

Another year passes. We are presenting our 11th annual report. It is not without a smile that we look back on the first months of Swanirvar's life when we talked about what we would do in the years ahead but did not know where the next week's kitchen expenses for the few of us who lived at Swanirvar's office would come from. Now work wise, performance wise and achievement wise things have changed a lot but, as with all NGOs, worry about where the money will come from for next year's programmes remains: We have however learnt to ignore this. There is a lot to do for an innumerable larger number of people whose survival is more doubtful than ours.

This feeling, which we glorify as a sense of equanimity, is natural when you have been around for 11 years but we do miss the thrills of growing up when everything seemed possible, the uncertain steps of a beginner who nevertheless wanted to go beyond the horizon, the confidence of the naive who welcomed failures as giving a chance to begin again, the camaraderie that comes only from not being overawed by the future, the dizziness that is inevitable when you are constantly looking up. Now we have reached a plateau and the intoxication is much gone, but, regrettably, we are all too busy with our allotted tasks to replace this with introspection.

1 This year's report describes our present situation in detail, but will be much shorter than usual. In previous years we tried to analyse why we chose some programme and also how we want to do it. This was getting repetitive and this year we have decided not to write anything, or at least much, about the philosophical basis of our programme, about the logical framework of our activities. They are very much there, though; we have not bet sight of or compromised with our goal of providing a replicable model of an alternative society and do not initiate any programme just because it looks good, or because someone wants to pay, for it. Innovation is a means, and even then not always, but it can never be an end in itself.

Another reason why the report is short is that this year we did not adopt any new programme of significance. Reports on work in the various section's will mention what additions, alterations, and changes of emphases went into them but none of these was of a fundamental nature or major import. Last year's report hoped we would this year go some considerable distance in two new areas - forming a network of NGOs active in our district, and collaborating with the panchayat - but in spite of our best efforts we have not reached anywhere near what we expected. The two main things that hindered progress with the work on the Forum were the inordinate time it takes to communicate with all members, and the fact that every representative finds it difficult to devote any considerable time for the network after their commitments to their own organization, all of which are too small to spare anybody exclusively for this work.

In the matter of the network our aims are

- * bringing together the NGOs' total strengths and capacities;
- * avoiding duplication of efforts;
- * arranging for mutual help and learning from one another;
- * exchanging resource information; joint advocacy, campaigns; interacting jointly with the Government, panchayats.

The network now has a name, North 24 Parganas NGOs Forum, an office, has formed committees, held regular meetings which have been well attended by most of its presently more than 40 members, published newsletters, proceeded with work on a directory, arranged for subscription from all member NGOs, and generally found a direction. It held a 3-day conference in November to discuss and determine its own agenda, and another meeting in January to decide on how to establish working ties with panchayats.

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The results of our exploration of ways in which Swanirvar or any other NGO can be associated with a panchayat in the process of participatory planning have been less fruitful than we hoped. Last year's report gave a defaced account of the situation in panchayats and what we hoped we could do this year to take them nearer what they were conceived as - autonomous and participatory local governments. After much thought we had decided to offer our suggestions and services to the Bajitpur Gram Panchayat in the Baduria block. We had met individual members informally between January and March 1999 and with the ground somewhat prepared we held a formal meeting with the panchayat on 23 April, 1999. Five days later the panchayat passed a resolution that it would work with Swanirvar in certain designated areas. Since then we have achieved the following.

Our proposal for a notice board in each ward was initially rejected outright. We wanted these to be used by both the people and the panchayat to communicate information and ideas. After some persuasion over the next few months the boards were set up in some wards. Some are being used more and more but we would like more to be used the most.

Except for revenue maps of different mouzas the panchayat, like all others in the State, did not have any detailed map of the area under its own jurisdiction or of any individual village or booth. It took us a long time to assemble all the revenue maps, photocopy them, and to join them in the proper sequence. The original maps themselves were old; the Ichhamati has since changed its course and many other details needed revision. Villagers and also panchayat members helped in the work and finally a large map showing the panchayat's area was ready but this could not be put up on a wall of the panchayat office as some construction work had to come before that.

We persisted with our efforts to activate the 17 primary school committees which exist only on paper. One committee so far has made an annual action plan, but our meetings with some of the others did not result in much progress. Our attempts to open a primary school file in the panchayat have drawn a blank so far.

Swanirvar staff assisted in conducting some Gram Sansad meetings in November 1999 and the results are best described as uneven. A resolution recommending the formation of subject committees was passed in a meeting of the Gram Sabha in January 2000. With the panchayat not taking a decision on the matter, nothing further has been done.

We gave an orientation to senior high school and college going youths of one booth on doing a detailed family survey in their area. This survey was completed in January 2000 but total tabulation and analysis was still pending when the year ended. We got the State Institute of Panchayat and Rural Development (SIPRD) involved in this experiment and they came for a one-day workshop with panchayat members in February but attendance was very poor and it was a washout.

3 Not all is lost. We have invested an enormous amount of time to get things moving and do not feel there is any reason to give up totally. Much of this years unsatisfactory progress was because the panchayat members were initially very suspicious about Swanirvar's motives. The whole thing was new to them, and they were not sure if they were "allowed" to collaborate with an NGO. Their mindset requires a lot of careful and sympathetic handling. Initially each idea was met with a lot of distrust and resistance as it was perceived as "unofficial" and therefore, without any further ado, not necessary. We think the secretary and many, members have now changed their mind and we hope for better results next year.

Our main sources of funds this year have been the following.

Friends of Swanirvar, Worcester, England (FoS)	Rs 11, 27, 780.53
Child Relief and You (CRY)	Rs 6, 84, 970.00
Share and Care Foundation, USA (S & C)	Rs 3, 81, 503.00
(This came from -ASHA-LA , and from individuals mostly in and around Los Angeles and some from Chicago)	
Ministry of HRD, Government of India (VERS - GOI) (through Vikramshila Educational; Research Society)	Rs 1, 69; 333. 166
Association for India's Development, USA(AID)	Rs 1, 42, 021.00
P Banerjee	Rs 90, 000.00
Individuals	Rs 76, 013.00

Total	Rs. 26, 71, 620.68
Government of West Bengal (reimbursement for eye operations)	Rs 24, 058.00
Bank interest	Rs 25, 209.00
Subscription	Rs 360.00
Sale of fish	Rs 59, 184.00
Grand total	Rs 27, 80, 431.68

Capital expenses this year are given below.

