

Eklavya Foundation

The New Beginnings

Three year report of Activities

(2001-2004)

Foreword

In this report we share with you a truly momentous leg of our long journey. Two events impacted significantly on the structure and work of Eklavya. One was the closure of our collaborative middle school educational programmes by the Madhya Pradesh government in July 2002. The second was the bifurcation of Eklavya into two autonomous units - a 'school education and publication' group and a 'rural development' group. The latter was registered as a new society on August 11, 2003 as the Samavesh Society for Development and Governance. A total of 32 staff members of Eklavya left to join the new society on March 31, 2004. Shri Anwar Jafri heads Samavesh as its Director. Meanwhile, Shri Kamal Mahendroo took over as Director of Eklavya on May 1, 2003.

This three-year report has been divided into three sections. The first section provides a chronological narrative and analysis of the closure of the school education programmes and its impact on the Eklavya group, including our learnings from the entire episode. The second section presents a documentation of the responses of people from all over the country and outside on the government's move to close the programmes. The third section reports and reviews the work done under the various ongoing programmes of the 'school education and publication' group and the 'rural development' group.

We are aware that justice may not have been done in representing and reflecting on all the turbulence that took place during these three years. We present this report with humility. We hope that it will help in our struggles as well as those of others.

SECTION 3

Report of Activities

(2001-2004)

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Introduction

This section focuses on our programmatic work during the three-year review period from April 2001 to March 2004. This period saw the closure of the Hoshangabad Science Teaching Programme (HSTP) and the Social Science Programme (SSP) by the Madhya Pradesh government. The closing down process began in February 2002 and culminated in July-August 2002. However, the official closure order allowed the workbooks developed by us under the various curricular programmes in primary as well as middle classes - which had been approved by the government - to be used as supplementary materials in schools that wished to do so in the 14 districts we had been working in. During the period from February 2002 to October 2002 we undertook a public campaign to make the government accept the need for an in-depth review of these programmes by appropriate forums (such as the State Advisory Board of Education). We also sought to impress upon the government the need to involve eminent academicians in evaluating the learnings from these programmes and guiding the process of assimilation of these learnings into the state-level curricular processes. This effort and its insubstantial outcome has been reported in detail in the first two sections of this report.

This section narrates the activities we undertook in the different programmes before and after the closure phase. The pre-closure phase basically represents a continuation of the activities we had reviewed in our previous three-year report. Interestingly, the process of looking at future directions along fresh lines had begun during this period. Following the winding down of our intervention in the formal school curriculum in Madhya Pradesh, we have sought to promote, with greater focus, the initiatives of individual teachers, schools and organisations in making the process of learning more relevant and pleasurable for children. Our efforts at fostering voluntary networking of schools and teachers, holding orientation workshops and regular monthly interactions, and generating innovative teaching-learning materials for students as well as teachers has continued to gain strength. These new initiatives are discussed in this section.

Hoshangabad Science Teaching Programme

Bal Vaigyanik revision

In July 2001, the Madhya Pradesh Textbook Corporation published the revised Class 7 workbook submitted by Eklavya. Subsequently, we held five workshops to revise the Class 8 workbook. The basic format of the chapters was outlined and those chapters that posed a challenge in terms of conceptual understanding, or required a more child-friendly presentation, or needed more research for better clarity of concepts, were discussed in greater detail. (See box on pages 155-156).

One aspect of the workbooks that had been engaging our attention during the revisions was their design and layout. While the revised versions of the Class 6 and 7 *Bal Vaigyanik* had been designed by Tarundeep Girdher, who is on the graphics design faculty of the National Institute of Design, Ahmedabad, we approached Dr Karen Haydock, an old associate of the group and a well-known illustrator-cum-designer, to take up the design of the Class 8 *Bal Vaigyanik*. Karen had several interactions with the resource group and tried to give each chapter a distinctive look while maintaining continuity with the Class 6 and 7 workbooks. The book is now ready for publication.

English translation of *Bal Vaigyanik*

We had prepared English translations of earlier editions of *Bal Vaigyanik* for English medium schools participating in the programme and to facilitate the use of the HSTP package in other parts of the country. During the period under review, we worked on the translation of the revised editions of the workbooks for Class 6, 7 and 8. The Class 6 edition was printed, the Class 7 book reached the print ready stage and the translation of the Class 8 book was at the finalisation stage.

Monthly meetings

Monthly meetings and student evaluation workshops went according to schedule during the pre-closure phase and a total of 12 preparatory meetings and 148 monthly meetings were held in 2001-2002. We familiarised the teachers with the revised Class 7 *Bal Vaigyanik* during these meetings. We also asked them to go over the new content areas, perform the experiments, compare the new chapters with the earlier versions and prepare a review. We thus got a comparative analysis of the old and new editions of *Bal Vaigyanik* for Class 7 and were able to discuss the perspective behind the revision.

We also tested some chapters and their content as preparation for revising the Class 8 *Bal Vaigyanik*.

Pre- and post-closure school survey and contact programme

We did not hold any training workshops for teachers and resource teachers during the summer vacation of 2002 because of the uncertainty regarding the continuation of the programme. However, we undertook a survey in Harda and Hoshangabad, covering both government/private and urban/rural schools, to assess whether experiments were being performed in the schools. The modus operandi was to show students some items from the science kit and ask them what they were and follow up with questions related to various experiments. What we observed is summarised below:

- Most schools had the science kit and there was at least one teacher trained in the *Bal Vaigyanik* methodology in every school.
- Class 8 students were more likely to recognise the kit items and could give satisfactory answers to our experiment-related questions. This is probably because Class 8 students sit for a Board examination, so more attention is paid to actually performing the experiments in this class.

- However, there are indications that teachers do at least demonstrate the experiments in many schools, although they do not cover all the experiments.
- Where experiments are actually performed by the students, their responses stand in stark contrast to the responses obtained elsewhere.
- Teachers felt that the monthly meetings were beneficial. However, they generally lamented the decline in the support structure, recalling the higher level of support they got in the earlier years of the programme.
- Without exception, all the teachers felt that this method of teaching science was better than rote learning, although they pointed to the difficulty students experience in adjusting to the methodology and content in Class 9.

Following the closure, we undertook an intensive contact programme, visiting about 120 schools in Hoshangabad district. A similar programme was undertaken in the Malwa region. We tried to ascertain what assistance, if any, HSTP teachers would like Eklavya to provide in the changed circumstances.

We also held a number of meetings in Hoshangabad and Malwa with our resource teachers to update them on the developments and to get their inputs to chart out our short-term as well as long-term strategies. One of the stipulations in the closure order was that the *Bal Vaigyanik* workbooks could be used as supplementary material in the classroom, if the teacher wished to do so. We sought to assess the teachers' response to this clause but found that none of them was using *Bal Vaigyanik* in this manner, their standard answer being 'lack of time'. Several teachers in our field areas, however, evinced interest in voluntary participation in any future programme for social science and science, like some schools had been doing in Indore.

Voluntary monthly meeting programme

We then embarked on a programme of inviting teachers to participate in monthly meetings on a voluntary basis, since we were keen to explore models of interaction with schools and teachers independent of the state. That meant not taking permission from the education department for organising the meetings during the school timings and not getting the travel and other expenses of teachers paid by the government for attending the meetings. This was a major departure. It meant teachers would have to come to the meetings on their weekly off day - Sunday - and it also meant that we would have to reimburse them their travelling expenses.

This approach had been initiated in the social science programme in 2000 in an effort to expand the programme in a voluntary mode beyond the eight experimental schools. We had also tried such voluntary participation in the Bal-samoochs, which involved youth from the villages, but this was the first time we were making such a sustained and potentially long-term effort with science teachers. We began organising these meetings at Harda (Harda district), Hat Pipalya (Dewas district), Narwar (Ujjain district) and Hoshangabad, Babai and Piparia (Hoshangabad district).

However, keeping in mind the problems teachers face, we decided to take a flexible approach, exploring the possibility of arranging the meetings through the local education authority - the Block Education Officer (BEO) - where possible. So while the Harda, Piparia and Hoshangabad meetings were held on Sundays, those at Babai and Hat Pipalya were held on weekdays during school hours with the permission of the BEO. A total of 37 meetings were held at these venues in the post-closure phase of the period under review, with the attendance ranging from a low of 6-7 teachers to a high of 35-40 teachers, giving an average attendance of 14-15 teachers.

The following topics, with appropriate experiments/activities where needed, were covered at these meetings:

- Atoms, molecules and chemical symbols.
- Reflection and refraction of light.
- Acids, bases and salts.
- The world of microscopic organisms.
- Organic evolution.
- The living world.

- Respiration.
- The universe and star gazing.
- Slide show on snakes.

As a starting point, we chose topics that broadly coincided with the content of the science textbooks (SCERT/NCERT) in use in schools, our objective being to enhance the understanding of teachers on these topics so they could teach them better in the classroom. To reinforce this learning process, in several instances we opted for thematic topics rather than those specific to the textbooks. We also provided the teachers with supplementary material for the purpose. Since we believe that science teaching should be largely experiment-based, we also introduced experiments and activities suited to these topics, which the teacher could get the children to perform in the classroom. Most of these experiments were taken from *Bal Vaigyanik*, since they have already been intensively field-tested for the age-groups of students covered. We are also trying to simultaneously develop alternative/new material for teachers on concepts/topics not covered in *Bal Vaigyanik*.

Workshops with children

We held a series of workshops with children in order to establish direct links with them after our school programmes were terminated. A total of 54 such workshops were organised in our field areas and elsewhere. The idea was to give children an avenue to perform experiments and also to build models, where possible. We generally tried to pose open-ended questions in the experiments, although the focus was on experiments related to the concepts presented in the new textbooks. We used some of the material developed for the monthly meetings with teachers in these workshops, thereby getting the opportunity to field-test this material with students. In the workshops held outside our field areas, we generally focused on material from *Bal Vaigyanik*, breaking it up into smaller modules. The response from children was positive, but the problem is that many such interactions remain a one-time affair. A better approach may be to choose a few schools and focus on holding regular workshops there, so that we can assess the impact on learning, while at the same time continuing to hold occasional workshops over an extensive area.

Kendriya Vidyalaya programme

During the post-closure phase of the review period, the Assistant Commissioner of the Bhopal Division of Kendriya Vidyalaya (KV) approached us to undertake a programme of inquiry oriented, environment-based science teaching in the schools in the division. Following extensive discussions, it was decided to hold a 7-10 day orientation workshop for science teachers from these schools during the summer vacation, beginning with Class 6 in 2003-2004, and following it up with trainings for Class 7 and 8 in subsequent years. The schools would also make arrangements for acquiring the requisite science kit for conducting the experiments in the classroom. Eklavya, playing the role of a resource group, would conduct follow-up visits to the schools during the course of the academic year by holding cluster-level meetings in six clusters once every two months.

The first training workshop was held from June 1 to 10, 2003 at Bhopal. We also decided to invite teachers from our voluntary programme to attend the workshop. A total of 104 teachers attended the training, of whom 35 were from the KVs, 30 were science teachers and 39 social science teachers from our voluntary teachers' programme.

Some of the topics covered during the training included structure and function of living things, life processes, force & motion, machines, Earth, light, measurement, symbols/formulae/equations, separation, classification, electricity, carbon, nature of matter, changes around us, our environment, organisation of microbes, etc.

Work with the voluntary teachers of our field areas continued through the rest of the year. However, the programme with Kendriya Vidyalayas could not go beyond the summer training and the scheduled follow-up meetings at the cluster level could not be held.

Teacher training workshops

We conducted a 5-day orientation workshop in June-July 2003 for 30 science teachers from private schools in Ujjain. Again, the focus was on introducing experiments in classrooms for teaching the chapters of the SCERT textbook. A similar six-day workshop was conducted for teachers from Choithram School and other private schools in Indore.

Review of SCERT science textbooks

We undertook a review of the SCERT science textbooks for middle schools in order to document a detailed critique and also identify topics we could take up in a fruitful manner in our voluntary programme for teachers. Basically it was a desk review, without a field-level analysis of its appropriateness within the classroom. We looked at the structure of the chapters, the experiments given, the design and layout of the book and the illustrations. Our findings are summarised below:

- While all the concepts related to the topics are included in the chapters, there is a lack of internal consistency in the sense that the concepts are not organised in any specific order.
- Several of these concepts are beyond the absorption level of the students of the concerned age-groups.
- Most of the concepts are treated briefly and superficially so it is unlikely that children will gain an understanding of them but would rather learn them by rote.
- Thus, while the size of the textbooks has been reduced, the weight of the content is heavy.
- While experiments have been added, many of them cannot be performed within the classroom, given the available resources.
- The outcomes of the experiments have also been given, which makes it even less likely that the experiments will actually be performed.
- One positive aspect of the books is that some of the questions posed at the end of the chapters are relevant and thought provoking, although their number is limited.
- The illustrations are often unclear and do not help in enhancing an understanding of the topic.
- There seems to be an element of carelessness in preparing these books, in terms of layout, design and printing. As a result, there are many proof errors as well.

Sawaliram

Sawaliram helps us maintain direct contact with children, so we were keen to keep Sawaliram alive after the HSTP closure. Earlier, Sawaliram letters were addressed to the District Education Office (DEO) in Hoshangabad and we had received a total of 275 letters in the pre-closure phase of the review period, of which we had sent replies to 250 students. Following the closure, we decided to handle the letters at the Hoshangabad field centre level so we needed to inform children about the change in address. We did this during our intensive post-closure follow-up, asking them to keep in touch. We also put up posters in all these schools giving the new address. In addition, we sent out letters about the address change to other schools and interested individuals.

Students have already begun responding, although the volume is much lower than earlier. Many letters tend to compare the current science teaching methodology with the HSTP methodology, especially the Class 8 children who have had two years of exposure to HSTP. The letters reveal that the children generally find the terminology and concepts in the new textbooks difficult and most of the questions are related to seeking clarifications and explanations.

Development of kit boxes

Kit sales were affected during the HSTP debate, and although there was a spurt in sales prior to the examination season in the second quarter of 2002, sales were lower in comparison to previous years. Following the closure, most of the kit sales have been to other organisations and

schools outside the HSTP field area or to schools following the HSTP methodology voluntarily, to the extent possible.

This has opened out a new dimension in our work in science education. We see considerable potential in generating a demand for kit boxes through our work as a resource agency for other groups interested in conducting experiment-based science teaching programmes in government and private schools. In fact, one group in Dharampur, South Gujarat has produced 30 kit-boxes locally, based on our design, so it could introduce an experiment-based methodology into schools.

We also feel there is significant potential for popularising science experiments through voluntary participation of schools and by organising 'science experiment melas' in our field areas. We see our field centres as local science laboratories where children come to do science experiments, just as the libraries we run attract children in large numbers. So we prepared a list of material necessary for setting up a kit library at our field centres, keeping in mind the science syllabus at the high school and higher secondary level. We procured necessary material and set up a kit library at our Pipariya field centre. We are yet to explore the full potential of these kit libraries and plan our future steps accordingly.

Other initiatives

Publications: We suspended publication of *Hoshangabad Vigyan* during the HSTP debate. However, we printed a series of booklets and pamphlets for our mobilisation campaign, including booklets focusing on explaining the programme in simple language to lay people and featuring frequently asked questions (FAQs) about the programme.

Science exhibition: In the first year of the period under review, we took our mobile science exhibition to schools in Shahpur, Harda and Itarsi. Science exhibitions were also conducted in schools in Ujjain. One of our resource teachers, who is working with Eklavya after his retirement, also began conducting a series of exhibitions of low-cost/no-cost experiments which can be done with materials collected from the local environment. He has conducted around 55 such exhibitions in schools and with various organisations during the review period.

Give Online: We have been getting public donations online through the GIVE Foundation for specific purposes, one of which is to help out schools wanting to procure science kits. After the closure, we widened the scope of these donations to include schools and organisations willing to undertake experiment-based science teaching on a voluntary basis.

Evolving content

One topic that was hotly discussed during the book revision workshops was 'Atoms and Molecules'. A common complaint against the *Bal Vaigyanik* workbooks has been that HSTP students are left unprepared to study this concept in Class 9, because it is not taught in middle school.

The logic for not including a topic like 'Atoms and Molecules' at the middle school level is our understanding that children in these classes do not have the ability to comprehend such abstract issues. The level of abstraction required to conceptually understand the structure of atoms and molecules is not developed at this stage.

However, owing to popular demand, we prepared draft chapters to give children a basic familiarity with the terms and concepts related to the topic. The drafts were circulated among teachers and a test chapter was finalised. This has been included in the new edition of the Class 8 workbook and we will continue to assess its impact and relevance in our field work in future.

During this phase of revision, we also analysed the subject-wise content balance of the workbooks for the three middle school classes. We found we had not given enough space for chemistry related concepts. So several chapters were developed and introduced over the three years. They included 'Solubility' in Class 6, 'Crystallisation' and 'Chemical Reactions' in Class 7 and 'Rate of Chemical Reactions' in Class 8.

