

ABHAS Site Visit Report:

Date: 10-11th January, 2010

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Location: Tughlakabad Village, Delhi

Scope (limited to Asha): ABHAS runs several education related initiatives focused on empowering girls, ranging from pre-primary to adult education, in the area. Asha has been funding two of their programs: NIOS classes (for school age girls), and vocational training (for adult women)

Timeline: Asha has been funding them for the past 4 years.

Background:

Tughlakabad village is an urban village – government owned land set on the outskirts of Delhi, it had been settled historically mostly by the Gujjar community. Women in this community still observe the 'purdah' once married. More recently, the village has seen new immigrants set up homes, mostly daily wagers from Bihar and West Bengal. These newcomers mostly rent their premises from the Gujjars. Today, the village can be roughly divided into 14 'mohallas', totaling around 70,000 inhabitants. These 'mohallas' are sub communities, homogeneous in terms on caste and/or profession.

All of ABHAS' initiatives are defined and led by a core team of 6 individuals, all with a background and training in social work. Including other support staff employed on a regular basis by ABHAS, including teachers and paid help, make the total team strength around 30-35.

Activities:

ABHAS has a multi-pronged approach to aiding the diverse community they serve. Some of the activities that Manjusha-ji (one of the core team members) showed me around were:

- Pre-school classes for children in the kabaadi-wala community: Basic language and arithmetic classes for these kids.
- TEACH-Plus: Day care centers for the pre-school age children of daily wage laborers in the community, with some educational element.
- Tuition classes for school going girls in the community: After school remedial classes held with special subject tutors for the girls who go to the nearby government school.
- NIOS classes: Classes taught under the NIOS curriculum. Special instructors bring the students up the required proficiency levels to clear the centralized examinations.
- Vocational training: Classes taught with a focus to making the women in the community capable of economically contributing to the household. Currently, sewing and beautician classes are held.

Of these, the last two are being funded by Asha.

Vocational classes:

- Classes are all held in a set of rooms rented specifically for this purpose, within the community
- Initially suitable tutors from outside the community were identified in order to teach the classes
- The classes are held in small sized batches (5-10 individuals) in fixed duration courses
- Classes mostly taught in a 'show-copy' fashion, where the instructor would show them how to do something right the first time, and the students would try and replicate it, either in class or at

home.

- After a few batches have completed the course, subsequently tutors are also sourced from the successful and interested alumni.
- The classes had all been shut down for a period of a few months (Sep 2009 – Jan 2010), owing to paucity of ready funds. While the funds had been approved by Asha, the money took time to reach them, and the core team decided that the other activities (like NIOS classes) on their roster were of higher priority.
- Students learn enough to start their own small scale businesses in the community, often operating from home.

Sewing:

- No students at the time of site visit, but a few past students had come by, just to talk about their experiences
- One told me about how she now earns some money by sewing basic things like pillow covers etc. for neighbors
- The tutor showed me some advanced designs she had planned on teaching the class – they were talking to some export houses about completing orders for them

Beautician classes:

- A few students in class at the time of site visit
- Training given on basic cosmetic procedures, like henna, facials, manicures, pedicures, hair styling and so on
- Very popular with community, and can become a good source of income – like providing services to neighbors, and at occasions like weddings and parties
- Current tutor has her own business in the community, and comes teaches the class for a few hours during the day
- Course running into problems due to competition from within the community: previous tutor quit, ostensibly because of unreliable income from the classes. She went on to start her own classes in the community, besides running her own beauty salon.

NIOS classes:

- Regular classes held for girls and women of all ages
- Some focus laid on life skills as well, besides NIOS curriculum
- At time of site visit, class on health education (including discussion of maternal care, STDs etc.) was going on
- Accurate and useful information given to students on topics that they would find hard to get elsewhere
- Students also get experience in public speaking, and were noticeably more confident

Notes:

- It appears unlikely that they are going to achieve self-sufficiency easily. Since we have been telling them to look for alternative sources of funding (given that we have funded them for four years now), they have now started applying to funding agencies in India, like the Dorabji Tata fund, and were also exploring some partnership with the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan.
- They have a lot of ideas about other ways to generate money – like the sewing contracts they were exploring, and a jute craft exhibition they were planning – but all of these require significantly more market research and capital investment than they have now.

- Even should they receive funding from other agencies, they were keen that Asha continue funding the fixed recurring costs, such as rent, as they were finding that the proposals they were writing asked for expenses specific to the project and given that their facilities tended to be used for several purposes, it was hard to include these expenses in the applications.
- They have a lot of goodwill in the community, but like in the case of the beautician tutor gone solo, their operations are affected by vested interest groups. They need to find some more better ways of increasing community buy-in and participation.
- With so many projects on the ground being funded by different funding agencies, it is going to be hard to keep the accounts separate and accurate. While some sharing of staff and facilities among these projects was inevitable, Manjusha assured me that the books were being maintained properly.
- Given the number of trained and motivated people they have available, I felt they were spreading themselves somewhat thin with all the projects they were taking on. From my talk with Manjusha about her own personal feelings about ABHAS, who had joined the team around two years back after moving to the city, it sounded like she felt a fair bit of pressure. The core team need better support and guidance in order to avoid burnout, in my opinion.
- I spoke with another lady who had been a teacher involved with one of the projects under ABHAS. She told me that while she was very interested in the work they were doing, she had to stop working there full time, as the pay was not good enough. As she is still looking for a good job, she was volunteering her time with ABHAS – which does say something about the morale of the staff.