

## the ant is 12

2012 could not have fled soon enough for us. It was the most difficult year we faced – we were challenged not just as an organization but as human beings. As burning villages and fleeing Bodos and Bengali Muslims made news headlines for weeks on end, Bodoland and Chirang District (which most people had not heard of) became (in)famous overnight. The trauma was real but so was the learning and the healing. We hope we have become better human beings and also stronger as an institution after this literal trial by fire.



# I. The Riots and Thereafter

When violence broke out in neighbouring Kokrajhar, it still seemed far away, for in our dozen years here we have not seen our District of Chirang ever breaking into violence. We have had our moments of tension but never communal or ethnic violence even when other places around us have burnt. So, it was with great shock that we saw the flames of violence engulf both Bodo and Bengali Muslim villages in our area – some villages where we have worked for over ten years. Baffled, immobilized, ashamed, helpless, despair – that was our immediate state. The days and weeks of curfew and uncertainty did not help. Half of our staff was living in Relief Camps with their families and the other half was immobilised and traumatised about what was happening around them. At the height of the conflict, over one hundred and fifty thousand people were living in relief camps in Chirang and three times more were the numbers in Kokrajhar and Dhubri districts.

After the initial shock, we reacted and acted, sometimes not very wisely but doing whatever we could. The problem was immense and we constantly despaired that what we were doing was too little. But then we would console ourselves that this little bit was also important. In fact just being and remaining around also seemed important. Some of us who could easily be seen to be from none of the conflicting communities, rushed into the conflict area before even the rations or the security forces took control, to be with the people! Distributing relief rations, supplying relief materials, sharing safety and security concerns, addressing breakdown of relationships between communities and fearing communalisation within our own team . . . these were new challenges for us. We have done with and learnt our lessons.

Some of our weavers with their families living in relief camps



And one year down the line, as we go to print, we are happy to report that not only have we survived but we seem to be healing well and can see that we have grown stronger as human beings and as an institution.

## Responding to an Emergency

We were fortunate to quickly receive support from Caring Friends, Paul Hamlyn Foundation, Action Aid and Mercy Corps for responding to the emergency that arose.

### 1. Emergency food items to fill the gap in the camps

It took five days for the government to get into action and start providing the first relief rations. Even as the villages were still burning, we tried to fill in the gap in a couple of camps in the initial days and then even later. We supplemented the government's supply of rice, dal and salt with edible oil, spices, potatoes, soyabean, channa etc. In addition, we put some money into the hands of our field staff in various areas and let them purchase things that the relief camps urgently needed – like candles, matches, spices, oil, chillies etc. It was a challenge as with all shops closed, there were no materials to buy. Our team had to be really ingenious – risking lives and limbs - to get needed relief to people in the camps.

While our District was bad, it was nothing compared to the alarming situation in neighbouring Kokrajhar and Dhubri Districts. We needed to respond but did not have a field presence in any of these areas. So, instead of ~~the ant~~ going and carrying out relief ourselves, we worked through partner NGOs. We gave grants to 3 partner NGOs to distribute relief materials and also to start some temporary schools in some camps in Kokrajhar and Dhubri.

### 2. Non-food items

Caring Friends, Paul Hamlyn Foundation and Action Aid supported us in the beginning to distribute some non-food items in some camps. Taking stock of the needs of families whose houses had got burnt, we distributed over 1000 plastic tarpaulin sheets for setting up temporary shelters and to keep away from the wet ground; 400 sets of cooking utensils, 11,000 pieces of

## Summary of the ant's relief work

- Medical relief in difficult-to-reach areas
- Supplementary food rations in relief camps
- Rations to poor households in villages who were affected by the curfews and bandhs
- Games and sports items for children in the camps
- 11,000 bathing soap bars
- 495 sets of utensils to families
- 900 plastic tarpaulins
- 65 scholarships to students
- Building and running temporary schools in 5 relief camps
- Status report and support to District Administration
- Project Xahajog – Distribution of non-food items to 7200 families in 32 camps in Chirang District in partnership with Mercy Corps and Ajagar Social Circle
- Currently, we are carrying out an ECHO funded project where Mercy Corps supports us for helping around 2000 riot-affected families regain their livelihoods.



washing and bathing soap. While this was but a drop compared to the huge sea in need, we felt that it was an important drop. In many of the camps we worked in, we were the very first agency to reach out to them – even before the government could reach them! In some camps, the 2 plastic tarpaulin sheets we distributed ensured that even men got a covering over their heads – else they had been baking in the sun and getting drenched in the rain sleeping in the open.

