

VMD-ASHA REPORT: AUG.'05-JAN.'06 (FINAL REPORT OF THE YEAR)

PREFACE

In accordance with the MOU made on December 6, 2004, between VMD and ASHA-Zurich, I submit this annual report (year 2005-2006) following on my last report sent to ASHA-Zurich in July 2005. After reporting on our activities and reference to the Budget I make my appeal for help again. I hope you will also have the map I sent before you to get the picture of our learning centres.

ACTIVITIES OF THE SUBSEQUENT MONTHS (August 1, 2005 to January 31, 2006)

August 2005:

The monsoons came on although with less intensity this year. Yet the streams both rapid and sporadic slowed down life, dampened firewood, slushed the earth. In mild to heavy showers even getting out of one's little hut would invite a wetting of books, clothes, and the 'flu. Yet teachers and children were regular. But the classes in the Chatipani hillsides showed doubtful attendance – Ugbudya and Navi Ugbudya were under a special “scanner” for performance.

Independence Day, August 15, saw each little class attempt to raise community awareness on issues of the commonweal. For some years now we discuss Independence Day celebrations in terms of peoples' welfare rather than stirring up euphoria for the past glories. In any case our poor masses don't make much sense of the political changes that left them just where they were – at least in their perception.

September 2005:

As the first fruits of the monsoon came in children enjoyed pumpkins, cucumbers, makka, etc.. Fee collection from parents began to pick up since food intake improved. Little excursions with the children could be organized as the rains receded. And with greenery around, with streams clear, the hills and the very air washed and spruced, the Re.1/- per head khitcdi picnics were exquisite.

October 2005:

Post monsoon class checks showed four classes in the red as regards attendance of the children. These were Ambadapada, Roshnipada, Prakashpada and the two Ugbudya classes. Neglect by the teacher of Moida began coming to our notice. Warnings were given both to the teachers and the community about our perceptions and improvements sought.

November 2005:

We decided to restart class in Chatipani rather than carry on a doubtful programme in the Ugbudyas. Master Rajesh showed a good list of 25 learners in Chatipani itself. In the Chatipani vicinity the hamlet of Ramsali asked for educational support since the Govt. “Vasti Shala” teacher had all but ceased coming. We held a meeting of parents who are also members of our savings societies. They promised to pay fees for three months to the teacher to “guarantee” attendance.

December 2005:

Ranejeera saw a dip in numbers. Worse still those who attended had hardly made progress beyond the first picture alphabet chart. Which means attendance of the children in class was poor. Master Bhaya Raila the teacher seemed to be regular. We found that the children also had small houses in neighbouring villages which they

returned to with their parents when post monsoon field work reduced. So we clipped Ranejeera. On the other hand the attendance of girls in Chundi gave them a big majority over the boys – 12 girls to 5 boys! Maybe because Carlibai the women leader whose brown eyes did not find favour with her separated spouse played an assertive role in having girls participate!

January 2005:

The headman of Dabadevi pada in the hills came with Rs.150 as fee arrears to be paid after two years of suspending that class for nonpayment of fees to the teacher: Dilwarsing Jeeksing. He even offered Rs.100 as advance fee to start the class again. It was a great day for our movement. We promptly sent the learning materials by jeep with Muktilal, my able assistant, upto Dabadevi. To our joy we heard reports that neighbouring hamlets seeing Dilwarsing so regularly take his bicycle up the rough roads to his Palaspani class are now asking that a teacher like him should come to their villages as well.

Ongoing Community Development Activities:

1. Regular meetings of the savings and credit societies for men and women (Vishwamandal and Anand Sadan activists)
2. Instruction on and observation of organic farming methods (AFARM Pune technical cell)
3. Periodic shibirs on herbal medicine

Ongoing Educational Development Activities:

1. Audio Visual Productions – a CD on Organic Farming
2. Flip Charts on Women, Organic Farming, Health
3. Trainings for Teachers both from Vishwamandal's centres and other NGOs

Visitors from ASHA Zurich: We were happy to have Andre Urech correspond with us and pay us a visit and look around our classes. We have no photographs which he promised to send us.

FUTURE PERSPECTIVES

We continue to seek collaboration with other NGOs in their field of educational innovation and we continue to search for ways in which education integrate necessary elements of occupational skill building necessary for the poor to persevere in the educational process. To incorporate a utility element for them is indispensable at their level of poverty. We have selected the agricultural field to study and improve and integrate into the educational system. For most tribals here agriculture is the only employment and livelihood opportunity.

We will also explore:

- Alternative sources of energy,
- Environment preservation strategies
- Other possibilities of improving living conditions.

Keep with us!

BUDGET

Referring to Table 1 of the MOU it is stated that ASHA Zurich will support our adivasi children's educational programme with a total contribution of Rs. 3,01,500 towards the costs of running 25 learning centres.

We have received to date two donations amounting to Rs.2,36,420.

*****CLARIFICATION SOUGHT*****

Hence we at Vishwamandal Sevashram have received todate totally the sum of: Rupees Three Lakh, Nine Thousand, Two Hundred and Seventy Six Only (Rs.3,09,276/-).

We request ASHA to send us the balance for the expenditures incurred for the programme.

FUTURE SUPPORT

Your support to this venture is valuable and needed for us to continue this service to poor tribal children and their communities.

Although the government makes attempts to send teachers into the kind of terrain we work in we soon find that the government teachers though better paid do not go regularly to their classes.

We have often been asked to return to hamlets or villages which we had given over to government teachers. The most recent example being the Dabadevi hamlet where people have even paid the teacher's fee in advance.

Our teachers have been active in promoting all round development of the community with special reference to women.

We have linked with other NGOs for agricultural development and issues of food security.

