



**Visit to Harsing, a beautiful old tea garden in Darjeeling**

I was disheartened to hear that in the last raining season, Harsing, a beautiful old tea garden, had to suffer for our profanities of nature.

Landslides crashed through this village causing heavy losses. My friend Siddhartha Pradhan, one of the founder members of Mankind in Action for Rural Growth (MARG) and I decided to visit the place. It was a bright Sunday morning when we set off. A fresh new blanket of snow covered the mighty Kanchenjunga, and the nearby hills surrounded the Darjeeling town like a mother embracing its baby. I attended the Sunday morning mass and stood near Divya Vani, waiting for Siddarth, who so lovingly volunteered to take us down to Harsing in his personal car. Mr. Navin Tamang from DLR Perena and Mr. Montu Gurung from Cathedral of Immaculate Conception agreed to join us too.

The air was crisp. However, it got warmer as we descended from Darjeeling to Lebong and had to remove our jackets. On our way, we were greeted by children playing on the sides of the road, women washing clothes outside their houses and some on their way to Darjeeling. The road was narrow and steep. But Siddarth maneuvered well.

As we reached Harsing, the local youth team gathered to welcome us. They were helping the landslide victims in constructing new houses. We parked and Mr. Tamang, the captain of the ship guided us up the hill through the narrow path. What a breathtaking experience!! Though we've been born and brought up in Darjeeling, it was difficult for us to keep pace with our other local friends. Soon we reached the first site. And what a sight it was! Around 10 to fifteen villagers were building the house of a fellow neighbour. Some were busy cutting mud, while some were cutting stones. I couldn't see the house which been there earlier. On enquiry, I was told that the landslide had destroyed the house completely.

**A landslide brings down more than land. It disrupts farms, homes and more importantly, lives.**

The second site where Mr. Tamang took us was a beautiful mud house with local flowers around it. But its beauty was undone as soon as I entered the house. There was a deep crack right in the middle of the house, breaking it into two. It was deeply saddening. The last site was a badly damaged house which till date, hangs from a hill.

My heart was weeping but yet hopeful. And the people that gave us

hope were none other than the villagers themselves. They displayed courage and friendliness which shook us all.

One family member of each house in that village gave his or her time to construct a house for the affected people. It was a rousing example of teamwork. Even though there were hardships, the faces of the villagers didn't show any. They welcomed us with their glowing smiles and an open heart.

However, the hills welcomed us with nothing but echoes of silence. Reverberations of rues. Who do we blame for the tragedy? Everyone knows the answer, but are we really doing something to stop this? This is our wake up call. Let us respect our nature, save our hills.

I noticed the work of DLR Prerna and Anugalaya and was truly impressed and moved. They work silently, not for fame. This year too, they are re-constructing thirty one new houses which were damaged in the hills of North Bengal.

After the visit was over we were taken to the nearby house and were offered tea. Tea with so much of love and respect.

Mankind in Action for Rural Growth (MARG) would like to thank Mr. Roshan Rai, Director, DLR Prerna, Mr. Ashish Rai, Mr. Navin Tamang, Mr. Montu Gurung, Shankar Daju and his team (Shankar Foundation Darjeeling) for involving MARG in Saving the Hills. MARG would also like to thank Mr. Hemant Bhutani and Ms. Kamlesh Takkar from New Delhi for donating blankets which were handed to the landslide victims during our visit.

Let us all stand up and pledge to Save the Hills and save precious lives. Today we are lucky for not having been effected by these vicious landslides. We are lucky for still having a home. Some were not that lucky. Remember that.



## Villagers from Dukka and Tandrebong seek help!!

In the hills of North Bengal under the Kalimpong region lies a tiny village of Dukka and Tandrebong where most of the villagers are farmers. Here the main crop is cardamom and ginger which is their cash crop, but lately it has not been giving a good yield because of the prevailing local virus called "Suirey". This has been a great setback for the economy there.



Nothing can stop the villagers of Dukka and Tandrebong NOW...



MARG team distributes refreshments to the villagers

Although mankind has been rapidly moving towards development, there are certain places where it has taken a U turn because of the rough terrain, peoples' attitude towards villages and the corruption. YES, the villagers of Dukka and Tandrebong are bearing this wound since a long time. Till date this village is left without a motorable road and electricity which is the basic need towards development.

After getting no response and help from the government, the local panchayat and other authorities, the villagers of Dukka and Tandrebong have stood up and have joined hands in constructing a motorable road which would connect Dukka and Tandrebong to the nearest small town Algarah and make life easier for the villagers living there. This road would be a lifeline for Dukka and Tandrebong.

Since 24<sup>th</sup> Nov 07 every month the villagers gather in a group of 200 and give one day of their manual labour in constructing the road which passes through the rough terrain of cardamom fields, streams and cliff. The day starts early on that specific day and friends and relatives of that neighboring village walk for approx two to three hours to give a helping hand to the villagers of Dukka and Tandrebong.

On 12<sup>th</sup> April 08, villagers from Dukka and Tandrebong had gathered again. This was the 7<sup>th</sup> time they had come together to construct the road. Members from Mankind in Action for Rural Growth (MARG) a local NGO from Darjeeling along with some volunteers set up early from Darjeeling on that very day to encourage and support the villagers working in constructing the road.

