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# Friends of Kalangarai

**Raising awareness and support for women of Kalangarai  
to realize their abilities and worth for sustainable livelihoods.**



DECEMBER 2023  
NEWSLETTER

## *A Holiday Message*

**“When you keep your truth in front of you and have the courage to keep moving toward it, through anything that arises, you live at your best.”**

Author Wagamese received this advice when he sought spiritual wisdom from an old woman in his book *Embers: One Ojibway's Meditations*.

In reflecting on her advice, I thought of the women of Kalangarai whom I met at their celebration of International Women's Day this past year. One by one the widowed women courageously took the stage at the event. Each spoke the truth of their oppression—misogyny in society, humiliating treatment by people who attempted to strip them of their human rights, and their internalization of a sense of worthlessness. Their empowered voices challenged the persons and institutions that tried to keep them voiceless.

Connecting with other widowed women in their self-help groups and working with each other in collective enterprises, they were empowered to tell their stories. The assembly hall was wired with microphones and speakers. But their strong voices did not need this equipment. Truth and courage were all that they needed to proclaim their growing freedom from oppression.

Now I understand the words of the wise woman: truth and courage are essential for living at your best. These words of wisdom apply not only to marginalized women but to all women.

On behalf of the board of Friends of Kalangarai, I wish you all an abundance of health, courage, and happiness in 2024.

Karen Kayser  
President, Friends of Kalangarai

## **Read our December Newsletter to learn about . . .**

- Empowering Widows' Livelihoods with Renewable Energy
  - Our webinar series on Gender, Equity, Mobilization, and Sustainability
  - Our new Book Club: Exploring India through the Lens of Novelists
- And more...

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*Friends of Kalangarai is a U.S.-based 501(C)3 nonprofit that supports community-based programs for widowed/abandoned women in South India through fundraising, education, and research.*

*<https://kalangarai-india.org>*

## Empowering Widows' Livelihood with Renewable Energy

### A. Kulandai, Director of Kalangarai

Through training programs and financial assistance Kalangarai is helping widows become successful entrepreneurs and change-makers in their community while empowering themselves financially. In 2023, Kalangarai entered into an agreement with SELCO Solar Light Pvt. Ltd. to supply solar-powered systems like printers, sewing machines, refrigerators, sugar cane juicers, rope-making machines, and chili grinding machines to our widows. SELCO gives a 70% subsidy to each system which includes batteries, solar panels, printers or sewing machines or refrigerators. Only 30% of the cost is to be borne by the beneficiary.

Solar energy is “clean energy”; that is, it is renewable, does not emit greenhouse gases, and comes from resources that nature will replace. Solar energy is the most abundant of all energy resources and can even be harnessed in cloudy weather. It is the fastest growing and most affordable source of new electricity in the world. As the cost of solar energy systems dropped significantly, more people have taken advantage of clean energy.

Eighteen widows received these solar-powered systems and are participating in a self-employment program which enables them to lead a dignified life.

#### Mrs Valli, a Petty Shop Entrepreneur

Mrs. Valli is a single mother of four adult children: two daughters and two sons. She owns and runs a small petty shop in a small village. In her shop she sells snacks, soft drinks, other packaged beverages, dairy products etc., She is not able to store these items in bulk and needs to go to the main market frequently to purchase them. With the financial support of Kalangarai in 2023, she bought a solar-powered fridge. She can now store soft drinks, vegetables, milk products like milk, curd, water, cheese and butter and rice and wheat flour in her fridge at her shop. Her income has doubled since purchasing the solar-powered fridge.



Mrs. Valli on right

#### A Success Story of Ms. Arul Catherin from Nagapattinam

Arul Catherin is a 29-year-old young widow who lives in a Dalit hamlet in Nagapattinam district. She married at an early age; her husband died from a cardiac arrest. After his death, she joined a Kalangarai self-help group. In 2023, she bought a solar-powered photocopier with the financial help of Kalangarai. Her photocopier shop is located adjacent to her house and near a high school and the panchayat (village council) office. Her electricity bill has drastically been reduced since solar panels were installed. She is the only business owner who has a photocopier machine in her village and has been able to get steady income from her photocopying business. Her small business provides a sustainable livelihood for her and her daughter.



## Join us for GEMS: Initiatives from the Global South Webinar Series

During Fall, 2023, Friends of Kalangarai launched a lecture series of six webinars focusing on Gender, Equity, Mobilization, and Sustainability (GEMS). This **free series**, co-sponsored by Adelphi University, features experts leading innovative programs to address poverty, women's rights, environmental injustice, and socio-economic developing in South Asia. Recordings of the [first three webinars can be found on our website](#).

