

Site Visit and Studies of Varun Projects in the Naugarh Block near Varanasi

6. July – 16. July 2006

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Abstract

After the visit of Noon.ch member Andi Fischer in May 2005, we decided to revisit the Varun project in 2006 to see the progress and development of the activities and tasks. For this visit, three members of Noon.ch have been engaged: James Glattfelder, Pascal Fischer and again Andi Fischer.

Generally, it was a very fruitful and successful year for Varun. The bee keeping project could be started and the first honey has been harvested. Varun opened two schools in new villages (Amritpour and Dhobahi) and is now running 5 schools. Over more, the women self help group project (Micro Finance) has proved to be very successful and is spreading throughout the villages by itself now.

1 Introduction

Climate:

Unfortunately, the whole Naugarh block - which is by nature not blessed with much rain and fruitful soil - has seen fewer rains than normally for two full years now. Hopefully, the currently starting monsoon will be extensive this year!

Naxal Movement:

Naxal movement is still very active in the area. We where forced to ask for permission to enter the Naugarh block at highest district level. Vallabh and Sandeep from Asha helped us significantly for this!

The district magister (DM) and the superintendent police (SP) have given us access and guaranteed for our security. For this, armed police troops with bullet proof vehicles have accompanied us whilst on our field visit. Although we did not want this police escort (Naxal mainly attacks police men and not social workers....) we could not stop them from following us.

Government Women Entrepreneurship Program:

Varun supports the self help group women who claim the government for not paying the spoken 310'000 RS for a women entrepreneurship program where they are taught to generate own income. From the spoken money, only 65'000 RS have been paid. The rest of the money disappeared. Varun is now actively forcing the government to pay the rest of the money and to investigate in the mysterious disappearing of the remaining 245'000 RS. So, Varun does not only make friends with this action, this was another reason for Noon.ch to ask for permission to enter the Naugarh block.

Right for Information Law (RTI):

From the 1st to the 15th July 2006 a awareness program for the latest law in India takes place India wide. VARUN, Asha for education and other NGO's organise the Varanasi and Chandauli event. For 15 days, interested people are informed on the scale and potentials of this law. Further support is given to these people for applying requests on any subject. Exemplarily, we could witness the following situation on our visit on the spot on July 7th 2006:

One man's father died in 2002, and in 2006 somebody emptied this dead mans banc account

with the aid of falsified identity documents. The son, as a beneficiary, now wants to claim the bank and wants access records. Many illiterate people neither know about their rights, nor do they know how to claim. The above mentioned program helps here.

In the Naugarh Block, the same awareness camp will be executed for 5 days end of July 2006.

Government Development Activities:

The ongoing strong Naxal activities in Naugarh – bombs and mine blast – seem to force the government to push and extend their development activities. So, the road and infrastructure construction (school, electricity, water, sanitation) is fast. Here the motto is “quantity instead of quality”. Often lower quality of material is used and constructions are rather made to show fast than sustainable results. Anyhow we are pleased to see that government is taking up its responsibility, if also it will take decades to develop the whole Naugarh block. Slowly but steadily we see some fruits of government engagement. But still sometimes maybe remarkable parts of a project sum might disappear as bribes.

2 Site Visit in two Villages (11. July 2006)

Together with Dr. Sanjay Mishra, Anjani Kumar Singh and Dr. S.P. Singh we visited two villages in Naugarh: Amritpour and Batauwa. These two villages have not been visited by Noon.ch before; in 2005 Andi visited Lehara, Shahpur and Pathrou.

Amritpour:

This village is close to Naugarh (3 km). It can be reached on a road where only the last 1 km is unpaved. We were visiting the school run by Varun for about 60 children. At the time of our visit, at least 50 children were present. Varun started running the school there in November 2005.

- Population: xxxxxx families or totally xxxxx people live there.
- Shops: 1
- General Literacy: xxxxx %
- Juvenile: Totally xxxx from 0-15 years (xxx/xxx male/female)
- School going: 60 children (xxx/xxx male/female) come to school (class 1-5)
- Teacher: Mr. Sri Rajahans 45 years, finished class 10, earns 1500 RS per month. Teaching since November 2005
- School building: mud wall, built by villagers
- Closest government school: 2 km (currently not operating)

Batauwa:

This village is also close to Naugarh, approximately 2 km from the block center away. The road is unpaved but not too bad. Government runs a school, thus no Varun school is posted here.

The purpose of our visit was to see the bee keeping project which has started here in November 2005. One box of bees is held there and we were offered from the first harvested honey for tasting. The quality is amazing and superior.

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- School building: mud wall, built by villagers

3 Educational Activities

Varun has no F.C.R.A. yet, so (officially) it works in the field as a volunteer agency of Asha. They are now running five schools in the Naugarh block: Amritpour, Shahpur, Pathrour, Dhobahi and Lehra. Mr. Lal Sahab is the supervisor of all school activities; we met and interviewed him on our visit. His function is to assure the quality of the educational program. For this, he visits each center 3-4 times per month and speaks to the teachers, the kids and their parents. He himself studied up to class 12.

