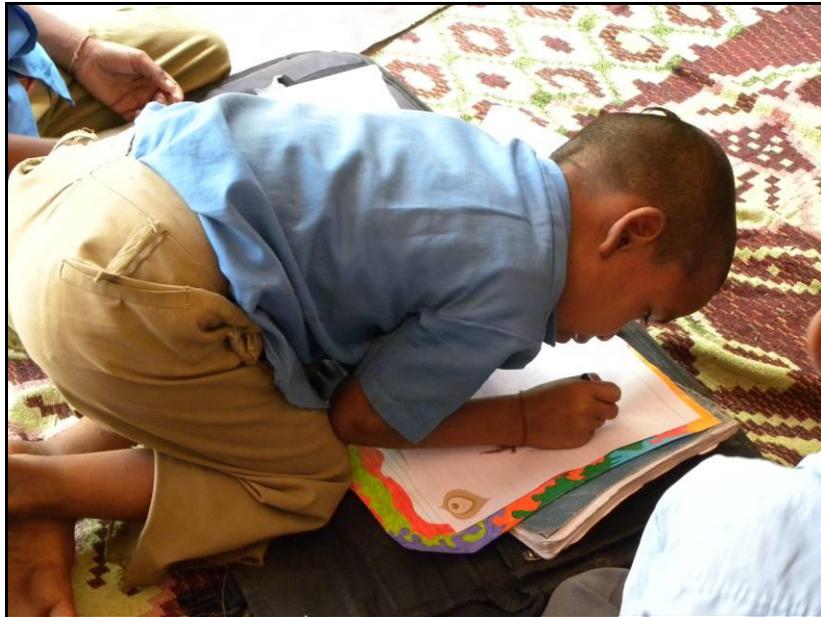


UPDATE ON
SUPPORTING EDUCATION FOR RURAL CHILDREN
(THROUGH SHIKSHA KENDRAS (SK))

July 2013 to December 2013

Supported by

Asha for Education



Submitted By:



Seva Mandir

Old Fatehpura, Udaipur – 313001, Rajasthan (India).

Ph: 0294 - 2450960 / 2451041; **Fax:** 0294 - 2450947

E-Mail: edu@sevamandir.org; info@sevamandir.org

Website: www.sevamandir.org

Education Program: An Introduction

The areas of Seva Mandir's (SM) focus are predominantly tribal and the government schools while being available physically in most villages are characterized with teacher absenteeism, poor pedagogy, lack of learning materials, inadequate infrastructure, and an apathetic atmosphere. In fact, 53% of the children in its work areas are out of school of which 36% have never attended school.

In response to these problems, SM's varied interventions are providing quality education for children ages 6 to 14, who are dropouts/never been to school or cannot attend school due to financial and family obligations.

One of them being SM's Shiksha Kendras, community-run schools, which provide primary education to children in villages. Over the past few years, around 6,000 children have been taught annually through roughly 200 Shiksha Kendras.

SM also reaches 200 children annually through 3 residential learning camps. These children can receive scholarships, if they continue their schooling after the camps, which have led to an 81% retention rate amongst the recipients. Lastly, SM works concurrently with government schools by creating activity centers that impact 800 students annually.

Through limited resources, SM has impacted around 30,000 children avail quality education and in last five years only the outreach was to 14,541 children out of which more than 6500 children were enrolled into schools for higher education. Perhaps the largest testament to SM's impact is that community members now demand better education from the schools.

Since the passing of the RTE Act, Seva Mandir and the communities that we work had the apprehension about the impact of RTE on the Shiksha Kendras. It was feared that the Shiksha Kendras (SKs) may have to close down. Although they offer good primary education to children in very remote locations but they do not conform to RTE norms of formal teacher qualifications and physical infrastructure. Seva Mandir approached the Government of Rajasthan regarding this. The Government of Rajasthan reviewed Seva Mandir's curriculum, pedagogy and visited 11 randomly selected SKs. All these centers passed the test of quality and rigor. The officials praised our SK's efficiency, and as a result of their experience on the ground, and after vetting curriculum and teaching material, the State of Rajasthan verbally granted our SK's the status of Special Training Centers. Seva Mandir is in process of getting the formal approval for the same.

Seva Mandir has received valuable support for education programme from Asha for Education since 2007. This update narrates the progress in the various education programmes for the duration of six months from July 2013 to December 2013.

