

For immediate release

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Founder of rural empowerment group Payir gets Rotary's highest award

When Senthil Kumar Gopalan quit a lucrative job in the U.S. in 2005 and used his savings to set up the Payir Trust for rural empowerment in Thenur Village near Trichy, he knew he had an uphill task. The enormity of his mission has become all too clear in the four years since. But now, thanks to the Rotary Club of Madras Esplanade, he's getting some wind behind his back.

The Rotary Club has pledged significant support to Payir's projects in future, and on Saturday, Oct. 31, bestowed its highest award, the "For the Sake of Honor" award, on Senthil Kumar.

At the award ceremony at the Taj Connemara, Tamil Nadu Tourism Secretary V. Irai Anbu applauded the Gandhian nature of Senthil Kumar's vision of making India better by improving her villages, and called for more public support of projects like Payir.

The Madras Esplanade Rotary Club's president, K. Govindarajan, chanced upon a magazine article about Payir's activities, and was moved to visit Thenur along with his Rotary associates, he said. "Most of us have no idea about conditions in villages," he said. Figuring that since they couldn't contribute their personal efforts, the least they could do was to help someone who could, club members have thrown their support behind Payir.

The club will sponsor several requirements for the school set up by Payir, including a roofing sheet and clothes for children. Besides, it will also collect and donate clothes for women and organize and support medical camps in the village.

Inspired by Senthil Kumar's work, the club has adopted the Kuthambakkam village near Chennai, and has earmarked Rs. 10 lakh for rural development.

Senthil Kumar praised the Rotary's Club diligence in "finding" him and approaching him to offer their support. He used the platform to highlight the perpetual paucity of funds in organizations such as his, and urged the audience to open their hearts and wallets, so that non-profit organizations could concentrate on their actual work, instead of the grinding search for funds.

For more information on Payir, visit www.payir.org.

About Payir: Payir was founded in January 2005 with the mandate to empower rural India to transform itself into a socially stimulating, self-reliant and growth-oriented community. Payir's project in Thenur, near Trichy, is the organization's first attempt to exercise the idea of holistic rural development, to which end, Payir has set up a health center, a school, and vocational and agricultural training programs, among other endeavors.

About Senthil Kumar Gopalan: Senthil Kumar Gopalan graduated as a Mechanical Engineer and worked in different corporate capacities, last at Lason Inc., for whom he led a team of 30 engineers in Michigan, U.S.A., and later set up their Chennai division. Since 2005, he has been part of the grassroots Payir team at Thenur village.

Photo credit: G. Ashokan

Caption: Senthil Kumar Gopalan receives the citation from the Rotary Club of Madras Esplanade from Tamil Nadu Tourism Secretary V. Irai Anbu. Others in the picture are, L to R: Hemu Ramaiah, who received the club's Vocational Excellence Award, and Rotarians Gurmeet Singh, K. Govindarajan, Benjamin R. Cherian and G. Chandrasekhar.