

The LAYA Chronicle

RHYTHMS OF NATURE AND RESILIENT LIVES
AND WEAVES IN THE JOURNEY

The LAYA Chronicle

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LAYA is a Resource Center for Adivasis. Adivasi communities are increasingly marginalized in spite of inhabiting resource rich areas and are constantly threatened by commercial interests interfering with their habitats.

For more information about our activities, please visit our website:
www.laya.org.in

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FOREWORD

LAYA is one of the many civil society organisations, which has stood the test of time and has had similar and unique achievements and stories to tell. The story that is presented here reflects the journey of LAYA. Started in mid-80s we feel fortunate that the LAYA team has been able to sustain the organisation all these years. The baby steps that were initiated way back in 1984 are beginning to fructify, although we still have a long way to go.

This chronicle would never have been a reality, if it were not for Uma Ramaswamy, who took up the challenge whole heartedly to pen the journey of LAYA. She has managed to capture the essence of LAYA's story, which is a tribute to the myriads of people, who have been associated with LAYA.

This chronicle comprises two main parts: Rhythms and Weaves. Rhythms fleshes out the substantive journey, governance processes, achievements, and outcomes. As I read the narration on Rhythms, I realised that Uma has viewed our experiences with empathy and critical appreciation. Weaves unravels some of the key voices from the governance system, management, and support partners. It was indeed heart-warming to listen to voices from those who have accompanied LAYA through the high and low periods of time. Innumerable people have been part of the growth process of LAYA. Much of what has been achieved hence has been through teamwork, a process that we all value and safeguard zealously. Many have come and gone but their contribution has remained! We thank each person who has been associated with LAYA as part of the team or as well-wishers.

Finally, LAYA would not have been able to achieve what it did without the generous support of many donors, who supported us throughout the process and continue to do so, even as we diversify our partners. There were those who accompanied us in the very beginning stages where the risks of sustenance were high. There were others who have been long-term donors with whom we have enjoyed a very enabling relationship and who have invested in us and continue to be our esteemed partners.

- Nafisa Goga D'Souza

LAYA OVER THE YEARS

FIRST PHASE

- Established Project LAYA under Society for People's Action for Development (SPADE), 1985
- First office, located in a thatched hut in a remote village, Tungamadugula
- Early beginnings on issues of land, 'de-certifying' of powerful non-tribal families
- Intervention in relation to social forestry government programme, non-formal education, health, agricultural development, work with youth and women, thrift and micro credit

SECOND PHASE

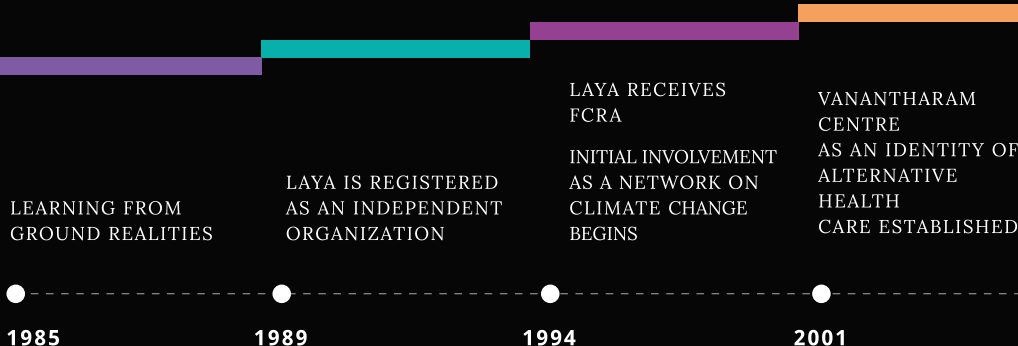
- LAYA is registered at Visakhapatnam, 1989
- Established LAYA Resource Centre, 1989
- Campaign against repeal of protective law for Adivasis Regulation 1/70, 1990
- Decentralized units for thematic areas of work established
- Initiated youth training programmes at the central (Yuva Parichay) and regional levels (Yuva Sikshana and Yuva Chaitanya), 1991-92
- Thatched centre established in Sirsapalli, Paderu, 1993
- Established 'Mannemlo', a news letter in Telugu, 1994

THIRD PHASE

- FCRA Registration, 1995
- Management and Governance Systems established
- Early deliberations on Climate Change
- Executive Director becomes a member of Ethical Response Team, Climate Change, WCC, Geneva, 1995
- INECC founded in 1996 with Executive Director as Convener
- Initiation of 'EcoEthic', a newsletter on climate and environmental issues, 1999

FOURTH PHASE

- LAYA-INECC organizes an alternative event on Climate Change during Conference of Parties (COP) 8, UNFCCC, New Delhi, 2002
- Jointly promoted Indian Institute of Paralegal Studies (IIPLS), 2002
- Established Vanantharam to legitimize Herbal Based Health Care systems, 2003
- Crash literacy programme for Adivasi Women Leaders established, 2004
- Adivasi Samvaad III, a national event organized at Addateegala, 2005



FIFTH PHASE

- Associate Director, elected as member of the Executive Council of ASPBAE, bringing insights on lifelong learning to LAYA
- Setting up of decentralized energy clusters, 2008
- Key micro-hydro project set up at Pathakota, East Godavari district, 2009
- LAYA receives observer status at UNFCCC, 2009
- First Carbon Credit programme registered under the Gold Standard
- Registration of a pharmacy in Vanantharam, 2012

SIXTH PHASE

- New LAYA office at Visakhapatnam, 2013
- 10-day crash literacy documented in UNESCO library of the Institute of Lifelong Learning (UILL)
- Consultative Status to UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), 2015
- Paderu office cum training centre established, 2015
- Health Award of Excellence received by Herbal Based Health Care Unit, 2016
- First course on Herbal Based Health Care as a part of the Community College idea initiated, 2018

ONGOING PHASE

- Andhra Pradesh State Biodiversity Conserver Award, 2019
- Begin documentation of Stories of Change of LAYA's interventions, 2019
- Change Management Committee established and Succession Plan put into place, 2019
- Response to Pandemic, 2020

FOCUS ON CLIMATE
CHANGE AND
DECENTRALIZED
ENERGY ISSUES AT THE
LOCAL LEVEL AND
LINKED TO GLOBAL
PROCESSES

ENGAGEMENT OF
LAYA TEAM MEMBERS
IN RESOURCE ROLES

INITIATION OF THE
COMMUNITY COLLEGE
IDEA TO TRANSFER
LEARNING PROCESSES

CHANGE MANAGEMENT
AND SUCCESSION
PLAN UNFOLDING

2012

2018

CURRENT

Rhythms of Nature and Resilient Lives

Chapter 1 : Inceptual Years, Organizational Threshold, Institutional Architecture and Transformative Paradigm

- 01 BEGINNINGS
- 02 ORGANIZATIONAL THRESHOLDS AND EXPANDING INSTITUTIONAL ARCHITECTURE
- 07 PARADIGM OF TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE
- 10 LEADERSHIP STYLES, GOVERNANCE AND FINANCIAL SYSTEMS
- 14 PROFILING CURRENT BOARD MEMBERS
- 18 LAYA'S INSTITUTIONAL UNIVERSE

Chapter 2 : Safeguarding Land Rights and Making Socio-Economic Rights Justiciable

- 25 GENESIS
- 28 SETTING UP RESOURCE FOR LEGAL ACTION UNIT
- 29 CAPACITATING A CADRE OF PARALEGALS
- 30 POLICY DELIVERY AND LEGAL ACTION
- 31 MULTI-PRONGED STRATEGY FOR LEGAL ACTION AND ADVOCACY
- 33 MAKING SOCIO-ECONOMIC RIGHTS JUSTICIABLE
- 34 SAFEGUARDING ADIVASI RIGHTS
- 36 LAWYERING FOR ADIVASIS AT RESOURCE FOR LEGAL ACTION UNIT
- 37 MAKING A DIFFERENCE TO ADIVASIS AS PARALEGALS
- 38 LANDMARK JUDGEMENTS

Chapter 3 : Resilient Pathways in Livelihoods: Adaptation, Mitigation and Sustainable Development

- 52 SEARCH FOR FERTILE LAND
- 53 MODELS IN ADAPTATION AND MITIGATION
- 54 ADAPTIVE VARIANTS IN NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT
- 58 ENERGY GAPS AND RENEWABLE ENERGY
- 59 GRAVITY FLOW AND HYDRAM TECHNOLOGIES
- 59 MICRO-HYDRO
- 60 BIO-SAND WATER FILTER
- 60 SLOW-SAND WATER FILTER

62	IMPROVED COOKSTOVES
64	WASTE-TO-ENERGY FOR ASHRAM SCHOOL KITCHENS
65	WOMEN MATTER: TRANSFORMATIVE GENDER SITES
70	MAKING AN IMPACT
74	PROFILING BIODIVERSE CROPS, PRACTICES AND LOW-CARBON TECHNOLOGIES
	STORY OF CARBON FINANCE
76	SYSTEM OF RICE INTENSIFICATION (SRI) IMPROVED YIELDS
77	SHIFTING TO CLIMATE RESILIENT ORGANIC CROPS

Chapter 4 : Streaming Lifelong Learning Empowered Leadership and Community Based Organizations and Networks

86	EARLY INITIATIVES PAVES THE PATH
87	PEDAGOGY AND ANDROGOGY OF ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION
94	GRASSROOTS ADIVASI-LED CBOS AND NETWORK
95	LIFELONG LEARNING THROUGH COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Chapter 5 : Establishing a Model in Herbal Based Health Care

107	HEALTH VULNERABILITY AND DEFICITS
107	EARLY EXPERIMENTS WITH AYURVEDA
109	MORBID HEALTH SYNDROME
110	REVIVAL OF HERBAL BASED HEALTH CARE
114	TRADITIONAL HEALTH PRACTITIONERS
115	COMMUNITY HEALTH PRACTITIONERS

Chapter 6 : Building Community Resilience of Marginalized Majority: Engaging in Policy Advocacy

123	BIODIVERSE EASTERN GHATS
124	DEBATING CLIMATE CHANGE
125	THREE CRITICAL RESPONSES IN CLIMATE ACTION ARE ADAPTATION, MITIGATION, AND RESILIENCE
126	LAYA-INECC: DEMONSTRATING, ADVOCATING, INFLUENCING MULTI-STAKE HOLDERS ROLE IN CLIMATE CHANGE
126	LAYA'S FOUNDATIONAL CLIMATE ACTION

127	COMMUNITY-BASED MODELS IN ADAPTATION, MITIGATION
128	ENTERING URBAN SPACES
129	INFLUENCING POLICY DIALOGUE
130	ENGAGING WITH STATAL BODIES
131	CONFERENCE OF PARTIES - SIDE EVENTS
134	STRATEGIC ENGAGEMENTS OF LAYA-INECC
134	NETWORKING TO SHARE AND ADVANCE MODELS IN COMMUNITY RESILIENCE
135	RESEARCHING AND KNOWLEDGE BUILDING
139	CLIMATE CHANGE EDUCATION
143	ADVOCATING ECOSYSTEM-BASED APPROACH FOR ECOLOGICAL RESTORATION
144	MOVING AHEAD WITH COMMUNITY RESILIENT MODELS AND CRITICAL THOUGHT ON CLIMATE CHANGE
145	VOICES FROM THE FIELD

Weaves in the Journey: Some Voices

Governance: Board Members

155	DR. LATA NARAYAN • MS. MANI MISTRY ELAVIA • MS. NANDINI NARULA • MS. N.V. RAMA NANDANAVANAM • MR. SANJAY KHATUA • DR. RITESH P. KHUNYAKARI • DR. NAFISA GOGA D'SOUZA
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Inceptual Years, Organizational Thresholds, Institutional Architecture and Transformative Paradigm

CHAPTER 1 - OVERVIEW

BEGINNINGS

Dr. Nafisa Goga D'Souza and Mr. Dominic D'Souza, the founding pioneers of LAYA, were probably unaware that in the decades to come, LAYA would play a major role in the transformative processes in the lives of Adivasis and other forest-dwellers of the Eastern Ghats. Nafisa and Dominic, academics, both teaching at the reputed Nirmala Niketan College of Social Work in the Maximum city of Mumbai made a bold shift when their student persuaded them to relocate and work for the well-being of Adivasis in Eastern Ghats. Neither knew Telugu, the local language, nor the specific Adivasi contexts. For the pioneers there was no looking back. Therein, the story of LAYA began in 1985 and the long-winding journey of LAYA has many tales to tell – personal and organizational. Today, LAYA occupies a niched civil society space with its diverse genres of engagement that have left their imprints in the ecosystem of Eastern Ghats and in the lives of Adivasis and other forest dwellers that inhabit this region.

The word 'LAYA' represents 'rhythm'

'The word 'LAYA' represents 'rhythm'. We believe in the wisdom of the 'rhythm' underlying tribal* societies. 'LAYA', in mythology, implies a cosmic balance of creation and destruction, which

to us means retaining what is beneficial and destroying the impediments to the development process.’ - Nafisa

ORGANIZATIONAL THRESHOLDS AND EXPANDING INSTITUTIONAL ARCHITECTURE

Invited by Mr. Inampudi Rambabu, an alumnus of Nirmala Niketan College of Social Work, Nafisa and Dominic worked for LAYA, a project of SPADE, an NGO in West Godavari District and being unfamiliar with Telugu, the local language, they put together a second level leadership and allowed them to take on the operational part of the project. Examples of professionals leaving their rarified positions to trust the second line to be in the driver seat, albeit for a while, is seldom seen and what resulted was an image-leapfrog. Soon, they went into the field to learn and, in turn, lead the development processes. A major spin-off of this is that as LAYA grew the second line leadership stayed on to be the lifeline of the organization.

Those initial years were a major learning experience for us. We began to understand and appreciate the worldview of Adivasi communities and their habitat as an integral part of their lives.

“Those initial years were a major learning experience for us. We began to understand and appreciate the worldview of Adivasi communities and their habitat as an integral part of their lives. As our involvement with the local communities began to deepen, our ideas, attitudes, and skills to respond to their issues underwent a rapid change. We realized that making a difference in the local community was far more complex than what we had envisaged.’
- Nafisa and Dominic

LAYA has gone through several organizational phases of growth with simple beginnings in 1985 in a thatched hut in the remote Tungamadugula village, Addateegala Mandal, East Godavari District and thereafter shifting to rented office in Mandal headquarters, Addateegala in 1986. For the founders, the initial years of LAYA were unsettling in several ways. Nafisa and Dominic had to withstand a storm when SPADE lost its FCRA (Foreign Contribution Regulations Act, 1976) registration in 1988 and all the resources for the LAYA project ended. Determined to forge ahead, the founders registered LAYA as a resource centre in 1989, got its FCRA in 1995 and thus the first phase of LAYA began.¹ Interestingly, even during the initial years between 1985 and 1989, amidst several ups and downs, LAYA began to intervene in complex issues of Adivasi rights to their lands, facilitated initiatives in agroforestry, rain-fed agriculture, non-formal education, and herbal based healthcare.

Having lost the source of receiving funding LAYA was forced to downsize. 'Good colleagues, who believed in us, helped to keep LAYA's work activities going at a skeletal level till we were able to secure some resources through a process of project-wise funding then permissible under the FCRA rules. Hence, we were able to rent an office at Rampachodavaram since this was a strategic location for legal intervention. In 1993, small beginnings were made with the establishment of a thatched place at Paderu in order to outreach the tribal communities in Visakhapatnam District where our administrative office was located.' - Nafisa

It was during the second phase that commenced in 1995 that LAYA went through institutional processes of positioning thematic-led Facilitating Units under the management of coordinators and their teams. With this, LAYA underwent a significant organizational shift from its earlier area-based approach where the coordinators were given charge of geographical areas. Furthermore, the coordinators were asked to choose their area of interest and the thematic stream that they would like to join. As Nafisa states, 'This engendered a leap in learning processes. The key team members grew in expertise and confidence. There was a marked change in attitude in the team leaders who now began to develop a passion for their thematic areas. This was the time in the early 1990s that Resource for Legal Action, Natural Resource Management, Herbal

Based Healthcare and Parichay (Youth Empowerment) thematic Units were established. Till date each of the team leaders have developed experience and expertise in the thematic areas. Three of the present Units are led by team members who joined us in the late 1980s and they are now nurturing the second line leadership.’

FACILITATING UNITS OF LAYA

- Safeguarding Adivasi Rights and Entitlements: Resource for Legal Action (RLA)
- Herbal Based Health Care (HBHC)
- Natural Resource Management (NRM) and Science and Technology (S&T)
- Parichay/Youth and Women’s Empowerment (YWE)/Lifelong Learning (LL)
- Climate Change (CC) and Decentralised Renewable Energy Options (DREO)

The strategy of Facilitating Units ensures a relatively small core of personnel that manages a wide outreach through a network with CBOs and collaborative relationships with other NGOs.

The second phase was full of diversification and a great deal of networking took place at the grassroots, state, regional, national, and international levels. Broadly, the following development and rights-based streams emerged:

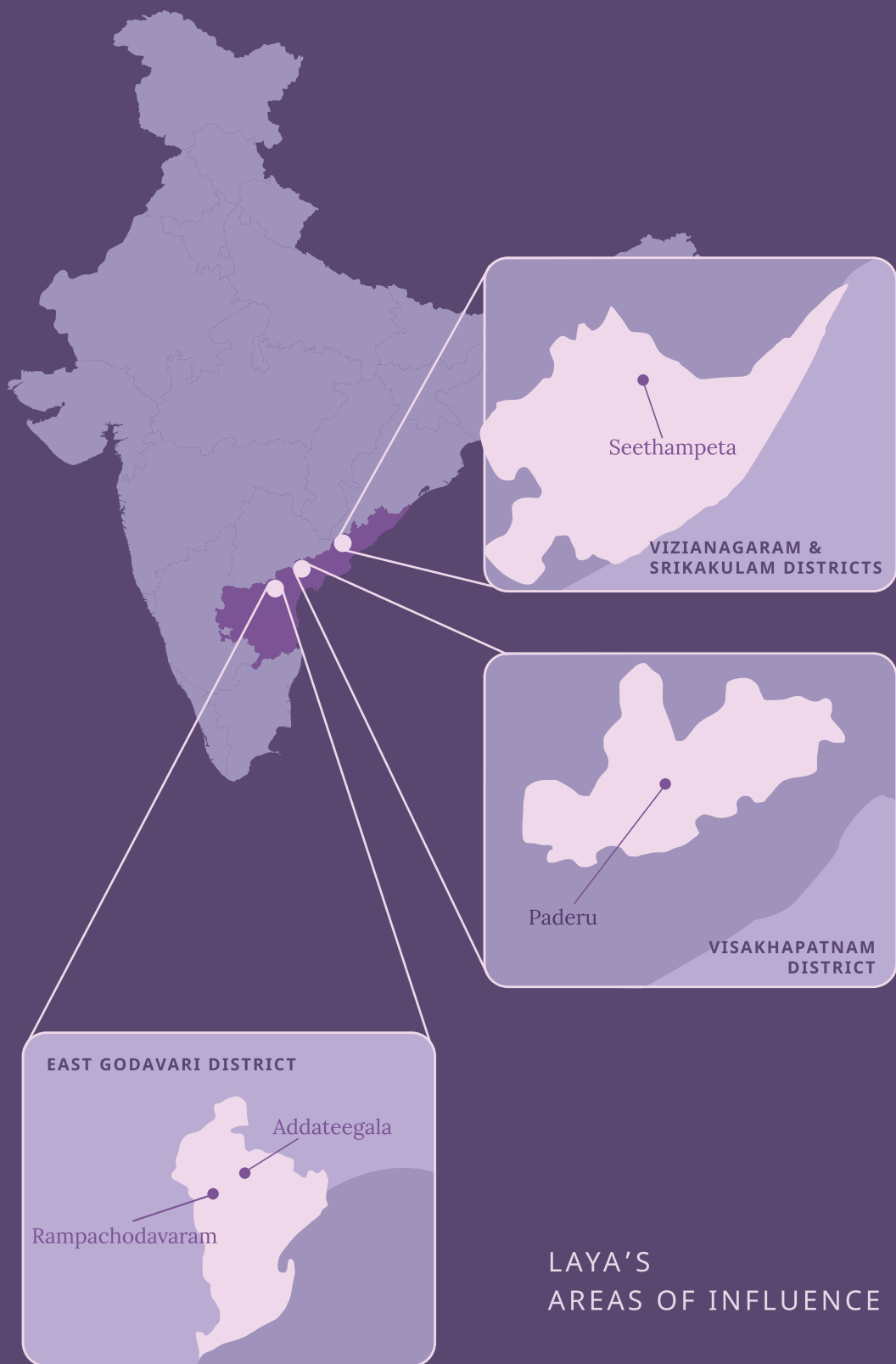
- LAYA gave strategic thrust to short and intensive long-term training to youth in alternative education that resulted in the growth of community-based organizations (CBOs), their network and grassroots committees. It was during this time, LAYA’s association with Asian South Pacific Bureau of Adult Education (ASPBAE) began, bringing several value additions to LAYA’s initiatives in alternative education for Adivasi youth. As a member of the Executive Council of ASPBAE for two terms, Dominic brought back his learnings in adult education, contextualized it for LAYA’s alternative education and climate education processes. All of this fructified into LAYA’s present thematic engagement in ‘Lifelong Learning’.
- LAYA made a strategic choice by establishing the Resource for Legal Action (RLA) Unit in 1996 to safeguard Adivasi rights

through legal action and advocacy, which ushered a movement of social justice lawyering.

- The second phase witnessed the evolution of biodiverse agriculture. The positive results of interventions in bio-diverse organic agriculture established firm footing in sustainable development and endeared the Adivasi communities to LAYA. In 2004, Vanantharam was established and became the organizational face of LAYA's herbal based healthcare.
- LAYA pioneered the Indian Network on Ethics and Climate Change (INECC) in 1996 and played a vital role in its growth – identifying partnerships, sharing its experiential models in low-carbon pathways in bio-diverse organic agriculture and renewable energy. The second phase brought deliberations on Climate Change at local, national level and in global platforms like the Conference of Parties (CoP) of United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).² Nafisa was the Convener of INECC for over two decades and through this process LAYA now connects to several partners of INECC.
- The second phase also cascaded a stream of women's empowerment through micro-credit and enterprise initiatives through SHGs and women-led CBOs. The crash literacy program for women that promoted literates is yet another threshold that opened opportunities for Adivasi women to enter local governance and other public institutions.

The third phase from 2010 to the present may be defined as the take-off stage that brought much dynamism in LAYA's institutional fields – pointing to paths in Sustainable Development. LAYA stabilized with a new office at Visakhapatnam and community-based centres at Rampachodavaram, Addateegala, Paderu with further plans to establish a centre in Srikakulam and Vizianagaram.

The geographical location of LAYA has increased to five districts of Andhra Pradesh. It's spread includes the Adivasi belt of north Andhra Pradesh. LAYA's larger outreach is achieved through collaborating with Adivasi leaders, networking with peoples' institutions and Adivasi-led community-based organizations.³ Presently, the outreach of LAYA covers 323 villages, 51 Gram Panchayats, 10 Mandals of five Districts in the Eastern Ghats.



PARADIGM OF TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE

The central premise of LAYA is embedded in societal exploitative structures where Adivasis and other marginalized communities are victims of changing societal pressures and their lack of wherewithal to safeguard their rights and secure entitlements that are due to them. Late to development and vulnerable, the livelihoods of Adivasis and their socio-cultural fabric will continue to be undermined by aggressive inroads by dominant mainstream forces. What is at stake is their rights to justice and dignity.

At its core, upholding and safeguarding the rights of Adivasis remains the *raison d'être* of LAYA. This has taken LAYA to champion and advance Adivasi rights to their forest lands, common property resources and legal action they had to take to claim their forest resources. LAYA has given equal importance to building community resilience with investment in herbal based healthcare and promoting climate-resilient models of bio-diverse rain-fed farming and eco-regeneration. LAYA's renewable energy initiatives bring yet another story of low-carbon and emission-reduction technologies for water, lighting, and cooking to demonstrate their relevance in the energy-strapped forest regions. All along their journey, LAYA respected the cultural contexts of the diverse Adivasi communities – their traditions, worldview and way of life. LAYA went forward to connect their models, potent with sustainable components to influence policies at state, national level and locate them within the global discourse. The power of LAYA's text is its argument that marginalized communities as lowest emitters are most impacted by climate variabilities and therefore their concerns must be given primacy in policy dialogues and be located within the global discourse on Climate Change.

The top leadership of LAYA promoted delegated functional teams and nurtured learning spaces all along the way. Learning while working has made the second line emerge as experts, several gaining wider reputation and credibility for their professional expertise and integrity. What coheres LAYA's team is their commitment to core values of 'commitment to the marginalized, social justice, personal and organizational integrity, gender equity

and interdependence'. The top leadership says that 'personal values take precedence over subject-competence.'

All along, LAYA grounded itself in the daily struggles of Adivasi communities. LAYA believes that the agenda of change and transformation must be in the hands of people. To do so, LAYA facilitated informed leadership – of farmers, youth, women, paralegals, and herbal practitioners. The youth of Adivasi region were rudderless, but with potential. LAYA strategized youth development as a route to sustain the investments they were making. As Dominic says, 'Our vision was not how to involve them in our program implementation as much as facilitating the trained tribal youth to initiate their own community-based organizations (CBO) and then federate the CBOs'. There is now an agency of empowered youth occupying several spaces in Adivasi activism.

LAYA is a knowledge builder. Alternative database and documentation has been an autonomous organizational pursuit. Over the decades, LAYA documented and published independently and collaboratively with other reputed institutions on issues that Adivasis are contending with. Its impactful initiatives in bio-diverse agriculture and decentralized renewable energy options were often preceded and accompanied by field assessments and published. The participatory assessments of four ecosystems that LAYA facilitated are qualitative knowledge products. In collaboration with INECC, LAYA has several publications that have received wide readership. The numerous publications of Dr. Trinadha Rao, Coordinator of RLA on legal dimensions of Adivasi law has gained wide recognition. Vanantharam, the Herbal Based Healthcare Unit has digitized 150 Telugu Ayurvedic books and also has its own publications. The Unit Coordinators too have been publishing.

Special mention must be made of *Mannemlo*, a Telugu quarterly periodical which reaches out to Adivasi youth, community-based organizations, ITDA, Collectorates of four districts, NGOs and other Civil Society Organizations. *Mannemlo* is one of its kind in the state because of the sole focus given to Adivasis. Well-known Adivasi activists and creative writers regularly publish in *Mannemlo* which has enabled its circulation to grow to 1000. *EcoEthic*, the INECC newsletter, currently published by LAYA as the secretariat, reaches a wider audience.

LAYA is a much-networked organization. Collaborations with networks at local, regional, national and international levels have allowed LAYA to be part of wider civil society and locate its experience and discourse. In 2002, LAYA along with other stakeholders, founded the National Youth Foundation, a national network comprising 5 regional clusters: Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Gujarat, Maharashtra and North India. In 2005, LAYA organized Adivasi Samvaad III, a national event at Addateegala to take the Adivasi rights agenda forward. This brought interconnections with Adivasi activists and their organizations. By pioneering and convening INECC, LAYA brought new partnerships for its Climate Change agenda. LAYA's partnership and being a member in the Executive Council of ASPBAE took LAYA to new fields of learning and networking in adult education. LAYA received the Observer Status at UNFCCC in 2009 and thereafter the Consultative Status to the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) in 2015. These are fulfilled moments in its history.

Our vision was not how to involve them in our program implementation as much as facilitating the trained tribal youth to initiate their own community-based organizations and then federate the CBOs

The leadership of LAYA has given thrust to systemic change. There is a churning among the leadership on how best its leadership at different levels can be driven by organizational vision and not be overshadowed by projects and resource opportunities that come with it. The wider society itself is experiencing vast changes and civil society organizations have come under critical scrutiny. LAYA, as Nafisa observes, has learnt to manage itself by 'living at the edge' and will continue to be guided by its equality and justice agenda for the vulnerable and marginalized Adivasis and other forest-dwellers.

LEADERSHIP STYLES, GOVERNANCE AND FINANCIAL SYSTEMS

ENGAGING LEADERSHIP

Several styles of leadership have contributed to the vibrant functioning of LAYA. Nafisa and Dominic have given a wide berth to the staff to grow in their roles, emerge as experts and take on leadership with responsibility. For those who were directly involved with projects, their leadership style got linked closely to the community development process. A few have become crusaders of Adivasi rights, cohering with the lives of forest inhabitants. Several staff have emerged as resource persons to the social sector and a few are members of institutions in the policy arena. Nafisa with her feminist⁴ charisma, academic rigour, and her resolve to fight for Adivasi rights deployed several styles of leadership that are directional and facilitative. Dominic has been most enabling in his leadership, taking on multiple roles of co-directing the organization and building organizational competencies. Nafisa and Dominic say that they share a partnership style to provide organizational direction to achieve LAYA's vision: 'A socially just and humanized society, where the marginalized communities find a space for a dignified quality of life and livelihoods.'

ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

The top leadership of LAYA has given precedence to ethical values and practices over professional excellence. The second and third-line leadership were given wide spaces to embed ethical values of equity and equality as they operationalised their projects and programs. Many cherished the freedom they got, gained expertise on the job, and performed. Nafisa nuances this further, 'The key principle that has guided our work is to engender passion in engagement at all levels with an on-going learning attitude, which allows individuals and the institution to charter new initiatives to continually respond to a changing environment.' LAYA's quest to define and strengthen the Adivasi identity and their dignity is guided by ethical values of equity and equality.

Leading and allowing others to lead is firmly etched in LAYA's organizational practice. This explains the diverse styles of

leadership that has unfolded within the organization and among Adivasi communities. LAYA's team has hand-held grassroots leadership and fledgling CBOs to grow independently to pursue their agendas. "Our value framework and empowerment processes underlie all our interventions involving the accompaniment of multiple stakeholders in the community: potential leaders across sectors, youth and women, elected members at the panchayat level and local bureaucrats. This is the bedrock of all our work that sustains our engagement." - Nafisa

Throughout its journey, LAYA has practiced the experiential cycle of theory-practice-critical reflection and in its wake this organizational practice has gone a long way in opening pathways of learning, thresholds of transformations and consolidation of change process. Culture building in LAYA has not been by design – each actor and team discovering and practicing organizational values as they performed.

"In the final analysis, it is the value system of team LAYA that matters most. Some of our workshop topics have been around reviewing organizational values and identifying value dilemmas. The core values of LAYA are broadly articulated under commitment to the marginalized, social justice, personal and organizational integrity, gender equity and interdependence." - Nafisa

BOARD GOVERNANCE

LAYA is registered under the Societies' Registration Act of 1860, now amended as the Andhra Pradesh Societies Registration Act, 2001, and under the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) of 1976, now amended in 2010 and governed by the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Rules, 2011.

The Society has a General Body of 16 members, governed by a 7-member Governing Board, advising the Secretariat through the Executive Director. The Associate Director and a team of Unit Coordinators, constituting the Project Policy Team, assist the Executive Director.⁵

The Board members have multi-disciplinary backgrounds and are reputed for their expertise in their fields. A few of them have their

own development outfits, bringing their insights into LAYA's work. Sanjay Khatua, the present Treasurer gave time to undertake participatory assessment of Forest Ecosystem (2011) which authenticates LAYA's premise on impacts of climate variability in the Eastern Ghats. Walter Mendoza held several positions in governance and 'EcoEthic', the newsletter of INECC for several years, deserving credit for his contribution. Nandini Narula brought her gender competence to the Board, facilitating gender perspectives. Apart from board governance, most of the members of the governing board have stayed on either in the general body or in the governing board and have given their expert support outside of governance – giving them a deeper understanding of Adivasi contexts.

Most importantly, a significant contribution of the governing board is seen in the organizational development of LAYA through its strategic meetings. The many deliberations of the governing board resulted in setting up thematic functional Units and synergetic fields of cooperation. To be in touch with grassroots realities, the governing board holds at least two workshops annually with the senior management and the governance teams within LAYA. This has ensured that the board members are hands-on and are not distant viewers.

MULTI-BASED FUND SUPPORT

LAYA has had its share of fund crunch in the initial years and mid-way through. Commenting on her efforts at fundraising, Nafisa observes, 'The struggle for resource generation began around 2013. Several of our funding partners began to withdraw because of policy changes at their end. Much of the earlier networking processes were also beginning to dwindle. And on the personal front I was forced into spending huge amounts of time on fund raising to keep the organization afloat. Resource generation became a real concern. We began to reflect within the organization on issues of sustainability. So, we began to take some concrete steps towards sustainability. One of our Board members and myself initiated LAYA Green Ventures in March 2013, a private limited company with the objective of creating a resource entity for LAYA to function independent of external donations. This has been an ongoing challenge. We also began to review

our grassroots involvement from a cost benefit and sustainability perspective promoting initiatives such as carbon projects keeping in mind its potential for resource generation. We facilitated the establishment of a self-financing pharmacy at Vanantharam and developed partnerships with local government programs.’

Presently, LAYA has a multi-funded base for its multi-level rights and development initiatives. ‘Our first funder who demonstrated their trust in us was Community Aid Abroad (CAA), Australia/Oxfam Australia.’- Nafisa. A few of the funders such as MISEREOR, Bread for the World (BftW) have been our long term support partners. Apart from project funding, a few funders have funded LAYA’s research such as the Department of Science and Technology, Government of India. MISEREOR funded LAYA’s critical research on Clean Development Mechanisms.⁶ BftW and MISEREOR gave forward funding to LAYA’s Gold Standard VER Projects, which enabled LAYA to upscale carbon-emission reduction projects in cookstoves. Förderverein Ashakiran e.V., Germany has spearheaded LAYA’s dream of establishing a Community College. LAYA cherishes the partnership orientation of its funders.

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Although LAYA enjoys multi-based funding, far from being complacent, the leadership and governing board continue to deliberate on how to make LAYA more public-funded and not overly dependent on foreign funds. At one level, LAYA has been fulfilling the funding requirements of multiple agencies on specific projects. Also, periodical projects’ evaluations have been reporting on financial rectitude and accountability of LAYA.

Having come this far, LAYA's leadership continues to reflect and debate on how best to optimise the organizational motivation quotient. In her reflections, Nafisa raises the following points:

- How to be driven by our vision and mission and not get side-tracked with resource opportunities?
- How to go beyond the project driven goals and retain the systemic aspects of change?
- How to engender and sustain passion in those in leadership positions in the organization?
- How to create opportunities for skill enhancement?
- How to build a sense of team value beyond independent personal growth?
- How to keep the organization alive and human in its mission?
- How to do the best that we can within the resource constraints and if resources are available how best to use them?
- How to strengthen the positives of our team rather than dwell on shortcomings?
- How to make sure our financial and administrative systems are sound such that decisions are guided by systems rather than ad-hoc interventions?
- Projects come and go but the real challenge is in how to sustain the core aspects of the organization on a day-to-day and year-to-year basis.

PROFILING CURRENT BOARD MEMBERS

MS. NANDINI NARULA, PRESIDENT

Nandini Narula has a Master's in Social Work from Nirmala Niketan, Mumbai and has over three decades of experience in the development sector ranging from grassroots to international donor agencies. With her gender competence, she has facilitated programs on women's economic empowerment and leadership development. Her professional competence includes participatory training methodologies, conflict transformation, youth development, organization development and democratic governance. Nandini Narula has been on LAYA's board since 2002.

DR. NAFISA GOGA D'SOUZA, SECRETARY

Dr. Nafisa Goga D'Souza is a founding member of LAYA and has been

the Executive Director of LAYA Resource Center, since its inception. She is also one of the founding members of the Indian Network on Ethics and Climate Change (INECC). Currently, she is involved in pursuing creative practices in the field of Sustainable Development from a grassroots perspective. Her key passion is to pursue justice issues from a micro and macro perspective. She believes that the phenomenon of Climate Change epitomizes the current 'destructive paradigm of development' calling for systemic transformation. Her roots lie in social work practice and teaching. Nafisa has a Doctorate on land dispossession in Adivasi regions of Andhra Pradesh.

MR. SANJAY KHATUA, TREASURER

Sanjay Khatua, a Freelancer in the area of action research, especially relating to sustainable livelihoods, ecology, mangroves ecosystems and developmental communication. He is the Director (Hon.) of DHARA (Socio-Eco-Cultural Research & Communication Syndicate), a Bhubaneswar-based institution. His career spans more than three and a half decades. His motivation and strength has been to understand the opportunities and scope of application at the community level to pursue a sustainable living relevant to the realities of the times. Early in his career, for more than half decade, he was head of the Socio-Economic Division of a drinking sanitation project supported by the Danish International Development Agency. Sanjay Khatua came into LAYA's board governance from 2008.

DR. LATA NARAYAN, MEMBER

A founder member, Dr. Lata Narayan is a retired professor (1984-2017) from the Center for Lifelong Learning, Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), Mumbai, India. At TISS she was a faculty member at various points of time in the School of Social Work and the Unit for Child and Youth Research. She has a doctorate in Social Work from Mumbai University. Dr. Narayan facilitated the introduction of the diploma in Dance Movement Therapy and initiated the diploma in Youth Development and Social Change in the Center for Lifelong Learning. She was the co-convener of a field action project in TISS, HUM (Humanity United in M-Ward), which aimed to create a Human Rights Sensitive Ward in Mumbai. Post retirement, her areas of interest and work include training and facilitating sessions of well-being and self-care, training methodology, therapeutic aspects of the arts especially dance

movement therapy. Post retirement she has completed a two year diploma in, 'Presence Oriented Psychotherapy: Integrating Mindfulness, Compassion and Wisdom', from the Just Being Center for Mindfulness and Presence, Pune. She is also trained in conducting Peace Circles, a program of Creators of Peace Circles (CoP), and the international movement of Initiatives for Change (IFC). Dr. Narayan also serves on the board of other NGOs - YUI (YUVA Urban Initiatives) and MelJol. Lata Narayan joined the governing board in 1989.

MS. MANI MISTRY ELAVIA, MEMBER

Ms. Mani Mistry has over 36 years of experience with NGOs in the fields of community development, building people's institutions, civil rights, and various programs for children. She has initiated the Bombay Slum Citizens Development Project of College of Social work. She has held the positions of Joint Director of Youth for Unity and Voluntary Action, Director of Children of the World (India) Trust and Director of Barbhaya Orphanage for Hindu Girls. She has handled the portfolios of livelihood and human rights at Tata Trust for 2 years. Ms. Mani Mistry worked with LAYA during its pre-registration phase for over one and a half years. Currently, she freelances as a child empowerment facilitator.

DR. RITESH P. KHUNYAKARI, MEMBER

Dr. Ritesh Khunyakari is an Associate Professor at the School of Education and Convener of the SC-ST-EO cell at Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), Hyderabad. He has a Masters in Botany from University of Pune and a doctorate in Science Education from the Homi Bhabha Centre for Science Education, Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (TIFR), Mumbai. He has published and presented his works in several international and national journals, conferences and magazines. He is on the editorial board of an international journal. He has represented the Indian contingent as a team leader at the International Junior Science Olympiads in 2010 (Abuja, Nigeria) and 2017 (Arnhem-Nijmegen, The Netherlands). He continues to serve as a member of several academic bodies and contributes to initiatives in Science Education. Ritesh Khunyakari joined the governing board in 2017.

MS. N.V. RAMANANDAM

Ms. N.V. Rama, an alumnus of Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), Mumbai, has been working in the development sector for 21 years. She has taken up multiple assignments that include tribal development, HIV/AIDS and weavers. For a while, she has worked as a school teacher in a government school. She is passionate about children's education and working in rural areas. She is currently working as the Director of operations AP & TS in Sikshana Foundation working with the children in government schools.

ENDNOTES

¹ LAYA is legally registered under the Societies' Registration Act of 1860, now amended as the Andhra Pradesh Societies Registration Act, 2001, and under the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) of 1976, now amended in 2010 and governed by the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Rules, 2011.

² The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) which came into force on 21st, March, 1994 is an international treaty on climate change. The Kyoto Protocol, signed in 1997 was the first addition to UNFCCC and committed its signatories to develop national programs to reduce their emissions of greenhouse gases. The Kyoto Protocol included two commitment periods, the first period lasted from 2008–2012. The Protocol was amended again in 2012 to include a second period from 2013–2020. The Kyoto Protocol was superseded by the Paris Agreement which came into force in 2016. Its supreme decision-making body, the Conference of the Parties (COP), meets annually. unfccc.int, en.wikipedia.org

³ LAYA's constituency comprises two distinct geographical regions. In the north eastern coastal district of Visakhapatnam, the Scheduled Areas comprise the hilly regions with an altitude of about 900 meters dotted by several peaks. The East Godavari District, situated on the North East of Andhra Pradesh has three natural zones: the delta, upland and agency tracts. The general elevation of the district varies from a few feet near the sea to 1500 to the hills of the scheduled areas.

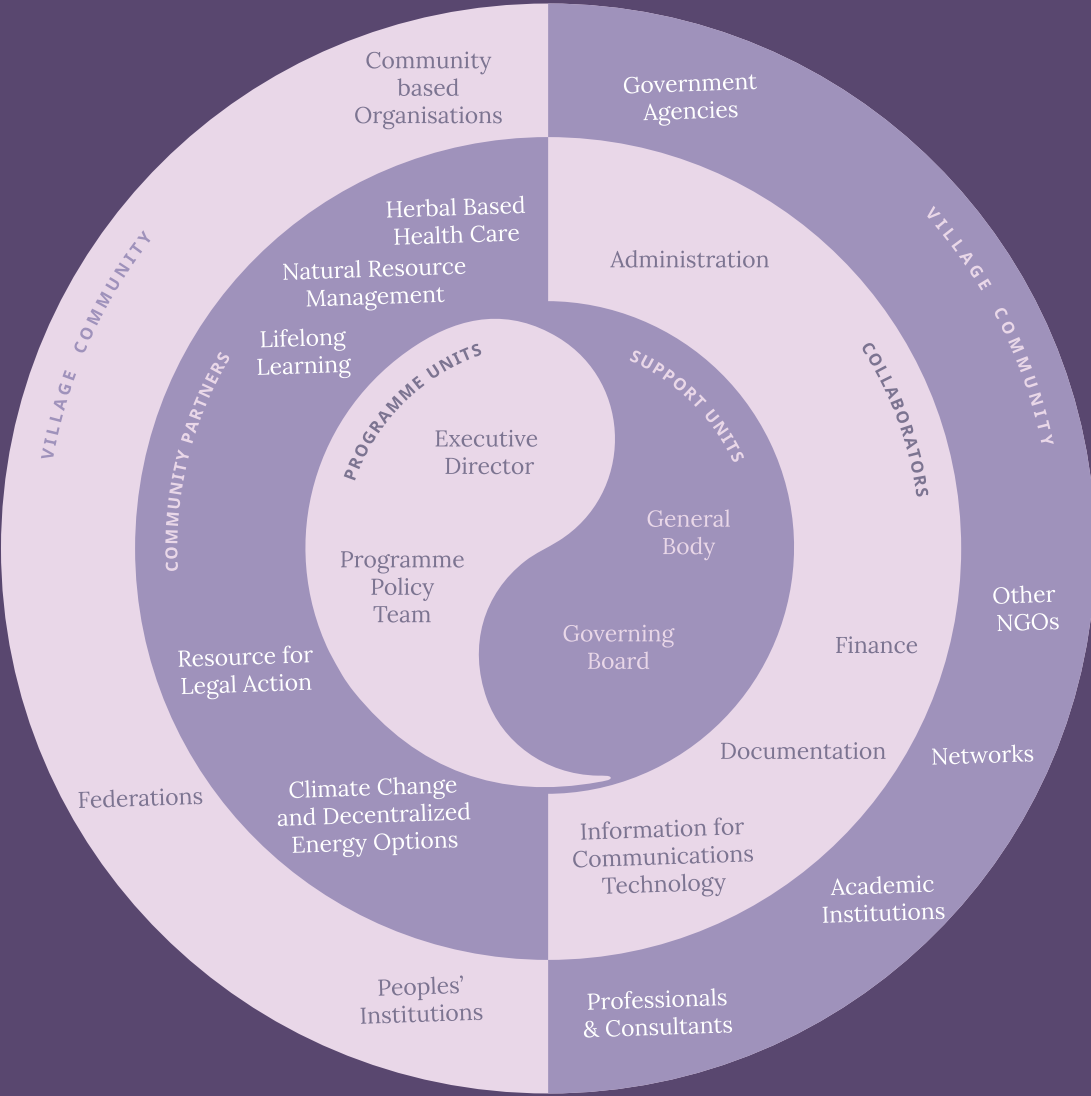
⁴ The term- feminist combines emotional and logical qualities that bring balanced behaviour.

⁵ The members of General Body are: Nandini Narula, B. Devi Prasad, Walter Mendoza, Lata Narayan, Sanjay Khatua, Mani Mistry Elavia, Ritesh P Khunyakari, Nafisa Goga D'Souza, Dominic D'Souza, D.V.R. Murthy, Minar Pimple, Maveen Soares Pereira, N.V. Ramanandam, Shabnam Patel, Biswaranjan Tripura, and T. Sudhakar Reddy.

⁶ Vasudha Foundation in Association with INECC and LAYA, 2014, CDM Projects in India: Do they Truly Promote Sustainable Development in India. MISEREOR supported this study.

* The term Adivasi is commonly translated as 'indigenous people' or 'original inhabitants', and literally means 'Adi or earliest time', and 'vasi or resident of'. Scheduled Tribes is the term used for Adivasis used by the Indian government in various official documents. In this document the term 'Adivasis' is interchangeably used with the term 'Tribals'. A tribe is a group of people who live and work together in a shared geographical area having a common culture, dialect and religion.

