

SWANIRVAR

**Andharmanik, North 24
Parganas,
West Bengal 743 401**

Annual report 2005 - 2006

THIS IS our 17th annual report and the year we write about has been one of quite some satisfaction to us. Why we say this will be clear from an account of our activities in the different sections. Briefly speaking, this year our cooperation and collaboration with the mainstream showed an increase in both quantity and quality, and this has meant that appreciation of our goals and acknowledgement of the viability of our methods are percolating to receptive cracks in what generally appears to be an immutable monolith, what Tagore called an *Achalayatan*.

This is not to suggest that the race is won. It has just begun and there are still many who do not even know of it or see any need for it. For them, the daily ration of hearing how well India is doing kills the hunger to wonder if India is doing good to itself, particularly to its millions who neither receive nor perceive any change in their condition. In the national hurry to believe in India's emergence, many have redrawn their mental map of India. Since Swanirvar works for those usually outside the borders of this map, one of our priorities is to change the mindset of people whose decisions and work help change the life of those excluded.

This is not easy. Exactly how difficult it was we found once again from our experience of working as the District Technical Agency for the State Government's SGSY programme, which entrusted to us the responsibility of strengthening over two years the government's delivery machinery for its massive Self-Help Group project. We found that even though they had given us the responsibility, they were unwilling to properly use our expertise or listen to our suggestions based on years of experience. This attitude is the one thing that has to change. However things did look up somewhat after months of persuasion. This ultimate change in attitude, along with the help that we have received from inside the "system" in other areas makes us confident that it can be done.

The UK-based Friends of Swanirvar has been indeed friends and a tower of strength to us over the years. Two of its trustees, Anthony Wilson and Brendan Mann, retired this year because they were getting on in years and we shall miss their wise words of counsel. FoS has inducted new trustees and we look forward to having similar productive relations with them. Our friends in California continue to surprise us with their capacity to raise money from individuals. Prithvi and Sulekha Shah from Indian Friends' Association in the USA visited us and what they saw first hand led IFA to a commitment of long-term support. Indienhilfe in Germany has helped greatly in setting up Shikshamitra and the personal touch in their activities takes the partnership to a somewhat different level. Many other individuals, organizations and donor agencies have helped us reach where we are today. They are too numerous to be mentioned separately.

If we have gained support from new sources we have lost one old prop of ours. Child Relief and You, CRY for short, was the first big name to lend us support when we began and over the years they helped our work get known to a wide sphere, but we have now parted company. This was not because they lost faith in us, but rather because our attitudes to how to work for development have diverged. It is perhaps inevitable that organizations that work nationally find it difficult to accommodate regional variations and compulsions. However, we continue to be actively associated with the education network that they helped set up

Swanirvar has always had a clear idea of where it wants to go, but we do not think we always know the best way to get there. And certainly we never think the way we follow at any given time is the only one worth taking. Our coordinator, Sujit Sinha, liaises with other NGOs and networks to constantly evaluate approaches and achievements, analyse disappointments and to update ideas of strategic planning.

One of our young workers, Ramprasad Munda, died this year. There was nothing very much we could do for his wife and small children, except getting her a job. Our failure to arrange for any kind of insurance for our workers is a constant reminder of how far we are from an equitable society. The sectional reports follow.

EDUCATION: PRE-PRIMARY

THIS YEAR 906 children were enrolled in our 14 pre-primary centres for 3-to-5-year olds. Classes were held on 225 days. The teachers met twice a year to make teaching-learning aids. Four special days were celebrated – Independence Day on 15 August, Rakhi Purnima on 19 August, Children's Day on 14 November, and Netaji's birthday on 23 January. There is nothing special to write about these centres this year, except that supervisory visits were totally discontinued as we felt that such intensive use of manpower resources would be untenable in any replication of the work over a wider area. It is a happy thought that the teachers did not falter or stray in the absence of these visits. In any case, the supervisor was always available if they had any problem, and the monthly meetings brought all the teachers and the supervisor together.

Freed of much of his responsibilities for the day-to-day running of the centres, the sectional supervisor, Salah-uddin Sardar, could devote all his energy to the larger, more ambitious, and futuristic goal of intervening in the mainstream education process, and to networking with other NGOs. One major sphere of this work was the sensitizing of the Village Education Committees (VECs) formed by the Government and helping them function purposefully and not just remain paper bodies. Several of the teachers assisted him in this, and other Swanirvar staff were always there to help whenever needed.

Formats for VECs

Our intervention started with 14 VECs in the Sansads where the pre-primary centres are located. At most of these places our workers showed the VECs how to conduct the annual survey of children and then helped them do it. They also participated in the enrolment campaign of the Sarva Siksha Abhiyaan(SSA).

Some VEC members proved more receptive to our ideas than others and with them we discussed, in an unobtrusive and informal way, how to improve the quality of the mid-day meals, make more students attend school, and, also, encourage more VEC members to attend VEC meetings. We also explained to them the need to make suitable teaching-learning material, and encouraged the inclusion of other enthusiastic villagers in the VEC.

On 18 June, a workshop at Swanirvar was attended by 14 members from 5 VECs – Dweep Media, Bajitpur Uttar, Bhojpara Paschim, Fatullapur Kalitala, and Chandalati.

- The initial discussion on the role of ordinary members revealed that they only listened to what the “teacher-secretary” said and signed the resolution book. There is very little genuine participation. Everyone agreed that they should and could contribute more and expressed their dissatisfaction in being “silent” members, but they had very little idea as to what they could do. The teacher and the Panchayat member also felt that there was a lot that these other VEC members could do, but when asked to offer some concrete suggestions on how to achieve more general involvement they too failed to be more specific. Everyone requested Swanirvar to prepare a plan of action.
- The grading (self-evaluation) and reporting formats made by Swanirvar were then presented. Everyone was quite pleased with the first. They felt that if this was adopted as the agenda of VEC meetings it would make everyone's role clear and see an end to the usual but unproductive practice of some members coming to meetings only to demand explanations from the secretary, without doing anything themselves. There were reservations about the second because they already had to follow a set pattern in reporting to the SI and were reluctant to fill in another format. So some more thought has to be given to this second issue.

- It was decided that every participating VEC would hold a meeting before 10 July where the grading format would be used and then they would send it to Swanirvar. The next steps would be decided after further discussions with Swanirvar.
- This was done, and 12 VECs were graded, using six broad parameters and 19 sub-parameters, with a total of 100 points. The scores ranged from 44 to 21 points. This was not surprising or overly pessimistic as the VECs are clearly in a formative stage and would be needing systematic inputs.

By March 2006, the midday meal programme was running better at five places and attendance at VEC meetings had improved in four villages. The most active VEC is the one in Bhojpara.

ICDS centres

We were not able to make much headway with introducing our pre-primary teaching-learning methods in the Government-run Integrated Child Development Service centres as the workers there were wary of accepting our cooperation without permission from their supervisors. We did not give up and were rewarded a little towards the end of the year when our teachers were allowed to take a few demonstration classes at ICDS centres near Chandalati and Shimle, and three special days were celebrated at the Kolsur centre with our help. ICDS centres are mostly run in the open and workers there say that in the absence of a secure place to keep the teaching aids they do not wish to use them. It is only at Gokulpur, Punra, and two centres in Bagjola that some such aids are being used.

Gram Unnayan Samity(GUS)

As elsewhere in the state, these Panchayat-linked villagers' committees have been formed in every booth of our area. During the formation process Swanirvar workers tried to sensitize people about the procedures with the help of IEC (Information-Education-Communication) materials supplied by an NGO, the Lok Kalyan Parishad(LKP), but there was very little response and proper procedures were not followed. However, we have not desisted from continuing with our efforts and from preparing ourselves to play a bigger role in the future. A brief account of what we have done follows.

- We sent one pre-primary teacher, two KKB workers, and one primary teacher to attend a two-phase training on GUS conducted by LKP.
- A one-day orientation for the Bhojpara GUS, with 20 members participating, was held on 11 September. The subjects covered included the rationale for GUS formation, its rules, expected role, the processes. At the end of the day-long session a two-month action plan was prepared. A second such orientation was held for the Dweep Media GUS on 2 October and another at Fatullapur on 13 November which was attended by members of five nearby GUS.
- Regular interaction is being maintained with LKP, and IEC materials regarding Gram Panchayats(GP) and GUS are being obtained from them .
- All information about untied funds coming to each Gram Panchayat (GP) from both the Central and the State Governments was collated for the three blocks where Swanirvar works and passed on to all the 37 GPs in them. Meetings regarding this were held in 23 booths and the government circular on this was distributed and explained.
- A five-hour training module on the Panchayat system, with 13 pages of reading material, has been prepared for various target groups.
- Regular interaction with five self-help group clusters were begun in March 2006 to make them familiar with Panchayat systems and processes.
- The constant efforts of our workers have borne fruit at Gokulpur, Fatullapur, Bhojpara, Bajitpur, Dweep Media, Bagjola, Chandalati, Kolsur, and Beliakhali where GUS have started to meet. Again, the most vibrant among these is the one at Bhojpara. This is also the only one to have opened a bank account.

Surveys

Pre-primary teachers surveyed the 14 villages where they live and work to gather data about the two following situations.

- Early marriage: This survey, done between April and June, found that 66% of the 44 women, and 33% of the 31 men who got married did so at below the legal age.

- Child labour: This survey was done in May and revealed that 1% of the children (out of ~ 2000) in the 6-9 age group and 9% of the children (out of ~ 3500) in the 10-16 age group work as child labourers.

West Bengal Education Network (WBEN)

Salah-uddin gave substantial time to WBEN activities this year. Half of the pre-primary teachers were also involved in various ways with furthering or strengthening its activities. This is a brief account of what he did.

- Attended various State-level meetings on planning, report compilation, finance, formation of an executive committee, and participated in workshops conducted by CRY, the State convention, the annual general meeting, etc.
- Visited Purulia for two days in May to represent WBEN at the district planning meeting, and again for two days in August to give orientation to teachers of government primary schools in Balarampur block under the SLIP+ programme on community mobilization.
- Initially as convener for North 24 Parganas district and later, from July, as coordinator, was responsible for setting meeting agendas, organizing meetings, preparing discussion notes, writing resolutions, creating and maintaining files, etc.
- Gave an orientation to the Murshidabad district chapter of WBEN in March on Panchayat systems. Our feedback is that that chapter has become quite active and some of its members have taken the initiative to form effective GUS in their areas, a rare occurrence in the state.
- Visited Goghat in Hooghly district in December to give orientation on GUS and VEC, but local political toughs did not allow the meeting to be held.

Swanirvar actively participated in a country-wide campaign organized by NAFRE (National Alliance for Fundamental Right to Education) by joining a cycle rally that passed through 60 villages in four blocks in our district between 11 and 13 December to create public awareness regarding the drawbacks of the education bill to be introduced in Parliament.