Head of expense	Total money spent (in Rs)	Source of money
Building	3, 93, 815.35	FoS
Land	1, 08, 270.00	FoS
	52, 069.00	Foreign
Equipment and furniture	26, 123.00	S & C
Cycle	6, 310.00	Domestic
Total	5, 86, 587.35	

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A programme-wise break-up of this year's expenses is given below.

Programme	Total money spent (in Rs)	Source of money
Agriculture and allied	47, 824.20	S & C
	22, 477.50	Domestic
Primary education	1, 81, 946. 85	VERS - Gol
	1, 46, 280.60	S & C
	21, 673.00	Domestic
	10, 894.25	CRY
Pre-primary education	4, 29, 191.50	CRY
	44, 674.15	S & C
Youth and Culture	1, 16, 334.35	CRY
	99, 000.00	FoS
	87, 343.07	S & C
Health	1, 51, 809. 95	All)
	52, 591.00	CRY
SHG (Savings-credit)	3,09, 8q8. 00	FMS
	5, 840.75	S & C
Organization	21, 729.50	Domestic
Training	20, 400.00	S &C

	40, 187.60	Foreign
	36, 000.00	CRY
Books, stationery, printing	27, 192.60	FOS
	27, 682.80	Domestic
	6, 594.60	CRY
Travel	69, 752.30	FoS
	13, 271.35	CRY
Total	20, 90, 489.92	

The year's administrative expenses are given below.

Head of expense	Total money spent (in Rs)	Source of money
Bank charges	1,917.00	Foreign and domestic
Repair of vehicles	9,184.00	FMS
	14,792.15	Domestic
Electricity	5,513.00	FoS
	4,221.00	Domestic
5 Postage and telephone	13,571.42	FoS
	3,838.00	Domestic
Fees (audit, IT etc.)	31,950.00	FoS
	4,000.00	CRY
Documentation	20,409.10	FoS
Salaries - Caretaker	12,000.00	FoS
Accountant	20,400.00	CRY
Total	1,41,795.67	
Total of the above three		
Capital	5, 86, 587.35	
Programme	20, 90, 489.92	
Administration	1, 41, 795. 67	
Total	28,18, 872.94	

Health

OUR COMMUNITY health programme is a many-pronged one and this year we did something or the other in altogether 11 villages. Of these, Bajitpur, Chandalati, and Fatullyapur - three of our five "original sites of presence - saw the most activity, in both range and commitment, and two, Punra and Gokulpur, found us digging in a beginner's toe-hold. In the six others, Dweep Media, Uttar Media, Bhojpara, Sarafrazpur, Beliyakhall, and Parpatna gradually increasing activity in the

preceding three years meant that now we were an established presence. We have six women workers who get a monthly salary, and seven others who are paid an activitybased allowance.

We worked for mother and child care in all 11 villages. Our basic target population comprises women of chili-bearing age, and children under five. Family planning continued to get a major emphasis and our workers in these 11 villages kept regular contact with 3868 eligible couples, advising them about and providing them with means of temporary contraception. The following table summarises our work in this area.

Name of village	Number of sterilizations	Oral pills	Condoms (cycles)	Loops
Bajitpur	3	792	4.990	1
Dweep Media	6	399	8640	8
Uttar Media	14	762	17570	4
Fatullyapur	7	1555	14400	3
Bhojpara	3	675	9100	1
Sarafrazpur	1	1180	7200	6
Punra	16	924	7200	2
Chandalati	1	668	1030	1
Beliyakhali	9	698	4200	3
Parpatna	2	1847	6660	1
Total in 10 villages	62	9500	80990	28

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There were 18 recorded cases of Depo Provera injection and 93 women admitted to taking the help of homoeopathic practitioners. The first is positively harmful and the second possibly inefficacious. We carried on with vaccinating children against diphtheria, polio, partussis, tetanus, measles, and tuberculosis. The vaccines are supplied by the Government which organises camps in four of these 11 villages. Our workers keep in constant touch with the Government staff, remind mothers of when their children are due for vaccination - the need for such reminding is gradually decreasing - and help herd them to the camp, in the running of which they provide all assistance. At Bajitpur the vaccination camp began at our initiative and is still run by us in the premises of our local affiliate, with our workers doing everything from bringing the vaccine from the Government stores to returning the unused but properly preserved stock. Children in the other villages have to travel varying distances to get to a camp or health sub-centre for their dose, and our workers see to it that this inconvenience does not affect attendance. For this they regularly visit the households under their care, for each of which they have a dossier. Apart from registering them for and then

reminding them of vaccination, during these home visits they advise women about rules of hygiene and sanitation, take the body weight of pregnant women, check their blood pressure, supply vitamin and iron tablets. On most occasions when a woman has to go to the health centre our worker is almost sure to accompany her. As part of the polio eradication programme all over India children up to 5 years of age were this year given their fifth oral vaccination dose. As before, we cooperated with the Government efforts with all our resources and ability.

Our workers identified all children in the relevant age group, spoke to their parents of the need to join the programme, were present at the camps, and helped make them a success. The following table shows the performance of these camps.

The figures relate to the 11 villages taken together.

October 1999	Vaccinated children	3013	Absent children	7
November 1999	Vaccinated children	309	Absent children	1
December 1999	Vaccinated children	317	Absent children	10
January 2000	Vaccinated children	3115	Absent children	56
February 2000	Vaccinated children	3054	Absent children	108
March 2000	Vaccinated children	3104	Absent children	63
Total In six months	Vaccinated	18550	Absent	245

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There are many reasons why 100% success is not achieved in any village. Some of them are legitimate and some others, given the situation in rural India, perhaps unavoidable. But how do we disabuse some parents of their stubborn conviction that these doses masquerade as polio vaccination and that actually, as is certain to

be realised years later when the loss cannot be repaired, these are meant to ruin the vaccinated children's procreative ability? The pity is that in many cases such notions are strengthened by insidious campaigning by people who should, and possibly do, know better and that with every passing phase of the campaign, the non cooperative section is getting more articulately and assertively obstructive.

At Bajitpur one child was stricken with polio in August 1999. When the subdivisidnal hospital confirmed this, a special camp was held by the Government where 100% of the eligible children were present to receive the dose. If this was not a flash in the pan, it was the panic induced by the child being affected that did the trick.

