

## **1. Detail of the reading program and the science program. I'd personally like to have more details on each of the programs**

The reading program: It basically works like this. Every kid in the class is classified into one of the five levels, which I will explain shortly, based on their reading capabilities. This happens at the beginning of the program.

1st level - alphabet recognition

2nd level - reading words

3rd level - reading sentences

4th level - recognize what sentences mean and under the logic behind them.

5th level - read an entire story and explain it to other kids

There will be a basket with different Tamil characters and words cut on separate paper. The basket also contains simple sentences cut in a different paper. These sentences together form a simple story. They are jumbled and given to the kids. Kids have to read each sentence, understand the logical flow and arrange them to form the story. In all these steps, kids have to read it to another kid and not to the teacher. They have interesting stories printed out on colorful sheets and pictures just to create enthusiasm in the kids to read it out.

Once the classification is done, there will be a 1 - 2 hr session of level-specific activities daily. Kids at a particular level will try to move onto the next level.

Grading also happens in the same way explained above. Same material is given to kids from class-1 to class-5 but the expectation levels from them are different. Kid's progress will be tracked periodically.

The science program: AID has developed a kit worth Rs 400-500. It contains about 100 experiments which illustrate various aspects of science. It contains simple things like balloons, funnels etc. The volunteers initially train teachers (if necessary) how to demonstrate the experiments to kids.

I can give an example - simple demonstration to show the reflection of light to the kids. The kit contains a small incense stick, a transparent plastic case and a red-light source. The incense stick is lit and kept inside the transparent case. After a while the case will be filled with smoke. Red light is passed through one end of the case. The light gets reflected and its path is seen clearly in the smoke. Numerous examples like this are given in [eurekaeducation.net](http://eurekaeducation.net). Each demonstration is aimed at making the kids understand different physics principles.

When asked what is science, before the start of this program, the kids used to say that it is something related to airplanes, rockets etc. Now, after the introduction of this program, they started to think that science is everywhere and it is a part of the daily events taking place around them.

**The library program:** Half of the libraries are in the schools and half of them are in villages where the access to school is limited. There is also another classification in them. One where the kids just read and the other which involves no reading of books. They motivate kids to participate in story-writing, drawing, dance competitions etc. Kids who are performing well at a block level are selected to participate in competitions at a district level and those who are performing good at district level are selected to compete at a state-level competitions. Recently, kids have taken part in a dance festival organized by AID. See the media coverage at <http://www.hindu.com/2007/08/01/stories/2007080158820200.htm> and <http://www.hindu.com/2007/08/09/stories/2007080951110200.htm>

**2. How do they get the district to participate (this will be covered in the site visit report)**

**3. What do the aid volunteers & staff do in this particular district especially prior to this program**

**4. What's the role of these 3 people? What's the role for program support and admin?**

The explanation below will answer the above 3 questions.

The districts to work on are chosen based on ASER review report. Those districts which are not performing well with respect to the education standards are chosen (check ASER review reports for 2006). AID volunteer goes to a village, rents a house and stays there for few months. He talks to a lot of people and gets to know that place. He will visit schools and study how teachers are and rank them into A, B and C grades.

**What do these grades mean?**

A - very good and easily susceptible to change

B - not bad and needs some work to change

C - bad and difficult to change

Grade the schools, school management, workers etc based on the above criteria. In the second month, the AID volunteer identifies individuals (3 to 6) who are very interested in bringing a change in the education system. These individuals were also graded based on the above criterion and only the A grade ones are picked. Other criteria in picking them would be - they must be educated and studied at least until 10th or 12th standard. These identified men are sent to Chennai to train them on padippum inikkum program. The training period is usually a week to 10 days. When they are back, they are sent to grade A schools to teach. Now you would wonder why they are allowed to teach in a govt. school where a teacher is already there in a class. This is where the grading system comes into play; he/she will be allowed to teach in the class room along with the teacher, as it is a grade A school. Teaching in the class is also a part of training to the volunteers. This is the time for establishing the connections with the collector. The connections actually go through referrals from one collector to the other. If collector

disagrees initially, they will approach DEO (district educational officer), if he disagrees, they will go to AEO (assistant educational officer). If anyone gives permission to enter schools, these trained volunteers will go ahead and instead of themselves teaching in the class, they start training the teachers in grade A and B schools in using the learning material, how to demonstrate the science experiments, how to create a good learning environment in the class and how to grade the kids periodically. Here the focus is to convert grade B schools into grade A schools and make the grade C schools realize the importance of what these volunteers are doing. The school management is made to understand that the volunteers are doing something in addition to what the teachers are doing and care is taken to ensure that the management never gets an impression that these volunteers are replacing their teaching staff.

