

The Hunger Project-India

July-December 2010

Executive Summary

The Hunger Project (THP)-India-trained elected woman representative Ms. Sharmi Bai, along with THP team Rita Sarin and Kanika Kaul, met US President Barack Obama in Mumbai to showcase the work of THP in India and their efforts to strengthen democracy at the grassroots. Sharmi Bai spoke of her achievements and presented her profile and biography to President Obama.



The Sarojini Naidu Prize, given annually for Best Reporting on Women and Panchayati Raj, celebrated 10 years of partnership with the media. On September 15, 2010 the high-profile jury chaired by THP Global Board member and Founder/Director of the Institute of Social Sciences (ISS), Dr. George Mathew, declared the three prize winners in the English, Hindi and Other Indian Language Category. The winners were awarded in a ceremony at the Global Fall Event in New York. Panchayat president Amita Devi was a keynote speaker at this event.

THP President and CEO, Mary Ellen McNish visited THP-India in September 2010 along with Executive Vice President Dr. John Coonrod. The THP-India team updated the new President on its strategies and interventions. Ms. Rita Sarin, Country Director and Ms. Sriparna G. Chaudhuri, Director, accompanied the President and the Vice President on a two-day visit to Udaipur, Rajasthan. The THP-India team in Rajasthan welcomed the new President with a presentation of its achievements. The global team met with two THP-India partners, Astha and Jatan, and also participated in the Women's Leadership Workshop (WLW). They visited Kesuli Gram Panchayat in Khamnore block of Rajsamand district to interact with the newly elected sarpanch (panchayat president) and other ward members, as well as the various functionaries in the panchayat. The Integrate Child Development Services (ICDS) Centre and the health sub-centre in the panchayat were also visited.

THP-India commissioned a review of its past nine years work in the field. This external evaluation aimed to assess our strategies to sharpen programmatic interventions in the coming years. The review team visited four THP-India state offices, met with THP-India staff in the national office and state offices, met with partner organizations, interviewed elected women representatives and analyzed THP-India reports and documents. The evaluation team also conducted a two-day evaluation workshop with THP-India staff in New Delhi. The team has submitted the evaluation report and some of the conclusions and recommendations were as follows:

- THP-India's current training is excellent in creating awareness on social issues and to implement thematic interventions. Scaling up the WLW curriculum at the state and the national level will help THP-India to disseminate best practices to other organizations.
- Along with developing the capacities of the elected women representatives, THP-India should focus on strengthening the institution of panchayats.
- THP-India's five-year cycle of leadership empowerment should commence with the Strengthening Women's Empowerment through Electoral Process (SWEEP) pre-election campaign. Capacity building should be the second year of the THP-India cycle and not the first.
- THP-India must continue to promote the federations at the block and the district levels.
- THP-India should review the possibility of withdrawing the Sarojini Naidu Prize (SNP) after a few years.
- THP-India should build a corpus fund.

During the reporting period, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Karnataka undertook WLWs, Follow-up Workshops, Needs-based Workshops and Federation Building Workshops.

Mrs. Rajeswari Devadass, President of Berahatty Panchayat and President of Coonoor Block Elected Woman Representative (EWR) Federation, was awarded the Utthamar Gandhi Award for best performance amongst 12,620 panchayats in Tamil Nadu. She also won the prestigious Rajiv Gandhi Young Leader Award in August 2010.

Details on Progress

Achievements

- Training of Trainers (TOT) workshops in Uttarakhand, Rajasthan, Odisha, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh and Bihar
- Block-level meetings to launch WLWs in Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka and Rajasthan
- Women's Leadership Workshops & Follow-up Workshops in Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka and Rajasthan
- Federation workshops, meetings and follow-ups in Uttarakhand
- Mahila Jagruk Manch meetings in Madhya Pradesh, Orissa and Rajasthan
- SNP 2010 – keynote speaker Amita Devi
- Meeting with US President Barack Obama
- Gram Sabha Mobilization Workshops
- Media interfaces
- Internal Review Meetings with trainers/partners

