



**A Grassroots Empowerment Network working with local NGOs and the most disadvantaged villagers to contribute to the elimination of poverty in the Alwar District of Rajasthan State, India**

***While poverty persists, there is no freedom, Nelson Mandela 2006***

## GEN News - April-October 2009

### **GEN backs 'End Poverty'**

From 2006, GEN worked for 2 years successfully supporting village level development in the Mewat District in the south of Haryana. Many of the people in the area were from the Meo community. Its work included literacy and numeracy classes for teenage girls who had never been to school and a series of eye camps to tackle eye disease and cataracts, both of which were funded by Connect for Change [www.connectforchange.org](http://www.connectforchange.org). It also worked in partnership with a local family Trust to set up a computer training centre, a dairy to improve the productivity of milk production, a model horticulture centre for training farmers, and a number of employment generation schemes. GEN's Director of Field Operations was Vinod Kausik.

A year ago, GEN Trustees handed over this work to its local partner, the family Trust set up in Mewat by a former GEN Trustee. GEN Trustees also agreed to support Vinod Kausik in setting up a new NGO, End Poverty (EP), to work with villages and the Meo community across the border in Rajasthan in the Tijara Block of the Alwar District in Rajasthan. People from that area had already shown an interest in GEN's work, as a result of its work in Mewat. EP has begun working in 5 Alwar District villages, all of which are very isolated and strung out along an unmade track in the foothills of the Aravali Hills. Struggling to survive with an almost cashless economy and suffering considerable deprivation, they are largely cut off from mainstream services and lack information and the support needed to improve the quality of life in their communities.



***Vinod, CEO of End Poverty (centre/ window), consulting villagers***

End Poverty was formally registered as an NGO in February this year, and GEN has set up a formal partnership arrangement with EP. Drawing on the experience of working with villagers in Mewat, both EP and GEN are now focusing on providing similar practical support to villagers in the new area. A core principle is to empower the villagers so they are better equipped to help themselves. To this end, a key feature of EP's work is to advise and support villagers on how to access funds and other resources already available through State and national governments and other sources. But this is only a start. In the long run, EP expects to expand its work to cover many more villages in the Tijara Block of Alwar, and beyond. *See report of GEN liaison visit to Tijara below.*

### **Summer fundraising for grassroots empowerment**

Over the summer two GEN fundraising events took place. The first was a jams, bikes, handbags and jewellery stall at a community festival in North London in July, with a special exhibition of paintings by GEN Trustees, Judith and Moyna (see right in photo below).

The second was a 10 km fund raising walk in the south Chilterns around Hambleden, Turville and a convenient vineyard along the way. We made it back to Hambleden in time for tea served by volunteers in the porch of the church, but too late to hear the afternoon concert. Attended by around 12 walkers and supported by many more, the walk and the stall raised over £1400 for GEN's work in India. Thanks to all who supported us. More walks planned.

***GEN fundraising stall in West Hampstead***



GEN has also just received an anonymous donation of £5000 from a generous supporter. We need more of these! We also want to make GEN the charity of choice by anyone looking to sponsor a good cause. Go to [www.justgiving.com](http://www.justgiving.com) and find The GEN Initiative for donations.

**GEN liaison visit to End Poverty projects**

In September Sue, as Chair of the GEN, met the EP Board in Gurgaon to discuss future working arrangements between GEN and EP, and to visit the area in Alwar where EP is now working. About two hours south of Delhi, and a further very bumpy drive along a very mangled track she and Vinod, the Chief Executive and founder of EP, went to two of the five villages where EP has formed village development groups to discuss needs and concerns with them and some women and youth representatives in the villages. Issues such as the plight of widows and old people, poor maintenance of water pumps and bore wells, lack of any kind of employment opportunities particularly for the young, absence of health facilities beyond the main Alwar - Delhi road, poor quality seeds and lack of fertiliser were raised.



