

PROJECT PROPOSAL

WISE Project Goals and Objectives:

Shree Nityananda Education Trust in partnership with Om Gagangiri Maharaj Trust proposes a WOMEN'S INDIVIDUAL & SOCIETY ENHANCEMENT (WISE) Project that will engage women, living in tribal communities, in:

- developing self-help groups to enhance the skills of community members in addressing their own needs.
- empowering individuals through education, self-reliance and financial independence.
- providing hands-on vocational training in skills and technologies appropriate for the village life.
- linking women with sustainable livelihood opportunities, nurturing them till they step up on the ladder out of poverty and begin enjoying a decent quality of life.
- supporting development of women in becoming leaders in their communities.

Background and Need of People in Catchment Area:

In the 10 km surrounding Ganeshpuri of Thane District, Maharashtra, India, there are approximately 20,000 families or 120,000 people. Although it is only 100 km from Mumbai, the financial capital of India, this area is undeveloped and the people suffer from lack of work, education, transportation, and government facilities and resources. About 48% of these families are illiterate, unskilled, landless and live below poverty level. They are suffering from easily treatable diseases and lack of food. The majority of hamlets are situated in inaccessible areas that are devoid of electricity and fresh water. They mainly depend upon daily wages to provide for their family's needs, often taking the most difficult work to be found, brick making.

In rural Maharashtra, especially in the tribal belt of Taluka Wada in Palgher District, agriculture, often at the subsistence level, is the predominant economic activity. The farmers cannot access water except during monsoon, and thus only grow one crop a year. They are left with little food for the major part of the year which leads to malnutrition. Six months of the year, they must migrate to other areas for work to augment their income and food supply.

These unfortunates suffer from the many problems of poverty: malnutrition, poor health due to lack of clean water, poor hygiene practices, lack of education, and lack of access to medicine and medical care. There is lack of awareness or access to government programs, banks and other financial situations. This leads to a dependency upon opportunistic and unscrupulous money lenders. The communities lack a sense of unity and working on problems together. Individuals and communities are unaware of their own strengths and thus have a sense of helplessness.

In this outback of rural India, the women are neglected by Indian society. Because there is no infrastructure for water delivery to their homes, these village women must walk to the wells or rivers five to eight times a day to carry water to their homes balanced upon their heads. By middle age, women have chronic back and neck complaints. The water they can access is not clean but usually contaminated with pathogens and chemicals. Women in our area have very few opportunities to improve their lives and those of their family members. They are not encouraged to

attend school, a high percentage of women are illiterate in their local language and simple math. Too many women cannot even sign their own names on a document. They are discouraged from going outside the home. They suffer from poor health, poor nutrition, family difficulties, and all the problems of poverty.

The Implementing Agencies:

Shri Nityanand Education Trust is a Bombay Registered NGO working in the tribal area of Wada Taluka, Palgher District, Maharashtra. Over the past eleven years SNET has identified 31 village in which it concentrates its seva:

Education: Health education, Nutritional education, Water hygiene & purification education, Early Pregnancy Health Education, tuitions for students who failed passing tenth and twelfth exams, and Marathi literacy. SNET fund raises and provides for financial scholarships for tribal girls.

Vocational training: in a wide variety of topics such as sewing & embroidery, computer classes, solar construction and repair, organic farming, guest services, and Ayurveda therapies. Yoga teacher training scholarships, Water shed development and water harvesting.

Employment: SNET maintains five facilities offering employment to 90+ tribal people - Fire Mountain Retreat Center, Padukas Women's Handicrafts Workshops, Hand Incense Rolling Workshop, Men's Alternative Technology Workshop and Fire Mountain Ayurveda Spa. (www.firemountainretreat.com, www.Padukaseboutique.com, www.firemountainayurveda.com)

SNET benefits from a continuing relationship with professors and students of IIT, Mumbai for survey, research and implementing of village-appropriate alternative technology (<https://youtu.be/G9sG4A3ovy>).

Om Gagangiri Maharaj Trust (GMT) is a Bombay Registered NGO working in the tribal area of Wada Taluka, Palgher District, Maharashtra since 2005. Its seva activities have been providing lodging and food to pilgrim visiting holy sites in Palgher District, addressing educational needs of tribal people, and co-sponsoring group weddings for families lacking the necessary funds for wedding expenses.

Om Gagangiri Maharaj Trust is guided by a board of trustees that include three engineers (from IIT), two Adivasi social workers, and two local residents of the community. GMT has 12A and 80G and is ready to issue tax certificates to Indian donors.

Project Strategy is Education:

Education is regarded as a key instrument for the empowerment of women. Education can help individuals change their worldview, overcome income barriers, make better career choices, inspire personal growth, build confidence, and develop a sense of well-being. An educated person is capable of collectively bringing in significant changes and improving the whole community. Implementing effective education resources for the tribal community will bring immediate changes in their state of living and improve their future.

Historically in India, Self Help Group (SHG) Movement has been recognized as an effective strategy for mobilization and empowerment of rural people, particularly poor women and other marginalized groups. The WISE project proposes to provide a variety of skill development programs through small groups (SHG'S). Though the access to credit has been a motivational factor in forming Self Help Groups, the potential of SHG's goes beyond the availability of funds and loans. SHG's are involved in various social activities that support women's empowerment. SHG's ensure people's

participation in the development process and provide a forum in which people can meet on a regular basis and discuss issues and concerns that they face in their day to day life.

The true potentials of disenfranchised women are realized when they are provided sufficient training to manage the external environment, have easy access to finance, are enabled to expand their skills and assets and then convert them into meaningful livelihoods. This requires continuous handhold support by their institutions. An external dedicated, sensitive support structure is required to induce such social mobilization, institution building, and livelihood promotion. These two NGOs are choosing to be and offer this kind of support.

Step One:

Formation of Self Help Groups in cachement area of 31 villages. Introduce & oversee methods and benefit of Group Savings Program. Instruction in record keeping, group dynamics and dealing with group obstacles.

Step Two:

Transfer knowledge and Skill Development. Provide vocational education and training in Organic Farming, Hand Incense Rolling, Water Harvesting. Inform members of educational opportunities within the community, such as Scholarships for tribal girls, Marathi Literacy for adult women, and Computer classes.

Specific training in Organic Farming and specifically suitable and optimal methods to reduce the cost of farming, to build agro-ecology, and to increase the farm yield. This includes 1) production of home-made herbal extracts for pest control, fertilizer, and growth promotion; 2) seed processing methods to increase seed germination rate, to resist the occurrence of plant diseases, and to increase the early growth rate of the plants; and 3) to make manure fertilizers with different types of input material (cattle dung and agricultural residues, various plants' leaves) and microbial cultures (jivamrut, trichoderma, azatobacter etc.).

Step Three:

Perform wealth building activities together, such as collective farming and vegetable marketing and distribution, and/or water shed development to improve water availability for farming.

The members of the SHG'S will be encouraged to go beyond their own groups and begin to impart their experience and successes to other groups within and outside of their own hamlets, thus setting themselves up as leaders and change agents.

Resources Needed:

Full time Staff: One supervisor, six field workers

SHG supplies: Accounting registers, individual record keeping supplies

Farming Supplies: seeds, extra-large plastic buckets, supplies to make natural pesticides, fertilizers, etc.

Transportation costs

Training costs for Women's empowerment & leadership development.

Budget Requirements:

Depending upon interest of donors and available grants, we can scale the project and create a budget somewhere from 80,000 a month to 2 Lakh per month.