EDUCATION: Primary

The schools and the children

WE HAVE four schools – three at Andharmanik, Fatullapur and Chandalati with Classes I to IV, and one at Matia with only Classes I and II. The total enrolment at the end of the year was 513 (253 boys and 260 girls) with 90% attendance. This year there were 222 working days for children and 258 for the teachers. In April 2006, 128 children who had finished Class IV left to join the next class at one of the several local high schools.

In 2003-04 we had translated – with some amount of adaptation – the environment education series “Apne Aas Paas” produced by Digantar, an NGO in Rajasthan into Bangla, calling it “Dekho, Bhabo, Karo, Shekho” and had used Books I, II, and III in the last two years. This year we started using the last two parts, Books IV and V, in our classes.

English teaching is our weakest area as the teachers do not know much English. This year we were very fortunate to get Margaret Flanagan, a retired school teacher from England, as a volunteer. In the four months that she was with us, she taught the teachers English, took classes with the children, and also trained the teachers on how to teach English to the children. With her experience, enthusiasm and commitment, she proved to be an excellent teacher and trainer. Some teachers from the government schools in our area also participated in the training sessions. She made detailed lesson plans and prepared effective teaching aids. We hope she will be able to return for a few months, as the task of developing a proper syllabus, materials and methods for teaching English in rural schools is tough and will require a lot of effort over several years.

This year for the first time we roped in our sustainable agriculture department to start taking a few classes in our primary schools. The seven classes in Chandalati and 12 in Fatullapur were well received but for optimum effects, the lessons need some re-designing and have to be made pedagogically sound. This will come with time.

The libraries in the three larger schools are doing quite well. This year there were 318 borrowings. Incidentally the children themselves have the entire responsibility of running their libraries.

The four days mentioned in the pre-primary section, as also Rabindranath Tagore's birthday on 8 May, were observed as special days with the children producing cultural programmes. In each school a Sports Day was celebrated with almost 95% of the children participating in some event or the other. Sahitya Sabhas, where children display their literary creativity in a show they themselves conduct, were held thrice at each school. Two of these were exclusively for our children and the third one offered participation to students of some neighbouring government primary schools. Four, seven, and five such schools took part in the joint Sahitya Sabhas at Andharmanik, Fatullapur and Chandalati respectively.

For some years now the children at each school have been choosing from among themselves members of four committees responsible respectively for keeping the school premises clean and tidy, the toilets clean and working, organizing various games and sports, and maintaining the equipment for these, and preparing for the Sahitya Sabhas. This year a new "evaluation committee" was formed to assess the performance of the other four committees.

We supplied one set of uniform to all the children. Ideally there should be two, but our funds were not enough for this. However, after several years, this year we had the money to provide a midday snack to the children.

The teachers and their training

Apart from the two-day review meetings every month, the teachers participated in three internal workshops, of which one was for making teaching-learning materials and two for preparing the questions for the two principal examinations in the year. The supervisor held six short workshops with five of the teachers to prepare themselves as trainers to give training to other NGOs and also conduct workshops with teachers in government schools.

The sectional supervisor, Prasanta Mandal, made a total of 68 visits to the four schools. In a parallel system of peer evaluation each school received two cross visits, where teachers from the other schools go and spend a day in one school to see the teachers' work and the students' progress there.

Two of the teachers, Gopal Mondol and Sofikar Ali, attended a week-long workshop conducted by Prof. Jalaluddin of NEEV (Network of Enterprising Educational Ventures) in Kolkata where they learnt how to make and use worksheets. These are now being used in our schools.

The primary wing gave an intensive three-day training to 26 of our pre-primary teachers on the various innovative methods we follow in teaching our students in Classes I and II in late August, to prepare them for the role we envision for them when we intervene in the mainstream primary education system. This was followed by five workshops (two each in September and November, and one in December) where these pre-primary teachers made teaching aids for the government primary schools

Involvement of parents

One parents' meeting was held at the beginning of the academic year, where older parents gave inputs to new ones. Another was held at the end of the year where examination results and the overall performance of the children were discussed. The average attendance in these meetings was 70 in the three full schools and 26 in Matia where there were five such meetings.

Workshops with parents, where they are explained the rationale behind our "uncommon" teaching processes and where they then actually make some teaching aids to be used in the classroom, have become well set now. One workshop was held with parents of children in Classes I and II, and two with those whose wards were in the two higher classes. The average attendance in these workshops was 44.

This year 15 mothers took a total of 48 classes, mostly in Classes I and II. Apart from them, two fathers in Fatullapur and one mother in Andharmanik come to the school quite regularly and help the teachers in various classes. We particularly value the mother's intelligently critical cooperation.

Training teachers of other NGOs

Last year was the first time that we had given training to 70 teachers from ten NGOs from three districts. This year we organized three more such training courses.

First, there was the second phase of the training for four teachers of a school run in South 24 Parganas by the NSS wing of St. Xavier's College, Kolkata, and five teachers from the NGO Parivartan from Barrackpore. This was in June.

In November we had a four-day training programme for six teachers from Tiash KG School of Kankura village in Moshat Panchayat in Diamond Harbour block of South 24 Parganas district. A course later that month for five teachers from the NGO RHDC from Malda district had to be specially designed as these teachers run special schools for child labourers and there are certain constraints with students as well as teachers.

EDUCATION: Intervention in the mainstream

ONCE WE saw that most of our innovations in and experiments with the teaching-learning process were bearing fruit we began efforts to interest government primary schools in the area into trying out replications. These offers of collaboration started in 2000-01 and, after some initial hesitation, many local teachers and their departmental superiors are now responding to our overtures with warm interest. In the coming years we expect most of our primary and pre-primary teachers to be involved in giving systematic and substantial inputs to their mainstream counterparts and there should be some visible transformation in the near future in the quality of teaching at a number of government schools. This year marked the beginning of this intensive collaboration.

Rakhi

Celebrating this event together with government schools is how we started our programme of collaboration. In 2000-01 we could interest 17 schools. Next year the number rose to 40, and to 47 in 2002-03. Then it was 50 and last year 10 more schools joined us. This increasingly wide participation encouraged us to scale things up this year. Planning for the event started more than ten weeks before the scheduled date, and involved the SI, and both unions of teachers. Our pre-primary teachers visited numerous schools to show the children how to make Rakhis and to help many of them prepare to perform some song and dance items on Rakhi Day. This is a holiday in schools but on 19 August, 2005, Rakhibandhan was celebrated through Swanirvar's efforts in 97 government primary schools, and five SSKs. Adding the number of students in our own four primary and 14 pre-primary schools meant that altogether 15,220 local children were involved in this traditional and secular celebration of fraternity and camaraderie. Some teachers asked our workers to teach them many of the song and dance items which we had anyway planned to do.

All India Radio mentioned the programme on 19 and 20 August and the leading Bengali newspaper in the State, the Anandabazar Patrika, published this in their "Events of the day" section.

Sahitya Sabha

This was our second sector of intervention and started in 2002-03 with 12 government primary schools, the number rising to 30 and 57 in the succeeding two years. This year our strategy was to involve some well known creative personalities of the area so that this event gets more publicity. . The first Sabha this year was held at Katiahat on 20 August where 70 children from 30 schools participated. It was attended by poets Krishnalal Maity, Bodhisattva Ray, and Nirranjan Bandyopadhyay. A collection of writings of the children read out or performed at previous Sabhas was published. This event too was reported by All India Radio and was published in the newspaper Pratidin.

The second Sabha was held on 28 January at Uttar Diyara F.P. School where 47 children from 14 schools took part. Another was arranged at Katiahat on 11 March where 90 children from 31 schools participated but before that we had decided to try something else to allow more children to show their talents before an audience. The existing arrangements meant that only two or three children could come from any school to participate in these big combined Sahitya Sabhas and now we decided to encourage some of the schools to hold their own such event. We put in a lot of effort and finally four schools – Madinatara F.P. School, Kushadanga F.P. School, Rudrapur Radhaballavpur Junior Basic

School, and Rudrapur C.S.F.P. School – held their own Sabhas on 24 and 25 February, and on 10 and 23 March respectively. A total of 154 children performed in these four Sabhas.

All these events attracted a large audience, among them many parents and panchayat and VEC/WEC members.

So eventually 63 government schools were roped into participating in Sahitya Sabhas this year, whether individually or jointly held. We hope that from next year many more schools will start observing such Sabhas in their own schools and it will gradually become a part of their curriculum.

Workshops for teachers

Swanirvar held its first such workshop in 2003-04 with 25 government teachers from 23 schools. The one next year included 30 teachers from four circles, each circle having 60-70 schools. This year we held three such events.

(i) On 3 April a special Bangla teaching workshop was organized at Katiahat. This was attended by 29 teachers from 17 government schools and also by 14 of our own teachers. Our resource person was Sudeshna Sinha.

(ii) A second workshop was held at our own building on 24 July. This was attended by 30 teachers from 26 schools and 13 of our teachers. They made teaching aids related to Mathematics, History, Bangla, and Science. The outside teachers were particularly impressed by the Mathematics teaching methods of Swanirvar and some of them asked for an exclusive 3-day workshop on them.

(iii) A third workshop was held on 30 November at Baduria. We kept participation limited as this was aimed at creating future trainers. So there were three of our own teachers and one each from five government schools.

These workshops have turned out to be two-way interaction sessions. Government teachers often come out with innovative ideas. We hope to enlist a group of such teachers who are willing and able to override the various constraints in the system in our goal of training a larger number of teachers in the mainstream schools who will offer meaningful and relevant education

Workshops for parents

This fourth intervention strategy – to involve parents in the working of government schools – was our new effort this year. We held three workshops to acquaint them with possible alternatives to the teaching-learning process generally followed. The one for

(i) the Bajitpur Panchayat area held on 20 May was attended by 44 mothers from 11 schools;

(ii) and that for the Belgoria area on 15 June by 21 mothers from 8 schools. Eight pre-primary teachers from our side attended these.

(iii) The workshop at Andharmanik on 10 July was attended by 48 mothers and four fathers from ten government and three of our own primary schools. Two pre-primary teachers were also present.

This will take some time, but we are sure that, as they do in our schools, parents of children in the government schools will contribute to the activities there in various ways.

Apart from these workshops, parents' meetings were held in three government schools with our encouragement and support. One of the schools held two such meetings.

Supplying teaching aids

Following the workshops some teachers wanted teaching aids from us. Ideally we would like them to make their own, but as a gesture of encouragement in the early stage we provided work cards and worksheets related to Mathematics and Bangla for Classes I and II, and to Geography for Class IV to nine schools. Six of them reimbursed us the basic material costs for these aids.

Pre-primary teachers' efforts

In October, our pre-primary teachers in all 14 villages began to go to their nearest government primary school once a week to give some teaching-learning inputs. At some places there was resistance. The SI forbade schools in Deganga block to allow entry to Swanirvar teachers. However, after some of the schools there had participated in Sahitya Sabhas with excellent results, he reversed his stand.

