



Partners in Aid

# Newsletter

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March 2012

## All Bengal Women's Union, Kolkata: Visit Report January 2012 *Anne-Marie Maltby*

This was a very rewarding trip, not least because it was the first (and possibly only) time Joy and I have been able to visit India together. It also allowed us to see and experience many aspects of India as we visited different parts of West Bengal.

Our shared trip started at Anandaniketan, a not for profit organisation situated in the countryside about 120km northeast of Kolkata. It provides residential care to 350 children, adolescents and adults. The residents have physical, mental and/or intellectual disabilities, and many are orphans.

Our group had three dentists and Joy which is a pretty uneven mix. Much to her surprise, Joy found herself working as a dental assistant and did a great job! It was quite challenging treating some of the residents but we managed to get a lot of work done. When not in the dental clinic, we went for walks in the beautiful countryside, met a lot of friendly locals, ate lovely food and also spent time with the residents who found us to be a bit of a novelty.

From here, we were driven 82km to visit a very small project known as Uthnau. The drive took 3 ½ hours which gives you an indication of both state of the roads and of our car! Uthnau started as an attempt to stop quarrying which was exploiting the local people and degrading the land. Having largely achieved this, its current focus is on helping the local people, particularly the indigenous tribes, to become a cohesive community that has ability to live with pride, with an emphasis on education, empowerment and building an economically and environmentally sustainable local economy.

Amongst many other things, we met women's groups, saw traditional craftwork, kitchen gardens and sustainable building work. We experienced wonderful warmth and hospitality.

In one home we accepted an invitation try homemade 'rice beer' – for those that are interested (and that no longer includes Joy), it was slightly warm from the fermentation and tasted like, ummm, maybe very dry sherry?? We were very impressed by what is being achieved and we hope that we may be able to provide them some support.



**Anne-Marie and Joy working in the Anandaniketan dental clinic**

***Please help us spread the word about Partners in Aid by passing this newsletter on to family, friends and colleagues once you have read it.  
Thank you.***

The train trip back to Kolkata was supposed to take 4 ½ hours but a derailment further along the track added another 2 ½ hours to that. Fortunately trains are a great way to travel and Indian trains are endlessly entertaining with food and other sellers constantly coming through the carriage, and we also thoroughly enjoyed the two groups of travelling musicians.



**Dining room at ABWU**

We finally made it to ABWU. It is gratifying to see that, after support from Partners in Aid, the block printing program is now self-sufficient and the weaving program nearly so. They both provide training as well as work for longer term residents such as two hearing impaired weavers. Our main project support is for the sewing and machine knitting training, as this has proved the most useful to provide skills for those leaving the home. Everyone was very proud to show us their work and keen to have photos taken with it.

Once again, thanks were given for the money donated for fire-fighting equipment and specialised (mainly remedial) teacher training.

One big change at ABWU is a babies area since they have been given Government permission to take in orphan or at risk babies. The ABWU ladies said that a session with the babies gave them a much needed break from the other work they do and Joy and I also enjoyed a few cuddles. This has also provided work, although with only token payment, for longer term residents.

We also enjoyed meeting the sponsored girls. Although there was much excitement about photos, the girls would immediately clam up in front of the camera so we had fun trying different ways to get a smile. They are aware that money for their support comes from Australia and seem to see this as a serious business. Although English is a required subject, very few of the girls are able to say more than a few words but there are a small number who have been able to go on to further education and are relatively fluent. It was a great pleasure to meet them and talk about their ambitions. One girl is studying engineering and enjoys it so much that she said it seemed like she was born to do this.

One of the most difficult aspects of ABWU's work is managing the transition of girls from ABWU to the 'outside'. Unlike in Australia, it is difficult and uncommon for single girls to live alone or in shared accommodation. To a large extent, Indian culture has marriage and family as the major ambition for girls and this is typically through arranged marriages. ABWU tries to facilitate this for those girls who want to marry and this requires a lot of work to make sure that the girl will be looked after and not treated as a servant. They also make great efforts to monitor girls after leaving the home and are prepared to try and intervene if required.

Being able to spend time in different ways with dedicated people made this a special trip. Unfortunately Kolkata's poor street lighting and uneven footpaths meant that Joy returned with one unwanted souvenir – a black eye, large lump on her forehead and gashed hand from a fall on our last night. True dedication Joy! At least it gave her a good story complete with strange Good Samaritans, taxi rides and security guards. It's a shame we can't include more of the wonderful, exciting, odd and beautiful aspects of our trip as India may be many things but it's never boring! Most importantly, we can confirm that our supporters' money is being spent effectively and that it is making a difference where it is greatly needed.

## **Partner Organisation Profile:**

### ***Symbiosis Bangladesh***

Symbiosis Bangladesh has been operating in Bangladesh since 1995. Since its inception Mr Akand has been the Country Director (Honorary) and alongside him has been his wife, Mrs Akand. Both of them have had a long relationship with individuals in Symbiosis Australia. They have three daughters; one is a medical doctor and two are engineers and all three are married.

