

# **Revival of Bird Sanctuary and Setting up of Mini Dairy in Koonthankulam**

(A Brief Case from Village Immersion Programme of BIM)

Tonnes of optimism and contentment among the local people, sans the unavailability of water were a revelation to the lot, and the team was determined to work towards doing something to revive the bird sanctuary located in the village and make their lives better. An analysis in depth about how the mini dairy could be set up with the help of government bodies has estimated to improve the lives of families who are unable to secure a consistent income to support their household.

## **Introduction**

Koonthankulam is a Village in Nanguneri Taluk/Block in Tirunelveli District of Tamil Nadu State, India. Agriculture is the primary source of income for majority of the population in the village, though the performance has seen a slowdown for harvest and its yield due to unavailability of direct factors, namely consistent modes of irrigation. As a result, the village has seen its people move out to nearby towns and cities in search for a more constant source of income, including painting, masonry, and cab drivers. Cattle breeding are a close second source, with the people following an expanding trend of buying cows and goats. Koonthankulam Bird Sanctuary located in the village declared as a sanctuary in the year 1994 is just 38 kms away from Tirunelveli and conveniently connected by road. This is the largest reserve for breeding water birds in south India. More than 43 species of resident and migratory water birds visit here every year. Now the situation is in a degrading way. Birds are not visiting this reserve land because of many factors.

The following were the major objectives of this village immersion programme (VIP) in Koonthankulam to help local community in improving their economic and livelihood opportunities:

- To suggest measures for restoring ecosystem and glory of the bird sanctuary in Koonthankulam village
- To suggest measures for increasing tourist traffic for the Bird Sanctuary in Koonthankulam
- To provide additional economic avenue in Koonthankulam by establishing a milk co-operative society

A team of students from Bharathidasan Institute of Management (BIM), Trichy under the guidance of Dr. S. Jaya Krishna worked together to study the Bird Sanctuary problem and socio-economic conditions of the local community. The study aimed at helping the Koonthankulam village in promoting eco-tourism as well as creating more opportunities to the people through other potential avenues like animal breeding, etc.

## **Bird Sanctuary – In a Devastated Situation**

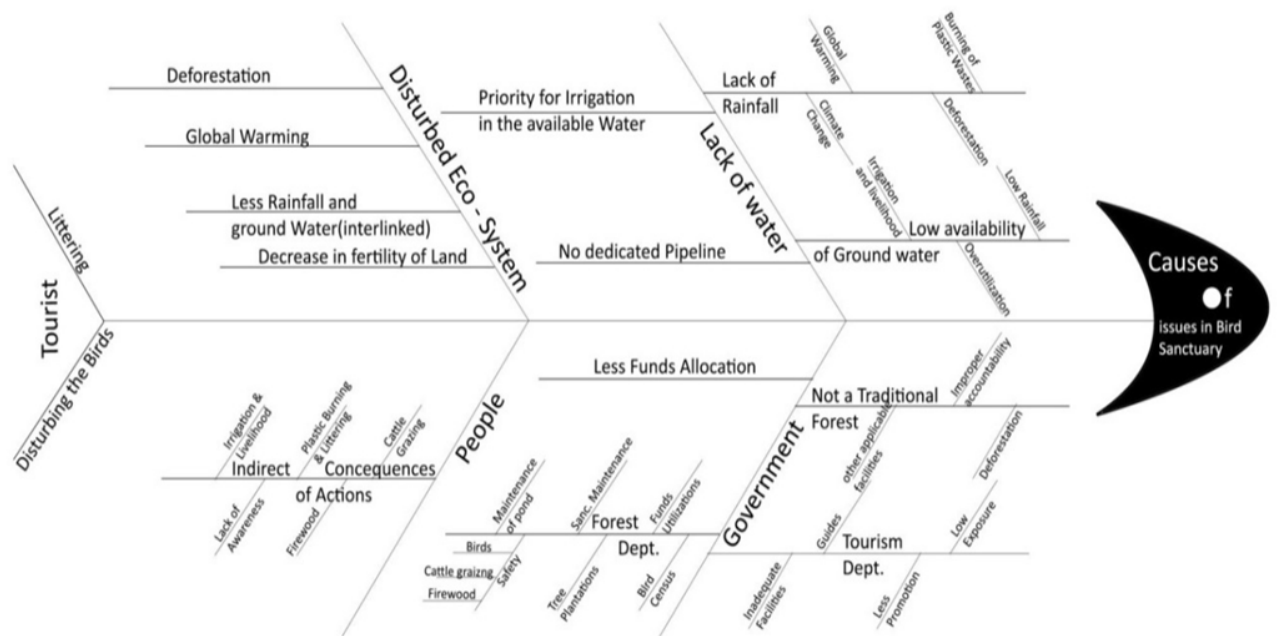
Koonthankulam Bird Sanctuary – historically a prominent one for both eco-tourism and heritage, which is an icon of Koonthankulam village is under severe threat and the reason is simple – lack of water. Water is the basic element of survival; its deficiency can result in an ecosystem disaster. One sight of the bird sanctuary provided below is enough to create an insight about the depth of the issue.