Similarly, the government teacher at Gokulpur in Swarupnagar block would not allow any Swanirvar

intervention, but when the SI came to the village and saw what we do in our school, he instructed the teacher to take our inputs.

In some villages in Baduria block, teachers have allowed our workers to teach songs and dances but have strictly disallowed any classroom teaching, saying that such outside intervention is against the rules and can be permitted only with the SI's specific permission. However in some other schools in the same area falling under the same SI, teachers have wholeheartedly welcomed inputs from our workers once a week – we would love to get more time – and also intend to use the TL methods and aids shown by us.

Organizing data

A primary school Circle has between 60 and 90 schools. Every month each of these schools submits some information to the Circle office. This is routine and no one at the receiving office looks at or does anything with the data before passing it on, again as a matter of routine, to the district level. There also it is received and retained, and that is all we have been able to ascertain. There is no system of sharing this data lower down at the Gram Panchayat level. We wanted to see what kind of information is collected and how it can be displayed in a circle office. We organized the information dividing them in relation to location, students (class, gender, SC, ST, OBC, Minority), teachers (age, gender, qualification, minority), school –student ratio, teacher-student ratio, school infrastructure, etc. We have tried to present the data through simple bar diagrams and pie charts. The SI and the other staff and teachers at the Baduria East circle are very happy with this. Now we have to put it up for public information and see how all this can be used as a planning tool at various levels.

State-level programmes

On 5 February a seminar was organized in Kolkata on “Operationalising the new National Curricular Framework in West Bengal” by WBEN and an NGO Sekhar Sathi. Both our education supervisors went there and they took along five of the government teachers who are most involved with us.

EDUCATION: Shikshamitra

LAST YEAR we gave details of the groundwork we had done for setting up this alternative secondary school and education resource centre (ERC), the first urban venture of Swanirvar, and also elaborated on what we wanted its main features to be. Shikshamitra, meaning Ally in Education, started work on April 18, 2005.

The students

Morning full-time school (9 am to 1:30 pm): Although 21 children had enrolled themselves before the school started, only 15 came on the first days. By the time the school closed for summer on May 20, the number had risen to 20. At the end of July, it was 21, of whom eight were dropouts and the rest had come to us from mainstream schools in the area. With the admission of three more girls and one boy from such schools in early January, Shikshamitra had 25 students in the morning school at the end of its first academic year. The children were initially divided into two groups based on their competency level. In October, this was changed into three.

In the beginning they were quite undisciplined and disruptive, not ready to listen to any instruction and always bringing their neighbourhood quarrels to the school. Sudeshna Sinha, the head of Shikshamitra, had been associated for over a decade with Ashirvad, a Kolkata school for slum and street children, and another teacher, Sukhendu Santra, had worked in CINI-ASHA for long as a social worker. Even they were not prepared for such chaos in a classroom. A few measures, like introducing a meditation session after the lunch break, strict implementation of a behaviour code, and rewards for certain forms of behaviour and actions helped a lot in establishing order.

Evening school (5:30 pm to 7:30 pm): During the preparatory phase in February-March 2005, we had met a group of girls aged 15 and above who wanted to “learn something” as part-timers. DRCSC, an NGO popularly known as the Service Centre, was interested in collaborating with us on this. So the evening school started on May 17 — a little earlier than we had planned — with 15 girls. Four of them were studying in a day school as well. Finally, nine girls completed the six-month course and were awarded a certificate.

The afternoon school (2.30 pm to 4.30 pm): Started in August, it allowed the students in the morning school to come back after a quick lunch at home to play, dance, draw, do their homework, watch certain programmes on TV or simply to take a nap. Special dance, drama and magic classes were started, where students from the evening section also started to come and even brought their friends. At its peak in December there were 14 from the morning school, four from the evening, and six outsiders. These experimental special classes were discontinued by March.

The staff

Shikshamitra needs at least seven full-timers, with passion and skill for the work, to prepare the basics for creating an alternative secondary curriculum and making it the hub of creative enterprises related to school education. But we were able to get only four, one of whom left after a few months. There were three part-timers, and we used the services of many resource persons on a daily fees basis. The education resource centre (ERC) could start its basic work only in January 2006. In spite of all this, we were able to do a large number of innovations with what is taught and how it is taught.

The teachers received 12 days of intensive orientation before the school started. Six sessions were conducted by six external resource persons, and the six internal sessions by the teachers themselves. Anirban Hazra, from Princeton University in the USA, conducted two science activity workshops for the teachers in October and November. The Art teacher, Atreyee Day, attended a week-long workshop on the Waldorf school system in December at the Young Horizon school of Kolkata.

The teachers held a mid-term review in late October where each of them – the full-timers as well as all the part-timers – made a presentation followed by discussions. Some interested outsiders were also present in some of the sessions. Another brainstorming on Evaluation was held in February. The progress made by the children, the grading system, the format of the report card for students, and the contents of the annual “exam” were discussed.

What is different about our contents and process ?

No text books: The children are not given any text books. Instead, we have made use of the best materials we could lay our hands on from all over India and abroad. These include books produced or written by NGOs like Eklavya in Madhya Pradesh, Digantar in Rajasthan, the Centre for Environment Education (CEE) in Ahmedabad, Service Centre in Kolkata, the Delhi State Council for Educational Research & Training, by authors such as Jose Paul, John Flatt, Sandip Bandopadhyay, by publishers like Sishu Sahitya Sansad, etc. We were also regularly using newspapers, children’s magazines like Prithibir Diary and Kaktarua. Towards the end of the year we also started preparing worksheets from these various sources.

Stress on the arts: Songs, dances, theatre and theatre games, and some physical exercises are part of the school’s daily routine. Drawing/painting is used when learning almost any subject besides being practiced as a separate activity. Clay work was thoroughly enjoyed by all the students and they can now make nice clay items and paintings. A Magic class was held once a week for four months, after which three students put up an excellent performance.

Total communication skills: The students are learning all kinds of verbal and non-verbal communication skills, like how to make charts, posters, bar diagrams, pie charts, graphs, how to use and prepare banners, hoardings, wall writings, newspapers; how to make our own body more supple/sensitive/responsive; how to develop listening skills; memory exercises; sound recognition; giving the form of drama to a situation/incident; responding to a music piece or song through dance, gestures, acting and painting.

Health and hygiene: Special attention was given to these through classes on sanitation, personal hygiene; nutrition; ORS preparation.

Stress on concepts/skills and not just facts: In History the children were given a sense of the past and that the past is part of the present; the concept of a timeline, examples of historical evidence. They investigated their own family history; and have started to explore the history of Chetla, the locality of

the learning centre as also of most of them. In Geography they learnt about the directions, locations, the use of calendars; how to measure and then make maps roughly to scale of a classroom/school/road/playground/locality; how to read the ward maps published by the Kolkata Municipal Corporation, the city and the State maps. Science & Ecology has taught them how to conduct experiments, observe things, draw one's own conclusions, classification and categorisation of objects according to characteristics, similarities, dissimilarities, and to develop their senses of sight, smell, touch, and taste. Various aspects of the themes of water, air, plants, and light were covered. A lot of puzzles have been used in Maths.

Learning by themselves: The children have been taught how to use a dictionary, both Bengali and English, and they do so quite regularly. Once they were taught the principles and the logic behind how a library is organized, they started using the one at the school quite extensively whenever they were curious about something. Many lessons also specifically require them to use the library.

Use of films and audiovisuals: For English teaching an interactive CD called "Genki English" was used. Watching interesting films is gradually becoming part of the school routine for aesthetic appreciation, for language practice, as a tool for raising/discussing issues, and certainly as simple entertainment. The following films were shown this year: The Lion King, Alladdin, The Jungle Book, Baby's Day Out, King Kong, Chaplin's Modern Times, and The Kid, and Satyajit Ray's Goopy Gyne Bagha Byne, and Hirak Rajar Deshe.

Randy Wang, consultant with Study Hall school in Lukhnow came several times between December and February to establish collaborative links with regard to audiovisual material production and was once accompanied by Urvashi Sahni, the Head of Study Hall. This is still at a very preliminary stage but promises to develop well and usefully.

Use and study of local environment: Major activities were done outside the school, like collecting plants from local areas and making relevant charts; visiting the Horticultural Garden; surveying the local markets and interviewing people to find out about various wood items; talking to parents and grandparents to find out the history of the locality; interviews with families to determine the disease cycles; and making local road maps.

It is very interesting that when our children went out to work on the area map, many other older children of the locality, usually school dropouts who now do some work for a living, got interested and joined in pointing out various roads and filling in the names. Similarly when the children went to take the measurements of a ground used by a club, the older members there realised they had never thought about measuring their own field and wanted the Shikshamitra students to share their findings with them. In such ways has the ground been laid for formation of youth groups in 2006-07.

Celebrations and visits: Children's Day was celebrated on 14 November when the teachers put up some performance for the children; German Day was celebrated on 6 February in the presence of Barbara Pollock, representing the partner school, Montessori Biberkor, and Elke Chakraborty. Two sets of letters have been exchanged among the two partner schools. During the year, the children, sometimes all of them but on occasions only the older ones, were taken to see a play on an environmental theme, to the Children's Science Congress organized by Science Communicators Forum, to the Indian Museum, and to participate in a children's fair.

Democratic responsibility: Since June the children have been assigned specific cleaning responsibilities which change every month. The duty roster, initially made by the caretaker, is now made by the children themselves. Once a month everybody in the school takes part in cleaning up the whole premises. The wooden racks bought for the library were painted by the children over a month before being put to use.

A fortnightly open session was started in October. Here anybody can raise any issue related to the school. Over time its work has become more systematic. At a special session in February the students evaluated what happens at the school.

On 7 October, the day the school closed for the Puja vacations, the children put up a show for about 60 parents and outside children. The event had been planned by the students and teachers together. The celebration of Saraswati Puja in February was planned and partially managed by the children.

Different kinds of rewards: A monthly reward system now covers attendance, punctuality, co-operation, perseverance, admitting one's mistakes, concentration, co-operation, personal hygiene, etc. The prize is just an eraser or a pencil, but the effect on the children's morale and enthusiasm has been great.

Pre-vocational: Activities like dance, drama, magic, clay work in the morning school are all some kind of pre-vocational inputs, as they give us some idea about the aptitudes of individual children. The evening school started with embroidery lessons and work, and the students there have now started making jute ornaments.

Getting others involved: The Eye Foundation at Manicktala, Kolkata carried out a check-up of our children, and prescribed and supplied at subsidised rates powered glasses for seven of them. Counselling services were obtained from Samikshani and the Mon Foundation for one girl who was talented but also emotionally very disturbed. The New Alipore Government Polytechnic was approached to admit some of the students of the evening school to the “certificate” courses there. Three finally got a place, one for dress making, and two for making soft toys. This is just a small start, but once we build up the database for areas and centres for vocational training we can arrange for the placement of more of our own students as well as other youths of the locality.

