

Prolog

...on help to self-help

For ten years in India, there has been a model for how to organize women's groups. These groups are of great importance if or when catastrophes and natural disasters happen, and a number of organizations and churches in India work with both organizing women's groups and self-help groups. During a study trip in January 2003 run by "Church of Sweden Aid" I saw some amazing helpprojects. However the journey was, in my opinion, too short and intense and I wished that I could go back for a longer period of time and see how the projects really worked. My idea was to live in Chennai for two months and there get to know the women's groups and also study different selfhelpgroups up close. Thanks to the sholarship given to me by Publicistklubben in 2005 I got the oppertunity!

To get another frame of reference from my life in Stockholm, I decided I would first travel to other parts of India, parts that as far as I knew had not been struck by natural disasters. I visited New Delhi, Jaisalmer, Jodphur, Jaipur, Nagpur and some places in Goa before I, the week before christmas, went to Chennai. It wasn't a tourist trip, I stayed in every place for at least a week and avoided the biggest tourists' traps. Instead I walked the streets and felt the atmosphere. I met many different people, got invited to dinnerparties, big weddings and small funerals. I lived as good as I could

the indian way. It was a valueble lesson for me to see the everyday lives of people living in this country of many contrasts.

I had the benefit of getting a close look at the work of TCC-ELC, Tamilnad Christian Council Economic Life Committee in Tamil Nadu, for two months' time. My base was both in TCC's branch at an orphanage in Chingleput, 60 km southeast from Chennai, and at the main office in Chennai with the Director Esther Kathirola and her staff.

I got a good insight in all the help programs driven by the TCC, and I participated in starting up new programs for extremely poor people in small distant villages. I saw present programs and was also informed of programs that had been cancelled due to malfunctions. During my two months with the TCC I couldn't find a single flaw in their work.

My report does not claim to be complete, I have chosen only a few of the many help programs being showed to me. Nor am I trying to explain the indian administration. When people I've met have talked about the government, it could mean government authority on any level, regional or local. I never asked for an explanation in order to avoid getting caught up in administrative discussions. Instead I tried to listen and ask as simple questions as possible. I took pictures with a small and discrete digital camera, a Nikon Coolpix S4. In many situations I had no influence over the camera's angle, in order to not interrupt. For the

same reasons I never used the camera's flash. The pictures enclosed in this report are a small selection of the 4000 pictures I took during this journey. This material has provided me with some other ideas, exhibitions and a children's book about everyday life in India.

When in Chennai, I got to hear a lecture about India's social system. It made me realize just how complicated and unique the caste system is. This report is not mapping out how and why the caste system is as it is. Instead I'm describing what I've seen and retelling the things told to me out in the country. I would also like to make a reservation against possible fact mistakes that might have come up along the road of translating the words from the local language to tamil to english to swedish.

After the Tsunami

TCC is always active in a preliminary phase when disaster strikes, for example the tsunami in 2004 (9171 people died in Tamil Nadu) and flooding catastrophes like after the heavy rain in autumn of 2005. After the tsunami, TCC donated boats to affected communities on islands in Pulicat Lake. Peter Manoharan from TCC explained how they together with CASA, Churches Auxiliary for Social Action, handed out rice for RS 30 000 to villages hit hard by the flooding disaster.

Pictures: 1. Ester Kathirola and part of the staff in the main office. 2. A boat given to the village Irrukam at Pulicat Lake by TCC.

On the anniversary of the tsunami I participated in a memorial ceremony on the beach in Chennai. The beach was almost completely deserted. In the newspapers "The Hindu" and "India Express" I read about the fishermen's fear of a new tsunami striking that very day. I figure that fear was probably the reason most people stayed away from the beach that day.

According to the media, besides the government helping the most affected, there has also been a lot of help given by other organizations, both domestic and foreign. Though some sources claim corruption has made it impossible for this help to reach the very poor.

Tsunami Relief in Devaneri

Peter from TCC brought me to the village Devaneri where we met Mr Prekumar, a project leader from the organization Udayam Palligaram. After helping the villagers with temporary houses, although with concrete floors, but no more than palm leaves for walls and roofs, this selfhelp program started. It allows every affected family in the village to get help building new houses.

The houses are 30 square meters in size, and consists of a family room, a work room and a small kitchen. The fire place and toilet are located on the outside of the houses. They've built the houses with reinforced corners, so that if a new tsunami would come, the houses won't sweep away. Each house costs RS 150 000, including the house owner's salary, because the owners are building the houses themselves under

the supervision of professional builders. The money comes from a German organization and is distributed by a nun who runs a home for deaf and blind children outside of Chingleput.