In the fields of vaccination family planning etc. we have not done too badly but we certainly could

have done better. However, success is not a matter of just competent management and coordinated commitment; often enough the ground reality proves to be unpredictable and intransigent. It is interesting and educative to compare our records over the years, but we do not give them here because this report is something of a public document and they could be misleading as grassroots evidence because our surveys are done and the data collected and analysed by people with no statistical training. Also, in a strict sense they are incomplete because in every village there are some households, no matter how few they may be, which refuse to answer our questions. We welcome any qualified individual or institution wishing to analyse our extensive data on vaccination, births, deaths, terminations of pregnancy, sex of the newborn etc. In some villages we continued to run some sort of a clinic where allopathic medicines for common ailments are supplied at cost price. Herbal medicines are also available there, or at least suggestions on how to make them. Because of this the number of persons seeking herbal help cannot be properly documented and the figures below are approximate.

Village	No. of patients	Cost of medicine	No. of herbal patients
Fatullyapur	783	Rs 1643.15	146
Sarafrazpur			76
Bhojpara			50
Bajitpur	1438	Rs 1978.00	74
Dweep Media	530	Rs 185.35	89
Uttar Media	145	N.A	162
Chandalati	38	Rs 5.00	117
Beliyakhali	667	Rs 497.00	13
Parpatna	1218	Rs 1542.50	449
Total	4819	Rs 5851.00	1176

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Providing remedial services is useful but our resources will always be woefully- inadequate if conditions are not created in which people need these services less. For this it is imperative to make them aware of the simple rules of sanitation and hygiene, adapted, when necessary, to their area-specific and socio-economic conditions.

Throughout the year we held awareness camps on subjects as varied as family planning, vaccination, problems of puberty, life education, herbal medicines, blood donation, cleanliness, use of clean water, use of latrines, nutrition, deworming, gastro-intestinal diseases and their easy treatment, etc. On occasions there are resource persons from outside, but usually our health workers can now very competently talk to a group of women on all these topics. Altogether 193 such meetings were held in 11 villages, with 4122 women attending, listening, and asking

questions.

Midwifery has been allowed to fall into disrepair, disrepute even, without any worthy alternative within universal reach. This is a loss and we think that this gentle art can be a mainstay of health care in villages if its practitioners are given some training to update their skills and hone their intuition, and some basic tools. We are still to decide on how to go about this, but we made a beginning this year by learning in detail about what most of them do, and how, when we held seven three-hour-long meetings in nine villages, with a total of 135 practising mid wives.

These meetings and camps were held in the villages where we work, but at our administrative head office at Andharmanik also we organized trainings, workshops, meetings, and camps to share information and experience, to plan our work, and to evaluate performance. The table below gives a summary.

Subject	No. of meetings	Duration	No. of participants
Monthly meetings	12	1 day	88
Quarterly meeting of health workers and village organisers	3	1 day	39
Workshop on analysing survey data	2	1 day	11
Workshop on use of adolescence kit	1	1 day	5
Awareness camp on adolescence kit, reproductive and child health	1	1 day	8
Workshop on year planning	1	1 day	7
Training on Life Education (for Kishor Kishori Bahini)	4	2 days	94
All-round health and development (for Kishor Kishori Bahini)	2	4 days	38
Nutrition (for youths)	2	2 days	46

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We could not organize any exposure trip for our health workers, nor did they go for any training outside our, project area, but the health supervisor was sent by our funding partner, CRY, to a two-phase training spread over eight days at CINI, Calcutta on reproductive and child health. In response to a request from an NGO in Purulia, our health supervisor and a mistry went to train people there on the construction and maintenance of low-cost toilets.

The arsenic menace keeps growing. The Government's stand seems to have changed from one of public denial that any problem exists to one of grudging admission and tardy action but that has not stopped people from dying of arsenicosis nor has it lessened by a decimal point the long-range

fatal presence of arsenic in ground water all over our area of work. Our resources are too meagre for us to do anything even remotely effective but we are in touch with large institution which can provide leadership and maybe something will take shape before it is too late before more people die of this than in any epidemic seen ever before, as the World Health Organization seems to fear. OXFAM gave us a few field kits and with these we tested water from 23 tubewells in a few villages, chosen randomly. There was nothing random in the results though, as 18 of the samples showed the presence of arsenic, but there was no way for us to ascertain the exact degree of its presence.

We continued to build low-cost toilets and 448 were added in 7 villages (Gokulpur - 99; Atulia - 36; Jashaikati - 95; Parpatna - 100; Kalinga - 44; Shimulia - 43; Chandalati - 36).

Collecting blood continues to be a priority in our health project. We train local youths to act as motivators in their own areas, and help any organization that wants to hold a collection no lion camp, not necessarily in our "own" villages his villages. We give them publicity material, send our children's and/or adult theatre group to produce a street play on blood donation, liaise with the blood banks, and help with some money towards arranging the camp.

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Our only condition is that no private blood bank will have any presence in all this, and also that the local Government blood banks should be asked to come as often as possible. Unfortunately, their keenness, particularly that of the blood bank of the Basirhat subdivisional hospital, to collect blood does not quite match the people's willingness to donate it, and it is a pity that the Calcutta-based blood banks, too, are sometimes not very eager to exploit to the most the potential the camps offer. Our target for the year was 1000 units of blood, but we overshot this by 20%, as the following table shows. Janakalyan Samity of Magurkhali, one of the most active of our affiliates, brought together 297 donors at one single camp. Our efforts in this direction were recognised by the Association of Voluntary Blood Donors, West Bengal, by its award of a handsome trophy, for the second year running, to us as the NGO to collect most blood in the State.

