

VILLAGE VOICE

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

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From the Operation Director's Desk

Dear Esteemed Readers of Village Voice,

'Better Villages for a Better World'

With a profound commitment to our motto, 'Better Villages for a Better World', I extend warm greetings to all readers of Village Voice. As we approached the culmination of the financial year, I am gratified to reflect on the transformative endeavours undertaken by Village Reconstruction Organization (VRO). In a significant collaboration with the Government, VRO has successfully constructed 233 houses for the underprivileged, notably benefiting the Yanadhi tribals and Dalits. I extend my heartfelt gratitude to DONORS, our steadfast funding partners, whose



unwavering support have been pivotal to our achievements. The diligence and dedication exhibited by our VRO volunteers merit special acknowledgment.

Our Circle Offices, spanning across Andhra, Telangana, Orissa, and Tamil Nadu, have been actively engaged in multifaceted initiatives. These encompass educational programs for government school children through our evening study centres and the empowerment of rural women with diverse skill sets. These skills range from tailoring, pickle making, and sanitary napkin production to the art of baking cookies, snacks, and processing cashew nuts. As the academic year draws to a close, VRO has conducted Evening Supervised Study Centres for 3850 Children across Andhra, Orissa, and Tamil Nadu. Furthermore, we have empowered over 2500 rural women with tailoring skills.

These endeavours underscore our unwavering commitment to education and skill development, charting a path towards a brighter future for our communities. Additionally, VRO has made significant strides in promoting digital literacy and computer proficiency among the rural populace, aligning with our mission to equip the underprivileged with essential skills for the digital era.

In collaboration with fellow NGOs, we have initiated several projects aimed at enhancing the livelihoods of rural women. These initiatives include training programs on solar drying of vegetables and fruits, as well as the installation of borewells and hand pumps. These collaborative ventures not only offer sustainable solutions for the communities we serve but also foster a culture of cooperation and mutual growth.

Recognizing the significance of continuous learning, VRO has orchestrated a summer training program for all our volunteers, focusing on augmenting their proficiency in English and computer utilization. We extend our heartfelt gratitude to the young Jesuits who generously dedicated their time and expertise to impart English grammar lessons to our volunteers. In a reciprocal gesture of learning and sharing, VRO provided an opportunity for 10 Jesuit brothers and three Jesuit priests to acquire car driving skills, emphasizing our belief in the value of practical skills and lifelong learning. Under the astute leadership of Fr. I.F.S. Jeyaraj, the novice master, and Fr. Bulla Peter, the assistant novice master, 14 Jesuit novices resided at the VRO Rajupalem Circle office. Over three weeks, they diligently contributed by clearing debris, tending to lemon plants, and preparing circles for each plant. Their diligence and dedication epitomize the spirit of service that VRO embodies.

I extend my heartfelt gratitude to all VRO volunteers, community workers, circle coordinators, project officers, area directors, and the associate director. Your tireless efforts and steadfast commitment have been instrumental in the success of our initiatives.

As VRO embarks on its 54th year with renewed vigor and dynamism, we acknowledge with deep appreciation our generous partner organizations and donors. Their unwavering support has been invaluable in our journey.

Our esteemed donors include BTURO (Belgium), Sonnenhaus (Germany), Misereor (Germany), Mrs. Thresa Heil-Haar (Germany), E-Klub (Vienna), Demains Association (Paris), Nicopeja (Italy), Jesuiten Mission-Nurnberg (Germany), VRO Germany, Salvatorianse (Belgium), and Stiftung Jesuiten Weltweit (Switzerland). We extend our heartfelt appreciation for believing in our mission and for facilitating our endeavours to effect positive change in the lives of the communities we serve.

*K Velangani Raju, S. J. M.A, LLM
Operational Director of VRO*

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar and Rural Development

On 14th April, the architect of our constitution Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar's birthday is commemorated all over India. Ambedkarism, rooted in the principles and teachings of Dr. B. R. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, holds significant implications for rural development in India. He dedicated his life to fighting against caste-based discrimination, social inequality, and economic disparity.

In the context of rural development, Ambedkarism advocates for the upliftment and empowerment of marginalized communities, particularly Dalits and other oppressed groups. It emphasizes the importance of land reforms, access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities for these communities. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar believed that socio-economic empowerment was essential for achieving true equality and justice.

One of the key aspects of Ambedkarism in rural development is land redistribution and agrarian reforms. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar argued for the equitable distribution of land among landless farmers and Dalit communities, challenging the entrenched feudal structures that perpetuated landlessness and exploitation. He envisioned a society where every individual, regardless of caste or background, had access to land and resources to live a dignified life.

