

India and Bangladesh Region

It is easy to underestimate the sheer size of the Indian subcontinent whose combined population number exceeds 1,300 million. It is also too easy to underestimate the diversity of cultural identities, tribal and ethnic groupings. There are more people living under the 'poverty line' in India

than any other country in the world. Yet both Bangladesh and India are countries of intense cultural richness and spiritual awareness that would be the envy of many nations. People work hard against incredible odds with great determination to succeed. Despite considerable industrialisation both countries operate on a primarily rural base and this is often where vibrant church work can be witnessed, ministering to the very poorest and marginalised sections of society.



Whether from Junior Ministry in south-east India or Kishor-Kishori Shanga in Bangladesh, programmes are simple and direct, often involving relevant teaching in hygiene, nutrition, practical skills and creative crafts. Young people are expected to participate in leadership roles and in planning their programmes and speak with confidence of their faith, taking part in and leading worship in many ways. Groups who are themselves marginalised within society are given a voice and means of expression.

It is often a region where there are clearly defined roles portrayed between men and women; where women get a less than fair share of opportunities. Yet all our work in this Region brings boys and girls together, giving both opportunities for leadership development. A lot can be, and is being achieved.

Regional meetings are, in practice, difficult to hold given the economic reality, the great distances and diversity of outlook involved. It is also true that resources for Christian communities and churches are severely restricted. In societies in which Christianity is very much in the minority life is not always easy. Living by example is important. Practical co-operation is not always easy, yet it is an issue that must be tackled in years ahead.

The potential for growth is huge and opportunities to serve young people in need abound. Already interest has been shown in some of the remote villages in Mizoram province in the restricted north-east corner of India. If that is to take hold, denominational barriers must be lowered and even between different sections of single denominations.

Exiting work includes programmes with street children, gypsies, homes for blind children and orphanages. Through all this the commitment of the churches and of the Bishops is fundamental. Projects are in hand to reduce dependency on outside help, however difficult

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| COUNTRY | COYS | LEADERS | YOUTH | TOTAL |
|---------------|------------|--------------|---------------|---------------|
| Bangladesh | 51 | 113 | 2,055 | 2,168 |
| India - ALC | 26 | 452 | 2,873 | 3,325 |
| India - TELC | 262 | 588 | 8,755 | 9,343 |
| TOTALS | 339 | 1,153 | 13,683 | 14,836 |

that may be. One idea is for each circle to plant coconut palms which, in years to come, will provide a useful income.

Junior Ministry in South India and Kishor-Kishori Shanga in Bangladesh are now both over 20 years old. The Arcot Lutheran Church held an anniversary camp at the beginning of 1999 to which over 800 young people attended. Steady growth is being seen and more will undoubtedly come to pass.



Eager members in a Santal village, Bangladesh