Grassroots Asia visited the Hariharananda Balashram this past summer to visit the children and see the continuing construction. There are now three classes of 40 children each. The first students, who arrived in 2003, started their first year of elementary school this year and have moved into the newly built dormitory and school building. The nursery building continues to house the 80 younger children in Upper Kindergarten and Lower Kindergarten.

The children are showing unbelievable talents. Last year five gifted children from kindergarten level were invited to compete in Bhubaneswar, the state capital of Orissa, at the “Anjali National Children’s Festival”. Over a thousand boys and girls from all over India were present at this event. Megha, Saran, Saran, Dipak and Om joined the different workshops featuring art, crafts and modern dance. Megha, in particular, did an outstanding job by performing Odissi dance, the ancient classical dance style from Orissa, at the closing function. The kindergarten class also joined an art competition at the “Vivekananda Art School” in Bhubaneswar. Megha won a special prize for his painting based on nature.

The Hariharananda Balashram continues to be the most successful project we have been associated with,” says Grassroots Asia’s President, Debbie Pennington. “The monks who run the school and the staff, many who have given their lives in selfless service for the children, are some of the most dedicated we have seen. It’s such a loving environment. That’s its real secret!”

Prajnana Mission started the school in 2002. Applications are taken from the poorest and most needy children from rural villages in Orissa. Children are hand selected in a lengthy interview process conducted in their villages by school management. Grassroots Asia came on board in 2003 to help supplement Prajnana Mission’s noble efforts.

Due to heavy monsoon and low pressure rain in the state of Orissa, almost all rivers and tributaries flooded in September, causing great loss of life and damage to countless homes in hundreds of villages. Volunteer doctors and staff from Prajnana Mission, with the financial aid of Grassroots Asia, were quick to respond. Six relief camps in Kendrapara and Puri districts treated 7,548 people who were offered emergency food supplies and medical treatment. Prajnana Mission is one of our implementing agencies in Orissa, India and was one of the first responders on the ground. Volunteers worked round the clock for several days, serving those who needed help.

Grassroots Asia and Prajnana Mission Respond

Prajnana Mission health camp

Mahanadi Floods: Thousands Lost Life and Property. Prajnana Mission and Grassroots Asia respond with food and medical care

Six relief camps in Kendrapara and Puri districts treated 7,548 people who were offered aid.

Volunteer doctors and staff from Prajnana Mission, with the financial aid of Grassroots Asia, were quick to respond.

Several bridges collapsed, flooding hundreds of villages. Many were cut off from supplies and aid workers struggled to get boats into the remote areas.

On The Ground is now broadcasting updates via e-mail to donors and friends. Please send your e-mail address to info@GrassrootsAsia.org so that we may include you.

12-year-old Girl Seeks Aid for Younger Brother

Five year old Santos Sahoo is the youngest son of four children. His parents struggle to support their children by cultivating rice on a small plot of land in rural Orissa. Santos was born with four congenital and crippling defects. During the past five years, his parents have not been able to afford a doctor or surgery.

Santos’ 12-year-old sister was one of the selected students in Grassroots Asia’s book scholarship program. After receiving her books, she ran to her nearby village to get her mother and brother, hoping and praying that Grassroots Asia would do something to help her brother. The mother and son approached the Grassroots Asia driver, shy to ask for help.

Arrangements were made for Santos to be examined by Dr. Ranjan Singh at the Sema Hospital in Cuttack. Dr. Singh is well known for his surgical skill and is currently helping to coordinate an Intl. Matching Grant with The Rotary Foundation and Grassroots Asia. Santos’ surgery was successfully performed by two surgeons and he spent two weeks recovering at the Sema Hospital. Three of the four congenital defects have been corrected. An additional surgical procedure will be conducted when he turns 15, but this will be minor.

Thanks to the Medical Dental Fund at Grassroots Asia, Santos will begin school next year with his peers.

