Aquaculture without Frontiers (AwF) and Organic Life (OL): The Vakkom Aquaculture Project Journey

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The Project and Focus

• Steps in a Community Project needing funding and support
• Background to the Vakkom Project
• Steps so far
• Steps still needed
• Value of a Plan
• Gratitude board
Process of an NGO Project

1) Source NGOs & funders to help

2) Identifying opportunities & assessing viability

3) Vision for the project

4) Gaining commitment

5) The initial Plan

6) The Funding

7) Assembling the Resources (funds, people, etc)

8) Finalising & implementing the Plan

9) Monitoring, Modification, Reporting

Finally Sustainability Step up or step out?

The problem & needs
The Problem

- **Vakkom** is a small coastal village located at Thiruvananthapuram District, the capital of Kerala State in south western India.
- **Vakkom used to be heavily reliant on the Coir industry for livelihood**

Vakkom has a population of around 18000 people, with approximately 55% females. Many have limited skills to use for income production.
The problem: 
Decline of Coir industry in Vakkom

One of last coir operations
The problem: Skills are not transferable

Many jobless and in financial distress: no financial assets
Hundreds of small ponds constructed near the backwater to soak the coconut husk for coir making now empty.
NGO’s to help

Aquaculture without Frontiers (AwF)
an independent non-profit organisation that promotes and supports responsible and sustainable aquaculture in the alleviation of poverty by improving livelihoods in developing countries (Key person: Roy Palmer, AwF’s Executive Director)

Organic Life (OL) a young and energetic NGO organisation based in Thiruvnanthapuram, Kerala (key person: Mrs. Geeji Madathil Tharanath, President, Organic Life)
Natural capital:
Three sides of the village are surrounded by the backwaters of Anchuthengu which is connected to Arabian Sea through the estuary. The lake receives an excellent daily exchange from tidal waters from the sea and has enormous potential for aquaculture if planned well.
Opportunity & viability: look to your assets
Former coconut husk ponds lay idle

Coconut soaking ponds can be transformed into aquaculture ponds
Working with nature to create a new future has possibilities for aquaculture

Message: Be an entrepreneur in your community
Pearl fish
Compatible visions: aquaculture for helping to a more sustainable life

Geeji Madathil Tharanath, President (OL)

• “We are wishing to develop long term cooperative relations with international technical experts on aquaculture and especially to develop cultural and social interchange through mutual assistance in the areas of agri/aqua foods education, training and research”

Roy Palmer: Executive director (AwF)

• empowerment of unemployed local women of Vakkom Panchayath through aquaculture intervention. The present project aims at achieving a sustainable livelihood for the economically challenged women community in Vakkom through aquaculture thus improving the future for all families in the community.
Vakkom: an aquaculture proposition

• Partial solution: Small scale Aquaculture businesses in Vakkom, particularly for women
• Will benefit their families also & the community

Opportunity and viability
AwF & Organic Life (OL) partnership

- The present project in Vakkom aims to establish aquaculture ponds to aim for achieving a sustainable livelihood for the economically challenged women's community in Vakkom through aquaculture.
- Thus improving the future for all families in the community.
- AwF & OL working with local people.
Consultation, offering skills and funding.
Commitment of partners
Signing a Memorandum of Understanding with Aquaculture without Frontiers Organic Life (OL) & (AwF)

Geeji Madathil Tharananth (OL)
Dr. Saju M.S (Dep. Dir. Fisheries)
Roy Palmer AwF
Shri Venuji Village President
The community:
Communication, consultation, commitment

AwF executive director statement at meeting
“This is your project we are just here to help” (Roy Palmer)
The Initial Plan:
Failing to Plan is Planning to Fail

Community projects also need to operate in many ways like a business:
A vision, a plan, funding & budget, resource & task allocation, timelines, accountability, risk management, ethical standards, reporting
The professionalism of the plan portrays you as a good risk & sells your story to funders
The Funding

*What do the donors want to know?*

- When they review your proposal, they will ask:
  - 🌟 Why do you want our money?
  - 🌟 What will you do with our money?
  - 🌟 What will you achieve with our money?
  - 🌟 How much of our money do you want?

Keep the big picture, but celebrate the steps along the way - so far:

The vision, the people, the commitment, initial plans & funding proposals. Now await funding answers.
Publicising the story for funding & sharing with stakeholders & general public

AwF site: http://www.aquaculturewithoutfrontiers.org/welcome-to-vakkom/
OL site

Media including news
sites: http://fis.com/fis/worldnEws/search_brief.asp?l=e&id=80858&ndb=1
http://www.aquaculturewithoutfrontiers.org/page/2/

Public talks (e.g. Rotary and other groups) may lead to funding or other help in future

Facebook & Twitter

Films for Youtube: AwF film re Vakkom project in Vakkom
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SPVk9yJNAQY

Networks: many and varied and global

Roy D Palmer
December 24, 2015 · Melbourne, VIC ·

WAS Affiliate AwF activities are cranking up and we are proud of the video just finalised which can be viewed at the Aquaculture without Frontiers YouTube Channel
https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC6lJobwBxfIpoCYHSifFRrQ

Thanks to all of you who are supporting the program be that through donations or volunteering your time.

