

It is difficult to express in words the sense of hollowness we at Swanirvar felt when the news of the premature death of our friend Tridip Sarkar reached us. Tridip was responsible for creating the Friends of Swanirvar through which Swanirvar received an enormous amount of support especially for the purpose of building infrastructure. We hope that he would have had reasons to feel happy if he saw this years annual report.

Our main donors this year have been the following :

FoS - Friends of Swanirvar , Worcester, England (This includes money from National Lotteries Charities Board NLCB)	Rs. 21,92,144.56
S&C - Share & Care Foundation, USA (Money raised by friends around LA, around Chicago, ASHA-LA, ASHA-Madison)	Rs. 5,52,698.00
CRY - Child Relief & You	Rs. 5,07,400.00
CARE , West Bengal (CASHE)	Rs. 4,68,091.00
AIH&PH - All India Institute of Hygiene & Public Health , Government of India (The fund coming from ICEF - Indo Canadian Environment Facility, Delhi)	Rs. 3,92,500.00
Government of India, MHRD (through Vikramshila - VERS, Kolkata)	Rs. 81,600.00
1 Alan Goncalves, England	Rs. 68,725.00
UNICEF , Kolkata	Rs. 45,000.00
Misc.	Rs. 26,486.00
Sale of fish	Rs. 43,064.00
Bank Interests	Rs. 29,226.00
Subscription	Rs. 552.00
TOTAL	Rs. 44,07,486.56

Our expenditures for this year are given below

Head of expenses	Amount Rs.	Source of money
CAPITAL EXPENDITURE		
Building	13,30,674.28	FoS
Land	30,000.00	Domestic
MotorCycle	26,300.00	AIH&PH
Furniture	20,332.00	S&C
Cycle	19,308.00	S&C,Domestic
Total	14,26,614.28	

PROGRAMME EXPENDITURE

Pre-primary	5,43,892.85	CRY , S&C
Primary	5,08,511.25	FoS
Micro-Finance	4,94,658.22	CARE , FoS
Youth & Culture	3,68,852.00	FoS , S&C
Agriculture	3,67,941.00	DRCSC , Domestic
Health & Arsenic	3,61,526.00	AIH&PH, AID , S&C
Staff Welfare Fund	68,725.00	Alan Goncalves
Flood (CBDP)	41,647.00	UNICEF
Organisation	38,640.15	Domestic
Pisciculture	23,978.25	Domestic
Travel	1,69,649.69	FoS, CARE, AIH&PH, DRCSC , UNICEF
Books, Stationery, Printing	1,44,560.75	FoS, CARE, DRCSC , UNICEF
Salaries	84,300.00	CRY, FoS , S&C
Meeting - Training	83,852.00	FoS , Domestic
Total	33,00,734.16	

2

ADMINISTRATIVE - OVERHEAD EXPENDITURE

Fees	46,700.00	FoS, CARE , CRY
Repairs	33,736.25	FoS, CARE, DRCSC, AIH&PH, Domestic
Electricity, Telephone	26,040.00	FoS , CARE , AIH&PH
Documentation	21,342.65	FoS
CRY Refund	13,568.94	CRY
Bank Charges	2,191.50	S&C, Domestic
Total	1,43,579.34	
GRAND TOTAL	48,70,927.78	

1. PRE-PRIMARY

Swanirvar is at present running 15 pre- primary teaching centres. The centres provide education to rural children coming from poor families using innovative teaching - learning methods. Over the years these centres have reached a stage of maturity and established their reputation among villagers.

Working days/attendance:

Total number of children this year was 1007. Working days have varied between 208 (Deepmedia) and 231 (Beliakhali). The percentage of attendance has ranged between 71% at Gokulpur and 89% at Chandalati and Beliakhali.

Innovations:

* In 3 villages we have started 'sahitya sabha', a method of encouraging creative thinking among children that was first introduced by Rabindranath Tagore in Santiniketan. Although the majority performers are primary school children, in these 3 centres the pre-primary children also took part.

* Various forms of entertaining as well as teaching the students has been explored this year. Videos of wild life shown in 10 centres has been very popular. In the remaining 5 centres the children were taken to melas (rathajatra), circuses and magic shows. Such activities have made the schooling process more enjoyable and have generated enthusiastic response from the parents.

* Sports was held in 14 centres whereas till last year it used to be held only in 3 centres. This led to a much higher level of mother's participation in organising and managing the programme.

