



the ant

the action northeast trust

18

the ant
Annual Report
2018 – 2019



We shall be entering our twentieth year soon, and it is time we take on more responsibility. We have nearly 150 staff members, half of them being part-time teachers working in Govt or community-run schools while the other work full-time with us. Salaries, PF, Gratuity, Medical Insurance, etc. . . we try to be fair and feel proud to be one of the foremost in terms of providing remuneration and staff security. As expected from ants, we have an extremely hard-working team that can often put the hardest working Govt servant to shame, getting half the vacations that a Govt employee may get and not even 10 people in the ant can boast of a salary that the lowest Govt employee would earn at entry!

Given the northeast situation, the ant may be paying better remuneration than most NGOs, but most other NGO personnel work their hearts out for next-to-nothing wages. We wish to start this report as a tribute to the lowly NGO workers who are lately labelled as 'rabble-rousers', 'anti-nationals', 'corrupt' or 'thieves', possibly because they swim against the current. Most of them are still wedded to the idea that is India – lofty constitutional ideals of socialism and secularism, and its concern for the marginalised, the poor and the excluded. As





we go to press, the newer laws and their connotations herald a change that ensures that the journey of many like-minded NGOs and fellow-travellers is being seen suspiciously and is publicly disparaged. The administrative procedures that presume that all of us are cheating or are waiting to support the enemy countries, take unnecessary time and energy and makes us all wonder if "it is worth it."

But it is the raw wisdom of people like our weaver Sandeswari of Khuzurapuri, the sharp intelligence and hard work of a health worker like Mithinga of Kanthalguri, or the sheer grit and dedication of many of our local colleagues, which reminds us that there is no way that we shall give up! Had these

people been born in a city to parents who could afford even a decent Central Government school, they would have made far better bureaucrats, doctors, engineers, or officers in the Armed Forces than you or we have ever seen. What takes them down and keeps them down is an unfair and apathetic system that refuses to invest sufficiently in rural health and education and instead plays to the gallery of the rich and mighty.

the ant's team today, boasts of a score of post graduates and professionals and they make us feel proud that the youth of today are still thinking about the rural poor and are ready to sacrifice their comforts and dreams to share their life's journey with the people of Assam and the northeast. We also feel happy to declare that the team has a work ethic that all ants are known for: working tirelessly, not accepting defeat, sharing work, cleaning the mess others create, and lifting 20 to 50 times their own weight without worrying about how small the others think of them!

But for the time being, let's report how the last year went!



EMPOWERING Women and Girls

Project AVAHAN

(Against Violence at Home – Act Now!)

With the primary focus on countering Domestic Violence, team AVAHAN has been tirelessly promoting and disseminating the key messages of the larger women's movement. Two years of capacitating work with the community, especially with women (via SHGs) to identify and resolve instances of domestic violence is paving the path for not just empowering the women folk but also towards forging a society that is sensitive to women's issues. The number of such cases that are reported and women who seek legal help, shows the effectiveness of the project in bringing about a change in attitude towards an issue once considered personal and not to be talked about. This is also hastened by the support of the police and other departments, with whom the AVAHAN team works closely with.



Supported 255 Domestic Violence survivors in nearly 2 years.



28 families shared that there is a significant reduction in physical violence after AVAHAN intervention



24 families are leading a violence free life for about one and half years.

Stress management workshops

In its efforts to curb violence perpetuated on gendered lines, AVAHAN – funded by Azim Premji Philanthropic Initiatives (APPI) has extended its effort by focusing exclusively on men with this training on busting stress. The workshops are aimed at helping men to cope with stress thereby preventing the disintegration of peace at their homes. With group discussions, yoga sessions and brain storming, the sessions liberate men to share or talk freely about stress, and equip them with mechanisms to cope with stress and its importance. The sessions lapped up by many, are led by Mrs Raina Bhattacharjee, a clinical psychologist, counsellor, therapist and motivational speaker based in Guwahati.



Faith, fear and the link between social issues and stress are the major pitstops of the sessions. Belief in God and prayers help many to go a long way in countering stress. The sessions are also instrumental in realising the direct role of fear in the dissemination of stress. Stress begets anger and that makes people irrational. The sessions further throw light on the measures to deal with individuals who have lost their cool. The sessions also critique the general rat race we are a part of, where we fail to invest some time in understanding a situation thereby adding to the complexity of the situation. Stress as a gateway to alcohol, gambling and henceforth violence on family members and the complexities of the same have also been major highlights of her sessions.

Judicial colloquium

Udangshri Dera hosted judicial officers from 5 districts of Assam for a colloquium on 'Domestic Violence: Legal & Social Challenges' on the 23rd of February. Hon'ble Mr Justice A M Bujor Barua (Judge, Gauhati High Court) agreed to lead the discussions, thanks to the introduction by our old



Top: Justice A M Buzor Barua Inaugrating the Judecial colloquim
Middle: AVAHAN Campaign on Violence against Women
Bottom: AVAHAN SHG Training

friend Advocate Debasmita of Human Rights Law Network). Prof Himangsu Nath of the National Law University and Judicial Academy and Nilanju Dutta from the North East Network contributed to the discussions. The event largely covered the stats on Domestic Violence in Assam and Chirang, the history and technical aspects of the PWDV act and also shed light on gender-based violence (with special focus on Domestic Violence). Most importantly, it brought to light the civil nature of the PWDV Act that makes prosecutions so difficult, but collectively during the discussions led by Justice Bujor Barua, the group – thanks to passionate demands by the activists in the room – found ways to expedite the cases and agreed to hasten the procedures in order to give Interim Judgements to help the victim.

The event was more than just lectures and meek listening. Domestic Violence victims shared their experiences of their encounter with the judiciary in a session named “Voice of Survivors”. It was followed by the introduction of the District Protection Officer. The house was left open for queries and discussions thereafter.

