

QUAKER SOUTH ASIA INTEREST GROUP NEWSLETTER

January 2013

Editor's note: 3rd January 2014

Dear Friends

I hope that, despite the later-than-hoped arrival of this QSAIG Newsletter, you will find articles that assist your understanding of the world. I apologise to those who have contributed – from Bangladesh, Nepal, and the UK – that your interests and wisdom have not reached our Interest Group earlier. I am hoping that at least forty people will read all or part of the Newsletter and that copies of the Newsletter will enter Friends House and Woodbrooke libraries.

I hope to produce a Newsletter in time for Britain Yearly Meeting in August so please send me material by June 30th 2014.

Anne Smith, our Membership Secretary, will be sending paper copies of the 26th October 2013 QSAIG meeting notes and minutes, and this Newsletter, to those who are not on Email. For those on Email, please let me know if you have not seen the Emailed copy of the notes and minutes (sent on 13.12.2013) and I will send them to you.

We would like to further develop the QSAIG website. If you are associated with work that connects with the South Asia region and has its own website, and if you feel that other Quakers would be interested to learn about that work or project, please contact our website manager/editor, Martin Schweiger, either directly or through me. We would be interested to place web links to your work/project on the QSAIG website. See the entry about the website near the end of this Newsletter.

Today I have heard about the most recent visit in December 2013 to Pakistan, India and Nepal by Quaker Peace & Social Witness (QPSW) committee member, David Mowat. The future of the South Asia networking for peace project will be discussed by QPSW in the near future. Gerald Coyningham's service as a QPSW staff member working on this part of the project has come to an end. The work in North East India will continue to be faithfully maintained by QPSW staff member, Martin Williams, and the QPSW Naga Conciliation Group.

In friendship

Stuart Morton

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Long-term development? - Manan Ganguli September 2013

During my career in ‘development’ I came across much jargon. It was used all the time – in reports, during training or even in conversation with colleagues after work! As the title of this short piece, I have picked one such phrase.

In the development business, you cannot be successful if you are not familiar with the right jargon. Therefore, I became fluent in ‘long-term’, ‘mid-term’, ‘objectives’, ‘expected results’, ‘indicators’, ‘risk analysis’, ‘partnership’, ‘participation’ and so forth. I also passed on this vocabulary to newcomers, explaining that when used in reports and proposals it greatly increases your chances of receiving funding.

In community development, plans have to be made, and resources must be used wisely. If someone is to invest money in a project, it is understandable that they will want to know how that money is being spent. In the development world it is therefore commonplace to verify results (or achievements) by applying indicators according to the project - short, mid or long-term. The problem, however, lies with the concept of ‘development’. The jargon used is often meaningless and far removed from the reality on the ground.

I did not study development at university. My understanding of what it means comes from living and working in a poor community. My training in ‘long-term’

development began when I first came to Fatepur in 1979, 34 years ago. I was younger then, but I am still learning today. So far I have learnt two important things – firstly, in community development you must have an unconditional passion to make a change for the better in the lives of those you are working with; and secondly, you must recognise and respect that you are entering a world different from your own.

Passion does not feature in the list of development jargon. But I believe that it is at the centre of community development. I saw it in Janet who lived and worked in a remote village in India as a Quaker volunteer. Janet and I worked in Fatepur, a village in Jharkhand (previously Bihar), for ten years. We set up Ekta Niketan.

In the world of development, Ekta Niketan is a community health project. Over the last 30 years or so, the project has had its ups and downs; but it continues. It is now run by the villagers themselves who we have trained as health workers. Is Ekta Niketan a long-term development? I think 'experts' would say that it has been too long for a project to run. Where is the exit strategy? And the indicators?

30 years is, in fact, not long if we are aiming to make a lasting change in the lives of people in Fatepur. There are still a lot of changes to be made if the lives of the people in this area are to improve, and in that sense Ekta Niketan is still in an early stage for a development project. Ekta Niketan will continue to serve these people as long as the group of villagers running it continue with the same passion.

