



Assam Foundation of North America

48166 Inveraray Road, Canton, MI 48188

NEWSLETTER :: APRIL 2012 ISSUE

Assam Foundation of North America, Inc. (AFNA) is a publicly supported non-profit organization with foundation status serving since 1982, under section 509(a) of the Internal Revenue Code with tax exemption under section 501(c)(3) with Tax ID. #: 61-0994468.

Welcome to the April 2012 issue of the AFNA newsletter.

*The people at AFNA wish everyone a joyous RongaliBihu season! **We deeply appreciate all our donors whose generous contributions make AFNA's work possible. Thank you!***

In this issue, we highlight some of our current initiatives, volunteer activities including visits to projects in Assam, and a response to the recent Japan earthquake. For more information about all our projects and about the organization, please visit our website at www.assamfoundation.net.

We always welcome your comments, questions, and suggestions. Please email us at assamfoundation@yahoo.com. To make a donation to AFNA, please write your check to 'Assam Foundation of North America' and mail to:

Pallav Saikia (AFNA), 5991 Corte Cerritos, Pleasanton, CA, 94566

First January Guwahati Run & Walk – An event for a cause



The Guwahati Run & Walk is a unique event to raise awareness about a few remarkable persons and their organizational work. These individuals with their determination, focus and zeal are bringing positive changes to the society. They are ParijatAcademy , Society for Health and Educational Development (SHED) , Snehalaya , Rickshaw Bank and AtmaNirbhar - Ek Challenge and AFNA is proud to be associated with each of them.

Background :

In the AFNA monthly volunteer call Sunday 11/20/11 - 9am Pacific - 12 EST , we discussed about the situation of the NGO we have been supporting. Our particular concern was with AtmaNirbhar. They are in a crisis because they are unable to provide \$450 (Rs 24,000) per year for the cost of supporting a disabled worker. In the meeting , Ankur Bora (who would be visiting Assam) was requested to explore if AtmaNirbhar (and other NGO) can receive financial help locally.

There has been excellent coverage by all the major newspapers highlighting the work of AFNA.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

"The AFNA will celebrate the first day of the new year by spreading the message of 'hope, inspiration and faith for the year' with five organizations working for down-trodden. "A leading private sector bank has already come forward to help the cause"

ASSAM TRIBUNE

"The run will also highlight the Rickshaw Bank project of the Centre for Rural Development, the activities of AtmaNirbhar-Ek Challenge that has rehabilitated many disabled by giving them an opportunity to work with dignity, the role of Snehalaya in providing a secure shelter to distressed children and the positive change brought about by Parijat Academy in an entire community."



Current project Solar light: Power to People

India undoubtedly is a paradoxical country. At one hand it is heavily spoken about as the second fastest growing economy and on the other more than 70 % people live on 1 dollar a day. We have cities and towns growing by numbers and those politically favoured with a better infrastructure than those who don't even have basic necessities such as electricity in their lives. While metro cities and towns all over India are consuming electricity at an alarming rate, raising environmental concerns, for villages such as Pamohi, located in the outskirts of Guwahati, Assam, it is a luxury and a distant dream and they literally live in darkness.

This isn't shocking considering that according to a recent census 'Housing, Household Amenities and Assets Census, 2011', conducted by the Government of Assam, only 37 per cent households in the State use electricity, which marks an increase of 12 point over 2001; 62 per cent of households use kerosene; and 0.8 per cent households use solar energy.

Though the use of kerosene is a common sight, as a source of lighting and cooking in villages, it is nevertheless a cause of concern. According to World Health Organization (WHO) kerosene has a potential impact on the health of the users. Some of them are (i) toxicity occurs if kerosene is inhaled while being ingested (aspiration), (ii) irritating to eyes and skin, (iii) aspiration may cause respiratory irritation, (iv) acute and chronic exposure to kerosene may result in including irritability, restlessness, ataxia, drowsiness, convulsions, coma and death and (v) the most common health effect associated with chronic kerosene exposure is dermatitis. Though, kerosene is not considered to be a

cancer-causing substance (carcinogen) but repeated exposure of animals to kerosene has caused skin cancer. WHO also points out that there have been reported cases of accidental poisoning by children in developing countries.



Besides impacting the life, health and environment, it is also impeding the productivity of women and children. In the absence of lighting, the education of the children is suffering since they have to read and write under kerosene lit lamps or candles. This is also affecting their eyesight. The women folks of Pamohi, who weave to support their families, suffer the most. Working under such circumstances is hindering their production and affecting their livelihood and that of their families.

