



# saltseller



Welcome to our first 2017 edition. We have had a great six months at Salt of the Earth. In January, Tom and I escaped the snow into the Tamil Nadu sunshine for our first new visit to the new partners with ten friends and supporters. It was great to see how enthused everyone was meeting the new partners and the people that we are all supporting. On page eight, you will hear from Karen, one of the tour members who reflects on her time in India.

During our trip it was clear what damage had been caused by recent events. Cyclone Vardah had left trees uprooted and homes damaged and I was told that a cyclone of this force only happens once in every thirty years or so. Also the effects of demonetisation were evident with huge queues at ATMs, many of which were closed or had run out of cash. The people that suffered the most of course were villagers who operate solely on a cash based economy.

Our photographer and web designer Adam Dickens arrived in Chennai amidst these two things and also witnessed the grief after the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu passed away. You will hear more from Adam on page four of this edition.

Thanks to Adam, we launched our colourful new website at the end of March ([www.sote.org.uk](http://www.sote.org.uk)) and so I hope you have been able to share it with family and friends.

We also have details of the 2018 visit to South India and its wonderful to see how many people are interested in coming along already so book up soon as places are filling up fast!

Looking ahead to the rest of the year our focus is very much on raising funds for our three fantastic partners, CRUSADE, CARE and MASARD. If you have any fundraising ideas that you would like to pursue or would like any support with your events, then please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Enjoy the summer and I hope to hear from you soon.

Reena Agarwal  
CEO

# MASARD

In our last edition of SaltSeller we introduced you to the work of our partners the CARE Foundation and CRUSADE. In this edition, we would like to introduce you to SOTE's third new partner, Mass Based Association for Social Services and Rural Development (MASARD).



MASARD was established in 1983 and focuses on poor and destitute children from rural villages. These villages are extremely disconnected from developed urban areas. The key challenges are lack of access to education, healthcare, drinking water, employment and government services. In partnership with MASARD, Salt of the Earth have developed a child sponsorship programme and are supporting 100 children from rural families in Pathakotte, Naikanapalli, Annanagar, Rampura and Nargur in Tamil Nadu. SOTE's child sponsorship programme will focus on three key areas, which are the promotion of children's education, health & nutrition and community level development.

Education is the major component of this scheme and school staff will be actively involved as well as MASARD's trained social workers. Teachers will also be equipped with up to date, progressive methods of training that engage children and improve learning. An annual school day will be arranged by students and teachers alongside awareness programmes and campaigns. MASARD will provide additional supplements to improve levels of nutrition and after school, children will be given nutritional snacks. Once a year, there will be a general health check camp where free medication will be provided if needed.

MASARD strongly believe that their work is not effective unless they work with the child's family and the wider community. MASARD social workers and members of staff will make regular home visits to provide family counselling and discuss any issues arising such as alcoholism, drug use and domestic violence. As part of the scheme, skill training and livelihood workshops will be offered to unemployed youths and MASARD will support the participants in searching for job placements in Hosur. MASARD will also run awareness campaigns in the village on environmental issues, health, sanitation and rights.

## MASARD Q&A

Tom Edwards, SOTE's Development Officer, spoke with Dr. John Fernandes during his visit to Tamil Nadu in January 2017 to discuss MASARD and the new partnership with SOTE.

**Tom:** How did MASARD start?

**John:** MASARD started in 1983 after years of active involvement with the rural poor, and after training myself professionally in this field. I put together a team of like-minded friends and social work professionals and founded MASARD.



**Tom:** Can you tell me a bit more about your background and experience?

**John:** My early childhood was greatly influenced by the work of Christian missionaries. I studied in their school and actively participated in their charitable works with the poor. The great happiness I was experiencing from this work inspired me to train myself professionally with a Masters in Social Work (MSW) and then follow with a PhD in Social Work. For a few years I also taught Social Work to MSW students.

I have also been on the Governing Board of several NGOs and been able to contribute positively to their effectiveness, which has given me great pleasure.

