

# **Project Report - Part 1**

"In this world, there is no literate population that is poor, no illiterate population that is other than poor"

**Prof J K Galbraith**

## **Introduction to Sikshana**

Sikshana is a program started by a small group of professionals towards improving the state of public education in the country. Details on the promoters can be had from Enclosure 1. Considering the relevance of education to the healthy evolution of our society and the fact that the primary stage sets the trend for the entire sector, we chose to concentrate on the age group 5/12. With nearly 90% of the children in this category attending a public school, the natural focus was on primary education in public schools. It was felt that, with the expertise pooled by us, a reasonable goal would be to come up with a model for the system, which is sustainable and replicable. Thus Sikshana was born. Before we took the plunge we studied the field in some detail in order to tune our strategies appropriately. We found that the report of PROBE (Public Report on Basic Education, 1999) to be a good indicator of what could be expected in the sector. Though many of their findings are common knowledge, some of them bear repetition here in the context of our Program. Excerpts from the PROBE Report are given under Enclosure 2.

## **Present Scenario in Karnataka**

At the macro level, Karnataka, which happens to be one of the better managed states in the country, has about 9 million children in the target group, of whom 8 million study in 48,000 public schools. While differing figures are offered for enrolment and depletion in primary schools, the most optimistic ones show that not more than 65 out of 100 eligible kids last up to Grade VII. With an average pass rate of 45% each at the 7<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> Grade open examinations, only 15 can hope to pass through High School. A mere pass being a poor indicator of acquisition of any worthwhile academic norm, it can be safely assumed that less than 5 can aspire for acquisition of additional skills and hope to break the barriers which confine them to their present strata. While a loss at this rate is mind boggling, it is no less a shock to realize that it is taken as 'normal' in our society. Further, it is this negative image which is the main cause of most ills of the public education system, like poor enrolments, drop outs etc; and not lack of awareness or knowledge of the essentiality of education on the part of the parents or the children. We found that most parents will go a long way to find an extra Rs 50 per month and seek a place for their child in a neighborhood private school, rather than risk its future in the Government run system.

## **Core Concepts of Sikshana**

We built Sikshana around a few core concepts, which distinguish it from various other attempts in the field. Our attempt is just not towards improving the state of a few schools or a few children studying therein. Rather it is aimed at evolving a sustainable model, which will lend itself to replication on a larger scale. We operate in the facilitative mode in the field so that the local community does not start looking at us as a source of revenue but goes on to develop over a period of time adequate skills to manage the school on their own.

The program focuses on the child as the sole beneficiary of all efforts; in cases where its interests clash with those of others around it, the former prevails. We believe that the interest of the child can and should be served even if the Community and / or the parents are not adequately motivated in the initial stages towards this objective.

Mobilization and deployment of resources under our program is solely for the enhancement of the learning levels of the children. All proposals for expenditure are strictly judged against this criterion. The program is run on a "zero overheads" basis.

There are three major resource inputs which are essential for the success of any effort to improve the academic performance of the children. Of these, the most vital one pertains to the nutritional needs of the child; hence we ensure that in all our schools, an adequate mid-day meal is provided to each child. The other two vital resources are: adequate space – physical and notional – around it to be able to concentrate on the studies and a 'dedicated' teacher exclusively available for the benefit of the group, to which it belongs. As a first step, the Trust is taking up with the Govt of Karnataka the issue of allotting and registering sufficient land for each primary school, initially at our Block and then at the State levels. Regarding the latter, additional teachers are being deployed, wherever required, by the Trust to augment the existing staff.

We believe that most of the management concepts that are applicable to other sectors such as Industry are equally valid for the educational sector as well. It should be possible to set quantifiable and measurable targets and deploy resources commensurate with them. Accordingly the use of the "return on investment" index is encouraged. Enhancement of performance is often related to non-fiscal/ quasi-fiscal measures such as motivation, training and low cost environmental upgrades. Co-curricular activities such as library sessions, fine arts meets, educational tours, etc., are encouraged, as they are considered to be significant factors in enhancing the receptivity of the children to academic inputs.

