

'A Better World is Possible'
Report on the Vikalp Sangam at Madurai
14th to 17th February 2015



The second Vikalp Sangam was co-organized by restore, ACCORD, Ritambhara, Ekta Parishad, Covenant Centre for Development (CCD) along with Kalpavriksh, at CESC (Centre for Socio-Cultural Interaction) near Madurai, Tamil Nadu from 14th to 17th February 2015.

Vikalp Sangam or the Confluence on Alternatives is a process which attempts to move beyond critiquing the present day disruptive and exploitative systems, and focuses on what are the Alternatives which can challenge such a system. This process thus involves coming together of various initiatives, organizations and concerned individuals. These Sangams are organized by a number of organizations constituting the Vikalp Sangam core group to celebrate, share and learn from each other's inspiring work and also to collaborate across domains and different regions to move towards a holistic vision of the Alternatives.

The Vikalp Sangam at Madurai had a wide participation of initiatives from Tamil Nadu from different sectors- groups working on alternative economic models, anti- corruption movement, gender issues, waste management, disability issues, sustainable agriculture, tribal rights, etc. The Sangam was planned in such a way that it provided space to present and explore new ideas and possibilities, and to have greater time for one-to-one interaction. The semi-structured format of the Sangam evolved throughout the three days at the Sangam. Each day a small group of main organizers explored what was working and what was not, learning from the experience that day and preparing the schedule for the next day accordingly. This helped in providing a more dynamic rhythm to the Sangam.

Although, the flavor and design of this second Sangam was different from that of the first Sangam organized in Timbaktu, Andhra Pradesh, what remained perfectly consistent in the two Sangams was the appetizing food. Every meal prepared by CЕСSI staff had a variety of mouth-watering traditional dishes (each meal had at least one dish prepared from some variety of *millet*), along with buttermilk and some delicious fresh fruits and salad to go along with the meal. Fresh juicy Pineapples were one of the hits along with the *Dal Payasum*, a traditional dessert.



(The ever smiling faces of the CЕСSI staff preparing meals for participants)

An exhibition on alternative initiatives was also on display. The exhibition was thematically organized with the first panel introducing the idea of alternatives and the exhibition itself, and the subsequent panels focusing on initiatives on livelihoods, food and agriculture, women’s empowerment, environment and ecology, and finally urban initiatives. Apart from this, the exhibition held on the second day of the Sangam saw many organizations participating and setting up their stalls with books, posters, bags, shirts, some organic products and other such materials; providing a better taste of what various groups were doing, in addition to the presentations given by them about their work.

One joint creative activity slot was specially organized as the Art Session, which got everyone to explore and bring out some creativity in the Sangam through dance, music, theatre, painting and clay modeling. This was thoroughly enjoyed by all.



(Clay modeling and paintings created by participants depicting the Vikalp Sangam process)

The Sangam began with great enthusiasm, with introductions taking place in a way which made everyone get into the feel of what the three days of Sangam would be like, which was nothing less than a treat to the mind, body and soul. The introductions were followed by a tribal dance taught to the rest by the group from ACCORD. Stan, one of the anchors, led the beginning in such a way that it became a great ice-breaker and hence Sangam started with a Bang!



(Glimpses of merriment at the Sangam)

The general structuring of the Sangam was such that the group/individual sharing of experiences took place around the 5 pillars of the Alternatives Framework note, thus combining both practical experiences and their conceptual implications/connections. The five pillars of the Alternatives' framework which are- Ecological Sustainability, Social Well-being and Justice, Cultural Diversity and Knowledge Democracy, Economic Democracy, and Direct and Delegated Democracy served as the bases for holding discussions in different sessions. Each pillar was pegged by someone with expertise in the area who laid out the larger picture of what that pillar is about. After this the participants working on similar issues were encouraged to hold smaller parallel discussions.

Five Pillars

Ecological Sustainability by Alex: Beginning with the Environment and Ecology, Alex spoke about the integrity of life which is getting lost. He stated that in the last 40 years we have seen the loss of over half of animal life. This damage and destruction is caused more by the rich and affluent, who have claimed control over the natural resources. Working on waste in Ladakh, he shared, "the rich would comment on how others have no civic sense." Making an analogy with the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, he pointed out how the structural damage is completely over looked. The big industries/companies go scot free from the environmental destruction they cause while some sweeping-under-the carpet kind of measures take place in the name of environment protection. So if movements like Swachh Bharat are superficial, then the question which comes up is- how to eliminate waste? A need for moving from cleanliness to zero waste was strongly communicated in his talk, while realizing that this would not be an easy task. This was put forward in the context of the globalized world that we live in which has become an institute for violence and irresponsibility. Emphasizing on the need to live without hindering the integrity of life of others he left the audience with the question, "Can we consume and produce without infringing upon others' lives?"

