



Building trust across the world's divides

Initiatives of Change

AP Newsletter - February 2015

*Greetings
from
Asia Plateau !*

Editorial

Up in the mountains above, Panchgani lies the center where a dog barks in the night, monkeys peer into bedrooms, and birds sing all day. Wonderful trees and gorgeous views with buganvillas and colorful geranium plants in every corner. Heaven on earth you might think and to someone who loves flowers it certainly is.

February was characterized by a series of programs for various groups including management students from Symbiosis, government officers from the Department of Public Enterprises of Karnataka, and officers from the Education Department of Odisha. In the latter half of the month, two programs on effective living and Leadership were held for the Indian Army (Institute of National Integration) and industry workers.



The new season of the Asia Plateau Volunteer Internship Program commenced, drawing in participants from Canada, Japan, India, Rwanda, South Korea and Sweden, anchored by Thuguri from Kenya. Some of them have shared their first impressions which you may read in the later part of this newsletter.

The Asia Plateau family welcomed home the IfL team. IfL helped facilitate sessions and support programs including Effective Living and Leadership, the Asia Plateau Volunteer Internship Program, and the Just Governance Dialogue. In addition to enhancing the AP environment, the IfL team used this month for inspiration. Quiet days contributed to personal and communal refreshment and restoration. Growth and inspiration has provided strength for the continued journey in March.

One of the highlights of the month was the Dialogue on Just Governance which focused on good governance and trust-building which gave priorities for developing nations and divided societies. Leaders, social workers, professors and activists, from no less than 40 nations, participated in the dialogue with the vision of building bridges between individuals and nations.

Why do so many people come to Asia Plateau year after year? It is because of the magic in the air which is created by the interns, participants, volunteers, and AP family. At Asia Plateau, people are inspired to take initiatives of change.

-Elizabeth (From United Kingdom) & Editorial team (Parag, Melanie and Stephania)

Programs

This month has been enriching for the new interns as they hosted and participated in the various programs that were conducted. From mixing around with the youth of Symbiosis Institute of International Business to sharing emotions of the Institute of National Integration, to singing the first song we learnt “Candle” at AP for Effective Leadership and Learning, February marked a busy month for programs. The programs brought the message of the absolute values loud and clear, in a fashion that is acceptable and understanding of everyone’s day to day life.

The shared impact for the programs has been positive.

A few of the sharing’s: *“It has helped me identify my weakness and showed the ways to convert them into strengths”*, said one officer. One of the participants felt he should and can face his difficulties with calmness and patience.



One of the strengths of the ELL program was the adherence to Moral Values, expressed one participant. Another received Intense Knowledge through Experience, Sharing and Communication.

Overall, the various programs offered presented opportunity for change for students, officers, government officials, and international delegates. The legacy of the transformative programs, which came to birth in the 70's, continue to guide others on their journey of change today.

Asia Plateau Volunteer Intern Program (APVIP)



Februum, Latin term for February, which means “Purification”, and in a way, it was just that for the new interns who were welcomed into the Asia Plateau family. There was still a slight chill in the air, but also a sense of summer with each new dawn. As we came, at different times during the month, we were all apprehensive yet composed. The interns batch is shaped of individuals who have the conviction to make a change, 10 youth have come from different parts of the world - Canada, India, Japan, Rwanda, South Korea, and Sweden, and India facilitated by Thuguri from Kenya.

We felt we were home, chipping in with the daily tasks of wash-up and service, getting used to the early hours, feeling both cozy and fresh. The first few days here, felt like being hit by a truck. Overwhelmed with the love, care and joy which was spread and shared by all those here. We were amazed at the experience and the learnings, received which are still being drawn from the dynamic people. Breathing the fresh air each day, overjoyed with the food that nurtures our soul and body, looking beyond the hills, into our vision for a “Beautiful Tomorrow”, we laugh, we cry and we love. We are blessed by the opportunity to be here.

How has our month been

We have been exposed to a variety of new concepts including the four absolute values and listening to the Inner Voice being Quiet.