3

Community participation:

* The key challenge in any such education project is to ensure greater and greater community participation. In other words setting up an innovative school is not good enough if the community cannot understand what it is all about. For quite some time Swanirvar has been trying to involve the parents in greater and greater number.

* This year the key areas of meetings with the parents were:

- To explain teaching methods to new parents
 - To explain the significance and relevance of half yearly and annual reviews.
- To discuss the formation and role of Village Education Committees (VEC).
- To increase awareness regarding the menace of Arsenic in tubewell drinking water.
 - To explain how the problem of tapeworms, vitamin deficiency related mouth sores and scabies can be prevented/controlled.

The task has been carried out quite successfully except at the villages of Fatullahpur and Hyderpur. The response from the parents has been good.

* Parents make a small monthly contribution at a rate decided by the parents of each centre. It is Rs.1 in three centres; between Rs1 and Rs.4 in eight centres; and between Rs.5 and Rs.10 in four centres.

Influencing the mainstream:

* Swanirvar has followed a policy of sharing its understanding of quality education with other main-

stream (government) schools. For example an effort is on to develop common programmes with the government run schools. This year Swanirvar extended its rakhi programme to include 40 local government primary schools.

What is significant is that in 3 centres the preprimary children made rakhis for the first time - a task normally done by older primary and high school children.

In one village - Punra - the preprimary children went and taught songs and dances to the neighbouring government primary school and then these items were performed jointly during rakhi celebrations.

* Swanirvar has started a process of activating the Village Education Committees constituted by government order but lying non functional in most cases. A workshop was organised for the pre-primary teachers at Swanirvar to understand the government circulars and brainstorm on possible role of VECs. In all 15 villages the teachers are getting quite involved trying to find out, cajole and encourage VEC members and villagers to become active with mixed results. Its going to a long tedious battle but in three or four villages some amount of success has been achieved.

Greater independence to the teachers:

4 * Another area in which Swanirvar is now working is to ensure that the teachers are able to design their own annual lesson plan. Over the last two years several workshops have been organised to upgrade the level of teachers competence. We are happy to say that from next year at least in three or four schools the teachers are going to design their own school curriculum.

* Similarly Swanirvar has had a system of internal evaluation and monitoring among the teachers. The idea is to ensure that the task of evaluation and monitoring is not restricted strictly to the supervisors only. Till last year every month 6 schools would remain closed on a certain day and all the teachers would visit the 7th school for peer monitoring. This year the teachers have started making exchange visits without any school being closed. The process has just started and is yet to take shape. However over the next couple of years the process is expected to become more effective.

Infrastructure:

With the help of Friends of Swanirvar, England (FoS) this year construction has been completed in 3 villages - Uttar Media, Dip Media and Bagjola. So over the years with FoS assistance, Swanirvar has been able to provide pre-primary buildings in 13 centres. Swanirvar does not have its own infrastructure in Gokulpur and Punra and in Bhojpara and Beliakhali the infrastructure is inadequate.

Training :

The 8 member Swanirvar pre-primary training team completed a 15 day training for teachers of other organisations and clubs. This has started last year (2000-01) and had remained unfinished because of floods in Oct-Nov, 2000.

2. PRIMARY

Swanirvar is now running 3 primary schools in three villages, Andharmanik, Fatullahpur and Chandalati. The primary education programme is part of Swanirvar's larger effort of experimenting with innovative education.

This year the performance of the primary department has been briefly as follows.

Work days/ student attendance:

The total number of students was 486 out of which 250 were boys and 236 girls. Total number of school days this year has been 224; and student attendance has been on an average 88.5% (same for both male and female). Tiffin was provided to the children on 167 days.

Innovations:

* A new history textbook, written by Sandip Bandyopadhyay, has been published and this is to be introduced from the 2002 academic year. The book emphasises on the development of the child's ability to understand the history of his/her family and surroundings, things with which s/he can relate, rather than memorising the history of great kings. It may be mentioned here that for some time now students of the primary schools have been writing the history of their family and their locality. The book that has been published would aid that process rather than initiate it.

* Swanirvar has in the past carried out several innovations with the teaching learning process. Therefore this year the focus was on creating better systems of evaluation. Two workshops were conducted by Sudeshna Sinha where attempts were made to come up with new kinds of "exams" and "report cards". The main idea was to come up with tests which judge the conceptual understanding and are open ended - quite a difficult task. Another shift in the new method would be to focus on continuous evaluation throughout the year rather than periodic (dreadful) examinations.

* The system of peer review of the teachers continues. Teachers of two schools visit the third school, examine in detail the teaching learning process and interact with the parents. This year 6 such group visits took place.

