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Newsletter of SAVE A FAMILY PLAN (SAFP)

Issue 16: April 2011

"partnering with the poor for a just world"

My Visit to India

Rev. Michael Ryan, former President of SAFP Canada

Years ago I read that when Pope John Paul II visited India his reaction was, "So many people!" I understand exactly what he meant. The state of Kerala, for example, is the size of Nova Scotia and has a population the size of Canada. India is truly rich in the resource that counts most in any country: people. In many other respects, however, it is very poor.

I have been associated with Save A Family Plan (SAFP) for almost 45 years and served as its President for 30 years. I was involved in bringing it to St. Peter's Seminary, getting it



Father Ryan joins families gathering for the Annual SAFP Family Day with the Hyderabad Social Service Society in Andhra Pradesh State, India

incorporated, and setting policy and planning projects. Yet I had never been to India. Finally, in what was a dream come true, I visited India from January 5th to 26th, 2011. What I discovered was a beautiful country filled with warm and hospitable people. It was a truly wonderful experience!

I spent time at the Head Office and training centre in Parappuram, a suburb of Kochi (population two million), about 10 kilometres from the international airport. I travelled by car to various parts of Kerala and of the neighbouring state of Tamil Nadu. I went by air to Nagpur, Maharashtra State, which is almost in the centre of India and to Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh State, which is the IT centre of India. In all these places my priority was to meet the poor, especially families who were beneficiaries of SAFP and to visit projects in which SAFP has been involved, along with the Canadian government (CIDA) and other organizations. What are my reactions? Briefly, the following.

First, the family assistance program, which is the heart of SAFP, is successful in a way that far surpasses my expectations. I found a very careful procedure in place for identifying the poorest of the poor, a network of trained animators, mostly poor women, who visit these families at least once a month and guide their efforts to become self-reliant through an income-generating project, a great spirit of co-operation among the Christians, Hindus and Moslems involved, and most of all, an atmosphere of hope.

Second, the sanghams, or neighbourhood self-help groups that SAFP helped to get started everywhere, composed mostly of poor women, Christian, Hindu and Moslem, are heart-warming. These women have a sense of their dignity and have learned how to work together effectively to bring about needed change in their communities.

Third, projects in which SAFP is involved as a partner are awesome: watershed projects that bring water to the homes of the poor; a school for tribal girls that is giving them a first-class education; the Sakhi Centre that, among other things, gives abused women a new start; a new hospital for people with HIV/AIDS that SAFP will soon assist.

We hear in the media about India's booming economy and the growth of its middle class. The reality however is that the vast majority of people in this wonderful country are terribly poor, often living in one or two room, dirt-floor dwellings. SAFP is a source of light and hope to millions of these people. It is a compassionate, extremely well-run organization that can still guarantee 100% of what people donate does reach the poor. It has identified hundreds of very poor families that are looking for a sponsor. It is eminently deserving of our support.

State Profile: Tamil Nadu

Cassandra Griffon, SAFP Staff

Tamil Nadu is located on the eastern coast of the Indian subcontinent's southern tip. It is roughly the same size as Greece and home to more than 62 million people. The capital city, Chennai, is a major metropolitan centre and the fifth largest city in India. Tamil culture is rich in music, literature, and dance. The Tamil language continues to be used throughout the state. Tamil Nadu has a long coastline that stretches along the Bay of Bengal, which made it among the most severely affected states in the 2005 tsunami. The yearly monsoons allow for a strong agricultural production of bananas, flowers, mangos, coconuts, coffee, tea, and sugar cane, etc. During the dry season, there is a high risk of water scarcity and drought. In some areas, the dry season is ideal for the harvesting of salt. Shallow, rectangular pools are filled with ocean water and the salt is collected as the water evaporates in the hot sun. During my recent visit to Tuticorin, a city on the coast where Save A Family Plan works, we met

with some workers collecting salt just outside the city. These men and women often work 14 hours a day in the hot sun and suffer with health issues because of their work. The continuous contact with the drying salt is damaging to their skin, particularly on their hands and feet, and can make it difficult for them to walk. Many will go blind because of the bright sun reflecting off the salt. Save A Family Plan's partner diocese in Tuticorin is engaged in working with these men and women to improve their situation. Along



with fighting for better working conditions from the employers, they also teach the workers the importance of wearing sunglasses to prevent blindness and proper protection for their hands and feet. Through education and awareness, they are working to achieve justice for salt workers and other marginalized groups in Tamil Nadu.

