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The Kernel



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America (n.n)+1 – How will we reinvent?

We have all seen phrases like Web 2.0 or Health 3.0 used to signify the next version or generation of the Internet or Healthcare. In Information Technology, there is a field called configuration management. People who work in configuration management assign numbers to versions of software to make them unique. They use a number system that can be generically represented as n.n.n.n.... (e.g. 1.2.2.3). The system begins with version 1.0. When version 1.0 is modified, it is assigned a new number depending on whether the change is minor or major. If it is a minor change, it may be assigned the number ‘1.1’. If the product is completely redesigned, it may be assigned the number ‘2.0’. A common phrase in configuration management is: “It is not change, it is continuous improvement”.

It is not easy to bring about change. Newton’s first law of motion applies here. Stated simply, it says: “A body will stay at rest or keep moving continuously unless an external force acts on it”. This phenomenon is called inertia. We are all prone to it. Americans are known to people world over as people who like to consume, people who like luxury. We drove the world’s economy by consuming and it was great while it lasted. Everyone was happy. Uncontrolled consumerism however, carries a heavy price tag. Someone has to pay. America is the world’s largest consumer of oil (more than 25% of the world’s total consumption). People in some of the countries exporting this oil live in despicable conditions, without any hope for change.

The reality that we are in currently is hard to escape from. We see the “For Sale” signs



everywhere, people’s homes being auctioned off and people at work speaking of the threat of lay-offs, etc. Reports from the news media carry messages that cause fear and anxiety. However, instead of looking at the present situation as being the end of America (as some seem to think), this may be that external force that is needed to cause real change. It is the time for a new, redesigned version of America ‘(n.n) +1’. Let’s hope that this ‘crisis’ brings a real change in our business model. We need a new business model that creates opportunity for others’ growth, instead of capitalizing on others’ weaknesses. There is so much that America can offer the world. There is much talent in this country. Talent coupled with infrastructure that can help people and businesses worldwide. It is time to innovate. Innovation that will bring hope to people in countries that we draw resources from. Let’s not brood over what is, but focus on what we can do to cause real change and improvement.

~Greetings from one Profugo to another!

[A report on the Profugo team's trip to Wayanad](#)

December '08/January '09

Background

Some members of the Profugo team visited India for two months, 12/2/08 to 2/2/09. During this time, the team was able to achieve much with regards to launching the first Profugo COD. A significant achievement was the execution of a high/mid level survey of the Wayanad district.

Survey Facilitators

The Profugo team was very fortunate to have P.V Baiju and Rincy Sebastian as the facilitators of the survey. Baiju and Rincy are a married couple who are passionate about economic development. They are both PhD candidates. Rincy has focused her research on 'the reproductive health among tribal women'. Baiju focused on issues surrounding gender inequality in economic development. Rincy has been studying tribal people in a remote forested location, while Baiju has been studying the Wayanad area! The Profugo team relied entirely on Baiju's expertise in guiding the survey.

Documentation

The Profugo team captured their survey on film and is in the process of editing the material. Photo and video documentation of the trip will be available on the web in the very near term.

Journey, geography and demographics

The team first visited Wayanad on a one day trip in December. Travel was conducted by road from Bangalore. The roads between Bangalore and Wayanad are very good! The government of Karnataka is keen on extending business successes in Bangalore to Mysore, which is a large neighboring city. The government has constructed a modern highway linking the two cities (called the Bangalore Mysore Infrastructure Corridor). Amenities that are available on this highway include modern rest stops and gas stations. National highway 212 (a.k.a NH 212) connects Mysore and the Wayanad district. The journey between Bangalore and Mysore takes travelers through a region steeped in historical significance. There is a lot of information regarding Mysore on the web. The road to Wayanad from Mysore goes through Bandipur national forest. This forest is still home to wildlife such as elephants and tigers and there is still a lot of folklore surrounding this forest. Bandipur forest was home to a large population of sandalwood trees. Many of these trees have been smuggled out of the forest over the years and because of this, security on the road is very tight.

