

Alternative Paths to Primary Education in Rural India

Five case studies of GAA-assisted educational projects

**Clemens Jürgenmeyer
Rekha Pappu
Benazir Patil
Heribert Weiland**

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List of Abbreviations

AEC	Alternative Education Centre
AP	Andhra Pradesh
BKVV	Bala Karmika Vimochana Vedika (teacher union)
CACL	Campaign Against Child Labour
CBO	Community Based Organization
CCC	Child Care Centre (nursery education)
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CRPF	Child Rights Protection Forum
CRS	Catholic Relief Service
DPEP	District Primary Education Programme
DWHH	Deutsche Welthungerhilfe
EGS	Education Guarantee Scheme
ESCAP	Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
EU	European Union
GAA	German Agro Action
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
IIPS	International Institute of Population Studies
ILO	International Labour Organization
MP	Member of Parliament
MVF	Mamidipudi Venkatarangaiya Foundation
NCAER	National Council for Applied Economic Research
NCERT	National Council of Educational Research and Training
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
NSS	National Sample Survey
OPEPA	Orissa Primary Education Programme Authority
OBC	Other Backward Classes
PRI	Panchayati Raj Institutions
RBC	Residential Bridge Course Camp
RKM	Ramakrishna Mission
Rs	Indian Rupees
RTU	Reaching the Unreached
SEC	School Education Committee
SHG	Self-help Group
SLC	Supplementary Learning Centre
SWRC	Social Work and Research Centre
UBS	Union de Banques Suisses
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
VEC	Village Education Committee



Source: <http://www.mapsofindia.com/maps/india/india-political-map.gif> (accessed: 7-2-2006).

1. Executive Summary and Recommendations

1.1. Summary

1. This study analyses five educational projects in India that are supported by German Agro Action (GAA) and the European Union (EU) and are executed on the ground by Indian NGOs. Located in different geographical parts of India, the projects follow different ideological and pedagogical approaches. The study does not claim, especially given the size and diversity of Indian society, to represent the Indian educational situation as a whole. Rather, it intends to elucidate some alternative approaches adopted by the specific projects to overcome the existing shortcomings of the Indian primary educational system. Using a range of qualitative indicators pertaining to the educational philosophy of the organisations, their curriculum, pedagogy, relationship with the state, relevance, effectiveness etc. the study critically reflects on each of the project, each of which works in areas where educational facilities are not easily accessible. The study thus helps further understanding about how the deficiencies of primary education in India, with regard to the underprivileged sections of the Indian society in particular, can be innovatively addressed. It should be noted that all findings and interpretations are those of the study team and do not necessarily represent those of GAA.
2. GAA commissioned Dr. Rekha Pappu and Dr. Benazir Patil from India and Prof. Dr. Heribert Weiland and Clemens Jürgenmeyer from Germany to undertake the study on the basis of short field visits carried out during July and August 2006. The consultants visited five projects which are co-funded by GAA and the EU within the framework of the “Geographically Based Programme India” (ONG/PVD/PG/2003/011-613/IN). The five projects are as follows:
 - The Mamidipudi Venkatarangaiya Foundation (MVF), Andhra Pradesh, which aims for the elimination of child labour through universal elementary education.
 - The Social Work and Research Centre (SWRC), Rajasthan, which has introduced Night Schools and Children’s Parliament in order to further elementary education in the selected villages.
 - The Ramakrishna Mission (RKM), West Bengal, which has started kindergartens and coaching classes for pre-school children in rural areas.
 - Sikshasandhan, Orissa, which has set up alternative educational centres for the children of the indigenous minorities, and
 - Reaching the Unreached (RTU), Tamil Nadu, which has developed Montessori style schools for children in rural areas of South India
3. The scope and impact of the work undertaken by the aforementioned five NGO projects can only be assessed within the overall context of the education system in India. Though the system of government education has undergone many reforms and improvements since Independence, the Indian state has until now not succeeded in providing free education of good quality to all children under fourteen years. The total literacy rate presently stands at 65 %. Substantial disparities in terms of gender, caste/class and urban/rural population still exist. The quality of teaching is insufficient and absenteeism among teachers is widespread. Basic education in India is neglected while institutions of higher learning are preferred. The education system continues to be strongly related to the deep power asymmetries of Indian society.

4. Common to all the project approaches is the strong attention given to the poor and the marginalised. All projects concentrate on underprivileged children (whether in terms of their caste/class or other disadvantage such as being found with HIV-AIDS) with a special focus on gender, particularly on girls' education. In the case of most of the projects, the focus on education has emerged as part of their integrated approach to development. In fact, education related work is part of the organisation's development related work. All the organisations have aimed at social transformation through their interventions in the field of education.
5. All projects are rooted within the community, making sure that the local environment, together with its strengths and weaknesses, is taken into account when planning strategies for educational success. In all cases schooling – in terms of infrastructure, administration and curriculum – is sought to be made appropriate to local circumstances and to serve the needs of the people. Different educational approaches provide different solutions but they are all to a large extent in tune with the needs of the community. In fact, the working of these groups has demonstrated that community involvement is the key to success.
6. The contrasts between formal education provided by the state and non-formal education facilitated by the projects were found to be critical issues in each case study. The study found that the educational philosophy of the projects in relation to the formal system of education can be summed up as follows (MVF is an exception to this and their approach is elaborated separately):
 - while curricula and syllabuses of government schools are widely fixed and prescribed, non-governmental institutions are much more flexible and concentrate on informal teaching and learning according to local needs;
 - deviations from government curricula were found to be necessary and very important for children of tribal origin (for instance in Orissa) and other underprivileged groups to facilitate their access to the formal education system;
 - the intervention in the field of education is based on the belief that informal education drawing upon local knowledge can be – at least for an intermediate period – more functional than formal education. It is believed that members of underprivileged groups can gain self-confidence which is a prerequisite for social mobility and political participation. A tendency towards vocationalizing education is strong in these non-formal approaches to education;
 - none of the organisations believe that they are competing with the government system. Instead, they view their work as supplementing the government's and as providing viable models of working for the government to emulate where possible.
7. Probably the most important outcome of non-formal education can be defined as acquiring "soft skills" like higher awareness of health care, hygiene, and other social and political competences. These competences lead to a higher self-confidence, more social interaction and political participation, increased awareness of rights, particularly with regard to social equality in a structurally unequal society like India. In that respect acquiring soft skills through informal education is freeing the underprivileged from the "culture of poverty and silence". The acquisition of these soft skills is seen as a stepping stone to future education and schooling.
8. While four out of the five cases under study provide a system of education that parallels the government system, MVF forms the exception through its insistence on not setting up its own educational institutions but of using the existing government system and thereby

forcing it to respond to the educational needs of all. MVF is fighting child labour and working for children's rights through mobilization campaigns for free and compulsory education within the government educational system. By establishing the norm that every child has to go to school, the objective is primarily defined as the responsibility of state and society.

9. The study found that the selection and quality of teachers is extremely important for the success of the project. In nearly all projects, teachers were found to be dedicated because they believed in the pedagogical and ideological concept of the organization with which they were involved and were well trained for their jobs.
10. All projects depend on external funding because the pro-poor approach does not raise adequate funds from among the target population. Thus, in these cases in particular, financial sustainability cannot be attained without external funding (either from the state or from the international community). Moreover, at least three of the five projects are characterized by strong, charismatic personalities who are still decisive for the success of the work even if they tend to retire from actively managing these projects.

1.2. Recommendations

The findings of the study that are mentioned in brief above form the basis of the study team's recommendations which are as follows. These recommendations apply to all the projects. Project specific recommendations themselves are provided in the concluding chapter of this study along with the best practices evolved by each group.

1. Given the size and heterogeneity of the Indian subcontinent, it is impossible to follow a uniform approach to the problem of how to improve the standard of education and living of the rural poor. The difference in approaches and strategies adopted by the different projects correspond to the diversity of situations and the needs prevailing in different parts of India. Though the approaches of the various organisations differ considerably, they nevertheless may be the right answer to the specific problems existing in the areas where they are working. A day school is not per se better than a night school. Therefore, there are clear limits to the replicability of the success of a specific educational project. The diversity of approaches and strategies, be they practical or theoretical, is not a liability but an asset which should be retained.
2. All the projects should be encouraged to extensively document their work in the field of education and to publish them. Almost all the groups have experimented with different strategies and met with failures / successes of different kinds. These need to be put out in the public domain so that they would influence other or similar interventions in the field. Moreover, the curricula and the pedagogical approach developed by the various groups for their non-formal educational setting too forms an important intervention and needs to be shared with others.
3. Since the teacher plays a pivotal role in the learning process special attention should be directed to the teaching personnel. In addition to a high level of commitment, they should be able to meet the necessary pedagogical and academic qualifications. Adequate recruitment and assessment procedures are necessary to guarantee a good quality of teaching. Teachers should be paid a salary commensurate with the demands. Generally speaking, the learning infrastructure, the teaching material and the curriculum as a whole should be relevant to the needs of the children.

4. In this context it may be mentioned that the demand from below for education in English is growing at a rapid pace even while the desirability of providing such education is being debated within elite sections. Given the cultural capital associated with English as well as the fact that knowledge of English opens up opportunities of different kinds, all the projects should seriously explore the possibilities for providing access to English as part of their educational programmes.
5. Strong charismatic leaders who exert a decisive influence on the working and the success of their organisations founded three of the five projects under review. In order to ensure the continuation of the project once they have retired from day-to-day business it is necessary to build up decentralised organisation structures to strengthen the independence of the various sub-units and ensure the sustainability of the whole project. Decentralisation and participation from below will enhance a sense of ownership and a growing support for the organisation in both material and non-material terms from the students and their parents. The Children's Parliament and the various village committees are cases in point.
6. Since all the projects depend on external funding they should be encouraged to make a consistent effort to improve the financial sustainability of their organisations. Apart from tapping public funds and other financial sources, it seems to be appropriate to ask former students and other beneficiaries to generously make financial donations to the organisation which gave them the opportunity to live a better life. The alumni could be considered an important resource either in financial terms or in terms of providing other services to strengthen the functioning of the organisation.
7. The project partners should be encouraged to regularly discuss and present their future strategies in view of the challenges ahead. Since the political and societal situation changes constantly, adjustment or even a reversal of the strategies and methods applied is of great importance. The conceptual debates have to be intensified in order to be able to cope with the future challenges.
8. In order to further improve the overall performance of the projects it seems to be advisable to have a critical review of the success and failures once a year. This review should be at best empirically based. Has the dropout rate declined? Where does the pupil-teacher ratio stand? How many students have been able to go over to a government school? Did the students find a job after having left school? How much funds did the alumni donate? What about other activities like health care, hygiene, participation in community activities, etc.?
9. Given the dismal performance of the Indian state's primary educational system the need for innovative strategies and projects by private organisations is not surprising. They play an important role in extending basic educational facilities to the poor. However, one has to take care that NGOs do not step in more and more and take over the tasks that are genuinely those of the state. The state bears a high responsibility to ensure that the basic right to education for all is put into practice. It should not be freed from this responsibility. Therefore, it is one of the main tasks of the NGOs working in the field of primary education in India to permanently pressurize the state into fulfilling its obligations. This also includes a critical cooperation with government institutions if need be. The groups under discussion should in fact be more pro-active in influencing the educational policies of the government and ensure the universalization of education.

2. Introduction – Study Framework and Methods Applied

Five cases of different educational approaches which are assisted by German Agro Action in India are analysed here. These five cases are but a small number when considering the fact that India, a country with a population of more than one billion people, has the second largest education system in the world with more than 215 million students participating in various forms of educational activities. In quantitative terms, this is obviously but the proverbial drop in the ocean but in qualitative terms these approaches represent some serious ways and means to improve the educational standards of the population and thereby contribute to the overall development goals of the country. The intention of even small educational projects is to kick off a process of development and to create a successful example which can be replicated. In other words, it is the light-house function which serves as a guideline for the following analysis of the five case-studies on education projects, supported by GAA / DWHH and partner organizations in India.

Two Indian (Dr. Rekha Pappu and Dr. Benazir Patil) and two German researchers (Dr. Herbert Weiland and Clemens Jürgenmeyer) were commissioned by GAA / DWHH to study and analyse the following education projects:

- Mamidipudi Venkatarangaiya Foundation (MVF) – Elimination of child labour through universal elementary education
- Social Work and Research Centre (SWRC) – Evening schools and Children’s Parliament
- Ramakrishna Mission (RKM) – Kindergarten and coaching classes
- Siksasandhan – Educational centres for indigenous minorities
- Reaching the Unreached (RTU) – Montessori schools for children in rural areas of South India

The Study has been carried out within the framework of the “Geographically-based Programme India” which is co-funded by the EU (ONG/PVD/PG/2003/011-613/IN). The partner organizations mentioned above have been actively involved in the Study by reflecting on their respective programmes and by sharing their views and ideas. Furthermore the findings and recommendations of the study were discussed intensively with the partners at a joint reflection workshop organised in Kolkata in September 2006.

The researchers visited the project sites in July and August 2006 for about 5 days each. They had the opportunity to meet the responsible personnel and discuss objectives and activities of the projects. They participated in the teaching and learning processes during class hours. They had interviews with teachers and students and read through the literature made available to them. The research team was also informed by the personnel of the organizations about the non-educational components of their multifaceted development projects. Thus, through intensive discussions and participatory observation the researchers got substantial information to draw up the following report. The authors are aware of the fact that the visits of a few days are certainly not sufficient to come to final conclusions. Needless to say that all findings and interpretations given in this report are those of the study team and do not necessarily reflect the ones of GAA.

3. General Background – Aims, Concepts and Challenges of the Indian Educational System

3.1. The educational system of India: The second largest in the world

Like most of the states with a colonial heritage, India also had to build upon the legacy of the educational system that it inherited from the British. Under British rule, educational policy was clearly subordinated to the imperial economic policy. No aspect of mass education, regardless of whether it was primary, upper primary or higher education, was ever delinked from the gains that the British would make.

The importance of education for the development of the Indian nation was therefore stated for the first time in the Constitution that independent India adopted in 1950. Article 45 stated a commitment that the state, “shall endeavour to provide, within a period of ten years from the commencement of this constitution, free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of fourteen years.” The Indian government soon realized that education is a fundamental requirement for economic growth in India. Therefore the importance of education was further emphasized in the five-year plans for development of the economy. Since the first five-year plan was presented in 1952, every plan highlighted the need to include education into the economic planning. Thus, it was envisaged that the growth of the educational system could go hand in hand with the economic development. Education was clearly recognized as a key factor in production, viewing education as a crucial area of investment for national development.

With the 42nd amendment to the constitution in 1976, the responsibility of education, which was earlier the sole responsibility of the Centre, came to be shared between the Union and the states. Finally, the 86th amendment to the Constitution passed by Parliament in December 2002 made education a fundamental right. The inserted Article 21A “Right to Education” stipulates that “the State shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of six to fourteen years in such manner as the State may, by law, determine.” Interestingly enough, the date of its coming into force has yet to be notified in the Official Gazette.

But the educational strategies since independence focussed not only on economic perspectives but were closely linked also to social mobility and political equality issues. Based on a set of concomitant objectives priority was given to eradicating illiteracy and providing a universal elementary education available for all as soon as possible. On the secondary level the focus was on vocational and technical education. Basically at all levels establishing equity in education regardless of gender, caste, and socio-economic groups, as well as reducing the regional disparities have been the major issues of educational policies.

To achieve these goals the government of India made heavy investments to expand the educational system. Consequently, according to official statistics, enrolments in all educational institutions has increased from about 24 million in 1950-1951 to above 210 million in 2002-2003. As a result of the opening of the educational institutions to all parts of the society, the total number of children enrolled into school has increased about eight times. As of today India has the second largest education system in the world, with around 1 million schools, 17,000 colleges and 329 universities.

Growth in Literacy in India (Age-group 6+) in per cent

	1981	1991	2001
<i>Rural</i>			
Males	49.7	57.8 (+ 8.1)	71.2 (+ 13.4)
Females	21.8	30.3 (+ 8.5)	46.6 (+ 16.3)
Total	36.1	44.5 (+ 8.4)	59.2 (+ 14.7)
Gender Disparity Index	0.4318	0.3573	0.2601
<i>Urban</i>			
Males	76.8	81.0 (+ 4.2)	86.4 (+ 5.4)
Females	56.4	63.9 (+ 7.5)	73.0 (+ 9.1)
Total	67.3	73.1 (+ 5.8)	80.1 (+ 7.0)
Gender Disparity Index	0.2006	0.1613	0.1219
<i>Total</i>			
Males	56.5	64.2 (+ 7.7)	75.9 (+ 11.7)
Females	29.8	39.2 (+ 9.6)	54.2 (+ 15.0)
Total	43.6	52.2 (+ 8.6)	65.4 (+ 13.2)
Gender Disparity Index	0.352	0.288	0.215

Source: Census of India, cited in Tilak 2006: 34.

Altogether, independence had created a tremendous rise in the social demand for education, which was further strengthened by the rise of individual earnings. The government reacted to this demand with the expansion of the educational system. There has been a significant improvement in the educational system regarding the regional disparities and inequalities by gender, caste and socio-economic groups over the years though a great deal still remains to be done. Overall, this expansion of the educational system also had a positive impact on the economic development of the country.

3.2. Major shortcomings of the educational system

All the same, a review of the achievements of the educational efforts displays major problems the system is still facing, both in terms of quality and quantity. Regarding the goals of the educational strategies, the progress achieved has been far below the original targets. The number of children never enrolled into school or dropping out of school, remains at an unacceptably high level. The literacy rate, a common indicator for educational development, continues to reveal high disparities, not only between gender and socio-economic groups but also between rural and urban areas. Literacy figures vary widely depending on the method of calculation; the figure for overall literacy in India is to be estimated between 54% and 65%. According to the Census of India the overall literacy rate in the age group of six years and above may have increased from 43.6% in 1981 to 52.2% in 1991 and 65.4% in 2001, but is still short of the government goal of reaching 100% literacy, and also below that of other countries, such as China, which claims to have reached a rate of 88%.

The most striking aspect regarding illiteracy is the disparity between male and female population: 75.9% versus 54.2%. The disparity is larger in rural areas than in urban areas, presuma-

bly reflecting various factors such as the greater degree of poverty in rural areas and the greater adherence to traditional gender roles. Thus, the rate of literacy among rural females is only 46% versus 86% among urban males. Despite the expansion of the educational system, the gap between male and female literacy is still alarming. Therefore, the right to education of the girl child has become a key focus point in all educational strategies, not only of Indian government policies, but also of most organizations interested in educational issues (NGOs).

The disparity between rural and urban areas is also still very high, with peri-urban slum areas falling in between. Apart from the greater degree of poverty in rural areas, other issues like the lack of schools in remote areas (according to government sources the population living in 17% of the habitations lack access to a primary school within a distance of one kilometre), problems of understaffing, parents' perceptions of the poor quality of teaching and poor condition of rural schools, and lack of awareness of the importance of education could be identified as reasons for the urban rural disparities.

Another aspect highly neglected by the educational policy, is adult illiteracy. Only few resources were allocated to solve this problem. Altogether some areas within India have achieved far higher literacy rates than the national average. According to the Indian census the various states could be divided into three groups: high literacy states (above 75% literacy), medium literacy states (above the national average of 65% literacy), and low literacy states (below 65% literacy). Only six states, Kerala, which has the highest literacy rate (93%), Mizoram, Goa, Delhi, Maharashtra, and Himachal Pradesh belong to the first group, four of them already have been in the top group in 1991. On the other hand states like Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Meghalaya, Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan, Arunachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, and Bihar belong to the bottom group below national average. Gender disparities remain especially in the last mentioned group very high. They do also account for more than half of the illiterates of whole India.

According to official statements of the Human Resource Department, the universalization of education should finally be achieved in 2010. With The Constitution (Eighty-sixth Amendment) Act, 2002 free and compulsory education for all children in the age group from six to fourteen years should become a fundamental right. Some view this act as a milestone for the educational system, but especially grass-roots organizations and other NGOs question the impact of this act. One aspect criticised is the dilution of constitutional responsibility towards children after the age of 14 years and in excluding children below six years of age. Another aspect is the act's complete silence on the matter of minimum quality education, which has left the whole issue of quality wide open to interpretations; particularly that it has pushed the commitment of curriculum and classroom process management to the vagaries of the State. Thereby, leaving a clear escape route for cheap alternatives where quantity could be traded off for quality through unmotivated, untrained and underpaid teachers with minimum infrastructure. Obviously the issue of quality of education has not been emphasised enough by the Indian educational system, especially in rural areas.

3.3. Enrolment and retention

One of the greatest achievements of the expansion of the educational system was in the field of elementary education. Enrolments into primary education have increased from 1.9 millions in 1950-1951 to 12.2 millions in 2002-2003, in upper primary education even from 310,000 in 1950-1951 to 4.7 millions in 2002-2003. Despite these positive figures there is also a downside to this development. There are still a large number of children in the age group from six

to fourteen who are not going to school. According to the International Institute of Population Studies only 79 % of all children in this age group attended school in 1998-1999.

This leaves around 50 to 60 million children who are not attending school on a regular basis. Again, there are high disparities between rural and urban areas, also regarding the income of the household. Nearly 90 % of the children of the highest expenditure category attend school, while in rural areas only 50% and in urban areas 60 % of the lowest expenditure category attends school. Overall about 33% of the children of the age group between five and nine years and 28% in urban areas are not going to school. Even if there have been some improvements in the attendance ratio recently, the high number of children not attending school is widely recognised as one of the biggest shortcomings of the educational system in India.

An important aspect of the universalization of elementary education is not only enrolment into school but also retention and achievement. The retention rate of the Indian school system is one of the major problems of education. From 100 children admitted into school, only 47 reach 8th grade and only 37 reach 10th grade. For example, in the school year 1997-1998, 45% of children in the first five classes dropped out, rising to 60% in the first eight classes. As a result of the high dropout rate in 1991 the majority of adults (56.7%) have had less than three years of education, and less than 20% had seven or more years. Again there is a large gender difference in years of education: 68.4% of women had less than three years, and only 12.3% had seven or more years. Overall in 1998-1999 males in urban areas had an average of 7.2 years of education while females only had 5.5 years. Even more striking is the difference in rural areas: 4.6 versus 2.6 years. Even if the average number of years of education is slowly increasing over the last decade to an average of 4.4 years, it still remains below that of many other developing countries.

