

Action Aid Australia Ltd

SYMBIOSIS – Bangladesh

Morris Lee

The sewing project in Bangladesh continues to have great effects in the communities in which it is operating. Well over 1800 women have received the training since its inception. The project has also recently started up two beauty training centres. This is to give women training in a skill which may help them to earn an income. One centre has commenced in Gazipur and another in Mymensingh.

In the photo below are two ladies who received sewing training in the Sharishabari Centre. One woman was trained about three years ago and the other about a year ago. They are now working together in a joint venture. They took a loan of about \$400 from one of the credit unions associated with Symbiosis Bangladesh. This is a lot of money for such women. With the money they have been buying material in bulk and with that they make garments ordered either by friends or neighbours or by retail outlets in the area. So far they have been more than able to not only meet their loan instalment repayments, but also give them a monthly income. One woman is married with school age children. With her income she is able to meet her children's education expenses.

The second photo shows a group of women at the Centre, one on a sewing machine and the other ladies with the material to be cut up and made into garments.

SILVER ANNIVERSARY of Development Work at SEDS in INDIA -
Lyn Pickering

Silver Anniversary celebrations for SEDS were held on 30th December 2005. Many local visitors from India and International visitors from Australia, Belgium, Germany, and England met and enjoyed a memorable day.

Formalities took place followed by a small dance display by hostel children. The dance routine followed the path of a forested area, denuded over the years by the local population. Trees were cut down and sold to support families, with no local knowledge of long term affects this would have. Trees and seeds were subsequently scattered over the area and small gully checks helped to harvest water. The trees regenerated and in some places are now 20 metres tall. A communal lunch was enjoyed by everyone, and this was followed by a local group of village men dancers performing a rope dance and other movements, and hostel children and staff singing.

The 31st December was set aside to take visitors to the hill for a tree planting exercise. Everyone planted a tree and this area will be known in years to come as the “Friends of SEDS Forest” plantation. The trees will be hand watered until they establish.

Rajen’s vision is being realised and with Manil’s administrative support, these two are a dynamic duo.

Photo : Ian, Kirra and Rajen with “The Friends of SEDS Forest” sign.

Recently released official statistics show that the Brahmaputra-Jamuna river system has changed dramatically over the previous three decades. The river has widened on average from 8.3 km to 11.8 km. Why has this occurred and of what interest is it to Action Aid? The change has occurred as a result of deforestation in the catchments which generally lies outside of Bangladesh. The topsoil released has decreased the mean depth of the river system by several metres over the period causing the river to flow over a greater width. Reportedly about 60 to 70 square km of land is being lost each year, resulting in a current displacement of 60,000 to 70,000 people per year. This displacement has amounted to about a million people over thirty years.

This erosion is extremely important to our projects because much of the erosion has occurred northward from Tangail. This region along the river is an extremely poor region and it is where much of Action aid's work is located. We, at Action Aid, cannot do what needs to be done to alleviate the erosion but we can alleviate the problems caused by loss of land.

Much of our work in the area is associated with general education. However, in December 2004 a pilot mobile sewing centre (part of our training programmes at many locations with Symbiosis), was set up on the mainland to compliment our schooling and support programmes on the islands in the river. This pilot sewing centre has trained twenty-five participants so far and it has been decided to consider expanding its operations on to the islands. Our commercial training activities in the area are small but their success at the pilot stage is encouraging a much greater activity.

ALL BENGAL WOMENS UNION – CALCUTTA**Joy Handley**

Joy has received a very brief report from ABWU on the children's annual trip. Photos of the trip had not arrived in Australia at the time our newsletter went to print.

A trip to Digha, a famous sea-side resort was arranged for 41 children, accompanied by staff members, on 20th October, 2005. They travelled by bus and stayed overnight in a local Hotel. Children enjoyed every moment particularly being taken to the sea-side and being allowed to wade in the water.

