

Report to Donors and Key Associates **January to December 2008**

A) Operations

1. Educational initiatives at Imlee Mahuaa Nae Taaleem Centre For Learning

During the period January to April 2008, we continued to teach our two students Anamika and Hiralal and ended the term and our first academic year in the middle of April with a meeting with their parents. We presented to the parents written reports of their work at school during the term and the children too gave them through a short presentation, a glance at the skills they had learnt at school during the term in areas such as yoga, poetry recitation, English and Hindi conversation, etc.

We commenced our second academic year on June 9, 2008 and were overwhelmed with the response from the Balenga Para community for the school. We were flooded with inquiries from parents of children from Balenga Para and the nearby villages, who wanted to admit their children to Imlee Mahuaa. Given the constraints of the size of the premises that were available at our disposal and in order to ensure that we were able to maintain a high level of quality in our academic processes, we restricted the intake to 13 students from three of the five clusters that comprise our village panchayat i.e. Kibai Balenga. We encouraged students from other villages especially those outside a 5 km radius to join schools in their own villages or other nearby villages, to save the little children long commutes to school.

All 15 students (the 13 new ones and the 2 who continued from last year) have attended school regularly barring absence due to illness (which has been high in the case of some children). Of the 15 students studying at Imlee Mahuaa six are boys and nine are girls. All are in the age group 3 to 9 years.

Towards building teaching skills among local youth, we decided that we would hire local, educated youth and train them to be teachers and would keep our intake of teachers hired from urban areas to the very minimum. We received a very good response from local youth, both girls and boys interested in working as teachers in Imlee Mahuaa, but none barring one of the candidates had studied beyond class 12. After rigorous interviews and an orientation day spent by every prospective

candidate at Imlee Mahuaa, we hired Mr Sahdev Netam, Mr Gautam Sethiya and Ms Sunita Potai as teachers during July and August 2008.

Sahdev and Sunita hail from the Muriya Gond tribe and Gautam is a native Chhattisgadhi. Sahdev and Sunita have studied upto class 12 and Gautam has completed his first year of the Bachelor of Arts degree course of the Pandit Ravishankar Shukla University at Raipur. Among the various terms and conditions on which the three teachers were hired, two important ones are:

- They shall complete their Bachelor's degrees as private external candidates within three years (for Sahdev and Sunita) and two years (for Gautam) respectively and on their successfully completing each year of such course within the agreed time, Imlee Mahuaa shall reimburse to them the respective course fees;
- They shall take effective steps to attain fluency in the English language within a period of three years, taking advantage of the teachers' training program that Imlee Mahuaa will offer them.

After an initial orientation to the working of the school for about two weeks respectively, the three new teachers were allotted five children each towards their class strengths. Each of the classes (students and teachers together) chose names for their respective classes - Pipal, Himalay and Kachha Karela. Going forward we propose to keep the student to teacher ratio in the school at 5:1. This is being done keeping in mind the interests of both students and teachers.

A revised time table was drawn up for the school and the teachers were also introduced to culinary skills and trained in cooking three different dishes for breakfast. A cooking and cleaning rotation plan ('rota') was established for all the teachers and the two co-founders - Smitha and Prayaag. The cleaning rota includes all the children too. Children and staff continued to enjoy nutritious and balanced breakfasts and lunch at school throughout the year.

Given the increasing work load in the kitchen, we also engaged Ms Sundarbatti Sodhi, a resident of Balenga Para to help in the kitchen and fill water and outsourced the making of leaf bowls (a substitute for steel plates/bowls) to another resident of the village Ms Ramdai Marawi. The school's first employee Ms Birajbatti Marawi who has worked with the school since its inception in 2007, has started teaching folk music and dance to the children and teachers during the second term in addition to her work in the kitchen.

The academic timetable now includes classes on yoga, semi-classical Hindustani music, conversational Hindi and English, poetry recitation, story telling, drawing and painting, basic mathematical concepts, reading the English and Hindi alphabets, folk music and dance, developing motor and sensorial skills using Montessori methods, sports and walks into the natural environs around Balenga Para. In addition, Smitha and Prayaag give regular classes in conversational English individually to all the teachers.

