

Asha For Education Site Visit Report

Date of Site Visit: 31 March 2023

Name of the Project: Garima Project and Srijan Project

Name of the Organization running the project: Sankalp Ek Prayas

My name is Anurag, and I am a volunteer for Asha Beyond Borders. I had the opportunity to visit Sankalp Ek Prayas, an NGO working near Bhilai in the Durg district of Chhattisgarh. The aim of the visit was to observe their work on two major projects: 1) **Garima Project** supported by **Asha Austin Chapter**, and 2) **Srijan Project** which **Asha Beyond Border** is considering supporting. This site visit report provides an account of my experience after various discussions with the volunteers at Sankalp, and my interaction with the student beneficiaries.

Click [here](#) to see the photos from this trip.

I reached Raipur on the night of 30th March 2023. Mr Deepak, who is part of the Sankalp advisory team and works closely with the founder Mr Parimal Sinha, was there to pick me up and hosted me at his home. Although it was almost midnight and I was very tired as the flight got delayed by more than 4 hours, Mr Deepak provided me with an overview of the various initiatives Sankalp ek Prayas is taking to contribute towards a bigger aim to create a “**children-friendly village**”. He was also explaining to me about the next day’s itinerary and the centres we would visit which I remember vaguely, as I was half-asleep.

In the morning, Mr Deepak escorted me as we visited the different villages in the district of Durg. During our trip, he explained to me the recent political developments happening in Raipur and the status of education in the district. He also mentioned why Sankalp is needed in addition to the education provided in the Government-run schools in the district. I asked him about the itinerary again as I didn’t remember it. He mentioned that he wants me to have an overall understanding of the three major projects under Sankalp i.e., Seekh, Garima, and Srijan. Therefore, the plan was to visit two villages where the Seekh and Srijan programmes run and then go to Morid (the main office of Sankalp), where I met the Garima volunteers as well as the beneficiaries.

Visit Sankalp Centre in Batang village: Srijan Project

Our first stop was at the Sankalp Centre in Batang village, where the classes for the Srijan Project were being conducted. To give a short background on Srijan, it is an initiative under the Kartavya Project at Sankalp ek Prayas. In this initiative, education for children of Class 6th to 10th Standard is included. Srijan centres are Learning and Support Centres for post-primary students to provide better facilitation around broader aspects of education. The students are taught three subjects i.e., Maths, Science, English, and some topics of Geography (a few concepts/chapters included as part of social science). Some innovative programmes organized under the Srijan group with the support of Community and Govt. schools are ‘Bal Vigyan Mela’, and ‘E-Udaan’ to provide quality education to children for their holistic development.

When we reached there, we were welcomed by three teachers who were teaching students in classes 6th, 7th, 8th, and 10th. Both the teachers and the students were from the same village. There were around 10-15 students in each class. The numbers were less because the students had their exams in school, so not every student had come to attend the lesson. I was told that generally, the students have different timings based on their classes. However, they

had invited students from all the classes just for my visit. I spent some time with the Class 7th students, who were learning Maths. I asked them to solve some equations based on the topic “algebra” they were learning that day. Initially, they were a bit shy but after some time, they tried to solve the equation. One of the students even came up to the board and attempted to solve the question. However, they didn’t solve it correctly. The teacher said that they get confused with changes in signs when they have to move a digit across the equal sign.

The students of Class 6th and Class 8th were learning science, Mr Deepak asked them a few questions related to space and the universe. The students said that Pluto was a planet but now it is not. However, didn’t know the reason for it.

For Class 10th, they mentioned their favourite subject is mathematics. The students were shy and seemed worried about their exams the next day. I observed that girls and boys were sitting far apart. I asked them the reason for it. They mentioned that they sit in a particular place in the class and because of exams as many students had not come, it seemed like they were sitting separately.

