

Technically this is our tenth annual report but we are not putting on this the special mark that is usually associated with completion of a decade of work. This is because we could do very little in the first two years, mainly because of a severe paucity of resources, primarily financial. Such days may always return. We have no savings as such, or what is known as corpus in NGO jargon. So we do not know what we shall do when the funding stops, but we are going on from year to year in the naive faith that our benefactors will not turn their generous face away from us. To make sure of that, we have to be doing good work, and doing it well.

But what is this good work to consist of? Do we only provide certain services that the Government should, but does not or cannot? We do not think an NGO's role is limited to that. We see ourselves as presenting a model for an alternative life in its totality. There has to be a change, change in identifying resources, in deciding on how to use them, in finding out new yardsticks for success, in carving new benchmarks for safe and shared survival for all. But change does not come easily. Machiavelli wrote, "There is nothing more difficult to carry out, or more doubtful of success, nor more dangerous to handle, than to initiate a new order of things. For the reformer has enemies in all those who profit by the old order, and only lukewarm defenders in all those who would profit by the new order. This arises partly from the incredulity of mankind, who do not believe in anything until they have had actual experience of it." The resistance to change has not changed in the five centuries since then.

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We ought not, to be misled by labels that emphasise apparent change. What we are looking for is something far more intrinsic than, say, a replacement of capitalist values by communist ones, which turned out to merely mean substitution of individual greed by a collective one. The entire ideology of the industrial worldview has become outmoded and it is time for a thorough overhaul. Yes, there is growth on almost every side, growth of a kind that at first sight cannot but Overawe us with man's tremendous potential to achieve immediate comfort and convenience, but what value is this economic and technological growth when for much more than half the world it turns out to be jobless growth, ruthless growth, voiceless growth, rootless growth, altogether futureless growth? This is not the time, nor do we have the space here, to write in detail about the changes we are seeking. But at Swanirvar we make sure that we never lose sight of the principles behind our programmes. There are perpetual questions permeating the process and content of development. Who is gaining? Who is losing? Are disparities increasing or decreasing? Are the most deprived gaining in wealth, power, knowledge, control, self-reliance, secure livelihoods, opportunities? Is it ecologically sustainable? Is there an increase or decrease of satisfaction, happiness, love, tolerance, peace, compassion?

We of course do not claim to have the answers to everything. But if we work in the knowledge that the answers will have to be found by the wretched of the earth themselves and we are there merely to help them, we cannot go wrong. We present a report of our activities between 1.4.98 and 31.3.99 in the humble hope that we have been of some service to them in the work.

We now have a presence in 17 villages, spread over four blocks - Deganga, Baduria, Basirhat II, and Swarupnagar - and mostly non-contiguous. The five core- villages still have the major share of our work, though Chandalati unfortunately is not performing as well as it used to do. The supervisors keep in close touch with their respective department's work in the villages, and they meet among themselves once in two months to exchange notes. There is a project committee, where the supervisors are joined by representatives of the village groups, and this meets every month to review progress and discuss strategy.

The apex body is the working committee elected at the annual general meeting. This sets policy and oversees what the other two committees have done and decided.

2 Several villages came to us in the year to explore possibilities of our going to them with some programme, with most being interested in our pre-primary schools and/or health programme. That our work is being found replicable is a good sign and while constraints of money and manpower force us to limit our commitments, we have tried to help them by advice, training and such intangibles.

It is now essential for NGOs to come together and we held meetings with several NGOs working in our district to study how we can i) learn from and help one another in areas of common interest; ii) embark on joint actions, say, advocacy campaigns; iii) interact in a joint manner with State-level and district-level Government offices; iv) interact similarly with district and block-level panchayats; . v) collect successful case studies, best practices, expertise which can be of wider use; vi) direct future programmes/actions to the appropriate NGO;

vii) connect NGOs with resource individuals/organizations/agencies;  
viii) act as a conduit for students in various disciplines and institutions to come to the grassroots and study things and life for themselves.

A lot more will have to be done in this regard but even when we have a sort of central forum, we shall still have to do our own work well. For this our donors have to be with us and they have been supportive all through.

Our main donors this year have been the following.

Friends of Swanirvar, Worcester, England (FoS)	Rs	1,075,373.20
Child Relief and You, Mumbai (CRY)	Rs	586,156.00
Govt. of India (through Vikramshila, Calcutta)	Rs	403,691.50
Association for India's Development, Maryland, USA (AID)	Rs	198,908.00
Share and Care Foundation, USA (S & C)	Rs	197,146.00
(Most of this came from ASHA-LA, and from individuals in and around Los Angeles, USA)		
F Banerjee, Calcutta	Rs	180,000.00
Sakhya, Cambridge Friends of India, England	Rs	73,127.00
(This money was reimbursement for what we had spent on building some pre-primary schools in the previous year.)		
ASHA-Madison, USA	Rs	63,082.00
Individuals	Rs	70,983.70
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>Rs</b>	<b>2,848,668.40</b>

3 We also received money from the following sources.

Govt. of West Bengal (Eye operation reimbursement)	Rs	8,505.00
Subscription	Rs	340.00
Sale of fish	Rs	28,067.00
Bank interest	Rs	18,643.00
<b>Grand total</b>	<b>Rs</b>	<b>2,904,022.40</b>

Our capital expenses this year are given in the following table.

Head of expense	Total money spent (in Rs)	Source of money
Building	208,921.82	FoS
	16,074.00	ASHA-Madison
	5,811.50	Share & Care
Land	33,875.00	Domestic
Generator	7,100.00	Share & Care
Motor Cycle	21,800.00	
Cycles	9,305.00	"
Furniture	23,415.20	"
	3,425.00	FoS
Audio-visual	22,640.00	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>352,367.52</b>	

The table below gives a programme-wise break-up of our annual expenses.

<b>Programme</b>	<b>Total spent (in Rs)</b>	<b>Source of money</b>
Agriculture & allied	71,815.53	Dom
Primary education	405,982.85	Gol
	45,654.20	ASHA-Madison
	9,543.00	Dom
Pre-primary education	332,643.45	CRY
	33,047.20	S & C
Youth & Culture	83,619.20	CRY
	82,680.00	FoS
	76,276.00	S & C
	14,420.75	Gol
Health	161,638.22	AID
	57,992.35	CRY
Savings & Credit	369,710.00	FoS
	3,583.00	Foreign
4 Organisation	85,184.80	
	78,742.62	FoS
	47,218.35	CRY
	30,248.40	Dom
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1,989,999.92</b>	

Our administrative expenses are given below.

<b>Head of expense</b>	<b>Total money spent (in Rs)</b>	<b>Source of money</b>
Bank charges	2,608.00	FC & Dom
Repairs of vehicles	22,531.00	DOM
Electricity	5,138.00	FoS
Postage & Telephone	15,185.20	"
Fees - Audit, IT, Accts	24,385.00	"
Documentation	13,487.50	"
Salary - Caretaker	10,560.00	
Accountant	18,000.00	CRY
Cook and others	9,600.00	Foreign
Travel	6,268.10	
(This travelling was done mostly in connection	47,155.69	FoS
with various programmes and was actually part	12,007.30	CRY

of our "programme" expenses. We show it under "administration" only for accounting convenience.)