I was guided around the village. I talked to a couple of women and men and I was shown the desalting machine making the water drinkable again. This was a problem caused by the tsunami, when all the salty ocean water swept in it contaminated the ground water.

I met the fisherman S Ravi, who lives with his wife and two children in the village's first completed house. He talked about the fishing, and how it's harder to fish now because of the high waves, and the heavy autumn rain has decreased the size of the catch.

"Earlier I could make RS 600 a day, and then I went fishing every day. Now I'm only able to fish three times a week, and I make RS 300, maximum." His wife sells the fish in the tourist town Mamallapuram. S Ravi thinks that the new boats are too weak. The old boats were much better and stronger, he says.

However, Mr Prekumar disagrees. Earlier the village only had two boats, catamarans made of wood. With the money donated they got twelve new boats. Unfortunately the fishermen were too eager to get the boats fast, so the company building the boats were unable to deliver high quality boats. But it was the fishermen's choice, Mr Prekumar explains. He also points out that the autumn's raining season with flood-

ings, along with depressions after the tsunami are the biggest problems. Here people didn't lose their lives, but they lost everything else.

In the end of July, it is expected that 140 houses, along with a pre-school and a community center will be finished. And as soon as this village is done, we'll start building on the other side of the road, Mr Prekumar says.

15 new houses will be built and before this tsunami relief is complete another village will get help. In all, 210 houses are yet to be built. In organizing this work, a lot of help came from the four women's groups existing in the villages. These groups have now increased from four to nine.

Pictures: 3. Tsunami relief in Devaneri. 4. Project leader Mr Prekumar and Peter Manoharan. 5. Houses are given reinforced corners to stand another tsunami. 6. Fisherman S Ravi on the stairs of his new house. 7-8. Interior of the new built house. 9. Ravi's new neighbours. 10. a couple of villagers who'll soon move out of the temporary houses. 11. An old wooden boat. 12. The new boats.

Tamilnad Christian Council, TCC

TCC, Tamilnad Christian Council, is a ecumenical organization with a lot of christian churches and organizations as members, for example the Churches of South India, the Tamilnad Evangelical Lutheran Church, the Indian Evangelical Lutheran Church, The Salvation Army, St. Luke's Leprosarium, The Bible Society Tamilnadu and the Christian Literature Society.

The TCC is organized in three dif-

ferent committees, Evangelism, Literature and the Economic Life Committee. In the latter one, for 38 years, work is being made for the extremely poor no matter if they are christians or muslims, hindus or of another religion. The targets are poor farmers, the uneducated, the oppressed, poor illiterate women, young people who have dropped out of school, orphans and the elderly. The staff consists of Director Esther Kathirolu, 10 administrators, 6 field workers, 6 teachers and 28 volunteers.

The TCC has started, sponsored and runs many different kinds of help programs within farming, sanitary, water supplies, education in work, health for women, and other non formal education. The effort TCC puts in to the work for the poorest of the poor is very extensive, and one organization to give it's support is the Lutheran World Federation in Geneva.

The help programs are put into effect through TCC's branches on 12 different locations around Tamil Nadu. The main office is located in Guindy, a suburb of Chennai. From there the administration is run, and it also holds the Creative computer Industrial School, where the TCC runs a very professional computer education.

Women's Groups

"They call them happyflowers.

The women's hope comes in the form of mushrooms and jasmins. In Cuddalore there are 732 women's groups with 20 women in each group. 503 of these were started after the tsunami and they have

been given support through microfinancing. We have noticed that women are more flexible and open to work with. They can make RS 50 a day by selling mushrooms. Some groups make candles and have gotten an export order. The building industry has had a upswing by the building of permanent houses for the tsunami victims. With our men so afraid of going back to the sea, thanks to the SHG groups we now see the dawn."

from The Hindu Nov 23 2005

The first women's group in Tamil Nadu started in 1996. It was Fatima Babi, who after a visit to Bangladesh went home to Andhra Pradesh and started the first women's group in India. Fatima Babi became president of the village and she created the village's infrastructure. Since then, women's groups have been organized all over India after this model. The idea of these groups has now spread throughout the world. I got the following description of how the organizing of a women's group is done:

1. First, the group with 12-20 women is made, a name for the group is registered, and a joint account is opened in a government administrated bank. After that, a president and secretary for three years are selected. They are trusted with the groups finances for these three years. An agreement is made concerning membership's fees and how big amount should be saved each month. The saved capital is then placed in the bank account. Group members may loan money at a low interest to pay their house hold expenses,

such as children's education and other costs. Repayment should be made within five months. All money transactions are carefully noted in government designed books. Every meeting is also noted in protocol.