In addition, we reworked the content of the workbooks across the three classes on the basis of feedback received from the classroom and our understanding of the stages of learning in children at this level of schooling. New experiments were included in several chapters. The chapter on 'Our Crops' was rewritten to highlight the various factors affecting growth and maturation of crops, the focus being on deducing the effects of these factors by studying available data from various experiments in Indian field conditions. The new chapter on 'Reproduction in Animals' gives students an exposure to a variety of reproduction-related issues in the animal kingdom, to give them an idea of the diversity and patterns in nature.

The chapter on 'Force' was shifted from Class 6 to Class 8 so it had to be pitched at a slightly higher level, which meant introduction of the concept of balancing and analysis of forces and the role of friction in this analysis. Regarding 'Chance and Probability', the general view was that children enjoy the group activities in the chapter, so more such activities should be introduced. At the same time, it was felt that the mathematical content of the chapter needed to be reduced. It was also suggested that questions to test children's understanding of key concepts in the chapter should be added.

One interesting debate related to the concept of 'Relative Density' and 'Why Things Float or Sink,' which were both part of a single chapter. The question we had to address was whether the issue of why things float or sink was being marginalised in our attempt to get students to understand the concept of relative density and the method to calculate it. Eventually, we decided to have two slightly smaller, independent chapters so as not to lose focus of either of the concepts.

We introduced new concepts in some chapters. Examples include the concept of 'dead' as a link between 'Living and Non-living' in the chapter on that theme, and a clearer definition of the difference between 'Growth and Development' in the relevant chapter. The chapter on 'The Microscopic World' was also rewritten.

One criticism - which surfaced strongly during the HSTP closure episode - was that *Bal Vaigyanik* is strong on 'process' but weak on 'product'. This means that while it emphasised the process of science through experiment-based learning in the classroom, it did not contain any laws and definitions, nor did it have enough scientific information. We held our ground on the issue of laws and definitions but we did seek to increase the information content while revising the workbooks by introducing anecdotal material from the lives of scientists as well as more descriptive material. We also sought to make the writing style less terse and more child friendly, with greater redundancy in language usage.

The revisions and changes were made possible because of the involvement of our extended HSTP fraternity - the HSTP resource group spread across universities, research institutes, colleges, schools and other institutions, which is the backbone of the programme. The Delhi University and Indore collegiate group played an important role during this phase, along with HSTP resource teachers.

Social Science Programme

Government inaction over our expansion proposal had led us to examine new ways of interacting with teachers in our field areas. After our intervention in the formal school curriculum ended, we continued to promote initiatives of individual teachers, schools and organisations in making the learning of social science more relevant for children through workshops and voluntary networking and through the generation of teaching-learning material for students as well as teachers.

Eight school programme

In the first year of the review period, we designed simple exercises to help children revise important content areas to improve their retention of basic information. Such exercises were prepared for three chapters and tested in the schools. Children found these highly useful as they often neglect working on the texts because of the open-book examination system.

We also conducted workshops for setting question papers and evaluating answer copies of students for the Class 8 Board examinations held in 2001 and 2002. These workshops were held at Harda, Hoshangabad and Dewas.

Teacher development initiatives

Orientation workshops

Largely because of government inaction on our expansion proposal in 2001, we decided to invite middle school teachers to a workshop on social science teaching on a voluntary basis. The DEO issued enabling orders for the teachers to attend and the principals of the schools actively cooperated in the effort.

Two workshops were held in Pachmarhi in June and September 2001 for teachers from Hoshangabad and Harda districts. We selected 110 teachers from among those who responded to the invitation we sent. Of these, 69 attended - 34 teachers from 26 schools in the first workshop and 35 teachers from 31 schools in the second workshop.

Three important concepts were discussed - hunter-gatherers, map reading and village panchayats.

Prof Jalaluddin, former deputy director of NCERT, demonstrated the methodology of group work in social sciences. Most teachers found the technique useful and agreed to try it out in their schools, although they did express reservations about whether it would be practical within a 35-minute period. Prof Jalaluddin and Eklavya suggested that the school opt for a double period for social science on alternate days, as they already do for science classes.

Eklavya invited the District Magistrate of Hoshangabad to the June workshop to share his experiences on the working of the Panchayati Raj system. In the second workshop, the Superintendent of Police of Hoshangabad was invited to share her views on the issue of reservations provided to women under the Panchayati Raj system and the changes this could effect on the status of women in society.

We felt this interaction with teachers should not remain a one-time affair, so we reached an agreement with the participants to meet once every month at the block level. These meetings have been taking place fairly regularly and have contributed to our efforts in building a network of interested teachers. The number of teachers who attended the training programmes and monthly meetings organised as part of this effort are detailed in the table below:

	Attendance at Training Camps				
	June 01	Sept 01	May 02	July 02	June 03
Hoshangabad-Harda	34	35	25	—	15

Monthly meetings

After the first two workshops, we visited all the schools from where teachers had come for the workshops. We found most of the participants had begun adopting the new techniques of teaching and we hoped that continued interaction in the monthly meetings would further enthruse them to adopt new ways of interacting with children in the classroom. Barring Hat Pipalya, the meetings in the last two years were held on Sundays, marking a shift from the first year when they were held on week-days. We proposed holding the meetings on Sundays following the tensions with the education department related to the closure of the HSTP. Teachers agreed to the proposal, assembling at different places on the stipulated Sunday.

At Hat Pipalya, however, the meetings continued to be held on week-days because the Block Education Officer cooperated by giving permission to interested teachers to attend the trainings, although at Eklavya's expense.

The topics discussed in these meetings included latitude and longitude (based on new material we had prepared), erosion, map reading, using a globe, water bodies and landforms, movements of the earth, republics and kingdoms in ancient India, King Ashoka and his inscriptions, British land revenue systems, social and religious reform movements in 19th century India (based on a chapter from Eklavya's textbook), national symbols, and examination system (based on the principles used in Eklavya's curriculum).

The meetings provided an opportunity to discuss basic issues in education, such as the role of discipline in schools and different kinds of discipline, friendly interaction and dialogues between teachers and students, continuous learning for being an effective teacher and practical ways of procuring teaching-learning materials for schools and organising their use in class. As a result, many schools purchased maps, atlases and globes and used these with children in the classroom.

Documentation of impact on teachers

In May 2003, we decided to document the impact of our work with teachers. Researchers from the Jaipur-based organisation, Sambhav, were invited to help us design and conduct the study.

The teachers were divided into three groups, based on their attendance at the events we organised:

- a) Three teachers who participated in 75% of the events.
- b) Three teachers who participated in 50% of the events.
- c) Three teachers who had just begun their association with Eklavya.

In order to maintain a balance between representation of private and government schools, we chose four private and four government schools for the study. However, since it was not possible to identify a teacher who had just begun association with Eklavya in Harda, the study was short of one school.

Between September 2003 and February 2004 teams of two investigators each recorded the teaching practice of the teachers in the social science period, in a verbatim mode, for three consecutive days. This exercise of classroom observation and documentation was repeated after a gap of two months. Of the two investigators in each team, one was a member of Eklavya's social science group and another was a person from another programme group or from Sambhav. Three schools of the eight were studied by a team that included a Sambhav representative. Data common to the separate reports written by the two investigators was taken as reliable for analysis. The Sambhav investigators and the 'other programme investigators' of Eklavya also spent time talking to teachers, children and headmasters of the schools.

The verbatim observation report noted the movements in the class, non-academic activities and behaviour of teachers and students, seating arrangements, classroom architecture, etc. As far as possible, no choice was exercised by the investigator in noting down the happenings and interactions. In addition, the profile of the teacher, school and headmaster was entered in a pre-determined format, with special attention being paid to noting their perceptions of the role played by Eklavya in the school environment.

The documented reports of interactions in monthly meetings, trainings, discussions with teachers and children as well as classroom observations will be used as an independent source of information to build up a credible picture of the impact of our programmes in the school. Our assumption is that participation in these programmes improve teachers' understanding of particular subject areas and their pedagogic abilities in general.

Development of resource material

Teacher's resource book on sources of history

This two-volume book by Prof Shereen Ratnagar and Ajay Dandekar introduces the reader to the rich variety of sources available to the historian and explains how the historian interprets these sources to understand the past. It gives extracts from the sources, along with detailed introductory notes and exercises, and is intended as self-learning material for teachers. The first volume of the book was released by Prof Romila Thapar at a special function held in Bhopal in December 2001. Work on the second volume is currently underway, with the editing of the text completed and the book being designed for printing.

English translation of textbooks

The English translation of the Class 7 textbook was completed during this period and the book came out in July 2001.

The chapters of the English edition of the Class 8 book were revised and edited, incorporating suggestions given by reviewers in the Evaluation Report. Work on designing and printing the book is currently underway. We are also printing sections of the textbook as modules on Mughal History, British History, Economics, Geography of India etc. We wish to explore to what extent the module format can help schools, parents and teachers who wish to sample the kind of material Eklavya produces. Six modules have been published till December 2003.

Improving social science teaching in Class 9 and 10

The second workshop on developing a social science curriculum for Class 9 and 10 was held at Pachmarhi in June 2001. The first workshop was held in February 2001 and its proceedings were reported in our last report.

The discussion focused on arriving at a broad consensus on progressive values/perspectives that could be the parameters in formulating the curriculum. The group succeeded in charting a list of some positive and negative values.

The list of concerns included democratic decision making; entitlements; protest/struggle for a better world; sensitivity to diversity; individuality; social change; sustainable development; mobility; exploitation; domination; inequality; sectarian strife; sexism and consumerism.

The group then divided itself into three subject groups (history, civics and geography) and met separately to discuss a possible curriculum that would focus on the issues listed above. A tentative framework of a Class 9 and 10 Social Science curriculum was formulated.

Developing an alternative atlas for beginners

The alternative atlas for beginners that we are developing seeks to present visually rich maps focusing on Indian states. The final plate for each map is reached through a number of steps. These include reference and notes, thematic map-making and dummy map-making. The final artwork is done on the basis of the dummy maps and stored as transparencies.

Referencing and material collection was done for the north-eastern states, while work on Madhya Pradesh is ongoing.

We had been facing the problem of non-accessibility of recent materials on the seven north-eastern states. So a trip to some parts of the region was undertaken and textual and visual materials procured for Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya and Nagaland.

Geographical Information Systems: As mentioned in earlier reports, we use GIS computer software to build a perspective view of the Himalayan states. This software enhances digitisation of contour information and its visualisation in a three-dimensional format. This later feeds into the dummy maps. We prepared GIS versions of the states of north-east India, thus completing the GIS work on the Himalayan series. The GIS version of a full map of India has also been completed.

Thematic, dummy and final maps: Notes prepared on a particular state are transferred to seven separate thematic base maps. Such maps were prepared for all the north-eastern states and Uttaranchal. We construct a single dummy map for each state by superimposing the seven thematic maps.

The black and white artwork of the final maps of Bihar-Jharkhand, Punjab-Haryana-Delhi, Andaman Nicobar, Uttar Pradesh and Jammu & Kashmir were checked and coloured. Final touches are being given to the colour maps of Uttar Pradesh and Jammu & Kashmir. We had earlier accommodated Punjab in the Himachal map (the first of the Himalayan plates) but later decided to have a separate plate for Punjab, Haryana and Delhi. This necessitated a certain amount of re-working since Delhi and Haryana had already been clubbed with Rajasthan.

Transparencies of six previously done final map plates were made.

Children's responses: We recorded children's responses to the map of Rajasthan at a session organised in Kerala. Interacting with children who are unfamiliar with the region/state shown in a map gives us insights into various possibilities of the map. The interaction also helped us in compiling the text pages for the Rajasthan plates in an effective manner.

Referees: Before the maps go to the press, we would like to refer them to persons acquainted with the geography of the different states. A list of such resource persons and others who can give us references was made. Correspondence of this nature is ongoing.

Other initiatives

Shodh Samveta: In our pursuit of generating quality material on regional history, we have been collaborating with Kaveri Shodh Sansthan, Ujjain in editing their history journal *Shodh Samveta*. We helped in bringing out two issues each in 2001-02 and 2002-03. Similar contribution of materials was made for one issue in 2003-04. The effort is also directed towards building up a regional group of historians committed to writing and disseminating meaningful history.

Articles: The article *Pathykrām Nirmaan ke Vividh Aayaam* was published in *Palakniti* while other articles were published in *Seminar*.

Closure of the programme

The social science pilot programme running in eight government schools was officially closed on August 8, 2002, a month after the HSTP closure.

For the past several years, we had been requesting the state government to initiate the process to expand the programme to a larger number of schools. However, that did not happen and the programme continued to remain in suspended animation, with permission being granted on an annual basis for the eight-school pilot project and no talk of a scaled up version.

We sent an application in March 2002 to the SCERT director for routine orders for continuation of the programme. She replied that in the light of the Hoshangabad District Planning Committee (DPC) recommendation, orders for continuation would depend upon the decision taken by the government on the entire issue of Eklavya's education programmes. We felt this interpretation of the DPC decision was unwarranted since the DPC had neither discussed the social science programme nor passed a blanket resolution against all our programmes.

The orders for continuation of the programme had to be issued before the end of June. So we wrote to the chief minister in this regard. The government wrote to us in June, asking us to submit a note answering the following questions:

- Has Eklavya tried to establish a correlation with the curriculum prescribed by the MP Board for Secondary Education and CBSE, so that children can easily answer the Board examination question paper?
- Do children who have studied the Eklavya curriculum till Class 8 perform better than the other mainstream children in Class 9?
- Since the Eklavya curriculum encourages curiosity, do local indicators in those areas reflect the impact of the pedagogy based on rational enquiry and learning from the environment?

We submitted our reply to the SCERT in June. However, the government did not make public its decision about continuation of the programme even after the new academic session started on July 1, 2002. As a result there was a great deal of uncertainty and confusion in the eight schools.

Meanwhile, the MP Textbook Corporation forwarded to us a copy of a letter from the MLA from Itarsi, who had raised several objections to our social studies textbooks and asked us to reply to the objections. The contents the MLA found objectionable related, on the one hand, to a number of outdated facts about local elected bodies and the mandi committee (the law had changed since the last edition of the book was prepared in 1992 and we were working on the publication of a revised edition) and to a different ideological stance on the other. Some of the issues the MLA raised (with his objections in parenthesis) included the following:

- Meat eating among Rg Vedic Aryans and animal sacrifice in Vedic *yagnas*, especially of cows.
- The Aryans came from central Asia. (*There are other scholars who hold otherwise.*)
- The Rg Vedic hymns were hymns composed in praise of many gods and goddesses. (*This lowers the greatness of the Rg Veda.*)
- Brahmins claimed that they were entitled to superior status because they came from the mouth of the God. (*Why are the writers raking up a dead issue and instigating people?*)
- Ayurveda developed in the post-Mauryan phase. (*Ayurveda actually declined because of the Buddhist emphasis on ahimsa.*)
- Prakrit was the common dialect of the people in the time of Asoka (*It was Pali*).
- The civics chapters show people agitating for water and other civic amenities and leading protest marches against the ward members. (*This would instigate children to indulge in extremist activities.*)
- The mandi chapter shows malpractices of traders and mismanagement in the mandis. (*What is the purpose of discussing such things?*)

While we were preparing our response to these question [which was finally sent to the Text Book Corporation (TBC) in early August], the SCERT sent a list of questions to the Hoshangabad DEO,

asking for 'clarifications' on the civics portion of our Class 6 textbook. Many of the questions were similar to those asked by the Itarsi MLA! We provided the necessary information to the DEO.

Quite suddenly, on August 8 the government issued orders mandating the books prepared by the Rajiv Gandhi Shiksha Mission (RGSM) in all the schools in the state and permitting the use of our social studies books as supplementary material in schools that chose to use them. This order brought to an end our formal curriculum intervention in social science that had been in place in Madhya Pradesh since 1986.

Learnings and questions about 'voluntary' teachers

1. Teachers are willing to invest their time for professional development, even in the absence of a directive from the government. This is reflected in the fact that when teachers cannot come for a particular training or meeting, they make an effort to come another time when it is convenient. A stable group of interested teachers crystallises from the larger number of teachers contacted initially.
2. We have to work harder to find ways to broaden this platform for teachers. Attendance at each centre is not adequate for a critical scale of work. There is potential for involving a larger number of teachers, as seen from the way those attending the meetings bring other teachers along. College students and other citizens have also shown interest in attending the meetings, as they provide learning experiences relevant to them. We have to evolve a framework to include such diverse participants
3. Given the constraint of the government-prescribed textbook, there are questions about the space available to a teacher who wants to teach differently. Besides the teachers' own motivation and dynamism, the attitude of the school management and the extent of facilitation and support provided by a group like Eklavya are also responsible for generating the 'space to innovate'. What are the possibilities in this regard and what more should we do to actualise the possibilities?
4. More effort is required to develop the content and materials for teachers' training and monthly meetings. In planning the training sessions, a better balance needs to be struck between presentation of abstract knowledge areas - such as meaning of democracy, evolution of the discipline of regional geography, etc - and concretising the issues with adequate examples.

