Spotlight on Tamil Nadu, India

In this edition of our newsletter, we focus on the Dalit people of India, considered ‘untouchables’ despite the relatively recent government policy outlawing India’s deeply entrenched caste system. Annie Namala, Indigo Foundation’s India Liaison Officer, has written an interesting and insightful article (below) describing the plight of the Dalits. Next, Pat Duggan, Indigo Foundation Project Manager for India, reports on her field trip to India, in January, to visit the Indigo Foundation-supported ‘Programme for Education and Awareness Building’ (PEAB).

The Enigma that is India

Annie Namala: In-country Liaison Officer, India

Ours is a battle not for wealth or for power.
It is a battle for freedom. It is a battle for the reclamation of the human personality

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar

India: Tremendous diversity, vibrant democracy and impressive growth

India is the most culturally, linguistically and genetically diverse geographical entity after the African continent. The people follow different religions, with the Hindu communities comprising 80.5% of the population, Muslims 13.4%, Christians 2.3%, Sikhs 1.9%, Buddhists 0.8%, Jains 0.4%, and others 0.7%. The country followed socialist inspired economic policies from the 1950s to 1980s and opened to the market economy through liberalization, privatization and globalization under the ‘New Economic Policy’ beginning in 1990. India has managed an incredible growth portfolio over the past decade with an impressive average growth rate of 7.7% during its 10th Five Year Plan (2002-03 to 2006-07). With its annual growth rate touching 8.9%, India is one of the fastest growing economies in the world.

How a third of Indian people live

There is another way of understanding India. Forbes magazine reports that India has the highest number of billionaires in Asia, with some among the richest in the world. India also has over 300 million poor people, a number that has barely declined over the last three decades of development. 34.7% of the people live on less than $1 a day and it is estimated that 27.5% of the population live ‘below the poverty line’. India has the highest number of illiterate people in the world, numbering about 304 million. About half of the children who enroll in ‘Standard 1’ drop out before eight years of education. The National Family Health Survey shows an alarming situation that almost 46% of the children in the 0-3 year age group suffer from malnutrition.

Dalits under the Caste System

Two particular structural constraints that create and contribute to the desperate situation of the poor in India are the Caste system and patriarchy. I will focus on the Caste system, in particular.

The Caste system describes the social stratification in the Indian context, a system of graded inequalities where social groups are ranked in hierarchy based on their birth, with strict norms of endogamy, rules on social relations, caste-based occupations, prohibitions on access to resources and barriers to positions of authority and decision-making in society. The Caste system divides Indian society into four broad groups of people based on the mythological belief of their origin from the ‘primordial being’. Brahmins (assigned religious/priestly functions in society) are at the top of the hierarchy. They are respected, have the right to learn and teach, and the
right to demand and receive services from all other communities in society. Kshatriyas come next in the hierarchy as the traditional rulers. Vysyas are the third group, comprising a large section of traders and agriculturists. These three social groups together are considered to be the ‘upper castes’, upholding the caste norms and holding rights over persons, resources and services considered ‘below’ them. The Sudras constitute the fourth section of the four-fold Caste system. They are artisans and service personnel with the duty to fulfill the needs and demands of those above them.

Below and outside the four-fold system falls 164 million people, a sixth of the population, considered to be ‘outcastes’ or ‘untouchables’. They have chosen for themselves the name ‘Dalits’, meaning ‘broken people’.

The concept and belief in purity-pollution (untouchability) is foundational to the Caste system. Dalits, by their very birth, are supposed to be polluting and impure and the norms ordain that other caste groups keep away from them to avoid being polluted. Dalits take care not to pollute other social groups. The notions of caste are so strong in Hindu society, that dominant caste communities who are part of other religions carry their caste identity with them and practice untouchability and exclusion on Dalits who also convert to these religions, be that Christianity, Islam, Buddhism or Sikhism.

Every aspect of Dalit life is circumscribed by the caste norms. Dalits occupy the periphery and the far ends of the villages at a distance from the rest of the habitation so as not to pollute the dominant caste communities by their presence. Entry and exit to Dalit habitations is monitored by dominant castes. Dalits provide services including ‘manual scavenging’ and are obliged to perform all unclean, polluting and cleaning tasks in society.

In addition, a number of social restrictions and prohibitions prevent Dalits from social mobility, despite a legal system which now makes such discrimination illegal.

Dalit access to government services, for example, is often negotiated by dominant castes and when provisions are made, they are often of poor quality. Dalit communities generally do not have equal access to relief after natural disasters. Caste discrimination has pervaded the administration and judiciary too. Elections are yet another process where Dalits face pressure to vote as per the dictates of dominant communities. Generations of caste-based deprivation and exclusion have resulted in present day economic and social exclusion from mainstream Indian society.

Caste discrimination is reflected in the schools where, despite their recent legal access to public schools, the dominant caste teachers have low expectations of Dalit children, they stereotype them, humiliate them on their caste identity and their parents’ occupation. Teachers ignore complaints by Dalit children of harassment by non Dalit children.

Any resistance or disobedience to caste norms, or rights assertion, results in violence against Dalit communities.

The cases of violence and human rights violations are so much a part of everyday life for Dalits, that the majority of such crimes are not reported. These include murder, injury, rape, abduction, dacoity, robbery, arson, and caste discrimination. The situation of Dalit girls and women is particularly dismal.