The other stakeholders

The advisory body: With members of our advisory body very busy with their own work which also often takes them out of Kolkata, it has been difficult to get all of them together for formal meetings. However, we have been able to get their individual advice whenever we needed it. One formal meeting could be held on 12 June. Five of the seven advisory body members, Abhijit Bardhan , Ardhendu Chatterjee, Br.Brendan McCarthaigh, Malini Sur, and Bulbul Bakshi, have visited the school and have kept the others informed regularly and in detail.

Donations: We have received much material support from well-wishers. This has included gifts of paint, colour pencils, various kinds of paper, pens, books, furniture, a TV set, help with .medical check-ups, outside trips, and school events. A large quantity of audio-visual aids for teaching English has come from Study Hall, Lucknow, and text books of all subjects for Classes V-VIII from about 20 publishers were received from Mahadevi Birla Girls’ High School.

Uniforms were not part of our plan. However, the parents and children were quite keen on an identity symbol, though many of them did not have the money to have one, so we procured boys’ used uniforms from St.Xavier’s School and girls’ from the Future Foundation. Some repairs/modifications were required and the costs of this were met from the fees collected from the students every month. Tata Consultancy Services approved our request for some computers, but the delivery has been delayed because of some procedural formalities.

Parents and the community: Six meetings were held with parents to explain to them what we are doing and how, and also asking for their inputs. Usually the school was the venue but on two occasions the meetings were called in the local club to attract general members of the wider community. In January, we met the Ward 81 “Nagarik (Citizens’) Committee” to discuss various issues related to the school. Many of the mothers and also some of the fathers are quite pleased with what happens in the school and with the progress their children have made, but we still need to persuade another 20-25 parents to send their children to Shikshamitra, instead of to the overcrowded mainstream schools where many do not learn much.

Local skilled persons as teachers: Gopal Das is the father of one of our students and taught clay modelling work at the school for some months. Kishor Ghosh, secretary of a local club, and a man of influence in the community, has agreed to come to teach practical electronics. He has also promised to prepare for us a comprehensive list of resource persons.

The Education Resource Centre (ERC)

The ERC could not be inaugurated this year as the basic preparatory work was not completed because we had no staff. We visualize its main tasks as being i) collection of good school "materials" from everywhere, ii) proper "processing", and iii) facilitation of their use as widely as possible in West Bengal. A start has been made in all three areas.

The library has been furnished, and all books, papers, audiovisuals – some bought, and some received as gift – put up on shelves. Cataloguing has started. Preliminary lists are ready for making two kinds of databases – materials, and persons and organizations.

Some material has been translated into Bengali from Hindi and English. They include the following.

1. Eight prose and ten poetry pieces from the book Khushi Khushi produced by the Madhya Pradesh government, mainly adapted from Eklavya books.
2. A Digantar book, Jangal Ki Sabha.

3. A Digantar collection of Hindi prose pieces and poems, Postmaster.
 4. Two stories from English, "Are You My Mother?" and "Giving Tree".
 5. The letter written by the American Indian Chief Seattle to the US president in the 19th century.
- A monthly informal get together named Adda started in Kolkata in September where some non-government resource and information centres, Shikshamitra among them, meet regularly.

The context and the future

We believe that a school in India now needs redefining in its urban or rural context. It should be an institution where many kinds of students and teachers can come and various kinds of teaching-learning take place; where many of the children after Class VIII onwards would go for livelihoods and related training. One of our tasks is to help devise a curriculum for such a school up to Class VIII.

The other task, the ERC part, is to reach the best education practices from all over the world to teachers, parents, academics, researchers, educationists, and policy makers, and to act as a centre to bring them together for purposeful action.

Many of the ideas that we want to spread have finally found a place in the National Curricular Framework, the official school education document issued by the Government of India. Books have started being written based on this framework.

Earlier in this report we have mentioned our collaboration with mainstream schools in the rural areas where Swanirvar has worked in education for several years now. Shikshamitra will provide ideas and materials for these collaborative efforts.

There is some talk about starting a vocational secondary education board in West Bengal. This gels perfectly with what we are trying to develop and propagate. Ideally Shikshamitra should seek affiliation with multiple boards, directly or indirectly, for the different kinds of students who come to it.

There is a very strong need in West Bengal today to develop an institution which can experiment with an alternative secondary school curriculum, spread new ideas among various stakeholders, and influence government policies. We can become that institution or an active component of such an institution, but that will require much larger and longer-term financial support than we have been able to get so far.

EDUCATION: KKB (Youth & Culture)

IN 1997 we started working with pre-teen and adolescent children roughly between 10 and 16 years of age in seven villages. They were organized into groups which we called Kishor Kishori Bahini, or KKB for short. This acronym has stuck. At the end of 2005-06 there were 28 such KKB groups in 16 villages with a total of 687 children and youths involved, 368 girls and 319 boys.

Our aim is to install in our secondary schools a hands-on curriculum relevant and appropriate to rural India. This will be devised to enable children to wield the physical, intellectual, and moral tools needed for the creation of a just, peaceful, and sustainable society. We want to train these KKB members in a manner that will give them access to a culture and climate where the real education they receive would be of lasting use to them, to their families, and to the community.

For this we have been trying all along to intervene in the local high schools which all have at least 500 students each. If we could reach them through the KKB our ideas would spread widely. Another goal we have is to link up our hands-on activities with the local government processes. Overall, this year has been one of important breakthroughs.

We list below what the KKBs have done on both these fronts and some of the other highlights of their work in 2005-06.

Regular activities

Unless otherwise specified, the following were done in the seven main KKB centres.

- Vaccination of animals: 3543 country chickens and 392 ducks for which the KKB charges Re 1 per bird; 199 cows and 208 goats were vaccinated in camps organized in three villages.
- Village libraries: number of books - 1547; number of users - 859; number of borrowings - 1361.
- Text books distribution: 474 given to 198 poor students.

- Nurseries: 1983 seedlings of 15 different tree species grown and distributed.
- Village cleaning: each village three times in the year.
- Clean water: 451 tubewells in 6 villages treated with bleaching powder.
- Wall magazine: one/two issues produced in all the villages.
- Guardian's meetings: Organised in four villages, with altogether 47 fathers and 28 mothers participating.
- Children's cultural programmes: Nine performances.
- Adult theatre: The KKB workers' theatre group presented 19 shows.
- Nutrition training: given to 83 KKB mothers.
- Intensive kitchen garden training: given to 159 youths.
- Life education training: given to 15 adolescent girls.
- Pest recognition training: 106 youths taught how to distinguish between harmful and beneficial insects.
- Herbal medicine: cough syrup, tooth powder, indigestion medicine made and Rs 963 worth of these sold by the Bajitpur group. After a promising start last year, commercial food processing activities – producing things like honey, jam and sauce – faltered this year.

Training children at the Kolkata school

Shikshamitra, our “alternative school” at 62B Alipore Road in Kolkata, started working on 18 April, 2005. Four KKB workers conducted a music-dance-theatre workshop for about the 40 children then there, between 23 and 25 May. A large number of items were taught. The children learnt easily, and even without any further inputs, they are able to perform all the items now, after months.

First aid training to junior members

In June Shajahan and Alamin, senior KKB members at Bajitpur, gave a three-day first aid training at Fatullapur to 43 junior members for about two and a half hours every evening. The “trainers” were quite nervous initially as some of the trainees were of their own age group but they eventually did a wonderful job. This was repeated elsewhere and finally altogether 211 KKB juniors in seven villages were trained by their seniors.

Beliakhali KKB shows the way at school

A large number of boys used to come to Kolsur High School on cycles which they then parked haphazardly, with the result that these soon and often fell over one another. Nobody, not even those who owned the cycles and had problems untangling them at the end of the day, cared to do anything about this daily mess. Until, that is, when some students, all from our senior KKB group at Beliakhali, entered the scene. They just started to pick up the cycles and put them standing in order every day, without telling or asking anyone. Gradually everyone started noticing and in about a month the students, with some encouragement from the impressed teachers, began parking their cycles properly. Many students asked the Beliakhali children what had given them the idea of intervening in such a “community” problem and were told about the KKB philosophy and activities. Some KKB members from Kolsur and Chandalati also come to this school and now children from other villages are expressing interest in starting a similar group in their own villages.

KKB trains other NGOs

- In early June, KKB workers gave cultural inputs to nine primary teachers from two NGOs, at South 24 Parganas and Barrakpur, who had come for a training at Swanirvar.
- KKB workers gave a training on theatre and dance to 43 persons, half of them women, chosen by the Diocesan Board of Social Service, Barrakpur from 22 to 24 June. They earned Rs.2500 as fees for this. The training was held at the RYTC hall at Kalyani. This organization was to hold an all-India meet in August and asked Swanirvar workers to help them out with some of the preparations in July.
- Two KKB workers gave a three-day training on puppetry to 32 persons from various NGOs from 18 to 20 December at Jhargram in Medinipur district.

Classes in high schools

After two workers of the KKB section, Fazlur and Subhankar, had taken some Physical Education classes at Kolsur High School last year, the school routine this year printed their names, thus somewhat formalising their involvement. There is now some discussion in the school if Swanirvar workers can collaborate with a newly appointed Work Education teacher to use a vacant plot of land for some agricultural activity.

Two other KKB workers, Souren and Kankar, have been taking regular classes in Geography, Bangla, English, Physical Education, and Work Education at Sannia-Atghara Zakir Hussain High School. The external examiner for Physical Education for the West Bengal Board of Secondary Education examinations at the end of Class X was quite pleased with what the students could do.

Interaction with other high schools

- KKB workers conducted a three-day first aid training for 100 students of Class IX at the high schools at Atghara, Belgoria, and Teghoria between October and December. They received some fees for this work.
- Several high schools of the area have requested Swanirvar to help them out with the teaching of Environmental Studies in Class VI in 2006-7 and in Classes VII and VIII from the year after. Two of our workers, Buddha and Reba, started taking classes at Jsaikati High School already in February. If this collaboration offer does materialize, many of the things that we have done so far in the KKB programme can be introduced in the regular schools - something we have been dreaming of.