They were also taken to visit different spots on the beach. Back in the Hotel a cultural program was arranged with the children and staff participating. The following day they visited the beach and bought locally crafted goods, visited Sankarpur famous for fisheries near Digha, and returned to Kolkata late in the evening.

ENTERTAINMENT BOOK - \$60.00 GREAT VALUE

The Entertainment Book will again be launched in April. These books contain vouchers which can be used in many different areas. We have run this small fundraiser for five years and thank you for your support.

The vouchers cover the following areas

- Fine dining restaurants
- Casual restaurants and Café dining
- Informal dining and takeaway
- Arts, Leisure, Sports and Attractions
- Plus – other great offers – magazine subscriptions, resorts, video, dry cleaning, holidays, car rentals, etc. etc.

COST is \$60 PER BOOK, WITH \$12 to ACTION AID AUSTRALIA for each book sold.

A second book designed for the Geelong, Bellarine, Surf Coast and Ballarat areas is also available. Similar offers are available.

For more information, or to order, please email Lyn Pickering on lpickering@bigpond.com, phone the office on 9704 6315 or just post a cheque to the office.

Photo: Kirra and Rajen planting a tree, assisted by Narayana,

During our recent visit to India through late December and January, Ian and I were delighted to have the company of several Australians during that time, a total of thirteen in all over a three and a half week period.

Long time supporters from Perth, Myra and Gideon, and their friends Moshe, Amy and Mikel visited for a day to gain a first hand experience of SEDS. The day they chose to come was a very special day for the older community members, and one on which I wrote a lengthy report in the March 2005 newsletter. They enjoyed the experience and I have asked that they consider writing about their experience for our newsletter.

Roger, Jenny and Andrew from Melbourne were also visiting and spent up to ten days each at the farm at various times. Roger is a Board member of Action Aid, and a Rotarian, as are Jenny and Andrew. Roger and Jenny's visit this year was planned to see the work of AAA/SEDS which they support, to visit Clubs in the area and visit friends, look at the humanitarian projects supported by Rotarians from our part of Australia, and visit some of the beautiful tourist areas.

Andrew was visiting to check on a project which involved shipping of hospital beds, computers, books and general health care equipment through a Rotary program. We had only known Andrew as an acquaintance prior to this trip, and became very good friends, due in part to a shared passion for improving the circumstances of people who have so little. Andrew visited villages and Action Aid Australia/SEDS watershed projects with us, and decided to sponsor a child in need through Action Aid after seeing children at a village school. All travel was self-funded by participants

Rebecca and Maybel, two Melbourne University students were in India as volunteers and were working in the outer areas of Bangalore for three months

Rebecca and her three brothers are all new to Action Aid, and have recently become sponsors of four children. The girls came to the farm for the weekend the sponsored children attended for their monthly activities. The January visit is the one set aside to give children a new outfit, sponsored by their donors and others.

Rebecca and Maybel interacted with the children very well, and together with Kirra spent time with many of them. A trip to a village where sponsored children live on the Sunday gave them an opportunity to see the village school and houses the children live in. Andrew also joined us on that visit.

Lastly, and certainly not least, our grand-daughter Kirra. Kirra's first visit was in January 2000 for three weeks at the age of 7 years 11 months. She experienced some trauma relating to travel and food, and seeing extreme poverty, but never with the children who live at the hostel and have come from some very impoverished families.

This visit was the very opposite. At 12 years and 11 months, Kirra had a wonderful time with the hostel girls and boys, and would often disappear for hours at a time. The

girls dressed her hair, made henna patterns on her hands and arms, and generally enjoyed having her talk with them. Throwing tennis balls to the boys was an interesting experience for her and the boys were very surprised to find that a girl could throw the ball as hard as they could. The girls like to stand in circles and have someone throw the ball to them gently. Many girls do not take part in physical games of sport, possibly due to their lives in their villages where they are expected to help their mothers with daily chores before and after school.