TOTAL	186,925.79
Total of the above three.	
Capital	352,367.52
Programme	1,989,999.92
Administration	186,925.79
TOTAL	2,529,293.23

### Income Generation

This was our first full year of disbursing loans to women for entrepreneurial purposes and the programme ran without any real hitch. We continue to be unsure about the efficacy of such micro-credit programmes when seen against the national perspective, particularly in a country where they, even at their very successful best, can touch but a small percentage of the people. Apart from this, our few villages cannot escape the general economic ambience of the country and throughout 'the year we write about, this continued to be bleak. However, even if not too many households managed a spectacular change in their condition, the indirect results of this empowerment of women have been very heartening. Of this, Mater, after we have given some figures that describe the progress of the programme, and a brief recapitulation of how it works. Five women, preferably living close to one another in similar economic conditions and occupying comparable positions in the family, form a group. For three months, at least once a week the group members together meet our workers to learn what is expected of them and to discuss options before deciding on how best they can utilize a loan. To establish the seriousness of their intent they also have to save some money every week. This goes to a savings fund, and remains theirs, with no relation to the later loan. These meetings, we have found, increase their objective awareness of extra-familial surroundings, bolster their self-confidence which would prove to be of immense value when they finally take on men on turf that has traditionally been exclusively the latter's, create among them a bond of solidarity that tries to exclude selfish considerations, and brings whiffs of fresh air into lives constricted too long by worries about what new miseries the morrow will bring. This last is much more important than appears on dull paper, and some of the women have had to fight for this freedom to meet a peer group outside the house. Many, indeed, consider this to be even more important than the later loan-related work.

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There are quite a few aspects of our scheme that the women have to understand, and arguably the most important of these why's and how's is that our loan is meant to be productively used and is to be repaid according to schedule. When our workers feel a group has achieved a certain level

of responsibility, one member, not necessarily she the members elected their leader, becomes entitled to receive a loan. Repayment is in weekly instalments, the first one falling due just a week after the loan is distributed. The whole amount can be repaid after 12 weeks, and certainly by the 52nd. Other members of the group do not have to wait until the first loan has been fully repaid and since not all members want a loan, anybody can ask for a second loan once she has repaid her first and an application from somebody else in the group is not pending.

The groups continue to meet even when loans have been received, but by now the women are taking about the community. Women from outside the area have come and spoken to them about the larger life beyond the homestead, our workers have shown them how they can be nurterers of more than their own biological offspring, and with expanding horizons comes a sense of commitment and responsibility. These women will, in the years to come, be catalysts for change. At the end of the year the number of women involved was as follows. The figures in brackets show what was achieved this year.

Village	No. of groups	No. of women as members
Fatullyapur	35(18)	175(90)
Kolsur	24(8)	120(40)
Bajitpur	17(7)	85(35)
Andharmanik	12(7)	60(35)
TOTAL-4	88(40)	440(200)

The village-wise disbursement of loans is as follows. All the figures relate to the year.

Village	First loan	Second loan	Third loan	Fourth loan	Total loans
Fatullyapur	90	44	24	-	158
Kolsur	47	38	20	2	107
Bajitpur	35	39	16	2	92
Andharmanik	35	25	-	-	60
TOTAL-4	207	146	60	4	417

The amount of money involved is given below.

Village	Total amount loaned	Total amount repaid	No. of women to repay totally
Fatullyapur	Rs 4,30,000	Rs 2,27,703	55
Kolsur	Rs 2,71,500	Rs 1,97,060	68
Bajitpur	Rs 2,70,500	Rs 1,77,042	61
Andharmanik	Rs 1,62,500	Rs 75,000	30
TOTAL- 4	Rs 11,34,500	Rs 6,76,805	214

We have kept a record of the various purposes for which these loans have been taken. We give

the major heads below and also one or two which might be of interest for the purpose, not the number.

Purpose	Fatullyapur	Kolsur	Bajitpur	Andharmanik	Total
Agriculture and allied	51	38	49	30	168
Animal husbandry	25	4	4	3	36
Fishing and allied	5	25	11	-	41
Land transport	7	9	3	3	22
Ferry boat	1	-	-	-	1
Trade in agri-products	23	8	12	4	47
Handicrafts: manufacture and/or selling	25	7	2	2	36
Sewing/tailoring	1	7	2	4	14
Small trade	2	4	-	2	8
Shops	12	4	1	4	21
Barber shop	-	1	-	-	1
Medicine shop	-	-	-	2	2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>152</b>	<b>107</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>397</b>

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During this year we arranged meetings, addressed by our workers in various fields or by resource persons from outside, on various subjects for members of the self-help groups in a village. We give below a list of the subjects covered and the number of meetings held.

Subject	No. of meetings
Kitchen garden	38
Herbal medicine	11
Deworming	11
Insurance	1
Veterinary treatment	3
Mushroom cultivation	3
Blood donation	2
Family health and hygiene	10
Pulse polio campaign	4
<b>TOTAL</b>	

We are giving some randomly selected items of information about these women and their links with our other activities to give an idea of why we feel hopeful about the important role

they will play in the development process.

133 women have borrowed money for farming; of them 77 have their own land and 56 are share croppers.

88 are involved with our kitchen garden programme.

108 have come for herbal treatment.

59 have grown mushrooms.

A considerable number of them attended meetings of the Gram Sansad, an important step in genuine participatory democracy.

110 came to blood donation camps, and 26 felt brave enough to donate blood after watching the proceedings, if they had not already decided on doing this.

95 of them have a child attending one of our schools.

219 of them have some sort of a toilet at home, while 221 still have to go to the fields.

152 went to school, for any period between 2 and 10 years.

288 have learnt to at least sign their name during their time in the group.

There have been quite a few instances of solidarity among members of a group. At times of illness, or of complicated childbirth, more than one woman have found help, monetary and/ or otherwise, from fellow members. The result has been that even on days when there is no meeting of the group many of these women come to our village organization to see if they can be useful in any way, talking to neighbours of the need to send their children to school, etc.

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## Health

It never ceases to surprise us that the standard of health care available to the masses at costs they can be expected to afford continues to decline year after year - political promises, media mauilings, and other such measures, generally **considered effective, notwithstanding**. The medical lobby still continues to be overconcerned with curative services, possibly unable to accept that a general prophylactic approach will lessen people's sufferings but at the same time lighten their own pockets ( or wherever they put their money). Our capacity to provide remedial measures is severely limited, nor do we aim to be a parallel medical set-up. We would like to see a situation where people have far less need to go for medical care, where there would be far less illness.

The basic goals of simple health care are not really unattainable, particularly for a nuclear power, but somehow India seems to be doing worse than so many others. Our maternal mortality rate is 555 per 100,000, which is six times more than in Sri Lanka. And let us see where we stand in regard to another one of them. We give below a table showing the position of household toilets in 8 villages in December 1998. The table is based on data collected by our Kishore Kishori Bahini in these villages.

Village	Houses surveyed	No toilet	Toilet	Pucca	Kutchha	Semi-pucca
Bajitpur	167	100	67	40	19	8
Chandalati	213	60	40	58	10	35
Andharmanik	177	110	103	78	28	4
Kolsur	143	52	48	18	6	48
Uttar Media	481	67	110	209	4	
Fatullyapur	225	38	62	107	26	2
Beliyakhali	220	71	72	57	11	7
Gokulpur	676	50	50	261	45	
TOTAL-8	2302	268	213	828	149	104
		56	44			
		90	135			
		40	60			
		145	75			
		66	34			
		370	306			
		55	45			
		1221	1081			
		53	47			

These figures were reached after a few years of intervention by us with a toilet-building programme, and there are thousands of villages where this did not happen, and so there the figures will be more disappointing. We give below a list of villages where kutchha toilets were built this year by local labour under supervision of our affiliate organization.

