

# Gnanodaya site visit report

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# Contents

- Background
- Updates about school
- Updates about leprosy community initiatives in Venkatapuram village
- Summary of Padma Aunty's work for leprosy communities in India

# Background

- Initial proposal presented at Asha Austin in Jan 2007 by Santosh
- Gnanodaya is school/hostel for healthy children of leprosy affected persons
- School is located in Venkatapuram village near outskirts of Chennai , Tamil Nadu and was started by St Johns leprosy rehabilitation association
- Leprosy community with 50 families is located near the school
- 102 children in hostel (children from leprosy colonies all over India) are provided free education, hostel and food
- 110 children from nearby villages (Venkatapuram and Chettipuniyam) are provided free education and lunch
- Asha Austin approved \$10000 for academic year 2007-2008 towards school's recurring expenses in March 2007

# Background (cont)

- DIK (Dutchdek In Kinder, German based NGO ) has been the main donor of school
- Funded the building when school started in 2001 and has been main source of funds for recurring expenses of school
- Views school + nearby leprosy community as a single component for funding
- Gnanodaya approached Asha Austin because funds from DIK was not sufficient for running the school and community
- DIK had indicated to Gnanodaya to find additional donors for the school's recurring expenses last year – wants to concentrate on agricultural initiatives of community
- Asha Austin funds will complement main funding of DIK for the next year

# Background (cont)

- Padma Aunty acts as project contact, introduced project to us. She is daughter of former Indian president R.Venkataraman (her resume and activities is on project webpage ). Gnanodaya approx once a month (this is one of many projects that she is involved with). Helps to get small donations for school from local contacts in Chennai. She is not involved in day-to-day management/finances of school. Excellent source of information about leprosy related initiatives in India
- Selvaperumal (secretary of St Johns leprosy rehabilitation association) and Thangaraj (school headmaster) are involved in school management and finances

Updates about school

# Location

- Access to school still a problem as noted in earlier site visit report by Santosh
- School is around 3 km away from the main highway – last 1 km is unpaved road and in really bad condition
- Lack of transportation is a main problem in retaining teachers (many commute by cycle) and in getting food supplies to school's canteen
- The community in Venkatapuram village have been pursuing the local panchayat to provide proper road access. The community people lodged an unique protest against local panchayat officials. They expect to have road access by June-July 2007 timeframe (still not sure if it will be done by then).
- Went by car – the last part of the drive was a really bumpy ride

# Teachers

- 7 male teachers and 3 female teachers (including wife of headmaster Thangaraj) for next academic year (2007-2008)
- Headmaster and his wife stay in school premises and act as hostel wardens. It has been difficult to hire female teachers
- They have hired a female warden (ayah) along with her husband (gardener /watchman). Both re expected to be starting in June 2007 (school starts June 5<sup>th</sup> 2007).
- Pay of teachers is sub-par with respect to pay of teachers in nearby government schools. Increase in teacher's pay so that they can be retained is one of Gnanodaya's immediate needs
- Teachers have 12 paid personal holidays a year in addition to school holidays and break between semesters (May/December). Attendance by teachers has been very regular and not a problem

# Local development affecting school

- A big software park is expected in nearby Maraimalai Nagar area (Mahindra estate park), which is ~ 8 kms from the school
- Planned software park has increased local employment, a couple of people from community are employed there for building maintenance
- Software companies give competitive salaries ex night watchman gets Rs 5700 and sweeper gets Rs 5000 per month
- Teachers get paid much lesser (around Rs 2500 to Rs 3500 per month). This coupled with poor access due to unpaved road makes it imperative to increase teacher salaries

