

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 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 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 **Kindergarten classes** in Bamhani are always very popular with two classes (KG1 & 2). Since the summer break a second kindergarten class has been added at Shedeshwar and Narayanpur Sub-Centres. In Gondwananagar Sub-Centre the space is limited but it is planned to add a second kindergarten class following the completion of the new building. In Bamhani the local villagers are very happy with their children education in the Sangam's Kindergarten and are continuing to press the Sangam to introduce infant classes for their children to progress into. 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 having been made during the school summer break by the tailoring class teachers assisted by a number of other Sangam staff.

The Tailoring Classes are also well received with Mrs. Minaz Begum currently running a nine month long course in Bamhani which includes

machine embroidery. Mrs Begum also oversees the Tailoring Classes in each of the three sub-centres which are of six month duration covering a reduced range of clothing. Each student is expected to contribute towards the cost of their course and supply their own material to make up various garments. At the end of each course the tailoring students sit either Government or Sangam set examinations, depending upon the individual student's ability and level of formal education, with the Sangam subsidizing half the cost of the examination. Healthcare subjects are included in these courses and 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 the student's experience outside their normal village life. The students are encouraged to apply for a Microfinance Loan to help them set up their business in their own village. As part of the agreement in obtaining a Microfinance loan the students agree to attend the Sangam's business development and book keeping classes.

The **Village Health and Social Workers** training courses are regularly run at Bamhani by the Sangam Health Team supported by guest lecturers covering specialist subjects. The practical aspects of this course are covered by the Sangam's two Auxiliary Nurse Midwives. The VHSWs who have successfully completed this course are encouraged to obtain further practical experience by spending three months visiting a number of villages and helping with regular clinics run by visiting Doctors supported by the Sangam Health Team. Once they have completed this period of practical experience they are 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 Health Team and by the Trained Birth Attendants based 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 in Mamta Cottage Hospital at Bamhani Base Centre. Critical emergency cases are transported to Mamta Cottage Hospital in Bamhani base centre or a hospital in Nagpur by the recently purchased Ambulance Jeep. The Sangam's Health Team makes scheduled visits to each of the villages and organize various health camps in gynaecology, eye, paediatric, chest and dentistry clinics in the Sub-Centres and at Bamhani, with visiting Doctors from Nagpur.

Work on the new **Sub-Centres** for the Narayanpur and Shedeshwar groups of villages, which is being funded by a grant from the German Government Overseas Development Agency (BMZ) has progressed well with the buildings nearing completion. The start of work on the third Sub-Centre building at Gondwananagar has been delayed by issues involving the legal registration of the two smaller plots into one unit.

Following the **Organic Farming Day** organised by the Sangam's Sustainable Agriculture Team on the 4th March when various talks and demonstrations were made by experts on the Model Farm at Bamhani Base Centre. The Sangam Team have run follow up sessions in the sub-centres and villages of the 150 farmers who attended the day and showed an interest in Organic Farming methods. This initiative, which has been well received by the villagers, has been made in an effort to help the farmers get out of a downward spiral in using hybrid seeds with the resulting diminishing yields, despite heavy dosing with expensive artificial fertilizers. With the failure of a crop utilising hybrid seeds the farmers have been getting into crippling debt with local moneylenders to finance the subsequent planting of hybrid seed, which unlike the organic seed is not suitable for replanting the following year.

The recently appointed Instructor Bhagwat Wankhede has not only been running the **Electrical House Wiring and Motor Repair Course** run but has utilised his other skills in Plumbing. With the new Sub-Centre at Narayanpur nearing structural completion, he has used this opportunity for the students to carry out their practical sessions to install both the electrical and plumbing installations. The **Two Wheeler Repair and Maintenance Course** introduced at the request of the villagers and run by the Instructor Prashant Rewale has continued to be popular with the young men from the villages. The Government Polytechnic College of Nagpur is continuing to support the development work of the Ecumenical Sangam by issuing certificates to all the students passing the Government Examinations.

Following a revival of a Government initiative on training in computer studies, the College has provided 6 computers and is paying the monthly salary of an instructor, Dilip Yadav, to enable the Sangam to run three month long **Computer Course**. The Sangam for their part have had to provide suitable accommodation by adapting the library area and are responsible for organising and recruiting between 20 and 25 students for each course. The College are responsible for running the examinations at the end of each course and issuing certificates to successful candidates. There has been a good take up of places on the inaugural course with

several of the Sangam's staff expressing an interest in gaining this qualification.

