



TREE PLANTING NEWSLETTER

2022-2023

Dear Tree Planting Sponsors,

To my delight, after three years, we were able to visit our partners in Tamil Nadu in Jan 2023. It was great to check in on the trees that were planted by myself, Murray, Janet, and Billie back in 2020, and stand under their growth spurt.

When visiting Self Help Group's (SHGs), I was pulled in different directions by members eager to show me their home grown vegetables. And, at an environmental awareness rally, we joined over 200 women on their march through Gumminipoondi holding signs stating 'save the environment', and 'look after trees' which definitely caught the attention of the locals!



Janet under the tree she planted in 2020 - Pathakotte

At MASARD's rural Ashagram compound, several hundred SOTE trees create a green escape from the busy roads and cities. A personal highlight was noticing a man on top of his fruit truck taking a nap under the shade of a 5-year-old SOTE tree. Seeing this reminded me of the scale of impact trees have and of how important it is to keep planting.

Our partners asked me personally to pass on their thanks to you all for your commitment to planting trees and vegetables in India. Trees give people hope for a better future for themselves and the environment around them. I look forward to sharing an environmental film from my trip later in the year. Best wishes, *Development Officer, Lena Calland*



Billie's tree - Same tree, same outfit! 3 years on

CRUSADE

Throughout 2022, CRUSADE set up **Health Committees** made up of local volunteers, including teachers, Womens Self Help Group (WSHG) members, local businesses, and community members, to discuss local matters affecting their communities. The groups collaborate on ways to improve their local water and health facilities and are passionate about enhancing their local environment.



Billie, Murray, and Janet join environmental rally

The Health committees from Athur and Thirunilai villages were instrumental in helping CRUSADE staff motivate the appropriate Panchayat President to set aside **one acre of common land for fruit tree planting**. Over **400 trees** were planted by village workers on the land utilising National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme. Once grown, the fruits will be sold to create funds that benefit the local community. The Panchayat has agreed to arrange for the maintenance and protection of the trees, and CRUSADE provided the saplings.

Environmental awareness rallies motivate rural communities on the importance of growing trees and vegetables and educate people on organic cultivation. SOTE staff attended an environmental awareness protest on their visit to CRUSADE and were joined by **200 women**, CRUSADE staff, Panchayat officials, WSHG leaders, and cluster coordinators. The campaign began by marching through the local streets highlighting the importance of protecting local trees, and finished under a large banyan tree, with songs and speeches about the environment. CRUSADE organised three marches in 2022, **involving more than 600 local people**.



WSHG member and husband in their garden

Since 2022, SOTE has been supporting over fifty groups for people with disabilities (PwDs). Group members are some of the most marginalised in rural communities and they rely heavily on government grants which are hard to obtain. A priority for CRUSADE in 2023, is to provide group members with trees and vegetables and to set up kitchen gardens that can enable these people to have a vital source of food and income.



Janet and Murray reveal plaque for tree planting plot with CRUSADE CEO Jothi, and Panchayat president

Throughout 2022, CRUSADE field staff and animators organised 34 kg of seeds into 5-10g packets for distribution. Seeds included a variety of greens, vegetables and herbs. In total, **4965 packets** were distributed to 1186 WSHGs and PwDs for growing organically outside their homes. Moreover, CRUSADE planted **2350 fruit trees, 240 teak trees**. The team motivated SHG members to set up **40 new kitchen gardens**, taking the total up to 160. Around **800 SHG members are currently growing vegetables at home**.



Secondary student reading under school tree

MASARD

MASARD had planned to plant 10,000 trees in 2022 on the assumption that the government subsidies to help pay for the saplings, tree guards and watering would continue.

In the event these subsidies were withdrawn which meant that the cost of tree planting rose considerably which in turn reduced the number of trees that were planted. Regular watering in the first two years of life is essential for many trees. Despite the shift in costs, MASARD has successfully planted **4500 trees** throughout 2022.