Our first month consisted of participating in many enlightening workshops. The Shield Of Life with Mohammed Ghabriss brought to surface those things in our lives that we hold dear. During the Nurturing Relationships workshop, Zooni inspired us to practice the four absolute standards in our lives. During the Listening Workshop, Archana Rao exposed us to empathetic listening approaches. The Creators of Peace Circle with Jean Brown provided an opportunity of deep sharing with the women in the group. Finally, Leena Khatri also hosted a Values Workshop that provided us with the opportunity to understand what we value deeply and what we are concerned about.

We also hosted and participated in a 3-day Symbiosis Institute of International Business Conference. We had the opportunity to engage with masters students to share in learning about building meaningful relationships, living absolute values, and identifying life purpose.

One of the highlights included the opportunity to support the Just Governance Dialogue through involvement in preparations: logistics, registration, housekeeping, and communications. We warmly hosted the participants to Asia Plateau. We had the privilege of being fully immersed into the dialogues. This exposed us to new challenges and opportunities that exist in good governance and trust building. Himanshu helped us to draw our attention back to the inner conscience and focus on our inner governance, by initiating a day of silence. This created an impactful shift in our thinking.



First Impressions

Azusa, Japan: I'm so grateful to build long lasting friendships with many wonderful people and grasp some important seeds to live my life fully.

Evodia U. aka Noah, Rwanda: Every moment at Asia Plateau is a time to learn and experience.

Gaurav Sah, India: A sacred knoll where I could contemplate under my favorite Pine and where the kind and dedicated souls are doing their bit to nurture the world.

Jisun Kim, South Korea: My first impressions of AP were warmth and welcoming. Everyone here is so warm and open, and that makes me try to be one of them. I want to be a warm and good person in here.

Jitesh Shrivastava, India: AP is a river full of wisdom, soul and opportunities.

Tim Nelson, Sweden: AP is a place that is home to whomever comes here.

Sabreena Khan, India: For me, A.P has given me "priceless joy of a clear conscience."

Melanie Klein, Canada: My first impression of this sacred place is potential growth. It is here, we find nourishment for the self and the world.

Anup Pawar, India: To the community from within. Amazing journey towards pure and selfless being.

Stephania Menezes, India: AP, hand-in-hand towards a Vision of a Brave New World.



Grampari

Grampari's programs and initiatives have been fruitful over the month.

The watershed programme began and completed the construction a 50 foot long spring box for the village of Vivar. This spring has been an unprotected source of drinking water for the villagers of Vivar. They spoke of how they were drinking this water which was contaminated with pesticide packets and worse still with ashes of the dead that were dumped into this spring due to its proximity to a crematorium. Desperate villagers came in large numbers to do Shramdam.

Work has started on replacing rusted pipes of Akkehgani. Grampari has sourced Rs. 2,20,000/- from a generous donation from Mr and Mrs Bhat. The villagers made a contribution of Rs. 73,000/-

In the month of February Grampari did its 7th and final follow up with the SHP programme. Both Tupewadi and Vasoli schools, in very remote locations, have done excellent work. It was thrilling to hear firsthand reports from the teachers about decreasing in absenteeism in the school and also the children saying that their family members were experiencing better health. Every student from Tuppewadi School has built a tippy tap.



The teachers talked about how the idea of have a quiet time has helped children to resolve fights and become more honest.

The ladies from our livelihood programme made a lot of quilts and bags and Khadi name tags for the participants of Just Governance, an international dialogue and have had record sales this month.

The conference delegates received a warm welcome with dholaks and tikka. The red tikka was made with organic material. A highlight from their visit was a story shared by Ganesh who participated in the last Residential programme and told of his decision to quit drinking and stop harassing the villagers and how he has been able to influence several of his friends to do the same. He spoke to the delegates about the decision to put their energies into converting their village into an ideal village. Putting this in practice immediately, the boys now help take people to hospitals whenever needed.



Stories of Change



“I can do something and I can make somebody think differently and I can be the start of Change.”

- Jisun

As a student, I was very much interested in history. When I was in high school, it was my dream to become a history teacher. Since I had studied history, even within my own country, and because I knew about the history of what Japan had done to Korea, I didn't like Japan. Two weeks ago, I attended a workshop on Peace and Forgiveness. During this workshop, somebody asked, 'is forgiveness conditional or unconditional?' I said, 'Forgiveness is conditional, without genuine apology, there cannot be forgiveness and reconciliation', and my eyes met with the eyes of a girl in the room; she was a girl from Japan.

