

**Report**

**on the mission to**

# **The Hunger Project India**

**by Alexandra Koch**

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## **Introduction**

The Hunger Project (THP) 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 the programs it chooses to finance in the program countries.

In order to be accountable to the Swiss public, a representative of THP CH visits the program countries on a regular basis. The purpose of these visits is:

- Appraisal of new programs, which may be funded by THP CH,
- Monitoring of ongoing programs and
- Evaluation of finalized programs, which have been funded by THP CH. This work is carried out jointly with the THP Program Country Director and her/his management team.

THP CH audited the program “Strengthening Women’s Political Leadership” in Madhya Pradesh that would be supported in 2015. It was originally planned to visit the program in Uttarakhand that we financed in 2014, but due to the weather conditions (late monsoon) we had to change our plans.

The objective of the mission in Madhya Pradesh was to get insight into the ongoing activities, to learn about their achievements and difficulties and assess their status.

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

## **THP India**

THP India has built upon the Indian Government’s commitments towards gender equality and women’s empowerment through political participation since 2001. It aims to empower elected women representatives as key change agents in local institutions of governance (Gram Panchayats) by strengthening their political leadership and participation with a women’s rights and gender perspective. With the timely intervention & leadership of elected women, communities have gained access to basic facilities and services like water, education, health, food entitlements. THP is committed to accompanying the course with the elected women representatives in Panchayats for a full cycle of five years in building their effective leadership.

THP derives its mandate from the 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment (1992) which gave formal constitutional recognition to rural local self-governance units called Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) and reserved 33.3% of seats in

the three tiers of PRIs. Most recently, several Indian States have increased the reservation to 50% in Panchayats.

THP India works in partnership with 41 local NGOs across 7 states of India. It has 6 State offices in the states of Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Odisha, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. Since the year 2000, THP has trained over 100'000 elected women representatives (EWRs) in Gram Panchayats with a view to strengthen women's participation in rural local self-Governance. It has also trained more than 800 staff members of these organizations to lead the Women's Leadership Workshops and provide on-going guidance and mentoring to the women leaders.

### **Visit of Madhya Pradesh Panchayats in Satna District:**

The visits took place on 2<sup>nd</sup> September and 3rd September and guided by Veda Bharadwaja and Eunice Thong, Programme officers of THP India, Litali Das, Senior Programme Associate of THP Odisha, Shibani Sharma, Programme Officer of THP Madhya Pradesh and Natasha Sharma, Programme Associate of THP Madhya Pradesh.

In Madhya Pradesh, 50% of all seats in village councils (Gram Panchayats) are reserved for women by state law. They are in the last year of the 5<sup>th</sup> year of the election cycle. The new elections will take place in February 2015.

#### **1) 1<sup>st</sup> Meeting on 2<sup>nd</sup> September:**

Gram Panchayat: Turki, Block: Rampur Baghelan

Turki is a village with 2'353 inhabitants. There are 18 wards in the Gram Panchayat, 10 are women and 8 are men. Sources of income are agriculture with wheat, rice and soyabean, and daily wage labor.

About 35 women (elected women representatives and their supporters) welcome us and we gather in the assembly room. After the meeting I was able to have a look at the Crèche Center, the water pond with fish and the school with children and teacher. They sung a song saying that women not being flowers but much stronger.

#### **Achievements:**

We ask the EWRs (elected women representatives) why they did contest. They reply: If women step out, other women will also step out and will support the female president (sarpanch). This is important for the development of the village. Urmila Patel (1<sup>st</sup> photo) is the sarpanch. She is the platform for other women to raise their concerns. She tells us about the **achievements** in her village:

- Education (5th grade - 8th grade, 3<sup>rd</sup> photo): teacher did not do his job, sometimes he didn't show up. The EWRs decided to monitor him on a

daily basis over 5 months and submitted their observations to the block level.

Children were given clean clothes in order to avoid infection.

