

Shola Fellowship from Keystone 2008 Vanastree report

The following is a list of the events and tasks carried out through the use of the Shola Fellowship funds:

1. Registration of Vanastree as a Trust

June 9, 2008

The collective that comprises Vanastree has existed since 2001, but the organization did not have official status until this year.

See annexure 1 for Trust Deed (can be posted to you).

2. Phone connection for Ganga Chennaiah

Dec 2007



Ganga is one of the collective's most active members, with a forest nursery and actively producing vegetable garden. Her home is in a remote forest location, difficult to access and she has no vehicle, which made communication a challenge, especially during the monsoons. Vanastree paid for her to have a telephone line connected, which has enabled her increased participation in collective activities as well as added a large convenience to her day to day life.

3. Eco-Ganesh Programme

August 19, 2008



Vanastree, along with the police department of Sirsi organized a public awareness programme on how to celebrate an eco-friendly Ganesh Chaturthi. The press, members of over 50 Ganesh Mandalis, traditional crafts persons (Gudigars) and the public were invited to the event. A clay Ganesh was decorated and coloured using only vegetable and mineral colours (yellow, white, red, orange, green and even pink) and about 10 collective members did all the other decorations. The hazards of using lead based paints and immersing the idol in water was explained and a lively discussion was facilitated.

Composting of all the flowers (nirmalaya) was encouraged as also the disuse of all manner of

non-biodegradable decorations. Newspapers reported the event, but we could not go to the water points on visargan day to monitor the crowds. We hope to do a repeat of the programme next year.



4. Yellapur Home Garden Fest

October 24, 2008

The event was held at Ishwari Bishwa Vidyalaya, home of the Brahma Kumaris just outside of Yellapur. 375 women gathered in the hall to share the season's home garden produce as well as crafts and prepared food items. The event was organized with the help of TEED, an NGO in Yellapur where women from 40 sanghas are part of the Vanastree seed collective.

Apart from seed exchange and sale of produce, we also had a chance to document some of the traditional varieties of vegetables as part of our work on producing a handbook on home garden biodiversity of the region.



Dizzy diversity of vegetable and seeds



Yam, eggs, honey and other home-garden produce

Brinjals on display





Home garden producers' listening to speakers



Active exchange and sale of seeds and produce

*Siddhi
seed
group*



5. Creation of official Vanastree logo

October 2008

After creating several versions over the past few years, Vanastree members settled upon a simple logo that expresses our prime focus (seeds). We subsequently incorporated this logo into a visiting card, stationery, brochure and other official documents. These materials were then printed for use in the office and at exhibitions and other events.

See copy of the brochure in annexure

6. Brochure update

October 2008

The official Vanastree brochure was updated to reflect our most recent activities, needs and plans for the future. Plenty of copies were printed as we find this is the best way to introduce people to the organization.

See copy of the brochure in annexure

7. Web update (Vanastree.org)

October 2008

Our website is also being updated with more information about our programmes, products and recent activities. See www.vanastree.org by end November. We are also learning how to update our own website.

8. Resource materials and supplies

October 2008

Vanastree purchased a sealing machine for packing, a multifunction printer/scanner/copier for the office, bookshelves to house a library of relevant books, and bottles for food products produced by collective members. In addition, we bought open-pollinated, organic seeds from fellow NGOs Green Foundation and Annadana for distribution among the collective.

9. Nellithota Forest Retreat materials

September 2008

Nellithota, an eco-homestay run by an active collective member, has seen great popularity in recent months. To improve the experience of guests and host, we updated and printed copies of the brochure and compiled a booklet with information on the area, treks, and guidelines for guests.

10. Vanastree field trip to Dharmendra Hegde Mashigadhe's apiary

Proposed Dec first week, 2008

This trip will allow collective members to view an apiary/forest nursery as a group, taking a much-needed break from household chores that will also be educational. A picnic on the riverside will add to the bonding experience. Seed exchange and contributions to the seed bank will also be part of the activity.

Future plans

We believe strongly in sustaining the philosophy behind our efforts, and the following goals will allow us to remain true to our ideals while enabling the collective to grow and further its mission.

- ❖ Create a handbook, published in English and Kannada, containing all the documentation data we have collected over the past few years
- ❖ Continue networking with local government agencies, NGOs and individual communities
- ❖ Hold workshops and trainings in seed saving and preservation; packaging, labeling and marketing; food preparation; and allied activities
- ❖ Expand network of seed groups and promote decentralized seed banking
- ❖ Continue hosting melas, expanding their community education potential



Needs

- ❖ Organic and open-pollinated seeds
- ❖ Volunteers and interns
- ❖ Our own space for an office, nursery, garden and extension outlet
- ❖ Support to run the garden and collective
- ❖ Good networking with other groups for seed and information exchange



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Associated Agencies: Prakruti, TEED, Sneha Kunja, BAIF, Sameeksha Ayurvedalaya, The Concerned for Working Children, ATREE, Kalpavriksh



Sirsi, Karnataka, India
www.vanastree.org



A few small seeds have the power within them to feed a family; a fistful of seeds, the whole community. Our future depends on saving the traditional diversity of seeds around us.

