



## Focus on Rural Tourism

GEN, a Grassroots Empowerment Network works with local NGOs and the most disadvantaged villagers to contribute to the elimination of poverty in the Alwar District of Rajasthan State, India  
<http://www.gen-initiative.org/>

Welcome to issue 12 of the GEN News. This edition, in a new style, focuses on the work of the GEN / End Poverty partnership to develop responsible rural tourism as a source of income for villagers in the Tijara Block in Rajasthan. It is an initiative which began in 2011 with a feasibility study (see overleaf) that has begun to bear fruit. A brief update on other GEN developments is included at the end of the News.

### Responsible rural tourism in Tijara – what's new?

In May and June this year two groups of visitors to India from Japan went for one day pilot visits to selected villages and projects in the GEN / EP funded part of the Tijara Block. This was a big step forward. It followed agreement reached on plans for responsible rural tourism that was reached at the GEN/EP Sixth Annual Stakeholder Meet held at the EP Office in Tapukara in February 2015 (see overleaf). After detailed discussions between the EP team, GEN reps and villagers it was decided that the main focus right now should be to promote day visits until there is sufficient suitable accommodation to cater for overnight stayers.

The focus on Japanese visitors at this stage reflects links between EP's Chief Executive, Rachna Singh, and Japan, where she lived with her family for some years. As a result of these links EP has hosted several Japanese interns in the past two years. Intern Sokichiro Don (Tsuji) did much of the work to set up the pilot visits and recruit groups of Japanese visitors. Each visit involved a briefing in EP's Tapukara office about life in this isolated rural area, a visit to a village hosted in the courtyard or Angan of one family where visitors were given a vegetarian meal and was the start of point for visits to one of EP's girls education centres and to a craft centre to meet the seamstresses at work, and buy some of the items they were producing. See photos below.



The Japanese party visits a girls' education class



The visitors enjoy a vegetarian meal

Building on the success of the two pilot visits GEN's partner ngo in India, End Poverty, has applied for funds from the DBS Foundation, an Asian focused corporate foundation that champions social entrepreneurship among people at the margins, to help it develop the rural tourism project to become self sustaining in 3 years. EP has called the project 'Project Angan' because groups of visitors will be hosted by different village families in their courtyards or angans. These will be selected to ensure visitors have access to facilities they require for a comfortable, hygienic and safe visit.

There is also a possibility that visitors from UK on Saga holidays in Jaipur and Delhi may be able to follow the same kind of programme. This will depend on whether GEN is successful in a fund raising bid made to the Saga Charitable Foundation to support an expansion of the GEN / EP adolescent girls education project to provide 18 more education centres by 2018. The Foundation likes to provide for visits by its holiday makers to projects it has funded. **If you are in Delhi or Jaipur you could also make this day trip. GEN can advise on cost and fix it with EP for you.**

# Rural Tourism in Tijara – The Story So Far

## First Steps in 2011 – the Feasibility Study

The GEN/EP project on rural tourism in the Tijara villages was launched in 2011, when Judith Schneider and Laura Zwicknagl (pictured on the right), postgraduate students from the International Centre for Responsible Tourism at Leeds Metropolitan University, UK, carried out a preliminary feasibility study. Their work aimed to identify prospects in rural tourism for income generation and boosting the local economy. They were assisted by Dr Simon Woodward, Head of the Centre, and presented their report in October 2011.



## 2013 – Eco-Survey

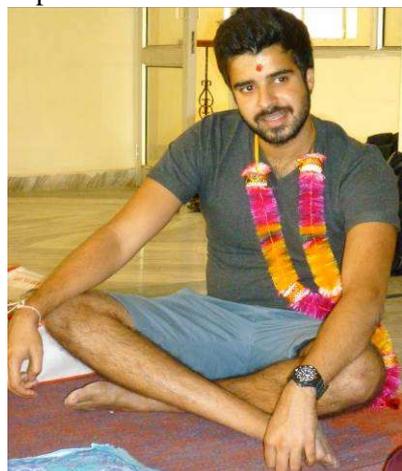
In March 2013 GEN organised an ecological survey of the Tijara villages, to identify the main ecological resources of the area. Two Indian experts in birds and ecology and a UK ecologist, with supporting teams from GEN and EP, spent three days collecting information on birdlife, local vegetation and land use, and historic buildings in EP's area of activity. The ecosurvey included mapping of two walking trails for visitors to the area – these will be used for 'led walks' by the EP team and local volunteers. The team has also produced a guide for visitors on historic buildings in the area, and a preliminary list of over 50 species of bird identified during the survey. A provisional start up plan for the development of rural tourism was prepared which includes ideas for developing village-based accommodation for visitors interested in experiencing village life in a rural Rajasthan. One household has piloted this, and can act as a model for future visitors.



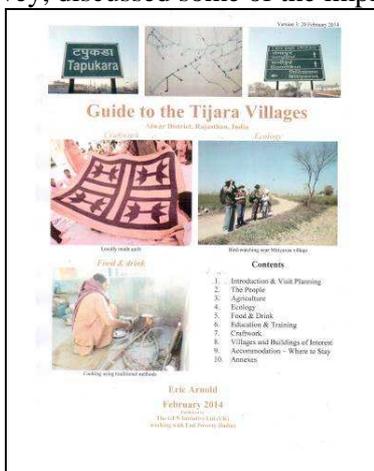
*Surveying the ecology of Tijara*

## 2014 – More Detailed Rural Development Studies

In 2014, further work on rural tourism was undertaken. Ameer Viranl, also from the International Centre for Responsible Tourism at Leeds, prepared a detailed study of the local tourism infrastructure. Also in 2014 GEN published a 'Guide to the Tijara Villages' (available on request) which describes the main features of interest in the area, and includes two trails. At the Fifth Annual Stakeholder Meet, held in February 2014, Niranjan Singh, one of the two local tourism experts who worked on the eco-survey, discussed some of the implications of developing rural tourism with villagers.



Ameer Virani



Guide to the Tijara Villages



Niranjan Singh (left) discusses rural tourism with villagers

## Other News (in brief) from GEN and its Indian partner End Poverty (2015)

- The 2 day GEN / End Poverty Stakeholder Meet held in EPs Tapukara Office in February brought together the GEN and EP teams with villagers participating in village development groups, adolescent girls education and handicrafts production to review progress and identify steps to be taken in the coming year
- Currently about 150 adolescent girls are participating in the one year catch up education classes in 6 villages. This brings the total number of girls attending the classes since 2010 to around 1150. In addition to funding from the UK based Pakhar Singh Foundation GEN has received some funding towards this from the Miss KM Harbinson Trust.
- GEN raised £2560 from the WF Southall Trust to support training and mobilisation of village development groups
- The income generating handicrafts project is now active in 10 villages in Tijara with 90 seamstresses participating.

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