# School's future plans

- School currently has classes upto 8<sup>th</sup> Standard. Plan to get approval from Govt for 10<sup>th</sup> standard.
- Minimum # of students for 10<sup>th</sup> standard recognition from Govt = 20 (currently 15 students in 8<sup>th</sup> Std)
- Minimum # of students for 12<sup>th</sup> standard recognition from Govt = 200 (currently 15 students in 8<sup>th</sup> Std). School does not plan for 12<sup>th</sup> recognition, students will appear as independent candidates
- DOE (Dept of Education) has an additional requirement that school library has at least 3000 books (currently they have 1000 books, most of them are not educational books, donated books are mostly English novels) for 10<sup>th</sup> standard recognition. School requested some help from us to satisfy this library requirement

# School's future plans (cont)

- Usually 1-2 students in every class perform very well (> 90% ). These students are all from leprosy communities.
- Plan to send these well-performing students to nearby schools for 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> standard. Possibly engineering or medical college later depending on available funds
- All of them cannot be sent for higher education given their family's economic background. Other students will be sent for practical training classes (industrial training or information technology classes). These are just plans and nothing has been finalized.
- The medium of instruction is Tamil for all classes. Suggested to school to look into methods to improve the student's spoken and written English skills (to prepare them better for higher education where medium of instruction is mostly English)

# Funds from Asha Austin

- Asha Austin approved funds to cover recurring expenses of school. During current site visit, it was agreed that funds from Asha Austin will cover salaries of teacher's and staff.
- Total amount of \$ 14,100 (\$ 10,000 from Asha Austin and \$ 4100 from Aha Madison) still doesn't cover the entire requirement of Rs 6,00,000 given current exchange rate. Remaining part will be funded by DIK
- In the meeting, Padma Aunty mentioned that DIK will not increase/decrease their funding amount for the next academic year (this was confirmed by DIK later)
- Contacted DIK by e-mail to inform them of our funding plans and asked them about their future plans for funding Gnanodaya. Mentioned that we wanted to work together with them in future to support Gnanodaya and make sure that our funding is mutually exclusive
- E-mail reply from DIK contact (Mr Chandran Tucker) attached in the next slide

# E-mail from Mr Chandran Tucker (DIK)

Dear Mr. Thandri,

Thank you for your letter of the 23rd of May. I was out of town for a while and just got back yesterday thus the delay in my replying to you.

Let me take up the last paragraph of your letter. The DIK would certainly like to share the responsibility of running not only the Gnanodaya School but also the leprosy community connected with the School. Cost wise the community does not need very much. Time and effort should also be invested there to maintain certain standards cleanliness and hygiene. It would be a great pity if these two units were to be separated. We are looking for a like minded totally secular partner with whom we could share the responsibility of running these two units.

The DIK is in a position to attend to the needs of both the School and the Colony for the year ending 31.03.2008. The contribution of Rs. 600,000 from Asha Austin and Asha Madison is most welcome. The equivalent amount of Rs. 600,000 from the DIK can be carried over for the following year by placing it in an FD. It would be good if all queries about the School and the Colony be addressed only through the DIK. By the end of the year, when both my wife and I shall be in Madras we can arrange to set up a management committee locally which will attend to the day to day running of the School and Colony. Until such time the management will be wholly in the hands of the DIK. We too very much look forward to working with ASHA to run the School and the Colony at Venkatapuram and I feel sure that we'll soon arrive at a modus that will be suitable to all concerned.

With kind regards

Sincerely

Chandran Tucker

# Revised budget

- School has lot of extra requirements (increase in teacher's salary, hire more teachers, additional English classes, vocational training for students etc) . Will present a revised budget soon after we get it from Gnanodaya.

