

A Case Study of Edapaddy Panchayat Union

Best Practices of Panchayats



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Centre for Budget and Policy Studies
1st Floor, Maitri Bhavan
(Above United Lodge of Theosophists)
#4, M.N.Krishna Rao Road,
Basavanagudi
Bangalore -560004
Telephone: +91-80-65907402
Fax: +91-80-26560734
Website: www.cbps.in

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Case Study of Edappadi Panchayat Union, Salem District, Tamil Nadu

Introduction

In 2005-06, the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, Government of India introduced the Panchayat Empowerment and Accountability Incentive Scheme (PEAIS) to incentivize States and UTs to devolve powers to local bodies. Under this scheme, the best performing State/UT is awarded Rs 2 crore every year. Further, the Ministry also announces awards for the best Zilla Panchayats, Taluk Panchayats and Gram Panchayats for their performance in implementation of flagship schemes and execution of welfare programmes.

The National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER) developed a Devolution Index to measure the State/PRI performance on the basis of devolution of three F's viz. finance, functions and functionaries. The assessment is carried out in two-stages with the first stage examining whether the State/UT has created a conducive environment that enables the transfer of powers to the local bodies. Accordingly, the first stage checks whether the States have setup the District Planning Committee, established State Election Commission and State Finance Commission, and held PRI elections every five year. The Devolution Index is calculated for those States which have satisfied the criteria specified in the first stage. The three pillars in the Devolution Index capture either directly or indirectly the level of financial discretion, transfer of functions and steps taken to develop the capacity of functionaries of PRIs.

As for deciding the best panchayat at all the three levels i.e. Gram Panchayat, Panchayat Samiti (called Panchayat Union in Tamil nadu) and Zilla Parishad, it is done through a process of scoring based on the devolution index and responses to a questionnaire that capture important aspects relating to activities of a model Panchayats. Some of the parameters used include – regularity of panchayat meetings including those of gram sabha and standing committees, attendance in these meetings particularly the representation of SC and STs in the Gram Sabhas, discussions held and issues discussed, resolutions undertaken on various development works, identification of various beneficiaries, implementation of the State and Central Government schemes, efforts for achieving total sanitation, development of effective plans for raising own resources, systems for effective tax collection, strengthening of local institutions, capacity building of the elected representatives and the staff and having mechanism for transparency and accountability and so on. Edapaddi Panchayat Union in Salem District is one of the eight panchayats from Tamil Nadu selected for award under the Panchayat Empowerment & Accountability Incentive Scheme (PEAIS) 2011-12.

Performance of Edappadi Panchayat Union under PEAIS

Panchayats at all levels are expected to fill a questionnaire which takes a multi-dimensional look at Panchayats. In terms of Panchayat functioning, questions are asked the frequency of

meetings, membership and attendance of marginalized community members, consensus formation at these meetings and the kind of issues that were discussed. Under Personnel Capacity Building, it looks at trainings attended and organized, reviewing the work done by the Panchayat. The next aspect is of Planning, which is gauged by looking at formulation of annual plans and budgets, the process of such formulation. Income generation deals with collection of dues and recognition of new sources for raising own local revenue. Performance is measured in terms of physical achievements, financial expenditure, IEC activities undertaken, any other special initiatives and performance of civic duties by the Panchayat. The final section on Accountability and Transparency records the maintenance of accounts, compliance with RTI and the availability of grievance redressal mechanisms.

