

**Report**

**on the mission to**

# **The Hunger Project India**

**by Andreas Ragaz**

**January 2012**

## Introduction

The Hunger Project is committed to the sustainable end of hunger. The Hunger Project Switzerland (THP CH), which is part of the worldwide The Hunger Project network, is certified by ZEWO. This means, that THP CH has to select, control and evaluate its own projects in the program countries.

In 2010, THP CH has chosen two projects of The Hunger Project India (THP IN) as its own projects, namely "Strengthening Women's Political Leadership in Local Governance in Tamil Nadu", lasting from January 2011 to December 2011, in the amount of CHF 142'080 and "Strengthening Women's Political Leadership in Uttarakhand", lasting from April 2011 to March 2012, in the amount of US\$ 18'000. THP CH received the entire funding for both projects in 2010 and 2011.

Thereupon, THP CH mandated Andreas Ragaz to carry out a mission to India during the period of 12 to 20 January 2012 in order to monitor and evaluate the project activities financed by THP CH. The mission was very well prepared by the local THP teams in Delhi and Chennai.

The objectives of this mission were:

- Get insight into the ongoing activities in Uttarakhand, learn about their achievements and difficulties and assess their status.
- Assess the outcome of the SWEEP campaign (Strengthening Women's Empowerment through Electoral Processes) conducted in 2011 in Tamil Nadu.
- Verify information about the impact of THP India's projects, particularly in Uttarakhand and Tamil Nadu.
- Establish transparency towards the funders of the two projects mentioned above.

Checking the financial situation of THP IN was not part of this mission, as THP Global Office, New York, is doing it on a quarterly basis. THP IN is audited annually by a professional local auditing company.

The mission was carried out together with Mr. Sourabh Ghosh from THP's Delhi office and Ms. M.S.Gayathri from the Tamil Nadu office in Chennai.

## THP India

THP India is working in 8 states in cooperation with 48 local partner organizations (tax exempted NGOs), covering 69 districts and 140 blocks including 2'789 Gram Panchayats (village councils). THP IN has offices in 6 states with totally 40 staff.

In India, THP focuses on strengthening women's leadership in political functions in rural areas. The training of the women, that were elected or stand for election, is carried out by local

NGOs, which usually are already working in the concerning region. The trainers of these NGOs are trained and supervised by THP. The training concept and the training materials have been developed by THP. THP trainers frequently participate in trainings of women by those NGOs.

## Visit in Uttarakhand

In Uttarakhand, 50 % of all seats in village councils (Gram Panchayats) are reserved for women by state law. At the time of the mission, THP was working in 4 districts in Uttarakhand, including 9 block level federations with 600 elected women representatives. Originally was planned to work with 750 women of 11 federations, but as one NGO was not tax exempted, THP postponed the programs with this organization until it has renewed its tax exemption certificate (Section 80G of the Income Tax).

The visit was made on January 16, 2012 together with Mr. Sourabh Ghosh, Ms. Kamla Bhatt, staff of THP (trainer of trainers), and Ms. Hema Kabdwal from SARAL, the local NGO partner of THP in Nainital district. We visited Bhimtal block in the foothills of the Himalayas.

## Meeting in Bhimtal

A meeting was held with **17 elected women** representatives of different Gram Panchayats of the Bhimtal region (block) in a YMCA building (YMCA buildings are often chosen for meetings of women in THP training programs, because of the bad reputation many hotels have on the countryside). From these 17 women, 2 were re-elected in their function, 5 are presidents and 2 vice-presidents of their Gram Panchayats. One of the presidents was elected to a so-called open seat, i.e. a seat, which had not been reserved for women. All of them had attended so-called cluster meetings, which include the women representatives of 6 to 8 Gram Panchayats.