2. After six months, the government checks all the protocols and books of the group. At least two meetings every months are necessary. If everything is in order the government recommends a loan be given to the group. This money is to be paid back within ten months, at the interest of 1 % per month. The organization, like the TCC, who has helped start up the group will stand as guarantee for the loan.

3. Once the loan has been repaid, the group meets the government for a discussion about the purpose of the group, what's being done in matters of education and skill training. If the government is pleased with the group's work a new RS 10 000 loan will be granted, to be paid back in 36 months with the same interest as the previous loan.

If a member is unhappy with the group or moving away she can exclude herself from the group. It is then discussed at a meeting how and when a new member should be selected. The saving's capital is returned to the resigning member. The group can be dissolved if the whole group is unanimous. A letter is then written to the government, the account is closed, and, if there is any money left it is split even by the members.

The power of the women's groups

are great. They have social control. If there is a fight between neighbours the group is summoned to discuss a solution. Likewise, with family problems such as abuse, the group handles counselling. A decision of what to do is made, and if it's not followed the police is called in.

Before the women's groups, people of different religions didn't communicate, not even neighbours talked to each other. Now they meet on a regular basis, no matter to which religion they belong. Earlier they couldn't afford everyday expenses, now they make their own money. Earlier the minimum age in the groups were 21, and only married women were allowed to join. Since two years ago, the minimum age is 18, and unmarried women are welcome to join.

During the two months I visited the TCC I met a great number of women groups. They showed me their activities, I participated at many meetings and I learned a lot. One of the groups I met was Kannagi Magalir Mandran, the women's group of Kannagi.

Meeting with Kannagi Magalir Mandran

Epsy Margaret, the president of the group, introduced me to the members of the Kannagi women's group. She told me that they work with making incense, soap powder, coloring clothes and making baskets. To make a basket, if working fast, they have to work for a day, a week if they have to do other things then just basketwork. The baskets are sold in the market

place for RS 60 per basket. The group has a house at Epsy Margaret's where they make cleaning products for toilets, without the dangerous acids. A few members work with cooking food and selling it to students and doctors at the hospital in Chingleput. All profit goes to the group. The women in this group are house wives. Their husbands have jobs like bus drivers and managers. Through the group the women become more independent, not having to ask their husbands for money all the time. The group meets once a week and exchange thoughts. They're also together when contacting the authorities about legal issues.

Many of the group's members are hindus. The red mark on their foreheads are called bindi and it should be looked at as a piece of jewellery. They've also got a white mark to bless their husbands. The toerings are a symbol of their marriages, so is the gold necklace.

Epsy Margaret explained the economy of the group. They save RS 50 each month in a joint account. There are special Minutes Books, the membership fee of RS 5 each month should cover all expenses. A member may loan up to RS1000, may it be for a wedding. The member pays back RS 100 plus 1 % interest each month. All transactions are noted in the Cashbook. The government pays for the first set of books, after that the group will have to pay for the books themselves. After six months the group can get a loan for RS 2000 per member. Epsy Margaret's group has 17 members and have taken a loan for RS 34 000. This amount is to be repaid within 10 months at 1 %

interest.

If the repayment goes well another loan for RS 3000 per member is granted. For Epsy Margaret's group, this would mean RS 51 000. Every group member may loan RS 500 000 if they want to start their own business. No taxes are paid when working in a small scale. According to the information I received, there is no taxes for income under RS 100 000 a year.

Kannagi Magalir Mandran has meetings once a week. The group has an important social function. Everything is discussed, families, school, parties and problem solving. They help each other! Epsy Margaret is responsible for five women's groups. She is a teacher but volunteers with this social work, it brings her much joy.

Advice for swedish women on how to start a Women's Group

1. Know the people well, 15-20 persons.
2. Motivate them.
3. Educate on rights of the society.
4. Talk and listen, solve problems.
5. Trust the person who is in charge of the economy.
6. Save as much as possible.
7. Try to have four meetings a month, at least two.
8. Produce something together, it may differ throughout the year, like candles in the winter.

Pictures: 13. The women's group Kannagi Magalir Mandran poses outside the house at Epsy Margaret. 14. Savings books. 15-22. I

got to learn how to make baskets, pickles, soap powder and incense. 23. Lunch brake.