Ammu left school before finishing, to marry a Muslim tea shop owner in the village. He left her early in the marriage, after their first child was born. Ammu took over the tea shop, and much against community norms for Dalits, she became a very successful tea shop owner. Her tea is a special brew and highly regarded. Business is thriving. Her daughter, who she has raised alone, is one of the Standard 10 students attending coaching sessions.

Recognising the special problems of Dalit communities, the Government of India has put in place constitutional provisions, legislations and proactive policies and programmes to prevent the practice of untouchability. This includes affirmative action in education, government services and political institutions, as well as special provisions for economic development and a permanent body (National Scheduled Caste Commission) to investigate and monitor the social and economic progress of Dalits on an annual basis. However, the Caste system is far from gone: “caste is an institution of prodigious strength and it will take a lot of beating before it will die”.

Civil society and government administrators are largely guided by the norms of the Caste system in their localities. The Hon. Prime Minister of India says "Dalits have faced a unique discrimination in our society that is fundamentally different from the problems of minority groups in general. The only parallel to the practice of untouchability was apartheid in South Africa. Untouchability is not just social discrimination. It is a blot on humanity..." and, as recently as 19th March 2009, admitted that ‘casteism (and communalism) are enemies of the country’. 
Persistent development inequalities of Dalits

Despite many provisions and programmes, Dalits continue to lag behind in development indicators. The mean year of schooling for a Dalit child in the 7-16 age bracket is 3.35 compared to 4.39 among non-SC/ST/Muslim population. The infant mortality rate (IMR) for Dalit children is as high as 66.4 per thousand live births compared to 48.9 per thousand for children from the other social groups. Similarly, the under-five mortality (USMR) among Dalit children is 88.1 compared to 59.2 among other social groups. Despite agriculture being the primary occupation of Dalits, about 70% of Dalits are landless or near landless. 46% of Dalit agricultural labourers are landless compared to the national average of 26% of agricultural labourers. Only 27% of Dalits have been able to undertake any self employment due to a lack of assets, no access to resources, and discrimination.

Dalit struggles and movements

Dalits have continued to struggle for a more egalitarian and just society. Religious leaders (who were Dalits) preached a casteless society from as early as the 12-13 BC. Dalits converted to Buddhism, Islam, Christianity and Sikhism to escape the caste norms. Babasaheb Ambedkar urged Dalits to 'educate, organise, and agitate' against caste norms and the various post-independent Dalit movements report the continuing struggle for a more just society. Dalit literature has made its mark in many Indian languages and in English. In 2001, the 'World Conference against Racism' was a watershed when Dalit and human rights civil society organisations took their voice to the UN-convened international conference. People and institutions feel diffident to debate Dalit issues. The key is empowerment. A senior civil servant committed to India - and not belonging to the Dalit community – has stated: ‘Empowering Dalits may be the way to empower India’ and also transform Indian society!

Note: Footnotes and references available upon request

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A trip to India – An assessment of the Programme for Education and Awareness Building

Pat Duggan – Project Manager, India

I visited Madhurantakam, in Tamil Nadu, India to see the Programme for Education and Awareness Building (PEAB), with Annie Namala, Indigo Foundation’s India Liaison Officer, and the Pravaham Trust. Dayalan, the Programme’s Manager, also accompanied us. During the visit, we met with a parents’ group whose children are attending what is called, ‘Standard 10’ coaching (essentially year 10 in our school system) and we visited the coaching sessions twice. We also visited communities at 5 Village Education Centres (VECs) and we met with the Project Committee.

Indigo Foundation’s team on the ground: Chezhiyan (left) and Dayalan at a meeting with the newly formed Project Committee at Madhurantakam.

We concluded that the project has made considerable progress since my last visit in April 2006, including:

- The Pravaham Trust (“the Trust”) is willing the project to succeed. They have put systems in place for financial management and for more regular follow up with Dayalan on project implementation.
- The recruitment of Chezhiyan, a retired (Dalit) high school teacher from the area, who is highly regarded (parents see him as a role model for their children), has created new momentum. Coaching classes for Standard 10 curriculum have begun - an important step forward.
- The coaching has been in place for most of this academic year, with 22 students in nightly attendance, and two volunteer teachers (who were previous colleagues of Chezhiyan) providing rotating nightly classes. The coaching is to help students do as well as possible in their exams. Like Chezhiyan, we are filled with anticipation about the results! The commitment of parents is demonstrated by their willingness to contribute Rs50 per month for each student. A pass is simply not enough: the students have little hope of securing prized seats in Standard 11 and 12 classes without a very good Standard 10 grade. Chezhiyan is determined that the "the first intake" group will do brilliantly!
- On the back of a successful 2-day camp, held for this group in December at the Trust’s compound in Vellore, the Trust is planning to hold a "career camp" for the first intake of Standard 10 coaching students in May, when school holidays are underway. Whilst the original idea was to focus on Standard 12 students, the Trust has opted for a longer term intensive investment in mentoring the graduates of the Standard 10 coaching program until they finish school. This is a good response to the question raised by a parent of one student being coached; "It’s great you are supporting them for Standard 10 – but who will support them in years after that?"
Evening coaching session for Standard 10 students underway, with one student reading from a Tamil passage, to display her skills to the foreign visitors!

- The 9 Village Education Centres (VECs) have continued, with around 3-4 now having attained a permanent community space, mainly in local schools. Chezhiyan has been pivotal in getting local agreement. Attendance varies but is around 25-40 per VEC.
- Parent Committees – with differing levels of interest and commitment - have been formed in three VEC communities.

