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## Reunion Seminar: Continuous Learning and Networking Towards Future Directions

*From your Editor Ms. Joy A. Bastian*

Reunion, from the Latin word reunire, is the act or process of being brought together again as a unified whole. Practically it is hard to bring together course participants post training due to resources, time, distance, leadership and so on. However, AHI and some alumni in Asia are engaged in this effort, time and again, to renew ones commitment and define future acts.

The in-country alumni reunion seminars, this time in India, harness the knowledge that they have gotten from Japan. It inspires the AHI alumni to keep striving for best practices and mutually share in this forum.

This issue focuses on the reunion seminar of AHI Alumni India on November 20-23, 2013 in Mysore, India. AHI's Ms. UI Shiori writes about the reunion as a venue to renew commitment. Karuna Trust's Mr. Anup Kumar Sarmah shares his view as the organizer and alumnus. While three participants from India; namely Mr. Subhashish Ghosh, Mr. Paddana Balaram Naidu, and Sr. Eliza Kuppuzhacker express their thoughts and feedback.

For AHI and its alumni, the definition of reunion is taking off from simply gathering together to a deeper meaning during this event. For them it is a timely, appropriate, and inspiring space for mutual sharing, expressing struggles and victories, gaining and re-gaining momentum to keep going against all odds, in order to achieve a certain level of fairness, peace, good health and quality life as a whole.

The continuity of holding reunion seminars is a great manifestation of the impact of the AHI training held in Japan. In the same passion, it is an opportunity for the alumni to strengthen their networks, and to define and redefine future directions.



*Participants of the reunion seminar in India 2013.*

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**AHI Family Reunion Moves Forward with  
Renewed Commitment: The AHI Alumni  
Reunion Seminar in India 2013  
Ms. UI Shiori**

**1. Second Reunion Seminar in India Initiated by the Alumni**

The AHI Alumni Reunion Seminar was held in Mysore, Karnataka State from November 20 to 23, 2013. This is the second seminar of this kind in India initiated and organized by groups of AHI alumni, this time

Mr. Anup Sarmah (ILDC 2009) and Ms. Mousumi Gogoi (ILDC 2012) of Karuna Trust. A total of 33 persons from batches 1982 to 2012 participated specifically from 9 states in India (25), Thailand (2), Bangladesh (2), and AHI team (4). The main theme



*Ms. UI Shiori*



*Mr. Anup Sarmah, 2nd left, explains how Karuna Trust works with government, during community hospital visit.*

of this seminar was People's Participation in Community Health and the Role of NGOs. Karuna Trust, one of the leading organizations in India on this issue with long years of experiences, offered a great learning case for various possibilities in empowering people and public-private partnership.

**2. Features of this Reunion Seminar**

There were some unique features in this reunion seminar. They were: 1) This event was hosted by one organization, Karuna Trust and all the resources and workers were mobilized. 2) The theme was developed after the 1<sup>st</sup> seminar held in 2011 in Andhra Pradesh, where AHI alumni discussed the new rural health policy and guideline of India. So this seminar was in a way, the second phase of the two series of seminars. 3) There were non-Indian alumni who joined the seminar. Alumni and their colleagues of other countries joined as resource persons and ob-

servers for planning their own country's reunion seminar in the future. 4) Cross-networks of various year batches of alumni from AHI international course and AHI India regional/national course 1982-1998 in collaboration with Deenabandu/ANITRA Trust.

**3. Main Activities and Topics were:**

- India's health policy, trends, and issues;
- Work of Karuna Trust and VGKK, case study and field visits related to community health monitoring process;
- Sharing of updates and practices by alumni;
- Thailand health care system and health advocacy case;
- Bangladesh community participation in community clinic case;
- AHI Japan: AHI updates, post MDG agenda, Japan's health care system, Hiroshima atomic bomb;
- Sharing of learning and insights, and;
- Alumni network future plan discussion

**4. Informal Sharing as Key Part of Event**

The seminar was full of exciting programs from the early morning to evening everyday. Participants continued informal discussion and sharing during tea break and meal time, and even till late evening. The group stayed together in a facility of Karuna Trust. Cultural exchange with diversity in India and additional flavors brought from other countries made even a bus ride for the field trip an unforgettable memory.



*Hectic schedule, yet the participants are enthusiastically listening, all awake ever!*

**5. Continuous Learning and Networking**

Going through the history of long experience in community health, each participant reflected their evolution of work and life; organization and self. After sharing their learning and insights, at the very

end of the seminar, the alumni initiated discussion for future plans. Decisions were made to keep this type of continuous learning and networking among alumni, and that the next reunion seminar would be organized in Kerala, tackling new issues. Another agreed point was to set a state-wise contact persons for six states and one region. These contact persons will be responsible for communicating with the alumni in their respective state, and also for orienting new participants for AHI training. Some ways of sharing burden in organizing the reunion seminar by non-host alumni were also suggested.

## 6. From Receivers to Supporters of AHI

Some alumni proposed that AHI alumni should change themselves “from receivers of support by AHI to supporters of AHI”. As concrete actions, some alumni voluntarily joined in as AHI supporting members who annually donate on their birthdays, saying: “Before, we could not do much for AHI, but now we can do something. Why not we alumni support AHI this time?” AHI heartily appreciated this proposal and actions to build mutual support between and among AHI-Japanese supporters and alumni members all over Asia.

For AHI, country-wise reunion seminar is a great opportunity to know updates and renew contacts with alumni, to know the impact of training, and to understand current issues and concerns in the country in the fast changing world. AHI is happy to respond to alumni’s enthusiasm and initiatives for continuous experience-sharing and networking toward collaboration for a common vision. We are overwhelmed with so much rich resources found among alumni, and we do look forward to develop concrete collaboration with alumni beyond this event.

**Why don’t you also organize the AHI Reunion Seminar in your place and country and get this exciting experience and learning as host organization like Mr. Anup of Karuna Trust!**

The reports of the previous seminars can be accessed from the following sites:

[http://ahi-japan.sakura.ne.jp/english/html/publication/Reunion\\_seminar\\_south\\_india\\_2011.pdf](http://ahi-japan.sakura.ne.jp/english/html/publication/Reunion_seminar_south_india_2011.pdf)

[http://ahi-japan.sakura.ne.jp/english/html/publication/Reunion\\_seminar\\_india\\_2013.pdf](http://ahi-japan.sakura.ne.jp/english/html/publication/Reunion_seminar_india_2013.pdf)

**Reflection from the Organizer  
(Reunion Seminar in India 2013)  
Mr. Anup Sarmah, Karuna Trust, India,  
ILDC 2009**

The noun Reunion is a gathering of people; can be family or relatives, or colleagues. It also means the reuniting of two or more people - their coming back together again after a separation to live in peace by sharing their knowledge, thoughts and inputs.



**Mr. Sarmah**

The reunion seminar which was organized in Karuna Trust at Mysore in Karnataka state in November 2013 was a big platform for the AHI-Indian alumni members who were enlighten by each of them. The alumni group was having variation in their age group, ranging from young enthusiastic groups to well experienced senior members. This reunion seminar could break the barrier between these two groups (young and senior) resulting a rich learning opportunity for the younger group. The experience and knowledge of senior alumni members was tremendous and inspirational for the younger alumni members like me. The outcome of the reunion seminar was full of joy, love, refreshment and a tremendous commitment to serve the needy people around us for all of the alumni members.

The reunion seminar is over but its impact on us is splendid. As rightly said by Ms. Eliza Kuppozackel (OMC 1992), this reunion brought a new life and energy. It will be a driving force for all of us. The blessings and well-wishes from the AHI and the alumni members will always motivate us to excel in our work. As an alumnus, the knowledge which I gathered from the veteran alumni was quite inspiring. Their extraordinary work in varied fields including health and livelihood was really motivating for me, which will greatly impact my work. This will act as motivator and will help me to work hard for the people with whom our organization is working for the last three decades.