Mean Years of Schooling of Population

	1998-1999			1992-1993		
	Males	Females	Total	Males	Females	Total
Urban	7.2	5.5	6.4	6.6	4.9	5.8
Rural	4.6	2.6	3.6	4.1	2.0	3.0
Total	5.3	3.4	4.4	4.8	2.7	3.8

Source: International Institute for Population Studies 1993 and 2000, cited in Tilak 2006: 37.

Reasons for the high number of children never being enrolled into school and the high dropout rate could be divided into three sets of factors: household economic factors; school environment, including quality of physical and human infrastructure; social and cultural factors. Recent studies have shown that in some states of India economic factors played the most important role for children not being enrolled or dropping out of school. Factors in school non-attendance include: children working to supplement family income; taking on housework and care of sibling responsibilities so that both parents can go out to work, this especially applies for female children. An important economic factor is the costs of schooling. Despite the constitutional right to free and compulsory education, sending their children to school involves families in high costs, e.g. for textbooks and school uniforms as well as for transportation. Moreover, in many cases families have to pay tuition fees, not only in private but also (to a lower degree) in government aided schools. According to the estimates presented in NSS (National Sample Survey) 52nd round, 1995-96, and NCAER (National Council for Applied Economic Research) 1994 household surveys, these households bear 38-43 % of the visible cost of sending children to government schools. On the part of the children, the most important factor for not enrolling into schools is lack of interest, mostly due to poor quality and

quantity of physical and humane infrastructure, poor quality of instruction, and social factors arising out of the family: especially for girls education is not valued as important.

3.4. Educational expenditure

Since economic factors are obviously playing such an important role, not only for enrolling children into school but also for the high dropout rate, the shortcomings in the public expenditure on education are highly criticised. While recognizing the importance of education, the Government of India had fixed a target of 6% of the GDP to be spent in the educational sector already in 1968. The target of 6% was reiterated in the National Policy on Education in 1986. Even if there has been an increase in public expenditure on education especially since the 1980s, the margin of 6% was never reached. In 2004-2005 only 3.5% of the GDP was invested in education.

Growth in Public Expenditure on Education in India

Year	Per cent of GDP	Per cent of budget
1951-1952	0.64	7.92
1960-1962	1.48	11.99
1970-1971	2.31	15.10
1980-1981	3.08	13.48
1990-1991	4.07	13.97
2000-2001	4.26	12.23
2004-2005	3.49	12.27

Source: Data based on Census of India and Economic and Political Weekly Research Foundation, cited in Tilak 2006: 43

As in many other countries it is not only the lack of financial resources put aside for education which can solve the economic, social and political problems linked to education in India. The educational debate includes many more issues being relevant for the future of the country. To name only a few: government vs. private schools; quality vs. quantity; content of education (curricula and syllabuses); schools and social mobility; gender and caste issues (social inclusion); the socialization and allocative function of education; vocational training etc.

The five projects of GAA / DWHH in India can be viewed within the above mentioned context of education. All the groups aim to improve the educational landscape. All transcend the narrow focus of schooling and try to include broader social problems, such as the situation of girls and women or the upward mobility of discriminated groups. The following chapters present the different approaches and the different answers of the GAA-assisted projects in the context of the general educational landscape in India.

4. Mamidipudi Venkatarangaiya Foundation (MVF)

4.1. Background

The Mamidipudi Venkatarangaiya Foundation (MVF) established in 1981 and named after the educationist and historian Prof. Mammipuddi Venkatarangaiya was during its early years of existence a research institution on issues relating to social change. Since 1991 the MVF has been focusing its activities on the abolition of child labour in the Ranga Reddy district of Andhra Pradesh as a specific instance of its overall concern with children's rights. The two main objectives of the Foundation are the eradication of all forms of child labour and the realization of a universal, formal, full day school programme for all children. It concentrates on enrolling the children in school and ensuring that they remain there. What started in 1991 with only a few activists as a small but nonetheless ambitious movement in just three villages of Shankarpally mandal (block) in Ranga Reddy district, soon expanded into a large and complex social movement employing a wide range of strategies.

Child labour in India, particularly in Andhra Pradesh, is a serious problem. "Bonded labour", in which an adult or a child is attached to and works for another family in return for a loan taken from them, is still common. The term "bonded labour" draws from the fact that since the loans are rarely repaid the child continues to provide unpaid labour for the moneylender's family all throughout his / her life. Child labourers, particularly girls, live under usually inhuman conditions at the cost of their self-development. Their everyday situation of e.g. domestic child workers is well described in an article by Shantha Sinha, the founder of MVF:

Their lives are described as lonely and friendless, tedious, labouring every moment for some one else to grow and benefit. Many of them sleep underneath the stairway or on the balcony regardless of the weather. Most of them don't get enough time to sleep. The food they are given is mostly the left over food of the family, which leads to malnutrition.

There is a generally held myth among the middle classes that they are doing them a favor because these 'hapless' children are given food, clothing and shelter. A double standard, one for one's own children and another for these young boys and girls is unabashedly practiced and condoned.

Thus, a notion of benevolence and charity masks the hidden exploitation and the long-term harm for such children and their lives. It is not true that children are benefited as domestic child labour because they are earning an income or are getting food and shelter, good clothes, can watch TV and so on. On the other hand, children are being exploited as they are a source of cheap Labour who will work long hours unquestioningly. Such a view is a reflection of society's tolerance of child labour and violation of children's rights where children are treated as mere commodities with complete disregard for human rights.

Concerned citizens must play a vital role in sensitizing one and all in making child domestic work socially and culturally unacceptable.

In its fifteen years of engagement for the abolition of child labour the MV Foundation has achieved remarkable success. Already by 1999, MVF was working in 500 villages and in 400 of these villages every child in the age group of 5-11 was enrolled in government schools. The extent of MVF's activities can be seen from the following figures: by 1999 about 150,000 children had been enrolled and retained in schools, more than 4,000 bonded child labourers had been released, and 168 villages were made child labour free through the efforts of MVF. According to MVF, until now 320,000 former child labourers could be enrolled in school and its programme is implemented in more than 6,000 villages in 11 districts of Andhra Pradesh.

Further to the specific work that MVF has done with the children, it has also succeeded in forming a large number of grass-roots organizations to work for the abolition of child labour. Among these organizations are the School Education Committees (SECs), youth committees, the Child Rights Protection Forums (CRPFs), or teacher unions like the Bala Karmika Vimochana Vedika (BKVV). Additionally, MVF has also involved the leaders of Gram Panchayats (village council) and other Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI, elected bodies at village, block and district level) in their work.

In preparation for enrolment into the formal education system 45,000 former child labourers were put through Bridge Course Camps and 30,000 youth volunteers, 2500 BKVV volunteers and about 75,000 CRPF members were mobilized to liberate children. This movement has also been receiving support from 3000 School Education Committees and active Gram Panchayats, and as a result, according to MVF, the numbers of child labour free villages in Andhra Pradesh has gone up to 1000.

As a result of the success of the MVF model the government and an increasing number of other NGO's are beginning to adopt MVF's methods and philosophy. The model of the bridge courses for example has been taken up in the 'Back to School' programme initiated by the Department of Social Welfare. This programme was implemented in the entire state of Andhra Pradesh. MVF sees itself as a national resource agency offering technical support to other NGOs as well as to the government whenever needed.

4.2. MVF's philosophy

4.2.1. Education instead of exploitation

The philosophy of MVF is essentially a political one, the idea is to strengthen democracy and to build a secular society in India, guaranteeing basic rights to all its citizens regardless of gender, caste, creed or religious affiliation. The philosophy focuses on children's rights based on the belief that children are among the most discriminated group in a society such as India, which is already divided on the basis of class and caste. Education is regarded as a universal right and formal education is thought to have an intrinsic value. MVF has been consistent in its affirmation that every child out of school is a child labourer. To prevent child labour, particularly bonded labour, the society has to ensure that every child goes to school, the primary activity of every child is to be a student and not a worker. Though MVF is largely involved in the educational sector, it has not yet given as much attention to developing pedagogical tools within the government institutions as it has to mobilizing the communities and ensuring universalization of education.

The MVF philosophy pursues a political mobilization programme aimed at changing the mindsets of the population. MVF believes that by changing norms, accepting children's right to education, the children themselves, parents, administration, employers, and the community as a whole will have to accept the universal principle of children's right to education. MVF claims that this universal principle should not only be accepted but internalized by everybody. Concerned citizens are asked to play a vital role in sensitizing one and all in making child labour socially and culturally unacceptable. The mobilizing process aims at energizing every stakeholder in the society to undertake a public debate and ensure the right of each and everybody to education. Therefore, a part of MVF's work is to initialize a national political debate about child labour by involving all sections of the society including educational institutions,

teachers, journalists, bureaucrats and politicians at all levels, as well as business chambers and big companies.

Since millions of children in India still have no chance to go to school, the realization of the universal right to education for children, which is also a constitutional right (Article 45), is still far from being achieved — de facto it is a political power game between societal interests and civil rights. In such a context, MVF believes that by mobilizing the communities through volunteers to send their children to school will eventually force the state to act by providing more and better educational facilities and ensure that the education system accepts the backlog of children of all ages and all classes. Each bottleneck within the system is sought to be converted into a systemic issue: the government is forced to act and to expand the educational system because the pressure comes from the people.

The MVF approach insists that the government interest in school attendance should not be restricted only to primary education. It emphasises that education should be universalized up to about ten years (class / grade 1 to 10) and not just the first five as it is presently done. If every child has successfully attended these ten years of education and more, it can be hoped that the cleavages within society will be eventually overcome, because the chance for upward mobility will be more real.

In response to MVF's approach it may be pointed out that the struggle for educational facilities for the poor by enrolling them into schools takes time. Today's children are winners and losers at the same time. The present generation is losing because with the rapid expansion of education quality standards cannot be kept up to the mark, it is winning because every child gets a chance of improving his future life and overcoming existing social hierarchies.

The MVF campaign has started off with children who are bonded labourers and has been expanded to all children who are not attending school. This move has helped MVF to mobilize the whole community for its cause. By following an area-based approach instead of a target-based approach, MVF clearly shows that it is not only taking care of particular sections or groups of society but applying instead a comprehensive approach for all parts of society. Based on this philosophy, MVF is trying to get involved in areas that are still deeply divided along the lines of class or caste.

4.2.2. Total abolition of child labour through education

The MVF has developed a variety of interlinked strategies to achieve its twin objectives, the abolition of child labour and the universalization of education. These strategies have evolved from a certain perspective on child labour which is expressed in a set of guiding principles referred to as the 'non-negotiables':

- All Children must attend full-time formal day schools, any other form of school like night schools or part-time schools are unacceptable.
- Any child out of school is a child labourer.
- All labour is hazardous and harms the overall growth and development of the child.
- There must be total abolition of child labour. Any law regulating child-work is unacceptable.

- Any justification perpetuating the existence of child labour must be condemned.

MVF's definition of child labour does not necessarily imply paid work but comprises of any form of occupation that a child is taking up in those hours at home or outside when she / he is supposed to be in school. This definition questions the traditional distinction between hazardous and exploitative labour and other kinds of child work. For MVF it makes no difference if the child is engaged in wage or non-wage work, or whether the child is working for the family or for others, being employed on a daily wage or contract basis as a bonded labourer. According to the concept of MVF, child labour is defined as children not going to school. Thus the objective of MVF is to get as many children as possible out of labour into school.

The implication of MVF's definition of child labour is that dropouts from school should also be prevented. Formal full-time school is seen as the best way to deal with the problem of child labour, following the simple logic that if a child is at school he / she cannot be at work. Community mobilization is the cornerstone of this campaign for universal education, which is executed by MVF volunteers and the members of the Child Rights Protection Forum (CRPF) who want to create awareness and try all possible ways to get children back to the schools.

At the core of MV Foundation's strategy for transforming children from labourers to students are the Residential Bridge Course Camps (RBCs). Once withdrawn from work, the younger children between the age group of 5 – 8 are sent directly to respective classes in the primary school, while the children of the age group 9 – 14 (class 5 to 7) are encouraged to undergo bridge courses in the Residential Bridge Course Camps (RBCs). Most of the children in the RBCs have hardly received any formal education. The RBCs provide rigorous literacy programmes. In a crash course for a period of 6 – 18 months the children get equipped with the necessary knowledge to pass the exams of class 7 and get re-integrated into formal government schools. The aim is not to keep them in the RBCs for the entire schooling period of 10 years but to ensure that they are absorbed into the formal education system. For both age groups, there is a detailed follow-up programme which would ensure a minimal dropout rate.

MVF does not see itself as being in opposition to the government and its educational institutions. MVF defines its task not as substituting the state by setting up its own parallel institutions but as facilitating access to existing ones. The idea behind this approach is to mobilise the community to create pressure for the state to take on its responsibilities, while simultaneously offering support to the existing educational system to take care of the children. With this strategy MVF is able not only to support the improvement of the government institutions but also to mobilize people to access them. Education is seen as an instrument of social change, which in the hands of the poor can help them find better social and economic opportunities in life.

4.2.3. Formal – informal education

MVF's position on education is also to question the approach that formal education is inappropriate in rural areas. Unlike some experts, who believe that for children in a rural context it is more important to learn traditional skills than attend school, MVF takes a different approach. MVF emphasises that ensuring all children's attendance in formal full day school is the only way to guarantee that children are not at work and therefore formal schooling enables them to compete on equal terms in their future. Moreover, MVF believes that vocational education does not enhance the prospects of the child in the long term; it only consolidates existing caste roles and increases the chances that children are exploited as cheap labour. MVF believes that the only way to guarantee the principle of equal opportunities for every child and

to overcome the existing social hierarchies is the formal school system, so that children are more mature when they have to decide on their own about their professional future.

Another argument MVF questions is the classical poverty argument, which claims that the income generated by child labour is essential for a lot of poor families to survive. MVF claims that the poverty argument is not the only reason for child labour and children not going to school. According to MVF, there is a variety of reasons that leads parents to send their kids to work instead of school, like illiteracy of the parents, low motivation, tradition, accessibility of schools, insensitive administration etc. MVF claims to have demonstrated that poor parents can also send their kids to school even without being offered financial compensation for the loss of income.

4.3. Educational environment

The MVF volunteers and the staff try to create a positive attitude towards formal education among students and within the communities. Key aspects of the reintegration of former child labourers are the RBCs (Residential Bridge Camps), which are a remarkable intervention and an important means to get children back into the formal system. In these camps students between 9 – 14 years are offered intensive literacy classes. A special attempt is made to recruit and retain girl children and to involve the entire community in developing strategies for reaching out to this group.

The infrastructure of these camps is simple, although the basic amenities are taken care of. The school buildings are in the form of sheds and platforms rather than properly constructed permanent classes (The RBC the study team saw was established in the remains of a former poultry farm.). The children normally sit on the floor, sleep on the ground, eat simple meals, have facilities to take a bath and wash clothes, and store their belongings in the boxes provided for them. Important to mention are the evening get-togethers where the pupils look back on the main events of the day, present their achievements, talk about common aspirations and problems and get the feeling that their views are being taken seriously. These evening meetings and presentations, which at times include some games and group singing sessions, are very important pedagogical means to induce self-esteem, confidence and a sense of equality among the students. This attitude, if it is successfully instilled into the students, can help them overcome social hurdles in their future lives.

Often mentioned critiques about the RBCs are that the students are kept away from their families for a long period, isolated from their communities and their peer groups. They not only face a strongly disciplined and stressful atmosphere but also an equally overloaded curriculum. Nevertheless, the experiment has produced remarkable quantitative results in terms of reintegration of children into schools and thus a reduction of dropouts.

4.4. Community involvement

Community involvement is bearing a late fruit in this programme through the tradition of political activities like communist and other radical movements in Andhra Pradesh. The proof of it is the active political engagement of the MVF volunteers who are rather militant supporters of the campaign. The success in terms of numbers reported proves that the communities have been motivated. Even some former employers of child labour have become fervent supporters of MVF.

Community involvement is also manifested by the fact that in 2002 CRPF (Child Rights Protection Forum) has been registered as an independent children's rights movement and parallel to CRPF the teachers have formed their own BKVV (Bala Karmika Vimochana Vedika) movement to improve upon the quality of teaching and learning achievements of the students. CRPF and BKVV have gained widespread acceptance in many of the communities.

Due to its grass-roots background the organizational principal of MVF is decentralization. Part of this decentralized concept is a strong community involvement. The local staff bears full responsibility for planning, implementation and monitoring of the programme and has autonomy in decision making. Decisions are taken at the village level and are only reported to higher levels, i.e. to the cluster and mandal organizers. Although the work is overseen by supervisors at the mandal (block) level, the local levels remain independent. If disputes arise at the local level, they are sought to be resolved at that level without interference from the higher levels. But in order to ensure that a permanent learning process takes place, the experiences of each activist and every unit are regularly presented and discussed in review meetings. This enables the MVF movement as a whole to share important experiences and innovative initiatives so that lessons learned become part of its collective memory.

The autonomy and independence of the staff at the local level is important for the work and self-conception of the activists. This enables them to act less as salaried workers than as independent activists. By doing so, they are setting an example for others and are making it attractive to work for MVF. This type of capacity building has proven to be very effective. MVF claims that most of its activists have undergone a mental transformation and have become active agents of change. A vast majority of them have never been to college and are from underprivileged sections of the society. Many of them have been child labourers themselves. Only few of the activists are from the 'upper' castes or classes.

Another MVF organizational principle is the close involvement and cooperation with the village community. MVF is anxious to involve the community leadership into its programmes. The aim of this strategy is not only to strengthen the programmes by community ownership or active participation but also to strengthen the community itself. The aim is to raise the communal awareness for the importance of the abolition of child labour. Therefore one important part of MVF's strategy of mobilization is to support community-based peoples' organizations and forums. MVF sees itself as a catalyst in this process and measures its success in the existence of forums and organizations obliged to the education of children. This strategy is aiming at the communities taking over the education programmes because MVF does not want to act as an overarching top down institution. To illustrate this approach of taking over the ownership of the programmes: In January 1999 MVF transferred the responsibility of its child labour programmes in 78 villages over to community-based, non-MVF groups.

Another aspect of community involvement is the introduction of para-teachers – people who are educated and recruited by MVF to teach in government schools. These para-teachers have no formal training as teachers and they are provided some initial training by MVF. In the initial phase para-teachers were appointed by MVF to compensate the shortfall of teachers. They were paid only a fraction of a regular teacher's salary. The state government itself then took over and adopted this approach starting from 1999. The low wages involved do make the programme cost effective and do create a sense of community participation and community ownership of existing schools. But questions of the quality of education remain. MVF, too, has therefore been critical of the manner in which the government has co-opted the idea of the para-teachers and has made it a regular feature of government school functioning.

4.5. Impact

MVF is a powerful NGO which was able to change social and governmental attitudes both towards child labour as well as towards the necessity of school education for children. As a result of MVF's efforts, significant change has taken place.

According to MVF, up to now 320,000 former child labourers were enrolled in school and its programme is implemented in more than 6,000 villages in 11 districts of Andhra Pradesh. Currently the MVF is engaged directly in the Ranga Reddy, Nalgonda, Kurnool and Adilabad districts in Andhra Pradesh. Additionally, it still offers assistance and technical support to previous programmes conducted in Srikakulam, Vizianagaram, Mahbubnagar, Chittoor, Kadapa, East Godavari, Visakhapatnam, Anantapur, and Warangal districts of Andhra Pradesh through its collaboration with the Child Rights Protection Forums (CPRF). As part of its efforts to bring children to schools, MVF has also been successful in opposing the practice of child marriage in several villages. It has launched a campaign against child marriage seeking to raise awareness among the villagers about the problems with child marriage, especially for girl children. In some villages this campaign has resulted in the MVF volunteers having to take a stand against the influential village elders. On the whole, however, MVF has managed to destabilize the traditional acceptance accorded to the practice of child marriages.

As a result of the success of the MVF model the government and an increasing number of other NGOs begin to adopt the MVF methods and philosophy. The model of the bridge courses for example was adopted as the 'Back to School' programme by the Department of Social Welfare. This programme was implemented in the entire state of Andhra Pradesh. The MVF did provide assistance in the training of Department of Social Welfare officials. The idea of the bridge camps was also picked up by the Department of Women and Child Welfare, which holds special bridge camps for former girl child labourers. Also the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP), funded by the World Bank, has adopted MVF's abolition of child labour philosophy through education campaigns in as many as 15 districts in the country. As a result MVF could spread its message beyond the state of Andhra Pradesh. MVF sees itself as a national resource agency offering technical support to other NGOs as well as to the government whenever needed. Currently MVF provides technical support to the states of Assam, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra and Rajasthan and to Nepal as well. Also, MVF increasingly networks with other NGOs supporting the effort of abolishing child labour like the Stop Child Labour – School is the Best Place to Work Campaign (in Europe), the Catholic Relief Services (CRS), and the Campaign against Child Labour (CACL). Additionally, it also receives support from international organizations like the International Labour Organization (ILO), UNDP India, UNICEF, and funding organizations like the World Bank.

4.6. Critical assessment

4.6.1. Relevance and effectiveness

According to the Population Census 1991 child labour in Andhra Pradesh used to be significantly higher than in other states of India. In rural areas of AP 12.5% of all children in the age group of 0-14 years were engaged in some kind of gainful economic activities, while in all other states of India the magnitude of rural child labour is much lower, the Indian average being at 6.4%. National Sample Survey data reveal the same pattern for the year 1999-2000. Taking this fact in mind there is no doubt that MVF has taken up an enormous challenge and their intervention has had a significant effect on the attitude towards child labour and the necessity of school education. The above mentioned figures underline the fact that MVF has been very effective in getting children into school, freeing them from child labour, stopping

child marriages, changing the attitudes of people and also influencing other state and non-state institutions to assist MVF in their cause.