"There is no electricity in the nearby villages of Parijat Academy. The kerosene used for lighting is causing respiratory problems and weak eyesights, especially among children and women." (Uttam Teron, 2011 CNN-IBN & Reliance Hero winner)

In this prevailing context, AFNA is supporting a project called **'Solar light: Power to People'** to be implemented by one its partner Parijat Academy. Solar Home Systems will replace kerosene lamps and provide better illumination and smoke-free indoor environment thereby enhancing productivity and quality of village woman artisans,

facilitating education to their children and improve lifestyle of the villagers. The target beneficiaries of the project will be woman artisans in the villages and most of their productive working hours are occupied by household work, firewood collection and up-bringing of children. Providing SHS will extend their working hours, improve their working environment and income. Elimination of kerosene lamps will reduce indoor air pollution and associated diseases and accidental hazards.



Apart from lighting, Solar Home System can also be used to operate a television/ radios and a communication system like mobile or wireless telephone. Providing these basic facilities will improve lifestyle, educate children and woman. The long term benefit of this project, is its replication of the models in different parts of Assam, Northeast or other parts of the country. It will also help in overall development of the rural areas through increased employment, education and increase in commercial activities.

Due to the investment barrier for the poor cash-strapped people, with a large share of income being spent on meeting basic livelihood needs, it is unlikely that a household can afford to invest on solar lamp or solar housing system. Therefore, the main barrier to the implementation of solar project activity is the initial investment cost of SL or SHS units. And without any additional financial support, poor rural households will not be able to afford it.

We are also glad to know that a number of individuals from Assam are showing keen interest in the project. A series of discussions have been going on where AFNA members including Ankur Bora and Pallav Saikia are participating. Some of the inputs

Aklantika Saikia, Engineer, Assam Power Generation Corporation Ltd Guwahati: I bought a solar light with Rs. 470 last week and I can't tell you how amazed I am with this product. It's hardly 250 grams (might be less) with plastic body and 2 operating modes, one with dimmer light and another with brighter light. It can be used as a study lamp, torch or lantern, bicycle light etc. They are claiming that it runs for 12 hours on a full charge, which needs to be checked. I don't know about the quality of the product but if it runs even for 2 years, money invested will be recovered totally.



Dwipen Boruah, Head, Renewable Energy Technical Advisory Group at IT Power New Delhi Area, India: I will be very happy to get involved in the project. From my past experience, I would like to make some tips while taking this project forward

1. The systems should never be distributed at free of cost
2. Since upfront cost will be a challenge, the lamps may be sold at installment @ cost of replacement of kerosene per week/ month (weekly collection is better as the amount is lesser).
3. Quality of solar lighting system is a major concern - We should talk to some quality product manufacturer for a partnership
4. Skill to be developed in the village for O&M and minor repairing - the same person may collect weekly installment
5. We should set an objective to support/develop one/two entrepreneurs in the village/area who can replace kerosene business by solar business
6. Introduction of smokeless improved cook stoves could another option to reduce indoor air pollution
7. Recently I visited Dhaka to attend a conference where I met Mr. Dipal Barua who is instrumental in promoting 4 million solar lamps through micro finance model.

To raise funds for this project, AFNA has joined the Global Giving April Challenge hosted by Global Giving and sponsored by Dell Inc. Global Giving, is an innovative online fundraising platform for U.S. and international non-profits and has **helped 5,614 projects, non-profits and social entrepreneurs grow their community of donors and volunteers to raise a total of \$63,099,943.**

After due diligence and standard compliances , AFNA was invited by Global Giving to enter the 'Solar light: Power to People' for the Challenge. The goal is to raise 4,000 dollars from 50 unique donors by April 30th. Apart from the funds raised reaching the beneficiaries directly , the long term benefits are :Opportunity to participate in regular/ongoing marketing and fundraising campaigns and challenges, many of which offer matching funds or other awards; Inclusion in corporate employee giving programs with companies like HP, Dell, Nike, Intel, GAP, which totaled \$5.2 million in 2010 alone; Access to GlobalGiving Rewards benefits; Benefits from GlobalGiving's branding marketing and public relations efforts, such as the Neutrogena campaign in which proceeds from the sale of their products go to three organizations that split over \$250,000 and monthly trainings and one-on-one consultations with staff to optimize your online fundraising as well as many others.



Being a part of Global Giving is an opportunity for AFNA to bridge the gap between Assam and the global community. By winning this contest it can further help the dedicated grassroots NGOs of Assam reach out to a global audience.

Help us win this contest and improve the lives of the villagers of Pamohi. The process of donating is simple. All you have to do is click the link <http://www.globalgiving.org/projects/solar-light-power-to-people/> and choose your options from donating 10 dollars to 3,000.

Some of the options are :

\$10 donation can provide access of a solar lamp to a child

\$25 donation 3 children read and write under solar lamps

\$50 donation can support 5 children to have access to solar lamps

Donating through the Global Giving is secure and very easy. This is a one time donation.