Organization and village	Date of camp	Total donors	Men	Women
Nabakalol Gram Unnayan Samity, Rudrapur	30.4.99	42	36	6
Unique Coaching Centre, Katiyahat,	8.8.99	71	66	5
United Club, Bithari	14.10.99	90	80	10

Jyoti Sangha, Bhojpara	15.11.99	40	39	1
Janakalyan Samity, Magurkhali	21.11.89	297	237	60
Netaji Seba Sangha, Bajitpur	30.11.99	88	72	16
Pall! Unnayan Sangha, Purbapolta	8.12.99	109	94	15
Nabasree Sangha, Iswarigachha	19.12.99	77	56	21
Sanghasree Club, Punra	15.1.00	82	76	6
Vivekananda Smriti Seba Sangha, Uttar Media	31.1.00	63	51	12
Gram Unnayan Kendra, Fatullyapur	8.2.00	71	59	12
Yubakbrinda, Mandra	11.2.00	43	40	3
Swasthya and Paribesh Unnayan Kendra, Matia	21.2.00	50	43	7
Palll Unnayan Kendra, Chandalati	21.2.00	40	34	6
Bankra-Gokulpur Gram Panchayat	22.2.00	20	20	none
Total 15 villages		1083	1003	180

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All the work that we take up in our health programme is meant for the whole population of a village, except the one we have for the schools we run ourselves. This is not deliberate selfishness but a compromise dictated by certain exigencies. We organised a day's orientation training this year for our 35 pre-primary school teachers, their supervisor, and for our six health workers. The teachers of our primary schools received the training last year. Our goals were very limited. A survey had shown most of the children developed sores in their oral cavity in winter and we took measures to give them relief. One prescription was to make sure they ate sufficient leafy and/or green vegetables just before the onset of winter and our kitchen garden workers met mothers about this. Seeds were given to families with doubtful purchasing power so that they could grow something for their own consumption. To supplement the vitamin intake this ensured, we distributed to each of 1000 children 10 tablets of vitamins B & C. We did not run a general deworming campaign this year, but some teachers took tablets from us and organised camps for their children.

YOUTH AND CULTURE

THIS section has two principal areas of work, the first covering mainly children in our schools but not closed to those outside them, and the second somewhat older children, those in high schools of the area, those who form our Kishor Kishori Bahini. In the first altogether 1749 children learnt 28 Bratachari items, 24 Yoga asanas, 35 dances with rhymes, 28 songs, 14 folk and 10 general

dance numbers, and 34 small games. They also practised puppetry and mime. Our basic intention remains the same; we would like all children to be creative, and also to develop a love; for and acquire proficiency in 'traditional modes so' as not to be swept away by standardised and, if we may say so, "imported" (not necessarily from a foreign country, but perhaps from parts of our own country's society. which are as foreign to them) forms of entertainment. Spontaneity or a smiling face is not unique to our children; but the joy that emanates from them when they perform with abandon, these underprivileged-in-every-which-way children, makes us feel their future may not be as bleak as economics would have us believe. Their elders in the area love what they do, as is shown by the fact that we received 23 formal invitations in the year for these children to mount a show on some occasion or the other, occasions that drew more than 12000 spectators. On a number of times we could not accept an invitation as either the children had some centralised training or school examinations coming up, or the trainers had a workshop or refresher course to attend.

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Nine special Days were observed in our schools, all secular celebrations to which we append some task of social commitment, and 14566 children took part in these, watched by 13709 persons. Our 15 villages were divided into five zones, and every zone held its own athletic sports meet. There were prizes for each of the 2379 children who participated. Members of our women's self-help groups, farmers' clubs, and women involved with kitchen gardens also took part.

Members of our Vishor Kishod Bahini, who are high-school-going children between 10 and 16, continue to enthuse us with hope. We give below a brief resume of what they have done in the course of the year in their respective villages. All this makes them different from their schoolmates in many ways; for example, they develop life and vocational skills; they improve their educational competence by actually doing things mentioned in their school books, what we call "real learning". Their strength is now 250 in 8 villages and though naturally and obviously not everybody has the same involvement, they did the following. rendered first aid; vaccinated 6854 poultry birds; vaccinated, with assistance from the Government's Animal Resource Development Department, 762 cattle and 600 goats; they could also diagnose and treat some bovine diseases; prepared fruit and flower tree nurseries, distributed 3525 saplings, helped with grafting to improve the quality of fruits;

- * designed and maintained 120 intensive kitchen gardens in 8 villages;
- * popularised and prescribed herbals for the treatment of common diseases;
- * disinfected tubewells with bleaching powder;
- learnt to make household water filters; recorded the daily maximum and minimum rainfall and temperature; made 5000 "rakhis" as part of our programme for joint celebration of Rakhi Bandhan

with students of 6 Government schools;

* surveyed the following and then presented the data through charts incidence of diarrhoea, worm infestation; number, location and use of tubewells and latrines; vaccination of animals and birds; rainfall and temperature;

* prepared detailed land use maps of their respective villages;

- helped in the publicity and other build-up work before a blood donation camp, and then looked after those who had donated blood and were resting;
- helped in road repair and cleaning;
- in three villages that were flooded they worked alongside staff of the Government Health Department on providing hygienic shelters for those who had to leave home.

We organized the following trainings for KKB members

Subject	Total participants	Boys	Girls
General health	32	17	15
Nutrition	46	27	19
Kitchen garden	148	71	77
Herbal medicine	133	N.A.	N.A.
Reproductive health	27	17	10

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These interactions, coupled with their practical work, have given them enough confidence to talk about the relevance of their work in many spheres. They can hold their own when they talk with Government officials, panchayat members, village elders about actual development needs and priorities as opposed to standard Government programmes. Some are articulate enough to talk about their future role in panchayats. No mean contribution is made to their self confidence by their ever increasing cultural performance skills. Recognition in the form of invitations to perform at outside high schools, Melas, Government offices, Block youth festivals, community programmes, etc., extend their horizons.

Parents are also impressed. They are proud that their children have learnt useful skills, have got crucial inputs which schools and private tutors do not provide. We met parents and guardians in 5 villages to discuss with them what exactly we wanted from these children and how the family could help. At Bajitpur the enthusiasm generated by KKB work has led to the activation of a primary school and a panchayat beneficiary committee.

To supplement the information they get from text books, we have asked KKB members to study the following and keep notes: source, use, filtration and conservation of water; life cycle, habitat and

habits of certain insects; birth, growth, conservation, destruction, use and utility of trees. Altogether 80 members of KKB were asked to come for an annual evaluation of their work in two central workshops. We try to mix work with pleasure and 120 children were taken to Calcutta to see the Birla Industrial and Technological Museum.

