

Report on
Savidya Upasamiti

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First of all, I would like to take this opportunity to thank Dr. H D Bist for giving me a chance of working with **Savidya Upasamiti (SU)** & also to Mr. Ravi for recommending me to Dr. Bist. It has been nearly three months (since 16th March, 2009) since I joined SU and has been a wonderful learning experience. Savidya is working hard to fulfill its mission of quality education & health care for the under-privileged of Uttarakhand, particularly Champawat & Haldwani. The efforts towards improving education in government schools, helping villagers with their issues, creating awareness in the community and many others are really laudable.

Presently, there are 7 schools adopted by Savidya (all in Champawat as decision on Haldwani is pending). During my visit to Champawat (from 15th to 19th April, 2009) I visited Kharak-Karki (primary & junior), Dungra-Sethi (junior) & Kulethi (primary). Savidya has provided part-time & full time teachers, sports equipments, computers etc to all the adopted schools. I was really happy to see children playing football during their lunch break at Dungra-Sethi.

Now, the functioning of any school depends on the principal. If the principal is performing his/her duties sincerely then the school is ought to be a good school. On the basis of my visit to the four schools I have the following remarks for them. Let us say best school gets rating 5.

ADOPT-A-SCHOOL

1. Junior School, Kharak-Karki

Rating – 4.5/5

Points in favor

- Principal (Mrs. Rekha Joshi) was cooperative & sincere in her efforts. She was present in every meeting we conducted at Champawat. She had kept articles from local newspapers regarding the participation & performance of the students from her school in sports & cultural activities. She personally knew the students absent most of the time (there were 5 girls). The way she was talking to students was good.
- Computers were well maintained and were functioning.
- Class timetable was available.
- All the three standards were having separate class rooms.
- Student participation in activities like sports, cultural etc was good. Some students secured places in local sports & cultural activities. That was confirmed by the postings in local newspapers.
- Out of 68 registered students 66 were present that day, which means that the problem of drop outs is almost negligible.
- A good no. of guardians (45) turned up on the day of meeting which shows their level of support for the school.

Areas of improvement

- While students were having lunch a dog was sitting beside and nobody cared (I talked to Mrs. Rekha Joshi & she told me that Ms. Aparna Srivastava who was volunteering with Savidya at Champawat also pointed out this problem & now the conditions are much better). School is not just about education, students must be taught to eat properly, wash hands before eating, eat in a clean area (ask them to sit on grass), in short personality development is as important as education. Thus, Savidya teachers must be given instructions/training on areas other than education also.
- The land on which the school is (both primary & junior) located has been purchased by SSB & they are planning to relocate the school. This might affect the students (though it depends on how the local administration handles the situation). Savidya is trying its best to convince SSB to adopt the school. Dr. Bist told me that in the similar case Dungra-Sethi junior school was also relocated but the studies of children was not affected. They shifted out of old campus only when the new one was ready. So, this relocation shouldn't be a big problem.

- No drinking water was available for the students. Presently, the problem has been solved to some extent due to the presence of SSB. Students are getting water from the SSB camp as told to me by Mrs. Rekha Joshi.

Conclusion

Among all the adopted schools, junior school Kharak-Karki was the best. The principal was sincerely performing her duties & was concerned about the students. However, the teachers must be taught that personality development is as important as the education. The students of the Kharak-Karki school secured places in local events (sports & cultural) which shows that the school is better than some other non-adopted government schools in extra-curricular. On the academic front no comparisons were available. However, on absolute terms the school has performed well as can be seen from the report sent to you by Dr. Bist.

2. Primary School, K.K. (adopted this year)

Rating – 2.5/5

Points in favor

- The principal was really interested in improving her school as she told me so many times the problem of shortage of teachers. She was present in both the meeting (one of all the principals & the other one with the district magistrate) we had called for discussions about the performance of adopted schools & the problems faced by them.
- 2 computers were available for the students along with a computer room.
- The attendance at the school was good as out of 77 students registered 66 were present.

Areas of improvement

- Only one teacher (the principal herself) was available for nearly 90 students which makes functioning of school quite difficult.
- No electricity was available in the computer room provided to the school. As a result they had kept their computers in the junior school K.K.
- Only 2 classrooms were available for the 5 classes. As a result more than 2 classes were being held in a single room. Thus, extra class rooms would be helpful for the students but that is possible only if the school can have more teachers.
- Emphasis should be laid on personality development also in addition to education.

Conclusion

The principal was very co-operative & interested in getting support from Savidya. Allotting 2 teachers to the school by Savidya is a good decision. Savidya has the result of the school for this year (when the school was not adopted) which can be compared with the result for next year and I am sure things will look positive.

3. Junior School, Dungra-Sethi

Rating – 4/5

Points in favor

- Students were playing football during recess which is a very rare scene in any government school
- Principal was co-operative & quite active.
- The participation by guardians was commendable.
- While we (Dr. Bist & I) were going to the junior school we came across some kids who had passed out of junior school and were going to a high school for admission. They had worn the shoes given to them by Savidya.
- There were separate classrooms for each standard.
- In the morning when we reached the school teachers were teaching the students and all the class rooms were filled with students.

