

VILLAGE MATTERS



'Be the change' Mahatma Gandhi change and plans for the future of AVI.

By Mary Holmes, AVI Trustee

The first thing to say is that AVI continues to work with splendid partners in rural India. Many of whom face huge challenges. However, our partners find ways to meet these challenges and at the same time to reach out to work with new groups such as disabled people. An inspiration for us at AVI.

As readers of Village Matters will know, it's been a period of change for us too. Now though we feel we are in a position to plan with confidence for the future. I'd like to thank all our supporters who have remained with us over the last few years.

Happily Ivan's health is fine and he continues to work two days a week as our projects and partnership manager. We owe a terrific lot to all the people who kept the organisation going through a difficult period.

During this time the trustees, especially co-chairs Paul and Caroline, took a searching look at the organisation: where we were, what we were trying to do, and the staffing and organisational structure needed to achieve our objectives. Guided by trustee Alan Leather we undertook a strategic review seeking the opinions of partners in India, and our staff, supporters and other AVI contacts, in the UK.

We had asked those interviewed about various possible ways forward for AVI in the light of current changes to funding and the situation of charities in India.

After considering the replies we feel the areas we need to focus on are:

- Using what we at AVI have learnt from our partners to raise awareness, here in the UK, on some of the issues they face.
- Major improvements in our communication strategy.
- Strengthening and broadening the relationship between partners and supporters through visits and contacts.
- Reaching out to a wider range of people especially younger people and those from Indian and other ethnic backgrounds.

“NOW WE FEEL WE ARE IN A POSITION TO PLAN WITH CONFIDENCE FOR THE FUTURE.”

AVI AGM 2015

The AGM on 21 November, 2015 was a good occasion to share experiences for those who had visited partners and attended the partners' forum in March 2015. It was also the occasion to talk about AVI's strategic review.

For most charities supporting overseas projects it is just the staff who report back. At our AGM



however we heard the views of a range of people who had all been part of the group visiting India in March 2015: staff, AVI supporters and interested friends. I feel such visits and the reports we frequently receive from our partners help AVI to get new insights and understanding about both their work and our own. It also enables us all to have confidence that AVI is supporting work which is reaching those most in need.

We also discussed the political situation in India which has changed since the BJP came to power in 2014. Narendra Modi has spoken forcefully about ending poverty though his model of development is questioned by AVI's partners. There is increased regulation of charities and a clamp down on campaigning. AVI is committed to raising awareness of issues in India in line with the needs of our partners. Discussion in small groups at the AGM produced many ideas about how we could reach a wider audience in the UK, including more contact with those of Indian heritage. Getting information directly not only from partners but from beneficiaries was seen as vital.

Another way of getting more people involved, particularly young people, is by encouraging them to visit our partners and spend time in India as volunteers. Several of the partners were very keen to host visits, particularly ASSEFA who have excellent facilities and are happy to take visitors to see their work. Anyone who

is planning a trip to India and would like to visit one of our partners should email Ivan on: ivan@actionvillageindia.org.uk

The AGM finished with Kat Crisp selling a brilliant collection of Ekta Parishad silk scarves and of course a delicious Madras Café meal. We hope you can join us this year!

The 2016 AGM will be held on Saturday 19th November. More details to follow.

Welcome to Anna

A comprehensive business plan for AVI was drawn up which took account of the need to plan for someone to take on Ivan's central role and the decision was made to appoint a director. We are delighted that Anna Griffiths, who has considerable charitable and organisational development experience, has been appointed and started work in April. We'd like to welcome Anna very warmly and we hope there will be a chance before too long, for supporters to meet Anna.

I'd also like to pay a special tribute to John Sayers, who did so much, as our treasurer and company secretary to keep us all on track. He is missed at AVI.

It's an exciting time. Please be part of it and let us know if you have thoughts about the future of AVI and what *you* feel is important.



My support for AVI.

A personal reflection by David Mitchell

I am grateful for this opportunity to think back over the years about what AVI has given me, when I have often given very little back. In particular, I think of the support I received from Chris Wilde, one of AVI's founders, in setting up a school link with ASSEFA Iyyanapuram School near Madurai, Tamil Nadu in 1988/9. As part of a Personal and Social and Health Education (PSHE) programme, students in year 9 in a secondary school in East London, were asked to write about their lives and to devise questions to ask students of a similar age group in Tamil Nadu, who ASSEFA knew. These exchanges went on over a number of years.

