



COMMUNITY EYE CARE IN THE THAR

RAJASTHAN District Map



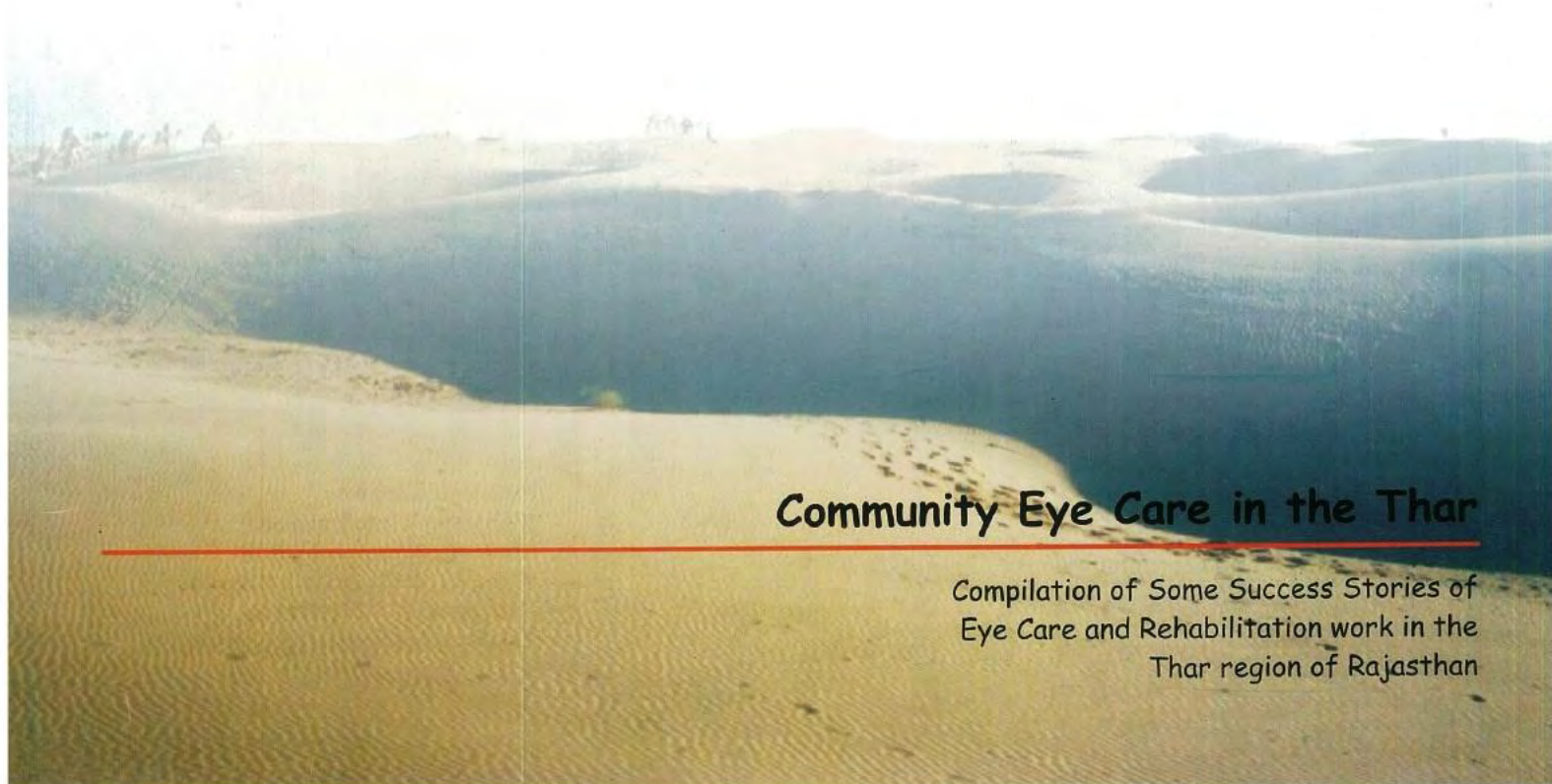
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Community Eye Care in the Thar

Compilation of Some Success Stories of
Eye Care and Rehabilitation work in the
Thar region of Rajasthan

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A NOTE FROM THE AUTHORS

Sightsavers' has been having rich and enlightening experience in saving sight and changing lives of the visually challenged persons around the world. In our efforts to ensure that our beneficiaries are able to piece together their lives with dignity and hope, we have been learning many lessons. Some of those have been especially valuable.

A major objective of Sightsavers' work has been the inclusion of irreversibly blind persons in their community and education of the visually challenged children. Along with providing primary, secondary and tertiary eye care services, we rehabilitate persons who are blind; ensuring they enjoy their rights as their peers. The children who are visually challenged are provided integrated education inspiring them to get ahead in life.

All of our work in India is through our partners. It is with great pleasure that we share this booklet containing some especially valuable stories from our programme in Western Rajasthan. We express our appreciation and gratitude to all our donors for their financial support and partners for their valuable efforts in the common mission of fighting blindness across the world.

I also thank all my colleagues for their support and encouragement in bringing out this booklet.

Praveen Kumar
Programme Officer, Sightsavers International

Eye care services in the Thar Desert are scarcely available. This results into high prevalence of eye care ailments and irreversible blindness, especially among rural communities. GRAVIS has been actively focusing on community based developmental initiatives in the region for last 23 years, with particular emphasis on community healthcare. The idea of integrating eye care in GRAVIS' programmes with its existing capacity and infrastructure came along four years ago. In 2003, GRAVIS initiated its first eye care programme with the support of Sightsavers International. The programme has made a very good impact in the community and GRAVIS wishes to continue the work further.

This booklet is a compilation of eye care work done by GRAVIS so far and of some stories of success. Through this publication, we would like to share our experiences with a wide range of readers. Your comments and suggestions on this publication will help us in further improvement.

I would like to thank Sightsavers International for their continuous financial and moral support for our programme. At the same time, a special word of thanks goes to GRAVIS team members, rural communities of the Thar Desert and our partner NGOs working in the Thar, who have played important roles in implementation of eye-care activities in the region.

Dr. Prakash Tyagi
Director, GRAVIS



THE BACKGROUND

Sight is essential. Almost every aspect of life is incomplete without sight. A community's access to eye care could be restricted due to variety of factors ranging from technical to socio-economic. The Desert of Thar in Rajasthan, India is one such region, where the rural and impoverished communities are living without very little basic eye care services. As a consequence, the prevalence of eye ailments in the region is extremely high and the awareness level on eye care among communities is significantly low. The whole region is in acute need of community based eye care services.

On the whole, community health care has always been an issue of major concern in the drought prone and arid state of Rajasthan. Feudal society, poor socio-economic status of women and prevalence of social evils have been predominant features of the rural communities in Rajasthan over a long time. Amidst numerous problems regarding the living conditions that the rural communities face in the Thar Desert (a sizeable part of Rajasthan), not surprisingly, health care is a meager issue and does not draw serious attention. It is easy to understand that the drought stricken inhabitants of Thar cannot afford to spend much time and money on health, when the priority is water, food and fodder. Lack of education and awareness among the rural population worsens the complexity of situation further.

Rajasthan, the largest State of India in terms of land, lies on the western side of the country and shares the international boundary with Pakistan. The Thar Desert occupies about 60% area of the State and further spreads into the states of Haryana, Gujarat and Punjab and continues in Pakistan. Erratic rainfall, severe droughts and lack of drinking water, crops and vegetation are common features in the region. Coupled with lack of education and health care facilities, the situation regarding preventive and curative health is well below norms in Thar.

Gramin Vikas Vigyan Samiti (GRAVIS) is a voluntary organisation founded by Gandhian social activists in 1983 to assist the people of Thar in rural development and environmental conservation. GRAVIS focuses on sustainable rural development programmes for alternative rural construction. GRAVIS has undertaken a number of programmes in natural resource management. It focuses on capacity building of the community based organisations through its programmes and activities in order to create self reliant rural communities. Over last several years, it has put major emphasis on rural health care activities and has also set up a fully equipped rural hospital. This booklet is an effort to put light on one of GRAVIS' health projects in partnership with Sightsavers, focusing on community eye care in remote rural areas of Thar Desert.

State of eye care in Rajasthan and Thar Desert

Every 5 seconds one person in this world goes blind, a child goes blind every minute. 75% of blindness is avoidable, either preventable or treatable. 90% of avoidable blindness occurs in developing countries. According to estimates, most blind people live in India: 9 million. In India every 20 seconds one person turns blind, and a child goes blind every 4 minutes. One out of every hundred Indian is blind.

The status of eye health has been a major concern in the state of Rajasthan and situation is particularly alarming in the Thar region. Lack of education and awareness about eye care among rural population, poor nutritional status caused by lack of vegetation and recurrent droughts, unhygienic conditions, scarcity of water, extreme and harsh climatic conditions and lack of specialized eye care services in remote villages are the main reasons behind this situation. The main eye diseases of the region are given below:

- Cataract
- Glaucoma
- Refractive errors
- Infectious-allergic-inflammatory ocular disorders
- Night blindness caused by Vitamin A deficiency
- Ocular injuries including retinal hemorrhages

As per the "National Survey on Blindness & Visual Outcomes after Cataract Surgery" (2001-2002) the prevalence of cataract blindness is 5.32% and the prevalence of blindness is 8.5% of the population above 50. Cataract is responsible for 62.6% of blindness. The other major causes of blindness in this age group are as given in the table below. According to this survey, Rajasthan has the third highest prevalence of blindness (12%) in the country (Source: Table 5.6, National Survey on Blindness 2001-2002). It is estimated that the State of Rajasthan has nearly 1 million blind people.

