



GEN, 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. To find out more about the GEN's work see www.gen-initiative.org

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

GEN News – December 2011

GEN 2011 Diwali Party boosts work in Tijara villages of Rajasthan

On Saturday 12th November over 150 people thronged into the Shelford Rugby Club, Cambridge, for GEN's second sparkling Diwali Party. Entertained by a striking firework display, (thanks to sponsors Tata, Ubisense, India Accelerator and a private donation), and by the music of Deep Blue, the well known Cambridge academics rhythm and blues band, and sustained by a warm welcome, good food and drink, everyone was in a good mood when the fund raising auction began.



GEN trustee, Shai Vyakarnam, himself a Cambridge academic, was auctioneer, and did a brilliant job encouraging 'bidding wars' or persuading bidders to add more to their bids. As a result over £4000 was raised from the auction alone to support the work of GEN and its Indian partner ngo, End Poverty, for work with the villagers of Tijara. It included funds specifically for books and materials for the girls literacy classes, for chickens and goats for deprived village families, for sewing machines and fabrics for the craft production project, for a handpump and for bicycles to enable the more isolated girls and teachers to get to classes. It also covered sale of 5 quilts made by women in the villages – popular items – which like last year raised more than expected. And some very generous tangible items like boxes of Cobra beer, MOT tests, speed driving, a photography course, accountancy advice and top quality coaching. Thanks to all for being so generous.



Pouches for sale!

The Party also provided a space for showcasing and selling some of the craft work of the Tijara girls and women, and for sharing some of the stories of the work of GEN and EP in this poverty stricken rural area of the Alwar District in Rajasthan.

Be prepared – this may become an annual event – each year a new and improved offering!

Tijara-made Quilt



Tijara women and girls keen to produce handicrafts for income generation



'I made this today!'

Last year GEN gave End Poverty, its Indian partner, £250 for sewing machines and materials for a pilot handicrafts project with the girls from the literacy classes that began 2009. A few girls made two quilts and some sample pouches for the 2010 GEN Diwali Party. Successful sales of these items made a big impact on producers - at last a way to earn independent income! This year they made 5 quilts and over 200 small bags for the Diwali Party. Some have also been sold in Delhi and Gurgaon. The challenge now is to build a sustained and efficient marketing system and to expand the range and quality of products.

Two 'Friends of GEN', Jo Hogg and Jacqui Jaffe, last month led a one day village based workshop attended by 30+ women producers to share ideas about designs and quality. (See left for one product of the day). This popular event has given GEN, End Poverty and the women producers lots of new ideas.



Exploring responsible tourism as a new venture for Tijara block

Two postgraduate students pursuing an MA in Responsible Tourism at Leeds Metropolitan University, UK, spent June and July in the Tijara block carrying out a preliminary feasibility study into the prospects for developing rural tourism in the GEN / EP supported villages of Tijara. The idea was that the venture should assess and identify prospects in rural tourism for income generation and boosting the local economy.

Judith Schneider and Laura Zwiknagl, supported by their tutor, Dr Simon Woodward, explored the area to identify potential resources and possible visitor attractions. They also interviewed samples of prospective visitors, both urban Indians including school teachers, and overseas visitors, to establish their preferences and ideas for rural tourism and leisure visits. EP now has a soundly based report to help it consider what future work is needed. The Indian government has made rural tourism a priority in its rural development programme, and may be a source of funding for such work.

First thoughts on priorities are a three pronged focus: **culinary tourism** – Tijara produces high quality vegetables and fruit and has some unique cooking techniques; **craftwork tourism** – to tie in with EPs existing craftwork project and plans; and **ecological tourism** – to train local guides in the natural history of the area and identify countryside treks between villages and across to the Aravali Hills which are a natural boundary for the area. Further work is needed on all three to check options and feasibility. GEN and EP see responsible rural tourism in the Tijara Block as a long term project which will take several years to implement on a sound and ethical basis.



The Singh family at home with researchers, Judith and Laura

Meanwhile short visits to GEN / EP Tijara projects and homestays with families who have suitable facilities will proceed on a trial basis. Judith and Laura were the first house guests of Dayal Singh and stayed in his home for 2 weeks while doing their research. Dayal and Satvinder his wife, a teacher on the EP girls literacy programme, enjoyed the experience as much as the researchers.

Two more student visitors, Amelia and Marcelina, from St Andrews University also enjoyed the Singh family hospitality while helping EP with developing village profiles for EPs website.

Contact GEN at SPBurke@aol.com for more about this project.



Want to experience rural life in India? Homestay opportunities in Tijara villages!

As part of our continuing East meets West philosophy GEN and EP are offering urban based Indians and overseas visitors who are travelling into or out of Delhi or Gurgaon or nearby Agra or Jaipur, the opportunity of one, two and three day village visits to join in village life, see our projects and meet villagers. Tijara Block is about 1 ½ hours from Delhi by car. The inclusive cost would be from £40 - £150 and is part of a pilot project to develop responsible rural tourism in the area – see below. **Contact Sue, Chair of the GEN, at SPBurke@aol.com to find out more and explore the possibilities.**

End Poverty - Update from the Tijara Block

As well as the activities reported above, GENs partner in India has continued its 6 month programme of literacy, numeracy, sewing, health and horticulture for teenage girls in 3 more villages in Tijara. Each time a new round starts the programme is evaluated and improvements made. Teachers go through a refresher course and share ideas with each other. New books are issued. Plans are now afoot to offer a second tier programme for around 70 girls who would like to continue learning.

The girls from earlier programmes have also joined in the craft work project and do their bit in making small pouches and quilts.



