

Kodagu District Mobile Science Van

Virtual Site Visit by Melli Annamalai, Asha Boston

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Attendees: Praveen Kumar Sayapparaju and Naveen Naidu (SVYM), and Vishwanath Keshavamurthy, Rotary Club, Madikeri.

The Kodagu Mobile Science Van project was inspired by some of the successes in the HD Kote Mobile Science Van project. It was started with 3 vans funded by Rotary International, and an initial grant by Asha Boston, followed by support from McAfee. The program was launched in December 2017, came to a halt in March 2020 because of Covid (and had an interruption in between because of heavy rains in 2018 in the Kodagu area that resulted in mudslides and flooding and extensive school closures).

In the 2.5 hours that the program was active the program was welcomed by the teachers, students and the administrators, more so than in places like Bangalore and Dharwad. There is interest from the teachers in re-starting the program, particularly because of Covid learning gaps. Also some of the administrators are actually former teachers from HD Kote taluk in Mysore district, where they interacted with the Science Van and so are very familiar with the concept and with SVYM.

Kodagu's project started with 3 vans to cover all high schools in the district reaching 13,000 students in grades 8 to 10 in 96 schools. 20% of these schools had a lab room, but with no furnishings or functioning equipment. So as with many government schools and grant-in-aid schools, children learnt Science only from the textbook with no hands-on work whatsoever. This led to very few students pursuing Science in the pre university courses (PUC).

The learning levels of the students were better when compared to HD Kote schools, perhaps because the teacher shortage issue is better. So the program was able to close learning gaps even by starting at the high school level (instead of starting at the upper primary level). (They have pre-session and post-session testing for each session at a school).

The Kodagu district has a different set of challenges when compared to HD Kote. The terrain is hilly, so different types of vans had to be procured. Schools are more spread out, and have fewer students in each class. So it was enough to hire one facilitator per van instead of two. The Van visits a school six times in an academic year in other projects, here they visit 4 times. As in other areas the program also has extensive training programs and exposure visits for the teachers. While the teacher shortage issue is not as severe as it is in other areas, they have not had good quality capacity building programs and have limited access to equipment.

Finding facilitators in Kodagu has also been a challenge. When the program was running they hired them in Mysore or Saragur and trained them and send them to Kodagu. Salaries are also higher in the area (about 20% higher).

There are 6 Rotary clubs in the district, and they are very involved in the project. Some of them have acted as resource persons and traveled with the vans. Some of them have donated notebooks, printers, desktops, as needed to the schools. Some of them have contributed to food costs at events

such as the Science fairs where multiple schools participate (which quickly become very popular community events). Rotary club members are keen to re-start the Mobile Science Van program. They have been hearing from the community and administrators that everyone is keen to re-start the program.

The success of the Kodagu program in the 2.5 years it was running include a positive perception from all stakeholders, and enabling children they worked with to have the ability to work experientially with Science equipment (as determined in post-session testing). Going forward, our success metrics will include:

- Specific student success stories as now seen in HD Kote (students from very remote villages going on to do a Ph.D in organic chemistry, getting state rank 1 and 2 in the government recruitment exam for teacher positions, etc)
- Increased enrollment in Science PU courses
- Creation of a collective of teachers who became very enthusiastic about Science, and about learning new things and ideas, and have become a strong force in Kote taluk. I consider this as the biggest success of the program. They have gone on to start various initiatives as teachers, and during Covid were very active in community learning centers. These teachers probably already had the zeal, but had lacked guidance and direction. The Science Van program gave them focus and encouragement, and they have blossomed into very good and activist government school teachers. I profiled one of them for Asha's annual report: https://ashanet.org/annual-report-2019/#pageflip5_book0/page/76-77
My hope would be to create such a collective in Kodagu that would identify the good teachers and encourage them and guide them. That then becomes multiplicative.