Causes	Percentage
Cataract	62.6%
Refractive Errors	19.7%
Corneal Blindness	0.9%
Glaucoma	5.8%
Surgical Complications	1.2%
Posterior Segment Disorders	4.7%
Others	5.0%

Table 1: Source "National Survey on Blindness (2001-2002)"

Vitamin A deficiency is emerging as another leading eye problem in the region, which is caused due to poor nutrition and less awareness among rural communities. Vitamin A deficiency is the leading cause of preventable blindness in children and raises the risk of disease and death from severe infections. In pregnant women, it causes night blindness and may increase the risk of maternal mortality.

Not surprisingly, the prevalence rate of blindness is much higher among rural population and particularly among poorer and weaker sections of the society. It is also to be noted that the prevalence rate of blindness among women is more than that of men.

As the penetration of modern medical facilities is limited, various myths regarding the causes and treatment of eye related problems prevail among the communities. Most of these traditional practices are considered to be harmful by ophthalmologists. Since most of the people are unaware of the causes of eye problems, preventive measures are also largely absent.

Before the initiation of Sightsavers intervention, Jaisalmer did not have any functional eye care facility and eye care intervention in the city was through seasonal screening camps organized by the hospitals in the city with no or poor follow-up services. At present GRAVIS runs a vision centre in Pokhran and SURE, another partner of Sightsavers runs a vision centre along with a community eye health programme in Sam block (administrative division) of Jaisalmer district.

Before Sightsavers' intervention (2002 - 2003) Jodhpur's Cataract Surgical Rate (CSR) was 3556 and Jaisalmer's was 1106. During 2005 - 2006 the CSR of Jodhpur 4444 and Jaisalmer's 3071 (Source: State Programme for Control of Blindness, 2005 - 2006), however most of the quality services are based in Jodhpur city. Along with other Sightsavers partners working in Jodhpur and Jaisalmer GRAVIS has played a major role in enhancing the CSR of these districts as well as Rajasthan state as a whole.

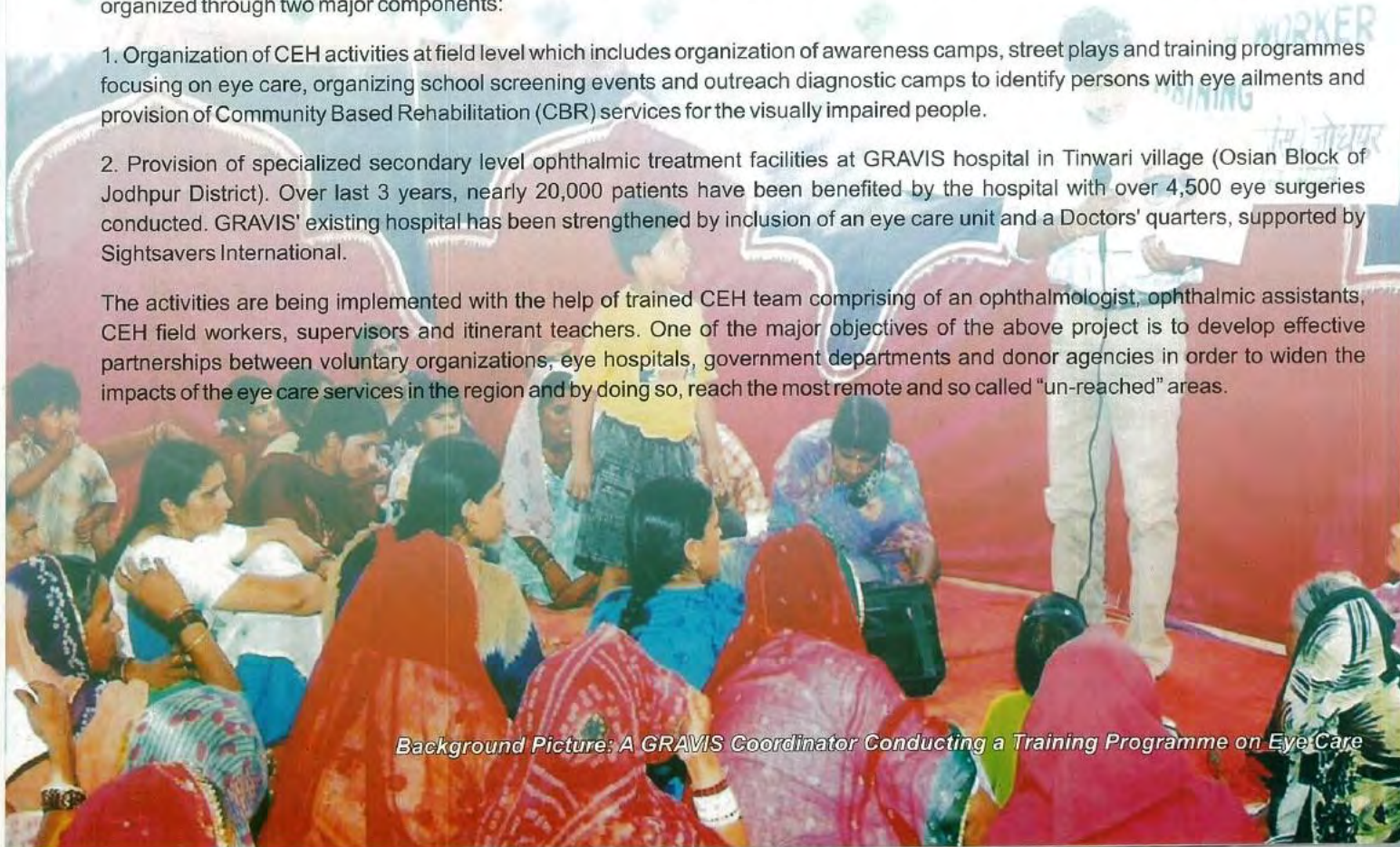


Community Eye Health (CEH) project organized by GRAVIS

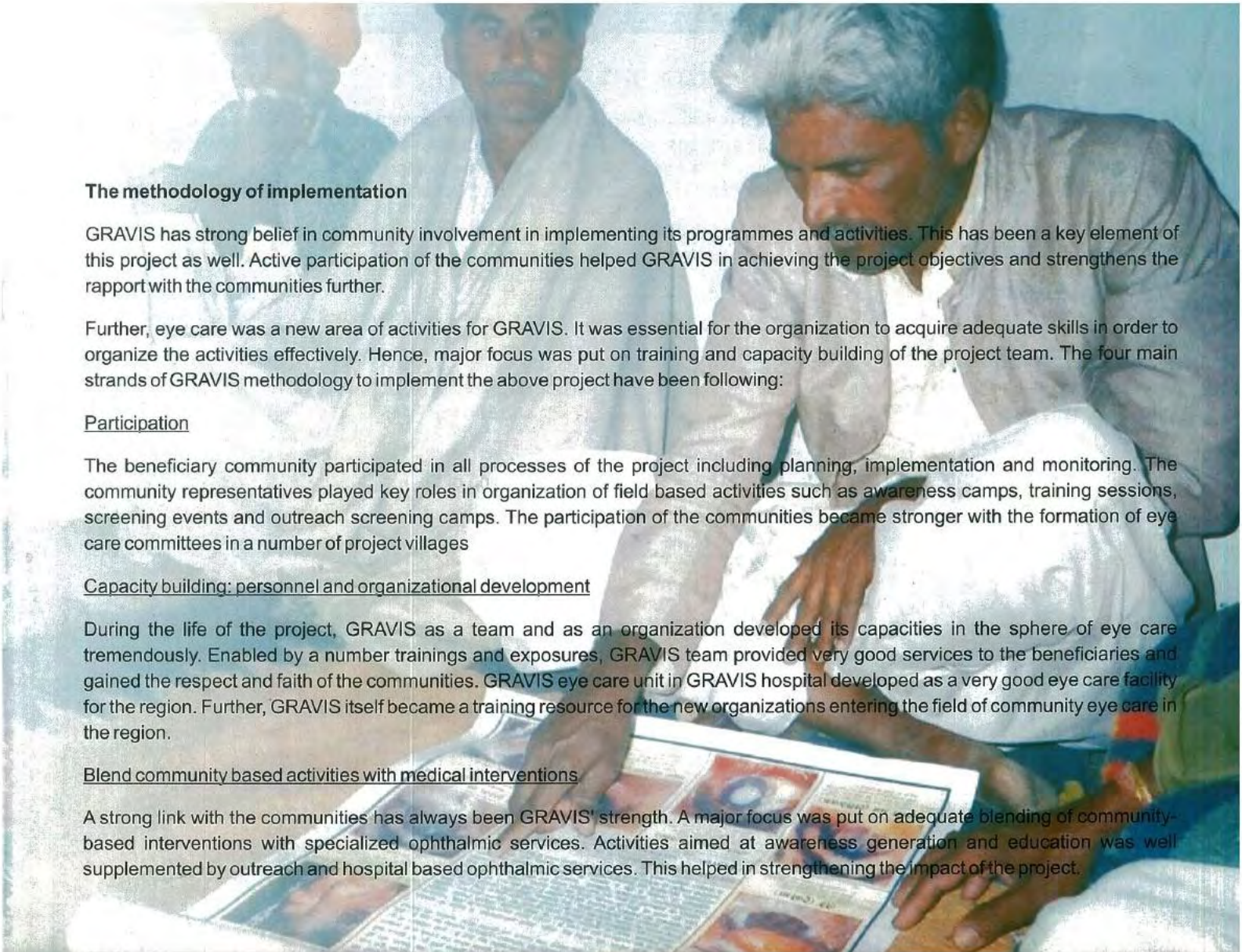
Concerned with the above situation, GRAVIS took the initiative of organizing the above programme in about 210 villages of Jaisalmer district of the Thar Desert benefiting more than 200,000 people. It is noteworthy that the project was first of its type in the history of Jaisalmer. Being an extremely arid and severely drought impacted area, Jaisalmer is one of the most poor and backward districts of India. The project is in function for over three years with the support of Sightsavers International (UK). The above project is being organized through two major components:

1. Organization of CEH activities at field level which includes organization of awareness camps, street plays and training programmes focusing on eye care, organizing school screening events and outreach diagnostic camps to identify persons with eye ailments and provision of Community Based Rehabilitation (CBR) services for the visually impaired people.
2. Provision of specialized secondary level ophthalmic treatment facilities at GRAVIS hospital in Tinwari village (Osian Block of Jodhpur District). Over last 3 years, nearly 20,000 patients have been benefited by the hospital with over 4,500 eye surgeries conducted. GRAVIS' existing hospital has been strengthened by inclusion of an eye care unit and a Doctors' quarters, supported by Sightsavers International.