At the end of the first and second terms of the second academic year of the school i.e. in September and December 2008, meetings were held with the parent body of the school. At both such meetings, the school children presented short cultural programs showcasing the skills that they had acquired at school during the previous term. Thereafter the parents were given an overview of the work that had been done at school during the term. This was followed by open discussions with the parent body and one on one meetings with the parents of the children to discuss their respective children's work at school and presenting to them written reports of their child's work. Since most parents are unlettered, the written reports were explained to them orally with appropriate translations in Halbi or Gondi being facilitated by the new teachers, wherever the parents were unable to understand Hindi.

The school has insisted that both parents of every child attend the parent-teachers' meetings and in deference to this request, the parent body responded very positively at both meetings.

2. Accreditation with the National Institute of Open Schooling, New Delhi

During September 2008, Smitha and Prayaag undertook a trip to New Delhi to initiate the process of applying for accreditation with the National Institute of Open Schooling ('NIOS'), NOIDA. Receiving the accreditation will allow the school to conduct examinations for classes 3, 5 and 8 independently under the NIOS umbrella and to train students for the class 10 and 12 examinations conducted by the NIOS.

The educational program of the NIOS is very flexible and allows a wide choice among subjects, with few or no compulsory subjects and with the facility of taking the examinations of various subjects at a pace that suits the student. It also allows the student to choose from a wide array of vocational subjects at the class 12 level. We believe that the NIOS pattern of examinations would suit the needs of academically oriented students from Balenga Para and its neighboring areas better than programs offered by other educational boards. Certificates

awarded by the NIOS are recognized by educational institutions and employers all over India.

We expect to prepare and submit an application for accreditation with the NIOS during the last term of the current academic year.

3. New premises for Imlee Mahuaa

During the parent-teachers' meeting in September 2008, the matter relating to space required for accommodating the school as it grows was discussed with the parent body. This meeting was also attended by certain village elders on invitation by the school who assured us that they would look into the matter. After the teachers and students returned to school for the second term, the village elders and some elected representatives to the village panchayat, informed us that a piece of land that could be used to construct new premises for the school had been identified.

We inspected the land and found it suitable for the purposes of the school. Thereafter the residents of Balenga Para village made the necessary applications to the Tehsildar, Kondagaon for allotment of the identified piece of land to Imlee Mahuaa. The Kibai Balenga Gram Panchayat also passed a resolution allotting the said piece of land to Imlee Mahuaa and gave us a copy of such resolution and verbally authorized the commencement of the construction on such premises, pending approval of the allotment of the land by the Tehsildar. Immediately thereafter, necessary steps were taken to commence construction of the premises. The premises are being constructed using local design and resources - both material and labor to the maximum extent possible.

4. Teacher's training in Montessori methods at Chennai

Between December 13 and 22, the entire staff (except Smitha) traveled to Chennai to learn select Montessori methods at Vruksha House of Montessori, (a well established school in Chennai co-founded by Ms Jayashree Radhakrishnan and Ms Nandini Joshi), that is collaborating with other schools in Tamilnadu and with the Government of Tamilnadu to train teachers in Montessori methods.

The visit to Chennai had twin objectives:

- to expose members of the staff to the world outside their village as none of them had traveled outside Bastar, or experienced

matters that city folks take for granted (e.g. traveling on a train, shopping in a supermarket, etc.)

- to train the teachers in select Montessori methods

Both objectives were largely met during the visit.

During their stay at Chennai, the staff met with Mr R K Radhakrishnan, Deputy Editor of The Hindu, Mr D K Oza, retd Chief Secretary of the Tamilnadu Government and social worker, Ms Aarti Madhusudan who works with not for profit organizations on governance matters, Ms Meenakshi Chittaranjan a renowned senior Bharatanatyam artiste and teacher and the teachers and staff of Vruksha House of Montessori. They also visited the Crocodile Bank, the Marina Beach, the Kapaaleeshwara temple and shops and supermarkets in Chennai and experienced the urban way of life living with Prayaag and his family. The visit got press coverage in the Hindu on December 22, 2008 - copy attached with this report.

The first lot of material required for introducing Montessori methods at Imlee Mahuaa has already been ordered from Pratishtha - the Montessori Store, Hyderabad and the store has assured delivery at Imlee Mahuaa before the commencement of the third term on January 5, 2009. We expect to introduce Montessori methods in the school in the third term of the current academic year.

