



# AHP - Action on Hunger and Poverty Foundation

## Annual Report: September 2014 to August 2015

### **1. The first twelve months on the field**

**AHP** - Action on Hunger and Poverty Foundation, working in partnership with Tarang Jan Kalyan Samiti (TJKS), a community-based organisation in Majhgawan Block, Satna District of Madhya Pradesh, Central India, has brought about significant developments in the region, in just one year.

We dedicate these achievements to our supporters, who have invested their trust in the commitment of the AHP Foundation. It has also been our privilege to join hands with TJKS, who have proved themselves impeccable and imperative in the changes that have been brought about.

### **2. The Situation**

Almost all 194 villages in Majhgawan block, of Satna district, are backward, despite the prevalence of natural resources like herbs, forest produce, stones and minerals. Satna district is located in the limestone belt of India, and contributes around 8%–9% of India's total cement production. Sadly, survival is hard for those who live in remote areas of the Block, and those who belong to backward castes (SC, ST & OBC).

Although there were sufficient natural resources and minerals, forest and agricultural produce, and livestock in this area, historically, the local tribal population had hardly any right over these resources. They used to work as slaves/bonded labourers for feudal lords, a system that continued even after the country became independent. For many, their meagre earning was as little as 1kg grain for a day's work. This resulted in creating an illiterate, oppressed, exploited and vulnerable society.

Life was hard; the elders worked in the fields for meagre wages, the women were often subject to rape and exploitation, and their children grazed animals in the forest. The lords even took possession of the land deeds, allotted to the tribal people by the Government. It was not unusual for the forest department to mix up

the tribal people's land with forest land. So, the activities of the revenue & forest departments continued to subjugate the tribal communities, exploiting their ignorance, illiteracy and absence of collectivism.

### 3. Taking Up the Challenge

AHP Foundation joined hands with Tarang Jan Kalyan Samiti in this region, to focus on those areas that required immediate attention and action: To work together against the exploitation of women, ensure proper implementation of MNREGA, address malnutrition in children through the proper implementation of the mid-day meal scheme, and to streamline the Public Distribution System and migration.

### 4. Setting Goals for a Year

After a systematic study of the region, a partnership appraisal was conducted by an independent development consultant. It was then mutually decided to enter into a one year agreement with TJKS, to work for one year in the Majhgawan block to bring about positive changes among the tribal communities by improving their livelihood status, health care and education.

#### The Proposed Action Plan:

1. Form and register a cooperative among tribal farmers, from the three proposed Gram Panchayats
2. Form women's groups, and create awareness among them on nutrition and other issues
3. Train selected youth members on tribal/herbal medicine
4. Strengthen youth groups to monitor the local primary school. The tasks include:
  - monitoring all aspects of school functioning;
  - ensuring regular attendance and improving enrolment;
  - teaching in the absence of teachers.

The objectives of the project would be measured through the following indicators:

-  Registering & forming a cooperative of Tribal persons who would pursue livelihood activities such as *Tendu Patta* & *Mahua* collection.
-  Forming Tribal Youth groups to monitor proper functioning of Primary Schools, PDS & ICDS on the lines of discussions with target communities.
-  Increasing enrolment and retention rate among primary schoolchildren, as per school records.

- ☞ Training a minimum of 30 youth/adolescent girls in Herbal Medicine.
- ☞ Increasing awareness among women on health and nutrition-related issues, on the lines of discussions with target communities.

## 5.



We are happy to share the successful work undertaken in the three Gram Panchayats of Kelhaura, Singhpur and Turra, Majhgawan block, in Satna district.

Turra, comprising of *Turra, Gauhani, Patangar and Patharigarh villages* is an extremely backward Panchayat. With a population of 2185, the tribal communities survive by selling wood collected from the nearby forests, and by selling white sand collected from the quarries. Last year, nine people lost their lives quarrying sand, but they have no option but to keep working here, as this is the only way to feed their families. The Government seems unconcerned.

AHP's major focus areas and progress update...

### 1. Anganwadi Centers

The intensive door to door enrolment campaign conducted by front line workers of TJKS motivated parents to send their children to Anganwadi Centres. Regular meetings with Anganwadi workers, and their participation in community meetings helped to increase enrolment and ensure regular and improved functioning of the centres. Previously, the centres were only open on Tuesdays for food distribution.

### 2. Primary Schools and MDMS

Teachers now take classes on a regular basis. Two teachers from Kelhaura and Bada Talab villages opted to become role models, and have influenced other schools in the Majhgawan block. Teachers now make home visits to persuade children to come to class. Attendance has started increasing in the secondary school as well.