Service Centre, Calcutta has formed a State-level network of organizations working in this fashion with older children and the environment. As one of its first members we have taken an active part in all its three meetings. Two of our workers visited an NGO in Medinipur to train 60 children in two areas. Locally two high schools asked us to take one period a week on herbal medicine, to supplement what the tact book says. News of the students' interest has travelled, and a few more schools have approached us to see what we can do together. Many teachers also want their schools and students to be involved in the villages cleaning activities carried out by KKB. All this is not quite unexpected, so more gratifying to us has been the response of Government officials, with a reputation of being unsympathetic towards innovation. Not merely are the veterinary staff of 3 blocks enlisting the cooperation of KKB members when they have to conduct animal vaccination and treatment camps, but when the veterinary department of Baduria block received a prize for treating the most number of animals in the district, it publicly acknowledged the contribution of Swanirvars KKB to its success.

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EDUCATION / Pre-primary

THIS YEAR we ran 15 schools in as many villages. We started this with 993 names on the rolls, of whom 512 were boys and 481 girls. As always, some children started to leave, their number finally becoming 125. As far as we could ascertain 43 of these stayed back at home and 48 went to some other school. The

remaining 34 were all at Matia where our school caters mainly to children of sex workers and with the mothers often changing their address it has not been possible for us to find out what happened to them. These losses were somewhat restored with new children coming in. When the year ended we had 962 children, 480 boys and 482 girls. Attendance showed an average of 74.4% for boys and 74.5% for girls. The Bajitpur school cuts a rather sorry figure with its boys and girls both showing the lowest attendance average, 64% and 66% respectively, while at Fatullyapur this was 88% for both boys and girls, figures no other school matches.

We have kept in touch with parents, both informally, and at regular meetings, of which there were 64 in the year with altogether 1928 parents attending. Teachers visited the children's homes 5118 times, to exchange thoughts and impressions with parents. Some schools had the happy experience of seeing parents come to watch their children at work, to understand exactly what our

system is, and usually returning convinced they had acted wisely by sending their child to us. We never forget that the parents' and the community's eyes are upon us. The supervisor made regular and frequent visits to the schools (120 altogether in the year) and held meetings with the teachers every month. There were the by now usual workshops and group visits to one school. Teachers continued to make all the teaching aids themselves.

A recurrent tension in civil society stems from the demarcation of the fine line between liberty and licence and the difficulty to ensure that one man's freedom of action does not curtail the same freedom in another. Our teachers feel they have the same problem with the children. Do we need a leash to ensure proper freedom of movement? Where does encouragement stop and interference begin? All four of our quarterly workshops saw much debate and discussion on this issue, to everybody's benefit. One problem seems destined to remain. We expect our teachers to work in an alternative manner to reach an alternative goal but, being all products of a traditional society and a traditional system, they find it very difficult to overcome ingrained beliefs and habits.

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This year we showed a video film on African wildlife to all our children, to their immense enjoyment and wonder. It is a pity that we cannot find anything like this dubbed in Bengali. Children from some of the schools had another treat when they were taken to an amusement park at Ashoknagar. It was a dream afternoon for them.

A major event this year was a three-phase, 15-day training on our methods held at Swanirvar and attended by 14 teachers from 7 organizations, one co-ordinator from another and an individual who ran his own school. They had all approached us for such inputs and we were happy to oblige. We justified CRY's faith in us and our own hopes that our senior teachers could now act as trainers themselves. All the participants felt that they had benefited greatly from the exercise. It was gratifying for us that whatever little good work we are doing is being replicated in this manner.

Since we work with so small children we could not have managed without the help of the community. There is some unhappiness at the beginning of the year almost everywhere for we have to send away some applicants for admission, but once that disappointment is forgotten the local people offer us all help. This year altogether Rs 34,184.50 was collected as parents' contribution in the 15 schools. At Bhojpara the mothers have taken up the responsibility to collect this money, to ensure children's attendance, and are also involving themselves in all our extra curricular work. At both Kolsur and Hyderpur a local individual has helped us with making charts and drawing pictures. At Rudrapur one villager even worked in the place of a teacher who could not come for a few days.

EDUCATION / Primary

OUR THREE primary schools, most of the expenses of which are borne by the Central Government under the NFE-2000 scheme, continue to thrive. If only the Government were more generous and somewhat more regular with its monetary help! Our teachers, whose competence and commitment would or, at least, should, shame a vast majority of their counterparts at Government-run schools, are expected to work for a comparative pittance, and our students, who do so well when they compete against their peers from these Government-run schools for admission to a high school, do not qualify for inclusion in the midday meal scheme.

We give below some cardinal particulars about these schools in a tabular form.

Particulars	Fatullyapur	Chandalati	Andharmanik	Total
1. Total students	160	145	150	455
Boys	71	73	69	213
Girls	89	72	81	242
2. Average attendance %	89.72	90.16	88.51	89.13
Boys	88.37	89.42	88.48	88.76
Girls	91.09	91.58	88.61	90.43
3. Total working days	232	232	249	238
4. No. of parents' meetings	3	4	4	11
Average attendance	78	64	65	69
5. Total home visits	583	444	1023	2050
Average per home	3.64	3.06	6.82	4.6
6. Central workshops				7
Average participation				14
7. Village workshops	3	3	4	10
Average participation	4	4	3	3.6
8. Teachers' monthly meetings				12
Average participation				12
9. Group visits				5
Average participation				12
10. Education organiser's visit	36	30	26	92
11. Fees collected (in Rs)	17,290	18,078	6330	39088

Going through these figures we asked ourselves a few questions and for answers we probed matters a little deeper. Whatever the average figures are, analysis of individual attendance records reveals that 227 of the to' 455 children were present on 90% or more days. The average for the

total is brought down by the other half. A child brings a letter from his guardian if he has been absent and on going through these we find that around 37% of the absences were because the family had gone somewhere, 25% because the child was needed at home, 21 % because the child was ill, and 12% because the child did not wish to come to school. Rain and sup causes accounted for the remaining 5%. This was more or less the picture in each of the last three years. Now we do not think things can be changed too much from this situation, and so we had better be reconciled to the present attendance average, even though we would like this to go up by, say, another 5-6%.

A teacher works on more days in a year than his students. Monthly meetings of teachers and regular workshops are essential to maintain the standard of their performance in class and this year we spent 34 days on these. But, and this is important, we make it a point to hold these over weekends so that school sits as usual, even if it means that the teachers work on Saturday evening and Sunday too.