Social Well-being and Justice by Gabriel: Being born at the end of World War 2, Gabriel described those years as a period of famine and disturbance. The world, from that period of destitution, within one or two decades moved towards sudden abundance and increased consumerism. There was a sudden shift to excesses through uncontrolled exploitation of resources. The only good thing that came out of it was that the ecological ramifications of such massive exploitations also shook people out of their slumber and made them, at least to some extent, more conscious about the earth and our environment. The 'Club of Rome' report which came out in 1971 fostered a sensitive understanding about ecology and ecological consciousness. She opined that we have reached a very interesting moment in history where we have begun to admit that there are ecological issues which are threatening the existence of the whole of the earth. People have now started to appreciate the fact that resources are in fact limited and an unrestricted exploitation and polluting of the environment would lead to our doom. Although in the current global capitalistic system, dealing with pollution, the disparities between the rich and the poor would be paradoxical to this system. If the mode of production doesn't change then it will be disastrous for ecology. Earlier these things weren't even considered, but now it is being admitted. Lastly,

announcing that on that very same day 1 Billion Rising campaign against violence against women was taking place, she urged the need for more people to rise for social justice.

Cultural Diversity and Knowledge Democracy by Manish: Explaining what the term 'culture' implies, Manish Jain from Swaraj University highlighted how in our current global consumerist culture, we are at civil war with culture itself. The diversity and local flavors of culture are being overshadowed by a monolith global culture which only gives an illusion of us having choices, while it strongly homogenizes. He also pointed out that Culture and Agriculture are closely related, and that it is not possible to talk about biodiversity without talking about cultural diversity as each culture is so closely related to biodiversity.

The modern nation states also play a hand in diminishing the richness of diverse cultures by infusing a dominant nationalist identity, superseding cultural identities, and also dictating who is our friend and who is our enemy. He pointed out a few majorly problematic aspects about this global culture such as the increasing need for ownership, the concept of being 'educated' as having more knowledge, the idea of digitalizing knowledge – illusion that all the knowledge can be captured on an internet search engine, and the colonization of our minds.

Speaking about the movements countering this global consumerist culture he gave the example of 'Dark is Beautiful' campaign which is challenging the cultural construct that defines beauty in a stereotypical way. It is a counter culture aiming to reclaim the notion of beauty. The consumerist culture has popularized such conceptions and it then feeds on these constructs to encourage consumption of products, thus fostering the capitalist markets.

The biggest challenge is the modern knowledge system. And the question for all working on alternatives is to find ways for a dialogue between the modern and the traditional knowledge systems.

Economic Democracy by Stan: Stan speaking about economy explained how earlier economy was the system by which needs of the people in a community were met. However over the years this purpose of economy has changed, initially to the generation of wealth, and now to accumulation of wealth. The level of hoarding of wealth has become exasperatingly high. Quoting the Institute Director of International Monetary Fund- Chirstine Lagarde, he stated that a small number of 85 people control the wealth of more than half of the world's forest population, i.e. the wealth of 3.5 billion people. With this hard hitting fact he highlighted the prevailing economic inequality in our society. And this wealth is generated through the destruction of our ecological system; it is dependent upon fossil fuel, mineral wealth, etc. This results in political inequality as well.

To find alternatives to this kind of exploitative economy what is required is to look at the purpose of the economy. The purpose of economy cannot be income generation, since it feeds into a similar system. Instead of looking at livelihoods and poverty alleviation, we need to radically look for alternative systems. Indicators of economic progress, which are not GDP and growth rate but such as well-being, etc. which are more meaningful. He then spoke about the adivasi society as an alternative. The economy in adivasi societies is based on collectives and social relationships of sharing and caring and so on. The purpose is well being of the community and not accumulation of wealth.

Another important point he made was about interconnectedness. It is not possible to tackle one aspect of the society without tackling all the other aspects. Thus apart from finding alternatives, it becomes essential to make existing alternatives more interconnected with other aspects.

Direct and Delegated Democracy by Ashish: In this session Ashish spoke about the concept of Participative democracy. What Democracy has come to mean is simply about electing people and then those people in power have control over us; whereas true participative democracy should involve people being part of decision making on a day to day basis in their own spheres/communities. Power of decision making needs to be held by the smallest unit. Building on that, one will have to have larger institutions of decision making. These larger institutions or representative bodies would have to be accountable to the grass roots direct democratic bodies. The power needs to emanate from the grass roots and actually be able to control what is happening in the representative bodies through mechanism of transparency, accountability and reporting back. The two possible ways of reaching such a system of more than just democratic system was elucidated as: one, through political parties, that you form a political party or you influence a political party and they gain their power and you get your mandate through them; the other being non-party political movement. An example of non-party political movement that he gave was Right to Information Act which came out of a local struggle and became a non-party political process.

