

President's Report Loaves and Fishes Dinner 2015

Welcome everyone. We are honoured and grateful you chose to be here with us on this very busy evening.

I am always moved by how many people are so willing to do so much for people they have never met and probably never will simply because in their hearts they can imagine, hope and act for a better world. That “hope-y change-y thing” we sometimes joke about is very real and very powerful.

I woke up this morning with an overwhelming sense of gratitude, much of it for the students we work with and for those who encourage, teach and engage them.

You have met and heard from our students. They are Augustana students both local and international, who are spending one or two semesters working with us under the leadership of one of our board members. They prepared the displays for tonight and have managed the market with skill and enthusiasm. They are truly immersed in the Sahakarini Loaves and Fishes experience.

The two senior students are doing capstone projects. Melissa, who is also a regular board member, is doing a major project on volunteers ; Suham is developing our social media presence and effectiveness, and hoping to get some of us older ones with the program before she graduates!

Walking with them makes the road ahead look pretty hopeful.

Many may not know that our full name is Sahakarini Inter-World Education and Development Assoc. While projects are the centrepiece of what we do, our involvement with Augustana's Community Service Learning program and our Film and Speaker Festival are important aspects of our educational mandate.

My role tonight is to tell you how what you hoped for and invested in last year has turned out, and to encourage you to keep up the good work.

Our theme for this year, *Walking together in hope*, was introduced at the annual meeting last June and was tweaked for this event to *Growing hope together*.

Each word was carefully chosen. Growing begins as a direct reference to the food, water, and agricultural projects we have been involved with, but is in fact much broader. When we walk together, we grow together, and as we grow together, we grow in hope and courage together.

We need each other to keep walking, to keep choosing hope and not fear, to see each other through.

There is an African proverb: *If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want go far, go together*. In her theme talk at our AGM, Dr Ronna Jevne pointed out the importance of walking steadfastly together; of having big hope, but taking small steps.

That is the story of Sahakarini. We are a small NGO but step by step over the past 35 years we have walked with thousands of people until they were up and running or at least better able to move ahead.

So, what steps have we taken this year ? Your partnership has made it possible to walk down three paths.

First, in **Colombia**: Most of you aware of our project in Colombia involving water conservation, wetlands preservation, and improving food security. By December our role there will be complete. We are grateful for the difference it will continue to make and we will continue to monitor it.

Apart from all the seeds, the wells, the classes, the clinics and all the other useful initiatives we can be part of, every project is always and first a story of people and communities. In a few minutes, Leah Johnson who recently returned from a year as a Sahakarini intern in Colombia will share some of the stories and insights of her experiences there living with the people in the project.

Secondly, in **Kenya**: This time last year we hoped to build two more sand dams. For those unfamiliar with sand dams, sand dams are simple rock and concrete structures across water channels (although the channels are usually dry and there are no permanent rivers in the area). Dams are filled with sand that traps water during the rainy season. The water can then be used domestically and for irrigation.

A sand dam brings hope and change to whole communities. The situation where the sand dams are located is that, on the positive side, the soil is rich and the people hardworking.

However, it is also a semi arid area with increasingly unpredictable rains probably due to climate change. Rains, when they come, are torrential. The water runs away, leading to erosion, and an eventual return to drought conditions. This together with inappropriate cropping for the conditions has meant that the food supply and incomes are erratic.

The hills are largely barren as trees have been cut for charcoal. This has contributed to the destruction of local water points. Women often walk 8 km for water which is not only arduous, but also unsafe, and takes their time away from other activities. The children miss school because they are travelling with their mothers or minding other children.

Contaminated surface water also causes health problems.

But again there is good news in a very simple, locally developed, and easily replicated technology that is engineer approved and has proven effective for over 30 years -- the sand dam .

This year's sand dams are serving two communities or about 760 people directly, 12,000 indirectly. The people have decided that no one will be denied access to water.

The effects are great.

- Health and safety: from the convenient availability of safe water.
- Food: There is greater food security because of irrigation, terracing and the planting of drought resist indigenous crops like sorghum, millet, and peas to replace maize. Planting fodder for cattle on the banks of dam are both food and an erosion prevention strategy.
- Education: Children are freed to attend school. Knowledge is shared between communities through exposure visits. Part of the covenant they make is to “pass it on.”
- Women: Women experience greater safety in gathering water and have more time to spend on home and income generation activities.
- Environment: Trees have a large role in restoring water points, preventing evaporation, and fixing nitrogen thus enriching soil.