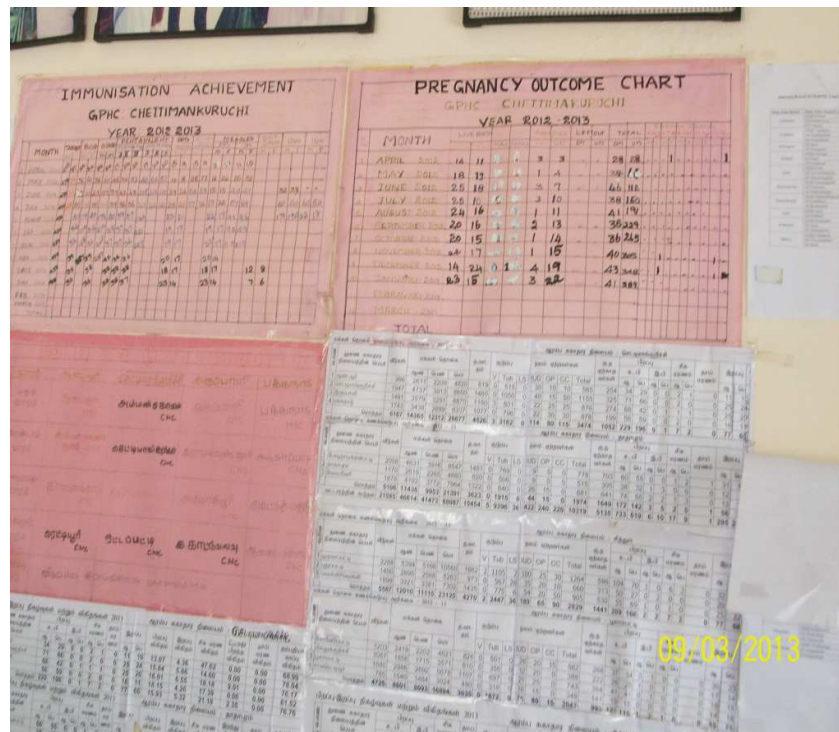
The following table reports the score of Edappadi Panchayat Union under the different indicators in the PEAIS questionnaire.

Table 1: Edappadi Panchayat Union Scores as per PEAIS Indicators

Indicator	Maximum Score	Edappadi Score	
Panchayat Functioning	26	21	80.7%
Management of Personnel and Capacity Building	12	8	66.7%
Planning and Budget formulation	12	10	83.3%
Income Generation	4	2	50.0%
Performance	34	23	67.6%
Accountability and Transparency	12	12	100.0%

Source: Proposal submitted for PEAIS by Edappadi Panchayat Union

The Eappadi Panchayat Union has done a commendable job in terms of accountability and transparency. The high score on this was evident as information was readily available, provided, and often displayed. It has also done well in planning and budget formulation. The analysis of budget documents, annual plans, minutes and agendas of Union meetings led to the observation that the mandated method and procedure had been



followed. Panchayat Union does not have a mandate to raise its own revenue and therefore what becomes critical is to access the money from sources where it is available. This Panchayat union has done well on that count as well.

Profile of Edappadi Panchayat Union

Edappadi Panchayat Union is situated approximately 40 kilometers away from the district headquarters located at Salem. It consists of 10 village Panchayats covering an area of 114.61 sq.kms with a population of 126,800 out of which 46.83% are female and 53.16% are male as per the 2001 census figures. The Scheduled Castes forms about eight percent of the population while the Scheduled Tribe population is negligible with only seven such households in the entire Panchayat union. According to the 2001 census, almost sixty percent of the population in the Panchayat Union was below the poverty line.

Agriculture and allied activities are the dominant sources of employment for the population of this Panchayat Union. The major crops grown in the area are tobacco, sugarcane and ragi. However, in addition, a significant proportion of population is also engaged in textile activities in Irrupalli and Avani Perur Keel Mugam. Additionally, in Pakkanadu, employment opportunities are available in brick-making units due to the availability of high quality red sand in this village panchayat. A number of persons also seek employment under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) in the Union.

A number of public and private sector banks are situated in the region making access to banking and financial services feasible for the local population, especially the Self Help Groups (SHGs). The Self-help group (SHG) movement is quite strong in the area with almost all women having access to SHGs. The SHGs have managed to access the private financial system to raise loans to meet their expenditure requirements. As a result, SHG members are able to directly, and independently, interact with bank officials for all purposes without the need of any intermediaries. The majority of loans taken by SHG members were to meet the household expenditure; however there were few cases where the loan was taken for education and entrepreneurship purposes. The SHGs have also emerged as forums for women to discuss about community, gender, education and hygiene issues. Such discussion among the SHG members have led SHGs to take initiatives in organizing workshops, campaigns on adolescent health and hygiene in local schools to address the problems prevailing in the community.

Best Practices of Edappadi Panchayat Union

The role of Panchayat Unions is to undertake activities to develop infrastructure facilities, water supply, implement centre and state sponsored schemes, establish public markets and control fairs and festivals. In Edappadi Panchayat Union, the officials have identified

developing the infrastructural facilities as the focus area of their work. The distinguishing feature of the Union's success has been its ability to access funds from the state schemes and utilize these funds imaginatively and efficiently to enhance the overall quality of life of the citizens. The other noteworthy aspect was the close and effective coordination and understanding between the elected representatives and the officials in the pursuit of infrastructure development.

