



In Celebration of VGIF's 40th Anniversary
Virginia Gildersleeve International Fund and
Indian Federation of University Women's Associations
Friendship Tour to Nepal and India and Kolkata Conference

VGIF Funded Projects and Participating Project Directors

Visit the Nepal Association of University Women, Kathmandu, Nepal

VGIF has funded NAUW twice, in 1996, and most recently in 2007 for a comprehensive educational program for women and girls involved in subsistence farming in Tokha Village. The thirty students in the academic classes learned to write their names, read an elementary Nepali book, and perform basic calculations. These same women also took lessons in sanitation and family planning that included methods and sources of contraception. NAUW used funding from VGIF to begin income generating programs in mushroom cultivation, candle/incense making, and seed preparation.

Project Directors

Ramita Suwal: Master in Science (Nepal); Training in Management (Nepal)

Jamal Shrestha: Ph.D Economics (India); Population and Family Planning Research

Projects to be Highlighted at the Conference in Kolkata (November 18-20)

Gene Campaign, Delhi, India

Gene Campaign, funded by VGIF in April 2009, is dedicated to reviving the indigenous healing system in the state of Jharkhand, a population that typically does not have access to institutional health care. The project will cover 3 villages in the Ranchi District with an average of 30 households, benefiting 100 women and girls. Women will set up and maintain a mother nursery for medicinal plants used by the community for common ailments, train in homestead health and nutritional gardens, and educate school children and youth to recognize the use of medicinal plants.

Project Director

Dr. Suman Sahai, Ph.D in Genetics (Indian Agricultural Research Institute in Delhi); Faculty Member, University of Alberta (Canada) and University of Chicago (USA); 2004 Borlaug Award for outstanding contribution to agriculture and environment; Expert Committee on Biotechnology Policy; Bioethics Committee of the Indian Council for Medical Research.

Narkeldanga Rehnuma-e-Niswaan, Kolkata, India

The project, implemented within the Muslim community in Kolkata, trained 35 women to perfect their skills in high fashion design, tailoring, and embroidery for the booming Indian high fashion industry. According to Project Director Tabassum Siddiqua, the two-semester program not only gave these women practical design skills, it provided the means to work outside of their economically-depressed and religiously-repressed homes and communities, enhancing their economic independence and social status.

Project Director

Tabassum Siddiqua, Master of Arts in Urdu (Calcutta University); Diploma in Tailoring and Embroidery/Diploma in Montessori and Primary Education

Rural Development Women Welfare Society, Yerraguntla, Andra Pradesh, India

VGIF has funded RDWWS twice, first in 2005 with a three-month training program for 25 women in candle making and marketing which included a nightly 2-hour literacy class. An awareness program was organized to motivate the women in group dynamics and action after which the women were formed into five groups to plan successful methods for candle making, selling, and savings. Following the training,

each group was given the equivalent of US\$217 to be utilized as a loan with repayment arranged in easy installments. The women were successful in selling their candles in the local markets.

The second project funded in 2007 supported a 6-month training program for 25 women and adolescent girls in making soft toys, leather toys, and leather garments. Yearlong literacy classes were included in their training. The project attracted the attention of a soft toy distributor in Nellore and as result the women now operate a collective which provides soft toys for distribution throughout India, as well as selling at local shops and festivals. Personal income from sales has increased and all participants must contribute Rs.200 monthly into a savings account.

Project Director

Mrs. D. Leelavathi, Secondary School, Government of Andhra Pradesh with additional training in social services

Bharathi Educational Society, Kavali, Andhra Pradesh, India

This project funded in 2007 trained 250 tsunami-affected women in the manufacture of fish pickles. The participants were formed into a production and marketing cooperative addressing pickling, storage, packing, and marketing techniques. Skills also have been developed in the areas of book keeping, accounts management, leadership, lobbying, and advocacy. The project has been successful in terms of supplementing family income on a regular and sustainable basis. The women are more confident and skilled and are better able to access development resources. They are more aware, organized and vocal regarding their rights and privileges and are also able to address their problems at the family, community and village levels.

Project Director

Kate Rajya Lakshmi, Post Graduate in Sociology, Andhra University

Project Five-O Calcutta, Kolkata, India

Project Five-O Calcutta established a training centre on fifteen acres of land in Thakurpukur in 1983 with initial expenses met by a grant from the Virginia Gildersleeve International Fund for University Women. The Centre provides an integrated program of training in welfare and income-generating activities for women from Thakurpukur and other villages around Calcutta. After taking craft courses in tailoring and weaving, embroidery and knitting, tie and dye, many of these women are earning a cash income from sales of their products in the local market, products such as blouses, saris, petticoats and pajamas, table-linen and toweling. Courses are also given in printing of wrapping paper and beautician skills which is a popular profession and easily ensures the students a job in this business.

Other subjects taught are literacy, health, nutrition, environmental hygiene, childcare and family planning. Children who come to the Centre with their mothers are catered for in a pre-primary school (a balwadi). The Centre also runs a mobile library, holds general educational seminars, and provides food supplements for children suffering from malnutrition. A medical-cum-personnel van has been acquired to extend medical help to village women, particularly in provision of immunization programs.

The VGIF Friendship Tour and Conference will include leaders and first hand reports from all of these NGOs. Delegates are urged to register through VGIF's accommodations and travel partner, Friendship Ambassadors Foundation, at www.faf.org (see VGIF button in left hand corner). FAF is a 501c3 not for profit organization with international relations and affiliations; the foundation is formally associated with the UN DPI and is a partner in operational relations with UNESCO. Interested delegates may also register at: 1-800-526-2908.