LAYA'S
INSTITUTIONAL UNIVERSE





Governing Board, 2016, *Visakhapatnam*



The LAYA team, 2019, *Maredumilli*

THE TEAM

VISAKHAPATNAM CITY · Dr Nafisa Goga D'Souza, Executive Director
Mr Siddharth D'Souza, Associate Director · Dr Venugopala Rao R,
Specialist, Science and Technology · Ms Nagamani V V, Coordinator,
Finance and Accounts · Mr Mallikharjuna Rao L, Coordinator,
Documentation · Ms Manisha Banerjee, Coordinator, Administration ·
Mr Kumar D S S P, Office Assistant · Mr Shankar Rao P, Driver ·
Ms Lavanya K, Accounts Assistant · Mr Venkateswar Rao D, Senior
Accountant · Mr Sai Parameswaran, Manager, Climate Change Unit ·
Ms Bhagya Lakshmi B, Coordinator, Information Technology ·
Mr Mahesh B, Driver cum Office Assistant · Mr Satyanarayana M,
Coordinator, Decentralised Energy Options, Climate Change Unit · Ms Rama
Lakshmi P, Program Coordinator, Welfare Project for Construction
Workers · Mr Dominic D'Souza, Consultant

MUMBAI CITY · Dr Ajita Tiwari Padhi, Lead, Climate Policy, Advocacy
and Strategic Partnerships · Mr Myron Mendes, Coordinator, Youth
and Communications

EAST GODAVARI DISTRICT - ADDATEEGALA · Mr Bulliyya G, Facilitator,
Herbal Based Health Care Unit; Area Coordinator and Field Program Lead
· Mr Koteswara Rao K, Facilitator, Natural Resource Management Unit
and Enterprise Lead · Mr Satyanarayana GVV, Accountant · Ms Padmavathi
A, Coordinator, Women's Empowerment · Mr Chakra Babu B, Associate
Coordinator, Natural Resource Management Unit · Mr Satyanarayana
D, Driver cum Office Assistant · Mr Gowri Shankar E, Field Coordinator,
Lifelong Learning Unit · Mr Bhagavan Raju K, Technical Assistant ·

Mr Ramu P, Field Coordinator, Climate Change Advocacy Project ·
Mr Srinubabu S, Field Assistant · Mr Satyateja K, Documentation
Assistant · Mr Rajesh G, Field Coordinator, Herbal Based Health Care
Unit

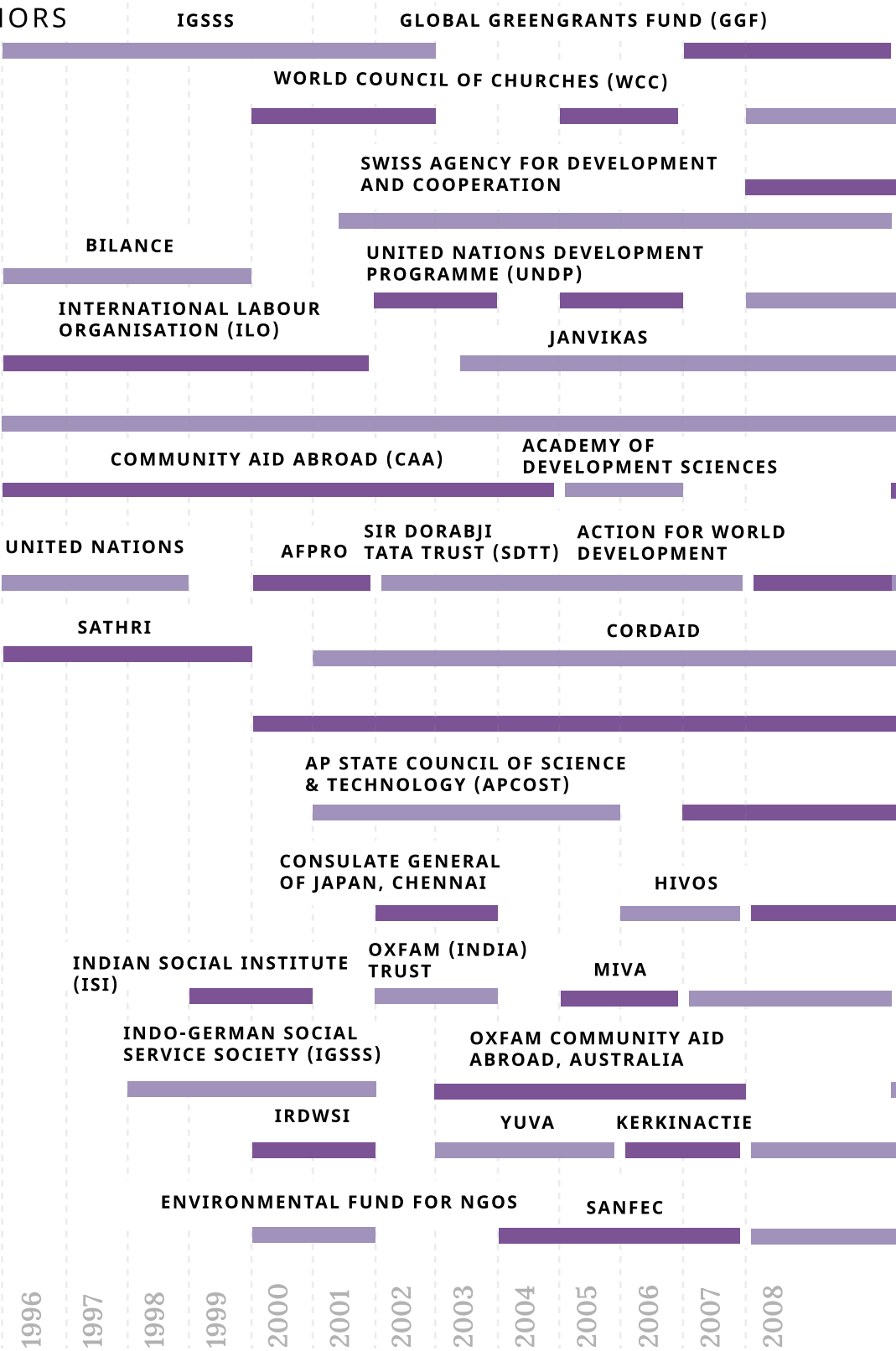
EAST GODAVARI DISTRICT - RAJAMAHENDRAVARAM · Dr Trinadha
Rao P, Legal Expert, Resource for Legal Action · Ms. Annapurna M,
Retainer Advocate, Resource for Legal Action · Mr Murali Vasu P,
Finance and Administrative Assistant, Resource for Legal Action ·
Mr Ram Babu M, Office Assistant, Resource for Legal Action

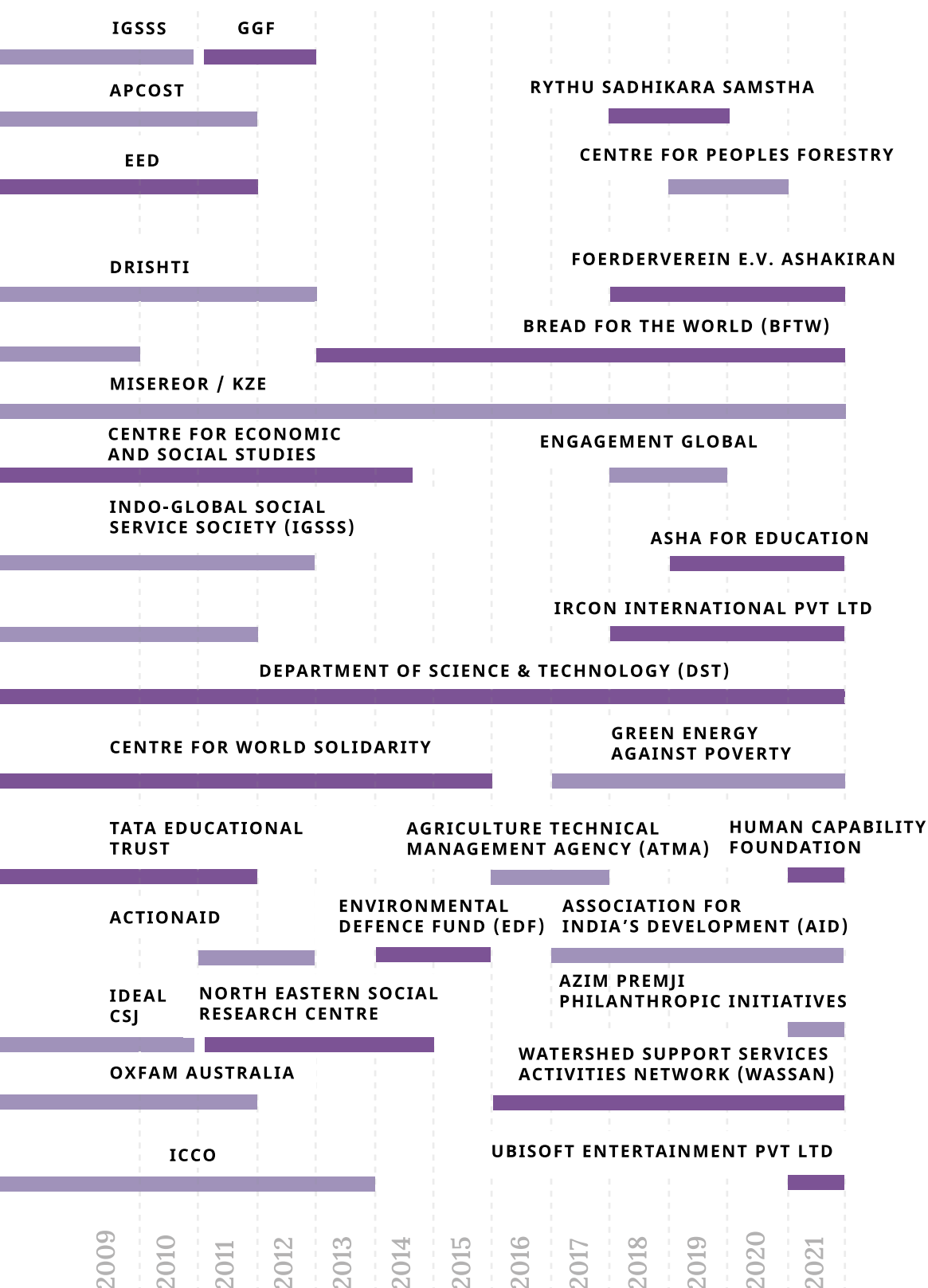
EAST GODAVARI DISTRICT - RAMPACHODAVARAM · Mr Ram Babu P,
Field Coordinator, Resource for Legal Action

VISAKHAPATNAM DISTRICT - PADERU · Mr Ravindra V, Area
Coordinator · Ms Annapoorna S, Finance and Administrative
Assistant · Mr Lova Raju D, Coordinator, Decentralised Energy
Options, Climate Change Unit · Ms Lakshmi Sunitha V, Data Entry
Operator · Mr Satyanarayana B, Field Supervisor, Decentralised
Energy Options, Climate Change Unit · Mr Simhachalam B,
Field Coordinator, Science and Technology Project · Ms Roja G,
Field Coordinator, Lifelong Learning Unit · Ms Madhuri N, Field
Coordinator, Science and Technology Project - Mr Venkata Ramana K,
Field Assistant

VIZIANAGARAM AND SRIKAKULAM DISTRICTS · Mr Kantha Rao T,
Facilitator, Lifelong Learning Unit · Mr Thirupathi Rao M, Field
Assistant · Mr Ramesh T, Field Assistant

DONORS







Safeguarding Land Rights and Making Socio-Economic Rights Justiciable

CHAPTER 2

GENESIS

The Eastern Ghats of Andhra Pradesh bring out an amazing imagery of the natural beauty of its forests, land, water resources and mineral wealth. The story of these forests, as elsewhere, unfolds the changing nature of forests with denudation – legal and illegal policies that gradually restricted the use of forest land by the Adivasis. The multi-purpose use of the forests by the forest-dwelling communities got curtailed during the British colonial period. The forest lands got demarcated, vastly restricting the boundaries of Adivasi land. With this, the land of forest-dwellers entered the grey zone – caught up in complicated forest policies with diverse interpretations; the Adivasis not knowing where their rights lay and the insecurities that followed. The Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act of 1996 (PESA) and the historic Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Rules, 2008 (as amended in 2012), henceforth FRA, came with much promise for self-rule by the Adivasis, to secure the rights of ownership of their lands, and access to Non-Timber Forest Produce (NTFP) that was once traditionally collected by the Adivasis.¹ Policies and even their practice do not always deliver. It is in this delivery space that the battles of Adivasis are located – their rights to land that they have occupied for centuries, rights to forest resources and rights to livelihoods. LAYA made a timely entry three and odd decades ago to co-construct an alternative paradigm that empowers the forest dwellers to fight for their rights and sustain their livelihoods.

The Adivasis of LAYA's constituency inhabit forests that are at different altitudes and are diverse – with distinct traditions and customs of their own. There are as many as 23 Adivasi communities in LAYA's operational areas.² The Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTG) are resident in the high-altitude tribal zones of Eastern Ghats.³ The well-known PVTG Konda Reddis with ancient culture, governed by their customary law and rule of their traditional leaders inhabit the interiors of Eastern Ghats of East Godavari District. Adivasis that are resident in lower upland regions are distinct from each other with their own dialects and cultures. Several of them speak Telugu, a few have forgotten their native dialect. Although the Adivasi women are known to enjoy greater freedom, there is a strong patriarchal weave that underpins their social status.

Several forces have played out to displace Adivasi lands and their forest resource base. The alienation of forest land goes back to British times when muttadars (tax collectors) gave land on lease to non-tribals. Thereafter, massive alienation of land and of best agricultural lands are recorded to have taken place with settlement operations during 1969-74. Post-Independence, the state too, deforested in the name of its own development needs, mining being one such example. Concessions were given to paper factories to cut forests. Dams too have displaced communities. 'There are 18 major dams in Andhra Pradesh and six of the large ones alone have been responsible for displacing about half a million people.'⁴ Going by reports, today, fifty percent of land in the Scheduled Areas of Andhra Pradesh is with the non-Adivasis. Although by statute, the Adivasi land cannot be alienated, gullible Adivasis are lured by non-tribals to illegally lease or sell their lands. The troubled history of alienation of lands in the past is now lost in dusty official records and receding memories of Adivasi forefathers. In its wake, the Adivasis of this region have suffered serious loss of their identity to land. To the Adivasis, the forests and the way of their life that come with it is an emotive subject that outsiders may not be able to fathom.

The genesis of LAYA's engagement with the land issue goes back to 1985, which is best narrated in *Rhythms in Development I*, 'In 1985 we came across 6 landless tribals in Mitlapalem Village. Enquiries led to the discovery of land assigned to non-Adivasis.'

Our intervention led to the land being reassigned to 6 Adivasi families. Feeling severely threatened, 46 non-Adivasis proceeded to the High Court and stayed all such proceedings. The stay was finally vacated. Follow-up was always slow. While the Project Director of the ITDA (Integrated Tribal Development Agency) and the Sub-Collector, a special revenue official assigned to Agency areas of a district, were normally helpful, the lower-level officials were obstructive. The MROs (Mandal Revenue Officer) delayed matters. We even had to get an RDO (Revenue Divisional Officer) transferred with the help of the Project Director, ITDA to effect the re-assignment of lands! Ultimately, 452 cases of non-Adivasi assignees were identified. The information we had uncovered through our investigations was shared with the Sub-Collector.¹⁵

The once prevalent community bond with land and nature is being irreparably destroyed

Title deeds were not previously a part of an Adivasis vocabulary. Government interventions, pre-colonial and post-colonial, have forced Adivasi communities to perceive land as individually owned rather than as a common property resource. Adivasi communities over time have been forced to differentiate 'land' as individual Units requiring legal affirmation and protection. The once prevalent community bond with land and nature that shaped the identity of Adivasis is being irreparably destroyed. (Rhythms in Development II)

By touching the land issue, LAYA was entering the treacherous power dynamics of the region. The non-Adivasis, who have for decades, hijacked tribal lands and even cornered state development funds meant for the Adivasis, were a powerful lobby with their tentacles on the local police and bureaucracy. LAYA knew that solutions to the Adivasi question at first lay in empowering the Adivasis through their own leadership and collective responsibility. LAYA's strategic focus to capacitate and empower Adivasi youth, women and promote Adivasi-led CBOs originated during the first phase. While the youth occupied a large space in LAYA's transformational work, in the context of land rights, their contribution to LAYA's legal action and advocacy engagement was most valuable.

WAY BACK IN 1987, AN ADIVASI DARED

Anantha Chakkar Rao, the Congress-I candidate, a rich influential landowner from a politically powerful family in the area for more than thirty years stood for Mandal President election in Addateegala – as an Adivasi. And won with a thumping majority. P. Dharmaraju, an Adivasi, associated with LAYA, resigned and made bold to file a case of false certification against Anantha Chakkar Rao and won the case in the Sub-Collector's Court, despite subversion efforts by Anantha Chakkar Rao. Ironically, a month before this historic win, Anantha Chakkar Rao was shot dead, allegedly by Naxalites belonging to the People's War Group. (Rhythms in Development I)

SETTING UP RESOURCE FOR LEGAL ACTION UNIT

By 1996, LAYA set up the Resource for Legal Action (RLA) Unit to protect and safeguard Adivasi rights. Under the crusaded leadership of Trinadh Rao and his team of lawyers, RLA's service and contribution has been seminal. Initially, the RLA covered 3 Mandals (Addateegala, Y. Ramavaram and Gangavaram) of East Godavari District and this got extended to other Scheduled Area Mandals of East Godavari and West Godavari Districts and the erstwhile border District of Khammam in Telangana. With the bifurcation of united Andhra Pradesh in 2014, the present reach of RLA is confined to residuary Andhra Pradesh. RLA's engagement expanded, which necessitated setting up a co-ordination centre in 1998 at Rajahmundry in East Godavari District. At Rampachodavaram, RLA has a field level Human Rights Centre with close linkages to human rights defenders including a cadre of volunteers, trained paralegals, and Adivasi youth. The RLA is also supported by a panel of lawyers at different courts.

RESOURCE FOR LEGAL ACTION

- Facilitates access to justice through the legal system and Alternate Dispute Resolution (ADR) Systems
- Empowers Adivasi communities through awareness, campaigns, legal education and promotes Paralegals and Human Rights Centres to play a vigilance role to safeguard Adivasi rights

- Provides special focus to safeguard Adivasi women's rights
- Develops alternate database on human rights violations
- Undertakes advocacy initiatives for policy action

CAPACITATING A CADRE OF PARALEGALS

RLA was strategic to introduce a ten-month Paralegal Training course in 1996 for Adivasi youth, who have completed class 10 schooling. The training was intensive and gave primacy to educate the Adivasi youth of the societal context of Adivasis in the forest ecosystem, customary law, forest legislation, local governance in Scheduled Areas, human rights laws related to land and forest resources, and the nitty-gritties of administrative delivery. One of the objectives of the Paralegal Training was to eliminate middlemen, reduce litigation costs and enable Adivasis to avail of law as an instrument for social change. The training was field based connecting the trainees to grassroots realities and brought rigour: 'Frequent tests are taken to make sure that the learners have grasped the concepts.

The paralegal training was field-based connecting the trainees to grassroots realities

A wide variety of methods including mock courts, case studies and records and maps as teaching aids are used during the sessions. During the sessions they are also helped in drafting legal appeals, in pleading cases and exposed to the functioning of lower courts. At the field level they are expected to work on assignments relating to specific relevant topics. After the training period an interaction session is held with the Project Officer, ITDA for his evaluation of the trained candidates and a recommendation is made to the District Collector to grant a 'sanad' certificate, which permits the trainee to practice in courts in tribal areas.¹⁶ These trainings were impactful and resulted in a few trainees being granted 'Sanads' by the Collector to practice as advocates in their districts of Scheduled Areas.

Until March 2020, RLA held 2181 legal camps covering 71309 different stakeholders including government functionaries. Among them 2957 youth were capacitated as Paralegals to play a bridge role between administrative/courts and tribal litigants, while RLA provided coordination support. One of the achievements of RLA is securing recognition of 'Tribal Paralegals' concerning tribal land matters. (Issuance of GOMs No. 313 in 2005)

POLICY DELIVERY AND LEGAL ACTION

For the first time, the Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas or PESA Act, 1996) and Forest Rights Recognition Act (FRRA), which came into force on 1st January 2008, radicalized the scope of forest governance. The PESA gave power to tribal Gram Sabhas in the Scheduled Areas to self-rule. The FRRA gives the right to inhabit and own forest lands individually, by groups or entire forest-dwelling scheduled tribes or other traditional forest dwellers. Predictably, both the legislations fell short of their promise and their passage has been far from smooth. For PESA to come into force, the Ministry of Tribal Affairs (MoTA) had to frame guidelines for its implementation. Both MoTA and their counterparts in federal states dragged their feet on this. Being a central legislation, the performance of FRRA in Andhra Pradesh came under critical scanner for underplaying the land claims of Adivasis and other traditional forest dwellers.⁷

Decades since its inception and until the present, RLA's efforts to resolve complex issues of land displacement, reclaim lands lost, access entitlements to the lands owned and assert usufruct rights to common property resources have taken them through embattled paths of legal advocacy and action. These cases are numerous for enumeration. However, the entire gamut of cases brings out a spectrum of simple cases of out-of-court settlements, settlements at Lower Courts, High Courts and even the Supreme Court to the most complex cases that could only be resolved through struggle modes of campaign and networking with other civil society organizations. Shackled by multiple vulnerabilities, the Adivasis and other forest-dwelling communities could not have taken-on the power of political and capital might without organizational backing.

MULTI-PRONGED STRATEGY FOR LEGAL ACTION AND ADVOCACY

Indeed, RLA has established a legal weave in LAYA's Adivasi belt to safeguard Adivasi rights. The following strategic paths clearly points to a movement in social justice lawyering:

- Creating awareness and building perspectives through diverse methods of holding camps, rallies, campaigns and using platforms of grassroots organizations that include CBOs and their networks, SHGs and women-led CBOs.
- RLA's strategy of sensitizing and perspective building went beyond the Adivasi community to include duty bearers of local governance, ITDA, forest rights committees and other state departments. By this, RLA has created enabling interventionist paths for Adivasi rights.
- RLA did not confine itself to merely land-related issues but dug its feet deep to enter the field of socio-economic rights. It has been addressing a host of individual and issue-based cases.
- By promoting a cadre of committed Adivasi Paralegals, RLA has created a grassroots legal cadre.

One must applaud RLA for giving special focus to women and their gender vulnerabilities. Under its aegis, RLA created two Adivasi women groups to focus on the question of land rights. It undertook surveys of single women and facilitated fact-finding visits for reality checks on single women's situation. Through legal and non-legal processes, RLA resolved cases of deserted women not receiving their maintenance, elderly women not receiving pensions and most importantly domestic discord and violence against women.

The overarching impact of RLA has been in the field of jurisprudence of tribal laws of PESA and FRRA with ethical perspectives. It has taken up more than 30 Public Interest Litigation (PIL) cases that pertain to local governance, prevention of large-scale alienation of land and violations of FRRA guidelines – with a few of them resulting in landmark judgements. Palla Trinadh Rao, the coordinator of RLA, with his crusader spirit, must be credited for this. The achievements of RLA are many and a few salient achievements and processes are worth narration:

- RLA has a record of gaining rights over 28,398 acres of land of 5,763 Adivasis, securing their livelihoods for generations to come.

Behind this stupendous achievement is the relentless legal activism of RLA.

- Although enacted in 1996, the MoTA did not articulate the guidelines under PESA. For more than a decade, the state government did not recognize the provisions of PESA and continued to implement development projects without involving the Gram Sabhas, as per PESA. Trinadh Rao was in the forefront of advocacy to speed up framing of PESA guidelines that came into force only in 2011, telling a tale of lack of political will and bureaucratic crawl. Despite this, LAYA motivated the Gram Sabhas and respective functional committees to self-rule and govern as per PESA. Backed by RLA, the Gram Sabhas made bold to exercise their powers in the management of their forests, regularized tribal cultivation on hill slopes and forest lands; resolved conflicts between the forest and revenue departments, ensured access to NTFP without hindrance from state agencies - establishing their pre-eminence. The grassroots CBOs, networks played a supportive role to backstop these processes.
- RLA should be acknowledged for taking up the most challenging engagement of educating Adivasis of their rights, setting up local level committees, vigilance task forces, facilitating grassroots CBOs and most importantly capacitating a cadre of youth volunteers and Paralegals to be the bridge between litigants and administrative machinery and legal courts. This cadre of youth have emerged as the Paralegal face of Adivasis - informed about pertinent forest acts, legal procedures of petitioning, appealing, court verdicts, out of court settlements and the entire legal rigmarole. This strategy is double-edged in that it messaged the wider world that the tribal youth have taken upon the mantle of protecting tribal rights and to their own communities that youth power is behind them. In turn, Adivasi youth started their own CBOs, legal committees, women's committees and networked as a federation and emerged as vigilantes in their villages. Decades of awareness generation has reached out to a wide spectrum of youth, women and even duty bearers of local governance. For the RLA Unit, this was a huge exercise.

MAKING SOCIO-ECONOMIC RIGHTS JUSTICIABLE

The livelihoods of Adivasi communities are intricately linked to ownership and sustainable use of natural resources. The Adivasis are also shackled by their inability to access a gamut of socio-economic rights. The socio-economic rights of marginalized Adivasis is a vast field, encompassing large clusters of right to food, work, and social security at one end to right to education, health, clean environment, and decent standards of living to lead a life in dignity, at the other. Once again, the RLA team has put their best foot forward to bring redressal to many lapses in the delivery of socio-economic rights through legal and non-legal processes. For this, RLA went on to relate with Adivasis, sensitize grassroots institutions to facilitate access to socio-economic rights and simultaneously educate and negotiate with officials of state departments to speed up delivery of various development and welfare schemes. These efforts brought state bodies closer to Adivasi communities. RLA's inventory of individual cases and collective issues points to the apathy and serious gaps in development delivery. The socio-economic rights that RLA has facilitated access can be clustered as:

The team has brought redressal to many lapses in the delivery of socio-economic rights

- Facilitation and legal support to non-implementation of Rehabilitation and Resettlement (R&R) packages in Polavaram dam project; facilitation of Gram Sabha resolutions on land related matters, facilitation of assignment of lands to landless poor and rights of access to NTFP, to mention a few. (2.5 foot March Against Polavaram)
- Substantial work on the right to work and employment, especially building awareness on provisions of MGNREGS, conducting surveys and reporting lapses in its implementation to the Ministry of Rural Development, ITDA and other duty bearers and ensuring access to job cards.
- Cases of delay and malpractice in basic provisions in village development – roads, housing, power supply, malfunctioning of borewells and safe drinking water, irrigation, among others.
- Legal orientation through camps, workshops, campaigns to CBOs, Forest Rights Committees, Gram Sabhas and ITDA

officials on socio-economic rights of Adivasis. Submitting petitions to ITDA and other duty bearers for speedy implementation of welfare and development schemes.

- Extensive legal orientation and education on women's rights to SHGs, Village Level Committees, CBOs, Forest Rights Committees and ITDA. Surveys on single women and specific support through legal and non-legal (ADR) processes to single women, who are neglected, deserted, and widowed relating to matrimonial disputes, maintenance, accessing waste lands for livelihoods, and facilitating access to social security schemes. RLA must be commended for motivating SHGs, Women's Committees and WCBOs to be vigilantes on gender-related violations.

SAFEGUARDING ADIVASI RIGHTS

By mooted an institutional response, RLA has taken social justice lawyering into different segments of Adivasi society to demonstrate the significance of an active engagement between society and legal justice. In more ways than one RLA has influenced Lawyers, Paralegals, CBOs, and their networks to initiate change processes in their contexts, allowing them to experience meaning in their success stories and celebrating. Each of the significant actors have gone through processes of empowerment – gaining confidence, leadership competence, technical expertise and being knowledge keepers.

The influence of wider societal forces in the Adivasi land has grown and with-it new vulnerabilities have emerged. It is well possible that more of Adivasi land will come into the market. The lacunae in the implementation of PESA and FRRA continues and Adivasis would be looking out for legal services to protect their lands and forest rights. RLA's engagement in social justice lawyering is bound to increase. For RLA, there is much unfinished work. The leadership of RLA foresees that they would have to deepen their interfaces with the state bodies – sharing their learnings, and building alliances to minimize the many gaps in policy delivery. With its vast experience base, there is much scope for RLA to emerge as Academy of Legal Services to play an enlarged role for impacts of scale.

THE LIVELIHOODS
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People around Palla Trinadh Rao refer to him as an institution. When he began to work he pledged that he would work only for Adivasis. The many influential positions he now holds deserves listing. He is:

- Convener, Legal Cell, Integrated Tribal Development Agency (ITDAs) of East and West Godavari Districts in Andhra Pradesh; Assisting Tribals in land right matters; Since 1996.
- Member of Internal Committee of Koneru Land Committee, constituted by Govt. of A.P on Tribal Land Issues (2005-2006).
- Member of State Level Committee constituted by Government of Andhra Pradesh, in 2010 for bringing out guidelines for implementation of Forest Rights Recognition Act 2006.
- Ex-officio Member of AP Tribes Advisory Council, Govt. of AP, involved in formulating draft rules under PESA Act 1998 in 2010.
- Legal Consultant, Tribal Welfare, Government of Andhra Pradesh in 2010.
- Consultant for Tribal related Projects, National Institute of Rural Development (NIRD), 2014-2015.
- Resource Person for Andhra Pradesh Human Resources Development Institute (APHRDI), Govt. of Andhra Pradesh to provide induction training to the government officers on Tribal Laws.
- Legal Consultant- Tribal Welfare, Government of AP since 2017.

LAWYERING FOR ADIVASIS AT RLA UNIT

C. SANTHOSH KUMAR

Santhosh Kumar is a Valmiki from Rampachodavaram, East Godavari District. He underwent Paralegal training in 1998 and worked as an intern for a period of two years. Inspired, he went on to pursue a course in law and became a lawyer in 2002. His capacity was enhanced when he got trained by RLA in court-lawyering. He is presently working in the Human Rights Field Centre of RLA in Rampachodavaram – attending local courts, representing land-related issues and criminal cases of Adivasis.

G .NAGARAJU

G. Nagaraju, a lawyer was inspired by the arguments of Trinadh Rao during court hearings on tribal land cases in Agency Courts. Soon

after he resigned from his earlier post of legal advisor in AWARE, a NGO and joined as an intern at the office of Trinadh Rao. He claims that he gained knowledge from reading numerous publications of Trinadh Rao and closely following his cases. His first field experience came when he went with Trinadh Rao to conduct legal awareness camps in the Scheduled Area Mandals of Khammam District. Thereon, he started taking up tribal related land cases. Two success stories that he narrates are that of securing 200 acres for Adivasis from the fold of non-tribals in Bhadrachalam and of getting permanent alimony for 30 neglected spouses. A high point of his career was his appointment as Assistant Government Pleader for a period of 6 years (2010-2016) at Bhadrachalam Court. Nagaraju gives credit to Trinadh Rao and RLA for his personal and career growth. He has been working with RLA for the last two decades.

MAKING A DIFFERENCE TO ADIVASIS AS PARALEGALS

SONDIVEERAYYA

Sondiveerayya from the Koya tribe, met Trinadh Rao during a legal awareness camp in Bhadrachalam, erstwhile Khammam District. Motivated by him, he undertook Paralegal training in 2003 and went through an internship for a period of two years at RLA. Later, he floated a group namely Adivasi Samkshema Parishad, which he then renamed as Gondwana Samkshema Parishad to work for Adivasi land and other rights. A major achievement of his was securing an order from High Court for implementation of GO No. 3, which provides 100 percent employment for Adivasis in the Scheduled Area and 1000 acres of land for Adivasis in Khammam District. He has with him 20 Adivasi youth, trained in tribal land and other rights. Sondiveerayya believes that RLA made him what he is today.

YELAGADA NAGESWARA RAO

Nageswara Rao from Konda Dora tribe came to know RLA through their legal education camps and tribal land cases in the Agency villages of Devipatnam Mandal, East Godavari District in 1996. He got trained as a Paralegal in 1997 and worked as an intern for two years at RLA. As a



Paralegal, he identified illegal land transactions of 1355 non-tribal households covering as much as 2500 acres of government and other tribal lands. He initiated an enquiry which led to the suspension of the concerned Tahsildar and a criminal case was booked against him for issuing title deeds to non-tribals in violation of the provisions of tribal protective Land Transfer Regulations. A major outcome was cancellation of illegal title deeds issued to non-tribals.

POLOJU NAGESWARARAO



Poloju Nageswara, a Konda Kammara tribal from West Godavari District was working with Girijana Sangham, an Adivasi organization. Upon the advice of Achary, a lawyer on the panel of lawyers at RLA, he went through the RLA Paralegal training in 2003. Since then, he has served the Adivasis in taking up their land related issues in the Scheduled Area of West Godavari District - retrieving the lands lost to non-tribals. With the support of RLA, he was a petitioner in 672 acres of lands of 230 Adivasis and obtained several orders from the High Court securing tribal lands. He observes that he went to jail for 5 months in 5 criminal cases foisted on him by the police at the instance of non-tribals. Nageswara Rao continues to work for RLA and claims that his achievements in several successful legal cases are entirely due to RLA.

LANDMARK JUDGEMENTS

PLEA TO AGENCY (SCHEDULED AREAS) COURTS: UPHELD BY THE SUPREME COURT

Civil Courts never functioned in the Scheduled Areas of Andhra Pradesh. Since 1924 Agency Courts have been functioning in the Scheduled Areas covered by the British ruled Andhra region under A.P Agency Rules of 1924. All civil disputes arising from the Scheduled Areas are dealt with by the Agency Courts that are manned by the revenue officials, who are well acquainted with the age-old customs, habits, traditions, and special

circumstances prevailing in the Agency Areas. The existing system of Judiciary has proven to be quite adequate, amenable to serve the interests of the Adivasis. The Agency rules of 1924 are simple without complicated technical procedures in the process of adjudication.

A litigation was placed by Appellant Companies before the Supreme Court against the functioning of Agency Courts while pleading for replacement of these courts with the Judicial Courts in the Agency Areas. The matter fell for consideration of the Supreme Court in CIVIL APPEAL Nos. 5030-5036 OF 2004 (Nagarjuna Grameena Bank and Others, Appellant (s) versus Medi Narayana & Others)

RLA took up the matter and extended legal support to the Paralegal turned advocate, Chukka Santosh Kumar, an Adivasi to implead in the pending proceedings of Supreme Court as a matter of PIL, seeking retention of the existing Agency Courts system, which is amenable to the tribal dispute resolution process. Trinadh Rao lobbied with the Tribal Welfare Department, Andhra Pradesh and got passed a resolution to continue the existing legal system in the Agency Areas in the larger interest of Adivasis. The matter was heard by the Supreme Court in 2012 and disagreed with the contention of the Appellant companies for replacement of existing agency courts with the Judicial Courts in the Agency Areas. This Judgement of the Supreme Court helps to continue the existing Agency Courts manned by the revenue officials in the Agency Areas.

ALIENATION OF ADIVASI LAND BY NON-TRIBAL PREVENTED

The Government of Andhra Pradesh issued a Circular Memo No. 889/RH1/99 in 1999, benefitting the non-tribals to raise credit from the Government owned Housing Corporation by mortgaging the superstructure of house existing on the site though they have no legal right on the land as per the provisions of tribal protective Land Transfer Regulations (LTR). The order issued by the Government in 1999 would have paved the way for non-tribals to settle in the Agency Areas and also intensify further migration into Scheduled Areas, which will lead to alienation of Adivasi lands.

This GO created tension among the Adivasis in the Agency Areas of Andhra Pradesh. Then a PIL was filed by an Adivasi, Tellam Venkatarao, who is a trained Paralegal by the RLA, challenging the Government circular in the High Court of AP, affirming that it is against the provisions of tribal protective LTR 1 of 59 as amended by 1 of 70. The LTR prohibits transfer of lands between tribal and non-tribal and among the non-tribals in the Scheduled Areas. The Government here is considered as a non-tribal for the purpose of implementation of these regulations.

I) HIGH COURT SET ASIDE THE CIRCULAR

The Divisional Bench of AP High Court in W.P.No.3373/2000 in 2011, struck down the circular, which is against the provisions of LTR, holding that:

‘The creation of any such enforceable right in a prohibited area, which is amply protected under the Constitution, is not only illegal, but also ultra vires the Constitution.’

II) HIGH COURT ORDER CHALLENGED IN SUPREME COURT

One K.L.N.G. Prasad, a non-tribal of Rampachodavaram, challenged the order passed by the AP High Court in W.P.No.3373/2000, before the Supreme Court in SLP No 24823 of 2011. With the support of RLA, the contention of the non-tribal petitioner was strongly opposed. The Supreme Court finally dismissed the petitioner’s case in 2016 observing that there are no merits to the case. This is a landmark Judgement that has helped to prevent non-tribal settlements in the Scheduled Area and helped to restrain the successive governments to take any steps benefitting the non-tribal housing and against the interests of Adivasis.

SECURING LIFT IRRIGATION MECHANISM

Karakagudem village, Kunavaram Mandal of East Godavari District has 110 households of which 22 households, with 41.40 acres of agricultural land, had no access to irrigation. They were accessing water from a non-tribal for Rs. 1000/ per acre. And even after payment, erratic supply of water kept causing low-yields and crop loss. The Adivasis were borrowing money at high rates

of interest by pledging gold and other valuable articles to raise the loan amount. RLA requested the village Gram Sabha to hold a meeting which resulted in the submission of a memorandum for assistance to the ITDA in June 2017. Upon this, the Project Officer of the ITDA sanctioned a lift irrigation which was installed in August 2018. In turn, the Gram Sabha passed a resolution that delegated the responsibility of management of lift irrigation to the three beneficiary villages. The Gram Sabha now charges the Adivasi farmers Rs 300/per acre and Rs 800/acre for non-tribals for the use of water for irrigation. The collected amount is to be utilized to maintain the irrigation scheme without depending further on the government.

The lift irrigation mechanism is now benefitting 22 households covering an extent of 41.40 acres and crop yields have increased from 3 to 5 bags of chilies. Interestingly, the Adivasi farmers gave water to other tribal farmers on the payment of Rs 500 per acre.

DELAYS AND LAPSES IN PENSIONS – THE CASE OF KONDA REDDI WOMEN

Being from the Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG), the women of Konda Reddi are eligible for pensions once they reach 50 years of age. RLA team during one of its surveys found that despite several representations, four women, Pallala Markreddi, Sadala Seemareddi, Sadala Neelapureddi and Kalumula Bullabbairreddi, in Chelakaveedhi hamlet of Pullangi Gram Panchayat in Maredumilli Mandal, East Godavari District were not getting their pensions. Similarly, two tribal widows, Kalumula Mallamma and Kalumula Amamma, who are eligible for widows pension also could not get their pensions despite repeated representations.

RLA supported these women to represent their cases and to post their complaints 'online' at Mandal Parishad Development Office (MPDO) at Maredumilli, which was sent to and approved by the District Rural Development Agency (DRDA) Office, Kakinada, headquarters of East Godavari District. All the 6 women have secured their pensions. Each of the women now gets Rs 2,250/- as their monthly pension.

POLICY CHANGE FOR COMMUNITY CERTIFICATES

Getting community certificates which is a legal right is not easy and makes Adivasis go through several bureaucratic procedures. These certificates validate their identity as Adivasis and are a must to access all kinds of socio-economic benefits. Often, non-tribals connive with officials to get these community cards and hijack the opportunities coming the way of Adivasis. This resonated in a news-item by the MLA of Rampachodavaram to inform that around 2000 tribal students lost their education opportunities for failure of producing these certificates in time in Rampachodavaram Revenue Division.

Finding the prevalence of non-issuance of community certificates in several villages of Maredumilli Mandal, RLA facilitated a meeting of Gram Sabha of Pamuleru to pass a resolution in April 2018 and demand that community certificates be issued only with the permission of Gram Sabhas, as per PESA Act. RLA then sent a copy of this resolution to the Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh, who then referred the matter to the District Collector, East Godavari District, instructing him to issue community certificates (CC) to all eligible Adivasis. On the instruction of the District Collector, a circular was issued by the Sub-Collector, Rampachodavaram instructing the concerned revenue authorities to conduct Gram Sabha meetings in all the 7 Agency Mandals in the Rampachodavaram Revenue Division. Thousands of community certificates could then be secured.

Taking the advantage of this outcome, RLA held a campaign on this issue in other parts of Maredumilli Mandal and facilitated Gram Sabhas' meetings. The outcome was 52 tribals in Pamuleru, 18 tribals in G. M. Valasa and Kundada villages, 31 tribals in Chavadikota village secured community certificates without any hassles.

The Gram Sabha of Pamuleru which pioneered this initiative steered a policy change in securing community certificates, reinforcing the authority of Gram Sabhas under PESA Act. For the Sarpanch and other members of Gram Sabha in Pamuleru, this was a proud moment.

LANDLESS GIVEN RIGHTS TO CULTIVATE

Only 52 out of 129 tribal families in Karakagudem village in Kunavaram Mandal, East Godavari District were given land pattas for 120 acres of land. This left a substantial number of families landless. LAYA encouraged women's groups to take up the issue with the Gram Sabha, resulting in a series of Gram Sabha meetings where they passed a resolution to include all the landless tribal families to cultivate the total 120 acres of the land on an equal share basis. Initially several of the pattadars did not attend the Gram Sabha meetings and other pattadars followed suit. LAYA's RLA team intervened and brought everyone on board. Now, all the tribal families in the village have started cultivating the total 120 acres of land during the current agricultural season 2019, setting up a precedent.

LAND RETRIEVED FOR CULTIVATION

This is a story of non-tribals alienating 18 acres of Adivasi land in the Scheduled Area of Kunavaram Mandal, Khammam District. The government acquired these lands from non-tribals by paying them compensation under the Rehabilitation Plan of the Polavaram Project. However, with government collusion, no land transfer took place. The RLA promoted Tribal Women Rights Forum represented the case to the Project Officer, ITDA requesting for access to these lands on lease. However, the government did not evict the non-Adivasis.

Thereafter, Radha, the leader of the Tribal Women Rights Forum organised both men and women and ploughed the lands in the 18 acres of land in 2010. The non-Adivasis lodged a police complaint against Radha and 30 others. The Kunavaram Police Station registered 2 criminal cases on receipt of 2 complaints from different lands and arrested 14 Adivasis, including Radha. Subsequently RLA sought the release of the arrested Adivasis on bail before the Judicial First-Class Magistrate court, Bhadrachalam. The disputed lands are now in possession of the Adivasis.



PLIGHT OF SINGLE ADIVASI WOMEN

Adivasi women living in the villages of Kunavaram Mandal in Khammam District were exploited by non-tribal settlers and

migrants. During RLA legal awareness camps, stories of single women being sexually exploited by non-tribals surfaced. Several single women were in distress and poor. RLA conducted a survey on single Adivasi women in 35 villages in 8 panchayats of Kunavaram Mandal. The major findings of this survey were:

- Non-tribal migrants gained access to the rich lands in the area by manipulating land records and through extra-marital relations with the Adivasi women. 88 Adivasi women were identified, who were sexually exploited by non-tribals. No action was taken by the Tribal Welfare officials.
- 45 unmarried Adivasi women between 30-40 years were identified with no male support in the family.
- Married women were burdened by spouses with extramarital relations, waywardness and alcoholism. The survey identified 80 women under these circumstances.

By law, a legitimate wife can seek maintenance under Section 125 Criminal Procedure Code if she is neglected by her husband.

However, the legal recourse is alien to tribal society particularly in matrimonial matters. Women, who are sexually exploited by non-tribals through illegal intimacy and neglected by the latter, cannot seek maintenance under 125 Cr. P. C.

The demographic details of the marital status of Scheduled Tribes in Andhra Pradesh (2001 Census) corroborates RLA's field survey on single Adivasi women. Out of the total divorced or separated, the number of Adivasi females, below the age of 60 years is 15511 (72%). While the number of Adivasi males of the same age group are 6002 (28%) only. These women are not covered by any Social Security Scheme, which has been in force in the State of Andhra Pradesh. Single Adivasi women who are under the categories of sexually exploited, neglected, separated, abandoned, and unmarried, and who have no male support in the family emerge as most vulnerable – economically and socially.

RLA held a campaign in 2009 for a separate policy for single Adivasi women alongside sending postcards, letter writing and lobbying with higher officials.

STOPPED THE PROPOSAL FOR ELEPHANT SANCTUARY

To protect elephants, which strayed from the border forest areas of Odisha, a Wildlife Sanctuary covering 117.86 Km was being

proposed in the forest areas of Vizianagaram and Srikakulam Districts. While the Ministry of Environment and Forests claimed that the sanctuary would affect only 300 families in nine villages in Srikakulam and Vizianagaram Districts with the promise of rehabilitation package of Rs 10 lakh to each family, with housing and infrastructure – in reality around 40,000 Adivasis from 100 villages were reported to be displaced.

About 5000 Adivasi families from 156 villages, with the support of 26 CBOs under the leadership of President of the CBO Federation met the then Chief Minister to demand that the Wildlife Sanctuary project be stopped. A few political parties too opposed the project. The State Government withdrew its plan.

POLAVARAM PROJECT

The gigantic Polavaram Dam proposed at Polavaram in West Godavari District in Andhra Pradesh on the river Godavari promises to transfer 80 thousand million cubic feet (TMC) water to the Krishna basin via a 174 km long right canal and to Visakhapatnam District via a 181.53 km long left canal. The project, it is promised, will irrigate 7.21 lakh acres in Krishna, Godavari (East and West) and Visakhapatnam Districts, and generate about 960 MW of electricity. These wild promises notwithstanding, the project will destroy the lives and livelihoods of tribals and destroy the little development achieved in their habitats. Over 276 tribal villages in the agency areas of East and West Godavari Districts and Khammam District are expected to be submerged. According to the 2001 Census, 2,37,000 people will be displaced. As many as 53.17 per cent of the displaced will be tribals. Tribals and Dalits account for 65.75 per cent of the displaced. The natural resources, cultural systems, traditional knowledge of these people are closely tied to the land they inhabit. With the loss of the land, minor forest produce, tubers, leaves, indigenous medicinal systems, commons, the very existence of tribals was threatened.

The government acquired the lands from non-tribals under Polavaram Project and even paid compensation in violation of tribal protective Land Transfer Regulations. With the support of RLA, the Adivasis challenged the Awards passed in favour of non-tribals as well as notifications issued for land acquisition

showing the names of non-tribals. With the intervention of the High Court and Local Courts, Adivasis and their CBOs stopped the illegal acquisition of lands and payment of compensation to non-tribals. They secured orders in their favour for land-to-land compensation under the Polavaram Project. A policy decision was obtained from the Government to consider forest land of rights of Adivasis in the submergence area under the Polavaram Project and to grant of entitlements. RLA held workshops to bring legal awareness and strengthened the role of Gram Sabha to address future issues of land acquisition and implementation of Rehabilitation and Resettlement under the Project.

LAYA undertook a study (in association with North Eastern Social Research Centre, Guwahati) on 'Displacement and Marginalisation in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana: 1951-2010' and brought out a study report suggesting measures for effective implementation of Land Acquisition and Rehabilitation and Resettlement Laws.

BAUXITE MINING IN THE EASTERN GHATS

The Eastern Ghats are a storehouse of bauxite - with 564.33 million tons of deposits in East Godavari and Visakhapatnam Districts alone that has a bauxite spread of over 4700 hectares of land. Bauxite mining would affect 247 villages and displace 44,000 Adivasis. The survey of The Energy Research Institute (TERI), New Delhi, discloses that there would be an environmental loss of Rs 1520 crores alone in Anantagiri Mandal in Visakhapatnam District. Also, since the entire coffee plantations are in the bauxite belt, the proposed mining would affect 60,000 coffee growers including workers. Rivers such as the Gosthani, Varaha, Tandava and Sarada have their catchment areas in the bauxite deposits, as bauxite absorbs rainwater, which is the source of the streams.

During the pendency of the proposal for the bauxite mining in the Eastern Ghats during the earlier governments, LAYA-RLA in collaboration with other NGOs and CBOs had taken up a campaign and advocacy opposing the bauxite mining project in tribal areas. In 2019, the government of Andhra Pradesh nullified the earlier GOs 97 - proposing to take up bauxite mining project in the Agency Area of Visakhapatnam District.

ENDNOTES

¹ The Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 or PESA ensures self-governance through traditional Gram Sabhas for people living in the Scheduled Areas of India. Scheduled Areas are identified by the Fifth Schedule of the Constitution of India and are in ten states of India which have a predominant population of tribal communities. The Scheduled Areas, were not covered by the 73rd Constitutional Amendment or Panchayat Raj Act of the Indian Constitution.

² Tribes in Srikakulam: Savara, Jatapu, Gadaba, Konda Dora; Visakhapatnam: Bagata, Gadaba, Kammara, Konda Dora, Kotia, Khond, Mali, Manne Dora, Mukha Dora, Reddi Dora, Porja Valmiki, Goud, Kulia and East Godavari: Konda Reddi, Koya Doras, Konda Kammara and Konda Kapus. Classified as the most backward, the government of India, the PVTGs have been given special schemes by the government of India for their development. There are 12 PVTG in the Eastern Ghats of Andhra Pradesh.

³ One of the 7 geo-climatic zones of Andhra Pradesh. The particularly vulnerable tribal group (PVTG) is a government of India classification created with the purpose of enabling improvement in the conditions of certain communities with particularly low development indices.

⁴ LAYA, LAYA - Rhythms in Development 1

⁵ LAYA, LAYA - Rhythms in Development I

⁶ Nafisa Goga D'Souza, 2003, Indigenous Education Program Case Study, Empowerment and Action: LAYA'S Work in Tribal Education.

⁷ The FRRA which comes under government's Ministry of Tribal Affairs (MoTA) is mandated to settle the rights of Adivasis and OFTD through proper examination of the filed claims. The bureaucratic process is long in that the gram sabha is given the responsibility of consolidating the individual claims to forest land and forest produce and authorize the Forest Rights Committee (FRC) to investigate the claim(s). Thereafter the gram sabha assesses the findings of FRC and shares their decisions with the Sub-Divisional Committee (SDC). The SDLC reviews and sends their recommendations to the District-level committee (DLC) or sends it back to the gram sabha for modifications. A state-level monitoring committee (SLMC), constituted by the state government, is mandated to monitor the process to ensure that it follows the rules framed under the act. The SDLC and DLC have six members—three government officials from the tehsil and block level and three “people’s representatives” nominated by the district panchayat. The paradox is that only government officials can chair these bodies – tilting the power balance to the political might.



A meeting on Human Rights, *Rajahmundry*



Adivasis demand better prices for minor forest produce, *ITDA, Rampachodavaram*



RLA Unit, RLA office, *Rampachodavaram*



Rally for implementation of Land Rights, *Rampachodavaram*



25 km foot march on the plight of migrant tribals, *Rampachodavaram*



Addressing Adivasis on Land Rights, *West Godavari District*



Resilient Pathways in Livelihoods: Adaptation, Mitigation and Sustainable Development

CHAPTER 3

Inhabiting at different altitudes of Eastern Ghats, the economy of Adivasis is inextricably linked to forest-ecosystems. Over the centuries the Adivasis have evolved composite livelihood pursuits from various segments of forests – lands on the hill-tops and plains, minor forest produce, water streams, birds, animals, and several others. The rich non-timber minor forest produce (NTFP) that ranges from fibres, fuelwood, grasses, resins, lac, bamboo, leaves, and gums at one end to nutrient rich forest-vegetables, medicinal herbs, nuts, wild fruits, honey, and the list goes on – has been serving the household economy of the Adivasis, variously.

LAYA entered the Adivasi universe at a time when the forests and livelihoods of Adivasis therein were already entrapped in climate variabilities. A vulnerability assessment of the forest ecosystem brought out trends in varying weather fluctuations, decrease of bird and animal populations that help in regeneration, perennial streams turning seasonal, and lowered water table, to mention the salient. Forests resources were over exploited. In search of fertile lands, farmers were going deeper into forest lands.¹ Lured by income potential, farmers began to opt for commercial crops (cotton, tobacco, tapioca), high use of chemicals that were aggressively being pushed by the government.

The Adivasis were and continue to be constrained by poor road connectivity and for long, not many development measures came their way. For example, a good measure of the budgetary allocations under Tribal Sub-Plan either gets diverted or goes unspent and this explains the underdeveloped Adivasi contexts. Again, most of the central missions in health, education and employment have been defaulting in their delivery.