Mr and Mrs Akand have throughout their married life been involved in business initially in construction and then in transport. Mrs Akand, though from Bangladesh, originally trained as a nurse in West Pakistan before her marriage when Bangladesh was still the eastern wing of Pakistan. They were married in West Pakistan but immediately returned to the eastern wing as the war of liberation commenced resulting in Bangladesh becoming an independent country.

Before Symbiosis Bangladesh commenced, Mr and Mrs Akand were involved in assisting another organisation and set up a very effective rural development concern. This experience proved invaluable in the establishment and management of Symbiosis Bangladesh.

Both Mr and Mrs Akand have a deep commitment to the development of the rural people of Bangladesh. Mr Akand's origins are from the village. He was able to receive a tertiary education and used that in his business work but he has never lost sight of the need to work with rural people at their level. The history of the area now known as Bangladesh has always been one of the urban people neglecting the rural people. The British rule of the area centralised administration, with this pattern continuing after the British departed. The present Bangladesh Government is seeking to reverse this historic pattern by encouraging a decentralised administration. For many years Mr Akand has been promoting and developing a decentralised administrative model in Symbiosis Bangladesh. The basic work of Symbiosis Bangladesh is to empower people in their rural social and economic context. The organisation is also seeking to empower the staff at each level in a decentralised administration with centralised monitoring.

Mr and Mrs Akand have visited Australia several times, and this has included meeting the Partners in Aid Board. They provide leadership to Symbiosis Bangladesh while also preparing the new leaders for the future to continue the work of empowering the poor.



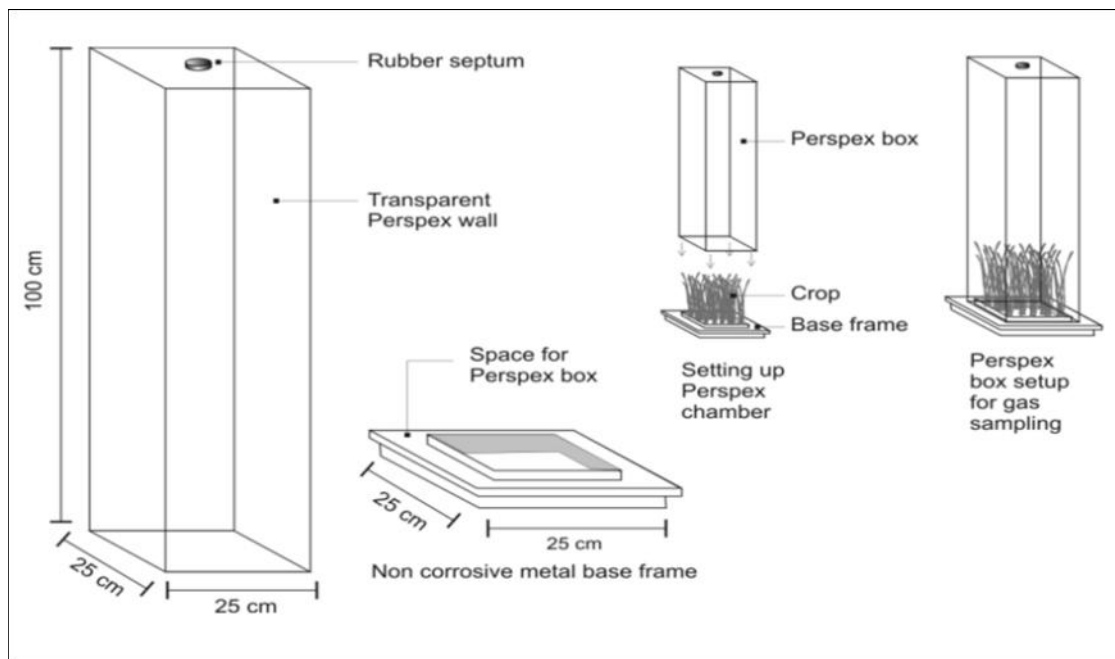
**Mr and Mrs Akand  
Founders of Symbiosis Bangladesh**

## SEDS: Taking Advantage of the Global Carbon Trading Market

Partners in Aid recently agreed to support a new project at SEDS – Low Carbon Farming.

SEDS has recognised the opportunities presented by the global carbon trading market and set up a trial where farmers will be trained in sustainable farming practices, will monitor the results by measuring greenhouse outputs, and will be able to trade carbon reductions on the world market.

SEDS has been working with farmers on sustainable farming practices for some years. However in the past these practices were difficult to 'scale up' given the exclusion of social and environmental costs and benefits from the market considerations. Whilst everyone knows about the benefits of sustainable farming and the costs of the alternatives (poor quality soil, erosion, high methane emission, loss of biodiversity and so on) it has not been possible to factor these into the economics of this way of farming. However, the Carbon Market attempts to correct elements of this market distortion by paying for social and environmental benefits produced by farmers and measured in terms of emission reductions.



