



Dining for Women

Food for Thought

January 2009

The Hunger Project

India

"If you want me to tell you what a nation is like..... tell me the position of women in that country."
Jawaharlal Nehru... First Prime Minister of India



EDUCATIONAL THEME: Empowering women to end their hunger

RELATED ISSUES AND DISCUSSION POINTS

The current world food price crisis is having a severe impact on women. Around the world, millions of people eat two or three times a day, but a significant percentage of women eat only once. And, now, many women are denying themselves even that one meal to ensure that their children are fed. These women are already suffering the effects of even more severe malnutrition, which inevitably will be their children's fate as well. The impact of this crisis will be with us for many years.

Studies show that **when women are supported and empowered, all of society benefits.** Their families are healthier, more children go to school, agricultural productivity improves and incomes increase. In short, communities become more resilient.

When women, who have traditionally been denied a voice in decision-making, come to power, they transform the development agenda toward the human component - focusing on health, nutrition, education, water, sanitation and better family income.

India, the largest of the countries in SE Asia is the world's largest democracy with a population of 1.3 billion people. Although it is self-sufficient in grain production and is an emerging exporter, hunger and malnutrition is higher there than in sub-Saharan Africa! 47 percent of children are underweight and suffer severe levels of malnutrition, ranking it third in the world for child malnutrition. While much

Fast Facts

928 million people
are hungry

98% live in the
developing world

60% are women
18% are children

80% of the world's
hungry people live
in rural areas

progress has been made on the food production and availability front, adequate nutrition outcomes cannot be assured without unraveling the complexities of the gender food security link.

I. HOW GENDER INEQUITY IMPACTS HUNGER FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS IN INDIA

A. In the agricultural sector:

- ❖ In many parts of the world today there is an increasing trend towards what has been termed the 'feminization of agriculture'. As men's participation in agriculture declines, the role of women in agricultural production becomes ever more dominant. War, sickness and death from HIV/AIDS have reduced rural male populations. Another major cause of this phenomenon is the migration of men from rural areas to towns and cities, in their own countries or abroad, in search of paid employment.
- ❖ Studies demonstrate that while women in most developing countries are the mainstay of agricultural sectors, the farm labor force and food systems (and day-to-day family subsistence), they have been the last to benefit from - or in some cases have been negatively affected by - prevailing economic growth and development processes. **Gender bias and gender blindness persist:** farmers are still generally perceived as 'male' by policy-makers, development planners and agricultural service deliverers. For this reason, women find it more difficult than men to gain access to valuable resources such as land, credit and agricultural inputs, technology, extension, training and services that would enhance their production capacity
- ❖ The agricultural sector employs over two thirds of the women workers in SE Asia
- ❖ Women are relegated to subsistence farming while their male counterparts move into commercial production of food.
- ❖ Lack of access to land ownership is a serious constraint to economic security and is the single most important source of security against poverty
- ❖ Fewer than 10 percent of women farmers in India, Nepal and Thailand own land.
- ❖ A girl in India is born underweight and malnourished. She is nursed less and fed less nutritious food than her brother. She is often denied health care and education.
- ❖ She is forced to work, even as a child. Her work burden increases significantly as she gets older even when she is pregnant. She is married and pregnant when she is young, often just a teenager.
- ❖ She is underweight and malnourished when she gives birth to her children, who are born underweight and malnourished. And the cycle continues.

DISCUSSION QUESTION: *Does the Hunger Project's process of empowering the women leaders have potential to address this problem?*

B. In intra-household food distribution:

- ❖ Intra-household gender disparities negatively impact the food security of women and children particularly
- ❖ Severe malnutrition is higher among girl children and is the most common cause of death for girls under the age of five
- ❖ A study of eleven villages in Punjab showed that while boys and girls had similar caloric intake, girls were given more cereals and boys received more fat and protein with their cereals. The study also revealed that the discrimination against the girl children was culturally and not economically motivated.

