

Asha for Education – Silicon Valley
Savidya Upasamiti – Site Visit Report
28 Feb 2007

Note:

The site visit was conducted by Ms. Aditi Kaur and Mr. Sudhir Bhatt, volunteers with a Dehradun based non-profit organisation, Mountain Childrens Forum (www.mymountains.org). AshaSV acknowledges the help of Ms. Smita Patel in facilitating this site visit.

**Site Visit to Savidya Upasamiti Projects in Champawat and Nainital for Asha SV
8-10 February 2007**

Two representatives of the MCF conducted a site visit of Savidya Upasamiti projects in Haldwani and Champawat on behalf of Asha SV. Dr. Hari Bist of Savidya Upasamiti accompanied them on the visit, which consisted of two parts:

1. Field visits to all three schools (2 in Champawat district, and 1 in Nainital district), meeting with the community and talking with the teachers, principals, and students.
2. Meeting with the Savidya Upasamiti organization at its headquarters in the town of Haldwani in Nainital district.

Since Savidya Upasamiti received the funds for this program only at the end of November 2006 many of the activities were taking place in February 2007, when this visit was conducted.

Champawat

Champawat is one of the three new districts that were created in the state of Uttaranchal. Initially the region came under the district of Pithoragarh and because it was so far away from the district headquarters it was underdeveloped in all spheres. After becoming a new district it still has not “caught up” and is counted among the least developed districts in Uttarakhand. However, there are some government development efforts such as the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) and Sum Vikas program, which can be harnessed to improve education. (Sum Vikas funds are routed through the village panchayat and have been used, by other organizations in the districts of Chamoli and Tehri, to obtain funds for school playgrounds and libraries.)



The Savidya Upasamiti is currently supporting / enhancing two government schools in Champawat: Kulethi and Dungra Sethi.

**8th and 9th February 2007
Visit to Kulethi and Dungra Sethi Schools and
community**

On the 8th of Feb 2007 we visited the communities and informally visited the schools.

In the morning we met with the newly appointed steward, Diwanji, who is to oversee both the schools in Champawat. Since Diwanji was new to



the job, he did not have a lot of information about the program but was a very willing guide and helped us meet the appropriate people.

We met with the parents who send their children to the Kulethi and Dungra Sethi schools. The parents were not very aware about the school or Savidya Upasamiti's efforts to improve it, but were happy their children were going to school. One mother, Dharma Devi of village Kulethi, said the school now has computers and that her children are learning how to use them and, as a result, go happily to school and do their homework as well.

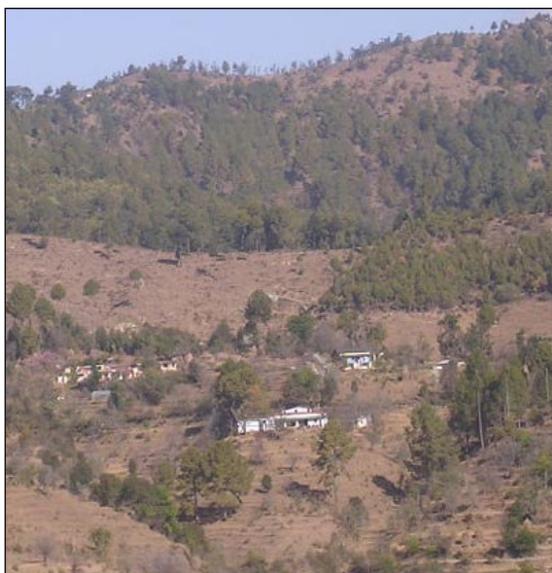
When we asked the women what they knew about their children's education we drew a blank. This is not surprising because in the mountains most parents have no time to see what their children study. They admitted they are called to the school but don't often go. Their own education level tends to be low and so they do not give much importance to schooling. When we pressed them, they said that they will try to ask their children questions from now on. They said that the children had got uniforms twice already and were getting a third set. This is from the beginning of the program in the Kulethi School in November 2005.



Suggestion

- ❖ The teachers that are being supported by Savidya Upasamiti / Asha SV should visit the community and try to engage them more and ask them for their feedback.

The Prathmic Pathshala in Kulethi is 1.5 km away from the nearest road. The children who attend this school are from the poorer section of the community, as the slightly more affluent send their children to the private, so-called "English Medium" schools in the town of Champawat. There are a total of 83 students registered in the school.



The Kulethi school principal is Asha Pandey. She is a mild person with very little energy or drive. Savidya Upasamiti has tried to get her replaced but has so far not been successful. (As this is a government school, they have limited control over the existing staffing of the school.)

