



## **Project Visit February 2017**

### **A permanent home for CEWAS**

Last October CEWAS director Saravana's request to build a house on her plot, was state-approved. As proprietor of the grounds she would like to give CEWAS trust the building rights in order to build a training centre including offices and a seminar hall on the ground floor.

Owning its own premises, CEWAS can economise on increasing rents and prevent CEWAS from having to move to new building every few years. Each removal has led to the loss of many participants as many of them could not find the new place. A constant physical presence of CEWAS is vital to the work of CEWAS however. Moreover, a new building closer to the villages reduces costs, as the CEWAS counsellors and office workers will have to travel a lot less. On top of that, the training room can be rent out and therefore generate an additional income for CEWAS.

This year's field trip was aimed at evaluating the building project. This involved the budget, questions of ownership and financial planning and the environmentally sustainable way of building the house. In the course of the field trip various houses, which had been built in an environmentally sustainable manner and which had involved traditional craftsmanship, were visited. Natural stone buildings using mortar mixed of fine-grained sandstone, herbs and minerals were considered most appealing as they have a cooling effect and repel insects. This craftsmanship has been passed down for generation and only few builders master it nowadays. We consider it important to support this local tradition. According to various experts' advice it has been decided to combine the traditional craftsmanship with load-bearing concrete elements for the large training hall.

Depending on the funding the house will be built in various stages, training rooms and offices for CEWAS being the first. Further steps consist of building a flat and installing solar panels on the rooftop. There are plans to make use of the rainwater to irrigate the adjoining garden. To this there is to say, that there is an area of about 300m<sup>2</sup> owned by the government next to the CEWAS plot. CEWAs has been granted permission to cultivate that land, which doubles the useable space of CEWAS.

Building costs for the ground floor with the training room add up to CHF 60,000. They are funded by an interest-free loan provided by the CESCO association as well as foundations and private donations.

### **Report on CEWAS India**

While we have been busy evaluating the building project, the work at CEWAS has been going on as usual.

At the moment Sathya, Vasanthi and Analakshmi act as fieldworkers in 50 villages north of Madurai. They pay daily visits to the villages, organise women's gatherings to discuss legal

and social problems and find solutions to them. They like their work and are highly appreciated by the local women. They are happy to counsel families and see couples reunited.

CEWAS is renowned for mediating. More and more often, CEWAS is invited to police stations to mediate. Heads of the village groups work independently and encourage other women in the villages to participate in government-funded training programmes (e.g. for tailors, beauticians, computer skills and so on). They are also acting as motivators and mentors for newly elected group leaders of other villages

Apart from settling family conflicts the women's groups take care of village concerns such as bus services, roads, public toilets and governmental childcare centres (*Angawadis*). Moreover they encourage women to engage in local politics (*Gramsabhas*). Alcoholism, predominantly among men, is still a big issue. There is also a growing number of men who are aware of their problems and come to CEWAS to seek information about rehab centres.

### **Daily Life at CEWAS**

In the morning the three field workers directly go to their scheduled villages. This is where they meet the local women during a break of their "*Nuru Naala*" jobs. "*Nuru Naala*" (translates as 100 days of work) is a governmental programme which is supposed to generate an income for women. Whereas it was limited to 100 days at the beginning it has now been extended to a whole year. The women involved go to work from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. Cleaning sewers, fountains and ponds they receive a pay of about 150 to 180 Rupees a day. During the break, the leader of the CEWAS village group organises discussion rounds. It happens quite often, that other co-workers from "*Nuru Naala*" listen in. Therefore CEWAS can reach a lot of women.

In the afternoon the fieldworkers go back to the office to write their reports and do other administrative tasks, clean the office and counsel people who pop in with a request. Sometimes the fieldworkers have to accompany a client to the police station where they are likely to meet other people who need their help. The fieldworkers mentioned a very shy lady they had met at the police station. Her husband had been arrested and she neither knew why he had been arrested nor where he was. She had already paid a lawyer, however he did not turn up. She was explaining the situation to the policemen when Sathya handed a leaflet about CEWAS to the policemen and explained them, that CEWAS provided their own lawyer to resolve such problems. Apparently this led to a more favourable attitude towards that lady. However, until such a case is settled, the fieldworkers often have to pay daily visits to the police station. There is an „All Women's Police Station“ in Madurai, but the police officers are so poorly trained that they often ask CEWAS people to give them counselling. CEWAS therefore prefers police stations which are run by men only, as they are more likely to take action.

*Nathalie Peyer, translated by Marie-Anne Pinheiro, April 2017*