

THE little village of Markunda in Bidar district of the South Indian state of Karnataka had never seen such an invasion.

Over 1,300 women from as far away as Mysore district in the South to villages in Maharashtra state had streamed into the village, some on foot and others in buses and carts.

The large open ground belonging to the local council was transformed overnight into a tent village, festive with coloured lights.

The event was the Information Fair organised by the Karnataka Women's Development Programme (KWDP). Wholly funded by the Netherlands Government, the KWDP is a five-year programme in three states (Karnataka, Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh) designed to empower women to recognise and deal with their own problems.

Its concept is simple: instead of the topdown approach, it builds from the bottom up. So the first step is to identify women from the participating communities who can assist women at the village level to form groups.

These groups then determine the issues to be tackled in their villages. The KWDP's direct contribution is non-formal education.

For the fair, each group in the village covered set their own priorities. For instance, the women from Bijapur district wrote plays which highlight the importance of literacy, as well as other problems confronting them like moneylending at usurious rates and exploitation by landlords.

Unique Fair Looks at Women's Issues

This programme for rural women encourages them to solve their problems and achieve goals themselves

Ms. Srilatha Bathiwala, KWDP state programme director, says it is different from other programmes which use service delivery as entry point. The latter mode of development intervention, she says, "leads to dependency syndrome where communities continue to rely on an outside source to provide them with service."

More importantly, such interventions have what Ms. Bathiwala termed "patriarchal underpinnings" and do not pay adequate heed to the needs of women who remain marginalised. In addition, the service delivery model fails to address the complexities of rural existence, she says.

Thus the KWDP deliberately chose to support village folk in acquiring the resources to run services for themselves, says Ms. Bathiwala.

The idea of the information Fair was also born out of a recognition of women's right to decide what they want to learn and how. When a representative of a non-governmental group in Maharashtra, involved in income-generating activities, approached the

KWDP for an opportunity for women to meet and exchange views, the fair was conceived.

Consultation with the groups led to a widening of the subjects on which information was desired. Interestingly, the choice of subjects shattered many stereotypes about rural women's interests.

Apart from law, health and issues relating to income such as credit and loans facilities, the women wanted to know about alternative rural technologies such as biogas, smokeless stoves, horticulture and plant breeding.

One of the fair's most interesting sessions was the one on law. Conceived by Delhi lawyer Ratna Kapoor who asked students from the National Law School in Bangalore to conduct it, the session had resource persons who interacted closely with the village heads another eye opener. One woman from Bijapur district who headed her group said the village head did not allow her to decide on certain issues important to the village, earning her the ire of co-villagers. Another recounted her problems when she found out that a building contractor was mixing mud with cement to construct a village project, but somehow she managed to get the contract cancelled.

Such instances show how the "process of empowerment" desired by the KWDP is showing results. The very fact that the village women left their families to come to the fair is commendable, as many of them had never even stepped out of their village before.

Ms. Bathiwala calls it "a great leap." She notes how the women approached the resource persons with confidence. "There was no shyness, no coyness, no hesitation at all. They conveyed in their attitude the belief that they have a right to know," she says.

Nevertheless, it was asked if such confidence can be sustained once the funding stops. "For such an eventuality, our team has endeavoured to ensure that structures that are

not integral to the process can be jettisoned at any point.

"For instance, already the State office of KWDP is not essential because the district coordinators are well-organised. If this programme can run even for 20 months, the process would have attained adequate momentum to continue even if funding stops," says Ms. Bathiwala.

Another strategic decision she made while setting up the project in Karnataka was to minimise the interaction of city-based people with the village groups.

The very presence of people from another class raises expectation of delivery of some form of services or resources, thereby undercutting the principle of self-reliance and empowerment," she explains.

Also, KWDP has found it easier to form the working groups when non-governmental organisations do not intervene. This is because NGOs, she says, start off being intermediaries but end up doing the service delivery themselves. — Depthnews Women's



Carora cattle, a high milk yielding cross breed between selected European and native cattle from Jamaica, Cuba, India and other countries, that Venezuela plans to make available to other developing countries.

Carora Cows, More Milk

The significance of the breed to the developing world is twofold. First, the Carora are uniquely well adapted to living in tropical climates. Second, they have an unusually high milk yield: an annual average of 3,052 litres per cow. The breed therefore has the potential to increase dramatically the supply of protein in developing countries.

CARACAS, Venezuela — A remarkable breed of cattle developed in Venezuela, with an astonishingly high milk-producing capacity, was one of the subjects discussed by TCDC focal points from 26 countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, who met here recently. Other topics included health, aquaculture, environment and information systems. The event was part of the annual meeting of the Latin American Economic System (SELA), founded in 1975 to encourage countries of the region to co-operate in promoting development.

Most of them came from villages bordering on this desolate area and many still remember how their fathers or grandfathers moved whole families away from the desert land.

The oases, dotted with new villages, are protected by criss-crossing belts of willows, poplars and drought-resistant shrubs. Many houses are surrounded by apples, apricots, grapevines, or timber trees and shrubs. Some families have dug ponds to breed fish.

