



" I merely wish to make a plea for their (the jungles of southern India) preservation, that their wild life and their beauty may survive, not only for their own sake, but that future generations may enjoy them as I have done. Time is already short.

...- it is the duty of every Indian – to make a supreme effort to save the country's wild creatures from extinction.

...sanctuaries have been formed. It is true. But it is not nearly enough. Rules are printed that cannot be enforced.

...so death stalks the wild creatures of India. Extinction, particularly in South India, will surely and certainly follow unless the governments of various states wake up to the fact very soon and become realistic. It is almost nearly too late already."

Kenneth Anderson (1910 – 1974)



Touchwood – the dawn of a new beginning

History of Touchwood

After many years of working with the Adivasi communities in the Nilgiris and Erode districts of Tamil Nadu, the chairman and founder of Touchwood, Rajendra K Vesana (Raj Vesana), decided to create a progressive organization to expand his efforts.

In February, 2006, **Touchwood Ecological and Social Foundation** (registered under section 12A(a) and 80G(5) of the Income-tax Act, 1961) was established as a registered Indian non-governmental and secular organization by Raj Vesana and Shammer Shah.

Henceforth, Touchwood is the official means through which Raj Vesana carries out all his work for the socially and economically backward communities.



The name of Touchwood was decided upon by Raj Vesana. The name essentially derives itself from the famous English language saying of 'Touchwood' whenever anybody wants to talk about good things happening. It started with Raj Vesana saying "Touchwood, everything should happen for the best and we will be able to dedicate more time and resources for the welfare of the tribals" – and it was then that the name of *Touchwood Ecological and Social Foundation* was decided upon.

Touchwood is headquartered in Kotagiri, India, a small town in the heart of the hills of the Nilgiris. Touchwood's most significant asset is a highly qualified team of international volunteers. With experience spanning many continents in both the nonprofit and for-profit sectors, this human capital ultimately increases the efficiency and effectiveness with which were able to operate. We believe that this unique quality will help ensure Touchwood's long-term viability.



Touchwood volunteers at a village meeting

Furthermore, Touchwood understands the significance of working closely with the community members where it operates, as ownership and internal participation is imperative to create the conditions in which internal change manifests. We are therefore dedicated to recruiting appropriate Adivasi staff to aid in the entire process of project development and management from strategic planning to implementation and evaluation.

The integration of local and international expertise helps to guarantee that Touchwood will remain an important component of the Adivasi development movement for years to come. Our future plans include prioritizing the formation of a broad base of partnerships with national and international development agencies, national government agencies, private corporations, and nonprofit, nongovernmental organizations.

Touchwood recognizes the challenges that Adivasi communities face in a modern, global economy. Touchwood addresses and resolves these issues by introducing critical new initiatives in the areas of education, healthcare, local economic development, organic agriculture, environmental awareness and social welfare. Working together with our team of local staff and our multifaceted partners, Touchwood is dedicated to create truly irreversible socioeconomic equity.

Tribal Healthcare Center

Vazhaithotam, Masinagudi, Nilgiris District – 643223, India

Phone: +91 944 438 6699 ; touchwood.info@gmail.com; www.touchwood-foundation.org



Touchwood is funded entirely by its trustees, Mr. Rajendra K Vesana and Shammer Shah.

Mission

Touchwood's mission is to create new initiatives and opportunities for Nilgiris tribes in the areas of education, health, economic development, environment, agriculture and social welfare through close cooperation between indigenous people, local NGOs and government.

Milestones: 2006

February:

Touchwood registered as NGO

March:

First batch of international volunteers

April:

Initiated contacts with government bodies, local communities and other NGOs

May:

Finalized teams and identified villages for commencing research

June:

Successful fieldwork and research with total cooperation of villagers

July:

- Submission of reports for endorsement by villagers
- Commenced work with NAWA hospital at Kolikarai
- Have successfully conducted medical awareness camps on hygiene, cleanliness, sex education
- Initiated work with NAWA to establish an exclusive hospital for the tribals near Masinagudi

August:

- Initiated work with Hill Area Development Project (HADP)
- Working on providing a well for Chemmanatham village near Masinagudi to enable the 45 families dwelling there to restart their agriculture, this time with focus on organic methodologies

September:

- Identified by the Department of Forests for the formation of an Eco Development Committee for undertaking a pilot project for Floriculture at Chemmanatham village. If this proves to be viable, then this scheme would be extended to other villages too.
- Working with the HADP for submitting reports on the status of each house in Chemmanatham to enable allocation of funds for repair under various schemes of HADP.