The long pending demand to get the District to appoint a woman protection officer was made possible with the massive gathering of 1274 SHG women and youth outside the district headquarters in one big rally where we saw sloganeering, songs and sharing of painful experiences of living with violence. The DC was compelled to come out and announce that he would appoint a woman officer from the Civil Services to be the District Protection Officer (DPO), as we have not had a District Social Welfare Officer for many years, who de jure is supposed to act as a DPO.

CHANGE STORY

Sikapara received Amina Khatun as the newly-wed bride of Zakir when she first walked the bleak lanes of the village. She was 21 when she adorned the robe of a housewife and tried to perfect her role. Next, she wanted to be a mother, which she believed to be the epitome of womanhood.

By the time Amina Khatun turned 26, each year of her married life had been accompanied by miscarriages. Blamed by everyone for her misfortune, life for Amina took a turn for the worse when the doctor declared that she can't bear children any longer. This hammered the last nail into her coffin. Turning to Zakir for compassion was met with abuses. "Baanji" (childless woman) is what she was called thereafter. It wasn't long before she was subjected to physical violence which somehow found its excuses every day.

Amina Khatun turned 27 coming to terms with her fate. Between the commotions of physical and mental torture Zakir expressed his desire to get married again. His faith made it mandatory to receive permission from his wife to remarry. That's how Anuwara at the age of 23 entered Amina's life!

Anuwara's vanity as the complete woman in the house grew unabated as she gave birth to two children in a matter of few years. This pride begot unchecked power, which competed with Zakir in inflicting pain on Amina. Apart from being called Baanji by a feminine voice in the house, her earnings were also confiscated by her husband and co-wife. It was only a matter of time that Amina found herself homeless with neither her jewellery nor her savings!

She walked back painfully to her parents' house. Understanding Amina's sorry state of affairs, her parents stepped forward and informed Hasina Khatun, field facilitator of AVAHAN who has been associated with the ant ever since we set up our first children's group. Amina narrated the episodes of domestic violence to Hasina as her face was veiled by an endless downpour of tears. The repeated visits and counselling of Hasina Khatun helped in improving her emotional state.

Amina decided to take the help of the ant's legal aid centre. The counselling seemed fruitful as her husband allowed her to stay back with him. However, this uneasy peace cringed as hate and violence lurked in every whisper, word, talk and action in the house. It stealthily devoured Amina as Zakir and Anuwara went back to their old ways. But this time, Lakhi, the SHG group in village, intervened when torture reached its crescendo. The tussle between the two parties culminated when Hasina along with the SHG members filed a police complaint in Amguri Police Station and cautioned the couple to mend their ways.

The violence in the house soon found its next victim in Anuwara. Zakir tortured her both physically and mentally to work and earn for the family. It was Anuwara now who approached Lakhi, the SHG group and Hasina to help her in her plight. The SHG along with Hasina stormed into the house and strongly cautioned him about the consequences of his action. Though we didn't expect him to change, something turned inside him. It is a mystery that even after a year of this notice, Zakir has not been violent. He seems a changed man and these days, both his wives co-exist in harmony.

During the last follow-up session with the family by our field facilitators, when Zakir was asked if violence is justifiable, he replied, "No. Violence is not justifiable. I agree that I used to beat my wives, but violence only brings unhappiness at home. Now I have realised that if I practise violence it will only hamper my inner peace."

Project: BODOLAND GIRL ICON



the ant has been working with youth and children directly – and indirectly – through many a project. From efforts to improve the state of education to child rights and peace promotion, the wide array of programmes and activities have helped us reach over 9000 children across the district. But we were always confronted by the lack of leaders among girls, highlighted by the fact that the transition from field worker to supervisor marks a big drop in the gender-ratio in the ant. We hope that the Girl Icon Programme, which we have started this year, shall be a response to this.

Started in UP by Milaan Foundation, this programme is guided by its staff and is spread across 26 villages of Chirang and 23 villages of Udalguri districts. The 50 Girl Icons we selected through a process of subjective tests, telephonic and panel interviews, come from 24 different schools and represent the diverse ethnic and religious communities of the region. Capacitating them to advocate for their right to education, safety and health, the project aims to transform them into agents of change in their communities.

Each of these 50 girls in turn form peer groups of 20 members each in their villages. These groups then become the medium to impart comprehensive, life-skills education.

The programme also aims to reach to the communities via theme-based street plays, rallies and other social action programmes, mainly to improve the environment for girls and women so that they can unleash their potential, for themselves, their families, society and indeed the nation. Stretching the marriage age - thereby checking and preventing child marriage; better health, more economic independence and also an increased involvement in public life are the expected outcomes.

After the successful completion of the Girl Icon programme – funded by kfb, Austria and Caring Friends, the icons may apply for a grant of ₹ 20,000. An alumni network of the girl icons will be formed after their graduation from the fellowship.

Residential training

The Girl Icon residential training was organized in the ant campus from the 13th to 17th February 2019. A total of 55 Girl Icons from Udalguri and Chirang district actively participated in a 5 day-long training. The main objective of the training was to empower 55 Girl Icons so that they get aware of their rights and advocate for the same on education, safety and health. The sessions were on goals and aspirations, gender roles, Right to Education, Fundamental Rights and to build their confidence and communication skills.

The participants were also trained in Ultimate Frisbee which can be crucial for the overall development of the Icons. The sport as proven in our other projects can play a crucial role in keeping the group together and the values disseminated by the sport. An inter-group Frisbee tournament was also held, with six groups, to encourage and promote the sport among the icons and their group.



Left: Girl Icon Barsha Kalita is conducting peer meeting at her school Borigaon High School about the girl icon program and its objectives
Right: Girl Icons Husana and Riya conducting peer meeting about the women empowerment at Sonaigaon High School, Udalguri



Development Through Education

Project LEAP

(Learning Eco-System Augmentation Project)

The project aims to improve the elementary level education in Chirang. Our work with Govt. primary schools focuses mainly on 4Rs, namely Reading, 'Riting, 'Rithmetic and Recreation. In Middle Schools the focus is on Science, Mathematics and a syllabus designed on holistic development called Conscious Citizenry. Enhancing the governance in schools and capacitating teachers in novel teaching methods is of utmost importance to the project. India Education Collective, Delhi and Vikramshila, Kolkata have been supporting and facilitating our work since the beginning of this year. The project reaches out to 3653 students in 139 LP schools and 16 ME Schools of the region.