Problems with loan repayment

Sathya is a 24 year old girl who recently started working at TCC as a coordinator. She helps groups with book-keeping, participate at meetings and writes protocols. In cases where group members fail to repay their loans, it's Sathya's job to collect the money. She drives around, together with Peter Manoharan, to talk to the women. They are allowed to pay as much as they can. The most important thing seems not to be the size of the amount these women are able to pay, but that they're making regular payments in order to decrease the loan. But one gets away from paying. They have to learn responsibility and do right by them, otherwise they will be bad examples for others and TCC might then be forced to quit standing as guarantee for future loans, Peter explains.

I accompanied Sathya and Peter to see a woman who hadn't paid her loan payments in over a year. She didn't have a job and her husband was ill. She got a respite.

Pictures: 24-25. Peter and Sathya from TCC drives around to collect loans.

Motivation of Women To Transform the World

On the day of the Republic, January 26, Esther Kathiroti gathered about 30 leaders of women's groups for a conference with the theme 'Motivation of Women To Transform the World'. Everybody got a red rose at the re-

gistration. Some women put the rose in their folders, others put the rose in their hair.

The participants were trained in how to put themselves in their lives' centrum. They did an exercise where everybody had to make a choice before the others and then do something after it, a way to control stage fright. The participants were asked how it felt to play. "At first, when you express emotions, if you show that you're happy, sad or angry you can see how other people are suffering. That will make you a good leader!"

In order to tell which kind of player they were, to test concentration control, patience and communication, they played a game with bricks. The challenge was to guess how high they could build a tower, and then try to build it at that level. They also had to decide if they wanted to build with opened or closed eyes, and with one or two hands. The four women who participated all chose the hardest option, and all of them were able to build a higher tower than they expected themselves to do. "Don't let anything or anyone stop your intentions" was the message.

Pictures: 26-31. The participants of the women's conference.

Selfhelp projects in Dalit villages

Around Pulicat Lake there are a lot of fishing communities. The fishermen owns land, boats and fishing nets, and looks upon themselves as being of a higher caste than the dalits, who own

nothing. The dalits, including the women and children, work for the fishermen. Part of their work is to carry the fish and clean the nets. The fishermen does not allow the dalits to fish from boats, they can only fish from the shore, or as far as they can stand in the water. This means the dalits catch much smaller fishes in a much smaller amount, and they often suffer serious health problems due to the dirty, cold water they have to stand in all day. The dalit villages stays undeveloped because of the oppression that's been going on for generations. The people there live in hopelessness, the poor continues being poor and are forced to live under oppression, without seeing any possibilities to change their situation.

The need for help is enormous. The first thing TCC did was to make an analysis of the situation in six different dalit villages out on the islands in Pulicat Lake near Gumidipoondi, about 60 kilometers north of Chennai. It was then decided that they would focus on the two dalit villages Irrukam and Vanadu, who were in most need of help. In these villages, there lives about 600 families, most in small huts. They live in absolute poverty and in total hopelessness. These people are in such bad condition that they can't find the strength to plant a fruit tree, or even a flower. They haven't got any possibilities, the situation is disastrous.

As in other lowcaste communities the people aren't organized. They have no banks, schools or healthcenters, to name a few. They lack permanent maintenance, and many men spend their salaries on alcohol. The people in

these dalit villages haven't even had an emergency health center. If there is an emergency, the jeep ride to the nearest town costs RS 20. With a daily salary of RS 25, this is an impossibility.

TCC's strategy to help the villages

The TCC's strategy to help the villages is to strengthen the women, their health situation, but also their social and economic situation. With an adequate education, followed by microcredits they can get the support and an independence which will give them the respect they deserve. TCC starts with electing a core group of women in the villages. They get an intensive education for a week and then, under the supervision of the TCC's staff, they get to lead the education for other women.

1. Two women's groups and two youth groups are first organized in each village. After that, a village center is built where the villagers can get educated, and which holds an emergency clinic. The center will also have a library. Later on, groups for the men and the children will be formed. Regular education depending on motivation and need will be offered.

2. Health programs with education concerning nutrition, first aid, vaccination programs, herbal medicine, HIV/AIDS prevention, water carried diseases etc. One person in the village gets a three month education in medical treatment in order to offer the rest of the villagers treatment in their own village. Then they won't have to

travel to the nearest town for simpler medical conditions. Doctors will come as resources. Every household should have a small kitchen garden where fruits and vegetables can be grown. The used water should be taken care of in a proper way. All programs should go hand in hand with culture and tradition.