Presentation on Alternatives

Ashish Kothari's presentation on Alternatives had the following key points-

1. Direct or radical democracy means every person and community having the power/right, capacity and opportunity/forum to be part of decision-making that affects their lives; practiced at local villages and urban neighbourhood levels, and at the level of 'communities of interest' cutting across geographic boundaries, this needs to be the base of representative democracy.
2. At larger levels, representative democracy has to be accountable towards the units of direct democracy, through mechanisms like reporting back, right to recall, etc.
3. Political decision-making needs to be transformed, over time, from the current political boundaries to boundaries that make ecological and cultural sense; eco-regional or bio-cultural units of decision-making, e.g. a small river basin, or settlements using a contiguous patch of forest. This then also means questioning nation-state boundaries (e.g. thinking of the whole of Sundarbans as being one decision-making unit, rather than split into two by India and Bangladesh)
4. Forums for direct and representative democracy could be both political parties, and non-party political forums, the latter being as important as the former in formal and informal forums.
5. Even while struggling for fundamental transformation towards radical/direct democracy, one needs to continue fighting for greater space within the current system, e.g. RTI

Parallel Sessions

Following are some of the parallel discussion which took place, subsequent to the presentations on the five pillars of the Framework Note.

- Sustainability and Health by Dr. Unni: In the session on Sustainability and health, questions such as, 'taking charge of our health', significance of meal timings, processed food and nutrition were discussed. In this context, initiatives on building awareness on diverse food-health belief systems and traditional knowledge practices were considered important. In reversing the present trends, role of movements such as School Canteen program, Women's Health movement, Traditional Healers' Network, People's Health in your hands movement, Millet Movement, etc. was also discussed. Diet choices which are good for the health of both the person and the planet are present, and need to be promoted.
- Urban Diversity by T.D. Babu: The session on Urban Diversity was focused on ways to make cities more environment friendly and a better place to live in through planting trees. One of the ideas flagged was creating stronger linkages between the rural and the urban. This would allow the urban community to support the rural needs and the rural could in turn take some responsibility in urban greening by providing their knowledge in this field. Another point which came up was creating awareness about environment and encouraging people, especially children, to grow more trees and understand nature. Lastly, emphasizing the economic value of trees will lead to eco-restoration in rapidly expanding urban areas.
In discussions with the main group, it was pointed out that rural-urban linkages will need a larger re-working since in the present system the dependence is more parasitic than symbiotic. Also a concern was raised about putting 'economic' value on trees.
- Politics of Shame 'Shame and Dignity' by Shakti :The context of this discussion, laid out by Shakti and Sankari, was to discuss how shame is used as a tool by the society for controlling and regulating, by playing on people's vulnerability. Who is shamed by society? When? What are the hierarchies at play? Can shame be redistributed?
Participants shared their personal experiences and opinions on this. One view was regarding the beginning at an individual level and exploring one's own vulnerability through honest communication and a willingness to laugh at self by honestly exposing.
In this regard, questions on how and whether individual acts can lead to political transformation were raised. Another person shared her knowledge about groups (like White noise in Bangalore) which try to reverse power structures by shaming the subjugating party. This opened up discussion on how systematic shaming may be alienating and how love, generosity, healing and forgiveness may have a larger role to play. The logic being that reversing entrenched cultural practices cannot happen how "they do it to us" but how "we do it to them". Ideas such as the forgiveness project and love letters to one's deepest darkest self were mentioned. This led to questions on there still being a need for resistance (especially in cases of violence and threat to personal safety).

- Waste Management by Bablu Mahendra & C. Srinivasan: The session on E Waste management had a discussion on how to create or motivate the informal sector to follow the formal sector and manage the E Waste according to the laws laid by the Pollution Control Board (Tamil Nadu). And also, how this could be done in an inclusive manner with collective benefits reaching the social sector. There was a presentation made by C. Srinivasan from Indian Green Service, on how solid waste management is carried out at local and national level.

