



QSA NEWSLETTER

Issue No. 9 – November 2016

Welcome to the latest QSA Newsletter where you will meet new people, learn about our projects and join us in helping to change lives. In this edition we visit the people and projects working to address poverty alleviation.

Projects – Pitchandikulam Bio

Resource Centre in Tamil Nadu

We begin this newsletter with news from one of QSA's project partners in Tamil Nadu, India. QSA with support from the Australian Government's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) has been funding the work of Pitchandikulam Bio Resource Centre for a number of years, where Joss Brooks is the project manager. In recent years the project work has been centred around Nadukuppam. Here environmental education has been provided to teachers via in-service courses, model courses have been prepared, and thousands of students have visited Pitchandikulam Forest to learn more about their environment and how to care for it. These ideas have also been shared with the communities, who have worked to reduce the rubbish in the area; worked on water channels for improved flow during times of flooding; collected and propagated indigenous tree seeds, and planted thousands of trees – 35,000 during the last year alone to reforest areas denuded by agriculture and years of neglect. New farming techniques have been taught, and through the women's self-help groups created, women have been helped to generate small businesses, mainly with an agricultural basis. Many of these micro-



Making herbal products below, and right, running a popular training course on how to cook with herbs, at Nadukuppam Women's Centre. Photo credit – Pitchandikulam Bio Resource Centre.



enterprises have featured herbs, whether as herbal medicines that can be used in the home, or creating a range of chutneys, pastes, teas and condiments based on locally grown herbs in their home food gardens. These products have been made under the supervision of herbal medicine practitioners, including Parvathy, a staff member at Pitchandikulam Bio Resource Centre. The project is nearing the end of the multi-year plan to support the communities there, making them sustainable and able to support themselves long into the future. This is part of an exit plan where QSA and DFAT will gradually withdraw funding as the community as a whole becomes more self-supporting.

People – Parvathy, community health coordinator at Pitchandikulam Bio Resource Centre, Tamil Nadu

Parvathy has recently returned from the Women of India Festival 2016 held in Delhi. This was a ten day exhibition from the 14th – 23rd October organised by the Ministry of Women and Children to showcase women's organic products across India. An invite-only exhibition, out of a total of 260 stalls, the one by Pitchandikulam Bio Resource Centre was the only one invited from Tamil Nadu, which indicates the respect with which the products are held and the level of professionalism demonstrated by Parvathy and the team of women involved in the production. Parvathy had this to say about her time in Delhi:-

“It was a wonderful and challenging experience. I went there to showcase herbal medicine and cosmetics produced by Amirtha Herbals, herbal food and organic millets prepared by Meera Herbal Foods and spirulina made by Surya Spirulina, all of which are produced by our women's cooperative in Nadukuppam, set up by the QSA / DFAT project in collaboration with other enterprises. With seven big bags of



Parvathy (left) explains the herbal products to the Minister of Women and Children's Development, Menaka Gandhi. Photo credit – Pitchandikulam Bio Resource Centre

produce, Selvi from Amirtha Herbals and I took the train – for two nights and a day. Unfortunately, on the first day Selvi had to go back to Tamil Nadu, so I was left to negotiate the capital by myself. It was my first time in Delhi, and I don't speak Hindi, so it was a real adventure!

More than two hundred thousand people visited the exhibition centre, and our stall was a real success, with over ten thousand people visiting over the ten days. Initially, I was surprised at how little people knew about traditional medicine – in Delhi, people only know about conventional medicine. They didn't know names of plants and flowers, so I took pictures to show them. It took time for people to understand how our traditional medicines are different from prescription medications, and to educate them, I laid out samples of all the products on our stall and offered health consultations to our customers, talking to them about body constitution and how to take food and eat healthily, lose weight, relieve joint problems and so on. Gradually, word of mouth spread, and many customers came back several times, each time buying more products.

Among the many new friends and customers we met at the exhibition, two were very important in our success. First was the Minister of Women and Children's Development, Menaka Gandhi: she spent ten minutes talking to me at the stall and enquiring about herbal treatments, bought some organic millets, and showed a real interest in our women's products from Tamil Nadu.

The second was the Director of the Women and Children's Development Department, Dr. George: he came to me with complaints about digestion, and after I gave him one remedy to try that night, he came back the next day with ten colleagues and told them all to buy it!