SEARCH FOR FERTILE LAND

A search for cultivable and fertile land led farmers to the hills, which were cleared for farming. But this was done with an inherent knowledge that they were attacking the very core of their sustenance.

‘A search for fertile and cultivable land led the farmers to the hills, which were cleared for farming. But this was done with an inherent knowledge that they were attacking the very core of their sustenance. The hills housed the forests and the forests have sustained them for ages. The truant rains are creating a vicious cycle. The space that was cleared for farming was used for three years and then left for better pastures. In due time it was noticed that these patches were rendered barren with no chances of regeneration of forest area’

LAYA encountered these contexts early on and realized that alongside their battle for land rights, their second mission lay in Sustainable Development of Adivasi communities. Well-aware that they had to get into a composite package of initiatives that sustains Adivasi livelihoods in farming and agroforestry, LAYA started with small initiatives in horticulture, digging bores, setting up check dams and progressively moved to establish comprehensive farming practices along the lines of adaptation and mitigation to build the resilience of Adivasi communities.² Thirty and odd years later, there are tangible impacts of household food security, stabilized household economies, visible regeneration of agroforests and an informed community on positive impacts of adaptive and mitigative practices.

MODELS IN ADAPTATION AND MITIGATION

As the various initiatives gathered momentum, LAYA nurtured models in sustainable farming practices. Demonstration and establishment of biodiverse humus based organic agriculture and agroforestry have emerged as the overarching practice in adaptation and mitigation. All along, LAYA's thrust has been to facilitate processes '...for optimum use and regeneration of natural resources for higher productivity and sustainability and being culturally coherent in the interventions that we seek to introduce.'³

Progressively, LAYA brought a variety of climate resilient new crops that adapt to agro-ecology with high income potential. Farmers were educated and encouraged to experiment with diverse techniques of organic composting such as drava, jeevamrut, vermicompost, and natural leaf litter to increase organic matter along with different methods of spacing and lining for different crops and efficient use of water. LAYA facilitated access to an impressive variety of agricultural implements that include markers, cycle weeders, horticultural tools, hand saws, secateurs, crop harvesting sickles, tarpaulins, sprayers, drums for making high humus manures, hand tools, hoes, ploughs, and others from the ITDA.⁴ Less stressful on soils, these tools have reduced the drudgery in manual labour, especially for women farmers. An overall impact is that biodiverse organic agriculture and removal of use of chemical fertilizers and other agrochemicals have visibly increased productivity of crops, enhancement of horticultural plants and forest species in varying degrees – pointing to a bountiful impact. During the initial phases, shifting to organic farming took time. To begin with a few interested farmers experimented and with results in increased crop productivity coming their way – there was a spread effect.

Several strategic levers enabled LAYA to initiate and spread livelihood initiatives to nurture a large field of demonstrative practices. The field teams of LAYA have reached out extensively to farmers, held large scale meetings on sustainable agriculture, forest regeneration, where required facilitated field-experiments, formal training, and most importantly close accompaniment for all initiatives – motivating, providing technical inputs either directly or getting experts from the government agencies and technical institutions. Simultaneously,

LAYA has leveraged schemes from ITDA, departments of agriculture, horticulture and at times collaborating with their projects – contributing to a critical change process.

Often, LAYA's initiatives preceded, accompanied, or followed by feasibility studies, assessments, action research and field trials with learnings that strengthened its engagements. Currently, there are action-research projects, underway. By this, LAYA's field has become a research hub, adding a valuable dimension to its model.⁵

ADAPTIVE VARIANTS IN NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

LAYA's farming constituency has a robust community of practice in rain-fed organic agriculture and agroforestry. The salient practices given below point to pathways towards resilience in Adivasi economy and society.⁶

1. Primacy to the promotion of crop-diversity with high-yields and income potential. Methods in spacing of crops and line sowing have found acceptability because of optimal use of seeds, reduced drudgery in weeding, systematic harvesting of crops, fewer chances of crop destruction due to climate variabilities and most importantly higher yields. The best illustration of this is in the System of Rice Intensification (SRI) with organic manure, wider spacing of seeds in a square pattern and intermittent watering that keeps the soil moist and aerated and earth-friendly weeders. Farmers have also begun to practice SRI in both kharif and rabi seasons. Farmers affirm that crop-yields have increased by 30 percent per acre.
2. The crop-mix in farmers' fields is now biodiverse with:
 - a) Increased production of varieties of cereals and pulses, some of which they had not cultivated before.⁷
 - b) Revival of multi-millet and domestication of other forest species such as broom grass and edible tubers, and
 - c) A rich variety of old and new vegetables and spices. Farmers regularly save seeds, several of them are a rare variety of seeds and most households have 15-16 varieties of seeds, resulting in seed sovereignty.

3. Climate Resilient Natural Farming (CRNF) is being practiced with 1500 farmers of Pathakota cluster of Y. Ramavaram Mandal, East Godavari District. This model adopts a package of biodiverse natural farming practices that protects soil from degradation with seed treatment of cow-dung and urine-based formulations, mulching, and soil aeration.⁸

One interesting variant of this is a five-layer model in one acre with horticultural plants such as mango, cashew, wood-apple

4. Agroforestry models through large scale mixed cropping with NTFP and horticultural species along with regular crops on slope lands (metta garuvulu and garuvulu), fallow and degraded lands – with twin objectives of income generation and forest regeneration.⁹ One interesting variant of this is a five-layer model in one acre with horticultural plants such as mango, cashew, wood-apple and guava, leafy greens, and vegetables.
5. Homestead land development with half an acre to one acre, largely managed by Adivasi women underscores practices of biodiversity that enhances climate resilience and household economic security. With main crops of turmeric and ginger and several other crops such as maize, cow peas and multi-vegetables – farmers harvest the produce all through the 365 days. The homestead development variant comes with several benefits in food and nutritional security, and in particular personal income in the hands of women.
6. Kitchen gardens have become a widespread practice in Adivasi villages. Women, who never had vegetables growing in their yards or those with one or two vegetable plants, now have a range of vegetables, providing multi-vegetable baskets for their cuisine.

OUR ROLE IN
CAPACITY BUILDING
PROCESSES HAS BEEN
TO ACCOMPANY
THEM, KEEP ASKING
PROVOCATIVE
QUESTIONS,
SUPPORT SOME OF
THEIR ACTIVITIES
AND CREATE AN
ENVIRONMENT FOR
DELIBERATION AND
REFLECTION

7. LAYA's projects in backyard poultry farming has brought several benefits in Adivasi households - with protein-rich food for the families, income in the hands of women and manuring of soils.¹⁰
8. The multi-purpose fast growing broom grass is a climate friendly NFTP with high soil conservation ecological value. Normally grown in different parts of forests, Adivasi use broom grass variously - for housing material, fodder, making brooms, and even for medicinal purposes. LAYA has been motivating farmers to domesticate broom grass on fallow lands, farm bunds and degraded forests. Broom grass production has also opened potential for external markets and increased household incomes. Currently experiments are being carried out on broom grass based intercropping models.¹¹
9. Land development and soil and moisture conservation is a salient initiative. Facilitated under MGNREGS, these initiatives include land levelling, bunding, farm ponds, horticultural plantation, compost pits at household level, clearance of bushes, removal of dead tree stumps and several others.
10. LAYA's efforts to undertake action research, document, and regenerate endemic forest species such as broom grass, wild mangoes, wild tubers, tamarind, Fishtail Palm (*Caryota urens*) occupies a special place. 'There are 10-15 wild tubers that form an essential seasonal diet for the Adivasis. Several of these tubers are natural antibiotics. Since these tubers are disappearing, we explored the propagation methods for their revival and recommended the Adivasi communities for their domestication. Domestication goes a long way in reducing the pressure on natural forests. There is an urgent need for conservation, protection and regeneration of an amazing variety of forest species'- Dr. Venugopala Rao (WEAVES). LAYA adopted innovative techniques in eco-regeneration that includes dibbling and broadcasting of several forest species.
11. To arrest over exploitation of edible wild tubers that provide sustenance to wild animals and Adivasi households, LAYA has developed protocols for harvesting of

non-wood forest produce (NWFP) from neighbourhood forests. The Adivasis are being motivated to grow and domesticate important wild tuber species on podu and doddi lands as a conservation strategy.

ENERGY GAPS AND RENEWABLE ENERGY

The energy gap in remote Adivasi regions of Eastern Ghats is enormous. The state policy to increase energy access has not gone beyond electricity connectivity and even to this day many Adivasi villages do not enjoy this privilege. The central government has done mighty little to understand and find contextual solutions to the energy needs of Adivasis inhabiting remote forested regions. In general, government measures to provide power grids to distant areas have run into rough weather for reasons of high capital investment, huge losses in inefficient power transmissions and dismal efficiency delivery. This is the case of one power grid in LAYA's operational area. In its critique of government policies on renewable energy, LAYA points out that the policy thrust on conventional renewables through large scale projects end up displacing the marginalized communities with high social and environmental costs.

By aiming to bridge gaps in basic energy requirements at household and community level, LAYA joins the larger debate on renewable/decentralised energy alternatives that offers a huge opportunity for Sustainable Development. LAYA postulates that renewable energy technology has potential '...to ensure tribal 'energy self-sufficiency', maintain environmental quality, generate employment and contribute to economic development... decentralized energy options, while rooted in renewables as a source of energy, also have the key dimension of local management of the energy generated, wherein there is no alienation between the producer and consumer of energy.'¹²

By adopting a cluster-based approach, LAYA initiatives are contextualized in a cluster of villages/hamlets proximate to each other to facilitate cumulative impacts. These initiatives have also been linked with LAYA's development initiatives in biodiverse

farming and agroecology. LAYA's models in renewable energy are demonstrative and validate low-carbon pathways for Climate Change and livelihood enhancement.

GRAVITY FLOW AND HYDRAM TECHNOLOGIES

These technologies have found relevance in remote forest villages where Adivasis, particularly women who had to carry water from long distances over steep terrain. The gravity flow uses earth gravity from a natural spring or perennial source of flowing water to lift water, which is tanked and then fed into taps in the heart of the community. These technologies dispense with expensive polluting diesel pumps thereby reducing the requirement of overall costs.

Hydraulic Ram (also known as hydram) uses kinetic energy of flowing water to elevate water from lower elevation to higher level elevation. It is a simple renewable energy technology with two moving parts that uses energy from falling water to an elevation much higher than the source level. No other energy source is required and if there is continuous flow of falling water, the pump will work continuously and automatically with simple maintenance. Farmers in mountainous regions with their perennial streams have found it of great value. Together, gravity flow, hydram and slow-sand water filters have provided water at the doorstep of farming communities - for multiple requirements of bathing, clean water for cooking, for cattle and plants and significantly for critical irrigation that has brought back fallow lands into farming. Women observe that now men also collect water, which is a gender shift.

MICRO-HYDRO

Although capital and technology intensive, the community-based micro-hydro at Pathakota was set up as part of an energy hub which included cookstoves and solar lanterns. But with the setting up of a power grid, it is now being used as a backup. One must hasten to add that the electric supply of the power grid is

erratic, and farmers are unhappy about the high Unit costs. One could argue that given the erratic supply of electricity in tribal areas, the micro hydro system has the potential to function as a full-time backup support system for multiple uses.

Since the Adivasi beneficiaries have contributed their labour for construction of micro-hydro power station (6Kw supplying 85 households), their stake in its upkeep and management is high. The communities continue to use it due frequent power cuts and rising charges of the government grid.

‘When the grid electricity will come or go nobody can say -- the electricity generated from the micro-hydro can be used daily and during times of celebration (festivals and weddings), it is used in the daytime as well.’

BIO-SAND WATER FILTER (BSWF)

The bio-sand filter is a zero-energy water filter for intermittent use in households. The filter container can be made of concrete or plastic and is filled with layers of specially selected and prepared sand and gravel. It can be fabricated from local materials and there are no on-going costs and no replaceable parts. It is small enough to fit into the smallest kitchens and is easy to maintain. Prefabricated Units are supplied to households.

This filter has proven to eliminate sediments, bacteria, viruses, compounds, cysts, worms, and other impurities in water. Pathogens and suspended solids are removed through a combination of biological and physical processes that take place in the bio-layer and within the sand layer. The advantage of this technology is that it also removes turbidity, the quality of water improves with time. More importantly, as a low-carbon renewable technology, it reduces the need for boiling water, thereby eschewing the use of fuelwood.

SLOW-SAND WATER FILTER (SSWF)

SSWF is an adaptation to the traditional bio-sand water filter at the village level. As a low-carbon renewable technology, SSWF

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uses the technology of slow sand filtration; where a layer of sand and gravel is used to filter the water and discharge through outlets. The slow-sand water filter is a proven technology and is effective in filtering turbidity and various pathogenic substances from water. LAYA has established several village community-based slow sand water filters.

These water filters have found wide acceptance with women, who would frequently visit the nearby streams to collect water. With potable water made available within easy reach at a central point in the village or hamlet, these water filters have saved time and women say that they now have more time for their agricultural activities.

I and my daughter used to collect water from the stream at least 3-4 times during the day. We no more have to do that. The water is now available ten steps away from my home. The food cooked with this water tastes good.

- SADALA SOMALAMMA¹³

IMPROVED COOK STOVES

LAYA's improved cookstoves have a special place in renewable energy. LAYA has promoted two major initiatives in improved cookstoves - LAYA Paderu Micro-Scale Gold Standard Project and LAYA Surakshana Gold Standard Voluntary Emission Reduction (VER) Project - earning credits for emission-reductions.¹⁴ While the entire exercise of earning credits for emission reductions demanded a business outlook, the social spin-offs outweighed the uncertainties these projects went through in accessing forward financing.¹⁵

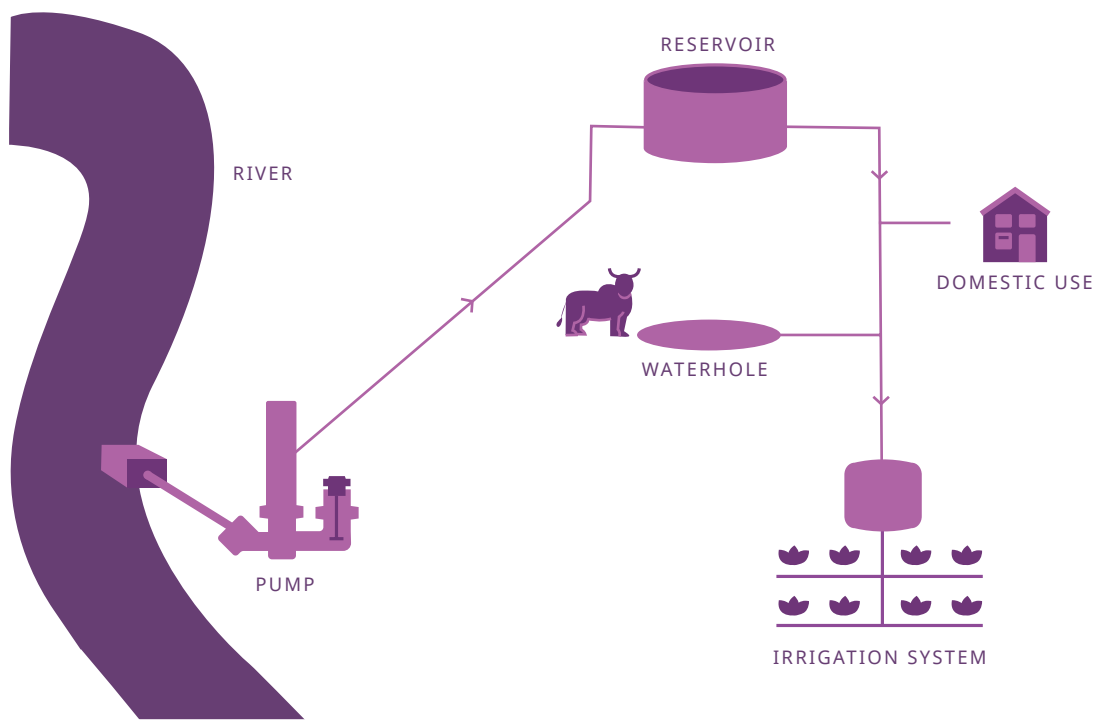
LAYA has gone through several rounds of experimentation to improve the cookstoves for the Adivasi households. These cookstoves are fuel-efficient and can burn with a variety of

biofuels, compatible even to small kitchens and conserve 25-30 percent of biofuels, reducing household pollution and emission levels in the kitchen. These cookstoves came as a boon for women who were trekking two to three kilometres daily to collect fuel and often heavy logs and then get on to the drudgery of cooking.

“The traditional cookstoves used to engulf the kitchen and other areas of the house with smoke. Often, mothers would cook while carrying newborn babies – both inhaling the smoke. High levels of smoke were taking a toll on women’s health. Women would complain of poor vision and chest problems. The improved cookstoves spew less smoke and reduce emissions. We no longer see heavy logs being stored on the trees in the house compound.”
- Lova Raju, Coordinator, Alternative Technology Unit.

A critical observation of a study conducted in 2018 merits mention, “...our results provide strong evidence that fuel savings allow women to spend more time collecting other items from the forest, which can enhance their quality of life as well as their income, as many women do sell these products at market.

Critical Stage
Irrigation System /
Hydrum



We also discovered that fuel collection is very much a social activity among women, as they not only help one another cut and lift wood pieces but also have the opportunity to gossip, joke, and relax with one another. This indicates that although fuel savings may only save a moderate amount of literal time, it can improve women's quality of life in nuanced ways... an inventory of fuel types used by households in these villages illustrates that every household has a diverse and unique set of fuel types and fuel sources. In trying to understand the effects of fuel collection on the local vegetation, as well as the emissions produced by stoves, attention to variability in fuel choice is especially important. This further reiterates the idea that most women very much value having customizable choices in fuel...Overall, stove users report that they are very much pleased with their improved stove. Many stove users note that the stoves are not large enough for certain occasions like festivals when women must cook for dozens of people. So more or larger burners which can accommodate larger families may be important for better stove compatibility.”¹⁶

With many positive outcomes of improved cookstove, a new culture has emerged – women redefining their free time, bonding with other women and their community. For the Adivasis, these stoves are sacred symbols. As worshippers of nature, they believe that the fire god resides in these stoves and therefore is a spiritual place.

WASTE-TO-ENERGY FOR ASHRAM SCHOOL KITCHENS

Bio-gas systems and water heater incinerators in 12 Ashram¹⁷ Schools in Visakhapatnam and Vizianagaram Districts were introduced to demonstrate an effective means to manage waste. In this process solid waste is treated in closed vessels, where in the absence of oxygen, microorganisms break down the organic matter into a stable residue and generate a methane-rich biogas in the process. Organic waste can be digested to produce methane as fuel for cooking. Likewise, inorganic waste can also be burned in a manner that is able to reduce the toxic matter released in the exhaust. In the process of burning the inorganic waste, water can also be heated to serve various purposes that could either facilitate

hot water for bathing as required or to pre-heat water for more efficient cooking.

The school authorities, cooks, teachers, and children have offered positive feedback about the utility of the systems. The cooks particularly have found their tasks relatively easier since they now need to walk relatively shorter distances to dispose of the waste. The children in many cases participate in the collection and disposal of inorganic waste and seem to enjoy the easy process of making hot water either for the kitchen or for their own bathing. The headmasters of some of the schools have also developed special gardens around the bio-gas system to facilitate the fertilization from the residual slurry. The teachers have generally been quite curious about the functioning of the system and have been known to try and educate the children on the process of creating and utilising methane through practical demonstration.

The systems are being monitored regularly with respect to their performance and more installations for some Ashram schools in the adjacent East Godavari District is in the pipeline.

WOMEN MATTER: TRANSFORMATIVE GENDER SITES

There is no denying that women are dynamic players in forest ecosystems – with central role in agriculture, collection of fuel, fodder and a variety of non-timber forest products, livestock management, whether of small ruminants (goats, sheep, pigs and chicken) or milch cattle, taking care of vegetable cultivation in their marginal farms or homesteads – all of this presenting packed work-schedules. LAYA argues that the impact of Climate Change and adverse development policies have often displaced women from productive engagements and in turn lowered their social status. “Women have become more vulnerable due to increased loss of access to resources at the local level. Problems like alienation of land and deforestation militate against the economic role of women in their families...This is a vital area of intervention in Adivasi societies... Our approach in the region has been – on the one hand towards perspective building processes with Adivasi women, and on the other hand accompanying them at

the grassroots level on specific issues which have policy implications.”
- Rhythms in Development I

INITIAL STEPS

LAYA had to make strategic efforts to bring women into the development stream. To achieve this, LAYA had to identify issues that are women-specific, promote SHGs and women-led CBOs that networked, establish cross-cutting linkages beyond their immediate environs and capacitate them to be part of Adivasi activism. This was not easy in the initial years. The first step was to motivate them to attend LAYA's meetings and training programs. To quote, “We explored 3 areas in our working areas specially with women. The first successful intervention was made in payment of minimum wages by a local landowner. We managed to get the local labour officials to pressurize the employer into paying the required wages. More difficult was the problem of ‘keeps’ - Adivasi women forced into cohabitation by non-Adivasis and exploited by them to take advantage of their tribal status to benefit the resources and facilities reserved for Adivasis. It is a complex phenomenon, and the prospects are often alluring for Adivasi women. Finally, efforts were made to promote economic programs - bamboo and palm-fibre weaving, rope making, adda leaves, etc. These did not meet with much success. We had specifically engaged a woman leader in charge of one of our sub-centres, and this facilitated our contacts with women, who then attended several meetings and rallies specifically organized for them. They even participated in exposures specially organized for them. The promotion of Grain Banks and Credit Societies sustained because of their intense involvement.”¹⁸

EMPOWERING WOMEN

As far as the gender biases are concerned, we began to encourage discussions around cultural perspectives and gender equity. These helped in addressing the extreme skewed mindset around gender equity. Fortunately for us since the organization is led by me being a woman, learning by example has become a positive tool in the management of personal behaviors.

“We have found this area to be challenging. The quality of life of women has changed where the impact of our multiple initiatives has touched them in a meaningful way. Some of them are playing

leadership roles in their own villages. Those who have been involved in our training initiatives have benefitted the most. However, the challenging aspect has been to outreach them in a sustained way in our activities because of the household burden that they carry. More needs to be done by evolving creative ways to get them involved in community affairs.” – Nafisa

SELF HELP GROUPS: CHANGE PATHS

LAYA's entry into micro-credit initiatives through Self-Help Groups (SHGs) was a response to large-scale indebtedness of Adivasis to moneylenders with interest rates peaking at 100 percent. The historical trajectory reveals three trends of LAYA in micro-credit initiatives. In East Godavari District, LAYA accompanied an intense process of setting up a bank – Manyaseema with its beginnings in 1989. In 2007, Manyaseema was registered under the Mutually Aided Cooperative Societies Act, Andhra Pradesh. Manyaseema for many years functioned as a self-governed micro-credit society with three-tiered structure comprising the Board and Secretariat, cluster level associations in the middle and the SHGs at the grassroots level. Unfortunately at a later stage due to a crisis in management this venture could not be sustained. In the districts of Srikakulam and Vizianagaram, LAYA capacitated women-led CBOs to promote SHGs in their villages. In Paderu division of Visakhapatnam District, LAYA brought a new variant of promoting SHGs and capacitating them in their internal governance while they amalgamated with the well-known state driven Velugu program.¹⁹

LAYA's micro-credit initiatives must be placed in the context of an aggressive state driven Velugu program. Through its SHGs, LAYA departed from the traditional model of savings and went beyond to address socio-economic rights of Adivasi women. The women-led CBOs that LAYA facilitated have taken on a vital role in motivating the SHGs to be part of the gender and Adivasi cause. The very first women-led CBO – Vana Nari Jagruti (set up in 1997-98) set a trend for others to follow. Today, there are five women-led CBOs that are in the vanguard of activism – be it vigilantes on violence against women, facilitating women's economic initiatives or being the gender face of Adivasi rallies and campaigns.

Nafisa's comments on micro-credit and finance institutions raises critical queries for reflection. "...to what extent are the goals of micro credit institutions and social empowerment compatible?... In the process of managing SHGs the confidence of the women tends to develop so does their social awareness. Most often they have been accompanied by NGOs who invest in the capacity building of members of SHGs. In a majority of cases the SHGs and their federations utilize this platform as an opportunity to discuss social issues and take up collective action on local level problems. For example, in the case of Manyaseema the women in several villages have responded to the issue of arrack and have broken down arrack shops in their villages. Much of the leadership came from women in SHGs. Many of the SHGs play a watchdog role on education and its management in their villages, some of them have handled dropout problems in schools, others have organized health camps, undertaken village sanitation initiatives and worked on village development issues. This experience does reveal the kind of opportunities that are opened up with some sort of collective initiative."²⁰

In Paderu division of Visakhapatnam District, LAYA brought a new variant of promoting SHGs and capacitating them in their internal governance while they amalgamated with the well-known state driven Velugu program

SPECIAL FOCUS ON SINGLE WOMEN –
WIDOWS, DESERTED AND UNMARRIED

While highlighting widespread incidence of deserted women, a study by LAYA comments, 'the customary law favours men against the interests of women... customary law does not taboo a man from having multiple relationships... In fact in the Konda Reddis the status of the man was reflected in the number of women he married... Several repressive

customs such as child marriages, forced marriages and polygamy do exist which are inextricably linked with the process of desertion in tribal societies. Desertion takes place largely at a rather young age... The impact on tribal women is by and large devastating. This is more so because a majority of the women on the one hand are young in age and on the other hand have children to take responsibility at the time of desertion.’

The two women-led CBOs have given special focus to support single women – counselling them, capacitating them with skills and bringing them into economic activity.²¹ There is an agency of women in LAYA’s constituency with several models of empowerment – as leaders, legal defenders, members of local governance, savers and entrepreneurs.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC ENTITLEMENTS

Thanks to multiple interventions by women-led CBOs and RLA, women have become gender-sensitive and better informed of various entitlements given to them by PESA, FRRA and government schemes. For its part, RLA and women-led CBOs have been providing seminal services:

- Conducting fact-finding visits, surveys to identify gaps in delivery of various schemes to women and in particular single women, denial of job cards, ration cards, social security schemes, and facilitating their access.
- Providing legal support to women in distress on account of desertion, widowhood, non-tribals manoeuvres to entice Adivasi women into marriage only to leave them after cornering their property and denial of alimony by their men and domestic violence. LAYA has been bridging gender gaps from multiple perspectives – vulnerabilities stemming from Climate Change, iniquitous gender traditions of different tribal groups, low levels of literacy, poor asset base and drudgery of work.

MAKING AN IMPACT

The field area of LAYA is a hub of happenings, aflush with clusters of households that are demonstrating that bio-diverse organic agriculture, practice of multi-cropping, mixed farming, climate-friendly technologies, and educational processes hold solutions to regenerate their ecosystems with food security and sustainable livelihoods. Wherever bio-diverse organic practices got clustered with low-carbon technologies that irrigate farms, impacts upscaled in terms of regenerated soils, increased crop yields and household economic security.

There are many references to empowered women in LAYA's field areas. For its part, LAYA brought an opportunity that created spaces for women's personal growth, women-specific initiatives that strengthened their economic roles, becoming literates which in turn has inspired others to join their stream, getting into activist roles individually and collectively – indicating gender resilience on several fronts.

The biodiverse organic farming models and renewable energy technologies have many take-aways for replication and policy. LAYA has been taking its demonstrative models for policy advocacy to national and global platforms.

CROP TECHNOLOGIES



Rare variety seed
conservation
and Propagation

LAYA'S OPERATIONAL AREAS/HOUSEHOLDS AND CROP VARIETY



Paddy - 15 varieties



Beans - 5 varieties



Millets - 5 varieties



Pulses - 6-12 varieties

CROP TECHNOLOGIES



System of Rice
Intensification (SRI)



Eco-regeneration and
Agro forestry



Mixed cropping



Live Fencing



Bio-farming in one
acre model



Five-layer model in
one acre



Homestead gardens



Micro-Hydro



Hydram



Gravity Flow Systems

LAYA'S OPERATIONAL AREAS/HOUSEHOLDS AND CROP VARIETY

1,495 Farmers covering 1,844 Acres (Increased yield on an average of 30% per acre compared with the normal cultivated paddy in kharif season)

1,680 Farmers covering
2,920 Acres

6,520 Households in 9,650 Acres

2,650 Households

40 Plots

15,600 Households

2,900 Households

4 villages

10 Villages

6 Villages

CROP TECHNOLOGIES



Slow sand water filters



Bio-sand water filters



Cookstoves



Millet Flour Mill



Waste management
practice in Ashram
schools: Biogas and
incinerator



Soil Nutrient
Management

LAYA'S OPERATIONAL AREAS/ HOUSEHOLDS AND CROP VARIETY

8 Villages

200 Households

12,200 Households

5 Units

14 Schools

Practiced by 7,695 Adivasi farmers in
8,118 acres in 289 Villages of 4 Districts
(Increased crop productivity to an
average of 20%)

HORTICULTURE AND AGROFORESTRY

Mango and cashew plantation were facilitated in 980 acres of 686 households in 42 villages of 16 panchayats of 4 Mandals in the East Godavari District in collaboration of MGNREGS and State Horticulture Mission (SHM). With fencing the plantation survival rate was 65%. Demonstrated agroforestry models in 258 acres of 320 households in 34 villages, 8 Panchayats of Y. Ramavaram, Addateegala, Gangavaram and Rajavommangi Mandals in East Godavari district. Broom grass cultivation

was promoted in 120 acres from 2 Mandals of East Godavari and Visakhapatnam districts. The salient agroforestry species include soap nut, sikakai, bamboo, neredu, tamarind, jafra and neem. The horticultural species comprised vakkaya, mango, sapota, pineapple, and banana.

PISCICULTURE IN WATER BODIES

Facilitated 127 households from 43 villages to take up fisheries in as many water bodies in East Godavari and Visakhapatnam Districts. They were supplied 2,54,000 fish seeds purchased from the Fisheries Department. At the end of the harvesting season February 2020 the fish weight was an average of 600 - 750 gm. The households have harvested fish, consumed and also sold some fish, earning Rs.15,000 - 20,000 per household.

DESI BACKYARD POULTRY

6,200 households and 56 Desi poultry breeder farms in Addateegala and Paderu divisions. (In collaboration with WASSAN, ITDA and TRICOR)

SEED CENTERS AND CONSERVATION OF RARE CROP SEED VARIETIES

Facilitated 10 community managed seed centres in 10 focal villages, which were established earlier in 6 Panchayats of Pathakota and Pedakodapalli region. Each seed centre has 32 traditional varieties of millets, paddy, pulses, beans, spices and oil seeds. 1450 farmers accessed seeds from the seed centres and utilized them in 1890 acres. In addition, farmers were facilitated to collect and supply seeds of many varieties of traditional crops to other farmers.

ALTERNATIVE MARKETING STRUCTURES

Initiated 6 Millets Producers Groups (MPG) in East Godavari District and linked them with Girijan Cooperative Corporation (GCC) and Manyam Grains to procure millets. 4 MPGs have marketed millets in collaboration with the GCC, Rampachodavaram. Also processing of millets is being encouraged and some of the processed millets was made available through the Public Distribution System (PDS) in 2 Panchayats of Y. Ramavaram Mandal and for sale in retail outlets in Tulasipakalu, Addateegala and Rampachodavaram.

PROFILING BIODIVERSE CROPS, PRACTICES AND LOW-CARBON TECHNOLOGIES STORY OF CARBON FINANCE

'LAYA was privy to international negotiations on Climate Change since the 90s. This was mainly because LAYA's Executive Director was attending these international events on Climate Change almost every year. Inspired and concerned by what she learned at these conferences led to the setting up of the Indian Network on Ethics and Climate Change (INECC). At that time INECC was largely informal but it helped our learning about Climate Change and environmental issues related to consumption and energy.

**The quality of
life of women has
changed where
the impact of
our multiple
initiatives has
reached**

Towards early 2000, LAYA was looking to engage with the climate issue practically with its constituent Adivasi community in north Andhra Pradesh. Several pilot studies, a few experiments with solar lanterns, a small hydro system and eventually constructing a few improved cook stoves gave us some insights of what was practically possible. In 2007 – 2009, an integrated study in the tribal area of 4 states gave us a concrete perspective of the potential and need of improved stoves in Adivasi households. However, the problem that presented itself was that the community members themselves would not be willing to invest in these new stoves as they did not know about its efficiency. The traditional stoves they were using were practically free of cost. So, we needed to find a way to make the stoves as cheap as possible with a subsidy that would enable the community to afford them.

We realized that the scale of such a project would involve constructing thousands of improved cook stoves that would be expensive. It was around this time what the opportunity of carbon finance presented itself in 2010. Agriculture Development and Training Society (better known as ADATs), based in a village near Bengaluru had successfully registered, established, and acquired forward funding for a CDM (Clean Development Mechanism) project to install approximately 5000 biogas plants in rural households. We also came to know that ADATs was looking to help other organizations like LAYA through its own network known as Fair Climate Network (FCN) to register carbon projects. This led to our Gold Standard Micro Scale (project is limited to 5000 VERs) Voluntary Emission Reduction Project (VER) to be registered in 2011. The Bread for the World (BfTW),

Germany offered to help us with forward funding to build the stoves. The forward funding was conditional to repayment in the form of Gold Standard (GS) VERs. The price of each VER, we agreed, would be decided in terms of calculated cost that we would expect to incur to construct and maintain the stoves over a period of 4 years. The assumption was that we would be able to construct approximately 4000 improved stoves in 6 to 8 months with enough stove constructors, selected from young members of the village community. We factored another 4 months towards delays due to weather and terrain, which meant that the construction of stoves would be completed within 1 year. The construction of the stoves, however, took more than 2 years. What we did not factor was the work ethic of the tribal community, which is quite different from the rural people/urban people. No matter what incentives were offered, the motivation to build stoves in large numbers just did not happen.

This meant that our business plan was not moving as expected. In other words, the construction and maintenance cost calculated in terms of the value per credit had increased and in the 4th Year of the project, we would not have enough credits to pay back. This also meant that the project would have to be extended by at least 2 years for it to be viable to repay the credits.

In 2014, the project underwent its first issuance - A process by which a monitoring report of the project progress is prepared, submitted, ratified by a third party, and then approved by Gold Standard after which credits are generated in LAYA's GS registry. The credits we received were far less than we had anticipated for the first 2 years of the project period. It was then that we decided to go back to BftW with the proposal to increase the price of the VERs by a small margin so that we would be in a better pay and facilitate the extension of the project. This would also mean that they would lend us more money while we would return the same number of credits as agreed in 2012. BftW did not agree. Effectively by the end of 2015, the money lent to the project was spent. In the months that followed LAYA already began to lend money from its reserves to pay for the basic honoraria to the community stove monitoring team. Towards the end of the same year, we were faced with the unfortunate decision to raise a substantial amount that would be enough to pay as fees to consultants to facilitate the 2nd issuance of carbon emission credits from the project.

At this point we were faced with 2nd issuance which would offer us some extra credits beyond what was already committed to BftW, which could be sold in the market to repay the debt from LAYAs reserves. This proposal was presented to the LAYA's governing board to make a final decision. The only question that the governing board raised was whether the extra credits would be enough to repay the loan to the project. We honestly could not be certain that this repayment was possible given the volatility of VER prices in the market. Finally, we decided to go back to BftW with another proposition. We would give them the extra credits, on the condition that we receive another forward finance or loan. This time since the cookstoves were already constructed, we were confident that we would deliver the credits in time. This time we got lucky! BftW agreed to our proposal. Now the project did not need to take a loan from LAYA's reserves and whatever smaller amount it had received earlier could now be returned. Subsequently the 2nd issuance took place in 2016 and we were able to repay another chunk of VERs. The new contract with BftW, however, meant that we would have to repay more VERS by 2019 to repay the additional money received.

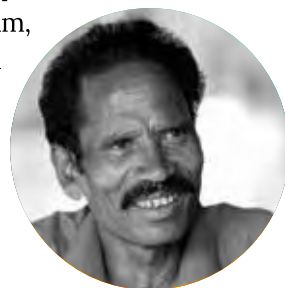
“Two years later on October 24th, 2019 this was precisely what took place. We transferred the final tranche of VERs to BftW, thus repaying the previous as well as current debt. Today we have about 3000 VERs left over with the project. In addition, we will be ready to go for the project's last issuance (In 2021 the project completes its life period), which would generate approximately 10,000 credits.
-Siddharth D'Souza

SRI IMPROVED YIELDS

BALARAJU REDDI, KONDA REDDI

Balaraju Reddi had 3 acres of Pallam and 2 acres of Gavurulu land. Before LAYA's intervention, he and other farmers were dependent on subsidized seeds, urea, and Di-Ammonium Phosphate for paddy cultivation. He started to experiment with SRI in 2 cents of his land in 2010 and increased it to 2.5 acres by 2014. He later shifted to organic farming using bio-fertilizers and bio-pesticides. Reflecting on paddy crop in SRI, he observes that paddy in his field has taken roots and resists weather variations better, the organic manure in his fields has

improved grain filling, and reduced pests. His crop yields have improved too. Apart from SRI, Balaraju cultivated millets, black and red gram, and various vegetables on his gavurulu land. “LAYA trained us on SRI and with this system, the input cost is lower and the output is more than double. We require to plant around 2 kg of paddy per acre and the yield is around 25 bastalu (1 basta = 75 kg) compared to the normal yield of 10 bastalu.”



SHIFTING TO CLIMATE RESILIENT ORGANIC CROPS

Non-tribals in Vanakaraayi village, Rajavommangi Mandal, East Godavari District were growing commercial crops such as cotton and tobacco, which were not within means for Adivasi farmers. Through LAYA's interventions, the Adivasi farmers were encouraged to return to climate resilient millet crops such as ragi, jowar, saama, ganti and others. They were also given training in organic farming. They soon began to grow vegetables in their kitchen gardens and were able to sell vegetables grown in their homestead lands. Seeds such as turmeric seeds, chennamadumpa, etc. were supplied to the farmers and drum seeders were accessed from the Agricultural Department and oil engine pipes and sprinklers from the AP Minor Irrigation Project (MIP). This helped farmers involved in guli ragi cultivation to get better yields in pulses even during drought conditions. Farmers have demonstrated better yields and growth of vegetables throughout the year, adding to their income from the sale of the produce. ‘We now have access to food throughout the year in our village, even though there is a shortfall during the rains. All the farmers in the village are able to transplant their paddy easily with the help of the drum seeders. My family is now also able to consume the vegetables we grow. We will continue the same agricultural system every year.’ Kosuri Bhaskar Rao (Konda Reddi Farmer, Vanakaraayi village Rajavommangi Mandal, East Godavari District)

PUSAM SATYAVATHI

Pusam Satyavathi, a Konda Dora woman, lodged a complaint with the police stating that the Revenue Divisional Officer was harassing her husband, and the police in collusion with non-tribal landlords sent her husband to jail while non-tribals illegally trespassed into

their land and snatched away the mango crop and cut away the trees in the lands and lifted the same. The tribal woman sought action against these same non-tribals and demanded they be booked under the prevention of SC and ST Atrocities Act. The police did not take any action. Through LAYA's intervention a WP was filed in High Court seeking direction to police, Devipatnam, to register a case against the non-tribals.²²

ENDNOTES

¹ LAYA, 2011, Vulnerability of the Forest Ecosystem in Context of the Changing Climate, A Participatory Assessment, The participatory assessment was carried out in two remote Panchayats, Pathakota and Daragedda in Y. Ramavaram mandal, East Godavari District, Andhra Pradesh

² Enacted in 2013, the Andhra Pradesh Scheduled Castes Sub-Plan and Tribal Sub-Plan (TSP) was intended to accelerate development of Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST). First of its kind in the country, these sub-plans guarantee that funds should be earmarked from the State total plan outlay in proportion to the population of SC and ST in the State. The Scheduled Tribe population in the Andhra Pradesh State is 5.33 per cent and the total Tribal Welfare Budget of the State should be spent only on tribal development without any specific allocations under the TSP. The other departments are expected to earmark funds to bridge the gap in tribal development.

³ LAYA, Annual Reports

⁴ ITDA is a nodal agency for the socio-economic development of Adivasi communities.

⁵ LAYA has collaborated with Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA); State Horticulture Department; Agricultural Department, Integrated Tribal Development Agency (ITDA); Central Research Institute for Dry-Land Agriculture (CRIDA); National Institute of Rural Development (NIRD); Regional Agriculture Research Station HAT Zone, Chintapalli; Andhra Pradesh Micro Irrigation Development Corporation (APMIDC) Agricultural Technology Management Agency (ATMA), Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVKs) of the Indian Council of Agriculture Research. The Rythu Sadhikara Samstha (RYSS) has allotted a cluster to LAYA, as a facilitating agency, to motivate 2150 farmers to adopt the Climate Resilient Zero Budget Natural Farming (CRZBNF) practices in the Pathakota cluster of Y. Ramavaram Mandal, East Godavari District.

⁶ In the past, LAYA has collaborated with the Tribal Habitat Institute (THI) for technical inputs on organic farming practices: collection of rare varieties of seeds, maintenance of seed banks, distribution of seeds, organising village meetings to promote organic farming practices.

⁷ These are black gram, green gram, red gram and rajma and others

⁸ The CRNF is a collaborative project with Rythu Sadhikara Samstha of the Department of Agriculture and WASSAN providing technical support. Originally advocated by Padma Shri Subhash Palekar, Zero Budget Natural Farming promotes traditional

practices of natural inputs such as cow-dung, urine, jaggery and pulse-powder that promotes microorganisms and earthworms with reduced tilling and minimal costs. In CRNF, composting techniques include Jeevamritam, Drava, Ghana (solid cow dung) urine, jaggery, pulse powder and mulching. Soil aeration refers to rapid exchange of oxygen and carbon dioxide between soil pore space and the atmosphere. This is a powerful determinant of soil productivity.

⁹ LAYA team has facilitated dibbling of NTTPs such as kanuga, nallamaddi, vegisa, tangedu, jafra and jeeluga.

¹⁰ Desi backyard poultry is being implemented in collaboration with WASSAN, ITDA, and TRICOR

¹¹ This is being done in collaboration with Centre for Natural Biological Resources and Community Development (CNBRCD), Bengaluru.

¹² INECC-LAYA, Decentralised Energy Options in the Tribal Belt of the Eastern Ghats Region in India. A Handbook Based on a Feasability Study. 2008

¹³ LAYA, Stories from the Ground.

¹⁴ Voluntary Emission Reductions (VERs) are carbon credits projects that bring about a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions (GHGs) that are independently audited against a third party certification standard. This provides a direct way of contributing to Paris Climate Change Agreement's goal of limiting Climate Change below 2 degree C. Gold standard verified emissions is viewed as the best variant with highest levels of environmental integrity and greatest contributions to Sustainable Development, www.goldstandard.org. LAYA Surakshana VER Gold Standard project was registered in December 2014. The first Emission Reduction Purchase Agreement (ERPA) was signed with Miserior in 2015. LAYA Paderu Micro Scale Gold Standard VER Project has received its third issuance and Surakshana Ver Gold Standard project has received is second issuance, so far.

¹⁵ ADATS is an NGO based in Chickballapur District in Karnataka with its large carbon-reduction bio-gas project provided the initial trigger to LAYA's thinking on cookstoves. BFTW played a major role in forward funding for LAYA's VERs project in cookstoves.

¹⁶ Simon, Gregory et.al, 2018, Finding Report: The Social and Cultural Context of Clean Cookstove Projects in Andhra Pradesh, University of Colorado Denver.

¹⁷ Ashram schools are residential schools for tribal communities to meet educational needs.

¹⁸ Rhythms in Development I

¹⁹ The Velugu is the largest state-run SHG program aimed at poverty alleviation and women's empowerment.

²⁰ Nafisa D'Souza, 2008, 'SHGs and Micro-credit in the Tribal Context: Experience of LAYA Resource Centre. National Workshop on SHGs and Role of Social Work Profession, 21st-22nd March 2008 organised by Department of Social Work, Andhra University, Visakhapatnam.

²¹ The five women CBOs are: Adivasi Girijana Samkshema Seva Sangam, Adivasi Mahila Raithu Abhivrudhi Seva Sangam, Vananari Jagruthi (VANAJA), Vikasini, Paderu.

²² Annual Report. 2006



Turmeric cultivation in slope lands, *Pathakota*



Line sowing, *Komaravaram*



Vegetable cultivation, *Pathakota*



Demonstration of the use of a farming tool in SRI, *Pathakota*



Backyard poultry breeder farm, *Peddakodapalli*



Improved mixed cropping of foxtail millet and maize, *Gurthedu*



Broom grass cultivation, *Peddapoyapalli*



Homestead development, *Batchaluru*



Hydram for lifting water to *Malluguda village*



Micro hydro at *Pathakota*



Dry waste incinerator for hot water and bio-gas for cooking at *D. Modhaputtu Ashram School Complex*



Improved cookstove and bio-sand water filter in a kitchen at *Chaamagedda village*



Gravity flow mechanism for channeling water to *Munagalapudi village*



Community slow sand water filter at *Gangawada village*



Streaming Lifelong Learning, Empowered Leadership, and Community Based Organizations and Networks

CHAPTER 4

For a long time and even in the recent past, schooling their children has never been a priority for the Adivasis, primarily because the quality of mainstream education offered little value to fulfill their aspirations. Mainstream education in primary and secondary schools with dismal educational standards, little connection to their ecosystem, and few prospects for employment have left a large segment of Adivasi youth either unemployed or unemployable. LAYA's pedagogy for alternative education has to be placed against this backdrop. The story of LAYA's alternative pedagogy and andragogy brings a meaning-making educative process that sensitizes the Adivasi youth in concepts of their degrading forest habitat, causative factors contributing to Climate Change, and the many gaps in the delivery of protective legislation in the Fifth Schedule Areas to centre-stage their constitutional rights. The trajectory of streaming alternative education underpins a powerful message to the youth - to be empowered they must take charge of their lives, their communities, and habitat; and to do so they must be equipped with relevant work skills and competence in leadership and organizational backing. The pedagogy and andragogy of combining concept-practice for youth empowerment has paid rich dividends, imparting a great sense of relevance to their lives, and defining their identity as crusaders of Adivasi cause. A major learning of alternative education for the Adivasi youth is that an educative

and learning mind happens when they are part of their struggles on human rights and development.

Etched in history, alternative education for youth kept repositioning for greater relevance to themselves and their forest ecosystem.

EARLY INITIATIVES PAVE THE PATH

The alternative education chapter of LAYA goes back to the nineteen eighties when it ran five schools for Adivasi children to provide basic literacy, general knowledge and bring awareness to the environment with non-formal aids. These schools had to be closed due to a resource crunch. Soon after, LAYA ran for two years a successful non-formal education centre for 23 children at Peddamunakanagedda, Addateegala Mandal, East Godavari District. Through this process, LAYA interfaced with government teachers, providing them with teaching aids. An exhibition and rally on issues of land alienation brought further connections between the school and parent community. By mid-1989, the children were mainstreamed in government schools.

**At the end of the
10 day period,
90% of learners
can read and write
some words**

A major learning of these educational efforts was that the Adivasi youth would stand to gain from a well-designed alternative education. The first step in this direction was the Night Halt Mass-Education Program (NHMEP). To quote, 'The night halt mass-education program helped us to mobilize youth from various villages who could be part of such a process. From initial involvement in these Night-Halt events participating in presentations of cultural items, a more rigorous involvement in a year-long educational process and simultaneous involvement in organizing and sustaining village-level programs was initiated towards the end of these early years in the field. This helped us sustain our programs and field involvement and ensured local community participation in the campaign and networking process that were beginning to take shape as we approached the '90s.' In a sense, NHMEP was foundational in that it paved the way for new pathways to harness youth power.

PEDAGOGY AND ANDRAGOGY OF ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION

LAYA was quite conscious that the Adivasi youth, mostly school dropouts, would have to be capacitated and brought into the development trajectory of Adivasi communities. Fortuitously, by 1992, LAYA facilitated the Student Mobilization Initiative for Learning through Experience (SMILE), sponsored by Indo-German Social Service Society (IGSSS) in the Adivasi belt of eastern region. Simultaneously, LAYA's Parichay Unit for Empowerment of Youth and Women took this opportunity to initiate and stabilise its youth engagement with a year-long and short-term capacity building processes. Successive years in alternative education brought out a diverse cadre of capacitated youth: dropouts, youth already working in NGOs/CSO with commitment and exceptional vision and Adivasi youth who were given spaces to dialogue and deepen their engagements in Adivasi struggles at local, regional and even national levels. One could argue that the alternative education ushered an era of youth movement with diverse interests and engagement.

EMPOWERMENT AS THE GOAL

The agenda of alternative education underpins the goal of empowerment that at its core aims at:

- Developing youth's analytical capacity for assessing their external and internal environment impacting on their own communities
- Instilling confidence and capacity to articulate their interests and perspectives thereby participating in decision making processes leading to better governance
- Providing skills to initiate local relevant alternatives to improve livelihoods and challenge external pressures and value personal-self and community history with a critical appreciation of traditional knowledge systems.

