

Step forward – empowering older women of the Thar Desert, India



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The Thar Desert of India

- Lies across north-west Rajasthan
- Home to over 23 million people in Rajasthan, it is the most densely populated desert eco-system in the world
- Drought prone, receives less than 20 centimeters of rain in a year
- Main source of Livelihood: agriculture, animal husbandry
- Impoverished, backward
- Poor health and literacy indicators



Older People in Thar....

- Remain vulnerable to droughts and are impacted by poverty.
- Are malnourished and isolated.
- Suffer with health problems.
- Marginalized from decision making.



Older women of Thar...

- Are impoverished and oppressed
- A large number of older women are malnourished and anemic
- Have high rates of prevalence of diseases
- Female literacy rate is significantly low, close to nil in older women
- Women have to work very hard especially for procuring water and in the farming lands – which includes older women
- Their role in the society in decision-making is minimal

Older women of Thar...

- Walk long distances to fetch drinking water
- And carry additional burden of raising their grandchildren



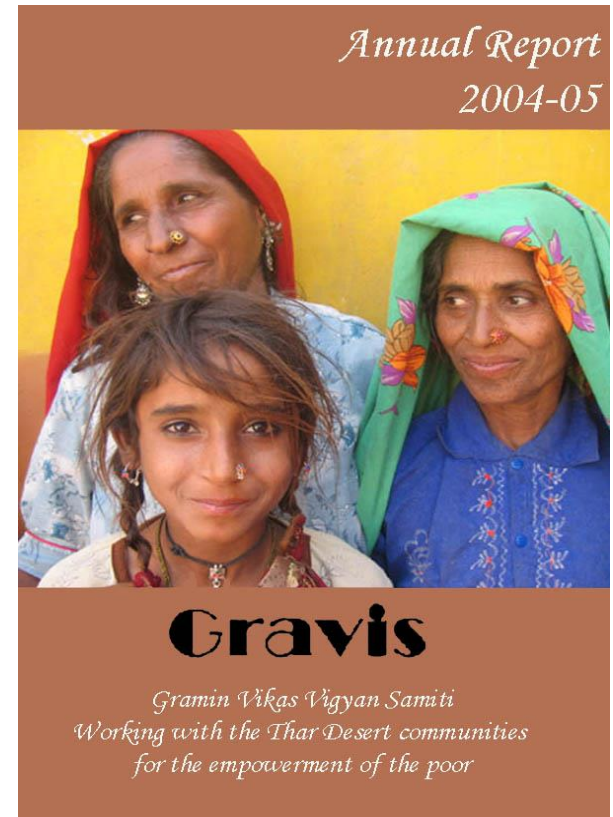
GRAVIS, the organization.....

- Founded in 1983
- GRAVIS has 15 field centers across the Thar Desert
- Directly works with the Thar Desert community
- Strongly focuses on older people's issues, including older women.
- Has been working on ageing in partnership with Help Age International.



Objectives of GRAVIS Action

- Develop self-reliant rural communities
- Organize developmental activities with community involvement aiming at sustainability
- Blend traditional wisdom with modern sciences
- Work for vulnerable and most needy groups including older people and women.
- Facilitate networking and linkages



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GRAVIS' work with older women

Confidence building and ownership

- Older women are given important attention in planning discussions and in monitoring.
- Older women are getting 50% space in OPAs.
- Assets in the names of older women.
- Leadership development courses.

GRAVIS' work with older women

Self Help Groups and microfinance

- Over 80 Self Help Groups (SHGs) of older women formed with over 600 older women members.
- Intergenerational linkages within the groups
- A capital of over 20,000 \$ collected
- Efforts underway to set up income generating ventures and promoting marketing linkages

GRAVIS' work with older women

Trainings and capacity building

- Vocational trainings for SHGs organized.
- Older women are given trainings on water conservation, animal husbandry and agriculture. Over 200 trainings organized.
- Exposure visits
- Participation in March 8 activities.

GRAVIS' work with older women

Health

- Specialized health trainings for older women. 48 trainings benefitted over 500 women.
- Outreach medical camps
- Identification and trainings of Village Health Workers. Over 500 trained and working.
- Researching and documenting older women's main health needs.

GRAVIS' work with older women

Overall....

- Has reached over 5,000 older women living in over 70 villages.
- Has helped in generating awareness about older women and their needs at the community level and govt. level
- Has been able to lay foundation to strong SHGs and OPAs
- Has initiated an effective healthcare delivery model
- Has provided confidence and leadership to older women



In conclusion

- Thar Desert, and many other settings in the developing world, will see rapid increases in the number of older women
- Special needs in the areas of income security and health for older women will need to be considered.
- In resource poor settings , older women will need a special attention.
- Older women have shown the willingness and desire to move ahead.
- An integrated approach will be needed.

THANKS



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