

Site Visit Report: Mahila Vikas, Orissa, May 2011.



Date of the site visit: 29th May 2011 (Sunday)

Name of the Project: Sanjukta Bridge course centers for re-instating primary school children into government schools

Name of the Organization Running the Project (if different): Mahila Vikas

Was your site visit announced? Yes, it was planned.

	Project Contact	Your Name (Volunteer conducting the visit)
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Travel and Background Information:

Bhubaneswar is the capital of Odisha (Orissa), and is the largest city in Odisha near the project site. Berhampur is the township having hotels to stay and good railway and road access to Bhubaneswar. The train journey (Falaknuma Express or Konarka Express) from Bhubaneswar to Berhampur takes ~3 hours, and the current one-way ticket cost is INR 140. I stayed at the Jeerango guest house, near the Tibetan-buddhist monastery which is a safe and quiet place to stay near the project site. A car service can be hired from Berhampur to Jeerango (~ INR 700), and the journey takes about two hours.

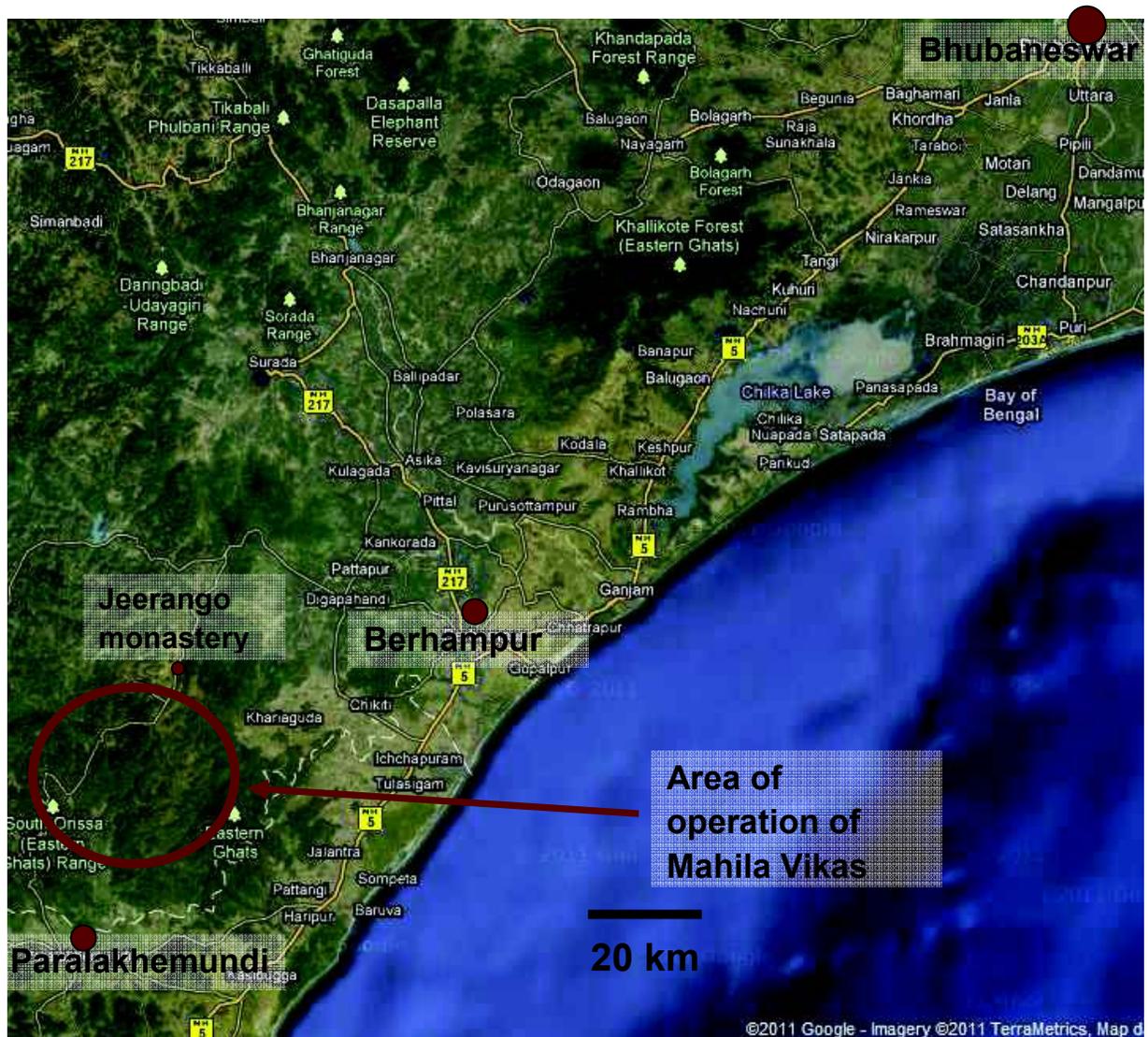


Fig. 1: Map of South-Eastern Odisha (from Google maps), with the relevant places as indicated. The head-quarter of Mahila Vikas is located at Paralakhemundi.

The area of operation of Mahila Vikas is ‘Gajapati District’, especially the tribal-populated blocks. The terrain is mountainous (Eastern Ghat ranges). Under the current project, a total of 21 ‘bridge course centers’ are being operated in different villages in the region. The number and locations of the centers may vary slightly from year-to-year, depending upon the

need of the villagers and the availability of the teachers. Currently, 15 centers are supported by ASHA-Stanford, 4 centers by AID-Columbus and 2 by Sankalpa-Columbus. I was able to visit 3 centers: Mentiamba (ASHA), Bariamara (AID) and Karanjsahi (Sankalpa). The funding agency does not choose the centers to fund; the assignment of funding is done by Mahila Vikas on a need basis. Some variations exist in the operation of the centers depending upon the level of community involvement, the experience and motivation of the teacher, and the conditions put forth by the donor organization. However, the centers follow the same generic modus operandi.

