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Visit to Swadhar/Akshardeep

(Review visit)

Summary: Swadhar-Pune is an NGO that concerns itself with "helping women in distress". Akshardeep is an offshoot of Swadhar that runs classes to help "out-of-school" children (viz. dropouts) get back into the regular school system. Asha-Zurich is sponsoring a project with Akshardeep in PCMC (Pimpri-Chinchwad Municipal Corporation) to run 10 non-formal education schools. Details of the proposal can be found on our website,

http://www.ashanet.org/pune/project_index.html). This visit follows the one by Vishwa Herle (ETH-Zurich) who visited in December and is the first 6-monthly review visit after the start of funding. We were accompanied by Mrs. Anjali Bapat who coordinates the activities of Akshardeep and Mrs. Torvekar (who is the supervisor who takes care of the day-to-day activities of the schools). We met at Mrs. Bapat's house in Pune and drove in her car to PCMC where we first picked up Mrs. Torvekar at a hospital (YMC) where she is a counselor. We then went to the schools from there.

Detailed:

Akshardeep is currently running 8 schools in the PCMC area. They were unable to find suitable locations for the two other schools so far – because they feel that they should not pay rent. They feel that the local community that is benefiting by sending their children to their classes should support them by providing a location for them to hold their classes. They have now identified a location for the ninth

school, but this school has not yet started functioning. We visited 4 of their existing schools and visited classes run in the community center of the Forbes-Marshall company (this last one is not an Akshardeep school). Forbes has asked Akshardeep to take over the running of this class (this will not be funded by Asha) and is also making land available to Akshardeep to run a school in a slum area where several of their workers live.

The first school that we visited was in Gandhinagar (teacher: Vidya). We got to this school at around 12:30pm. This school had been closed when we visited to evaluate the project. The school is run in a community center, and is the site of two of the Akshardeep schools (the school in the afternoon is meant for adolescent girls). When we visited, there were about 8 to 9 children (the normal attendance is about 17-18 and there are a little over 20 students on their rolls). The teacher told us that someone in the neighbourhood had expired that morning and several of the kids were absent for that reason. We spoke to the children there and asked them what they thought of this school, why they did not go to the regular government school and asked them about their backgrounds. The following is a summary of what we learnt.

One of the boys that we talked to has dropped out of regular school in his fourth standard. He has passed third standard, but had failed the fourth. He said that he did not like going to the regular government school because the other children often beat him up. He also said that the teacher beat him because he did not have books or pencils (he did not have them because he could not afford them). This was a common refrain that we heard from several of the children – that they were often picked on in the government schools and that the other students beat them and that they had problems with the teachers when they could not take the required books/pencils etc. to school or were unable to pay fees (like examination fees – basic schooling is otherwise free at government schools). We spoke to another girl child who said that she was a ragpicker. She did not want to be a ragpicker since she did not enjoy sifting through garbage and since she felt that people looked at her disdainfully due to her occupation. She would prefer to be a maid in a house and wash utensils etc. – however, ragpicking fetched her about Rs. 100 per day while cleaning utensils would only bring in Rs. 150- Rs. 200 per

month per house. Therefore, her parents had asked her to continue with ragpicking. One boy we spoke to (Sabya Sahib Rao) said that his mother was a construction worker while his father had passed away in January (the boy said that his father had a fever for 3 days and passed away after that). Some of the children had brought their younger siblings with them. This is not something they could do at a government school. The teacher asked the children some maths questions. They were good at simple arithmetic since they needed to use those skills daily for purchasing things from shops/selling their wares etc.

Akshardeep aims at training these children well enough that those who can go to a government school (viz. those who can take time off from taking care of younger siblings, and those whose jobs allowed them to go to regular school) are able to cope with the curriculum there. This class had sent 5-7 children to a regular government school last year.

While speaking to Mrs. Torvekar, we found out that Akshardeep had secured funding for uniforms from the Each One Teach One foundation. They had purchased 124 T-shirts with that money (Rs. 60 per T-shirt). There are more children at Akshardeep schools than they could get T-shirts for. The children who received T-shirts wear them very proudly (we could clearly see that!). They wear the T-shirts for 2 days of the week (since they have only one and need to wash them).

The next school we visited was in Morwadi. This was held in a shack made of metal sheeting. The temperature was near 40°C on the day of our visit. Summer has come early to Pune this year and the temperatures have already shot up. It was very hot and unpleasant in most of the schools as none of them even have fans. The school in Morwadi was especially uncomfortable since it is held in a metal shed. The school was not very well attended (perhaps about 10-12 children). The teacher told us that she had already made two rounds of the slum to convince the children to come to school and even then only so many had turned up. She said that this was because there was a popular programme on cable TV (Kumkum) and several of the children watched it. (Note that while several of the children had cable TV, only one or two of the community centers/temples where

Akshardeep classes were held even had an electricity connection). We asked whether the class could be moved so that it did not have to compete with TV, and whether attending school could be made a more attractive proposition for the kids (viz. by having educational toys/games, interesting story-books of decent quality with pictures etc.). The teacher told us that the school normally ran in the mornings (when it was less hot, and when there was no TV programme). Akshardeep has purchased several books from which the teachers could read out stories to the children. These are rotated through the classes so that the children get to listen to new stories. However, they don't have very attractive books with pictures (like comic books) that the children might want to read.