### Achievements

The women mentioned the following positive changes and achievements that they experienced since they started THP training:

- Knowledge of function, to which they were elected.
- Knowing, how to prepare a meeting with the administration.
- Being able to write a proposal, making a copy and having it signed by the administration as a receipt (otherwise, they might later say, that they never received anything).
- Creation of an ID-card for elected representatives, thus the women can prove that they are entitled to represent their panchayat towards the authorities.
- Increase of courage and self-confidence of the women. Their status has grown.
- Reduced interference by husbands.
- Enforcement of the right of poor families to have one family member employed during 100 days per year for 100 Rupees a day in a government employment scheme (NREGS).
- Enforcement of the right of widows and handicapped people to pensions.

- Release of 20'000 Rupees from the health budget of the local government, dedicated to people below poverty line for medicaments against malaria and stretchers.
- Co-operation with other elected women representatives from the region.

### Remaining challenges

The following specific problems and chances were mentioned:

- Consumption of alcohol by men → violence towards women.
- Pressure by men directly on a women candidate or indirectly on her family for withdrawal of her candidacy. While competition between women is fair, men try to force women to renounce.
- Women will conduct solidarity rallies in order to support threatened women.
- Since many men leave the region for work in Delhi, women gain more freedom.
- Planting trees in order to stop and reverse deforestation, which is an obvious serious problem in the Nainital region.

### Overall impression

Despite of the difficult conditions, the women of Bhimtal show courage and strong determination to take their fate in their own hands, to solve problems and to satisfy the most urgent needs of their communities.

## **Visits in Tamil Nadu**

In Tamil Nadu, 33.3 % of all seats in village councils (Gram Panchayats) are reserved for women by state law. Within the period of January 2011 to December 2011, THP was working in 11 districts in Tamil Nadu, including 26 blocks and 547 Gram Panchayats. Originally, it was planned to work in 10 districts with 500 Gram Panchayats. 2'804 women participated in the Potential Leadership Workshops (PLW) of the SWEEP campaign that was co-financed by Canton of Geneva with CHF 55'700.

The visits were made on January 18 and 19, 2012 together with Mr. Sourabh Ghosh and Ms. M.S.Gayathri as well as representatives of the NGOs that conduct the training of the women.

We visited The Nilgiris district (selected by myself) and Madurai district (proposed by THP IN).

## **Meetings in The Nilgiris**

In The Nilgiris, THP is working with ISLAND Trust as local partner. ISLAND Trust has been a longtime partner of THP. Mr. Alphonse Raj as its representative accompanied us. The SWEEP campaign was implemented in 35 Gram Panchayats belonging to 4 blocks (Ooty, Coonoor, Gudalur, Kotagiri). After the October 2011 elections, 48 % of all panchayat seats are held by women (compared to 33.3 % reservation), which is the highest rate in Tamil Nadu.

## Meeting at Kunjappanai

The Kunjappanai panchayat belongs to the Kotagiri block, where 86 women were trained. We met Ms. **S.Krishnammal**, a Dalit woman, who had been a daily labor at a tea plantation. She finished 7<sup>th</sup> class of school. Her husband works and earns money. She has two grown up and married girls, one is attending the IT-college. In October 2011, Ms. S.Krishnammal was elected for the first time and became president of her panchayat. She participated in the Potential Leadership Workshops (PLW) of SWEEP and got 1'117 votes, which was about 300 more than her closest rival.

### Results from THP trainings

Ms. S.Krishnammal mentioned as the most important that she learned to undertake during the election campaign:

- Focus on basic needs of the people (water and housing), in particular of Dalits.
- Going from door to door in order to meet all people; she visited all 40 villages of her panchayat, 20 of them by foot and 20 by vehicle.
- She created pamphlets with a symbol, which she distributed.
- Kunjappanai panchayat has 9 members, 5 of them are women! (Only 3 seats had been reserved for women.)
- Ms. S.Krishnammal has attended all further THP trainings after she was elected.
- In these trainings, she learned the proceedings and rules of the government administration, how to prepare meetings, writing proposals as well as simple things like, as she mentioned, to read everything (e.g. minutes of meetings) before signing (we could notice, that she keeps the stamp with herself, give it to the clerk and after he stamping a document claims her stamp back immediately).