On one notable session which I called "Receiving a Visitor", AVI arranged for ASSEFA's CEO Mr Loganathan, to visit the school here. The students took charge of the session themselves – offering hospitality and thanks before a question and answer session. Years later Ivan supported me in continuing with my link by assisting me in a visit to Madurai in 2014, for which I am most grateful.

However, this is only one side of the coin. The other, is the realisation of the vital significance of AVI in supporting girls' education and women's groups. In the past year there have been powerful reminders of misogynistic nature of society in India, through documentaries and literature exposing the dynamics surrounding low-caste girls. These have served to emphasise the continued urgency for AVI's work in helping to give girls and women a voice through health education and the setting up of self-help groups.

Lastly, two very personal and emotional experiences serve to highlight and to enhance my continued commitment to the work of AVI. The first occurred in November 2014 when my wife and I were touched by the gracious reception we received from ASSEFA and their staff in Madurai and from the staff at the school at Iyyanapuram – it was a feeling difficult to convey in words or to quantify, but it tugged on the emotions and the throat and left us in the realm of almost-tears.

The second occurred on July 11th, 2015 as I lined up with my two adult sons, in Piccadilly, waiting to start the 10k UK London Vitality Run. We were three people among thousands supporting many charities and were proud to be sporting AVI T-shirts. Again, the wave of emotion was overwhelming, the feeling of gratitude for good health to enable us to participate and gratitude to all our sponsors for all their support, was immense. Our commitment to further support the work of AVI was confirmed. I hope to be able to run again in 2016, because by giving we are receiving.



Village Matters, Money Matters.

Could you help AVI to save costs by receiving Village Matters by email?

If you're happy to receive Village Matters by email contact the AVI team on info@actionvillageindia.org.uk or return the slip and enclosed envelope to us.

Joshi's Story.

By Tony Mortlock, a long term supporter of Assefa and AVI

AVI secured a large grant from the Big Lottery Fund in 2014 which is assisting 36,000 people living with disabilities, through AVI's partner, NBJK (Nav Bharat Jagriti Kendra, which free-translates as Awakening the New India). A big part of this programme is to ensure that people with disabilities have access to training and skills development through placements in mobile, motor and bicycle repair shops and other types of business to enable disabled people to start small business, become economically active and more visible in their communities. This is Joshi's story.

Polio was endemic in India until very recently. Happily, due to a successful immunisation programme there has not been a single case since 2011 and the country is now considered polio-free. However, there are still many who contracted polio before immunisation. One of them is Joshi. Joshi has no use of his legs but now has a tricycle which is powered by hand operated pedals. Joshi received neither education nor training, but clearly has initiative and an entrepreneurial spirit.

With funding from the Big Lottery Fund AVI's partner, NBJK runs a micro-credit project from which Joshi was able to access a loan, probably of no more than the equivalent of £5 with which his tricycle was modified. He was able to buy stock and set up a mobile shop selling sweets and biscuits, which he peddles around town.

Some years have passed since I met Joshi, but at that time he was well on the way to repaying his loan and his business was flourishing. I shall revisit that part of India next year when I hope to have a chance to get up to date with Joshi's progress. This is one example which illustrates how little is needed to transform an unfortunate life into one that is productive and deeply satisfying.



Environmental activities in Uttarakhand- Himalayas- A twenty five year journey.

By David Hopkins, who works at Lakshmi Ashram

AVI has had a long non-funding relationship with Lakshmi Ashram, our partner in Uttarkhand, on the edge of the Himalya mountain range.

Lakshmi Ashram started working in Almora District of Uttarakhand, in the late 1970s when discussion with the local communities found the need for a pre-school educational programme for the children of isolated Himalayan communities. In the spring of 1982, a unique environmentally focused kindergarten programme began in the villages around Danya and Sakhande.

Although the programme had been designed to develop environmental awareness in young children it was only around 1990 that Lakshmi Ashram began to implement specific environmental programmes. In the early years the programmes were small-scale allowing the team to slowly build up their skills. As years went on the activities included encouraging people to grow fruit trees to improve nutrition which also offered the chance for income generation.

