

# ANNUAL REPORT

## 2019-20



Centre for North East Studies & Policy Research

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**Centre for North East Studies & Policy Research**

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# Introduction

The Centre for North East Studies and Policy Research (C-NES) was established in January 2000 as a Trust under Sec.80G/ Income Tax Act 1961. It has offices in Guwahati, Assam state in North eastern India and at New Delhi and works on a range of issues and areas at both field and policy levels relating to governance, participative planning and rights, water resources, environment, rural livelihoods, peace building and building better understanding among communities. C-NES is committed to building bridges between the North-east, among the lesser known and misunderstood parts of India, and other regions. The region is finally and slowly creating its own space and finding its own pulse after over six decades. C-NES develops innovative ideas for implementation to reach the poor and marginalized group in areas of health, education and environment, conducts workshops and training programs, reviews government policies and projects and designs ideas for development.

## **MISSION STATEMENT**

- C-NES recognizes the right of every individual in the region to live in dignity, peace and safety because only under such conditions can the quality of their lives improve and their deepest aspirations met.
- Values the unique ethnic and ecological diversity of the North East as an advantage.
- Encourages local governance, decision- making and initiatives as the key to social and economic growth.
- Lobbies actively for changes in official policy at the national, regional, state and district levels which it considers necessary to build a just society
- Supports regional cooperation as a strategy to create, sustainable economic development

## **The Centre's priorities include:**

- Health, education and environment
- Livelihood generation
- Infrastructure and transport
- Documenting cultural and environmental diversity
- Studies of migration, internal displacement and refugee flows
- Media exchanges and communication



## From The Chairman

### Board of Trustees C-NES



*I*t gives me immense pleasure to pen these few lines. This report highlights what we achieved during 2019/20 and it is a testament to what a few inspired and committed individuals can do. I would like to express my appreciation to our supporters, friends and staff for making it possible to reach individuals in some of the most remote areas of the country. I would also like to thank our board members, community leaders, and partners and to the National Health Mission, Government of Assam, who gave their best support in our mission to see a world free of poverty and discrimination. We all work together for a common value of seeking out to the unreached India – in this case, the marginalized island dwellers of the Brahma-

putra in Assam, through the unique Boat Clinic health outreach programme. These 15 Boat Clinics from Tinsukia in upper Assam to Dhubri, bordering Bangladesh in lower Assam are almost the lifeline of the various communities inhabiting the islands providing not just health but touching almost all aspects of their insular lives. The organization has worked with multiple stakeholders: governmental bodies, media, private sector, international and national NGOs and multilateral organizations to create a platform and an understanding towards this marginalized and voiceless section of the society. I hope this annual report will inspire you to join and support us in our mission to find solutions to poverty and moving towards a just world.

GK Pillai  
March 2020

## From the Managing Trustee

*A*s we complete another year of service and collaboration, both with stakeholders and communities, we remain acutely aware of the challenges ahead of the region. Among these are issues relating to continuing concerns on health care and the new dangers that are appearing on the horizon with a new health threat known as the Coronavirus or COVID-19 virus which appears to have emerged in the Chinese city of Wuhan and then swamped China before moving to the world as one of the most devastating international outbreaks of any disease in recent history.

It may seem so far back and few may remember that on March 24, conscious of the devastating consequences of this disease, Prime Minister Narendra Modi declared a nationwide lockdown with a bare four hours' notice as a preventive measure in this vast nation of 1.38 billion. The lockdown followed a 14-hour voluntary public curfew on 22 March 2020 and then in turn was followed by a series of regulations across the country, invoking and amending an old law on epidemics. As we are aware, this was to result in the greatest mass movement of people in India, described as the largest since Partition.



The COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the need to robustly strengthen our health infrastructure as well as communications and education. In addition, it has shown the need to be wary of misinformation and disinformation which are toxic to individu-

als, communities, states and countries. Social media can play a great role in building trust and reaching the needy; but they can also lead to abuse and harm.

Government and the private sector must invest much more in health, not just infrastructure and human power, but also re-training, capacity building, use of smart technology and communications. In the days of such disasters, telemedicine becomes key. While in the budget, it has been recorded, the total allocation of Rs 69,000 crore for the health sector in Union Budget 2020-21 was higher from the previous year—negligible, considering consumer price index inflation was 7.5 per cent in December 2019.

The secretary of the India Medical Association (IMA), said, "More than half the increase will go in offsetting inflation. What will the government achieve? We are in no way close to achieving the target of allocating 2.5 per cent of our gross domestic

product to health, envisaged by the Planning Commission in 2011.”

Indeed, one analysis places it as merely a four per cent increase compared to the previous year’s budget estimate. Overall allocation to health constitutes a meagre 2.28 per cent of total government expenditure in 2020-21. Such a low share of allocation to health in this year’s budget will further impact the public spending on health (combined union and state spending) which stands at 1.18 per cent of GDP.

Several reports, including one submitted to 15th Finance Commission in January 2020 by an expert group set up by the commission in 2019, sought more funds for primary healthcare, which caters to the rural population. As we are aware, a host of health schemes are bundled under NRHM.

The leading economist Kaushik Basu said some time ago that inclusiveness pays a key role in improving the economy: “Where ... government needs to be more active is in promoting inclusiveness and diversity. Stable, long-run growth depends more on this than most people realize. People work harder if they feel a part of society; if they can trust one another. We can see examples of this from Singapore to the US.”

This means building trust and mutual respect and confidence, all non-measurable qualities but which are visible in and drive the work of the boat clinics and other operations similar to it, which are people-centric. This is a true PPP or People Public Partnership.

That is why 2.5 percent of GDP must go toward health both in central and state government budgets. Governments can cut back from non-critical areas such giving more flab and funds to inefficient, overstaffed and underperforming government departments. Each state government and the Union Government needs to review those departments which are not performing and reduce funds to them and put those into health, education and livelihoods building. This is where fiscal discipline comes in. The bureaucracy has been too vast and too flabby to perform effectively. Lateral entry is a must to improve efficiency.

A nation that is not healthy cannot be internally strong. It is also where our field workers and staff in the boat clinics -- doctors and nurses, lab assistants and Ocharmaists, district programme officers and boat crew members, which are doing their work without fear or favour in conditions of great physical rigour and challenge, including floods, storms and dry seasons -- need to be highlighted as the front line warriors of this unending battle.

But health infrastructure without human resources are not enough, You need what C-NES’ founder Chairman Dr VA Pai Panandikar is fond of defining as the Trinity: Health, Education and Livelihoods/Jobs -- or income generation, through up skilling and innovation.

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As far as Covid is concerned, let me refresh memory by quoting from a Rajya Sabha TV report of 2020 on a 123-year

old law which was used to combat plague in Bombay (now Mumbai) in 1897 by the British:

"On March 11, the Centre advised all States and Union Territories to invoke provisions of Section 2 of the Epidemic Diseases Act 1897.

"The decision was aimed at ensuring that all advisories of the Union Health Ministry and State Governments on the COVID-19 crisis were enforced.

