Donor Speak

Around 15 years ago, two of my friends got me started on the journey with Tribal Health Initiatives which is still going strong. One friend, Manoharan, spoke to me about a wonderful couple - Dr. Regi and Lalitha Regi who with their super-dedicated team, have been making their best efforts to ensure that the tribals of Sittilingi receive the basic healthcare that we in the cities take for granted and essential emergency services too. Another good friend, Dharmaraju Kakani, who when I was trying to repay him the application fees he had paid for my pursuit of higher studies for some of the institutions, said “do not pay to me, pay it forward.”

Pallavi (my wife) and myself made up our mind on steadily giving back to the society, how much we can. Over the years, I came to believe that good health and education are the quickest routes to diminish poverty.

An encouraging factor about THI is that they are forever exploring ways to enhance their development impact and serve their targeted communities better and in a more comprehensive way. This entails trying out several new activities and approach, which at times may not fit within the existing plans, programs and the requirements of the traditional, larger, institutional donors. This is where the contributions of an individual can prove to be very handy as they often come with no strings attached and quickly deployed with maximum flexibility. I would like to think we have been of some help to THI in their path breaking way.

- Mr Sri Kumar Tadimalla, Supporter of THI
  Senior Transport Specialist, The World Bank
The Tribal Health Initiative story

This is the 25th year since we first set foot in the beautiful forested valley of Sitblingi, Kurnool district, Mahabubnagar, Andhra Pradesh, that is inhabited by tribal people, popularly called as the `Meatball' or `Hill People'. We, Dr. Rohini and myself, Dr. Raji George, started Tribal Health Initiative (THI) in 1993 from a small hut and a thatch hut that the tribals helped us build. They were poverty-stricken, with no electricity, no road, or even a small building to live in. It was a hospital for the community.

Much has changed now. We have a 40-bedded hospital with 2 operating rooms, from being the doctor couple who ventured into the forest with 2 staff members, our medical team has grown into a group of 6 doctors which includes a surgeon, a gynecologist, and an anaesthesiologist. Our doctors are supported by 50 trained staff - most of whom are the tribal youth from the community around. THI has progressed slowly, starting as a small medical facility, a basic hospital which now treats more than 1000, mostly tribal people.

Health and Food traditionally have been connected. We helped tribals start organic farming and tribal embroidery units to generate alternative incomes in lean periods of the year and also revive the traditional art form and designs of the Lambasa Community, this today involves over 500 farmers and 500 women (craft and women entrepreneurship combined).

All this was possible due to the community we work with, without their support we could not have accomplished and created impact on many lives. Thanks to one and all, both to our supporters across the world and the tribal communities of Sitblingi Valley.

Mission

Work towards improving and providing the best atmosphere that will develop and sustain the tribal communities.

Vision

The people of Sitblingi Valley and Kalayan Hills in Dharmapuri district, Tamil Nadu lead a better quality of life, keeping their traditions, customs and pride intact.

Health Care

Simplifying Health Care for the tribes.

We run a small hospital that serves to 1 lakh people and 4 districts for low-cost, secondary care of comparable quality that other tribal areas have. In the year 2010-11, our health programs provided outpatient services for around 20,000 people and admitted 1,591 patients. Our outreach clinics averaged more than 700 people per month. Our health programs are in 33 hamlets which focus on hypertension control, old age insurance, school health program, while our Outreach clinics continues to be a great help to people with chronic diseases who have to be monitored monthly, and also for post-operative cases coming for the hills. Our nurses still each month showcase to provide healthcare for the same.

Organic farming

Unfold the old traditional methods of Organic farming.

Sitblingi Organic Farmers Association, SOFA has now metamorphosed into a company. 500 tribal farmers got together and after an hour of discussions and training, have become a producer company of 800 tribal shareholders. The uniqueness is: all the company directors and CEO of SOFA are tribal people - making a small group come true in THI: a company of the tribes, by the tribes for the tribes. SOFA also had a record turnover of Rs 94.9 lakhs last year, with much more customer base due to improvement in quality control and more farmers coming into the fold.

SOFA has now moved into a new 3 acre campus to facilitate a farmers resource center, coldstore and bigger processing centre which will increase the productivity by next year.

Craft

Wings to fly: Porgai Craft finds a base

Porgai was started in 2006, the Porgai Center was started in 2015. It was a dream come true for Sumi and Neeva, two senior artisans who almost 10 years ago started training the younger generation in the intricacies of Lambasa embroidery under the relentless push and support of Lathitha. The Tribal Porgai Craft Centre was opened in the presence of Ms. Rakesh Mitra, the MD, Tamil Company, and his colleagues in 2015. With 60 artisans, both men and women, each earning between Rs 3,000 to Rs 5,000 per month, showing a visible shift towards gender equality and independence in those villages.

This year people's goodwill around Rs 40 lakhs, of which Rs 10 lakhs went to weavers enhancing their local economy and welfare.

Infant mortality* has reduced from 147 to 20 per 1000 and women's acceptance for antenatal ** examination has increased from 11 to 90 percent since the initiation of the outreach program.

*Infant mortality refers to the death of infants and children under the age of five
**Antenatal examinations are the screening during pregnancy