Meeting some parents of the Standard 10 coaching students

An overall Project Committee is in very early days of formation (i.e. members have been appointed). We hope that this committee can be the central forum for deciding key directional issues for the project.

**Key areas that need attention in the coming year:**

- More community support for the VECs: as one elder put it, parents are happy to send their children to VECs, as they are offered free, but it is unlikely that they would want to contribute resources to their upkeep. On the other hand, parents see the Standard 10 evening coaching sessions by Chezhiyan as the “main game” and their support is demonstrated by their preparedness to pay.

- The tutors of the VECs need skills development: this has not happened as we’d hoped it might. The tutors are great – smart and motivated – but they are not trained. Some simple sessions on methodology and a venue for them to share experiences and learn from each other could help enormously. The project team – Chezhiyan and Dayalan – and the Trust have agreed to give this priority over the coming year.

After a meeting with a group of the VEC tutors

- Youth groups need some attention: In most VECs, youth groups have been formed, with the main task being to obtain and disseminate the daily Tamil newspaper (that the project is buying). While the project team spend much time making these youth groups work, their role and functioning do not seem clear. Also, the newspaper in some communities is not being systematically shared around the community. It is a key resource, and a community-driven mechanism, however simple, needs to be found so everyone can benefit from the information. The project team and the new Committee will decide over the coming months, what shape any future project should have.

For this year, the project team has agreed to concentrate on strengthening the contacts already established, with support from the Trust, Annie, and Indigo Foundation. The idea behind this is that with stronger and wider connections with organizations that have an interest in the same community activities as the PEAB, activities can build a life of their own, tapping wider resources than those available from Indigo Foundation.

**PEAB beyond June 2010?**

The project is halfway through its life and much of the discussion during the visit was focused on the still unresolved question about the future of the VECs. While we know that they do serve a purpose – a place for children to develop the habit of study after school – is there enough community interest to justify continuing to support all 9 VECs? What scope is there for the VECs to...
become platforms for community organization? The other components appear to have greater community support: Standard 10 and Standard 12 coaching, as well as long term mentoring for the students involved.

Indigo Foundation is currently considering what the next phase of the project might look like. What type of support, and at what level, is most likely to change peoples’ lives in the long term?

Kiruba is the tutor of the VEC at Mulli village, which comprises agriculture day labourers, earning around $AUD1 per day. Kiruba’s family has agreed that their house can be used for night schools. Without this generosity, the 25 children in attendance would meet outside - there is no other building.

An important footnote to my visit was Annie Namala’s point that the importance of this project lies in its focus on “professionalizing” skills and organisation in the Dalit community. Dalits have a longstanding history in activism around discrimination. However, they have not organized as well around strategies to increase their economic and social opportunities in the wider community. This project is one of the first Annie is aware of in the area which is attempting to help Dalits improve their life opportunities – by improving education opportunities.

Summary

As we’ve known from the outset, the journey we are taking with this Dalit community in Tamil Nadu is a long one. Momentum is definitely building, but the most difficult work – to build genuine community ownership of PEAB’s aims – is still ahead. I am confident we will get there if we and the Trust stay the course.

2009 Indigo Foundation Development Praxis Award

Annie Namala

Each year Indigo Foundation offers a Development Praxis Award to support and promote links between development research and practice. The award of $500 is granted to a person or organisation undertaking research Indigo Foundation believes will contribute, in a practical and accessible way, to community development. IF also provides non-financial support to award recipients, including access to our organisational experience and contacts and, as appropriate, introductions to communities that we are working with.

The Management Committee is very pleased to announce that the winner of the Development Praxis Award for 2008 is Annie Namala, for her dedicated work with Dalit communities in India.

Annie’s capacity to link research and action has been demonstrated in her long research/development career. As a human rights activist and researcher, Annie has a particular focus on inclusive policies and practice for Dalits. She has been working with the Dalit community, through the National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights and the Indian Institute of Dalit Studies for over 20 years, exposing their situation and advocating for an improvement in their human rights. Currently, she is the Director of Centre for Programming Inclusion and Equity based in New Delhi, The Centre is a new initiative designed to connect different stakeholders to build inclusiveness into policy and practice in development interventions. Annie also undertakes consultancy work with United Nations and bilateral aid agencies, she has represented and participated in various national and international policy discussions and workshops and in addition to all this is Indigo Foundation’s Liaison Officer for our Tamil Nadu project.

Coming from the Syrian Christian community, Annie’s own journey in life and work has been one of living the dynamics between ‘exclusion-inclusion’, born into a non-Dalit community, married to a Dalit and working with the Dalit community.

We hope this award, in a small way, contributes to Annie’s exceptional work.
Turusuala Community Based Training Centre, Solomon Islands
An Evaluation!
Helen-Lucy Moss - Project Manager, Solomon Islands

In late November last year, Doni Keli, Indigo Foundation’s Liaison Officer, and I visited Turusuala Community Based Training Centre to conduct our annual evaluation. Turusuala runs a three year residential vocational program for youths on the isolated Weathercoast of Guadalcanal. Indigo Foundation has been working with the centre for four years following two years of support for other youth related activities in the area.