Primary Education Programme

Assimilation and continuous evolution of curriculum

In our earlier three-year report (1998-2001), we had mentioned that the Prashika package was trialled in 129 schools of Shahpur block and the learnings were incorporated in the Seekhna Sikhana package of the state government's Rajeev Gandhi Prathamik Shiksha Mission (RGPSM), which was meant for all primary schools in the state. This package also incorporated the experiences of the SCERT as well as the Alternative School Programme developed with help from Digantar of Jaipur.

The period under review began with the last phase of the trialling in Shahpur in early 2001, with the final written, oral and practical examinations held for all classes in all subjects in the 129 schools. As usual, the answer papers were analysed and checked by the teachers. Criteria for evaluating the Class 5 Board examination papers were also worked out by the resource teachers.

Forums and processes: a vacuum

During the six years of trialling, we had identified several bottlenecks that limit the effectiveness of curricular reform. One was irregular attendance of students and teachers, which drastically reduces the teaching-learning time available for each child. Another was the nature of the teaching-learning material used. We felt these materials needed to be re-structured and reorganised to help teachers in organising learning opportunities for children.

Hence, although formal trialling was coming to an end and the process of assimilation in the 'mainstream' had also been accomplished, the issues that emerged called for further trial and evolution of the innovative package. We outlined several options for further work, which included further trialling in Shahpur block, advanced trialling in a few clusters, work on supplementary learning materials, and out-of-school support to regularise attendance of children in schools. We began negotiations with RGSM on the above issues.

The RGPSM and SCERT asked the janpad panchayat of Shahpur block for its opinion in the matter, even though curricular matters are not within the purview of panchayat bodies. The janpad panchayat met in July 2001 (after the academic session had started) and opted for the new Seekhna Sikhana package, which was in use across the state, instead of continuing with the Prashika package. The government accepted the recommendation and discontinued our experiment in the primary schools.

Prashika thus became the first Eklavya curricular experiment discontinued by the government. It was a disturbing trend. We may have our differences with the government, but the simplistic way in which it had 'accepted' local demands raised many questions. We strongly felt the need for a framework and forum of consultation and decision making where concerns emanating from parents, teachers, local leaders, etc as well as those emerging from the academic domain can be assessed and woven into a long-term perspective of social change. This is the challenge for the future. No such forum exists today where differences can be mutually resolved. Many of us felt we should have publicised the issue. In fact, the urgency to publicly take up such grave issues that were emerging was becoming stronger day by the day. They related not just to governance and decision making, but also to more 'academic' areas such as programme evaluation.

As reported earlier, the government had organised an evaluation of three programmes in primary education - Education Guarantee Scheme (EGS), Prashika and Seekhna Sikhana. The Ravi Mathai Centre (RMC) of IIM Ahmedabad undertook the evaluation, in which Eklavya participated. The draft report was reviewed after which a revised final report was submitted. During the course of this exercise, many issues related to programme evaluation were intensively debated. To our surprise, we found that the government was publicly using data from the draft report to propagate the success of its EGS programme while underlining the failure of other programmes, including Prashika.

A number of academicians got together to analyse the use of data by the government. We voiced our objections in a note to the RGPSM director, which we circulated widely in September 2001. Some excerpts from the note - to which we did not get a response - are given below:

"... Of particular concern is the use of aggregate tables of student achievement scores from the interim report ... The RMC team wisely excluded these aggregate tables from its final report. The rationale ... is that aggregation across three very different districts distorts analysis by overlooking several crucial factors ... academic achievement of children is not a function of the academic package alone. Socio-economic, institutional and cultural factors also play an equally important role.

"The RMC study recognises this fact when it compares only district-wise scores in its final report. The scores across the three districts ... cannot be aggregated because these districts are distinctly different in terms of socio-economic, geographical and demographic profiles. In addition, it is significant to note that Eklavya's programme runs only in one district, and therefore its student achievement scores cannot be compared to aggregates across the three districts. Yet the Mission document has thought it fit to include this preliminary data in its documents and presentations. It is the practice to use only the analysis of the final report publicly, as preliminary analyses may be faulty in many ways and such use leads to erroneous conclusions. We hope that this will be corrected forthwith.

"We are also concerned about the comparative use of data on student achievement tests to compare three innovative educational packages for primary schooling ... despite the fact that the RMC study clearly and unequivocally states in ... its final report that ... it would be unwise to make a strict comparison across packages, since the assumptions made by the packages vary, the contexts within which the packages are implemented ... vary widely. The report ... also warns against considering the achievement scores of children in isolation.

"There is another reason why such comparisons ... are untenable. Two of them, Eklavya's Prashika programme and the Seekhna Sikhana package ... have a graded system of general promotion. This means even if children do not develop the expected competencies ... they are moved up to the next class. The EGS stream ... has a non-graded system in which all children move according to their pace of learning. Thus a child may be in school for 2, 3 or more years ... negotiating material meant for Class 1.

"The difference is reflected in the fact that the EGS sample drops significantly in every district from Class 1 to Class 4 ... only 15 to 20 percent of students in this stream reach Class 3. In comparison, the formal stream sample drops less than 15 percent in any district.

"This renders comparison of any class level between the two streams meaningless.

"While the retention rate in the EGS stream may imply that a large number of children are not learning at the average pace, this pedagogy has also succeeded in reducing the drop-out rate substantially by removing the stigma of failure ... In fact we would urge similar experimentation with non-graded pedagogy in clusters of formal schools.

"... the Mission has indeed made commendable attempts to improve school education. ... Its achievements in increasing enrolment and reducing the drop-out rate have been rightly recognised and highly appreciated both within the country and at the international level.

"It is thus difficult to understand why the Mission is trying to prove the success of the EGS programme at the cost of other programmes ... with similar objectives. Like the EGS, these other programmes too have achieved a fair amount of success. The aim should be to build upon the strengths of each programme and to encourage the development of many more such innovative approaches."

Continuing in a changed context

We also realised that we had not been able to develop effective forums for academic discussions with the community. We have thus decided to work strongly on this count in our current phase so that the parents of the children also begin to appreciate the dynamics of providing quality education in a deeper way. Following the discontinuance of the Prashika programme, we have continued our work in primary education in two different contexts. First is the typically rural tribal

context of our out-of-school support centres called Shiksha Protsahan Kendras (SPKs) in Shahpur block. Second is the urban context of some government and private schools in Bhopal, where we are seeking to enhance the language abilities of primary school children through a library and wall newspaper programme. Simultaneously, some private schools in the city are using *Khushi Khushi* as supplementary material in the classroom. The thrust in both cases is to further develop and adapt the teaching-learning material we have created till now.

Developing teaching-learning materials

In October 2001, our team visited the MV Foundation, Secunderabad, and Rishi Valley Rural Education Centre, Madanapalle and its satellite schools to observe their methods of community mobilisation and multi-grade teaching. We turned our attention to reorganising and revising our teaching-learning material to make them usable in a multi-grade situation, since children of any one class/grade are not at the same homogenous learning level. In fact, during our monthly meetings we had given additional inputs to teachers to plan activities to address the needs of students at different levels in each class.

We assessed the levels of children from Class 1 to 5 in about 15 schools of Shahpur block and divided them into three levels for language and mathematics. The language levels were pre-reading stage, transitional stage and fluent reading and comprehension stage, while the mathematics levels were understanding number and operations up to 20; understanding up to 100, simple fractions and simple space concepts; and understanding large numbers and operations, decimals, and operations with fractions and decimals. We then began organising our teaching-learning materials according to these three levels for the five classes in our SPKs.

We held two material development workshops for the language learning levels and partially reworked *Khushi Khushi* and other learning materials into learning cards on the basis of our review. However, though card-based materials are more suited to paced learning, they are more difficult to use. So we are also developing booklet-based modules for use as supplements to textbooks.

We began work on materials for the first two language levels, designing activities for word and letter recognition and sentence formation. Simultaneously, we selected library books for this level and also designed activities for their use. These were tested by some interested teachers in their schools and also in SPKs in Shahpur.

We have developed a framework for a reading package, comprising six such modules composed of activity and reading/learning cards, workbooks and teachers' materials. The first module has been field-tested and published while the second is being finalised. The modules contain a list of appropriate library books.

A set of activity cards for numbers up to 100 has been published for use in the SPKs. This has enabled us to document the activities developed with teachers during the training workshops over the past seven years.

Evolving a comprehensive curricular framework

During this period, we initiated a process to articulate the principles behind our experiences in teaching language, mathematics, environmental studies, science and social sciences at the primary and middle school levels. We also viewed our work in relation to the curricular work done by other organisations. We feel this process will facilitate a more comprehensive revision of the teaching-learning materials we have developed and help us create, select or adapt learning materials for areas of the curriculum we have not touched upon as yet, such as middle school language and mathematics. As a first step, a two-day workshop was held in February 2004 on language learning in which many Eklavya members participated. Similar workshops on mathematics and environment studies are planned.

Educational and curricular change in urban areas

During the last five years, Eklavya has established its work fairly strongly in two large cities of Madhya Pradesh - Bhopal and Indore. As both these cities have a large percentage of private schools, our interactions included several private schools. Since we had not worked independently with such schools earlier we had to evolve a strategy to convince the principals about the need for educational change in their schools. Book fairs in the Indore schools and school-to-school contacts in Bhopal were a first step in this direction. We explored the possibilities of these schools taking up our curricular programmes and text-books - with varying success. We have reviewed our experiences and revised our strategies over the last couple of years. As a result, this initiative has led to the development of resource centres in both cities. The details of the work undertaken in these cities are outlined in the following pages.

Bhopal Education Resource Centre

In Bhopal we envisioned a programme of work that included our playing the role of a resource centre for schools or networks of schools and for organisations working with the urban poor in the field of education. We sought to develop collaborations with schools through introductory activities like bal-melas or teacher-training activities, reactivate or establish school and *mohalla* libraries and develop a system of fostering the creative abilities of children through the production of wall-newspapers on a regular basis. The idea of developing the library and wall newspaper programme was to initiate and broaden the discourse on utilising such efforts of children in comprehension and expression as an integral part of a language curriculum. We focused on language as a key programme because the development of language impacts the whole curriculum.

We also found that there is a growing demand from these city schools for improving their all-round management and functioning. So we have begun to structure our regular interactions with both government and private schools, and we have found that teacher motivation levels are rising and teachers are getting a better conceptual understanding of children as a result.

Bal-melas and children's activities

Bal-melas and children's activities are a way of introducing schools to activity based learning. Several schools in Bhopal invited us to help them in organising bal-melas for their students. They included 10 schools in Neelbadh, Preeti Public School, DAV School and the Juvenile Remand Home.

Once this introductory activity is undertaken, we follow it up by developing libraries and wall newspaper programmes in these schools. As they become more conversant with these activities, the schools then begin conducting them on their own, asking for our help only when required. We have conducted more than 60 such programmes in over 30 schools over the last three years. We also initiated a process whereby the children from these schools acted as facilitators for activities we undertook in new schools.

Library and wall newspaper programme

We have initiated and developed libraries in 25 schools. Of these, 12 schools now have a regular library and wall newspaper programme. They include Ashuna, Rajpushpa, Gyanodaya, Sanjay Gandhi, Ankur, Sarojini Naidu, Old Campion, SOS, Disha, Abhyudaya, Z.A School. This means they incorporate a library period in the weekly time-table for Class 3 to Class 7 and one period per fortnight for producing the wall newspaper for Class 4 to Class 8. We trained the class teachers in a variety of library activities to ensure that the library period is utilised properly. We have also provided them opportunities to share and review their work.

Library books catalogue

One requirement for the smooth functioning of libraries is to ensure that books appropriate to each age-level are selected and distributed to schools and periodically exchanged. We finalised a list of reading material for children for the purpose, categorising literature for libraries into three age-groups - 5-to-8 years, 8-to-12 years and 12-to-15 years. The younger and mid-age categories have a little under 200 books each while the upper age-group has a little over 225 titles. The list was compiled after intensive examination, field-testing and vetting by experts in children's literature. We plan to include activities related to reading and writing in the catalogue and publish it in booklet form.

We are currently working on short summaries/reviews of each book in the catalogue to familiarise teachers/library organisers with the book, so they can make a better selection. We have also built up a stock of 50 sets of these titles for use in our different programmes and for general sale through Pitara. More than half have already been sold, showing the latent demand for good

reading material in schools. We have also reviewed some non-fiction literature which we hope to include in the catalogue.

Apart from schools, we have supplied the catalogue and books to other organisations like Muskan in our local area and Aparajita, Room to Read, Rajiv Gandhi Foundation and Vidya Bhawan Society from outside our field areas. The books are presently used in the 12 school-based libraries that we are helping to run in Bhopal. Different sets of 50 of these books for the three age groups are periodically circulated among the schools. The schools have also set aside a library period in the time table for each class.

Mohalla and slum libraries

Our network of out-of-school libraries has also expanded - there are now 14 libraries run by volunteers or organisations working with slum or street children in Bhopal. They include Swabhiman Kendra (working with gas-affected people) - 3 libraries; Nitya Seva (working with street children) - 3 libraries; Muskan (working with slum children); Shri Hari Samiti; Sambhavana Trust (working with gas-affected people); etc.

Our role is to provide a set of books, training and follow-up support and we have already held seven workshops with different organisations. The workshops cover issues such as the methods of maintaining and using libraries creatively, the need to stock books according to two broad age-groups of 3 to 7 years and 8 to 14 years, using books to generate creative activities like theatre, mask making, reading aloud sessions, etc.

We worked out a collaborative project with Swabhiman Kendra in old Bhopal, and with volunteers in Banganga and Rahulnagar to set up community libraries supported by the Rajiv Gandhi Foundation (RGF).

Orientations on how to conduct library activities and conduct bal-melas have also been done with the bal-sakhis of Bachpan, volunteers from Muskan and Pratham in Delhi.

This model of networking with other organisations for out-of-school libraries is proving useful. A similar model for schools needs to be explored, considering that our earlier experience with the BHEL chain of schools was fairly successful. Unfortunately, these schools closed down because of BHEL's financial constraints.

Wall newspapers

In the schools where the wall newspaper is brought out, each class is organised in groups of 4 to 5 students. So each school produces 4 to 5 wall newspapers every fortnight. This gives children the opportunity to practice and develop their language and expression abilities. The teachers say the activity has led to marked improvements in the reading, writing and organisational abilities of children. The children are also able to express themselves more freely and generally interact better with their peers, especially in group activities.

During the review period, we began a new phase of the wall newspaper programme. We held an inter-school workshop attended by students from five schools. They chose a series of new columns, including interviews with local VIPs such as corporators, social and environmental problems and their solution and letters to the editor. Each school then set up its editorial team and produced the wall newspapers independently.

The new columns had two impacts. Firstly, they focused on social and civic issues such as the environment, bursting crackers during Diwali, water and electricity shortage in the state, etc. The students thus learned how to investigate and analyse civic problems and some students even wrote letters to the president, complaining about the weight of the overloaded schoolbag. Secondly, they learned to work together in teams and develop their organisational and leadership abilities. These students are now acting as resource persons to begin wall newspaper activities in new schools. The involved schools set up a process to exchange their productions and give feedback to each other on their writings.

Documentation and assessment

We initiated a process of documenting and assessing the impact of our work in setting up libraries and conducting wall newspaper activities in June 2003. We chose three sample schools for the study - Sanjay Gandhi Government School, Z.A. School and Gyanodaya School. We observed the library period in each class in these schools and documented the processes that took place. In addition,

we tracked two children in each school for the whole year, documenting their activities in the library and wall newspaper process. This documentation is helping us analyse the changes in the abilities of the children, especially in their confidence levels and their powers of self-expression.

Teachers' workshops, lectures and discussions

We conducted 16 workshops and discussions with teachers of different schools during the review period. The topics covered included the teaching and learning of Hindi, English, mathematics and social science; map reading and referencing skills; the use of libraries; evaluation of students; etc.

Curricular support

Primary education: At the primary level, Rajpushpa school used *Khushi Khushi* as supplementary material in Class 1 to 3. Teachers of SOS school used selected pages of *Khushi Khushi* to teach Hindi and mathematics. We were thus able to assess the learning levels of urban children in primary classes and select the appropriate material from *Khushi- Khushi* for different classes.

One fallacy was effectively demolished during our interactions with the teachers. They kept insisting that the standard of children in urban schools was high and all students knew how to read and write. We thought otherwise, so we tested KG II, Class 1 and Class 2 students in three schools, using simple tests covering mathematics (counting and operations up to 100, multiplication tables, addition, subtraction, multiplication and division), Hindi and English. We discussed the test results with the teachers and they soon accepted that the knowledge children gained was rote retention, not understanding. Moreover, there were considerable variations within a single class itself.

Based on these tests, we re-graded the *Khushi Khushi* material vis-a-vis student levels in urban areas. Teachers found the Class 1 *Khushi Khushi* suitable for KGII. This was true of the other workbooks as well, with Class 5 being the level for Class 4. We shall bear this in mind when we create modules from these materials over the next five years.

