



FRIENDS OF METTUPALAYAM

August 2020

Hello Friends,

In this regular newsletter, we will update you on the evolving coronavirus situation around the project area and the quite remarkable work our team have done, thanks to your generosity. And we can report that fundamental rural development work is also still being provided, despite the extreme difficulties being faced.

The Covid-19 situation and our Food Aid Programme

For much of the last three months, the area around Mettupalayam has been in some form of lockdown. The biggest impact on the local people is on jobs – travel is severely restricted, and many businesses are closed meaning that the vast majority of locals have no income. The government is providing a small amount of rice, cooking oil and sugar to families who are registered, but many of those in the tribal groups who we support, have no ration card and so get nothing. Many have no savings, so Venkat tells us that pawn shops and money lenders are among the very few thriving.



We have dug deep and thanks to some very generous donations and prudent use of our funds, we have been able to send significant extra monies to enable Venkat to purchase and supply vegetables to support the most needy in the surrounding area. Through his contacts in the area, Venkat is sourcing enough vegetables and rice to supply limited weekly rations to around 1050 families. We have insisted on a risk-assessed process to minimise the possibility of virus transmission. This involves arranging a token system, sorting and bagging vegetables and rice into portions and then weekly deliveries to the four identified local villages. It is a mammoth logistical exercise, being overseen by Venkat and delivered through the support of our teachers and selected village volunteers. It is a life-saving mission which Venkat likens to the emergency typhoon relief work he did at the start of his career.



Our team are also providing key training and role-modelling of the sorts of behaviours we are becoming accustomed to here in the UK. As you will see in the photos, face masks are widely worn, personal hygiene and social distancing encouraged. Venkat says “In India we have learned to live alongside the cobra snake and now we will learn how to live with the virus.”

Your Trustees are very aware that the current level of support cannot be continued indefinitely. Venkat

is hopeful of some relaxation of restrictions in September and is drawing up plans to refocus a reduced level of support on groups such as the disabled and elderly, as necessary.

The situation at our second school at the Bay of Bengal coast is markedly better. The locals there are fisher folk and the government is supporting them to increase catches for local food supply.

Education



Schools in Tamil Nadu including our Crakehall primary school, are closed. However, we continue to pay our teachers a full salary and they are now dividing their time between supporting the Food Aid programme and providing learning for our pupils from stages 2 to 5, ages 7 to 11. On Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays the teachers pack and deliver food aid; on Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays they travel to local villages to deliver outdoor lessons. They are a credit to us all.

The Story of our new Logo!

We have a new logo and we thought you would be interested to hear how it came about.

Our founder and trustee Adele worked with teacher Liz Latta at Crakehall CE Primary school near Bedale, to set pupils the task of coming up with a logo. The school has a longstanding connection with its namesake in Mettupalayam. The children looked at logos of other organisations, discussed the use of colour, shape and line to communicate and have visual impact. They then spent time researching the work of Friends of Mettupalayam and trying to work out its fundamental essence to be communicated in an image. Lots of exploring and rearranging went on to create a wide and interesting variety of designs which were then shared with the trustees.

Although impressed with all the ideas, the work of Alfie Wells and George Brooks stood out, as did their mature and professional approach to working together. After they had refined and combined their ideas their logo was passed on to professional graphic designer Jordan (who has visited the project in India) so that it could be converted to the digital image you see here. As trustees we thought the hexagon was a pleasing impactful shape and we liked the colour scheme which is that of the Indian flag. The hands clearly represent the children and adults who live and work together in a rural setting under the protection and support of the project.



Mrs Marino, Headteacher at Crakehall CE Primary said, 'It is a fantastic logo, which is a great example of creativity and what happens when we collaborate to share our different skills and talents. Our collaboration with the students at Crakehall School in Mettupalayam is mutually beneficial. We are proud of the links that have been developed and the friendship that has been shared.'

We intend to continue to build our connections with North Yorkshire schools and will keep you informed of further developments which are planned.

Ongoing communication and support

With so much going on, please do take the opportunity keep updated through our Facebook page at Friends of Mettupalayam and on our website at www.irdt.co.uk

On our most recent video call with Venkat, he asked that we pass on his heartfelt thanks to you all in enabling him to provide the ongoing development work and the emergency relief work that is so desperately needed right now. Your trustees add their thanks and very best wishes.

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