

Shri Perumal Vivekanandan
Recipient of the Award for the Application
of Science and Technology for Rural Development – 2015

Born: June 1, 1956

Mr. P. Vivekanandan, a post graduate in agriculture, quit his job to join the NGO movement in 1987. He wanted to promote simple technologies developed by grassroots innovators and bring them to the forefront, while preventing erosion of traditional knowledge and resources. In order to institutionalize this initiative, Mr. Vivekanandan formed an organization Sustainable-agriculture and Environmental Voluntary Action (SEVA) in 1992. He collaborated with likeminded friends and community volunteers with specific focus on finding and researching rural people's traditional knowledge systems and innovations. Mr. Vivekanandan has reached to the rural, tribal, marginal, nomadic pastoral communities.

Empowering grassroots innovators: He has been instrumental in empowering grassroots innovators, knowledge holders, traditional healers, nomadic pastoral communities; and promotes conventional practices, innovations; and resources conserved by them. Under the leadership of Mr. Vivekanandan, SEVA has helped to promote grassroots green technologies in Tamil Nadu; and documents the traditional knowledge/grassroots innovations in agriculture, animal husbandry and conservation of agricultural biodiversity.

The need for enhancing people's capacity to cope with drought, barren land, degraded soil and growing scarcity of ground water in many villages of Tamil Nadu instigated Mr. Vivekanandan, to explore alternate ways and means of sustainable livelihoods. He was also involved in the development of bhoodan land which was allotted to the poor and for community farming.

Mr. Vivekanandan believes that solutions are locally appropriate and feasible when they are based on indigenous knowledge. He and his facilitators follow this guiding philosophy. Mr. Vivekanandan's areas of contribution are:

- Identification and documentation of the works of the rural innovators
- Conservation of medicinal plants and rare animal breeds
- Training farmers on ethno veterinary practices and capacity building
- Encouraging low cost green practices in rural areas
- Facilitating linkages for micro venture capital and marketing

While emphasizing on the preservation of indigenous agricultural practices, Mr. Vivekanandan and SEVA broadly focus and classify the work into two areas viz.

- Development activities towards conservation of local livestock breeds and natural resource management
- Documentation and dissemination of indigenous knowledge and grassroots innovations

While invention is about innovation, it is also about reviving traditional practices such as herbal medicine for animals and conservation of native livestock breeds. SEVA under Mr. Vivekanandan's guidance encourages participatory interventions. It enhances the collective capacity of resourceful poor population, through sustainable management of natural resources and by building upon their indigenous knowledge and innovations.

Mr. Vivekanandan's vision has led to formation of herders' association, farmers' groups and grassroots innovators association. He also has motivated institutions, professionals, farmers, innovators and conservationists to join the network for the purpose of recognition, empowerment of resource poor community members; and for conservation of animal genetic resources.

Some grassroots innovations: There are more than a dozen of rural innovators who have discovered a range of products from an automatic on and off switch system for street lighting, a device to climb palmyra trees, and improved handloom giving better production, to a new variety of drumsticks and red rice.

Some innovations such as herbal pesticide development, automatic weft insertion in handlooms, coconut

dehusker are commercialized.

Mr. Vivekanandan's strength is his ability to find and encourage such grassroots innovators and to document their innovations, interact with scientific institutions; so that they are tested or validated for the purpose of recognition, rewards and for dissemination.

Preservation of local breeds: Mr. Vivekanandan supports customary practices, pastoral communities as they are known for conserving local breeds of animals which in turn provide livelihoods. This is what led him to work with the pastoralists across the country to revive and build local cattle breed. SEVA is the lead agency working on a project to preserve four rare breeds of animals in India, ranging from the Pullikulam cattle in Tamil Nadu to a breed of amphibious camel in the Rann of Kutch, among others. In Tamil Nadu, Mr. Vivekanandan has worked for the rights of the herders for conserving rare breeds. SEVA also promotes and facilitates farmers to use local breed of cattle for dairy.

Mr. Vivekanandan facilitated local Panchayats to renovate common property resources (viz. animal drinking water ponds, tanks, bore wells in 14 places in Nagapattinam, Thoothukudi districts of Tamil Nadu), arranged animal health camps, supplied breeding bulls and prepared action plan for conservation of ten native animal breeds by involving all the stakeholders. In several cases as an outcome, notably for Umbalachery cattle in Nagapattinam district, there has been a significant increase in population of the breed.