We were really pleased to be accompanied by Charles Pegoa, from the Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development, as well as Clement Hadosaia from Kastom Gaden Association (KGA), a major national NGO working in the agricultural sector. The Weathercoast, as its name suggests, is notorious for its extreme weather, with 5-8 metres of rain a year and rough seas. Having prepared ourselves for a difficult eight hour trip in a small outboard motor boat, we were very happy to have perfect weather. It also gave the local members of our M&E team, who each had a family connection to the Weathercoast, the opportunity to point out their villages as we sped by.

One of the highlights of the trip was being able to stay in the recently completed female dormitory building, which was funded by the Japanese government and took the students and staff four years to build. It is hoped that the new building will encourage more girls to study at Turusuala.

Indigo Foundation Liaison Officer, Doni Keli, assisting Turusuala staff during their evaluation small group work

During the visit, the M&E team conducted interviews with Principal Jerry Anderson, held small group sessions with staff and students, and toured the local area to see the community outreach projects. While we were there we also arranged for Jerry to meet with World Vision because they are about to roll out a large program across the Weathercoast. It’s planned that World Vision’s program will include vocational training so it was important for the two organisations to have an informal preliminary discussion on how they might work together.

It has been another challenging year for Turusuala with only 12 (two female and ten male) of the 24 students who enrolled at the beginning of 2008 completing the year. A key factor was the collapse of the literacy program following the opening of a similar program nearby. The centre lost almost half of its teachers during the year which was in addition to the loss of their only trained teacher at the start of the year. Despite these challenges, the centre successfully graduated several students and trainee teachers, providing these students with a rare second chance to build skills and contribute to their family and community. Indigo Foundation was very proud to participate in the graduation ceremony and the feast afterwards to mark their great achievement.

The 2008 graduate students and trainee teachers (with Principal Jerry Anderson at the back)

The year ahead: The centre continues to face challenges with its day to day operations. Despite the successful opening of Turusuala’s new residential building, the centre will not be able to offer a full residential course this year as pigs have again destroyed the centre’s crops. The increase in food prices in the Solomons, particularly rice, means that the centre cannot afford to feed the students, who will now spend ten days a month at the centre with the rest of their time back in their villages. While disappointing, this will provide the centre with the opportunity to trial a more practical based learning method and assist the students to set up their own projects in their communities.

The 2008 Indigo Foundation M&E visit provided an important opportunity for Turusuala to meet with potential partner organisations (the Ministry of Education, KGA and World Vision), helping it to overcome the Weathercoast’s isolation, which is often a barrier to accessing the assistance of, largely Honiara based, donors, ministries and other partner organisations. Having seen the centre, the representatives were
impressed with its vision and were eager to provide assistance to turn that vision into a reality.

Indigo Foundation was very fortunate to be accompanied by Government Representative, Charles Pegoa who undertook an assessment of Turusuala against the membership criteria for the Solomon Islands Association of Rural Training Centres (SIARTCs). SIARTC membership would provide Turusuala with access to annual government funding and secure its long-term financial future. While Turusuala was not judged to have met the criteria yet, the centre’s leadership now has guidance on what needs to be done. The Ministry also offered to provide some assistance to Turusuala in the meantime under its smaller program for community based training centres. The Ministry is keen for Turusuala to become an RTC, as part of its strategy to combat rural-urban drift.

With the potential support structure of Indigo Foundation, the Ministry, KGA, and World Vision, Turusuala’s management must now decide which offers of assistance suit their intended direction for the centre. This process has already begun with Jerry accepting KGA’s offer to fund a teacher at the centre to assist graduates during their transition back to the villages. This year will be an important year for Turusuala to overcome the challenges of working on the Weathercoast and consolidate and strengthen its programs with the help of these organisations.

The 2008 Turusuala students

Final note: Indigo Foundation would like to say a big thankyou to the local community and the RAMSI Army and Police forces stationed at AvuAvu who took our M&E team in when our plane didn’t turn up. It turned out to be a lovely extra day.

Indigo Foundation Project Manager: Helen-Lucy Moss
Country Liaison Officer: Doni Keli
MC Representative: Sue Cunningham

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Hope never runs dry
Supporting orphans & vulnerable children in Budake, Uganda

Ian Seal, Indigo Foundation Representative

The Budaka District lies in Eastern Uganda, not far from the border with Kenya. Conservative estimates are that there are 6,000 orphans in the district population of 160,000, mostly due to the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Many more children have parents that are ill with the disease, and all families are affected, as grandparents, uncles and aunts and neighbours attempt to support the ever growing number of orphans. My visit to Budaka in December 2008 - February 2009 was to meet with the Budaka community, to share ideas, and to develop a proposal for a project that would enhance the capacity of families and village communities within Budaka to support orphans and other vulnerable children.

I was made to feel most welcome by representatives of local government, schools, village heads and by a number of small community-based organisations working to minimise the impact of HIV/AIDS through pre- and post-test HIV counselling, development of income generating activities for families, visits to homes where people are ill, and the use of drama and song to promote HIV prevention messages. These organisations are entirely volunteer-run, and have no funding other than what the volunteers themselves contribute. Many of the volunteers are themselves HIV positive and many are looking after orphans. Through these organisations I was assisted to meet with orphans directly, with parents suffering from HIV/AIDS and others who are providing homes for as many as 25 orphans and other children. I also met a boy of 16 who cares for eleven brothers, sisters, nieces and nephews.

