CHAPTER - V

INFAM - VISION AND ROLE

5.1 Introduction

The birth of INFAM can be attributed to a spontaneous movement on the part of the small farmers in Kerala who were adversely affected by the economic reforms of 1990’s. The neo liberal reform measures did not help the farmers in any way. It only increased his sufferings. In Kerala there are a large number of peasant farmers with small agricultural holdings. They till the land and cultivate it. The important products are rubber, coconut, coco, cardamom, cinnamon etc. But unfortunately they do not get much in return. The increasing cost of inputs have compelled them to take bank loans. Here again they cannot repay the loans. As a result many of them committed suicide during the first decade of the 21st century.

The Christian Church has played an important role in bringing together the farmers. The Church is influential in many of the farmer dominated areas like Kottayam, Idukki and Wayanad. But all types of farmers find a place in INFAM. They have learnt to cooperate without the leadership of the politicians. The INFAM leaders have a vision of their own and they have successfully led demonstrations and rallies to submit their demands before authorities.

The farmers’ community of Kerala was seriously affected by the evil effects of globalization. It led to the indebtedness of farmer’s families. There were practically neither the local nor the State and Central Governments,
political parties or other agencies to render a helping hand to the lives at risk of many thousands of families who depended exclusively on agriculture for their livelihood during this crisis. The immediate victims of this inescapable agrarian economic crisis are the lakhs of small scale farmers of Kerala. It is this factor which led to the origin of INFAM in Kerala.

5.2 Indian Farmers Movement
5.2.1 Origin and Development

The history of the origin of ‘INFAM’ is closely related to the socio-developmental activities of the Catholic Diocese of Kanjirappally in Kerala. It is the pastoral centre of the diocese and its social-development centre which served as the infrastructure that give birth to the people’s movement called INFAM in favour of farmers in Kerala.

The diocese of Kanjirappally is one of the fifteen Syro-Malabar eparchies in Kerala. It is situated in the eastern part of the Revenue District of Kottayam, which has the highest percentage of Christian population in India. Among its various, social development activities, the most prominent and well established is the Malanadu Development Society (MDS), and it has its headquarters in Parathodu near Kanjirappally. This Social development centre served as the basis to make the initial preparation for the origin and development of INFAM as a people’s movement, under the leadership and guidance of its visionary director Mathew Vadekkemuriyil (Fr), who was the first National Chairman and Managing Trustee of INFAM.

5.2.1.1 Malanadu Development Society (MDS)

The MDS is the official organization of the Eparchy of Kanjirappally for social and developmental interventions. Formed in May 1997, MDS was founded and registered as a nonprofit making charitable

5.2.1.1.1 The Vision and Mission of MDS

The vision of MDS is the creation of a just society ensuring dignity and sustainability of life. The MDS is committed to integrate rural development, livelihood security and sustainable development. It envisions an egalitarian and just society and strives to realize its vision through ecologically sensitive development, people-based and participatory micro level planning and by advocating the cause of the last to come first.

The mission of MDS is ‘to enhance the quality of life, especially that of farmers, women, children and other marginalized communities through decentralized institution building and participatory development processes, and application of sustainable technologies respecting our environment, culture and heritage’. In order to realise this mission, it has undertaken a number of development projects namely in the areas of agriculture, animal husbandry, dairying and natural resource management, community development, housing and sanitation, rural industries for employment generation, women’s development, non-conventional energy and a centre for development training, research and innovations.

5.2.1.1.2 The developmental activities of MDS in agriculture

Having stated the mission to enhance the quality of life of farmers in the Malanadu region, MDS has a priority interest to promote sustainable
development in agriculture and many related fields. Among its chief areas of
intervention and principal developmental activities in favour of farmers are:

1. Campaign for production of food crops.
2. Promoting value addition of primary productions.
4. Participatory technology development for sustainable agriculture.
5. Participatory research in pepper, cardamom and vegetables.
7. Agricultural Nursery and seed bank.
8. Promoting vermin culture.
9. Soil and leaf testing laboratory for farmers.
10. Spices farm societies.
11. Organizing tea farmers’ co-operatives and setting up of tea processing factories.
12. Coffee processing unit and cardamom curing centre.
13. Agro industrial employment generating programmes.
15. Organising farmers Movements and Co-operatives.

The MDS also functions in support and collaboration with national and
ternational development agencies like the India – Canada Environment
Facility Government Departments and Social Development Agencies with
training and capacity building in a wide variety of areas like manufacturing,
domestic consumer goods, bee keeping and honey processing, sericulture silk
reeling and weaving, candle and match box making industries, rural entrepreneurship development and SHG dynamics etc.\(^6\)

**5.2.1.1.3 Farmers March at Kozhikode**

The impact of the economic crisis was greater felt by the immigrant farmers in the north of Kerala. The repeated appeals made to both state and central governments seeking solutions for the problem of farmers remained a cry in the desert. The farmers realized that above all, their state of “being unorganized” as a force was a hindrance for them to put pressure upon the government and the concerned entities to consider seriously the farmers crisis and take action in favour of them.

In north Kerala, the activist Dr. Antony Kozhuvanal took initiative in educating people about the need to get organized in order to speak out for their rights and to put pressure on the decision making structures. As a result on 7\(^{th}\) September 2000, for the first time in Kerala, many thousands of farmers irrespective of their religion, caste or creed made a peaceful march towards the civil headquarters of the district of Kozhikode.\(^7\) The march included many women and children, manifesting their misery, as a result of the impact of the crisis felt in families. The march was organized by the farmers association called “Karshaka Munnetta Samithi” (Farmers Progressive Committee). This resulted in a reawakening for the farmers, who otherwise were very reluctant to get organized for protest. The media’s positive coverage of the event and the wide appreciation it received, gave farmers a renewed confidence and convinced them of the need to get united as a secular movement and to rediscover their strength to seek solutions to the problems in farm sector.
5.2.1.1.4 All Kerala farmers Representatives Meet at Kanjirappally

During the assembly of leaders of Kanjirappally Diocese in the month of September 2000, there was a suggestion to convene a meeting of the representatives of farmers of Kottayam, Idukki, Ernakulam and Pathanamthitta revenue districts inorder to discuss together the problems of farmers and to share ideas for seeking solution for their grave crisis. There was a suggestion that the meeting should be conducted by the farmer’s representatives alone. The MDS prepared a guideline-questionnaire explaining the situation of the farmers and concrete proposals seeking solution.

The guidelines analyzed the situation of farmers in its introduction. “Together with the steep fall in prices of agricultural commodities, the policies of the state and national governments also stand against the interests of farmers. The World Trade Agreement, especially AoA is favourable mainly to developed countries often exploited under the label of these agreements. It is to be doubted that even the financial help of IMF and World Bank too are leading us to slavery. Today what is needed is a permanent response that studies the problem and finds scientific and effective solutions”. It elucidated various aspects of the problem and formulated a questionnaire for reflection to take concrete and urgent steps during the forthcoming farmers meeting towards finding solutions.”

According to the indications given by the leaders, the meeting that temporarily named itself as “Indian Farmers’ Association”, took place at the pastoral centre at Kanjirappally on 16 September 2000. Around 157 representatives of farmers from all over Kerala, economists and experts from farmers sector including the Ex. Chairman of Rubber Board, Members of the Parliament and State Legislative Assembly also participated in the meet. This
important event took the following decisions in preparation to the institution of the future farmers movement ‘INFAM’

The new farmers movement, INFAM which is beyond all sorts of political allegiances and which brings together all types of farmers took the following decisions.

1. Once the farmer’s movement is registered, then there should be the formation of a public limited company of farmers.

2. The farmers movement should include farmers from all religious denominations, The leaders of various religious communities should encourage and support the movement.

3. The creation of warehouses, network of the collection, processing, conservation and trading of commodities, promotion of exporting and obtaining bank loan for deposited commodities of farmers.

4. Facilitation of making available agricultural equipments and fertilizers through farmers consumer stores.

5. Lobbying State and National governments to diffuse rubberization of roads, which for see great potential in the increase of consumption of natural rubber.\(^9\)

**5.2.1.1.5 The Farmers Association Inter Religious Meet**

A second larger meeting of religious leaders and the representatives of farmers of various religious denominations and experts in farm sector was convoked at the Malanadu Development Society’s training centre at Parathodu on 8th October 2000. The assembly was presided over by the Msgr Mathew Aerathedem and among the participants were the farmers of different regions. The president of the assembly enlightened the audience of
the urgent need for farmers to get organized beyond the religious and political differences and to stand against the exploitation by the powerful trade giants.\textsuperscript{10} The secretary of the MDS explained to the members of the gathering the objectives and relevance, and a probable first draft of the Bylaws of the farmers movement to be constituted.

It is during the gathering that the name for the newly constituted movement was suggested and approved as “Indian Farmers Movement INFAM in short form - and unanimously approved the draft of the Bylaws.\textsuperscript{11} Among the twenty four decisions taken by this assembly, besides the choice of name and approval of the By Laws, the most important are;\textsuperscript{12}

1. Non- allegiance to any political party.

2. Inclusion of members of all religious denominations.

3. Entrusted Fr. Mathew Vadakkemury, the secretary of MDS as the Managing Trustee of the movement to proceed for the registration of the movement.

