



# help Foundation

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newsletter

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## Workshop on Water Conservation

HELP Foundation has been engaged in Environmental conservation and protection in Kollam District through environment education movement with application oriented focused activities that address issues having direct influence on the society. HELP Foundation teamed up with World Wide Fund for Nature India (WWF - India) a premier nature conservation organization to conduct a Workshop on Water Conservation and Education for Teacher-in-charge of Nature / Eco Clubs.

The topic becomes all the more significant given the water scarcity issues facing the district and the context in which water bodies and wetlands of Kollam, given the likes of Sasthamcotta Lake and Ashtamudi Lake are facing with respect to their very existence. This workshop further drove home the need to value ecosystem services and to conserve water and assist in recharging of our water bodies. Communication and Capacity Development Unit (CCDU), Kerala and other expert resources from WWF handled the session for the participating school teachers from Kollam District along with HELP Foundation.



## REACH– Resources for Assisting Children

Today Human Development is considered to be a very important aspect of a country's progress. A nation's efforts towards enhancing women and children's health, nutrition and education and also its commitment to resolve social issues like child labour, illiteracy and poverty is relevant in measuring its development. India's concern for children is evident in the constitutional provisions, policies, programmes and legislation. India is home to almost 19% of the world's children. More than one third of the country's population, around 440 million, is below 18 years. The future and strength of the nation lies in a healthy, protected, educated and well-developed child population that will grow up to be productive citizens of the country. India must invest resources in children proportionate to their huge numbers. The juvenile justice system in India contemplates the legal response with respect to two categories of children, namely those who are 'in conflict with law' (an individual under the age of 18 years who is accused of committing an offence); and those 'in need of care and protection' (children from deprived and

marginalized sections of society as well as those with different needs and vulnerabilities). It's this second category that is in need of immediate attention from all concerned.

HELP Foundation on working with the District authorities of Kollam was concerned about the plight of the Girl child and the woeful inadequacy of care homes to house them. Towards the same we started to work with the local administration in creating awareness and sensitizing the elected members to this serious social issue we face as a society and were successful in nudging them towards them taking the lead in creation of infrastructure within their jurisdiction so as to be able to support the girl Child. However our policies and legislations for children have on the whole suffered from weak implementation, owing to scant attention to issues of child protection, resulting in scarce resources, minimal infrastructure, and inadequate services to address child protection problems. 'Child Protection' is about protecting children from or against any perceived or real danger or risk to their life, their personhood and childhood. It is about reducing their vulnerability to any kind of

## REACH- Resources for Assisting Children



Juvenile Justice Board Chairman at the Seminar along with Mayyanad Panchayat President

harm and protecting them in harmful situations. It is about ensuring that no child falls out of the social security and safety net and those who do, receive necessary care, protection and support so as to bring them back into the safety net. While protection is a right of every child, some children are more vulnerable than others and need special attention. The Government recognizes these children as 'children in difficult circumstances', characterized by their specific social, economic and geo-political situations. In addition to providing a safe environment for these children, it is imperative to ensure that all other children also remain protected. Child protection is integrally linked to every other right of the child but it's seldom met.

Failure to ensure children's right to protection adversely affects all other rights of the child. Thus, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) also cannot be achieved unless child protection is an integral part of programming strategies and plans. Failure to protect children from such issues as violence in schools, child labor, harmful traditional practices, child marriage, child abuse, the absence of parental care and commercial sexual exploitation among others, means failure in fulfilling both the Constitutional and international commitments towards children. Violations of the child's right to protection, in addition to being human rights violations, are massive, under-recognized and under-reported obstacles to child survival and development. Failure to protect children has serious consequences for the

physical, mental, emotional, social development of the child, with consequences in loss in productivity and the loss in human capital for the nation.

It's our sincere belief and understanding based on our research on the real field conditions local bodies (Panchayats and Corporations) have a huge role to play in this arena. This realization has to be dawned upon the elected representatives so that the annual plan exercises goes beyond fund allocation to Aganwadis. Children 'in need of care and protection' should need the immediate attention from all concerned starting from civil society to local administrators and NGOs. Its about time our local bodies (elected members) goes beyond distributing chicken and goats and demonstrate an ability to have a grasp of urgent issues plaguing the nation.

The State Legislature and the Social Justice Department has also been found wanting in this arena as the provisions mandated in the Juvenile Justice Act is not made available to the local bodies for reasons beyond common understanding. Neighboring states and notably legislatures and local administration have made much headway in this regard. HELP Foundation is working closely with all concerned to accord Child care and Protection the attention it deserves. Politics is all about Nation Building and Nation Building starts with our children without any doubt.