- ❖ A study of tribal villages in four states in India found that decreased food stores were addressed by reduced food consumption by women as a first step followed by skipping of meals in order to ensure that the male members of the family and the children had larger portions

DISCUSSION QUESTION: *What are some of the indirect ways the position of women in leadership in rural villages might be able to break down the barriers of gender discrimination? Do you think women who witness another woman in a position of authority might experience an increased sense of empowerment herself?*

C. In education and female literacy:

- ❖ Female literacy is widely recognized to be an important determinant in the health of a nation
- ❖ Children of women with only a primary school education have 20 percent less malnutrition than women who are illiterate.
- ❖ Education has emerged as the single most important factor affecting individual food and nutrition security. The strong positive correlation between literacy and various education levels of mothers with children's nutrition levels has been verified in various studies across diverse developing countries and has also been shown to have the largest impact in the South Asian region.
- ❖ In South Asia, the level of school attendance by girls amounts to only 60 percent of that of boys, while in Africa the figures stands at 68 percent.
- ❖ According to one UN study, child mortality would be reduced more effectively by providing women with ten years of education rather than by doubling their income, providing sanitation and piped water, and turning every agricultural worker into a white-collar worker.

DISCUSSION QUESTION: *Educating girl children will create cascading solutions for the problems of chronic hunger and malnutrition. Discuss the specific ways that the education of girls will address this pervasive issue.*

II. SOLUTIONS TO HUNGER THROUGH WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

The **KEY RECOMMENDATIONS** by the International Food Policy Research Institute include:

- ❖ Reform and monitor legal institutions to eradicate gender discrimination and improve the status of women. Legal institutions must be changed to create a level playing field for men and women and an environment in which women can realize their full potential.
- ❖ Target resources to women.
- ❖ Increase women's ability to actively participate in the development process. Involving more women in development processes may require special outreach and training for poorer and less educated women and for those who hesitate to voice their needs in front of men for cultural reasons.

IN SUMMARY

"Ultimately, gender inequities in food and nutrition security lie at the root of the cycle of hunger and malnutrition in the region. It is, in the ultimate analysis, an issue of woman's own perception of her status. Only when women in the region begin to feel empowered and equal in status to men, will the stranglehold of gender disparities across the region weaken and break. It is then that food security will become merely an economic issue with simple solutions to the problem."

Eventually, gender empowerment alone is likely to be the key to the resolution of the hunger challenge in the region.

While The Hunger Project's approach to empowering women leaders in India through the panchayati raj doesn't appear to be *directly* related to hunger relief, we can see from the research into the causes of chronic hunger and from the recommendations from research and policy institutions, that the increase of women's status and the legal empowerment of women is, in fact, directly related to the relief of hunger for women and their children..When women, who have traditionally been denied a voice in decision-making, come to power, they transform the development agenda toward the human component - focusing on health, nutrition, education, water, sanitation and better family income. They tackle long-ignored problems such as domestic violence, alcoholism and corruption. Through empowerment and increasing their status, the lives of their families and communities are changed for the better.

VOICES OF PANCHAYAT LEADERS

(Photos courtesy of Paul Voothuis and represent women involved with THP)



Radhia Adivasi: A Courageous and Powerful Elected Woman Representative, Chak Dehi Village, State: Mahdya Pradesh

Radhia Adivasi is the sarpanch (village governing council chairperson or President) at the Chak Dehi village in the state of Mahdya Pradesh. She is a tribal woman, which means she faces all the marginalization and exclusion that Dalits, also known as untouchables, experience. She is 30 years old and at the end of the day, the strength of her leadership seemed to be an inverse of her physical size – she's about 4 ½ feet tall and could hardly weigh 80 lbs. She wore a beautiful red sari over her very dark skin and gold post in her nose.

Radhia lost her mother when she was a young child and she immediately became the one responsible for the maintenance of the household. She has never attended school. She is illiterate and only learned how to write her own name after she was elected to office in 2005. She is married

but has no children. You could see in her face the pain of being childless especially in a society that considers children, especially boy children to be the key to your survival as you age while considering childlessness to be caused by a curse or some kind of witchcraft.

Radhia's husband works in Satna, the nearest town, as a rickshaw puller (pulled by bicycle). Every day he walks a couple of miles, crosses a river bed that is impassible during the monsoon season, and then catches a bus for a 45-minute ride into town. Once there, he rides all day and returns home the way he came and sometimes not until 10pm at night. For this work, he makes 60 R a day or US\$1.50. Of that, one-third goes just to cover his daily bus fare. Radhia is unable to do wage labor due to health issues (including a heart condition). At first my poor math led me to have a whole new appreciation of what it may be like to live on \$1/day. Then I realized two people are living on this amount. She does receive a card from the state that allows her to buy rice and wheat for half the going rate at a local government store. When asked whether she is ever able to eat any meat or vegetables, she said that occasionally her husband will bring some home from Satna.