17 Apart from teachers' training the two other distinguishing features of our education programmes are classroom management and community involvement. In the first, our sustained efforts have started bearing fruit in many directions. Children right from Class I upwards no longer demonstrate better powers of observation which help them in their environment studies in which we go outside and beyond the book; they now show more creativity when writing or telling a story enquiries into local history continue to throw up lots of new or forgotten facts; in geography they go out on field trips to collect specimens and note characteristics for themselves; their use of and coordination between the senses are more developed.

There are of course areas where we are short of success. The children's handwriting continues to be bad, and we still do not know how to go about teaching them English effectively. Another old problem is the often huge gap between sections of students in the same class. We have tried many methods to remove this difference but none seems to work. In two areas our success has bred new problems. We do not know how to use or keep the enormous amount of data the children are collecting on local history, and how to reconcile the some times contradictory information they are bringing back. Also we can feel that extensive and intelligent use of the teaching-learning material that we produce has honed their analytical and various other skills, but how do we evaluate the quantum of increase?

The constraint that bothers and frustrates us the most is that we have to follow syllabi decided by others, in our case the State Government. We feel we have gone quite some way in providing an alternative method of teaching, and our children have learnt to look at things somewhat differently,

but we cannot change the contents of the books, to us often irrelevant. There is no satisfactory and viable solution to this in the prevailing circumstances, when our children's admission into Class V of the high schools depends totally on their intimate knowledge of the government prescribed text books.

Our efforts to involve the community at large have not been as sustained as they could have been and so have not borne much result. But we are always close to guardians, who in a village are mostly, parents. After seeing for two years how easily our, students get into Class V of local high schools, for places where they have to compete with a very large number of candidates from other schools, they are now assured that even if we teach in innovative and "strange" ways, the children do learn their stuff, and learn it better. The result of this has been that we now have to turn away more and more children. We hope parents understand that we are a small organization with severely limited resources and we cannot solve the problems of education, or the lack of it, in society. We are just trying to build a replicable model. We are ready to give all help to any individual or institution wishing to learn about our ideas and from our experience but that is all we can do.

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INCOME GENERATION

This is perhaps the most visible of our current programmes, and seems set to move ahead rapidly on its own steam in the coming years. We give below the salient details of our performance this year.

The figures in brackets show what we achieved this year.

Village	No. of groups	No. of women in the groups
Fatullyapur	39(4)	195(20)
Kolsur	31(7)	155(35)
Bajitpur	23(6)	115(30)
Andharmanik	18(6)	90(30)

Now for the number of loans distributed this year.

Village	1st loan	2nd loan	3rd loan	4th loan	5th loan	Total loans
Fatullyapur	20	59	33	2	-	114
Kolsur	28	45	38	17	1	129
Bajitpur	33	35	36	19	1	124
Andharmanik	30	40	24	-	-	94
Total	111	179	131	38	2	461

The amount disbursed as fans is given below, in rupees.

Village	Amount given	Amount repaid
Fatullyapur	3,65,000	3,19,161
Kolsur	3,74,300	2,95,700
Bajitpur	4,04,500	3,06,282
Andharmanik	2,76,000	2,24,575
Total	14,19,800	11,45,718

Now for the various purposes for which the loans were taken.

Purpose	Fatullyapur	Kolsur	Bajitpur	Andharmanik	Total
Agriculture	52	49	54	27	182
Animal husbandry	14	5	8	7	34
Fishing	5	20	7	5	37
Ferry boat	1	-	-	-	1
Cycle vans	3	1	1	3	8
Trade in agri. products	13	8	19	15	55
Handicrafts	15	4	11	-	30
Sewing	-	4	4	2	10
Small trading	4	38	9	29	80
Grocery	7	-	9	3	19
Barber shop	-	-	-	1	1
Medicine shop	-	-	1	2	3
House building	-	-	1	-	1
Total	114	129	124	94	461

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This is so far the only loan given for an ostensibly non-productive purpose, but the local organization acceded to the group's request on the merits of the case.

Each of the four villages we have so far named actually stands for a larger area; for example, Fatullyapur includes that village and Sarafrazpur, Kolsur itself and Kamdebkati, Bajitpur itself and Kefayatkati, and Andharmanik two villages besides itself, Magurkhali and Jashaikati. These nine villages followed the same procedures as in previous years and the only change, but a major one, came regarding the rate of interest. Our limit for a first loan was Rs 2500 which had to be paid back in 50 weekly instalments, beginning from the week after the issue of the loan, with a sliding 12% simple interest. With a reduction of the quantum of the principal every week, the amount repayable as interest was also going down, and we found that we were ending up with receiving

no more than Rs 146 as total interest when the principal was fully repaid. Outside experts warned us this would not be viable in the long run, and we soon found they were very right. We were not running the programme to make a profit, but we also had to make sure that when the funding ended, it would pay for itself, at least for the departmental staff's salary and the stationery. Considering that the local moneylender, whose monopoly over sources of credit we were trying to break, charged as much as 365% interest on occasion - the usual rate is around 200% - we decided to raise our rates too, to 10% flat. This meant the total amount we would get as interest on Rs 2500 repaid over 50 weeks, would be Rs 250 instead of Rs 146. We were prepared for resistance and were happy that members of the groups presented their case forcefully and cogently, but were happier when they understood our logic, and agreed that the benefit accruing to them even now was so great that their protest sounded niggardly. Another not unexpected result of our decision was that the moneylenders, who had so far been watching our progress with impotent distaste as their clientele, present or prospective, slipped away from their stranglehold, be it in ever so small numbers, now began a campaign against us, highlighting our "perfidy". This did not hurt us too much, though, for the women now understand a lot more since they began training for and forming the groups.

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This has given them the voice to make other demands also. The maximum limit of our first loan is Rs 2500, of the second Rs 3000, of the third Rs 4000, and of the fourth Rs 5000. A major demand is for a higher quantum. Our sympathies are often with them as we agree that even Rs 5000 cannot be used to create any permanent asset, but our hands are tied as we just do not have enough money. Second, they clamour for more information on: the possibilities before them and for more entrepreneurial assistance. Both are necessary, but again we cannot help march with our limited resources. It would indeed be very good if they could be helped in these ways to be more independent, for we make no secret of the fact that many of the loans are actually utilised by the menfolk, if only because the women do not have enough skills or capacity to successfully use them.

