



Grassroots Empowerment in Rural India The GEN Initiative Ltd (GEN)

www.gen-initiative.org

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

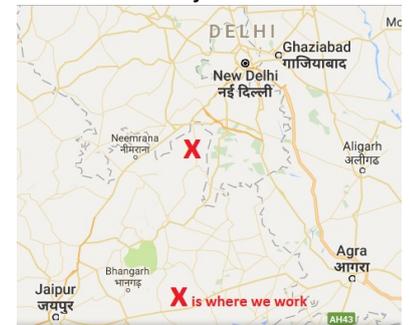
Astuni who had been through our catch up education programme has become vital to her farmer parents as she can now understand the farm accounts. She discovered that they had been systematically underpaid for their milk over many years so her father successfully claimed a refund. She now has increased respect within the family and the village. See Educating Unschooled Teenage Girls below

GEN's partnerships GEN works primarily through its Indian partner End Poverty (EP) which it helped to get started in 2009. It supports EP with funds, strategic advice and development experience. EP has an excellent reputation locally with good insight into government programmes and strong rural development expertise. Our main activities are in education, livelihood and village development



Where we work

Currently we focus on a group of about 50 villages in the Tijara Block in Alwar District in the State of Rajasthan. The area is primarily agricultural, and is one of the most impoverished districts of India. The majority of people in the area are Meos (70%), who follow a unique branch of Islam. The population also includes some re-settled Sikh communities (10%) and some scheduled Hindu castes (20%).



Educating unschooled teenage girls

The main focus of our education programme is adolescent girls like Astuni from the Meo community, many of whom have not previously attended primary school due to responsibilities for housework and farming and the reluctance of parents to allow them to travel far from their homes to a school with only male teachers. The programme was launched in 2009 in 5 villages. It has now been offered through 25 local community centres. Nearly 1700 adolescent girls have benefitted from this basic education programme. On parental demand, the initial six month education programme (which includes skills in reading, writing, numeracy, health and nutrition, horticulture and sewing) has been extended to one year. The course is now certificated by the Alwar Education Department and the girls can join formal primary schools or the governments Open School at level 3 on successful completion of our one year programme. The programme is very cost effective - about £50 per pupil for participating in a whole years programme.



Livelihood programme for women

At the request of women and girls in the Tijara villages in 2010, GEN, in partnership with End Poverty, launched a pilot handicrafts project by funding the purchase of sewing machines and materials. The programme builds on the local tradition of craft work and colourful quilt production. The craft work project provides a good source of income for women in the area and has increased their status in their families and local communities. It has grown significantly –

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and now there are 10 informal centres and over 80 seamstresses. The next step is to formalise production and marketing as part of a plan to set up an independent locally run production company by 2020. One participant commented "My sewing skills now allow me to earn money and contribute to the household expenses and also to save for my children's education. Since I started earning I have more say in my home."



Village Development Groups – improving village life and farming activities

A key driver of rural development in the Tijara Villages is the establishment of Village Development Groups (VDGs). VDGs help villagers to identify problem areas, assess priorities, and take action to tackle them. Achievements of VDGs include new village toilet blocks, minor road works, training programmes on crop management and improving farming skills, installation of water pumps and the provision of safety fencing for open-topped wells which are a hazard for children. EP helps VDGs access government funds for several community programmes. New initiatives include 'Plant a Tree for Life project', which encourages farmers to diversify traditional farming practices to include small orchards. So far since 2014 over 100,000 saplings have been provided to farmers to this end. Progress in this project in 2016 was largely due to the generous contribution by the UK foundation Open Gate. A dairy development programme has trained 400 farmers in ways of improving milk production to meet national standards. "I like being part of my VDG. I can help get things done to improve village life" said one VDG member.



Stakeholder Engagement

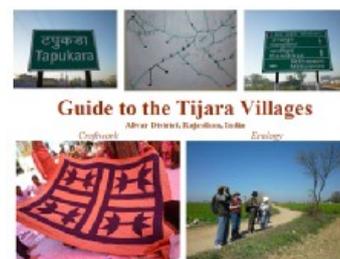
An annual three day GEN/ EP Stakeholder event consults with villagers about progress in the previous year and prioritizes current issues of importance plans for the coming year. This bottom up approach ensures that GEN/EP work plans address the needs of the people we are serving.



The GEN / EP stakeholder event 2017 in action

Responsible rural tourism

An innovative idea from VDGs is the development of responsible rural tourism in Tijara. Initial work includes preparation of a tourist guide , plus design of local treks



GEN's fundraising activity

The major fund-raising activities in the UK are GEN walks and applications to funding organisations plus some very generous individual donors. GEN supporters especially walkers have also through many years regularly contributed to GEN's work and our thanks to all of them. Our grateful thanks also to the following organisations for their financial support without which GEN could not have contributed to our various projects: - CB and HH Taylor 1984 Trust; Cobra Beer Partnership; Miss K M Harbinson Trust; Open Gate Trust; Oxford India Society; Pakhar Singh Foundation; Public Health Action Support Team (PHAST); Romeera Foundation; Saga Charitable Trust; Southall Trust and Waterloo Foundation.

How can you support GEN's work?

Please support our programmes to make life better in the Tijara Villages. There are still 10,000 teenage girls unschooled in this area and many more need increased incomes and improvements in villages and farming. **Please make donations through <https://mydonate.bt.com/charities/GEN> or visit GEN's website: <http://www.gen-initiative.org>.** To join our mailing list to receive newsletters, annual reports etc please contact sue@gen-initiative.org