4.6.2. Relationship with the state

MVF is a non-governmental organization which collaborates closely with all levels of the state. According to its philosophy it is fighting child labour by trying to send every child to school. MVF believes that for education to reach everybody, particularly the poor and the members of the lowest castes, it has to be free education which the state has to provide in accordance with the law. Thus, MVF seeks cooperation from the educational authorities at the mandal, cluster and village levels. However, since MVF is demanding adequate schooling facilities from the government which is very often not provided, the relationship between MVF and the state authorities can turn out to be rather contentious. While MVF presses for policy level changes that will ensure enrolment of children and prevent dropouts, it does not insist on curricular and pedagogical changes at this stage of its campaign. MVF believes that these systemic changes will follow from a quantitative increase of pupils and the consequent community pressure on the state to provide for better schooling. Anyhow, it remains to be seen whether such systemic change in government policy will be realised because of a quantitative increase of pupils as a result of the MVF campaigns.

4.6.3. Suitability

Any attempt to fight child labour, particularly ‘bonded labour’, deserves respect and support. Thus, an institution like MVF has gained a lot of appreciation because of its success in abolishing child labour. The question which might arise is whether concentrating on formal schooling alone is the right answer. It is certainly a good and to some extent an easy answer. But the issue of children’s rights is too complex to be solved through government school attendance only.

The problem starts with the political definition of non-school attendance as a form of child labour. Sending children to school has to be assessed positively – but does this concept alone change the overall circumstances of postponed child labour and postponed exploitation? Are children who stay for a few hours per day in school free from exploitation? Does schooling free them from being exploited? How much do children learn in a bad rural government school? The general proposition of MVF therefore has to be discussed further.

The attempt of RBCs for dropouts for instance is to be seen very positively as out-of-school children can be reintegrated into schools. Moreover, the curriculum or the skills of the teachers seem to be adequate to allow the children to catch up and go further and succeed in getting them back to school. Nevertheless, a price has to be paid in the sense that the curriculum is reduced to a minimum. What a child has to learn is packed within a rigorous schedule (more lessons and study time per week, fewer holidays / vacations and no extra-curricular activities). The question could be posed whether after undergoing such an intensive learning period ending up in a poor government school is worth all the hard work. It can be justified only if the students are really empowered as personalities who are able to manage life successfully after coming from a marginalized environment. This in fact is MVF’s contention that the very fact of entering the modern space of the school changes the mind-set of the child and prepares him / her to take on the challenges ahead. As an overall hypothesis for members of a social class, this is a viable solution. However, it is also possible that the approach would not work with each child or each family. The MVF approach is therefore primarily a political and not an educational one.

Finally, the political mobilization for formal schooling without any vocational input suggests a strong bias against the utilitarian dimension of education. Interestingly, however, MVF does not elaborate on what it regards as a positive work culture. While MVF strongly lobbies with parents to not engage their children in work, it does not tell the children to stop working at home. In fact, it does not seem to discuss work with the children at all. MVF believes that children from the lower classes / castes are so exploited that it would be a complete mockery to discuss the positive side of work with them. However, there are fewer elaborations of this stand of MVF. What is often highlighted is its fundamental opposition to any form of child labour in moral rather than pragmatic or political terms.

MVF's approach to children's rights talks about non-alienation of members of the community among whom are also stakeholders like employers and, in some cases, parents of the child labourers. Since as a first step MVF tries to avoid direct confrontation, it often seeks to build consensus especially when freeing bonded child labourers. When this yields no results MVF volunteers have resorted to protests and dharnas (sit-ins). There are, however, no examples of public interest litigations, court cases or imprisonment of employers. MVF believes that a showcase notice to the employer is enough to deter him from repeating the same crime. Over and above that, in fact, MVF could have been instrumental in strengthening the largely trivial regulations related to child labour and also in implementing the much stronger Bonded Labour Act by strategically moving the court in certain instances.

4.6.4. Quality vs. quantity

Closely linked to the issue of suitability are the questions of quality and quantity. MVF is very much focussed on quantity, relegating issues of quality to a secondary position. Getting children out of child labour is a value in itself, but the substitute which is provided to them should be worthwhile and have proper value in itself, too. It is important to note that as far as they get a good and useful education, be it formal or informal, it should be of such a quality that empowers them sufficiently and helps them in coping with the competitive world.

It may be pointed out that if the non-negotiables are just full-time schooling without caring much about quality then education becomes relatively irrelevant because many students might not carry on their studies after the tenth class / grade either due to some lack of competencies or good results. MVF, however, contends that in Indian society schools have a function that goes beyond providing literacy. Schools are public spaces where children cannot be exploited, and even if they are, the issue can be taken up unlike in the private spaces within which these children are generally employed. "Schooling" in this sense is therefore seen as a value in itself. While MVF volunteers follow up the schooling process of every child that they have helped to enrol, as an organization it has not focussed attention on changing the curriculum or making education in schools relevant to the life of the child that it has enrolled.

Although there have been some attempts by the state to improve the quality of schools and the teaching environment, a number of indicators loudly speak of worsened situations. In such a situation MVF's intervention in quality related issues, given its rich experience and innovation in pedagogical issues, would be extremely relevant.

4.6.5. Efficiency of the project in terms of cost-benefit ratio

The cost-effectiveness of MVF's activities is difficult to assess. Looking at the high figures presented in the MVF statistics, MVF works extremely efficiently. MVF has effectively decentralized its work by forming local level organizations such as the CRPF and BKVV to which it has handed over the responsibility (in 78 villages) of working for children's rights.

The central offices are modest and the permanent MVF staff is rather low compared to the influence MVF exerts on the public, particularly on government schools.

4.6.6. Contribution to self-reliance and public participation

The overall relatively successful political campaign “Education instead of Exploitation“ was based on public participation, particularly promoted by the volunteers. By organising public meetings, demonstrations and public pressure MVF could get across its message to send children in school.

It can be expected that the campaign against child labour is standing on its own feet and will be continued by the volunteers, CPRF, and BBKV in those areas of Andhra Pradesh where MVF mobilization has been successful in the past. It is hoped that those who have been to school accept and realise the value of education and send their children to school too.

Looking at the individual children it is by far not clear whether getting them to school is a guarantee in solving their problems and empowering them. Schooling is certainly an attempt to overcome caste- and class-based divisions but it also depends on the individual and on the circumstances whether social uplifting takes place or not.

4.6.7. Chances for scaling-up and for replicating the mobilization approach

The scaling-up process is taking place presently in other districts of Andhra Pradesh and also in Madhya Pradesh. The approach – i.e. political campaigns and bridge courses – is the same, although MVF is also starting to think more about quality education.

In general terms, one should be hesitant about replicating and transferring the concept to other parts of India without proper research. In other areas the problem of child labour is less urgent and might demand different answers. Our discussions with members of MVF working in other states revealed that they were aware of these issues and were attempting to make appropriate modifications to the MVF model in terms of the organization of bridge courses, materials used etc. The basic principles and non-negotiables, however, remain the same.

4.6.8. Contribution to reducing poverty and improving living conditions

Depending on how poverty is defined, MVF’s contribution to improving living conditions, though not necessarily in the short run. Sending children to school might even have an initial impoverishing effect if children are not contributing to household income because they are going to school. In the long term this might be different if the educational investment bears fruits and household income rises because children might find a job and advance socially and economically.

4.6.9. Sustainability of the concept

Sustainability – is it related and defined in terms of the project to abolish child labour or is it an end of an institution itself? If we are talking of abolishing child labour, can we say that in a hypothetical situation of total abolition of child labour and every child in school, will the need for MVF ever arise? MVF as an NGO has tried to push the responsibility to a large extent to local NGOs like CRPF and BKVV which are meant to be self-reliant and not so much dependent on international funds. These organizations have probably a chance to be more sustainable than an NGO which is very much dependent on foreign funds and very much dominated by a single-handed leadership.

Finally, the spirit behind MVF is Shantha Sinha, a strong personality who passionately believes in and therefore expresses the MVF concept extremely well. Her perseverance and determination and her strong arguments on the subject put forward by her in many articles and pamphlets have kept MVF going. In fact we observed that the personnel of MVF have been enthused by her spirit and have internalised the values of children's rights to the extent that if necessary MVF's work will continue even without her direct involvement.

5. Social Work and Research Centre (SWRC)

5.1. Background

The Social Work Research Centre (SWRC) or the Barefoot College is situated in the village of Tilonia in the district of Ajmer which is located in the state of Rajasthan. It was founded in 1972 by Sanjit (Bunker) Roy and his wife Aruna Roy who broke away from the urban middle-class-centric social work tradition to set up a voluntary organization, working with Indian villagers and fully integrating with the rural poor.

Work started with a two-year ground water survey of the 110 villages in Silora block of Ajmer district. By and by health and education programmes were added, to be followed with rural industries and agricultural services. The project slowly expanded. It became clear that addressing technical problems was not enough. Social issues also had to be taken up and integrated into the development work.

The Barefoot College staff therefore consciously decided to concentrate the work on the poorest and the most marginalized people in the villages: landless families, marginal farmers, women, children and members of the Scheduled Castes and Tribes. The staff wanted to empower these local villagers in the interest of rural sustainability.

In the beginning, the project grew relatively slow. It could meet the basic needs of the villagers, like the provision of drinking water, the establishment of Night Schools for children and the provision of health dispensaries free of charge for women etc. By the early 1980s the staff members started training villages with technical skills such as repairing water hand-pumps, farm implements, solar energy panels etc. so that they did not depend anymore on the assistance from urban areas. All these Barefoot technicians learned on the job without having any formal qualifications. This concept was based on the firm belief that using the human resources of the village itself was an appropriate approach for seeking solutions and sustainable development.

Nowadays, the activities of the Barefoot College cover a whole variety of fields which are relevant for the daily life of the poor villagers. All of them are part and parcel of a holistic understanding of a development centred around the villagers whose skills, knowledge and practical wisdom are seen as most valuable assets. Development is thus perceived as a process coming from below. Decentralization is a major characteristic of the approach. The Barefoot College is part of an ongoing two-way process of learning and teaching.

Therefore, education is only one component of the activities of the Barefoot College. It is part of a unified strategy of integrated rural development combining economic, social and educational programmes for the improvement of the living conditions of the rural poor. Rural education is not seen as just management exercise to provide literacy skills. It aims at building self-esteem and confidence and generating awareness among the people concerned.

The major aims Barefoot College wants to achieve can be described as follows:

- To raise the standard of living
- To improve the quality of life
- To upgrade individual and community skills through training
- To guide the community to take the responsibility and control over providing some of the basic services

- To struggle and campaign for justice and what is laid down by law
- To be transparent and publicly accountable to the community in whose name funds are received

All Barefoot College activities are firmly rooted in five non-negotiable values that are reflective of the Gandhian philosophy. They are the guiding principles of programmes at both the implementation and planning stages. These five non-negotiable values are:

- Equality – Every individual is equally important and must be respected regardless of his education, gender, caste or class. All are eligible for any staff position.
- Collective decision making – All programmes involve decision-making skills since these are essential for problem solving.
- Self-reliance – Self-reliance and self-esteem are given high priority when people develop self-confidence and jointly solve problems, they learn that they can depend on themselves.
- Decentralization – The programme is based on decentralization of planning and implementation at the grass-roots level, enabling individuals to articulate their needs.
- Austerity – Austerity in thought and actions is stressed. The staff lead a simple life working for the collective aspirations of rural communities rather than striving for individual material goals.

The idea of making educational opportunities available for children by starting Night Schools emerged from consultations with the villagers of Tilonia. Many children in the villages are required to work and contribute to the family economy. They are engaged in numerous activities like doing household chores, fetching water and firewood, grazing cattle and attending to their siblings. These children do not get the chance to go to school. To reconcile the right to education and the economic necessities of every day life is practically impossible under these circumstances. The Night School evolved as an answer to the specific needs of the poor living in villages around Tilonia to work and to learn, this option was seen as means to impart primary education to children who otherwise would keep on remaining out of school. Therefore, the Night School scheme and the Children's Parliament are educational institutions jointly brought into being by the Barefoot College and the villagers. It started in 1975 with only three schools. Today there are around 150 such schools in various districts of Rajasthan, 60 of them are located around Tilonia, where the headquarter of the Barefoot College is situated. In addition, there are five day schools run by SWRC, one of them being the experimental Shiksha Niketan in Tilonia with 349 students.

For the schools within Rajasthan, SWRC's centre at Tilonia is responsible to provide materials for use in the schools, set up monitoring mechanisms, organize trainings and develop curriculum and pedagogic tools. Also, whenever there is a demand for a new Night School, the Education team at the Tilonia Centre conducts meetings with the villagers and helps in the setting up of the Night School. It also coordinates with the field centres that have been established as part of SWRC's structure to work more closely with the community. Each field centre, located in a relatively well-developed town, participates in and coordinates the range of activities taking place in 25-30 villages close by.

5.2. Educational philosophy

One of the striking aspects of SWRC is the pride that it takes in introducing visitors to its staff or trainees who are highly skilled or talented or intelligent but who have minimal formal schooling. In a nutshell this provides an insight into SWRC's philosophy in relation to education. SWRC also calls itself the "Barefoot College" because it believes in a process of learning and teaching that is practical, continuous and does not depend on certification. Learning is distinguished here from being schooled. While this comprises SWRC's overall educational philosophy, the details of its approach to the Night Schools that are more systematized need to be spelt out.

The approach that has animated SWRC's work in relation to education and the running of the Night Schools is that it has sought to make schooling as relevant as possible to the lives of the children. For one, and as mentioned earlier, the Night Schools were started following the realization that if children had to go to day schools they would have to take their goats along! On the whole the attempt has been to avoid alienating the children from the community. On the contrary, the Night Schools have sought to draw on the expertise of the local people.

New methods of teaching are introduced, learning and teaching are structured in a way as to meet the needs of the working children. Their time-schedule is also taken into account. Education is not seen as an isolated activity but rather a holistic learning experience that combines the ability, for example, of acquiring greater social mobility, increasing market value for village products and generating employment for the community, along with a traditional curriculum of imparting literacy and numeracy. Education is therefore more than just teaching literacy skills in a formal way. The village community together with teachers identified the most important education needs for them:

- Access to information, particularly of government programmes and legal literacy to help rural families become self-reliant.
- Learning opportunities for literacy and numeracy, partly for reasons of rural sustainability but also to protect them from being exploited by the literate.
- A learning process that would enable rural people to serve their communities, rather than seek individual gain and prosperity.
- A relevant education that does not alienate their children from their families, communities and environment.
- The need to achieve gender equality in education.

5.2.1. Curriculum

The educational philosophy of SWRC as an integral part of its grass-roots level approach to development is clearly reflected in the curriculum that has been put up for class I and II of the Night Schools. Learning and teaching are closely interrelated to the living conditions of the villagers and their daily experiences. The topics taught are taken from the midst of their lives and exemplified accordingly. The curriculum and the pedagogy at the Night Schools draws on the fact that the child comes to the school having had an active engagement with its surroundings but with a passive knowledge of their meanings or significance. The child is aware of agricultural practices, of the livestock, of water bodies, of forests, mountains, and even of some of the institutional facilities available within the village. The curriculum uses this awareness and builds on it to educate the child. Teaching material such as specially designed textbooks have been developed by SWRC for use in the classroom. Taking the daily round as

a starting point, problems like social discrimination and economic exploitation, democracy, secularism and gender issues are dealt with and incorporated in the educational process.

The curriculum comprises the following subjects:

- Hindi
- Mathematics
- Environment (Social Sciences, Politics, History, Geography, Health, Moral Stories, Agriculture, Animal Husbandry, Solar Energy, Ecology etc.)
- Arts (Singing, Dancing, Painting, Drawing, Handicrafts)

The integrated curriculum for class I and II consists of several units comprising each of the subjects mentioned above. An example is given here:

- Draw a picture of your house (Art)
- What is the purpose of the house (Environment)
- Which things in the house are important for you (Environment)
- How many things are in your house (Mathematics)
- Write down the word house and the names of the important things (Hindi)

During winter school timing is scheduled between 6 p.m. and 9 p.m., in summer between 7 p.m. and 10 p.m. from Monday to Saturday. There is no school during peak agricultural seasons. Class begins with children singing, dancing, reading poems or playing together. After 30 minutes the children are taught in groups according to their age and knowledge level. During the last half an hour the children sing, dance or play together before going home. Once in a week a song competition takes place. The teachers are not bound to strictly follow the curriculum. He / she can use it in a flexible way according to local needs.

What is particularly striking about the curriculum prepared by SWRC is that it is extremely imaginative. Through the abundance of stories, games and rhymes that it has included in the textbooks it seems to hold a special appeal for children. A remarkable combination of these are geared towards teaching children language, math, environment related issues and creative work. These aspects become particularly important because a consequence of scheduling the school timings for the night implies that the children come to school after a hard day's work and that they are already tired. Unless the curriculum and teaching method holds the child's attention, she / he is likely to doze off and eventually drop out.

When we visited a Night School in a small village near Kotri the teacher introduced the topic of the persisting drought in the area. There has been a permanent water shortage during the last five years, which heavily affected the rural people of Rajasthan, especially the poor. The teacher tried to discuss the reasons for this scarcity of water with the students. Normally, the villagers explain this due to men's sinful lifestyle, their disobedience towards God and therefore as a punishment on them sent by God. On the other hand, the water shortage can be interpreted as a consequence of a non-sustainable development, the waste of natural resources and environmentally unfriendly modes of economic production. By juxtaposing these two opposite perceptions the children are encouraged to question the traditional interpretations of life and to perceive the persisting water shortage as a consequence of inappropriate human activities.

In class III – V textbooks of the Rajasthan government schools are used together with specially designed manuals for teachers. Night Schools are meant only for classes I – V; thereaf-

ter, the children have to be sent to formal government day schools if they or their parents wish to do so.

Other sections of the Barefoot College are also involved in the lessons of the Night Schools. Health workers regularly visit the Night Schools and teach the children about health issues. Puppet shows are arranged and sometimes Children's Fairs take place. The Barefoot College makes use of this traditional medium and imparts knowledge about problems like minimum wages, education, poverty, politics, environment etc. Sometimes, members of the solar section of the Barefoot College repair and check the solar lamps used in the Night Schools and explain to the children how solar energy works.

SWRC has also started bridge courses in 2000. These are residential courses with 30 to 35 children which last up to three months and are designed to give older out-of-school children a chance to enter school together with other students of his age group. A bridge course is a kind of a crash course with full day lessons. After having passed such a course, the student should be able to join a higher class in the Night School or even go to a formal government school. Barefoot College also offers pre-school courses for children below six years.

The Tilonia centre as well as the other field centres also organize bridge courses whenever necessary. The bridge courses for a student strength of 30 - 35 were started in 2000. The bridge courses actually began with the idea that the children should have some day school activities in addition to the learning that takes place in the Night Schools. Initially, the day school was scheduled for Sundays. A 7-day camp was also organized for the children. However, since the Sunday day school was not very popular, bridge courses were introduced instead. The procedure for selecting children for the bridge courses gives preference for weaker children, orphans, students recommended by the teacher, 4th and 5th class children, as well as those students who expressed their desire to participate in the course.

The education team felt that the residential bridge courses served several functions. It provided for a carefree atmosphere where the children could live and study together. There were also several spin-off benefits from such courses: caste taboos were broken through the close living together of the students, the students developed confidence that they could stay away from their parents and were exposed to different professions. These bridge courses also provided the girl students an opportunity to learn about their bodies, the reproductive system etc. These matters are discussed even through the schools but the bridge courses offer yet another opportunity to do so. Additionally, the bridge course allows the girls to speak up in groups and this is a significant aspect in a society where women do not speak in public. The bridge course is also very beneficial for the education team as well because they are in touch with the children and get to know how effective the curriculum and the teaching aids are.

Educational excursions are a further component of the Night School programme. They bring the world beyond their village boundaries to the children. These excursions lead the students to places they never saw before, like Jaipur or Jodhpur.

Interestingly, together with the many Night Schools that SWRC runs it also runs a day school in Tilonia for children at the primary level. This school has government recognition. The school in fact is envisaged as a model to demonstrate to the government about what can be done. The day school uses the government curriculum for classes I to V instead of the curriculum prepared by SWRC. The teaching method, however, is different from that found in the government schools and more along the lines of the pedagogy used in the Night Schools. This school has proved to be extremely popular with the villagers. Parents who can afford to put

their children through regular school prefer the day school run by SWRC. In fact, notwithstanding the distances and the fact that government run schools may be closer to their place of residence, students from nearby villages attend this day school.

Vocational training forms an important aspect of the Barefoot College educational programme. The vocational training courses are meant for students who otherwise have no chance to receive formal vocational training due to their deficits in formal education. They are oriented towards the needs of the village economy and offer training in welding, forging, assembling of solar technology components, agricultural skills, carpentry, masonry, sewing, production of toys, etc. When we visited the workshops which are situated at the old Barefoot College campus in Tilonia we even met two young persons from Afghanistan who stayed in Tilonia for several months and were trained in assembling solar panels components. Every year hundred girls of class III – V take part in sewing courses for several months. These courses are very popular because they give these children a chance to take up an income generating activity.

One of the fundamental aspects of running the Night Schools is to enable processes that will ensure that the child is taken seriously by the community and is herself / himself emboldened to participate in the life of the community. As part of this approach, SWRC has also sought to introduce the children to electoral politics as a way of preparing them for future citizenship. Towards this end, the Barefoot College initiated the Children's Parliament in 1993. This parliament aimed to provide students with the opportunity to actively participate in the management of their schools through a democratic process. It should teach children about politics and the electoral process within their own world and to learn about their rights and to understand the system of Indian democracy. The Children's Parliament has 56 members and the present Parliament is the fifth one in place. There are 53 girls and only 3 boys who were elected by all students of the schools run by Barefoot College in Rajasthan. The members of the Children's Parliament should be between 11 and 12 years old and know how to read and write. The normal term is about two and a half years. The Children's Parliament meets once in a month for a two days session. There is an agenda of the issues which have to be taken up. The deliberations are recorded in written form. The MPs elect a Prime minister, 14 ministers and a Speaker from among themselves. The portfolios allotted to each minister correspond to the various administrative sections of the Barefoot College, such as education, water, health, energy, agriculture, communications, women's development etc. The coordinator of each section serves as the secretary to the corresponding minister, their function is to service the parliament and to impart all the information needed for the parliamentary work. Through these links the coordination and mutual understanding between the Barefoot College, the Children's Parliament and the community is facilitated.