An inevitable question now arises: what has been the effect of all these loans, all this money? It is not easy to assess the impact of any restricted input into a complex society. In tangible terms many households now have more cows, goats, or poultry birds. Quite a few people who drove van rickshaws or otherwise worked with others' equipment, paying a daily rent that frequently left them with very little from their labour, now own their own means of livelihood. Small shops have sprung up. More people are leasing land to cultivate it. What the longterm effect of our small effort would be we cannot presume to foresee.

The point behind these self-help groups is however not simply economic well-being. Empowerment of women is a wider concept, sometimes it can be independent of economic indices. For example, even if the husband gets to use the money the fact that the wife alone is able to procure the loan gives her status; also, since she is responsible for the repayment, she wields considerable control over how the money is spent and what happens to the surplus. More important is the lifting of veils, an extension of horizons. Our group members are attending Gram Sansad meetings as a matter of both duty and right and, with maybe just a few exceptions, all the group members send their children to school, and themselves attend without any compulsion meetings on health, nutrition, and herbal medicine. Thirty of them in various villages have volunteered to grow a kitchen garden, 24 have donated blood, and they have attended in numbers the following trainings: kitchen garden - 1; herbal medicine - 7; health - 8; blood donation - 1; legal rights - 3; education - 1; insurance schemes - 1.

This is no mean achievement. Getting hold of one's lawful rights is a long process, but an effective beginning is made when one makes a clear claim to them. Thus, it was most heartening to see, at a convention of all group members of the Kolsur area, still-illiterate or neo-literate women take the microphone, fully aware that the local panchayat Pradhan, a member of the Zilla Parishad and such high-ups were listening, and unhesitatingly state their demands and proposals. No journey was ever finished if one did not take the first step.

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KITCHEN GARDEN

Standard response to this programme of ours is to wonder why at all this should be necessary when, so goes received wisdom, every village home has creeper vegetables on the roof, and some vegetables growing around the house, without the need of any care, for is not the rural soil very fertile? Unfortunately the reality is not quite like this. Yes, some houses do have some vegetables growing but there are many others which have no vacant space, or has space but no sun there. And, let there be no mistake about this, everything needs tending, the more scientific the better. Indeed, that is the key to our programme. We would like every house to have some supply of vegetables throughout the year, not from haphazardly grown plants but from a carefully mapped and laid out garden, no matter how small the available space is, which uses as much as possible waste water and no chemical fertiliser or pesticide at all. And one more thing, for hedge we recommend some herbal plants, as every household needs them for common ailments.

This might appear a wonderful idea but unfortunately there are not many takers for it. For one thing, rural Bengal is not overtly nutrition-conscious and greens are good if you get them, but for most people potatoes would do. Second, people have become conditioned to working for cash. Women in a family would rather use what little time they can spare from domestic chores on work

that would fetch them ready payment and not go for work that would save them spending that money. Third, planning for or working on a vegetable plot is not a glamorous way of spending time and energy.

This year we made and maintained 17 model gardens in 6 villages - two at Andharmanik, and three each at Bajitpur, Belyakhali, Gokulpur, Kolsur and Rudrapur. For each of these we made a resource map of the household, surveyed what fruit and other trees it has, prepared a calendar of its existing in-house sources of vegetable, a detailed design of the plot showing the paths of sunlight, areas and times of shade, and sources of water, preferably from the house. Our workers are responsible for these gardens, and the idea is to have something on permanent display to enthuse neighbours. Our workers are always ready to offer suggestions to anybody interested in having a garden of their own and we also have regular training sessions. These last are generally of five types. First, there are meetings With around 40 persons in new areas to tell them what sustainable agriculture is and to find out how many of them would be interested in working for a garden in their own house.

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These last for about 5 hours. Those who show interest, and most of them turn out to be women, are now called by a day-long concept camp where our ideas are explained in detail and certain elementary techniques introduced. The need for herbs in daily life is also broached.

After they have begun work our workers keep in touch with them and around 20 of them are invited after a few months of work to a three-day intensive session at Swanirvar. Experience is shared, much new information is given, more techniques are explained, and they now move deeper into the reasons behind and goals of our programme. Then there are follow-up meetings. Our workers and supervisor keep in constant touch with these "gardeners" but when it appears that they need a collective discussion they are again asked to Swanirvar for one. The number of participants and duration both vary according to the specific needs of the situation. This meeting we call a follow-up training. Apart from these somewhat graded courses there are study circles for regular exchange of information and solution of problems, often held locally.

This year we had just one meeting in a new area, 6 concept camps with 92 women attending in all, 2 intensive sessions with 33 women, one follow-up meeting with 12, and 164 study circle meetings with 1572 participants. Our workers met among themselves 20 times, they held 5 workshops, they met altogether 161 members of the Kishor Kishori Bahini on eight occasions on kitchen gardens, and 150 of them on nine occasions on use of herbs.

What has been the upshot of all this? Apart from the 17 model gardens that our six workers have

set up, this year 236 new gardens were producing full scale in 11 villages. Our workers advised on and supervised the gardens in eight villages, while KKB members took charge of those in the other three. Apart from this, 500 households in these 11 villages who have no land at all to grow plants, are using roofs or frames for creeper vegetables. We provide them with seeds for the first season and explain to them in detail how their very limited space is to be used to maximum advantage. Herbs are a priority with us. When our teachers noticed that many of their children developed sores in the mouth around the onset of winter we planned and then held meetings with 270 mothers in 11 villages to tell them what the children could eat to get the required vitamins most cheaply, and also distributed seeds for such things to those who could not afford or otherwise get hold of them. We also asked the mothers to use neem oil for various skin problems and showed them how to make it.

Getting good seeds is essential but not easy. This year we collected, and most of this was given to us free, from six villages 14.34 kg of seeds of 18 kinds of vegetables and distributed these among 223 gardeners. Now they will keep seeds from what they grow, for their own later use or for distribution. In two villages we already have two such seed banks. The KKB helped our workers in preparing nurseries but we had to supplement these efforts by buying from the outside market as we are keen to introduce some new and uncommon varieties in our area. In 8 villages we distributed 3085 saplings of 5 types of fruit trees among 1000 families, and 983 saplings of bay leaves and black pepper among 500. In 11 villages 1000 cuttings of ten types of herbs were distributed among 170 families.

