

In 1993, India's Parliament passed a ground-breaking amendment that required one-third of the seats in village councils to be reserved for women. The passage of the law was a breakthrough for women in India, who faced a history of gender inequality, but it also was the beginning of a new set of challenges. Illiteracy, intimidation, and lack of education still prevent women from effectively participating in democracy.

The Hunger Project's goal in India is to give women the resources to overcome these challenges and impact their villages through participating in local government.



2009 Sarjini Prize Ceremnoy

In order to accomplish this, we aim to:

1. Strengthen women's leadership for increased and effective participation in panchayats (village councils);
2. Build networks and civil society alliances for women leaders;
3. Advocate for policies that support women's participation in democracy; and
4. Engage with media for positive coverage of elected women's work.

As of September, THP had trained approximately 917 elected women representatives (EWRs) in 2009. Along with these EWRs, and 38 partner organizations, The Hunger Project is currently reaching over 89 million people in 10 states across India with its advocacy and mobilization programs. Since the program began in 1984, we have trained over 71,000 elected women leaders to be more effective leaders in their communities.

### ***Details on Progress in 2009***

Achievement	Measurement
Training of Trainers (TOTs) workshop	41 workshops, which trained 281 trainers
Women's Leadership Workshops and Follow-up workshops	81
SWEEP – Pre-election Campaign	111 meetings across Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Karnataka
Federation <sup>1</sup> -building meetings in Karnataka	51 meetings with participation of 1,463 Elected Women Representatives (EWRs). In the spring, federation representatives from 21 districts met at the state level.
Launch of SUGRAMA, a state-wide network of EWRs in Karnataka	582 EWRs attended the group's first meeting

<sup>1</sup> A Federation is a network of Elected Women Representatives at the state or national level. Federations enable women to collectively advance issues at a higher level than otherwise possible.

Achievement	Measurement
Federations facilitated in Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Bihar	32 block-level federations with 1,900 EWRs members. In the Spring, 32 block-level federations with 1,900 EWRs members.
Gram Sabha tracking <sup>2</sup>	123
Women attending Gram Sabha Workshops	555
Media workshops	10 media workshops from April – October 2009; In the spring, 173 journalists interfaced with EWRs. Several mainstream newspapers in India wrote about EWRs, and the annual THP-sponsored Sarojini Naidu Prize received 1,347 entries.
National Platform for Promoting Decentralization (NPPD) <sup>3</sup>	249 organizations have become members of NPPD in 2009

### THP-India Highlights from 2009

Strengthening Women Leaders in India: The Hunger Project supports the formation of federations among elected women leaders, which act as networks for knowledge sharing and collective strength. In the states of Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka and Rajasthan, women leaders are creating federations at the district and state levels to voice their concerns as a collective unit. Priority issues include 50 percent reservation of seats in local government for women, removal of two-child norm laws<sup>4</sup> and increased transparency and support between levels of government.

Improving Disaster Preparedness: To strengthen local governance and improve disaster preparedness in 17 tsunami-affected areas, The Hunger Project facilitated the formation of contingency plans for use by each of the panchayats, including digitized maps that will help villagers evacuate in times of natural disasters and developing the capacity of the community for managing disasters.

Encouraging More Women to Participate in Effective Democracy: Citizens of the state of Karnataka recently elected women to 43% of panchayat seats in the state (10% more than the government-mandated quota of 33%), due in large part to The Hunger Project's SWEEP campaigns, which encourage women to participate in elections.

New Federation of Women Leaders Launched: In the spring of 2009, THP-India officially launched SUGRAMA, a network of 3,500 elected women representatives, which covers 75% of the districts in the state. These women leaders will now have a unified platform from which to speak, and the strength and support that comes from that solidarity.

<sup>2</sup> Gramsabhas (general assemblies) are open community meetings, which all village leaders are required to attend. THP mobilizes women in the village to attend and participate. THP tracks Gram Sabhas across the country to document and assess the role of women's leadership within them in an attempt to gauge the impact of THP trainings in building the leadership of elected women representatives.

<sup>3</sup> The NPPD brings together stakeholders to consolidate lessons-learned, share experiences and insights on decentralization and create a mechanism through which existing expertise can be used towards systemic reforms that would strengthen the voice of the poor within governance. THP-India serves as the Secretariat of the NPPD.

<sup>4</sup> The "two-child norm," meant to curb population growth, is a legal provision allowing the removal of elected officials with more than two children. In practice it is only used against women – men with more than two children can avoid removal by applying for divorce.