The main task of the Children's Parliament and its government is to monitor the Night Schools and to see that they are functioning properly. Its members visit Night Schools and write reports about any complaints and problems like insufficient equipment, teachers' attendance, non-working solar lights, etc. In addition, the MPs monitor rural development work in their own areas. They have small budgets to manage. They also attend the meetings and activities of the Village Education Committee and interact with them.

5.3. Learning environment

The Night School classes are normally held in the open, some of them are located on the premises of the village government school, others in places which were allotted to the Night School by the village or built by the Barefoot College itself. We also witnessed a Night School that took place on a small veranda in front of a private house. It seemed important that the school is centrally located in the village where the students live so that it could be easily reached during night-time. Proximity of the location is an important factor to the success of the Night School programme. Since the district of Ajmer is located in a semi-arid area with only minimum rainfall per year and classes only start in the evening, the problem of not providing enough shelter against rain or sun does not really exist. The Night School may move to the covered veranda or even inside the classrooms of the school building if necessary.

The Barefoot College puts the necessary teaching materials at the teacher's and student's disposal. Each Night School has got a standardized equipment consisting of a blackboard, slates, books, pencils, wooden teaching aids, visual aids and a metal chest to store all the material. In addition, a first aid box, a water bucket, cups and a broom are provided. The students sit on mats or carpets which are spread on the floor. Light is generated by one or two solar lanterns designed and built by the solar section of the Barefoot College. We noticed that most often only one lantern was used so that if its charge was used up the other one could then be started. Since we visited the schools during monsoon, we noticed that the lanterns attracted a lot of insects that abound in the season. This was quite distracting. Also, the light provided by the lanterns seemed to us inadequate at times. However, the students didn't seem to mind this at all and continued to interact with the teachers or carry on with the tasks assigned to them. All in all, the infrastructure is rather basic but not at all insufficient.

In some places, together with the Village Education Committee, SWRC has facilitated the construction of rainwater harvesting structures / tanks at the government schools. These tanks not only provide a supply of water to the school, but also enable discussion of water conservation and harvesting since the Night School teaching usually takes place on these raised tank structures themselves.

Since the teaching takes place in the open, often times some villagers stop by to observe the classes. At times they are invited to address the students directly. On other occasions, the observer gets pulled into the lesson being taught and begins to himself (it is men in most cases) engage with the teacher and the content of the lesson taught. We were also told by the members of the education team that invariably the more political or controversial of discussions that take place at the Night School are reported around and get a fresh lease of life in the conversations and debates that the villagers have among themselves.

A Night School has a staff of one or two teachers. On average, they teach 30 students, the pupil teacher ratio stands at about 20 : 1. More than 30% of the teachers are women. Most of the teachers are below 35 years. They are selected from among the village community by the village education committees with support from the responsible education worker of the nearby field centre. The minimum qualification for male teachers is the graduation from upper primary school, for female teachers from primary school (class V). They all get their initial training from the education section of the Barefoot College.

The Tilonia centre conducts workshops with teachers on a regular basis. This workshop extending over a period of 3 days is held once in three months. The workshop is meant to take stock of the teaching / learning taking place at the Night Schools, address problems that the

teachers may be facing, review the curriculum and pedagogy, familiarize them with new educational toys that the centre has prepared, discuss various issues related to SWRC and to the body politic of Rajasthan itself, train the teachers in areas such as handling of solar lanterns or other similar aspects and plan for the future. Evaluation procedures too are discussed at these workshops. Tests for the children are conducted three times in a year. The first time is by the teacher of the Night School, the second time by the education team at the field centre and the third time by the centre at Tilonia.

There is an average number of 30 students per school or class (there is only one class per Night School). Nowadays, girls make up more than 70 per cent of all students, a sharp increase from 10 per cent in 1981. The reason for this can be attributed to the growing awareness of education. While the boys are more and more sent to government day schools, an increasing number of girls are now attending the Night Schools in order to get at least a minimum of education.

The children are grouped together according to their age and standard. Since they all assemble in one place, the teacher has to alternately address one or the other group of children. While moving to the next group, he / she gives a task to the students of the group that was being taught until then. If there are two teachers present, they take turns in teaching or advising the children. The noise level is relatively high, children always get up, walk around and talk to each other, so that some students might feel disturbed by these activities. However, we did not hear of any complaints about this. Obviously, the students are used to this lively atmosphere in class and concentrated on doing the work assigned to them.

The teacher plays a key role in the education process. He tries to actively involve the children in the activities during class. During our visits a joyful and pleasant atmosphere prevailed. Children were eager to learn new things, they were not afraid of asking questions or giving wrong answers. Even girls spoke up. Teaching and learning were embedded in a dialogical process. All the children were very curious and told us about their lives, their experiences at school and their future dreams. They were also very much interested in what we do, where we come from and how people live in far-off Germany. Our overall impression was that the children enjoy going to school which broadens their perception of their life within and without the village.

5.4. Community involvement

Participation and decentralization are central pillars of the Night School project. The Night Schools were started by SWRC in consultation with community members. While SWRC does seek to invoke interest in education through its various activities and through the medium of puppet shows, it inaugurates a Night School in a particular village only when the villagers themselves express the need for one. The community members also commit themselves to providing a space where the school can be located. It needs to be emphasized that the community that is being referred to here is largely the lower caste community of the village.

The Night Schools in each village are under the responsibility of the Village Education Committee (VEC). SWRC facilitates the formation of the VEC by involving men and women who are committed to the welfare of the village. Each VEC comprises of 5 men and 5 women who regularly meet once in a month. The government does not recognize the VECs formed by SWRC; in fact, the government schools have their own VECs. The difference between the government VECs and the VECs formed by SWRC is that the former have some compulsory requirements (such as the Sarpanch (chairman of the village council) having to be a member

of the VEC, membership allowed only to parents of children studying in the school etc.) whereas for the latter commitment and involvement in the activities of the village is the most important criterion. The VEC members in the latter case need not necessarily be parents of children in the Night Schools. In fact, we came across a case where a very active member of the Night School's VEC had all his children studying in government schools. His involvement with the VEC was because he believed that educational opportunities should be made available to all children.

The VEC is responsible for appointing the teacher to the Night School and ensuring that the teacher is regularly present in the school during the hours fixed for teaching. The teacher is also a member of the VEC. The VEC manages all the finances related to the school including the payment of the teacher's salary by operating a bank account which is jointly held by it and a member of the Field Centre closest to the village. In short, the VECs are engaged in all matters related to the Night Schools and play a pivotal role in the educational programme of SWRC. Interestingly, SWRC has managed to involve the VECs in activities that go beyond looking after school matters. In almost all the villages that SWRC works in, the VEC has been pro-active in taking up issues of water harvesting as also looking for solutions to other problems faced by the villagers.

The school system initiated by SWRC is designed in a manner that continually looks for opportunities to involve the community members in its activities. In fact, even the bridge courses that the SWRC organizes at the Tilonia centre turns out to be a means of drawing the villagers into the activities of the organization. The bridge courses that SWRC organizes bring parents to the centre when they come to meet their children. This also provides the occasion for the parents to acquaint themselves with the working and the approach of the organization. The fact that the children are taken good care of by the centre gives the parents further confidence in the organization as well and further opens up the chances of their involving themselves with the activities of the organization.

5.5. Impact of intervention

The impact of the Night Schools started by SWRC has been far reaching. Children who would never have gone to school did so through the Night Schools run by SWRC. As a result of the Night Schools, at least two generations of women who would have otherwise remained unlettered have gone to school. Parents who went to the Night Schools now send their own children to these schools. One of the members of the education team told us that about 10 years back only boys attended the Night Schools. Today, however, the situation has changed. There are more girls in the Night Schools than boys. For instance, at the Panwa Night School, we noticed that 90% of the students were girls. We were told that most of the boys in the village now largely go to day schools and girls attend the Night Schools. Thus, there are very few children in the villages who attend neither the day schools nor the Night Schools. Some parents send one child to the Night School and others to the day school. Many of the senior students we spoke to, girls as well as boys, wanted the Night Schools to provide education after class V as well.

The Children's Parliament that is now an integral part of the Night School system has been a very significant means by which student involvement in the education process has been ensured. The Parliaments provide a learning environment for the children even as it enables the extension of those learning benefits to the community at large. We learnt about an instance in one of the villages where an entrepreneur wanted to start a carpet making business using child labour. One of the members of the Children's Parliament protested about this initiative to the

SWRC office in Tilonia. The latter in turn intervened and mobilized a campaign against such a move. As a result of this large spread opposition, the entrepreneur had to give up the idea of starting the business. The Children's Parliament thus holds enormous potential.

During our stay with the Barefoot College we had the opportunity to witness a meeting of the Children's Parliament at the old campus in Tilonia. The sitting we witnessed was one where people from the local bank reported about their work and the existing credit facilities extended to the village people. Since indebtedness is a serious problem in rural India, information about the availability of bank credits may help reduce the dependency of poor people from the local moneylenders. We noticed at this sitting of the Children's Parliament that the adults adopted a rather patronizing attitude towards the children. The SWRC educational coordinator's follow-up on some of the issues raised by the children seemed lax. This gave the impression that the Centre / Secretaries (staff of the Education Team) did not take the Parliament seriously enough. This might well have been a one-off situation since the Barefoot College regards the Children's Parliament as pivotal to the educational process itself.

The Night School programme of SWRC makes possible education in several different areas of social life in a manner that day schools do not. For instance, caste related issues are directly discussed in the schools. Practices in the Night School such as sitting together, drinking from the same pot of water etc. help to break some deeply entrenched taboos about caste. The content of the curriculum used in the Night Schools as well as the approach to teaching seeks to also give more attention to the girl students in an effort to build their confidence. These aspects of the approach used in the Night Schools is in contrast to the government day schools where status quo is maintained; on the other hand, the teachers of the Night School make a conscious effort to address such socio-political issues.

SWRC has been looking for ways of extending the impact of the Night Schools per se by forming youth groups of children who have passed out of the Night Schools. In the case of most of the students, it has been noticed that once they are part of the Night School, there is a tendency to participate in the activities of the village. These children understand the issues and take them up. Often, they also have an important say in family matters and in the village. SWRC has, thus, sought to build on the resource that the Night School has created and channel it towards the betterment of community life.

5.6. Critical assessment

5.6.1. Relevance and effectiveness

SWRC is today widely recognized as an NGO successfully implementing what is called development from below. Its decentralized and participatory approach to improve the living conditions of the rural poor has attracted much interest and support from within and without India. Its Night School programme and the Children's Parliament are generally seen as innovative and appropriate institutions to universalize basic education and democratization in India. At present, the Barefoot College runs 150 Night Schools in Rajasthan with altogether approx. 4,000 students. Since 1975 over 50,000 children have passed through the Night Schools.

The competency displayed by the teachers while we visited their classes seemed to meet the requirements necessary for primary non-formal education. At least we did not hear of any complaints about the qualifications of the teachers. However, according to a study on the Barefoot College Night Schools published in 2003 the relatively high fluctuation rate of

teachers hampers the continuity of the educational work and negatively effects the motivation of the students. One reason for this is the low salary paid to the teachers which amounts to Rs 900 per month and forces them to take up other jobs at the same time. As part-time teachers they work as agriculturalists, craftsmen, shop owners or midwives. Some are even students in the nearby town of Kishangarh. This study also mentions that about one third of the teachers were not able to fulfil the required qualifications necessary to teach the basics in literacy and numeracy. These financial constraints obviously limit the success and quality of the Night School programme

Under the prevailing conditions, it is therefore small wonder that the effectiveness of the Night Schools in purely academic terms seems to be rather moderate. The poor quality of some teachers, irregular class attendance and a relatively high dropout rate – approx. 30 per cent of the students leave before they have completed class III – bring about consequences which negatively influenced the literacy and numeracy competences of the students. On average, it takes a student 2.5 to 3 years to attain literacy and numeracy. Therefore, a considerable number of children, in particular girls, failed to become functionally literate.

Of course, these findings have to be qualified. The primary goal of the Night Schools is not only to teach children formal qualifications like reading, writing or calculating but to impart competences which may improve their lives in many respects. Moreover, the record of the state-run formal schools is by no means better though they have more funds and a better infrastructure at their disposal.

5.6.2. Relationship with the state

The day school in Tilonia has given further legitimacy to SWRC's efforts in the field of education. They can no longer be dismissed as running only non-formal set-ups. Also, the fact that the school has been successful and is talked about has meant that the government is forced to involve the centre whenever it organizes discussions on matters of education. Members of the education team also recounted their experience of taking on the responsibility of running a few government schools that had almost zero attendance. The team identified the problem as one of teacher absenteeism. Consequently, it looked for other solutions to the problem instead of targeting individual teachers. The idea of the "Sikshakarmi" or the para-teacher emerged as a result of the deliberations on the subject. Teachers from within the community were selected to teach at the school. The school as a result revived and students started coming back to school. In fact, this success story had the unintended effect of the government of Rajasthan adopting the strategy of appointing para- teachers in large numbers throughout the state, though with only limited success. Thus, rather ironically, SWRC seems to have introduced a non-formal element into the government's formal education system. However, given that the Sikshakarmi programme turned out to be a means by which the government was evading its responsibility rather than consolidating it, SWRC has distanced itself from the government's strategy.

Until the end of the 1990s the Barefoot College was a partner of the Lok Jumbish project, which was initiated by the state government in cooperation with the Swedish International Development Agency. It is a project for the education of all children through people's mobilization and participation. Its main objective is to create conditions which enable the poorest sections to advance towards equal participation in basic education. Lok Jumbish has incorporated many aspects of the Barefoot College approach to a community-oriented, participatory primary education. SWRC coordinated the programme in 20 villages.

5.6.3. Suitability

Under the prevailing conditions in rural India, SWRC's holistic approach to development and education seems to be well suited to induce a change for the better. It tries to actively involve the community into the various activities and motivate them to join together to solve their problems. Solutions are not presented to them by experts from outside, but they have to be found by themselves on the basis of the available resources. The Night School is a specific answer to the problem of how to provide children who work during the day with a non-formal basic education. The classes centre around the child and his daily life in the village, teaching and learning is closely related to the daily experiences of the children.

SWRC does not believe that non-formal schooling is better than formal schooling but that non-formal schooling is better than no schooling. The Night Schools are not seen as permanent institutions lasting forever, rather they are transitory in character and shall help bring the children into the formal state school system. For its part, the community members, especially those that are poor and from the lower castes, are happy with the Night Schools because they feel it benefits them in two ways. For one, their children can continue to work during the day and also attend school during the night. Moreover, since schooling is free at the Night School, it does not place any financial burden on the family. They also prefer the Night Schools because the regular government schools do not function properly (largely because of teacher absenteeism) as a result of which they feel that their children are neither working nor learning and instead become wastrels.

The success of the Night Schools can be gauged from the fact that girls and boys who had successfully completed class V but did not have the resources to join the regular formal system, keep urging SWRC to make arrangements for providing education even after class V. However, SWRC does not favour the idea because it perceives its objective as putting pressure on the government and not substituting it. In fact, in one such discussion during our visit, responding to a similar request, a member of the education team emphasized the need for the villagers to take more active interest in the government school and ensure that it worked properly so that the students could pursue further education in these schools rather than depend on SWRC's schools.

5.6.4. Quality vs. quantity

At present, more than 4,000 children are studying in the 150 Night Schools run by the Barefoot College. This number seems to be small in itself if compared to the total number of children who go to school in Rajasthan not to speak in India. However, the qualitative impact is higher than the quantitative one. SWRC's activities have set into motion a process of awareness rising and empowerment of the poor which goes beyond sheer numbers. It brought about considerable changes to the lives of many poor people in the villages enhancing their self-esteem and self-reliance. Even the state government acknowledges the positive outcome of SWRC's work in Rajasthan through financial support and cooperation in the field of educational development. In recognition of its expert and successful work, many renowned international organizations like UNESCO, the Aga Khan Foundation and ESCAP (Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific) awarded prizes to the Barefoot College.

Nevertheless, a dropout rate of 30 per cent during the first three years of schooling, a relatively high fluctuation of teachers, their partially insufficient qualification and a low percentage of women teaching are problems which should not be neglected though the Night Schools do not fare worse if compared with the state-run schools. The major difference is that Night Schools are schools *by* and *for* the community.

5.6.5. Efficiency of the project in terms of cost-benefit ratio

Cost-benefit efficiency is difficult to specify because no exact financial data are at our disposal. Per year Rs. 30,000 to 50,000 are spent on every Night School. With an average number of 30 children per school, this means that Rs. 1,000 to 1,650 are spent per child. Compared to the per capita costs in formal state schools, these figures seem to be very low in particular if we take into account that these expenses involve the teacher's salary, health check-ups, excursions, solar electrification, etc. In our opinion, the cost-benefit ratio seems to be positive.

For example, the total expenditure of SWRC in the period of 1 September 1998 to 31 August 1999 amounted to around Rs. 40 million. Out of these 40 per cent came of government resources, another 40 per cent from various funding agencies and 20 per cent were generated by SWRC's own income. At present, SWRC gets some financial support from UBS, Plan International, German Agro Action and others.

5.6.6. Project contribution to self-reliance and public participation

While addressing itself to the needs of the community, SWRC has also attempted to bring about changes in the hierarchical and casteist culture of the villages. It has worked with lower caste people, particularly women from these castes. It has also been involving physically challenged persons in different areas of its work. Its activities cut across caste and class and promote the value of equality of all human beings. The experience of equality is gained by the children when they go to the Night School, sit and learn together, talk to each other and play with their class mates and even share water from the same bucket. Children become acquainted with their rights as laid down in the Indian constitution, which helps them oppose the manifold forms of discrimination and exploitation. The growing awareness of their rights and acquiring higher self-esteem are, without any doubt, a major achievement of the Night Schools. Thus, they contribute to the empowerment of the poor and the democratization of Indian society. The Children's Parliament plays an important role in this process.

Given this sensitivity to the social situation, it seemed surprising that SWRC has not overtly addressed the widely prevalent practice of child marriages and the adverse impact it has on girls / women in particular. While some of the members of SWRC did explain the complexity of the situation and the fact that it cannot be perceived in black and white terms, what seemed striking by its absence is SWRC's serious engagement with the issue.

On the whole, SWRC believes in tackling problems at the systemic level rather than blaming or finding fault with individuals. This approach is evident even in the manner it has set up the Night Schools and is attempting to empower the community to seek better educational facilities from the government rather than targeting individual teachers or government officials.

5.6.7. Chances for scaling-up the educational concept and for replicating successful learning experiences

The Social Work and Research Centre is among the best known and documented organizations in the country. The experiments tried out by SWRC within the field now referred to as "development" and its experiences have in fact inspired many other similar efforts at working with rural communities. The Barefoot College does not pursue an area approach but a concept approach. Therefore, it can be perceived as a model NGO, which has facilitated many initiatives all over India. Over a period of 25 years, SWRC has helped start 150 Night Schools in 5

districts of Rajasthan and it continues to facilitate the functioning of these schools. Emulating the model evolved by SWRC, 100 Night Schools are presently functioning in several other states of India as different as Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Orissa, Assam, etc. The activities of these various subcentres do not follow a uniform and strict pattern but they are adjusted to the needs of the local communities. The subcentres are part of a loosely structured Barefoot College network, some of them are independent with their own financial resources.

5.6.8. Contribution to reducing poverty and improving living conditions

It is rather difficult to give an exact assessment of SWRC's contribution to reducing poverty and improving living conditions in those villages where it has been working for many years. In addition to the provision of a basic non-formal education to children SWRC has greatly contributed to the diffusion of health care and better hygienic conditions. The vocational training courses provided the young people with new skills and practical knowledge which gave them better chances in the labour market. According to a study of 2003 about one third of the former male students who attended a Night School for at least 3 years or even went to a government school afterwards were able to find a job as self-employed or wage workers which otherwise they would not have been able to get. Some of them have opened a shop or became veterinary service workers. Others worked as employed technical workers, machine operators or belong to the Barefoot College staff. The other students were doing jobs which do not necessarily require literacy and numeracy. Most of them work as agricultural or manual workers or as self-employed potters, barbers, farmers, shepherds, etc. Yet, the newly acquired skills and competences were quite useful for the students in their job-related activities, leading also to positive economic results. Nearly all women who participated in the sewing courses are able to earn a supplementary income by sewing clothes and other textile products. Many of the Night School alumni, mainly from poor families, have left their village and migrated to other places in search of jobs or a better salary.

5.6.9. Sustainability of the concept in view of the challenges ahead

Thanks to its decentralised structure and its community-based approach, SWRC's activities in general and the Night Schools in particular do not depend on the leadership of one dominant person who initiates and controls everything and everywhere. All the coordinators of the various SWRC sections are persons who came into contact with the Barefoot College during their childhood and became intensively engaged in its work. The staff, the children and the community are all actively involved in the project which is an ongoing process of teaching, learning and changing the circumstances in the villages. Therefore, the Barefoot College as a people's project from below seems to be mature enough to stand on its own feet without a dominant leader at its apex. Of course, an organizational structure of the centre is necessary to run its day-to-day affairs, but over the years, the staff has been recruited mostly from local people.

SWRC has laid down its future course of action during the next decade in relation to its ongoing involvement with rural working children which can be summarised as follows: The overall objective of the Night School programme is to facilitate the "rural-poor" children / families to access education in a basic sense without disturbing their lifestyle and livelihood pattern and to take them further to "quality" education for democracy, once they get into the educational process. Quality education for democracy implies: (a) understanding the framework of justice and equality with clarity, (b) ability to access information from a growing body of knowledge by reading, writing, seeking knowledge from people and use of technology, (c) ability to absorb the information and internalize its implications, (d) ability to assess "patterns" in lived experience, and (e) make informed choices within a framework of justice, rights and responsibilities. Participatory, democratic processes would be an integral part of all

educational transaction – giving an opportunity to discover individual strength and possible roles in society. It would build an attitude of respect for diversity in styles of living and functioning within a shared vision of equality in social relationships.

The Night School programme contributes to the goal of universalization of free primary education for all as stated in the Indian constitution. Transitory as it is, it may help bring children, especially girls, from poor rural families into the education mainstream by providing basic educational facilities in their villages. Night Schools are not an end in itself, the long-term goal being to dissolve themselves when all children are able to attend a formal day school. Interestingly enough, all alumni of the Night Schools want to send their own children to a government school. Therefore, Night Schools can function as a catalyst for full literacy in India.