3. Economic programs to help self-support by work training: Making soap powder, candles and incenses etc. Education will be held for at least a week up to a month. Education in marketing will also be held so that the end products won't be sold at a price too low. During the three years the help program will be run in the villages, every year 120 women will participate.

When finished their educations, the women may get microcredits in order to start businesses that will generate income. 45 women are able to get this credit at first, and when repaying, funds can be started to help more women. Girls and women who'd like to learn tailoring can get this education and then get help to start businesses. It of course helps in strengthening their confidence. TCC elects a female co-ordinator whose task is to lead the programs in the women's groups, and who will work close to TCC's director. Three field assistants will be located in the villages.

The first meeting with the people of Irrukam and Vaenadu

On December 27 2005 Ester Kathirolu and a team from TCC, went to start up

the help programs in the dalit villages Irrukam and Vaenadu. I was invited to join them and we drove ten and a half kilometers along a narrow, bumpy road before reaching Vaenadu. Piles of building materials and half-built houses were everywhere. The government had given them bricks, gravel and cement.

At first, I didn't notice the misery. My eyes were fooled by the lovely, colorful fabric of the sarees worn by the Vaenadu women. But looking closer, I saw how hard they lived. People are so poor they can't find the strength to deal with their situation. They don't even think about how to change things. Most of the men in Vaenadu are unemployed, some work for landowners of a higher caste. One day's salary is RS 20, not a great profit.

The strategy of this visit was first to hand out medicine, then discuss and finally hand out gifts. The nurses handed out cough medicine, deworming pills, multivitamins and paracetamol. One man got a nasty wound looked at, it saved him from getting his leg amputated!

The team from TCC had a discussion with the villagers about how and what they needed help with. The missionary of the village worked as an interpreter between Tamil and the local language. After, team members translated it to English for me. The missionary has spent ten years in school, but as a missionary, he is lowest on the caste scale. They talked about building a new village center. The material needed will be paid by TCC, and the workers will get paid. It will be an easy

construction, the work will be led by people from TCC. However, the first thing that needs to be done is having the villagers agree on where the house should be. The villagers will have discussions about this matter and notify TCC when a decision has been made.

After that, it was time for the gift hand-out to all the families. Earlier they had been given yellow coupons which were to be traded for the gifts. The villagers were organized in lines, it got a bit rowdy, because they were all very eager. Dhotti for the men, sarees for the women, towels, rice and snacks for the children. But when the children sat down on the ground and waited their turn things got crazy and Ester stopped the handout. At another hand-out in Chennai a couple of weeks earlier, 42 persons were killed when it got too chaotic and out of hand. Rumour had been circulating that it would be the last day of help being distributed after the heavy rain.

We left Vaenadu and travelled by boat, a boat that TCC had given after the tsunami to the Irrukam village. It took us nearly one and a half hours to get there.

On the island, we walked up to the village's church, where a large group of villagers had gathered. The team from TCC were informed that another help organization that wants to help with education and health care. At the discussion it was decided, as in the other village, that a place for a village center would be decided. They were to get back to TCC when this decision had been made. Rice was handed out,

and then we went back to the boat.

Pictures: 32-41. The starting of a self-help program in Vaenadu.

The second meeting with the people of Irrukam and Vaenadu

A few weeks later, it was time to visit the villages again. The ground stones were to be laid in a traditional way, and Irrukam had already prepared for our arrival. They had put out tables and chairs, built a shelter from the sun, and dug a hole in the ground where the ground stone should be laid. However, it turned out that the place the villagers had decided for the center was owned by another villager, who had not been asked. A discussion started but the man would not cave in.

Esther feels it is very important that all the villagers participate in the decisions, and after a long talk it was decided that the village would use another place for the center. They dug a new hole, and the ground stone ceremony could begin. Brick were painted yellow with red crosses, and a flame was lit on each stone. The stones were put down one by one, I too got to put one down. The hole was blessed by a minister and we prayed. We then went to the village's church to eat a meal together. Before we left Irrukam a group of women danced traditional dances for us. Some villagers waved us off as our boat drove away, and from the boat we saw some dalits standing in the water, fishing.

Because of the land deciding problems in Irrukam, we were a bit late to Va-

enadu. We first travelled by boat, and the ten and a half kilometers of bumpy road, was, if possible, even bumpier than the first time we went out to the village. We arrived at sunset, and another discussion concerning the place of the center was started. Did they really want the village center so close to a grave yard?

"You'll always be reminded that you're going to end up there one day", someone said laughing. The hole was dug, but before it was finished, the hole was filled with water. They now had to wait one month before the building could begin. But the ground stone ceremony could continue, and I participated there as well. It was pitch dark as we drove back to Chennai.