Through a series of meetings, discussions and visits to different parts of the district, the community identified a number of priorities and needs from which we have developed a project proposal. The overarching aim is “To improve psychosocial outcomes and reduce risk factors for poor health in orphans by strengthening and supporting the capacity of families and communities to protect and care for their children”. Within that, three key areas were identified:
**Capacity building** - Supporting orphans, vulnerable children, young people and their carers, through direct, participatory-based work and through capacity building support to community-based organisations.

Orphans and vulnerable children and their carers currently have little opportunity or influence in community-level decision making. This is acknowledged by the District local government, who support participation as a key principal but lack the resources and expertise to facilitate this. Strengthening the small community-based volunteer organisations in Budaka through training, technical support and resourcing, and supporting orphans and their carers to participate directly in decisions that affect them, ensures that decision-making is relevant and focused on the needs of those most affected.

**Education** - Strengthening schools through support to teachers, collaborative projects, resourcing of equipment and policy support.

In recent years government schooling in Uganda has been made free for all children. While as a principal this is fantastic, schools have received little in the way of extra funding and resourcing to cope with major increases in student populations. Added to this, the increasing number of orphans attending school who have both physical and emotional needs has created significant strain on already overstretched teachers and schools. Working to support schools through training of teachers, joint projects, policy support and resource provision will improve educational and social outcomes, not just for orphans, but for all children.

**Public Health** - Improving public health by protecting water supply, policy development, and building linkages to other services.

A focus on public health also improves lives across the community, not just for orphans. Currently 40% of people in Budaka cannot access safe, clean water. Protection of natural springs to ensure safe water supply is thus a priority. The district has also identified a need for support at a health systems level, focusing on research, policy development and recognition of a continuum of health needs.

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**Big project, small steps, multiple partnerships**

Major challenges for my first visit to Budaka were the complex and entwined needs of orphans and vulnerable children in the community and high expectations from the community regarding support that we might provide. Ensuring that the project is "do-able" is crucial. Two strategies should assist this -

**Start off small**

While the district functions as one community in many ways, it is possible to work within a smaller geographical area and with a smaller population. The proposal for this project is thus to begin this work just in the Iki Iki sub-district and expand to other sub-districts over time and as resources allow.

**Organisational champions**

To address the three major objectives of the project I hope to find three "organisational champions" that would work alongside Indigo to provide technical and other expertise to the project. Each would identify how they could provide specialist knowledge and resources to one key priority area of the project. I have already begun having positive and constructive conversations with three organisations in this regard.

I am most grateful to the Indigo Foundation for the support that enabled me to make this first visit to Budaka, and also to the Rotary Club of Eltham. I’m very pleased to be able to present this report of my visit as we move towards making the project a reality.

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**Indigo Foundation People**

**Kieran Longridge** - Indigo Foundation Coordinator

A profile of Kieran, who is on maternity leave until mid-June. [CONGRATULATIONS to Kieran on the birth of Elisha Billie Griffis!]

![A typical street in Budaka](image-url)

I was very fortunate to be appointed as Indigo Foundation Coordinator in January 2008. Until I learnt about the Coordinator position, I was unaware of the work of Indigo Foundation.

In fact, having come from the international non-government sector (NGO) sector, I had set about finding work with a small, personal NGO that focused on empowering communities through community development AND allowed me to work from home. I thought it was a big ask but that was what I was hoping for. I was slightly blown away to discover, through a friend, that there was an organisation based in Australia that actually met this criteria and was looking for a Coordinator.

It is rare that a week of work goes by and I am not reminded about the commitment and integrity of the wonderful people who contribute to supporting the vision of Indigo Foundation, whether this be through the Management Committee; Project Management or delivery of specific needs such as fundraising, newsletter...
production, database design and our small but dedicated pool of financial supporters. Many of our volunteers already work full-time; have families and other life obligations. Yet, they manage to stay engaged and active and are a joy to work with.

Another aspect of Indigo Foundation that I admire is the diversity, respect and acceptance of each other, in terms of skills, background and experience.

My own story is that I have been involved in social justice campaigning for 10 years. My background includes a Honours degree in Communication and Social Inquiry at UTS (research focus on questioning the effectiveness of large international Non Government Organisations working collaboratively with small, localised community groups); on campus campaigning (as Environment Convener and Transport Convener whilst at Newcastle University); working for Amnesty International for 2 years in Northern Ireland; and Greenpeace Australia for 3 years.

My work at Indigo Foundation varies from week to week and it is hard to define a typical work week. Most of you will only know of me through correspondence regarding membership, donations or fundraising events (if you have organised one). A core part of my role is to ensure that the administrative side of Indigo Foundation is up to date and accurate (of course). This work includes processing donations; responding to enquiries; maintaining the Indigo Foundation database; coordinating the Annual Report; writing regular volunteer updates; providing inductions to incoming volunteers; ensuring our fabulous pro-bono accountant receives all necessary information and so on.

The other more high level aspect of my work has been to work with the Management Committee to set up a long term strategic plan and implement various aspects of our plan. For example, this year I helped design and analyse our first supporter survey; wrote grant applications; identified areas for improvement with our tools and processes and am currently working with specialist volunteers to re-design and develop our stationery, database and website needs.

You can see why no two weeks are the same working with Indigo Foundation. As I mentioned earlier, it really is the commitment of the volunteers and our supporters that provides me with my motivation. So, I thank you, the reader for contributing positively in whatever way you have to the mission of Indigo Foundation. And I look forward to upcoming opportunities to meet you, whether it be at the end of an email, phone call or in person.

