

2021-2022

AREDS' Annual report



AREDS

**Association of Rural Education and
Development Service**

Annual Report: April 2021 to March 2022

AREDS, with its mission 'Towards one Humanity' has passed 42 years in the field of community development and still continues its journey in the path of human centered development, inclusive of women, children, oppressed communities, small and marginal farmers and unorganized workers. AREDS strongly believes that education is the prerequisite for any social transformation and will help the masses act irrespective of colour, caste and creed. Hence, it started its service with non-formal education in Renganathapuram, the very first place where AREDS set foot on, by involving the youth of the village.

Still, we continue educating people belonging to different sections of the society and we make them aware of and claim their rights. Hence, we impart awareness to the workers of unorganized sector on the right to social protection and on the importance of registering with the Labour Welfare Board. Also, we make common people aware of the need to get vaccinated for combating corona pandemic. Time-appropriate programmes make the functioning of AREDS relevant to the society, sustainable and dynamic.

AREDS for ensuring Social Protection:

Unorganized workers have been involved in irregular employment and live on precarious income. They suffer lack of job and income security and other gross instabilities that are constant threats to their lives and livelihoods. They are swaying to the effect of economic and political changes that take place because of the pro-corporate policies of the government. Uncertain employment opportunities and precarious income force people to migrate in search of livelihood within the nation. In a way, they become immigrants, who are the potential threat to the employment opportunities to the local people. Hence, they have to confront also the wrath of local communities.

The plight of the unorganized workers and the migrants was awfully pathetic during the time of lockdown imposed in the wake of corona pandemic.



AREDS + People's Movements in Lockdown relief works:

Lockdown put the life of unorganized workers at stake because they had to remain inside their houses and they had no source of income. Therefore, SWATE, KADALU and WPC together distributed relief materials (groceries) to people (sanitary workers, hair dressers, washer men, differently abled and destitute) who are suffering under the economic crisis due to lockdown situation.



Essential commodities were distributed in the following panchayats:

Kadavur block - 24.06.2021

Adhanur panchayat, Keeranur panchayat, Pannapatti panchayat, Pappayampadi panchayat, Sempianatham panchayat, Vadavampadi panchayat, and Vellappatti panchayat

Thogaimalai block - 01.07.2021

Chinnayampaalayam panchayat, Kalukur panchayat, Porunthalur panchayat and K. Udaiyaapatti panchayat

Kulithalai block - 07.07.2021

Innugur panchayat and Nagavaram panchayat





Blocks	Panchayats (local bodies)	Beneficiaries
8	95	2000

We decided to execute this work with the participation of panchayats. Therefore, we invited the presidents and vice-presidents of respective panchayats and they distributed the groceries to the people.

Through these relief works, we were able to mitigate the grief of the unorganized workers and the migrants only to some degree of level, there were no huger deaths reported in the operational area of AREDS.

KADALU receives recognition as a Trade Union

Due to its pro-worker policy and the relentless struggle for retrieving labour rights and ensuring social protection to the unorganized workers, KADALU has been recognized as a trade union capable of negotiating with the policy makers. Hence, it was invited for an opinion drawing meeting by the Labour Welfare Board.



Meeting with the Labour Welfare Board:

Opinions of various trade unions are necessary for reforming the functioning of the Labour Welfare Board and for ensuring social protection to the workers of the unorganized sector. Presently, the Tamil Nadu state government has made online registration for becoming a member of the Labour



Welfare Board mandatory. Therefore, the Labour Welfare Board of Tamil Nadu government organized a meeting of trade union representatives on the 19th of July 2021 for getting their opinions on the existing social protection schemes and on the functioning of the Labour Welfare Board. The Chairman and the Secretary of the Labour Welfare Board and the technical experts were participated in the meeting. The next day, the points discussed in the meeting were taken to the perusal of the minister of Labour Welfare.



Political trade unions CITU, AITUC and HMS sent their deputies to the meeting from Karur district. And along with them, Mr. Rajasekar, representing KADALU, participated in the meeting. The difficulties in the process of online registration and increasing the amount of financial assistance of social security schemes were discussed the meeting.

Labour Welfare Board assured of simplifying the online registration process and increasing the amount of financial assistance in all categories of social security schemes

AREDS in Ensuring Social Protection to the Unorganised Workers

While the lockdown imposed by the union government strictly guaranteed quarantine, it simply threw the migrants out on the street without food, water and shelter. Thousands of migrants with their children and luggage, from different states walked thousands of kilometers on foot to reach their destinations. Hundreds of them died of hunger. Though lockdown shut the nation completely, it opened up the eyes of the society on the plight of migrants and unorganized workers.



Government disbursed lockdown relief fund to the unorganized workers. However, those who had valid documents only got benefitted. Therefore, AREDS determined to ensure social protection to all unorganized workers in Karur district and launched a programme for enrolling the



unorganized workers in the Labour Welfare Board for enabling them to avail the benefits of social security schemes. Following the lockdown regulations, we started imparting awareness on the importance of trade union for retrieving labour rights and on the need for enrolling in the Labour Welfare Board for availing the benefits of social security schemes in May, 2021.

