

Site Visit Report

Project: Savidya Upasamiti of Himalayan Water Services Thatha Vikas Avam Prayavaran Sanrakshan Samiti.

Location: Haldwani, Nainital District, Uttaranchal

Date of visit: 24th and 25th April 2005

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I reached Haldwani at 10 pm on 23rd April 2005. Prof. Bist and his wife met me at the station and took me to their home. Prof. Bist has converted one room of his office into for Savidya Upsamiti. A board to this effect has been hung outside the room which has a separate entrance. After dinner, I asked Prof. Bist about how he was motivated to start Savidya Upsamiti. He told me how as a boy in Champavat district he was given a scholarship of Rs. 10/- to pursue studies and how that enabled him to eventually get a PhD in Physics. And that was the basis of the motivation for he felt that if he could give a scholarship to the brightest child of the poorest families in his village, he could give them a chance to do something in their life.

Last year on the 2nd of October, he gave out some scholarships to the children. There were two categories of children- some who were still in school and some who would be trained in computer education.

Next day morning, he took me for a walk around his area and we stopped at a Municipal school. Here he had give out a form to the principal wherein he had asked for the brightest children in class III along with the occupation of their father. This he said was to do the scholarship stuff at an experimental level in Haldwani / Bhimtal.

Conversation with Mr. Pandey:

Around 9.30 am Mr. Pandey, who is now the President of HWSTVAPSS came over. We went with him to Bhimtal. Mr. Pandey is the director of Jan Shikshan Samiti (JSS), which is under Ministry of Human Resources Development. He was with Birla Institute of Advanced Studies (BIAS). Mr. Pandey is currently pursuing Ph.D. in Education. There is 80% literacy rate in Nainital and 65% literacy rate overall in Uttaranchal.

JSS runs vocational training in the Nainital district. There are 43 resource people working under Mr. Pandey, who have been trained in different things. There are 56 programs in which training is imparted. The programs vary from Para-medical training to carpentry to embroidery and tailoring.

The ultimate goal is to make the people who are taking training self-employed. Towards this end, Mr. Pandey has got together a business outlet called Sekho through which he encourages others to get such training and for the trainees to sell their products. Ultimately he wants to set up self-help groups under the resource persons for selling the products.

Meantime, he has also designed a Mobile Hospital Unit which has X-ray, ECG, and Ultrasound facility. The hospital is currently operational; the funds come through Uttranchal government. Two such hospitals, one in Kumaon Hill, and one for Garhwal hill were designed. Only the hospital in the Kumaon Hills (where Nainital district is located) is operational. The bus does a round every 16 days. Dates and timings are allotted so that villagers can come down to the mobile hospital unit. There are 2 doctors per bus.

Currently, he plans to train youngsters for call centers, he is trying to get some industrial openings, or call centers opened in these hills. He is also trying to get JSS registered with NIOS (National Institute of Open School) whereby the trainees, and children, if they want can get the class V, VIII, and X certificate. NIOS runs a very open program for students to get their school certificates. With this, the students can opt for higher studies if they want to do so.

I asked Mr. Pandey what his vision for Savidya was. He said that he would like to get the children to do their schooling, get vocational training, and be gainfully employed. One of the lacunae he mentioned was that the current schooling system did not lead to employment which is a need for the poor families. The vocational training run by JSS can therefore fill in the lacunae.

Meeting with other members of HW...

In the evening Prof. Bist had organized a meeting with the other members. There in total 13 members including Mrs. Bist, Prof. Bist's brother and his brother's wife. We discussed about the aims of Savidya Upasamiti.

Prof. Bist wants to give out scholarships based on merit-cum-means in Champavat district. The brightest children of the poorest family will be given a scholarship. This will cover dresses, shoes, etc. Also the villagers want the children to be tutored in the evening. So the scholarship will cover the tuition fees too. This will be in addition to the school.

The members were not clear about the fees structure. Some said that there is a fee and some said that there were no fees. If there is a fee, then the scholarship will cover that. I was told that the schools in the village have just one teacher. With the mid-day meal scheme, the responsibilities of the teacher/principal has increased manifold.

I then asked them that instead of hiring a tutor, wouldn't it be better if the resources were mobilized to improve the school instead. And I told them about Asha's experience with schools in Karnataka. Mr. Pandey said that this seemed like a good idea and that he would pursue this option with the Department of Education at the state-level.

I also pointed out that instead of tutoring or covering the day's lesson in the evening, children can be encouraged to read. A library could be set up. Again Mr. Pandey said that he would like to pursue both a library and a book-bank for children in the school.