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Village	No. of toilets built
Magurkhali	4
Andharmanik	1
Kalinga	7
Purba Simulia	80
Antlia	18
Beliyakhali	76
Parpatna	70
Uttar Media	53
Gokulpur	42
Bajitpur	1
Chandalati	65
TOTAL -11	433

Our six health workers did their usual work in mother and child care, visited our schools to check the children there. All of them have now moved beyond their own village and their work is also gradually moving from individual or family-wise health-related activity to functions with more public and community concern. Thus they now interact with kitchen garden groups to spread awareness of nutritious diet, with self-help groups to bring their women into our activities, with youth and culture groups to help them spread various messages of health.

We have kept detailed records of family planning measures, pregnancy, abortions, births and birth weights, sex of new born, mode of delivery, maternal and child mortality, natural death etc in some villages. We continued with our clinics where our health workers supplied medicine at cost price for treatment of certain common diseases. Simultaneously we provided herbal medicines also. The table below is not a true picture of the respective popularity of the two methods, as many households now grow some herbs and use them without reference to our worker or just ask her what to give. Such advice is not recorded in our books.

Village	Allopathic section		Herbal section
	No. of patients	Cost of medicine supplied	No. of patients
Fatullyapur	864	Rs 2547.60	410
Sarfarazpur			320
Bhojpara			315
Punra			173
Bajitpur	923	Rs 1608.10	172
Dweep Media	348	Rs 824.80	163
Uttar Media			119
Chandalati	21	Rs 13.00	232
Parpatna	1001	Rs 1310.80	820
Beliyakhali	699	Rs 428.65	20
TOTAL-10	3856	Rs 6732.95	2744

In villages where we do not have a trained worker there is no provision for supply of allopathic medicines.

We continued to hold village-level awareness camps. These were mainly for mothers, but anybody else was welcome to join. This year we often had members of our self-help groups among the participants. It is mainly our health workers who speak on some topic, but sometimes we had somebody else from outside, too, sharing knowledge and information. The table below says all.

Village	No. of camps	Total No. of participants
Fatullyapur	29	689
Sarfarazpur	26	559
Bhojpara	25	502
Punra	20	392
Bajitpur	23	459
Dweep Media	17	333

Uttar Media	22	356
Gokulpur	23	437
Chandalati	13	325
Beliyakhali	17	440
Parpatna	26	550
TOTAL-11	241	5042

Our health workers, the health supervisor, and on occasions an outside resource person conducted trainings on specific topics in various villages. Members of the local Kishore Kishori Bahini were mainly expected to attend but quite often they were joined by other teenagers. The table below gives details.

Village	Subject of training	Duration (in days)	No. of participants
Fatullyapur	First aid	One	22
Fatullyapur	Nutrition	One	21
Bajitpur	First aid	One	21
Bajitpur	Nutrition	One	Unrecorded
Gokulpur	First aid	One	15
Gokulpur	Nutrition	One	23
Uttar Media	First aid	One	20
Uttar Media	Nutrition	One	Unrecorded
Magurkhali	First aid	One	11
Magurkhali	Nutrition	One	Unrecorded
Kolsur	First aid	One	18
Kolsur	Blood donor motivation	Three	36
Chandalati	First aid	One	10
Chandalati	Nutrition	One	29
Beliyakhali	First aid	One	28

Three of our health workers attended 3-day workshops organised by us on life skill training for adolescents. Two attended a four-day training on all round health and development. The supervisor participated in a four-day workshop in Calcutta organised by the India-Canada Environment Facility on the arsenic problem. He also attended a five-day workshop on the same topic organised by OXFAM and a five-day workshop on malaria organised by the West Bengal Voluntary Health Association.

Apart from these outside trainings there are regular meetings within the organization to exchange information, experience and ideas, and also to interact with workers from other departments. We

give below a selected list of such meetings and workshops.

Occasion	Number	Duration	Participants
Monthly meetings of health department	12	1 day	93
Bi-monthly meetings among health workers, motivators, village organizers	5	1 day	94
Workshop with pre-primary teachers on deworming	1	1 day	32
Workshop with health workers and village organizers on deworming	1	1 day	19
Orientation training for primary teachers on deworming	1	1/2 day	13
Training for Kishore Kishori Bahini on all- round development	2	3 days each	74
Workshop on planning & record keeping	1	2 days	7
Workshop on first aid	1	1 day	4
Life skill training to adolescent girls	2	2 days each	42
Follow-up meeting with pre-primary Teachers on deworming and planning the next campaign	1	1/2 day	34

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We went into the deworming campaign with intensive planning. SAHAY, another NGO, was providing the medicines and after a series of awareness camps and meetings, in some of which there was active and helpful participation from Government health employees, we distributed in six villages 8004 tablets in the first phase and 3053 in the second. The number came down so drastically in the second because the Government had by then begun distributing free tablets through its sub centre.

Our workers visit our schools to check the children's health at regular intervals. Since they are not medically qualified we do not get ideal care but in matters of general cleanliness they see if the body is dirty, if the child has regular baths, wears clean clothes, has clean nails and hair, and finds out if he washes his hands before eating, after going to the toilet, and if he cleans his teeth properly. If anyone is found to be suffering from any simple disease he is told what to do and given allopathic/homeopathic/herbal/home remedies, whichever is found most appropriate. On their part the teachers, during home visits and frequent meetings with parents, and in class, talk about proper and cheap nutrition, the need for a balanced diet, home gardens for food and herbs, toilets, safe drinking water, and immunization. There are provisions for first aid in each school.

In immunization we work in 11 villages with a total population of 26000. In the 3 villages where we have had health workers from the beginning, things have fallen into an easy routine but in the 8 others where we have spread out gradually, they can be much improved. Government staff are unable, maybe unwilling, to go to distant villages and so in 5 of these 8 we have to take people, mainly women and children, a long distance to get to where the immunization camps are set up. We still have not been able to build up an awareness level which will overcome such obstacles.

As is to be expected in a tropical region we have a lot of people suffering from cataract and among them are many who are poor and/or lonely, unable to get any help. We have made arrangements with the Government so that after proper screening and checking we can take a number of patients to the district hospital at Barasat, about 35 km from Andharmanik, and bring them back after operation. The Government reimburses us some of our expenses, and is also supposed to give the patients proper powered glasses but this takes so long that we have had to give these ourselves. It has also happened in a number of cases that the patient has not been able to come back for the checking for the power and so never got the new glasses. Our workers take care of the patients, when they come for the screening, again when they come to spend the night at Andharmanik before going off to Barasat, and at the hospital there before and after the operation. Altogether 364 persons reported at the three screening camps and 63 were selected for the operation, in two phases. On both occasions, a few extra patients became our responsibility as they found, on somehow reaching the hospital at Barasat in ways totally independent of us, that they had nobody to look after them. So we had to care for a total of 69 persons. Of them 59 came to us for the powered glasses.

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New villages keep coming to us asking for help in their area but we are generally not inclined to take responsibility for more than what we can properly supervise and run well. However, sometimes we are convinced of the need for future intervention that may be of benefit to our present work also. So this year we appointed two motivators, at Punra and Gokulpur, and they started work on a base line survey of the families that will be under their care. In this sort of work we act in close co-operation with the Government departments that function locally. The total number of such motivators is now 7.

We had a target of 1000 bottles of blood for the Government blood banks this year and are happy to say that we collected more, as the table below will show. We work in co-operation with village organizations, some of them affiliates of Swanirvar, some independent and who join hands with us for this purpose. We generally make all the external arrangements and help the organizers with propaganda and other help.

