

## Site Visit – CRC (Children’s Resource Center) Timbaktu Collective

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During my trip to Timbaktu from 11<sup>th</sup> – 14<sup>th</sup> Dec I spent most of my time at Prakruti Badi. I was able to have a couple of discussions with Timbaktu staff regarding the CRC and visit it for a few hrs (3:45 p.m. – 6:30 p.m. on Wed, 12<sup>th</sup> Dec 2012).



I indicated to Mani that I would like to have a discussion with Timbaktu regarding CRC on 11<sup>th</sup>. He scheduled the meeting at CRC the next day. We reached the CRC early and met Alivelu (Librarian) and Narendra (new computer instructor) there.

Narendra was teaching three youth html syntax. There were 6 other youth who were working on the computers in the inside room on their own. They were working on replicating newspaper

advertisements in word in order to learn word (2007). Among the youth I spoke to one had finished his MBA from Vellore and wanted to learn html to help him find a job, another had finished his B.Sc from Ananthapur and two more were in 2<sup>nd</sup> yr of the B.Sc.



There were three other children who dropped in at the CRC to read the newspaper and one more who dropped in later to work on the computer.

The library has large number books. A fair number are in English or for higher education.

As we were early for the meeting we decided to go next door and visit the adolescent girls – Arts and Craft Centre (ACC) supported for learning vocational skills. They are situated in three of



the rooms where Prakruti Badi (Timbaktu run school) was situated when it was in C.K.Palli.



There were 5 girls sewing settled in the corridor working on hand bags. There was an open room behind them that had a couple of sewing machines and one on the right that had a screen printing unit.

The rooms were empty so I asked about the remaining 5 girls who were part of the program this year. Alivelu mentioned that three had been married and were no longer coming to the centre. Two girls did not come that day.



The primary item they had recently worked on was 600 small pouches for Timbaktu Organic. The pouches had been stitched and the logos and tag lines had been put on both sides. The bags still needed to be opened at the seam and threaded such that when the threads are pulled the pouch will come together.



This is shown in the sample above. I asked regarding the pricing of the bags. It appeared that the pricing may be Rs.25/bag. I asked about how the price was arrived at, but they were not very clear. I asked about the larger bags they are making now, they said that it was for Durga Shakti (one of the self help groups) and they would also put the logo on it. I found out that the order was for 1500 bags! I asked the girls how many bags they make in a day. One of them said that from measurement to adding the logo they make 25 bags a day. (I had misunderstood and asked if they made 25 bags each and got a funny look from the girl 😊). Hmm...this order itself could keep them occupied for over two months at this rate.



By this time Nageshwara also came to the CRC for the meeting. He is/was managing a part of the Militha (disabilities) program and the CRC. He is skilled in the use of bamboo to make various objects like bangle holders, pen stands, letter holders, toy bullock carts, wall hangings that were made this year. I enquired about how long it would take for an order like the 600 bags for Timbaktu Organic. He thought that it was the work of about a week. I asked him how

many bags he felt could be made for the present order in a day, he said 50 bags. Perhaps, as the order progresses they will leave the screen printing for later and focus on making the bags first. I asked about the delivery commitments, he said that the Durga Shakti bags needed to be delivered by early Jan and the Timbaktu Organic ones needed to be delivered soon. He was not sure of the pricing of the Durga Shakti bags, but mentioned that the Timbaktu Organic bags were initially priced at Rs.15, but would be priced at around Rs.25 now.

Perhaps, it wouldn't hurt to maintain a diary of what products were worked on (and to what stage) on each day to estimate the amount of time put into the products for pricing as well as deriving estimates for the time to meet orders.



The other members of the CRC working group also arrived and we started the meeting. Other than Alivelu and Nageshwara, Sayonika and Mani are also part of the working group. Sayonika recently joined Timbaktu Collective and is responsible for the CRC and Mogga (child rights) programs. Sayonika reports to Mani who is responsible for all children programs at Timbaktu (including Prakruti Badi).

We started with Nageshwara giving an update regarding CRC.

- Of the 10 members of the ACC 3 were married and have left.
- The screen printing has picked up in a big way and they are doing a lot of it on cloth.
- They introduced some bamboo crafts this year.
- In tailoring the girls are quite proficient and made uniforms for the Bal Militha program.
- They tried to combine the arts and crafts centre with the weaving center to make custom dresses instead of only selling the cloth made by the weaving unit, but this was unsuccessful. One reason is the distance between the two another is that they have been unable to retain employees for activities other than weaving (e.g. dyeing ) at the weaving centre.
- The computer instructor joined last month and the computers are being used actively and there are 22 children/youth learning computers in 4 batches.
- CRC has been trying to engage with other schools to use the facilities, but had limited success.

- They have been hosting different events at the centre e.g. sports day. This year the split the sports day for juniors and seniors to allow more children of the same age group to participate.