List of schools, teachers and their own education:

Village	Teacher	Education of teacher	Remarks
Shapur	Sri Punnu Singh	Intermediate (Class 12)	
Shapur	Sri Madan Gupta	High School (Class 10)	(2 teachers in Shapur)
Pathrour	Sri Vinod Kumar	High School (Class 10)	
Dhobahi	Sri Bhavan Vishawakarma	Intermediate (Class 12)	
Amripur	Sri Rajahans	High School (Class 10)	
Lehra	Sri Ramkesh Singh	High School (Class 10)	

Interview with Mr. Lal Sahab, School supervisor:

- 1) How to attract more student's to the classes

By encouraging sport activities, craft work ship, convince the parents of necessity and benefit, and know the reason behind the drop outs (mainly child involvement in parents work). Generally, the situation has improved, the sensitivity and acceptance of the parents is growing.

- 2) How high is the dropout rate?

The dropout rate for class 1-5 is marginally small. But after class 5, only 25% of the kids participate in further education. This is due to long distance to such schools (Only two High Schools in Naugarh and Deorikala; but road construction in Naugarh is progressing!) and involvement of the kids in their parents work. Often, the parents cannot afford the requirements for further education like stationary, clothes, transport. If Varun could sponsor the further education of talented kids in future will be evaluated now. (See chapter 9 'Recommendations from Noon.ch')

- 3) How to provide training to the teacher?

The teachers annually participate in a training day at the Asha headquarter in Kaithi (Vallabhs home). Further training is suggested, we discussed on that whilst visiting. (See chapter 9 'Recommendations from Noon.ch')

- 4) How is the acquisition process for new teachers?

First, the school supervisor searches for capable persons in the village and then checks the acceptability of this person as a teacher by the parents and the villagers. If not successful, other (nearby) villages are considered. Due to remoteness of the villages, the teacher must be from the local community. Usually the highest educated person of a village is the designated teacher. So far, no major problems have occurred in the teacher recruitment process.

5) If or How to expand to other villages?

Quality instead of Quantity:

Varun currently does not want to expand its educational program to other villages. They want to assure and guarantee a high quality of education. So, even schools earlier ran by Varun which are now running by Government are continuously supervised by Varun.

Government is still not capable of assuring continuous, sustainable quality of their education.

Exemplarily, the government teacher in Lehra does not show up sufficiently, so Varun restarted to teach at least part time additionally to the government education.

If Varun would open more centers at the time being – and this centers would be very remote- no sufficient quality of the education could be assured.

Current further development action is seen in the field of income generation. (See chapter 4 'Income Generation Project (Bee keeping)' and chapter 9 'Recommendations from Noon.ch')

6) How to select the right villages to run schools? (Totally 111 villages in the block)

Government runs schools in most of the 111 villages. Totally 95 schools are run by government, and some schools serve two villages. Currently the following villages are totally without schools, means neither government nor Varun runs schools there:

<u>Village</u>	<u>Status</u>
Horila	Govt. Education center is proposed
Pandi	Govt. Education center is proposed
Sukdheopur	Not known
Goretutwa	Not known
Hathini	Not known
Danogarh	Not known
Inaut Ghat	Not known
Khutahar	Not known

The remoteness of the mentioned villages will not allow Varun to open schools there at the time being. Probably, the ongoing road construction in the whole Naugarh block may better this dissatisfying situation.

Most existing government schools face a problem of lacking willingness and motivation of the teacher. Often, the teacher is not a local person and needs to travel 100 km or more on rough and Naxalite affected roads to reach his school. He does therefore not regularly appear. In addition, there are insufficient monitoring capabilities of the government for their schools. So, quality is low and cannot be assured. Varun spends lots of their capacity to monitor their ancient schools which now have been overtaken by Government.

In 2005, Varun also organized a procession against this situation and mobilized villagers to participate in a bicycle tour. The right for information law might be helpful here. (See chapter 1 'Introduction')

4 Income Generation Project (Bee keeping)

The bee keeping project has been started in 17 villages in November 2005. Approximately 36 boxes of bees are in operation now. In this starting and trial phase, already 53 kg pure honey of high quality has been produced. The boxes have been purchased by the women self help group; loan thereto has been given by the governmental bank. The gained honey is sold in the market in Varanasi for 150 RS/kg. So, one box can be amortized (loan can be paid back to the bank) in one season (October to March) only.

Future aims for this very successful project are to start with another 100 new boxes in 2006/2007. Varun wants to spread and establish this project throughout the whole Naugarh block and estimates that it will take 5 to 6 years to do so.

An other successful Varun project is the implementation of Grocery Stores run by families with help of the women self help group. These shops sell soap, sugar, spices, biscuits and other daily life items. They help to increase the quality of live for all villagers.