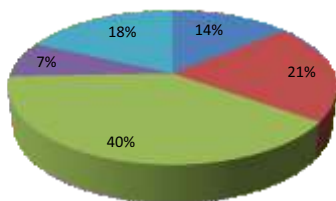
ASER TEST: After finalizing the list of schools for Project LEAP, the team conducted an ASER test (Annual Survey of Education Report developed by Pratham Foundation). 2243 students from classes 3 to 5 underwent the test which was conducted in 2 phases - July 2018 and January 2019. The first phase was held in the villages as the schools had closed for summer holidays. The EFs did door-to-door visits to conduct the tests. This has also paved the way for building a good rapport with the community. The second phase was held with the children in their respective schools as a baseline measure of our big intervention in the next few years. The results of the ASER tests are given later.

LEAP ASER Test 2019

A total of 2516 students underwent the ASER test

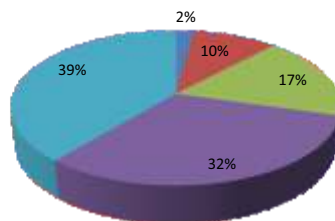
Assamese** Students Reading

Nothing Letter Word Para Story



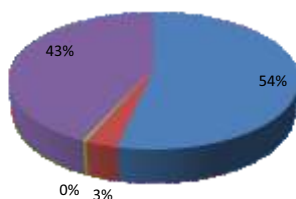
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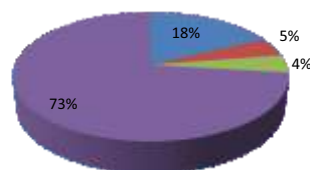
Assamese** Students Writing

Can Copy Can't copy cannot write when dictated Can Write when dictated



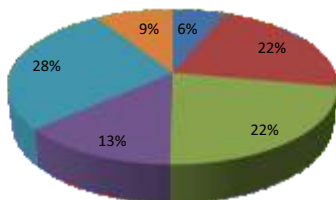
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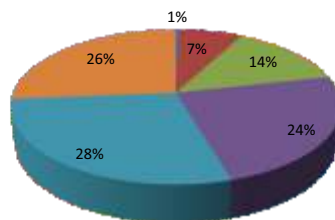
Assamese** Students Mathematics

Nothing Numbers Addition Subtraction Multiplication Division



Bodo Students Mathematics

Nothing Numbers Addition Subtraction Multiplication Division



** Assamese students – Students studying in Assamese medium schools but speaking at home in Nepali, Santhali, Bengali or Assamese dialects

Launching of LEAP & Convention of Head Teachers

On the 21st July 2018, the official launch event of LEAP was held at Udangshri Dera (the ant campus). The highlight of the event was the seminar on 'Leadership in Education', for head teachers of the Chirang District as per the suggestion of the District Elementary Education Officer. The seminar aimed to remind the head teachers and head masters (of LP and ME Schools) about the importance of their role and the need to develop leadership skills among them.

Key speakers in the event were: Dr. Nirmali Hazarika (Retired Additional Director, SCERT, Assam) was the keynote speaker while others like Mr. Adesh Kumar Sharma (Principal, Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya, Chirang), Mr. Jashamnik Brahma (DPO, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Chirang) and Mr. Peter Rauckes (ex-rural Govt. Teacher, Germany and a volunteer with the ant).

The convention, attended only by 40% of the official invitees (due to the summer vacation), chiefly dwelt on:

- Overview of Head/Assistant teachers' roles & responsibilities and the management process.
- The practical image of Leadership.
- The current status of elementary education in the country, and in Assam generally.
- The understanding level of every student is different and it is the duty of a teacher to teach in a manner that the weakest child can also understand.
- Simple participatory activities to teach students in a joyful way.
- Importance of observation and listening.





Capacity building of M.E. School teachers on Science and Maths subjects

At the Middle level, the LEAP team organized training of teachers who teach Science and Mathematics. The first phase of the training was in the month of August 2018 followed by one in the month of November 2018 and the latest in March 2019.

Our old friend, Mr. Rajiv Vartak from Adhyayan, Mumbai came for the first phase of training. Like he has done for the past 2 years, he poured in a lot of passion while pushing the teacher trainees to think and to remind them that their role is to kindle the imagination of the young students. The participants were kept engaged during the entire course of the session.

In the month of November, another round of science and mathematics teachers' training was conducted from 14th to 17th November 2018. The resource person was Atanu Sain, Deputy Director of Vikramshila Education Resource Society, Kolkata. The major take-away from his session was the emphasis on learner-centric teaching methodologies. Vikramshila is our new partner and will also support us in periodical trainings and follow up visits to mentor the middle school staff and teachers in the field. Its staff shall also help in capacity building of our staff. The resource person affirmed that we need to make the child see the questions/equations repeatedly, which can lead a child to focus on maths and proceed towards problem solving.

The teachers were particularly enthused due to the emphasis on practical tools that can be used to help the students learn better than before.

Teachers' Collectives

Multi Grade Multi Level teaching, where children of different age groups sit together and help each other to learn, is an excellent technique that suits our area as most schools have only one or two teachers for 6 classes. This has a greater emphasis on activities in the learning process. And

because the system allows iterative learning processes, it helps to layer the learning from simple to complex using the same theme. The students are not distinguished by the class in which they study but based on their learning abilities. We have started this at an opportune time as the Assam Education Department has also decided to use this technique and issued a teachers' training manual for the same.