These webinars focus on the UN's Sustainable Development Goal #5 to "achieve gender equality and empower all women." Despite our efforts to educate and economically empower marginalized women in the Global South, there is still extensive work to be done. According to United Nations reports, gender inequities are deep-rooted in every society. Women suffer from the lack of access to sustainable work and gender wage gaps. Many are denied access to basic education and health care and are victims of violence and discrimination. Furthermore, they are under-represented in political and economic decision-making processes ([United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs](#)). As we move forward with implementing our programs to address gender equity, we will need to think about how we can integrate gender equity and empowerment with the dimensions of sustainability. They are all very inter-related and it is hoped that these webinars will help us to further understand the complex interactions among these dimensions and how policy and social activism can build synergies between them.

The webinar series examines initiatives making progress in empowering and mobilizing women and girls to reach the SDG goals. Each webinar allows time for discussion between speaker and audience. [Join us for the remaining three lectures](#). The Webinars are free, but you must [register to receive the Zoom link](#).

### Save the Dates for Upcoming Webinars

January 18, 2024  
Time: 10:30 am (EST)  
Location: Zoom

Making Land Ownership a Reality: Reflections from the Journey of the Working Group for Women and Land Ownership (GWLO)  
Speaker: [Ms. Shilpa Vasavada](#)

February 15, 2024  
Time: 10:30 (EST)  
Location: Zoom

A Holistic Approach for empowering women in War-affected Areas in Sri Lanka  
Speaker: Ms. Shamila Sivakumaran

March 21, 2024  
Time 10:30 am (EST)  
Location: Zoom

"AWAKE"ning Entrepreneurship in Women: Women Empowerment and Sustainable Livelihood by AWAKE in Karnataka state, India  
Speaker: [Dr. Rajeswari](#)

## **We are launching a new Book Club: Exploring India through the Lens of Novelists**

Interested in traveling to India but don't want to leave your cozy armchair? Friends of Kalangarai is launching a book discussion group that focuses on Indian novelists. Authors include Arundhati Roy, Jhumpa Lahiri, Thrity Umrigar, Abraham Verghese, Sujata Massey among others.

The book club will be hybrid—in person and on Zoom—and meet every two months on the second Friday of the month at 5:30-6:30 (EST). The dates for 2024 are: February 9, April 12, June 14, August 9, October 11.

For more information and registration, check our [website](#) under “Events” or email Karen at [kalangarai.friends@gmail.com](mailto:kalangarai.friends@gmail.com)

## **Fall Festival ‘Friend’raiser: A Big Success!**

Despite the inclement weather over 50 people gathered under a warm cozy tent to taste a variety of craft beer and enjoy a delicious spread of October Fest fare and Halloween treats. This was enjoyed along with a terrific Irish Band in the background. There was a robust silent auction including catered Cajun meals, Champagne dessert parties, end of summer sail and an apartment in a spectacular part of Italy. We had lovely pashmina scarves and shawls for sale. In total it was a great success with lots of joy to be had and yielded over \$15,000.00 to support the widows!



## **We are grateful to all our Fall Festival Helpers and Silent Auction Donors**

Taylor Dorsey  
Dan Underwood  
Tessa O'Rourke  
Cameron Hoffpauir  
Dave Kayser  
Marcia Hathaway  
Pamela Lowell

Winston Langley  
Barbara Honthumb  
Rick Clare  
Amy Goolkasian  
Ellen Venis  
Jane O'Rourke

### Business Donors

Buzzards Bay Brewery  
Farm and Coast Market  
Sail Loft Restaurant  
Duchess of Dirt

## A Special Thanks to Our Website Volunteers

With the help of David Groskind (Website Builder) and Sarah Sanford (Graphic Designer), we accomplished a complete makeover of [our website](#). Utilizing best practices in website design, the website is easy to navigate and to update with current content and events. The new [logo](#) beautifully symbolizes the mission of Kalangarai.

### Our Board Members

*Karen Kayser (Chair)  
Dartmouth, MA*

*Chrisann Newransky  
(Treasurer)  
Garden City, NY*

*Jane O'Rourke (Clerk)  
Lincoln, MA*

*Barbara Honthumb  
Dartmouth, MA*

*Praveen Kumar  
Waltham, MA*

*Winston Langley  
Arlington, MA*

*Gokul Mandayam  
Providence, RI*

### Volunteer Wish List – We Need Your Talents

As Friends of Kalangarai expands its programs, our need for volunteers increases. There is a variety of opportunities to contribute. If interested, please email: [info@kalangarai-india.org](mailto:info@kalangarai-india.org).

**Administrative Volunteers:** volunteer coordinator, data analyst, communications strategist, events coordinator, website support.

**Board Service Volunteers:** fundraising/donor relations, financial management/accounting, grant writing.

**Program Volunteers:** event planning, tech support for website and virtual events, advertising, organizing silent auctions and sales.

### Why Donate?

Your contribution to Friends of Kalangarai will support women served by Kalangarai programs including:

- the start-up of small social enterprises
- educational programs for school-age children
- tuition for young adults to attend college

### DONATE ONLINE AT:

<https://kalangarai-india.org/donate>

OR

### SEND A CHECK TO:

Friends of Kalangarai  
P.O. Box 8755  
New Bedford MA 02742