Social science: Rajpushpa, Gyanodaya and Ashuna schools decided to use our social science material at the middle school level. They selected some chapters common to the state textbook for Class 6 and substituted them in the classroom. The chapters included Hunting and Gathering, Indus Valley Civilisation, Maps, Directions, and Local Government. Given the level of interest shown by the schools, we feel that a sustained programme of intervention in middle schools in Bhopal should be formulated.

Pre-primary: A child's first exposure to school learning is in the balwadi and many of them create distorting pressures on children by forcing them into formal learning at this stage. It is important to work out a strategy to protect them against such pressures, but to do so, one must first know what the true situation is. We got two students from Nirmala Niketan, Mumbai, who were on summer placement with Eklavya, to conduct a survey of balwadis, anganwadis and nursery schools in the city. They found the infrastructural facilities were abysmally poor and teachers were insufficiently qualified, requiring training and orientation as well as support in terms of teaching-learning materials.

We subsequently conducted one training workshop for balwadi workers of Seva Sadan and organised learning materials for their balwadis.

Resource support to groups outside Bhopal

During the review period, we participated as organisers and resource persons in a three-day children's fair organised by a school in Khandwa. The fair was attended by over 500 children. We also organised a workshop for teachers and children of an educational resource centre in Sheopur (Agra), near Shivpuri, run by a non-governmental organisation for children of tribal families resettled from a forest area that had been declared a National Park. We helped the organisation chalk out a six-month action plan for language, mathematics and children's activities. We did a follow-up visit to the school six months later and found the activities were continuing.

A review of our work till now

Our interaction with schools in Bhopal has mainly focused on lower middle class Hindi medium schools - both private and government. Though these schools charge comparatively lower fees than the more elite private schools, they have been able to invest in both time of their teachers as well as materials. However, teacher turnover is high particularly in the case of private schools. This implies more frequent trainings, which has not always been possible.

The current challenge is to re-orient teacher training for the library and wall newspaper programmes, given the high turnover of staff in private schools, spread the programmes across more schools in the city and link these activities more explicitly to the curriculum. We feel they should eventually become part of language, science and social science teaching.

We also need to strengthen our capacity to conduct thematic workshops with larger groups of teachers and schools on different subject areas. The demand is there for providing inputs for all levels of schooling in all subjects. At least some of the schools we have been working with are now ready for a more comprehensive curricular intervention which we are planning out in detail. There is also high demand for support in teaching English and mathematics. We need to evolve and develop a range of such inputs since there is a wide range of variations from school to school, and from year to year within each school. These new challenges make it imperative that we speed up our own agenda of developing a comprehensive curriculum for elementary education if we are to respond in a meaningful way to the demands from schools.

In addition, we have been interacting with Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) and school development committees in the schools we are currently working with. Such a holistic approach is a basic requirement for any process of whole school transformation.

Developing a Teacher Resource Centre at Indore

We had been interacting with schools in Indore for many years from our field centre at Dewas. As the volume of work grew we decided to set up a full-fledged field centre in the city during the period under review. We rented office space and enhanced our personpower. We also began a marketing thrust for our publications by opening a Pitara outlet.

Our Indore thrust has focused on schools associated with various networks such as :

- ◆ Sahodaya – a network of schools affiliated to the CBSE.
- ◆ Sahotkarsh - a network of private schools affiliated to the MP State Board.
- ◆ Niramaya - a UNICEF support programme in government schools in slum areas that is part of a community empowerment programme.

In addition, we have been interacting with other small private schools, special schools for the visually challenged and schools run by prominent trusts. The interactions have varied, ranging from book exhibitions and bal melas to workshops for teachers and intensive curricular work with a few schools.

Book exhibitions and bal-melas

A major initiative at Indore was the establishment of a Pitara outlet. This seems to have given an impetus to the Indore marketing effort. Within the first couple of months two-day book fairs were organised in several schools. The books are exhibited for children on the first day and the attempt is to coincide the second day with the PTA meeting in the school so that parents can also see the books and buy them for their wards. In some schools the book fair is followed by a bal-mela. The response from schools has been so encouraging that the Pitara sales for the last year were Rs 1.25 lakh. Besides, this interaction with the schools also serves as a window to our activities, ideas and philosophy.

Special schools

Several rounds of meetings were held with Helen Keller school and orientation workshops were organised for the teachers followed by a day-long mela. Later, two five-day trainings were also held for Hellen Keller School and Mahesh Drishtiheen Shala. These two schools for the visually challenged have decided to take up some activities developed in our science and social science programmes. This experience of working with groups of visually challenged children is new for us and has thrown up questions about how to design/modify some of our science experiments, how to use the social science text as an audio-book, etc. The entire thrust in quality improvement is part of a programme initiated by the MP Welfare Association for the Blind.

Intensive school programmes

We have been doing intensive work in two to three schools over the past three years. This involved some degree of curricular change and the accompanying elements of teacher training, follow-up, provision of kit, change in examination pattern, etc.

We conducted teacher training workshops in science and social science at Choithram and Karnataka Vidya Niketan and followed them up with visits to the schools as well as workshops for setting question papers and evaluating the answer sheets of the students. Despite initial doubts, the teachers responded fairly well and their confidence level grew as they saw the responses and enjoyment of children and their own interest growing in the interactive process. This change in attitude of the high school teachers towards innovative approaches in the classroom has a strong influence in the school since it is these teachers who handle the board classes. We have tried to ensure their involvement in the programme, although we had to overcome several hurdles at the outset. The parents also interacted with the principal and the teachers and one evaluation study in

a school showed that nearly 80% of the parents felt their children were 'enjoying learning through this method'.

The experience in these schools was not uniform, but it showed us that:

- ◆ Sitting in groups and changes in the examination pattern became issues of healthy debate but these could be satisfactorily resolved only if we worked with the entire group of teachers.
- ◆ Any innovative change requires a stable and leading peer group, which is difficult to sustain because of the rapid turnover of teachers in private schools.

For example, the science programme was discontinued in Vidyasagar School following the transfer of the principal. To guard against such occurrences and ensure continuity and smooth functioning of our programmes we drew up and signed a memorandum of understanding with Karnataka Vidya Niketan, where the principal and teachers were changed. However, even this was not effective because the change requires some dynamism and commitment from the school management and doesn't survive in an indifferent atmosphere. The longest interaction was with Choithram School, where a peer group did evolve and changes in examination pattern were tried out. However, here too we ran into hurdles when the introduction of an international school wing brought in changes in the academic leadership.

The above experiences have led us to rethink our strategy of introducing schools to our innovative ideas. We now feel that a more gradual approach is required so that teachers have an opportunity to try out some elements. Towards this end, we propose to conduct thematic workshops for teachers and plan out some changes in the classroom practices of interested schools. Management involvement must be more than peripheral and should also have some financial commitment. Also, since one or two schools tend to get isolated, a wider network with some involvement of the board should be pursued.

Teachers workshops

Our discussions with the management of Niramaya and Bal Niketan opened up the possibility of undertaking a primary school programme in Indore schools. We organised a five-day training workshop for the Niramaya chain of schools, which involved 50 schools and 65 teachers from Class 1 to Class 3. The training programme covered languages, mathematics and environmental science. We subsequently helped Niramaya formulate a six-month action plan of teaching and children's activities in these schools.

The response from schools suggests that we should work towards setting up a resource centre for teachers at our office premises. This could consist of library facilities and a Sawaliram corner for teachers. Such a centre would help us widen the exposure of teachers to different teaching learning materials and alternative practices.

Improving the Basic Abilities of Children

One disturbing factor we have encountered in our school education programmes is that children, mainly those studying in government schools, progress up the school ladder but their basics remain weak. Over 30 per cent of children entering middle schools have serious problems in understanding what they read, writing what they think, or drawing or deciphering information which is presented in graphic form. These children can read and write the alphabet and even individual words, but they do so with difficulty. More importantly, they do not have the ability to do the basic math operations of addition, subtraction, multiplication or division.

This lack of abilities limits the scope for introducing activity based and child-centred learning methodologies that stress self and peer learning. It also leaves children with serious problems in handling the demands of traditional text-based teaching strategies in middle schools. They are stigmatised as failures and forced to drop out of school.

Another major area of emerging concern is the institutional problems of inefficient functioning of schools. If such issues are brought up before the larger community of teachers, educational administrators at various levels, parents, society leaders and intelligentsia at large, we feel it will lay the ground for a purposeful search for solutions in partnership.

In order to address the above concerns, we have sought to provide both in-school and out-of-school learning support for children in Babai block. We are trying to create contexts in which children in Class 6 and 7 are able to use their language and mathematical faculties freely and without pressure, through the provision of appropriate tasks/materials and regular monitoring of their progress. Such opportunities are being generated through the involvement of community volunteers, interested teachers and administrators.

Phase 1 - team building and trials at Balaganj

We began by building up a group comprising staff from our Hoshangabad field centre as well as others in the town who were interested in addressing the problem. Since none of the group members had direct experience of teaching in schools or working in subject areas like languages and mathematics, we undertook a familiarisation and orientation programme wherein we took regular classes for two hours every day during summer in the government primary school at Balaganj in Hoshangabad town. This school was chosen on the suggestion of a trader who had once studied there and wanted to see what could be done to help the school and the children.

We also took up a survey of the literature on language and mathematics learning at different stages in the education ladder and began building up a data bank of educational materials related to the subject.

We discontinued work in the school after four months because we were unable to enthuse the teachers to participate more actively in the proposed programme. During this time, our field centre in Harda conducted detailed observations of classroom processes in several primary and middle schools and also did some preliminary experimental work in language and mathematics teaching through the medium of libraries set up in two schools.

We then organised an exposure trip to Rishi Valley in Andhra Pradesh where the team members studied the work being undertaken by the Rural Education Centre of the Krishnamurthi Foundation school. The team also visited our SPKs in Shahpur.

Reflecting on our experiences, we formulated a three-year proposal of work, the focus being on Babai block in Hoshangabad district.

Phase II (Babai block)

Getting people involved in seeding the programme

The first task was establishing contact with schools in the block. We initially went to schools where HSTP resource teachers were in service and discussed the proposed programme with them and the headmaster/headmistress of their schools. Some other schools where youth active in our Bal-samoo programme were teaching also evinced interest in taking up the programme, as did the middle school for girls run by the Nitaya Gram Sewa Samiti.

Responding to the interest shown in different places, we organised community meetings in three villages in which teachers, parents, local youth and members of the village education committees and panchayats/gram sabhas participated. All three villages have Jan Shikshan Kendras so teachers from nearby villages also participated in the meetings. Subsequently, meetings were organised in two other villages whose teachers showed interest in joining the programme. Thus, in a way the programme went along with people who opted to participate in it.

We put forward a proposal that if any youth in any of these villages was interested in undertaking this work in their village school, we would provide resource support and training, but not payment. The work had to be voluntary or community supported and there should be a commitment to devote an hour every day to it. We also discussed the educational materials available, the way they could be used as well as the educational methodologies for achieving the objective.

The youth volunteers were selected at the meetings. The chairperson or sarpanch gave them permission to work on a voluntary basis with the schoolchildren and recommendations to this effect were passed in two villages.

We soon realised that meetings were generally possible only in villages or schools where the teachers themselves were interested. Only then do the sarpanch, panchayat members and prominent villagers attend. The attendance of other villagers and parents is generally low and some strategy needs to be devised to increase their presence. But what is clear is that in every village there are a number of youth who are willing to volunteer to do this work. They are also interested in doing a wide range of work among children and adults in their villages.

These volunteers range in age from 18 to 25 years, with an educational background ranging from Class 10 pass to BA degree. Some are unemployed while others give tuitions at home. They were selected on the suggestions of those who attended the meetings or through consensus. We did not interfere in the selection process, nor did we stress any particular capability of the prospective candidates. We held two or three meetings with the volunteers in which they were made to understand the work they were expected to do. Their suggestions were also incorporated.

As a first step we asked them to start libraries for children in the schools and gave them sets of books for distribution among the children every day. We followed up their activities by going to the schools, providing fresh material, observing how they interacted with children and suggesting activities they could undertake.

The volunteers undertook a study of students in Classes 4, 6 and 7. They found that about 50 percent of the children in Class 6 manage to spell and read but are weak in writing skills. They can add and subtract in maths but 80 percent cannot multiply or divide. In Class 7, the situation is slightly better, except for multiplication and division, where the problem is as acute. The study showed that more than language, it is essential to work in mathematics, particularly in the context of place value. We were unable to arrange a meeting with the parents and panchayat members to share these findings.

We organised a three-day workshop in May 2003 to orient the volunteers in reviewing books in the children's library. They were also trained in activities related to reading, including theatre, mask-making and production of wall newspapers. They used the learnings from this workshop to run the libraries in their villages.

Developing learning materials

On the learning materials front, we found that the Rishi Valley method and material were organised in several useful ways. The learning process is divided into several stages and materials appropriate to each stage have been developed. These consist of small activity units that children can do individually and are particularly useful in cases of children who are irregular in attendance. Children work in groups. However, since they are at different levels, they all do

different units. But group interaction results in their helping each other out and there are also collective activities woven in with the individual tasks.

Children move to the next unit only after they have completed the previous unit. Although this permits a practical way of moving up the learning ladder, we were keen to build in more flexibility in providing a choice of tasks to children and teachers. So we decided to prepare material for language teaching in seven stages, in the form of text cards, with 10 to 15 cards in each stage. Most of the material for the first three stages was taken from the *Khushi Khushi* books while the material for the subsequent four stages was gleaned from issues of *Udaan* and the 'Mera Panna' pages of *Chakmak*. We found that children respond well to the short but meaningful material contained in these pages. *Khushi Khushi* does not have the kind of smaller pieces we required so we asked our resource persons to build up a collection of such material written by adult writers.

Apart from text cards, six poems were printed on large-sized posters, with the lines and words of each poem printed as strips. We also designed a pocket board to hold the cards, posters and strips.

We are currently focusing on selecting appropriate materials for mathematics. We have designed a set of cards and a kit of wooden sticks to help children gain concrete experiences related to the concept of place value. We have also identified and translated selected readings on language and mathematics learning for teacher training.

Implementation

We gave these materials to the volunteers and interested teachers for trials in their schools. The initial five schools that got involved were Samon, Gulon-Mekhli, Kajalkhedi, Manangaon and Bagra Tawa. We gave strict instructions to the volunteers not to do anything in Class 8 and not to teach for more than three hours in the school. The temptation to do so is great because most schools are single teacher schools and the teachers are happy to get some support. We also organised a monthly meeting forum for the participants at Babai.

In Samon, four to five volunteers go regularly to teach. They are enthusiastic and committed and don't restrict their interaction to the one hour allotted but generally spend the entire school day (11.00 am to 4.00 pm) with the students. They have developed a good relationship with the children, more as friends than teachers, so they end up teaching not just the supplementary material we provide but other subjects in the syllabus as well, although their understanding of educational issues and their preparation for teaching remains weak.

The involvement of teachers is far greater in the second school in the programme at Gulon-Mekhli.

Dissemination

The programme began generating a lot of interest among teachers and local administrators in Babai and Hoshangabad blocks. We were invited to hold presentations of the programme at the Block Resource Centres in the two blocks. As a result, many new teachers began getting in touch with us to enquire about the materials developed and procure them for their schools.

The Babai Block Academic Coordinator (BAC) invited us to train selected teachers in language and mathematics teaching for elementary schools. A four-day training programme was conducted in November 2003 and the BAC distributed a set of materials, library books, toys and stationary for use by children in 15 schools of the block. Thus, apart from the five original schools where the programme was run by volunteers, it was extended to 15 schools through the initiative of the BAC and teachers.

We had not anticipated this development, which accounted for the delay in preparing the maths materials. We visited the schools to support the efforts of the teachers and observed that the materials were being extensively used in the schools. We also organised a baseline test of the children who were to use the new materials. However, since the full set of learning materials was not provided to the schools we felt it was not worthwhile conducting a post-usage test. We hope to undertake a more systematic and comprehensive implementation of the designed intervention in the coming academic session, and this will allow us to study the impact of the strategy being evolved.

Understanding the model for implementation and dissemination

The understanding that has emerged till now is that the programme cannot survive merely on the strength of interested teachers in schools. It requires additional youth volunteers from the village. In a way, this is good because educational issues become more widely understood in the village and these volunteers also help in other developmental work in their villages. However, the organisational paradigm needs constant clarification and affirmation - on issues such as monetary payment, permission from the local elected body, understanding of role-division with teachers, their sustained involvement, etc. In future, as the volunteers get jobs and move on, we will need to address the issue of inducting a fresh set from a similar age group and orient them in the new methodology. Our Bal-samooch programme has shown us ways of addressing these issues and the new programme can learn from these experiences.

However, the crucial difference we need to investigate is that given the greater time commitment and regularity that the programme demands from volunteers, will it be possible to sustain their contributions in the absence of monetary remuneration? This question has many ramifications that we are exploring. For example, although it has not become a big issue in a developed area like Hoshangabad, it is so in Shahpur, where SPKs are conducted by paid volunteers.

Secondly, the experience of working in a programme with Eklavya gives young people inputs other than financial ones. They are exposed to ideas that widen their perspective, acquire new skills and gain in confidence, leading to all round personality development. How deeply are these inputs valued? If they are, does it indicate that there is potential for upscaling volunteer-based programmes which do not require us to make arrangements for finances and management of employed staff?

