

Minutes of the conference call on Monday, October 06, 2008

Subject: Inviting Asha NYC/NYJ to co-fund and co-steward FORWARD.

Participants: NYC/NYJ – Sandeep, Tushar
Uflorida – Ajoy, Meera, Palani, Sanketh, Sharan and Swapnil

Prelude: Asha Uflorida has been supporting FORWARD for about 4 years now. The funding requirement for FORWARD has grown to about \$10K per annum. Funding FORWARD in full constrains Asha Uflorida (financially) in choosing and supporting new good projects. In order to alleviate this, Asha Uflorida sought the help of Asha NYC/NYJ to co-fund and co-own FORWARD. This conference call was conducted to address any questions or concerns that NYC/NYJ might have before it is taken up at the chapter level for further discussion and voting.

Sandeep and Tushar had gone over Meera's site visit report. After a brief introduction of what FORWARD is, Meera presents the feel of her site visit in a nutshell:

With FORWARD, the word sustainable doesn't make sense. With the rate at which Chennai is expanding and the impact it has on the suburbs, within the next 10 years the communities in which FORWARD operates will be gone. Villages will be gone, people will be doing something else, agricultural lands will be grabbed and made into residential plots. In this situation, FORWARD is doing what we would have done if we were there. Initially, Ms. Shiamalababy started to work in Tambaram which is on the immediate border of Chennai 'city'. However, over the years she has expanded her operations moving away from Tambaram.

Is it because, affluent people has moved into those areas?

Not necessarily. Either the community starts to operate the schools or people move out. Through the women self help groups, new people contacts are established in new villages and FORWARD ends up starting a school in the new area and tries to get support from the community. However, not all schools that Asha doesn't support are taken up by the community. One school went defunct because a dance school was started in the same location and kids were attracted to that. Schools in the coastal area are not being supported other than the scholarships.

What happens to the school that go defunct? Isn't this serious? Does that community take up?

This is a good point. We don't have the statistics right away. But we should be able to gather the details. But the community itself adopts some schools.

**Are the performance metrics good? Is there an increase in the pass percentage?
Does the evening school really help?**

Yes it does. The children look forward for the evening schools. The numbers are reported in the yearly reports. There are also case studies and interviews with the kids. Times of India supported interns help FORWARD. The biggest positive thing about FORWARD is that the parents see this happen in front of their eyes. The evening school is a routine thing. If it doesn't happen one day, they feel as if something is missing. This is a welcoming change especially in a community where the initial challenge was to convince the parents to send the kids to school.

What is the qualification of the teachers?

1 Masters. 2-Bachelors. 1 studying for bachelor's degree. 2 has +2 education. 2 – 10th grade education. They are being trained by the co-ordinator who has a Masters degree in Social work. There is a teacher ability enhancement program on one Saturday every month.

Can u elaborate on the cluster?

Cluster division is based on the panchayat system. Each cluster is a collection of 2-3 villages/ 2-3 schools.

Does the kids come from all communities?

Yes. In one school – the thasildhar's kid also attends this evening school. 25-40 kids come and it varies from school to school. All kids attend the school, no kid wouldn't want to go there.

Shiamalababy - does she have leadership skills?

Shiamala is really good. The kids love her. She enjoys a great rapport with the community as such. The women look at her as a lifeline. She understands their situation and helps them.

What makes her to work towards this. What is the drive?

She herself is battered woman. And, she just feels there is a strong need to create a just society and all citizens be granted their basic rights.

Who is number 2 in FORWARD?

There is a co-ordinator who visits the schools every day. Shiamala tries to go there once a week. For education related activities, there is a co-ordinator who can be considered number 2.

Other activities?

Field trips. Career training for women in several fronts -computer training, handicrafts and healthcare. Graduates of the night school come fwd to support.

Checks and balances?

- 1) us
- 2) villages themselves. Self help group is co-ordinated. Less likelihood of embezzlement of funds.

Assuming that NYC/NYJ would agree to co-fund the project, Asha Uflorida would love to have someone from NYJ to be on the steward committee too.

Further clarifications from Palani:

Currently there are 14 schools that function under the Asha umbrella. However there are about 5 schools that function by themselves (I spoke to Shiamalababy, director FORWARD). One school which lost the race against the dance school seems to be the only school that is not active. However, some of the students from that shcool attend school at other villages. I think this data should get you going on the vote aspect.