**Tom:** What was your motivation to start MASARD?

**John:** For several years I worked in the villages and volunteered my services to those in need. All these experiences inspired me to set up an NGO through which we could reach out not only to individual but to bring about change to entire families and communities.

**Tom:** What is life like for those living in rural areas in Tamil Nadu?

**John:** There is poverty everywhere and there is an increasing anger at the lack of opportunities to improve their lives. Agriculture

was the backbone of rural economies but is now becoming unsustainable and so as a result, the poor are becoming poorer and the gap between rural and urban areas increases.

**Tom:** Is life different for those living in rural villages compared to those in urban areas?

**John:** The majority of people in urban areas are migrants from rural villages who moved to the cities to have better access to opportunities for development e.g. better educational facilities, employment opportunities and access to credit. The greatest magnet that attracts the poor to the cities is that there is a reduction of caste based discrimination which still prevails in the villages.

**Tom:** SOTE is running a child sponsorship scheme with MASARD. What changes is this going to bring to the lives of children involved?

**John:** With sponsorship support provided by SOTE, children are able to dream and achieve a brighter future for themselves, their families and their community. A few years from now, due to SOTE's interventions and existing community resources, every child in these communities will be in school and as a result there will be great improvement in their health conditions. Through capacity building, skills training and strategic planning, the vulnerable sections in these communities will be empowered and the poverty level in these villages will be substantially reduced.

# Adam's Trip to Tamil Nadu



In December 2016, I travelled to see SOTE's work in Tamil Nadu with Emma Turner, who was there to collect the stories to accompany my pictures.

We arrived at a pretty volatile time: 86% of the currency notes had just been declared as illegal tender by the Prime Minister and the banks were in chaos. The streets were filled with people queuing in hope of getting any of the money that was left. Also on the day we landed, the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu Jayalalitha died and then adding to this disruption, Cyclone Vardah was predicted to hit Chennai on the last day of our trip. There are always challenges when travelling, but this was pretty extreme!

One of my strongest memories is watching 1 million people line the streets of Chennai for the Chief Minister's state funeral. Everywhere was shutting down around us to mourn however luckily we could still visit CRUSADE during this difficult time.

We worked closely with all of the new partners (CARE, CRUSADE and MASARD) visiting the people benefiting from the projects and listening to their fascinating life stories. By visiting individual projects, and meeting people face to face, we had the privilege of seeing the reality of what it is like to live in these communities.

The generosity of the people we met through CARE, CRUSADE and MASARD, and their willingness to share their stories with us was incredibly humbling. All three partners have such a heart for change in the communities they are working in and I am so fortunate to be able to work alongside SOTE and help facilitate change with the tools I have. It is a joy to portray individuals' stories to people back in the UK who care and want to support SOTE.

I'm looking forward to joining SOTE again next year to see the progress that has been made and of course to take more pictures!

For more information on my work, visit [www.tpcl.org.uk](http://www.tpcl.org.uk). Adam Dickens, Taking Pictures, Changing Lives

# Fundraise for SOTE

Our work couldn't happen without the support of our amazing supporters!

From coffee mornings to running marathons, supporters across the UK are finding fun and creative ways to raise money for Salt of the Earth. Whether you fundraise on your own, in university or as a group in your community, we can support you as you raise money and awareness for Salt of the Earth. Please do get in touch if you need any support and let's have fun when fundraising!

## What is a good way to fundraise?

You can do anything to raise money for Salt of the Earth and the two most popular ways of raising money are getting sponsored and holding a fundraising event.

You can raise money from bike rides, walks, hikes, runs or giving something up for a year!

Other ways of raising money include holding fundraising events such as taking over Indian restaurants for the evening and inviting friends and family, bake sales, coffee mornings, garden parties, supper clubs, quizzes or raffles. The possibilities are endless!

Salt of the Earth have all the resources to support you with your event such as booklets, leaflets, and if we are free, a member of staff or a Trustee would love to come and talk at your event.

If you want to talk about fundraising for Salt of the Earth please call Tom Edwards, Development Officer, on 0117 916 6597 or email him at [tom@sote.org.uk](mailto:tom@sote.org.uk).