5. Karadi Path for learning English and Hindi

During the visit to Chennai, Prayaag met with Mr C P Vishwanath of Karadi Tales Company to explore the possibility of adopting the Karadi Path learning methodology for learning the basics of English and Hindi languages. The Karadi Path methodology has been used successfully in government schools in Goa and Tamilnadu to teach the basics of the English language to children whose mother tongue is not English. The methodology involves learning the language like one learns one's mother-tongue and uses story-telling and lessons in music to establish the fundamentals of the language in the child. The methodology is very similar to the one already in use in Imlee Mahuaa and its implementation would greatly enhance the learning experience of the children and teachers at the school.

During the meeting it was agreed that Mr Vishwanath would visit Imlee Mahuaa during January 2009, and train the staff during his visit in implementing the Karadi path at the school. He will also dispatch in advance the necessary audio and textual material that was required to implement the Karadi path. Mr Nachiket Mor of ICICI Foundation has

already kindly agreed in advance to sponsor the financial costs of this initiative.

6. Community work

An essential part of our work in Balenga Para is reaching out to the larger community beyond the parent body of Imlee Mahuaa. During the last year we have continued to build good neighborly relations with the residents of Balenga Para. Trust between the residents of the village and us, continues to build steadily. One of the areas besides children's education where the villagers and co-founders share common ground is health.

Balenga Para is a clean village and the residents live close to nature in every way. However, awareness of the benefits of simple inexpensive methods of ensuring personal hygiene and nutrition and especially about their strong linkages to health and resistance to disease is almost non-existent. Thus while use of scented soap for bathing is in vogue among the villagers, almost none of the villagers use soap to cleanse their hands after attending to calls of nature or before cooking food. Areas adjoining the hand pumps of the four tube wells in the village are used for a variety of purposes – bathing, cleaning vessels, spitting, attending to calls of nature, etc.

Balenga Para is ravaged by fevers, malaria, chicken pox and diarrhea throughout the year, and in heightened intensity in the post monsoon season. Herbal remedies (in addition to mumbo jumbo and sacrificial offerings) proffered by the four witch doctors (or sirahas) of the village are still the first line of treatment for most residents of the village. Over the last eighteen months we have seen several deaths in our village that in our amateur view could have been avoided if the respective individuals had got timely medical advice from trained medical doctors.

During this period, our neighbors have increasingly approached us too for help in treatment of fevers, diarrheas and skin related ailments, especially of young children. We try and diagnose their ailments with the help of our elementary knowledge of diseases and their symptoms and with the help of books such as "Where There Is No Doctor" and a "Family Guide To Homoeopathy". We treat the ailments with a variety of over the counter allopathic, homoeopathic, ayurvedic or home remedies that we stock for our own use and also counsel the village folk on hygiene, nutrition, simple home remedies such as steaming for colds or oral re-hydration solution for treating diarrhea on such occasions and advise them to see a trained medical doctor or the

village nurse in cases where we ourselves would normally consult a doctor.

We have also observed that the 'mitanin' program (under which certain women in the village are trained by the village nurse to administer medicines for common ailments and are equipped with a stock of such medicines including antibiotics) does not seem to be working at all in our village. Few people approach the village nurse at the primary health centre which is located in another cluster of our village simply because a visit to the centre involves a commute of 3 kms each way.

We are currently exploring ways and means to revive the 'mitanin' program in our village, one that has yielded benefits not only in health but also in the empowerment of women in many ways in villages where it is being successfully run. We are also exploring the possibility of having trained medical doctors or nurses as resident volunteers to help us augment the impact of our work in the area of health.

7. Financing education of needy children in Chennai

During the year, we have continued to bear the educational expenses of four needy girls in Chennai:

- 1) Ms Anitha - studying for her Bachelor's degree in electronics engineering
- 2) Ms Mahalakshmi - studying for her Bachelor's degree in English
- 3) Ms Priyadarshini - studying in primary school
- 4) Ms Priyanka - studying in primary school

All four girls continue to do well in their respective courses.

We will continue to actively identify needy children and provide them effective support through their school, college and professional education and ensure that their journey through formal education is as smooth as that of children from more privileged backgrounds.

