

## **Site visit report by Pooja Sinha (Asha London Volunteer)**

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### **Details of the Project**

The Tapovan Education Foundation ("**Tapovan**") is a charitable institution set up, among others, by Ms. Monika Arora, whom I met on my visit to Delhi in February of 2004.

Tapovan proposes to set up a non-formal, primary level, open-air school in a slum area behind Shipra Sun City at Indrapuram in Ghaziabad, which is a middle-class residential neighbourhood in the suburbs of Delhi (the "**Proposed Project**"). Monika has been active in social work for a period of three years after she quit her job with an MNC to do something more meaningful. With her efforts and the collaboration of an NGO called Rural Multidisciplinary Research Centre ("**RMRC**"), now three schools have been set up in slum areas around Delhi for the non-formal education of children.

I visited one such school located in the slums just behind the high-rise area that is Shipra Sun City. It is pertinent to note that my impressions in this report of the feasibility of the Project etc are largely derived from my impressions of conversations with Monika herself, the children, staff and residents on a planned visit of the *existing school*. The school consists of about four-five standards at the moment (from nursery to standard fourth?) and all the children sit together in open air. There are approximately 70 students at present and about three to four teachers, who are hired from the local area, manage the entire school. The education is non-formal but teaching is done from regular NCERT books, which are provided to the students.

Tapovan wants to set up a school on similar lines in another slum, which is near first (above mentioned) slum but some distance away. The school will only be started formally once a concerted effort had been made over a period of two to three months to arouse children's interest and to make the parents aware of the advantages of enrolling their children to the school. This is usually done by story-telling sessions, group discussions, etc., which was supposed to start by the 10<sup>th</sup> of February and it is likely that this process has already started. Monika and I visited this slum briefly and spoke to a couple of children and parents, who seemed keen to be involved in the education offered by the school, and wanted to know when the school would start.

In this report, I will be relying, to a major extent, on the impression of my visit to the existing school, which will provide a pretty good idea of the feasibility/problems of the proposed project, especially given that they are in the same general area.

### **Fund commitment**

Tapovan is seeking a commitment from Asha Munich to fund the school for a period of one year, which will be an amount of 1,44,000, calculated as per the costs provided in their brochure (please see attached) (*PS-I am not sure if this is the exact amount they have asked you for*).

### **Evaluation**

I would recommend the proposed project for funding based on a review of the following key features:

- **Feasibility of attracting students-** The area is dominated largely by people who have migrated from UP and Bihar. The men generally hold regular jobs and the women work as domestic help in the nearby high rise buildings. While the average monthly income is fairly high (about Rs. 3000-4000), the residents typically do not appreciate the value of education and do not recognize that it will have a beneficial effect on their children. Monika told me that very few parents paid the optional school fee of Rs. 20 per month per child. They prefer their children start earning as soon as possible especially from the domestic work, which is readily available nearby. In fact, there is already an existing government school in the area but the families have made no use of the free education offered there. One of the key tasks of the current school and the Proposed Project is prudently talking to parents to convince them to send their children to the school and get them involved in their child's education. Ensuring regular attendance has been one of the main problems but attitudes to childrens' education have been changing, albeit very slowly. In the existing school, approximately 30% of the children are females (a higher proportion in the lower standards). Encouraging families to send the girl children to the school is and will remain a challenge. Raising people's awareness about education is and will continue to be the foremost challenge. In these circumstances, the model followed by this school (and to be replicated in the Proposed Project), with informal teaching offered right in the heart of their neighbourhood, is probably the best (and the only) way to attempt 100% literacy.
- **Formal education-**At the school I visited, the highest standard was standard four. There were no children who had yet reached a level where they could be sent to the formal education system (typically around standard five or so). However, Monika said that a number of students in the other two schools run by them had successfully made the transition to the formal education system schools and were making excellent progress. As mentioned earlier, while there is a government school nearby, given that the main hurdle is still tackling the awareness level amongst the residents, it is not likely that many parents will allow their children to make the transition to the formal education system though the students themselves showed a great willingness to do so.
- **Attracting teachers-**One recurring problem with the existing school, and most likely will be in the Proposed Project, is the shortage of getting teachers who are ready and willing to work in a slum, even though the school provides a fairly reasonable salary of Rs. 1500-1700 per month. Several residents from the high rises initially made efforts to get involved on a voluntary basis but the enthusiasm soon petered out. Currently, the school has three teachers (two teachers recruited from the nearby areas and one a volunteer college student).

- **Why Tapovan-** One of the questions, that I specifically asked was, why it was necessary to start a new organisation for the proposed school and it could not be undertaken by Monika and her other volunteers, in conjunction with RMRC. She said that the intention of setting up Tapovan was to have an organization that would concentrate exclusively on education as opposed to the wide range of activities aimed at rural empowerment conducted by RMRC. Also, Monika continues to have good relations with RMRC and in fact suggested that if due to some reason, it was not possible for Asha to route funding to Tapovan, you should consider funding RMRC directly.

Of the five members of the board of trustees, two are family members; but an effort has been made to broaden the base by recruiting three outside members, two of whom are educationists.

**Other points-**It does appear that the proposed school is quite heavily dependent on the efforts of Monika and her family members but this should not be problem as they apparently work with a fairly broad and ever-expanding volunteer base.