

Part 1

**Trip Report
Visit to Meghalaya, India
Richard Ford and Eileen Higgins
28 Sept—13 October 2010**

Trip Report
Visit to Meghalaya, India
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On behalf of the UUPCC
(Unitarian Universalist Partner Church Council)
September 28—October 13, 2010

We traveled to the Khasi Hills for three reasons:

- To conduct a first-time-ever training program for capacity building facilitators, drawing trainees from the UUNEI Social Service Committee (SSC). This is the first step toward enabling the UUNEI to manage its own community planning workshops.
- To visit the villages of Nongkrem, Puriang, and Kyrдем, all partnered with UU churches in North America and all communities that have previously carried out capacity building planning workshops
- To conduct a planning workshop in the village of Kharang, partnered with the East Shore Unitarian Church in Bellevue, Washington

Glossary

BDO—Block Development Officer
NEHU - North Eastern Hill University
MGREGA—Mahatma Gandhi Rural
Employment Guarantee Act
SSC - Social Service Committee
UUNEI - Unitarian Union of North
East India
UUPCC - Unitarian Universalist
Partner Church Council

We met or spoke with the following people:

Unitarian Union of North East India (UUNEI)

Rev. Nangroi Suting, Minister and Secretary, SSC
Dr. Creamlimon Nongbri, UUNEI Education Committee and Nongkrem workshop organizer
Rev. Pearl Green Marganiang, Minister, Shillong Unitarian Church
Rev. Helpme Mohrmen, Minister, Organizer Puriang exercises
Khlur Mukhim, Organizer, Kyrдем exercises
*Note that Rev. Derrick P. Pariat, President, UUNEI was out of town as he had duties tele-
vising the Commonwealth Games in Delhi and that Rev. Darihun Khriam, Minister, UUNEI
church in Kharang was ill and unable to attend the workshop.

North East Hill University (Shillong)

Dr. Kyrham Nongkynrih, Department of Sociology

Leaders in Puriang

Mr. Ditol Myllemngap, Head, UU Secondary School, Puriang; member of the Dorbar
Shri Kitlan Kharlukhi, President, "To Nangroi Self-Help Group"
Smti. Doltimai Kharbithai, Member, "To Nangroi Self-Help Group"
Smti. Khamtilang Myllemngap, Secretary, "To Nangroi Self-Help Group"

Leadership in Kyrdem

Arki Kshiar, Headman, Mawblang	Shel Umbah
David Warjri, Teacher and volunteer facilitator	Jrin Nongrum
Selningroi Masharing	Maniwel Mukhim
Lina Shadap	Esbor Kharsahnoh
Iohsuklin Kharsahnoh	Basngewhun Mukhim
Lidia Nongrum	Mes Maring

Leadership and Government Officers in Nongkrem

Mr. Bakot Kharrngi, Dorbar Chairman, Raid Nongkrem
Dr. Creamlimon Nongbri, North Eastern Hill University
Mrs. Riana Nongbri, Secretary, Unitarian Church, Nongkrem
Shalin Kharbuli, Facilitator
Lincoln Sawian, Facilitator
Wanlang Myllemngap, Facilitator
Sunabi Nongpiur, Facilitator
Bidison Warbah, Facilitator
Pynkhrabor Warjri, Facilitator

Leaders in Kharang

Shiningstar Kharsahnoh, Secretary of the Village
Yesroy Pole, Chairman, the Unitarian Church in Kharang
Throida Shylla, Secretary, Unitarian Church in Kharang
Langbor Noypluh, Headman, Kharang
Thrim Lansei, Local Headman, Jongskai
Drok Shylla, Local Headman, Manibynna Area
Garalander Kharmudai, Member of Executive Committee, Kharang Village

East Shore UU Church, Bellevue

Roger and Fran Corn
Cathy Perry

1. Training Workshop for Facilitators from the SSC

The primary reason for the visit was to train 21 capacity building facilitators who are members of the Social Service Committee, the youth group of the UUNEI. In recent years, the group has taken the lead in social action programs, especially a new program stimulating self help groups in many UUNEI villages and more recently in learning the skills of facilitating community planning meetings. A separate report is available (Workshop Report on Participatory Community Capacity Building) describing the details of this training and can be found on the UUPCC website (UUPCC.org). It can also be obtained from Cathy Cordes at **Ccordes@UUPCC.org** or Dick Ford at **RFord@Clarku.edu**. The training in facilitating participatory capacity workshops is an additional move to strengthen the work of the UUNEI in general and the SSC in particular.