As an organizer of this event, it was a mixed experience for me. Balancing between being an alumnus and the organizer was most crucial and indeed a great opportunity for me to keep continuing this responsibility. Although there were some hitches initially, but we as a Karuna Trust team could overcome those problems towards a healthy ending of the seminar. Those hitches have already been discussed in the evaluation session of the seminar with inputs from the alumni which may be useful in or-

ganizing the next reunion seminar. It is also important for us to know if all enjoyed themselves, and if not why not, or what could be done better. My colleague Mousumi Gogoi, Satya Ranjan Goswami and Karuna Trust Mysore office team members including Mr Kantharaju, Sharmaji, Ananda, Viswanath, Subramani, Sandeep, Chandru, Kumar, Manjunath and others worked very hard to make the reunion seminar a great success and without whom, it would have never been possible.

We need to give some more time in the evaluation of the reunion where the voice of everyone can be useful. This is a reunion that belongs to everyone and while one person must be in charge and others help out, everyone should have a voice in how the reunion went and in what could be done to match or exceed it next time. The evaluation offers some ideas that, if regarded seriously, can make the reunion a perfect and holistic product for all of us. Their opinions, comments, ideas, suggestions, constructive response and, yes, criticisms should be taken seriously which makes our members more active and enhance the participatory way of learning.

At the last I would like to express my gratitude to AHI for helping and guiding the Indian alumni in organizing this wonderful event. Your efforts to bring the alumni close to AHI family is very much innovative, inspiring and fruitful to make a strong bond between all of us. I am proud to be a member of the wonderful AHI family. Long live AHI! Long live alumni members! Long live Asia! Cheers!

**Voices from the Participants of the Reunion Seminar**

***Voice of Mr. Subhashish Ghosh, Nutanhat Development Society (NDS), India, ILDC 2000***

We were quite pleased to have with us the secretary of AHI, Ms. Kagumi Hayashi and other members in the meeting. Her presence along with Ms. UI, Ms. Shimizu and others has encouraged us especially that they stayed throughout the sessions in the meeting. Presentations and interactions have given more clarity on strategies, community monitoring and results. Sharing of challenges and to overcome them was interesting for all of us.



**Mr. Ghosh**

Karuna Trust’s presentation by Mr. Padmashree H. Sudarshan, health activist, was worthy in under-

standing the strategies, community monitoring, establishing local governance and undertake challenges remaining with the Sloga tribes of B.R. Hills. He expressed the development of Sloga tribes, and during field visit to B.R. Hills we saw his self-commitment and determination which has changed his life situation today.



***From right to left: Karuna Trust founder Dr. Padmashree H. Sudarshan, Ms. Kagumi Hayashi, and Mr. Ugrid Milintangkul.***

From the Thai Government’s National Health Commission (NHC), Mr. Ugrid Milintangkul, Deputy Secretary General, and Ms. Sirithorn Orachai, Senior Officer, shared on the health systems by National Health Assembly. The presentation and interactions have also given us clarity on the “Rights to Health from Grassroot to Tree Top” in Thailand. Issues on early child marriages, teenage pregnancy, female child trafficking are similar with India and Bangladesh but each country has its own legal provisions to meet the challenges and NHC-Thailand with their own systems has been able to minimize it.



***Mr. Ugrid Milintangkul (ILDC 1987) sharing the Thai experience.***

Mr. Modon Das and Mr. Md. Reazul Karim, Development Association for Self Communication and Health (DASCOH), a Bangladeshi organization, presented their strategies in addressing health issues



and education. During these four days meeting, we have met the Professor of Bangalore University who happens to be a Sloga tribe and he shared how he got the thoughts of Swami Vivekananda from Dr. Sudarshan. He shared his personal development along with professional achievements as a backward tribal from B.R. Hills.

I thank AHI for the very touching video presentation about Hiroshima. We felt the trauma and agony of those victimized. Videos from other participants were educational and gave us apparent ideas. Session on the Millennium Development Goal 2015 by Ms. Ul vis-a-vis setting goals and target indicators were shared to improvise it. Ms. Hayashi and Ms. Ul handled the session regarding the future involvement of the Indian Alumni in the upcoming reunion seminar. In the end, Ms. Eliza Kuppzhackel took the responsibility as in-charge of the third meeting in 2014.

Participatory learning, which I had learned from AHI (ILDC 2000), was extremely useful in my work for the tribal children and women groups. I understand that all of us as participants follow the same path to reach the goals on community health development and take new initiatives to alleviate the community situation. International meetings of this nature keep us thinking forward, clarify concepts, update new ideas and knowledge on new laws in health. I am grateful to AHI for supporting the AHI-India Alumni meetings and workshops and the future collaborative projects as told by Ms. Hayashi.

***Voice of Mr. Paddana Balaram Naidu  
Comprehensive Social Service Society (CSSS)  
India, ILDC 1982***



**Mr. Naidu**

Congratulations organizers! You have coordinated your team very well for the arrangements of the second reunion seminar. The accommodation, food and venue were excellent. You have rightly chosen the resource persons who shared their rich experiences and speeches.

Every development worker should know the commitment and hard work of Mr. Sudharshan for the overall development of the people. We can realize that a single individual could develop so much, yet why not us? It is good that every participant is eager to know new things through the sharing. Both the first and second day sessions were marvelous!

The field visit on the third day was relaxed and stimulated enthusiasm to learn more about health and development, and livelihood options introduced by Karuna Trust. The reunion seminar, on the whole

gave a picture not only health but also comprehensive development of the needy in the thick forest of Karnataka and Tamilnadu borders.



***Listening to the experience of a doctor at Karuna Trust managed Primary Health Center.***

I think the second seminar is better than the first reunion seminar. We hope the third seminar in Kerala will be the best AHI alumni reunion seminar. It is really great that Ms. Eliza Kuppzhackel shouldered the responsibility. Let us extend our whole hearted support to her whenever she needs. Whenever she calls for any planning meeting let us go on our own without troubling others.

It was a good chance for us to know each other who have undergone training in different times in AHI, Japan. Having representatives from nearby countries inspired us to do our best in holding the reunion seminar, and probably hinting them to do the same in their home country.

Our thanks to all teams, Mr. Sudharshan's cooperation and encouragement, and Karuna Trust members who were involved in this task in behalf of AHI.

***Voice of Ms. Eliza Kuppzhackel  
AYUSHYA, India, OMC 1992***

We were happy to meet every one as we already knew many of them from our first reunion at the Comprehensive Social Service Society (CSSS) in Andhra in 2012.



**Ms. Eliza**

Appreciated the care of the AHI team and their personal interaction us. They even carried some special snacks with them all the way from Japan which we enjoyed during our tea time. It became like a family reunion. Lots of positive energy was created and shared among the group. Time we spent together was relaxing as well as informative.

Our visit to the hills where Mr. Sudarshan worked among the tribes single handed in a very challenging situation was a great chance. We were inspired to see the developments in that area in the field of education and health. One of his first students from the area is now working in a university, who was also one of our resource persons. The hospital we visited on the way was a good example of how public-private partnership can effectively work upon to help the people improve their health.



***Sr. Rossama (ILDC and OMC 2002) talking to the pregnant women waiting for health check up at the Community Hospital.***

All in all our reunion was informative, educational and energizing. We look forward to our next gathering in Ayushya, Centre for healing and Integration at changanacherry, Kerala, to energize ourselves in a holistic way. Ms. Ui and Ms. Tateyama already visited the place after our get together in Mysore to get an idea about the venue for our next assembly.



