

Friends of Kalangarai

December 20, 2019

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Self-Reliance through Collective Activities



Dear Friends,

I have recently returned from Chennai, India where I participated in an *International Conference on the Environment and Sustainable Futures*. This was a great opportunity for scientists, educators, governments, and citizens across nations to share their knowledge and further the understanding of the cultural and social context of environmental problems and potential solutions.

Fr. Kulandai, Director of Kalangarai, attended the conference and we discussed how Kalangarai could help the widows develop income-generating activities while also addressing issues such as food insecurity, waste management, and natural disasters due to climate change. In the articles below, Fr. Kulandai provides details about their recent efforts to achieve this goal. There are also two links to articles in the media about Kalangarai.

A brief update on their educational program--Kalangarai's community college program was successful this past year in graduating students with expertise in computer desktop publishing, AC mechanics, electrical trades, and nursing assistance. They are now renovating and expanding the college building to be more sustainable. The student body is composed of primarily children of the widows served by Kalangarai. They continue to need our financial support to defray the costs of room, board, and tuition.

Through your donations, we are able to support community-based programs to enhance the dignity, self-reliance and well-being of widow-headed families in South India. Thank you for your continued support.

Best wishes for a healthy and peaceful 2020!

Karen Kayser
President
Friends of Kalangarai, Inc.

Collective Farming

One of the novel sustainable economic activities promoted by Kalangarai since 2012 is *collective farming*. In 2019, a total of 91 widows in 5 zones were involved in collective farming in cultivating rice, chili, cotton, ground nuts and vegetables either on their own land or on leased cultivable lands. These women farmers are part of 24 self-help groups that Kalangarai supports through skills training and interest-free financial assistance to help women lease and plough the land. Each group leased 1.5-3 acres of land. The marginalized women have gained tremendous psychological strength and social capital from this initiative.

Collective Small Enterprises

Kalangarai has been motivating more women to join together into small enterprises. In October 2019, several widows from the Annaitheresa, Udhayam, and Srithalaamman self-help help groups jointly opened the *Kalangarai Textile Shop* in Vedharanyam, where they sell cloth to enhance their livelihoods. So far, they have been earning Rs. 1000 (about US\$14) per day in profit. They report feeling remarkably happy and with an increased sense of dignity. They want to improve the business by selling flowers and stationery and by sewing clothing for customers. Inspired by this shop, three other widows in the area opened a *dosa/idly* (breakfast foods) restaurant in their own village. They prepare and sell food in the morning, close the shop at 9am, then go for agricultural work. These widows would like to expand by opening a shop on the main road, and are seeking financial help from Kalangarai to build a small food stall.



My Green Bin Compost Project



In 2018, Friends of Kalangarai bought six compost bins for five widows. In the first six months an external source was buying the compost regularly for Rs. 25 per kilogram (US\$0.35). However, in the second half of 2019, the external source became an unreliable buyer and Kalangarai decided to buy the compost for the same rate to use as an organic fertilizer in Kalangarai's garden. Kalangarai is currently exploring other buyers.

Kalangarai in the Media

Caste, the Patriarchy, and Climate Change: The Dalit female farmers of India's Tamil Nadu state are working together to overcome a daunting set of challenges, 2/15/19 by Namrata Kolachalan, for Slate

In this report, the author describes how collective farming has offered Kalangarai's widows upward mobility, but she also explains how changing patterns of rainfall due to climate change can thwart these efforts. See full article [here](#).

TN dalit women sow seeds of equality through land ownership, 8/15/2019, Times India

This news article describes the rational and success of 11 farming collectives that were developed among the Kalangarai widows groups. It also features the efforts of one widow, Thamizharsi, who now has "hired 10 men, lends money to those in need, and works on land she can call her own." See full article [here](#).

Make a Difference in the Lives of Widows

Friends of Kalangarai is a U.S.A. non-profit that supports the programs of Kalangarai through fund-raising, education, and research. We are a 501(c)3 charitable organization. *Kalangarai* is a non-governmental organization that supports the human rights of widows in India through community-based programs to enhance dignity, self-reliance and the well-being of widow-headed families in South India.

Please consider supporting these efforts by making a donation. Checks can be sent to:

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