

the ant crosses



The nature of annual reports is cyclical. Their duration is finite yet the production perpetual. Soon, each annual report sounds similar to the previous one. However, this year's annual report is extra special. We have crossed 10 years! Just as most children stop having fun at birthday parties after ten, even at ~~the~~ ant, we rouse and admonish ourselves that the time for experiments, fun and games is over, period. We need to brace ourselves for some serious growing up. An OD (Organisational Development) exercise is readying us for the turbulent but exciting adolescent years ahead.

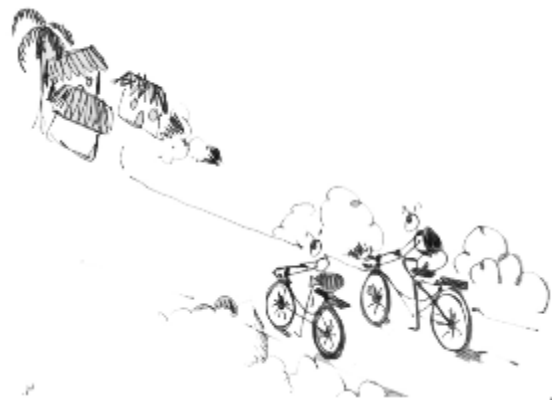
Shall we begin by indulging in nostalgia, and share some fun memories that have shaped **the ant**? We think a strong sense of history should chart our future course.

Birth of **the ant**

When Sunil and Jenny moved to Bongaigaon in 2000, they were amazed to learn that there is an area in Bongaigaon town actually called Paglastan (the place of mad people)! The two had been dubbed crazy by family and friends. An office in Paglastan could not be managed, so B.O.C. Gate was the headquarters of **the ant** for the initial seven years. And over the years, we have tried earnestly to live up to our reputation of being MAD, i.e., Making A Difference!

Of internet and aliens

Year 2000 was early days of internet in Bongaigaon and few people had heard of it. We received serious stares when we carried our sole piece of precious computer – a laptop – to the STD booth to use their line to dial up Guwahati for checking our email. Whispers grew and before long half the town was talking about a strange couple who connected with God-knows-who (perhaps aliens from the outside world!) and exchanged God-knows-what through the phone line! People were deprived of further gossip when we finally got our own phone connection. But it would be some years before we could access email direct from Bongaigaon.



The 'laamreh' party

Our first recruit from the village was Nirila, a rebellious young 19-year old, who now manages our accounts. We were horrified when two weeks later, she turned up for our weekly meeting with a smart 'boy cut'. Inspired by Jenny and Meghali's short hair, she courageously fulfilled a lifetime ambition to chop off her long hair! It was a long time before we could get another girl from the Bodo community to join us. They called us the 'laamreh party' (or the 'short haired ones') and Rani, the second young woman to join us, pleaded to be taken in conditionally, only if allowed to keep her long hair!



Rani – who refused to cut her hair – in front of our first ever office in Khagrabari village where Meghali learnt to cook water!



Clockwise from top left: the complete ant team of five people (including a guest!) at our weekly meeting in 2001; 8 March 2002 – the first ever Mahila Divas celebration in the area; Year 2000 ant's first office – B.O.C. Gate; building our campus – the first bamboo sheds come up in 2004

The art of cooking water

Meghali wanted to 'live' in the village since that is what she had joined **the ant** for. Our first field office was in Khagrabari village seven km (through awfully muddy roads) from the town. An old widow whom everyone called 'aayong' (aunt) relented to rent us a spare room. She kindly walled off a part of the verandah with a bamboo mat to create Meghali's 'bedroom'. This young tenant was an enigma, and a concern to the villagers of Khagrabari. More so to old aayong, under whose nose she lived. She fussed over the young girl's eating properly. Brought up on a diet of Maggi noodles in the hostel of her alma mater TISS (Tata Institute of Social Sciences), cooking a full meal of rice, daal and vegetables daily, was an avoidable chore. Meghali quickly learnt the art of cooking water: a couple of loud whistles of a pressure cooker filled with water were enough to assure aayong that rice had been cooked, leaving Meghali, who now coordinates the Northeast Centre of TISS at Guwahati, free to go back to her biscuits and noodles!

Left to right: the ant's first annual report; malaria handbooks printed in 2001 in English, Bodo and Asomiya.



Our river of life

2000

the ant is registered – Sunil, Jenny and Rabinbhai are the founder trustees. The information collection takes off.

2004

Flood of work and initiatives: support from Ford Foundation; Design Support Centre comes up; also create Udangshree Dera – campus of *the ant*; in-house weaving started through resident rehabilitation of domestic workers.

2002

Weaving programme launched with our own money of ₹ one lakh; we train the first ten 'village pharmacists'.

2006

Set up community blood testing labs, especially for Malaria; commence work among conflict-induced Internally Displaced People near the Indo-Bhutan border.

2008

Inception of Community monitoring of NRHM.

2001

Make forays into the field; collect data; more ants join; work in the village begins; conduct training programmes of health workers in Manipur, which sustain our field work

2003

the ant gets its first grant of ₹ 1.36 lakhs – from National Foundation for India (NFI); our newsletter called *Agan Se* brought out; also fight to get our FCRA registration; recruit 'barefoot' doctors – supported by Sir Ratan Tata Trust.

