow**
  - Uplift and empower the Irula Tribe. Create a society where a respectable life and livelihood is possible for all.
  - Make them aware of their rights (understanding that laws exist for the people to earn minimum wage).
  - Community based resource center to educate economically disadvantaged, provides skills to sustain. Revive traditional/organic farming methods

- **Vision over the next 5 years**
  - Bring education to several children in Chengelpettu
  - Bring basic amenities: electricity, gas, housing and water
    - To train local leaders to represent the community and ensure equitable development for the community and ensure that funds from the Tribal Welfare Board is used effectively.
Strengths and Weakness

- **Strengths**
  - In the field - heavily connected and involved with the community she serves. Knows of all the daily issues they face and is present with them to resolve issues/conflicts.
  - Empowering women leaders in several villages and enabling them to resolve their own issues.

- **Weakness**
  - Siddamma is a one lady army – she does not have a team going out to seek funding for her or providing any administrative help to her.
  - Hard to reach since she is travelling and so spread out.
  - Dependence on only Asha for funds.
Welfare Board Meeting

- Welfare boards usually provide various benefits to the unorganized workers including pension scheme. These welfare boards had become dormant.

- 64 leaders (Sarpam Sangam) and leaders of the Unorganized Workers Union urged the Tamil Nadu Govt to activate the welfare boards during a demonstration held in front of Thootukaadi Collectorate.

- The UnION Govt. had repealed several Acts on labor safety; the Unorganized Workers Union have appealed to the Tamil Nadu Govt to pass a resolution in the Assembly to protect the welfare boards functioning in the State

- These Welfare Boards have been reinstated again
Chengelpettu Irula Families

- 150 Irula families did not have allocated land last year.

- Additionally, there are 18 Irula families living in Sirudavoor rice mill. The rice mill owner agreed to accommodate these families temporarily till they get alternative land from the Govt.

- Several Irula Leaders conducted a procession in front of the Govt. building demanding that these families be compensated and taken care of.

- The TRIBAL Director has been very responsive. He has identified land for these families. The next step would be to build housing for these families.
22 Irula families had occupied a piece of land which they primarily used for farming. The electricity board wanted to run its high voltage lines through the farm and was threatening to oust these families.

With constant conversations with the local collector and Tribal Director, these families have been able to get their land back and the voltage lines will no longer go thru their farm land.
Gummudipoondi

- The Govt. spent Rs. 40 lakhs to get land and patta for 63 families.
- 43 families for land for housing
- 8 families got old age pension
- 18 children for ST (Scheduled Tribe) Certificate.
Pazhaverkaad

History
- Coastal town- the Irulas were not allowed to fish here by other communities. With baskets on their backs, usually husband and wife used to go out to fish late evenings. Dangerous conditions killed quite a few of them
- 3000 Irulas came together demanding for better rights for the Irulas living in this area in front of the Collector’s office
- The collector granted rights to the Irulas in Pazhaverkaad to go fishing; police protection was given to the Irulas to go fishing
- Siddamma raised funds for this Irula community going from school to school – she was able to raise Rs. 18,000.
- After Tsunami, they bought 35 boats for the community with the funds they raised

Current Issue
- 4 acre piece of land used by the Irulas to keep their boats along the coastal shoreline suddenly claimed by a local politician. He started putting up a fence line around the piece of land to prevent anyone from getting in
- The local community was enraged. Several women Irula leaders leading this struggle. The Tribal Director is with the Irulas and stated that this land only belongs to the Irulas

Spotlight
- Durga (previously trained to be a teacher) runs free tuition classes for 60 students in the evening.
Pazhaverkaad

Land by the backwaters

Meeting with Siddamma and local officials

Durga taking free tuition classes
Cuddalore

- **History**
  - A huge Irula community of more than 40 villages
  - Siddamma helped build homes for over 2,000 families
  - The presence of a large Irula population leads to the District being declared as a “reserved constituency for Irulas”, which means the Irulas can contest in the Panchayat elections and thereby have better representation
  - With better representation, the leaders can expedite housing schemes for tribes, ensure smooth issue of community certificate, create infrastructure and start schools

- **Current Update**
  - Siddamma has travelled to Cuddalore twice for the Panchayat meetings. She was able to convince the community to not conduct elections since it becomes a very political affair with a lot of money being spent on elections.
  - The community unanimously chose a woman leader (who lost her husband in Tsunami) as the Panchayat Head.
Education

- **Chengelpettu**
  - 250 community certificates for children for the first time in Chengelpettu
  - These kids will get Rs. 15,000 and continue on with their education

- **Bharathi Trust Resource Center – Farm**
  - Siddamma trained students from an agriculture college for eight days in organic/traditional farming techniques on the farm
  - She was also invited by the college for 2 days to train students in organic farming

- **Pazhaverkaad**
  - Previously an ASHA Star School in this District. The students currently goto government schools. Durga runs tuition classes for free for the kids.

- **Kuvempu project**: runs several non formal education centers and imparts vocational training in Chitraturga, Karnataka
  https://ashanet.org/project/?pid=349

- **Senjiyagaram : Senchiyamma School**
  - Balwadi for Irula tribal children – provides early education to 35 boys and girls upto 6 years old. One teacher and a cook. This project is funded by ASHA Seattle
  https://ashanet.org/project/?pid=787
Crime

- A 50-year-old Irula woman, Jyothi was raped and murdered on October 31, 2021 in Vadakupatti village in Chengelpettu district. Latha, the Sarpam Leader for Chengelpettu organized a meeting to raise awareness of the various issues Irula face. The police finally caught the criminal who was a 15-year-old boy.
Current Needs

• Several remote villages in Chengelpettu do not have access to basic needs like electricity, water and education
• The Chengelpettu community wants to primarily focus on bringing education to all the children
• Thruuvallur Sarpam Sangam is going work making a representation to the Govt for the need for free higher education for the Youth in Thruuvallur
Car put to good use

- ASHA Austin sent Siddamma Rs. 16.1 lakhs to purchase the car
- The total price of the car: 16,40,130.00
FCRA Compliance

- FCRA is currently valid only till June 30, 2022
- Bharathi Trust had applied for renewal in March 2020 timeframe and is still pending approval
Fellowship Disbursal (2022 – 2023)

- For the time period of April 2022 through March 2023, we will disburse Rs. 4,20,000

- Time to Vote
  - Yes - 7
  - No - 0
  - Abstain
Thank You
Asha Austin