

Dear All,

Working with projects in remote villages which volunteers have not been able to visit is quite difficult. In such a case we have to ask the help of our volunteers in India to help us with the evaluation and coordination of our projects in India.

We had requested our volunteers in Varanasi to visit Bharatiya Jan Seva Ashram and give us a better understanding of the social context and a clear idea of how the school is operating.

The report is in four parts:

- 1) Information about the conference call with Vallabh (Varanasi) after his visit to BJSA.
- 2) Minutes of the conference call of Asha Austin volunteers with coordinator of BJSA (Daulat Ram).
- 3) The translated report written by Vallabh and Rajesh.
- 4) Going forward.

1) Minutes of Conference Call with Vallabh (Asha Varanasi) Oct 11, 2005

Attendees: Vallabh (Varanasi), Ravi (Princeton), Sanjeev (Austin), Santosh (Austin) and Gaurav (Austin).

Vallabh and Rajesh conducted the site visit for BJSA on 29th of Sept, 2005. They have prepared a detailed report and sent it to Sundar Kumar Iyer (Kanpur) for translation to English. Here are a few key points regarding the school and the people in the village there from the conversation with Vallabh. More details can be found in the site visit report that follows.

- Daulat Ramji, who is the coordinator of the school also works in the neighbouring 10 villages and helps people in land rights, women issues, panchayati raj, etc.
- The local community consists of dalits and lower caste people. Most of them are laborers working in farms. Some have domesticated animals and others make things like rope for a living.
- The Pradhan of the village is currently from the local community. Earlier the politics was dominated by the upper caste, so most of the relief never reached the most needy. This Pradhan has just been elected and will be in office for five years and is promising change in the next 5 years. He said that the land where the school is, will over time be transferred to BJSA. He says that a hand pump will also be

- installed in the premises. He said that they would also help in building some sort of shelter for the school kids.
- The Asha Varanasi volunteers spoke to the children and found that the children were very good and that the school had been very effective in teaching them. Children were able to answer questions very promptly.
 - The volunteers felt that the children looked well-fed and well-dressed. There was no need for a mid-day meal program.
 - Currently there are two teachers and probably one more is going to join soon. Both of them are new and are currently being paid around Rs. 1000 pm. There were other schools in the surrounding area where the teachers were being paid Rs. 2000 pm. In fact one of the teachers, Raj Bahadur who had been teaching for more than two years recently left to join another school because of the pay difference.
 - The volunteers felt that though the teachers were new, they were quite good. They were of the opinion that training for these teachers would really help them and the students.
 - Most houses there have sewing machines. It is customary to give sewing machines as dowry. But very few women knew how to use them at all. The sewing center has helped the women learn to sew and take care of simple repair work of their own households. They are also able to make small clothes.

2) Conference Call with Daulat Ram

Attendees : Daulat Ram, Sanjeev and Gaurav

This call was made to on 10-23-2005 6:30 pm IST.

Q: Why have none of the items that were suggested been done for the children?

A: We provided what was required to the children who needed it. We have been involved with the community and provided for them in the time of their need. When there was a fire and most of the people in the village lost everything, so we tried to provide for them and all the children.

It is true that we have not been giving anything regularly, only when they needed it. Exposure trip needs to be done, but has not been done yet.

Q: When will it be done?

A: In another month

Q: Where would this trip be?

A: Varanasi.

A: The sewing center did not require rent. We used the funds to support an office that we did not have support for. We also do provide the children activities on important days like 26 jan, 15 aug when we give learning material. We only require the salaries of the teachers. We will manage for the rest. Balmela and exposure trip will happen.

Q: What happens in Balmelas?

A: Events for the children to participate in, games.

Q: What are the other events organized for the children?

A: We have organized writing competition. We have not provided any play material for the children.

We also took the children to participate in the Sarv Shikshya Abhiyaan (SSA) In Lucknow. It is true that the event was organized by many other organizations and not by us, but we helped in organize the trip and arrange for the bus. The children took our a rally and took part in many of the competitions.

Q: What was the rally for?

A: The rally was in support of education for all and for no child to be left behind.

Q: How do the children study without books?

A: The children do have books. We provided for those who could not but the parents provided for the rest.

Q: What is the background of the parents of the children?

A: The children are from SC background. This is the poorest section of the population. Their parents are agricultural laborers.

Q: Who are the teachers now?

A: There are two teachers – Raj Bahadur we transferred to the other school.

Q: Why was he transferred?

A: There was Rs.1000 allocated for each teacher. He was a more of a senior teacher and we were providing him Rs.1500, but decided that we could support him better in another school.

Q: Would moving out senior teachers not effect the education of the children?

A: We didn't think it would effect the children much. He is from the village itself and he does look into it every once in a while. Among the other two teachers

there is one who has been with us for nine months, the other has been with us only for a month.

Q: Where are the other teachers from?

A: One from the same village and one from a different village.

