

# Sir Ratan Tata Trust

## Study of Four Educational Projects in Madhya Pradesh

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### Introduction

The quality of education being accessed by the majority of our children, but especially those from marginalized communities, is a cause for national concern. Campaigns and policy documents, both national and international, have been emphasizing that school education of a high standard has become an urgent priority: low learning achievement leads to the exclusion of large numbers of people from participation in the excitement of a rapidly developing world,

The Sir Ratan Tata Trust believes that education is a critical requisite and an effective catalyst to spearhead social and economic change in the lives of people, and will be instrumental in eliminating the imbalances that exist in society. In the thematic areas of education, the Trust supports initiatives towards:

- ***Reforming Elementary Education***

It focuses on supporting interventions that address some of the critical gaps in the field of elementary education. The thrust is on supporting on good quality field projects that address issues of quality of education partnership with the government and the community. It also undertakes initiatives to address neglected areas in elementary education, like professional development of teachers, curriculum development, publication and dissemination of books/educational material in regional languages for children as well as teacher/practitioners among others.

- ***Nurturing Elementary Education as a Discipline***

Under this theme, the Trust supports educational research, linking higher education with elementary education through collaborative networks, fellowships and research with a cross-cutting concern of professionalizing elementary education.

- ***Building Institutional Resource in Education***

The Trust has supported Institutional Development in the area of elementary and higher education and provides strategic support to institutions of higher learning and institutional support to alternative and heritage schools.

Grants may be a drop in the ocean of overall educational funding, but they are the best hope for creativity and reforms. Grant money can be deployed for innovative experiments that are difficult to measure and initiatives for which governments are unable to bend rules and provide resources. Where they can, the delivery mechanism is painstakingly slow, unreliable and bound in red tape. National and State level programmes evolve macro plans toward meeting the goals of Education for All, but poor delivery mechanisms are unable to ensure that the benefits reach all sections of society and in the process the most vulnerable, voiceless groups are left out of the range of institutional vision. If education has to respond to the historical, cultural and linguistic diversity of the country, an effective system of extending support where the government has proved to be dysfunctional has to be evolved which is based on the principle of collaboration and not parallel systems. It is in this context that community/grassroot organizations play a vital role in providing the spread into difficult-to-reach areas of society, depending heavily on private funding for their initiatives.

Changes in government beliefs regarding NGOs and partnerships have opened windows of opportunity and created constitutional spaces for external agencies to partner with elected bodies and together explore

ways of bringing stakeholders to come together and work collectively and synergistically. Governments have become increasingly aware that NGO are much more spontaneous and dynamic in their response to the felt needs in the community: something that the government has been unable to replicate. NGOs working at the grassroot level have taken advantage of this enabling condition and strengthened themselves to facilitate this interface and provide direction and momentum to the process: all with the help of funding from philanthropic organizations.

Funding organizations are also looking for a better understanding of the conditions in which effective innovation and reform can happen. They are looking for strategies for increasing the likelihood that newly funded initiatives will succeed and better ways to measure the effectiveness of ongoing projects.

The Sir Ratan Tata Trust is supporting a cluster of grants in Madhya Pradesh and Karnataka and is exploring ways of synergizing work in these states / districts and expand into new states. In Madhya Pradesh, the Trust is supporting the following organizations for working towards improving the quality of government schools:

1. Naandi Foundation for district level intervention in Sheopur,
2. Samavesh for block level intervention in Harda and Dewas,
3. SAHMET for community based monitoring of schools in Kesla, Hoshangabad,
4. Muskaan for working in 10 government schools catering to poor communities in Bhopal

Along with supporting field level studies, the Trust would like to promote research and documentation of work that has been undertaken by its partners. The current assignment is undertaken in this context. It is hoped that the findings will identify factors that facilitate or impede sustainable change, add to the current discourse and serve as an instrument for advocacy to strengthen the SRTT portfolio and its role in ensuring quality education in schools.

## Goal

The goal of this study is to collect and analyse both quantitative and qualitative information on the work being done in four projects in Madhya Pradesh to derive learnings that will yield a better understanding of the conditions in which effective innovation and reform can happen including identifying those strategies and best practices that increase the likelihood of success of funded initiatives in bringing about lasting changes in functioning of schools / education system.

## Methodology

A desk review of the project proposals, annual narrative reports, reports of external evaluations undertaken of the four organizations and other documents was undertaken. Based on this document review, a **Framework for Analysis** was created to provide a basis for site-based project study.

Site visits were conducted in two phases, covering two projects in each phase for data collection and gathering perspectives from all stakeholders, the community, government teachers, officials, community workers, students, SHGs, PTA members, Panchayat members, HMs/Prabharis and project staff. Wherever possible, workshops and community meetings of SHGs/youth groups and elders of the society were attended and discussions were held.

Schools in which the organizations were actively working were visited and the intervention processes of the organization were observed.

Further documents, TLMs, publications, specimens of worksheets that were collected during the interaction were read.

## **Draft Report: Work in Progress**

The study and on-site participation in the actual working of the organizations has been an overwhelming experience. An attempt has been made to capture as much as possible of the depth and range of all that is happening in the field. It is by no means a complete picture: that would require being with each organization in close collaboration for much longer periods.

What follows is a draft document based on the above. It is still dynamic and subject to additions as and when more thoughts emerge on reflection.

**Sir Ratan Tata Trust**  
**Study of Educational Projects in Madhya Pradesh**

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**Part 1: Narrative Report of Project Visit**

Visits to the project sites were made in two phases. In the first phase from October 9 to October 17, 2007 I visited Sahmet and Samavesh. In the second phase from October 28 to November 4, 2007, I visited Muskaan and Naandi Foundation.

**1.1 SAHMET**

**Background**

Sahmet is working in the Kesla block of Hoshangabad district in M.P since 1997 and began its work by promoting organic farming, high yield seeds and water conservation in the rural areas. However, it realized that low levels of education hinder any initiative towards rural development and a small survey conducted in 1996 revealed that more than 50% children were out of school. Sahmet began its educational intervention with a focus on community ownership of schools and building the capacity of the community to demand their rights. It has a staff strength of 62 personnel spread over 30 villages working in 24 primary schools, 6 middle schools and 30 libraries.

Sahmet does not have a formal MoU with the government. It has even stopped bothering about the block level sanctions that it used to take to enable their teachers to enter the classrooms. It works with the community to increase enrolment, retention and ensure that children are going to school and learning. Towards this goal, it establishes Shiksha Samitis in every village to bring issues in education delivery and school functioning to the forefront in discussions in the Gram Sabha, holds bal melas and summer camps and forms youth groups to help in organizing these events.

I visited 4 middle schools, 4 primary schools, 2 libraries located in 6 villages and interacted with the government teachers, HMs, the community, the parents (palak), PTA adhyaksha/up-adhyaksha, the panchayat sarpanch/members, students and MDM meal providers. I held long discussions with the coordinator, the supervisor, clusters-in charge, librarians, Sahmet teachers, the resource person for teacher training and visited the hostel for girls in Kesla and spoke with the girls and warden of the hostel.

**Working Environment**

Kesla is about 20 km from Itarsi and the Sahmet office which is located here serves as the hub for all administrative activities, meetings with teachers and librarians and trainings. The hostel for girls is also located in Kesla. Sahmet has pushed deeper into the hard-to-reach tribal villages and schools are located in the interior regions linked up to some points by a pucca road thanks to the Pradhan Mantri Sadak Nirman Yojna and thereafter accessible only through dusty, deeply rutted and rocky kutchha ways running through keekar and mahua forests. In the monsoon, these roads would be rendered un-usable and the only effective means of traveling to the school would be by bike or tractor. Most locals use cycles or just walk. The tribal villages were at one time located in forested areas, remote and isolated, thriving on whatever

the forests could provide them with. Presently, however, the forests have depleted and the villages are struggling to survive in changed circumstances.

No matter where we drove, about 15km -35 km in all directions from Kesla, the land on both sides of the drive was stark and barren and covered with keekar or mahua trees. There were no small stalls or dhabas lining the roads and wherever a cluster of shops existed, no one sold mineral water, packaged snacks, aerated drinks or other junk food that one normally sees even with a roadside panwalla in a small town. Agricultural activity was limited to small areas around the dwellings. All homes were mud huts with creepers of 2-3 kinds of the gourd vegetable trailing all over the roofs providing the main ingredient of their daily meals.

## **The Community**

It is a fairly homogeneous society comprising of adivasis belonging to the Gond and Korku tribes with a very small number of Harijans. Their daily activities are: collecting wood, collecting shrapnel from the ammunition testing range, grazing livestock, collecting minor forest produce, farming small patches of land, collecting mahua and brewing liquor and fishing in the Tawa Dam. Children help in minding cattle, housework, collecting firewood and sibling care. During spring harvest and autumn harvest, the families move to other parts of the state to work as daily labour. Poverty is visible everywhere - poverty of resources, livelihood opportunities, power, health amenities, good education and water for irrigation. It is a land of silent people with no voice in articulating needs and unable to influence decisions that impact their existence.

Government provided financial compensation for land acquired from the adivasis for the construction of the Tawa Dam and absolved itself of all responsibility. Unused to possessing so much disposable money, the villagers were unable to plan for its utilization in an informed, sensible manner for their future requirements, and there are numerous stories of how they took rash decisions and squandered the money on goods that provided instant gratification but were of no value to them after a while.

Three organizations play a significant role in the lives of the inhabitants. The Kisan Adivasi Sangathan which works on the belief that the land and the forest belongs to the tribals even though they may not own any papers or 'patta' establishing ownership, and therefore engages in legal, political and social battles to protect these rights. The Samajwadi Jan Parishad which is a political party and to which many of the literate, well-to-do families belong and wields considerable influence over the opinions established in the minds of the people of the region. The Matsya Sanstha was a powerful body engaged in regulating the fishing rights in the Tawa Dam which provided some relief to the tribal community as it prevented private agencies from acquiring access to this resource. However, the recent verdict of the Supreme Court has resulted in the closure of the Sanstha and the future processes to be followed are still vague and not likely to benefit the adivasis. Any organization working on ensuring the right to quality education for the children cannot ignore these agencies that exist as very often their paths cross each other and activities overlap. In a rights-based approach to social upliftment, increasing awareness and educating the adivasis on their rights to better living conditions, food and livelihood opportunities, water, healthcare and education becomes an integrated need for the tribal community.