"Besides this, the government also invoked the Disaster Management Act to enforce the 21-day nationwide lockdown that started on the midnight of March 24.

"Combined, these two acts empower the government to enforce all the actions to battle the crisis.

### **The Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897**

"One of the shortest legislation in India, The Epidemic Diseases Act has four sections. It is aimed at 'providing for better prevention of the spread of Dangerous Epidemic Diseases.'

"The act was first enacted in the British colonial era primarily to control the Bubonic Plague outbreak in the late 1800s ... Section 2A of the Act allows the Centre to prescribe regulations to inspect any ship or vessel leaving or arriving in any port and to detain any person planning to leave or arrive into India.

"The government's decisions on restricting international and domestic travel to and from India fall under the provisions of this Act.

"The Act also empowers State Govern-

ments under Section 2(1) to prescribe regulations with respect to any person or group of people to contain the spread of COVID-19.

### **Penalty**

"Section 3 of the Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897 gives the penalties for violating the regulations. Section 188 of the Indian Penal Code states that it will be six months imprisonment or Rs 1000 fine or both.

### **The Disaster Management Act, 2005**

"The Disaster Management Act was enacted to tackle disasters at both Central and State government levels.

"Section (2) defines a disaster as a 'catastrophe, mishap, calamity or grave occurrence in any area, arising from natural or man-made causes'.

"On March 14, the Central Government termed COVID-19 as a 'notified disaster' as a 'critical medical condition or pandemic situation'.

"The Act enables the Centre and States to enforce a lockdown and restrict public movement. It allows the Government to get access to the National Disaster Response Fund, the State Disaster Response Fund and the District Disaster Response Fund. It also has provisions for allocation of resources for prevention, mitigation, capacity building etc.

### **The Penalties**

"Sections 51 to 60 of the Act prescribes the penalties for the violators.



"The Law describes the offence as obstructing any officer or employee from performing their duty or refusing to comply with directions.

"Violators can be jailed for up to 1 year or fine, or both.

"In the case of dangerous behaviour, the jail term can be extended to two years.

### **Section 144 of IPC**

"Along with these two Acts, several state governments are also invoking Section 144 of the Indian Penal Code. This prohibits a gathering of four or more people in a particular area. By using this provision, the administration aims to control crowding and prevent the spread of the virus."

\*\*\*\*\*

In our annual report, we mention many issues and achievements, awards and recognitions which should make us proud and determined to do more. These are enumerated in the next pages. However, financial sustainability and cohesion are concerns that need to be constantly addressed. I am grateful to my Board headed by Mr GK Pillai (IAS, Retd) and other members- Dr. Jayanta Madhab, Niketu Iralu, Patricia Mukhim, Preeti Gill and Dr. Mahfuza Rahman, to my Program Management Unit headed by Programme Manager Ashok Rao with strong support from Associate Programme Manager Manik Borua, Communications Officer Bhaswati Goswami and advisers Dr CR Hira and Dr Milan Barooah as well as our internal auditor RK Bhuyan, advocate Prashant Choudhury

and Statutory Auditor Jagdish Chand and Co, for their unstinting support.

My deep gratitude goes to each and every member of the C-NES staff and family in the field, in the boat clinics, for their courage, commitment and perseverance in the face of immense difficulties. We cannot do this work without you, because you are not just the foot soldiers but the generals. Bhaskar Bhuyan and his unique team in the award winning Brahmaputra Community Radio Station for their innovative, pioneering and extraordinary work in building awareness, communicating complex issues simply and leading to understanding and behavioral change -- I salute them.

In closing, I wish to emphasise the need to be constantly vigilant to health and wellness needs, including mental wellness, and the lurking dangers that lie in the twin challenges of lack of preparedness and over confidence.

**Sanjoy Hazarika**

March 2020

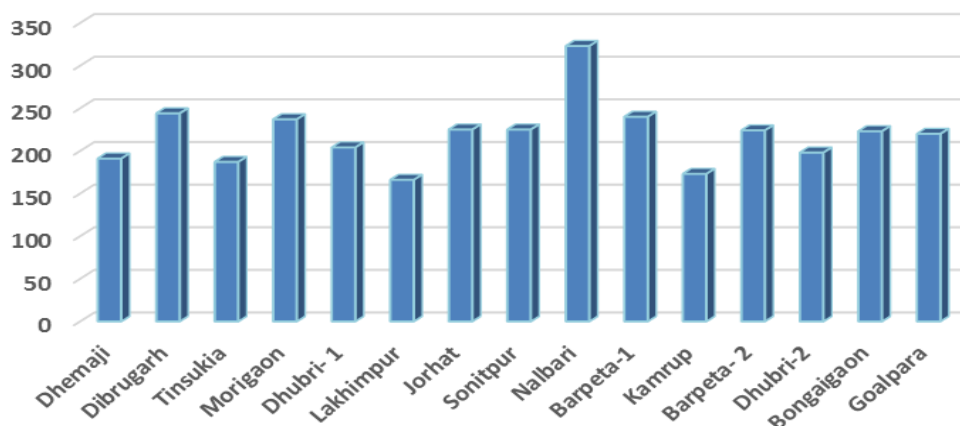
## Districts where Boat Clinics are operating in the Brahmaputra Valley, Assam



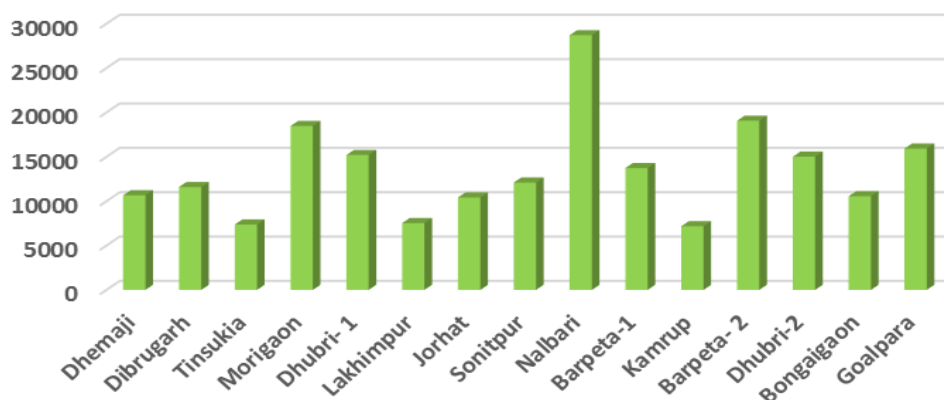
*(Barpeta and Dhuburi have two Boat Clinics each due to the size of island population and size of islands)*