In her meeting with us, she expressed appreciation of the extra teaching staff the school had received and she was very proud of the computers her school had. It was her opinion that the increase in the number of students was due to the better level of education her school was able to provide as a result. She is one of the two government teachers who have been posted to the Kulethi school and they were supposed to teach 5 different classes. Now they have one teacher per class. (The government teachers are often required to attend meeting or collect data for the government, which results in their not being present in the school.)

The Kulethi school has 3 full-time teachers and 2 part-time teachers that are supported by the Savidya Upsamiti / Asha SV program. The full time teachers are:

1. Ms. Beena Chaudhry (teaching science and English)
2. Ms. Sunita Negi (teaching class 1 and 2)
3. Mr. Ramesh Pant. (teaching maths in class 4 and 5)

The teachers' attendance register was up to date and most teachers were coming to school regularly. One teacher whose attendance had been spotty was reprimanded by Dr Bist.



The teachers at the Kulethi school were selected through a local committee set up by Savidya Upasamiti and consisting of principal Asha Pandey, the Gram Pradhan, and members Narayan Tamta and Kamlesh Rashiyada. The committee is also meant to oversee the other Champawat school but the committee members are busy and have little time to monitor the program. Since Champawat is a whole day's journey away from Haldwani, the main Savidya Upasamiti center is not able to provide constant, hands-on monitoring either. Savidya Upasamiti has appointed Deewanji to act as steward of the Champawat schools, which should help with oversight and communication.

The computer teacher recently resigned was replaced by a math teacher, Ramesh Singh Bist, but he is unable to teach computers. Navin Rashiyada, the games teacher, feels that he can teach computers. As a games teacher he does not have much work during the day as the games are during the break and before and after school. Most of the physical education/games are conducted before the morning prayer, but the children are brought out for 5 minutes of each class for some exercise.

The library is being used not only by the children but by the community as well. The books have been entered in a register and there is an issuing register as well. Sanjay Kumar is the librarian. The library would benefit from more books; it currently has somewhere between 50-75 books.

We were told that the teachers also held special classes during the winter break for some of the students who came to school.



The school had received their tables and chairs and the children were happily using them.

The swings and slides and other sports equipment had also just reached. (For a list of the supplies received, please see Annex 1)

The computers are being used by the children and the children have a fair knowledge about the computers, which they were excited to show off. (This puts the school far ahead of many other government schools in Uttaranchal where the computer is kept safe in a locked room and far out of reach of the children.) Dr. Bist also presented the school with 5 interactive education CDs from Savidya Upasamiti.



There are now 3 classrooms that are built in the government style, which allows for 2 classes to be seated back to back in one room. The youngest class sits outside when the weather is clear but goes inside in bad weather. Two rooms have been made with SSA funds (the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan infrastructure development budget includes provisions for two classrooms for each basic school).

The children are receiving the midday meal. Early in the program, the children had been given some vitamins, deworming tablets, etc. as well, however those had run out and the health camps that would have continued the process were still under discussion. But after our visit we were informed Dr. Govind Bist, who looks after the health part of the program, was to go to Champawat for a health camp on the 15-16 of February. There is a first-aid kit in the school. The medicines need to be checked and replenished or a process should be made for replenishment.

The school has a large gate and barbed wire around the compound as fencing, which was provided by Dr. Hari Bist. The school may be able to get SSA funds to build a wall around the school.



The students were given their second set of uniforms on the 9th of February: Shirt, Skirt/ Pant, Shoes, Sweater, Tie. The uniforms were from Haldwani and of good quality. Dr Bist said that they had got very good discounts. The uniforms given were in accordance with the government requirements.

The school is clearly benefiting from the support provided by Asha SV and this support should continue in its present form so that in a period of 5 years you can compare a grade 5 student from the Kulethi school and a student of grade 5 from any other basic school and see the difference.

The games teacher is innovative and had procured poles from the village and his house to put up the basketball and volleyball nets that were provided.

Dr Bist said that the grant given by MP Satish Sharma has arrived at the CDO's office and will soon be released to the school. This is being followed up by the committee in Haldwani. Soon there is to be a science center in the Kulethi school.

