

Avehi Abacus Site Visit Report

Below is my account of a visit to the Avehi Abacus Project. Though I tried to spend as much time as I could - I realized when I got there it would not be enough considering the scope of the project. Therefore, please view this short report as an outsider's account of the project, and someone who is not experienced in conducting site visits of this scale.

I coordinated with Simantiniji on when I'd be able to visit. Because I was traveling heavily I was not able to visit them until a few hours before my flight. Simantiniji was very accommodating and worked around my schedule. My father and I visited the Avehi Abacus main office and a school where its materials were being used during this visit.

Because I was not familiar with this project I didn't know what to expect. Simantiniji however explained what the project was about, what impact it has had so far, and what its deliverables are.

From what we understood, Avehi has created and published materials that go above and beyond what is currently used in government run schools. She explained, for example, that history books currently used by the government have massive holes in its explanation of the course of Indian history, neglecting major milestones. Avehi corrects this in various subjects. She was especially proud to show us the history and science books they have published and distributed. I was amazed to learn that their materials are now in basically every government school in the city of Mumbai. She also showed us materials that educate children on their growing bodies, essentially sex education. I personally was heartened to see this since I think it's sorely missing in the typical curriculum.

We then visited one of the schools that have their materials. Keep in mind this was toward the end of the day so the results of the visit might have been because the students were exhausted. It was around 5pm. The teacher was talking to the class, essentially, about values and virtues using the method of story telling. I did not see the exact material he was using. Basically, the teacher walked the students through a story involving characters that encounter an ethical conflict, and asked the students to tell him what the correct course of action would be. This was done with heavy guidance from the teacher. My father and I also asked the class a few questions to see if they really understood what the material was asking. The results were mixed, and we saw some of the students struggle to recount what the story was about. We weren't sure if it was because they were nervous, tired from the school day, or that they didn't really understand the material. Unfortunately this was the only class we could visit because we had to make a flight the same day.

My takeaways are that the project that has huge scope, and has done a valiant job at questioning and pushing themselves to make better materials that teachers and students can learn from. The implementation of the curriculum might need more work to fully realize the potential of the material. I also feel they are managing their accounts very carefully. They use financial software to keep their bookkeeping in order, and have a separate ledger for the Asha funds that were received. Simantiniji related to us that because another funder had dropped their funding at the last minute, she had to ask Seattle for more than usual. I asked her what else she needed, she replied saying was just grateful that Seattle was able to come through and to work with her while she finds alternate sources of funding.

I understand this may not be very detailed, so if you have any additional questions I will be available for a follow up call.

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