

Partnership-in-Action was set up in April 1994, to work with our sister organization in Germany to support the work of the Ecumenical Sangam in Nagpur, India. The overall aim of the Sangam is to start and support a process of sustainable development in the rural villages and urban slums in such a way that the people do not become dependant upon the Sangam but are able to manage their own affairs. The Sangam is currently working in more than 49 villages supported from the Bamhani Centre and three Sub-Centres which are at Shedeshwar, Gondwananagar and Narayanpur. Bamhani is approx. 35 kms south of Nagpur on Highway 7 towards Chandrapur. The Sangam provides primary health-care and social development to all people when requested. At present the Sangam relies on funding from the German partners called Deutsch-Indische Zusammenarbeit (DIZ) and Partnership-in-Action. The building of the 'Rainbow Centre' in the Civil Lines area of Nagpur, which is a Conference Centre and Guesthouse, has enabled the Sangam to start to generate funds locally. The 'Rainbow Centre' provides office space for the Ecumenical Sangam as well as the Slum team and the Leprosy project. Since conversion of the basement in 2006 there is dormitory accommodation, lecture and study rooms for the twelve month residential Trained Birth Attendants course.

Partnership-in-Action has supported and funded for the past sixteen years three projects, a **Kindergarten Class** and a **Tailoring Class** in Bamhani, and the ongoing training program to provide 'bare foot doctors' (**Village Health and Social Workers**) for the rural villages and the urban slums.

The **Tailoring Classes** both in Bamhani base centre and the three village sub-centres continue to be very popular with the young women. Mrs. Minaz Begum, the instructor for the tailoring class in Bamhani, has been with the Sangam for more than 15 years and has been responsible for developing and organizing all the tailoring courses including those currently being run in the three slum centres. All of the tailoring classes are carefully designed to meet the needs of each group of women, with the course currently at Bamhani having been designed to fit around the family commitments of a group of married women. On completion of the Sangam's tailoring course, the women take an examination set by the Government. This will enable many of them with low family income to obtain a government grant to purchase a sewing machine. Those women whose level of general education is not good enough to meet the entry level for the Government examination are able to sit the Sangam's own exams and receive a certificate from the Sangam. They are then able

apply to the Sangam's Micro-Finance scheme for a loan to purchase a sewing machine, repaying the loan from the money as they establish their own business. In India the women purchase suitable lengths of material from the local market or stall and take them to a tailor to have the articles of clothing made up. With the women setting up their own businesses in the villages, the money that they are able to charge for their tailoring services remains within their village economies.

The **Kindergarten Classes** in the base centre and sub-centres continue to be very popular, with the villagers at Bamhani base centre pressing the Sangam to introduce infant classes to follow on from the kindergarten. This step is currently being carefully considered. The past year has been very much a year of consolidation for the health programme in nearly 50 rural villages around Bamhani Base Centre. With the Bamhani Health Team, lead by Dr. Mahesh Awchat, supporting the work of the Trained Birth attendants and Village Health & Social Workers, the Team has encouraged the creation of women's Self Help Groups in many of the villages. Following interviews a new group of twelve young women have been selected to begin training as Village Health and Social Workers. They are currently learning about all the various activities that the Sangam undertakes.

The Classes for young men for both the Electrical Installation and Motor Repairs and the Two Wheeler Maintenance and Repairs are both being held in the recently completed Technical Block. The 20 students in the Electrical Course are using the lecture room and the more practical Two Wheeler Course utilising the workshop area. The Two Wheeler Course will run through to next April enabling them to sit the Polytechnic Examinations and be awarded a Government certificate. All the students are enjoying the various extra curricular activities organised by the young German (weltwaert) volunteers.

In 2004 because of the increasing cost of transport the Sangam set up its first **Sub-Centre** at Shedeshwar (approx 25 kms from Bamhani) with a Grant obtained by P-in-A, to serve a cluster of 12 villages with a Nurse to oversee healthcare, a Kindergarten and a Tailoring Class. Following the success of this Sub-Centre, two further Sub-Centres were set up in Gondwananagar and Narayanpur to serve other groups of remote villages. All three Sub-Centres were established in rented accommodation. In 2008, our

German partner DIZ, were successful in obtaining a Grant from the German Federal Government Development Agency BMZ to design and build three purpose built Sub-Centres. In the latter part of 2009, land was purchased in Narayanpur and in Gondwananagar villages, but due to difficulties with establishing land registration in Shedeshwar, a suitable plot of land was found in Sawangi Burg, an adjacent village in the Shedeshwar cluster. Construction work is at various stages on all three sites but work on the Gondwananagar has been slowed by a delay in the Government office completing the land registration. As in the other two sites a borehole has been sunk to provide water for construction work and for the completed centre. Each purpose built Sub Centre will house the health clinic, kitchen, and kindergarten classroom on the ground floor, with a tailoring classroom on the first floor and a second classroom, with living accommodation for staff and volunteers on the second floor. Completion of these purpose built Sub-Centres, together with the purchase of a 4 wheel drive ambulance will give the work of the Sangam a more permanent presence in the villages.