In September, Mercy Corps (Scotland) came forward and we partnered with them on a Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation funded relief project along with another NGO called Ajagar Social Circle from Goalpara to carry out a larger scale NFI (Non Food Items) distribution. Relief packs including 4 blankets, a plastic sheet, a set of kitchen utensils, tarpaulin sheet and mosquito nets was given to every single household still remaining in the relief camps in Chirang in that period. Called Project Xahajog (Sahayog), we distributed relief packs to 7200 households across 35 big and small camps in just three weeks. The materials, especially the blankets, were timely and kept many families in the relief camps warm through the cold winter months. For us ants, the project was a huge learning as we had never worked on this scale before and never so closely in partnership with other NGOs.

### **3. Food Support to poor families affected by the curfews and bandhs**

The government gave rations only to the families living in camps. Yet poor families who survive on daily wage labour but did not need to live in relief camps were equally punished. The lack of security did not allow any work and many were starving. So, we stepped in to support such families. Across our various work clusters, we supported over 600 such families with emergency rations like rice, lentils and soyabeans in the peak of violence and unrest. Our field staff identified the poorest families and we could help them till the situation normalized enough for them to work and earn.

### **4. Scholarship and education support to students**

School-going children lost their books and uniforms when their



houses were burnt and they fled to the relief camps. While primary and middle school children got new books and uniforms since they were covered under the Right to Education Act, we stepped in to support the High School children with scholarships. Scholarships ranging from Rs. 2000 to Rs. 3000 helped them buy books and uniforms or even a cycle – as students got separated community wise – so that they could continue their studies.

The support from Mercy Corps also helped us start 5 temporary schools in the Relief Camps as children had not been to school for 5-6 months since they fled from their homes. We continued this till the camps closed down and people returned to their homes. Apart from the education, we started sports, games and activities with children in some of the camps in the hope that children can be kept busy and also have a way to vent out their energy and frustrations.

## **6. Supporting the District Administration**

All through the period, we worked closely with the District Administration – getting medical help and rations to unreached and difficult-to-reach areas, getting security to sensitive areas and generally reporting events on the ground and helping villagers to move back to their original areas. Our close contact with the field helped connect Administration with people and vice versa.

## **Picking up the pieces . . . and moving on**

By the end of March 2013, the District Administration moved most of the relief camp inmates back to their villages. There are challenges ahead, as the shattered economic and social relationships between the Bodos and Bengali Muslims are yet to be mended. Mercy Corps (Scotland) with support from ECHO (European Commission Humanitarian Organisation) has just come forward to again partner with the ant and Ajagar to help around 2000 affected families to rebuild their livelihoods. So, even as people try to pick up the broken pieces of their lives, it was time for the ant to move on.

## **Retreat of the ants**

With villages burning outside and communities we worked consumed with the poison of hatred and mistrust, we could hardly have remained unaffected within the ant. With everyone in emergency alarm mode, most of us had not slept a full night's sleep for over two months. We too had been badly traumatised and if we had to help our communities, we first needed to heal within, to cleanse ourselves of the poison of violence and hatred that was choking us too!

We were lucky as DKA, Austria (who supports our children's development work) came forward to support a reflection-retreat for the ant team. So, from the 10th-13th September 2012 we ants retreated. The three days in serene Siloam Retreat House on the edge of the beautiful Umiam Lake near Shillong were filled with moments of healing for the ant team. Facilitated by the wonderful Eva Wallensteiner of DKA, Austria, generous Fr. George – of Siloam who refused to charge us for the retreat - and our friends Niketu and Christine Iralu of Nagaland, we relaxed, ate, slept and learnt to smile and slowly laugh again. The distance from the "scene of the crime," so as to speak, helped. It helped us refocus, energise, marshal together as a team and yes, commit ourselves to a vision of humanity that is beyond the narrow boundaries of religion and ethnic community.

We cannot thank our friends and supporters enough for standing by us through that tough period. For helping us reconnect to that little piece of humanity inside! Thank you.