It is evident that LAYA invested a great deal in the design of alternative pedagogy and andragogy: criteria for selection of trainees, duration, content, and methodology. The capacity building matrix provided to the youth range from subject-specific themes of livelihood promotion, micro-credit, local governance, legalities of forest laws, many gaps in development delivery and updates of government schemes, and, most importantly, interventional methods to usher change processes.

BY CAPACITATING A
CADRE OF ADIVASI
PARALEGALS, RLA
PLAYED A CENTRAL
ROLE IN CREATING
BRIDGES BETWEEN
THE POORLY
INFORMED AND
INADEQUATELY
EQUIPPED ADIVASIS
AND THE ESOTERIC
SYSTEM OF JUSTICE OF
THE HIGHER COURTS

Beyond this, the training included intermittent subject-specific workshops between inter-modular capacity building sessions. This created a grassroots' experiential base. Interestingly, LAYA also brought staff from NGO/CSO for accompaniment. All this created the alloy of pedagogy and andragogy for alternative education.

PARALEGALS - GRASSROOTS LEGAL ACTIVISM

By capacitating a cadre of Adivasi Paralegals, RLA played a central role in creating bridges between the poorly informed and inadequately equipped Adivasis and the esoteric system of justice of the higher courts. Coming from their own communities, Paralegals brought a comfort zone for the aggrieved Adivasi litigants; fact-finding the lapses in land rights and gaps in the delivery of socio-economic rights and accessing them. Interestingly, several Paralegals became part of the CBO stream and a few even trained to become lawyers. (Chapter 2)

A PARALEGAL

- Engages in pre-litigative work and follow up: Investigation and fact finding, out of court settlements with rights perspectives, filing of First Information Report (FIR) and ensures proper implementation of court orders.
- Brings awareness and educates people about their rights and motivates them to fight for their rights that are violated.
- Integrates legal and rights perspectives in dispute resolution mechanisms.
- Sensitizes lawyers to social issues and adds social perspective in standard courtroom lawyering.
- Studies the impact of law on people's lives and collects data on socio-legal issues, identifies gaps, pitfalls in law requiring changes and the need for new laws
- Counsels with rights perspective and facilitates out of court settlements.

INDIAN INSTITUTE OF PARALEGALS (IIPLS) REGIONAL RESOURCE CENTRE- EAST (RRC-E)

The reputed Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) based in Ahmedabad established the Indian Institute of Paralegal Studies (IIPLS) in June 2002 to train and promote value-driven paralegals and legitimize

their role within the justice delivery system in the country. It established Regional Resource Centres (RRC) across India with Facilitating Centres that impart training to paralegals. From 2007-2009, LAYA took charge of Regional Resource Centre-East (RRC-E) of IIPLS to facilitate and strengthen paralegal identity in the Scheduled Adivasi and non-Scheduled Areas that have a predominant Adivasi population. The RRC-E covered the states of Orissa and Andhra Pradesh. For its part, LAYA promoted 6 Facilitation Centers, providing an enabling platform to induct more Adivasi villages to address an entire gamut of Adivasi rights to land, human rights violations, governance of PRIs, women, and child rights from the context of trafficking. 'The Facilitation Centres were instrumental in influencing policies at the district levels and initiating state-wise collaboration with like-minded organizations such as State Legal Service Authority, District Legal Service Authority, Mandal Revenue Office, Department of Labour, Ministry of Panchayat Raj, Member of Legislative Assembly and group of advocates.' In 2009, the State Convention of Paralegals was organized with the participation of 75 paralegals representing the 8 Facilitation Centres from the Eastern region. Developing a cadre of trained Adivasi legal practitioners, paralegals, and activists to play multiple roles in safeguarding Adivasi rights was a major outcome.

The Facilitation Centres were instrumental in influencing policies at the district levels and initiating state-wise collaboration with like-minded organizations such as State Legal Service Authority

ACCOMPANIMENT SERVICES

During the initial phase, capacity building of diverse youth through short and long-term training and motivating them to return to their villages to contribute to village development was but one stage of youth development. But the more challenging facet was LAYA'S

Parichay Unit's accompaniment support given to youth leaders as they began to set up their own CBOs to intervene in village development, strengthen their CBO governance, orient them to address individual issues, and go beyond to facilitate a collective response to common issues through the networking of youth groups.

Successive phases of youth development opened new areas of capacity building for the youth. The Parichay Unit must be credited for its sustained support services to youth empowerment, their CBOs, and its network - Andhra Pradesh Adivasi Sanghala Samakya (APASS) which was established in 2000.

MAKING WOMEN LITERATE, LEADERS, AND EMERGENCE OF WOMEN-LED CBOS

From the beginning, LAYA gave separate space to capacitate women and their CBOs on a range of themes. Amongst the many capacity building initiatives, the Crash Literacy Program in 2015 emerged as a unique model.

10-DAY CRASH LITERACY FOR WOMEN

The main objective was to promote literate, well-informed, and empowered women leadership to get into local governance and other public institutions to mainstream gender perspectives and Adivasi human rights agenda. Well-designed, the ten-day crash literacy program selected a cadre of potential learners and equipped them with basic literacy skills - to read Telugu, gain numeracy skills, speaking competencies and be informed of contexts of the forest ecosystem. The trainers for the program are young literate Adivasi enthusiasts who are assisted by resource persons and a lead trainer from the LAYA team. The design of the crash literacy program also includes follow up initiatives (six months later) for further learning among the neo-literates at Community Learning Centres (CLCs) with the support of Community Based Organizations (CBOs) and further through an annual three-day refresher program. Significantly, as many as 1100 literate women have come out through this process.

It is important to be reminded that these potential learners have either never been to schools or dropped out of school after a couple of years of primary education. Several of these women literates returned - most exuberant of their experiences, with more self-confidence and better informed perspectives.

CRASH LITERACY: EXCERPTS

While LAYA's literacy program enables learners to acquire the knowledge, skills, and values necessary for being responsible citizens, it also supports them in shaping their own path of development and has had a positive impact on the self-esteem and confidence of the participants, especially on Adivasi women who have leadership roles in their community. In addition, the program provides an opportunity for participants to engage in lifelong learning on practical aspects of their daily life.

By the end of the ten-day period, almost all learners (90%) can read and write some words. About 60% of the participants can read simple sentences and half of them are able to read simple stories. In the case of numeracy skills - introduced more specifically in the last few training programs - participants are able to read and write numbers and do simple calculations. There is also a tangible increase in self-esteem and confidence among the Adivasi women, particularly as they perform their leadership roles in the community. Several of them are currently asserting themselves on local socio-economic and environmental issues and some have been elected for different posts in their local self-governments.

A TYPICAL DAY IN CRASH LITERACY

Session begins with a lesson where words are selected from the context of learners' lives and then these words are depicted visually. Learners are encouraged to repeat the vowels aloud and then practice writing them. Their attention is then drawn to consonants and they are encouraged to practice writing them. The same process is applied to learning the combination of vowels and consonants as well as their corresponding visual symbols. This process also involves telling simple stories where the words they have learned reoccur and are reinforced. They are then asked to identify these words and write them on their slates or notebooks.

Each lesson also involves teaching numeracy related to reading time, weight, measurements, and simple calculations related to money and wage payment. In between the lessons, learners are engaged in sharing their own experiences related to literacy. These can include singing songs or engaging in energizers and simulation games. Sessions are typically organized around themes such as

THE CHANGE STORY
OF SEVERAL WOMEN
IN REMOTE TRIBAL
AREAS OF THE
EASTERN GHATS
BEGINS WITH THEIR
INVOLVEMENT IN
A 10-DAY CRASH
LITERACY INITIATIVE
UNDERTAKEN BY LAYA
SINCE 2004

personal hygiene, health, the use of herbal medicine, promoting kitchen gardens, organic farming, accessing government schemes, protective legislations, and leadership qualities. Cultural activities are often organized after dinner. These can include singing folk songs, dances, sharing different tribal customs and street plays. During these sessions, the trainers also teach socially relevant songs on, for example, the importance of literacy, women's empowerment, unity, and thrift, among other topics. In addition, participants are encouraged to develop other basic skills relevant to their daily life experience. In these cases, learning materials consist of letter cards, flash cards, charts of the Telugu alphabet, vowels and consonants, as well as photographs and video documentaries depicting the local life situation of learners.

GRASSROOTS ADIVASI-LED CBOS AND NETWORK

Adivasi youth-led, the CBOs have contributed to the development of their villages

In its design, Yuva Parichay's capacity building initiatives opened up several streams of Adivasi youth leadership to emerge. One set is the youth who went on to work with NGOs or start CBOs in their own villages. Another set of youth that went on to take larger roles in the Andhra Pradesh Adivasi Sanghala Samakya (APASS), a network of Adivasi youth-led CBOs. The Adivasi youth-led CBOs grew in relation to the contexts of the villages they adopted, nature of issues they addressed and their leadership styles – all of which, giving an alternative institutional identity to the Adivasi region.

Adivasi youth-led, the CBOs have contributed to the development of their villages – being part of various development initiatives in agriculture and ecology, keeping close watch on lapses in MGNREGS, RoFR, RTE, Social Security Schemes and PESA and reporting to ITDA and network leadership; be it in the forefront of campaigns and rallies or interfacing with government bodies to access socio-economic rights. All this is a vital contribution by any yardstick. The women CBOs have given thrust to promotion and strengthening of SHGs in their governance, micro-credit, income generation initiatives and proved special focus to single women, atrocities committed on women, as well as battling for women's socio-economic rights.

As members of APASS, CBOs have been part of Adivasi struggles on multiple issues of violations of their rights to land and livelihoods. They have taken on roles in fact-finding missions, participating in rallies, campaigns and being the grassroots voice. Several of the CBOs have also networked with other Adivasi organisations in other districts and even neighbouring states and this has strengthened their identity.

ANDHRA PRADESH ADIVASI SANGHALA SAMAKYA (APASS)

Established in 2000, the Andhra Pradesh Adivasi Sanghala Samakya (APASS) has emerged as the collective face of Adivasis. Since its inception, it has been in the vanguard of activism – establishing a collective identity and with several achievements in their trajectory.

- In the past, it was most active in petitioning for the implementation of 1/70 Regulation, which is a protective legislation of land rights in the area and with the enabling support of Dr. Trinadh Rao and RLA has been successful in participating in preventing the repeal of 1/70 Regulation.
- With the support of its CBO members, APASS is most active in monitoring the performance of MGNREGA, FRA, RTE, Social Security Schemes and PESA and representing lapses to ITDA.
- Several postcard campaigns and representation to stop the practice of mining, in particular bauxite in tribal areas.
- Took up a much-publicized case of a tribal woman raped by a landlord in Kamakutam village in Madugula Mandal, Visakhapatnam district. Apart from achieving social justice, the Sub-Inspector of Police was suspended.
- Facilitated 8 Model Gram Panchayats for local governance.

LIFELONG LEARNING THROUGH COMMUNITY COLLEGE

The concept of lifelong learning points to the integration of formal, non-formal, and informal learning, which takes place through one's life, enabling people to especially upgrade their skills throughout their adult lives to cope with changes both in their work and personal lives. Thus, lifelong learning offers an opportunity to all to understand and involve at all levels of their communities and society.

Since the beginning, LAYA has been involved in functional adult education. After considerable experimentation, LAYA has recently established a Community College for Adivasi youth to be professionally qualified and be employable. Still in its nascence, the community college aims at leveraging growing aspirations of youth to build work and life skills that integrate them in sustainable livelihood pursuits in the forest ecosystem. With its long history of working and training youth, LAYA perceives promotion of Community College as a logical forward step to enhance the educational and professional profile of Adivasi youth.

Right from 1985, based on our earlier experience we have strategized development of tribal youth leadership as the only way to sustain whatever investment that LAYA would make. Our vision was not how to involve them in our program implementation as much as facilitating the trained tribal youth to initiate their own community-based organizations (CBOs) and then facilitate to federate the CBOs so that they could advocate and redress their issues. Even though right from 1985, we had attempted to train tribal youth, but we met with little success in the initial stages. However, informal contact with youth was continued as we popularized the government's Social Forestry Program and related with the numerous cases of land alienation. By 1992 as part of the SMILE program of IGSSS, we had a perfect opportunity to address the potential of the tribal youth's involvement in development. For LAYA, this program converged with the need for tribal youth leadership to relate with issues that were threatening their identity. Since 1989, the government was seeking to repeal a protective legislation and although the NGOs and concerned individuals protested, the absence of tribal leaders in this process was conspicuous. LAYA felt that this was because of tribals' lack of awareness of the issues and lack of opportunities to participate in community issues. The SMILE project was a perfect opportunity to address the potential of the tribal youth's involvement in development. Thus, from 1992 the Parichay Unit (of Youth and Women Empowerment) LAYA began organizing short-term and long-term training programs. Over decades the training programs underwent a number of relevant changes adapting to changing needs. Today, 600 tribal youths have been trained and 120 community-based organizations have been initiated. A federation of the community-based organizations was registered in 2000.

For more than 2 decades the training programs focused on enabling tribal youth to respond to community issues and thus build their leadership potential. But, since the last 2 years based on the changing livelihood needs of tribal youth, the focus of the training programs has become more vocational with emphasis on opportunities for self-employment. So, in addition to issue-oriented workshops on MGNREGA, FRA, government welfare schemes, the earlier short-term and long-term courses were 'professionalized' in terms of detailed curricula, methodologies of adult learning, training of trainers and stringent selection processes. This has led at present to streamline three long-term courses: Community Ayurvedic Practitioners; Sustainable Agriculture Practitioners; and Community Lawyers. Short-term courses include, Community Videographers, Training of Teachers, Borewell Mechanics. More need-based, self-employment related courses are in the pipeline.

So, in the last 5 years, apart from the formation of CBOs by trained tribal youth, as the outreach of the programs of LAYA broadened, some of the trained tribal youth with special skills were recruited as field-based extension personnel in the Natural Resource Management, Herbal Based Health Care, Resource for Legal Action, Renewable Energy, and Lifelong Learning (earlier Youth and Women Empowerment) Units'. - Dominic D'Souza

YOUTH POWER: MAKING A DIFFERENCE

The transformational paths that the Adivasi youth facilitated occupies a critical space in LAYA's trajectory. For a large segment of youth who would have languished as dropouts from school, the competency building processes catapulted them to different levels of empowered states. For some, the leadership leap was orbital; many gained reputation as value leaders and yet others experienced new ways of meaningful life. It is the cascaded impact of their leadership that will be remembered.

ARIKA OFFICERAO, SAVARA: ADIVASI LEADER

27-year-old Arika Officerao, father of two, is from the Savara tribe and lives in Thotaguda village of Seethampet Mandal, Srikakulam District. He kept to himself cultivating his two acres of cashew plantation and 0.50 cents wet land. Although he became an education volunteer in his village, he was quite unaware of village

problems and could not relate with the youth or village community.



His life took a turn when he attended LAYA's youth awareness program and realized that he could do meaningful work for children and his village. Soon he got connected to other CBOs and activists associated with LAYA. It took him some effort to build trust levels with the community and officials. "I've learnt many lessons from LAYA's capacity building sessions."

He has begun to reach out to youth and villagers – bringing them on a common platform for discussions, and consulting CBOs, sarpanchs and ward members – gaining their trust and respect. He now has outreached to 16 villages – facilitating access to loans, government schemes, community certificates, job cards, among several others. He has emerged as a trainer too – conducting awareness programs on topics of Climate Change, health, and other development issues. He now enjoys enormous respect from the villages that he outreaches as well as local influencers and officials. He has facilitated a team of 15 active Adivasi youth to be engaged in development activities in the area.

'I am happy because belonging to an ordinary family I am now recognized as a leader. I inspire other youth to think and work like me. I am proud of seeing all these changes. Working for people and society is a great thing instead of thinking only of one's own family and life. This is also especially important for the development of Adivasi society.'

ARIKA KRISHNA RAO, SAVARA: MY JOURNEY AS A CHANGE AGENT

Krishna Rao of the Savara tribe was formerly President of Andhra Pradesh Adivasi Sanghala Samakhya (APASS), the CBO federation of which he is a founder member. He has participated in state, national and international platforms: Asian Social Forum (January 2003) at Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh; LAYA's Climate Change side-event at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Conference of Parties (CoP) at New Delhi (October 2002); and UNFCCC's CoP at Copenhagen (November 2009). He is now a trainer and has initiated a district level network with 25 CBOs. He enjoys a great rapport with panchayat members and plays a prominent role in his own panchayat.



'I learnt reading and writing in a night adult education centre run by a local NGO in 1983. Almost all the villagers in my village belong to the Savara tribe. The role-play activity in our village context in LAYA's training program motivated me and other youth to start an association of youth, with me as the President and soon our work extended to 7 villages. We were also supported by an NGO in this.

Earlier, I used to go to the forests for podu cultivation. But after the Yuva Parichay training (1991-92), I felt that I came into a new world and into light and I felt proud. After Yuva Parichay, my mind did not allow me to go back to my old life and pushed me forward. We started activities with other Adivasi youth and soon new villages joined us. Through our association, we promoted a thrift initiative, started night schools, and worked on health issues. We prepared the people to demand their due remuneration from the traders for their produce. To do all this, we collectively raised money through our labour. I learned to read and can now read newspapers. I started going to legal courts for local disputes, something which I did not do earlier.

MARIGELA NARASAMMA, KONDA REDDI: SARPANCH OF BODDAGANDI PANCHAYAT

Narasamma from the Konda Reddi tribe, presently the Sarpanch of Boddagandi Panchayat, Y. Ramavaram Mandal, East Godavari District recalls of her childhood travails of hunger and hardship her family went through. As a child she had to do menial jobs to earn small monies. Her life took a dramatic turn when at a very young age, her parents married her off for a glass of local liquor into a tribal family from Odisha.

Narasamma's fortunes turned when she underwent the crash literacy program. 'I would shiver in front of strangers and I could hardly utter a word. This was the fate of many women who joined the literacy program. I credit this program for the confidence and exposure it gave me and soon I began to bring other women into the literacy stream.' Narasamma joined the Natural Resource Management (NRM) Unit of LAYA, which for her was a learning journey. She got elected as the Sarpanch in 2014. Along with her responsibilities as Sarpanch, Narasamma continues to be part of NRM Unit.



When asked about what her contribution as a Sarpanch has been, she comes up with a long list of amenities she brought to her village. Most articulate, recognized for her dynamism and dedication, Narasamma is consulted by her colleagues and senior personnel in the Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs). Narasamma confesses that she never dreamt that her rise would be this meteoric and attributes it all first to the crash literacy program and then to her exposure to sustainable farming practices through the NRM Unit. She says that for her it is most important to stay connected to the field Units of LAYA.

ENDNOTES

¹ The state government has made efforts to reach out to tribal communities, such as the Girijana Vidya Vikas Kendras standards I and II in areas where 'primitive tribal communities' reside; Mandal (subdistrict) level elementary schools; special residential schools called Ashram Schools mainly in tribal areas. There have also been some special programs such as bridge courses and back to school initiatives for dropouts. For adult literacy, the government has a special program known as 'Akshara Sankranthi' which is for 'adults' above 15 years of age.

² The term alternative education has now been replaced as Lifelong Learning in 2019

³ The SMILE was initiated by Indo-German Social Service Society (IGSSS), a national level NGO, working for capacity building and development of the vulnerable communities across the country. Started in 1987, SMILE grew to be a successful national network of youth leaders across the country.

⁴ LAYA's alternative education comprised of: 1) Yuva Parichay: A year-long intensive training to tribal Youth with high school education from the 7 districts of coastal tribal region of north Andhra Pradesh; 2) Mitra Samuha: Providing of fellowships to Adivasi and non-Adivasi youth with commitment and exceptional vision for Adivasi cause to be capacitated; 3) Chhatra Parichay: Youth, especially non-student dropouts with a base and experience of working with gave focus to youth with a base and experience of working with Adivasis and Jan Parichay: Creating spaces for leaders and representatives of Adivasis communities to dialogue on issues of displacements, their forest rights and issues pertaining to their identity. The Jan Parichay had limited outcomes and eventually became a sub-centre of SMILE.

⁵ Nafisa Goga D'Souza, 2003, Indigenous Education Program Case Study, Empowerment and Action: LAYA's Work in Tribal Education, Presented at Asian South Pacific Bureau of Adult Education (ASPBAE)

⁶ The CSJ, then a project of Janvikas, a well-known NGOs based in Ahmedabad was established with the aim to intervene and ensure vulnerable communities get access to justice.

⁷ The RRC-E Facilitation Centres in Orissa are Jeevan Rekha Parishad located in Bhubaneswar and Khurda Districts and Seva Bharati located in Tumudibandha, Kandhamal District.

⁸ These centres were located in Adivasi Adhar in Paderu, Chaitanya Vikas in Araku Valley, MESRO in Srikalahasti, Parichay in Srikakulam, Jana Jagruthi in Tuni and Resource for Legal Action in Rajahmundry.

⁹ LAYA Annual Report, 2009

¹⁰ IIPLS and Regional Resource Centre (Eastern) - LAYA

¹¹ <https://uil.unesco.org/case-study/effective-practices-database-litbase-0/ten-day-crash-adult-literacy-program-india>.

¹² The crash literacy program was an adaptation of the flagship program on literacy education Read India, developed by reputed NGO, Pratham.

¹³ A case study of the program has been uploaded on the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning website on 7 October 2015. <https://uil.unesco.org/case-study/effective-practices-database-litbase-0/ten-day-crash-adult-literacy-program-india>



Paralegal training, *Rampachodavaram*



Postcard campaign on Forest Rights Act, *Seethampeta*



Crash Literacy, *Chintalapudi, Paderu, Denduluru*



CBO Federation General Body meeting, *Seethampeta*



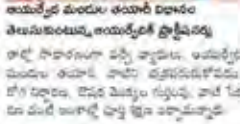
SAP trainees exposure visit to Bio Diversity Block, Y.Ramavaram



SAP trainees preparing drava jeevamrutham, Addateegala



SAP trainees batch 1, Addateegala

[illegible]

A group of people, including students and staff, are gathered outdoors in a courtyard. Some are standing, while others are sitting on a red mat on the ground, engaged in a communal activity, possibly a meal or a craft project. Large metal pots and bowls are visible on the mat.

Medicine preparation for CAP trainees, Addateegala



Establishing a Model in Herbal Based Health Care

CHAPTER 5

HEALTH VULNERABILITY AND DEFICITS

Inhabiting the interior regions of Eastern Ghats, Adivasis have always been challenged by access to quality health care. With poor road connectivity and little to be said of public transport, for the Adivasis, reaching out to hospitals and medical practitioners, especially in times of crisis continues to be one of serious hardship and stress. As elsewhere, Adivasis have become accustomed to allopathic healthcare even though accessing medical practitioners for simple day-to-day basic ailments is not within easy reach. In the absence of this ease of access to quality care, Adivasis' dependence on technically unqualified quacks grew. 'These are self-proclaimed 'doctors', also called as Registered Medical Practitioners (RMP), who often prescribe life-threatening treatment for easily treatable illnesses and charge exorbitantly as well.'

EARLY EXPERIMENTS WITH AYURVEDA

THE CASE OF TUBERCULOSIS

The incidence of Tuberculosis was high and the response of the local health centres was inadequate. The Adivasis had to travel approximately 75 km away to get themselves tested for TB! There was no consistent follow up by the primary health centres.

LAYA undertook to treat five cases of Tuberculosis through a local Ayurvedic doctor. The results were positive, and the team shared this

information with the local officials. A cost-benefit analysis was made and submitted to the ITDA Project Officer for follow up. Further, efforts to respond to 'liver and spleen problems' of very young children, which the allopathic doctors were not responding to, also met with success.

TRAINING OF VILLAGE HEALTH WORKERS

The community health volunteer scheme of the government was practically non-existent. Most volunteers were non-Adivasis with little understanding of the ground situation, and with little motivation. Hence, LAYA developed a program of training for village health workers. After the first batch of 20 volunteers in the introductory program, LAYA took up another with specific efforts to identify women volunteers. A third one was held specially for women.

CORRUPTION IN THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT HOSPITAL

The doctors and compounders of the local hospital often took bribes from the Adivasis when treating them. During a local weekly shandy, about 40 Adivasis with the support of LAYA demonstrated in protest against this practice. The District Medical Officer and the PO - ITDA took up the issue and had the doctor suspended and the compounder transferred temporarily, with a month's loss of pay.

The health scenario in tribal areas was alarming because of the pathetic quality of healthcare service structure prevalent in these areas. LAYA learned very quickly that apart from responding to the health crises the team had little capacity to deal with the healthcare problems in the region. Nor did LAYA wish to interfere with the accountability of the government to fulfill its healthcare function. In the initial stages LAYA supported individual cases in crisis situations and supported people to demand better services. But it was the organizations' belief that in the long run LAYA must relate in a more substantial way to the rich herbal resource availability in the region and the traditional knowledge systems of the local health practitioners in responding to basic health needs. – LAYA, Rhythms in Development I

In the early 90s, we ran into endemic prevalence of tuberculosis in one area. The government outreach initiatives were medicating the patients with high doses of antibiotics that only exacerbated patients' condition because the Adivasis were not following the health regimen

for this disease nor did they have the financial back up for nutritional food that they were asked to consume to aid their recovery. We then put them onto Ayurvedic treatment under an Ayurvedic doctor and monitored their recovery to assess the efficacy of Ayurveda. In the process, we found women to be seriously anemic and afflicted by gynecological disorders. Even today, almost 60 percent of Adivasi women come to us with these disorders.’ – Guggilapu Bulliyya, Coordinator, Alternative Health Care.

Even today, almost 60% of Adivasi women come to us seriously anaemic, afflicted by gynaecological disorders

MORBID HEALTH SYNDROME

LAYA attributes the morbid health syndrome in Adivasi communities to several causative factors. The bio-diverse forests had depleted due to climate variabilities and extensive deforestation. In its wake, the herbal base of Eastern Ghats too has depleted. ‘There are nearly 1000 herbal plants and 30-40 rare species occurring in Adivasi forests. Medicinal plants, especially rare and endangered species, are getting overharvested. Both small and big companies source these plants from state-controlled Girijan Cooperative Corporation (GCC). Our concern is that as many as 16 rare species of medicinal plants have become scarce. We have been organizing campaigns, making representations to the authorities to prevent overharvesting of rare and high-value medicinal species. In our herbal medicine gardens, we are raising these rare species and conserving them.’ – Guggilapu Bulliyya, Coordinator, Herbal Based Health Care

The Adivasis’ access to minor forest produce which was a major food resource has been systematically curtailed by forest laws. Changing cropping patterns have resulted in farming communities moving away from nutrient-rich multi-millet. The high use of chemical fertilizers has taken a toll on soil fertility and the health status. As elsewhere, the introduction of low-quality rice through the Public Distribution System since 1986 has taken its toll on the nutritional status of Adivasis.

REVIVAL OF HERBAL BASED HEALTH CARE

It is against this backdrop that LAYA envisaged establishing a model in herbal-based healthcare (HBHC). LAYA moots that, in the past, Adivasis enjoyed a rich tradition of healing with naturally occurring herbs and this traditional wisdom and herbal rich Eastern Ghats provide an excellent foundation to revive and establish a community of practice in herbal healthcare that is relevant, affordable, accessible, reliable, and effective. For LAYA, several pathways opened and to quote, '... promote the value and use of herbal based medicines to supplement the low quality of health care provided by the government... safeguard traditional knowledge systems, protect plant species of medicinal value, develop demonstrative herbal gardens and train Adivasi representatives in preparing and dispensing medicine for simple and common ailments.'

Again, the long-standing traditional health practitioners (THPs), popularly known as vaidyulu/healers provided a ready base and had to be given legitimacy for their know-how on herbal medicinal plants, their medicinal properties, spotting them in the forests and regenerative practices in harvesting them. The story goes that these traditional healers were being debunked as uncivilized, superstitious, and chased out of their practice even by the government. This brought down their morale and put them in a denial mode of their competence as practitioners.

INSTITUTIONAL FACE

By 1993, LAYA began a planned phase – first to assess the legitimacy and viability of herbal healthcare and build consensus among the stakeholders – the traditional healthcare practitioners (THPs), Adivasi communities and interested youth willing to be trained as community health practitioners (CHPs). The initial agenda of HBHC Unit was to identify 10 common ailments and standardize herbal medicines for these ailments.

By 2003, the Herbal Based Health Centre (Vanantharam) was constructed at Addateegala and thereafter, Vanantharam became the institutional face of Herbal-Based Health Care. Proximate to Adivasi region, Vanantharam provides a strategic location for its outreach engagement. As part of an outreach strategy, it began to fulfil several objectives: bring healthcare directly to tribal communities in the

region, further capacitate and update the knowledge of traditional health practitioners, ease of travel across Adivasi villages to visit Adivasi families, conduct health camps and build perspectives.

Well-designed, the HBHC program picked up momentum with health camps at weekly markets, setting up of community centres by THPs and over time, registering four of their networks and inducting young community health practitioners (CHPs). By 2012 Vanantharam pharmacy was set up with a manufacturing license and good manufacturing practice (GMP) certificate from the government for preparation of 25 types of herbal medicines. The medicines are prepared through standardized purification processes in hygienic conditions, stored and dispensed. The Vananatharam team has digitized 150 Telugu Ayurvedic books, established a library, published 3 books on Ayurveda and visual documentation (photos) and houses an herbarium of over 300 medicinal plants in its mother herbal gardens. The training manual, Vanamulika Vaidya Vidhanam – Sikshana Karadeepika (Telugu) with a database on the use of 84 herbs and the process of treatment in 24 common diseases is a ready reckoner for all practitioners.

Since its inception, the HBHC Unit has journeyed with its strategic design, innovating as it progressed. Today, the HBHC unit's engagement has an outreach of 220 villages in 4 districts of Andhra Pradesh and gives treatment and healthcare to 15000 to 20000 patients annually.

PROFILING HERBAL BASED HEALTH CARE

- Four Traditional Health Practitioner's networks are registered with an outreach of 450 THPs, in 4 districts (East Godavari, Visakhapatnam, Vizianagaram and Srikakulam)
- 155 Community Health Centers (CHC) with a coverage of 222 villages. Each Centre is located in a village and serves patients from adjacent villages
- Regular Health Centres in 4 locations
- Special Health Camps with collaboration of AYUSH Department
- Health camps conducted during epidemic seasons in collaboration with the AYUSH Department - 10 to 12 health camps annually covering over 50 villages

A UNIQUE MODEL

Not many forest ecosystems are served so well with herbal based healthcare – of the prototype that LAYA has established. A few distinguishing features of HBHC stand out.

THPS IN A CONNECTED WORLD

The HBHC team has brought back the THPs to full swing – establishing their rights to practice. By registering four networks with a total membership of 450 members and giving each member an identity

card, the THPs have emerged as legitimate practitioners. The local Panchayats too have passed resolutions on the rights of THPs to practice. The THPs are taken for interactive visits to other initiatives and networks in herbal based initiatives, non-Adivasi Andhra Pradesh Anuvamsika Ayurveda Vidyula Sangam (APAASV) in the plain areas. For the last five years, they have been participating in National Tribal Healers Meeting at Jamshedpur under the aegis of Tata Steel Corporate Social Responsibility. The THPs are now in a connected world – all of which has bolstered their motivation quotient.

By inducting interested Adivasi youth to get trained and be community health practitioners, the HBHC Unit has created a second generation of practitioners and has ensured continuity of herbal-based health care practice

SECOND GENERATION

By inducting interested Adivasi youth (men and women) to get trained and be community health practitioners (CHPs), the HBHC Unit has created a second generation of practitioners and has ensured continuity of herbal care practice. Young Adivasi women too have been trained as CHPs and are practicing. Several of these are also kith and kin of THPs and have inherited family traditions in herbal healthcare. These Adivasi youth underwent a year-long training by qualified ayurvedic doctors and were given inputs on diagnosis skills, medicinal plant identification, propagation, sustainable harvesting of medicinal plants, medicine preparation and preservation skills. Motivated, many have established Community Health Centres with herbal gardens in their respective villages.

MOTHER GARDENS, HERBAL GARDENS AND NURSERIES

Central to the HBHC Unit is the encouragement it has given to THPs, CHPs and Adivasi families to develop herbal gardens and nurseries. Vanantharam houses two mother herbal gardens – one in its own compound where rare and endangered species are grown and a second mother garden on a land donated by Adivasis in Gummaripalem, a village in Y. Ramavaram Mandal, East Godavari District. Saplings of medicinal plants are distributed to THPs, CHPs, and on demand given to the ITDA, medical colleges, students and researchers. With this, the HBHC Unit has created a weave of medicinal plants – reviving and conserving the bio-diverse herbal base in Eastern Ghats and this merits accolades for the investment that HBHC Unit has made.

ADIVASI HERITAGE IN HERBAL BASE

HBHC unit's engagement has been processual and takes one through its two decadal work in building awareness and perspectives through campaigns in critical locations (weekly markets), exhibitions, herbal melas and connecting with Adivasi families with accompaniment services. The HBHC team has taken much effort to popularize herbal medicines - taking their model to allopathic medical practitioners, doctors, and researchers from the Ministry of AYUSH; encouraging them to participate in their workshops, campaigns and herbal melas; facilitating botanical tours to student community, providing access to rare medical plants, live wild tubers, and others for researchers.

Over the years, LAYA has played a role with the tribal community to create a value base for medicinal plants, contain culling and overexploitation in the region. The problems posed by warming temperatures, disrupted seasonal events, extreme weather, and other effects of Climate Change, on the other hand, cannot be so quickly and easily resolved. Raising awareness of Climate Change to the communities by focusing on local or regional impacts is a crucial step in order to inspire individual and community action. Furthermore, conservation of these medicinal plants in their native habitat is also an important response approach. To achieve this, LAYA encourages the growing of herbal medicine gardens among the communities and around their settlements.

CAPACITATING OTHER ORGANIZATIONS

With their experience and expertise, the HBHC team has been providing training on herbal based care to NGOs like Amurtha Welfare Society, Kovel Foundation, and Andhra Pradesh Social Service Society (APSSS) and to undergraduate students in a few colleges as well.

HERBAL AND INSTITUTIONAL WEAVES FOR LARGER ENGAGEMENT

The HBHC Unit of LAYA has created herbal weaves of mother gardens, herbal gardens, nurseries – conserving diverse medicinal plant species with much scope for enhancing the herbal base of Eastern Ghats. The herbal base medical practitioners have come of age and are enabled to sustain the transformations that are unleashed. In 2019, the Andhra Pradesh State Biodiversity Board awarded LAYA the ‘Biodiversity Conserver Award’, in recognition of HBHC unit’s seminal work in conservation of diverse herbal species, and promotion of community-based alternative healthcare for the marginalised Adivasis of Eastern Ghats. Special credit must be given to Guggilapu Bulliyya, the Coordinator of HBHC, for journeying with this engagement from an incredibly young age and taking his team along with him to establish this model. The story of G. Bulliyya is unusual and striking – of a person with great commitment and passion. He is at the forefront, championing the cause and rights of Adivasi health. (See, WEAVES).

The HBHC unit’s engagement has created a unique space in the Eastern Ghats – demonstrating the efficacy of herbal medical care and nurturing a culture of collaborations with stakeholders in alternative herbal care practice. The scope for the HBHC Unit to broad base its engagement is considerable and in times to come may emerge as a college or academy of herbal based services.



TRADITIONAL HEALTH PRACTITIONERS

KAKARA SANUKURUMAYYA, KONDA REDDI

Kakara Sanukurumayya, 60 years old, from the Konda Reddi tribe, hails from Chikilinta village, East Godavari District. He is a Traditional Health Practitioner (THP) and has participated in LAYA’s skill upgradation program in 2018.

‘LAYA is doing something good by providing this skill upgradation training for practitioners like me. Since the training, I have found a change in my practice. Earlier I only treated patients in my village but now I am able to provide treatment in 6 villages. My specialization is in treating snake bites and gynaecological problems. Thanks to LAYA, I also have an Identity card from the THP Network, and I regularly attend Mandal Network meetings.’

GAMMELI CHITTIBABU, BHAGATHA

Gammeli Chittibabu from Kujjali village, Paderu Mandal, Visakhapatnam District hails from the Bhagatha tribe.

‘I participated in the Community Health Practitioners training in 2006 as I was always interested in herbal based medicine. After my initial training I only used to work in my village. As I continued my engagement with LAYA by attending several skill upgradations I began to develop confidence to offer my skills in surrounding villages as well. Today I treat patients in more than 8 villages and my practice and income is growing.’



COMMUNITY HEALTH PRACTITIONERS

GOKURUBOINA PANDAMMA, KONDA REDDI

Gokuruboina Pandamma from the Konda Reddi tribe was 23 years old when she participated in the Community Health Practitioner’s Training in 2003. Over the years she has participated in the skill upgradation training on herbal medicine preparation and healing organized by Janasikshana Samstha (Human Resource Development Ministry) and LAYA. LAYA’s work with herbal medicine has reduced the expenses on common illnesses. I am now working as a Community Health Practitioner in 2 villages. As a result of my work I have earned credibility with the community, and now I am the elected Vice President of Somannapalem Panchayat, Addateegala Mandal, East Godavari District.’

GAMMELI SOUJANYA, BHAGATHA

Gammeli Soujanya completed the 6 months Community Ayurvedic Practitioners (CAP) program in 2020. She is a resident of Kujjali village, Visakhapatnam district, and belongs to the Bhagatha tribe. ‘As a part of the program I learned how to prepare medicines and the required



skills to diagnose and treat common illnesses. Before the training program I was not confident in my ability to speak in public. The training program, particularly the sessions related to life skills, helped me overcome this fear. Today I feel much more confident in my ability to communicate and carry out my work. These days I assist my father who is a Traditional Health Practitioner.'

KADABALA AMMI RAJU, KONDA REDDI

Nineteen-year-old Kadabala Ammi Raju daughter of Chinnabbai, belongs to the Konda Reddi tribal community from Penikelapadu village, Dhanyampalem Panchayat, Addateegala Mandal. Kadabala was earlier involved in agriculture as this was the primary source of livelihood for the family. Recognizing her potential, the Youth and Women's Empowerment Unit provided the opportunity for her to enrol for the ten-day literacy program conducted in February 2007. She completed the training successfully and learnt to read and write simple words and gained confidence to relate to people.

In July 2007 she underwent the six months training on herbal medicine preparation and healing. This provided her with the skills in identification of medicinal plants, medicine preparation and preservation techniques, diagnosis and treatment of common diseases. Today Kadabala is working as a Community Health Practitioner in her village. Her role is to provide healthcare for common diseases, create awareness among the community on diseases and the protection of medicinal plants and to refer chronic cases to the nearest Traditional Health Practitioner.

KORRA BHEEMANNA, KONDA DORA

Jamiguda and Urrada villages of Pedabayalu Mandal, are located on a hilltop about 30 km away from the Mandal Headquarter. There is no road facility and hence accessing mainstream healthcare is difficult. RMPs (Allopathic quacks) come to these two villages regularly and provide expensive and often unsafe treatment.

During the course of LAYA's intervention the HBHC Unit identified Korra Bheemanna, a Konda Dora, 30 years of age, who was a Traditional Health Practitioner for jaundice, skin problems, and white discharge but was irregular in outreach. He had studied upto Std 10 and then dropped out. He was identified and motivated to participate in LAYA's

Community Ayurvedic-Herbal Practitioners (CAP) long-term course. He successfully completed the CAP course having learned effective communication skills and gained knowledge in treating patients (diagnosis, medicine preparation, and preservation). He was exposed to the Government Ayurvedic Hospital and College and to a National 'Tribal Healers' workshop at Tatanagar, Jharkhand, to increase his confidence and develop relationships with others.

Korra Bheemana was then introduced to his village community during health camps and village meetings as a Community Ayurvedic Practitioner. He conducted one mega health meeting with the AYUSH Department in these two villages. Initially the village elders were reluctant to accept him and pay for his services. In time however they have recognized the value of his services. Bheemana established a Community Health Clinic in his village Jamiguda on land donated by the community. He has raised a community herbal garden in Jamiguda equipped with 40 types of medicinal plants. He now provides treatment to two villages Jamiguda and Urrada. He is able to earn approximately Rs. 4000 to 6000/- per month. He is able to treat common fevers, piles, arthritis, skin diseases, headache, constipation, indigestion and other simple diseases. He maintains an outpatient (OP) register. Today, there is a drastic reduction in the RMP visits to the villages.

'I participated in the Community Ayurvedic Practitioners training program in 2019. I was an apprentice with my father, who is a Traditional Health Practitioner. The training I received helped me build my confidence to develop my own independent practice. Today, I have built my own health center with a herbal garden and my practice extends to 2 other villages.'

KRISHNA MOHAN (RETIRED), BMS,
MEDICAL OFFICER, ADDATEEGALA

'I was introduced to Vanantharam in 2017 by my colleagues. I was very impressed with the diverse work that is being done by the team to facilitate treatment to tribal communities in the area. I am able to learn about several new rare plants and their healing qualities. I am always happy to help as a resource person or to conduct health camps and help in the dissemination of herbal based health care in the area.'



ENDNOTES

¹ LAYA, Rhythms in Development, Herbal-based Health Care

² Adivasis suffer from several endemic health problems such as tuberculosis (TB), malaria, gynecological problems, diarrhoea and jaundice. There is serious mosquito infestation in the forest region.

³ Wide arrays of medicinal plants are used not only in Ayurveda but in Siddha, Homeopathy, Tibetan and even Allopathy. The demand for medical plants is high and therefore the threat of biopiracy. There is not much legal protection for the therapeutic properties of medicinal plants – as was by cases of patents on neem and turmeric. The government department of AYUSH is now upgraded as a Ministry of AYUSH. The Ministry of AYUSH has been working on the promotion of traditional knowledge and health care systems in India.

⁴ LAYA, Rhythms in Development I and II

⁵ During the preparatory phase, HBHC team went on an exposure visit to Vietnam to gain insights into its model of integration of traditional and alternative medicine into national public health care as a relevant, affordable and effective system.

⁶ The department of AYUSH was upgraded as a Ministry of AYUSH by the Government of India. AYUSH Ministry has been working on the promotion of traditional knowledge and health care systems.



Community Herbal Health Clinic, *Jamiguda*



Traditional Medicine Exhibition,
National Tribal Healers Meet, *Tatanagar*



Traditional Health Practitioners' skill upgradation, *Tamerapalli*



Organised a Medicinal Plants Exhibition on Biodiversity Day, *Vijaywada*



Botanical tour by students of LAYA's Herbal Garden, *Vanantharam*



Training to test the quality of drinking water by Community Health Practitioners, *Vanantharam*



Preventive Health Camp in schools in collaboration with the AYUSH Department, *Vedurunagaram*



General Body meeting of THPs, Paderu



Training Adivasi youth on herbal medicine preparation, Gopalapuram



Aerial view of *Vanantharam*



Medicines prepared by the pharmacy, *Vanantharam*



Training on identification and uses of medicinal plants for college students, *Vanantharam*



Building Community Resilience of Marginalized Majority: Engaging in Policy Advocacy

CHAPTER 6

BIODIVERSE EASTERN GHATS

Extended from the mountain system of central India, the discontinuous mountain range and diverse eco-regions of Eastern Ghats that runs through Andhra Pradesh continues to be bio-diverse rich and acts as carbon sinks of the Indian peninsula. Outsiders who walk through the interiors of this mountainous range come back with memories of undulating mountains; the fresh air of diverse plant species; flowing rivulets in several parts; the chirping of birds and the living silence of the mountains. For Adivasis, and other dwellers who are integral part of Eastern Ghats, these forests have played a vital role in their economy, their way of life woven around forest ecology and its resources.

There is no gainsaying that the forest ecosystem of Eastern Ghats has degraded, and the story of its decline first goes back to the history of British times and subsequently to post-liberalization - both the state and non-state actors contributing to it. LAYA's vulnerability assessment of the forest ecosystem mirrors a spectrum of Climate Change-induced results that have adversely impacted on the regeneration of these forests - several findings are eye-openers, and a few worth iterations: unpredictable rains, later arrival winter months, the period of dry months increasing, and crop failures due to excess rainfall; disappearing wild animals and reduction of trees that

enable regeneration. Several forest species have almost disappeared, and some are no longer found in abundance.¹

Climate variabilities have seriously undermined the livelihoods of the most marginalized Adivasis

The Adivasis have been weathering, coping with these changes, and went on to explore new livelihood options – converting forest lands into agricultural lands, moving away from food crops because of soil erosion and repeated crop failures especially on podu lands,² growing pulses in podu and slope lands as buffer, going deeper into forests for matured trees needed for household requirements, agriculture tools, bio-fencing.³ The message is clear – climate variabilities have seriously undermined the livelihoods of the most marginalized Adivasis. In its discourse, LAYA brings the intersectionality that Climate Change shares with livelihood vulnerabilities and development. LAYA has taken its experiential-based models in adaptation, mitigation and building resilience of Adivasi communities in Eastern Ghats to national and global platforms to advocate that climate policy and action must underscore the perspectives of marginalized Adivasis.

DEBATING CLIMATE CHANGE

What is the Climate Change buzz all about? That Climate Change is real, no one disputes. The general rung of the populace wakes up to it when weather disasters of excessive rains and floods inundate their residential premises or excessive heat hits them. For most, the media coverage on the rapid melting of glaciers, devastating forest fires in California and Australia and earthquakes in the Himalayas are distant events. Closer home, the Indian subcontinent has had its share of disasters – multiple cyclonic storms (Hudhud, Nisarga, Amphan, and others), droughts, more recently the worst attack of locusts in twenty-five years, and urban floods of great magnitude, to mention a few. The Carbon Footprint of humans, carbon source and stocks are buzz words in the world of cognoscenti. Not many, however, give serious thought that Climate Change is a result of human activity and greenhouse gas emissions (GHGs).⁴ There is a global war afoot on how best to keep the global temperatures below 2 degrees Celsius above

pre-industrial level and even further at 1.5 degrees Celsius. It was in 2015, 196 State Parties came together at the Conference of Parties (CoP) 21 of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) to limit global warming to 1.5° to 2° C above pre-industrial levels. Central to the Paris Agreement are the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) that each country outlines and communicates their actions to reduce national emissions and adapt to the impacts of Climate Change. In October 2015, India submitted its NDCs to the UNFCCC. India has pledged that by 2030, it would reduce its emissions intensity of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by 33–35%; 40% fossil-free power generation capacity by 2030, and creation of additional carbon sink of 2.5 to 3 billion tons of CO₂ equivalent. In its critique LAYA-INECC points to the absence of peoples-based solutions in India's NDCs.⁵

While capping growing temperatures are welcomed by all, there is deep-divide amongst nations on capping green-house gas emissions. Developing countries are pressured to increase their carbon stocks by the developed nations while they themselves are dragging their commitments to reduce emissions. Equity and justice issues of Climate Change are caught in a cleft here. Yet, climate is a geophysical global reality and seen as a global common. Be this as it may, as the fourth largest emitter of greenhouse gases and world's fourth energy consumer, India is bound to come under increasing pressure to adapt and mitigate Climate Change impacts. Having ratified the Paris Agreement, India has now positioned Nationally Determined Contribution(NDC), which has given emphasis to adaptation strategies to address Climate Change impacts.



THREE CRITICAL RESPONSES IN CLIMATE ACTION ARE ADAPTATION, MITIGATION, AND RESILIENCE

ADAPTATION refers to responses and adjustments in ecological, social, or economic systems in response to actual or anticipated changes in Climate Change. Adaptation are critical actions that individuals, households and communities employ against current or anticipated impact of Climate Change. Early adaptation has the potential to reduce risks and costs of Climate Change disasters.

MITIGATION is about measures that aim to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and enhance carbon sinks. In other words, mitigation addresses the causes of the problem, which involves reducing greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere.

RESILIENCE is the ability to recover and bounce back from the effects of Climate Change. Put in another way, resilience means the key economic and social systems are climate-proofed for the future.



LAYA-INECC: DEMONSTRATING, ADVOCATING, INFLUENCING MULTI-STAKEHOLDERS ROLE IN CLIMATE CHANGE

LAYA-INECC has positioned and advanced a powerful school of thought that places the centrality of people-based perspectives and solutions to build community resilience and safeguard marginalized minorities that are most impacted by Climate Change. With its byline 'People's Voices in Policy Choices', LAYA-INECC stance flows from the perspective of equitable and inclusive Sustainable Development paradigm to give thrust to low-carbon pathways, governed by values of decentralization and localization. LAYA-INECC argues that the marginalized majority in India's ecosystems lacks the wherewithal—social, economic, and political to withstand the inroads made by Climate Change processes - manifest and latent.