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**EVENTS & FUND RAISERS**

Community events and fundraisers ‘spread the word’ about Indigo Foundation and raise the necessary funds to support communities around the world.

**University of Wollongong**

In February, Indigo Foundation Project Advisor for Afghanistan, Salman Jan, and Indigo Foundation Chairperson, Sally Stevenson, spoke to staff and students about Salman’s trip to Borjegai, Afghanistan last July and Indigo Foundation in general. Salman provided a first hand account of the positive impact that Indigo Foundation supported education is having for boys and girls in Borjegai (including graduates who now live in Kabul) amidst an increasingly uncertain context. The talk and discussion was very well received and Salman and Sally were invited back to the University to speak to various student forums.

If you would like to hold a fundraising event, please consider having Salman and/or Sally speak - they are inspiring to listen to.

Attending the talk were Sorrell Ashby and Nadia Neal, Aboriginal students who have a public health scholarship with the South Eastern Sydney and Illawarra Area Health Service and University of Wollongong. Indigo Foundation supports this scholarship program by providing funds for professional development purposes (for example, conference attendance, or community visits). Whilst not a community development project per se, by supporting these students we hope to contribute (in a small way) to a program that has the potential to make a significant impact on the health of Aboriginal communities over the longer term.

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Sorrell Ashby and Nadia Neal
Another Fabulous Fashion Swap!
Rowena Ivers held a Fashion Swap on Sunday, May 3rd at her house in Wombbarra. People were invited to bring five pieces of clothing they no longer wanted to be displayed on racks for the swap-fest!!! This was a great opportunity to not only socialise, but the $25 (tax deductible) donation per person will help support the anti-tobacco program Indigo Foundation supports in East Timor. This program involves education on the harmful effects of tobacco and promotion of smoke-free environments. Rowena has particular expertise in this area and is the project Advisor for Indigo Foundation.

The event was a great success raising almost $600, and awareness about our East Timor project. Many thanks to Rowena for her passion and commitment to this project!

We are now planning on following this with a book swap, which has generated much interest and enthusiasm!

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If you have any fundraising ideas, we are more than happy to arrange for a speaker to come along and talk firsthand about our work. We can also provide all promotional materials you will need. Please contact Elizabeth House on indigo.foundation@bigpond.com.

LATEST NEWS!
We are now able to receive on-line donations!
Go to www.indigofoundation.org and you’ll see the bright red ‘donate now’ icon on our homepage. Clicking on this will transfer you to ourcommunity.com.au. This is a secure site, supported by Westpac, for not-for-profit donations.

Donations to Indigo Foundation are tax-deductible

Our Annual Workshop!
On 14th February we enjoyed our largest workshop weekend yet. Held in Wollongong, eighteen volunteers attended! Highlights from the weekend included:

- Having a diverse group of volunteers attend including newcomers and founders members. We have such a great mix of people in Indigo Foundation, all passionate about good development, and all committing extraordinary time and energy to achieve it. It is inspiring to have such people in a room altogether (when usually communication is all by phone or email), knowing we are all working towards the same goals – and many times getting some great results!

- Susan Engel’s talk on the evolution of economic theory and the impact such theory (and ideology) has had on development approaches and processes since the mid 1950’s. This may sound a dry topic, but Susan was able to bring the subject alive and demonstrate the importance of it in a very practical way. It’s relevance to our parents communities generated much enthusiastic discussion. We ended with some thought provoking comments about the impact of the Global Financial Crisis (and, for example, the consequent rethinking of global financial architecture) on developing countries and development theory. An abstract of Susan’s paper is below, and her full paper is available on request (indigo.foundation@bigpond.com).

When development economics emerged as a sub-discipline of economics in the 1950s its main concern, like that of most economic theory, was (and largely remains) understanding how the economies of nation-states have grown and expanded (Szentes 2005: 146). This means it has been concerned with looking at the sources and kinds of economic expansion measured via increases in Gross Domestic Production (GDP), the role of different inputs into production (capital, labor and land), the impact of growth in the various sectors of the economy (agriculture, manufacturing and service sectors) and, to a lesser extent, the role of the state. These concerns are at the heart of classical and neoclassical development economics. In contrast, most radical development economics starts from the other side of the coin – how to improve the welfare of the population and the planet although much development economics in the Marxist and neo-Marxist vein ultimately also focuses on national income. Nevertheless, what can be seen here are two fundamentally different approaches to the core issue of what exactly is ‘development,’ which is what underlies this exploration of the key ideas of classical, neoclassical and radical approaches to development economics.

- The marketing presentation and workshop presented by Alice Davies (Marketing Manager, Medecins Sans Frontieres – Doctors without Borders). Alice is kindly donating her time to provide guidance on our marketing strategy. Her exciting presentation focused on brand identification, and the importance of names, logos and taglines. As a result of her review of Indigo Foundation’s marketing position, we are revising the relevance of our name and tagline and have commissioned a new logo. [When Alice tested the ‘Indigo Foundation’ name on those who hadn’t heard of us, people thought we were anything from an independent movie house to a covert right wing military think tank!!!]. We hope to have this process finalised shortly and will then incorporate our new ‘image’ into a revamped website, pamphlets and other publicity documents. From this point, Kate Weir (responsible for our Marketing and Fundraising) and Alice look at how we can maximise our potential for growth through a marketing strategy that suits the culture and structure of Indigo.