We conduct awareness meetings among workers in order to sensitize them on the need to enroll in Labour Welfare Board and on the social security scheme. In order to make them capable of claiming their rights, we make them members with the trade union KADALU. We identify the workers found with leadership qualities, and impart training to them on labour rights, social protection and social security schemes.



Until now, we have enrolled 1354 workers in KADALU and 492 workers in the Labour Welfare Board. Besides unionizing them, we are helping them avail the benefits of social security schemes. However, there are challenges ahead of us in enrolling the workers either with KADALU or with the Labour Welfare Board. Government has made online registration with the Labour Welfare Board is mandatory. Online registration process is complicated and time-consuming one for the illiterate or partially literate unorganized workers. Mushroom growth of bogus or vested interest trade unions is another challenge. Again, e-sharm, which is a portal for accessing different schemes of the union government, which does not speak about social security schemes, is the major challenge.

S. No.	Activities done in 2021-2022	No. of awareness programmes, meetings/trainings	No. of beneficiaries
1	Awareness meetings held on the importance of enrolling in Labour Welfare Board	194	6230
2	Training to leaders of workers' collectives	34	850
3	Street theatres conducted	8	About 2500
4	Applications made for the benefits of social security schemes		84
4	Enrolling workers into the trade union KADALU		1354
5	Workers already been enrolled in KADALU		2150
6	Total members with KADALU		3504


AREDS in Promoting Practical Alternatives

With the changes in economic policies and in the mode of production in Indian agriculture, farmers face much uncertainty and they tend to give up farming practices and sell out their lands in desperation. Therefore, practical alternatives are the need of the hour to the changing scenario in the nations' economy and agriculture.



Farmer Producer Company

Social Enterprise



Though they toil hard on the field, undergoing ordeals like flood and drought for safeguarding their crops, farmers do not have the power to fix the price on the agricultural produces. It is the middlemen who fix the price and make huge money without toiling on the land. Further, most of the farmers sell their raw food grains, vegetables and fruits in the market on less profit. Again, they buy value added products, which have been made out of the raw produce that the farmers had sold already, on high price from the market.

Giving value addition to the agricultural produce and milk may be a great task to individual farmers. If the farmers join together, adding value to the agricultural produces will become much easier and they can sell the value added products on high price in the market. Hence, Farmer Producer Organizations, which are supported by NABARD, come in handy to them. With the support of NABARD, AREDS has promoted four Farmer Producer Companies, one in each of Paramathy, Kulithalai, Kadavur and Krishnarayapuram blocks in Karur district.

Farmers, who had witnessed the farming practices followed by AREDS in its model farm 'Conversion of Barren Land into an Orchard', had been inspired by it. They formed 'farmer interest groups' among themselves in four blocks and these groups have been transformed into Farmer Producer Companies at present.

Sengathir Uzhavan Agri Producer Company

This Company is operating in Sooriyanur of Kulithalai block, involved mainly in floral business. In addition, the company has been running a computer browsing centre and lending out utensils for cooking meal for big functions like wedding, conference, festivals etc.



Navathaniyangal Farmer Producer Company



It is operating in Thelungapatti in Thogaimalai block, involved mainly in selling rice. The process of launching oil extracting plants is underway.



Krishnarayapuram Gramiya Uravugal Farmer Producer Company



Karur Sheep and Goat Promoter's Producer Company



It is operating in Thennilai, mainly involved in the preparation and selling of cattle fodder at present.



The Board of Directors and the CEOs of these companies meet once in a month and share their businesses ongoing, success stories and the challenges they face. In addition, PIMC meeting, in which regional manager from NABARD, and officials from agricultural department, veterinary hospital and marketing will attend, is also conducted periodically for analyzing the way of functioning of the companies, finding out the shortcomings and guiding them to pursuit successful and profitable business path.



Further, for boosting up their ambition, AREDS took the board of directors and the CEOs of all four companies to witness a prosperous Farmer Producer Company named Navadhanya farmer Producer Company, which was promoted by the NGO DEEPS, operating in Pennaagaram in Dharmapuri district.

Name of the FPC	Business ongoing	No. of members
SengathirUzhavanAgri Producer Company	Floriculture and sale of flowers	407
Navathaniyangal Farmer Producer Company	Sale of rice	200
Krishnarayapuram Gramiya Uravugal Farmer Producer Company	Sale of milk	334
Karur Sheep and Goat Promoter's Producer Company	Sale of cattle fodder	470
Total members		1411

AREDS in the Campaign against bonded labour



AREDS has been networking with fraternal and like-minded Civil Society Organisations and the allied departments of the government for eliminating child marriage, child labour and bonded labour system. Bonded Labour is not just another issue of workers but a crime against humanity. This crime was banned legally by Bonded Labour Abolition Act 1976.

Besides being exploited of their labour power, bonded labourers are being exploited sexually and subjected to torture in case of trying to escape from the clutches of employers/money lenders. Despite legal ban on this heinous crime, it is being practiced clandestinely by hard-hearted employers by taking the advantage of the desperation of the workers.