Pictures: 42-53. The second visit to the dalit village Irrukam with the foundation ceremony before building a village center.

Computer Education

Creative Computer Industrial School near the main office in Guindy, was started in 2000 and has four different education programs: Job oriented desk top publishing (3 months), Data entry operator (3 months), Computer aided accounting management (6 months) and Computer hardware technology (6 months). Preknowledge similar to the tenth year in school is necessary.

The school has a well equipped computer lab, with twelve computers, server, cd burner, scanner, laser and ink printers, and the latest version of Windows XP installed. The students work with Word, Excel, Tally, Photoshop and Pagemaker, to name a few. All programs are in English. After finish-

hing their education, the students are given a test, and if they pass they get a certificate from the government. The teachers are well educated and make RS 5000 per month. The hardware teacher is also responsible of the computers at the main office.

New students are recruited through the churches, and sometimes through recommendations. No more than 20 students are accepted at the same time. The gender proportion is usually 50/50 and the ages are 16-20. The education costs RS 500 per month, and if a talented student can't afford it, TCC sponsors.

During my visit in the classroom, I meet 10 students, of which 7 are girls. They are learning Tally, a book keeping program developed in Bangalore, the Silicone Valley of India. 8 boys study hardware. They're from villages north of Chennai, where they lost everything they had in the tsunami. Before they were fishermen like their fathers. After the tsunami they have participated in a help-project. It was in this project they got selected to join the computer education. The task of today's lesson is to put a computer together from scratch and install Windows XP on it. They succeed well and I am very impressed with their skills, they had never seen a computer before this course. A few months remains, as well as some tests, but after that, they'll get their certificate from the government, which will read "Hardware Engineer". Of the 195 students who have completed this education, 46 have started higher education, and 149 have gotten jobs. They make an average of RS 3000 per

month. One of the student have gotten a job in a government owned company. Other companies where former students work are Ford, Scope International, Indian Airlines, Bluedot and a public authority in the process of digitalizing it's archives.

Pictures: 54. Girls in the 6 months computer program are learning Photoshop. 55-57. Hardware engineers-to-be.

Tailor program

In almost every corner of the towns I've visited in India, there is a tailor. There is also sewing being done for the export industry, and countless of people make their income behind a sewing machine. TCC has a Tailor Program on many different locations. Information about this program are put up on posters and handed out on flyers, but also by staffmembers of TCC speaking of the possibilities of this program in the villages. They also give information through the churches and place ads in the Manai Malar Magazine, TCC's own news paper. Of course is information gets talked about when girls from the education get jobs.

At TCC's branch, Chingleput Camp, I followed the students in the tailor program during my visit. 10-15 women are being educated during 6 months. The students have already gone 10 years in school, it is a necessity in order to understand pattern constructions etc. The education starts with a one month theory class, where they make a work book with a miniature model of every garment they're going to sew. They sew by hand and the teacher teaches on the black board. They are taught to

make one garment per week, and when I participated in the classes they were making blouses and dresses. After finishing the education, the student are given a certificate and can get jobs in tailor factories. There they can make about RS 2000 per month.

I met some former students. Most of them worked in factories. A girl told me that 600 people work in "her" factory. She makes RS 1300 per month, after three years her salary will be RS 2600. I got a short description of their working situation. They work on a production line with the hours 7 am til 6 pm, one hour lunch break, it's often hard to get to work, it takes a long time just to get to the place where the buses go. Many suffer asthma and dust allergies, even though the factories have safety protection and do regular health checks. Some of the former students work are home sewers. They make RS 1,5 for a petticoat. They explain that they couldn't continue working at the factory after they got married, their mother in laws wouldn't let them.

Pictures: 58. Tailor students at Chingleput Camp. 59. A women's collective out in a village.

More programs run by TCC

Chingleput Camp holds a TCC branch office and an orphanage. The children are between the ages 8-14. Most are children of single mothers who can't provide for them, others are orphans. The children come from villages up to 60 kilometers outside of Chingleput. Relatives are allowed a one day visit per month. On holidays and school-

brakes, the children get to go home to their villages. It costs RS 50 per child per month to stay at the orphanage. Although most of the mothers can't afford it, their children get to stay anyway.

Hepsy is a 40 years old unmarried woman. She has the main responsibility for the children. She is helped by other TCC staff members at the camp. Peter Manoharan is the manager, and his wife, son and daughter are like an extended family to these children. Before I left the orphanage, one more woman had started to help out. She had her little boy with her, and it was great to see how the other children gave him love.