### Achievements

The elections took place in October 2011. Therefore, Ms. S.Krishnammal has been in office for only 3 months. However, she was able to tell us some results that she had been achieving:

- 22 houses for homeless people were being built.
- 200 street lights were working again, because she had ordered bulbs (her predecessor apparently did not care).
- Regular supply of drinking water for 4 villages.
- Implementation of the National Rural Employment Scheme concerning 150 families in 2 villages (100 days/year, 119 Rupees per day – see also Uttarakhand chapter).
- Her panchayat borrowed 50'000 Rupees from private money lenders at 3 % interest per month for a period of 2 months (without collateral or personal liability) in order to pre-finance the expenses of the panchayat until the funds from the government will be released.

### Remaining challenges

- Being president of the panchayat is a full time job. The household remains to be her sole duty.

The second lady we interviewed at Kunjappanai was Ms. **Lakshmi**. Ms. Lakshmi belongs to a Scheduled Tribe (there are seats reserved for Scheduled Tribes). She has been a perma-

ment worker at a tea plantation for 10 years. Before she was elected as a panchayat member in October 2011, she did not attend the THP the PLWs of SWEEP, but since she had been working in self help groups, she was used to work for the community (and not only for her family). However, since she realized that THP trainings had been useful to other women, she started to participate in the THP trainings following the elections.

#### Results from THP trainings

Ms. Lakshmi mentioned that she is learning:

- How to understand people and how to communicate.
- To be an effective leader.
- Working for all people of her panchayat (not only for those who voted for her).

#### Achievements

Since October 2011, Ms. Lakshmi has brought forward successfully the following issue:

- Family cards for tribal people. This card (see photo) is needed to get food stamps (poor families have the right to obtain food from the local government store), passports, driving licenses, etc. There had been a lack of awareness among the people entitled to this card.

#### Remaining challenges

The following specific problem was mentioned:

- As a panchayat member, Ms. Lakshmi needs up to half a day 3 to 4 times a week. Her employer gives her permission to leave work for ½ day while being paid for the whole day, but not often.
- So far, there have been no big difficulties.
- As the panchayat members are as well the members of the school board, school at Kunjappanai functions well, and all children go to school (this seemed to be an important issue).

#### **Meeting at Jackanarai**

The Jackanarai panchayat includes 10'000 inhabitants and consists of 16 seats (including the president). All 16 members were first time elected in October 2011; since the people had been dissatisfied with the previous council, none of the predecessors got reelected. There were about 60 candidates. 8 of the 16 seats were won by women (6 of them had been reserved, i.e. 2 women won against male candidates). We met the whole council that had just finished an official meeting. We could speak with Ms. Chitra Kala Sivaji, the president, who won the election against 9 other candidates. Other members of the council, including men, in particular the vice-president, participated in the discussion as well.

#### Results from THP trainings

For the elections to Jackanarai panchayat, 7 women had been trained in the SWEEP campaign. Only 2 of them got elected. The reason is that some of the trained women turned out to be not eligible and therefore, could not stand as candidate. This is due to the late decision of the government of Tamil Nadu – in September, one month before the elections – about

wards and reservation of seats for Scheduled Casts and Scheduled Tribes. The **2 ladies** who had participated in the SWEEP campaign mentioned the following learning:

- Motivation and courage to contest.
- Overcome male resistance in her village.
- Techniques of campaigning; there had been strong competition, and she was elected only because she had practiced what she had learned in the SWEEP training. Distribution of leaflets, 3 times to each family.
- Rules, regulations and procedures for filing as candidate, filing in the forms correctly.
- Information about the role of a panchayat member.
- While only 2 of the 8 elected women had undergone the SWEEP training, now 6 of them are participating in the after election trainings of THP, because they realized how useful those trainings were.

#### Achievements

After 3 months of being in office, the president and other panchayat members could inform us already about some achievements of their administration:

- Jackanarai Panchayat borrowed 700'000 Rupees from private sources for the time when the funds from the government will be released (without collateral or personal liability).
- Salary arrears of several months were paid.
- Bulbs were ordered and street lights are working again.
- Water pumps had been repaired.
- According to the vice-president, a man, the new panchayat is very active, certainly much more than the former one.