In some cases reported to the government, bonded labourers had been rescued but because of the absence of rehabilitation measures, the labourers had to offer themselves to

The following are the different forms of bonded labour:

- Forcing persons to work by paying money to their emergency needs.
- Forcing persons to work without a timeframe.
- Paying less than the legal minimum wage.
- Prevent the workers even to participate in the funeral ceremony of their family members or close relatives.
- Subjecting the workers to torture.
- Putting workers in desperation.

bonded labour again for their survival. On many occasions, the government officials concerned turn a blind eye to the existence of bonded labour and hence the bonded labour system continues unabatedly. Prevalence of bonded labour system in this modern time is shame on the government administration and judiciary.



NALSA (National Legal Services Authority) celebrated National Legal Services Authority Week from 2nd of October 2021 to 14th of November 2021. As a part of its celebration programme, it planned to conduct a week-long campaign against bonded labour and on the toll-free helpline telephone number: 18004252650 in Karur district. Accordingly, AREDS together with Childline-1098, Karur campaigned against bonded labour, for ensuring social security measures to unorganized workers and against violence on children.



District-level consultation of unorganized workers:

District-level consultation of unorganized workers was organized on the 13th of November 2021 to discuss the challenges in registering the names of unorganised workers with the Labour Welfare Board and to get recommendations from the participants to overcome the challenges.



The director of AREDS Mr. L. A. Samy presided over the consultation. Honourable Judge of District Legal Services

Authority Mr. Mohanram was invited as the chief guest to the consultation. He distributed ID cards officially certified by the Labour Welfare Board to the unorganized workers and said that DLSA was prepared to address the

problems, if the unorganized workers approached the DLSA on any issue. He also said that he would take the challenges in enrolling the names of unorganized workers in the Labour Welfare Board to the notices of the rulers and the officials concerned. Besides, the national president of Swaraj India Ms. Christina Samy and leaders from different trade unions and panchayat presidents also participated in the consultation.



South India Action Dialogue of Farmers, Peasants and other Informal Sector Workers:

Working People's Charter (WPC) and Tamil Nadu Land Right Federation together organized a two-day dialogue to make the farmers and the unorganized workers understand each other's problems and learn lesson from each others' struggles. As many of the participants and the speakers were from the southern states of India, the programme was organized in Chennai on the 17th and 18th of December 2021.



At the outset, the Tamil version of the book about the study done by WPC on the informal workers in Tamil Nadu was released by



Prof. Yogendra Yadav – Jai KissanAndolan and Prof. Jawaharirullah, MLA – president, ManithaNeyamakkalKatchi and social activist and researcher Ms. Navsharan Singh and Mr. T. M. Murthy, state general secretary – AITUC received it.



MLA and the president of Manitha Neya Makkal Katchi Prof. Jawaharirullah, Joint Commissioner of Labour, Tamil Nadu Manual Workers' welfare Board Dr. Divyanathan, the president of Construction Workers' Welfare Board Mr. Pon. Kumar and the Covenor of Tamil Nadu land Right Federation Mr. Nicholas felicitated the dialogue.

District-Level Seminar: Right of the unorganized workers to social protection and the Labour Laws:

Today, the nation is celebrating the birth anniversary of Dr. Ambedkar, who was one of the architects of Indian Constitution and who fought for the freedom of oppressed communities in the colonial era and in the post-independent era. Many of the politicians and common people think mistakenly that he fought for the freedom of dalit communities only. Indeed, he also fought for the rights of workers. Therefore, we organized this seminar rightly on the birth anniversary of Dr. Ambedkar and all participants took pledge to keep equality and fellowship irrespective caste and creed.



About two-hundred workers participated in the seminar. The district president of KADALU Mr. Sathish welcomed the participants. At the outset, floral tribute was paid by the participants to Dr. Ambedkar and oath of equality as a honour.

Prior to that, a state-level consultation will be held in order to make a consensus among the trade unions and the workers on the plan of action. Mere facilitating the workers to get enrolled in the Labour Welfare Board is not enough. Therefore, the participants unanimously welcomed the idea of forming workers' collectives for retrieving the labour rights beyond the boundary of social protection.



AREDS for the welfare of Sanitary Workers



The real frontline workers, who commit themselves to the sanitation of the society and engage themselves in work tirelessly during normal times and in the time of disasters, are no other than sanitary workers. But, they have been continuously denied of Labour Rights: job permanency, fair salary and social security measures. Sanitary work is a polite way of describing the nature of work. Indeed, it is manual scavenging in camouflage and it has been put on the shoulders of particular community in our nation.

Since they live in the socially stratified society, they face dual discrimination: professionally, their work is considered as the meanest job and hence, people look down upon them; socially, they are being treated as untouchables by all other caste people. However, defying death and severe infectious diseases, these selfless workers engage themselves in sanitary works when the spread of pandemic was at peak. Further, though there are legal mechanisms and tools to prevent manual scavenging, entering into manholes and cleaning septic tanks, asphyxiation deaths occur elsewhere in the country. But the employers, who engage people in such works, go scot-free.



