

## **Sehgal Foundation: Experiencing a sense of community firsthand**

*By Elle Gough*

It is not often that individuals get to experience grassroots committee meetings in the flesh. Actually, it is almost never. That is why it was an immense privilege to be guests at a grassroots committee meeting hosted by the S M Sehgal Foundation (Sehgal Foundation) in the Nuh District of India.

The particular field exposure the University of Florida (UF) in India students (such as myself) were able to witness was that of the hygiene and sanitation women's committee meeting. Since they only conduct four meetings annually, it took more than simple luck to ensure our presence at this gathering.

At this quarter's meeting, women from a multitude of villages where the foundation team works came together to discuss issues of sanitation and hygiene in their communities. In discussion groups and large group sharing, women discussed malaria and basic hygiene needs at home and in the community. Women discussed the importance of rallying together to make change, rather than trying to work for change on their own, especially in a patriarchal village society.

As an anthropology student, attending this committee meeting felt rather surreal. I've always been lectured on what it's like to be in the field and have cross-cultural discussions, but I'd never before had the chance to experience it. Sehgal Foundation allowed me to experience and observe grassroots women's empowerment firsthand. I was able to listen to women gather around issues directly affecting their communities and come to conclusions on how to address them. I was able to observe the curiosity of children at the sight of foreign students coming to their village. I was able to hear Hindi and, despite my linguistic gap, continue to understand the passion these women had through universal gestures and emotions. I saw laughter, and I saw community.

My experience with Sehgal Foundation went beyond the physical walls of the nonprofit. It went on a ride through the countryside with Malvika, an assistant program leader, to discuss women's roles in India; it went inside the community meeting center with the women representing the sanitation committee; and it went on a bus back to Sehgal Foundation headquarters, capturing pictures of the countryside. It's almost unfathomable to think that this experience all unfolded within one day. But alas, here I am, reflecting on one of the most insightful nonprofit visits I've experienced yet.

Thus I owe a thank you to the Sehgal Foundation. A thank you for telling us about the multitude of programs being implemented in the districts and villages outside of Delhi. A thank you for being gracious hosts and answering our cacophony of questions. And a thank you for letting us sit alongside some of the most empowered women I've met in India. Your work is inspiring and humbling. On behalf of the entire UF in India group, we look forward to hearing more great

news of Sehgal Foundation's rural government empowerment and women's empowerment in the future.



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*(The University of Florida group visited S M Sehgal Foundation's intervention areas on July 13, 2017).*