

# Site Visit Report

During the year 2014-15, I visited and stayed in Sittling on more than one occasion. The first of these was during the months of June, July and August 2014 when I had undertaken an assignment with Tribal Technology Initiative, one of the activities of Tribal Health Initiative, Sittling. During this time, I was staying in the Thulir campus and witnessed their work in person. I subsequently visited Thulir in September 2014 and again in the first week of April 2015, when I undertook a bicycle tour to Sittling.

## **Activities during 2014-15**

Thulir continued with the regular programs - the after-school program for school going children and other allied activities for them like sports, weekend camps, science camps and organised tours.

### **After-school program**

The after school program continued for the school going children despite a few set backs. First, the school hours in the Government School have been extended to 4:30 PM, giving very little time for the children to spend in Thulir and the effectiveness of the program reduced. Secondly, there is a newly found emphasis on class 10 examination in the Government School leading to the absence of class 10 going children altogether from Thulir.

The programs organised during weekends like science camps, forest walks, sports day attract more students and encourage more interaction with visiting resource persons. The running program continues to be pursued and the students participated in the Auroville Marathon 2015.

### **Pre-School and evolution to a School**

The pre-school program continued with the addition of three more children. Some of these children are likely to become students of the school that is planned to start from next academic year.

## **Initiative to start a School**

Thulir has made rapid strides towards evolving into a formal school. A detailed note on the rationale to move towards a school has been prepared by Anu (please see the annex.). The existing houses in Thulir campus are making their way as classrooms as the team continues to search for a more permanent location. The school will initially feature kindergarten and class 1. The team is working on getting a formal registration and adhering to regulations under the State education system.

## **Staff Update**

Thulir had a new addition to their team with Ravi joining them from June 2014. Ravi holds a B.Ed. qualification which comes handy during the process of applying for formal school. Ravi assists in the evening program and is getting oriented to become a full time teacher with the start of the school. Nikhil continued his stay for another year and finished his tenure with Thulir in March 2015. His assistance in newsletters, evening classes, documenting many activities through his lens was very useful for the team.

In addition, Perumal (brother of Tirthamma, a former student of Thulir) and Mohan have joined as an apprentice. Perumal and Mohan has been asked to leave the Government School as they were not found to be 'fit' by the School authorities to appear for the class 10 examinations. Their daily routine is similar to the routine of students who pursued the basic technology course. They are taught skills in masonry, electronics, organic farming in addition to basic reading and math skills.

## **Meeting with ASHA Volunteers**

On February 1, 2014, Anu and Krishna met ASHA volunteers, Ajay, Neha, Aanchal and Ankush, during their visit to Bengaluru. More detailed meeting notes have been circulated earlier.

## Budget and Realisation

	Note	Budget (Rs.)	Realisation (Rs.)
Salaries	1	2,36,400	2,59,450
Nutrition Program	2	2,05,500	1,71,166
Resource person Expenses	3	35,000	68,141
Exposure Tour	4	30,000	40,005
Travel Expenses		15,000	21,382
Telephone and Communication		12,000	17,916
Vehicle Maintenance		15,000	18,091
Campus Maintenance	5	50,000	63,490
Printing & Stationery		5,000	
Teaching Materials		22,000	9,884
Equipment Maintenance		5,000	4,472
Bank Charges		1,000	200
<b>Total</b>		<b>6,31,900</b>	<b>6,74,197</b>

### Notes

1. The budgeted salaries were for Senthil, Rajamma, Shaktivel and Anjala. Anjala has left Thuir and Ravi had joined (at a higher salary than Anjala).

2. The expenditure on Nutrition program was less than the budget due to the reduced number of students in the last few months for the after-school program. The program was also suspended during the months of March and April.

3. Some of the Resource persons who visited Thulir during the year:

- Vanya and Goutham during the month of June
- Aftab, Max and Santhosh conducted workshop on Raspberry Pi during the month of September
- Stan and Mari from Accord, Gudalur

- Others include routine visits from Prof. Ravindran, Vanaja, Perumal, Ramsubramanian, doctors from THI and teachers from Marudham.

4. The following exposure tours were undertaken during the year (details available in the newsletters from Thulir).

(i) Vidyavanam, Anaikatti, ( only Anu and Krishna),

(ii) Puvidham at Nagarkoodal, Dharmapuri Dt., whole group

(iii) Marudam at Thiruvannamalai (2-3 visits by different people at different times)  
CFL Hyderabad (only Nikhil and Senthil),

(iv) Sita School, Bangalore - 7 of us

(v) Anand Nikethan, Sevagram - all of us

5. The break-up of campus maintenance are as follows:

a. Work on deepening the well last summer- Thulir's share - Rs. 16,000

b. Thatching of roof - Rs. 31,750

c. Lighting repairs and solar panel maintenance - Rs.7300

d. Repair, maintenance and plastering/ whitewashing of buildings - Rs. 8440.