The ways to manage waste as discussed were: Think before you throw; Begin spreading awareness from home, institution, office, etc. ; Organize events with Civil Society Organizations and networks and focused time needs to be given to effective segregation in different areas. Easy and simple steps can be applied to solve the problem in handling the solid waste management through completely integrated model.
- Arts in Society by Sangeetha Shivakumar: A discussion on arts in society was led by Sangeetha which focused on bringing arts to a larger section of people. In the context of the present commodification and inaccessibility of art through artificial constructions and boundaries, participants were made to think about the unifying force of art. The idea of access and inclusion would lead to redefining classical and folk music and dance. As an attempt in this direction, a concert was organized at Kuppam, which is a fisher folk village. The need to make art more inclusive and participatory was strongly communicated by the group. Art as a means can be used for bringing about change in the society and for other purposes as well, instead of it being categorized mainly as a thing of beauty and pleasure, that too for the elites. Art should bring people together, cut across boundaries and connect to people in their daily lives. Concern was also expressed regarding many art forms getting obsolete in the absence of practitioners who could take forward the respective art form. Thus communities are losing out certain skills relating to their traditions and culture.



(One of the groups absorbed in discussions during the Parallel Session)

- Sociocracy by Shammi and Radhika: This was a highly interactive session on sociocracy where the idea was demonstrated through an exercise. In this exercise, a proposal was made and every

person, in their turn, was asked for their consensus. An objection was raised about the extent of rights of intervention that a person who joins the group in the middle of conversation will have. This led to multiple reformulations of the proposal, and multiple objections, so that it took a very long time to reach a proposal that satisfied everyone. With this exercise, the idea of sociocracy was introduced as a system of effective, equivalent and participative decision-making. The proposal is then something that everybody agrees to, and it is understood that it may not be how the proponent would have ideally conceived it, but is 'good for now'. There is also the concept of double-linking where groups are organized as circles, with representatives at different levels and regular feedback.

- **Alternative Politics in Tamil Nadu by Vijay:** This group session, highly charged up with the vigor to bring in well-meaning alternative politics in Tamil Nadu, was focused on how to open up the political space of the state so as to make it more inclusive and energetic. The youth was seen as an important section which needs to be mobilized in a positive direction for such a change to take shape. While the current political parties were criticized for working for just a small section of the society and involved in vote bank politics, the current political scenario in the state was discredited for not providing any space to independent candidates. Taking inspiration from the Aam Admi Party, with regard to its performance before the Delhi elections, a need to get directly involved and contest elections rather than working with the government from outside was felt. For this a few steps that were discussed, such as concrete work at the ground should get started; people doing good work need to be identified and given space for contesting elections; involving youngsters and NGOs together; and to have a bottom up approach. Some very constructive ideas such as engaging with the youth & holding workshops for them on how to evaluate candidates, and finding creative ways for disseminating news and information were also suggested. Lastly, the need for people to work together, go beyond petty ego issues and for sharing responsibilities without looking for individual benefits was strongly reiterated.
- **Elango and Stan on Alternative economics:** Speaking about his experiments with local economies, Elango explained that our villages are in poverty as most of the wealth generated doesn't flow back into the villages. Thus emphasizing the need to bring this wealth back. In his village Kuthambakkam, the village produces a few things, and tries to sell them, typically in Chennai (which is 40 km away). Most of the things they sell are "unfinished products", such as harvested crops, unpasteurized milk, nuts for oil, etc. They send these off to someplace else, like Ambattur, to be processed, packaged, and transported back to them. Typically, there is a 100% markup in price in that process. Elango stressed on the fact that we think of ourselves as consumers only of finished goods, but there is no reason why we cannot be buyers of the unfinished goods as well as the producers who make the finished goods. In the same move, you can eliminate all the middleman costs, and also find employment through new economic activity. From this there is self-reliance, a sense of pride and independence.

- Direct Democracy and Radical Ecological Democracy by Ashish and Stan: The discussion initially focused on the Forest Rights Act, how it came about and how it has helped in empowering adivasi groups. An example of land rights movement of 1988 was given, where an Adivasi Sangam was started by the Panniyar adivasi group. The forest department stopped them from doing anything in the forest and assuming they had no rights within the forest, they obeyed the government. In 2006, the Forest Rights Act had given a lot of recognition to these groups. It was suggested that a gram sabha be created by the Adivasis. They formed the Tribal Gram Sabhas in different villages (31 of them) recognized by the local panchayats. Under this right, they can enter the forest to collect honey, medicinal herbs and so on. The FRA grants legal recognition to the rights of traditional forest dwelling communities and makes a beginning towards giving communities and the public a voice in forest and wildlife conservation. There are three types of rights within FRAs; Individual Rights, Community Rights and lastly Conservation Rights or Habitat Rights. The Conservation Rights allows the adivasis to decide which part of the forest they would manage, protect or conserve. The representation of such minority groups in mainstream political system has been negligible. And a shift of power to these gram sabhas is observed. And due to this, the relationship with the forest department has also changed drastically. There is now an understanding that these adivasis would not harm the forests. Even officials who trouble them occasionally are handled successfully through Gram Sabhas. Initially, the claims within Tiger Reserves were not accepted but now claims within these reserves are also accepted. In the last 3-4 years, where villages have obtained community land rights, they are engaging in substantial healthy land management and utilization. In a number of villages, these laws have been used to stop or resist destructive ecological activities happening within villages. Other models through which Direct Democracy is being practiced in India highlighted during the session were- the communitized management of health, education, power and roads in Nagaland by the village councils; in Nagaland the village councils even have legislative power and can pass laws; Maharashtra is experimenting with communitization of health; the decentralized planning process in Kerala; decentralized water harvesting in Maharashtra, etc. Through these models of governance, these areas have experienced a progress in performance. The decentralization process in Maharashtra also aided reverse migration in some of the villages due to drastic improvement in economy and eradication of caste inequalities in some areas.

