



Partners in Aid

Newsletter

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Visit to All Bengal Women's Union (ABWU), Kolkata, India

Joy Handley

My visit to All Bengal Women's Union in March this year was once again a wonderful experience. I never fail to be amazed at what a small group of ladies manage to achieve for so very many girls and young women as well as the elderly.

On my arrival at the Home I was confronted by a sea of colour. They were preparing for their spring sale and there were lots of beautiful saris hanging on the line fluttering in the breeze while drying. The saris and some beautiful bedcovers and tablecloths had been produced by the girls and women in the block printing project.

Over the next few days we spent time in all the different project areas. The girls were very busy and extremely focused on getting all their garments ready for the sale. The young girls learning sewing were all very active doing fantastic embroidery as well as baby rugs and scarves using the traditional Kantha stitch, which is a running stitch. It is amazing what they can do with this simple stitch.



Joy with some of the sponsored girls



The weaving project was also busy spinning and weaving some lovely rugs and shawls, as well as tea towels and cleaning cloths. When the girls first start in the program, they initially use a 'practice loom' and once they have mastered that they move on to the next step, which is cloths and tea towels.

Tailoring project stall at spring fair

**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.**

By the day before the sale, the bakery and kitchen were in full swing making muffins and all sorts of delicious food to sell. The spice making was also in a spin! The atmosphere as they all got everything ready was very infectious. I was officially asked to open the sale and encourage the girls to continue their learning. I had to cut the ribbon with much pomp and ceremony and was presented with a lovely arrangement of flowers which we later divided up among the offices.



Goodies for sale

I spoke with many of our sponsored girls individually and it was an honour to be able to spend time with them. They are so eager to know about their sponsor and family. What they do; how many children they have; what are their names; when can they come and visit. They are all very keen to show their sponsors what they have achieved in their school work as well as other activities.

Many of the girls performed for me whether it was dancing, yoga or singing - sometimes **all three!** **The Children's Welfare Home** does yoga at 6am each morning and they did ask

me to come, but sadly, I never quite made it!

Spending time with the older girls in the After Care Home was very special. I spent about four hours with several of them and it was great to get to know them a little and learn more about their goals and different characteristics. They even taught me **to write my name in Bengali, giving me a tick and 'very good' comment.** **Once more** I was treated to some lovely dancing. Many of the girls learn classical dance and a lot of them are extremely good at it. They are often asked to perform at various assemblies, be it a school or another charity, as well as Rotary and Round Table. One of our sponsored girls, Joyeeta Roy, went to Japan for a month in the recent summer holidays with a dance troupe and I am eagerly awaiting photographs. I have seen some of her performances in the past and she has much talent and could go a long way with her dancing. Other girls take lessons in classical singing and again they are much in demand, as is the band that was formed about three years ago. One girl is excellent at self defence and is considering becoming a trainer in that field. Many of the girls excel in various activities including drawing, singing, and poetry recitation. They take part in many competitions against the general public, often winning 1st, 2nd or 3rd prize. Most girls have extra tutoring and these classes are run early in the morning and again later in evening.

Once the girls in the Children's Welfare Home reach 12 to 13 years old, they are put into the tailoring project for a few hours a week and this gives them a start in that direction. Of course not all want to do tailoring, so it helps to identify what is best for them. They can also do some cookery training, and from quite early on they learn to make bags of all shapes and sizes.

I watched some of the older girls doing cross-stitch which they were really just learning. The Home had asked if I could get any different cross-stitch patterns for them as they were having difficulty finding any. Fortunately a good friend had quite a few patterns and also some lovely embroidery, cross-stitch and smocking books which she very kindly gave to me to take. Everyone was delighted and already the girls are working with the new patterns, with one advancing so well she is doing a special cross-stitch piece which when completed they intend to auction at their autumn sale.

The girls in the cooking class prepared and served a fantastic meal for the ladies and me, and also did an excellent job waiting on table. I had personally raised the funds for this project so it was great to see it all working so very well. These girls will be able to get jobs working in school canteens as well as their own restaurant. The little restaurant has been greatly improved since I first saw it. It is well set up and very popular with locals. When I had lunch there it was quite full and I was told this was normal most days.

