

Otimé



Adivasi Kudumbashree of Attappady

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

ADS	Area Development Society
AGM	Annual General Meeting
AHADS	Attappady Hill Area Development Society
AVSS	Adivasi Vana Samrakshana Samiti
BLF	Block Level Federation
CDS	Community Development Society
CIF	Community Investment Fund
CLF	Cluster Level Federation
COO	Chief Operating Officer
CRP	Community Resource Person
DDU-GKY	Deen Dayal Upadhyay Grameen Kaushalya Yojana
GP	Gram Panchayat
MAM	Moderate Acute Malnutrition
ICDS	Integrated Child Development Scheme
MGNREGS	Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme
MKSP	<i>Mahila Kissan Shashaktikaran Pariyojana</i>
NHG	Neighbourhood Group
NMMU	National Mission Management Unit
NRLM	National Rural Livelihoods Mission
NTFP	Non Timber Forest Produce
ODF	Open Defecation Free
PMU	Project Management Unit
PSC	Public Service Commission
PVTG	Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group
RF	Revolving Fund
SAM	Severe Acute Malnutrition
CDS	Community Development Society
VRF	Vulnerability Reduction Fund

“First came the forest department. They took our land. Then came others. They took the rest of the land. Now we are stranded here without our own land. What do we have today? Liquor was brought to Attappady to push our men out of work. Now people need elephants to move trunks. It was not elephants but our men who moved trunks of trees here. They were strong enough to do that. They had the strength of an elephant. Now where are our men? They are all disappearing; getting buried as if in a hurry. We are facing extinction today.

How will we regain our lost strength? Our lost men? Our traditions? Our culture? Several projects came and went. None could help us regain what we once had”

*Rajamma, Leader, Taikulasangham, Attappady
Palakkad District, Kerala*

When a woman gets emotional with words, is it a sign of weakness? Hardly, especially when what she speaks is deeply political. Rajamma is a leader of *Taikulasangham*, an organisation of Adivasi women in Attappady, Palakkad District of Kerala. Initially reluctant, once she started speaking, she spoke at length. Looking at the camera through tearful eyes on occasions more than one, she spoke about the Attappady of her childhood; a childhood when children created toys and wove games around Attappady’s rich farming traditions.

Rajamma quipped that those were days before the ‘A-for-Apple-B-for-Ball’ era started. Those were the days when Adivasi men had the strength of elephants. Their hands were so powerful that they moved trunks of huge trees. After stopping for a moment, taking another moment to wipe off her tears, Rajamma said they were stranded now.

Several projects came and went. Nobody really understood what ailed the Adivasis of Attappady. Their land was alienated, their farms taken over, their men thrown to alcoholism, and their children died at birth, or a few days later. Children who ran around the village playing suddenly fell dead. Mothers died during delivery.

Year 2012-13; Attappady became famous; for all the wrong reasons. Rajamma stopped again, stood lost in thoughts for a few moments. Then she sat down, and wept.

1. Introduction to the Project

An ongoing project in Attappady in Palakkad district, aimed at the comprehensive development of tribal communities, stands out among Kudumbashree’s projects for the unique project strategy. The strategy involves building up exclusive tribal women institutions and capacitating them for addressing the plight of the tribal communities. The project has recognised the central position of a tribal hamlet, *Ooru* in local language, and has centred on *Ooru* as the basic domain for all initiatives. Unlike the Community Development Societies (CDS) of Kudumbashree, *Ooru samities*, the mid-layer community institution of tribal women has all the members of the neighbourhood groups (NHGs) in its general body.

The institutional structure allows multiple membership from the same family, thus attempting total enrolment of adult tribal women in the community institutions. Another key tenet of the project

strategy has been addressing the most clearly felt needs of the communities. In Attappady, given the disturbing yet overwhelming presence of starvation and malnutrition, the most felt needs related food and health. The ‘community cadre strategy’ of National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM) has been adopted in the project.

1.1 Background

Government of Kerala accorded administrative sanction to the Attappady Comprehensive Tribal and Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (ACT and PVTG) Development project on 3rd September, 2014. The Empowered Committee of the Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India, had approved the project on 18th February, 2014. The project, supported by the National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM), is of seven years’ duration.

The project has been conceived as a potential national model for working with tribal groups in general and PVTGs in particular. The project aims at comprehensive development of all the families of the three tribal communities of Attappady block in Palakkad district. These families belong to three communities – Irula, Muduga, and Kurumba. Of these, Kurumba is considered a particularly vulnerable tribal group (PVTG).

The project was formulated in the context of the incidents of child deaths, reported from the block, during 2012-14. With 58 malnutrition deaths reported over a short period, Attappady had gained nation-wide attention. It has been pointed out that land alienation and the loss of traditional food security systems had led to the state of poverty and malnutrition. Questions were raised on the effectiveness of the development projects implemented in the area over the last few decades.

The geographical area commonly referred to as Attappady is a rural development block covering three Gram Panchayats – Agali, Pudur, and Sholayur. It is part of Mannarkkad Taluk in Palakkad district. Attappady borders Tamil Nadu on the northern and eastern sides. Attappady is located close to the famous Silent Valley National Park. It is within the catchment area of Bhavani River, one of the east-flowing rivers of Kerala, and its tributaries – Siruvani and Kodungarapallam.

Table 1 summarises the demographic profile of the tribal communities in Attappady.

Name	Families	Men	Women	Population
Irula	7616	13160	13361	26521
Muduga	1274	2225	2443	4668
Kurumba	543	1128	1123	2251

Before independence, the population of Attappady was entirely tribal. Subsequently, waves of migration, which brought Tamil and Malayali settlers, put the tribal communities at a disadvantage and eventually outnumbered them too. As per the latest statistics, tribal communities are only 35% of Attappady’s population. Of these, Irula is the largest community, followed by Muduga, and Kurumba.

1.2 Objectives

The project endeavours comprehensive integrated development of tribal families of Attappady block. It aims at reducing vulnerabilities of the communities and improving their socio-economic and livelihood status. Another objective of the project is to maximise the communities’ access to their rights and entitlements.

The current project, as per the government order according administrative sanction, is a pilot; therefore, it is also intended to build the area as an 'immersion site' and 'training ground' for tribal and PVTG communities across the country. The project is also expected to nurture the social capital of community resource persons along with protocols and modules developed for deployment, wherever needed, for supporting and guiding the tribal and PVTG communities.

The project also proposes to train 6000 youth for skill development for placement and self-employment, each through separate convergence efforts.

1.2 Project Strategy

The project strategy involves social mobilisation and building exclusive social institutional structure of tribal women. Various components of the project, aimed at improving the social economic and livelihood status as well as at maximising community access to rights and entitlements including capacity building and skill development, are to be implemented through the social institutional structure.

The institutional structure envisioned in the project comprises neighbourhood groups (NHGs), *Ooru Samities* at hamlet level, and Panchayat *Samities* at the Gram Panchayat level. NHGs are women's collectives formed at neighbourhood level within hamlets. These are the building blocks of the social institutional structure. *Ooru Samities* are federations of NHGs at the hamlet level; these forums have general bodies comprising all the NHG members of the respective hamlets. The general body of the Panchayat Level *Samiti* consists of office bearers of all the *Ooru Samities* in the Gram Panchayat.

1.3 Implementation

The government has ordered the setting up of a Project Management Unit (PMU) headed by the Chief Operating Officer (COO), who is an officer of the National Mission Management Unit (NMMU) of NRLM. The COO has been placed by the Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India, at Attappady.

As per the government order, the PMU should consist of an Assistant Project Officer (APO) responsible for finances and administration of the PMU, and a Finance Manager who assists the APO. The APO has been delegated powers of a District Mission Coordinator of Kudumbashree.