Typically, each 'village' consists of ~ 20 households, and each is located at a different hilly region of the mountain range, hidden behind dense forests. Traveling through the ranges on foot is a necessity; and it may take hours to reach some villages from the nearest point where a vehicle can reach. The condition of the roads, wherever they exist, is such that a jeep or a motorbike is the only possible mode of transportation. The bridge-course centers are operated at a publicly owned central place in the village: a community center, a temporary shelter or an abandoned school building built by the government. (Some of these villages do have formal schools established by the state government, but the teachers abandon the schools due to their remoteness.) Only one teacher runs the bridge-course center in each village, and is typically a local youth.

The site visit took place on a Sunday in the month of June, when the schools (centers) were closed for holidays. Since the visit was planned in consultation with the Mahila Vikas personnel, they were able to communicate with the community members, teachers and students in each village and bring them together to the school building.

In this report, I will focus on the Mentiamba center while answering part B and C, but the generic information about the demographics and the economy is applicable to the entire region of operation. Since the questions are framed with reference to a 'school', I have used the same term in the answers. Yet, it should be noted that these schools are more appropriately classified as cumulative coaching centers for 1st to 3rd standard classes.

PART A: Particulars about the organization and its environment

1. *What are the different focus areas of the organization? (give a rough estimate of the % of their total effort/funding)*

Community development ___30___ % Education ___50_____ % Health
___20___ %

Other _____ % (please specify) _____

2. *What is the administrative structure of the group (e.g. Board of Directors/Grassroots-based)?*

Sl. No.	Name of the Person	Designation
1)	Prof. Anita Patra	President
2)	Ms. Manasi Rout	Vice- President
3)	Mrs. Sibani Panigrahi	Secretary
4)	Mrs. Amita Kumari Padhi	Member
5)	Mrs. S. Prema	Member
6)	Mr. Bhagabat Padhi	Member
7)	Mr. D. Jagannath Raju	Member

3. *Are there any other organizations working in the area providing any one or all of the services provided by the visited organization? (Briefly mention their names and their objectives)*

There are 6-7 organizations that have headquarters in nearby townships, but work in remote areas of R. Udayagiri block. Their names can be found here:

<http://gajapati.nic.in/ngos/ngomain.htm>.