My heart felt heavy until the end of the workshop. There was a feeling of anger and heaviness, and I knew why, but I also knew that the relationship between Japan and Korea was a difficult subject to discuss at this workshop. When the workshop ended, I approached my Japanese friend and spoke politely. I reiterated what I had expressed during the workshop and asked her if she knew about the wrongdoings of Japan towards Korea. I told her "I do not want to offend you. But I also feel it was impossible to forgive without genuine apology and acknowledgement. So the Japanese attitude towards Korea lately, makes the relationship more and more difficult."

There were a lot of things that I wanted to explain, but my heart felt extremely heavy; I felt emotional and there was a great turmoil internally. As I cried a little, my Japanese friend, comforted me, she said, "I know Japan was wrong and I feel sorry about that. I don't know if what I learnt in history back home was correct but if you are comfortable, I want you to teach me that history."

I spent a day or two brushing up my history, re-reading history books several times. I wrote down this history as a letter in 4 sheets of paper. I wrote and erased several times with my pencil because I was afraid it could be partial to Korea, I was also afraid of being overcome by emotion and missing the chance of genuine reconciliation. I gave this letter to my friend feeling uncomfortable and knowing that some of the information written about Japan, might be for her to face. I liked her very much and was afraid of losing her as a friend, but I really appreciated her. Sometimes Truth is not accepted because not knowing makes people comfortable, so I was grateful for her courage.

The letter made her research Japanese History again and she found a great incongruity between the two. She discovered that historical wounds exist. She said, "I am really sorry, maybe it's not enough for me to say sorry but I apologize". I felt weird, I expected to feel a temporary satisfaction but what I was feeling was different. But I also felt relieved and comfortable. I felt gratitude towards her, the feeling I had while growing up was similar to hatred but this feeling disappeared by her genuine apology. Without that apology, I would have disliked Japan for a longer time. But her courage made me want to take a step forward to Japan and have courage to see the wounds directly.

“This has given me an identity, the ability to stand on my own feet..”

-Sharda Ashok More

I live in the Godavali village, I have been coming to Grampari for 5 years now. We are 6 people at my home, my three children, my father-in-law, my husband and me. When I first came here, I was stressed a lot, because of conditions back home. After I attended a meeting here, I felt a sense of family from the atmosphere, everyone was empathetic towards me. My tensions seemed reduced and I felt relaxed. Here I learnt to make diyas(Lamps), Blankets and hand-bags. This has given me an identity, the ability to stand on my own feet and be financially independent. There has been a positive change in my behaviour. I can live my own life in a better manner because of it.



Just Governance



The third annual Dialogue on Just Governance was hosted at Asia Plateau. The dialogue brought together 130 participants from 40 countries around the world including Burma, Cambodia, Myanmar, Palestine, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Sri Lanka, Ukraine, among others. Many of these countries have struggled to heal the legacy of their pasts. Some are burdened with existing conflict and oppression. Delegations from these countries shared a common vision of just governance.

As such, the dialogue embodied creating a safe space for inner governance, open and honest sharing, as well as exchange of lessons and best practices. It sought to build good governance and trust building amongst divided societies, specifically within the context of Asian, African, and Middle Eastern nations.



The annual dialogue highlighted an array of topics that are crucial in today's age. Dialogues embodied debates and discussions on corruption, public participation, trust building, and healing of historical wounds. Strategies for building democratic societies, bridging racial divide, cultivating sustainable peace and ethical governance of refugees were brought to surface. These important outcomes manifested through deep sharing which created an intimate environment. The dialogue unfolded into understanding the significance of apology, reconciliation, and the need for continued conversation.

Music serenaded participants throughout the dialogue; bringing inspiration. Delegates also shared in unity through laughter, tears, and dance; glimpses of peace and harmony. The dialogue was "harvested" by Siddharth Singh and Rob Lancaster, inspiring many to be part of the solution, both internally, and within their communities. People left with renewed insights for bridging divides and greater hope of good governance.

One of the great successes of the Dialogue was an extraordinary team of 35 volunteers from around the world who worked tirelessly, selflessly and with perfect synchronicity to ensure that a space was created for deep dialogue to occur with all needs being met.





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