

News from an Assam ant Hill

the ant's newsletter (January – March 2013)



Even before we know it, a quarter of this year has gone! The ethnic violence of July- August 2012 affected not just the villages and communities we work with, but also left us at **the ant** battered and bruised in mind and spirit. But we are happy to share that we are recovering. From the action-packed positive changes and happenings in **the ant** in this new year is anything to go by, we look forward to the rest of the year with excitement and renewed hope.

New Happenings

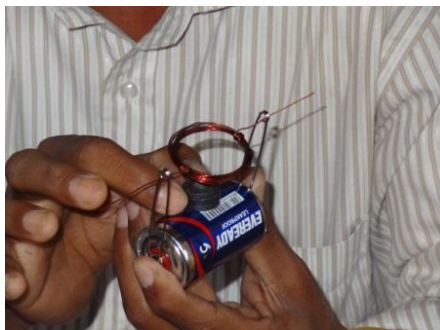
a. Inauguration of Our Multi-Purpose Centre



The ground floor of our Multipurpose Centre was finally inaugurated on 16th February 2013. It is already being used extensively – we inaugurated it with a seminar for Lower Assam NGOs on “Conflict in Lower Assam - Role of NGOs”. In a month since its inauguration, the building has already seen many trainings and meetings. We brought back the Mental Camp to our campus because we now have a place to seat the over 300-400 patients and their relatives while they wait for the doctor to see them. The wheel-chair accessible hall, room and toilet is being highly appreciated and we got our first wheel-chair guest to test out and give us feedback! Thank you CF and all our other donors for making this possible. With hope in our hearts and sheer optimism, we have started construction of the first floor which will house 2 dormitories, a library and other facilities.

b. Science-on-Wheels

We are really excited about a new programme we are starting to demystify maths and science for our village children. The programme will make maths fun for primary school kids and introduce “Science by Doing” to middle school children in government schools. We have bought a van which will serve as a science van for the kids. We have tied up with Navnirmiti, Pune (thanks to CF for having the Annual Meet there as it helped me meet them!) and they have just completed a 4 day training of our staff, youth volunteers and some government school teachers. We are ready and keen to start the programme and will appreciate any advice and help from those more experienced in making maths and science fun for kids.



The 4 day long training on maths and science in our campus in Rowmari. Navnirmiti, Pune were our resource persons and they even did a very exciting day long “Day Time Astronomy” Workshop with us!

c. Water Harvesting Work

Most of our farmers are solely dependent on rain water for farming. With climate change turning the weather unpredictable, this is fast turning into a crisis. Water table has fallen, thus drying up our streams, wells and ponds and endangering drinking water itself. Our challenge is to capture the over 3000 mm of rain water that we get every year. Thanks to our Caring Friends partner Dilasa (Yavatmal, Maharashtra), we are starting to work in this

area of water harvesting. Recently, 10 of our people – both staff and also community volunteers – spent 20 days training with Dilasa. We are grateful to them for sharing their technical expertise. We have started some initial survey work in one pilot site and look forward to having Mansur bhai and Amol from Dilasa with us here in Assam in the first week of April to help us take the work forward. We are thankful to the Ford Foundation for supporting our work with farmers and even that comes to an end, we hope to start a new chapter of helping farmers with critical work on water harvesting.



d. Women's Empowerment
The way our federations are growing is really encouraging. What started out as an experiment in handing over to the community because we ran out of money to keep our women's programme running, has actually turned out positive! Our



Training of our women's groups in dynamics

A game of Kabbadi on Women's Day!

federation of women's groups are now growing in confidence and given a few more years of systematic handholding, they should be able to manage on their own. With support from donors of **Arpan Foundation**, we have now got some money to build up the federations into strong community institutions. 6 women's federations are being built up in each of our work clusters to take on leadership in the community. They are monitoring health services, education and also cases of Violence Against Women in their areas. We are carrying out intensive capacity building trainings for them so that they are able to take action to better their own lives and the lives of their communities.

e. Scholarships for Students

Our students are thrilled as their lives have been lit up this year. We are offering scholarships to 200 girls students from government schools with support from a caring friend, Sh. Chetan Shah. We will also be able to give cycles to a 100 girls and women. The scholarships are being distributed and this has come as a huge relief to poor families who struggle to put together the Rs.2000 required to keep their children in High School or college. We have announced a reservation of 33% scholarships for boys i.e. For every 100 girls we give scholarships to, we will raise money for scholarships for 33 poor boy students. That's reverse reservation for you!

Breaking News – New Governance Changes!



Our Board of Trustees met earlier this month, on the 9th & 10th of March. The trustees took some major decisions in order to strengthen systems, processes and programmes within the ant. Jenny's resignation has been accepted and she has stepped down from the Board. She will now be full time Executive Director with responsibility for improving programme quality and achieving programme results. She will also work to build up a capable and motivated programme team.

The Board has brought in Sunil as Managing Trustee of *the ant* for next couple of years. His job is to keep building up stronger systems of accountability – both financial and programme. Both Sunil and Jenny will be working to get

themselves out of the driver's seat after some years. While *the ant* team is committed to working extra hard in building up a stronger, accountable and capable public institution.