However, Mahila Vikas seemed to be the only organization working in the village that I visited. Mahila Vikas gets advice and cooperation from an older and larger organization, SWWS which also has its office at Parlakhemundi. (Details below)

Organization	Objectives of the organization
S.W.W.S (Society for the Welfare of Weaker Sections)	Development of the Rayagada, R.Udayagiri, Paralakhemundi & Nuagada blocks in the areas of : Animal Husbandry, Dairying & Fisheries, Agriculture, Children, Differently Abled, Drinking Water, Education & Literacy, Environment & Forests

3. What are the main problems the organization faces for running this project?

1. Remote location of the bridge-course centers
2. Lack of residential facilities in the nearby government schools where the children can be re-instated.

PART B: The Beneficiaries and the community

(Information to be gathered from parents and children)

1. Approximately how many families live in the area? 15

2. What do the parents do for a living?

The entire population of the village is tribal (Saura tribe). ‘Subsistence agriculture’ is their main occupation. The village is situated in remote forest-region, thus the community is also forest-dependent. They gather and sell forest products (chiefly *mahua* (*Madhuca longifolia*) flowers).

3. What is their economic/educational background?

Majority of the older population is not literate, and the children attending the bridge course centers are the first literate persons in some families. Some older boys who completed primary education have migrated to nearby states for work. Typically, these youths are employed as workers at restaurants in Andhra Pradesh.

4. At the time of enrolment, does the school ask for the names of both parents? Yes. A snapshot of the attendance register, with the student and parents’ names is shown here:

Mentiamba		05/01	06/01	07/01	08/01	09/01	10/01
Sl. No	नाम / नामिका नाम	नाम उ ठोका नाम	05/01	06/01	07/01	08/01	09/01
		Jembusa Raik					
97	Rajani Raik	Jatni Raik					
		Kastika Raik					
98	Sabitri Raik	Kundari Raik					
		Pandita Pujari					
99	Gayatri Pujari	Sumari Pujari					
		Pandita Pujari					
00	Sumanti Pujari	Asali Pujari					
		Sukru Raik					
01	Namita Raik	Sifa Raik					
		Sabana Raik					
02	Silabati Raik	Santari Raik					
		Sumbasu Pujari					
03	Santilata Pujari	Sunam Pujari					
		Kardika Karyee					
04	Minati Karyee	Ahi Karyee					
		7					
05	Sasila Karyee	7					
		Maheswar Karyee					
06	Premila Karyee	Lebi Karyee					
		Bhakti Mandel					
07	Sanyabati Mandel	Sandi Mandel					
		Saitana Raik					
08	Kanjita Raik	Yagali Raik					
		Pandita Pujari					
09	Debaki Pujari	Sumari Pujari					
		7					
10	Sebati Pujari	7					
		Sumbasu Pujari					
11	Subhadra Pujari	Sunam Pujari					
		Pandita Pujari					
12	Sukanti Pujari	Asali Pujari					
		Sumbasu Pujari					
13	Sasila Pujari	Sumari Pujari					
		Pandita Pujari					
14	Asbati Pujari	Sumari Pujari					
		Esacbeaym Raik					
15	Laxmi Raik	Grandayli Raik					
		7					
16	Sabita Raik	7					
		Sambasu Raik					
17	Santusi Raik	Yagali Raik					
		Sabana Raik					
18	Jamuna Raik	Santari Raik					
		Bhakti Mandel					
19	Chusama Mandel	Sandi Mandel					
20							

Fig. 2: a snapshot of the first page of the attendance-register at Mentiamba.

5. How often do the teachers meet the parents?

Formally, the teacher meets the parents once a month during the Village Executive Committee meetings. However, since the teacher is a local youth, he has a close rapport with some of the parents.