## **School Education**

### ***Primary School***

In all the villages government has provided at least two rooms for the primary school and in some villages the PTA was able to access an 'atirikta kaksh' (extra room) which shows signs of being designed by Vinyas. The grills have the alphabet, varnmala or numbers in their pattern and the walls have pictures and sayings of eminent people of India. Many schools have a 'kitchen kaksh' where the midday meal is cooked and where this room was not there, the PTA and the teacher hastened to clarify the process for the construction of the kitchen room had been initiated. At present, it was being cooked in one of the houses

of the PTA member. All these rooms stand on land that belongs to the community and has been donated for education of their children. All schools had a hand pump that was working. There were tat-pattis for the children to sit. All schools had one teacher teaching classes one to five except one school which had two teachers. The maintenance of the school buildings was poor. They badly need white washing and none of the rooms had been swept. The blackboards had become almost white and were unusable and in two schools there was no chalk. All schools had one Sahmet teacher teaching classes 1 and 2 and minding the whole school when the government teacher was absent or on leave. Enrolment ranged between 160 children to 230 children. All children had text books. Most children were unkempt and had not bathed. Their nails and hair were unclean. None of them were made to wash their hands before sitting for meals. Some went of their own accord. Uniforms had been provided but only one set and therefore they were in uniform for a few days and then out of it for the next few days. There were no toilets.

The mid-day meal was being provided to all children. The meal is one of the main reasons for regular and high attendance in the schools whenever the families have not migrated for seasonal labour. Everyone - the parents, the Panchayat members, the PTA members, the mothers - seem to be quite happy with the midday meal scheme. Everywhere, children were eating from steel plates that were clean and new. The cooking areas and serving utensils were also clean by village standards.

### ***Middle school***

The middle school buildings were relatively new, with large airy rooms and freshly whitewashed. The number of children enrolled is lower than those in class 5 in the primary school. In 2 schools, the number of girls was higher. The Middle Schools were in the same premises as the primary or a very short distance away. The blackboards were more functional and there were maps/charts/on the walls. There were tat-pattis for the children and cemented shelves to place books/TLMs/ bags.

Most of the children were in uniform and looked presentable with neatly combed hair and clean clothes. Something does change in the children after they are about 10 years old. All children had text books, notebooks and writing material. The middle schools had an HM or a 'Prabhari' (in-charge) and at least two teachers. In addition, there was a teacher from Sahmet for math and science. There were either no toilets and if there was a small structure, it was abandoned and in disuse.

### **Classroom Processes**

Teaching /learning processes in general remain dull, boring and mundane. **No child could identify or tell anything about the pictures of leaders adorning the walls.** The teacher sits at the desk while the children read without understanding one by one, stopping at random. At times they are copying sums written on the blackboard not realizing or knowing that they are supposed to work out the sums and write the answer. They come to proudly show you what they have copied. Most times they are left to their own devices. Sahmet teachers use pebbles, sticks, number grids etc. to teach children and this engages them. They work with interest. They have been taught several poems by the Sahmet teachers which they recite with great gusto using actions. Teachers are reluctant to take the children outside for fear of sudden inspections. The natural world outside that is so abundantly available in the villages remains unutilized as a teaching resource.

The strategy of providing a supplementary teacher in the classroom to bring about change in the behaviour and habits of the teacher and ensure that children are learning needs a climate of collaboration and cooperation. The Sahmet teachers' capacity needs to be enhanced to network with the system with greater confidence.

### **The Libraries**

The concept of the library grew out of a perceived need to give children some space to come together to play, read, study, discuss, do their homework and seek remedial support if required. It was an organized

time for extra-curricular and co-curricular activities without the constraints of a formal school routine. The idea was excellent and it fulfilled a very real need. In the two libraries that I visited, one girl was really energetic, enthusiastic and cheerful, while the other was subdued and listless. The children however enjoyed coming together and showed off their skills in recitation and various games. One library was being run out of the home of the librarian, while the other used the empty classroom in the school building.

What was really disappointing was the complete lack of reading material or other recreational material such as drawing paper, colour pencils/crayons, charts etc. In both places there were three or four miserable looking half-torn cartoon books lying around. The librarians had files with specimens of children's drawings and a register which listed out about 50-60 books and a record of who was reading which book. However, over time, the books and paper had depleted and needed replenishing.

## **The Hostel**

Sahmet runs a very basic hostel for fifty girls in Kesla. Food and shelter is provided along with bedding to sleep. Girls take turns in groups to help with the cooking and washing. A rudimentary enclosure provides privacy for bathing. There was a similar enclosure for a toilet, but the girls prefer to go into the forest. Sahmet has also arranged for volunteers to help the girls with English and Math. The hostel is enormously popular. In fact, Sahmet had to arrange for some girls to stay in Hoshangabad as it could not accommodate them in this hostel. For girls who wish to continue to study after class VIII for which they have to come to Kesla from their villages, this hostel is one of the reasons that they are able to do so.

## **Observations / Recommendations**

As we approached the schools, we would see a few children in twos or threes along the way going the opposite way and some of them would turn back on seeing the vehicle approach their school. The usual explanation was that they go out in the forests to relieve themselves. Typically, the teachers would be sitting in a group under a tree or sitting in the Prabhari's room chatting. If a teacher was in class, he/she would be sitting with the children left to their own devices. There was always something written neatly on the board but it could have been written the last week. Not a single teacher was found in class engaged in teaching something. Attendance in all schools was 50% at best and 10-15 children in some classes. This is the harvesting season when villagers migrate to work as daily wage labourers taking their children with them.

The high enrolment could be due to several reasons. The midday meal is one strong reason why parents send their children to school. Also, the government teachers have made special efforts to enroll all children to avail the provisions that each enrolment ensures. Much of these provisions end up in private homes of selected people in the village. Uniforms, books, and financial assistance are also reasons why children come to school. The Sahmet teacher goes around each morning collecting the children from their homes and brings them to school on time, very often to stand before a locked school. The interesting methods used by the Sahmet teacher have captured the interest of the children and this brings them to school. There is also a growing desire among parents to educate their children. There is skepticism about whether education will really help children lead better lives, but the question remains unresolved in their minds and sending children to school seems the best that they can do.

Poverty of the people prevents them from focusing on anything else other than the urgency of providing for the family on a daily basis. In one meeting with the PTA chairman and a few parents in Jhunkar, the group could not keep away from the topic of the damage the Tawa Dam had done to their fields and the ineffectiveness of the lift irrigation system to provide water. They wondered why the money was not utilized to make a few more tube wells. It was difficult to keep them talking about education of the children. They were sending them to school regularly, not sending them out to graze cattle and that was all that mattered. The rest was up to the school and the teacher.

Mainstream education systems with their regular exams, syllabus plans and attendance requirements are rendered meaningless and irrelevant to the children in tribal areas.

The seasonal migration of almost the entire village twice in the year for at least a couple of months at a time to work in the fields as daily wage labour affects the learning of the child. This migration is necessary for survival and hence unavoidable. Children who are in primary school accompany their parents. This annual movement makes school and studies seem unimportant and an activity that has to be stopped and started according to their life pattern. Hence the need for a learning strategy that adapts to this pattern is critical.

Under the Jan Shiksha Adhinyam, the PTA is an empowered body. It signs on the attendance register that releases the salary check of the teacher. It disburses funds up to about rupees seven thousand annually for school maintenance and TLMs. It works with the panchayat to utilize the midday meal scheme funds. But its powers are curbed by the better educated teacher. The official seal of the adhyaksha and the sachiv (secretary) both remain with the teacher and very often it is easy for the teacher to forge their signatures. The current rule states that the parent of the child who comes first will be the adhyaksha of the PTA and the teacher connives to keep an ally as the adhyaksha by raising the marks of the child. The PTA secretary in Chandkiya disclosed that meetings were deliberately scheduled at timings that the members and parents cannot attend and then the teacher goes around individually getting their signatures on an agenda that suited his need. Sahmet does not undertake trainings and capacity building of PTA bodies. It works through the Shiksha Samitis that it has formed which is used monitor the performance, presence and regularity of the government teacher as well as the Sahmet teacher.

The brief description of the working environment and the society are important to understand the geographical background, the habits and behaviours of the children and families, the active forces of political and social organisations which form the complex context in which the Sahmet implementers are working. Considering the fact that Sahmet does not seek to make its presence felt in mainstream systems nor does it go out to cultivate relations within government departments but consciously remains a powerful grassroots organization leveraging the active support of the community, educational officials and political bodies quite often become a source of harassment rather than allies in the task of education delivery. One recent example is the allegations of conversion to Christianity which required Sahmet to divert focus to counter the allegations.

The Sahmet teachers were treated as assistants, friends or colleagues in some cases and with hostility in many cases. The Sahmet teacher has provided the parents with an image of what a teacher should/could be and comes with the full support of the community and therefore, the government teacher has little choice over their presence in the school. Yet it is clear that this teacher is the eyes and ears of the community and this curtails the freedom of the government teacher and imposes expectations of regularity, punctuality and some amount of teaching activity on the reluctant teacher. Currently the Sahmet teacher has been given classes 1 and 2. She/he uses TLMs to teach the children and this captures the interest of the children and it is also evident that they are learning. Sahmet teachers have undergone training in the summer and have an annual break-up of the curriculum in language and math and try to stay on track. Some government teachers and officials are appreciative of their teaching methodologies but very few come forward to learn and use it themselves. Sahmet does not have an aggressive strategy to involve the government teacher and ensure changes in their approach to teaching / learning but relies on the painfully slow process of role modeling the classroom practices and waiting for the teacher to express interest and begin to change themselves. It is important to find ways to ensure the two teachers engage more deeply and collaboratively with each other.

The librarians are relatively an independent group with a lighter task of engaging all children in the village for a couple of hours in the evening. It is a mix of remedial work and games/songs and discussions with their 'didi' and generally enjoyed by the children. Interference by external official or political forces is almost non-existent and therefore the librarian and the library could really transform the notion of quality education and change the demands that the community makes on the mainstream education delivery system. The full potential of the libraries has not been exploited and the girls/boys running the libraries need better training to know all that they could possibly do in those two hours. At best they are class 8

pass children of the village, but could be trained to teach simple drawing, story telling, providing remedial support, doing simple math puzzles, experiments using material available in their fields, project work based on their environment, discussing hygiene and sanitation etc. The library could be an extremely effective strategy to generate interest in learning and in school. At present, as a strategy, it remains under-utilised.

Sahmet is held in high regard in the area for its work, commitment, transparency, values and readiness to take up causes against social injustice. However, Sahmet is reluctant to spend time, manpower and energy on working with mainstream systems such as the DIETs and initiate reforms in classroom practices through participation in design and delivery of teacher-training programmes. There seems to be little faith in the intentions or the ability of the system to hold the government teacher accountable, enforce punitive action and take genuine measures to raise the quality of education in their schools. Sahmet has stopped bothering to take official permission for their teachers to enter the schools and relies completely on the power of the community decision that puts their teachers in the classroom ensures that the community remains in control of the school.

The Sahmet community worker is selected for three basic skills: good communication skills, ability and willingness to live in any village and ability to strike a rapport with the villagers. The only reason for removal from the Sahmet team is if there is a community complaint regarding misbehaviour with girls. Sahmet does not promise the community worker anything permanent. It encourages its workers to continue their education and upgrade their skills and look for better opportunities. Sahmet has been able to put together a team of confident, motivated, dedicated and emotionally strong youngsters. Credit needs to go the Sahmet leadership for delegating responsibility and encouraging decision making at the community level but there is a continuous turnover of young tribal boys and girls moving in and out of Sahmet.

