

As we prepare our 12th annual report to cover the period from 1 April 2000 to 31 March 2001 we realize with distress and dismay that the most important event in that one year was something that was not on any of Swanirvar's agendas, but which affected all that we did, and was largely responsible for most of what was on our agenda and yet remained undone at the end of the year. The floods of September-October which ravaged almost all the villages where we work was the first of such magnitude in living memory for the local population, but we fear from now on we are going to see them regularly. Nature has no obligation to be nice and soft to us, but usually even when it is red in tooth and claw its behaviour is very much part of the normal order of things. The floods that visited us were there because of unwise and uncaring human intervention in that order-meddling would be a better word.

1 When the water started coming in, over fields and breaking or melting houses along the way, we at Swanirvar were taken unawares as much as everybody else. It was soon clear, even with only fractured reports coming in, that the devastation was deep and widespread and both immediate and long-term relief would have to be provided. Swanirvar workers had no training or skills in disaster management, and we had never had to organize or distribute relief. But this was not a time when we could wait to learn how to work; instead we began work as we could and learnt on the way. First we supplied packets of dry food to people in makeshift camps, among them the main building of Swanirvar, and one of our primary schools. Three large international NGOs - Oxfam, CARE, and Save the Children Fund - entrusted us with the responsibility of identifying people who needed help the most and then distributing relief material of various kinds to them.

The stuff that Oxfam sent throughout October was distributed in 21 villages in Baduria block, 11 in Swarupnagar, and 5 in Deganga. Swanirvar works on a regular basis in only 12 of these 37 villages, so we involved local NGOs and formed temporary committees with panchayat members on them to oversee the work. Most of what Oxfam sent - plastic sheets and buckets, food packets, ORS packets, various kinds of disinfectants, squatting plates, sanitary kits, etc. - came in October and were distributed almost as soon as they came. Vegetable and paddy seeds were received in December- January at the planting time for the Boro season, and were distributed to 2663 families and 150 farmers respectively.

In November CARE supplied 16,000 packets, each containing a sari, a lungi, a blanket, a mosquito net, a lantern and some children's clothes. Quite a large percentage of the clothings had to be rejected for various reasons and CARE could get replacements from its suppliers only in January. Towards the end of December CARE also supplied 8000 pieces of ground sheets. All this was distributed in 77 villages falling under 15 panchayats and one municipality. The 3000 pieces of garments that Save the Children Fund gave for distribution among children between 8 and 14 from families below the poverty line went to 15 villages. The competence, and of course the spirit behind it, of the donor agencies was most impressive, but we are convinced that in the long run providing relief once disaster has struck can never be of much use. We have to be prepared beforehand.

The physical work of distributing relief also disrupted our usual schedule greatly.

Stocking this material took up so much space in our main building that all our scheduled trainings and meetings for November and December had to be cancelled. Drawing up beneficiaries' lists, carrying the material from our main centre to the ten principal distribution points and from there to the affected villages, maintaining meticulous records - all this kept our workers busy for too long, at the cost of our regular work. And, predictably but annoyingly, there were constant charges of carelessness or worse in selecting beneficiaries. The committees that we formed tried to reach the poorest and the most affected people and in cases of controversy we took the help of all political parties to reach a fresh consensus. We must have made some mistakes, but they were due more to inexperience than design. Some of the complaints/charges were frivolous and mischievous, but more often they stemmed from pardonable frustration, disappointment and a refusal to believe that we had not been given enough for everybody.

The whole thing was a good and valuable learning experience for us but for the affected it was also a trauma and has left scars that may take years to heal. But since daily life is a cliché, it must go on, once the immediacy of the trauma is erased. So taking the year as a whole, pre- and post-flood, we have continued with our work towards the goal of integrated development, and of building up replicable models of an alternative socio-economic structure. Those who support us with financial assistance, expertise sharing, and active participation have continued to have faith in us.

2

Our main donors this year have been the following.

Friends of Swanirvar, Worcester, England (FoS)	Rs 25,88,757.99
Child Relief and You, Mumbai (CRY)	Rs 6,31,590.00
Share and Care Foundation, USA (S & C)	Rs 4,44,968.00
Govt. of India (through Vikramshila, Kolkata)	Rs 2,44,800.00
CARE West Bengal	Rs 2,21,106.00
Association for India's Development, Maryland, USA (AID)	Rs 1,62,263.00
OXFAM	Rs 1,08,570.00
Individuals	Rs 26,025.00
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>Rs 44,28,079.99</b>

We also earned money from the following sources.

Sale of fish	Rs 51,308.00
Bank interest	Rs 24,857.00
Subscription	Rs 192.00
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>	<b>Rs 45,04,436.99</b>

Apart from these we received things, all as relief for flood victims, in kind as detailed below. Food, plastic sheets, medicine, disinfectants, sanitary kits, buckets from Oxfam worth Rs 6,79,810.00.

From Save the Children Fund one set of garments each for 3000 children.

CARE West Bengal gave us 16,000 sets of saris, lungis, blankets, mosquito nets, children's clothes, lanterns, and 8000 ground sheets.