## II. Developing A Dynamic GenNext



It speaks volumes about the resilience of children and also of our work with them. Even as the adults fought it out, lost sleep, plotted and planned destruction, our children continued their football coaching in Rowmari and then slowly in our other clusters. After the initial few weeks of shock and derailment, our children's programme was the first to recover and get back on track. It was strange at first but also very reassuring to hear the happy sounds of children seriously at play in the midst of the long periods of curfews and bandhs, moments when even the flights of birds were suspended in the thick air of tension. It made us feel that at least something was right with a world that had suddenly turned horribly upside down. The children must have felt it too as many fought opposition from their homes to continue coming for their football coaching camp when there was tension all around.

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Celebrating Children's Day in Birhangaon Primary School



### a. Our Work with Younger Children between 8 – 14 years

It is five years since we started our work with organising children in villages for their development. And we feel it has grown in strength. Let us look at what ~~the ant~~'s team has done with the children and what it has resulted in. We are happy that DKA, Austria has further extended their support for 3 years for working in 4 of our 6 clusters with children. We are now focusing on enhancing the quality of learning for the children.

What we have done – the numbers	What it has achieved – the results
<p>We have organized <b>53 groups with 1074 children</b>. The average group size is 20 and we have an equal number of boys and girls in our groups.</p> <p>A minimum of <b>1000 activities</b> were held by all the groups in one year itself as most groups meet every week and carry out some planned activity.</p> <p><b>Groups were trained 48 times</b> by the ant team; many a times trainings were done jointly with 2-3 groups at the same time; <b>18 groups involving 538 children</b> took part in exchange-learning visits between the groups;</p> <p><b>18 Summer camps</b> were held; from July 2012 onwards, we started holding smaller camps so that more children could take part. This year, <b>650 children</b> took part in six week-long camps.</p> <p><b>1538 children</b> took part in 17 different events last year</p> <p>Started using sports and culture as a means of mobilizing and involving children – we have organized <b>6 culture teams</b> and <b>10 football teams</b> – 5 girls' teams and 5 boys' teams.</p> <p><b>315 children</b> took part in <b>4 Football Coaching Camps</b> last year.</p> <p>Took <b>29 children to Guwahati</b> for a one day visit. They loved the science centre, the planetarium and the zoo!</p>	<p>The children's groups have been trained and many of them are able to conduct their own activities on a regular basis. They can plan their monthly schedule of activities and some groups have their "meetings" twice a month while most of the groups meet regularly every week. Children conduct activities according to the plan they make and they make sure that all the members take part in group activities.</p> <p>In the weekly interactions and "meetings", the children discuss topics like the importance of games and sports, the place of good habits like speaking the truth, helping others etc. We find that most children who are confident also do better in school. In villages, members of the Children groups and youth groups encourage each other to study. Parents report that their children now study when it is the time to do so and play when the time is to play. They did not have this time discipline earlier. Village elders also report that the children now know how to play group sports and games together. Earlier, they used to indulge only in individual activities like catching birds, fishing or swimming in the river.</p> <p>The celebration of events such as Children's Day, Teacher's Day, Environment Day, Exchange Learning programmes, Summer camps etc. have taught children important skills of planning and group work. And it also helped children cross the ethnic and religious divide to come together to learn, play, interact. For example, some of the dramas enacted in the Summer camps were multi-lingual with children from 2-3 communities taking part together. For example, the mother would be Bodo and give dialogues in Bodo while the father could well be a Bengali Muslim child and deliver his dialogues in Assamese and the children of that family could be an Adivasi or a Rajbongshi!</p> <p>Unfortunately, the ethnic violence of July 2012 has delivered a heavy blow to this process. Muslim children are yet to come together with Bodo children in the same manner as before. But we will be working for integration as children cannot be divided by the politics of us adults.</p>





Girls football team warming up before a match



## **b. Our Work with Youth between 15-25 years**

Our work with youth made our hearts sing and it far exceeded our expectations this year. Mostly, it is mostly children from our children's groups who graduate into our youth groups though other young people who are new to the process also join in. We have formed 23 Youth groups with over 500 youth till date. These groups are then federated into Youth Parliaments, which are now very active. Apart from their regular activities of games, sports, literary activities and culture promotion, the youth – with the Rowmari Youth Parliament taking the lead - were very enthusiastic in organising a Youth Mela in which 300 young people from our different clusters took part. Our team facilitated the process, but it was the young people who ran the show. In order to manage within the given budget, they cut costs by collecting leaves, ferns and vegetables from the jungle and donating bamboo from their homes. They sure did us, and themselves, proud!

