

Activity Report 2014-15

Education Programmes:

Our programmes to educate the children of impoverished widows in India have been at the heart of The Loomba Foundation since its Foundation was established 18 years ago, and 2014/15 has been another milestone year with 1693 students benefiting in 13 states.

We partnered with the Hinduja Foundation in five states – Andhra Pradesh (193 students), Karnataka (201), Maharashtra (200), Tamil Nadu (201) and Uttarakhand (202). With NBCC Ltd we educated 100 children in Bihar and 100 in Mizoram. The generosity of our long-term supporters Mr Ricky Kapoor and Mr Sheetal Kapoor helped fund the schooling of 102 children in Jammu & Kashmir, and likewise a further 10 children were educated in Haryana with the support of Mr Vijay and Shama Bhardwaj. In Chhattisgarh, Jindal Power Ltd is our partner in the programme to educate 198 children while in Delhi, 96 students benefit from the funds of Mr. Chris Parsons. In addition, we educated a further 81 children in Punjab. We also partnered with Gyan Ganga Institute of Management and Technology in Bhopal where 18 students are studying 4 year engineering degree courses. This college has now been taken over by Laxmi Naryana College of Technology.

Behind these statistics lie stories of families healed and prospects transformed. The Loomba Foundation is proud of its focus on breaking the cycle of poverty set in train by widowhood that can so often last for generations, and educating the children of poor widows remains a foundation stone of our global programme.

Empowerment Projects:

The opportunities for widows to rebuild their lives and support their dependents are shockingly restricted in many countries, with bans on employment, removal of assets, violence and discrimination commonplace. Alongside our all-important efforts to change cultures and attitudes, the Loomba Foundation seeks to address this by empowering individual widows to become economically self-sufficient, setting them up with equipment, support, skills training and advice.

This year our empowerment programme has helped almost 6280 widows throughout India, including the August 2014 launch in Ludhiana by the Chief Minister of Punjab, Shri Prakash Singh Badal, one of our largest schemes yet for 5,000 widows. Also in 2014-15 we saw the launch by Dr. Kiran Bedi and Lord Loomba in Delhi- National Capital Region of a scheme benefiting 120 widows including 40 prisoners in two jails. In addition a project was launched to empower 524 impoverished widows at BSE, Mumbai. Others benefiting during the year were 41 in Patna, Bihar, 83 in New Delhi with the support of Delhi Lions Club, 51 in Hyderabad, 255 in the district of Srikakulam, Andhra Pradesh (Now Telangana), 100 in Puducherry and five in Ahmedabad, Gujarat. .

Raising funds and awareness:

Raising funds and awareness go hand in hand. As usual, The Loomba Foundation has had a busy year, with activities including fundraising dinners, parliamentary debates and a corporate social responsibility conference.

Foremost however has been the amazing feat of leading international lawyer Chris Parsons, one of our most dedicated campaigners against the injustices faced by widows, who on 10 January 2015 set off on walk from the Gateway of India in South Mumbai, 30 marathons in 30 days, covering a total distance of one thousand two hundred and sixty kilometres!, raising around £200,000 to support the

poor widows in India and making many more people aware of the importance of this cause. Long-time supporters will recall Chris' previous fundraising spectacle when he cycled from London to Gibraltar in 2011. These efforts must rank among the greatest individual contributions a person can make to improve the lives of widows in India. Nevertheless, the support is always welcome, whatever be the form. .

The enactment in India of a new law mandating companies to contribute 2% of their profits to Corporate Social Responsibility programmes opens the door for more of India's fast growing business sector to play its part in eradicating the terrible plight of millions of widows in the country. This opportunity was highlighted at The Loomba Foundation's fundraising dinner in Delhi on 21 June 2014. This event was chaired by our Trustee Mrs. Aruna Oswal and managed by Mr. Anil Bhalla who has been supporting The Loomba Foundation for a long time in India. The event was attended by Justice Shri K G Balakrishnan, India's former Chief Justice who then headed the National Human Right Commission, British High Commissioner Sir James Bevan and prominent social activist Dr Kiran Bedi. We are grateful to our major supporters – Mr. Raju Chadha, Mr. Alok Tandon, Mr. Ajay Khanna, Mr. Mahendra Nahata and Mr. Atul Kulshreshtha who helped us to raise over Rs. 1 Crore and 25 Lakhs (£125,000)

Empowerment was the central theme of The Loomba Foundation's International Widows Day dinner at the House of Lords in London on 23 June 2014, when the president of Lions Club International, Barry Palmer, announced the Lions Clubs International Foundation's partnership with The Loomba Foundation to benefit 2,000 widows for a sewing machines and training in tailoring project. Attendees included Deputy Prime Minister RT. Hon. Nick Clegg MP and the Indian High Commissioner, His Excellency Ranjan Mathai.

In November 2014, BSE Ltd., formerly known as the Bombay Stock Exchange, hosted a conference encouraging corporate India to channel its mandatory corporate social responsibility contributions to help alleviate the plight of poor widows. Our programme to empower 524 widows in Mumbai was supported by the Loomba Foundation's Trustee Mrs. Shamin Lalji and her husband Shiraz Lalji, who provided sewing machines and Padma Shri Vikram Singh Sahney of Sun Foundation, who paid for the training cost.

Parliamentary debates:

Our chairman Lord Loomba initiated a debate in the House of Lords on 30 June 2014, highlighting the UN's International Widows Day. He quoted UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon's statement that it is "our collective responsibility to safeguard the human rights and dignity of widows", and asked the Government, through its Department for International Development and other agencies, to raise awareness of the day of action. Following an insightful debate, Baroness Northover, a Minister at DFID, paid tribute to the work of The Loomba Foundation. Baroness Northover pledged the Government's support for continued combined efforts "to achieve real gender equality and empowerment of women and girls, including widows."

Lord Loomba made a series of other parliamentary interventions during the year, including:

- 11 June, in the debate on The Queen's Speech, asking DFID to work with the UN to ensure that the plight of widows is included in the post-Millennium Development Goals framework;
- 10 July, in a debate on the BBC World Service and the British Council, emphasising the importance of both institutions in promoting education, the English language, and an understanding of British values;
- 26 November, in a debate on poverty and caste discrimination in India;

- 5 March 2015, in a debate on gender equality, with a question highlighting the education of girls and young women.

Impact and Recognitions:

During the year the work of The Loomba Foundation received recognition in the form of a number of prestigious awards, including a Lifetime Achievement Award from the United Nations Association of New York and two of India's highest Honours: the Pravasi Bhartiya Samman Award conferred by the Hon'ble President of India, Shri Pranab Mukherjee, which was presented by Shri M. Hamid Ansari, India's Vice President and Punjab State's Praman Patra Award, presented by Punjab Chief Minister Sardar Parkash Singh Badal on the occasion of Republic Day 2015.

Future Plans:

The coming year, 2015-16, is shaping up to be another productive year for The Loomba Foundation. Our plans include the publication of an updated Research Study Book "World Widows Report". This book will be one of its own kind and will be of great importance to libraries, universities and governments all over the world. In addition, we will also publish a commemorative book about Chris Parsons' "Walk for Widows".

The Loomba Foundation is vigorously doing a major empowerment programme for 5000 disadvantaged widows in the holy city of Varanasi which is located on the banks of Ganges. In addition we have also a plan to empower 2000 widows in Bangalore in the state of Karnataka, in partnership with the State Government, in addition to 3000 widows in partnership with Lions Clubs International Foundation in Vrindaban, Mathura and Agra.

We are grateful to all our supporters and partners for their contribution this year and look forward to their continued support in the future.