Areas of improvement

- During recess two students were fighting (which is quite normal in any school) and nobody noticed that. Teachers should keep an eye on the students to prevent them from doing any such activity.
- No playground is available for the students (they were playing on the fields meant for agriculture)
- The principal didn't seem much involved with the kids. The way he was talking to them was in no way amicable or civilized.

Conclusion

The principal of Dungra-Sethi junior Mr. Pandey is a smart person. He was present in every meeting held at Champawat. The school was well managed. They had the class time table & time table for teachers.

Although I didn't visit the primary school Dungra-Sethi but on analyzing the results (of 5th standard) and comparing it with the Dhakna primary school the difference can be easily seen. Dungra-Sethi (primary school) has nearly 78% students with first division while Dhakna has 69%. This simply shows that the success of the adopt-a-school program depends on the principal. Dungra-Sethi is better than the non-adopted school Dhakna because of the extra efforts made by Savidya.

4. Primary School, Kulethi

Rating – 2/5

Points in favor

- Separate classroom were available for all the 5 standards (2 were under construction).
- The participation of guardians was amazing. Around 25-30 were present in the meeting held on 19th April. They were not only listening attentively but were asking questions and proposing solution for the kids who don't come to school regularly.
- The Science center & library were well equipped. There were a good number of sports equipments available at the school.

Areas of improvement

- The principal was not at all interested in the improvement of the school. Although she was present in the meeting held at a hotel but I didn't saw any enthusiasm or support from her towards improving the Kulethi School. During the meeting with DM when she was asked if her school has a playground she said that they have. Later on when I visited the school there was no proper ground. This simply shows that she doesn't want to go through any pain of improving the school. If possible, the guardians along with the gram sabhapati of Kulethi should meet the principal from time to time & request her to perform her duties sincerely. Even if the situation doesn't improve the principal should be replaced which the gram sabhapati can do with the support from the guardians.
- Only 1 teacher (the principal herself) is available for nearly 75 students.
- Unavailability of proper playground.

Conclusion

The Kulethi School was the first one to be adopted. The Science center & the library are located in its premises. Considering these points it should have been the best school among all the adopted schools. If I wouldn't have seen the participation of guardians & their willingness towards providing better education to their kids I would have asked Savidya to

drop the school. However, just because of the parents I think we should hold on to the school this year also. The result of primary school Kulethi (5th standard) can be compared with the primary schools Dhakna. Although, Kulethi should have been a better school but that is not the case. About 69% students secured first division in Dhakna while 40% secured first division at Kulethi. After the meeting Dr. Bist & I conducted with the gram sabhapatis & the guardians I am sure things will turn around, so let us give 1 more year to Kulethi School.

VOCATIONAL TRAINING PROGRAM

The vocational training programs conducted by Savidya are good efforts towards providing the under-privileged youths with a means to earn money. Savidya has conducted vocational training on **1) Computer training 2) Soft toy making and 3) dress designing & stitching**. I have seen the soft toys made by the children & the work is really impressive. Similarly, I visited the children learning dress designing & stitching on the day of examination and they were making Salwar-Kameez, Kurtas etc. which were pretty good. As for computer training I don't think it will be helpful in generating any income. The course structure mainly included accessing MS Word, PowerPoint, making directory, saving files etc. Now, this is good if you want to introduce children to computer but from the perspective of earning it can't be much helpful. Thus, I believe that there can be further improvements in the program. Some of the points which can be considered are as follows:-

1. No home work has been done before starting the vocational training programs. As I proposed to Dr. Bist, we can go to the local industries, institutions etc. to enquire about the course which can provide vocations to the youths & can be afforded by Savidya.
2. The soft toys that were made a year ago are still lying with the organization. No efforts have been made to sell these soft toys to the local shops. Instead, Savidya is waiting for some fairs to sell those toys. What we can do is to contact the local shops (gift galleries etc.) & try to sell them those soft toys. This way we can be sure that the vocation can be used for generating income.
3. The type of vocational training given to children & youths on computer by Savidya in no way can be helpful in generating income. Instead of conducting 2-3 training in a year on computer basics (which just teaches you how to open MS Word, PowerPoint etc.) just one training can be conducted on some topic (tally, flash or even typing etc.) which can be helpful in generating income. The students can be selected based on their economic condition, education level etc.

This year's vocational training program is going to start from mid June. In order to make sure that the students attend the training & the parents also get involve, Rs. 75 has been kept as registration fee for the various courses. Thus, if parents are paying for the courses they will certainly be interested in knowing what their kids are learning, thus getting involved with the program.