Organization and village	Date of camp	Total	Donors		Blood bank
			Men	Women	
Nabakallol Gram Unnayan Samity, Rudrapur	30. 04.98	67	47	20	Cent. Blood Bank (CBB)
Khelaghar, Andharmanik	28.06.98	51	41	10	Basirhat
Gramin Development Society, Kolsur	4.08.98	76	56	20	CBB
Vivekananda Smriti Seva Sangha, Uttar Media	10.10.98	71	62	9	Basirhat
Nabodaya Krishak Sangha, Gokulpur	31.10.98	50	47	3	
Janakalyan Samity, Magurkhali	7.11.98	170	130	40	R. G. Kar
Jyoti Sangha, Bhojpara	15.11.98	60	55	5	N. R. S.
Suprabhat Sangha, Beliyakhali	17.11.98	36	25	11	Basirhat
Netaji Seba Sangha, Bajitpur	31.11.98	70	60	10	Basirhat
Sanghasree Club, Punra	8.01.99	66	63	3	Basirhat
Dilip Kumar Memorial High School, Baduria	9.01.99	29	27	2	Barasat
Bankra Gokulpur Panchayat	27.01.99	34	31	3	Basirhat
Eastern Standard School, Dattapara	6.02.99	100	83	17	Basirhat
Al-Mustafa Hospital, Mandra	11.02.99	48	44	4	CBB
Gram Unnayan Kendra, Fatullyapur	17.02.99	76	59	17	CBB
Basirhat Subdivision Environment and Health Development Centre	21. 02. 99	30	28	2	Basirhat
Punra BKMP Institution	22. 02. 99	61	57	4	CBB
TOTAL-17		1095	915	180	

Women thus form 16.5% of our donors, which is a considerable achievement, given the various constraints in a village that would pull them back from such a public act of community service, and also a personal gesture. We are part of a local movement to keep the blood bank in our subdivisional hospital at Basirhat active and working, and so we tried as often as we could to ask them to work as the collecting agent. This was not always possible, and even when they came it was not always in a spirit of cooperation. The West Bengal Voluntary Blood Donors' Association recognized our efforts by the

presentation of a handsome trophy in a public ceremony.

As all the above indicates we are taking steps to meet our health goals in various ways. Some of these are. very tentative, some too inadequate when the magnitude of the problem is considered, and there is no call for complacency, certainly nothing to crow over. But we trust we have not lost sense of the right direction. Only in the matter of arsenic in drinking water are we totally baffled. This is because nobody seems to know the true extent of the danger and nobody knows what exactly to do and how. There is no consensus on the definition of arsenic poisoning, the WHO feels high concentrations of arsenic in a community's well do not necessarily correlate with high levels of arsenic symptoms within the community, and the level of actual intake is almost impossible to determine so future health effects cannot be predicted. Then again health effects from consuming arsenic-contaminated drinking water are delayed, and so it is difficult to convince people about the danger. Moreover arsenic concentrations in wells in close proximity may vary widely.

As of now, there is no proven technology for the removal of arsenic at water collection points, nor is there any simple technology for household removal of arsenic from water. The most important remedial action is prevention of further exposure by providing safe drinking water, best done by utilising rain water and sources of uncontaminated surface water. We have dug a couple of wells, and are telling people to devise ways of preserving the abundant water that we receive during the monsoon but this is much easier said than done. We are tackling the menace on another front. Studies suggest that malnutrition and Hepatitis B will accentuate the effects of arsenic poisoning. So we are giving priority to popularising ways of getting inexpensive nutrition for the whole family.

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This threat of arsenic poisoning, a threat that has become a fatal reality in a number of families in a number of not necessarily neighbouring villages in our work area, also draws attention to a basic dilemma: is human intervention doomed to prove counter availing? Experts seem to agree that apart from other reasons, mainly to do with the overdrawal of ground water for cultivation, populations have now been exposed to this arsenic problem as an unexpected side-effect of man's success in controlling the incidence of several diseases like diarrhoea, dysentery, typhoid, cholera and hepatitis - all transmitted by contaminated water. Programmes to provide "safe" drinking water meant people were no longer collecting their drinking and cooking water from rivers and ponds, sources that had no arsenic. The Resident Coordinator of UN Agencies in Bangladesh, a country facing a similar problem with arsenic as West Bengal in India, recently said in a speech, "The very tubewells that were considered a boon for their supply of safe, affordable and easy-to-fetch drinking water turned out to be a source of poison. . . What started out with good intentions is now becoming anathema. It is now recognised as a potential environmental disaster which will play

havoc with millions of human lives, society and the economy in the coming years.”

### Education Pre Primary

This year we started another pre-primary school taking their number to 15. When we began this programme for children between 3 and 5, there was much misgiving among parents, mostly because we used no books and often they sent their children hoping for nothing but just to keep them away from a busy mother maybe. All this changed soon enough. Even without any of the paraphernalia that we have come to associate with schools and learning, our children, taught in what is basically the Montessori method adapted to local conditions, go up to the primary level mentally and physically much better equipped than those we could not take in or who did not come. Their sensory co-ordination is much more well developed, they have learnt to exercise their various faculties with little prodding and no spoon-feeding, and are thus more self; confident and ready to solve problems, their limbs have responded to various rhythms in the j extra-‘curricular’ programmes we have devised, and even after all this they have learnt the alphabet, albeit phonetically, and can count also. Now we find more and more villages asking for a school and in villages where we already have one, more and more children seeking a place there. We have to disappoint people on either score, for one major reason of our success has been our intensive supervision of the teachers’ work and their not being burdened with an unmanageable number of children. We sometimes wonder, though, if either condition is replicable on a wider scale and, if not, what should be done about it.

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We have 15 schools, with 34 teachers and 932 children. Of them 457 are boys, 475 girls and average attendance has been 73.5%. The schools sat for an average of 230 days in the year, the one at Kolsur having the most working days with 245, while that at Matia worked on 214 days. We have to remember that the latter has a number of children whose mothers are sex workers and there are social and economic problems involved that make it a special case. Our effort always has been to involve parents in the process of educating their children. The two hours the child spends at school must not be seen as a radical departure from what his home gives and wants.

Once the parents understood how they can contribute to and participate in this collaborative process their possible lack of any formal education has not really mattered, as we hoped it would not. Thus at the 65 parent-teachers’ meetings the total attendance was 2064, with an average of 31.48%. These interactions are supplemented by home visits, where teachers and the supervisor visit parents at home, to maybe answer questions about what a child does or does not do at school, and to learn about some water, she said the water at home had been what he or she does or does not do at home, all used up but he should begin to eat and she end what all this together means. In the course of the year altogether 5758 such visits were made. The supervisor

visited the schools 236 times in the year, so each school was visited 16 times on an average. To have a sense of involvement, and maybe also to provide against a day when funding will cease, all local organizations continued to take a token amount of fees from every child. As in other years this money was either not spent or spent on the children themselves. This year the amount came to Rs 32,150 which means Rs 2.87 per child per month.

All our teachers are young and willing, and all like working with children. Still it helps to give them some fresh inputs regularly and this we try to do in a number of ways. A total of 10 workshops were organized for them, 5 of them at Swanirvar's main building at Andharmanik, and the agenda included the year's plan, making of educational material, review of methodology etc. Five other workshops were held in various villages and all were devoted to making diverse aids to teaching.

We do not wish our teachers to be involved with the schools only, as development to us is an integrated process where different facets of life are but parts of an all-inclusive whole and you ignore one at the cost of the others. Thus we expect them to contribute to all our activities and to prepare them for this, we sent 27 pre-primary teachers to visit the Rangabelia project of the Tagore Society of Rural Development.