The project team includes two Coordinators – one for social mobilisation and the other for institution building and capacity building, three Young Professionals, and a Consultant for *Mahilam Kissan Sasaktikaran Pariyojana* (MKSP). The project team has 120 Animators, drawn in from the communities and paid by the project. There are also Community Resource Persons (CRPs) and Para-Professionals among the paid staff of the project.

1.3.1 Status of Implementation

Implementation status of the project, as of January 2017, is provided in table below.

Activities	Gram Panchayats			Total
	Agali	Sholayur	Pudur	
Number of hamlets (<i>Ooru</i>)	75	51	66	192
Neighbourhood Groups	215	185	189	589
<i>Ooru samities</i>	41	34	45	120
Panchayat <i>Samities</i>	1	1	2	4
<i>Balagotrasabhas</i>	39	38	21	89
<i>Balagotra samities</i>	16	9	5	30

<i>Balagotra</i> Panchayats	1	1	1	3
Youth clubs	52	34	36	122
Labour Banks	45	44	44	133

1.4 Implementation Process

The current project started in the context of the high infant mortality reported from Attappady. Therefore, it was logical for the project to start with exploring the real problems that the tribal communities faced. It was clear to the project team that typical thrift and credit self-help groups may not work with the communities. Micro finance could not have been cornerstone for community mobilisation, as the communities were facing much more serious problems starting with starvation and malnutrition.

The 2013 survey, conducted for formulating the project, had identified the lack of food and malnutrition on the one hand and the need for immediate health interventions among the communities. It was decided start from these two fundamental issues.

“In a community that was so starved of food, it was impossible to do any mobilisation around thrift and credit”, says Seema Bhaskaran, the Chief Operating Officer (COO). “How can you talk about forming a neighbourhood group to women who haven’t had a meal the whole day? Can a bank account solve any of their problems?”

So, the Project team started from food and health. The first step was to initiate community kitchens in the hamlets. Community kitchens served food to children below six years, adolescent children, lactating mothers, pregnant women, widows, and the elderly. Food was served once a day in the evening, when people reached back the hamlets after the day’s work. This became an instant success with community kitchens being opened across the hamlets of the three communities in Attappady.

Community kitchens made community mobilisation easier for us, says Seema Bhaskaran. When the funds for operating the community kitchen had to be transferred, Neighbourhood Groups and *Ooru Samities* took the initiative to open bank accounts as they realised that the bank accounts were necessary for receiving the funds to run the kitchens.

Simultaneously, the project team recruited the community cadre and trained them to work on health issues in general and child and maternal health in particular. The project team and the community cadre helped identify the children facing ‘Severe Acute Malnutrition’ (SAM) and ‘Moderate Acute Malnutrition’ (MAM), and helped them access medical and nutritional support.

In addition to identifying and supporting SAM/MAM children, the community cadre supported the families, across hamlets, in availing health care and preventing malnutrition. Parallel to this, the project team has also been promoting the idea of traditional nutritional food of Attappady through the community kitchen. These two interventions helped the project team gain acceptance among the communities.

The community kitchen programme suffered subsequently as delays crept in during release of funds. However, the project took the idea to the next level and started working on Nutrition Education Centres. The idea is to build awareness on nutrition and health, while trying to restore the collective understanding of these communities on their indigenous habits relating to seasonally appropriate diet.

A Nutritional Food Festival was organised as part of an educational campaign. Women from 40 hamlets cooked various items from their traditional cuisine. The festival, while working as an event for community mobilisation and capacity building, also turned out to be an avenue for the display of a rich culinary tradition. A wide range of millets, varieties of pulses, vegetables and tubers, both wild and grown, were used for cooking.

2. Project Components

The project has been organised into three major components, with sub components and programmes under each. The major project components are Social Development, Livelihoods, and Skill Development. Under Social Development, there are two streams of programmes: Institution Building and Capacity Building. Fund flow to the communities is also managed under Social Development.

2.1 Social Development

Community institution building, capacity building, and funds to the community are under Social Development.

2.1.1 Institution Building

The community institution, as visualised, has NHGs that are federated at the hamlet level to *Ooru Samities*. These are further federated at the Gram Panchayat level to form Panchayat Level Federation. There is a Block Level Federation covering all the three Gram Panchayat Level Federations.

2.1.1.1 Neighbourhood Groups (NHGs)

Neighbourhood Groups (NHGs) are formed by organising women living in a neighbourhood within a hamlet. The size of a NHG is 10-20 women; the membership in a NHG is broadly maintained homogeneously. Special NHGs are formed for persons with disabilities, elderly, and other highly vulnerable sections. Such NHGs may comprise men also, if necessary. Smaller group sizes are allowed in the case of special NHGs.

Once the members of a NHG are identified, a first level training is conducted where the basic features of the proposed NHG are shared with the women. These include the '*Panchasutra*' and the responsibilities of the group. Typically the meeting gets into the reasons for their coming together and the rationale for forming the group. The second meeting elects the officer bearers of the NHG and appoints a bookkeeper. The members take an oath in this meeting.

The SHGs or NHGs that already exist in some of the hamlets can decide to be part of the new evolving institutional structure. In order to make themselves eligible, the groups have to decide to follow *Panchasutra*. A condition has been set for allowing entry that at least 70% of the members should be poor and vulnerable women.

Every NHG has a president, secretary, and treasurer. Volunteers are also selected for looking after thematic areas. There are volunteers for (1) Agriculture, (2) Education and Social Issues, and (3) Health.

These NHGs differ from the standard NHG design of Kudumbashree in the following aspects.

- NHGs are exclusively for tribal women
- Among tribal households, multiple members are allowed from the same family
- Volunteers are for agriculture, education and social issues, and health

“These two cannot be compared”, says Gauri, an Animator with the Project team. Gauri was responding to a question, asking her to compare the NHGs that had existed before the initiation of the project and the current NHGs.

Gauri, 30 years, is from Kollankadavu hamlet in Agali Gram Panchayat. Prior to joining the project team as Animator, she had worked with AHADS; she had also been a mate for MGNREGS and an Anganawadi teacher.

According to Gauri, tribal women could never be active in the old NHGs as they were invariably dominated by women from settler communities who were better-educated, rich, and had better leadership qualities. Even when tribal women became office bearers through reservation, they could never play any role. Everything used to be decided by the women from settler communities.

There were also problems with the management of NHGs, adds Vanchi, another Animator from Sholayur Gram Panchayat. She says in mixed groups tribal women would not be even informed about the meetings and other events. “Even if a tribal woman raises an opinion, she would be just shut off”, says Kamala from Mele Chavadiyur in Pudur Gram Panchayat.

CDS would never provide training in accounts management to tribal women under the pretext that they were incapable of keeping accounts. They were never considered for loans as the settler women feared that repayment would become problematic and that would affect the credibility of the group, says Meenakshi from Agali Gram Panchayat.

This led to a situation where tribal women were made passive recipients even in MGNREGS. “I did not become a mate through the Kudumbashree ADS; I was nominated through the Ooru Vikasana Samiti”, says Gauri. Ooru Vikasana Samities (OVS) were set up in Attappady under the AHADS project.



A Kurumba NHG in session, Kottiyarkandi, Puthur Gram Panchayat

2.1.1.2 Hamlet Level Federations – *Ooru Samities*

Ooru Samities are the primary level federations of the Neighbourhood Groups (NHGs) in the new system. Unlike the Kudumbashree Area Development Societies (ADS), which are organised mostly around wards, Ooru Samities are federations of the groups at the hamlet level. Their jurisdiction is a hamlet, irrespective of its size. However, in cases where there are not enough groups to form a federation, the groups could be part of a federation in a neighbouring hamlet.