LAYA'S FOUNDATIONAL CLIMATE ACTION

The foundation of climate action commenced at first in several villages of the Eastern Ghats. The iteration of degradation of forests of Eastern Ghats brings out a long list of analytics of its manifestation. But the experience of climatic changes in these forests is best achieved when forest dwellers anguish about lack of rains, and changing patterns of rains, failure of their crops and low yields and this narrative goes on. They know exactly which species in the forest cover can no longer be spotted and which are getting endangered, the slowing of mountain rivers and the disappearance of wildlife. The medicine men know where the herbal medicinal species

are to be found, their uses and several species, which are no longer in profusion. The paradox is that the globalizing wider society is clueless to the ecological vulnerabilities besetting the Eastern Ghats, hailed as one of the heritages of India. `... these voices are lost in mainstream dialogues... In the mainstream development paradigms, the convergence of the people's wisdom and aspirations and scientific understanding, policies and programs, have so far remained elusive... In the context of Climate Change – mitigation, adaptation, technology, and financial transfers – from the ethical perspective are the development needs of the majority of the population, which have not been met through decades of planning, and are in great jeopardy, given the state of international negotiations and the pressure put by the rich, developed nations.⁶

COMMUNITY-BASED MODELS IN ADAPTATION, MITIGATION

Initially, LAYA's encounter with the vagaries of climate happened when its pioneers trekked the hills of Eastern Ghats, befriending the Adivasis and listening to their stories. LAYA put on the Climate Change lens progressively, involving the Adivasi communities to co-construct their own Climate Change conundrum.

LAYA's entry into climate action was gradual; this picked up momentum over time and has been quite consequential. Living in high altitude zones, the Adivasis and other forest-dwelling communities were coping with climate variabilities, looking out for acceptable solutions to increase their crop productivity, ease of access to water resources, and energy for households and agriculture. LAYA nested a community-based practice to demonstrate a spectrum of best practices in agroforestry for eco-regeneration, bio-diverse organic farming, shifting land-use pattern, revival climate resistant crops, introduction of new crops with high productivity for sustainable livelihoods. Sure enough, results showed slowly and steadily. Alongside, LAYA came up with decentralized renewable energy solutions for domestic and farming requirements. Special mention must be made of fuel-efficient cookstoves and the water filters that found their way into the domestic domain – reducing emissions and women's drudgery of work. LAYA-INECC's debating point is that

Climate Change is a development question and an equity issue for the marginalized majority.



Today, the LAYA team and the capacitated youth are grassroots advocates, espousing the alternative paradigm with conviction. Listeners are captivated by the team's journey in nurturing best practices and stories of their initial years when they had to trek 2-3 hours, with layovers in between, to reach Adivasi villages that had no approach roads or basic amenities. The Addateegala (East Godavari District) region where LAYA has model projects was once a feared Naxal area, which the LAYA's project team had to brave through. Recalling his brush with the underground activists, K. Koteswara Rao, the Coordinator of the Natural Resource Management Unit reminisces jocularly, 'Two of us were traveling by foot on our two-hour journey to the project villages. At one point, we found ourselves surrounded by the underground activists who covered our faces with masks and took us to their base. They wanted to know all about us and why we were in these areas. In the middle of the conversation, one of their commandos fortuitously recognized my friend from his school days and started to banter about bygone days. At the end, they let us free to our great relief.'

ENTERING URBAN SPACES

LAYA has been involved recently in addressing several development issues in the urban context through relevant solutions that foster sustainability. It is headquartered in the Smart City of Visakhapatnam, with its field and working areas spread around 250 km. Over the years Visakhapatnam has witnessed the growing urban sprawl, infrastructure development together with growing densification and congestion in its peri-urban locations.

LAYA has been critical of the current urbanisation model, which is based on centralised systems that promote unplanned agglomeration

and concentration of carbon intensive infrastructure and services benefiting only a handful of people. While critiquing the Smart City Mission of the government of India,⁷ LAYA advocates a pathway that aligns with the concept of 'Sustainably Smart'- one that respects environmental boundaries, the carrying capacity of the location while respecting socio-economic equity. LAYA has been deliberating on an alternative model - of developing sectoral roadmaps for building a 'carbon neutral urban resilient cluster' in a strategically selected geographical region in LAYA's working constituency in Andhra Pradesh.

LAYA advocates a pathway that aligns with the concept of 'Sustainably Smart' - one that respects environmental boundaries, the carrying capacity of the location while respecting socio-economic equity

INFLUENCING POLICY DIALOGUE

The next layer of climate engagement occurred when LAYA pioneered and incubated INECC in 1996.⁸ Its formative period created debating spaces for activists, researchers, and civil society organizations to discourse and agree that Climate Change is as much an Indian concern as global. Successive learning platforms, backed by research and learnings from local contexts, reinforced the thesis that global discourse and policy would be infructuous without mainstreaming micro-realities, especially of marginalized majority.

The climate story of LAYA has been intrinsic to INECC's growth. LAYA has been exploring, experimenting, strengthening, and establishing adaptation and mitigation models in the forest ecosystem of Eastern Ghats and this empirical base provided an essential experiential base for INECC's policy and advocacy engagement. Nafisa, as the Convener for more than two decades, provided critical leadership

in expanding INECC's partnership base and took its advocacy work to policy platforms and global events. LAYA's kinship with INECC is symbiotic with mutual collaborations in research, climate education, advocacy, and other sharing processes.

ENGAGING WITH STATAL BODIES

Walking through the corridors of power, to influence policy, requires not just a strategic mind but a sturdy one. Knowing this full-well that policy advocacy is a different ball game, LAYA-INECC strategized to reach out to policy stakeholders at local, state, and national levels. The running theme of all policy level advocacy espoused 'People's Voices in Policy Choices' to underscore integration of grassroots perspectives of the marginalized majority and low-emission economy for Sustainable Development processes to emerge.

From 2009, at the instance of the Government of India, the federal states have been preparing State Action Plans on Climate Change (SAPCC), consistent with the National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC). LAYA-INECC forged interfaces with representatives of SAPCCs, facilitated workshops that brought researchers, CSOs and other stakeholders to share and establish mutuality with the objective of mainstreaming experiences and perspectives of marginalized minorities. Through this strategy, meetings and workshops were held in the states of Andhra Pradesh, Orissa, Chhattisgarh, Assam, Maharashtra and in Delhi.⁹

LAYA-INECC made considerable effort to relate with the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC). Listing a few of its interfaces:

- After its study of Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) projects in 2014, LAYA-INECC made a presentation to demand that the Designated National Authority (DNA) in the MoEFCC takes a proactive role in scrutinizing the CDM projects from a sustainable development perspective¹⁰ and to give a boost to pro-poor CDM projects.
- Submission of a policy note, 'Strengthening Climate Resilience for the Poor – SAPCC' to the MoEFCC, Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE), with follow-up dialogues and prepared a document on Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDC) for the crucial CoP 21 at Paris.

CONFERENCE OF PARTIES - SIDE EVENTS

Since the last two decades, LAYA-INECC has been relating and participating at side events of Conference of Parties (CoP), the apex decision-making body of the United Nations Climate Change Framework Convention (UNFCCC) and most importantly CoP 21 of 2015 at Paris.¹¹ The LAYA-INECC thematic presentations have been impactful as they have brought into dialogue a grassroots framework for Climate Change. To mention a few:

- A 3-day national 'people's convention' on the UN led Conference of Parties, CoP 8 in 2002 at New Delhi with a participation of about 1000 grassroots representatives. We were also able to secure passes for some of the representatives to present their perceptions on Climate Change in a side event at this conference.
- Played a lead role in establishing 'The Civil Society Coalition on Climate Justice and Equitable Development' in 2009. This national coalition comprising INECC, FCFC, OXFAM, India, WADA NA TODO ABHIYAN¹² and CEC organized a three-day pre-conference event of 'Public Hearings on the Climate Crisis and the National Action Plan on Climate Change,' at New Delhi in November 2009 with local communities and CSOs from different eco-systems to articulate the impacts of and responses to the Climate Crisis. This was followed by active participation in December 2009 with a side event at CoP 15, Copenhagen.
- At the CoP 17 at Durban in 2011, the theme was, 'Low Emission Economy which called out for the need to promote people centred adaptation and mitigation processes and called on the national government to upscale these initiatives for transitioning to a low carbon path.'¹³
- In collaboration with Church Development Service (Evangelischer Entwicklungsdienst - EED) and German Agro-Action at COP 18 at Doha, Qatar in 2012, LAYA-INECC placed the theme of 'Peoples' Voices in Policy Choices' that presented a roadmap for an alternate vision for India. This was based on the concept of a threshold level of 'well-being' from the perspective of a low carbon society and limited carbon budget.
- At CoP 20 Lima in 2014, LAYA-INECC team made a presentation on 'Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) and Sustainable Development - Insights from India'.

- The side event at COP 24 in Katowice in 2018 had a gender theme: 'Climate Friendly Technologies – Improving Adaptive Capacity of Women and Building Resilience'. This showcased LAYA-INECC's models along with presentations of Saleemul Huq from Bangladesh and Colin McQuistan from Practical Action.¹⁴ This side event dialogue on renewable energy options for cooking (improved cookstoves) and drinking water and their gender benefits. This side event advocated the need to recognize gender-based roles in building adaptive capacity and integrating it as a key criterion for Global Adaptation Goals for building long term resilience.

'The CoP also is an opportunity – a space where you can meet ministers and connect with most of the civil society actors, who are difficult to reach while in India. The minister's office at the CoP on many occasions organizes a meeting with civil society to update and share information. It is also an opportunity for them to know you are an active player, present at the largest climate meeting and have your two bits to say. However, with the latest platforms of 'country pavilions', countries like India showcase their domestic achievement on tackling Climate Change on a very grand scale. In the last three years that I recall, India had one of the most technologically advanced and glittery pavilions that gained a lot of attention from the global climate community and media alike. However, there is a big gap in what is presented by the India government pavilion and the reality back home.' – Ajita Tiwari

LAYA-INECC participation in several side events of CoP has added a lot of value to its advocacy work – getting shortlisted for side events and interfacing with global organisations. Commenting on the changing nature of civil society participation in the side events of CoPs, Ajita Tiwari remarks, 'Only a limited number of 'quotas' are provided to the nine major constituencies. The UNFCCC is creating newer constituencies such as the Women and Gender Constituency (WGC), Youth Constituency (YOUNGO) and Farmers Constituency (FC), which indicates that the space is theoretically expanding and that stake holding on climate is increasing. LAYA has so far not aligned strictly with any of the 9 major constituencies but expressed solidarity with NGOs, who represent people's voices and the voices of the marginalized. Recently, in June 2020, we have become part of the Women and Gender Constituency (WGC), which will lead to enhanced quality of participation at CoPs, especially from a gender perspective.'

THE CLIMATE STORY
OF LAYA HAS BEEN
INTRINSIC TO INECC'S
GROWTH. LAYA HAS
BEEN EXPLORING,
EXPERIMENTING,
STRENGTHENING,
AND ESTABLISHING
ADAPTATION AND
MITIGATION MODELS
IN THE FOREST
ECOSYSTEM OF
EASTERN GHATS.

STRATEGIC ENGAGEMENTS OF LAYA-INECC

- Engages with grassroots communities, local governance institutions and government officials and state bodies to integrate climate change agenda in the local development policies and programs.
- Shares local people-centric solutions with ministries of state and national governments to influence their action agendas to consider authentic stories from the ground. Plays a critical role to highlight equity gaps in government policy processes.
- Develops policy briefs and recommendations for local, state and national government departments with a Climate Change and Sustainable Development perspective.
- Undertakes Climate Change Education to multiple stakeholders.
- Undertakes feasibility, assessment studies, action research on impacts of climate variabilities and Climate Change.
- Plays a watchdog role at the international level. INECC and its partners share experiences and insights from their community engagements with global stakeholders through side events at Conference of Parties. Keeps a close watch at the Conference of Parties on the translation of the decisions for the most marginalized communities in India.

INECC shares experiences, learns from others, builds collaborations and forge convergence with a variety of actors: NGO representatives, grassroots organizations, movements, academicians, researchers, scientists and others.

NETWORKING TO SHARE AND ADVANCE MODELS IN COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

LAYA believes in the efficacy of networking and has a history of networking at local, national, and international levels. At the local level, LAYA has promoted other networks and is also a member of other networks of Adivasis, youth and women – sharing and disseminating its experiences.¹⁵

At the global level, LAYA has established mutuality with ASPBAE – learning from its international base on adult education and at the same time sharing its perspectives and experiences on climate

education. This is a big take-away. As a core group member of the Fair Climate Network, LAYA took part in the Fair Climate Network - Low Carbon Farming (FCN-LCF) Coalition, by bringing together some NGOs working with Adivasis on Sustainable Agriculture in the Scheduled Areas.¹⁶ However due to the non-availability of relevant technology to measure carbon emission reduction from sustainable agriculture practice, this venture did not come to a fruitful end.

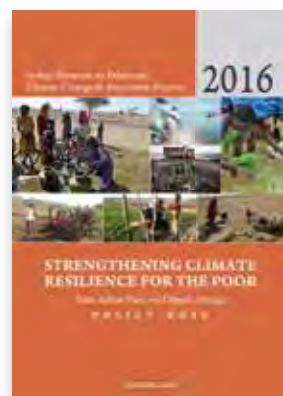
RESEARCHING AND KNOWLEDGE BUILDING

Not many CSOs are known for researching their own project outcomes and building a body of knowledge as guideposts. From the beginning, LAYA gave attention to different types of research – assessment and feasibility studies, reviews and research on renewable technologies, research-based policy notes and several others. A few of its knowledge products:

- Documentation and Research Studies on displacement due to development projects, land alienation and customary law and gender inequity
- Action Research Studies on science and technology aspects of non-timber forest produce, medicinal plants, resilient cropping patterns, domestication of broomgrass, availability and consumption of nutritious food in the local areas.
- LAYA undertook a grassroots study on CDM projects – ‘Money for Nothing’. In 2014, a larger study on CDMs was facilitated that covered 25 CDM projects, 10 states and 8 sectors. Unique to the second study was the primary data it collected for critical analysis. These two studies highlight how these projects were largely cornered by corporates through their Corporate Social Responsibility for their own benefit and faltered in their focus on marginalized poor. The second study makes a strong recommendation for redefinition of Sustainable Development for CDM projects that integrates pro-people development perspectives.¹⁷
- The participatory vulnerability assessments studies in four ecosystems brought about an ethnographic account and analysis of how Adivasis and other marginalized communities perceive their own realities - weathering climate variabilities. These studies illustrated the importance of adaptation and mitigation strategies for building community resilience. Consequent upon the vulnerable

assessment study of the forest ecosystem, LAYA's initiatives in sustainable farming from a low carbon and resource efficiency perspective became stronger and with this, LAYA-INECC stood on authentic ground in its policy and advocacy work.

- More recently, Youth Unity for Voluntary Action (YUVA), an NGO based in Mumbai approached LAYA-INECC to serve as a knowledge partner for the development of an urban poor vulnerability assessment framework. The framework is specifically tailored to assess the vulnerabilities and adaptive capacities of urban poor communities in India. The framework has been designed to simplify climate vulnerability assessment so that it can be easily conducted by urban poor communities themselves or the organizations working with them by using community-based approaches.
- The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), based in Beijing is a multilateral development bank with a green motto for infrastructure development in Asia Pacific. India became a founding member of AIIB in 2016. As a partner of a multi-country consortium of NGOs, which is engaging with AIIB, LAYA has been researching and examining the AIIB projects in India which are predominantly large Business-as-Usual (BAU) infrastructure projects. LAYA has been advocating that AIIB revisit the existing project portfolios to support meaningful renewable based resilient infrastructure that responds to the needs of the poor and the most vulnerable while meeting national and international goals of the Paris Agreement (PA), Disaster Risk (Sendai Framework),¹⁸ and Human Rights and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- LAYA-INECC prepared a discussion paper on India's Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs) - A Civil Society Perspective (July 2015). Well-articulated, this paper argues that INDCs offer a great opportunity for India to facilitate shifts that would be in line with Sustainable Development imperatives. It calls upon India to develop its own equity indicators that expresses the principles of the convention internationally, while also responding to the equity issue nationally.¹⁹
- Along with INECC partner - Samuchit Enviro Tech, in Pune, LAYA has been sensitizing middle-class urban people on their carbon footprint. This has led to realizing the value of carbon emissions from lifestyles. This resulted in a calculation of individual carbon footprint and subsequently brainstorming on solutions for a low-carbon lifestyle at individual and community level.



Documents for policy advocacy and dissemination by LAYA-INECC

WE REVISED AND
CONTEXTUALIZED
THE UNDERSTANDING
OF ENVIRONMENT
IN THE ‘COURSE ON
CLIMATE CHANGE’ FOR
9TH CLASS STUDENTS
AND INITIATED
THE DESIGNING
OF ANOTHER
CURRICULUM: ‘COURSE
ON ENVIRONMENT
EDUCATION AND
SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT’ FOR
8TH CLASS STUDENTS
- DOMINIC D’SOUZA

CLIMATE CHANGE EDUCATION

LAYA's foray into Climate Change Education began with the first workshop on Climate Change, in Mumbai in 1995, which led to the establishment of the Indian Network on Ethics and Climate Change (INECC) in 1996. Our first workshop held at Mumbai and others that followed in different locations, we discovered that the ecosystem approach was very helpful in contextualizing the impacts of Climate Change and to explore the possible ways of coping.

Obviously, the most developed knowledge then was the science of CC, but the causes of Climate Change were not emphasized and the political economic factors underlying the causes were not sufficiently explained. Also, the ensuing justice and ethical aspects of Climate Change were not the centre of discourse, although some faith-based groups had begun to critically reflect on the justice and ethical implications of CCL. From the beginning, however, the major concern was how the awareness created on the crisis of Climate Change would lead to action and change in behaviour at all levels to reduce carbon emissions. Thus, attempts were made in collaboration with the participants to identify possible actions and commit to some of them. This experience from the workshops helped us to develop a template on Climate Change Education (CCE) that could be used to design a structured course or an informal activity-oriented meeting in a community.

Using this template, LAYA in its area of operation held a number of meetings and workshops with different target groups: LAYA personnel, members of community-based organizations (CBOs), teachers, print and electronic media personnel, farmers and sarpanchs. Some awareness sessions were also held in Ashram (residential) Schools. Armed with this experience, several LAYA personnel participated in developing a curriculum: 'Course on Climate Change' for the 9th class students in 2014. A relevant and contextual curriculum of 8 weekly sessions of 45 minutes was designed comprising the 4 key elements of the Climate Change Education template: science and technology, political economy, ethics and justice and relevant action. From 2015-2020 this course has been conducted in 12 schools (boys and girls) in 4 districts. We sought permission of the principals to take this course and were assigned the afternoon class, which was intended in the

government curriculum as 'Environment Education' but not taught, as no teacher was trained to take that subject. We had hoped that in the process, we could do some capacity building of teachers and principals but after attending parts of the classes in the beginning, the teachers would slink away. Later the teachers stopped attending altogether. However, over a period of time, they have become appreciative of our efforts as they got positive feedback from the students. This was because we used improvised and participatory teaching methodologies.

We used improvised and participatory teaching methodologies

In 2019, we critically reflected on our experience, only to realize that we were engaging students (and for that matter, even other target groups) on the issue of Climate Change, while there was little awareness of the environmental degradation that was rampant in the area. We also felt that beginning by focusing on environmental education, the leap to understanding Climate Change would be easier. Also, around this time 2014-2015, the discourse on Sustainable Development (SD) had gained currency resulting in the adoption of the United Nations' 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) in 2015. This was very helpful in curriculum development as Sustainable Development was the real answer to CC, because Climate Change was the result of historical and current unsustainable development choices.

Based on this analysis, we revised and contextualized the understanding of environment in the 'Course on Climate Change' for 9th class students and initiated the designing of another curriculum: 'Course on Environment Education and Sustainable Development' for 8th class students, which was not based on the Climate Change Education template but drew on some key elements from the template. The detailed curriculum took a year to design and drew on the experience of the LAYA personnel, who were involved in taking classes in the 'Course on Climate Change'. - Dominic D'Souza

Also, LAYA-INECC initiated Yuva Drishti in 2007 by bringing together youth from different locations to share their own experiences. These programs brought ground-realities to the climate education process. Soon, Yuva Dhristi got decentralized to different locations of Varanasi,

Pune and Mumbai which got better monitored. Alongside, the climate education process began to reach out to other societal segments such as teachers, journalists, faith-based groups, government officials, corporate houses, restaurant owners, chefs, homemakers, nutritionists, bloggers, and entrepreneurs. To each of these societal segments, tailor-made frames were developed which they could use contextually. The knowledge products of climate education also include curriculums for three ecosystems, survey and interview schedule frameworks and case studies. Over the years all structured initiatives in Climate Change Education are being monitored either through an interview or a survey conducted, post-factum. Building awareness apart, LAYA was capacitating teachers, media persons, entrepreneurs, and staff of CSOs, providing perspectives to all its partners in energy efficiency, carbon-audits, and calculation of carbon footprint, designing and implementing campaigns on Climate Change, captured opportunities to facilitate waste management and zero-waste lifestyles. LAYA's staff across the Units have developed their own expertise in climate education and skills in designing meetings and workshops on climate education.

LAYA's involvement in playing a resource role in Climate Change Education (CCE) in collaboration with INECC continues to have several spinoffs. A few significant conferences that were held since 2015 are:

- In 2015, LAYA-INECC was asked to coordinate a 2 days conference: 'Initiatives to Combat Climate Change' in Mumbai. This conference was special as it was organized by the Archdiocesan Office of Environment (AOE), Mumbai together with Caritas India, Justice and Peace Commission (JPC), Climate Change Desk-Forum of Asian Bishops Conference (FABC) and the Institute for Community Organization Research (ICOR). The participants were mainly bishops, members of the FABC. The template of Climate Change Education was utilized to design the inputs.
- In 2016, LAYA on behalf of INECC played a prominent role in planning and designing of workshop on 'Education for Sustainable Development', which was co-organized by Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education (ASPBAE) and National Coalition for Education (NCE), India (8-10, at New Delhi (December. 2016). A feedback from ASPBAE: 'The facilitation team and resource persons from LAYA-INECC steered the workshop to make the learning process for all participants extremely relevant and

meaningful. The workshop has motivated the participants to venture to integrate the learning in their on-going education work in their schools and communities’.

- In 2020, LAYA collaborated with INECC to create an online course on Climate Change with an Indian perspective. The course helps the participant gain an understanding of the science, politics, and justice dimensions of the climate crisis as well as relevant and practical actions one can take up within the context of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.
- A recent engagement of LAYA-INECC is the setting up of a webinar series which is a platform to share and disseminate on various themes and issues on Climate Change. This platform has helped in introducing discussions on sustainable farming, millets revival, Climate Change Education, COVID-19 response, among others.

‘The whole purpose of Climate Change Education is to provide the participants and stakeholders with the capability of engaging

**The purpose of
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stakeholders
with the
capability to
engage in
discourse,
critically and
accurately**

in Climate Change discourse, critically and accurately. It is easy to dismiss its relevance to learning when the discourse on Climate Change is characterized by the concepts of complexity and uncertainty. Over the past decade, LAYA-INECC has engaged with various stakeholders from the formal and informal educational sector to teach the issue of recent Climate Changes, specifically global warming, to equip learners with functional knowledge on how to mitigate and adapt to anticipated warmer global conditions. On the surface, Climate Change communication is about educating, informing, warning, persuading, mobilizing, and solving this critical problem. At a deeper level, Climate Change communication is shaped by our different experiences, mental and cultural models, and underlying values and worldviews. And this is what ‘Eco-Ethic’, our newsletter aims to bring. Voices from across diverse locations and different ecosystems coming together to share challenges and solutions and stories from the ground that inspire and edify the audience. It is individuals, communities, and

organisations coming together to understand, care, and act on Climate Change through the newsletter. The newsletter covers advocacy issues, adaptation stories, mitigation solutions that can be replicated or upscaled. Social media has played a huge part in this process and through Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Twitter and LinkedIn we have been able to network as well as create awareness of our work and showcase models of change online and reach out to more people. Now with the pandemic restricting physical meetings and workshops we have taken to webinars based on different themes’ - Myron Mendes, Coordinator, Youth and Communication.

ADVOCATING ECOSYSTEM-BASED APPROACH FOR ECOLOGICAL RESTORATION

Dr. Priyadarshini Karve, Convener of INECC, makes a poignant remark, ‘... just individuals making changes in their lives or at the level of their communities is not going to be sufficient to address the climate crisis... Large and disruptive systemic changes are also needed, and these must be driven by national governments. The lessons learned from the community level success stories need to feed into policy making to make this happen effectively. We have to therefore focus our policy advocacy work more on amplifying the voices of the innovative experiments of carbon mitigation and climate adaptation from the grassroots level and pushing for policy reforms driven by the lessons learned from such experiments.’

The climate policy action that LAYA-INECC espouses for INDC is an ecosystem-based approach for ecological restoration. A long list of action recommendations that it submitted in 2020 to the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC) are given below for wider readership. Whether the MoEFCC is likely to consider a few of the recommendations is left for conjecture.²⁰

- Restore degraded land through afforestation and reforestation measures with native species which are culturally relevant.
- Promote domestication of economically important Non-Timber Forest Produce (NTFP) species.
- Stop encroachment of forest ecosystems with intensification of commercial crops of horticulture, spices etc.

- Empower communities to revive village commons through Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation Plus (REDD+).
- Need for Forest Stream Revival Policy to ensure flow of 'green water'
- Create a Special Coastal Forestry Mission.
- Adopt and institutionalize a people driven 'micro ecosystem restoration and management' strategy.
- Promote Community Colleges for creating forest-based entrepreneurship models.
- Activity-based learning for reviving ecosystem health.
- Create urban forests as green infrastructure in the Smart City Mission.
- Share on the ground best practices, success stories, innovations and learnings.
- Ensure corporate commitments to eliminate deforestation.
- Harmonize with other policies and programs to achieve common goals of Climate Change and Sustainable Development with multiple co-benefits.

MOVING AHEAD WITH COMMUNITY RESILIENT MODELS AND CRITICAL THOUGHT ON CLIMATE CHANGE

A matrix of critical thinking on Climate Change has emerged in LAYA's institutional universe with its active engagement in INECC. Within this matrix is a composite cluster of low-carbon practices in bio-diverse organic agriculture and renewable energy models contributing to resilience practice in Sustainable Development. LAYA has taken the story of marginalized communities into its advocacy work and located its demonstrative models to influence the thinking of policy makers and global players. Educating diverse societal segments on Climate Change has run through the entire engagement on Climate Change. The ongoing agenda of LAYA-INECC is to build on the community resilient model to develop a vision for 'community resilience building for Climate Change'. With climate disasters on the rise, for LAYA-INECC, its story/trajectory will continue to unfold with new thresholds to cross.

VOICES FROM THE FIELD

PAPPULA JANAKAMMA, KONDA DORA, KOTHAPALLI VILLAGE, PADERU MANDAL, VISAKHAPATNAM DISTRICT

I have been preparing sweets and selling at the local shandy. My income has increased due to savings in purchase of firewood. The cook stoves are far more efficient as compared to my traditional mud stove and my cooking now is faster. My health has also improved.

Recently, Pappula Janakamma moved to a new house and has requested LAYA's field volunteer to construct a new stove in her new house. LAYA aspires that the improved cookstoves be available to every Adivasi woman in every household to reduce their drudgery while collecting fuelwood and also during cooking.

INSTALLATION OF BIOGAS IN ASHRAM SCHOOLS, VISAKHAPATNAM DISTRICT

For nearly 2 months after the installation of the biogas, we were using it only for cooking. It was only during this time we realized the value of the biogas waste slurry as a source of soil enrichment. We now have a lush green kitchen garden and grow vegetables which we use in children's meals. This has created a lot of excitement, curiosity, and an enabling learning atmosphere in the school – Gangabhavani, Headmaster, Kandamamidi Girls Ashram School in Paderu Mandal.



NAGESWARA RAO, HEADMASTER OF HUKUMPETA BOYS ASHRAM SCHOOL, PADERU, VISAKHAPATNAM DISTRICT

LAYA has been conducting Climate Change Education classes for 8th Class students. In the beginning, students were not confident enough to speak in front of teachers and were shy of asking questions. After LAYA's Climate Change Education classes, I have noticed a clear jump in their confidence levels, and a positive improvement in their attitudes and thinking. Our students now are keen to be part of field activities initiated by LAYA – various plantation works, starting a school kitchen garden and maintaining it. They see a connection of their activities and a solution for the climate crisis.



ENDNOTES

¹ Sanjay Khatua, 2011, Loc. Cit. This vulnerability assessment was carried out to gain insights into people's perception on the nature of changes in the forest ecosystem and to identify potential initiatives necessary to decrease vulnerability and improve resilience. Reduced forest species are korkibusi, neredu, parimi, panasa, mammidi, garrikigaddi, kopurigaddi, vempalli and nallajeedi. Trees that have substantially decreased include - neredu, panasa, daduga, veduru, vegisa, vasaka, kinnerea, velamma, gummadi, karaka, thani, busi, gumpena, usiri, pothadi, bandararu, zelugu, sinduga, tadisa, erugudu, kondachippuru, chinnem and anem..

² Podu is a form of shifting agriculture using slash-and-burn methods. Podu is traditionally practised on the hill-slopes of Andhra Pradesh

³ Pulses such as black gram, red gram, kidney beans (red) are cultivated in 80 to 100% villages; Cashew plantation at the foothills/slope lands and rubber plantation. INECC, 2011, Ibid

⁴ The primary greenhouse gases in Earth's atmosphere are water vapor (H₂O), carbon dioxide (CO₂), methane (CH₄), nitrous oxide (N₂O), and ozone (O₃).wikipedia.org

⁵ LAYA-INECC observes that, 'India has committed to ensuring that 40% of its installed power capacity is from non-fossil sources (renewables including nuclear) by 2030. There is an interim target of 175 gigawatt of non-hydel renewable power set by 2022 (up from 35 GW in 2015). Non-fossil sources accounted for about 37% of India's power capacity, as of September 2019, according to the Central Electricity Authority (CEA). Thus, the larger 2030 target seems like an easy one to achieve. On the interim target of 175 GW of non-hydro renewables by 2022, despite strong initial progress, the government's plans appear to be floundering. A recent CRISIL report indicated that India may fall short of this interim target by as high as 42%., Eco-Ethic, Volume 2: Issue 1

⁶ INECC 2011, Ibid

⁷ Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched 100 Smart Cities Mission on 25 June 2015.

⁸ INECC works with 20 partner organizations who are directly part of the network outreach across 15 states, covering 50 districts and 74 panchayats.

⁹ The State Action Plans on Climate Change (SAPCC) is the primary policy document that lays out project plans and targets laid out under SAPCCs, several pilots and demonstration projects are conducted, with funds from designated agencies and by the national government under the National Adaptation Fund on Climate Change

¹⁰ Vasudha Foundation in Association with INECC and LAYA, 2014, CDM Projects in India: Do they Truly Promote Sustainable Development in India. Misereor supported this study

¹¹ The Conference of Parties (COP) is the apex decision-making body of the United Nations Climate Change Framework Convention (UNFCCC). The UNFCCC was formed in 1994 to stabilize the greenhouse gas emissions and to protect the earth from the threat of Climate Change. COP members have been meeting every year since the year 1995. The Paris Agreement of 2015 was a historic event that brought 196 Parties to agree at limiting global warming to 1.5 to 2 degrees C above pre-industrial levels and a long-term goal for enhancing adaptation. Nationally determined contributions (NDCs) are at the heart of the Paris Agreement and the achievement of these long-term goals.

¹² Wada Na Todo Abhiyan was a national campaign to hold the government accountable to its promise to end Poverty, Social Exclusion and Discrimination

¹³ www.inecc.net

¹⁴ Saleemul Huq, a Bangladeshi scientist is a Senior Fellow in the Climate Change Group at the International Institute for Environment and Development and the Director of the International Centre for Climate Change and Development. Colin McQuistan is the Head of Climate and Resilience in the Influence and Impact team of Practical Action

¹⁵ LAYA is a member several local networks such as Adivasi Solidarity Forum, Adivasi Lawyers Forum, Yuva Chetana Vedike, and Mandal Sarpanchs Federation

¹⁶ The Fair Climate Network (FCN) and Low Carbon Farming (LCF) Coalition comprises of development practitioners, Climate Change activists, environmentalists, scientists and other professionals from India and other countries.. The purpose of FCN is to facilitate and capacitate grassroots bodies to develop pro-poor CDM/VER Projects in India and tap carbon resources for the Sustainable Development of the poorest of the poor

¹⁷ The CDM is one of the Kyoto Protocol's "project-based" mechanisms, in that the CDM is designed for emission-reduction projects in developing countries to earn certified emission reduction (CER) credits. Vasudha Foundation in Association with INECC-LAYA, 2014, Ibid

¹⁸ The Framework was adopted at the Third UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction in Sendai, Japan, on March 18, 2015. The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 outlines seven clear targets and four priorities for action to prevent new and reduce existing disaster risks: (i) Understanding disaster risk; (ii) Strengthening disaster risk governance to manage disaster risk; (iii) Investing in disaster reduction for resilience and; (iv) Enhancing disaster preparedness for effective response, and to "Build Back Better" in recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction. www.undrr.org

¹⁹ Authored by Kamlesh Kumar Pathak, Mrinmoy Chattaraj and Ajita Tiwari Padhi of INECC

²⁰ Letter dated, 3rd September 2020 to Mr. Ravi Shankar Prasad, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change, signed by Nafisa Goga D'Souza, Executive Director and Ms. Ajita Tiwari Padhi, Secretary, INECC.



Yuva Drishti, Semiliguda, Odisha



Side Event at COP 24, Katowice, Poland



Climate Change education and awareness with educational institutions, youth and professionals



Participation in Fair Climate Network (FCN) meeting, *Bagepalli, Karnataka*



Engagement with corporates and civil society, *Bhubaneswar*

EPILOGUE

IMPACTFUL JUNCTURES

The three and half decadal story of LAYA enfolded impactful junctures of inceptual initiatives and their growth towards demonstrative practices for Sustainable Development of Adivasis. LAYA's leadership and facilitative teams have been vehicles of change even as they went through personal transformations through their involvement with issues of marginality and vulnerability of Adivasi communities. There are lessons to be had in top leadership styles with their motto – grow as you do, at your pace and with responsibility. An empowered second and third generation leaders have emerged imbibing values of freedom and culture of equality.

ANCHORED IN SAFEGUARDING ADIVASI RIGHTS

LAYA has firmly put its imprint in the history of Adivasi rights to their lands and forest resources. The growth path of India will bring greater pressure to harvest natural resources of the forests in times to come. The generational shift in the Adivasi communities with aspirational younger generation moving towards progressive migration could bring their lands to the market. RLA Unit's tenacious legal services points to continual need for organizational and legal support that Adivasi would need to protect their land resources. RLA Unit's legal engagement would only increase and with this, it could reposition itself for larger engagement.

BUILDING YOUTH COMPETENCE AND SPIRIT OF VOLUNTARISM

LAYA brought a quantum of youthful energy that catapulted Adivasi youth to be volunteers, gain legal skills, and take on leadership of CBOs and be networked. Their significant contribution has been making their society wakeful of their vulnerable contexts, claim their entitlements and be the youth face of Adivasi rights. The Adivasi youth, who would have otherwise languished, grew in stature even as they served their communities. This is no small contribution. LAYA's youth engagement went into regional and national networking processes through National Youth Foundation which it co-founded and partnering with the Indian Institute of Paralegal Studies.

For LAYA, capacity building through its alternative education paradigm remains an approach, a strategy and contextual practice. At one level, alternative education of LAYA is undergirded by Freirean pedagogical principles. The alternative education has progressed towards integrating progressive parameters of adult education. Empowerment of youth is now brought under the umbrella of 'Lifelong Learning'.

There is growing migration in Adivasi region – progressive and distress and neither is easy to contain. Modern forces whether of religious or political nature are gaining foothold in Adivasi belt and these trends will only increase. This may take a toll on the culture of Adivasi unity. The larger question here is how best can LAYA keep youth energy for larger application in decades to come? Against this backdrop, LAYA's 'Community College' is timely and comes with the promise of making adivasi youth employable and create a qualitative human resource to serve the rights and livelihood needs of forest inhabitants of Eastern Ghats.

LARGER APPLICATION IN HERBAL BASED HEALTH CARE

The herbal base health services of Vanantharam, which is the face of the Herbal Based Health Care Unit, belongs to unique genre in LAYA's story. Its significance is not just for just for Adivasi health care but takes one to debates on ancient knowledge and practice of Ayurveda and the place it deserves in policy. In this regard, Vanantharam has established interfaces with the Ministry of AYUSH, health practitioners, and brought them into its field contexts. Vanantharam's engagement has also drawn attention to the depleting herbal medicinal plants and the importance of their revival of herbal and in particular endangered plant species. The debate is also about regeneration of forests without which herbal medicine plants have little chance of survival. The possibility of herbal base health care to entrench itself for larger application is vast.

ENVISIONING COMMUNITY RESILIENCE BUILDING FOR CLIMATE CHANGE

LAYA-INECC has ably combined field-based practice and policy engagement to posit its theory of change to the complex question of Climate Change. It has put together demonstrative practices in adaptation and mitigation in bio-diverse organic agriculture;

renewable energy; researched and published; brought climate education to the public domain and networked to advocate ecosystem-based approach for ecological restoration and sustainable livelihoods. By taking its paradigm to global platforms, LAYA has enhanced its global presence and sphere of influence.

In times to come, negative impacts of climate variabilities will challenge marginalized poor and both civil society sector and the state would be asked to come up with solutions – short and long term. LAYA-INECC may have to take larger mandates to advance its community resilience vision as a long-long term manifesto.

RESEARCH, KNOWLEDGE BUILDING AND PUBLISHING

LAYA has been mindful of the relevance and use of evidence-based data, action-research, different genres of research and published. For several of its initiatives, it got into collaborative action research that allowed other stakeholders to be part of the change process and enhanced its sphere of influence. Through this process, several external professionals in social science, forestry, agriculture, law, Ayurveda walked through LAYA's corridors – enriching its learning and knowledge base. While LAYA has researched and published, it may be asked to do more to continually build its brand through a thought-out communication strategy that disseminates its experiential based knowledge and critical research. Contemporaneously and in times to come CSOs that have immersed themselves in critical research for its development engagements are bound to be valued.

SPEAKING FOR THE MARGINALIZED ADIVASIS AND STRATEGIC PATHS

The historical journey of LAYA has brought out a robust voice of the Adivasis to demonstrate the power of voluntary action and empowerment. LAYA story also poses larger questions about how best to combine issues of rights and development? When does one convert a right to development and how best to do this in the contemporary context where civil society organizations have come under critical scanner? Already the state and corporates through their corporate social responsibility are capturing the spaces of civil society organizations. How best can civil society organizations strategize that brings the states and corporates into their arenas of influence? Interestingly, LAYA has critiqued the state policies and at

the same time collaborated to build their perspectives and bring them on board for dialogue – a competence that is not easily got. Probably, a lot more investment must be made in this regard. Critical issues of marginalities and perspectives of the marginalized must make a dent and fracture the mainstream society. Not many realize that questions of Sustainable Development of the marginalized communities, who are the majority can ill afford to be at the periphery as their lives and livelihoods, are intricately connected to the well-being of dominant mainstream society.

Weaves in the Journey:

Some Voices

Several players have journeyed with LAYA – co-travelling, collaborating, researching, learning, and sharing and funding. Their experiences are woven around LAYA's story. The stories reflect that of these actors over the three and half decadal journey of LAYA.

GOVERNANCE: BOARD MEMBERS

DR. LATA NARAYAN

I have known Nafisa and Dominic since the 1970s, first as friends and colleagues in the College of Social Work, Nirmala Niketan, Mumbai. I made my first visit to Addateegala to see what my friends were doing after leaving Nirmala Niketan. This was probably in 1987. I was later to join the Governing Board and since then I have witnessed the various phases of LAYA's growth.

Over the years, LAYA moved – being in a hut at Addateegala, often with no electricity and minimal infrastructure, to Vanantharam, the Health Centre; housed in rented offices in Visakhapatnam and thereafter to having its very own office space. Addateegala, and Paderu, have now developed into mofussil towns and Visakhapatnam into a major city. The expansion of LAYA's office, and Centres are just symbols, but it's true growth is in the impact of LAYA with Adivasi communities. LAYA is the flow of the organization over the past three decades.

Relevance, authenticity, people-centred are words that come to mind, and these principles are predominant in LAYA. LAYA has grown through phases of exploration of the field, to engage in innovating strategies with the people; capacity building of various stakeholders; building evidence; and replication of work in other areas. Expansion to other locations has been strategically planned, and not for the sake of larger presence. The range of concerns addressed are rooted in the community.

Building evidence and knowledge based on community experience is often discussed. The established methodologies of research do not always fit to explain people's lives, though I must add, there has been a major rethinking on the notions of evidence, and the subjective interpretation of data in mainstream research paradigms. LAYA has expanded to other locations and this has enabled the organization to build evidence based on replication of strategies and activities in other locations as well as study the influence of these in different locations.

For LAYA, participation of the people is sacrosanct; the pace of change was looked at from the concerns of the community and people's readiness for change. This is evident even within the organization. G. Bulliyya and K. Koteswara Rao, who started young, are today part of the senior management team. Balancing professional and personal roles and responsibilities is a major strength sustaining the sense of commitment and teamwork within LAYA.

Being part of the LAYA's Board is one of the most enriching experiences in my professional life. The Board is into serious business and complete immersion towards achieving the goals of the organization, and yet full of humour and fun working through the tensions and celebrating the spirit of LAYA through its milestones and achievements. There have been organizational glitches, and challenges and yet LAYA has sustained itself by practicing principles of relevance, authenticity, and most importantly, being people-centred.

LAYA has been my learning ground to understand Adivasi society in Andhra Pradesh. Personally, I have gained an understanding of the tribal scenario, experienced good governance, witnessed positive influence of active participation leadership at different levels, skills of balancing personal and professional priorities while keeping the overall goals of the organization and gaining credibility in the external world through people's acceptance of the work done.

In social work, we say that ideally, we need 'scholar practitioners'. Nafisa and Dominic, the founders of LAYA, have embodied these two aspects of being practitioners, and given importance to studies, assessments, reviews, documentation and plans based on experience. I am confident and pray that LAYA will continue to engage with communities with the principles of relevance, authenticity, and people orientation.

MS. MANI MISTRY ELAVIA

My association with LAYA goes back to its initial pre-registration phase and later on I was part of its General Body and presently I have come back to the Governing Board. Through this process, I saw LAYA grow with unique organizational practices that have lessons for development organisations.

At the very first, I would say that the leadership styles have helped in not just facilitating but catalysing the growth of staff members like G. Bulliyya – from a young lad who joined just after completing his schooling (from a simple village school) to a Coordinator to lead and manage the Herbal-based Health Care engagement at Vanantharam, Addateegala. Not only is he leading HBHC but has gained a reputation for his subject expertise. Bulliyya reflects and symbolizes the leadership style in LAYA that has allowed its young team to pursue their areas of interest and bloom. There are several Bulliyyas in LAYA working with passion, commitment, and a sense of ownership to the organization.

Consciously, LAYA has avoided Adivasis (with exceptions of Adivasi professionals with specific expertise) to be working in the organization. This is a considered decision to ensure that Adivasi youth are capacitated to work for their communities at the villages rather than be alienated. LAYA believes that Adivasi youth must be leading the cause of Adivasi rights. LAYA is not driven by rigid objectives but has grown organically from the needs of the Adivasis and their local, ecological, and wider political contexts. LAYA has connected well from its grassroots initiatives to global platforms, especially in the context of Climate Change.

MS. NANDINI NARULA

I have been associated with the LAYA Board for a long time, probably for a decade and half. Of course, I have known the founder leaders from much before as they were my teachers when they were part of the academic fraternity. They have brought their background of academia plus activism to shape LAYA as the organization it is today! An integration of research and grassroots level work with a special sauce of looking at Climate Change from how it impacts local communities at a time when Climate Change was seen only as an issue for the ‘West’.

LAYA's DNA consists of being a learning organization that is locally grounded yet having an eye and an ear for what is happening at the national and international levels. This is apparent in all the themes, strategies, systems, leadership, etc. All leadership positions in all the themes are in the hands of men from the community who had joined as 'Youth' from the area and they grew literally and figuratively along with LAYA. The flip side of this is that there are no women in leadership at the field level!

The composition of the Board has been a tapestry of academicians and practitioners basically known to the founder leaders or at times to the existing Board members. The prospective members are invited after considerable deliberation at the Board level, if possible, they are involved in one or another assignment so that LAYA as well as the potential member have an opportunity to know each other. They of course begin by being a General Body member. The futurist needs from a theme/issue perspective, age, location as well as alignment with the values of LAYA is a consideration in the choice of a member.

The interaction with Board members is not restricted to Board meetings only. One day before the actual Board meeting there is a daylong interaction between LAYA staff team and Board members over a theme/issue, review, input into future plans, etc. This has become the way the Board functions and is an established practice. This meeting provides the Board as well as the staff an opportunity to interact and benefit from each other's experience.

As Board members come with diverse sets of capacities LAYA often involves the members in their professional capacities; again this is a mutually gainful experience for both. It provides the Board members an opportunity to interact closely with the team as well as understand the ground reality in which LAYA operates. The founder leaders have built-in practices that have now become a part of the culture of LAYA governance, whether it is the daylong meeting with the team or an evening meal together.

Since 2019, a small committee of Board members has been working as a Change Management Committee to help find a new leader for LAYA. An intensive process of first looking outside of LAYA and then inside has led to the identification of the new leader. The committee has been closely overseeing and supporting this change by regular interactions with all concerned. Since it is an internally driven process a two to three year

overlap is built in with six monthly reviews with the committee sharing the developments with the Board.

The evening space is for reflection, debate, fun, building/strengthening friendships. The arenas vary from social issues, politics, culture, sports, films, music, food and sharing of life experiences, stories and many personal snippets. On a lighter note, food to many of us is an important energizer so what is to be eaten and where, is a crucial decision to be taken as a wrong choice could result in a mood spoiler!

MS. N.V. RAMA NANDANAVANAM

LAYA has carved out a unique space for itself with great patience and resilience. It has never pushed itself onto a path of competition or into a space where the dynamism of its mandate is determined by external players. I say a unique space because whatever LAYA is doing today seems to have reached this stage with deliberate ideation, research, pilot interventions, failures, deep understanding and then scaling up. This approach takes a fair deal of patience and resilience and the time interval between the initial – middle – final scale up stage is very long – seemingly dead slow.

LAYA's Board governance is strong, playing an active role in reviewing, brainstorming to see that the organization is going ahead on the path it has defined for itself. The Board members have brought information resources that could be helpful to the management in implementation and also takes the effort of making those connections. The management honors the governance by being very transparent about its operations and plans, giving updates on the follow action taken in adherence to the suggestions given by the Board. In the seven to eight organizations that I have been associated with closely, I have seen this in only two organizations and one of them is LAYA. LAYA is in a good place to scale up its interventions, directly or as a resource organization.

MR. SANJAY KHATUA

True to its name, LAYA, understanding the 'rhythms' – layers and nuances around the issues, is one of the organic practices embedded in

conceptualization processes. It gives importance to 'think' from different perspectives, especially of diverse ecosystem-based communities. LAYA has that unique capacity to be comfortable in bringing the micro and macro synergy in its strategic planning. It has not lost its innocence and hunger to explore, is eager to learn, is ready to put ears to the ground, listen to what the stakeholders think and the ways they respond along with their aspirations, plough back recurring ideas into action and keep the processes evolving. These architectures are behind the rich content and lively engagements not missing out on the objectivity and micro-macro linkage.

LAYA's paradigm on Climate Change is aligned with its engagement with diverse constituencies, primarily hills and forest dependent Adivasi communities. The way people live, their world view, relationship with the resources they live on, issues and concerns around their livelihoods, changing development choices and the changing climate, their response to policies and programs, linkage with macro issues and policies. It dynamically pursues the issues of livelihoods and Climate Change, exploring and broad-basing ways and means to live and grow sustainably in the midst of a changing climate with judicious use of local knowledge systems and resources, effective mix of climate friendly technologies, strategic use of government programs, convergence opportunities, and making use of market systems. There has been a concerted effort to build the capacities of communities to critically understand these issues and make climate friendly, sustainable choices, and respond to policies that affect their livelihoods and resources.

LAYA's governance structure is like many other NGOs. But the process at LAYA involves consciously creating spaces for learning from engagement at the community level that help evolve the governance process organically (updated with dynamics of ground reality) to address the issues and challenges. Each Governing Board and General Body meeting is preceded by presentations from field Units, at some occasions community leaders share their experience and observations (including youth, PRI leaders), field visits and critical reflections on activities or presentations by Board members on current issues. This governance process has evolved a practice of 'thinking together', which at present times is important to face the paradigm shift in community engagement, stay relevant to community aspirations and challenges of mobilizing resources to sustain the momentum created.

My journey with LAYA began in September 2015 with my first interactions with Prof. Devi Prasad, a senior faculty at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai. He introduced me to the activities of LAYA and suggested that we have an interaction with the team. Further, he suggested that I could also share my work and speak on a topic of my interest in education. An openness to mutual exchange as a starting point, created a positive vibe to approaching the opportunity as a means to understand more of LAYA. With my latent interests in education of the tribal and vulnerable sections, I chose to speak on my thoughts about imagining ways to address issues of marginalisation in education. In my talk on “Education and Youth of the Marginalised Communities”, I attempted to share the findings from a few studies and my field experiences to ground the conceptual ideas on the matter of interest. The presentation resulted in a discourse of sharing and knowing of LAYA’s experiences and what it foresees as an area of continued engagement.

