

two/three good papers in reputed journals? This works to ~20–25% of the project cost, and is the most important element of the scientific project. The investigators could include a separate item in the project budget as 'publication charges'. If publication of project results in reputed journals is insisted upon (by permitting payment of publication charges), it will put requisite pressure on scientists and motivate them to bring out their best.

Presently, many scientists are taking advantage of the 'no publication charges' financial guidelines of the Government, and are able to get away publishing their results in low impact Indian and foreign journals/conference proceedings/unrefereed project reports, etc.

It is high time that the Government of India gives blanket approval for the payment of publication charges wherever required by scientists. It should be in-

sisted that all major works be published in relevant/high impact/reputed journals, notwithstanding publication charges.

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Perplexing ground realities

Most of us are driven by an insatiable urge to do good – largely to those who are perceived as being deprived. And it is often this urge that drives us to take up initiatives which are beyond our own sphere of work. Hence many devote their time and energy in upgrading the quality of remote rural schools, while others organize fora to popularize science and technology amongst the rural and tribal populations of the country. The Tamil Nadu Science Forum is one such example. Then there are others who innovate and provide technological solutions for improving the quality of life, and these are predominantly visible in the agricultural sector.

However, just as there are many standing examples of the success of such innovations, there are an equal or more number of instances where well-established technological solutions have failed. And lack of efficacy of the solution is not always the reason for failure.

Two cases in South India amply illustrate this confounding issue. The coastal districts of Kerala, notably Ernakulam and Alapuzha are severely deficient in potable water due to the fact that large portions of the districts are part of the brackish water system. Dotted this landscape are villages that are rather unique, being named after the predominant plant species. Anthropogenic factors such as coconut retting, small industries that are not strictly regulated, and the recent influx of small aquaculture initiatives further aggravate the condition. The non-availability of potable water within domiciles has increased the labour of women collecting water and has also rather significantly impacted the general health of the com-

munity through repeated bouts of waterborne diseases and occasional toxin-related fatalities. About 66% of the total water supply comes from the Kerala Water Authority piped water, which is not reliable, particularly in summer. 33% comes from tanker lorries that deliver drinking water, which is unaffordable to a majority of the population. One per cent is groundwater sourced from wells. To specifically address this problem, the Welfare Society, Ernakulam, which is a church-based organization started a project of rainwater harvesting in April 2003, covering two major villages of Ernakulam, viz. Cherthala and Pallipuram. If the notion was simple, so was the project structure and implementation. Using ferro cement tanks of varying capacities, rainwater is collected into the tanks through a basic filter of charcoal, pebbles and net from rooftops through pipes. The tanks are built with a single outlet and there are provisions for cleaning. The project was operationalized on a mutual contribution mode. Each household had to pay Rs 3000, which was matched by a grant from the Welfare Society. Periodic visits and training sessions were used to support the project. Today, the initiative has not only sustained itself, but has also spread to adjacent areas with the local Panchayats absorbing the idea in their plans. Institutions, notably colleges and schools have also taken up the initiative.

The second case is an initiative to improve the livelihoods of the fishing communities, notably women who were severely impacted by the tsunami of 2004. Located in Tamil Nadu, the project sought to enhance the scope of traditional fish

drying and trading, which is exclusively handled by women. After a year's effort of community mobilization and a number of hands-on training sessions, 12 women's groups were formed and through a completely participatory process, a solar dryer that could dry 100 tonnes of fish was located within the village. The initial period of enthusiasm soon disappeared and the feedback received was one of discontent and rejection. It was rather intriguing, since the dryer not only reduced the drudgery of women, but also provided good quality dried fish. Further, there were no operating costs. Why then did the village reject the dryer? The answers were quite perplexing. The first of these was the 'efficiency' of the dryer, which completely removed the moisture from the fish. This was against the local practice of allowing some moisture to remain to maximize the weight. Perfect drying was bad local economics. Other reasons cited were equally confounding, reiterating the fact that decades of community work can still be just as confusing as it was on day one.

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