

# Shikshanavahini- Mysore

## Project Site Visit

### Report

Project Name: Shikshanavahini-Mysore

Location: Heggadadevanakote, Mysore District, Karnataka.

Project Partner: Swami Vivekananda Youth Movement (SVYM)

Funded by: Asha for Education, Silicon Valley

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#### **Preface**

Details of the project, including annual report, financial statements, budgets, organization details and other reports can be found in <http://www.ashanet.org/projects/project-view.php?p=485>.

In my three day visit, I attended an extensive SDMC taluk level meeting organized by the Shikshanavahini program at Kote. I visited government schools in different areas in the Heggadadevanakote taluk and interacted with community members. I also visited the SVYM's Viveka tribal school at Hosahalli and Vivekananda Institute of Leadership Development (VILD), Mysore. (<http://www.vild.edu.in>)

I sincerely thank the cooperation and help extended by SVYM. I am particularly grateful to Shikshanavahini team: Mamatha, Vijayananda, Rajendra Prasad, Satish and Santoshkumar for their help in my visit to schools and interaction with community members.

#### **Background**

The project Shikshanavahini aims at empowering local community representatives in villages to improve infrastructure in Government schools and increase the quality of education. School Development Monitoring Committee (SDMC) is a local school committee of nine members. Every government school in Karnataka has SDMC and this committee oversees the functioning and is responsible for the development of the school. Apart from SDMC members the Gram Panchayat (GP) members also have control on allocation of funds to the schools under the panchayat.

These SDMC members and GP members are, in general, not completely aware of their roles and responsibilities. They either do not take effort in improving their schools or lack awareness of government schemes and policies. This project conducts special information campaign and meetings for SDMC and GP members and facilitates a forum for several SDMC members to resolve issues of their schools. Apart from these meetings, special awareness campaigns on importance of education are conducted as part of the project.

The project is overseen by the project coordinator. A program manager, an assistant program manager and four community organizers help in running the project and directly interact with the GP and SDMC members.

## **SDMC Federation Meeting**

I attended the SDMC taluk level meeting, held at the MYRADA (an NGO) office in Kote on 10<sup>th</sup> June. These SDMC meetings are held every month and the meeting is facilitated by Shikshanavahini project. SDMC members from different panchayats in the Taluk attend these meetings. On an average about forty five SDMC members attend these meetings.

In this particular meeting, that I attended, the program manager presented an elaborate power point presentation in Kannada, the state language. This presentation covered the roles and responsibilities of SDMC members. The members interacted with the program manager extensively. They raised several question and inquired about possibilities to resolve issues related to their schools. The environment was immersive. The members also discussed other issues related to contracts for building school facilities, absence of proper kitchen for midday meal preparation.

One of the major problems discussed in the meeting was “abnormal” and “sudden” transfer of teachers from local village schools to schools in urban area. SDMC representatives from thirteen schools reported shortage of teachers. The teacher student ratios in these schools were as low as one teacher for ninety students. The SDMC members have already reported the problem to education department officials, and to higher bureaucrats in the state education department, yet no action was taken.

As the academic year had started, the rural schools faced a considerable shortage of teachers. SDMC members attributed the “irregular” teacher transfer to the Block Education Officer (BEO) and to the elected member of the State’s legislative assembly. SDMC members present in the meeting, around forty of them, decided to meet the member of the legislative assembly to present their case. A personal appointment with him was set through telephone call. In the mean time, dinner was arranged in the MYRADA premises for all the SDMC members. After the dinner all the members, the project coordinator and program manager left to meet the member of legislative assembly at his office. I accompanied them.

Even after prior confirmation of the meeting, it was only after a protracted struggle, hopping from one location to the other, we were able to meet the elected member of the legislative assembly. Almost forty of the SDMC member, waited patiently for more than an hour outside his office to speak to him. Finally when the case of “irregular” teacher transfer was presented to the MLA, his attitude was not only defensive but also defiant. After some “heated” argument, he told that the problem has to be addressed only by the BEO and offered to meet the BEO with the SDMC representatives.

In the evening we reached the BEO office and the officer was there. The SDMC members presented the case to the BEO. The nonchalant and irresponsible answers from the officer led to yet another round of heated debate and accusations. The MLA and the BEO sided together. As the response from the official and the elected member became more reckless, the SDMC members lost hope and started to leave the scene. The issue of “irregular” teacher transfer was not resolved, that day.

However, later a memorandum requesting adequate number of school teachers for the rural school was sent to BEO on behalf of the SDMC federation. The collective and persistent effort of the SDMC federation for around three months helped to withhold transfer of twenty five teachers from different rural schools. This effort also helped in appointment of new teachers to rural schools. This is a major achievement by the SDMC federation. In later SDMC meeting, representatives from education department were present to address the issues raised by the members.

## **Viveka Tribal School**

Started in 1988, this is a semi-residential school for tribal children, run by SVYM. This school is recognized by the state education department and National Institute of Open Schooling. More than four hundred tribal children are served by the extensive, high quality facilities in this residential school. Though this is not part of Shikshanavahini project, Asha for Education had partly funded this residential school.

On 11<sup>th</sup> early morning I was given a quick tour of the facility. I interacted with teachers; the science and computer laboratories for students and the classrooms were of remarkable standard. Apart from regular academics, the teachers encouraged students in several extracurricular activities. One of the major problems was the very low pass percentage in tenth grade government public exam. Several of the students find it difficult to clear mathematics and science subjects. Also majority of the girl students tend to dropout. Irrespective of these problems, the service of this Viveka tribal school in the tribal belt, in Hossahalli, is remarkable.