Section 1 – Shiksha Kendra- Rural Schools

Currently 171 Shiksha Kendras, reaching 5976 students, are in function in 5 blocks of Seva Mandir work area. Of these, 20 SKs with an enrollment of 580 children, of which 47% are girls, are in Badgaon. The AfE- SV supports the SKs of Badgaon block

As compared to last year, the number of SKs has decreased by one due to closure of one SK, however this did not had much impact the total enrolment and boys-girls ratio across the SKs. However due to enrolment of children beyond 30 per SK, additional instructors were appointed at two more SKs - increasing the number of instructors by 2. Last year 20 SKs, through 21 instructors, were catering to 576 children with 49% being girls.



Table 1: Enrollment details in SKs

| No. | Zone | SKs in July 2013 | SKs in Dec 2013 | Instructors | | | Enrollment in December 2013 | | |
|-----|--------------|---------------------|--------------------|-------------|----------|-----------|-----------------------------|------------------|------------|
| | | | | Male | Female | Total | Boys | Girls | Total |
| 1 | Delwara | 5 | 4 | 2 | 2 | 4 | 62 | 50 | 112 |
| 2 | Bagdunda | 7 | 7 | 6 | 3 | 9 | 128 | 113 | 241 |
| 3 | Dhar | 2 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 44 | 44 | 88 |
| 4 | Godach | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 24 | 15 | 39 |
| 5 | Kadiya | 5 | 5 | 4 | 1 | 5 | 53 | 57 | 110 |
| | Total | 20 | 19 | 14 | 8 | 22 | 311 (53%) | 279 (47%) | 590 |

* Since the last report was sent in December 2012, though this report is from July-December 2013, all the comparisons in the report are between December 2012 and December 2013 to mark the progressions.

The table shows closing down of 1 SK as this particular centre, in Rama village of Delwara zone, was opened twice in the reporting year but was closed down eventually owing to some personal commitments of the instructors. Enrolment at this centre is 30 and procedure for appointment of new instructor is under process.

New Enrollment

In the year 2013-14, total 124 children took new admissions in 19 centers of Badgaon block. These figures are low compared to last year where 172 children were enrolled out of which 52% were girls. Of the 124 children enrolled this year, 45% are girls. As done in the past, Pravesh Utsav (a traditional way of celebrating and encouraging the enrollment of out-of-school children) was organized at all the centres of Badgaon block. Students of the SKs organized rallies in their hamlet encouraging other children to join them. The details of the new enrolled students are given in Table - 2.

Table 2: New enrollment in 2013-2014

| No | Zone | SKs (No.) | December 2013 | | |
|----|--------------|-----------|---------------|-----------|------------|
| | | | Boys | Girls | Total |
| 1 | Delwara | 4 | 11 | 13 | 24 |
| 2 | Bagdunda | 7 | 28 | 22 | 50 |
| 3 | Dhar | 2 | 16 | 11 | 27 |
| 4 | Godach | 1 | 3 | 5 | 8 |
| 5 | Kadiya | 5 | 10 | 5 | 15 |
| | Total | 19 | 68 | 56 | 124 |

Enrollment in Schools for further education:

Students from SKs are encouraged to enroll in a government school once they have basic competencies in language and mathematics. This year till December 2013 a total of 1231 children took admissions in other schools for higher education. Out of these, 112 children were from the 19 SKs of Badgaon block. Out of 112, 38% children have taken admission in class 5 and class 6. last year 99 children, with 55% in class 5 & 6, were enrolled in government schools.

Class wise break up of these children is given in the following table no. 3.

| Centers(No.) | Class 1 & 2 | Class 3 | Class 4 | Class 5 | Class 6 | Total |
|--------------|-------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|-------|
| 19 | 42 | 14 | 14 | 18 | 24 | 112 |

Interventions with SK Instructors

Since SKs are mostly single instructor schools, barring a few which have very high enrolment rates and hence have two instructors. All the instructors belong to the communities they work in and very few of them have had any formal training in teaching children. Out of the 22 instructors, 12 teachers are having qualification of below class 10 while 10 instructors are qualified in the range of class 10 to class 12.

Even though most of the teachers have not had much academic training, due to Seva Mandir's sustained investment in their capacity building, the students of the SKs outperform their peers of government and private schools. Regular and intensive capacity-building sessions, which are delivered in quarterly instructor meetings and annual instructor training, to make teaching more context-oriented, child centered, interesting and enjoyable by strengthening the teachers' conceptual understanding of the subjects they teach (math and language), and emphasizing the practical aspects of how to conduct classroom transactions.