The criterion for forming a primary level federation is to have at least five NHGs in a hamlet. The NHG itself acts as Ooru Samiti, wherever the population of eligible women is 20 or fewer.

Another important feature of *Ooru Samities* is that their general body comprises all the member of all the NHGs in a hamlet; the membership in the general body is not limited to the office bearers of NHGs. This makes *Ooru Samities* inclusive forums that could work as a platform for an entire hamlet.

Executive Committee of *Ooru Samiti* consists of its President, Secretary, Joint Secretary, Treasurer, and three Thematic Leaders responsible for (1) Agriculture, (2) Education and Social Issues, and (3) Health. Election to the Executive Committee requires that the member meets the non-negotiable criteria of working as a member or leader of a NHG. Ability to read and write, initiative and leadership, are also considered. The Executive Committee is elected at the meeting held for the very formation of the *Ooru Samiti*. The term of the committee is one year.

Presidents and Secretaries of the NHGs along with members specially nominated for the purpose by NHGs can become President, Secretary, Joint Secretary, or Treasurer of *Ooru Samiti*. Thematic Leaders are elected from among the NHG level Thematic Leaders.

The meeting for the formation of *Ooru Samiti* is held as a workshop, where the community facilitators try to ensure participation of all the NHG members in the hamlet. It is a capacity building exercise with sessions on the concept of collectives and their significance, social issues faced by tribal communities, addressing problems through collectives, and strength and potential of collectives.

The workshop also has sessions discussing agriculture, land and water, and other livelihood options. The members are provided with information on the project and the significance of *Ooru Samiti* in the community institutional structure.

The election process starts with a speech by the traditional head of the hamlet – *Ooru Moopan*. The general body elects the Executive Committee as well as the office bearers of the committee. The election is recorded in the minutes' register of the *Samiti* with signatures of all the members attending the general body meeting.

Once *Ooru Samiti* is formed, it registers all the NHGs using prescribed formats. Once this is done, the NHGs are considered affiliated to the *Ooru Samiti*.

Every *Ooru Samiti* has a bank account jointly operated by the President and Secretary. The Executive Committee constitutes sub committees for conducting various activities. Four sub-committees have been made mandatory for *Ooru Samities*.

- NHG Monitoring Sub-committee
- Social Mobilisation Sub-committee
- Bank Linkage and Repayment Sub-committee
- Social Action Sub-committee

Ooru Samities use the following grades and criteria for grading the NHGs.

Grade 1	NHGs adhere to the non-negotiables: Observance of <i>panchasutra</i> , preparation of micro-plans.
Grade 2	Absorption of funds, devising repayment schedule, adherence to repayment schedule.
Grade 3	Members taking up livelihood activities along with adherence to non-negotiables.
Grade 4	Accessing credit from the bank, accessing all entitlements from the Panchayats, Departments, and Agencies.
Grade 5	Members, after achieving all the above, take up social and cultural issues and address issues of legal rights.

2.1.1.3 Panchayat Level *Samiti*

Panchayat Level *Samiti* is the federation of all *Ooru Samities* in a Gram Panchayat; it is the equivalent of the Community Development Society (CDS) of the Kudumbashree community network. As Kudumbashree CDS is already in existence in the three Gram Panchayats of Attappady, the Panchayat Level *Samities* are not envisaged as parallel institutions to the existing CDS. Instead, the office bearers of the Panchayat Level *Samities* are ex-officio members of the existing CDS.

Executive Committee of the Panchayat Level *Samiti* consists of President, Secretary, Joint Secretary, Treasurer, and Thematic Leaders for (1) Agriculture, (2) Education and Social Issues, and (3) Health. Office bearers other than Thematic Leaders are elected from among the Presidents and Secretaries of *Ooru Samities*. Thematic Leaders in the Executive Committee are elected from among the respective Thematic Leaders of *Ooru Samities*.

Similar to the election process of the *Ooru Samities*, the Executive Committee and office bearers of Panchayat Level *Samities* are elected in the general body meetings that are held in the form of workshops. Discussions are held on the functioning of *Ooru Samities*, disbursement of funds, repayment, bank linkages, schemes and services availed, entitlements claimed, and livelihood and self-employment activities. Significance of the Panchayat Level *Samiti* and its roles are also discussed.

Panchayat Level *Samiti* is expected to

- Supervise and monitor *Ooru Samities* ensuring regular meetings and proper functioning.
- Monitor and review activities.
- Support *Ooru Samities* in implementation of activities
- Review the disbursement of vulnerability reduction fund, community investment fund and livelihood fund.
- Hold primary responsibility of disbursement of corpus fund.
- Audit books and accounts of *Ooru Samities*
- Look after producer federations as they evolve
- Conduct Social audit
- Manage activities entrusted by the Project Implementation Unit (during the project period).
- Represent the tribal NHGs in the meetings of departments and agencies.

In addition to the three Panchayat Samities in Agali, Sholayur and Pudur, the project organised a special Panchayat level samiti for the Kurumba community, which is the only PVTG in the project area. This was done based on the realisation that Kurumba settlements were relatively distant and

closer to the forest areas (The Silent Valley National Park and its buffer zones), and that they would not be able to participate in Samiti meetings as easily as the other two communities.

2.1.1.4 Block Level Federation (BLF)

The current project has used the structure promoted by NRLM for its community institution. Therefore, the topmost layer in the structure is a Block Level Federation (BLF), which is equivalent to the Cluster Level Federation (CLF) in the structure promoted by NRLM in other States. This is a major shift away from the Kudumbashree structure, which has Community Development Society (CDS) at the local government level as the top layer of the community structure. Panchayat Level *Samities*, which are considered equivalents of CDS in the Kudumbashree structure, are affiliated at the block level to form BLF.

The general body of the BLF consists of all the Executive Committee members of the three Panchayat Level Federations, and the fourth Panchayat Level Federation constituted exclusively for Kudumba community living in remote locations. The general body holds an annual general meeting (AGM) annually to elect its Executive Committee and office bearers. The office bearers of the BLF include President, Vice President, Secretary, Joint Secretary, and Treasurer.

In addition to electing the office bearers for the year, the AGM appoints a community cadre including Facilitators and Theme-Based Cadre such as *Bank Mitra* and *Bima Mitra*. The Executive Committee of the BLF constitutes sub-committees to carry out various activities. The following sub-committees have been made mandatory.

- Monitoring Sub-committee
- Repayment Sub-committee
- Social Action and Convergence Sub-committee

Other than these, the Executive Committee may constitute need based sub-committees.

Similar to the general body meetings at the other levels, the first AGM was also conducted as a capacity building workshop with detailed deliberations on various aspects of the project as well as the community structure.

Functions of Block Level Federation

- Provide support to the Panchayat Level Federations, *Ooru Samities*, NHGs, and the community cadre
- Monitor, support, and assess the performance of Panchayat Level Federations.
- Ensure convergence with line departments for helping members access their entitlements
- Disbursement of community investment fund to Panchayat Level Federations against micro credit plans
- Facilitate services such as insurance and pensions for members
- Conduct audit of Panchayat Level Federations through community cadre
- Guide and monitor community procurement processes
- Initiate livelihood collectives and activities at the BLF level
- Conduct training programmes
- Network and advocacy

2.1.1.2 Community Kitchens to Nutrition Education Centres

Community kitchen was conceived as an idea in the context of the widespread starvation reported from Attappady. It was initiated by the Social Justice Department of the Government of Kerala and was implemented through the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS). However, the programme was subsequently transferred to the current project. Kitchens are now managed by *Ooru Samities* at the hamlets and are run by NHGs in turns.