Organisational structure of Sahmet is a weak link in the project. Sahmet has a leader but does not have a leadership team to plan and implement the intervention more efficiently and provide continuous feedback to inform programme delivery. It has continued to function in the same manner as it used to and has not changed or added new strategies to its approaches. Reviewing, providing concerted academic support and training for skill enhancement of both the teachers and librarians needs to be done in a much more organized manner. TLMs that the teachers are using have not been updated. There is so much innovative material available across partner NGOs that could be used and workshops for teachers to create their own based on material available in the vicinity need to be organized.

There was little evidence of documentation, research and evaluation.

An effort to increase public awareness of the work being done with the community and the children has to be taken up in a concerted manner.

## 1.2 SAMAVESH

### Background

The Samavesh Society for Development and Governance was registered in 2003 in Madhya Pradesh. Samavesh was a part of Eklavya which has a long, well regarded presence in the field of education in Madhya Pradesh which gives Samavesh a distinct advantage in terms of influence, reputation and acceptance in schools and school administration in the State. Samavesh has launched this project with two factors that go in its favour. Firstly, the teams operating from Bhopal, Harda and Dewas are highly experienced, committed and understand the Madhya Pradesh context extremely well. Secondly, the Samavesh Project takes forward the activities undertaken as the Centre for Planning and Development in capacity building, research, community empowerment and direct educational support at the village level through the Shiksha Protsahan Kendras. Together, they form a formidable base for the current intervention.

Samavesh has an MoU with the government of MP signed in November 2005 to work in 6 Jan Shiksha Kendras of Dewas and Harda Districts for a period of five years to provide effective education to all children and strengthen the BRCs of two blocks to provide improved support, monitoring and training to the CRCs and the schools. The work covers 50 schools spread over as many villages in Khirkiya and Khategaon blocks. It requires Samavesh to interact with the DIET, provide inputs to AWP&B at the block and district level, extensive inputs in the 50 schools of 6 clusters and work with the community towards enrolment and retention of children. The project will be reviewed periodically by committees at the district and state level followed by an internal as well as an external evaluation at the end of the project.

Samavesh has very wisely invested time and energy in drawing up an organogram that would be able to deal with the requirements of the project proposal and in recruiting, orienting and training the implementation teams stationed at the block level and in the community. Samavesh has placed one Bal Mitra in every school whose task is to introduce innovative and joyful methods of learning using simple, creative TLMs such as pebbles, buttons, matchsticks, flash cards, songs, poems, skits etc. to involve children in the process of understanding and learning. The Bal Mitras belong to the village in which they are placed and many of them were earlier teaching in the Shiksha Protsahan Kendras and are well versed with their tasks and the children with whom they work. There are 15 Jan Mitras each of whom supervises the work going on in three or four schools as the schools are widely separated from each other and reaching them takes time. They also interact with the community and set up forums to strengthen community involvement in the functioning of the schools, understand critical issues and evolve solutions. Two such forums that have proved to be particularly successful in mobilizing community involvement in the affairs of the school including the larger developmental issues in the village, have been the youth groups Yuva Sangh and the Sakhi Pahal.

In Harda district, I visited six schools, met with the women's group in one village, observed a youth meeting conducted late at night in another village, had a meeting with the Bal Mitras and the Jan Mitras and attended a one-day workshop for youth groups conducted in the Samavesh training centre in Charuwa. I also met the BRC Coordinator and visited one girls' hostel run by the government. In Dewas district, I visited five schools, met the PTA Adhyaksh, held two community meetings, one meeting with fourteen Bal Mitras and Jan Mitras, and met a Prabhari and a Jan Shikshak (Cluster-in-charge). In Bhopal, there was a review meeting with the Samavesh organizational team.

### Working Environment

The geographical and economic conditions in Khirkiya and Khategaon appeared much better than what they were in Kesla block and consequently the attitude of the people had more energy, hope and cheerfulness. It could have been the result of good crops of soyabean, til, and jowar or a generally higher level of prosperity. Exposure visits of the community groups and outstation residential trainings of PRI members by Samavesh may have also generated excitement about the world beyond the village and the

possibility-thinking that it has triggered in the minds of the people. The landscape was greener, there was sufficient water for irrigation (for no one spoke of dry, barren fields) and everywhere that we went, the community members - men, women and children - were ready to hasten to the fields to bring in the soya bean before the sun rose too high. All our meetings were conducted with their sickles by their side. In terms of approach, these villages also lay deep in the interiors beyond rocky, rutted, kutcha roads. Some had to be reached after crossing shallow rivers which filled up during monsoons and made access difficult and sometimes impossible for days.

## **The Schools**

The schools consisted of generally two rooms, and a kitchen room. The classes were held in the two rooms and the verandah outside. Most times, there were three classes held in one room and two in the other. The verandah was usually taken over by the BalMitra who was working with a selected group comprising of children from classes 1,2, & 3 needing special care. The space was insufficient for the number of children and they sat together with barely enough space to move around. The school buildings lacked regular maintenance and looked neglected, unswept and dirty. The building in Sunderpani especially, was in a shocking state of disrepair with gaping holes in the thatched roof. The Kanya Vidyalaya in Ajnas had sufficient number of rooms but in dismal conditions. One of the teachers was angry and vocal about the indifference of his colleagues, no funds for TLMs and nothing being done for the school building or about the absenteeism among teachers. The situation in Rantha was too good to be true and yet it was there. The attendance was 98%, all the teachers of the Primary and Middle school, the HM, the PTA members, the panditji, elders, the youth and the chowkidar were all present. The school building was well-maintained. Rantha has a Marwari majority, some gujjars, adivasis who now work for the Marwari landlords and a few harijans. Kanjipura was a muslim majority community and there was a parent in the school arguing with the government teacher that his son was unable to read even though he has been sending him to school regularly for the last four years and whatever little he now knows is because of the Bal Mitra. The school in Dudhwas had a physically challenged, past pupil HM who took his work quite seriously. There were about 90 -100 children in school who demonstrated their learnings and recited poems and said prayers before sitting for the midday meal. This was the first school where I was able to see a small part of the interactive radio programme on English conversation being conducted in class. The transmission was disturbed and the sound was cracked and difficult to understand. Kanwalasa gaon had a protsahan Kendra, new buildings for the primary and middle school built on land donated by the villagers with separate rooms for each class and the old primary school building being used as kitchen kaksh. The primary school had five teachers and one raised by the PTA for the community was sensitive to the government pulling teachers out of classes for other tasks. Midday meals were regular, generally hot, and cooked and served by women from the village. The school in Maktapur lay locked and abandoned in a total state of disrepair with broken floors and holes in the roof. The PTA and other elders planned to go to the block office to take up the matter with the officials and also invite the media there to highlight their problems and get speedy solutions.

## **Classroom Processes**

There was greater energy and spark visible in the schools in Khategaon and Khirkiya. Even in Sunderpani where the school was almost falling apart, and which had one Bal Mitra managing the whole school till about a week back, the children were present in large numbers and could read simple words written in their notebooks. There was some understanding between the BM and the teachers on managing the children. The BMs were given a group of children selected from classes 1, 2 and 3 who required special care. They worked with this group to bring them up to class levels. Each BM had a small bag which was the kit they get during their trainings. These educational kits are prepared in the Samavesh workshop in Harda. The kit has all the TLMs the BMs would need to perform their tasks. The class room walls had pictures made by the children. Children sat in groups working on their tasks using the material given to them by the Bal Mitra. The government teachers acknowledged that children learnt with great interest when taught in this manner and it was easier for them to build on this foundation in the regular classes. Some govt. teachers had purchased the kit for use at home with their own children.

## Community Meetings

The community meetings were attended by elders, sarpanches, panchayat members, youth, women, PTA members and parents. There was a youth who had undergone a workshop with the UNDP on Human Rights. They were asked to reflect on changes in the last few years both in themselves and their surroundings and several interesting perspectives emerged from the discussions:

- The community - men, women (old and young), youth were all articulate, confident and aware and were able to speak on issues and needs related to their village with clarity and knowledge. They acknowledged that this was something they could not do earlier. This confidence had come from the encouragement and support of organizations like Samavesh. They narrated their fears when asked to speak on the mike for the first time and now they were able to address large gatherings without a problem.
- They were all aware of the strength of a group.
- They were able to speak to senior government officials without fear or nervousness.
- They kept an eye on the school and the teacher and believed that the entire village was responsible for the education of the children. They felt that the education system was much better now. Everyone was very satisfied with the midday meal programme.
- They were poor and they believed that the prosperous class wanted to keep them that way. When asked what they proposed to do about it their response was - nothing! They (the rich) will remain where they are - we will go on ahead!!
- Girls' going to the nearby village/town to pursue higher studies on a cycle or by bus was acceptable and normal and no one raised any apprehensions or fears on that matter.
- Men and women now sit together and discuss the problems of their village.
- All children of the community sitting together at the midday meal was okay.
- The men acknowledged their short-sightedness in suppressing women.
- The youth had influenced changes in the way farming was being done. The elders in the family joined in on discussions on organic fertilizers and chemical fertilizers, the costs and the gains. Sowing, marketing and use of fertilizers show better processes and awareness emerging from being better informed.
- In three generations sitting there, a quick count revealed that there were fewer children in each successive generation indicating awareness that lesser number of children are better provided.
- Several members spoke of vocational courses to help the young generation to become self-employed or employable.

**The women's SHG meetings** were full of fun and laughter. The women seemed happy with the beginnings of an economic independence and tried to find time to learn to read and write. The general positive attitude of the women seemed to emerge from their new found sense of their own self-worth and the possibilities of engaging with the larger world that has opened out before them. They are more strongly aligned to Samavesh as they see the organization as a means of understanding and realizing their potential. Wherever the women had been teased out of their secluded, excluded existence, they revealed openly and enjoyed their freedom and boldly came forward to participate in affairs of the village.

In the Gram Sabha meetings the Bal Mitra was being criticized for not teaching the children properly and only making them sing and dance. The women's groups spoke up in defence of the Bal Mitra saying they had less trouble sending their children to school as they seemed to be enjoying their time spent there.

## Yuva Sangh Meeting

We attended a meeting of the youth group that had been formed in Joonapani. The meeting was convened late in the evening and was well attended, perhaps because they knew some of us were guests.

Nevertheless, this meeting was extremely interesting. It was convened by the secretary of the youth group who was a class 8 passed young boy named Mukesh and the chairman who was a farmer. The meeting had an agenda. The secretary reported on successfully completing the task of getting 206 BPL (Below Poverty Line) cards made for the villagers who had been deliberately left out of the count by the government official. He also brought back information on a scheme being offered by the government to BPL card holders to start a dairy. A question was raised regarding a child being absent from school for a while and what the youth could do about it. The meeting continued with the villagers being asked to give their opinions on all the points on the agenda. Samavesh had initiated the idea and supported the youth club that had been started a year back to harness the energy of the young, providing space and opportunities for youth leaders to emerge and they were learning to function in an organized, democratic manner. My only concern was the lack of girls in the meeting.

