

Asha SV Meeting Minutes [Jun 15, 2011]

[3] Asha Darshan mid-year review [Vinod]

- Vinod played a video
- THE project focuses on schools, self help groups, and mid day meal
- A self help groups women get micro loans for local and small scale business
- They also run 11 schools
- Balwadis along with mid day meals
- They want to focus on economic security as way to promote peace.
- In the past 8 years we have given them \$225K to the project since its inception
- A side track issue was how do we track how we raise money from events, who visits our site, etc. Sindu said that she can analyze the data related to all our feedback.
- Important and unique aspects of this project is the location of the project in a rural, mountainous district with Bodo insurgency area-the area is governed by Bodo tribal council who implement central schemes like Sarva Siksha Abhiyan but don't work on any state schemes.
- Education is governed by the tribal council that has a district level admin body who everyone reports to. Also the area is sort of governed by the council on their own rules.
- When project partners tried to find out information about what kind of schools run in the area, and related information through RTI applications but it did not succeed because of the problems of who is accountable for what.
- There is always political tension in the area. Children, particularly boys join the militant group at a very young age. The geography is very pretty and green and plain land, palm trees are everywhere and farmers grow rice and mustard,
- Asha Darshan runs 11 schools, 38 teachers, 1500 children in villages where there are no Bodo schools. Depending on where they run the school they run it in Assamese, bodo language or Bengali.
- A single person called Biju basically runs this project. She was a part of a group of people who started a movement to have people come together and donate land for public projects
- Biju found that women were most impacted by the militancy and needed self-help group. She started with self-help groups.
- These were not taking off because women did not know where to leave their kids. Schools were therefore started. Children were not still coming so Asha SV increased funding to give them mid-day meal.
- Right now there are 8 people in each group, they take loans, have training in marketing, etc. and are able to make high quantity purchases like grain from 10 acres of land.
- Asha DArshan provides training for creating groups, maintaining accounts, etc. there are currently 400 groups.
- They have had some government support Rs.50,000 (BTC) to put up a building.
- In the past there were 13 schools and 4 were taken over by BTC
- Biju started off as an Asha Fellow on recommendation of Sandeep Pandey
- Question: are they able to get government schemes like mid-day meals funded? The issue is that only if you are a registered government school can you get mid-day meals. Biju is trying to get to the bottom of this issue because the areas around are not all getting mid-day meals.
- We are trying to work with the school to see if they can find their mid-day meal budget from elsewhere.
- Question: is there a reason why this project with its well established background why they have not been able to get other funding? The issue is that they are not really set up for education and only doing it because they needed a back-up. Asha SV is trying to impress upon them that they should up the quality of their schools via increasing teacher training.
- They are trying to increase quality but a lot of donors want is very sophisticated and we could not present them in that light. We should engage closely with agencies and project partners.
- Vinod will follow up with Ajoy on Sikha Mitra training for Asha Darshan
- Question: what was the reason that 4 schools were adopted by government? It appears to be a politically motivated move rather than quality.

- Question: can't we see if the government department is open to Asha Darshan teachers becoming government school teachers? The issue is that the schools run by Asha Darshan are not schools that are in competition to government schools. It is that these schools are where there are no government schools so it may not be a good idea to try and have ashad darshan teachers going to government school.
- Local people have helped in maintaining and running the school. Once a site is identified then people make roads and help with the structure of the schools.
- Question: are these people entitled to NREGA monies. Starting 2010 BTC has said that Baksa Dist. Will be entitled to NREGA schemes but there have been no schemes at all.
- If we can assist with more jobs through NREGA then we can at least increase the kind of help that the school can get from people around there.
- Last time that Vinod presented this there was a question about Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (a national scheme of residential schools for low income girls) in the Guahati area. There is one in Nalbari Dist. Biju was told about it and they will look for ways to train girls who can go these schools.
- Can you connect them with the Fair Trade Commission to get their products sold. So find out a way to connect them with FTC so they can sell their products outside.
- A group called ANT (Jane is the person who runs it) and she sells some of their products.
- Rabin Bhai (Rabindranath Upadhyaya) came to Assam to start the local gramdaan program, Biju was one of the people who was influenced by him.
- Question: is there a succession plan for Biju? She got a person called Meena to work with her to do bookkeeping. The self-help groups and education part, Biju is integral to it.
- Question: what happened to the teachers? It appears that some teachers who got trained really well left and got jobs in the bigger schools. There is one teacher who is now helping Biju with education planning.
- Question: is there one thing that we can identify as a reason why they are not growing and whether we can move money around to improve quality of the education and teachers?
- TAGS got a big grant under the Dept. of Science and Techonology under the scheme of taking science to the people through vocational training. So the vocational part exists and is well used.
- It is not that the answer is that get kids to high school because we don't know what will happen to them if we educate them. The question is can we keep track and find out what is happening to the kids so we can figure out ways to track them to see if we are helping end to end.
- Teacher training is a big thing but it is not measurable because we have not been able to get the same people to visit again.
- Vinod will create an evaluation document but it is hard to get it on the matrix.