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

Head of expenses	Total money spent (in Rs)	Source of money
Building	11,36,571.81	FoS
Furniture	18,990.00	S & C
	20,012.00	CARE
Equipment	17,804.05	S & C
Cycle	3,548.00	S & C
Motor cycle	25,165.00	CARE
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>12,22,090.86</b>	

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

Programme	Total spent (in Rs)	Source of money
Primary education	1,48,388.40	Gol-Vikramshila
	1,68,321.08	S & C
	1,61,787.72	Foreign
Pre-primary education	4,43,290.30	CRY
	37,290.60	S & C
Youth & Culture	1,13,979.60	S & C
	79,957.95	CRY
	1,09,800.00	NLCB
	4,596.00	Gol-Vikramshila
Health	1,58,715.00	AID
	53,239.50	CRY
Agriculture	34,882.00	Domestic
	3,00,442.35	Service Centre
Pisciculture	30,227.00	Domestic
Village organisations	31,188.90	Domestic
Relief	30,596.25	CARE
	1,04,622.35	OXFAM
Road	42,100.00	S & C
	69,075.00	Service Centre
Travel	14,526.61	CRY
	11,086.71	CARE
	83,288.60	NLCB
Books, Stationery, Printing	7,406.70	CRY
	10,534.30	CARE
	30,208.80	NLCB
Meetings, training	40,182.00	NLCB

	60,719.05	Domestic
Salaries (Co-ordinator, Accountant)	33,600.00	S & C
	45,600.00	CRY
	13,200.00	NLCB
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>24,72,852.50</b>	

Our administrative expenses during the year are given below.

Head of expenses	Total money spent (in Rs)	Source of money
Bank charges	698.00	Foreign
Fees	4,000.00	CRY
	15,825.00	NLCB
Repairs	2,867.90	CARE
	9,332.50	NLCB
	13,125.05	Domestic
Documentation	19,872.40	NLCB
Postage & Telephone	5,431.00	CARE
	16,278.90	NLCB
Electricity	3,837.00	CARE
	8,538.00	NLCB
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>99,805.75</b>	

4

Total of the above three.

Capital	12,220,90.86
Programme	24,72,852.50
Administration	99,805.75
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>37,94,749.11</b>

Now we shall give section-wise accounts of our activity in the year.

## EDUCATION: Pre-primary

OUR 15 pre-primary schools in as many villages had 982 children, 479 boys and 503 girls. On an average each worked for 221 days, which is much lower than usual, but in many villages a substantial number of the children had had their homes damaged or totally destroyed and in some our school itself was being used as a living place for the homeless. The frequency of the supervisor's visits also came down, but the floods were only one reason for this. We have to place more faith in the teachers' commitment and competence if our model is to be viable in a wider context. Also, we wish to move beyond just running a few schools of our own and our supervisors are now spending much of their time liaising with Government and panchayat officials to devise ways to get the wider community more involved in all schools in any given area. In our own schools there were 55 parents-teachers formal meetings, with an average attendance figure of 31. The teachers made 4472 visits to the children's homes to discuss individual problems with guardians.

The teachers had their yearly planning workshop, and their monthly meetings. There were also four group visits. We had decided to hold a 2-phase, 15-day training session for teachers from other organizations and schools who wanted more familiarity with our methods. In the first there were 18 persons, among them two of our own teachers who had started work later than their colleagues and so had received less training than them. The second phase could not be held because of the floods.

This year we almost completed work on three school buildings - at Matia, Uttar Media, and Rudrapur - with money sent by Friends of Swanirvar but even though they have been consistently generous quite a few of our schools do not yet have brick buildings and only six have toilet facilities. On his annual visit this year, the Chairman of the Board of Trustees of Friends of Swanirvar devoted considerable time to this and promised all help.

The Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) has begun to be extended to some of our work villages. We feared our enrolment figures will come down because the schools under this scheme provide food to the children and we do not have the monetary resources to match this. The advantage has certainly and justly drawn some parents to choose the ICDS centres but the very clear superiority of our teaching methods has kept our support base largely intact. However, we do not at all see this as a matter for competition or comparison. Food for the children is a very important component of the education-for-all concept, so we wish the ICDS to prosper. We are ready to share our teaching-learning methodology with its workers so that the children benefit in both ways.

5

CRY continued to support this programme financially and with other inputs. Its representatives kept in close and regular touch with what we were doing. In June, six CRY partners from Uttar Pradesh came to visit our schools.

### **EDUCATION: Primary**

OUR three primary schools - at Fatullyapur, Chandalati, and Andharmanik - had altogether 475 students in their classes I to IV, 232 of them boys and 243 girls. The average number of working days for a student was 224, a figure which would have been considerably higher but for the floodwaters. For the teachers however, this figure was 243 as they often work on Sundays on their nonteaching chores so that the children get all their time on school days. Taken together the parents and teachers of the three schools met on 8 occasions, with a total attendance of 480. The teachers and the supervisor made 2172 home visits which means every student's individual problems were discussed with his guardians five times a year on an average. We spent Rs 1,44,481 on giving the children something to eat during school hours. The building at Andharmanik now has two storeys, thanks to the Friends of Swanirvar, though neither they nor we could have guessed that almost the first use of the first floor would be to give shelter to about 250 flood-marooned persons. The ground floor was under water.

The teachers held their monthly meetings and central workshops as usual, and each school received six group visits. Representatives from the funding agencies and other people who had heard of our experiments visited one or more of our schools on 33 occasions. The head of the department of Initial Teacher Education at University College, Worcester came from England to spend seven days with us, four of them in the villages, watching and talking to the teachers and students in and outside class, and discussing ways in which our methods and ideas could reach more people.

We continue with our efforts to take the children away from and beyond their text books, to see, find out, and judge for themselves. Thus, students of Class III were asked to work on the area's festivals and dresses on their own, with guidance from the teachers and help from the family. This forms a chapter of their Geography text but they now know much more about their local scene than any book at that level can hope to tell. Similarly when the Class IV children were studying "industry" they were taken to a local manufacturing centre to find out about what a unit needs in terms of labour, raw material, transport and marketing facilities etc.

6 All material that they gather is then expressed through charts. In nature studies, the text books mention an experiment, and then proceed to narrate in full detail what is to be, and is, observed, and also the findings. What we do is not the perfect way, but it should certainly be more rewarding for the children than having nothing to observe or discover by themselves. We ask them to conduct the experiment much before they come to that chapter in the book and when we do come there we just ask them to recall what they learnt and noted down.