What is required is constant judgment and sensitivity in orienting volunteers and contributing to their individual growth needs as much as taking their contributions for the programme. So a volunteer-based programme has two dimensions - one for children and one for the youth. While our attention has been more squarely focused on developing inputs for children, we need to reflect on the demands of the youth who work with us and enhance our capacity to provide suitable inputs to them. For example, we have planned several steps to maintain their enthusiasm, including residential trainings and conducting English language classes.

However, there is a caution which needs to be appreciated. It may be wiser not to place all hopes on any one agency in society, since our experience shows that volunteers show signs of irregularity in their participation, while many teachers show high levels of motivation and initiative. Perhaps we need to reach out to all possible sources of support and facilitate the role of each agency according to its circumstances and interests.

Involving the Community in Educational Issues - Shiksha Protsahan Kendras in Shahpur block

Challenges and impact of implementation

We currently run 28 Shiksha Protsahan Kendras (SPK), with some of the larger villages having more than one. The impact of SPKs in the village is easily discernible to parents and the community, and these centres are becoming nodal points for the community to discuss and monitor the attendance and achievement levels of children. We are exploring the kind of structure and funding required to expand the network of SPKs to cover more villages and children, given the growing demand from villages in the region.

The demand for opening new centres is far outstripping our personpower and resources. The additional expenditure is now proving to be a strain on our resources, although we have not raised the meagre honorarium of the volunteers who teach - we pay half while the community contributes the rest.

What is heartening is that the centres run throughout the summer holidays, which is usually a lean period, and attendance is reasonable. Special attention was paid to Class 5 students who had supplementaries in their Board examination.

We have noticed some irregularity in attendance among non-school going children. We need to strengthen inputs for this vulnerable group, revisit activities like collecting children, giving them special attention in the SPKs.

There have also been problems in collecting the community contribution to pay for the volunteer, because of prevailing drought conditions which affected the incomes of many of these already marginalised families in this tribal area. The community members had suggested that contributions for the kendras be collected at harvest or forest produce collection time. When we began collections in March 2003, the response was fairly good in terms of contribution in kind and cash despite the paucity of resources in the tribal villages, which have mostly dry lands with very little topsoil. However, there has been pressure to increase Eklavya's contribution to the stipend.

Based on our experience, we have modified the form of community contribution. It has been decided to collect agricultural or forest produce in kind up to a value of Rs 3,000 per year. The collection will be done twice a year and the proceeds will be used to provide resource materials for children attending the SPKs. Eklavya will pay the full stipend of the volunteers on a regular basis in most villages.

Although we have not been able to interact in any specific way with panchayats and VECs, we have observed that members of the SPK committees are also active in the VECs and the newly formed PTAs.

Monitoring achievement

We discussed the progress in developing teaching-learning materials in a previous section. While developing these materials for use with children of the SPKs, we also tried to group children into three groups according to their learning levels and developed tests and exercises for this purpose. We paid special attention to developing adequate materials to address the learning needs of each group.

The preparation and use of the first two 'language learning modules' helped us monitor the learning curve of each child and also helped the volunteers to plan their work in the kendras. We have also begun holding fortnightly meetings of volunteers to help them develop their workplans.

We now have a system of simple monthly tests taken by volunteers to record the achievement of each child in key areas. The results are presented to parents and the progress of each child is reviewed with them. These meetings with parents, which focus on the learning process of children, have forced the volunteers to become more alert to the needs of the children. Attendance of children in the SPKs is improving and their learning achievements have also shown considerable improvement.

Kishoravastha Shikshan Karyakram **(Adolescence Education Programme)**

Over the past seven or so years, the Kishoravastha Shikshan Karyakram (KSK) has developed gradually from informal discussions with schoolgirls into a well defined programme that addresses the concerns of adolescent girls and seeks to educate them on the changes taking place in their bodies and minds during puberty. Its purview has been widened to include issues like pregnancy, malnutrition, childcare and gender relationships. A set of teaching modules on these different issues has been developed and field-tested. The most significant development during the period under review was the formulation of plans to extend the programme to cover adolescent boys.

Teacher training and school-level workshops

In the years 2001 and 2002 we held regular teacher-training workshops, which were followed up with school-level workshops in about 28 schools. The issues discussed in the August 2001 workshop included Our Body, Puberty and Menstruation for Class 6-to-8 and Women and Violence for Class 9-to-12.

This was the third time the teachers were organising a workshop on adolescence in their schools, so they displayed a far greater level of confidence, were less inhibited and more creative. On their part, the girls were keen on discussing the subject of violence, which appears to be a phenomenon that is more widespread than is apparent. We feel this is an area that needs more discussion, with a focus on better relationships and laws relating to women.

A second workshop for 17 teachers was held in January 2002, again followed by two-day school-level workshops in 28 schools. Half the group of teachers at this workshop was new and took a keen interest in the proceedings. The issues discussed were misuse of injections and intravenous fluids, management of common health problems like fever, colds and coughs, diarrhoea and dehydration and headache.

In several schools, all the middle school teachers and students attended, including boys. Demonstrations and role-playing were used to teach children how to sponge a fever, give a steam inhalation and prepare an ORS solution. They were also advised on the importance of checking the expiry dates of medicines, and tasting the content of saline dextrose bottles to determine what exactly is in them and when they are required.

A few herbal medicines like *triphala churna*, *trikatu churna*, *amritdhara*, pain balm, toothpowder and soap were prepared during the workshops. The common problems children sought more information on included skin allergies, hair and skin problems of adolescents and specific problems like sciatica, headache, joint pains etc.

A poster exhibition and a cyclostyled booklet, *Pichkari ane batal ni chawe (We do not want injections and intravenous fluids)*, as well as a booklet on herbal remedies called '*Gharelu batwa*' were developed and both booklets were distributed among the children.

The third teacher-training workshop was held in June 2002 and was followed up with school level workshops in 25 schools. The theme this time was Personality Development, and the focus was on knowing oneself, one's values, communication and self-confidence. We were able to get a much clearer idea about the identity and character traits of girls from the region from the deliberations of these workshops that were attended by both teachers and students. Pamphlets

on the importance of self-confidence, effective ways of communication and some motivational songs were also developed for distribution among the students.

We organised a week-long training for 30 teachers from Tonkhurd in May 2003. The objective was to orient these teachers, both men and women, to hold workshops on adolescence education for boys and girls in middle and high schools.

Teachers subsequently participated voluntarily in three monthly meetings held in the months of September, October and November 2003. The topics discussed included the human body, nutrition and care of teeth and the workshops were followed up by sessions in the schools conducted by the participating teachers. We also undertook follow-up visits to these schools.

Weekly sessions with boys and girls

We held weekly sessions with girls and boys of Class 7 in the middle school in Kalma, and Class 9 in Siya High School during 2001. An intern from the National Foundation of India documented these sessions so we were able to get a better idea about the needs, attitudes and interests of older children. The children were highly enthusiastic and gave us a lot of feedback, which fed into the work, improving both its content and methodology.

The topics and issues covered in these sessions included anatomy, reproductive health, reproductive system, menstruation and menstrual problems, puberty in boys and girls, pregnancy, contraception, sexuality, rape, infertility, sex-determination and HIV-AIDS and primary healthcare.

School AIDS awareness programme

During this period, NACO and MPSAC initiated a School AIDS Awareness Programme in high schools and higher secondary schools of Madhya Pradesh. We contributed to this effort by assisting teachers in eight schools of Dewas district, conducting sessions with students of Class 9 and 11. We provided resource materials, conducted some of the sessions ourselves and set up a Question Box, inviting questions from students.

This interaction gave us fresh insights into the needs of Class 11 students, which are different from those of Class 9 students. We collected a large number of questions and hope to use them as the basis for developing booklets for older teenagers and young adults.

Documentation and manual

We generated a lot of material developed by children during our interactions with girls and boys studying in Class 7 over two years as part of our effort to develop an adolescence education programme for boys. We plan to use this documentation to prepare a resource manual and improve our functioning as a resource centre.

We also plan to bring out a manual on adolescence education. This has been a constant demand of the teachers involved in the programme. The manual will comprise a set of 11 modules, with lesson plans on each topic for the facilitator-teacher, some reference material for the facilitator and some reading material for children. Given the changed context of our work following the closure of our educational programmes in government schools, we have also modified our initial plan for the modules accordingly.

The changed context

In January 2003, the Block Education Officer (BEO) of Tonkhurd informed us that he could not issue official orders for regular teacher training and school level workshops for the KSK. The strained relationship between Eklavya and the MP government was the plausible cause of his reluctance, although he had been issuing orders earlier. So we decided to explore our new group approach of inviting voluntary participation of teachers. The involved teachers said they would work voluntarily and were prepared to spare three Sundays a year and a week of their summer vacation for the programme.

However, there was an additional problem. When we began the programme for adolescent schoolchildren, we had tried to build up a resource group of women teachers who could conduct sessions independently with middle and high school students in Tonkhurd block. A large number of these teachers were posted in primary schools. They were able to hold workshops with middle schoolchildren on the basis of enabling orders from the BEO. This was not possible in the new context, since they could no longer visit the middle and high schools. So the teachers suggested that we prepare a manual for conducting sessions on health and nutrition with primary schoolchildren, since some issues were also appropriate for this age-group. They felt a manual would be useful for Class 5 children since many girls drop out of school at this stage of schooling. Designing modules for primary schoolchildren is now an added challenge. We have already reworked the modules on the human body, care of teeth, and nutrition to reach out to this section of students.

We have also documented each teacher training session and the school follow-up visits in detail and prepared an assessment report of the programme.

Working as a resource agency

Training of trainers

During the period under review, we worked regularly with Sahmet in Kesla, Hoshangabad district, and Kasturba Jeevan Shiksha Karyakram in Indore - helping them develop their programmes for young people and training their resource persons. The target groups were para-teachers in the case of Sahmet and village youth leaders in the case of Kasturbagram.

We held three workshops with Sahmet. The first in May 2002 focused on rational medicine, gender and questions pertaining to sexuality. The second in January 2003 attracted 20 male participants as well as six women teachers and village women. The theme being adolescence, it focused on the human body, puberty, menstruation and sexually transmitted diseases. The third workshop had 16 adolescents and youth in attendance and its theme was adolescence and sexual myths.

In the case of the KasturbagramTrust, a gender workshop was held in June 2002 and it attracted participation of 60 persons aged 12-to-60 years. This was followed up by a short one-day session during a youth cultural festival in January 2003, in which 60 youth discussed the issue of tobacco use, and a workshop in March 2003 on personality development. In addition, a two-day workshop was organised at Kasturbagram for a group of women trainees working for women's empowerment.

The interaction with Sahmet appeared more fruitful since there was a link between successive workshops. We were able to collect many questions from the participants and understand the needs of youth, which, again, are different from those of adolescents, since many of them are married. However, we feel there is a need to be more clear about the objective of conducting such workshops and their frequency, as well as the role of the partner agencies. We feel such workshops should be held for a minimum period of three days and should follow once every two months, if we are to arrive at a meaningful outcome.

At Kasturbagram, the workshop on gender and personality development was more an orientation. The youth leaders require more frequent and longer training workshops if they are to acquire the capability of organising similar workshops with youth in the community. Better planning is also required with the partner organisation.

Networking and collaboration

The CBSE, which is implementing a population education programme in its schools, invited us to share our experiences, methods and materials on adolescence education at a discussion on population education. About 15 schools in Indore participated in the orientation which was organised at Choithram School.

We conducted a two-day workshop for 30 adolescent girls at Gram Seva Samiti, Nitaya where we discussed issues like gender and nutrition.

We organised a drama workshop for NSS volunteers at the Girls Degree College, Dewas. The plays were subsequently enacted in a few villages. The volunteers assisted us in organising a workshop in Bangar village on herbal medicines. Men, women and children learned how to prepare and use these medicines.

We held a one-day workshop for a group of Integrated Child Development Scheme supervisors and other workers on the needs and concerns of adolescents. The workshop was held at the Madhya Pradesh Voluntary Health Association.

About 40 youth participated in a two-day workshop on HIV-AIDS at the Nehru Yuvak Kendra, Devli. They took keen interest in the proceedings and urged us to continue this learning process.

We also assisted government personnel involved in organising a camp for physically challenged children of Tonkhurd block.

Among other workshops held was a session on personality development for 50 children in Ujjain; a bal-mela on personality development for 200 children; gender workshops for 130 teachers of the Rajiv Gandhi Shiksha Mission in Tonkhurd, 40 Unicef officers under the Aakansha Project and activists of Bachpan in Bhopal; a training camp for community health workers at the Casp-plan training centre in Bhopal on traditional medicines; a seminar on rational medicine at the Barli centre of Bhartiya Gramin Mahila Sangh (BGMS), Indore which drew participation from various states.

We assisted the Gabriel Social Welfare Trust in developing their adolescent centres and acted as resource persons at a workshop held on International Women's Day with girls of the basti, the Trust is working in.

We trained animators from Bhartiya Gramin Mahila Sangh of Indore who are running centres in the slum bastis for neo-literates. We taught a group of 18 animators to make 15 herbal medicines that are useful in primary health care. This interaction helped us refine our module and training materials on traditional medicines.

We also assisted the BGMS in conducting a ten-day training workshop of 40 animators who will be running centres for adolescent girls in the villages of Sidhi district, Madhya Pradesh.

Human resource development

Sama, New Delhi sponsored one of our team members to participate in a 10-day workshop in Cambridge, UK. The workshop, organised by International Planned Parenthood Federation, sought to orient young people in adopting a sexual and reproductive health and rights approach in their work.

We also participated in workshops on male sexuality organised by Tathapi, Pune and a workshop on sexual abuse of children organised by Sama.

A resource centre for those working on Kabir

Several individuals and groups showed interest in documenting the activities of the Kabir mandalis that our field centre in Dewas had helped set up. They included filmmaker Shabnam Virmani, who filmed the performances of the bhajan mandalis in eight villages, and Rajula Shah and Gurbinder, who filmed mandalis in ten villages as part of their project for Wardha Hindi University.

In addition, Shekhar Sen of Mumbai gave a presentation on Kabir at a chaupal meeting, while another visitor, Linda Hess, undertook an analysis of the diaries of the meetings of the Kabir Manch. The rejuvenation of the mandalis opens a new avenue for work on reproductive health and gender issues among the youth.

Bal-samooh Programme

Bal-samoohs are youth forums organised in villages that provide a platform for children to develop their creative and leadership abilities. The responsibility of running the bal-samooh rests with a team of three or four youth of the village and the programme is coordinated from the Hoshangabad field centre. Each bal-samooh is centred around a children's library run by one of the team members from her/his home. In addition, activity workshops and bal-melas are organised and children contribute their writings and drawings to the monthly magazine *Udaan* brought out from Hoshangabad and various other wall magazines.

Bal-samoohs functioned regularly in 15 villages and localities of Hoshangabad district during the period under review. Several new volunteers have also come forward to organise bal-samoohs in the villages of Mahendrawadi, Managaon, Amupura and Kotgaon.

At present bal-samoohs are located in Tugaria, Bairakhedi, Amupura, Hirankheda, Raisalpur, Kotgaon, Matapura, Bagratawa, Pothia, Mahendrawadi, Managaon, Sontalai, Parsapani, Hoshangabad-Police Line, Malakhedi.

Monthly meetings

Bal-samooh coordinators and Eklavya members hold a review and planning meeting at the Eklavya field centre office in Hoshangabad on the first Saturday of every month. Issues of interest are discussed at these meetings and some new activity or skills are taught. Among the topics related to the organisational aspects of bal-samoohs discussed were:

- ◆ Children's contributions to *Udaan*, the importance of original writings, ways to encourage children to write and encourage those who cannot write to narrate stories.
- ◆ How to select material for publication and how to edit the selected material.
- ◆ The role of bal-samoohs and volunteers; the notable impact of theatre activities at the village level and their role in contributing to the personal growth of individuals and helping them to become more self confident.
- ◆ Orienting the large number of new persons who join the bal-samoohs; the purpose and usefulness of children's activity workshops and the contribution of wall newspapers in fostering creativity among children.

Topics of general and social interest discussed included:

- ◆ Genocide in Gujarat and the need to stage a play on the issue of communalism.
- ◆ The Hoshangabad Science Teaching Programme. The discussion included a sharing of experiences of bal-samooh coordinators who had studied under the programme during their schooldays.
- ◆ The history and origin of prehistoric cave paintings at Adamgarh. One of the monthly meetings was held at Adamgarh.
- ◆ The play *Nitthalle ki Diary* staged by Vivechana of Jabalpur, its theme, script, acting, stage setting, costumes etc.
- ◆ The books *Art: The Basis of Education* and Gijubhai's *Divaswapna*, which were reviewed and analysed.
- ◆ A case study of a Rajasthani village called Kankra.

Libraries

We have seen that children who use our libraries regularly show marked improvement in their reading and writing skills. The bal-samooh coordinators short-listed the type of books that help children most and those that they themselves are interested in reading. They use Eklavya's resource library at the field centre quite intensively during their monthly meetings.

