

**28<sup>th</sup> May. 2021** (*Subhangi Ghosh*)

(Meeting over WhatsApp call with Mr. Manoj Dey.)

## **1. School Updates (Covid and Regular)**

*(From 20<sup>th</sup> April 2021)*

KSSK has been officially closed since mid-2020. During later part of the year the West Bengal govt. opened up the high schools but the lower classes were not given official permissions to open. Mr. Dey was very clear that Antyodoy had the capability to open KSSK and continue its regular schooling while maintaining social distancing and masking, but as they are a govt. affiliate, they did not want to do anything without official permissions. They were under the impressions that all grades would eventually open up after the elections, around May 2<sup>nd</sup>. However rising cases of Covid-19 had resulted in another state wide lockdown mandate and now the timeline for schools opening appears unsure.

KSSK however has continued to operate virtually trying to maintain as much as possible of their usual yearly schedule. Like before, the non-resident KSSK students are taught on a regular basis via cell phones. Once Covid-19 restrictions had started to ease up, as and when it was convenient, teachers paid regular visits to the families to check up on their students, provide learning material, and taking classes individually or in small groups. Some of the students who lived close to the ashram came in there to attend classes with the resident students. Resident students have been receiving virtual classes through a partnership program with Adore India. Teachers would come in a few times a week to teach them, and there are also a couple of resident teachers. They get computer education on the weekends and regular exercise and yoga is taught by a yoga teacher. Resident KSSK students also get opportunities to participate in cultural programs along with the older residents of the ashram. Some of the teachers are common for the resident and the non-resident students. At the present time, the students are taking exams.

It's important to note that the lockdown that starts from today will affect this again. Virtual education will continue but any in-person teacher contacts will cease.

## **2. FCRA new rules compliance update**

- SBI branch in operation. MHA approval obtained.
- The chartered accountant for Antyodoy Ashram had already submitted applications for registering for 80G and 12A, and have provided DSC (digital signature) but they are yet to hear back.

### **3. Site visit update**

Dr. Ajoy Saha has given a progress report from his visit to Antyodoy Ashram on 6<sup>th</sup> March 2021. It details Antyodoy's vocational training efforts.

The products they produce are beautiful, artistic, and made for utilization, and decoration. They have produced decorative items, paintings, jewelry, and clothing. As they are established in a rural locations, they are unable to sell their wares in a city. However, before covid hit, they were able to generate income on a small scale from local customers. Now, because of the lockdown, this is drastically reduced. Mr. Dey has been trying to see if, and how online e-commerce sites can be established but has not had any success till now.

Dr. Saha was unable to provide a site visit report. I spoke to Mr. Dey of conducting a virtual site visit to be held in a couple of months' time. Mr. Dey will be happy to arrange it. All of the updates we have for KSSK till now is from phone conversations, and the pictures shared.

### **4. Update on the covid relief and rehabilitation.**

Antyodoy received Asha's covid relief funds last week. They have used it to distributed cooked food amongst the ashram kids, and the KSSK school kids and their families, when they were sheltering in the ashram from cyclone Yaas. (Pictures have been sent to me). They had plans to distribute packets of the dry items (food, and hygiene and education kits), but before they could purchase, they had to start preparation for cyclone Yaas, and provide help for the victims. They will continue their relief distribution after Yaas crisis is overcome.

### **5. Updates on cyclone Yaas**

They prepared for the oncoming cyclone by providing as much protection to their structures (solar roofs, water pipes, building structures). Thankfully the winds did not cause much damage, however saline water entered into their lakes and fisheries and killed the fishes. Part of their vegetable garden has been destroyed. Water entered the KSSK physical school (not in use because of covid), but is now subsiding.

Water has entered many kachcha houses in Paunshi village, and caused damages. Antyodoy has sheltered the local villagers for two days and nights. They have distributed food that was donated by few local donors, and obtained from govt. rationing. In addition they provided cooked food to the families of children who attend KSSK as part of the covid relief package.

Antyodoy has a small branch in a coastal area called Mandarmani. Mandarmani has been hit badly by the cyclone. They have provided shelter to the villagers at Mandarmani, and are

providing food to them at this branch. This food was donated by local well-wishers and donors. (Pics sent to me).

The rescue and shelter efforts raises the chances of spreading covid infection. Antyodoy are doing their best to prevent it under the circumstances (wearing masks), however physical distancing is not possible, and there are many families in need of help. Antyodoy, being the only non-profit, and perceived as something akin to a relatively sizeable organization in the area, is always looked upon for help during crisis, and so they do their best to provide help. As of now, I haven't been informed of any occurrence of covid cases.

## **6. Antyodoy Sustainability :**

*(From previous few reports from conversations over the past couple of months)*

Antyodoy Anath Ashram is an orphanage in a rural setting, supporting around a hundred kids from poverty stricken backgrounds, in West Bengal. They have been assisted by donations from individual well-wishers. Donors give as much money as they are able to, whenever they can, and this goes into running the ashram. The donations don't add up to any savings, and it is used up as it comes. Their resources include borrowing essentials (food, basic items) on good will of vendors, whom they pay back within one or two months, upon receiving funds.