During a study trip to Santiniketan our teachers were impressed by a Sahitya Sabha organized by the secondary school children there. After some planning such an evening was arranged at Chandalati when our primary school children, those who have passed out from there, members of the Kishor Kishori Bahini and some local senior school students read out stuff they had written, acted out small plays they had got together, recited poems usually of their own. The creativity was infectious and the whole thing was enlivened by the very confident way in which the children themselves conducted the "meeting".

We have already mentioned the parents-teachers meetings, which are usually held at each school once every three months. These are somewhat formal affairs, and we place equal value on the visits we receive from individual parents at school. They watch their children at work, in or outside class, and then discuss with the teachers how better results can be obtained. A rough survey reveals that almost 80% of parents paid at least one visit to a school to see for themselves the progress and conduct of their child, which they would discuss when the teachers visited their house.

A welcome offshoot of this was that on quite a few occasions, and for quite longish periods also, we had parents, particularly mothers, volunteering to help us in the school. Their offer was most useful

when some teacher was absent for a few days at a stretch and even more so when two mothers at Fatullyapur helped us almost on a regular basis in establishing some sort of parity among children newly admitted to Class I who showed widely varying literacy and numeracy skills.

Whatever changes and improvements we are trying for in the total teaching learning process can reach a very limited number of people if they are practised only in our three schools. So we have all along been trying to involve in our work children who go to other schools, and their parents and teachers, along with the general population as well as panchayat members. In earlier years we organized an evening of cultural performances and competitions at Fatullyapur where many children who went to schools other than ours also came. This year we managed to widen the circle of participants to include all school-goers, parents, and panchayat members, and the evening became something like a village festival of culture.

Rakhi Bandhan, which we celebrate jointly with other schools, was this year observed with even more enthusiasm by a larger number of children. This was particularly true at Fatullyapur where we managed to involve the panchayat and its members in every stage of the programme. It was decided to tie up Rakhi Bandhan with Independence Day celebrations, and the schools in the panchayat area were divided into six clusters which observed the days as their respective committees planned. Each committee included a panchayat member and the panchayat also gave some monetary help to each cluster.

7

Once the clusters and the committees were in place, Swanirvar workers persuaded the latter to think about the problems of the schools in their respective charge. They discussed issues like how to get drop-out children back to school, how to ensure that parents do not fail to secure the birth certificate for their child, how to keep the schools' furniture and grounds protected from misuse, how to keep a sizable number of boys from leaving school to go to work in the brick kilns when demand for labour is the highest there, etc.

A number of the 17 primary schools in the Fatullyapur-Bajitpur Panchayat area now have an education committee, following Government regulations and Swanirvar's efforts. Some schools also have parents' committees. It will take time for many of the committee members to understand that their responsibility does not end with their silent presence at a meeting, but to really believe that they can and do have things to say, ideas to contribute, time and energy to offer for the betterment of the village's, even if not their own, children. Some of the committees have already begun to consider ways of improving the physical condition of the school buildings and of getting more teachers for them.

Some of the things we have done over the years are now being taken up at some other schools also. The more significant among these are observance of locally and/or nationally important secular days, sifting the oral tradition to know more about local history, producing maps of the village, complementing class learning with cultural training etc. More people are now likely to know of our work in primary schools as Communication for Development and Learning, a Bangalore-

based organization, sent two of its staff to our work area to see things for themselves for a booklet they plan to bring out on our schools and their special features as part of the Childhood Matters series sponsored by CRY.

There have been disappointments too. Seven of our children have joined the ranks of drop-outs in the past five years, which means they did not complete Class IV. Two girls were decreed by their families to be “too old” to study any further, a boy went to Kolkata for work, and four others work as farm labourers. Seven in five years is of course well below the national average, but we take it as a failure on our part.

Since we think of our schools as investments in the nation’s future, we try to keep track of our alumni. Forty-six of them were in Class VI in different high schools; one of them, a girl, was among the top performers, 35 were in the middle ranks, and 5 did not do well. Similarly, of the 76 children from our three schools who are now in Class V in high school, two, both girls again, were among the very best, 60 were middle rankers, and 11 did not do well. This we mention only as passing information, as such indices are neither sacrosanct nor permanent nor really indicative of anything. More important to us is that there were six drop-outs in both classes. One is chronically ill, another “too old”, another too poor, three are needed for domestic work, and six have to work to earn a living, one in a Mumbai tea shop. Only one of them, who works at a kiln, keeps some touch with our work, the others are lost to hard reality.

8

Part of our expenses in running these three schools came from the Government of India through Vikramshila Educational Resource Society but that stopped in January 2001. An expert from the NCERT came for an evaluation and wrote in his comments for our records that he was satisfied with the children’s achievements and performance.

We continue to be an active member of the West Bengal Education Network or WBEN. It met once in August when, among other things, we discussed doing a fresh round of surveys and campaigns related to NAFRE (National Alliance for Fundamental Right to Education). These were done and we met again in September to discuss the results. In December a 2-day State-level meeting was held in Kolkata, to which Swanirvar brought an 18-member team, which included our own workers as well as teachers from our area’s Government schools, both primary and high, and local youths interested in education. The main agenda was the 83rd amendment to the Constitution. Political leaders, educationists and education officials, teachers, experts from related fields, and activists spoke at several panel discussions. A candle march was held at the end of the second day. The year’s last meeting was held in February to discuss what would go into the WBEN status report, the network’s strengths and weaknesses, future plan of action, and to choose people from West Bengal who would participate at the forthcoming NAFRE meet in Delhi.

The only way we can bring more and more children, and teachers too, into the teaching-learning system we are trying to put in place, is by getting the Government schools interested. We have



been considering various strategies of extensive interaction with the Government system and made some beginning this year. In February we called a day-long meeting at Katiahat, a village where we do not have any programmes running, but where we have had good relations all along with the local high school and this we chose as the venue. This was attended by 35 Government primary school teachers.