- Due to low water level, the pond was useless. They found out about the employment scheme. They went to the block, district and state level and decided to use the 100 day work scheme for the community (an Indian labor law that guarantees the right to work). The community members deepened the pond (2<sup>nd</sup> photo) and got money for it. Now there is enough water in the pond to take a bath. They also started with fishery there.
- Through the federation (sarpanches of several villages together) they decided that it is important to send kids to the Crèche center. If the measurements showed that the children are malnourished they could take the respective measures. 2 children were so malnourished that they had to go to the Nutrition Rehabilitation Center (21 days for children and their mothers).
- 25 houses were built through the housing scheme.
- EWRs solve domestic violence cases within the community with the help of a group of women.
- Earlier there was a celebration when a son was born and a mourning when a daughter was born. Now when a girl is born there is also a celebration.

One big challenge is that men don't take them seriously.

We ask women supporters why they ward for female EWRs. Their answers:

- There were always men. It is important to support for a woman candidate. It is time for a Woman Gram Sabbath.
- The female sarpanch (President) should go to the front.
- EWR's are not respected by the men. Panchs present their issues to the sarpanch. They can count on her.
- They found out together that there is a solution to any issue.
- Transformative leadership: EWR's want to take it forward and push other women that more and more women go into politics.
- The sarpanch takes more care for her village than for her own household.

### **Objectives:**

They want a hospital closeby. Primary health center is 2 km far away.

I was able to have a look at the Crèche Center, the water pond with fish and the school with children and teacher. They sung a song about that women are not flowers, they are stronger.

## **Benefits of THP Action:**

There is a lot of support with all the information they get. They learn to have their own voices, to put their points across. They learn that men and women should be equal also in regards to voting. The women become confident, know their rights and schemes that they can apply for.

## **2) 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting on 2<sup>nd</sup> September**

Gram Panchayat: Kund, Block: Rampur Baghelan

In Kund there are 2 villages with 2720 inhabitants. There are 20 wards in the Gram Panchayat, 11 are women and 9 are men. Sources of income are agriculture with wheat, rice, soyabean, gram, and daily wage labor.

Nisha Pandey is the sarpanch. We met about 50 women (EWRs and their supporters) in their newly built assembly room. They welcome us warmly with a song. Nisha has a different leadership style than the sarpanch in Turki. Her ward members (EWRs) are very strong and express themselves more.

## **Achievements:**

- Assembly room for the ward members
- Crèche Center (5<sup>th</sup> photo)
- School boundary
- Road construction
- Housing schemes since January this year

## **Challenges:**

- Violence against women: One woman tells that since her husband works in the city and is far away for a long time, authority men wanted to take away her land. They hurt her: She got a hand fracture and a injury on the head. The police did not file the case. The federation filed complaint and she could keep her land. She is not afraid, since she knows that the federation will always help her.
- Men stopped women to go to panchayat meetings, now the men are tired of doing it, since the women are going anyway.
- They wanted to get a boundary for their school since it is close to a main road. They had to go to 3 different levels of administration, which didn't want to build it. So they built it themselves. The authority warned that the police would come, but the women went on with the work of building the boundary and succeeded.
- They had to fight against the keeper of the ration shop (there is food for subsidized cards for Below-Poverty-Line-People). The shop keeper didn't open when it was supposed to open. The federation broke the lock of the shop and the beneficiary families could get what they were supposed to get.

They are convinced that they can find a solution for any problem.

**Objectives:**

- 100% women ward members, all EWRs will take part in election again in February, so far 3, who are not wards yet, will contest in February.
- Kala, one of the EWRs, wants to work more on the issue of malnourished children:
  - monitor their weight
  - send children to the Nutritional Recreation Center (NRC) if needed
  - promote that pregnant women take responsibility for their own health, which would also improve children's health
  - monitor the meals at school.
- In the Gram Sabbath women should sit in the front and men in the back.