Another early activity was to protect and regenerate the community forests, construction of compost pits and water storage tanks. We secured more support to improve water resources, agricultural land, forests and community pasture, always working closely with the community who contributed with ideas and labour to many of the activities.

One of the most impressive successes was the revival of the community forest in the village of Phalyant. What had been an extremely degraded forest is now a dense mixed forest that provides fodder to the community and which continues to be well managed by the village forest committee today. A spring that had dried up on the lower edge of the forest now has water throughout the year.

Since then, environmental regeneration work and efforts to encourage natural resources around livelihoods have continued in the region, alongside an emphasis on improving the agricultural infrastructure. The project also seeks to encourage farmers to improve farming yield and income to prevent them leaving their villages for employment on the plains.

Lakshmi Ashram will continue to explore new ways in which the local economy and environmental structures can be enhanced to the benefit of the community.

If you are interested in visiting this remarkable organisation get in touch!



Hello



We welcome **Anna Griffiths** as AVI's new director. Between 1999-2008 Anna founded, ran and grew the award-winning international development charity, PhotoVoice. More recently Anna has completed an MBA focussed on social entrepreneurship at Oxford University, and has for the last five years been working as a consultant for UK social enterprises.

Anna@actionvillageindia.org.uk

Goodbye

Mônica Vidal

In January we bid farewell to Mônica Vidal who had worked with AVI on fundraising and communication. We thank Mônica for all her hard work, not least in helping us secure our grant from the Big Lottery Fund, and wish her the very best for her future.

Jaheda Begum

We also bid farewell to Jaheda Begum who has worked with AVI as our trusted administrator since 2007. Jaheda has been a steadfast, reliable and very valued asset and friend to everyone involved with AVI. We would like to thank Jaheda for all her hard work and wish her the very best for her future.

Words of Farewell: John Sayers RIP.

We are very sad to announce that Action Village India's Company Secretary and recent Treasurer died suddenly last November. John Sayers made an absolutely vital contribution to AVI. He was deeply committed to seeing a fairer and better world and in the last part of his life his encyclopaedic knowledge and ever growing experience in charity administration were devoted to the work of Action Village India. We will miss him a lot - as a friend and fellow worker.

Returned Volunteer Action

John worked in the research department of the National Coal Board but had a lifelong and very active concern for people in developing countries. He did Voluntary Service Overseas in Jamaica and when he came back to the UK joined a new organisation - Returned Volunteer Action – which took a radical approach to the whole question of volunteering. John was treasurer and central to RVA for 40 years. His colleague there, Charley Symes, said RVA aimed to help returned volunteers 'use their experience to make a difference in the UK and to promote development towards a fairer and more equal world'.

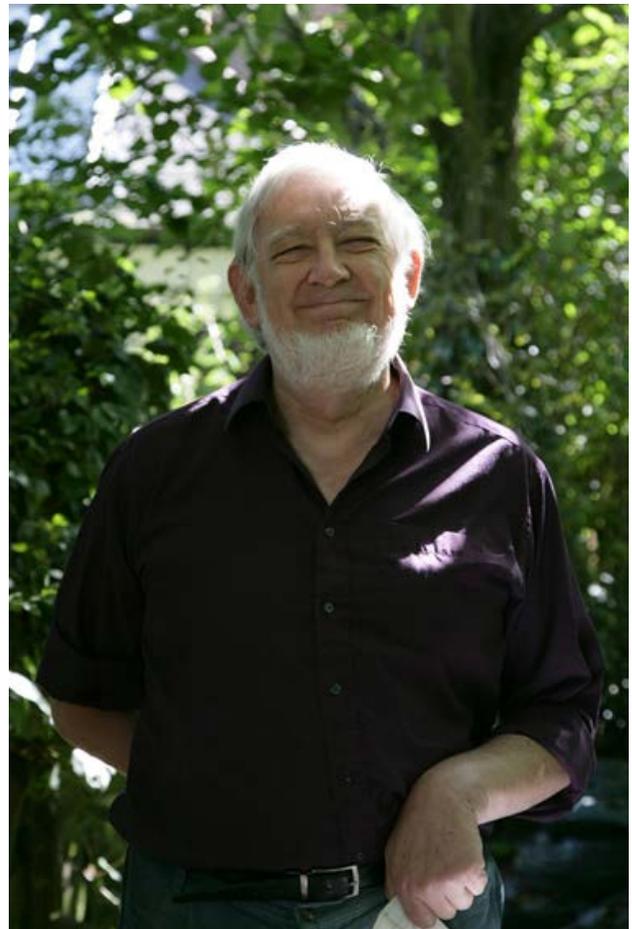
A wonderful addition to AVI

John served on AVI's Management Committee, for over ten years since 2004. He worked steadfastly over these many years, dedicating much time to supporting AVI. John's warmth, steady presence, attention to detail and common sense approach gave the AVI community a great reassurance that the organisation rested in good hands.

