

March 2012

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

Welcome to another Tamwed News and thank you to all those who have supported the three projects managed by our partner organisations in South India since the last edition. We fund training, health awareness programmes and other vital work delivered by 10 Community Health Workers managed by CRUSADE north of Chennai. These experienced women reach hundreds of rural families and are able to identify those who need referring for specialist treatment. Our Medicinal Herb Project, also with CRUSADE, is helping to revitalise the use of medicines created from indigenous plants. We also work with the ISLAND Trust in the Nilgiri Hills and GAWDESY in Thanjavur on a programme of actions that are helping communities adapt to the effects of climate change.

Since the loss of a regular funder last year we are unable to contribute to these projects at the same level as previously. The health and herb projects come to an end shortly and we are determined to continue helping the vital work of Community Health Workers with whatever we and our supporters can raise. Research among the poorest communities by our partners has shown that poor diet is the main contributory factor to the high level of health issues. This could be tackled through an awareness campaign targeted at areas where the problem is most acute. We also need to continue the very successful Herb Project which complements the health programme - see Diana's report in this newsletter.



Women preparing herbs to make medicine.

Thank you to everyone who contributed to our Christmas Tree appeal which raised enough to buy hundreds of trees which were planted as part of a campaign to help farmers and others to take practical steps in response to climate change. Every pound that our supporters give us is multiplied many times over in terms of value to those who benefit. It also helps to lever contributions from Government departments and organisations such as the Lions in India.

Please keep supporting events such as the Indian meal and Tamar Travellers and spare whatever you can - it will be put to good use!

Finally, a big thank you to Jothi Ramalingam, Alphonse Raj and Mavadiyan our Project Managers in India who, with their colleagues, deliver our projects to a very high standard and offer such a warm welcome to visitors from the UK.

Jane Weatherby



Health issues caused by a poor diet are a problem throughout the areas where our partners work. Surveys show that vegetables produced on a small scale are often sold rather than eaten by the families that produce them. This can be due to traditional eating habits but also because cheap, poor quality, free rice that is distributed to poor families by the government has become the staple of an unvaried diet. Tamwed would like to support campaigns by community health workers to encourage a more varied diet based on locally available food. .

Indian Meal

**The Old Chapel, Albaston,
Saturday 21st April 7.30pm**

We are organising another Indian Meal with a slide show, photo booth, quiz, raffle and sale of Indian goods.

Come in whatever clothes you like for a special photo!

See the flier for further information.

Please buy your tickets early as we were over-subscribed last year.



CLIMATE CHANGE

Two of our partners, the ISLAND Trust and GAWDESY, have begun a further 12 month programme of awareness raising and actions to help remote communities that rely on agriculture for food and income adapt to the rapidly changing climate. At one event covering four villages, staff from GAWDESY gave a presentation on climate change and distributed 3,000 saplings - some bought with funds from Tamwed, some donated by the owner of the Murugan Book Centre in Thanjavur.

Both organisations undertook surveys to establish the issues that are of most concern to food producers. Apart from climate change, the ISLAND Trust survey revealed that attacks from wild animals and poor nutrition are causing major problems in some villages. The Trust is working with food producers in 10 tribal villages to research and provide climate-resistant seeds with appropriate fencing, irrigation and soil nutrition.



A family receiving a sapling to be planted next to their house.

MOOLIGAI THOTTAM (HERB GARDEN)

The Mooligai Thottam project was launched by Tamwed's partner CRUSADE two years ago with the aim of creating 220 small gardens by householders who would be trained in the cultivation and preparation of medicinal plants. Following extensive research this was seen as a positive way to reduce medicinal costs through the use of herbs to treat common health conditions such as colds, sickness, small wounds, aches and pains and menstrual problems.

The current phase of the project is due to finish in April of this year and so a full evaluation was undertaken in January. The outcomes have been very encouraging with over 400 women involved in the creation of small gardens attached to their homes.

Whilst some of the plants are available in the wild, the gardens focus on planting local species that are not currently growing nearby. To satisfy the demand for about 10 plants per garden, a nursery has been developed bringing on small plants. These are only distributed once the training has been completed.

CRUSADE recruited 20 women (including their Health Workers) to be trained as trainers by experts from the Foundation for the Revitalisation of Local Health Traditions (FRLHT). FRLHT started by working with the 20 trainers and traditional healers to identify local diseases and also the local plants that have traditionally been used in their treatment. The plants are all thoroughly cross referenced to ensure their safety. The lists are narrowed down to approximately 10 diseases and the most useful herbs. Only then does the training of trainers (TOT) begin. FRLHT delivered in-depth sessions covering the identified diseases and precise methods of plant usage as well as identification and cultivation techniques.