Once the results obtained are good, they catch the attention of the collector. If things are improving dramatically, the news will reach higher authorities like education minister etc. This is how they are building reputation. If they have success in some districts, the other collectors will definitely give access to the volunteers in the schools of their districts.

Balaji Sampath has a friend of him working as a collector of one of the districts and that is how the work in the very first district began. Now these programs have already become a part of their curriculum in some districts. If they prove to be promising, the collectors would obviously refer this program to the other district collectors. The very first collector got involved with this program at least two years ago.

There will be district level coordinator who takes care of picking, training the volunteers who eventually go to the schools and train the teachers. These volunteers collect the grading reports of the kids periodically and work on areas (visiting those class rooms more often) where the rate of change is slow.

In the budget proposal, for one block (~ 100 schools, a block is roughly 15kms in radius), three people are allocated for reading program, two for the science program and one for the library program. These are the volunteers visiting the schools and training the teachers. These volunteers work from 9AM in the morning until 8:30PM in the evening. They are paid 2000 Rs out of which Rs.600 will be spent on travelling. The money won't be sufficient but they work because of the lot of respect and recognition they receive. They also take part in developing the kits. They also know how to do group activities with the kids when the teacher doesn't know.

## **5. What is the material?**

The materials for the reading program, the science program are explained in answer to question 1. Most of the creative stuff is created by the AID-US volunteers. They are produced on a mass-scale by the AID volunteers in India. Some of the ideas how to demonstrate the kits are online at [eurekaeducation.net](http://eurekaeducation.net).

## 6. Network - need some details / breakups

Started working in schoolagiri block. We put stage plays etc. It has a good volunteer base. Start science club, start library. We would visit village, talk to the people, talk to youth, talk to adolescent girls. Go to schools and do science exp in 8th std. by that they got in touch with youth etc. Talk about development work and meanwhile they talk about good development work in their village and emphasize with their participation. Regular one day volunteer camp with debate sessions etc...They would interact with other people who would like to do such a volunteer work. Lot of schools already recognized us, the teachers and district educational officer. Based in schools and based in villages. In schools do science experiments, give reading kits and that gives us good interface with the teachers. Our AID team in schoolagiri is very strong team. The second step is to expand it to all blocks. Padippum inikkum gave a chance to interact with the entire teacher staff initially.

Ariveli is a huge literacy movement in 90s. There are a lot of its volunteers, now they are not a part of any movement. Identify NGOs and ARIVELI volunteers. Ask if they are interested in doing volunteering for this.

1. Getting contacts in every block thru local NGOs
2. Approaching ariveli volunteers
3. There would be people who are writers, individuals who are not part of anything, but would like to part of writer network, and found people who could actually spend some time to volunteer

Strong focus in school and equal focus in village as well. 10 blocks - 200 to 300 teachers voluntarily want to take up this program. That is one category of volunteers. There are some in the villages who would like to spend some time in improving the learning levels of the kids in their community.

The paid volunteers visit each school at least twice a month. These are trained paid volunteers. The role is to on the field training, block level training, evaluate the program, and conduct surveys at the block level. They also interact with the govt officials to get permission to conduct some special events etc.

As far as I understand, these are the different levels.

- a. District coordinator
- b. AID volunteers who go to different villages to observe/analyze/grade/pick other local volunteers
- c. Identified individuals of a particular village/block who receive training from the AID-Chennai volunteers and visit/train teachers/evaluate the kids

Assistant coordinator, each program has a program coordinator, not a hard and fast rule, but usually he will be there to plan and coordinate. They do a day to day tracking and give the reviews and developments to district coordinator.