4. Constituting a Board of Trustees of at least 51 Members which should include a priest and a layman each, nominated by the Catholic Bishops of all dioceses in Kerala and Mr. Moydeen Haji and P.K. Venugopal as the Muslim and Hindu representatives respectively.

5. Constituted a committee of eight persons for the final drafting of the By Laws of the movement.

6. That the movement will function with the approval and support of Kerala Catholic Bishop Council (KCBC).

7. Office – holders of political parties should never occupy official posts of IFAM.
5.2.1.1.6 The Farmers march at Koorachundu and Thiruvambadi

On the birthday of Mahatma Gandhi, a small village in the northern region of Kerala named Koorachundu witnessed some very special type of protests in favour of the farmers in crisis. Many thousands of farmers under the leadership of the Dr. Antony Kozhuvanal, marched together proclaiming their solidarity, and ventured to burn the imported ‘Palm oil’ that caused the disastrous crash of the price of coconut and proclaimed Koorachundu ‘the first palm oil free village of Kerala.’

This event gave stimulus for a subsequent and similar demonstration in the near by village of Thiruvambadi by many thousands of farmers who gathered together and promised to refuse the use of products of multinational like cocoa cola, pepsi-cola, and instead of it to use only locally produced coconut oil and coconut products like tender coconut water as soft drinks, soaps and detergents made using coconut oil etc. They also became an eye opener to many farmers to become aware of making use of one’s own resources rather than over depending on imported goods that indirectly exploit or steal away the local production potentials and resources. Following these events, voluntary youth groups started intensive conscientisation programmes by visiting house after house, distributing local products and diffusing the need of valourizing the ‘local’ before being taken away by the attractions of the ‘foreign’ that eventually turn to be an instrument of under development and exploitation. These incidents provided stimulus for the organization of INFAM.

5.2.2 The institution and registration of INFAM

The two combined meetings of the committee preparing the ‘By Laws’ for INFAM and the ‘Ad Hoc Committee’ were convoked at MDS central...
office in Parathodu on 21st October and 28 November 2000 respectively. Both meetings were presided over by Fr. Mathew Vadakkemuriyil as the managing trustee of the new movement. These committees discussed the articles of the By Laws and made the necessary modifications.

They agreed upon having in the Board of Trustees, three kinds of members: a group of ‘Founder Trustee’ made of the two representatives proposed by the Bishops of each Catholic dioceses of Kerala; a group of ‘Nominated Trustees’ chosen from experts in different fields and representatives of other religious denominations; a group of ‘Elected Trustees’ consisting of the presidents of the districts democratically elected by the local units of INFAM. They also decided to establish units of INFAM at ‘Panchayats’ and ‘district’ levels. After completing and approving the final draft of the ‘By Laws’, the gathering decided to go ahead with the registration of ‘INFAM’ and to have the official inauguration of it on the 9th December 2000.

5.2.2.1 Registration and Inauguration of INFAM

In Kerala movements, organization or trusts are to be registered according to the norms of the ‘Travancore Cochin Literary, Scientific and Charitable Societies Act XII of 1955. INFAM was registered according to the norms of the Societies Act, on 7th December 2000 as a charitable organization with the Registration number 323/4/2000, with Registered office at Parathodu, Kanjirappally. As a registered entity, INFAM becomes a juridical entity and assumes civil identity, which can operate without profit motive for the well being of the farmers all over India.

At the time of registration there is a group of founder Trustees numbering fourteen members, and four Nominated Trustees. This group is
formed of the diocesan representatives nominated by the Catholic Dioceses, one representative each from other religions (especially Hindus and Muslims) and some experts in the farm sector.

The historic and glamorous event of official inauguration of INFAM and its membership distribution took place on 9th December 2000 at the auditorium of St. Berchman’s College at Changanacherry. The great farmers’ gathering in which thousands of farmers participated from all over Kerala and the nearby states, was presided over by the Archbishop of Thalassery Dr. Geroge Valiyamattom. In his presidential address, Archbishop Valiamattom spoke about the great crisis that the farmer’s community is facing today and about the relevance of INFAM. Inaugurating the membership distribution of INFAM, Dr. Joseph Powathil, Arch Bishop of Changanassery emphasized the need for the farmers to get organized and seek together a solution for their problem. Among other points, he observed that it was better for the church to support the INFAM movement from behind than to be in the frontline to organize them. By handing over to Mr. Moydeen K. Haji, a Muslim farmer from Moovattupuzha, the first membership of INFAM Dr. Joseph Powathil officially opened the membership distribution to the farmers. Mr. Harikumar Koickal, a member of the Board of Directors of N.S.S. inaugurated the ‘INFAM Agro-Movement Limited Company’ by handing over the first share of the company to the Ex MLA of Konni Mr. P.J. Thomas. The editor of ‘Karshaka Shree’ of Malayala Manorama, Mr. R.T. Ravivarma spoke on the occasion about the necessity to modify the pattern of cultivation, and to diffuse organic agriculture inorder to improve the quality of farm products.

Fr. Mathew Vadakkemuriyil, the nominated Managing Trustee of INFAM and the secretary of MDS exhorted the people to adopt a creative
and fruitful attitude towards the problem of farmers. He sustained “today there is practically no one to stand in favour of the farmers in crisis. There is not any political party in which farmers can place their trust. Irrespective of religion, caste and creed, all kinds of farmers in Kerala are looking at the INFAM with hope for support, solution and consolation. Our indifference can only contribute to increasing the number of suicides and hunger deaths in the families of farmers.”\textsuperscript{18} He also added that INFAM, by constituting an Agro Limited Company has determined to improve the farm commodities by value addition, to collect the products through the local units of INFAM and to market them through the commercial network, thus saving the crops from continuous price fall.

After the official inauguration of INFAM Movement, for the first time, all the members of general body met at MDS training center at Parathodu on 29 December 2000. This meeting elected the office bearers and the managing committee of the INFAM. They elected Fr. Mathew Vadakkemuriyil as the National Chairman and Managing Trustee of INFAM movement, Mr. Moydeen K. Haji as the Vice Chairman, Dr. Antony Kozhuvanal as the General Secretary, Mr. P.K. Venugopal and Gregory O as the Secretaries and M.D. Joseph as the treasurer.\textsuperscript{19}

5.3 The aim and structure of INFAM

5.3.1 INFAM – A Registered Charitable Trust as a Social Movement

As referred in its By Laws, INFAM is the movement of farmers, registered as a ‘Trust’ called the ‘Indian Farmers Movement’. The short name INFAM is generally used to indicate the Trust.\textsuperscript{20} The Kerala, experience has taught the farmers that only an organization of farmers by the farmers and for the farmers could alleviate the suffering of the farming
community and save them from the grave economic crisis created by the impact of globalization. It is this awareness that prompted farmers from all over Kerala, belonging to different castes, creed and political affiliations to gather together and to launch a new movement to protect the basic rights of farmers and save themselves from the exploitation of industrial grants and trade lobbies. The INFAM is constituted and registered as a secular trust and as a ‘farmers movement’ open to farmers of all religious denominations in the multi religious context of India especially Kerala.

5.3.2 The Aim, Vision and Mission of INFAM

The aim of INFAM is to organize farmers irrespective of considerations of their caste, creed and political affiliation inorder to inculcate in them the ‘organization consciousness’ and to protect their interests by making them to act as a catalyst to create a society based on human values. Its vision is to create a just society and to ensure quality of the life of farmers through sustainable agriculture.

The objectives of the movement are stated in Art. 6 of the By Laws and are totally fifty three in number. The most important twelve among the objectives are the following.

1. Develop in the farmers self-confidence, mutual trust and unity, thereby enkindling in them the social and national consciousness and to strive for a welfare state.

2. Teach the farmers and propagate the basic principle that the very existence of life is in nature. The life situation received traditionally, belong to the future generation also, and that simplicity of life be made ideal by limiting their needs.
3. Encourage traditional agricultural ratios and present pollution of soil, air and water.\textsuperscript{24}

4. Propagate the truth that agriculture is absolutely essential for existence and encourage the youth to take to farming.\textsuperscript{25}

5. Make the farmers capable of reacting when problems arise for the farmers anywhere in the country and of facing them unitedly by organizing themselves under the movement.

6. Encourage natural food habits, rural medical practices and cultivation of medical herbs and conscientize the farmers about their importance.

7. Plan combined efforts for increasing agricultural products and improve their quality.\textsuperscript{26}

8. Obtain international patent for agricultural products, seeds, medicinal herbs and their products.

9. Encourage organic farming and try to obtain necessary certification for exportation; market agricultural products within and outside India after value addition.

10. Impart training, technology and encouragement to farmers; study the modern farming techniques and start research centers for agricultural improvement.

11. Bring to the attention of governments the regulation and rules injurious to farmers and ensure justice by applying necessary pressure for amendments favourable to farmers.\textsuperscript{27}

12. Render help to the deserving farm labourers in times of urgent need and give temporary debt relief loan to farmers facing revenue recovery measures like confiscation of property.
Over and above all the objectives mentioned here, it is very fundamental to the movement to formulate an action plan for the all round development of the society and particularly of the farmers.  