Updates about leprosy  
community initiatives in  
Venkatapuram village

# Details of community activities

- Community has 50 houses (1 family per house)
- St John's rehabilitation association owns 10 acres of land near the community (used for agriculture)
- Agricultural initiatives provide employment and food material to the community and school
- Grow rice, pulses (ragi, kadalai etc) and vegetables (eggplant, ladiesfinger etc)
- Raise poultry (broiler chicken), goat, cattle for meat. Milk from cattle is used mainly by school
- Recent initiatives include raising of love birds, rabbits etc to be sold for profit in nearby markets
- Lack of transportation makes it difficult for them to sell these products (esp perishable items like milk) in nearby places

# Details of activities (cont)

- DIK supports all of the agricultural initiatives, which is one of the main components of expenses in running the community. Other main expenses include electricity charges for all houses in the community
- DIK pays Rs 250 per family along with rice and essential groceries. They also pay for medical expenses and for a doctor to visit the community regularly. DIK contributes Rs 80,000 per month for community and Rs 1 lakh per month for school
- Above expenses are in addition to revenue generated by agricultural and animal raising activities – these initiatives are a long way from making this community + school self-sufficient
- 15 of the 50 families are employed (either in farming or in nearby places). The other 35 families include those whose hands/legs have been affected by leprosy such that they cannot work. They still earn their living by begging in nearby places

# Women's self-help group

- Padma Aunty has been trying to start women's self-help group in the community
- There are lot of funds available for women's self-help groups through various agencies
- She is trying to fund micro-credit projects through this self-help group for the community

# Van owned by community

- Found during the site visit that they had a vehicle (Maruthi 800 van) which was donated by board member's friend. It was used mainly for transportation of groceries from market and for emergency purposes
- Did not know about this during first site visit (by Santosh). Even Padma aunty didn't know about the vehicle
- They had requested bigger vehicle in project proposal (6 lakhs). Hence they were hesitant to mention this vehicle to us earlier.

# Summary of Padma Aunty's work for leprosy communities in India

# Padma aunty - background

- Active social worker involved in grass root efforts for rehabilitation of leprosy affected patients for about 20 years
- Started with leprosy colony near Delhi-UP border, now works mainly with colonies near Chennai. Also involved in rehabilitation of fishermen kuppams affected by 2004 Tsunami
- Involved through Women's Indian association to organize women's self-help groups and provide micro-credit to them
- Various foreign NGO's (mainly European and US based) have been supporting her work

# Leprosy in India

- About 700 leprosy colonies throughout India
- 46 leprosy colonies in Tamil Nadu alone. Around 40 – 160 families in each colony.
- Govt run homes for leprosy affected people (provide free food/shelter), only in Tamil Nadu (run by state govt)
- Indian govt declared that leprosy has been eradicated in India (after numbers fell below rate fixed by WHO). NLEP (national leprosy eradication program) - conducting leprosy checks in schools and communities were stopped
- NLRP (National leprosy rehabilitation program) is currently being considered – to provide long term help for all leprosy patients in India (food, shelter, monthly payment for expenses etc), Padma aunty is part of that committee board

# Projects supported by NGO's

- Two NGO's – Hope world wide foundation and Rising Star outreach (US based) support leprosy rehabilitation projects coordinated by Padma Aunty
- Mobile health clinics go to leprosy colonies to provide medical help. Services around 9 colonies and cost ~ Rs 1.5 lakhs/month
- Micro-credit projects for 16 colonies. Cost ~ Rs 0.5 lakhs/month
- Rising Star outreach is building a school in a 14 acre plot at Uthiramerur (90 kms from Chennai). Plan to accommodate around 450 children from leprosy colonies throughout India and 300 children from nearby villages. Expected to complete in June 2007. This project may require some support for school's recurring expenses

# Future course of action

- Reply to DIK about the issues addressed in e-mail form them – are we interested in supporting community related initiatives in future?
- Get revised budget from them for funds given by Asha Austin and Madison (\$14,100) for year 2007-2008

## May 2007 site visit photos

- Site visit photos attached in a html file. Link is available in the project webpage.

[http://data.ashanet.org/datastore/data/Chapters/Austin/Projectpics/Gnanodaya/May2007\\_sitevisit/photo\\_album/index.html](http://data.ashanet.org/datastore/data/Chapters/Austin/Projectpics/Gnanodaya/May2007_sitevisit/photo_album/index.html)