Bal-melas and activity workshops: Over 30 bal-melas and activity workshops were organised during the review period, the more active villages being Hirankheda, Matapura, Pothia, Tugaria, Raisalpur and Managaon. These melas feature activities like story and poetry writing, origami, painting, games, mask making etc. One new feature was the organisation of discussion forums during the melas. Some of the topics discussed included the habits of wild and tame animals, monsoon season etc.

We held a workshop in Hoshangabad in June 2001 to orient new members. The week-long workshop was conducted by the older, experienced bal-samoooh workers, who imparted training in various creative activities.

Publications

Udaan, the monthly children's magazine brought out by the bal-samooohs, was published regularly and efforts were made to improve its sales and distribution. Discussions were held with children, teachers and others from places like Dolariya, Amupura, Tugaria and Rohana and some people took the responsibility of selling the magazine on a regular basis. Attempts were made to regularise sales in schools.

We published *Baje Meri Dholki*, a booklet of children's poems selected from various issues of *Udaan*.

Wall newspapers

Eight bal-samooohs regularly bring out wall newspapers prepared by hand on card sheets. They are Raisalpur (*Bachchon ki Umang*), Bagra Tawa (*Bal Kala*), Tugaria (*Sadabahr*), Police Line (*Balsangrah*), Hirankheda, Pothia, Amupura and Bairakhedi.

Theatre: In January 2001, the bal-samooohs of Bairakhedi, Tugaria, Amupura and Hirankheda bal-samooohs independently produced and performed a series of plays. They included *Anpad Jamai* (Bairakhedi), *Jaise ko Taisa*, *Akal Badi ya Bhains*, *Lalach Buri Bala*, *Chor Machaye Shor*, *Bina Vichare Jo Kare*, *Madari ka Khel* (Amupura), *Panchayat*, *Mahangai ka Bhoot*, *Bhedbhav* (Police Lines, Hoshangabad), *Anpad Biwi*, *Anpad Mata Pita*, *Uthapatak* (Tugaria).

We organised a theatre workshop in Hoshangabad in June 2002 on the issue of communalism. A play was written and performed against a backdrop of a collage showing the happenings in Gujarat. The play, *Sookhi Padi Ganga Phir Se Hari Ho Uthegi*, was staged in several places in Hoshangabad and in villages like Mahendrawadi, Sontalai, Pothia, Bagra Tawa, Parsapani and Kesla. We looked into the writings of Kaifi Azmi, Harishankar Parsai, Kabir and O.N.V. Kurup for inspiration in writing the play.

The Sontalai bal-samoooh staged two plays independently. These were *Bhrashta Rajneeti* and *Sudama Ke Chawal*.

In January 2003, the bal-samoooh group attended the Children's Theatre Festival organised by the Experimental Theatre Foundation in Prithvi Theatre, Mumbai. The festival drew participation from children's theatre groups in Maharashtra. Our group staged the play *Sudama ke Chawal*. We published a souvenir called *Smriti - Prithvi Theatre Tak* for the occasion.

Other initiatives

Some bal-samoooh members participated in a writing workshop organised by the Gram Seva Samiti, Nitaya. The Samiti organised similar one-day workshops for the bal-samooohs in Amupura, Mahendrawadi and Pothia.

The youth of Hirankheda organised a tree-planting programme.

The Amupura and Police Line bal-samooohs organised special functions on Teachers' Day. In Amupura, children attended a discussion on Dr Ambedkar and the practice of untouchability. Similarly, in Pothia a discussion was organised on the late Makhan Lal Chaturvedi.

Two bal-samooch volunteers attended a cartoon workshop in Pachmarhi organised by Charkha Feature Service and Gram Sewa Samiti, Nitaya.

Volunteers of Hirankheda set up a Kishori Samvad Manch and started a library with a special collection of literature on women's issues.

A youth group in Bagra Tawa has shown interest in running a library. Some of its members are bal-samooch volunteers. We began by giving some books for the library. This was developed further as a community library with support provided by the Rajiv Gandhi Foundation. Special efforts were made to involve women actively in the library.

Documentation

Documentation of the bal-samooch processes has been going on for the past one year and two persons from outside Eklavya were involved in the task. They have studied all publications, monthly meeting records and other secondary literature. They have also undertaken field visits in which discussions were conducted with parents, children, other villagers, panchayat representatives etc. Discussions were held with the bal-samooch volunteers and the Eklavya team. Various sections of the document are being finalised, including those relating to theatre activities, *Udaan*, *Bal Prayas* and bal-melas, while the write up on wall newspapers has been completed.

Local initiatives for starting bal-samoochs have come from four villages and we attended to the task of orienting new volunteers into the bal-samooch processes. At the same time, in older bal-samoochs, we had to attend to the transition to a new generation of adolescents as older volunteers moved away into the demands of earning a livelihood. We have thus evolved a process of constant group building, involvement and orientation.

Playing the Role of a Resource Agency

Over the past three years, we have received a number of enquiries from groups and governments of various states to support their initiatives in curriculum and textbook development or other educational programmes.

Ladakh

In Ladakh, we were invited by Students' Educational and Cultural Movement of Ladakh (SECMOL) to help prepare a set of textbooks in science and social science. SECMOL had earlier brought a team of teachers from Ladakh on a field visit to Eklavya. We constituted a team of Eklavya members as well as other resource persons for the first 15-day workshop in May 2003, which sought to evolve a curriculum and textbooks for Class 4 and Class 5 in environmental studies for primary schools of the Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council. We subsequently participated in a second workshop held in September 2003 for developing, reviewing and finalising the chapters.

Taking stock of the situation during the second workshop, we realised two things a) if we try to complete both the class 4 and class 5 books, we would not be able to meet the deadlines for publishing for the session, which starts in November; b) with the new approach to the subject, the class 5 books would build on and refer to many of the class 4 chapters; hence, it would be more logical to institute the class 5 books from the next session.

The Ladakh experience has been a fairly interesting one. A strong local organization with a fairly good interface with government and political bodies, mobilisation of a group of resource persons from outside Ladakh for a continuous period of about six months, involvement of local primary school teachers for feedback, illustrations and trial of chapters – all these were instrumental in our completing the books within a period of six months.

Chhattisgarh

In Chattisgarh, meetings were organised with the State Resource Group of the education department to plan a workshop to outline a possible programme for curriculum improvement in the state. We participated in these meetings where it was decided to put together the efforts of the state government, Unicef and several voluntary agencies, including Eklavya, in this project. Subsequently seven workshops have been held to formulate the curriculum and develop textbooks for Class 6. We took up the responsibility of guiding the work in science and social sciences.

Gujarat

In Gujarat our activities as a resource agency were seriously affected by the unfortunate and tragic happenings in the state in 2002. All the local agencies, including our resource group, were involved in fact-finding and relief work. We have been working with two groups in the state - Shishu Milap in Baroda district and Arch Vahini / Nachiketa Trust in Valsad district.

Once stability returned, Shishu Milap continued revision of science textbooks in Gujarati based on *Bal Vaigyanik*. New chapters were developed with the involvement of faculty members of MS University as well as school teachers from around Vadodara. During this period teachers' training camps were held and workshops were organised for material development and revision, as well as redesigning the science workbooks. Thus, the programme completed one phase of development of workbooks for Classes 5 to 7 and related teacher training package.

This phase of Avishika had all the necessary formal permissions till March 2004, so State Government constituted a review committee well in advance, for evaluating the programme. Simultaneously Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) appointed Homi Bhabha Centre for Science Education for reviewing Avishika. MHRD was funding Shishu Milap's inputs into the programme. Both committees lauded the programme's achievements and recommended

that these innovations in science teaching should be expanded atleast to one block of Vadodara district. But the State Govt did not seem keen to continue with Avishika even after these two positive evaluations. This was indicated by the fact that it hadn't issued either expansion or continuation orders till March 2004.

In another development, Arch Vahini has taken up science training, provision of kit and some other components of HSTP, with Eklavya support, in about twenty Ashram schools of Dharampur in Valsad District. Two science trainings were organised for teachers from these Ashram schools. The Education officer of Dadra and Nagar Haveli showed interest in science education and a training of about 50 government schools was also organised at Silvasa by Arch Vahini with Eklavya support.

A beginning was also made in social sciences. Shishu Milap organised a three-day workshop on social science education with the Department of History, MS University, in November 2001. Faculty members from the history, geography, economics and sociology departments and research institutions, DIET staff and some schoolteachers participated. The workshop sought to build links between school teachers and university professionals and involve the latter in the programme. It also reviewed materials we had produced for Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan in terms of their utility for conditions pertaining in Gujarat. It was felt that the treatment should change for Gujarat since social science is taught from Class 5 in the state. The resource group subsequently translated and adapted a few chapters according to their needs, which they tried out in schools. They have prepared a draft manuscript of textbooks for Class 5 and 6 based on our material.

Shivpuri

The Member of Parliament from Gwalior, Shri Jyotiraditya Scindia, invited us to work as a resource agency for improving school education in two districts within his constituency - Guna and Shivpuri. We had several interactions with the local administrative and educational bureaucracy and also sent a team to make a preliminary survey of 20 schools in both districts to get a feel of the ground situation. Following on the survey and discussions, it was decided to develop a programme in collaboration with the district administration in Shivpuri.

Subsequently we facilitated a school development planning process in two clusters of Shivpuri district - Pohri and Badarwas. We held three meetings with teachers, cluster and block resource persons and some members of the community. The participants envisioned an ideal school, made their own school profiles and then came up with plans for infrastructural, personnel and academic requirements for their schools. They also shared experiences in solving school-related issues and tried to analyse the factors that lead to successful innovations. These developmental plans were approved by the local Parent Teacher Associations (PTA).

We identified the areas in which we could give inputs such as library related activities for enhancing literacy skills, activities and materials for improving learning in maths and languages as well as middle school science and social science.

The next step is to consolidate the school development plans and take up school-wise activities with involvement of local community. Our role will lie in providing academic inputs and teacher training.

A major problem with this programme is the absence of an organisational node. This programme had begun at the behest of the congress MP and after the 2003 state elections, it has receded to the backburner due to changes in power at the state level.

Assam

The Assam government has initiated a process of quality improvement of education for the upper primary stage of schooling. The government requested us to share its work in science and social science education. Our cooperation was also sought for developing improved curriculum and textbooks for languages and mathematics.

The process began with an introductory workshop in May 2002 which was attended by about 60 people from the SCERT, DIETs, schools and the Board of Secondary Education. We presented our approach to science and social science teaching through selected activities and reading

material. The prevalent textbooks were then discussed and participants reflected on the difference in approach and the implications of Eklavya's approach for the children and the development of textbooks.

Another point discussed was the need to exercise choice in selecting content for the curriculum for different classes. We presented our study on how students in different classes understood concepts related to the movements of the earth and their relationship with day and night and seasons on earth. In the course of the discussion, the complexities of the issues involved and the difficulties middle schoolchildren face in grappling with these complexities were clearly articulated. Participants then held discussions to define the curricular objectives for the proposed new textbooks for Assam.

Following the preliminary workshop, we sought to involve a wider academic resource group in the process of developing school curricula for Assam. Persons teaching in the university and colleges and members of other organisations were contacted such as the Assam Science Society, the Assam Academy of Mathematics and the North Eastern Geographical Association.

Between May 2002 and April 2003, a total of seven workshops were conducted to evolve a curriculum, syllabus and textbooks for Class 5 for the state. An effort was made to ensure that the syllabus is made relevant for a large number of children by evolving an appropriate treatment of each topic; that the syllabus makers work in tandem with the textbook writers and also take part in field trials. The manuscripts were sent for approval by the state textbook committee in April 2003 and subsequently these were published in September 2003 for use in the next academic sessions.

Visitors to Eklavya

- Teachers and resource persons from Rishi Valley School who came to understand the work of the Shiksha Protsahan Kendras.
- Teachers from Sri Lanka.
- Two media probationers from Press Information Bureau who made short reports for newspapers on our primary education and adolescent education programme.
- Two people doing a photo book on elementary education for Penguin India. They visited the science teaching programme and primary education programme.
- Volunteer from Alternatives, Canada, who helped us learn web designing in order to set up an Eklavya website.
- Volunteers from Voluntary Services Overseas, Delhi.
- Visitors from Oxfam India, Bangalore, and National Institute for Women, Child and Youth Development, Nagpur.
- Community educators from SEWA, Gujarat
- Two persons from Spandan Samaj Sewa Sansthan, Dhar for guidance in starting a school and community library.
- A large team comprising of over 15 partner groups supported by Samarthan.
- An exposure visit of six BAIF units from MP and Maharashtra.
- A team from Education Department and SISE, Allahabad, UP.
- Navnirmirti, Mumbai
- SIRDI, Bhimpur, Betul
- Samaj Parivartan, Dharwad, Karnataka
- CYSD-Plan, Orissa
- Social workers and government officials from Afghanistan

Students who visited Eklavya

Several colleges and universities are making Eklavya an institution of choice for summer placements and field visits by their students. For example, Nirmala Niketan has for the first time agreed to send its MSW II students outside of Maharashtra to Eklavya for their block placement. Many of these students undertook short research studies or surveys for Eklavya during their stay and helped in the work of the Eklavya field centres. These are reported in the section on Research Studies.

- 21 students from TISS, Mumbai, for two days.

- 10 students from Nirmala Niketan, Mumbai, for a week and another batch of 6 students for a month-long placement.
- 8 students from Jesus and Mary College (B El Ed), New Delhi.
- 16 B El Ed students from Dr Shyamaprasad Mukherjee College, Delhi.
- 2 students from IIT, Kanpur.
- 2 students from National Law Institute University Bhopal who helped collect information for the social science programme.
- 2 Indian Institute of Forest Management, Bhopal students.
- 1 fellow of the National Foundation for India, who participated in the adolescents education programme.
- 1 management student from T.A. Pai Institute of Management, Manipal.
- Two Nirmala Niketan students, who spent a month in Shahpur helping to strengthen the recording and documentation processes.
- Two Nirmala Niketan students, who helped in a study of women's participation in community organisations in Khategaon.

Workshops, seminars and meetings

- ◆ Collaboration with Ed CIL to conduct a workshop at Pune on pedagogical issues in middle schools, for the DPEP Phase I states - Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Maharashtra and Assam.
- ◆ Three meetings in Delhi with educationists, students, research scholars and college and university faculty members on future directions of government-NGO collaboration following the closure of HSTP organised by Education Discussion Group, Ramjas College and Central Institute of Education, Delhi University.
- ◆ Meetings in Delhi and Bhopal to prepare for the Teachers Science Congress organised by Gwalior Science Centre.
- ◆ Refresher course for social science and language lecturers and medical lecturers at Aligarh Muslim University.
- ◆ Workshop on Science and Social Science teaching in Jaipur for orientation of Digantar personnel.
- ◆ Two workshops in Bhanvargarh, Rajasthan for training of activists of Doosra Dashak in children's activities and science popularisation.
- ◆ A workshop in Kolkata for school teachers associated with Teachers' Forum on 'Language and other domains of knowledge - Science'.
- ◆ Activity workshops during children's science congress held in Itarsi organised by NCSTC and Gwalior Science Centre.
- ◆ Orientation of cluster resource coordinators of Shajapur district in interactive teaching learning methods.
- ◆ Training of teachers of Mahila Evam Bal Adhikar Bachao Sangathan, Ferozabad for the use of *Khushi Khushi* textbooks with working children.
- ◆ Workshop organised by idiscoveri, Chandigarh for primary school Maths teachers.
- ◆ A two day workshop on 'Analysis of text from the literary and social perspectives' conducted by Prof. Krishna Kumar for Eklavya personnel.
- ◆ Representatives from Samrakshan Trust, Sheopur, MP; Nachiketa Trust, Dharampur, Gujarat; Vikas Vartul Trust, Gujarat; Jagriti, Kanpur, UP; Rupantar, Raipur, Chhattisgarh and Shishu Milap, Vadodara participated and got a first hand experience of the Eklavya methods in the summer teachers' training camp for Science and Social Science held in Central School, Bhopal in June 2003.
- ◆ A two-day on-site workshop was organised for the Hindi teachers of Rishi Valley School in Madanapalle.
- ◆ A workshop on the Method of Science was organised for about 40 teachers participating at the National Science Teachers' Congress in Bhopal.

