Asha Darshan
Site Visit Report
12/10/2019 - 12/12/2019

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**Asha Darshan Location and Visit Top Level**

**Major Items**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day 1</th>
<th>Day 2</th>
<th>Day 3</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reached Guwahati by 10AM (Early morning flight from Hyderabad SES visit)</td>
<td>Education Program Visits (AD schools, Government Schools)</td>
<td>Meeting with Block Development office</td>
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<tr>
<td>Met Biju-ji, taken to a safe house in Guwahati due to curfew and protests all over Assam.</td>
<td>Women Empowerment program visits (different AD sites, infrastructure developed)</td>
<td>School Visit (AD school, Government school)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussions, reading through AD accounts, documentation along with another AD volunteer (Nirmala didi and Biju-ji)</td>
<td>Meeting with AD core volunteer team to brainstorm how current process can be improved upon.</td>
<td>Meeting with Women from villages who have progressed through AD programs.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Started for Tamulpur at 10 PM in the night after the curfew was lifted</td>
<td>Brief visit to Bhutan</td>
<td>Left for Guwahati by train in the evening, decided to spend night at airport due to protests.</td>
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</tbody>
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Source: scroll.in
Education Program Background and Update

- There are two types of schools in the areas around where AD works.
  - Assamese Medium
  - Bodo Medium
- There are stark differences between the two language and student from each medium cannot interface with the kids from another.
- AD compliments the government schools where-ever there are gaps in resources.
- For Instance in Nagarpur, there is a govt. school in BM from 1 to 5
  - Therefore AD has BM (6 to 10) and AM (1 to 8)
Education Program Background and Update

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Visited</th>
<th>AD Schools</th>
<th>Government Schools</th>
<th>Road Conditions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nagarpur - AM (1 to 8)</td>
<td>Nagarpur BM (1 to 5)</td>
<td>No Roads</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nagarpur – BM (6 to 10)</td>
<td>Nagarpur High School (8kms)</td>
<td>No Roads</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shimliguri – BM (6 to 8)</td>
<td>Shimliguri - BM (1 to 5)</td>
<td>Good Roads</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Satyanarayanpur – AM (6 to 8)</td>
<td>Shimliguri High School (5kms)</td>
<td>Good Roads</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Satyanarayanpur High School (1kms)</td>
<td>Good Roads</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Mid Day Meal scheme implemented
- Toilets are there but water shortage is a problem (separate toilets for boys and girls)
- No fans, Very limited lights
- Library, sports material, science & math experiments available
- Drinking Water available (limited)
- Difficulty to reach schools during rain due to many rivers, no roads. in the school paths.
- Very efficient de-centralized process where each school maintains its own finances, day to day work flow and school running operations.
- Students clean, dressed up and healthy
- Schools have proper infrastructure (benches, black-boards, study materials)
- Student to teacher ratio good (about 20/25:1)
  - Government schools have poor ratio.
- Teachers mainly from local community or Ex-Asha Darshan students studying correspondence higher education.
Education Program Background and Update

- Students travels either on foot, or riding bicycles.
- Visited on the day of exams, quality of exams very good which also shows the content taught in the class.
- Went through the students and teacher attendance sheets at each school. Accounts are well maintained.
- Schools suffer massive destruction due to heavy rains, flooding, and wild animals (elephants roaming around) – hence need to be repaired each year.
Education Program Background and Update

- Assam government has put a hold since last 5 years to convert any non-formal school to formal school, verified by government school teachers.
- 8 Thousand such applications are waiting the approval process.
Summary Education Program

Positives
• Running Pretty well structured program.
• Biju-ji and her team of volunteers have done tremendous quality work over the years to improve the education system in the area and it shows both quantitative and qualitative results.
• There is a huge respect from the community for the work they have done.

Missing:
• Better learning material will be helpful for school
• More outside specialist teacher training will be helpful for teachers and improve the quality of education imparted in the schools.