6a. How do the parents/the community view the efforts taken by the organization that runs the project? 6c. How do the parents participate in the organization's activities? (e.g. by contributing their time, money or labor in the school's activities etc.)

The 'school' in Mentiamba is a small shelter (approx. 100 sq. ft.) that was traditionally used as a community center in the village. When we reached the center for the site-visit (on a Sunday morning, around 9 a.m.), a 'satsang' was being conducted inside, with many of the residents praying / singing devotional songs. We had reached there much earlier than planned, so the school was not ready to receive us. The Mahila Vikas volunteers who accompanied us had to politely request the gathering to disperse for some time so that the 'inspection' could be carried out, and the teacher quickly gathered the students (12-13 girls, 4-5 boys all in the age group of 2 years to 9 years). 7-8 parents/ village elders were also invited to stay back. An elderly person who spoke on their behalf said that the organization was doing good work. However, I felt that the center /teacher being relatively new, (less than a year since it started in the village?) the involvement of the parents had not developed to the extent that it could have. The Mahila Vikas volunteers seemed a bit cautious in their approach, they also formally apologized for having interrupted the satsang. The volunteers did seem well-versed in the local etiquette, and I believe that they are taking the right approach for sensitizing the community and trust-building. However, these are my opinions based on a single site visit, and since I do not know Oriya at all, my impressions are based on non-verbal signals observed during their communication.

By comparison, the support of the local community was greater for the Bariamara school. The teacher from Bariamara (Mr. Kura Bodoratha) has completed his matriculation, and has been teaching at the school for the past two years. He has also started conducting adult literacy classes in the evenings for the village residents on his own accord. The center receives technical support from AID-Orissa, and they have bought a LED-based lamp for running the night-school. Bariamara has a non-functional local primary school. The mid-day-meal scheme which was originally assigned to the local school, is now being run at the bridge course center by the local women. The 'official' teacher gets the raw ingredients for the meals and sends them over to the village, and the residents of the village cook food and provide it to the children attending the center. The village is a good example of how a grassroots-level NGO can help develop an underprivileged community holistically, if mutual trust and motivation exist. In one instance, some residents from this village were employed to work at road-building / drainage / water-storage well building work under NREGA last year. When their payments were stalled for a long time, the Mahila Vikas staff helped them to file an RTI complaint with the BDO, which ultimately resulted in their getting paid immediately.

The history and the location of Karanjisahi is a bit different than the other two centers. Traditionally, 'weed' was grown near this village and tar roads were built to the

village for its transportation. The residents (30 families) definitely looked more affluent and their houses were in much better condition. This village is more exposed to the outside world through its contact with Christian missionaries; the whole population of the village is Christian. The teacher at Karanjsahi (Ms Sukhi Karanda) has also completed matriculation, and resides in a neighboring village. The parents in this village looked eager to have their children well-educated, and there was no instance of dropping out of the school reported. The residents, especially women in this village looked more confident and forthcoming in expressing their views.

It can thus be seen that the response and the involvement of the local community differs from village-to-village. The languages/dialects of these communities also differ a lot. This makes the work of organizations like Mahila Vikas very challenging. Employment of local youth as teachers, even if they are under-qualified (non-matric), seems to have been an effective solution in this regard.

6b. What is the motivation for the parents to send their children to school?

The parents might view education as a necessity towards a secure future of the children. It is a fact that most of the parents are not equipped to teach their own children, so sending the children to this bridge course center located in the village itself is very convenient for them.

7. Are there any Government Schools in the area? 8. If yes, how far are the Government Schools from the community? 9. Why did the parents choose this school over the Government School?

There are government schools in nearby towns, but the geographical location of these centers makes it extremely difficult for the children to attend the schools. (4-5 hours would be spent daily in commute on foot.) The Sanjukta centers operate so that the children can be made proficient enough to pass the exams that admit them to residential governmental schools nearby.