Clearly this is a story of high hopes – small steps – deep effects.

We all love food. So as you consider your support this evening, please think about farmers you have met and consider a gift to some Kenyan farmers in their honour and in gratitude for your groceries.

Third, in **India**: It is my joy to introduce this, our newest project, The Pipal Tree Children's College near Mysore, India.

It is good to be back in India where our earliest and many of our best projects began thanks to the practical passion and determination of Mina and Gordon Schieck.

This project was identified by Dr. Varghese Manaloor who teaches at Augustana and is originally from India. He regularly travels back with students and to do research. Through his contacts there he was able to introduce us to Pipal Tree, an Indian NGO.

There really is a pipal tree notable for several things, but also because it always appears to be moving. As far as I am aware, it is only a lovely coincidence that PIPAL - spelled P-i-p-a-l sounds like "People". To me Pipal Tree sounds all about growing people.

The name Children's College was chosen by Pipal Tree because *college* signifies a community of people gathered together to learn. I believe that a number of the old and esteemed universities have "colleges" but none could be more exciting than Pipal Tree Children's College!

It is not a school. The children go to government school in village. (Poor quality) It is an after school program for Adivasi or tribal children

"Tribal" is an official designation for the indigenous people of India who have traditionally lived subsistence lifestyles in forests and jungles. They are discriminated against and extremely poor.

Now they are being displaced in the interests of modern development (parks, dams, reservoirs, etc) and forced into a migrant, day labouring lifestyle.

Their hope is for one meal a day. Their fear is that their children will have no choice but to follow in their footsteps Their choice is to send boys and girls to the Children's College.

Look around at these beautiful children. Girls are particularly highlighted because girls have even fewer opportunities than boys, but boys are also included in the program.

They are discriminated against and displaced, but they are not unloved. Their situations make it nearly impossible for them to finish high school i.e. grade 10 because their families are on the move and lack resources.

Through our project in partnership with Pipal Tree they now have opportunity to finish high school and after that they will have more choices.

Our support will provide: room and board in a safe stable setting, tutoring, extra-curricular enrichment through

leadership and cultural development, activities to help them develop pride in their culture, field trips (awareness, exposure), some clothing and school supplies, and a program for keeping families involved. Classes will be conducted in Kannada, the local language, but English will also be a priority.

Right now they are struggling with one foot in their traditional ways and the other needing to get a toehold in modern times. It is a tenuous position as you can imagine, but *they have hope. Their families have hope.*

This is not a one way street. At the same time, and in the long term, they may be able to impart some of the traditional knowledge and wisdom of their people about preserving the environment and living sustainably.

We have high hopes for this program. That is why we have made a three year, \$84,000 commitment to walk with these children.

Our fear could be that we could not raise that amount. Our choice and our hope is to go ahead and in sharing their story ask for your help. These children matter.

Our support will be decreased annually as Pipal Tree brings on support from donors in India and from the recreational centre they are developing. (Tourism is quite popular in this very beautiful part of India)

Again I ask you to think about people you know and love: Your teacher, your daughter, your son, your grand daughter or grandson, your elected representatives, the women and girls in your life and ask self, "if they had not had the chance to go to school, how would things be different for you and for them?"

Remember your grand/child's first steps out the door to kindergarten or grade one - All the hopes that went with him, all the resources there were to support her along the way. A graduation celebrated, a milestone marked. THEN – think about a much loved child in India whose hopes and chances of finishing even grade ten are almost non-existent without our help...

Nelson Mandela urged us to let our choices be driven by our hopes and not by our fears. These are our choices to make. Perhaps you will choose to make support for a child part of your Christmas giving and share their story with others.

I hope that we have given you a glimpse of what wonderful things you can do this year; how you can walk steadfastly growing hope in the life of a child and a whole community

Small steps High hopes Life giving choices

When I was in grade four, my grandfather wrote in my autograph book something I simply did not understand at the time. He wrote: You cannot pour perfume on others without getting a few drops on yourself. Turns out Grandpa was right. Doing what we are doing tonight helps not only others, but also ourselves.

May you leave tonight feeling wonderful, smelling good aware not only of your abundance but of the joy of sharing. Please give from the fullness of your heart and enjoy the rest of the evening.

Thank you.