

Date: 01/12/10

Name of the project: Baikunthapur Tarun Sanga

Name of Volunteer conducting visit: Aritro Sinha Roy

Mrinal Chakrabarty (Not an Asha member)

Was the site visit announced? Yes, but only the night before the visit

Journey from Central Kolkata to BTS

We reached Subhasgram railway station starting from Sealdah station (one of the major train-station in Kolkata) after about an hour of journey by train. Susanta Giri, the project contact for BTS picked us up from there at 7 am in the morning. BTS had recently received a car from Vibha-USA funding and since a road had been established between Sundarbans and the mainland, they took us by that way. We reached BTS-Patha Bhavan at 10 am.

At BTS

We didn't go to the school, BTS-Patha Bhavan directly. Mr. Giri took us to their health-care center first where we met the panchayat pradhan (highest authority of the village council) and people who work in the health-care center. In a brief tour to the center, they showed us their effort to produce *bio-fertilizers* and its use on the land around the center to produce fresh vegetables, work in providing temporary solution to the sanitation issue and of course the facilities (and future plans) in the health-care center. Then we went to the school where we had been greeted with warmth by the students and the teachers of the school. We took a quick tour of different classes after that. The student strength was pretty good in each of the classes and we had some fun interacting with the kids. Some of the students and couple of the teachers were not present as they were preparing for their performance at the panchayat mela (an annual fair organized by the panchayat) which was scheduled on that night.

Then we went to the roof of the building to check the solar panels. It seemed that the system was working fine and Aila didn't damage it at all. Mr. Susanta Giri and Mr. Chitto Giri (the chairperson for the school) then explained their plan to extend the school building. We then went to the damaged part of the school building and it was really in no condition to use. That part of the building was used to cook the mid-day meal for students. Now it had been shifted to a temporary place just outside the campus and that was not very convenient. So, reconstruction of the damaged part of the building seemed essential. We also visited one of the child-care centers that was located within the Patha Bhavan campus. The children were taught using interactive methods over there. Then we had a meeting with the teachers of the school to discuss some of the present issues and the future direction.

One of the distinctive feature of Patha Bhavan is the "joyful learning" as a part of the teaching method. We came back to the school after lunch to see a demonstration of it. Patha Bhavan has classes from preparatory to VI and students from all of these classes

performed in singing, dancing and yoga during a period of almost two hours. We thoroughly enjoyed the performances and came to know that some other schools in neighboring locality were planning to introduce this method of teaching inspired by BTS. There was a student-organized art exhibition which was also a pretty commendable effort.

Parents

Most of the parents are daily wage earners. Sometimes they take up fishing or farming as an alternate source of income. Teachers meet parents by going to their houses. There is a fixed date every month when students born in that month get to celebrate their birthdays in school. The teachers try to maintain a good relationship with students as well as their guardians.

Statistics

1. The school has 14 teachers including 2 females. The teacher's salaries are Rs. 1600 and above based on seniority
2. The school has ~250 students. This number varies from year to year as some of the parents are migratory workers and also due to the political tension arising in that locality in last couple of years
3. The school has one cook and a helper
4. Students pay a monthly fee of Rs. 20

Facilities

1. The school has a computer center
2. It is building up a library from books donated by several organizations
3. Electricity has not reached the locality. But because of the solar panel, the school has electricity in couple of rooms so that at least some of the students can study after dark

Additional activity

BTS participated actively in every post-Aila reconstructive effort in the locality. Among other requirements, land rehabilitation is one of the biggest issues. AID (Association for India's Development) is helping BTS to produce *bio-fertilizers* and to aware the farmers about the efficient use of it to revitalize their land in a faster way. Revathi, an organic farming activist who played a key role in land rehabilitation process in tsunami affected areas of Tamilnadu had been working their along with AID and BTS members to teach farmers the use and benefit of eco-friendly *bio-fertilizers*. We had an opportunity to talk to her and the AID member. Both of them appreciated the effort by BTS.

Suggestions from the site visit

1. Bathroom/ toilet doesn't have adequate water supply. Need to install tube-well in the school campus
2. The light in most of rooms is not very suitable for teaching. A much bigger solar panel is needed for the purpose
3. Aila-affected part of the building needed to be repaired urgently