We visited two other Akshardeep schools, one in Shantinagar and one in Phulenagar. The school in Shantinagar also had a problem with low attendance (but their records showed that they had a better attendance on other days). Perhaps the intense heat in the afternoon on that day (plus the India-Pak one-day final that afternoon, and other cable-TV distractions) contributed to the low attendance during our visit. Several of the children in the Shantinagar school said that they were planning to see the cricket match on that day. When we did a poll, we found that about half of the children had fans at home (there was no electricity connection in the community center where the school was being run) and two had TVs (and cable). The school in Phulenagar was well attended (there were about 20 children). The children did some arithmetic for us and we spoke to them for some time.

Akshardeep is facing a peculiar problem in Shantinagar. The class in this area is currently conducted in the community hall of the slum. Now, the slum owners have asked Akshardeep to contribute Rs. 5000 towards an idol of Ambedkar. As Akshardeep has no political or religious affiliations, they have refused. So, the local people are asking for back-rent for the last year. Even the local people whose children go to the Akshardeep school feel that Akshardeep should contribute to the cost of the idol. They do not seem to value the experience that their children get by attending school – their argument is that the highest level of education that their children will receive is unlikely to get them a job – and this education makes them unsuitable for the kinds of jobs that their parents do. Mrs.

Bapat is planning to talk to the local committee in charge of the community hall to sort this out. At this moment, Akshardeep's position is that they are unwilling to pay rent or to contribute towards buying an idol.

Finally, we visited the community center in the Forbes-Marshall premises. Forbes-Marshall runs classes for students from nearby slums (several of whom are children of their workers). When we went to the center, an NGO called Aakansha was running English language classes for children on the ground floor. On the first floor, there were remedial classes for older children. The teacher was the same one who was at the Gandhinagar school (she comes here after that class) and she had been teaching these children for about 3-4 years. Forbes-Marshall wanted Akshardeep to run this school as they wanted these children to be part of the larger Akshardeep non-formal school network. Several of the children had attended Urdu school until 7th standard. There is no Urdu school beyond that level in the nearby area, and they could not switch to the regular school since the medium of instruction would change to Marathi. Therefore, they were being taught in this class. Akshardeep plans to continue with this class, and use some of the methodologies/text-books from their other NFE classes here. Forbes-Marshall has also promised Akshardeep land in the nearby slums where they can start another NFE school for children who are not in these classes. Mrs. Bapat said that she would try and get Forbes-Marshall to fund that school, but if they wouldn't then this could be one of the 10 Asha sponsored schools. So, she still need to find one (or if Forbes funds this school, then two more) locations for schools.

Other annual activities for the children in Akshardeep schools (pics from Mrs. Bapat):

Trip to Katraj: See pictures: [Going to the park in a truck](#), [at the park](#).

Annual get-together: Many of the [children from the PMC and the PCMC schools](#) and [all the teachers](#) from these schools came together. [The children](#) put together a [show](#) for them and got to interact with the entire Akshardeep family.

Recommendations:

Akshardeep has done a good job with the schools that they are running. They have been unable to locate suitable places for two schools (10 schools were funded, they have run 8). I recommend that they be allowed to spend the unspent money on improving their current schools. For example, they could purchase uniforms for the children (this enthruses the children and might make them more willing to attend school regularly) or reading materials (like Amar Chitra Katha comic books) or other fun educational material that will entice the children to attend school. Alternatively, they could also use the money to fund a trip for the children.

Follow-up Action:

Akshardeep to send out a 6-monthly report plus financial statement that reflects utilization of funds received from Asha Zurich (time line: first week of April)
At Asha-Pune, we receive several requests from volunteers who are interested in directly working with NGOs at a grass-roots level. Therefore, we have started a “Direct-Impact” programme (Asha-Pune effort led by Sanjog Jolly) to chalk out definite tasks that volunteers can help with. We are working with Akshardeep as a “pilot” to see how well this concept works. Sanjog and Mrs. Bapat have identified precise tasks (with details of what is required, in what time frame, what the deliverables are etc.) and Sanjog is looking for volunteers who will commit to complete one or more of these tasks. Look at the Asha Pune website for updates on this programme.