To determine the current learning level of instructors, an evaluation was conducted in September 2013 in which 176 (90%) instructors participated. The question paper was divided into 3 sections of language, mathematics and English. To identify the current learning level of instructors the paper was categorized in three levels viz. 1-3. In the initial analysis of the 20 instructors (2 did not appear in the evaluation), 85% instructors were found to be in Level -2 and 11% in Level- 3 (highest level). The performance of instructors in the evaluation will help in designing the structure and content of the upcoming annual instructor training proposed to be held in month of February 2014.

World Teacher Exchange Program was organized from 14th – 26th October 2013, in cooperation with Edukans (A Dutch organization) for the second time. The World Teacher programme is designed with the aim to facilitate professional and informal exchange between education professionals from the Netherlands and SK, camp and activity center instructors of Seva Mandir. The program was divided into three phases of observation, teacher training (workshops) and implementation of learnings. The themes of the workshop were: 1. Observing learning; 2. Evaluating learning; 3. How children learn (in their brain); 4. How children learn (in behaviour); 5. Active learning; 6. Lesson Planning. 8 instructors (7 from SK and 1 from Activity centre) participated in this workshop. The learnings from the program will be shared with rest of the instructors during the quarterly meetings and annual instructor training.



Community Participation:

Strengthening community contribution and ownership of education is another key dimension of Seva Mandir's work. Democratically elected village committees have the responsibility of monitoring and evaluating the SKs and the work of the instructor and paying the instructor's monthly stipend. Some committees have taken up the responsibility of paying the stipend of the instructor from interest earnings of their own village corpus fund. Parents are also invited to participate in two-monthly parents' meetings where they can interact with instructor and learn about what happens in the centers. Every student pays token fees (waived off for children from families with economic constraints), which is deposited in a common village fund and is spent on the children, under the supervision of the committee. Through these mechanisms, the SK centers contribute to overall community development, their sensitivity to local needs making them an important component of the development process.

Thus to encourage partnership with the parents and community, and bring a sense of accountability both from the teacher and the community side, various initiatives were taken, some of which are described below.

- **Shiksha Shulk – Education Fees**

Previously it was decided to take the consent of the community members and parents to raise the *shulk* amount from Rs. 100 to Rs. 150. During the parent-teacher meetings and community level meetings, the appraisal was agreed upon and from this year an amount of Rs. 150 is collected in all the SKs. out of 590 children, fee for 53 children was waived off due to their financial inability to pay. Thus, a total amount of Rs. 80,550 is expected to be collected during the year. So far Rs. 40,550 (50 %) has been collected which is almost similar to the collection last year which was 61%. Depending on the children's and parents needs, the fee has been used for different purposes such as buying uniforms, sweaters, water bottles and lunch box for the children.

- **Pravesh Utsav: Enrollment Festival**

The traditional pravesh utsav was also celebrated in all the SK's in the month of July. The purpose is to encourage the out of school children to get enrolled in SK. Students of SK organized rally in each hamlet. Parents and some community members participated in the rally. The new students were welcomed with jaggery, tilak and they were also tied laccha (traditional thread).

- Community participation is also observed in activities like Independence Day celebration, Bal Melas (children festivals) and parent-teacher meetings.

Case Study

Valu ram, a 13 year old boy from Sango Ka Vera studies in Majam Middle School. He is presently studying in 9th standard. His village is surrounded by hilly ranges from all sides. It has no road connectivity and thus, no government facility could reach this village. Shiksha Kendra in this village is the only access to education and eventually a better future. Valu ram got enrolled in our SK, run by his uncle, in 2007. He was mainstreamed in a nearby government school in 2010 in 6th standard. He then topped his class in standard 8th and received a laptop from Government of Rajasthan for his distinguished academic performance. He loves science and aims for studying in a college some day. Can

Other activities in SKs

- Half Yearly evaluations were conducted across all the SKs in the month of November and December. The evaluations results will be published in the coming months.
- 3 instructors meetings were organized in the months of July, September and December. The meetings focused on sharing of the learnings from the World Teacher Exchange program and formal exchange on the functioning of the SKs.

