



Grassroots Empowerment in rural India

The GEN Initiative

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
<http://www.gen-initiative.org/>

About GEN

The GEN Initiative Limited ('GEN') is a UK-registered charity which works to promote sustainable rural development in India. Improving the position of women and girls is particular target. GEN stands for 'Grassroots Empowerment Network'. GEN's approach is to work at the community (grassroots) level to empower individuals and groups within the community to identify their goals and work to achieve them.

GEN works in partnership with an Indian charity 'End Poverty'

GEN takes an integrated approach to promoting sustainable rural development. GEN works with partner organisations in India in order to achieve its development objectives. Partner organisations are carefully selected to ensure that they are reputable and have a shared philosophy with the GEN. GEN's main partner organisation in India at the present time is 'End Poverty' (EP). EP is an Indian-registered non-governmental organisation, which GEN helped to get started. Staff and volunteers at EP believe strongly in education as a tool to reduce poverty.

We work in villages in a deprived area of rural Rajasthan

Currently, End Poverty, supported by GEN, is focusing on a group of about 40 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 the 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%).

Consultation with villagers is a key feature of our approach

Each year GEN and End Poverty hold a Stakeholder Meet over two or three days. The purpose of the Meet is to consult with villagers about progress in the last year and to discuss plans for the coming year. The 2015 Stakeholder Meet was held in EP's office in Tapukara on 23 & 24 February 2015. The focus of Day One was on Village Development Groups. The focus of Day 2 was on Education (KSP) and Craftwork (ACC).

Day 1 Village Development



Father and daughter show off one of her saplings

Day 2 – Education



Teenage girls learning to read

Day 2 – Craftwork



Plenary session on craftwork

Thousands of adolescent girls are missing out on education. We help them learn a whole range of skills

The main focus of the GEN/End Poverty education programme is on adolescent girls from the Meo community, many of whom have not previously received any formal education. The programme was launched in 2009. In 2014 the programme passed the milestone of 1,000 girls completing the programme. Also in 2014 the basic six-month literacy and general education programme (which includes skills in reading, writing, numeracy, health and nutrition, horticulture and sewing) was extended (by parental request) to one year in duration. Each year, more villages ask to join the programme. So far about 10% of unschooled girls in the Tijara Block have been reached by the programme.



A girl shows her schoolwork

Farmers' wives have almost no income of their own. Our craftwork programme helps them earn a little money



Quilt-maker Khatija shows her quilt with 'horse's head' pattern

The Tijara villages have a tradition of craft work (in particular the production of quilts). In 2010 GEN launched a pilot handicrafts project by giving End Poverty £250 to buy sewing machines and materials for women and girls from Tijara villages where EP was actively engaged. The craft work project as a source of income is popular with women in the area and has grown significantly since then. The range of products produced by the artisans includes quilts, large and small pouches, shoulder bags, shopping bags, table cloths and cushion covers. Sales are made partly through exhibitions and partly through the Internet. Plans are in hand to help the artisans set themselves up as a producer company.

We help establish Village Development Groups to help villagers to improve their villages

A key driver of rural development in the Tijara Villages is the establishment of Village Development Groups by EP. VDGs help villagers to identify problems areas, assess priorities, and take action to tackle them. VDGs receive modest financial support from GEN for running expenses such as travel costs. In 2014, the number of VDGs doubled, from 7 to 14. Achievements of VDGs include minor road works, installation of water pumps and the provision of safety fencing for open-topped wells which are a hazard for children. A key feature of the rural development programme in 2014 has been the distribution of over 2500 lemon and guava fruit tree saplings to farmers to set up small orchards to supplement their income and improve the environment through use of less water.



Tasmeena enjoys looking after her guava sapling

We are helping to develop responsible rural tourism

GEN and End Poverty have been working together on a project to develop rural tourism as a source of income for villagers in the Tijara Block. The initiative began in 2011 with a feasibility study. In 2013 GEN and End Poverty worked on an 'eco-survey' (pictured, right) to identify and record key features of the ecology of the villages. IN 2014, GEN produced a full-colour Guide to the Tijara Villages, showing key features of the area and including trails. Current work is focusing on promoting one-day visits to the area. In May and June 2015 two groups of visitors to India from Japan went for one-day pilot visits to selected villages and projects in the Tijara villages.



'Eco-survey' in progress

GEN's activities in the UK

Raising funds to support the work of End Poverty is one of the main activities of GEN in the UK. The three major fund-raising activities are: (i) GEN walks; (ii) Diwali party; and (iii) applications to funding organisations. During 2014 there was a series of walks in and around London which raised over £1,500. In October 2014 GEN with support of the Oxford University India Society held a Diwali party in the dining hall of Corpus Christi College Oxford. The event raised over £3,000. GEN is also supported by a number of individual donors. GEN also provides specialist advice to EP, eg on craftwork and rural tourism.

The GEN/End Poverty Partnership has received generous funding for the unschooled girls education project and the handicrafts project from the Pakhar Singh Foundation through iPartner India. The EP field team has been funded by the Brogan Partnership. The WF Southall Trust has made a valuable grant towards the work of the VDGs, and the Miss K M Harbinson Trust has contributed to the girls' education project. The Cobra Beer Partnership contributed to the 2014 Diwali Party organised by the Oxford India Society in collaboration with the GEN. GEN supporters, especially walkers, have regularly contributed to GENs work with EP. Many thanks to all. Without you we could not continue our work.

Please support the work of GEN and EP with a donation to <https://mydonate.bt.com/charities/GEN>

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