The border between Karnataka and Kerala lies within the Bandipur forest. It is very interesting to experience the dramatic



Scenes from Wayand (a home in a tribal development, coffee beans, pepper, cattle sharing the road and girls from the tribal development)

change in culture while crossing the border. Signs and billboards on the Kerala side suddenly change to Malayalam, compared to Kannada on the Karnataka side. Many of the people close to the border are bi-lingual. This includes the tribal population. Wayanad has the highest tribal population in Kerala state.

The roads are littered with signs for resorts and tourism destinations. Sulthan Bathery is the first small town in Wayanad encountered while travelling from Mysore on NH212. It lies about 20 Kms from the Karnataka border. Incidentally NH212 connects Mysore and Kozhikode (previously known as Calicut). Calicut is a major city of Kerala and is located about 98Kms from Sulthan Bathery. Wayanad is located in a tri-state area. It borders Karnataka to the north and Tamil Nadu to the east. Especially in Sulthan Bathery, one does notice the influences of the other states. However, people who are familiar with Kerala will feel right at home here.

The district is home to people who practice different religions. Christians and Muslims each account for about a fourth of the population. Tribals and Hindus of various castes make up the rest of the population. This demographic is also reflected in the NGO presence in the area. There are a number of NGOs affiliated with Muslim and Christian institutions.

NGOs visited on our first trip

For our first visit, Baiju had arranged for us to meet with three NGOs at their offices. These NGOs were Shreyas, World Vision and RASTA.

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Shreyas

The offices for Shreyas are located in Sulthan Bathery. Sulthan Bathery was actually called 'Sultan's Battery'. The location historically has had military significance. However, the locals pronounced 'battery' as bathery (buhth-aye-ri). This is now the town's official name. Shreyas is one of the largest NGOs in Kerala and perhaps in South India. They operate in 15 districts of Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka and impact over 47,000 families. They offer a wide variety of programs that are executed through a complex governance structure. Self help groups are the basic unit of this governance structure. They have had considerable success in their 'peoples bank' program. The Profugo team is very grateful to Fr. Thomas Madukammoottil for taking time out of his busy schedule and organizing a presentation of Shreyas' programs.

The Shreyas training center that we visited is a rather large facility that offers a number of amenities. They have an interesting 'Rural Mart' where they showcase organic products and also a tailoring school where they have the ability to execute orders for different types of merchandize. For more information on Shreyas, please visit their website - <http://www.shreyas.org/>.

Shreyas has published research on some of the most pressing problems among the locals. Suicides among farmers in India are at an alarmingly high rate. This has been a problem in Wayanad as well. Good research and data is hard to come by. Work done by NGOs like Shreyas helps considerably.

World Vision

The World Vision office in Wayanad is located in Kalpetta. Kalpetta is probably one of the largest towns in Wayanad district. We met with the director of World Vision's operations in Wayanad, along with the head of their Information Technology services. World Vision's programs are catered towards children and child sponsorship. Through their sponsorship programs, World Vision tries to ensure that children receive a good education, nutritional diet, proper clothing, etc. The director explained how their focus has shifted from the child and the child's family, to include 'the village'. The quote 'it takes a village to raise a child' came to mind as the director explained the type of environment they were trying to create for the children. Their argument is that, if children are to grow up healthy, it is essential that their surroundings are clean and that they have good examples to emulate in the community. World Vision has also started to provide pro-



Scenes from Wayand (tribal women and child, pepper mill workers, earthen cooking and coconuts)

grams for the people of the village along with the existing programs for the kids.

For more information on World Vision India, check out their website at: <http://www.worldvision.in/>.

RASTA

RASTA is an acronym for 'Rural Agency for Social and Technological Advancement'. The word also means 'way' in Hindi. The RASTA offices are located in Kambalakkad village. The most interesting part of the visit to RASTA was the personal stories of Omana (current Director) and Dhanish, her husband. Prior to founding RASTA, Omana and Dhanish were part of Barefoot College (<http://barefootcollege.org/>) in Rajasthan (a state located in North India). When they first moved to Wayanad, the only shelter they had was a hut that they built. They had to work hard to build relationships with the locals and gain their trust. They used simple technological innovations that considerably improved the quality of life of the locals.