Then, this year we trained the Youth Parliaments to carry out social campaigns. Campaigns are a powerful way of engaging with youth to take part in social change. This year, the youth of different clusters worked together and carried out a Cycle Rally cum Campaign to raise the issue of Early Marriage arising out of the misuse of mobile phones by youth. Over 50-60 youth cycled around 90 kms through heavy rain and storm for 4 days to spread awareness about issues which they were concerned about – substance abuse and early marriage. They were hosted by youth from the host clusters all along the way. They were welcomed by student leaders and had discussions with them. In open meetings other young people took the oath not to run away and get married before the legal age but continue their studies. They also promised not to use addictive substances like alcohol and tobacco products. This was a highly successful campaign and gave the young people a much-needed shot in the arm. We will be using this campaign method much more in the future – not just with young people but also with our women and other constituencies.



## **c. Other Youth Development Work — Education Support**

- Career Counselling: This is another important area and we have been doing sessions with the youth. We are thrilled to note that this year according to their interest and aptitude, 6 of our youth from our youth groups in Rowmari who have been closely associated with us actually went in for some other branches of study like commerce etc. Many others are even thinking of professional courses. This is the first time that children are getting guidance and learning of vistas that they did not know existed.
- Coaching and Tuition Classes : Post ethnic conflict of August and September 2012, we

ran 5 coaching and tuition classes for 225 Class 10 students to help them get back to their books and studies after the disruption of the conflict. These classes were to support students and were made possible with help from individual donors of the ant. The students really appreciated the timely support they got.



Top: Distribution of cycles.  
Bottom: Relief camp kids with their new notebooks ready for school

- Students Scholarships & Cycles: It is a struggle for poor students who have managed to complete school and now want to go for higher studies but do not have the means. The poor families have to take loans at high rates of interest for this and really struggle for this. Seeing this, we helped 86 poor students from our groups with scholarships and cycles. We mobilized our 3 lakhs of rupees from our donors in the Caring Friends group to support the students to buy books, uniforms and also cycles to reach the town so that they can attend college. In the second round, Sh. Chetan Shah of Caring Friends has given us money in order to support at least 300 girl students with scholarships in 2013.
- Note Books: We received 5000 notebooks from Infosys company employees as part of their CSR activities thanks to Suja who came on a sabbatical to us from Infy. This was very helpful for poor students in our groups whose parents are too poor to even afford notebooks easily for all their school going children.

## Science-on-Wheels



We are really excited about a new programme we have started. The programme introduces “Science by Doing” to middle school children in government schools. Supported by Indian Oil Corporation (Bongaigaon Refinery), we have bought a van which will serve as a science van for the kids. The programme is now running in 8 schools where we visit each school on fixed dates twice a month. Navnirmitti, Pune came and trained our team for 4 days and we have tied up with them for further support. The wonder on the faces of the kids – who would otherwise have gone through school without doing a single fun experiment – is a sight to behold! The fact that on the Science Van days, school attendance suddenly shoots up tells us that the children seem to be liking it!

### III. Empowering Women by Empowering Collectives

What started out as an experiment in handing over to the community because we ran out of money to keep our women's programme running, has actually turned out positive! The way our federations are growing is really encouraging and we now have 6 women's federations with around 130 women's groups under them. Our federations of women's groups are now growing in confidence and given a few more years of systematic handholding, they should be able to manage on their own. After many years, we got some support last year for our women's empowerment work when Arpan Foundation, U.S.A. stepped in to support the work in building up the federations.

We are working to build up the women to take on leadership roles in the federation and in their community. Apart from training the groups and federations and putting in staff to follow them up, we also support each active federation with a small amount of money every month. With that they are able to partly compensate their members a bit for the time and expense they incur to service member groups and carry out various federation

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*Right: Women at play during Mahila Divas 2013. Bottom left: Campaign by our Federation to stop violence against women. Bottom right: Training of Federation members*







Our Federation members campaign violence against women

building work. This we feel is extremely important – that women are supported when they try to come forward to do community work. Each time if they have to spend their own money and also their time every time, their husbands and other family members might taunt them or stop them from doing this work.

Apart from building up individual member groups, the federations also keep an eye on the village school and report about it and discuss action in their meetings, they visit the government health centres to monitor quality of health care and also keep a watch on any case of violence against any girl or women in their areas. By and by we hope that the federations will start driving change in their own areas. And it thrills us to know that the evidence of this is already visible.