### **Meeting with CRC Coordinator and Prabhari: Haralgaon (Khategaon) - Shri Om Prakash Mandloi and Shri Ram Niwas Kakoria**

The Jan Shikshak (CRCC) has to monitor, provide academic support and training to 36 teachers working in 16 schools (9 PS, 3 EGS, & 4 MS) spread over 9 villages. They had completed 12 days of training under the ADEPTS programme in the summer. The JS spoke highly of the NGO ability to mobilize women and provide support to weak children. They do not seek to establish an alternative system but collaborate with the government and have a supportive role. He observed that the JS trainings only focus on reporting and there is no training on school management. DIET teachers are not sent to villages and therefore both the school and the teacher do not benefit from each other. When asked about changes in the school system in the last few years, they spoke of more funds for schools and TLMs, more interest in education among the community, more facilities being provided e.g. cycles, hostels, scholarships, uniforms etc. When asked about needs that they perceived in the future, they brought up the need for vocational courses and being able to speak English.

### **Meeting with Mr. Shitoke, BRC Coordinator, Khirkiya.**

My question to Mr. Shitoke was about what changes he has perceived in the last five years in education management and what were the needs that he could foresee in education in the next few years. Mr. Shitoke commented on a number of issues. He spoke of the low number of children who were still out of school and the high enrolment. Monitoring of schools was comparatively easier as each BEO has about 10 - 15 schools under him. He spoke of four different kinds of teachers in the department and criticized the lack of clarity on the role and responsibility of the BRCC as overlaps exist among the education officials as a result of which critical duties do not get done. He commented on the trust that the Bal Mitra has been able to build with the community while the government teacher is looked upon with mistrust essentially because the Bal Mitra lives and belongs in the village while the teacher is an appointee and has no links with the people whose children he comes to teach.

When asked about involving Samavesh in their planning meetings, Mr. Shitoke promptly replied that Samavesh involves them in all their activities, but the government is not so forthcoming.

What emerged from the conversation was that education officials are unable to look into the future and envisage needs and plan for them in the present. The current situation and its hold on their thoughts are too powerful for any of them to distance themselves from this situation and view it objectively in order to understand it and find solutions. Hence, future needs did not emerge in the conversation. However, two strategies that the government has planned came up. One was a short-term residential hostel for children of migratory parents so that they are able to leave their children behind and not interrupt their schooling; and second was a hostel for girls being run by the department. We did visit the hostel and found it running quite smoothly. There were 50 girls who were provided free accommodation, food, bedding, one pair of night clothes, soap and oil. There was a hostel in-charge, two women who came in to cook, and a chowkidar. The hostel had 6 large rooms, two verandahs in the front and back and an open space at the back where the children played games.

## Meeting with the BEO, Gender Specialist and AIE in-charge: Khategaon

The meeting with the officials did not yield any new information. They were highly appreciative of Samavesh and their involvement in education in the villages. Many of them openly acknowledged that Samavesh was actually doing what they should be doing. They expressed their helplessness due to excessive administrative work and compilation of reports. The AIE in-charge demonstrated how a child's hearing is tested and showed us an impressive collection of audio-visual aids and other walking aids that are given to children who are identified with such problems. He was obviously very excited about his job.

## Observations / Recommendations

The role that Samavesh is playing in the community is extremely interesting. In its earlier avatar, Samavesh had been working towards women's empowerment, livelihood, capacity building of Panchayat members through the Agaaz Academy and in health support. This kind of organised involvement in several aspects of the life of the community has result in an integrated approach to development that is the critical requirement in any intervention at the village level. All activities planned for the village can be organically linked together and strengthen each other. On the one hand, Samavesh first gets reluctant villagers to attend village meetings to listen to the discussions and then encourages the community to place demands before the Sarpanch. At the same time they prepare the Sarpanch to deal with the demands effectively. The male-dominated panchayat is being compelled to recognize the growing economic and literacy capacities of their women that Samavesh is initiating. Youth groups that used to make fun of women going for their own meetings or attending Gram Sabha meetings have shown a change in attitudes that now reflect respect and cooperation. The women panchayat members are pleasantly surprised to see their men folk washing their own plates after meals at PRI training camps. Age old traditions are slowly breaking down without rancour and resistance. Creating awareness on issues in education, health, child rights are woven into the training designs and discussions. Strong groups exist in the communities which has issues for which another group in the same village is responsible or accountable. If left unresolved, these issues become formidable barriers to an integrated development of the village. Samavesh brings together groups within the community with their own agendas and facilitates this interface so that it is not confrontational or accusatory but more rights-based and applies pressure on both sides to resolve and perform. This trend is not pervasively perceptible at present but it seems to be one of the skills that Samavesh could concentrate on developing in its team members. Samavesh has a strong organizational structure and good systems to support the project teams in the field. The field offices provide basic meals, a place to rest and re-group, and the training centre in Charuwa is well-equipped and is an ideal place for trainings in peaceful surroundings. Samavesh takes good care of its people. There is regular interaction with the office based in Bhopal where meetings are held, feedback is taken and analysed and the progress of the project is collectively charted. Undertaking integrated rural development with special focus on education would not be difficult for this organization.

The baseline data that had been collected does not figure in discussions about the learning of children. It is obvious that children are learning but currently there isn't a systematic way of capturing their growth nor is it mapped against the baseline data. Samavesh needs to start using the data before it gets dated and perhaps maintain a portfolio for each child to track the academic and personality progress of the children.

The focus up till now has been on establishing and strengthening the classroom intervention. Work with the DIET has to be taken up and the involvement with the AWP&B has to be seriously pursued. The involvement with systemic teacher trainings is also not integral. A clear strategy for achieving deeper involvement at the block level and becoming a regular presence at the District is not apparent. Currently it seems to be staying with the 'being allowed to work' mode. However, the team members make a conscious effort to make their presence felt and recognized by the education department officers. The officials are kept informed of all Samavesh activities and invited to all major events.

Two activities that I did not observe but which continued to come up very frequently in all discussions was - the Chak Mak Club and the Summer Camps. Both these strategies apparently yield high results among children in terms of creating interest, increasing curiosity, exploring and showcasing talents. It proved to be an effective forum for providing multiple spaces for development that is critical for fulfilling the needs of differentiated learning. They generated high levels of enthusiasm and energy with impact that stayed much longer with all the stakeholders. What was probably started to bring some fun and entertainment into the lives of the children has actually become an example of 'joyful learning' and could become a powerful strategy to attract and retain children.

Samavesh has consciously made efforts to involve the media in their work and therefore, there is continuous coverage of their activities in the local dailies both Hindi and English. It is an effective way of dissemination and the publicity also ensures high levels of self and organizational performance.

Working at the village level, managing the politicization of issues is a critical and complex task and it is easy to get embroiled in political and social power-play. However, the team's stand was that issues of children's education and health thankfully remain neutral agendas and more often brings even warring elements together. Yet, Samavesh is aware of the delicate balances of village politics and treads carefully.

## 1.3 MUSKAAN

### Background

Muskaan has been working in the urban slums of Bhopal since 1998 by running non formal centres for imparting education to non-school-going children, supporting school-going children, income-generation and savings initiatives, addressing health issues and more recently, enhancing the quality of education in 10 government schools. There is a group of about 17 teachers/community workers who are all in their 20s with high levels of energy and motivation. Both boys and girls run around Bhopal on their motor bikes from school to school and basti to basti. They are well-educated, some still studying, hardworking, sensitive and creative. Their ability to strike a rapport with children is excellent and have been able to establish trust among the parents and the children. The work with the government schools has required the Muskaan teachers to re-assess their own capacities and undertake new learnings to respond to the needs of the formal education system in which they would be working.

In the government schools intervention, Muskaan facilitates child-centred and activity based learning through support to the teacher in classes 1-4 for 2 weeks every month in 6 schools. In the other four schools they conduct demonstration sessions of TLMs and their use. They organise a Bal Mela once in a month in every school where children engage in creative activities and have fun. Muskaan proposes to conduct workshops for teachers to sensitise them to the needs of deprived children and interact with the community where required. However, all of what they do in the government schools emerge from their ongoing close interaction and work with children in the slums of Bhopal. Muskaan has an MoU with the Rajya Shiksha Kendra to facilitate their work in the schools.

I visited six schools, observed the groups in the Jeevan Shiksha Pehal (Learning Centre), saw the hostel, held discussions with the Muskaan teachers and group facilitators, had a meeting with the DEO (District Education Officer) and discussed Muskaan's work and future plans with Shivani.

### Working Environment

Muskaan works in the schools and slums situated in different parts of the city. Access is easy and does not require long distance travel over rough terrain as with some other rural based projects. The impact of being in a city is evident in the manner in which the families live. Most homes have television sets, radios, cycles, motor bikes and the children are generally dressed well. Older girls and boys, in particular, take care of their appearance. The children are articulate, talkative, confident and cheerful. Ambition levels are high but a little confused about how to go about it in life. However, the children who come to the Learning Centre are a motley group. They are happy and well adjusted in the Centre, with their teachers and the other children there, but would probably be a little lost in a regular school set-up with its strict routine and stern teachers. Urban existence over a long period of time driven by commercial goals and ambitions to improve life styles has blurred the lines of castes and cultural differences. One slum is predominantly of families from Maharashtra. The Gonds living in another slum had not been to their village in the last 25 years. There was no village to return to!! Muskaan is dealing with a different set of problems in their working environment which is less physically demanding but more psychologically challenging. In the work with the under privileged and marginalized children they have to help the children deal with class barriers, social snobbery and stereotypical attitudes, aspersions on their learning abilities, low self-esteem, fear of adults, fear of school systems, fear of officers and anything official, being easily bullied, ignorance among parents and communities of their own rights as well as their children, feelings of insecurity and living under a constant sense of threat.

### The Schools

All the schools in which Muskaan works have adequate infrastructure and in fact many were housed in brand new buildings. The rooms were large and airy but with little storage spaces. All schools had hand

pumps. There were no toilets and wherever they existed, they were either unusable or locked. Children went to the nearby homes when they felt the need. All schools had adequate staff. Midday meals were provided by Naandi Foundation and children would stop paying attention to their teacher and quickly start putting on their shoes or packing their bags when they heard the tempo bringing the meal outside their school. Unlike the rural schools, I found the distribution of midday meals in the schools quite disorganized. There were no thalis and the children lined up to collect their food in anything that they could produce - small tiffin boxes, lids of tiffins, small katoris, pencil boxes, even cardboard pieces. Most children did not get the full meal. There was no designated place to sit and the children went around carrying their food in their makeshift containers which barely held the food in place. All school time tables set aside 30 minutes for the lunch break but it is impossible to distribute the food and expect children to finish eating within this time and it usually takes about an hour, thereby cutting into the time of the class just after break. Besides, no school has explored the possibilities of using the midday meal to teach concepts of hygiene and cleanliness, nutrition, proper chewing and digestion etc.

