



TRIBAL HEALTH INITIATIVE



Wishing all our friends and well wishers a
Happy New Year...
we are blessed to have your friendship.

Last year was our 25th anniversary and we chose to celebrate it by unconventional methods – no functions or pomp, but by asking the community what they thought about us and by having a retreat to look inwards on our journey.



Listening to the Community: Very often, those of us involved with work in a community, never pause to ask the community what they think of us and our work. We had an external evaluation done by Public Health specialist, Dr. Mani Kalliath. The process was wholly community based – over 5 days there were several Focus Group Discussions – with the community, farmers, artisans, staff etc – mostly in the villages. We wanted to know what they thought about our work, where have we not met their expectations, what is the future direction THI should take etc. The report is out – and it is a public document – so those of you who are interested, please get in touch by email. It highlighted our success, but also pointed out that we have a lot to re-think – especially in the community health aspect, which was slowly straying from a community empowering mode to a more disease oriented one.

Clap or Cry?

Marimuthu from Rakkod village in the Kalrayan Hills was brought unconscious a week back. He had been to North India as a lorry cleaner, a job he was forced to take because there was no rain to do farming and no jobs in the hills to support his family. He was unconscious for 2 days in the village – the 'shaman', in a trance had told his wife – take him to Sittilingi only, anywhere else he will die!! He was diagnosed as cerebral malaria – very rare here and has a very high mortality, best treated in super specialty hospitals. But because the 'shaman' had said Sittilingi, the relatives refused to take him elsewhere. So we were forced to treat him – Marimuthu is up and walking and back to work. No, we are not clapping – we are crying at the state where tribals have to migrate and get diseases they never had here.



Taking Stock: Every 3 years all Staff of THI go to a remote retreat camp in nearby Yercaud to reflect, discuss and plan for the next 3 years. This being our 25th year, it was definitely

indicated. In 2 batches of 2 days each, it was a great time to bond, reaffirm and rejuvenate our pledge to help the tribals of our area. Our work dissected and our future mapped – lets hope THI's future work reflects the efforts taken.

Migration: is one of the biggest public health problems - but our successive governments want people to migrate to the cities... that they think is "development." We think differently! For us development is creating jobs in rural areas so that tribals are not forced to leave their homes in search of work. Development is making villages independent! Development is strengthening the self respect of the local population. And to do so it is very important to make the local economy stronger -



to keep the money circulating within the village area. An example of this is reflected in all our work.

All our buildings including the hospital are built stabilized mud blocks. These bricks are all produced locally ! 94% of the material which is used for the production comes from natural local resources. The bricks are sun dried and not burnt, so the production of our bricks does not harm the environment. In the process of brick making, almost no money goes outside the village. It circulates within and helps the villagers create a better and more independent life for themselves! As we grow, the village grows. We believe that health care is not only about a healthy body and mind, but also about an economically and socially secure environment!

Rains and follow up: It rained very little this year. A few months before we had started work on water conservation, starting with Mullikadu village. The villagers and the staff of THI doing "shramdan" on 2 check dams – desilting it. Even this small rain filled up the dams – and well water went up by 4 feet in the downstream wells. Seeing this



people are coming forward to have some water stopped in their lands too – Selvaraj of Kaliankuttaidid a Check dam to store water from 2 springs that come from the hillside to his land. THI supports such ventures by bearing 75% of the costs. We look forward to funds for this, because water is so important for survival.



Visitors from Kerala: We had 15 Panchayat Presidents visit Sittilingi – recommended by KILA {Kerala Institute of Local Admin}. The "Sittilingi model" obviously has admirers from other States too – they came to look at our Farmers Collective, our attempt at local food security, women taking control of their lives – and lastly at our low cost health systems run almost entirely by the local tribals. And it was two way – we learnt a lot from those experienced members about local governance too.

Battling Tuberculosis: For centuries TB or tuberculosis has been the scourge of society, killing millions every year. We "celebrated" World TB day by having a series of education classes and skits by our nurses for the patients here. We get at least 2 or 3 patients every OP day, usually from far off villages where we don't work in. Nutrition is a key to eliminating TB, but no Government program ever supplements nutrition for TB patients yet – they believe that just tablets will cure all. So also migration – is a huge contributor to TB ; here too the powers that be never encourage local enterprise, but want to centralise production and employment to the cities. The poor pay for it by contacting this killer disease.



Life Insurance – Community Based: When 2 of our young farmers died some months ago in a bike accident, leaving just their wives and small children to fend for themselves; we all felt upset that as a community we could not do much for them. For this we have set up a Farmers Family Security Scheme. Each farmer and his wife chips in with Rs 100/- per year and if they lose their life – we guarantee Rs 50,000/- to their family. Each year, if nothing happens, the amount gets accumulated and we are aiming to give the sum assured of Rs 1 lakh for a premium of Rs.100/- in a couple of years time. Just wondering if any of the Insurance companies can beat that !!

Thank you all for trusting us and being part of us. Friends of Sittilingi and the Donor Partners are the pillars which support our endeavour. May the New Year bring fun and joy to you and your dear ones.

Team THI

Your help could mean a lot to us, [CLICK HERE](#) and donate.