- Capacity building with THP-India participation in Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) -sponsored course in Sweden titled Women's Political Leadership: Impacting/Gendering Development and Promoting Good Governance
- Completion of Gender Justice and Reproductive Health program in Bihar
- SWEEP planning for Bihar
- Exposure visit to Kerala Institute of Local Administration by federation members of Maharashtra
- Sharing federation building processes by THP and SUGRAMA at the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC)-hosted seminar
- Submission for Edelgive Social Innovation Award
- Convention in Madhya Pradesh
- Consultation on Section 40 in Madhya Pradesh
- Monitoring visit of United Nations Democracy Fund (UNDEF) in Rajasthan
- Mid-term report submitted to UNDEF for Rajasthan
- Climate change camps in Uttarakhand
- Launch of Gender Resource Centres in Odisha
- Initiation of documentation process for SUGRAMA
- Action research on 30-month tenure of Gram Panchayat Presidents in Karnataka
- Collecting baseline information on WLW participants in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Karnataka

Partnerships

In this reporting period, THP-India partnered with the following donors to implement its programs at the grassroots:

- United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) for awareness building on gender discrimination with a focus on reproductive rights, reproductive health and gender justice in Bihar
- SDC for federation building in Maharashtra and organizational development
- Environmental Defense Fund for raising awareness on climate change issues
- SKL International to support the newly elected members of SUGRAMA
- Forum Syd for facilitating federations in Uttarakhand
- Ribbink Van Den Hoek Foundation for Women's Leadership Workshops and Follow-up Workshops in Madhya Pradesh
- UNDEF for Women's Leadership Workshops and Follow-up Workshops in Rajasthan

- UN Women for Strengthening women's political leadership in local governance in India in the five states of Karnataka, Odisha, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan

Country Director Rita Sarin, a member of the nutrition committee of India, participated in the Coalition for Sustainable Nutrition Security in India.

In September 2010, Sriparna G. Chaudhuri, Director at THP-India, participated as a panelist in the panel discussion on Creating Alliances to Strengthen Women's Political Leadership at the Vital Voices of Asia Summit. Other panelists included women leaders from Indonesia, Thailand and India.

THP-India also hosted a delegation led by the US Ambassador for Global Women's Issues, Melanne Verveer. Ambassador Verveer met with the THP-India team to understand the leadership of elected women representatives in different states and THP-India's role in building the political leadership of women in India.

At the request of the Global Office and THP-UK, THP-India hosted freelance journalist Ms. Karen Bartlett on a field visit to Orissa. Ms. Bartlett wrote an article in *The Times* (London) describing the work of THP-India.

THP-India partnered with UN Women at the launch of their governance program in New Delhi in November 2010. Twenty EWRs from five states participated in the program and met with the Rural Development and Panchayati Raj Minister, CP Joshi.

At the request of the Global Office, THP-India hosted representatives of Givewell Foundation, an organization in the United States that reviews charities and helps them to build linkages with prospective donors.

Broader Awareness and Advocacy

In December 2010, 55 participants representing civil society, elected women representatives, media and state officials deliberated on section 40 of the Panchayati Raj Act of Madhya Pradesh. This section of the Act provides for removal of an elected representative who is found to not be working in public interest, guilty of misconduct or failing to carry out the assigned duties by the executive body of the Administration. However, this section is misused by the officials and has a disproportionate impact on those panchayat presidents who belong to marginalised sections including the economically weak, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Women panchayat presidents are the worst affected. This one-day consultation was held to build a consensus amongst a variety of stakeholders around misuse of the section and the need for its removal/repeal.

Also in December 2010, 250 EWRs from 11 districts in Madhya Pradesh, along with 124 civil society representatives, government officials and media persons, participated in a two-day convention in Bhopal. The objective of the convention was to bring together a representative group from the larger newly elected and first-time THP-India-trained EWRs from different districts to share their journey as elected leaders, share their achievements and challenges,

identify issues for state-level advocacy and build a collective understanding on the future course of building federations. Some of the issues identified were strengthening the constitutional unit of the Gram Sabha, addressing the issue of non-cooperation by Panchayat Secretary and the rightful implementation of the Right to Work/Livelihood (MNREGA).

Amarbati, Ward Member from Samnapur Block in Dindori District said, *“The Secretary of my Panchayat didn’t allow any development work to take place. I mobilized other EWRs and together we petitioned the higher officials for his removal. The Panchayat Secretary was removed. At present the work is going on well. We had to struggle a lot for this.”*

In Karnataka, THP-India completed the action research on the impact of the 30-month tenure of Gram Panchayat Presidents on the development of the panchayats. The study was conducted in 17 blocks of Karnataka.