End Poverty has also assisted the Education Department of the state of Rajasthan with its target of locating and getting all children under 10 years registered in primary school. They found that existing data was inaccurate, under counting the number of children eligible so provided more accurate data to the authorities .

Finally.....

Adult villagers ask GEN and EP to start a literacy night school for them

In February GEN sponsored a 3 day exposure visit for 70 villagers and EP staff to visit the well known Barefoot College of Tilonia which has been empowering villagers to take charge of their lives through a series of innovative ventures for over 40 years. They came back with lots of new ideas. One was a request to start a night school to provide literacy and related classes for adults who could not read or write. With £1000 financial help from a 'Friend of GEN' a pilot project was started in October in one village, Ramlal ki Dahni.

About 25 adult male villagers have enrolled and are taught by a male teacher, Puran, who taught on the girls literacy programme. He is 19 years and younger than almost everyone in the class! But has commanded the respect of his pupils.

Classes are held from 7.00 – 9.30 each night illuminated by solar lighting. Asked why they were there almost all of those who spoke said they felt trapped by their inability to read and write, and especially wanted to keep track of their finances. As the programme evolves financial literacy will be added to the course content.



His daughter attended a girls literacy class. He wants to understand his finances better and to travel more easily .

Other GEN / EP plans for Tijara in the coming year

On the cards for 2012:

- From January to June 2012 take the basic girls literacy programme to three new villages and repeat in three where there are still young women who have not attended the classes. Take programme to other groups in the second half of the year, according to available finances. (£500 / 1x6 month class / village)
- Develop and test a level 2 education programme for those girls keen to build on their initial literacy class experiences and go further
- Develop a photography module for girls in the literacy classes to use cameras to explore and record life in their village**
- Expand the library resources available to graduates of the literacy classes. These are currently delivered on a rota basis to each village group
- Give a small travel fund to each Village Development Group (VDGs) so members have money to cover costs of 'negotiation' visits to local government service providers to take up issues of concern. Or to cover costs of seeing innovative projects set up in other Rajasthan village communities. Support VDGs in using this fund effectively
- Research and introduce a pilot 'financial literacy' project designed to support those villagers who are struggling to understand and manage their finances and their debts.
- Work out how best to set up an integrated education centre that can be a focal point for providing basic education and vocational training for all the Tijara villages in a form suited to their circumstances.

**** Old Digital Cameras wanted – can you help?**

If you have an old digital camera you have replaced with a better model we could really use the old one as part of this project. We need about 12 cameras and would take them out in February or March for Vinit, EPs field man, who is piloting this piece of work . Contact Sue – SPBurke@aol.com to arrange collection

Join us! GEN needs more trustees, associates & 'friends' i.e. people who would like to play a more active part in our work. You would have the opportunity to build working relationships with our partner, End Poverty, & to get to know people in the villages we support. 'You can get a real feel of rural life in India' says one GEN friend. Want to know more? Contact Sue – see end of newsletter

More on our UK fun and fund raising activities

Walking for GEN in 2011



Come rain, come shine, GEN fund raising walks carried on throughout 2011. This year we did four walks and raised over £1250 for GEN's work with End Poverty in the Tijara Block in Rajasthan.

In July eighteen walkers gathered outside the Cock Inn in Combe to walk 11 km to Blenheim Palace and back. Led by David Wiles, the walk also provided for sight of some architectural gems on the Palace façade. Lunch was picnic style overlooking the grounds of the Palace in light rain

In October the weather treated us better and 20 happy walkers sat in the sunshine in the garden of the historic Red Lion pub at Islip for lunch. Sarah Hayward who has lived in the village for 20 years gave us a potted history of Islip. The walk started in Oxford, at the home of Sue and Eric and then followed the river Cherwell northwards to Islip, covering some 10 km.

Earlier walks in the season took in Windsor Great Park and around Hyde Heath near Chesham.



Watch this space - The walks programme for 2012 will begin again in February or March 2012 with a target of four during the year. On the cards are walks around High Wycombe, around Waterperry Gardens near Oxford, and along the Thames. Suggestions or offers to lead welcome. Get in touch if you want to join in.

Next walk - Contact Sue for details – SPBurke@aol.com 020 7794 9495



Tony gives his all!

GEN Trustee clocks up 12 sponsored 10 km runs!

GEN trustee, Tony Charlwood, aged 60, has run well over 120 km (75 m) in 2011 to raise funds for the GEN. His initial goal was 10 x 10 km, but he got so inspired that in October, the last month of his programme, he ran two x 10 km and a half marathon in a month (with just a few creaks and groans). Well done Tony! Thanks.

We need more such devotees to take on sponsored activities to raise funds for our work, whether physical endeavours or other 'sponsorable activity'. Are you a likely candidate? Tony is happy to advise and we would love to back you. You might even get a free GEN vest! Creating a page on the Just Giving web site is a good start. Go to www.justgiving.com and look up the GEN to see what Tony came up with. Contact Tony for more information / advice - tony_charlwood@hotmail.com. He mentioned the London Marathon as one where GEN should be seen in future.

Coming soon – A fun filled GEN briefing day

We will be organising a GEN Saturday lunch and briefing session in Central London in March 2012 for those who would like to find out more about our work in India. Details will be circulated in January 2012.

GEN News is currently compiled and edited by Sue Burke, Chair of the GEN. SPBurke@aol.com 020 7794 9495
GEN Initiative: Charity Reg. No. 1101193 Charitable Co. Ltd. by Guarantee Reg. No. 4620446, Regd. Office Radbourne Management Service, Radbourne House, Butchers Lan, Pattishall, Northants e mail colinp.marsh@btinternet.com Tel 01327 830756 07767898381