What then have we achieved so far? If measured with conventional indicators, Ekta Niketan has already achieved a lot – it has saved lives; it has provided simple treatments at low costs to a large number of villages, it has trained villagers in the standard diagnosis and treatment for tuberculosis. Perhaps, however, the greatest achievement of Ekta Niketan is having provided an alternative to conventional 'development', offering a new approach relying on passion and community rather than strategies and jargon.

Ekta Niketan owes a great deal to Quaker Peace and Social Witness - they have supported us to grow and continue (without the jargon!). If you would like to know more about Ekta Niketan please do not hesitate to contact us or visit our website at www.fourthworldaction.org

The ongoing wisdom of Rabindranath Tagore: - Abu B. Siddique

Rabindranath Tagore is discovered and rediscovered, again and again, even 72 years after his death; the interest in him and his work is not decreasing, rather it is increasing. We find the evidence through a simple search on the Internet.

Meanwhile it seems that paper publications remain untouched.

I recently felt an urge to discover Rabindranath when Dr. Sujit Kumar Brahmochary, Director, Institute of Indian Mother and Child (IIMC) in India, told me that Rabindranath is one of the inspirations for his groundbreaking work for the mothers and children of the rural poor. To find the inspiration, I thought of doing a research for few hours, but I ended up doing it for months, gathering 50 pages of notes!

Family tradition taught Rabindranath to think 'Swadeshi', own country's society, from his early age. Beside his copious work on literature and music, Rabindranath continued, till his final day, thinking and working on the development of rural poor people. If you give a little time to examine my blog: <http://shagarsideation.blogspot.co.uk> you will gain an idea of how much time, efforts and dedication he employed for the poor people's development. You will see that he is still an inspiration for the development of the rural poor.

Your generous comments would be highly appreciated.

Dr. Abu B. Siddique is a UK based Development Consultant who originally came from Bangladesh.

Letter from Bangladesh – October 2013

Rob Gallagher

In 2010 I returned to Dhaka after an absence of 12 years. I felt a bit like Rip Van Winkle: so much had changed, and I hardly recognised the place. I went to streets and neighbourhoods that I used to frequent twenty years earlier, and couldn't find my way around.

During the past two years I have been working in Dhaka, so I have had a chance to get more familiar with the new city. Apart from the buildings and the increased traffic, I have noticed some social changes, and also some things that don't seem to have changed very much. The following note highlights a few of these.

Some Changes: One thing that is very different is the level of attention I receive. Once upon a time I used to be stared at, wherever I went in Dhaka. Yet nowadays people seem to pay less attention to foreigners. Is it because of TV and the internet; or because so many Bangladeshis have been overseas? Or is there a threshold urban size, above which people become more anonymous? Or is there a difference in me, perhaps older and more relaxed? Whatever the reason, the interaction amongst city dwellers feels different.

Another random observation I have is of queuing. One day walking around Dhaka I noticed a line of people standing in the road. I went up and asked why

people were queuing. 'Tempos' (micro-buses) was the answer. Since then I've noticed plenty of queuing for buses, which is a relatively new development and definitely a sign of progress!

Material standards have changed enormously. The first time I came out to Bangladesh (in 1978) I was advised to bring biros with me, as these weren't readily available in Dhaka. I even brought paper clips, just in case! Today, I've seen plenty of rickshaw pullers talking into their mobile phones. Somehow it just doesn't square with the traditional image of the 'poor rickshaw puller'. Not to say that they aren't hard up, but the shops are full of goods, and much has changed. In some posh parts of Dhaka, the rickshaw pullers are even ordered to wear trousers (instead of lungis), because local dignitaries feel this looks 'smarter', even though it is less comfortable or convenient for the pullers.

Another difference is the number of women and girls wearing burkas and headscarves. Once this wasn't a common sight in Dhaka, but now it is more common. Although there are thousands of young women working in the garments factories who do not cover up, the proportion who do has risen noticeably. Again, I speculate on the reasons. Does this reflect the huge numbers (of men) who have worked in the Middle East and brought those customs home? Is it connected with the rise of Islam in the country's politics and social life? I think there are elements of 'fashion' too; almost a badge of being a 'good Muslim', even though it is not prescribed in the Koran.