# Boat Clinic Figures:

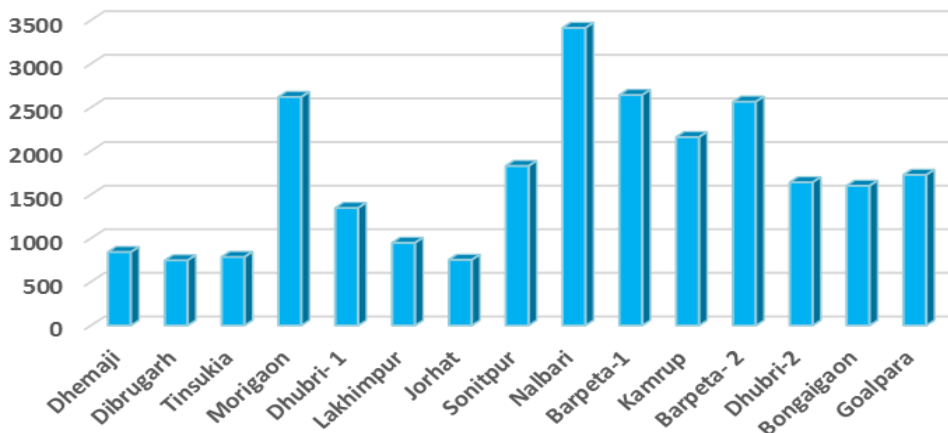
**Total Camps Conducted (1st Apl 2019-31st Mar 2020)**

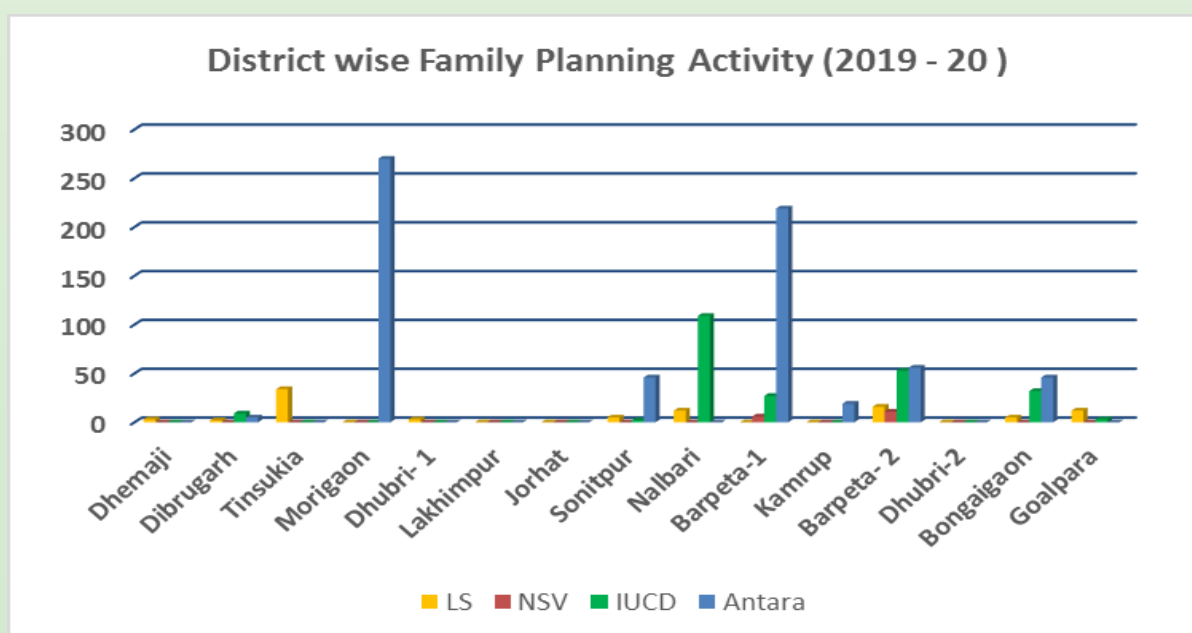
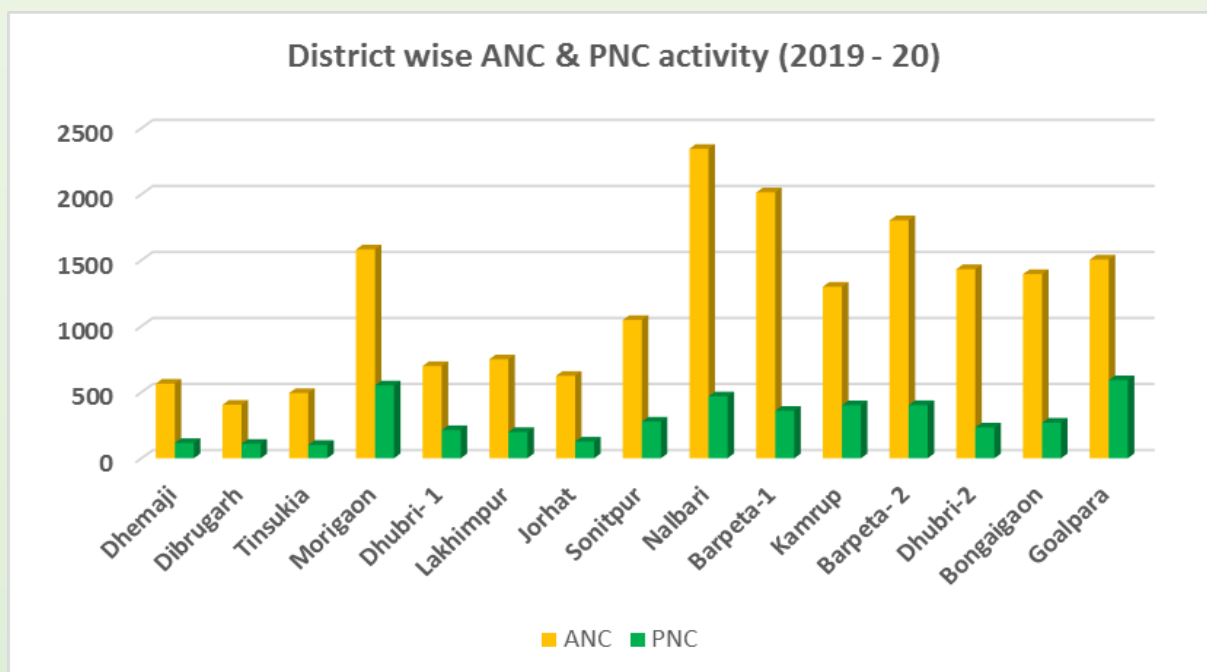


**District wise General Health Checkup conducted (2019-20)**



**District wise Routine Immunization (2019 - 20)**







## Health Initiative: Boat Clinics with NHM

Since 2005, C-NES has been providing basic health care services to the flood vulnerable population living in the Brahmaputra islands, through specially developed boats equipped with OPD, laboratories on board as well as pharmacies, first to one, then three and now reach thirteen districts in Assam through a Public Private Partnership (PPP) with the National Health Mission (NHM), Government of Assam. The goal is to take sustained health care to lakhs of persons on the islands, for the first time since independence, with a special focus on women and children, who are the most vulnerable in difficult conditions. Assam has India's worst Maternal Mortality Rate at 237 MMR (Registrar General of India, Special Bulletin on Maternal Mortality in India 2014-16) and a high Infant Mortality Rate at 44 IMR.

