

# A visit to RVC in Akajan, Dhemaji

By Pallav Saikia

On December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2019, I made a trip to Akajan (অকাজান), in Dhemaji district to see the RVC (Rural Volunteer Centre). The 7 hours round trip was totally worth it. I spent almost 5 hours there, talking to folks in the RVC office and then went to one of the villages to see their work (30km away, last 5km is almost no road, the jeep went over bushes, fields). It is a very well managed and organized team with a strong presence in the community. Their office is in the middle of the village, in an old cremation ground donated by the community. They ran a small hospital in the compound long back and stopped when the government finally set up hospitals nearby. However, they still run a self-funded school(K-10) for mostly remote boarding students. They are into advocacy, community building, and disaster resilience, and are a key resource group for whom the district administrations of Dhemaji, Lakhimpur, and Majuli rely on a lot. Additionally, they are engaged to prepare detailed plans for the disaster management by the district and engage lots of social worker interns (I met one MS passed intern too) who carry out thorough research and community engagement. What I saw that was different from our other engagements is that this team relies on ground data and thorough research before sending out any plan, which definitely requires a lot of man power and can be seen as administrative overhead.

My visit to the village showed the involvement on the ground and awareness they have built in these remote villagers. I saw quite a few raised hand pumps in the villages while on my way to the site. RVC has been experimenting with their design for some time. One I saw was cleverly enhanced to a sand water filter and provided drinking water to the kids in the school. I also saw raised earthen beds and bamboo platforms. Some of them are for kids during the flood season called CFS - child friendly space, a concept I had proposed many years back. The villagers are more worried about the flash floods that have become much

more common in recent years. They were accustomed to high water, but the flash floods cause lots of damage. In recent years, the floods dumped lots of sand instead of fertile silt. Once the flash floods are gone, they also have no water to do any other crops, the water goes underground very quickly, and ponds don't retain any water. They were talking about having water pumps for irrigation. Unfortunately, I could barely see any young men in the village as they all went out to work in remote places like South India.



Another raised hand pump



Tarps seem to be a key item for these places

## Flood Relief Project Phase 2/3 Update

By Pallav Saikia

In the summer of 2019, AFNA started a relief and rehabilitation project for floods in Assam, which was divided into three phases as stated: Phase 1 - Immediate Relief, Phase 2 - Recovery post the Flood, and Phase 3 - Long-term infrastructure work. AFNA launched the first phase of the project right away and has seen the impact it had on the villages in Dhemaji working with RVC. AFNA has now taken the steps to move ahead with Phase 2 and 3 of our Flood Relief, recovery, and resilience work in Assam. Floods in Assam are a regular event, and typically the sentiments are high to rush with relief work when the flood hits Assam. Unfortunately, not much is done upfront to build capability for withstanding the floods or rebuilding the life in the impacted areas after the floods are gone. When we started the relief work during the 2019 flood season, we were determined that we would work beyond the period when floods hit the villages. With that in mind, AFNA has worked out a plan with RVC to better equip the villagers to withstand floods in 2020.

With an approved budget of \$7300, we kicked off phase 2/3 with a goal to:

- 1) Train 2 villages on community response methods when a disaster hit [flood is the regular occurrence, multiple times a year]
- 2) Build 3 hand pumps on raised beds for clean water supply during the flood [can be used rest of the year too, but an extra need during the floods]
- 3) Improve and adopt a design of a community toilet that could be used during high water level of floods

This will help us serve 2 villages in the Dhemaji district of Assam and gather data on what can be done to further scale this model.