

Second quarterly report

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Project: Sadhana Forest

After my change of project to Sadhana Forest three month ago I feel well integrated into the project and at home. The last three month I realized how much more this project is pushing me to develop and to grow. Being part of a community is something completely new for me, I feel it requires a new type of social interaction and also another level of taking care of myself. It took me a while to figure out when and how to take the time I need for myself, but by now I think I have adopted to always having people around and found a working system for me.

By now I took up more and more responsibilities as a long-term volunteer. As part of the team I welcome new arriving volunteers once or twice a week, a job that basically includes a lot of paperwork and afterwards a brief introduction about the place itself. Even though in the beginning I did not feel confident in creating the first impression people get of the place, by now I enjoy the task because it allows me to help to make the start in the community as smoothly as possible. Other general tasks of a long-termer are for example running the morning circle once a week, leading the technical meeting on Sundays, where we organize the distribution of the Sevas or managing breakfast and lunch serving.

For more specific tasks Sadhana Forest is organized in a way of work distribution. Every long-termer has an own field of responsibility, and is so to say the manager of one work area. For the last 3 month I have been accommodation manager, assistant of the forest manager and recently took over the tree care section as well.

Being responsible for the accommodation, I spend a lot of time cleaning and preparing our huts, which have been neglected during monsoon time. Also I restructured and organised our storage of mosquito nets, blankets and bedsheets. In order to give more privacy in our main dorm, I put up curtains and so created smaller, separated rooms inside the dormitory itself. For bigger groups and families that arrive at Sadhana Forest I prepared the huts in advance, what required some organisational skills. Even though it was a necessary work for the community I did not enjoy it too much and am very happy to now give away this responsibility to another long-termer.

As part of the forest team I spent all of my first Sevas doing reforestation work. There we focused mainly on two projects lately. One was the plantation of new trees and the other one an experiment about soil regeneration. Especially because of the 3 month I spend in Pitchandikulam and the knowledge I

gained there, I was quite critical about the current plantation method of Sadhana. The mounds we plant in dry out really quickly because they are more exposed to the sunlight and we can not mulch them as properly as required. Furthermore the drip irrigation system is not always functioning ideally. So together with the rest of the forest team we are experimenting with a new planting process where we try to work with the natural succession of the forest. On some parts of our land a dense forest of green acacia is already established. This pioneer tree from Australia was spread some years ago all around Auroville and can stand harsh climate conditions without problems. As these trees do not live longer than 40 years and can not grow in their own shade, our idea is to introduce a next generation of indigenous trees (tropical dry evergreen forest), that in the future will replace the green acacia. Underneath the canopy of the acacia the soil condition is already improved and the trees provide shade, which allows us to resign from the drip irrigation system and plant in normally dug holes. Together with Vincent I led the teams for the plantation and tried my best to constantly improve on the process itself.

For the soil regeneration we profited from the high volunteer numbers in high season. In a quite labour intensive process we focussed on a new plantation area with especially bad soil conditions. Instead of continuing the planting itself, we did an intensive trunk mulching following the guide of Masanobu Fukuoka. Therefore we collected fallen trunks with fungi and buried them on the land. The fungi and other already on the trunks established microorganism should have a beneficial impact on the soil. Additional to that we covered the soil with multiple layers of brown matter, human manure and red soil to attract termites. Hopefully in one or two years the land will have recovered enough so that the plantations can be continued.

I was very much impressed how much freedom we were given by the project to experiment on our own and to develop proper systems. This practical learning by doing suits me much more and I enjoy the learning process a lot.

Three weeks ago I took over the Tree Care job, which includes watering the planted trees of the past two years, mulching them and taking care of our nursery. Having this field of responsibility pleases me a lot! I now get to spend both of my Sevas doing environment related tasks, again learning more about planting and raising trees. Also on a social level this work suits me very well because I get to work with two volunteers for the whole week instead of having a changing team every day.

One of the biggest challenges I faced especially in the beginning of my time in Sadhana Forest was how to adjust my stay here with the attempt to do development aid. Even though I am hundred percent sure that our reforestation work has an important positive impact on the environment and so in the end on the

life of the local people, that fact that also a big effort of our work goes into keeping up the community itself made me think a lot.

Development aid in general is such a complicated topic, asking just questions on how the development should be conducted, in which direction it should lead and most important which examples to follow. Being in India I can witness how rapidly the Indian society is simulating and adopting to our western behaviours. Just to name one example the consumption of meat has drastically increased during the last year, what is now introducing a destructive factory farming industry in a culture that was primarily vegetarian based.

In my opinion we should question if we really want to keep spreading and introducing our lifestyle that itself is so unsustainable. Western Countries are the main consumers of the planet, therefore produce way more waste than countries of the global south, use up pretty much all of the earth resources and so are responsible for the existing climate crises.

By spending my “weltwärts” year in Sadhana Forest I hope that I can help to provide the best possible stay here for other volunteers and so enable them to get familiar with a less resource depleting lifestyle. That might not be considered as development aid in a broad sense but might additional to the environmental improvements have an impact on the actual root of the problems.