Each district has 15 staff headed by the District Programme Officer (DPO) who is the key person in organizing district

plans and coordinating among the team, district health departments, district administration, NHM and the community. His or her team includes two Medical Officers and paramedical staff including two ANMs, a GNM, a pharmacist and one laboratory technician besides three community workers and a four member boat crew. The work of the boat clinics has led to remarkable results: On an average, 18,000-20,000 people are treated every month in the districts, individuals who were earlier beyond the reach of government programmes because no doctors or paramedics would go on a regular basis. The only time, villagers say, they would see a doctor on site was during an emergency like a major flood. Otherwise, they had to travel long distances at great cost and risk to get treated. Today, the services come virtually to their doorstep. Till March 2019, over 2.9 million basic health services have been provided

## Excellence Healthcare Award

It was a proud moment for C-NES and the Boat Clinics when the organization was awarded the Healthcare Excellence Award 2020 in the category "Excellence in Outreach Healthcare" on 27th February 2020, at a function held at Guwahati's Radisson Blu Hotel. Programme Manager Ashok Rao and Communications Officer Bhaswati Goswami received the trophy and the citation on behalf of the organization from the Assam Minister of State for Health and Family Welfare, Pijush Janti Hazarika. The Award was part of the News 18 Network for outstanding contribution to the healthcare sector of Assam.



*Programme Manager Ashok Rao and Communications Officer Bhaswati Goswami receiving the trophy and the citation from the Assam Minister of State for Health and Family Welfare, Pijush Janti Hazarika*





*The winning health teams with the Chief Guest*

## Radio of the Year Award

On the occasion of World Radio Day 2020, the Brahmaputra Community Radio Station (BCRS) or Radio Brahmaputra as it is commonly known, was awarded the Community Radio of the year at the 6th International Radio Fair at Bhubaneswar by the Minister of Revenue & Disaster Management of Odisha Government, Sudam Marndi. Jyoti Prakash Panigrahi, Minister (MOS, Ind. Charge) of Tourism, Odia Language, Literature & Culture of Odisha Government, Tanaya Patnaik, Executive Director of Kanak News and Radio Choklate, RJ Kartik from Radio Choklate, Subrat Kumar Pati, Convener of 6th International Radio Fair were also present at the event. Coordinator of the station Bhaskar Jyoti Bhuyan(standing centre), received the award on behalf of Team BCRS.



## C-NES Review Meet

Chairman C-NES Board of Trustees, Mr. G.K.Pillai and Managing Trustee Sanjoy Hazarika had a meeting with the DPOs of the Boat Clinic teams on 11th February 2020 at Guwahati's Ginger Hotel. The Boat Clinic units made short presentation of their work and the performances of each unit reviewed. Members of C-NES'PMU including Dr CR Hira, Technical Consultant and Dr Milan Barooah, Special Advisor, Health, C-NES were present.





*Swapna Das, DPO, Barpeta Boat Clinic Unit II making her presentation to the Trustees at the Review Meet*



*Chairman, C-NES Board of Trustees and former Union Home Secretary, GK Pillai, Trustee, Patricia Mukhim, Editor, Shillong Times, Managing Trustee, Sanjoy Hazarika, and Advisor Health, Dr Milan Barooah with members of the Programme Management Unit (PMU) Dr CR Hira, Technical Consultant, Ashok Rao, Programme Manager, Manik Boruah, Associate Programme Manager and Bhaswati Goswami, Communications Officer at a Trust Meeting with PMU at the Guwahati Address Hotel, Guwahati on 12th February, 2020*



## Consultation on Nutrition

Program Manager, C-NES Ashok Rao and Dr C. R. Hira, Technical Consultant participated at a consultation on nutrition on 30th April at Guwahati organized by Voluntary Health Association Assam (VHAA) in collaboration with Civic Engagement Alliance (CEA). A



series of seminars and consultations on Nutrition for infants and young children were organized by Centre for Sustainable Development Group, Assam in collaboration with Coalition for Food and Nutrition Security.

## Workshop on Gender and POSH issues

A sensitization workshop on POSH (Prevention of Sexual Harassment) issues was conducted at Guwahati's Ginger Hotel on 23rd September 2019. Anurita Pathak Hazarika, State Director and Nilanju Dutta, Project Director, North East Network, a Women's Rights organisation, conducted the session as resource persons. DPOs from all 15 Boat Clinic units along with the Coordinator of Radio Brahmaputra and staff from regional office participated in the workshop. Dr Milan Barooah, member, C-NES Advisory Council and Dr CR Hira, Technical Advisor, C-NES were also present.



*Participants and resource persons at the gender issues sensitization workshop*

## Knowledge Fair

Laura Simms, a New York based award winning performer, writer, and educator advocating storytelling as compassionate action for personal and community transformation was the resource person at a Knowledge Fair sponsored by US based TAOS Institute for the ongoing SALT project supported by Constellation on 5th February 2020, at Ginger Hotel, Guwahati, Assam. Laura performs, teaches, coaches and gives keynote addresses worldwide. Since the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, she has devoted herself to training health workers and educators to use narrative in healing.

C-NES, Voluntary Health Association of Assam (VHAA) and Constellation jointly organized the Fair where community facilitators and champions of 30 SALT intervened villages from 3 districts of Assam (Bongaigaon, Kamrup rural and Udalguri) came together to share success stories and experiences.



*Laura Simms, the New York based story teller getting introduced to a participant at the Knowledge Fair*



*Laura addresses the participants*



## SDG workshop

Communications Officer Bhaswati Goswami participated at the Assam State Round Table Meet on UN SDG Goal (5) on Gender Equality as Panel Speaker on “Addressing gender equality in Assam and improving gender equality score(Goal 5) of Niti Ayog SDG India” on September 26, 2019. The multi-stakeholder round table meet was organized by Digital Empowerment Foundation, North East Development Foundation, Assam Civil Society Network for SDGs (ACT4SDGs), in collaboration with National Foundation for India and supported by Institute of Bio-Resources & Sustainable Development, DST, Govt. of India and UNDP. She spoke on gender equality pertaining Assam including women’s access to reproductive and sexual health services and reproductive rights in the marginalised Brahmaputra river island villages. Dr Monica Banerjee, Director of National Foundation of India, moderated the session.



*Monica Banerjee, Director, NFI with Bhaswati Goswami at the meet*



*Monjur H.Mondal(sitting third from right) District Programme Officer, Bongaigaon Boat Clinic at the EvalFest as panelist in the technical session*

Monjur H.Mondal, District Programme Officer, Bongaigaon Boat Clinic participated at the EvalFest and was the panelist in the technical session on 13th Feb-2020 organized by Evaluation Committee of India (ECOI) at India Habitat Centre, New Delhi.