Some Things Haven't Changed: During the past two years I have worked on two aid-funded transport projects in Dhaka. When I worked here in the 80's and 90's I felt very critical of 'foreign aid', which didn't seem to address the causes of poverty. Unfortunately, I don't see many signs of improvement. On the two projects I have worked on, the same shortcomings seem to be present; for example: - Expatriate consultants writing long and detailed reports, with very little input from the Bangladeshi side; hence all the thinking is being done by the consultants, who often don't know how to get to grips with the real situation; - Emphasis on spending money and meeting (artificial) deadlines, rather than taking a slow and careful approach to make sure that the proposals are both suitable and properly implemented; - Emphasis on building infrastructure rather than strengthening the local institutions. Both projects that I have worked on involve many millions of dollars in loans, which will eventually have to be paid back by the national population. Yet recruiting a few more staff for the government organisations, which would only cost 'peanuts', seems beyond the scope of all concerned. Meanwhile, the organisations limp along with only a handful of staff to undertake the huge tasks of urban development and management. - Corruption still seems to dominate everything, from the selection of projects (often costly and inappropriate) to their poor implementation and management. Corruption is largely the reason why key government

organisations remain under-staffed in areas such as planning, and why the maintenance and management of urban facilities is so poor. There have been many donor-funded projects to strengthen government institutions and tackle corruption, yet the institutional situation seems as bad as or worse than ever.

Conclusion

I don't really have a conclusion to this letter. I feel rather like a spectator, watching events unfold and feeling rather helpless about anyone managing to influence or change what is happening. In some ways, Bangladesh always seems to 'muddle through', and the dire predictions of the past haven't materialised. The country is a lot more sophisticated and resilient than it was thirty-five years ago. On the other hand, I feel the country is also increasingly vulnerable to adverse events, whether these might be earthquakes, or water shortages, or world economic crises. I do feel concerned about the future here, as I do in the UK too.

Notes from a Field Visit to Mental Health Projects in Rural Bangladesh, by Cora Gallagher

Introduction: The following is an edited version of a note I prepared for Action on Disability & Development (ADD) International (Bangladesh) after a short field visit to their mental health projects in the districts of Natore, Rajshahi and Chapai Nababganj in August 2013. I accompanied Md. Nurun Nabi, the Project Manager, to learn about their programme and offer some suggestions and comments. I was particularly interested as I have been a volunteer and Trustee of Wiltshire MIND for a number of years.

Overall Comments: My field trip to ADD International's programme was amazing, seeing at the ground level what they were doing to support people with mental health. In some ways it was not so different to what we are doing in the UK; we have carers' support groups and counsellors, the one thing we have got in the UK is the medication whereas in Bangladesh the cost is too great for the village folk; so many go without and the families have to cope the best way they can and even if you do have the money finding a psychiatrist is an even harder task.

Specific Observations and Comments: ADD International is one of the few NGO's in Bangladesh doing work on mental health. Their programme in the west of Bangladesh had been running for about 10 years, and they want to expand it to other areas. I offered some comments, from experience of Wiltshire MIND's efforts of running 'drop-in centres' in different places:

1. Had ADD prepared short and long term plans for expanding their mental health programme, especially regarding the costs and funding implications?

There would be clear advantages in expanding the existing programmes to neighbouring areas, rather than starting in completely new regions, for the following reasons:

- i) knowing the local area and its needs; local staff could learn from each other and have group meetings; hardly any travel costs (which otherwise would be a hardship for them); ease of organising group training in the area
- ii) visits by the Project Manager would be easier and enable better interaction with people and staff.

2. Psychiatric support – an issue to consider if expanding to neighbouring areas. The programme in Natore District benefitted from a very good relationship with a local psychiatrist called Dr Moyeen Uddin Ahmed. If the programme was to expand geographically, it would need to be near a psychiatrist and as there are only a few in the rural areas this could be a problem if following the Natore system.