## STOP SALE

Koila Moila is one of our work clusters in the Bhutan foothills where many small Bodo villages live on forest land. Somaina Jagruti Group is one of the women's groups we formed who along with the other groups in that cluster had successfully campaigned to stop the sale of alcohol in their own villages some 3-4 years ago.

Women from neighbouring villages (where we do not have groups) were impressed with the achievement of Jinjiri and invited them to help them stop alcohol sale in their villages too. Today, 16 villages around Jingiri Jagruti group have stopped sale of alcohol in their villages. They report that the daily drinking of men is lesser now and the best thing is that children do not get exposed to alcohol so easily and are able to study because of less disturbances around them. Women from these villages now invite our federation to also help them form groups and let them also join the federation.

## IV. Securing Livelihoods

### a. Organising Farmers

By organizing farmers, we hoped to harness their strength as a collective so that they are able to face the huge challenges posed to agriculture – from weathering climate change to falling land productivity, high fertiliser prices, decreasing water table, low selling prices of grains etc. We thought that organising and moving farmers to chemical-free organic farming might be step forward. And so, with support from the Ford Foundation, we had started doing that some years ago. This year saw our assumptions and work with farmers being challenged like never before. For one, we had found the organising of all-organic farmers' groups difficult but had pressed on hoping that the other farmers would see sense and join in. But that was a strategic mistake. There were too few "pure organic farmers" and we were ending up alienating the majority of other farmers and even if they wanted, we were unable to engage meaningfully with them to start talking about organic farming. Hence, we have started forming farmer's groups, irrespective of whether they practice organic or inorganic farming at this moment. Farmers have responded positively to this and we have been able to



Organic farming at Deosri.



*Top left to right: Farmers' Shoppe – pesticide-free products; tomato and onion crops. Above: A farmer in Deosri.*

make some headway. We could form 59 of the targeted 100 farmers groups and supported them through the 6 Farmer's Resource Centres across the 6 clusters.

These farmers were helped to construct demo poly and green houses for growing off-season vegetables and for providing quality saplings to other farmers also. The 10 poly houses and 6 greenhouses act as demo and training units for farmers in the

area. Other farmers from the area have started their own poly houses seeing this. Like the previous years, getting farmers to do SRI method of paddy cultivation on a large scale has still not been successful. While many farmers attend the trainings and are interested, they have not been able to convert it into a practice. Our farmers largely have low lying lands and without irrigation facilities, and water cannot be controlled making it unsuitable for SRI farming. We thought we would link the farmers to the government agriculture and veterinary departments and they can then get equipment and other support. But due to corruption and other causes, the government departments either kept delaying or did not respond to the legitimate needs of our farmers groups. Hence, we supported the small farmers with much needed equipment and supplies to save them one farming season. This was of huge help to the farmers.

With deforestation and overuse, water is becoming a real crisis. Without working on water harvesting and irrigation, we have realised that we cannot help our farmers in the long run. This is something we will be focusing on in the coming years. We made a start this year by sending ten local people to Maharashtra to be trained as barefoot water engineers. This year



we have started carrying out one small watershed project in our Deosri Cluster. This we hope will benefit 150 families directly with water for drinking and also agriculture apart from raising the water table and storing water too help us carry out irrigation activities with more farmers next year.

But the biggest challenge in our work with farmers this year has been the riots and the breakdown of economic relationship between the Bodos and Muslims. The violence shattered the symbiotic relationship in agriculture between the Bodos (largely the land owners who employ labour or give their land for share-cropping) and the Bengali Muslims (excellent cultivators who work hard on spewing gold from the borrowed land). The landowners are now struggling to work their lands whereas the labourers are starving with no work. Each side is still trying to work out what to do given the new reality. We will be working to mend bridges between the communities and hopefully be able to do our bit to restore livelihoods and life back to many households.

## **b. Micro-Loans for Micro-Businesses**

Our micro-loan for micro-businesses initiative needs a new business model! Though the work is much needed, growing the micro-finance work has always been a challenge. Many gurus of this business have said that micro-finance is like riding a tiger, there is no getting off once we get on its back! So, we struggle with managing the tiger – enjoying the part when our small entrepreneurs who have taken loans succeed in their business and we see an improvement in their lives, but most of the time fearing for the survival of the programme! Even as this goes to print, the ant's Board of Trustees will be taking a decision regarding the future of GraminVikas Samiti and the micro-finance work.



