

Leadership for Environmental Awareness, Eco-Restoration and Community Participation

Case Study & Documentation of Best Practice

2025-26

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About the Place and the School

Bongaon lies in the Brahmaputra Valley, a biodiversity hotspot bridging the Eastern Himalayas and Indo-Burma mega-diversity zones. Its proximity to Kaziranga National Park—home to the world's largest population of greater one-horned rhinoceros—attracts spillover wildlife, including over 150 resident and migratory bird species. The areas wetlands, grasslands, and roadside trees historically supported diverse avifauna.

Bongaon Chola High School is located in the Bongaon area near National Highway 37 in Golaghat District, Assam. It was established in 1961 by local communities through donations and land contributions. The school was provincialized in 2013 and serves as the only public sector institution for secondary education. It now offers classes from the lower primary level to Class 10. It serves a rural community whose students are mostly from the Adivasi tea-garden families. These families have long faced limited access to education and healthcare, widespread superstition, alcohol dependency, and chronic social and financial instability.

Bongaon Chola High School fraternity has identified several issues linked to lack of environmental awareness, pollution, and education and untiringly have been being trying to address the issues. The school has launched a multi-pronged plan with the ultimate goal of creating a sustainable, educated, environment-friendly society.

Environmental and Social Problems in the Feeder Areas of the School

Creating a Plastic Free Campus

There is a tradition in the schools of Assam to celebrate Saraswati Puja, to worship the Goddess of Knowledge and wisdom, every year in the school campus in association with local community. With time the plastic and paper plates and bowls replaced the biodegradable utensils used in the feast of the festival. Plastic plates dominate festivals due to convenience, low cost, and systemic gaps. Besides the ill effects of plastics in human body during its use as plates, it also litters courtyards, streets, and lingering weeks. Debris clogs drains, stagnates water in playgrounds and breeds mosquitoes. Improper disposal leads to burning, smoke irritating eyes, lungs of kids. Non-biodegradable bits pollute soil, block plant growth, and taint groundwater.




Fig 1: *Plastic Free Festival*

To address plastic plates in festivals, school revives the traditional use of plants as alternatives by our ancestors. This helped find sustainable, local options that replace harmful disposables without changing cultural practices. Traditionally, we used banana tree sheath, banana leaves, lotus plant, Mallotus albus, and Phrynium pubinerve as eco-friendly plates. These were valued for biodegradability, strength, and ability to hold hot, oily festive food securely. Fortunately, nearly all these plants grow abundantly locally in fields, riverbanks, and groves. Banana plants, common in Assamese farming, supply leaves and sheaths in plenty. Mallotus albus and Phrynium pubinerve thrive in the humid climate. The school aimed to cut down plastic waste, raise environmental awareness among students, and honour Assamese traditions. This proactive step not only solved the immediate issue but also built community responsibility for sustainable celebrations. Moreover, using plastic bags are now prohibited in the school. Now the school campus becomes a completely plastic free campus.




(a) ***(b)***

Fig 2: *(a) Festival Before & (b) Festival Now*

Eco friendly Holi: A Movement to Rediscovering Local Biodiversity

Holi, a vibrant traditional and religious festival in Assam, has been celebrated by its people since time immemorial. In ancient times, Assamese communities rejoiced in the festival of colors using natural pigments from diverse plants in the region's lush forests. These organic hues, extracted from flowers, leaves, roots, and barks, symbolized harmony with nature and posed no harm to health or the environment.

Modern celebrations have largely abandoned plant-based pigments for artificial, synthetic ones. During festivities, toxic pigments scatter, contaminating water bodies and soil. Runoff from coloured water seeps into rivers, ponds, and groundwater; discarded powders infiltrate the earth. This pollution harms aquatic life and terrestrial ecosystems. Plants absorb chemicals through roots, disrupting growth and yielding contaminated produce. Birds, animals, and insects contacting tainted soil or water suffer poisoning, reproductive failures, and population decline—rippling through Assam's rich biodiversity.