Q: It would have been good if we could be more informed about the needs of the children and the teachers. We would have considered fundraising for it. If he is from the same village, is a good senior teacher who still visits the school when possible, isn't the best solution to keep him at the school with the appropriate pay? Also as the school grows it will be useful to have senior teachers who understand the children to lead by example and provide guidance on keeping up a good program.

A: Yes, that would be the most optimal. But, I was not sure how to convey this to asha/work with asha.

Q: In the other schools coordinated by BJSA (supported by orgs other than asha) the senior teachers are paid Rs. 2000. Why this difference in the school we are running?

A: That is what was sanctioned in the budget.

Q: But, you prepared the budget. We are not at the grassroots to observe and understand the requirements and it is not possible for us to know what the local requirements are. We expect this to come from you and have given you a free hand to work at the grassroots.

A: I did not realize that we are given this kind of freedom.

Q: We don't understand. When did we ever give you an indication otherwise?

A: People who knew some of the asha projects in India said told me that I needed to pay as little as possible otherwise I will not get funded, so I did not put any pay beyond Rs. 1500. I am also always unsure of how much funds have been approved.

Q: Aren't the funds we send exactly what you anticipate in the budget you send?

A: This is true, but it takes a substantial time for the checks to arrive to us in the village and the funds to eventually get realized. The check you mentioned you sent out is still to reach me and it will still take over a month to get realized once I get it. I also don't get information that the budget has been approved I only realize it when I receive the funds, so I'm never really sure how much I should use and how much I should keep for later.

Asha: In future please let us know what is the actual requirements for smooth operation of the school. For our part we will also go over the budget and let you know what exactly we can support.

DR: I will speak to my group and present the information. I think everyone will agree that reinstating Raj Bahadur is the best course of action. We made the decision based on what we understood then.

Q: You had mentioned a fire in the basti. Could you explain what caused the fire?

A: The fire was last April. The fire was caused when one of the households threw out ambers from the choola with the garbage. The weather was very dry and hot and the the garbage caught fire which spread quickly through the village.

Q: Please understand that our motivation is not to grill you it is only to provide the best we can for the children.

A: We would also like to provide the best for the children. It is true that we have not provided as much material as possible, we will never want the children to suffer. We are starting to understand how much you care pay attention to the betterment of the children. We have made mistakes, but we take responsibility and work towards correcting for it.

Q: Do you have any updates for us?

A: We have been working on petitioning for a government school in this area. There are many incentives that the government can provide like mid day meals, clothes, scholarship for each child and this can be very useful for us.

Q: How many children are in the school? If any of the children are integrated into another school please let us know, it is not necessary to continue having them on the rooster just because they are supported. It is not an issue to let us know that a child no longer requires support, this is a good thing.

A: There are 56 children in school. All children in the rooster are in the school. The govt school is not a reality yet.

Q: How often are you able to go to school?

A: In the last year, only once in 3 months or so. We have many programs that we run and I was busy with the coordination of some of the other programs. There is a person Phool Chand who was taking care of coordination of the schools. He has also expressed interest to work on other areas and I will try to go there each month.

Q: We would also like to speak to the teachers and if possible the children going forward.

A: If you let me know when I can call them over to my place.

Q: Please let us know when you will be going to the school and we will call you up then. Let's fix the first Sat of each month and try to work out a time. What are the timings of the school?

A: 10-4.

3) Evaluation Report

Today (Dated 29-9-05) we reached BJSA office located in *Badlapur* at 8:00am. We did not know the location of *Budhnaypur* center, so it was important for us to contact Mr. *Daulat*. We went there without any prior notice. Because of our sudden arrival head of BJSA was a little surprised. We asked for the location of *Budhnaypur* center, and then *Mr. Dalut* sent a worker to guide us the way. *Budhnaypur* is about 14 km away from *Badlapur*, located on *Ghansham* road. This is a big village, in which people of different communities like *Brahmin*, *Kshtriya*, *Khatik*, *Chamar*, *Yadav* etc. resides. This center is being run under a *Neem* tree, in *Harijan* community. Place for the center belongs to people of this community. Whenever rain occurs, children get shelter in nearby huts. There were about 40 students with about equal number of girls and boys, and two teachers were teaching the children sitting in different rows. Class wise distribution of students is given below:-

Class	Boys	Girls	Total	Today's Attendance		
				Boys	Girls	Total
1	10	06	16	06	04	10
2	04	08	12	02	04	06
3	06	10	16	06	06	12
4	08	05	13	08	05	13
Total	28	29	57	22	19	41