### **THE TEA STALL OWNER**

Ranju Ray of Aie Powali village in Deosri has a small shack near the Kali Mandir by the roadside selling betel nut. The family was so poor that he needed to do small odd jobs to supplement the family income. He then got a loan of Rs. 5000 from GVS and built a tea stall in the village market.

The shop was running well and he was returning his loan. Unfortunately, in an accident, his shop caught fire and everything was burnt to cinders. He requested for another loan of Rs. 10,000 this time which after some debate within our team, we decided to invest and gave Rs. 5000 each as loan to the father and also to the son. They rebuilt their shop and today, they clock in daily sales of Rs. 1500 – Rs. 2500. The family is managing very well now. He does not need to do any odd jobs and his son also does not need to go to Bhutan for daily wage labour. They all help in the tea shop and they have even constructed a small house with their earnings and most important, they have started returning their loans to GVS!

## V. Mental Health

We started treating mentally ill patients since there were no facilities for that in our area. Seven years later, there are still no facilities worth talking about and we continue our monthly mental camps. 35 patients in the first ever camp have now grown to 700 patients in the 61st camp! This year we organized 10 treatment camps in which 5833 patients received treatment. Of these, 660 were new patients and 5173 were old cases. The support from Paul Hamlyn Foundation for the camps ended in September 2012 but much before that, we had started getting sleepless nights wondering how we would run the camps with no funds. The Government shamelessly refused to get interested and we could not close it down for hundreds of patients just had no other options. As usual, Caring Friends stepped in to fill in the critical gap and we could continue the service. We have been using generic medicines thanks to LOCOST making a special supply line for us and spend an average of almost Rupees Eighty Thousand each month – wholesale market costs would be around three lakh a month! – only on medicines. Two months ago, one of the Tata trusts has started supporting partial cost of medicines through Ashadeep, based in Guwahati. We have also just started charging patients some money as contributions for arranging the volunteers, getting the doctor for the camp and managing the records and the camp. This we hope will help make it less vulnerable to closure when projects end.

The shadow of the violent conflict last year fell on our mental health work too. We were unable to hold the camp for one month because of the curfew and patients ran out of medicines. Even when the treatment camp was held, many of our patients were either still in the relief camps or could not travel. For us, it is heart breaking to see patients who have gotten well relapse back to their former state of mental illness.



*Left: Patient follow-up by our staff. Right: Crowd awaits to see the doctor at the mental health camp.*

## VI. IDeA

The Institute of Development Action (IDeA) completed five years. It was set up with a mandate to build up strong local NGOs who will do effective work with communities and hence bring about change. And if we have enough of such organisations, the entire voluntary sector in the Northeast will be strengthened. Supported by Sir Dorabjee Tata Trust (SDTT), IDeA has a clear enough mandate but that which translates into a Herculean task. Those in any kind of leadership position quickly learn that many a times it is much easier to do the work ourselves than to get it done by others! So it is the same with working with NGOs. We may work with them, train them and prepare them but finally, the individual NGO decides how they will perform. This learning came home starkly in our Long Courses which were conducted over various phases spread over 9 – 10 months with hand holding support in the field by our faculty.



IDeA's long course NGO partners get used to laptops donated by Infosys

### a. NGO Trainings

In 2012-2013, we ran 4 long courses which started with 40 partners NGOs. Our efforts were directed towards making these organizations grow to be more planned, independent, accountable and effective organizations ready to engage with communities meaningfully and make a real change in their lives. Of these 40 NGOs, 30 finally survived the entire length of the training and now the challenge is for them to take the next leap forward and be linked to funding resources which can sustain them and their work.

Apart from the courses, we also carried out short trainings – 5 in-house short courses were held including one on trauma management following the riots. Dr. Barbara Preitler from Austria, a psychologist specialised in Trauma Counselling was our resource person and she did the training pro-bono. It was really timely as many of us were still dealing with traumatised victims of the violence (apart from our own trauma) and this helped us understand their psychology and deal with them. The IDeA Training Centre was used for a total of 112 days for NGO trainings in 2012-2013.

IDeA faculty also conducted 7 short courses outside of our campus on topics such as proposal development (in Nagaland); Rights Based Approach (twice in Tripura) and Skills of



Working in Communities. One of the most interesting short programmes we did was a workshop for Conflict Mediators & Dialogue Facilitators. 22 people from different parts of the Northeast with active conflict came together and looked at various ways people were playing the role of mediators and how they could be effective peace facilitators. This was the first workshop of its kind and was highly appreciated. We also did 2 workshops in Manipur & Assam on Domestic Violence as a Public Health Issue. This was done in collaboration with SAMA (New Delhi) and quite many groups were invited for this.