Apart from the group discussions, presentations on the 5 pillars and a movie screening by Naresh Giangrande called 'Transition Towns', some other very interesting sessions took place during the Sangam.

Presentation on Disability and perceptions associated with it

Rajiv Rajan's presentation on disability led everyone to question the perceptions/notions attached with it and deconstruct the idea of - What we think is normal? What does being independent mean? What is disability? In a very simple yet effective way, he asked for 4 people from the audience to come and stand in the centre, then asking the audience questions like, "Do they look alike? Do they act in a similar way?" he made his point that we are all different. Then why are disabled people thought to be 'abnormal' if they seem to be different! Every human is dependent on others for food, clothes, and other such basic things, then why are disabled people expected to be more independent, when so called "normal" people are also not entirely independent. Along with questioning such notions, he also questioned the terminology associated with disabled people such as the use of the term 'handicapped'. He explained that the term originated during the First World War and was used to refer to those people who could not get involved in the war due to physically being unfit. For a living, those people were left to beg with a cap-in-hand, and this is how the word originated. It was a humbling experience for all those who attended the session and left everyone to reflect on these questions that he had put forth.

Collaborations

There was a session dedicated to collaborations in a fish bowl format, wherein any participant who wanted to ask for or was offering collaboration came in the centre. After putting forth their proposal, all those interested in collaborating would join him/her forming a small circle and would then discuss how they could collaborate, with all others in the bigger outer circle listening to them. The session was named 'Bringing Gifts' and was truly performed in the spirit of warmth and compassion being exchanged.

In this session, Shammi and Radhika offered to help in mediation, facilitation and resolution in decision making process to any organization struggling with conflicts within. Rajiv offered to provide support to people working on disability by providing training for accessibility audit and laws related to accessibility. Piyush, who has been documenting how local media is reporting sexual offences against small kids asked for others to report back to him with newspaper cuttings relating to the same and also offered to provide legal training- filing Public Interest Litigations, etc . Stan from Just Change asked if anyone would like to become investors in their organization or join them as producers. He also offered to provide training, or support any group in Business Management, to those who need it. In Stan's circle there were offerings to provide e-commerce platform, investments, buying of products from Just Change, documentation of the work the org. is doing and spreading awareness about it. Dr. Regi offered to send doctors from his organization- Tribal Health Initiative, for 2-3 days to provide medical training and also help in creating awareness. Apart from these there were some other productive offerings to contribute and support each other through funds, knowledge, physical work, ideas, information and training.



(An ongoing process of offering and receiving collaboration)

Feedback

The feedback session was as interesting as rest of the Sangam. The comments that came in were a mix of personal reflections, constructive criticism, appreciation of the way Sangam was organized and some warm notes of thanks to the organizers. Following are some of the feedbacks in participants' own words:

"Got to meet a lot of people and learn a lot more, such as about sexuality and forests right. A new way of looking at what I do";

"Looking forward to working on Alternative Politics. Can we have the next Sangam in a more accessible place?" (The space was felt to be unsafe for disabled people);

"Should have some thematic sangams";

"It was a celebration of diversity, got to learn new things like- participative capital, non-violent communication and non-participation as important strategies";

"We were able to laugh amidst pain"; "Having youngsters was inspiring";

"Waiting for an outcome from these Sangams. It has to be action oriented";

"Feel recharged. Got to hear a lot of stories of hope in the Sangam";

"Blown away by the amount of commitment and purpose everyone present here has";

"The evolving process of the Sangam each day was impressive";

"The un-conference structure and down time helped, should have more non-session time";

"Truly democratic as there was respect for others views";

"Liked the energizers, translations made the process inclusive";

"Don't see us getting into depths when we split into smaller groups. No new understanding gets formed in this manner";

"Need more political/people's movements to participate";

"There should be thematic sangams on Food and Learning/Education".