KKB and Panchayat team up

On 15 August, India's Independence Day, 175 KKB youths from three villages, 80 children from two high schools, 12 teachers, eight Panchayat members, and 50 SHG women created history of sorts at Kolsur by collaborating on cleaning up schools, government health centres, the Panchayat office, and a 3-km stretch of a road that passes through the Panchayat area. The Panchayat contributed 500 cft of bricks and the health centres 20 kg of bleaching powder. A lot of planning had gone into the programme and the volunteers were divided into 16 groups, each assigned specific tasks. This event was reported in two State-level newspapers and a special bi-monthly Panchayat newsletter

Ecological exhibitions

- A highly successful exhibition was organized by Service Centre at the NGO Champa Mahila Samity in South 24 Parganas where youths from seven districts, including seven of our KKB members, participated on 17-18 April, 2005. There were singing, discussion and question-answer sessions. Many students of local high schools and villagers came.
- A similar exhibition was held by Swanirvar at Sannia-Atghara Zakir Hussain High School on 8 November where 21 senior KKB youths showed various things made by them. These included items made by using waste materials, detergent made from bamboo leaves, wall calendars, greetings cards, hand made paper, incense stands, flower vases, herbal products, and various charts and posters detailing data collected during surveys and studies they had done. A large number of visitors came to see the exhibition.
- Another exhibition, organized by Service Centre at Seva Kendra in Kolkata on 24-25 November and visited by many students of city schools, had seven of our KKB members displaying data collected from their surveys on the common local weeds, and the use of empty pesticide containers, fuel and fodder in the area, as also their analysis of this information. They showed the paper they had made from waste, and cheap and easily made detergent. They also taught interested visitors their special ways of making things like toy frogs and birds with paper.

Trainings received by our KKB staff

- Service Centre organized a training at Swanirvar August 6-7 for the KKB on recycling of waste and 15 youths attended this.
- A training on human rights was conducted at Swanirvar by Kiriti Roy and Sanjay Sinha of the Manabdhikar Suraksha Mancha (MASUM) on 26 and 27 October covering the topics of History

of Human Rights, relevant portions of the Indian Constitution and police-related information. This was attended by all 13 workers of the KKB section.

- Two KKB workers attended a two-phase training on Panchayat systems, given by Manab Sen of Lok Kalyan Parishad (LKP), at the Birbhum LKP project, and at Vikas Kendra, Atghara.
- A folk dance training by Pulak Das and Munmun Maity from Medinipur district was held at Swanirvar for our KKB team from 6-9 March 2006 .

“Young Adults” (YA) project

The purpose behind this YA project was to get young adults in the 16+ age group involved in the Panchayat processes and also to teach them specific skills according to their aptitudes. So far 353 youths in 14 villages have been enlisted. In December each was asked to fill in a questionnaire and on the basis of the answers they gave they were categorized according to the skills they possessed and what they wanted to learn.

A training on Panchayats was conducted in 15 villages where a total of 320 youths – 256 boys and 64 girls – participated. A further workshop on village notice boards was conducted for 57 youths.

A fact finding survey was started by these YAs on how the newly formed Gram Unnayan Samities (Village Development Committees) are doing.

This YA project was assisted by Nupur Chowdhury from Boston, USA, who spent seven months from September 2005 with us at Andharmanik as an Indicorps fellow.

Activating notice boards

Several notice boards were put up in some villages by other departments of Swanirvar some years ago but most of these were not being properly used. From December onwards KKB and YA youths have re-activated or set up 64 notice boards in 16 villages. The kind of information they have put up include (i) vaccination camps for animals, (ii) services available from the Panchayat, (iii) request for monetary help to hold a sports meet at the village, (iv) cuttings from the local government newsletter “Panchayat Barta”, (v) reports on Gram Sansad (general meetings of all villagers that a Panchayat must call twice a year) meetings held in November, (vi) reports of village sports meets, (vii) nutrition trainings, (viii) soliciting contributions to a wall magazine, (ix) invitation to join the youth parliament groups, (x) notices regarding Gram Unnayan Samities (village development committees), (xi) names of new voters.

Links with a local college

In December 2004, when one of our KKB members then studying at Basirhat College learnt that members of the National Social Service (NSS) wing there were looking for a place to hold a 15-day camp, he persuaded them to come to Bajitpur, his home village. KKB workers and others involved with our extensive work there developed links with participants in the camp. We followed this up by asking the college authorities to collaborate with us, in various ways that should be mutually beneficial and productive, throughout the year instead of holding just one camp and they seemed quite receptive. Environmental Studies is now a compulsory subject in all colleges, and the college is keen on working with the KKB in regular ecological and development activities. Forging such long-term links always takes time but once it happens, this will be one of our thrust areas and offer us wider and more extensive fields of intervention in the mainstream.

EDUCATION: Indo-German school partnership

The concept

There are three basic expectations behind such a partnership between children in disparate circumstances and distant areas: (a) it should lead to better awareness, acceptance and appreciation of diversity; (b) at the next stage it should generate an understanding of how we are all connected and affect each other in various crucial ways; (c) it would promote all kinds of actions via learning and cooperating with each other - actions which will resist harmful changes and strengthen the beneficial ones.

The partners

Until last year there were three Indian and four German schools in the programme.. This year 6 new schools joined , four Indian and two german and the situation on 31st March 2006 was as follows.

India	Germany
1. Dakshin Chatra Boys High School Mr. Krishnangshu Mishra, headmaster (Chand)	1. Volksschule Herrsching Wulf Hoefler , Rektor , Martinsweg 8 ,82211 Herrsching Martha Stumbaum, contact teacher
	2. Christoph Probst Gymnasium (CPG), Horst Fessel, Director Talhofstr. 7 , 82205 Gilching Erwin Bretscher contact teacher
2. Loreto Day School Sealdah Sr. S.M. Cyril 122 AJC Bose Road , Kolkata 700 014 Ms. Bishakha Sen , Ms. Amrita Kumar, Ms. Noor Ashfaque	3. Dante Gymnasium Clemens Mayer-Schuchard, Director ,Wackersberger Str. 61 81371 Muenchen Ms Anja Finckh , contact teacher
3. Atghara High School Sri Debabrata Mukherjee ,(Headmaster) P.O. Atghara , Dist: 24 Parganas (North) ,Pin: 743 438 Sri Uday Kumar Mondal, contact teacher	4. Carl Spitzweg Gymnasium Mr. Georg Gebhard, Director ,Masurenweg 2 ,82110 Germering
New Partnerships forged during 2005-06	
4. Chatra Netaji Balika Siksha Niketan (Girls High School) , Mitali Bhattacharya, Headmaster P.O. Dakshin Chatra 743 247 ,Dist. N-24-Parganas, West Bengal	Christoph Probst Gymnasium (CPG), Talhofstr. 7 , 82205 Gilching Erwin Bretscher contact teacher
5. Ananda Niketan P.O. Dakshin Chatra 743 247 ,Dist. N-24-Parganas, West Bengal Ms Shukla Mazumder	Volksschule Herrsching Wulf Hoefler , Rektor , Martinsweg 8 ,82211 Herrsching Martha Stumbaum, contact teacher
6. Shikshamitra (Open learning centre , project of Swanirvar) 62B Alipore Rd., Chetla , Kolkata 700027 Sudeshna Sinha	5. Montessori Schule Biberkor Biberkorstr. 21 , 82335 Berg Carolina Abel, Leiterin GS Bärbel Pollok , contact teacher
7. Sannia-Atghara Dr. Zakir Husain High School P.O. Buruj, N.24 Parganas 743401, West Bengal	6. VS Gars am Inn Bosostr. 9 ,83536 Gars a. Inn ,Director: Wolfgang Egger, Rektor , Reinhard Retzer, contact teacher

The exchanges

Except for Sannia-Atghara ZH School and VS Gars am Inn, the last two to join, students in the other partnerships have exchanged a fairly large number of letters, once a year in some cases and twice a year in others. They have also exchanged personal photographs, things made by them, etc.

German Day celebration

The highlight of this year was the celebration of 6 February, 2006 as a German Day in six of the Indian partner schools to coincide with the visit of a big team from Germany. There were some preparatory meetings in individual schools and one at Shikshamitra where a teacher from Loreto Day School, Sealdah, also came. The German visitors divided themselves into six groups, each of which spent the whole day in one school. They had brought a large number of colourful posters, charts, cassettes, picture story books, flutes, plates, mugs, cards, paintings, maps, foodstuff, coins, T-shirts, and many other items. These they divided up and took to the schools.

The schools organized the celebrations in different ways. In some the visitors went from class to class showing the items they had brought and answering questions on them and on other things, as also asking questions of their own. In two schools they were entertained with German songs by the students. The visitors also sang at some places. In one school the children put up an extended cultural programme.

The biggest fallout of this has been that the spirit of partnership is now spread all over the schools, and not just limited to the 30 or so students in a school who wrote letters or participated in the two joint programmes in 2004-05, and the one or two teachers responsible. The visit and the celebration of the German Day celebration meant that the whole school, all the staff and in many places the school managing committee, are now involved.

Most of the stuff brought by the visitors have been catalogued and categorized and kept at Swanirvar, Andharmanik for further use in specific schools or at any other appropriate place.

MICROFINANCE

THE FIGURES below indicate the status of the programme in the last three years.

SI No.	Particulars	2003-2004	2004-2005	2005-06
1	No. of villages	54	54	60
2	No. of groups	463	485	531
3	Total No. of members	6017	6060	6416
4	Total savings of the groups	Rs. 36,53,374	Rs. 52,93,768	Rs.69,15,744
5	Repayment rate	93%	93%	96%
6	No. of new groups formed	116	34	62
7	No. of new members	1328	421	751
8	No. of groups disbanded	13	12	16
9	No. of members leaving	237	378	395
10	No. of loans	2799	3924	4212
11	Total loans from Swanirvar's revolving fund (in Rs.)	1,22,41,500	1,72,06,500	2,03,86,900
12	Interest rate paid by groups	12%	12%/14%	12% / 14%
13	Loans given by groups from their own savings (in Rs.)	35,00,247	53,80,461	68,92,370
14	Interest income earned by Swanirvar (in Rs.)	6,87,888	11,72,522	15,04,087
15	"Service charge" earned by Swanirvar (in Rs.)	1,22,370	1,72,065	2,06,664

16	Loans taken by Swanirvar for the revolving fund	From CARE Rs. 18,55,000; From WBMDFC Rs. 1,00,000; From UCO Bank Rs.50,00,000 in the form of cash/credit; Total Rs. 69,55,000	From WBMDFC Rs. 9,00,000; From UCO Bank Rs.80,00,000 in the form of cash/credit; Total Rs. 1,64,91,500	From WBMDFC Rs.5,00,000; From UCO Bank Rs.1,00,00,000 in the form of cash credit Total Rs.2,22,42,900
17	Interest paid on loans and savings by Swanirvar (in Rs.)	3,60,286	5,41,413	6,79,176
18	Loan loss provision (in Rs.)	2,44,830	3,44,130	4,07,738
19	Human resource, capacity building, and administrative expenses (in Rs.)	7,71,945	10,28,276	9,34,915
20	Total income(14+15; in Rs.)	8,10,258	13,44,587	17,10,751
21	Total expenditure(17+18+19; in Rs.)	13,77,061	19,13,819	20,21,829
22	Financial sustainability (20/21)	59%	70%	84.6%

Notes:

1. After a year of slow-down to help us consolidate, we are again in an expansion phase. The number of villages has gone up by ~10%; that of groups by 9.5% and of members by ~6 % . The actual % of new groups is 12.8% because 3.3 % old groups have been disbanded and 6.5 % of the old members have left.
2. Members' savings are going up at a very steady rate and have increased by ~30 % over last year's. The average savings per member stand at Rs.1078.
3. After two years the repayment rate has improved to 96 % from 93 %.
4. The number of loans shows only a modest increase of 7.3 %. This is because we are now stricter in releasing loans, using a more dependable rating system to evaluate requests. The cash credit limit of UCO Bank was increased this year from Rs.80 lakh to Rs.100 lakh (1 crore or 10 million).
5. Our income rose by approximately 27 % and expenditure by only 5.6 %,and so the financial sustainability of the whole operation shows a substantial increase from 70 % to 84.6 %.
6. Agriculture loans this year were 69 % compared to last year's 60 % , consumption loans remain at the same 2 % . So the share of non-agricultural loans has come down from 38% to 29%.