With the SDTT Grant to IDeA ending in September 2013, it will be challenging to see the direction in which IDeA would move. We feel that the NGOs have to be supported but will need to work out the modus of support and the best ways in which we can build up strong responsive and responsible institutions.

### **b. NGO Teerth**

From 27th October – 7th November 2012, we went on a “teerth” (pilgrimage). Voluntary work being the religion of many of its founders, we thought we should take NGO leaders of our partner NGOs on a journey of the heart and motivate them by showing them as to how institutions started and led by local people like themselves have grown and developed. There were three groups going to three different places i.e. Nagpur region and Pune region in Maharashtra and the last to Rajasthan. It was a wonderful journey of 10 days of staying with, seeing and interacting with different NGOs and learning from their work. The time spent listening to the story of the founders was specially inspiring for our NGO partners. Some of the organisations we visited were Maharogi Kalyan Samiti started by Baba Amte, Bhagini Nivedita Gramin Vidya Niketan whose founder Ms. Nilima Mishra recently won the Magsaysay and Padmashri Awards; SWRC (Tilonia) and Urmul Trust in Rajasthan. The three groups congregated on the 7th November at IDeA and had a debriefing, reporting and sharing of experiences, so that they could complement and supplement the knowledge of each other.

### **c. Research Studies carried out by IDeA**

Study on Nutritional Status of Children and Women (Poshan Shoshan): IDeA scientifically carried out a Malnutrition Study between January and May 2013. Supported by NFI (the National Foundation of India, New Delhi), 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.

Bongaigaon Refinery Baseline Study: Using both quantitative survey method and also participatory methods of PRA, we helped Bongaigaon Refinery of the Indian Oil Corporation to carry out baseline studies in 18 villages in Chirang and Bongaigaon Districts. There is an attempt by all Public Sector companies in India to move their CSR work from a charity orientation to community development. Bongaigaon Refinery being a part of Indian Oil was keen to find out the status of villages within 10 kms of their refinery plant and after understanding the development needs of the villages, to address the issues. It was a very rich and meaningful exercise as we could help the villages articulate their needs and then see that those needs are developed into projects which would help the poorest families and villages build up their assets – like having much needed pucca latrines in the households, building community halls or repairing of the schools etc.



Village baseline evaluation study by IDeA for Bongaigaon Refinery.

## VII. Multipurpose Centre

After many years of postponing, we tore down our bamboo and tin structure. This was our very first “building” and every year we would prop up the rotting beams with a few bamboos and keep using it. But there was every danger of it collapsing on our heads every monsoon. With our field staff using it for staying, we could not take the risk as it had become a safety hazard. In its place, we planned a Multipurpose Community Centre which would be a 3 storied pucca building – to house a training centre for training women, children, farmers and others from the community. It will double up as a patient waiting hall for our mental patients and the project offices will be cubicles for the doctors during the mental camp days. Dormitory accommodation will also be available for the community as well as **the ant** staff during meetings. The building is built with donations from individual friends and well-wishers. Donors from the Caring Friends network stepped in and supported (and are still supporting) the construction.

Finally after a delay of 2-3 months due to the violence and fleeing of all Muslim labourers, the ground floor of the building got completed. We inaugurated it on the 16th of February 2013. It is already being used extensively – we inaugurated it with a seminar for Lower Assam NGOs on “Conflict in Lower Assam – Role of NGOs”. It is used extensively for our many trainings and programmes. We brought back the Mental Camp to our campus because we now have a place to seat the over 300-400 patients and their relatives while they wait for the doctor to see them. The wheel-chair accessible hall, room and toilet are being highly appreciated. We thank our donors for making this possible. We have started construction of the first floor too which will house 2 dormitories, our project offices, a small reading room and other facilities.



Foundation ceremony of the multipurpose building



## VIII. Aagor Daagra Afad

Aagor, our weaving organisation is now a property owner! They bought a one bigha (0.3 acres) plot in Chapaguri (diagonally opposite their current rented office) and with support from Bongaigaon Refinery, have started constructing a small centre to house a tailoring training cum production centre and a showroom. Once it is ready, they will also move the office and sales counter to the new building.

