
Advocacy case studies

LOBBYING LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN INDIA

COUNTRY:	India
THEMES:	Children and education; governance; land and property
ADVOCACY APPROACHES:	Community mobilisation; government officials; lobbying

Life is hard for the Mahadalit communities in India, who are traditionally one of the lowest-ranking groups within the caste system. One community of about 75 families are known as *Musa Hari* or ‘mouse-eaters’: they live apart, away from the nearest town, on the other side of a foul-smelling canal. Shunned by society and ignored by the government, these communities often struggle to survive. But now the *Musa Hari* community have reason to be hopeful about the future, thanks to the transformation they have seen through working with the local congregation.

With support from Tearfund, a local partner organisation has engaged the people there in community mobilisation, known locally as *Parivartan*. It has helped them work together to identify their needs and then find resources to solve their difficulties. As a result, people have been able to build new houses for themselves and start education initiatives to help local children learn to read and write and thereby gain entry to local schools. One lady received support to complete three months of nursing training, which allowed her to secure a job – just one of many other benefits for the community.

The local pastor also inspired the community to engage in advocacy with their local government to improve their situation further, with much success. The congregation supported families to request the BPL (Below the Poverty Line) government cards that they are entitled to. Now most families in the community have these cards, which means they can access government benefits, such as a minimum paid-employment guarantee, medical services and free meals for their children. Lobbying the local government has also led to funds being released for the construction of a new concrete road to the village, where only a poor-quality mud track existed before. Initially, 500m of road was built, and the government granted money for a further 700m to be constructed to complete the work. A member of the local government also promised to build a community hall for use as an education centre for the children learning to read and write.