Education also occupies a central place in Ambedkarism and rural development. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar recognized education as a tool for social transformation and empowerment. He advocated for universal access to quality education, particularly for marginalized communities, as a means to break the cycle of poverty and discrimination.

Furthermore, Ambedkarism emphasizes the need for political representation and participation of marginalized communities in the decision-making processes at the grassroots level. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar himself championed the cause of political rights for Dalits and other oppressed groups, advocating for reservations in legislative bodies to ensure their representation. In summary, Ambedkarism offers a comprehensive framework for rural development that prioritizes social justice, equality, and empowerment. By addressing the root causes of socio-economic disparities and systemic discrimination, Ambedkarism seeks to create inclusive and equitable societies where every individual can realize their full potential. VRO is inspired by the teachings of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar hence initiated the new Legal Mission for the Poor

1. SERVICE TO THE GOVERNMENT SCHOOL CHILDREN

The closure of the Evening Supervisory Study Centres marks the end of a significant chapter in the educational support for students who needed extra guidance to excel in their academic pursuits. These Centres were conducted in Nellore, Sagarasangamam, Perecherla, Rajupalem, Jaggampeta, Ravikamatham, situated in Andhra Pradesh and Inugur near Trichirapalli, Tamil Nadu VRO circles. Totally **3850** children studying in Government schools have benefited. Besides VRO centres in North Orissa and South Orissa (**23 centres**) have catered to 1150 tribal children. These centers, which have been a beacon of hope for many, provided personalized attention and tailored study plans that addressed the unique challenges faced by each student. The dedicated community workers at these centers worked tirelessly, often beyond regular stipulated hours, to ensure that no child was left behind in the competitive race for knowledge and skills. The impact of these centres extended beyond academic improvement; they also served as a pillar of strength for students who have felt marginalized within the traditional school system. The nurturing atmosphere of the Evening Supervisory Study Centres fostered a sense of community and belonging, where students could build confidence in their abilities and develop a positive attitude towards learning.



The legacy of the Evening Supervisory Study Centres has been carried forward by the success stories of the students who, once considered weak, have now emerged stronger, more knowledgeable, and ready to face the world with new-found assurance. The gratitude from both parents and students resonates with the collective acknowledgment that these centers were more than just a place to study; they were a community that fostered growth, learning, and mutual support.



AD testing the reading skill of a student at Thatiparathi ESSC

VRO takes this moment to thank the VRO volunteers, Community workers, Project officers and Directors and VRO indeed celebrates the achievements and look ahead to new beginnings, where the essence of these centers lives on in every student they have helped to flourish.





Children of Jalampalli ESSC prepared a first aid box for their centre



RAMAKOTI NAGAR - ESSC-BYCYCLE RACE



Children of B. Jalampalli ESSC doing yoga asanas-2



ESSC at Vellaturu



ESSC students Extra-curricular activities at Anupalem



VRO volunteer conducting the parents meeting at Siripuram



2. YOUTH SKILL DEVELOPMENT FOR EMPLOYMENT AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

The closing of Youth Skill Development centers marks a significant shift in the landscape of vocational training and employment opportunities for young individuals. These centers have been instrumental in equipping the youth with practical skills that are essential for gaining a foothold in the job market. Driving, Tailoring, Electricals and Computers in particular, have provided avenues for self-employment and entrepreneurship, enabling many to secure a stable income.

2.1. EMPOWERING THE RURAL WOMEN

Driving, Electrical Repair and maintenance, and Computer skills were imparted in Perecherla, near Guntur and Jaggampeta, near Rajahmundry, Andhra Pradesh. Skill Training for women in sewing and tailoring skills were imparted in the villages as well as in the Centres. YSD for women was conducted in Nellore, Perecherla, Rajupalem, Inungur (T.N.), Jaggampeta and Orissa. Totally 500 rural women have attended four month programme and gained confidence in handling the sewing machines and stitching all types of women-ware. Orissa completed 10 month residential programme in four centres, which included holistic training involving , leadership training and skill training.



BUJABUJA NELLORE



DAARAMADUGU



JAGGAMPETA

Tailoring training has also facilitated social cohesion, as women come together to learn and later, to work. This camaraderie built a support network that is invaluable in rural settings. Furthermore, the training programs have been tailored to accommodate the unique challenges faced by rural women, such as balancing work with domestic responsibilities, thereby ensuring higher rates of participation and completion. The success stories emanating from these programs are numerous, with many women establishing their own tailoring businesses or joining cooperatives, thus injecting vitality into the family and local economy. In essence, the completed training in tailoring for rural women stands as a testament to the transformative power of skill development and the enduring benefits it brings to individuals and their communities alike.



