

Project Visit report to Childrens Resource Center of Timbaktu Collective, Anantapur District, Andhra Pradesh

-Vijay Krishna

I visited the project on the weekend of 9th/10th April 2011. I met Satish the co-ordinator on morning of the 9th and had a discussion with him, and then visited the CRC and spent about 45 minutes there. In the afternoon, they had previously scheduled a meeting of the teachers of the education programme and I attended that. It was held at Timbaktu Badi one of the two schools run by Timbaktu. The meeting was a long one so I left it midway and spent some time interacting with some of the children at the school. The next day, I spent time with Kalyani, one of the earliest teachers of the school programme. She is planning to take a break from her work at Timbaktu after this academic year and spend more time with family and pursuing her interests.



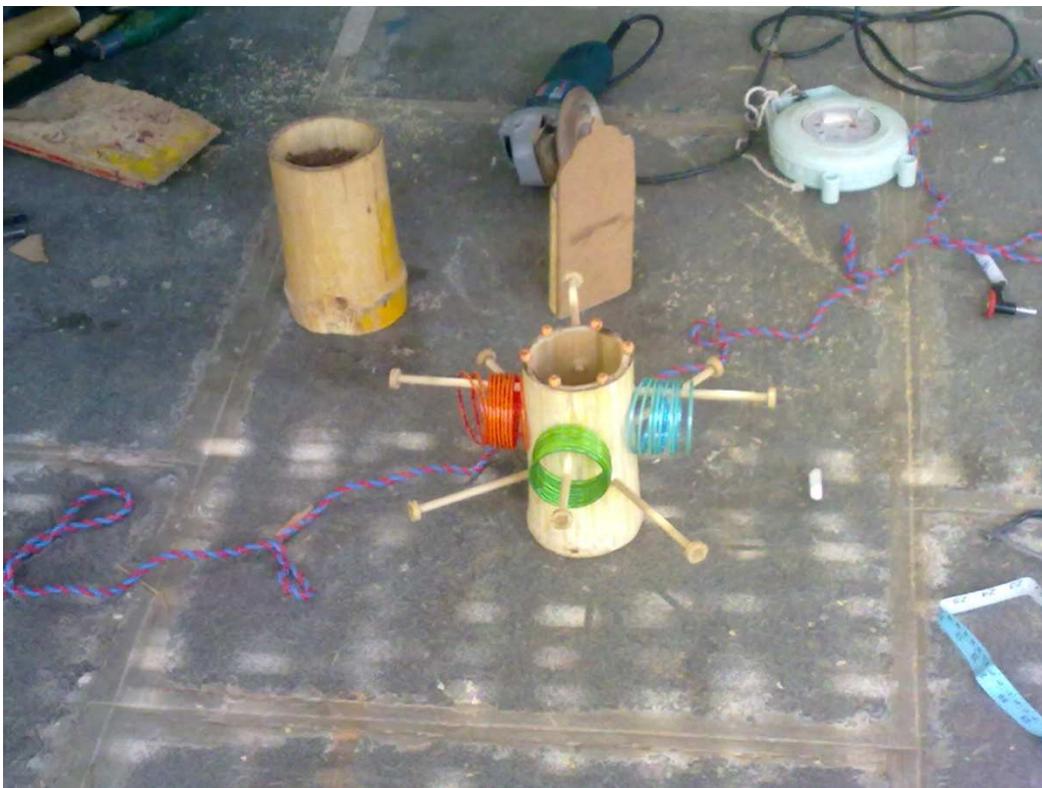
Front view of the CRC

Satish updated me on the basic finances of the CRC project and the future plans. The formal figures are with us, but here is a rough summary:

In 2009-2010 we supported the program to the tune of 5.82L. The funds came around December so were not fully utilized so 3.8L was left over. 2010-11 funding is 6.7L including the carryover. A small amount of 20-30,000 is unspent from this amount and the budget is 6.74L for 2011-12. Separately in 2011-12, Asha will raise funds for the Timbaktu Schools program through the Support A Child programme.

The accounts for the year are being finalized and the accounts person, Manikandan promised to send the details of CRC finances once that was done.

There were not many students using the CRC when I visited, since it was a weekend and the children were also having exams. The youth in the tailoring programme were there and were busy stitching uniforms for the Timbaktu school students, a project that they had been assigned. Asha is supporting the fellowship of the trainees in the various vocational skills. The CRC was well maintained and clean. The computers that have been purchased from the recent ASHA funding are there, and a few children were watching a film on one of them while I was visiting. The library was very well-stocked. Since a lot of these books are from donations, there is some skew in the distribution ; there are lot more English books than Telugu, and some of the books are pretty 'heavy' for their audience. There were a lot of good arts and crafts and toys on display ; these are objects that the children have been taught to make and are available for purchase. This is an accumulated body of learning over a long period of time and the results are now quite substantial.



A bangle stand idea that they are working on



Arts and crafts that the students have learnt over the years. These items are for sale.

At the programme meeting in the afternoon they were discussing various management matters ; particularly a ‘school day’ kind of event to be held soon, where there would be a cultural event, lunch etc. That aside, the big news is that Timbaktu are looking into closing down the Prakruthi badi, the other school that they run. This has been a decision arrived at after a long discussion at Timbaktu and taking into account many factors as I understood it, like difficulty of hiring good teachers, uncertainty in financing etc.

During my interaction with the students at Timbaktu Badi, I found the children were very active and enthusiastic and loved to interact with outside people. They didn’t show any shyness. They really appreciate people coming to visit them especially from some far-off place or city so that they learn about new things.

I saw that the children were showing signs of dental fluorosis (distinctive brown markings on the teeth). This is typically due to consuming water containing fluoride, an endemic problem in the area. Fluoride in water has other serious health effects over time and is a cause for concern.

As I mentioned, Kalyani, who has been at Timbaktu schools for a very long time and is a very talented and dedicated educationist, has asked to be relieved of her duties at the schools from next year to get more time with the family and 'recharge' herself. We may consider if she can play some role for Asha in her personal capacity.



Students at Timbaktu Badi



Students at the Timbaktu Badi. Note the discolouration in teeth due to fluorosis

The CRC is a really great place with lot of energy around it. The arts and crafts activity and capacity that they have built up over time is impressive. There are lots of books and the library is being used quite a bit, I was told. For eg. students from the local high school visit it to read the newspapers every day. They recently held a science day that was attended by students/teachers of the government schools in the area and was well appreciated. They take up paid projects from outside from time to time, like the calendars produced for Asha and the current tailoring project. The overall sense I got is that the CRC is doing a good job but with more energy it could do a lot more. Timbaktu people there are quite stretched so they are finding it difficult to give enough time to CRC. Further, for the arts and crafts work it takes someone who has a real talent for that to come up with new innovative ideas, activities and products that would be useful for the children and would find a ready market. With some changes in personnel this may have taken something of a backseat. And finally it also needs a lot of visitors who come with new art and craft ideas. However my visit lacks the historical context of the functioning of CRC, so my comments above should be viewed in that light.

All photos from the visit are uploaded at:

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/despoki/sets/72157626414386469/>