The most significant thing was that these 35 belonged to two rival associations which are at loggerheads in their State-level agendas, but they agreed to share the same stage here. We explained what we do and what we want to do with their help. Most of them were hopeful that an appeal to a wider audience would also bring good response, so we decided to call another meeting.

This was again at Katiahat, in March. This time there were 120 teachers, and two School Inspectors in charge of schools in our area. The discussion was lively and besides the 83rd amendment we discussed how to go about forming village education committees which would be active and effective. Almost everybody stayed till the meeting ended at about 4 in the afternoon, which is a fair indication of their enthusiasm.

9

## **YOUTH & CULTURE**

THIS is in a way an extension of our education programme for here too we work with children, both small and older, in matters that teach them things which are beyond books but very much a part of real life, life as they live it, not life as described in the printed word. This section has two distinct divisions. The first deals with children in our schools and with others of a similar age but from elsewhere in the village. This year 1,893 of them in 14 villages were taught Bratachari, yoga, small games, songs, dance items, puppetry, acting skills, physical exercises, etc. Eight special commemorative days were observed in 15 villages and altogether 10,551 children performed before a total of 11,185 persons. We organized a sports meet in ten villages, not so much to test athletic prowess as to give children and adults a chance to have a day in the sun, to meet children from other villages, and as a break from routine. The number of participants - children, parents, other adults having something to do with us - was 2,534 and that of spectators 5,600. The children put up 22 cultural shows which were appreciated by an audience of 8,500.

Our culture section is much in demand now. The Bajitpur panchayat sought its help at times of meetings of the Gram Sansad so that people would stay for the whole duration of the meeting. Local clubs frequently ask them to come and train their members. Sometimes they receive some money also and this is used to buy costumes for their various shows.

The trainers themselves underwent training on many occasions. There were two workshops, one on puppetry, and another on production of street plays on current issues like arsenic pollution, chemical agriculture etc. There were monthly meetings and group visits as well, though the latter

was not possible in three villages because of the floods.

Our Kishor Kishori Bahini, comprising older children, continues to work well. It now has 223 members in 8 villages. We can organize trainings for them only during the two long vacations in summer and autumn, but this year the second was lost because of the floods, so we ended up with only two trainings for them. The first was on first aid, with 87 boys and 76 girls coming to a one-day training in different centres, and the second was on nutrition and kitchen garden, where two-day trainings were given to 60 boys and 66 girls.

We give below a summary of what the KKB did during the year. In eight villages they vaccinated 727 ducks, 3,845 hens, 599 heads of cattle, and 234 goats. This work is in great demand, and villages where we have no presence are contacting the KKB in their nearest village to go and vaccinate their animals and birds. They grew saplings and made grafts in 8 villages and these were distributed to people who were selected after a village-wide survey of which household had what.

In 8 villages some untarred roads were cleaned and repairs, minor but adequate to make a real difference to users, were made three times in the year. A rough estimate found that altogether around 17 km of roads was kept in usable condition throughout the year because of these efforts. They looked after 65 tubewells; minor repairs were done, the bases were cleaned, and a channel for drainage dug and kept in order.

10

They grew and nurtured 62 kitchen gardens in 8 villages after receiving training in this, and keeping in close touch with workers in that section. After receiving training in first aid, they helped 399 persons in 8 villages. They conducted house-to-house surveys on the incidence of diarrhoea and worm infestation and presented their findings through charts and tables. They kept a daily record of temperature and rainfall and presented the information through graphs. These data will be of use mainly to workers in the agriculture section when they talk to farmers about introducing new crops in the area or changing the existing crop pattern.

They made rough but handy maps of some villages showing the land use pattern. They talked to local groceries to find out what things they stock in what quantities now, in comparison with past years, thus trying to gauge the extent of changes in food habits and general consumer behaviour. They helped our older workers as much as they could during the flood relief operations. They worked long and hard hours with disinfectants to keep the affected areas disease-free. They did practical work in environmental studies by noting down their observations on various aspects of water, insects, birds, trees, herbs, and sources of domestic fuel.

They worked with children in our primary schools, and in 23 Government primary schools, to produce 7000 "rakhis" to make Rakhi Bandhan Day a huge success. They were encouraged by panchayat members and local teachers. Sketch maps were made of small areas, basic information

provided on the panchayat, banking, and postal services available locally, our older workers assisted in preparing for blood donation camps, and help given to donors there. 210 of them went on an educational trip to Sanhati Park at Ashoknagar. In January, 120 of them were divided into two groups and each held a central conference for an evaluation of the year's work.

After the previous year's success with our work on medicinal herbs in two high schools, this year we changed the subject into environmental studies and allied things. It needed time to get off the ground but the children had started doing some surveys of the sanitation scene in their areas and then the floods changed everything. When academic work resumed so much time had been lost that neither teachers nor students wanted to do anything other than finishing the syllabus. So that programme had to be abandoned.

In February we held a meeting at Swanirvar with 25 teachers from 20 local high schools. We told them about our work with and hopes from the Kishor Kishori Bahini and wanted them to consider if they could not start such a movement in their schools. We also explored the possibility of their attending a training session on activity-based science teaching if we brought a well-known resource person as trainer.

11

## AGRICULTURE

WE continue to be part of the sustainable agriculture network co-ordinated and led by Service Centre, Kolkata which has partner NGOs in almost all the districts of West Bengal, with their vastly different agro-climatic features but basically same socio-economic-ecological problems. In our past annual reports we wrote in detail about our basic goals and the strategies we follow to reach them. This time we are not mentioning them at all, keeping instead just to what we have done. This, incidentally, is true of our account of activities in all sections.