I was delighted to see Mita, our blind girl who is now 23 years old. She has grown into a beautiful and very independent young lady, and is now in her 3rd year at University. She took part in a fashion parade with top models which was a fundraiser for a charity for the visually impaired.

My last day was very sad for us all. After spending two weeks with them it was hard to leave. Being there longer gave me a better insight into all the programs run at ABWU, and reinforced the knowledge that our funds are doing so much for so many.



Joy with top made for her by sewing trainee



Dance therapy



Young children at their first computer class



Block printing class

SEDS Update

Project Co-ordinator - Amanda Stone

Tank Desilting Now Complete

In the last newsletter, we reported that tank desilting had started early this year, due to high levels of local interest and a desire to get ahead of heavy rains. We are now pleased to report that the tank desilting, funded by Partners in Aid, has been completed for this year.



Digging machinery excavating silt from the tanks

Desilting of tanks has been a regular SEDS project since the early 90s. SEDS took up this pioneering role to help the farmers improve their land. The build up of silt in the tanks is a result of water erosion, when the yearly monsoons wash away tons of earth silting up the precious water bodies. Most of the soil ends up in the numerous tanks in the area. Partners in Aid funding helps with the costs of hiring the enormous machinery needed to dig large quantities of silt from these tanks.

The benefits of tank desilting are twofold. First it increases the water holding capacity of the tanks. Tanks that are heavily silted lose out on a lot of stored water. This water is needed to irrigate the fields of the farmers and a decrease in the holding capacity results in fewer lands being irrigated, leading to a smaller harvest and a direct reduction in income for the farmer. So, by doing the desilting, SEDS is directly contributing to the livelihood of the farmers who live downstream of the tank.

Secondly the excavated silt is applied on the farmers' fields. The silt is much more fertile and has better water retaining capacity than the common red soil on which the farmers cultivate. All this helps in increasing the yield.

Tanks for desilting are selected each year based on the willingness of a village or group of villages to contribute part of the cost. This year two villages met the criteria. In Mavatur village, there was a strong interest. A village meeting was conducted with SEDS and it was decided that digging would take place during the second and third week of May in three different places. 106 villagers in the area benefitted from the desilting, and divided 2109 tractor loads of silt between them. The local contribution from the community was Rs. 209820 (approx AU\$5000), while SEDS contribution was Rs. 195198 (approx AU\$4600).

In Cherukur village, the tank silt went to the people in Budipalli, with 42 villagers dividing 1258 loads of silt. The local contribution from the community was Rs. 130680 (approx AU\$3100), and SEDS contribution was Rs. 164136 (approx AU\$3900).



Children swim in a desilted tank at Mavatur

SEDS Continues to Advance the Empowerment of Women

March 20th was International Women's Day and was celebrated in India along with 100 years of the women's empowerment movement. At SEDS, 400 women came together to share the day. The theme for this year's event was 'Celebrating the Identity of a Woman'.

Women hired vehicles at their expense to come to Penukonda, near SEDS, to participate in the women's empowerment celebration. The goals of the day were:

- To create an opportunity for learning and sharing experiences in the larger group
- To update knowledge on the available welfare schemes
- To strengthen women's forums towards attainment of self sustainability
- **To motivate rural women folk to understand and make use of women's rights**
- To promote girl child education through imparting knowledge to illiterate mothers
- To build a strong base for women's groups to strengthen local bodies
- To improve leadership qualities
- To increase awareness and to make best use of resources
- **To celebrate the 'Identity of Women'.**

The women took an oath against female infanticide and gender bias within their family network.

During the day, SEDS launched their innovative Unique Identity Cards (UID). These cards are a pilot project of SEDS who hope to stimulate a country wide adoption of the cards by state governments to tackle the problem of ID cards for all. The cards were distributed to 10,000 women belonging to the 920 women's empowerment groups operating in five mandals in the Ananthapur District.