Students from remote villages are encouraged to live in the first floor technical college accommodation during the week, returning home at weekends. The Health Team encourage these students to help the Sangam team with drama and 'role play' in village meetings when tackling the subjects of HIV/Aids, alcohol and debt problems.

The **Microfinance** programme 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. In 2008 with a grant of funding from a German Bank the Microfinance scheme was extended to include both technical and tailoring class students and to date has seen a full repayment of all loaned funds. After detailed research and discussions the guidelines have now been extended to cover loans for improvement or expansion of existing businesses, with the formation of Joint Liability Groups to guarantee the repayment of their loans.

The **Counselling Cell** based in Butibori Police Station is running smoothly with the team tackling the problems of conflict within marriages and families in the rural villages. Recently they have extended their work into the urban slums, counselling those involved and generally trying to improve the position of the women in Indian society.

The **Slum Development** and healthcare work continues in the urban slums around Nagpur, from three slum centres, with the Tailoring Classes proving very popular along with other craft sessions introducing self help money raising skills, enabling the women to produce items that they can sell and improve the financial position of their family. In November the HSBC bank encouraged the development of the Sangam's Fair Trade group by allowing the Sangam to set up a stall and sell craft items to their customers in a local branch for a week. 30 women from the local slums attended a seminar at Sewa Nagar slum centre to learn how to manufacture and market Nirma powder, Phenol and disinfectant liquid. This sort of training has a dual purpose in that it not only encourages self help groups but also improves the health of the slum dwellers by making cheap soap & disinfectant readily available.

Health camps are regularly organised in the slum centres with the Sangam staff publicising and organising the sessions with visiting

doctors. In November an eye camp was organised in Sewa Nagar with Dr. Kharabe and Dr. Arvind from Mahatma Eye Hospital. 80 patients attended the programme. 10 patients were identified as suffering from cataracts with 7 of them being referred to the hospital for cataract operations. 12 other patients received spectacles.

The Sangam's involvement in LEAP – **Leprosy Elimination Action Programme** has been pivotal in the development of the programme in and around Nagpur. Leprosy activities are covered through three different fields of action: the Continuing Medical Education (CME) programme, the Selective Special Drive (SSD) and the Leprosy Referral Centres. Mr Dilip Sathe is acting as facilitator and organizing the Continuing Medical Education programme. The Sangam's Leap Team are training volunteer Project Health Assistants to inform the villagers and slum dwellers in the Special Selective Drives and the Leprosy Referral Centres minister to the patients referred to them for treatment. In August the Sangam's Rainbow Conference Centre hosted the 50th Leprosy Awareness Seminar organised for final year medical students of Lata Mangeshkar Medical College. 45 students participated in this programme along with a number of their teaching staff.

To date more than 2500 students and their teaching staff have benefited from the 54 Leprosy Awareness Seminars.

The Sangam now acts as the lead Non-Government Organisation for Nagpur, Amravati, and Wardha districts, with all the villages in Amravati and Wardha districts falling in the tribal or forest areas. Several villages in Amravati district are known for acute malnutrition as well as other health related problems and most of the villagers in this block are very poor and lack basic health facilities. A total of 12 other local NGOs have become involved under the Sangam's Leap programme to cover a population of nearly a million people. As lead NGO the Sangam's Leap team of 6 staff are also undertaking the responsibility of monitoring and facilitating the work of its partner NGOs. By the end of December the Sangam's Leap Team will have trained 47 Health Assistants from other NGO's who will start to cover the whole area with the help of local community volunteers. The Sangam's Team have also participated in primary healthcare training in an effort to strengthen the Leprosy Referral Centres in Chandrapur and other districts of Viharban regions.

If you would like to make a donation or regular monthly contribution to the development work of the Ecumenical Sangam please e-mail: pina@sangamonline.org, ring 01323 731715 or write to 73, Baldwin Avenue, Eastbourne, East Sussex. BN21 1UL.



The Sangam's new purpose built Sub-Centre building in Narayanpur village nearing completion

Autumn 2010

*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.