THP-India’s partnership with the Environmental Defense Fund (EDF) on “Raising awareness about climate change issues with elected women in Gram Panchayats and civil society in Maharashtra and Uttarakhand” moved to the second phase. Through this partnership, THP-India aims to build the capacities of the elected women leaders to understand climate change issues and their impact in their own Panchayats. This would enable them to exercise their leadership and take steps to reduce their vulnerability as well as formulate strategies to mitigate the climate change risks. An orientation of trainers on issues of climate change was undertaken. Thereafter, climate change camps were held by elected women representatives in their respective panchayats.

THP-India supported the “Alliance for 33%” asking for reservation of women in the Indian Parliament. Elected women representatives from across India and members of federations supported by THP-India undertook signature campaigns in their blocks and sent banners endorsing their support. Seventy-seven banners with thousands of signatures were received and displayed at the demonstration venue on Parliament Street in New Delhi. Fifty-four elected women representatives and THP partners participated in the demonstration.

In September 2010, the new members of SUGRAMA held their first annual general body meeting at a SAMAVESHA in Bangalore. The new steering committee elected its office bearers who took charge from the old and also set up an advisory committee. Two-hundred and thirty SUGRAMA members from 53 blocks and 19 districts attended the two-day meetings, met with their steering committee and office bearers, passed resolutions related to their functioning and developed a manifesto for the coming years. The State Minister of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj Mr. Jagadish Shettar was the Chief Guest on the final day of the SAMAVESHA. Representatives of SKL International and SIDA New Delhi also attended the meeting.

Recent Innovations

Elected Women Representatives Build Awareness on Gender Discriminatory Practices in Bihar

In April 2010, THP-India partnered with UNFPA in Bihar to build awareness on gender discrimination with a focus on reproductive rights, reproductive health and gender justice. The program closed in December 2010. This was the first time THP-India worked directly with EWRs to address specific gender discriminatory practices.

The nine-month program reached out to 37,500 citizens in eight blocks of four districts through the leadership of 208 EWRs. EWRs prioritized issues of sex-selective abortion, child marriage, dowry and domestic violence. Of the 268 trained EWRs, 208 EWRs were able to take the message forward in their panchayats. Despite being sensitive topics, EWRs easily accepted to work on the issue of sex selection, domestic violence, and child marriage and have been accepted as the change agents in the community. Dowry remained a sensitive issue as EWRs found it very difficult to change the mindset of people on this topic.

The THP-India-UNFPA partnership provided an excellent platform to engage with elected women on the issue of gender discrimination and gender justice in a comprehensive and focused manner. This has also helped them to build a base to campaign in the upcoming panchayat elections for greater participation of women in panchayats and also for some to re-contest for the elections. Elected women have emerged as responsible and effective leaders and will continue to be citizen leaders in the future – advocating against gender discrimination and upholding the dignity and rights of women in their Panchayats.

Towards Building a Strong Support System for EWRs in Panchayats

THP has initiated the building of local “manchs” (platforms) for EWRs, which will address women’s and human rights issues, and also enhance and increase the ability to share knowledge on important issues. This was undertaken with the goal of creating a strong platform and building an enabling environment for EWRs within their own panchayats.

Known as Mahila Jagruk Manch, it is a platform where EWRs interact with other women in their communities to understand and together solve the issues of governance that plague them. It also aims to increase women’s participation within the panchayat and their work on issues of gender justice and social justice. Jagruk Mahila Manchs are being formed in Madhya Pradesh, Odisha and Rajasthan.

Profile of a Leader in the Community

Laxmi Bai, Ward member

Morthala Gram Panchayat, Abu Road Block, Sirohi District, Rajasthan

Laxmi Bai stands out as a woman representative who is perhaps among the few in the state to have the experience of contesting every single election since the first panchayat elections were held in Rajasthan in 1995. Moreover, barring her first attempt, she has never lost an election.