We have roped in India Education Collective (IEC), Delhi which is known for its Quality Learning Initiative in different states, to train our Govt Lower Primary School teachers in 10 clusters. Till March of 2019 one headteacher orientation and one teacher collective had been conducted to explain this teaching method. There is complete support from the District Elementary Education Officer (DEEO) and the District Project Officers (DPO). Also, a bi-monthly review meeting is arranged in the ant campus where the progress of the project and the implementation of LEAP which is supported by Child Aid Network, Germany.

Project: SHIKSHA

Project Shiksha contributes to the development and sustenance of learning spaces in the hamlets of Kuklung and Deosiri clusters, and these are also among the poorest regions of Bodoland. Being villages in the remotest forest areas of the district, the region suffers from a lack of proper functioning institutions. This is particularly reflected in the conditions of the government and venture schools of the regions. With 28 Child Development Centres (CDC) in lower primary age groups and 4 Study Centres (MESC) at the middle level, the project reaches out as remedial or tuition classes to students and includes sports and extracurricular activities after school hours. With barefoot education workers who spend a few hours with the children, Shiksha also provides supplementary teachers for 3 schools in the region, of which two are Government schools having an adverse teacher – student ratio and one in the Khoraibari forest area where there are almost 200 children but no schools in the next 5 to 8 kilometers.

Built with community support, we run the Khoraibari school with 2 local education volunteers who try to teach 100 odd children, though only 60% attend school on any single day from 1 to 4 kms distance. We have been struggling with the school, knowing that we need to give better quality teachers and better learning conditions to these children, but where do we also get



well-educated teachers to stay and work in the region? And each time the funding tends to dry up for the initiative, we don't have the heart to let down the children and the few interested parents. Thanks to this dilemma, to make the school sustainably run by community contribution after a few years, we decided to introduce a livelihoods initiative with the parents, thanks to a Singapore couple who had originally given us money to start an embroidery initiative in the Deosiri area (we had to decide against it with the dip in handicraft markets)!

Project: LIVELIHOODS, KHORAIBARI

Khoraibari, a forest inhabitation in Deosiri cluster is occupied mostly by the Santhals. Most of the villagers are daily-wage labourers and often go to Bhutan 10 kms away to earn a living. As stated earlier, we needed to set in immediate measures to sustain the institution which consisted of 2 teachers teaching an enrolment strength of 105 students – 51 girls and 54 boys – of which approximately 90 attend classes regularly.

the ant's Livelihoods Programme which commenced during the first week of February is a modest effort to sustain the functioning of Khoraibari LP School. The programme covers 100 households, which have been divided into 10 SHGs. Each group is to be provided with 1 male and 10 female goats. The SHGs are expected to also



save Rupees 10 to 20 on a weekly basis as a self-help group for internal loaning amongst themselves, like any credit and savings group.

The abundance of forest cover for grazing, convenience of rearing, low risk-maintenance and also the possibility of earning profits within a year were the reasons for choosing goats for such an on-farm intervention. Besides, there were many villagers who aspired to buy goats but couldn't due to their backward financial situations.

Out of the 100 she-goats to be distributed, 82 goats of the local breed have been purchased and distributed among the SHGs. The rest are to be purchased in the coming months. All the 10 billy-goats – of Sirohi and Beetal varieties – have been purchased and distributed to the SHGs to improve the quality of progeny.

An awareness programme detailing out the expectations from the forest dwelling mothers and the ant's staff was held on 7th January 2019 prior to its inception. Training on the prevention and treatment of diseases common in goats was done by the veterinarian from the local KVK in February where information was shared on the supplements, pre and post-natal care, etc. The session also went on to discuss prevention and remedies of diseases in pigs, cows and other livestock. Later, a vaccination camp was also held where a total of 60 goats were vaccinated, while the rest were left for April. Shiksha staff have been trained to dispense medicines to tackle liver issues and intestinal worms, and they distribute them in times of need. Awareness on insuring the goats is also going on.

Project: SPORTS FOR DEVELOPMENT

The Sports for Development project reaches out to 3191 children across 96 villages, where games have been used for the past 3 years as a medium to improve the understanding of children in health, education, gender disparity, child rights and socio emotional learning. The curriculum was developed with help of Magic Bus Foundation, Mumbai for the first two years and was taken up by the S4D team from there. The programme was set forth with the following goals:

- Improved demonstration of social cohesion among children of different ethnic groups
- Improved participation in schools from children and parents
- Improved confidence in children and youth

Starting with a selection of Community Youth Leaders, both boys and girls, it envisaged that these young people would be trained by the team and they would donate 2 hours every week to Sports 4 Development to improve the awareness of village children in health, education, environment, gender and other domains through games and sports. The team would give some basic equipment to play and train the CYLs to take S4D sessions in the villages with the active participation of the parents and teachers.

After a year, on review it was found that the CYLs were unable to promise the fixed day for the 2 hours and the irregularity resulted in a breakdown of the trust of the children, thus leading to their poor attendance. The system was changed to one where 20 Community Youth Mentors were hired to carry out 6 sessions a week on a part-time payment basis and to reach out to 120 village hamlets. This model brought far better efficiency and effectivity to the project. The CYLs were also involved but the sessions weren't dependent on the CYLs who often were high school or college students and hence couldn't mark regular time.

Once Ultimate Frisbee was introduced, it galvanised the team and soon the energy levels were visibly raised. It seemed to give a purpose to all the team members. The rules of Ultimate Frisbee ensure equal participation of boys and girls, inculcate self-



Sensitisation meeting on child marriage at Tulshijora

Child marriage and teenage pregnancy are another deplorable societal bane that the team had to grapple with since the advent of the project. There has been a substantial reduction in the number of child marriages in the region. The team has been successful in spreading awareness of the laws and regulation against child marriage and also sensitized children (and parents) about their rights and entitlements. The team was successful in stopping 4 child marriages in the past 6 months. In one of such incidents, a girl child who took the bold step of using the toll-free number against her own parents as they were forcing her to get married. The incident is particularly a proud one for the S4D team as the girl who was involved was a recipient of the S4D sessions and had also attended 2 workshops held in Guwahati on Child Marriage.



discipline, promote the concept of applauding your opponent for her/his efforts and also ensure that one accepts her/his fault while playing as there is no referee, except you, your team members and your opponents. All these are what can inculcate all the values needed to make conscious citizens for an equal and just world, and what better education can one impart to children at such a young age!