Fig 3: *Eco-friendly Holi as News Content*

Bongaon Chola High school revives Holi with organic, plant-derived pigments, celebrating life, health, and nature. We source from local flora, protecting Assam's biodiversity using traditional methods for safe, biodegradable colors. Red: dried, powdered hibiscus, rose petals, or red sandalwood blended with rice powder for gulal; or turmeric water with lemon juice; or fresh juices from mulberry, Indian currant, or Molucca bramble. Violet: crushed Malabar spinach or deadly nightshade leaves for purple dye. Blue: soaked/boiled indigo leaves or blue butterfly pea flowers. Brown: dried henna powder with Indian gooseberry juice; black: ground Eclipta alba or dried black myrobelan fruit. Yellow: turmeric powder with dried chrysanthemum/marigold petals and rice powder. Orange: dried/powdered Flame of the Forest petals with rice, or boiled fresh in water. Green: dried henna/neem powder with rice. Pink: boiled beetroot, red onion skins, or pomegranate rinds, strained. Pigments are dry powders for throwing or wet pastes for smearing, rinsing easily and nourishing skin.

The teachers and students prepared pigments by boiling, grinding, and drying materials for vibrant, non-toxic colors. Students participated eagerly, learning about natural dyes. Holi was celebrated solely with these vivid, skin-friendly, residue-free organic pigments. All students, teachers, and staff pledged to avoid synthetic colors forever and use only herbal ones. These changes improved accessibility and cultural relevance while reducing health risks and preserving biodiversity. The initiative built environmental responsibility in students and residents, showing small, informed actions yield major gains in community health and conservation.


নিয়মীয়া বাৰ্তা
গোলাঘাটৰ বনগাঁও চ'লা উঃ মাঃ স্কুলত পৰিবেশ-স্বাস্থ্য অনুকূল দৌল উৎসব
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Fig 4: *Eco-friendly Holi as News Content*

Silent Diwali: Eco-friendly Diwali

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বনগাঁও চ'লা হাইস্কুল
গোলাঘাটত পৰিবেশ অনুকূল দীপাৱলী শীৰ্ষক সচেতনতা অভিযান
গোলাঘাটি, ১২ নৱেম্বৰ ঃ গোলাঘাটি জিলাৰ বনগাঁও চ'লা উচ্চ মাধ্যমিক বিদ্যালয়ৰ উদ্যোগত আৰু দাঁতিকাযৰীয়া বিদ্যালয়সমূহৰ সহযোগত অঞ্চলবাসীয়ে আগন্তুক দেৱালী উৎসৱভাগি পৰিবেশ-অনুকূল আৰু শব্দহীনভাৱে পালন কৰিবলৈ সিদ্ধান্ত লৈছে। দেৱালী ভাৰতীয় সভ্যতা সংস্কৃতিৰ এক অবিচ্ছেদ্য অংগ। জনবিশ্বাস মতে ৰামচন্দ্ৰই বনবাসৰ পৰা অযোধ্যালৈ উভতি অহাৰ দিনা মনৰ আনন্দত অযোধ্যাবাসীয়ে সহস্ৰ বস্তি প্ৰজ্বলনেৰে অমাবস্যাৰ নিশা দিবালোকৰ সৃষ্টি কৰিছিল। তাৰেই অনুকৰণত প্ৰতিবছৰে আলোকৰ উৎসৱ দেৱালী উদ্‌যাপন কৰা হয়। দুখৰ বিষয় অৰ্বাচীন কালত দেৱালী উৎসৱৰ আধ্যাত্মিকতাৰ অৱনমন ঘটি আলোকৰ উৎসৱৰ পৰিবৰ্তে ধ্বংসাত্মক শব্দৰ অত্যাচাৰলৈ পৰিণত হৈছে।দেৱালীৰ নামত বিস্ফোৰক ব্যৱহাৰ কৰি বায়ু আৰু শব্দ প্ৰদূষণ কৰাৰ উপৰি ৰাতি জিৰণি লোৱা চৰাই-চিৰিকতি পশুপক্ষীৰ জীৱন দুৰ্বিষহ কৰি তোলা হৈছে। সেয়েহে দেৱালী উদ্‌যাপনৰ নামত হোৱা এনে বিস্ফোৰক ১০ পৃষ্ঠাত

Fig 5: *Eco-friendly Diwali as News Content*

The Bongaon Chola High School fraternity is striving to generate awareness in the students, regarding the celebration of noise free green Diwali. The school organizes meeting, talk program, poster campaign and procession in support for green Diwali.

Go Green and Clean

Bongaon Chola High School has institutionalized a regular plantation drive as a cornerstone of its environmental stewardship, conducting tree-planting events multiple times each year both within its sprawling campus and in the surrounding local communities. These initiatives, led by dedicated teachers, enthusiastic students, and occasional partnerships with local NGOs and forest departments, aim to foster a lush green campus and verdant surroundings that combat deforestation, enhance biodiversity, and mitigate climate change impacts in the rural Bongaon region.