Capacity building

We decided to concentrate capacity building (CB) efforts this year on three aspects: strengthening the Cluster-Federation, creating a group of trainers from amongst the SHG women and social animators, and using them to conduct handholding training of weak groups. With these goals in mind, the following trainings were organised.

- Cluster members: 90 were trained in three batches.
- Federation committee members: All were given three to four days of training.
- Trainers: About 20 selected SHG women and six animators were given five days of general, and seven days of handholding training.
- Social animators: These ground level workers were given two days' training
- Groups: 200 of the weaker groups were trained for a day by the "new" trainers.
- Group cashiers: 208 of them cashiers were trained in seven batches.
- Police training: 80 groups in the Kolsur area office attended in three batches a workshop with police personnel on issues related to law and order.

Grading

This is now a very important aspect of the programme as this decides which group will get loans and also tells us which groups need additional CB inputs. The last grading in the year put 215 groups in the A grade, 181 in B, 53 as C, and 13 in D. The groups that were formed this year will come up for grading in 2006-07.

Meeting and conferences

We have 23 clusters with the number of groups in them ranging from 15 to 30. This year, for the first time, we had an annual conference for each cluster in which altogether 526 groups participated. We did not hold a general Federation conference which we had been doing for the last three years. Instead, we had a smaller meeting where 100 SHG women representing all the 23 clusters elected a new 10-member Federation Committee.

The Bajitpur area office decided to hold a mass conference in February 2006 mainly to discuss various aspects of SHG-Panchayat collaboration. The speakers invited to address the ~ 2000 SHG members at Katiahat High School included the Zilla Parishad Karmadhyaksha, Bhranti Adhikari, senior workers from the NGO Lok Kalyan Parishad, G.Pallab and Jaya Datta, a Panchayat member from Birbhum, Nirmal Sheel, and the Swanirvar president, Abdul Hannan. The SHG women asked many questions and raised a number of issues.

The Kolsur area office decided to combine a blood donation camp with a day-long conference. Here 970 women participated and 50 women gave blood.

State-level events

- Ten of our SHG members represented Swanirvar at a State-level SHG conference at Bagnan in Howrah district.
- 75 SHG members attended the “Women Empowerment” seminar at Bidhan Chandra Agriculture University held as part of a three-State agriculture conference from 31 January to 2 February.

Initiatives by SHG women

- The Arsenic Removal Plant (ARP) set up by Swanirvar at Kolsur Bhabakpara is being managed by the local SHG for the last one year. It is the best run ARP out of the 30-odd plants that have been set up.
- Another SHG in Kolsur has taken over the responsibility of maintaining the deep tubewell set up by the government, mainly to ensure that it is used only for drinking water purpose.
- On 15 August, a combined force of Swanirvar KKB (youth groups) and SHG women of the Kolsur area, in collaboration with the Panchayat, the government health centre, and local high schools carried out a day-long road cleaning and repair exercise.
- One SHG member at Solka village in Habra-1 block under our Kolsur area office, developed pregnancy related complications. The group raised money from the locality and organized the hospitalization and other medical assistance for her.
- A landless woman at Fatullapur took a loan to buy land and put up a house on it. Her fellow members in Group No. 22 made local collections and then arranged for a Government tubewell to be set up up there.
- Five members of Group No. 64 at Fatullapur have purchased knitting machines for woollen garments, to try out a new income-generating activity in the area.
- The child of a member of Group No. 75 under the Bajitpur area office fell from a tree and was seriously injured. The local cluster allowed her a long-term interest-free loan of Rs.25,000 to take care of the hospitalization expenses in Kolkata.
- The Kushadanga cluster under the Bajitpur area office assisted the local Panchayat in supervising the road repair and construction work in their area.
- When a member of an SHG group needed money for her daughter’s marriage each group in the Aturia cluster of Bajitpur decided to give Rs.500 to her as an interest-free loan.
- It is heartening that more and more such instances of social intervention and mutual help are taking place, as we do not want the SHGs’ work to be limited to the financial aspects of the programme.

Our target is to take the number of groups to 1100-1200 by 2010 and reach an annual loan target of Rs.5 crore (50 million). In the coming year we are going to give quite intensive inputs to the clusters regarding the Panchayat system and see to it that they get actively involved in strengthening the Gram Unnayan Samities.

Dr Gopal Mishra, a former bank official, joined the programme as consultant soon after it started. Over the last few years he has been of immense help in setting it on course and in making sure that the sectional supervisor, Niranjana Paik, and his team of workers are confident and capable of running it when he left us at the end of the year.

SGSY INTERVENTION

Swanirvar as DTA (District Technical Agency) to the DRDC , North 24 Parganas district

This two year special project formulated at the state level between Panchayat & Rural Development department and CARE envisages a district level NGO partner of CARE strengthening the Grade-1 passed SHGs under the govt. SGSY programme through a comprehensive capacity building support to the District Rural Development Corporation so that the groups attain self-management capacity. We set up a 4 person DTA team at district headquarters Barasat which started operating from 1st July 2004 . Only one team member Abdul Hannan was Swanirvar senior worker. Rest three were outsiders, out of which the two from other NGOs have been known to us for many years. DTA head was a retired senior bank official .

This project is our first big attempt at fairly comprehensive collaboration with the state and district government .

.The project will be over in another 3 months ie by 30th June 2006. No new development are likely to occur in the remaining months . So here is the overall situation :

WHAT HAS HAPPENED AFTER TWO YEARS (July 2004-June 2006)

ITEM / ISSUE	PRE PROJECT STATUS	POST PROJECT STATUS
Training module , methods, materials , concept	Virtually non existent . Most people consider Capacity Building as a few hours/one day of classroom lecture-training only.	Proper training modules made; methods taught to many; all kinds of training materials supplied and being used at various levels . But the mindset of considering CB as an event is still widely prevalent.
Trainers	Almost non existent	Although intensive training given to ~400 persons ; eventually there are only about 50 trainers as repeated requests and appeals to not send block officials have had very little effect. So trainer situation is better than before(it was almost zero) , but still highly inadequate for 22 blocks, 200 GPs and 10,000 groups
Training quality and relevance	i. The previous training known as BOP (basic orientation programme) was a total farce – a useless 2 hour lecture to hundreds of women ii. Skill development (teaching a new economic skill) : we suspect that it was quite useless	Handholding which replaced BOP is good in only 20% cases where DTA team or NGO trainers are present. In 80% cases it is almost as bad as the original BOP. Skill Dev (we suspect has a big budget) and is as useless as before ; but DTA has no role in this skill development which apparently is Govt of India's obsession.
Info systems	Some numbers come every month. But there is no	DTA team did try to do something with the wrongly computerized data , but no

	analysis, no checkup. District level computerization has been done wrongly leading to massive wastage and no use	success. So status same. DRDC employees have no idea what to do with data . Did not show any interest to use DTA expertise
Grading	Many complaints of delays and wrongful grading	DTA has had no role except for visiting some grading events. Massive numbers made Grade 1; so backlog removed , but grading process full of loopholes and so incompetent groups , broken groups , non existent groups have been passed and are in the official list .
Panchayat Role	Some GPs involved in “forming” groups ; PS , ZP SGSY committee roles unclear and they are ineffective.	In the last 6 months DTA entrusted with forming GSMT. So GP will have some role in the future . But DTA has had no role in strengthening the PS and ZP committees.
Monitoring system	Quite vague and highly inadequate	DTA not asked and could not make any intervention to improve the monitoring system .
Bankers	Highly uneven in both understanding and cooperation with the SGSY programme	DTA involved in orientation of bankers (one day event each year) . Today many more bankers have a proper idea , but that might not be just the effect of the orientation programme under DTA.
Block level NGOs hired by DRDC known as SHPI (SHG Promotional Institutions) who were contracted to build and nurture SHGs	Many SHPIs were formed overnight Some even if old had no experience in SHGs; As usual many were selected on dubious criteria. No CB was done for these NGOs Fee Payment to NGOs is quite arbitrary and full of corruption	DTA’s suggestion to build the capacity of NGOs repeatedly turned down (they were hired as “experts” !!) Some totally useless NGOs were thrown out after “grading” done by DTA. Towards end , more NGOs staff inducted into BSMT. But with drastic reduction of fee, it is doubtful how many will survive to do this job.

We are in the process of drawing up all the lessons from this two year venture . This is for us , for CARE , and also for the state govt. so that such future collaborations and interventions can be better designed and be more effective.

HEALTH & ARSENIC

THIS WAS the last year of work according to the third memorandum of understanding (MoU) on the Community-Based Project to Mitigate Arsenic Pollution in West Bengal under the guidance of AIHH&PH (All India Institute of Hygiene & Public Health). This MoU was signed on 3 June, 2004. The previous two had been signed on 27 November 2000 and 13 December 2002 respectively. This phase of the work was mainly in Nadia district, though some villages in our own area were also covered.

We give below a table to summarise our activities in the two districts. The third column indicates which model of arsenic removal plant (ARP) or domestic filter (DF) was installed/distributed. An ARP meets the needs of the community while DFs are used in individual households. The villagers

choose their own ARP model after taking into consideration how it will work and their own capacity for maintenance.

Nadia

All these villages are in Kaliganj block of Krishnanagar subdivision.

Sl.	Village	Intervention	No. of families
1.	Pathargona	Oxide India ARP	60
2.	Gohorapota	Do	70
3.	Chandpur	Do	56
4.	Doulipur	Do	50
5.	Panighata	89 DFs	
6.	Radhakantapur	99 DFs	
7.	Dhojapukur	100 DFs	
8.	Hazrapota	80 DFs	
9.	Kamalbati	51 DFs	

North 24 Parganas

1.	Sreerampur	AIH&PH ARP	56
2.	Purbo Simulia	Oxide India ARP	33
3.	Bayorghata	Do	71
4.	Raikhola	Do	27
5.	Baheragachhi	20 DF (Oxide India)	

Notes

- An ordinary DF costs Rs.100. This is shared equally by the project and the beneficiary. An Oxide India DF is made of activated alumina and costs Rs. 450. A beneficiary opting for this has to pay 70% of the cost, with the project contributing the rest.
- The ARPs in North 24 Parganas were installed on 15-18 August and those in Nadia on 27-28 August.
- An additional 20 DFs were supplied this year to each of the following five villages where we had worked under the 2nd MoU: Uttar Parpatna, Chandkati, Baksirhati, Polta Rajbanshi Para, and Polta.