**Long Term Objectives:**

- Child marriage should stop. There is also a problem that when a woman lives with her inlaws (what she has to do) and the inlaws are not happy with the dowry, she will be murdered.
- Continuation with the work they've already done
- They would like to establish a college closeby for the girls (until now college is 12 km away)
- Women police officers also at the Panchayat level

**Story of Aradna:**

Aradna Parni (4<sup>th</sup> photo) is the 17 years old daughter of a widow. She is in 11<sup>th</sup> grade and her dream is to become a medical doctor. She wants to study and is happy that the marriage age is getting later (formerly with 12 years). She also wants to become an EWR. Her mother wants that she succeeds in whatever she wants to do. The mother had to work all the time (in the Crèche Center). She did not have enough money.

**3) 3<sup>rd</sup> meeting on 3<sup>rd</sup> September**

Gram Panchayat: Posta, Block: Rampur Neikin

In Posta there is one village with 3'050 inhabitants. There are 18 wards in the Gram Panchayat, 10 are women and 8 are men. Sources of income are agriculture with wheat, rice, gram, peas, pulses, daily wage labor, and animal husbandry.

We met about 40 women in the assembly room of the village.

## **Achievements:**

- Set up of a local health center with the help of a petition at district level: First there was no doctor, they submitted an application and now the health center is open and working.
- Established four Crèche Centers: There was only one at the beginning. They had to create awareness that it's important to use them. They did a food security campaign. There was the superstition for several 100 years that malnutrition is a disease. They took a malnourished child to the canal closeby, bathed it, and gave him new clothes. This would cure the malnutrition. Finally, they managed to fight against the superstition.
- Education: Convinced parents that they should send their children to school, parents preferred that the children attend the animals.
- Construction of roads: provided access to the schools, so that the teachers can come and teach

### **Health Center (6<sup>th</sup> photo):**

The building was built ten years ago, but the health center is only working properly since 2 years with the help of the EWR federation. The health center is open from 8 am to 1 pm and from 4 pm to 6 pm, 2 to 3 times a week. There is a doctor, a pharmacist, a sweeper and a dresser. They treat common diseases like diphthery, cold and malaria. The EWRs make sure that all of the 71 drugs are available. Medicine and treatment is free for everybody.

## **Challenges:**

- There was a struggle for food for eligible persons. Many women gathered, confiscated and distributed the food from the ratio store. The man who did not give it out was suspended.
- All these things to take care of are women's business. Men don't care about social responsibility. They are completely involved in agriculture because they can earn money with that. Therefore, women gather and take care of social issues. Their husbands support them to a certain extent, as long as the household is being taken care of.
- Most of local administration people are men. There is a lot of bribery.
- Make the health center work: The service of medical doctors is now free for the population. It was hard work to get it.
- There is a lot of pending construction work (Crèche and ratio shop)
- Construction of 15 toilets, mention it in every meeting, but nothing happens. Problem: Women have to go far away to relieve themselves and can get harassed. It is a decision from the authority.
- Water is a big problem: four houses should get one hand pump, in one area only one hand pump for 20 households, there is a lot of fighting, because there should be four more hand pumps. They passed a request to the administration department. They don't know if it is

approved or pending. They have to follow up with the administration again and again.

### **Objectives:**

- School for girls to get constructed
- Fully sanitized Panchayat
- Other female members of community contest for election
- Women police station closeby

### **Benefits of THP Action:**

The EWR Rajvanti Singh tells us the following: When she was newly elected, she didn't know what to do. There was a lack of information. When the local partner organization of THP gave the workshop she knew what to do. There was a sharing of experience. 20 Panchayats of block level formed the federation (192 members): They found out that they have a lot in common. After the convention there were monthly meetings at the Panchayat level. Neighbors were invited to discuss issues and solve them.

