

Visit Ugta Suraj & Vidya Ratna. Feb 26th 2015

Minutes

Meeting with Mala & Project Coordinator from Sadrag and Doris & Klaus from noon.ch

Dr. Mala Bhandari
Projekt-Koordinatorin Sandhya

noon.ch supports Dec 2014:

58 children in Nagla.

53 children in Barola

16 children in the Vidya Ratna scholarship program



For our visit this winter we prepared some questions. This is the unabridged version of the A&Q talk with Dr. Mala Bhandari, the leader of SADRAG NGO. The questions refer mainly on the Ugta Suraj program. In this program noon.ch supports two learning centres for children, who don't go to school. In the Vidya Ratna program noon.ch supports selected gifted children from Ugta Suraj program with school fee, uniform and books to attend a good school.

Questions and Answers

Minutes written by Doris from noon.ch and checked by Mala from SADRAG

How is the present situation in the Vidya Ratna Program?

Altogether there are 20 children in the Vidya Ratna program up to now. Three of the children supported by a trust lost their support and we were asked to admit these students. As noon already decided last year to admit more children in the program, we agreed. One of the children is still supported by one private donor.

How to achieve sending children to the Vidya Ratna program from Barola and Nagla?
As Sadrag has four LCs in Noida, we didn't understand, why only one child from our former centre Agahpur was in the Vidya Ratna program.

Barola and Nagla are too far away from the Noida Secondary School, where the Vidya Ratna Students are. SADRAG doesn't want to be engaged in the transportation of the children to school. Also the good contact from Mala to the principal of this school is helpful. We would have to meet the extra costs for coordination in another good school close to Barola or Nagla.

We see on all the pictures in the Ugta Suraj report only neat school rooms and never the basic one in Barola.

We discussed the subject, and Mala agreed to write in future also about the difficulties she faces running these learning centres. For example: Barola is an old panchayat hall, which isn't nicely maintained by the responsible people of the panchayat.



The children show, how many siblings they have

How many children stay in the Ugta Suraj program more than one year before the child goes to a regular school?

If the children have to care for their siblings or if the children are over the age for going to the first classes, and they will also stay more than one year.

What do the children learn in the English lesson?

The children like to learn English as they told us, but the capacity of the community teachers is poor, so the teaching in this subject is limited.

Which books do they use?

We have seen a syllabus made by the LC-coordinator, but Mala told us, that the teachers follow the syllabus to some extent. The LC coordinator told us, that she visits all centres every second week.

What do you do for the teachers training?

We train the teachers ourselves. We have monthly meetings with them, preferably Saturdays, and that is when syllabus and method of teaching are discussed. Sandhya, Program Coordinator, teaches them how a particular topic has to be taught and gives them Photostats of additional exercises that are required to be done. On that day, teachers also carry their stationery and notebooks for their centres.

We have capacity building exercises as well, like recently, we had a trainer from outside, who taught them how to make paper files, envelopes and folders. Teachers enjoy such sessions and share with the children too.

What are the difficulties you face with the Ugta Suraj program?

LC's are in the Ugta Suraj program performed in the panchayat hall. The place is dependent on the panchayat's maintenance. Specially if there was a wedding, the surrounding of the hall is a big mess. Also in Nagla was a marriage before we arrived. All the old food was still standing around. The surrounding of the LC in Barola is wet and filthy; the water drain doesn't work. It also happened, that the community hall was broken before the new was ready built.

Above are the issues of concern for us but children don't mind because at this age, they would not like to go out of their community for studies.



Panchayat hall in Nagla after a wedding

Where do you have the school material you need to teach the children? Which material do they get from you?

Nagla LC has two rooms - with cupboard, blackboard and three computers. The rooms can be locked. Children can see on the computer educational films. Barola LC has only open rooms and a not working washroom, where the teaching material is stored. Children get every month stationery material they

need. Also books are there, but it isn't clear, up to which extend the teachers use it. In case we would support the salary for better teachers, Mala explained: we would not find this teacher within this community. Teachers from outside would create problems.

My reservation is that these are learning and support centres, where we prepare and groom children for entering and sticking to formal schools. That's one of the reasons why the emphasis is more on learning to sit, listen talk, drawing and crafts rather than studying, which they will do, as it is, while in school. They have no dearth of material as such.



