

SOCIAL AND DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH AND ACTION GROUP (SADRAG)

THE ORGANISATION

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SITE VISIT REPORT AUGUST 26TH 2008

SADRAG started a forth centre on May 12th 2008 in Agahpur (Sector 41) in Noida with two female facilitators Ms Santosh and Ms Kavita. Ms Santosh is taking care of the more advanced bunch of children, Ms Kavita of the smaller and less advanced children.

We meet Karuna Kher in the Nithari Centre and can clarify open questions while we see around 40-50 children studying with the two local facilitators. With Karuna we proceed to Aghapur and arrive at the centre shortly before the lunch break.

In line with fundamentals of Ugta Suraj program, this centre follows community centric approach. The centre is housed in village Agahpur's community centre which has a big hall and a small room. The Pradhan (local community leader) is a practicing lawyer in the District Law Court and has a tremendous interest in the education of children in and around the vicinity of the village. Therefore he threw open the doors of community hall for the children.

At the centre, we see a bit more than 20 children. Significantly more boys than girls are attending the lesson. They seem highly motivated and most of them also take the chance to recite for us some hindi verses they have learnt during their time in the centre. Although we are delaying their lunch break the children continue to be very disciplined. Their shoes are neatly stringed in a row at the wall on the side, while they wait for their colleagues to recite their verses.

We talked to the teachers, mainly to Ms Santosh, who knows English well. The discussion with her was very reaffirming. She is an energetic, inspired lady and we are very confident that she and Ms Kavita will be able to establish and run the school successfully. Karuna was presenting the curriculum, the book with the children's names and their level of participation. It was obvious that the two teachers and Karuna were able to replicate the successful system of the other centres of Ugta Suraj also in Aghapur.

Meenakshi, the programme coordinator, has resigned and Karuna took over her tasks. In fact Karuna and Mala decided not to contract anybody again for this job but to allocate these duties permanently in the portfolio of Karuna. So Karuna is now coordinating the centres and coaches all the facilitators intensively, especially the newer ones like Ms Santosh and Ms Kavita who need more assistance. Karuna and Mala also recruited the facilitators within the community of Agahpur. As trustworthy persons the facilitators are thus well positioned to motivate the local parents to send their children to the centre. During the installation of the centre and until trust and awareness is raised in the community, this is an extremely sensitive issue - parents can only slowly form an opinion based on what they experience. As the centre gets established in the community it will be easier to find children willing to attend the lessons. So next year it should be possible to form two classes each with around 20 children.

Karuna makes sure that the curriculum is effected adequately in all the centres. Alternately she visits one centre every day and prepares the content of the lessons according to the curriculum and the didactical issues with the facilitators. She also discusses upcoming problems and organizational matters with them. By this means she can ensure the homogeneously high quality of the lessons. Karuna has also adapted the curriculum in the course of her experiences with the entrance examinations of the government and public (private) schools in order to assure an optimal preparation of the children and a high enrolment rate.

In its few months of existence, Aghapur centre has already coached a small number of children into government school. Supervision of them is just being set up, while the facilitators still focus more on establishing the school in the community.

Mala is taking care of the financial part of SADRAG and has regular meetings with Karuna to discuss and plan how to proceed. When it comes to recruiting and employing facilitators Mala and Karuna take conjoined decisions.

For the other centres of Ughta Suraj, the enrolment of the previous bunch of children was very successful. All the children who tried could be placed either in public (private) or in government schools and up to date none of the children dropped out. For the extraordinarily gifted children a private sponsorship could be established out of Malas and Karunas circle of friends. These children are given the chance to attend a private school instead of the overcrowded government schools. Some of the parents were even able to pay the costs for a private school themselves. As the public (private) schools are much better than the government schools SADRAG's aim for this year is to place as many children as possible in a private school prior to the government school.

At the time of our visit, SADRAG did not have a FCRA number due to corruption. We support SADRAG in their position not to bribe but to apply pressure via the official channel. SADRAG at that moment was forced to take a private loan of Rs. 40'000 which will be repayed with no interests when FCRA is available and noon's payments have arrive.