**Interview with Rajvanti Singh (7<sup>th</sup> photo), Age: 38, children: 4 male, (2 work as teachers at the private school in Posta, 1 is in 9<sup>th</sup> grade, 1 in 5<sup>th</sup> grade) 2 female (1 in 12<sup>th</sup> grade, the other has a Master in Science):**

1) How has THP changed, affected, impacted your live?

The most important thing is that the kids have to be educated, otherwise they get exploited! First, I thought that it would be very complicated to be an EWR. The THP training gave me a lot of confidence. I got to know that I have rights. It was important to share the experience among women. Information is the most important thing. It gives an instant click. I realized that it was high time to get it and that she is eligible for it. I was transformed. When you realize that the challenges are the same for every women, you stick together.

2) Did you initially face difficulties in participating the training workshop?

The difficulty is to do the household. On the first day of the THP workshop I realized that the information I got was very useful. So I did the household very quickly to go for the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> day. The biggest impact is that I got the respect I never got before. Now, when I go to meetings, my husband and my kids support me in the household. I'm also respected by male village people. They take my advice.

3) What are your goals, your expectations and plans for the future?

I'm going to contest for the next elections. I'm going to support other women to contest for the elections. Even if I'm not elected, I would still go on with working for the community. Men had it always easy. If a woman is strong, all women become strong.

4) What would you want me to tell my people, colleagues, friends etc. at home?



It means a lot to me that you have come from that far to see the challenges in India. Recognizing the challenges and taking it with you to inform your people, empowers us as well.

There is also a video about Rajvanti Singh:  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IhOK\\_zQFG84](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IhOK_zQFG84)

#### **4) 4th meeting on 3<sup>rd</sup> September**

Gram Panchayat: Kuriya Pavai, Block: Rampur Neikin  
In Kuriya Pavai there are 2 villages with 4'217 inhabitants. There are 19 wards in the Gram Panchayat, 11 are women and 8 are men. Sources of income are agriculture with wheat, rice, gram, pulses and daily wage labor. They are very poor people. There is a dilemma between attending meetings or going to work, development is very tough (very harsh environment). We met about 40 women (EWRs with their supporters).

#### **Achievements:**

The EWR, Dhokiya Saket, tells us about their **accomplishments**:

- Housing scheme: Singleria was very poor, lived in a mud hut, she was able to stay at a neighbor with her family (3 kids), there is not enough work in the village to earn money. The federation helped her to build a house with the housing scheme (8<sup>th</sup> photo).
- Monitoring of school
- In the last 2 years: development of 2 roads, cemented paths
- Toilets for girls, they used to be harassed because they had to go to the field to relieve themselves.
- School from 5<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> grade

#### **Challenges:**

- The secretary of the administration changed three times in two years (link between local democracy and authority). It slowed the process down to get supplements for pregnant women at the Crèche Centers. They did not get any coupons for the very poor. They submitted an initiative to an upper level to get the food released. They got it, but not regularly.

#### **Objectives:**

- They want 8<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> grade school for girls to study in the Panchayat. It is 12 km away.

**Main Issues of the Women:**

You need to get your entitlements, walk to the authorities to get them. Male EWR's don't have this kind of federation, female EWR's feel socially responsible for the villagers.

**My overall impression:**

In 2011, when I was in Madhya Pradesh for my first visit of the Panchayats in India, many women were very shy and were not able to express what they wanted. Now, in the 4<sup>th</sup> year of the election cycle I could notice a transformation: Women work together as a group, support each other, they are able to talk about their issues, even if they are in different castes. Women stand strong and confident and are not afraid to confront their counterparts. The achievements are very impressive considering the timeframe of three and a half years after the last election. My strongest impressions were how the women in the Panchayats work together for something better and how powerful the solidarity of women is. There is no turning back. It showed me again how important education is for the unleashing of human spirit and for development.



February 14<sup>th</sup> 2015

Alexandra Koch

Annex:

- Photos (8)