

Mangreen – from project to institution

In spring of 2011 it was completed and inaugurated, the Palk Bay Center in South India. It is the new center for the work of our partner Vedharajan Balaji and OMCAR Foundation. From here, the reforestation of mangroves will be implemented and supported by scientists. At the same time, the Palk Bay Center will be an educational institution for sustainable development in the region.



Report by Vedharajan Balaji

The Palk Bay Centre is located Velivayal village near Mallipattinam, Pattukottai taluk, Thanjavur district, Tamil Nadu. The centre will serve as a platform for the activities like environmental education programmes for school children, for coastal ecosystem field research training programmes. It is an information centre for coastal ecosystems and socio economics of northern Palk Bay. We conduct disaster management training and preparation in coastal villages as well as alternative livelihood training programmes for fisher women groups.

The centre has 1.5 acres of land registered under the name of OMCAR Foundation. The main building has a conference hall which can accommodate 50 people, with a presentation stage. The presentation hall is equipped with high qua-

lity sound systems, DVD player, computer, LCD Projector and screen. The hall is well illuminated with lights and fans. 2 meter corridor around the conference hall will offer group discussion and additional space for dining. The first floor of the building has a open hall, where accommodation can be arranged for participants. Both western and Indian type toilets, 1000 liter water tank, bathroom are constructed around the main building. A solar cooker, eco-friendly paddling pump and eco-friendly toilet will be the key attraction for the participants.

The centre is located about 500m from the Velivayal Bus stop in East coast road and 500m from the Velivayal beach. The shoreline of Velivayal beautifully ornamented with seagrass beds and mangroves, which means an easier access to the participants by walkable distance.

First activities at Palk Bay Center

An awareness campaign on the 'Mudskippers Conservation' was held in March 2011 at the Palk Bay Centre and about 50 fisher women from Velivayal village were attended the programme. It was one among the objectives to create awareness about the mudskippers and their conservation in the mudflats and mangrove region. As OMCAR foundation Director I welcomed the gathering and Dr. V. Ravi, Assistant Professor and Principal Investigator of the Project explained



At Palk Bay Centre resource-saving technologies such as solar cookers are provided.



Students can test the use and potential of solar cookers.



New mangrove plantations be located with GPS.

the role of mudskippers in various perspectives including evolutionary, ecological and economical aspects.

People of Velivayal celebrated world biodiversity day in May. The programme was held at Palk Bay Centre and Dr. P. Santhanam, Lecturer of Department of Marine Science, Bharathidasan University was invited as a key speaker. He delivered a lecture on Marine Biodiversity conservation. About 60 Women self help group members of Kollukkadu and Velivayal have attended the programme.

The Coastal Environmental Education Summer Camp was conducted at Palk Bay Centre. The children from local fisher villages were invited to participate in this programme. The participants learned about mangroves and seagrass beds and types of fishes that are available in their coastal area. They have learned to draw regional commercially valuable fishes and crabs after which they learned about solar cooker. A documentary film on ocean life was exhibited at the end of this programme.

Mangreen Project in IUCN Regional Conservation Forum, South Korea

OMCAR exhibited the achievement of mangreen project to the international conservation community. A poster was presented entitled as "Community Based Mangrove Restoration in Palk Bay, India" and was displayed in the prime exhibition zone. Our poster is distinctly different from other posters as we showed only the field work action photos of our project activities and impressive time lapse photographs of mangrove restoration are the key attraction. The poster demonstrated also our mangrove awareness activities and showed how the community was involved by om-car foundation in field work. Further aspects were the special women programmes of Mangreen project and how our project is presently evolving with eco-friendly technological solution such as solar cookers and eco-friendly paddle pumps.

Mangrove Restoration Field Work

In the vast coastal area in northern Palk Bay, only a selective places are suitable for long term man-

grove plantation. OMCAR field staffs select only few places for planting mangroves. Due to increasing material and labour cost for fencing, the new plantation sites are not fenced. So, the main criteria for suitable mangrove plantation sites are that the sites have to be geographically protected from cattles by creeks or islets. The sites should have a suitable soil and presence of mangrove species that are similar to nursery raised seedlings and the sites should have a natural seed dispersal facility by estuaries or creeks, so that the seeds will be naturally distributed from the restored mangroves in future.

The fences in mangrove restoration sites were added with eucaliptus wood and spiny Prosopis spec. Rhizophora propagules are rare in northern Palk Bay, when compared to Avicennia marina. To increase the diversity of mangrove restoration sites our staffs travelling along the coast and estuaries to identify the Rhizophora trees. The trees have been observed from premonsoon season to collect the propagules in suitable period.

In October 2011, the monsoon climate brought a perfect condition and the nursery raised seedlings were travelled up to 15 km through sea to reach Ambuli ar estuary. The sites were selected by omcar staffs in June 2011. There is no roads to the plantation sites and we decided to carry the seedlings by boat. On the coast of Kollukkadu village, located on the southern side of Agni Estuary, a public mangrove plantation event was organized by OMCAR Foundation. Nearly 100 fisher women self help group members of local villages were participated to plant hundreds of mangrove seedlings in the selected, protected sites.

Cooperation with NGOs

OMCAR Foundation has organized its first joint meeting With MSSRF, an Indian research and social NGO. OMCAR Foundation is ready to open a platform for MSSRF to carry out its livelihood support programme in Agni estuary fisher villages. The fisher representatives from two villages have participated in this meeting. They insisted the need for weather forecast, GPS training, women livelihood training and infrastructures. As a



O MCAR brings the subject of the sea directly in the schools.



Important target group are the women of the region.

direct follow up of this meeting, OMCAR Foundation and MSSRF has jointly organized weather forecast information service in Kollukkadu village.

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since July 2005

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16.620 EUR

Project partner:
Organization for Marine Conservation,
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