For finances, each district coordinator submits a budget proposal to the state team. Also submit a 6 month budget and plan. Evaluates that plan. And every month they keep track if the budget is sufficient or not. Admin person who can submit the budget documents, ensure the money is spent well, give expense docs.

**7. Given that this is already proven effective & the scale, why are they not approaching AIF type BIG orgs, or have they? Details please.**

We are going to approach AIF – We have talked to a few people and will soon submit a proposal to them. But I guess that will come only next year. Gates does only health programs. They did a one time grant that they transferred to Hewlett. I wrote a joint proposal for it along with Pratham – that was a spread out program across 100 districts in the country. But only for the reading components. As it is so thinly spread out, we get a very small share – also because the northern states need a bulk of it. So some of our state level support required comes from this grant through Pratham. (In fact that's why we are able to even run our operations right now – our fund supply currently is very low, but the pratham-hewlett support is covering our current state level costs). We are approaching others as well – but all in starting stages. Last year our program expanded so rapidly that we didn't get any time to think of the future or fund-raising. That was the problem for the current crisis. But I hope this year we will start getting at least some groups to support us in a few districts over a longer time. Asha-Seattle hopefully will be one of them (at least for krishnagiri district)!

**8. What are the roles for program support and admin?**

Program support involves lot of evaluation, documentation, travel, and support for field visits, etc.

Admin involves calling people, sending couriers, taking care of the communication part, handling day to day expenses.

**9. Who are the NGOs in the villages? Examples? They talk about leveraging schools & NGO's etc towards lowering the cost. How is that done? i want to know how the leveraging is happening**

In each block there are lots of NGOs...Very few are working on education, they are self-help groups. It also has lot of forest area, some work in the forests. Most of them are self-help groups. There are some sincere NGOs...You talk to them after work. They have good standing among people. They run 50 libraries in their surroundings etc...They will elect some body responsible for the training. The AID trains them, provides material etc.

Almost all the villages have fan-clubs. Tamil actor fan clubs. They would be interested to do a special reading campaign. They take pride in conducting special events.

**10. How many science experiment kits are given to a school? Is it one kit per school? (From the budget table, it appears that every school will have one kit. please clarify)**

Each school will be given 5 science kits. These are not our 100 experiment kits – these have 35 experiments. 5 kits because then kids can do group activities. UNICEF is already supporting the supply of these kits. We will therefore add some extra materials, booklets and other science experiments – that is the Rs.500. But ensuring the UNICEF funded kits are also used is the key support from Asha for this component. Also a part of the Rs. 500 will be used for supplementing some of the kits and materials in high strength schools, and replacing the broken items. So instead of uniformly supplying one extra kit, it is better to break up the money to provide what is needed extra. If UNICEF did not supply we normally would have asked for Rs.2500 – for 5 kits + extras. Here we are asking only for the extras.

**11. The teachers in the govt. schools are being trained in the classroom by the AID volunteers in various programs - the reading program, science program etc. Since it is very effective and since the government is also involved in the campaign, wouldn't it be a good idea to push the government in eventually incorporating this training program as a part of B.Ed curriculum for the teachers? Has any efforts being taken in this direction?**

Yes – we are hoping that a lot of this training can be incorporated into the B.Ed curriculum. Right now the course is so outdated that it is not funny! But the fellows there are also very closed to new ideas and people – I have been interacting with them quite often. Once some of our ideas actually take shape in the schools, we will be able to push the Teacher training course to change as well. But that will take some time.