5.3.3 Principles of INFAM

5.3.3.1 Organisation and Solidarity for the right of farmers

The function and activities of INFAM are basically founded on the three principles of organization, industrialization and new farming culture. Even though almost seventy five percent of Kerala’s population are farmers, they happened to be abandoned by all including the succeeding governments and the reason was that they were never organized. Often, the governments were making and modifying rules and regulations inorder to please the interests of the powerful and organized groups at the expense of the farming sector. Today it has become ever more necessary to get organized inorder to regain the justice so far denied to farmers and to stand for their rights.

5.3.3.2 Industrialization and Diffusion of Appropriate Technology

The farmers in Kerala are not very much aware about the importance of diversification of agricultural products through industrialization. This is due to the lack of sufficient training and awareness. In the age of globalization and market competition a very high priority is given to evolving new crop specific, viable and farmer centered technologies in the agricultural sector. This should focus on promoting organized, efficient and result oriented agriculture researches which should complement in enhancing the research capacity, learning and sharing attitude of village farmers. Due emphasis need to be given on reinforcing the traditional and indigenous knowledge of the farmers in pest incidence and disease attacks. It is a priority for INFAM to set up agro
processing units in the producing area, increased value addition and creation of off farm employment opportunities.  

5.3.3.3 A new culture of farming 

The present culture existing in farm sector, of abandoning food crops and turning to cash crops cultivation has become counter productive. INFAM intends to instill in farmers, the importance of simplicity of life, love for nature, sense of hardwork and co-operation, that helps them to resist the devastating hyper consumerist culture of globalization. A new life style and a new culture a counter culture to the globalized consumerist culture is what INFAM ultimately hopes to realize.

5.3.4 The By Laws of INFAM 

The norms and By Laws of INFAM first approved on 8th October 2000, and finally approved with minor amendments and promulgated on 29th May, 2002 contain a total of 34 articles. Besides, defining the movement’s identity, its goal, mission and objectives and area of activities, it also widely explains the membership governing system, elections, general assembly, central administrative organization, and details of office bearers.

5.3.4.1 The primary membership 

Any one-man or woman aged 18 years owning or possessing at least 20 cents (20% of an acre) of land and engaged in agriculture, animal husbandry, or other agriculture related programmes can become a member of INFAM. There is an admission fee of Rs. 25 and an annual subscription of Rs. 25. Article 10 of By Laws state that inorder to maintain the ‘non-political’ character of the movement, people holding official position of political parties or their tributary organization, and liquor contractors etc are not eligible to hold official positions at any levels of the organizational set up.
of INFAM.\textsuperscript{32} As of today, INFAM has over one hundred thousand members from the fourteen districts and 357 panchayat of Kerala.\textsuperscript{33}

5.3.4.2 The General Assembly, the General body

The General Assembly, the General body of INFAM is constituted by three types of trustees; Founder Trustees, Elected Trustees, and Nominated Trustees. The founder Trustees are composed of those representatives designated by various religious leaders with the view of implementing effectively the aim and objectives of the organization and for ensuring its stability.\textsuperscript{34} The members elected to the General Assembly from the units through panchayat and District committees are called Elected Trustees. Those members nominated to the General Assembly by majority decision of the founder Trustees from prominent individuals and from other communities will be the nominated trustees.

5.3.5 The structure and Governance of INFAM

5.3.5.1 Administrative System

INFAM has a four-tier system of administration. General Assembly, District Committees, Panchayat committees and local units. The day to day administration at the four levels will be the responsibilities respectively of the Managing Committee (at INFAM Head-quarters), the District Executive Committee (at district level) the Panchayat Executive Committees (at Panchayat level) and the local Unit Executive Committee (at the unit level in the ward of panchayat).\textsuperscript{35}

There shall be a maximum of 21 members in the Managing Committee to be selected from the General Assembly; 12 from Founder Trustees, 6 from Elected Trustees and 3 from Nominated Trustees and the ratios however shall be 4:2:1. The chairman, General Secretary, and
Treasurer of the Managing Committee are selected from the Founder Trustees while the Vice Chairman and secretaries shall be from the Elected Trustees. The term of office of all these shall be three years and they will not be eligible for any remuneration other than the expenses specifically prescribed by the Managing Committee for attending meetings. The managing committee has all powers and rights to implement actions to achieve the aims and objectives of the trust as well as to carry out the daily activities, including complete control of the assets and liabilities of the trust. The responsibilities of the Managing Committee are illustrated in the detail in Article 14 of the By Laws.

The central Administrative Committee consists of the Chairman and Managing Trustee of the Trust, the Vice Chairman, the General Secretary, the Secretary and the Treasurer. Their roles, any function and responsibilities are given in the numbers 1 to 7 of Article 15.

5.3.5.2 Regional Administrative Bodies

Under the General Assembly, the administrative set up at the regional level will be the District Committee, Panchayat Committee and Local Unit. According to the By Laws of INFAM it is ideal of to have a unit of INFAM in every ward (portion) of a Panchayat. The local unit is the grass root level basic corps of INFAM. There must not be less than 30 members in a local unit. The president and secretaries of all the local units in a panchayat constitute the panchayat committee, and the presidents and secretaries of panchayat committees form the District Committees. They will elect the District Executive Committee, who eventually elects the president, vice president, secretary, joint secretary and treasurer of the district. The president of the district is an ex-officio member cum trustee of the General Assembly.
The Article 19 of By Laws explains in detail the duties and responsibilities of all office bearers of the administrative body.

5.4 The function and Activities of INFAM

The INFAM has undertaken a large variety of activities to reach its objectives. They may be summarized as; awareness programmes, industrialization of agriculture sector, promotion of organic farming, empowering through autonomous development, marketing network and exports of farm products, pressurising the government, conducting protest marches against anti-farmer legislation, publication etc.

5.4.1 Conscientisation through development seminars

Some of the major drawbacks of the majority of farmers in Kerala are, their inability to distinguish the unjust structures existing in the society, their impossibility to respond to the anti farmer legislation, and to defend their rights against agents of exploitation, as they are un-organized. Being committed to land, dependent on the providence of God and the mercy of nature, they ordinarily are a peaceful community who have learned to live with what they receive from nature. Consequently, organized protest against injustices very rarely takes place. Often, this kind of attitude of farmers, especially their not being organized offered opportunities for the governing structures, the selfish motivated industrialists, multinationals and giant traders to join together to exploit them by complicated legislations and cunning ways of making them victims of unjustifiable profit making in the market.

The newly created atmosphere in the farm sector in Kerala as a consequence of Globalization brought new threats not only for farmers peaceful life, but also for their livelihood sustenance. A number of elements like continuous steep fall of prices of commodities that even forced the farmers to
abandon farming, the negligence from the part of the government organ concerned to come to their rescue, the accumulated debts and the consequent family crisis, all aggravated the situation. Such a situation necessarily demanded massive intervention and organized effort to find solutions.

With the objective of making awareness among farmers, INFAM conducted, conscientisation seminars at the local level. By this time it has conducted such seminars in most of the districts of Kerala, especially those in urgent needs of intervention like the districts of Idukki, Kannur, Wayand and Kazargod. Besides the local level seminars, INFAM organized three state level Development Seminars at the south and central zones of Kerala.

5.4.1.1 Thiruvananthapuram Seminar on “Development of Kerala-which direction?”

This state level seminar discussed mainly about the perils hidden in the existing style of the ‘Kerala model of development’ in the reeling agrarian economy of Kerala under the impact of globalization. Does development means ‘increasing the needs and satisfying them or limiting the needs’. Is it because the accumulated waste of the hyper consumerist culture started giving troubles that one needs to limit his needs? If my luxuries of life generate suffering and inconvenience to the other is it true development? The seminar sought measures to invent new direction and identity in development which safeguards sustainability in the farm sector which is presently at great risk. Experts from agricultural sector, economists, journalists and parliament members guided the seminar. Among the expert guides of the seminar were prominent thinkers like Mr. Alphonse Kannanthanam of Indian Administrative Service and Ex MLA Madhavankutty, Dr. Mohan Pillai, Dr. Michael Tharakken, V.G. Adiyodi etc.
5.4.1.2 Cochin Seminar on ‘Export and Import Bill’

This seminar analyzed the impact of government’s new bill on export and import on the farmers community of Kerala, and was inaugurated by Mr. P.K. Vasudevan Nair, the Ex Chief Minister of Kerala Dr. P.C. Cyriac, the former Chairman of Rubber Board India, of the Indian Administrative Service moderated and guided the seminar. Retired Chief Justice Chettur Sankaran Nair, Kasim Irikkur, the Trivandum Bureau Chief of Madyamam etc presented papers. The seminar emphasized the importance of constituting farmers self help groups, of conducting farmers literacy campaign and organizing the farmers’ shops.

All the seminars were well attended by INFAM members and the speakers who presented study papers were experts from different sections of society related to the farmers problem and from Hindu, Muslim and Christian denominations of Kerala.

