



Children learning the traditional Mullakurumba dance from a Village elder

Vidyodaya School and ASHA RTP Chapter Partnership Proposal for 2026-2027

Background

Educational context

Education is widely recognized as the key to socio-economic mobility and the Constitution of India guarantees every Indian citizen social, economic and political justice, with the vision of a pluralistic, egalitarian society with liberty and equality for all. India has also made universal elementary education a fundamental right with the Right to Education Act 2009, which guarantees free and compulsory education to all the children up to the age of 14 years. India is also committed to the UN SDG goals of equitable, quality education for all (SDG 4,10).

With a population of 10.42 crore, the tribal communities of India account for about 8.6% of the total population of the country (Census, 2011). Even while the Indian state strives to meet this commitment to all the people, the lived realities of the tribal communities present a different picture. While there has been an increase in the school enrolment rates of Adivasi children over the last two decades, low attendance, poor performance and high rates of school discontinuation¹ present a challenge for the attainment of educational outcomes. Educational theorists have observed that the low levels of attainment have to do with the design of the educational processes of school systems, administrative limitations and the psycho-social conditions of the tribal people². On the other hand, tribal communities look up to the formal education system as a way out of their poverty and marginalized living conditions.

The Adivasi communities in Gudalur

The forests of the Western Ghats in and around the Gudalur valley in the Nilgiris district of Tamil Nadu have been home to the Adivasi people of the Bettakurumba, Kattunayakan, Mullakurumba, and Paniya communities for thousands of years. Until the nineteenth century, they largely remained in isolation and exercised full freedom of movement over these territories. With a deep knowledge of the forests, these communities also have a unique world view that emphasizes a culture of interdependence, harmony and an egalitarian ethic. Their traditions, cultural practices and their poems and stories reflect their unique history. When forests began to be used for development and plantations, these communities were displaced and their ways of life were disrupted. Stereotypes about indigenous people resulted in their being discriminated against while accessing education and employment.

Recognized by the Indian Government as Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTG), they are now spread across 320 villages, in Gudalur and Pandalur taluks, some of them deep inside the Mudumalai Tiger Reserve. To address these challenges and to enable the communities in negotiating the world, while retaining their cultural roots, the Adivasi Munnetra Sangam (AMS) was formed as a collective in 1988. This collective represents over 20,000 adivasis from the Bettakurumba, Kattunayakan, Mullakurumba, and Paniya communities. The vision of AMS has been to improve the quality of living for Adivasis through a focus on health, education, community organization, and livelihood in a way that enabled the community to move towards autonomy and self-reliance.

¹ The percentage of children discontinuing school shows a marked increase at grades 5 and 6 and increases steadily up to Grade 10, with nearly one-third of children dropping out in Grade 10. (Looking inward, looking forward, TESF, 2023)

² A humane approach to designing a school in and for tribal communities (Voices of Teachers and Teacher Educators, 2019)

Our model of education

The Viswa Bharati Vidyodaya Trust (VBVT) was founded in 1993, as a response to the collective aspiration of the communities to have a culturally responsive learning system, which would affirm their values, language and traditions and equip them with skills to participate meaningfully in today's society. Our theory of change situates the community and the village at the centre, emphasizing participatory decision-making and ownership of all the programs, taking an integrated approach to the overall development of the community, while affirming their lived experiences.

Designed keeping the community ownership and the lived realities of the people in mind, the education ecosystem for the Adivasi community is broadly along three dimensions:

1. an inclusive and empowering school³ that affirms the culture and identity of the Adivasi children while introducing academic learning
2. community education centres for strengthening villages as sites for learning and enabling the supporting the to take ownership over their children's learning
3. a teacher education program for developing people from the local community, as empathetic and skilled teachers

Core principles of our model of education

- Education for the Adivasi communities is about reclaiming their space and identity and is part of a larger arc of transformation, led by the community, towards their future.
- Recognizing and strengthening the role of the community in their own educational journey – building agency and strengthening their voice
- A contextual curriculum blending foundational academic learning with traditional Adivasi knowledge and culture, including the geography, history, and oral traditions of the Adivasi communities
- Creating a model of teacher education and curricular support that can be adapted to the resource-constrained and underprivileged regions of the country
- Creating and strengthening linkages between VBVT and the larger education ecosystem to enable successful completion of schooling by the children