## Opening of the natural Estuary at Paravur Lake

As the Paravur Lake is dying fast and the Ithikkara river is fatally hurt the combined ecosystem which amalgamates into the Arabian Sea is fast crumbling causing a host of issues from sea erosion to loss of lives to food security to livelihood issues. A council of people from various segments was brought together under HELP Foundations leadership to coordinate activities to revive the water bodies under the banner of Paravur Lake and Ithikkara River Protection Council. The council has taken it upon them to work for the cause of reopening of the estuary with immediate effect as this is one of the significant steps needed to revive the lake.

HELP Foundation together with the Paravur Lake and Ithikkara River Protection Council met with Kollam Collector P.J. Thomas on 6th-May-2013 and passed on a file (with all studies, research papers and representation about Paravur Lake) to immediately intervene for restoration of the natural estuary at Mukkom which has been closed to suit certain interest groups. Based on the above meeting on 12th-June-2013, Major Irrigation Department Executive Engineer (Shri Jacob Mathai) visits the spot of the natural estuary and readily agrees that the estuary should be opened up and the original spot and requests HELP Foundation to assist his office to document the same. Paravur Lake Ithikkara River Protection Council led by its President Shri Arch Bald, Mayyanad Panchayat President Smt Shiela Kumari and elected ward members as well as local Indigenous fisher people met with the Irrigation Department delegation and convinced upon them the need for the same without succumbing to pressures of certain sea wall contractor and vested real estate interests.

Finally on 19th-June-2013 HELP Foundation and Paravur Lake and Ithikkara River Protection Council are invited for a meeting with Major Irrigation Department Assistant Executive Engineer (Shri Alex Varghese). Technical solution as well as the exact location has been agreed upon and documented as to what needs to be done to open up the estuary so as to revive the ailing lake and take care of other issues like



*Major Irrigation Department Executive Engineer (Shri Jacob Mathai) at the spot of the natural estuary*

food security and livelihood issues of fishermen. The solution as agreed upon is document below. Much further work needs to be done to get this implemented.

At least a dialogue has been started and the authorities who have been in denial mode have finally been brought around as the vested forces have had their way for the past 3 decades on this estuary issue and had kept this under wraps.



Paravur Lake is too precious a water body to allow it to become extinct, and the ecosystem service it provides to the local population has finally been appreciated by even the government officials. Through the recent intervention we have been able to give a fillip to our efforts of the past 3 years aimed at reviving this lake.

### Project DAYA (Dialysis Assistance Programme)



HELP Foundations Project Daya has chugging along into its 15th month since we started supporting needy patients. We have extended our support across multiple hospitals and have to date supported over 250 plus dialysis free of costs through our Dialysis Centre and are looking at

ways and means to further deepen HELP Foundations impact into this arena.

It has been our endeavor to be able to provide hope to renal patients outside of plain dialysis which is just looking down the barrel. For many people with advanced kidney failure, dialysis treatment can greatly improve their quality of life. However, the treatment may be demanding and time-consuming and it is usually necessary to make lasting changes to once lifestyle. Although it is often possible for these patients to adjust and still lead a fulfilling life, dialysis is not a cure at all. The treatment only partly replaces some functions of the kidney and it does not benefit other health problems; indeed the treatment may make some of them worse. Because of this, dialysis may not improve the quality of life for some people. The need to change lifestyle can also prove an added burden.

In such situations it is important for all concerned to have a clear view of the likely advantages and disadvantages of dialysis treatment for each individual patient. This should take account of each patient's particular problems, circumstances and concerns. Reaching this point usually involves a good deal of discussion over a period of time between patient, relatives and careers and the renal team. We at HELP Foundation have not been successful to date with our efforts in this direction and we intend to redouble our efforts in this direction taking onboard all concerned towards assisting renal patients.

To continue to provide totally free dialysis at our Centre for more patients, we need support from all concerned. We are literally inundated with a long patient queue asking for help as they are unable to bear the cost associated with subjecting oneself to 3 dialysis every week. This can be individuals, our well wishers, organizations or corporate's who are willing to lend a helping hand to the needy kidney patients and not to HELP Foundation, as we are simple plain enablers. Assistance could also be by providing us with material needed for dialysis, inclusive of blood tubing and dialyser. For those of who, that are interested contact us at [help.foundation@rocketmail.com](mailto:help.foundation@rocketmail.com).