The third day ended with Thank- you notes to the co-hosts, to the staff at CESC who had a huge hand in the smooth running of the Sangam, to Kannan for very patiently doing translations in Tamil during the discussions and finally to the participants who had led the Sangam to be as vibrant as it was. Warm good-byes were exchanged with those who were to leave by the end of the day. And the rest looked forward to next day which was to be the last day at the Sangam.



(A group photo of all the participants at the Sangam)

The last day was kept to consolidate the discussions and plan future action. The note on a conceptual framework for an alternative vision was further evolved on this day through discussions and constructive suggestions. Along with this, a very healthy discussion took place with the enthusiastic participants from Tamil Nadu regarding how to continue the process of Vikalp Sangam within Tamil Nadu.

Follow Up Actions

The follow ups as discussed on the last day were:

- Preparation of List of Participants
- Preparation of Organizational Profiles and stories for Vikalp Sangam website
- Video documentation, Report and Photographs of the Sangam
- Releasing a Press Note
- Following the collaborations that were initiated during the Sangam
- Starting a Tamil Nadu Vikalp Sangam elist
- A follow up meeting at the Tamil Nadu Level
- There was a decision by the regional groups to take this process forward by organizing further local and thematic Sangams within Tamil Nadu.

With these final discussions summing up and the announcement of the next regional Vikalp Sangam to be organized in Ladakh in July 2015, the Madurai Sangam reached a meaningful and conclusive end, leaving all with more hope and purposefulness to work together towards an Alternative world.

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Annexure

Organizational Profiles

- Ekta Parishad: Ekta Parishad is a people's movement dedicated to the principles of non-violent action, aiming at social and land reform in India; deeply convinced that the grassroots, i.e. the village, is the perfect space in which to plant the seeds of unity that will create positive changes at the social, political and economic levels. Ekta Parishad's activists work towards building community-based governance (gram swaraj), local self-reliance (gram swawlamban) and responsible government (jawabdeh sarkar) with the aim to see India's poorest people gain control over livelihood resources, especially land, water and forest.
- The Covenant Centre for Development: The Covenant Centre for Development (CCD) is a Madurai-originated NGO, active primarily in the drought prone areas of Tamil Nadu state in the south & 4 central Indian states (M. P., Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh and Orissa). It promotes medicinal plants and agriculture based sustainable livelihoods for poverty alleviation in the drylands and forest areas, for the women, the landless and the small farmers, including the backward/ scheduled castes/ tribes. CCD aims to build community institutions and enterprises for long term sustainability using local resources and traditional skills (LRTS) aided by the modern technology.
- ACCORD: Action for Community Organisation, Rehabilitation and Development (ACCORD) is an organization working to help the adivasi community of the Gudalur Valley in the Nilgiris district of Tamil Nadu to take control of their own lives. ACCORD focuses on human rights, health, education, housing and culture of the adivasis living in the region. Their mission is to redesign the systems necessary for that, to help the adivasi community cope with the onslaught of modernity on their way of life and to prepare them to emerge from their forest retreats with their heads held high. Proud of their culture and their people. ACCORD began in activist mode to help adivasis organize themselves in order to assert their rights - especially land rights. Today ACCORD functions primarily as a Resource Centre providing Training and expertise and mobilizing the required resources for the adivasi activists and sangams. It plays a crucial role in providing the managerial, technical knowledge required for the village sangams and staff to manage the different programmes and political activities on their own.
- reStore: It is an Organic Store which has been functioning for the past six years. Amidst the mainstream ventures they wanted to do something new and alternative which also made urban people interested. So they started selling traditional food, cotton clothes, and varieties of traditional rice. Their venture posed a challenge to the dominant mainstream paradigm. They do not have the certificate for the organic food and the entire endeavour is based on the trust amongst the volunteers, producers and customers.