Visits to Schools on 25th April

We visited a private school where Prof. Bist had given out a form asking for the brightest children for scholarships in Haldwani. Later we visited the Government School in Rajpura, Haldwani. This is a pucca building, recently renovated. There is a boys section and a girls section coexisting in the same building; but classes are held separately for them. There is a principal for the boys section and a principal for girls section. There are classrooms for each class. There are 5 teachers in the boys section (this is the one we visited) and the total strength is about 350. I understood from the Principal that the state govt. provides a stipend to the poor children of the reserved section (SC, ST, Muslims, Christians, OBC etc...). Only 40 children in this school are without a stipend. The parents are all laborers. The state govt. also provides text books to the children. The central govt provides a mid-day meal. Earlier grain used to be given to the children and then they found out that the parents were selling the grain and making money. Now, the school cooks and provides food. The central govt. gives Re1/- per child per day for this. An additional Re1/- is given for fruits. In addition, the Central govt. provides rice per day for the children.

We also visited a private school run by Catholics where Mr. Pandey's daughter studies. The principal told us how he too supports children from poorer background. Prof. Bist immediately asked him to provide a list of such students for possible scholarship.

We also visited the National association for Blind Students, which has been started by Mr. Danak in Haldwani.

Further conversations with Prof. Bist

Later that day, Prof. Bist visited the Director for Education and then got hold of a reporter from Dainiki Jagran. He told the reporter that Asha Stanford has promised aid and SV plans to give out scholarships pending FCRA clearance. I was asked to say a few words about Asha.

I tried to get a clear picture from Prof Bist about:

- 1) Experimental program in Haldwani
- 2) Logistics of this program
- 3) How many years the scholarship will be given out to the same child- I was more concerned about this for he has already given out some scholarships in Champavat, which will need to be renewed on 2nd Oct 2005.

Dr. Bist said that the programme will evolve as it goes on. Also at one point he talked about tuitions and about giving out dresses and shoes. When I asked him who will do this work, whether money will be given or whether shoes will be purchased, he said that a committee appointed by the Upasamiti will be in charge of this. And also that he would do whatever Asha SV recommended. Finally he also said that I should convey that the villagers would not like a senior student to teach. They want a proper teacher for the tuition classes.

Nainital District:

Haldwani is located on the plains of Nainital District. The hills start little further from Kathgodam which is the Rail Head. Bhimtal is up on the mountains. The villages are nothing but few houses cobbled together. Apparently, one family would move in and then the children would build houses when they grew up. And it would become a village. The village name often times reflects the family who is living there: for example Pandey Gaon is a village of Pandey's. Some villages might have just 3-4 families; the large ones might have 25 families. Farming is the major occupation. The next popular occupation is Army. There is no industrial development either in Nainital or in Champavat, which is the smallest district, and therefore no other means of employment.

My views:

Pros:

- 1) Prof. Bist is very enthusiastic and eager to do something for the children of Champawat.
- 2) It will enable us to start something in Uttranchal.
- 3) As I understand, Prof. Bist wants to do something starting from Pre-primary (anganwadi) to vocational training. For vocational training, he is planning to rope in JSS and SSI (Small Scale Industrial training Institute, Haldwani).

Cons:

- 1) The tuition thing in the evening makes no sense. Yes, if there were regular classes and the children did not understand, then tuition in the evening is needed. But what I understand is that most of these schools are one teacher establishment where the teacher has no time to teach. So

if the children are not learning anything, then where is the issue of tuition? Would it not be better to improve the school, if the state government approves?

- 2) In a scholarship programme, monitoring is very important. For an NGO to successfully start a brand new project, a lot of monitoring and daily involvement is required. This may be too much to begin with. Asha's demands are quite strident, and it may not be possible for the NGO to meet SV's criteria from the beginning. So, an alternate plan is required where the Upasamiti will also become familiar with the demands and requirements of Asha SV. Later on, a more hands-on project can be considered.

Recommendations:

A scholarship-based programme may not bring much benefits to the region. Therefore, I suggest that the project idea be amended so that Asha SV & Savidya Upasamiti can concentrate on one school, as it might be more worthwhile. If Savidya Upasamiti can adopt this school and focus on:

- 1) Teaching program- see if teachers can be locally hired. Mr. Pandey said that there are many village women who have done even their B.Ed but because of lack of opportunities are staying at home.
- 2) Evening classes where we do not focus so much on textbook learning but encourage the children to read, sports, hobbies... Maybe we can even think about a mobile library.
- 3) Medical check-up. With the mobile hospital in Bhimtal, we can encourage the children to get regular medical attention
- 4) Computer education for those who would like- Mr. Pandey would like to start this program in Bhimtal. He was asking about the feasibility of getting used and discarded computers from US to Bhimtal.
- 5) Vocational training- This can be the tail end of the program that Mr. Pandey can do with the help of JSS, where Asha need not be involved.