Section 2 - Residential Learning Camps

Background

Seasonal Residential Schools were first started in year 2001 with the aim of catering to the educational need of out-of-school children who are either child laborers or do not have a functional school within the periphery of village. Since the inception the, the program has evolved continuously to contribute in a holistic way towards the overall development of children from the most neglected and disadvantaged regions of Southern Rajasthan.

Progress Update

The second seasonal camp of the financial year 2013-14 was held for 55 days from 7th November 2013 to 31st December 2013. 197 children (95 girls and 102 boys) in the age group of 6-14 years from 26 villages completed this camp. AfE supported education of 25 children in this camp. Out of these 196 children, 58 children came to the camp for second time, repeating after the first camp held in May-June 2013. Rest all the children had never been to school, and were engaged in the domestic work to support their families, hence making the camp as their first ever experience of education.

Table 4: Block wise participation of children

| Block | Boys | Girls | Total |
|--------------|------------|-----------|------------|
| Kotra | 75 | 42 | 116 |
| Jhadol | 17 | 24 | 41 |
| Girwa | 5 | 9 | 14 |
| Badgaon | 2 | 17 | 19 |
| Kherwada | 3 | 3 | 6 |
| Total | 102 | 95 | 197 |

Teachers Selection and Training

The camps also provide young people from rural backgrounds an opportunity to get trained and teach in the camps. Before beginning of the camp, the instructors were selected through a written test followed by interview. A total of 21 instructors (12 M, 9F) were selected out of which 4 instructors rendered their services for the first time.

The selected teachers underwent 2 days training on 5th-6th November 2013 on what and how to teach in camp. The training was divided in two major parts, Hindi language and Mathematics. In addition to this, sessions were also organized to sensitize them towards the other psycho- social needs of children and other subjects like environment.

Childrens Learning Process

In the beginning of the camp, the children were assessed on their existing literacy level and were divided into groups of 8-10 children, with each group being assigned to one teacher. The acquired pedagogy allows the children to study (individually and in groups) on their own. There are spaces and exercises, which allow them to read, write, speak and reason on their own. The children are also encouraged a lot to speak and ask



questions. Plenty of teaching materials and aids were used, which were meaningful and interesting to the child. We selected storybooks, which are in good and simple language, had attractive illustrations and suited children of different ages and learning levels. In mathematics, exercises were designed which allow children to understand the concepts of numbers and the functions possible with them instead of just learning the algorithms. A lot of other play materials like snakes and ladder, dices, flash cards aided the children to understand and learn while having fun. An activity centre equipped with a library was set up and used extensively by both teachers and children.

Evaluation

At the beginning of the camp, based on the learning level test conducted during the initial days, 10 children were placed in Level-A1, 37 in Level B and 150 in Level C. Regular class room observations and meetings with teachers kept a close track of the children's academic progress.

A mid-camp evaluation was held on completion of one month to mark the progress made by children and to re-group them based on the learning acquired. 28 children were placed in Level-A, 31 in Level-B and 138 remained in Level-C. Second round of evaluation was conducted during the ending days of camp. Only 96 children remained in Level-C, while more than 50% children progressed in their Levels with 32 children acquiring Level-A and 69 children acquired Level-B highlighting the capacity and efforts put in by the instructors.

Other Activities

Apart from the subject teaching, children are also instilled with habits like basic health and hygiene and extra curricular activities on a regular basis. Sunday mornings were reserved for hair/nails cutting, cleaning of the classroom, washing clothes etc. since all the children were coming for the first time, they were told how to use toilets and harms of open defecation. A doctor visited every Sunday to have regular health check-up of children. In the afternoon children had a chance to work on their creative skills in the arts and craft classes followed by games and sports in the evening and cultural events in the night.

¹ To identify the progress of a child Seva Mandir has categorized three learning levels viz A, B and C. The levels are roughly equivalent to government classes. Level C is when a child can barely read or write. When a child can start reading, understand simple sentences, write small/incomplete sentences and do basic counting and simple operations like additions and subtractions with small numbers, she or he is placed in Level B. At level A, child can read and understand simple texts, articulate themselves by writing a group of sentences and understand the concepts of multiplication, division, etc.

A special event for these children



All children (and teachers!) from the learning camp were invited by the manager of Celebration Mall in Udaipur to attend an afternoon of fun, magic, ice-cream, singing and dancing. All the children arrived looking smart in their new red and white t shirts provided by the Celebration mall and were greeted with ice cream and a puppet show shortly followed by a magic show, lots of music and a packed lunch.

