

I visited the Rural Development Unit of Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Narendrapur on Dec 26, 2006. It was not a surprise visit, as I felt that it was not necessary. I am an alumnus of Narendrapur, and I knew about the existence of this Rural Development Unit extremely well. I should emphasize **that this is a secular organization**, and that they provide educational assistance to the needy but meritorious students from rural and urban areas within a distance of 100 km of this unit through Book Bank, **irrespective of the religion of the student**. Besides giving text books of different classes up to Higher Secondary level, other educational aids in the form of note books, school dresses, instrument boxes, bags etc. are also given to cater to their educational needs. This aid is given every year to students of different classes, and the number of such students totals over 600 every year. As far as I know, this is a very unique project, no other organization does similar work in the entire district.



From the project proposal, one can see that during the last 4 years the help rendered to different students is as below.

Years	No. of schools	No. of Boy students receiving aids	No. of Girl students receiving aids	Total No. of students	Total no. of books
distributed					
2002- 03	75	268	263	531	3476
2003 - 04	85	310	314	624	4252
2004 - 05	88	330	340	670	4031
2005 - 06	86	289	355	644	3703
2006 – 07	83	323	372	695	4047

(up to September 2006)

Since the demand for books is rapidly increasing and almost every year many of the schools change text books with the change in syllabi, **it is becoming necessary to purchase new books every year**. In addition, the existing facility in this unit which keeps both new and old books is quite inadequate. So there is an urgent need for a unit which would exclusively serve as a Book Bank and have modern facilities for keeping books, a computer for keeping records and documentation and an extra hand for smooth functioning of this unit. Presently the entire unit is run by collecting donations from individuals and corporate houses to meet the expenditure. **No government grant is received for carrying out the work of Book Bank**. When I went to visit the unit, it was evident that they are very under-staffed. The person who used to just hand the books over to the students now has to maintain a computer – of course, things don't run as smooth as they should.

Books are distributed throughout the year, but mostly in the beginning of the academic year. I was given some photographs of students receiving books, which I have attached below. Also, I myself took some pictures.

To conclude, this unit does a superb job in rural development, and the book bank is a necessity for maintaining and improving the literacy rate in that locality. As the entire project is run by donations, I strongly feel that Asha for Education should sponsor it to guarantee regular funding.



