

PRINCIPLES OF PROJECT SELECTION

On January 9th and 10th we visited two local development projects in Delhi, run by two different local organizations. The projects were selected out of number of project proposals that were made available to us by Rohini Muthuswami of "Asha for education". We selected the projects by the following criteria:

1. **Vision:** Does the project fit the spirit of Noon.ch, to bring development through education? We believe in the right for equal opportunities and in the inexhaustible potential of discriminated children and adolescents for development. We distrust the effectiveness of one-sided charity and believe that blind, well-meant charity can cause more harm than not doing anything.
2. **Size:** Is the project size in a reasonable relation to Noon's financial abilities? Will Noon be able to maintain a reasonable stake in the project over a longer period? Noon does not intend to support projects with more than 50% of their budgets, avoiding dependence. It is important that the project managers raise other funds besides Noon's, also from an audit perspective. On the other hand it does not make sense for Noon to support projects with far less than 30%. These organizations don't need Noon.
3. **Quality:** Is the project promising? What are the chances for an enduring success? Noon owes to its donors that we assess all supported organizations and their projects thoroughly. The Asha site reports and the Asha project proposals were very insightful.

From Asha's material we selected a project by "Concern For Humanity" (CFH) and by the "Social Development Research and Action Group" (SADRAG) according to the above criteria for a personal site visit. In the site visit we were focusing on obtaining more information on the following issues:

1. Is the project well integrated in the community it is for? Does it meet the needs of the community? What is the community, what are the children willing to contribute?
2. Does the organization understand the source of the problems they are trying to address with their projects? Is there a convincing case that the project helps to achieve an improvement?
3. The project scope and the financials must be well specified and reasonable. Measurement criteria for the project progress & success must be in place and communicated on. The aims of the project have to be specified and well operationalized to allow evaluation.

Is there a transparent communication of the project risks and an according mitigation plan?

THE ORGANIZATION

Address:

Dr Mala Bhandari
Social and Development Research and Action Group (SADRAG)
L-16, Sector-25
Noida (U. P.) - 201301
India

mail@sadrag.org.in

phone: +919312362669 / 3264313

Registration:

Established under The Societies Registration Act 1860 in March 2004

Application for F.C.R.A. No. (yet to be applied with commitment letter from foreign donar)

Application for tax exemption (pending since at least 18th August 2007, missed the date and have now applied fresh in January 2008)

Description

SADRAG was established in March 2004 by Mala Bhandari who has done a PhD in sociology from Delhi School of Economics. Her years of involvement in social research/development sector led her to identify the key areas such as education, health and self-reliance. With these ideas in mind, SADRAG was started and currently runs two programs: Ughta Suraj (rising sun) for underprivileged children and Sarthak (The Innate Capacity) for migrant women, both in Noida (U.P.). In the Asha proposal, the project name is described as "Towards a literate childhood: A network of Learning and Support Centers (LSC's) in Noida (U.P.)".

Mala Bhandari is the wife of an Air Force pilot and due to this fact has moved around a lot within India. She has two children and is working as a self-dependent consultant in the field of development assistance. Whenever possible, she raises funds to conduct research in the context of the Learning and Support Centers in Noida which allows for integrating the findings within the ongoing projects. This financial basis enables her to commit part of her time to the projects Ughta Suraj (Learning and Support Centers for mainstreaming children) and Sarthak (skill development and income generation program for the mothers of the Ughta Suraj children – mainly tailoring and sewing education with sewing machines).

Mala is closely working together with Karuna Kher who is doing the job of the Program Director for Ughta Suraj. In this position besides organizing she is predominantly defining the Learning targets and the curriculum / timetables which are afterwards discussed with the facilitators. She provides overall guidance to programme, trains the staff and determines the output indicators for the success of the programme. She closely works with the Programme Coordinator on activities enrichment and value addition to the programme. Since the end of 2007, Karuna was doing this full time job without any financial compensation as she, like Mala, wanted to do something meaningful and give back something to the society. In 2008, there is for the first time a salary budgeted for her.

Mala and Karuna believe very firmly in the rights of the children which allow them to grab the opportunity to unfold their potential, to preserve their dignity and to envisage an autonomous life. On the occasion of our visit we could assure ourselves that the interest of noon is very welcome to Mala and Karuna. Visits – also without prior notice – are most welcome. The structured and consequent approach of SADRAG allows the implementation of the project with low frictions. Thus the project achieves a high cost efficiency. To make the project sustainable it is also planned that the local communities take over financial responsibility more and more.