Tribal Healthcare Center

Vazhaithotam, Masinagudi, Nilgiris District – 643223, India

Phone: +91 944 438 6699 ; touchwood.info@gmail.com; www.touchwood-foundation.org

**October:**

- Signed an MoU with NAWA for working on various projects aimed at the welfare of the tribals in the Nilgiris

November – December:

- Follow up on Eco Development committee with the Forest Department
- Identification of a suitable location for setting up of the Tribal Healthcare Center at Vazhaithotam

January: 2007

- Put infrastructure for THC in place and recruited a nurse for working with THC
- Second set of volunteers arrive

February: 2007

- Inauguration of the THC by Additional Collector (Development) & PD – HADP, Mr. C Samayamoorthy - IAS and Mr. M Iqbal Basha Mohamed – IFS, DFO North, The Nilgiris
- Met with Dr. Graham Serjeant of University of West Indies during a seminar on sickle cell research and mooted the idea of working together on a sickle cell research project.

March: 2007

- Dr. Murugesh appointed as the consulting doctor for Touchwood. He would provide Touchwood with 2 visits a week.
- Dr. Graham Serjeant agrees to be the advisor for Touchwood on its Sickle cell research program.

April 2007 to August 2007

- Touchwood is setting up tribal societies in the following villages in order to enable them to empower themselves and stand united in ensuring that the efforts of the various government agencies and NGO's and other private bodies reach the needy.
- These tribal societies will be the base for the formation for an Eco Development Committee which is essentially a tri-party agreement between the tribal council (a cooperative of all the tribal societies), the government and Touchwood itself.
- Once this EDC is in place, Touchwood aims to start fundraising campaigns by targeting the domestic corporate giants within India and partner with them to work towards achieving the aims and goals of Touchwood and the partners.

September 2007 to February 2008:

- Touchwood has registered 5 tribal societies thus far and is working actively to register another 11 more societies by the end of March 2008.

February 2008

- Work has started on the construction of 2 wells and a Kalyana Mandapam in Chemmanatham village based on the initiatives taken and reports submitted by Touchwood.

March 2008

- Registration of Touchwood under 12A(a) and 80G(5) of the Income-tax Act, 1961

Tribal Healthcare Center

Vazhaithotam, Masinagudi, Nilgiris District – 643223, India

Phone: +91 944 438 6699 ; touchwood.info@gmail.com; www.touchwood-foundation.org

April 2008 till date

- Touchwood is planning to acquire land and build a 20 bed hospital for the tribals in this region in association with its partner NAWA.
- Touchwood is mootng CDM projects through the societies to achieve sustainable livelihood options while contributing to the conservation of the already fragile ecosystems in the Nilgiris.

Partners

Touchwood firmly believes in the benefit of partnerships. We recognize the immensity of the issues confronting the Adivasi communities and understand the importance of working collaboratively with our partner organizations. We believe that success is achieved in an environment of cooperation and not competition. We greatly value our partners and the stability that they bring to our development efforts.

We are the in the process of building relationships with local, national, and international agencies. Currently, our partners are the Nilgiris Adivasi Welfare Association (NAWA),

Nilgiris Adivasi Welfare Association – NAWA

The Nilgiris Adivasi Welfare Association (NAWA) is one of the longest running and most effective development organizations working in the Nilgiris. Founded in 1958 by pioneering humanist Padmashree Dr. S. Narasimhan, NAWA has long-term projects in the areas of health, organic farming, and education. NAWA has consistently implemented effective solutions to some of the most pressing issues facing the Adivasis.