Community participation:

* This year 11 meetings with the parents were held, where 614 villagers participated. In addition regular home visits have ensured that the parents have remained involved in the affairs of the school. Our records show that 171 fathers and 217 mothers and in 92 cases both the parents kept regular contact with the schools. In the past it was mostly the mothers who were coming to school, but now the fathers have also started coming. The parents of the students of class 3 and class 4 have shown keen interest in various subjects especially history, geography and science.

* Swanirvar collects a voluntary monthly fee from the parents at rate decided by the parents. This year

our records show that out of 486 students, 247 paid the fees regularly, 168 were irregular, 71 did not pay out of which 45 were too poor to pay.

* This year we have also collected very detailed data on income levels of all the families and the schooling of the parents. We would like to analyse this to see whether we have been able to overcome the handicap of poverty-illiteracy of parents with regards to the performance of the students. We were also interested to see how the parents might get involved in the total primary schooling process. In the coming years this effort to involve the parents in the affairs of the school would have to gather greater momentum and it remains a vital area of activity for Swanirvar.

Influencing the mainstream:

This year also we have continued the policy of developing contacts with the local schools and devising ways of having joint programmes so that we can create an environment where innovative experiments can take place in the local government schools.

* As mentioned in the pre-primary section this year Swanirvar has established links with 40 primary schools through the celebration of rakhi bandhan. In Bajitpur gram panchayat, Swanirvar was able to hold several joint planning meetings involving the panchayat and all 17 government primary schools in the GP leading to a well coordinated celebration of rakhi and independence day.

* Swanirvar has been actively involved in the formation of the Village Education Committees in the locality, especially the Bajitpur GP. In June- July 2001 Swanirvar staff helped the local SI (school inspector) to form the VECs. In September-October an effort was made to activate the VECs by organising regular meetings with teachers and VECs and also by organising orientation camps for the VECs in the Bajitpur GP. The VECs of the Bajitpur village has started to function systematically - it has fixed a meeting date for every month; has decided to raise partial money to increase the depth of a school tube well (the rest of the money to be given by the panchayat); has decided to invite the teachers of all kinds of schools in their area to the VEC meetings. On the other hand efforts to activate the Ward Education Committees of Magurkhali have not been successful.

*At another level Swanirvar staff has played key roles in various organisations/networks that are trying to influence state policy on education. Very briefly one can mention the following significant interventions:

- The pre-primary and primary supervisors - Salauddin Sardar and Prosanto Mondol - are now both in the State Resource Group (SRG) on Community Mobilization of DPEP. They did a review of Birbhum district in Jan 2002 as members of the SRG and submitted their report. One of them was also the key trainer of government functionaries involved in DPEP at a training held in Dinajpur district in Feb,2002.

·Swanirvar as a partner of CRY was part of the National Alliance For Fundamental Right to Education (NAFRE).As part of the national effort to modify the bill on fundamental right to education, Swanirvar

teachers , along with many local persons, VEC members, GP members met the local MP - Ajoy Chakravorty and explained to him in detail NAFRE's point of view and gave him some papers. Later that month in parliament Sri Chakravorty was one of the few members to raise the relevant questions.

- As a member of the West Bengal Education Network (WBEN) Swanirvar has submitted an elaborate proposal to the Syllabus Committee of SCERT (State Council for Educational Research & Training) who are in the process of revising the school syllabus and books and had invited suggestions from interested parties.

None of these efforts have resulted in massive changes in government education policies but Swanirvar can claim that it has done its bit. A long and treacherous road lies ahead.

3. YOUTH and CULTURE

Training

The Youth and Culture department of Swanirvar works in 8 villages. This year like the previous years the Kishore Kishori Bahini were trained in several topics. Specifically they were:

- Kitchen garden and herbal medicine - as a result of this training the Kishore Kishori Bahini (KKB) is now making kitchen gardens at home. This is helping us to further disseminate the knowledge of sustainable agriculture. They are maintaining records of the vegetables that being grown in the region. They have also understood the technical aspects of preparing the soil and using natural fertilizers according to the seasons. This training unfortunately could not be provided to the BBB of Kolsur and Bajitpur, but next year the gap is definitely going to be fulfilled.

- First Aid - As a result of the First Aid training KKBs of the 8 villages have given first aid to 504 persons in all.

- Health and Nutrition - This is one of most difficult areas as far as implementation is concerned as the parents of the KKBs hardly ever care for what their children have to say for example regarding healthy practices in the kitchen. However since this is part of school syllabus of class IX and class X, the training has at least one utility value for the children. WE are however hopeful that the parents would start listening at some point and more importantly when the teenagers themselves start their own homes they would implement these practices.