One innovation that was particularly interesting. RASTA leaders considered the problem of the high suicide rate among the local farmers. Alcohol addiction was a big problem that was just as big. They suspected that these problems were somehow correlated. What they found was that the local people did not have any particular type of entertainment in the evening, after a day's work. Indulging in alcohol was a relatively easy solution. To help with this problem, RASTA put in place a television driven by solar energy. They

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also installed a video cassette recorder (VCR), so that people in the community could watch a movie/show in the evening. What they found out surprised them! The number of people indulging in alcohol decreased and so did the suicide rates. For more information on RASTA and its activities, please refer to their website - <http://www.rastaindia.org/>.

Second Trip

The goal of the second visit was to make visits to the project sites run by the NGOs. We visited the program locations of Wayanad Social Service Society (WSSS), RASTA and a project site of an NGO called Uravu.

Wayanad Social Service Society (WSSS)

Shreyas and WSSS are both NGOs that are run by Catholic institutions. They are called diocesan NGOs. WSSS also has a wide variety of programs. Two programs in particular were very interesting - one that involved non-traditional medicine and the other involving organic farming. WSSS has individuals called 'healers' within their organization. These healers are well versed in non-traditional medicine, such as herbal medication. Using these methods they have been able to successfully treat Sickle Cell Anemia, a common sickness among the people of the region. However, they are also ready to disclose that their methods are not scientific. They do not have the data to prove that their medication works, or how it works. WSSS has done a lot of work in the area of organic farming. They have run training programs among the farmers on the use of organic pesticides and organic fertilizers. People in the region have been hurt by the use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides. Many have contracted many illnesses including cancer.

The Profugo team visited a tribal community that has been adopted by the WSSS. It was great interacting with the people and learning about how far they have progressed with the help

of NGOs like WSSS. The team also had the opportunity to visit the spice processing plant that WSSS has been operating. WSSS is able to offer farmers a premium price for products that are certified organic. The certification process of a farm takes about three years and farmers in the program own between .5 to 5 acres of land. At the spice processing plant, the team witnessed how the more expensive white pepper is created from black pepper using organic methods. The manager of the plant explained that they were not able to keep up with the demand for their products on the world market (Middle East and Europe).

RASTA Tribal Community Center

RASTA has partnered with the government of Kerala to build community centers for among the Kattunakayan (keeper of the forest) tribal community. The Profugo team visited one such community. To reach this tribal community we had to journey on foot through a tea estate and climb up some very steep paths. The tea estate and the surrounding areas were very beautiful. We found out that many of the young men in the tribal community prefer to work as coolies (day workers) compared to going to school. Couples marry at an early age and have a number of children. Dhanish (RASTA representative) is an expert in a number of sciences. He pointed out interesting aspects of the culture, flora and fauna, which the team would have otherwise never noticed or understood.

Uravu

Uravu is a fascinating organization that deals with all things Bamboo. They offer programs that deal with a wide range of issues; from the cultivation of Bamboo, it use to manufacture handicrafts and household items, to it use as a construction material. The Profugo team visited their craft center and were amazed by the various application of Bamboo. For more information on Uravu, please visit their website: <http://www.uravu.org>.

Upcoming Events & News

- **Profugo's first GALL group** is being formed! This group will be meeting in the Mainline area, beginning in March. If you are interested, please contact Jared at Jared.Evans@profugo.org.
- **March 28, 2009—Eastern University Microfinance Conference.** For more information, visit - <http://www.easternmfc.com>
- **April 8, 2009—Temple University's 4th Annual Social Entrepreneurship Conference:** Can Local, Healthy Food Transform Our Community? For details, visit - <http://sbm.temple.edu/iei/sec09.html>
- We are currently busy putting the plan together for 2009 and beyond. We are in need of volunteers who will take up leadership positions over key areas. We need people who have skills in technology, writing (communication), marketing (publicity), graphics design, etc. Please be on the lookout for emails regarding this.