Therefore it is important to take the plight of sanitary workers to the conscience of the government so as to pressurise it to undertake remedial measures. Hence, AREDS organised a one-day conference of sanitary workers on 12.12.2021 in Karur on the following demands:

1. Manual scavenging must be checked. Civic authorities should provide quality safety gears to the sanitary workers.
2. Dignified life depends on the salary that the sanitary workers receive. Therefore, Rs. 20,000 must be given to a sanitary worker as monthly salary.
3. Pay slip and salary register must be maintained properly with all civic authorities. They must be subjected to periodical monitoring and surprise visit.
4. As the chances for getting physically wounded are more in sanitary works, medical insurance must be ensured to sanitary workers.
5. Contract labour system must be wiped out entirely and all workers who are engaged in this profession must be made permanent workers.
6. Earn leave, maternity leave and provident fund must be ensured to sanitary workers.
7. Sanitary workers must have the freedom to join trade unions of their own choice for promoting substantive rights: wage hike, work timeframe, agreeable working condition and minimizing inequalities in salary of different categories of sanitary workers.
8. Panchayats and municipalities must arrange periodical meetings of sanitary worker for updating their knowledge on the latest enactment of laws and passing of Government Orders in favour of sanitary workers' well being.
9. Government should end the practice of manual scavenging. It should rescue and rehabilitate those who seek livelihood in cleaning septic tanks and entering manholes. Also, it should help them pursue alternative professions.
10. Woman sanitary workers must be integrated through National Skill Development programme. At the same time, sanitary work must be mechanized so as to easing off the labour of sanitary workers.
11. First-aid kits, potable water and hygienic toilets must be provided to the woman sanitary workers for maintaining their health.
12. Crèche and child care centres must be established to take care of the children of sanitary workers and create a situation where the woman sanitary workers can engage themselves in work with full involvement and without tension.
13. Each shift must have eight-hour timeframe and because of that woman sanitary workers can pay good attention both to work and to family welfare.
14. Government should provide financial assistance to the families of sanitary workers for helping their children pursue higher education and skill trainings.
15. Internal Complaints Committee must be established at all work places in compliance with the Sexual Harassment (Prevention, Prohibition and Redress) Act, 2013 and see to it that those committees function independently and unbiased.

AREDS and Children's Welfare:

AREDS Play-way School

The region where the school is located was notorious for child marriage practices ten-fifteen years ago. Parents seldom send their girl children to school after fifth standard. Once the girl children attain puberty, their parents would get them married, mainly to their maternal uncles. As the parents had adhered to this conservatism, the girl children had been deprived of child rights which their counterparts in their families were enjoying in full-fledged manner. Therefore, the women from this region expressed their longing for a better future for their girl children to AREDS staff on many occasions. They also requested AREDS to start a school so as to encourage and enable the girl children not only to learn literacy but also to pursue higher education and a prosperous life.



We started the Play-way School with just 18 children and last year there were 189 children were studying the last academic year 2021-2022.





Childline- 1098

AREDS, as the collaborative organization of Childline India Foundation, has been operating childline-1098 in Karur district, since 1916. The main objective of childline is to rescue the children in difficult situation and provide them immediate care and protection. During the period between April 2021 and March 2022, childline received 356 calls and intervened 464 cases. Also during the same period, childline conducted 125 outreach programmes at main places: bus stand, railway station, places of worship, schools and children's homes. Besides disseminating the objective and functioning of childline, outreach programmes also helped us find out cases of children in difficult situations.





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TulirThalir Students' Movement (TTSM) (Movement for buds and sprouts)



In order to minimize the number of dropouts and the incidence of child labour in Karur district, AREDS has formed TulirThalir Students' Movement (TTSM). Programmes on street theatre and cultural activities are being organised for school going adolescent boys and girls in order to bring their latent talents to the surface. Awareness on social issues, need for education and importance of preserving the environment are imparted to them.



Children reflect what they learn in their artworks, skits, street plays etc. Learning extracurricular activities help the adolescents perform well in their studies and this has been proved in their progress reports. Above all, the adolescent students, viewing TTSM as a platform for exhibiting their talents and views, go to school with enthusiasm and participate in all programmes organized by AREDS.



The summer camp is the highlight of TTSM activities. These camps are organized to provide the children with a space to acquire and tune hobbies, interests and dreams and the skills to express and communicate the same. Summer camps organised by TTSM include cultural programmes, spoken English classes, computer skills acquisition, and general knowledge courses, playing and swimming. The summer camps motivate adolescent boys and girls to go for higher studies after completing schooling. All the children sing, play, swim, eat and stay together – irrespective of castes and religion for the duration of the camp.

However, because of pandemic and the lockdown followed schools were closed down and public gathering was prohibited subsequently for two years. As a result, the number of school days in the academic year 2021-2022 was shrunk and the students sparingly had time to focus on things other than their academic courses. Therefore, we could not conduct week-end programmes and summer camps to the children for the past two years.