Aagor continues to produce handwoven fabric with home based women weavers and also around 30 weavers based in our centre called Udangshri Dera (Freedom Camp). They made sales of Rs. 66.76 lakhs of goods this year. Sales levels remained the same as last year though there was a disruption in production and sales for many months this year because of the conflict situation. Due to the continued slump in the Handloom market and unwillingness of the market to pay the actual rate of the products, we have not been able to reach the Rs. 1 crore turn over we had hoped to achieve at the end of two years of this project.



## IX. TACT

**Shopping at The Ants Store is now a click away!**

*Now, online shopping is so much fun at The Ants Store, especially when you are shopping for a wide range of products like stoles, kurta, jewellery, black pottery, accessories and lots more at <http://theantsstore.com/>*



We refer to the ant store in Bangalore as TACT (The Ants Craft Trust) ever since it was registered separately two years ago. This year, TACT got a fresh loan of Rs. 70 lakhs from NABARD with a grant component to take care of the salary of the ED & the Finance Manager as well as pay for some international market exposure. As we go to print we have returned the entire NABARD loan of 9 lakhs and have paid five of the thirty lakh borrowed from Millepede Foundation but there is still a huge challenge of returning the remaining loan and also having enough working capital of our own to revolve. While the ant café continues to do well and the wholesales & exports help in breaking even, the retail sales in the store are yet to be anywhere near desired. The team there is working hard to realise our dreams.



# Heartfelt Thanks:

## OUR FUNDERS

**DKA, Austria** for being there whenever we needed – even beyond projects.

**Ford Foundation** for walking with us for 9 years and for being a true partner. Thank you and we remain honoured by your association and your role in helping us grow.

**Paul Hamlyn Foundation** for making us healthier by supporting our health work and also supporting relief after the Riots.

**SDTT (Sir Dorabjee Tata Trust)**, Mumbai for helping us reach out to so many NGOs, the experience has enriched us as much as we have helped them.

**ActionAid** for your support to give relief to the victims of the riots.

**Mercy Corps (and hence the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation)** for stepping in during the Emergency – we could not have otherwise dared to attempt the scale of relief that you made possible.

**Arpan Foundation**, for supporting our work with women.

**NFI** for epitomising the true spirit of partnership. You were our first funder and remain the most understanding! Thank you for supporting the nutrition study this time.

**Bongaigaon Refinery** – for the Science Van which has been a long dream of ours.

. . . And every donor of **Caring Friends!** Your care and ever ready support remains our strength

## OUR DONORS IN FY 2012-2013

ATMA Foundation, AB Paul, AG Panduranga, Ambarish Malpani, Amit Petrolubes Pvt. Ltd, Apoorva Shah, Asha Kaul, Ashish Kacholia, Ashit Chandrakant Kothari, Babu Joseph, Chetan Shah, HCL Technologies Foundation, J. Uma Rani, Jamuna Ramakrishna, Jayashree Ramakrishna, Kalpana Naresh Shah Foundation (Vishal Shah), Lata Kacholia, Nancy Huang, Narayani Gulab Foundation, Neela D'Souza, Nihit Kaul, Nimesh Shah, Paul & Kate Morioka, Poonam Kaul, Prameela Bhat, Prachee & Prasanna Joeg, Prashant J Sarkar, Rajkumar Agarwala, Rakesh Aggarwal, Ram Mohan Vareir, Ramesh Kacholia, SD Shibulal, Sohini Andani, Sudhakar Ram, Suja Warriar, TV Mohandas Pai, Trees, Music & Art, Unmana Datta, Vade Gosine, Vishal Shah, Vishwaraj Infrastructure Ltd. (VIL), Nagpur

## the ant's

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## the ant's

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Donations made to the ant are exempt from Income Tax under Section 80G of the IT Act. Cheque / DD in the name of "the ant" payable at Bongaigaon may be sent to the ant, Udangshree Dera, Village Rowmari, PO Khagrabari, District Chirang via Bongaigaon, BTAD, Assam 783 380 India. For RTGS/ online transfer of Indian funds into our Punjab National Bank Account 1201000100106170, IFSC Code is PUNB0120100.





**the ant**

the action northeast trust

Udangshree Dera, Village Rowmari, PO Khagrabari  
District Chirang via Bongaigaon, BTAD 783 385  
Assam, India. Ph: +91 3664 293801/2/3  
Email: [contact@theant.org](mailto:contact@theant.org) Web: [www.theant.org](http://www.theant.org)