This year we worked with 136 farmers in 18 groups in 14 villages. The various new things they tried with help from us were mainly of four kinds and a total of 145 agricultural plots of varying sizes were used for them: i) introduction of new crops; this year the two we principally tried for were rice (one perfumed and another, pest-resistant) and the other a smaller than the usual variety of "patal"; ii) sustainable techniques; iii) comparative experiments, this year the crops chosen were rice and potato; iv) integrated farming, in which there were 9 experiments.

Our principal target group comprises small, marginal, and landless farmers and we want to reach information to them, and help them take the first step by giving them access to seeds of cereals, legumes, oilseeds, and some covering crops. Under this Small Holdings Improvement Programme, this year there were seven concept camps where 100 farmers shared information and experience.

The number of both camps and participants would have been higher but for the fact that for about 10 weeks most villages were either inaccessible or with no facilities available for holding a meeting, and after survival had been assured we had to alter previous schedules to tackle the post-flood

priority of rehabilitation.

Primary trainings are for those who continue to show interest in our work after these concept camps. This year we held eight such trainings for 113 farmers, most of whom had attended concept camps last year. In these, through discussions in which they participate actively and effectively, they learn about data collection, data analysis, identification of area-specific problems, planning solutions, etc. These trainings are not all talk or classroom work, there is enough provision for practical work in the fields. Those who face problems once they begin working according to the strategies determined come for a follow-up training, of which there were 3 with 53 participants. Apart from these graded interactions, our field workers meet members of farmers' groups regularly every month to make sure work is going on smoothly, and that problems are tackled without delay. These semi-formal meetings, with no specific agenda, are called study circles, and this year we had 174 of them with 1818 farmers participating.

The farmers in our groups have been trying to bypass the market, where good seeds are often difficult to get and usually unreasonably expensive, by gradually building up a seed bank which serves their own needs and in some cases caters to others also. There is a lot more to be done in this regard but the beginning has been good and we are optimistic that in a few years' time it will solve a major constraint in sustainable agriculture.

12

Our workers meet regularly among themselves and they also visit other districts and NGOs to learn from work there. At Kajla in Midnapore they saw a revival of an old practice. Our workers liked the idea and have tried it in a small scale at Belyakhali. In this, farmers who usually find it difficult to buy foodgrains when their price goes up in the normal course, deposit a part of their own harvest in a sort of grain bank. They can get cash loans against the deposit which they have to repay when they want their grain back. This experiment has created considerable enthusiasm among the people who stand to benefit most from it, and may grow into a large movement in the coming years. Service Centre has given an initial grant to get the programme going.

The floods destroyed standing crops just before they were to be harvested, thus leaving the farmer with no money to buy seeds for the next season, even if he was in a position to plant, with most fields remaining under water for a long time. Service Centre and Oxfam came up with seeds which we distributed in the following way. In many places the usual choice of the winter crop had to be changed under the new circumstances.

Name of seeds	No. of villages	Quantity of seeds	No. of farmers
Rice	16	5147 kg	378
Wheat	10	6534 kg	426
Mustard	12	151 kg	139
Khesari	4	239.5kg	48

Musuri	13	170 kg	52
Mung	1	18 kg	11
Matar	1	28 kg	5
Seeds of 5 vegetables for kitchen gardens	20	116 kg	2612
Saplings of 3 “ “ “ “	20	45000 saplings	2612

Altogether 3671 families were helped make a new beginning when all seemed to be lost. We keep in constant and close touch with the State's only agricultural university and with the Government agriculture department, particularly its local functionaries. The Agricultural Development Officer of Baduria block has been very kind to us with help in extension work and with material. In February there was an orientation camp on pulses and oilseeds where 86 farmers came and the ADO's cooperation proved to be of immense help. His office also gave us the following.

What was given	Quantity	No. of farmers to benefit
Groundnut seeds	255 kg	58
Jute seeds	6 kg	10
Potato seeds	10 gm	4
Wheat seeds	30 kg	6
Sugarcane	For 3 acres	10
Coconut saplings	115	4
Soil testing	76 samples	50
Phytonol	41 packets	29

13

## KITCHEN GARDEN

THIS programme is aimed at persuading households, particularly those with inadequate purchasing power, to utilize all available space in or around the house - the roof, the base of any large tree, around the tubewell - to grow vegetables, particularly greens, using no chemicals at all, as either pesticide or fertilizer, instead depending as much as possible on compost from household waste, and on nature. This takes a lot of skill, to choose the right plant for the right place, and sustained care. Over the years, our workers have been able to convince a number of families - they interact mostly with the women there - about the merits of what they talk about and now such gardens flourish in all the villages where we work. These households are also advised and helped to grow some medicinal herbs. The twin impact of this programme - fresh green vegetables almost round the year, and herbs instead of chemicals as medication for common ailments - has led to a clear improvement in the health, and finances, of the families concerned. Apart from the sectional workers, members of women's self-help groups and of our Kishor Kishori Bahini also propagate the concept and their concerted efforts have resulted in 400 such gardens in our villages. These are grown and nurtured by the household itself, with help from our workers. Of these 400 the appellation "model garden" is given to 29 in 10 villages. These are meant to draw the attention of the neighbour or passer-by who may then feel interested in having one for her own family.

When a number of such interested women is found, we hold a concept camp for them in which the ideas behind the programme are explained. This year we held 7 such camps for 131 women. Those among the participants who then begin work on a garden may soon be faced with problems and to answer their questions stemming from practical work, primary trainings are arranged. This year there were 8 such trainings where 86 women were told in greater detail about their next steps. Follow-up trainings are held so that the women can exchange experience and information, learn from one another, and of course from our workers. This year 59 women attended 4 such camps. Apart from these, there are study circles where our workers regularly - maybe as often as twice a month - sit with women trying their hand at growing a garden. These are informal advisory sessions, and this year such study circles met altogether 134 times, with a total participation of 2015.