AREDS in Ensuring Community health:

The majority of the Indian population lives in rural areas with poor water and environmental sanitation. Economic inequality, the lack of awareness on health and hygiene, the non-availability of nutritious food and caste discrimination are the reasons prohibiting the rural poor from accessing health. This leads to prolonged ailments, the outbreak of epidemics and stunted mental and psychological growth among the poor. The prevalence of poor health in children hinders them from acquiring knowledge effectively and playing sports skillfully. Health is one of the major causes for rural children to dropout in the middle of their educational process.



villages with poor access to medical care. The health team of AREDS also focuses on children with dyslexia.

Last year, 53 trainings on Antenatal Care were imparted to 279 pregnant women. No maternity deaths or infant mortality was noted. Also, the importance of timely immunization and intake of nutritious food was explained through 50 trainings on Postnatal Care were given to 589 lactating mothers.

AREDS has evolved a programme of action involving Ante-natal Care and Post-natal Care, immunization to children under five, promoting alternative health systems such as herbal medicine, tackling learning disabilities in children aged 5-8 years, conducting health awareness education programmes and health camps for the rural poor. AREDS conducts periodical health camps for children and adolescents in remote



Awareness on the importance of keeping personal hygiene and menstrual hygiene was given to 1185 adolescent girls through 65 trainings. Awareness on HIV/AIDS was given to 1138 women aged 18-40 through 52 trainings. The participants became aware of the importance of being compassionate towards people afflicted with AIDS. Diabetes has become a common ailment nowadays and therefore, 82 trainings on the preventive methods were imparted to 4224 people.

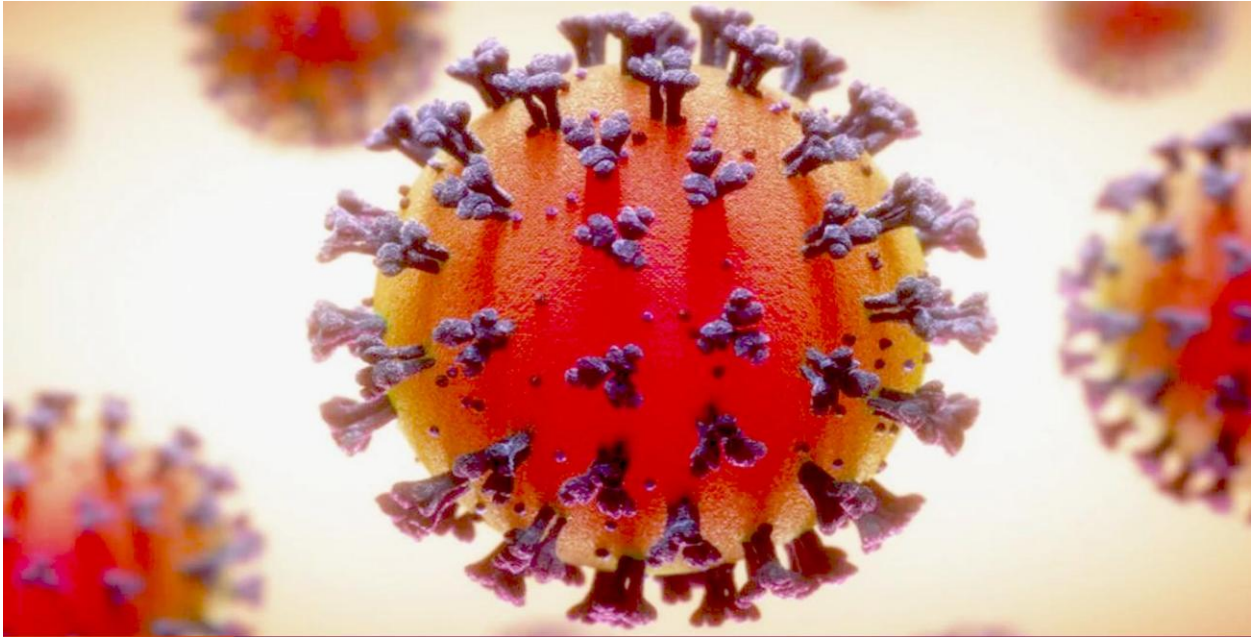
In the past, people followed native medicine practices to get common illnesses and minor ailments cured. In course of tie, they switched to modern medicinal practices ignoring the traditional medical practices. However, people were forced to follow the native medicine practices by the lockdown situation. Hence, we imparted 72 trainings on native medicine practices to 4024 people and of them, 748 people are following it persistently.



The following is the remark of the Block Medical officer of Kulithalai Block: “The work of AREDS Health Team is one of the contributory factors that curbed the maternity deaths and infant mortality in Kulithalai Block. Therefore, it should extend its work to other areas also.”

