

# Field Trip Report

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SHANTI SADHANA ASHRAM  
SHANTIVAN, BASISTHA, P.O. BASISTHA  
GUWAHATI, 781029, ASSAM

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Site Visit Conducted  
by  
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# Introduction

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The purpose of this report is present a summary of findings based on the site visits to several schools run by Shanti Sadhana Ashram (SSA) in Assam. During the site visits, five schools in Kamrup District of Assam were visited. These site visits were conducted by Mr. Partha Bora of Asha Irvine along with Mr. Hemanta Barua, Coordinator of SSA on March 28 and 29, 2007. This organization is currently funded by Asha Detroit and Seattle and as a part of annual project review, this visit was conducted.

The following sub-sections provide a background of the organization and their current student enrollment. Following that, brief description of each of the visited school is provided. Finally, a list of future action items for these schools is presented.

## Background

The SSA is located on the outskirts of Guwahati city in Assam. It runs six schools in and around the city of Guwahati for kids from the poor socio economic backgrounds. Each school caters to the children from at least 3-4 nearby villages. These schools follow the system of non-formal education for the children of ages 2 to 12 years. The classes fall into 3 categories; Pre-primary, Primary and Upper Primary

## Purpose and Goals

To make all the children in the tribal villages go to the government schools after attending the pre-primary level of study through non-formal education.

## Organization Description

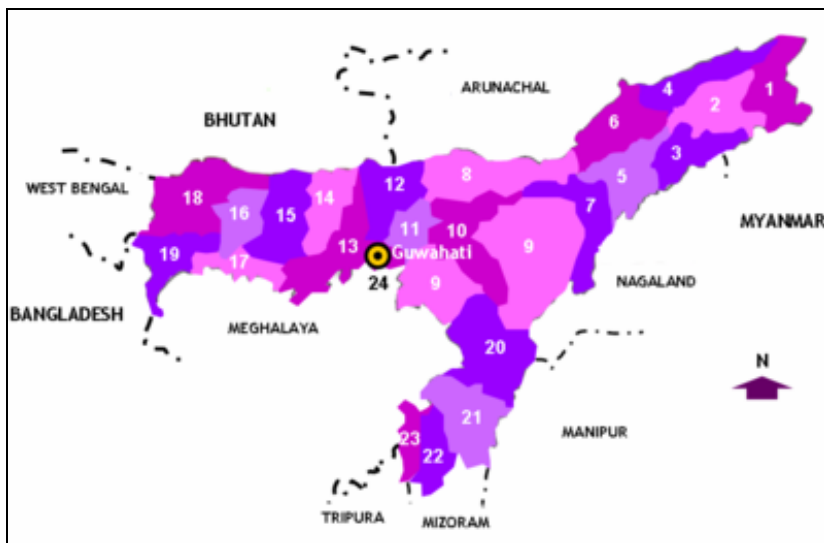
Shanti Sadhana Ashram is one of the pioneer organizations in championing the cause of literacy in the backward districts of Assam, which it started as a "Literacy As a Movement of the People (LAMP)" in 1989. The National Literacy Mission, Govt. of India, recognized the Ashram's contributions to this literacy movement by giving the National Award on Literacy to its Secretary Mr. Hembhai in 1997. Since the beginning of the literacy movement the Ashram had an ardent desire to start some innovative schools for deprived children scattered in the remote areas of many districts.

## Project Type

The schools run by SSA are Non Formal Education (NFE) centers that are typically created for children who are unable to attend an entire day of school. Often these centers serve as a stepping stone to more formal education. NFEs are, as their name implies allow non-formal enrollment. Children can join irrespective of their age. Some NFEs tend to be non-formal in content. They can follow varying curriculums. There are bridge schools that offer several years of curriculum in a condensed manner to help the children join a formal education system. Other schools try to get the children comfortable with a subset of the curriculum such as language and basic math and sciences hoping to encourage the children to learn further. Asha works with NFE centers that have been started by members of the community themselves i.e. started by community groups. NFEs need various forms of support from infrastructural support, running expenses, educational resources and teachers training programs.

# Site Visit Summary

During the site visits, five schools were reviewed. These schools are located on the outskirts of Guwahati, Kamrup District, Assam. These site visits were organized by Mr. Hemanta Barua, Coordinator for SSA. The following is a map of Assam showing the districts. The schools run by SSA are located in Kamrup and Lakhimpur District.



## Districts of Assam:

1. Tinsukia	7. Golaghat	13. Kamrup Rural	19. Dhubri
2. Dibrugarh	8. Sonitpur	14. Nalbari	20. North Cachar Hills
3. Sibsagar	9. Karbi Anglong	15. Barpeta	21. Cachar
4. Dhemaji	10. Nagaon	16. Bongaigaon	22. Hailakandi
5. Jorhat	11. Morigaon	17. Goalpara	23. Karimganj
6. Lakhimpur	12. Darrang	18. Kokrajhar	24. Kamrup Metro

A brief summary of the schools visited is provided in the following table.