It is a pleasure to be a part of a sustained tradition of openness to dialogue, exploring ideas and continual acceptance to considering ideas for growth and enhancement of the organisation

As I walked into LAYA and interacted with the team, I felt a sense of warmth, mutual respect and solidarity among different members of the team. The cordial environment with the field practitioners and sharing of experiences, future plans and co-discussing the challenges, suggested a sense of commitment and sincere engagement with each other’s work. During this first interaction, a pervading sense of community cut across discussions that reflected deep investment in social action. The open-approach to learning that variously involved people in realising ongoing field projects and day-to-day activities, represented to me, a vibrant culture that has been nurtured over the years. Getting to know each team member and their interests helped me understand the variety and scope of LAYA’s activities. Little did I realise that at some point, I would become a part of this team later.

Steadily, over the years, I have been in close talks on various ideas as a member of the Governing Board. It is a pleasure to be a part of a sustained and well-nurtured tradition of openness to dialogue,

exploring ideas and continual acceptance to considering ideas for growth and enhancement of the organisation. The prevailing coherence in wide-ranging engagements that LAYA continues to be a part of – education, livelihood, tribal development, land rights, green ventures, Climate Change, sustainability, technologies and society, women issues, etc., – testify the organisation's committed presence to social action, life and culture of the sections of society that LAYA has partnered with. The growth and ramification of the organisation demonstrates a rich profile of achievements consistent over the years. Much beyond being an organisation growing in terms of its strength and reach, LAYA has invested in nurturing entrepreneurs, serving the cause of social justice, people empowerment and welfare. The active guidance and freedom to realise ideas has created self-sufficient Units on safeguarding rights and interests of adivasis, herbal-based healthcare, developing and harnessing sustainable resources through systematic technological interventions, and lifelong learning. The experiences through projects and field actions have been captured and disseminated through publications, courses and workshops around various themes.

I have been fortunate to have an academic presence that cuts across traditional disciplinary boundaries. I have a M.Sc. degree in Botany with a specialisation in plant biotechnology. My interests in taxonomy and ecology led me to be a part of field projects and studies from which I learnt a lot. Through my doctoral research in Science Education, I engaged the urban and tribal students in design and make tasks, which led us to develop insights about design thinking, cognition and learning. With an eclectic academic background, I find worth and relevance in exploring a canvas of activities that are coherently guided by principles of social justice, welfare and productive engagement. This I feel strikes a chord with my association with LAYA. Although seemingly disparate interests, one continues to gather a lot through a process of continual association with experienced resource persons that have long been instrumental in shaping the character and sense of purpose for activities at LAYA. As I reflect, I feel assured and greatly benefitted from my interactions with the LAYA team. I earnestly wish that LAYA continues to grow further in strength and impact. I hope that I will be able to serve my level best during my term of association with the team.

A JOURNEY INTO THE UNKNOWN

This narrative begins with my teaching days in College of Social Work, Nirmala Niketan, Mumbai way back in the 1970s. Through a series of unplanned circumstances, both my partner, Dominic D'Souza and I found ourselves a part of the faculty of the college in 1976. This was a vibrant period with lots of learning experiences. We were blessed with a 'boss', the then Vice Principal, Dr. Ms. Armaity Desai, who was dynamic and far seeing! She later became the Director of Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) and went on to lead the University Grants Commission (UGC), Delhi. In those days she encouraged us to explore our vision and operationalize our ideas to achieve that vision.

In the initial years, when the learning curve was high, it was exciting to be a member of the faculty, not only because of the teaching experience but also because of other roles assigned such as curriculum development, integrated social work seminars, field mentoring, and research responsibilities. This kept me on my toes, and I enjoyed the camaraderie with my colleagues despite our differing perspectives on Social Work Education.

However, eight years down the line, there was a dramatic change precipitated by the exit of the Vice Principal, which shook the management of the College of Social Work to the core. During this time many of our colleagues left. The work atmosphere was becoming stifling as creativity was no longer encouraged and the dynamic culture in which we had earlier operated slowly began to evaporate. In these circumstances my spirit took a beating, and I began to lose heart. Besides, there were logistical factors that were daunting. Dominic and I lived in the suburbs of Mumbai and we had to leave our young son every day to attend classes and could only get back late evening. This tore my heart and I began to feel that life was becoming too mechanical and feared the dreariness of the future.

As luck would have it, out of the blue, an ex-student of our college from Andhra Pradesh, Mr. Inampudi Rambabu, whom we had assisted in starting a new organization called SPADE, surfaced and encouraged us to initiate work in an adjacent tribal area of East

Godavari District in Andhra Pradesh. It is true that we had kept in touch with him and often spent our holiday period supporting him in his work, but we had not expected this invitation.

After much deliberation and short visits to the area we decided to take the plunge. Yes, my colleagues cautioned me against making such a wild decision especially since I had a small child of about four and a half years old. They advised me to stay back while

Dominic left and got started and a bit established.

While this advice seemed logical, my heart pushed me in another direction. I was not going to miss the adventure of setting up an initiative. As far as my son was concerned, he was already unhappy with the atmosphere in school in Mumbai and had dropped out. In his interest too, I felt that a different experience might be beneficial. Hitherto, I had always advised my students to follow their heart when making decisions and I was determined to do so in my own case as well.

I remember very well the poster that our students gave as a parting gift which read, “I do not know where I am going but I am on my way”

So began our journey and a new beginning. I remember very well the poster that our students gave as a parting gift which read ‘I do not know where I am going but I am on my way’. This has always been etched in my memory. Indeed, we did not have much of a clue where we were going but we were well on our way! I decided that I would home tutor my son during the exploration phase.

The highpoint of my journey was to come face-to-face with reality rather than talk about realities in a classroom context. The challenges were huge because we (my partner and I) were in a location which was outside our comfort zone. Nevertheless, being confronted day after day with the problem areas ignited a passion that one could not ignore. Within the arena of so-called insurmountable obstacles there was always that hope that we were part of a real-world grappling with real issues. In my initial days, I always felt that despite all the physical difficulties (remote area, no electricity, no easy transport, lack of basic service infrastructure, etc.) was worth the insights that I was drawing day after day from just being and experiencing life in a tribal village.

1985-1989: BREAKTHROUGHS

When I look back, I can recall the various phases of my personal life interconnected with my professional occupation. The first phase between 1985-1989 began when Dominic and I found ourselves living on the banks of the river Godavari during the exploration phase. We surveyed the villages around mostly by boat as that was the most feasible option available to go to the villages. And then we came onto the other side of East Godavari district where we finally decided to touch base and establish a centre based on a number of practical reasons. We stayed in a village, Tungamadugula, 12 km away from the Mandal headquarters, Addateegala in a thatched hut with several of our colleagues. This was quite an experience. Few basic amenities and no language competence! Quite a combination. And yet there was something compelling in living in this god forsaken village. The slow pace of life, intermittent visits to the villages due to lack of adequate transport, being part of the village ethos, and just observing how families lived from day to day was a tremendous learning experience that no amount of money could have bought. Physical challenges were many but they were compensated with the experience of being in a real situation calling for real solutions. Being young it was an adventurous time and travelling to villages and figuring out what interventions are called for occupied my mind besides taking care of my son as Dominic was often called upon to visit adjacent districts.

Despite the language problems I was located in this village for about nine months. During this time, I was fully immersed in the village ethos: learnt a lot about the problem situation and began to interact more closely with an operative team that was made available for us by our colleague, the Director of SPADE.

Nine months down the line, by the end of 1985 I was expecting our second child and decided to go to Mumbai for my delivery. I left the village location in early 1986 and returned to Addateegala, Mandal headquarters later that year when my newborn daughter was 6 months old. From this time on I was located with my family in a rented place in Addateegala.

It was during this time that we began to evolve our initial strategy of work on land issues. We began to understand that there were

special laws that governed tribal areas and that land dispossession was the main problem that touched the adivasis. We also began to understand that these areas were hot spots of naxalite activity and the police system was geared to 'track' outsiders. We also began to learn about day-to-day issues and realized that an integrated approach was necessary in these circumstances to outreach several of the felt needs in the community.

At the interventional level, the first breakthrough came when we were confronted with land issues and received an overwhelming response from the local community. A large number of Adivasi families had lost their lands in the 1970s due to a 'settlement survey process' conducted in the area, which resulted in widespread alienation of lands by non-tribals, who claimed ownership on those lands which were actually leased to them by Adivasis in exchange of some economic favours. This enabled us to establish rapport with the community as we began listening to stories from the ground and tried to resolve the issues as they began to emerge. This made us relevant within the community context and also may have established our credibility with the extreme militant groups, which otherwise may not have allowed us to function. From this initial experience we began to look at other points of intervention such as issues of false tribal certification of non-tribals, education access, health infrastructure, youth engagement, etc.

By now we had a second-hand jeep which enabled me to travel to villages and begin new interventions. Together with Dominic and colleagues we began to respond to local concerns, and got more deeply engaged in local issues. We got involved in critical issues like a false tribal certification case, where a local non-tribal landlord stood for elections as Mandal President in a tribal reserved constituency, in another case of government lands being fraudulently assigned to non-tribals instead of deserving landless tribals; in taking up cases of lands falsely settled in favour of non-tribals; in initiating campaigns on local issues related to bank loan fraud by bank officials, unlawful restricted access to tribals in reserved forest areas for basic needs, in protesting against non-fulfilment of quota of health personnel in health centres and taking up some corruption cases of officials, etc. Our larger purpose was to deal with the power equation in the area where

non-tribals attempted to control and siphon off resources in the region and where local officials were non-responsive to local needs and often worked hand in hand with the powerful non-tribal lobby. At the level of Sustainable Development, we were involved in constructing a check dam for irrigation and thereby learned how corruption operates at the ground level; we initiated a school for children, which was eventually burnt down by non-tribals due to our involvement in land issues; we gained beginning insights into herbal based healthcare realizing that mainstream services were not reaching remote communities and that we had to think differently and in other such initiatives related to promoting social forestry, thrift, non-formal education, etc.

In 1988, Dominic left for New Delhi joining Indo-German Social Service Society (IGSSS) as a Project Director, based in New Delhi. I continued to stay back and sustained the work that we had initiated. During this time, I was assisted by two colleagues from Mumbai, Walter Mendoza and Radha Kunke, who decided to join LAYA.

In the meantime, SPADE was having some difficulties with local politicians due to reasons of its involvement in land issues and vested interests of political luminaries in the region resulted in this organization being blacklisted and losing its FCRA in 1988. This meant that overnight we as a project of SPADE had to suspend all our activities and SPADE died a natural death! This is how LAYA, the organisation was born. However, due to our past association with SPADE acquiring an FCRA was a difficult task. So, all our activities had to be carried out in collaboration with other like-minded organizations. The second breakthrough came in 1995 when LAYA received its own FCRA which made it possible for LAYA to pursue its own goals and establish its own identity.

In this context, I continued the activities for about a year at Addateegala, on a low key and then decided to shift to Visakhapatnam due to family obligations and also because I felt that this was the right time to initiate a Resource Centre which could cater more specifically to regional concerns. My two colleagues from Mumbai also shifted with me to Visakhapatnam. I liked Visakhapatnam, my home till date.

1989-1995: BEGINNING AGAIN FROM SCRATCH

We initially rented a place at Visakhapatnam which was a sort of residential-cum-office space. The first challenge was to register a new organization since SPADE was now dying a natural death. This we did in September 1989. Several of the Founder Members continue to be part of the governance team to date. The second challenge was to raise resources at least for a skeleton team to continue the work that we had started in the local area. We undertook remunerative studies which helped in keeping our work going. I began to work on my Doctoral thesis on 'Land Dispossession' since this would give us an opportunity to document data in a coherent way and build on the organizational knowledge on land alienation. I completed my Ph.D in 1998.

I began to conceptualize a Resource Centre, the idea being to combine grassroots learning while relating to macro concerns. In this context, we responded to local issues undertaking a campaign against repeal of a protective law for safeguarding Adivasi land rights in 1990 and participated in organizing a Padyatra in February-March 1991 with like-minded NGOs in which the Adivasis and their associates walked through the Scheduled Areas of North Andhra and South Orissa to highlight issues in the region but mainly displacement of tribals. It was in this period too that we initiated youth training programs at the central (Yuva Parichay) and regional levels (Yuva Sikshana and Yuva Chaitanya: 1991-1992). Yes, given the circumstances at that time we were able to network with several likeminded NGOs and were supported with resources through their generosity and were thus able to give the Resource Centre idea some shape.

And it was during this time, in 1993, that I got introduced to the issue of Climate Change by a colleague of mine, William Stanley, who was working with tribal communities in Orissa. He urged me to attend this international meeting at Toronto, Canada. I did not see the point because I had very little exposure till then to the issue of Climate Change and perceived this issue to be irrelevant for local communities. Hence with a great deal of reluctance and pressure from my colleagues I attended this event. Interestingly, this was a small core group meeting on Climate Change organized by the World Council of Churches (WCC).

This meeting was an eye opener and a game changer for what is to follow. I began to get interested in this issue and began to understand its relevance to the Indian context. I saw in the arguments of the phenomenon of Climate Change an opportunity to present the need for systemic change required for a better world. Hence, I came back and called for a meeting with like-minded friends. Several of my colleagues concurred with my viewpoint.

1995-2002: PROMOTING LAYA'S IDENTITY AND INITIAL ENGAGEMENT ON THE CLIMATE CHANGE AGENDA

A new chapter in my life had begun. This was the year after we received our FCRA in 1995. The FCRA registration was a new lease of life for LAYA. We were finally able to raise resources and establish an organizational identity with our own vision and mission. During this time we received excellent support from funding agencies. We were able to do a lot of networking activities in the Andhra-Orissa region. Several initiatives flourished and we began to develop positive relationships and collaborate with several colleagues in our sector.

At this juncture, too, there was an organizational change. Dominic returned from his stint in Delhi in 1995. In 1996, Walter and Radha left for Bengaluru to pursue their own priorities and Dominic got integrated into the LAYA team as an Associate Director. During this time, the Unit approach as an administrative strategy was introduced and the various thematic areas began to be defined. The Unit approach, as it turned out, began to pay huge dividends. Our team began to develop expertise in the thematic areas of their choice. With expertise grew independent functioning which bloomed into a passion related to their own engagement.

In 1995, I became a member of the Ethical Response Team, Climate Change, WCC, Geneva. I began to participate in international meetings and understand the Climate Change problem from a global perspective and share the impacts of Climate Change from a developing country like India's perspective at public platforms. I also began to understand the importance of emphasizing the ethical and justice aspects of the climate issue in an environment where science and politics were the drivers of the emerging global problem. Thus, given my frame of mind together with that of my

colleagues, the Indian Network on Ethics and Climate Change (INECC) was born in 1996.

2002-2007: NATIONAL NETWORKING PROCESSES ENHANCED AND NEW INITIATIVES UNDERTAKEN

This was the period when national networking was at its best. LAYA along with other NGOs founded the National Youth Foundation, a national network comprising 5 regional clusters: Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Gujarat, Maharashtra and North India, 2002. We were also one of the key partners of an entity established called the Indian Institute of Paralegal Studies (IIPLS) in 2002, with the objective of promoting relevant legal intervention. In February of 2005, LAYA also organized the Adivasi Samvaad III, a national event at Addateegala to take the Adivasi rights agenda forward.

At the local level we began to promote renewable energy-based technologies

The new critical program initiatives undertaken would establish Vanantharam Centre as an identity of alternative healthcare in 2004. There was much debate in the organization before doing so because this would be our first attempt at constructing a centre involving asset creation. So far, we had only operated from rented centres. After much thought we felt it was imperative to construct a health centre given the challenges of healthcare realities in the Adivasi context. In hindsight, this has proved to be an excellent decision as today this centre is able to provide spaces for training activities, infrastructure for preparing herbal medicines, while also housing a pharmacy, and a demonstrative herbal garden. It does indeed ensure a face to Herbal-based Health Care.

The second initiative was to initiate a 10-Day crash literacy program for Adivasi women leaders in Telugu established in 2004. While participating in meetings of the Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education (ASPBAE) I felt challenged when hearing that there was a 10-day model of imparting literacy to adult women. The way forward was to develop a syllabus suitable for Telugu speaking women learners with potential leadership skills. This was a hugely creative exercise, which ultimately proved to be an effective empowering

tool for Adivasi women, who have not had the opportunity to go to schools or dropped out of school very early.

We also facilitated the registration of Manyaseema as a micro-finance institution under the Mutually Aided Cooperative Societies Act (MACS) in 2007 which comprised all the SHGs we had so far nurtured in the tribal belt of East Godavari District. This initiative however had a disappointing outcome as the CEO of the bank began to play truant such that we were later forced to withdraw support to the bank.

2008 + : CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENERGY ISSUES FROM LOCAL LEVEL TO GLOBAL PROCESSES

At the local level we began to promote renewable energy-based technologies. We set up decentralized energy clusters and began to experiment with various technologies.

INECC was strengthened during this time and as the Convener, I felt that it was necessary to drive the INECC process. LAYA-INECC took the responsibility to organize a series of regional round tables in different parts of India in 2008: Delhi, Mumbai, Guwahati, Chennai, Bhubaneswar, Visakhapatnam and Bengaluru. On LAYA's part, we organized an international meeting on 'People's Voices in the Domestic and International Climate Agenda' in collaboration with INECC and Forum of Collective Forms of Cooperation, held at Visakhapatnam, in November of 2008. The deliberations fed into a larger national event which took place in New Delhi in November of 2009.

By now almost all the development support agencies were encouraging local actions on Climate Change. This was in anticipation of Conference of Parties (COP) 15, scheduled for November 2009 at Copenhagen, a watershed year for negotiations in the Climate Change discourse to focus on the next steps to taking decisive international actions on the issue of Climate Change.

In this context, at the national level, I along with my INECC colleagues spearheaded 'The Civil Society Coalition on Climate Justice and Equitable Development' towards democratizing the debate and Action Plans on Climate Change. This created an opportunity for diverse marginalised communities to articulate the impacts of Climate Change, their responses to these calamities,

and the articulation of their own needs and aspirations at a national event in 2009 together with other people's organisations and NGOs, activists, academic institutions, and individual researchers. At the international level, our partner agencies were planning a huge campaign for making tough decisions at Copenhagen. In this context, this international coalition comprising mainly faith-based groups planned a huge event inviting Desmond Tutu, a South African Anglican cleric and theologian, known for his work as an anti-apartheid and human rights activist as the chief guest and a few other CSO representatives. Since, by this time, I was active at the international level, I was invited to respond to queries about India's position on Climate Change during this event, just before Desmond Tutu could deliver his speech. Never did I expect that I would address this huge gathering of more than 100000 persons from all over the globe!

Subsequently, I was invited to be a part of the Global Campaign for Climate Action (GCCA), an international umbrella organization initiated with the objective of bringing together representatives of the key actors involved in the Climate Change debate. Following this period, I also got involved in a German-India Research Study Consortium on 'Low Carbon Pathways for a Sustainable India', 2014 which demanded much attention and in the long run did not prove to be a satisfying experience due to the nature of dynamics operative within the Consortium members.

However, there were many lessons to be learned in engaging with networks. This was a tension provoking period for me and exhaustive to the core, which ultimately had adverse effects on my health after which I decided to reorient my priorities. I needed a break. I shared the need for a flexible time schedule for introspection and re-energising myself at one of our Board meetings. During this time, I began to express myself through oil painting, mentored by one of our Board members, a Professor in the Fine Arts Department of the Andhra University. This process was a therapeutic one and helped me to tide over the 'burnt out' syndrome through an overdrive of engagement.

2013 +: STRUGGLE FOR RESOURCE GENERATION

The struggle for resource generation began around this time. Several of our funding partners began to withdraw because of

policy changes at their end. Much of the earlier networking processes were also beginning to dwindle. And on the personal front, I was forced into spending huge amounts of time on fund raising to keep the organization afloat. Resource generation became a real concern. We began to reflect within the organization on issues of sustainability. So we began to take some concrete steps towards sustainability. One of our Board members and myself initiated LAYA Green Ventures in March 2013, a private limited company with the objective of creating a resource entity for LAYA to function independent of external donations. This has been an ongoing challenge. We also began to review our grassroots involvement from a cost benefit and sustainability perspective promoting initiatives such as low-carbon projects keeping in mind its potential for resource generation. We facilitated the establishment of a self-financing pharmacy at Vanantharam and developed partnerships with local government programs.

LEADERSHIP STYLES

Interestingly, in LAYA the genesis of our leadership style began from an apparent weakness where both my partner and I who were leading the intervention processes lacked the local language capability required for community interaction and could only do so via our team members. Thus, our team was forced to interact directly with the community on their concerns. This led to the frontline workers developing their skills in community engagement. Our contribution was to play a resource role and provide a critical analysis of the objective situation and the possible arenas of intervention. The implementation process was left to the creativity of the frontline workers.

This led to a leadership style in LAYA which is based on expertise of domain areas. As an organization, LAYA has believed in nurturing decentralized leadership. We believe that if the key persons in the organization own the processes that they are involved with, learning is facilitated as they develop their own independent insights and do not depend on external approval for day-to-day intervention. Also, we have observed that the key personnel in the organization have developed their own management skills and demonstrate a great deal of independence in carrying out their tasks.

At the level of direction, the leadership has been assumed in a partnership style where my partner and I share directional roles. We most often do not agree with each other but have learnt over time to arrive at a consensus in most crucial matters. At the coordination level, each individual has his own style of assuming leadership. Some are hands-on and others prefer to lead from behind.

2018 + SUCCESSION PLAN INITIATED

I have now been associated with LAYA since 1985...a journey of more than 35 long years. Dominic retired in 2016 and moved onto playing a role of Consultant to the organization. It was my turn now to shift the mantle of responsibility to other capable hands. The process of handing over my responsibilities has been an interesting process. In 2018 we began to reflect in the Governing Board on LAYA's succession plan. We first initiated an external process of identifying a person who could eventually take up the role of directorship in LAYA. We were unsuccessful in our efforts in finding a suitable person with potential to fulfil this role in the future. Then we created a Change Management Team comprising some members of the Board of LAYA. The Change Management Team begins to dialogue and interview the senior management team within LAYA in order to sense the pulse of what kind of leadership would be desirable for LAYA from a long-term perspective. Finally, after many deliberations and intensive interview processes Siddharth, my son, was approached, interviewed and appointed as the Assistant Director in 2019. Despite the challenges posed by the conflict-of-interest factor, the Board decided to appoint him based on his educational background, expertise, experience, and acceptance within the LAYA team.

No doubt this development responds to one of my biggest worries related to the future of LAYA. For me the future pathway becomes less daunting than beginning afresh with mentoring a new person to take the organization forward. I feel I can now retire in peace as soon as the Board decides that Siddharth is able to assume the role of Executive Director. Indeed, sustaining LAYA as a vibrant entity is going to be our key organizational challenge in the future. But I am happy I leave behind a capable team empowered to take the organizational goals forward and have full confidence that LAYA will fulfil its prophetic role.

GOVERNANCE: GENERAL BODY MEMBERS

MR. MINAR PIMPLE

Former Executive Director, Youth for Unity and Voluntary Action (YUVA), First Chairperson of LAYA and Former, Regional Director UN Millennium Campaign and Senior Director Global Operations, Amnesty International

FOUNDING PHASE

Nafisa and Dominic were my teachers at Nirmala Niketan, the reputed College of Social Work, Mumbai. After my Bachelor's degree, I joined a youth project led by Nafisa – to train youth leaders from different slum communities – youth who were keen to work in their own area of interest. We called this 'Seven Sunday Slum-Youth Leadership Program' for youth who were active in social, religious, and sports groups in the slums. We also held a one-year long-term training for paraprofessionals with certification. This was for youth who had passed 10th and had a passion for social work. Youth who got trained as paraprofessionals were all placed in Mumbai NGOs and absorbed as community organizers in Greater Mumbai Municipal Corporation. At the closure of this training, we decided to establish an independent organisation rather than being hosted by Nirmala Niketan. YUVA was born out of this thinking and Nafisa became the founding Chair with me as the Secretary.

Right at the start, LAYA's key focus was on Adivasi rights to lands taken by non-tribals

ENGAGEMENT WITH LAYA

I became the first Chair of LAYA and held it for four terms. My personal dream was creating centurion organisations with leadership taking charge through sound organizational governance. I was active in LAYA's governance – brainstorming, envisioning, supporting, and being part of LAYA. When I took up international assignments, I had to give up all my Board roles. Now I am a member of LAYA's General Body.

Right at the start, LAYA's key focus was on Adivasi rights to land – lands taken by non-tribals – and LAYA's effort went into the restoration of their lands. We were also addressing issues of forest produce and illegalities in its supply chain. Alongside, LAYA went into training

the Adivasi youth, consolidating the oral traditions of Vaidyulu, the traditional health practitioners, upgrading their skills, preserving medicinal plants and addressing herbal healthcare from all aspects. Through these initiatives, LAYA grew organically.

Thereon, LAYA went into networking mode. We were also looking at the larger picture – how to bring together the Adivasis in the Dandakaranya region and work out the organising principles of networking. For this, we were putting our thinking on geopolitical and cultural contexts and connections. The operational area of LAYA was a naxal base. LAYA's challenge lay on how to continue to work while managing the tensions between the state machinery that was suspicious of who we were and naxals, who were suspecting that we were state agents.

GAINING A REPUTATION

Today, LAYA is recognised for its excellent groundwork on Adivasis land rights, herbal healthcare and Climate Change. On issues of land rights, they have cracked and won many battles in Adivasi lands' recovery. LAYA is a torchbearer in Herbal Based Health Care. Their advocacy work on Climate Change at national and international levels has brought their demonstrative practice from the field, which is a new way of defending the commons. I was supportive of LAYA to look at carbon credits beyond greenwashing and as an effective way of economic empowerment. Carbon credits with its capital interest is now a vast industry, and we were persuading LAYA to occupy these spaces that are not occupied by non-profits. I would say that LAYA defended Adivasi land issues as commons in a traditional sense. But with carbon credits, LAYA was defending the commons in the arena of the new institutional mechanism.

LOOKING AHEAD

LAYA has a rich ground experience and has put together a fair amount of written material for a specific purpose. When you read LAYA's annual reports, it is so rich with data. However, it is most critical that LAYA translates its experience and knowledge to build a brand identity. LAYA would have to position a full-fledged communication strategy to create this brand. Civil Society Organizations must begin to see the value of communication. Today, the world of communication has radically changed with Instagram,

WhatsApp, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, it is a new ecology. CSOs should segment the audience and produce knowledge products accordingly. LAYA has both the content and expertise to do this.

BEING ON CONTINUOUS CHANGE PATH

LAYA is going through a leadership transition process. It is vital that LAYA is on a continual change path to renew itself both at governance and executive leadership. Many NGOs are not at the cutting edge because they do not think beyond the curve and are only recycling. I often say that to sustain any institution - program development, organizational development and human resource development must work in tandem.

CRITIQUE AS YOU COLLABORATE

How much are CSOs critiquing the state, its policies and when do they put on collaborative caps? I think this is an important question to address. In YUVA, I would often be seen gheraoing municipal officials in the morning over cases of eviction of slum dwellers and demolitions. At the same time, I would sit with the Commissioner to discuss adult literacy plans. Contest and collaborate as a dual strategy, I call this the 'kick and kiss'. Some bureaucrats understood this and later came to work with us as consultants. But for this, we must have a credible knowledge base, and we must be a credible institution, which LAYA is. In the civil society sector, we cannot crack the key to the combination of messenger and message. Having your core values established as non-negotiables and aligning these values to your work. Which is conveyed by credible messengers - LAYA will continue to be a vibrant institution.

DR. B. DEVI PRASAD

B. Devi Prasad, who has a Doctorate in Social Work, was Chairperson of LAYA for three terms. He is a retired professor from the Centre for Equity for Women, Children and Families, School of Social Work, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai.

The late 1980s and early 1990s witnessed a revival of debate on the role of NGOs and their leadership styles. Social work as a discipline was coming of age and schools of social work in Indian Universities

were becoming popular with a new generation of students of social work entering the development field. Leadership styles of NGOs saw a shift from service to professionalism in their approach of working with India's poor and marginalized. It was during this period, Nafisa and Dominic with their academic background in social work entered the world of Adivasis in Andhra Pradesh.

I was teaching at the Department of Social Work in Andhra University and one of my useful engagements began with LAYA in 1993, as a member of its governing body. My long association with LAYA kept me connected with the challenges of the civil society sector and provided me with the much needed academic-practice linkage that I could bring into the classroom. LAYA was also a breathing space for me intellectually. Several of my students came to work at LAYA and fondly recall the facilitative and supportive work environment they experienced. LAYA is a learning organization where people can be on learning paths continually to expand their capacities to create the results they value, where new ways of thinking are encouraged and nurtured, and where the individual and organizational aspirations mostly converge smoothly.

LAYA was also a breathing space for me intellectually. Several of my students came to work at LAYA and fondly recall the facilitative and supportive work environment they experienced.

LAYA has completed three and half decades of its eventful journey with Adivasi communities. Way back in 1996, at a time when Climate Change became a public concern, LAYA, and thereafter INECC, made a remarkable contribution to the understanding of Climate Change by bringing in a grassroots' perspective with an emphasis on peoples' voice. I found their work on decentralized energy options innovative and I am sure LAYA would do more of such innovative interventions.

India is changing and the civil society sector has been redefining itself. Increasingly, civil society organizations are being asked to be more accountable and transparent. To my mind, LAYA stands unique during this challenging period with its underlying value framework, its evidence-based programmatic approach and rights-based perspective. I am sure this will continue despite the changing times.

MR. BISWARANJAN TRIPURA

Biswaranjan Tripura teaches Indigenous Studies at Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai, India. He is the author of 'Educational experiences of Indigenous peoples' (2014), New Delhi-Mittal Publication.

It was in 2017, during one of our brief conversations at TISS, Dr. Devi Prasad, asked me to be one of the members of the General Body of LAYA Resource Centre. He was then the President of LAYA. I agreed to his invitation as I came to know from him about LAYA's work with the Adivasis of the state of Andhra Pradesh. Further delving into their annual reports of earlier years led me to a deeper appreciation about the organisation's work. My acceptance to a formal email that I received from the Executive Director of the organisation confirmed my membership in the governance process of LAYA.

When I participated in a workshop 'The Current Challenges in Tribal Societies' held at Addateegala on 27th February 2017 along with the field level staff, I could have an understanding of the field realities and some of the best practices adopted by the field staff of LAYA to enable empowerment of the Adivasis by nurturing the idea of Sustainable Development for equitable society and dignified life. On the following day, when I visited the Adivasi villages in and around Addateegala, I could see how some of the interventions of LAYA brought a positive change in the lives of the Adivasis especially in such remote areas where the presence of state-initiated development is almost absent.

Without undermining the significance of other areas of interventions, I wish to reflect here on two programs of LAYA such as 'Safeguarding Human Rights' and 'Community College'.

In my understanding, 'Safeguarding Human Rights' of Adivasis, one of the core objectives of LAYA, could effectively address the land alienation and socio-economic rights of the Adivasis. It emanates from an assumption that land, forest, and water are foundational to Adivasis life as an epistemological community. As a 'people with history,' Adivasis are known for centuries for surviving on the land that their ancestors earlier own. In this regard, working on the alienation of land and human rights means that the organisation is heading to a route to revolution to ensure access to land rights to Adivasis communities. Therefore, any development resulting in the severing of their close relation with land and forest amounts to a form of epistemicide. It is noteworthy that the Resource for Legal Action (RLA), a Unit of LAYA with its efficient team over the years has successfully reclaimed about 25000 acres of land through legal recourse. In the process, the program also has enabled Adivasis women to seek land entitlement both through customarily and statutory legal rights.

'Community College' is another innovative program of LAYA, that works on the interface between the impact of global forces on the survival skills of Adivasi communities including their youth and the local needs. Pedagogically, the 'community college' initiative of LAYA, in fact challenges the dominant discourse by linking the local needs with the global agenda; and preparing the youths to become self-reliant by focusing on hands-on learnings and employability. According to me, this initiative by contextualising the skills of the Adivasis is aiming to build the confidence and agency of the Adivasis youth. LAYA's work in this regard is relevant and has the ability to take a bigger role in the future.

In conclusion, I found the organisation is professionally managed with a committed team of workers and guided by an experienced group of board members with a balanced gender representation. LAYA's governance process is transparent, non-hierarchical, and proactive. I am glad that I am part of LAYA.

DR. D. V. R. MURTHY

Dr. D. V. R. Murthy has a Doctorate in Journalism, is a Professor in the Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, Andhra University, Visakhapatnam. Currently, he is heading the Department.

LAYA: A Confluence of Individual Ideas with Worldly Actions. My association with LAYA began around two decades back as a member to take part in the organization which works for the uplift of marginalized sections of the population. The meetings I attended were to focus on initiatives that were undertaken to help those vulnerable populations, in particular tribals. May be, the issues that were surrounding those tribals were in the nature of land disputes and farm issues. One such issue that I paid rapt attention in one of the meetings was the extension of legal assistance to vulnerable populations and provision of power generation in the tribal villages to suffice to those village needs. Further, I took part to the village sports conducted at Anakapalle as a promotion of inter-cultural nuances to the village groups. The involvement of LAYA in experiments to provide livelihood issues to the tribal population was combined with in-depth research was laudable. I rue sometimes for missing some meetings/workshops because of my official work at the university. Personally, I enrich my knowledge and understand the development issues owing to my interaction with other members. I participated in the World Social Forum conference in 2004 at the instance of LAYA and gained new insights into the world of social issues like transgender, sanitation workers and so on. The journey with LAYA continues, and this continuation opens many doors for me to look at the world with different perspectives. LAYA signifies a confluence of individual ideas with worldly actions.

MR. WALTER MENDOZA

Walter Mendoza, former Board member, is an independent analyst and mentor in the field of Climate Change, Sustainable Development and institutional advancement. After completing a Post Graduate Program in Human Resources Management from XLRI, Jamshedpur, in 1973, he worked for 13 years in an industry in Mumbai, and then 28 years in Social Development.

My association with LAYA began in 1987, when I visited Addateegala and joined a team going into the interior field areas of the then Project LAYA. A year later, I joined the LAYA team there. Dominic D'Souza had left for Delhi and I joined LAYA. By this time, I had known Dominic and Nafisa for 20 odd years. I had also been associated with the formation of SPADE.

Soon after joining, the then EZE, a funding organisation, organized a series of preparatory meetings, one of which was held in Orissa, focusing on Adivasi issues of the Andhra-Orissa region, towards Govindpur. Out of that meeting a networking process focusing on local Adivasi leadership developed. One of the enduring relationships that was formed at this time was with the Council of Professional

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Social Workers (CPSW), based in Bhubaneshwar. The group of young Social Work Professionals formed a close relationship with LAYA, which endured. The relationships formed at Behrampur, Orissa, deepened at Govindpur, so when in late 1990 it was proposed to Chandrasekaran of Chetti, AP to undertake a regional documentation, it organically grew into the Manya Prantha Chaithanya Yatra, with a focus on involvement of Adivasis in the process. This took over a year's preparation, culminating at Polavaram, the site of a proposed multipurpose barrage that would displace nearly 1,50,000 people, overwhelmingly Adivasis and their most fertile lands.

LAYA followed through with a comprehensive documentation of all the (more than) 30,000 families likely to be displaced by the Polavaram dam. This happened over the next two years. LAYA finally was registered under the FCRA, at this time, and our original donors at the time of closure of Project LAYA were back with us. An interesting development at this time, one of our donor agencies CEBEMO was helping a fledgling organization, HIMOS, to develop itself as a donor agency. We were asked to undertake pre-funding studies on their behalf in the Andhra Region.

1990 was a watershed year, literally too. We did not know it then, and still do not really make the connection, because deep depressions and cyclones were a fact of life on the East Coast. It poured for quite a few days, and the run-off from the hills just poured into the plains all across North Coastal Andhra. From Rajahmundry to Isakhota, it was one pool of water pouring in unabated over a few days.

At that time a documentation centres' meet was being organised in South India - May 1990. Manoj and Lalita from CPSW and

Radha Kunke from LAYA attended and were stranded outside Rajahmundry. They had to return via the Agency hills.

The connections made with Centre for Education and Documentation (CED) and the Timbuktu Collective, at that time just an idea taking birth, were an enduring relationship and were part of the different strands that contributed to LAYA developing as a Resource Centre in Visakhapatnam. At this juncture, we became a key part of the Jan Vikas Andolan (JVA) too, a network of people's struggles and movements just before the formation of the National Alliance of People's Movements (NAPM). This was the heyday of networking, coalitions, alliances raising our collective voices against UNCED and then the WTO; critiquing the temples of modern India much before Climate Change and Sustainable Development became buzzwords and action plans. In the field area of LAYA, the land redemption and the SMILE programs continued to be key activities that sustained a meaningful field presence. The networking processes mutually reinforced the outreach of field activities of the different field-based organizations of North Andhra and South Orissa working with Adivasis.

The Adivasi Samvaad was one such initiative, enabling Adivasi leadership across the region, and eventually across the country to engage in a dialogue, without claiming complete or comprehensive representation of the region, or the country; that gradually evolved into autonomous agenda setting, and self-driven dialogue process. The network provided a platform, a logistical base to facilitate its happening. Through one of our network partners we went to Sri Lanka to see micro-hydel projects, resulting in a set of micro-hydels being taken up in interior hilly regions where there was not, and there was unlikely to be a link to the national grid.

Beyond this, an energy needs and potential study across North Andhra and the Adivasi regions of Orissa, Chattisgarh, Jharkhand was carried out, articulated as decentralised energy options, and fed into the program activities promoted by INECC, and its partner organisations. By this time, a new field area was being explored in the agency area of Visakhapatnam district.

Simultaneously, the 'professionalisation' of registered organisations was developing, first in response to donor agencies that were

increasingly accessing state funds in their own countries and then in response to the tightening of rules and regulations under the FCRA, with the Income tax the cutting edge of compliance enforcement. LAYA was part of this too. By this time Dominic returned to LAYA. Soon after, I left my full-time engagement with LAYA. I remained on the Governing Board until this year, when I decided to disengage from the Board as well. I remain a member of the General Body of LAYA.

MR. DOMINIC D'SOUZA, --- CO-PIONEER AND CONSULTANT

He has a Master's Degrees in History, Pune University, 1972, and Social Work Administration, Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), Mumbai, 1976

INITIAL YEARS

In the belief that our struggles, especially in the early years, have more stories to tell than our successes, I have attempted a brief historical narrative. However, I have not attempted to capture the emotional fallout of the struggles, as it has become a fading memory as time has elapsed.

1984-1988: CO-PIONEER

This period we worked under the mentorship of Mr. Inampudi Rambabu, who was an alumnus of the Nirmala Niketan College of Social Work, Mumbai and the original initiator of the Project LAYA as part of the Society for People's Action for Development (SPADE). He was based at Chintalapudi, West Godavari district, directing SPADE's key project, People's Development Project (PDP). He motivated us to join him in initiating and managing the Project LAYA. However, because of our lack of knowledge of Telugu, we had to quickly develop second line leadership with direct operational responsibility. This worked well as there was mutual respect between the second line leadership and us. However, managing the project was not without its share of problems from our point of view of autonomy as sometimes the second line leadership felt comfortable sharing their problems with Mr. Rambabu. However, this did not demotivate us.

LAYA had a fortuitous beginning. Our past appeared irrelevant. Future, bleaker, with no funding in sight. The present was challenging

(especially, in the context of the naxalite area with threats from also the police hindering mobility). But unexpected breakthroughs changed the path of LAYA for the better. But there were more challenges to come.

From the activity perspective, we were shocked as few of our initial initiatives in education and health worked. Maybe, we were not able to contextualize as we had little knowledge of the local tribes and their way of life. At that point, we felt that whatever we had learnt and taught was not immediately relevant. Also, although we were living in a village, Tungamadugula, 12 km from the Mandal headquarters, Addateegala, we were barely able to communicate with the villagers because of our lack of knowledge of Telugu. They also saw us as strangers but were cooperative on food, water and other basic needs. So, we embarked on a plan to walk with a few project personnel, 7 km thrice a week in different directions. We would start in the morning after breakfast carrying some dry rations of rice and dal. We would interact with the villagers along the way and stop to cook our lunch at any obliging tribal family's kitchen. If possible, we would return in another direction. Over a period of 6 months, we were able to visit a number of villages on foot, on rare occasions we were able to return by public transport. This strategy enabled us to build rapport with the tribal families in the villages surrounding Tungamadugula. However, we were running out of funds as expected resources did not materialize or were delayed. We approached Mr. Manohar Prasad, Project Officer, Integrated Tribal Development Agency (ITDA), Rampachodavaram Division, East Godavari district, who had invited us earlier for a Tribal People's Assembly held in a remote area. He asked us whether we would be interested in taking up some civil construction works as that would give us some income. We were reluctant as we had no experience, but Mr. Rambabu said we have no option but to accept the offer. So, he hired a civil engineer, and we built a check dam at Bhimavaram, 5 km from Addateegala. However, it did not serve our original purpose of getting income. In fact, due to a tussle with the Engineering Department, ITDA, we could only complete three-fourth of the check dam and we ended up spending Rs 90,000/- from Project LAYA funds!

TWO UNPLANNED BREAKTHROUGHS

Our trekking to villages and interacting with the tribal families resulted in creating an organized space for the tribals to present their grievances and issues. Tuesday is a weekly market day at

Addateegala and hence there is considerable mobility of villagers in the Mandal to Addateegala. We promoted the initiative of tribals meeting and interacting on issues at Tungamadugula, which is on the way to Addateegala. Over a month, every Tuesday the number of tribals visiting Tungamadugula increased and a more organized platform for leadership mobilization was initiated.

The first unexpected breakthrough was related to the government's Social Forestry Program (SFP). Mr. Manohar Prasad, Project Officer, ITDA, Rampachodavaram Division, visited Tungamadugula and sought our cooperation in popularizing the program. We readily agreed but had mobility issues. We happened to see some motorcycles lying in the ITDA, Rampachodavaram compound and proposed to the Project Officer to get two of them functional at our cost and use them for popularizing the SFP. He agreed, and we used those motorcycles and then returned them to the ITDA after almost 2 years. Through this program, we were able to reach out to about 80 villages and enable the tribal families to plant cashew and mango trees, whose fruits bring considerable cash income to them today.

The second unexpected breakthrough occurred when we moved to Addateegala in August 1986. Tuesday was the village weekly market day. One Tuesday early morning, I saw a number of tribals gathered around the Project LAYA office, a part of which was also our residence. I called my colleague, who lived next door to find out what they wanted. Then we got to know that they wanted us to solve their land issues and they had brought their pattas. On asking what motivated them to come today and not earlier, they said that they had heard that Project LAYA had intervened to cancel the pattas of absentee/benami non-tribals and those lands were assigned to landless tribals in the village, Mittapalem, on the bank of Yeleru river. This was news to us. We remembered that as in many other villages we had represented the land issues to the Project Officer, ITDA, but in this particular village he had asked to also identify the landless tribal families. So, as we came to know later, the Project Officer visited Mittapalem one very early morning, held a panchnama and cancelled the pattas of the non-tribal absentee landowners and assigned the lands to the landless tribals of the village. He went one step further and sanctioned an oil engine so that they could lift water from the river to irrigate their lands. This incident opened the Pandora's Box

on the land issues in the area. The non-tribal landlords filed cases against the ITDA and also named Project LAYA as respondents. Thus, we came to know all the key landlords and began to investigate their role in alienating tribal lands. We had no knowledge of the legislations in the Scheduled Areas, so we bought books to study them and argued fruitlessly till we agreed that we needed a lawyer. We engaged a lawyer, but he turned out to be more of a problem than a solution. Then in 1987 we walked Mr. Palla Trinadh Rao, Resource for Legal Action (RLA) Unit and laid the foundation of LAYA's cornerstone program.

In March of 1988, I left Project LAYA to join the then Indo-German Social Service Society (IGSSS). The push factor related to the decision-making space that was not large enough for the two of us. We were stepping on each other's toes and we felt that one of us needed to move out for at least a short time. The pull factor was Mr. Adi Patel whom I knew very well when I was in Mumbai. He had taken over as the Executive Director of IGSSS and was proposing some innovative ideas. Anyway, one thing led to another and I was recruited and found myself in Delhi as the Projects Director, IGSSS.

Relevant to our context, IGSSS, which was mostly a resource support agency, had since 1987 a flagship program of motivating student youth to involve in development activities called Students Mobilization and Involvement through Learning and Exposure (SMILE). In the initial phase, the program focused on students of professional courses, architecture, engineering, etc., within Delhi. In 1989 after some introspection, the program was extended to students from all disciplines in Delhi, and in 1991, it was decided to include the non-student youth all over India. This led to the decentralization of the program in 1992 with some strategic partners: IGSSS in collaboration with Pravaha, Delhi; Janvikas, Ahmedabad; YUVA, Mumbai; Samvada, Bangalore; and LAYA, Visakhapatnam. Each of the strategic partners of the program had their own cluster of organizations.

I returned to Visakhapatnam from IGSSS in March 1995 as the National Coordinator of the SMILE program till October 1996, when Mr. Walter Mendoza, who was the Associate Director of LAYA from 1989 (he came to Project LAYA in March 1988) resigned to shift to Bangalore. I was offered to take Walter's position and I accepted with some misgivings.

POSITIONED A LARGE YOUTH AGENDA

There are at least two significant reasons why LAYA has positioned a large youth agenda: one is that this was found to be a dire need given the lack of adult educational opportunities as most youth tend to drop out of the formal education at the higher secondary level. With hardly any opportunities for livelihood and leadership focused learning, the absence of informed leadership and self-employment opportunities were starkly evident in 1989, when the government tried to repeal a protective legislation related to land alienation. The other reason was that the Executive Director and myself came with competencies of social work teaching at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels but believed that investment in paraprofessional training was far more relevant and effective. So, both of us had initiated one-year paraprofessional training programs: one in Mumbai for slum-based youth and another in collaboration with a NGO, Rural Communes, for tribal youth from some districts around Mumbai. These competencies helped in developing and implementing various need-based training processes that addressed self-employment opportunities in agriculture, horticulture, health care, etc., and developing leadership.

CULTURE BUILDING

I have always wondered to what extent culture building is intentional and therefore by design. Managing a civil society organization is beset with innumerable tensions of funding insecurity, compliances to different government institutions, monitoring programs, innumerable coordination meetings, travelling for workshops and seminars. So, I wonder whether organizational culture is built, or you discover it when it is brought to your notice, especially during an evaluation process.

So where does the design of LAYA's culture of functioning come from and how is it nurtured? Our first experience of institutional functioning was as faculty members of the College of Social Work, Nirmala Niketan. We had a faculty meeting every Tuesday afternoon. In those meetings over a period of 7 years, we learnt that the views of all faculty members were respected on merit, irrespective of age and experience (and gender, as I was the only male among the 12 faculty members). There was functional hierarchy, if at all, and we rarely experienced it. Also, the principal was appreciative of critical thinking and creative solutions and readily provided space to experiment. This brought out the creative best in most of us.

We had internalized the underlying values but seldom articulated them. So, when we tried to introduce this culture in the initial stages in Project LAYA, it was a disaster. When we organized our first staff meeting it ended up in a fiasco. We were relating with personnel, who were waiting for orders, did not want to or could not think for themselves. Our frustration led to some course correction, but we were resolute in introducing a more empirical, collaborative, and creativity focused working culture and to a great extent we think we have succeeded. The interactions in the LAYA's annual strategic meetings and the governing Board meetings have helped nurture the organization culture. The continuum of theory-practice-critical reflection-designing and implementing training programs has made LAYA into a learning-by-doing organization.

To what extent is culture building intentional and therefore by design

LAYA IN THE DEVELOPMENT SECTOR

It is not very comfortable for me to claim the impact of LAYA's growth in the development sector at the national level. As described earlier LAYA's development has been a result of responding to emerging needs in a very specific context. LAYA believed in collaborative relationships in networking and showcasing its experience at the grassroots' level. It would be presumptuous to claim that LAYA, by itself, has had any significant impact at the national level, except in the case of scaling up grassroots' renewable energy technologies: fuel-efficient cook stoves, bio-sand water filters, hydrams and gravity flow mechanisms that reduce carbon emissions in the context of Climate Change. The collaborative relations have been mainly with the Indian Network on Ethics and Climate Change (INECC) on Climate Change and Sustainable Development; with Fair Climate Network (FCN), Karnataka on carbon credits; and with Asia-South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education on lifelong learning, especially adult learning.

However, to a great extent the impact is felt at the State level, where different government departments and NGOs have recognized LAYA's competencies in legal support, herbal based health care and natural resource management, renewable energy solutions, and collaborations have been initiated. The LAYA Community College curricula is one more potential area of impact envisaged.

