



An Ant Comes Calling

Newsletter October – December 2013



New Year Greetings from all of us here at **the ant** ! We hope for a year full of health, peace, happiness, contentment and fulfillment for you, your families, colleagues and communities. Thank you for your immense goodwill, support and prayers and at the start of 2014, we again commit to doing our very best to make lives better for communities whom we work with. We are happy to share with you recent happenings in our ant hill.

Investing in Peace

Much is invested – money, talent, energy, people - to create and keep war and hate going and so, if we are serious about countering that, we then NEED to invest an equal amount (if not more) for peace. An important lesson we are learning is that life does not automatically “become normal” for affected communities after a severe conflict. Cracks need joining, breaks need mending and conflicts need healing. Peace building is becoming an important component of all of our work and in the past six months, we have started actively “doing peace”. We are rebuilding safe spaces to bring children and youth from various communities together, helping NGOs collectively raise a voice for non-violence and sensitizing our staff to wear the peace and diversity lens for every programme. We are trying to make inclusion and equality the leitmotif of our DKA, Austria supported children and youth programme.

Peace Building Activities by the ant

- Youth Peace Drama Troupe
- Youth Interaction Winter Camp
- 3 days Workshop on Pluralism, Diversity & Peace with Sh.Harsh Mander & Sh.Ram Puniyani of Aman Biradri as resource persons
- White Peace Rally by Lower Assam NGO Forum
- Peace Festival on 2nd October (Gandhi Jayanti)



20 young people from 5 communities affected by riots getting trained in “peace drama” by Jaya Iyer, a known dramatist, youth facilitator and peace activist from Delhi.



The “peace drama” being performed in villages and areas in Chirang and Kokrajhar affected by violence.



The peace team performs in JNU, New Delhi in November 2013. With limited resources, helped by college students from Delhi who even hosted the youth in their own homes, the team performed in 7 places telling their story of conflict and peace and touching the hearts of students, teachers and the people of Delhi.

Vegetable Patches in Deosri

Bodily survival has been a struggle for most of our internally displaced Adivasi families in Deosri who have been displaced from their homes by ethnic violence for over 15 years now. Even as we work to improve education and income of the people, we decided to try and improve their nutritional status by introducing the culture of vegetable cultivation this year. After much coaxing, cajoling, support and hand-holding, 20 families came forward to start kitchen gardens. Passersby were pleasantly surprised to see the small green patches of vegetables of families living in the relief camps by the roadside. 18 of the 20 families not only got vegetables to eat this year but earned income by selling vegetables from their patches. Even as we explore possibilities to grow fruit trees with these families, other Adivasis are now asking for support to start vegetable gardens. We hope to grow it into a much larger programme.



Increasing Pedal Power

With support from Caring Friend, Sh. Chetanbhai Shah, we added another 90 cycles to our women's cycle bank. These cycles were handed over to our 4 women's federations to be given on loan to women from our groups and then revolved. To our delight, the cycles double in number in less than a year. Our Patabari women's federation was initially given 20 cycles and in just 10 months, they have 54 cycles on loan and a waiting list of women wanting cycles on loans! Most of the other cycle bank chapters are also self-sustaining needing minimal inputs from us.



Nilima Basumatary - Eri Silk cultivator; with a cycle she gets home early from the market and saves Rs.70 a day on transportation!



Lina Narzary of Oxiguri Village uses her cycle to fetch water; saves her 2 trips a day and she is now free from backaches!



Habley Daimary of Khamarpara is a widow who sells firewood for a living in a market 6 kms away; with a cycle, her income has doubled to Rs.150 a day!

Community Mental Health Programme

Even as we ran monthly Mental Illness Treatment camps, we were aware that medicines alone cannot adequately heal complex mental illnesses with deep social stigma. After over two years of dialogue, we finally began a Community Mental Health programme supported by Jamshetji Tata Trust. This is part of a long-term larger multi-partner initiative in different parts of India to communitise mental health. In this first phase of three years, we hope to reach out to a population of 1 lakh. Our team will follow up patients with major and minor mental disorders from amongst them and work for their treatment and rehabilitation.

Other continuing work of the ant

- **Science on Wheels** – reaching much needed science experiments to 8 government schools regularly. We thank Bongaigaon Refinery for supporting the initial capital costs but since they do not give running costs under their CSR budget, we urgently need support for continuing and expanding this much needed and appreciated programme.
- **Scholarships for Poor Students** : Till date we have distributed 313 scholarships to students for whom the help has meant difference between dropping out or continuing their studies! Thank you Chetanbhai for the same.
- **Watershed in Deosri**: With very low rainfall last monsoon, we are yet to understand the impact of the watershed effort in Deosri. We hope to know the actual results this year which will then plan further interventions.

Construction of the Multi-Purpose Community Centre

Second Floor :

Rooms for running vocational skills training centre

First Floor : Male &

Female Dormitories; project office of the ant; small library cum computer room

Ground Floor :

Multipurpose Hall; wheelchair accessible rooms; doctor's examination hall; medicine dispensing room etc.



A big THANK YOU to Caring Friends who have supported and continue to support the construction of the building. We need a bit more help in completing it and starting the vocational trainings for the youth.

We welcome any feedback. Please do get in touch. Our contact is : the ant, Rowmari, P.O Khagrabari, Dist Chirang via Bongaigaon, Assam – 783380; Ph: 9859978991 email: jenny@theant.org ; www.theant.org (Donations to the ant are exempt from Income Tax as per rules under Sec 80G of the Income Tax Act)