

The Goal: The Friends of H.O.P.E, together with our implementing partner NGO's in India, are helping the desperately poor indigenous tribes' peoples of the Nilgiri Hills region create a sustainable livelihood for themselves and future generations.

We do this through promoting biodynamic organic farming, through traditional health – including promoting the re-introduction of ancient Siddha medicines and Ayurveda; through education – the School eco-club; encouraging the protection of a wonderful eco-system and environment, and helping village women to develop income generation projects for themselves and their village communities.

The problem

It was recently reported that there have been around 280,000 farmer suicides in the last 15 years and there is one farmer suicide every 30 minutes in India. Farming in India, despite accounting for 14% of India's GDP, is in crisis. Helping farmers and growers is mission critical for us. Many farmers and growers commit suicide each year and many widows do not receive compensation (often as high as 60% of widows in some states) and the surviving spouse is pressurised into repaying mountains of debt. In 2014, 5650 farmers in India killed themselves and more than 20,000 housewives took their lives, and the rate – more than 20 per 100,000 people average – is higher in Tamil Nadu where the cause of suicide is often farming related. Educational debt is also a huge and increasing problem.

On occasions there is human sacrifice – a girl of 7 was killed by two desperately poor illiterate tribal farmers to appease the gods and get a better harvest – “the two men confessed to cutting her open and removing her liver as an offering” (reported January 2012).

Some years ago, just as Vanya Orr was to begin her life's work, and in one of “our” villages, we heard and believe, that a baby boy was sacrificed.

Degradation of the environment, over-use of fertilizers, pesticides and weedkillers – increased incidences of breast cancer due to polluted water streams.

We regard the present poverty line in the Nilgiri region to be Rs72,000 a year or less, that's broadly £70 a month.

400 farmers attend training programmes and benefit from our outreach support a year. Farmers come to our model nursery to see how zero input farming can be achieved – no fertilizers, we are only using recycled waste, with amazing yield and quality – kids producing cauliflower weighing over 3kg with the record being 5.7kg grown in 100 days! Strawberry plants yield over 1.5 kg per plant. Panchagavya – a mixture of cow muck, cow urine, ghee, curd and milk subsequently diluted with water can be used not only on the land to help vegetables grow profusely free from pests and disease, but it cures skin conditions and can be taken internally for HIV/Aids!

HUNDREDS OF VILLAGE COMMUNITIES HAVE OR ARE BENEFITTING FROM SUPPORT WE FUND

For example we are reintroducing ancient traditional healthcare to 60 villages (see RTTMP project) where we are training women to provide front line support, linked to traditional practitioners and healers and the hospital system. A sickle cell anaemia monitoring programme has just commenced. Traditional organic oils and creams are used for skin conditions, severe burns and joint, ulcerated leg conditions and muscular problems. Our health team is engaging village groups and conducting health awareness classes, and providing counselling. “It's good to know somebody cares, thank you,”

is what we are told.

Our eco club children, some 800 students from 14 of the poorest government schools, are so very knowledgeable about biodiversity, organic farming, and the importance of protecting the environment in which they live - we believe they have more knowledge than many university students yet are aged only to 8th standard!

We teach the women to learn to knit, sew and dress-make – each course takes 3 months and is held under the umbrella of our income generation programme.