# Garden Party

On Saturday 3rd June, SOTE supporters and friends gathered at the Friends Meeting House in Leicester to attend Murray and Janet's garden party.

60 supporters and friends came throughout the day to drink tea, eat cake and learn more about SOTE's work in the sunshine. It was a fabulous day and it was a good

opportunity for supporters to meet Reena, Tom and some of the Trustees and to talk about the work SOTE is doing with their three partner organisations.

Together our support is making a huge difference to rural communities in India and on the day, we raised over £1000 towards our work. Thank you again and please do keep in touch.



# News from our Partners

## CRUSADE

### Creating Access to Safe Water



The quality of the water provided by the state government to villages is very low and is deteriorating. In the Minjur area there has been the exploitation of ground water to provide drinking water in Chennai and as a result there has been the incursion of sea water. This then turns the water hard with total dissolved solids (TDS) exceeding the permissible limit.

With the contribution of Self Help Groups, CRUSADE commissioned a reverse osmosis plant at Thinaipakkam centre to distribute purified drinking water in the surrounding villages. The 500 litre per day plant caters for the needs of 20 SHGs in four nearby villages. Other groups would also like safe drinking water and so the project has been expanded. A unit was installed and constructed with a 1000 litre capacity tank. The project is nearing completion and will start supplying safe water in the upcoming months. The purified water will protect the target population from water borne diseases such as jaundice, diarrhoea and cholera.

### Providing Shelter to Rural Communities



Action Rural Housing (ARH) is a not for profit organisation set up by SOTE's partner CRUSADE to address the challenge of affordable housing finance for Self Help Group (SHG) members living in poverty. The main objective of the company is to promote safety, hygiene and health through proper housing.

ARH offer grant assistance to those living in extreme poverty. Although people are able to access government schemes for housing, the funding available isn't sufficient and ARH step in to provide additional grants to complete the construction of housing. ARH's work is greatly appreciated by the communities SOTE work with as it allows communities to live in safe and secure housing.

### Eye Camps



CRUSADE has been organising eye-screening camps in project villages in collaboration with Dr. Agarwal Eye Hospital, Chennai for the past few years. Eye screening helps identify elderly people who suffer from cataracts which is one of the common reasons for loss of vision among older people.

Through CRUSADE's partnership with the hospital, those identified with cataracts are taken to hospital to receive surgery that is free of cost. This year they have already conducted 5 eye-screening camps which 241 people attended. Free cataract surgery was arranged for 29 people and spectacles were given to 67 individuals. 9 of these individuals are living in extreme poverty, so they received spectacles free of cost through SOTE's ethical gift scheme.

## MASARD

### The Tamil Nadu Drought



*In May John Fernandes, the Director of MASARD, updated SOTE about the current drought facing rural communities in Tamil Nadu.*

"This is the worst drought in 140 years and is badly affecting our community in Hosur. The annual rainfall recorded in 2016 is 82% less than the year before and it appears this is the result of climate change. This trend is now continuing into 2017, creating huge problems.

Drought is a serious natural hazard with far-reaching impacts including soil damage, economic losses, threats to the livelihoods and health of local residents, with farmers being the most affected. Many of the farmers have been badly affected and are in immediate need of food and are requesting urgent assistance.

MASARD are working to support the villages during the drought by distributing much needed food and water. Furthermore, with SOTE's support, have started a water project aimed at providing clean water."

## CARE

### Demonetisation in India



On 8th November 2016, India declared 86% of currency notes as illegal tender, by invalidating 500 and 1000 denomination notes. In a country where 95% of all transactions are done in cash, the impact on rural communities was felt the most.

Many villagers do not have IDs required for exchange of old notes and the only bank or ATM in the area (which most of the time were not working) were 5 to 12kms away. Without the availability of regular public transport, accessing cash became a nightmare. Overnight, the entire savings of women suddenly became 'invalid tender' thus stripping them of all their hard earned money. In many cases they couldn't exchange it due to lack of identity papers or a bank account. In many households, exposure of these housewives' savings strategy led to cases of domestic violence.

After demonetisation, MASARD supported rural communities by distributing food, water and essential medicines and also worked with the community to prevent further domestic violence.

