



Finalist's case study

Anglia Ruskin University Community Sustainable Sainji: A Community Focused Learning Partnership



Profile

- Higher Education
- 39,440 students (includes all students studying on and off campus)

About the project

Sustainable Sainji is part of Anglia Ruskin's International Community Experience Programme which has been supporting students, staff and alumni undertake volunteering projects in communities overseas since 1997. In 2015, the University's Chaplaincy, who manage the programme, joined forces with ARU's Global Sustainability Institute to help enhance the existing programme, and in particular to develop and make more explicit the links to sustainable development and sustainability education. Sustainable Sainji, based in a remote rural community in the foothills of the western Himalayas was born. This new project is unique in that through collaboration with community leaders it matches volunteers discipline specific skills and knowledge with the community's development priorities. It also directly addresses several of the Global Sustainability Development Goals (SDGs).

We are currently focusing on individual projects within 3 themes:

1. Improving villagers Health and Nutrition, e.g. encouraging washing hands with soap, first aid and providing advice on puberty to 9-14 years old.
2. Improving the quality of Education at Garhwal English Medium School (GEMS) especially by teaching teachers and,
3. Improving the quality of buildings, e.g. helping make buildings watertight and safe.

We hope to also be able to help provide a safe and reliable water supply for Sainji village in future years.

Project partners

Within Anglia Ruskin University, Sustainable Sainji is a partnership between the University Chaplaincy and the Global Sustainability Research Institute. We undertake the Programme as a partnership between Anglia Ruskin University and the community of Sainji.



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The results

The problem

[Sainji](#) is a village of around 400 people situated in the foothills of the Himalayas in the Indian state of Uttarakhand. The villagers traditionally live by growing subsistence crops; rice, wheat, maize and vegetables on steeply terraced hillsides. However they are increasingly relying of the remittances sent to them by members of their family who have been able to find employment in nearby towns or distant cities. Many of Sainji's problems are similar to countless other villages throughout the developing world, and include being able to grow sufficient food and having reliable access to clean water (SDG 2, SDG 6), affordable healthcare (SDG 3) and good quality education (SDG 4). In Sainji these problems are compounded by the low status of the Jaunpuri people and the impacts of climate change which mean that subsistence agriculture is increasingly unable to provide a sustainable livelihood.

For all students, sustainability can sometimes seem a nebulous concept with imprecise and poorly defined links to their main reason for being at University: to get a degree. This programme provides practical and often life changing experiences by enabling them to see how they can use their degree skills to help create a better future for themselves, each other and the planet.

The approach

Education, in its broadest sense, is the approach being taken in this programme. This is education *for* and *as* sustainability. GEMs was established to provide a quality education for poor village students, helping empower them, in particular the girls (SDG5) and helping them to compete for employment with those able to afford the school fees needed for a quality education in India (SDG 4). We are also helping educate the adult community, in particular providing education about the importance of washing hands with soap. This is commonly considered the single most effective intervention which can be made to improve the health and nutrition of a community (SDG 3). We are also teaching them basic first aid which has the potential to save lives.

Our goals

Sustainable Sainji aims to give GEMs children and villagers' knowledge and skills they can use to help others in their community and there is growing evidence that this is occurring. For example seizures are relatively common in adults and children due to infestations of tapeworm. On at least two occasions in the past year a GEMs pupil has been able to help a villager who had suffered a seizure, by placing them in the recovery position, and therefore potentially saving their life. Our sessions on puberty have been particularly impactful, many of the girls have very little knowledge of the changes about to happen to their bodies. Our sessions and resources have provided this information in a safe and culturally appropriate way and will help empower them as women who understand and are in control of their bodies. In 2017 we observed lessons where lesson plans are now clearly being used, helping raise the quality of the education the children receive and ultimately their life prospects. Sustainable Sainji also provides students with an opportunity to practice and develop their discipline specific skills and knowledge in a sustainability context, and feed back into their curriculum. Their experience also brings to life the aspirations and practicalities of several of the Sustainable



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Development Goals (e.g. no poverty, quality education, good health and wellbeing, reduced inequalities and clean water and sanitation).

Obstacles and solutions

Access to people in remote villages	Work with community leaders to be accepted into the community
Electricity to run laptops etc	Take spare batteries and use different ways to communicate e.g. theatre rather than Powerpoint
Language barriers in villages	Work through the community leaders and use the school children as interpreters – it also helps improve their English!
Cost of the trip to India	UK Fundraising to help fund the trip and pay for e.g. materials and resources for the projects (e.g. Menstrupedia books, concrete floor for school)

Performance and results

In the UK, the ARU team spend 6-9 months researching and planning their projects and discussing with key community members. Their projects are undertaken during a 2 week visit to India. In 2016 our team included 5 students from ARUs Heath Faculty which provided an opportunity for us to focus on projects related to the health and nutrition theme. Our 2017 team included 4 members with an English or Education background. This enabled us to develop the pedagogical effectiveness of our 2016 health related workshops as well as work directly with teachers at the Garhwal English Medium School (GEMS). For example, we created a piece of hand-washing themed theatre with the older children at GEMS which they performed in 2 villages. We also developed the 'puberty' workshops from 2016, adding a video and providing a copy of the comic "Menstupedia".

The 2016 projects we undertook included; **Health and Nutrition**; An hour long 'tippy-tap' workshop to 60 children at GEMS school and (with the help of 'trained' children) a workshop in Khandi village; a lesson for each GEMS class (10 classes) on hand-washing with soap – included songs and videos, 8 "puberty" workshops with 50 children aged 9-12 in GEMS, 5 First Aid workshops with 100 GEMS children and a workshop with Sainji women. **Improving education**; Half day workshop with 10 GEMS teachers on lesson planning, one to one sessions with teachers for 8 days to improve lesson interactivity. **Maintenance**, painting and decorating classrooms with learning materials. In 2017 the projects included; **Health and Nutrition**; 5 First Aid workshops at GEMS, First Aid and hand-washing workshops and theatre in Sainji and Bicchu villages, 8 enhanced "puberty" sessions with video and booklet for 50 GEMS children aged 9-12. **Improving education**; Workshop on lesson planning with teachers, 8 days of one to one sessions with teachers and lesson demonstrations (esp. English grammar), 3 lessons on how to draw a scale plan of a building and calculate material volumes (for their new permanent school building), **Maintenance and improvement**; Architecture team member advised on making temporary building watertight and helped design a new permanent building.



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The future

Lessons learned

1. It is essential to let the community tell us what their developmental priorities are. They WILL be different to our perceptions of what is important.
2. Be flexible, for example, build in a considerable amount for contingency time especially when working in the field. Adapt your plan .e.g. the normally ubiquitous 5 liter containers used to build 'Tippy-taps' are not commonly found in this part of India
3. Remember to reflect on what has been achieved, personally and as part of the programme

Sharing your project

Internally - the Chaplaincy promote the programme at Fresher's Fair and by visiting classes. Dr Greig delivers guest lectures, e.g. as part of the GSI research seminar series and the Library learning lunch. A report is published in the University staff magazine and in the GSI's So What? Magazine. We also have 2 websites. **Externally:** In 2016 Sustainable Sainji was included as a good practice case study for the "ESD Learning in Higher Education" presented by the International Sustainable Campus Network at the World Economic Forum in Davos. It will also form the case study for an international conference on ESD learning in Malaysia in 2018.

What has it meant to your institution to be a Green Gown Award finalist?

Being a Green Gown finalist provides external recognition of some of the efforts we are making at Anglia Ruskin University to use our knowledge and skills for the benefit of others and to practically embed sustainability in all that we do.

Further information

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