Suggestions

- ❖ Each class has a teacher and so all the students are officially being "taught." But the education is not different from that of the other government schools. If the school needs to be different then the quality of education needs to be improved. The teachers should have training. There are books available like *Mujhe Swayam Seekne Do* and *Aatmanirbhar Shiksha*, which provide fun ways of learning and might help improve the overall school quality. Teacher training would help as well.
- ❖ Savidya Upasamiti has provided the school with 3 kits, two for maths and one for science, but these are apparently not being used much (the teachers say they do use them, but because there are so few, they can't use them all the time.) More kits might help the teachers give the children more hands-on education.
- ❖ Savidya Upasamiti has been trying to reduce the number of holidays the teachers take and encouraging them to teach during holidays as well. This is an excellent idea and would be a good time to focus on games, computers, library, special classes for the weaker students, etc. They could also have cultural programs and sporting events during vacation time. This would draw the school and community closer and the parents can visit/attend a sports and cultural giving teachers an opportunity to interact with them, thereby promoting community involvement with the school and better communication among teachers, parents, and students.
- ❖ The parents should be asked to provide some contribution to the school. Not necessarily in cash but in kind. This will ensure their participation in the school and their children's education.
- ❖ A student parent teacher association should be formed and should meet once in 3 months, providing an opportunity for parents to enquire or be informed about their child's progress.
- ❖ There is supposed to be a Village Education Committee (VEC) under each panchayat, but it very often exists only in name. If the VEC can be rejuvenated, it can become the monitoring agency as well. This would ensure the buy-in of the local government and the community.
- ❖ The school needs to make maximum use of the support provided by the SSA. There is a program by Azimji Premji in collaboration with the SSA that provides CDs to the schools on English, Hindi, science, etc. these can be collected as well.



- ❖ A suggestion given was that the supplies given to the school by Savidya Upasamiti (tables, chairs, computers, games equipment, etc.) should be entered in the school register as the property of the school so that the principal takes responsibility for the material provided. This the committee has followed up on.



- ❖ The school needs to talk with the SSA department about getting a wall around the school. It is written into the SSA policy to provide a wall around each basic school in Uttaranchal.
- ❖ Savidya Upasamiti should perhaps make a strategy for the teachers which would help them map out and plan their activities.

The Girls Junior High Dungra Sethi School is approachable by road and is currently located on the campus of the new district government headquarters. This district collectorate is very new and the school will be shifted out within a year or two. The process will start from March 2007. Even though this is officially a girls' junior high school (grades 6-8), boys also attend.

The school has 77 students, which is lower than last year. The principal attributed this to the 8th grade class last year being unusually large. So when those students passed out of school, the overall numbers dropped.

The Principal, Mr. D.S. Pandey, is new and met with Dr. Bist for the first time on the 9th of February, 2007, the day of the site visit. He said that he did not know enough about the Savidya Upasamiti program in the school to comment on it, but he felt his school had benefited from the Savidya Upasamiti/ Asha SV support.



There are two part-time teachers in the school who are supported by Savidya Upasamiti, one for computers and one for games: Kamal Singh Chaudhry and Rakesh Parthiyal.

This school has received 2 computers and they have one computer from the government as well. The children from each class have been taught computers (some schools limit computer instruction to a certain grade level, but here all grade levels have had the opportunity to work with the computers.) The three computers ensure some hands-on time for the students. With only one computer this would not have been possible.

As in the Kulethi school, the teachers here were also very dissatisfied with the community participation, saying that parents never came to see what their children were doing, did not send their children to school regularly, etc.

Savidya Upasamiti was distributing uniforms on Feb. 9, 2007. The uniforms were in accordance with government requirements and included the following:

- Boys - pants, tie, belt, sweater, shirt and shoes.
 - Girls - kurta, pajama, sweater, socks and shoes.
- (The uniforms for boys and girls were balanced on the basis of cost, so since the girls' uniforms cost a little less, they each received a pair of socks, which the boys did not receive.)



These purchases were made in accordance with the Savidya Upasamiti budget, after a reasonable discount. The quality of the uniforms was very good.

A medical camp is going to be held on the 15 -16 of February 2007. The Principal requested a first aid box, which Dr. Bist said would be provided.

No new games programs or cultural programs have taken place in either of the schools. The government does have some sports activities that they hold each year and some of the students take part in them.



Because the school will be moving, the principal is unwilling to do anything in the old school. He feels that it would be a waste of money. The playground they have is not very large but they say they use a playing field that is a short distance away.

This school has a very active teacher, Janki, who has received training from the SSA to teach computers. She is not currently supported under the Savidya Upasamiti program. It was suggested that it would be good if she could take over the computer classes, but she said that if she switched subjects, her current classes would not be taught.

The steward will have to be very active in monitoring this school as the committee in Champawat does not have the time. It is very natural that there are shortages and discrepancies in supplies, but if properly monitored this can be corrected as the mistakes are not intentional and usually due to gaps in communication.

Also the principal in Dungra Sethi, Mr. Pandey, did not know who to talk with, etc. This was sorted out during our visit and when Dr. Govind Bist goes to Champawat for the health camps he can assess the progress made.