Parvathy receiving her commendation on stage Photo credit - Women of India Festival 2016

More than fifty businesses were interested in our products, including retailers, exporters and wholesalers. One lady who runs a vegan cafe in Delhi even asked us for recipes for her cafe – so now we want to compile a herbal recipe book. We have been invited to another exhibition later in the year, and we're all very excited to see what happens next.

The best surprise was at the end of the exhibition – our stall was awarded 4th place out of a total of 260 stalls, and I was asked to give a speech on stage in front of all the other participants.”

Zimbabwe Food Relief Action (ZFRA)

With all of the other international news on TV and in the media recently, it is sometimes difficult to remember the other things which are happening away from the spotlight. Zimbabwe, a land-locked country in southern Africa is experiencing a severe drought, and has been for a number of years. Quakers Kelitha and John Schmid, using funds sent by Quaker Meetings around the world and also funds from QSA, regularly purchase maize meal and other food staples and visit communities to distribute food. In John's latest email to QSA he had this to say:-

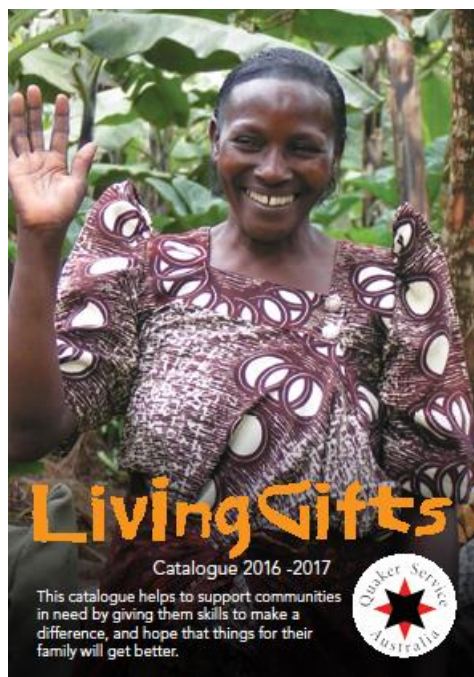
“This year the serious drought continued unabated, with only a few farmers lucky enough to reap a reasonable crop. Their luck does not just depend on hard work, but also on soil conditions, the vagaries of where rare wandering thunderstorms will dump their precious liquid, the type of crop planted and the threat from flocks of quelea birds. There is no end to the regional drought in sight. Even the mighty Zambezi river is drying up, reducing Victoria Falls to a trickle.

On behalf of ZFRA we have just ended a full distribution amid beautiful songs expressing thankfulness from the villagers. We provided 20 kg of unrefined maize meal to about 3,150 households in three wards of Matobo District in Matabeleland South Province. Hunger is now a continuous feature of rural life and we do not want to 'sit on money' unnecessarily so when we have enough to support a region, we do just that. Next to be helped are Mawusumane and the four villages of Gwedza ward. At present prices we need about USD 10,000 to assist them.

We are always aware that our help is a small drop in an ocean of need. Equally, our villagers are aware that they are among the lucky few who are receiving help from us. But it is a help these people would not otherwise be getting and so we will continue as long as we can, as long as the need is there, and as long as you (and your friends) continue to support our action.”

So Friends, as you plan your own Christmas celebrations, please consider doing what you can to support these communities in Zimbabwe. QSA will forward any funds received. For those of you making a direct credit to QSA's CUA bank account, (in the name of Quaker Service Australia, BSB 814 282, account 50585902) please do send us an email so that we know the funds are specifically for Zimbabwe, or indeed any other project or Living Gift nominated by you.

Living Gifts catalogue – QSA is happy to say the latest catalogue is now available. If you need more copies, please see our website (www.qsa.org.au) or contact the QSA office. Remember this catalogue is not only for use at Christmas time, but provides year round support for QSA's projects. There are a range of items to give much needed support to communities in Cambodia, India and Uganda. We hope you will use it frequently!



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Would you like to learn more about QSA and its project partners? If you would like to know more, please contact us at administration@qsa.org.au, by mail at 119 Devonshire Street, Surry Hills NSW 2010, or by phone on 02 9698 9103. We would love to hear from you.

QSA's Statement of Purpose is to express in a practical way the concern of Australian Quakers for the building of a more peaceful, equitable, just and compassionate world. To this end QSA works with communities in need to improve their quality of life with projects which are culturally sensitive, as well as being economically and environmentally appropriate and sustainable.

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