## Visitors:

### German Consul General visits C-NES



*The German Consul General, Kolkata Dr Michael Feiner, visited the C-NES regional office on 7th January 2020 and had an interaction with members of the Programme Management Unit. (From left) Ashok Rao, Programme Manager, Dr Milan Barooah, Special Adviser, Technical(Health), Bhaswati Goswami, Communications Officer, Dr Feiner, Dr CR Hira, Technical Consultant and Manik Ch Boruah, Associate Programme Manager after the meeting*



*Former Trustee Mr Chaman Lal, with the Dhemaji Boat Clinic team in September 2019. Lal, an IPS officer from the Madhya Pradesh cadre has served on deputation BSF, ITBP, SPG besides his home cadre. He was also a former DGP of Nagaland. Post retirement, he has been working with the National Human Rights Commission and working to help people in mental institutions. Honoured with the 6th Nani Palkhivala Civil Liberties Award in 2011, he has also been working with the Swami Vivekananda Youth Movement, concerned about social causes and solutions.*



## Team from USAID and SAATHII visits Boat Clinic

A team comprising of the officials from USAID and SAATHII (Solidarity and Action Against the HIV Infection in India) visited Brahmaputra Community Radio Station (BCRS) on 9th May 2019 and Jorhat Boat Clinic on 11th May 2019. The visit was undertaken to see C-NES' interventions in health, sanitation and community media among the marginalized communities. C-NES' Program Manager, Ashok Rao and Associate Program Manager, Manik Boruah accompanied the team both the days. The USAID team included Ramona El Hamzaoui, Deputy Director; Xerses Sidhwa, Director, Health Office, both from US Embassy, New Delhi and Amy Fowler from USA. The SAATHII team comprised of Subhasree Raghaban, President, SAATHII, Dr Meeta Maher and three state level officials of SAATHI.



*The visitors with the Jorhat Boat Clinic team*

### **Visitor from UK onboard**

Philip Forth, Chair of the Board of the Constellation, a Belgian organization, which supports local responses around the world, visited the Kamrup Boat Clinic in April 2019. Constellation has worked to stimulate and connect communities through the SALT (Stimulate, Appreciate, Learn and Transfer) approach initially to respond to the HIV/AIDS pandemic. The organization now celebrates the action of communities in re-



sponse to a diverse set of life. In Assam this approach of community mobilization has been working successfully in specific villages in lower Assam



*A team led by Dr. Zoya Ali Rizvi, Assistant Commissioner of Adolescent Health Division, NHM, Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Government of India and comprising Dr. Parminder Gautam, Senior Consultant in Quality Improvement, NHSRC, Dr. Debojit Bora, Sr. Consultant, RRC, Dr. Rashid Ahmed Khan, State Adolescent Consultant, UNICEF. Mrs. Monikha Borgobain, SPM2, NHM, Assam. Mrs. Pran Purnima Borah, RKSK consultant, NHM, Assam. Dr. Emdadullah, JDHS, Dhubri, Dr. Prabal Mukharjee, Consultant, UNICEF, Purabi Brahma, DPM, Arif Ahmed, DCM and A. Das, DME, Dhubri visited a camp conducted by the Dhubri Boat Clinic Unit-II on 20th November 2019. The team interacted with the team members of the Boat Clinic, looked at the activities conducted in a health camp along with the records/reports.*





On 10th June 2019, the Deputy commissioner of Jorhat, Devo Prasad Misra spent the day with the Boat Clinic team, observing keenly how the team works and conducts camps. He also listened to village problems. He was accompanied by the district SDM&HO Dr. Bimal Pegu, Dr. Bhaktimoy Bhattacharya of TB Control Society, DPO of Disaster Management and others. This was the first ever visit by a DC and he expressed satisfaction to see the work. A group photograph of the DC and official with the Jorhat team

## C-NES BOAT CLINIC- JORHAT/UPPER MAJULI



### Researchers onboard

Researchers and Film makers Vandana Mohan and Debashish Nandi visited the boat Clinics at Sonitpur and Jorhat in September 2019. The duo have been collaborating for the past two years on various documentary projects as film makers at the Srishti Institute of Art, Design & Technology. The films looked at alternative paradigms that challenge current notions of development and progress. Follows a report by the researchers:

*The boat slowly drifted to set anchor in Upper Majuli on an island called Besamora. The loudspeaker crackled and the clinic's arrival was announced for the people on the island. Simultaneously a makeshift tent, medical supplies, chairs, tables were unloaded off the boat and set up quickly on the river bank. As film makers researching the Brahmaputra, we were really keen on spending time on one of the Boat Clinics run by C-NES. We landed in Jorhat on 11th September 2019 and were invited to join the crew on the Jorhat Boat Clinic on 12th September 2019 for a day long camp visit in Upper Majuli.*

*We reached Nimati Ghat after a few adventures on a rainy morning. The Brahmaputra stretched out behind the boat clinic. We were invited on board by Riturekha holding an umbrella and once we'd settled into the lower quarters of the deck, we were introduced to the rest of the crew. After the initial introductions were done we sat down to try and explain why we had come and also to try and understand how the clinic works.*



*Our main interest in the boat clinic was due to the fact that it uses the river as a means of transport to access islands that are inaccessible by road. We were given a crash course in the various medical interventions conducted by the crew from dental care to immunisation to basic health care. Once the rain stopped, we went to the upper deck and were introduced to the master boatman Gunjan Da. We learnt that he is from Kamalabari and has spent his whole life on this river. For us, the river stayed the same and we could only try and gauge the scale of it in terms of its width. But Gunjan Da knew the depths of this river as well and navigated based on knowledge systems that are a little alien to a person from an urban landscape.*

*Initially people came down to the clinic from different directions in ones and twos. Some on foot, some by cycles and some by smaller boats. Soon however, there were close to eighty to ninety people around the doctors and nurses seated behind the tables. We were told that the number was actually low due to the weather and normally they would see a minimum of a hundred and twenty or so patients. There seemed to us, a real sense of camaraderie between the crew and the people they were treating. Apart from the science of medicine, they all seemed to want to catch up and share news of what was going on in their lives with the boat crew. We were also given a warm welcome perhaps due to this very connection and people answered our questions patiently. They also took us around the village and introduced us to different people who they thought would be able to answer our questions about communities, livelihoods, health care etc.*

*As we returned to Nimati Ghat that evening we couldn't help but feel that it was a day well spent with many learnings and an insight into the workings of the boat clinic and the communities by the Brahmaputra. It left us with the realisation that we'd like to come back and spend more time with the camp since we'd barely scratched the surface in one day.*

Vandana Menon & Debashish Nandi

## On the Boat Clinic experience:

Arnab Dutta, CSE, New Delhi

Assam is a unique state, and the Boat Clinic initiative of Centre for Northeast Studies is one-of-a-kind initiative. On November 18, 2019, I had the opportunity of travelling with a team of doctors and health workers on one of these boats to a small river island in Nalbari district. I have seen primary health care centres on land, but for the first time in my life I saw this unique exercise of delivering health services through boats.

