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# Evaluation of a community-based buffalo project in Tamil Nadu

John Devavaram

### • Background

In 1990 a community-based dairy buffalo project was established by the People's Service Society (PSS) in partnership with VetAid in the villages of T. Kallupeti and Karaikeni, Madurai District, Tamil Nadu.

The project assists families, drawn from the economically and socially deprived sectors of society (mostly landless), by providing them with a dairy buffalo. The beneficiaries then pay back 60 per cent of the purchase price of the buffalo over a three year period using income from milk sales. The balance is paid by the Indian government. On completion of the loan repayment the buffalo belongs to the beneficiary. Until then, the buffalo are housed in a communal shed in the village where the beneficiaries will inevitably meet up whilst attending to their animals. It is hoped that this regular contact will help to foster a sense of community spirit between beneficiaries during the course of the three year loan repayment and ensure the project's sustainability in the long run.

Whilst VetAid provides the funds to erect a communal shed to house the buffalo in each village, the beneficiaries are supposed to milk, feed and take full responsibility for their own animal. Each shed has an on-site manager and a part-time veterinarian employed to provide advice and training in management and health. The milk produced is measured, recorded, pooled and sold in nearby Madurai. The PSS, who provide accounting and administration for the project, receive the income from the milk. They put this towards individual loan repayments and the purchase of essential inputs. They give the balance to the

beneficiaries, depending on the milk yield of their individual buffalo.

### • Mid-term evaluation of the project

In December 1991 VetAid asked the Society for People's Education and Economic Change (SPEECH), a local NGO, to carry out a mid-term appraisal of the project<sup>1</sup>. The overall objective was to understand the implications of the project from the beneficiaries' point of view. The specific aims of the evaluation were:

- To gather and analyse socio-economic-cultural information from the project beneficiaries and their families;
- To evaluate the relevance of the buffalo project with respect to the livelihoods of the beneficiaries; and,
- To determine whether the project managers should take further measures to create a greater sense of involvement for the beneficiaries.

With the above goals in mind we prepared a set of key questions which we felt needed to be answered. By incorporating a wide range of participatory (PRA) methodologies we hoped to create an atmosphere in which people would interact freely with the PRA practitioners and respond honestly and in depth to the different questions and exercises.

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<sup>1</sup> Mattick, A. 1991. The VetAid Community Milking Buffalo Project: A Mid-Term Review. VetAid, Roslin, Scotland.

## • Participatory research methods

The SPEECH team chose the following participatory techniques:

- Social and resource mapping;
- Seasonal calendars (labour division, income, expenditure, disease, rainfall, fodder);
- Trend change and linkage;
- Daily routine diagrams and livelihood analyses;
- Semi-structured interviews; and,
- Individual family profiles;

Having introduced ourselves, we divided the group of 30 villagers into three groups according to their villages. A group of older participants was also selected for the trend change and linkage exercise. A report on the outcomes and issues associated with the application of some of these techniques is outlined below.

### Trend change and linkage

An historical analysis of animal husbandry practices showed that in the past animals were traditionally purchased through money lenders. They were housed, cared for and the products either consumed or marketed by individual owners. Local bulls were loaned for mating and if an animal was sick a traditional healer was called for assistance.

However, this scenario has changed. The buffalo are now kept in a communal shed, the PSS provide medical care, artificial insemination and concentrates for the buffalo. The PSS also market the milk themselves. Inevitably the beneficiaries do not feel responsible for their animal and to date have not received any training in animal husbandry and health from the PSS.

### Semi-structured interviews

These provided most information about the organisation and structure of the project. We discovered that the villagers had some concerns about the way the project was being managed and it was not difficult to get them to speak openly about their feelings. Relations between the PSS and the villagers seemed poor. There was a basic lack of

communication between the two groups, the villagers misunderstood the project goals and management structures and were not participating fully in the project.