- Sex education - this training was started about 4 years ago. Initially it was restricted to teenage girls only but it was realised that boys need to be educated as well. We are happy to say that as a result of the education provided the boys and girls are managing this crucial period of physiological change better than ever before and as a result of the clearing of many misconceptions they are mentally more at peace. However we do feel that sex education should become a part of the school curriculum so that a large number of boys and girls get the opportunity to clear up their confusions.

- General Health - The KKBs are now equipped to

- i. prepare ORS

- ii. give adequate advice on common cold prevention
- iii. give instructions on how to prevent tapeworms
- iv. give instructions on the causes of environmental pollution and its impact on health
- v. keep the tube wells of the villages clean
- vi. identify the garbage dumps of the village and clear them

· Problems of arsenic pollution - in our project area arsenic pollution is a major cause of concern. In order to generate awareness among the people regarding the causes of arsenic pollution and how to avoid diseases caused by arsenic pollution in ground water the KKB was informed and mobilised. Consequently a mass awareness campaign was launched which included rallies, puppet shows and plays.

· Superstition and Science - The KKB was given instructions on how to generate awareness among the villagers regarding the various ways in which magic is used to fool the villagers. It is expected that in 2002-2003 there would be a campaign would be launched.

Theatre workshops and performance:

* This year two workshops were organised on the theme of globalization. Two plays have been produced

· Shikor cherar shobdo

· Khuror kol

* In all 6 performances took place with an estimated audience of 950. These shows were done by the members of the Youth and Culture team.

* In addition the KKB has done 15 shows where the estimated viewership was 7350. In these shows The KKB performed puppet plays, folk dances, bratachari, and dances to the accompaniment of tagore songs.

Networking through Environment and Natural Resource Education (ENRE)

* In association with Services Centre (DRCSC), Swanirvar along with several NGOs in 4 other districts has created an environmental education network. The aim is to provide children with hands on education on various aspects of the environment rather than memorising the books on environment.

* The ENRE team usually meets once every 2 months. This year the following topics were covered:

- a. birds
- b. kitchen garden
- c. herbal medicine
- d. rice cultivation
- e. fishing
- f. local economy

g. fossil fuels

h. garbage

The KKB were taught to follow a step-by-step scientific method of analysing these topics. This included observation, data collection, reaching a preliminary hypothesis, evaluation of the data on the basis of the hypothesis, presentation of the findings and finally planning of long-term research.

Intervention in Government High Schools

* In May 2001 a three-day workshop at Swanirvar was attended by 15 local High School science teachers conducted by Samar Bagchi - a well-known science teacher.

A one-day follow up was also conducted on 18th August 2001.

* Swanirvar's Y&C supervisor Samir Biswas keeps contact with the schools and teachers concerned. At least teachers of 10 schools are doing some Physics experiments in the classrooms.

* Meanwhile another NGO in Calcutta called Science Communicator's Forum (SCF - its president is Samar Bagchi) with some experience of conducting science activity camps for high school students during vacations got an offer from one of the district governments to conduct a workshop for teachers of some schools. This kind of offer is quite a unique happening in West Bengal. SCF has decided to include Social Studies and Sujit Sinha and Debraj Bhattacharya of Swanirvar were two of the resource persons in Jan 2002 with 25 High School History and Geography teachers on the strength of the work which Swanirvar has done with the youth groups.

9

4. MICROFINANCE - SELF HELP GROUPS

Swanirvar's microfinance programme is almost five years old now but it has gone through a change of methodology over the last two years. The SHG model has now replaced the earlier Grameen Bank model. Over the last couple of years the microfinance programme has undergone a slow process of adjustment from one model to another. In this we are being assisted quite comprehensively by CASHE wing of CARE-West Bengal. The transition is not yet complete, as is evident from the fact that a sizeable amount of loans is still to be repaid. The most important facts about the last year are as follows:

- Total number of groups/members : 313/5164
- New groups/members joined this year - 189/3024
- No. of new loanee groups/ no. of loans - 135/1183
- Total amount of loan disbursed from Swanirvar revolving fund during the yr - Rs. 29,85,700
- Interest rate charged - 10% to the groups
- Total Savings of the groups - Rs.12,43,385

·Self loans by the groups from their own savings - Rs.7,35,123

Capacity Building

On the whole it may be said that the number of groups that has formed is quite encouraging, but the groups would require careful nurturing. There are several ways of doing it

* 15 training sessions of 372 group leaders were carried out; basic training was provided to 1626 members of 109 new groups; training was provided to the 25 social animators who are the ground level workers responsible for forming, nurturing the groups and acting as the link between the group and the field worker at the cluster level.

