

Nishtha – Jagaran Proposal

Site Visit Report, January 2009

Site visit: Villages under Jagaran proposal submitted by Nishtha, South 24 Paraganas, West Bengal

Date of visit: January 16, 2009

Asha Volunteers: Girish Ramaswamy, Swati Sirkar

Volunteers from project: Mina Das, Mimi

I and Swati reached Nishtha in the afternoon of January 16th and were welcomed by Mina Das who runs the organization. When we entered, we saw around 20 girls split into two groups debating about the advantages/disadvantages of child marriage of girls. While the group supporting it raised issues of eve-teasing, other risks of being unmarried in the society and the eagerness of parents to complete their duty by marrying off their daughters, the opposing group brought out the interest in education for girls which gets disrupted by marriage and that girls are still not at the right age to take on family responsibilities in their teens. It was very impressive to hear the girls being vocal about their opinions & wishing to study more given the opportunity.

I and Swati were then driven to Domdama, one of the four villages which would be covered by the Jagaran proposal. The other 3 villages that would be a part of the Jagaran program are Dhoochesali, Sonagachhi and Gopalpur. We were accompanied by Mimi, a Nishtha volunteer who has been working in that organization for almost five years. At the village, we were greeted by around 20 women and 50 girls from the local community. All the women were members of the Mohila Mandal, a group for women of age group 19-55 while all the girls were members of the groups Balak-Balika Bahinis for children of ages 6-11 and Kishore-Kishori Bahinis for adolescent girls & boys of age 11-18 years. These groups help the women & girls form a social network and work towards the development of the village, speak up against violence etc.



The girls sang songs in the local language and one of them performed a short dance too. The children mentioned that they attend the nearby government school and enjoy their classes. They said that once in a while during the weekend, they clean up the village and

sing songs to make people understand that it is their responsibility to maintain and improve their village. The parents of these children are primarily farm workers. So girl children are made to skip school and either help the parents in the fields or take care of the household chores & younger siblings at home. In such scenarios, retention of kids, especially girls older than 10 years of age in school is the biggest concern.



The main objective of Jagaran is to ensure the retention of 200 kids who are at the risk of dropping out from government schools due to family stress from the four villages mentioned. The kids who are already enrolled in the local government schools would be provided with school uniforms and stationary supplies. The proposal mentions that social workers would be appointed to make follow-up visits to these villages and schools and ensure retention of these children in schools.

We heard from Mina Das that they are planning to set up water & sanitation committee in schools which would comprise of 5 members – 1 from the school management, 2 teacher representatives and 2 kids (a boy and a girl) to maintain proper sanitation of toilets in the school campus. Nishtha has been working in these villages for the past 2 years and have already identified the neediest 200 children who would be funded from this Jagaran proposal.

Mina Das said that they would conduct regular meetings with the stakeholders including the local panchayat, local teachers and members of Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) to discuss the progress of the proposal. Regular meetings with the parents will also be held to increase their awareness about the importance of education of children.

Overall, I was truly impressed by the support from the local Domdama community for Nishtha, especially the mothers of the girl children in the village wanting to send their kids to school. I definitely support the Jagaran proposal and hope Asha would fund the proposal for this year. I sincerely hope this proposal is implemented and Nishtha succeeds in decreasing the dropouts from schools.