Also help us spread the word. In case you need any further information please feel free to write to AFNA . You can also visit AFNA page on



Face Book <http://www.facebook.com/pages/AFNA/373680230210?ref=ts>, for regular updates and information. Assam, India, a state known for its pristine beauty, rich history and culture. The majestic Brahmaputra flows through the heart of Assam, which is known as one of the cultural and literary centers of the east. This cultural evening will provide an opportunity for community members to experience the coming together of these two great cultures through celebration in dance, music and songs.

We are organizing a fundraising event .Where the Brahmaputra meets the Mississippi.

which symbolizes the confluence of cultures of the mystical east with the vibrant west.

Event highlight : Where the Brahmaputra meets the Mississippi

The mighty river Brahmaputra flows through the state of Assam, India, a state known for its pristine beauty, rich history and culture. The majestic Mississippi flows through the heart of Minnesota, which is known as one of the cultural and literary centers of the west. This cultural evening will provide an opportunity for community members to experience the coming together of these two great cultures through celebration in dance, music and songs.

We have two main goals for this fundraising. First, we want to create awareness and interface of the local with the global. The local community here in the twin cities, particularly young students will have a unique opportunity to understand and explore a part of the world that is not often in the limelight. Our other goal is to raise funds for two organizations in Assam, India. These are RGVN (Raastriya Gramin Vikas Nidhi; <http://rgvnindia.org>) and SPADE (Society for Promotion of Appropriate Development efforts; <http://spadeindia.org>). Both organizations have been at the forefront of capacity building, development, and empowerment of vulnerable and marginalized groups, particularly women in northeast India.

The funds raised through this event are aimed at targeting the plight of underprivileged women from rural Assam who often work as domestic help in cities. Many of these workers are young girls, as young as 11 and 12 years of age who are sent to the cities by their struggling families to live and work with employers for petty remittances. In the absence of enforcement of the required laws, many of these women and children face tremendous physical and mental abuse. This is a serious issue that has existed for several years, yet rampant poverty, lack of efforts by state and civil society has continually accentuated the problem. SPADE is working on providing special life and job skills for the rehabilitated domestic workers and the funds from this event will help SPADE to strengthen its efforts and broaden its coverage. The other issue that RGVN has been working with is developing entrepreneurial and self-sufficient skills among groups of very poor women from the traditional weaver community in Assam. These women have excellent traditional skills sets of weaving textures and artifacts, yet because of their lack of access to credit and market, they are not able to make gainful livelihoods out of their skills. They are often tricked by middle-men who benefit tremendously by buying their products at very cheap rates and selling the same products at exorbitant amounts locally and globally. RGVN has made impressive groundwork in helping these women organize into self-help groups, and any additional funds they receive will help them in creating other capacity building skills, marketing issues etc. We are very confident that the funds

that these two organizations will receive through this fundraising will go a long way in providing them the help that they need to create positive changes in the lives of women they work so passionately for.

Your support of our event and the cause is crucial as we are dependent on your commitment of help to further our efforts. We are hopeful that you will consider supporting this excellent initiative that will nurture the local community as well as provide the much needed help to people in the other part of the world. We thank you in advance for your time and sincerely hope that you will support us in our initiative. You can make your contribution through [Assam Foundation of North America](#). Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Monika Katakya (651-485-8329/mkatakya@gmail.com)

Mallika Dutta (763-458-8661/gogettergirl@gmail.com)

Ankita Deka ([812-361-4459](tel:812-361-4459)/bijanankita@gmail.com)

AFNA 2012 CALENDAR CAMPAIGN

ASSAM FOUNDATION OF NORTH AMERICA 2012 CALENDAR



projects above that are in most need of funds

AFNA Raised over \$6000 in donations in Dec 2011/ Jan 2012 by distributing 250 copies of a unique calendar across the US. The calendar was created by AFNA volunteers Satyajit and Latha Nath and contains pictures of Assam listing both US and Govt of Assam holidays. The amount raised is being sent to three of the

FUND DRIVE FOR MID-WEST TORNADO RELIEF VIA AFNA

Nature's fury and devastation doesn't differentiate anyone. Whether one lives in a poor country like Bangladesh, or in a rich country like the US, we are all within its grasp! It's just a year ago that we witnessed the devastation and toll of human lives it caused in Japan. And this year, we are seeing it right here, about a month ago ...the awful devastation and destruction caused due to a series of tornadoes thru the mid-



SCENES FROM
THE MIDWEST TORNADES

west in the US. Yes, we all are touched by the scenes of deaths and destruction these events cause, and consider it as a solemn duty to extend a helping hand (in terms of donations in \$\$\$), no matter how humble it may be, the affected people through contribution via AFNA– **AN APPEAL BY DEBOJIT BORA**

Quarterly Update

AFNA continues to make good progress on its development activities, primarily in Assam and also in response to some recent events. Here is a summary of status of our key initiatives in 2011 and so far in 2012:

Support A Child: Donated \$5400 in 2011 for the continuity of education of poor children in Assam who cannot afford to stay in school (\$100/child/year). This initiative is stewarded by AFNA volunteer Chandan Talukdar.