The Social Justice Department, Social Security Mission, Integrated Tribal Development Project, and Kudumbashree Mission together fund the community kitchen programme. These agencies take turns in transferring their share of funds to Kudumbashree Mission; the Mission then transfers the funds to the project.

Community kitchen along with health interventions opened the pathway to institution building. However, the community kitchen programme took a beating subsequently as operational issues at the government level led to delays in transferring funds. Community kitchens have become defunct some of the hamlets as a result.

Once the community institution building gained traction, the project team started working on converting these community centres into Nutrition Education Centres.

2.1.2. Capacity Building

Capacity building of the community is the key theme of the project. Capacity building programmes include training programmes, exposure visits, and activities and actions. It covers the communities, community cadre, and the project team. Two streams in which the programmes for capacity development have been organised are through Community Cadres and through Block Resource Centre.

2.1.2.1 Community Cadre

There are two streams of community cadres in the current project. The entire project is driven by a community cadre, trained for various programmes and activities. This cadre is paid salaries from the project funds. The second stream is the cadre developed as part of the community institution building. All the persons in both streams of community cadre are from the three tribal communities; all are local people.

Animators are the people who run the project on a day to day basis. They are responsible for community institution building and capacity building of the members. They are expected to handle all functions relating to institution building and capacity development. However, there is also some level of specialisation within the cadre.

There are around 30 persons specialising in education, 16 in social audit, and 40 in health; the remaining are generalists. Being a specialist means that the animator would be responsible for the programmes and activities in that specific thematic area, even as they carry out their general activities. Among Animators, around 30 have been made Senior Animators based on experience. Table shows that number of persons in each cadre.

Sl.No.	Community Cadre	Cadre Strength		
		Male	Female	Total
1	Animators		140	140
2	Community Resource Persons		59	59

	(CRP)			
3	Youth Coordinators	6		6
4	Para Professionals (MKSP)		10	10
	Total Strength	6	209	215

Para Professionals are specialists in Agriculture and are responsible for activities under *Mahila Kissan Shashaktikaran Pariyojana* (MKSP). Community Resource Persons form a cadre that could be used in future for similar programmes in other areas. Youth Coordinators are specifically for the programmes related to youth.

The second stream of community cadre is employed by the community institutions. The cadre includes NHG Book Keepers, and Bank *Mitra*. NHG Book Keepers are from among the members of the NHG and are selected based on their literacy or education levels and the trust that they enjoy from the members of the NHG. Active women are from well performing NHGs; they support other NHGs to improve their performance. Bank *Mitra* is selected from among the members to facilitate the bank linkage process and other bank related work.

Vulnerability Reduction Plans for Convergence

A major initiative in capacity building of the community network has been the preparation of Vulnerability Reduction Plans (VRP). These plans were prepared for each hamlet, through community mapping of resources and problems conducted at each hamlet. The process was facilitated by trained community cadre. The community network was asked to prepare their dream plans for the next five years of development for their respective hamlets. These are expected as comprehensive problem listing and proposed solutions. After all the plans are consolidated, they will be presented to the officers of various departments. This process is aimed at creating convergence of departmental programmes and schemes for addressing hamlet level development problems.

Adivasi Vana Samrakshana Samiti

It was during the efforts to intervene in the marketing of Non Timber Forest Produce (NTFP) that the project team came to know that *Vana Samrakshana Samities* (VSS) have not been formed in Attappady under the Forests Rights Act¹. The project took up the matter with the Chief Conservator of Forests, Kerala. Following this, steps have been taken to set up *Adivasi Vana Samrakshana Samities* (AVSS) in Attappady in cooperation with the community network. These *Samities* will have inalienable rights on collection, transportation, and marketing of NTFP. The step is expected to release the forest dwelling communities from the clutches of an existing exploitative system.

Training Programmes

Regular training programmes conducted as part of project implementation covers a range of themes and stakeholders. In addition to the project's own programmes, training programmes collaborating with government departments and agencies are also conducted for facilitation and convergence.

Areas/ Themes	Training Programmes
Institution Building	Members and leaders of the four tier community institution covering <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Book keeping - Management of <i>Ooru Samities</i>

¹ The Scheduled tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Micro Plan preparation - Business Plan preparation - Social audit - Grading of NHGs, <i>Ooru Samities</i>, <i>Panchayat Samities</i> - Preparation of Vulnerability Reduction Plans - Training of community cadre (various themes, for generalists and specialists among the community cadre – Animators, CRPs, and Para Professionals)
Social Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teachers' training for bridge school - Teachers' training for bridge course - Community cadre training
MKSP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Exposure visits for animators and leaders - Training of community cadre - Training for Community Resource Persons (CRP) - Village level training in micro enterprises
Funds to the community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Vulnerability Reduction Fund (VRF): Fund administration including criteria, repayment, duration, interest - Community Investment Fund (CIF): Fund administration - Livelihood fund for businesses
Convergence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Management of community kitchen: Attendance, vouching, intending, stock management, financing system, buying firewood and vegetables - Open Defecation Free (ODF) programme: Special training for masons²
Departmental schemes	Training programmes with <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Department of Health and Family Welfare - ICDS - Local Self Government Department
Special programmes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - For animators in identifying SAM/MAM children

2.1.2.2 Block Resource Centre

Block Resource Centre (BRC) has been conceived at the project level, as the hub of capacity building programmes aimed at different stakeholder groups. The BRC is expected to continue its activities beyond the project period. The BRC has the following programmes associated with it: Child Resource Centre, Gender Resource Centre, Youth Resource Centre, Legal Aid Centre, and Community Theatre.

2.1.2.2.1 Child Resource Centre

The project was initiated in the context of child deaths and widespread malnutrition in Attappady. Therefore, child health has been an overbearing priority for the project. Once the project activities gained momentum, the need to work with children in a more focused way became evident to the project team. Three main streams of activities are Bridge School, Bridge Course, and *Balagotrasabha*.

² As part of the training programme, two community toilets were constructed using locally available materials- Vayalur and Sambarkot. Each toilet block as four toilets and a bathroom.

Bridge School

Bridge School is an initiative to bring school drop outs of Attappady back to the educational system or a skill development stream. An early survey that the project team had conducted covered all the hamlets of Attappady. The team did a study of the schools where Adivasi children study, and the hostels where they stay.. The survey and the study together revealed the extent of school drop outs among Adivasi children. The project team presented the findings of the survey to the animators working on the hamlets and leaders of *Ooru Samities*. A demand to bring back drop outs to the schools came up from the communities.

Schooling for a Pittance, Dropout as Result

Excessive school drop outs in Attappady was caused by a set of reasons, both historical and political. There have been agents in Attappady who paid Adivasi households some money to take away their children under the guise of enrolling them in better schools elsewhere. These children were enrolled in government-aided private schools in town areas where schools were in need of more attendance to maintain vacancies of teachers. As teachers are appointed by school managements, reportedly taking huge amounts as capitation, and paid by the government, this provides lucrative avenues for school managements.

At the same time, these schools are also under pressure to maintain good results in public examinations. Therefore, the Adivasi children would be sent back after Class IX to the hamlets; they discontinue school after that. Inadequacies in food and nutrition, excessive alcoholism among men, and a lack of encouraging environment of education also contributed to higher dropout rates among Adivasi children.

It was an inquiry into the frequent incidents of suicide among adolescents that led the project team to the realisation that the failure of public education system in catering to the specific needs of Adivasi children had evolved into a social problem with serious ramifications.