10. When you visited, how many children were present in the class? What is the regular class strength? What is the boy-girl ratio in the school?

15 girls and 4 boys were present at the time of the visit.

11. Do the children seem to enjoy coming to school? What do the children feel about the school? Do they feel happy to come to school every day?

The children were a bit shy. I briefly talked to them with the help of the volunteers from Mahila Vikas as interpreters. The eldest amongst the children present, a girl (~ 9 years old) answered our questions, and she said that she enjoyed coming to the school and learning. Some children were too young to attend any formal school, but they would come and sit in the school building along with their elder siblings.

12. What portion of children from the local community (approx.) attends this school? What portion of children does not go to ANY school?

Nearly all children above age 5, who have not already been re-instated in a governmental residential school attend this school. A particular problem with Mentiamba (and presumably, with other centers funded by ASHA) is gender-related. Since ASHA has funded the project for the education of girl-children only, the formal register contains only girls' names. Yet, there are 4-5 boys in the village who would like to avail of the facilities in the school. They do attend the classes, but they do not get to participate in other activities or have study material or art supplies. The volunteers and the teacher from Mahila Vikas have requested ASHA to review this policy.

13. What activities do the children do after school hours?

Playing in the village / jungle, helping their parents with the housework and farm-work during monsoon , taking care of the younger siblings.

14. What is the main motivation for the students to attend school? What is the drop-out rate among students? Why do they leave the school? (If high, what is the organization doing regarding this?)

I did not enquire about the motivation of the children to attend the school. I suspect that the experiences of elder siblings who go to the government schools, and the joy of actual learning and peer-gathering would be their main motivations. The drop-out rate is very low. The teacher, Mr. Rajendra Raita, is a 9th-standard pass local youth and is devoted to the smooth running of the center. He keeps a register where he records his personal experiences, goals and achievements related to the project. He has recorded of an incidence where the parents of a pre-teen girl were not ready to send her to the school and he counseled them and made them agree to let her learn further.

PART C: Project particulars

(Information to be gathered from students and staff)

- 1. How far is the project site from the main town/village? How do the children commute? (foot, bus etc.) What infrastructure and facilities are available at the project site you visited? (eg. Furniture, buildings, toilets, library, sports, hostels, mid-day meals etc) Is the building permanent or temporary construction? Is it owned or rented? What is its physical condition? How big are the classrooms? How many children per room? How many classes (1st to 3rd etc) per room?*

The houses in the village are situated along the slopes of a hill, and the project site is somewhere near the top. 3-4 houses are located in the same premises as that of the school center. The building is a single sheltered room with a permanent construction, publicly owned, and without any furniture. It has charts (alphabets, pictures of flora and fauna) along the walls. 20-25 children from classes 1st to 3rd sit in the room along with the teacher.

2. *What is the mode of teaching in the school?*

Non-Formal Education (NFE)

Do the students also attend formal school? No

Medium of Instruction is Oriya.

5a. *If B (Non-Formal Education) how many of the children also attend formal schools in the area?*

none

If none do, does the project plan this for the future?

Yes, the plan is to have the children pass an exam conducted by the government every April. The scores in the exam provide the eligibility criteria for admissions into government-funded residential schools.

5b. *If B(Non-Formal Education), does the organization create its own study material (books, games)? Or does it use NCERT/NIOS books?*

They follow the 'Sanjukta' syllabus prescribed by the Government of Orissa for bridge course centers, under the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan.

5d. *What are the daily school hours? How many days of the week/month/year is the school open?*

The school hours are 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. The schools are open all around the year, with seasonal variations (e.g. during monsoon months, the whole village migrates over to the top of the hill, and the school may not function well during that time.)

6. *How many staff or volunteers are involved in the project? (Full-time/Part-time/Volunteers)*

1 teacher (Mr Rajendra Raita) , 1 facilitator (community-contact person, inspector : Mr basant Kumar, who visits the center in this village and some nearby villages periodically). The overall project coordinator (Mrs Sibani panigrahi) is also closely involved with the project.