5.4.2 Industrialization of the farm sector, INFAM Agro Movement

Months after the inauguration of INFAM, with the aim of giving the farmer control over the price of his product, to accelerate implementation of technologies in farm sector and to promote industrialization of agriculture, the movement registered a company with the name ‘INFAM – Agro Movement’ It was registered on 17th October 2001, under section of 25 of Indian companies Act 1956. The company obtained the license from the Ministry of law, Justice and company affaires of the government of India dated 17-10-2001. The speciality of this private limited registered company is that the shareholder of the company will have no right over the profits of the company. The company has initiated a number of projects to bring about changes in the development of the farming sector in Kerala.
5.4.2.1 INFAM Kera complex (Private limited)

Kera or coconut is the most cultivated tree in Kerala. It had been known as the ‘Kalpa Vruksha’ of Kerala. It is becoming today the tree of sorrows. In 2001-2003, the pest infestation ‘Eriophyd (Mandari – of Mexican origin) which was never present in the land, appeared in the premises of Cochin International Airport and diffused speedily to damage and destroy millions of coconut trees within a short period of time.\(^{42}\) As the Indian proverb goes ‘the manstruck by lightning was also bitten by the snake’ was the situation of coconut farmers, when the price of coconut as well as coconut oil steeply fell beyond control.

Even though INFAM brought to the attention of the government the defects in collecting Kopra (dried coconut) from farmers and the negative impact of palm oil imports the government refused to act effectively. In order to save the farmers, INFAM decided to start a Kera Complex to produce and sell different coconut based products. The foundation stone of the ‘INFAM Kera Complex’ was laid on 29\(^{th}\) May 2002 and was inaugurated at Kokkannu in the district of Ernakulam on 31\(^{st}\) March 2003 by Sri. K. Karunakaran the former Chief Minister of Kerala.\(^{43}\)

The INFAM Kera complex has a basic capital investment of Rs. 6 Million collected from a group of farmers. It has aimed at producing a number of coconut products like scientifically processed coconut water (coconut soft drink) desiccated coconut, production of coconut oil, Baby oil, Kera Gel, coconut Vinager, byproducts of coconut shell etc. The company has planned to collect coconut through the local collection centres of INFAM at a price higher than the market price. Through this, it has the scope to prevent the eventual crash of the price of coconut.
5.4.2.2 INFAM Rubber Societies and Exports

INFAM Rubber Societies (IRS) are the first project of INFAM Agro Movement Company. There were 168 societies, in the beginning, in the eight district of Kerala. Rubber farmers who are members of INFAM are members of these societies. Through the collection centers of these societies rubber is stocked at a price always higher than the market price, then to be exported. According to the IRS programme, through a primary deposit of an amount, equal to the quantity of production of rubber in a year the farmer is guaranteed to get a price never below the basic price always, even when the market price goes down.

As a result, INFAM has become a licensed exporter of rubber and other farm commodities so as to obtain the subsidies offered for those agencies exporting the highest quantity of rubber, by the Rubber Board India and the Kerala Government. During the year 2001-2003, INFAM has exported a total of 1806.5 Metric tones of best quality rubber (RSS 4) to different countries. For becoming the exports of the largest quantity of rubber in the short time, INFAM received a subsidy of Rs. 419,27,50 lakhs from the Rubber Board. But the Government of Kerala failed to give the subsidy even 20 months after exporting rubber.

Table 5.1

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<tr>
<th>Statement of Rubber exported by INFAM during 2001-2007</th>
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<tr>
<td>To Sri Lanka</td>
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<td>To Pakistan</td>
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<td>To China</td>
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<td>To UAE</td>
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<td>Total</td>
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5.4.2.3 Collection of paddy and Distribution of Rice through INFAM units

Kuttanadu, the low land in the districts of Kottayam and Alappuzaha is known as the rice store of Kerala. But today, the crisis of farmers of paddy cultivation is increasing year by year. A series of reasons like pests, labour problem, floods, and above all the crash in the price of paddy are behind this. Besides, during the harvest, the commercial lobby which comes to collect paddy from farmers with the intention of making larger profit, becomes active to reduce the price of paddy.\textsuperscript{46}

After discussing the problem of rice cultivation with the representatives of 12 Panchayats of Kuttanadu, it was decided by the INFAM and the Kuttanadu Development Society to collect quality controlled paddy from farmers, in order to prevent falling prices during paddy harvest season.\textsuperscript{47} During the year 2002, 1800 quintal of paddy was collected at a higher price, was milled under the responsibility of INFAM and was distributed through the local units.

5.4.2.4 INFAM Rice Mill Company (Private Limited)

On 19\textsuperscript{th} February 2003, the ‘INFAM Rice Mill’ was registered at Changanassery as a public limited company and started functioning. The working capital was collected from a group of around forty farmer shareholders. During the 2006 harvest season, around 300 metric tonnes of paddy was collected from farmers at a reasonable price. The milled rice is sold through the INFAM shops under the label INFAM rice.\textsuperscript{48} In order to strengthen the marketing network, with the rice mill, the consumers of INFAM rice has constituted ‘INFAM Rice Club’, which was inaugurated on 14\textsuperscript{th} January 2003 the Honourable Minister for Village Development at Changanassery.
5.4.2.5 INFAM Coffee Growers Society and Coffee Factories

In order to find a lasting solution to the price fluctuation and price fall of coffee and to provide assistance to the coffee growers, INFAM has formed societies among its coffee growing members. These societies collect coffee from farmers, process it and either sell it through their market network or export it. This is expected to give incentive in raising the price of coffee for farmers. Two processing factories (one at Kanchiyar in the Malanadu District of Idukki and other at Nadavayal in Wayand District) have been established through the farmers’ societies formed by INFAM. In these factories 10,000 kg of coffee beans can be kneaded and 200 kg of coffee can be powdered per day. In the month of 2003-06, 39.4 metric tonnes of processed coffee ware exported to Italy.49

5.4.2.6 INFAM Cashew collection

The Kerala State has set up two institutions for assisting the Cashew growers who are in difficulty namely ‘Cashew Corporation’ and ‘Capex’. When the price of cashew fell steeply in the year 2001, these institutions actually remained indifferent without intervening to save the farmers. It is in this context that INFAM intervened to help cashew growers, especially the majority in the northern districts of Kannur and Kazargod where there was a total of 60000 tonnes of cashew production. INFAM collecting centers collected around 1450 tonnes of cashew from farmers at a price of ₹ 5 per kg more, than the existing market price.50 This has contributed for the farmers of these region, a total excess of income of ₹ 300 lakhs. To maintain the price of cashew, the price was slightly increased from Rs. 20 per kg. in 2001 to ₹ 30 per kg in 2002, during the season, and in the following year too. This
experience has well proved how the unity and organized efforts of farmers can resist exploitation and improve market prices of farm commodities.51

5.4.2.7 INFAM Tea Societies and INFAM Tea

In the district of Idukki, where the highest amount of tea (around 46,456 tonnes per year) production in Kerala is concentrated, tea farmers have organized INFAM Tea societies. The purpose of the society is to collect fresh tea leaves from small tea growing farmers who are in great crisis and often exploited by the private factories, and to process it under the responsibility of INFAM. The processed ‘INFAM Tea’ will be sold through the movement’s marketing network, through INFAM shops.

5.4.2.8 INFAM Marketing Network and INFAM Farmers shops

Today, a farmer does not have the right to fix prices for his produce. He is conditioned by a series of limitations to sell off his good, at a price fixed by the mediators, the traders union etc. In order to gain farmers’ right, INFAM shops have started functioning throughout Kerala. Today there are about 300 INFAM shops throughout Kerala. These shops have become primary centres for selling INFAM products as well as the ordinary goods for daily use. The most important aim of INFAM shops is to ensure just prices for the farm products of farmers. At the same time, it also aims at making available to the consumers, ‘quality goods’ for just prices. Mostly established in villages they aim to gather together and unite farmers around the shops, a centre of encounter and sharing.

5.4.2.9 New Delhi Marketing and ‘Green Bogy’ in Railways

INFAM can be proud of having started for the first time in history a green bogy in the Indian Railways that carries twice a week fresh farm products from Kerala.52 Beginning from 12th April 2002, the first green bogy
was flagged off by Mr. O. Rajagopal, Hon. Central Deputy Minister for Railways. Accordingly, twice every week, typical Kerala products like tapioca, rice, bananas, mangoes, coconut, coconut products, other fruits and vegetables etc. are transported from the two major cities of Kerala, namely Trivandrum and Cochin to New Delhi, almost 2800 km north of Kerala where few hundred thousands of Keralities live. INFAM has a central shop and 65 franchisees in Delhi. Being aware of the market possibilities in the major cities in India, where lakhs of Keralities live, INFAM hopes to open market in other Indian major cities too, thus establishing a network of marketing at national level.