The children were in uniform and quite neat in their appearance. All children had their bags and text books. Enrolment and attendance in all schools was high and did not seem to be an issue. Enrolment of girls was higher in some schools but that was because the parents sent the boys to private schools in the hope of a better education for them. However, there were still dropouts from the school system. Some of the reasons listed by Muskaan were:

- Teacher attitude
- No value for education
- Uninteresting methods
- Examination phobia
- No encouragement
- PTA funds
- Lack of parental awareness
- Migration / resettlement

## Classroom Processes

Most of the teachers and the HMs in the schools that we went to were grappling with the DISE data form. It appeared to be a formidable task collecting all that data and then finally filling it in. In reality, all schools have all the information that is required in the data form. The task appears daunting because no one has bothered to sit with it and read it seriously and understand it. No government teacher was teaching.

In all schools, when teaching/learning was discussed, the government teachers were very vocal about what they did and how concerned they were for the children. The teachers spoke of activities they conducted and of children being bored with traditional methods. However, when observing them at their work, the style of teaching was still very traditional where the focus was on having done their task of teaching a lesson and finishing the syllabus with no awareness of whether the children had learnt or not. So when children were asked to demonstrate their learning, they simply stood diffidently and unsure and the teacher resorted to harassed promptings of how and when she had taught the lesson and other bits of reminders to jog their memory and elicit a response. The teacher is genuinely frustrated and confused but still self-righteous and defensive. The situation is not unique and recurs all the time. In staff meetings, the regular refrain is that they are sent on non-academic duties and tasks which do not allow them time to teach. Yet when they are in class, they are not teaching. They are sitting on their chairs, periodically rapping sharply on the table with a scale and getting the class to write out questions and answers which will be reproduced without understanding a word. I observed a teacher transacting her lesson in class 5. In 20 minutes she taught the children about the Earth, the axis, day and night, storms, midday-morning-evening, without getting up from her chair or using the blackboard or any other model or chart to aid in the understanding of such complex concepts!! Any learning that happens is by default and not by design.

## Jeevan Shiksha Pahel: the Learning Centre

Alternative schools are for those who have fallen out of the mainstream school system or never been in it. Staying away from school is not a planned choice. It is enforced through a sense of rejection and being unwanted. Conformity to structures and rules is the norm in mainstream schools and it takes far too long for the schools to respond to the special and specific needs of some children. Muskaan runs a non-formal education Centre for all children - those who are not in school as well as some who are enrolled but prefer to come here. These children belong to the six bastis in which Muskaan has been working and teaching the children earlier. Now they all come to the Centre in tempos at a given time and the tempos take them back to the basti in the evening. The children are given one meal at the Centre. There are about six groups of children at different levels of learning and each group is facilitated by one teacher - a Bhaiya or a Didi. The groups comprise of about 25 - 30 children. Some children are a sort of floating group who are there some days and absent for some. Yet they are taken care of whenever they are in the Centre. All groups have selected a place for themselves in the building in which the Centre is housed. The facilitator and children make collective decisions on how the room should look and how the tasks of drinking water and cleaning would be managed. There are about 135 children in the Centre ranging from five year olds to eighteen year-olds who are preparing for class twelve exams.

What is happening in the Centre is almost like a personalized tuition being imparted to each child with the growth and progress of each child being tracked and recorded. The group facilitator prepares worksheets for each individual child and plans all activities for group work in keeping with what the groups are learning. It is common to see the teachers sitting in the middle of their group while all around them children are doing different things in different subjects. A small child may be just drawing, another is doing sums using paper money, another group may be at class 8 level science. Muskaan workers spend a lot of time after the children leave, planning for the next day and recording the day's work in each child's file.

Muskaan's strength is their deep knowledge of the intricacies and the 'differentness' of the minds of the children living on the margins of society whom the schools were unable to retain. These children needed a different environment where no questions were asked and they were unconditionally accepted and allowed to interact and withdraw according to their desire. These children start their days early working to earn some money e.g collecting plastic bags, and performing other chores. They have independent personalities and cannot be forced to learn at a required pace or compelled to conform to rules, sitting quietly in closed rooms for hours, deprived of the open spaces that they are used to. At the Centre, there is no pressure on the children to perform - the organization simply creates an environment that tempts them to try out things - which would result in learning. Gradually the children respond to the stimuli and are drawn into a mode of self discipline and self learning and only come to the facilitator when they need an answer to a question. They are free to stop doing whatever they were doing and go out, walk around or simply curl up for a nap if that is what they want to do.

## **Community Interactions**

The Muskaan workers visit each child's parent in the bastis with samples of the child's work and explain what the child does in the Centre. Many parents are pleasantly surprised for they thought the children simply went there to play.

There is a schedule for Basti visits in the evenings. All the children in the Basti collect in the centre place and the Muskaan team plays games, tells stories, or teaches origami, or they sing songs together. Adults also stand around and watch.

Muskaan also runs Balwadis in the bastis to take care of smaller children.

Under their savings initiatives, the basti people are also engaged in making jhadus and paper bags towards becoming self-employed and adding to family incomes.

## **The Hostel**

Muskaan runs a hostel for young girls pursuing higher studies. Food, lodging and bedding is provided free of cost. There are about 18 girls staying there all preparing to take their exams through the open school. Muskaan arranges for their studies and coaching as required. Hostels are emerging as an important facility that increases the possibility of pursuing education especially in the case of girls.

### **Meeting with the District Education Officer**

The DEO was very supportive of Muskaan and in fact went to the extent of saying that they should just tell him what they wanted him to do and he would do it. Teachers cannot complain about provisioning - rooms, textbooks, incentives for increased attendance such as uniforms, midday meals etc have all been provided. He was dismissive of teachers' complaints of non-academic tasks. It was mandatory for teachers to participate in government duties as and when required and it is something that is mentioned in their employment letter. Besides, the whole working world is undergoing change and adapting to change. Why should the teacher insist on remaining in a comfort zone? He spoke of the fact that teaching is the last resort professional option that educated people exercise which means that most teachers are characterized by frustration, de-motivation and disinterest and the insensitive system compounds this problem. The teacher operates from negative beliefs such as education gives you nothing, what will these children do with an education, there is no point in teaching them, these children cannot learn etc. and these beliefs become visible in their attitudes and behaviours which the children are able to sense.

### **Observations / Recommendations**

The Centre (Jeevan Shiksha Pahal) with about 135 students from age 5 - 18 demonstrates how multilevel classrooms can be efficiently managed with each child getting the attention he/she needs and learning at their own pace without fear or pressure. Each group belongs to one group facilitator and the individual learning plan that exists for each child ensures that even if the child disappears for a while, he/she can resume from wherever the learning process was disrupted. There is no sense of being left behind while the entire class has moved on. The children are involved in the decisions regarding their learning space and share responsibilities of daily chores. There is no effort to re-shape every child into a single mould in order to make the task of teaching easier. On the contrary, teaching responds to each child's differentness by employing multiple methods of engaging them.

The curriculum and the worksheets that are being used are developed along the way incorporating the learnings and observations from each day's work. The curriculum is highly contextual and builds on skills that exist in the children e.g the ability to correctly calculate the cost of the pannis that they collect and sell or the water system in their basti. The close interaction of the group teacher with the basti and families of the children makes it possible for them to weave aspects of the children's lives into the examples/word problems/situations that are used in teaching. Therefore the world of learning is a familiar world and the connection is immediate.

Teaching aids and methodologies used in the government schools are very simple and in most cases freely available or very economical. Learning results from the use of the aids in different group processes which demand the involvement of all the children. The class is noisy, active and the children are all over, but they are smiling, very happy, busy, alert, involved and thinking.

The government teachers are witness to a different approach to the whole business of teaching/learning. The Muskaan teacher is in their class, using an assortment of TLMs and various group processes to help the children learn independently. The entire class is engaged in arranging sentences written on strips to reconstruct the lesson. They are working in twos to complete sums using coloured buttons. Paper money is being used to understand profit and loss. They sit in circles to play word games. Learning is happening surely and effortlessly. It is evident to all - including the government teacher.

What then prevents the government school teacher from adopting pedagogy that is apparently so suited to the children's needs? It seems to be two major reasons:

- what they see as the effort and planning required in terms of preparation of teaching aids and orienting children to a new way of interacting. It will require managing noise and enthusiasm and energy without recourse to the scale or danda and also being physically more actively involved,
- there is no systemic pressure on them to work in this manner. Their work will not be monitored based on this method of teaching. In fact there is a fear that they will be reprimanded for lagging behind in their syllabus. In instances where teachers have begun to resort to a child-centred approach it has been largely due to their own conviction and interest and the discovery of a deep sense of satisfaction and achievement that they experience.

It is critical therefore, where the thrust is on changing pedagogical approaches in the classroom and involving the teachers to take on the changes, simultaneously, there has to be pressure on the administration to change the design and delivery of teacher trainings and the parameters of monitoring classroom processes. In the absence of administrative support, teachers alone will not undertake changes even when convinced of the need to change. Muskaan teachers (as well as teachers in the other organizations) are constantly grappling with the problem of being treated as an extra teacher and the teacher using their presence to go off to either do their regular record keeping, have tea or just chat. The overall goal is to initiate the government teacher into an effective way of teaching and it is therefore critical that the teacher be present and engaged in the classroom while Muskaan is working.

Muskaan prefers to focus on continuing to model their methods patiently and hope for the attitudinal changes to take place in the teachers. The reactions, if any, are gentle - such as insisting that the teacher remains with them in the classroom and not go off to do some record maintenance. Muskaan has had some successes in influencing the teachers. Being in direct contact with the children in the classroom has its advantages. Teachers are witness to the visible changes taking place in the children and are unable to resist the magic of unfolding minds. Even if there is one success - such as a teacher who leaves her chair and joins the class as a group facilitator - it is a reason to celebrate and enough to go on. In such cases, the changes in the classroom and individual teachers are palpable and exciting for it immediately brings the child and his/her uniqueness into the centre of all efforts.

Muskaan (including all other organizations) now has sufficient experience with the teachers in government schools to be able to develop a simple monitoring tool with indicators to track the stages of involvement of the government teacher and also the time it has taken for moving from one stage to the next. This would reveal considerable information to feed into planning and re-strategising e.g identifying the critical stage, factors that aided a swifter change etc.

Government teachers need to see time spent with Muskaan as practical teacher training sessions comprising two components: demonstration, and academic support to the teacher in the classroom - something that the government always talks of but has not been able to find effective ways of achieving. If Muskaan could negotiate with the department to allow these hours to accumulate into workshop days that the teachers have attended to fulfill the mandatory number, then it could possibly change the equation in the classroom. Under the ADEPTS teacher training programme that MP is currently experimenting with, after 10-12 days of summer training, the remaining 8-10 days can be completed through flexible options including classroom support by the CRCs. It would be worthwhile to explore this opportunity with the DEO.