The children help out with daily chores, they wash their clothes, clean, help out in the kitchen, do the dishes and run errands. They get up at 7 am to have time to do all things before running off to the school next door. The evenings are spent doing home work for a couple of hours, before an assembly and after that it's bed time. So time for, what we call free play, does hardly exist.

The children sleep on mats on the floor in a big room. During the day, this room is used as a dining hall or a meeting place for women's groups. During my round trip in India, I saw how people lived. They lived on the floor, slept on the floor, ate on the floor, hung out on the floor and worked on the floor. When entertaining guests, plastic chairs were sat out, but the host remained on the floor. At first it felt uncomfortable to be sitting above the people I visited so I usually declined

the chair. After a while in India, I took place in the chair if it was a short visit, if it was a long visit I sat on the floor, being able to take pictures more discreet. Sitting on the floor to me felt natural.

Pictures: 60. Some of the children. 61. Nap time. 62. Cooking. 63. Hepsy. 64. Dancing on the roof. 65. Peter peels sugar canes for the children. 66. At the washing stone. 67. Dishes. 68. Ranju painting. 69. Outside the sleeping area. 70-71. At Peter's. 72. Girls listening. 73. I get flowers in my hair.

Agriculture program

An agriculture program for growing mushrooms was recently started at Chingleput Camp. The staff tries it first before teaching it to the women's groups. A bag of mushroom seed costs RS 20, from that it is possible to get 1 kilogram of mushrooms. This program is so simple even children can help. Straws are cut into small pieces, washed in boiling water, then hung to dry over night. The straws and mushroom seed are then packed in plastic bags, which are placed in a shed. After 10-15 days it's time to harvest.

Pictures: 74-79. Sathya leads the work. 80-82. Children isolate the shed with sand and palm leaves. 83. Inside the shed.

Reading/writing programs

TCC has 23 reading and writing programs out in different villages. I visited a number of these. Happy students told me how good it was to be able to read the destination signs on the buses. Earlier they always had to ask

where the bus was heading.

In Paranam outside of Chingleput there are two villages for lepers. One of the villages looks like any Swedish suburb, with three-storey houses. The other has small houses and huts. TCC pays for three teachers, books and material. A total of 100 people enroll in these programs where they get an hour education per day, 5 days a week.

Pictures: 84. Leper woman proudly shows how she practices writing her name.

Closed down programs

The motorbike program existed on three locations in Tamil Nadu for five years. The program was closed down because the government gave benefits to students enrolled in similar programs held by different tutors. The teachers in those other programs were given a higher salary, RS 5000-6000 per month and TCC couldn't compete with that. TCC had educated local mechanics to teach, and the salary was much smaller. Another problem was that they only taught how to repair a certain model of motor bike. Esther Kathioli at TCC plans to start this program again because it will generate lots of jobs. I believe that because there are many, many different motor bikes in India. Esther also has a vision of starting a program for television technicians, seeing as owning a television is becoming more and more common.

Picture: 85. A motor bike parking.

Milk society program

In 1998, women in the village KK Na-

gar got to lend money from the Ecumenical Church Loan Found, the EC-LOF, with TCC as creditor. A women's group was started where every woman loaned RS 5000 to buy a cow. The cows gave 2 litres of milk in the morning, and 1 1/2 litres in the evening. The milk was sold at the price RS 8 per litre, and the loan was of course meant to be repaid. But there were great problems. Some women sold their cows, and some women didn't insure the cow, and if it died there was no milk to be sold but the loan still had to be repaid. The milk groups have all been dissolved now.

I accompanied when money was getting collected from some of the women. One woman we visited had it terrible!. Her first cow died in 1999, and one calf died during the last raining period. Her daughter used to work at a zip factory, but because she got mugged three months ago she's too afraid to go back to work. Because of this, the woman, Mrs Thatimayani, has no income. She talks about her diabetes, and how her husband recently had a stomach surgery. She now gets to pay back the loan when she can, about RS 50 a month. But she hasn't paid anything since April of last year, and she still has RS 500 left to pay.

Picture: 86. Mrs Thatimayani and her daughter.

Ten years ago, the ECLOF lended RS 6000 to every 22-25 members in the Kamaraj Nagar Milk Society. We visited the widow Mrs Maragatham who lives with three daughters. They've got one cow and two calves, and they get

four litres of milk in the morning and three litres in the evening. The income the milk brings is enough to provide for her family. she has repaid her loan. The women's group she was part of has been dissolved because the leader didn't handle the money in a good way. Mrs Maragatham says she can't continue the group due to her lack of leadership skills. But one of her daughters is planning to start a group with the help of TCC.

