

Health and Hope

The importance of Traditional healthcare

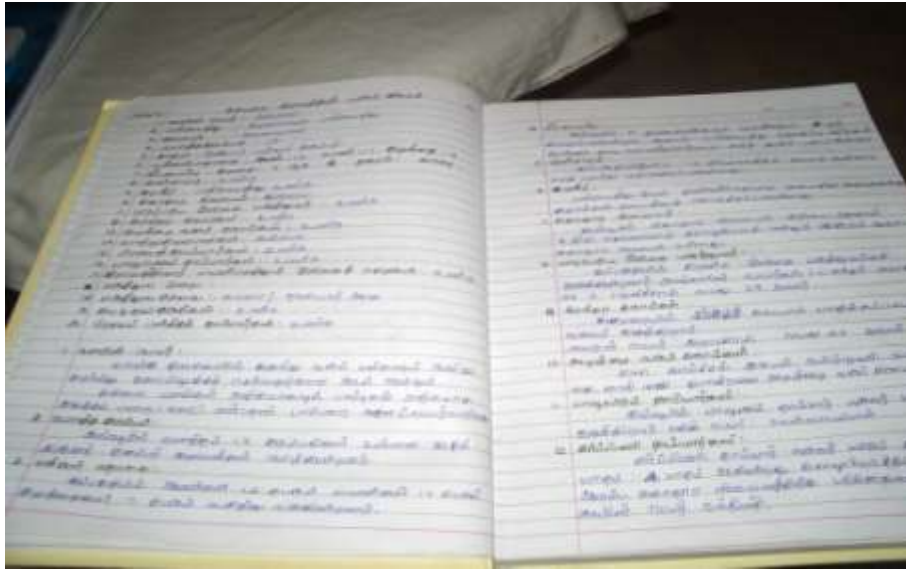
60 tribal villages to benefit from new healthcare initiative! Rejuvenation of Traditional Tribal Medical Practices project

An MOU between FoH and NAWA was signed early in 2015 and launched with a formal inauguration ceremony.



The RTTMP (rejuvenation of traditional tribal medical practices) project is hugely important. It's important because not only is it delivering front line healthcare in tribal villages (60 villages feature in the project, some 1400 families and over 7200 very poor people are benefitting) but as a joint initiative with NAWA, it serves as a very important base for establishing a link of Tribal Medicinal practices with that of Ayurvedic and Siddha medical practices mainstreamed as alternative medicine in the Indian medical system. **We understand that over 60% of households in this part of India are currently in debt as a consequence of meeting healthcare bills and so a self-help project such as this is of immense value, particularly if linked to nutrition and organic farming and horticulture.**

During 2015 basic training was completed for the 15 health organisers (VHO's) and the 2 Interns (Priyanka and Rajalakshmi), drawn from the Kurumba, Kota and Toda tribes. Following which we then began advanced training and support programmes by integrating the VHO's with traditional practitioners and healers – such workshops have taken place for the first time ever, together with the involvement of Siddha gazetted practitioners. As we have been informed, there are 67 known practitioners in the NAWA geographical area all of whom historically have tended to keep their knowledge a secret. The project seeks to work with these practitioners so that not only is their knowledge documented but available to hand down to future generations. We are now continuing to support the women with workshops and seminars. It is essential that traditional knowledge is not lost. In the five months since training was completed some 50-60 consultations per month have taken occurred and a range of complaints and illnesses have been satisfactorily dealt with, and referrals taken place where necessary. We expect this to reach an average of 300 or so consultations per month and have set this as a target for the project as FOH believe that close to 4000 people could be treated each year by this group – an amazing achievement given the geography of the region.



Copy of site diary with training notes -

The joint efforts of the parties enable the traditional medicine knowledge gap to be bridged. The project is organised in two village clusters and focuses on health awareness programmes, food and nutrition and traditional remedies for common ailments and specifically for some chronic ailments.



The health organisers, Interns and Traditional healers hold a workshop on traditional medicine. In attendance: Rajkumar (Project manager), GoHT personnel, and NAWA personnel.



Indira being treated by Veeran for joint pain and ankle sprain using Helichrysum oil.

In previous years we have reported on the high incidence of *sickle cell anaemia* in the region, some 1000 cases are thought to exist. *Sickle cell anaemia* is a serious inherited blood disorder where the red blood *cells*, which carry oxygen around the body, develop abnormally and result in reduced life expectancy. The women at the Kollikarai herbal medicine unit have in the past produced a tablet that gave some encouraging results. Vanya supported by similar thoughts from NAWA, have often thought that a properly monitored treatment programme would be worthwhile and the problem was always credibility and finding a partner willing to undertake a properly structured research programme. Now, following the successful launch of the RTTMP project, we understand that SRM University in Chennai have agreed to undertake a scientific analysis we believe as part of a research project on rural healthcare, in collaboration with Queen's University, Canada.

We are further informed that the College of Tropical Medicine in London are also looking at research programme in the area of traditional medicine and the impact it may have on healthcare provision – all potentially very exciting stuff!

Let's not forget though, that another objective of our healthcare project is to improve nutrition, particularly amongst children in the tribal communities. Incidences of diabetes have dramatically increased too as a consequence of poor diet so it is not just a UK problem. This is why organic farming/horticulture is a fundamental link to the whole health issue and which together with traditional healthcare provides a really powerful healthy sustainable environment for the rural poor in India – a vision that Vanya had some 20 years ago when she set out on her life's work!



This photograph, shows key nutritional foods being prepared

As with all projects the agencies we work with in India submit monthly and quarterly reports. Expenditures are closely monitored and controlled. Monthly cash flow statements with actuals and forecasted expenditures are then reconciled to bank accounts and the reconciliation sent to FoH with summary bank statement. Thus the implementing agencies are fully accountable for the projects.

Kitchen gardens

33 nutritional gardens in 18 of the villages have been or are in the course of being established under the RTTMP programme.

Kollikarai nursery for medicinal plants

The Kollikarai unit acts as a resource centre for medicinal herbs. During the year the women based there have made Centella Asiatica oil, Peacock feather oil, Helicrysum oil, and syrups for coughs and colds. A gene pool nursery is being discussed as part of the RTTMP project and is likely to be established in the other village cluster



Aloe Vera (Indian Aloe) being grown at Kollikarai and is used for a variety of skin conditions from acne and eczema to psoriasis. Burns are also treated effectively with the pulp from the leaf.

A story to tell

We always ask for one or two case studies as these real life stories are always interesting. In this story one of our Interns, Rajalakshmi (Raji), was travelling on a bus when she fell into conversation with a man on his way to hospital to have a leg amputated. His leg had become ulcerated, and the ulcers were spreading. The hospital doctors had told him amputation was the only solution. Persuading him to come to her village, Raji introduced him to the traditional healer, Shri Ranganather. By applying Helicrysum oil regularly, the man's wounds cleared completely within 3 months.