#### Some of the strategies adopted:

- i) Regular meetings organised at the field level with parents.
- ii) On-the-spot monitoring by volunteers and front line staff; photographs taken to record progress.
- iii) Women members regularly monitored attendance, the daily curriculum and menus of the mid-day meal.

Previously, teachers used to attend school according to their convenience, and some would come to school drunk. Parents were unconcerned about their children's education, who mostly spent their time fishing or playing.

Though midday meals were mis-managed and not served regularly, the school registers would indicate false attendance.

The TJKS field staff and parents started making regular school visits to inspect school records, the frequency, and quality of meals. This ensured that meal menus now included dal, rice and vegetables on a regular basis. Sometimes, bread is also added. However, there is much scope for improvement.

Motivating the parents and group discussions in community meetings has brought about positive changes. Regular and better quality meals have resulted in a significant increase in the number of children from 12 –15 per day to 55 –60 per day.

### **3. Public Distribution System (PDS)**

Only 50% of eligible persons had ration cards, and those registered were not provided the prescribed quantities of rations. Awareness through community meetings has ensured that people now demand their PDS cards, and insist they receive a regular supply of rations, in the prescribed quantity.

In the six targeted villages - Kelhaura, Jhiriyaaghat, Mudkhoha, BadaTalab, Madulihaiand, and Hirapur, constant follow-up and advocacy resulted in 450 new members receiving ration cards. They now get 20 additional quintals of grain.

### **4. Claims under the Forest Rights Act**

A total of 335 claims made under the Forest Rights Act, 2006, were held up.

In the past twelve months, files were followed up regularly, and the necessary documents, mobilised. Organised sit-in protests took place in front of the Forest departments, for speedy settlement of claims. Out of 335, 205 claims were compensated and 50 were under process (at the time this report was written).

*Studies have shown that in many areas this process either did not take place, or took place in a highly faulty manner. Thus, 82.9% of the forest blocks in undivided [Madhya Pradesh](#) had not been settled as of December 2003. Those whose rights are not recorded during the settlement process are susceptible to eviction at any time. This "legal twilight zone" leads to harassment, evictions, extortion of money and sexual molestation of forest dwellers by officials who wield absolute authority over forest dwellers' livelihoods and daily lives.*

*Under these laws, the rights of people living in or depending on declared forest or protected areas, are to be "settled" by a "forest settlement officer." This basically requires that the officer enquires into people's claims to land, minor forest produce, etc., and, in the case of valid claims, allows them to continue or resolve them by paying compensation.*

## **5. Women's Empowerment**

### Women's Collectives

In an effort to unite women beedi and tendu leaves workers, so they could raise their issues in the appropriate forums, three *Women Tendu Patta Collectors Cooperatives* have been formed, with 85 women from three villages to create a better negotiating space. As a result, the women actively participated and presented their needs, in a series of conferences held during the year.

One *Women's Agricultural Labourers Cooperative* has also been set up with 30 members from two villages. These cooperatives negotiate for fair wages; fight for their rights through dharnas and meetings; ask the right questions about the non-functioning of the ICDS & PDS. All the members have opened bank accounts.

In addition, three *Women Committees* have been formed with 30 members each, in Turra, Gauhani and Titahari. All 90 have been trained in vocational skills and have bank accounts in their name. Regular meetings are held to create awareness on women's rights. Women members come together to voice their views about issues that concern their villages.

### Maternal Health

Pregnant & lactating mothers, totally unaware of the medicinal value of the herbs in the forests surrounding them, had no access to healthcare. Today, 182 women have been trained to use herbal medicines during pre and post-natal periods, for basic ailments such as hand/feet swelling and fever. They were also trained in identifying the right herbs growing in the forests around them. These trained health workers provide health care to pregnant women. But, it is not adequate.

## **6. Working Hand Pumps**

The five existing hand pumps were non-functional, and in some villages, almost dry. Even if they produced water, it was not potable. Several representations to the concerned department made over a period of one year, have finally led to the installation of new hand pumps in the villages.

## Recognition and Representation

The Project not only aimed at enabling the marginalized to access their rights and services provided by the government, but also groomed them to hold responsible positions for local governance.

The Project's core strategy was to enable the affected persons to participate in the Panchayat elections, so they would have the capacity to address their issues in a rightful manner. The communities were mobilised through awareness building, and the best representatives were then selected to stand for elections. It was a great moment for the community when seven members from local communities won the election. In addition, Ms. Maina Rawat, a community member, was appointed Vice President of the Zilla Parishad and President of the Education Committee, at the District level. This helped the community to improve the situation of education in the district, with a special focus on the tribal areas. It is a great privilege for the community that their representative, Ms. Maina, is directly involved in monitoring the Anganwadi Centres, Primary and Secondary schools, the mid-day meals and SHGs.