6a. *How many of them are from the local community?* All teachers are from the local community, and the staff members are from nearby villages or townships.

6b. *How many of the staff are women?* 5 of the 7 director-board members are women. I also met a lady facilitator (Ms. Smriti for Chellagada block) and a teacher (Ms. Sukhi Karanda); the organization primarily focuses at employing women at these positions whenever possible.

6c. *What is the education level/teaching experience of the teachers? What is their background?*

The teachers have either finished matriculation or have passed 9th standard. Mr. Rajendra is 9th std. pass, and is studying for the matric examination.

6d. *What is the motivation for the teachers to work in this project? What are the other employment opportunities that they have in the town/village?*

The motivation for the teacher is a work-study opportunity within his native village without having passed std. 10th. There are no other employment opportunities in the village.

6e. *How long have they been with this project/organization?*

One year.

7. *How many teachers have left the school in the past one year, and why?*

None

8. *How many new teachers have joined in the past year?* One.

9. *Does the organization train the teachers?* Yes

If yes, how do they provide the training? The training is provided through workshops organized at nearby town-centers (Parlakhemundi, Mahendragada etc) through the year, where experienced social workers and educators train the teachers about teaching methods, community mobilization, lobby and advocacy strategies, developing low-cost teaching materials and acts like RTE, RTI.

10. *How much is the staff paid? Are they happy with their salaries?* The teachers are paid Rs 1,000 per month with a Rs.200/- raise per year. I did not ask them if they were happy with the salaries.

Is it on par with the salary paid to the staff in the Government schools? No; but it is comparable to the salaries in private unaided schools; please refer to Fig. 3.

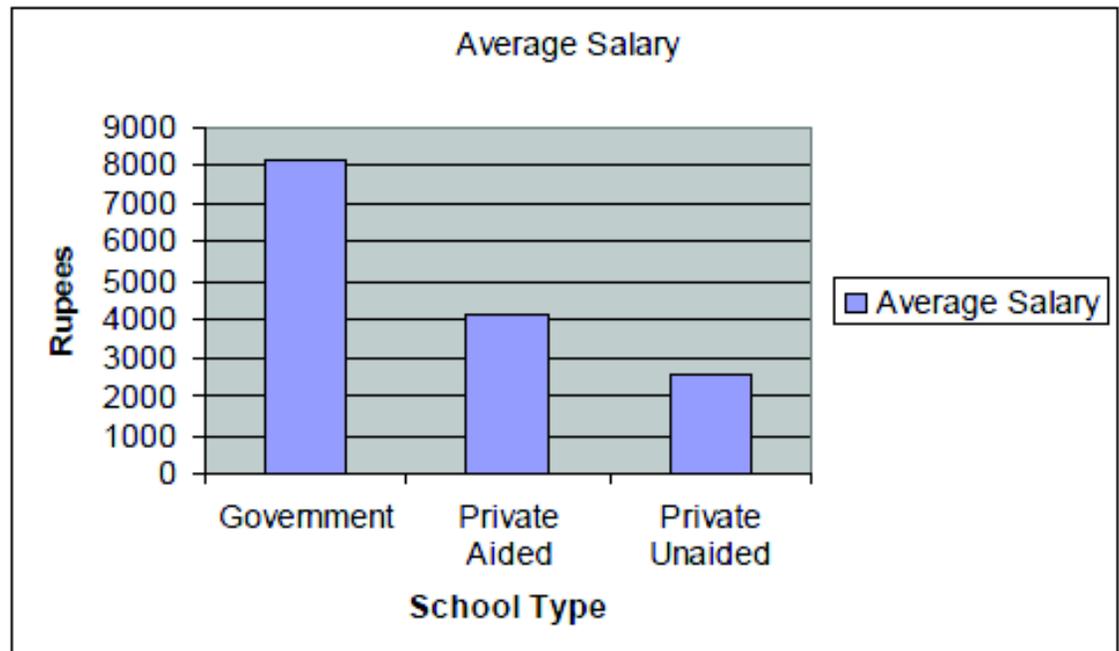


Fig.3: Average salary of primary school teachers in Orissa by school type. Reference : http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTINDIA/2132853-1191444019328/21561890/SGoyalOrissa_Learning_Achievements.pdf

11. How often do the main volunteers visit the center? Do they do only administrative duties or spend time at the grassroots as well?