THE PROJECT

Delhi has grown at an enormous pace in the last 10 years. The growing city steamrolled the rural villages of the local Gujjar communities in the area of Noida. The result is a totally new urban area with industry, middle-class residential areas, densely populated tenements on the foundations of the former villages and slum clusters.

The prospering area of the modern city attracted humble farmer / landless families from West Bengal, Bihar and the interior of Uttar Pradesh, where they hardly had a living in their over-populated villages. Lacking all aspects of education and totally inexperienced in the anonymity of the urban environment, they ended up in the slums or in the hands of the Gujars. Now, after roughly 10 years, growth has reached a level of saturation. Gujars are mostly rich from selling off their land to construction companies. If they haven't spent their quick wealth already on alcohol they are landlords and earn their living from the rents. Ten years were for most of them too short to get accustomed to the new environment. Most are still poorly educated and consequently lack basic notions of ethics and civilization. As a consequence, they hold tenants almost as their property.

Migrants settled down over the past few years. Whole families live in one single room in the high rising buildings that are built on the foundations of the former villages. As their address they mention simply the name of the landlord. The logbooks at school show whole pages with kids that have all the same name in the address field, that live all in the same house of the same owner – the logbooks of only one age-group! The landlords refuse to sign certificates of residence, to demonstrate their power or having an indifferent attitude towards the tenants. With no certificate of residence, there is no admission to school, no access to passports. A class of unregistered migrants is the consequence, with virtually no rights. Scandals like that around Kohli and Pandher that killed dozens of children just for the satisfaction of their sick perversion and the police that knowingly closed their eyes are just the most shocking consequences!

The migrant families are deprived of all the rights they are entitled to. Parents work as daily wage earners in the nearby factories or as construction earners. They are illiterate and had no means to fight for their rights even if they knew them. Every child in India is by constitution guaranteed to have free access to primary school education. In Noida, poor children usually don't go to school. They work as rag pickers or cheap manual labor. Many of them stay at home to look after their younger siblings while parents are away to work. Other than in more rural areas, however, the awareness of the importance of education is widely spread among the poorest Noida. They see that school is the only way out of their misery. It is corruption and lack of means that prevents them from going there. And first of all, it is lack of self-esteem, lack of conviction that they deserve it and that they can cause a change in their lives by taking responsibility.

SADRAG believes that change comes from within. All that needs to be done is to grant the children of the poor their rights. Education purifies the children. It provides them the basis to live a self-determined life in prosperity, based on an honest, morally sound and proud intellectual basis. In order to achieve this, SADRAG offers the families support in dealing with the authorities. It helps the children to obtain certificates of residence required for

admissions to government / public schools. SADRAG is not a charity organization. It provides only help to the underprivileged to obtain what they are entitled to. It considers itself just a facilitator in the whole process. With its learning and support centres (LSC), SADRAG is providing a space to children, where they can be on their own, a world exclusively for them. At the LSC, they are learning basic skills like math, Hindi, some English. The LSCs mainly are a temple of education and peace where the kids find their self-esteem, learn their rights and that they can achieve a change in their life. They are helped to establish their own will and determination to pursue it. They learn what is right and what is not and that it is worth to vouch for it.

SADRAG is facing the usual problems: short attention spans, little ability to sit still, lack of moral standards, nervousity and lack of accountability, all as consequences of the shattering conditions in which the kids live. They observe great changes in their behavior after very short time at the LSCs. Children become quieter, take a stake in their community, the school, establish a sense of responsibility for the community. In the older centers SADRAG is very successful in mainstreaming children in governmental school and monitoring the mainstreamed. Logbooks for the presence in both, governmental school and LSCs show only very little absences and all are well excused. Demand for a place at the LSCs is by far larger than the number of places available. A place at the centre is perceived as a chance by the kids.

SADRAG is running a network of learning and support centres (LSC) in Noida, Uttar Pradesh. The programme is called "Ugta Suraj", meaning "rising sun". The youngest centre is at JJ colony (sector 16), where two classes are taught by two she-teachers. 15 children are in the senior level class (6-9 years), 25 children follow the junior level class (1-5 years). The teachers are graduated and an English conversation is well possible with them. There is no batch mainstreamed into governmental school yet.

In July 2008, about 150 children from all the three centres would be mainstreamed in the formal school system. Thereupon a fresh batch of children would be enrolled in these centres.