It was awe inspiring to say the least, especially given the difficulties of accessing these river islands, let alone provide a comprehensive set of essential health services to some of the most impoverished people. I witnessed that during the dry months, when the water in the river reduces, the regular clinics housed in bigger boats cannot ply and therefore the team has to hire smaller local boats to access these islands. I witnessed that after alighting from the boats, the team had to trek a long way carrying medicines on bicycles. I also saw the boat clinic team open up four different verticals in a matter



*Arnab Dutta(left) with Swedish journalist Naila Saleem enjoying a late afternoon lunch with the health team after the camp was over and a long walk back to the boat from the campsite*

of minutes, two doctors attending to patients; a team of nurses addressing pregnancy and post-birth related issues; a mobile laboratory service; and an ad hoc pharmacy. I also saw hundreds of patients avail these services, with the team working with clock-work efficiency.

All this was beyond the imagination of someone who is a city dweller, and for whom these services just a phone call or a short walk away. The entire experience left me with a lot to think about and made me feel humbled and happy at the same time. Is this model for other states like Bihar and Bengal, I wondered? As affordable health care in India still remains distant dream, I witnessed a group of dedicated people trying to show the way. I wholeheartedly salute the people running the Boat Clinic Initiative for

going beyond duty to help people. I hope this initiative grows in strength with time and becomes an example for others from outside Assam to follow.

All the best!!!

Arnab Dutta

## Intern at Jorhat Boat Clinic

Abhinav Goswami, from Centre for Undergraduate Studies, Tata Institute of Social Sciences(TISS), Guwahati campus interned with Jorhat Boat Clinic in December 2019. He tried to understand the socio-economic scenario and complexity on the ground as a participant. Abhinav conducted some basic research on Bamboo production and its economic viability in terms of scope of marketing accompanying the health team to Ghuria sapor, Balisapor, Bhekeli 2, Pogola sapor, Bhakat sapor, New samoguri, Afalamukh, Besamora, Salmora and Kamjan. Interviews were taken with villagers about the scope of Bamboo industry in Majuli district. He also interviewed the boat clinic beneficiaries. "Boat Clinics program is highly successful and extremely attractive to engage young



*Abhinav interviewing beneficiaries at Jorhat's Ghuria sapor*

people to work in the sector of both public health and community service. Thus, I would like to contribute to the land and its people through professional community service as an intern at C-NES and thereby, expanding my horizon to further continue my professional community service in future' says Abhinav.



## Media on the Boat Clinics

### Documentary Shooting

The Boat Clinics at Dibrugarh and Sonitpur were covered for a documentary series "A Medical Journey" from 13th to 20th May, 2019. The series is about healthcare delivery in different milieus - each representing a unique challenge and offering valuable insight into the communities and spaces that they work in. The Boat Clinic episode would focus on providing the audience an insight into the ecosystem and lives of island dwellers along the Brahmaputra and how the Boat Clinics have fast emerged as a lifeline for them. The series is being produced by August Pictures Pvt Ltd ([www.augustpictures.com](http://www.augustpictures.com)).



*Film shooting by Singapore team at Dibrugarh. Awareness on diarrheal disease at Udaipur, Dibrugarh while (right) Jojo from the Singapore documentation team demonstrating hand washing as part of personal hygiene*

com.sg). From 13th to the 16th of May the shooting was at the Dibrugarh river islands which the boat clinic services and from the 17th to 20th May 2019, the Boat Clinic at Sonitpur was covered. C-NES' Communications Officer Bhaswati Goswami accompanied the visitors and the health team to Tintikia char. The district Joint Director Health Services Dr. Krishna Kemprai accompanied the team on the 19th May.

### **Media Coverage:**

A documentary on the Boat Clinics part of the Singapore based series called "A Medical Journey" has been released. The series is about healthcare delivery in different milieus - each representing a unique challenge and offering valuable insight into the communities and spaces that they work in. The series is for Channel U, part of the Mediacorp Network, Singapore produced by August Pictures Pvt Ltd ([www.augustpictures.com.sg](http://www.augustpictures.com.sg)).

The Boat Clinic episode is roughly 45 minutes in duration. They have tried to provide the audience an insight into the ecosystem & lives of island dwellers along the Brahmaputra and how the Boat Clinics have fast emerged as a lifeline for them. At the same time, they have also tried to look beyond, and see what it takes to get a clinic such as this up and running. The shooting was done in the Dibrugarh and Sonitpur Boat Clinic Units.

## Boat Clinics on Livemint

- Journalist Avantika Bhuyan covered a flood story from the Boat Clinics at livemint, the online portal of Mint, one of the fastest growing news website in India. The link and the story follow: <https://www.livemint.com/mint-lounge/features/ferrying-hope-on-the-brahmaputra-1564137596324.html>

- Boat Clinics covered by Hindustan Times on 26th November 2019. The link follows:

[https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/in-flood-hit-assam-boat-clinics-bring-respite-to-many/story-zVlvhdB0rKz9IiTegewovO.html?fbclid=IwAR0tJ\\_ErdQnRiWTgz-zHWfmls38QDZzLtc38NwRFsH7oonE\\_T1uG6xqJm9WM](https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/in-flood-hit-assam-boat-clinics-bring-respite-to-many/story-zVlvhdB0rKz9IiTegewovO.html?fbclid=IwAR0tJ_ErdQnRiWTgz-zHWfmls38QDZzLtc38NwRFsH7oonE_T1uG6xqJm9WM)

- Swedish Radio on Boat Clinics

Swedish Radio Culture Correspondent, Naila Saleem from Stockholm and Arnab Dutta from the Centre for Science and Environment, New Delhi, accompanied by C-NES Communications Officer Bhaswati Goswami visited a health camp at Nalbari district's Somboriya Bazar conducted by the Nalbari Boat Clinic on 18th November 2019. Communications Officer Bhaswati Goswami accompanied the visitors. With water subsiding, the team has been sailing on a smaller country boat. It was a nearly four hour commute both ways followed by a long walk to reach the village. The visitors observed the camp where 192 general checkups were conducted along with 8 antenatal checkups, 3 post natal checkups, 14 routine immunizations and condoms and ocps distributed. The link to the coverage- both as a news and feature piece follows:.