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Projects facilitated by Asha-Pune

ASHA-SILICON VALLEY funded project ([Link](#)) : Ankur proposal (Support A Child), Swadhar, Pune **NEW !!**

- [Ashs-SV's Sponsor-A-Child site](#) | [Ankur school project site at SV](#) **NEW !!**
- 6 Dec 2003: [Visit report by Guru- Visit on 3 Dec \(pdf\)](#)
 - Related docs: [School prospectus \(3 MB, pdf\)](#); [Job specs of employees of school \(pdf\)](#); [Brief student profiles of selected students \(txt\)](#)
 - Photos: [MS Word file \(1.6 MB\)](#)
- 25 Nov 2003: [Replies to some queries by Mrs Bapat \(Word file\)](#)
- 12 Nov 2003: [Proposal and some queries from Guru \(Word file\)](#)

ASHA-ZURICH funded project ([Link](#)): Swadhar's Akshardeep, Pune

- [Vishwa Herle's Visit to Akshardeep - photos etc](#) **NEW !!**
- [Articles written by Akshardeep students/ staff for Asha-Zurich Souvenir \(pdf, 5 MB\)](#)
- [29 Sept 2003: Site visit to PCMC schools \(Doc file\)](#) | [Photos](#)
- [MOU \(pdf\)](#)
- [Student records \(pdf, > 1 MB\)](#) | [Read Me file for student records \(txt file\)](#)

- [Clarifications to questions asked by Asha \(Doc file\)](#)
- [20 July 2003: Asha-Zurich has decided to fund Akshardeep for 2003-2004.](#)
- [MOU between ASMAE and Swadhar \(25 June 2003\) \(pdf\)](#)
- [More background information \(24 April 2003\)](#)
- [Latest update \(20 April 2003\)](#)
- [Asha chapters discussing project \(MS Excel\)](#)
- [Swadhar Akshardeep, Pune, MH> Clarifications on funding \(March 2003\) \(MS Word\)](#)
- [Swadhar Akshardeep, Pune, MH> Followup on Jan visit report \(html\)](#)

- [Swadhar Akshardeep, Pune, MH > Visit Report \(Jan 2003\) \(html linked to pdf, jpg, doc\)](#)

ASHA-MSU/ BERKELEY funded project ([Link](#)): ISDGEI, Kolhapur

- [Questions asked by Asha and replies \(DOC file\)](#)
- [Recent progress](#)
- [Meeting with Sonia on 20 July 2003](#)
- [Guru's queries](#) | [Response to Guru's queries](#)
- [Fund requirements](#)
- [Proposal \(1.6 MB, pdf\)](#)
- [Visit to project site -- review visit -- 14 June 2003](#)

ASHA-PRINCETON funded project ([Link](#)): Aaj Pottery Center, Aajgaon

- [Discussions with LKSS members in Pune on 25 May 2003](#)
- [Discussion on future of this project](#)
- [Aaj Art, Ceramics, Training & Research Center, Aajgaon, MH \(17 March 2003\)](#)

ASHA-BOSTON funded project ([Link](#)): Katkari/Thakar villages, Raigad district

- [Draft version of MOU for next year \(Doc file\)](#) **LATEST!!**
- [Receipts of last year \(pdf format\) \(27 Oct 2003\)](#)
- [Modified/ revised proposal \(word file\)](#) and [attached Excel sheet with details of financial plan](#) (25 Oct 2003)
- [Excel sheet format for reporting finances and budget suggested by Asha-Pune](#) (Sept-Oct 2003)
- [Brief Year-end report and first cut proposal \(Word file\) \(19 September 2003\)](#)
- [Year-end visit review and report of visit \(27 April 2003\)](#)
- [Report Financial \(Q4-2002, Q1, 2003\)](#)
- [Report on students \(Feb 2003\) \(Doc file\)](#)
- [Spreadsheet for financial mgmt and reporting \(Oct 2002\)](#)
- [Mtg with Mahendra Singh \(Oct 2002\)](#)
- [Katkari villages, Maharashtra > Review \(Aug 2002\)](#)
- [Katkari villages, Maharashtra > Evaluation \(Oct 2001\)](#)
- [Katkari villages, Maharashtra > Proposal \(Nov 2001\)](#)

ASHA-COLORADO funded project ([Link](#))

- [News report \(Dec 2003\)](#)
- [Project review and site visit report \(Dec 2003\) \(Word file, 36 kB\)](#) **LATEST!!**
- [ARZ, Baina Beach Goa > Review \(Oct 2002\) \(pdf, 750kB\)](#)

ASHA-CHICAGO funded project ([Link](#))

- [Aralu, Bidar, Karnataka > Review \(Feb 2002\) \(pdf, 34 kB\)](#)

ASHA-ST LOUIS funded project ([Link](#))

- [Rachana, Pune, Maharashtra > Evaluation \(June 2000\)](#)











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पिंपरी-चिंचवड विभाग