Briefly summarized, the training took advantage of two recent products that Eileen Higgins had prepared. One was a PowerPoint presentation that she has developed to provide an overview of the goals, tools, and advantages of the participatory approach to capacity building. The second was a superb new handbook, *Participatory Action and Planning*, that she has prepared over the last six months. Each of the 21 participants received a copy. This workshop was the first time that the handbook had been used in a training session. Needless to say, it was received with enthusiasm. The workshop then proceeded with using a selection of the tools with the trainees rotating as facilitators, presenters, and scribes.

The training continued the following weekend in Kharang where a community planning workshop was held. Ten of the 21 were able to come and served as facilitators of virtually every exercise carried out during the Kharang two day workshop. Their performance was exemplary and suggests that the UUNEI SSC is ready to serve as a facilitating resource group for future workshops. There is discussion that the first of these workshops might be held in Nongtalang. The local UUNEI staff felt that such a workshop was within the present capability of the SSC group and that they would like to do it. Discussions continue.

2. Visit to Nongkrem to Review Recent Progress, October 5, 2010

Nongkrem Gathers to Consider its Action Plans Again

Dr. Creamlimon Nongbri organized a meeting of Nongkrem residents to review the Community Action Plan that they had developed last year. The Village Chairman, two of the eleven locality headmen, and nearly thirty community members gathered in the community center to discuss the reasons that implementation of programs surrounding three of its highest priorities had not begun. In 2009, the village was clear on its priority needs – water, roads, health,

and a college, but had not yet mobilized to implement their action plans.

Dick Ford, Eileen Higgins, Nihal Attanayake, and Cathy Perry from the UUPCC as well as Nangroi Suting from the UUNEI assisted in leading the discussion. A newly energized group of six recently trained local facilitators attended. They were able to use tools featured in the training workshop as they led breakout groups of participants.

In opening the meeting, Creamlimon noted that the priority needs persisted and all that was left was to begin implementing the action plans. She expressed excitement that this meeting would ignite the flame that is within the community and lead to implementation.

Resources to Enable Local Action – A Plan, Training, Facilitators, MGREGA

The group was happy to see Dick who greeted the room of familiar faces, noting how happy he was to see that the group remained committed to working together to implement their action plan. He brought the previous year's report documenting the detailed community efforts to come to consensus about their highest priority needs. The group was excited when Dick described the details of Mahatma Gandhi Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGREGA). This government program guarantees 100 days of work for residents living below the poverty line and can be used to implement community projects similar to the ones in Nongkrem's action plan. However, the community must organize to create project plans, meet as a Village Employment Committee (VEC), and ensure that eligible participants have job cards. Because Nongkrem has already come to consensus on an action plan, it can take advantage of MGREGA opportunities more rapidly if it understands the regulations. The village has tried to use the MGREGA program, but never received a copy of the regulations. It has struggled to meet the program's bureaucratic hurdles because the VEC chairmen did not know what the regulations stated. Dick provided an English copy of the MGREGA program with Creamlimon offering to provide a Khasi translation for use by the community.



Local Facilitators - Sunabi, Wanlang, Lincoln, Pynkhrabor,
Bidison, Shalin

Eileen described the new field guide including eight simple steps communities can use to take charge of their own community development plan. The community has already completed the first seven steps and now simply needs to mobilize towards action (step 8). She also introduced a group of six trained facilitators, five of whom live in Nongkrem, to the community. These facilitators spent three-days in a workshop and are now able to assist Khasi communities with the 8 step Participatory Planning and Action process and will be able to assist Nongkrem with implementing its action plan.

Progress Takes Time, but Can't Happen Unless Implementation Begins

The village of Puriang wrote its action plan in 2008 and its highest priorities were similar to Nongkrem's – water, roads, and health. It began implementation right away. In 2008, Puriang had an old and non-functioning water system, and now it is using a greatly expanded and updated one. In 2008, the village had no hope of having a health center, and now it has been approved for a government health center. In 2008, there was no road leading to the rice paddies, and now a MGREGA project has completed the first stage of building this road.