## Annexure

### 1. Newsletters from Thulir

January-March 2015 - <http://www.thulir.org/wp/2015/03/newsletter-jan-march-2015/>

August-December 2014 - <http://www.thulir.org/wp/2015/01/newsletter-aug-dec-2014/>

June-July 2014 - <http://www.thulir.org/wp/2014/08/newsletter-june-july-2014/>

### 2. Initiative to Start a School - By Anu

*Dear friends at Asha,*

*Greetings from Thulir*

*As you know Thulir has been working in Sittilingi for the last eleven years!*

*Around 500 children have benefited from Thulir so far. This includes around 70 students who had opted out of school and were with us full time. Some of them have joined Thulir and the hospital as staff. Many of them are in college. Some are working as masons and electricians.*

*Thulir has also laid emphasis on alternative energy and environmental friendly building. The new operation theatre, nurses' hostels etc. have been built by the youth trained by us.*

*All of this would never have been possible without the support of Asha Princeton and Asha Bangalore all these years. We have had an excellent and smooth relationship all these years with Asha. Many from Asha have become personal friends and we cherish the relationship. A big thank you to all of you.*

*From the very beginning, there were pressures on us to start a full time school. We had been putting off doing that since we did not want to duplicate the government's effort in logistics and administration and we wanted to concentrate on teaching. At that time no teachers would come to the government school. And students would come to us and stay for long hours voluntarily, without compulsion and with enormous eagerness, curiosity and interest to learn.*

*But ironically, now, though more teachers come to the Government School (they are still not adequate or regular) and there are one or two private schools in the*

*nearby small towns, the quality of education has deteriorated badly. There is a heavy emphasis on rote learning and scoring marks. There is virtually no teaching of concepts or understanding. Students are kept there for longer hours writing test after test the whole year. The values transmitted by these schools are even worse. There is a lot of verbal and physical intimidation. Students now are exhausted and drained when they come to us. They have a reluctance to engage seriously in learning or understanding. Many are too tired to come. We find it difficult to function and are not as effective as before. We would be more effective and the children would benefit more if they were with us full time.*

*Working with the government schools has not been easy! There is a yearly turnover of staff there and when the individuals at any point in time are sympathetic or interested, we are able to do many things with the govt. school children. There have been periods when we from Thulir have conducted regular classes and science experiments workshops in the govt. schools. But when the staff are not interested or have other problems, everything stops or becomes extremely difficult. For instance, last year the Panchayat president brought a group of press reporters to Thulir. They were genuinely interested and wrote about Thulir in the Tamil newspaper. But it somehow angered the staff of the local Government School and they stopped the children from coming to Thulir scaring them with a lot of threats. They deliberately sabotaged specific workshops we had organised, by keeping the children back in school for flimsy reasons! Of course, the children started coming back after a month or so, but it is still frustrating!*

*Parents, especially the hospital and Thulir staff, realise the abysmal state of education around and have been increasing the pressure to make Thulir a full time school. We have been having many meetings with the group regarding this. We have now decided that it is time for us to take the plunge....To create a sanctuary for atleast a small group of children to grow, learn and bloom to their full potential in an atmosphere of freedom and goodness taking pride in their adivasi culture and agricultural heritage.*

*With the RTE act and regulations now, starting and running a school is a daunting task but we feel it is inevitable now.*

*The community here also feels strongly that we need to demonstrate what good education is all about so that the govt. will take us seriously. That children can learn happily and freely through play and meaningful activities. They also feel that it will stop people from migrating out in search of good education for their children. More young doctors and others would also shift in to work in Sittilingi if their children's basic education is taken care of.*

*Land for the new school is still being negotiated by the group. We have to then plan and build according to the govt.regulations. That will take time. But we are planning to start with a small group of 20 students in June in our neighbour's house.*

*We have temporarily suspended all our normal activities ( evening classes and teenage programme) and already started on the preparations for the school. Our team is young and being trained on the job. They cannot really multi task. We feel that our complete focus is needed on the school right now if we have to maintain quality. There is no point in spreading ourselves too much and claiming numbers but not doing anything properly. We hope to restart these activities eventually as the school settles down. The two teenagers with us already will continue for another year though. We will also organise running, sports days and such events for the govt. school children.*

*Travelling to and fro to Dharmapuri (our district headquarters) for govt. regulation is going to be log drawn and very difficult and judging from the experiences of other schools, it needs two people on the job for the next two,three years! Identifying, negotiating and buying land is another huge task ahead. We need one person to supervise and manage the construction of the new school.*

*We hope Asha Bangalore could support and hand hold us in this new venture at least for the initial crucial years.*

*Warm wishes,*

*Anu*