Muskaan's links with the system are not very strong and neither is the interaction regular. The Muskaan workers who have returned from exposure visits to Diganter and Bodh commented on the strong links these organizations have forged with the government which provides opportunities for wider impact. The remoteness of 'the system' is disheartening and it is difficult to sustain motivation while working with cynical babus.

But the rapport that they have with the DEO needs to be expanded to include other like-minded officials in the department. Seeing is believing. The more officials who see Muskaan's work, the greater will be the belief within the system on the possibility of doing things differently.

Acceptance of an external agency in the classroom and being allowed to do what they want to do with the children, including the acceptance of higher levels of noise and movement in the classrooms, school staff

proudly presenting child-centred pedagogy as ‘their’ teaching method to visitors are some of Muskaan’s achievements at the school and teacher level. Muskaan plans to start a newsletter with each school where all that is happening in the school is presented by the school. This would increase ownership of the intervention and gradually impose self pressure to perform as promised.

In the government school intervention, Muskaan does not reach out to the PTA or the parents of the children in the classrooms. It works only with the school and teachers and interacts with the parents only if there is a specific request from the school

Media management and exposure is also an area on which Muskaan does not expend time and energy. This needs attention and a strong public image is desirable. However, it is contemplating the possibility of organizing a seminar on ‘Meaningful Education’ in collaboration with the department. The self-development workshop that Muskaan organized to prepare itself has an interesting, innovative agenda. If this is indicative, then it is possible that this seminar would generate debates and discussions on areas and dimensions in education management to which the department has never given much thought.

Leadership and decision making is largely de-centralised. The director keeps a low profile, quiet and almost invisible and prefers to lead from behind. Muskaan is in the process of re-structuring and is setting up a new governing body to meet future needs.

Muskaan is a very ‘economical’ minded organization. Cost cutting is integral to their planning. However, considering that the workers are at their tasks for long hours voluntarily and many are living independently, the office could think about a system for providing a simple meal or a filling snack sometime in the day. Just a thought! There may be good reasons for not having done it so far.

## 1.4 NAANDI FOUNDATION: *Ensuring Children Learn*

### Background

Naandi is a professional, autonomous, not-for-profit organization working since 1998 in the areas of child rights, enhancing livelihoods and provision of safe drinking water. In the field of education, Naandi focuses on enhancing the quality of 900 government schools in four states, providing midday meals to half a million children in three states, and providing academic and material support to 12000 girl children in three states. In the current project, Naandi is engaged in collaborative interventions at the state, district and block level for improving the quality of elementary education, impacting 12000 children in 220 primary schools spread across three blocks of Sheopur district in the northwest border of Madhya Pradesh.

Sheopur is one of the most backward in terms of socio-economic conditions of the people where more than half the population live as subsistence levels earning approximately Rs.500 a month. The people are landless and migrate to nearby areas to work as daily wage earners at least twice in the year. Scarcity of water and lack of other natural resources such as forests adds to their problems. Vijaypur and Karahal comprise of tribal communities belonging to the Gujjar, Meena and Sahariya tribes while Sheopur has a mixed population. The 220 schools are spread across approximately 200 km reached only through extremely rough and rocky terrain and kuchha roads that are a nightmare during monsoon. Sheopur has a district literacy rate of about 27%, the rural literacy level is 22% and the female literacy rate as low as 12% making it one of the most challenging areas for any educational intervention and more so for a proposal that is as ambitious as Naandi has.

#### Naandi proposal envisages intensive work in almost all aspects of SSA:

- Infrastructure: Create attractive schools and improve the learning environment
- School-based interventions for children: Baseline data to track progress, Use innovative means to reinforce learning in children, provide libraries, enhance reading/writing abilities, special care for disabled children.
- School-based interventions for teachers: academic support in teaching of difficult concepts in all subjects, improved classroom management and planning,
- Enhancing community participation in school activities and children's performance
- Special focus on girl child education including integration with NPEGEL activities,
- Integration of ECE with school education and providing an organic continuum both at home and at centres
- Integration of health and nutrition component with educational initiatives,
- Accelerated learning and residential centre for adolescent girls: academic and vocational training,
- Strengthen micro planning process: build capacity of PTA, block, cluster and district personnel to formulate habitation level plans, develop software to compile information and generate reports at the village level,
- Strengthening resource centres at the cluster, block and district levels to plan and implement effective teacher trainings and monitor schools,
- Incorporate cross cutting issues such as HIV/AIDS, social equity into the quality initiatives
- Build capacity of 8 DIETs in need assessment of teachers, developing need-based training modules, training and research activities,
- Increase capacity at State level for educational research and analysis, strengthening curriculum, textbooks, training and training methodology and evaluation of learning.

Naandi has an MoU with the State government to undertake this project over a period of five years. The Naandi team comprises of the State Programme Manager who leads the initiative supported by five Nanhi Kali Coordinators, 18 academic resource coordinators and 220 Bal Mitras. The project team is supported by the academic resource group at Hyderabad.

During my interaction with Naandi, I visited 12 schools, saw the workings of three libraries, observed the Maje ka Kendra in 9 schools, observed the launch of a community blackboard, saw a Bal Sabha in the morning which included a visit with the class to the potter's house to see him working at his wheel, participated in two community meetings, held discussions with the BMs and the NKC's in the project office and attended one meeting called by the CRC where about 15 government teachers and Naandi members were present.

## The Schools

The schools are located deep in the interior regions comprising of two or more rooms. The school buildings in all three blocks that we visited were fairly well maintained except in Ranipura where the building had been abandoned and part of it was being used to cook the midday meal. Midday meals were provided by the women of the village and cooked on the school premises and distributed to the children in an orderly manner as they sat on their mats in rows. Attendance in schools was high even though it was the harvesting season and many families had migrated. There were a good number of girls visible in all the schools.

The schools are attractive and colourful. The lower part of the walls all around the rooms have a blackboard where children can stand and write or draw. There is a yellow strip running above it with the alphabet, varnamala and numbers to aid visual reinforcement. There are colourful charts and pictures of animals, birds and plants. All schools have the pocket board, an interactive learning tool for both math and language developed by the Programme Manager. This tool is used extensively by the children for it is fun and the whole group can participate. There are numerous books from the Room to Read project hanging from a rope strung across the room. There are charts displaying project work undertaken by children's groups. There is a wall news paper on which children put up imaginery or real events of their village, stories that they have made up or little verses that they have created. Specimens of children's work in clay are displayed on a table. The most fascinating models that I saw was a tractor and a bullock cart. Children's drawings are pasted here and there. There is a corner on which information is displayed regarding the 'Parent of the Month' and the members of the Bal Panchayat. The environment is definitely conducive to learning, interesting and engaging.

One part of the wall has markings to measure height and there is a weighing scale in another corner.

These were the only schools where I could not spot the teacher's cane or rod.

## Classroom Processes

The school starts at 9 in the morning with the Centre for Fun or Maje ka Kendra (MKK) facilitated by the Bal Mitra. These are attended by about 50 children who require additional academic support. Since the Bal Mitra is also present in the class during regular school hours, he is aware of the weak areas of the children and he puts them into appropriate groups and gets them to work towards filling the gaps in their learning using relevant learning aids.

As soon as you step into the class, two children will come up and introduce themselves as the sarpanch and up-sarpanch of the Bal Panchayat and welcome you to their school. Then a small group will take you on a round of the rooms showing you all the projects undertaken by them - trees in their village, produce of their fields, coins found in their fields, kinds of leaves, kinds of soil, a survey of the village including number of livestock and hand pumps, survey of shops and their wares and a calculation of how much tobacco is being sold by them in a year (which shocked the villagers!!), paintings and drawings they have made, a wall newspaper on which they have contributed real or imaginary events/stories/poems/jokes, the table on which their clay products are displayed, a shelf on which creative handicraft items and different kinds of masks are displayed. They will tell you the meaning of the name of their village and how it got its name which they have found out from questioning the elders in the village. This is followed by presentations of skits where the organs of the digestive system begin to

complain, humorous plays of a mother taking her child to the school teacher to complain that he only learns how to sing, etc. and perhaps a poem or two. Then they will make you stand against the wall and measure your height and take your weight and note it down in their register. If you ask them how much taller am I than him, the answer is very often correct. There is a chorus of byes as you prepare to leave. **The scene remained the same in all the schools visited including the Sahariya children in Karahal who had been written off as uneducable.**

Through their extracurricular activities, the children have learnt skills like information gathering, categorizing, calculation of weight and height; the process of elections right from campaigning to voting; their confidence has enhanced and articulation has improved and now they know a lot more while enjoying themselves all through the process.

## The Library

The library time is held in the courtyard of a private house, the panchayat room or any other area that the community has identified. There are numerous books many which have come from the Room to Read programme. **The community worker in charge of the library lays out mats for the children to sit. A group of children enacted a skit. These kids just love dramas!! Then a little girl from class two recited a long story poem in a mixed Hindi and local dialect. Someone narrated a joke. Then another group sang an action song. Finally, a little girl and a boy took turns reading out a story. All the children in the community come to the library. They are allowed to take a book home to read and the Bal Mitra keeps a record of who has taken which book.**

Some libraries were being held in the verandah of the school building. The books were hanging from a string hanging across the room. Children come in and sit down and browse around reading or looking at pictures. There is one story reading session where the Bal Mitra reads out a story and the children listen. In Ranipura, the MKK and the library is located in a round thatched structure, open on all sides standing in the middle of the open space in front of the dwellings. All the material used were provided by the community and the villagers have built it themselves.

**The interaction with the colourful books has been instrumental in increased interest in the written word and the desire to read the word and understand what it means. It is a powerful means of increasing the ability to read and understand amongst children as well as adults and as a strategy it needs to be fully explored and exploited.**

## Community Meetings

**The summer camps and the extension of the joyful activities to include some for the older women and men of the community have brought out several changes in the behaviour and attitudes of the community.** The opportunity to showcase their talents in mehendi, rangoli, drawing, painting, crochet, handicraft and stitching has infused a lot of interest in the women to do something more. Many have come forward to help decorate the walls and doorframes of the school building. The specimens of the women's drawings show an innate sense of colours, balance, symmetry, in depicting folk/tribal art. Many of their drawings were equal to what we usually see in emporiums and high class shops in cities. **It could be worthwhile exploring opportunities to turn this talent into economic activities.** The men would come back in the evenings and engage with books, reading material and this aroused interest in them to read. The Choupal Library emerged from this interest.

The Bal Mitras keep in touch with the parents of the children in the school through monthly meetings called 'Palak Milan' to keep them informed of the child's progress. This also ensures regular attendance in school. The parents are encouraged to visit the school and many of them do walk in.