During the last years, with the office move and Ivan being away for a period John was a tower of strength, always prepared to take on new jobs. In spite of being ill, and having regular spells in hospital, he never complained but came into the office to deal with financial matters, attended practically every meeting, and produced impeccable minutes.

John will be very much missed by all at AVI and never forgotten. His legacy will always remain.

John's family has made a very generous donation of £10,000 from John's estate to AVI. We would like to thank all of John's family – specifically Fiona and Ivan Jackson and David and Margaret Sayers for this exceptional gift. We will let you know in due course how this wonderful contribution has been put to best use to benefit our partners' work.



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Upcoming Opportunities with Action Village India

AVI Treasurer and Secretary

AVI is looking to recruit two new management committee members to fill the roles of both Treasurer and Secretary. The AVI treasurer works closely with the AVI director and other board members to set the annual budgets, prepare financial reports and to work with the auditor. The AVI secretary is responsible for taking minutes at meetings and ensuring AVI's legal and regulatory compliance with Companies House and the Charity Commission.

Both new committee members will be required to attend AVI Management Committee meetings (held on evenings or weekends) four times a year as well as the AGM and to potentially sit on other organisational sub-committees. The posts are voluntary with expenses covered. We welcome existing members of the AVI community who have the necessary skills to benefit our organisation. For more information please visit our website to view the role descriptions.

Enjoy a Summer Picnic and raise funds for AVI

Baruch "Barry" Solomon, who raised £400 for AVI last year through his guided walks, is organizing a 'a big and amiable picnic' in **Regent's Park, London** at 1pm on **Sunday, June 26th**. Attendees are asked to make a small donation to AVI. It is set to be a lovely day. For more information go to: <http://meetup.com/TheLutrinians/events/230853528/>

Kalamkari Cards

David Knock, a long-time AVI supporter is selling beautiful Kalamkari from India, cards with 100% of the retail price being send back to AVI's partner Crusade. In 2006, AVI's partner, Crusade trained a member of staff in the art who has passed the skills on to other women. These cards are the fruit of their work. David is selling four cards for **£5 + p&p**. To order your cards contact David directly on davidkock@davidknock.plus.com



Madras Café at WOMAD 2016

Madras Café will, of course, be present at WOMAD from 28th to 31st July. This is a highlight of the year for AVI and the café last year turned over an amazing £38,000, 2000 thalis and many thousands of samosas and onion bhajis. Many thanks to Bryan, Halford, everyone on the Madras Café Advisory Group and their army of volunteers.

AVI is looking for volunteers to man our front of house desk at Madras Café and to spend time engaging and drumming up interest and support for our work with festival goers. Volunteers will get £50 off their Womad ticket. If you can help please email info@actionvillageindia.org.uk ASAP (before the end of May).





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Action Village India (AVI) supports projects devised and managed by its six long term partners who work in rural areas with people who are missing out on India's recent economic growth. We fund:

Three of NBJK's programmes in Bihar and Jharkhand: girls' education, its grassroots groups advocacy network and the Big Lottery funded Disability Rights project.

Just north of Chennai over 7,000 women have joined CRUSADE's micro-credit groups. CRUSADE is now working with them on health, housing and local democracy issues and enabling them to start small businesses. South of Chennai, ASSEFA is training women and farmers to work in their own communities, developing microcredit groups, starting small dairies and diversifying farming.

KGSN has enabled 2,500 families in five Keralan villages near Trivandrum to start growing vegetables, root crops and spices organically on their household plots. Work in three more villages is now well under way.

Ekta Parishad's activists are supporting traditional fishing communities on Chilka Lake, Odisha who are losing access to fishing grounds. AVI also supports Ekta's ongoing rights campaign.

If you would like to make a donation to our work please do so by returning the enclosed form.



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