***Alumni of AHI supported India national course 1982-1998 with Ms. UI Shiori.***

## FLASH ARTICLES

**The Art Workshop on Peace and Health and Sadako's Prayer Book in Pakistan**  
**Mr. Hector Nihal, AIDS Awareness Society (AAS)**  
**Pakistan, ILDC 2013**



***Mr. Nihal***

### **1. Introduction**

Peace is a key component of human development and a healthy nation. For many years, Pakistan is suffering from internal and external crisis of peace, religious intolerance, and war and terrorism that created mental torture and uncertainty to everyone in the country. According to the

Pakistan Security Report 2013 compiled by Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS), militant, nationalist insurgent and violent sectarian groups carried out a total of 1,717 terrorist attacks across Pakistan in 2013, claiming the lives of 2,451 people and causing injuries to another 5,438. In this situation every human being in and outside Pakistan is concerned about this terrible situation and would like to play its due role to restore the peace of mind, to rebuild the gaps among people and create opportunities where rays of peace, love, acceptance, tolerance and co-existence can shine.

The above situation led Mr. Hector Nihal (ILDC 2013), Director of AIDS Awareness Society (AAS), Pakistan to join hands with the organizations working for the restoration of peace in the world and play its due role to strengthen the peace-building process internally. He was inspired by the efforts of the Atomic Bomb survivors from Hiroshima that he met during the ILDC exposure visit in 2013.

He utilized his learning from the AHI-ILDC and the Asian Network of Trust (ANT) Hiroshima, Japan exposure visit by organizing two activities in partnership with the latter. These activities are 1) Art Workshop on "Peace and Health" for students, and 2) distribution of Sadako's prayer books among school children, both in Lahore, Pakistan. The objectives were 1) to create awareness of the effects of Atomic Bomb on the lives of the people with special reference to Hiroshima, Japan, and 2) to promote values of peace and justice among the young people in Lahore.

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## 2. The Art Workshop on Peace and Health

On 17<sup>th</sup> December 2013, a one-day workshop was organized with 25 students from different academic institutions in Lahore. It was aimed at sensitizing young students about peace issues, effects of atomic bomb on humanity, and efforts of the people of Hiroshima for the restoration of peace in the world. It was facilitated by Mr. Hector Nihal in tandem with Mr Ajaz Ahmad, art trainer from Funkor Child Art Organization, Islamabad.

In the first part, Mr. Hector Nihal gave a presentation about his exposure visit to Hiroshima. He showed a video about the atomic bomb dropped in Hiroshima on the 6<sup>th</sup> of August 1946. Thereafter was a discussion about the destruction and stories of the survivors. It was very shocking for the participants.



*Students painting their concept of peace.*

Second part, Mr. Ajaz Ahmad shared the process of conceptualizing ideas of peace and transforming it on a canvas or chart. The participants amazingly conceptualized many ideas about peace and health, and made different charts related to it highlighting various issues related to daily life.



*Students happily express peace through art.*

The workshop helped the participants to understand the importance of peace, and how to create awareness within their family members and among students about the links between health and peace through art.

## 3. Distribution of Sadako's Prayer Books

On the 18<sup>th</sup> of December 2013, a Christmas program linked to peace was organized at St. Dominic High Girls School, Youhanabad, Lahore, with over 1000 participants. The program was based on different skits, Christmas songs, speeches, reading and distribution of Sadako's prayer books and making paper cranes. Mr. Ajaz Ahmad a Muslim played the role of Santa Claus to make it symbolic that Christian and Muslims can live together. Muslims are also part of the happiness of Christmas with Christian community in Pakistan. Rev. Fr. Macus OP, (Coordinator of Justice & Peace Committee), and Mr. George Paul (member of the National Peace Committee, Pakistan) and Mr. Sana Ullah (Principal of St. Dominic Girls High School), all appreciated the content, objectives and purpose of the program and efforts of the school management, AAS, ANT and children for organizing the very impressive program.



*Christmas peace program and Sadako's book.*

One of the comments on facebook was very impressive; "Oh, The Story of Sasaki Sadako; the girl of "one thousand paper cranes' in Pakistan"! It has created spiritual bonding and linkages among the children of Japan and Pakistan. The story of Sadako's prayer and making paper cranes, making linkages with atomic bomb survivors, and Christmas created the symbolic need to highlight the importance of peace in the world especially in Pakistan. These programs helped the students to play their effective role in the peace building process in their homes, school and society.

**EDCI and ZP Workshop on Malnutrition  
for Supervisors**

**Mr. Sandesh Sudhakar, Ecumenical  
Development Center of India (EDCI),  
ILDC 2007**



**Mr. Sudhakar**

In Melghat area malnutrition is very high due to various reasons. Malnutrition also exists in the surrounding rural areas and slums of Nagpur District. This issue is unnoticed and small children perish and suffer.

There should be coordinated efforts so that Nagpur District will

become a malnutrition-free district. With this concern in mind on 19<sup>th</sup> January 2013, the Ecumenical Development Centre of India (EDCI) and Nagpur Zilla Parishad (ZP) organized a one-day workshop on malnutrition for 13 talukas in Nagpur District for the supervisors working in the grassroots level at Pragati Centre, Lonara, Nagpur.

The program was inaugurated by Mr. Prabhu Thute, Deputy Chief Executive Officer (DCEO) of ZP, Mr. Borker, BDO of ZP, Mr. Sandesh Sudhakar, Assistant Director of EDCI, and Mr. N.P. Wankhede and Dr. T.J. Sawarkar, CPDO supervisors. Around 13 Community Development Project Officers (CDPOs) and 100 supervisors from 13 talukas of Nagpur District participated in this workshop. The workshop was to train the supervisors for the government projects to be implemented in different villages of Nagpur District for children's welfare and for bringing down the malnutrition level.

NGOs and government agencies have to play an important role for child development as a holistic mission. With this, health check-up camps, agriculture based projects, self employment schemes, women development schemes, and employment schemes for women are some of the projects of ZP in Nagpur District.

Mr. Prabhu Thute, Deputy CEO of ZP conducted the day's sessions and evaluated the work of the supervisors, ZP schemes implemented in 13 talukas in Nagpur Region. He ordered them to bring zero level of malnutrition in Nagpur District. More programs will be organized with EDCI in the near future and training will be given to all the grassroots level workers.

Dr. T.J Sawakar talked about the work of EDCI for the past 32 years. Mr. Sandesh Ramteke, Assistant

Director of EDCI, shared on the role of NGOs and government agencies as partners to achieve zero malnutrition level as well as other future prospects. The CDPOs and supervisors discussed the problems they are facing to implement the project, and how the officers of ZP can help. Mr. Prabhu Thute assured them of all possible help and encouraged them to work hard to reach the target. Mr. Borker appreciated the work of EDCI especially the workshop.

On February 2013, a big Health Check-up Camp with emphasis on treating malnourished children was organized in Pragati centre Lonara. The team of specialist doctors treated the detected malnourished children by providing medicine, guidance and follow-up on regular basis.

**The Struggle of Plantations Communities  
to Acquire Land for Survival**

**Mr. W. A. Herman Kumara, National Fisheries  
Solidarity Movement (NAFSO), Sri Lanka,  
ILDC 1999**

*"We are citizens of Sri Lanka. Keep the President's promise of the Budget speech. Give land to landless plantation people as promised in the budget speech 2012."*



**Mr. Kumara**

**1. Introduction**

"Dan Danak, Dan Danak, Dan Danak..." This is the sound of the bell ringing in the tea estates during the past 200 years, since 1813 when the British colonizers brought the labors[s-laves] from Tamil Nadu, India to work in their tea plantations. Plantation communities have been ready to play to the tune of their white masters while Sri Lankan local communities rejected to work in the tea and rubber plantations as labors. Those people have been living in 8' x 8' space lain room (small room each family allocated for living and cooking purposes for the whole family) which served as their house for generations in the plantations. The same people lost their citizenship, hence lost almost all the basic human facilities, human rights, and human dignity after by a Parliamentary Act in 1947. There was considerable number of people from the plantations who were returned back to India after Sirima-Shassthri Pact (agreement between the then Prime Ministers of Sri Lanka and India). The Indian Prime Minister and the Sri Lankan Prime Minister had signed an agreement to repatriate the so called "Indian Tamils" in 1963.

