



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 – June 2011

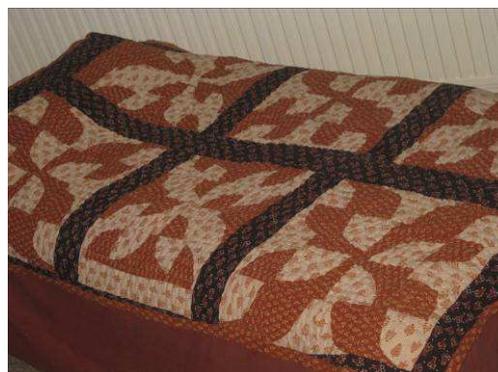
End Poverty makes its mark in the Tijara Block, 2011

GEN's working partner in India, End Poverty (EP), is increasingly recognised by villagers in the Tijara Block of Rajasthan, by local government officials, by local banks and corporate organisations as an ngo that makes a difference. In the first half of 2011 EP has:

- Organised two eye camps attended by around 800 villagers, including children and young people, who had eye examinations, sight tests, were allocated specs, and were checked for cataracts. Seventy, mostly elderly villagers, underwent successful cataract surgery.
- At the request of the Rajasthan state government EP mobilised women from the 10 villages where we work to attend a women's health camp to provide basic health checks and advice
- Provided its 6 month girls literacy and numeracy programme to 6 more groups of teenage girls in 6 villages, reaching around 200 more girls in all. At the request of the girls, games, dance and sport have now been added to the programme – see Sunetra's report that follows
- Started work on establishing an income generating craft production programme for graduates of the literacy classes. This grew out of a small pilot project funded by the GEN to support the girls with making quilts and bags which were sold at the GEN Diwali Party in November 2010. As a first step GEN funded the teachers on the project to visit the huge government funded craft market, Dilli Haat, near Delhi, to see what villagers from other parts of India were producing. Craftwork designs will concentrate on use of traditional Meo designs and quilt making skills.



Dancing & play in the Patankalan literacy class



One of the quilts auctioned at the Diwali party

- Taken 70 villagers on an 'exposure visit' funded by the GEN to get ideas from the renowned Barefoot College and Tilonia villages where many innovative village based projects have been initiated over the past 30 years, ranging from use of solar energy for village lighting, through enabling illiterate women to use computers for craft production to training illiterate dentists! They came back full of plans, including a request for help with setting up night classes for adults in our Tijara villages.
- Taken steps towards an income generating rural tourism programme supported by GEN through a feasibility study by 2 'responsible tourism' postgraduates at Leeds Metropolitan University.

Tony Charlwood, GEN trustee, has committed to run 10x10 kms in aid of GEN this year. So far he has run six. The aim is to get as many sponsors as he can to support his 'marathon effort'. **GEN wants more people to do sponsored activities to support its work!** Tony wants more sponsors! Interested? Get in touch....Contact details on last page. To sponsor Tony contact - tony_charlwood@hotmail.com or find Tony's page with picture on www.justgiving.co.uk. His goal is to raise at least £1K.

Report of my first visit to the Tijara Block - Sunetra Puri (GEN trustee) March 2011

"I want a better life" said a young girl in a village in the Tijara area attending a literacy class supported by GEN and its partner End Poverty (EP). "I would have been blind by now if EP had not organised the cataract camp" said a village leader and member of a Village Development Group (VDG). "I think we should plan for solar panels as we have so much sun and it is good for the environment" said a young and very bright village development group reporter. An educated young man, he was speaking in his role as reporter for a VDG, who organises VDG meetings, fixes consultations on new ideas, and reports to EP on the needs and comments from his village.

After two years as a GEN trustee I had the much desired opportunity in March to visit some of the work in the villages that GEN supports in partnership with the NGO, End Poverty in Rajasthan. I came back impressed by the feedback and enthusiasm of the villagers in the Tijara Block and their commitment to develop their villages and improve their lives and those of their children.



'We can now read, count, write, draw and sew!'



'I can see again!'

I visited literacy classes in three villages-Mithiabad, Patankalan and Patankurdh. The young girls I met were confident as they showed me what they had learned- numbers, alphabets, timetables, reading, drawing and stitching. They were proud of their achievements, wanted so much to learn more, to get skilled in stitching and to have some time to play. While I was there one girl raised her hand and asked for skipping ropes and balls for the class. The girls generally work in the fields in the morning, and in the afternoon cook, do household chores and look after younger siblings. The literacy classes take place from 12 o'clock to 2 pm daily to accommodate the girl's daily chores. Up to now the girls have had no free time. The classes are now to be extended by half an hour after agreement from parents, girls and teachers, to allow some play time. EP has promised to supply all the literacy classes with balls, skipping ropes and simple games like snakes and ladders. Given the enthusiasm and demand for developing sewing skills, EP also ensures that each class has two sewing machines. The teachers in all 9 of the villages are village women with some education. They have been trained by EP's expert educationalists and follow easy to use teaching materials. The women are dedicated to the improving the literacy of the young girls in their villages.

As to the future, the first step is that 10 more villages want to work with EP, making a total of 20. A nearby area has also been allocated as an industrial area. This will enable EP to work with the government and industry to train young people for gainful employment. The VDGs are also seeking more help in water management, sanitation, agriculture diversification and access to markets. A vocational centre where 40 women and girls will specialize in cutting and sewing of marketable craft products is planned. So a lot of new opportunities for the GEN – EP partnership to help improve the quality of lives of the villagers by meeting the needs expressed by them and by building their capacity to take ownership of the projects. I cannot wait for my next visit.....