SIDDHA JAGRAN SEVA PROGRAM

During my visit to Champawat I, along with Dr. Bist, was involved in activities related to create awareness among the local people and address their issues. Some of the activities that were conducted are:-

1. Meetings were conducted with guardians of students from different adopted schools to gain their support for the success of the Adopt-a-School program. In order to involve them Savidya has proposed to charge some amount for the school uniform that they are planning to distribute somewhere at the end of May 2009. That will give the guardians the feeling of being responsible for the uniforms. Parents were told about the importance of education and how they can help their children with their studies. Emphasis was laid on the fact that the principals, gram sabhapatis & the guardians will have to co-operate with each other for better & efficient functioning of the schools.
2. As mentioned earlier, the land around the Kharak-Karki school has been purchased by SSB, due to which it is proposed to relocate the primary & middle school. Although, the relocation might be to a better place but it might also affect the functioning of the school. Savidya has written an application to SSB commanding officer requesting them to adopt the school.
3. The shortage of teachers in the government school is a common problem and our adopted schools are no exception. According to the norms there should be one teacher per 40 students. Although there have been many promises but no one of them materialized, reason being nothing was done in written. Savidya requested the principals to give written applications to the education authorities and remind them from time to time about the shortage of teachers. This problem was also raised during the meeting with the local administrative (SDM) & educational authorities (DEO, BSA etc.) and the problem was given to them in written.
4. The villagers have been facing the problem of wild boars eating away their crops mainly potatoes, wheat, chilly etc. for last 2-3 years. Savidya has given in written to the local administrative authorities requesting them to address this issue, either the boars can be relocated to Corbett National Park or some areas in the forest around Champawat can be fenced to prevent the boars from entering the villages.

SAVIDYA OPERATIONS

Savidya's methodology of purchasing items whether the uniforms, books, medicines etc. is by getting as much discount as possible (as in the case of books purchased from a book fair in Bhimtal where the organization got discount from 25% to 70%) which shows that the organization values the money it receives from ASHA For Education, Silicon Valley Chapter. However, the only person concerned about this is Dr. H D Bist. As the result he is involved in every purchase made by the organization. Similar is the case with other activities also. This really makes the working of the organization inefficient as it is very difficult for single person to work in so many areas/issues. Things can be better managed if the organization can adopt a more structured model of management where everyone will perform only those duties that are assigned to them. Moreover, it needs a methodology for better monitoring of the schools, vocational trainings etc. Some of the points that can be considered are as follows.

Firstly, a project manager/co-coordinator should be appointed. Although, nobody can be better than Dr. Bist (General Secretary) but considering the work load (which is too much at his age, though still he manages it beautifully which is really appreciable) and the fact that he lives in U.S. for about 5-6 months it becomes necessary that there should be someone who can take over the role of Dr. Bist and can work under his guidance. Presently, we are looking out for some eligible candidate & hopefully before Dr. Bist leaves for U.S. we will find a suitable person.

Secondly, a monthly meeting should be conducted at Champawat among principals from all the adopted schools, the Savidya appointed teachers, Savidya committee members (manager etc.) and a report on what has been taught (syllabus covered as planned in the annual timetable), any sport/cultural activity conducted, any issues regarding attendance, infrastructure etc. needs to be addressed etc. should be submitted to the project coordinator. This way the schools can be better monitored. After talking to Dr. Bist I came to know that from this academic year the submission of monthly report around 25th of each month has been made mandatory without that no one will get the salary.

However, the working of Savidya is much better than any other organization in the region. Dr. Bist makes sure that the money is utilized for the purpose it is granted. But the organization needs to expand and find some alternate sources of fund. This will require good amount of time & efforts which will be the job of the project coordinator.

OTHER ISSUES

One of the main problems with the adopted schools was the drop-out of children and this was more prominent at the Subhash Nagar School, Haldwani compared to the schools in Champawat where the drop-outs were quite low. At Haldwani school total no. of registered students were around 160 but whenever Savidya had visited the school the attendance has been mostly around 120-140 implying that 20-30 students were almost always absent. Some of the points that can be considered to address this problem of drop-outs are as follows:-

1. The profession of the guardians is such that they have to move from place to place (one of the reason for drop-outs at Haldwani school), for e.g. construction labors. Due to which their children have to leave the school. The school should visit the students who are absent for more than a week. It should mark the students as “left the school” and, if possible, should try to check if the student has been admitted somewhere else.
2. I talked to some children who were absent at the school most of the time. They had full family support for studying but still they didn't want to go to school. Now, this problem can be solved by proper counseling of the children & by keeping some kind of incentives. For e.g. 1) Savidya can announce that the children with maximum attendance in each standard will be given some prizes(monthly or bi-monthly) which can be chocolates, clothes, bags etc. 2) the Savidya teachers should be given training on methods of making studies more interesting & involving more and more children. 3) The Savidya teachers can be given kind of performance bonus (some amount like 1000, 1500 etc.) on the basis of the consistency of attendance, maximum attendance, lowest drop out rates etc.
3. Savidya appointed teachers should go to the students who are absent continuously for 3-4 days. Now, this was proposed last year also but was not implemented. The teachers were simply not interested in putting the efforts but if there can be some incentives for them (performance bonus etc. as mentioned in point 2 above) I believe they won't mind working 1-2 hrs extra.

Thank you.

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