Our workers need to know the answers to all sorts of questions that a woman can raise as she progresses with her garden. For best results a garden has to take shape following a certain design, which could well be unique to every household as the available space and its features, particularly location in regard to the sun, vary from plot to plot. To be on their toes they constantly exchange information and during the year there were seven workshops where they worked on their own problems.

14

We would like our Kishor Kishori Bahini to get involved in the work. For this we trained 125 of them in 7 villages on the ways to go about growing a simple garden. They have all set up one in their household grounds and next year we shall discuss with them more complex and productive gardens.

In two villages, Bagjola and Haiderpur, where we do not have workers for either kitchen gardens or health, we sat with 60 mothers of our pre-primary children to discuss the annual problem of sores in the mouth before the onset of winter. Our recommendation that intake of green leafy vegetables would give the children the vitamins to keep the sores away was met with scepticism but was nevertheless followed and gave results.

So many women are now involved in these kitchen gardens, which one must remember also include medicinal herbs, that they must be used for other development work also. We started an experiment with 46 women in three groups at Belyakhali. Each of them puts aside a fistful of rice every day at home and when they meet for the group meeting once every week, they bring it there and put their week's collection in a central store. This is against the time when there will be want, of supply and/or purchasing power. Most of our women consider this to be a workable guarantee for food security throughout the year and many other villages might soon start a scheme like this. We have not had to look back in the use of medicinal herbs. Many villagers now need no advice from us on what to use how for what, and those who are not sure can get assistance from our health workers, kitchen garden workers, and also members of our Kishor Kishori Bahini. It is thus

impossible to give even approximately the number of persons who were benefited by herbs; all that we have on record is that kitchen garden workers treated 192 persons for 37 problems with 39 herbs. These were documented because there was some novelty factor or the other in them.

After everything had been washed away in the floods we distributed vegetable seeds to many families, of which we have written in the agriculture section's report. The vegetables grown from these saved a number of families from malnutrition. In times when the ground was under water innovativeness was of great help; saplings of tomato, eggplant, chilli, kohlrabi, beetroot etc. were grown on rafts, raised beds, stilt-frames, and in baskets.

We constantly try out such new things in our gardens, for example, divergent uses or non-use of mulching, use of water hyacinth as fertilizer, mixed cropping, multi-tiered frames, etc. Every meal with produce from our gardens is not just cheap nutrition, it is also a firm negation of pollution.

## HEALTH

OUR community health programme reaches 11 villages, in three blocks and under five panchayats and a municipality. In matters like health service to school children or blood donation camps we do go beyond these 11 but these are event-specific and do not entail any stable commitment.

15 We do our work through six full-time workers and seven who work only when there is something particular for them to do.

Mother and child care is still our main concern in the 11 villages. All married women of child-bearing age and children below five are covered by our programme. This year we kept in touch with 3427 eligible couples in these 11 villages and helped them with advice on access to contraceptive measures. The table below summarizes the situation in ten of them.

Village	Sterilization	Oral pills(cycles)	Condoms	Loops
Bajitpur	8	831	3540	0
DweepMedia	1	275	5760	0
Uttar Media	3	150	10650	0
Fatullyapur	7	1189	12580	1
Bhojpara	4	817	7220	0
Sarfarajpur	2	740	4280	2
Punra	1	544	5430	0
Chandalati	9	797	1060	1
Beliyakhali	9	837	6920	4
Parpatna	13	1380	3910	0
TOTAL	57	7560	61350	8

Apart from these, 32 women took Depo Provera injections, which are most likely harmful in the long run, and 28 took homeopathic contraceptives, which are most likely inefficacious. In ten

villages there were 55 abortions, 11 of them uninduced, 16 under proper medical supervision, and in 28 cases a quack was called. Apart from these there were 344 pregnancies in ten villages. Each of these women received our worker's attention, their blood pressure was measured and weight taken regularly. In 52 cases they were asked to see a doctor, for some condition that our worker could determine but not remedy. We kept track of all births and deaths in ten villages but despite our best efforts we do not feel certain these figures are totally accurate. Our records say there were 375 births, 205 of them boys, and 170 girls. Of these 375, 12 were stillborn, and 5 died in their first year. There was one more death before the age of 5, and altogether 94 persons older than that died in the year. In four of these 11 villages the Government regularly holds vaccination camps where children get immunized against diphtheria, whooping cough, tetanus, polio, measles, and tuberculosis. Our workers make sure that all children go to these camps at their appointed date. They also help the Government staff in arranging for and running the camps. Home visits are a regular part of our workers' routine. They have cards for households which keep a note of each family's health situation and requirements and apart from talking about health and hygiene, our workers do what the card expects them to. They are all trained to treat common diseases with both allopathic and herbal medicines and it is generally the sick person's choice which to take. This year we treated 4,829 persons with allopathic medicine and 630 with herbs.

16 Thus providing cheap and non-toxic curative facilities is of course good but much better would be to have a situation where villagers will have much less occasion to seek medical help. For this we have to raise the level of their awareness of all things, personal and communal, that have to do with good health, and throughout the year we held discussions, formal and informal, with only some people or at a large gathering, just a few words about a specific situation or a day-long session on a wide theme.

On a few occasions we bring in outside resource persons but usually our health workers can now talk with full confidence and competence on most topics. Among the subjects covered at these discussions were family planning and welfare, immunization, problems of adolescence, especially for girls, blood donation, sanitation, use of toilets, care about water, nutrition, intestinal worms, common problems of digestion, general physical well-being, herbal medicines etc. This year, there were 133 such discussions in our 11 villages, with 4,308 participants, and we also went to 5 other villages to talk to 483 persons on 16 occasions.

We have already said that there were 375 births in ten villages. Of these 93 were at some health center or the other - Dweep Media and Uttar Media together saw 18 births, and not one was with any medical help, for the health centre is just too far away and the journey too uncertain for a woman who may go into labour at any time - and the remaining 282 were at the hands of midwives, or dais.

