

Site Visit May 16, 2010
Nartap High School
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Dr. Sunita Changkakati from ACRD (Assam Center for Rural Development), which is based in Guwahati, graciously arranged my visit to Nartap during the afternoon of May 16, 2010. Nartap village is located about 1-1.5 hours from Guwahati, near a town called Sonapur.

Most students in the school are apparently from the Karbi tribe. The students do learn Karbi dances and other aspects of Karbi culture. In fact, I was given a Karbi jacket as a welcome gift.

The school is a high school, and has classes 9-12. On the date of my visit, the 9th Standard had their exams. The other students were waiting in the courtyard. The school grounds and the school appeared clean and well maintained.



Next, we had some tea and snacks at the head masters office. The school has apparently got a good reputation in the area for it's quality. The results in the board exams the past couple of years had also been good. However, this year, the results were not good. Sunita is still trying to understand all the reasons why.

The admission to the school has become competitive, and there is now an entrance exam to get in. This has raised some consternation among the villagers who claim to be the original founders of the school, but now cannot assure a place for their children in the school.

Teacher training and motivation is an issue. Sarva Shiksha conducts training at the school via workshops, which have proven useful. In addition, alumni as well as other Assamese who have settled in different parts of India, have come to the school to interact with students. Many of these visitors have praised the students creativity and knowledge, which in turn has motivated teachers to teach the students better.

Funds are given to school by Sunita every month. I believe the headmaster goes to Guwahati to collect the money. The school has hopes of being supported by the government at some point. In the meanwhile, it has realized the need to raise funds on it's own so that it does not become overly dependent on Asha. For this purpose, it has started a garden to grow different kinds of vegetables and other crops (like betel nut and coconut). The main garden is located about 100-150 m behind the school. There is a problem with goats encroaching into the garden, so they have fenced the garden. However, on the day of my visit, a goat had managed to make its way in, despite the fence. There is a fairly big open area right behind the school, which is owned by the school. However, since the local villagers use this area as a playground, the school is unable to grow anything there. There are also some coconut trees planted around the courtyard. The expectation is that these betel nut trees will give Rs 15-20,000 per year after about 5-6 years (if I remember the figures correctly).





(with the headmaster and other villagers on the ground behind the school)



(coconut trees planted around front courtyard)



(Asha sponsored toilet)



(students rushing in for chat with me 😊)



(students gathering for chat with me).

After going around the grounds, there was a half-hour chat with the students in the front courtyard. The headmaster and Sunita gave short speeches, and also felicitated me with a Karbi-style jacket and towel. After that I gave a short speech and had a chat with the students. Of course, the scenario was not conducive to carefree conversation, with the headmaster and other teachers around. It was more of a monologue with me talking and occasionally asking the students questions. I touched on different topics including the school, the students' backgrounds, their plans, sports, movies, etc. It was interesting conversation, though only a few students were actively providing answers and interacting with me. Still, it was fun. The conversation was mainly in Hindi.



After interacting with the students, we had excellent lunch in a nearby home, and then we went for an enjoyable trip to a nearby rhinoceros arena, which involved an eventful crossing of a bridge. But that episode is for another place and time.



Summary of Issues/ Recommendations :

1. I was very happy with the condition of the school. It was also great interacting with the head master and teachers, and the students as well. I was also happy to note that the school has become a top school in the area, with admission being competitive.
2. I was maybe a trifle disappointed by the students' lack of general knowledge. A few students seemed fairly bright, but I was perhaps expecting them to be a bit more familiar with world affairs. Maybe it is just a matter of getting some current affairs magazines or national newspapers to their library.
3. I was happy to see that the school is taking active steps with the use of the plot. It is definitely a long term investment, but I am happy to see that the school is making the investment. It will be good to see the students involved in this as well.
4. Again, see previous point on getting English and other audio/visual materials to the school. Perhaps, it will become even more feasible after electricity is available at the school.
5. It will be nice to explore ways in which the students could get connected with the volunteers at Asha Stamford. I am wondering if we can set up regular post-based communication with students (and with the teachers as well). Perhaps this can take the form of pen-pals, essays that the students write for the Asha website, etc. It does not have to be very frequent; maybe it is something that happens once a month or once in 6 weeks.
6. It will be nice to take yearly class photos for the different classes.