Programmes	No. of activities	No. of beneficiaries
Antenatal Care	53 trainings	279
Postnatal care	50 trainings	589
Health awareness to adolescent girls	65 trainings	1185
Awareness on HIV/AIDS	52 trainings	1138
Awareness on diabetes control	82 trainings	4224
Native medicine practices	72 trainings	4024
Total number of beneficiaries		11439

AREDS in Combating Corona Pandemic



Following the ravages of COVID-19 pandemic in the past two years, the present Tamil Nadu government has been undertaking vaccination programme for administering vaccine to every adult in the state. There are widespread campaigns and visual advertisements on the importance of getting vaccinated are ongoing. Despite, many of common people in the state simply ignore them because of their ignorance and misconception about vaccines. Anyway, it will be risky to leave a death-defying pathological entity prevail on the earth just because of the lack of knowledge and misunderstanding of people.



Therefore, AREDS decided to enhance the awareness of people in its operational area in Karur district on the detrimental effect of corona pandemic. Hence, it has launched a six-month programme for assisting the government's effort for ensuring 100 per cent vaccination in the state of Tamil Nadu. Accordingly, it has selected 196 villages that come under the healthcare of four Primary Health Centres (Panjapatti, Veppangudi, Innungur and Ayyarmalai) and 19 Habitat Service Centres in Karur district.



The PHCs and the villages which have been chosen for the programme are located in remote areas where people have less public transport facilities. As many of the villagers are illiterate and poor economically, they pay less attention to their health and hygiene. So, AREDS undertook a survey on the health status and on the number of people who got vaccinated and who have not yet got vaccinated in the villages chosen at the outset. Diverse surprising reasons were put forward by the people for not getting vaccinated. Stimulated by the astounding statements put forward by the villagers during survey, AREDS involved the elected representatives of panchayats in the campaign.



The valedictory function of the six-month programme was held on the 2nd of May 2022 at the PHC, Panjapatti. The Block Medical Officers – Mr. Sivakumar from Kulithalai block and Ms. Niraimathi from Krishnarayapuram block – participated in the function. The medical officer Dr. Anusuya from the PHC, Innungur and the nurses and the paramedical staff from the PHC, Panjapatti also participated in the function.



Direct impact of vaccination programme

According to our survey the unvaccinated people were 9422. Out of them 7241 people got vaccinated in this six-month period. Of the remaining 1181 people, 154 are aged and sick people and some of them are dead. Only 640 remain unvaccinated.

Unforeseen impact of vaccination programme



At the outset, we undertook a survey on the health status and on the number of people who got vaccinated and unvaccinated in the villages chosen. We engaged 85 volunteers for taking this survey. Then we appointed 4 programme coordinators, one per each one of the 4 PHCs and 23 field staff. Except two staff, all others are graduates and post graduates seeking employment. Hence, the vaccination programme ensured employment opportunity for these young people for a shorter period.

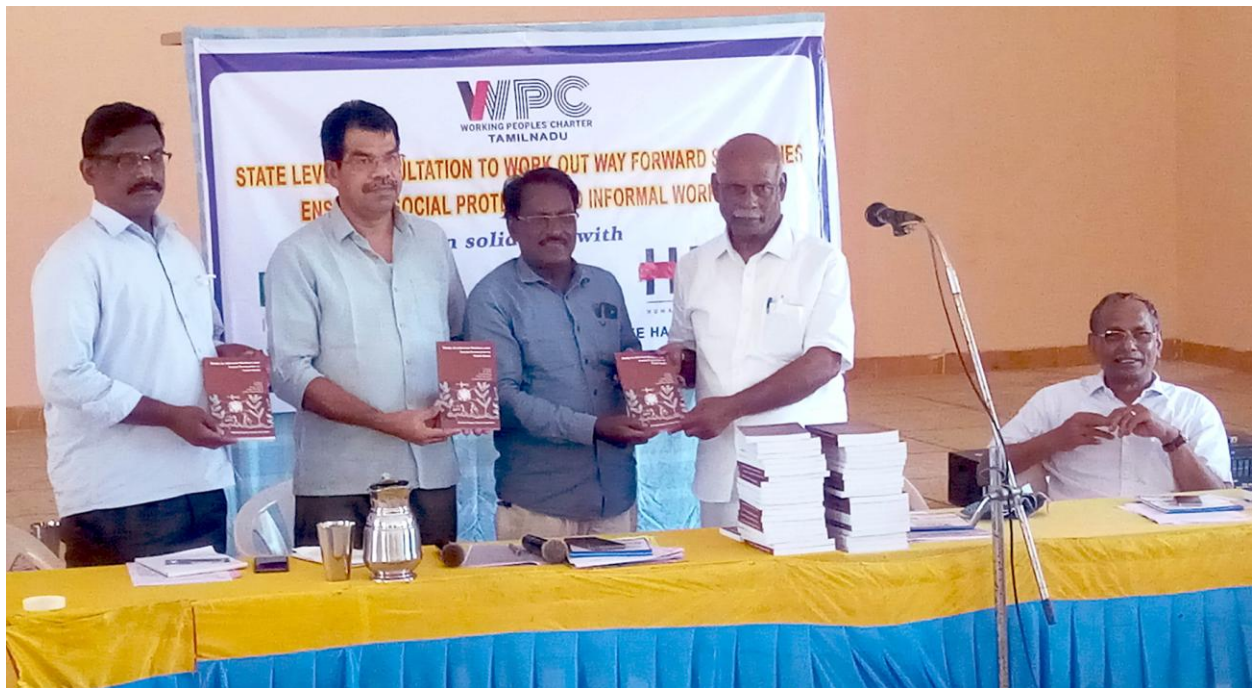
The remuneration they got during the period helped them become economically independent and some of them bought two wheelers for their transport. From their articulation, it was evident that they gained self confidence, courage to face hardships, skill in riding vehicles, boldness to visit new places independently, attitude to be compassionate towards others and fellowship from their six-month experience.