Only 20 of these were assisted by trained dais. Last year we had talked to 135 of these women in 9 villages and had collated their experiences, problems and weak points, and requirements to raise



their performance level. Three of our health workers went to CINI in Kolkata to learn more about what can be done and after they had returned and shared their knowledge with their colleagues, we called 72 dais from 10 villages in three groups for a day-long workshop with each.

All the figures for meetings and discussions that we have given so far are for what took place in the various villages. Our main centre, at Andharmanik, also plays host to many such meetings. Apart from the monthly meetings and inter-sectional meetings where participation is only for Swanirvar workers, there was one 4-day workshop on Health and Development attended by 32 persons, and a 2-day training on nutrition, with 70 participants.

Our workers and their supervisor attended a number of trainings on various issues organized by CRY, CINI, All India Institute of Hygiene and Public Health, etc. In November we signed a Memorandum of Understanding with AllHPH for working together in an arsenic mitigation project funded by the Indo-Canadian Environment Fund. Until the end of the year we were still preparing the groundwork for work on this very big project to start in real earnest.

We collected 1,227 units of blood this year for the Government blood banks and only for them. Particularly notable was the camp organized by Janakalyan Samity, our affiliate organization at Magurkhali, soon after the floods when people in the area were still to re-build their homes or resume work. To show their appreciation for all the help they had received during the disaster 398 persons, 101 of them women, turned up to donate blood. The following table gives details of all the camps.

17

Date	Organization	Total donors	Male	Female
29.04.2000	Rudrapur Nabakallol	50	38	12
29.06.2000	Eastern Standard School, Duttapara	91	81	10
08.07.2000	Balki High School	100	77	23
14.08.2000	Gokulpur Seba Sadan	42	34	08
09.09.2000	Bithari United Club	80	73	07
18.11.2000	Janakalyan Samiti, Magurkhali	398	297	101
31.12.2000	Nabashree Sangha, Iswarigachha	39	30	9
08.01.2001	Punra Sanghashree Club	74	68	6
05.02.2001	Islamic Sanskritic Sangstha, Baduria	60	53	7
21.02.2001	B.S.E & H.D.C.,Matia Palli Unnayan Kendra, Chandalati	181	140	41
13.03.2001	Jyoti Sangha,Bhojpara	80	36	4
	TOTAL 12 camps	1227	982	245

## INCOME GENERATION

WE BEGAN the year with the ink not yet dry on the signatures on our agreement with CARE West Bengal - making us that international organization's first CASHE (Credit & Savings for Household Enterprise) project partner in West Bengal - on running a small loans and savings project.

Swanirvar has had such a programme for the past four years with a grant from the National Lotteries Charities Board in the UK, which came to us through Friends of Swanirvar, and was not due to end for another year. This was working well, in so far as organizing women into groups and lending them money for some productive purpose was concerned, but we had begun to develop a gnawing sense of doubt and dissatisfaction that we were getting stuck in a blind alley. The model that the new agreement held before us seemed to give the programme a sense of purpose and direction and a set of well-defined goals which, even if they looked somewhat utopian, certainly deserved a try. And after a year, even though our progress was interrupted and actually set back by the floods, the goals do not look so unachievable. Indeed, we feel confident that if we do not falter in following the strategy we have decided upon, and if we adhere to the time-frame set for the various indicators on our way, we shall reach where we have set out to go. This - the goal, the strategy, and the indicators - was drawn up jointly by us and CARE. In a sentence, the goal of our programme is to set up a model women's organization for the economic uplift of poor village households, in the process furthering the cause of integrated rural development. In five years we shall have to put in place 300 groups, each with a maximum of 20 members, which will access various economic services and forward these to the around 6,000 member women. Economics or their own family will not be the sole concern of the group members; they will be made aware of social issues and motivated to deal with them and to participate actively in the development process. The groups will coalesce into clusters as their numbers grow, and the clusters in turn would form federations. These federations will have financial sustainability and autonomy at the end of the fifth year and, along with that, will actively participate in the development processes of the local panchayat samiti.

18

All this calls for aggressive and imaginative action, not just disbursing loans and ensuring timely repayment. Everybody involved in the programme, right from the members of the working committee of Swanirvar, to the workers in the section, to the group members, needed a change of orientation. Trainings were held for all to explain features of the new model, workers were taken to places in Andhra Pradesh and Orissa where it has been working successfully to be convinced that the changeover is viable, and the women were encouraged to strengthen their hands as their destiny, or at least a large segment of it, would lie there.

Mindsets were gradually adapting themselves to the new set-up with new goals and new priorities and emphases when the floods struck and set everything back by months. People lost their homes, group members were scattered, workers could spare no time from relief work, survival nudged out development. Things began getting back to normal in December, but only in their externals, for you can rebuild a house in four weeks, but rebuilding a life takes much longer. There were strong demands at group meetings that loans should be written off, and it is a measure of

everybody's maturity that the borrowers did not need much persuasion to understand that such a move would harm not just the programme but themselves too, as it was their own money that they were asking to forgo.

In January the first general conference of all group members of an area were held at Kolsur. This was marked by the women's refusal to be stuck with what they had lost in the floods. In the presence of leaders of the local panchayat and a member of the Zilla Parishad they talked of the future, of various social problems that could be rectified with a little help from the authorities. Cluster committees were formed. A second general conference was held at Bajitpur, and it followed more or less the same pattern as the Kolsur one. The planned conferences in the Magurkhali and Fatullyapur areas could not be held before the year ended, as group members in both places were still to recover from the effects of the floods.