Fig 6: *Plantation Activities*

Shelter Problem of the Birds: Celebration of Bird Nesting Day

Over the past two decades, the Bongaon area has experienced a phenomenon seen worldwide ie common bird species that once lived only in protected forests are now moving into villages and towns. Drawn by reliable food and safer nesting sites, these birds have learned to thrive among people. Their numbers have soared, yet this success has come at a cost. To the Adivashi communities working nearby tea garden, the birds are simply another source of protein. Many are trapped or shot for the pot, turning a story of adaptation into one of quiet conflict.

The expansion of NH-37 into a four-lane highway necessitated clearing over a big number of mature trees near the highway leaving a large number of birds without shelter and nesting sites. Although some new tree planting has been undertaken, it will take time for these saplings to mature and become suitable for bird nesting. Besides the problems of bird shelter and hunting, Bongaon Chola High School identified several issues linked to lack of environmental awareness, pollution, and education.

To address this issue, we consulted with experts and decided to provide a temporary alternative to offer an immediate platform for birds to establish their nests. Furthermore, with the goal of creating a bird-friendly environment and protecting local avian populations, we established the "Friends of Flyers" organization for the students of Bongaon Chola High School in 2024 to work towards this mission.

To ensure suitability for Assam's climate and avifauna, we have designed a terracotta nest which specially houses sparrows and Magpie Robin. Naturally occurring bird nests typically feature adequate ventilation and drainage, which helps prevent parasites from taking refuge and making birds sick. Replicating these conditions in a terracotta platform posed a challenge. To overcome this, we developed a model incorporating small holes at the bottom for water drainage and air vents at the top for ventilation. Additionally, we adopted an intermediate design to accommodate varying lighting needs across different bird species, recognizing that lighting requirements can differ significantly between species.



Fig 7: *Nest Model Developed By "Friends of Flyers"*

The model developed by 'Friends of Flyers' was shared with a local potter, who has been serving the Bongaon area for a long time. Utilizing traditional pottery techniques, our bird nesting platforms were carefully shaped by wheel and hand. The platforms were then sun-dried, prepared for firing, and subsequently burned to achieve the desired hardness. Once ready, the platforms were installed within the premises of Bongaon Chola High School in Golaghat district.



Fig 8: *Tree cutting during road expansion*



Fig 9: *Installation of Artificial Nesting platform*





Fig 10: *Installation of Nesting Platform at Bongaon Chola High School*

We selected the school premises for setting up the artificial bird nesting platforms for several strategic reasons. The campuses of schools in rural Assam often sprawl across large areas, boasting an abundance of trees. Moreover, schools typically become quiet and deserted after a certain period of teaching during the day, creating a serene environment conducive to birdlife. By installing terracotta nesting platforms in schools, students can be engaged in monitoring and ensuring the safety of these platforms, fostering a sense of responsibility and stewardship. Furthermore, involving students in such conservation efforts can instil in them a deep sense of affinity with birds, reducing the likelihood of their participation in bird harming activities in the future. If we can sustain such projects over an extended period, we will be able to nurture a new generation of bird-friendly students every year. Ultimately, this will enable us to cultivate a society that is compassionate towards birds, promoting a harmonious coexistence between humans and avifauna.

Pursuant to our ambitious plan, on February 4, 2024, 'Friends of Birdlife' in collaboration with the Eco Club of Bongaon Chola High School, successfully installed 30 artificial bird nesting platforms made of terracotta within the school premises. To ensure meticulous monitoring, each member of 'Friends of Birdlife' was assigned to observe one nest at a time. Fortunately, our initiative garnered significant attention from both state and national media outlets. Our scheme proved to be an unexpected success in its inaugural year. We are thrilled to report that many birds have already inhabited the platforms we installed, and breeding activities are underway, with birds laying eggs and successfully hatching their young.



Fig 11: *The Success Story*



Fig 12: *Media Coverage of the News of Platform Installation*

(https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/guwahati/save-the-birds-charai-bandhab-initiative-to-provide-shelter/articleshow/107594236.cms)

Bird Nesting Day Celebration

Approximately 20% of the world's bird species can be found in human-dominated landscapes, relying on vegetation in these areas for survival. The destruction of vegetation in these areas is a major threat to global bird population. Unfortunately, our local culture and traditions often do not promote a harmonious coexistence with birds, instead perpetuating a violent attitude towards them. Further, our unconscious actions often disrupt nesting birds, preventing them from laying their eggs in peace. The increasing use of high-intensity firecrackers and loudspeakers in our festivals not only destroy the sanctity of these celebrations but also force the birds to flee from their nests. Protecting their nests is a critical aspect of bird conservation. To raise awareness about the importance of conserving bird nests, we propose to observe Bird Nesting Day on 14th February.