If then ASHA Zurich offers us support for another or further periods of our venture we will be most grateful.

But even with the help you at ASHA Zurich have already given us we have been more than rewarded for the response elicited from the adivasis of the Satpuda foothills in Shirpur, Dhule District.

Hoping you will help to us.

Fr.Godfrey D'Lima (Director)
The Shirpur Vishwa Mandal Sevashram, Shirpur, Dt.Dhule 425405, Maharashtra,
India
Email: vishwamandal@sancharnet.in Phone: 02563 255561
January, 2006

ASHA ZURICH 5-MONTH REPORT

The following five-month report follows the outline emailed (August 14,2005) by Mr.Chidambaram Narayan. I was not able to access the pdf file. If there is more information required please intimate.

THE VSD-ASHA (Z) MOU

The MoU was confirmed on December 12, 2004 by VSD and ASHA (Z). It spells the beginning of a hopefully fruitful (for the adivasi learners involved and their communities) partnership between VSD and ASHA. VSD runs 25 learning centers in the project area of northern Shirpur Taluka, District Dhule, on the Satpuda foothills and unto the higher range itself (see map sent by post). Funds from ASHA (Z) reached VMD on February 24, 2005.

ACTIVITIES OF THE PERIOD (March 1 to July 31, 2005)

March 2005: This being the last month of the academic year ending March 31, 2005, we planned the evaluation of the learning centers with the teacher-activists. Our supervisor Michael Rautela composed evaluation sheets based on teacher-trainings held in Mumbai with inputs from D.Ed. College staff. The teachers were instructed how to administer the evaluations taking into account the different age, aptitude and application of the learners in their centers. The evaluations were held by the supervisors and teachers together over the entire month so as to avoid hurry and have the learners' convenience in mind. The supervisors then tabulated the results of their evaluations. The graded questions that learners had to respond to enabled them to display the variety of learning achievements possible in the context.

April 2005: Community participation was specially assessed in this month. Specifically the contribution in cash and kind of adivasi parents to the education of their children was assessed. The minimum cash contribution of Rs.5 per learner was found to have been paid in most centers. In addition the supervisors and teachers compiled a list of community development activities that took place around the children's learning programme. Among activities promoted were forming credit unions, experiments in organic farming, women's leadership groups, seed bank, health awareness and micro-watersheds.

May 2005: The focus of this month's action was assessing the needs of the last year's learning centers as well as those of new learning centers. Teachers and supervisors visited hamlets and villages in their respective vicinities and held meetings with adivasi communities to assess the number of children who could become potential learners in the new academic year beginning from June 2005. In the case of 10 learning centers (refer to the Map) it was assessed that they would not be able to function further for the following reasons: - 1. The number of children left in these hamlets (Dukanpada, Juni Samryadevi, Khadkipada, Samryadevi, Sakliapada, Kalampada) after those joining Govt. Ashram Shalas had left their homes, or who were going into full time agricultural work, would leave too small a quorum (at least 8-10) for holding the learning programme. 2. In the case of Ambaduk and Chirkanpada there was a lack of common will to cooperate in the programme. 3. With Bhiklapada it was the problem of the backward class/caste community having to send its children to work frequently and irregular running of the class. 4. And in Samryapada the unavailability of a youth to take up the job as teacher stalled the class even though local Govt. teachers requested VMD to restart the learning center as a help to the functioning of the zilha parishad school.

The final list of classes that began to run in June is as follows: -

Name of Village/Learning Centre	Teacher	Number of Learners
1. Vadpura	Rohidas Sursing	18
2. Vahanyapani	Ambaram Munga	15
3. Telyamulya	Ambaram Munga	18
4. Umarpada	Netram Pema	17
5. Navi Ugpudya	Rajesh Pradhan	20
6. Ugbudya	Rajesh Pradhan	19
7. Ambadapada	Virsing Bahadur	12
8. Junapani	Virsing Bahadur	18
9. Chundi	Bhaya Raila	13
10. Ranejeera	Bhaya Raila	12
11. Nimbari	Tarasing Chetram	20
12. Kalapani	Tarasomg Chetram	12
13. Palaspani	Dilwar Zeeksing	14
14. Kadaipani-Jamapada	Bharat Rumalya	16
15. Kadaipani-Kekdiapada	Bhrat Rumalya	16
16. Khajanaik	Sunil Nansing	14
17. Batwa	Sunil Nansing	20
18. Moida	Sardar Bhaila	20
19. Chakachaki	Karamsing Rupsing	16
20. Sevapani	Dilip Kuwarsing	15
21. Kuyakundi	Dilip Kuwarsing	16
22. Shapryapani	Dilip Kuwarsing	15
23. Piprapda	Sampat More	15
24. Mukeshpada	Sampat More	16
25. Roshnipada	Chunnilal Virji	12
26. Prakashpada	Chunnilal Virji	12
27. Bomliapada	Dilip Nanta	20

Note: -

- The location of isolated hamlets makes it impossible for little adivasi children to access a functioning school. Unless they are sent into boardings (Govt.ashram shalas) far from their homes. The apparently smaller numbers of the learners reflect the remoteness of their villages and hamlets from bigger homesteads.
- Payments of the teachers take into account both the number of children and therefore the hours needed per class-day as well as the distance that the teacher has to cover daily to get to his learners.
- Dropouts are not always final. Depending on the agricultural cycles and the migratory patterns of families learners take part or drop out. There's no necessarily final drop out. Hence it is difficult to categorically answer as to how many have finally dropped out.
- Some of our learners have been shifted into Govt. ashram shalas and so continue their formal education. However, it is a questionable education principle to remove children from family environs in the interest of formal education. Our model of education in Shirpur challenges this trend. Little children need their homes. So education must reach out to them and not the other way around.
- You may ask why some names of teachers appear against two or three learning centers. This is because in remote homesteads it is not possible to find suitable teachers to reach a single class for the stipend offered. Hence the same teacher plans his day-long teaching schedule beginning from the morning and taking two hours of teaching time per learning center covers these remote learners.