The project supported by DKA, Austria came to end this year. DKA, an Austrian agency that has been funding us for the fourth term starting this year, has sanctioned a new project that continues to engage with youth and children. The new project Colouring The Rainbow shall work on the principle of Inclusion, and shall formalise our attempts at bringing children of different communities together on the play-field on a regular basis and also try to include the disabled in the play sessions.

Central Sports Tournament

On the 20th and 21st October, an Ultimate Frisbee tournament was held in Manikpur as a part of the S4D Central Sports Tournament. This was also one among the 3 selection tournaments prior to the North Indian Regionals in Surat conducted by the Ultimate Players Association of India.

A total of 240 players (120 males and 120 females) from 12 teams took part in the tournament. A 46-member team which included government medical staff, members of the S4D team, other volunteers and staff from the unit along with the local community facilitated the event.

Mr Manickam Narayanan, president of UPAI (United Players' Association of India), had an exuberant presence in the event. He not only supervised the whole tournament but also played a key role in tallying the spirit scores after each game. He also headed sessions with a myriad of tactics, throws and defensive techniques along with the importance of spirit-scoring and the criterion on which it is to be awarded to the opposite teams.

The participants contributed to making the tournament a zero-waste one by bringing their own plates and cups. Unlike the previous tournament there was an increase in the number of Girls from the Bengali Muslim community. There was also an active presence of parents and teachers in the event, whereby some travelled miles to be a part of the claps and cheers that echoed from the venue not just during the games but also during the cultural night that was held after the games. As reported in earlier Annual reports, the above-mentioned Ultimate Frisbee is also a means to promote gender equality, interaction between different religious, caste and linguistic groups.



Project: DOLPHIN

With the successful completion of the Dolphin pilot project in 12 village hamlets of Bengtol, we extended it to the entire cluster of 2 VCDS covering almost a 15,000 population. Primarily working with children and youth, the project aims to enhance the cohesion between the diverse communities of the region through creation of creative and learning spaces at schools (Joyful Learning Centres) and villages. Through the Youth Information Centre which is open 3 days a week, the project caters to the youth's needs in career guidance, access to newspapers, magazines and books, sessions on various social and environmentally relevant topics and other recreational activities.



The project also aims to strengthen village level institutions that impact the lives of children and youth like the School Management Committees (SMCs) and Village Level Child Protection Committees (VLPCs).

The vision of this *terre des hommes* (TDH) project – funded by BMZ, Germany, spans 4 organisations in 4 districts and aims to develop a generation which is aware of their rights, who appreciates diversity, values peace and is active in society. The project in Chirang district reaches out to 45 villages in Bengtol, covering 22 schools and is working directly with 277 youth.

Youth Convention, Lucknow

Samary Soren and Jounal Rahman of Bengtol were among several youth from 12 states of India and of Nepal who attended the Youth Convention on Sustainability from 16th to 18th November 2018 at the Sahbhagi Shikshan Kendra, Lucknow. The convention was a coordinated ensemble of both theory and practice.

The convention began with skits, states-wise presentation of activities of tdh partners, a presentation on constitutional rights of youth and their status in the current socio-political scenario in India, and another on Quality Environment Education. There were also presentations on disaster management, superstitions, and animal rights. The first day was successful in

developing an understanding among participants on the power that is vested in the youth which could drive positive social change. The participants also went on a village visit to Haraiya in Sitapur District to see and understand the efforts of the youth of the region in keeping their environment clean.

There were sessions on fake news and its impact on youth and society at large. The convention reached its climax with an open programme where the youth enacted skits at Ambedkar Park and this was followed by a discussion with acid attack survivors at Sheroes Café. The convention was a step forward in sharing adequate tools to convince communities in protecting the environment.

Red Hand day

On 20th February 2018, at No 2 Serfanguri LP school in collaboration with No. 4 Serfanguri LP School, the Dolphin Project observed the Red Hand day. Even parents, guardians and teachers actively took part in the event.

There were 64 students (from both Bodo and Assamese medium), 6 teachers and around 25 parents/guardians in the event. It became a platform to spread awareness on the atrocities that are perpetuated using children as pawns by violent groups across the world – the red signifying blood on our hands!

From addressing instances of violence and involvement of children on a global scale the event was also able to critically look at instances of violence around them and the need to raise our voice and condemn them both at home and in public places.

With red palm impressions against a white backdrop, the participants along with the Dolphin team announced their solidarity with promotion of peace in the region. They also renewed hope for collective action against arms and ammunition and made a promise to maintain peace and to prevent instances of conflicts.

Mahila Divas

On 9th March 2019 (Saturday), the Dolphin team organised a programme with the youth from different community. 56 boys, 57 girls and around 20 parents contributed to the success of the



programme which remained faithful to the theme of 'Balance for Better' for the International Women's Day celebrated a day earlier.

The games and activities which kick-started the day set the stage for the events that followed. Mrs. Nirmala Hajowary, a Hindi teacher of Amguri High School as one of the guests for the event talked at length on the discrimination faced by girls/women from cradle to grave. Identifying discrimination on gender lines and to rise above stereotypes was her primary focus, and she supported this by highlighting historical instances from our society.

Sifung Harimou Afad, the cultural troupe from Rowmari – that ~~the~~ ant initiated some years ago and is now spreading its wings to more areas – added to the vibrancy of the day with their traditional melodies and dance.

The team also opened the session for children to talk and share their opinion on several instances of injustice that are purely driven by the gender stereotypes and unequal power distribution.