Community ownership of education

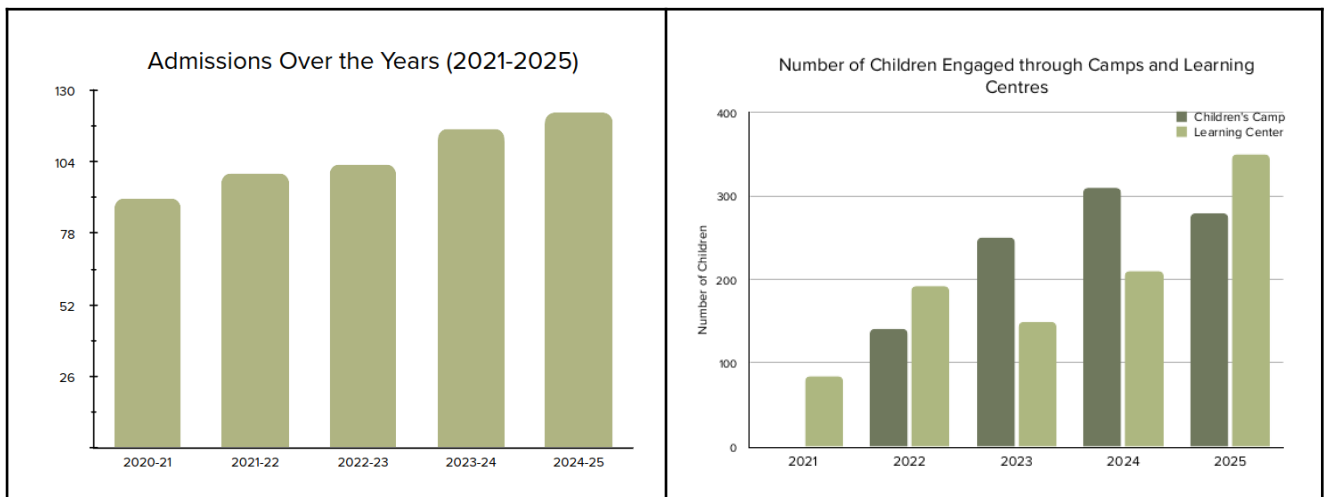
Community participation is the foundation on which all our programs are built.

- The steady rise in admissions over the past five years reflects the deepening trust that Adivasi families place in Vidyodaya's approach to education. The demand for admissions from the same set of villages reflects the strength of Vidyodaya's long-standing relationships with families and the continued trust they place in the school, while the sustained presence of Adivasi teachers at the heart of the teaching team strengthens its cultural and pedagogical integrity.
- In parallel, the participation in our community education centres has also been increasing steadily, reflecting the willingness and readiness of the community to be active participants in learning. With the youth from the villages leading these centres, they model democratic

³ In the first decade after beginning in 1995, we had students with us all the way to Grade 10; post the implementation of the RTE, we have registered ourselves as a primary school with nursery classes attached

learning in action - children and youth learning to speak up, take initiative and collaborate across generations on issues that matter to their lives and communities.

- Over the 30 years of its work, VBVT has trained several youth from the community to become teachers on various aspects including imparting necessary content knowledge, introducing methodologies of teaching, integrating Adivasi cultural practices with the school curriculum. During the last two years, a sensitization program was developed for building skills, attitudes and mindsets among the youth from the communities to become inclusive and competent educators.



Engagement with ASHA RTP Chapter

Among our programmes, our engagement with ASHA RTP Chapter has been specifically towards our Vidyodaya Adivasi School.

Key Progress in 2025-26

As we began the academic year 2025-2026, we looked closely at the areas that could help strengthen our school. From the conversation 4 areas emerged as our main priorities,

- Teachers' learning and development and School Leadership
- Curriculum and learning resource building (crafts, social studies and sciences)
- Strengthening Library space and Practices.
- Partnership with Parents

We are happy to share that through collective efforts from each team member, we could achieve significant improvements across all focus areas.

Teachers' learning and development and School leadership

Our learning and reflection spaces, where teachers come together in smaller groups to share challenges, exchange ideas, and support one another, have taken on a newer and more intensive form. Based on the needs that emerged from these spaces, and to support teachers who are new to the classroom after their training, we developed an in-service teacher training program. In this program, teachers with over 20 years of experience in the school, as well as subject matter experts, guide and mentor those who have recently joined and have limited teaching experience.

Alongside this, to expose teachers to diverse teaching approaches and innovative classroom practices, and to share and learn from each other's experiences, we sent them for **month-long internships at other alternative schools**, such as the Centre for Learning in Bangalore and Marudham Farm School.