5.4.3 International Organic Congress and promotion of Organic farming

Today, consumers all over the world are increasingly becoming aware of the importance of the quality of food material they consume, which they want to be doing lesser harm to their health and be produced through a process that respects nature and environment. Due to this, there is an increasing demand for bio-products in the market obtaining through organic farming. The new technically complex farming that utilizes chemical fertilizes is not only costly, but eventually it decreases the fruitfulness of nature and increases the pests and damages the environment. Environmentally and economically, organic farming is a safer economic growth as well as respect for the environment.\(^53\)

According to the regulation of the WTO, by 2005, the World Trade Organization has placed new restrictions for quality control (like organic certification) for exporting food materials. The Kerala export sector needs to face new greater challenges unless it returns to organic farming. According to the existing regulation of the European Union, the bio-products goods
imported from third world countries need to be processed according to the norm of ‘equal standards’ and be certified. In order to get the certification, the product should be exempt from the residues of the chemicals and pesticides used in farming, which at present is a difficult as well as costly task for Kerala farmers.⁵⁴ It is in this background that INFAM wanted to convince its members and its unit leaders of the relevance, usefulness and possibilities of organic farming through scientific seminars and training programmes. A pioneering attempt was started by the INFAM when it took the initiative to conduct the first International Organic Congress at Renewal Centre, Kochi on 4 July 2002. The Hon. Minister of State for Law and Justice, P.C. Thomas who inaugurated the Congress told the assembly that he will take initiative to ask the central ministry for Agriculture to convoke a national seminar on organic farming. The papers presented were on themes like (i) the economic dimension of organic farming, (ii) national projects and organic criteria (iii) the certifications of organic farming (iv) the challenges of WTO and Kerala agriculture (v) traditional agriculture and bio-dynamic farming. Among the experts and scholars who presented the papers were Ms. Beate Huber (Director of the Research Institute of organic Agriculture, Berlin) Dr. Koshi John (Director, spices Bond – India). O.T.S. Nambiar (Joint Director Spices Board India) Dr. Jyothi (Director – Department of Agriculture, Kerala State) Dr. P.C. Cyriac (Ex-Chairman of Rubber Board)⁵⁵ INFAM has already conducted seminars in organic farming in almost all districts of Kerala. The Organic Congress conducted by INFAM at Sultan Battery in the northern district of Wayand namely “Jaiva Waynad (organic Waynad) was the largest of its kind in Asia according to the number of participants. The district of Wayanad alone could give training in organic farming to nearly 40,000 farmers.”⁵⁶ It is significant to note that the national
chairman of INFAM is a member of Board of Directors of INDOCGRT (Indian Organic Certification Agency) the first organic certification agency approved by the Government of India.

5.4.4 INFAM Publication

To have a strong medium of communication is already a powerful instrument of conscientisation. Being conscious of this, INFAM has already published a number of booklets and guidelines. But its strongest publication is ‘INFAM Vartha’, the monthly newspaper, regularly published in Malayalam from its central office. This functions not only as a network of communication among its members, but also serves to awaken the conscience of the public against social injustice, corruption discrimination against farm sector, to denounce political exploitation of farmers and to conscientize the farmers and common people about the importance of values for which INFAM stands. As referred by its chief editor Dr. M.C. George “INFAM Vartha is the Voice of the Voiceless”. The slogan of the journal is “Loka Samashta Sukhino Bhavendu” the Sannkrit saying that means “My well being should promote the well being of all in the world”.

Besides INFAM Vartha, Wayanad District Committee publishes another monthly Booklet by the name ‘INFAM Voice’. The propagation of Organic farming is the main motto of the monthly. Through this Newsletter, INFAM tries to inculcate moral values in farmers. Kerala is blessed with a good number of ‘Nattarivu’ (useful village knowledge of rural farmer). The propagation of this knowledge is another important motto of INFAM voice.

Most of the publications of INFAM are practical guidelines for farmers. Following are the important publications of INFAM.
(1) The Norms and By Laws of INFAM.

(2) Guidelines for instituting INFAM Units.

(3) Oh, farmers, awake and unite.

(4) Training for UD tapping of Rubber.

(5) INFAM – self – help fellowship.

(6) We too need a Bank.

(7) Farmers towards Second liberation movement.

(8) A means for daily income in family; organic poultry farming.

(9) A means to increase income-fish growing.

(10) Scientific tapioca cultivation.

(11) With twenty cents of land a family can sustain.

(12) Water is becoming a problem: Let’s get ready.

5.4.5 Training and Research

Besides the development seminars and congresses, INFAM intends to give comprehensive training to its members and other farmers in Kerala, on various innovations in farming sector. It desires to be a pioneer in mixed farming, organic farming and model farming. It aims at providing training, information and demonstration on job training to marginal farmers. Farmers are made aware of and empowered to self sufficiency and autonomy. Using model farming methods, a family with 20 cents of land is trained to produce the necessary materials for the family.

In the field of rubber cultivation, INFAM has introduced a new system of tapping the rubber trees called, UD tapping. UD tapping means
‘Upward Downward Tapping’ system. This is a new method of tapping rubber trees to increase the production up to 50 percent and to prolong the productive period of the tree from 15 to 20 years to 25 to 30 years. INFAM trains farmers to spread this new form of tapping, to increase their productivity without increasing the cost of production, at a time when the price of rubber shows fluctuations. Traditional and new methods are sought and experimented in processing and conserving farm products in the INFAM research programme.

5.4.6 INFAM Autonomous Integrated Development programmes

5.4.6.1 INFAM - self help groups

The self-help groups are those primary units of people in a village who by themselves identify their basic needs through collective thinking and seek to respond to it effectively and locally by realization of people’s development programmes. What is intended by their going together is that, they acquire strength so as to channel resources for development from the government or other development agencies which is often not possible singularly. The most important element in the activities of SHGS is that they are to function independently and autonomously, without the intervention of external governance. Through the SHG’s people are empowered to determine what is good for them and to execute it with co-responsibility.

Some positive aspects of these groups are that through their weekly gatherings, they are enabled to create a “We feeling” through knowing each other, understanding life better and its problems, transmitting and sharing knowledge regarding methods of farming, encouraging the habit of ‘saving’ through simple life and reaching financial self-sufficiency. INFAM gives keen attention in the formation of SHGs.
Being at the grass root level it promotes better participation of women too. As a small entity, to give an example of its wide diffusion, Wayanad, Northern district of Kerala alone already has 600 self-help groups under the supervision of INFAM. The idea is applied to financial matters also. The SHGS are supposed to function as a popular bank (similar to the Gramin Bank popularized by the Bangladesh economist Mohamad Yunus), to receive deposits and give loans without interest through the collective decision of members who will discern the worthiness of the borrower, ‘for what’, ‘how much’ and for ‘how long period’ the loan need to be given. However, in a time of growing economic crisis, this group’s work will be directed to limit the needs, reduce the expenses and to avoid works so that the T.V. culture that imposes upon the common man, unnecessary consumer goods through attractive publicities may be collectively resisted. INFAM has now grown much through the SHGs.  

5.4.6.2 Boycotting TNC’s products against unjustifiable import Regulations

For the past five decades, coconut and coconut oil are two alimentary substances constantly present, contributing taste and identify in the food habits of 99% of Keralites. But today they have turned out to be elements of controversy, by becoming victim of the cunning tactics of today’s predominant hyper-consumerist culture controlled by multinational market forces. Through publicity in the media, there has been a deliberate attempt to defame the salient qualities of the locally produced coconut oil by the TNC lobbies from Malaysia to win market for Palm oil and the Soya bean association from U.S. to acquire market for Soya bean oil. While the widely and attractively publicized Palm oil enters the market, people taken up by desire for foreign goods and brain washed by the publicities, easily
become its consumers leaving behind coconut oil from his own place - far better in quality than palm oil without realizing the perils hidden behind it.\textsuperscript{64}

Similarly, it is popularly said that a Keralite is one who ‘carries the taste of coconut and the smoothness of tender coconut in his heart’. He has the tradition of receiving the guest by offering “tender coconut water”. But these traditions are becoming alien to contemporary Keralites because the heart stealing publicities of types of colas-like Coco-Cola, Pepsi-Cola are ruling the market. Being one of the most nutritionally balanced soft drink, tender coconut water is advised by doctors to babies of two weeks, up to old and sick people. Without being conscious of the salient qualities of the homely available natural products the ordinary people run after the fashion goods without becoming aware of the fact that they are being exploited.

In this context, INFAM has started a staunch campaign for boycotting the use of imported palm oil and propagating the use of coconut oil. The INFAM youth activists went around all over the state with INFAM kits propagating the use of coconut oil for cooking, for making soaps and detergents. Many stalls rose up in the villages selling sweets prepared in coconut oil. In collaboration with Deepika Daily, the oldest Malayalam daily of Kerala-conducted tender coconut fairs and the sale of tender coconut in hundreds of ‘Ilaneer Panthals’ (tender coconut stalls) throughout Kerala.\textsuperscript{65}

5.4.6.3 INFAM Bio-gas plants for non-conventional energy generation

As a part of promoting the process of autonomous development INFAM is propagating the construction of bio-gas plants for the generation of non-conventional energy. Any farmer who rears two or more cows at home can maintain a small bio-gas plant which will produce sufficient cooking gas for the domestic purposes. The slurry (emitted cow dung) from
the plant is a valuable organic manure for cultivation. Having an additional amount of nitrogen content, this serves as organic fertilizer to increase the productivity of coconut, pepper, bananas and tapioca plants.

With the collaboration of the central Government agency (SDA) that promotes the generation of non-conventional energy and provides every farmer a subsidy of Rs 2300 for the construction of bio-gas plants, INFAM has constructed in the year 2002 alone nearly 4722 bio-gas plants. In the year 2003, INFAM received the National Award of the Government of India for the construction of the best quality bio-gas plants.66

5.4.6.4 INFAM Bio-Gas lights to solve Electricity Deficiency

Kerala is a state that suffers from deficient electric power. This remains a serious impediment to the industrialization of Kerala. ‘Power cut’ is a usual phenomenon in Kerala. Seeking ways to overcome this problem, INFAM has developed bi-gas light that function through bio-gas generated from cow-dung and other domestic wastes.67 This will allow mostly the village people to save energy by having Bio-gas lights at a lower cost. The technical experts of INFAM after making necessary modifications to the first model, have planned the commercialization of this light which will be a good solution to the power crisis of Kerala.