#### Remaining challenges

- None particular were mentioned.

#### **Meeting at a private home**

We had the opportunity to meet Ms. **Sakunthala** from Naduhatty Panchayat (Kotagiri Block), Ms. **M.Poongodi** and Ms. **I.Leela**, both from Hubbathalai Panchayat (Coonoor Block) as well as Ms. **P.Selvarani**. All four ladies are ward members of their panchayat. They all participated in the SWEEP trainings. Ms. Sakunthala got elected for the first time (she contested already 5 years before, but was not elected at that time), Ms. M.Poongodi and Ms. I.Leela were reelected, i.e. they are serving their second term, and Ms. P.Selvarani was elected for the 4<sup>th</sup> time, i.e. she has been in office for more than 15 years already.

#### Results from THP trainings

In the block of Coonoor e.g., 126 women had been trained in the SWEEP campaign and 26 of them got elected. The four ladies mentioned the following effects of the training:

- Encouragement to contest, realizing the importance of women being elected in political functions.
- Use of materials, like CDs, posters and pamphlets helped.
- Door to door campaign, distributing pamphlets was effective.
- Rally in September reinforced their campaign.

- Big enthusiasm among a lot of women, many supported each other.

### Achievements

The four ladies told us the most important of their recent achievements:

- Establishment of a new government food shop (village of 200 families). Before, the people went to the shop of another village. Since a dalit man was killed a few months ago, because he was queuing in front of the “wrong” shop, the local authorities approved the new shop in the “right” village rather quickly.
- In the same village, water pipes were being laid; up to now, people had to walk 3 km in order to get access to drinking water.
- In another village, a garbage site is being cleaned up. For giving an example, some women started to do it by themselves. Now, almost all people of this area are doing this work.
- Satisfaction, despite of ongoing difficulties.

### Remaining challenges

- Alcohol abuse; about 50 % of men drink to much. One illegal shop was closed, after 300 women had protested during one day, blocking the local buses in the morning and in the evening.
- Fear of going to the police.
- Stopping child labor. The women are monitoring the situation closely.
- The duties of a panchayat member require a lot of time, which is paid very little (25 Rupees per month).

## **Meetings in Madurai**

In the districts of Madurai, Dindigul and Cuddalore, THP is working with EKTA as local partner. EKTA is a new partner of THP and was represented by Ms. Bimla Chandrasekhar, Mr. Senthil and Ms. Suganthi. The SWEEP campaign was implemented in 120 Gram Panchayats belonging to 5 blocks.

### **Meeting at Nilaiyur**

The Nilaiyur panchayat belongs to the Thirupparankundram block and consists of 15 members, of which 6 are women. Three of them had been trained within the Potential Leadership Workshops (PLW) of SWEEP. We met the president, Ms. **M.Sivakami**, whose husband is a trade union leader, and Ms. **Banumathi**, an energetic ward member. The president’s seat was reserved for a woman, the seat of Ms. Banumathi, who was elected for the 2<sup>nd</sup> time, was not reserved.

### Results from THP trainings

The two ladies mentioned as the most important effects from the training:

- Motivation and self-confidence.
- They performed a street theater in order to foster their campaign.



- Ms. M.Sivakami won against 6 competitors; the training helped, but the good reputation of her husband helped too.
- While only 3 of the 6 elected women had participated in the PLWs of SWEEP, all 6 attend now THP trainings, because they recognized their usefulness.

#### Achievements

We did not discuss this.

#### Remaining challenges

- Male domination. The separation of the political function from the role in the family has to be made to the men more clear.
- Fighting with the local government administration.

### **Meeting at Kodimangalam**

Kodimangalam Panchayat belongs also to the Thirupparankundram block and consists of 10 members, of which 4 are women. Three of them had been trained within the Potential Leadership Workshops (PLW) of SWEEP. We met Ms. **Sumathi**, 1<sup>st</sup> time elected, and Ms. **Anita**, 2<sup>nd</sup> time elected, both ward members.