Social security for pastoralists: Mr. Vivekanandan through SEVA and other NGO groups (LIFE Network) and volunteers, has advocated for pastoralists grazing rights. Due to this effort, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) has recognized pastoralists globally as the guardians of biological diversity; and approved SEVA to support four local breeds maintained by pastoral communities in India.

Advocacy: Mr. Vivekanandan strives for advocacy in

- Standardizing methods of preparation and administration of various traditional, herbal recipes for animals
- Sensitizing and encouraging the government to mainstream the innovations
- Including the innovations in educational curriculum for students
- Facilitating linkages, revitalizing the process, creating awareness and promoting the innovators to other NGOs working in the related field

Training and recognition to innovators: Selected best practices are tested by Mr. Vivekanandan and that knowledge is disseminated to train the farmers and conduct practical demonstrations at village levels. The innovators are encouraged by involving them in documentation process; with awards/recognitions; conducting workshops and training, providing credit and value addition to the products. SEVA conducts trainings/workshops/field demonstrations on herbal medicines for animals, for increasing efficiency in handloom weaving by automatic weft insertions, on local breed and pasture land conservation, green farming practices and operating innovative technologies/equipments, etc.

To encourage and recognize the livestock keepers at the grassroots level, Mr. Vivekanandan introduced the Breed Saviour Award in association with the Local Livestock for Empowerment of Rural People, (LIFE) Network and the National Bureau of Animal Genetic Resources and this is being supported by the National Biodiversity Authority, Chennai. Information is also disseminated through their quarterly newsletter Num vali velanmai (in Tamil) which is circulated to around 1000 subscribers since over two decades. It is published in association with SRISTI/National Innovation Foundation, Ahmadabad.

Impact: To spread the work, SEVA in association with the Honeybee Network conduct Sodhyatras across various villages and communities to exchange knowledge on best practices and local innovations. Youth encouragement and involvement is also of prime focus. Mr. Vivekanandan has organized farmers training programmes to popularize low cost herbal treatment for animals in 135 villages in Tamil Nadu, 2 villages in Karnataka, 3 villages in Kerala, one village in Jharkhand; and benefitted more than 5,500 farmers. During

an outbreak of foot and mouth disease in Tamil Nadu, an herbal formula, low cost treatment (which was based on traditional knowledge) saved more than 500 animals. This herbal medicine can be prepared by any farmer.

Mr. Vivekanandan strives for capacity building of innovators through documentation, testing and marketing of products like low cost plastic mulching in vegetables, automatic street light automatic on-off switch, and handloom innovation for physically handicapped, fuel efficient 4-stroke engine in a two wheeler.

Some quantitative impacts are listed below:

- Innovations, traditional practices documented: 8600
- Innovators provided micro-credit / venture capital: 30
- Practices tested and validated: 8
- Farmers / women trained in herbal medicine for animals and other innovations: 5500
- Livestock keepers recognized with Breed Saviour Awards: 104
- Innovations commercialized: 2
- Farmers adopted new low cost green innovations: 500
- Breeds conserved through pastoralist/herders associations/service facilities: 12

He helped many innovative small farmers, laborers, handloom weavers, women, tribes, traditional vaidyas/healers to receive national level recognition through awards, royalties for technology transfers/patent rights; and micro venture support for their knowledge, innovations and genetic resources. Mr. Vivekanandan has built a network of volunteers and youth to work with innovators

Association and Awards: Mr. Vivekanandan has been nominated as member of National Steering Committee on Conservation of Threatened Breeds of Livestock constituted by Department of Animal Husbandry, Dairying and Fisheries, New Delhi. He is a member of the Sub-Group on Conservation of Animal Genetic Resources constituted under Working Group on Animal Husbandry & Dairying for the Twelfth Five Year Plan (2012-17).

Mr. Vivekanandan was awarded first prize for scouting maximum number of innovations of rural people in Tamil Nadu in 2001 by National Innovation Foundation, Ahmedabad. He has received The World Technology Awards 2003 for Environment (finalist) and the George Atkins Communications Award in 1999.

Mr. Perumal Vivekanandan practices material simplicity with spiritual richness in his way of life. He has created a system that breeds local innovation, supports sustainable and rural livelihoods. Like his personality, Mr. Vivekanandan's approach to life and work is simple and deep. He is a facilitator of development of grassroots innovation since over two decades.

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