One of the teachers told me that she is about to get married and therefore, Sankalp would have to find another teacher for the students. She said that she liked teaching the kids at Sankalp and as she is moving to another village after her marriage, Sankalp asked if she would be willing to teach there, they can open a Sankalp Centre for her there. Another teacher said that he has been with Sankalp for more than 3 years. He is preparing for competitive exams and enjoys teaching the kids as it helps him revise his concepts. Overall, I realized that the standard of the students’ needs to be improved further. The way the teachers taught was good from my limited observation. They were passionate and felt connected to the kids.

One of the things bothering me was the number of hours the students need to commit to learning. They do their normal school hours from 10 am to 4 pm and then in addition attend the lessons at the Sankalp Centres either in the morning from 6 am to 9 am or at night from 5 pm to 8 pm. Mr Deepak said that Sankalp understands that the number of hours is a lot. Therefore, they try to engage the kids not only in studies but also in extra-curricular activities such as sports, arts, and science projects to make the classes interactive. The teachers are also getting trained to make learning fun and enhance the inquisitiveness of the kids.

Visit Sankalp Centre in Karsa village: Seekh Project

After visiting Batang village, we moved to the Sankalp Centre in Karsa to interact with the student beneficiaries of the Seekh Project. To give a brief background of Seekh, it is an initiative under which education for children of Class 1st to 5th Standard is included. The main subjects included are English, Hindi, Maths, and Environmental Science (to be included soon). When we reached the centre, there were around 15-20 students in the class. There was an equal division of girls and boys in the class. This centre was situated inside a government school, where regular school runs during school hours (10 am – 4 pm) and Sankalp conducts their classes before or after the school.

The students were learning via videos being played using a projector. We asked the teacher to continue teaching. She started showing the videos and was explaining words and their meaning in English. I stopped the teacher multiple times and asked the students the spelling of some words. The students were not shy and answered all the spellings correctly. I also twisted some questions for them and asked the meaning of some words, however, they answered correctly. Later, we asked some maths questions to the students as well, especially, related to division and multiplication. The students took time to determine the answers for the division questions when there was a remainder. However, they solved complicated multiplication questions easily. They were also not shy to come on the board and solve it. I also asked them to give various general life scenarios where they can use this knowledge of multiplication and division and I was impressed that they did very well in understanding how in a market, while selling or buying this skill of multiplication and division would be useful.

We also played some games with them. We created a team of 3 boys and 3 girls and gave them digit names 1, 2, and 3. They had to remember their digit names and we called numbers like 123, 312, 231, etc. and asked them to stand in the correct order as soon as possible. The team standing correctly and in the minimum time was supposed to get points. The remaining students were asked to check if they are standing in the correct order or not. It was a fun time. Just before leaving, I asked some of the students what they wanted to become. Most of them wanted to be a doctor.

Interacting with the teachers, they mentioned that they have observed a significant difference in the student learning experience by introducing digital learning. The students find it more interesting and are able to remember things better. I asked them how they are doing financially, they said that if they could get a slightly higher salary, it would be very helpful as the inflation is high. The teachers also mentioned that they are helping the students prepare for school entrance exams, such as the Navodaya Entrance Exam, which is considered very prestigious.

Visit Sankalp Headquarters in Morid: Garima Project

We next visited Sankalp's support centre at Morid. Parimal Sinha the founder of Sankalp couldn't be with us as he had some health issue. However, there were around 80 teachers, Garima Didi's, coordinators, and administration staff, were there to meet us. We did some initial introductions, and an outline was provided of what we would be doing for the next 3-4 hours. The idea was to explain the different initiatives at Sankalp and what they intend to achieve with their education centres followed by questions and answers and finally, one-on-one interaction with the Garima Didis and Garima Project beneficiaries.