KEY FEATURES OF THE SHIRPUR VISHWAMANDAL SEVASHRAM MODEL

The VMD (Vishwamandal Sevashram, Dhule) Model of educational assistance to adivasi children is based on the following principles:

1. Principle of Attraction

Children and especially adivasi children must find education attractive. It must make sense to them even at a young age. Because, unlike the case of elite learners, whose education is a system for outcompeting others to claim jobs or seats in institutes of higher learning, the adivasi cannot hope to get employment as a class by virtue of her or his formal education.

Hence it is absurd to discipline the child by force alone to attend any kind of learning activity which might be a strategy necessary for the survival of elite class learners.

The VMD programme offers learning content that adapts to learning capacities of the most remote tribal learner and in a flexible system of attendance using the mother tongue – which is not the State or National Language.

2. Principle of Productive Education

The content of education cannot afford any superfluities of information or complex numeracy. Education must have a life supportive content. This cannot be easily found by just adopting the formal system. Hence we have introduced in the content elements of productive education. Which means perspectives and possible activity on dealing with natural resources (see our flipchart series), human rights, health, agriculture, women's issues. Education begins in classrooms but flows over into community contacts for development of credit societies, organic farming inputs, microwatersheds, etc. Even children can participate in productive education activity through tree planting, vegetable patch gardening, herbal learning, etc.

These activities are important to the VMD learning process.

3. Principle of Community Support

Both the teachers who spearhead this learning process and the local community have to use the maximum of their own resources to further learning. The teachers may not be academics but must make the best of the various training modules VMD offers and develop their abilities even if the stipends may not be matching the Govt. teachers'. Further the community has to make purchases of the individual learning materials of their children and offer to their teacher in the line of "gurudakshina" a stipend in cash or kind for his support.

4. Principle of Multiple Achievements

Learners are capable of different achievements. Some achieve a marked socialization. They grow in confidence to stand in class and speak or recite. They improve their habits of cleanliness. They learn to enter routines and to correlate their efforts with those of other learners. They become familiar with topics that they may later explore further. They learn reading and writing not as the sole obsession of the educational process but as part of many achievements that education furthers. Hence we assess the progress of the class in terms of participation and varied achievement.

5. Principle of Pedagogical WellBeing

The child's home and family is not considered by VMD as hostile to learning. The now popularized perception of sections of the public especially the lobby promoting the Govt. Ashram Shalas has resulted in hundreds of little adivasi children being transported far from home and village to be confined to the shabby environs of ashram shalas, there to be fed free, somewhat clothed, and cursorily looked after. The VMD programme gives primary children a chance to learn from home. To be loved and cared for by their parents. To attend if possible a nearby Govt. school with the support of the VMD learning programme. Since only a minority of adivasi children can get admission to Govt. ashram shalas it is important that

educational facilities are set up in accessible areas to the children. Otherwise they will have no education at all. VMD has demonstrated the possibility of a relatively low cost educational system that can reach nearly 500 adivasi children right where they live. So they can enjoy the well being of a home nurtured child as well as access basic education.

EXPENDITURE STATEMENT

The following expenditure has been incurred under the project from the month of March 2005 to July 2005. (All in Rupees)

Month	Teachers' Stipends	Teaching Aids (Stationery)	Coordinators' Stipend
March	14,500	200	4460
April	14,272	36	4310
May	4,200	835	4380
June	19,790	335	4380
July	19,235	884	4450

Total 71,997 + 2280 + 17,600 = Rs.71,997 + Rs.2280 + Rs.17,600 = Rs.91,877

(Rupees Ninety-One Thousand Eight Hundred and Seventy Seven Only)

Explanation:

1. While ASHA's support was being negotiated after visits by ASHA's representatives we had to ask for other help to incur expenses till as such ASHA's grant came in. This shows in the less than budgeted expenses we have incurred till now
2. Since April marks the end of the academic year 2004-2005 the Teachers' Stipends ("salaries") reflect the old scale we have been paying. From June the stipends reflect an upward revision.
3. The 2 Supervisor's stipends have been included in the item of Teachers' Stipends since they sign as teachers although they do not confine their services to a single class but offer their services to all the classes.
4. I have enlisted the additional services of one more local youth to assist in the task of Coordinator given the spread of the Classes over a range of 35 Kms. (see Map sent by separate post). Hence the Coordinator's stipend has exceeded the allocation.
5. The low expenditure on teaching aids is primarily because the children bought their individual learning materials while the stock of teaching aids that we had before ASHA gave us the first donation did not warrant heavy expenditure on that score yet.
6. I do hope ASHA does not withdraw support even though we have spent less in this period than the budgeted figure.

If ASHA would allow us we would like to make more provision for the travel expenses of our Supervisors and Coordinators in order to reach the far flung learning centers. We would

also like to make a purchase of a Solar electric unit for our training center to ensure electricity in the current national shortage of power.

IN CONCLUSION

We are very grateful to ASHA ZURICH for the powerful and simply conveyed support to our project for the education of poor adivasi children on the Satpuda Range in Shirpur, District Dhule. We endeavour to provide a creative syllabus, profusely illustrated teaching aids, and intense support to the teachers through visits and trainings. We use our educational foothold to draw the village community into small steps of self-development with programmes of organic farming, microwatershed, credit groups and women's initiatives. We appreciate the trust you place in our efforts. May our partnership grow. Thanks to everyone of you who helps us and others like us in children's education unto the least and last!