MASARD have focused their planting on areas which can be regularly watched and maintained.

MASARD's Ashagram compound has daily gardeners that care for the 2000+ SOTE trees ranging from 0-5 years. They have also been providing trees to families, to be watered using wastewater from homes. Trees planted on highways are more difficult to maintain, so instead of highways outside their quick reach, the team have focused their attention solely on the highway outside the Rural Development Centre (RDC) in Kamandoddi.

As well as tree planting, MASARD set up **12 new impressive kitchen gardens** in 2022. Some new gardens are currently on their second and even third crop! These gardens take MASARD's total up to 39, and are providing people with regular nutritious foods, incomes, and a sense of purpose. Billie and Lena visited several gardens and were moved by the stories of the participants. MASARD also ran **two general environmental campaigns** with an average of 300 people attending each, and **15 village level campaigns** with around 15 attendees, to continue to motivate people to care for their plants organically.



Local villagers waiting for bus in the shade of 5-year-old SOTE tree outside RDC



MASARD staff, Nandhini, under 5-year-old SOTE tree at Ashagram compound

Mallamma

'I feed my son and grandchildren with food from my garden'

Mallamma (nicknamed Amma), is 56 and lives on the outskirts of Kamandoddi village in a small home with her son, and young granddaughter, and grandson. She does not do paid work outside the home, instead cares for the children and runs the household. She expresses that in the past, she was perceived as an unskilled grandma with no voice.

Mallamma's neat and green kitchen garden is maintained daily with great pride. She spends several hours a day tending to vegetables in her garden. She grows four types of greens, coriander, tomatoes, beetroot, and radish, and a banana and a gooseberry tree. The garden has improved her wellbeing and given her a sense of achievement. Through her garden, she can feed her son's family and no longer needs to buy expensive veg from vendors.

The food she grows is organic and she expressed:

'I just pick fresh from the garden when needed and it can be eaten immediately!'

Mallamma involves her grandchildren who love helping her. In early Feb 2023, some plants were already on their second crop in 6 months!

Mallamma sends her thanks to SOTE for her garden, and also its protective fence and for the motivation and training she has received from MASARD.



Mallamma and grandchildren in garden



Mallamma's vegetables



Mallamma's granddaughter picking veg

Kasthuri

‘Caring for trees as if they were children’

Kasthuri lives in the Orphanage’s neighbouring village of Pathakotte, with her husband and her baby cow. The couple have no children, her husband is unwell with lung issues.

Kasthuri works in the gardens at the compound several days a week and cleans the Rural Development Centre in Kamandoddi once a week. Before her roles at MASARD, her only source of income was irregular agriculture work. She tells the SOTE team:

“Daily we pour water. We are very happy to see the plants grow. I look after them as if they were my children”

The couple recently purchased a cow, which she is deeply fond of. They tend to the cow together and have named it ‘Kothanda Raman’. Kasthuri is a positive light around the campus. Her husband is accessing medical support through SOTE’s cloud clinic. They send their thanks to SOTE supporters.



Kasthuri picking fruit



Kasthuri & Ashagram gardeners

Focus on fruit trees:

Since meeting with our partners, we have come to appreciate the demand for providing fruit trees to rural families. Fruit trees offer ample opportunity for income and can match their initial investment several times over from just one yield.

Fruit trees cost more than shade trees planted on roads, schools, and communal areas. However, the maintenance cost for fruit is far lower, as families care for the trees themselves with wastewater from their homes. There has been an immense amount of interest in fruit trees from families. MASARD alone has over 200 families on the waiting list. To keep up with demand, we have **shifted our tree planting ethical gift from £2 a tree to £5 to donate a fruit tree for a family.**

With the increase of costs the average price of planting and maintaining a tree in its early years has risen. This means that less trees will be able to be planted with your donation. In the light of this if you would like to increase your donation please contact Dave Bradley our Treasurer at treasurer@sote.org.uk

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