**12. The Program Support column in the budget proposal says that Rs.20,000 is required for one block for the entire year. The proposal document also mentions that the district coordinator and other program coordinators (would be 3 co-ords for the 3 programs) for various blocks are working full-time. Rs.20,000 per year is not sufficient for paying the coordinators in a block. Can you please clarify whether these coordinators are paid or not? If yes, where are they included in the budget? If no, can you explain how the aforementioned money is utilized? Who actually takes care of program coordination, travel expenses, training and monitoring etc.? The same question applies to Administration section as well. Rs.5000 is requested for the admin. We understood that he/she is a person who tracks the program expenses and submits budget documents to the district coordinator. Is the money requested for admin sufficient?**

The Rs.20,000 program support is per block. But we won't have one person per block as coordinator. We have 1 person for each district (big districts 2 people) for each program. And one overall coordinator. So we will have 1 dist coord + 1 dist reading coord + 1 dist science coord + 1 dist admin coord. Right now we won't have a math coord – the reading coord will double up for math as the field people are also the same. So we have 4 district people for 10 blocks and we have 2 lakhs for that which is sufficient. Basically this will cover their salaries and Travel. This does not cover the cost of the district in charge (Smitha) but for her we have a separate fellowship that will take care of her.

**13. If any other district runs into financial trouble, will that affect the quality/quantity of materials provided to the district?**

No. The funding for each district will be kept independent. If other districts are in trouble, we will scale the program down in the other district (we are already doing that in Dindigul) - until we get the funds required. But for districts which are well funded, we will not let the lack of funds for other districts affect it. (Except in the sense that when new funding comes we will look for funds for the other districts rather than enhancing quality further in the well funded district).

**14. What are the minimum criteria on the amount of reading materials provided?**

Minimum materials given: The Reading and Math Kit , Reading Cards, Library materials, posters and science kits and District Level Teacher's Story Posters. We will supply whatever materials are required to get the program running - lack of funds will be reflected in reducing the scale a bit or reducing the number of people a bit. It won't reflect on the basic minimum materials that are needed. Of course if we get sufficient money, we will provide a lot more materials to the schools and libraries.

**15. Will we get direct involvement with the district level coordinator? Will he be exclusive for this project or will he be involved in other AID activities as well?**

Yes - you can directly interact with the district coordinator. He will be involved in all the projects for the district. He is exclusive for the district - therefore almost exclusive for this project. Additionally he will be involved in cadre building, training people, motivating them etc - reporting to the state team - which is in a sense also part of this project. But he will also be involved in visiting a few other districts to see how things are going, giving comments etc - exposure visits. But other district coords will do the same for his district. So that can also be seen as part of this district work.

If you are asking whether he is half-time/quarter-time etc on other projects - the answer is no. He is entirely devoted to the overall district education program.

To help you get regular reports from the district, we will have a liaison person in Chennai, with whom you can be in email contact. She will be responsible for sending you regular reports, photos, and informing you about events, plans, additional support required etc. So that will be your main contact person. You can of course contact the district coordinator whenever you want to - but he will typically not be able to get back to you with reports etc regularly as will be busy with organizing. The liaison person will be the best person for regular contact.

**16. How to ensure the sustenance of the project when there are issues/problems with the state-wide coordination team?**

If there is a problem with the State team, the project will definitely suffer. The district can manage the implementation on its own, but not the content and materials. So we need the get the state team to work effectively. But this is not a major problem - we have several people from TV Malai district on the state team and we constantly keep strengthening the state team by getting promising people from districts and training them. So if a few people drop out, we can get others to replace. The core management group is unfortunately not that easy to replace - and one really hopes nothing happens to them! We will keep working on ensuring that the state team is strong. But right now I cannot see how we can insure the district if the state team runs into problems. In the long run, the district team will grow into a strong resource group on its own and will need the state team less and less - but that will still take several years.

**17. We see Government Involvement at some point in time as a critical for the success of this project. What plans are there to ensure the government involvement in the 7 year plan?**

As I was mentioning in the beginning, the Govt is already involved. They may not fund much today, but they are involved in working closely with us. Govt teachers are involved in a very big way. The Chief Education Officer, Dist Elementary Education Officer, ADPC, Block Level Assistant Education Officers, Block Resource Center Supervisors are all being met regularly and we have their strong support for this program. In the long run we also hope to build enough clout and pressure to get most of the funds for the program from the Govt. But involvement is there even currently. To strengthen this, we are planning to start a newsletter system where we get comments and reports from the district officials, teachers etc. We are also planning to get teachers materials printed at a district wide scale and get the officials involved in this as well.