2.2. SKILL TRAINING OF THE RURAL YOUTH FOR EMPLOYABILITY

The training in driving and computer skills to the rural youth has marked a significant milestone in bridging the urban-rural divide. This comprehensive program, aimed at equipping young individuals with essential modern skills, has empowered them to navigate the challenges of the 21st century with greater confidence and competence. Driving courses have provided essential training, enabling rural youth to become proficient drivers, which is not only a means of personal independence but also a gateway to numerous job opportunities, particularly in areas where public transportation is limited or non-existent and in occupations that require travel, such as logistics, sales, or even entrepreneurial ventures that necessitate the transport of goods and services.

In the second phase, VRO has trained 30 (15 in Jaggampeta and 15 in Perecherla) rural youth in car driving and electrical repair and maintenance. In collaboration with LAYA, an NGO, 15 rural youth received intensive training for three weeks in plumbing and electrical maintenance skills.

Twenty five girls and 10 boys learnt the basic skills in computer operation. The computer training component of the program has introduced the youth to the digital world, making them proficient in various software applications, internet research, and word processing tools, which are highly sought-after skills in today's job market.

This dual-faceted training has also fostered a sense of independence and self-reliance among the participants, allowing them to support their families and contribute to their communities more effectively.

The program's impact extends beyond individual beneficiaries, as it enhances the overall socio-economic fabric of the rural areas, promoting sustainable development and inclusive growth. The completed training in driving and computers has been an example of progress for rural youth, providing them with the tools to forge a better future for themselves and their communities. It stands as a shining example of how targeted skill development initiatives can lead to substantial and lasting benefits, fostering a cycle of empowerment and prosperity.



3. MEDICAL CAMP FOR THE SCHEDULED TRIBAL PEOPLE (YANADHI) AT REPALLE CIRCLE

On the 21st of March, 2024, the Village Reconstruction Organisation (VRO) organised a one-day free Medical Camp in the Repalle Circle, catering to the underprivileged individuals belonging to the Scheduled Tribe of Yanadi. The medical team, led by Dr. Ratna Kumari MBBS and Dr. Dinesh MBBS from the Community Health Centre in Nagar, Repalle, was accompanied by Mrs. Devaki, Circle Coordinator, 9 VRO volunteers, and 5 Community Workers of Repalle Circle. Together, they visited three villages Vellaturu VRO Colony, Alluri Kalava Katta, and Isukapalli VRO Colony where they provided medical examinations and dispensed necessary medications to 202 villagers, free of charge.



This initiative aimed to address the healthcare needs of individuals who are often neglected due to their financial constraints, preventing them from seeking medical assistance at hospitals. Many individuals experienced a range of health issues, including bone and muscle pain, gastric problems, the common cold, cough, and fever. Additionally, a significant number of individuals suffered from anaemia and weakened immunity. Some individuals also reported allergies, high blood pressure, and diabetes. The medical interventions offered at the camp played a crucial role in alleviating these long-standing health issues, ultimately contributing to the overall well-being of the beneficiaries.

The recipients of the medical camp expressed their gratitude towards VRO for organizing this much-needed initiative, recognizing it as a vital intervention that addressed a pressing need within the community.



4. OPERATIONAL TEAM LEADERS (OTL) MEETING FOR UPSKILLING AT PERECHERLA

The Operational Team Leaders Meeting was held on at Perecherla Circle Office. The Meeting was attended by K.Velangani Raj, SJ., Operational Director, Fr. Dr. S. Emmanuel, S.J. Associate Director, Fr, Antony George, SJ Area Director, Mr. Bosco, Finance Manager, Project Officers, Circle Coordinators, Accountant and a few field volunteers from each region. Rev. Fr. Peter Daniel SJ, the former Operational Director, was observer for the session.

The annual report showcased VRO's achievements and challenges in its five main areas of work: Child Education and Rights (CER), Youth Skill Development (YSD), Village Empowerment and Entitlement (VEE), Village Rebuilding and Sanitation (VRBP) and Agro Forestry (AF). The reports featured several success stories of the VRO's beneficiaries in each of its works.

5. INTROSPECTION AND SUCCESS STORIES

An input session on project profiles, SWOT analysis of the projects and success stories of the projects that was held on 24th February, 2024. Mr. Paul Raj Kumar, the former Project Manager, was the Resource Person for the day.

