**Site Visit and Evaluation Report**

Of

**Seva Mandir**

For

***Asha for Education***

By

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September 29/30, 2012

Seva Mandir, Udaipur, Rajasthan

1. Chaali Bhilwara Shiksha Kendra (NFE Center)
2. Akhariya na Neda Shiksha Kendra (NFE Center)
3. Undithal Government Upper Middle School Activity Center
4. Pipad Government Upper Middle School Activity Center

***Project Background***

http://www.ashanet.org/projects-new/documents/876/impact\_study\_report.doc

AfE-SV has been supporting Seva Mandir’s education program in entire Badgaon block of Udaipur district since 2007. AfE-SV & Seva Mandir reach over 1400 children in Badgaon block through the following interventions:

1. 20 Non-Formal Education centers also called Shiksha Kendras
2. 5 Activity Centers in government schools
3. Supporting at least 25 children to attend bi-annual seasonal residential learning school

Starting 2009-2010, AfE-SV and Seva Mandir devised a mechanism to improve quality of government schools by creating Acvitity Centers in government schools on pilot basis. Since then the pilot has expanded to 5 government schools sowing remarkable results and allowing for a greater reach to children and influencing a broader segment of children, while improving the institutional capacity of government schools.

***Background***

Seva Mandir is an NGO that has been working in Udaipur/Rajsamaand region for over five decades with objective of rural institution development, sustainable livelihoods, community rights, and empowerment through education. The work of the organization spans entire Udaipur district and has been primarily divided between (a) Natural Resource Development, (b) Education, (c) Health, (d) Women and Child rights, (e) Village Institutions and Panchayati Raj. Education Program of Seva Mandir has been running since 1991, and is broadly divided into the following:

1. Shiksha Kendra or NFE Center for primary/elementary learning for children in villages and hamlets across Udaipur
2. Activity Centers for improving quality of education and building institutional sustenance of government middle/higher secondary schools (started in partnership with AfE-SV)
3. Seasonal residential learning schools or learning camps for tribal, mostly migrant laborer children
4. Teacher training and certification program for capacity building
5. Youth Resource Centers or Uurja Ghar for mobilizing youth and channeling their collective energy into constructive and participatory community building

***Site Visit Background & Objectives***

This site visit was a part if a larger exercise of compiling and documenting the work of Seva Mandir through a photo journal. The overall visit was spread across Gogunga, Pepad and Undithal in Badgaon block, and a day long visit to Jhadol block, which is outside scope of AfE-Seva Mandir relationship. The intent was to study and document the overall work of Seva Mandir beyond just the Badgaon block. This report however only covers the Badgaon block visit.

The site visit started from near Badi lake in Udaipur where I met Seva Mandir education program coordinator, Anjila Jacob and Chandrakala Gehlot, along with and an extension worker Vivek around 8:00AM. The plan was to survey a government school, visit the activity center, and a few NFE centers. Meet the teachers and parents of NFE center in the afternoon and then regroup for a informal session at Seva Mandir’s office the next day.

***Undithal Activity Center***

This is a repeat visit to Undithal center from last year. This is one of the first Activity centers and one of the best performing schools in the block that was started since the conception of the idea in 2009. I have own the instructors since the beginning of this center and a continued dialogue is of much importance to understand how the ground realities and needs are changing.

We reached Undithal school at 9:20 AM and met with the instructors. The school was starting up and we took a survey of the activity center as the children were going through morning prayers and exercise. We entered into an informal chat with the instructors on the progress they have made in last few; how the attendance has risen significantly and resources are now being stretched to limits in some way. The obvious requirement, which seemed like a repeated theme from past few years is the need for more learning aids, books, and material. This is important in light of the fact that AfE-SV has cut-down/reduced funding in teaching aids, and books over last few years due to budgetary pressures. We met into the school headmaster’s office along with the Activity Center instructors, Seva Mandir representatives, and a few schoolteachers. And there was an overwhelming sense appreciation for the activity center and the fact that it has improved the quality of education and student retention tremendously. A deep sense of appreciation of Seva Mandir and Asha for Education was palpable, but we soon entered into the details of overall functioning of the schools in the district and things started to look dismal again. While activity centers are very impressive in concept as well as their functioning, and the overall feedback from the school personnel as well as students is encouraging, and has shown reasonable progress and results in short term. There is a tangible and acute shortfall of teachers in the school. Undithal is one of the best performing schools now and that is working against improving teacher student ratio – the BEO and department of education is not allowing recruitment of teachers in this school because from performance persepective the school is doing well with the given teachers and it is their belief that new recruitments somewhere else might be more useful. It is also important to note that there is a plausible tendency for activity center instructors to act as augmented teaching resource to cover the shortfall, which is against the operating agreement as well as the very objective of running activity centers. It is our belief that is continued, and expanded, this program has a potential to improve the quality of government schools, and therefore attendance and reach of government educational institutions. But, these centers are no replacement for continued engagement of the schools as well as local education departments/bodies.

