



June, 2021

## Friends of Kalangarai

Empowering Women Globally

*Our mission is to support community-based programs working to enhance dignity, self-reliance, and the well-being of widow-headed families in South India*

Dear Friends,

As the number of COVID-19 cases is decreasing in the US and Americans are returning to some sense of “normalcy,” India is having one of its worse spikes of the pandemic, reaching as many as 39,000 new cases and more than 700 new deaths daily. Tamil Nadu, where Kalangarai is situated, has been one of the poorest performing states in the COVID-19 vaccine coverage, with 13.8% having received at least one dose and only 3.6% having taken both. The barrier is not hesitancy but inadequate supply.\* Limited access to medical care and an inadequate supply of the vaccinations forced India to lock down in April 2021 until mid-June. Life in rural villages, in particular, is far from returning to normal as people daily struggle to meet their basic needs and cope with uncertainty about their future.

While the lockdown is needed to control the coronavirus, **there are serious economic and social ramifications for the 3,200 widowed or abandoned women and their children who participate in the Kalangarai programs.** Widowed/abandoned women are the sole breadwinners for their families, work at low-paying jobs, and continue to face discrimination due to the stigma of being widowed women. Restrictions during the lockdown have limited women in their ability to travel to work.

**Despite assistance with food from Indian corporations and the government, there are other unmet needs.** Many of the women live in thatched houses that need repair or replacement. Before the pandemic they began these repairs but now cannot complete them. The cost of building materials has skyrocketed due to increases in the cost of petrol needed to transport materials during the pandemic.

The children are also suffering from school closings. Schools provide structure, social connection, and a future for children and youth. All schools (private and public), have been closed during the lockdown and synchronous online classes are not an option. St. Joseph’s Community College—a technical school that Kalangarai established after the Indian Ocean Tsunami—had opened in December after the first lockdown ended but was required to close again in April. **The psychological stresses of social isolation, hopelessness, and uncertainty about the future are being felt by the youth and young adults.** For fear that students may not return to school after the lockdown, the staff of Kalangarai will be making strong efforts to recruit students in the villages to attend the upcoming school year.

**Your support can make a difference!** Donations to Friends of Kalangarai will go toward establishing sustainable asset-building enterprises, providing college tuition for students at St. Joseph’s College, educational programs for younger children, and medical or caregiving expenses for the women affected by COVID. **Your donations during June will be doubled by a matching gift of \$4000.** Please help us to raise \$4000 so that it becomes \$8000! (Page 3 includes information on how to make your donation).

Warm regards,  
Karen Kayser  
President, Friends of Kalangarai

\*<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/tamil-nadu/supply-not-hesitancy-slowng-down-vaccination/article34756852.ece>

## From the Field:

### *Establishing New Asset-Building Enterprises*

With the donations from Friends of Kalangarai December's virtual brunch, we were able to continue our support of the women's innovative social enterprises (WISE). Fr. Kulandai (director of Kalangarai) reports: "Kalangarai offered training on food preparation and business management to 30 widows. As a result of the training held for four days on non-conventional business training, two women jointly opened a mushroom food stall in Nagapattinam in the beginning of March. Inspired by their example, four more women formed themselves as 'Semmalar Self-help Group' and opened a Mushroom stall in the name of 'Kalangarai Mushroom Corner' on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021 in Vailankanni. .... This Mushroom Corner serves variety of mushroom dishes like Mushroom Samosa, Mushroom Roll, Mushroom Cutlets and Mushroom 65. These women feel remarkably happy and have a sense of leading a dignified life."

### *Laying Cornerstone for Kalangarai Development Centre Building*

On March 12<sup>th</sup> Kalangarai laid the foundation stone for the Kalangarai Development Centre building, which will house the *Widows Livelihood Rights Association*. "To break the superstitious custom forbidding widows' participation in such auspicious functions, the leaders of the Widows' Association attending this ceremony were treated as VIPs and each leader was asked to place a brick on the foundation" (Fr. Kulandai).

### *International Widow's Day – June 23*

The United Nations observes June 23<sup>rd</sup> as International Widows Day—a day to raise awareness of widows' experiences and to promote their human rights, livelihoods, and dignity. Similar to last year's celebration, Fr. Kulandai reports that they will gather the women in smaller groups to celebrate the day. "It is certain that we will conduct the celebrations in all 5 zones. But the number of participants for each celebration depends on the government's announcement. If the State Government permits to have public meetings or marriage functions with 100 members then we will mobilize only 100 members for each celebration. Our target is that 1500 women would be celebrating their Day with some focused themes."



Mushroom Stall  
Patturoja Self-help Group



Laying the Foundation for the  
Development Centre Building



International Women's Day Celebration

### Welcome to New Board Members

The board is excited to welcome two new board members, Winston Langley from Arlington, MA and Barbara Honthumb from Dartmouth, MA. Winston is currently professor emeritus of political science and international relations at University of Massachusetts Boston, where he served as provost and vice chancellor for academic affairs. Winston has a special interest in environmental issues in India. Barbara Honthumb is a healthcare executive, who served as executive director of a non-profit organization focused on microlending and microenterprise development with low income women in Ohio. Barbara has experience in program development and grant writing, and is interested in self-sufficiency for women.

### Introducing Our Social Media Volunteer

We are also deeply grateful to have on board as volunteer, Deepa Bhalerao, based in Mumbai, India. Deepa is currently managing the social media and website pages of the Centre of Excellence in Teacher Education, Tata Institute of Social Sciences. Previously, she managed the social media of an organization focused on health education through popular entertainment. Deepa has volunteered to advise the board on social media strategy and will be helping us set up Twitter

### Board of Directors

*Karen Kayser (Chair)*  
Dartmouth, MA

*Chrisann Newransky*  
(Secretary)  
Garden City, NY

*Shirnett Khorran Gajaraj*  
(Treasurer)  
Hingham, MA

*Barbara Honthumb*  
Dartmouth, MA

*Winston Langley,*  
Arlington, MA

*Gokul Mandayam*  
Providence, RI

*Jane O'Rourke*  
Lincoln, MA

**Help us reach our Goal of \$8000!**

**Your donation doubles with a match contribution if it is made before June 30th!**

### To make your donation

Online with a credit card, go to "donate" page at: [www.kalangarai-india.org](http://www.kalangarai-india.org)

OR

Send a check made payable to: "Friends of Kalangarai" to:

Friends of Kalangarai  
c/o Karen Kayser  
2 Fresh River Valley Rd  
South Dartmouth, MA 02748

*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.*

*To learn more about the programs, visit [www.kalangarai-india.org](http://www.kalangarai-india.org)  
For questions/comments, email: [kalangarai.friends@gmail.com](mailto:kalangarai.friends@gmail.com)*