3. Care givers: the support and discussion groups seemed to work well and this approach was very important.

4. Counsellors are a good way to expand the mental health services, but the existing training program for counsellors is very basic at present. ADD could look into developing a short and simple training programme.

5. Village Awareness programme: a ‘Grandfather/Grandson’ drama was demonstrated in the Rajshahi office. This was good mental health education and enjoyable for the village folk, and could be more widely used at low cost. World Mental Health Day on 10th October provided an opportunity to raise awareness more widely through, for example, TV chat shows, radio, women’s magazines and newspapers, village dramas, and also through religious groups.

Follow Up Actions

I was very moved by all that I saw: the members, the member’s families and their wonderful hospitality, all the loyal hardworking members of staff, and volunteers. Without their support the people suffering with mental health would be totally lost and the families desperate.

I offered to follow-up some tasks when I got back to England, in particular looking for useful information to send to ADD, especially:

- Any leaflets in Bangla which could help staff and even care-givers;
- Mental health training plans for counsellors (short courses relevant for Bangladesh).

If any QSAIG members have information on these areas that might be helpful for

ADD in Bangladesh, I would be very glad to hear from you.

Cora Gallagher Email: cora.gallagher@hotmail.co.uk

Perspective from Nepal –October 25th 2013

Subhash Kattel

Some thoughts on the current situation of the society I am living in:

Peace and justice are one of the most talked issues in Nepal at this time- by all the political parties, NGOs, INGOs, government and civil society. And these are the needs, too. But, ironically, these are the most neglected of agendas, too- from a 'what is being done" perspective. For example- the 'Truth and Reconciliation Committee' was supposed to form 4-5 years ago to address the 'post conflict' situation in Nepal. But political parties are afraid of facing the justice and so are intentionally delaying or are unwilling to form such committee! This situation also includes the rampant 'criminalization of politics' by politicians and the complete disrespect of rule of law. Please follow a link for a story of situation of justice in Nepal:

<http://www.ekantipur.com/the-kathmandu-post/2013/08/29/oped/tenacity-in-the-time-of-villany/252991.html>

<http://www.ekantipur.com/2013/09/08/top-story/adhikari-couple-end-fast-unto-death/377689.html>

The couple involved are sitting on hunger strike again this week because they were lied to and no justice was delivered.

Nepal is in political transition at present – it is moving towards writing a new constitution by the constituent assembly. The first elected assembly could offer no constitution and so there is second election for 19th November. There are strong questions- whether the new constituent assembly will bring a constitution and stability in the country!

Nepali society is now moving towards division based on religion and ethnicity. So, there is strong need of exploring opportunities for coexistence and harmony work. Nonviolence as a political tool and as philosophy of life needs to be strengthened.

There are few economic opportunities for poor people, though there are a few individual initiatives that are inspirational. The cost of living is sky rocketing; the wealth divide is huge.

Sorry, all came negative observations. But that how I felt. The hope is that someday people will stop intolerance and that there will be some transformation in the whole system. Until now, this seems a false hope.

Safer Roads- Our Responsibilities: a workshop in Bangladesh **14 September 2013**

Held at Peace Centre, Khalia, Rajoir, Madaripur - organised by Gono Unnayan Prochesta (GUP) with technical support from the Accident Research Institute (ARI) of Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET).

A total of 70 participants including the vehicle owners, drivers, teachers, members of the law enforcing agencies, the representatives of relevant govt. departments and Local Govt. Institutions (LGI) of Faridpur, Madaripur and Gopalganj districts of south west region of Bangladesh participated in the workshop. The Deputy Commissioner (DC), Madaripur was present as the Chief Guest while two special guests were the Superintendent of Police (SP), Madaripur and Professor Dr. Mahbub Alam Talukder of Bangladesh University and Technology (BUET). The workshop was chaired by Nasir Uddin Ahmed, Executive Director , GUP.