On the Ground

Grassroots Asia

12-year-old girl sees aid for younger brother

One surgical procedure corrected Santos Sahoo’s right leg and foot and he will now be able to walk normally.
A Day at Ruchika Shraddha Bhaban: A Personal Story

Grassroots Asia visited Ruchika’s Shraddha Bhaban, the rescue home that we began in 2004 with the cooperation of Ruchika Social Services in Bhubaneswar. The Shraddha Bhaban was the first rescue home in the State of Orissa to allow women to keep their children and to allow for longer stays, giving them a chance to attend school and vocational training classes. All services are supplied free of charge. Emphasis is placed on self-sufficiency and life management skills.

While we were visiting, a 15-year-old girl ran away from the home after a dispute with the other children. She returned to the red light district in Bhubaneswar and was considering continuing her education. Grassroots Asia asked her friends if they wanted to write a letter to her, asking her to return. Grassroots Asia President Debbie Pennington, along with the house mother, traveled to where she was staying to deliver the letter personally. It took a long time for her mother to trust us, but once we gained her confidence, the discussion led to a tearful and beautiful scene as her mother encouraged her to return with us and pursue a more fulfilling life. The teenager read her friends’ letter with tears in her eyes and decided to come back and commit to her education. It was a touching afternoon for all concerned. The women and children at Shraddha Bhaban are part of one big family.

Samvav Youth Center Scholarship Program Proves Successful for Teens

In June 2004, Grassroots Asia and Sanlaap, a Kolkata based NGO, began renovation on a property in S. Kolkata to establish a care center for children and young teens. The Samvav Youth Center is now operating at full speed with over 100 youth participating in programs that they design and operate under the supervision of Souvik, the young man at Sanlaap that has dedicated his life to these children.

Teen programs have included computer training, youth leadership, counseling, tailoring, a library and a scholarship fund for those who need help paying fees to stay in school. Scholarships were awarded to 15 youth this year who may otherwise have been forced to drop out.

The children have a safe haven at Samvav Youth Center, away from the dangerous brothel districts after school. They have made Samvav a second home and a solid base for exploring new opportunities in life. To see the transformation in them is truly inspirational.

Grassroots Asia and Sanlaap also purchased a school bus in 2005 which is used to serve 14 red light districts in Kolkata. The school bus provides hundreds of children, teens and young adults with transportation to care centers and vocational training.

Many of these projects and programs have been funded, or funded in part, by a grant from the Duane Strahanan Estate of the Toledo Community Foundation. Grassroots Asia extends a warm thank you to the Duane Strahanan family and all of its donors for making this work possible.

Bijayalaxmi Rout Receives Scholarship to Ali College

16-year-old Bijayalaxmi Rout from Ali district of Orissa, was awarded a scholarship from the Grassroots Asia Tripathy Scholarship Fund. She lost her father five years ago and lives with her brother, mother and grandfather. Her grandfather took up a collection in her village for the first year’s tuition, but it wasn’t even close to being enough.

Bijayalaxmi’s scholarship included college fees for two years, books, uniforms, and a bicycle for transportation. The scholarship amount was $109.

The Tripathy Scholarship Fund was started by Dr. Ghana Tripathy, who currently lives in the US. Tripathy was born and raised in Orissa and the fund is for children attending the Mahu High School, originally built by Tripathy’s brother.

Raincoats Distributed to Children During Monsoon

Raincoats of various sizes were distributed at two high schools just before the monsoon season began. Children who have to make long treks to school in the rain, and who cannot afford a raincoat, were selected to receive them.

Grassroots Asia will sponsor small tokens of love to children in Orissa and Kolkata in W. Bengal. Rather than materialistic holiday gifts, Grassroots Asia will distribute gifts that are practical and fun. Pens, notebooks, art supplies, books and new clothes will be in Santa’s bag throughout the holidays.

Anyone wanting to help with the 2006 Santa Fund, must send in their donation by 12/12. For more information, phone Grassroots Asia at (970) 923-1700. Donations may also be made on-line at GrassrootsAsia.org