

## **EARTHWATCH INSTITUTE FIELD REPORT 2004**

**Earthwatch Institute Mission:** *Earthwatch engages people worldwide in scientific field research and education to promote the understanding and action necessary for a sustainable environment.*

Earthwatch Institute uses the UNESCO Definition of a Sustainable Environment: *A sustainable environment is one in which the natural environment, economic development and social life are seen as mutually dependent - and the interaction between them contributes to the sustainability and enhancement of the quality of people's lives and the natural environment.*

This field report will be publicised on our web link with the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) World Conservation Monitoring Centre (WCMC) at [www.unep-wcmc.org](http://www.unep-wcmc.org). This website is available to the general public.

**Project Title: Maternal and Child Healthcare in India**

**Principal Investigator (s): Nithya Balaji, R. Jeevanandham and Uttara Bharath**

**Position/Affiliations: Executive Trustee, Project Director and Founding Trustee of Nalamdana Charitable Trust - Chennai, India.**

**Research Site(s) (geographic location, include coordinates if known, e.g.**

**Lat/Long):**

**Urban slums and select rural villages in Chennai and state of Tamil Nadu.**

**Co-ordinated for the State: 80 E.Long. and 8 to 13 N.Lat (approx).**

**Local Management Status of the Research Site(s) (e.g. National Park, RAMSAR Site, World Heritage Site, IBA etc.):**

**“Food for Thought” is a communication research project, using nutrition education among target groups of women and children in the Southern state of Tamil Nadu, India - a social science (behaviour change communication research project.)**

**Scientific names of primary species being studied: Homo sapiens**

## **Key Research Objectives:**

- To research cultural beliefs and practices of target groups of women, children and stake holders in select urban slums and villages, with a view to improve their nutrition.
- To address key issues through innovative and participatory communication using entertainment education.
- To track key indicators for behaviour change; document these for scaling up and sharing with partner organisations.
- To produce and field test IEC materials on key issues- audio, video, games and drama.

## **Data Collection and Results**

a) Give a concise account of the data you have collected during the past field season.

During the 2004 field season, the Nalamdana team of 15 members along with Earthwatch volunteers (totalling 22) covered:

- Approximately 7800 people through 12 dramas- eight in rural villages and four in urban sites.
- We also facilitated over nine meetings among 70 adolescent girls in urban sites, during field dates and another 15 during the rest of the months. Four health camps were conducted for the members to track their Hb levels.
- Continued to supplement the daily free meals provided by the state- at two day care centres, covering around 75 pre school children in two urban sites. This is a daily program, which is run when the field teams are not present also using a peer educator and local volunteer. We held monthly weight and height check ups recording improvement in their growth. (findings attached)
- We field tested six posters produced by the centrally funded state agency working on Maternal and child health programs- on our own initiative, among intended audience both urban and rural. This will help us design more effective posters during the coming year. This central agency will see the completed report by 2004 end and are likely to involve us as a resource agency in their IEC training activities.
- In collaboration with our partner organisations, World Vision, WCC College for women- Nutrition Department, and Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS-WB-III funded by World Bank) we covered new sites in their respective project areas- see report on drama enclosed.
- We created two new scripts for street drama- addressing issues of health and social practices, which have been enacted for the first time during this project period in 2004.

- We continued to field test the drama on pre natal health in new sites. Evaluation of pre and post play knowledge and attitude continues to be documented. Pre and post play questions and feed back have been submitted to Earthwatch Institute.

b) What progress have you made towards achieving your original objectives?

The original long-term objectives were:

1. To address the alarming levels of malnutrition among women and children in the state of Tamil Nadu.
2. To create appropriate innovative communication tools to address identified communication objectives and key issues that emerged from baseline survey through years one and two.
3. To document and record best practices and use lessons learned to scale up and share with partner organisations
4. To create and field test participatory teaching tools- audio, video, games, dramas etc.