Keep up with our news through the website -
http://www.aquaculturewithoutfrontiers.org/.../IMG-20151215-W... or join one of our social media groups
Rabo Share4More Foundation for financial support for Aquaculture without Frontiers (Australia) Ltd.

“With pleasure I can inform you that we are able to support this project with a single donation as requested for the training program to empower unemployed woman through aquaculture intervention in Vakkom”

Well done Roy, Gigi, Renjith & Dinesh
Assembling the Resources: Which of the Five Capitals do I have & need?

**Natural** resources, ecosystems, aesthetics
**Human** knowledge, skills, abilities
**Social** networks, values, trust, shared vision
**Institutional** public, private, non-government
**Produced** built environment, public assets, harvested, made, $$

Questions to reflect on:

*Do I already have enough of all these capitals?*

*Which ones do I need to build and how?*

*A successful business to enhance the community needs a balance of all these capitals*
Five Capitals Framework
(Cocklin & Alston 2003)

- **Produced:** built environment: public assets, harvested.
- **Human:** knowledge, skills, and abilities
- **Social:** networks, values, trust, and shared vision
- **Natural:** resources, ecosystems, and aesthetics
- **Institutional:** public, private, and non-government
Three key factors needed for a sustainable rural area that are interdependent in oyster farming:

- **Healthy natural environment**
- **Economic base** that has the potential for strong growth and diversification,
- **Sufficient social capital** to sustain and build on

These aspects appear to be present to varying degrees in the Ben Sen (Vietnam) commune oyster farming area at the time of this study.

Additional income from oyster farming helps improve living quality, more money to raise and take care of children better.
In Vietnam project were found:
• Produced capital issues relating to sometimes poor seed quality, parasites Unpredictable oyster prices
• Lack of access to low cost loans

These factors will impact to differing degrees on wellbeing of aquaculture farmers, & are forces that impact on expansion for these farmers in this industry.

Note: this data was captured through Photovoice (community driven photo research) a great way to supplement Funder reporting
Along the way the Plan must be evaluated to see if all is on track at regular stages, and what needs to be monitored

Remember: Write the plan down (so you can benchmark against it) re what is working, budget, profit or loss, training or other areas such as environmental issues, commitment issues, yield expectations, etcetera

What needs modifying?

Remember: Don’t get stuck in the Plan

The Plan is there to serve you not for you to serve the Plan
Report and comply with Funder expectations

• Each year we ask our project partners to report on their outcomes. In addition to sharing their financial data, all partners complete an online survey. These are supplemented with case studies that provide additional and more far-reaching information about our projects. (RaboBank)
And the Plan may grow & change:

**Aim: to grow fish and also grow the project**

OL and AwF in Dec. 2015 organised a Workshop: *Nurturing the entrepreneurship opportunities in aquarium fish seed production, culture and trade among the unemployed youth* of Kerala State, India at Snehasena Hall, Kaloor, Ernakulam, Cochin.

- **Sponsors:** International Aquafeed magazine
- **Support:** *Training & continuous project support* through the joint activity of AwF through the team members of OL
When have the project goals been achieved? The Plan and the community will decide in consultation with you.

In the end it is the community’s project to step back from when it is sustainable, but be there if needed.

This is not the end. This is the beginning.
Sometimes there is a moment when you just know what has been desired is achieved.

Happiness of farmers when harvesting oysters. From this, income of my family and other farmers is more stable, my village is more beautiful.

(Vietnam oyster farmer’s own words & photo)
Finally: or is there ever a finally?

It is the community’s project, Report is done

Stepping up: Is there a next stage you can move towards together, but maybe with less support than before?
What can be built on that still needs your help?

Stepping out:
What it is time to move away from -when they are ready
To let them fly in their own way

Ensure you have captured what was learnt, that it is reported, shared, used as a benchmark for comparison & best practice
Gratitude

Always support and acknowledge those who assist - they are not being paid in most instances: Roy, Geeji, Renjith, Dinesh community members.

My son Ben shot film & son David (not in photo) who helped edit 28 hours of film down to 4 minutes.

Two wonderful drivers, and advisors who made my trip around Kerala possible & safe.
Nature provides ways if we only know how to look deep for answers, to respect and act sustainably. But sometimes we need to show and help others a better way to a better life. Aquaculture is an opportunity to achieve this.