



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 – July 2013 ~

Walk – Eat – Talk! What have GEN and EP been up to in Tijara since 2009?

On June 15th a group of GEN supporters and trustees met with Vinod Kaushik, the chair of GEN's partner in India, End Poverty (EP), at the Abbey, Sutton Courtenay near Oxford, to discuss how things were going in the villages supported by our two organisations in the Tijara Block in Rajasthan. On June 13th Vinod also addressed a seminar of post graduates at the Judge Business School at Cambridge University on the same theme. His reports on EP's experiences and achievements since it was founded in 2009 was upbeat. Impressive progress has been made!



Vinod (L) with Gen supporters & trustees 15/6/13.

i) Over 800 unschooled teenage girls from 13 villages have attended EP's 6 month literacy and general education programme and gained basic skills in reading, writing, numeracy, health and nutrition, horticulture and sewing. Of these over 130 have attended the newly instituted follow on one year programme, and are asking for more.

ii) Since 2010 over 130 women from poor and needy backgrounds have trained and become engaged in income generation activities through handicrafts production.

iii) Over 50 small infrastructure development projects have been undertaken at the instigation of village development groups supported by EP. These have included providing water pumps, improvement of roads and pathways, building proper boundaries to schools and other public places, improving agricultural production through water management and supply of better plants and seeds.

iv) On the cards is a new livelihood initiative based on the development of rural tourism (see below)

Vinod highlighted EP's approach (which parallels GEN's focus on grassroots empowerment) as working with villagers based on regular dialogue and support with reaching their own priorities and goals. EP does not impose external solutions. Rather it aims to build villagers capacity and confidence through regular education, training and exposure visits to successful projects tackling similar problems. Villagers are supported as they embark on taking new steps.

End Poverty plans to expand its out of school education to reach 6 to 14 year old girls



Encouraged by the local Board of Education EP wants to pilot out of school education centres in its villages starting in 2014. Each centre will provide a 5 year programme to 25-30 young girls whose parents do not want them to attend formal primary school. The Board has agreed to certificate the course after 5 years, and offered to provide funds for uniforms and midday meals. An Indian ngo has offered a tested curriculum, funds and other essential support. Watch this space for news on progress.

The GEN / EP Stakeholder Triangle – March 2013: EP, GEN and Tijara villagers look ahead

Stakeholder consultations between GEN and EP teams and village representatives took place over 3 days in early March. First, GEN reps (Sue Burke, Andrew Picken, Eric Arnold and two supporters) met with the EP team of 12 for an initial out of doors briefing in Gurgaon. Some of the EP team had never left the Tijara Block before so the size and busy-ness of Gurgaon was quite a shock. Taking place in a mixture of English and Hindi each member of the EP team reported on their area of work since the 2012 stakeholder meeting. This was also an opportunity to practice public speaking!



GEN and EP teams meet for briefing in Gurgaon at start of stakeholder meet



Vinod uses twigs to show alignment between EP, GEN & Tijara villagers

Highlights of the EP briefing included:

- Girls education classes, both 6 month starter classes and one year follow up have now taken place in 13 villages. An emerging demand is for more vocational content. Some girls are asking for the opportunity to learn English – we will help to satisfy this by sending 2 UK volunteers in September
- Women in 3 handicrafts centres are producing bags, pouches, table covers, cushion covers, and quilts. Among other things they produce approx 1000 pouches a month and several women are able to earn over R1000 per month which makes a big difference to family incomes. Women from the Hindu and Sikh communities in Tijara are particularly active, but every effort is being made to engage more Meo women.
- Village development groups in 3 villages have addressed the problem of power cuts, quality of water supplies and access to drinking water, relining existing water ponds and improving roads. A recent exposure visit took a group of farmers to an agricultural show where one decided to install a solar powered irrigation pump that was demonstrated there and attracted a government subsidy.
- 8 pairs of goats provided through the GEN Diwali Party auction were allocated to widows in the villages and have provided them with valuable nutritional support and milk supplies for sale
- Two eye camps have been held that have arranged treatment for cataracts among other things

Consultations with villagers



Villagers discuss how to progress the handicrafts project

After the initial GEN / EP meeting consultations took place with EP beneficiaries and contacts in a sample of 4 villages – two where EP has worked since 2009, and two new ones. They were joined by reps from UNDP's Water Management programme, and the National Skills Foundation – both want to work with EP in future. Careful records were kept for future planning purposes.

Discussions ranged over the work of the craft centres, the girls education programme and the work of village development groups, with many practical suggestions for future action, and some more strategic proposals.