5.4.6.5 Ferro-cement Tanks to meet the Drinking water problem

Though Kerala is a state rich with lakes and rivers and water resources, due to climate variations in the recent years, scarcity of drinking water is increasingly becoming a problem. During the period of summer from February to June, it gets aggravated. Having abundance of rainfall during the monsoon which is not properly utilized, INFAM has designed the construction of Ferro Cement tanks for the collection and conservation of
The advantages of this type of tank is that while it has very low cost of construction, it has a longer life. INFAM has submitted a proposal for the state Government to propagate the construction of Ferro-cement tanks with Government subsidy to farmers so as to find a permanent solution for the scarcity of water in Kerala.

5.4.6.6 INFAM Organic Livestock Products

For the purpose of contributing to the sustainability of organic farming INFAM is engaged in diffusing organic poultry farms in collaboration with Kerala Agricultural University. Small groups of fifty, hundred or two hundred numbers of chicken is attached to the houses of farmers and fed with organic feeds. While the normal poultry farms are interested in rearing hormone-induced broiler chicken in order to accelerate growth in weight within a short time, INFAM not only distributes the chicks but also provides the exclusively organic feed of its own production.

The leading English newspaper Indian Express writes: “The brain child of INFAM, the organic rearing of country-chicks is finding many takers among the farming community, thanks to its growing demand. People are becoming more and more aware of organic foods and willing to pay a higher price once the product is ensured by organic certification.” A family that rears 100 chicken can have a net profit of Rs 2000 in fifty days. Besides, from the dung of the chickens, the necessary cooking gas for the family and the nutritional slurry necessary for agricultural farming could be obtained. Besides this, INFAM is also promoting all sorts of live stock rearing that helps the all round development of farmers. It has launched bee-keeping and honey collection, fish growing, rearing of pigs, rabbits and goats etc. which are easily combinable with agricultural farming in Kerala.
5.4.7 INFAM’s Agricultural Investor’s Meet (AIM)

For the purpose of finding solution for the economic crisis aggravated by globalization, the Kerala Government has conducted several studies. The various studies have revealed that the lack of investment in the industrial sector was one of the main reasons for the crisis. It was also realized that only Keralites residing abroad was capable of making solid investments in industrial sector. In the year 2002, Kerala Government convoked a “Global Investors Meet” (GIM) with the intention of inviting potential investors from around the world to invest in the Kerala industries. A number of projects were approved, and many expressed their willingness to invest capital in those projects. But, unfortunately, the agricultural sector which was in great need of recovery from crisis was totally disregarded by the GIM.

Taking up the challenge INFAM decided to convoke the ‘Agricultural Investors Meet’ (AIM) in the year 2003 in Kerala in collaboration with INDOCERT and Central Ministry of Agriculture, with the aim of inviting potential investors of the world, to park money in agro-based industries in order to rejuvenate the Kerala agricultural scenario.”72 It started sensibilising farmers with concrete proposals for orientation through its publications. Taking note of the initiative of INFAM in the agricultural sector for a new venture, the Government of Kerala has come forwarded to work with INFAM to conduct such a meet in a wider perspective, combining AIM with International Organic Seminar with the participation INDOCERT and other international Agencies for organic certification conscientisation campaign.
5.4.8 Mobilization and Empowerment Conscientisation Campaigns

5.4.8.1 Jeevan Raksha March to save Mullaperiyar Dam

The ‘Mullaperiyar Dam’ across the river Periyar of Kerala at Thekkady in the Idukki district form part of one of the oldest and most important irrigation projects of Kerala. Situated in the border region of Kerala and Tamil Nadu it serves the irrigation purposes of both states. The Mullaperiyar dam is always a point of controversy between Kerala and Tamil Nadu. Tamil Nadu demanded the central government to increase the height of dam to channel greater amount of water for their irrigation purposes. After verifying the danger hidden in raising the dam’s height, by visiting the dam together with Members of Parliament and legislative Assembly INFAM took initiative to convince the state and central governments, officials concerned and the common people about the seriousness of the problem. It sent an appeal signed by 10000 farmers to the Prime Minister of India and dispatched 2000 post cards to the President of India, requesting to block the proposed construction activities. Moreover, INFAM also joined as a partner in the lawsuit filed in the Supreme Court of India questioning the decision of the Central Government. When the central government committee decided to increase the dam’s height, INFAM in collaboration with ‘Save Mullaperiyar Valley Action Forum’ demanded the construction of a new dam in the same river in order to protect the life and property of farmers. On 19 February 2001, around 5000 farmer members of INFAM led a peaceful “Jeevan Raksha March” (Life Saving March) to the dam. They were arrested and soon released.
5.4.8.2 Bharath Yathra, Farmer’s Conscientisation March from Cape-Comerin to Mumbai Port

With the aim of drawing attention of the state and the central governments to solve the urgent problems of farmers, a farmers journey was conducted under the leadership of national social activists.

Prof. Nachunda Swamy and Mahendra Singh Tikkayath from the Southern cape of India-Cape Comerin to Mumbai port, covering a distance of around 1500km. INFAM gave complete support to the march and conducted awareness in different stations during the four days time when the march passed the state of Kerala from 19 to 21 January 2001.  

5.4.8.3 Declaration of Farmers Rights

On 28 March 2001, Dr. George Valiamattom made the Declaration of Farmers Rights at Kozhikode. In the declaration he said: “Now that the farmers have come forward together to safe guard their rights, it would no longer be possible to exploit them. I request the Government authorities to change anti-farmer policies and legislation to save the Kerala farmers.” This had been widely published by the media in Kerala and it created a serious impact upon the 2006 assembly elections in the state.

5.4.8.4 The Arrest and imprisonment of INFAM leaders

For the purpose of alleviating the sufferings of rubber farmers in crisis and to encourage the export of rubber from Kerala, the State Government of Kerala had declared a package on 18th February 2002 by setting apart Rs 500 million from the contingency fund. According to the package, every agency that first exports 10,000 tonnes of rubber sheets or latex will be granted a subsidy of Rs 3.50 per Kg of rubber. The order states “export subsidy at the rate of Rs 3.50 Kg will be granted to Rubbermark,
Kerala state warehousing corporation, Rubco, INFAM or other such agencies as may be designated by Government; Whoever first exports 10,000 metric tonnes of RSS grade 4 or grade 5 rubber or latex at the minimum price notified by Rubber Board.” According to the regulation of the package programme, INFAM after exporting 1198 tonnes of rubber started submitting the documents of exports to the office of the Hon. Minister for Agriculture from January 2002 onwards to obtain the promised subsidy. At the same time, according to the separate scheme of Rubber Board, INFAM was given the whole amount Rs 41,94,750/- for exporting the said quantity of rubber, ten days after the exportation as promised by the central government. The ministry of Agriculture of Kerala was many times approached by INFAM leaders to obtain the due subsidy, but without positive response. A group of six leaders of INFAM (including Fr. Mathew Vadakkemuriyil - the National chairman, K. Moydeen Haji – National Vice Chairman, P.V. Elias, Kunjabdulla, Joseph V, Joy.P- all trustees of INFAM) who went to meet the Minister for Agriculture Mrs. K.R Gouri to demand the unduly delayed subsidy, while sitting in the office in Satyagraha was unjustly arrested and jailed by the order of the minister.

5.4.8.5 INFAM’S Karshaka Munnetta yathra

The arrest and jailing of the leaders of INFAM, who went to the minister’s office to demand the subsidy for rubber exportation as their due right, brought forth the moral indignation of the whole farmers community in Kerala. In order to protest against this unjustifiable act and to sensibilize people throughout Kerala about the wrong policies of the Government, INFAM conducted the” Karshaka Munnetta Yathra”(farmer’s forward journey). Dr. Joseph Valiyamattom inaugurated the yathra at Kolichal in the northern most district Kasargod on 9 December 2002 in the presence of
many thousands of enthusiastic farmers. He said that politicians are exploiting farmers for their selfish motives. Farmers are tired of the empty promises of the Government. No dividing forces can resist the united leap of farmers who very well know the value of hard work and struggle. It is good for the Government to realize the strength of farmers.\textsuperscript{81} After passing all the fourteen districts of Kerala in fourteen days of journey and meeting around thirty thousands farmers in hundreds of centres throughout Kerala, the Yathra reached the southern most district of Thiruvananthapuram, the capital city of Kerala on 22\textsuperscript{nd} December 2002. The march was a historic success in the conscientising programme of INFAM as well as an important event that well demonstrated the solidarity of Kerala farmers.

5.4.8.6 INFAM Anti - Corruption Vigilance Cell

Bribery and corruption is an increasingly diffused phenomenon in Kerala, especially in the public services and government departments. Fighting against corruption and injustices in the society is one of the founding objectives of INFAM. In order to awaken the conscience of the people against this social evil and to prevent it spreading further, INFAM has decided to form anti-corruption vigilance cells at the grass root level-village.\textsuperscript{82} Lawyers P.S Michael and Mathew M were entrusted with responsibility of framing the norms and they codified the norms and submitted it by June 1, 2005.