Fr. Godfrey D'Lima, S.J.
Director
The Shirpur Vishwa Mandal Sevashram
Shirpur Dt. Dhule
425 405
INDIA
PHONE: 02563 2 55561
email: vishwamandal@sancharnet.in

Efforts of the Year 2005

This year sees more progress in our promotion of organic farming. We had the technical help of agriculturists from AFARM, Pune. Nearly 70 farmers took part in the experiments. We hope to increase participation as time goes on since organic methods promise to save soil from the degradation and contamination of chemical fertiliser and pesticide. AFARM also offers 6 of our credit groups (70) further assistance in field bundings, purchase of farm implements, preparation of organic components in farming, etc.. Discussions are underway with village groups as to modalities of the help.

Our children's classes struggle against educational apathy and frustration which mark some rural educational scenarios. 25 learning centres were run for mostly out of school and poor adivasi children. Two teachers secured awards for their children who demonstrated organic farming techniques in a science exhibition.

The adivasi and backward class boys' boarding has a complement of 35 scholars.

Watershed development lacked sufficient funds this year. Though a little got done.

New teaching aids were developed and are being used across 4 districts of western Maharashtra. The latest being a CD on organic farming methods whose cast is totally adivasi. The CD is bilingual with Marathi and Pawara languages.

Our teacher-activists have promoted 4 modest grain banks with local resources alone.

Some social centres in Nashik and Raigad Districts involved us in teacher training and educational planning.

We continue fostering a longstanding tradition of value-based, spiritual associations whose members have withstood great and small life-challenges.

Attention has been paid to the progress of women and girls: tutorials in English for girls, providing girl-boarders with bicycles to enhance self image and confidence, promotion of women's credit unions, helping organize village girls camps.

We are also building rooms (farm house type) for college and IIT boys and our staff. The boys hail from distant villages and need cheap accommodation during studies.

With erratic electric supply it would have been a pace-setter to demonstrate wind and solar energy units. But funds and technology eluded this purpose. We have just a solar lantern functioning!

Negotiations are almost completed for a one-year extension programme of education and village development beginning January 1, 2006, on the Madhya Pradesh side of the border with adivasis of the same Pawara clan. We link with Nandurbar's Janseva Mandal for promotion of herbal medicine.

Novelty doesn't characterise our development efforts. Most of the time it is routine needing creativity and commitment. With God's grace and help from friends we continue our efforts. The people we work with provide the humanscape for meaningful existence no less. That makes life in Shirpur worth it.

Do keep in touch –

Fr. Godfrey D'Lima, S.J.

The Shirpur Vishwa Mandal Sevashram,

Shirpur, Dist. Dhule 425 405, India

email: vishwamandal@sancharnet.in phone: 02563 255561

Applied, Low-Cost Technology for Rural (Specially Adivasi) Communities

- A pilot paper from Fr. Godfrey D'Lima,
Director, The Shirpur Vishwamandal Sevashram

1. Background

The Shirpur Vishwamandal Sevashram works with poor adivasi communities in the areas of nonformal education, small savings and credit, micro-watersheds, organic farming, health and through boardings formal education. These communities inhabit the lower Satpudas on the Maharashtra side of the state boundary with Madhya Pradesh in the Shirpur Taluka, District Dhule. There is a special effort to involve adivasi women in health and development through credit societies.

2. The Need for Applied and Low-Cost Technology

A. The adivasi farmer here is mostly a subsistence producer. I have observed the following obstacles in his/her efforts to improve living conditions:

- Wearing out physical labour (this would be an overall observation on their manual operations)
- scarcity or absence of water resources
- vulnerability of crops to insects
- degraded environment – especially forests
- overdependence on chemical and toxic substances for crop production and protection
- difficulty in accessing adequate credit
- absence of optimal infrastructure to promote development
- a wasteful system of education that hardly equips him/her for earning a living

B. What kind of applied technology would help adivasis in our area to improve living conditions?

- Improvement on farm implements making them more labour saving but at the same time affordable and self-serviceable
- use of solar and wind energy
- use of more organic farming methods
- development of prototype bricks for housebuilding using different soils and agri-surpluses
- irrigation systems that can be both manually and mechanically operated
- access to TV, communications equipment in remote villages
- etc.

With these ideas as a starter I invite interested persons or organizations to get in touch with me at Shirpur for a collaborative venture to assist adivasi communities in their struggle for better food, clothing, medicine, education and other basics for humane living

MEDIA FOR RURAL LEARNING

Universal education is a serious and growing concern cutting across all sections of Indian and world society from struggling Dalits to business tycoons. In rural India, where literacy levels are low we need alternative media to serve educational needs. The effectiveness of such media will depend on their quality of production as well as their relevance of content. Both of which need consistent research and development.

The Shirpur Vishwa Mandal Sevashram, a Jesuit supported Trust, has been experimenting with the development of educational models in tribal communities inhabiting the lower Satpuda Range on the Maharashtra side of the border with Madhya Pradesh. We are working at an educational model that largely includes print illustrations to help tribal learners comprehend better. We struggle in particular with two persisting handicaps of the present educational system. One being that tribals and other sizeable sections of our population cannot cope with the medium of instruction which is not their mother tongue. Secondly the generally irrelevant content does not assure them of a livelihood in future nor improve their occupational skills for present survival. Our model has a long way to develop and must be regarded as a step towards an educational solution.

Other steps need to be taken. Here is where we begin to harness the potential of varied media for rural and especially tribal education. The electronic media despite the erratic power supply – which handicap we intend overcoming with a mobile audio-visual unit – is a useful tool for education even as it entertains. Moreover such media is proliferating through the marketing of cheaper TVs, DVDs and commercial cinema software. Education must utilize this context and reach out to rural audiences that increasingly access electronic media. The nature of audio-visual communication makes it more universal than the print media which confines access to the literate in a specific language. The Indian rural scene reveals more individual mother tongues than the printed media can cope with. Maybe that's why commercial Hindi cinema has bigger audiences and English dominates as the commercial language.

