

LADY DOAK COLLEGE, MADURAI

Department of Economics in collaboration with

People's Action and Development

Report of the Rural Camp 2022-2023

Theme - 'Learn and let others learn'

Place: Vembar, Thoothukudi District

Date: 10th October – 14th October 2022

No of students: 25 (I and II MA Economics)

Staff Escorts: Mrs. R. Ruth Rebecca & Mrs. D. Angel

DAY 1: (10/11/2022) - Monday

Orientation programme:

On the first day of the rural camp, around 12:30 PM, an orientation programme was conducted by Dr. Rajendra Prasad, Founder, and Dr. Mannar Mannan, Project Coordinator of the NGO People's Action for Development (PAD).

Dr. Rajendra Prasad began the session with a brief introduction to PAD, outlining its history, objectives, and achievements. This was followed by a round of self-introductions by all participants. Dr. Mannar Mannan then discussed the plan of action for the upcoming four days, explaining the roles and responsibilities of the students and staff involved.

Dr. Rajendra Prasad shared that PAD was founded in 1985 and began its community development activities in 2002. Since then, the organization has extended its services to 148 villages surrounding the Gulf of Mannar. He highlighted several challenges faced by the residents of Vembar village, including:

1. **Infant Mortality Rate (IMR):** Initially, the IMR in Vembar was alarmingly high, with **196 deaths per 1,000 infants**.
2. **Education:** Only 46% of women in the area can read and write.
3. **Caste and Religious Discrimination:** Social divisions continue to impact community harmony and progress.

In response to the issue of child labour, PAD introduced four fundamental rights for children:

- The Right to Live
- The Right to Development
- The Right to Protection
- The Right to Participation

Following the inaugural and orientation session, students were asked to sign an undertaking related to child protection, affirming their commitment to uphold and support children's rights throughout the camp.

Subsequently, a staff member from PAD led the students on a transit walk, marking the beginning of their field engagement and exploration of the village.

Transit Walk:

The transit walk began at 2:00 PM, starting from PAD and extending to various locations within the village. During the walk, the participants were able to observe the village's conditions, available facilities, and prevalent issues. They then visited St. Sebastian's Middle School. With permission from the Headmistress, Mr. Ravi, a teacher, provided an introduction to the school and shared the history of the church associated with it. He mentioned that the church was built 100 years ago and that the school celebrated its centennial in 2023. The school has been serving children from Vembar and nearby areas, with many underprivileged students benefiting from its services.

Mr. Ravi highlighted the support PAD has extended to both the school and the local fishing community. He explained how companies used to exploit the fishermen by purchasing their entire catch at low prices and reselling it at higher rates in the market. PAD intervened by offering financial support to help the fishermen clear their debts and encouraged them to engage in direct selling for better profits. Unfortunately, once their debts were cleared, the community failed to cooperate further and returned to selling their catch to the same companies.

He also noted that following the pandemic, student behavior had deteriorated. Many children were no longer attending school regularly, had become addicted to mobile phones, and were showing signs of indiscipline.

The faculty in charge met with Sister Selci, the Headmistress of the school, to seek permission to teach general knowledge, languages, good manners, and mathematics.

She agreed and requested that etiquette lessons be conducted daily from October 11th to 13th, 2022, between 2:00 PM and 4:00 PM.

The group later proceeded to the seashore at 4:00 PM, where they observed a local marketplace. It was noted that fishermen sell their catch there every alternate day between 4:00 AM and 6:00 AM.

Skill Training: (Mehndi Art)

The skill training session in Mehndi art began at 5:00 PM for the young women in the village. Three second-year postgraduate students volunteered to serve as trainers. On the first day, nearly ten young women participated and benefited from the session. Peer learning also occurred simultaneously, as some participants shared what they learned with their classmates. The trainers taught basic Mehndi designs, and the learners showed great enthusiasm and interest in acquiring the skill.