2005

Weavers Collective registered separately as Aagor Daagra Afad; weaving work branches out from *the ant*; Rights Based Approach adopted at annual meeting.

2007

Embark on mental health programme; *the ant* office moves to its campus in Rowmari; *the ant* store opens in Bangalore with an interest-free loan from Millepede Foundation, and NABARD; *the ant's* training for NGOs formalised as a new initiative called Institute of Development Action (IDeA), with monetary support from NFI and Sir Dorabji Tata Trust.

2009

Initiate Agriculture and SRI work. The Ants Craft Trust (TACT) registered at Bangalore.

2010

10th year Celebration on 9th October 2010; Gramin Vikas Samiti registered to separate the micro finance work. OD process of *the ant* starts off.



**Why
an ant?**

- Hardworking, or busy all the time
- Small yet efficient
- Lifts fifty to eighty times its body weight
- Each ant has a specialised role in the community of an ant colony
- Does not give up . . . finds a way!
- If one ant fails . . . others continue
- Dinosaurs and giants disappeared . . . ants are still going strong!
- In crossword clues, the word social worker is the synonym of an ant.

Our current work graph

Aagor –
the weaving
organization

TACT

(The Ant Craft Trust) –
an association to promote
craft, and build a positive
image of the Northeast
in Bangalore

GVS

(Gramin Vikas Samiti) –
Lending support to
micro-enterprises in
villages

IDeA

(The Institute of Development Action) –
the NGO training institute; programmes to
build up capacity of NGOs and strengthen
the voluntary sector in the northeast

the ant –
village development work;
intensive work in 150 village hamlets
in Chirang District

OD Exercise – the next 10 years of the ant



Just as an individual encounters hurdles, many ups and downs, peaks and crises in a lifetime, so does an institution. Moments of intense clarity are often closely followed by troublesome self doubt and confusion. As **the ant** crossed ten years of its existence, it seemed appropriate to undergo an exercise of intensive reflection and planning. A self-examination of the past to plan for the future. We launched an Organizational Development (OD) drill in November 2010. Our OD consultant Gagan (now a good friend too) has been working with the trustees, staff and management to contemplate the change we want and the systems we need to evolve. It has been uplifting to see our Board of Trustees take charge and share responsibilities. An expanded and active Board sure feels good.

We are optimistic that this course will strengthen us. Greater accountability to our donors and funders, to the people we work for, and to the vision, work and values we cherish, is our set goal. The next year is certain to be one of sweeping changes within **the ant**. All here are charged up yet apprehensive. With your support and goodwill, we will arrive, soon!

Village Development Work

the ant's field team reaches out to some 194 village hamlets across 16 VDCs (akin to Gaon Panchyats) in Chirang District. Intensive and regular work gets done in around 150 villages.



a. Engaging children

Our children's programme grows stronger by the year. In three of our four clusters (barring Deosri), we have formed children's groups in 38 villages, involving over 800 children. Regular activities are conducted through the groups. In this year alone, the children's groups took part in 204 activities! Some were facilitated by the ant's village organizers, but several activities were carried out by the children themselves – after receiving training, and according to a plan they had developed. These activities include regular art and craft activities, games and sports, drama, storytelling etc. The best testimony of our work with children comes from the appreciation of some of the teachers in the nearby government primary schools. They feel that the ant engaged with children while the government was indifferent. Apart from taking the lead in programmes

Our village development work

1. **Engaging children** – Children's groups; development opportunities for children; education rights of poor
2. **Mobilizing women** – Women's groups; action against Domestic Violence; Women's cycle bank, promoting micro enterprises; promoting solar lights
3. **Ensuring food security among farmers** – Organic agriculture; animal husbandry; entrepreneurship development
4. **Aiming for health** – Community monitoring of NRHM; mental health programme
5. **Promoting peace among Internally Displaced People (IDP) and Forest Dwellers** – Improving food security; promoting peace among communities

Clockwise from top left: Children inaugurating their activity centre in Nowapara village; Children's Day celebrations; children's groups of Koila Moila



such as Cartooning Workshops, Captain's Trainings, etc., they have won appreciation for the celebration of events such as Environment Day, Teacher's Day, and Children's Day. These, they feel, have helped enhance the innate creativity and leadership qualities of the children. Supported by DKA, Austria the children's programme aims to secure the rights of children – to survival, to development, to participation, etc. Tarzen Narzary, a Class 10 student of Goybari village of Patabari (an area in the foothills of Bhutan which is cut off by river on all sides) announced that ~~the ant~~'s work with children has given his playmates encouragement, and made them realise the need for education. He proudly says, "Now the boys of our village have stopped skipping school and hunting for birds."

Right to (What) Education?

This year, a major step taken has been to address the poor quality of education. In some government schools in the interior villages, the appointed school teacher comes just five to six times a year. Rest of the time, the community hires a local person to teach, many a times paying her salary by selling the rice meant for the School Mid Day Meal scheme! Buoyed by the new Right to Education Act, we have activated the largely defunct School Management Committees. While those who can afford to invest in education admit their children to private schools, it is left to the poor to helplessly watch the rubbish that is dished out to their kids in the name of education through government schools. In the next few years, we intend to focus on organizing children and the community to improve the quality of government school education.