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The British colonizers connected the plantation communities to the world market through railway lines to export tea to Europe and elsewhere. Their sweat and blood brought “Golden Pound” to the estate owners and named those lands as Golden Pound estates. However, the life of the workers were desperately down as there was no any basic facilities for the plantation communities. From birth, mothers should keep their babies in the crèche (a place where small children are looked after while their parents or guardians are working or doing something else), and go picking tea buds to earn their livelihoods. There were no schools for the plantation children. Some plantations had only primary schools. Even today, plantation communities are the least educated in the country.

## 2. Injustice

The communities living in plantations can neither cultivate their Lain (home) garden nor plant vegetables; even those are temporary plants in nature. They had the most fertile land in the country yet plantation sector communities reported the highest malnutrition prevalence in the country. About 30% of children under the age of five are underweight, nearly 1 in 3 babies have low birth weight, and one-third of women of reproductive age are malnourished. (DHS 2006-2007). There were only common toilets for the whole of lain people in the estate. Water, sanitation, health facilities were one of the poorest in the country.

Their daily wages are below the country's standard. Even today, a woman gets 600 LKR (4 USD) per head while men get 800 LKR (5.5 USD) as daily wage if they work more than



*Protest rally demanding land.*

18 days per month. If they work below 18 days, the daily wage becomes 450 LKR per (3 USD) person. The plantation trade unions are not actually helpful to gain the rights of their members. All of them are actually working hand in hand with their estate owners, investors, and companies. On the brighter side, the tea plantations were the highest contributor to the national income as a matter of fact. This was true till 1977 with the introduction of open Market Economic policies under Neo Liberal economic agenda in the country.

The citizenship was one of the biggest issues among the plantation communities till 2002, when the government finally granted citizenship to closely 1 million people in the plantation community. This action created the legal space for demanding the rights of the people in plantation communities - right to land, right to education, right to housing and right to basic facilities for decent life.

Even after two centuries, in the era of modern slavery, the plantation workers still suffer from low wages as well as insufficient number of working days. The plantation workers are unable to work at least 18 days. The reason is now most of the plantation companies are managed by big business groups not relevant to tea estates. Even the managers of the tea estates are not qualified for tea plantation. For example, tea planting can be conducted in two ways, one by cultivating tea seeds and the other by the budding system. Through budding system, productivity is doubled but tea leaves cannot be plucked during the rainy seasons. Under the seeding system, tea leaves can be plucked throughout the year. The management only uses the budding system, requiring, such as this year, the plantation workers can work only 7 or 10 days in a month. This is also because February is a rainy month. Thus, the estate workers utterly lose their income under the budding system.

## 3. Political Will Disguised in Lip Service

In this context, Sri Lankan President proposed in the budget for 2011 that the government distribute 37,000 hectares of uncultivated land among landless plantation communities. However, to date the government has not implemented this. Instead, the land rights groups such as Praja Abilasha (PA), National Fisheries Solidarity (NAFSO) and Peoples' Alliance for Right to Land (PARL) had observed that the Government of Sri Lanka (GOSL) prepared plans to lease out the same lands for a 99-year system to the multinational-companies to make huge investments, while two acres land will be given to farmers in a 30-year leasing system. PA and NAFSO pointed out that the GOSL is planning to give this land to multinational-companies whereby the very long term lease destroys the richness of soil and all. The short term profit motives of the companies will caused the serious environmental destruction through cutting of trees exposing soil which could erode and deposit river bottoms overflowing them during the rainy season. The GOSL is already attempting to displace the landless plantation communities from their lands.

Herewith, we, the PA, NAFSO, and the Movement for Land and Agriculture Reforms (MONLAR) pro-



posed that the land be given to plantation workers who have been working hard for many years on it and contributing to the national economy of this country. So the campaign has been initiated in order to obtain plantation people's land rights. The People demand the GOSL to provide 1) two acres land for agriculture and 2) 20 perches land for housing and home gardening.

#### 4. We Raise and Echo Our Voices



*Mr. Francis Raajan, Praja Abilasha Network Co-ordinator, giving leaflets.*

The Praja Abilasha (People's Aspirations) Network launched a signature campaign since last year and handed over the petition to the relevant authorities, insisting plantation people's demands. We highlighted this issue and conducted a mass rally on this in Kandy, during the World Food(less) week of action in October 2012. During the last provincial council election in October 2013, we used this petition as a campaign strategy. We organized poster campaign, stating "Vote only for the party which provides 20 perches land for housing and 2 acres for agriculture for each family who landless." We likewise distributed leaflets and conducted group discussions. Many political parties raised the land rights of the plantation workers during the election campaign as their platform. Unfortunately, after the election everybody became silent. But we will voice out relentlessly until we win gain the land for plantation workers through our proposed solution for the marginalized community. WE are approaching various civil groups for support and planning the next steps of the campaign to get the land rights to the landless communities in the plantation sector.

The struggle continues.

**Women Struggle in Sri Lanka**  
**Ms. Logeswary Ponniah**  
**Human Development Organization (HDO)**  
**Sri Lanka, ILDC 2008**

*Who gulped the 1889 million Rupees saved from the plantation workers wages, for Employees Provident Fund, Employees Trust Fund and Gratuity, who created and developed the plantations and improved the economy?*



**Ms. Ponniah**

#### 1. The Women Solidarity Front (WSF) in Retrospect

In the contemporary social, political environment, women's rights and gender equality occupy an important place. Women have to take interest in safeguarding and strengthening their social, economic, political, cultural, and employment rights that is equal with men. It was in pursuance of such women's political and employment rights that Women's Solidarity Front was founded. The Front has been registered as a Trade Union under Trade Unions Ordinance, in the name of Women Solidarity Front. But, going back into its history, it could be found that the initiatives it took went a few years before.

Human Development Organization is a civil society organization deeply involved in human rights, women's rights and gender equality projects for the last 20 years. With the need of the hour coupled with the inflow of request, Women Solidarity Forum was founded, on the basis of women's leadership and women membership in the background of HDO in 2010. It started its activities centered on hill country women workers and Ampara District Fisheries and Agricultural sector women workers. Now as the trade union, the Front which gives importance to women's economic and political rights has about 2000 women members.

The Front's agenda includes 1) Strengthening women's economic rights; 2) Organizing women into a powerful force; 3) Sustaining women's right to politics, education and employment; and 4) Voicing against all forms of violence against women.

The Front has a woman at the helm of leadership, taking into its fold plantation women workers, Free Trade Zone (FTZ) women workers and migrant women workers.

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Women Solidarity Front has the proud privilege of being the first to bring the plantation, FTZ and migrant women workers who play the major role in the economy of Sri Lanka, under one banner. The joint May Day 2013 where these working women in Colombo - Katunayake, came together was a milestone in the success of Women Solidarity Front, which has its office in Kandy.

Women Solidarity Front has been founded upon the cardinal principle of representing these workers. Who include the plantation women workers, Free Trade Zone women workers and Migrant women workers. WSF strongly stand for building women leadership in labor movements and politics.

***The Objectives of the WSF are to:***

- 1) promote, protect and further the socio-economic, cultural, and political and such other workers rights;
- 2) foster, promote and further women's rights on the basis of gender equality and protect them against domestic and work place violence, abuses and harassment;
- 3) unite workers irrespective of ethnic, religious linguistic and political diversities;
- 4) foster, promote further children's right to education and protect schooling age children being exposed to child labour, physical and physiological abuses and harassments;
- 5) build Labour Alliances among workers in different industries; and
- 6) strive to ensure labour dignity and equality to women workers.