The final tally

Period of work	No. of ARPs	No. of domestic filters
1 st MoU	11 in 10 villages	30 in six villages
2 nd MoU	10 in 10 villages	111 in six villages
3 rd MoU	8 in 8 villages	539 in 11 villages
Total villages: 39	29 in 28 villages	680 in 11 villages

Awareness programmes

Central awareness meetings were held according to the schedule given below.

Place	Date	AIH&PH representatives	Participants
Bethuadahari, Nadia	30 April	Bhaskar Banerjee, Mr. Sarkar	59 committee members from nine villages, five GP members, three Pradhans
Swanirvar, Andharmanik, North 24 Parganas	17 May	D.Kahali, Ambar Mukherjee	52 committee members from five villages and three GP members

The following is a summary of village awareness workshops and meetings.

Event	No. of events	No. present	Male	Female
Pre-installation workshops in 3rd MOU villages along with educative	14	664	432	232

theatre shows by Swanirvar KKB wing				
Small group meetings to discuss problems in all project villages	144	2721	1479	1242

Water testing

The effectiveness of a plant and the quality of its maintenance can be assessed only if the water is regularly tested for its arsenic content. We also test samples brought by householders. In the table below 'S' in Column 2 stands for the number of samples of water; the next three columns give the result of the testing, with D standing for "Dangerous or arsenic above permissible limits", A for "Acceptable", and F for "Free of arsenic or safe".

Source of water	S	D	A	F	Remarks
29 ARPs	208	41	76	91	Samples taken from AIIH&PH models just before back washing showed dangerous amounts of arsenic.
Private tubewells (five camps)	434	149	118	167	
Domestic filters	84	31	40	13	Wrong use led to the large number of D results; became F after correction.
Private tubewells (at Swanirvar)	149	73	39	37	

Note:

- i) Water from a large number of private tubewells had dangerous amounts of arsenic.
- ii) The AIIH&PH model probably needs back washing more than once a month.
- iii) It is not enough to check the domestic filters just once.

Village-wise status

There is some unavoidable overlapping in the lists that follow, because some villages are so big that a neighbourhood (Para) there is as good as a small village elsewhere, and sometimes we record such a Para as a village.

Villages with no deep tubewells (DTW) are unsafe: All the nine villages where we worked in Nadia are in this category. However, the foundation stone for a scheme to supply piped water to the area has been laid. Our guess is that it will take about three years for the villages to receive safe piped water.

The village has safe DTWs, but the neighbourhood(s) where we worked is far from where they are: There are seven villages in this category: Uttar Kolsur Parui Para, Poltarati, Beliakhali, Keotsha, Baksirhati, Chandkati, Purbo Simle.

The neighbourhood has a DTW but it is unsafe: There are 13 villages with such neighbourhoods: Uttar Kolsur Bhabak Para, Uttar Kolsur Brahmin Para, Dakshin Kolsur Munshi Para, Dakshin Kolsur Tarafdar Para, Chandalati, Teghoria, Gandharbapur, Kefaetkati, Aturia, Bagjola, Bayerghata, Raekhola, Baheragachhi.

A DTW was sunk after our ARP installation, making the ARP redundant in some cases: This has happened in seven cases: Parpatna Mallik Para, Purbo Parpatna, Sayestanagar, Piyara, Bhojpara, Sarfarajpur, Sreerampur.

There is a safe DTW, but people are still putting that water through our domestic filters: This is happening in two places: Polta and Uttar Parpatna.

Wrong selection: Fatullapur has enough safe DTWs spread all over the village. Local pressure forced us to work here. This was a mistake.

The table below categorizes the villages according to how well the community management group formed there is doing in i) realising user fees, and ii) maintaining the plant.

Grade I: Very good	Grade II: Good	Grade III: So so	Grade IV: Bad; no fees
<u>Five villages</u>	<u>Eleven villages</u>	<u>Five villages</u>	<u>Eight villages</u>

Uttar Kolsur Bhabak Para, Uttar Kolsur Brahmin Para, Bagjola, Gahorapota, Baerghata	Polterati, Beliakhali, Parpatna Mallik Para, Sreerampur, Chandpur , Dakshin.Kolsur Tarafdard Para Dakshin Kolsur Munshi Para, Chandalati, Gandharbapur, Sayestanagar, Keotsha	Doluiapur, Sarfarajpur, Pathorgona, Raikhola, Purba Simle	Uttar Kolsur Parui Para, Bhojpara, Fatullapur, Purba Parpatna, Teghoria, Aturia, Piyara (Four of these have other safe drinking water sources; see category D above.)
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Other details

1. Piped water: Apart from the nine villages in Nadia, certain areas of North 24 Parganas will also be covered by piped water schemes. Work on some of these has already started and seven villages around Kolsur, a hub of our work, should get arsenic-free water within a year.
2. Deaths: We received reports of death from arsenic-related causes from Teghoria, Raikola, Piyara, Chandalati, and Kefaetkati villages in our project area. Altogether 64 persons, 51 men and 13 women, were identified as suffering from such causes. The responsibility of providing them with some treatment rests with a partner NGO in the project.
3. Fees: Total fees collected by the village maintenance committees from ARP users this year came to Rs.14,092. This is kept in an account in the committee's name. The total balance in these accounts on 31 March 2006 was Rs.50,855. Kolsur Bhabak Para, with Rs.3049, and Baerghata, with Rs.2,180, received the most in fees from users.
4. Plant maintenance:
 - ◆ The galleon packing in the AIIH&PH-model plants needs to be changed twice a week, which puts some strain on the weaker user groups.
 - ◆ Another problem with this model is that the alum-bleaching powder is to be put in daily. The weaker user groups can afford to do this only on alternate days, thus decreasing the plant's effectiveness.
 - ◆ The parts that need to be regularly changed in all models are the bucket washer once every 2-3 months, check valves every 5-6 months, some nuts once a year, and the tap twice a year.
 - ◆ Various screws need to be tightened frequently.
5. Water testing: It is essential to test the level of arsenic at water sources in villages. But who has the responsibility to test the very many deep tube wells (DTWs) which most people use? How frequently is this done? And, how reliable are the tests? In several cases our crude tests have found that DTWs marked as safe and coloured green by government agencies have high amounts of arsenic. AIIH&PH laboratory tests confirmed our results. This is one area where we have to make some serious intervention if any lasting safety is to be guaranteed in a wide area.

Blood donation camps

Lack of resources, mainly financial but also of manpower, has led to a drastic whittling down of our activity in this sphere, after years of intense involvement and State-level recognition. This year we helped out with only 16 voluntary blood donation camps, where the total number of donors were 1004.

SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE

OUR WORK in the agriculture department has now expanded so much that this report can mention only the highlights of the year, and these, too, more briefly than we would have preferred. We have arranged the information under some sections. Sometimes these overlap, but sustainable agriculture is indeed a holistic concept, so there is no way we can strictly compartmentalize our experiments and achievements.

There is another change in the reporting format this year. We have now brought the two wings of our agricultural work – one with farmers in the field (all men), and the other with home (earlier called kitchen) gardens where both the workers and gardeners women) – together. They work jointly with Sandhya Mondol as an indefatigable supervisor.

Crops: varieties and new practices

1. Trials with rice: In order to preserve the varieties which are getting lost and to identify new ones suitable for our area, last year we had 31 farmers in 10 villages conducting trials with 29 different varieties of rice. This year the numbers went up to 28 farmers in 12 villages trying out 53 varieties. We now think we have 24 varieties suitable to be grown in our area.
2. Mushroom: We had a shorter than usual winter this year and lower than expected demand. Maybe this was not bad, for we also had some technical problems of our own. All this meant that we ended up producing only 371 packets of 200-gm spawn compared with 945 packets last year, and this was sold to 110 persons in 13 villages. As our interaction with women's self-help groups increases, the demand should pick up in the coming years.
3. Herbal medicines: All the workers together treated 316 patients in 16 villages this year. We also gave orientation to 137 persons in six villages and many people have by now learnt enough from us to be able to make and use quite a few herbal medicines themselves. One of our workers, Sushila Haldar, widowed at a young age with two children, showed admirable initiative in making and selling about 400 units of six medicines and the demand for her produces is always increasing.
4. Potato with mulch: Last year 20 farmers had tried this out in three bighas (= one acre) of land on an experimental basis. Encouraged by the results, this time 20 farmers did it in 24 bighas in six villages. This has excellent potential wherever a large amount of vegetable waste, like water hyacinth, is available as mulch.
5. Poyra or relay cropping: This is the technique of broadcasting the seeds of the winter crop among the rainy season crop just before this is harvested. This requires no ploughing and it is gaining in popularity. This year 1559 farmers (447 last year) in 24 villages (13 last year) tried this out with legumes, oilseeds, wheat, coriander, jute and some mixed crops in 2780 bighas of land (double of last year).
6. New varieties: This year we experimented with two varieties of "note shaak" (a green leafy vegetable) and two varieties of "kundri" (a sour-sweet vegetable not so common in our area). The leaves were a disappointment, the kundri did fine.

Soil nutrients

1. Vermicompost: So far we were asking farmers to make this in earthen vessels (locally called mechhla) and large bamboo baskets. The mechhlas are breaking in a year, so this year we began persuading them to switch over to longish cement chambers with a thatched roof. The initial investment will be somewhat larger but it will be permanent. This year the number of farmers was 76 in 24 villages, both about the same as last year.
2. Normal compost: This can be made at home and in the field. The number of those who did it at home increased from 65 farmers in 13 villages last year to 156 farmers in 30 villages. Two-thirds of them make a bamboo cage while the rest have a pit or pits. Wherever possible we are encouraging farmers to make the compost in the field itself, with water hyacinth and other field wastes. This year 70 farmers in 24 villages did things this way.
3. Bacterial fertilizers: This year the sale of Azotobacter, PSB and Rhizobium was 259 packets of 300 gm each, about the same as last year.
4. Heap manure and pond sludge: We are trying to encourage these two traditional practices now fallen into disuse. This year 250 farmers in 20 villages used heap manure made at home compared to 100 last year. Using pond sludge is becoming quite popular and we have recorded 160 farmers in five villages doing this.

Plant protection

1. Integrated pest management (IPM) in rice: This was the sector in which we decided to take a great leap forward this year, by increasing the area to be covered to 50-60 times more than last year's.