Clockwise from top left: A child admires the activities; teaching school children the importance of washing their hands; children's groups make protection for saplings planted on World Environment Day on 5 June 2010; children of Rowmari learn cartooning skills; skill-building training of children; children learning while playing.

THE RAINBOWS TAKE CHARGE

The children of New Lawkriguri Village of Patabari were fed up. Their teacher would visit school three-four times a year, and there was no proper school. After we formed the Jaikhlone (meaning a rainbow), a children's group in their village, they became aware of their rights, including the right to education. They pressed their parents to take up the issue with the School Management Committee (SMC). The SMC took the matter seriously and complained to the Block Elementary Education Board. The teacher was found guilty and his service terminated. A new teacher has been appointed and to the delight of the parents and Jaikhlone children of Lawkriguri Village, classes are now regular.

Activities galore

When we work with children, can fun-filled learning opportunities be far behind? This year too has seen a frenzy of activities. Four summer camps in the July holidays of 2010 in which over 500 children took part for a week, Environment Day Celebrations, Children's Day Melas, Teacher's Day Celebrations to warm the hearts of teachers, health awareness activities, tree plantations and protection, etc. Not content with this much on their plates, for two years in a row our village children hosted 16 children and facilitators from Delhi, in their homes and villages. We continue to partner with the Children's Resource Centre of Nehru Memorial Museum & Library (NMML). It has helped strengthen the skills and confidence of **the ant**'s team which works with children, besides providing fabulous opportunities of learning to children from the otherwise remote villages of the northeast. In the coming months, we hope to take yet another group of our children to Delhi with support from NMML. For most children who have never seen a train or set foot outside their village, this should be excitement enough to last them a lifetime.

b. Mobilizing women

Our biggest achievement this year has been the strides taken by our nascent women's federations, especially in the Rowmari and Koila Moila clusters. In under two years, the federations' performance far exceeded our expectation. Though a long way from truly championing women's rights on their own, their enthusiasm and willingness to shoulder responsibilities is inspiring. While the task of promoting self-help groups still lies with **the ant**, the federations are coming into their own in other matters. The most active period for the federation is still during the Mahila Divas (Women's Day) celebrations.

For the third consecutive year, women in all the four clusters took the responsibility of organizing the Women's Day. Once a year, the community gets to experience the collective strength and voice of the women we work with. This year saw over 1500 women taking part in the celebrations across the four clusters. While the show of strength highlights the concerns of women in the public domain, the lessons learnt in organizing this event are also unparalleled. The confidence of the field teams has grown tremendously with each successful Mahila Divas celebration. Especially thrilling is to see an astounding leap in the growth of confidence and skills of the federation members! Skills like decision-making, careful planning, budgeting and coordination are slowly getting ingrained. This year the four clusters were able to mobilize ₹76,000 from the community in cash and in kind for the celebrations. Rice, vegetables,



Rowmari Federation meeting

firewood, bamboo and cash donations were collected from Self-Help Group members, from non-members in the village, shopkeepers and community leaders. Every cluster was able to meet the expenses from the contributions itself and did not have to dip into the reserve they had saved from last year. Now, most of the clusters have enough skills – and in some clusters enough money – to organize celebrations next year, without the ant's contribution.

It is a challenge for us now to take the women's federations to the next level of growth: take on issues of injustice, and become change agents in their communities. Illiteracy severely hinders many vocal and strong women from taking on active leadership roles. This will be addressed shortly. Also on the anvil is a paralegal programme with a supportive legal cell, to tackle domestic violence and other cases. These initiatives will give wings to our women's federations to surge ahead. Raising resources for our women's programme last year was tough; we hope this challenge will be met efficiently in the near future.

Women at play

One and half year old Janglari Jagruti Group is the kind of self-help group that we ardently wish all our women's groups to be like! Regular in holding meetings, good at savings and loans, carrying out income generating activities, taking up and solving issues of domestic violence, divorce, corruption etc. But in September 2010, the group did something which stumped us (and perhaps even surprised themselves in the bargain!).

THEY DECIDED TO ORGANIZE A KABBADI TOURNAMENT! Not just an ordinary tournament but a kabbadi tournament for married women! This was done to 'celebrate the spirit of womanhood', i.e., even married women have the right to display their talents, sporting skills and have fun in the bargain too! Their spirit was contagious. In no time at all, all our other women's groups in the area bought into the idea and started taking up responsibilities. They planned the event, raised the money and put up handwritten posters and notices to publicize the tournament. Men of not just their own village of Khunguri but of the other surrounding villages went into shock! They could not imagine their wives and women participating in a public tournament. The shame of it! Husbands stopped talking to their wives, the village committees put their foot down and everywhere one could see men trying to convince the women to have better sense. But the more the men resisted, the more the women grew adamant. No matter what, they went ahead with the tournament.