We were able to find a dedicated sponsor for Ms Anitha's education in Ms Jasmine and Mr Divesh Wadhwan last year and shall continue the search for dedicated sponsors for financing the education of the other girls during the year. However since the educational expenses of the other three girls are not very substantial at this point in time, we are able to meet such expenses from interest and accumulated incomes from earlier years.

The educational costs for the girls vary from Rs 12,000 per annum for the younger girls to Rs 80,000 per annum for one of the senior girls.

B) Fund raising and budgeting for expenses

In order to raise funds for Imlee Mahuaa, we made fund raising and networking trips to New Delhi, Pune and Mumbai during the year and reached out to our friends over the phone and the internet. Many friends reached out to us spontaneously after hearing about the work that we are doing.

Vineeta and Dhananjay Date (Swiss Re - India), Divesh and Jasmine Wadhavan (GIVE India), KK Moradian and Dr Oswin Thayal continued to support us as donors from the last year.

During the year, we also added several new donors to our existing donor base.

New donors include the Ernst & Young Foundation (Rajeev Memani and Sridhar Iyer), New Delhi, Allegro Corporate Financial Advisors Pvt Ltd (Kunal Kashyap and his colleagues), Bangalore, Nachiket Mor (ICICI Foundation), Abhay Bhagwat (Hindustan Unilever), Kripal Joshi, Gauri Bhagwat, Rajan Sabhlok (Accenture), Sharmila Brahme and Vinod Agarwal both practicing chartered accountants and Shoma and Samanvay Joshi both graphic designers from Tampa, USA.

Our relationships with our donors have been very fulfilling - they provide us with the means to operate and grow and with valuable advice and help us in various other ways as mentioned at various places in this report.

There are several new donors in the pipeline and we are in the process of providing them / have provided them with information that would enable them to take decisions regarding funding our work.

We have also filed an application with the Echoing Green Foundation, New York for obtaining fellowships that would help fund our work in Bastar. This is a competitive application that is processed in three stages. We have submitted our proposal for the first stage and are expecting to hear from the Foundation on January 10, 2009 as to whether we have been selected to participate in the second stage of the competition.

Irrespective of whether we receive a positive response from Echoing Green or not, we have benefited greatly from the first stage itself which involved filling out a detailed application involving fourteen questions that required introspection, research and coaching from two

external coaches – Mr Abhay Bhagwat and Mr Avinash Joshi. By participating in this application, we were able to formally think about and articulate what we were doing, why we were doing it, the root causes of the current situation in the society where we are working, what changes we would like to see in the society where we are working, and what is required to be done to make the change possible.

In order to facilitate the process of receiving donations from overseas, we have recently filed with the ICICI Bank papers necessary for establishing a FCRA bank account. Once the bank account is established, we will file an application with the Ministry of Home Affairs seeking their permission to allow us to receive donations from abroad.

Donations received are spent on a variety of operating costs (food, school supplies, staff salaries, hosting volunteers, teachers training, warm clothes for children, medicines...) and asset building costs (school building, kitchen equipment, desks...). During the next two years we expect to spend on an average Rs 1000 per month per child directly, pay our teachers average salaries of Rs 2500 per month, purchase Montessori educational aids of approximately Rs 200,000 every year, spend approximately Rs 10 lakhs on constructing school premises and purchasing assets required for the school and for the community work, etc.

We would also like to work towards a situation of financial stability where at any point in time we have money in the bank to pay for the next three year's budgeted expenses.

C) Sourcing people

1. Imlee Mahuaa

a. Principal for Imlee Mahuaa

Given Smitha's formal training and experience in education and teaching, we had planned that in the initial years of the school, Smitha would be the Principal of the school. However, her prolonged expected absence from Balenga Para following her recent marriage has created a need for grooming / recruiting a new person for this role. We have recently initiated a search for a suitable candidate.

b. English teachers, community workers

We also need more people to help assist teaching English and various other subjects to teachers and students at Imlee Mahuaa and to help

build our work in the areas of health, hygiene and nutrition in the Balenga Para community.

Towards this end, we have started working with Prof Farida Lambay at Nirmala Niketan College, Mumbai, Prof Denzyl Saldanah at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai, CSO Partners (Soumitra Ghosh) at Chennai, I Volunteer (Shalabh Sahai) at Mumbai and Archana Bali in Alaska to tap into their organizations / networks for volunteers who might be interested in working with us at Balenga Para. We were introduced to the two colleges in Mumbai and I Volunteer by Aarti Madhusudan and to CSO Partners by Nachiket Mor.