## Launch of Community Blackboard: Ranipura

We assembled a little distance away from the village on the dusty track leading into the village. There was the big blackboard being carried by two men with two men beating on dholaks walking in front and all the children of the village running along it followed by a large crowd with more joining in as the little procession slowly made its way to the open space in the centre of the dwellings. Everyone settled down on durries and the blackboard was placed on a table. The PTA Adhyaksha welcomed everyone and explained that they were going to launch the community blackboard in their village. The Sarpanch applied a tika on the blackboard, framed it with a garland and broke a coconut. Then the Bal Mitra explained to the group how the information on the board had to be filled in. This was followed by dances performed by some girls on film music, folk songs by the men's group and bhajans by the women's groups. Some women joined in spontaneously to perform simple dances with their faces covered with their saaris. We saw a father almost forcing his daughter of about 10 years to get up and participate in the dance. She was too shy and would not do it and this made her father angry.

I asked Mr. Ravi Thakur, the Programme Manager, the rationale behind this system. He explained that earlier, they put up community blackboards and it was an uphill task to ensure that it was being used regularly. Then they changed strategy and only put in the blackboard when the community asked for it. The fanfare associated with the establishment of the blackboard made it into a special event and brought the whole society to participate, partly having fun and in the process, understanding the function of the blackboard and its use as a means of monitoring. The community involvement in the launch transferred the ownership and responsibility of using the blackboard.

## Support to the Girl Child

It was the same logic with the distribution of the kits to the Nanhi Kalis. The event is colourful and dramatic with a ceremonial handing over of the kit to every individual girl who comes on stage to receive it with the parents and the larger community looking on. The kit is carefully examined and admired by everybody several times. It becomes a matter of pride to wear it and go to school and there is a moral obligation involved in attending school regularly having received such a wonderful kit. Approximately 2,500 girls get these kits at present and about 1200 more are being processed by the Nanhi Kali Coordinators. These coordinators maintain close interactions with the girls and their families. Their problems are promptly taken up and dealt with.

The strategies are based on an understanding of what works for the people in the village and provide opportunities to disseminate information about the programme in a social setting.

## Observations / Recommendations

Naandi has an organisational structure firmly in place. Processes for recruitment, orientation and training of staff have also been defined. Naandi has organizational capacity to converge all its interventions e.g. meals, water, livelihood, health and undertake an integrated approach to development at the village level.

The Programme Manager who heads the project is a dynamic, driven, workaholic with extensive experience in educational initiatives and teacher training. He is on deputation from the Rajya Shiksha Kendra. He is a man on a mission to prove a point - that all children are educable - and he has his team wholeheartedly with him on this mission. Together, they have evolved some strategies that appear to be working. The summer camps, Bal Sabhas, the Bal Panchayats, the Maje ka Kendra, the libraries and use of project methods in the teaching process have played a significant role in defining the components that enhance the quality of education.

The Bal Mitras, who have been selected from the villages where they will be working, are the backbone of the school level initiatives and it is critical to the success of the intervention that their commitment, sense of responsibility and clarity of purpose is of the highest order. Naandi has been

extremely fortunate in this matter and at this point in time, owe much of their school and village level successes to this cadre of well-trained, alert, dedicated, self-motivated field staff. They are young, eager, ambitious, physically fit and full of hope and promise. Much energy and focused attention has been expended on preparing and strengthening this team who have in a way exploded onto the village scene bringing great excitement, enthusiasm and spark into the classrooms and the minds of the children and into the lives of the villagers. **Everyone is on a high: the children are simply delighted with the sudden wonderful newness of their learning environment and processes, the community is exploring an involvement with education and schools that they had never known before and the teachers and officials are reveling in the reflected glory and taking credit where they can.** How does Naandi ensure that this continues?

**At the level of institutional intervention, the pace has been slow. A team that has sufficient experience in institutional development and facilitation skills required to work with deeply entrenched systems and difficult mindsets that resist change is clearly not in place.** The successes that are now visible at the village level and are getting highlighted in the media are having the desired impact and state and district institutions are coming forward willing to continue along the terms of the partnership with renewed interest. Now is the time that Naandi needs a highly motivated, experienced team to take the thrust forward. Naandi has a broad-based, multi-pronged agenda and very little time.

**Involving the government school teacher in the programme is a huge challenge. At the school level, unless the school teacher willingly takes on the role that the Bal Mitra is now performing, sustainability is not possible and there will be no change in the classrooms once Naandi withdraws.**

The future of an excellent workforce, on whom organizations invest considerable time and resources in nurturing, training and developing, is also a concern.

## Part 2: Reflective Analysis of Strategies

The recent Education For All (EFA) Global Monitoring Report by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (Unesco) says that despite slipping five ranks on global education parameters from #100 to #105 in 2007, India shows high chance of achieving the universal primary education (UPE) goal by 2015, suggesting that the country will be able to achieve literacy target of 71 per cent by 2015. However, it is still far from achieving the goals of EFA.

A variety of measures and nationwide thrust on access and enrolment have resulted in near universal enrolment of children in primary education. In Madhya Pradesh, government programmes such as school infrastructure, midday meals, financial assistance in the form of scholarships, teaching aids - however rudimentary - from the TLM grant to teachers, residential facilities for children, strengthening of systemic support especially of the PRI institutions, availability of text books and uniforms, cycles to girls to continue studying after primary school, were all visible. Access and enrolment are no longer an issue.

Quality Education to retain children in school remains a huge concern. Drop-out rates, especially of girls, continue to plague the system. Quality brings in the complex social dimension of schools and the fragile school-child relationship - the teachers' attitude, training and teaching methodologies, the life patterns of the poor (migration, working children), irrelevant curriculum, rigid schooling systems that compel conformity, society's attitudes towards girls and their needs, perceptions of the utility of education - all of which pose a formidable challenge.

Therefore, the following reflections focus on those strategies developed by the four organisations that directly impact quality education and retention of children.

### 2.1 Thought leaders from the Community

Three of the organizations have uniformly and successfully used the strategy of identifying a key person from within the community to become the activators of change. This person has the dual responsibility of providing the thought leadership to the community and is also the critical 'last post' in the delivery mechanism of change initiatives especially in remote, difficult rural regions. Considerable thought is given to the recruitment, training and motivation of this key person. He/She is the backbone of all efforts.

In the entire belt comprising of rural, tribal villages, the profile of the community that emerged was at one level typical - poor, illiterate, activities controlled by pressing livelihood needs, somewhat wise, intuitive understanding of officialdom, growing understanding of publicity and media. But above all, the characteristic that came across strongly is that when left to itself, the community is very passive. It is willing to follow but cannot lead. It requires activation. And then it requires support to realize its latent potential. One of the reasons why the Bal Mitra or the supplementary teacher becomes such an integral part of the community is that they activate and provide the 'thought leadership' to the community. They instill confidence among the people and are trusted and the community responds to their leadership.

Development at the village level requires a deep understanding of the place and a deep partnership. The Bal Mitra lives the lives of the locals and understands the problems and is able to work out solutions together. In the next phase, they have to be nurtured to see their role extending beyond education.

### 2.2 Partnerships at the State Level

This strategy is to facilitate all that the organization proposes to undertake at different levels of educational administration and delivery and ensure smooth operational environment. It apparently implies that the NGOs are extensions of the government delivery system in areas that the system is unable to reach. However, partnership and collaboration is expected to bring Change, not greater efficiency. The

partners need to constantly focus on this aspect and distil their grass root experience and knowledge to impact planning and policy decisions. Government organizations merely deliver and are not known for their customer focus which is the greatest strength of the NGO and this child focus needs to be present in all decision making forums in order to make rules more relevant. In their present status as projects-in-progress, this strategy is yet to consolidate, but the trends indicate that the chances of success seem fairly high.

### **2.3 Community Teacher in the Classroom**

All four organizations have in their own ways put a teacher in the classroom with the government teacher. Consciously or unconsciously, this teacher is playing the role of a catalyst. She/he models a different attitude, a different approach to teaching/learning, transacts the syllabus differently, allows natural children behaviour to prevail in the classroom and demonstrates learning in the child. It is a powerful strategy for the daily contact between the two teachers raises the chances of change.

In order to sustain the change, mainstream systems should be influenced to see the supplementary teacher in the classroom as on-site academic support component of teacher training modules and the NGOs as their block level resource group for which provisions exist within the system. In which case, two years of project time dedicated to increasing teacher accountability and hand holding is likely to ensure long term change in the teacher. Such a partnership would induct the teacher into using context specific teaching methodologies and reduce the alienation that the teacher feels in the community.

### **2.4 Community Monitoring and Ownership**

Of the four projects, barring Muskaan, the three rural-based projects have used the community as a strategy to pressure the teacher and administration to perform. Some indicators of community involvement are:

- Vigilant of teacher presence and absence,
- Problems of single teacher managing multiple classes,
- Demanding better resources from government,
- Asserting pressure on the system to perform,
- Awareness of what quality education means.

Of the above, the first four are fairly visible in the project areas and the last one is slowly manifesting itself. The Bal Mitra or Supplementary teacher performing his/her duties with dedication, regularity and involvement on a much lower income than the government teacher, their attitudes and methods of involving children in their learning process, getting regular updates from them about the progress of their children have resulted in creating an image of what education should encompass. This provides a comparison for the community to make similar demands from the government teacher.

### **2.5 Teacher linked to the School**

Teachers belonging to a centrally recruited system and teachers belonging to the school where they are stationed is an ongoing debate. There is great resistance from the teachers against this move. There are deep issues of wages, incentives, promotional avenues and union affiliations involved, along with greater opportunities to shirk duties and enjoy a life of no accountability. However, if schools have to improve and continue to improve even after a project withdraws, the teacher needs to be doing what the Bal Mitra is doing. One of the ways in which this could be made possible is, if the teacher belongs to the village and is recruited to or by the school. Therefore, this restructuring of the recruitment and posting system has to be supported at all forums.

## 2.6 Summer Camps as Leverage Mechanisms

It is important to place this activity in the category of a strategy for the impression gathered from the field indicates that Summer Camps have evolved beyond a simple fun activity to keep the children involved and connected with the school during the long separation of the summer months to a powerful strategy with wide ranging impact. It not only keeps the children engaged but also provides the multiple spaces that children need to develop all dimensions of their mind, emotions and body. This strategy could be the mechanism to leverage the teacher and the block officials. Lack of quality time spent with the student is one of the major reasons for apathy in the government system resulting in inability to understand each other, indifference and emotional distancing. Summer Camps provide an ideal opportunity for the system and the child to come together in an informal, de-structured environment and begin to build a relationship based on creative interaction, knowing and understanding each other. Samavesh, Naandi and Sahmet spoke about achieving in one summer camp what would have taken them almost 6-8 months to accomplish in regular activities.

Summer Camps is not a new concept and schools in urban settings have been tapping this activity to provide children with opportunities to engage with and understand the diversity of India and its people and ensure the development of creative and critical thinking in school students through a wide range of innovative activities organized in these camps.