14th February as Bird Nesting Day

The breeding season of most birds worldwide, including India, typically begins in March and ends in July. In preparation for laying eggs in March, birds start forming pairs and building nests from mid-February. Therefore, it is more effective to initiate awareness campaigns on bird nest protection from mid-February. After all, the well-being of our forests and, in turn, our very existence depends on the presence of birds, as the adage goes: 'No birds, no forests; no forests, no life'.

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Fig 13: *Bird Nest Conservation Day Celebration*

The inaugural 'Bird Nest Protection Day' received an overwhelming and unexpected response from various media outlets, which enthusiastically promoted and disseminated this innovative concept to a wider audience, acknowledging its significance and potential impact on bird conservation efforts.



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A safe haven: Assam team provides artificial nests for birds to breed, raises awareness for habitat protection

Hirakjyoti Deka / Feb 17, 2025, 00:27 IST

SHARE AA

Guwahati: A team comprising of a teacher and 30 students of Assam, raising awareness for imperative need for bird conservation and habitat protection, has succeeded in giving habitat for birds to breed by providing artificial bird nests made of roasted

Fig 14: *Media Coverage of celebration of 'Bird Nest Conservation Day'*

Community Participation in Education

Aponar Poduli, Amar Porhashali

(Our School at your doorstep)

Student dropout is a key challenge in the tea garden community near Bongaon Chola High School, due to low parental awareness, economic issues, and social barriers. To address this, the school used a multi-faceted approach to increase enrolment and curb dropouts, achieving steady growth over five years, as shown in enrolment records. The School conducted home visits to engage students and families, building trust and encouraging attendance. The teachers explained to parents how education can break poverty cycles. Community meetings in tea garden areas involved parents, leaders, and influencers, emphasizing role of education in better prospects and economic stability. Success stories of educated individuals from similar backgrounds made benefits relatable, fostering community support. In 2025, the school launched the "**Aponar Poduli, Amar Porhashali**" campaign with alumni from the tea garden community who shared success stories as role models, motivating students and parents via door-to-door outreach, rallies, and workshops on education's value.


