

## **Project Pearl – Report for academic year 2009-10**

Asha Chennai started this project in Thoothukudi district during the 2009-10 academic year. The focus of the project was to enhance the quality of education in a few rural government schools by working closely with the teachers and students of the school. In addition, we wanted to explore a few other things including starting village libraries and dealing with health & hygiene related issues.

We set out to accomplish quite a few things over the course of the year, as can be seen from the [original proposal](#). While we were able to close the loop on a lot of these things, there were some aspects which we could not focus on. Please see below for details.

### **Government schools**

We appointed teachers at different points of time to teach in the primary section of the following schools:

**1. PUMS, Nagalapuram – Kayathar block**

Mr. John Baul was appointed to this school at the end of October '09.

**2. PUPS, Panickar Kulam – Kayathar block**

This is the first school we appointed a teacher to. Mr. Gopinath joined this school by end of August '09. He was the third teacher in this primary school when he joined. In February of 2010, government posted a third teacher to this school. This led to “overcrowding” of teachers in this school which quickly started having negative effects in the performance of government teachers. Hence, we moved him to A.M. Patcheri school.

**3. PUPS, Melamanthai – Vilathikulam block**

Ms. Theresa was the only teacher out of five teachers selected in the first round who eventually joined. She was from a village in Ramanathapuram district and after several conversations with her and her parents, she moved to Vilathikulam to join as an Asha teacher. She started working in August of '09 and was there for six months. The school got an additional primary teacher in January '10 and at the same time, Theresa decided to move on because she was getting married. We did not appoint another teacher in this school.

**4. PUMS, Anaindha Madan Patcheri – Ottapidaram block**

This was the toughest school to get a teacher for. It is quite remote with just one bus in and out of the village daily. This is also a caste-sensitive place. Three women teachers originally selected visited the village along with their parents/guardian and decided not to join if this school was offered. We were in constant touch with the HM of the school and she desperately wanted some additional help. In February, when we were pulling Mr. Gopinath out of Panickar Kulam school, we decided to have him move here. After a very difficult start due to issues with accommodation, food, etc, he settled in and started teaching here.

**5. PUPS, Vilvamarathupatti – Vilathikulam block**

This was another very remote school in a village with a majority of population that was illiterate. The HM here was quite uncooperative initially as well. After several conversations, we were able to get her approval and appointed Mr. Durai to this school starting November '09. He commutes two hours each way from his native village to this school daily.

### **Teachers' selection and appointment:**

Here are some things we proposed originally and specific action items (in blue).

- Appoint only teachers who have certified teachers' training (DIET, B.Ed) or are graudates/post-graduates with an interest in teaching.
- Have a formal selection process for appointing teachers. This could involve calling for applications, filtering them based on qualifications, experience and other achievements. Have a written test to further filter candidates. Finally, hold interviews to select teachers and invite the government school teachers to be part of the interview panel.
- We were able to accomplish this and are very satisfied with how it has worked out. The teachers we selected happen to be quite self-confident with a passion for teaching. They are not afraid to try out innovative methods of teaching in their classes. We have very good feedback from the government teachers so far.
- Obtain written approval from the District Elementary Educational Officer (DEEO) permitting Asha Chennai to work in the schools. We have already contacted him and have a verbal approval from him. Will be meeting him to get a formal approval.
- Request DEEO's and AEEOs' active participation and permission for schools' cooperation on several things that would help improve the efficiency of our involvement. This includes identifying government teachers who could train Asha teachers working in these schools on ABL, allowing us to conduct evaluations / written tests, filling gaps in infrastructure requirements of these schools by pushing SSA or other sources of government funding and so forth.
- We did meet the DEEO and got his approval. He refused to give written permission but assured that he would verbally instruct all his AEEOs to cooperate and aid Asha's efforts.
- Get a letter from every school that we work with assuring their fullest cooperation and that Asha teachers' time will be spent only on education-related activities.
- Again, we couldn't get letters because the HMs deferred that to the DEEO but in all schools except Melamanthai, we've had excellent cooperation from motivated government teachers.

Over the course of the year, we continued to stress on our teachers the importance of following the ABL methodology in their primary classes. We provided them with teachers' guides and other materials to help them with that. We also had them visit a very-well-run government-aided school in Eppodhum Vendran to absorb best practices from the teachers in that school.

We let the Asha teachers consult with students and government teachers in their respective schools to come up with a list of learning and teaching materials for students in various classes. For instance, the middle school children wanted pocket Tamil-English dictionaries while the primary children wanted sketch pens. They then coordinated the purchase of these materials and distributed them.