* Training was also provided on socio-legal awareness and home nutrition garden to 25 group leaders.

* A convention was organised at the Magurkhali cluster where more than 2000 women participated. The convention was attended by the Sabhadhipati of North 24 Parganas, Smt. Aparna Gupta. Similarly a sammelan was arranged at the Kolsur cluster, where 700 women participated and was entirely managed by the women. The women contributed Rs.5 each to organise this sammelan. The Zilla Parishad member and many Gram Panchayat members were present.

10

Structure

The structure that the MF programme is following is as follows. The functioning unit of the programme is the SHG, which consists of 10 to 20 women. Several SHG form a Booth Committee, and several booth committees together form a Cluster Committee. The clusters are supposed to be governed by an apex federation of elected women of the SHG.

This year some advance has been made towards building this structure. Kolsur cluster has created 5 booth committees, Bajitpur has created two and Magurkhali has created one. No booth committee has been unfortunately been created at the Fatullapur cluster.

Overall Empowerment

Several incidents occurred in course of the year which gives us the hope that empowerment of women is actually happening. Some of the incidents were:

- In two villages SHGs were involved in voluntary road repairs.
- In one village 90% of the voluntary blood donors in a camp were SHG women. A total of 293 SHG women donated blood in various camps organised by Swanirvar.
- In one place the SHG women called the local panchayat member and asked her about the status of schools, roads, drinking water etc — problems about which the panchayat member himself was not aware. 814 SHG members participated in the Panchayat Gram Sansad meetings in their respective villages.

·In one village the SHG s were able to stop wife beating in a family which was not even part of the SHG.

·In an adivasi para the SHGs were able to stop the sale of “hanria” to outsiders who were creating trouble.

Many such incidents of growing confidence are taking place but they need to be carefully documented.

State Forum

* CARE has encouraged the formation of a statewide network — West Bengal Microfinance Promotional Forum. This forum organised a state meet in March 2002 in Kolkata. About 40 SHG leaders from Swanirvar attended this conference.

* Swanirvar as one of the founder members will be asked to play a wider role in the coming years on evolving and guiding state specific models of microfinance.

5. HEALTH

Mother & Child Health

11 * Swanirvar’s community health programme is conducted in 8 villages. They main focus as always has been on the health of the mother and her child. In this year we have regularly stayed in touch with 3077 eligible couples and served 400 pregnant mothers. 275 pregnant mothers received regular check ups in the form of weight check up (275), measurement of blood pressure (175) and measurement of the birth of the new born baby (89).

* In addition regular instruction on family planning was provided. The following methods of birth control were adopted:

·sterilization - 44 persons

·loops - 20 persons

·oral pills - 5375

·condoms - 36,250

·Injections - 167 persons

·Homeopathic

Contraceptives - 220 persons

The fact that there is an enormous gap in this area between the medical services that are supposed to be provided by the government and the villagers is evident from the fact that there were 297 births in the total project area of which only 75 took place in a hospital. Similarly there were 36 cases of abortion of which only 4 happened in a hospital. This reveals a huge gap in the provision of medical services to the poor that Swanirvar is trying to fill but its existing strength is not enough to do so.

Herbal Treatment

Swanirvar's focus is very much on the dissemination of information regarding cheap medicine that the poor can afford. It is increasingly becoming clear all over the world that herbal medicine can offer a source of inexpensive medicine that the poor can have. In many cases herbal medicine is capable of providing better treatment than expensive allopathic treatment. This year we are happy to note that the number of patients who have received herbal treatment is 709 as opposed to the number of patients who have taken allopathic treatment which stands at 695.

Capacity Building

* For villagers the method of course is to have village level training and awareness camps. This year in all 146 such camps were organised and the total number of attendants were 3484.

* Some key Swanirvar workers themselves underwent trainings at CINI, Kolkata on Reproductive & Child Health and another on School Health.

* A one-day orientation was provided in two batches to 37 Traditional Birth Attendants of the area. The TBAs felt it was very useful and wanted longer sessions with experts to improve their skills and understanding.

12

Blood & Eye Camps

* 16 blood donation camps were organised with a total number of 1250 donors. Like in the last three years, Swanirvar was again awarded the prize for mobilizing the largest number of voluntary donors in West Bengal for any social organisation.