There were three presentations given by three volunteers each on Seekh, Srijan, and Garima projects. Here are some things I learnt from the presentations and interactions with the volunteers:

Srijan:

- No. of Centres – 51 Srijan LRCs in Patan Block of Durg District (Chhattisgarh)
- No. of students get supported – 2487.
- Girls to Boys ratio – 960/1527
- Most of the teachers have a bachelor's degree and are from the local village where they teach. Only 1 or 2 have a degree in education (B.Ed.).
- Therefore, several pieces of training (7) were conducted to train the teachers specific to subjects, digital education, and children engagement/empowerment.
- The slides demonstrated pictures of extra and co-curricular activities conducted by the students.
- The slides also included details of how the student experience and learning are improving in different subjects because of Srijan.

Seekh:

- No. of District Covered – 005; No. of Development Blocks Covered – 07
- No. of Seekh LRCs – 209; No. Community Teachers – 400
- No. of Children reached – 12000; No. of STFs (Sankalp Trainee Fellows) – 25
- Categorize the students into 5 groups: Star, Moon, Sun, Rainbow, and Sky based on their understanding compared to the baseline results to determine the level of support required for the students.
- The slides included pictures of various extra-curricular, co-curricular, and activity-based learning sessions conducted for the students.

- The slides also included details of how the student experience and learning are improving in different subjects because of Seekh.
- Around 35 different training sessions and workshops were organized for the capacity building of the teachers.
- Monthly parent-teacher meetings are organized to include parents as part of the learning journey for the students and build community engagement.

Garima:

- No. of District Covered – 005; No. of Development Blocks Covered – 07
- No. of Villages – 188; No. Community Teachers – 400
- No. of girls and women benefitted – 5535 and 711 respectively; Sanitary pads distributed – 10,000.
- 193 workshops have been organized for capacity building of the Garima volunteers.
- The volunteers have prepared the content for workshops related to 21 social issues.
- The slides demonstrated the impact the workshops have on the understanding of various issues.

Overall (through Q&A and interaction):

- Almost all teachers were women. About 50% of the teachers are married and probably 70% of them have children. A lot of teachers seemed to indicate that they would look at teaching as a long-term career option and would continue teaching after they got married and have kids.
- The teachers loved their work. The main motivation for them is to not let kids be deprived of any opportunities or guidance which they found missing when they were growing up. However, they indicated that they would prefer a higher salary.
- All of them were very satisfied with the training that are provided to them. It was surprising and motivating that many of them had gone out of Durg, Chhattisgarh for the first time and travelled as part of a group.
- The teachers are also provided lump-sum money (downpayment plus monthly EMI) to buy a two-wheeler for their travel to nearby villages by Sankalp especially for Garima Didis.
- They get their salaries regularly in their bank account. Only once or twice they received it delayed but that was because of some bank issue.
- They also requested that more sources of content can be provided to them. Right now, they develop content through YouTube, guidance from UNICEF, Websites, etc. If some books and more training can be included would be helpful.
- They also mentioned that there is great camaraderie among the Didis and they discuss and learn from each other's experience in case they have doubts or have a difference in opinion on certain social-economic issues.

We had a short lunch break after the presentations. During this time, I met Mr Rinu Koshy, who is the CA for Sankalp. I asked him a few questions related to the financial aspects of Sankalp. He said that they would email me the salary details for March for all the volunteers. I received it after the visit and it can be found [here](#).

Interaction with Garima Didis:

After the presentations were over, I wanted to have an informal interaction just with the Garima Didis and the girl beneficiaries of the project. I asked them about the challenges they have,

the support available from Sankalp, their motivation, the profile of the children, how they prepare the content, etc. The main points of the conversation are summarized below:

- How many Master Garima Didis and village-level Garima Didis do they have? How many Master Garima Didis and village Garima Didis did you get to meet?

There were around 18 Garima Didis who had travelled to attend the meeting. Overall, they plan to have 25 Garima Didis. They mentioned that they plan to stop the concept of Master Garima Didis now.

- Do they work only under the Garima project, or do they work on other projects of Sankalp Ek Prayas also?

Some of them work on other projects as well.

- If Garima only, then how do they manage with such a low stipend?

They would want the stipend to increase. They said right now they try to contribute as much as possible towards their family expenses.

- If they work for other programs too, which ones, and how do they divide their time between other programs?