And this is the woman who heads the village council responsible for the well being and improvement of the lives of 1,800 fellow villagers.

We learned more about Radhia and other elected women representatives when we asked to meet with other village women without the presence, interference or interruption of any men from the village - which involved a continuous and strenuous

battle to keep the men out. It was there that we learned from a local midwife that she had never been trained and had no access to sterile instruments. Instead, she is forced to use the same blade to cut the umbilical cord of each child she delivers. We learned that it was Radhia's leadership that led to the construction of four additional schoolrooms during the first three years of her term as chairperson of the panchayat. The rooms were beautiful concrete, well painted, high ceiling classrooms for upper grades – 7th and 8th standard.

To accomplish this she, along with the president of the village Parent Teacher association made trip after trip to the district official's office. She also worked with the panchayat secretary, a paid government position who must be literate, and first obtained the land from his brother in law.

There's a lot more to be said about Radhia's strategy for getting more schoolrooms for girls in grades 9-10 so they are not at risk of assault walking far to the nearest school. And her plans to maneuver a local member of parliament to commit to moving ahead with a much needed bridge so villagers are neither isolated nor endangered during the annual monsoon season. I'll close with something that Radhia said as we walked back from seeing where the river bed flooded and where the new bridge would need to be built.

I asked her if she planned to run for a second term in 2010. If she chose to do so she would have to run against village men for seats not reserved for women - no small challenge for an illiterate, tribal woman with no children and a heart condition currently living on less than \$1/day.

Without any hesitation, she responded, "Of course, there is much work yet to be done."

Sangita Devi, Upmukhiya, (Vice-President) Panchayat: Devthu, District: Madhuban, State: Bihar

I am a shy person and was not interested in holding any public office, but the seat in our panchayat had been reserved for women. My husband persuaded me to stand as he could not contest himself. After I got elected I was still not interested in panchayat work and so, my husband did all the work.

However, my attitude changed once I attended The Hunger Project's Women's Leadership Workshop. It was an eye-opener and since then, I have begun to take an active interest in the work of the panchayat.

I started taking a keen interest in the running of the local school and contacted the teachers. I also began to monitor the quality of the food being given to the children

I spoke and encouraged parents to send their children to school. The improvement of food quality and my monitoring of the teachers helped to improve child absenteeism and the children began to go to school regularly. I encouraged parents to send their daughters to school – earlier they had not been interested in educating them. Now there are 125 female children and 205 male students in the school.



Gangi Devi Nat, Gram Panchayat Chakdahi, Sirmore Block, Rewa MP, State: Madhya Pradesh



Armed with information, I feel stronger. More women are accompanying me in monitoring Schools and Aanganwadis and actively participate in looking developmental works in the village. The opportunity that I had through the reservation, all the women must be given, so that we women can live equally with men in the society.

MEETING RESOURCES

Videos

- Overview of The Hunger Project. Journey into the lives of hungry people in Africa, Asia and Latin America - and discover what becomes possible when people are empowered. [Watch video.](#)
- Cycle of Malnutrition in South Asia. The Hunger Project's strategy is designed to break the cradle-to-grave subjugation of girls and women that gives rise to chronic malnutrition in South Asia. [Watch video.](#)
- Women's Leadership in India. The Hunger Project trains and empowers 70,000 women elected to their village councils to be effective change agents for the end of hunger and poverty. [Watch video.](#)
- Turning the Tide: The Hunger Project Tsunami Response in India. After the devastation, villagers are empowered by The Hunger Project to take charge of their future and rebuild their communities. [Watch video.](#)

Magazine Articles

[News India Times \(Vol. XXXIX No. 29\) – The Hunger Project; Empowering Women to Be Change Agents by Ela Dutt.](#) The 30-year old Radhia Adivasi, *Sarpanch* of the village council (*panchayat*) in Chak Dehi village, Madhya Pradesh, has brought benefits to her 1,800 constituents...She is the kind of woman The Hunger Project has worked with over the years to build leadership capacity for local democracy to function and succeed...(download pdf of full article)