A Study and lobby

The informal sector in Tamil Nadu got paralysed completely when lockdown was imposed all of a sudden on the pretext of combating corona virus. This was no problem for the government workers and the economically well-off people. But for the daily wages earners and the workers of unorganized sector lockdown period was a terrible ordeal. Subsequently, the state government announced certain relief measures –disbursal of money and package of essential groceries - for the informal workers. But for receiving the assistance, the workers must have ID cards for having registered their names with the Labour Welfare Board.

Regrettably, many of them have not registered their names with the Labour Welfare Board. Hence, many of the unorganized workers could not avail the benefits of the relief measures of the government. Having understood the gravity of the situation, Working People’s Coalition, decided to make a state-wide study on the situation of unorganized workers for survival, which was and is precarious. Besides collecting data on the personal details of each worker, Focus Group Discussions and interviews with stakeholders were also undertaken.



The English version of the study ‘Informal Workers and Social Protection in Tamil Nadu’ was released online, as the entire state was shut down due to lockdown, in June 2021. After the lockdown was lifted, the book was released in the state-level consultation held in Karur in August 2021.

Observation and Findings from the Survey, the FGDs, the Stakeholder Interviews as well as the Action-Research

- At least the first two months of the lockdown passed in total chaos with the state administration having no clue or direction in guiding the informal workers of the state with regard to their basic survival.
- It was explicitly clear that due to the dearth of appropriate institutional arrangements, absence of proper policies, and due to lack of visibility and voice, the informal workers had to go through such blatant hardships.
- It actually took nearly 3 months for the local administrations to have some control over basic relief distributions for the workers and their dependent families.
- Not being regular members of the vocation-based welfare boards was the main reason for not getting the COVID-19 relief benefits.
- Fresh memberships and renewal of old memberships were the key challenges to workers from all sectors.
- Most workers were totally dependent on the brokers for registration and renewal and they were not able to go directly themselves, as they did not know how to fill up the forms or locate the appropriate welfare centres.
- The newly introduced 'online registration' process during the lockdown period was the biggest challenge for the informal workers as their formal education and exposure to latest technological issues was bare minimum.
- Most informal workers in the rural areas were not aware of the existence of 'labour welfare centres', the functioning of various sector 'welfare boards', and various social security benefits that they were entitled to, etc. mainly due to lack of information and lack of exposures.
- Even if the workers were interested in registering themselves into the welfare boards, they had to shuttle between places and spend at least a week to produce the relevant documents to the authorities, which was cumbersome for the workers in the rural areas.
- The workers had to obtain too many certifications and had to run from pillar to post to get every document.
- At all stages of online application & certificates uploading, they struggled in the process as it involved officials' concurrence, OTP (one time password) acknowledgements through mobile phones, linking with AADHAR cards, etc. which was challenging for them to handle independently.
- It was also perceived as a time and money consuming process with unnecessary glitches, stress & strain. Moreover, it involved a lot of uncertainties and didn't serve their emergency or immediate material purposes during the COVID-19 lockdown period.

- The financial assistance was generally not rendered immediately or time-bound against their applications. On an average, the informal workers had to spend at least INR₹ 500 for registration including bus fare and food expenses during the processing days. COVID-19 relief of INR₹ 2000 and PDS (Public Distribution System) rations under LWB scheme were eventually not availed in a large number of cases.
- Moreover, for the workers and their families, the relief fund disbursed by the government was frail, thus making both ends meet with it as impossible and meaningless.
- Most informal workers managed their families during COVID-19 by borrowing loans from individuals/ microcredit organisations, mortgaging/ selling their jewellery/ properties and with relief materials received from NGOs/ public charities/ humanitarian citizens

Recommendations based on the Survey, FGDs, Stake-Holder Interviews & Action-Research

- There is an urgent need for explicit, interpretable and inclusive framing of social protection rights, obligations, procedures and development plans for the welfare of informal workers.
- There is a critical requirement for adequate monitoring, inspection and enforcement of welfarism and all social security systems related to informal sector workers. Adequacy, availability and continuity of resources are central for implementing any social security measure. It was the responsibility of the government to ensure the uninterrupted accessibility of benefits to the needy workers.
- Informal sector is a massive domain in India, so it is also important to prioritise and to have governance, management and procedural adequacy for each type of work and vocation.
- Lack of awareness was a significant concern among informal workers. Therefore there is a need to enhance sharing and updating as well as maintaining continuity in disseminating information.
- In any successful implementation of social security systems, it is imperative to remove the psychological and socio-cultural obstacles amongst the workers and the officials.
- Equity, equality and opportunity issues were often glossed over in most development plans related to the informal sector. Therefore it is absolutely essential to target vulnerable groups, marginalised sections, priority sectors and specific territorial regions in implementing the welfare initiatives

Earlier, in June 2021, the programme coordinators who work for the welfare of the unorganized workers called on two Members of Legislative Assembly – Kulithalai constituency MLA and Krishnarayapuram constituency MLA – and gave them the brief report on the findings of the study on the plight of unorganized workers.



