Action Plan Report

Jaskrit Singh

Attended: Leadership and Global Development (CRN:10298)

As I headed to the Providence airport in the early hours of morning, my baggage was filled with more than just memories. I had a great time at Brown, made great friends, had lively debates and discussions, but the most important part was that I came back with an Action Plan. As I sat down in my room in Harkness House, trying to figure what my Action Plan should look like, I had a thousand thoughts in my head. Poverty, illiteracy... different problems faced by the Indian society flocked my brain. But in the end, I decided to work on something different, after hours of research and thinking, I finally had my Action Plan ready. I had ambitiously decided to address the issue of Women empowerment in rural parts of the state of Uttarakhand in India. I had planned to focus on issues right from girl child-foeticide to the social status of women.

Two weeks after my return from USA, I found myself and a couple of my friends (who had been really impressed with my idea and had decided to work with me) in a 4X4 jeep on our way to a village called Bhatoli. It was half-way through our journey, that we realized that we were headed to a village that did not exist on most of the maps and which lacked cemented roads. Located between two hills in the Great Himalayas, Bhatoli is a small village with a population of about 100-odd people. Upon our welcome, we were greeted with sweets and tea (the typical Indian welcome!). It was to my surprise, that the women in the village actually out-numbered the men (something which is indeed very rare in North India). After beginning discussions with the females of the village, I started to feel ambivalent. I was told that the women in this part of the state were actually pretty well empowered. As most men in the region join the Army, and are away for a large chunk of the year, it is the women who run the households, work in the fields and teach at schools. Hearing this brought about a lot of joy to my heart, but at the same time, I had a feeling that my Action Plan was turning futile. It was at that juncture, that a small girl from the village approached me and asked me for water. Soon, there was a queue of about ten kids fighting for one bottle of water. I was acquainted with a major problem faced by the villagers. There was acute water supply. The taps had running water for about three hours in the morning and a couple of hours in the evening. It was a major issue of concern and the villagers were desperately seeking help. Due to this reason, the population of the village was drastically reducing. Before we left the village, we took a small tour of the village and were surprised at the agricultural prospects of the village. Those people, living in a remote part of a small Indian state were practising organic farming. Instantly, I was struck by an idea to revive the economy and help the villagers sustain a better lifestyle.

Over the next few months, I visited the village a couple of times with my friends. The first thing I started working on was to get the organic produce of the village certified by the Government agency. With help from my school Social Service co-ordinator, we managed to get them the required certification, and now the organic produce from Bhatoli was ready to be sold in the market. Over the last year, I have been involved in a number of projects in the village. One of them being the construction of two water reservoirs to ensure better water supply in the village and help the people practise Rain-water harvesting. On my most-recent visit to the Bhatoli, I was accompanied to two of the water sources located in the nearby hills. I was told that if we could get a new water pipeline
from the sources to the village, there would be enough water for the people. I am currently working to get funds for this project.

Over the past year, I have seen a whole new perspective of life through the eyes of the village kids. Their smiles on all my visits have given me self-satisfaction, happiness and made me feel a part of something bigger in life. But the most important part has been everything that I have learnt in this past year from the people of Bhatoli. Be it the feeling of being united, standing by each other in tough times or just motivating your-self to move forward in life.