



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 - November 2009 – January 2010

Good News for Meo girls in Tijara!

End Poverty (EP), GENs partner NGO in the Alwar District in Rajasthan, India, has just launched the 'Kishori Saksharta Shivir' initiative for girls in 3 of 5 target villages in Tijara Block where, together, GEN and EP are currently focusing their energies. GEN funds have helped this happen. The majority of the population of Tijara are Meos, a unique Muslim group whose religion and culture has integrated many Hindu practices. Literacy levels, especially among women and girls, are very low.



The EP education initiative is a 3 month low cost but intensive literacy programme (2 hrs pd, 6 day pw) for vulnerable adolescent girls who are on the verge of marriage, but have never been to school. Three teachers, all either Meos or from Scheduled Caste or Tribal groups, are Class 8-12 graduates from nearby villages with 8-13 years schooling. A first step in the project has been to provide on-the-job training for the prospective teachers.

Supporter & girls at the launch of the EP literacy project

Dr Rachna Singh, an EP Trustee and educationalist, has responsibility for this initiative. She reports that the project is popular with older women in the villages who have offered practical support. In the picture below, the woman on the right has offered space in her house for classes, and will also make sure girls attend regularly.



EP Trustees on the job (left – Rachna; back – Shobha Prasher, EPs Chair)

The approach adopted by EP in this initiative takes on board lessons learned about effective literacy education in India over many years – short duration but intensive literacy programmes work better than the more traditional 2 year programmes run by government in the 1980s and 90s. The project is taking place 'on site' in the students' own villages which provides a familiar and supportive setting for the girls and for their teachers. The project is being implemented at the request of the Village Development Groups recently formed within the Tijara Block.

For more information contact Rachna Singh rachna@endpovertyindia.org

GEN and EP to meet Village Development Groups at a Stakeholder Meet, March 2010

Some GEN Trustees and Associates will be getting together with End Poverty Trustees at a rural centre near the Tijara villages in March to do some joint thinking and planning for future activities. The Meeting will start with a consultation day with the 5 Village Development Groups that have been set up in Tijara where GEN is supporting EP, to take forward phase 2 of its work. Phase 1 took place over 2003-8 in the nearby Mewat District.

At the Meet, the villagers of Tijara will explain their village development plans and priorities so that GEN and EP are all fully briefed about their needs and concerns. On the following day, GEN and EP will work out how best to support the villagers, bearing in mind, limited resources, either with expertise or with funding. Finally, on day three, GEN and EP representatives will visit the villages to hear and see first hand the challenges the villagers are facing. The next GEN Newsletter will report.

GEN Trustees meet young ‘would be’ entrepreneurs

On a cold evening in January, GEN Trustees, Sue Burke (Chair) and Moyna Aicken, made their way on icy roads from London to Coventry where fellow Trustee, Prof Shai Vyakarnam, one of GENs founders, was running an intensive 4-day Enterprisers’ Programme to equip research students from across the UK with entrepreneurial skills. Shai is Director of the Cambridge University Centre for Entrepreneurial Learning. **Contact Shai@transitions.co.uk.**



As part of this annual Enterprisers’ event, Shai invites business leaders, managers from the public and private sectors and from the voluntary sector to a networking evening where they meet up with participating researchers to discuss what it takes to be an innovator. Sue and Moyna were delighted to join Shai for the networking evening where they were able to demonstrate their own innovative talents both in getting GEN off the ground, and by taking this opportunity to progress GENs plan to get more young people involved in its work.

Prof Shai Vyakarnam, GEN Trustee since 2003

Ideas that came up included:

- join a GEN focus group to discuss creative approaches to community participation for social and economic development;
- help with developing an innovative fundraising project based on a city walk called ‘Echoes of India in London’;
- help GEN expand its fundraising efforts for work with End Poverty and rural India;
- volunteer to work with End Poverty and its partners for 3 months on developing community-based business initiatives;
- undertake a study visit to the GEN / EP area to see for themselves the challenges faced by villagers and come up with ways of tackling them.

We wait to see how the Enterprisers we met will respond to Shai’s blog on these and other alternatives. See www.shaivyakarnam.blogspot.com

New GEN fund raising initiatives

• Virtual gifts

In the weeks before Christmas, GEN piloted a shopping list of ‘virtual gifts’ such as water pumps, learning opportunities for girls, fruit trees and seedlings for family farms in Tijara, chickens and goats, sewing machines and so on. The idea was that friends and family could buy these virtual gifts in lieu of material things. The take up was sufficient to persuade us to keep the project going during the year and promote it more next Christmas to a bigger mailing list. On the GEN web site, go to HOW YOU CAN HELP to find out more about what is available on the GEN shopping list – visit www.gen-initiative.org.



'Fun' winter walk to raise funds for GEN

At the end of January, Sue organised the first of a series of 'fun' fundraising walks for friends and family following two more ambitious fundraising walk ventures in 2009 and 2008. This time the walk was a circuit over the Chiltern Hills and along the Thames, starting and ending in the beautiful town of Henley. Twelve people came, and six more almost came! The result, around £250 raised for GEN's work. Thanks to all who came and / or contributed.

GEN winter walkers, Henley, January 2010



The GEN 'fun walks' plan, at the popular request of previous walkers, is for 3 'fun walks' a year. **The next two walks in 2010 are likely to be held on Sunday 18th April and Sunday 18th July** respectively, with a more ambitious 'fun'n'fundraising' walk in the autumn. Participants on the latter walk will be asked to find 10 sponsors each as well as paying a fee to join the walk, which is what happened in 2008 and 2009, with the result of £1000+ raised. The fundraising target for the 2010 autumn walk is £1500, and for all 2010 walks, £2250. **Contact Sue for details SPBurke@aol.com**

Hello and Goodbye

We are sad to say Goodbye to GEN Trustee, Moyna Aicken. She has been with us for nearly 4 years since she returned to UK from Bangladesh. Moyna has a talent for fundraising-cooking activities, finding really good auction items for our Melas (2007 and 2008), for making excellent chutneys and doing fine paintings for us to sell in aid of GEN. She also has good experience of running an NGO in India. Moyna has now moved to Pakistan for 3 years or so with her husband, but will stay on as a GEN Associate and friend. Thanks to Moyna for all her hard work.

We are happy to say Hello to a new GEN Trustee, Sunetra Puri. Sunetra was born in India, and educated in India and UK (Cambridge). Her career, which began at the International Planned Parenthood (IPPF) in London, has focused on women's development, human rights and development. She went on to do consultancy work for UNFPA and UNAIDS, and then joined the World Bank in Washington as Communication Specialist and then as Adviser to the World Bank Institute. This included contributing to the Global Conference on Reducing Poverty. Her work in communications on governance issues and on poverty reduction will be a huge asset to GEN. Welcome to Sunetra.



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