## **The Program**

The Government of Karnataka has a commendable program under which interested individuals or groups can adopt schools and carry out innovative ideas for their improvement. We have adopted so far seven schools under this scheme, with more than 3000 children studying in them. Being a child-centered program, we started by listening to them. We found that many kids get either breakfast or lunch, rarely both, which was a cause for lack of attention in the class room. Hence we started with a nutritional program, placed in position through a unique arrangement with the School Committee, by leveraging our funds and enabling the latter to get the facility. The class rooms were so cramped that jostling among the kids was seriously hampering their attention to the teacher. We have been assisting the School Committees to build additional class rooms, with our funds supplementing those from the Government. The third major factor for poor performance was the lack of 'dedicated' teachers, resulting in shared classes and 'part time teaching', which gives a strong negative signal to the kids – that strengthens a "nobody cares about education" syndrome. We have been providing these schools with additional staff from our resources to supplement the existing staff. With these basics taken care of, we were convinced that everything else thereafter is a matter of plain common sense and good management practices.

In this phase, we started by setting quantified targets for performance evaluation. However discredited, examinations, passes and marks or grades are still the best options available. The state run system has abolished many of these, with the result that the kids under the PES (Public Education System) do not have to face a serious test or grading till they reach 5<sup>th</sup> and no threat of detention till 7<sup>th</sup>. The non-quantitative skill based progress reports under the present system are so complex that they cannot be expected to relate meaningfully to the semi-literate parents. In

any case, the gross hypocrisy and the dual standards adopted by the elitist ruling class towards the schooling of the privileged children and the underprivileged are only too transparent. A lot is made out on the subject of possible trauma to the kids, ignoring the obvious fact that these same children will have to fight it out for their survival in a not-too-distant time frame without any protection from the system. We have reverted back to a meaningful and quantified system of evaluation which gives feedback to the kids and their parents. Not surprisingly, the community, the parents as well as the kids are overwhelmingly in favor of this and more such changes, including a strong start with a second language from Grade III. There are many indicators which show how successful this effort has been over a year. While at least 30% of the children even in the 5<sup>th</sup> Grade were initially unable to read and write Kannada fluently, we now find that almost all kids in Grade 3 are able to do so! There has been a corresponding increase in the computational and cognitive skill as well at all levels. We get near 100% passes in 5<sup>th</sup> as well as 7<sup>th</sup> Grades, with some kids going beyond 90% - a very unusual situation in State run schools.

On the resources front, we adopt standard management concepts like return on investment, accountability and physical budgeting, which are routinely practiced in other sectors like Industry but generally ignored in the Education. The school is encouraged to come up with proposals for expenditure, but they are screened for their relevance to our focus: improvement of learning levels of the children. The staff members were initially unable to come with such proposals as they were unable to link the poor performance to lack of specific inputs and they needed external support and guidance to frame the proposals. We sent all the teachers for a one day program on TQM, a package designed and organized by CII specifically for primary school teachers in the PES. Besides making a deep impact on their 'status-quoist' mind, this also equipped them to meet the changing environment, being brought in by us.

With the children, the motivation started with 'group counseling sessions' run with the help of our volunteers, aimed at what they want to become in their lives and providing information and guidance on what they need to do to be able to achieve their goals. We were very happy and pleased to note that children, even from these strata, have a wide range of aspirations- many of them eminently feasible, given their circumstances. Their lingual skills were found to be skewed, with poor writing and reading abilities even in their respective mother tongues. The reason was obvious: they have little scope to practice these skills at home where reading and writing materials are scarce. The text books prescribed under the system are too unattractive to be of any use beyond the school hours. We launched on a library movement, wherein we sent selected children from each school with escorts to go shopping, browse and select books of their choice for 'their own' library. They were then encouraged to take these books home every week, read them and come back to narrate what they have read to their class mates. This gave such a boost to their lingual skills that even third graders could now stand up and not only read but also express themselves in Kannada fluently. Other techniques used by us for igniting the spark for knowledge include co-curricular sessions with our volunteers on subjects of interest, educational tours, growing of indoor plants, use of multimedia content and unlimited access to the Computers in each school. As a result, we have a situation, where the kids prefer to stay extra hours in the school and often insist on the volunteers and the teachers to do the same! The kids continue to hang around the school even on holidays to get a chance to play with the PC's! Just a year back, these kids had to be coaxed to come to the school on a normal working day. This goes to show that it needs little more than a few marginal improvements to the environment and some innovative motivational steps to get the kids back on line for higher learning levels.

We are in the process of giving shape to the next phase in which we plan to consolidate the gains in the existing schools by encouraging self dependence in the various processes of planning, fixing of targets, budgeting etc., within a given set of guidelines. We also intend to expand the base through creation of additional nodes in the City and elsewhere, where the experiment will be replicated with local leadership.