Audio-visuals can be designed for maximum learner outreach. We intend to use them as a complement to the illustrated educational material, including posters, flipcharts, handbooks, etc., which we have been developing.

Production of a Series of 10 Educational Documentary Films

To provide life-supporting information and practical skills for rural and especially tribal learners in this part of Maharashtra we intend producing 10 educational documentaries under the following subjects:-

1. Organic Farming –

Part I: Akho Badli Gayo – 6 lowcost techniques of seed treatment, soil enrichment, insect control. *This has been already produced and has been well received by rural tribals.* In case of the cotton crop this module would relate mainly to premonsoon cultivation.

Part II: Post Monsoon Cultivation: Practical hints for seed treatment in the rabi season, with soil enrichment and insect control additions.

Part III: Vegetable and Fruit Tree Cultivation. The emphasis being on dryland farming practices.

2. Livestock Care: Practices of animal and poultry care. Proper feeding, nourishment. Disease Prevention and Disease Remedies; along with housing of animals and birds. The kind of practices related will be cost efficient and affordable by poor farmers.
3. Traditional Health Practices and Herbal Medicine: Reinforcement of traditional health wisdom. Use of common plants for healing. Simple health preparations. Nutritional food preparations. All this based on low cost and accessible herbs and foods. A non-exotic/elite approach that will showcase what adivasis actually can and sometimes do practice. This will have an effect of improving self-image and fostering greater ecological concern.
4. Grain Banks and Seed Banks: Different ways in which grain banks and seed banks can be organised. Information on the value of propagating traditional seeds. Grain and seed preservation measures.
5. Watershed Development: Different measures of soil and water conservation. Protecting the environment. Advantages gained by watershed development – drinking water, water for animals and irrigation, etc. The linked theme of afforestation.
6. Organising Credit Groups: Simple systematic steps for organizing credit groups of different kinds: monthly collection followed by redistribution and later returning with interest; collecting money and banking it for future need; registering savings groups with government schemes. Building solidarity in such groups through involvement through community service, resisting corrupt influences. Productive use of credit. Accountability. Credit societies as a forum for constructive village development.
7. Building Materials for Rural Housing: Use of sundried mud bricks – advantages to soil fertility. Use of different soils and other biomass for the fabricating of bricks. Technical guidance as to construction – by demonstration of prototype housing alternatives.
8. Alternative Sources of Energy: Better use of firewood fuel (smokeless chulla?). Use of solar heating and solar power, wind power. Models that are workable in poor rural communities.
9. Legal Education: Handling of different land documents; encountering village level Govt. officials; forest officials; relationship with police personnel. Highlighting role of the traditional panch committee in conciliating (settling?) legal and other disputes.
10. Village Panchayat Functioning: Demonstration of proper functioning procedures, democratic processes of election, participation, representation of all sections, attention to duties and responsibilities, place of women in village self government.

These modules should be produced with local actors (real life activists) and using a language that is easy to follow (maybe a simple form of Hindi can be considered in addition to the most widely known tribal language of the area). If possible provision for dubbing into simple Marathi should be considered.

The films themselves will be circulated among village audiences and discussion held for practical implementation. They will be specially effective when the NGO has activists who lead the review of the film and help rural tribal communities concretize their responses. As is the case with Project PALAS of The Shirpur Vishwa Mandal Sevashram. There are also many areas contiguous to Shirpur's tribal habitats which will be able to benefit from such communication tools. Hopefully this will become a major educational enterprise for mass learning of life-supporting syllabus content all over India.

Key Proviso

To make the media production process participatory and not intrusive there is need to hold workshops with the people who's lives will mould and who in turn will be positively affected by the media. Training in different media skills so that local adivasis can take up roles in the production process is a necessary part of the above strategy. Workshops on data collection, script writing, playing on camera roles, etc. would be a necessary concomitant to the media production. Thus the end product will not be an alienating distraction but something that mirrors the soul of and the aspirations of the people who are to benefit from the end product.

Conceptualisation:-

Fr. Godfrey D'Lima, S.J.

The Shirpur Vishwa Mandal Sevashram

Shirpur, Dt. Dhule 425 405

email: vishwamandal@sancharnet.in

October 30, 2005

CONCEPT NOTE ON: MODEL AGRI-TRAINING UNIT FOR TRIBAL AREAS

I CONTEXT OF TRIBAL AGRICULTURE

Adivasi (Tribal) farmers are generally subsistence agriculturists and rank among the poorest sections of Indian society. Their productivity is confined to meeting basic needs of food, clothing, shelter and other minimal consumer items. But even subsistence sufficiency is barely possible for a majority of adivasi communities.

In terms of land holdings some adivasis are revenue land holders, others are considered by the state to be encroachers on forest land, many are seasonal farmers who also migrate for wage earning out of the farming season.

Since a majority of adivasis depend on natural resources like land, forest and water for their survival the preservation and development of these resources is crucial. These resources are being threatened by chemical pollutants, industrial pressures, and undisciplined commercial exploitation. These exploitative technologies are offered by the present market-driven systems which are accessible everywhere.

Market driven systems are pressurizing adivasi agriculturists to invest in expensive and toxic chemical fertilizers and pesticides. Genetically modified seeds with their accompanying technology are invading the markets. These artificial systems both weaken the natural strengths of the soil as well as pollute water resources. They displace traditional agricultural practices and use of time-tested seeds. Besides there is a weakening of the natural cycles through certain technologies. Adivasis cannot afford these costly systems and fall into debt-traps by using them.