Reflection and Feedback of the Day:

At 8:00 PM, all participants gathered for a reflection and feedback session. The faculty member in charge divided the students into different groups (committees) to carry out their assigned tasks. The committees and their responsibilities were as follows:

- Fishermen Community – Field Survey
- Life of Young Women – Field Survey
- HCL – Field Survey
- Kitchen Work
- Cleaning and Discipline
- School Activity Preparation
- Skill Training – Mehndi Art
- Report Writing

Each group was assigned a specific area of focus to ensure the smooth execution of activities and responsibilities.



DAY 2: (11/10/22) - Tuesday

The day began at 6:00 AM with yoga and exercise. After this refreshing start, the students were divided into their pre-assigned groups to carry out the day's planned activities.

Field Survey:

As part of the study titled *"Life of the Fishing Community at Vembar in Thoothukudi District,"* eight students were assigned to collect data in South Vembar. The students reported that the data collection process was a valuable experience, allowing them to explore lesser-known aspects of fishermen's lives. Through their interactions, they observed that most residents in Vembar were relatively unaffected by common diseases.

Meanwhile, another group involved in the HCL field survey identified a potential research topic: *"A Study on the Life of Youth in Vembar."* They began preparing a questionnaire based on their initial findings.

HCL – Field Survey:

Four students accompanied enumerators from HCL and received training on using a survey application named BPMS. The enumerators were supportive and facilitated communication with villagers throughout the process.

Kitchen Work:

Three students voluntarily assisted the kitchen staff and cooks with enthusiasm, contributing to meal preparation and organization.

School Activity Preparation and Implementation:

In preparation for the afternoon session, students developed activities for children at St. Sebastian's Middle School. They worked with students in Grades 6, 7, and 8.

- In Grade 6, two students led games and taught English self-introductions.
- In Grade 7, three students shared moral stories and organized activity-based learning games.
- In Grade 8, two students discussed good and bad habits before engaging the class in interactive games.

All students participated actively and showed enthusiasm for the activities conducted.

Skill Training – Mehndi Art:

On the second day of the Mehndi art training, young women who had attended the first session returned, this time bringing friends who were eager to learn. The lesson content was expanded, and the participants showed even more energy and excitement. During the session, students interacted with several young women who had dropped out of school.

Reflection and Feedback:

At 8:00 PM, all participants gathered to reflect on the day's experiences. Each group shared detailed accounts of their activities and insights. Some students discussed challenges they faced during data collection, while others shared that they had learned the importance of patience when engaging with community members. Students were asked to submit individual written reflections to the report committee for documentation.





DAY 3: (12/10/22) - Wednesday

On the third day, the students woke up at 4:30 AM and, guided by a local fisherwoman, visited the fish auction marketplace. There, they witnessed live auctions and trade activities. They engaged in conversations with fishermen about different types of fish, pricing, and the challenges faced in the fishing industry. Afterward, they walked along the stone path at Vembar beach and enjoyed the peaceful sunrise.

After this early start, the students regrouped at 9:00 AM according to the pre-assigned task divisions for the day:

- HCL Work (Data Collection)
- Field Survey – Fishing Community
- Field Survey – Life of Young Women
- Kitchen and Discipline Work
- School Program – Preparation and Execution
- Reflections from School Students
- Skill Training – Mehndi Art

Field Survey:

At 9:30 AM, four students accompanied PAD workers for HCL-related data collection in South Vembar. Eight students who had earlier gathered data from the fishing community began preparing a master data table. Two students participated in kitchen work, while three were involved in maintaining discipline and cleanliness. Meanwhile, some students prepared for the school program scheduled for later in the day.

As part of the study titled *"Life of Young Women at Vembar,"* five students conducted surveys across various streets in the village. They shared their field experiences and observations, noting that a significant number of young women aged between 15 and 25 had dropped out of school. Although many parents expressed willingness to send their daughters to school, the students observed that the girls themselves often lacked interest and viewed schooling as a burden.

In the afternoon, the same group resumed their data collection and managed to reach more young women in and around the village. The collected data was later entered into Excel for analysis and recordkeeping.