Eileen and Dick encouraged the community to think about beginning the implementation step now and divided the participants into three groups to review last year's action plans and decide how to move forward.

Last Year's Action Plans were Solid Plans

The newly trained facilitators helped the breakout groups to re-examine the action plans for health, roads, and water. The health and water groups believed that these plans were sufficient and showed the correct path forward. The group looking at the issue of roads thought that the plan for a road to the field and new footpaths was still appropriate, but also believed that drainage should be incorporated into any technical plans for road construction. None of the groups adjusted the responsible committees. They continue to believe that the Dorbar must lead the implementation of these three projects.

So, Why Weren't They implemented?

What the discussion groups showed was that the community had developed excellent action plans, but a problem remained. One year later, implementation had not yet begun on any of the plans. So, what was wrong with the plans?

Several participants, including one Dorbar member, noted that not all Dorbar members participated in the community meetings. In fact, only two were present at the meeting this evening. In addition, the eleven-member Dorbar is an all-volunteer village council that may not have the time to take the leadership role in all community action plans. Several innovative suggestions arose. The first was to involve the Village Employment Committees (VECs) that operate underneath the Dorbar. Because the VECs are charged with designing plans that can be implemented under the MGREGA system, the action plans for the roads and water could more effectively be addressed by the VECs. The second was to break down the problems by locality. Because some localities have a more acute need for water, perhaps the locality VEC would be more likely to write a plan to address the problem.

Taking Steps Towards Implementation

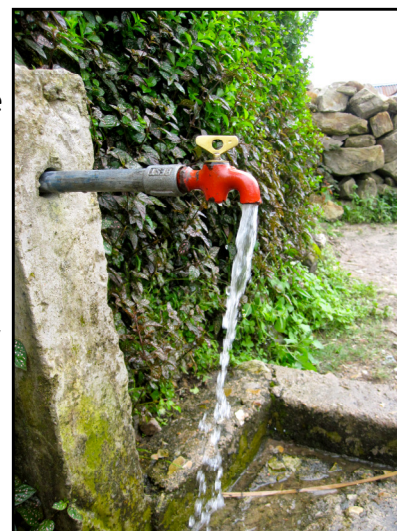
The participants believed that it was important that more community members become involved and asked if the local facilitators would train each locality in the process and in the MGREGA. They also said they would wholeheartedly support the UUNEI Social Services Committee's leadership of the process and additional training for the village.

The village of Nongkrem has not yet implemented its action plans, but this meeting showed that they can combine their strong action plans with the organizational resources of its local committees, the leadership of its volunteers, and the MGREGA support from the government to fully implement the changes they hope for with respect to water, roads, and health.

3. Visit to Puriang to Review Recent Progress, October 6, 2010

- **Water.** Since our last visit, three things have taken place with the water system. First and most important, the new tank has been connected to the new feeder pipe and the system is now serving most of the community; second, the open stand pipes have now been closed with a faucet so that the water runs only when someone is there to fill a container; finally, construction is already underway near the new tank of still a larger tank — probably ten times the size of the tank recently installed — that will serve several additional communities adjacent to Puriang. The community is both happy with the water system and proud of the way they persevered with the government to make it happen. We did not visit the other communities that will be served by the expanded system but assume that they too are pleased with the prospect of clean water.

The new faucets will save much water and the huge new tank, in addition to the new smaller tank to the right, will enable many more communities to be served.



- **Road.** Once the community figured out how the action plans help them get things done, they investigated the new MGREGA program (see below), became registered and submitted a proposal for one of their major priorities from their planning workshop. They proposed a road that would lead from the main road (Shillong to Jowai) down a steep slope to their farms in the valley below. Previously there was no road access to the farms so all materials were carried in by hand. The road project was approved last year and work began in the fall, after the harvest season. The road is four kms long with several culverts and a drainage ditch that runs the full length. The road is passable ten months of the year. The community is happy. The pictures below tell the story. The work was almost entirely done with hand labor and utilized 268 of the village residents, most of whom worked upwards of 100 days, as provided in the MGREGA program. They received 100 Rupees a day for their work — about \$2.00. That is an attractive wage in rural India.



The new 4 km. road to the fields in the bottom of the valley was built largely with hand labor from 268 village residents. The picture above shows depth of a cut and how much dirt was removed. Picture to the left shows road running along a ridge on its path to the valley floor.