	Name of School	Village	Class Levels	Year Started	Total Students	Male Students	Female Students	Staff	Student/Teacher Ratio
1	Shantivan	Beltola	Nursery - Class VII	1997	135	57	77	6	22.5
2	Pachim Killing	Pachim Killing	Nursery - Class IV	1999	36	18	18	3	12
3	Uloni	Uloni	Nursery	1995	40	12	28	2	20
4	Dikchak	Dikchak	Nursery	1994	22	14	8	1	22
5	Robingaon	Robingaon	Nursery - Class IV	1994	78	34	44	4	19.5

## Shantivan School

This school is located within the Shanti Sadhana Ashram campus on the outskirts of Guwahati at a village called Beltola. The school was visited on March 28, 2007. The school caters to children who live besides the ashram. Most of the parents are extremely poor and mostly survive by doing daily labor. The school currently has one building that houses classes from Nursery to Class VII. The infrastructure is broken down and students have to share class rooms. There is urgent need for expansion to accommodate overcrowding at this school. In addition, there is an extra room that was donated by Bharti Tel that serves as a library. This library has very minimal equipment. There are a total of five teachers and one librarian.

During the site visit, I was able to observe the students during their classes. The teachers appear to be dedicated and have genuine desire to help these children to learn. Currently, the students are taught math, language, general knowledge, science and social studies. My mother and mother-in-law, who accompanied me during this visit were able to interact with the teachers and the students and asked them about the school and their studies. They found them to be satisfactory. The biggest stumbling block for this school is the lack of study materials and class room furniture. Since these schools are NFE centers, there are always lacking in study materials. These schools follow the Board of Secondary Education of Assam (SEBA) curriculum and the government schools have access to study materials first before the other schools such as this NFE centers. Some of the teachers are making their own study materials for the nursery students out of their own pay.

As part of the schooling, the teachers interact with the parents and make sure that they are trained to provide a suitable atmosphere for study at school. When students miss classes, these teachers visits the children's home to inquire about their status and why they are missing classes.

The teachers are provided some form of periodic training and some of them have gone through the Vikramsila course in Kolkatta, West Bengal.

## Pachim Killing

The school is located off of National Highway 37 about 4 kilometers (km) inland. Access to the school is difficult and is only through a narrow dirt road. Most of the children are from the local village and on the average have to walk 2 to 3 km to reach this school. The school consists of one building that has concrete floor and tin roof. The school has two teachers (Mr. Dharma Rahang and Ms. Pratima Lahkar) and one assistant. The assistant is not a regular school employee but rather hired by teachers themselves to help the students. She is paid by the teachers out of their own pocket.

Here you have classes from Nursery to Class IV. There are only about 3 students in Class IV.

This school was first one to be established in the village. Very remote area but has great support from the local community. The school is planning to develop local business to help sustain additional resource for the school. One of the projects that they are thinking of is to build a pond and create a fish farm. Income from selling fish would be used to supplement

the schools need for equipment and to pay teachers salary. Again there is lacking of study materials and furniture for the children. Also during the visit, I was told that during the summer months, the enrollment at the school drops because of malaria season. The children get sick because of the lack of access to clean water. One of the requests by the teacher was to have water filters for the school so that children can have clean drinking water.

## Uloni

This school only has nursery class and is currently housed in temporary room donated by a local villager. This school was destroyed during a thunderstorm and urgently in need of permanent structure. I briefly visited the temporary school and was surprised to see students waiting for our visit even when it was past their school time. The teacher for this school is Mr. Jayanta Baruah and was very impressed by his dedication to this school. He is also highly educated (BA) among his peers within SSA. He has worked for two schools within SSA for over 8 years. In spite of better opportunities outside, he continues to be a teacher at this village because of the amount of respect he gets from the village and that he is helping to better a kid's life through education. He also expressed the desire to have more teaching materials and water filters for the kids.

## Dikchak

This school is located 1 km inland from the NH-37. The school building consists of a mud structure that is broken down because of termites. This school is also in the urgent need for a new school building. Currently the school has only nursery class. During my visit, the classes were over and therefore unable to meet any children or the teacher. There is a local school (Lower Primary) adjacent to this school.

## Robingaon

The school is located about 3 km inland from the NH-37. This school is the best among the five schools that I have visited in terms of infrastructure and teachers. Here they have classes from nursery to Class IV. There is major involvement by the local community and the school has obtained funding from World Vision in the past to build its infrastructure. Was able to observe the students during their class. The children appear to be enthusiastic and focused at their work. The school also has a library with very few books.

One major issue raised by the teachers was the lack of any salary increase. Last time they receive any raise was Rs. 100 few years ago. In spite of that the teachers seems to continue do their work without complaints.

# Action Items

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Following is a list of action items for SSA

- Need funding for school building for Uloni and Dikchak. Mr. Hemanta Baruah has provided proposal for the construction of two school buildings.
- Need furniture, teaching aid, education materials.
- Provide water filters for each of the school. At a minimum they require two filters for each school.
- Need funding for additional room at Shantivan School at SSA campus. Current building is too small for eight class room
- Review salary structure for the teachers and provide raise to commensurate with local salary for government teachers. Current levels are way too low. For example, Senior Teachers are paid anywhere from Rs 1,000 to Rs, 1400. Junior teachers pay ranges from Rs. 600 to Rs. 800.
- Provide salary for the teacher's aid at Pachim Killing School. Currently, she is paid by the two teachers at the school.

# Conclusion

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Overall I was impressed by the dedication of the teachers and the children's desire to attend school. This organization (SSA) is really doing great service by establishing these NFE centers at these villages where the government has no schools. The SSA organization is not only looking for funding but also guidance and mentoring to create new ways for teaching these needy children. They are also exploring other avenues of funding so that they can be self sustainable. We should provide guidance on these issues and help them to generate their own funding since in the future, if Asha decides to stop funding, they will be prepared for it. They do want to be in the same situation as when CRY stopped their funding (2000) of SSA because of their policy changes.



# Site Visit Photographs

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Shanti Sadhana Ashram





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