6. Ramakrishna Mission

6.1. Background

The Ramakrishna Math, which seeks to carry out philanthropic work, was registered as a trust in 1901. In order to facilitate the work of the Mission and to provide it a legal status, a society named the Ramakrishna Mission (RKM) was registered in 1909. Its management was vested in a governing body. Both the Math and the Mission gradually extended their spheres of activity as a result of which a number of branches in different parts of the country and abroad came into existence. As the name suggests, the vision of RKM is profoundly influenced by Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, widely regarded as a saint in modern times who emphasised upon the twin ideals of self-realization and service to society.

The Ramakrishna Mission draws its basic guidelines from certain traditions and values:

- Opposition to miracle-mongering: Sri Ramakrishna never encouraged interest in miraculous powers as he believed that it was an obstacle to spiritual progress. He exhorted his disciples to be free from religious hypocrisy and spiritual pretensions.
- Cultivating a modern outlook: According to Sri Ramakrishna, in our way of life, social manners, personal habits and attitudes, we should be modern and progressive. Relics of past social customs like caste distinctions have no place in our individual or collective life.
- Pursuing a non-sectarian approach: Sri Ramakrishna did not believe in setting limits to God. According to him, God has infinite powers and can assume various forms. A true follower of Sri Ramakrishna looks upon all religions as valid means of realizing the ultimate Truth and regards the various cult practices and spiritual techniques as suited to different temperaments. Therefore, those who belong to the Ramakrishna Mission are required not to associate themselves with fanatical religious groups or leaders. According to the Ramakrishna Mission, love must manifest outwardly as hospitality since hospitality has been one of the time-honoured virtues of Indian culture.

The Ramakrishna Movement stresses on three more principles in practical life:

- First among these ranks character. Selflessness, truthfulness and purity in personal life are essential virtues for a worker of the Ramakrishna Mission.
- The second principle is spirituality. The Ramakrishna Mission is pre-eminently a spiritual movement.
- Finally, the principle of social service. Although there are now a number of other organizations actively engaged in social services, the need for social service has not been reduced.

With regard to the leadership and management within RKM, there is a focus on decentralization and a system of checks and balances. There is a rotation of management and leadership among the complete order of the managers (the Sanyasis) of RKM. Though this is a time-consuming process, and a changeover in management from time to time has its own disadvantages, however, it does result in a consensus that helps undertake initiatives and activities systematically.

Typically RKM works in collaboration with a number of other community-based organizations, civil society organizations, youth clubs, women's groups and local organizations of all

the districts of West Bengal. RKM's intervention in the field of education is through its Loksiksha Parishad (association for the education of people). The study team visited four villages in the Murshidabad district of West Bengal where the Loksiksha Parishad is enabling pre-school education for the children of these villages through a local organization. The visits were made to the following villages:

- Pulinda and Daherdhar in Beldanga block
- Bahadarpur in Lalgola block, and
- Joy-Krishnapur in Jalangi block

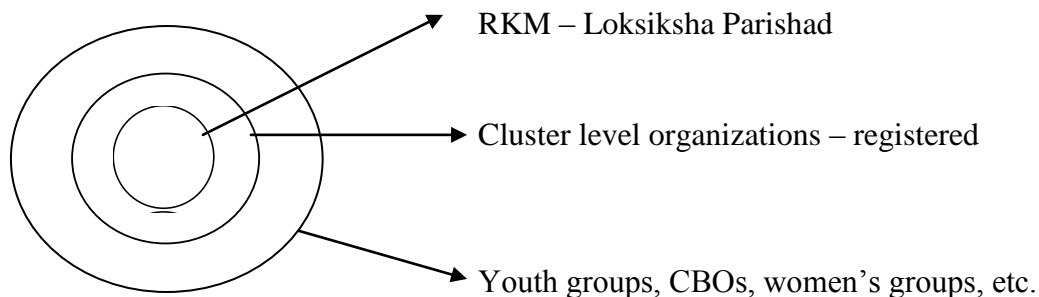
The network could be explained as a 3-tier structure. At the first level are all experts, resource persons and administrators from the RKM's Loksiksha Parishad, further at the second level there are the cluster level organizations, generally the registered trusts and societies from the local areas, and at the third level, at the periphery, are the smaller organizations, the CBOs like the youth clubs and the women's groups. The 3-tier structure typically develops through one of the community-based organizations approaching RKM expressing their willingness to work in the community and seeking RKM's support. At times, it is RKM that approaches these organizations. The next step then is the registration of these organizations at the cluster level. The direction as well as partial finances for the work carried out by these registered organizations is provided by RKM, which thus takes on the overall responsibility for the work being carried out at the local level.

Generally, the centres for development, education and all the other activities are called Gram Unnayan Kendras (Village Development Centres). Every cluster has one desk in charge of RKM who looks into guides and reports about the work being undertaken by that particular cluster. Almost all the clusters have become formal registered organizations, albeit some are huge and some are small.

This 3-tier arrangement within the RKM has led to linkage between the RKM, the clusters and the smaller groups and clubs working for village development. It has always resulted into increasing motivation and is therefore a very good tool for sustainability of the activities being undertaken. RKM, while working with the cluster level organizations, has two binding conditions in order to sustain the association:

- Accounts of the cluster level organizations have to be internally audited by RKM; further, the statutory auditor of the organization is also selected by RKM.
- Secondly, the cluster level organizations must run minimum three programmes with an objective of community development before being affiliated to RKM or supported by it.

Every year, RKM organizes a five-day workshop called Secretary Conference, wherein the need-based planning is undertaken for all the clusters on the basis of suggestions of RKM experts. Experts of RKM from the field of education, health, nutrition and SHG development are involved in these planning meetings.



6.2. Educational philosophy

6.2.1. The role of education

The RKM campus in Narendrapur, with its emphasis on education, has more than 2000 resident students presently on 150 acres of land. On this particular campus educational opportunities are provided for boys coming from displaced families and backward classes. Apart from the regular schools, it also has a night school that caters to students from poor families. According to the RKM personnel, education is chosen as the special field of service because the right type of education is considered to be the best and most effective means of doing lasting good for the nation. They base their assertion on what Swami Vivekananda, the best known of Sri Ramakrishna’s disciples, used to say about education being the panacea for all social evils. Obviously by education he did not mean merely book learning and RKM is alert to this crucial fact. Their approach to education furthermore is drawn on his mission statement that “we must have life-building, man-making, character-making assimilation of ideas (...) what we want is that education by which character is formed, strength of mind is increased, the intellect is expanded and by which one can stand on one’s feet”.

RKM has centres all over the world which work towards providing education and health services. Loksiksha Parishad, a rural development wing of RKM, was established in North Kolkata in the 1950s, starting from adult education and gradually burgeoning into many different community-based initiatives in many of the backward districts of West Bengal. The term “Loksiksha”, literally meaning education of people, came from the preachings of Swami Vivekananda, who talked about this concept and reflected that for the development of the people, it was very necessary that they get education in its entirety. Loksiksha Parishad also has a network of institutional activities, like the 59 vocational courses, which are utilized by the local and the cluster level organizations.

The philosophy behind all the initiatives of the RKM’s educational programme, Loksiksha Parishad, revolves around the mother and child. The three main activities taken up by RKM, i.e. a) education, childcare and development, b) health and nutrition, and c) rural development activities in the village are organised with this particular focus. The centre of all the activities is thus essentially the mother followed by the child.

The RKM philosophy of undertaking social development activities is largely based on the belief of Ramakrishna who before passing away talked about practice of seva (service) through human beings, as he believed that God is in human beings and hence, it is the human beings whom we should worship and unveil their inherent divinity. Thus, service to human beings is considered a great opportunity to serve God.

Education, according to RKM, is a means to unveil the potential and talent hidden in the individual. It is compared with the idea of clearing the sun from the clouds, the final end of which is empowerment. RKM believes that knowledge exists in everybody, it is just that many of them are not able to express it and hence, interventions that will help human beings to express this knowledge are necessary. Education, thus, is the manifestation of the perfection already in man.

Therefore, the pedagogical aspects and the inputs in education concentrate upon the fact that:

- Children should be the entry point in a village.
- Youth in the village should be prepared to act as an agent of change.
- Mothers should be organized to act as instruments for child development.

The three focus areas for child development are nutrition, health and recreation.

As an organization focusing and working fundamentally initiating activities around the mother and children RKM comes across as an organization with gender sensitivity and focuses on the aspects of gender equality. RKM ensures that in most of its activities it is the women who are in the forefront and it is they who need to be empowered and provided accessibility to resources in and around their villages.

6.2.2. Pedagogy and syllabus

The basic objectives of the Early Childhood Education Programme being implemented in Murshidabad district are:

- To upgrade the level of awareness among the parents of the children and upgrade the status of health and nutritional status of the mothers and children through health, nutrition and educational support
- To ensure a minimum standard of education for the children of backward families
- To encourage mothers' empowerment
- To strengthen community participation in the process of child to family development

The purpose of the project in relation to the children, too, has been clearly spelt out in terms of the resolve to install and strengthen schooling habits, physical and mental development of children from the ten villages selected from seven blocks of Murshidabad district.

The schools run by RKM through the local organization work at two levels, the Child Care Centres (CCCs) and the Supplementary Learning Centres (SLCs). The early childhood education programme in the form of the Child Care Centres actually caters to children from the age group of 2 – 6 years and the Supplementary Learning Centres are meant for school dropouts, children between the ages of 8 –14 years.

RKM school's syllabus is based on the state government's syllabus. Though Swami Vivekananda envisioned the setting up of Veda Vidyalayas (schools in the tradition of the Vedas), he finally compromised by working along with the existing formal education system because he felt that it was necessary to go with time and learn those things that will ensure livelihood in the long run. Value education, hobbies, creative and extra curricular activities, however, form the basic thrust of all the educational activities of RKM.

The early childhood education programme of RKM, which was initiated in the eighties, focuses on developing the school going process as a habit among children in areas where schooling is not a norm. Though RKM believes that modern education sans cultural rootedness will not work, it encourages any form of education that would in the long term make a difference to the individual personality. RKM also strongly believes in developing life skills education among adolescents and creates coping capacities among them.

6.3. Learning environment

6.3.1. Infrastructure

The Child Care Centres (CCCs) and the Supplementary Learning Centres (SLCs) are housed in the same premises that in most cases comprise of two small adjacent rooms. The rooms are large enough to accommodate 20-30 children and have little space around for children to play and undertake extra-curricular activities.

The interactions with the children of CCCs and the SLCs revealed that they are well trained through the efforts of the teachers and have learnt about Indian tradition and culture, about national and religious leaders, different rhymes, poems and prayers, the numbers as well as language. The teachers are liked by the students and the parents, too, seem to be happy with their work. The teachers have regular meetings with the mothers of the CCC children especially those who get involved in the Self Help Group related activities and other developmental initiatives in the village.

The children wear a standard uniform, the CCCs command respect in the villages and are looked at as the best for their children. In most cases, apart from the government schools, the CCCs are the only schools available in the villages. A number of parents in the villages where CCCs exist talked of it as a quality-oriented school where the children look neat, are well dressed and are treated well.

At many places we found that even after joining class I in the government schools, the children still want to come back and study in the CCCs. In fact, many children try and attend the classes at the CCCs even after joining the government school. The parents, too, have therefore started to insist that RKM should start 1st and 2nd grades as well for their children. However, RKM says that starting schools in Murshidabad is not their objective, but the idea is to ensure effective development of mothers and children at the same time. The schools are just a medium to achieve this.

6.3.2. Activity patterns

The activities undertaken in the classrooms of CCCs follow a set pattern and a schedule that tries to concentrate upon developing all the faculties of the children. The activities can be described as:

- Assembly and prayer – this is the beginning session which concentrates mostly on recitation of different national and traditional prayers.
- Interaction of teacher with learners – this session is a kind of icebreaker for the children and creates a positive learning atmosphere. Apart from this, a simple conversation between the teacher and the children regarding the things they saw on the way to school, what they ate the day before and many more things helps remove the fear / timidity from the minds of children and also builds a friendly atmosphere.

- Indoor activities –are mainly learning sessions that concentrate upon language development, learning names and numbers, etc.
- Outdoor activities – these are mainly sports exercises and games that are undertaken outside the class.
- Supplementary activities – mothers’ meetings, health camps, awareness camps, cultural activities, games and sports competition are taken up every week, one after the other, and ensures a continuous dialogue between teachers, parents and the children.

6.3.3. Methods and ways of extending education

RKM basically focuses upon very distinct aspects in terms of extending education and strengthening the foundation for the education of young children. A few fundamentals spelt out are very clear and relevant to the communities in the villages of West Bengal:

- Creation of schooling habit – the CCCs essentially focus upon nurturing the habit of attending school every day among the small children and sees to it that the education imparted and the means utilized in doing so create an interest and love for school among these children. This ensures that the children develop an interest in going to school. The syllabus as well as the textbooks are very carefully designed and developed indigenously by the RKM experts. Apart from using the materials developed internally, the books prescribed by the state board are also utilized.
- At the Supplementary Learning Centres (SLCs), the effort through 2-4 hours classes is to upgrade the capacities of school dropouts and further integrate these children in formal government schools of the state board. The syllabus of SLCs has been developed indigenously by the RKM experts and basically tries to teach students the basis of creating capacities for class I and II and focuses upon integration from Class III onwards. The syllabus focuses on creating their capacities in language, maths and science. The syllabus of the CCCs and SLCs are based on the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan programme (a nation-wide scheme launched by the Union Government to universalize elementary education by 2010) and Minimum Level of Learning by NCERT.
- In order to upgrade and develop good health of the children, medical camps and special health inputs are extended by the visiting doctors of RKM.
- Supplementary nutrition is provided in order to upgrade their nutritional status. This is done through the distribution of nutri-meals, a kind of nutritional powder prepared by the women SHGs that comprises of all the pulses and lentils following a set formula.
- Along with the school education activities, the mothers of the children are encouraged to form SHGs and undertake income generation activities in order to strengthen and upgrade their socio-economic status.
- The women’s groups, the youth clubs, the adolescents and everybody from the village are encouraged to participate and organize cultural and recreational activities in order to enhance the creativity of the students from CCCs, SLCs, the women members and all the youths.
- RKM and the clusters organize skill-based trainings, mainly kitchen gardening, poultry keeping, food processing, tailoring for the women members of SHGs, so that they are not only able to help themselves, but also generate some income for their families. Many of the SHGs have been trained in preparing chutneys, pickles and other food products, which can be marketed locally.
- Regular trainings are provided to CCC organizers, assistant organizers, SLC teachers and other community organizers involved in the village development activities
- Monthly reviews are undertaken at every centre along with the concerned cluster organization and the desk in charge of RKM.

The teachers are extremely dedicated and have worked hard in creating a conducive and cheerful environment for children to learn and be active enough in every sense of the word. Though the physical infrastructure of the centres is not very encouraging, despite the lack of any great facilities, the efforts of the teachers have made a great deal of difference to the learning environment.

6.4. Community involvement

Our meetings, discussions and the village visits revealed the extent of the involvement of the village level youth clubs, women's groups and adolescents in the integrated development activities initiated by RKM. In almost all the villages, the communities are involved in building classrooms with their own funds and the utilization of their own resources.

The parents are very keen on knowing more and more about the inputs their children receive in the school and therefore they attend all the meetings. Though the education programme at the first glance appears to be child-centric, but at a later stage they are village-centric too, as all the activities are continuously trying to induce the involvement of villagers at large.

In order to assess the initiatives undertaken by RKM, the team interacted with a number of villagers in the service villages of the project. The interviews and focus group discussions revealed the following: positive changes have taken place in the local attitudes towards education; the villagers have continuous access to the social workers of the local youth clubs, to teachers, the educational services, information on and inputs related to women empowerment activities along with focus on nutrition and health; that their participation in income generation activities initiated by local groups has increased through the facilitation done by RKM in accessing government schemes; and that they achieved several benefits due to continuous guidance from RKM.

A mother from one of the villages expressed that, with the inputs from RKM, she has been able to participate in the SHG activities, learn some skills, and undertake income generation activities. This has not only ensured her some income but has also ensured a sense of independence and self-confidence. One of the mothers talked about the nutri-meals that have helped the children in getting good nutrition and also provided good nutrition to her family.

Many of the mothers talked about the importance of these schools in their villages, wherein their children are getting standard education through extremely well-trained teachers and demanded that further classes should also be started by RKM as they don't want to send their children to government schools after attaining good education in the CCCs.

Though one gets the feeling of all educational activities of the organization right from its basic and clearly laid down objectives as well as its philosophy, it should be noted that to many RKM is also known as a grass-root level organization working for the development of village folk in various parts of the country. In Murshidabad too, a blend of women empowerment, youth enhancement, income generation initiatives and many other activities along with education can be noticed. In most cases, it is the mothers of the children coming to CCCs and SLCs that successfully participate in these activities and this definitely helps in enhancing their interest in the education of their child.

Apart from this, a number of young men and women from the villages where CCCs and SLCs function urge to participate in SHG and other youth development activities. Interestingly, it is a commendable fact that all the activities in the villages, whether mobilized by the cluster

level organization, local youth clubs or by RKM staff itself, appear to be completely linked with each other and are carried out as an integrated village level activity, in many cases also being undertaken in a single physical premise such as the CCC or an office of a local youth club or an office of a cluster level organization.

Apart from this, though the activities vary in terms of description and also with regard to the target groups, education is an underlying element that is taken care off by each and every group that undertakes any activity, be it sports, cultural functions, SHG formation, income generation, village development and so on.

6.5. Impact

Though RKM appears to be an education-oriented organization to an outsider, it essentially is an integrated development-based institution which believes and concentrates more on the development of its beneficiaries in rural areas in ways that could enhance their livelihood and their living conditions. However, education as a part of this development process is one of the most important components and has evolved as one of the means to develop the society / community as a whole.

RKM's stated development approach is the establishment of programmes and services for the socio-economic and cultural development of the beneficiaries. According to RKM this constitutes the essential core of its constructive work. Inherent in this is the conscious limit that RKM's focus in this development approach, which is largely centred on the community involvement.

In other words, RKM adopts a community- rather than an institution-centred approach. The structure of RKM activities in Murshidabad is also consistent with this approach. The structure takes within its ambit the specific interests of the beneficiaries pertaining to the specific activities: both educational and cultural development as well as income generating activities.

The structure represents these interests adequately by incorporating representations from the direct beneficiaries of the activities of RKM besides the staff of cluster organizations and the local youth clubs. This provides adequate interests of the beneficiaries to be reflected in the decision making, planning and monitoring.

6.6. Critical assessment

6.6.1. Relevance and effectiveness

RKM as a people's organization in the field of education as well as social development comes across as a successful institution, which has not only catered to the needs but also facilitated and enhanced participation of rural population in the process of development. The progress made in the last 50-100 years is paved with step-by-step growth in the fields of livelihood and education. The organization has a clear vision and mission, specific goals and objectives supported by donor members, government, and non-governmental agencies, which is further managed by an excellent management.

The education project in Murshidabad has been successful in confidence building of the rural population. The overall inputs of the project have tried to ensure them formal education, health care, access to other developmental approaches focusing on micro-credit and youth welfare. The management of RKM, its staff, and the cluster level organizations and networks

have effectively reached out to the target groups and have won their confidence in the process.

The formal early childhood education activity, the Child Care Centres (CCCs) and the Supplementary Learning Centres (SLCs) have proved to be very impressive. The CCCs and SLCs education activity has not only succeeded in providing formal education but has also ensured an improvement in the lifestyle of the rural children.

RKM considers itself as a people-oriented organization, and commands respect as well as reputation among the beneficiaries, the state and central government officials and agencies. RKM is a member of several district, state level committees and missions formulated for development.

The community governance system also seems well established, looking at the levels of participation of the community in the developmental processes. To a large extent the active participation and enthusiasm of the representatives of village committees reflect their urge to understand governance and also obtain benefits from it. The involvement of the community members notwithstanding, it is in fact the cluster level organizations that orient their involvement and interests.

6.6.2. Suitability

As far as the cultural patterns of Murshidabad are concerned, there have been instances where the community has not entirely gone along with the staff of RKM and the cluster level organizations. One of the issues the study team discussed with members of the organization was regarding the relatively low level of involvement by members of the Muslim community in the activities of RKM. This aspect is particularly striking given that there is a substantial population of Muslims in the Murshidabad district. Though the children from the Muslim community attend the schools, both the CCC and the SLC, especially the latter, the parents of these children do not participate much in the activities of RKM when compared with members of the other communities in the village. The team observed that there were possibly quite a few reasons for this attitude of the Muslim community.

All the activities and traditions followed in these centres reflect the Hindu culture in a region that has a substantial Muslim population. RKM is thus working among the Muslim community, but there is nothing in these centres that reflects the Islamic / Muslim culture at all. Thus, in spite of the children and youth from the Muslim community using the resources provided by RKM, they feel alienated and out of place in the centres supported by it. The question therefore arises whether it is not required of an organization such as RKM to realize what is needed in an area where a particular community is in a large number. RKM, however, feels that it is not discriminating against any particular community and believes that such sectarian feelings just don't exist in the areas in which they work. They did concede that they would be more sensitive to such matters in the future.

Yet, it should be noted that RKM's educational, cultural and developmental inputs have brought about visible changes in the daily habits, hygiene and cleanliness in the villages and in the changed attitudes of the villagers towards bettering their lifestyles.

It should also be mentioned that the government and other political parties perceive RKM as an education-based organization, undertaking programmes related to education and imparting

one of the best educational inputs for the children. No clashes or conflicts exist with any of the governmental institutions or departments.

6.6.3. Efficiency of the project in terms of cost-benefit ratio

RKM's activities in one of the most backward districts of Murshidabad in West Bengal have ensured qualitative educational opportunities to help build the foundation of the young children through the CCCs. It has also ensured a minimum standard of education for the dropouts through the SLCs. The micro-credit activity has helped achieve the basic objective of enabling resources to be accessed. As a result the women have been strengthened and feel empowered.