Underpinning all of these and the other issues raised was a serious lack of cash to invest in any kinds of improvement, personal or community based. Also evident, and we knew this from our previous work in the Mewat area, was the villagers lack of information on those sources of support from government and elsewhere that are available, and how to access these. This is where End Poverty comes in. For instance as a result of one of our meetings the EP field worker, Shawkut, is now organising a meeting with village youth to discuss how they might access funds from the Government PMRY scheme that exists to support initiatives by young entrepreneurs. He will help them make the necessary applications.

***One example of local transport on the track to one EP village***

**Handicaps and hopes**

Sue notes 'My visit to the second village was quite distressing. It was clear that in the group of 30 or so villagers that I sat down with at least 5 of the middle aged and older folk had serious eye problems – either loss of or limited sight or severe inflammation of the eye area. They spoke sadly of the 'eye troubles' they were suffering. In the same village, an old bore well exists but is unusable because of broken parts and no possibility of replacing them without cash. As a result the women have to walk miles to collect water. None of the 5 villages has easy access to local health facilities. The nearest are at least an hour away on the main road, assuming transport is available. As a result many health problems go untreated.

***Sue, a village leader & potential young entrepreneurs in one of the EP villages***



On the other hand, the Tijara District, which is in the foothills south of the Aravali Hills, is more fertile than

the Mewat area of Haryana where GEN worked before, and has better quality water and is less eroded. As one of the villagers said 'we could improve our crops and grow more things if we could afford better seed and fertiliser, but we do not have the money for this'. EP has already stepped in with some help in the form of 1000 fruit and forest trees, and plans to do more. The former improve nutrition and diversify diets, the latter are needed to replant the hillsides and limit soil erosion. Along the main road, back down the bumpy track, there are small market gardens that grow cauliflower, tomatoes, brinjal, onions, melons and various spices. At the moment however the EP villagers have neither seeds, nor transport nor the marketing skills to enable them to break out of the cycle of poverty that binds them. EP, with GEN support, intends to help change that. At the very least it can help them access sources of support that are available so they cease to exist in a forgotten world.

The newly formed village development groups set up by EP are a source of hope, but need some early tangible results. Eye Camps, literacy and sewing skills for girls, self help groups for women are on the cards, subject to funds being raised. Records are kept, and at present enthusiasm seems reasonably high. EP is working hard to establish partnerships with other ngos and other possible partners and supporters to move things on. The EP Board, for instance, was interested in GENs fund raising ventures, and have started to discuss how funds could be raised in Gurgaon by selling produce from the villages at the many religious festivals that take place – selling spice plants in locally made pots for example, or home made pickles from the area.



#### ***VDG leader shows his record of VDG meetings***

#### **Next steps – you can help!**

GEN is preparing a 'gift aid' list of items that, if purchased, would provide direct help to EP villages, and which anyone either in UK or in India, could buy in lieu of gifts for family and friends. The list will include: sewing machines (£25each) for village women to make things for sale; fruit and forest saplings (£10 for 30 fruit trees for improved nutrition and marketing, £10 for 100 forest trees to reduce erosion on the hillsides); installation of a village hand pump (£160); repair of a bore well in one village (£150); installation of domestic biogas systems (£150 each); also to be included - provision of cows, buffalo, goats, sheep, hens, improved seeds. The list should be ready by early November. Meanwhile, do register your interest with Sue or Judith or any other GEN Trustee.

We are also planning to set up a Friends of GEN group (walkers included) to keep anyone interested in our work up to date, and to serve as a focus for discussions on new ideas or ways of improving on old ones. We know a lot of GEN supporters have valuable and relevant experience and would really like to tap into this. More on this in a later newsletter.

And, of course, both GEN and End Poverty could do much more with more funds. Donations and sponsorships welcome.

#### **On the cards – addressing climate change**

GEN and EP are exploring how to do more to address issues arising from climate change. Planting forest trees, introducing biogas systems and use of energy efficient power is a start, but there is much more we could do. Watch this space. Ideas or contacts welcomed.

***Want to know / do more? Contact Sue Burke [SPBurke@aol.com](mailto:SPBurke@aol.com) or +44 (0)207 794 9495***