### International Women's Day Celebration



International Women's Day is held every year on 8th March to promote a more inclusive gender equal world. The theme this year was on 'being bold for change' and encouraging women and men to join forces to take action to accelerate gender parity. This day was celebrated across the world and our partners, the CARE Foundation, were involved in Tamil Nadu, India.

CARE Foundation celebrated International Women's Day alongside all women and girls from the community with a special day of talks, food and activities. A special talk was delivered on 'Self-Confidence' to encourage the ladies to think more positively about their value to their families and communities. Men from the communities cooked a special meal for their wives, sisters and friends. Some of the young girls wrote and performed a play for their parents on the subject of child marriage. CARE Foundation told SOTE it was wonderful to see the girls able to share their feelings on this difficult subject.



## Karen Martin's Reflection on SOTE's 2017 Visit to Tamil Nadu

Arriving in Chennai was welcoming as we relaxed in the guest house and waited to hear more about our two week visit to see the new projects SOTE had recently adopted in Tamil Nadu.

This was my second trip to India and with a smaller group than two years ago. It had always been a secret ambition to see India as it really was ever since my nursing days. When I heard Janet Elisita, a SOTE Trustee, give a talk years ago about the work of SOTE and what was being achieved, I decided to give my support.

Now, years later, I was travelling to a new area and visiting SOTE's new partners CRUSADE and the CARE Foundation. In addition we were also able to spend time in Pondicherry (an old French colony), visiting the Cultural and Heritage Centre of Auroville, and also Mahabalipuram (a 7th century coastal port and UNESCO World Heritage site).

Our party spent the first few days getting to know each other and the vibrant city of Chennai with guided walks to spice markets, food tastings, museums, temples and churches.

A few days later we visited both Minjur and Sholavaram to see SOTE's partner CRUSADE. Seeing the work for the first time was thought provoking and as I watched and listened I soon realised that SOTE had chosen wisely. CRUSADE is working hard to encourage local people to become self sufficient and empowered using the resources they are offered. This includes regular access to health professionals, care for those with disabilities, education, self-help groups and tree planting.

The second project at the CARE Foundation in Chengalpattu highlighted the needs of the locals and SOTE have been able to set up a holistic child sponsorship programme focusing on education, child care, hygiene as well as the prevention of alcohol abuse, that is so prevalent in this community.

At the end of an incredible two weeks my lasting impression was that the work SOTE is doing (to improve the lives of those who would otherwise live in poverty) is being achieved in the most caring way possible. It is being run so efficiently by Reena and Tom with the support of so many people who give generously to allow this work to happen.

It has to be experienced firsthand to be fully understood and I also hope to visit again in the future. Thanks must also go to Eddie who spent many hours researching and planning the visit.

Thank you SOTE. You are all amazing!  
Karen Martin



## SOTE's Visit to South India January 2018

The visit to India is £1,200 per person and includes 13 nights accommodation, airport transfers, transport and a volunteer leader throughout the visit.

After arrival at Chennai Airport you will have time to relax after your flight. The next day we drive south to Pondicherry, also known as Puducherry. The centuries of French rule gave this town a unique Indo-Franco atmosphere, preserved in the architecture and relaxed lifestyle. Here we will visit places of interest and you will have time to explore this charming place and its beach.

The next destination is Mahabalipuram where you will have a guided tour of some of India's oldest Hindu Temples dating back to the 600s. From there, you will visit the CARE Foundation. Returning to Chennai, Tamil Nadu's state capital, formally known as Madras, you will visit CRUSADE, SOTE's second partner who are located north of Chennai

Your final destination is Bangalore, the capital of Karnataka state, in what is known as 'The Silicon Valley of India'. From here we travel a short distance over the border into Tamil Nadu to visit SOTE's third partner, MASARD. At the end of the trip, you will fly back to the UK from Bangalore.

If you would like to book a place on SOTE's supporter visit, or simply ask a question, please contact Eddie at [eddie@sote.org.uk](mailto:eddie@sote.org.uk). We hope to hear from you soon!