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## KISHORE KISHORI BAHINI

This programme was started towards the middle of last year and this year it has gathered more steam. Before we give details of what they have achieved it would be a good idea to clarify exactly what Swanirvar wants to do with these 10-16-year-old children. First, we are not trying to take them away from school, but we would like to make school education very different from what it is for them now, by making the teaching-learning process meaningful, enjoyable and relevant. One thinks it would be easy to do this in the non-urban areas of India, where its overwhelming majority of students and schools are. Take the children outside the school and the classroom, make innovative use of the physical and social environment, of local materials, of the area's art, craft, and folklore, and education would be a lot more productive and a lot more rewarding than if you stick to the text book, the classroom and rote learning. Easy in thought, but not preferred in act, we find. At least not by the majority, and if certain elite schools have always had their own agenda for being different, in the thousands of rural schools all over the country, education is still cramming, vomiting the undigested and indigestible according to rules very carefully framed - barring maybe in Madhya Pradesh where intervention by Eklavya has led to a very healthy difference. Children read about medieval Europe's ruling dynasties but do not investigate local history, customs, culture. They memorise features of the Ruhr as if their life depended on it and maybe it does too - but do not observe, record and understand local geography, local - and local does not have to mean national, or regional natural resources. There is such a wide variety of exciting local flora and fauna but our Botany, Zoology, Ecology text books do not care about developing interest in them. We think there are two basic reasons why things are like this. First, in the years following independence we have totally accepted the ideology of the industrial system that says two things:

i) urban-office-factory life offers more than rural life, and ii) standardization is not just inevitable, it is desirable. So no need was felt to have a separate system for the villages and education there was made and meant to copy the ideals and the model accepted by urban centres. In cities there is very little natural environment and very little scope to leave the school's precincts to learn anything, so in villages also the teaching-learning process was restricted to within the four walls.

It is idle to speculate what could have been done in the first flush of independence, but over the decades the teaching fraternity set certain goals for itself and, unfortunately, encouraging and participating in local creativity did not seem to be of any use in reaching those goals. It is

not by any means an easy task to come up with a series of meaningful village-based activities corresponding to lessons and chapters of the curriculum. Even to be moderately creative, one has to really work, and think, and experiment. This indeed is our main task. We are trying to evolve model activities which would make high school curricula exciting and relevant (you cannot really have one without the other). In the thirties Gandhi formulated the idea of Basic Education in which productive work would be the core of a school's activity. Soon after independence Basic Education was allowed to die an unsung death, and a massive tokenism called work education, socially useful productive work, etc. took its place. Happily many state governments are showing the courage to admit the total fraudulence this has become and are doing away with it. Schools are for texts with the written word. They are for the elite in a class society who will not venture out of the cocoon of the classroom. But we look at it from another way. Rural high schools are very valuable social assets in terms of their physical infrastructure, the large number of trained personnel they employ, and the fact that 600-800 or more young persons spend a large part of their day there during a very creative period of their lives. The community and society have a right to ask for more from this storehouse of resources, now rendered akin to silos. Secondly the NGO worldview believes in the inevitability of decentralization. It cannot be very long before we see true participatory democracy in the three-tier panchayats. Then we shall require baseline surveys, local resource surveys, local monitoring of development projects will require periodic surveys and feedbacks, impact analyses will require more surveys, implementation of locally formulated policy will require the informed and the motivated at both stages. This is what we are preparing our Kishore Kishori Bahinis for. High school students along with their teachers must be made to do useful development work as an integral part of their curriculum. Take Baduria block. It has two NGOs, employing about 50 people who can help in that sort of work. But the block also has 27 high schools. If each has on an average 750 students in classes VI to X and 10 teachers, that gives us about 20,000 students and 275 teachers, potentially altogether 20,200 development volunteers instead of the NGOs' 50. There are about 5,600 rural high schools in West Bengal with 40,00,000 students. At the same time, there are no village maps, no gram panchayat maps, no data base, or analysis of local resources, problems and opportunities and of course no system to periodically update all this information. We at Swanirvar think a permanent motivated body of 500 students per gram panchayat, if they are put to work, can create miracles. Our Kishore Kishori Bahinis are the pioneers of that miracle.