Last but not least, one group of villagers started a tent-renting service. This group was able to gain 10'000 RS per year by leasing and positioning tents for marriages or other festivals.

5 Health Care

In all 5 villages where Varun runs schools, First Aid Boxes have been installed. The teachers are responsible for the content of the boxes and the distribution of medicine to sick villagers, they where given basic training to do so at the primary health center (phc). The boxes contain medicine for the most common sicknesses and diseases like cough, diarrhea, dehydration, malaria, cholera. These drugs are given from the Naugarh block hospital to Dr. S.P. Singh for free; he distributes them to the teachers on their demand. The teachers are instructed to provide medicine for three days only, if a sickness cannot be cured in this time, the villager has to seek medical help in the hospital. These three days do help the villagers to cure small sicknesses themselves or to travel to the hospital safely.

6 Women Self Help Group (Saving)

Dr. Singh initiated women self help groups for saving money. There are currently 60 groups with each 10-15 members running. Each member of a group pays monthly 10-25 RS and the money is brought to a banc-account. Other income possibilities for these groups are provided by collecting and selling mahua and other natural products from the forest. The money on these bank-accounts is a guarantee to get further credit from the bank for any investments in the villages. The fourfold of the deposited money can then be raised as credit. Exemplarily, one group has saved 20'000 RS saved and was the able to get a loan of 80'000 RS from bank. The credits are mainly needed for:

- farming, cultivation and fertilizer
- medical treatment
- education
- rituals like marriage and cremation

7 VARUN Organization

Situation in Varun is pretty the same like last year. Generally, we refer to our report of last year.

Particularly, Dr. Sanjay Mishra has taken up work for the European Union (EU) in Mugalfarpur (Bihar), he started there in April 2006 as field coordinator in a cross university Leishmania research project. Further, he has been offered a job as researcher in South-Africa at the Natal University in Durban where he might start in October 2006. Thus, this shows the superb qualification of the Varun members!

8 Personal Impression

We are working with Varun for more than one year now. We have been visiting the project villages in Naugarh two times (totally 5 villages) and we keep close contact to the Varun members also by E-Mail from Switzerland to follow the project development and to advice on any issues.

We are pleased to see that Varun is doing a very good work and shows great success! The Varun projects are run well and with a lot of knowledge, motivation and professional engagement which comes from heart.

Thus, we are convinced that the success story of Varun will continue and maybe even extend!

The need for help in this area is obvious and fruits of the Varun engagement are highly visible. The whole Naugarh block has been remarkably developed (from Stone Age to Middle Age right now), last but not least through the help of Varun.

9 Recommendations from Noon.ch

As follows, our suggestions and recommendations based on our observations:

Education:

- Providing enhanced training for the teacher could further motivate and attract the children to visit the school. Such additive activities to the normal school topics could be: Playful and joyful learning, pedagogical skills, Art, Music, Sports, Play and Handicraft. This might help the children in personality forming and getting more self confidence.
- Not to start education in new villages seems – for the moment - meaningful due to the explications given.
- The teacher's salary is now at 1500 RS and therefore still at a low level. Varun wants to increase the salaries by 20% per year what is desirable, at least for some more years. The government teachers earn 1000 RS for a part time job. Teacher salaries in India are not too high.
- If Varun can sponsor the further education of talented kids (after class 5) or if this would increase the support expectation level of the villagers drastically should be evaluated. An opinion study amongst the villagers could be carried out. Generally, it would be very wishful if more kids would study after class 5.

Income Generation:

- Continue and enforce the bee-keeping project.
- Think about other income generation possibilities.
- Planting Papaya trees, sun flower could be another worthwhile long term investment to be considered. The government action to promote and support biodiesel and bioethanol might be lucrative if government support could be obtained for starting it and if distribution channels would be developed.

General:

- Clearer Future Plans and Project Extension Strategies should be communicated (and partly also developed). This will enable seamless support of the villages and rises transparency for Asha.
- Funds need to be on time, it creates problems otherwise. As said by Varun, only 50% of the Asha donation for the period 2005/2006 has been obtained up to now:
 - 77'000 RS obtained in July 2005 for the period July-December 2005
 - 73'000 RS for the period January-June 2006 is still PENDING
- Installing First Aid boxes in more villages (not only in those villages where schools are running) would be highly desirable. Varun should find and define responsible

persons in each village to take care of these boxes, their up to datedness and the distribution of medicine to sick villagers. This person will need basic training.

- The vaccination program should be continued and reach all villages.
 - Due to road construction, these villages slowly open to “the world”. Helping to be ready for this process by organizing cross-villages events like sport tournaments, cultural festivals etc. will make it easier to meet “neighbors” for the often mentally closed villagers. This is partly already done but maybe extended.
 - Varun has a clear first mover position and acts as a model and idol NGO in the whole Naugarh block. They should reserve small parts of their budget for experiments and trials for new development activities. Exemplarily, bee keeping turned out to become a great success. Other such activities might follow when trying the out.
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