

Gnanodaya
Yearly project review and
site visit report

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Project background

Background

- Gnanodaya is residential school for healthy children of leprosy affected patients
- School is located in Venkatapuram village near outskirts of Chennai , Tamil Nadu and was started by St Johns leprosy rehabilitation association in 2001
- Leprosy community with 50 families is located near the school
- Children from leprosy colonies all over India are provided free education, food, lodging, uniforms and books. Some children from nearby villages (Venkatapuram and Chettipuniyam) are provided free education and lunch.
- Asha Austin has been supporting the school since June 2007. Our support is small part of school budget, which is managed by DIK (NGO based in Germany)

Background (cont)

- DIK (Dutchdek In Kinder, German based NGO) has been the main donor of school
- Funded the building and land 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
- DIK Supports agricultural initiatives in the land owned by the community. Vegetables/rice/pulses produced are used mainly by school and community.
- DIK organizes regular health checkups and provides medicine free of cost to leprosy patients in the community (some of them have sever physical deformities). Also provide rice/dal/cash support to pasienst who cannot work.

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). 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
- Sevagaperumal (secretary of St Johns leprosy rehabilitation association) and Thangaraj (school headmaster) are involved in school management and finances

Site visit - Apr 2008

Access to school and community

- Visited Gnanodaya school with Padma Aunty, 2 hrs drive to school from Chennai
- From main highway to Chengalpet, around 4 km in side road . As noted in earlier reports, the 4 km side road is unpaved. For first 0.5 km, road has been paved (due to nearby software park) and was an improvement from last year. Last 3.5 km is still in bad condition – bumpy ride even in car
- Travel is difficult, esp in rainy season for teachers and community people. Teachers come from nearby towns and usually travel the unpaved roads by cycle or motorbike

School visit

- Reached school at around 11 am – classes were in progress. Went around all classes and met the students and teachers.
- Went around the school campus – student's hostel, playground, kitchen - the cook and assistant cook were preparing lunch for the students. Rice/sambhar/eggs was on the lunch menu.
- Students were very disciplined during lunch and the line went in increasing order of age.
- School campus/hostel rooms/bathrooms were very clean and are maintained in good condition by the school administration.
- Talked with students – all of them replied in Tamil (local language), which is the language of instruction in the school.

School enrollment

- 203 students (110 boys + 91 girls) currently studying in school – 115 students (68 boys + 47 girls) stay in hostel and 88 students (47 boys + 41 girls) come from nearby villages. Classes are from Std I – Std IX.
- Number of hostel children increased to 115 (from 100) in June 2007. Hostel is near resource limits. No more space for new children.
- 15 new children were admitted from leprosy colonies in Tamil Nadu (mostly 1st/2nd std) All students from village background. Remedial classes every evening from 4 – 5 pm for children with weak academic performance to bring them up to speed
- Summer break during month of May, all children go back to be with their parents. Rest of the year, they stay in hostel. This year, summer break is from April 25 – June 1 2008.

X std recognition

- School got IX std recognition from govt this year. Plan to apply for X std recognition in June 2008
- 18 students in IX this year. Extra coaching classes for Std X preparation till May 15 2008
- After X std, plan to send students to nearby schools for XI and XII – these schools are in towns and involves considerable travel distance (~8 km). Depending on interest, they are also planning on vocational training (ITI, computer classes etc) – school administration is exploring various option

Schools in nearby community

- 3 govt primary schools from Std I – V in nearby villages (Venkatapuram, Chettipunniyam and Kolathur) ~ in a 5 km radius. 1 Private primary school + nursery. Gnanodaya is only school with higher education ~ VI - IX std
- Day scholars get free education + books + uniform + lunch. In spite of this, number of children from nearby community dropped from 100 to 88 last year. Most of dropped students join nearby govt school. Mainly due to govt school teachers instilling doubt in villager's mind that their children will be affected by leprosy (not true since none of children in hostel are affected by leprosy and they undergo regular checks to make sure they are healthy). Moreover, with a single dose of the MDT (Multi Drug therapy), leprosy is no longer communicable.
- Main effort by teachers and administration at Gnanodaya to explain to villagers about these myths, but have been able to get through to only part of the community ~ ongoing effort

Field trip for students

- All hostel students went on a field trip. Children from Std IV – IX went on a trip to MGM wonderland in Feb 2008. Children from Std I – III went a trip to nearby Vandalur zoo in April 2008.

Teachers

- 10 teachers on payroll in March 2008. Only 3 of them have B.Ed degree, with one teacher currently doing B.Ed by correspondence. 9 male + 1 female teacher (headmaster's wife).
- 8 teachers (3 female + 5 male) have left school from June 2007 – March 2008. Teacher retention has been one of their biggest problems.
- Talked to teachers – main problem is transport to school in unpaved roads everyday
- Pay scale of teachers still not competitive as compared to nearby govt schools. Current proposal includes increase in pay for next academic year
- Ayah (maid) was hired in the past 2 months. Difficult to fill this position since many maids have left after staying for brief periods. Maid and headmaster's wife act as wardens for 47 girls in the hostel.

Teachers (cont)

- Plan to hire 2 more teachers for X std and one teacher for computer classes (high school students need compulsory computer education in govt syllabus)
- Only 3 teachers have B.Ed and other 7 teachers have teacher's training , which allows them to teach only Std I – VIII
- All teacher's went for govt training program called SSA (Sarva siksha abhiman). Teachers in td I – III went for a 1 day training program on different teaching techniques for younger children
- Asha Austin supported \$10,000 and Asha Madison approved \$4200 towards teacher and staff salaries for 2007-2008. Asha Austin sent money in June/Dec 2007. Asha Madison sent only one installment, second is yet to reach Gnanodaya. All receipts/salary reports have been uploaded to the web page

Proposal for academic year
2008 - 2009

Proposal details

- Budget for school + community
- Daily transportation of teachers has been a major problem. Starting next year, they also have to arrange transportation daily for students in XI/XII . School administration wants to purchase a van for school transportation. It is also included in the budget. See webpage : Proposal for 2008-2009