* Eye cataract screening camps were organised by Bhojpara village and Dishari of Bithari village in December 2001. Subsequently Susrut of Salt Lake, Kolkata carried out microsurgery on 71 selected candidates free of charge in two batches.

6. ARSENIC

Arsenic pollution in groundwater has emerged as a major problem in the region in recent times. Swanirvar has been actively involved in a project with All India Institute of Hygiene and Public Health (AIH&PH) and funded by Indo Canadian Environment Facility (ICEF) to tackle the problem and is now working in 10 villages. The aim of the project is to provide relief to those who are already affected by arsenic, develop methods of water testing, make provisions for arsenic free safe drinking water and most importantly empower the community so that they are able to fight the menace on their own.

Awareness

Several methods have been used to generate greater awareness among the community. They are:

- Rallies - altogether 5 rallies took place with a total estimated attendance of 4700. In three cases

the rallies were accompanied by puppet shows.

- Street theatre - altogether 5 times in 5 villages, with a total attendance of 2900.
- Wall writing and postering.
- Meetings with village committees - Swanirvar has created 11 village committees in the 10 project villages to look after the problem caused by arsenic pollution. Altogether 25 meetings were held with the participation of 996 persons. Similarly 72 community meetings with the community groups which have been formed in the worst affected paras were held where 1698 persons participated.
- Meetings with school students and teachers - in all 13 meetings took place with 937 participants.
- Meetings with KKB - 4 meetings were held with 103 participants.
- Meetings with the panchayats - altogether 6 meetings were held with 5 GPs of the project area.
- 1·Co-ordination with other NGOs - Swanirvar is co-ordinating its activities with Save the Environment, another NGO which is also working in this area.
- 16 village committee representatives and 11 Swanirvar staff went on an exposure visit to South 24 Parganas district Technology Park set up by School of Fundamental Research - another NGO partner of this Arsenic Project to look at 13 different types of Arsenic Removal Plants.

13

Water Testing

The second important aspect of the programme is water testing. The Swanirvar team has carried out intensive testing of all the project villages. In all 2361 tube wells were tested in the ten villages. Of these 1140 were found to be dangerous and only 126 was found safe. 659 were thought to be acceptable. The tube wells that are considered to be dangerous have been identified with a red coloured cross while the ones which are safe has been identified with a green colour. It has been observed that 22 paras out of the 67 paras of the 10 villages have a level of arsenic pollution (more than 69 per cent) that can be considered dangerous. There is a plan of installing arsenic removal plants in these paras with the help of All India Institute of Health and Public Hygiene and Oxide India. In these paras 13 community groups have been formed to aid the process of combating the arsenic menace. The technology has been selected by the local committees based on their exposure visit mentioned above and subsequent discussions with the villagers.

Treatment

The third level of our work consists of providing treatment to the patients who have been affected by arsenic. Our study reveals that in all there are 110 patients in our project area. On 12th January 2002 all the patients were taken to the Save the Environment Clinic for check up and some of them were referred to the School of Tropical Medicine, Kolkata for further treatment.

7. AGRICULTURE

Swanirvar in association with Development Research Communications and Services Centre (DRCSC) or Services Centre for short has been involved in the promotion of sustainable agriculture in the region. Swanirvar's field area is characterised by intensive high yielding cultivation with a very heavy emphasis on the use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides. Changing the mindset of the farmers in a region such as this is a task that is quite difficult.

There are two ways in which Swanirvar is working towards promoting sustainable agriculture in the region. The first is to carry out experiments with various techniques of growing crops or vegetables and the second is to form farmers groups through which the task of promoting sustainable agriculture is carried out.

Groups

At present there are 21 farmers groups with 309 farmers and 23 Home Nutrition Gardeners groups with 337 members with whom Swanirvar is directly working. This is a small increase in comparison to last year. However instead of expansion, this year the emphasis was on the improvement of the quality of the groups. There are several indicators which would suggest that the quality of the groups have improved. Some of the indicators are:

- Savings - every group is now saving a minimum of Rs 10 to Rs 20 per person per week.
- The groups are also giving membership fees worth Rs 1 or Rs 2.
- There is a strong tendency towards the creation of grain banks. At present there are 2-grain banks by men farmers and another 3 by the nutrition gardeners. Saving a fistful of rice and depositing them in a central store every week in order to safeguard against days when there would shortage is something that is slowly gaining popularity.
- Many of the farmers are now able to conduct the group meetings themselves.
- Use of organic fertilizers have increased.
- The use of herbal medicines have increased.