Laxmi Bai's journey into politics began in 1995, when the first panchayat elections were held in Rajasthan in 1995. At the time, with very little exposure and no experience of public life, she failed to get elected. When the next round of elections were held in 2000, she again filed her nomination as a ward member and was elected un-opposed. In 2005, she was again reelected un-opposed as a ward member. Having gained ten years of experience as a ward member, she was keen to contest for the post of the sarpanch (president) in the 2010 elections. However, the sarpanch's seat was of a reserved category and she was not eligible to file her nomination as she was from the general category. Undeterred, Laxmi Bai once again contested the elections and was reelected as a ward member for the third time. It is her determination to continue working for the development of the panchayat that motivates her to re-contest elections time and again.

Laxmi Bai is eager to ensure that the NREGS (National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme) implementation in her ward is done properly. Recognizing the potential of the scheme to bring development, she not only serves in the capacity of a ward member, but also works as the supervisor of NREGS to ensure that the right wages are paid to the workers. She ensures that measurement of work is done fairly and accurately. She has even motivated women to file an FIR (first information report) against a previous supervisor who was mistreating them at the work sites. All facilities that are mandated by the NREGS – whether a crèche (day care center) for children or the guaranteed availability of clean drinking water – are ensured at the work sites.

Having attended all trainings and meetings organized by THP-India, Laxmi says, “*Whether it is NREGA or social security pensions, I don't care what time of the day or night it is. When people approach me for help, I make sure I address their problems.*” Realizing that she alone cannot monitor all the work in her ward, she has organized the active women in her ward to monitor the developmental activities of the panchayat. She ensures that all ward members and other active women participate in panchayat meetings and gram sabhas. In these meetings they table issues and priorities that they want addressed and have discussed before.

In the recently concluded panchayat elections, Laxmi Bai played an active role in motivating women to participate in the elections by assisting them in filing their nominations and making sure that the women cast their votes. In the current term, Laxmi Bai has taken the initiative to mobilize women together to form a mahila jagruk manch (a platform where EWRs interact with other women) in her Panchayat. Through this group, she has been instrumental in spreading awareness on the issue of domestic violence, encouraging open discussions on the topic. Laxmi Bai has also been instrumental in building toilets for women in the panchayat, through resources that the panchayat itself has raised.

Through her tireless efforts, Laxmi Bai has emerged as a role model inspiring and motivating other women to participate in the processes of governance and decision making in their panchayats.

Quarter 1 and Quarter 2 (2011) Priorities

- Capacity building of THP-India team on Governance, Decentralization and Panchayati Raj; Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and Women's Human Rights.
- Roundtable on preliminary research findings on the impact of 30-month tenure of Gram Panchayat Presidents on the development of the Panchayats in Karnataka.
- Hosting Edelgive team for a field visit in Madhya Pradesh and preparation for the jury presentation in Mumbai.
- Preliminary talks with United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) on governance program.
- Hosting investor trip planned for in February 2011.
- Hosting Ribbink Van Den Hoek Foundation Family visit in February 2011.
- Participating in launch of UN Women. THP-trained elected women representatives speak at the launch.
- Meetings with Ford Foundation, World Bank, Deputy Chief of Mission, US & Undersecretary for Democracy and Global Affairs, Maria Otero, the Austrian President.
- Visit of John Coonrod in February 2011.
- Training of trainers (TOTs) and four district consultations in Madhya Pradesh.
- Tamil Nadu Office to be reopened. Recruitment of staff for the office.
- Planning for SWEEP in Tamil Nadu. Gram Panchayat elections in October 2011.
- Closing partnerships with
 - Environmental Defense Fund
 - SKL International
 - Swiss Development Cooperation
- Annual Reporting in March for
 - Environmental Defense Fund
 - SKL International
 - Swiss Development Cooperation
 - Forum Syd 2010 – 2011
 - Ribbink Van Den Hoek Foundation

- Capacity building of partners in each state as per need assessment.
- Rolling out SWEEP program in Bihar. Gram panchayat elections in April 2011.
- Completing interventions in states committed to UN Women.
- Building linkages with parliamentarians in five states.
- Planning a National Platform to Promote Decentralization (NPPD) advisory committee meeting in April 2011.
- Review and analysis of programs in April 2011.
- Partner assessment in each state of operation.
- Proposal and budget for UN Women Year II.
- Analyzing baseline information.
- Rolling out Forum Syd 2011 – 13 program in Uttarakhand.
- Finalize and launch THP-India website.
- Planning for Sarojini Naidu Prize 2011.