The activities are being implemented with the help of trained CEH team comprising of an ophthalmologist, ophthalmic assistants, CEH field workers, supervisors and itinerant teachers. One of the major objectives of the above project is to develop effective partnerships between voluntary organizations, eye hospitals, government departments and donor agencies in order to widen the impacts of the eye care services in the region and by doing so, reach the most remote and so called "un-reached" areas.



Background Picture: A GRAVIS Coordinator Conducting a Training Programme on Eye Care



The methodology of implementation

GRAVIS has strong belief in community involvement in implementing its programmes and activities. This has been a key element of this project as well. Active participation of the communities helped GRAVIS in achieving the project objectives and strengthens the rapport with the communities further.

Further, eye care was a new area of activities for GRAVIS. It was essential for the organization to acquire adequate skills in order to organize the activities effectively. Hence, major focus was put on training and capacity building of the project team. The four main strands of GRAVIS methodology to implement the above project have been following:

Participation

The beneficiary community participated in all processes of the project including planning, implementation and monitoring. The community representatives played key roles in organization of field based activities such as awareness camps, training sessions, screening events and outreach screening camps. The participation of the communities became stronger with the formation of eye care committees in a number of project villages

Capacity building: personnel and organizational development

During the life of the project, GRAVIS as a team and as an organization developed its capacities in the sphere of eye care tremendously. Enabled by a number trainings and exposures, GRAVIS team provided very good services to the beneficiaries and gained the respect and faith of the communities. GRAVIS eye care unit in GRAVIS hospital developed as a very good eye care facility for the region. Further, GRAVIS itself became a training resource for the new organizations entering the field of community eye care in the region.

Blend community based activities with medical interventions

A strong link with the communities has always been GRAVIS' strength. A major focus was put on adequate blending of community-based interventions with specialized ophthalmic services. Activities aimed at awareness generation and education was well supplemented by outreach and hospital based ophthalmic services. This helped in strengthening the impact of the project.

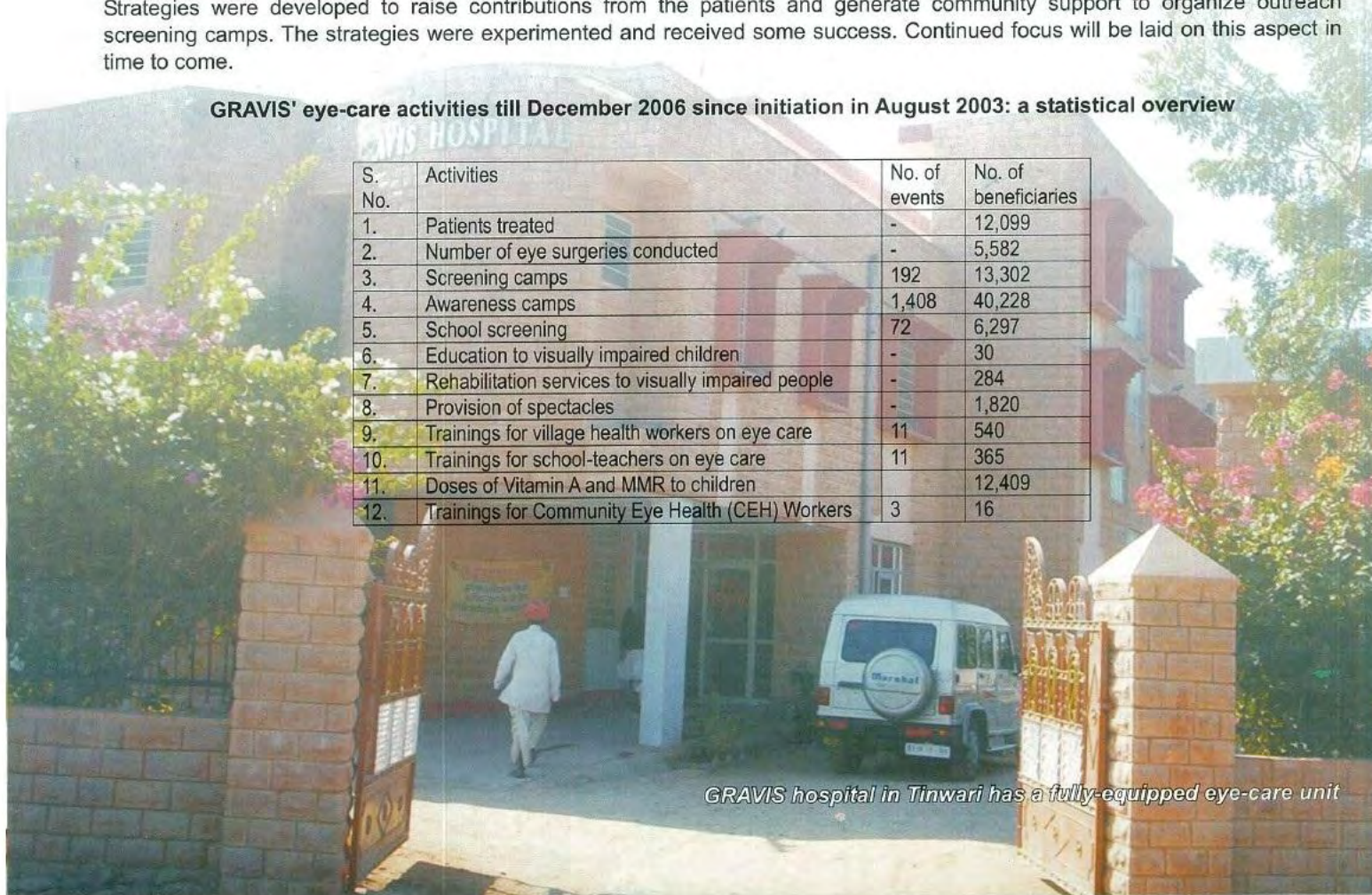
Sustainability and self-reliance

Sustainability is a key issue for a community-based project. GRAVIS took some very important initiatives to make the programme sustainable and self-reliant in coming future. This aspect was a very important strand of methodology of implementation. Strategies were developed to raise contributions from the patients and generate community support to organize outreach screening camps. The strategies were experimented and received some success. Continued focus will be laid on this aspect in time to come.

GRAVIS' eye-care activities till December 2006 since initiation in August 2003: a statistical overview

S. No.	Activities	No. of events	No. of beneficiaries
1.	Patients treated	-	12,099
2.	Number of eye surgeries conducted	-	5,582
3.	Screening camps	192	13,302
4.	Awareness camps	1,408	40,228
5.	School screening	72	6,297
6.	Education to visually impaired children	-	30
7.	Rehabilitation services to visually impaired people	-	284
8.	Provision of spectacles	-	1,820
9.	Trainings for village health workers on eye care	11	540
10.	Trainings for school-teachers on eye care	11	365
11.	Doses of Vitamin A and MMR to children		12,409
12.	Trainings for Community Eye Health (CEH) Workers	3	16

GRAVIS hospital in Tinwari has a fully-equipped eye-care unit



THE IMPACT, THE STORIES.....