[Rivaaj Magazine – The Hunger Project: Empowering Women to Make a Change in Their Communities](#) It is clear that women's leadership in panchayats is transforming India. These elected women – now role models to other women in their communities – are altering the development agenda to address issues critical to village life...(link to full article)

[Women, Power and Politics – Two Million Women Leaders and Counting](#)

(An online exhibit of the International Museum of Women) Because women are traditionally responsible for meeting their families' basic needs, their contribution to local government has been crucial. It is clear that women's leadership in *panchayats* is transforming India...(link to full article).

RECOMMENDED BOOKS

Bumiller, Elisabeth. *May You Be the Mother of a Hundred Sons: A Journey Among the Women of India.* Ballantine Books, 1991

Lapierre, Dominique. *City of Joy.* Full Circle Publishing Ltd, 2000.

Markandaya, Kamala. *Nectar in a Sieve.* Signet Classics, 2002

Seth, Vikram. *A Suitable Boy: A Novel*. Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2005.

CHILDREN'S BOOKS

Returning this month, DFW will have book suggestions for children, tweens, and (hopefully) teens. While some books may be below your children's or grandchildren's reading level, I think they'll still hold great value in the insight to the culture and issues faced by the women and children we support that month. My 12 year old daughter and I have thoroughly enjoyed sharing this month's suggestions! I hope you enjoy them also.

Baya, Baya, Lulla-by-a, by Megan McDonald is a beautifully illustrated lullaby sung my Mata (mother) to her baby. Each page shows a glimpse into rural Indian life, including Mata weaving baby's first quilt with a belt loom, women gathering water from a community well and carrying jars on their heads, and the daily interaction with nature (Recommended ages 3 -6).

In the Heart of the Village, by Barbara Bash (Sierra Club Book) depicts the role of the Banyan Tree to village life in rural India. The colorful pages introduce the many foods and wares sold in the market, the multitude of animals that depend on the tree, and the general interconnectedness of life in rural India (Recommended ages 6+).

Younguncle Comes to Town, by Vandana Singh is a hilarious easy chapter book about an eccentric uncle who "rights" the many unfair situations he encounters in modern day rural India, including an unwanted arranged marriage intended for his sister, a woman tied to an ankle leash by an angry relative, the hunting of a tiger in a wildlife sanctuary, and general corruption. The issues are expertly portrayed to avoid frightening the young reader but create a great stepping off point to discussing these issues in age appropriate ways. Singh was born and raised in New Delhi, and became involved in women's and environmental issues at an early age (Recommended ages 8+).

SOCIALLY CONSCIOUS SHOPPING

[Buy an "I'm Tired of World Hunger" bracelet](#) made from recycled tires with a cylindrical recycled metal bead. For every \$10 bracelet sold, half is invested in The Hunger Project.



Zardozi (sometimes *zardosi*), is intricate metallic embroidery that originally came to India from Persia with the Moghuls. Long associated with the royal courts, the thread is usually gold, silver, or a multi-colored metal. Glass beads, shells, or sequins are worked into the patterns. Traditionally zardozi was done on silk, satin, or velvet. It decorated festive wear like wedding clothes. Today top designers use the ancient techniques in new ways on new fabrics. It's used not only on clothing but also on house wares (pillows, wall art) and is popular on purses and shawls. The goods made by Matrichaya's SHGs are made for the Indian market, but we can purchase zardozi made by other empowerment groups through fair trade importers. Novica carries beautiful examples of zardozi artistry in many forms, from tree ornaments to evening purses. Also checkout Marketplace India (highly recommended by one of our chapter leaders—thanks Carolyn!), which carries a variety of products made by Indian women in empowerment projects, and Ten Thousand Villages for Indian embroidery, textiles, clothing, and jewelry.