The next step was identification of school drop outs across hamlets. The project mobilised the families of these children and organised a three-month camp for the children. It was not easy; there were 80 children to be accommodated, both boys and girls. Getting a space with sanitation facilities for accommodating such a large group was difficult. The project office was used for conducting the camp by moving the project team to a different location.

School drop outs who attended the camp had dropped out at various levels of education; many were even illiterate in spite of having attended schools for several years. The camp attempted to reintroduce schooling to the children. It used a different pedagogic approach with the following features.

- Contextualise knowledge to the characteristics of Attappady.
- Start with ideas and words and then move on to letters.
- Use of music and dance forms for communication.

Towards the end of the camp, demand for continuing education came up from the participants themselves. This was where the idea of 'Bridge School' came up. Bridge schools were started for boys and girls in different locations. These were residential in nature; the project arranged teachers for training the children. Children from the bridge school take three routes:

- Some of them can directly enrol in Class X in the public education system
- Others could take '*Tulyata*' examination conducted by the department of education of the State government and enter the school system at two different levels
- Children who had already passed their normal schooling age and had no interest in further studies can be enrolled for skill training

Bridge Schools catered to children in the age group of 12 to 20 years. A highlight of bridge school administration has been that it was conducted under the responsibility of two *Ooru Samities* – Chalayur in Puthur Gram Panchayat, and Nakkuppathy in Agali Gram Panchayat. The project transferred the fund required for the schools to the accounts of these *Samities*; and the *Samities* were supported in organising the schools.

Presently, Bridge schools are conducted in buildings within the campus of the Kerala Institute of Local Administration (KILA), the former campus of Attappady Hill Area Development Society (AHADS). The school has started coaching in football and karate to both boys and girls. These have gained wide acceptance among the participants.

Bridge Course

As part of the bridge school programme, the project organised a programme called *Munnettam*. This was based on a demand from the children from different hamlets. The demand came out of the need for supplementary education for children who continued in schools. Bridge school addressed the problem of the drop outs and tried to bring them back to schools. At the same time, school going children were underperforming in examinations as they lacked any support for their studies.

Munnettam was about conducting a three crash tuition programme for children preparing for Class X examinations during the year. The programme proved to be a success with several children coming out of the examinations with success levels that were beyond their imagination till then. This led to the demand for providing regular supplementary tuition support based out of hamlets.

Bridge course focused on the following aspects:

- Creating an ambience conducive for studies at the hamlet level. In typical Adivasi hamlets, children lacked any facility to study after school time. The programme provided a space for children to come together and study in the evenings on week days and more extended hours on weekends.
- Providing a '*Balamitram*', typically a person with educational training, who conducts the bridge course in the hamlet and works as a facilitator for studying children.
- Providing food twice at the hamlet for school going children, thus ensuring that lack of timely nutritional food does not adversely affect their schooling.
- Supervising and facilitating better hygiene behaviours and sanitation practices among school going children under the leadership of '*Balamitram*'.
- Creating an environment where every small achievement of a child is appreciated and complimented on. Experience shows that Adivasi children have habits and character that are unique and healthy. Appreciating these were expected to help them gain confidence and improve in their studies.

- Conducting cultural programmes and events. An event, organised as part of the programme called '*Changatikoottam*', was well-attended across hamlets, in all the areas of all the three tribal communities.

The programme emphasises on ensuring nutritious food on a regular basis to children, as well as on personal hygiene and health. The bridge course centres at the hamlets subscribe children's magazines and educational materials. It is more of a facilitation centre than a tuition centre. A regular tuition is not practical as there are students of different levels in the same class room. There could be children preparing for public examinations while others are reading out aloud from their text books. The facilitator of the centre acts as a teacher while clarifying doubts or in helping children to clarify the doubts.

Bridge Course has helped in providing the much needed educational support to Adivasi children. Bridge courses have been initiated in more than 120 hamlets by February 2017. Bridge Course, if properly conducted, are expected to make Bridge Schools redundant over time by reducing school drop outs. Teachers in charge of the Courses are qualified under the Teacher Training Programme in most cases. In some of the hamlets, the centres are run by persons with a bachelor degree in education.

The project has attempted to bring together Nutrition Education Centres, the Bridge Course, and the Producer Group of traditional healers. Nutrition Education Centres are based out of community kitchen, and is considered a follow up programme of the latter. Producer Groups of traditional healers have been formed under MKSP; these groups get Producer Fund from the project. These Groups are expected to link up with the Bridge Course and Nutrition Education Centre in ensuring healthy habits and fitness of the children.

Balagotrasabha

Similar to the three tier *Balasabha* structure of Kudumbashree, the Attappady project has organised children into *Balagotrasabhas*. These are the lowest units in the three-tier structure comprising Bala Samiti and Bala Panchayat. Activities are now underway to create a *Bala* Parliament at the Block level.

Balagotrasabha and Bridge School together have created fundamental changes in the environment at the hamlets. Children have activities to engage themselves, their food is assured, and there is Balamitram to support them. Adivasis of Attappady have been living in communes, and looking after children was everybody's responsibility. This was a well-entrenched community system where every child was taken care of collectively. This assumed more importance given the fact that adults had the freedom to withdraw from marriages and look for a new partner. In such cases, children did not have any problem of security and health as the entire community was concerned about their well-being.

Over the years, with changing life styles and practices among communities, and failure of old customs and practices, children lost the security and safety that they enjoyed through the collective responsibility of the communities. Added to this had been the woes of excessive alcoholism among men, promoted actively by settler communities. The communities lost out on farming and became wage labourers. The main losers in the process have been Attappady's children, along with women. Children not only lost their childhood in the process; they were even taken away to distant places to satisfy the student strength requirements of government aided private schools. High dropout rate was common among school children. Significant number of children also took to alcohol and substance abuse at early ages.

It is to this state of children that the Bridge courses and *Balagotra sabha* are making a difference.

2.2.2.2 Gender Resource Centre

Gender Resource Centre is part of the Block Resource Centre (BRC). Gender Resource Centre started its work by initiating discussion among Adivasi women on selected topics. The topics included resources and women's entitlements. Training programmes and discussions held helped women in critically looking at their status in the society and judge the social perceptions on women and children.

The Centre encourages women to engage in discussions on the problems and challenges that they face. The issues addressed include domestic violence, alcoholism among men, health issues, and women's status. Discussions with women showed that they have gained confidence and strength in addressing some of the critical issues that they have been facing.

An Agency of Adivasi Women

Taikulasangham is an organisation of Adivasi women of Attappady. It is not a traditional institution; nor is it a modern institution formed by any agency. It was an elderly woman who lived in Attappady who advised the women to form an organisation of their own. This was in the wake of the increasing alcoholism among Adivasi men caused by the availability of excess cash brought in by development projects such as those implemented by AHADS.

Taikulasangham is an inclusive organisation of practically all Adivasi women of the three Adivasi communities of Attappady across the three Gram Panchayats. The Kudumbashree Project had involved them from the early research stage, and carried their partnership through the project formulation phase, and to implementation.

It was under the leadership of *Taikulasangham* that the Adivasi women of Attappady waged a struggle against the liquor shop on the Tamil Nadu side of Anakkatty, a small town, and forced its closure by the government of Tamil Nadu.

When *Taikulasangham* resolved to agitate demanding the closure of the liquor shop in Anakkatty, the leaders were wary about the ability of the women to pull it through. The women had no experience in conducting such agitations. In addition, men were pitted against the strike in general and understandably so. The struggle had to be against all odds, and the women knew that it was going to be a long drawn one. It was 19 day leadership training conducted by the Kudumbashree Project that provided the women the confidence to launch the agitation. The project team also supported the agitation by throwing its weight behind *Taikulasangham*. The agitation, which had been successful in achieving the intended objective, had been a morale booster to a majority of the women in Attappady.