What is Vanastree?

Vanastree is a small collective dedicated to promoting **forest garden biodiversity** and **food/nutrition security** through the conservation of traditional seeds.

Our main objectives:

- ❖ promote cultivated and wild biodiversity in farms and forest home gardens
- ❖ encourage seed saving and conservation of traditional crop varieties
- ❖ provide economic incentives for these activities through ecologically sensitive enterprises



Beginnings

The Malnad Forest Garden and Seed Keepers' collective formed in 2001, and made its first appearance with a seed display at the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP) *Biodiversity Mela*. Soon after, women and schoolchildren of the area joined the organization's efforts and began documenting traditional crop varieties. Having discovered what incredible biodiversity lies at their fingertips, the collective members began working actively to educate the community about biodiversity and conservation. Beginning in 2003, the collective added conservation-

oriented enterprises to its activities in order to boost women's economic standing and promote conservation. In 2008, the seed collective officially registered as a trust, calling itself Vanastree.

Location

Vanastree's office is located in Sirsi town, but the collective has established seed groups throughout the Malenadu (hilly regions of the Western Ghats) as well as in the narrow coastal belt and in the eastern fringes of the Ghats.

Philosophy

The organization's objectives arose out of concerns for the economic stability of the region and the danger of losing its small-scale, traditional food production system to the forces of globalization. We recognize the importance of forest home gardens as refuges of biodiversity, providers of nutritional food, extra sources of income, and educational tools. Vanastree, which translates as "*Women of the Forest*" in Kannada, also emphasizes the traditional role of women in conservation. We believe that any biodiversity conservation plan aimed at arresting genetic erosion must recognize the role of women as gardeners, seed savers, and sources of knowledge. The collective includes women from various communities, religions and economic classes. Forest gardens vary in size and structure; some consist of a tiny patch of land outside a house, while others may comprise an acre or more. They share in common a great diversity of plants and trees. The vegetables grown include varieties of amaranth, spinach, cucumber, squashes, lady's finger, brinjal, starchy tubers, beans and chilies.

Accomplishments

Vanastree's efforts have been chiefly focused on seed groups and documentation, although our extension services (trainings, networking and establishing conservation-oriented enterprises) have also been successful.

Work completed thus far:

- ❖ Documenting around 120 vegetable and 60 flower varieties grown in the Malnad
- ❖ Distributing over 3000 packets of organic, open-pollinated seeds
- ❖ Forming 22 seed exchange groups, reaching over 500 home gardeners
- ❖ Establishing both a decentralized regional seed bank by individual gardeners and a central seed bank in Sirsi town
- ❖ Supporting collective members in creating a variety of home-based conservation enterprises:
 - value-added food and non-food production
 - home-based camps and eco-homestays
- ❖ Building an internship program
- ❖ Participating in several annual melas, festivals and exhibitions promoting biodiversity and seed saving



SHOLA FELLOWSHIP TO VANASTREE – PRELIM. STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS

Date	Budget Head	Paid to	Amount
12/1/08	Telephone connection for Ganga	BSNL plus transport	650.00
June 2008	Registration of Vanastree	Lawyer, Stamps paper, Office fee etc	6400.00
10/6/08	Vanastree Annual Day - Prizes	9 women farmers	2500.00
19/8/08	Eco-Ganesh presentation	Several	2000.00
30/9/08	Library/product racks (2)	Gautam furniture	5200.00
4/10/08	Sealing machine	Mysore Sales Corp	1352.00
5/10/08	Book ends and office supplies	Reliance Stationery Mart	1366.00
18/10/08	Books	Natraj Publishers	1750.00
20/10/08	Travel (OFAI meeting)		2000.00
24/10/08	Yellapur Seed Mela	several	15000.00
31/10/08	Computer peripherals	Divine Computers	588.00
3/11/08	Printer/Scanner/Copier	Premier Computers, Bangalore	8185.00
3/11/08	Rewritable CDs/Headphone	L.A. Computech	1265.00
3.11.08	Membership to Annadana Soil and Seed Savers' Network	Annadana	2000.00
		TOTAL	50,256.00

Rupees Fifty Thousand Two Hundred and Fifty Six only

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For Vanastree