**2. Women Political Empowerment**

Around 40 % of the plantation workers are not unionized and especially among the teens. The youth don't trust the traditional trade unions because they have seen their parents fighting through these traditional organizations and losing little by little their rights and their dignity. Furthermore, women participation in the decision making of the main trade unions is very low and there is a need to empower women political participation.

**3. Support the Isolated Workers of the Non-formal Sector**

On the above three sectors, according to the available information, there is no coordinated action or actually no women headed trade unions for these workers together and the need to collaborate with these worker's community is a priority for WSF.

**4. Building Ethnic Harmony through Workers Rights**

Through women workers struggle, various communities in Sri Lanka can share, exchange and learn to live in peace and harmony. Women workers struggle can be a tool to build peace through an inter-ethnic based unions. The WSF aims to unite women workers (and workers in general) irrespective of ethnic, religious, linguistic and political diversities. The traditional trade unions of these sectors are "yellow trade unions" in the mind of a majority of the workers. They are mainly taking the side of the employers and most of their leaders are male and using the trade unions to take political power, rather than fight for the workers rights. There is a need for an alternative union which gives priority to the women workers.

**5. Activities Carried Out**

***5.1 WSU Promoting Women Participation in Trade Unions (TUs)***

There are more women subscribers to the trade unions by virtue of outnumbering their male counterparts particularly in the plantations. But, women representation in the decision making process is pathetically low. In the leadership position of TUs, from the grassroots to the top are men. In the local committees while the leaders are men, there is a women's wing attached to it with woman leadership. However this woman leader, in the practical sense is devoid of any power including to take decision. There is little possibility for women to lead a trade union. However, according to a women's right activist, women are making efforts to create women leadership in the trade union movement. In the meantime it is noteworthy that the estate leaders are not elected on merits. On the contrary they are elevated to that position because of their closeness to the trade union hierarchy or relationship or based on caste. Many of the women participants stated that the trade union mostly was functioning at the whims and fancies of the leaders both at estate level and the top level and in their interest than to struggle for the workers rights.

***5.2 WSF, WSU & HDO Campaign for Living Wage for Plantation Workers***

Plantation sector is a major foreign exchange earning sector with around 4.5 percent of the Sri Lankan workforce directly employed in it. Of late, the daily wage of the tea and rubber plantation workers is determined on the basis of a Collective Agreement (CA), signed between the plantation Trade Unions

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and Employers' Federation of Ceylon (EFC), which is renewable once in two years.

While the practice followed in the other countries of the world is to determine the wage on the basis of the prevailing cost of living in the respective countries, the wage of the Sri Lankan plantation sector worker is determined through the CA with no regard to the increasing cost of living index. The last CA expired of March 2013, except that the workers who bore the brunt of the cost of living, but no trade union took any serious note of it. Some trade unions and political parties made their presence felt at the demonstrations and agitation campaigns which the workers themselves organized with the support of some civil society organizations, of course, only for their political gains.

In this background the Workers Solidarity Union and other non-signatory Trade Unions together demanded Basic wage Rs. 550 and other remuneration Rs. 200, altogether Rs 750. The government kept away from the issue in spite of a conflict and the continuing worker agitations, which has created discontentment among the people. The WSF joined the campaign together with HDO on behalf of the women workers. Finally the plantation workers gained Rs.620 per day wage.

### ***5.3 Struggle Against Private Sector Pension Scheme***

The Government Proposed Private Sector Employees' Pension Scheme made the country face protests of gigantic proportion. Though the bill has been withdrawn at present, it should be noted that it created condition for the government to face opposition from various quarters. This makes it necessary to have a clear understanding of the bill.

A majority of the Free Trade Zone workers, main opposition parties and leftist parties are up in arms against this private sector pension scheme on the ground that it will benefit the next of kin (or the heirs) only up to a certain period, and therefore it is needless. The Women Solidarity Front, joining with Women's Centre supported the struggle of the private sector workers like FTZ workers.

The government took action to cripple this through military intervention, and on the other hand, as a measure to satisfy the masses, it announced on 4<sup>th</sup> June 2011, that the bill was withdrawn.

### ***5.4 Towards Collective Action***



***Women struggle, women power, against private sector pension scheme.***

Since the workers of the plantation sector, migrant sector and FTZ workers, put out their demands in isolation from one another they are found to be unable to win their demands. The workers of one sector are not aware of the right violations in another sector, the counterparts are subjected to, and, there is no link among these three sectors. If there is solidarity among the workers of these three sectors, and they unite in action, it will be a challenge to the employers who cannot afford to mistreat them.

### **6. Women's May Day: Historical Day of Women Solidarity Front**

“Let us defend and ensure the rights of plantation, migrant and free trade zone women workers.”

May 1, 2013 can be seen as a special May Day, as this was the first in Sri Lanka in which women were participating and their rights considered to be the theme of the day. With the rally starting from Katunayake, Evary Watta ground to Amantholuwa Jayawarathana Puna auditorium, around 700 women workers from three different sectors participated in this year's May day, organized by 'Women Solidarity Front' trade union with the support of Women's Centre, HDO and Workers Solidarity Union.

Plantation women workers, free trade zone women workers and migration women workers came together underlining the importance of women workers' rights.

May Day is celebrated all over the world and important as far as the workers are concerned. As women of the 8-hour workday, the workers commemorate the struggle of the Chicago workers demanding the reduction of 12-hour shifts to 8 hours per day. Women Solidarity Front - which believes the rights of the workers cannot be won through isolated sector based struggle - organized the May Day rally jointly with its sister trade union, representing the migrant workers and FTZ workers.

With this in view, it was proposed to form a common platform which will enable the workers of these sectors to meet, discuss and work out a common strategy to pursue their demands, for solution to problems that may arise:

- Out of demand for wage increase;
- From the women workers' rights, and especially, pregnant women and mothers;
- Right to organize;
- Residential area and work place rights;
- Health and nutrition;
- Family and children's education;
- Employer – employee conflicts.
- Language Rights
- Land Rights

Language and Land rights are the issues specific to the plantation community.

## 7. Campaign on Land & Housing Rights of Plantation People

WSF joined with the Workers' Solidarity Union and HDO in the Campaign on Land & Housing Rights of Plantation People; another major issue. About 56% of the families live in line rooms, which were constructed by British rulers more than 100 years ago. Plantation community is a landless community; however it is identified that around 70,000 hectares uncultivated land is available in the plantation areas to be distributed among tea small holders. The plantation workers who toiled their life for generations are marginalized. There are two demands put forward by the people themselves as follows: 1) Land for housing purpose (20 perch per family), and 2) Land for livelihood purpose (2 acre). Therefore, land issues will be a major issue and challenge for the community in the future.

## 8. 1889 Million Rupee Campaign

WSF also supports the "1889 Million Rupee Campaign", The government owned JEDB, SLSPC and Elkaduwa plantations are due to pay the Employees Provident Fund (EPF), Employees Trust Fund (ETF) and Gratuity around 1889 million rupees to around 13,000 plantation workers in 31 Estates in Kandy, Matale and Nuwaraeliya districts since 2001. However workers of all the JEDB and the SLSPC estates are now on struggle to win their demands such as EPF and ETF arrears, lack of job security and lack of equal benefits, same as the staff of the JEDB and the SLSPC. The trade unions said that both institutions did not pay the EPF and the ETF contributions since 2001. Number of workers and activists approached Workers Solidarity Union and the HDO to initiate a major campaign on S.L. Rs. 1889 million EPF, ETF and Gratuity issues. WSF joined the campaign since July 2013.

