Payir Call (Virtual Site Visit)

Date: 08/21/2023, 9.30-11 pm ET

Attendees:
- Payir: Senthilkumar Gopalan, Founder
- Asha-UFlorida: Anand R, Deepak, Mamta, Ravi, Vishal

Location: Google Meet

Since there has not been a site visit or chapter interaction with the project directly for a while, this call was arranged to touch base with Senthil. Most of the meeting was updates on Payir provided by Senthil, with intermittent questions from the chapter. Due to time zone differences, the chapter was unable to interact with local teachers, volunteers or children associated with Payir.

Government school intervention

- For Govt schools, the goal was to have no child without adult supervision. This led Payir to have an involvement in the government schools, and is currently involved in 15 schools.
- Over the years, acceptance from the administration has improved a lot. Now, Govt provides an incentive (of INR 1000) to have Payir teachers involved in their school

Neighborhood learning center

- Normally, it is an evening tutorial. These are concrete physical spaces available within the village. 350 children are benefitting from this. During covid though, it was the only learning point.
- Teachers come from the same village. They are equipped with appropriate devices. In addition to regular teaching, they have offline videos followed by discussion.
  - Teacher training: They must be able to relate to a child. Most teachers have completed Undergrad. They also have a larger support group in the community and Payir.
- Also partnered with e-vidyaloka, started by Microsoft executives. These are Skype based classes, (now hybrid), covering 6-8th classes. Each day is a 1 hour topic.

Residential training children

- This program is for children aged 6-14 (current count is at 35), who come from difficult family backgrounds, few orphans. They are all migrant or nomadic families. System has failed them. They stay within the Payir campus. This is combined with the Payir school.

Career Guidance

- In 2004, all schools had only until 8th std. Nearest high school was 12 kms away. Currently, there are 4 Higher Secondary, 3 High Schools. The State Education system improved. So the number of children completing 10th and 12th increased exponentially. But after age 17, 85-90% of the children do not have an idea of what to do next. Even a high scoring child couldn’t guide them.
• 2016 - Payir got the idea to get involved in Career Guidance. A friend called Arvind from Coimbatore helped out. They provide guidance on what kind of career options, what does college mean, what to look forward to etc.
• Last 7 years: Guided close to 1000 students, and also talked to parents.
• Data collection: Info available for 6 years, placed close to 300 students into college in 30 courses from Payir’s contacts. 130 children have also been supported financially
• Second set of kids completed undergrad now. Few have taken up Masters

Updates, Challenges

• Post-covid, things are challenging both from a quality and funding perspective. Mobile penetration has changed things, attention span is lower. One of the better things that happened was since our teachers were engaged, they could sense what was happening. Last year(2022) was much better financially.
• During covid year, addiction to drugs with children has changed. Lot of kids are introduced to alcohol even as low as 10-11, Payir has been working on that.
• Another focus area is the way they treat girls, Payir is putting in a lot of focus there.

Overview of non-education aspects

Payir was started with an idea to enable the village and its environment

Health:

• Community health work was the first initiative for Payir. Health aspect drives a lot of other initiatives. Health animators sense the pulse of the village, and then we create programs
• Worked with nutrition of the community.
  ○ Thenur is a drought prone area, one of the most malnourished population
  ○ Supplementing nutrition model was developed, which was eventually to State level

Agriculture:

• Nutrition was related to what people were growing. In the past 3-4 decades, agriculture has been about cash crops, not about sustenance. Payir worked with natural farming, irrigation
• Worked on watersheds. Groundwater is just 20 ft (from 100 ft)
• Most people had only 3-4 professions: farm labor, rearing sheep
  ○ Now people introduced to different livelihoods
  ○ Thoorigai: last year had a turnover of INR 35 lakhs, 15 people. Their products have reached all over India including Titan

Governance: Work with local govt and administration to ensure better services
Alternative sources of funding

- UF Chapter wanted to know funding sources, since the chapter has been low on resources. Chapter may not be able to support the full budget.
- 80-85% comes from individuals and friends. Reason why Payir wanted to make it that way is because a lot of individuals want to contribute who have not been able to help.
- Institutional funding:
  - Asha: 15%
    - Total outlay had been 50 lakhs, Asha gave 14
  - AID, little bit for career guidance
  - CSR (4 companies in last 5 years)
  - Friends of Payir: 30%, formed by friends