

Youth Dream Bilana

Asha Project in Bhadrak District, Odisha, India

Field visit report, 30 August 2014

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Introduction:

Asha has been supporting Youth Dream Bilana education project since 1993. The primary goal of this project is to support basic educational needs of children attending 6-8 primary and middle schools in the remote villages in the state of Odisha, India. The core financial support has been provided by five Asha Stars (R. Divakaruni, G. Janakiraman, J. Jayapalan, A. Gupta, and D. Nayak), who have been very generous to continue this work for over 20 years. In recent years, Asha-Athens has been able to provide matching funds. This field visit report gives a brief description of the current activities, progress made, and the basic teaching and material needs of these Asha-supported schools.

This project is run by Bhoomika, Bhubaneswar, Odisha. Bhubaneswar is the capital city of Odisha, and the Bilana project site is about 135 km north of Bhubaneswar. B. Rath, President of Bhoomika and I started from Bhubaneswar at 7AM by car on 26 August, 2014. It was a very hot and humid day. We arrived at the district head quarter, Bhadrak, at 9AM. It took us about one hour to reach the project site because of the windy and narrow road passing through many villages. We spent the whole day to visit all Asha schools at the Bilana site. We talked to students, head master of each school, and many villagers at each school site to evaluate the performance of Asha teachers as well as to assess the impact of this project on the villagers.

Economic and education background of Odisha villages:

Although India's economic growth has been impressive in recent years, it has not been uniform all across India. State like Odisha has fallen behind because of the poor political leadership at the state level, lack of help from the central government, and little or no industrial growth, especially in manufacturing and IT sectors. One can see huge growth in the capital city (expensive villas, malls, imported cars, wide roads), but there is little economic progress in the villages. I myself had lived in one of these villages some 30 years ago, but I am surprised to see

that still most of the people live in straw-and-clay houses. Except a very few, most of the people in these villages remain extremely poor. Even today, I see students attending classes without wearing any shoes (see photos below).

In educational front, however, I see some tangible progress. When we started this Asha project in 1990s, there were very few primary schools, one government school covering 4-6 villages then. During that time, each school was not fully staffed. Each elementary school (grades 1-5) had only 2-3 teachers. Today, there is one elementary school in every 2-3 village, but they are not fully staffed. By setting up more schools, the state Government has increased teacher to student ratio by about a factor of 2-3. Unfortunately, these government public schools in villages only receive teacher salaries. No money is received for teaching aids (table, chair, blackboard, maps, science experiments, school repair, rest rooms, or sports equipment). Asha can significantly enhance the teaching experience of poor students by providing little money to each school towards teaching aids (Rs10,000/yr per school would be a big help).

Academic progress:

While visiting Asha schools, I specifically asked the school principal in each school and a few villagers how Asha money is helping to improve the academic standard of students. Today, the graduation rate is almost 100% in primary schools, and many students pass high schools to attend a college. Asha teachers play a big role in taking up main teaching loads, where there are only 3 teachers for 5 grades in a primary school. Also, I found that the equal percentage of girls and boys are attending these schools, a very encouraging trend. I am also happy to see that a non-profit girl high school has been started by the villagers here, as there is no government high school near these villages, and girls used to walk 2-3 kms under heavy monsoon rain and high summer heat to attend a nearby government high school. Only way for the young students to come out of the poverty cycle is to go out of these villages and attend a college. All villagers are very happy to see their children attend schools regularly and graduate at a high rate.

Teaching aid requested by each school (does not include Asha teacher salary):

1. Itagari ME School (Number of students = 55, Number of Asha teacher = 1)

Item	Description	Approximate Cost (Rs)
Teaching Aids	Globe, Geometry box, Measurement, Chemicals, Bone structure, Plant Structure	10,000
Sports goods	Carem, Chess, Ring Ball, Badminton	2,000
Building construction/repair		

2. Deula Primary School (Number of students = 115, Number of Asha teacher = 1)

Item	Description	Approximate Cost (Rs)
Teaching Aids	1 Godrej Almirah 2 Tables	15,000
Sports goods		
Building construction/repair		

3. Deula ME School (Number of students = 92, Number of Asha teacher = 2)

Item	Description	Approximate Cost (Rs)
Teaching Aids	1 Godrej Almirah Black board, long bench, high desk	15,000 10,000
Sports goods		
Building construction/repair	House building Ladies Toilet	4,00,000 50,000

4. Deula Girl High School (Number of students = 60, Number of Asha teacher = 2)

Item	Description	Approximate Cost (Rs)
Teaching Aids	Maps, Blackboard, Globe Science instruments	2,000 10,000
Sports goods		
Building construction/repair	House building Ladies Toilet	6,00,000 50,000

5. Bilana Primary School (Number of students = 50, Number of Asha teacher = 1)

Item	Description	Approximate Cost (Rs)
Teaching Aids	Maps, Blackboard, Globe Table, Chair	2,000 10,000
Sports goods	Soccer, Chess, Carem, Badminton	2,000
Building construction/repair	House building Ladies Toilet	2,00,000 50,000

6. Rahaliasahi Primary School (Number of students = 70, Number of Asha teacher = 1)

Item	Description	Approximate Cost (Rs)
Teaching Aids	Maps, Blackboard, Globe	2,000
Sports goods	Soccer, Chess, Carem, Badminton	2,000
Building construction/repair		

Sample pictures taken during this visit:



Itagari School - inside a class room



Itagari School - in front of the school with students and one Asha teacher



Deula primary school – inside a class room with two Asha teachers



Deula primary school – in front of the school with teaching staff



Deula middle school – discussion with the teaching staff



Bilana primary school – discussion with headmaster and one Asha teacher (lady teacher in the photo)