[https://sverigesradio.se/sida/artikel.aspx?programid=1650&artikel=7351128&fbclid=IwAR0Odb1s\\_mZw-UQE6d5LQHu1SUYzyYO3SFB1-wA3puuq9k5gF46\\_L5wLOQo](https://sverigesradio.se/sida/artikel.aspx?programid=1650&artikel=7351128&fbclid=IwAR0Odb1s_mZw-UQE6d5LQHu1SUYzyYO3SFB1-wA3puuq9k5gF46_L5wLOQo)



*The Swedish journalist with the Boat Clinic team*



*Journalist Naila Saleem interviewing Dr. Rishikesh Koundinya and Dr. Harthis kr. Englong as the team proceeds to the camp on a small country boat*



## On AIR – Discussions on the Boat Clinics



*District Programme Officer, Morigaon, Shyamjit Pashi and Medical Officer, Dr. Asraful Islam speaking on their district Boat Clinic activities at AIR Gauhati moderated by AIRs Sanjeev Goswami on 29th Oct 2019.*



*C-NES' Communications Officer Bhaswati Goswami delivered a Radio Talk on the Boat Clinics at AIR Gauhati on 16th Oct 2019. The talk was moderated by AIRs Nisha Barua. Both programmes were aired on 14th November 2019 and 5th December 2019 respectively.*

## Hope Stories

The visit by a documentation team from Singapore for a film on the Boat Clinics have brought out positive stories like this one. 72 year old P Bhattacharya of Mesaki chapori, originally from W Bengal, could not complete his medical studies years ago, due to financial problems. That has not dampened his spirit. He is well informed about national and international developments through books and magazines. He often visits the Dibrugarh boat clinic conducted health camps to collect medicines for his asthmatic problems. He is an effective voluntary campaigner of routine immunizations of children and ante and post natal check ups of pregnant women. The film crew observed his enthusiastic involvement in the camps and his keen thirst for knowledge. They sent a three band Philips radio as gift to a delighted Bhattacharya who proudly shows it to everyone visiting his tiny grocery store



### Boat Babies

Dibrugarh, 16th October 2019: Yesterday was a critical day for our team. Our boat clinic beneficiary, Kanchan Devi was detected as high risk pregnancy case because of her Rh negative factor. She attended OPD at AMCH Dibrugarh thrice, our nurses helped her. She was admitted to AMCH day before yesterday. Doctor at Hospital informed our sisters and community worker that the patient needs immediate operation, and asked for 2 units of blood to be kept ready by the family. The family members who had not handles such situation earlier became nervous. The community worker mobilized some people residing in the main land, checked the blood banks, contacted local police, army and even blood banks from nearby Tinsukia district but failed to arrange blood. Finally



one person, who is also from our intervened river island and works at AMCH blood bank informed at around 7 pm yesterday that he could manage the blood and at 8 pm the patient was brought to the OT and at 8.49 pm she gave birth a healthy baby boy much to everyone's relief and happiness.

Arup Saikia, DPO, Dibrugarh

### **Kamrup Boat Clinic: A new arrival**

29th October 2019. A pregnant woman under the care of Kamrup Boat Clinic delivered a healthy baby near the campsite at Laheswari under the supervision of the team. The team was informed by the ASHA, the team had records of the pregnancy and good coordination ensured a successful delivery. Babies delivered by the teams have mostly been emergency deliveries as the boat clinics are not geared for this service. Home delivery is still common, in the river islands due to the remoteness and physical challenges of accessing health centres in the mainland land for institutional deliveries.



*The new born being given the first check up while relatives look on*

On the 8th of August 2019 while a Bongaigaon Boat Clinic health camp was on, a pregnant 24 year old Nureja Khatun who had come for her antenatal check up suddenly went into labour. Dr Deepranjan Das helped by the ANMs conducted an emergency



delivery. A healthy baby girl was born soon after and both the mother and child were sent home after necessary precautions were taken..



A healthy new born arrived at Sonitpur's Tinikur char on 8th April 2019. This was the first ever (emergency) delivery conducted by the district's Boat Clinic team led by the Medical Officer Dr Nasir Hassan and ANMs Hasena Banu and Bidyabati Das while conducting a regular camp. The team rushed to the home of the beneficiary when informed by the ASHA. DPO Mousumi Dowerah always a support, flashed on light from her mobile phone during the delivery which took over 3 hours. Post delivery the male baby was given necessary care and OPV, BCG injected. A strenuous day ended with utmost satisfaction



## From the Field



*Home visit for Routine Immunization and Ante Natal Care at Mesaki saponi, Dibrugarh May 2019*



*World Population Day(WPD) being observed at Dibrugarh's Chakia village*





*On a rainy morning, nurses on way for home visits to cover RI and ANC at Dibrugarh's flooded Chakia island village on 2nd July 2019*



*The District Programme Officer Bongaigaon Boat Clinic Unit MH Modal meeting the WHO central review team at the Additional Director's office*





*An awareness meeting and street play on TB organized by the Lakhimpur Boat Clinic at Naali Avanori Higher Secondary school, Mortonsapori. The school teachers and over 350 students participated. The script was written by Dr. Jagdish Goswami, TB office, Lakhimpur district. The play was performed by a group named Suraksh.*



*Deworming campaign by Kamrup Boat Clinic Unit in February 2019*



*(Right) Women members of the health team getting onboard SB Kaliyani, the Kamrup Boat Clinic on way to a health camp. This boat has been donated to C-NES by Numaligarh Refineries Limited as part of its CSR initiative*





*Handwashing among students as a part of IDCF at Charisiti under Panitola BPHC Dibrugarh May 2019(Right) by the Dibrugarh Boat Clinic team*



*Awareness session conducted by the Jorhat Boat Clinic Unit to improve food habits coinciding during the mid day meal schedule at Gopalchuk L.P School*



*Awareness camps on ICDF were organized at Jorhat districts Bhekeli 1, Bhekeli 2, Missamora, Sengelisuti, Kankur, Kerker and Gopal chuk with good response from the villagers.*





Along with the other Boat Clinic units, to encourage breastfeeding and improve the health of new-born, World Breastfeeding Week was observed at Jorhat Boat Clinic. The awareness programmes were organized supported by ASHA workers, community workers, ANMs and Medical Officers in the presence of new mothers and villagers. ANMs Rimpi Bordoloi, Juli Phukon and Pranjali Thakuria highlighted the benefit of breast feeding for baby and mother. Awareness camps were organised at Bhakat sapor, New Samoguri, Salmora, Kamjan, Besamora, Afalamoukh, Baruachuk, Kachikata, Kerker, Kankur, Gopalchuk, Missamora, Sengellisuti, Huttar, Sesuguri, Kathsaori, Balisapori and Ghuria sapor.



*Jorhat boat SB Nabor being repaired in April 2019*



## “Salt” Initiative

At SALT intervened villages, community facilitators and champions have often shared successful stories and experiences which emerged during the project implementation period. Be it dream building for better health of their children through immunization or education, safe drinking water, nutrition and sanitation, it has been observed that communities effectively took steps through action plan after self-assessment. Thanks to the (SALT) process of community mobilisation, many families are using water filter, they boil water and taking steps to ensure cleanliness and sanitation. Parents are aware about the need to immunize their children.

VHAA and C-NES supported by Constellation, a registered not for profit organization



are working (from February 2017) on a project titled “Impact assessment of the SALT (Stimulate, Appreciate, Learn and Transfer) approach of community engagement - a mixed methods study in Assam”. C-NES had been given the responsibility to conduct the project in 30 villages of Bongaigaon district while Voluntary Health Association of Assam (VHAA) have been given Kamrup (Rural) and Udalguri districts. The SALT approach encourages people to dream, to build on their strengths and develop their own solutions to challenges. The beauty of this approach lies in its simplicity, in not setting any standards, in enabling people at self-realization and collective action. The photographs taken on 16th May 2019 show field visits undertaken by facilitators team at Bongaigaon's Barjhana village (Srijangram block) and how villagers have taken many action after salt intervention.