[http://www.novica.com/search/searchresults.cfm?searchtype=quick&txt=1®ionid=1&keyword=zardozi&keyw
ordsubmit=%C2%A0](http://www.novica.com/search/searchresults.cfm?searchtype=quick&txt=1®ionid=1&keyword=zardozi&keyw
ordsubmit=%C2%A0)

<http://www.marketplaceindia.org>

<http://www.tenthousandvillages.com>

DINING WITH WOMEN: Recipes from India

Chana Masala

2 T vegetable oil
1 medium onion, chopped
1 large clove of garlic, minced
1 T curry
1 T tomato paste
15 oz can of chick peas drained, reserving 3 T liquid
1/2 T lemon juice
1/2 t salt
fresh black pepper
crushed red pepper, optional to taste
1 T butter

First heat the oil on medium high heat. Fry onions until they get slightly brown. Reduce the heat to medium. Add garlic, paste and curry. Simmer and stir for about 2 minutes. Add liquid, chickpeas, salt, lemon juice and black pepper. Then simmer it for 5-6 minutes, stirring continuously. Add red pepper to taste. Add butter and stir a bit to melt it. Simmer and stir for 5 minutes or more or until the peas are softened and the dish is hot. Serve over rice

Madras Chicken Curry

2 lb chicken cubed
2 finely minced onions
3 *cloves garlic* minced
1 inch *ginger* minced
4 chopped ripe tomatoes
3 oz vegetable oil
3 gently crushed *cardamom pods*
6 *cloves*
2 inch *cinnamon stick*
1 tbsp. *ground coriander*
1 tsp. *ground turmeric*
1/2 tsp. *cumin*
1/2 *ground red chilies*
1/2 ground fenugreek
1 tsp. paprika
2 tbsp. lemon
Salt

Directions:

- In a deep saucepan heat the oil to a high temperature. Add the onions, fry until the onions take on a rich golden brown.
- Add ginger and garlic. Stir and cook for a minute. Now add all the spices. Fry for a minute or two.
- Turn heat to medium-low and add salt, chillies and tomatoes. Fry till tomatoes cook into a paste.
- Add chicken and coat the chicken with the spices. Saute the chicken and then add a cup of water. Bring the dish to boil then reduce the heat and simmer for 20 minutes or more.
Turn heat on low and cook on low until the meat falls easily off the bone and the curry thickens about 30 minutes.
- Add a cup of water. Bring to the boil then reduce the heat and simmer for 15 to 20 minutes.
- Just before serving, add lemon juice. Serve with rice.

Kadhahi Gosht

This Mughlai dish is traditionally cooked and even served in a wok-like dish called a Kadhahi. Serve Kadhahi Gosht with hot Chapatis (Indian flatbread) or Naans (tandoor baked Indian flatbread).

Prep Time: 3 hours

1 kg lamb/ mutton cut into 2" pieces

1 cup yogurt

2 tbsps garlic paste

2 tbsps lemon juice

2 tsps garam masala (see link below for recipe to make your own)

Salt to taste

3 tbsps vegetable/ canola/ sunflower cooking oil

4 green chillies slit lengthwise

2 tsps coriander powder

1 tsp cumin powder

2 medium tomatoes chopped fine

Ginger julliennes to garnish

Fresh chopped coriander to garnish

Directions:

- Mix the lamb/ mutton with the yogurt, garlic paste, lemon juice, [garam masala](#) and salt to taste, cover and allow to marinate for 3 hours.
- Heat the oil in a [Kadhahi](#) (or any other wok-like pan) on a medium flame. Add the green chillies and fry till they stop spluttering.
- Add the lamb with its marinade and fry, stirring frequently, for 5-7 minutes.
- Now add the tomatoes, coriander and cumin powder and mix well. Sprinkle some water over the meat, cover, simmer the flame and cook till the meat is done. Check occasionally and add more water if needed to prevent sticking and burning. Ideally this dish has a minimal amount of thick gravy.
- Turn off fire, garnish with ginger and coriander leaves and serve with hot [Chapatis \(Indian flatbread\)](#) or Naans.

