



Fresh News from an Assam ant Hill

the ant's newsletter (April– June 2013)

Sharing with you yet another newsletter from us ants. Even as we watch with horror the destruction of the rains in Uttarakhand, yet we cannot but long – for the sake of our farmers - for the much delayed monsoons to hit us. Already into the second half of 2013, work is going full swing, keeping our spirits soaring.

I. Lives & Livelihoods Restoration of the Violence Affected Families

Thousands of families lost not just their homes but their livelihoods during the violence of last year. Many families had been living in the relief camps for over 6 months and recently went back to their homes but to lost livelihoods. The breakdown of social and economic ties between the two communities means that one community (generally the Bodos) has land and the other community (generally the Bengali Muslims) has labour, but there is no exchange between them! Led by Mercy Corps and supported by ECHO, (European Commission Humanitarian Organization), we are partnering in a project to support some 2000 affected families of both Bodos and Bengali Muslims in around 20 villages to restore their livelihoods –to help farmers with seeds & to help them plough with hired tractors as they have no cattle left, to restore tools for skilled workers, to give toolkits to families to rebuild their houses and to work on their fields.



Houses damaged during the riots of 2012



Helping Relief Camp returnees rebuild their houses after they return (May 2013).

II. First Baby Steps in Watershed

After getting trained in Dilasa, Yavatmal – a lovely organisation in Maharashtra - for 20 days, our team of 10 barefoot water engineers came back before the rains and we have taken the first baby steps in carrying out a small watershed project in Deosri Cluster. We are still confused about the technical details about water-harvesting and watersheds but we felt that we could also learn by doing! Then, we have the luxury of falling back on the expertise of Dilasa when in doubt. With support from Caring Friends, Mumbai and also with the community pitching in, we have put up 5 structures.



5 check dams were built – some with mud and some stone and concrete. Total cost was around 7 lakh rupees and we hope it will benefit 150 farmers directly apart from recharging the wells which now remain dry 6 months of the year.

III. Science has Gotten Wheels

The Science on Wheels programme was finally launched in the schools in the second half of April 2013. We now reach out to 1100 children of 8 government middle schools through the programme. Every school is visited twice a month – the curiosity on the faces of the children tells us that we are doing something right!! The programme is currently supported by the Bongaigaon Refinery of the Indian Oil Corporation located nearby.



IV. IDEa helps develop Strategic Plans of other NGOs

It is quite a learning for ourselves when we carry out strategic planning exercises with our NGO partners of IDEa. *When you help others up the hill, you too reach the top!* The workshop done with the Governing Board members of other organisations gives them a direction in which to move ahead given their own strengths, weaknesses and also in their context. We have helped our partner NGOs across the different districts of Assam with this exercise and will be monitoring their progress in carrying out their plans. With help from Caring Friends, we hope we will be able to support some of them who are promising even with some financial help.

V. Malnutrition Study

IDEa – our Institute of Development Action scientifically carried out a Malnutrition Study between January and May 2013. We checked the weight and height of 1376 children of different communities between the ages of 2-5 years from 4 Districts in Assam. This was done to look at malnourishment at an age after which permanent malnourishment sets in and one cannot do much to rectify it. Almost 70% of Adivasi and Bengali Muslim children were found to be stunted- the average stunting for all children was a high 53% and underweight levels were of 36% - WHO terms these levels 'Very High Severity of Malnutrition; - the worst level!! We also studied the height and weight of 288 women to check their BMI (Body Mass Index) from which we found that averagely 38.1% of women have BMIs lower than the lowest normal level of 18.5 – a prevalence close to what WHO labels as Critical Level of Malnutrition, once again the worst category! The findings of the study were shared in meetings attended by top government officials in Guwahati and in all the districts where the study was done. It caught headlines in all the major newspapers in the region. We are at present planning a Maternal Death Review Study in various parts of Assam which will involve 12 NGO partners of IDEa.



We Need Your Support!

Even as **the ant's** work grows, we are also trying to put in place robust governance and office systems. But this calls for skilled personnel with higher skills for which we have to pay more. With most funding organisations unwilling to accept higher admin costs, we are suffering a shortfall in many of our funded projects. This coupled with the bad habit of "always finding more to do in the field before we can raise the resources" it gets somewhat difficult to manage! Thus, to help us grow and do more work, we need your support. Will be really grateful for any help received!

Please check out www.theant.org for details about how to donate to **the ant** .