

## **Prologue**

Rural India represents the 65% population of India. That means the development of India is synonymous with development of its villages to become self-sustainable to support a good quality of life on all parameters and indices – *be it health, education, employability, community and culture.*

NESSCO has chosen about 20 villages in East Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh for taking up Developmental Projects in alignment of our charter and vision. Our choice of the area of impact might appear surprising and a question might pop-up as to what sort of developmental works are needed in East Godavari, one of the highest per-capita income district of AP.

While it is indeed true that there are many affluent and financially well-to-do families/communities in the district. But, when we scratch the surface of the superficial gloss of income or wealth, there are issues concern in terms of education levels, attitudes, family and community relationships, health and habits. No community, village or country can sustain for long without a holistic well-being. It is this holistic well-being related issues that NESSCO would like to improve upon. These are the very issues that typical NGO would ignore and even the villagers themselves would not care about given either ignorance of the matter or unwillingness to accept it as an issue.

Bringing about a positive change to these subtle but deep issues would require a really long term commitment and a well-planned program that has a view range of 10-12 years with continuous monitoring for results and improvement.

*But what is the root cause for the issue at hand? How did the problem of plenty come about to this community/village? What exactly are the issues we are trying to address?*

### ***The path of past glory***

East Godavari was not always the same affluent community that it is today. One may be surprised to know that around 1900's, it was not uncommon to see people die of poverty! All that changed with the construction of the barrage at Dowleswaram on the river Godavari during the British regime.

Suddenly a place that had been starving for lack of irrigable land became a place of 2 crops of rice in a year. With the successful mono-cropping of rice for decades and very good margins on the produce, even farmers with small holdings have become surplus income families. This also resulted in the mushrooming of many ancillary/support industries every nook and corner of the district. The most prolific of these being the enterprises involved in Rice Milling followed by Poultry Farms and Aqua Culture.

Cash surplus generated at farmers end over one of two generations has initially gone into acquiring more land holdings and beyond a point, the cash surplus needed new avenues: *Lending & Financing was one such avenue.* It seemed to be simple to execute without much infrastructure or legal hurdles or hard work. Soon East Godavari was becoming one of the biggest Personal Lending & Financing places in AP. Whether the Lending & Financing or the Poultry and Aqua Culture all seemed to have created easy wealth initially. This resulted in the next generations taking it easy while continuing the same business that they inherited on a platter. The in-house knowledge passed on meant, focus on education per-se or even on innovation or keeping with latest trends was ignored.

*Eventually this has ill-prepared the community for any shifts or down-trends that are natural to any business life-cycle. Not only for the business, they were also ill-prepared to deal with the consequences of the life style changes that was a result of this surplus income and single focus on same business. Just like in-breeding results in unwanted deformities, the community is seeing issues that need urgent attention.*

***What exactly are those issues?***

There are two issues that we have identified: **First category** would be those resulting from the long period of relative economic well-being. Details of some of these are listed below:

Health Concerns: Continued affluence has meant lesser of physical work, use of conveniences like washing machines and grinders coupled with unhealthy eating habits has resulted in rampant lifestyle related ailments like obesity and its sister illnesses like diabetes in these villages.

Social Concerns: Another aspect of concern would be waywardness of youth over-indulging in cultural and entertainment habits including alcohol abuse due to easy money and ample free time. This would be the beginning of social strife initially at family level and then at a larger level as it leads to economic repercussions.

Community Concerns: Another unintended but eventual outcome of affluence is the break-up of the joint family and thus sowing the seeds of the 'me-myself' attitude. This self-centered syndrome not only meant break-up of the social and cultural cover that was available in times of crisis, but it also meant, no one cared about the community or what it needed. Even if that negligence meant hurting themselves in the long run. This lack of ownership and affinity to community issues would result in even a 'rich' village not having basic amenities like drainage leading to public health issues like Filaria or Malaria.

The **Second category** of issues are, the lack of education, innovation or diversification which are important to ensure the continuity of income and wealth generation and the community is prepared to tide over the spikes and waves of disruption happening due to technology, globalization and environmentalism.