It is worth noting that in a second evaluation of the buffalo project by SPEECH in 1993<sup>2</sup> the villagers were no longer willing to participate in PRA activities. The recommendations from the first PRA workshop had not yet been acted upon. As a result the villagers were disappointed and wished to withdraw from the project. They scorned any suggestions of 'playing games' (drawing resource maps), claiming that there had been no changes since the first evaluation so there was no need for a second one. The facilitators tried their best to probe into the issues using open-ended questioning and to establish some solutions but they were in a difficult and uncomfortable position.

### Seasonal calendars

A seasonal calendar (Figure 1) helped VetAid and PSS to appreciate and understand fully the responsibilities and production constraints involved in buffalo husbandry. The employment potential in the area appears to be high, roughly 200 days for men and 160 days for women. This is significant because it means that the beneficiaries spend a large proportion of the year seeking casual harvesting jobs in different localities. Therefore they do not have the time to constantly tend their buffalo or to attend animal production and health training courses. The calendar showed that March, April and October are the months in which buffalo suffer from different diseases, while it also showed that from February to June green fodder was available.

<sup>2</sup> Devavaram, J. 1993. *Participatory Appraisal on Buffalo Project*. Report on an evaluation carried out on behalf of VetAid. VetAid, Roslin, Scotland.

Figure 1. Seasonal Calendar: Buffalo Husbandry

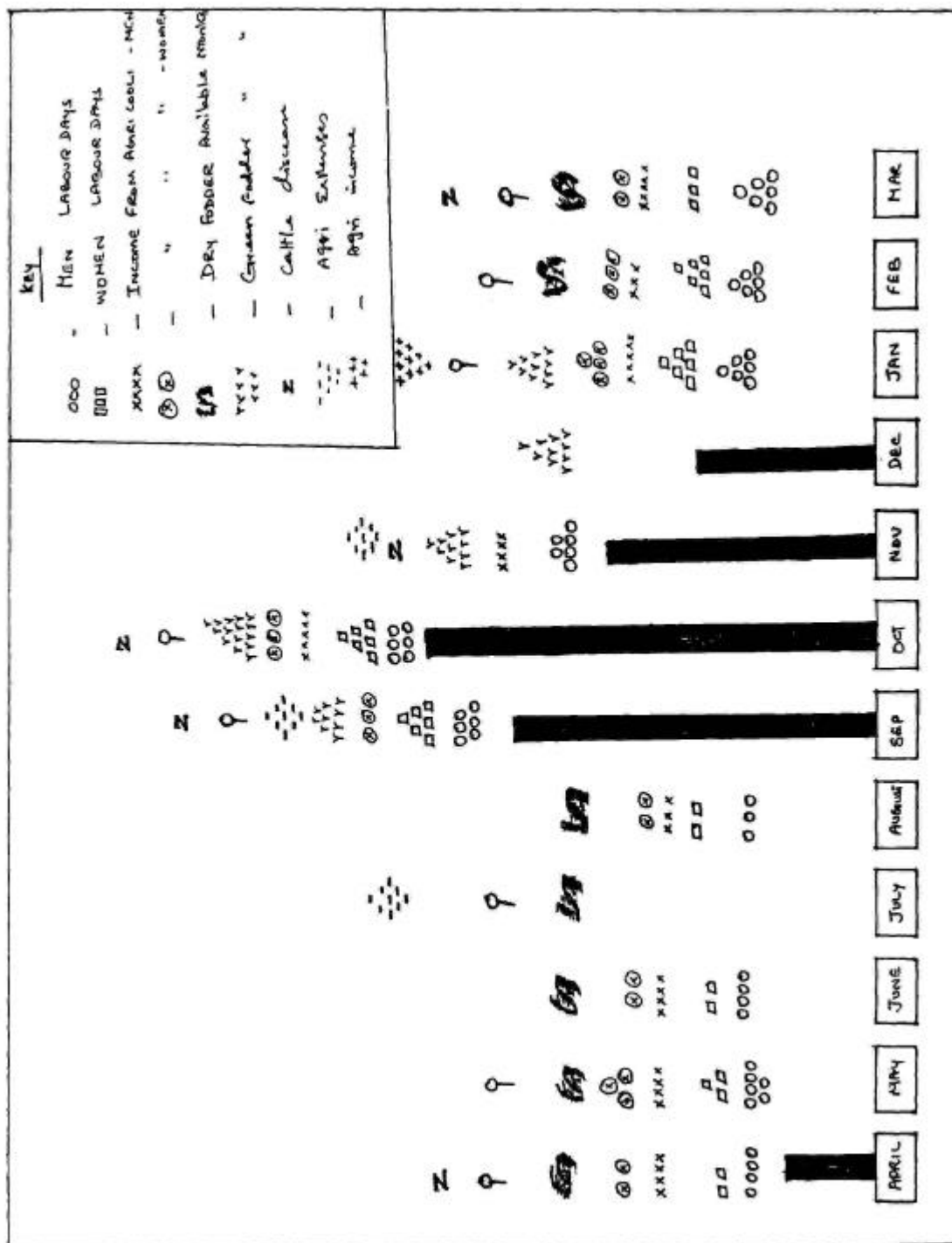


Figure 2. Livelihood Analysis: Karakemi Village

DETAILS	SANTHANA	KOMATI	REKHAMM	THANAM	SIRANASA	CHINAM	GOATU	ALAMBI	S. PALUBI	SANSE P. PALUBI
<u>HOUSE HOLD MEMBERS</u>										
MALE	1	1	1	2	1	2	1	2	2	1
FEMALE	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	2	1	1
CHILDREN - MALE	-	2	-	1	1	2	-	1	1	1
- FEMALE	-	3	-	1	1	-	3	2	2	1
<u>ANIMALS OWNED</u>										
COW	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
GOATS / SHEEP	4	-	-	-	-	-	2	2	1	2
CHICKEN	5	3	1	2	-	3	4	-	-	4
BUFFALO	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
<u>SOURCE OF INCOME</u>										
AGRI - OWN	-	50 cents	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
AGRI COOP	Rs. 300/-	Rs. 225	Rs. 300	Rs. 150	Rs. 300	Rs. 225	Rs. 300	Rs. 275	Rs. 150	Rs. 150
LIVESTOCK	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