1. Successful Use of the Self-Sufficiency Scheme

The Self Sufficiency Scheme, previously called *Namakku Namme Thittam*, is a state-sponsored scheme implemented from the financial year 2011-12 with an annual allocation of Rs 100 crores. The scheme aims to improve the infrastructural facilities both in rural and urban areas with public involvement by mandating a minimum of one-third public contribution of total expenditure on works undertaken as part of the scheme. Thus, the process leads to creation of community assets by pooling in individual and state resources results in the emergence of a sense of common ownership and an interest in the assets' continued maintenance besides promoting public participation through an increased role in the planning, organizing and funding of community activities.

A comparison with the neighboring Panchayat Unions of Sankari, Nagavalli and Kongapuram of Salem District helps in assessing the efforts of the Edappadi Panchayat Union officials in accessing resources and undertaking projects for creation of community assets.

Table 2: Number of Works and Amount Spent under Self-Sufficiency Scheme

Block	Number of Panchayats	2011-12		2012-13	
		Number of physical works completed	Amount spent (Rs Lakh)	Number of physical works completed	Amount spent (Rs Lakh)
Sankari	22	3	2.69	3	7.7
Nangavalli	9	0	0	0	0
Kongapuram	9	0	0	0	0
Edappadi	10	3	2.13	8	25.96

Source: District Collectorate, Salem

Edappadi and Sankari are the only two of the four neighboring panchayat unions to have undertaken projects under this scheme during 2011-13. The performance of Edappadi is definitely much better than Sankari, especially in terms of the progress observed for 2012-13. Edappadi Panchayat union was able to take up a larger number of projects and access scheme funds and raise more matching resources from the public.

Table 3: Expenditure incurred per project

	Expenditure incurred per project (Rs. Lakhs)	
Block	2011-12	2012-13
Sankari	0.90	2.57
Edappadi	0.71	3.25

Source: District Collectorate, Salem

However, the increase in expenditure in 2012-13 was also partly the result of other contributing factors; one of them being the appointment of the local MLA as the Minister of Highways and Ports in the ruling government at the state level. This had apparently helped the Panchayat Union in having a easier access to the political decision makers in the state capital. Nevertheless, the efforts of the Panchayat Union in mobilizing the public resources and completing the works on time was major contributing factor.

The projects undertaken as a part of this scheme in Edappadi Union included girls and boys toilet in two schools, school compound wall, additional school building, and two stores cum kitchen shed in schools, mini power pump and concrete cement pavement. The successful completion of these projects requires the existence of strong public-official interaction and collaboration among all key players (public, societies/expert groups and union officials- both elected and non-elected).

Construction of Compound Wall in Chettimankurichi

Step – 1: Identification of the Issue

The teachers of middle school in Chettimankurichi faced several problems due to the lack of compound wall. The problems included trespassing of the school premises by locals, the use of school playground by adults, and difficulty in monitoring the movement of school students during breaks and lunch periods. The teachers considered the trespassing and use of school playground by other locals as one of the serious problem as it led to the presence of unknown faces within the school premises raising serious security concerns especially with regard to the safety of girl students. Further, the misuse and destruction of school property was also reported. The issue was discussed at the SDMC meeting and parents-teachers meeting which was then brought to the attention of Union Officials.

Step – 2 Briefing and persuading the concerned parties:

The Union officials gathered the parents, teachers, elders and students in the village to discuss about the various possible solutions to the problem. Then, the officials conducted two meetings using the channels of SDMC and parents-teachers meeting to brief the parties about self-sufficiency scheme. They ensured that people understood that they have to contribute a minimum one-third of the compound wall construction cost. The officials were able to raise

about Rs 50,000 from the public¹ - the parents of students studying in the school were able to contribute about Rs 28,000 and the remaining Rs 22,000 was collected from important persons of the area such as Union Chairman, Panchayat President, Panchayat Councilors and other interested members of the public. The Union officials kept emphasizing about the necessity of consensual decision, raising funds within the stipulated time period and timely completion of the compound wall construction.

The officials still faced difficulty in the initial period since the public believed that *the government was responsible for the construction of compound wall*. The Union overcame this by embarking on an intensive awareness campaign via the SMC and public consultations about the necessity to take responsibility and participate in the development process in addition to decision-making process. This ensured that they earned the trust of the people, which facilitated the fund raising and monitoring processes as the public was more active in ensuring that the compound wall was constructed within the stipulated time period.