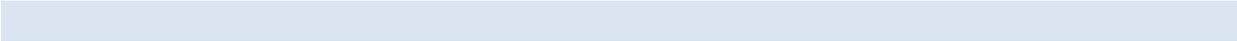
In Harola (sector 5), SADRAG is running an older center. We met Meenakshi, the program coordinator. She is a very well organized young lady with good command of English. She took us through the logbooks, the curriculum and the instructions for the teachers. The logbooks show a plan and what has been achieved for every day. A general structure is as follows:

9:00 – 10: 00	games, drawing, book reading
10:00 – 12:00	creative activities
12:30 – 13:00	lunch break
13:00 – 16:00	education: Hindi, math, English, science

At the well established centre of Harola, there is a good track record for mainstreaming kids – over a period of one year, every mainstreamed kid is monitored and all absences are reported with reasons why. SADRAG gives no incentives such as lunch – the kids come all on themselves. At Harola the current junior level class comprises 25 kids, the senior level class 20 kids. The children call their teachers affectionately "didi" (elder sister) or "bhaiyya" (elder brother). When we were at the centre, the kids had a project-wide exam. The same exam was held at all centres in order to give feedback to the teachers.

The last sector we visited was Nithari (sector 31), the place where the terrible incidents around disappearing children shocked the whole world one year ago. The centre is again younger, there is no track record for mainstreamed kids. The organization is identical and the children again seem very affectionate and motivated. We had the chance to talk to some of them and ask them about their lives. They all live in very crowded environments. Parents are working as construction workers or kitchen aids, the kids have to contribute to the income of the family by working at motor mechanics or in shops. But still they go to school in their spare time.

At Nithari we met also the project director, Karuna Kher. She was volunteering for the project and is giving it an external face, while Meenakshi is doing all the management work. Karuna Kher is from a middle-class background and is essential in the contact with the local authorities. She added some more insights and repeated the principles at Ugta Suraj. She told us a bit more about ongoing education of the facilitators. And she mentioned, that used computers would be welcome. Not for education but for the children to reward them with multi-media education programs after they have performed well.



REQUEST FOR SUPPORT

SADRAG wants to extend the Ugta Suraj network by 3 more centers. The communities are expected to provide the centers for free – confinement problems of ownership are tolerable. The salaries are paid by SADRAG, leading to the following annual budget of the growth:

Expenditure Item	Budgeted Amount Rs	CHF
6 Teachers	288,000	9,600
Field coordinator	96,000	3,200
Programme Coordinator (Karuna Kher)	120,000	4,000
Total	504,000	16,800

SADRAG is asking for support with teaching aids, books and stationery and with local travel expenses. All together, including the salaries, adds up to **584'000 Rs annually or 18'250 Swiss Francs**.

The existing centers are currently supported by SETU foundation. The funding of SETU for the existing centers will continue until April 2008.

SADRAG is asking Noon to take a significant stake in the extension.

RECOMMENDATION

SADRAG is a professionally led development organization. We share SADRAGs vision of no charity but empowerment. SADRAG considers itself only a facilitator with 100% efficiency and occasionally even private support in times of need. From this perspective, SADRAG is on the same page as Noon and a collaboration would be enriching for both.

Noida definitely needs this program. Of hundreds of drop-out children, Ugta Suraj can mainstream 40-45 per center and 140-150 in a year. Dr. Mala Bhandari is a professional in the field and her insight is impressive. She and Karuna Kher have an extremely subtle understanding of the situation and they bridge the gap between authorities, the community, the kids and the parents extremely well. We consider their enlightened approach to education and personal development extremely modern. The organization of Ugta Suraj reflects both, true love and dedication to the kids and a very strict and highly reliable administration. Meenakshi and the teachers are skilled and dedicated people with a high educational level. The free access to the community centres is proof enough for the large support by the communities.

SADRAG is aiming high and it is very promising that it will be successful. We consider SADRAG a low risk investment. On the other hand, the professional organization of SADRAG makes the costs slightly higher than other development projects. We still think, SADRAG is asking for a fair amount of support, given the high success.

We suggest that Noon takes a significant stake of the 3 new centers over the next 3 years, depending on:

1. Transparency on status of the extension
2. Transparency on other funding sources
3. Formulation of a milestones plan and subsequent regular updates
4. Noon's financial means – it is important to guarantee a constant level of support for at least two years

Alternatively, Noon could offer to support the existing centers, involving less risk and freeing up resources for the planned growth. However, we do not favor this solution, because we think that SETU funding should be maintained for the time being.

If Noon decides to support Ugta Suraj, next actions are

1. Ask SADRAG to apply for FCRA registration and to set up an international bank account
2. Specify targeted achievements of extension and success measures in detail
3. Layout of a time plan and a staged payment scheme upon achievement of milestones
4. Agree on payment modalities upon non-achievement of one of the common goals