Kirra has come home knowing all the details of all the children and her pronunciation of names is far superior to mine. She also travelled with us to visit Rotary Clubs and members families. Ian, Andrew, Kirra and I were part of a program which handed out push carts to needy women giving them the opportunity to become self sufficient. Push carts look like a single bed or door on four bicycle wheels.

A short field trip to the Hill.
Ian, Rajen, Bec (Rebecca)
Maybel and Andrew

Photo – Bec (Rebecca)
with Harish, the young
boy she sponsors

We were pleased to have so many Australians visit SEDS and see the many and varied programs which we have been part of for many years. Over the years I have written of the positive changes we see on our regular visits. It was pleasing to us to have new friends from Australia visit and reinforce our belief in the excellence of the work being carried out by Rajen and Manil Joshua and their team from SEDS.

VISIT TO AUSTRALIA by RAJEN AND MANIL

Rajen and Manil Joshua are planning a visit to Australia. At this stage, we expect this to be in late April or May for about two weeks. A dinner will be held to welcome them, and allow an opportunity for interested supporters to meet them and find out first hand about the SEDS programs which have just celebrated 25 years of service to the community through Watershed management and integrated programmes.

The dinner will be held at the home of Geoff and Andrea Pickering in Bayles, where our World Food Day dinner is held each year. Interested people may like to contact the office and when details are finalised we can advise the date and times.

CHILDREN IN NEED OF A SPONSOR AT SEDS

On each of our trips to SEDS, I come home with profiles of children who have come to the attention of SEDS Health Care workers during the course of their busy days in the villages assisting families with day to day issues of family health and nutrition through the Womens Self Help Groups. This trip was no exception. If you can assist, I would love to hear from you.

- V. Jyothi (female) – is 10 years old, the eldest of three children living with her parents who are agricultural labourers.
- Jamrun (female) – is 12 years old. Her parents have died and she and her older sister live with their grandmother, the older sister has dropped out of school to help support them.
- K.Aswerthamma (female) is 10 years old, the eldest of three children, all girls. They live with their parents who are day agricultural labourers.
- M. Maheshwari (female) is 9 years old and lives with her parents and older sister. The parents are agricultural labourers.
- K Mani (female) is 7 years old. From a very poor family. Father has deserted and Mani lives with her mother and grandmother. Mother is a stone cutter
- G.Madhavi (female) is 9 years old, and has two older and one younger sister. She lives with her parents. Father is a carpenter, and relies of irregular work to support his family.
- K. Prathiba (female) is 9 years old and has a younger sister. Her parents are stone cutters and work is not plentiful.
- K. Prameela (female) is 4 years old and attends kindergarten. She has an older sister and parents rely on stone cutting work to support the family.
- M. Nandini (female) is 7 years old, and has an older sister. She lives with her parents who rely on irregular agricultural labouring work to support their family.
- Pavan Kalyan (male) is 8 years old and has two older sisters. His parents are agricultural labourers.
- Abhilasha (female) is the second child of four children. Parents rely on agricultural labour to support their children.

- J. Anitha (female) is 10 years old and the youngest of three children who all attend school. Her parents rely on seasonal work to support the family.
- K. Gayathri (female) is 9 years old, the middle child of a family of three girls. Parents are stone cutters, but father has deserted the family and mother now relies on daily work to support the children. The three girls are all at school, but support is needed to keep them there.
- C. Rajeswari (female) is 9 years old, and has one older brother. A third child was given up for adoption because of the family's desperate situation. The parents would like their children educated to help them achieve a better life ahead.
- Sivamma (female) has a younger sister. Parents are day labourers.

WEB PAGE

**Please visit our Web site, this is currently being updated.
www.actionaidaustralia.cjb.net**

COMPUTER INITIATIVES

**Tim Moore
03 9707 4850
Berwick, 3806**

M & K PRINTING

**For all of your printing
requirements, talk to KEN
at M & K Printing, Vesper Drive,
Narre Warren.
Telephone – 9704 8500**