EDUCATION FOR ALL

The camp puts great emphasis on encouraging children of all backgrounds and abilities; this is achieved through a balance of group and individual learning tasks in the classroom coupled with games and singing activities at the beginning of lessons. Teachers pay special attention if a child is struggling. Further to this all children are encouraged to be confident enough to shout out answers when appropriate or fill in answers on the blackboard which makes for a fun and fulfilling classroom environment.

Case study

Name: Kamal Singh

Lives: Biroti village, Jhadol block

Number of camps: 1



Kamal, was an extremely shy student who was put in the B Level. When he was at home, he used to take the cattle for grazing and had never attended school previously. He had also migrated to Gujarat for some time to help his elder brother gain extra income by working at a marble mine and factory. Their combined salary was Rs200 a day and they kept some of the money to pay for their rented room and food whilst in Gujarat while the rest of the money was sent back to his parents. His older siblings have been to school but because he is the youngest he had no choice but to get involved with household chores. His father is blind and therefore cannot work as much as he used to and his mother is a housewife who now works in farming.

What Kamal had to say:

When he first arrived at the camp he was scared. However, post the initial inhibitions, he did not miss home and he really enjoyed studying.

- He liked to be at the camp because he was taught things that he enjoyed. He also liked to play cricket and sing songs with everyone during the evening. He also likes the camp because he was fed well.
- He would like to study until his father can finance him and would afterwards like to join one of his elder brothers at a factory doing marble cutting work.

When asked why he thought education was important Kamal said:

- Landlords often give farmers half the wages, they deserve. He said that if one studies, they would be better in understanding when you are getting paid the right amount of money because you can count. He also says that he thinks he will be able to get a job after attending Kaya.

Section 3 - Activity Centers

Brief Description:

Seva Mandir had started 5 Activity Centers in the Government schools of Badgaon Block from 2009 with the help of village communities. The purpose of this programme is to provide meaningful education to the children in the Government school. Through these centers Seva Mandir is trying to build conceptual understanding of children in the subjects of Math and Hindi.

Seva Mandir faced a huge challenge in establishing these centers and building relationship with Government during the initial years. As the year pass by SM has institute better relationship and space within the government system through these centers. The teaching learning patterns and pedagogy which Activity center instructors are using to build basic concept of children has created a faith in Government school teachers also. Many government teachers are using the teaching learning material of activity centers in their own classes. It shows that after years now the centers are serving the purpose of creating a platform for the children to learn joyfully.

At present, 4 Activity centres are being run in Badgaon block. The Negadia Activity centre was closed owing to lack of availability of a qualified facilitator. The current enrollment in these 4 schools is given below.

Table 5: Details of activity centers

| Village/Zone | Classes in School | No. of teachers in School | No. of children enrolled in July 2013 |
|---------------------|-------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| | | December 2013 | |
| Selu/ Kadia | 1st – 8th Class | 6 teachers (including principal) | 131 (49 Girls – 52 Boys) |
| Peepad / Kadia | 1st – 8th Class | 6 teachers (including head teacher) | 194 (63 Girls - 134Boys) |
| Undithal / Bagdunda | 1st – 10th Class | 6 teachers | 159 (90 Girls and 109 boys) |
| Maruwas/Kadia | 1st – 8th Class | 6 teachers (including principal) | 197 (103 Girls and 130 Boys) |

Capacity Building of teachers

- During the reporting period 3 instructor meetings were held. These meetings provide them a platform where they can share their concerns and experiences amongst each other and with the block level program co-coordinator. The prime agendas of these meetings were inclusion of drop out/out of school children in schools, reasons and possible solutions regarding irregularity of children meetings in the period and better use of available resources
- One-day training cum meeting was organized with the aim of discussing some basic concepts in science and geography. The facilitators were shown how to perform simple science experiments and teach children through activities, charts and practical utilities.
- Teachers day was also celebrated at all the activity centers. Students of higher classes taught lessons to junior sections and performed activities like poem recitation, singing, dancing etc.

Conclusion

Through the continuous support from Asha for Education, across all programs, we have been able to impact lives of many children. The likely approval of SKs as STCs has helped increasing the motivation of the Seva Mandir as well as community and inspired them to keep bettering the programs. However, we have faced hurdles also, most concerning being the low attendance rate of children at the SKs.