



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

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

GEN Newsletter No. 3 : February - April 2010

'Getting to know you' – GEN and End Poverty consult Tijara village development groups

In March four representatives of the GEN, four representative of End Poverty (EP) and around 50 villagers from the five Tijara Block villages we support spent a day together in an old cinema hall in Bhiwadi, the nearest town to the villages. The idea was to get to know and understand each other better while also progressing plans and priorities of the five village development groups (VDGs).



Over 50 participants attended the Stakeholder Meet

The villagers came to the Meet in minibuses organised by EP's newly appointed young executive officers, four literate young men and one woman who are paid a small honorarium for their work as organisers – a mini employment creation scheme as a side benefit of EPs work with VDGs. The event began with a 'water ceremony' where everyone watered plants in centre of the meeting circle and committed themselves to a fruitful meeting. This got the event off to an optimistic start.



Using the power of water to 'refresh' our exchanges

EP reported progress in what they had been doing in the five villages. VDGs introduced themselves and the work they had done with and without EP, supplemented by interesting village sketch maps. GEN representatives (Sue Burke, Chair of the GEN; Eric Arnold and John McCormick, GEN Associates, and Colin Marsh, GEN Company Secretary) used small photo galleries they had brought with them to introduce themselves, their families, and their interests.

A high spot of the event was a play by the GEN team supported by EP and narrated by EP's Chief Executive, Vinod Kausik, to illustrate the principles of how GEN and EP work. *'You can give a family eggs and they can survive for a day. If you give them healthy chickens that produce eggs they can live independently'*. The play starred Mr Faroukh (Eric) and his wife Fatima (Sue) and their several hungry children. Children and chickens were played by John and Atul (EP volunteer) and some villagers! EP (Rachna, EP Operations Head) delivered the chickens, and also enabled the Faroukh family to solve a water shortage problem, by guiding them in dealing with a local bureaucrat (Colin) who was responsible for arranging fresh water supplies.



Atul discovers his 'chicken' self – see eggs!

The play set the scene for lively discussions and a period of intensive work by each VDG to spell out its vision for 5 years time and identify its top five priorities. Access to clean drinking water and good sanitation came high on all village lists, as did employment opportunities, improved roads and support for widows and disabled people. Other needs were loans for farmers to buy cattle, seeds and fertiliser, a health care centre, and in two cases a primary school. Here is one village's vision *'In 5 years time we want to have basic facilities in our village like electricity, water, a good road, a health care centre, and basic education, with the main emphasis on job oriented education.'*

EP had cleverly invited a representative of the local MLA (MP) to attend the session, and he listened intently to the villagers priorities and was able on the spot to advise on how some of these needs could be met quite quickly.



One VDG at work on its priorities and vision.

What's happened in the villages so far? 'Live' feedback from GEN team visits

EP and people from each of the five villages were proud to take us to see the girls literacy classes at work, growth of the fruit tree saplings EP had provided some months ago, and in one case to launch the newly established sewing class.



Teacher & students



Sapling growers

The launch of the sewing class was a special occasion, with an opening ribbon cutting ceremony, leading on to presentation of six sewing machines to the class, including four from GEN. Earlier the GEN team had also seen some rather fine home made quilts hanging on a line. Rachna from EP then disclosed her plan for a pilot project to help some village women have a go at making good quality quilts that could be sold in nearby Gurgaon, or even auctioned at a GEN fund raising event (see below).



Opening the sewing class



A traditional quilt – a future income generator?

10 for GEN Walk in April provides direct help to Tijara Villagers

On April 18th twenty enthusiastic walkers met for a fund raising walk for GEN. It was a beautiful spring day for walking along the Thames river bank, having lunch in the garden of a pub in Cookham, and then following a more undulating route back to Winter Hill where we had started. When we arrived in Cookham we were lucky enough to get an unscheduled guided tour of the local part Norman Church by the church warden.

Some of the funds raised through the walk are being sent immediately to our partner organisation in India, End Poverty, to provide the five Tijara villages we jointly support with things they need that were identified during our visit – sewing machines to enable a second sewing class to get started in Dolhi Pardhi, fruit tree saplings for the other villages, well designed books for use in the literacy classes for vulnerable teenage girls, fabric to enable village women to make better quality quilts they can sell.



Happy walkers refreshing themselves over a pub lunch in Cookham.

Next 10 for GEN walk

The next GEN fundraising walk will be on 18th July, led by famous Oxford walker, David Wiles, and will follow a trail that covers the original village models for Lark Rise to Candleford, recent TV series and book by Flora Thompson on her childhood in rural Oxfordshire. Contact Sue for info.

Fabulous Diwali fund raising event in Cambridge, Saturday 20th November

GEN is planning an ambitious Diwali fund raising party with fireworks, a blues band, a fashion show, food and drink, and a 'madly' spectacular auction at the Cambridge University Rugby Club. Details in next newsletter. Chief organiser is Professor Shai Vyakarnam, GEN Trustee and head of the Centre for Entrepreneurial Learning at the Judge Business School, University of Cambridge. Put the date in your diary **now!** You wont want to miss it.



Watch this space in next GEN newsletter for fun, fireworks and fundraising!

Want to know / do more for GEN? Contact Sue Burke SPBurke@aol.com or +44 (0)207 794 9495

GEN Initiative: Charity Reg. No. 1101193 Charitable Co. Ltd. by Guarantee Reg. No. 4620446, Regd. Office: 3 Howitt Close, Howitt Road, London NW3 4LX, Tel: 020 7586 5923 Email: judithcrosland@btinternet.com