A few random indicators will show how involved the group members are gradually becoming in areas of development other than their own micro-finance programme. Seventy-four of them donated blood this year, 147 attended Gram Sansad meetings - these meetings often cannot be held because of a lack of quorum, and women attending in any number is particularly notable; 41 have children in our Kishor Kishori Bahini, which we hope will play a major part in local development; 97 have grown systematic and planned kitchen gardens; and 718 have toilets at home. The usual amount of minimum loan is now Rs 2500 and of the maximum Rs 4000, though one woman asked for just Rs 500 and another was given Rs 10,000. The groups borrow from us at 10% interest but charge their members 12%, which is how they will create their own fund.

The table below summarizes the situation on 31.3.2001. The names do not refer to just one village, but to the principal village in a group of a few.

Village	No. of groups	No. of members	No. of loans	Amount loaned
Bajitpur	12	150	96	Rs 3,37,500
Fatullyapur	12	240	140	Rs 4,89,581
Magurkhali	69	1104	74	Rs 1,87,440
Kolsur	12	175	116	Rs 3,04,800

## OTHER ACTIVITIES

WE HAVE not made any big headway in working together with any panchayat or in persuading it to involve people in its work, but there is one thing we have helped achieve that we must mention.

This is about putting some real life and meaning into the meetings of the gram sansad.

These meetings are meant to be occasions where the villagers ask questions, place demands, make suggestions, etc. Unfortunately attendance has usually been meagre, to the extent that meetings at many centres have frequently had to be cancelled because of a lack of quorum. Even when people did come they kept quiet, mainly because they thought there was no point. Their experience had convinced them accountability was only in name and decisions were taken regardless of what they said. We thought the situation was ripe for a change.

And changed it has. At four booths of Bajitpur Gram Panchayat, the attendance at the November 1999 meeting of the Gram Sansad was 14, 4, 8, and 23. In May this rose to 86, 76, 73, and 111 respectively.

More significantly, women were more than 30 % of those now present. Quite a few things had happened in the meantime.

The first was a brainwave that struck the panchayat job assistant. He suggested that the Swanirvar children's cultural team be asked to put up a show before the meeting, so that people would come to the venue. But would they stay back for the main thing once the show was finished? It was then decided that the items of the show would be interspersed among those of the meeting.

This would, and did, ensure attendance but what about active participation, with emphasis on both words? Usually those who speak at such meetings make demands that concern individual households; the interests of the community are rarely considered. Staff from the State Institute of Panchayat and Rural Development, the Panchayat Pradhan herself and the job assistant, and workers of Swanirvar held a meeting with people in one booth. They were divided into five teams, and each asked to discuss among themselves one particular issue that should exercise the community: education, roads, health, drainage, and agriculture. At the meeting itself, they presented well thought-out opinions on their respective subject. Women were as vocal as they had promised in their self-help groups to be. This experiment being so successful, the pattern was repeated at the three other booths also, with Swanirvar workers taking the leading role, as the others could not make the time to come to each booth.

20

The North 24 Parganas NGOs forum continues to struggle to do anything beyond surviving. In April we took the initiative to organize a workshop on micro-finance for its members. This was conducted by CARE, some members of the faculty of the State Institute of Panchayat and Rural Development, and two leading micro-finance NGOs of West Bengal - Village Welfare Society, and Taj Mahal Gram Vikas Kendra. In July the first annual meeting of the forum was held at Swanirvar, with 30 members participating. It met again at Madhyamgram in August. Then in September there was a workshop at Vikas Kendra on globalization. In March we met at Jana Samhati Kendra at Badu to discuss members' role during the floods and to seek opinion on how to prepare ourselves for such a natural calamity in future. But nothing much has come out of these.

Apart from being a member of a State-level network on sustainable agriculture and of a national network on education, and from being an active member of the district forum, we keep in touch with NGOs, individuals and other organizations in and outside West Bengal whose work we admire or feel may have something to teach us. Our supervisors often attend seminars in Kolkata and it is only the language constraint that keeps them from going beyond West Bengal. Thus it is on our Coordinator that the main responsibility of interacting with others devolves. We do not wish to sound immodest but there are many now who wish to hear what we have done and how, and it is again our Co-ordinator who represents us at these sessions. We give below a brief list of meetings

he attended and places he went to during the year. The Rajya Samanvay Upadeshta Parishad is a committee formed to co-ordinate NGOs' activities with the ideas of the State Planning Board. It invited us to its meeting this year. He was one of the speakers at a 2-day Eastern India Consultation on Non-violence for Sustainability of Life organized by VANI. He addressed a group of rural journalists on sustainable development at a workshop organized by Service Centre. He attended a State-level workshop on micro-finance where among the participants were representatives of the West Bengal Government, the SIPRD, NABARD, various nationalized banks, SIDBI, the co-operative department, Sadhan which is a national apex NGO on micro-finance, and an NGO from Andhra Pradesh instrumental in the promulgation of a new co-operative Act there. On another occasion he also addressed a large conference of women in self-help groups from many places at a conference organized by Gana Unnayan Parshad. He went to Sevagaon at Wardha for a 3-day conference on education where he met leading educationists from all over the country. He addressed a workshop on floods where many organizations participated. He was a key participant at a SIPRD workshop called to draw up a training module for women panchayat pradhans.

He went to Britain on a brief visit on invitation from the Friends of Swanirvar. He met the trustees of FoS and gave them a first-hand account of the activities that they have been so assiduously supporting over the years, explaining our position and philosophy, answering questions, and clarifying uncertainties in the process. He discussed with the NLCB the progress of our micro-finance project until then, and addressed members of the Society of Friends, a church group, Worcester Fourth Form College, and University College, Worcester. He was interviewed as a development activist by the Worcester centre of the BBC. Unfortunately, some of his other engagements had to be cancelled because of floods in England. Our patrons in the USA, particularly in and around Los Angeles, Chicago, and in New Jersey, and some of our active supporters on various campuses there, most of them Indians or of Indian origin, also want him to visit them but a definite plan is yet to take shape.