### Empowering of Elected Representatives

HELP Foundation has all along tried to assist local bodies and Panchayats in different ways in finding ways and means to work with the elected representatives. It has been our Endeavour to work with the Panchayats as a governing body but it has been a mixed bag due to the administration being driven by the local political party managers. While we are still continuing our efforts to engage a Panchayat as an unit, we have all along tried to work with individual local representatives to develop their capacities as Panchayat Presidents or ward members. It's worth noting that the Panchayat Presidents are endowed with most of the powers within PRI, s (Panchayati Raj Institutions) and it's an Executive Office.

We have been fairly successful in this approach as this has given them a better view of what an NGO can bring to the table by Support PRI, s in planning & implementation through making available capacity, resources, skills and experience. While most of the elected ward members are at sea as they are don't fully understand the responsibilities vested on them and their inadequacies are more than visible in the plan preparation process. On working closely with the Plan Process under the 12th 5 year plan and the various options available under each area for plan proposal submission, we are impressed by the world class systems made available for the process through the rural development ministry. But it's another matter that discussions are still centered on chicken, goats and construction of roads. Even the Mandatory functions of the Panchayat as specified in the Panchayati Raj Act doesn't get discussed in the planning process, let alone the General Functions and the Sector wise Functions.

It s our firm belief that Panchayat trainings must be devised to promote a culture of oneness among Panchayat leaders and officials, through exposure visits and interactions between gram Panchayats, districts and the states. Consultative processes like group discussions, public hearings, and other participatory tools should be made mandatory or rather ensured at local governance level as to add value to the plan process. Social audit system needs to be institutionalized in order to improving local service delivery and ensure compliance with laws and regulations so that accountability to stakeholders or the citizens of the Panchayat can be ensured. BMC (Biodiversity Management Committee) and its functions, its role in Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) etc is another area which needs a lot of attention and care. Empowering and Supporting PRI, s should be the priority of all concerned as they are key to the success of decentralized planning.

## Existence questions in Kollam District and the need to safeguard our water bodies and wetlands

Have you ever noticed the constantly shrinking acreage of Ashtamudi Lake in the heart of the town?

How many underground waste tunnels empty into the Ashtamudi Lake right at KSRTC bus stand?

How many of you know that District Hospital Kollam is the biggest pollutant of Ashtamudi Lake?

What are the health hazards of eating fish caught of Ashtamudi Lake?

Why are mangrove forests disappearing from Ashtamudi Lake banks at an alarming rate?

How many of you know that Paravur Lake is dying a natural death?

Do you know that the natural estuary at Ithikkara River Paravur Lake is blocked manually forever?

Which contractor owns possession certificate of the estuary area of Paravur Lake?

Is Kollam's drinking water supply safe or how contaminated is your ground water and why?

Forget waste processing what is the district administration doing to reduce waste and will they be ever able do anything in the current scenario?

Do you know that no more boat jetties can be constructed in Ashtamudi Lake due to the deep pits caused by sand mining as this makes piling impossible?

How many of you think that Governments 24.8 crore efforts can salvage Shasthamkota Lake from being extinct?

How severe are the problems being faced by Kollam's major Rivers Ithikkara, Achencoil & Kallada.

Define the role Inland Navigation and Major Irrigation Department played over the last decades for contributing towards the fast eroding beaches of Kollam?

Who are the revenue and agricultural officers listed in the Vigilance and Anti Corruption Bureau (VCAB) report to government for assisting land grabbers in converting paddy fields and wetlands of Kollam?