5.4.9 INFAM Interventions for Farmers through Media

The most powerful instrument of communications for INFAM is its own monthly publication ‘INFAM Vartha’ which functions as an organ of reawaking and organising the farmers of India. Besides Wayanad District Committee, publishes, ‘a monthly’ by the name ‘INFAM VOICE’. But given
the limited number of its circulation, INFAM almost regularly intervenes through the well circulated popular news papers of Kerala. Especially the oldest Malayalam Daily, Deepika.

To understand a few interventions of INFAM for the cause of farmers, it would be sufficient to go through some of the recent examples given below.

5.4.9.1 Government need to re-examine the import policy

Dr. Antony Kozhuvanal the former general Secretary of INFAM wrote that the policy of central government that permits unrestricted Import of farm products from Srilanka without any tariff need to be re-examined, as it will cause the breakdown of the already weak situations of Kerala farm sector.83

5.4.9.2 Do not commercialize Water and Air

As a response to the Government’s move to privatize the commercialization of water in Kerala, the former National Chairman of INFAM Dr. Mathew Vadakkemuriyil said in the press confidence, not to allow commercialization and privatization of the commodities of basic necessities like water soil and air. The accessibility to them comes under the basic rights of people, he said.84

The mid-term budget of the Central Government presented on 13th January 2004, which offered many tariff reductions to the top class in the society, but offered nothing consoling for the country as a whole observed Dr. M.C. George.
5.4.9.3 Vote for the candidates who stand for the cause of farmers

During the different election INFAM exhorted all farmers to give their votes to these candidates who take real interest in solving the problem of farmers. The political leaders instead of becoming exploiters of farmers, should work with and work for farmers in order to get reduced the interests of bank loan for farming, the tariff for farm products and ensure get basic prices for agricultural commodities.\(^{85}\)

5.4.9.4 National Chairman made an Indefinite fast

Fr. Mathew Vadakkemuriyil conducted a Satyagraha and indefinite fast infront of the statue of Mahatma Gandhi at Kottayam from December 1, 2003 onwards. The reason behind the fast was the absence of responses from the part of Government regarding the ‘people request’ handed over by INFAM more than one year back to the Government.\(^{86}\) Among the immediate demands were: Government should proclaim moratoriums for agricultural loans upto three years or until farms commodities get a just price and it should write away the heavy interests and compound interest of farmer’s debts.

5.4.10 Hartal by INFAM

The Wayanad district committee of INFAM declared a hartal on 19.06.2010 as a protest against the steep fall of prices of pepper and other spices. The INFAM blocked the National Highway and other roads. The honourable Member of Parliament M.I. Shanawas made discussion with leaders of INFAM and presented the problems of farmers in the floor of the House on 27.09.2010.
5.4.11 Agitation Against Endosulfan

INFAM promotes bio-fertilizers. The use of endosulfan created a number of problems in Malabar region. As a result INFAM observed “Anti Endosulfan Day” all over Kerala on 20.11.2011. It conducted seminars in different parts of the state on the evil effects of endosulfan. Besides the farmers of Malabar collected about 1,000 litres of endosulfan and destroyed in the presence of large crowd at Kalpeta.

5.4.12 Protest against the Plant to Declare Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary a Tiger Reserve

The INFAM unit of Wayanad conducted a series of agitations against the plan of declaring Wayanad a tiger reserve. In October 2012 the tigers encroached and killed a number of domestic animals. In 2012 November 13, tigers killed two cows of the people. The farmers under the leadership of INFAM tried to put the dead bodies of the animals in the office of the District Collector. This attracted the attention of the public and Government officials and the Collector conducted discussions with the leaders of INFAM and the problems is raised to the attention of Central Government.

5.4.13 Anti-Narcotic Day

INFAM is against alcoholic consumption and other intoxicating commodities. In 2009 INFAM conducted a study on farmers suicide. Wayanad and Idukki were the centres of farmers suicide. The survey found out that alcoholism is a main cause of farmers suicide. As a result INFAM observes February 7 as anti-narcotic day. In February 7, 2009 INFAM raided shops of Malabar region and destroyed narcotics.
5.4.14 Survey on Farmers suicide

Farmers suicide is a common phenomenon in Kerala. Hundreds of farmers committed suicide, after the introduction of new economic policies. The survey was conducted under the leadership of Sri. Babu Mappilasseril. The result of the survey was published and submitted to the Central government. The famous ‘Idukki Package’ (Package announced by the Central government to protect and help the farmers of Idukki district) to a certain extent was the result submitted by INFAM and such other farmers organizations.

5.4.15 Fast on ‘Thiru Onam’

Onam is the most important festival of Kerala to commemorate the golden rule of King Mahabali, a glorious ruler of Kerala. Onam is the most colourful festival of keralites. INFAM declared fast on Thiru Onam Day as a protest against the steep fall of the prices of agriculture products. It observes fast on Thiru Onam day from 2005 onwards.

5.4.16 Agitation for the Construction of New Dam in Mullaperiyar

INFAM actively participates the Mullaperiyar agitation. In 2011, the agitation was well participated by the members of INFAM.

5.4.17 The Formation of “Green Community”

Green Community is an intellectual offspring of INFAM. The aim of green community is to protect universe from the atrocities of man. It propagates bio-fertilizers, bio-farming and planting of trees etc. The earth is the mother of human civilization. Green community was inaugurated 25th September 2009.
5.5 The Future Dreams of INFAM

For the integrated development and self-sufficiency of farmers in Kerala, INFAM has a series of projects and plans in the reserve. The prominent among them are:

1. The production of organic commodities and after obtaining appropriate certification, export them abroad. The propagation of construction of bio-gas plants throughout Kerala is in view of this. INFAM is also propagating vermin-compost and other organic fertilizers for farmers use.

2. The propagation and protection of Vanilla cultivation in Kerala, INFAM wants to propagate Vanilla cultivation which will solve to a great extent the economic crisis of farmers, as it is affordable to small farmers. But the attempt was not so successful as intended.

3. INFAM wants to bring stabilization in the price of rubber which is on high fluctuations. By increasing exports and finding other sources of rubber utilization, this is possible.

4. Regarding Tea and cardamom, the two crops facing great fluctuations in prices and the consequent crisis, INFAM plans to establish processing units through which value addition becomes possible and by selling in internal market, the price could possibly be improved.

5. INFAM has the intention to extend its activities towards the cocoa cultivation, which is a diminished sector. By instituting a unit for cocoa processing value addition can be obtained.
5.6 The Politics of INFAM

5.6.1 INFAM sustains the Gandhian Principle of Development

The INFAM’s openness to models of development that can adequately respond to the requirements of the particular situation offer space for a kind of development, already proposed in 1930’s by Mahatma Gandhi, the father of Indian Nation it has been taken up, integrated, re-proposed and practiced by INFAM in Kerala. This model is traditionally known as ‘Swaraj’ or Non-Violent development. Gandhiji himself left the concept of swaraj mysteriously vague. It contained political, economic, social and spiritual elements and his method of attaining the same were similarly all embracing rather than precise, definite and one-pointed. Among the meanings given to the term swaraj are, spiritual and moral freedom, self-government and autonomy, rule over one’s self etc. His concept of development presupposes an integral vision of man. Swaraj is not a pure economic theory or ideology or model, but rather a way of life. According to Gandhi “What we mean through Swaraj is an awakening among the masses; a knowledge among them of their true interests, and ability to serve that interest towards the whole world, harmony, freedom from aggression from within or without and a progressive improvement in the economic condition of the masses.” Gandhi gave to the term ‘Swaraj’ the content of an integrate revolution that encompasses all spheres of life. “At the individual level” he maintained Swaraj is vitally connected with the capacity for dispassionate self assessment, ceaseless self-purification and growing Swadeshi or self reliance Politically Swaraj for Gandhi is self Government, not good government (for Gandhi, good government is no substitute for self government) and it means sovereignty of the people based on moral authority. Economically Swaraj means economic freedom for the toiling millions.
In India, there had been a deeply entrenched presumption that the state was an effective mediator in ameliorating the conditions of the weaker and poor sections of the people for the purpose of ensuring social justice and equality. But today, the state is seen, as pointed out by Kothari, to have betrayed the masses, “as having become the prisoner of the dominant classes and their transnational patrons and as having increasingly turned anti-people. The state in the third world, has degenerated into a technocratic machine serving a narrow power group that is kept in power.”89 This evoked the emergence of new people’s movements, action groups and social organizations and movements against globalization, that, as being mobilized and organized as a response to state’s inefficiency. Most of them are of Gandhian inspiration.90

Gandhi feared that in the name of moulding the state in to a suitable instrument of serving people, the state would abrogate the rights of citizens, leading to creating a paradoxical situation where the citizen would be alienated from the state and at the same time enslaved to it, which according to Gandhi was demoralising. Instead, he was convinced of empowering state by empowering people. He launched a massive programme of rural reconstruction and of empowering the marginalized sections of the people. To translate these constructive programmes in to reality an organization was necessary. Constructive work organization (Lok Sevak Singh) was the name he proposed to conscientize and mobilize the people to work and struggle for Swaraj. How to realize Swaraj had engaged Gandhi’s attention seriously. He reminded his colleagues that Swaraj will not drop from the cloud, and “it is the fruit of patience, perseverance, ceaseless toil, courage and intelligent appreciation of the environment.”91
The Swaraj that Gandhi dreamt recognizes no race or religious distinctions. It is meant for all, but emphatically includes the poor, the starving and the working millions in the villages. Real Swaraj will become a reality only when all citizens acquire the capacity to resist authority when it is abused. In his thought, self-sacrifice is the basis of Swaraj.” Progress towards Swaraj will be in exact proportion to the increase in the number of persons who will dare to sacrifice their interests for the cause of the poor.\textsuperscript{92} Gandhiji underlined the moral dimension of human activity as well as the need for self-purification in realizing Swaraj. If Swaraj was not meant to purify and stabilize our civilization, it would be nothing worth. The very essence of our civilization is that we give a paramount place to morality in our affairs, public or private.