As Garima Project doesn't require a regular commitment of time. They can teach regularly for Seekh and then contribute towards Garima in their free time.

- How do they receive their salaries? Cash or bank accounts? Do they get them regularly, or are there delays sometimes? If possible, also ask what their stipend is.

They get it in their bank accounts regularly. The stipend amount is based on the number of hours committed by Garima Didi. It is a maximum of 8000 per month for a full-time commitment of 8 hours per day.

- How many hours do they spend weekly on the Garima project, roughly? (ask master Garima Didis and village Garima Didis separately)

They spend around 2 to 3 hours per day.

- What are the responsibilities of Garima Didis? What does their typical day look like?

The responsibilities of Garima Didis include preparing material for the workshops, and promoting, organizing, or conducting them. They also have to prepare reports on the attendance and impact of the workshops. This is official work, some volunteers also mentioned that they spend time bonding with the girls as they really treat them as "elder sisters" and share their feelings or issues.

- When are the Garima workshops conducted? Weekdays/weekends? Morning, afternoon, evenings?

They are flexible and conducted according to the availability of the girls either on the weekdays or weekends. Generally, in the mornings or evenings.

- Have they attended any training sessions for these workshops? With whom? How was the experience? What did they learn?

They have attended multiple training sessions starting with induction training which is provided in-house to training sessions at other organisations which specialize in separate topics.

- How are they addressing dropouts?

Sankalp is preparing itself for a 30% dropout rate and wants to develop a format of commitment from volunteers for at least 2 years. They want to develop topic experts who can guide a team of young volunteers.

Interaction with Garima girl beneficiaries:

There were around 10-15 girls who could make it to the meeting as they had exams the next. The girls were a bit shy initially. However, later they opened up a bit.

- Do they find the workshops useful?

Yes, they said they liked the workshops and learn many useful things through them, especially on hygiene.

- Do they get printed modules after workshops? Do they find them useful? Do they read them?

As the topics are sensitive, they do not get printed modules. However, for some topics, they might give some selected information.

- What have they gained from the workshops? (Note: This may be a sensitive question, as workshops also cover menstrual hygiene, sexual crimes related topics. Judge the vibe before asking. Here, we want to know if they have gained confidence and career aspirations from these workshops.)

They talked about the increase in knowledge in terms of cybersecurity, menstrual hygiene, and safety for girls.

- What do they want to do after growing up? What are their career aspirations?

They wanted to be doctors, police, and in the army. One of them mentioned that she wants to have a famous YouTube channel and Instagram page. When asked if they would want to be teachers, none of them said yes.

- Do they like studying? Do they attend a regular school? Would they like to attend college? What do they want to do after college?

All of them had shown interest in studying except one. She mentioned she likes dancing. Others wanted to attend college.

I also took pictures of the van, sanitary pad manufacturing machine, and printer. I went to their main office and spent some time looking at the workshop materials prepared for the Garima

workshops. They also showed me the finance-related documents and explained the budget requirements for the Srijan project. In the current plan, they mentioned a structure which would have 25 STFs and one coordinator each for Srijan, Garima, and Seekh Projects. They suggested that considering the request they would increase the stipend and aim to make it lucrative with more specialized training. They also shared the budget they have proposed and requested from Asha for Education which can be found [here](#).

Conclusion

After these school and centre visits, they dropped me off at the Raipur airport. Overall, it was a very enjoyable trip, where I learned so much. The most important takeaway for me was the enthusiasm of the volunteers and the determination that what we could not get, we should be able to give that opportunity to the next generation. They showed a lot of trust in Sankalp and its management. The volunteers are keen to get trained, learn new skills, and impart them to the students. One thing, I could not observe was restrooms. I would recommend if possible Sankalp can ensure clean restrooms, especially for females. Sankalp's aim is to ensure good quality education for kids and make the villages children-friendly. They want "learning" to be fun for the kids and not forced. It is a distant dream with all social and economic challenges, but this is a step towards it.