NAWA's Dr. Narasimhan Hospital at Kolikarai

The partnership between Touchwood Ecological and Social Foundation and the Nilgiris Adivasi Welfare Association (NAWA) is mutually beneficial and equips both organizations with means to better serve the Adivasi population. Touchwood has opened the **Tribal Healthcare Center** at Vazhathotam near Masinagudi.

Tribal Healthcare Center

Vazhathotam, Masinagudi, Nilgiris District – 643223, India

Phone: +91 944 438 6699 ; touchwood.info@gmail.com; www.touchwood-foundation.org



This clinic serves several surrounding Irula villages, providing the only healthcare in the vicinity. Touchwood continues to work closely with NAWA in the area of health. Touchwood also sees the potential benefit of working with NAWA in developing a regional scheme promoting organic farming.

Projects

Tribal HealthCare Center (THC) - MISSION, GOAL AND FOUNDATION

The mission of the Tribal Healthcare Center, a partnership between Touchwood and NAWA, inaugurated on the 2nd of February, 2007, is to raise the physical, mental and social health of the tribals to the highest level. The THC goal is to ensure that comprehensive, culturally acceptable personal and public health services are available and accessible to all tribal people. The THC mission and goal are based on the strong principal foundation of Touchwood & NAWA to uphold our social obligation to promote healthy tribal people, communities, and cultures, and to honor and protect the inherent sovereign rights of the Tribes.



Katherine of Touchwood presenting a mobile medical kit to NAWA

The Tribal Healthcare Center mandate is to provide healthcare services to members of all recognized tribes and to train them to assume responsibility and administration of their healthcare services. Specifically **THC** envisages,

1. Assisting tribes in developing their healthcare programs through activities such as health management training, technical assistance, and human resource development.
2. Facilitating and assisting tribes in coordinating health planning, in obtaining and using health resources available through Central, State, and local programs, and in operating comprehensive healthcare services and programs.
3. Providing comprehensive healthcare services, including hospital and ambulatory medical care, preventive and rehabilitative services, and development of community sanitation facilities.
4. Serving as an independent advocate in the health field to ensure comprehensive health services for tribes.

Health services may also include health care purchased from private providers. The THC clinical staff consists of approximately 1 doctor and 1 nurse, 1 helper and a field supervisor. Touchwood sponsored healthcare camps for the tribes, aims to employ various allied **health professionals, such as nutritionists, health administrators, and medical records administrators** apart

Tribal Healthcare Center

Vazhaithotam, Masinagudi, Nilgiris District – 643223, India

Phone: +91 944 438 6699 ; touchwood.info@gmail.com; www.touchwood-foundation.org

from other medical experts on a monthly basis. At THC we always welcome any number of healthcare professionals and workers to be a part of us.



Volunteer Erin Bures at work among the tribals

Though the town of Masinagudi has a small government hospital, its services are too expensive for poor tribal communities to attend leaving them without medical coverage and forcing travel to distant locations for medical help. There is no emergency response for local accidents. According to a report on the demographic data of the tribal villages gathered by Touchwood in September 2006, the **Tribal Healthcare Center would directly benefit 670 families with a total population of 2829.**

Project – Water

Touchwood is working with Acer Engineer Private Limited, Hyderabad to construct cost effective water filtration plants for all villages in the Nilgiris District.

On finalization of design and costs associated, Touchwood will submit an in-principle proposal to the government seeking permission to take this further.



Existing alternate water resources for Chemmanatham Village

Tribal Healthcare Center

Vazhaithotam, Masinagudi, Nilgiris District – 643223, India

Phone: +91 944 438 6699 ; touchwood.info@gmail.com; www.touchwood-foundation.org

Public health education

Preventive measures involving environmental, educational, and outreach activities are combined with therapeutic measures into a single healthcare system.



Public health education program

Within these broad categories are special initiatives in traditional medicine, elder care, women's health, children and adolescents, injury prevention, domestic violence and child abuse, healthcare financing, state healthcare, sanitation facilities, and oral health. Most THC funds are appropriated for tribes who live on or near reservations. Touchwood also has programs that provide access to care for tribes who live in towns and out of reservation areas.