Rally against child marriage and child labour

Overcoming age and gender differences, the people of Bengtol came together for a rally in solidarity against the perils of Child Marriage and Child Labour. Placards held high, echoed the slogans for change as people silently walked the noisy roads of Bengtol bazaar on 16th of March 2019.

Followed by the rally, the Dolphin team organised an awareness meeting with the villagers on 'Child Protection' which chiefly dwelled on the Rights of Children, the Acts and Laws that promote Child Rights and the need for an active Village Level Child Protection Committee (VLCPC).

The meeting held at Laxmi Mandir Hall, Bengtol Bazaar was headed by District Child Protection Officer (DCPO), Village Council Development Committee (VCDC) chairmen, Ex Principal of

Bengtol High School and village headmen. Around 250 people took part in the meeting. Pamphlets on Child Safety were also distributed after the meeting.

Project: CARING 4 RIGHTS

The project Caring 4 Rights, supported by UNICEF and co-funded by Caring Friends, was an effort to disseminate awareness on rights and entitlements to 30 villagers. The project was aimed to collectively identify, analyse and take action against issues that affect children and marginalized especially the disabled.

Two years ago the ant began collectivising communities of 60 villages with a history of conflict into Sahayak Manch or 'Cooperation Forum' and also established Golpo Deras or 'Dialogue Houses' with UNICEF support. We now felt that the time was right to help them take action for demanding accountability from the State and get children and women, esp. from marginalised households, their rights and entitlements. In the entire collectivization and action process are embedded principles of dialogue, cooperation, mutual respect, collective action and participation. We formed 30 VCDC level monitoring committees with 10-15 members representing each VCDC. Each VCDC has representatives in the District Level Monitoring Committee with 10-15 members as steering committee members and also has subject-wise committees that are trained to deal specifically with each scheme. The project team supported them with knowledge through periodic training and mentoring meetings by invitation. Training on National Social Assistance Programmes, NREGA, and the National Food Security Act was provided to members of the Monitoring Committees.

Alerted rights committee

The District and VCDC level monitoring committees by now have adequate knowledge and skills regarding the basic entitlements and have put in place a system to effectively monitor and strengthen the implementation of policies and schemes related to children and women in villages affected by ethnic conflicts in Chirang district.

The Caring 4 Rights team went beyond the Expected Level of Achievement in forming VCDC level monitoring committees. Instead of 15 committees the team achieved 30 committees, out of which 27 committees were very active and regularly conducted monthly meetings to identify

and analyze the issues and acted to make sure proper implementation of government schemes are being made. Representatives from each monitoring committee underwent a two-day long Training workshop on National Social Assistance Programme. A total of 60 members attended the training programme in two batches. The workshop was conducted by Sri Naresh Ch. Nath, Assistant Project Officer, DRDA, Chirang and Md. Azgar Ali, Legal Counsellor of the ant.

Objectives of the workshop

- i) To build capacities of VCDC Level Monitoring Committees with adequate knowledge and skills about the basic entitlements guaranteed by National Social Assistance Programme.
- ii) To develop a system to effectively monitor and strengthen the implementation of policies and schemes related to Old Age, Widows and Persons with Disability in villages affected by ethnic conflicts in Chirang district.

Later the equipped VCDC monitoring committee conducted a two day long dissemination meeting for the monitoring committee member along with the ant Caring For Right team. A total of 2400 people from 30 VCDCs became aware of NSAP. After the training, the monitoring committee helped the people to apply for various schemes. Monitoring Committee members helped 150 people with disability to apply for disability certificates and 174 people to apply for other pension schemes under NSAP. 20 RTIs and 18 complaints were filed on different pensions under NSAP. A total of 60 monitoring members made visits to the government offices for gathering information and filing complaints.

Kitchen gardens in schools

A two-day on-site training on kitchen gardening was held in 20 schools focusing on seed cost, composting and the required tools for the same. The training was conducted by a team that had earlier received a 7-day training on Organic Farming. Students and SMC members received information on ecological farming methods namely, preparation of vermicompost, Bio-pesticides, Double Raise bed, Trench Composting, Liquid Composting, etc.

26 schools have Kitchen Gardens now. The seasonal vegetables grown in schools are now used in mid-day meals which directly contributes to an improvement in the nutritional intake of children. Some of the produce was even marketed by the SMC to raise money for repairing the infrastructure in the school.

Swachh toilet campaign

The unhygienic condition of school toilets and the indifference of teachers towards the same prompted the Caring for Rights team to initiate the Swachh Toilet Campaign in 20 schools (both ME and LP). The campaign convened with SMC members, monitoring committee members, teachers and school children who got together to clean the toilets of their respective schools. It was noted that the senior students came forth to take up the responsibility of cleaning toilets. A



change in attitude of the teachers was also noted after the campaign. 20 Schools had clean toilets for the very first time.

Achievements of the project:

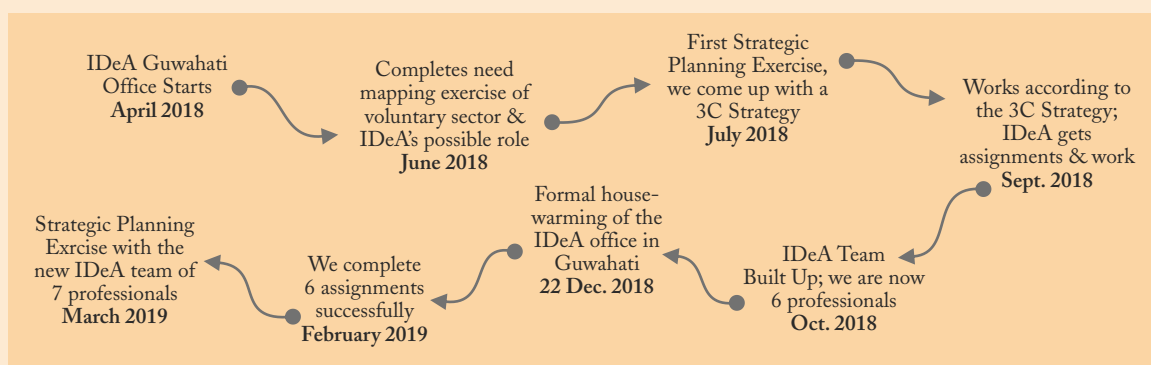
- An active District Rights Committee was formed with trained members at VDC level; each having 10-15 members is functioning now with strong emphasis for effective implementation of RTE, NFSA, MGNREGA and NSAP.
- Monitoring Committees also created jobs for job card holders under MGNREGA with their due wages
- 32 RTIs were filed by Monitoring Committee and received information on 19 RTIs.
- Many Anganwadi Centres started functioning and also distributed take home rations to pregnant and lactating mothers whenever they were distributed.
- 12 drop outs re-enrolled to schools.
- Introduction of complementary feeding for babies from the 6th month (was 8 months before).
- Functional Kitchen Gardens in 14 Primary Schools.
- 18 Lower Primary and 2 Upper Primary Schools have a Clean Toilet now.