[observations]

1. Center has two instructors (Jitendra and Madan Singh ) that have been with center for last 3 years., with each trained specifically for working with certain grades of students/classes.
2. Trained by Seva Mandir in activity based learning and alternate education techniques and have graduate degrees
3. Conduct up-to 10 classes everyday for children of different grades
4. Primary focus is on classes 4-10
5. Classes last 45 min each and tuition classes last 2 ½ hour
6. This center has been running since July 2009, instructors go through annual training and attend quarterly meetings with other instructors and NFE center teachers as well.
7. There are a lot of students from children from Seva Manfir NFE center in this school and since 2010 over 60 students have joined this school; the overall impact of seva mandir and AfE work is quite evident here
8. Over 35 students attend after school tuition classes
9. Not all children attend Activity Center though, and the teachers in Activity Center are under some pressure to teach regular class syllabus
10. The instructor noted insufficient learning material at the center, and a need of a computer for higher-grade students. AfE can think about sending a donated computer to this center
11. There are 192 children in Undithal school, out of which roughly 90 are from NFE centers which is a fairly significant number
12. Open learning environment in the activity center makes learning fun and children seemed happy in the moderately sized room
13. Lots of activity learning, including open playground learning using sticks and open recitals and group learning. Students entourage each other rather than competing

***Aanganwaadi***

We made a pit stop at the Chaali village Balwaadi on uor way t the NFE center. Seva Mandir has been running Banwaadi program for young children and infants since last two decades and has proven to be a important intervention in tackling problem of malnutrition amongst children, particularly girl child. A single trained balwaadi worker cares for 18 young kids through the day. Balwaadi provides a safe and open environment for these children and serves breakfast and lunch besides an open environment to play and mingle. At the time of our arrival the children were napping after lunch. I spent some time talking to the balwaadi worker and it was very encouraging to know that all balwaadi workers meet on a periodic basis and go through training annually on infant and child care. There seems to be lack of funds for some aspects of the balwaadi and there is little financial assistance for balwaadi program now. There are a variety of central government programs that target this age group and target segment but never reach interior hamlets and villages where the need is more urgent. It was also important to note that MNREGA has reinforced the need of balwaadi type institutions where both parents work on daily wages in the field with no durable place for young children except on the work site. It became apparent that what is a norm in the cities and urban areas of young children in/around construction site is now penetrating the village environment as well. MNREGA is changing and affecting the social structures in much deeper manner than is generally visible or assumed.

***Kadiya and Chaali NFE Center***

Chaali NFE center was the next stop, and we arrived around 2:30 PM through a unpaved road off-of the newly constructed express way that connects Udaipur to Ahmedabad. Its always interesting to note how access to the people living in villages doesn’t change while the connectivity to urban centers at expense of the farm land that these very people once owned keeps expanding. Nonetheless, we moved to revisit the Chaali center instructor whom I’ve been in touch with since 2009.

There were three small groups running in parallel in a large hall inside the community building. The community building continues to houses a kerosene & PDS distribution facility, that despite my past three years of requesting and advising hasn’t moved. However, the PDS center only opens after NFE center hours or over weekends, and a brick structure now separated the storage from classrooms. Overall functioning is quite impressive and Tej Singh an old time instructor is still there and going strong. The facility has good supply of material and books and the center has 31 children in attendance.

As we spent time observing, and talking to children, I noted Tek Singh picking up a box of chalk [used to write on blackboard] and distributed pieces to a group of children. Whilst the intent and purpose of ding so was noble, his method of doing so was a little unpalatable. Tej Singh essentially threw pieces of chalk amongst a group of children who quickly tried and grabbed as many as they would and would proceed to stuff them into their pockets of bags. I understood that Tej Singh didn’t really mean it that way and was perhaps stretched with 31 children and three groups, but, I thought it’ll ge good for us to quickly and informally talk about it. So after about 30 min, Tej Singh, Chandrakala Ji and I met outside the school. I noted to him that perhaps throwing chalks towards a group is not a good practice and there can be easier and different way of doing so. Tej Singh ji noted that kids tend to hoard chalk and the supplies run out rather quickly so he only distributes a few to the group himself. After a few minutes of conversation, I suggested that as an experiment, each group should get a box full of chalk every day that is kept in full pubic view and any kid can take as many and as often he/she wants it. The intent was to establish that chalk belongs to everybody and is in limited supply, if it runs out it runs out for everybody and it was everyone best interest to maintains usage. It was based on a belief that hoarding only happens if supply is obscured and controlled, and if the children were put in charge they will self regulate usage. Chandrakala ji agreed that supply of chalk is not a problem at all, and we immediately placed the chalk boxes in the center of the groups who were engrossed in reading/writing exercises. As of writing this report, this practice has been adopted in all NFE centers and I hope that this fosters some good consumption practices amongst children. I’d argue this practice could be of much use in all schools than just an obscure NFE center in tribal Rajasthan.

[observations]

1. 32 enrolled students, and 31 present; Center has a single instructor, Tej Singh, who has been with Seva Mandir and this center since 2003.
2. Well stocked with books, stationary, and charts, posters. A stock of teaching material kept in the community center under the community watch.
3. The center has a mandatory attendance register that had average 31 students attending regularly. The center also maintains a record of when the last log was collected by the block coordinator
4. Center runs from July-June cycle and has children of 6-14 age-group; students are divided into 3 groups by learning levels according to evaluation levels
5. The center is a part of MIT-PAL/Seva Mandir Camera Monitoring intervention project (where children take a picture of the running class through a digital camera to catalogue presence teacher and students)
6. Monthly parent/teacher meetings with a register of past meeting participants
7. Parents are very supportive of the school and gram samuh allocate funds from the village fund for maintenance and stationary as-needed
8. Children seemed happy and excited to be in the school although we might have caused some part of the excitement
9. English as a alternate language is also thought in the center, and this was the first center in which this program was implemented
10. 11 students from this center have graduated to government school last year; this center is phenomenal in graduating students into mainstream schools
11. Excellent parent teacher interactions and larger support system Seva mandir has built in the village helps bringing more children the center.