

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 (Indo-German Cooperation)* 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. In the Rainbow Centre there is also office space for the Ecumenical Sangam. Since conversion of the basement in 2006 there is dormitory accommodation, lecture and study rooms for the twelve month residential Trained Birth Attendants courses and an office base for the Sangam's Slum and Leap Teams.

Partnership-in-Action adopted three projects and has supported for the past fifteen years 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 Kindergarten classes are always very popular with two classes (KG1 & 2) in Bamhani and a class in each of the three sub centres at Shedeshwar, Gondwananagar and Narayanpur, in total there are currently 111 children attending classes. At Bamhani the local villagers are very happy that their children are being educated by the Sangam's Kindergarten and are pressing the Sangam to introduce classes in Bamhani for the children to progress into infant education. The fees that the parents contribute towards their children's education provide for a school uniform, sweater, books, diary and identity card. The school uniforms are made by the tailoring class students and parents are able to purchase a second uniform.

The Tailoring classes are also well received with Mrs. Minaz Begum currently running a nine month long course in Bamhani for 17 students which includes machine embroidery. There are also tailoring classes in each of the three sub-centres which are of six month duration covering a

reduced range of clothing. In total there are at present 38 students attending tailoring courses in the three sub-centres and the courses are moved around the villages to meet demand and to keep to a minimum the travel distances of each group of students. Each student is expected to contribute towards the cost of their course and supply their own material for making up the various garments. At the end of each course the tailoring students sit either a Government or Sangam set examinations depending upon the individual student's level of formal educational, with the Sangam subsidizing half the cost of the examination. Healthcare subjects are included in the course and the students are encouraged to take part in outings to visit various locations in and around Nagpur and social events organized by the Sangam team to broaden their experience outside village life. All the students are encouraged to apply for a Microfinance Loan to help them to set up their own business in their village. As part of the agreement in applying for a Microfinance loan the student agrees to attend business development and book keeping classes. Students from families living below the poverty line (BPL) are assisted by the Sangam to apply for a Government grant to cover the cost of purchase of a treadle powered sewing machine. 19 young women from four of the Sangam's villages have just completed a Village Health and Social Workers Course run from April to August by Dr. Nilima Vaiday. Dr. Vaiday has been supported by other guest doctors giving lectures on their specialist subjects. The more practical aspects of the course having been covered the Sangam's two Auxiliary Nurse Midwives Ms. Raut and Mrs. Thul. The VHSWs who have successfully completed this course are currently obtaining further practical experience by visiting a number of villages and helping with regular clinics run by Dr. Avacht and the Sangam Health Team. Once they have completed this period of practical experience they will be set up in their own villages with a bag of medicines to sell and minister to the basic medical needs of their village. The VHSWs are supported in their work by regular visits from the Sangam's Doctor and Health Team and by the Trained Birth Attendants in the three sub centres. Any medical conditions that the VHSWs are unable to diagnose or treat are referred to the Sangam's Health Team resident in Mamta Cottage Hospital at Bamhani Base Centre. Critical emergency cases are transported to Mamta Cottage Hospital or a hospital in Nagpur by the recently purchased Ambulance. The Sangam's Health Team makes scheduled visits to each of the villages and organizes various

health camps in gynaecology, pediatrics, dentistry and chest clinics in the sub centres and at Bamhani, with specialist Doctors visiting from Nagpur.

The current Electrical House Wiring and Motor Repair course run by Mr. Dalal has 17 students attending the course. Students from remote villages are encouraged to live in the technical college accommodation returning home at weekends. Mr. Dalal not only teaches his students the theory and practical aspects of the course but the Health Team also cover healthcare encouraging the young men to help the Sangam team with drama and 'role play' in the village meetings on HIV/Aids, alcohol and debt problems. The Sangam are at present seeking a suitable instructor for the Two Wheeler Repair and Maintenance course and will restart the courses as soon as the instructor is appointed.

The Microfinance scheme was 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. It was extended in 2008 to cover both technical and tailoring class students and to date has seen a full repayment of all funds. After detailed research and discussions the guidelines have now been extended to cover loans for improvement or expansion of existing businesses, with the Joint Liability Group guaranteeing the repayment of their loans.

Conversion of the Model Farm at Bamhani is progressing well with 10 acres being used for growing organic soya beans, wheat and vegetables. 81 trees have recently been planted in the field borders namely rose apple, guava, black plum, custard apple and lemon. A large field of vegetables is under cultivation as the kitchen garden.

The Counseling Cell in Butibori Police Station is running smoothly with the introduction of Miss Devayani Gebhane who joined the Sangam in March 2009. Her main aim is to contribute to the improvement of women's positions in and around her home town of Nagpur.

The slum development and healthcare work continues in the urban slums around Nagpur with the Tailoring Classes proving very popular along with the craft sessions introducing self help money raising skills.

The Sangam's involvement in the LEAP programme – Leprosy Elimination Action Programme has been pivotal in the development of the programme in and around Nagpur with the Sangam now acting as the lead NGO with Mr. Dillip Sathe as facilitator for the Continuing Medical Education programme and the Selective Special Drive in the urban slums.



A meeting of a ladies Self-help Group learning about and providing feed back on the Sangam's Microfinance Loan programme.

Autumn 2009

Newsletter prepared by Bruce Williamson, Hon. Secretary
Partnership-in-Action
e.mail: Bruce58@btinternet.com

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.