Khemre Khan's only son - Rasaal

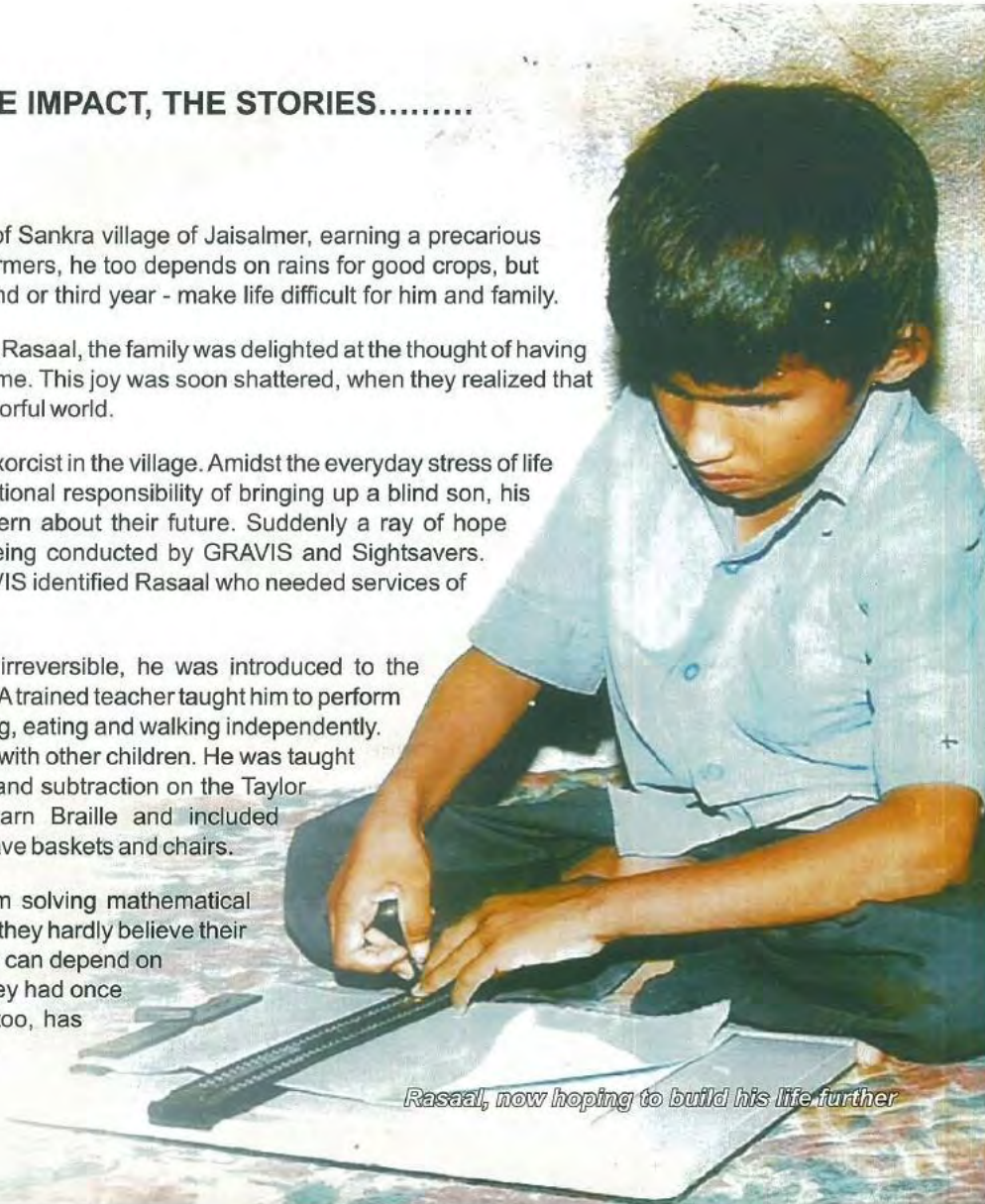
Khemre Khan lives in Rai Ali Khan's hamlet of Sankra village of Jaisalmer, earning a precarious living through agriculture. Like other small farmers, he too depends on rains for good crops, but the frequent drought conditions - every second or third year - make life difficult for him and family.

When Khemre Khan's wife gave birth to a son, Rasaal, the family was delighted at the thought of having a child who could support them in years to come. This joy was soon shattered, when they realized that their much loved son was unable to see the colorful world.

To no avail, Khemre Khan took Rasaal to an exorcist in the village. Amidst the everyday stress of life in the Thar, he now had to shoulder the additional responsibility of bringing up a blind son, his anxiety increased with time and rising concern about their future. Suddenly a ray of hope emerged in the form of the CBR Project, being conducted by GRAVIS and Sightsavers. During the survey, a health worker from GRAVIS identified Rasaal who needed services of the programme.

After confirming that Rasaal's blindness is irreversible, he was introduced to the Integrated Education Programme of GRAVIS. A trained teacher taught him to perform his routine activities such as washing, dressing, eating and walking independently. He was enrolled in a school where he studies with other children. He was taught numbers orally and later his tables, addition and subtraction on the Taylor frame. This program helped Rasaal to learn Braille and included vocational training where he was taught to weave baskets and chairs.

Today at 13, when Rasaal's parents see him solving mathematical problems and reading books written in Braille, they hardly believe their eyes. Khemre Khan now hopes that his family can depend on their son for support in their old age, whom they had once thought to be their life long liability. Rasaal too, has hopes now and sees some meaning in his life.



Rasaal, now hoping to build his life further



A confident Shabbir now goes to school alone!

From disabled to most able.....

With three daughters and two sons, Mobu Khan should be assured of support in his old age. Both his sons, however, have problems with their eyes. Saddam can see partially, but his younger son Shabbir is highly myopic. The anxiety of his son's disabilities prevailed until the CBR Project run by GRAVIS came into existence. Initially, both the children were examined at GRAVIS Hospital and were advised to use spectacles. But with the severity of Shabbir's sight loss, this did little help.

Shabbir was included in the Integrated Education Programme where a specially trained Itinerant teacher taught him to perform his routine work independently. He learnt to walk on his own and clean, wash and dress himself. He learnt English and Hindi alphabets orally and exercised on Braille script as well. He was taught to carry out mathematical calculations on the Taylor frame.

Today, Shabbir is an independent 15year old, young boy. He is so confident he professes he will do better than the other students in his studies in future. Learning to make baskets and chairs under vocational training, he hopes to one day earn enough money to support his family.

Looking at the smiles on the faces of Mobu Khan and his family, there is no way of quantifying the happiness and quality of life that the CBR programme brings to the Thar Desert. Mobu Khan now describes his son as the most able member of his family.

Return to the world of light

"I lived in darkness for almost 15 years. I can now see everything crystal clear" were the first words of Kastruri Devi when the field team went to her in her village. 52 years old Kasturi Devi lives in Lawan village of Jaisalmer district. Her family background is quite poor. Her husband is a farmer.

The problem in her eyes started 16 years ago with a Cataract. In a few months, the Cataract progressed further in both her eyes and her vision started blurring. In next few months, she went completely blind. She was also having diabetes, which complicated her problems further. She could not get a satisfactory treatment for many years.

In August 2004, Kasturi Devi made a visit to GRAVIS hospital after a screening camp in her village. She was recommended a Cataract surgery. Within a gap of one month, both her eyes were operated successfully and Intra Ocular lenses were implanted. Her vision is now back to normal. Restoration of sight has brought huge change in her life. She now supports the household work and helps her grandchildren. She also earns some money by taking up small stitching works from the nearby households. She also supports her husband in agriculture.

"I wish I could have benefited by the above treatment earlier. I spent many years in dark" adds Kasturi Devi.



A true inspiration

Striving to make a living through his small plot in the Pokran town of Jaisalmer, Jamaldin was always thrilled at the arrival of a new baby in the family. 12 years ago, his 3 year old son Sikander suffered from measles, after which his eyesight began to diminish slowly. Being poor and uneducated, Jamaldin took him to an exorcist instead of a doctor, and as a result his only son lost his vision completely. Jamaldin felt his dreams and future security are shattered.

Neglected by family, he became mentally and physically dependent on others. He lost his receptiveness to his surroundings and could not mature mentally. As if life hadn't dealt him enough hardship, when he was 8 years old Sikander lost his parents. Life got worsened for him.

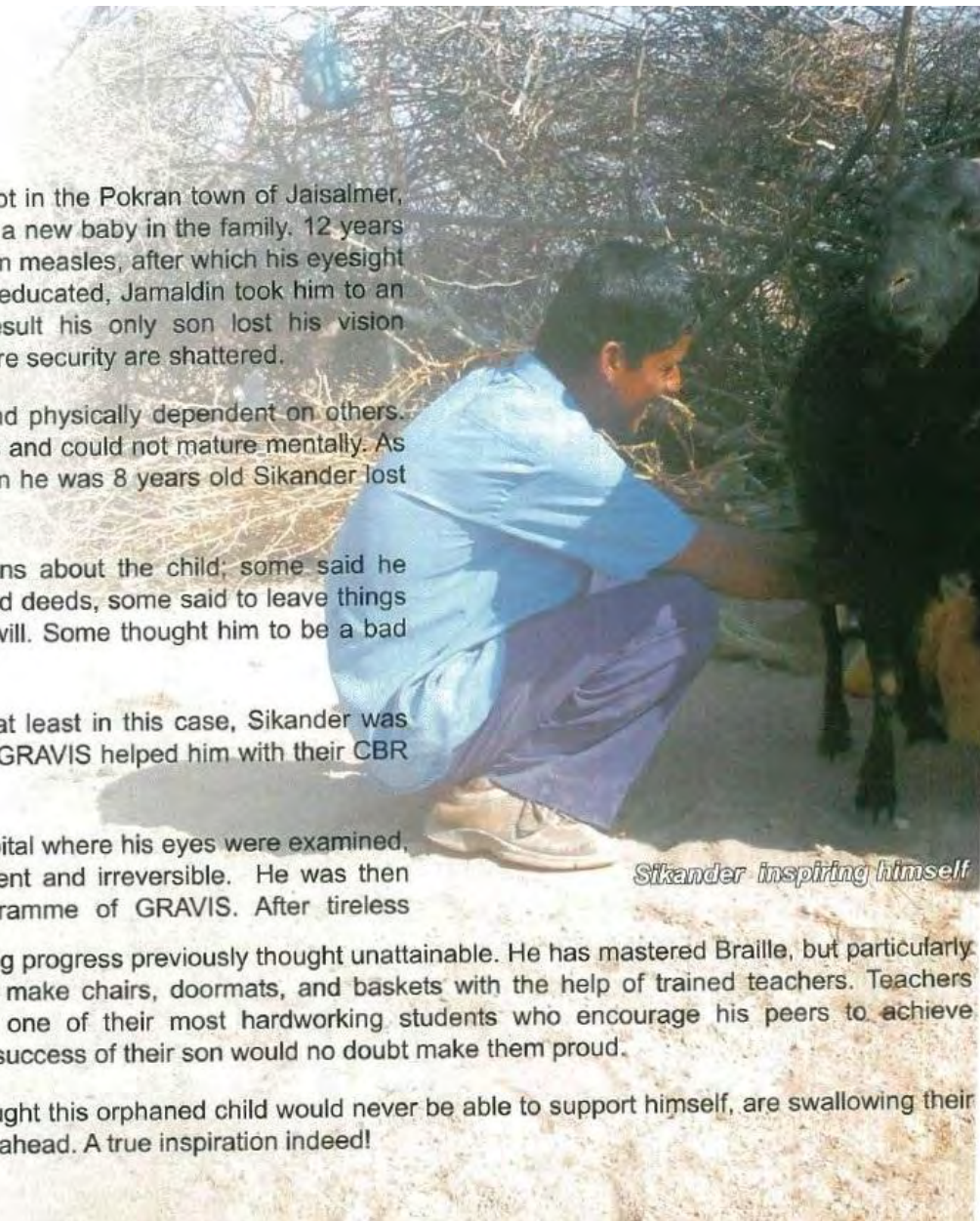
People in his community had varied opinions about the child; some said he should pray to God to do expiation for his bad deeds, some said to leave things as they were as God was only fulfilling his will. Some thought him to be a bad omen and did not want him to be around.