Support A Rickshaw Puller: Provided additional funding (\$1200) to the Rickshaw Bank to help rickshaw pullers in Assam break the cycle of poverty with loans for technologically advanced rickshaws (\$250/puller). AFNA volunteer Ankur Bora nominated Centre for Rural Development (CRD), the organization behind Rickshaw Bank, for the Flextronics Economic Development award, which was awarded to CRD in San Jose, CA in October 2011.

Support A Disabled Worker: Started a new initiative to support AtmaNirbharEk Challenge in its mission to provide productive employment to disabled adults in Guwahati (\$500/worker). \$3200 was donated to this effort in 2011 that is stewarded by AFNA volunteer KrishanuKaushik.

Spreading Sunshine: Helped Kaushik Das of AtmaNirbharEk Challenge bring smiles to the lives of hundreds of orphans in and around Guwahati with gifts on festivals with a donation of \$800 in 2011.

sStep: Helped domestic workers in Guwahati balance poverty and hard work with finding vigor and happiness in their lives with a donation of \$5730 to sStep in 2011. This project is stewarded by AFNA volunteer Smita Das.

Japan Tsunami Relief: Donated \$1000 to the International Red Cross as a token in support of the people of Japan in their time of crisis. This initiative was led by AFNA volunteer Debojit Bora.

AshaDeep: Surplus funds (\$1500) from Assam Convention 2010 were donated to AFNA to support this Guwahati-based organization whose mission is to initiate and strengthen mental health interventions in north-east India.

Release of the magazine Friends



The 3rd edition of the magazine Friends carries stories / activities / news of AFNA including

- Tech award to Rickshaw Bank .
- Support a child including sponsorship of KrishanuKaushik / Monalee Saharia.

- Articles on Spreading Sunshine (byAtmaNirbhar) and AFNA support to SHED.
- Domestic worker movement by Smita Das
- AFNA support to Parijat

The magazine was released on 17th December and an event was organized at the B. Baruah College. During the event ,UttamTeron , Kaushik Das and LanuAimal was felicitated. Kaushik Das and SubhashSarma of Rickshaw Bank also talked about activities of AFNA.

Support a Disabled Worker initiative:

As a follow-up to an appeal from AtmaNirbhareK Challenge in Nov-Dec 2011, so far AFNA was able to sponsor eight disabled workers with individual sponsorships from generous patrons and another seven of them will be sponsored thru the Calendar Campaign for the first year.

Testimonial - Story of DeepikaKalita

Kaushik Das, who is the founding proprietor of this wonderful organization in Assam, had shared the following story with one of the sponsors recently.

"..... We will utilize the sponsorship to pay the stipend of DeepikaKalita (25). In spite of our ongoing difficulties, we did not have the heart to refuse work to Deepika--- her knee joints are at the back of her legs. She had never climbed up stairs before coming here, because she thought she could not do it. After seeing all the bravehearts here, she is encouraged to do many things that she thought she never could! She is thrilled that she has got a job now --- and her parents, they feel deeply relieved....Last week, a Ladies Club came to celebrate International Women's Day in our unit. Although Deepika can only waddle, she danced on that day and won a prize!"

A touching story, indeed!



Assam Foundation of North America, Inc.

www.assamfoundation.net

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A non-profit organization registered under section 501(c)(3) of the IRS code with Tax I.D # 61-0994468

President: Satyajit Nath

Treasurer: Pallav Saikia

Membership and Donation Form

Name : _____

Spouse's name : _____

Address : _____

City : _____ State: _____ zip: _____

Telephone number : _____ (____) _____

Email address : _____@_____

Request Membership1 Yes _____ No _____

Soles For Tots:

Support a School/Organization (_____) 3:

Other Project 1(_____) 3:

Other Project 2(_____):

Additional contribution to AFNA's general fund 4:

Total 5:

Notes:

1. You are eligible to apply for a yearly AFNA Membership if you donate \$25 or more to any of the AFNA projects or to its General fund.
2. Support a Child cost: \$100 per student per year
3. AFNA is currently working multiple educational and other social welfare organizations. You may like to contribute directly towards them. For details of our supported projects, please visit our website: www.assamfoundation.net
4. Funds for "General funds" are used for emergencies, natural calamities such as flood, earthquake etc.
5. Please make **checks payable to AFNA**. You may also explore online payment option at our website.

Please send this form and contributions to following **address:**

PallavSaikia (AFNA), 5991 Corte Cerritos, Pleasanton, CA, 94566

We would also like to hear from you your comment / suggestions / feedback and more about you(or you can write to us from our site):

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