With this context in mind the present project aims at setting up MODEL ORGANIC-AGRICULTURE TRAINING UNITS (MOTU) to re-introduce organic and sustainable agricultural technologies. These technologies will draw on traditional agricultural practice as well as innovations in the field. They will not only arrest polluting and resource degrading technologies but more positively help adivasi agriculture to become pollution-free, productive, profitable.

II MODEL ORGANIC-AGRICULTURE TRAINING UNITS (MOTU)

MOTU is a vital need in adivasi agricultural development. It consists of a chain of agricultural demonstration units set up with the active support of area NGOs to:

- showcase affordable organic farming possibilities
- find concrete solutions to local adivasi farming problems
- make available developing organic technologies that market forces discriminate against.

POINT OF DEPARTURE

Unlike certain projects that give farmers financial inducements to adopt a particular agricultural practice MOTU basically is a TRAINING APPROACH that presents CREDIBLE AND AFFORDABLE technologies for poor farmers to: -

- reduce their costs of production through maximum use of renewable organic resources
- improving the sustainable quality of their natural resources
- thereby producing more healthy crops and livestock
- increasing their consumption of adequate and healthy food

- building up marketing potential of organic farm produce surpluses
- MOTU does not give farmers subsidies or donations that in the long run weaken their capacity for self-reliance in farming.
- Rather MOTU offers skills and technology which the farmers themselves can freely choose to adopt, adapt or reject.

III MOTU's WORKINGS

MOTU involves the setting up of nodal training units for agricultural demonstration, for farmers meetings and as a base for village programmes in organic farming.

The nodal training units will be either in plots offered by NGOs for the purpose or by farmers with the clear understanding that the unit will be developed for the common good.

The resource investment in MOTU will consist of expert personnel and a minimum of tools, infrastructure, furniture and fixtures to help hold trainings.

Resource investment will be undertaken by a competent NGO, for instance: AFARM, Pune, under a relevant project, covering a contiguous geographical area, so that the agricultural experiments can be demonstrated in a sufficiently large number of individual farms for maximum impact.

The kind of learning experiment we have been trying out at Shirpur for adivasi children in remote villages covers the following elements of an attempted "Model for Education": -

1. Organisational Framework for Implementation
2. Fixing of Syllabus or Content
3. Developing Teaching-Learning Material
4. Training of Teachers
5. Involvement of Community
6. Attempts at Networking with other NGOs and Government
7. Wider Community Development
8. Fund Raising
9. Evaluation, Course Correction

1. Organizational Framework

We have attempted to simulate the organizational structures of primary education as per the current government school network operated by the zilha parishads.

This approach will give us vital experience in facing problems similar to that of the government educational system and make our strategies realistic and credible.

Which in practice means:

- Operating several learning centres. We manage about 25 learning centres annually in varied terrain most of which is barely accessible
- Having a uniform reference point syllabus
- Fixed timings
- Regular supervisory visits. One of the mainstays of the programme is on the spot checking of functioning
- Mobile resource unit to reach stationery, teaching aids, resource persons to learning centres
- Etc.

However these are the differences between our model and the zilha parishad model:

- we function on a much lower budget
- our teacher-activists are part-time
- we contract to run our learning centres with community contribution or we stop the programme
- we maintain maximum flexibility to include meaningful participation rather than only follow the formal system

Experiences: -

- The greatest challenge of reaching a system of education to poor adivasi tribals is the maintaining of morale among the teachers and the learners.

- Along with morale there is a constant need to innovate and include new experiences for the learner
- Trainings however well conducted do not result in fruitful field implementation without the backup of on the spot field direction to the learning programme.
- Hence the Director and Supervisors endeavour to reach every learning center with the desired regularity necessary to keep the learning network in good functioning.

2. Fixing of Syllabus Content

The syllabus is set up with reference to elements of the formal system but treated as a reference framework always adapting to the availability of the learner and the aptitude of the teacher. Most of our learners are poor farmers' or labourers' children.

Participation is seen as a key achievement.

The overall principle of subject selection is that it must be linked to their interest and their livelihood.

The syllabus includes literacy, general information, health topics, a series of flipchart contents on productive education, songs, stories, games.

The aptitude and availability of the children (and teacher); the teacher's observations; supervisor's and programme director's interactions go into syllabus formulation.

The syllabus is never absolute but is considered a vital reference point for any local development of educational content.

Experiences In Syllabus Building: -

- Syllabus takes up as much as is feasible those topics and approaches that appeal to the learner.
- Syllabus is expressed and communicated through teaching and learning materials.
- There is a powerful imperative to create relevant syllabus or loose the participation of the learner and the community
- The community however tends to be apathetic in articulating what it considers a suitable syllabus based on realizable expectations.
- There is a tension between what the wider and formal syllabus demands and what is actually possible to communicate in the context

3. Developing the Teaching Learning Material or Teaching Aids

- We procure market-available charts
- Design our own charts and produce them locally
- Work with professionals to produce additional material
- Our emphasis has been on picture-illustrated content to reduce the burden on learners from oral-traditional backgrounds
- We use the state language for literacy learning but also encourage use of local language where possible

- For general information, songs, skits, etc. the local language is emphasised. (local language = mother tongue)

Experiences of Developing and Using Teaching Aids

- Teaching aids must be physically manageable in the situation of our learning centers. Logistics of reaching teaching aids to the learning centers, convenient handling, durability and replaceability are taken into account when designing and producing them.
- We have been able to use the creativity of local adivasi youth in developing teaching aids as well as enlist the support of media persons, writers, communicators, in generating teaching aids.
- There is a growing need for both print-illustrated teaching aids as well as electronic media aids.
- We hope to press into service a mobile audio-visual unit.