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The high point of our teachers' training schedule this year was a 3-day "sharing workshop" held at Swanirvar. Since our teachers have started work at various times, their experience and training are not the same and they have been feeling the need for an overall sharing of experience. CRY (Child Relief and You), which funds our pre-primary project, sent a group of four teachers and a supervisor from an NGO in the Sunderbans to attend the workshop. Apart from some general observations from resource persons, the workshop gave a chance to all the teachers to talk about their own experience with the children, how they can or cannot relate the contents of their training to specific situations and this exchange of information, experience and ideas made everybody, particularly those who had joined later than others, more confident and opened up new possibilities.

## EDUCATION: Primary

We still run three primary schools under the Central Government's NFE-2000 scheme and applying quite a few of our own ideas to good use. But before we talk about what makes our schools different let us give a tabular representation of certain facts about them in this year.

Particulars	Fatullyapur	Chandalati	Andharmanik	Total
1. Total students	150	135	141	426

Boys	72	68	70	210
Girls	78	67	71	216
2. Average attendance %	91. 53	90. 55	82. 54	88. 21
3. Total working days	240	239	246	242
4. No. of parents' meetings	4	3	3	10
Average attendance	91	45	104	81
5. Total home visits	953	745	281	1979
Average per home	6. 5	5. 3	2	5
6. Central workshops				8
Average participants				13
7. Village workshops	4	3	5	12
Average participants	4	4	4	12
8. Teachers' monthly meetings				12
Average attendance				12
9. No. of group visits				12
Average participation				12
10. Edu. Organiser's visit	58	36	35	129
Average per centre				43
11. Fees collected (in Rs.)	17,196	16,379	4,600	38,175

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At Fatullyapur one or the other teacher was absent on 43 days, and the corresponding figures for Chandalati and Andharmanik were 18 and 29 respectively.

We held two self-evaluation workshops with our teachers and based on what came out of these and on observations by others we dare say our progress has been good but even if this claim is discounted as coming from ourselves there is no denying that we have succeeded in being different. This difference can be seen in three major spheres. 1. Community involvement, 2- Teachers' training and motivation, 3. Classroom management.

Relations with the community, Parents' involvement is essential for a child's development at the primary school stage and since we have introduced this concept in our area it is as well to now for certain what sort of families we are interacting with. The first table gives a picture of their economic condition and the second of their formal educational status.

Village	Annual income			
	Up to Rs 10,000	Rs 10,000 -Rs 15,000	Rs 15,000 -Rs 18,000	Above Rs 18,000
Fatullyapur	80	42	18	10
Chandalati	56	45	26	8

Andharmanik	78	36	24	3
Total-426 fam.	214	123	68	21
In percentage	50	29	16	5

Village	Families	Illiterate		I-IV		V-VIII		IX-X		XI >=	
		M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Fatullyapur	150	27	28	40	52	58	56	16	12	9	2
Chandalati	131	20	35	44	40	42	46	19	9	6	1
Andharmanik	142	65	73	28	38	24	18	14	13	11	
Total	423	112	136	112	130	124	120	49	34	26	3
In percentage		26	32	26	31	29	28	12	8	6	1

Traditional wisdom will despair of utilising this to get much help in educating children but as what follows will show, a different faith and approach can turn this on the head. For various reasons we have not yet been able to form any village education committee or any guardians' association - both have turned out to be quite difficult - but every three months every school holds a meeting between its teachers and parents/guardians. Both sides ask and answer questions and an overall picture emerges of the children's habits, hygiene, attendance, interests, shortcomings, special needs, and special qualities. A bond of partnership, of shared responsibility, grows up between the teachers and the parents. Once the parents are emboldened to wonder if their apparent inadequacy does really make them unfit to bring up a good human being, the rest is easy. The success of parenting is not pre-determined by one's level of education and the table below shows that parents agree and take their responsibility seriously.

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	1997-98	1996-97	1998-99
No. of parents' meetings	12	18	10
Average attendance	48	29	81
Average students per centre	90	50	142

We do not intend to give the impression that these parent-teachers' meetings are veritable examples of participatory workshops. Many parents are still shy in public, even before neighbours, and some may even now feel it hard to find their bearings, but most do contribute and/or learn. In any case, a meeting like these is not the place where individual children's problems can be discussed. For that, our teachers, and sometimes the organiser, too, visit students' homes. This is particularly useful in the case of someone who is falling behind. The teachers, who watch him at school, now seek information about what happens at home and try to decide on what requires to

be done. On them-part, the parents might have questions about what their child does at school. There is nothing in being illiterate to stop a mother from seeing that her child obeys the simple laws of health and hygiene or from following injunctions of nutrition a she certainly can assert her affectionate authority to get him to study regularly.

Parents who have been to school may help more actively with the studies, that is a lack all first generation learners face, but all parents, once they understand their child will spend more time at home than at school, can see to it that this time is properly spent. These problems can be discussed at these one-to-one meetings at home. The child is welcome to be present, and since detailed notes are kept of every child's performance in various fields there is little chance to get away with vague formulations. Finding they are so efficacious we have increased the number of home visits. In 1996-97 there were 559 such visits, in 1997-98 this rose to 1433 and this year the figure was 1979 or, expressed differently, the teachers met every family about 5 times a year. As politeness demands, these visits are returned. We encourage parents to come to school to see for themselves what their children are up to, to learn more about them and their progress, and also about our methods which are not exactly what many of them were used to when they went to school. This year we kept a record of how many parents were in touch with us on their own and the figures are not discouraging at all.

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Village	Parents in touch			Parents showing little interest		
	Father	Mother	Both	Father	Mother	Both
Fatullyapur	92	118	50	58	32	6
Chandalati	82	88	43	49	43	5
Andharmanik	91	110	68	51	32	4
Total	265	316	161	158	107	15
In %	62	74	-	37	25	-

Mothers still seem more interested but our teachers say the number of fathers visiting or talking to them is increasing. We do not know if this has anything to do with the first batch of children getting older and getting into higher classes.

We charge our students some fees. The amount is minimal - Rs 10 a month per child at Fatullyapur and Chandalati, and Rs 5 at Andharmanik - and no pressure is put on any parents, even habitual non-payers. We have found this payment invests the parents with a sense of right that they value. This money is not spent and remains with the school for possible later use. How much was collected this year has been given earlier, now we give another set of figures.