Next Steps:
• Engage local government bodies like district BDO, BEO to raise funds and do long term planning. They have not been able to create any sustainable long term solution for the schools. They have tried to work on some models but not successfully.
  • Like last year they organized an annual celebration where DIG was the chief guest to showcase the quality of work which AD is doing but not much came through it in terms of financial relief.
• Create an alumni list of the students who have passed through AD program over the years, find there whereabouts, try to engage them to raise funds, and increase AD visibility to the outside world.
Women Empowerment Program (WEP) 
Background and Update

• AD initially started as a wing of Mahila Shakti Sena, an initiative started by Jay Prakash Narayan in 70’s.
• So empowering the women has always been there key focus area of work
• Key initiatives
  • Mobilizing local women groups to fight social structures of the society
  • Awareness camps regarding women education, health, social norms, participating in the decision making in the households, fighting for their rights etc.
  • In-field trainings on different aspects, travel to different parts of India for various training (NDA camps in North, Khadi trainings in west, leadership trainings in UP etc.)
  • Providing ways of livelihood to women (tailoring, organic farming, handloom, khadi development etc.)
• Micro-finance Program
• There are many more initiatives taken over the year.
Infrastructure Developed for WEP

- A lot of infrastructure has been developed over the years for WEP.
- AD has two properties

- Khadi Center with more than 10 machines for khadi development
- Pukka Roof

- Used for Tailoring, Leadership Skill Center, Awareness Camps etc.
- Lot of material, goods etc. for training
Business Model from WEP

• AD rents a shop on the main India-Bhutan highway for selling the in-house developed khadi products, local tailoring needs etc.
• After taking out expenses (rent, material costs, shop operational running cost, employees salaries), they make in between 1.25-1.5 lakhs each year from it.
• AD volunteers travel to different khadi exhibitions in North-east to sell their products and raise about the same amount as above through it excluding the expenses.

• Government has put together many schemes under which they are supposed to setup these centers both for development and selling.
  • But officials mainly come, put banners, give some financial assistance, some raw materials, take photos and go back.
  • Maybe with time, situation will improve
Business Model from WEP

- Organic Farming is another avenue where AD has been un-successful and a lot of effort and time has not resulted into any tangible financial awards.

- Other than the small fields in above photo, they also have a big farmland (donated by local panchayat body) To AD, where they can actually do farming.
- All the vegetables currently consumed by them are grown in the farms above.
Summary WEP

Positives
• Biju-ji and her team of volunteers have done tremendous work over the years to empower the women in the area and the results can be seen in a lot of different dimensions (self confidence of the women, stature of women in society, social norms, generating livelihood for family etc.)
• There is a huge respect from the community for the work they have done.

Missing:
• The program has not been very well structured and the process is not well defined.
• They just kept on adding and doing things as the time went by rather than building a long term strategy, vision and process of how they want to do that.
• Project in its current form is not Self sustainable.

Next Steps:
• After discussing a lot of options below are the few steps zeroed down which can taken to consolidate work on WEP
  • Invest in Organic Farming
  • Try converting some portion of tailoring center into a restaurant (as it is on main road, there is a potential for a lot of customers) or Motel/PG.
  • Both of these will be taken care by AD volunteers.
  • Improve the quality of khadi shop, put some banners around the main road at few places to publicize it better. Go to more exhibitions, publicize hard work of its volunteers etc.
Ask from Asha SV

• Education Program
  • We can tweak the budget but don’t cut it as it would stop the schools from running.
  • Maybe we can take out the finances supported by central team and try to keep the rest of the budget as it is.

• WEP
  • Enable to improve the problem of water in the area (currently the water comes from Bhutan in pipes for a small duration of day), this is one of the main failure reasons for Farming and will be also needed for restaurant or PG.
    • Work with PSI to build a long term sustainable solution for AD for water issue.
    • AD has a long list of on the ground volunteers which should be able to take up work and sustain it for long term.