And what a successful tournament it was! 16 teams came from far and near to take part (we did not even know that so many women could play kabbadi!). A crowd of 300-500 were present every single day of the week long tournament. The men slowly thawed and even volunteered as referees in some of the matches. The icing on the cake — over 1200-1500 people, both men and women gathered to watch and thoroughly enjoyed the final of the women's kabbadi.



Left: A women's Kabbadi match, organized by the women of Koila Moila cluster; on the right, the crowd enjoys the finals

The women's cycle bank

The process of decentralizing the Jagruti's cycle bank was further deepened. There are now three chapters which lend cycles to women on easy monthly instalments. Two are running well while the Mongolian chapter does not appear strong enough to sustain. Run by self-help groups and monitored by the federation, two of the chapters are now independent of **the ant**. From an investment of ₹ one lakh and 40 cycles, till date 370 cycles have been leased with the revolving money, in all the chapters. New cycles are added monthly. It is pleasing to know that the idea has been adopted by other agencies and NGOs too. We contemplate expanding the programme by offering cycles to girls studying in middle and high school. When schools are far, distance becomes a reason for dropping out of school. But the cycle bank remains a joy for us. The nervous triumph writ on the faces of women when finally cycle-borne, defies description. And, when they cycle to places on work, our hearts swell with pride.



Learning cycling for mobility

c. Enhancing food security among farmers

Agriculture has always been a gamble for farmers in India. But for small farmers, the situation is critical. Climate change, high costs of pesticides and fertilizers, poor quality seeds, no credit facilities, etc., have made farming unviable for them. Only 5% of farmers in Dhahalapara village (next to our campus in Rowmari) still farm on their own lands. The rest leaves land fallow or gives it for share cropping, preferring instead to work as labourers or petty traders in the nearby Bongaigaon town. We have been striving to stem the tide, and make farming viable and sustainable. Last year we had four Farmers' Resource Centres (FRCs) working in Rowmari, Koila Moila, Shantipur and Mongolian clusters. Till date, we have trained over 1500 farmers in 80 training programmes on various topics such as SRI paddy cultivation, plant diseases, weeds and Integrated Pest Management, potato cultivation, vermi-compost, mushroom cultivation, goatery, piggery, and dairy. With **the ant**'s support 170 farmers carried out SRI paddy cultivation this year and almost doubled their yield. Others would have followed suit but untimely rains destroyed the nursery. Energizing agriculture is a daunting task in the absence of irrigation

POOR FARMER TURNS CHAMPION

Soliha Borgoyary of Nandorbari, with seven bighas (almost one hectare) of cultivable land, became a member of our Mongolian Farmer's Resource Centre (FRC) two years ago. He learnt and implemented the System of Rice Intensification (SRI) method of paddy cultivation along with other farmers. Although declared mad, he went ahead and experimented with this novel and strange method of paddy planting. Compared to his other land, where he got just around 12 – 14 maunds a bigha, i.e., around 500 kg, using the SRI method and high yielding certified seeds, he reaped 22 maunds, i.e., 880 kg a bigha. Encouraged by the success, the following year he planted paddy using hybrid seeds and the SRI method in



the entire land. Some other farmers copied him. Soliha got 37 maunds of paddy to a bigha, or around 120 maunds, i.e., 4800 kg of paddy per acre of land! Duly impressed, the district administration awarded him the District Level first prize for the highest yielding paddy.

Soliha feels the training provided by the FRC, especially for SRI, is precious for farmers like him. He also appreciates the idea of the FRC lending out farming tools and equipment to poor and marginal farmers who would otherwise be unable to farm. Today, Soliha sees a lot of visitors – now eager to learn from the champion!

facilities. Farmers are wholly dependent on the rains. The SRI method of paddy cultivation delivers high yields but hinges on a timed process. A delay in any one of the process-links, can derail it. Though the FRCs hire out small diesel pump-sets to small farmers to get water to their fields, this additional effort alone will guarantee a supply of irrigation facilities.

Presently, 350 associated farmers have switched to farming without chemical fertilisers and pesticides. The focus now is the marketing of their produce. With support from the Ford Foundation, a small shop has been opened near the national highway in Bongaigaon, to sell pesticide-free food. The government department's cooperation and support has given a fillip to our agricultural work. In two years time, we hope to have at least 1500 farmers carrying out SRI paddy cultivation, and in five years, convert 100 villages from chemical to organic farming!

d. A commitment to health

i. Community monitoring of NRHM

Before the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) was introduced in 2006, the government health services in our area were dismal. People had virtually no access to medicines or health care. We were among the first in the region to train health workers to tackle several illnesses, with

a revolving kit of medicines. By reaching out to the remotest villages bordering Bhutan, where health care was unheard of, we took a small step. Similarly, by 2006, we began operating Community Blood Testing Labs to detect and treat malaria long before NRHM and the Health Department initiated such facilities in government dispensaries. Since the health centres have begun to function, to obviate duplication, we now supplement the government's effort. With support from the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, our health team works with 60 Village Health and Sanitation Committees (VHSCs) to facilitate community monitoring. We train the VHSCs, help them carry out health facility checks, prepare report cards, and then present it in Public Dialogues, where officials from the NRHM and health department are present. We also support the village level ASHAs to deliver efficiently, besides helping them to understand and claim their entitlements. Such intervention has resulted in considerable improvement at many health centres.

ii. Budget monitoring of NRHM

In another 12 VHSCs we proposed 'budget monitoring', teaching the community to watch how funds for health are utilized. We are partners of CHSJ (Centre for Health and Social Justice), New Delhi in this pilot project. Apart from the usual facility-monitoring activities, **the ant** team working on this project is capable of drawing up Village Health Maps, carrying out disease listing with the villagers and creating awareness campaigns.