- ◆ Sahmet, Kesla, Hoshangabad district, and Kasturba Jeevan Shiksha Karyakram, Indore were provided help to develop their health and education programmes for young people and training their resource persons.
- ◆ Eklavya participated in a collaborative venture to develop a Post Graduate course in Education with five other organisations - NIAS, Bangalore, Homi Bhabha Centre for Science Education, TISS, Vidya Bhavan Society and Digantar. This course is at present being nodalised by NIAS, Bangalore.
- ◆ **Attended workshops and seminars on -**
 - Review of innovative student evaluation methods, by Ed Cil, Pune.
 - Student evaluation processes, organised in Mumbai by NIAR, Mussoorie.
 - Multi-grade teaching learning situations, organised in Rishi Valley.
 - English language teaching, organised in collaboration with BGVS in Bhopal.
 - Shifts school study in NIEPA, Delhi, where we presented research done in Bhopal.
 - IT and primary education, organised by Azim Premji Foundation.
 - Development of IT modules for teachers and students, organised by Indian Institute of Information Technology, Hyderabad.
 - Community and quality issues - learning achievements at the Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration.
 - Domestic violence, in Chennai.
 - Initiatives in urban schools, with Wipro Corporation, Bangalore.
 - Globalisation and education, organised by Ashuna Vidya Mandir in Bhopal.
 - Citizenship and education, organised by National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bangalore.
 - Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan organised by NSDART Mussoorie in Raipur, for State level resource persons of Chhattisgarh.
 - Reviewing and streamlining the Chhattisgarh SSA plans organised by its education department.
 - Universalisation of Elementary Education organised by NIEPA, Delhi.
 - ICICI partners meet at Mumbai.
 - NSS Symposium at Delhi - presentation on 'Challenges of working in an NGO'.
 - Sampradan Annual Conference of Trusts and Foundations, Chennai.
 - 'Changing the Face of Student Evaluation' in Mumbai by AKES.
 - Chhattisgarh Human Development Report - education section.
 - Preparation of class 1 to 8 Science and Maths books for SCERT, Delhi.
 - Primary School Maths teaching with Kendriya Vidyalaya Schools, Bhopal.
 - Review of District Quality Education Project, Chamarajnagar, Karnataka.
 - Presentation of Pratham evaluation study.
 - Reviewing the quality education project of NIAS, Bangalore.
 - Reviewing the curriculum for girls run by Central Social Welfare Board.
 - Wipro Applying Thought in Schools with WATIS partners.
 - Review and planning of Doosra Dashak programmes.
 - 'Theoretical aspects of Education' organised by Vidya Bhavan Society, Udaipur.
 - Planning and review of work under the Library Movement of Rajiv Gandhi Foundation and its partners.
 - Perspectives in Whole School Development Programme with WATIS partners in Delhi.
 - Issues in Pedagogy of Social Sciences with WATIS partners in Bangalore.
 - Experiences in language teaching in middle school at CIEFL, Hyderabad.
 - Multi-year education plan for SARD, Delhi.

Seeding Research Studies

Social Science

The following studies were presented at a seminar in Delhi University in November 2001:

- An evaluation report of the social science programme.
- A study of children's perception of *sarkar*.
- A study of the impact of curriculum on geography learning.

Sections of these papers were suitably edited, improved and modified on the basis of the feedback received during the seminar. The chapter on 'Transaction of the Curriculum: A View from the Field' in the Evaluation Report was modified, the concluding chapter of the Geography Learning Report was elaborated and the *Sarkar* study was extensively edited and converted into an 80-page monograph - as well as an article for publication in an education journal.

Local modes of collective action

The study of local modes of collective social action continued during this period and consisted mainly of regular fieldwork through running seven libraries in three villages. These libraries enabled the researcher to have extensive conversations with people and provided the base data for the study. Besides interactions in these three villages - Tugaria, Jasalpur and Nimsadia - interactions with people from Hoshangabad town and a remote village in Hoshangabad block yielded 45 conversations which were documented and keyed into the computer.

The analysis of the data is awaited. The researcher has meanwhile shifted to work in another institution and will complete the report this year.

The libraries were developed by the local people and will continue to run, with some maintenance level help from Eklavya. A review of secondary literature on the subject of collective social action has been circulated and discussed with academics. Another note on an outline of possible findings of the study and their implications for civics curriculum visioning has been prepared and is being discussed.

The fieldwork also contributed to the preparation of several articles related to civics education, including one on the meaning of patriotism in a modern country and another on cultural politics in the aims of education. A presentation was also made at a national seminar on participative research in Delhi, entitled 'Cultural dialogue and education - what should civics teach?' Another article was published in *Economic and Political Weekly* in November 2003.

Primary education

Double shift schools in Bhopal

We conducted a study for NIEPA of 20 primary schools in Bhopal running in double shifts. NIEPA had organised similar studies for Class 6 and 7 in other cities. Its purpose was to examine existing practices in double shift schools and find out how these schools coped. A paper on this study was presented at a national seminar organised by NIEPA in New Delhi in September 2001.

The growing privatisation of education has seen the number of private schools increase to five times the number of government schools in Bhopal (1000/200). However, many of these schools have fewer students than most government schools in the city. Several private schools are run in two shifts to cut costs and increase the utilisation of limited space. Generally, each shift has an in-charge, who functions under a common principal.

The study covered an equal number of government and private schools. Data was collected through a semi-structured interview and observation schedule. The in-charge of the shift and the primary school teacher were interviewed separately.

Two types of shifts were observed - one which breaks the primary school itself into two shifts and the other in which the primary section runs in one shift and the middle and/or high school runs in the second shift.

We found that the actual teaching time ranged from 3-to-5 hours in private schools and averaged 4 hours in government schools. Each period was 35-to-45 minutes long. Only a few shift schools complied with the new government stipulation that schools should run for six hours instead of the earlier limit of five hours.

The teacher-student ratio was 1:20 in private schools and 1:75 in government schools. There was not much activity based learning or use of teaching-learning materials in any school.

The advantage of the shift system was perceived to be ease of management of large numbers of students in the same space and keeping the student-teacher ratio within reasonable limits. The disadvantage was the inability of the principal to manage teachers in two shifts and interact with students.

Baseline survey for SPKs

Two Indian Institute of Forest Management students, who joined Eklavya for their summer organisational training, conducted a baseline survey of six villages in Shahpur block where we run SPKs. The survey, in which our Shahpur team participated, provided a database of children in the 0-to-14 year age-group in these villages of Shahpur block.

The team undertook a house-to-house survey of these villages and collected data on the socio-economic and educational background of the households. This baseline data will help us in planning our work in the villages and will be the basis for building a similar database for the other villages.

A total of 367 households were covered in the sample. The survey showed that the average literacy rate of these villages was 55.10 percent, with male literacy at 65.30 percent and female literacy at 44.50 percent. The literacy rate of children was 83.92, with male literacy at 88.73 percent and female at 79.20 percent. The single most important source of income was cash wages, with farming a distant second and the consumer goods economy still not fully penetrating the area.

The drop out rate, non-enrolment and irregularity in attendance of the girl student were high in all the villages, especially scheduled tribe children. Most of the out-of-school children worked at home or for the family.

The study found that our efforts in running the SPKs and in convincing people to become members of the SPK programme was having a fairly positive impact on the education of children.

Science

HSTP study and documentation

During the review period, all relevant HSTP documents were collated and a draft catalogue and bibliography was completed. A proposal to do a field level documentation on the impact of HSTP and the response to the closure of the programme was evolved and submitted to Sir Ratan Tata Trust (SRTT). It is proposed that the documentation be done in two phases. SRTT has agreed to support the first phase of the study. Vidya Bhawan Society has been requested to coordinate the study. The study was launched in 2003 and study design was finalised by a team consisting of Dr. Hriday Kant Diwan, Dr.Sadhana Saxena and Prof. Ramakant Agnihotri which is coordinating this task. Data was collected from the chosen sample of students, ex-students, parents and teachers in Harda district between November 2003 and March 2004.

Research support

We facilitated the work of two scholars researching on the quality of elementary education in India. Elspeth Page of UK and Francois Leclercq of France did their fieldwork in our field areas. Ms Page observed classes conducted by our resource teachers in Harda district to study aspects of gender in the classroom. Mr Leclercq, who did his field work in Shahpur (Betul district) and Tonkhurd (Dewas district), looked at issues of decentralisation in primary education.

Publications

A major concern of our publication unit has been to achieve partial sustainability, without compromising on quality or our purpose of developing good reading material and field-tested activity material at a reasonable cost, especially for rural and urban readers from the economically depressed sections. So it is a process of striking a balance between what the market demands today and what we feel requires to be put on the market.

Development of new titles

Ganit ki gatavidhiyan: This resource book for mathematics teachers is a compendium of the work of thousands of volunteers teaching mathematics to children the world over. These volunteer teachers were affiliated to the UK-based NGO Voluntary Services Overseas. The book was originally published by Heinemann Publications, London, UK.

We negotiated a tripartite agreement with both partners to publish the book in Hindi. Arvind Gupta did the translation and Prof. R.P. Singh, a Bhopal-based mathematician, checked the technical aspects of the translation. The book was released at the World Book Fair held at Delhi in January 2002.

Bhoolbhulaiyan: This is an addition to our series of four low-cost problem-solving activity books. It is a collection of about 20 maze-based puzzles.

Darpan se boojho: Another addition to the problem-solving series, this book contains a series of symmetrical pictures that have to be formed with the help of a mirror strip and a master picture.

Chichibaba ke bhai: This anti-war story focuses on the hatred between two imaginary fraternal nations. Written by Prof D.P. Sengupta, a scientist, the book forces children and sensitive adults to question the validity of violence and realise the futility of war. It is illustrated by Sumantra Sengupta.

Hrituyon ka school: This collection of children's poems, collated from our monthly children's magazine *Chakmak*, is woven around the seasons and the changes they usher in. Some of the poems have been freshly re-illustrated because the original illustrations used in *Chakmak* could not be reproduced.

Main bhi and Rusi aur pusi (colour editions): These picture storybooks for beginner readers have been reprinted in colour. To cut costs, we printed 25,000 copies of each title - 10,000 in Hindi, 10,000 in English, 2,000 in Marathi, 2,000 in Bangla and 1,000 in Gujarati.

Bharatiya itihās ke srote (Prachin kal, Bhag 1): This book, developed by historian and archaeologist Prof Shireen Ratnagar and Dr Ajay Dandekar, is a response to frequently asked questions by teachers in Eklavya's Social Science Programme about the sources of history and how historical texts are analysed and artefacts dated.

Khilonon ka khazana: Arvind Gupta gave us permission to publish this sequel to the series of activity books he has written. We published it after revising it.

Nanhe chooze ki dost: A picture story book for beginner readers, this book was designed by a graphic art student in the collage form. The story line is simple and the illustrations beautiful and inviting.

Other books under development: We have taken up work on several educational classics, a book on making microscopes with low-cost or no-cost materials (developed by one of our HSTP resource teachers), a book on making simple toys, one more addition to the riddles and puzzles book series and a book on women's health. Some of these are in the final editing stages and will be ready to print shortly.

The translations of educational classics have been farmed out to professional translators. They include *Summerhill* by A.S. Neill and three books by John Holt - *Escape from childhood*, *The underachieving school* and *Instead of education*. We have negotiated the rights for publishing two of these classics in English, of which *Escape from childhood* was published in March 2003. This is a new endeavour for Eklavya and we see it as a necessary step to strengthen our publication programme, give a fillip to the marketing effort and establish the Eklavya label as a strong brand name in the field of educational literature.

Publication catalogue: A publication catalogue and accompanying order form was designed and printed in January 2004, in time for the World Book Fair. We also developed an e-catalogue of our publications and circulated it through our e-mail network, with fairly positive results.

Production, promotion and marketing

Print runs: We usually take a large print run of fast moving titles like *Kabaad se Jugaad*, *Bhalu ne Kheli Football* and the activity charts. However, we had to reduce the print runs in the light of financial constraints we were facing during the review period.

Agents and sales outlets: We have been steadily increasing the number of outlets stocking and selling our publications in other towns and consolidating our mailing lists to boost direct mail order sales. The number of out-station agents has gone up to about 30 and we now have categorised mailing lists with over 2,000 addresses for five cities and/or states in the Hindi belt.

We also standardised the discount structure for agents distributing our publications. In addition, we provided promotional materials like bookmarks, posters, stickers, etc to the agents.

Book fairs and melas: We have been organising mini book fairs in Bhopal. These are usually set up on the sidelines of a convention, rally or other event. Six such exhibitions were organised between October 2001 and March 2002.

We have also been organising mini-book fairs in schools. Many schools demand that we conduct activity sessions or bal-melas for children. We are trying to arrive at a judicious balance between responding to popular demands for activity sessions and maintaining our thrust in organising mini book fairs.

We participated in the National Book Fair at Indore (November 2001), Bal Vividha at Mumbai – a fair on educational issues organised for schools (December 2001), Regional Book Fair at Patna (December 2001), World Book Fair at Delhi (January-February 2002), a second National Book Fair at Allahabad (April 2002), the World Social Forum in Mumbai (January 2004) and World Book Fair at Delhi (February 2004).

We also displayed our publications at smaller book fairs and exhibitions through our agents and/or fraternal organisations. In this way, we were able to reach the state-level Teachers' Science Congress for Madhya Pradesh and Chattisgarh held at Khandwa and Raipur respectively, a seminar on education in Mumbai, All India People's Science Congress, Shimla and Children's Science Congress, Itarsi. We also set up a stall at the People's Science Congress in Chennai and the Patna Book Fair held in November 2003 with the help of a fraternal organisation.

Pitara outlets: Pitara at Indore has taken shape and the main effort there is to organise school book fairs which are showing good results. We tried to start a similar initiative in Bhopal but it has seen only limited success. We need to learn from the Indore experiment if a successful endeavour is to be worked out in Bhopal. We are also thinking in terms of opening a Pitara outlet in Raipur.

To popularise Pitara and our publications, we distributed two sets of pamphlets in Bhopal through newspapers. We also reprinted our revised book list and conducted promotional activities in local supermarkets and other venues.

Review of pricing policy: The publication advisory committee reviewed our pricing policy and decided to stick to the current policy of fixing the print price of books at three times the printing and paper costs. It also decided that all reprints would henceforth be priced keeping two factors in

mind - the existing three-times-print-price policy as well as parity with similar new titles being published.

Advertisements in magazines: We negotiated an agreement with *Hans*, the Hindi literary monthly, to carry a one-third page insertion in all the issues for a year at concessional rates. We also advertised our publications in a history research journal in Hindi, our own magazines and a souvenir published by the All India People's Science Network.

Design consultant: The Sir Ratan Tata Trust gave us financial support to appoint a design consultant for our publications. The consultant developed some modules from the Social Studies textbook and is presently working on the revised English edition of the Social Studies textbook for Class 8.

Other promotional efforts: Some small but significant efforts were made towards popularising our sales outlet Pitara in Bhopal and Eklavya publications on the whole. A glow-signboard has been put up for Pitara and it has been instrumental in attracting many new visitors to the outlet. Another effort was to send our publications order form to all subscribers of the three magazines we publish and to all recipients on the mailing list of the new wall newspaper *Kyon Aur Kaise*. The results of both these efforts have been very positive.

To improve the functioning of the publications team, we decided in August 2002 to bifurcate it into two smaller groups, one focusing on editorial and production activities while the other looked after sales and marketing. The teams have been functioning independently, although regular meetings and consultations are held to ensure proper coordination.

Contributions by summer internees

A student of the management course conducted by the T.A. Pai Institute of Management, Manipal undertook a survey of the pricing of our publications in 2002. We asked him to design and execute a pilot survey to gauge the buying capacity of middle class readers in Bhopal. The publication team and a few local student volunteers conducted the survey. Our publications were categorised into four broad groups and some books under each category were chosen as samples. A blind test was then done with 40 randomly selected parents with children in the age-group of 5-to-15 years. The prices printed on the books were hidden and the subjects were asked to go through the books and quote the price they would be willing to pay for it.

The survey results showed that people found the actual printed price reasonable in three of the four categories. They were, however, ready to pay slightly more for the activity books. The riddles and puzzles series was a hit. In some cases, the subjects were ready to pay three times the printed price for these books. These books are priced at around Rs 5.00 so there appears to be scope to price them at Rs 8.00 to Rs 10.00 for the urban middle class market.

The exercise was carried out to see whether we could raise the prices of some publications or go in for dual pricing.

Another graduate student from the Institute of Rural Management, Anand (IRMA) worked with the publications marketing team for one month in June 2003 on his summer block placement. He visited many non-governmental organisations in Bhopal and Indore and tried to understand how Eklavya publications could feed into their educational and other programmes and if these organisations could be used as a channel to promote educational publications. He also visited some bookstores – both retailers and suppliers - and tried to understand the mechanisms of book sales through agents and suggest appropriate processes to the marketing team.

Magazines

In addition to our book publications, we bring out several magazines for different target audiences and age-groups. These magazines serve two purposes - to reinforce our educational programmes and propagate our ideas and to make available progressive literature to people who generally don't have access to reading material. However, our magazines have been going through a lean

period in terms of circulation and readership. It is because we do not have the kind of person-power required to push their marketing in new and innovative ways. However, there was some cause for cheer in this otherwise dismal scenario during the period under review, because we were able to take a few innovative steps that augur well for the future.

Kyon aur Kaise

The first positive step was the launch of a new science wallpaper for high school and college students. Titled *Kyon aur Kaise*, the wallpaper is essentially a project of the National Council for Science and Technology Communication (NCSTC) of the Department of Science and Technology (DST). We provide the editorial content and also look after its production and distribution.

