

Meeting Minutes of Asha SV Meeting from Feb 8, 2012

ASHA DARSHAN-renewal and philosophical update

- Works in the remote areas in Assam
- Empowering and educating rural, underprivileged children, women, peace corps.
- Works in Baksa district, bordering Bhutan governed by Bodoland Territorial Council
- If you are under BTC, there is no concept of village panchayat.
- The other thing to understand about the geographical location of this project is that there is a lot of insurgency in this area.
- The men migrate out of the region in search of jobs and women are therefore marginalized in the area.
- Asha darshan wanted to set up something to help women to come up as self-help groups so that they can find a way to be economically independent
- Initially a lot of movement was there but the women could not come and it was because they had kids to look after and so they could not come to the groups
- Asha darshan therefore started schools-there are 14 schools in the area but there was a lack of attendance because of lack of mid-day meals.
- So asha darshan also started providing food. That took off and allowed self-help groups to flourish
- Mahila Shanti Sena is run by Biju and this was the core of the agency.
- Their motivation was to reduce insurgency by promoting self-help groups. Among some of their programs are vocation training programs, advocacy, etc.
- Each self help group has 15 women. There is a saving model and a bank based loan model. So each person puts in Rs.5 each week and they take loans from the bank and then return it. overtime their credit is built and can get bigger loans.
- The groups run pretty autonomously and Asha Darshan works across groups to ensure that the accounting is done properly.
- Loans are not only given for self-help economically needed loans but health and marriage are two times when their money is not returned.
- A lot of these loans are not traditionally something that banks will give loans for.
- Asha darshan runs 11 schools and 1400 children were enrolled with 38 teachers
- The medium of instructions in the schools depend on what the language in the area is-Assamese and Bodo usually.

- There are teachers in various class levels; the only option for older kids is to graduate to a bigger school in Bhutan but kids don't usually go to the high school.
- Asha darshan has been trying to track the kids and it appears that the kids who leave from Asha Darshan schools do not join the insurgency.
- Does anyone take any loans from self-help groups to send their kids to higher schools and there is no return on education in that area.
- The higher education issue is a problem with a lot of our projects because of no future.
- Is higher education the way to go?
- The primary goal for Asha Darshan was to find something for the kids to do while the mothers are in self-help group and also instill in them an understanding of why not to join the insurgency.
- Asha SV has been trying to get training for Asha Darshan folks on teaching tools, etc. recent training with their help of a program called Right Start, from Asha Chennai
- If the number of kids average in each school is about 100 and how do they fit in it? not all kids show up all days.
- Mahila Shanti Sena is a program promoting peace, ending insurgency, etc.
- Asha darshan centers have a ton of books via donation
- During teacher training, it appears that it becomes like an NGO training, they identify problems, and figure out solutions instead of learning how to be better teachers.
- The budget is organized under staff salaries, teachers salaries, training program, mid-day meal, healthcare, health check-ups, sishu mela which is a two day picnic, rent and educational materials.
- This is budgeted for about 800 kids although 1400 are enrolled.
- The organization is not skilled in making budgets etc, so Asha UP has been helping them prepare budget, etc.
- If all 1000 kids show up, the amount we are sending will not be enough. In that sense, we have reduced the amount already.
- The total is INR 2,356, 700 which is not taking the 20% cut into account.