Though a specific cost-benefit ratio from financial / quantitative angle is rather difficult, it is important to look at the qualitative improvements the project has focused upon. The presence of RKM and its activities definitely reflects their strength in terms of the potential platforms that have been developed for undertaking any other developmental activities in the villages. On the other hand there is a scope to leverage the existing activities to a larger platform so that the developmental activities in these villages are further enhanced and extend the outreach.

6.6.4. Contribution to reducing poverty and improving living conditions

The contributions from RKM and its cluster organizations have enabled decisive socio-economic changes and improvements among the rural people of Murshidabad. The project, providing qualitative and formal education through CCCs and SLCs, and encouraging a constitution of self-governing bodies in the project villages to involve the target groups to participate in the development activities of the project has been effective in terms of improving living conditions of the people in the area by way of their participation in deciding upon what they want for themselves and how they go about setting their priorities. Working out different options for enhancing educational inputs for their children and for generating more livelihood and self-reliance amongst mothers has definitely been tried by the villagers and has made a difference in their lives as well.

6.6.5. Sustainability of the concept in view of the challenges ahead

The 3-tier structure of RKM for implementation of activities would definitely help in terms of establishing sustainable programmes and processes, as most of the governance system is gradually evolved through the participation and involvement of the villagers. The cluster-based approach of having several local organizations looking at the field level rapport building and implementation of activities rather spell out a completely decentralized approach that always helps in sustaining the grass-root initiatives and also policy development in terms of the corresponding needs with the demands generated by the villagers.

This system has also helped RKM in initiating need-based activities and subsequently handing them over to local groups and agencies, which not only have a great sense of ownership but also value the support and encouragement received from RKM in building up and developing their village.

With time the Ramakrishna Mission is growing from strength to strength. People all over the country want the Mission to open more branch centres - schools, colleges, hospitals, orphanages, etc. for they know that the quality of services they will get from the Mission will be better than what they may get elsewhere. Their requests are almost always accompanied by of-

fers of money, land, and buildings but the Mission proceeds cautiously and avoids proliferation unless there is a compelling reason in its favour. Apart from the fact that it suffers from shortage of manpower, it prefers that people themselves come forward to start such institutions, imbued with the spirit of selfless service. Happily, the present trend clearly shows that this spirit is fast spreading.

The strength of the Ramakrishna Mission is not in money, men or organization, but the ideas it tries to present. These ideas are fast spreading, and wherever they are spreading, they are producing a great impact. Silently but inevitably, they are changing the minds of the people who come under their influence.

The reputation, respect and the presence that RKM enjoys in the villages of Murshidabad definitely reflects the rigorous efforts that RKM has made along with their cluster organizations for penetrating not only in the field of education per se but trying to achieve an integrated development in line with its basic objectives of focusing on mother and child.

7. Sikshasandhan

7.1. Background

Sikshasandhan, which was established in 1995, focuses on issues of education, especially that of tribal children in Orissa. It functions as a resource centre for education wherein engagement both with theory and practice of education are given equal importance. The founding of Sikshasandhan in fact was propelled by the interest many of its founding members had in the field of education. While most of them had practical experience of working in the area of education, they wanted to develop a still deeper understanding of educational issues by establishing schools or alternative educational centres in tribal areas where access to school education was not available.

Sikshasandhan believes that education is a vital tool in the process of empowerment of tribals as also other underprivileged sections of the society. It has therefore sought to provide educational opportunities for this section through a consortium approach. The consortium approach involves seven voluntary organizations that are already working with the tribal community and are therefore equipped to understand the needs of this community. Through these seven organizations, Sikshasandhan has set up 30 Alternative Education Centres (AECs) in remote tribal hamlets. These AECs are spread over 10 low literacy districts of Orissa. They also coincide with areas where watershed programmes are being taken up by the organizations. While the member-organizations of the consortium are involved in a range of activities that include watershed development, formation of self-help groups, joint forest management programmes etc., Sikshasandhan's exclusive focus is on education.

Sikshasandhan's efforts in the area of education need to be understood in the context of the larger educational scenario in Orissa. The State ranks 26th in the country in terms of literacy figures. The problem that Orissa faces is also in terms of substantial disparity between regions and the fact that it has a large tribal population (almost 23%) living in far-flung areas. In spite of various government programmes such as DPEP, Jan Siksha Nilayam and Sarva Siksha Abhiyan, educational opportunities are not available for tribal children. The government's Education Guarantee Scheme (EGS), which makes participation from the community a prerequisite to the sanction of schools, has had only limited success. One of the most common critiques of the government is that several of the schools mentioned by it exist only on paper. Within such a context, Sikshasandhan seeks to draw the attention of the government as well as the debating public to the importance of education. It also seeks to link the requirement for education with developmental issues, primarily through the voluntary organizations it networks with.

The structure of Sikshasandhan has at its apex a General Council of 30 members from which a Governing Council consisting of 9 members is selected. The Member-Secretary is the executive head of the organization and he looks after its day-to-day functioning. Sikshasandhan has a staff strength of 8 members.

7.2. Educational philosophy

The educational philosophy Sikshasandhan has adopted and propagates can be grasped through a range of coordinates. Here its stated objectives, the curriculum followed, the pedagogy adopted, the thinking on formal and non-formal education are discussed. Together these provide an understanding of Sikshasandhan's educational philosophy.

As a background to Sikshasandhan's work and philosophy, it may be mentioned that several of the organizations that form the consortium earlier ran educational centres for tribal children through the central government's Innovative Education Programme. The idea behind this particular programme was mainly to provide a place in tribal areas where children could get formal education. The AECs that are run through Sikshasandhan on the other hand have a broader vision in terms of involving the community, selecting teachers who show an aptitude for teaching tribal children and training them up, providing health check-ups, setting up libraries at each of the schools, providing vocational training, forming village education committees and further involving the community in other developmental activities through the schoolteacher.

7.2.1. Objectives

The experience of working with tribal communities for different developmental activities had provided members of Sikshasandhan with a sense of what the educational requirements of these communities would be. The setting up of the resource centre itself was in order to develop further the theoretical understanding of the issue through a practical orientation. The idea of setting up the AECs firmed up from the realization that it is not easy to innovate in government schools while innovation is important especially if tribal children are to be brought into a semi-formal structure of education. In the profile that Sikshasandhan provides of itself, it states its objectives as follows:

- Universalization of functional literacy through alternative model of education.
- Promotion of an innovative model of tribal education suited to local conditions.
- Education to be used for sustainable development of tribals in remote watershed areas.
- Enhancement through proper education of the ability of tribal children to utilize their own resources and face their own life situations.

Sikshasandhan places a great deal of emphasis on educational innovation since it sees innovation in matters of education as being key to the problem of successfully providing education to tribal children. It therefore seeks to intervene in this area through its various publications on matters of educational interest as also through the production of teaching-learning materials. Its publications include Oriya translations of "Letter to a Teacher" by Barbiana School, "How Children Learn" by John Holt, "Heart not Head in the School" by A.S.Neill, "To Children I Give My Heart" by V. Sukhomlinsky and Paulo Freire's "Reflection on Education and Society".

Through these publications and its other activities, Sikshasandhan mainly aims to facilitate dialogue among "the key stakeholders of the educational process and environment – teachers, learners, parents, administrators, NGOs, policy makers and others – for educational enhancement in terms of its quality, accessibility, and relevance to the aspirations, rights and dignity of the most deprived and marginal sections of society" (Annual Report 2002 – 2003).

A significant aspect of Sikshasandhan's approach is that it has closely linked the education of tribal children to their health. Health check-ups are carried out every month at each of the AECs. This emphasis on regular health camps has emerged from the realization that ill health is one of the major reasons for children dropping out of school. Therefore instructions about health and hygiene are not only incorporated into the curriculum but medical attention too is provided to the students. The notion of education is thus expanded to include the different dimensions of a school going child's special requirements.

7.2.2. Curriculum and pedagogy

Sikshasandhan's educational philosophy is evident in its investment in developing a curriculum for use in the AECs and the pedagogical approach it has introduced in these centres. These followed from the realization that tribal children feel alienated in mainstream schools. An alarmingly large number of tribal children drop out of school because they are not able to follow the standard dialect (of Oriya in this case) that is used in the schools. The language used in their community is completely different from this dialect. The teachers do not make any special efforts to communicate the lessons or the information to these children in a manner that can be grasped by them. Also, the topics covered in the textbooks do not at any point relate to their lives and environs. The children's own experiences as represented in one of the workshops conducted by Sikshasandhan speak about their acute sense of being misfits in mainstream schools.

The curriculum developed by Sikshasandhan therefore seeks to address these problems and provide one that will enable the tribal students to value their own culture and history while also acquiring other forms of knowledge. For instance, when we visited the school in Kadamdhi in Angul district, we observed that the teacher was teaching the students about their village and from that local topic extended the lesson to the part about the children belonging to the larger country called "Bharat" (India). The lessons are invariably taught in the dialect the children use at home. In fact, the local dialect is used to convey the standard language better. The students are taught the alphabets of the standard language. In the school mentioned above, the children were very bright and forthcoming. They were able to identify the alphabets with ease. We noticed that the teacher here was a dynamic young man who had also helped form the local youth club. In the classroom too he was able to enthuse the children and involve them in the activities of the class.

The curriculum of the AECs also places a great deal of emphasis on playing, singing and dancing. This is thought to be in keeping with the culture of the tribes. Their festivals are marked and their heroes recognized. The timings of the school too are flexible in order to suit the requirements of their lives better, tuned especially to the agricultural seasons. We were surprised, however, to note that though the classrooms were lined with an array of charts and posters, there were none of tribal leaders such as Birsa Munda. Some of the classrooms again had posters of well-known national leaders. Members of Sikshasandhan clarified that they were in the process of producing posters of tribal freedom fighters and leaders such as Laxman Naik, Chakra Bisoi, Dharani Bhuayan, Birasa Munda, Sumani Jhodia and others. They has also collaborated with Prof. Nilakantha Rath, a renowned economist based in Pune to distribute Sumani Jhodia's autobiography written in her own language.

Another aspect of the curriculum introduced in the AECs is that it includes vocational training, mainly in sawai (bamboo-like wood) and bamboo crafts. The vocational training aims both at equipping the students with skills to generate some income as well as to inculcate in them a healthy respect for manual and other kinds of labour. Sikshasandhan believes that mainstream education separates work from life processes, that it only produces individuals who can be employed in different jobs rather than developing self-reliant persons. It also believes that incorporating vocational training into the curriculum would inhibit alienation of the child from its own community. Sikshasandhan also makes special efforts to bring girls into the schools. In particular it has tried to motivate the women to send their daughters to school through the programmes organized by the consortium members. Care is taken to ensure that the curriculum and training materials prepared by Sikshasandhan are sensitive to gender matters.

Curriculum and pedagogy related matters are regularly discussed at the training workshops organized for the AEC teachers. At these training sessions a lot of stress is placed on making the teachers sensitive to the potential of the tribal child as well as his / her limitations. The teachers are encouraged to collect indigenous games and stories that in turn can be used within the classroom for teaching purposes. The pedagogy involved encourages learning from the environment rather than from textbooks.

Another forum where issues related to curriculum and pedagogy are put out for wider discussion is the magazine “Sikha” brought out by Sikshasandhan. Many of the AEC teachers write about their experiences in the magazine. However, there is no evidence yet of this magazine having become a dynamic instrument through which curriculum and pedagogy related matters are discussed or elaborated.

7.2.3. Formal – non-formal education

Sikshasandhan is categorical in its understanding that education does not mean only formal schooling but includes the activity that takes place in non-formal settings and at alternative educational centres as well. In keeping with this philosophy, Sikshasandhan has not only set up alternative educational centres for tribal children but has also actively campaigned for the recognition of the need and efficacy of such efforts. Members of the organization have in fact participated in the raging debate about child labour. Mr. Anil Pradhan for instance intervened in the e-discussion about MV Foundation’s formulation that any child out of school is a child labourer. Expressing his deep disagreement with this approach Mr. Pradhan emphasizes the distinction between literacy and education and contends that most existing schools at present provide mainly literacy and that too if the child doesn’t drop out due to the hostility they face in schools. On the other hand, a great deal of self-learning takes place in informal contexts and lays the foundation for life-long education and contribution to the society. Sikshasandhan’s “Annual Report for 2003 – 2004” states: “We at Sikshasandhan firmly believe that if any revolution will ever take place in this country, the path will lie through true education which will not be state-controlled. The objective of such education will be the creation of self-less human beings, not employees for the job market.”

Notwithstanding the emphasis on non-formal education, Sikshasandhan does work with the formal schooling system. This engagement with the formal structures derives from the recognition that the system as such works through a process of certification. Sikshasandhan has successfully managed to get the certificates it issues to the students of AECs recognized by the government. Since the AECs run by Sikshasandhan have classes only up to three levels, Sikshasandhan would like to expand the centres to the extent that they can have at least seven levels. This plan, however, is contingent on the availability of funds. In the present scenario wherein the AECs have three levels, students wishing to pursue further “education” are forced to enrol themselves in government schools. Members of Sikshasandhan reported that very often there is a drop out at this stage because the mainstream schools are not sensitive to the situation and needs of the tribal children. Several aspects of the experiences of these tribal children in government schools emerged during the workshop that Sikshasandhan organized with 50 tribal children at Konark.

Sikshasandhan’s engagement with the formal educational system therefore also derives from its efforts to make the schooling system aware of the tribal children’s background and their educational requirements. To this end, Sikshasandhan has been part of the training programmes conducted by the government for schoolteachers. It has also evaluated the functioning of social welfare residential schools and hostels meant for tribal children. In some tribal

hamlets, such as Asunapani in Angul district, Sikshasandhan has taken the initiative and merged the government school provided under the Education Guarantee Scheme (EGS) with the AEC run by it. The advantage of such a merger has been that there are more number of teachers teaching in the merged unit. Both the schools function at the same time and in the same premises. Thus the teachers of EGS as well as the AEC teach all the children. Also, after finishing their 3rd level, the students now have access to teaching for higher levels. Sikshasandhan's AEC and the government's EGS school have been merged in three other hamlets as well. This is yet another indicator of Sikshasandhan's close association with government centres that are not entirely formal either in their functioning. But contrary to its insistence on non-formal structures for education, Sikshasandhan sees the AECs only as a short-term solution for the educational needs of tribal children. In the long run it believes that the government should provide schools in all tribal villages.

Sikshasandhan has been lobbying with the government to change its policy regarding recruitment of teachers to schools located in or close to the tribal hamlets. It has been arguing that for such schools the requirement is not so much teachers with degrees in education but teachers who have an aptitude for teaching tribal children and who understand the culture and lives of tribal communities.

7.3. Learning environment

Sikshasandhan's AECs are run either in what is called "Vikas Kutirs" (Development Cottages) constructed under the watershed development programme or under thatched roofs constructed by the villagers. We also learnt that very often the villagers decide to allot the village community hall for the use of the educational centre and classes are held in the community hall. When this is the case, the premises are more airy and spacious. From among the four AECs we visited, two were situated in the village community hall, one was a vikas kutir and the other was a class held under a thatched roof. While the last had the advantage of being a completely open school, located right in the middle of a field amidst lush greenery, it faced the potential danger of not providing enough shelter during the monsoon. The vikas kutir and the community halls had plenty of open space around them though the former was relatively small and stuffy. On the whole, however, the emphasis on learning from the environment rather than the textbooks is always possible because the students can step out into the open whenever the lesson requires it.

On an average the classes have 25 – 30 children with one teacher responsible for teaching all the children in the AEC. The children are divided into three groups depending upon their age. They sit on mats or carpets spread over the floor. The teacher addresses each of the groups in turn, giving each one a task when he / she moves to the next group. The lowest level is taught the letters of the language and numbers, while the higher levels are taught lessons from the textbooks on different subjects such as sciences, maths, language and environment. All the children are taught songs and dances as well. At two of the AECs, the children demonstrated their singing and dancing abilities to us. Since all the students are gathered together in one room, there is the possibility that activities of one group might disturb the other, especially if singing or loud reading is involved. The children however seemed to have become used to these kinds of activities taking place in the background. For the most part they focused on the work assigned to them. There are also times though when the children do not have much to do when the teacher is with another group. We did not find any interaction between the children of different levels. Possibly such an interaction could be used as a pedagogic tool but this has either not been explored by Sikshasandhan or was just not in evidence when we visited the AECs.

Each AEC has a blackboard, sometimes two given the fact that a single teacher takes care of students of three different levels. Sikshasandhan makes available all the necessary materials for classroom teaching. All the AECs we visited were well maintained. The walls of the educational centres were lined with colorful charts and posters. As mentioned earlier, we were struck by the absence of posters with specifically tribal themes or characters.

Almost all the AECs run by Sikshasandhan are located in tribal hamlets that are far from the closest town. Most of these hamlets are not electrified. The distances to these places are particularly tedious because the hamlets are not connected by tarmacked roads. During the monsoon the kutchra (non-tarmacked) roads become even more difficult to take. While this factor may not directly impact on the actual teaching taking place at the AEC, it does impact upon the monitoring process where visits to the AEC are involved. In the system evolved by Sikshasandhan, the community does the day-to-day monitoring of the AECs. The consortium organization responsible for the AEC within its area of functioning also monitors the activities at least twice a month. These visits by the consortium partners to the AECs are ensured because they are linked to the regular health camps that have to be held. Sikshasandhan's monitoring in turn depends not so much on actual visits but on the feedback it receives every month from each AEC and once every six months from the consortium organization. Sikshasandhan also holds meetings involving all the consortium partners on a quarterly basis in order to assess the affectivity of the programme.

7.4. Community involvement

One of the basic motives in setting up of the AECs was to facilitate the involvement of the community. Since Sikshasandhan believes that the educational system should not be only state controlled but that it needs to have input from different sections of the society, it has sought to involve the community in the process of teaching and learning. Without the active involvement of the community Sikshasandhan would not be in a position to design an alternative curriculum. Sikshasandhan encourages its teachers to collect the life stories of the older persons living in the communities, the stories that are told and retold within the community, the games that are played and the cultural events that are a part of their lives.

Out of the 30 teachers in the 30 AECs, 23 are tribals themselves and seven are from OBCs (Other Backward Classes). Of these 30 teachers, ten are women. The socio-cultural profile of the teachers reveals that they do not all belong to the community. Of the four AECs we visited, we found that only one teacher belonged to the same community as the children. This teacher also lives in the same village as the children. The other three teachers belonged to different communities and lived in nearby villages. However, from what we could gauge, this aspect did not make any major difference to the community members and to the children. The community members seemed to have faith in the capabilities of the teachers and the teachers too involved themselves wholeheartedly in the matters of the village and the problems of the tribals.

As mentioned earlier, one of the teachers (in Kadamdihi) had started a youth club in the village and was very active in taking up various local issues. At Asunapani, the confidence the villagers had in the AEC teacher resulted in the EGS being merged with the AEC. We also observed that in all the AECs we visited, the AEC teacher was not only coordinating the village education committees and the parent teacher meetings but also facilitated the activities of the self-help groups by maintaining accounts and helping the groups with bank related work when necessary. That at least one parent, the mother or in some cases the grandmother, came

regularly to the school in connection with the child being in the AEC enabled the teacher to be in touch with different households in the village.

We observed that the community members at the sites we visited were on the whole happy with the AECs being run in their hamlets. Some were more pro-active than the others. In some communities, the teachers had to take permission from the villagers in order to go on leave. Overall though, it seemed that apart from being supportive and attending the parent-teacher association meetings the involvement of the community members in the activities of the AEC was quite minimal. Their input into educational matters in particular was minimal. The curriculum developed by Sikshasandhan seeks to draw upon the expertise of the locals while teaching in schools, for instance by inviting some of the villagers to talk of the history of the village or to teach some craft etc. We ourselves however did not come across any such instance of teaching by the villagers during our visits. The input from certain community members could also perhaps be used in the training sessions organized by Sikshasandhan for the teachers of the AEC.

7.5. Impact of Sikshasandhan's educational intervention

The educational levels in all the hamlets we visited were extremely low. In Kadamdihi for instance, the most educated person in the village had completed the 5th class in a government school. The teacher in the AEC himself had passed the 12th class. The presence of the AEC in the villages therefore held the hope of more children getting educated. The villagers also emphasized that they would prefer it if their children could get education beyond the 3rd level at the AEC itself rather than admit them in state run schools. It's not clear though what exactly the adults of the community expected from education itself. They were unable to address the question about what dreams they had for their children. Clearly education itself, irrespective of the fact that the kind of education the AEC sought to provide was trying to approximate to their lives, was something new to them. It had not yet become a part of their commonsense in such a way that they could extrapolate from it to form concrete plans for the future. Some of the villagers responded to our question about the future of their children by saying that they would expect their children to carry out farming and other traditional occupations even after they completed their education.

Though the community members are not directly involved in educational matters, the AEC seems to have had a deep impact on their lives. Their confidence has increased remarkably and they are even able to speak to and challenge government officials. Prior to the establishment of the AEC, they apparently lacked this kind of confidence in themselves. Members of Sikshasandhan told us that through the workshops they had conducted for the tribal children they had realized that the authority figures the children feared the most were the forest guards. Through the training programmes it conducts and the teaching modules it prepares Sikshasandhan in turn has addressed these issues. It has also sought to provide positive role models for the students by drawing upon their own histories and cultures.

While the work that Sikshasandhan does with the children is apparent, it is not clear in what specific ways the AEC has brought about changes in the confidence levels of the community members. It could be either the presence of the schoolteacher, who in most cases is the most educated person in the hamlet, or the sense that the AEC and by extension the hamlet is backed by an NGO which is in its own right powerful enough (through its knowledge of and connections with the mechanisms of the state). While the overt role of the AEC is to provide education to the children of the tribal villages, it seems to serve a function that overreaches its mandate. The teacher at the AEC in fact serves as a facilitator without whose presence a lot of

activities would not have taken place. The teacher at the AEC also becomes the nodal person through whom grainbanks are started, self-help groups formed and watershed activities made acceptable.

Quite a large number of students from the AECs have joined the formal school system after completing their studies at the centres. This is a good indicator of the success of the learning environment (including the pedagogical process) that Sikshasandhan has created. According to figures given by Sikshasandhan at a review workshop in March 2006, out of the ca. 1,000 tribal children attending AECs 253 have been admitted to formal schools till date. In the academic year 2004-05 alone about 100 students from these centres entered formal government schools. Moreover, 5,790 children have so far benefited from the health check-up camps organized by Sikshasandhan. These figures clearly indicate that Sikshasandhan uses the AECs both to provide education but also to help improve the living conditions of the community.