This sanctuary is actively protected and managed by the Koonthankulam village community. It is established as a bird sanctuary created by the people in 1994 by the forest department. This is because the local people take a keen interest in protecting this sanctuary. The bond between the birds and the people of Koonthankulam can be dated back to the era of kings. According to a tale believed by the villagers, the birds are coming to the place since many decades and the kings ruling the land at that period loved the birds and restricted the people from harming the birds. Birds



coming to villagers' backyards are protected vehemently and regarded as harbingers of rain and luck. The village elders and leaders later on carried out this tradition. Therefore, this became more of a hereditary sense. With such a humungous landscape and the long period as the peak season, the ornithologists often visit the place to study the habitat and photographers enjoy the luscious sceneries and beauty of birds. An interpretation center, watchtower, children's park and dormitory are open for public use throughout the year.

The sanctuary that is supposed to be completely filled with water is now less than 1/10th of how much it is supposed to have. Without adequate water, the number of birds in the sanctuary is decreasing at an exponential rate every year. As a result, this has disturbed the ecological balance in the village. There are many reasons for this and each factor is interlinked with other which in-turn creates a vicious cycle of destruction. The following fishbone diagram depicts the causes that are part of the vicious cycle.



In Koonthankulam, rainfall is the most important source of water. But the level of rainfall is deteriorating every year and there was reportedly a period where there was no rainfall at all. 3 years of drought (2011 - 14) plagued the village and the land still suffers the after effects of those three devastating years. Besides lack of rainfall, deforestation, use of on-biodegradable & plastic wastes, over utilisation of ground water, indirect reasons like cattle grazing, firewood theft, etc., and lack of adequate maintenance, development and promotion have led to the devastating bird sanctuary and infertile land scenario.

### Seven Point Solution Framework

The bird sanctuary should gain new lease of life as early as possible. In order to achieve a sustainable development of the sanctuary and its surroundings, a prudential framework has to be laid and upon which the developmental activities should be launched. Futuristic approach has to be inculcated with every activity carried out regarding the sanctuary's development. The very basic and effective solutions that can contribute vastly to the sustainable development of the sanctuary and its surroundings are described below:

- I. Re-Establishing the Eco-System of the Bird Sanctuary
- II. Massive Afforestation for Rainfall
- III. Establishing a Dedicated Organisation with Sustainable Governance and Management
- IV. Establishment of Special Bird Sanctuary Protection Force
- V. Sustained, Independent and Exclusive Water Supply Model for the Bird Sanctuary Tank
- VI. Infrastructure for Eco-Tourism/Tourists Including Landscaping and Gardening
- VII. Environment Safeguard Measures in and around the Sanctuary

There are a few crucial parts in which the natives should focus on creating awareness, developing basic amenities, conduct promotional events and marketing using social media in order to substantiate the growth of tourism. In the interest of attracting a good number of tourists and spread positive word-of-mouth (PWOM), the concerned officials should also take steps to improve the quality of living and experience of the place.

## **Mini Dairy @ Koonthankulam**

Breeding cattle is a major source of income for the people of Koonthankulam, next to farming. Almost 70 percent of the families are involved in the activity, with an average of two cows in a household. A few families have established themselves in the locality, owning up to thirty cows. The people sell it to private milk societies, who are largely old friends or distant relatives. This was until five years ago, when Arokya milk, which is a part of the Hatsun Agro Group entered the village and established a co-operative milk society. They invited the farmers and breeders to sell the product to them, at competitive prices. They were also taught better ways of maintaining hygiene, and other healthy practices concerning cattle breeding.

on surveying the people who sold the product locally; they failed to get more than Rs. 23 a liter, along with minor issues like delayed payments, et al. At present, milk society of the state based milk producers' union officially known as Tamil Nadu Co-operative Milk Producers' Federation Limited, commonly known by their trademark *Aavin* is not present in the village. In lieu of competing with the existing market to gain a share, Aavin's strategy is to provide cows to families who have no livestock to maintain, or families with an income level that is lower than the mean level in the village. This offers a new economic opportunity to those marginalised families in the village who couldn't buy cattle and lacks decent livelihood.

According to the Indian Contract Act of 1872, a minimum of 25 or more individuals competent to contract under section 11, owning milch animals, can form a Primary Dairy Cooperative Society, including one or more villages as its area of operation. Improving economic standards of the people and establishing Aavin Milk Society in the Koonthankulam locality are the focus of this project. By conducting a socio-economic study in the village, the team has identified around 27 potential beneficiaries whose names were suggested to the district administration and Aavin for setting a mini dairy / milk society in Koonthankulam. The suggested list of names shall be properly verified and validated by Aavin-Tirunelveli so that the new milk society does not include any banned defaulters, who have indulged in financial irregularities, if any, in the past with Aavin co-operative society.