Help needed! GEN needs more trustees, associates & 'friends' i.e. people who would like to play a more active part in our work. As Sunetra's report shows you would have the opportunity to build relationships with our partner, End Poverty, & with the villages we support. Want to know more? Contact Sue - details at end of newsletter.

'Grassroots empowerment' – what does it mean? *Some thoughts from Eric Arnold, GEN Associate*

What does 'grassroots empowerment' mean? The 'grassroots' part is relatively clear. GEN and End Poverty need to work at the community level, with individual villages and villagers. The 'empowerment' part is more complex. In general terms, 'grassroots empowerment' is about helping individuals and communities to identify their goals & aspirations, and to achieve them. Several stages are involved. The first stage is to identify goals and aspirations, and if possible to prioritise them. The 'stakeholder meet' (see below) is a key element of this process, as is the formation of Village Development Groups. A second stage is to identify options for intervention, and to decide where best to focus attention. Typically, this stage involves looking at options across a range of sectors, eg: civil society; education & skills; health; income generation & livelihood; and infrastructure.

Eye camps are an example of intervention in health; craft training is an example of intervention in income generation. The boundaries between sectors are fluid; and work in one sector can interact with another, and vice versa. For example, an improvement in health can lead to better prospects for income generation; or an increase in income can facilitate better nutrition, which can lead to improved health. A third stage is implementation. Since the funds available to both GEN and EP are very limited, finding other sources of funds is an important aspect of facilitating change.

Part of the work of GEN and EP revolves around helping villages to communicate their aspirations to Government, and identifying which interventions might qualify for financial help from Government. The process of empowerment needs also to contain an element of enjoyment or fun. The trips organised by EP (with funds from GEN) to Dilli Haat (to see craft skills in action) and to the Barefoot College (to see new approaches to sustainable development) have managed to combine learning with fun. Finally, it is important to monitor progress and learn from experience. Which interventions are most successful? Or how best can a project develop? An example here is the evolution of literacy classes into sewing skills classes and then into a project on handicrafts. The process is evolutionary. More about this later!

Second Tijara Stakeholder Meet, April 2011 – Looking ahead / Setting priorities

On 10th April this year about 50 people from GEN, End Poverty, and the villages GEN and EP support came together in the EP office open space in Tapukra village on the Delhi – Alwar road. Their purpose was to review progress and impact of EPs and GENs work in Tijara over the past year and set priorities for the next. It was a highly participatory event – VDG reps were there, literacy class and sewing class teachers were there, EP village reporters were there, EP staff and volunteers were there and two reps of GEN were there.



EP Office – outside



EP Office – Stakeholder Meet begins



VDG rep shares some ideas

Everyone, including new learners and trainees, reported on how the year had gone in their area of work. Reports included feedback on achievements against priorities set in the village development plans prepared at last year's Stakeholder Meet – more water pumps have been installed, a cemetery wall has been built, roads have been improved. We also heard about the impact of the exposure visit to Barefoot College, Tilonia – and how this had showed the 45 who went just what can be achieved by illiterate villagers to improve their lives – using solar power for lighting & cooking, putting recycled materials to productive use, using computers, craft production for income generation. The group came back inspired! The same was true for the group who went to Dilli Haat to see craft work produced by villagers in other parts of India.

Looking ahead village groups identified three priority areas for future action: **education, livelihood improvement and rural development**. Some of the actions agreed reflected a sense of empowerment and plans to help themselves that the villagers increasingly feel. Others called for support from EP and GEN.

There is a lot of dissatisfaction with the quality and running of government schools, but also calls for new provision of girls only schools and for night schools for adults. Lack of irrigation equipment, poor quality seeds, inadequate knowledge of how to improve agriculture on a scientific basis, and poorly organised milk and dairy marketing were all raised as challenges faced by farmers which need attention. Income earning from craft production and from improved employment opportunities in local industries were seen as ways forward. Poor roads and transport, inadequate water supplies, poor sanitation, and scant health services and facilities were seen as developmental issues to be tackled. So too was the need to ensure older people and disabled people are able to access the pensions and other support that government legislation provides for.

End Poverty will use the feedback from the Stakeholder Meet as the basis for setting its plans for 2011-12, and for its longer term business plan. A report of the stakeholder meet is available on request.

Fundraising - Walking for GEN

The 10 for GEN walks programme continues to go with a swing. In March this year 26 walkers left the Plough Inn in Hyde Heath, near Chesham to cover 6 km in the hills to the north before returning to the pub for lunch and then covering another 4 km to Little Missenden and back. In June 22 walkers were led by GEN friend, Mike Ridley, around a delightful trail through Windsor Great Park. Lunch was taken at the Wheatsheaf Pub in Virginia Water on the south side of the Park. So far the 2011 walks have raised about £750 including gift aid, and much fun has been had by all.



Making for our pub lunch at the Plough Inn



The great oak in Windsor Great Park

Next walk - Blenheim Palace Park, Sunday 17th July: to be led by David Wiles. Will include the option of visiting the formal gardens of the Palace. Lunch will be a picnic taken on the banks of the lake in the Park. Sorry no pub this time! Contact Sue for details – SPBurke@aol.com 020 7794 9495

Next BIG GEN event – the annual Diwali Party, Saturday 12th November in Cambridge.



After our successful Diwali celebration last year we are now planning a bigger, better, brighter firework party to raise funds for GEN. The programme will include food, music, dancing, an auction of some brilliant items including stays at the Sariska Game Park or the Dunlod Palace Fort, Rajasthan. Put it in your diary!

Contact Sue at SPBurke@aol.com 020 7794 9495 or Shai at shai@vyakarnam.net 07768821732

GEN News is currently compiled and edited by Sue Burke, Chair of the GEN. See above for contact details.

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