- **Tribal Health Initiative:** Tribal Health Initiative was started in 1992 by Dr. Regi George and Dr. Lalitha Regi. The organization is working to improve the lives of the tribal communities living in the Sittilingi valley and surrounding hills through a variety of programmes in health care, community health, farming and craft work. Tribal Health Initiative views health as a state of mental, social and economic well-being and not the mere absence of disease. The health interventions go beyond merely providing curative and preventive medical services. They see their farming and craft initiatives as being directly connected to maintaining health and well-being in the communities they serve.
- **Nirangal:** Nirangal is an Ngo aiming to work in a multi-pronged way to advance justice and rights for sexuality minorities – LGBT and sex worker communities – in Tamil Nadu, and thus contribute to the overall progress of these communities in India. Its multi-pronged approach is informed by a combination of feminist political practice, queer activism, and the discourse of human rights. Nirangal’s work is informed deeply by feminist politics, particularly in its queer- and trans- forms; perceiving gender as a core and foundational axis of oppression. They believe that oppression on grounds of sexuality and sexual expression is grounded in hetero-patriarchy.
- **5th Pillar:** 5th Pillar is a non-profit, non-governmental organization aimed at fighting corruption, one of the deep rooted evils of our nation. The Nation already has four pillars of democracy the legislature, executive, judiciary and the media. 5th Pillar has been formed as a coalition of like-minded citizens of our country who want to see a better society and governance system. The organization uses the Zero Rupee Note and the RTI Act of 2005 to empower those experiencing corruption.
- **The Forest Way:** The Forest Way is a Charitable Trust based in Thiruvannamalai, in Tamil Nadu, which has worked to restore the forests of the sacred Arunachala Hill, the creation and ongoing maintenance of parks for people and nature, and has opened a small holistic school surrounded by organic farmland.
- **Viswa Bharati Vidyodaya Trust:** The Viswa Bharati Vidyodaya Trust is a charitable body registered under the Indian Trusts Act. The thrust of VBVT’s work has been to ensure 100% enrolment in 185 adivasi villages of the two taluks of Gudalur Block, Nilgiris district in Tamil Nadu. In order to provide motivational and academic back-up to these children who were going to school, an Outreach programme of Camps, Mobile library, Science experiments, and village level institutions such as tuition centres, non-formal centres and such other programmes were also undertaken.
- **Indian Green Services:** The trust was registered with an aim to create a sustainable impact in the area of Environmental protection and conservation. IGS provides services in the area of Environmental protection with a holistic perspective and belief that any issue related Environmental degradation can be addressed only if all the members of the society work

together. In order to achieve this mission IGS has been rendering services in the form Awareness generation Programs, Consultation services on Environmental standards, workshops and demonstrations, direct implementation of programs.

- Vidhya Sagar: The Spastics Society of India was born in March 1985 in a garage in Chennai. It was started by Mrs. Poonam Natarajan, the mother of a child with profound disability, since there were no services available for this group. It was renamed 'Vidya Sagar' in 1998. Vidya Sagar is a rights based organization, with emphasis on creating awareness in the community on issues related to disability and advocating rights for persons with disabilities. It runs several programmes reaching out to over 3800 individuals with disabilities. This has been possible by setting up high quality delivery of services, focusing on early intervention, special education, physiotherapy, speech and communication therapy, vision training, occupational therapy, co-curricular activities, counselling, vocational training, exploring and creating employment opportunities and training of resource persons to work in the field of disability.
- Women's Collective: Women's Collective (WC) is a Non Profitable Organization of more than 100,000 Women spread across 15 districts in Tamil Nadu working for the empowerment of the rural and marginalized women, children and elders. Their major focus is on- Women's Rights with special attention to Issues of Violence against Women; Dalit Rights; Local Governance; Alternative Farming for Food Security, Safe food production, Global warming; Environmental Protection; Disaster Preparedness; and Developing responsible future Generation – Children's Panchayat / School Awareness.
- Adventist Development and Relief Agency: The Adventist Development and Relief Agency is a global humanitarian organization of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church. ADRA provides individual and community development and disaster relief without regard to political or religious association, age, gender, or ethnicity. It has been operating projects for more than 20 years in India. Apart from earlier support to hospitals and schools ADRA provided major support during some major emergencies such as the Gujarat Earthquake, the Orissa Super Cyclone and the Tsunami of 2004.
- Puvidham: Puvidham translates from Tamil to love for the earth. Puvidham Rural Development Trust is a registered organization that works on developing effective organic farming techniques and providing a humane and child-centered education environment for children in the Nagarkoodal area of Dharmapuri, Tamil Nadu. Puvidham is managed by a 80 strong family of committed children and individuals who are working to change the harsh and arid landscape into a sustainable and resource rich area.
- Ritambhara: Ritambhara is a community of seekers, who are attempting to engage with the question 'What does it mean to live meaningfully in today's times, along the path of Yoga?' The members share a common concern for the current ecological, socio-cultural and political state

of the world, and find deep wisdom and hope in the teachings and praxis of Yoga as a way forward from these crises. The activities of Ritambhara include, active co-learning through inner work, communing with nature, theatre, music, art, the practice of various aspects of the Krishnamaachaarya's Yoga and exploratory dialogues on the different facets of the Indian tradition.