## HERE AND THERE

**Be Aware That We Are Asians!  
AHI's New Challenge: "Mobile Classes"  
for International Understanding  
Mr. KAMIYA Kingo, AHI Board Member/  
Volunteer**



*Mr. Kamiya*

### 1. What is "Mobile Classes"?

AHI has started to deliver participatory workshops to promote international understanding among elementary schools in the City of Nisshin and others. AHI organizes a special team, dispatches it to the elementary schools and encourages the students (the 6<sup>th</sup> grader, 12 year-old children) to experience various programs. The purpose of which is to understand the reality of children in Asian countries. The AHI team, started the program on September 6, 2013, at Nisshin-Minami Elementary School. We have carried out Mobile Classes in the following number of schools in Nisshin City (6), Toyota City (2), and Miyoshi City (1) in three months (September to December 2013).

One thing to be noted about this workshop is that all the programs are designed and conducted by AHI volunteers except the introduction of AHI and Dr. Kawahara. The lead person of the team is Ms. Hasada, AHI staff, who contacts the proper volunteer instructors for each specific purpose. She arranges several proposed ideas on Mobile Classes into a plan for implementation. The teachers' requests are given priority in drafting the plan. The first half of this series project was owed to Mr. Kazuya Goto, a part-time staff of AHI, also an important instructor. But Ms. Hasada fully relies on every volunteer instructor when a program is carried out. She usually plays the role of a timekeeper. She knows that some volunteers are specialists in a certain field on this category. Usually 4~8 volunteer instructors attend the Mobile Classes, according to the number of students of the school.

### 2. How it started?

The local government of Nisshin City raised an open call for the participants in its model collaboration action plan with community-based non-government organizations as per regulations. AHI submitted the idea of this mobile classes as part of the action plan which was luckily adopted. The government asked all nine elementary schools in the

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city whether or not they want to carry out the special classes for international understanding. Seven out of nine schools replied positively. Two staff from the local government normally observed each time we organize the class. The other three Mobile Classes except Nisshin City were requested by experienced teachers. These teachers are mostly AHI supporting members.

### 3. What do children experience in the Mobile Classes?

Beforehand, the AHI team shows the line up of program contents (Mobile Classes) to the teachers in-charge of the target school. Then they select three or four program topics that suit their needs and the class size.

The most popular program contents of the Mobile Classes are as follows:

The AHI team starts with a brief self-introduction of instructors. It is followed by telling the story of Dr. Hiromi Kawahara, founder of AHI, especially of his experience in Nepal. The students were eagerly listening as they are familiar with AHI and Dr. Kawahara. They came to know AHI and Dr. Kawahara from the textbook that they had to study at school.

Finally, the students are divided into three to four groups and enjoy the following in turns.

**I. Try on Sari.** The purpose of which is to let the students learn cultural diversity among Asian countries. We also encouraged the boys to experience putting on sari by themselves.

**II. Hunger Banquet.** Using small pieces of chocolate, the students learn about the gap between the rich and the poor. They are divided into 3 to 4 groups by lot (janken game). Through janken, one group is declared as winner and gets a basketful of chocolate. The winning group simulates the most developed countries in Asia. On the other hand, the losers, who mimic the less developed countries in Asia, get only a few chocolates. Then each group begins to discuss what to do with the extra chocolates (winner) and the insufficient chocolates (losers). What if someone among the winner group reject to give some to others?

**III. Three bottles of medicine.** This lets the students recognize the importance of literacy. What if you can't read nor write? Suppose one child of each group suffers from stomachache. But, both labels on the three bottles and the prescription given to each group are written in Bengali language! Which one is for stomachache? At the end, they are informed that

bottle A is for headache, bottle B is for stomachache, and bottle C is a pesticide! (Don't worry. We used pure water, water with sugar, and water with salt.)



*Prescription in Bengali.*

### IV. Jar on the head.

It was an exciting experience to carry some water in a brass jar on the head. What if you have to work all day long to support your family?

In some rural villages in Asian countries, young children go up down and up the steep slopes to bring water



*Students in simulation.*

from the river at the bottom of the valley, instead of going to school. By carrying water in a brass jar on the head for a few minutes in the classroom, the Japanese students experience only a part of hard work to share the sorrow of those children living in the rural areas of Asian countries.

**V. Picture story of “Ek Musti Char” ( One Grip of Rice).** The picture story depicts a little girl and her mother in a remote village in Bangladesh, who are subjected to human rights violation. From it, the students learn about Human rights violation against woman.

Mobile Classes end with getting feedback from the students as regards to their honest impression of the workshop.

### 4. Results achieved

It is remarkable that the students expressed their thoughts after attending the Mobile Classes which are stated as follows.

**Student A (girl):** The most impressive program for me is the “TRY ON SARI!” At first it looked like a magic to make a beautiful costume out of only one piece of cloth. As I was putting on the sari, I could feel the pride of those who wear it. How I wish I could introduce the Japanese kimono to as many friends as possible in Asian countries.



**Student B (boy):** I was interested in the serious problem of the gap between the rich and the poor. Our group won the *janken*. I was lucky to simulate as a citizen of the rich country, where we got a lot of chocolates. In our group discussion, one of my friends insisted not to give any single piece of chocolate to other groups because we won them. But another friend blamed him for his greediness. This triggered a deep discussion. On the contrary, all the members of the unlucky groups seemed to be very happy to share the small pieces of chocolates; cutting them into smaller pieces.

**Student C (boy):** I played the role of a patient with stomachache. We were entirely confused when we received the prescription. But I was suffering from stomachache, so we had to decide which bottle is the medicine. Of course we could read neither the prescription nor the label on the bottle. Anyway I had to drink. A bit salty! I was shocked to hear I had taken the **PESTICIDE!** I was much more shocked to hear that there are still a lot of people who can neither read nor write in many Asian countries.

**Student D (girl):** I cannot but admire those boys and girls of my age for their hard work to bring water with a heavy brass jar on the head to support their family. I wonder what I can do for those children to go to school.

**Student E (boy):** I have learned a lot about the people in developing countries in Asia through this special workshop. Although we are surrounded by the so-called Western culture, I decided that we should be much more aware that we are Asians.

The Mobile Classes have proven to be effective in



*Dynamic and enthusiastic students facilitated by Mr. KAMIYA of the AHI team.*

raising the awareness of young students about Asia.

## Learning on the Thai National Health Assembly 2012 at BITEC, Bangkok, Thailand

### A. Voice from Nepal

**Ms. Roshani Deri Shrestha, Nutrition Program, Nutrition Promotion and Consultancy Service, Nepal, ILDC 1997**



*Ms. Shrestha*

#### 1. Background

The fifth Thailand's National Health Assembly (NHA) was held on Dec 18-20, 2012 at the Bangkok International Trade and Exhibition Center (BITEC), attended by more than 2000 representatives from different constituencies and 234 networks within NHA. There were international participants who are AHI alumni: Ms. Mousumi Gogoi (ILDC 2012), India and Ms. Sara Munkhabayar, Mongloia (ILDC 2012), Ms. Emelyn Q. Bahajin Jalani (PCHAP 2002; JICA course administered by AHI from 1998-2007), Department of Health Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, Philippines, and Ms. Roshani Shrestha (ILDC 1997), Nutrition Promotion and Consultancy Service (NPCS), Nepal sponsored by AHI. Among the many applicants, the above-mentioned participants from the Philippines and Nepal got the opportunity to attend this Assembly to share experiences on participatory public policy process. The aim of AHI alumni participants was to learn good practices from the Assembly and replicate to their own country and organization. It was conducted in collaboration with the Thai National Commission office led by Deputy Secretary General Mr. Ugrid Milintangkul (ILDC 1987).

The NHA Organizing Committee is in compliance with the Thailand's National Health Act 2007. NHA is one of the mechanisms to mainstream health in all policies at the national level. It included health in all policies like agriculture, transportation, academic, public and private sectors. Without good health, it is impossible to develop a country. In this regards with extensive participatory process of NHA from agenda setting to endorsement, this enables all partners to have ownership and join in driving NHA's resolutions into action at various levels.