**Progress:** We have moved through the baseline years of 2001 and 2, created several dramas scripts and set in place two interesting pilot projects in the target communities and are in the process of monitoring the same. We have successfully created a network of partnering organisations who regularly team up with us, in both urban and rural areas, often sharing costs and using our group as resource organisation for training their own teams. As per schedule- we move into our fifth year of the project- we intend widening our reach geographically and through other forms of communication- and also will be converting more field tested scripts into training films.

c) Please provide a summary of your results.

1. "Kalyana Malai"(meaning wedding garland)- the street play on pre natal health. Scripted by our team, this play has been enacted in 10 sites during 2004 and earlier in more than 25 sites between 2001-3. Each time covering an audience of 500 to 1000 people. The pre and post play evaluation done have indicated the misconceptions and cultural practices among the young women and men in such semi literate communities. We were able to record immediate knowledge and attitude change and have documented the same. We staged this same play for around 1300 factory workers in Chennai (young female workers in garment export units, funded by our partner Global Alliance for Workers and Communities-N.Delhi) We have also created new scripts to address emerging issues. We have been able to adapt this story to address key topical issues- like a. benefits of breast-feeding, and b. importance of vitamin A.

Pre and post play questionnaire used to elicit immediate knowledge change have yielded positive results. The survey is ongoing as we cover new areas every season.

2. We have continued to supplement the daily feeding of 70 children (pre-schoolers between the age of 2.5 years and 5 years) in two-day care centres. The state run free meal program is being augmented by our volunteer teams .The monthly weight and height measurement indicate marked improvement within the first 3

months, however after this the levels tend to plateau as there are other reasons that hamper rapid change (like frequent infections, illness of children) and as this is the only major meal they get in the day. On going monitoring will give us further indications.

3. The adolescent girls meetings have progressed to more than 25 totally. 30 girls in two slums continue to meet weekly. They have reported behaviour changes in their attitude to health and food intake. This has been documented. They are now accessing specific skills and training to further empowering themselves. This is an ongoing behaviour change project and separate reports are attached with this document.
4. New scripts to address specific identified socio cultural problems- of female infanticide and suicide prevention were undertaken this year. The same has been enacted in a few locations. The scripts will be further modified and fine-tuned before field-testing them.
5. Experimental novel partnerships – have been made- with the World Bank funded ICDS Project- by our group being allowed to perform in peri-urban villages where they run their project. We have teamed up with their field workers and enacted the pre natal health play. We hope to get support from this project in the future through our group being accepted as a resource group for training their field workers.
6. The Women's Christian College- (WCC), Chennai- has a recognised Nutrition course. The department concerned have partnered us in one health camp and we have invited their senior students to intern with us and work on this project. This would be the first time an Indian educational institution will recognise field projects undertaken with us- as part of their formal course. (Most Indian educational institutions coming under the Madras University are very inflexible and rigid in their rules. They do not encourage students to spend time out of the structured course.)
7. We field tested select posters produced by the ICDS-WB-III, Central Government run agency, to learn what works best in the field. A process evaluation is enclosed with this report. We intend compiling a final report by Dec. 2004 end and share with this agency, who have already partnered us this year for field programs.

### **Significance/Benefits of Research**

- a) What is/are the significance/benefits of your research at the following levels?

#### **Local (in the area of the research site)**

- Appreciable behaviour change has been registered among our target groups within the first four years. Encouraging results are emerging from both children and adolescent girls covered through our pilot interventions.