Skill Training – Mehndi Art:

On the third day of Mehndi art training, the participants practiced designs on their own hands and showed noticeable improvement. Many brought their own materials and began creating more intricate and creative designs. The learners expressed that they had started to understand the value of acquiring new skills, recognizing the potential of Mehndi art as a viable source of income and self-employment.



DAY 4:- (13.10.2022) Thursday

On this day, a group of students accompanied PAD workers for HCL data collection. The remaining students were divided into teams to prepare for the afternoon's school program, including skit and dance performances for the children.

The main activities for the day were as follows:

- HCL Work (Data Collection)
- Practice and Performance of Skit and Dance at the School
- Reflections from the School Students
- Guest Lecture on Government Schemes for the Fishing Community

HCL – Field Survey

In the morning session, three students joined HCL enumerators and conducted data collection using a mobile application named BPMS. The students were trained in how to use the app and found that digital data collection through BPMS made the process more efficient and user-friendly.

School Program – Preparation and Performance

In preparation for the school event, first-year M.A. students practiced a group dance, while second-year M.A. students worked on both a skit and a dance performance. At 1:30 PM, the faculty in charge and the student teams arrived at St. Sebastian's Middle School, where students from Grades 1 to 8 had gathered in the auditorium.

The program commenced with an introductory speech by Dr. Mannar Mannan, Project Coordinator at PAD. This was followed by a skit performed by second-year postgraduate students on the theme "Importance of Education" The skit conveyed a powerful message and helped the school students understand the value of education.

The skit was followed by two dance performances – one by the first-year students and another by the second-year group. The school children enjoyed the performances with great enthusiasm. As part of the program, gifts were distributed to students who had actively participated in learning sessions during the camp.

The event concluded with a vote of thanks by Mrs. R. Ruth Rebecca, Assistant Professor at Lady Doak College. She expressed gratitude to the school's Headmistress, teachers, PAD staff, and the people of Vembar village for their continuous support and cooperation throughout the rural camp.

Reflections from School Students

The school children were deeply moved and thrilled by the cultural performances. One student from Grade VI shared, *“Through the skit, I learned that education is important in life, and without it, there is no future.”* The teachers and the Headmistress expressed their appreciation for the students who conducted the activities and noted how valuable the sessions had been for their students’ development.

Guest Lecture on the Fishing Community and Government Schemes

A guest lecture was organized to raise awareness about government schemes available for the fishing community. The speaker, Mr. Karuppasami, founder of *Thondu Company*, provided a detailed overview of the lives of fishermen, their challenges, earnings, and the support available through various schemes.

He began by explaining the geographical distribution of fishing communities across India, noting that approximately three crore people belong to the fishing community nationwide, with around one crore in Tamil Nadu alone. He traced the evolution of fishing from traditional sailing boats to current practices and mentioned how Vembar was once a major exporter of fish to European countries.

He highlighted the historical shift in the fishing industry, pointing out that the introduction of machines led to the disuse of traditional boats, which eventually fell into disrepair. Additionally, he mentioned issues such as water scarcity and the disruption caused by chemical factories.

Mr. Karuppasami also described government welfare schemes for fishermen. To benefit from these, individuals must become members of fishermen’s associations through cooperative societies in their villages.

Reflections and Queries from Teachers and Students

During the interactive session, Ms. R. Ruth Rebecca inquired about the reasons behind fishermen taking loans. The community explained that debts were usually incurred to meet daily household expenses, family needs, or to purchase fishing nets.

Ms. D. Angel asked whether the community had any storage facilities to preserve the caught fish. The resource person clarified that only private companies currently have storage facilities, and the government has not provided any such facilities for local fishermen so far.

Students also raised questions regarding school attendance in the fishing community. The villagers responded that most families do send their children to school, though there are a few exceptions in some areas. The students shared their concerns and emphasized the importance of education. Both teachers and students recommended forming a separate association for the fishing community, enabling them to voice their needs and concerns directly to the government.