We also lobbied with them for raising the issue of social protection of the unorganized workers in the state assembly.

Conclusion:

AREDS always looks back at its journey ever forward as an act of self-evaluation. As the future endeavors, *we have proposed to undertake two initiatives:*

ARREDS Fin tech

which aims at helping all kinds of agro-economic initiatives financially. The focus will be given to small and marginal farmers for growing organic food. More focus will be given to farmers producer companies aiming at social enterprises. Women engaged in agriculture as wage earners will be assisted with income generation investments

The Idea of Share and Care

is aimed at contributing to ensuring social protection of the people in concern with various social movements. By this initiative it is envisaged to acquire experience and data to lobby with the state for human centered and inclusive social protection policies and programs. Also lobby with the state for universal social protection and fair and equal share in the economic progress of the country.

After long search and understanding of lack of political will and concern by the rulers in ensuring social protection to the workers, especially the migrant workers, we propose the above as alternatives to ensure equal and fair share of economic progress to all citizens.

A just human society is realised:

“Development of each person,

All persons and the whole person”

A true Human Economy: Person centred development where no one is left behind

General Body Meeting 2021-2022



The Annual Report 2021-2022 was presented by the Secretary of AREDS and sector-wise reports were presented by the respective programme coordinators.

Mr. Rajasekar presented the report on the activities carried out for the development of unorganized workers.





Mr. Arivarasu presented the report on the ‘Study on Informal Workers and Social Protection in Tamil Nadu.’

Mr. Karikalan presented the report on the activities executed for the welfare on sanitary workers and on the relief works done during corona lockdown period.



Ms. Packiyam presented the report on the Farmer Producer Company, which is a agribusiness venture promoted by AREDS.

Mr. Rajiv Gandhi presented the report on AREDS Play-way School and also on the needs and wants of the school to get improved.





Mr. Subaraj presented the report on childline-1098.

Ms. Amutha presented the report on the AREDS Health Team activities and on the six-month programme executed for promoting vaccination against COVID-19 pandemic in Karur district.



The Annual Report was discussed deeply by the GB members so as to find out the connectivity between the outcome of the activities ongoing and the two new initiatives proposed as the programmes for the future.



Mr. Saravanan explained the new initiative **ARREDS Agro-Tech**.

Mr. Britto explained the initiative on **Social Protection: Share and Care**.



Feedbacks and consensus

ARREDS Agro-tech is aimed at supporting small and marginal farmers or farmers' collectives financially so as to enable them to continue farming practices. Only when farming practices continue, fertile lands will never be transformed into barren grounds for building houses and establishing industries. Above all, it will contribute much to the nation's food sovereignty. Nowadays, no financial institutions, including the nationalized banks, are ready to disburse loans to small and marginal farmers. At this juncture, AREDS Agro-Tech will come in handy to the famers for continuing their farming activities. Therefore, the GB members agreed to this new scheme, as the financial support is to be rendered to farmers instead of SHGs. At the same time, the GB members – Mr. Moorthy, Mr. Nicholas, Ms. Sahayam and MS. Mary - suggested that we should see to it that the loan amount disbursed is invested only in farming activities. They also suggested that whether it is individual farmers or farmers' collectives, they should have a definite business plan, which will bring in a social impact.



Since the objective of this programme is contribute to the national food sovereignty in the long run, all members unanimously approved to take up this new initiative ARREDS Agro-Tech.



Then, the members discussed another new programme Social Protection: Share and Care. The members expressed the need of such social security schemes in the present context in which a huge multitude of Indian population is barely exists without any social security measures ensured to them. The lockdown periods brought out the truth about the miserable life of unorganized workers in our country to the surface. Therefore, people, who do not have means of social security norms, need to find out and operate a sustainable social security scheme for themselves, instead of depending on the precarious social security schemes of the government.



The members suggested that health insurance schemes also included into the Share and Care programme. Since the new programmes are highly relevant to the present context, they unanimously approved to take up this new initiative.

Besides the GB members, representatives from people's movements and FPCs also participated in the meeting. Seeing the number of memberships with each of the people's movements and the FPCs, the GB members found the two new initiatives proposed were possible, feasible and achievable. They also comprehended the characteristics of Human Economy embedded in the objectives and the activities of the two new initiatives. Therefore, they unanimously approved the two new initiatives.

Thank you!