Learning centre in the new panchayat hall in Nagla

What do you know about the health and nutritional situation of the children?
Influence of anaemia on the education program.

Up to now there weren't considerations about influence of the nutritional situation of the children on their capacity to learn. Both of the LC's have potable water for the children. Once a month children get biscuits and chocolates. Mala told she is doing this since the children should not be deprived from these things.

We do try to have health check-ups for the children. We had around two years back with district health department. We didn't do it last year. We would do it now.

Situation of toilets for the children?

In Barola there isn't a toilet and Nagla's new panchayat building has a toilet, but this still doesn't have water connection. Nobody really know, where the kids go to the toilet. Mala explained, that if the parents live in a colony with brick rooms five families have together one bathroom.

Mala: This is one touchy subject. The children go home or go in the open-air. We have not been able to do much about it. We need to change their behaviour and habits but where is the infrastructure?

How do you see the main changes within the last 10 years for the children coming from places like Nagla and Barola? Same, better, worse?

There is a definite change in terms of improvement of lifestyle. When one child in the family goes to school regularly, change is bound to come in the rest of the family. Costs for life, yes, are steadily increasing. However, the children are the change agents, they convince their parents to think differently. Parents come to us thanking that their children attend school because of us. It's all qualitative change.

How can you be sure, that we support the really poor children, where the parents can't pay for better schools?

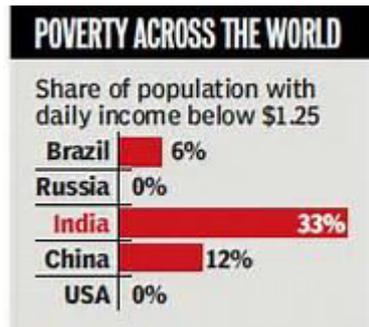
We know their migrant background and the places they live. Nobody would live like this, if not necessary. Their household incomes and occupations are other indicators that reflect their marginalised status.

How is the poverty line in India/Delhi defined?

This calculation is confusing. There are different approaches and nobody knows, which one is considered as the correct one. There is a lot of politics in this calculation.

We may read the following link:

<http://thediplomat.com/2014/03/indias-growing-urban-poverty-crisis/>



POVERTY NUMBERS, OLD & NEW (in million)

Regions/ countries	By 2005 PPP (\$1.25 line)	By 2011 PPP (\$1.25 line*)
Developing world	1,215	567.3
Sub-Saharan Africa	413.7	299.8
South Asia	506.8	134.2
East Asia and Pacific	250.9	105.9
India	400.2	98.9
Nigeria	107.7	76.3
Latin America and Caribbean	32.3	26.8
Europe and Central Asia	3.2	2.6
Middle East and North Africa	8	2

*The authors have used the existing poverty line drawn on the basis of the 2005 PPP index for the new 2011 PPP index
Source: Laurence Chandy and Homi Kharas, Brookings Institution, 2014

Up to which age is the compulsory school attendance for all children?

14 years under Right to Education Act.

From which age onwards are the children allowed to work?

14 years. There are some restrictions about the kind of work the 14-18 years group is allowed to do. The law is only observed in case the situation of the family allows.

Now, a bill is to be passed that has a blanket ban over children till 16 years of age, working in any occupation.

What is in your opinion the strength of your concept and how can we show, that our effort with the children is successful?

Most of the children, who stayed at home or helped their parents are going to regular school after this year in Ugtta Suraj program. The teacher and project coordinator keep contact with the principal for one year to see if the child will not drop out. We are also in touch with school and parents to see if the child continues to go to school or not. This monitoring is done for one full year. This strategy helps keeping the school drop out rate under check and action can be taken promptly. We are able to get 80-90% school retention till date.

Are you also in contact with the parents of the children?

*There are meetings with the parents. Mala want to include the nutrition of the children as a topic in the meetings. She has the material for this already made for an other organization.
Yes, we plan to include nutrition as a subject for information whenever we have parents meetings.*

What are you doing for the esteem/self confidence of the girls to stand for their right?

Mala is involved in the campaign "safe Noida". The children are taught to speak up for themselves. This was a central govt. project for one year and its over on 31 March 2015. We are applying for its continuation through other donors.