### **Visit to different Government schools and interaction with community members**

On 11<sup>th</sup> morning, I and the program manager with the community facilitator, left to visit set of schools that were “prelisted” for our visit.

My first visit was to a lower primary school in *Katte Manughalli*. This is a village in Kote Taluk. The school served hundred and ten students and had three teachers. The SDMC members and the headmaster of the school were awaiting our visit. The school has the required infrastructure. The SDMC members told me how Shikshanavahini has helped them to realize their strength and their responsibilities. I asked them specific questions about source of funds to the school and how they used those funds. Funds were routed to the school by the Gram Panchayat and through the Sarva Shiksha Abhyan (SSA), a central government scheme. They used the funds to build a compound wall, a classroom and a “stage” for the school to conduct school functions and morning assembly. They reported that a teacher position in their school is vacant and they have asked the local education officer, to take steps to fill the vacancy. For the following year, they have planned to build additional classroom and buy benches for students. On enquiring, what they want: almost all of them including the headmaster wanted a “computer” for their school.

This school has classes from first to fifth grade. A single teacher handles classes for 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> grade a total of 26+23 students. Another teacher handles 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grade a total of 21+24 teachers and the headmaster who is the third teacher handles 16 students in the fifth grade.

My second visit was to a higher primary school in *Soghalli*. The interaction was much similar to that of the previous school. The SDMC members were active and well informed of their roles and responsibilities.

It has to be noted that there are three hundred and twelve schools in HD.Kote taluk. All the schools are not of the same nature. In my interaction with the program manager of Shikshanavahini, I came to know that only the top twenty percent of the schools meet required standard and the SDMC members were active. In the middle sixty percent of the schools, the infrastructure is substandard and the SDMC members are not well informed. Infrastructure in the lower twenty percent of schools in remote and tribal areas is nonexistent.

My next visit was to a higher primary school in *Antharasanthe*. On reaching there, we were able to gather the SDMC members through mobile phone calls. Within half an hour many of the SDMC members came to the school. This particular school had the needed “basic” infrastructure. The school served two hundred and eighty students and had six teachers. The SDMC members were not able to answer questions on the funds allotted to the school by SSA or by the GP that year. Many SDMC members told that they don’t know about fund allocation and only Panchayat president knows about those details. On enquiring about their contribution to the school as SDMC members, many of them pointed me to plastic chairs or to wall clocks. On asking again, they told that SDMC monitored the work on building a compound wall. I specifically asked them about any problems or required improvements. The members told that they had no problems with the school. I observed that the SDMC members in this school were not so effective as those in the previous two schools.

I asked the program manager about the other schools listed for my visit. I was told that rest of the schools will be almost similar. I insisted him to take me to schools that come under the lower fifty percentile, even if it meant a longer drive.

My next visit was to a lower primary school in *Dammanakatte Hadi*. This school is in a “very” rural area. However, there were many houses surrounding the one room, unfenced, school. After some effort and interaction with the local villagers, we were able to get hold of an SDMC member. All that he knows is that

he is an SDMC member and has never attended any information session. The school has a proper building with a single classroom. However, the kitchen to cook the midday meal was a low-raised thatched structure. Having nothing much to do, we decided to leave.

Next was lower primary school in *BalleHadi*. This school is in middle of a tribal belt, surrounded by multiple thatched huts. This government run school serves thirty five students. The school itself is a thatched structure with dilapidated mud walls and mud floor, with a rough, broken, wooden plank painted in black serving as blackboard. The question of meeting SDMC members didn't even arise.

It was almost towards the evening, we left to the Vivekananda Memorial Hospital in Saragur for the night stay. Next day, I and the project coordinator left to SVYM's Vivekananda Institute of Leadership Development (VILD) in Mysore.

### **SVYM's Vivekananda Institute of Leadership Development (VILD), Mysore**

VILD, is a "rich" facility and an example of "institutional building" by SVYM. Apart from conducting MBA programs in nonprofit, this institution provides training programs for other NGOs. On the day of my visit, 12<sup>th</sup> June, it was the first day of a two week seminar and training program. Through "Reach India" program, SVYM had selected certain NGOs and had offered to train their employees in education related community service, similar to Shikshanavahini program.

### **Conclusion**

Problems related to elementary education are multidimensional and are not isolated. These problems cannot be minimized without addressing other socio-economic issues. Any government education schemes and policies need to address these issues as well. The Karnataka state government made it mandatory for each school to form SDMC and gave the members some powers and responsibilities for effective functioning of the government schools. However, because of inherent socio-economic disparities and because of the social background of the committee members, these committees were not effective in rural areas. The government training programs for these SDMC members were not helpful.

NGOs through "socially responsible interventions" can play a significant role in bridging the gap to make government schemes more effective so it reaches the community. Shikshanavahini tries to do exactly that. Though there are several problems on the ground, this project has made a significant impact on several government schools empowering SDMC and GP members. This project indirectly benefits an estimated 43,000 school children of the 312 Government run schools located in the interior areas of 216 villages and 110 tribal colonies in Heggadadevanakote taluk.

### **Recommendations**

[A] "Asha for Education" should continue to fund Shikshanavahini program and strive to work with SVYM for more community empowerment programs.

[B] I request/recommend Shikshanavahini project coordinator and the program managers, to do a comparative study on the SDMC members in areas not served by the project. For example, Mysore district has seven taluks and Shikshanavahini serves only in HD.Kote. It will be useful to survey and study the effectiveness of SDMCs in nearby Hunsur or Priyapatna taluk. Similarly, the project Shikshanavahini-Bijapur serves the Bijapur district. A qualified survey on the working of SDMCs in Bagalkot or Raichur district, where there are no large-scale community empowerments by NGOs, will help to better understand the problems, functioning and necessities of SDMCs.