The main volunteers visit the centers frequently through the year; the facilitators for audit and inspection purposes and the project coordinators for community sensitization. They perform the administrative duties and also spend time at the grassroots. Some volunteers are also learning the local dialects in order to be able to better communicate with the tribes.

12. What does the organization say about education of the child after they leave its school?

The organization keeps the children enrolled at the bridge centers until they are accepted into government schools.

13. Were you able to look at actual work of the students? Homework/classwork/tests etc? Comment.

I was able to look at board-work of the students, and the students at Bariamara and Karanjsahi sang a few patriotic/ devotional songs that were taught to them. One or two elder students, who were less shy of the 'new visitors', were called forth by the teachers to identify / read words from charts that hung on the walls of the classroom. Overall, it was hard for me to judge the exact

degree of progress because the visits were short and had a 'school-inspector-being-shown-around' aura about them.

PART D: Financial resources of the organization

(Feedback from the person conducting the site visit)

1. What are the different sources of funding for this project? (different agencies/Govt)

ASHA-Stanford, AID-Columbus, Sankalpa-Columbus.

2. What is the annual budget?

Annual Budget per center is ~ INR 50,000.

3. ***Are detailed records of past funding and spending available? If possible, please request a copy (of annual financial statements, for example).***

[Yes, I presume these would have been provided to ASHA separately].

4. What is the largest portion of their expenses (salaries/infrastructure/etc.)?

Salaries.

5. Do the salaries listed on their account books match the salaries that the teachers communicated to you?

Yes

PART E: Comments

(Feel free to attach documents if necessary)

I met the local coordinator from ASHA, Mrs. Santilata Rath. Her feedback, and the feedback from the volunteers of AID-Orissa about the Mahila Vikas project and the organization itself was very positive. The southern tribal region of Orissa is extremely under-developed, and apparently intentionally kept so because of its vast riches of coal and rock (granite) mines. The region is also home to intense naxalite activities. It is therefore important to reach out to the tribal community, understand their problems and provide avenues for them to be able to live independently. The Sanjukta bridge course center project is an important social integration exercise in this regard.

The Mahila Vikas staff members seem to face a problem that is common to all NGOs: 'how to make people care?' A senior member remarked that the people are willing to spend their own money to build a community center for the satsang, but they want the government to give them money to build a borewell in the village. Such attitudes can only be changed through a long-term association with the village community, working with them rather than imposing upon their ways of thinking and slowly building trust. The efforts of Mahila Vikas alone might be on a small scale, but I believe that the support to them should still be continued, both in monetary terms and if possible, by active participation.

Photographs from the site visit:

1) The road to Mentiamba. The jeep could not have gone any further.



2) Climbing the hill towards Mentiamba.



3) Houses in Mentiamba



4) The school building, and the 'satsang' that was going on in there before the children were assembled together.



5) The teacher at Mentiamba, Mr Rajendra Raita



6) Mahila Vikas staff members, with a Mentiamba resident. The first person on the right is Mr. Srinibas Panigrahi, an SWSS member and the husband of Mrs Sibani Panigrahi, who is the secretary of Mahila Vikas. The second person from left (wearing a cap) is Mr basant Kumar, the facilitator for Mentiamba.



7) Students and community members at Mentiamba



8) The teacher Mr Kura Bodoratha and students at Bariamara



9) Standing: Ms Santilata Rath, Ms. Smriti (supervisor for Bettarsing, Burusi, Durango and Bariamara centers) and Ms Sukhi Karanda (teacher at Karanjsahi)



10) Students and community members at Karanjsahi



11) The condition of the roads!