In Sikshana, we strongly believe that:

- The future of our country is closely tied up with the fate of the public education system
- While the State will strive towards Universal Elementary Education, it will have its compulsions and limitations
- Each one of us who are in a position to help this cause should come forward and contribute our mite
- A decentralized mass movement is needed to make a dent on the system
- Volunteering and networking should form the back bones of the effort
- We should address the main-stream education system, not to a few 'glamorous' parts therein
- Efforts from private sector and NGO's are often as misdirected and unfocused as those of the State
- Alternate education models do not have or have only a very limited role to play in PES
- Venture philanthropy should be developed as a concept and allowed a major role in this effort
- We need a low cost approach and a sustainable and replicable model
- The model should confine itself to the basics – a decent environment and a dedicated teacher for the child
- Good Management concepts and practices should be inducted into the Educational sector

We believe that it is possible to make a significant impact on the learning levels in the public schools at a cost less than Rs 20 k per annum, barring the three major inputs: nutrition, accommodation and teachers, for which the State has to assume the responsibility. At this level, the proposition becomes highly attractive for mass replication.

### **Progress under Phase I**

As at present, Sikshana has 15 schools with about 5000 children in them. Details on our coverage can be had from Enclosure 4. Our intervention has covered a wide range of activities such as:

- ✓ Providing mid-day meals
- ✓ Providing additional class rooms where space is critical
- ✓ Improving the environment in the existing class rooms
- ✓ Ensuring power, water supply and sanitation
- ✓ Posting additional teachers wherever required
- ✓ Supplying teaching aids, notebooks etc,
- ✓ Providing incentives for kids to excel through prizes and scholarships
- ✓ Re-orienting and re-training the staff

- ✓ Setting quantified targets and measuring performance at each stage and in each school
- ✓ Organizing a strong library movement
- ✓ Providing PC's and multimedia content

The first five schools which have gone through two years of this program are showing significant improvement in the learning levels of the children in the various grades. A typical target and a bench mark has been to get every kid in the third grade to be able to read Kannada fluently, not just from the text books but from newspapers and story books appropriate to their age. This is against an average of 60-75% being able to do so in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade of a typical school before the advent of Sikshana. Similar targets are being attempted for numerical and other skills.

The current phase of Sikshana is about getting a feel of the ground realities, motivating the kids, teachers and the community towards the goal of up-gradation, identifying the deficiencies in consultation with the schools, finding cost effective solutions and freezing the scope for volunteering/ external interventions.

### **Scope of Phase II**

With the completion of the first phase, a second one is now envisaged where the following are sought to be achieved:

- ✓ Consolidation of results obtained under Phase I
- ✓ Progressive empowerment of schools for setting physical targets and financial planning/ expenditure
- ✓ The existing school committees to move towards becoming 'competent' autonomous school boards
- ✓ Enlargement of the program over a wider area to establish statistical validity of the results

It is against the last of the above objectives, that the present project for setting up of a second node at Kanakapura is being proposed.

## **The Faces behind Sivasri Trust**



The founder member of Sivasri Trust, which operates Sikshana is **Mr E S Ramamurthy**. He has had a long and distinguished career in Industry, ending up as the CEO of a large Organization. Subsequently, he functioned as a Senior Adviser to the Govt. of India for a while, before opting to involve himself with socially productive causes on a full time basis.



**Ms Meenakshi** has been the driving force behind Mr Ramamurthy. She strongly believes that there is more in 'giving' than in 'acquiring', more so beyond a point in life.



**Mr Srivatsa Krishnaswami** is a software professional with an M Tech from IIT Chennai. He presently holds a senior position in a major multi-national firm in Bangalore. With a passion for the cause of public education system, he is a strong motive force behind the Trust in all its programs.



**Ms Indira Sharma** is a Post Graduate in Business Administration from the University of Mysore with awards from the State and the University for her performance. She is presently holding a senior position in a reputed Company, responsible for marketing its products in a highly competitive environment. She has a strong parallel interest in primary education, to which she devotes considerable effort and time.



**Mr A Balamuralikrishna**, the financial expert in the group, is a highly successful and competent Chartered Accountant, with extensive practice. He has a personal interest in assisting social causes.