## Community Action

### Community-led initiative to resolve the issues: A case study

*Picket-Performance:* As part of its strategy to resolve community issues, the core team formed by the Project, comprising representatives from different collectives, meets once every two months to discuss issues and ways to address them.

In the Picket performance organised on 10<sup>th</sup> Oct 2015, the members focussed on the following issues to be taken up with the District administration:

- ▶ Gareebi Rekha cards.
- ▶ Corruption in PDS.
- ▶ Claims made under Forests Right Act, 2006.
- ▶ Non-functioning hand pumps.
- ▶ School issues – irregular classes, drunken teachers & lack of electricity.

Despite heavy rain, the villagers stayed on to voice their issues to Government officials from the revenue and forest departments, the police and the block level offices. The villagers were promised that the issues would be resolved within 15 days.

As a result, several actions were taken, with immediate effect:

- Investigations conducted in ration shops to curb corruption.
- Proceedings set in motion to settle claims made under the Forest Act 2006.
- Ms. Maina's name was included in the District Forest Rights Committee.

- 52 hand pumps were repaired, and four new hand pumps were installed by the Sangathan.
- More than one thousand children received their caste and residence certificates which enabled them to get scholarships.

## Other Partnerships of AHP

Action on Hunger and Poverty Foundation continued to support **Rewanchal Dalit Adivasi Sewa Sansthan** in Dabhaura of District Rewa, Madhya Pradesh, and **Swadhina** in East Singhbhum district of Jharkhand. AHP is also in contact with **Nemmadi** of Bangalore Rural District, Karnataka, and **Boomika** of Poonjar in Kottayam District, Kerala, to identify and develop programmes in accordance with the mission of the Foundation. AHP Foundation is a member of the Coalition for Food and Nutrition Security (India).

## In the Pipeline

AHP has initiated and completed the field assessment of *Rewanchal Dalit Adivasi Sewa Sansthan (RDASS)*, an organisation working in the Rewa district of Madhya Pradesh to empower tribals and dalit communities on the issues of malnutrition, education, health and land rights. Under the dedicated leadership of Ms. Siyadulari Adivasi, it has been working in 40 villages, fighting against the oppression of feudal lords and the administration for 13 years. Ms Siyadulari received the “Alex Memorial Award” in 2013, for her community work in Madhya Pradesh.

Today, the issues to be addressed urgently are malnutrition, education, women’s empowerment, livelihood, food security, and land entitlement. RDASS proposes to work in 15 villages under seven panachayats, in the Jawa Block.

*...We have found that many children are severely malnourished in the villages of Java Block, Rewa District ...and the government schemes and programs guaranteeing right to food, including health care and employment are not fully implemented because of discrimination against the tribal community as well as the corruption of the duty bearers. Despite the demand for immediate action for the severely malnourished children, neither government authorities nor health institutions have taken any action...*

Recent Update: Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC)

RDASS works to ensure the rights of the community and children through:

- Awareness generation and capacity building of the community, especially women.
- Organising community members in groups.
- Liaising with service structures and officials at the local level, lobbying and advocacy at a higher level.

## Outcome

Through its interventions, RDASS aims to achieve that:

- Children between 0-6 years are enrolled in Anganwadi Centres.
- At least 70% get regular benefits, such as nutrition, immunisation, etc.
- Children between the ages of 6-14 years are enrolled in school.
- At least 70% of pregnant women are immunised, and 60% births take place in institutions.
- At least 50% of members working under NREGS receive their wages within a month.

The main strategy of the organisation is to build and strengthen community organisations, and advocate with governance structures at the local and state levels.

AHP looks forward to working with RDASS, once funding is available to support their proposal.

## The Way Forward

AHP is overwhelmed by the results brought about in the field by our partner in Madhya Pradesh, with a small monthly stipend. With practically no administrative expenses (except to set up the website, [www.ahp.org.in](http://www.ahp.org.in), which is essential to disseminate our progress to partners, friends and our esteemed supporters), most of our costs have been directly incurred for the benefit of people in the remotest villages.

We are happy to have made a difference in the lives of hundreds, and plan to extend and take this work forward in the coming years. Our immediate commitment is to facilitate another year of support in Madhya Pradesh, and scale up partnerships across India.

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