4. Recruitment and Training of Teachers

- Teachers are recruited from the adivasi communities which have the learning centers. Knowledge of the children's mother tongue is crucial.
- Academic qualifications do not matter as much as willingness to learn while teaching.
- Regularity in teaching and interest in other developmental concerns is a further qualification
- There is an orientation training at the beginning of the academic year (June)
- Monthly trainings and evaluations are held
- Additional topics are also taken up: like organic farming, goat rearing, kitchen gardens, local self government; in special trainings when needed
- When affordable an educational excursion out of Shirpur is undertaken
- There is an emphasis on the teachers' role as community activist even as skills are developed for specific academic competencies.
- Service motivation is a high value in the morale building of the teachers

Experiences with Teachers

- Teachers are best when they decide to learn and teach rather than assume their competence because of academic degrees.
- A teacher who handles the children's learning ably is usually able to further the community development agenda
- Teachers give of their best when the Director and the Supervisors visit the learning centers and offer real help to deal with the challenging task of making an educational system work.

5. Involvement of the Community

The adivasi community is clearly asked to contribute the following if the learning programme is to be started:

- Free classroom space
 - Fee per child in cash or kind from Rs.5 upto Rs.10 per learner
 - Purchase by parents of slates, books, pencils, etc.
 - At times the teacher is even offered a meal besides the above
- Also: The community is encouraged to (and in several cases has) take up other developmental activity promoted by the teacher-activist.
The community must ensure that 70% of the attendance is regular
The community must report on the teachers' attendance
If involvement is not satisfactory the learning programme is withdrawn

Experience with Community Involvement: -

- Poor, adivasi or tribal communities do not automatically opt for the Shikshan Vikas Kendra (SVK) even when there is no other educational opportunity beyond the informal educational impact of home and environment.
- The communities that choose to have the SVK develop interest in other related developmental activity like credit societies, micro watershed, organic farming, health programmes, etc.
- Some communities even after the learning centres have been closed continue to take interest in other developmental programmes.
- While material resources are minimal these tribal communities show extremely dexterous survival abilities.

6. Attempts at Networking with Govt. and other NGOs

Networking efforts with Government

- The Director has met the Block Education Officer at the Taluka level
- The Director has visited the offices of the District Special Education Officer (DPEP)
- The Director has visited the District Education Officer
- Individual Govt. Teachers have been talked to

Networking efforts with Other NGOs

- The Director has conducted trainings for other NGOs
- The Shirpur programme or Shikshan Vikas Kendra experiences have helped other NGOs to set up their own learning systems
- Teaching Aids have been developed and supplied from Shirpur to other interested NGOs.

Experiences of Networking:-

- It is useful to know how other NGOs approach the challenge of educational support to the poor. But we do not have staff and funds to further develop purposeful links with Govt. or other NGOs.

- Each NGO struggles to make a relevant response to the educational challenge but finds it difficult to incorporate the experiences of other NGOs.
- Government has too many preoccupations of polity to show enough flexibility required to use the experiences generated by the local NGO.
- What at least has been achieved is to have knowledge of other NGOs and Government approaches as a reference point for developing the educational programme.

7. Wider Community Development

Thanks to the credible work of teacher-activists the communities have responded to other development initiatives. We take care of this development under Project PALAS (Peoples' Action for Learning and Self-Help). PALAS includes:

- credit societies for men and women
- microwatershed development
- organic farming techniques
- grain banks
- goat rearing

With help from NGOs like AFARM (Pune), AFPRO (Ahmednagar), MPSM (Nashik), etc. these development inputs have resulted in small action programmes periodically initiated.

Experiences in Wider Development: -

- A well accepted learning center is a useful base for other community development action
- The teacher is truly a community activist and enhances his (*since there are through circumstance only male teachers*) role when other community concerns are paid due attention to.
- Development processes have been modest but authentic thanks to the present strategy of teacher to community outreach that is both personalized while being enlightened.

8. Fund Raising

Since we do not have any State help for the programme we look for both Indian and foreign sources of financial help. Besides institutional help from professional funders, church sources, we also gather donations from individuals. Efforts for fund raising are routine.

Experience: -

- We need to mobilize help for our programme continuously.
- We have not been frustrated in our efforts to obtain help.

9. Evaluation

Although we do not embark on any statistical study annually we have an ongoing qualitative assessment of the functioning of the programme. The participation of the learners, teachers and the community is constantly motivated and appraised. Correctives are applied and where necessary the programme has been suspended.

Without ever claiming clinching success we could posit the usefulness of our programme for nearly 400 adivasi learners and their communities on the foothills of the Satpudas.

The Shikshan Vikas Kendra programme as a voluntary organisation's complement to and supplement of the formal educational system, when needed and where positively supported by adivasi communities, and to the extent resources of The Shirpur Vishwamandal Sevashram Trust permit, enters its 15th. Year (2005-6).

10. Ongoing Developments: Our Appeal to You

We have been approached by other NGOs to extend the Shikshan Vikas Kendra programme to their centres. We extend our consultative support to the Raigad District chain of learning centres for Katkari adivasis and also supply some of their teaching learning equipment. In the Nashik District we offer periodic help with teachers' orientations for the educational support of Kokna, Koli and other tribals. Our learning materials are also used in Thane and Nandurbar Districts. From Madhya Pradesh across the Maharashtra border three centres have requested us for extension services. It is only the limitation of our financial and personnel resources that prevent us from doing more in support of education among poor tribal communities.

Hence this statement of our educational strategy or model is also an appeal to you to consider helping us in our commitment to Indian education. In whatever way you decide to help we will put such assistance to the best use possible and make some difference to the times and trends we live in.