The purpose of identity cards is to give women a basic identity and recognition so that they can effectively handle problems and approach government agencies with self-confidence and dignity. Carrying information such as their name, picture and group, the card will open doors to government and other agencies.

Manil Jayasena, SEDS CEO, (centre) with women holding ID cards

We have reported in earlier newsletters on the village Self Help Groups, run by women, who use bank loans to fund small businesses increasing their independence. The ID card will enable women to go alone to a bank to arrange a loan and access other commercial and official **services more easily. The card will boost women's self esteem. In raising each woman's** awareness of her own identity, it will identify her as an individual within her family and her community. Women will feel empowered as the ID card represents being part of something bigger, giving a feeling of security, trust and partnership.

"Serving our rural population and under developed community with integrated sustainable development programmes and tracking effectiveness has been our key focus over the last 30 plus years," said Manil Jayasena, CEO of SEDS. **"Today, SEDS still works through an integrated rural development approach with a special emphasis on women's empowerment. UIDs will go a long way in helping my women friends in establishing their identity. Today it is 10,000 cards; tomorrow SEDS vision is to take this process of a UID card to all members of Self Help Groups, which have 500,000 members in Anantapur District alone. This is a pilot for a larger vision and mission."**

The SEDS identity card was widely reported in local and national media in India.

SEDS Sponsored Children and Visit to India Sponsorship Co-ordinator—Lyn Pickering

A huge THANK YOU to everyone who has kindly forwarded money for the SEDS medical fund in response to my article in the June newsletter. At this stage it would appear we have close to \$3,000, which is a wonderful result.

Your support will certainly help the children. I look forward to sitting down with Manil and Iris at SEDS to discuss the most effective use of these funds for the sponsored children. Ian, Kirra (our granddaughter) and I leave for India in November for one month.

Kirra is looking forward to working for three of the four weeks in the SEDS English Medium School, and with the Vocational Training program for the women and girls. We will also visit the local schools attended by the majority of our sponsored children. Kirra has chosen to do this after she completes her Year 12 exams. Voluntary work in developing countries is becoming a good alternative activity for students not wishing to take part in the end of year parties.

Copies of the school reports for the children are due to arrive in Australia soon, and I will send these out as soon as possible.

New sponsors needed

There are a number of girls looking for sponsorship support. If you, a friend or family member are able to assist, please email me at the Partners In Aid address (admin@partnersinaid.org.au), or phone (03) 9704 6315.

Thanks again everyone. Your support for the children who attend school through the SEDS sponsorship program is highly valued by the children and their parents.

Bangladeshi Projects Update

Project Co-ordinator - Roger Hughes

The Great Aussie Rickshaw Ride

Morris Lee from Symbiosis, our partner organisation in Bangladesh, is currently leading a group of rickshaw riders on a 2000 kilometre trek down the east coast of Australia from Queensland to Tasmania to publicise the issues related to poverty in Bangladesh. The message is that **alleviating global poverty is possible through 'people-powered change'**. For more details visit www.aussierickshaw.org. At the time of writing the group are close to Canberra, having come down the Queensland and New South Wales coasts. It is reminiscent of the great walks that our founder Len Reid used to do in the 60s and 70s.

The Monsoon Affecting our Jamuna River Development Project School

Before setting off on The Great Aussie Rickshaw Ride, Morris sent some interesting photographs of engineering works around our Partners In Aid funded school on an island in the Jamuna River. Readers may recall that this school provides an education to some of the country's poorest children. The otherwise landless families of these children live a precarious existence on this island as it is slowly washed downstream, southward towards the sea, each year by the monsoonal flood in the river.

The school had been relocated several times during its history to avoid it falling into the river as the island migrates. This year the school is no where near the northern edge of the island and is not threatened by the river ripping the island away from under it. However, each year the whole island floods, apart from those parts of the island that have been artificially raised and, although the school is raised above the flood prone natural level of the island, this year the monsoonal flooding is threatening to undermine the mound that raises the school above the general level of the island. The photograph shows work on the early stages of a levy to reinforce the defence on the south east side of the school. Life on the island, even though it is one of the largest silt islands in the river, is extremely precarious, but what alternative is there for these people?