But where there's a will, there's a way. Or at least in this case, Sikander was shown a way. Sightsavers International and GRAVIS helped him with their CBR project.

A field worker took Sikander to GRAVIS hospital where his eyes were examined, only to find that his blindness was permanent and irreversible. He was then referred to the integrated education programme of GRAVIS. After tireless

months of hard work, Sikander started making progress previously thought unattainable. He has mastered Braille, but particularly enjoys his vocational education learning to make chairs, doormats, and baskets with the help of trained teachers. Teachers describe Sikander, now 15 years old, as one of their most hardworking students who encourage his peers to achieve independence. If his parents were alive, the success of their son would no doubt make them proud.

The people in the community, who once thought this orphaned child would never be able to support himself, are swallowing their words. Sikander is now certain about his life ahead. A true inspiration indeed!



Sikander inspiring himself

Story of a toy-seller

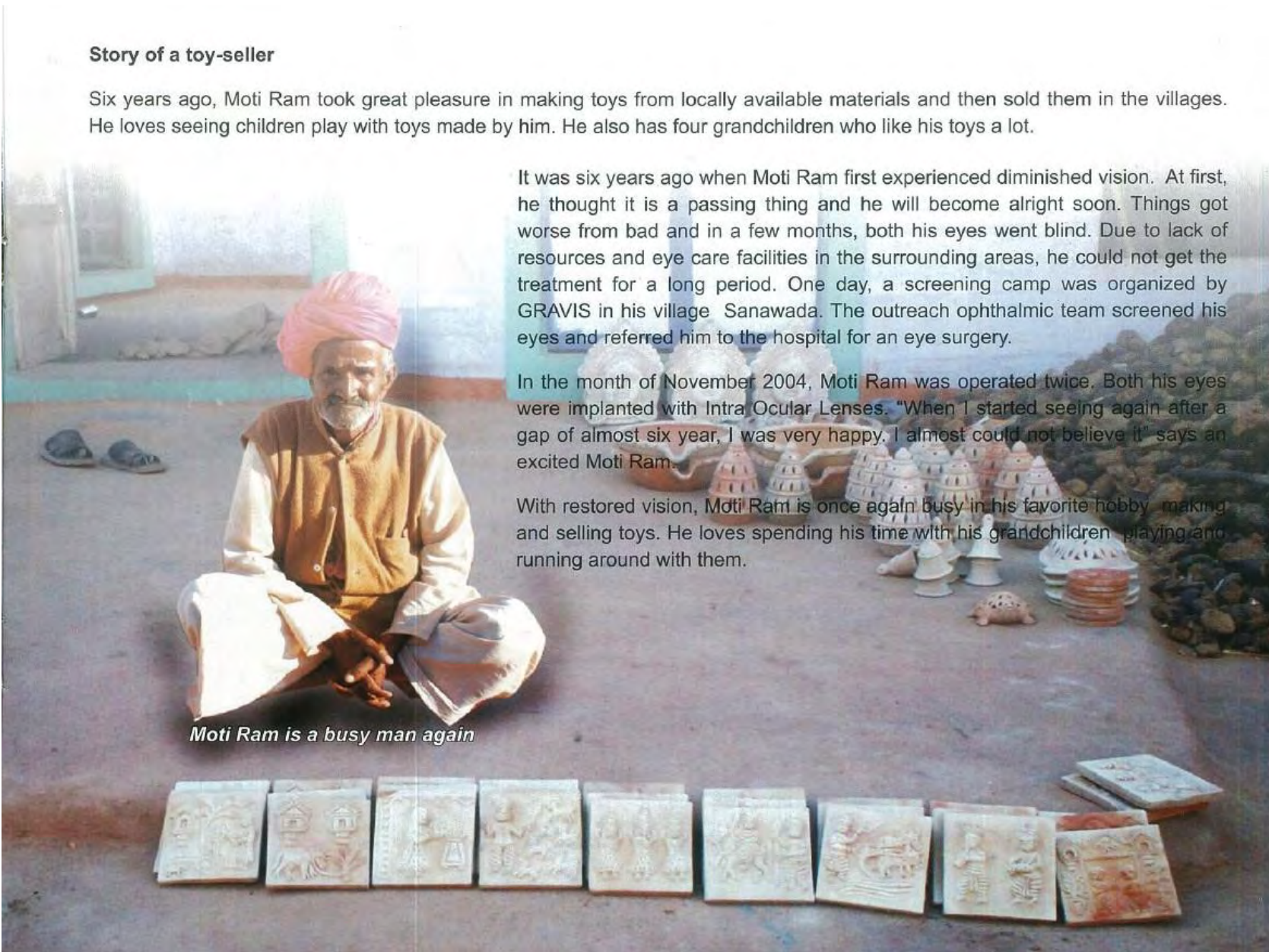
Six years ago, Moti Ram took great pleasure in making toys from locally available materials and then sold them in the villages. He loves seeing children play with toys made by him. He also has four grandchildren who like his toys a lot.

It was six years ago when Moti Ram first experienced diminished vision. At first, he thought it is a passing thing and he will become alright soon. Things got worse from bad and in a few months, both his eyes went blind. Due to lack of resources and eye care facilities in the surrounding areas, he could not get the treatment for a long period. One day, a screening camp was organized by GRAVIS in his village Sanawada. The outreach ophthalmic team screened his eyes and referred him to the hospital for an eye surgery.

In the month of November 2004, Moti Ram was operated twice. Both his eyes were implanted with Intra Ocular Lenses. "When I started seeing again after a gap of almost six year, I was very happy. I almost could not believe it" says an excited Moti Ram.

With restored vision, Moti Ram is once again busy in his favorite hobby making and selling toys. He loves spending his time with his grandchildren playing and running around with them.

Moti Ram is a busy man again



Another example of determination and commitment

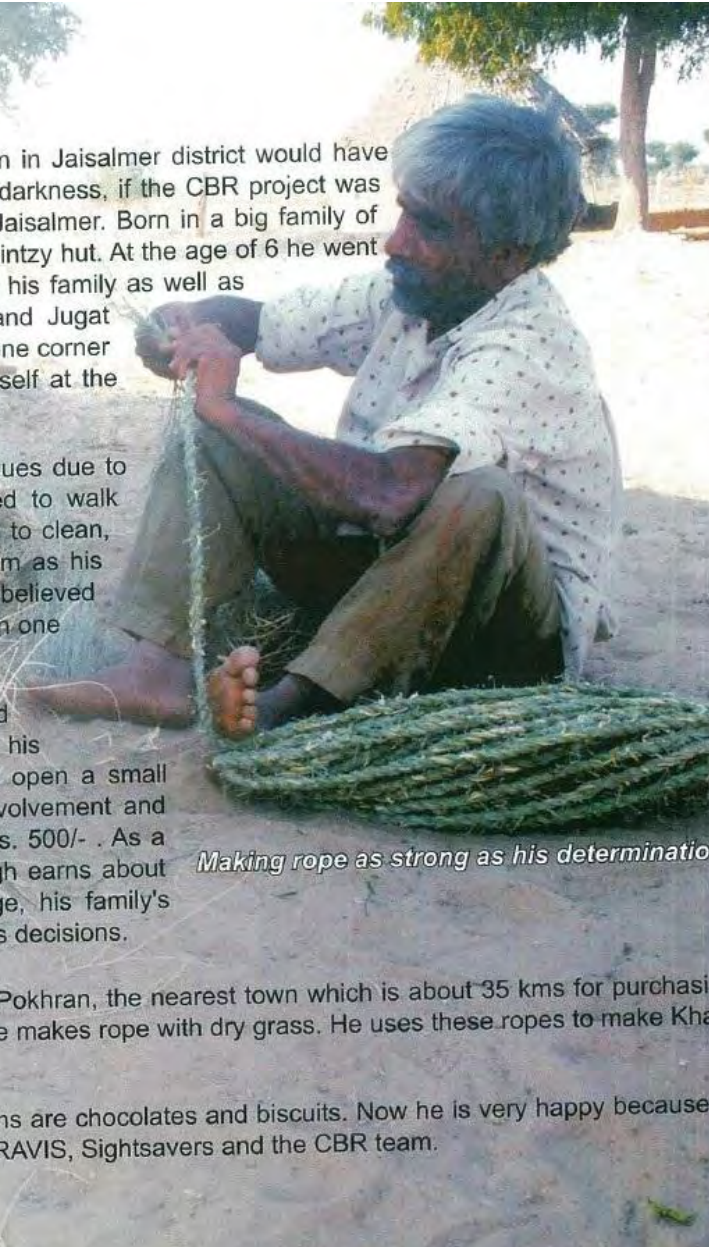
35 year old Jugat Singh of Sakahdia village near Pokhran town in Jaisalmer district would have been another blind person sitting at the corner of the house in darkness, if the CBR project was not implemented in Sankara block (Administrative Division) of Jaisalmer. Born in a big family of nine, with poor economic conditions they lived in a very small chintzy hut. At the age of 6 he went blind because of measles and since then he was neglected by his family as well as community. He was never included in any of the functions and Jugat Singh used to feel miserable for of this. He was forced to be at one corner of the house only, because he used to get hurt by hitting himself at the walls.