The Impact of the initiative

The construction of the compound wall has resulted in ensuring that students stay within the school premises during school hours. This has also ensured that school playground is available to the school students exclusively as they do not have to fight for space with non-student locals occupying and using their playground.

The major beneficiaries of the compound wall have been the girl students as they now feel safer within the school premises. It has also led to parents of girl children being more willing to send their wards to the school, since the compound wall has put to rest the problems they were facing earlier due to the presence of unauthorized people in school premises. Girls and their parents, both feel safer and more comfortable to utilize the playground for physical activities.

The Edappadi Panchayat Union officials were able to successfully complete the projects undertaken as a part of the Self Sufficiency Scheme, primarily due to their ability to cultivate public and harness



¹The total cost of construction of the compound wall was Rs 2,00,000.

their support to propose and implement the works relating to this project. The Union officials took the initiative to motivate the public to promote projects even though there was an expectation from the public that government will have to assume all the responsibilities relating to the work undertaken. For this purpose, the Union officials went through the channels of SMCs, VECs, SHGs and other social groups to reach the people of the Union. This was followed up with frequent interactions with the public which involved discussing of issues, dissemination of information about several schemes and explaining restraints and limitations, sensitizing the public to ground realities to create a common ground for both parties to understand each other. This increased state of interaction has led to the public coming forward to discuss problems and potential solutions with the officials. This was a huge step forward in terms of achieving the objectives of increasing public participation in development process and enabling the Panchayat Raj Institutions to be self-sufficient and more responsive to local needs.

An element that contributed to this success is the presence of well-functioning societies and groups in Edappadi Panchayat Union. This helped when the Panchayat Union President and officials started participating, reaching out, communicating and understanding the outcome of these meetings. The groups were aware of problems faced by the local community and could articulate the issues as well as propose solutions, which helped the Union in skillful utilization of scheme-related funds to resolve the problems. This example is an illustration of the manner in which the Panchayat Union acted to make successful use of the Self Sufficiency scheme.

2. Successful use of the Village Habitation Improvement (THAI) scheme

The Tamil Nadu Village Habitations Improvement (THAI) scheme launched in 2011 envisages making available basic amenities in all village habitations. These basic amenities include water supply, street lights, roads, burial grounds and pathways to burial grounds. The scheme also provides scope for undertaking establishment of anganwadi centers, public distribution shops, SHG buildings, threshing floor, play-grounds and many other similar works. The scheme focuses on habitation clusters rather than villages to ensure that the development takes place in an equitable manner. Thereby, it aims to reduce the urban-rural disparity in terms of availability of basic amenities. For the purpose of fund allocations, the village clusters are classified into four categories based on the number of habitations: (a) below 5 habitations, (b) 5 – 15 habitations, (c) 16 – 25 habitations and (d) above 25 habitations. The permissible limit for the highest allocation of funds is Rs 20 lakh for the smallest group and increases by Rs 10 lakh for each of the consecutive group.

The responsibility to implement the THAI scheme falls under the purview of the Block Development Officer (BDO). The challenge is not only to carry out the projects undertaken but also to do it in a responsive manner by understanding the local requirements which in turn depends on the nature of interactions with other key members. What made Edappadi

Panchayat Union function effectively in this context is the efforts of the BDO and other block level officials in establishing a mutually respectful and enabling relationship with the Panchayat members and Secretaries. This has allowed faster completion where panchayat secretaries/members have taken the responsibilities of local level implementation, maintenance of records and monitoring. It has also enabled capacity enhancement at local levels.

One-fifth out of 10 village Panchayats in the Edappadi Panchayat Union are covered under the THAI scheme every year with a strategy to cover all the 10 village panchayats by the end of the 5 year term.

Chittoor and Velleriveri were the two village panchayats covered under the scheme in 2011-12, and Pakkanadu and Iruppalli are the village panchayats being covered in 2012-13. In Edappadi Panchayat Union, the two village panchayats selected every year under THAI are given additional priority in proposing, implementing and fulfilling infrastructural needs through other schemes as well. This strategy makes monitoring easier and assists the officials to track and complete the projects undertaken within the stipulated time period. This helps in accessing additional funds that are linked with timely completion of already allocated works. Edappadi Panchayat Union has been successful in accessing this additional fund as well. Table 4 provides the financial and physical details of the achievements of the Panchayat Union with respect to THAI. Financial investment has been highest for water supply, laying down of concrete cement pavement, improvement of burial ground and BT roads.