- **Income Generation / Handicrafts Production**

Work for income generation was seen as a high priority, especially handicrafts production. Expansion of the current programme was proposed, with suggestions on how to ensure range and quality of products are saleable in the market place and how to improve the quality of equipment available. It was proposed that the girls education programme should include more sewing skills so they can move into handicrafts production after completing the education programme.

- **Girls Education**

There was a lot of enthusiasm for the girls education programme with suggestions that it should be more condensed and shorter. It was suggested, too, that girls should have the opportunity to reach level 8 of schooling. Currently through EP they can only reach level 3, although work is underway on how best to provide higher level opportunities. [Note: Despite this enthusiasm, we are disappointed that 2 villages have opted out of the EP education programme because village elders don't want their girls to participate and get an education! Working in this culturally plural area can be challenging.]

- **Village Development Groups (VDGs)**

Action identified for VDGs attention included: arranging training for farmers to increase productivity and improve marketing of their products; ensure fair prices and availability of seeds, fertiliser and pesticides; find loans for livestock; set up dairies at village level; improve quality of roads; support widows engagement with livestock and dairy activities; improve distribution of water and access to drinking water; programme to install toilets. VDGs were also asked to address problems of youth unemployment, to press for improvements in the quality of schools and the quality and level of education they provide including provision to level 8 or better still a local secondary school, and to seek ways to provide higher education for girls in the villages.

End Poverty and GEN will support villagers in meeting these needs and aspirations over 2013-14

Eco Survey – next step towards developing rural tourism in Tijara

NEW

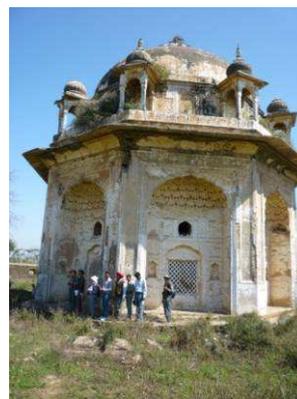
In March 2013, two Indian experts in birds and ecology, Niranjan and Brijender, and one UK ecologist, Jan, with supporting teams from GEN and EP, spent 3 days collecting information on birdlife, local vegetation and land use, and historic buildings in EPs area of activity. This was a follow up to the feasibility study into rural tourism for Tijara, done by interns from Leeds Metropolitan University's Responsible Tourism Masters Programme in 2011.



'Can you see it?'



Brijender, Sue, Niranjan and Jan looking!



Mughul building



Weaver bird nest

The ecosurvey has resulted in 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 an informative note 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 was drafted as a basis for preparing a policy on the development of rural tourism for discussion with EP's Board. This includes suggestions for developing village based accommodation for visitors interested in experiencing life in a rural village in

Rajasthan. One household has piloted this for several GEN interns, and can act as a model for future visitors.

GEN Walkers keep striding on and raising funds for Tijara villages

Since the start of 2013 there have been three more 10 for GEN fund raising walks, one in the snow, and two in the sun. In the snow we followed a beautiful circuit around Saffron Walden. A stalwart seven completed the course and promised to come back on a sunnier day. On a sunny day in April more than 20 walkers took a trail in a spectacular part of the South Chilterns taking in Pishill and an excellent lunch in a historic pub there called The Crown. Sunny day two was a walk near the former home of George Bernard Shaw in Ayot St Lawrence near A. Together the three walks raised about £1000. Thanks to all who came along and contributed.



Some of the GEN walkers in June 2013 showing their intentions

Next Walks

On August 4th the next 10 for GEN walk will be just off the M40 near Stokenchurch starting at Ibstone. Contact Sue for details SPBurke@aol.com And in September we are planning a walk near Tring. Contact Andrew for details andrewpicken@cantab.net Two more will happen before the end of 2013.

Malala's Day – 12th July. On 12th July, Malala will address the United Nations on the need for girls education. She is the young woman who was attacked by the Taliban in Pakistan for speaking out about this need. To mark this GEN is running a special fundraising campaign to help expand EPs out of school education programme for adolescent girls. £10 covers education of one unschooled girl in EPs 6 month literacy programme. Please support this important work! Donations to: <https://mydonate.bt.com/charities/gen>

Note for your diary

The annual GEN Diwali Party is scheduled for Saturday 7th December 2013: food – fun – lights in some shape or form – a fantastic night of entertainment including music, an auction and a chance to dance and enjoy.

Stop Press: Win £2000, £1000, £500, £50x10 in the Big Give Charities Raffle & support your favourite charity. We hope this might include the GEN! This is the first on line raffle organised by the Big Give. Tickets can be bought for any of the charities registered on the Big Give, including the GEN. Sales close on 7th August. Draw is on 9th August. Tickets are £1 each & are sold in batches of 10. Go to the raffle page at www.theBigGive.org.uk/about/opportunities/raffle/ to buy tickets. Good luck!

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