Sarojini Naidu Prize Awarded: On October 2, 2009, The Hunger Project (THP)-India hosted the ninth annual Sarojini Naidu Prize ceremony. India's Minister of State for External Affairs, Dr. Shashi Tharoor was the event's principal guest of honor. Social activist Ms. Aruna Roy and Director General of Doordarshan (India's leading national television network) Ms. Aruna Sharma, also attended as special guests of honor. The prize was awarded to four journalists working in English, Hindi, Tamil, and Marathi.

New Partnerships in India: In 2009, THP-India has successfully sustained its operations in the heartland states through focused and successful efforts in fundraising. THP-India received a grant from the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) to raise awareness of women parliamentary representatives regarding the Right to Information (RTI) Act, which helps counter corruption and promote accountability in the councils. The United Nations Democracy Fund (UNDP) also awarded THP-India one of 70 successful grants (out of 2,100 applicants) for a project to strengthen women's leadership in local democracy in the state of Rajasthan. Additionally, the Embassy of New Zealand has supported THP-India's women's advocacy work.

Ongoing partnerships include: The Government of India, the Ribbink Van Den Hoek Foundation, the Environmental Defence Fund, the Ford Foundation, SALA IDA (SLK International), the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), and Symantec.

Major Strides in Demonstrating our Impact: THP has made significant progress in our Impact Assessment program, enabling us to powerfully demonstrate our progress. In April 2009 the first major phase of this work was completed. With the input of program staff in the field and technical guidance from monitoring and evaluation professionals, THP developed a set of performance indicators for each country. As of September 2009, we began to consistently collect and log quarterly indicators that tie directly to our programmatic goals and activities.

Book THP's Work Published in India: The THP-commissioned book *Sarpanch Sahib: Changing the Face of India* was published by Harper Collins in September 2009. It is now available in every bookstore across India. *Sarpanch Sahib* is inspired by the everyday courage shown by the one million elected women leaders in Gram Panchayats who exercise their leadership amidst severe odds.

THP's Partnership Featured in Documentary: THP's partnership with the Environmental Defense Fund has culminated in the production of the 40-minute documentary entitled: *Arohan: A Climate Change Story*.

### **Future Plans**

- Planning and implementing a campaign to recruit large numbers of rural women to participate in elections in 2010 – by voting, volunteering, or running for office – in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Jammu and Kashmir, and Karnataka.
- Rolling out the Right to Information Campaign in Bihar and Orissa.
- Continuing to develop the monitoring and evaluation of all programs.

### **Profiles of Village Leaders in India**



Dalimba Majhi, Ward member, Orissa

In 2007, when the seat in the ward was reserved for Scheduled Tribe (women), Dalimba Majhi aged 24, was asked by people in her area to contest, as she happened to be the most educated of women in their ward. A ninth-grade graduate and a first-time entrant, she was encouraged by her father-in-law, who saw this as an opportunity to do something worthwhile in their village. She contested against one other woman and won by a margin of 60 votes.

Soon after, her electoral victory, Dalimba attended a Women's Leadership Workshop (WLW) organized by THP in Golamunda Block. Following the WLW, she shed her initial hesitation and her shyness evaporated.

Golamunda block is known to be one of the most misruled blocks of Kalahandi district. Here, even male ward members find it difficult to get any work done due to continuous interference and harassment by unruly elements (contractors, corrupt officials) and village women generally do not attend Gram Panchayat meetings. Yet, in a short stint of two years, Dalimba has managed to get a road constructed under the centrally sponsored National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS), facilitated fourteen old age pensions and one Indira Awas Yojana (a government housing scheme) house for her ward. This is a commendable achievement for such a young woman.

Apart from being a ward member, Dalimba is also an *Asha* worker (Accredited Social Health Activist) under Janani Suraksha Yojana [Women's Protection Programme, National Rural Health Mission (NRHM)]. Until now, she has successfully motivated and assisted 20 mothers in safe delivery at the local hospital. Her readiness to assist any person in distress has endeared her to the villagers. Coming from a community where female literacy is very low, Dalimba gives special emphasis to girl child education. When she came to know that many girls were dropping out of school after grade III, she went door to door urging the parents to let their girl children complete their primary school education, and to ensure they could at least read and write Oriya competently. Her campaign paid off and five girls, who had earlier dropped out of school, are now in grade VI. Dalimba further wants to improve the overall education facilities at Golamunda to ensure a better life for her own as well as all other children in the village.