At the end of 1997-98 we had 25 boys and 34 girls in our KKBs in five villages. The expansion this year is shown below, according to the class in the schools they go to.

| Village     | Boys | Girls | IV   | V     | VI    | VII   | VIII  | IX  | X   | XI  |
|-------------|------|-------|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-----|-----|-----|
|             | B/G  | B/G   | B/G  | B/G   | B/G   | B/G   | B/G   | B/G | B/G | B/G |
| Fatullyapur | 3    | 15    | --   | 0/2   | 2/2   | 0/3   | 1/6   | 0/1 | -   | 0/1 |
| Chandalati  | 8    | 14    | 4/6  | -     | 0/2   | 0/4   | 1/2   | 2/0 | -   | 1/0 |
| Bajitpur    | 10   | 7     | 1/0  | 0/1   | 2/1   | 2/2   | 2/3   | 2/0 | 1/0 | -   |
| Andharmanik | 14   | 5     | 1/0  | 2/0   | 1/1   | 7/2   | 2/1   | -   | 1/0 | 0/1 |
| Kolsur      | 16   | 2     | 4/0  | 5/0   | 1/1   | 2/1   | 2/0   | 1/0 | 1/0 | -   |
| Beliyakhali | 12   | 13    | -    | 2/5   | 0/7   | 6/1   | 2/0   | -   | 2/0 | -   |
| Uttar Media | 9    | 8     | —    | 1/1   | 3/1   | 1/1   | 1/5   | 2/0 | 1/0 | -   |
| Gokulpur    | 6    | 8     | -    | 0/1   | 2/4   | -     | 0/2   | 2/0 | 1/1 | 1/0 |
| Total - 8   | 78   | 72    | 10/6 | 10/10 | 11/19 | 18/14 | 11/19 | 9/1 | 7/1 | 2/2 |

From Class V to Class X every year children have to read about the life cycle of a tree, its uses, conservation, etc. In Class VII there is a chapter on medicinal herbs. The KKB prepares nurseries, does grafting. Similarly in various classes they are taught about environmental pollution, water conservation, parasitic worms, etc. To supplement the theoretical information with practical knowledge, to keep them aware of their own surroundings, and to sent up and so everybody was help the Panchayats, should they ask for it, we trained the KKB in making various surveys, presenting the collected data for they now had a secure through tables and various kinds of charts and graphs, in first aid, in poultry and animal vaccination, keeping records of temperature and rainfall, in making land use maps of mouzas. It has not been easy work, as not all guardians were willing to the families said a closed toilet the children spend time over "useless" work, and making charts etc. was something everybody was learning from scratch.

The following trainings were organised for them during vacations or over weekends.

| Subject   | Children attending |
|---|--------------------|
| General health and hygiene                                  | 63                 |
| First aid   | 145                |
| Common diseases of domesticated animals and their treatment | 91                 |
| Nutrition   | 107                |
| Problems of adolescence and puberty in girls                | 50                 |

The following table details the work the KKBs have done in the various villages. We are being

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strict with ourselves and are not including any activity that was either not finished during the year or was not done to the expected level of competence. Each activity, however, was started in every village.

| Activity                                 | No. of villages |
|--|-----------------|
| Nursery for herbs                        | 5               |
| Diarrhoea and worms survey               | 6               |
| Cattle, goats, and poultry birds survey  | 8               |
| Cattle, goats vaccinated - 487 animals   | 4               |
| Hens and ducks vaccinated - 6088 birds   | 8               |
| Sanitation (tubewell and toilets) survey | 8               |
| Tubewells bleached - 943                 | 8               |
| Temperature recorded daily               | 8               |
| Rainfall recorded daily                  | 5               |
| Mouza maps                               | 6               |