Village	Families	Regular payers	Irregular payers	Non-payers	Unable to pay
Fatullyapur	150	76	49	25	13
Chandalati	136	84	50	2	1
Andharmanik	140	32	59	49	29
Total	426	192	158	76	43
In percentage		45	37	18	10

About 70% of the fees are collected within the year, and since half of those who do not pay really cannot pay, we are happy with what we get. Many donate books also. There is another way in which parents get involved in what the children do at school. Homework often entails seeking parental help, and particularly with the local/family history project the family's involvement has to be sustained and deep. Then there is interaction with others in the village, members of the panchayat, teachers in other schools, the general public. If we think we are offering a better alternative, we must try for its replication. We do not do anything that is impossible to follow in other schools which, in any case, will always have a substantially larger number of students. The local government is our government, too, and we would like to involve them in our experiments as also to be involved in theirs. This year there were a few significant cases of cooperation. At Fatullyapur our workers met teachers of the four government primary schools in the village and with their permission some senior students from these schools joined our children in making rakhis, about 1000 of which were finally ready after three days' work. On the day of the celebration, first these Government school children came to our school to tie rakhis, when they were offered something to eat, then our children divided themselves into four teams and each went to a Government school to reciprocate the gesture. They also presented a short cultural show. Independence Day this year was celebrated jointly by children of our schools at Fatullyapur and Bajitpur and by children of five Government primary schools in the area and their teachers in the presence of the Upa-Pradhan, of the panchayat. On Teachers' Day, at both Andharmanik and Fatullyapur the function at our school was attended by some local teachers, including a few from high schools, and members of the general public whose wards did not attend our schools. Quite a few teachers from primary and high schools came to our exhibition on education at both Kolsur and Fatullyapur and exchanged ideas. In Bajitpur particularly, the Pradhan and the Upa-Pradhan have always given us a patient hearing. One evening during Ramzan arrangements for Iftar for local people were made at the Andharmanik school. And children from all three of our schools were invited to put up cultural shows at other local schools, both primary and high, whenever there was some function there. Teachers' training and motivation: Every month our 12 teachers and the Education Organiser meet for a reporting, reviewing and planning session. Apart from these there are regular workshops to discuss what to make in teaching-learning materials and then to make

them. Vikramshila Educational Resource Society in Calcutta, which has been training our teachers for the past few years, continued to hold refresher courses and advanced trainings. Supervisory people from there and from CRY visited our schools regularly and closely studied the quarterly reports we send to both organizations. All our teachers from the three schools some times visit one school, teachers from NGOs elsewhere come to see our schools. For two years running we have had a visit by a five-member international team of young people studying at a teachers' training school in Denmark. This year we had two resource persons spending a day each with our teachers. One of them spoke about the proper ways of teaching environmental studies from a holistic viewpoint. He was shown the various charts our children had made on various facets of a tree's life, on flowers etc. There are often heated debates on the accuracy of the data to be put in the chart. At Fatullyapur there was no agreement between groups on how long it takes for a patal flower to turn into fruit. The teacher asked for new observations and it was found both groups were right, it could take anything from 13 to 15 days. The other came to help with the teaching of history. He had two main concerns; first, how to make sure that new information does not create confusion in a child's mind because it conflicts with accepted belief, not necessarily always but often taught by religion, and, second, on how to route their curiosity into the local past. From this has grown our wide-ranging project on the region's forgotten and neglected history. Classroom management: We follow, or at least generally try to follow, certain methods and principles which are different from what is done in most schools. Maybe the following chart will better illustrate the comparison.

Alternative/non -formal/Swanirvar	General/formal
1. Fun	
Enjoyable and interesting	Solemn and boring
2. Activity-based	
Doing	Hearing and reading
Active participation	Passive reception
Use of all senses	Use of only a few senses
3. Discovery-based	
Collect information/evidence	Receive these
Draw own conclusions	Be told these
Encourage independent learning	Always teacher-dependent
Produce knowledge	Only consume knowledge
Open ended	Closed ended
Emphasis on why and how	Emphasis on what
Encourage creativity, imagination, individuality, diversity	Demand standard/routine response from everyone

#### 4. Group work

Team work, mutual learning,  
and cooperation

Everyone participates

#### 5. Relevant

Move from known to unknown,  
from own experience to wider world

Can be used

Only individual learning,  
and competition

“Star” performers

Start with wider, unknown picture

No obvious use

In practical terms this means we use a lot of teaching-learning material and do not restrict ourselves to text books. There are any number of work cards, made by our teachers themselves. After each chapter is finished special cards are given to see how far and how much the children have assimilated. Only when the teacher is satisfied is a new chapter begun. The progress is reviewed at the monthly meetings. If only a few are found to be trailing, they are asked to work with these cards for some time along with the new work.

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There is some competence based free movement within classes. This is seen most in Arithmetic. A backward student may either be asked to sit with a lower class or given the old cards to practise with until he can join his peers in other subjects. There is a lot of group work. A class is divided into groups which are asked to work with one another, mainly through debates, discussions, questions and answers. Since the group's honour will be at stake, the comparatively weaker ones in a group receive help from their fellow members before the other groups get around to targeting these weaker ones. In all classes there is much combined cooperative work when charts are made, experiments are conducted, and many work cards are prepared, particularly in the first two classes, so that five or six children have to work together.

All children have to sit for two examinations in a year, one in September-October, and the other in March-April and their progress to the next class depends on how they do in both. There are both written and oral tests and a mark sheet is included in the general progress report. Generally we do not keep children back in a class, but in some cases this is unavoidable.

There is a growing demand within Swanirvar to add more classes to our schools as also for opening more primary schools. We have decided against both. Unless major changes have been effected in the aims, syllabus, and methods of our country's school education - the why, what, and how respectively of our plans for the future - there is not much point in expending the same work in one small geographical area. In the section on our Kishore Kishori Bahini we have talked about why these changes are necessary.

The time is more than ripe for educational planners in our State to learn from the success of educational interventions, curriculum initiatives and teacher-training programmes in other parts of the country and in some isolated parts of West Bengal too. The present offers an unprecedented opportunity for NGOs working with education to intervene in and affect the process. Last year we were among a few NGOs which organised a large workshop and certain follow-up actions were taken, but not much concrete has come out of them. We are now ready to offer all our resources towards setting up an Education Resource and Research Centre (ERRC) that will be dedicated to strengthening initiatives in education through various means. We called a meeting of various NGOs and individuals and shall be continuing our efforts towards reaching a consensus on strategy and implementation.

Apart from this we are part of a National Alliance for Education whose primary goal now is to fight for an amendment to the Constitution to make education compulsory for children be- 6 and 14. We published a booklet on this, setting out the various misconceptions that are popular, demolishing cleverly propagated disinformation, and suggesting concrete steps for action. These included an awareness campaign in the villages which would include some detailed surveys about children in the villages and their education, holding general meetings in the villages to make plans, etc. We visited 37 primary schools in 19 villages to see how many students and teachers each had, how many rooms, the state of the roof, the floor and the walls, total floor space, what furniture and educational equipment each had, if they had doors and windows, how the students are divided into classes, if the schools had toilets, drinking water, and play grounds. Our findings were not unexpected but predictability does not make something dismal less so. If anything, it makes the resolve stronger.

We also surveyed 22 villages in 3 blocks, mostly those where we work, to find out what children there did. We give the results in a table. We also have data on how many of the school going children are regular and how many not so, but that is not included in the table.

Age	Girls			Boys			TOTAL CHILDREN		
	In Sch	Out of sch	Total	In Sch	Out of Sch	Total	In Sch	Out Sch	Total
	A	B	C(A+B)	D	E	F(D+E)	G	H	I (G+H)
0-2	-	966	966	-	869	869	-	1835	1835
3-5	699	963	1662	701	972	1673	1400	1935	3335
%	42.1	57.9		41.9	58.1		42.0	58.0	
6-10	2521	332	2853	2461	417	2878	4982	749	5731

%	88.4	11.6		85.5	14.5		86.9	13.1
11-14	1264	362	1626	1286	478	1764	2550	840 3390
%	77.7	22.3		72.9	27.1		75.2	24.8

So not merely do such a large number and percentage not go to school, more than 50 years after independence, of those that do go an overwhelming majority will make no use of their years in school, or will in effect be rejected by society. What sort of a nation is this, then, where more than half of its people have nothing to gain from its first and most important 15 years of life?