## 2.7 Libraries as Retention Strategies

The libraries that Sahmet and Naandi have experimented with, have the potential to transform into very powerful strategies to enhance reading and understanding in children. The libraries are a very flexible idea: space is not a specified requirement, anywhere will do, the activities can be limited or expanded as required, it can take on multiple roles e.g. remedial centres/science lab/puppetry/indoor-outdoor games etc. It can explore the fascination that children have for colourful books and inculcate deeply entrenched habits at the right age. Most of all, it can enthrall children with story telling sessions. The possibilities are unlimited and the children can get hooked for life. At present, the full potential of this strategy has not been explored.

## 2.8 Integrated Model of Intervention

Samavesh had been working towards women's empowerment, livelihood, capacity building of Panchayat members through the Agaaz Academy and in health support. This kind of organised involvement in several aspects of the life of the community has resulted in an integrated approach to development that is the critical requirement in any intervention at the village level. All activities planned for the village can be organically linked together and strengthen each other

The Samavesh intervention has indicated that projects at the village level have to seriously incorporate the notion of the school and the village as a whole unit which needs multiple inputs to grow and develop. It is critical that all inputs converge in a synergistic manner to impact the overall development of the village including the school. Understanding the need for coherence and convergence at the local level and ensuring that there is concerted, collective action improves the possibility of enhancing success in school reform initiatives.

## 2.9 Harnessing Student Power: The Bal Panchayats

As an activity, the Bal Panchayat was hugely successful in increasing understanding of democracy and the electoral process and generated high levels of involvement of the community. Having established this, the role of the Bal Panchayat could be developed and expanded to become a powerful peer group to motivate reluctant children to come to school, spreading awareness of hygiene and cleanliness in the village,

informing parents of changes taking place in the classroom etc. The Bal Panchayat could harness the energy of the youngest stakeholder into the change initiatives.

## **2.10 Attractive Schools**

The Naandi experiment has revealed that attractive classrooms and school are a means of increasing enrolment and ensuring retention. The children, as well as the teachers, are proud of the appearance of the school. It is also a way of involving the community, especially the women, who come in to decorate the walls with their traditional forms of art.

Naandi facilitates the process of accessing school improvement funds to beautify the school and helps in planning the utilization of funds in the school.

It has been universally acknowledged that an attractive school provides a conducive environment for learning and generates enthusiasm and excitement in children.

## **Part 3: Future Focus**

It maybe argued that even after years of engagement with educational initiatives by NGOs, there has been little change visible in schools, school systems and what is happening in the classrooms. However, in the last few years some circumstances have changed:

- Parents' expectations and awareness has increased,
- The Political Will prevails,
- Public concern and interest in the quality of elementary education, especially among future employers, largely driven by market needs,
- The NGO sector better organized and equipped to partner in large scale reform initiatives with a willing government,
- The concern with quality has begun to put pressure on teachers to perform: the professional world is working and adapting to change and the teaching profession cannot remain in a comfort zone.

It is important to participate in this global wave of change and transformation and carry forward what had been started to its natural and logical conclusion.

Some areas of focus that emerged:

### **3.1 Girl Education and Women's Literacy**

Girls' education and women's literacy are of crucial importance in addressing issues of gender inequality. In India today, though the GER is 95%, the overall dropout rate for Class 1 is 14.4% of which 66% are girls. The EFA Global Monitoring Report of Unesco states that gender disparities in primary education stem first and foremost from disparities in enrolment in first grade.

Measures to increase girl enrolment and retain them need to include pressurizing the system for installation of separate toilets for girls, remedial bridge courses, female teachers and meals for all girls. In all the schools visited, there were no toilets functioning at all. School kits along the lines of what Naandi has undertaken could go a long way. There is also a need to re-examine text books that seek to reinforce stereotypes on gender roles in society.

### **3.2 Working Children**

Programmes that will focus on the area of non formal educational opportunities for working children to provide alternative modes of schooling for their learning and social needs. Working children are a reality that cannot be easily wished away. Bringing them into mainstream classrooms has proven to be a recurring task. They need to be treated as a special group. They will be there as long as poverty alleviation does not happen. Muskaan works with working children and makes no attempt to change this reality.

### **3.3 Provision of Hostels for Girls/Migrant Families**

The projects have begun to understand the emerging need for hostels to facilitate the continuation of education among deprived families. Even the Government has taken cognizance of the need and begun a provision for temporary/short term residential hostel for migrant families. The Sahmet hostel currently has 50 girls and had to refuse 17 others. Muskaan also realized the need for a hostel. The thrust on primary education and the incentives to complete school and go on to upper primary has resulted in this very basic need. In the absence of any such provision, dropout rates are bound to increase.

### **3.4 Vocational Education**

Upper primary education needs a logical continuum into livelihood opportunities after class 8. The establishment of centres that can provide vocational courses that would be able to impart employable or entrepreneurial skills is the need of the hour.

This need was perceived and expressed at all levels but without any concrete thought about how it can be achieved. The Gender Specialist in Khategaon spoke of rojgarmoolak shiksha. The seniors at the community meeting in Ajnaas spoke of technical centres. At the meeting with the Bal Mitra and Jan Mitra in Charuwa, they talked of three things post class ten - vocational courses, technical courses and computer courses.

Future projects need to focus on plugging such outlets into the upper primary school system and explore resources, agencies that can partner in the effort.

## **Part 4: Thrust Areas for Policy Change**

### **4.1 Mainstreaming vs Recognition**

Marginalised, underprivileged children get left out of school because they are difficult to reach, they are different and their lives do not have the semblance of stability that is essential to access formal schools. Therefore, such groups of learners will always require special measures - syllabus, curriculum, pedagogical approaches, timings, duration - that suit their environment, context and needs. They stand just beyond the reach of the government where everything is standardized, structured and formalized. Exceptions are difficult to incorporate, so they are inevitably eased out. NGOs play a significant role in bringing this group of abandoned children into the ambit of education and prepare them to live, learn and grow in the way they can. Their work is by its very nature context specific and diverse requiring multiple approaches. Mainstreaming of these children cannot be guaranteed.

However, recognition of alternative schools engaged in meeting the needs of such children is a critical requirement to enable all such organizations to avail systemic facilities like midday meals for their children, TLM grants for their teachers, facilities for health checkups at government hospitals/dispensaries, etc. for which they have to currently rely on funding.

### **4.2 Meeting Teacher Requirement**

Rapid increase in enrolment without a corresponding increase in teacher recruitment, training and posting has resulted in high average PTRs. At present the PTR is 40:1. This defeats the whole effort of UPE. Children are in school but there is no teacher there for them.

At the same time government cannot replicate the NGO ability to create extraordinarily energetic, committed and effective work forces out of young people who may not have high educational qualifications and no work experience. Currently, all four projects have remarkable youngsters belonging to the community, well-trained and oriented to the needs of their context.

It would be worthwhile to explore the possibilities of utilizing this asset in more productive ways.

### **4.3 Teacher linked to the School**

If schools have to improve and continue to improve even after a project withdraws, the teacher needs to be doing what the Bal Mitra is doing. One of the ways in which this could be made possible is, if the teacher belongs to the village and is recruited to or by the school. Therefore, this restructuring of the recruitment and posting system has to be supported at all forums.

### **4.4 Incorporating Classroom Interventions as Training Component**

Mainstream systems should be influenced to see the supplementary teacher in the classroom as on-site academic support component of teacher training modules and the NGOs as their block level resource group for which provisions exist within the system. In which case, two years of project time dedicated to increasing teacher accountability and hand holding is likely to ensure long term change in the teacher. Such a partnership would induct the teacher into using context specific teaching methodologies and reduce the alienation that the teacher feels in the community.

This recognition of the NGO partner as the resource group for the CAC (Cluster Academic Coordinator) would pave the way for the CAC to collaborate with the resource group and develop monitoring parameters based on child friendly systems of teaching.

## Part 5: Challenges / Concerns

### 5.1 Alternative Source of Funds

Imposing sustainability requirements on implementing agencies forces them to divert energy and resources on finding other sources of sustenance and driven in a crazy merry-go-round from one funding agency to another. NGOs traditionally function on skeletal staff who are stretched, and this stretches them even further. It would be better to come to a realistic time-line with implementing partners and fund the entire effort. Where government resources are being made available, then these resources should be utilized as anything that is funded by the government have far greater chances of being accepted into the system. Sourcing government programme funds should be a part of the MoU.

### 5.2 Strengthening the BRCs/CRCs

There are critical questions that have remained unanswered. Is this the structure that should be strengthened? What is the current status and effectiveness of these structures in the areas where the organizations are working? There are serious overlaps of roles and responsibilities at the block level with officials holding parallel functions and duties of monitoring, academic support and administration are divided arbitrarily. In the absence of clear guidelines by the government, organizations need to study the mainstream system carefully, clarify their own positions and evolve the best method of working with the system which may currently differ from block to block.

The CRCCs, in the manner in which they have been envisaged under SSA, interact directly with teachers in their classrooms and are the vital link between the teacher and the teacher training institutions, feeding the needs of the field into the centralized training system. In reality, the Jan Shikshak (Cluster Academic Coordinator), is a lonely figure trying to reach the schools on his cycle or taking a lift on someone's bike, with little resources to facilitate his work. There is no assistance even to fund the travel to the schools. What are the ways in which this structure could be strengthened needs to be explored and planned with the department.

A comparative study to examine the field level functioning of the structures along with executive orders/guidelines undertaken as a short, research project would contribute significantly to facilitate planning among all partners.

### 5.3 Institutional Development

Capacity building of state and district level officials DIETs including BRCs/CRCs, is a huge challenge. It requires high level facilitation skills, awareness of successful models of organizational restructuring in other state governments and departments of social development and experience of having successfully orchestrated the process of developing common goals and aligning people and processes to the stated vision.

### 5.4 Attitude of the Government Teacher

Bringing change in the attitude of the government teacher is a huge challenge. In the current scenario, where they are centrally recruited and belong to the state cadre, it is impossible to compel the teacher to perform their duties. There is no effective monitoring of schools, no accountability and no punitive measures taken against those found shirking their duties. There is stiff resistance to the idea of teachers being recruited by the PRIs as it impacts a wide range of issues such as postings, transfers, pay scales, training etc.

The focus on the quality of elementary education due to large numbers of supposedly educated but unemployable youth, has resulted in pressures beginning to form from all sectors of society which may shake the teachers from their comfort zone and compel them to perform.

Teachers themselves, a majority of whom are not educated beyond Class XII, have never been exposed to any other way of being than what they are; they have emerged from the same system that they are now expected to change. In the absence of any mental models of interactive, child-sensitive teaching / learning processes, they are unable to identify ways in which they need to change. A centralized teacher training system which is not based on an analysis of the needs of the teachers fails to transact appropriate training and orientation to prepare the teachers for a challenging task of taking on the role of teaching children who require a different pedagogy and flexible schedules to help them in their learning process.

The 'teacher in the classroom' approach along with pressure on the system to incorporate the interaction time of the supplementary teacher and the government teacher as training time and treated as the practical part of the training module could be a possible solution.

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