- Other community based organisations and research organisations include us in workshops and planning seminars covering different aspects of Nutrition and Child health. Example- the M.S. Swaminathan Research Institute Chennai, and C.A.G.- Consumer Action Group and the Madras Institute of Development Studies. State level discussions have happened where we have participated and shared our inputs. The MSSRF organised the 30<sup>th</sup> session of the U.N. standing Committee on nutrition in Chennai- see details under the “international “ section that follows immediately.
- Local colleges offering Nutrition courses have started inviting our core members to address and train their students in using theatre to reach the un-reached. Example- the Women’s Christian College (WCC), The MGR Janaki College of arts and Science.
- Local media coverage of one of our programs has resulted in more requests from other organisations. State wise- our trips into rural Tamil Nadu have created strong partnership with World Vision Tamil Nadu project and invitations from service providers and hospitals with community health programs. (The press report was submitted to Earthwatch Institute).
- We have been part of the Tamil Nadu Nutrition Network- an informal task force funded by the UNICEF, involving the state Govt. Health Depts. And other NGOs working in the same areas of health and nutrition. So our future training materials will have a ready pool of takers, we are invited as resource persons in consultation meetings held on school feeding/ child nutrition etc. at State Government level NGO meets.

### **National**

- Global Alliance for Communities and Workers- located at New Delhi commissioned several programs on pre natal health for factory workers in Chennai- after seeing our play on pre natal health. We have been regularly covering about 1800 women factory workers through 2003-4. Our research base has therefore expanded to include women in the work place. The GA funds the cost of these programs and Earthwatch volunteers have helped with those programs that happened during field dates.
- We hope to get the UNICEF office in India interested in our results and methodologies and plan to disseminate our materials. We are identifying specific sponsors for state level mass media campaigns, in which we hope to get the local UNICEF office interested.

### **International**

So far, awareness for this research project internationally has only been through Earthwatch institute’s efforts. We seek wider exposure after 2005 onwards when we will have impressive findings to share. We would also need additional support to create our own suite of training materials on these issues.

Ms. Balaji, the P.I. was invited to attend the Thirtieth session of the United Nations Systems Standing Committee on Nutrition from 3-7<sup>th</sup> March 2003 organised by M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation in co-operation with the Government of Tamil Nadu where the latest research and development happening in the field was presented. This took place in Chennai and Ms. Balaji was able to participate in specific sessions during the 3 days.

Our project research findings are all process evaluation results and are not quantitative in nature. Our project itself explores methodology and creates innovative ways of reaching semi literate audiences. We will have a consolidated report to share by 2005 middle- covering our baseline research data collected through 2001-2003, which we hope Earthwatch or an appropriate agency will be interested in publishing.

b) How do your findings contribute to issues of sustainability?

This is a health awareness program. The findings will directly contribute to behaviour change among the target audiences and be shared as a model with partner organisations. Once we start to create specific IEC (information-education-communication) materials in local languages, the dissemination of these materials will sustain the future re-production costs. As an organisation committed to Strategic Behaviour Change Communication, we are moving into training and skills development for partner organisations and educational institutions. Health and Nutrition education is an ongoing process.

## **Dissemination of Results**

a) Have you provided details of results from your research to or within:

- Scientific papers
  - Please provide full references – not yet.
- Management plans and reports
  - By who, for whom, and used by which agencies- already shared in previous section.
  - All annual activities and field reports are available with Earthwatch.
  - A consolidated report of baseline data will be ready by March 2005- to be shared with Earthwatch first and then with partnering organisations. Hope to share with renowned research institutions based in Chennai- like M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation and also with the local UNICEF office.
- Presentations
  1. Periodic presentations have been done for local colleges, partner organizations- like Mediscan Foetal Research Centre-Chennai and other prospective funders/corporate sponsors-local.
  2. Small gatherings of 10 to 15 professionals and in educational institutions- like the communication course students- some 60 in number at the Madras University.
  3. Early stage of the project- was presented at the EW annual conference- as one of the projects being featured that year- an oral presentation with power point slides - roughly some 200 people at the Tate Auditorium-Boston. This is available with EW-Social Science Dept.

- Who was the audience? How many people attended? Already answered.
- Popular articles or films (in progress or completed) - copy of media story enclosed-2004.  
Our new play scripted specially during 2004 was staged in a local slum site. The leading English newspaper of India- "The Hindu" covered this and the article copy is enclosed.
- Books, chapters, illustrations- n.a.