

**Project** – Aasra Seva Sansthan

**Site Visit Date** – Jan 15<sup>th</sup> 2011

**Site Visit by** – Saurabh Awasthi (Project Coordinator, Philadelphia Chapter)

**Aasra Representatives** – Vallabh Bhai and Ajay Patel

### **Mankaiya Village Educational Centers**

- I visited the educational centers run by the Aasra team in Mankaiya village near Varanasi. The medium school was closed due to the cold weather so I could not meet the children and see them attend classes. However, a small educational center near a Madarsa was being run as per schedule. It was amazing to see the kids braving the cold and studying passionately. An Urdu class was being held, taught by an Aasra team member. Urdu is not taught in the local government schools but the parents want their children to be well versed with Urdu. The classes are held every morning 9am-11am. The class has children between ages 7-14. 50% of these children also attend the primary school in the village.
- I had a chat with the children and asked them whether they enjoyed studying. It was great to hear a unanimous 'yes' as the answer. I also spoke with the parents and requested them to ensure that their children focus their energies on education rather on work activities to support the family. It was great to see the parents appreciating the work done by Aasra in the village. The parents wondered whether Asha would be able to fund a shelter for these classes. Both Vallabh bhai and Ajay appreciated the concern but felt that it was the responsibility of the parents to build the shelter.
- I also visited the government run medium school. Unfortunately, the school does not have any government teachers. Those who were initially appointed have moved to other schools in nearby villages as they get better remuneration there. Consequently, the number of children dropped to less than 60 last year. Aasra recruited three teachers to take classes at the school. These teachers and some other efforts by Aasra helped increase the strength of the school to 103 children. Aasra has also been organizing several extra-curricular activities in the school to engage children in interesting developmental activities. An art competition was recently organized and the participation was impressive. Children enjoyed drawing their interpretation of pollution in India. I was told that some of the portraits were quite artistic and creative.
- The teachers are pursuing B.Ed. and other than taking classes, have taken several initiatives. A good example being the newly implemented "grievance box" to engage children and allow them to put forward their issues, concerns as well as suggestions to improve the school operations.



**Children studying outside a Madarssa in Mankaiyya Village**



**A library run by Asha as part of Aasra Seva Sansthan**

## Amini Village

- Vallabh bhai, Manoj and I went to Amini village where Asha is working with the local laborers to help them understand how they could gain employment through NREGA. A session was held that included several residents of the village including the “Head of Gram Panchayat”, who won the election with some crucial support from Aasra
- The session included several questions from the residents about how they have not been able to get any employment. They blamed the BDO (Block Development Officer) for not creating enough work. They were concerned that if they did not complete 100 days of employment, all the effort would go wasted and their money would lapse after March 2011. Vallabh bhai and Ajay provided several suggestions including submitting a signed petition (see picture below) to the BDO with the signatures from 60 laborers. The petition was submitted on 7<sup>th</sup> September 2010 but the BDO has not taken any action yet. The residents agreed that they would send a reminder and escalate the issue to the DM
- The residents also complained that they were not allowed to open bank accounts (Union Bank of India in Sevapuri) and their applications were torn by a bank representative and some of them were beaten by the guard. Since the NREGA money is transferred to a bank account, the residents were concerned that they would not be able to receive the money even if they completed 100 days of employment, the guaranteed wage-employment time in NREGA. In addition, some of the accepted applications were not processed by the bank. Vallabh bhai suggested that a complaint against the representative and the bank be filed immediately. He also suggested that the residents try to open their accounts in Kashi Gramin Bank, a bank in which residents from other nearby villages have successfully opened accounts
- Vallabh bhai also informed the residents about the latest changes in the NREGA scheme and how the residents need to keep a few important things in mind while working with women. Vallabh bhai also requested them to not involve children below 18 years in the work otherwise there could be serious legal implications
- Both Vallabh bhai and Manoj Patel highlighted the importance of unity and suggested the residents to remain patient while continue to work collaboratively



सेवा मे  
कार्यक्रम अधिकारी / खण्ड विकास अधिकारी  
सेवापुरी  
वाराणसी

विषय: नरेगा के तहत काम का आवेदन

महोदय,

हम सभी मजदूर ग्राम पंचायत ..... अमिनी ..... विकास खण्ड सेवापुरी  
जनपद वाराणसी के पंजीकृत मजदूर हैं। हम सभी मजदूरों को नरेगा एक्ट के  
तहत काम की आवश्यकता है।

कृपया हमें नरेगा एक्ट के तहत 15 दिन के अन्दर काम दे।

काम मांगने की तिथि: ..... 7/9/2015 ..... कुल मजदूर ..... 60

हमारा विवरण निम्न है।

क्रम सं०	नाम मजदूर	पिता/पति का नाम	जॉबकार्ड सं०	हस्ताक्षर
1-	<u>कुल मजदूर</u>	<u>डॉ० जगजित</u>	<u>98556</u>	<u>7/9/2015</u>

Petition by the residents of Amini village requesting employment



An information session on NREGA held by Vallabh bhai and Ajay Patel

### Mushahar Community Village

Finally, we went to Kansraipur, a nearby village where Aasra is working with the local Mushahar community to improve their living conditions. Mushahars are one of the most backward classes in Uttar Pradesh. Aasra has hired a teacher to teach the Mushahar children as they have had trouble attending classes at the local government school. I was told that Mushahar children would often be beaten up by the teachers because of their caste. Most of the children stopped going to the school to avoid such harsh punishments. Although a complaint was filed with the local police station, no action was taken against the teacher. Moreover, Mushahar parents do not appreciate the value of education so it takes a lot of persuasion to request them to let their children study.

In addition to providing education, Ajay ji told me that Aasra has also provided the families with blankets as it is extremely difficult to bear the cold inside thatched huts. Looking at their current situation, I believe a lot of work needs to be done to improve the lives of the Mushahars who live in abject poverty and unhygienic conditions. Aasra continues to provide educational and financial support that's crucial for improving the living conditions of Mushahar families.



**A small class of Mushahar children being taken by an Aasra teacher**