Presenting a report card during a public dialogue (Jan Samvaad) on health at Koila Moila

AFTER MONITORING

17,000 people in 22 villages are served by the government-run Makra Patkiguri Mini PHC. We had prior engagement with the area in a pilot of the Community Monitoring Project. Seeing their enthusiasm for change, we enlisted these villages in the Budget Monitoring Project. As in all government PHCs in our area, minimal facilities existed here before we moved in. But regular monitoring and incessant pressure, not just from the community but also from the doctors and staff of the MPHC, resulted in unbelievable improvement. At the beginning of 2011 we saw an 80% increase in the facilities provided. The MO (Medical Officer) of the PHC proudly says that his hospital stands first under the Ballamguri PHC, as 75% of the population in their coverage area comes to the government hospital for treatment. Not just that, 20-25% of patients is from outside their coverage area. And 70% of the patients reported being happy with the services provided. This says a lot about a government hospital, where the opposite is normal. The MO credits this to the continuous effort of **the ant**, and the community.

iii. Mental Health Programme

Mid-2007 saw the launch of our mental health programme. Quite erroneously, we assumed that within two to three years we would convince the government to begin treating the mentally ill patients who visit our treatment camps, and benefitted too. We firmly believed that it would wake up to the need for these services, and predictably step in! Outrage consumes us. Patients continue to throng our monthly camps but the government is yet to get its act together. If in March 2009 we had 150 patients attending the camp, by March 2010, 260 sought medical intervention, including 35 new patients. Thanks to the hard work of our team, low cost generic drugs, and an understanding funder in Paul Hamlyn Foundation, we cater up to 260 patients in a monthly budget meant for 125! We have resolved to maintain this service despite all odds, as such patients and their families are helpless without medical aid. Till we succeed in badgering the government to institute mental health services, this programme will require commitment for quite many years. Last year alone, 1185 cases were handled, and till date 5041 cases, i.e., total patient load since June 2007. We estimate that 300-350 patients have profitably resumed normal life after treatment. Beholding a 'raving mad' person recover and work stably, is an achievement which motivates us to maintain this crucial service.



Top: Raising awareness on mental illnesses and helping remove stigma; bottom left: mental patients getting treatment at our mental camp; bottom right: checking medicines at a mental health camp, May 2009

FROM JUNGLE TO THE FARM

Always a loner, Horen Basumatry of Hasraobari village was disinclined to interact with anyone. Staying indoors worsened his condition. The family had to run away and stay in someone else's house for a year when he became violent and bit his wife and others! Unmanageable Horen was sent away to the Mental Hospital in Tezpur. Diagnosed with Chronic Schizophrenia, he had to suffer a cycle of admissions and discharges. He would be admitted to the Mental Hospital, respond to treatment and subsequently discharged. As the medicines stopped – the family could not afford prolonged medication – Horen's downslide necessitated rehospitallisation. A time came when he would retire to the jungle, stay without clothes, forage in garbage for food, and hit, beat and bite people in the streets.

Someone from his village heard of the ant's mental camps and brought him to us. That was two and a half years ago. Seeing a dramatic improvement in him within a month of medication, the family has kept up the treatment. They watch in disbelief as Horen helps around the house, and attends to the fieldwork.

e. Organizing IDPs and Forest Dwellers

The Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) of Deosri, and the poorest families living in forest areas, deserve attention. Their food security and access to basic needs – food, shelter, education, water and land, have been an abiding concern. Caring Friends, based in Mumbai, has been supportive of our work in the Deosri area. Of all the areas we work in, our work in Deosri is by far the most complicated. We tread a fine line between promoting rights of the displaced and marginalized people, and be accused by the authorities of helping illegal encroachers live in the forests and thus encourage the destruction of forests! Add to this, negotiating sensitive relationships between various communities living there together. One of the most gratifying results of our work in Deosri is in getting communities once in a conflict to work together. Being inclusive has now become the trademark of our work and it is a boost to see Bodos, Santhalis, Nepalis and Rajbongshis on the same committees, and willing to work together. The thrust of the work here is to create spaces of safe interaction for the various communities. So, whether it is celebrating Children's Day or Mahila Divas, a rally against domestic violence or protesting NREGA corruption, we urge working together.