- Understanding and deciphering finance in the field by Alice Martin. Another apparently dry – but hotly demanded – topic. Whenever Project Managers undertake monitoring and evaluation visits, reviewing the robustness and transparency of our partner’s financial management is a key task. As most managers do not have a financial or accounting background this can be a daunting task. Alice de-mystified ‘finances in the field’ and gave some basic but crucial tips on what to look for, and what to do if you find something you are not comfortable with.

Thank you to those of you that were able to attend the weekend – it was your energy, enthusiasm and participation that ensured the workshop was a success.
**THINK PIECE**

*An environmental approach to well-being*

*Ian Seal – Indigo Foundation Praxis Award Recipient*

Research from across the developed world tells us that we can predict likely long-term outcomes for the health and well-being of children and young people by assessing their exposure to various environmental risk and protective factors. The crudest and most obvious examples of this are those environments (familial, community, national and political) that fail to provide sufficient nourishment to children. Beyond this, though, is clear evidence that the social environment, and the ways in which it does or doesn't support the social needs of children and young people, also has major impacts on health and well-being.

The following are some of the most common environmental risk and protective factors that have been shown to be significant in influencing the health and wellbeing of children and young people across the developed world.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common risk factors</th>
<th>Common protective factors</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Multiple school transitions</td>
<td>Attachment to significant adult</td>
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<tr>
<td>Family breakup</td>
<td>Sense of optimism / purpose</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social and/or economic disadvantage</td>
<td>Family harmony</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isolation</td>
<td>Supportive parents / other adults</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor social skills</td>
<td>Consistent parenting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low self – esteem</td>
<td>Sense of belonging at school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience of abuse / neglect</td>
<td>Opportunities to experience success</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of warmth / affectionate parenting</td>
<td>Connectedness to community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullying</td>
<td>Strong sense of self, identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer rejection</td>
<td>Participation in community organizations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Academic failure</td>
<td>Multiple opportunities to participate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of school connectedness</td>
<td>Sense of agency, control</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Measures used to assess the impact of these factors on health and wellbeing include depressive symptoms; homelessness; tobacco, alcohol and illicit drug use; and levels of safe sex practice. Note that some concerns, such as academic failure and connectedness to community, are both risk factors in themselves and outcomes of exposure to other risk factors.

**A framework for review and change**

A number of successful, evidence-based, intervention projects have developed strategies for addressing and improving social environments for children and young people, and have demonstrated success in reducing risk factors, enhancing protective factors, and measurably improving health and well-being. One example has been the Gatehouse Project here in Australia, which focuses on schools (Bond, Patton, Glover, Butler *et al*).

The Gatehouse Project recognised that a sense of belonging and connectedness to school was a key protective feature in young people’s lives, and that this was either supported or undermined by a range of factors (as described above). To simplify this complex range of factors and create a framework for schools that could be put in to practice, three key themes were identified: security, communication and positive regard.

- **Security** – a feeling of safety, not just from physical harm or threats of physical harm, but also a sense of being safe to be oneself
- **Communication** – the skills and the opportunities to communicate effectively with both peers and adults in a range of contexts
- **Positive regard** – the perception of being able to participate fully and being valued for doing so

Essentially, a focus on security, communication and positive regard for all students in schools at all times, and through all means – policy, relationships, curriculum, physical environment etc, is a focus on building protective factors and reducing risk factors.

**What does this mean for orphans of HIV/AIDS in Uganda?**

Children and young people everywhere in the world are impacted by the social environments in which they live, learn, work and play. Where those social environments nurture, support and encourage them, the health and wellbeing of children and young people will improve. Security, communication and positive regard in all actions focused on orphans is ‘shorthand’ to improving their social environment.
The African context

Orphans in sub-Saharan Africa are significantly less likely to attend school than other children (USAID, 2004) and less likely to succeed academically if they do so (Salaam, 2005). Stigma and isolation are common for orphans of HIV in school and in broader communities (Salaam, 2005; UNAIDS, UNICEF, USAID, 2004). As school attendance, engagement and success is seen internationally as a proxy measure for psychosocial support and emotional wellbeing, this alone is of concern.

Orphans are at an increased risk of suffering psychological distress, economic hardships, exploitation, and trafficking -- and of HIV infection (U.S. President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, 2006).

In assessing and addressing the social environment for psychosocial issues as a major concern.

How can the community/school/NGO assist orphans to feel secure, connected and valued? How do they demonstrate this? What might undermine this? How can we strengthen what is positive and reduce what is negative?

How can the community/school/NGO and the process we are undertaking together, encourage and support the active participation of orphans in determining their own futures and the future of the community in which they live?

What resources/supports does the community/school/NGO need in order to address stigma that orphans may experience?

How can extended families be supported to maintain orphans in home environments? How can communities recognise the valuable role extended families play?

How can we make non-family residential supports provided to orphans (i.e. institutional care) more home/family-like?

What is needed to improve the participation and academic success of orphans in schooling?

How is this congruent with Indigo Foundation principles and practice?

Community ownership - Whilst I am describing and promoting a particular process and framework for action, the content is determined entirely by the community. The community determines what its strengths and concerns are, what issues they want to work on and how; and where resources are needed. My role in this is to act as a ‘critical friend’, asking questions as an outsider and supporter of the community.