Strengthening the Voluntary Sector

IDeA 2.0: Shifting to a higher gear

The seriousness of the ant's board in furthering IDeA's mandate of strengthening the voluntary sector in the northeast is so strong that the Board Chairperson, Enakshi, quit the Board to head IDeA 2.0 herself with able help from Jenny who is veritably our star trainer. With a green signal from the Board, IDeA hired an office in Guwahati and moved its operations there in April 2018. It was a leap in faith and what a heady journey it has been since then.

The One Year Journey at a Glance



IDeA's 3C Strategy

The 3C strategy of IDeA addresses the three roles that IDeA has set for itself – firstly, of building up capacities of small NGOs and helping them move to the next level of growth; secondly, to forge strong linkages between the voluntary sector of the northeast so that it can fulfill its mission of social transformation of the northeast; and thirdly, through research and advocacy, to advise larger policy change even as IDeA takes on short and longer assignments for its own sustainability while providing services and support to the voluntary sector.

The first of the Cs: Cultivate & Incubate

Thanks to Caring Friends (Mumbai), we have continued supporting and handholding small NGOs in the Northeast. The work of our 9 partner NGOs spread across Assam and also one each in Manipur and Meghalaya collectively benefitted over 7000 children. All the partners work for the development and rights of children on issues such as getting drop-out children back to school, reviving traditional children's clubs in Assam's villages, stopping child sexual abuse, keeping



children into books and away from militancy, stopping child labour, etc. Through our friendly but firm nudging, training and also encouraging, the partners have also been growing as responsible and accountable public institutions. Without paying middlemen or bribes, three of the nine partners got their FCRA; this year, another two received their income tax exemptions and as the ultimate

mark of our success, some partners are on their way to financial independence from the ant!

The Second of the Cs: Connect & Organise

IDeA's office in Guwahati not only houses our team but has also been hosting small meetings and discussions. Starting with the house-warming ceremony of IDeA on 22nd December 2018 where many NGOs of Guwahati met after a long time, it also hosted a consultation on CSR Law, a discussion on women's leadership and also a brainstorming session on second-line leadership among NGOs. With much to do to connect the NGO sector of the region, IDeA's strategic plan has the task cut out for the team in that direction.

The Third of the Cs : Consult & Advise

Moving to Guwahati has also meant interesting work and assignments coming the way of IDeA. Within a year, we could successfully complete six assignments providing one on one support to strengthen the policy and quality issues of different NGOs and also to provide inputs to the government on ensuring effective and efficient delivery of their programmes. We are also carrying out small research assignments that take us to riverine char areas as well as to the tea gardens of Upper Assam. As of March 2019, we are about to complete a year-long study on Women's Leadership in the Northeast Region with a small research grant from South Asia Women's Fund. This we hope will also guide our strategic action for increasing women's leadership in the coming future.

Beyond the Cs : Project MITA (Mental Illness Treatment in Assam)

Modelled largely on the ant's financially sustainable, low-cost yet good quality mental illness treatment camps, we have now spread to 6 other districts in Assam through IDeA's NGO partners. Over 600 patients are now receiving treatment in the camps. Three of the six MITA partners are already financially stable and with robust protocols, management systems and motivated volunteers, their camps will go on even without the help of IDeA. By the end of 2019,



we hope to have 10 MITA camps running and helping many more patients with mental illnesses. Seeing patients and their families in the remotest villages healed in mind and spirit pushes our NGO partners and also us to do even more.

Other Events

Lower Assam Consultation on Child Rights

the ant and the Lower Assam NGO Forum organised a consultation on Child Rights; supported by Child Aid Network (CAN), Germany from the 10th to the 12th November, 2018. At the NERSWN complex in Gwjwn Dera, Kokhrajhar on 10th & 11th November 2018, hosted the discussions and deliberations on the Rights of Children in Lower Assam focusing on education, trafficking, child marriage, child abuse, nutrition and health through the lens of Right to Development, Survival, Protection and Participation as ratified by the government of India. This was attended by participants from over 14 organisations, each discussing their kind of work and the hurdles they face in the process, thereby shortlisting the major concerns and recommendations to improve the status quo. On 12th November 2018, the conference hall in Bodoland Guest house in Kokrajhar acted as the nodal point for the NGOs and the Government Officials of Bodoland in

discussing the concerns and recommendations that were narrowed down in NERSWN complex the previous day. The final list of recommendations was presented to the Principal Secretary, BTC and the Directors of Education, Health, Social, Welfare and to the District Protection Officers of Kokrajhar and Chirang.

Bharati ME School renovation

Bharati ME School, Patabari, was established in the year 1986. It facilitates both Assamese and Bodo medium classes. In the 2016 Bigyan test (conducted by the ant), it found a place among the highest performing schools of the region. Though the academic results weren't bad the school had major infrastructural pitfalls. Teachers have taught here for so many years with practically no remuneration and we hope that some day it will get Govt recognition.