Taikulasangham's role in the project is unequivocal as all the members of Adivasi groups, the leaders, and the community cadre of women are their members. Recently Kudumbashree Project has entered into an agreement with *Taikulasangham* making it a resource agency for

Gender Resource Centre. The declaration to this effect was made by the Member of Kerala Legislative Assembly from Mannarkad constituency on 20th February, 2017.

‘Poverty affects men and women differently within the same household’, says Seema Bhaskaran. ‘Even when there is poverty in general, men spend on alcohol, young men buy expensive mobile phones and so on while the women survive at homes eating rice and tomato gravy’.

Kudumbashree’s decision to organise women’s groups was partly based on the realisation of differential experiences of poverty between men and women. The Women’s Component Plan (WCP) which was made compulsory in LSGI level planning came out of a realisation of the gendered nature of human and social development.

Scholars call it ‘gendered poverty’ and ‘feminisation of poverty’. The logic behind the Attappady project is perhaps an extension of the same argument; exclusive groups because poverty is experienced differently by Adivasis; and emphasis on women’s issues for addressing the gendered manifestations of poverty.

Women in Attappady have been facing serious malnutrition. Lack of food on the one hand and loss of appetite on the other have worked together in leading to the current state. Women also have the habit of chewing beetle leaves and tobacco throughout the daytime. This has been found to worsen the loss of appetite. Among other issues, Gender Resource Centre addresses malnutrition and food habits of women on a regular basis.

2.2.2.3 Youth Resource Centre

Youth Resource Centre is part of the Block Resource Centre and has upliftment of Adivasi youth as its objective. The Project Team had realised the need for working with youth early on as the struggle by the *Taikulasangham* against the liquor shop in Anakkatty progressed and succeeded. It was noted that there was widespread cynicism and apathy among Adivasi youth. Majority of them were school drop outs and had no avenues for employment. Many had taken to alcoholism and substance abuse.

It was the realisation that the changes that it intended to bring into the Adivasi communities would not be sustainable without changing the state of the youth that the Project Team initiated activities of the Youth Resource Centre.

Coaching for Government Job Aspirants

The first major activity was a coaching camp for government job aspirants from the Kurumba community. This was in response to a demand raised by the youth from the community. A 30 day residential training programme was organised in collaboration with a leading training agency of the State. Thirty five Adivasi youth from the Kurumba community attended the programme. The programme trained the participants in taking up examinations conducted by the State’s Public Service Commission (PSC).

The training programme, popularly known as PSC Coaching, was repeated for another batch in response to further demand from the communities. The second programme was also organised effectively. This course was attended by youth from all the three Adivasi communities of Attappady.

Youth Clubs

In spite of the successful PSC coaching programmes, a large majority of the youth among Adivasi communities remained aloof to the project activities. In order to address this, the project decided to use sports as means. At that time there were barely 10 or 12 youth clubs in Attappady. Youth Resource Centre organised more than 140 tribal youth clubs across the hamlets; these clubs are not exclusive. They have members from the settler communities too, wherever they are present.



A Volley Ball tournament in Vayalur

By end of February 2017, out of the 140 clubs, 34 were already registered under the Charitable Societies Act. The Project organised a football tournament in Attappady; in all 72 teams attended the tournament, which turned out to be a huge mobiliser of youth. A volley ball tournament followed this. Youth have become active in engaging with the project through their clubs now.

Labour Bank

Another initiative of the Youth Resource Centre has been the setting up of a labour bank. The objective of the programme is to end the labour exploitation prevalent in Attappady, which puts Adivasi youth at the receiving end. Formation of the Labour Bank is by registering employable youth, in the age group of 18-45 years, with the details of skills sets available with them.

The database is uploaded on the Kudumbashree web site. The database already has the details of around 3500 youth including men and women from Attappady. Youth Resource Centre envisages to develop the Labour Bank into an agency that takes up works on contract from government and private agencies in and around Attappady.

Culture Centre

Adivasi culture is rich, diverse, and nuanced. Three Adivasi communities of Attappady – *Irular*, *Muduga*, and *Kurumba* – have their own cultural traditions. However, there are common cultural tenets that these communities share too. Each community has their own language.

These languages are unique; however, there are common words and usages across the three. All the three communities are able to understand all the three languages in general.

Several of the nuanced cultural tenets and traditions of these communities have been lost over the years. Most of the cultural practices associated with farming traditions such as *Panchakrishi* have been closed. Festivals associated with harvests, events announcing changeover of seasons, celebrations relating to special food, and ceremonies conducted for specific reasons were part of it. Occasional temple festivals too are aligned with seasonal ceremonies.

Community singing and dancing have been part of their culture. The collective celebration and action that the project tried to revive under the MKSP scheme – *Kambalam* – has been associated with clearing the land and tilling for sowing seeds. There had not been any *Kambalam* over the last thirty years or so before the project started. When the project attempted reviving it, the response has been heartening. People participated in the event with passion and enthusiasm.

Farming and food habits were integral part of the culture. So was traditional healing. Adivasi people enjoyed good health from a system based on healthy food and community living. Their food consisted of a variety of cereals, pulses, and herbs including green leaves. Elders among the Adivasi communities claim that food was their medicine; they never fell ill. It is believed that the longevity of the past generations used to be really high.

The project has been trying to revive the farming and the food system. It has helped the communities regain their seed varieties from even outside the State. The project has tried to bring together school going children, the concept of nutrition education centres and community kitchen, and traditional healers, who are there in significant numbers even today among the communities. The coming together of these three is expected to contribute to healthy upbringing of children. This is where the concept of Bridge School is headed for.

'Sopputhod' is a ritual performed at the tribal hamlets which marks the beginning of the season in which they eat spinach and other green leaves as part of their daily food. Spinach is brought to every *Ooru*, some rituals are performed over the cooked spinach, and it is eaten by the entire community. This event is typically held in the second half of June every year.

Picture shows the shed in which this ritual is performed in Kottiyarkandi hamlet in Puthur Gram Panchayat where it was done on 22nd June, 2016. The man in the picture is the one who performs the rituals.



Tribal communities of Attappady have the tradition of seasonal diet systems which is reflected in the way they cultivate different crops. Their multi-crop mixed cultivation system, which produces different varieties of cereals and pulses in different seasons, is practised even today in some of the hamlets. The system, which had become almost extinct in the wake of years of domination by settler-driven farming practices, are now being revived under the Nutrition Education Centre initiative under the current project.

Decades of exploitative engagement with outsiders and the influence of alcoholism affected the culture. Intergenerational transfer of the culture had been affected as children were sent away from the hamlets to hostels.



Community Theatre

Culture centre is an endeavour to revive some of the nuanced cultural tenets and traditions of the three communities, many of which, unfortunately, have been lost over time. This is being attempted by forming culture centres at all hamlets, initiated through the Community Theatre group and facilitated by the community cadre.

2.2.2.4 Legal Aid Centre

Objective of Legal Aid Centre is to provide legal support to Adivasi women. Legal Aid Centre has a legal advisor to assist its programmes. Women get legal advice and support on issues ranging from domestic violence to child sex abuse. It is through training programmes that Adivasi women gain awareness of the laws that could protect their interests in situations of conflict and oppression. Legal Aid Centre, therefore, has a comprehensive approach in ensuring legal awareness and in providing support.

2.2.2.5 Community Theatre

Adivasi communities of Attappady had their own theatre; this too had been associated with the farming culture and events. Every village has a person designated as the Village Clown (*Komali*). *Komali* used to be the messenger, narrator, and lead player in cultural programme including traditional theatre.