We followed the same procedure for purchase of sports materials. We ensured that girls got enough materials to play with. Some of the items we provided were tennicoit rings, skipping ropes, footballs, volleyballs, nets, carom board and chess boards.

The main challenge we faced during the first year of the project was appointment of teachers. Though the teachers' selection process worked well, four out of five teachers selected during the first round, all of whom

happened to be women, felt the villages were too remote for them to commute. In cases where they were willing, their family was quite opposed. Hence, we had to go through two additional rounds of selection before we could appoint teachers in the schools we took up. This inevitably delayed our involvement with other aspects of the project.

### **Community involvement**

- Proposed - We would like to set up a community center/library inside the village as a starting point. The initial plan is to provide some newspapers, magazines and books to the center; we would have a local person keep the center open for a few hours daily and gauge the interest of the community. The Asha teacher working in the school will monitor and oversee the work of the local person and the center as well. Providing a computer or adding some games or expanding the library are some things that could be done in the future based on the feedback.
- Action - We started village libraries in Nagalapuram and E.Velayudhapuram (near Melamanthai) around November of 2009.

We got a couple of local persons who were very keen to help out to run the library part-time – Mr.Veilumuthu in Nagalapuram and Mr.Siluvaikani in E.Velayudhapuram. In the latter, the panchayat allowed us to use a room for library and paid electricity bills for it as well. We stocked the libraries with about 300 books each during the first few months. Registers are maintained in both these places. Newspapers are subscribed for and the librarians purchase magazines frequently. There is a lot of foot traffic so far, especially from school children.

John Baul, our teacher at Nagalapuram school, also oversees the functioning of the library. As it happens, the librarian is a school-mate of his.

### **Health and Hygiene and Rights-based / Advocacy work**

We could not take up any specific action items on these, mainly due to lack of time and volunteer bandwidth.

**Total funds raised for the academic year = Rs.6.5 lakhs approx.**

### **Expenses from June 2009 to May 2010**

#	Work Description	Budgeted Cost	Actual Expense
<b>Panchayat schools in Thoothukudi district</b>			
1	Honorarium for one trained teacher each in the following five schools: Nagalapuram Panickar Kulam Melamanthai Anaindha Madan Patcheri Vilvamarathupatti	Rs 1,86,500	Rs 1,00,410

2	Conveyance for teachers who are not from the local community and need to commute	Rs 27,500	(included in #1 above)
3	House Rent Allowance for outstation teachers	Rs 24,000	(included in #1 above)
4	Educational materials for children Notebooks, Colours/crayons, files to keep children's works, geometric instruments  Number of children: Nagalapuram – 100 Panickar Kulam – 83 Melamanthai – 146 Anaindha Madan Patcheri – 126 Vilvamarathupatti – 90 Buffer – 56	Rs 30,000	Rs 19,602
5	Footwear for children	Rs 21,000	-NA-
6	Sports Materials for the schools	Rs 5,000	Rs 2,834
7	Footballs, Tennicoit rings, Skipping ropes Health, hygiene and environment related things  Charts, Plant saplings, buckets/pots,	Rs 5,000	-NA-
8	Volunteers/interns would need to make four trips a year for two days to the villages to monitor the work, retrain the teachers and report back to Asha.	Rs 6,400	Rs 2,762
<b>Sub-total</b>		<b>Rs 3,05,400</b>	<b>Rs 1,25,608</b>
<b>Teachers' selection process</b>			
9	Advertisements in local newspapers, renting a hall, buying materials, photocopy of test sheets and other administrative costs		Rs 1,463
10	Travel and food allowance for people attending the test and interviews	50 members * Rs 100 per head	Rs 6,60
<b>Sub-total</b>		<b>Rs 10,000</b>	<b>Rs 2,123</b>
<b>Community center</b>			
11	Room rent for centers in two villages in the first year, starting October '09	Rs 4,800	Rs 1,800
12	Honorarium for a local person (educated & motivated, preferably) to manage the center	Rs 4,800	Rs 5,800
13	Subscription to newspapers, magazines and purchase of books for the center	Rs 8,000	Rs 8,874

Questions?  
Contact Bhaskar (bhasve@gmail.com)

14	Floor mats, two chairs, lights and locks for the resource centers	Rs 3,000	Rs 3,000
15	Electricity and maintenance of the centers	Rs 3,000	-NA-
<b>Sub-total</b>		<b>Rs 23,600</b>	<b>Rs 19,474</b>
16	Miscellaneous (Asha seal, maintenance, other admin costs, emergencies, etc.)	Rs 20,000	Rs 2,124
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>Rs 3,59,000</b>	<b>Rs 1,49,329</b>