7.6. Critical assessment

7.6.1. Relevance and effectiveness

Given the kind of mandate that Sikshasandhan has chosen for itself it has been both relevant and effective. It has succeeded in raising the levels of discussion and debate within government circles and the civil society about education for tribal children with its publications and public interventions. It has also succeeded in making educational opportunities available on the ground within some tribal hamlets through the Alternative Educational Centres that it has established using the consortium approach by involving other voluntary organizations. It is today recognised as the only organization within Orissa that is focussed exclusively on educational issues and its involvement is sought both by the government as well as other organizations as far as education related issues are concerned.

7.6.2. Relationship with the state

The position taken by Sikshasandhan is that education should not be exclusively controlled by the state. In its public interventions it has in fact emphasised the usefulness of non-formal education over formal education. Towards this end it has even set up alternative educational centres where efforts to innovate in curriculum design and pedagogy are being made. However Sikshasandhan has also made the point in other contexts that non-formal educational centres cannot run in perpetuity and that the state should take over the responsibility of providing education for all sections of the people. In making this latter point, Sikshasandhan is perhaps invoking a future time wherein the state would be sensitive to the requirements of the marginalized sections of the population. The process of sensitization would be through the non-formal educational set-ups wherein innovations are being tried out. Sikshasandhan's formulation therefore suggests that once the differential needs of the tribal population is recognised and accepted by the state, there would be no need for alternative educational centres. Given this framework of understanding Sikshasandhan has been both critical of the government on various issues while also working closely with it in terms of providing resources for government training programmes or in evaluating government institutions.

Sikshasandhan is also particularly alert to the current situation in which there is an almost unbridled growth of the private sector. The increasing dominance of the private sector would result in the poor being unable to pay for their education. Such a scenario has also impacted on Sikshasandhan's position vis-à-vis the state. It has sought to impress upon the state its responsibility in providing education for all.

7.6.3. Suitability

Given the extreme marginalization of the tribal communities, the approach adopted by Sikshasandhan seems best suited to the conditions. Their integrated approach, which also provides health care to the children, seems to have helped retain students in school and build the confidence of the community members.

7.6.4. Quality vs. quantity

Since the time Sikshasandhan set up the AECs, it has provided education to 1,000 tribal children. This number is in itself a small one but the impact of Sikshasandhan's efforts has been far reaching. The AECs operated by Sikshasandhan may be perceived more as a means through which it understands the dynamics between the tribal community and education rather than an overall solution to the lack of educational opportunities for the tribal community. To this extent, Sikshasandhan is more concerned about grasping what quality of materials, curriculum and pedagogy is most relevant to the lives of the tribals. Through its publication of Oriya translations of critical thinkers and educationists Sikshasandhan has also sought to raise the quality of the debate on matters related to education in Orissa.

7.6.5. Efficiency of the projects in terms of cost-benefit ratio

An extended analysis of Sikshasandhan's expenditures has not been made but an example may suffice to indicate that the benefits from the project far outweigh the costs involved. On an average, Sikshasandhan spends Rs. 30,000 per AEC per annum. This includes the costs of materials provided for the AEC as well as the salaries of the teacher. However, as we have seen in section 7.5. on the impact of Sikshasandhan's educational intervention, the role of the AEC seems to have gone beyond the mere fact of providing education for the children and has most importantly brought in subtle changes in the confidence levels of the community as a whole. This kind of empowerment of the community thus more than compensates for the kinds of costs incurred for the project.

7.6.6. Project contribution to self-reliance and public participation

The GAA project has contributed to making Sikshasandhan self-reliant to a certain extent. Sikshasandhan was able to set up a printing press unit under this project. Apart from providing income to the organization, it also helped in expanding its constituency and also in creating goodwill for Sikshasandhan. Sikshasandhan developed and published a lot of teaching / learning materials thanks to this unit.

The project also helped Sikshasandhan in expanding its activities to other areas. This project expanded its knowledge based on people's practical problems, knowledge systems etc. As a result, people from government and voluntary organizations invite Sikshasandhan to meetings, workshops etc. organized by them. Sikshasandhan is now a resource agency for Orissa Siksha Abhijan coordinated by Actionaid International. Furthermore, one of the staff is now executive member of Orissa Primary Education Programme Authority (OPEPA) set up by the Government of Orissa. Sikshasandhan is very much involved in training programmes for teachers working in tribal areas organized by OPEPA, Schedule Castes and Scheduled Tribes Research and Training Institute, Govt. of Orissa. Under this project, Sikshasandhan also organizes interfaces at Gram Panchayat (village council) and state level inviting teachers, parents, people's representatives, educationists, and educational administrators. This gives the organization a platform in participating in public debate.

7.6.7. Chances for scaling-up the educational concept and for replicating successful learning experiences

Sikshasandhan is not aiming for an expansion of the AECs into other hamlets but is in fact seriously considering upgrading the existing AECs such that they provide education at least till the 7th level. Subject to the availability of funds that would allow for further recruitment of teachers and other related matters, Sikshasandhan would be able to successfully upgrade the AECs using its present pedagogic approach in tandem with the consortium approach.

7.6.8. Contribution to reducing poverty and improving living conditions

Through its efforts, Sikshasandhan is not overtly aiming at reducing poverty or improving the living conditions of the children or the community. Through its intervention in the field of education, Sikshasandhan seems to aim for changes at the subjective level rather than at the material level. There are some related interventions that it does make which have an immediate impact on the living conditions of the children, e.g. the health check-ups it organizes in the AECs. Through its curriculum Sikshasandhan also provides vocational training in the belief that this training would help in income generation activities. There is no evidence yet whether this training has actually helped attain the objective.

Some other activities of Sikshasandhan do help to a certain extent to reduce poverty within the communities. Most of Sikshasandhan's teachers assist the community in forming self-help groups. This initiative helps raise the income level of the community. Sikshasandhan has also initiated discussion on various government schemes and self-governance issues during its interaction with the community members. It mobilizes the community to take advantage of various government schemes. Sikshasandhan has also played a role in mobilizing communities for forest protection, which is important because tribal people's livelihood depends on the availability of forests. Because of the presence of the education centres, people's confidence in interacting with the market has also increased. In several ways this can be said to have contributed to reducing poverty.

7.6.9. Sustainability of the concept in view of the challenges ahead

In the present scenario, German Agro Action supports Sikshasandhan and the funds enable it to carry out a range of activities. Continued support will no doubt enable the organization to further strengthen its core activities and improve upon the earlier years. It will be able to play a more effective role vis-à-vis the government as well as in civil society. However, it must also be noted that Sikshasandhan will be able to sustain itself even if the fund flow should stop since it has already taken a two-pronged approach to actualising its concept. One, it has adopted the consortium approach. Two, it has sought to involve the community in its activities. Both these aspects might in fact be the key to sustaining the idea and materiality of the AEC. This in turn would require a strong sense of commitment from both the organizations as well as the community. As regards the activities Sikshasandhan is involved in from its base in Bhubaneswar, these too may be sustainable because it already involves a lot of voluntary work from various members associated with the organization. The reference here is largely to the translation work that takes place, which are eventually published by Sikshasandhan. Additionally, Sikshasandhan is now operating a printing unit, which would provide some kind of income for the organization. Having said this, it may also be noted that no organization in the present time can sustain itself only through voluntary work. Either the quality of its work suffers or the organization itself collapses. So while the *possibility* of sustainability of Sikshasandhan's work and concept does exist, it is difficult to say that it will *definitely* do so.

8. Reaching the Unreached (RTU)

8.1. Background

The children's programme 'Reaching the Unreached' was established in 1972 to care for a small group of abandoned children. Over the years it has grown into a complex programme focussing not only on education but also on family care. In the rural parts of Tamil Nadu four different children's villages have been established where orphaned and destitute children can find new prospects of life by being integrated in a family system, being looked after in a well established, though artificial village environment and finding very good education provided by twelve day care centres / kindergartens, three primary schools, one high school, and supplementary vocational activities.

Education is only one part of the RTU children's programme. The education programme is embedded in a family care system, a health system and a rural development programme. Thus the overall goals comprise much more than educational achievements and the approach is based on the conviction that educational success is based on physical and mental health and well-being. Moreover, RTU does not want to exist as an isolated, well-managed island of material wealth and knowledge in a much less developed and educated environment of Tamil Nadu. Instead it feels a strong responsibility for the neighbouring villages and hopes that through participation and cooperation trickle down effects will occur and lead to sustainable development impacts.

The programme was initiated by Brother James Kimpton belonging to the Christian order "De la Salle" that concentrates on educational activities all over the world. But RTU understands itself as an overarching non-denominational institution caring for children in need regardless of gender, caste, creed or religious affiliation.

The project area is located in parts of Theni and Dindigul districts of Tamil Nadu. These are predominantly agricultural areas where paddy, sugarcane and coconut trees are grown. About 50% of the population own land of less than one acre. Due to prolonged droughts many of the small landowners had to sell their land to the big landowners and work as agricultural coolies.

The vast majority of the target population of the RTU programme belong to the lower caste communities. Socially they are seen as untouchables, economically they are landless and without assets. They live below the poverty line. As in many other parts of India women are in many ways discriminated due to patriarchal customs and traditions. The subordination of females in sexuality, labour and mobility is keeping women illiterate, underpaid and socially insecure. Almost 50 per cent of women in that part of Tamil Nadu have no school education. But the biggest threat presently is the HIV / AIDS epidemic which is spreading rapidly. Due to misconceptions related to HIV / AIDS the affected people are stigmatised and discriminated. A particular form of the problem is in relation to the children orphaned by AIDS. They face the danger of being abandoned and therefore form the most important target group of RTU.

8.2. Educational philosophy

The educational philosophy of RTU can be understood as a mixture of humanistic and spiritual ideas focussing on benevolence. Although the official approach is multi-religious, the Christian philosophy, represented by the founder who is also the President of the organization,

Brother James Kimpton, forms the backbone of RTU. The organizational philosophy is exemplified through the invocation of the words of Jesus Christ: “Whatever you do to the least of these, you do it to me” and “He that welcomes one such little child in my name welcomes me.”

8.2.1. Objectives

The overall aim of RTU is “to generate responsible young people in the society, who are committed to equitable justice in terms of gender, poverty alleviation, culture and social well-being.” It is underlined by the vision statement of RTU which focuses on women and children as the primary target group of the programme: “To care for the felt basic needs and priorities of the poorest, especially the women and children and empower them towards their overall development and self-reliance.”

The objectives spelt out below are the ones that are meant to be realised in the two main branches of the RTU programme:

- Family care approach through the creation of children’s villages and
- Educational approach through the provision of full time schools

The educational objectives are viewed and valued under the “Convention on the Rights of the Child” (CRC) which comprises the following guidelines:

- Every child has the right to survive and to develop to the best of his or her ability.
- All children have the same rights. There should be no discrimination among children.
- All decisions about a child should be guided by what is in the best interest of the child.
- The views of the child on matters that concern him or her should be considered taking into account how old and mature the child is.

Following these guiding principles RTU feels legitimated and challenged to provide each child with an excellent education and it has established a comprehensive school system reaching from kindergarten to high school, some vocational activities included.

Access to RTU schools depends mainly on social considerations: Eligible are orphans, mostly from the Children's Villages, but also children with a poor family background from the surrounding villages in the area. Here again, girls have better chances to be admitted, because they tend to be discriminated in every day life.

The overall concept of family caring implies that the children are looked after when they leave the Children’s Village at the age of about twelve years to stay in hostels for boys and girls, still within the school sites of RTU. Since the majority are orphans RTU takes on the responsibility of caring for them and giving them further guidance until they become self supportive and settled in life. The vocational training activities provided by RTU in addition to formal schooling are part of this process. The same holds true for a number of jobs RTU can offer as it has been growing over the years.

8.2.2. Curriculum and pedagogy

Although RTU schools are organised and financed as private institutions they have adopted the state government curriculum. The main medium of instruction is Tamil.

The spiritual and pedagogical background of “De la Salle” plays an important role here: Jean Baptist de la Salle, a French philanthropist and educator, born in 1651, founded the order “Brothers of the Christian Schools”. It was the first Roman Catholic congregation of male non-clerics devoted solely to schools, learning and teaching. Daily prayers – interdenominational prayers – and contemplative retreats play an important role for character-building and the learning and internalization of moral values. The “De la Salle” Brothers have established schools all over India. Although RTU is not directly connected to that congregation any more the strong educational ethos can be traced easily to this Christian order.

RTU`s pedagogy is also influenced by the philosophy of Maria Montessori and her school of thinking. The Montessori system is based on a faith in the child's creative potential, his drive to learn, and his right to be treated as an individual. Particularly for the younger children in the first classes “play way” methods are implemented. Although teachers conform to the government syllabus, they try at the same time to eliminate the school's traditional stiffness and to break down hard subject-matter lines as far as possible. For the first classes there are no exams. Promotion in school is based on ongoing skill-oriented evaluations. Much importance is given to non-curricular activity programmes. The basic assumption is that education should be based on bringing out the latent potentiality of the child. This might even lead to a democratic concept of individual worth and create social responsibilities in the students.

It is worth mentioning here about how dedicated the teachers in RTU are and how intensively they prepare teaching aids and photocopies to supplement the syllabus they follow. Moreover, teachers meet every week to discuss the learning progress in class and decide on educational activities that supplement or transcend the official curriculum. The researchers had the impression that the majority of educators give their very best to provide children with a very good pedagogy.

Since the majority of students stay in the Children`s Villages or the RTU hostels extra-curricular activities, games, sports, singing, dancing and other forms of recreation are supported. Similarly, sports- and game-contests are highly rated. The philosophy is that society should be interpreted to the child through daily living in the classroom and the life in the village, which acts as a miniature society.

8.2.3. La Salle Open School

For slow learners and dropouts from government schools in the region RTU has introduced a special institution, the "La Salle Open School". This Open School allows dropouts to continue their education and to finish at the end with an official government examination. Depending upon the children`s educational level and their own speed in learning, this school tries to facilitate the slow students to complete a minimum high school examination and to get also some basic vocational knowledge, for instance in computer literacy or in tailoring.

8.2.4. Formal – non-formal education

The paragraphs above have already indicated that informal educational activities are closely linked to formal schooling. The underlying educational philosophy of RTU and the environment of Children`s Villages and the hostels imply a strong bias towards non-formal educational activities. Nevertheless formal schooling is given priority.

8.2.5. Vocational training

As mentioned already, vocational training for some trades (sewing, weaving, metal-cement tiles, etc.) is also offered. The responsibility of RTU to take care of the students until they are finally settled justifies also vocational training branches within the RTU philosophy.

8.3. Learning environment

Taking into account what has been said about the philosophy and the pedagogical attempts of RTU it is not surprising to rate the learning environment for the students as excellent. The school buildings are simple but of good quality. The students are well protected against the sun and heavy rains. The classrooms are adequately furnished.

All in all, the infrastructure is extremely well established; space for each and every education as well as extra-curricular activity is well planned and arranged for. The premises are well kept and maintained, which generates a very pleasant atmosphere in the campus. They are not just neat and clean, but are made to look beautiful from a child's point of view.

The well-designed teaching aids in each classroom are eye-catching. The RTU teachers attempt not to overburden the children with theoretical knowledge. On the contrary, they try, whenever possible, to use practical examples taken from the children's daily experience. The teaching aids are developed indigenously by a team of educators and artists and meet high pedagogical standards.

All learning materials, books, notebooks stationery etc. are provided free of charge to every student.

The teaching activities are very well planned and adapted to the syllabus and curriculum of each year, regular reviews guarantee a high standard of teaching, but it should be noted that it is the style of teaching that is really remarkable even when compared to international standards.

Though 50 per cent of the teachers join as untrained teachers – i.e. just graduates and post-graduates without being qualified in the subject of education – a high standard of teaching has emerged from the trainings, upgrading and ongoing review of the work done by the teachers. The overall teaching standards are high. The spiritual and pedagogical atmosphere has produced dedicated teachers who derive a high sense of professional satisfaction; this is evident from the long duration of services of the teachers, many of whom are here since the inception of schools. The annual turnover of teachers is very low at just 2 per cent.

The atmosphere in the classes is filled with a lot of joy and friendliness. This leads to a frank and candid interaction between children and teachers. The all in all positive and joyful atmosphere creates an island of paradise, free of troubles and pains, which tend to alienate the children from the real world in which they live. This is remarkable because the majority of children are orphans, mainly from the HIV / AIDS affected parents and large numbers of them are affected themselves. They participate in the school life like anybody else.

8.4. Community involvement

RTU started with an integrated rural development approach responding to the felt needs of the people of the villages around, focusing on their urgent needs like health and education.

Through this tradition, the project has always maintained a good rapport with the local people, village authorities, leaders and parents. The four children's villages Anbu Illam, Miriam, Nirmala and Sirumalar are situated close to local villages and have a good relationship with the villagers.

This exemplary kind of relationship was established way back from 1972 when the project was started. RTU did not only look inwards to its own villages and schools, but took also care for the local population in the area.

The biggest contribution is that the RTU cares for orphans and destitute children in the area and has developed new homes for them. Up to now RTU has established four Children's Villages consisting of 95 houses where 5-6 children live with a foster mother, i.e. altogether more than 600 orphans and destitute children are looked after properly. The foster mothers recruited are destitute women who are appointed as mothers in the children's villages. Thus, they get not only shelter for themselves, but also for their children and a paid job. Their job as a mother in the village gives them a sense of self-respect and acceptance in the village.

Clinical services – open to everybody – were started in 1974. 150 to 200 patients are getting clinical services every day, particularly for Leprosy, tuberculosis and HIV / AIDS. Mobile clinic services started in 1982 serve 21 remote villages in Theni and Dindugul districts. Modern health care facilities are brought to the doorsteps of the rural poor - about 50 per day.

Rural development activities, with components for the empowerment of women, were started in 1992. Community health, building wells and rural housing are also on the agenda.

Village level committees have been formed in each village with the help of RTU. They mainly comprise of women members, as RTU has experienced in the past that men are not reliable and do not take initiatives. With these activities against the male dominated trend RTU exerts a strong gender sensitive influence.

The education programmes have already been mentioned. Almost half of the 1500 children benefiting from free education in RTU come from the nearby villages.

Similarly, a mobile laboratory for teaching natural sciences is serving about 10 government schools in the region. The assistance provided by RTU to the neighbouring government schools is visible and much appreciated by the government, especially RTU's support in conducting science classes, construction of buildings and appointment of supplementary teachers. Teachers are mostly from the local areas and nearby villages. Their selection is based not only on their official qualification (exams), but also on their pedagogical abilities, which they demonstrate "on the job".

The "La Salle Open School" for the dropouts is not restricted to the RTU school children but open to everybody in the villages around who fails to continue in government schools.

In the schools parents-teachers associations have been created to strengthen the relationship between the RTU schools and the villages.

8.5. Impact of the educational intervention

The extraordinary well-organised RTU system produces very good results. School performance is excellent because of the positive learning atmosphere (dedicated teachers, low teacher-

student ratio, good learning conditions etc.). St. Peters High School of RTU ranks among the best schools in Tamil Nadu. This success is not only due to a good learning climate in school but also to the positive environment as a whole referring to the integration of schools and Children's Villages.

The social and educational efforts concentrate on orphans, destitute children and the poorest of the poor, mainly belonging to the lowest castes. They get a chance to live a completely different life compared to their prospects without RTU education.

The impact is not only restricted to the RTU children but includes the dwellers of the nearby villages. Many children in the villages get the chance to find a good job, to overcome the barriers of the caste system and move up the ladder of social mobility. Nevertheless, the impact of the project is restricted to a relatively small area.

It is too early yet to give detailed information about the long-term impact of RTU intervention. Only a few of the RTU children have finished high school so far. Some started vocational training within the project, others went to college. Some are working as nurses and similar occupations in the health sector nearby. The project tries to maintain contact with the alumni because of the "family bonds" which normally hold until marriage. With the good education the pupils receive in RTU schools they appear to have a solid platform for further education and a professional career afterwards. For now, this is only speculation because only a few have gone through the whole education process.

8.6. Critical assessment

8.6.1. Relevance and effectiveness

The RTU approach seems to be very successful when measured by the standards it has set for itself. It is one of the best educational institutions in Tamil Nadu, the performance is excellent and it is well connected to the communities nearby. The project is well known in the state of Tamil Nadu and in the international donor community. A proof for that is the immediate and successful help RTU could give after the Tsunami incident by setting up a Children's Village (Sirumalar) within a few months of the catastrophe.

8.6.2. Relationship with the state

RTU is a private institution, a registered society with a NGO status. Thus, it is autonomous in its financial management and to a certain extent also in its socio-political orientation. To be recognised as educational institution it has decided to follow the government syllabus in formal schooling so that its certification is accepted by public institutions. After passing school the students have no difficulties entering institutions of higher education and finding jobs in government offices as well.

RTU is well accepted by educational authorities in the respective districts because it assists government schools in teaching natural sciences and is also of help in many other fields like health services and community development. Whether there are tensions between public institutions and RTU because of the better performance and greater efficiency of RTU is a question to be raised but the study team did not find any evidence of this.

8.6.3. Suitability

Adopting a micro-perspective with respect to the project, it may be concluded that the RTU approach is best suited to the desperate situation of the orphans and destitute children. Intensive health care and good schooling helps them to overcome their difficulties. However, from a macro-perspective it can be asked whether such an intensive input of resources is justified for a relatively small number of people.

8.6.4. Quality vs. quantity

The RTU-approach is certainly a qualitative one. All the services rendered are of high quality. But with sufficient resources from outside quantity has also become an important factor. 1,500 school children, four Children's Villages, substantial health services for the region have reached a level that can be assessed as having a significant development impact. For the individual pupil or health patient a qualitatively better service is preferred to a quantitative approach. With respect to the basic educational concept of "De la Salle" a primarily quantitative approach neglecting quality education is not acceptable.