The Sangam's Sustainable Agriculture Team organised an Organic Farming Day in March with various talks by experts and demonstrations on the Model Farm at Bamhani Base Centre. The main advantages of Organic Farming were outlined to the 150 village farmers who attended with the savings in the cost of seeds and in the expensive commercially produced fertilizers. Among the speakers was Mr. Manohan Parchure, a member of the Organic Technical Empowerment Committee on organic farming for the Ministry of Agriculture of the Government who is supporting the efforts of the Sangam to introduce organic farming into rural village farms. It was explained that Organic is a method of farming that relies on natural systems and products that is free of all synthetic and toxic chemicals, fertilizers and pesticides. Organic farming uses seeds that can be saved and replanted for successive crops and uses simple fertilizers that can be made by the village farmers from a mixture based on cow manure and urea, saving the farmers approx. 3000 Rupees (£40) an acre on commercially produced fertilizers. Bio-pesticides can also be used to control and eradicate pests, as an example planting hibiscus plants alongside the cotton crop eliminates the need for expensive pesticides. This Organic Farm Day was the first of a planned series of events where the Sangam's Farm Team encourage groups of farmers to learn how to produce their own low cost organic fertilizers as well as being instructed in the use of bio-pesticides. It is also planned to help the farmers to access supplies of suitable seeds.

The Indian Government has taken many initiatives to address rural poverty, but in the process has tended to neglect the rising urban population. Since 2006, in an effort to meet the needs of these urban slum dwellers the Sangam has initiated development work with a Slum Team, Ms. Vanashri Ghuse (social worker) is co-ordinating this work. The Team consisting of 2 Slum Nurses & 2 Field Workers assisted by three sewing class teachers are currently working from 3 Slum-Centres in Saraswati Nagar, Sewa Nagar and Motibagh in 13 slums. The move into the Slum Centre at Motibagh has been made following the co-operation of a number of leading figures in this slum who have provided the ongoing free use of their community hall together with a letter of intent of long term help and co-operation. Motibagh slum area (pop. 3,000) is adjacent to a much larger 'needy' area called Lashkaribagh, with a population of 45,000. Since the work began in 2006 more than 300 women have trained in the sewing classes enabling them to set up their own businesses and provide an extra income for their families. Excessive alcohol consumption is the most common cause for death in the slum areas. In addition, due to poor hygiene, a poor or non-existent sewage system and irregular clearing of the accumulated garbage, diseases like malaria, cholera and abdominal problems are wide spread amongst the slum dwellers. The Slum Teams activities include the raising of awareness on health, hygiene and sanitation issues and introducing other money making ventures with training in hand embroidery, mehindi, (ornate henna decoration for festivals and weddings) and the making of soap powder, disinfectant and candles have proved very popular. The Slum Team assisted by the German 'weltwaert' volunteers have started to develop the sale of Fair Trade items made by the young women in the slums through their German DIZ partners. In all the slums there has been a concerted effort to encourage the women to become independent by setting up Self Help Groups, enabling them to meet and discuss common problems and set up savings accounts. These Self Help Groups have enabled the women to provide start up loans to their group members from their savings accounts and tap into the Sangam's Micro-Finance funds to purchase items to hand embroider and sewing machines.

The Microfinance scheme originally started as a 'Rolling Loan' scheme to help the tailoring class students purchase sewing machines with the students repaying the loan from their earnings. In

2008 this programme was extended, with a grant through DIZ, to cover both technical and tailoring class students and to date has seen a full repayment of all funds. After detailed research and discussions by the MF team assisted by a 'weltwaert' volunteer the guidelines have now been extended to cover loans for improvement or expansion of existing businesses, with a Self Help or Joint Liability Group guaranteeing the repayment of their loans. Built into the conditions of the loan is that the individual or group will undertake instruction sessions provided by the Sangam on how to set up and run the business venture.

The current group of Trained Birth Attendant (TBA) students recently helped to organise a Reunion in the Rainbow Conference Hall to bring together all the TBAs who had successfully completed the Sangam's training course. More than 30 young women attended together with the students of the 2009 Course who are currently completing a six month internship spread between the Bamhani Base centre and the three rural Sub Centres. The students from the current course opened the proceedings with a song to welcome everyone to the Reunion. Shrikant Bhalerao introduced the invited guests. Dr Rohatgi, Dr Mukerjee and Mrs Sinha Bithi (TBA English teacher) were presented with flowers and a present by the students of the current TBA Course to thank them for all the help that they have given all the TBAs. There was a Role play by the current student TBAs and all the previous trained TBAs were invited to come forward in turn to tell about their current work and their experiences since completing the TBA training. Many of the TBAs telling how the training they had received has changed their lives and taken them from a village environment to working in one of the top hospitals or clinics in Nagpur. The Reunion was followed by lunch for everyone in the Rainbow Conference Centre's Dining Hall.

Leprosy is still a public health problem in many countries with the highest concentration of cases in India. The Sangam's health Team and VHSWs have been trained to diagnose the disease in the rural villages and refer upwards to the Sangam's Doctor for confirmation and treatment. With the Sangam now acting as the lead Non-Government Organisation in and around Nagpur, and the Sangam's Mr Dillip Sathe acting as the programme facilitator, the fight against the stigma associated with Leprosy and its detection and the prevention of the isolation of patients is being taken into the urban slums. The Sangam's involvement in the LEAP programme – Leprosy Elimination Action Programme - has been pivotal in the development and implementation of this programme.

Partnership in Action

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Trained Birth Attendant Course students with Dr. Rulu Mukerjee and Dr. Manjula Rohatgi at the Reunion

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See the Ecumenical Sangam Website: www.sangamonline.org with regularly updated 'News' and 'Success Stories' telling how individuals lives have been changed by the various training programmes and initiatives run by the Ecumenical Sangam. If you would like to make a contribution to the development work of the Sangam e-mail: pina@sangamonline.org