Extension and Awareness

Apart from working on the groups, several other measures have been taken to promote the cause of sustainable agriculture. Seeds have been distributed among 110 field farmers and to 307 home gardeners; leaflets and posters have been distributed among the groups; in all 17 notice boards have been put up where relevant information has been made available; and 321 persons have been taught to grow and use herbal medicine; 168 packets of mushroom spawn was sold; 150 packets of PSB and azotobacter were distributed. A stall was put up at Katiahat and a play; 'Bikolpor Sandhane' (in search of an alternative) was performed at Harishpur.

Capacity building

Various trainings have been conducted:

- * Small few hour study circles — 315 for home gardeners attended by 3451 persons and 295 for field farmers attended by 2472 farmers.
- * Half-day awareness camps in 4 new areas — attended by 158 persons. Subsequently in these areas new groups were formed.
- * One-day Orientation programmes — 7 were conducted for home gardeners with 136 participants and 6 were held for field farmers with 117 participants.
- * Four day Sustainable Agriculture Training — 7 for home gardeners with 138 participants and 5 for field farmers with 90 participants.
- * One-day follow up workshops — 3 for home gardeners with 62 persons and 6 for farmers with 109 persons.
- * Exchange programme between different villages of Swanirvar's project area — 6 for home gardeners with 69 participants and 8 for field farmers with 89 persons.
- * Exposure trips to other NGOs in other districts of the Sustainable Agriculture Network — 2 trips were organized for a total of 46 persons.
- 15 * Service Centre organized various specialised trainings for supervisors and staff of Samovar . These include subjects like — Herbals, Nutrition, Bio-Lab, Seedling Nursery, Fishery & Animal Husbandry, Panchayats, NGO management & leadership etc.

Collaboration with Government

There has been an effort at developing joint programmes in association with the office of the Agricultural Development Officer. Swanirvar participated in the Krishimela organised by the ADO of Baduria block. Also an attempt has been made to cultivate groundnut with seeds supplied by the ADO with 43 farmers of Bajitpur and Dakhshin Media.

System & Model Plots

- * The results from the 9 systems plots are quite encouraging. Four of these are low land models of integrated farming with a pond, a very wide bundh on the pond bank, and a rice field thus producing food grains, vegetables, fish and ducks. Such farming although quite common in many Southeast Asian countries is very rare in our area. The other five are models for high land with very intensive mixed vegetable cropping, proper crop rotation, using successfully all kinds of bio-inputs and maximising recycling .With one exception the rest have shown good results. Uday Das of Punra, who switched over from high yielding cultivation to sustainable agriculture sometime back, has had excellent results and has a plot worth seeing.
- * 16 model home nutrition gardens were progressing well with one started in 1998, one in 1999 and

the rest in 2000. All the essential ingredients ——— compost pit, liquid compost, live fence, properly made beds, multi tier cropping, use of big trees and roof, proper use of shaded and waterlogged areas, essential herbs, and a proper crop rotation and mixed cropping plan — not all the gardens have everything. But we are gradually getting there.

Trials

These are careful experiments done in small plots of lands by a bunch of farmers to test new crops, new varieties, new techniques, bio-inputs etc. One might study the economics, pest resistance, productivity, amount of care required, whether seeds can be kept etc.

* In the pre-kharif season the trials were done with 11 crops involving 59 farmers. The crops were ——— barbati (long bean), eggplant, til (sesame), lata Kochu , mukhi kochu (a type of), mug (), khamalu, mixed til-mug, dhani patal (a variety of ridge gourd), gimi-kumro (a variety of pumpkin), Ol (elephant).Not all the trials were succesful and some need to be repeated.

* In the rabi season trials were done with 7 crops involving 30 farmers. The crops were — bakla, chillie, dhani patal, wheat (using home kept seeds), ladysfinger, patal and mustard.

* In 11 home nutrition gardens the following 7 trials were done — planting various crops on and under the trellis, pitcher irrigation, comparison between single and mixed cropping, use of neem oilcake, use of mulch, crops for waterlogged tube well base.

16

Farmers and Home gardeners groups have become quite active

* All the members are doing regular savings

* The groups are doing their own meetings and writing the minutes in a resolution book

* The groups are collecting and preserving many seeds

* Farmers are using organic inputs and pak mati (pond sludge) more and more. In Fatullapur almost 2 km of the drainage canal sludge has been lifted and used by farmers thus desilting the canal also.