For instance, the farming, aqua culture and poultry are going through tremendous pressures due to over cultivation or import gluts or even shifts to new trends like organic produce and fair trade. To be able to ride this through means having the requisite knowledge, acquiring new skills, openness to new ideas and being enterprising and innovative. *Else it will lead to stagnation or even reduction of standard of living.*

The flourishing Lending & Financing business is also at its most vulnerable phase due to multiple reasons: reduction in of funds at village level as compared to previous troubled times. Also, borrowers in some sectors have become bankrupt that has a ripple effect on the lending community. Also, be it demonetization or Govt. emphasis on universal access to banking and new payment platforms meant that this business is in for a major overhaul. *It is important to prepare for softening the hard fall and work on alternatives.*

Although there has been increase in the number of schools, colleges and technical educations being set-up in these villages on in the vicinity, these have become more of symbolic learning centers with no emphasis on real-understanding. With little focus on quality of education, graduates are being minted without requisite knowledge on the academics they go through. Rote learning based ranks and marks have taken the priority than the skill and knowledge. *Schools and Colleges can be the first and most important place to start addressing the social, economic, cultural and health issues of the village.*

### ***How do we intend to bring a change, for the better?***

*Culture makes people understand each other better. And if they understand each other better in their soul, it is easier to overcome the economic and political barriers. But first they have to understand that their neighbor is, in the end, just like them, with the same problems and the same questions -Paulo Coelho*

It is important to understand that a long term sustainability and initiatives that are impactful is one that involves a change in the attitude, manifested as a 'cultural shift'. This requires enormous patience, planning and above all a summoning of available resources and people – *an entire eco-system approach, not a piece-meal, short-term attempt.*

If we design a holistic and comprehensive program, we can make them self-reliant, skilled in all means, to become employable and entrepreneurial. Then it's not impossible for the village to become healthier, happier and harmonious. Some of the programs that we could explore are:

### **School Children and Youth**

Schools are the places of change for many traits. We can impart spirit of brotherhood, social responsibility and ability to handle stress and equip them with better technical knowledge and communication skills.

Depending on the area of interest and aptitude of the student, whether its sports, arts or academics activities will be designed to encourage and hone those specific skills through provision of infrastructure and guidance.

Youth form the key to the growth of a village as their skill and will change the fate of the village. They need skill enhancements along with linkage to the opportunities, be it employment or entrepreneurship. These would be provided through special emphasis on connecting mentors from the urban areas with the village youth.

### **Women empowerment**

This is essential from multiple perspectives. To address issues of hygiene at home or to reduce the 'me-myself' syndrome, it is important to start with the home maker, mother and wife. It is important to have a healthy, learned, confident, empowered woman for the development of the community as a whole. While there were many ad-hoc efforts in empowering women by way of trainings and work exposures, very few of them succeeded in creating success stories in women entrepreneurship or income generation.

One of the key reasons for this is the absence of an accommodative eco-system or supporting 'value chain'. Instead of training everyone on everything irrespective of their interest or talent, it is better to have deeper expertise of focus areas and provide the underlying services required to complete the whole process. Mentorship and Networking facilitations like an Exchange will help sustain the growth. Whether it is Lijjat Papad enterprises or the AMUL story, it is all about creating the right base and provide the end-to-end value-chain services. *This is what **NESSCO** will provide as part of the woman empowerment initiatives*

### **Village development**

While we are known to individually keep our homes clean and hygiene, we neglect the neighborhood that leads to communicable diseases and can cause a bigger damage at a village or a community level. Improvement of basic amenities like good inner roads and drainage will prevent diseases while parks and workshops like yoga will reduce the lifestyle diseases like obesity and related ailments like diabetes. Sometimes, we all need shock treatment or a crisis or disaster to shake us out of our stupor and act on urgent or burning issues. If you see the incident of Plague in Surat in the year 1994, it was a classic example of an overcrowded diamond business city that neglected everything including hygiene but was brought down to its knees by a plague epidemic.

Today Surat is a very clean city. This miracle was a result of the efforts of municipality administration and citizen groups involvement. Collective efforts of entire city and suburbs brought back to normalcy within 18 months on record. This is a classic example of how a collective effort can mitigate a crisis problem.

**NESSCO** puts its trust on community development through collective effort. The villages have the records of filarial and cholera attacks frequently. This is due to lack of drainage and sanitation compliances to the desired levels. Through a series of awareness and action campaigns, we make the

entire village conscious of these issues for taking up action. This work leads the village to healthier today and healthiest tomorrow for the next generations.

**NESSCO** wishes to work towards a paradigm shift in the way we look at what is happening for a better living that has health, skill based knowledge, employability, entrepreneurship for all the stake holders in the village eco-system. It is about building a healthy, socially conscious and community caring world that we want to leave to our children.

**NESSCO** welcomes all the stake holders and well-wishers of the village development be a part for this long but ultimately satisfying journey.