#### 2. Formalities and Agenda

The NHA Organizing Committee President 2012 Dr. Sirina Pavarolorvidya gave the welcome ad-

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dress. The Deputy Prime Minister of Thailand gave a keynote speech highlighting the agenda as follows:

1. Supportive system and structure for walking and cycling in daily living;
2. Managing children's environment 24 hours: A case of Thai children and IT;
3. Monks and building well-being;
4. Food safety: solving pesticide-related problems;
5. Reform of environmental and health impact assessment system;
6. Prevention and mitigation of health impact from biomass power plant;
7. Management of smoke hazes/smog with adverse effects on health;
8. Transforming health professional education to meet health needs in Thailand; and
9. Developing mechanism and process capable of handling health impacts resulting from ASEAN integration, especially for food and agricultural food product

### 3. Interesting Points

3.1 During the panel discussion on breastfeeding, we learned that breastfeeding practice in Thailand was lower than its neighboring country like Cambodia. Only 15% of the Thai women gave breastmilk to their children. Now the government is taking initiative to control baby milk powders and supplementary food.

3.2 Visit to the Primary Health Care Unit (PHU) provided us insights. PHU's philosophy is self-promotion of their health, family and community. It promotes culture, morality, virtue and economic sufficiency to reach the ultimate goal "Tambom Happiness". To achieve this, they collected 2 Thai bahts per household to match the government fund. They used the fund to provide better health services as well as income generating projects like making soap, fertilizer, and so on. Their health system, structure and facilities are well-equipped. No more nutrition-related problems expect obesity.

3.3 Successful move to prevent the establishment of a power plant in the area where the production of mangoes and mushroom (Thailand's second highest produce) are located. The power plant is feared to affect the health of the community, environment, agriculture, river, and hospital. It took them two years to have it approved by presenting hard evidence.

### 4. My Personal Reflection

For the NHA organizers, you did an excellent job! Praises for Mr. Ugrid Milintangkul. Just a minor thing, due to language, translation was not clear and hard to understand especially those critical points.

For AHI, salute to you! AHI should continue this kind of support to participate NHA. It is better to have two participants from each country (if possible) to make up a better support system in convincing government policy makers to advocate this NHA process back home.

For me, I should engage myself in health advocacy upon my return to Nepal. I will advocate walking and cycling as a way of life in three areas. I am also committed to share: 1) the 24-hour management of enabling environment for children (Thai children case studies), and 2) food safety---solving problems from agricultural chemicals. I am going to share this to more networks in various levels and occasions in Nepal.

### 5. Overall Insights

I learned about Thailand's public health policy, strategy, processes, problems, and effective advocacy to propel from the national level to the community level. Participatory public health policy is a process which makes develop sound policies

involving collective action from the community level up to the national level. My learning from NHA will help me advocate, design, and plan for nutrition related programs to encourage more community participation, so that people feel its ownership.

I also learned 1) Health in all the policies; 2) community people have more voice with evidence-based report; 3) community ownership, feeling of their own development, primary health care structure/groups, fund collection/management, and collection of 2 Thai bahts per household makes government matching fund for their own development; 4) equal participation and empowerment of Thai women and mobilization of young generation; 5) promotion of traditional methods likes making soap, fertilizer, juices, food, effective micro-organism; and 6) government sector, private sector, NGO/INGOs share their ideas, problems in one platform for decision making.



*2012 NHA participants visit to PHU.*

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## B. Voice from the Philippines

### Ms. Emelyn Q. Bahjin-Jalani, Pangutaran District Hospital, Philippines, PCHAP 2002



*Ms. Jalani*

Visiting Thailand was neither in my immediate list of priorities for 2012 nor in the next several years. The Tsunami that hit Phuket and Japan in 1996 and 2010, respectively has somehow made me cautious and prudently hesitant to consider traveling to these parts of the globe or anywhere abroad for that matter. Even the mere

speculations of high magnitude earthquake in Manila, has put me wary of my official travels outside my hometown in the Philippines. Maybe this jittery feeling comes a long way from childhood experience of sporadic war in the Southern Philippines, where I come from. Perhaps it is the instinct of self-preservation that is always at work in my mind. So, Thailand's invitation and AHI's sponsorship for me to attend the National Health Assembly (NHA) in Bangkok came first and foremost as a challenge, especially because the date, Dec 21, 2012 was a very controversial date as the end of the Mayan calendar, thus predicted and anticipated by some groups to be "the end of the world".

Quite the contrary however, my 6-day Thailand experience from Dec 17-22, 2012 is one of the most educational and inspirational travels I have ever experienced. Apart from the unequalled hospitality of the National Health Assembly Organizing Committee and fellow AHI alumni, the participants from the different villages themselves were very accommodating and eager to share their experiences with us. I felt privileged and honored to be a participant to this prestigious NHA in Thailand. The idea of a National Health Assembly that cuddles the aspirations of an empowered community for self-sufficiency and an honest desire for good health is indeed very commendable and worthy to emulate. I have attended national health assemblies and annual health conventions in my country, but not one comes close to the concept of NHA in Thailand.

The concept of "Health In All Government Policies" is a brilliant idea, but even more exceptional is the process by which this idea is implemented and materialized in Thailand, starting from the village to the top echelon of government hierarchy. The very essence of "bottom-up" approach is made manifest in the consultative and participatory process that each and every health issue is being addressed.

Indeed, community participation is an essential element in planning for community health. In fact, the best of plans are those made by the communities for the communities themselves. It is the people who know best what is happening around them and what they think is best for them, so it is just but fitting that they are involved in the situational analysis, planning, implementation, assessment, and decision-making for issues that relate to them.

Health is one issue that everybody can relate to. So, as a medical doctor I believe that the integration of health issues in all policies of government is essential for a holistic safeguarding of everybody's well being. And for that, I can say that Thailand has etched a mark in history for successfully implementing this concept in this part of the globe.

The idea of having participants from other Asian countries to observe NHA in Thailand not only promotes friendship between participants and stronger ties between AHI alumni, but also advances the idea of collaborative sharing of best practices and exchange of meaningful experiences between participating countries, which is an avenue for sharing the successful Thai experience to the rest of the world.

Specifically for my part, I am awed how starting from one baht per family per month, a village can plan to have its own Health Promotion Hospital. The Community Health Fund being "matched" by the sub-district, district, province and other higher organizational structural hierarchy in government is a concrete example of people's initiative matched by strong sense of shared responsibility by government.

Among the many best practices I witnessed in the gallery presentation and during the field trip, this idea of a matched up community health fund is very appealing and I chose to replicate in my health district. Having presented the idea to our Local Chief Executive who responded positively, we intend to promote the concept and convince barangay local government units to participate.

I believe that this proposed project will highlight the involvement of the community towards being more responsible for their own health. A sense of ownership of the project will be rightfully claimed by the community as well, which among other things, will propel their interest and enthusiasm to maintain and sustain it.

Given the next chance, I will definitely revisit Thailand.

**Message from New AHI Staff**  
**Mr. SHIBATA Eichi**



**Mr. Shibata**

Hi friends! How are you? This is Eichi Shibata, a new staff of AHI. I joined the organization in November 2013. First time I visited AHI in Nisshin, it reminded me of one fine spring day almost 20 years ago. I was in a park at the opposite side of the

big reservoir, Aichi Pond near AHI. I was with my colleagues having lunch together on a trip for new employees at my former company. My former company was into development consultancy. Over 50 years ago, it designed the Aichi irrigation canal to carry precious water for drinking, agriculture and industry from a big river in the north of Aichi prefecture to the dry southern area. Aichi pond is one of the regulator ponds located at the middle of the 112-km main canal. Since then, I worked on overseas projects mainly under the Japanese Official Development Assistance. I met many local leaders, including both government officials and grassroots leaders. Gradually I began to think about working with grassroots leaders more directly. In March 2013 I learned about AHI and its activities, and was very impressed with its way of working with such grassroots leaders for rural development through participatory training. I feel so fortunate to start again here, right next to Aichi Pond. I am so proud of working with you as AHI staff.