DAY 5- Friday (14/10/22)

On the final day of the rural camp, all participants prepared their belongings and had breakfast together. At 9:00 AM, a valedictory ceremony was held at the PAD office. The event was attended by faculty and students from Lady Doak College (LDC), along with staff members from People's Action for Development (PAD).

The ceremony began with a prayer led by Mrs. R. Ruth Rebecca, from the Department of Economics, Lady Doak College.

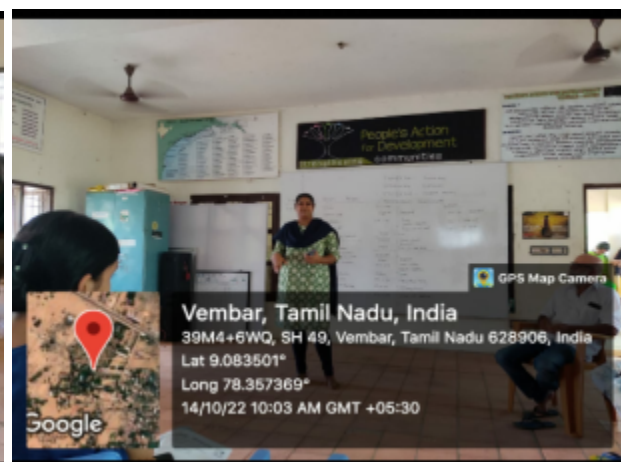
The valedictory address was delivered by Dr. Rajendra Prasad, the founder of PAD. He appreciated the active participation of Lady Doak College students, stating that their

involvement brought energy and vibrancy to Vembar village over the past four days. He emphasized the importance of setting personal goals and illustrated his point with the life story of Abraham Lincoln. He described Lincoln's perseverance and self-motivation despite numerous setbacks, highlighting how, even as a Black individual facing adversity, Lincoln eventually became the President of the United States through determination and vision.

Following this, Mrs. Rosy, wife of Dr. Rajendra Prasad, addressed the gathering. She spoke about the current state of the global economy, stating that many of the crises and natural disasters we see today have been foretold in the Bible. She reminded the audience that God has a unique purpose for each individual's life. She also discussed the interconnectedness of religions, noting how they all share common values, and beautifully conveyed the essence of spirituality and the need to preserve the world we live in.

Three students from the Department of Economics shared their reflections on the rural camp experience. They described how, although stepping out of their comfort zones was initially difficult, the camp became a valuable learning opportunity. They gained insight into rural life, appreciated the delicious food provided by PAD, and expressed gratitude for the warm and friendly support extended by the PAD staff.

To conclude the program, certificates were distributed to all postgraduate students by Dr. Rajendra Prasad and Mrs. Rosy.





The **vote of thanks** was delivered by **Mrs. Angel** from the Department of Economics, Lady Doak College. She expressed her heartfelt gratitude to all members of the **PAD organization** for their continued support, with special thanks to **Dr. Mannar Mannan** for his unwavering cooperation and assistance throughout the rural camp. She also extended her appreciation to the PAD staff for their kindness and dedication, which significantly contributed to the smooth functioning of the entire camp.

Mrs. Angel further thanked the **fishing community** and the **residents of Vembar village** for their warm hospitality, cooperation, and support. She acknowledged the efforts and positive attitude of the students, appreciating their openness and willingness to learn. She also expressed her gratitude to the **Department of Economics, Lady Doak College**, for providing such a valuable opportunity to explore, engage with rural life, and gain enriching experiences.

The camp proved to be a **transformative learning experience** for all students involved. The core objectives of the camp were largely achieved. One of the key takeaways was the development of teamwork among students. They interacted closely with the local community and adapted to the food, environment, and rural lifestyle. This exposure offered practical insights and meaningful lessons that extended beyond the classroom.

The rural camp was widely regarded as a **great success**, both in terms of learning and community engagement.

Ms. R. Ruth Rebecca & Ms. D. Angel
Faculty Incharge – Rural Camp

Dr. Christianna Singh
Head of the Department