



QSA NEWSLETTER

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Welcome to the April 2014 edition of the QSA Newsletter where you will learn more about our project. This month we visit the people and projects of Tamil Nadu, South India. We hope you enjoy reading about them.

People in Tamil Nadu

Meet our project manager Guna, (on the right) who is from Tamil Nadu, but in the west of the state near Madurai, where he is a key part of the Vasandham Environmental Resource Centre. Although this is not a large project, its impact in the region is quite extensive. On the left, is a photo of Joss Brooks, director of Pitchandikulam Forest, Tamil Nadu which has a strong emphasis on environmental education in schools, and there will be more about this project later in the year. We hope to run a Study Tour to both projects in 2015.



Places

Vasandham Environmental Education Centre, or VERC, has been established to demonstrate a range of agricultural methods which are more environmentally sustainable than the current practices. The area around VERC however has been in a drought for over two years, and obtaining sufficient water supply is an on-going concern. The local Vaigai River has had very little water flowing during that time.



Project

VERC is specifically addressing more ecologically sound agricultural practices to redress long term damages brought about by over grazing and prolonged drought, and removing trees and shrubs which serve to retain the soil. With such an emphasis, the issue of water acquisition and storage is significant, particularly as the area has been in drought for a considerable time, and reports of needing to deepen wells to reach the falling water tables are common. VERC regularly monitors the traditional open water storage area (called a kanmai) to reduce the incidence of encroachment by farmers planting crops in this fertile soil, and to ensure equity of access to these significant water resources. They also encourage community consultations and non-violent protests when violations of access to kanmais are noted.

VERC is also emphasising a wider range of crops, particularly to offset the trend for more wide spread monoculture crops such as tapioca and maize, grown as cash crops. This leaves little produce for home consumption. VERC encourages an organic approach, with multiple cropping to provide a year round range of food for the home and some surplus to sell in the markets. This also results in less chance of disease destroying the entire crop. Emphasizing intercropping methods for maximum use of the soil and mulching retains what moisture there is in the soil and reduces the incidence of top soil being lost by winds.

Within the demonstration site, VERC has some cash tree crops bringing in an income, as well as field crops and herbs, all of which provide year-round flowers to satisfy the growing population of honey bees. Another demonstrated feature is alternative technology, with working examples of



A training session on making organic pesticides
Photo credit – QSA



Guna and some of the development staff and Federation members
Photo credit - QSA

solar power generation, wind turbines and a bio-gas plant. VERC is considering eco-tourism to raise some income to run its development projects, particularly as the Tamil Nadu government has declared the adjacent land as a wildlife sanctuary so sightings of tigers, bears (yes India has its own bears) and many other animals, a wide range of birds, reptiles and butterflies could be possible.

Photos of the month Do you know what these cash crops are?



Ans –Left is kapok cotton, which is carded, the seeds removed, and is then used as filling for mattresses and pillows as an income earner. On the right are cashew nuts, also grown as a cash crop. Both are grown at VERC. Photo - QSA

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