An Invitation to Right Sharing

By Lynne Sootheran, Right Sharing of World Resources
Mrs. P. Kannagi
Greetings, Friends. My purpose here is to introduce members of Quaker Earthcare Witness and others interested in healing the Earth to Donor-Designated Projects available through Right Sharing of World Resources (RSWR). Since 1967, RSWR, a Quaker organization, has worked to alleviate poverty throughout the developing world. Most recently, it "has worked in partnership with hundreds of women’s self-help groups, among the poorest of the poor in Africa and India, lifting families out of poverty and away from violence." We do this by providing $5,000 grants to groups of women who have designed their own projects. They form their own banking system and pay the interest back to themselves. Many of the projects are then able to help additional women start their own businesses.

Some of these projects would be of particular interest to QEW members because they deal with reclaiming land from the consequences of the green revolution. These women are healing the Earth as they make a frugal living. In the process, many are doubling their family income from $1.25 a day to $2.50 a day. RSWR contracts with local field representatives to identify and nurture projects that have a good chance of succeeding, in places where the need is great. In most cases, there is no other organization providing grants to these women.

This article describes three projects that are available to anyone–any group, any Monthly Meeting or Church, any Yearly Meeting or other organization–that can be supported under our new program of Donor-Designated Projects. This is an opportunity for individuals or groups to provide financial support for an entire project, one that especially speaks to their heart, one that seems especially worthy of their support.

The first project, #I-930, involves 25 women farmers from southern India. Here is a project description provided by Dr. R. Kannan, our field representative, who has his Ph.D. in Gandhian studies: "The area of this project is drought-prone and the land has been rendered infertile because of the overuse of chemical fertilizers and pesticides. Even if the land were fertile, the people could not afford to farm it because of the high cost of the chemical input. These 25 women want to help renew the fertility of their lands through sustainable and organic farm methods. In addition, with help to buy millet and other grains to plant, they want to buy cows and poultry to give them additional income and fertilizer.

"The Gramma Valar Nirai Trust (GVN), the non-governmental organization (NGO) working with these women, will provide training. It has worked with RSWR on four other projects. So far 410 women farmers have benefited from the RSWR revolving funds. Women members organized by GVN are venturing into the age-old, almost forgotten, indigenous minor grains, millets, and integrated farming. Minor grains and millet are the answer to malnutrition, depletion of ground water, and soil erosion."

Project #S-902 is from Sierra Leone, and its description was written by Harold Johnson, the RSWR field representative there: "The project is requesting money for 25 poor rural farmers. RSWR has funded two other projects in this area, but there are still 685 women who need help. The women would like to purchase seeds and other input to grow rice, cassava, okra, potatoes, and groundnuts. They would also like to start growing paw paw and ginger as additional cash crops. The women farmers’ beneficiaries will eat some of the produce and reserve enough seeds for the next planting season. The War Widows Development Program has had two other projects with RSWR and has helped over 200 women. The group’s leader is capable of handling anything set before her and she is well informed."

The third project, also in India, is #I-943, under the direction of the Success Trust. This project involves 32 marginal female farmers, who will be involved in farming, rearing cows and calves, selling vegetables, and making coconut thatch. This NGO has had two other projects with RSWR through which it has taught skills in organic farming to poor women. The new project will give the women an income in their own villages so that they won’t have to migrate and thereby become prey to the money-lenders and middlemen looking for bonded laborers (who are virtual slaves). The women themselves have chosen the activities. Success Trust offers training to its women members in savings, credit, legal rights, and the environment. Three hundred twenty of them have received revolving loans from previously funded projects.
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Published on Quaker Earthcare Witness (https://www.quakerearthcare.org)

My husband Kent and I, both members of the Board of Right Sharing of World Resources, have funded two Donor-Designated Projects since they became available in late 2012. We give because we are moved by the needs of these women, the good that comes from funding projects, the knowledge that the money is used wisely and well, and—as the RSWR newsletters say—because "God calls us to the right sharing of world resources." It seems equally true that justice, compassion, and the needs of the Earth call us to this sharing. Kent and I are grateful to be of service to these women in this way.

As individuals, families, Meetings, Churches, Yearly Meetings, or groups of women and men who share these concerns, if you would like to support one of the described projects, please e-mail Sarah Northrop, Program Director of RSWR, at sarahnorthrop@rswr.org, or Betty Tonsing, General Secretary of RSWR, at bettytonsing@rswr.org. My husband, Kent Simmonds, and I would also welcome conversation with you about RSWR Donor-Designated Projects or giving of any kind to RSWR. My cell phone number is 563-379-9467, and my email address is sootly01@luther.edu. Kent’s cell phone number is 563-277-2434, e-mail at simmonke@luther.edu.

The women and families helped by Right Sharing of World Resources would be grateful for any amount you would like to contribute.

With love for the Earth and the families that need our help to heal it,

Lynne Sootheran
Board Member, Right Sharing of World Resources

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The quarterly journal of Quaker Earthcare Witness.

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