Our adult literacy centres mainly for mothers run in the following eight villages and the figure in brackets gives the number of women who came there to learn : Rudrapur(18), Andharmanik(12), Chandalati(8), Beliyakhali(12;but here 25 older children,who had dropped out of school earlier,also come regularly), Fatullyapur(24), Punra (5), Bhojpara(11), Bajitpur(17). The centres are run by some of our pre-primary teachers.Progress is uneven,but some mothers can now read fluently if no joint word has been used.However, we would like to overhaul the entire programme to make it more meaningful and productive.

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## Agriculture

This year's report on our work in agriculture is going to be different from the preceding years' in that we shall not give details and figures of individual activities. Our work is restricted to a small number and percentage of farmers even in the few villages where we work, and these figures will thus mean nothing to the reader who is used to thinking in macro terms, as most Indians are. The box item below sets out our basic ideas and suffice it to say we are proceeding slowly, but methodically and steadily, towards tackling all the problems raised in them and in it.

We continue to be part of a State-level sustainable agriculture network and our work is overseen by some of the best people in the field here. As a founder-member of the network we play an important part in the formulation of its strategies and in seeing that implementation is informed and intelligent. The network constantly reviews its strategies and working goals in the light of experience on the field while not losing sight of or altering the larger perspective.

In the initial years, our emphasis was on spreading sustainable agriculture techniques and crops as widely as possible through various trainings and campaigns. This resulted in the introduction of some appropriate crops and in a large number of farmers using more and more bio inputs as soil nutrients and for pest and weed control. This was good, but not good enough. On review we found this approach had four principal drawbacks.

First, in the absence of thorough village-level agro-ecological surveys and analyses, the emphasis

on various new ideas being introduced was getting too standardised, and not specific to the problem. We were losing sight of the trees in looking for the wood.

Second, farmers were adopting techniques, or at least a-number of them, but they were doing this piecemeal. Nobody was taking his total farm system towards sustainability through long-term involvement. Some grew one crop on a small plot, some used bio fertilisers for maybe one crop but not another, and we were not getting the total picture.

Third, interventions were not being viewed as trials. So neither the initial conditions of individual farms nor the results of the interventions were being either observed in detail or documented meticulously. This meant proper learning was not taking place.

Fourth, there was no organised sharing of experiences and skills directly between farmers. Everything passed through us and this was not what we wanted. So we organised farmers' clubs whose members would adopt, if only in part of their holding, our full systems trial for a full year and not just a season and the experiments would be very carefully documented.

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This has posed a few problems for many of our workers, for the change from being a model farmer to an effective communicator, a sort of technical consultant, cannot be easy, but most have adapted after an uncertain start. Monitoring the work of farmers, keeping detailed record of what precisely is done and exactly when, does not also come easily to people used to working with their hands and keeping data in their head. Our workers form these clubs in their own and neighbouring villages, provide farmers with detailed information on what has been experimented with elsewhere and with what results, and supply all relevant information to any innovative farmer who is willing to experiment and directly or indirectly spread information about sustainable agriculture systems. Interaction with these farmers, individually or through the forum of the clubs, is constant and these regular meetings are the focal points for innovation and dissemination.

The agricultural year in our area has three broad divisions: Rabi, pre-Kharif, and Kharif. One-to-one discussions, short sessions with a few, a half-day or a full-day study circle in the periods when the field does not need much looking after, meetings with outside resource persons, with innovative farmers from outside - these are routine for our workers. It is heartening that the Government has at long last woken up to the problems and the various agriculture officials in our area are glad to give us help. These meetings with farmers cover almost all the aspects of sustainable agriculture and results vary from village to village, from crop to crop from one year's drought to another's over-kind monsoon.

The following table gives details of our work in certain areas, randomly chosen here.

Subject	Techniques	No. of farmers	Total land used acres
Soil and nutrition	i) Manche	50	25
	ii) Compost	168	84
	iii) Azotabacter	64	19
	iv) Azolla	61	18
New crops	i) Sabita paddy	19	3
	ii) Deep water paddy	20	9
	iii) Arhar pulses	10	Shoulders of land
	iv) Aman long beans(barbati)	17	1 acre
Seed treatment	i) Saline water use	108	63 acres
	ii) Cow urine use	30	12.5
Seed propagation	i) Grafting kul trees	10	13 trees
	ii) Lime trees	10	28
	iii) Jamrul	4	7
Bio pesticides	i) Neem leaves and fruits	107	33 acres
	ii) Lime and mulberry	30	8
	iii) Integrated pest mngt	100	66 "
	iv) Neem oil cake	21	4 "
	v) Tobacco leaves	3	1 "
	vi) Garlic+ soap + kerosene	73	16 "

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In the matter of irrigation we would like to see less wastage of ground water and less use of electricity and so have agreed to help an NGO making pedal pumps by demonstrating its use and capacity to draw surface water. Between August and February 76 demonstrations were given to over 2700 farmers and 12 pumps were sold.

To enable them to perform effectively our agriculture workers have to be trained thoroughly and kept up to date. Apart from the regular monthly meetings and monthly workshops, trainings on various subjects and of various durations were arranged at various places for them. Some also visited other districts to see work there. On their part they carried the message of sustainable agriculture to the general people through stalls at village fairs, through talking at schools, and used our theatre and puppetry troupes extensively.

Without an exact idea of our resources we can never plan for development. So extensive surveys

were made of all sorts of things. In 15 villages we collected detailed and house-to-house information on the following: use of fertilizer; use of pesticide; fruit trees; trees for timber or other use, not food; agriculture costs and income; crop pattern; general status of the village; crop rotation; land use. In the case of those villagers who belong to our farmers' groups we recorded more detailed information about their personal land holdings. At Punra, every household was surveyed for all kinds of trees and we discussed with every family what they could do with what they had and what changes they would like.

All this close interaction with producers on the land and the means of production and the produce raises many questions as we go on. What will happen if use of chemical inputs is totally stopped right now? Should we make their total elimination our goal? Are we convinced that in such an event land can, with time, be equally productive through non-chemical means? If we are, then what time-frame should we have in mind?- Can more food be grown by using present water resources more efficiently? Should we lean towards crops that are more efficient in respect of water usage? Can we ever hope to gain much if we do not address the problem of changing the people's food habits? How can we press for bio-regional decentralized planning? Low input does not necessarily have to mean a decline in production but cash income may fall, and would a change of human culture make it more responsive to eco-farming? Even if we do not wish to or are unable to get rid of the market, must we so easily succumb to its pressures, and allow the overwhelming majority of our vast population to be manipulated by its impersonal biddings?

### KITCHEN GARDEN

No matter what its inadequacies are, the name kitchen garden has stuck and so we use this to describe the plots of vegetable to provide year-round non-toxic nutrition to the poorest of households, with a few herbs grown there for the commonest of diseases. This programme is run by women and through women as they are the ones to cater to the family's needs for food and we try to show them how the tiniest of vacant land near or next to the homestead, if not a part of it, can be used to provide some vegetable throughout the year. This will be grown without the slightest use of chemicals. Along with this we encourage women to learn about medicinal herbs so that minor illnesses can be managed at home without expensive and often unnecessary medical intervention.

This year we have helped set up 312 kitchen gardens in 10 villages, not all of equal productivity but none that does not meet some need of the household that runs it. This is more or less a routine continuation of our last year's work, but this year we also decided to have one or two model gardens in every village where we have a worker. This is a place for experiments and we want also

to see if more women do not come forward to join the programme on seeing the continuous utility of such a garden. Our worker also gets a place of her own where she can use and test her skills and ideas before passing them on to others. There were 12 such gardens this year.