The general use of household dung heap as fertilizer has increased quite a lot

Two system plots are developing quite well; Uday Das and Bikash Mondol.

Swanirvar Trainers have become competent and confident and have given several external trainings in other districts this year.

In Gokulpur other villagers are coming to buy organically grown vegetables from the model gardens paying higher prices.

In Andharmanik village model gardener Geeta Sardar has opened a shop to sell her organically grown vegetables and people are eagerly buying them.

Contacts with ADO have increased and there have quite a few collaborative works.

8. COMMUNITY BASED DISASTER PREPAREDNESS PLAN (CBDP)

In April, 2001 Swanirvar was invited by UNICEF to become the 5th NGO to join the CBDP experiment with the other 4 being in Nadia district. Such a plan would be the villagers own plan to tackle the first 7-10 days before they get proper government or private relief. This would minimise the damages and severe inconveniences the people face.

Swanirvar decided to work with one Gram Panchayat (GP) - Atghara Jasaikati - as the geo-political entity.

In May 2001 some Swanirvar workers were trained in PLA (Participatory Learning and Action) methods. Then the GP members were given an orientation.

In June 2001 the PLA exercises were done with GP members and selected villagers to understand the floods of 2000, the problems and possible village level actions were identified in three batches each with 5 booths (a booth is the constituency of a GP member with 600-1200 voters)

In July 2001 a workshop was organized with the GP members to understand the participatory surveys to be done in each booth; then the surveys were done; and finally another post-survey workshop to make booth levels CBDP plans.

In August 2001 all the booth data was put together and a GP level CBDP plan was written. A GP level map was also finalised.

In September 2001 the plans made were presented in the Gram Samsad meetings (the mandatory booth level peoples general meeting which are supposed to be held at least twice a year all over India but are either not held or are disposed off without any meaningful discussions). The Atghara-Jasaikati Panchayat office now has a map of the whole GP drawn on its wall and is probably one of the few GPs in the state to have such a map.

As part of this work, the Swanirvar workers concerned and the key GP members attended 5 monthly reviews, one in each of the participating NGO — Calcutta, Ranaghat, Krishnanagar, Dattapulia, Swanirvar and Nabadwip.

While the other 4 NGOs involved the women SHG members, Swanirvar worked with one Panchayat and its elected representatives. From October 2001 Swanurvar dropped out of that project after completing this panchayat. But the other 4 NGOs have each expanded the flood planning from 4-5 villages to around 50-100 villages. (Nadia has a much more severe flood problem compared to North

24 Parganas). Now all of them are involving the panchayats. UNICEF claims that that was the effect of Swanirvar on the others.

In March, 2002 Swanirvar coordinator Sujit Sinha was asked to be part of a team to evaluate the expanded CBDP work done by the 4 Nadia NGOs .

9. PEOPLE'S PANCHAYAT PLAN

All villagers sitting together to do the analysis of their own area to identify the problems and possibilities; then draw up various plans with the help of some experts (who can increase the number of options); then have the resources to implement this plan — is a dream which has been partially realised only in Kerala.

West Bengal tried it in 42 GPs of 4 blocks (there are 350 blocks in the state) in 4 districts in 2000-2001. This pilot project was funded by UNICEF. Only 10 GPs of one out of the 4 blocks has anything like a plan to show.

Swanirvar is one of the few NGOs in West Bengal which 4 years back had decided to try and build up a few model local government and develop systems to make a people's development plan. Although there was very little progress as the work was "unofficial", this had prompted UNICEF to invite Swanirvar to join the CBDP experiment (see Flood above)

In early June, 2001 Swanirvar coordinator Sujit Sinha along with a senior person of CARE, an influential political leader from Swanirvar's area, a very dynamic young political leader from Jalpaiguri, and a government official of Jalpaiguri visited Kerala to see their panchayat planning system.

On 15th June, 2001 a big meeting involving ministers, UNICEF, key government officials, departments, institutions, NGOs, interested individuals was held in Calcutta to discuss people's planning.

In July, 2001 an economist A.N. Bose who had tried this thing way back in early 1980s in some villages of Midnapur while being a faculty of IIT KGP was inducted in the State Planning Board to carry this forward to 40 blocks!

Because of the presence of the two NGOs - Swanirvar and Vikas Kendra, Bose has persuaded the North 24 Parganas district authorities to select Baduria block as one of the 40 blocks. A preliminary meeting was held on March 23rd, 2002 at Baduria block office where Bose, district officials, block leaders etc were present.

We hope to report some exciting developments in this area in our next annual report.