*The Dhemaji Boat Clinic conducting an IDD cum health and awareness camp in November 2019*



*Dhemaji Boat Clinic team conducting health checkups.*

## Family Planning Initiatives



*On September 27th 2019, the Barpeta Boat Clinic Unit I inserted 8 IUCDs to beneficiaries in the Kadagi and Nirola Char*



### Sonitpur

Marajina Khatun, the newly appointed ASHA of Bihaguri block prefers a small family. Most from her community have large unplanned families. She wanted to adopt a permanent FP method after her second delivery but was not able to access the nearest hospital. When she met the Sonitpur Boat Clinic team on May 2019, she was convinced about the advantages of undergoing an Laparoscopic Sterilization. Floods and irregular boat services to her home in Teliagaon ghat prevented her. She finally succeeded in her fourth attempt on 30th September 2019 at KCH Tezpur. She played a dual role- as beneficiary herself and motivator for other women.





A community worker from the Sonitpur Boat Clinic Unit gets on top of the vehicle (they use to commute to and fro health camps) to make announcements asking beneficiaries to come for the health camp for better outreach. He read out the names of beneficiaries due for vaccination. At times it becomes difficult for ASHAs/ AWWs/VWs to inform all benefi-

ciaries. Parents become alert once they hear the names of their children due for vaccination. The health teams have become innovative while striving to give the best possible health service despite the great physical challenges in conducting camps in far flung island villages where there are no roads





Overcoming hurdles every day. Sonitpur Boat Clinic's Bidyabati Das and Hasena Banu carrying chairs and other camp requirements to destination, close to 3 kms from ghat in a bi cycle. The Team members of all Boat Clinic units are expert at multi tasking and working in team spirit.





Sanjoy Hazarika, Managing Trustee, C-NES visited the Morigaon Boat Clinic on 31st December 2019 and spend the New Years Eve with the team onboard much to the delight of the team. The Boat journey from Kathoni ghat downstream started in the afternoon and the team reached

Panikaity near Guwahati in the evening for an overnight halt. Ushering in the new Year the team shared breakfast with the MT on the river bank after which they parted ways for their respective destinations.

## From Radio Brahmaputra

Community radio has proven to be the voice of the community. Apart from disseminating knowledge among local communities and bridging the gap between the government and marginalized population, these radio stations also play a critical role in disaster management. It serves as an information bridge between the government and the public in remote areas.

Radio Brahmaputra, a community radio station licensed to C-NES by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, New Delhi, is trying to break that barrier through radio programmes to reach out to more ethnic communities in their local dialects. "Since many of them, mostly women still do not understand the Assamese language, we are translating the contents of WHO and health department about Coronavirus into Sadri language for those living inside tea gardens in Dibrugarh and into Mising, Hajong, Deori and Banai language for residents in the remote riverine villages in Dhemaji district"



adds Bhaskar Bhuyan, the dynamic and untiring coordinator of Radio Brahmaputra located in Maijan Borsakia village, on the banks of the mighty Brahmaputra, in Dibrugarh, Upper Assam.

On the occasion of International Women's Day, 8th March 2020, Dr. Rita Panyang Kat-aki, Associate Professor of Pediatrics, Assam Medical College Hospital talking to Radio Brahmaputra on diverse issues of women empowerment including education for the girl child, safe environment, proper nutrition for adolescent and growing girl child, health and hygiene Rumi Naik, from Radio Brahmaputra spoke about the station as a learning space" and "as community producer/worker of Radio Brahmaputra representing their own community".

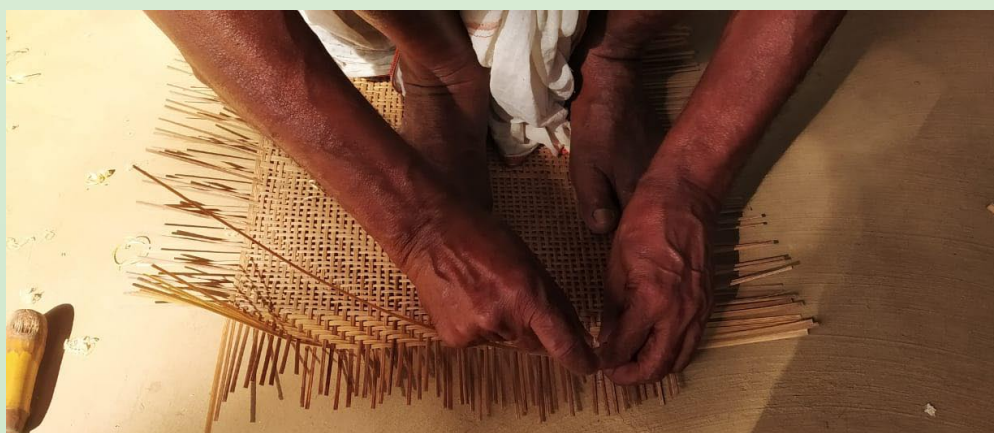




*Additional Director, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting.( MIOB), Govt. of India, G.S. Kesarwani, Archana Kapoor, Founder, SMART, Rukmini Vemraju, Community Media Expert, and team members of SMART from New Delhi visiting Brahmaputra Community Radio Station on January 23rd 2020. The visitors seen with Bhaskar Bhuyan, Coordinator of the station*



*Students at Radio Brahmaputra to celebrate children's day on 14th November 2019. A number of children centric programmes were organized by the station*



*Radio Brahmaputra developed a new programme on Bamboo for Sustainable Development in November 2019 to help communities develop their livelihood skills through locally available resources. Bamboo grown abundantly in villages all over Assam*





*Jan 28th 2020. A campaign by Radio Brahmaputra to collect opinions and suggestions from different citizen groups of the Dibrugarh on various civic issues, the reasons behind, the consequences and possible solutions and to put them together in a collective and participatory way to submit to district administration before or during public meetings called by administration of Dibrugarh. Seen here, a group of local women from Padum Nagar, Dibrugarh sharing their thoughts on issues they were facing during the rainy season in their areas.*



*Sep 4th 2019 An introductory launch of a recipe book on complementary feeding by Dr. M. S. Lakshmi Priya, IAS, ADC, Dibrugarh developed by Brahmaputra Community Radio Station (BCRS) under Community Nutrition Program with support of UNICEF, ASSAM on the occasion of Poshan Maah 2019 (Month dedicated to Nutrition)*



*A Community interactive program designed and facilitated by Radio Brahmaputra on ECD (Early Childhood Development) in April 2019 covering issues from conception to age two. Mothers are seen actively participating in the program and playing games and quiz on early intervention and protection through immunization*



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CENTRE FOR NORTH EAST STUDIES  
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# Annual Report : 2019-2020

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