**Mr K. Ravindra**, President, Vertexperts, has been in the IT industry for the past 16 years. He started with Tata Unisys after his Mechanical engineering degree and spent many years outside of the country in the US, UK and Switzerland. He left TUL in 1995 to help start a Business and Software consulting venture called EWI Business Consulting. Oracle Corporation acquired this company and renamed it as Oracle Solution Services in 1999. He left Oracle in Feb 2003 as the Executive Director of their offshore consulting division and is currently in the process of establishing an independent organization. His special professional interests include Business and strategy consulting, application of new technology and change management. He is a regular speaker at seminars and is also on the board of several companies in an advisory capacity. On a personal level, he has a passionate interest in the public education system, which will help Sikshana in realizing its objectives

**Mr M Prabhakaran**, had spent more than forty years in Industry, ending up in a Senior Management position in a public sector unit. He is an internationally recognized expert on Frequency Control Devices and Techniques. He has a deep and abiding personal interest in the field of public education. He has been instrumental in giving a shape to the entire program, right from the stage of its inception.

## **Enclosure 2**

### **Excerpts from PROBE Report**

- The constitution of India stated that "The State shall endeavor to provide within a period of ten years from the commencement of this Constitution, for free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of fourteen years." Forty years have passed since the 1960 deadline for universal primary education and this goal is nowhere near to being realized.
- There is a myth that poor parents do not care about educating their children. This is astonishingly widespread, especially in official circles, where it provides a convenient rationalization for poor performance. A typical father or mother is very keen that their children receive a good education. The problem lies in the fact that they do not always have much faith in the system's ability to impart such education.
- Our founding fathers did not intend that we just set up hovels, put students there, give untrained teachers, give them bad textbooks, no playgrounds and say, we have complied with Article 45 and primary education is expanding. They meant that real education should be given to our children between the ages of 6 and 14. The expectation of two reasonably large, weather-safe rooms for primary schools is far from ambitious, yet it remains unrealized in the majority of schools in India. Most schools are held outside, in rented rooms, or in crumbling structures with leaking roofs, bad lighting, few resources, poor teachers, and conditions of social discrimination.
- Teachers play a crucial role in fulfilling the potential of a community school. If any single factor can make the difference between a poor school and a successful one, it is the commitment and initiative of the teacher. However the state of teachers in India is very poor. The primary school teacher occupies the lowest position in the hierarchical administrative structure and is expected to bear the burden of education in complete isolation with very little support. A typical teacher is also expected to perform other functions such as census taking, etc., which take time away from teaching. Paralyzing curriculum, dismal environments, excessive paperwork, unwanted postings, and lack of respect create teachers who are discouraged and unmotivated.
- Another factor that discourages children and teachers is the unfriendly and unimaginative curriculum currently used in schools. Teaching continues to be completely de-contextualized. An irrelevant and uninteresting curriculum, boring teaching by an often bored or frustrated teacher, very little to learn or understand besides what is thoughtlessly memorized — this is the experience of most children who do manage to attend school.

- The current situation in education management makes it difficult to reform the system or make any real changes to education in India. The education system operates with top down management style from the national government down to the rural level, and gives the impression of a rigid bureaucracy, unresponsive to the real needs of teachers and children. Classroom realities are out of focus and the preoccupation instead is with fulfilling official directives. Teachers are not respected or listened to, the school inspection system is inept and ineffective, and there is a huge lack of understanding and training about education at every level.
- There has been little change in the state of India's schooling system in the last few years, but there have been a few interesting ideas that have been experimented with to help improve education. All across the country, alternative schools, private schools, and non-formal schools run by NGOs have sprung up to meet the demand for education as an attempt to make up for unsatisfactory government schools. While all these efforts are well-intended, they do not make up for the poor condition of the government school system and should not be viewed as a substitute for good government-funded schools.

**Enclosure 3**

**School at Ittimadu**



**Before Sikshana**



**Under Sikshana**

## **Enclosure 4**

### **On Going Projects**

The Government of Karnataka has a scheme for adoption of schools by voluntary agencies through formal deeds of adoption. Under this scheme, Sikshana was introduced in four Government Primary schools of Bangalore South school zone during 2002/ 03. These were at:



#### **UPS Arahalli**



#### **LPS Chikkakallasandra**

#### **LPS Gowdenpalya.**

#### **UPS Adugodi**

We have since added a few more schools in the same school zone during 2003-04 as below:



**LPS Gubbalala**



**UPS Ittihamadu**



**LPS Kariasandra**



**UPS Kadirenehalli**



### **UPS Hosakerehalli**



### **LPS Kumaraswamy Layout**

### **LPS Chandranagar**

In addition we have adopted two schools in Bangalore North Zone to form a second node in the City:



### **Tamil medium UP School, NS Lane, RT Nagar**



### **Urdu medium UP School, NS Lane, RT Nagar**

Nearly 5000 kids studying in the above schools are being covered under our program.