The CBR team identified him during the survey, and all his issues due to blindness were analyzed. With the team's support he learned to walk around and got oriented about his village. He was also trained to clean, wash and dress himself. Initially it was very difficult to train him as his family did not cooperate. They were not cooperating as they believed that a blind person cannot do anything other than simply sitting in one corner of the house.

However a determined and committed Jugat Singh learned things very quickly. To the field worker Kamala, he expressed his wish of not becoming a burden on his family and wanted to open a small provisional shop so that he can be independent. With the involvement and support of the community he was provided provisions worth Rs. 500/- . As a result of his true commitment, now a self confident Jugat Singh earns about Rs. 50/- a day after all his expenses. Looking at his change, his family's attitude changed to an extent that he is being involved in family's decisions.

The team facilitated him with bus & rail pass. Now he goes to Pokhran, the nearest town which is about 35 kms for purchasing the provisions for his shop. The free time he gets in the shop, he makes rope with dry grass. He uses these ropes to make Khaa (typical bed which is normally used in the villages).

Jugat Singh's shop being near to a school, his most selling items are chocolates and biscuits. Now he is very happy because of his inclusion in his family and community. He keeps thanking GRAVIS, Sightsavers and the CBR team.



Making rope as strong as his determination

Shamsuddin, learning to lead his life himself...

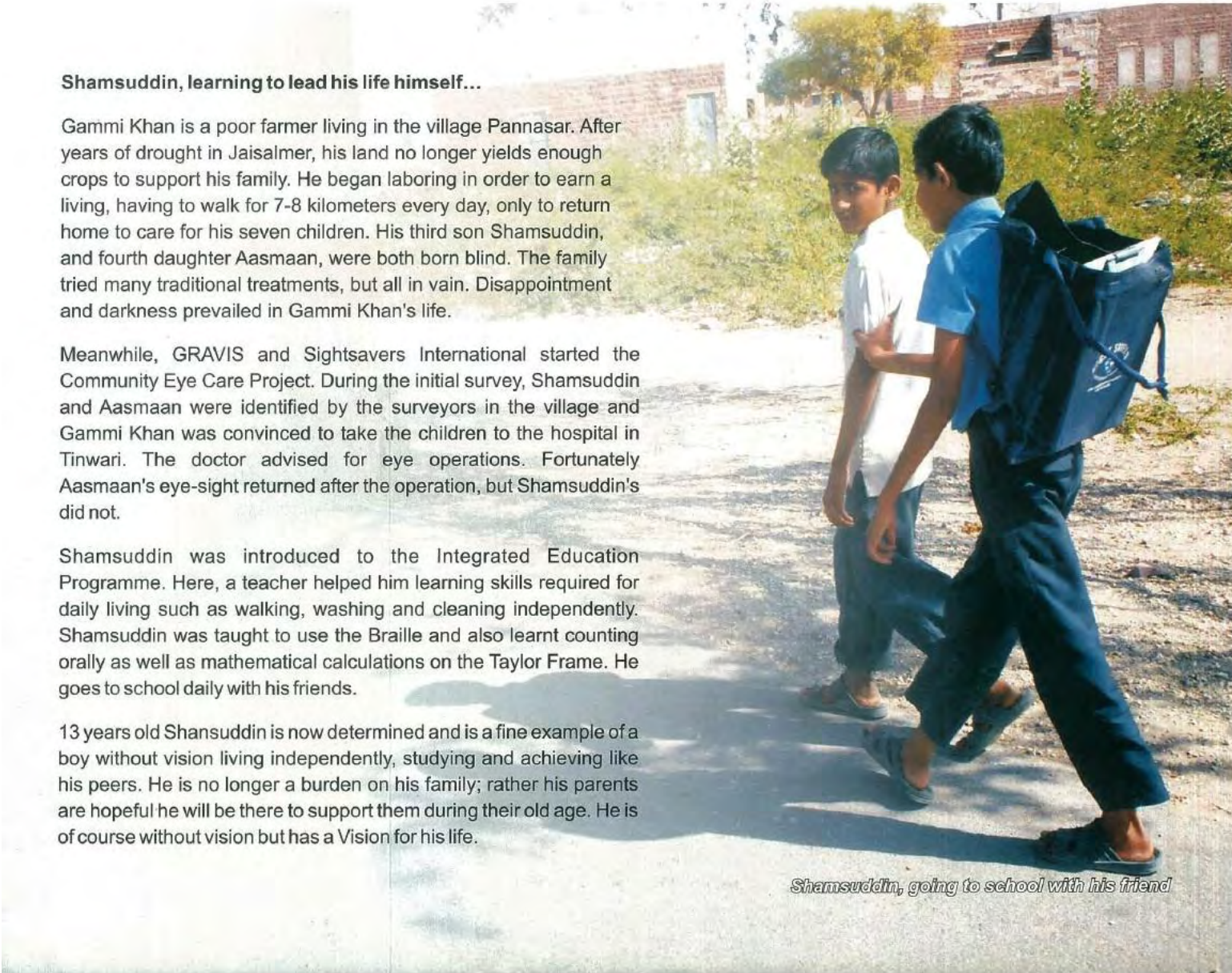
Gammi Khan is a poor farmer living in the village Pannasar. After years of drought in Jaisalmer, his land no longer yields enough crops to support his family. He began laboring in order to earn a living, having to walk for 7-8 kilometers every day, only to return home to care for his seven children. His third son Shamsuddin, and fourth daughter Aasmaan, were both born blind. The family tried many traditional treatments, but all in vain. Disappointment and darkness prevailed in Gammi Khan's life.

Meanwhile, GRAVIS and Sightsavers International started the Community Eye Care Project. During the initial survey, Shamsuddin and Aasmaan were identified by the surveyors in the village and Gammi Khan was convinced to take the children to the hospital in Tinwari. The doctor advised for eye operations. Fortunately Aasmaan's eye-sight returned after the operation, but Shamsuddin's did not.

Shamsuddin was introduced to the Integrated Education Programme. Here, a teacher helped him learning skills required for daily living such as walking, washing and cleaning independently. Shamsuddin was taught to use the Braille and also learnt counting orally as well as mathematical calculations on the Taylor Frame. He goes to school daily with his friends.

13 years old Shamsuddin is now determined and is a fine example of a boy without vision living independently, studying and achieving like his peers. He is no longer a burden on his family; rather his parents are hopeful he will be there to support them during their old age. He is of course without vision but has a Vision for his life.

Shamsuddin, going to school with his friend



Not just another statistics

Under the figures of 'poor rural Indian farmers', Kamruddin could easily be described as simply another statistic. Above the usual tribulations of poverty in the desert however, this particular farmer has a blind child. Living in Madva village of Jaisalmer, growing crops and rearing sheep, Kamruddin has 5 sons and 3 daughters to look after. The family slipped into a deep depression when Shakruddin, the youngest son in the family, was born blind.

Like his father, Shakruddin may also be seen to many as yet another statistics. Another hopeless case of a child cursed with blindness in the Thar Desert. To GRAVIS and Sightsavers however, he is a boy who deserves quality of life as much as the next person. Through the Community Eye Care Project in Sankra block, Shakruddin was identified and taken to GRAVIS hospital where assessment confirmed treatment for him was not possible.

Shakruddin was introduced to GRAVIS' Integrated Educational Programme for children. He learnt to walk, talk and through Braille taught at school was taught to read and write.

Today, at the age of 15, Shakruddin can conduct his activities of daily living with ease and independence. He is no longer a burden on his family. He is confident and particularly talented in mathematics, at his tables, additions, subtraction, and division. His father, Kamruddin, is thrilled.