The project has formed a community theatre, which made a street play focusing on social evils such as child marriage, alcoholism and drug abuse. The play has been performed in more than

50 locations already. It has won a special award of the *Sangeet Natak* Academy. The play has now become a regular item in the events organised as part of the project.

Community choir is an effort in reviving the community singing tradition of the Adivasi communities. A troupe has been formed that has both men and women singers as well as percussionists playing traditional instruments. A song written and composed by an Adivasi youth has been creating ripples in Attappady's cultural arena for the last few months. The troupe's performance has a slot in any major programme held in Attappady these days.



Community Choir

It is the Community Theatre group that leads the formation of culture centres across hamlets.

2.1.3 Funds to the Community

Thrift and Credit

Every member has to compulsorily save an amount with the NHG; the amount to be saved is decided by the group and is collected weekly. NHG keeps books of accounts to track the transactions. Every NHG opens a Savings Bank (SB) Account three months after its formation and regular functioning. The NHG deposits the money collected through the thrift programme.

NHG uses the money collected, through the savings programme, to lend small amounts to its members. The interest rate is 2% per month. Members raise their requirement for credit in the NHG meetings; the meeting decides on the eligibility and priority for internal lending.

Financial Inclusion

National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM) provides the following funds to the community institutions for financial inclusion.

- Revolving Fund (RF) to the NHGs, Rs 15,000 per NHG
- Vulnerability Reduction Fund (VRF) to the Panchayat Level Federation, Rs 1500 per member.
- Community Investment Fund (CIF) to the Block Level Federation, Rs 3000 per member.

Using the above sources, and also utilising funds under MKSP, the following funds are made available to the community institutions.

Sl.No.	Fund Type	Fund Size	Particulars
1	Revolving Fund (RF)	Rs 10,000 per NHG	Given as corpus to NHGs to meet members' credit needs; available to NHGs practising <i>Panchasutra</i> . Disbursement is within 3-6 months of NHG's formation.
2	Start-up Fund	Rs 1 lakh per <i>Oooru Samiti</i>	This is a one-time payment made directly to Ooru Samities for meeting their setting up and operational expenses.
3	Vulnerability Reduction Fund (VRF)	Rs 1 lakh per <i>Oooru Samiti</i>	Given to <i>Oooru Samities</i> . <i>Samities</i> select three NHGs among those affiliated with them and provide funds based on micro credit plans (MCP). Fund is to be used for addressing vulnerabilities like lack of food security, health security etc. Individuals are offered loans based on vulnerability factors accepted by the NHGs.
4	Community Investment Fund (CIF)	Rs 1,20,000 per <i>Oooru Samiti</i>	Fund is given to Panchayat Level <i>Samiti</i> ; <i>Oooru Samities</i> get the fund from Panchayat <i>Samiti</i> and give to NHGs. Two NHGs can be given Rs 60,000 each; these NHGs are selected based on business plans prepared for livelihood activities. NHGs can offer the amount as loans to either individual members, Rs 30,000 maximum, or to four-member groups, Rs 60,000 maximum. The condition has been relaxed for Kurumba community in remote villages as funds may have to be distributed to more people to support working capital requirement for farming. NHGs are to repay the funds directly back to Panchayat Level <i>Samiti</i> .
5	Producer Fund (MKSP)	Rs 15,000 per NHG	Given directly to NHGs; to be used for lending for agricultural activities only.
6	Livelihood Fund	Rs 1 lakh	Meant for livelihood initiatives of relatively larger scale by groups; Can be given to NHG, <i>Oooru Samiti</i> , or Panchayat Level <i>Samiti</i> . These institutions can give the fund to groups; bank loans for higher investment are encouraged.

Given the specific context in which the project is being implemented, the Project Management Unit has made certain changes in the administration of the funds.

- Interest rate payable by members has been fixed at Re 1 per Rs 100 of loan or 1% irrespective of the period of loan. This in practical terms means- a woman taking a loan of say Rs 1000 pays only Rs 10 as interest, no matter what the repayment period is.
- Even though Vulnerability Reduction Fund (VRF) has a provision to be made into a grant to the NHGs, it has been termed a loan. This is to avoid creating an impression of free funds being made available among the communities. However, the Ooru Samities have been given the leeway to write it off as a grant wherever required.
- In the case of CIF, lending condition has been relaxed for Kurumba community. As this community is mostly located in remote locations and are poorer and more vulnerable compared to the other two communities, the CIF money can be distributed to a larger

number of members in smaller amounts as prescribed by the guidelines. While the guidelines allow Rs 30,000 to individuals and Rs 60,000 to four-member groups, smaller amounts to more members have been allowed in this case.

2.2 Livelihoods – MKSP

Kudumbashree Project has aligned with the *Mahila Kissan Sasaktikaran Pariyojana* (MKSP) under the National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM) of the Government of India to draw up a plan for rejuvenating the traditional agricultural practices of the Adivasi communities of Attappady. The food crisis, widespread malnutrition, and child deaths could be linked to the land alienation Adivasi communities faced and the loss of their traditional agriculture.

Panchakrishi has been a farming method, which was part of the Adivasi culture of Attappady. It was a farming method that used mixed varieties of cereals and pulses; it was known for staggered harvesting seasons primarily ensuring food security of the communities across seasons. Seeds were preserved with diligence; seed processing, storage, and use had been part of Adivasi culture and rituals.

Over the years, as Adivasi communities lost their land to settlers, and as they were driven out of forest land by the Government, the *Panchakrishi* system faced setbacks. Development projects in Attappady too led to converting these self-reliant communities into wage labourers. Adivasis ironically became wage labourers on land that they once thought was theirs. The exploratory studies held in 2013 for formulating the current project had found that the loss of traditional farming systems have been at the core of the malnutrition and death that the Adivasi communities faced.

Therefore, while the project started by setting up community kitchens for community mobilisation, revival of traditional farming practices and eating habits became part of the project strategy. This, however, was not an easy task as many of the rare seeds had been lost over the years, and the land available for cultivation was limited. The project took the initiative to identify the important seed varieties and making them available from other States for cultivation by Adivasi communities in Attappady.

Along with this, Kudumbashree Project started a redistribution of available seeds by allowing the Kurumba neighbourhood groups to save in kind. The Kurumba women sold the excess seeds that they had held to Kudumbashree, which was then distributed to other areas. As seed became available and when people saw that they were being encouraged by the project for cultivation, several hamlets took to their traditional farming practice of *Panchakrishi*.

The project team encouraged the communities to organise *Kambalam*, the traditional land ceremony that marked collective land preparation for cultivation. *Kambalam* had been lost as a cultural event some 30 years back, according to community sources. Revival of *Kambalam* and active involvement of the project team in it created lot of enthusiasm among the communities of Attappady.

Producer groups have been formed at the Gram Panchayat level based on the nature of activities that are dominant in the area. Producer groups were formed in Gram Panchayat broadly based on their strengths in specific sectors.

- Agriculture: Sholayur

- Goat Village: Agali
- Non-Timber Forest Produce (NTFP): Puthur
- Honey collection: Kurumba Panchayat Samiti
- Traditional Healers' Group: Block level

Agriculture Producer Group, Sholayur

Farming is done by individual farmers in their own land. The Producer group based in Sholayur provides support on the input side to all the farmers in the three Gram Panchayats. Making seeds available and initiating 'Kambalam' have been able to trigger an interest among Adivasi farmers.