**Condolences to Ms. Ishihara's Passing**

Ms. Makiko ISHIIHARA of "GOBAR" in Kushi-hara Village in Gifu Prefecture, a long time supporter and former Board of Trustee, passed away on March 30, 2014, surrounded by her family members and friends including her newly born 9<sup>th</sup> grandchild. She and her family, the ISHIIHARAs warmly hosted many AHI groups since the early 1980s when there was no AHI building. Many AHI alumni cherish memories of their visit to GOBAR and meeting Ms. Makiko, a person of love in action. We surely miss her and offer our deepest condolence to the ISHIIHARA family and friends.



**Ms. Ishihara**

**NEWS FROM FRIENDS**

**BANGLADESH**

**Mr. Mohammad Nazrul Islam, Bangladesh Institute of Labour Studies (BILS), ILDC 2008**

I keep receiving the AHI English newsletter and go through the whole matter. It's really impressive. I also would like to thank specially AHI's Ms. Ui Shiori for her tremendous contribution on the Peace Building Project case study sharing. The "Peace Table", "Peace Camp" will really contribute a lot to our efforts. Special thanks to our friends Ms. Dedette Suacito (Philippines) and Mr. Kep Kannaro (Cambodia) for their touching experiences.



**Mr. Islam**



**Curious kids at the exhibition.**

As regards to my recent exhibition, it was "Our Father of the Nation" held on August 14-15, 2013 for the observance of the National

Mourning Day. I have exhibited the struggle of the Father of the Nation "Sheikh Mujibur Rahman" for our independence. I am informing the children the real history of our nation.

**INDIA**

**Ms. Mary Innocent, A.J., Wayanad Social Service Society (WSSS), ILDC 1986**

Thank you for your season's greetings and birthday wishes. Every time I remember AHI, I feel that the institution is the mother of my knowledge and turning point in my medical practice. The knowledge, I have acquired from AHI is very useful to the needs of people in my country. I have already submitted cases/stories to the government related to the topic, "People's Health in People's Hand". The District Government requested me to submit the documents in 2020. We are facilitating the revitalization of local



**Ms. Innocent**

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health tradition program for the community and also promoting family health kit for common diseases. Each kit has tablets, oil and balm. These tablets are curative, preventive and promotive. The oil helps the community members who are suffering from burn, wound and all kinds of skin problems. The balm is very useful for headache and joint pain. We also prepared a book for the farmers: "Health from the Kitchen" and I am very glad to inform you that I received four awards for uplifting the poor section of the society. You help us achieve our goal.

#### INDIA

**Mr. Anil Ramchandre Rananavare (ILDC 1986) and Ms. Alka Anil Rananavare (ILDC & OMC 1999), Asha Kiran Clinic, Prakashpur Housing Society**



**Ms. Alka shaking hands with AHI staff Ms. UI, while Mr. Anil watching.**

We received your letter and we are very happy to hear from you. Thank you very much for the photos, they reminded us about those happy and healthy reunion seminar days at Mysore.

We all had a nice experience of sharing and learning together. It is going to help us in the future. We returned on November 25, 2013. We shared our experience with our friends. We had an opportunity to create an awareness talk about "health issues in old age" among the elder members of our church. We discussed herbal preparations and how to use them to be healthy during old age. The sharing was very simple but effective. These are the small health activities we have been doing in the community which do not require any financial support.

Anyway, please convey our regards and thanks to AHI Family for providing us an opportunity to attend the reunion seminar to widen our knowledge and enhanced our experiences for the benefit of the community.

## ANNOUNCEMENT

### Training on Integrated Approach to Health

The Ayushya, Centre for Healing and Integration at Changanacherry, Kerala, in collaboration with the Catholic Health Association of India (CHAI), Secunderabad, is organizing a one month training program in Integrated Approach to Health (Health, Healing and wholeness). The program is open to all interested in Holistic Health and Alternative Healing modes (non-drug therapies). Those working in Community Health can gain skills in Alternative Medicine to help the people in their health promotion. There will be two programs in 2014.

**Dates: June 1 to 30, 2014 and October 9 to November 7, 2014.**

**Fees:** Rs. 15000/person; No. of seats is 20; Medium of instruction is English.

**Course Coordinator:** Ms. Eliza Kuppозhacker MMS

**Resource persons:** CHAI and Ayushya team

#### Course contents:

**Part 1:** Health of the participants through a journey into self discovery for physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health through stress management, psychotherapy and emotional body health, self-esteem, assertiveness training, emotional regulation, dream analysis, holistic health, psychology, nutrition, yoga, meditation, art, music, dance & laugh therapy.

**Part 2:** Skills on alternative healing (Acupressure, Auricular Therapy, Biodynamic massage, Sujok, Jin Shin do and Energy Medicine.

**Contact phone:** 0481-2720544, +91(0)9961752903

**Email:**  
ayushyamms@gmail.com, elizakup@gmail.com

**Website:** www.ayushyamms.org

Contact us as soon as possible if you have any questions.



**Come and Join Us!**



**The 3rd AHI  
Reunion Seminar in  
INDIA, 2014**

**Date:** November 17 - 20, 2014

**Venue:** AYUSHYA , Kottayam, Kerala

**Theme:** Holistic Health for People and for Ourselves

**Organizers:** AHI alumni in AYUSHYA and in Kerala in collaboration with AHI.

**Contact person:** Sr. Eliza Kuppuzhacker, MMS, Program Coordinator of Ayushya Centre for Healing and Integration, Oriental Medicine Course 1992

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**The AHI Reunion Seminar  
in Bangladesh, 2015**

**Date:** January 17-21, 2015

**Venue:** DASCOH, Lutheran Mission Complex, Dingadoba, Rajshahi

**Theme:** Appreciation, Connection, and Cooperation

**Organizers:** AHI alumni in DASCOH and other organizations in Rajshahi area, in collaboration with AHI

**Contact person:** Mr. Modon Das, Project Manager, Public Health Improvement Initiatives Rajshahi (PHIIR), Development Association for Self-Reliance, Communication and Health (DASCOH), ILDC 2011.

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**BE A MEMBER NOW!  
PLEASE SUPPORT AHI**

AHI is supported by over 4,000 individual regular members and occasional donors. Recently, however, the number is decreasing due to aging population and sluggish economy in Japan. Even so, it is getting more important for AHI to commit working with the disadvantaged people living in endless uncertainty in Asian communities. That's why we need to get more supporters to achieve our goals.

***How to support AHI..***

For those who live in foreign countries and have credit cards, AHI just started the on-line money transfer system thru PAYPAL (www.paypal.com), by which, membership fee or donation is easily and safely transferred to AHI's account.

1. Supporting member  
Annual Membership Fee:
  - ❖ Organization (S): \$ 300.00 per year
  - ❖ Individual (A): \$ 100.00 per year
  - ❖ Individual (B): \$ 50.00 per year
  - ❖ Individual (C): \$ 30.00 per year
2. Donation  
Donation at anytime of any amount as you wish is always welcome.

Please check our website and go to the page of "support AHI"

<http://www.ahi-japan.jp/english/Supportus/index.html>. If you have any question, please send an e-mail to: [info@ahi-japan.jp](mailto:info@ahi-japan.jp).

**Calling for Articles !!!**

***Calling AHI Alumni to write:***

- Community Health Workers
- Indigenous People's Health
- Holistic Health
- Globalization and Health
- Health Care Financing, Health Equity Fund, Community Based Health Insurance System
- Organizing Factory Labors
- Migrants and Urban Issues
- Environment/Biodiversity, Development
- Peace Building/Conflict Resolution
- Cooperatives (Health, Women, Health Insurance, Agriculture, etc.)
- Gender and Development