Picture: 87. Mrs Maragatham and her two daughters.

Programs supported by TCC

Center for Transsexuals

Thamilnadu Aravanigal Association, the center for transsexuals, was started in New Perungalathur, Chennai in 1998. Transsexual people, meaning people born in the wrong gender, are not homosexuals as is the common belief. The discrimination of these women born in men's bodies starts in their own families. They appear in women's clothes and this is looked upon as very strange.

In this center, caste and religion does not matter. The mix of religions lets them celebrate every religion's feasts. All the women in the center are HIV positive and get treatment at a nearby hospital. There are two selfhelpgroups here. The groups have the same conditions as all other women's groups in Tamil Nadu. They have meetings where they hold discussions when someone wants to loan money. The money may be for anything, as long as the group

allows it. I meet Anita, the leader of the group "Happy", one of the two groups, and Asha, the manager of the center. She has been working to make the situation for the transsexuals better since 2001. Her passport reads female, with a special note that she is a castrated man.

-I don't have the strength to fight everything, she says. She has a scooter because she is afraid of getting harrassed when commuting. Asha's never been a prostitute, earlier she worked as a chef. The women are her family, they take care of each other.

Some of the women in the center sell sex, and they are often arrested for "unnatural sex", according to the 377 which also includes child sex. The law was founded by the english. People have tried to have it modernized, but Asha doesn't believe in changes. The women arrested are looked upon as thugs, because of their constant police visits.

Asha workes hard to give the women an education, mainly in the hotel and restaurant business, but also as seamstresses, folk art, dancing and working with computers. Asha uses the internet as a tool to contact transsexuals from other countries. in May 2005 she went to Japan for a conference. It was her first trip abroad. Asha's computer skills are self taught. Asha's final words are; You come, you go, but life goes on. The development will continue. TCC does not give financial support, only moral support.

Pictures: 88. Asha surrounded by her girls, Anita to the left. 89. The page in Asha's

passport where it states she's a castrated man.

An orphanage for HIV positive children

Outside of the village Maari Mala Nagar, there is an orphanage for HIV positive children. 30 children between the ages 2,5 and 12. Most of them are alone, their parents have died in AIDS, and other relatives have abandoned them. The orphanage is located in an industrial area near the Ford factory. A young minister, Benjamin Franklin, runs the orphanage. He's renting the house, which by our standards, would be called a windowless shed. Because of the Ford factory, ground prices have gone up and no one is interested in donating a piece of ground. Therefore, this shed will have to do for now. The orphanage has been forced to relocate many times, because people don't want the HIV virus near their drinking water. Getting water from the village's pump is a struggle.

The Ford factory gives food to the orphanage, and the children get medicine from a hospital once a month. The older children go to school. Mr Franklin lives in the house too. His small room works as an office as well as a bedroom. Some women help him during the day, but he himself takes care of the children during the night. Mr Franklin says that his taking care of these children is a calling from God.

Benjamin Franklin has also organized a women's group in the nearby village Marai Mala Nagar. Six months ago, TCC started a tailor program there and gave them sewing machines. The

women now work in three-shifts. They sell to neighbours and people from Ford. Some in the village works as stone cutters and make RS 2 for every basket of stone, they make an average of RS 10-15 a day.

Pictures: 90. A group photo of the children and some of the women who help out. 91. Esther and Benjamin Franklin, manager and founder of the orphanage.

Epilog

"If you want to help a fisherman, give him a net." Seeing how the Tamilnad Christian Council work to help the poor was an incredibly positive experience. An enormous respect for these people is shown, nothing is done above their heads, and the villages get time to make decisions. Even though it is a Christian organization, the same help is offered to people in need, regardless of their religions.

The need of help in the dalit villages is enormous, and TCC does not have the resources to help everybody, instead the needs are analyzed and then they offer help to self-help. Director Esther Kathioli works with seeking money from funds, writes letters to the organizations that are a part of TCC and ask for contributions for new projects. And, she always participate when new programs are started. With a never-ending energy she tries new ideas and new help programs.

It is my full conviction that work like this, with true self to selfhelp, only can happen through an organization that,

like TCC, has been around for many years. When natural catastrophes occur, it is easier to give help to the villages when they have a functioning organization set up. And, on the contrary to what we sometimes hear in Swedish media about India refusing help from other countries, TCC accepts help from the outside very thankfully. More money will give them bigger possibilities to help the poor people who always loses the most when disasters strike.