



Grassroots Empowerment in Rural India The GEN Initiative Ltd (GEN) Annual Report 2019 - 2020



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

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



GEN: PURPOSE & PRINCIPLES

GEN is a Grassroots Empowerment Network for sustainable human development in India. GEN, a UK-based charity, works primarily through its Indian partner End Poverty in education, livelihood and village development in an area of impoverished agricultural villages in Tijara Block, Alwar District, in Rajasthan India.

Our purpose is to contribute to the elimination of poverty in rural villages in Rajasthan

The underpinning principle of our work is to empower and support villagers in taking charge of improving life in their communities. Our projects are based on their priorities, needs and aspirations.

The GEN/EP partnership began working in nine villages in Tijara Block, Alwar District in 2009. We now work in over 60 villages in Tijara block which is one of the most disadvantaged areas in India where around 80% of the population depend on agriculture for their livelihoods.

WHAT WE DO

- 1) A one-year literacy and education programme for unschooled girls and adolescents. On completion of this course they are eligible to apply to join Government training programmes. End Poverty also trains women from the villages to qualify as teachers for this course. It costs only £47 to support one Tijara village girl through this year-long programme.
- 2) Village -based programmes to improve farming practices, including a 'plant a tree for life project' and village development groups where needs and priorities can be decided.
- 3) Income generation for women through handicraft production and promotion of self-help groups for women. We aim to expand this work into a wider programme of small business start-ups at village level.

Find us at www.gen-initiative.org and our Facebook page at Gen Initiative.

FROM GEN'S ACTING CHAIR *Bet Tickner:*

I write this in 2020 when we are all acutely aware of how different a year we have had and what momentous and monstrous changes have happened the world over.

India has been very badly hit by Covid19; the virus has rampaged through its overcrowded cities and towns and continues to spread into rural areas. The economic effects of the pandemic have been severe also with hundreds of thousands of low-paid workers losing their livelihoods and forced to rely on extended family networks, often in poor rural areas, to stave off hunger.

GEN and EP though continue to work in partnership in rural Rajasthan, and the village women in Tijara have used their skills to make facemasks for distribution in health centres and among their poorest neighbours.

The newly opened Dinker producer company has begun operating out of its shop in Tapukara, selling new produce from farms which have diversified their crops and/or have nurtured fruit trees from saplings provided by the 'Plant a Tree for Life' programme.

With funding granted by the Waterloo Foundation in UK, our partner in India, End Poverty is recruiting a Fundraising manager, a transformative change which has the potential to expand our programmes into new areas.

At GEN there is one more major change to report: Sue Burke, who has chaired GEN since it began work, has suffered a long period of illness and is still not fully recovered. All GEN trustees wish her well and hope she will continue her active involvement in GEN, while the writer and other trustees strive to maintain, support and expand our work in rural Rajasthan through to a recovery from the pandemic and beyond.

For the future GEN intends to focus on developing our work with village women with a project providing training to aspiring women in setting up and running small village-based businesses for income generation, developing their potential on the basis of their skills and ability to save through our self-help groups (see below).

MEETING AND CONSULTING WITH VILLAGERS

End Poverty (EP) holds an annual stakeholder meeting in Tijara block when villagers, EP staff and GEN trustees meet to discuss how far our programmes are meeting their needs and aspirations and what more can be done. GEN trustees then have an opportunity to familiarise ourselves with life in the villages, calling in on farmers working on their fields, talking to village women and observing learning at village-based classes.



End Poverty President, Vinod Kaushik, shared the journey of the organisation over ten years with around 400 villagers and all stakeholders, many of whom shared their experiences too.

The 2019 Stakeholder Meeting also celebrated 10 years of growth for GEN and End Poverty since the inception of our partnership with this then young NGO in 2009.



A day of celebration and stocktaking, held in our local area, followed a full programme over several days of consultation with farmers, women and girls at EP's field offices in Tapukara, a small town in our area of operation, and in the villages. There was much to celebrate in terms of changing lives, of growing confidence among the villagers, of well established principles of working together, of lessons learned that provide the basis for future growth for both organisations and the villagers we work with.

