

Asha for Education,

Site visit Report

Project : SES, Hyderabad
For: Asha for Education, Silicon Valley chapter
Date of visit: Aug/20/2012
By: Ashok Naidu (SV volunteer)

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Purpose/Nature of visit: The site visit was conducted for the SV chapter, to assess strategic and operational performance of the school.

Executive Summary:

The site visit conducted during a weekend.

I validated that the school is functioning per SES's operational commitments, including checking the staff sign-in registry. The school operates on a regular basis & has a devoted team of teachers who help teach the curriculum to a high risk population.

SES runs a very tight budget and runs a risk when funds from a single source are either delayed or not sanctioned. While the target population has alternative Government run schools within the vicinity, the quality of such Government establishments is so very inadequate that SES forms the only alternative that fills the vacuum. The Management officers including Mrs and Mr Kanaka Raju are highly credible.

I recommend funding the project with the specific condition that SES manage to find alternative local sources of funding within 3 years.

Description of the visit:

I was in Hyderabad during the festival of Eid-ul-Fitr. It being a holiday in India, I visited Mrs & Mr. Kanakaraju (hereafter referred to as Rajus) at their residence and subsequently drove to the school.

During my conversations with the Rajus, it was pretty evident that they were highly committed to the school. Despite being elderly and unwell, they take personal interest in all aspects of the school. Mrs. Raju informed me about the demographics of the school children, which is primarily at the lower end of the socio economic ladder & who were also first generation learners. Mr. Raju informed me about the nature of funding to the school and the challenges the school faces, due to a shortage of funds or its delay in sanction.

The teachers are a highly committed team of folks. SES recently obtained permission by the local Government to run the school upto SSC or 10th grade. This was an encouraging step in the history of the school.

There is a new Principal Mrs. Lavanya who joined the school this year. She has 10 plus years of experience and is a valuable asset to the Organization. The turnover of teachers over the past three years has been zero. This is a significant achievement of the management, since they have managed to retain the teachers despite having a 20% budget cut. The previous Principal continues to stay on a SES as a teacher, hence getting the new Principal upto speed rather quickly. Mr. Ravi Prameela has joined as a teacher, who was previously a lecturer at the Mehrubia Junior college.

The school is housed in a single storey, with rather tiny classrooms.

I visited the library, which had “very” old books that would deter any child from picking up the books. None of the books looked attractive from the perspective of a child with either pictures or attention grabbing content. Also visited a room, termed the Laboratory. It was dismal, with the barest of instruments or lab equipment.

The school has separate bathrooms for male and female children and it was maintained pretty well with running water. While going through the classes, I randomly picked up the class notebooks in some classes to understand what the kids were learning. The written material was age/class appropriate and there was an increase in complexity/ skills from the first page to the last page that I could quickly leaf through. I had picked up English & Math note books in grades 1,3 and 5.

Mr. Kanakaraju had made arrangements within the school to have the kids/ teachers present for my visit. Since I could not make it into Hyderabad until late Friday evening, I chose to visit the Rajus and the school.

Concerns facing SES:

- a. The Rajus informed me about the dependence on the staff salaries to enable the teachers, support their families. The delay in sending committed funds, creates major havoc to the project and its students/teacher family.
- b. The reduction in budget by 20% in the past, caused the inability to hire teachers.

Recommendations & Observations:

- a. SES heavily depends on a single stream of income (AfE) despite being operational over the past 10 years. This creates a high risk to SES, its teachers and the target population it serves. SES must therefore find local partners and funding sources to enable it to sustain in the long term.
- b. SES, while running a parallel machinery – due to existence of Government schools in its vicinity - needs to exist, since the quality at the Government schools is dismal & it provides much needed value to the community. One of the Government schools was shut down last year due to poor quality. SES must therefore seek Government help in the long run to help sustain itself.

- c. SES is currently running a single shift of classes. In the event there is increased demand for its services, it would have a dual shift classes 7 to 1 pm and 2 to 7 pm, enhancing its presence in the community and possibly showcasing itself as an Operational model of efficiency to the Government.
- d. SES is in dire need of Laboratory equipment and children centric books that would excite the children, thereby developing their reading abilities. AfE could suggest partner agencies in India who could donate some equipment/ books to SES.
- e. SES, while being a NGO and a formal organizational structure – does not have second tier of Management leadership. The Rajus are the driving force behind the school & hence SES runs a risk in the absence of the Rajus. AfE needs to encourage SES to build a second tier of leadership and build their bench strength.
- f. AfE has supported SES over the past 8 years including a WAH event. AfE need to come up with a successful Exit strategy, enabling SES to stand on its own.
- g. SES has the ability to build 3 additional class rooms on the second floor of the adjoining building. However SES rents the space and does not own neither the land nor the buildings. I therefore do NOT recommend supporting additional infrastructure building costs towards these additional class rooms.