The main objectives of the session were to:

- Review the ongoing projects' Output, Impact and Achievements.
- Identify and analyze the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) of each region.
- Share the best practices and lessons learned from each region Discuss the challenges faced during the project implementation and how to overcome them
- Provide feedback and suggestions for improving the project management process and outcomes

The session was a productive and interactive event that fostered a positive and collaborative atmosphere among the members. It provided valuable insights and feedback for all to improve their performance and outcomes



Fr. Peter Daniel Inaugurating the statue of windey at Perecherla



Fr. Velankani Raju, OD, VRO Giving Inputs at Perecherla OTL Meeting



VRO Volunteers Playing Games at Perecherla OTL Meeting

6. A New Look of the Renovated Blocks at Perecherla

The Opening of the Renovated Blocks of the Perecherla Circle was held on 24th February, 2024 in the presence of VRO's Former Operational Director, Associate Director, Area Director, Finance Manager, Project Officers, Circle Coordinators, Accountant, a few field volunteers from each region and the Youth Skill Development Trainees of Perecherla.

The following blocks were renovated

1. A statue of Prof. M.A. Windey SJ, Founder of VRO is Installed at the Entrance
2. Kitchen
3. Dining Hall
4. Type-writing Hall
5. Meeting Hall-1
6. Meeting Hall-2
7. Meeting Hall-3
8. Computer Lab
9. Boys' Dormitory
10. Office Room



The renovation of the blocks involved repairing the structural damages, replacing the old and worn-out floor and galvanized roof, installing new windows and doors, and landscaping the surrounding areas. The participants were impressed by the quality and the beauty of the renovation work. The ceremony ended with refreshments.



BEFORE



AFTER



BEFORE



AFTER

7. Training on 'Solar Drying of Fruits and Vegetable'- A Collaborative Venture

A two-week training programme on 'Solar Drying Fruits and Vegetable Processing' was held from 12th to 25th March at VRO Youth Skill Development Centre at Perecherla. The training has been carried in collaboration with COWE (Confederation of Women Entrepreneurs), Andhra Pradesh chapter. 35 rural women have been educated on the use of solar dryers, which are an Eco-friendly alternative to conventional drying methods, reducing reliance on non-renewable energy sources and minimizing carbon footprints.

The benefits of this training extend beyond environmental impact. Through solar drying techniques, the trainees have been trained on how to increase the shelf life of their produce, thereby reducing waste and enhancing food security. Moreover, the ability to dry and preserve food opens up new market opportunities, allowing participants to sell their goods out of season and at a higher value, leading to improved income and economic stability.

Furthermore, the training emphasized the importance of quality control and introduced participants to ensuring that the processed foods met safety standards. Overall, the training on 'Solar Drying Fruits and Vegetable Processing' was a trans-formative program that equipped rural women with valuable skills, promoting sustainable practices, and contributing to economic development.



8. Commemorating the 103rd Birth Anniversary of Prof. Windey, Founder of VRO and the doyen of rural development

On the occasion of the 103rd birth anniversary of Prof. Michael Anthony Windey SJ, the founder of VRO, Fr Dr S Emmanuel SJ, Associate Director, all the VRO volunteers and Jesuit brothers in the Summer Camp, were gathered at Perecherla to celebrate the legacy of a visionary who dedicated his life to the upliftment of rural communities. In a symbolic act of remembrance and respect, we honored Prof. Windey's statue with a floral tribute, each bloom representing the gratitude and admiration for his life's work.

Born on April 28th, 1921, Prof. Windey's journey was marked by a profound commitment to the Gandhian principles of Sarvodaya and Anthyodaya, which inspired him to initiate the VRO in response to the devastating cyclone that struck the Coastal Districts of Andhra Pradesh in 1969. His approach to village development was holistic, focusing on self-reliance, dignity, and the empowerment of the marginalized. Mr Bosco Finance Officer and Fr S Emmanuel exonerated the greatness of Fr Windey, the Visionary and volunteers from diverse backgrounds shared their experiences, reflecting on the transformational impact of VRO's initiatives.

They spoke of the organization's efforts in non-formal education, skill development, and ecological sustainability, which have fostered a sense of hope and security in the communities they serve. The volunteers' narratives are a testament to Fr Windey's enduring influence, as they continue to carry forward his mission of integration of underprivileged rural masses into the broader fabric of society.