Three sub-themes were presented in the workshop jointly presented by six road safety specialists of the Accident Research Institute (RTI) of BUET during the technical sessions of the workshop. The titles of the papers presented in the workshop are as follows:

- 1. Road Safety Problems in Bangladesh: Dimensions and Consequences**
- 2. Factors Contributing to Road Traffic Accidents & Our Responsibilities**
- 3. Community Based Road Safety Programme: Engineering, Education and Enforcement**

Thematic papers and participant discussion helped to identify some pertinent factors causing road accidents and brought some recommendations to help reduce/solve road accidents.

A. Factors responsible for Road Accidents:

- i) Road conditions: narrow space of roads having no provision for footpaths, lack of Zebra crossing/Over Bridge. Low quality construction, poor maintenance and repairing of roads.
- ii) Lack of knowledge about Road Safety rules among the common people, particularly among the drivers.
- iii) Lack of enforcement of laws: laws exist but implementation is lacking.
- iv) Lack of proper punishment: the punishment level is very low in the existing system.
- v) Inadequate number of Traffic Police. vi) Prevalence of locally modified vehicles such as, Nasimon, Mohendra etc.

Increasing number of small size locally developed slow speed vehicles on the highway.

- vii) Lack of driver education, training, skills and experience and the mindset of the driver.
- viii) Trees/bushes and non-existence of sign boards/indicators along the roadsides particularly at road turning points.
- ix) Lack of public awareness/community initiatives and responsibilities.
- x) Dumping of construction materials including bricks and sand on the roads/road sides.

B. Recommendations to reduce/solve Road Accident Problems:

- i) billboard at strategic locations to inform the common people about risks of road accident.
- ii) Build community awareness through community based programs-meetings, seminars and street drama.
- iii) Form local groups and build their capacity through awareness building and trainings.
- iv) Increase the number of highway traffic police, and arrange car parking in specific selected areas.
- v) Ensure punishment for crimes according to degree of crime
- vi) Preserve Roads related information in the UP offices.
- vii) Keep provision for Alternate roads & modern transport system.
- viii) Highway police carry First Aid box while patrolling on the roads.
- viii) for ambulance/medical team/camp in all strategic locations for rapid treatment of the victims of the road accident and establish required number of hospitals in the nearby roadside areas.. Establish more Trauma centres.
- ix) Develop systems for rapid dissemination of information on accidents to the appropriate authority as early as possible.
- x) Honesty of the management, & patriotism and commitment of the politicians needs to be enhanced.
- xi) Introduce community policing.
- xii) Enhance public awareness through documentary feature film, prepare and distribute posters, banners, leaflets for public awareness
- xiii) Road Safety Programmes, Public Awareness, Formation of Local Committee, and Introduce Community Policing to protect people from frequent accidents.

Conclusion: Participants expressed their deep interest in organizing many more of such workshops in and around the country in order to make aware of people and particularly the concerned individuals, agencies, departments of public and private institutions about their roles and responsibilities to avoid/reduce further road accidents in future.

In his concluding remarks, the chairperson thanked the distinguished participants for their valuable contribution in the workshop, taking trouble to come from different districts of the region.

The chairperson finally expressed his high gratitude to the generous personal financial contribution of Ms Nusrat. He specially expressed his high regards to Dr. Martin Schweiger (a friend and well-wisher of GUP) for his deep concern for increasing number of road accidents in Bangladesh and for his support and encouragement that has led to the organising of this regional workshop. The workshop was concluded with thanks to every one involved hoping to organize similar events in all regions /strategic locations of the country.

A visit to India – Kathy Siddle

Kathy is not a Quaker. She supports the work of Action Village India (AVI), a British based charity that supports Ekta Parishad and other grassroots' work in India.

I had a great visit earlier in 2013. I am happy to share my overall thoughts with you.