<u>REMITTANCES / CONSUMPTION</u>										
Family (feeding/edu)	100%	150%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Loan (Refugee)	50%	50%	-	-	-	50%	25%	-	-	-
Fodder	50%	50%	-	-	-	50%	75%	-	-	-
<u>NOTE: out of income from cattle</u>										

## Livelihood analyses

The livelihood analysis (Figure 2) showed the following. Taking into account the average number of labour days available, a family with both members working seems to receive Rs.3,000/- to Rs.3,500/- per year. This information further emphasises how a waged income provides a primary and significant source of income for the villagers. This explains why they allocate a large proportion of their time to waged activities rather than to their buffalo.

## Resource map/model

A physical model was made of the Karaikeni village. This showed the resources available within the village and the location of houses. It drew VetAid's attention to the fact that the *Daliths*, around 20 per cent of the project beneficiaries, are excluded from common resources such as grazing areas, ponds and wells because they are from the 'untouchable' caste. This inevitably affects their ability to manage their own buffalo efficiently.

## • Lessons learned

One reason why the PSS development project failed to achieve some of its objectives was because an in-depth consultation with the villagers was not carried out before it was implemented. The donors had merely relied upon advice from key informants and used social and economic indicators to identify needs. By doing so they had overlooked some of the social, economic and cultural constraints and aspects of their livelihood that had implications for the proposed project.

The PRA revealed information about how the villagers perceived the project in relation to their needs and priorities. This type of knowledge could not have been gained without the full co-operation of the villagers. They reported feeling isolated from the day-to-day events of the project and felt they were not being informed of details of milk sales, loan repayment, project expenditure etc. This information allowed VetAid to recommend that the PSS take steps to increase the involvement of the beneficiaries in all aspects

of decision-making and implementation. As a result the project was modified to make it more people-centred and participatory.

- **John Devavaram**, SPEECH, 14 Jeyaraja Illam, Opposite Kasirajan Hospital, Ezhil Nagar, Tirupalai, Madurai 625014, Tamil Nadu, India.