024, 21



9. Establishment of Borewells with hand pumps. - A collaborative venture

VRO-Donor dedicated to alleviating human need and suffering, sponsored Three new borewells, Two in Nambur and one in Uppalapadu. These borewells, strategically located to serve Yanadhi (ST) communities with limited access to clean water, represent a significant step towards improving the quality of life for many. The initiative is part of donor's commitment to providing sustainable clean water solutions and has been met with gratitude by the local population. The inauguration event was marked by community gatherings, where the importance of water conservation and proper sanitation were emphasized. This project not only provides immediate relief by addressing the critical need for clean water but also fosters long-term health benefits and community development, and also 17 more bore-wells work is in progress.



10. An experiential Work Camp of the Jesuit Novices at Rajupalem

From the 7th to the 25th of April, a work camp was held for Jesuit novices at the Rajupalem VRO Campus. During this period, the old buildings on the campus were undergoing repair and maintenance.

The work camp was attended by fourteen Jesuit brothers: Chodagiri Sudhakar, Jalli Raymond Martel, Koram Satwik, Kotta Bujjibabu, Nallapati Sumanth, Potla Anil Kumar, Thammiseti Praveen, Chinthagunta Rahul, Gandhala Amruthraj, Godavarthi Vamsi, Manda Satish, Pendyala Sukumar, Polanki Anthony Kiran, and Yarra Sai Lokesh. These brothers camped on the Rajupalem site and contributed their physical labor by working eight hours a day. Their tasks were varied and included removing roof wooden frames, carrying debris from demolished walls and floor stones, and digging around lemon trees and watering them daily. Despite the sweltering heat and the discomfort of sleeping on the floor, they embraced these hardships with a positive spirit.



During the camp, they also visited Ganapavaram, a nearby village, and participated in the closing ceremony of the Evening Supervised Study Centers for school children. This program, organized by VRO volunteers Syamala, Sandya, Subba Rao, and community worker Venkat Lakshimi, featured children singing patriotic songs and dancing joyfully. The Jesuit novices also presented a couple of programs emphasizing the importance of education and entertained the children.

Notably, the novices performed two street plays, “Road Meedha Rai”(రోడ్ మీద రాయి) and “Sthri Sakthi,” which they learned from Fr. S Emmanuel, the VRO associate director. These performances were a highlight of the final day of the camp.

An evaluation conducted on the 25th of April concluded that the camp was highly beneficial. The VRO learned that the Jesuit novices were deeply moved by the hard work and hospitality of their volunteers, Mrs. Syamala, Mrs. Sandhya, and Mr. Subba Rao. Guidance at the workplace was provided by Mr. Samson.



10. SUMMER CAMP OF VRO VOLUNTEERS AND DRIVING SKILLS OF THE JESUIT BROTHERS AT PERECHERLA

The VRO volunteers working in various centres were asked to gather at Pericherla cluster office to undergo rigorous training in Computer skills and improvement of English. Luckily they could get the help of Jesuit brothers who came forward to teach them on individual basis.



The following Jesuit brothers namely K.Ravi Kumar, Venkata Giri, S. Tagore, Nithin, T. Harshavardhan, U. Rajesh, M. Kevin Bosco, Ch. Satwik ,V. Bala Hrudaya Raju and Br. Gulshan participated in the Youth Skill Development programme of VRO at Perecherla from 17th April to 12th May, 2024. During this period all of them learnt car driving and taught English for VRO volunteers. Br. Kiran gave intensive and interactive English coaching for the VRO volunteers. The names of the VRO Volunteers are as follows: G. Anjaneyulu, M. Jayaraman, N. Sudhakar, B. Venkatesh, M. Ramaiah, G. Vanisree and P. Samuel. VRO volunteers learnt basic computer skills and English during these summer days. Thus, VRO has been offering opportunities for capacity building of the volunteers. T.Prakash and M.Vinod Kumar taught Computer Skills, whereas K. Sujan Kumar, M. Ashok, S. Sekhar and P. Ratnam taught car driving to the Jesuit Brothers. This training programme at Perecherla Centre was coordinated by Mr. Kamalakar, one of the Project Officers of Village Reconstruction Organization.



12. VRO CORE OBJECTIVES

- ENTITLEMENT (Rights)
- ENJOYMENT (Joy)
- ENVIRONMENT (Care)
- EMPOWERMENT (Power)
- ENLIGHTENMENT (Study)
- EMPLOYMENT (Work)

} **These are our guiding steps**

13. SPECIAL EVENTS

13.1. Women's Day Celebration Held On 8th Mar' 24. International Women's Day serves as a reminder of the progress made towards gender equality while also highlighting the ongoing challenges and the need for continued advocacy and action to create a more inclusive and equitable world for all genders. It is a day to celebrate the achievements of women, acknowledge their contributions to society, and renew commitments to advancing women's rights and gender equality worldwide.





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