RELIEF TO VICTIMS OF ETHNIC VIOLENCE

When ethnic riots broke out among Rabhas and Garos in neighbouring Goalpara District this year in January 2011, a message for urgent help was sent to us. 20,000 people had been displaced from their homes to live in temporary camps. Women and children were taking ill in the severe January cold and needed warm clothing urgently. Caring Friends from Mumbai responded with lightening speed. In less than 36 hours of the distress call, 5000 warm blouses and 3000 new sweaters for children were delivered promptly. Later, a truck full of clothes, mattresses, and blankets was gifted by Goonj, also a partner of Caring Friends. Through smiling faces, the women and children sent a thousand blessings to our friends – far away, but caring enough to respond instantly.



THE PUBLIC HEARING (JAN SUNVAI) ON RURAL EMPLOYMENT GUARANTEE SCHEME

With all data now available on the government's own rural employment guarantee (MGNREGA) website, it is easy to figure out if money has rightfully gone to the people claimed to have benefited. All hell broke loose when at people's request we downloaded information from the government website and furnished it to some of the 'beneficiaries' of the employment scheme. People who did not even possess a bank account realized that they had been 'paid' through the bank — and the money withdrawn too — for work which they knew they had not done! Ten-year old school-going children were listed as having worked and received payment! In one household, a member bearing two names — one official and one personal — was shown to have worked, in both avatars, on the same day, and received two separate wages! Babies dead so long ago that their families could not even remember them were also put down as workers who had accepted payment! The outcry was spontaneous. People demanded accountability.

We knew that a backlash would be unpleasant but then a stand had to be taken. After conferring with the community leaders, we decided to organize a public hearing or jan sunvai. The entire duration saw real tension not for us alone but for all those who dared to stick their necks out. There were threats, warnings and intimidation. But the committee formed for this task did not pull out. On 4th September 2010, the jan sunvai was convened. Braving threats to keep away, many turned up. Thirty-nine people — who we could check and verify that fraud had taken place — testified before the government officials, and had their testimonies recorded. The government later conducted its own enquiry. We are yet to be furnished with a report on action taken in the matter, and are contemplating further action. In retaliation, the motorcycle of one of **the ant** members returning from the jan sunvai, was burnt. But all in all, it was a small price to pay for the awareness created against corruption.

the ant celebrates its 10th Anniversary

On 9th October 2010, for the first time in the history of **the ant**, we held a public function to highlight our work. The Governor of Meghalaya, Shri Ranjit Shekhar Mooshahary, was the Guest of Honour. We thank the people of Rowmary and other areas for volunteering for the event. The celebrations also involved an exhibition on development by other NGOs, government departments and local institutions, besides a cultural show in the evening and a get-together with friends in Guwahati.



*Top left to right: The Governor of Meghalaya H.S. Shri Ranjit Shekhar Mooshahary releases our 10th year memento; Meghali, the first **ant** who joined Jenny and Sunil in 2000 cuts the birthday cake, Guwahati; a local youth band promoted by **the ant** sings at our 10-year celebrations. Bottom left to right: Celebrating with friends of **the ant** in Guwahati; an exhibition of development options for rural areas held at the event. **the ant** birthday card.*

Organizing the weavers

Started as a weaving programme of **the ant** in 2002, aagor daagra afad (called aagor) was registered in 2005 as a separate entity with its own management and funds but still organically linked and promoted by **the ant**. In 2009-2010, aagor gave work to 350 weavers across 15 villages, though this was not through the entire year but based on the quantum of orders. Of these, 120 weavers in the villages were given work regularly. In addition to the weavers in the villages, aagor also gave work to 30 weavers at the in-house

Year	Total Wages (₹)
2005-06	731,577
2006-07	1,332,148
2007-08	2,026,669
2008-09	1,563,175
2009-10	2,079,101
2010-11	1,828,965
Total	9,561,635

centre. This is the 17th batch of domestic workers being given work since 2004. A total of 313 domestic workers have been through this programme, and around 70% of them have not gone back to working in people's homes.

Aagor sold ₹ 75 lakhs worth of goods last year and distributed wages of ₹ 18.5 lakhs. The ever increasing cost of cotton and a small market monopolized by a single big buyer, is a huge challenge to meet. Aagor is going through a rough patch, as it has faced a loss for the second year running. Delays in payments from buyers, the steep rise in the prices of cotton, and some management challenges, all these are behind the losses. We hope to surmount these problems soon.



Top: Women earn their way to freedom from living as domestic workers; bottom: spinning at aagor to earn their living at the centre; right: the tedious job of feeding the reed from the warp.

Organizing capacities of the voluntary sector

Even as ~~the~~ **ant** works directly in villages, it believes that for the fruit of development to be tasted at large, the voluntary sector must intensify the stir to effect larger social change. Hence, we are a part of various state and national level campaigns on different issues, networking in order to advocate for better laws and implementation of government schemes. We have founded an institute called IDeA (the Institute of Development Action) which runs short training courses to shore up the capacity of NGOs in the northeast region. Ever since we started IDeA in 2007, we have trained 1888 people from different NGOs all over the Northeast. In our IDeA Training Centre at Rowmari, we have run 64 courses hosting people from Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Nagaland and Tripura for short courses on NGO management, Rights Based Approach, proposal development, documentation, training skills, etc. This year, we have embarked on a long term hand-holding course for NGOs termed COACH (Capacity Organising for Action in Community

Health). Seven NGOs with two members each were taken through a process of organizational improvement and were evaluated at the end to observe if their systems are suitable for inviting funds from funding agencies. Besides this, the IDeA faculty members also double as resource persons to train the staff of other NGOs, and regularly teach at various institutes and training centres across the Northeast. We also hold contact classes in Bongaigaon College for the IGNOU students pursuing social work (BSW and MSW) through the Open University. MSW (M.A. in Social Work) students from colleges across India regularly visit IDeA for their field training. Presently, IDeA is being supported by the Sir Dorabji Tata Trust.