8.6.5. Efficiency in terms of cost-benefit ratio

All RTU activities seem to be very well organised and therefore very efficient. Similarly the cost-benefit ratio appears to be positive although an exact evaluation of the project in this respect has not yet been done. The main issue here is the definition and interpretation of benefits. But looking at the extremely well-maintained school infrastructure, the dedicated teachers, the excellent learning results and the good chances of school leavers for further studies or to find a well-paid job, there is not much doubt that the cost-benefit ratio is positive.

8.6.6. Chances for scaling-up and for replicating

All services provided by RTU are inconceivable without the presence of the organising brain of Brother James Kimpton who is now 82 years old. He is the President of RTU and is extremely respected, even venerated as 'spiritus rector' of the project activities. Although he personally tries to remain in the background he is still involved in all major activities. He plans to withdraw more and more. Presently, it is difficult to assess whether this attempt will be successful or not. RTU, particularly the Children's Villages and the schools are very much formed by his own ideas.

A strong leader can have constructive influences in building a complex project like RTU. He can also dominate all activities and suppress alternative ideas and competitive claims. For the evaluation team it is impossible to assess the situation in RTU in that respect. The president earns extraordinary merits for what he has done. Whether his collaborators have gained enough confidence and courage to carry on without him remains an open question. It will be very difficult to continue and especially to replicate a project without a personality like him in the background.

8.6.7. Contribution to self-reliance and public participation

RTU has enabled the individual children and the villages which are linked to the project to gain more self-respect, self-confidence and therefore also self-reliance. Again it is difficult to assess to what extent the individuals and the villages have become dependent on the RTU services and in how far they take these services for granted.

Similarly, public participation is affected by a huge project like RTU. The influence of RTU is probably very far-reaching and affecting village affairs in many ways. This could not be explored by the researchers.

8.6.8. Sustainability of the concept

Education and health activities need very high resources and cannot – particularly in underdeveloped countries – be sustained without external assistance. If they are run by NGOs they have to be supported either by the government or through external resource channels. This is also the case for RTU which is supported by GAA / DWHH and by private donors, assisting the activities through “De la Salle” charity funds.

Brother Kimpton and other responsible personnel of RTU are very much aware of the sustainability problem and have prepared a paper on the chances and challenges of sustainability. Brother James has established financial funds to maintain at least the Children’s Villages in future. But the schools – particularly if they want to keep the present quality standards – are not able to carry on without external assistance. Even if the village people would pay a certain amount to secure a good education for their children they never would be able to raise the necessary resources because most of the children come from very poor background. It will take a long time until that situation might change for the better.

9. Conclusions

The study of the five projects supported by GAA has demonstrated that while all of them are invested in ensuring educational opportunities for children, their general approach as well as the specific details have been shaped by the context in which the organizations themselves are working. In assessing the work done by each of the organizations we used some common indicators such as the relevance and effectiveness of the organization, its relationship with the state, the suitability of its approach to the objective that it has defined for itself, the balance it strikes between issues of quality and quantity, the cost-benefit ratio of the project, the project's contribution to self-reliance and public participation, the chances for scaling up the project, the project's contribution to reducing poverty and finally the sustainability of the concept introduced by the project. In this concluding section of the report, we return to the functioning of the five groups in terms of the best practices each of them has evolved. In other words, we focus here on particularly innovative practices that have emerged through the functioning of the groups, which other groups might also seek to reflect upon. These innovations in fact are ones that ensure the sustainability of the group's objective.

In this section we also briefly comment on the potential that each group holds and the direction that they may wish to adopt. We finally conclude with some larger questions that remain questions that emerge not with reference to any one particular group but those that are part of the larger educational context in the country and that impact on the functioning of all the groups.

9.1. MVF Foundation

In relation to MVF's work, the most striking aspect is the manner in which it has configured the problem of children's education itself. MVF's major success lies in the fact that it has successfully impacted upon the discourse of children's rights and education both at the civil societal level as well as at the level of government policies. The fact that not all invested in the field of education are agreed upon MVF's approach does not detract from the fact that it has single-mindedly and strategically worked to make educational opportunities available for a large number of children, in the State of Andhra Pradesh in particular. In this respect, four aspects of MVF's approach are particularly noteworthy: i) sustained campaigns to change long-standing norms in relation to children, ii) bringing about radical changes in government policy iii) introducing the idea of residential bridge camps and iv) forming CRPFs and BKVVs.

Changing norms: To a large extent the success of MVF's work can be attributed to its early recognition of the fact that there is an absence of a norm favouring children and children's rights within the context in which it is working. Through a systematic approach and a campaign based on the slogan that "Any child out of school is a child labourer," MVF was able to create a norm that every child should be in school. Once again, while not all would agree with this formulation, it must be emphasized that the uncompromising stand of MVF did focus attention on the very large number of children on the margins who had no access to schooling. MVF was thus able to effectively change structures of thinking through the efforts of its many committed volunteers who carried out intensive campaigns throughout Andhra Pradesh.

Changing Government Policies: Along with its efforts to change societal norms in relation to children, MVF has also been consistently pressurizing the government to live up to its commitment of providing education for all. In fact, MVF's work on the ground has enabled it to precisely identify the problems with the system and to address them innovatively. The policy changes that have come about as a result of MVF's interventions have far reaching implications. They are clearly weighted in favour of the child. Significant among the many policy changes introduced as a result of MVF's intervention are two government orders: 1) government schools have to admit children at any time during the academic year and 2) children cannot be detained at any level of schooling where evaluation is done internally. These policy changes were introduced due to the realization that given their own poverty and low levels of literacy, parents of these children are not able to cope with educational institutions. The implication of the above two policies is that the government school is made responsible for facilitating the child's education both at the administrative as well as academic levels.

Organizing Residential Bridge Camps: Even as MVF has been putting pressure on the community as well as the state, it has itself intervened to provide educational input to the students. Given that MVF has been instrumental in getting the government to admit students at any time during the year and also in introducing the non-detention policy, it has sought to ensure that the students thus admitted into the school are academically prepared for school. They are provided a crash course through the residential bridge camps that MVF conducts. The pedagogic strategy adopted by MVF in these bridge camps has by and large been successful because the students have then fared well when they have joined regular schools. MVF volunteers too have followed up with the students even after they were admitted into the government schools.

Formation of CRPFs and BKVVs: MVF's strategy of forming the Child Rights Protection Forum and Bala Karmika Vimochana Vedika, has ensured that the work that it initiated in different villages would be carried on irrespective of MVF's own presence in that particular village. The decentralized mode adopted by MVF has thus ensured the sustainability of the idea introduced by MVF even if it were to exit from the area.

Future Direction: MVF's rich experience of working towards universalizing education for children makes it particularly equipped to work towards improving the quality of schools and teaching in the schools. The innovations that MVF has introduced in pedagogy and materials use for its own bridge courses should also inform its interventions in changing the curriculum used in government schools such that it is more relevant to the lives of the children that it is admitting into the government schools. MVF's work towards ensuring that all children are in school will acquire further relevance if it also works towards improving the quality of education within the government schools.

9.2. SWRC

Among the contributions SWRC has made as part of its integrated approach to development in certain districts of Rajasthan, its efforts at providing educational opportunities too ranks as an important one. SWRC's approach has on the whole been a non-controversial and non-confrontational one vis-à-vis both the state and the community. As a result, the changes it has brought about in the attitudes towards education of the children from poor families in rural Rajasthan have been slow paced but extremely critical because these changes are now well

entrenched in the commonsense of the people. SWRC's educational approach was found acceptable in the first place because it had set up night schools for children acting on the suggestions of the village community. Over and above this basic requirement, SWRC's intervention has been in terms of introducing the innovative concept of Children's Parliament, of preparing and using educational materials relevant to the night schools and of attempting social transformation through the interventions in the night schools.

Children's Parliament: The model of the Children's Parliament introduced by SWRC has been widely hailed at the local, national and international levels. The Children's Parliament, which basically looks into the functioning of the night schools and of the requirements of children, is also designed as a practical lesson for the children to understand the workings of an electoral democracy. From the point at which the children learn how to canvass for votes or cast their votes to the point where they translate their own educational needs into demands and get them fulfilled, the entire process is a rich learning experience both for the children and the functionaries of SWRC themselves. There have also been several instances in which members of the Children's Parliament have in fact taken the initiative and helped to resolve the problems of the village (of water scarcity for instance) though they were not directly related to their night schools. The Children's Parliament is thus an educational experience for all involved: the children, the villagers and SWRC.

Educational Materials and Pedagogical Innovations: The educational materials prepared by SWRC are an excellent example of how the textbooks can draw upon and in turn be made relevant to the contexts from which the children come. The materials prepared as well as the pedagogic approach is very aware of the fact that the children arrive at the night schools after a full day's work. The moot point for the teaching process therefore is to keep the children interested in the teaching – learning activities. Attempt is made to teach through educational toys, games and other cultural activities as well. Puppet shows are also organized to aid teaching sessions. These approaches help to involve the children in the teaching process.

Social Transformation: In the process of gathering children in the night schools for classes, SWRC has also been able to herald significant social transformations within the society itself. More and more girl children have been attending schools and are becoming increasingly articulate. Another critical change that the night schools have been able to introduce is in terms of diluting the distinctions between different caste groups. The very fact of children from different castes ensures that they intermingle with each other. Equally pertinent is the fact that both the educational materials prepared by SWRC as well as the pedagogic approach that has been devised address some of these issues upfront. The puppet shows organized for the schools / villagers also raise these issues and discuss them.

Future Direction: While SWRC has successfully emphasized schooling and education as a positive value, it should build on this aspect to pressurize the state and make government schools functional. Harnessing the growing awareness about the importance of education among the villagers, SWRC should seek to make the government system more responsible, but even more importantly, responsive to the needs of the children from these communities. Given its own long term and rich experience, it should seek to innovate in the formal government school setting and impact upon government policy.

9.3. RKM

A distinctive feature of RKM's work in the Murshidabad district of West Bengal is that their focus is on pre-school level children. This aspect is notable because most non governmental

or community based organizations that work in the area of education seek to intervene at the level of school going children. RKM itself runs a large number of educational institutions including schools and colleges. Its specific effort in the Murshidabad district with pre-school level children is unique even among its own various programmes and is part of the larger child welfare project that it has taken up in the district. In addition to running child care centres (CCC) for the pre-school children, RKM has also introduced in the same villages supplementary learning centres (SLC) for coaching children who have dropped out from school. The objective of the SLC is to reintegrate these drop outs into the schools. The success of RKM's project in the Murshidabad district stems from the decentralized approach it has adopted as also from the fact that educational issues have been linked to other developmental concerns.

Involvement of Community Based Organisations: RKM's approach to decentralization has involved not the setting up of its own branches or field offices in different places but of collaborating with groups or organizations that are already working in these areas. RKM makes contact with these groups or vice versa and then proceeds to make the local youth group / CBO responsible for running the two kinds of centres. Before officially affiliating itself with these groups, RKM requires that the groups independently organize at least three activities with the children of the area in which they work. Thus RKM draws on the existing confidence of the villagers in the group in order to introduce its own programmes. RKM itself is a very well known organization in West Bengal and its joint effort with the local group adds further credence to its work.

Linking education to nutritional issues: RKM's effort at providing pre-school facilities for children is part of its child development programme. The overall objective is to inculcate within the child and its family the school going habit. RKM believes that an early start to the schooling process would have a beneficial impact on the children from underprivileged backgrounds. As a further incentive to bringing children to school RKM has prioritized nutrition. Not only do the teachers speak of health and hygiene during class hours, the children's parents are given nutri-meals (a nutritional powder) to in turn be given to the children.

Future Direction: RKM provides partial support for the building in which the CCC and SLC activities take place. The community or the community-based organization raises the remaining amount. Perhaps because of the paucity of resources, often these centres are cramped. In the coming years, RKM could perhaps focus attention on making the environment in the centres more conducive to learning activities. The infrastructure could be improved. Additionally, RKM could pay more attention to developing teaching materials for use at the SLC level as well, paying particular attention to the constituency of students that it gets.

9.4. Sikshasandhan

Through a consortium approach involving seven organizations working in different districts of Orissa, Sikshasandhan has established alternative educational centres (AECs) in tribal areas for the benefit of tribal children. The most critical part of Sikshasandhan's effort is its attempt to remove tribal children from their isolation but enable an interaction with the mainstream on equal terms. Sikshasandhan believes that to interact with the mainstream, tribal children need greater confidence and that education should endow them with the ability to interrogate certain negative aspects of the mainstream. The mainstream too has a few things to learn from tribal cultures. Sikshasandhan has kept these aspects in mind while designing its education program. It has repeatedly stressed the need for an alternative space where educational innovations can be tried out even as it has emphasized the need to debate and discuss tribal education related issues with the larger public.

Establishing alternative spaces for innovation: Sikshasandhan feels education under government control is not free from biases. Given the complexities in government administration, Sikshasandhan feels that even if government recognized the special needs of tribal people, alternative experimental schools outside the government system may be necessary. Because of the government system, teachers will not teach the history of people's vulnerability or about exploitative power structures or about class and caste issues. The fact that Sikshasandhan has established the AEC in remote tribal areas is thus a first step in understanding what is involved in the teaching of tribal children in a manner in which they can be empowered rather than being further undermined.

Publications: A very important contribution of Sikshasandhan has been to publish in Oriya a whole lot of literature on education. Most of the publications have been translations of well known works in the area of education and some have been monographs or edited works produced in Oriya. The publications ensure that there is some connection between the innovations that Sikshasandhan is trying out at the AECs and the discussion it seeks to raise on education related matters. This attempt is particularly laudable in a context where organizations very often carry on with their work at the grass-roots level without seeking to inform the dominant discourse.

Future Directions: Given the experience that Sikshasandhan has gained from its work on the ground and given that it is consistently seeking to impact upon the discussions about the education of tribals, it should also seek to develop curricular materials that can be used by the state and non-state educational institutions. Extensive documentation and publication of its own efforts and experiences at the AECs should be published. Sikshasandhan too could perhaps focus its attention on raising resources and providing better infrastructure for the AECs and improve the learning environment.

9.5. RTU

The education programme of RTU is meant for destitute and orphaned children belonging in particular to lower castes. RTU's educational programme is closely linked to the family care system, health system and rural development system that RTU has evolved. Educational success is thus linked to the child's physical and mental well being. For RTU, education also means developing the potential of the individual child rather than setting uniform standards for all children across board. The most impressive aspect of RTU's work in relation to education is that it has been able to create a learning environment for children from troubled backgrounds. RTU has also been consistently working with government schools thereby extending its capacities to government schools as well.

Conducive Learning Atmosphere: RTU has very successfully created a secure atmosphere for children who have gone through traumatic experiences. Not only does this environment help the child overcome its initial liabilities but also enables it to participate in the educational programme devised by RTU. The secure and caring atmosphere is made possible through a family structure set up by RTU. This simulated family includes a woman recruited by RTU who looks after 5 – 6 children and recreates a family atmosphere by caring for them and looking after them. The critical issue in creating this kind of atmosphere is that all the members of RTU, right from the teachers to the mothers and other functionaries of RTU have to be committed and sensitive to the needs of the individual child. RTU seems to have achieved this required combination in an exemplary manner.

Supporting government schools: RTU's mobile laboratory which is used for teaching natural sciences serves 10 other government schools as well in the neighbourhood. RTU also provides training to government school teachers on its own premises. RTU's close collaboration with the government is a significant aspect of its functioning.

Future Direction: An interesting aspect of the educational programme run by RTU is that it uses the government school syllabus but supplements them with a lot of activities devised at RTU itself. It is critical that in addition to the training that RTU provides to government school teachers, it should document and publicize the various activities that it has evolved to supplement the lessons in the textbooks.

9.6. Overall inferences

Out of the many insights which the different projects offer and which have been dealt with here a few lessons learned are worth mentioning separately again:

- All NGO-projects – formal or informal - are in one or the other way related to government education. They are complementary (RTU), they can be preparatory (SWRC, Siksasandhan, RKM) or they are directly supporting and leading to government education (MVF). Informal education is meant to be transitory. The final objective is full enrolment in government educational institutions. Important is the flexibility of all pedagogical approaches preparing children for further education in state schools.
- Probably the most important outcome of non-formal education can be defined as acquiring "soft skills" like higher awareness of health care, hygiene, and other social and political competences. These competencies can lead to a higher self-confidence, more social interaction and political participation, increased awareness of rights, particularly with regard to social equality in a structurally unequal society like India. In that respect acquiring soft skills through informal education is freeing the underprivileged from the culture of poverty and silence.
- All projects show how important inclusiveness, i.e. community involvement is. All projects are geared to the needs of the community which are mostly neglected by government schools. Important factors are e.g. proximity of school buildings, school timing, practical relevance of teaching contents etc.
- The teachers have a key role to play. They are pivotal in the learning process. Teachers can create a good learning atmosphere, cheerful, free of fear and non discriminatory. In the projects visited it were the dedicated teachers who were able to inspire the children to perform well in school and to acquire those competences that enable them to take part in public life.
- Given the dismal performance of the Indian state's primary educational system the need for innovative strategies and projects by private organisations is not surprising. They play an important role in extending basic educational facilities to the poor. However, one has to take care that NGOs do not step in more and more and take over the tasks that are genuinely those of the state. The state bears a high responsibility to ensure that the basic right to education of all is put into practice. It should not be freed from this responsibility. Therefore it is one of the main tasks of the NGOs working in the field of primary education in India to permanently pressurize the state into fulfilling its obligations. This also includes a critical cooperation with government institu-

tions if need be. The groups under discussion should in fact be more pro-active in influencing the educational policies of the government and ensure the universalization of education.

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11. Programme Schedule: Study of GAA-assisted Education Projects in India

11.1. M.V. Foundation (Date: 12.07.06 to 15.07.06)

- Day 1 / 12.07.06:
- Meeting with MVF core team at MVF head office, Secunderabad
 - Visit to a village and Girl Child Residential Bridge Course Camp in Rangareddy District
 - Visit to Kowkuntla village, interaction with school teachers, children and community
- Day 2 / 13.07.06:
- Visit to Nalgonda District
 - Meeting with core staff of MVF at Nalgonda District
 - Meeting with mandal level officials, community and a village visit to see campaign activities
 - Overnight stay at Suryapet
- Day 3 / 14.07.06:
- Interaction with Child Rights Protection Forum members, Gram Panchayat members and other community groups in Nalgonda District
 - Return to Hyderabad
- Day 4 / 15.07.06:
- Meeting with core staff of MVF at MVF head office
 - Consolidation of data and concluding discussion

11.2. Social Work and Research Center (SWRC): Date: 16.07.06 to 21.07.06

- Day 1 / 16.07.06: - Arrival at Tilonia
- Day 2 / 17.07.06 - Introductory session with director, Barefoot College, and interaction with college staff
- Visit of Barefoot College New Campus
- Visit to Barefoot College Old Campus
- Visit to Night School in the village of Panwa
- Interaction with teachers, children, and Village Education Committee (VEC) members
- Day 3 / 18.07.06: - Discussion with Mangi Devi, Co-ordinator of Night Schools Programme, and her team
- Discussion with former students of Night Schools in the village of Kotdi
- Meeting with members of the Children's Parliament
- Visit to rainwater harvesting structure in the village of Bhopon ki Dhani
- Visit to Night School in the village of Samli Dhani
- Interaction with teachers, children and members of VEC
- Day 4 / 19.07.06: - Visit to vocational training centre for girls in the village of Relavta
- Interaction with former students of Night Schools in Tikawda
- Interaction with VEC members in the village of Mundolav
- Discussion with women's group
- Day 5 / 20.07.06: - Visit to Children's Parliament's monthly session at Tilonia
- Interaction with Prime Minister, cabinet ministers and MPs
- Visit to Night School in the village of Ramner
- Day 6 / 21.07.06: - Concluding discussion with Barefoot College Education Team
- Departure for Delhi

11.3. Ramakrishna Mission (Date: 31.07.06 to 03.08.06)

- Day 1 / 31.07.06:
- Departure for Kolkata
 - Discussion with Swamiji who is in charge of the Murshidabad project
 - Departure for Berhampore
- Day 2 / 01.08.06:
- Visit to two Child Care Centres and Supplementary Learning Centres in Beldanga Block and Lalgola Block
 - Return to Berhampore
- Day 3 / 02.08.06:
- Visit to two Child Care Centres and Supplementary Learning Centres in Jalangi Block
 - Return to Kolkata
- Day 4 / 03.08.06:
- Discussion with the members of the Loksiksha Parishad of Ramakrishna Mission in Narendrapur Campus, Kolkata

11.4. Sikshasandhan (Date: 24.07.06 to 27.07.06)

- Day 1 / 24.07.06: - Meeting with the core team of Sikshasandhan at their office in Bhubhaneswar
- Day 2 / 25.07.06: - Travel from Bhubhaneswar to the office of one of the consortium members, Jana Vikasa Kendra, Pallahara. (Left in the morning and reached Pallahara late in the evening).
- Discussion with the Co-ordinator of the organization
- Day 3 / 26.07.06: - Visit to two Alternative Education Centres close to Pallahara.
- Interaction with the teachers, children, members of the community at both the AECs.
- Departure for Sukroli late afternoon.
- Day 4 / 27.07.06: - Visit to the office of another consortium member, Agranee in Sarat. Discussion with the members of the organization.
- Day 5 / 28.07.06 - Discussion with Sikshasandhan team. Consolidation of data, verification of facts, etc.

11.5. Reaching the Unreached (RTU): (Date: 16.07.06 to 20.07.06)

- Day 1 / 16.07.06: - Transfer from Hyderabad to Madurai and to the head office of RTU in G. Kallupatti (Theni District)
- Day 2 / 17.07.06 - Meetings with RTU Staff
- Visit to St Peter's Primary School, St Peter's High School and Open School
- Day 3 / 18.07.06: - Discussion with Parents-Teachers-Association
- Visit to Government School following natural science teaching assisted by RTU Mobile Science Laboratory
- Discussion with 10th grade students, St Peter's High School
- Discussion with teachers of St Peter's High School
- Visit to Sirumalar Children's Village
- Day 4 / 19.07.06: - Travel to Bodinayakanur, Rudat
- Visit to Nirmal Children's village
- Visit to Primary School Boys Hostel
- Visit to Nirmal Primary School, Dharumathupatti, Bodi
- Visit to Ferro-Cement Products Unit, RTU premises
- Day 5 / 20.07.06: - Final discussion with directors