There is constant interaction between our workers and women in the village and the agenda in such meetings is not always restricted to kitchen gardens or herbs, though they are obviously always discussed. We would like these meetings to encourage the participants to understand more of the problems that keep them in so poor a condition of body and mind and to search, along with us and in ways we think might help, for better options. This explains the variety of subjects on which we conducted surveys in some villages. The table shows how many households were covered in each village.

Village	Fruit trees	Garden calendar	Resources	Illnesses
Kolsur	36	25	2	25
Rudrapur	10	10	2	15
Andharmanik	20	20	2	18
Beliyakhali	16	16	3	18
Gokulpur	20	20	1	21
Bajitpur	34	24	2	25
Punra	41	9	1	x
Uttar Media	40	10	2	10
Fatullyapur	22	x	x	x

These data give us a better idea of which vegetable or herb to plant when for a particular household.

Apart from our monthly meetings of workers, and the monthly workshops for them this year we arranged a 3-day training camp. Our workers in their turn ran 10 awareness camps in various villages and altogether 234 women attended these. There were 131 study circles with 1508 participants. The following techniques of sustainable agriculture were followed in the number of gardens noted against them after the woman of the household had been trained in the technique and convinced of its need in one of these camps or meetings.

1. Special types of compost - 30
2. Usual compost - almost every garden
3. Liquid tea(a home made fertiliser) - 50
4. Neem leaf powder - 130
5. Organic pesticide - 75
6. Use of water hyacinth - 55

## 7. Use of mud from a pond bed - 55 8. Vegetable beds - 70

Our efforts to revive the use of medicinal herbs have been welcomed widely. It is a pity that some herbs have totally disappeared from our area of work, where they must once have been common. Along with the herbs themselves, knowledge of which to use for and in what and of their methods of application has also disappeared but this can be brought back and we are trying hard to persuade people to use home remedies for ordinary problems. Many are using herbs on their own, often grown in their kitchen gardens, and so an exact figure is impossible to give of how many used herbs for what, but 434 persons consulted our workers - 23 of whom were specially trained in this in 6 villages - for help and most found relief. In our schools, we are checking the medical history of the children and asking them to take herbs as preventives. Mainly these are Neem-tablets, Kalmegh, Tulsi, and Thankuni.

Village of school	Children treated	No. of doses
Andharmanik	50	393
Rudrapur	50	243
Bajitpur	38	175
Bhojpara	50	225
Fatullyapur	90	450
Uttar Media	50	600
Beliyakhali	60	782

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The herbs we have managed to grow in the villages and the expertise of our herbal “practitioners” have been most effective in curing the common cold, dysentery, indigestion, skin diseases, headache, burns, leucorrhoea, liver problems, insect bites, tooth ache, and diabetes. This year 77 households in 6 villages grew mushrooms but production was not too good because the winter was far too mild and we also had problems with the spawn.

The main work of this section is to provide opportunities for cultural development to students in our schools and also to other children of the area and to involve youth in our activities. This latter is now taking roots in our Kishore Kishori Bahini and will be dealt with separately. In the matter of culture, and for us this is an all-embracing term for all extra-curricular activities that we hope will develop a healthy sense of values in the mind of the child. The children in our three primary and 15 pre-primary schools are those with whom we work the closest but our efforts generally are to involve all other children too, as and when possible. Time and money are the two main reasons why we cannot cover all children in a village, and not because we wish to give any special priority to

our students. We are gratified to see that in quite a few villages other schools are learning some of the things we do with our children and then following these. This year we taught Bratachari, song and dance, games and sports, yoga etc. to more than 1500 children. They learnt 20 Bratachari items, 21 asanas, 25 short games, 25 songs, 29 action recitations, 11 folk dances from other areas of India, 10 short plays, and two puppetry items.

Spontaneous participation is our main goal, not artistic excellence, but of course we are happy when there is recognition of the crowd-pulling and -pleasing quality of our performances. In the four blocks where we work - Baduria, Swarupnagar, Deganga, and Basirhat II - different organisations, schools, Government offices, etc. have invited us to perform and on altogether 42 Such occasions between 32000 and 36000 persons must have watched our children give of their best. We usually perform free but some time the organisers insist on paying some token honorarium, and often they pay for our travel expenses from which we manage to save something. The money thus collected we spent this year in buying some costumes for our folk dance numbers. This has added more colour to our shows, and in any case borrowed plumes, as we previously had to give to the children, are best avoided.

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Every village trains and usually performs separately but there are central teams also which draw on participants from more than one village and so some track has to be kept of what is happening where. Thus the trainers made four group visits to individual villages and met 11 times in the year for a day's refresher training for themselves. A team from Sreema Mahila Samity in Nadia spent five days with us to teach us folk dance items from other parts of India. One of our workers attended a 10-day training camp organised by Vikramshila on various educative games for children.

Our adult theatre troupe this year incorporated certain changes in the play on sustainable agriculture following suggestions from the audience after some performances. A particularly happy moment was when, after a performance of this play at a function organised by the Government's agriculture department, a senior official told the invited audience of farmers that they had now learnt more effectively about the agenda of the conference than all the speakers could hope to tell them.

Nine special days were observed in all 15 villages through various programmes. The birth anniversaries of Rabindranath and Nazrul are celebrated together and putting bleaching powder into tube wells was part of this day's programme, in addition to the cultural components. Gandhi's birthday was remembered with cleaning campaigns. Independence Day saw distribution and

planting of plants and saplings, and Jagadish Chandra Bose's birthday was observed by checking how the previously planted trees were doing. Among the other special days were Children's Day and Raksha Bandhan. We recorded 16436 children as participating in these days.

Until last year we held our annual sports in 4 separate zones. This year we divided our 15 villages into 5 areas and held a sports meet in each on a different date. Participation, not competition, was our goal and so all the children who came and took part went home with some prize. The fun was not restricted to the children; their parents, particularly mothers, women from the self-help groups and the kitchen gardeners - all came, raced and laughed. Altogether 2006 children took part in the sports, but there were a great many left behind in the more distant villages. Our resources just did not permit us to bring them all and/or to give them prizes.

#### 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				
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 datafor 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 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

## Conclusion

There is enough around us to be sad about, to be concerned about, but there is no call to despair. A very faint wind of change can be felt to be blowing. Take the issue of when to start teaching English to children. As we said last year, we think this was a non-issue. The exact year is immaterial until and unless the method of teaching helps the overwhelming majority develop an interest in learning the language and qualified teachers are motivated and trained to do a difficult job. But what is significant is that in the face of public opinion the decision takers had to turn back on what was clearly their own preference and in the process it was seen how front organisations of the ruling elite, pressed by popular demand, dared speak against the centralised monolith and how this all-wise and all-powerful monolith had to listen and to give in. Who knows if this does not indicate the way things will work from now on? Advocacy on our part on proper issues and in the proper way may give the people a voice, the clear enunciation of the wise and the strong and not the tentative whining of the unconvinced and the weak, and the voice may prevail. We shall not be too immodest if we claim that the sum of our past few years' work in a small area has given us the confidence and the authority to say that in the coming years we may, with the people's generous help and total cooperation, get an alternative of real and sustainable worth in place. We lead, not because we are better but simply because there is a vacuum, and the people accept our leadership because they perceive it as partnership. There are leaders the people fear and we have

had enough of them; there are leaders the people hate and we have had enough of them too. There are leaders the people love - but it is human nature to kill whatever it loves. The best leaders of all, however, are those who, when they have finished their work, find and are happy to find the people saying, "We did it ourselves." We strive for such a future, all the time stressing to our companions on the road to justice that it is the process that matters, not just the outcome.