Photo: Viji (Trainee) observing a library session at Center for Learning, Bangalore.



Towards strengthening curriculum and learning resources

We continued to strengthen our Social Studies curriculum, focusing on developing observation, analysis, reflection, and expression skills. Students engaged deeply with the content through contextual learning, field trips, model building, creation-based activities, and interactive classroom discussions. We also made sure that we refined it continuously based on the reflections from our classroom experiences.

This year, we also began **revamping Science, Maths, and Craft curricula, incorporating teaching approaches and practices** that enhance learning. Alongside existing crafts like bead chains, string art, and macrame, we have restarted our carpentry batch after a few years, where students started to make items like wooden spatula and boxes.

Photo: Children analysing historical artifacts and forming hypotheses.



Strengthening Library space and Practices

Over the past year, we have focused on strengthening our Library space, enriching the collection and introducing a variety of activities (*that go beyond the traditional library hour*), that spark **children's imagination, creativity, and confidence in reading and expression**. Alongside Viji, we are excited to welcome Manju, who completed the Bookworm Goa Library Mentorship Program this year, as a new facilitator. With more educators joining the team, we look forward to developing the library into an even more vibrant space where children can explore freely, engage deeply with books, contemplate and share their thoughts and ideas.

Partnership with Parents

Vidyodaya has always seen parental engagement as an integral part of school life, with parents participating not just outside the classroom but also in the day-to-day functioning within it. This year, we have continued to strengthen this engagement by creating more opportunities for parents and elders to actively contribute to children's learning. This year's **Adivasi Day theme was Adivasi Knowledge Systems**, and throughout the month, parents and elders came to school to teach traditional dances, songs, and crafts such as chains and pot holders, and led walks to help children identify local medicinal plants. Alongside these contributions, parents supported the school in its operations by contributing towards the stationery of their children, helping children build savings habits through post office accounts, and participating in building and campus maintenance.

Photo: Children learning to make pot holders from grass



Key Priorities for 2026-2027

For this academic year, in addition to our usual programmes in Vidyodaya Adivasi School, we want to continue building on and strengthening these initiatives. A senior educator with strong expertise in curriculum and teacher development will be joining us for the academic year 2026-27 to bring these into reality.

1. Teachers' learning and development: This academic year, we started our in-service professional development program for teachers in English, Maths, and Tamil. The program will continue until the middle of the next academic year, and we plan to extend it further to include Science, Social Studies, Child Psychology, and Philosophy of Education in the following year.
2. Curriculum and learning resource building: We are excited to be expanding the school into a full-fledged higher secondary school over the coming years and have begun taking steps toward this goal. Over the next year, we will design the curriculum for the new grades and pilot it with the batch completing grade 5 this year, ensuring they receive continuous support. To strengthen this process, we are also hiring a resource person with significant experience in similar educational contexts.

Support requested from ASHA RTP Chapter for 2026-2027

Many of the children come from remote villages that are located far from the school, with limited access to reliable public transport. Due to this, travel continues to be a key barrier to regular school attendance. Over the years, the Trust has been supporting and subsidising the transportation cost, as parents are able to contribute only a part of the expense. This support has been crucial in ensuring that children are able to attend school regularly despite challenges such as long distances, difficult terrain, and extended monsoon conditions that affect road access, not to mention wild animals along the route. As the number of children enrolling from different villages continues to increase, the need for sustained travel support has also grown.

We request ASHA RTP to support us towards children's travel, which will help ensure consistent attendance, and enable children to continue their education without disruption. Along with this, we also request your support for the salaries of 3 teachers, who are all from the adivasi community here and have completed our two-year intensive facilitator training program and are currently working as teachers at the school. We have also supported them to complete their post-graduate education and qualify as teachers. Their role is essential for a deeply committed teaching community that ensures there is no attrition. It is the kind of investment that will sustain over the years and strengthen the quality of learning for the children.

Budget for 2026-27

Budget Head	Budget description	Funding required (in INR)
Teachers salary	Covers the salary of 6 teachers	1,032,708
Children' s Travel support	Covers the partial cost of transporting children to and fro from the village to school	5,65,000
Office and Maintenance expenses	Covers the cost of office supplies, building maintenance, and recurring expenses such as electricity and telephone bills	110,000
	Total Proposed support for FY 2026-27 (in INR)	17,07,708