I would be happy to hear from you

Fr. Godfrey D'Lima, S.J. (Director)
Shikshan Vikas Kendra
The Shirpur Vishwa Mandal Sevashram
Shirpur, Dt. Dhule 425 405, INDIA

email:- vishwamandal@sancharnet.in

(PS: Our Trust has FCRA permission as well as 80-G for Income Tax Exemption)

PROMOTING SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE WITH ADIVASI FARMERS
IN SHIRPUR
(A Component of the PALAS PROGRAMME)

1. Life Conditions of Adivasi Farmers on Satpuda Foothills

Adivasi farmers on the Satpuda foothills bordering the States of Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh survive on frugal land, water and credit within a subsistence economy. Basic needs like medicine, adequate food, education, clothing, shelter, are barely afforded. Their dependence on market forces for seed, pesticide, makes them vulnerable to expensive credit of moneylenders. Market forces also determine the kind of agriculture they pursue and the prices they receive. These forces are still exploitative with adverse effects on wellbeing of poor farmers. Industrial employment, in far off cities, is not available to the vast majority.

It is important for the survival and wellbeing of the rural poor that new skills and technologies of farming based on traditional sustainable practices are introduced for self-reliant agriculture: increase in affordability, productivity, and protective of natural resources, i.e., Land, Water and Forest.

2. The Promotion of Organic and Sustainable Agriculture

In view of the need to help poor farmers introduce eco-friendly and productive practices, we are inviting the expertise of AFARM (NGO Federation: Action for Agricultural Renewal in Maharashtra), and AFPRO (Resource Unit), to provide the required inputs of information and materials towards sustainable and organic farming. The following activities are being initiated by the experts:

- Seed Treatments with organic cultures
- Developing fertilizer from organic materials
- Production of nontoxic pesticides
- Integrated crop management technology
- Promotion of monsoon vegetable gardens for nutritional needs
- Introducing lowcost technologies for improving labour efficacy

3. Implementation Programme

- Monthly visits by 2 agriculturists from Pune with Field-Visits and Instruction sessions to 5 selected villages.
The visit and instruction costs @ Rs. 2 000 per visit of 2 working days for 12 months. Total cost of field visits and instruction: Rs. 24,000
- Provision of Seed Treatment cultures: 200 packets each of Rhizobium and Azatobacteria @ Rs.10/-. Total Cost: Rs. 4,000
- Plastic bags for seedling preparation: Total Cost Rs. 4,000

- One battery- motorised sprayer (15 litres): Costing Rs. 5,000
- One bicycle treadle pump for demonstration: Costing Rs. 5,000
- One Vermicompost/ Organicompost Unit: Rs. 5,000

Total Cost of the Programme: Rs. 47,000

4. Time Frame and Continuity of the Programme

This programme is being initiated from May 2005 to April 2006 beyond which We will be initiating other experiments in organic farming based on the results of the present venture.

We are also keen on developing micro-watersheds having initiated this activity since the past 5 years but lacking funds to continue.

5. We need your help.....

We request your help to implement this farmers assistance programme with a donation of Rupees Forty-Seven Thousand Only.

We welcome a visit from you and whatever helpful association you may offer towards this vital programme.

Thanks

Fr.Godfrey D'Lima

Director

The Shirpur Vishwa Mandal Sevashram

Shirpur, Dt.Dhule 425 405

Phone 02563 255561

email: vishwamandal@sancharnet.in

VILLAGE WINDOW PROJECT (2005-2006)

Once Upon A Time Again

We helped 20 village tribal teachers last Christmas to improve mobility on sturdy cycles. And fifty village tribal girls learnt cycling in the bargain. Thanks to generous help from persons like you.

This year we want to provide remote tribal hamlets with a "Window" to information and skills to change their lives for the better. The Window will bring them face to face with organic farming techniques, health messages, credit society formation, watershed development, and much more.

We'll use our chain of 25 children's learning centres as fora for the Village Window Project.

Education for Everyone

In each of these centres as well as in other villages we'll 'open a window' which means holding audio-visual programmes for even illiterate villagers to understand since we won't base learning only on the print media. Audio-visual learning includes a recreational element sorely required for hard-worked, manual labourers. Our Village Window will be educationally popular and effective especially for the illiterate – as well as the miniscule lettered!

Village Window/s needs a mobile audio visual unit to take informative and skill building programmes right into remote hamlets. We possess a used jeep. We need a generator, a DVD player, TV, adequate software. And to better logistical challenges even an LCD. But..

Estimated Costs

The estimated cost of this equipment is as follows (from quotations in Shirpur):

1. A Honda Generator – Rs. 15,000 (petrol fuelled since even kerosene disappears at times from the market). We prefer the automatic switch-on model unless advised to the contrary.
2. DVD Player – a good, sturdy, model – Rs.5,000
3. VCDs/DVDs _ a set of 30 educational discs @ Rs.500/- each _ Rs. 15,000
4. TV – 21" flat-screen for Rs.15,000
5. Expenses of diesel, wear and tear of equipment. But we must make a start – now!
6. What if we had an LCD to give the best in media to the poorest tribal

Shirpur and Beyond

We begin the Village Window Project on the Satpuda foothills in northern Maharashtra. We'll share it with Nandurbar District. Enquiries come from along the border of Madhya Pradesh. The market is slowly providing useful software for formal as well as nonformal learning contexts. Hopefully this simple, obvious strategy will lift the burden of learning everywhere in India.

Will you help.....

If you wish to support the **Village Window Project** please send your help (cash, cheque, or equipment) to: -

Fr.Godfrey D'Lima, S.J. (Director)

The Shirpur Vishwa Mandal Sevashram, Shirpur, Dt.Dhule, 425 405

email: vishwamandal@sancharnet.in (FCRA permission and 80-G obtained)