Happily the results were much better than those in the original phase of historic adventurism. Our original impetus for our ambitious expansion came when we met a team of interested farmers in Swarupnagar block, somewhat far from our project area. The Agriculture Development Officer (ADO), Swarupnagar, was very encouraging. We eventually worked with 17 farmers' groups in Swarupnagar block, 11 in Baduria, and one in Deganga, altogether covering 32 villages, 1719 farmers and 9142 bighas. Last year the figures were 2 villages, 63 farmers, and 180 bighas. The villages came under eight Gram Panchayats and one municipality. The work required intensive interaction with the farmers, the ADO and other government officials, and Panchayat members. We made weekly field visits with the help of some local animators, went around with microphones to explain our intentions and rationale, prepared and put up posters, and held meetings. This was by far our biggest venture so far and almost fully occupied many of our workers in the last quarter of 2005-06. Although final results are still awaited, a quick appraisal points to an 80% reduction in pesticide use (in many places it was zero pesticide use), equal or better rice yield than under chemical farming (a farmer in Beliakhali used both methods in two separate fields and his IPM rice yield was 20% more), less straw yield because there are fewer side growths in IPM, and of course lower costs.

We were fortunate to have Sonja Brodt, a Fulbright scholar associated with the IPM programme at University of California -Davis, and her economist husband Donald with us from January to April 2006 while the IPM work was going on in full flow. They were here to study the use of IPM methods and how the message was spread and received, so they also went to many of these meetings, spoke to farmers, and met government officials. In many ways their presence was an added impetus for our workers.

2. Trichoderma viridae (TDV): We started using this last year for fungal and some other plant diseases and it has remained popular. We sold 50 kg this year.
3. Botanical pest controllers: We have been using various botanical concoctions over the years. The ones which have been accepted as the most effective are extract of tobacco leaf, custard apple leaf, jute seeds, garlic, turmeric powder, and neem oil.
4. Cow urine and cowdung in water: Both of these are of traditional reputation and we are just making them popular again. Altogether ~2000 farmers in 42 villages used them to control pests and diseases. A large part of this was used on rice under IPM, but many used it also for vegetables.

System plots (integrated model)

1. Home garden: We currently have 14 gardens in eight villages.. Learning from them, many households now have their own garden to supply them with vegetables and herbs grown without chemicals.
2. High land (field): We have 14 models of mixed vegetables in eight villages
3. Low land (field): We have five models where land shaping has been done and an integration of rice, fish, trees, and vegetables has been possible. These are in four villages and one has come up particularly well. A high-level team of scientists and members of all-India NGOs came there for a visit.

Training/awareness

1. Exposure trips: All our workers went to see the Agriculture Training Centre (ATC) at Phulia in Nadia district, the only government institute in West Bengal dedicated to organic farming. We are negotiating for a proper training there for our workers.
2. Panchayat systems: All the workers underwent an orientation on Panchayat systems and Gram Unnayan Samities (GUS) as working with these two institutions is going to be a very important aspect of our work in future. In two Panchayats, at Bajitpur and Chatra, there was talk of forming an agriculture subcommittee with Swanirvar workers likely to be included in it, but nothing has happened so far.
3. Evaluation & indicators workshop: This was conducted by Sonja and Donald for all the workers as a means to making our total programme more effective.
4. Training to KKB: A total of 126 of the 10-16-year-old children involved in our Youth and Culture programme were given a theoretical and practical training on IPM. They came from four villages

and were trained in five batches. We hope that many will be able to persuade their families to use the techniques they learnt.

5. Fruit (Kul) grafting: Lok Kalyan Parishad asked for our help in turning sour Kul trees in their working area into growing the sweet variety. Two of our workers spent three days in Dinajpur district doing the graft on 48 trees in 10 villages.
6. Teaching in primary classes: This year the agricultural workers took some classes in two of the Swanirvar primary schools. This has to be systematized over the next year and the primary teachers trained so that they themselves can conduct the classes then.

Documentation, publicity

1. Writing things down: This year we collated the inputs from our workers and information available elsewhere to prepare the following:
 - an annual technique calendar showing which is suitable in which season;
 - a list of traditional and new crops which have come to the area in the last few years;
 - a database of 20 crops with a comprehensive description to help introduce them in areas where they are not grown, and to help farmers trying out a new crop/variety;
 - a compendium of 55 medicinal plants and weeds for use in finding out their possible utility;
 - a survey of 15 fruit trees to see which are becoming rare in the area, like the custard apple (Ata);
 - a similar survey of fuelwood trees to see which need to be propagated.
2. Agriculture melas (fairs): This year we participated in four fairs. The most significant was the one held at Bidhan Chandra Agriculture University from 31 January to 2 February. There were 90 stalls from four states. Ours was one of the most popular with a constant crowd and lots of enquiries. It was also one of the few stalls that drew the attention of the State Chief Minister, Buddhadeb Bhattacharya, who stopped to ask questions. Many books produced by Service Centre on sustainable agriculture were sold. Of the other three where we participated one was at Swarupnagar block organized by the ADO there, the second at Chatra, and the third at Ghoshpur. At all three places visiting farmers showed much informed interest.

Farmers' organizations

1. Farmers' groups: We currently have 24 home gardeners' groups with 274 members, and 26 men farmers' groups with 236 members.
2. Empowered farmers' organization: We would like to spread out to a much larger area and will not be able to give so much time to the groups mentioned above which we have nurtured over the years. To make them more autonomous, this year we formed them into three clusters (men and women together) and started having a quarterly meeting from May and then a monthly meeting from January with 25-30 of their leaders. This will continue next year also, after which we plan to decrease our visits to individual groups. They will of course be free to ask our workers for help, advice, and information at all times.
3. Farmer trainers: In order to prepare ourselves for future expansion of the work we need to have more trainers. This year we selected 15 farmers, three of them women, and conducted two days of training for them. Next year we plan to have more such systematic training of trainers.
4. Joint activity: Many of the groups, apart from farming, are also working together in areas like saving money, operating a seed bank, running a cooking oil business, and various types of social work.

Wider links

This year strong links were forged with the following: the ADO, Swarupnagar; some faculty members at BCKV; the Principal Agriculture Officer at Barasat, and some other technocrats there; the training centre at Phulia; some Zilla Parishad agriculture karmadhyakshas; Ashish Hui, Jt. Director of the Plant Protection and Quality Control Office of the State Government; Balia Agro Mission, an NGO working on organic farming; Anirban, an entrepreneur marketing organic produce. Many of these contacts were facilitated by Sonja and Donald as they went about trying to explore the status of IPM and marketing of organic produce.

ANTI-TRAFFICKING

WOMEN AND children being lured into hazardous situations is assuming alarming proportions and West Bengal seems to be one of the biggest supply points. Our village organization at Matia has been running a pre-primary centre and a two-class primary school in a sex workers' colony for quite a few years. From July 2004 it worked on a year-long project called "Preventive Action to Stem Trafficking in Persons in the Indo Bangladesh Border Areas", funded by USAid through SARI/Q of Delhi.

A set of counsellors and volunteers were trained intensively on various aspects of trafficking, and two vigilance centres set up at Panitar and Bankra on the India-Bangladesh border. A series of awareness and training events were held for various kinds of actors – general villagers; 621 members of local clubs and women's self-help groups (SHGs), 90 policemen in local police stations, two CIs, the SDPO-Basirhat, the CID-Basirhat, 53 Border Security Force (BSF) personnel, 140 members of 12 Gram Panchayats in Hingalganj, Hasnabad, and Basirhat-1 blocks, seven local NGOs, one BDO, four Panchayat Samity members, two Zilla Parishad members, one MLA. These training/awareness camps/meetings were frequently reported in the local newspapers thus reaching the information to a wider public. A big campaign was mounted during Durga Puja in October 2004. Contacts were also established with Bangladeshi NGOs doing similar work.

As a result of all this there were 85 cases of interception before the actual trafficking of village women to big cities like Kolkata and Mumbai could take place. In 47 cases women who had been taken out of the area were rescued. In all such cases the women themselves, as also their families were provided proper counselling. What was more heartening was that in many cases the lead role in the interception and confronting of the traffickers was played by the SHGs, and the village communities in some form. Some traffickers were arrested and cases have been initiated against them. The police and the BSF provided cooperation and four of the 12 gram panchayats where we worked started maintaining a migration register which they are likely to continue.

ACCOUNTS

INCOME

Name of Donor / Donor Agency / Source of income	Rs.
Friends of Swanirvar (FoS), Worcester , England	1,048,438
Friends USA (LA and Philadelphia) via Share & Care	714,880
Share & Care Foundation , NJ, USA	649,378
Indienhilfe (IH), Herrsching, Germany	602,805
All India Institute of Hygiene & Public Health ,Kolkata (ICEF)	573,972
CARE – West Bengal	556,180
CRY, Kolkata	504,358
District Rural Development Cell, N.24 Pgns (Panchayat & Rural Development Department, WB govt)	387,000
Loan from MF area office	330,000
SARI/Q – AED, Delhi	306,787
AID – Association for India's Development , Houston, Austin, San Diego, USA	194,526
ASHA for Education, USA, Seattle, Silicon Valley, Stanford	173,859
IFA India Friends Association, CA, USA	152,542
Misc. Donation, Rent, Subscription	73,729
Foreign General	34,869
Bank Interest	10,427
Sakhya , Cambridge , England	9,379
TOTAL	6,323,129

Loans taken by Swanirvar for further lending to women SHGs	
West Bengal Minority Development & Finance Corporation	500,000
UCO Bank	22,242,900
Total Loans	22,742,900

EXPENDITURE

A. CAPITAL	Rs	SOURCE
Building	208,573	Friends USA , IH,
Computer	27,291	Friends USA
Cycle	14,238	Friends USA
Sub-Total	250,102	
B. PROGRAMME		
Pre-primary education	778,036	CRY, Friends USA, ASHA
Primary education	772,175	S&C, IFA, ASHA, Friends USA
Youth & Culture	596,379	FoS, Friends USA, Sakhya
Learning Centre (Shikshamitra)	962,071	IH , AID
School Partnership	48,354	IH
SHG – Microfinance	654,600	CARE
District Technical Agency for SGSY	419,941	DRDC
Agriculture	454,057	FoS
Health & Arsenic	853,490	AIIH&PH, AID, Friends USA
Trafficking	183,580	SARI/Q
Organisation	37,756	Friends USA
Panchayat & Misc.	12,477	Dom, IH
Misc. Meeting, Training & Training centre expenses	138,976	Dom
Printing ,Stationery, Publications	34,486	FC Gen , Friends USA
Sub-Total	5,946,378	
C. ADMINISTRATION		
Salaries, Fees	106,170	FC Gen, CARE, CRY
Electricity & Telephone	60,510	Friends USA, Dom
Website, internet	9,273	FC Gen , Oxfam
Bank Charges	10,061	FC Gen, Dom
Sub-Total	186,014	
TOTAL	6,382,494	

