

BOAT CLINICS IN THE BRAHMAPUTRA RIVER

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" Boat Clinics is a working model of God's work on earth. Initiating it is one thing, running it is an entirely different thing. This is a classical case of Public Health victory of some sort. Call it in whatever name."

-Dr. Edmond Fernandes, Founder and CEO, CHD Group

The Brahmaputra River is one of the major rivers in Asia which flows through India, China and Bangladesh. This long and tiring journey has riverine islands inhabited by humans since a long long time. As the mighty river flows through different channels it creates, it brings with it, seasons of aggression and peace putting human life and livelihood at great risks.

Nevertheless, man although he remains a stranger in the world he has mechanically created, man has also found solutions in some places. Likewise, Centre for North East Studies and Policy Research (C-NES) in partnership with the National Health Mission, Government of Assam has been running the Boat Clinics providing primary health care to the remote island populace in the Brahmaputra and across it since 2005. There are over 2.5 million people living in over 2500 islands in Assam where the mighty Brahmaputra flows. This represents eight percent of the total population living in and around.

Recently, I had the privilege to train the medical doctors and district programme officers of the boat clinics for a two day programme conducted by C-NES in partnership with NHM, Government of Assam, RNTCP, Regional Resource Centre- North East and CHD Group, Mangalore.

It was a mixed bunch of doctors, the young and young in heart, but the energy level, passion and commitment they brought to the table was very motivating for any global health professional.

I believe the Boat clinics led by Sanjoy Hazarika and his team including Ashok Rao, Bhaswati Goswami and Manik Baruah is simply doing God's work on earth. Reaching the islands is one thing, treating patients is another thing, but the challenge doesn't end there. The islanders are at least 3-4 decades behind mainland Guwahati and India as a matter of fact. Providing basic health care in itself is challenging as the terrain is unpredictable at times and without consistent funding, the boat clinics would not have seen the light of day.

If you want to understand poverty, if you want to know what is life; outside your comfort zone, if you feel God has not been fair with you and your family, if you really want to find God, visiting these islands is the answer.

What policy makers need to understand are the field challenges that emerge while responding and the psychological effect it might add to those working there. The bureaucracy must factor in the philosophy to ensure every support is offered when such public health activities are undertaken.

May their tribe increase.

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