KEY MANAGEMENT TEAM

MR. SIDDHARTH D'SOUZA, 
ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR

LAYA WAS MY HOME

LAYA was conceived when I was 4 and a half years old. My parents at that time shared with me something about moving from Bombay to a village. The 'village' kept changing for a while before we finally settled in Addateegala for 5 years. LAYA was my home, even at that age my friends were mainly the team at LAYA, along with all the visitors (from various parts of India and abroad). Some of these relationships continue to this day. I would often find myself in meetings that were quite dreary. Subconsciously perhaps my learning had already started although I was not aware of its importance and the part it would play in my future.

Eventually we shifted to Visakhapatnam. My studies kept me busy yet I would often find ways to bunk school and later college so I could sneak a trip back to Addateegala (something I do even now to rewind). After I graduated from Business Studies, I quickly realized that I was not cut out to just material aspirations. Probably the competition was too severe or I was just incompetent in the business management world. It became clear that I was more equipped in the field of development.

WORKED IN NGOS AND STUDYING AT ISS

My father made it clear that I needed to work. Almost the very next day I found myself in my first job with a network of NGOs from Orissa called Orissa Development Action Forum (ODAF). After about a year with ODAF, I left Visakhapatnam and interned with National Center for Advocacy Studies (NCAS), Pune. Towards the end of the internship, I was reading about the riots in Gujarat. I was quite affected by the pogroms. Since the internship required a deputation with an NGO, I decided to move at the first opportunity to Janvikas, which was my first in the grassroots' learning experience in the field of conflict management. Although I was learning, I knew that conceptual frame was missing.

On and off I spent two years with Janvikas in Ahmedabad, by this time I had already applied for my Master's degree at the Institute of Social

Studies (ISS), The Hague, The Netherlands. I was lucky to have been admitted to their MA program, and I was fortunate that they offered me the possibility of differing my admission by one year. I decided to head back to Visakhapatnam for one year before I made my trip to The Netherlands.

After I finished my studies I was back in Visakhapatnam gaining a much better understanding of the basic concepts of development. I began to assimilate my ground experience of learning with the theories I had learnt in The Netherlands. However, it still was all too overwhelming. The first few months, I did not want to do anything. I was so happy to be back home, in India. Eventually however I agreed to do a few short assignments. At that time, it was the 5-year report (Rhythm in Development -II) and the first considerably basic version of our website. It was during that period that I met Ajita.

PERSONAL EXPERIENCES IN LOW-CARBON TECHNOLOGIES

Ajita, joined LAYA to coordinate the existing projects on decentralized energy, notably the construction of a micro-hydro and a few solar lanterns (LED). I found myself accompanying her and working with her on these initiatives. The major reason was that the project was failing due to technical reasons, and we needed to coordinate with technical advisors. Secondly, I was always passionate about technologies and this was just the kind of thing I understood better than most at LAYA.

Following this initiative another major assignment presented itself. The task was to prepare a 'Handbook on Decentralized Energy Options'. This time I was collaborating with Ajita directly. We travelled extensively, attended a few training programs and conferences. Ajita wrote the first draft of the handbook and I designed the layout of the book.

This handbook explored the potential of renewable energy (water, solar and biomass) in developing energy services in the tribal areas of 3 states (Jharkhand, Orissa and Andhra Pradesh). In the process of developing the handbook we learned how these different technologies worked as well as framed programs that could facilitate on the ground interventions.

By this time Ajita needed to move out of Visakhapatnam, as her husband, a Naval officer, had received transfer orders. Effectively, I found myself leading the initiatives of LAYA on Alternative Technology. This was in 2011. It was around this time that I also became involved in developing LAYA's carbon projects. The first Improved Cookstove under the carbon project was built in August of 2011. As the carbon finance system began to take shape, a company LAYA Green Venture Pvt Ltd was initiated. I took responsibility to run the carbon project with the company as well as facilitated LAYA's ongoing projects on Alternative Energy. In this period from 2009-2019, I was also involved in LAYA's advocacy initiatives on Climate Change, particularly with INECC (National) and the UN negotiations (International). I was traveling to almost all the Conference of Parties discussions in various parts of the globe representing either LAYA or INECC.

LAYA'S PERSPECTIVES ON LOW-CARBON TECHNOLOGIES

The perspective with which LAYA works on low-carbon alternative technologies is from the point of view of delivering energy services to reduce the drudgery of labour that communities face in their day to day lives. This is mainly attributed to access to cooking, lighting, access to water (potable and non-potable) farming and processing of farm and forest produce. The idea is to reduce human effort where possible with technology and techniques that produce the same or better results.

Currently, people living in villages in remote areas need to depend on energy services such as electricity and gas delivered from centralized energy production centres that involve great cost (distribution) and poor maintenance. These services are poorly managed and receive lower priority particularly for marginalized communities. Therefore, our focus has been to decentralize energy production as far as possible as an alternative to the current system. We have two major Climate Change related carbon projects on improved cookstoves. LAYA has constructed and continues to monitor about 11,000 improved cookstoves benefiting as many households in the tribal area of East Godavari and Visakhapatnam Districts. There are more efficient stoves in the market that can make a significant difference. We realized that a traditional stove does much more than just cooking. It also works as a heater during winter, 'drier of seed material' during the agriculture season and

facilitates cooking in a way that is flexible and easily repairable with local materials. We set up bio-sand water filters to enable communities to produce potable water in areas, where the sources of potable water are suspect due to the contamination of streams, open wells, overhead tank water supply and bore wells. Both the Hydram pump and the Gravity Flow system are installed in remote locations that lift water from the underlying streams to the village to facilitate access to water for basic use and to irrigate lands. More recently LAYA has introduced organic waste biogas systems in residential Ashram schools. The system produces methane gas for cooking from organic waste (food waste and other bio-degradable waste) that enables the schools to refrain from dumping their food waste in their backyard. We have also introduced water/heater incinerators that efficiently burn inorganic waste (paper, packaging waste) to produce hot water that could be used by the school for preheating water for cooking and bathing.

The idea is to reduce human effort where possible with technology and techniques that produce the same or better results

CLIMATE CHANGE

Climate Change is an anthropogenic phenomenon. It is intrinsically linked to energy demand, production, and consumption of fossil-based fuels. Today development is perceived predominantly from the consumption of fossil-fuels. Effectually this means that for an area, region, province, and country to develop, fossil-fuel consumption must necessarily increase. This is a paradigm that requires change. Development needs to be disconnected from fossil-fuel consumption with renewable energy. At the same time development is not only about unlimited production and consumption. I think we need to re-look at our priorities in terms of what is produced, who can consume and how much is consumed in a way that there is fair, equitable share for all. For a country like India, the biggest impact is on rainfall and the second is the increased frequency of disasters (experienced mainly in the

form of cyclones and spells of drought). Almost 70% of the sown area in India is rainfed. Effectively a significant population of the country is dependent on this area for livelihood and the production of food. Changes in the rainfall pattern is going to adversely impact production of food, particularly food grains. This would lead to all kinds of market vacillations that will impact the farmer as well as consumers (non-farmers).

GLOBAL FORCES

Markets have bought all kinds of material aspirations. A community that once lived mutually well with a barter system for their basic needs finds that their sons and daughters aspire to own a mobile phone, televisions and motorcycles. The desire to earn money with a weak or negligible bank system to support them suggests that there is dire distress in terms of aspirations and fulfillment. This also opens them out to moneylenders, exploitation and cheating from traders that we have observed over the years. The other issue is that credit and savings are by themselves alien terms to Adivasi culture as is money. I think to understand savings and credit one needs to understand how money works. The governments persistence on Aadhaar Cards and banks have somewhat forced communities to work with banks. The banks instead of enabling communities have in fact made them subservient to their own money, making it so much harder to withdraw money easily and efficiently. SHGs have largely tried to solve these issues but have instead created their own set of barriers to access credit. The fact is at this point little real savings are happening at the collective community level. Government run SHGs are still largely run with loans converted mostly into grants.

LAYA has so far been actively propagating ideas around adapting to Climate Change. We do not believe that it is the responsibility of the community, who have a comparatively small carbon footprint to worry about mitigating carbon emissions. The improved Cookstoves program, although designed around reducing carbon emissions, is about adapting to reduced availability of natural firewood from the communities' point of view.

I personally see Climate Change knowledge and climate friendly technologies as an opportunity to reduce the drudgery (mainly for

women) and generally improve living conditions of the community. Similar techniques and technologies also facilitate improved yield and better resilience to increasingly unpredictable weather conditions. Contextually LAYA needs to continue to promote the existing interventions around Climate Change as well as seek ways to enhance quality and outreach of these interventions. More importantly LAYA should not stop constantly innovating as well as trying out different methods, techniques and technologies on a consistent basis even at the risk of partially failing.

RENEWED FOCUS

I think the original pathway from the perspective of safeguarding human rights and dignity of marginalized communities will continue to remain the central theme on which LAYA will take on projects and continue its interventions. I think one of the pathways to this end is investing in localized business opportunities that will directly benefit communities. LAYA Green Ventures was set up with this objective as well as the securing the Carbon Funding resources with the possibility of investing in such initiatives.

The other aspect that I do believe needs renewed focus and energy is in executing the idea of the Community College. As mentioned earlier, I think it is imperative that we must not give up on the youth and their aspirations. I think it is important to channel their aspirations positively so that they can offer leadership to build not only their own lives but also that of the community.

Finally, the work on climate initiatives, from the perspective of advocacy and local adaptation has slowly emerged as an area of global focus. If current trends are to be believed then it is a wonderful opportunity for local communities to have access to climate friendly technologies that can transform lives, particularly of women and children.

CHANGING LIVELIHOODS

When I ask Adivasis in our area “Has there been a change in your livelihood?” I get a fairly positive answer suggesting that MGNREGS and the PDS system have vastly ensured sustained access to food. This is accurate for the older generation that has seen a shift in the availability of food and basic income through the MGNREGS

and PDS system. However, further reflection on what kind of food and whether the general nutrition and health has changed for the better is another story.

Only a few lucky young men and women get jobs as ‘Teachers’ which is a lucrative ‘job’

The Adivasi youth do not want to follow in the footsteps of their parents. However, the education that they have received from the newly developed Ashram School system has only inculcated aspirations that are far beyond their capability. The schools encourage them to migrate and leave their local area and focus on offering the drudgery of hard labour/menial jobs in urban centers that are entirely alien to their culture and heritage. The abject failure to deliver on these ‘jobs’ has led many young men to despondency and depression. As a result, alcohol consumption in the tribal area among the youth has increased significantly.

Only a few lucky young men and women (mostly men) get jobs as ‘Teachers’, which is a lucrative ‘job’ offered by the government. These few men and women often leave their community and prefer to live in urban centers purchasing all kinds of modern amenities (TV, refrigerator, AC, etc.) along with cars and motorcycles with their disposable income. In effect skewing the difference between rich and the poor within the community and effectively becoming role models of consumption and greed.

BALANCING ASPIRATIONS

LAYA has followed an integrated approach to development. We have tried to balance aspiration with context. In the context of livelihood LAYA has tried to reflect with the community on the rich traditional knowledge systems. Focusing on the positive aspects of the traditional knowledge our attempt has been to add value with modern systems and technologies. This has been the ongoing philosophy with which LAYA has conducted research and dissemination with the community on several thematic areas.

LAYA has contributed significantly in terms of developing agriculture practice that is remarkably close to the traditional system. Line-sowing, homestead development, kitchen gardens are all traditional Adivasi agriculture systems that we have only nurtured and wherever necessary revived with added science based inputs.

Similar is the case with health and herbal based health care. Adivasis have a rich understanding of diagnosis and treatment of basic illnesses with basic flora such as leaves, roots, and tubers. LAYA has basically linked this knowledge with the mainstream Ayurvedic system and offered a more systematized version of Adivasi medicine. Effectively at LAYA the consistent attempt is to respect the rich contextual knowledge and awareness of Adivasi people and offer conviction and confidence to survive with dignity.

ENHANCED ADIVASI IDENTITY

Land Alienation and Human Rights has been one of the core issues with which LAYA started its work during its inception. For Adivasi communities their land is at the core of their identity. We continue to fight cases in the courts and outside the court to retain lands which were lost to non-tribals. In addition to these cases LAYA continues to support local leadership particularly in legal issues to facilitate their basic entitlements. This is also evident in the health care work that we are involved in, where the idea is to legitimize the traditional health knowledge of communities in terms of diagnosis and cure as a viable alternative to modern allopathic medicine that is expensive and not administered by qualified doctors in the local area.

DR. PALLA TRINADHA RAO, 
FACILITATOR, RESOURCE FOR LEGAL ACTION UNIT

EMOTIVE LAND QUESTION OF ADIVASIS

Land alienation is the key issue in the Scheduled Areas. Both the state and non-state actors have alienated and dispossessed Adivasis of their lands – completely disempowering them. The tribal protective Land Transfer Regulations 1 of 70 prohibits transfer of lands in favour of non-tribals either from tribal or non-tribal. Despite this enabling law, tribal lands are being alienated. Adivasis lack legal literacy, legal support and are unable to articulate their rights before the administration and courts. We have been going through Courts for legal cases and Revenue Administrative Offices for non-legal cases. Till March 2020, we have a record of 5763 Adivasis gaining rights over 28398 acres.

Getting favorable settlements for tribal lands is entrapped in

tangles and one must be extra vigilant at all levels to access tribal rights to their own lands. In the past, the non-tribal lobby has fought hard to repeal 1/70 - a land related protective regulation, which does not permit transfer of land between two non-tribal parties. Disputes and arbitration over land and property that go to lower courts, especially where non-tribals are involved are invariably long drawn. Special efforts must be made in cases of lands that were alienated long ago - to access documents that may not exist as Adivasis did not have formal traditions of ownership of lands. Non-tribals do not let go easily and are ever ready to go to higher courts in the hope of favourable judgements. The tradition of bribing to get favourable orders is deep-rooted among non-tribals.

Disputes and arbitration over land and property that go to lower courts, especially where non-tribals are involved are invariably long drawn

IMPACT OF RLA UNIT

Over the last three decades, RLA has done extensive work on two aspects of Adivasi land. The paradox is that many Adivasis have land titles but do not own them. We then must survey these lands all over again, get approvals and physically hand over the lands to the Adivasi owner. This is the first aspect. The second is accessing the lands as per policy guidelines and getting the title deeds. We have filed more than 30 Public Interest Litigations (PILs) that are effort and time intensive and may take a minimum of two years or five years or more to get judgements. To our credit, we have a few landmark judgements of the Supreme Court.

Our policy actions are many but the most important are our interventions in speeding up of framing PESA guidelines (2011) and being actively involved in a five-member committee to frame FRRA guidelines. I was a member of the inner committee of the Koneru Ranga Rao Land Committee, which accepted our 30 out of 40 guidelines on land related issues. Through this process, we have mainstreamed

our perspectives on tribal policy on land related issues.

I would say that through our legal advisory camps, training events, activism of Paralegals, CBOs and our large inventory of pamphlets, brochures, books and newsletters, we have brought out the robust voice of the Adivasis in different platforms and this is a huge impact and achievement.

WOMEN'S QUESTION

We have been addressing women's issues relating to domestic violence, marital discord, maintenance provision and facilitated their access to socio-economic rights. Under our aegis, we have promoted two women's groups to work on land rights. By tradition and customary law, women are not entitled to land rights. While earlier, the Adivasi land was communally held, the FRRA has changed this by establishing individual rights to lands. Adivasi women have been articulating that they should be given ownership rights to land. Without this, their vulnerabilities will increase and they will be marginalised further. We have been asked to deliberate on this with stakeholders and move for a policy change.

MY EXPERIENCE IN RLA UNIT

LAYA provides a wonderful opportunity to RLA Unit for experiential learnings in the field of tribal rights. It provides a liberal space for experiments while pursuing designed programs. The team members are given a long rope to associate with any group organizations/institutions based on their individual interests without undermining the broader goal of the organization. Responsible behaviour of our team, strategic meetings at LAYA and RLA Unit, report monitoring systems are enablers for achieving our envisaged objectives.

As an anchor of the RLA Unit, I often face internal and external threats due to my involvement in the activities of the organization and pursuing rights-issues of Adivasis on individual decisions. I have faced major threats from the police and non-tribal landlords who have nexus with unscrupulous non-tribal leaders. The sustainability of RLA Unit hinges on external factors, more particularly in the changing context of erosion of tribal values, aspirations of tribal youth, changing policies of the successive governments.

DR. AJITA TIWARI PADHI,

LEAD, CLIMATE POLICY, ADVOCACY AND
STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS, LAYA-INECC

ENTERING LAYA: MY SELF DISCOVERY

It was early spring in 2007. I had moved to Visakhapatnam to join my husband who was serving with the Indian Navy. I was frantically looking around for a meaningful engagement, which was seeming to get elusive in the very limited nonprofit space in Visakhapatnam; this had started to unnerve me. My ex-colleague suggested that I reach out to LAYA. Initially I thought it was the name of the contact person at LAYA, only to realize that it was the name of the organization, drawn from the hindi word “lay” meaning ‘rhythm’. After an anxious wait of about one month, I was finally called for an interview. That has so far been the ‘last interview’ as I continue to be part of the story of LAYA. You might have those obvious questions... but why? So long? Why didn’t you make a career switch? Don’t you stagnate? Well, these questions are often posed to me, and you might have some answers by the end of this.

So, let me start with the interview itself. It was a unique experience! Since LAYA’s office was far away from the naval base and I was relatively new to the town and was not driving around, my husband decided to drop me and wait in the ‘waiting room’. But lo and behold there was no waiting room but just one multifunctional room which served as a meeting room, dining table, board meeting room, brainstorming space for the project staff, R&D space, storage, etc. And therefore, my husband was in the same ‘waiting room’ alongside me in the ‘interview room’! This could not have been more embarrassing for a woman like me, holding some degree of feminist values. However, what seemed to draw home was the fact that this might perhaps be a grounded organization involved with what we call “real work” without having a fancy setup.

The interview was more like a discussion unlike my previous three interviews; therefore, this was really refreshing and told me something implicitly about the values of the leadership. At the end of the “interview” I was given to understand that there was no

opening and that they would “get back” to me and if you already know what the traditional “getting back” means, you will not be absolutely wrong in thinking what I had already thought. But this was LAYA and they “got back” not just in some distant future but the very next day! Thus, I started ‘sailing’ too, to the rhythm of LAYA, and there has been no looking back, ever since.

With no background in energy studies, I was responsible for exploring the potential of Decentralized Energy Options and coming up with feasible sites in the Eastern Ghats Region where alternate low carbon energy could power development in areas, which were “off grid”. In rather no time with a small team of specialists, engineers and practitioners, I was travelling to the remotest areas in Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Jharkhand and Andhra Pradesh, I was climbing hills, crossing waterfalls, taking part in waterflow experiments and jaunting in naxalite areas. This was the opening of a new world to me.... the world of the marginalized majority dependent on their farms and forests for their survival; the least carbon emitters but the most impacted by the Climate Crisis. Thus, seems to emerge the understanding around “Climate Justice” that was so often being referred to by Nafisa. The world of equity, justice, ethics, and political economy was slowly opening up to me... on the job, without any theoretical understanding or academic degree in social sciences or humanities.

Here, I would like to emphasize on the leadership model of Nafisa (the Executive Director of LAYA, who ensures that you call her by her first name on your very first encounter) provides you plethora of space and opportunities to experiment, nurture ideas, think out of the box, make mistakes, challenge yourself and to constantly be on a learning curve. And, she has your back.... always! So simply put, while you are growing professionally, you are also picking up leadership traits and somehow learning to be like her.... in your own little way.

By the end of all this jaunting around, I had a little one, Aditi, in my arms. Nafisa encouraged me to keep my professional instincts going and I recall having several meetings at home with my toddler around. Work from Home (WFH) might have evolved as a new age COVID-19 response, but I have been working from home since the last decade!

Going ahead, I had opportunities to lead Action Research on Clean Development Mechanism. Nafisa guided me all through this study and my exposure to bringing objectivity and methodology to any research process, big or small was a big learning process. This study was immensely appreciated in Germany where I was invited for a month-long CDM tour of the country rooting for pro-poor CDM projects. We also presented this study at a side-event in the UN Conference of Parties (CoP) in Durban. My brush with policy makers in Delhi started with this small but significant research.

The research experiences that I got involved resulted in getting through a Ph.D entrance exam and achieving a Ph.D seat at Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), Mumbai. The research related to exploring livelihood vulnerability to Climate Variability in one of LAYA 's field areas in Andhra Pradesh. I learnt a lot in the process and colleagues at LAYA helped me with data collection and invaluable insights. I owe my PhD journey to LAYA and the Konda Reddi community which is trying to stay afloat with the new challenges that climate variability is throwing up.

SHIFT TO MUMBAI AND INECC

Over the years as I moved from one city to another, my bond with LAYA continued but with a little shift in responsibility and scope. My first brush with INECC happened in 2009 when I attended my first and most hyped-up Conference of Parties (CoP 15) in Copenhagen, which culminated after two years of intense negotiations during the 2007 Bali Action Plan. It drew a level of political attention well-beyond any previous climate meeting, I was informed. By its closing days, the summit had drawn well over 100 heads of state and government.

I met a few INECC partners at a tiny hotel in Copenhagen. I was handed a Gandhi cap and a white kurta to wear as a sign of solidarity with the group that was campaigning for a low-carbon lifestyle along Gandhi's philosophy of need and not greed. The kurta was indeed oversized for my tiny frame but undersized for the cause that the INECC team was rooting for. Copenhagen CoP failed miserably. Despite the presence of leaders like US President Barack Obama, it created no clear path for taking urgent climate action and each country's ability to take collective action hung

in balance. Copenhagen was to deliver on the follow up climate regime that would follow-on the Kyoto Protocol. Copenhagen failed but for me it was a huge platform to observe the stupendous scale of the UN meeting, assess the nature of our participation, expose myself to the role of civil society and analyse what that process meant for the people of our country and more specifically for the poor and marginalized, who were the most impacted by the climate crisis, for no fault of theirs. It was a jigsaw puzzle that I was beginning to put together.

I became an active part of INECC and functionally in a hyphenated relationship LAYA-INECC which related to promoting and facilitating initiatives in other states with state level partners, engaging with climate concerns at the national and international level. I was part of grassroots actions and relating it to policy decisions being taken at various levels.

INECC'S APPROACH

INECC has a network of 21 partners spread across 15 states working in 61 districts and 82 panchayats who work with the most marginalized communities on issues related to Climate Change and Sustainable Development. INECC's approach to Climate Change draws from the perspective of an equitable and inclusive Sustainable Development paradigm. It believes that in a climate changing world, the road to Sustainable Development can only be achieved through an equitable low-carbon pathway - a pathway that promotes values of decentralization, localization and that which is people-centric.

Our by-line is 'People's Voices in Policy Choices'. Our partners work with communities, and believe in the power of context specific, ecosystem based low-carbon solutions - for lighting, cooking, drinking water, irrigation, farming, and others. INECC maintains that improved socio-economic situations reduce vulnerabilities and improves the adaptive capacity of the most vulnerable. This has fed into the long-term resilience vision, which encompasses three key elements: sustainable farming, Climate Change education and climate responsive technologies. INECC occupies this unique niche that links micro-macro space of bringing micro-practice insights from the ground to the tables of macro-policy makers.

RELATING WITH THE STATE

At the very outset let me say, being an NGO you generally do not find favour with the bureaucrats in general, especially organizations like us, who ask hard questions and seek accountability to the poor. They consider us anti-development, which is irritable. I had to jostle my way, single handedly to 'earn' a meeting in central ministries in Delhi (2014-2016). However, I realized that if you come from ground experiences and talk real, they listen. Whether they do anything about it is another matter altogether.

I engaged with the State Action Plan on Climate Change (SAPCC), The Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDC) study before the crucial Paris CoP 21 in 2015, Sustainable Development Perspective papers, Sustainable Smart City among others. My connections with Delhi policy makers especially in the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) led us to be seen as a uniquely positioned network with a strong narrative on equity. We were getting slowly recognized from having a small presence to some degree of national identity. At some point, this resulted with me co-chairing the South Asian Network on Climate Change (CAN-SA). I think the reason we were getting recognized was because we were bringing practice examples of Climate solutions from our on-the-ground experiences and experiments that were creating impacts.

CONFERENCE OF PARTIES (COP)

My journey with the global climate discourses which began in 2009 with the Conference of Parties (CoPs) is a decade old. The spaces for civil society participation have shrunk a lot and CoPs are now restricted to official meetings. Only a limited number of 'quotas' are provided to the nine major constituencies. The yellow badge (NGO observer) is not really welcome! Simultaneously, the UNFCCC is creating newer constituencies such as the Women and Gender Constituency (WGC), Youth Constituency (YOUNGO) and, Farmers Constituency (FC), which indicates that the space is theoretically expanding and that stake holding on climate is increasing. LAYA has so far not aligned strictly with any of the 9 major constituencies but expressed solidarity with NGOs who represent people's voices and the voices of the marginalized. Recently, in June 2020, we have become part of the WGC, which

will lead to enhanced quality of participation at CoPs, especially from a gender perspective.

For me, this space has been for learning, meeting and sharing work experience. I found a lot of value in having our official CoP side events which is an opportunity to present our work from a practice – policy perspective. Of late we have been regularly shortlisted for side events, collaborating with other global organizations, which brings yet another value to our work, presence, and perspective. We are also being covered by the media and our stories are carried through local radio and TV stations. We also find value with the exhibit booths, which is an extremely interesting space to catch up, meet and connect with people from around the globe. The exhibit booth in fact became a kind of ‘adda’ for colleagues and friends from India and around. The ‘Global Day for Action’ which usually falls on the first Saturday of the 2 week-long CoP, global civil society representatives march through the roads of the CoP city and demand quick and urgent action and enhanced climate ambition from the world leaders. This is indeed an energetic and vibrant space to get connected with action and express solidarity.

Being an NGO you generally do not find favour with the bureaucrats

Additionally, the people’s space (generally referred to as the People’s CoP) is a similar space like the official UN CoP has been a regular feature across all the CoPs. The People’s CoP space is a civil society organized space where organizations like us can relate to and meet like-minded communities. One can also organize side events and other cultural events here. You do not need an official UN badge for participating in the People CoP space which makes it very inclusive.

The CoP also is an opportunity- a space where you can meet ministers and connect with most of the civil society actors, who are difficult to reach while in India. The minister’s office at the CoP on many occasions organizes a meeting with civil society to update and share information. It is also an opportunity for them to know you are an active player, present at the largest climate meeting and have your two bits to say. However, with the latest platforms of ‘country pavilions’, countries like India showcase

their domestic achievement on tackling Climate Change on a very grand scale. In the last three years that I recall, India had one of the most technologically advanced and glittery pavilions that gained a lot of attention from the global climate community and media alike.

FUTURE PATHS

INECC relates to the most crucial issue of our survival and offers us huge opportunities at a time when Climate Change has become an urgent global issue. Even as INECC continues to engage with the climate justice perspective, there is a growing level of technical interest and ever-increasing stakeholders on different aspects of Climate Change and sustainability. Businesses and industry are taking the lead in creating technological fixes and climate mitigation solutions.

For me, the unheard voices of the most impacted communities must be brought to the policy tables

Climate research on meteorology, climate science, earth science, oceanography is at the driver's seat. While these stakeholders are extremely significant, spaces for social science, community-based organizations and women's collectives are shrinking. In the race for measuring carbon and the growing focus on monitoring greenhouse gases (GHGs), my worry is that the voices of the people might get side-lined or diluted despite the narrative on inclusivity, equity, human rights etc. For me, the unheard voices of the most impacted communities must be brought to the policy tables and complement the carbon measurement process. In the current environmental context of India, where the environmental laws are getting diluted (e.g. Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Notification, 2020) and spaces for civil society organizations and people's voices are shrinking - networks like INECC with strong community perspectives should not lose their momentum and must stay relevant by upholding the micro- macro linkage.

LAYA TO ME

LAYA, to me, so far, has been my journey of self-discovery, metamorphosis and internal transformation, which I value more than anything. I am part of the small LAYA family and saying goodbye to this family - someone who has nurtured, cared and loved you and with whom you have built a unique relationship is extremely difficult. I think this association has been my own way of giving back to society!

MR. G. BULLIYYA,

COORDINATOR, HERBAL BASED HEALTH CARE (HBHC) UNIT

INTEREST IN HERBAL HEALTH CARE

My family has a background in Ayurveda. My grandmother practised traditional healing and I used to watch her and eventually got interested in herbal healing. Whenever I visited Adivasi villages, I would talk to Adivasis on their health while also visiting with the traditional healers, profile them, discuss with them medicines and their effectiveness. Later on I would accompany them to the forests, and learned to identify the various medicinal plants and where they grow. The Adivasis have different dialects and refer to the medicinal plants in their own dialect. I had to learn their herbal vocabulary. I regularly documented my findings and began to read well-known texts on Ayurveda. For four years from 1993, I interacted with traditional healers, visited the forests, and documented my engagements and learnings. This was a major exercise. By 2002, we set up Vanantharam, under the advice of Brahmanandam, an Ayurvedic practitioner who also educated us on the various aspects of Ayurveda.

IMPACT OF TWO DECADAL ENGAGEMENTS

Our mother herbal gardens have 250 medicinal species and there are as many as 30 to 35 rare and endangered species. For example, we have Yerra Chitramoolam (red flowering) Plumbago rosea, three types of Nalleru, Rudraksha, Laxmanphal, Vasa, white and black Gurivinda, Bandi Gurivinda, to mention a few.

The Traditional Health Practitioners (THPs) and Community Health Practitioners (CHPs) are given the saplings of medicinal plants to

plant and conserve in their herbal gardens. Through our nursery, on demand, we supply the saplings to a range of clients – the forest department, pharmacies, engineering and degree colleges, and researchers. I would proudly say that with all of our hard work this accessibility of herbal resources has vastly increased. There is much scope to scale up our conservation interventions.

**When we initially
met them, they
would not reveal
their practice out
of fear**

The Traditional Health Practitioners – as many as 450 have gained legitimacy and this itself is a huge impact. When we initially met them, they would not reveal their practice out of fear. We do not realise that they come from generations of ancestral and traditional knowledge on herbal-based medicines. The four networks of traditional health practitioners have given them a collective face. They are recognized by identity cards given to them through their network and this has given them a new-found identity. We have also been providing support to strengthen the governance of these networks and their leadership. These health practitioners are exposed to the world of traditional practitioners in Jodhpur, Rajasthan and Jamshedpur, Jharkhand where various forest officials, medical staff from the AYUSH Ministry, college students, and researchers visit and interact with them.

PERSONAL SHIFTS

I joined LAYA when I was sixteen years old and gained my intermediate and graduate degrees while working part-time. I have become very confident, passionate and knowledgeable about herbal-based healthcare. Even if I am engaged with some other activity, I keep an eye on Herbal Based Health Care. I am also a practitioner and I can recognize about 300 different medicinal plants. My experience has led me to publish three books on Herbal Based Health Care.

I have developed a particularly good relationship with the Adivasis, personal contacts with THPs and I know most of them by their names. I have a good rapport with the medical staff of the AYUSH department and facilitate their involvement in several of our activities. I am also on the board of non-Adivasi Andhra Pradesh Anuvamsika Ayurveda Vidyula Sangam (APAAVS), which operates in the plains. All these are my cherished accomplishments.

MR. K KOTESWARA RAO, COORDINATOR, NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT (NRM) UNIT

EARLY EXPERIENCES

I was volunteering during the Godavari flood in 1986 when I met Nafisa and Dominic. I joined LAYA in 1986 and have not looked back since – being groomed by Nafisa and Dominic and becoming part of LAYA. When I joined, there were no roads and the villages were infested with mosquitoes. I remember ITDA starting single-teacher primary schools for every 50 villages. The Adivasis were growing food crops – mostly millets and then the state government started to provide two-rupee rice to the Adivasi families – shifting them to become rice-eaters. This gradually saw the disappearance of millets from Adivasi kitchens and their fields. Soon commercial crops such as tobacco, cotton, tapioca, etc., entered the area and farmers started using chemical fertilizers and pesticides. By 1997, LAYA began to work thematically and when I was asked I chose agriculture. I trained the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT), Hyderabad and returned with techniques in organic agriculture. We started to educate the farmers about spacing of crops, line sowing, and various other techniques in organic composting. Earlier, mixed crops were being broadcasted and this practice has changed with line sowing and planned cropping. Gradually, we began to give a strategic thrust to a package of good practices in sustainable agriculture.

I would like to make special mention of the most primitive tribe of Konda Reddis, some of whom inhabit high-altitude zones. We have given a special focus to their livelihoods by facilitating special packages given to them by the ITDA, reviving millets on hilly slopes, introducing diversified crops in their pallam lands (low-lands), plantation of income-generating horticultural crops such as mango and cashew and most importantly bringing awareness on environment, ecology and their health.

ADIVASI WOMEN'S SITUATION HAS CHANGED

Adivasi women have always worked more than men in agricultural fields. Initially, they used to hide inside their homes and not come forward to attend meetings. We had to continuously reach out and connect with them – making them aware of the work we are into and build their trust levels.

I would say that the technologies that we introduced in their fields and homes brought about visible transformations. Because of the spacing and line-sowing methods, Adivas women's work eased in the fields. Traditionally, women weeded and transplanted – bending their bodies, but with cycle and kone weeders they no longer need to bend to weed, and this is a great benefit. Again, they were winnowing farm produce and processing some crops manually. Now with millet processing machines they moved their job to machines.

By introducing new crops, homestead and kitchen gardens, and backyard poultry, women have a continuous supply of nutritious vegetables and we see them having several meals a day – improving their eating habits. With all of this, the women and their families are becoming increasingly food and nutrition secure in the areas where LAYA operates. They now have personal income in their hands and the women's social status has improved, which is a huge gain.

DR. R. VENUGOPALA RAO, 
SENIOR SCIENTIST, SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY (S&T) DESK

OVEREXPLOITED FORESTS MUST BE REVIVED AND REGENERATED INTO NATURAL FORESTS

As a forest scientist, my association with LAYA goes back to 1998. Initially, I documented traditional knowledge systems/practices in agriculture and we observed that several economically important forest species were being overexploited, thereby depleting the forests and affecting the livelihoods of Adivasis. Alongside documentation, LAYA started action/applied research projects, conducted field-based research trials on overexploited economically important forest species.

We have taken up several initiatives to regenerate endemic species restoring degraded forest and private lands with positive outcomes. In all our research, we explored seed harvests, seed dormancy, propagation material, cultivation practices, harvesting material and their economics. All this resulted in our recommendation for domestication of several forest species. For example:

- We started experimenting with broom grass which once grew extensively and had multiple uses. Our experiments began in 4 acres which we then multiplied in 5000 acres that benefitted 1500 Adivasi families. We have been recommending to the Government of India to multiply broom grass all over the forest regions of North Eastern India. Our research on broom grass is pioneering and continuing.
- We documented the uses of wild mangoes that come in various sizes and shapes – starting with the size of an onion to really big mangoes. There are 40 varieties of wild mangoes in these forests and these are part of the Adivasi food basket. There are also 10-15 wild tubers that form an essential seasonal diet for the Adivasis. Several of these tubers are natural antibiotics. Since these tubers are disappearing, we explored various propagation methods for their revival and recommended that the Adivasi communities start domesticating them. Domestication goes a long way in reducing the pressure on natural forests. There is an urgent need for conservation, protection and regeneration of an amazing variety of forest species.
- A few of our innovative techniques in eco-regeneration include seed dibbling and broadcasting. We broadcasted all over the forest a truckload of tamarind seeds which we obtained from the government. Even if 10 percent of these seeds survived and five percent went on to yield, I would consider it a huge impact. We have dibbled many such forest species.

The Adivasi region is a natural place for landraces. Around 400 agriculture crop varieties are seen in this region. In the last 12 years, during organic melas that are conducted regularly, 400 varieties crop species are being demonstrated. These melas provide spaces for sharing and exchanges of propagation material of rare crop varieties and pathways for policy.

- The Fishtail Palm (*Caryota urens*), a natural species of the palm family, is found in high-altitude zones. These trees come to yield anywhere between fifteen and twenty years. The Adivasis tap these trees for toddy or for a drink - which is mixed with 10 to 15 types of medicinal herbs and consume them during festivities. Once it comes to yield, toddy can be tapped all through the year continuously for three years. An Adivasi tapper can earn as much as Rs.2000/per day from tapping toddy. These trees are

said to fetch as much as one lakh rupees. We managed to collect 5 quintals seeds of this tree and distributed them to 1000 families in Pedabayulu Mandal, Visakhapatnam District.

- *Sterculia Urens*, one of the gum yielding species, used to be grown in profusion in the natural forests. During 1980-1990, extraction of gums from *sterculia* was a major source of income for the Adivasi communities. Normally, once you extract the gum, the tree dies. There are several research studies on tapping methods of *sterculia* for gums that can save the trees. Several researchers have developed techniques of extracting gums with poor results. However, our participatory research revealed that the tree cannot be saved if the gum is regularly tapped. On the other hand, we found that systematic tapping practices can enhance their life span. We taught the Adivasis how to tap the gum with our techniques and enhance the longevity of *Sterculia Urens*.

FOCUS ON NATURAL FORESTS

The lands of Adivasis in the forests are now intruded by new species such as rubber plantations, palm oil species, and agriculture crops like cotton and cashew, that go against the grain of the natural biodiversity. There is no denying that these crops are cash crops and lured by their money potential, the Adivasis are cutting forests for large plantations of cashew crops. Our fight is with these intruding species and we want to promote endemic species and their domestication. It is imperative that a policy thrust must be given to natural species of the forests. For example, Rosewood that grows in these forests has a high income potential. One cubic foot of Rosewood fetches around Rs.6000 and about a lakh per tree. Rosewood, teak, and other wood and non-wood yielding species are natural species that must replace the existing cashew plantations.

Our research projects are reviewed by policy makers and subject specialists. We are developing a monograph on broom grass including participatory agronomic practices, microbial application for growth of the species, and economics of broom grass for domestication in high altitude regions in Andhra Pradesh, Odisha and the North Eastern states. I believe that endemic forest species must be revived and restored for natural forests to emerge.

FOCUS THE CHANGING WORLD OF ADIVASIS

Our applied research to regenerate endemic forest species and LAYA's engagement have resulted in positive benefits. On the livelihood front, the Adivasis are food secure. They are most aware of the 1/70 Act that cannot alienate their lands. But the Adivasi culture has eroded. Earlier, these Adivasis would fight but quickly resolve their conflicts by the end of the day. Now they are seen going to police stations and courts to resolve their disputes.

MUTUALITY

Nafisa and Dominic are excellent leaders who are open to ideas, new thinking and are encouraging. With my two decades' association there is mutuality in my engagement with LAYA. Dominic has been my mentor in all my research work, supporting me in fine-tuning my proposals and encouraging me. He has admirable administrative skills and in all his administrative support for my research, he has worked with trust which is a rare quality. I have learnt a lot from Dominic.

MR. T. KANTHA RAO,

COORDINATOR, LIFELONG LEARNING (LL) UNIT

IMPACTFUL TRAINING

Adivasi youth who have gone through our Parichay training are aware and reflecting about developing their communities. These Adivasi youth have learnt to question, raise their voices and are closely connected to the communities. We now have a sizable number of Adivasi youth leaders, organizing their communities, and serving them. A few exemplary leaders that I can recall are: Arika Durgarao, unanimously elected as a Ward member; Kondagorri Gouri, who established a women-led CBO – Adivasi Mahila Chaithanya Sangham; Nimmaka Jagadish, known for strengthening as many as 20 Adivasi women's groups; and Biddika Suryam. Altogether youth awareness (chaitanyam) in the Adivasi vulnerable contexts, changing climate and lapses in delivery systems has grown. To me this is a big shift.

At one time, we facilitated the promotion of as many as 120 CBOs from seven districts of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. Adivasi youth who have formed CBOs or joined other CBOs have become

watchdogs of village happenings. They network with other NGOs and networks. Andhra Pradesh Adivasi Sanghala Samakyan (APASS) is now the recognized collective face of Adivasis and has fifty percent women members sharing their issues and being part of the network struggles. The leaders are capable of speaking confidently at any public platform on Adivasi issues. A few of them have even traveled to participate at national conferences. All the presidents of APASS are well-known personalities. They have all gone through our Yuva Parichay training and it is heartening to see the heights they have reached.

Many of our trained youth are now in local governance -as Ward members, Sarpanches and even present in Zilla Parishads. A few have even contested elections. Approximately 650 members have entered local governance institutions.

CHANGING TRENDS

There are many positive changes in the youth segment. The education levels of both boys and girls have improved. Adolescent girls and young women are far more vibrant – getting educated, taking decisions on their own, seeking jobs and getting elected in local governance institutions.

GROWING MIGRATION

Adivasi youth are seen migrating soon after the completion of 10th or 12th standard. Many return unable to find suitable jobs or adjust to urban life and often with poor health. Young Adivasi girls who migrate are exploited by outsiders.

ELDERS THINK DIFFERENTLY

There is an intergenerational shift in perspectives. The youth want to go out for a better life and the elders expect that their youth take on responsibilities for their family and community development. Against these changing contexts of the Adivasi society, LAYA's rights-based and development engagements are making a difference.

MY JOURNEY WITH LAYA

I was working with Fr. Vindy, Director of Village Reconstruction Organization (VRO) and was given charge of education. Later I

worked in Velugu. I came to LAYA through a contact from Velugu, who knew LAYA. I was not interviewed by Nafisa. I was asked to write about what I know about the Adivasis and that got me into LAYA.

I like to stay in villages - eat what Adivasis give me to eat, sleep in their houses, and live among them

I like to stay in villages - eat what Adivasis give me to eat, sleep in their houses, and live among them. This has given me a wonderful opportunity to see their lives and be part of it. I have learnt a lot from their life. I would say they have taught me rather than me having taught them. I like their culture of sharing. They bring food and eat together. This is a great quality that we non-tribals lack. They abide by what their elders say. I have learnt about their festivals and I have tremendous respect for them. I have travelled so much that the local Adivasis know me very well. There is love in them. You must experience to understand who they really are.

MR. RAVINDRA VEJANDLA, _____
AREA COORDINATOR, PADERU, VISAKHAPATNAM DISTRICT

EARLIER ADIVASI CONTEXT

Before I came to Paderu, I knew nothing about the Adivasis nor about the forests they inhabit. For five years from 1995-2000, I lived in a village community hall which the Adivasis had built for us. During this period, I lived as part of the Adivasi communities, walking through the villages, learning about their festivals, culture, and I have also written a book about them. My life's learning has come from the Adivasis and the forests of this area.

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

In the Paderu Agency Area, 60 percent of the villages are in interior forest regions. Apart from Bagatha, Konda Dora, Nukadora and Valmiki, the Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups – Kodu, Porja, and Gadaba inhabit these forests. When I began my work, I found that the Adivasis were extremely poor and the various government schemes were not reaching them. The Adivasis had limited knowledge in utilisation of natural resources. Most of the Adivasis, especially living in the hills practiced podu cultivation and were

able to procure food only for nine months of the year. The forests were degrading.

I came to LAYA's Paderu Centre in 2000 and for many years I was the only staff in the centre. The LAYA office and training centre was established in 2014. We now have 9 staff members in our Paderu centre as well as a training centre. Our work area includes 4 Mandals, 170 villages and outreaches 7396 households. Since 2000, we have brought several interventions under our livelihood projects – planting as many as 15-17 horticultural species, introduced improved mixed cropping, promoted homestead gardens, strengthened podu cultivation with millets and SRI, among others. Due to heavy rains there is high soil erosion in the hills due to run-off. We have given a lot of focus to soil and water conservation with stone bunding and other soil conservation methods. Paderu has a lot of fishponds and we have taken personal responsibility to go to the plains and procure and provide fish seedlings to as many as 150 ponds which have benefited the farmers. We have been encouraging farmers to make small payments for fish seedlings and new plants. This increases the ownership and sustainable processes in the community. We have established several best practices in agriculture, mixed farming, soil conservation, fisheries, desi poultry, all of which has improved the livelihoods of the Adivasis.

ADIVASI WOMEN'S CONTEXTS HAVE CHANGED

We have conducted intense training for women through the Yuva Chaitanya program – bringing awareness, building their self-confidence, and educating them. Vikasini, which is an Adivasi women-led CBO, has taken up several initiatives to empower women – accessing government schemes, strengthening the SHGs in savings, income-generating activities, and addressing their health issues. One story to highlight is that of 50 women who could not get ration because they did not have an Aadhaar card. Our SHGs went on a protest and succeeded in getting Aadhaar cards and now these women are able to avail their ration. As a support organization, we have been training youth and women leaders, accompanying them wherever required. There are several examples of Adivasi women demonstrating their collective power and questioning the authorities to claim their rights.

The younger Adivasi women are now getting educated and altogether women are economically better off. Adivasi women no longer go to forests to carry heavy logs of wood. With water facilities, cookstoves – their workload has decreased and younger women no longer work hard like the previous generations.

We are noticing many positive changes in the lives of the Adivasis. However, with greater exposure to the wider world, the Unity of Adivasis has come down.

LAYA has a good team. We have very good infrastructural facilities for training, conferences and computers which are important to work effectively. Our organisational policies are particularly good as well.

PERSONAL SHIFTS

I have learnt so much after coming to LAYA. My knowledge levels have increased vastly and I can say that I now know the Adivasi context well. On my own, I have learnt how to use computers and other software. In the beginning, I was a one-man army. Our leadership used to appreciate that I was doing everything by myself, which used to inspire me. My nature is such that I first self-learn wherever necessary, possibly go on an exposure visit and then get into implementation. When I work, I have this feeling of naadi (my work) and when this feeling comes, I work excellently.

Our leadership puts no pressure on us and gives us great freedom to do our work and guide us when required. They tell us 'Learn and do'. If we are not able to do something, they give us time to work – at our pace.

MS. AKULA PADMAVATHI, FIELD COORDINATOR, WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

SPECIAL FOCUS TO ADIVASI WOMEN

In 2002, when I went into the villages of Addateegala, I found that the Adivasi women were poorly clad and were taking only gangji (rice gruel). They could hardly speak in public and knew little about the wider world. Little attention was paid to their children's education nor were they aware of the benefits of nutritious food for their children.

When I joined LAYA, Vana Jagruti (Vanaja), a women-led CBO was doing a great job in facilitating access to government schemes, obtaining ration job cards, reaching out to single women and supporting them with income generating activities, and above all empowering them to stand up for themselves and their dignity.

ADIVASI WOMEN'S LIVES ARE CHANGING

LAYA has taken special efforts to build gender perspectives and empower women through various ways. We have promoted mothers' committees, village level committees, SHGs and women-led CBOs. These grassroots groups have taken up a variety of initiatives to bring awareness to their gender situation, facilitate income generating activities, address issues of domestic violence, and several others. Not many took up issues relating to children's and women's health. Together with SHGs and CBOs, we have reached out to schools to educate students and parents on nutritional food, personal hygiene, and health. With growing awareness and backing of CBOs, Adivasi women have been demonstrating their power in issue-based rallies and campaigns.

Women are now far more articulate and confident. They are schooling their children and with the introduction of nutri-gardens, the Adivasi families are eating well. I am presently monitoring their nutri-baskets at home to see that children are given a balanced diet. In government child-care Anganwadis, children are given balamrutham, which is very nutritious. Often mothers over-feed their children with this powder and complain that their children are not digesting well and discontinue giving this nutritious powder. I am monitoring the mothers to ensure that the right amount of balamrutham is given to children.

10-DAY CRASH LITERACY PROGRAM

LAYA's 'Crash Literacy' program occupies a special place in our empowerment agenda. Making women literate and gaining leadership competency is a major objective. Beyond literacy and numeracy, women were made to speak out in classrooms to gain confidence and be educated about a host of gender and Adivasi issues: forests they inhabit, forest policies and Adivasi rights, women and children's health, relevance of herbal medicines, and good agricultural practices. We ensure that the Crash Literacy program was not just a training event and conduct follow-up visits and interactions at the household level. Personally, I have invested a lot in the 10-day in-house literacy program and I feel fulfilled at the impact it continues to make.

A segment of Adivasi women have entered wider institutional fields of SHGs, local governance and in the health sector. In our area alone, there are 26 Ward members, 11 Sarpanches, 6 Mandal Parishad Territorial Council (MPTC), 3 in Zilla Parishad Territorial Council (ZPTC), 850 SHG office bearers and 85 Asha Workers.

To be empowered, women would have to be gainfully employed. We have been demanding that Adivasi women be recruited as teachers and Wardens in schools.

LAYA HAS CHANGED ME

I have learnt and grown in LAYA. I worked for a while with an NGO and joined LAYA in 2002. Initially, everything was new to me – the Adivasis and the hills – and I used to be fearful. I used to take my father and walk 9-10 km to reach these villages. Then I got a two-wheeler that changed my life and I was the only woman riding a two-wheeler on the roads. There was a time when I was scared to talk to 20 people even though I knew the subject. Now I can talk to 500 or more, and can go into the interior of the forest region all by myself.

I have learnt that one must talk directly to women – about their needs, concerns to get connected and facilitate change. Earlier, Vanaja promoted 5-member village level committees (VLC) which brought us close to women. Even now in the interior villages, Adivasi women are poor and in need of support. While violence on Adivasi women has come down, many cases do not surface.