Table 4: Financial and Physical Achievement of THAI in Edappadi Panchayat Union (2011-13)

	Financial (Rs Lakhs)			Physical (number of works)		
	THAI		THAI Addl	THAI		THAI Addl.
Head	2011-12	2012-13	2012-13	2011-12	2012-13	2012-13
Water supply	21.2	31.94		16	20	
Street light	3.4	7.11		56	N/A	
Improvement of Burial ground	20	10		5	6	
CC pavement	23.1	16.95		4	16	
Link Road	2.3			5		
BT Road	30	25	70.7	4	4	4
Approach road		7			2	
Improvement of Shandy		2			1	
Total	100	100	70.7	90	49	4

Note: The financial and physical achievements for the year 2012-13 is until March 2013

Source: Edappadi Panchayat Union

Impact of implementing THAI Scheme

A number of works undertaken through THAI in these four villages have made substantial difference in terms of access to services and the quality of living. Some of these are not necessarily very resource intensive. We present here a few examples of the some have led to an improvement in the lives of villagers:

(a) Improvement of Dalit (SC) neighbourhood

This is an excellent example of synergy and leveraging one scheme funds for accessing others. In Pakkanadu village, the construction of the cement concrete pavements taken up under THAI scheme has benefitted a Dalit (SC) neighborhood significantly. This neighborhood faced several problems such as frequent sickness of family members and stinking air due to unclean, unhealthy surroundings and poor hygienic practices. In order to address this issue, the officials adopted a three-pronged strategy of (a) conducting awareness campaigns organized through the funds sourced from Clean Village Campaign, (b) constructing community toilet using the funds from Total Sanitation Campaign and (c) laying down concrete cement pavements using THAI scheme funds. This was not a chance occurrence that these three were adopted simultaneously but a result of careful planning and implementation. The strategy adopted warranted simultaneous implementation of awareness campaigns, construction of toilets and concrete pavements in order to accomplish the tasks efficiently and achieve the pre-determined objective of cleaner environment. The awareness campaigns were conducted for a period of 6 months during which the inhabitants were educated about the importance of clean environment, painting of walls with instructions to promote hygiene and create awareness, training to segregate and dump garbage periodically in garbage bin and approximately 200 plants were planted to make the environment greener as well. The Panchayat constructed garbage bins to ensure that garbage are not dumped randomly on sidewalks and streets.

In addition, a community toilet was constructed to ensure that practice of open defecation was prevented. In addition, the walls of community



toilet had been painted with instructions on how to keep the toilet clean as well as emphasizes on practice of hygienic methods. This is a general practice that had been followed in all the community toilets that have been constructed in Edappadi Panchayat Union. The panchayat had also undertaken construction of private toilets attached to household whenever construction for a new house is sanctioned under IAY or Green House scheme.

It is important to note that the concrete cement pavement undertaken under THAI is more than just a sidewalk. The laying down of concrete cement pavement includes laying down cement surface of narrow mud path that inter-connect households within the neighborhood and also pathway that connects the neighborhood to the road as well. The impact of cemented mud path is that it has facilitated the local population in maintaining their surrounding environment as clean as possible throughout the year irrespective of weather conditions. Cemented surfaces are also easier to maintain as compared to the mud surfaces. This three-pronged strategy has also empowered the inhabitants to be responsible for maintaining their surroundings.

(b) Street Lights

Installation of street lights in these four villages namely Pakkanaddu, Chittor, Velliveri and Irupalli was one of the major activities undertaken under this scheme. People in general and women in particular feel safer to move around the village after sunset because of functioning street lights.

(c) Water supply

The availability of water for irrigation and other household purposes is very low in Edappadi Panchayat Union. The problem has worsened even more due to the failure of monsoon rains last year and therefore this emerged as a major need for investment under THAI. The solutions provided to resolve the water supply problem has been to install over-head tanks, bore wells, install/ extend pipelines and install mini-tanks in each neighborhood.