The first harvest was impressive and the project team organised a sale of the products at the premises of Thrissur District Collectorate. The marketing effort met with success; the Adivasi communities realised the potential of their produce to fetch good prices. The products were sold under the brand name '*Malleeswara Products*', after the main deity of the Adivasi communities of Attappady.

Legends of Malleeswaran

Malleeswaran is the presiding deity of the three Adivasi communities of Attappady. *Malleeswaran* peak, along the hill that borders Attappady, is visible from most of the hamlets in the area. Adivasi people believe that the peak is their source of protection and strength. In fact, people of the few hamlets from where the peak is not visible believe that they had been cursed by the God.

The annual festival at *Malleeswaran* temple is marked by a ritual that is central to the *Panchakrishi* system of Attappady. People offer varieties of seeds on that day at the temple. At the end of the event, the mixed seed lot is distributed to the devotees.

The Producer groups sell several products under the label '*Malleesrawam Products*'. Products are sorted, packed, and labelled. The groups have made arrangements to sell the products in Thrissur, Palakkad, and Mannarkad towns. The current portfolio includes honey, millets, millet flour, tour dal (pigeon peas), ground nut oil, and mustard.

Goat Village Project, Agali

Goat rearing is close to the culture and lifestyle of Attappady's Adivasi communities. They used to keep animals and birds for occasional consumption. Later traders from the mainland entered the scene. They would visit the hamlets, identify animals, and fix a price, which would be typically very low. Once they fix the price, the animals would be left with the family with the responsibility to look after them, but without any right to sell or use.

'We always used to rear goat and chicken. They were part of our life. Whenever there was a shortage of meat, we used to use the goats and

chicken for meat. The entire family and neighbours together would kill a goat and eat. There was no concept of selling. Later when we started selling, we never used to get good price. People would come from Kerala and give us some money and reserve the goats for them. We continue looking after them and when they grow up, those people would come and take them. Now with Kudumbashree, all that has changed. We get good price for our animals now'

- Kali, Community Resource Person

'You can't imagine the extent of exploitation. 'They' would come and declare a price, and we have to sell at that price. Now the price we get is two to three times what we used to get'.

- Rajamma, Leader, Taikulasanghom

At present, the Producer group in Agali has made a central facility for goat rearing and have appointed staff to look after the goats. Veterinary support has been ensured. Farmers can sell their goats to the Producer groups; the group keeps the goats and sells in the market.



Goat Rearing Centre

By the end of February, the group had got 225 goats in their facility; 46 goats had been sold at competitive prices. Farmers are getting prices two to three times of what they used to get.

NTFP Producer Group, Puthur

Puthur is the abode of the particularly vulnerable tribal group Kurumba. This community lives in remote areas, far away from the town area, and closer to the Silent Valley National Park. There is a Kurumba Society with authorisation to collect and sell non-timber forest produce (NTFP). In reality, the Society had been captured by settlers and a settler family has been running it since then. Even though the authorisation for NTFP collection has been for Kurumba people, the entire trade was being managed by the above group. Kurumbas have been made to sell their NTFP at throw away price.

Kurumbas never had any link with the market and therefore did not know about the market price of the NTFPs that they collect. Over the years, they were even replaced from the collection of NTFP while others took up collection in their name. When the project team as part of MKSP started discussing the issue with the Kurumba families, there was severe opposition from the current Society. It was then that the project team realised that the Department of Forests had not formed Vana Samrakshana Samities of Adivasis under the Forests Rights Acts. The project did lobbying for this, and simultaneously established an NTFP Producer group in Puthur.

Against the opposition by the well-established Kurumba Society managed by settlers, the Producer group set up a system where a single *Ooru Samiti* buys the NTFP collected by the members of NHGs in the whole area. The NTFP are bought, dried and sold by the Producer group at the *Ooru Samiti*. The first attempt to establish a marketing arrangement with Oushadhi, the Ayurvedic agency owned by the State government did not succeed owing to lukewarm response from the Oushadhi management. Then they tried other means; however, the Producer group has been able to eventually establish marketing links with Oushadhi.

The Producer group has already sold (by February 2017) NTFP worth Rs 12 lakh. The members are happy with the price that they are getting now. Potential is huge, but the Producer group needs business management support to firm up the processes and linkages.

Honey Collectors' Producer Group, Kurumba Panchayat Samiti

The honey that the Kurumba communities collect is probably the best available in Kerala. However, this Adivasi community has never been able to sell their honey at a reasonable price. While forming the Panchayat level *samities* of NHGs, the project had formed a special samiti for federating the Kurumba *Ooru Samities* considering their remoteness and isolation from other areas. A Producer group of the honey collectors from the Kurumba community has been formed to try out developing a business model for marketing honey. The Producer group has started selling bottled and labelled honey in the market.

Traditional Healers' Producer Group, Attappady

An understanding of malnutrition and child death as phenomena caused by the loss of traditional farming culture, food and dietary habits, and its political-economy links to the progressive alienation of land that the Adivasi communities faced, have been the corner stone on which the project strategy had been drawn up. To sum it up, as Rajamma rightfully said, 'food was our medicine'. Diet based on millets, pulses, herbal plants, and meat is what kept them healthy.

Traditional healers of Attappady have been a pivotal element in the traditional healthy living of the Adivasi communities. These people, present across hamlets, had become inactive over the years when the communities saw their traditions and culture getting degraded. The knowledge of the traditional healers too was dying, with the passing of a generation.

In this context, the project brought in the Traditional healers as the third and binding component in a scheme that included Nutrition Education Centres and Bridge course. The concept is about linking food, personal hygiene, health, and education of the children at the hamlet level. In order to revive the system of Traditional healers and to encourage them to actively participate in the programme, the project took the initiative to form a Producer group for them. Traditional healers, once identified and recruited, become eligible for loans and other benefits from the Producer group.

The system of Nutrition Education Centres, Bridge course, and Traditional healers has started working at the hamlet level. The Producer group has to develop a revenue model for sustaining its work.

2.3 Skill Development

Skill development is a stream of activities managed separately; however, the administration is through the Youth Resource Centre, and logically so as the programme is aimed at developing employable skills among youth and supporting them to find avenues of employment.

The project has collaborated with Nettur Technical Training Foundation (NTTF), a private educational trust approved under the Deen Dayal Upadhyay Grameen Kaushalya Yojana (DDK-GKY) for providing skill training to Adivasi youth. A total of 90 youth have been trained in three batches. Even though the package included placement of the trained youth, it had only been partially successful, warranting a revision of the skill training strategy.

Kudumbashree has identified two more agencies and areas for skill training. The agencies are Apollo Hospital, Thiruvananthapuram, and Skill Pro, Palakkad. Two batches of youth have further been recruited for training. Apollo trains people to take up jobs as General Duty Assistants and Pharmacy Assistants while Skill Pro conducts programmes such as 'Electrician', Retail Shop Assistant, and in Hospitality Management.

Meanwhile, Kudumbashree held discussions with NTTF to start courses of longer duration. NTTF has agreed to start a course in data entry at Malappuram; mobilisation is on for recruiting youth for the training. There is also a proposal for starting new courses in electrical wiring and plumbing, with batches of 30 each, in Attappady itself.

3. Conclusion

The ACT-PVTG Project in Attappady has proved that it is possible for Kudumbashree to break the barriers to build community institutions among tribal groups. In order to prove this, Kudumbashree had to break away from its established methodology and reconcile with the idea of exclusive tribal groups. The experiment proves that the exclusive groups that Kudumbashree tried out in Attappady in fact gave an impetus to the process of inclusion; inclusion of some of the most vulnerable communities of the State in the Kudumbashree network. Sustained efforts and focused work would be necessary for mentoring the community institutions and the structure for future.