As a social worker, I am a Bench Member (out of three) in the Lokadalat in the Judicial First Class Magistrate Court in Addateegala. I have settled a few cases of domestic violence by out- of- court settlement.

MR. D. LOVA RAJU, 
COORDINATOR, ALTERNATIVE TECHNOLOGY UNIT, PADERU

RELEVANCE OF LOW-CARBON TECHNOLOGIES

The relevance of improved cookstoves, bio-sand filters, and biogas from waste materials have proved to be highly relevant in remote forest villages. We have successfully installed biogas plants from kitchen waste in 11 Ashram schools in Paderu mandal, Visakhapatnam District. We have been able to provide two hundred bio-sand water filters for clean drinking water to farming households. The Adivasi households were using brown-coloured turbid water from mountain springs. The bio-sand water filters, which we installed at the households, have provided clean drinking water and are perceived as a blessing to the community.

IMPROVED COOKSTOVES

I believe that our improved cookstoves have proved to be most beneficial to women, children and Adivasi households in general. We have so far distributed 7000 improved cookstoves in three Mandals of Paderu Division. Before installation of these stoves, we hold meetings in the villages and panchayats for mutual consent. We have a worker from the village panchayat helping us in the installation and if required, helping in the maintenance and repair of the cookstoves. As well as a few village volunteers to support us in the cookstove project.

The traditional cookstoves used to engulf the kitchen and other areas of the house with smoke. Often, mothers would cook while carrying newborn babies – both inhaling the smoke. With two pans, a chimney and 6/6 inch opening (gate) for fuel that can accommodate small quantities of fuel, these improved cookstoves spew less smoke and are more efficient. There was a time when Adivasi women would carry 10-20 kg of heavy logs of fuel wood from the forests, which must have affected their bone strength.

Instead, women now bring small twigs and waste of silver oak that is grown as shade trees in coffee plantations as fuel for the cookstoves. The silver oak branches are lighter and burn faster. The cookstoves have transformed Adivasi kitchens with reduced emissions, cleaner environment, and faster cooking.

The traditional cookstoves used to engulf the kitchen and other areas of the house with a lot of smoke

ARRESTING DEFORESTATION

Adivasis depended on fuel wood from the forests. Traditionally, women were given the role of collection of fuel. They would go early in the morning along with others and carry heavy loads of big logs of wood – as much as 10-20 kg. These logs were put on trees in the house compound for future use. We no longer see these logs being stored on the trees. Our cookstoves have changed this practice. I think a major impact of cookstoves is that it has arrested deforestation.

IMPROVED HEALTH AND SAVING TIME

High levels of smoke were taking a toll on Adivasi women's health. They would complain of poor vision, chest problems and some even contracting tuberculosis. Children often caught a cough and fever. With poor health, they would visit doctors three or four times a month, which cut into their budgets. From their feedback, they are in much better health now and are happy about the clean air in their homes.

By not going to the forests as much as they did before, these Adivasi women have more time to engage in other activities. Women say that they now give more time to farming and other activities.

CHANGING PERSPECTIVES

Women's lives are changing. When they see educated girls working with good incomes, they see the value of education. Women working as teachers in government schools earn as much as Rs.50000/- to Rs. 60000/-, which is quite motivational. Both parents and adolescent youth – girls and boys are seeing the benefits that come with education.

MY LIFE

My parents were in Paderu and I returned to Paderu after my studies

at Anakapalle. I got interested in decentralised technologies because these technologies have provided many benefits to the Adivasis.

MR. MALLIKARJUNA RAO, 
COORDINATOR, DOCUMENTATION

ALTERNATIVE DATABASE AND KNOWLEDGE BUILDING

Not many NGOs/CSOs see the relevance of building a knowledge base. From the very beginning, our leadership gave importance to database, research, and knowledge building. At our head office, we have a Library with 5000 books, including prominent journals such as Economic and Political Weekly, Down to Earth, Frontline and three daily newspapers. LAYA's publications, research documents, filing of relevant materials from newspapers, journals, forest laws, and many others are kept in the library.

GROWING READERSHIP OF MANNEMLO

Since 1994, we have been publishing 'Mannemlo', a Telugu quarterly periodical, which reaches out to Adivasi youth, our community-based organizations (CBOs), ITDA, Collectorates of four districts, NGOs, and other civil society organizations (CSOs). *Mannemlo* is one of its kind in the state because of its sole focus on Adivasi issues.

Mannemlo has grown to a quarterly circulation of 1000. Although *Mannemlo* is priced, those who are interested and cannot afford to pay receive it for free. Our readership is drawn from Adivasi youth that have gone through our training, leaders of CBOs, network activists. Three of our regular columnists have enriched this periodical with their issue-based articles: P.S. Ajay Kumar is well-known for his experience and knowledge on Adivasi rights and in particular land rights. His posts on YouTube are well-known; Dr. Trinadha Rao, Lawyer and Coordinator of the RLA Unit, contributes regularly giving insights into the various legal aspects of Adivasi rights; and Chakradhar, who was earlier a part of the Parichay Unit of LAYA, writes on rural youth and other issues. Our Field Coordinators write periodically on programs initiatives. Adivasi youth, who have moved out are given the opportunity to share their experiences - wherever they are located. Altogether, *Mannemlo* offers a platform for Adivasi rights - providing information and analysis that is rarely available

elsewhere. We ensure that our writings come down to the level of the youth and Adivasis who can relate with what is written. I have been writing on current issues in *Mannemlo* and being a creative writer, my writings are satirical and use the medium of comics to elicit the attention of readers.

MAKING AN IMPACT

A major impact is seen in the awareness and information made available to the Adivasi youth. Almost all of them are in the know of at least 10 to 11 legislations relating to Adivasi rights, and how the local governance functions. This has made a lot of difference in their lives. If one looks around, not many in the mainstream would have knowledge on the legislations that pertain to them.

Again, the CBOs in LAYA's constituency have made a difference – increasing the awareness levels of Adivasis, helping the Adivasi communities access basic village amenities and government schemes. Adivasis dwell in small clusters and this enables the CBOs to be close to their communities. They are now a bridge between Adivasi communities, the government, and what is happening in the wider society. Adivasi women too have changed – they are working, are part of CBOs, single women networks, and are elected to local governance bodies.

CHANGING ADIVASI SOCIETY

The aspirations of Adivasi youth to seek employment in the wider society has grown and the youth are looking out for opportunities. Several Adivasi youth, who have ventured out are unable to compete and return back home with an uncertain future. Even girls and young women are lured by outsiders and the outside world. We observe that the Adivasi youth have begun to give less importance to the cultural and community sentiment that they once held dear to.

MY JOURNEY

I have obtained a Master's degrees in Social Work and in Literature. My post-graduate education in Literature has proved to be helpful in my alternative documentation work at LAYA. When I first came to LAYA two decades ago, I worked in the field areas but due to my poor health, I shifted to the Documentation Unit. I have gone through many learning curves in LAYA. Apart from my services in documentation, I have become a writer, translator, and a trainer/facilitator. As a writer, I have written

extensively in Mannemlo, which has given me an opportunity to be a creative writer – using my satirical and narrative skills and the medium of comics. My writings are read by other development practitioners, which gives me a sense of personal fulfilment. My readers and friends call me 'Mannemlo Mallik' which makes me happy for the identity they have given me. I have published a book on climate issues – Manduthunna Bhoogolam.

LAYA stands out in the freedom given to its staff and to take responsibility for their work. They give importance to individuality and this is rarely found.

LAYA stands out in the freedom given to its staff and to take responsibility for their work. They give importance to individuality and this is rarely found. Although functional hierarchy is there, we are non-hierarchical in our work culture. We call each other – including our Executive Director by their first names. This is unheard of in the development world. Those of us with twenty years of experience are happy to work in LAYA – for the organizational culture and collegiality it brings.

MR. MYRON MENDES,

COORDINATOR, YOUTH AND COMMUNICATION

LAYA will forever be family to me. It was exactly a decade ago that I became a part of the LAYA family with my very first experience as a participant for Yuva Drishti. The program was held in Semiliguda in Odisha. There were almost 25 of us traveling, and I happened to be in the same vehicle as Siddharth and Ajita. The 5-hour journey took us almost 8 hours, because the Commando we were riding in broke down. And where? Right in the middle of nowhere with absolutely no cellphone service. Until we were rescued a couple hours by the hardworking, always smiling, LAYA team who came back searching for us. This trip was also my very first experience with the Adivasi community in their own habitat. My heart swelled

with curiosity and awe when we met the community. I was filled with questions of their existence. I was just completing my studies in Theology during this time and from having questions about the Adivasi existence I found myself asking questions about my own!

My philosophical journey began a few years before I joined LAYA. It was during the time my mother was diagnosed with a terminal brain tumor and given three months to live. From questioning the Universe, “Why her? Why me? Why us?”, I suddenly found solace and peace when I asked myself, “What now? What do I do now?”. It was this same question that I asked myself at Semiliguda. And I knew the answer. It is at LAYA where I can make a difference. And each of us doing our own bit of making a difference we could together make change. And I think we have. In the last ten years, I have seen LAYA evolve in many ways. As an organization, as a voice for Adivasis, as a climate action advocate, and as a family.

Under the mentorship of Nafisa and Ajita, I have seen myself grow and my own perspectives being developed. There is something very unique about the way LAYA is managed and I don’t think anyone will find it anywhere else. We are given an opportunity to grow. We are given freedom to make decisions. But most of all we are given the space to grow and create our own path. I am forever grateful to be a part of this journey of LAYA. One of the greatest things I have learnt here is that I can choose to be affected by the world or I can choose to affect the world. And I choose the latter!

MS. V.V. NAGAMANI, 
COORDINATOR, FINANCE AND ACCOUNTS

ACCOUNTABLE AND TRANSPARENT FINANCIAL SYSTEMS

We take great care to ensure that our financial systems are compliant and conform to all statutory requirements. Dominic, who was heading the finance Unit trained us to be abreast with financial requirements and be equipped with all statutory requisites. During his tenure, a financial manual was developed which goes through requisite changes from time to time. Administration of finance is done through authentication process, and in a manner that builds the trust levels

I felt most happy that I could support LAYA in upkeeping the statutory compliances

There was a time, our financial transactions were manual but now we are online. For FCRA, we would send receipts and expenditure by post to the Home Ministry. Over the years, the FCRA brought greater compliance and now we are asked to submit quarterly reports and any changes that are made not only with regard to finance but even in board governance. We have statutory audits twice a year and separate project audits that feed into the former. I remember FCRA officials visiting us some years ago for financial monitoring and verified all the reports and they went back appreciating our transparent financial systems. I felt most happy that I could support the organization in upkeeping the statutory compliances.

Our financial governance is also complemented with other policies such as conflict of interest and HR policies. We are appreciative of several HR policies that include insurance, accidents, leave, maternity benefits, and sexual harassment that the governing board has positioned which makes us feel protected.

ACTIVE BOARD

We have qualified professionals with academic backgrounds on our board. They are most active and extremely supportive when we make our presentations – listening and guiding. Sometimes, two of the four board meetings are held in the field which would give us opportunities to be in the field and spaces for interactions with the board members.

FINANCE AND PROGRAMS MUST FUNCTION HAND IN HAND

I believe that there must be close interfaces between finance and program Units. I have taken the opportunity to visit the field, visit remote villages which informs me of the impactful work LAYA has done in the field of herbal medicines and its relevance in remote Adivasi regions, the revival of traditional crops, and many others. I have seen the literacy programs of LAYA which have made women learn to read within days and given them confidence which is amazing. I understand that several women are now elected in local governance systems. It is this field understanding that makes finance management effective as we transect between the board, funders, auditors and field Units.

LAYA TO ME

I joined LAYA in 1998. I started as an accounts assistant and I grew professionally in LAYA. I had worked in the formal atmosphere of other offices and in a company. But the work culture of LAYA is qualitatively different with the trust, freedom, and space it allows an individual to grow. Nafisa and Dominic insist that we call them by their first names and I have never found this elsewhere.

I have learnt a lot at a personal as well as a professional level. The basic principles of accounting in NGOs are different with its fund profiles of grants and donations, different reporting procedures and authorities. We are liable to the law of the land. LAYA has taught me all this and above all what it is to be transparent and accountable. The value-framework of LAYA is my inspiration and the most satisfactory factor behind my 22-year tenure. I am proud to say that there were never any circumstances where the value-frame has been compromised.

There is a protective cover for women in LAYA and because of it, I am able to function in harmony between my professional role and domestic role.

MS. MANISHA BANERJEE, COORDINATOR, ADMINISTRATION

For me, LAYA opened new ways of working and learning in a culture of equality and diversity. As an administrator, my competency in reporting, coordination in administrative matters and multi-tasking has increased vastly. Our Board meetings, that are held regularly, have given opportunities to relate with the Board members. Our Field Coordinators make presentations at strategic meetings where Board members are present and they guide us where necessary. I believe they have contributed to LAYA's good governance. LAYA is well-structured with decentralized thematic Units and this has positioned the organization as an umbrella.

LAYA has made a great difference to all of us. Nafisa and Dominic have groomed us with great positivity, collegiality and given us scope for individual growth. I used to be an introvert and I have changed and grown in my confidence. When leaders trust you, one grows. Personally, my knowledge levels have improved. I now understand the

Adivasis and their lives. I believe that LAYA has made a difference to several dimensions of their lives. There is a strong culture of values that makes us all committed and dedicated. We never think of looking for employment elsewhere. The trust that the leadership gives us makes us work with responsibility and dedication. This is the binding factor that has nurtured ownership in the organization.

MR. M. SATYANARAYANA, 
COORDINATOR, ALTERNATIVE ENERGY DESK

SMALL IS BIG

For me LAYA is 'home, guru and values'. I joined LAYA in 2005, as an Information and Communications Technology (ICT) Assistant. I was twenty years old. I was looking for an opportunity to use my little bit of computer knowledge to support my further education and family. By magic I got a reference to LAYA from friends of mine, Nagalaxmi and Sekhar. For me it was a big blessing. I had little practical knowledge in various computer applications. But from time-to-time, LAYA provided me big opportunities to utilize and improve my skills and myself.

I got a lot of opportunities to interact and work with the Adivasi communities. Till today, I remember my first journey to Addateegela and Paderu. My first engagement was to accompany Bulliyya in Paderu and Dumbriguda area for herbal medicine distribution. My role was to take photographs of the entire event. Here I came to know how a small initiative can provide a big relief to lots of people from the tribal communities. Also, working with the Manyam Praja Video Team promoted by LAYA, taught me how the Adivasi youth are eager to learn new technologies and improve themselves. Working with Adivasi youth and the Youth and Women Empowerment Team showed me the ways to interact with people. For me working in LAYA always reminds me that a small intervention can lead to a big change.

LEARNING WHILE WORKING

When I joined LAYA, speaking in English was a first and biggest challenge for me. With the help of LAYA team I could learn and speak in English. Dominic and Nafisa especially contributed to

my English practice. I was encouraged by Sekhar, the then ICT Unit Coordinator, to explore new technologies to incorporate in the work. When the Internet was an unknown illusion or far from reality to many, we had an internet connection in our office. My quest for knowledge got satisfied from the internet, travelling with Dominic and interacting with every person in the organization. When I entered LAYA, I was pursuing my 2nd year Bachelor's degree in distance mode. I got a lot of support and encouragement morally and financially to finish my Bachelor's and Master's degree. One thing I believe in LAYA is, if you have interest to develop, your interest and views are honoured and encouraged.

APPLICATIONS OF LEARNING

I have worked in various roles in LAYA. I am enthusiastic to use technology. Even though, we are the support staff in the organization, we do not limit ourselves to just support activities but from time-to-time we have been encouraged to be a part of the field activities like developing applications to automatize Manyaseema Bank, Address Tree and Library Package for the Documentation Unit. Also, website designing and development and designing of various publications became part of our teamwork.

Now I am working as the Coordinator, Alternative Energy Desk. As a part of this team, I am very enthusiastic to bring alternative technologies to the doorsteps of Adivasi homes. More specifically, we have been monitoring the Improved Cookstoves Projects. This gives us satisfaction that our team has contributed to the reduction of drudgery of Adivasi women in collection of fuelwood, and minimized health issues, like eye and pulmonary diseases, and saved time and energy use for more than 11000 households.

Finally, I love the lunch time, it shows our LAYA's values and culture. At lunch time, all LAYA team members right from supporting staff to the Executive Director sit together, share food, thoughts, problems and joys as sharing is caring. It always reminds me of my home.

RESOURCE SUPPORT PARTNERS

MISEREOR

Dear Ms. Nafisa, Mr. Siddharth and the staff of LAYA,
With this letter, we send our wholehearted congratulations for LAYA's 35 years' journey! We are happy to state that Misereor has been part of this journey for more than 25 years.

Right from the beginning LAYA started to strengthen and empower Adivasi grassroots organisations in such a way that they have been able to improve their situation and live a decent and mostly self-conscious life. Over the decades, you included new topics and challenges such as environmental awareness, prevention and mitigation of Climate Change impacts in rural areas, cooking energy, community resilience among Adivasi and urban communities in India towards achieving SDGs, youth development, health, human rights as well as influencing political stakeholders to come up to their duties. Not all strategies have always proven to be successful, but LAYA has always been keen on learning and is known to us as well as to many other Misereor partners and civil society organizations for its professional and holistic curiosity which made you expand your mission on sustainability also to urban areas. The exchange with you all over the years has been very inspiring for us. Some of the Misereor colleagues remember well the visit of Siddharth in Germany on the occasion of Misereor's Lenten Campaign 2010 on Climate Change issues.

We wish all of you continuing enthusiasm and energy for your good work for the many years to come, especially now that times are getting rougher due to antidemocratic forces, shrinking civic spaces and the enormous challenges posed by Climate Change and, in this very moment, by the COVID-19 crisis. Congratulations again from the bottom of our heart on your 35th anniversary!

With our best wishes,
Elisabeth Bially (Head of Asia Department), Brigitte Mandelartz (Regional Officer India) and Dr. Almuth Schaubert (Urban Pro Poor Desk), Almuth Heider and Kathrin Schröder (Part of the Learning Team on energy issues) Edith Lindner (Finance Desk) and Gudrun Peterke (Admin Support)

BftW has been partnering with LAYA since more than a decade and has played a very supportive role especially in the Climate Change Agenda. Franziska Kny, South Asia Unit, BftW, has been associated with LAYA since 2015 and continues to support LAYA as part of her work commitments.

I was asked to write some reflections on LAYA to contribute to the three and a half decadal story of LAYA. BftW has been working with LAYA since 2008, which are 13 years of partnership. I joined and took over the responsibility for the cooperation with LAYA in 2015. I look back at a very good and trustful journey of cooperation between BftW and LAYA including very good developments, joint visits and discussions.

What impresses me the most about LAYA's work are essentially two things I would like to share:

First of all, LAYA manages to sustain linkages between the micro and the macro level: On the one hand LAYA works closely and effectively with local Adivasi communities, facilitates integrated, Sustainable Development in these communities and on the other hand LAYA brings these issues into the larger Climate Change perspective. The special local conditions are used for a broad lobbying on the national as well as international level. This is what definitely makes LAYA's work so unique.

Furthermore, I got to know LAYA as a very innovative and progressive NGO, who focusses on finding efficient and creative new solutions and who works in a future-oriented way. Whether it's the technical developments LAYA is testing in Adivasi communities or the engagement with young people on Climate Change, LAYA addresses the relevant issues of our time and responds to the changing needs. I still remember the long discussions we had about a research component on sustainable farming experiments, that should be part of the project and I was not convinced at first. LAYA finally convinced me and thus also showed me the importance to work on creative solutions and ideas.

As I am writing this, we also look back on very eventful and challenging last 12 month, that demanded a lot of us. Since end February 2020 we are all busy to get through the Corona Pandemic. Especially in these

times, the importance of LAYA's work becomes evident: For example, the development of E-learning courses is particularly relevant. Working towards community resilience and on food security has strengthened the local communities and helped them to tide over the crisis. Building community resilience is certainly a huge and ongoing challenge and that's also why these success stories are all the more important. I hope that LAYA will keep its innovative and dynamic spirit for the next three and a half decades to meet to great challenges in our constantly changing environment.

DR. CORNELIA MALLEBREIN, PRESIDENT, 
FÖRDERVEREIN ASHAKIRAN E.V., GERMANY

The Förderverein Ashakiran e.V., Germany, is a Government recognised NGO working in the field of education and training since 1993. Their focus is on children and young people from poor background mainly in Odisha and to some extent Ladakh.

Since 2012 it was decided to partner with DESI Technology Solutions, Bhubaneswar, as our Local Coordinating Agency (LCA) to monitor our projects in Odisha. Later during 2017, Dr. Benudhar Sutar of DESI Technology Solutions had introduced to us LAYA as a professional NGO engaged in Rural Health education emphasising traditional herbal health practices thus empowering the local Health Practitioners. When we got introduced with LAYA and their educational programs, we were happy to become a partner of LAYA in their community development endeavour. We were fascinated to learn the journey of LAYA from its inception by Nafisa and Dominic. The efforts of LAYA Leadership in grooming the Program Team in a professional manner is very much appreciable.

After going through the LAYA profile, the board members of the Förderverein Ashakiran e.V., agreed to finance a long- term relationship on projects, thus on "Training of Community Ayurvedic Practitioners (CAP)". Since then, we are partnered with various other projects such as "Sustainable Agriculture Practitioners Training and BIOFARM", setting up model fields and Community Health Centres, etc. For us the partnership with LAYA is more than just funding projects, our relationship developed to a lot more, we became friends and we highly appreciate their profound work.

Thomas Hirsch is the Founder of Climate and Development Advice, an international consultancy network, headquartered in Heidelberg, Germany. Before he worked as Climate Policy Advisor and later as Development Policy Representative of Bread for the World, a supporter and partner of LAYA.

Think Global, Act Local

If any sentence expresses what LAYA stands for, this is it, according to my view. I got to know LAYA at the international climate conference COP15 in Copenhagen, in 2009. Here they acted globally, joining the global movement's call for climate justice, fighting for a global climate treaty, and ending up bitterly disappointed. It should take another 6 years, until COP21 in Paris, to get the deal done. Again, LAYA was there. I met LAYA at all COPs, from Copenhagen to Paris, and in all the following ones. We shared a strong passion for justice, and the conviction that enabling multilateral policies are a prerequisite to achieve change in a globalized world. We may not always have agreed what the best next steps would have been, but we enjoyed discussing them, making our arguments, and thinking global.

At the same time, LAYA is deeply rooted at the local level. Whenever they take the global stage, be ensured that they will report to their constituency back home what they do and what they fight for. You always find them with the film camera, making interviews, and producing video clips about the international events they attend. The videos are streamed in the villages they work. They inform the people, discuss with them, enable them, remain connected with them on what they do.

Act local. LAYA is a resource centre for Adivasi, India's Indigenous People. I visited them in Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh. Together we went to Pathakota, Y. Ramavaram Mandal, East Godavari District, and other remote places where they have their projects: Legal advice on land rights; literacy courses for women; video projects for the youth; cultivation and processing of medicinal plants; promotion of energy efficient cook stoves; solar and micro hydro energy in remote off-grid villages; climate resilient farming practices. Action that matters for the local people, making a real difference for their lives. In Pathakota, I felt LAYA's commitment and compassion, and the authenticity of their action. But what really makes the difference,

and the uniqueness of their work, as I see it, is the combination of the two: think global, act local: LAYA's approach is well-thought, innovative and transformative. The same connectivity with the people, which impressed me when we visited their work areas, I also observed when we travelled together in rural Bangladesh, where I showed them a community-based climate adaptation project I work with; and in Germany, during a speaker tour.

LAYA is thrilled to develop solutions for today's problems and to find answers for tomorrow's questions, showing passion for a more equitable and sustainable future. We have collaborated in a number of such projects, connecting local to global: In Germany, we campaigned for more ambitious climate targets, including on a raft on a river surrounding the German Parliament in 2009. In an Indo-German cooperation involving scientific and NGO partners we developed a modelled scenario how India could achieve its sustainable development targets without exceeding its fair share of the global carbon budget. The results we presented at the COP in Qatar, in 2012. Together we worked on a just energy transition, on local-led resilience building, and most recently, on making infrastructure investments greener, more climate resilient, and pro-poor. Here we work together with partners from a number of Asian countries and Europe.

Green and resilient recovery, building back better, or shouldn't we better say, "building forward more sustainable", will remain high on the political agenda, locally as globally, in view of the still ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, and the climate crisis. Voices like LAYA are needed more than ever, to shape the discourse, and change the direction. LAYA can be proud on the milestones achieved during the last decades. I am very grateful for the parts of the journey that I could attend. But the journey continues, and I am looking forward to the next phase. Let us continue to walk the talk.

DR. PRIYADARSHINI KARVE, 
PRESIDENT, INECC AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
SAMUCHIT ENVIRO TECH, PUNE

Priyadarshini Karve (Ph.D. Physics) runs her own social green enterprise focused on enabling sustainability at household and organizational level. Her work in decentralized renewable energy, urban sustainability and Climate Change has been recognised nationally and internationally.

As a scientist, I have been researching and experimenting on renewable energy solutions for the last two decades. I have designed and promoted several smokeless cookstove designs to burn wood, charcoal, and other solid biomass fuels. These cook stoves have been designed for rural and urban households as well as larger scale charitable or commercial cooking establishments. I have developed decentralized waste to fuel technologies; a portable kiln for converting agri, forestry and garden waste (dry leaves, grass, dry twigs, fronds, woody wastes like bamboo waste, coconut shells, etc.) into charcoal with minimal pollution; promoted biogas generation from kitchen waste to replace LPG in the same kitchen; and solar cooking for households, small eateries, and community cooking.

In the current climate crisis world, decentralized and locally sourced energy services are the best option for everyone. But for remote locations this is even more critical.

In the current climate crisis world, decentralized and locally sourced energy services are the best option for everyone. But for remote locations, this is even more critical. It is well established now that access to energy is a key factor in improving the quality of life of families and in creating new livelihood opportunities for the members of the community. For remote tribal populations, the cost of providing reliable access to affordable energy services creates a financial burden for the energy suppliers (either electricity or fuels). As a result, typically centralized energy systems tend to bypass these communities. Whenever governments intervene through special programs and missions, typically the efforts are marred by apathy and negligence at the level of the local implementing authorities. These communities are also at the highest risk of being hit by a variety of climate disasters. These often break down the centralized energy supply systems. The best option for these communities is to have decentralized systems, using locally available renewable energy

sources. Another advantage of a community based decentralized system is that the energy services offered can be tailored to the energy services required by the community. Even if a disaster damages a few systems, a few others will survive. So communities being totally cut off is highly unlikely.

In its operational constituency, LAYA has been demonstrating a few low carbon technologies, providing energy security to an extent. To mention: clean cookstoves have empowered Adivasi women and

improved their health and bio-sand water filters have contributed to better health for the entire household/community without dependence on electricity. LAYA's interventions in agriculture have improved nutritional levels, increased incomes in a way that helps the community cope with Climate Change. The various training/education initiatives are also important as knowledge helps people make informed choices.

At LAYA the leadership operates in a democratic way, and the organization functions with much better efficiency

LAYA-INECC

The fact that LAYA's leadership took the lead in creating a separate legal entity to operate the network shows their commitment to the network. This is very rare when power grabbing and hoarding seems to be the norm in the NGO sector! The organization is only now becoming somewhat active, and so far there have been no clashes. The interface between LAYA and INECC is very open and based on goodwill and trust. I feel confident that the two organizations will continue to have a cordial partnership and the network will benefit in the process.

INECC is the only open platform where grassroots level organizations can learn about the role of Climate Change in their work, and also share their experiences and learnings in a 'safe' space. There are other climate focused groups, but they come together only for a specific and limited agenda and are more hierarchical in nature. INECC is more open and democratic, according to me. Apart from this, the network has over the years created small but significant impacts on local, national and international policies.

I believe that LAYA and INECC can be more effective if we can expand the network base beyond the founders, whose historical contribution

should be recognized. We have already initiated the process. We at INECC have to be more effective in our communications and target these not just towards policy makers but also towards the general public. LAYA has a very open work culture, where everyone's expertise, experience and views are respected and heard. The leadership operates in a democratic way, and the organization functions with much better efficiency than is typically seen in NGOs.

INDIA'S POLICY AND PRACTICE ON CLIMATE CHANGE

India's actions so far convey its commitment to the Paris Agreement in the sense that we have shown willingness to do the minimum that is necessary to meet our obligations. We are capable of going the extra mile, but perhaps the influence of the petroleum and coal lobby is preventing the government from taking those extra steps. Some of the policies and practices are therefore contrary to what makes sense for a low carbon economy. For example, while investing in renewable energy (RE) based power generation for additional electricity needs, we continue to use the existing coal fired power plants and are also planning more coal/petroleum-based power generation. For cooking energy, our policy is aggressively promoting fossil fuels, and totally killing the renewables-based cooking energy sector. For the transport sector, we seem to rely more on electric vehicles, than on strengthening public transport systems.

As far as climate adaptation is concerned, our policies and practices seem to be totally blind to this in spite of India being one of the countries most vulnerable to Climate Change. There are no efforts to climate proof even our cities let alone the sectors like farming, fisheries, forestry and others.

DR. WALTER FERNANDES

Dr. Walter Fernandes has authored several books on displacement and has the reputation of being one of the lead researchers on displacement in the Indian context. Apart from his professional relationship with LAYA he has been a dear friend and supporter of LAYA.

LAYA has been a partner in my life from 1989 when I first met its founders in my office at Indian Social Institute (ISI), New Delhi. At first it was an effort to know each other and find areas of collaboration which emerged rather soon. LAYA was an activist group trying to become a resource centre

and that required support in research. ISI was a research centre getting involved with activist groups and that became the meeting point. People at LAYA were worked up by the displacement of Adivasi communities and that is where the Polavaram dam became a point of collaboration. The numbers it would affect, how it would displace two thirds of an Adivasi community, its impact on their culture etc were the areas of a study we did together on the proposed Polavaram dam. This collaboration continued when I decided to launch the study on “Development-Induced Displacement in Andhra Pradesh 1951-1995” (DID) and later its second phase “1996-2020.” The first stage in particular was fruitful collaboration in a combination of highly professional research with an activist bent given to it. Data collection was well supervised, and the findings were tabulated and dealt with for a professional and activist commitment. Then came cooperation around Climate Change, from the first workshop organised by LAYA in 1996 and a training workshop at ISI, New Delhi in which the two organisations cooperated.

We built on that foundation once I moved to the Northeast in December 1999, to start the North Eastern Social Research Centre (NESRC), Guwahati, on 1st March 2000. The very first workshop NESRC organised was on Climate Change, in September 2000. A book emerging from the papers presented at it and edited jointly by Nafisa Goga D’Souza and me, came out of the press on the memorable day of 9/11, 2001. Collaboration continued at other workshops in Bangalore and elsewhere in the form of Indian Network for Ethics and Climate Change (INECC). Intrinsic to it was the national workshop on Climate Change organised at Guwahati in 2012 and the visit to some environmentally sensitive spots that was part of it. Then followed a collaborative study on DID 1996-2010. It was a long struggle to get reliable data, but we persevered with it, and it came out in the form of a book in 2019. It was released by a Government of Andhra Pradesh official. Most officials to whom copies were sent have recognised it as well researched and presented.

Briefly, it has been a highly satisfactory and creative collaboration that has borne fruit in the form of joint action on behalf of the tribal communities and material produced to support and help LAYA to become the LAYA Resource Centre.

MR. AUGUSTINE ULLATIL

Augustine Ullatil was the Field Director, Eastern/Southern Region of Community Aid Abroad (CAA)/ Oxfam Australia. He has been a fellow traveller of LAYA from its inception. He continues to bring Australian students on study tours to LAYA at Vanantharam.

My relationship with LAYA began in 1980 when I joined the Nirmala Niketan (NN) College of Social Work, Mumbai for the MSW program. Dominic and Nafisa were my teachers. I was very impressed with Dominic's approach to social work education and his ability to adapt social work theories to the then social issues. Dominic demonstrated an endearing and egalitarian attitude towards his students.

From NN, I returned to my NGO in Orissa and a year later joined Community Aid Abroad (Australia) as its Field Director. By that time, Dominic and Nafisa had resigned their teaching job in NN and moved to a remote Tribal village called Tungamadugula in the East Godavari District of AP; decided to live and work there. I still have a vivid memory of their thatched hut, the wooden fireplace, the flowing stream for water supply, the hurricane lamps for lighting and the nearby forest dotted with toddy palms etc. - a paradise for an urban visitor for a short stay. Some friends dismissed their rural venture as urban romanticism; few others compared it to the flickering glow of a pre-monsoon firefly. However, the truth is that the glow continued to shine for more than thirty plus years and their decision to take 'the road less traveled' did make all the difference. Salute to their firmness in a good cause - Saddagraha in Gandhian terms.

My role in CAA gave me ample opportunities to visit LAYA and to some extent even become a fellow traveller. My field visits and time spent at LAYA, especially with the Addateegala team, provided a unique opportunity to discuss, debate, reflect and plan appropriate projects initiatives not only in the Andhra context but also in the South/ Eastern India region where CAA was actively promoting new NGO initiatives. Dominic and Nafisa also played an active role in CAA's Program Advisory Group. I am pleased to acknowledge that their practice-based feedbacks as well as their networking experience/knowledge of the NGO sector helped to deepen CAA's own development understanding. LAYA practiced a decentralized, non-dogmatic and pluralistic approach to working with communities, blending professionalism with grassroot level activism.

LAYA's work in the field of Climate Change is an important achievement- focusing Climate Change from the perspective of the marginalized. Nafisa and the LAYA team did play a lead role in developing and sustaining the INECC network which brought such a perspective to the national and international Climate Change fora. Here again, I would like to mention that Nafisa's focused and holding firm attitude- her 'saddagraha' with Climate Change- made the difference. Much of my Climate Change orientation and learning came via my interactions with INECC.

The realities of Adivasi life soon became apparent. Among other illnesses, chronic upper respiratory diseases and poor nutrition dogged children's longer term health outcomes.

Study tours to overseas projects were an important CAA tool for development education and fundraising. The first study tour to LAYA was in 1987. All participants camped at the Addateegala centre with very minimum facilities. The LAYA team organized the event in such a way that the exposure was a good chance for community linking, learning and leisure. Back home, those volunteers became the good will ambassadors of LAYA and CAA-India. The program was a huge success and CAA study tour to LAYA became an annual event.

LAYA's Vanantharam Centre at Addateegala is an excellent place for linking, learning and leisure. The centre also has facility for Ayurveda treatments. Even after CAA's exit from India, I continue to take a number of study tours and Australian students' groups to Vanantharam to give them "an experience never before" as commented by many.
My Best Wishes to the LAYA TEAM.

MR. TONY LISLE

Tony Lisle is a public health and development policy specialist with 30 years of experience in designing, managing, and implementing public health care and

large-scale rural and community development programs in South and South-East Asia. He has served the United Nations for 21 years in various positions in UNAIDS, UNICEF and UNDP.

LAYA THEN AND THIRTY YEARS ON: REFLECTIONS FROM OXFAM AUSTRALIA'S SOUTH ASIA COORDINATOR IN 1987 AND 2019

A hectic schedule of project inception and mid-term partner reviews in 1987 had brought Augustine Ullatil (Oxfam's Director for India's South-East Program) and me (Oxfam's South Asia Program Coordinator) to a remote settlement, located deep within the verdant forests of the Eastern Ghats in East Godavari District of Andhra Pradesh. Augustine had begun to reshape Oxfam's social justice and development mandate to intensify focus on, among other communities, the often forgotten and marginalised Adivasi communities of East India. The strategy gestated a partnership with a nascent group of risk-taking development thinkers and practitioners and aimed toward building a network of Oxfam supported autonomous, people-centred development organisations, committed to addressing the neglected and chronic issues of poverty, land dispossession and the attendant poor health and education profiles of these communities.

The settlement of Addateegala and the modest adobe and rice-straw roof cottage we reached that early afternoon in October 1987, was the home of LAYA, one of these organisations, and its founders and visionaries, Dominic and Nafisa. They had both left tenured academic posts in their respective schools of social work at universities in Mumbai to embark on a journey, which would not only be a turning point for new approaches to community development in the area but would forever transform their lives and those of the communities they went to work with.

That afternoon, Augustine and I were introduced to the history, traditions and situation of the Konda, or Hill Reddis, one of the indigenous (Adivasi) peoples of Andhra Pradesh, distributed over a large part of the Eastern Ghats, with the majority concentrated in the Maredumilli and Addateegala community development blocks of East Godavari District.

As part of our orientation to LAYA, its community-centred development approach, Dominic, Nafisa and staff had arranged to take us to a remote

Konda Reddi village in the high mountains of the district. With no road access, this journey was going to demand two days of difficult hiking through forests and across perennial streams to reach our destination, Kannivara village.

Early the following morning, we set off, Dominic and Nafisa, accompanied by their little son, Siddharth, (who was fascinated by the community and the geography, and was enthusiastically imbibing his parent's passion for community development), LAYA staff (Koti), Augustine and myself. While the walking and coursing of streams was demanding, the sheer beauty of the thick-canopied forest we traversed, together with the unimaginable diversity of wildlife we observed in that fleeting moment in time, left a profound impression on me.

This habitat had been continuously protected by its Adivasi custodians; a precious gift freely given. My first encounter with the Konda Reddi Adivasis was on this remarkable trek. As we climbed along the steep and heavily wooded track, two young Konda Reddi men suddenly appeared as if from the shadows. Dressed in langotis, tucked into belts of twisted creeper, bows and prey in hand (to be deposited for the evening meal) and arrow cases slung across their chests, they greeted us with smiles and a few welcoming words.

We reached Kannivara mid-morning and were warmly welcomed by the community. Adobe and thatch roof houses, thresholds decorated with traditional symbols and patterns, were perched precariously on the mountain top, a myriad of valleys and streams dancing with each other in the distance. The afternoon breeze brought the laughter of young Konda Reddi, tending podu cultivation on the nearby slopes.

However, the realities of Adivasi life soon became apparent. Among other illnesses, chronic upper respiratory diseases, and poor nutrition (including iron deficiency) dogged children's longer term health outcomes. Primary education was a distant aspiration for all but a few lucky ones. Village land was being encroached and plundered for valuable forest produce by outside forces for which the Konda Reddi were ill prepared to confront. The community did not have approaches or forums to articulate their concerns and wishes, address their grievances or to shape and oversight government programs designed to address Adivasi development aspirations. The challenges for LAYA were clear, but stark in 1987.

We set off from the village on our return to Addateegala in the early evening, with an inevitable camping stop on the way; Dominic and Augustine used the dappled dusk to put the wind of fear into me, telling me of the rumours (investigated by, and uncorroborated by the District Collector) of an unfortunate itinerant trader in pots and pans, sacrificed to the mother spirit of these forests eighteen months previously!

I remembered little of our arrival to Peddavalasa village in that full moon evening, no doubt distracted by the potential of a sacrifice to the local forest spirits! The villagers provided food and hessian gunny bags were laid out on the spacious mud verandas of a couple of huts for us to sleep on. They set a large blazing fire nearby, to take the bite out of the early winter cold. As we slept, exhausted from the day's exertions, the fire eventually died to embers. A mangy, grandfatherly dog decided to curl up next to me on the gunny bag to keep warm; I was too tired to notice. He or she, no doubt thankful for the warmth, abruptly woke me with a stretch and a yawn in the crisp cold of the early morning and ambled off down the hill to check on breakfast possibilities. And on we walked to Addateegala.

Thirty years later, in January 2019, at the invitation of Dominic, Nafisa, Siddharth and the LAYA team (including Koti) Augustine and I returned to Addateegala and, this time, travelled by jeep on an all-weather road, through the mountains, to Kannivara village.

Little could we have realised that the strategic support provided by Oxfam Australia all those years ago would seed many critical community initiatives. For a start, I was stunned at the extent to which the natural forest in the Eastern Ghats had been preserved by the leadership, perseverance and efforts of the Konda Reddi, having already witnessed the rapid despoliation of forests in other parts of India, and the consequent alienation and impoverishment of local inhabitants.

LAYA's decades-long effort to establish, nurture and sustain independent local community governance bodies, provided the vital tool these Adivasi communities in the Eastern Ghats required to put their lasting and indelible mark on forest and other legislation that protects the forest and land rights of the Adivasi people from exploitation and alienation. This alone is a remarkable achievement. These community bodies have played a critical role in nourishing and

consolidating Adivasi leadership and decision-making in all aspects of local development.

LAYA continues to be a resource for communities. The organisation continues to provide technical and management ideas to reinvigorate and sustain herbal-based health care and its well-trained Adivasi primary health care provider network, in so doing, harnessing hundreds of years of Adivasi forest herb knowledge. Sustainable natural resource management practices (local water filter and clean fuel cooking technologies, for example) are front and centre work for all these communities.

The 2021 United Nations Climate Change Conference, to be held in Glasgow in November, will be a pivotal moment for the World. India's Adivasi communities will be heard and play a part in decision-making processes, thanks to the assiduous work of LAYA to forge alliances across India, research the evidence for the impacts of Climate Change on local communities, and importantly, provide active and meaningful platforms for the concerns, ideas and actions of the Adivasi people.

Little did Augustine and I know that this program inception visit to Addateegala during that winter in 1987 would assist, in small measure, to sow a seed which has borne such a remarkable achievement by LAYA, surmounting considerable challenges over the years. LAYA remains an outstanding example of the very best that community development, at its foundations, is about.

DR. BENUDHAR SUTAR

Benudhar Sutar is a graduate in Civil Engineering, Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Chennai, and has a doctorate in Renewable Energy. He has been associated with LAYA as a technical consultant and facilitator of photo voltaic systems within our office spaces. He is a well-wisher and has accompanied LAYA in many of its grassroots initiatives.

SHARING MY ENGAGEMENT WITH LAYA

In 1999, I decided to leave my corporate job and joined with IRDWSI to work as Decentralize Energy Options (DEO) Coordinator. It was during those days, I got the chance to attend the INECC meetings and met with Nafisa, Dominic and LAYA team and came to know about LAYA's work. While I was in IRDWSI, I got a chance to be part of an Institutional

training on Micro-Hydro concept and design as a resource person. After I left IRDWSI, I got my first engagement with LAYA in 2009 as a technical expert to conduct the Micro-Hydro feasibility study in Marridatu village of Paderu Mandal. Later the plan was shifted to do the feasibility study at Bonjangi and subsequently I became part of the LAYA team to establish the Bonjangi micro-hydro power project. Later on, I led LAYA team to do further feasibility studies for micro-hydros in Dumpavalsa, Munungalpudi and many more. During those days, I was visiting LAYA frequently. Hence, I suggested to install the first ever solar system for Vanantharam and accordingly I made the design. Later on I was instrumental to install the first solar power system for Vanantharam building, when the solar concept was new to the area. Further I was part of the LAYA team to establish a Pico-hydro project in a village called Munungalpudi. I was also instrumental to bring Hydrological Ram-pump technology to LAYA field area to address the water supply issues in the remote villages, which is taken up by LAYA team alter on in large scale with further innovation into it. During the process I was part of the technical capacity building program of LAYA team in the field of Renewable Energy field. Since that as a socio-techno professional, I become part of the LAYA family.

Nafisa introduced me to critical pedagogy, which I realise has guided me in my growth as a development professional

I work with many NGOs across India but working with LAYA is a completely different experience. LAYA is the one and only organization that gives space to the subject matter expertise and respects professionalism in any circumstance. Team spirit in LAYA is immense and it gives the scope to learn at every step. My each and every involvement with LAYA has been a learning process because of which I enjoy my work with LAYA till today.

MS. ANITA BORKAR

Anita Borkar is a Development Professional and an Adult Educator. Co-Founder, Abhivyakti, Nasik, Maharashtra, and Regional Coordinator of the Training for Transformation Program of Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education (ASPBAE) since 2009.

I was first introduced to Nafisa and Dominic in 1981-1984 as the faculty members at the College of Social Work, Nirmala Niketan, where I was

enrolled for my undergraduate studies in Social Work. Nafisa was my teacher for the elective Course on Non-formal Education. She not only introduced me to this novel field of education but also to the democratic way of learning. My most indelible memory of those classes were Nafisa introducing the topic in the classroom and taking all of us to the college library to browse through the shelves of books on the topic and invite us to pick up any book that fancied our interest. The agreement was – all of us, including Nafisa, had to read our book of choice and make a brief presentation on it in the next class. The discussion that followed these presentations were so insightful and engaging with Nafisa facilitating and synthesising the key points. Incidentally, this was an elective Course hence the groups size was only five, including Nafisa herself. Never had I felt so equal, respected, and responsible for my own learning! It was also my introduction to critical pedagogy, which I realise has guided me in my growth as a development professional and an adult educator.

In the same period, Dominic was my Supervisor in the rural placement – Van Niketan, Murbad, which I had opted for my year-long field work. My secure middle-class upbringing and conservative outlook to life in that age, was challenged day in and day out through that exposure and, the very interesting and intriguing discussions (often leading to confusion) that we as students had with Dominic. Reflecting on that experience, I realise that it was a coming of age, a transformative experience for me. Dominic's inputs and interactive ways enabled me to understand and deconstruct myself and pushed me to get in touch with my core being. Often, in later years, I have introduced Dominic as my teacher in the College of Social Work, from whom I did not learn anything related to social work but learned so much about myself and life. Being with Dominic was then and, always a philosophical experience for me.

In those years, it was a delight to meet Siddharth, who was a toddler then. On days that he accompanied his parents to the college, he used to get surrounded by us, students who loved to indulge him. When asked why he did not go to school today, with a sombre expression, he used to look at the ceiling as if in grave thought and slowly respond – “Because”. No matter, how many times one asked him a ‘why’ question, the invariable answer was “Because”, provided in the same manner!

The year, I graduated from College of Social Work, we learned that Nafisa and Dominic had moved to Andhra Pradesh, and later Dominic

to New Delhi to join IGSSS. Those were the times, where we survived without electronic and social media and hence for a long period of time, I lost direct contact with Dominic and Nafisa. However, I recollect a chance meeting with Dominic in New Delhi in the IGSSS office to introduce our young friend for a fellowship. A few years later, Abhivyakti, the organisation that I had co-founded became a member of the SMILE (Anubhav Shiksha) network and brought opportunities to meet with Dominic, at the network meetings. The evaluation of the Resource and Support Centre for Development (RSCD) network, of which Abhivyakti was a member, brought Dominic to Nasik and it was a treat to interact with him and learn about LAYA and its work from him. Abhivyakti organised a Learning Journey to Visakhapatnam to visit LAYA and its projects and peer organisations in and around Visakhapatnam. It was an enriching experience for all of us in Abhivyakti - exchanging ideas, interacting with LAYA colleagues, visiting the innovative projects of LAYA. We were also fascinated to learn about Siddharth's home-schooling and somewhere it stayed with me and gave me the strength to negotiate with our daughter to walk out of school.

The other opportunity to work with Dominic was when both, Dominic and I, served on the Governing Board and teamed with other members to facilitate the YUVA leadership transition process. Those were interesting times with rich collective learnings as it was a novel experience of the founder transiting from his leadership and holding and establishing the new organisational leadership. I admired the wisdom of Dominic and other Board members as they navigated this process and held the organisation together through the fragile period.

Abhivyakti and LAYA reconnected again, when a new initiative - Earthcare Designs, was launched by Abhivyakti. LAYA offered the space and resources for Earthcare Designs to experiment and prototype their eco-friendly design technologies - cashew processing machine, oil extracting among others. Those were the times when I visited Vanantharam in Adateegala often and was able to learn of LAYA's initiatives on herbal medicines, adult literacy, micro-hydel project, INECC, etc. It was so inspiring to meet Nafisa after decades and learn her trajectory from academics to activism. Long discussions on practically everything under the sun with Nafisa and Dominic and be-friending the youthful Siddharth, Karuna and

LAYA staff colleagues – Bulliyya and Koteswar, were the added attractions in these trips.

The year 2009 was a new phase which lasted for a decade when I got immense opportunities to work with Dominic and LAYA through ASPBAE, the regional network, where Dominic was the Executive Council member representing South Asia and I was the staff in my role as the Regional Coordinator of the Training for Transformation Program of ASPBAE. Dominic's inputs in the governance of ASPBAE were rich and insightful. LAYA's participation in ASPBAE's programmes contributed to ASPBAE's work in strategising for Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) at the regional level, generating the quality benchmarks on indigenous people's education and several milestone capacity programs on regional leadership in adult education and lifelong learning, including the Regional Facilitation Skills training and the annual Basic Leadership Development Course (BLDC) where Dominic was its Course Director during his tenure. Colleagues from LAYA participated and continue to participate in programmes organised by ASPBAE, bringing perspectives and practices in lifelong learning.

For me personally, it has been a remarkable journey with Nafisa, Dominic and LAYA, over the decades, starting from the 80's in Bombay, and over the years, Abhivyakti and LAYA evolving as peer organisations in the development sector. The teacher-student relationship organically evolved into a sustained mentorship, grounded in lifelong friendship!