Villagers building a levy

We are all concerned about the huge floods in Pakistan and the utter tragedy unfolding. The people of Bangladesh go through similar floods each year but they have, over the years, developed techniques to live within the cruel environment. The poor of the entire subcontinent are very vulnerable to climate variability in their daily struggles.

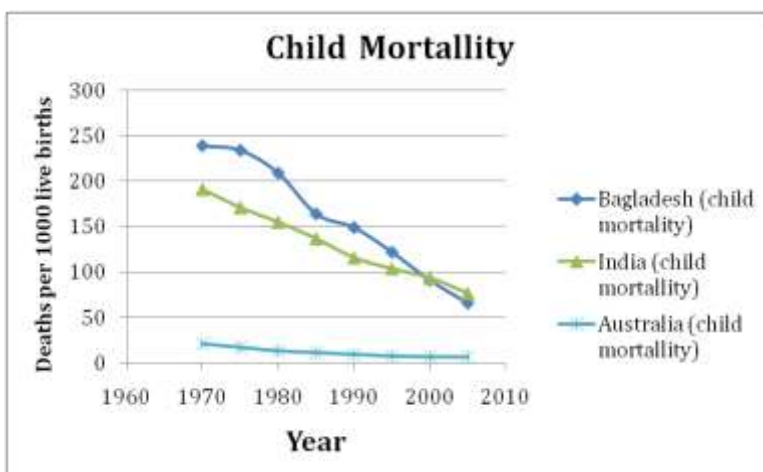
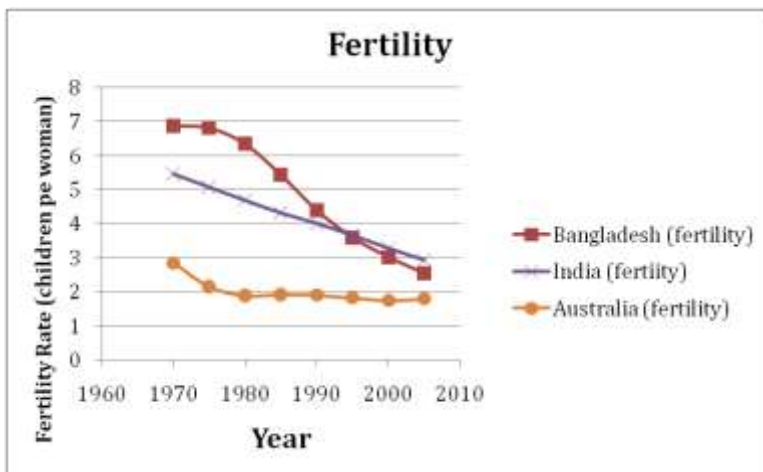


Villagers collecting silt to build the levy

Did You Know?

These two graphs show key indicators of development of Australia and our key partner countries, India and Bangladesh.

They show that over the last 40 years there have been remarkable reductions in the birth rate and numbers of children dying. The figures demonstrate the success of programs like ours that concentrate on improving the health, education and well-being of the poorest people. In Bangladesh, the literacy rate has increased from 18% to 48% between 1980 and 2005.



2010 Annual General Meeting

The 2010 AGM will be held at 8pm on Thursday 21 October in Fitzroy. For more details and to register your attendance please contact the office on 03 9704 6315 or email us: admin@partnersinaid.org.au

Christmas Gifts

Yes we know it's only September, but Christmas is coming!

In our December newsletter, we will be including a range of options for donations to Partners in Aid as an alternative to purchasing traditional Christmas gifts for family and friends, or even the workplace 'Kris Kringle'.

If there is anything in particular you would like to see, please let us know.

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



Donations

I would like to make a general donation to Partners in Aid

I would like to make a donation to a project:

Bangladesh

SEDS

Other

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 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