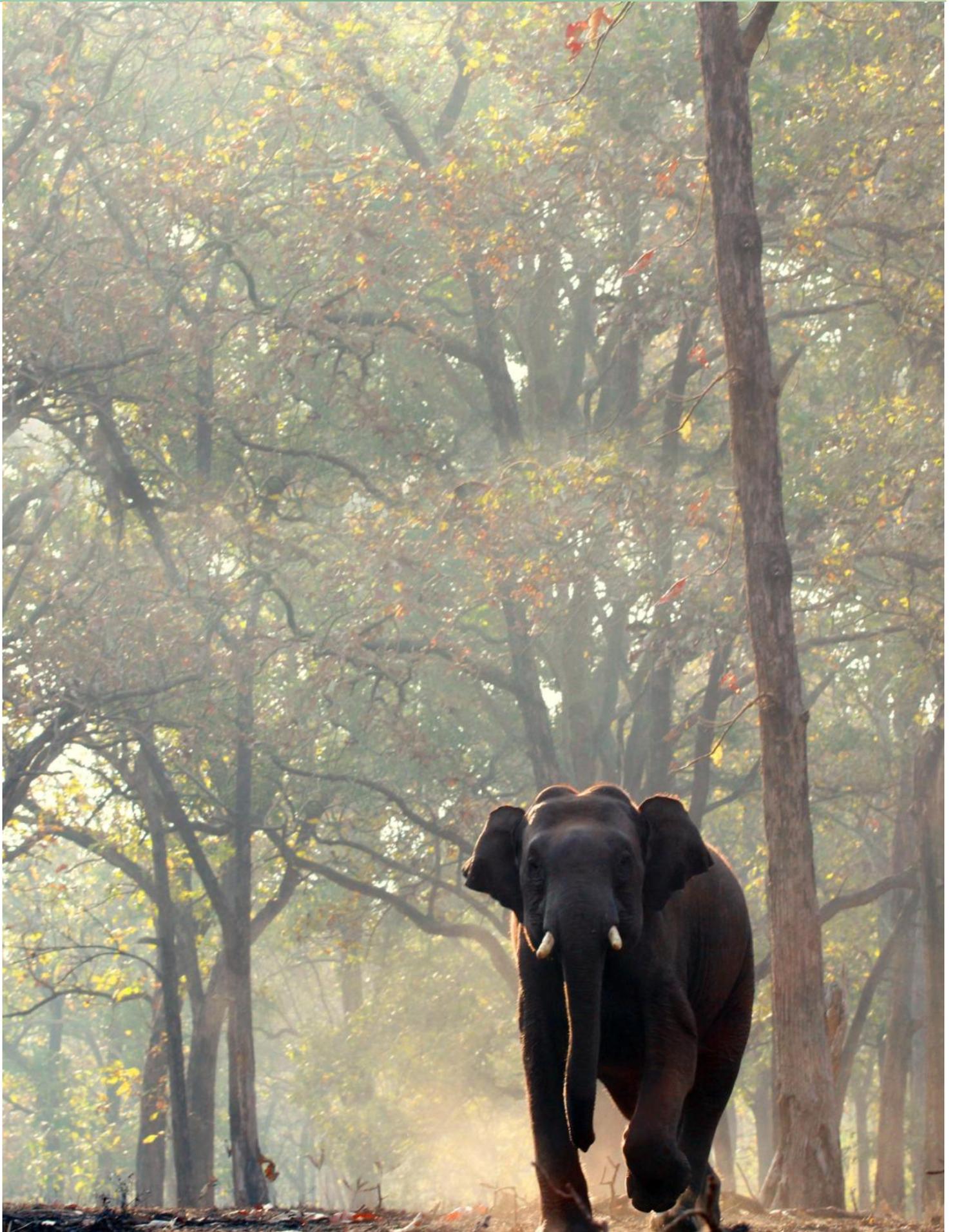
Why are we asking these rather dumb questions? Because, quite frankly, these are the questions we need to answer as they relate to the very existence of Kollam's citizens. As our government machinery is numb and inept, the only way Kollam citizens can crawl out of the quagmire of waste and polluted ground water is to actively participate in safeguarding our water bodies, wetlands and paddy fields from corrupt rulers. Our democratic rulers have utter disregard for the scientific advice and indigenous knowhow and would rather listen to contractors and builders to whom they are depended for funds.

Land grabbing in Kollam has become more rampant after the "THE KERALA CONSERVATION OF PADDY LAND AND WETLAND ACT, 2008" states the Vigilance and Anti Corruption Bureau (VACB) report submitted to the state government. Active connivance of corrupt Revenue and Agriculture department officials have helped land-grabbers convert ecologically important paddy lands to prime real estate in Kollam points out the report. The VACB says the provisions of the Act that give powers to revenue and police officials to stop illegal reclamation of wetlands, seize equipment used for illegal reclamation and ensure that the reclaimed land is reverted to its original state at the expense of the land-grabber has rarely been used in Kollam district. The agency has recommended that the District Collector constitute special teams to assess the extent of the illegal conversion, register cases wherever necessary and investigate the role of certain village and agriculture offices.

Preserving and conserving of our Wetlands calls for drastic changes in Public Policy and law enforcement given the state of water bodies in Kollam. The voluntary sector can play an important role in the process, particularly through community participation. Voluntary Organizations can offer alternative perspectives, committed expertise, an understanding of the local opportunities and constraints, and perhaps most importantly, the capacity to conduct a meaningful dialogue with communities. It is therefore essential that the Government and the Voluntary Sector work together. Where ever feasible, such partnership may also include other entities such as Panchayati raj institutions, municipalities, academic institutions, and private sector organizations.

HELP Foundation hereby launches it wild life supplement as part of it Nature Photo Division, as it aids in our process of communicating with the next generation citizens











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