- **Coop Forest:** Coop Forest is an effort to create a forest for profit and with a strong belief that once it gets going a lot more initiatives will follow such models of Investing & Restoring. Coop Forest is home to bamboo from which, apart from food, all other needs of man could be met. They have planted around 40000 bamboo saplings. Guava, Naval, Lemon, Vilvam, Neem, Rosewood, Pungam, Custard apple, Jack fruit, Silk Cotton, Singapore Cherry, Simaruba, Chiku, Mango, Kodakapuli, Ficus varieties have been planted in the thousands. Apart from afforestation by planting trees numerous ponds, trench and tranches have been dug up.
- **UnLtd Tamil Nadu:** UnLtd Tamil Nadu is an organization which searches and supports exceptional individuals who are committed to solve some of India's biggest challenges using their passion and entrepreneurial skills. The organization believes that social entrepreneurs use tools from the business world to solve social problems like poverty, hunger, disease and pollution. There are thousands of talented and passionate change makers in Tamil Nadu who could transform this country, given the right support.
- **Trust for Village Self Governance:** The trust was founded by Elango Rangaswamy in 2001 to eliminate poverty by decentralization through promoting village self-governance; and to revive and build village industries that are labour intensive, not dependent of electricity where possible, dependent on renewable and local sources of energy where necessary, making wise use of information technology in a way that it does not interfere with the village culture, eco-friendly and making use of local resources.
- **Poovulagin Nanbargal:** Poovulagin Nanbargal is an independent public benefitting organization working on Environment, Nature Conservation and creative approach to development issues. They are engaged in recommending solutions for environmental issues and mobilizing support for it, awareness through communication tools, environmental education and training, the provision of legal advice.
- **Nizhal:** Nizhal (shade) is a trust to promote concern for trees in the city. The idea that led to its formation was to bring about awareness on the role of trees in our lives and on the need to plant, propagate and care for trees for the benefit of all. It aims to promote tree culture in urban areas through collaborative efforts. Nizhal's vision is to be an effective catalyst in greening urban areas, with a special focus on regenerating biodiversity.

- **Sadhana Forest:** Sadhana Forest started its ecological revival and sustainable living work in December 2003. The vision of its founders, Yorit and Aviram Rozin, is to transform 70 acres of severely eroded, arid land on the outskirts of Auroville. In a spirit of human unity, their aim is to introduce a growing number of people to sustainable living, food security through ecological transformation, wasteland reclamation, and veganism. Their energy and resources are focused on the creation of a vibrant, indigenous Tropical Dry Evergreen Forest (TDEF).
- **Cure Trust:** CURE International India Trust (CIIT) began its service from April 2009 with a goal to eradicate disability caused by clubfoot in India and at present over 13,000 children are enrolled in this program nationwide. CURE International India Trust functions on behalf of CURE International, a global Healthcare NGO committed to establish teaching hospitals, wherever there is a need, and establish specialty programs globally.
- **Seer7:** At Seer7, they impart leadership training to school and college students, based on the principles of the Tamil classic, Thirukkural, and Gandhian thoughts. The focus is on righteous, compassionate and effective leadership. Through the prism of leadership, with the aid of inspiring real-life stories, they encourage students to ponder about development, wealth and an alternative world.
- **Prastara:** Prastara is a Chennai based charitable trust created with an initiative to identify, document, preserve and share the sources of cultural information with special regard to the History and Heritage, which are sliding into decline mostly as a result of contemporary mind-set and lack of awareness amongst the general public.
- **Vidiyal Trust:** Vidiyal Trust is a hands on charity registered in the UK and India. In Madurai, Tamil Nadu they have a residential care home for elderly street ladies, and also run a lunch and care unit in a slum which cares for over 50 elders daily. In the same slum they have a tuition and care centre attended by 150 children. They also care for 19 people in a nearby leprosy compound. In the slum and surrounding areas they regularly run medical clinics and have a particular concern for eye health, completing over 70 cataract operations for street elders.
- **The Yellow Bag:** The Yellow bag is an initiative to bring back the habit of 'carrying your own bag' to shop. They intend to do this by creating awareness and by creating products which will help switch to this way of life. They also conduct awareness discussions with students and communities of all age group. They manufacture and sell Cloth bags as a tool to spread the message against use of plastic bags. The cloth they use for making bags is unbleached and free from chemicals used for coloring. Each bag is stitched by a woman homemaker from Madurai.
- **IYAL – IYAK** is an organic food store in Tamil Nadu.
- **Poonthottam Ayurveda Ashram:** Poonthottam Ayurvedasram was founded by Vaidya. P.M.S. Raveendranath in the year 1989. His aim was to develop a centre for Ayurvedic treatment

procedures as he strongly believed that treatment methods like Sodhana (elimination) and Rasayana (rejuvenation) did not get enough attention and could not be done in the out-patient clinics or at home. Poonthottam Ayurvedasram is a complete centre, which is self-reliant for practice, research and training in Ayurveda.