Lately, IDeA completed a study on the implementation of the Supreme Court's orders on the Right to Food, and released the report in Guwahati. The report, besides being sent to the Commissioners of the Supreme Court, was also sent to various departments of the Government of Assam.

This year, we have also collaborated with a Jaipur-based NGO, CUTS International to carry out a study probing Collusive Behaviour of Health Care Personnel. The full form field work has just been concluded and preliminary findings clearly suggest collusion of health care professionals with the pharmaceutical companies.



Top: IDeA team finalising its Long Course COACH-1 training module; bottom: IDeA training for NGO workers.

Crafting traditions

The most ambitious initiative of **the ant**, TACT (The Ants Craft Trust) was registered recently in 2009. But it began three years ago (in December 2007) as a Store to showcase high-quality northeast craft and weaves in Bangalore. We took a huge loan to exhibit handicrafts and weaves from the northeast, find a market for these, and to sensitize the 'mainstream' to issues of the region. A small café within the Store subsidizes the rent. Though we have recently commenced repaying our loans, managing resources for the growth is still a hurdle. The sky-high rent of the store soaks whatever little profit is made. We had sales of ₹ 1.25 crores in this financial year, inclusive of wholesale. Retail (for which the store was opened) is our weakest segment still and increasing it is a distinct goal. The Store has taken a bank loan but it needs an infusion of ₹ 40 lakhs for incremental growth. Although we are breaking even, we need to garner healthier profits and expand our business to ease loan repayment obligations.

Smitha and Pradeep, the designer couple who worked with us here in Assam earlier, have been blessed with a daughter. They continue to lead the team well. Last year, when one of our staff lost some money on the way to the bank, the entire staff decided to make up for the lost money from their pockets rather than allow it to affect the Store's finances, keeping the NGO character of the Store alive!

Northeastising Bangalore

Not confined to selling crafts and weaves of the region, in January 2010 a project to 'northeastise the mainstream' took off. With a small grant from a newly established Guwahati based funding agency called Foundation For Social Transformation (FST), we took a hesitant step. Using the Store as a base, we held small events such as food festivals of various tribes, musical evenings, book readings, documentary film screenings, and discussions on various northeast states. Out of these, 20 were in-house programmes which 600 people attended. These included four screenings of films on northeast, five talks and discussions on different states of northeast India, four book readings, four food festivals, one theatre performance based on the northeast theme and two music events. This has helped the people of Bangalore understand and empathize with northeast issues. In just one year we organized 25 events — and reached out to about 1000 socially conscious people. The express objective is to effect a holistic change in people's minds and hearts about the northeast.



*Left: A book reading by author Anjum Hassan in **the ant**'s café in Bangalore; right: Naga Food Festival at **the ant**'s Store.*

Organising and building small enterprises

It started as an initiative of **the ant** to promote micro-enterprises in our village areas. Gramin Vikas Samiti today, is registered as a separate entity. Apart from encouraging savings, it imparts training and disburses small loans to start and run successful micro-businesses such as poultry, piggery, vegetable vending, agriculture and animal husbandry. We have given loans of ₹17,48,000 at 2%



Promoting Dhoop Kati, incense stick slicing, as an income generating activity

monthly interest (earlier 1%) to support 145 individual businesses (disbursed 302 loans — some took big loans, after returning previous ones). We also supported loans to 40 women's groups. Fresh applicants are given loans from the amount recovered. Loan management committees at the cluster level oversee the management now. As a separate registered organization we hope that the Gramin Vikas Samiti will blossom into a self sustaining independent entity in the near future.

Our heartfelt thanks

THANKS TO ALL OF YOU who donated to us this financial year. Despite the odds, knowing you are behind us, helps us move forward:

- A.B. Paul, Asha Kaul, Asha Raheja, Chand Kapoor, Deep Arora, Edelgive Foundation, Gloria Mak, Jamuna Ramakrishna, Jayashri Ramakrishna, Liang Family, Jugnu Jain, Juliet Chow, Manoj Shah, Nancy Huang, Neela D'Souza, Nihit Kaul, Nimesh Shah, Prasanna and Prachee Joeg, R.P. Kalsi, Rajeev Singh, Rajiv Popli, Raj Kumar Agarwal, Rakesh Aggarwal, Sandip Mathur, Shubha Mangal Credit Capital, Shyam and Ratna Ashtekar, Shyamala Raman, Sunil Tewari, Sunita Chauhan, Uma Rani J.

OUR FUNDERS (April 2010-March 2011)

Thank you so much for supporting our work. We value your trust in us.

