

**Partnership-in-Action** was set up in April 1994, to work with (DIZ) our sister organization in Germany to support the work of the Ecumenical Sangam in Nagpur, Central 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 50 villages supported from the Bamhani Base Centre and three Sub-Centres which are at Sawangi, 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, 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 Guesthouse with a Conference Centre, has enabled the Sangam to generate funds locally. In the Rainbow Centre there is office space for the Ecumenical Sangam. Following conversion of the basement in 2006 there is dormitory accommodation, lecture and study rooms for the twelve month residential Trained Birth Attendants courses together with an office base for the Sangam's Slum and Leprosy Awareness Teams.

**Partnership-in-Action** has supported and funded for the past twenty two years three projects, a **Kindergarten Class** for up to thirty five 3 and 4 year old village children and a **Tailoring Class** for young women in Bamhani Base Centre plus the ongoing training programme to provide 'bare foot doctors' **Village Health and Social Workers (VHSWs)** for the rural villages and urban slums. The VHSWs training courses are run twice yearly for up to 15 young women with six weeks intensive training in Mamta cottage hospital in Bamhani, followed by 4½ months practical experience working in the rural villages. The trainee VHSWs work with the Sangam's Health Team from the Base Centre and three Sub-Centres at Narayanpur, Sawangi Burg and Gondwananagar. As well as making daily house to house visits in the villages with the Health Team, they assist in running weekly clinics with visiting doctors and in organising and running various Health Camps.

As part of the training programme the VHSW students are taken on various visits to specialist unit, recently they made an educational visit to Anandwan village in Chandrapur district. This village was founded in 1949 by Mr. Baba Amte with the aim of providing a place where people that had suffered from the effects of Leprosy could regain their self-confidence and self-esteem through self-reliance. The Maharogi Sewa Samiti organisation has been a pioneer in medical treatment and the

rehabilitation of leprosy patients and over the past six decades more than 2.6 million people have benefited from their services. This work spans a wide spectrum of activities including basic healthcare and rehabilitation, development of land and water resources, enhancement of income and sustainable livelihoods, imparting formal and vocational education and the sensitising of youth on the environment and socio-economic issues. The VHSW students were given an insight into the life of a leprosy patients. Many of the residents who live in Andawan have received a late or incorrect treatment or developed a drug resistance that was not previously recognised. In consequence many have developed deformities and nerve damage which has resulted in their exclusion from society. The VHSW students were given the opportunity to talk with the leprosy patients and to learn about their individual stories and how they live their lives. The VHSW students visited the schools, training centres, working and building facilities and even learnt how the staff in the centre were processing the compost to help to improve the village's soil. The exposure of the Sangam's VHSW students at Anandwan showed them that people who are differently handicapped due to deformities after having suffered with Leprosy can develop a great many of the same skills as any able bodied person. The experience of this visit is considered very important as it raises not only the project's cause but also helps the VHSWs to develop a better understanding that leprosy if diagnosed early enough it is curable with multi-drug therapy and also the need for them to help to develop an inclusive approach for all leprosy sufferers.

As part of the ongoing Sangam's Healthcare programme 'Eye Camps' are organised regularly in the Base Centre and Sub-Centres and in the rural villages to try and reach out to all the villagers. Dr. Lambat (Ophthalmologist) and his team from Nagpur, are regularly in attendance working alongside the Sangam's Sarika Jangle (Nurse) and the other Trained Birth Attendants when an 'Eye Camp' is organised. Dr. Lambat examines the eyes of the villagers, making eye tests, administering eye drops, prescribing and distributing spectacles, and referring the more serious cases to the nearest Government Primary Healthcare Centre for treatment including cataract operations. Recently 63 people attended the Eye Camp at Kawtha village with the Sangam helping to develop the awareness of good eyesight being important in India which has the highest percentage of blind people worldwide.

The Organic Farming team are continuing to reach out to the village farmers with Organic Farming Awareness and Training

programmes to encourage the farmers to convert to Organic Farming techniques. Awadhut Kukadhar, the Organic Farm Project Co-ordinator organises awareness programmes in the Community Hall in the Bamhani Base Centre where he explains the methods and benefits of Organic Farming in comparison with their existing methods that they are currently using. He explains and demonstrates how they can make their own fertilisers and insecticides from ingredients found around their farms. The costs of Manure and Insecticide that they are currently purchasing are relatively high and reduce the profits that the farmers earn when they come to harvest and sell their crops, Organic Products can also demand a premium in the market place. When chemical fertilisers are constantly used in farming they gradually reduce the productive capacity of the soil and more and more fertilisers have to be applied to produce the same amount of crop. Even the soil loses its water retention capacity, making the land relatively dry. Such dry lands can be made fertile again using Organic Farming methods. Organic Farming methods are ideal to maintain the productive capacity of the soil and the land becomes more fertile and has good water storage capacity. Awadhut explained to the farmers the ill effects of chemical pesticides to both producers and consumers and that organically produced crops have a better nutritional value for human health.

This December the current batch of Trained Birth Attendants will be completing their training before going onto their practical period working with the Sangam's Health team in the Base Centre and the three Sub-centres. The Sangam has been running this programme for 15 years and the opportunity has been taken to review the content of this training programme and learn from both the TBA students and the Doctors involved in the Hospitals and Clinics, to see how it can be improved. Both Dr. Rohatgi and Dr. Vaze were involved in starting this programme with the intention of meeting the international Millennium Development Goals of significantly reducing maternity and new-born mortality rates in developing countries. Within the past 15 years, there has been a significant decline in mortality rates with Maharashtra state having among the lowest rates in India, partly through the Sangam's contribution and because of a higher interest in the causes by other institutions.

If you would like to make a donation or regular monthly contributions to the development work of the Ecumenical Sangam please e-mail: [pina@sangamonline.org](mailto:pina@sangamonline.org), ring 01323 731715 or write to 14, Luton Close, Eastbourne, East Sussex. BN21 1UX



Organic Farming Awareness sessions for village farmers and their families in the Community Hall in Bamhani Base Centre

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Newsletter prepared by Bruce Williamson  
Hon. Secretary of Partnership-in-Action  
e.mail: [Bruce58@btinternet.com](mailto:Bruce58@btinternet.com)

See the Ecumenical Sangam Website: [www.sangamonline.org](http://www.sangamonline.org)  
for more regular updates of the Sangam's activities click on 'News Items' and see how individuals lives are being changed by the various training programmes and initiatives run by the Ecumenical Sangam

Partnership in Action

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