Success Through Education Breaking the Cycle of Illiteracy

Laura Stinson, SAFF Staff

A solid foundation of education for any individual, family, community or country has the ability to improve and perpetuate success and stability in order to achieve empowerment and social change. There is a close relationship between literacy and power. The objective of basic education and literacy is to enable people and communities to take control of their destiny and society. It allows them to advocate for their own rights as well as mobilize people to access government resources and benefits.

It can be deceiving in a country like India which appears to be achieving universal primary education, when in actuality there is a large contrast between education in the densely populated urban cities compared to the poor rural villages. The bulk of illiterate people live in these rural areas, where social and economic barriers keep the marginalized illiterate. Government programs, which do exist, are incredibly difficult to access for these people, without basic literacy skills and guidance.

There is a lack of emphasis on the importance of education in these villages due to socio-economic priorities and the struggle to meet basic human needs. Pressure and expectations are placed on young people to drop out of school to assist with jobs at home such as helping to raise a family, or income generating work like farming or fishing to help pay for basic family needs. The importance of education is not instilled in the children by their parents which will continue the cycle of illiteracy, poverty and inequality.

Save A Family Plan and partner dioceses have developed programs to address the educational needs of rural villages.



Teaching adults basic literacy skills in Balasore, in Orissa State, India

Recently, starting in 2010 and continuing into this year, the *Udhagamandalam Social Service Society* with Save A Family Plan are implementing a non-formal education program to improve the levels of literacy and awareness among children and adults in five impoverished rural villages where literacy rates are extremely low. The youth component of this program will focus on bringing education to 500 children under the age of 15 who

are scoring below 50% in school. They will have access to tutoring classes to help improve their marks and their tuition will be paid. For adults there is an adult literacy program which focuses not only on skill development but also encouraging adults to nurture, respect and value education. There are also courses for adults that focus on accessing government resources and benefits. Ten self-help groups will be organized to facilitate awareness training on issues such as gender equity, hygiene, health and the utilization of natural resources.

Schooling does not have to be limited to the teaching of reading, writing, and gaining a basic primary education. It can go beyond that definition and encompass other forms of learning



Santhosha, embroidering on her new tailoring machine in Chinthal Pally, Andhra Pradesh State, India

such as trade education which involves gaining skills and knowledge for a specific purpose, for example starting a business.

Save A Family Plan helps adults develop income generation projects to sustainably support themselves and their families. In Chinthal Pally village of Andhra Pradesh lives Santhosha. Santhosha dropped out of school at an early age. Through the *Hyderabad Archdiocese Social Service Society*, she was taught tailoring skills, so that she could seek employment or start her own business. She learned stitching, cutting methods, measurements, and machine and hand embroidery. Upon completing this course, Santhosha started her own tailoring business and began to earn 50-75 rupees per day to help support her family. Opportunities like this give adults the tools to succeed in starting their own business. They become more independent and gain self-confidence in their ability to help themselves and their families.

Ultimately the goal of such projects as this is to ensure the participation of families and communities in the education of their children. This can end the cycle of problems associated with illiteracy so that future generations are able to move forward and improve their quality of life.

Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) Update

Save A Family Plan gratefully acknowledges the recent funding approval for the "Sustainability, Participation, Empowerment and Decentralization (SPED) III" program. In partnership with CIDA, SAFF will implement this exciting five-year program with 29 partners in 580 villages within 10 states of India. The areas of focus for this extensive program are: Economic Growth; Food Security; Education; Health & Hygiene; Gender; Environment; Capacity Building and Good Governance. The participants in the SPED III program will take part in the process of gaining rights, control and ownership over their development results.



We gratefully acknowledge the support of the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) in the funding of this newsletter
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Canada BN 11914 1943 RR0001 / U.S.A. 98-600-4051

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