

## the ant is a partner of *Caring Friends*



Thanks to Caring Friends for bridging our resource gaps and letting us work!

the ant's work has been generously supported by *Caring Friends* since 2006. *Caring Friends* is literally a group of friends based mainly in Mumbai and recently in other parts of India and also abroad, who believes in and generously support trustworthy and needed action for social change. Unlike traditional funding agencies, **Caring Friends** is operated by volunteers with zero overheads. Donors are linked to the needs of the NGO and encouraged to send the donation directly. Our support from Caring Friends is like an institutional grant – it supports many aspects of the ant's

work and helps us plug the gaps just where traditional funding agencies are unable to do. Right from building up our corpus to helping repair leaky roofs to allowing us to experiment and start new initiatives to helping us respond to emergencies, help from Caring Friends has been at hand. The lightning-quick response, flexibility, trust and care of **Caring Friends** has really been a source of strength to **the ant**. Some of the ant's work which Caring Friends has supported and some which they continue to support are:

### 1. Expanding our Women's Cycle Bank

Women's cycles mean mobility and freedom for women but which poor families can never afford to buy. *Caring Friends* encouraged and supported us to decentralize our women's cycle bank which we had been running centrally for the past 4 years. They gave us 30 cycles to start the first field level chapter in our Deosri cluster. The success of that chapter has encouraged us to now hand over our cycle bank to self help groups in 3 of our clusters to run. We added another 100 cycles to the number and have a total of 350 cycles being revolved in all the chapters. The chapters keep adding and distributing new cycles with money collected monthly from the cycle loans.



Women from Raikhati Group in KOila MOila Cluster pose with cycles for the cycle bank

### 2. Work with IDPs

When we wanted to start a new cluster and work with people who had been displaced by ethnic violence and still not rehabilitated, Caring Friends stepped in to help us. The IDPs (Internally Displaced Persons) are the most marginalized of the poor. Displaced with no land, no work, no assets and no facilities, they live in fear and marginally survive. Our Deosri project is to help such IDPs and also forest dwellers who are poor and needing help and development. *Caring Friends* supports our small office out there and also the expenses of a couple of field staff.



Women in Deosri learnt cycling at a cycle camp – Some women have learnt can now do small business and supplement their family's income

### 3. Relief to victims of ethnic violence

When ethnic riots broke out among Rabhas and Garos in neighbouring Goalpara District this year in January 2011, we got an

S.O.S message for urgent help. 20,000 people had been

displaced from their homes and living in temporary camps. Women and children were falling sick in the severe January cold and urgently needed warm clothing. Caring Friends responded with lightening speed. In less than 36 hours since we got the distress call, we had organized 5000 warm blouses and 3000 new sweaters for children to be distributed. The smiles on the faces of the women and children were a thousand blessings they sent to our friends far away, but caring enough.



Camps Inmates in one of the relief camps in Goalpara – Jan 2011



Children in the camp pose with the clothes they have just got – Jan'11

### 4. Infrastructure Support to the ant

Most funding agencies shy away from giving any money to construct a building or to buy vehicles, even if it is a motorbike. Where do NGOs get the money to put up some infrastructure, even the most basic ones required for work? Two years ago *Caring Friends* supported us to build a pucca kitchen and dining hall which is now used by women weavers living on campus, the ant staff and also trainees from other NGOs who come for training programmes. An average of 35-40 people use the facilities every day and has made a world of difference to our lives.

This year too they also stepped in to help us replace the badly leaking thatch roofs of three of our buildings with tin roof. Monsoon has started and every time it rains really hard, we send our prayers and thanks to *Caring Friends*.

They are also supporting us with a small amount to supplement some funds required to build two rooms



Badly leaking kitchen roof in our houses – Sept 2010



Getting a new roof – Jan 2011; thanks to Caring Friends, no more getting up in the middle of a rainy night to catch water in pots and pans!

for our accounts and office. The old building made of bamboo thatch walls is on the verge of collapse and we fear this year it may not last the very severe monsoons that hit Assam every year.

Then, with our work area spreading out more and more, supervisory staff gets really stretched. We are really grateful for the two motorcycles that Caring Friends sponsored. This will go a long way in helping us provide support to the field.

## 5. Youth for Peace Programme

Again, which funding agency would support us in starting a youth band?! Or support youth to put up hoardings on peace and non-violence all across Bodoland? The open support from Caring Friends helped talented but resource poor young people in our area put together a music band, the first of its kind in the entire Bodoland. Rocked by violence for many years, some of the youth are now rocking to music and able to realise their talents. *Caring Friends* supported the musical instruments and the initial training to use it. Less than 2 years old, the band has won hearts and also awards in local music fests. Once they are more confident, they

plan to write and compose their own music and we hope they will be able to put concert on “peace” some day. Similarly, with support from Caring Friends, we helped a youth organization start a campaign for non-violence. We helped them put up hoardings in all key places in Bodoland urging common people to do their bit for non-violence.



*Campaign For Peace – a hoarding in Bodo language in a market asking people to adopt non-violent means.*