বনগাঁও চ'লা উচ্চ মাধ্যমিক বিদ্যালয়ৰ উদ্যোগ

'আপোনাৰ পদূলি আমাৰ পঢ়াশালি' শীৰ্ষক সভা

নিজা বাতৰি দিওঁতা

ধূমটী, ৩০ মে'ৰ তোলাবাৰি জিলাৰ বনগাঁও চ'লা উচ্চ মাধ্যমিক বিদ্যালয় পৰিয়ালে স্থানীয় বস্তাগড়া চাহ বাগিচাৰ ২৩ মে'ত বিদ্যালয়ৰ অনুষ্ঠানৰ শিক্ষাগীন অভিভাৱকসকলক লৈ 'আপোনাৰ পদূলি আমাৰ পঢ়াশালি' শীৰ্ষক এক শৈক্ষিক সভা অনুষ্ঠিত কৰে। বিদ্যালয় পৰিচালনা সমিতিৰ উপ-সভাপতি সংঘৰ্ষিত নুবৰন সভাপতিত্বত অনুষ্ঠিত এই সেওবাৰীয়া অভিভাৱক সভাত সহকাৰী প্ৰধান শিক্ষক অমূল্য তাম্বুলীয়ে এক নতুন আগদৰ্শন পুলি অভিহিত কৰি সকলোৰে সহযোগিতাৰ আশা কৰে। চাহ বাগিচা অঞ্চলৰ ছাত্ৰ-ছাত্ৰীসকলৰ সৰ্বাংগীণ উন্নতিৰ বিশেষ আলোচনা হোৱা সভাখনক বস্তাগড়া বাগিচা অঞ্চলসমূহৰ এক বিশেষ মাতৃযোগে গঢ়ি তোলা ডাঙৰাত্ত চৰণ শিক্ষয়িত্রী চিৰিমিক্রিয়া শইকীয়াই এক প্ৰস্তাৱ আগবঢ়োৱাৰ লগতে বাগিচাই বাগিচাই, ঘৰে ঘৰে মাতৃ ভোলা শাখা গঢ়ি তলা পোনকতা কৰে। সেই মতে বস্তাগড়া বাগিচাত এক মাতৃভোলা শাখা গঢ়ি তলা হয়। বিদ্যালয় পৰিচালনা সমিতিৰ সভাপতি অৰুণ হাজৰিকাই বুদ্ধত্ব কণাঁও অঞ্চলৰ প্ৰতিটো কোণতে সমাহে সমাহে বিদ্যালয় কৰ্মকৰ্তা এনেদৰে অভিভাৱক সভা অনুষ্ঠিত কৰাৰ পৰিকল্পনা লিয়াত আগ্ৰহ কৰে। ছোৱে শিক্ষক পাকত থকাই শিক্ষাৰ্থীসকলৰ বিদ্যালয় উপস্থিতি নিশ্চিত কৰাৰ ক্ষেত্ৰত মাতৃসকলৰ সদা ভূমিকাৰ শিশুৰ আলোকপাত কৰে। সভাত উপস্থিত অভিভাৱক বস্তাগড়া শাখাৰ উপ-সভাপতি গংগেশ ঘটোৱাৰে অভিভাৱকসকলক সন্তুলন শিক্ষণ ক্ষেত্ৰত আগবঢ়াই নিৰ্দেশ সহযোগ হ'লৈ বাবে আহ্বান জনায়। অভিভাৱকসকলৰ কৰ্মকৰ্তা সোধাসনি কৃত্তন, বিদ্যু বৰিবাস আদিয়ে নিজৰ সন্তুলনসকলক বিদ্যালয়লৈ নিয়মিতকৰে পঠোৱাৰ প্ৰতিশ্ৰুতি দিয়ে। বস্তাগড়া অঞ্চলৰ লগেইগাভালী সম্প্ৰদায়ৰ অভিভাৱক, বিশিষ্ট ব্যক্তি, অটোৱাল বস্তাগড়া উপ-শাখাৰ সভাপতি গংগেশ ঘটোৱাল, সম্পাদক অৰুণ ৰাঁচী আৰু আহুল বনগাঁও শাখাৰ সম্পাদক ভূপেন কুৰ্মী, প্ৰাক্তন ছাত্ৰ আৰু শুভাকাঙ্ক্ষীসকল উপস্থিত থকা সভাখনে আঁচৰাত বস্তাগড়া উপ-শাখাৰ সভাপতি কথা বিদ্যালয় প্ৰাক্তন ছাত্ৰ গংগেশ ঘটোৱাৰক বিদ্যালয় পৰিচালনা লৈ সম্বৰ্ধনা জনোৱা হয়। কণাঁও চ'লা উচ্চ মাধ্যমিক বিদ্যালয়ে এই প্ৰগতিক সহযোগ মহলে আগনি জনাইছে।

Fig 15: *Media Coverage and Meeting*

Trust Building Through Sports

To foster a warm and inclusive atmosphere with the local community, the school organized an exciting football match between current students and alumni. The event turned out to be a resounding success, drawing enthusiastic crowds of families, neighbors, and supporters who cheered from the sidelines. Laughter echoed across the field as former students shared stories of their school days with wide-eyed youngsters, while friendly rivalries sparked joyful banter and high-fives.



Fig 16: *Building Bridge Through Sports*

Clean Class Room, Clean Community

Proper cleanliness and hygiene remain a significant challenge in the fringe villages. To raise awareness about cleanliness and hygiene, we have decided to initiate the campaign from schools. We regularly organize classroom cleanliness competitions among different classes and sections. We involve the guardians of the students as judges for these competitions. The guardians evaluate the cleanliness of the classrooms as well as the personal hygiene of the students. Through such engaging competitions, the message about the numerous benefits of maintaining cleanliness and hygiene effectively spreads not only among the students but also among the guardians. This approach fosters a sense of community responsibility, encourages habitual practices, and gradually transforms attitudes in the villages. By starting with the younger generation and involving families, we aim to create a sustainable impact on overall health and well-being in these underserved areas.



Fig 17: *Quest for Cleanliness*

Bongaon Chola High School actively plays its pioneering role in advancing education, fostering social uplifting, driving eco-restoration initiatives, and strengthening community building in a rural area. It empowers students with quality learning, promotes equality and welfare, restores local ecosystems through sustainable practices, and unites residents for collective progress and harmony.