Shakruddin's success is very inspiring

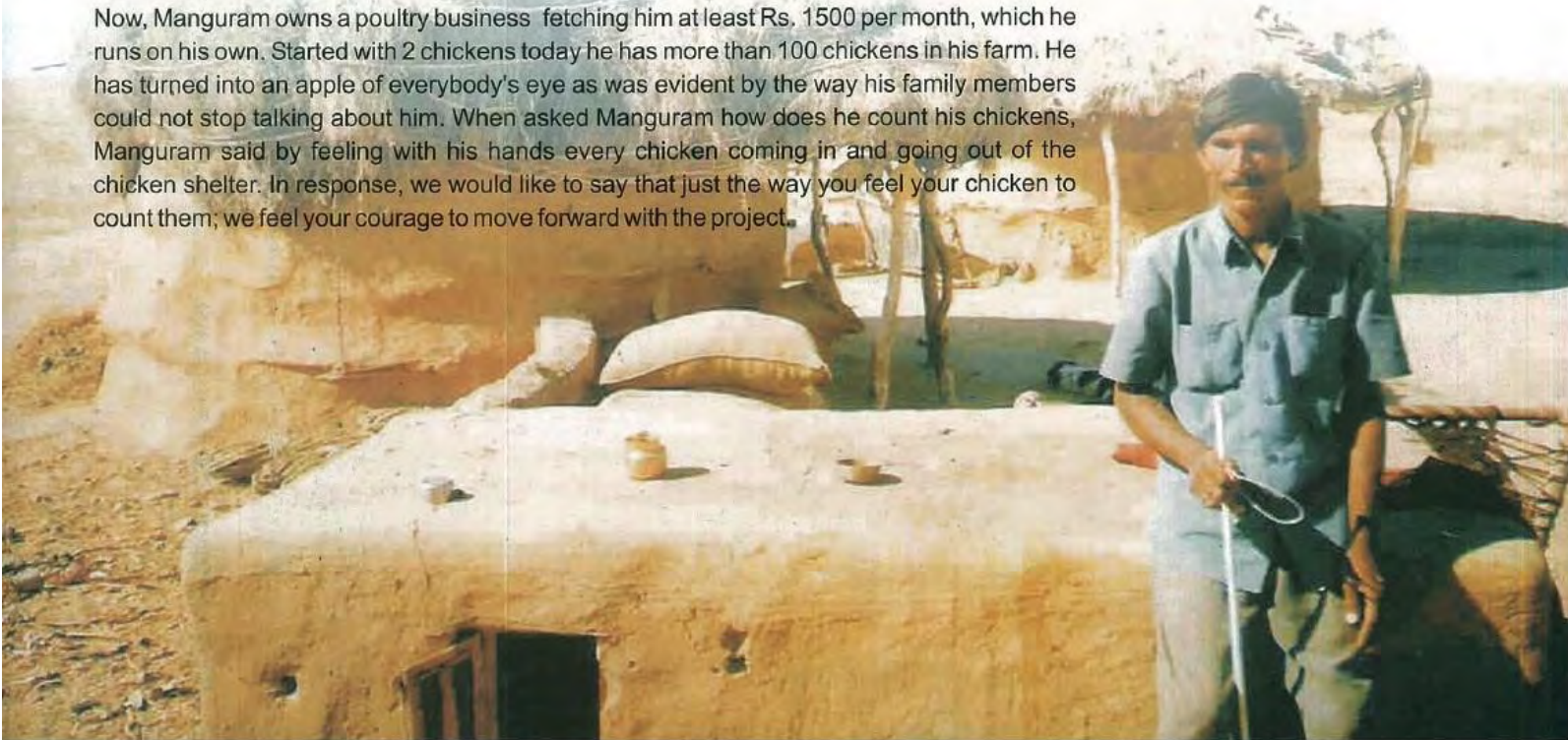


Counting the chicken....

Manguram from Sanwara village is just another 27 year old ordinary man, earning his own living, strolling at dusk in leisure, killing time by fooling around with his nephews and cousins, eating *bajra rotis* (*Bread made of maize*) smeared with *ghee* basically leading a carefree life despite the stress of poverty. Or did we get the facts right? Well, a little correction is required, so let's start the introduction again... Manguram from Sanwara village is a completely blind 27 year old extraordinary man...

He is extraordinary not because he is blind, he is extraordinary because he did not let blindness handicap him, rather with the help of the project team, he has become an example for every blind person. An irreversibly blind, Manguram was identified by the project team in the very first year of the project. At that point, diffidence and negligence kept him under the wraps. However, nobody could deny that he had a spark in him that made him very special. He was eager to learn and grow, and these qualities helped him to both socially and economically rehabilitate sooner than the project team had expected.

Now, Manguram owns a poultry business fetching him at least Rs. 1500 per month, which he runs on his own. Started with 2 chickens today he has more than 100 chickens in his farm. He has turned into an apple of everybody's eye as was evident by the way his family members could not stop talking about him. When asked Manguram how does he count his chickens, Manguram said by feeling with his hands every chicken coming in and going out of the chicken shelter. In response, we would like to say that just the way you feel your chicken to count them; we feel your courage to move forward with the project.



INTERVENTIONS AT COMMUNITY LEVEL

In addition to benefiting individuals by curative ophthalmic facilities and rehabilitation programme, GRAVIS has organized a wide range of activities at community level too. The objectives of these community-level interventions have been

- To educate rural communities about eye care and generate awareness
- To prevent incidence of eye-diseases and develop health seeking behavior among the community
- To sensitize the status of eye-care in Thar Desert
- To facilitate partnerships aiming on comprehensive delivery of eye-care services

The Interventions

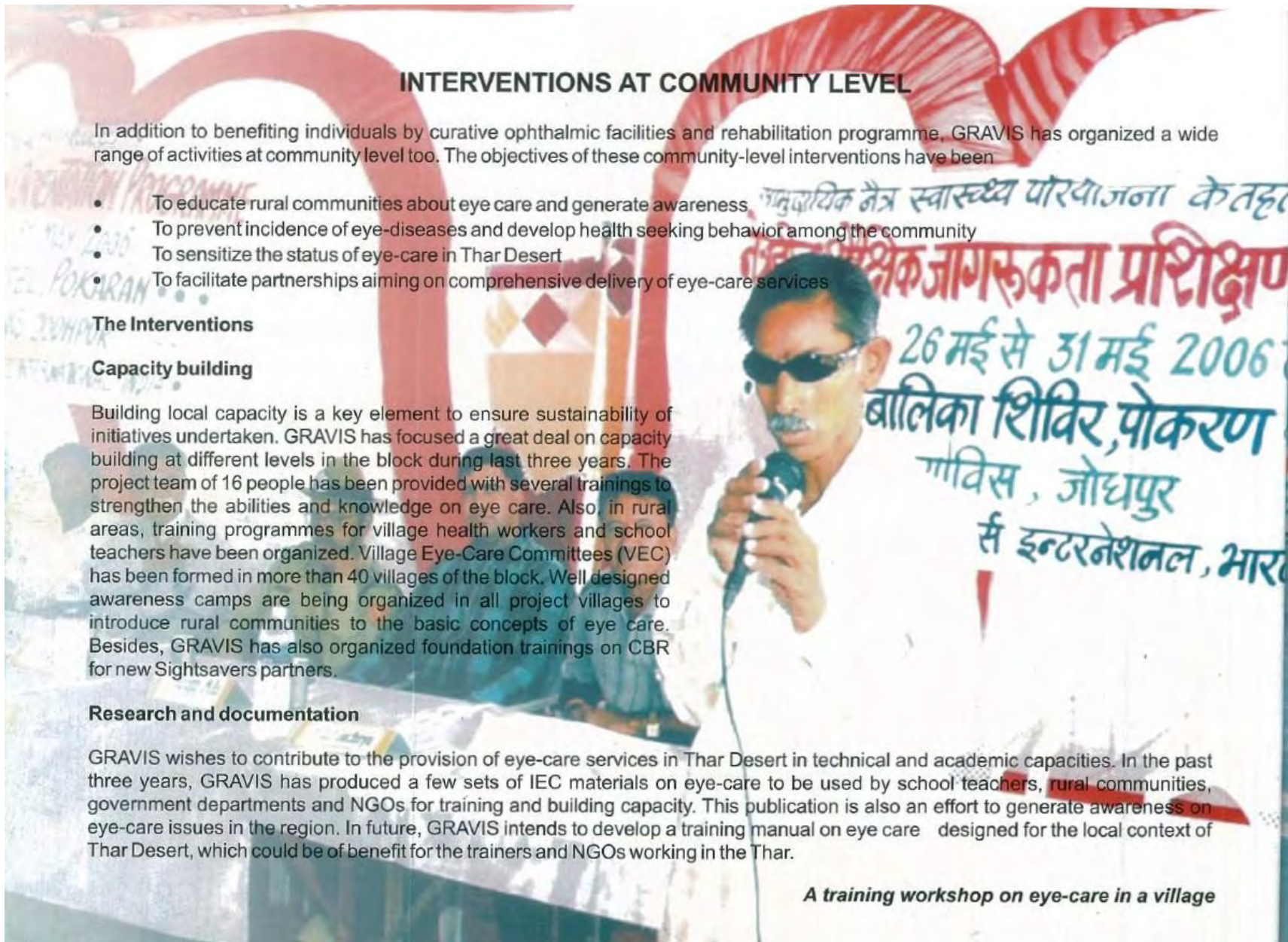
Capacity building

Building local capacity is a key element to ensure sustainability of initiatives undertaken. GRAVIS has focused a great deal on capacity building at different levels in the block during last three years. The project team of 16 people has been provided with several trainings to strengthen the abilities and knowledge on eye care. Also, in rural areas, training programmes for village health workers and school teachers have been organized. Village Eye-Care Committees (VEC) has been formed in more than 40 villages of the block. Well designed awareness camps are being organized in all project villages to introduce rural communities to the basic concepts of eye care. Besides, GRAVIS has also organized foundation trainings on CBR for new Sightsavers partners.

Research and documentation

GRAVIS wishes to contribute to the provision of eye-care services in Thar Desert in technical and academic capacities. In the past three years, GRAVIS has produced a few sets of IEC materials on eye-care to be used by school teachers, rural communities, government departments and NGOs for training and building capacity. This publication is also an effort to generate awareness on eye-care issues in the region. In future, GRAVIS intends to develop a training manual on eye care designed for the local context of Thar Desert, which could be of benefit for the trainers and NGOs working in the Thar.