This young woman spoke at the tenth anniversary celebration. She has found the confidence to speak in public about what education means to her

A highlight of this celebration was also the inauguration of the newly formed farmer/producer company Dinker Agricultural Producers Company in Tapukara. The shop will serve as an outlet for all farmers in Tijara block, as they seek to diversify their farming and market their produce. (see below - Plant a Tree for Life)



EDUCATION FOR UNSCHOOLED ADOLESCENT GIRLS

The GEN/EP Kishori Shiksha Programme (KSP) provides an intensive 1 year catch-up education programme for girls aged 10-18 in Tijara Block who have not previously received any formal education.

The format of the programme has been developed and refined regularly on the basis of feedback and lessons learnt and today covers literacy, numeracy, as well as health and nutrition, environmental studies, art, sports and vocational skills in sewing and horticulture.

Each class of 25-30 girls is taught by a locally recruited woman trained in teaching methods; adolescent psychology; evaluating students and modern methods that make learning fun. An essential component is the mobile library that provides girls with access to reading material geared to their needs and interests. During the year covered by this report 126 girls completed the course. A total of 2272 girls have achieved literacy through the KSP programme.



A KSP class in action

FIZA IS A STUDENT AND MISKEENA A TEACHER FROM KHARKHARI VILLAGE



Fiza, a KSP student, never went to school as a child and says, “As I grew older I realized that I am illiterate and I felt very sad about this. One day I heard that an organization named End Poverty is going to conduct literacy classes in our village, and my neighbour will be teaching us. I attended the KSP classes for the whole year and now I can do household calculations, read a newspaper, go to a bank and fill out forms and I can travel independently. I am very happy to have the opportunity to become literate in the KSP and I do not need to be shy about being illiterate”.

Miskeena lives in one of the Tijara villages, and as an educated woman wanted to teach the girls in her village how to read and write, She says she also “wanted her children to have a computer and not be at a disadvantage by not having IT facilitation for learning. With the honorarium I earned by teaching in the KSP I have bought a computer for my family, and am very proud that my children will not be at a disadvantage in life due to my association with EP”.



SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS: CRAFTWORK PROGRAMME FOR WOMEN – Ajivika Craft Centres (ACC)



An ACC Craft Centre in action

Since 2010 GEN/EP have worked to promote income generation for women through its Ajivika Craft Centre Programme running in Tijara villages. End Poverty set up fully equipped craft centres in ten villages where women are trained and given job work to produce marketable products.

In 2019, ACC activity focussed on production of eco-friendly cloth grocery bags for retailers, not only to provide a means of livelihood but also to protect the environment by replacing one-use plastic bags with reusable and biodegradable cloth bags. Saving and caring for the environment has always been a shared priority.

By the end of this year, 70 women were engaged in making grocery bags, while 50 women were making other craft items. Most of the women are also engaged in stitching clothes for fellow villagers. Since the programme began more than 340 women were trained under the ACC in different craft activities.

SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS: SELF-HELP GROUPS (SHGs)

In a new initiative launched by the GEN / EP partnership in 2016, women’s self-help groups were pioneered as small microenterprise clubs. Now 23 village-based self-help groups are running successfully with 239 women members saving 100-200 rupees monthly (roughly £1-2). These Groups meet in a disciplined manner to collect and allocate their savings effectively to the neediest among them. EP helps them in opening group bank accounts so as to keep their savings safe and leverage them to get credit to start income generation activities. The cumulative savings of the groups stood at over £10,000 in 2019.



Several members have borrowed money from their group’s funds, for example to set up a cosmetics shop, buy a buffalo, or buy farming equipment. The women are slowly becoming more self-reliant and confident, more entrepreneurial. They are happy to contribute more within their families and are better able to resist taking loans from money-lenders in times of hardship.

ASHA FROM NAKHNOL VILLAGE GETS A LOAN

Asha began earning an income through teaching a class within our KSP literacy programme. She is highly aspirational and talented and later joined her sister Papita in developing sewing and stitching skills in our ACC (handicrafts) programme. Together they formed an SHG (self-help group) with other women and began saving. Asha bought this buffalo with a loan from the group and thus income from the milk is in her own hands.



SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS - VILLAGE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

A key driver for our rural development work in the Tijara villages has been the establishment of Village Development Groups (VDGs). These act as a catalyst and facilitator in supporting rural development. Our field staff, who work in the villages throughout the year, join their meetings to help villagers to identify problem areas in their villages, assess priorities, and act to tackle them. Through our VDGs villagers gain access to government schemes and other assistance, such as providing solar lights, gas connections and toilets for village families. They also helped 355 farmers to open bank accounts during the year. The programme has directly benefited more than 7321 beneficiaries to date.

PLANT A TREE FOR LIFE



The GEN/EP partnership launched the “Plant a Tree for Life” project to help small-scale farmers to create small orchards which diversify their traditional cropping practices and make better use of their land.

Horticulture also gives higher

returns, needs less water and labour and improves the environment and nutrition in the family.

Thus far, 35,820 saplings have been distributed to 680 farmers, they include Guava, Lemon, Sweet Lime, Pomegranate, and other local fruiting trees, some of which are already fruiting and farmers have begun selling and realizing better returns for these crops. The newly opened cooperative Dinker shop will provide an outlet for their produce.



IMPROVING AGRICULTURE

Working alongside the Village Development Groups, GEN has supported EP's activities in improving farming practices including soil testing, dairy farming, improving livestock and improving access to high quality seeds, thus helping villagers to improve their farm productivity by adopting modern and scientific farming.

EP nurtures and motivates farmers to adopt best practices through exposure visits to agriculture institutes and facilitates frequent interaction with sustainable farming experts to address farmers’ problems and queries. EP helped over 1550 farmers to obtain soil health cards, and 1030 farmers have been trained in soil health management, use of quality seeds, pest management, risk mitigation, storage of produce, and organic farming and horticulture farming, etc.

DESHRAJ is a farmer from BURHEDA village

and is disabled, he tells this story:

“I used to have difficulty in bringing seeds from the market and had to depend on others to take me to the market with them or to buy seeds for me and often they did not.

Since I have associated with the End Poverty team, they provide me with information and guidance about the seeds and even deliver seeds at home. So far, I have used cotton and millet seeds from End Poverty, and the results have been very good.

End Poverty team has also provided me with good quality fodder for my cow, the fodder is of very good quality and the milk from my cow has increased by approximately 1 to 1.5 litres.

This has ended a lot of my troubles and I thank End Poverty heartily.”





FUNDRAISING AT GEN

GEN raises funds in the UK from individuals, crowdfunding, events and from grant-awarding foundations/trusts to enable it to support its NGO partner End Poverty (EP) to deliver education, agricultural and livelihood programmes. GEN trustees work voluntarily to fundraise, manage and administer its programme, there are no paid staff or employees at GEN. This means that generally more than 95%, of the funds we raise go directly to the projects that End Poverty works on in India. EP submits quarterly financial reports on its work and on specific projects. These are reviewed by GEN’s Board of Trustees.

A substantial new grant for our programme of education for unschooled girls in 2019 from the Saga Charitable Trust enabled us to add new classes to our education programme, in addition to funding previously granted by the Funding Network. A grant from the Open Gate Charity also supported the ‘Plant a Tree for Life’ project providing saplings to farmers. We thank them for supporting our work.

Generous donations from individuals have also enabled us to continue our work on projects and to support End Poverty’s work during 2019. We are hugely grateful to all organisations and individuals who have supported our work. We hope to be able to join our network of supporters in enjoying sponsored walks and other events in the now nearer future.

THE GEN INITIATIVE LIMITED STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES

Year ended 31 December	Total Funds 2019	Total Funds 2018
Incoming Resources		
Incoming resources	£23254	£26812
Investment income	£7	£10
Total income	£23261	£26822
Resources Expended		
Cost of generating voluntary income	£55	£238
Support to End Poverty	£24756	£34141
Governance Costs	£994	£2517
Total resources expended	£25805	£36896
Net incoming resources for the year	£ -2544	£-10074
Total funds brought forward	£14214	£24288
Total funds carried forward	£11670	£14214

All movements are in Unrestricted Funds.

The charity has no recognised gains or losses other than the results for the year as set out above.

All of the activities of the charity are classed as continuing.