Suggestions

- ❖ The teachers should invite the parents to make a parent-student-teacher association that sits once a month. Under the SSA each school is supposed to have a parent-teacher association. We suggested having students on the committee as well because students can provide important inputs for their own school.
- ❖ A suggestion given was that the supplies provided under the Savidya Upasamiti program should be entered in the school register as the property of the school so that the principal takes responsibility for the material provided. This the committee has followed up on.
- ❖ Savidya Upasamiti should work with the teachers to help them develop a teaching strategy and goals and map out their activities. This would improve the quality of education provided to the children.
- ❖ There is supposed to be a Village Education Committee (VEC) under each panchayat. Unfortunately, it usually exists only in name, but the VEC can be rejuvenated and become the monitoring agency as well. This would ensure the buy-in of the local government and the community.
- ❖ Dr. Bist suggested that during the holidays the teachers appointed by SU/ Asha SV should teach the community computers as well. This is a good suggestion as everyone wants to learn computers. They can charge a small fee for the classes as well so that either they can earn it as a bonus or the money can go into a fund. But if the teachers benefit they will ensure that the training will be effective and many students will come

10th February 2007

Subhash Nagar Govt. Primary School, Haldwani.

This school is quite close to Dr. Bist's residence and so is monitored very effectively by him. The number of students in this school has increased and is now at 202.

The principal Mr. Hira Ballabh Belwal is a very meticulous and all the material received by him has been entered into his book of records. Games materials have been given to this school as well. Mr. Belwal was, in fact, a part of the team that went to select the games material for the schools in Champawat and in Haldwani.

The Savidya team and Mr. Belwal have been proactive about finding a variety of ways to support the school. Mr. Belwal obtained the slides and swings for this school through the SSA and the school is getting new schoolrooms built under an SSA program. The school also received a computer, which was presented to them by a government representative who had visited and was impressed with the work being done. No uniforms have been given by Asha SV in this school. Six students have been given uniforms by Dr Hari Bist's family through their personal program.



(L→R) HD Bist, Rajna Pandey (Teacher), Suman Pant (Teacher), Hira Ballabh Belwal (Principal)

The school has two teachers supported by SU:

- Ranjana Pandey, a part-time teacher, teaches the youngest class and computers to all classes as well.
- Suman Pant, full-time, teaches grade 5. Out of all the teachers seen she was the best teacher in terms of sincerity and interest in teaching. She has the potential to be a very good teacher. She is a young girl and comes from a poor background.

This school also has one mentally challenged boy. He is now in class 2. He had spent 2 or 3 years in class 1 and so the principal felt he should be given some incentive and has promoted him. The young boy seemed quite happy in class and the teachers treated him with special care. The part-time instructor teaches computers but the children do not get much time on the computer.

Although the number of students in this school has increased, the principal said they had a problem with absenteeism because parents don't consider sending their children to school a priority. This phenomenon is prevalent in all government schools, which tend to serve a more impoverished population and the older children often have to stay home to look after their younger siblings.

Suggestion

- ❖ A pre-primary daycare might help reduce absenteeism by removing this obstacle to the older children's attendance at school. The government's Intergrated Child Development program might already have an Anganwadi that could serve this purpose, or Savidya Upasamiti may want to consider starting one.

Meeting with the Savidya Upsamiti Committee

On the 10th of February we met with the members of the Savidya Upsamiti. We had previously met with Mr. K.K. Pandey. He is now the director of Amrapali Institute, which provides educational opportunities in hotel management and other management studies.

We met with KK Pandey, President; HD Bist, Secretary; Nirmala Bist; DD Gurrani; R.K Pant, Advocate; Dr. Govind Bist; Pandeyji (who provides accounts backup); and Shyam Dhyanak.

We presented what we had seen in Champawat and Haldwani and the Savidya Upasamiti committee said they did not want to expand the schools in Champawat because of the difficulty of coordinating and overseeing the schools at such a distance. They would like to expand the program in Haldwani with a special focus on vocational training in 10 schools. Each member has been instructed to survey schools in their area and then they will short list the schools to 10. They feel the vocational training course should require students to pay a small amount for the course. This amount may not be substantial but will strengthen their commitment to the program.



They were very happy to note that their schools were the first to provide computer education at the basic school level.

We believe the Savidya Upasamiti members are all highly dedicated people. Their commitment and passion has taken this program forward. Several of them are employed fulltime yet make the time to work on this project. They have ensured that they have got the maximum out of the program, with special emphasis on the purchases made.

Suggestions

- ❖ Should the program expand we strongly recommend designating one person who is charged with coordinating this program as it is not possible for the committee to spend as much time on the program as would be required. The committee can provide oversight and give their services and support as and when required. So far it has been Dr. Hari Bist's passion to ensure the quality of this program but to ensure its continuity and expansion, a single person responsible would make it easier.
- ❖ We also suggest that a comprehensive proposal be placed before Asha SV on taking the vocational training idea forward. Mr. K.K. Pandey said that he has a concept note ready.

Respectfully Submitted,

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