The villagers comprising of men and women, old and young were very happy and thankful to MARG for coming and supporting and encouraging them. It was the first time ever that an NGO had come forward to support their cause. The refreshment which was sponsored by the MARG team for the villagers was appreciated by them and in return the elders of the village thanked MARG and its volunteers by offering Khadas.

We all are so engrossed in our own busy life and we fail to realize the pains of our brothers and sisters who are facing in the far flung remote villages in the hills. Let us come forward and support them in our own way, guide them in whatever way we can. Your small initiative can IGNITE a SMILE.

MARG in a special way would like to thank Mr. Sagar Pradhan (Ex Tea Garden Manager), Mr. Arun Pradhan (Secretary Pradhan Samaj Darjeeling), Mr. Manish Pradhan, Mr. Ranjan Pradhan, Mr. Sudip Tamang, Dorjee and Edu Chettri for volunteering in going to Dukka and supporting the villagers.

If you would like to send in your contribution to the villagers of Dukka and Tandrebong then please contact MARG at [inform.marg@gmail.com](mailto:inform.marg@gmail.com) or [nirnay.john@gmail.com](mailto:nirnay.john@gmail.com).

## MARG felicitates its children who excelled in studies in the academic year 2007



Nima Thendup Bhutia of Ghoom Boys High Secondary School Darjeeling receiving a gift from the Head Master



Soma Subba, Purna Tamang and Sapna Thapa from Ghoom Girls High Secondary School Darjeeling receiving gifts from the Head Mistress

## A dream come true!!

Indeed it was a dream come true for most of the children of Mankind in Action for Rural Growth (MARG) Darjeeling, on 29th April 2008. It was the birthday of a little girl named "Bhumika", younger daughter of Mr. / Mrs. Rajesh Garg respectful citizens of Darjeeling and the owner of the most happening place in Darjeeling. The shopping Mall.



Mrs. Garg interacting with MARG children at Cafe Coffee Day

I was filled with joy and happiness when Mr. Rajesh Garg told me that he wanted to celebrate his younger daughter's birthday with MARG children on our first meeting. Wow!! was my reaction. Without wasting any time I rang up the school principals and informed them about this gathering. Accordingly MARG children were informed to assemble on certain locations.

Mr. Sagar Pradhan and Mr. Albert John volunteered to usher the children of Turnbull HS School Darjeeling to the shopping mall where we all were supposed to assemble. I took a vehicle to Ghoom railway station to pick up MARG children from Ghoom Boys High H S School and Ghoom Girls' H S School. We were right in time at 4:30pm. At one corner MARG children from Turnbull High H S School were waiting for us eagerly. My old friend Mr. Vikram well known as Viki was there to make us feel comfortable.

Mrs. Garg and her father were there to welcome the children. After few minutes they were joined by Mr. Rajesh Garg. The children were then ushered to the near by coffee house (Café Coffee Day). MARG children had glow on their faces, some were shy, some were nervous and some were quite. What can we expect from them? I thought I should spend some time with them and started chatting and cracking jokes. Very soon all their nervousness vanished and they were sitting like any other confident boys and girls reading the menu card in the cafe. Café Coffee Day team was very hospitable as they always are. I am sure the children didn't feel awkward with their service which was with full of love.

After the snacks were over MARG children sang and wished Bhumika a very Happy Birthday. A Birthday card with all the children signature was handed to Bhumika by one of the MARG children. They also showed their gratitude to Mr. and Mrs. Rajesh Garg and others present in the café by offering the sacred scarf (Khada).

As a return gift MARG children were given a shopping voucher worth Rs 500/- each of Big Bazar which was handed to them by Mrs. Garg. Children had no boundaries for joy and this was showing it on their faces. They were running from one corner to the other, from the ground floor to the first floor looking for items to buy.

Some bought school bags some dictionary, some bought stationery items, some were looking for t shirts, some slippers, and I did see some boys buy hair gels and face creams too. Some were very wise enough and decided to come after few days to use their voucher. What a wonderful sight was it to see them happy and running around in the mall. Though I know it's was a momentary joy I am sure this day will be carved in their memories in their whole life.

Finally since it was getting dark and some children had to trek back home We all gather outside the Big Bazar and thanked Mr./Mrs Garg for their noble idea of celebrating their daughters birthday with MARG children. Yes, Mr./Mrs. Rajesh you have truly IGNITED SMILES of many children.

MARG family would like to thank you from the bottom of our heart for giving us this opportunity.

## Children's Day Celebration with MARG's children 07

With the object to inspire and motivate its children, Mankind in Action for Rural Growth (MARG), a local NGO, which supports the underprivileged children, celebrated Children's Day with its children at Divya Vani, Darjeeling.

The programme was presided over by Mr. Augustine Lepcha, Deputy Magistrate, DM office. Members of MARG and social workers were present on the occasion, where an overview of MARG was highlighted by Mr. Nirnay John Chhetri, general secretary of MARG.

The programme also conducted drawing competition, which was held with the slogan "Save Environment" among the MARG sponsored children from different regions of Darjeeling hills.

The drawings were reviewed by the panel of MARG members and attended guests, Ms Prerna Tamang of Ghoom girls' higher secondary school stood first in the competition. Chief Guest handed over prizes to winners of the competition.