The installation of over-head tanks and mini-tanks in the neighborhood is to ensure that adequate amount of water is stored and accessible to meet the



requirements of the population. Further, the installation of mini-tanks has ensured that a water source is available within the reach of each neighborhood and can be accessed during periods of water supply failure via regular channel, such as public and private water taps. The Edappadi Panchayat Union officials have also got permission to check the possibilities of operationalizing 43 open wells out of the existing 160 open wells in Edappadi Panchayat Union.

The installation of bore wells and pipelines are undertaken primarily to address the problem of water supply for irrigation purposes. In this case, the officials go through systematic process of checks and verification such as thorough verification of installation request, field visit to investigate the request and requirement, tests by geologists and registration of bore well owners. This process ensures that the ground water is not over-utilized thereby resulting in fall of groundwater level. Further, the systematic approach also ensures that records with respect to installation (or) extension of bore wells and pipelines are maintained. Therefore, it enables the officials to keep a track of number of active bore wells and pipelines. This facilitates the officials in keeping the active bore wells and pipelines within the desirable limit.

A cause of concern is that most of these measures are dependent on monsoon, and therefore they need to look for sustainable solutions in addition to efficient utilization of existing sources.

3. Other notable Good Practices

In addition to the above, two initiatives deserve mentioning:

1. Village Libraries

Each of the villages under the Panchayat is equipped with a library. The library is stocked with books for all ages and interests, ranging from children's literature to material for competitive examinations. The library also occupies a place in the weekly time-table for the local schools with class-hours each week being reserved for reading in the library. Additionally, it is used in the evening, weekends and vacations by students. This ensures best of use of limited resources.



2. Sanitation:

Sanitation has been a focus area for the Union. A multi-scheme approach is being used to improve sanitation facilities and status in the area. While on the one hand, Integrated

Sanitation Complexes equipped with bathrooms, toilets and wash areas have been constructed in various parts of the Union for each of the sexes, there has been promotion and encouragement of construction of household toilets as part of the Total Sanitation Campaign. The houses being constructed under Indira Awaas Yojana and Solar-Powered Greenhouse Scheme are also compulsorily equipped with toilets. They have also built one toilet in a PDS shop that receives large number of women who usually spend long hours there in queues.

An intensive campaign promotion sanitation and hygiene has been undertaken using self-help groups as information dissemination points. Promotional messages at community toilets and pictorial representations of importance of hygiene on the walls of school toilets are also common.

Conclusion

The Edappadi Panchyat Union presents a unique case of pro-active officials and supportive set of elected representatives coming together to address the problems faced by citizens through consultative and participative processes. It is indeed a exemplary case of good governance in practice where the public, the officials and the elected representatives have all come together to achieve a common public goal. The ability of the Union to leverage the government scheme funds effectively to create useful infrastructure is in itself commendable.

The obvious lessons are that larger public good is possible where and when there is convergence of interests. The elected representatives and officials have set a good example by aligning their goals with those of the general public.

Key People Interviewed

Sl.No	Name	Designation
1.	A.Madesh	Panchayat Union Chairman
2.	K.Krishnamoorthi	Block Development Officer
3.	C. Vijayan	Block Development Officer
4.	N. Santharam	Deputy Block Development Officer
5.	Chitra Rajendran	President, Irupalli Panchayat
6.	S. Govindaraj	Secretary, Irupalli Panchayat
7.	Kannamal	President, Vembaneri Panchayat
8.	Senthil	Secretary, Vembaneri Panchayat
9.	Kollazdha Goudhar	Secretary, Avani Thirumugam
10.	N. Jayavel	Panchayat Union Primary School, Head-master, Chittor
11.	Veni	School Teacher, Pakkanadu
12.	Palaniappan	Librarian, Pakkanadu Village Library
13.	N. Srinivasan	Block Medical Officer/ Chettimankurichi Addl PHC
14.	Prakash	Head of Household, Chittoor
15.	K.P. Muthuswamy	Head of Household, Chettimankurichi
16.	Muthuvel	Head of Household, Green house Beneficiary, Vembaneri
17.	Manjula	Self-Help Group Official
18.	SHG Members	30 SHG Members, Chettimankurichi
19.	MNREGA beneficiaries	40 MNREGA beneficiaries at different work sites
20.	Kandaswamy	Irrigation User-Group Member and 2 other members, Velleriveri
21.	School Children	10 children at different schools
22.	Rajendran	Former Panchayat President, Irupalli