A closer and critical look at the Gandhian concept of Swaraj reveals that it can provide an adequate conceptual apparition to locate and assure the struggles for the marginalized farmers. It is a very comprehensive concept which encapsulates the human person and life in a holistic framework. It visualizes the possibility to strive for a more humane, participatory, just and sustainable social order. It is these Gandhian ‘Swaraj ideals’, though not explicitly declared, that substantiate the manner of action of INFAM and upon which it has, built up its concept of participatory and sustainable development of farmers.

\textbf{5.6.2 Gandhian Non-Violent Development}

The analysis of Robert Schreiter, on ‘doing theology between Global and local’ has taken him to the verification of the weakness of a globalised concept of culture and comes across the anthropological question; are human beings and human societies fundamentally, even ontologically, violent?\textsuperscript{93}
Many would appear to answer this question with a ‘Yes” saying that in as much as globalizing process run on the energy of capitalism, they are bound to be violent. In fact, Robert J.C. Young is of opinion that “the constant construction and reconstruction of cultures and cultural differences is fuelled by an unending internal dissent in the imbalances of the capitalist economies that produce them.” Such a proposition explains the reason behind the widespread emergence of fundamentalist extremism that is manifested in the greater amount of violence in response to the cultural homogenization of globalizing capitalist powers.

Today the question widely asked is, does not a critique of capitalist violence imply a peaceful alternative or does not as ontology of peace need to ground the critique of violence? These interrogatives pave the way to rediscover once again the worth and relevance of the Gandhian concept of non-violent development. Accepting non-violence as an article of faith and making it the central organizing principle of life today seems to be the ideal, if a just social order is to be a reality. In today’s globalized context, more than ever, justice is an essential value, and violence in any form or any degree amounts to a denial of justice.

According to Gandhi, the concept of non-violence (Ahimsa) is essentially related to the concept of Swaraj. In fact the path to reach Swaraj is that of non-violence. Non-violence to Gandhi is also the road to truth. Without non-violence, it is not possible to seek and find truth.

The non-violent development contains in itself sustainability that pushes towards a more human dimension, which is characterized by a different concept of space and time, with which it enters into the past (accumulating time) and future (enduring time). “The earth is given to us in
loan by our sons” and “therefore it belongs to the future generation”. As a consequence, there should follow a shift of attention from the ‘monetary patrimony’ which is less enduring to the natural, biological and cultural patrimony, that should endure for many millions of years to come.

According to the interpretation of Prof. Martirani, the non-violent development regains a capacity of ‘in-nocentia’ (un-harming, in offensive); not harming oneself by discovering self consciousness of one’s own talents and limits; not offending the other – the neighbour by finding the conscience of the other, his ‘otherness’ and his difference-including the reasonability of the opponent; not hurting nature, reacquiring the cosmic conscience that renders human beings, brothers to the resources of nature (water, air etc.); not offending the people of the worlds, by finding the ‘conscience of the species’, that render human beings ‘brothers’. This ‘inoffensiveness’ (innocentia) to oneself to the other, to the nature and to human species is the method and culture to reach the objective of peace, the ultimate scope of human development.

The advantage and relevance of adopting a method like that of Gandhian non-violence in the multi-religious context of Kerala is very essential to maintain the secular character of a people’s movement like ‘INFAM’, because though founded by the initiative of the Catholic Church, it is a movement open to members of all religion faiths. The ideals of a person like Gandhi, who could integrate in a superb way in to his vision of life and faith, the best elements of Hindu Philosophy and fundamental principles of Christianity is widely accepted and followed. This explains why ‘INFAM’ too has adopted the Gandhian Model in launching the reawakening of farmers to resist the disadvantages of globalization. So we can find that the methodology of development actions of the INFAM is mostly Gandhian
in its style and character. If the ideals of Swaraj and non-violence of Gandhi advocates values like self-discipline, moral character and solidarity, denouncing ingestions through conscientisation and peaceful protests, and a kind of development that does no harm to man and nature, INFAM follows more or less the same principles of Gandhism. In its priority are the conscientisation programmes, promotion of simplicity of life and love and respect for environment, promotion of local potentialities, peaceful marches and passive resistance. The boycotting of products of exploiters’ and enabling poor people to be autonomous and self-sufficient through simple projects appropriate to them that INFAM propagates have their origin in Gandhi.

Therefore what INFAM has adopted is a style that harmonizes moral values taught by traditional Indian cultural values preached and lived by Gandhi, in order to be authentically Indian’ and Gandhian, to face the homogenizing challenges of globalization.

5.7 INFAM promotes Inter-religious Dialogue

We are living in an age of religious fundamentalism and terrorism. The very word ‘religion’ means ‘to relate’. The fundamental duty of religion is to relate people vertically and horizontally. The vertical relation is the relation with god and the horizontal relation signify the relation between people. But now a days religions have deviated from this golden path. As a result what is witnessed is the growth of religious fundamentalism and religious fanaticism. Kerala is slowly becoming a centre for terrorist activities.

In the context of Kerala, where different religions co-exist, religious dialogue is of utmost importance. In today’s globalized world, it should not
be forgotten that there is a common responsibility for all religions in shaping the emerging world. The religions with their moral and spiritual tradition can contribute to a critical judgment upon the prevailing idioms of global economy and suggest creative alternatives. There are religious resources that promote global responsibilities for all and therefore to the solidarity of a global family. Since in every culture, religions need to search for a cultural unity, which is often weakened by their own internal divisions, the religious dialogues would help peaceful co-existence in pluralistic world.

Born in the pluralistic religious context of Kerala INFAM is determined to promote unity, not only within each religious denominations but also between various faiths. From the moment of its inception INFAM was attentive to include all religious denominations among its members. The dialogue and collaboration with members of other faiths was a priority of INFAM. In fact, before constituting INFAM, the starting event was the inter-religious meet at MDS central office at Kanjirappally to think together, plan and organize the movement. In its By Laws INFAM has maintained a secular character that embraces all faiths. Among the founding motives of INFAM it is said: “to organize farmers irrespective of considerations of their caste, creed and political affiliation”. There are Christian, Hindus as well as Muslims in its Board of trustees and among office holders. In a spirit of dialogue and collaboration as the member of INFAM, followers of different religious witnesses each other in their daily activities, the human and spiritual values proper to them and helps each other in building up a man just and fraternal society.
5.8 INFAM stands for the dignity of humanity

INFAM as a people’s movement has always been vigilant in placing the human person at the centre of its initiatives for farmers in crisis. Against the tendency of globalization that at times turn to become instrument of dehumanization in contexts like Kerala, INFAM wants to venture the creation of a more humane and just society. It bases itself upon the principles of charity and human solidarity. In its socio-development endeavors all are taken in to account especially the weak, the oppressed the exploited and the marginalized. By making farmers, protagonist of their own growth, INFAM plays a liberating role for those over burdened and marginalized by the exploiting agents.

5.9 The demise of Fr. Mathew Vadakkemury, the founder of INFAM

Fr. Mathew Vadakkemury, the founder of INFAM was died on 3\textsuperscript{rd} August 2012. Thousands of people visited and paid homage to the departed leader of farmers. The Chief Minister Sri. Oommen Chandy and almost all the members of the State Ministry visited and paid homage. The Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh sent consolation message. All these reveal the relevance of INFAM, as a powerful peasant movement. The INFAM instituted an award to the best farmer of the state in memory of Fr. Mathew Vadakkemury.

5.10 Conclusion

From the above survey it is clear that INFAM has proved its worth and sustainability as an independent farmers movement. Its leaders are very well aware of the importance of survival without political support. Of course, it has succeeded in bringing together farmers of all shades of opinions. The peasant farmer have been finding it very difficult to carry on their livelihood
in the light of globalization and foreign competitions. The INFAM has successfully conducted concretisation programmes for farmers. It has also organized protest marches and submitted petitions to the govt. However, it requires good leadership and sustained activities to keep up the spirit of Kerala’s farmers.

End Notes


5. Ibid, P.5.


17. Minutes of the Inaugural Meeting of INFAM, Archives of INFAM, P. 35.


20. ‘By laws of INFAM’, Article n. 1, P. 1, INFAM Central Office, Parathode, Kanjirappally.


22. Ibid, n. 6:2.


27. Ibid, n. 6:44.
34. By laws of INFAM, Article n.11, 1-3, Pp: 8-10.
35. By laws of INFAM, Article n.13, P.10.
37. Ibid, P.10.
41. ‘Certificate of Registration, INFAM Agro Movement’, *Archives of INFAM*, P.11.
43. ‘INFAM Kerala Complex Inaugurated’, Mathrubhumi Daily, 1 April 2003, P.7.


87. Mahatma Gandhi, *Young India*, 18 June 1931, P.147.


91. Mahatma Gandhi, *Young India*, 27 August 1925, P.297.