- **MGREGA.** The above road project is a good example of how a community can benefit by having a good action plan that meets MGREGA criteria and is fully registered with the government as an eligible community. They obtained guidelines from the local BDO, created a Village Employment Committee, registered individual members of the community and obtained Job Cards, and then used the core of the action plan created in the planning workshop of March 2008 to write a successful proposal. The MGREGA program has been fully explained to the other UUNEI villages that have completed their action plans, including Kharang that has just prepared their own action plan. Given their success with the road program, the community has recently submitted three proposals to MGREGA: (1) improve the village footpaths, especially those used by children going to and from school; (2) create areas where clothes can be washed that are adjacent to a stand pipe that is part of the new water system; and (3) expand the water system to additional parts of the community.

- **Health Center.** Discussions continue about constructing a building for the health center, also part of the plan from 2008. The government has promised to provide staff if the community will construct a building. They have a piece of land but have so far been unable to find funds to buy building materials. The search continues. Ditol, the school principal, was optimistic about finding support though he said it could be a long time before they actually had the building. He estimated that they needed about \$10,000.



- **The School.** The school continues to prosper with new applications becoming so many that Ditol was concerned that they would be unable to accept all of them in February when the new school year begins. They are making good use of the computers, the new latrine provided by the Fairfax, VA partner church is much appreciated, and plans for an additional classroom continue to be part of the planning agenda. One should note that the school partnership has been underway for several years and precedes the planning exercise of March 2008.

An additional highlight of the school's accomplishment is that one of the school graduates, Intrisha Kharlukhi, has just received an MA degree in sociology from NEHU. The entire village in general and the school in particular are indeed proud of this accomplishment.

- **Self Help Group ("To Nangroi").** Another accomplishment indirectly related to the capacity building work is the Bowland Trust work with the SSC. They are promoting self help groups, with the UUNEI SSC young people serving as village organizers. In Puriang they plan to grow vegetables for sale in the local markets, offer courses in the village for tailoring and sewing, and to buy a small van that they can use to bring pupils to and from school. While these plans are just getting started, they are hopeful that they will have a positive impact on the community.

There is no question that Puriang continues to be a village on the move.

4. Visit to Kyrдем to Review Recent Progress, October 7, 2010

Our visit to Mawblang Raid (hamlet) in Kyrдем village turned out to be still another delightful time. We carried out a planning workshop there in February 2008. The community is some distance from main roads and therefore interacts less with the national economy and educational system than other villages where we have worked. The village therefore has taken a longer time to get organized implementing its action plan. We were joined by Khlur Mukhim, a science teacher at one of the colleges in Shillong. He has family roots in Kyrдем and is active with the UUNEI's educational program, especially the Unitarian school in Kyrдем.

Their highest priority needs in 2008 were health, upper primary school, public latrine, public bath house, playground, roads/footpath. After many visits to government offices, mostly at the block level, they found very little interest in any form of partnership activity. Then they discovered MGREGA (actually it was an earlier version of the plan). They created a Village Employment Committee (VEC) that consisted of one male and one female from each household and then proceeded to obtain one job card for each registered household. As of our visit they have obtained job cards for 48 of the 57 households.

The VEC meets to discuss priorities and then sends its recommendation to the Executive Committee of the Council that makes the final decision. That recommendation goes to a special committee at the Circle (cluster of villages) level that passes it on to the Block Development Officer for approval. Awards are made on the basis of merit and size of the community. Because Mawblang is small in relationship to other villages, they receive only one project per year. This year (2010-11), their project was one of their priorities — roads and footpaths. Next year (2011-12), their approved project will be clean drinking water (a portion of their health priority). They are now planning for future years and are considering two projects in reforestation that would be part of a larger watershed protection program.

Unfortunately, the MGREGS program does not include support for buildings such as the public bath house or the public latrine. The bath house is of particular interest as it gets quite cold in the winter and a heated facility (wood fired stove) and hot water would be greatly appreciated during those months. They had placed high priority (#s 1 and 2) on these two items so had visited many ministries within their block, especially health, water, and water and sanitation engineering. While they have received encouragement from some of their visits, they learned that the ministries did not have sufficient funds to cover the entire costs of such a project. They are now searching for partners and are hopeful that if they can find partial support from a private source that they can interest the ministries in covering the remainder of the costs.