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Brainwashing has been thorough and we face a lot of mental resistance to the idea of using herbs for common and frequent complaints. One reason certainly is that one has to spend time and energy on preparing herbal medicine and most people have become averse to doing this when other types of medicine are so easily available. But still, more and more people are growing herbs themselves for their own use with help from us, and there are also many who do not do that but come to our workers for herbal succour. We keep a record of only those to whom we distribute medicine, and this year we treated 346 persons with 45 types of herbs for 18 types of complaints. The high school syllabus for Class VII contains a few references to herbs and students every year dutifully memorise them for the class examinations, move on to the next class, and forget them effortlessly. We hope things will change for students of two local high schools, at Uttar Media and Polterati, for there the school authorities were happy to agree to our proposal that one of our workers take one period a week on herbs. We talk about seasonal illnesses and complaints, and herbal prophylactics and remedies, and also show them how to make oils, pastes and ointments. A video recording has been made of this. This is a very popular period with the children, who report

to us whenever they make practical use of what they learnt. We have also participated in three local Health Melas, with information and models of kitchen gardens and herbaria. Altogether 1500 visitors came to our stall.

This was the sixth year of our work on this programme and even as we say we have made some real progress there is no denying that a major source of disappointment shows no signs of going away. People know their own problems but will not agree to work for their amelioration; either everything is somebody else's responsibility or it makes no sense to do what the neighbours are not doing. It is for sociologists to say why and how the general population has become so unsure of their capacity, so diffident about the chances of the individual who decides to swim against the tide, but our main problem is to convince people that they can take better and cheaper care of their health if they take a few small decisions, give some time to them, and have the courage to think for themselves. Everywhere our gardeners say the general health of their family has shown a marked improvement since they started to eat their own produce and those who, use confirm that their medical expenses have consistently gone down. We can only hope their neighbours are watching, observing and learning,

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AGRICULTURE

WE ARE one of the founding members of a State-level network formed to spread the ideas of sustainable agriculture and have continued to work in close collaboration with fellow NGOs in 9 districts of West Bengal. The main direction for and close supervision of our work comes from Service Centre (DRCSC) of Calcutta. Our emphases change from time to time but these are strategic revisions, not in any way affecting our principal goal of making the rural population aware of the various factors that affect the security of their food and livelihood and of the principles of sustainable agriculture. We also offer farmers theoretical and practical help with various alternative ways of farming. We work directly with them as they try out new systems and techniques. We also document, in great detail, local resources and their use.

This year we worked in 16 villages in three blocks of North 24 Parganas district. We have named the principal component of our programme the Small Farm Improvement Programme and we worked with 271 farmers in 11 villages who formed themselves into 17 groups. It is never too early to hope that they will turn out to be the vanguard of the revolution we are working to usher in. We have identified five main problems for them and the area in general. These are

1. gradual and irreversible erosion of the productivity and fertility of the soil;
2. loss to crops because of pests;
3. ever increasing presence in the soil of harmful elements that come with chemical pesticide, fertiliser, nutrients, and artificial irrigation, and their widespread and lasting impact on the food

chain;

4. unrestricted use of ground water possibly leading to arsenic in this water which is the main source for drinking;

5. vanishing flora and fauna, which means a loss of irreplaceable genetic diversity and wealth.

All these developments mean agriculture is geared

the same few crops season after season, year after year, and is totally dependent on chemical inputs. This in turn means loss of employment opportunities and food security for a large section of the rural population, if not round the year, at least seasonally. What farmers

learnt over generations of practical work is becoming irrelevant. In the face of standardization, they are being forced to forgo and forget the area-specific orientation of their knowledge of seeds, technology, methods, nutrition; instead, regimentation is bringing in new experts who, firmly committed to securing profit for their employing companies, recommend and then enforce systems and techniques that are generally irrelevant, mostly useless; and frequently harmful, to both man and nature.

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The main thrust of our work is to make the small farmer see what ails him and why, and to try together to find a way out of the mess. The first step is to hold an awareness camp in a totally new area or village and tell a group of farmers the basics of sustainable agriculture and how it can help avert an environmental disaster whose portents they can all see. This year we met 81 farmers in two villages for such talks. Some of them will come back to us and then we shall organize orientation camps. This year we met 106 farmers in seven such camps in five villages; they had attended awareness camps last year. We discussed with them the various visible and short-term and also invisible and long-term imperatives of chemical-dependent agriculture, and also the basic principles of sustainable agriculture and the techniques it requires to be followed in our area. We kept watch on how they responded. Some came back to us with more questions, some started experimenting with the new suggestions, and we then called all of them for what we term an introductory training. There were two of these for 33 farmers in two villages. We collated and compared the data they and we had collected in their respective villages about agriculture and related resources, analysed these with their help to find out if, and how, they were likely to help or hinder sustainable agriculture. We also emphasized the need for keeping meticulous records of whatever they would be doing in the fields. At the same time we gave practical demonstration of techniques of water and soil conservation etc. As they started putting these new ideas into practice they had frequent problems, questions, doubts and our workers were always at hand to discuss matters. A time soon came when individual problems assumed wider proportions, and then we arranged follow-up trainings for those who felt they could do with one. These also gave farmers from different villages a chance to meet and exchange ideas and experiences among themselves.

This year 31 farmers spent time with us at three such trainings, in as many villages. Apart from these formal sessions our workers frequently meet small groups of farmers to discuss various issues. We call these study circles. This year we held 120 such meetings in 13 villages in which a total of 1366 farmers were present. To keep our workers — one project leader, three trainers, and five field workers — in good fettle for the myriad questions and issues that are raised in these various forums of interaction there were 21 general meetings and 7 workshops for all of them, and 4 meetings for only the trainers. We are confident that our team is now competent to conduct practical courses in sustainable agriculture in any area of West Bengal, barring the hilly terrain.

In another programme, which we call collaborative field trials because the farmers work in close partnership with us, we encouraged selected farmers to introduce in parts of their holdings crop diversity, new crops, sustainable technology, management techniques, and integrated pest management which treats crops, plants, birds and animals, fish etc. as a total entity in nature. The ultimate goal is soil and water conservation, reduction or elimination of the use of chemicals in agriculture, and increasing bio diversity. In the pre-Kharif season 86 farmers tried new things in 1.7 acres of land, in the Kharif season 43 tried these or others in 0.8 acre, and in the Rabi season we had 45 partners in 1.25 acres. Work on seed multiplication, selection, collection, and distribution continued throughout the year.