## Discussions

- 1) We talked about the Alumni of the ACC. There are 25 odd alumni of the program in the last four yrs. Most of the girls are married and Alivelu is in touch with 5-6 of them. One of them is working in the garment industry. Another is doing some odd jobs related to tailoring/painting in her neighbourhood, but this is not regular. Alivelu suggested that it may be possible to connect up the girls to Dharmavaram where there are middle men who will provide cloth and design to provide the girls regular employment if they needed it. We also discussed Asha's inputs of gauging the impact of a year-long arts and crafts program and also framing the program based on how the alumni were using these skills.
- 2) Mani talked about how they were creating a business proposal for the Bhawani (weaving) and the ACCs (stitching unit) together, but given their experience will be working on creating them separately for the two programs with the help of Cream. This will be worked on in Jan. We also discussed Asha's efforts in the past to raise funds through sales of calendars (made at CRC) through Asha US chapters. However, these have been bogged with difficulties – limited response by Asha-US chapters, issues with shipping internationally and issues with connecting with the US chapters resulting in delay in receiving funds. Asha Bangalore feels it is not in a position to do this further.
- 3) We discussed the change of coordinators from Subba, Adi and now Nageshwara and how it has impacted the CRC. Mani talked about how Timbaktu is working on program management instead of relying on individuals to give vision to the program. Timbaktu as an org will decide the direction/vision of the CRC and be committed to this irrespective of the people involved. Such program development was kicked off 3 months back and though there has been some lack of communication since Satish left as the transfer could not complete e.g. with respect to updates regarding CRC, this will be committed and met by Timbaktu now. Sayonika will be responsible for the communication with Asha and CRC will send out quarterly reports to Asha with updates at the centre.
- 4) We talked about the impact of Prakruti Badi no longer being next to the CRC. Initially the plan was for Prakruti Badi children to continue to visit the CRC, however, this has not happened.  
CRC has been able to tie up with Liberty Convent, a local school, and the children come to the CRC on Sat to use play material, books and take computer classes. The reasons this has not worked out with other schools are
  - a. Transportation issues
  - b. Teachers in these schools not being interested in coming to the CRC beyond school hrs
 There are also children who stay in government hostels who come to the CRC during holidays.
- 5) Asha also supports many village resource centres that run only in the evening and provide children a space and access to play and study material. These centres only employ a youth e.g. one who goes to college in the evening and are hence have a very small budget (yearly <

50,000). I wanted to understand how Timbaktu perceives CRCs role as a full day center to engage with the children.

Sayonika mentioned that Timbaktu also runs village CRCs in 40 villages as part of the Mugga program. These villages are usually small rented houses. The centres are run by an interested village youth or a homemaker who are willing to put in the time. However, the activities and resources that are available in these village centres are very limited. E.g. there is no free computer access in any of the centres and a limited library and play space. During the various events/celebrations they get children from these centres to come to the CRC for a full day of fun activities. This serves as exposure for these children as well as the individuals responsible for these centres to further these activities in their own centres e.g. the quiz that was organized at the last event has been taken up by many Mugga centres.

Q: Are the children who attend these events different each time.

A: There are 300-400 children who attend these events. Most children from Prakruti Badi are included (80), the rest are different each time to provide them exposure.

Q: Is it possible to build on these events in terms of identifying talent in children and exploring further training on the same?

A: This has not been done so far. In sports day this year instead of just coming together and then forming teams, many children groups came with their own teams. We identified a few teams that were very good at KhoKho and were working to taking them to play neighbouring mandals.

The CRC is presently the only space to conduct such events and is a boon for the Mugga program.

Whether the CRC is effective in being open during the entire day will need to be examined and discussed by the team. Presently, the computer centre is used both in the mornings and evenings.

- 6) We had a discussion regarding the use of the computer centre by youth. They now have a computer instructor and it is possible to work with someone who has completed his/her degree and wants to learn html to put on his/her resume, but does this need to be free? This is a very different activity than providing access to computer facilities (to learn on their own) or provide exposure to children regarding computers.
- 7) I checked about possible interest in wood working workshop. Timbaktu is interested and it is an action item for me to follow up with Vanya and Gautam and check if there is interest from their end to do this as they did for Thulir youth.
- 8) I also gave a demo of scratch as a software to introduce children to things you can do with a computer ([scratch.mit.edu/](http://scratch.mit.edu/)) instead of being limited by Microsoft products.

I had a similar discussion the next day with Mani, Mary and Bablu regarding the CRC. The main points of the discussion were:

- 1) Detailed survey of the alumni of the ACC program at CRC.
- 2) There will be sufficient emphasis on the ACC when presenting the proposal and quarterly progress reports.
- 3) Visioning exercise will be carried out for the CRC based on the realities facing the CRC now. The vision will be communicated to Asha.
- 4) Effort will be taken to put a process in place with Asha next year. Timbaktu will send a draft proposal that Asha discusses and provides suggestions/feedback. The nputs will be

considered/discussed by the team at Timbaktu and any aspects that need to be included in the proposal shall be added to create a final proposal. This proposal will then be used to understand the effectiveness of the program.

- 5) Email communication regarding the two programs will be cced to Bablu and Mary.