This structure of sustenance has been negatively impacted now, and in a manner that may not recover in the near future. This has been brought about because of covid-19 pandemic, however it is expected to continue even if/when the pandemic diminishes. Current circumstances have affected donors in various ways, resulting in redirecting funds away from charitable contributions. Antyodoy, relying entirely upon the charity of individual well-wishers such as these, has also faced the consequences. Not only have their incoming funds been reduced, they are also unable to go out, knock on doors and raise money. Part of the reason is the pandemic, and partly because they cannot ask money when their well-wishers themselves are in crisis. Situations like loss of jobs, declining businesses, altering family responsibilities, loss of health or life etc. will not be immediately, or in some cases ever, remedied even when their cause is removed. As such, the constancy of regular funds to sustain Antyodoy in the future is uncertain.

From my conversation with Mr. Dey, it appears that they are able to maintain some aspects of Antyodoy. Their electricity expenditure is manageable because they have solar panels. Their water supply at this time is expected to not be affected because of the generosity of a previous well-wisher. Their basic medical supplies are replenished by the free medical samples that are handed out intermittently. Their regular medical check-ups are done by some visiting health-care workers that they know. (Unfortunately one of them succumbed to covid recently). They also have a paramedic personnel locally to assist them. In case of an

emergency, the local govt. health center, and a sub-divisional hospital is available. They get clothes for their children regularly during yearly festivals season.

Their need really is for food and some everyday usable items. Part of their food is managed because of their homegrown vegetable garden, and the fishery that they maintain. They however loan grains, rice, dals, biscuits etc from their local stores, and pay them back when they have the money. This system has worked till now because of their good reputation and the relationship that they maintain with their locality, and the assurance of them being able to pay back their vendors in a couple of months' time when funds are available. However incoming funds are now affected, which may be long lasting, at least into the near future. Also their vendors themselves may not be able to sustain loaning items on credit now.

The organization, Antyodoy Ashram, is in a situation now where their ability to support their orphan kids are at risk. They will benefit from separate funds directed towards their orphanage.

### **Update on sustainability efforts**

*(From 20<sup>th</sup> April 2021)*

Antyodoy has been unsuccessful in establishing a sustainable funding partner, apart from Asha supporting KSSK. Mr. Dey had visited the SBI foundation earlier but was unhelpful because he was directed to look at the huge number of applications that they receive. He did fill in some web-forms for organizations that Minal had introduced. His primary concern is that they are a small organization in a rural setting without any visibility. They have no resources or expertise or even experience for securing funding. Even Asha's partnership, he says, came by because Dr. Saha had taken an interest in them and recommended them to Asha. Antyodoy needs assistance and guidance to learn to go about and secure other sustainable funding opportunities. He had requested if Asha would be willing to make a referral to funding organizations on their behalf.

*(From today)*

No big updates since the last time we spoke. He gave me some more details on what they have tried. The excel sheet of sustainability efforts shows "approved" from two organizations (Manoj Modi Foundation (Kolkata), and Vorgo Helping Family (Howrah). Both have been donating since the last year, sometime after cyclone amphan disaster. Both organizations are very small, and although Antyodoy has been receiving funds from them for the last few months, there is no guarantee or commitment of continuation. It can stop on any month. They are able to fund for as long as they can generate enough funds.

## **7. Updates on outstanding loans.**

An excel sheet showing their updated loans has been given.

Mr. Dey was saying that banks are unwilling to give loans to local non-profits because of uncertainty of timely repayment. Therefore, their loan structures are varied.

The Rs. 450,000 loan was taken for regular maintenance, and upkeep of the ashram buildings. This is from local construction vendors. They need repay by 31<sup>st</sup> March. 2022. They have been paying in parts whenever they have the funds.

The Rs. 480,000 loan was taken from local money lenders even before they became a project partner with Asha Austin. This loan was taken to establish their vocational training school, and purchases of equipment like sewing machines, materials etc. As these purchases could not be made locally, they had to go to Kolkata, and therefore couldn't establish the loans based on goodwill, as they have dine with local vendors. The West Bengal Society for Skill Development had agreed at the time to provide the money required to repay any loans. Based on that, they borrowed from local money-lenders. However it's been close to two years, and the WB Society has failed to provide the money to remove the loans. Unfortunately Antyodoy has also lost hopes of getting any money from them, and now they have these large outstanding loans with the money lenders. The money lenders have been asking for re-payment. Antyodoy pays back whatever they can when they have the funds, but the pressure of paying back is higher with the money lenders. Mr. Dey has been trying to get some corporate assistance. Minal's directions have helped him to know who to approach, but as of now he is still unsuccessful.

Apart from these, there are other smaller loans in the order of Rs.10-30,000 with the local vendors as outlined before, for food, and everyday use items.