THC services are aimed to be provided directly and through tribally contracted and operated health programs.

Education

Touchwood is now working with Nalla Ayan Middle School (translated as Good Shepherd Middle School) in Kotagiri. This school, started around 20 years ago has also enrolled tribal children.

The aim is to bring the tribal children into the mainstream life by encouraging them to live and study together with the non tribal children. The school also runs an orphanage for around 100 children providing for free boarding, food and education.

Touchwood has donated 2 desk top computers to assist in the daily running of the school and also to help research better ways of providing quality education using the internet as a broad base of information source.



Tribal children at school

Touchwood intends to increase the infrastructure of this school and aims to provide better facilities to ensure that these children have a better tomorrow. We welcome inquiries regarding our work with this school and will be happy to provide any information that is required.

Cultural & Community outreach programs

Touchwood is now bringing about a new concept of cultural exchange program. The children from local schools are encouraged to visit tribal hamlets and spend quality time understanding tribal traditions and cultures while in turn passing on their own cultures to the tribal children, thereby creating an awareness for better education, hygiene and better standards of life.

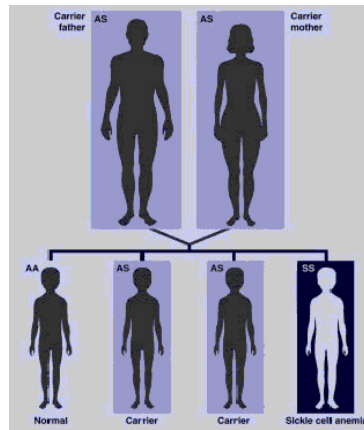
We are currently working with the 6th – 9th grade students of Riverside Public High School and we are proud of the children there for readily willing to accept these cultural exchanges.

One batch of the students have already been through the Touchwood programs and a second batch of children will be meeting with the tribal children in the jungles during the month of January 2008.

Sickle cell anemia research

Sickle cell anemia is a serious disease in which the body makes abnormally shaped red blood cells. Normal red blood cells are smooth and round like a doughnut without a hole. They move easily through blood vessels to carry oxygen to all parts of the body. In sickle cell anemia, the body produces red blood cells that are shaped like a sickle (or crescent).

These "sickle cells" are hard and sticky and they don't move easily through blood vessels. They tend to get stuck and block the flow of blood to the limbs and organs. This can cause pain, organ damage, and a low blood count (anemia).



Inheriting sickle cell genes

Sickle cell anemia is an inherited (genetic) disorder. People who have sickle cell anemia are born with it. It is a lifelong disease.

Touchwood has teamed up with Dr. Graham R Sarjeant of the University of West Indies to research the sickle cell disease within the tribal communities in The Nilgiris, South India.



Dr. Graham Sarjeant, UWI - Jamaica

Touchwood is now putting a team in place to commence its research by collecting data and correlating the same into a comprehensive database that will be the foundation for identifying ways and means to combat / control this disease in association with its partner NAWA.

Opportunities

For ongoing volunteer/intern opportunities please write to us.

Contact us

Touchwood Ecological & Social Foundation

Tribal Healthcare Center

Vazhaithotam, Masinagudi, Nilgiris District – 643223, India

Phone: +91 944 438 6699

touchwood.info@gmail.com; www.touchwood-foundation.org (under renovation)

Chairman of the Trust

Rajendra K Vesana

B 702, Jimmy Park 1,

Sector 17, Nerul

Navi Mumbai – 400 706

Phone: + 91 983 389 6699

+ 91 932 318 0113

Home: + 91 222 770 2154

rajvesana@gmail.com

Map of The Nilgiris



Map of The Nilgiris District, Tamil Nadu, India

Tribal Healthcare Center

Vazhaithotam, Masinagudi, Nilgiris District – 643223, India

Phone: +91 944 438 6699 ; touchwood.info@gmail.com; www.touchwood-foundation.org