Apart from her father-in-law, Dalimba's husband gives her his complete support. The people in her ward are very happy with her work, and they cooperate fully with her. Her role as an *Asha* worker also entails visits to a wide variety of people in her ward, who now also come to her with their problems, in addition to her own constituents.

Nevertheless, Dalimba rues that a lot remains to be done.

### Khusboon Khatoon: An Elected Woman Leader Fighting Domestic Violence

Khusboon Khatoon is a Ward Member in a post reserved for women in her gram panchayat (village council) in Siwan District in India. She is 32 years old.



Khusboon Khatoon was a child bride at 12 years of age. She was widowed early. However, even though Khusboon's Muslim community is not against the remarriage of widows, she, in consultation with her mother-in-law, decided to stay on in her marital home. Khusboon single handedly worked and looked after her mother-in-law and two small children. She recalls that following her husband's death she lived a life of misery, because widows in the village community are shunned and cannot participate in the community festivities such as marriages or religious festivals.

The community was impressed by her grit, dedication and hard work and asked Khusboon to stand for elections. Khusboon says she seized the opportunity as in her words "I always wanted to do something so that other women do not have to go through such suffering."

After becoming elected, Khusboon participated in The Hunger Project's (THP's) Women's Leadership Workshop (WLW). The workshop provided Khusboon the first inkling that she could actually work for the betterment of women who had undergone similar child marriages and widowhood like herself. She was given encouragement and motivation to fulfill her dreams. Following the WLW, she learned to read and write.

Last year, Khusboon undertook a survey of 1,500 homes in her constituency to learn about domestic violence. Her survey revealed the following: 20 women had been abandoned and returned to their maternal homes; 20 women had gone back to their maternal homes and then returned; seven women lived alone; three women had committed suicide by swallowing poison; two women had set themselves on fire and died subsequently; and one woman had jumped into a well with her children. Only three women had maintenance under Criminal Procedure Code CRPC 125 (a law requiring a monthly allowance). These cases had been suppressed, and none of them had been registered with law enforcement agencies.

After discovering this, Khusboon organized a three-day legal training for 45 women on their legal rights and on domestic violence. Khusboon also convened a *Gram Sabha* (general assembly) to hear the case of a deserted woman. This is notable, as these issues are never taken up in these forums. She has, in addition, ensured that BPL (Below Poverty Line) cards (for food rations), disability pensions, and widow pensions are given to the appropriate people. Khusboon has resolved many domestic violence cases, and she has even brought some cases to the District Courts. Now, people in her constituency call upon her to resolve matters of domestic violence.





An Elected Representative in India Charts a New Course for Her Community: Rami Devi Nai is an elected representative in her village council in India. Her face tells the story of a life of hardship, but her eyes shine with her unrelenting commitment to her community.

Through attending workshops facilitated by The Hunger Project, she has found a way to make a difference through her position. Twice a week she visits the local school to make sure that the teachers have turned up and are doing their job, and she asks the headmaster to list all the kids that attend class.

Rami has gotten to know all the poor people in her village and has mapped out where they live. She makes a point to visit the food distribution station to see that the right people are receiving their allowance.

She keeps track of all this information by making drawings in her note-books; her friends help her with the notes. She is not literate. Yet she is writing a new future for the people of her community.

#### Kenchamma, Panchayat Member in Chikmagalore

Kenchamma has served four consecutive terms in Neralekere Panchayat of Chikmagalore District; thrice as a panchayat member and once as Sarpanch (president). Before becoming a panchayat member, she was active in the Self-Help Group in her panchayat. She belongs to a Scheduled Caste and is educated only up to the fifth standard. Initially, she was sidelined by another panchayat member because of her caste and gender.



Kenchamma participated in THP's Women's Leadership Workshop. Slowly, she overcame the hurdles on her path by mobilizing women in the Gram Sabha. She has proven to be an effective leader. Kenchamma has reclaimed panchayat land from encroachers and constructed a school and an Aanganwadi centre. She has built houses for the homeless and also worked for the welfare of senior citizens by ensuring that they receive an old-age pension. She has successfully petitioned senior government officials in the area for total electrification of her village.

Kenchamma is an active participant of the THP-supported Taluk Federation in Tarikere Block and is a member of the Steering Committee of SUGRAMA, the state federation of elected women in Karnataka.