After talking to local villagers, we came to know that this center is active from last two years. Government school is 3 km away from this village. There is private school around 500 m from this school, but because of high fees these students are able to go there. In this center children do not pay any fees. This school runs from 10:00 am till 4:00 pm. Villagers told that children are not provided with books or slate. Last year after a fire mishap in *Harijan* community, some of the

families were provided with cloths and books. Villagers are satisfied with this center and are willing to make this center more systematic by providing some nearby space for building shed etc. There are two teachers *Akhilesh and Amarnath* in this center who are local natives. *Amarnath* is teaching since January 2005 and *Akhilesh* since September 2005. Before that *Rajesh and Rajbahadur* were used to teach there. *Rajesh* was elected for *shikshamitra* in December 2004, while *Rajbahadur* was transferred to the center which is controlled by “reha” of the organisation. *Amarnanth* is getting Rs. 1000 per month, but since April he is not receiving it. We talked with children. We had the profile of children who were send through SAC program with us, while talking with some of those students they told that they have not got any educational material. They have arranged books by themselves. They were not taken to any kind of trip or child fair. Also they were not provided with any kind of sports facility. Even then children are willing to come there because teachers teach in a very interesting manner. We questioned many students from which it is clear that their educational level is very good. Teacher told that they have not received anything from the organisation to pass on to students and also children had not gone for any trip. In between former teacher of this school *Rajbahadur* came there, who was a teacher at time when school was established in July 2003. He told that in the first year copies were given to 6-7 children, but after that nothing was provided. Even there is no mat available. There we met *Mr. Phoolchand*, who is working since the establishment of BJSA. He told that all the children were taken to visit *Sarnath (Varanasi) and Lucknow*. But after long cross questioning he admitted the truth. Then we contacted newly elected village head *Mr. Rameshvar Prasad* who lives in the same community. He promised to give full support to this school and took the responsibility of providing space for tin shed. He is satisfied with the school and wishing that children should be given better facilities. At the present time sewing center is not functional. In May center was shifted to some other place. *Mrs. Pramila Devi*, who was the tutor in that center when it was active, told that she had three old sewing machines with which she trained around 50 girls. She used to run that program in her home.

Mrs. Pramila told that girls used to bring their own thread, cloth etc. and pay Rs. 15 per month. *Pramila* was receiving Rs.500 per month. In May that center was shifted to nearby village. We couldn't able to go there, but *Mr. Phoolchand* told that there are 15 girls learning in that center. Tutor in that place is teaching in her own home. For sewing center, money was never needed for paying rent. Local community itself provided place for the center. From this center we returned back to BJSA office. There we described about our evaluation to *Mr. Daulat* and asked him about why children were not taken for a trip or child fair, and provided with books, sports facilities etc. when "*Asha*" was paying money for these activities and where did the budget was used that was allotted for sewing center, where there was no need of rent and also cloth, thread etc. were also arranged by girls on their own. When we asked him about the other activities and sources, we came to know that besides "*Asha*", from other sources they are getting around Rs.10 lac annually. Details are given below:-

S.No	Donator name and address	Aim	Money obtained
1	DAPWH Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi	Public awareness about <i>Panchat raj</i>	2,87,000
2	IGSSS, New Delhi	Territorial rights	2,00,000
3	TDHG (REHA) New Delhi	Child progress	5,77,000
4	VIKALP, Saharanpur(U.P.)	Dalit Development	40,000

Mr. Daulat was trying to protect himself by behaving as if to be ignorant about the truth of *Budhnaypur* center. We gave him the references of the various reports that he send to "*Asha*" and the talks we had with had with *Mr. Phoolchand*, *Mr.*

Rajbahadur, villagers and children. Then he admitted that something has been gone wrong somewhere. He assured to complete all the work that was not done in last year's budget. We gave him a period of three months for the same.

After looking a local situations and educational level etc. we came to the conclusion that *Budhnaypur* center should be kept functional. Even BJSA has done some financial irregularity and children were kept away from the various facilities, teaching work is proceeding honestly. In accordance with the assurance given by *Mr. Daulat*, if all the facilities would be provide to children then after around 6 months, after reevaluating the budget for next year should be decided. After evaluation we find that we should not blindly believe on reports send by organization and should check the physical truth time to time. We request to members of "*Asha*" *Austin* to contact members of "*Asha*" in *Varansi* before taking any decision about BJSA.

Rajesh /Vallabh
29-9-2005
"*Asha*" Varanasi
Mob: 9415256848

Translated by Munish Jassi (Kanpur) 21Oct. 2005

4) Going Forward

From the reports we know that the children are definitely benefiting from the school and the organization (BJSA) has been able to bring about change in the villages it was been working with. Based on the reports, conversations with the projects and discussions at the chapter we believe that we will be in a position to work on the project going forward:

- a. We plan to get Asha India actively involved in conducting further surprise visits to the school and making sure the kids are doing well. Asha India volunteers will also cross check the financials provided by BJSA.
- b. Asha Austin plans to closely follow up with the working of the school. We shall organize monthly conference calls and it will be a good opportunity for the donors to speak to some of the children, the teachers and the coordinator of the school.

- c. Some of our volunteers will be visiting the project in the near future to get first hand information about the workings of the school and people involved in the effort.
- d. Currently we are reviewing the budget of the school and once it is concrete will modify the support-a-child program. It is likely that the support requirement will reduce from \$10/month. Existing donations will allow us to provide support for a longer period of time.