#### Results from THP trainings

Mses. Anita and Sumathi mentioned as the most important learning the following:

- Communication with voters.
- Self-confidence.
- Conducting an effective campaign.
- They will continue with THP trainings and work in self help groups of EKTA.

#### Achievements

Both ladies being from the same panchayat itemized the same achievements as follows:

- Sanitation
- Drainage
- Cleaning up the village.
- Cleaning water tanks.
- Street lights (again the same: simply replacing defunct bulbs).

#### Remaining challenges

- Ms. Anita is working as a Coolie and loses income when she is performing her tasks as a panchayat member, but she has no regrets.

### **Meeting at Kuravakudi**

Kuravakudi Panchayat belongs to the Chellampatti block and consists of 10 members, of which 4 are women. All four had been trained within the PLWs of SWEEP. We met the president Ms. **Pandiammal** as well as Ms. **Sumathi**, a ward member of the neighboring Vikramangalam panchayat. Both were elected for the first time. Ms. Pandiammal got 1'123

votes, which was 193 more than her competitor. Ms. Sumathi, a Dalit, finished 9<sup>th</sup> class of school, has lots of experience of working in self-help groups, participated in EKTA-trainings already before the SWEEP campaign, appears to be self-confident and speaks freely.

#### Results from THP trainings

Mses. Pandiammal and Sumathi mentioned the following effects from the SWEEP PLWs:

- Self-confidence and motivation.
- Knowledge of function, for which they stand as candidate.
- Better interaction with people.
- Conducting her campaign more effectively; Ms. Pandiammal contested in an earlier election, but did not win.
- The seat of Ms. Sumathi was reserved for a Dalit women, she won against one competitor.
- Both will undergo more THP trainings and work in self help groups of EKTA.

#### Achievements

Ms. Pandiammal mentioned the following success in her panchayat:

- School repairs
- Road repairs
- Repair of public toilets.

#### Remaining challenges

- There is a long list of demands from people; this scared in the beginning.
- Ms. Sumathi wants to become president of her panchayat.

## **Overall Impression and Conclusion**

In total, I could spend 5 days with THP India, including SARAL, ISLAND Trust and EKTA, and could interview 17 women in Uttarakhand and 14 in Tamil Nadu. The outcome of these interviews shows that the information, which THP CH obtained from THP IN, is credible and that THP trainings have a considerable positive impact on Indian society.

The visited communities benefited from their female THP trained panchayat members already within the first three months after the elections. A shining example (in the truest sense of the word – at least after sunset) is the replacement of defunct street light bulbs. Apparently, the former panchayats did not care and now, the newly elected women can demonstrate their usefulness. Obviously, women take care of the basic needs of their communities, while many male predecessors neglected their duties. Achieving results and making them visible should yield public support.

THP training helps to make women stronger and more professional in office (being an effective leader). It is remarkable, that while only about half of the women elected in October 2011 in Tamil Nadu had attended THP's pre-election trainings (SWEEP), almost all of them participate afterwards in the subsequent THP trainings. This shows that THP's PLW of the SWEEP campaign were considered as very useful.

For several women, particularly those from low income families, being a panchayat member and in particular being its president, remains a challenge because of the time that these duties consume during working hours; daily workers usually lose their wages for the time, which they are absent from work.

Overall, I'm impressed with the courage and determination of these women, whom I had the opportunity to meet in January 2012 in Uttarakhand and in Tamil Nadu.

Finally, I would like to express my thanks to Mr. Sourabh Ghosh and Ms. M.S.Gayathri from THP's Dehli and Chennai offices for their most valuable support and efficient preparation of my mission.

31 May 2012



Andreas Ragaz

Annexes:

- Final Closing Report on SWEEP by THP India
- Financial Report on SWEEP for 2011, established by THP Global Office
- Photos (17), by A. Ragaz