Soupy Dal, American Style (4 Servings)

3 T. vegetable oil
1 onion, chopped
2 – 3 stalks celery, chopped
2 – 3 carrots, chopped
½ - 1 c. chopped mushrooms (opt)
1 T minced garlic, or 2 – 3 smashed cloves (not minced)
Salt & pepper
1 T or more curry powder, garam masala, or similar spice mix
½ c or more split green or yellow peas (or lentils, if you'd rather)

1. Put the oil in a deep skillet or broad saucepan and turn the heat to medium-high. Add the vegetables along with some salt and pepper and cook, stirring occasionally, until the vegetables start to soften (5 – 10 minutes). Add the spice mix and cook another minute or two, stirring.
2. Add the split peas, stir, and water to cover by about an inch or so. Simmer and cook, stirring occasionally, until the peas are tender, a half hour or so. Taste and adjust seasoning and serve.

Samosas with Potato and Peas (Aloo Mattar Samosas)

If made in the traditional style, samosas are a major time commitment. Normally you would make the dough from scratch and deep-fry them. They are delicious and truly easy if you use frozen puff pastry dough and bake them instead. Be creative with the filling. Curried ground lamb, or spinach, would also be delicious.

4T ghee, butter, oil or a combination
1c frozen peas
4 medium potatoes, peeled if desired and cut into cubes
2-3 cloves garlic, minced
1T fresh ginger, minced
1 medium onion, finely diced
2-3t garam masala
1t turmeric
½-1t cayenne pepper, or to taste
Salt to taste
3T finely chopped fresh coriander, or 1T ground
1 egg, lightly beaten with 1T milk
1 pkg frozen puff pastry, thawed

Line two baking sheets with parchment paper and set aside. Cook potatoes in a large pot of boiling salted water until fork tender, about 15 minutes. Drain and allow to cool slightly. When cool enough, coarsely mash the potatoes. Set aside. Now, preheat oven to 350 degrees. Heat desired oil in a large, high-sided sauté pan to medium. Cook the onion until softened, but not browned. Add garlic and ginger and cook, stirring until softened and fragrant. Add garam masala, turmeric and cayenne and mix

well. Add potatoes and mix to coat potatoes with masala mixture. Cook until potatoes start to brown slightly. Add the frozen peas and salt, cover, reduce heat to medium-low, and cook for 10 minutes, or until peas have softened and potatoes are fully cooked through, adding a little water or milk as necessary to keep from drying out. Garnish with fresh coriander. Mix to combine. Cool. Dust rolling surface with flour, and roll puff pastry out to a rectangle, about 1/8" thickness, with the longer side at the top. Using a pizza cutter or a knife, cut dough into 12 roughly equal squares. Place a tablespoonful of the potato mixture in the corner of square, not too close to the edge. Pull the opposite diagonal corner over to seal the package, brushing on the egg wash as glue. Continue in the same manner for the rest of the squares. Arrange on baking sheets, leaving space for the rising dough. Crimp edges with tines of a fork. Before baking, brush the tops of the samosas with egg wash and bake until puffed and golden brown, about 15 minutes. Serve warm with any chutney. Makes 24. Make extra – you'll need it.

Easy Curried Carrots (serves 6-8)

This could not be easier. If you want more color, garnish with chopped parsley or cilantro. If you want to make it saucier and serve over rice as a vegetarian main course, just add a teaspoon or two of flour when you add the curry powder to the melted butter, cook it with the curry powder, and then add some extra water when the time comes. Also, just about any vegetable, or combination of vegetables, could be prepared this way.

6T ghee or butter
2T curry powder
1 (1 lb) bag baby carrots
1/4t salt
1/4t black pepper
pinch cayenne or to taste
1T fresh lemon juice
1T honey
1c cashews, toasted and chopped
1/2c raisins

Melt ghee or butter in a large skillet over medium heat. Add curry powder, stir and heat for a few minutes. Add carrots, cayenne, salt and pepper and a couple of tablespoons of hot water, stir, cover and cook over medium to medium-high heat for about 5 minutes, stirring once or twice. When carrots are tender, which should not take more than 5 or 6 minutes total, turn off heat and stir in lemon juice, honey, cashews and raisin. Adjust seasonings and serve warm.

SOURCES

<http://thp.org>

<http://website1.wider.unu.edu/research/2004-2005/2004-2005-4/papers/ramachandran.pdf>

<http://www.fao.org/gender/en/agri-e.htm>

<http://www.ifpri.org/pubs/ib/ib33.pdf>

Photos courtesy of Paul Voorthuis/THP

Recipe adapted from <http://www.recipezaar.com/Curried-Carrots-99243>