- Arpan Foundation, USA; Caring Friends, Mumbai; DKA,

Austria; Ford Foundation, New Delhi; FST, Guwahati; Paul Hamlyn Foundation, UK; SDTT, Mumbai.

SPECIAL THANKS TO GENDER AT WORK for partnering in the Action Learning process with **the ant**. We have grown and learnt and in the process, developed a dynamic gender policy to empower women in our organization sail in the years to come.

MANY THANKS TO **the ant's BOARD OF TRUSTEES** for being rock solid behind us:

- Debojit Brahma, Enakshi Dutta, Jyoti Basumatary, Jennifer Liang, Madhavan V.K., Mahfuza Rahman, Mukul Goswami, Sunil Kaul.

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HIGHLIGHTS SINCE 2000

INCOME GENERATION

1. the ant's weaving programme and Aagor Daagra Afad have distributed wages worth almost ₹ 1 crore since 2002-03 only through weaving. Salaries of local staff and other income generation activities are separate.
2. Distributes ₹ 20 to 25 lakh wages every year – mainly within 3 VDC areas – since last 3 years to weavers of the region. Another ₹ 4 lakh goes as local salaries every year.
3. Other entrepreneurial activities supported by loans and training worth 10 lakh per year in the area.
4. Currently has ₹ 1 crore of loans from Banks and other organisations to help women get wages for helping their children's education, health and for their empowerment.
5. Aagor Daagra Afad and Laimwn Jagruti Group's products are sold as far as USA and Europe!
6. Aagor Daagra Afad and Laimwn Jagruti Group run by local women almost entirely from management to supervision.
7. Amongst worldwide Fair Trade groups – groups getting a certificate that certifies that the organisation pays fair wages to its producers – circles and related handloom markets, now the beauty of Bodo weaves is well known.
8. FILING SALES TAX AND INCOME TAX regularly.
9. NEVER PAID A SINGLE PAISA AS BRIBE.

HEALTH

10. One of the first agencies in the northeast to develop the Community Health Worker and Barefoot Doctor model. Its manual and personnel helped in formulating the Mitamin concept in Chhatisgarh which ultimately became the ASHA model for the country.
11. Community Laboratory model attracted WHO and National Institute of Malaria Research to come over and see the model for themselves of how just a one month training of microscopists could get 95% correct results!
12. Part of ASHA Mentoring Committee of NRHM, Govt of Assam.
13. Invited as Observer and Commentator for the Plans & Budgets 2010-11 Presentation for Health for all eight northeastern states.
14. Invited by GOI for Pilot Scheme for Community Monitoring Scheme of NRHM in Assam in 2008-09.
15. Visit of Chief Financial Officer & World Bank to meet staff of the ant to understand field implementation of NRHM and people's requirements.
16. Has treated more than 500 mental patients since 2008.

WOMEN RELATED

17. A self-sustaining Cycle Bank that allows women to buy

ladies cycles at low EMIs and helps to improve their mobility and confidence. Concept now being replicated widely and qualified as finalist for the Edelgive Social Innovation Award in 2009.

FOOD SCHEMES

18. Sunil works as advisor to Supreme Court's Commissioners on Right to Food Schemes of Mid Day Meal, ICDS (Anganwadi), PDS (Ration), Old Age Pension, NREGA, etc.
19. Conducted survey of 3 districts of Assam in 2010 regarding all Schemes connected with Right to Food on behalf of the Supreme Court's Commissioners on RTE.
20. Convenor of 2 Joint Commissions of Enquiry enquiring into lapses in Right to Food schemes in Assam.
21. Member of Joint Review Mission on Mid Day Meal Scheme in 2010.
22. Founder member of the People's Rights Forum in Assam.
23. One of the first to start awareness and training of RTI in BTC areas.

NATIONAL CONSULTATION

24. Planning Commission invitation for improving health in India and to improve NRHM.
25. Planning Commission invitation for improving Handloom & Handicrafts sector in India in 2009.
26. GOI invitation by Union Health Ministry for Review on ASHA.

MEDIA

27. Cover of 'Outlook' for its grassroots health work 2005.
28. In 'India Today', one of top 50 in social work in the country in 2008.
29. In 'Outlook Business', one of top 50 social businesses in the country.
30. Bangalore Store very often gets covered in print and electronic media, and its café has got a few awards too!

GENERAL

31. Sunil appointed as State Representative by the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights.
32. Never taken any money from Government of Assam or the Territorial Council.
33. Indirectly taken grants from Central Govt through other NGOs only worth ₹ 7 lakhs in 10 years.

In the last ten years, we are proud that our work has been supported by grants from some of the best Indian and foreign funding agencies like National Foundation for India, Ford Foundation, Sir Dorabji Tata Trust, ActionAid, Sir Ratan Tata Trust, DKA Austria, British High Commission, and Caring Friends.

Donations made to the ant are exempt from Income Tax under Section 80G of the IT Act. Cheque / DD payable to the ant at Bongaigaon may be sent to the ant, **Udangshree Dera, Village Rowmari, PO Khagrabari, District Chirang via Bongaigaon, BTAD 783 380, Assam, India.** Phones: +91 3554 293802/03. Email: contact@theant.org Web: www.theant.org.

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