Kalpana in her herb garden. She has approximately 30 different plants, each one carefully labelled.

After this, the new trainers each deliver sessions within their villages to other women. Although some men have shown an interest, working through the women's self-help groups is an effective method of transferring knowledge. The cost of a visit to a doctor at a health centre with medicine and including travel could cost the equivalent of £3 while the day's wages that could be lost for a patient can be less than £1, so this represents an important saving. Not only are the now trained women successfully treating their own families, but many of them have become an important source of support within the villages.

During the evaluation process 17 gardens were visited in 9 villages, a training session was observed and discussions were held with all involved in managing the project as well as the Health Workers and beneficiaries. Without exception, the 2-year programme was seen as a positive addition to the health work undertaken by CRUSADE with an estimated 1,600 people having directly benefited.

HEALTH PROJECT

Tamwed supports the work of its partner CRUSADE in dealing with health problems suffered by the most needy communities in their area. 12 trained Community Health Workers organise surveys to establish and prioritise health issues in groups of villages. They set up awareness-raising programmes about issues such as hygiene and women's health problems which are followed up by health camps where diagnosis takes place and treatment is offered or referrals made to specialist clinics and hospitals. A Homoeopathy clinic operates at CRUSADE's centre where Dr Hari Prya can consult with new and existing patients and prescribe medicine. The most common illnesses include diabetes, allergies and gastric disorders. Health Workers who meet regularly for training and sharing information are able to follow up patients in their area.

Mrs. Panjavarnam aged 50 of Sholavaram was diagnosed as Diabetic during a Diagnostic Camp conducted in her village. Her blood sugar level was high so she was referred to the nearby clinic. She is now under treatment and the blood glucose level has reduced. Her health is monitored by Health Worker Sheela who advises on diet and exercise.



It costs just £280 to support the work of a Community Health Worker such as Sheela and Porselvi. They are part of a team managed by CRUSADE who work with around 100 of those with the greatest need in villages close to their homes. Tamwed is looking for sponsors for individual health workers who will provide a profile and keep them in touch about their work.

INDIA'S RURAL POOR

- It is estimated that 70% of people live in rural areas where poverty is associated with those in the lowest castes and indigenous tribes. The lowest castes, while a minority of the total rural population, account for as much as 80% of the rural poor.
- The rural poor are located in those areas that are most prone to extreme climatic shifts. Long droughts punctuated by severe unseasonal storms exacerbate their poverty.
- According to the World Bank, India has 433 million people living on less than a US Dollar a day, twice the number of poor in sub-Saharan Africa, and 36% of the total number of poor in the world.

PETE SQUIRE VISITS TAMWED'S PROJECTS, JANUARY 2012

Prior to the train doors closing at Gunnislake station and then reopening four weeks later, the name 'Tamwed' could have easily been misconstrued as meaning one "wedded to the Tamar". However, with the intervening month and a few thousand miles of travel, the visible outcomes of funding from a West Devon organisation that meets the proven need of international neighbours and we see that the 'Tam' really does stand for Tamil Nadu.

Travelling with Tamwed's Secretary Oz Osborne and the herbalist Diana Lee I was privileged to visit the three organisations supported by Tamwed's partners - Crusade near Chennai, the Island Trust in the Nilgiri Hills and Gawdesy near Thanjavur. All three exemplified the interdependency between meeting basic health needs, women's emancipation and efforts to mitigate our contribution to climate change. Links with these partners grew from Tamwed's initial support for communities affected by the tsunami in 2004. My daughter Justine travelled from North India to Chennai a few days after the catastrophic event and met up with Jothi Ramalingam, Tamwed's Project Coordinator, and sent back information and photographs. This, I found out, provided the stimulus for the launch of Tamwed.

It is difficult in writing to do justice to the work of Tamwed's distant partners or describe the problems which are confronted by the communities that they work with. What you can begin to understand is the value of financial contributions when converted into simple acts such as growing herbs to meet basic health needs or planting drought-resistant trees and crops to provide an income. However, it is important to convey how our visit was like having a mirror held up to our faces. We see the effect our western lifestyles have on these communities and which are then doubly compounded by their desire to emulate our consumerism.



This farmer brought some of his cows to the Pongal festival.

If Tamwed can continue to substitute tree and plant growth for so the so called economic miracle of growth, as highlighted by the proliferation of modern shopping malls in this part of the world, then we might actually be making amends for an earth we have been literally helping to tear apart.

Thank you TAMWED.

Pete Squire February 2012

Please pass this newsletter on to family or friends that might be interested. Ask them to let us know if they would like to be included on our emailing list. The latest news on our projects and events is on our website.