In the past decade, 53,000 hectares of sandy wastes have been transformed into farmland. About 200,000 hectares of low-yielding fields now give high and stable yields of wheat and corn, and 4,500 hectares of saline land have been turned into irrigated paddy fields yielding 7,500 kilograms of rice per hectare or even more.

The area, known as the Yulin-Yanchi desertified area, extends from east to west across eight counties along the ancient Great Wall in Shaanxi Province and the neighbouring Inner Mongolia and Ningxia regions. It covers an area of 20,000 sq. km. with a rural population of 550,000.

The remains of an ancient city, which was the capital of the kingdom of Xia (407-431 AD), bear witness to the encroachment of sand. Historical records have it that King He-lianbo built his capital named Tongwan in the area of today's Jingbian County, Shaanxi Province, with rich water resources and lush green pastures.

Yet now the walls surrounding the deserted city have

Salvador, Grenada, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, Uruguay and Venezuela.

Also represented were the World Health Organization, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the International Organization for Migrants, the Action Committee for Supporting Economic and Social Development in Central America, the Caribbean Community and the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean.

The talk, given by Gerardo Santeliz Carrasco of the Venezuelan Association of Carora Cattle breeders, aroused intense interest among the delegates.

The Carora is a type of cattle that has been developed over the past 60 years in north-western Venezuela. The cattle were evolved by careful crossing of selected European breeds with native cattle from Jamaica, Cuba, India and other countries. This was the first briefing on the breed to an international gathering.

The significance of the breed to the developing world is twofold. First, the Carora are uniquely well adapted to living in tropical climates. Second, they have an unusually high milk yield: an annual average of 3,052 litres per cow, as against the national average in Venezuela of 1,318 litres. The breed therefore has the potential to increase dramatically the supply of protein in developing countries.

"A miracle" is how Mr. Santeliz described the breed. "With Carora cattle," he said, "We could bring per capita milk consumption almost up to the level of the United States."

He hopes that the breed will be made available as soon as possible to all the countries that need it. First, however, it will be necessary to set up a development centre where research into the strain can continue and to which people can come from all over the world to obtain the cattle. For this purpose, \$140,000 is being requested from the Perez-Guerrero Trust Fund. — Cooperation South

The oases, dotted with new villages, are protected by criss-crossing belts of willows, poplars and drought-resistant shrubs. by Shu Bin and Yun Tong

New Oases Sprout On Sandy Wastes

been half buried by sand. The battles fought there over the centuries plus wanton tree felling and overgrazing led to ecological deterioration.

In the 100 years from 1850 to 1950, sand dunes from the desert moved 50 kilometres southward and more than 130,000 hectares of farmland and 412 villages were engulfed.

In 1949, trees and shrubs covered only 2 per cent of the area. The proportion has now risen to 38 per cent, and the greenery has improved the environment. More than 20 kinds of birds and such animals as fox and here have reappeared.

According to Sun Zhong-tang, senior engineer of the Sand Control Station at Yulin, the vegetative cover has anchored or semi-fixed 60 per cent of the 600,000 hectares of shifting sand. Trees, shrubs and grass have been grown on more than 800,000 hectares of land.

The transformation has attracted scientists and other visitors from more than 20 countries, including Germany, the United States and Japan. They see it as an example of the successes achieved in halting environmental deterioration, a problem baffling many parts of the world.

The economic results are remarkable, senior engineer Mr. Sun said. Timber reserves, for instance, are estimated at 3.4 million cubic metres, worth \$80 million yuan (US\$130 million). This is nearly 20 times the total investment earmarked for sand control in the past four decades.

The fight against desertification started in 1958 when the Yulin Sand Control Station was established by the Chinese Academy of Sciences. The dry

the seeds were swept away by wind.

The problem was solved by dense seeding and by mixing the seeds with soil before broadcasting. About 47,000 hectares of young forests have been grown by aerial seeding.

The Yulin-Yanchi desertified area has rich underground water tables, with a total reserve of 876 million cubic metres. The farmers have dug thousands of wells, mainly for irrigation. A well can irrigate two to three hectares of farmland.

Since 1985, the government has encouraged farmers to contract land for afforestation or for the management of tree plantation. In return, the government gives the contractors priority in the supply of tree seeds, saplings, funds, fertiliser and technical service.

A group of 47 families headed by farmer Shi Guangyin in Hatzeling village of Dingbian County has contracted to control 1,600 hectares of sand-swept land. In the past three years, they have grown trees and grass on more than 1,000 hectares.

The standing timber of their forests is estimated to be worth 100,000 yuan (US\$19,000). So far, 100,000 families have contracted to transform 270,000 hectares sandy land.

In 1990, the Yulin-Yanchi desertified area produced 250 million kg of grain, averaging 450 kg per capita. With more than enough for their own food, farmers have expanded their stock-raising industry. They also earn 45 million yuan (US\$8.6 million) a year from selling timber, fruit and hand-woven articles made of willow twigs and branches of shrubs.

— Depthnews
Science



Women sharing the burden with men.