A training workshop on eye-care in a village



Taking eye-care to the communities

The distances in the Thar are large and the transportation facilities are scarce and poor. It is essential to organize outreach activities to benefit communities in larger numbers. In order to do so, GRAVIS has been organizing the following:

- Screening camps
- School screening events
- Refraction and provision of spectacles
- Running a vision center in Pokhran
- Outreach surgical camps in the government hospitals

Awareness generation, sensitization and networking

GRAVIS believes in developing an atmosphere in the Thar Desert, in which comprehensive, community-based eye care services could be organized with sustainability. Generating awareness and developing partnerships will be crucial for that. A range of activities are organized keeping above objective in view. Organization of events on World Sight Day, organization of rallies with school children and women, designing and performing street plays, participating in meeting organized on eye care by the government and NGOs are salient features of GRAVIS' eye-care programme.



A rally on eye-care

LOOKING AHEAD

GRAVIS plans to continue its eye-care activities in the region in future and expand the work in new and remote areas. Core focus of upcoming interventions will be on the following:

Integration of eye-care with developmental programmes and inter-sectorial approaches

It is essential to integrate eye-care with GRAVIS' existing developmental activities such as community health-care, education, empowering elderly and watersheds. This will result into increased efficiency of eye-care services in rural areas enhancing its sustainability. GRAVIS plans to do this in selected blocks of Thar Desert.

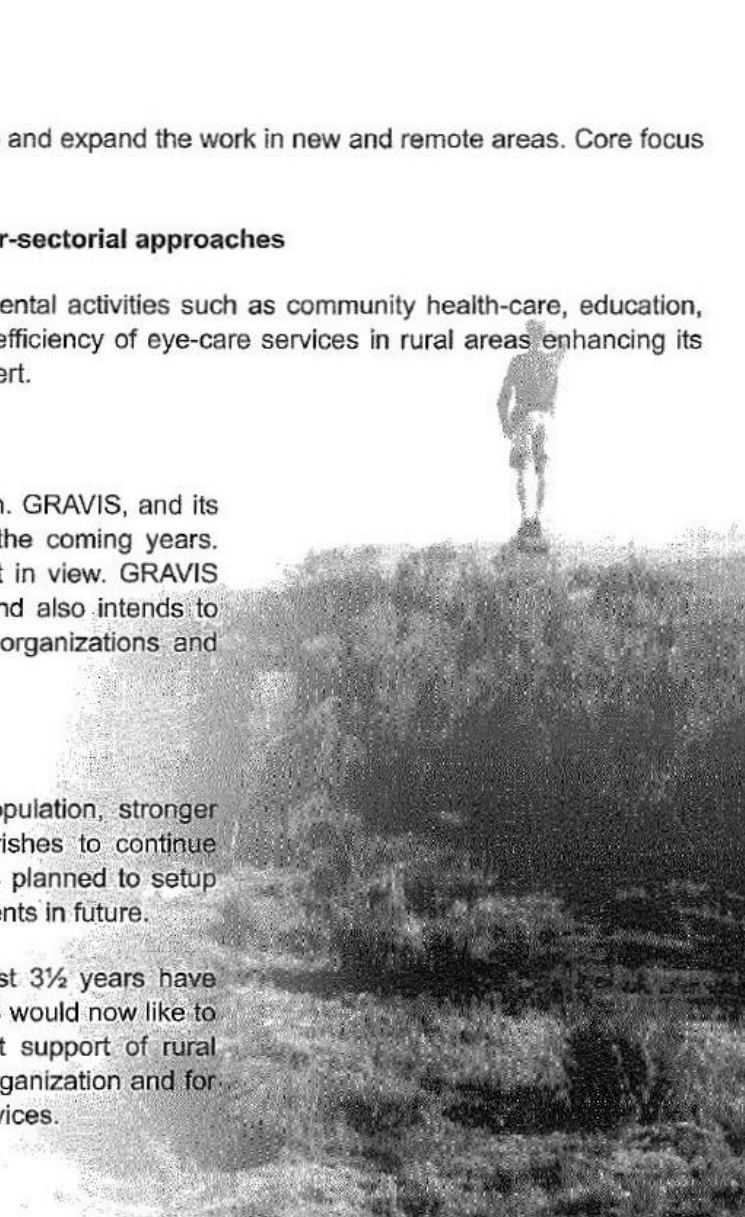
Capacity building

Capacity building at all levels will play an important role in the region. GRAVIS, and its partners, would like to put stronger focus on capacity building in the coming years. There is a need to develop training materials keeping local context in view. GRAVIS plans to develop these training materials in not-too-distant-future and also intends to develop its capacity in order to become a "Resource Center" for organizations and individuals willing to work in the sphere of eye care.

Outreach

Looking at the vastness of the Thar Desert and the scattered population, stronger outreach services is always going to be a key factor. GRAVIS wishes to continue strengthening the outreach component of its eye care services. It is planned to setup more vision centers in remote areas and organize more screening events in future.

GRAVIS has made a promising beginning. For the organization last 3½ years have been of learning and development in the sphere of eye-care. GRAVIS would now like to consolidate its work and expand further. Continuous and constant support of rural communities and of other partner organizations will be vital for the organization and for the Thar Desert communities eventually in order provide eye-care services.



Comprehensive Eye Services

The integrated approach ensures provision for all aspects of eye care

Prevention - promoting eye health

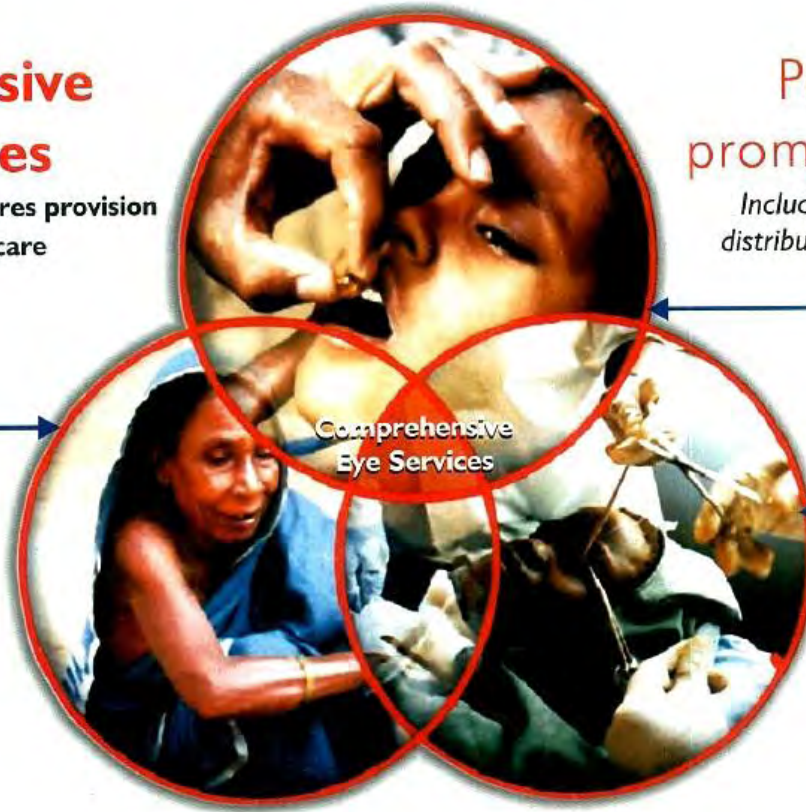
Includes eye screenings, Vitamin A distribution, messages about eye care

Service for blind people

Irreversibly blind children and adults get the support they need and are integrated within their communities

Eye Care

People with eye problems are able to receive the level of treatment they need



About Gravis and SSI

Sightsavers International is a UK based International Non Governmental Development Organization. Sightsavers has been working across the commonwealth countries to prevent avoidable blindness, restore sight and support irreversibly blind persons, for the last 50 years.

Sightsavers vision is of a world in which no-one is needlessly blind and where everyone who is irreversibly blind or severely visually impaired enjoys the same rights, responsibilities and opportunities as people who are sighted.

Sightsavers has been working in India since 1966. Its work in India is divided into two main strands. As well as providing curative and preventive services under the banner of VISION 2020: The Right to Sight, the organization also provides services to blind and visually impaired people.

Sightsavers uses Comprehensive Eye Services (CES) as its core delivery model. CES aims to provide a network of services covering all aspects of eye care, from the promotion of eye health, the prevention of blindness and provision of clinical services, through to education and rehabilitation for people with an irreversible visual impairment.

Sightsavers believes that no man, woman or child should be needlessly blind. Since 1950, together with our partners in the developing world, we have restored sight to over 5 million people, treated 80 million for conditions which could cause blindness and helped millions who will never see, lead independent lives.

www.sightsavers.org

Gramin Vikas Vigyan Samiti (GRAVIS), registered under the Rajasthan Societies Registration Act, 1958, is a voluntary organisation founded by Gandhian social activists in 1983 to assist the people of Thar Desert of India in rural development and environmental conservation. GRAVIS focuses on sustainable rural development programmes for alternative rural construction with active community participation. GRAVIS has firm belief in blending local, traditional wisdom with the modern technology in order to identify remedied to the problems of the region.

GRAVIS has undertaken a number of programmes in natural resource management, healthcare, education and training and capacity building. It has concentrated on conservation and development of water and land resources and their use in a most judicious manner. Currently, Gravis programmes cover over 800 villages of the Thar Desert and benefit a population of around one million people. Community based health care an area of significant importance within GRAVIS overall programmatic approach.

In the sphere of eye-care, GRAVIS has been working actively since last four years. It has implemented Community Eye Health activities in none of the most under-privileged districts of the Thar Desert. It has also set up an eye-care unit in its fully equipped hospital in a rural setting.

www.gravis.org.in