Sustainability - The process is inherently about capacity building and about finding local solutions to local concerns. It’s not a one-off process, but one that can be used for review and reflection at any time.

Transparency - Working in this way requires broad and diverse opinions, and is ineffective if undertaken by a small group of self-selected leaders or ‘experts’. The process and its decisions must be public to be effective.

Gender equity - Focussing on the social environment means engaging directly with the social and cultural pressures that impact on individuals and groups.

In order to undertake these activities, democratic, inclusive decision-making structures are important. In communities where these do not exist, the establishment of such structures can be a first task of the work itself.

How might it look in action in Uganda?

1. Establish key relationships - meet and engage with community leaders, including teachers and other professionals. Describe and propose a process for moving forwards together, including workshops, as appropriate, on environmental and participatory approaches to improving health and wellbeing.

2. Survey / needs assessment - work with community leaders to determine best methods for developing a broad understanding of needs / issues for orphans and other vulnerable children and young people in the community. This may include community forums, workshops in schools, art and drama activities, photography and film making as methods for including, engaging and empowering children and young people and their families.

3. Develop participatory structures for orphans and other vulnerable young people. This may be through a school, or in some other way. How best do they get heard, and have a say in developing solutions?

4. Identify priorities and develop project proposals - This may include things that we can address immediately, things that can be done with small financial assistance, and things that require planning and support in subsequent years.
5. Implement and review

Yeah, but what will actually happen?

Without wanting to pre-suppose in any way what might be identified as useful activity, examples from other projects, both in sub-Saharan Africa and in disadvantaged communities in Australia, help to give a sense of what we might expect from such activity -

Mentoring - community mentors regularly 'check in' with a child about their experiences at school and in the broader community, providing homework assistance, moral support and advocacy as necessary. The mentor may also be the teacher!

Children as helpers - A program in Zimbabwe trains children at school as volunteer carers for people with HIV/AIDS. This helps them to understand what has happened / is happening to their parents, gives them a valued role, and provides support to people in need in the community.

Peer educators - Similar to above; trains young people to educate their friends about health issues and concerns.

'Tribes' - grouping younger children in school-based activities in such a way that they have the opportunity to develop peer support and a sense of belonging

Grandmother's group - Across sub-Saharan Africa it is grandmothers who bear a disproportionate burden of caring for orphans and recognising this by providing services and support that links grandmothers together.

Breakfast clubs - feeding children when they arrive at school has multiple benefits.

Theatre / festivals - Giving orphans and other vulnerable children opportunities to tell their stories and to 'take centre stage' in their community. Also a vehicle for health promotion messages etc

Linking institutions to community - ensuring through policy and practice that orphans in institutional care are engaged actively in their community and in decision making, and that their needs for nurture and support are recognised

All, some, or none of these activities may be appropriate in the Budaka community. What they have in common is that, as well as being practically useful in themselves, they build security, communication and positive regard for vulnerable children, and they focus on the social environment in which these children live. Developing such a focus may not necessarily lead to 'different' or 'better' ideas than other community development processes, but it provides a framework and an evidence base for action, and highlights the possibilities of looking for multiple benefits from any action undertaken.

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Management Committee Update

The year is certainly moving along quickly, and with it, Indigo Foundation continues to thrive.

As we our growth phase takes off (with likely new projects in Uganda, Syria and possibly Aboriginal Australia and Cambodia), we continue to review our organisational structure to ensure it is the most efficient and supportive mechanism for our Project Manages and partner communities. At the Annual Workshop, Project Managers made a request to the Management Committee to provide more support in terms of development theory and practice, as well as Indigo Foundation’s development policies and processes. Consequently, in February the Management Committee decided to split the current coordinators role into two. There will now be a General Coordinator (for administration, marketing, fundraising, and general liaison) and a Development Coordinator.

I am very pleased to announce this new position will be filled by Sue Cunningham on an interim basis until November, and then by Elizabeth House on a permanent basis. Sue has been with Indigo Foundation since 2002, as Solomon Islands Project Manager, and since 2007 has been on the Management Committee. She brings to the role enormous experience in development with a particular focus on monitoring and evaluation. Elizabeth has been the Indonesia Project Manager since 2005. Elizabeth’s deep understanding of development processes and cross cultural challenges on the ground will bring a new and energizing dimension to Indigo Foundation. We are thrilled to have them both in the position!

The Management Committee would also like to thank Caitlin Marshall for her contribution over the last eighteen months. Unfortunately Caitlin has had to stand down due to personal commitments. Fortunately Rieko Take has agreed to join the Committee in Caitlin’s place. Reiko works for AusAID and recently returned to Canberra from the Solomon Islands. Reiko is now Indigo Foundation Secretary, and we all very much look forward to working with her.

It seems every newsletter brings with it news of another birth in Indigo Foundation. This issue is no exception. Our warmest congratulations to Kieran Longridge and Zoe Mander-Jones on the births of Elisha Billie and Malo David Antionous respectively. We wish you all the best and welcome Elisha and Malo into the Indigo family!

It doesn’t stop….! Over the next six months trips to Uganda, Indonesia and the Congo will be taking place. And, as always, we will be focusing on fundraising to ensure we don’t let our partners down, AND so we can assist more communities.

Once again, thank you for your support.

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Pass it along!

Once you have read the newsletter, why not pass it along to someone who you believe would be interested in supporting the work of Indigo Foundation?

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