In September 2008, we were invited by IIT Bombay at Powai to make a presentation to the staff and students of the Centre for Technology Alternatives for Rural Areas (CTARA) and some of their students have expressed interest in working with us.

Students and staff of Srishti, School of Architecture and Design, Bangalore visited us during the year and interacted with our staff and students. Some of them have expressed interest in volunteering with us. We continued to get receive visitors from India and abroad throughout the year referred by Saathi Samaaj Sevi Sanstha, Kumhar Para - the not for profit organization that helped us set up Imlee Mahuaa in Balenga Para.

We have received about 4-5 enquiries for volunteering opportunities from the I Volunteer network and 4 enquiries from Archana's network of friends.

One volunteer - Sheetal from Bangalore - tapped by the I Volunteer network is slated to arrive in Balenga Para on January 8, 2009 to spend a week with us, with her two friends. Another volunteer Jaya from Ahmedabad - tapped by Archana Bali's network is slated to arrive in Balenga Para in the third week of January 2009 to spend a few weeks with us along with her daughter Meher who is 18 months old. A third volunteer Anuja based in New Delhi - also tapped by Archana's network has already started making flash cards for us from her residence in New Delhi. Other wannabe volunteers are still in the process of finalizing dates on which they could come and spend time with us at Balenga Para.

2. Staff for supporting the education of needy children in Chennai

Given the small size of operations of this initiative, it does not require any dedicated full-time staff and is being monitored by Ms Nandini Joshi and Mr R K Radhakrishnan, who are resident in Chennai. Both

volunteers are in regular touch with the four girls whose education is being supported and their parents and ensure that the all necessary steps are being taken to ensure that the education of the four girls continues without hitches and that the girls are applying themselves diligently in their educational pursuits. We do not expect to need any additional staff support in this area in the coming year.

D) Strengthening Governance and Expanding the Board of Trustees

Over the last twelve months, we have been discussing with Ms Aarti Madhusudan, of Governance Counts the matter of examining our own governance processes and making them more robust wherever required as well as strengthening our Board of Trustees, given the expansion in our work and the associated needs.

We are increasingly feeling the need for members of the Board of Trustees to take on independent responsibility for delivery of specific value in key areas, as our operations expand and activities intensify. This need is being felt especially because of the remoteness of Balenga Para where Prayaag has to reside throughout the academic terms to nurture Imlee Mahuaa (10-11 months annually), its poor connectivity with the outside world and our current crisis on the human resources front following Smitha's marriage.

Towards fulfilling this need, we have recently requested Aarti to help us identify a person (or persons) who can work initially as a volunteer or as a consultant and later on graduate to a trustee and take on the mandate(s) of :

- a. Building financial stability and
- b. Building a healthy pipeline of teachers and community workers who can be sourced from urban areas

We have also had initial discussions with Mr Abhay Bhagwat at Hindustan Unilever, a donor and good friend about his willingness and interest in become a member of the Board of Trustees. Abhay has responded positively to our enquiry and we will soon be initiating due processes to introduce Abhay to the Board members and seek their views on inducting him on the Board. Abhay has been associated with us as a donor, a coach for our application to Echoing Green and was instrumental in getting IIT Powai to extend an invitation to us to talk to them.

We have had similar discussions with Mr Bharat Varadachari at Ernst & Young, London and good friend and Bharat was introduced to the Board members earlier this year. Bharat has already started advising us in the fund raising area and his efforts contributed towards Ernst & Young Foundation making a donation to us this year.

In both cases, discussions with Bharat and Abhay about their joining the Board of Trustees were held when they were working in India. Since then, Bharat has moved to the UK and Abhay is in the process of moving to the UK. We are in the process of checking with our auditors Velu Muthu and Associates whether we would require any regulatory approvals to have non-residents as members of the Board of Trustees.

E) Outlook for 2009

We expect 2009 to be a year that will be more challenging and enjoyable than the year that has gone by. During this year we expect to move into new surroundings, add new faces both very young and not so young at work, deepen existing relationships and build new ones, expand and strengthen the linkages of our educational work in more than one area, move further on the road to achieving financial stability and continually introspect on the relevance of our work in the environment in which we live.