**Measuring greenhouse gas emissions from low carbon farming**

This new Low Carbon Farming (LCF) project will protect and optimise the livelihoods of small, marginal and drought prone farmers in the SEDS area, providing more stable incomes, enhancing the quality of their lives and moving into a new orbit of sustainable agricultural practices.

The LCF project will encourage farmers to adopt a range of practices that reduce, and ultimately remove the use of synthetic products (fertilisers, pesticides) while simultaneously improving soil carbon content. This is done through reduced tillage, precision fertilisation, anaerobic composting, use of organic fertilisers, mulching, intercropping, multi-cropping, and a horde of techniques specially designed for particular regions, populations and climatic zones.

The benefits of this project for farmers are many. SEDS will leverage carbon markets through its connections and networks to provide access to farmers to the benefits from trading. The 'scaling up' will be done by forming farmers into organisations which can together aggregate their carbon credits in order to trade meaningfully. The farmers will also be changing to organic farm practices which will open new markets for their goods and support their incomes.

Finally, sustainable and organic farming practices will result in environmental regeneration which in turn improves the livelihoods for these farmers. The farm sector globally offers significant opportunities for carbon sequestration and emission reductions. Emissions from farming contribute 14% of global greenhouse gases. In India, farming contributes to 28% of the country's greenhouse gas emissions. Low Carbon Farming practices offer farmers the opportunity to capitalise on the carbon market, as they shift to agricultural methods that are more sustainable, involving lower input costs that result in reduction and sequestration (improved soil carbon content) of carbon emissions in the process.

Amanda Stone will visit SEDS in July to explore this project on the ground and report back on progress for the Partners in Aid September newsletter.



**Low carbon farming in action**

# NEWS



## **World Food Day Dinner, 3 March**

The annual World Food Day dinner was held on 3 March, and was another very successful night despite the rain being continuous all day, which did provide a few challenges. Our plans changed almost by the minute, as we scrambled to make things comfortable for those attending.

The amount raised this year was almost **\$8,000**, which was a wonderful result. We sincerely thank everyone who joined us for dinner for their good humour and enthusiasm, despite being spread throughout the house, the garage, the gazebo and the tent.

A special acknowledgement to Geoff and Andrea for opening the doors to their home each year for the event, and for the beef, lamb and pork all home grown; and to Andrea who always impresses with the array of finger food, both savory and sweet. Our thanks are also due to Anne-Marie for the wonderful salads, and to the many helpers for their assistance both prior to and on the night.

Funds raised from this event have been earmarked to support our project work. Further funds came in for the child sponsorship program at SEDS, made available from the craft work produced by the women and girls through the Vocational Training Centre at SEDS, and some donated vegetables.

A huge thank you to everyone for your continued support.

## **PayPal**

Just a reminder that Partners in Aid is now registered with PayPal, meaning we can accept one-off donations online. We would still prefer regular donations and child sponsorships to be paid by EFT into our bank account. To make an online payment, go to the '**How you can help**' link on our homepage at [www.partnersinaid.org.au](http://www.partnersinaid.org.au).



## **Spreading the Word**

Board members are available for talks about Partners in Aid, so if you are involved with a church, community group or school which would be interested in finding out more about our work, then please get in touch.

**We would like to thank the following local businesses who help us keep our administration costs low by kindly providing their services at a reduced rate:**

- **M & K Printing, Narre Warren, 9704 8500 (Ken)**
- **Computer Initiatives, Berwick, 9707 4850 (Tim Moore)**

# Partners in Aid Donation Form



Partners in Aid

## Donations

		Gift cert required?
I would like to make a general donation to Partners in Aid	\$ <input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I would like to make a donation to a project:		
ABWU (orphans trip/school uniforms/project support)	\$ <input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
SEDS (fish fingerlings/trees/project support)	\$ <input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sinangpad Healthy Villages (materials for latrine /pig pen)	\$ <input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Symbiosis Bangladesh (books & writing materials/trees/ project support)	\$ <input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## Child Sponsorship

I would like to begin/continue (please circle) to sponsor a child at ABWU/SEDS  
(Please circle and note in the box number of children you would like to sponsor)

Please tick the appropriate payment box:

3 months = \$60        6 months = \$120        12 months = \$240   

**Total amount enclosed (donations and child sponsorship)**

\$

If paying by EFT please email [admin@partnersinaid.org.au](mailto:admin@partnersinaid.org.au) for bank account details. If paying by cheque make it out to Partners in Aid and send to PO Box 42, Narre Warren LPO, VIC 3805

Name for receipt: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Postcode: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Email (for internal use and occasional updates): \_\_\_\_\_

Gifts of \$2.00 and over are tax deductible (receipt will be issued)

***Thank you for your support***