First of all, on an personal level, it was amazing going back. Leaving Chennai airport I really thought India had made it to the 21st century. All the bill boards advertising the latest mod technology - iPads and mobile phones etc. But the heat and the masses remained, and it did not take long before images of people living in makeshift houses, among the dirt and rubbish in little alleyways made me think that little had changed. By the end of my trip I really felt that the gap between rich and poor had grown so much wider.

We stayed at the YMCA in Chennai - an oasis where we could rest and discuss what we had seen. It was all very easy in terms of seeing the projects with cars to transport us to the outskirts of the town or surrounding rural areas. We started early and returned late. In Kerala, we stayed at the YWCA and again were taken to visit people and projects. The projects were varied - self help groups, disability groups who had become self help groups, microcredit projects, organic farmers, work with the poorest of the poor, and very interestingly the work of the panchayats.

I had worked in a community based distribution health and family planning project in Uttar Pradesh back in the mid 90s and done research work in the early 90s in India so I had experience of visiting the villages but it was so lovely to go back - meet the people and see how the funds from AVI through the partner organisations can really make a difference. The self-help groups were saving

nominal amounts on a monthly basis until the collective pot was big enough from which the women in turn could get loans, or it might be used as collateral with a bank, providing more money for loans. All loans were charged an interest rate. We saw how the self help groups not only helped the women financially but also gave them a voice. They held planning meetings, looking at the needs of their community, and this was then fed back into the local panchayat. This had resulted in village roads being built among other things. The panchayat also acted on behalf of the local people in accessing government schemes etc. For the poorest of the poor, we met women who had been given a goat, or perhaps an iron so that she could take in other people's ironing, and now they were able to make a little money and look after themselves and their families.

The organic farming project in Kerala was in response to the high number of pesticides found in the soils of Kerala, pesticides that were banned in Europe. Individuals had responded to this project by growing a variety of vegetables in gunny bags around their house or if they had a solid house with flat roof, on the roof. They were now selling excess produce at local markets and so were not only feeding their families with healthy food but were also making some money too.

The projects alone were impressive but more so the dedication of the partner organisations who had come together to learn and take away best practice. In the discussions that took place, the partners from the hosting organisations no doubt learnt much from the visitors too.

I really felt that this was development theory in practice, and felt honoured to be part of the visit. AVI is, I feel, quite unique, in that it has long lasting and special relationships with the partners and I felt it was telling when at the Forum, the partners were asked would they still want to maintain the relationship, if due to the economic climate, AVI was no longer able to provide all the necessary funds. However, the partners were resounding in their positive response. They did not want to lose AVI's support because for them it was much more than funding!

Other news:

Petition to view and sign regarding Gay rights. Margaret Johnston, a QSAIG member, brought this to my attention in mid December 2013 and I have signed it. http://www.avaaz.org/en/indias_gay_outrage_loc/?bdKCnab&v=32699

Bachchu (Dr. Abu B. Siddique) has written a heart warming article about an inspirational person, **Dr. Akhtar Hameed Khan** whom he describes as “**a sage in development**”. Bachchu has been invited to present the paper at the

centenary of Dr. Khan's birth to be held in Bangladesh in the early part of 2014. If you would like to read the article please contact Bachchu at a.siddique2007@yahoo.com Bachchu would also like to hear from anyone who knows of any source of funds that might help him to make the journey.

The QSAIG website: <http://www.qsaig.co.uk> We are grateful that Martin Schweiger has initiated the QSAIG website. We trust that this has a potential for QSAIG and for those with whom we work and uphold. For example, you can access the notes of our last meeting on the website at <http://www.qsaig.co.uk/news-and-events>

Future Newsletter: We welcome written material for this Newsletter though as editor I will maintain responsibility for the final selection and editing of material. This may be in the form of an article about the region and its people, or news of the region through your own contacts, or indeed personal news that you would be willing to share with others in the QSAIG network. This could also include any "Letters to the Editor" responding to articles in this edition. The deadline for receipt of material for the next edition will be 30 June 2014. Stuart Morton.

QSAIG Annual Meeting - will be in the north of England in October 2014. The date, venue, and speakers will be announced as soon as possible.