Leaking tin roofs, worn out bamboo partitions amongst class rooms, windows and doors that were hardly functional were the apparent structural realities of Bharati M.E School until recently. This might be reflective of the significant decline in the number of students over the years; from 117 students in the academic year of 2015-16 to 70 at present. The issue was raised in SMCs (School Management Committee) and Parents meetings frequently, as a result the head teacher of the school got in touch with the ant to collectively sort out the problem.

Renovation of the class rooms and the head teacher's office was sanctioned with the help of 'Caring Friends'. With the collective efforts of the staff and villagers the renovated buildings were inaugurated on the 21st of February 2019, by the CRCC (Cluster Resource Center Coordinator) Patabari, in the presence of VCDC (Village Council Development Center) chairman, Head Teachers of nearby LP Schools, students, teachers, parents and other staffs of the school.

The students and teachers are delighted with the renewed air of the school. This could further enrolment, attendance, regular classes and improved academic outputs according to the teachers. The teachers are particularly revitalized by the efforts rendered.

the ant family day

On the 18th of January the ants celebrated a Family Day in Udangshri Dera. Current and ex- staffs of the organisation along with their families sang, danced, played and ate together relishing every moment of the day.

The welcome address was followed by the introduction of the staffs of each project. Sunil and Jenny were asked to share their journey since the inception of the ant. Musical chairs and a Tug of War set the stage for the fun and excitement that unravelled during the course of the day. The Sifung group made a significant presence, as the cultural events commenced with their traditional melodies and the rhythmic steps of the revived heritage of the land. It was also an opportunity to brush up the talents of the ants and to showcase them. Chris Yerling, a member of "Magicians without Borders," stole the show by enthraling the ants with his Mime and Magic show.

It was an opportunity for the family members of the staff to get a first-hand taste of the ant. The day signified how the ant's efforts for a peaceful world where there is love, respect and dignity for all has captivated and brought diverse people together.



Other Developmental Interventions

Project: Artisan Mapping

Our textile designer, Smitha who has been the heart and soul of the handloom intervention, is also part of a group called Crafting Future. When she wished to do something on a large scale for weavers and wanted us to collaborate with this new group, we were only too happy to say yes. So, Crafting Future in collaboration with the ant worked on a UNDP-funded artisan mapping project in the four districts of BTAD Assam – and the project shall also be done in Karnataka with funds from SVP.

The objective of the mapping project was to create a database of artisans, raw material suppliers and market players in the defined geographical area. Through this, the aim was to bring maximum visibility to the artisans for access to relevant intervention and connect to a larger data base of raw material suppliers and market players leading to sustainable livelihoods through an app!

The project was executed along with the support of local partner organisations in each of the districts. In Chirang District, of course it was with the help of Aagor; in Kokrajhar District it was our trusted partner, NERSWN; in Baksa we partnered with Gramya Vikas Mancha and in Udalguri District, this was done with a relatively new organisation, ROSS (Rural Organisation for Social Service). Through this project we have mapped a total of 9000 individual artisans, clusters and organisations, which was a revelation as Govt. records had an estimate of approximately 4000 artisans in the defined area. We had some interesting findings too:

- During the research phase of the project, the project team visited ASRLM offices in each respective district. There we learnt that for the past 2-3 years, Assam State Rural Livelihoods Mission has a mandate to encourage individual entrepreneurs as opposed to clusters and SHGs in the districts.
- The SHGs/Cooperatives that do exist have been mapped keeping in mind that they are active and are providing some kind of livelihoods for the artisans through their craft activities.
- We also discovered that there are a lot of individual artisans who mainly supply to the local markets and earn a supplementary income for their family through this activity.



- We found that individuals are acting as entrepreneurs and are also providing livelihoods to other artisans within their capacity.
- The individual artisans are not just supplying to the local markets but through Government initiatives they are actively engaged in exhibitions and are supplying to other surrounding markets also.

The long-term aim of the project is to attempt an app-based aggregator model that can reduce middlemen costs and minimise the time taken for placing or receiving orders and reduce the possibility of wasted opportunities: anyone who has a few days of foreseeable leisure time can accept a small do-able order based on her/his design skill, thus reducing the uncertainty and costs of handlooms, and hence, improving the competitiveness of handlooms vis-à-vis machine products.



**We gratefully acknowledge
utilising funds from the following
grants/donations in 2018-19:**

Anil Kantilal Somaiya, Arpan Foundation, Arun Nahar, Bhagwanidevi Basudev Jhunjhunwala Trust, Chetan Shah, Dr. Deep Arora, Dr. Namrata Shrivallabh Kabra, Dr. Shailaja M. Wagh, H.P. Karia Charities, Hemant Kumar Misri, Ilaben Mody, Jamuna Ramakrishna, Jugnu, Meeta Vadgama, Mohini Kaul, Moumita Deb, Neela D' Souza, Nihit Kaul, Piyush J. Karia, Poonam Kaul, Prachee Joeg, Rajiv Popli, Sai Smruti, Sandeep Kapur, Shubhamangal Credit Capital Pvt. Ltd, Siddhi Trading, Smt. Dhirajben Nandlal Gandadal Charitable Trust, Sumangala Wagh, Surity Brohmo Choudhary, Tohan Tamhane, Vikram Suresh Nerurkar, Weitsicht.

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, Udangsri Dera, Village Rowmari, PO Khagrabari, District Chirang via Bongaigaon, BTAD, Assam 783 380 India. For RTGS / online transfer of donations / endowments by Indian citizens and corporate entities to our Punjab National Bank account number 1201000100106170, please use the IFSC Code of PUNB0120100. We are eligible to receive foreign contributions but foreign citizens (including Indians with foreign citizenship) and foreign organisations may please write to us before donating to us to comply with Government of India procedures.



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GIF – Daffodil Basumatary, Haina Hajwary, Ranjita Basumatary

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