The wallpaper consists of two newspaper sheets per issue, brought out twice a month and published in Hindi as well as English. We launched two test issues in July 2003 and took up publication in December 2003. However, we could not go into full-scale publication with a planned print order of 10,000 copies because the registration took an inordinately long time. The English edition was registered in September 2004 but registration of the Hindi edition still remains to be done by NCSTC.

We send out six issues of the wallpaper free to a set of schools (4,000 English and 1,000 Hindi) and then repeat the process with a fresh set of schools every three months. However, because of the registration problems we were not able to recruit the required staff for marketing the publication, as envisaged in the project proposal. At present, publicity is by word of mouth, so although the publication has been well received, subscriptions are coming in at a trickle. The publication has nevertheless set new standards for 'poster' journalism in science and reinforced our reputation as a pioneering organisation in the field of Hindi - and English - language publications.

Sandarbh

This magazine for school teachers and college and high school students, is brought out once every two months. We found it difficult to adhere to this publication schedule because of the lack of person-power. The editorial staff are mostly part time, most of them being fully engaged in our educational programmes. However, the publication has been able to maintain its high standards and is highly regarded as a serious reference journal in science and education. Regular demand for indexed bound volumes of *Sandarbh* provides an indicator in this regard. In fact, Nachiketa Trust, a group based in South Gujarat launched a Gujarati edition during the review period in 2002-03. This is in addition to a Marathi edition, which is being brought out by Prayas, a group in Pune, Maharashtra.

Srote

Our science news feature service for Hindi language newspapers continues to be supported by NCSTC and is listed among its prestigious journalistic projects. The science features are sent to newspapers once a week and later compiled in magazine form every month for readers who subscribe to it. Newspapers pay on a per article basis and the publication rate has crept up to around 5 per article after a dismal fall to under 2 at the beginning of the review period - we have never really been able to come to the root cause for the fall.

Monthly subscribers are mostly teachers and high school and college students, because they find its regular coverage of science research topics and issues very informative and useful.

We have further streamlined the feature service on the basis of feedback from the end-users, making the articles and news items more crisp and topical. We are reviewing our exclusive service to select subscribers because the returns are not commensurate with the extra effort we were putting in.

One new development, in keeping with the times, was the launch of a *Srote* website on which we feature the monthly magazine. Regular maintenance and updating of the site faltered after the first year. Availability of Hindi fonts has been a major bottleneck in continuing with this effort.

Chakmak

This award-winning children's science magazine completed 200 issues during the review period. However, it is presently going through hard times because of a low circulation, following the cancellation of government subscriptions for schools. We are currently in the process of revamping the magazine to redefine its target audience, since we feel it has a growing market among groups working in primary and middle schools around the country. Hence, we have begun to introduce material for beginner readers and younger children. We are also trying to improve its layout and illustrations.

Other initiatives

In addition to these magazines, our bal-samoohs continued to bring out their local level publications - like *Udaan* and *Neev* - which are mostly devoted to the creative output of children they interact with. These publications are distributed locally.

Apart from this, the Centre for Participatory Planning and Development also publishes a newspaper - *Panchatantra* - devoted to panchayats as part of their work with panchayats and self help groups. It is proving to be a lively discussion forum for issues related to Panchayati Raj.

New titles printed

Textbooks/workbooks/modules

1. *Bal Vaigyanik* Class 6 (English/revised)
2. Social Studies Class 7 (English)
3. Social Studies Class 6 (English)
4. Enjoying Science Class 6 (for CBSE students)
5. History - The Mughal Period (revised)
6. Economics - Banks and Taxes
7. History - The English Rule India
8. Geography - India and the Himalayas
9. History and Geography
10. How Hot How Cold
11. Civics - Constitution, Fundamental Rights & Duties, Central Government
12. History - British Dominance & Indian Independence

Children's story books/poetry books

1. Rusi aur Pussy (colour edition)
2. Main Bhi (colour edition)
4. Chichibaba ke Bhai
5. Natkhat Gadha
6. Hrituyon ka School
7. Aayi Ek Khabar (Poetry poster)
8. Char Chane (Poetry poster)
9. Nanhe Chooze ki Dost
10. Ram Sahay (poetry poster)
11. Bandarmama (poetry poster)

Activity books, charts and posters

1. Apna Chidiyaghar Part 2
2. Chalo Chitra Banayen /Let's Draw
3. Darpan se Boojho
4. Bhoobhulaiya
5. Khilonon ka Khazana
6. Bharat ki Aahar Chakti/Nutrition Disc of India (activity chart)
7. Aavart Sarani (periodic table in Hindi)
8. Manganit

Reference books

1. Bharatiya Itihas ke Srote
2. Ganit ki Gatividhiyan

Educational classics

1. Escape from Childhood

Titles under preparation

1. Apna Kabadi Sookshmadarshi
2. Khel Khilone Part 2

3. Drishtibram
4. Na Shariram Nadi
5. Under-achieving School
6. Summerhill (Hindi translation)
7. Bachpan se Palayan (Hindi translation of Escape from Childhood)

Extra-curricular Activities

Enhancing out-of-class learning opportunities for children is an essential supplement to our efforts at curricular innovation. The objective is not to focus on curricular concerns alone but to address the myriad needs of the process of growing up in a societal as well as individual perspective. Our efforts in this direction are part of a process of reaching out to the community and creating a social milieu that supports a scientific outlook among children and youth and fosters their creative and leadership abilities. We run libraries at our field centres and organise bal-melas, children's clubs, activity workshops for children and youth, public discussions, theatre workshops and special programmes geared to understanding adolescence and its requirements.

Since the basket of activities is similar across centres and are repeated over the course of every year, we have reported activities in the Malwa region to give the overall flavour. In addition, we have included a few other events of importance conducted elsewhere.

Summer workshops/camps

Two 15-day summer workshops were organised in Dewas. Seventy children from 15 schools participated. The resource persons included volunteers who had participated in earlier workshops. They taught children how to make craft items.

About 25 children were interested in learning more. So we organised a one-week workshop for them in June 2001. The objective of the workshop was to train children to organise activity workshops in their local areas. The activities include performing simple experiments, writing, painting and making craft models.

We also organised a summer camp in May 2001 at Ujjain in which 95 children participated. Here again, it was the older children who helped teach the newcomers, the role of Eklavya being restricted to organising the workshop.

The activities included a discussion on earthquakes, making cloth bags, building science models, maths games, bird-watching, a tour of Ujjain, a visit to a milk plant, preparing wall-newspapers, designing greeting cards from old magazines, origami and making cloth flowers and balloon muppets.

Bal-melas

Eleven bal-melas were organised in 13 schools in Dewas and Dhar districts. Over 2,000 students and 76 teachers participated in them. Fifteen girls from Dewas were trained as resource persons. Seven bal-melas were held in schools in Indore and Ujjain districts in which over 1,350 children participated. The activities conducted included origami, know your body, science experiments, mask making, making toys with card paper, making leaf patterns, drawing, brain teasers and a magic show.

The District Education Officer, lecturers of the DIET, officials from the DPEP and a local municipal corporation member who attended a bal-mela suggested that such events be organised in other schools too. A plan has been formulated to organise such bal-melas every year. We also participated in 'ma-beti' melas organised by the Education Department in Tonkhurd and Dewas blocks. Thirty students from four schools of Dewas town formed the resource team.

We jointly organised a bal-mela with the *Jan Shikshan Kendra* at Ujjain. Children from eight non-formal centres participated. Most of them live in slums so such a programme was new to them. It was held in a park and the children and staff enjoyed the experience.

Training resource persons: We followed up the bal-mela at the *Jan Shikshan Kendra* in Ujjain with a children's activity workshop for teachers. A book exhibition for students was held after the training session. A similar workshop for teachers of Hamza Urdu School in Ujjain was also conducted in which we oriented the teachers in organising children's activities as part of their teacher-training workshop. We taught science experiments, origami and maths games during this

workshop. Three similar training workshops for resource persons were organised for 30 students of schools and colleges in Dewas district.

We also conducted an in-house training workshop for Eklavya staff at Ujjain. In all 11 persons participated from Hoshangabad, Pipariya, Shahpur, Bhopal and Dewas field centres. They were taught how to make muppets, card toys and some origami.

Sunday activity workshops: These workshops were organised on Sundays. A total of over 450 children from 10 schools in Dewas town participated in 12 workshops and some of them now volunteer to act as resource persons. Activities included model making, origami, mathematics puzzles, mask making, playing various kinds of games, a quiz and library sessions. The objective of these workshops was to provide space for children to express their hidden talents and get them interested in reading books, learning new activities and interacting with each other. Our attempt was to develop a resource group of at least 10 to 20 children.

Magic shows: This medium is often used at bal-melas, activity workshops etc to help in demystifying certain practices and to also attack irrational and superstitious beliefs. One such magic show was held at the Government High School, Jalseva, where about 300 students participated. After staging the magic show, we held a discussion on how magicians perform and how people sometimes fool us. A similar show was staged at the Government Boys High School and the Government Primary School, Desai Nagar, both in Ujjain. In the latter show which was attended by 100 children, in addition to demonstrating some tricks, we discussed why children do not enjoy studying.

Workshop for primary schoolchildren: A five-day workshop for 30 primary schoolchildren of Matru Vidya Mandir, Nanakheda was organised by our Ujjain centre from April 21 to 27. The Arvind Society runs this school for slum children. It was an interesting experience. The activities included making paper bags from old newspapers, balloon puppets, mask making, story writing, using origami for house decorations, making science models, brain teasers etc.

Celebration of Science Week: On the occasion of Science Week from February 21 to 28, 2002 the Ujjain Centre organised science experiments, exhibitions and lectures at the DIET, *Bharatiya Vigyan Peetha* and some schools in Ujjain. A book exhibition was organised on the last day and a discussion on science for the people was held at Freeganj, Ujjain, in which about 2,000 people participated.

Jamavada at Book Fair: A 10-day book fair was organised by the Jainson Book Shop, Indore, from October 5 to 16. A large number of children visiting the fair attended our activity corner called *Jamavada*. About 15 children who participated in the first three days of the fair later assisted us in teaching the activities to other children. In all, about 2,600 children from 20 schools participated and there were also thousands of observers, including 245 parents who learnt about these activities. The activities included origami, mask-making, making charts of the human body and the skeletal system, collage and drawing. The exhibition on snakes was put on display on the walls of the stall that was decorated with plastic teacups, paper plates and origami models.

In addition, we organised book exhibitions at Guru Harikishan Public School in Indore and at Narwar in Ujjain district.

Bal Vividha programme: We participated in the *Bal Vividha* programme organised by the Comet Media Foundation, Mumbai. Eklavya managed the children's activity corner and displayed its publications. This year we introduced some new activities such as making toy dogs and birds with card paper as well as some other toys. The stall was attractively decorated and drew the attention of about 5,000 people, both children and adults, many of whom learned to make these toys. We had an opportunity to meet a number of organisations that were interested in pursuing such activities.

Pitara Utsav: Eklavya's publication sales outlet *Pitara* has been organising bal-melas, mini-book fairs and children's festivals in Bhopal to popularise Eklavya's publications. A *Pitara Utsav* was organised from December 25 to 26 in collaboration with the Regional Museum of Natural History. Around 40 children participated. They were trained in various children's activities including

origami, mask making, toy making and environmental and wildlife games. A film *Gajraj* was also screened.

Libraries at field centres: The field centre libraries contain newspapers, journals and books on literature, science, society and development that are available to children as well as adults. These libraries usually have about 60 to 80 regular members, while an equal number visit the reading room daily. College students use these libraries for reference work, while school students delve into books to prepare for debates, essays, model making, competitions etc. In 2003–04 we began efforts to branch out the resource library facility to smaller towns and casbahs and set up libraries at Sohagpur, Babai, Bagra Tawa, Bhayawadi and Bhaunra. Support for these new libraries was received from RGF, Delhi.

Other activities:

- ◆ Conducted a teacher-training workshop at Adharshila School, Sakad near Sendhwa, in Badwani district, whose students are from tribal communities staying in *Vindhya*s in Western MP.
- ◆ Supported the Progressive Writers Association of Dewas in organising nine events involving lectures by writers, reading of papers and book reviews. (Impact of communal riots on women, folk traditions, Hindi poetry after Ayodhya, the meaning of Hindu religion etc.)
- ◆ Supported the organisation of the Children's Science Congress held in Bhopal.
- ◆ Participated in a conference of district and block level education officials and *Jan shikshaks* of Dewas, who were introduced to our work, publications and toys.
- ◆ Participated in the All India People's Science Network conference in Shimla and in the World Social Forum.

Doosra Dashak, Rajasthan:

Our team supported the efforts of the Doosra Dashak initiative in Rajasthan to enable adolescent children in backward areas to have meaningful learning opportunities. Three workshops were organised in December 2003 and February and March 2004 to train resource persons of the programme in devising creative activities for children, such as origami, mask making, creative writing, wall paper and journalism, theatre and science experiments.

Participatory Planning for Rural Development

Although the focus of our work is school education, we have made a significant effort to address developmental issues as well. Since 1998, a strong group has evolved within the organisation, whose focus is exclusively on socio-economic and developmental issues. This group seeks to empower local communities, especially women, through human resource development programmes, strengthening their participation in local self-government and widening their involvement in developmental work revolving around livelihoods, health and education. The idea is to evolve holistic grass-root strategies for participative development and natural resource management.

At the beginning of the review period, we decided to register this group as a separate organisation, since balancing the concerns and working styles of two groups with different agendas within a single organisation was proving impractical and cumbersome. The group is now registered as a separate organisation called Samavesh, and the reorganisation of work, infrastructure and field areas has been more or less completed.

The group has been trialling several programme packages since 2000, which include panchayat training, self help groups, natural resource management, shiksha protsahan kendras, children and youth activities and community health.

Strengthening Panchayats

The 73rd Amendment ushered in a three-tier panchayat system of governance and development at the district, block and village levels. We are concentrating on working at the village level, although we have been involved in training programmes at a statewide level. However, we discovered during the course of our work that direct methods of panchayat strengthening, through training, was not effective enough unless accompanied by a programme of awareness generation and empowerment of rural people who can play a greater role in the gram sabhas and village level development.

We have found that women and men, who become active in smaller forums like SHGs or seed banks, become more aware and vocal participants in gram sabhas. This points to a growing degree of convergence of our different programmes in the villages, with immense scope for cross learning and synergy.

Panchayat training

Madhya Pradesh has a statewide training programme for panchayat representatives in which the government has sought the help of non-government organisations. We were involved in the programme from the initial stages in 1999 and prepared a training manual - that was used in training 12,000 resource persons in the state. We also prepared a booklet in simple language for panchayat members - *Panchayat ki kitab* - that was used as a primer for training sarpanches and panchayat members in seven districts. Over 17,000 copies of the book have been distributed and it has been widely used by other NGOs working in strengthening Panchayat Raj institutions.

We took up the responsibility to train master trainers in six districts - Jhabua, Dhar, Khandwa, Indore, Badwani and Khargone. A total of 109 master trainers were trained in three batches between February and March 2003 at Indore. We were also involved in developing village level training plans as well as manuals and related literature for the training of Gram Vikas Committee members. The village level trainings will start in April 2003. We have taken up the responsibility of organising the trainings in our field areas - Khategaon block in Dewas district and Khirkiya block in Harda district.

Panchayat resource centres

This concept has been evolving for the past three years. We have undertaken a number of activities to give shape to this centre. They include production of training materials and imparting

training and orientation to different categories of panchayat representatives as well as members of other NGOs. However, these activities have, until now, been conducted in a dispersed manner. Therefore, the logical step is to set up a Panchayat Resource Centre where all these activities can be conducted under one roof and where panchayat representatives can come regularly for information and discussions.

In pursuit of this objective, we conducted a preliminary study in which we held discussions with sarpanches and other panchayat members. They gave us feedback on the kind of problems they face in trying to solve village problems and in following up various schemes and programmes at the block level janpad panchayat. We then formulated a basic list of materials to be collected for the resource centre. We also decided that our panchayat team will help the panchayat representatives to follow up selected cases and schemes. This will give us a direct understanding of the problems they face as well as their strategies for tackling these issues.

We presently have one such resource centre operational in the Ajnas cluster of Khategaon block in Dewas district and are planning to start one in the Morgadhi cluster in Khirkiya block of Harda district very soon.

Panchayat newsletter

We publish a monthly newsletter titled *Panchatantra*, which we have been distributing to panchayats in these two blocks as well as to NGOs. The newsletter reports on developmental issues, focusing on initiatives taken and problems faced by panchayats in these blocks.

Empowering Women

Self help groups

The programme for women's empowerment is presently functioning in three clusters, namely Harangaon cluster of Dewas district, Morgadhi cluster of Harda district and Ajnas cluster of Dewas district. A total of 27 women's self help groups (SHG) are now operational in these areas, the oldest being about three years old. The total number of women members is 323. The groups carry out regular savings and credit activities and have also begun taking initiatives in the social sphere. Till now they have been able to generate around Rs 1,36,466 from their own savings and interest from loans. Some natural leaders have also emerged and they are helping to organise women on issues of local importance.

Self Help Groups (as of March 2003)

No.	Name of group	Village	Members	Total amount saved in rupees (including interest)
1	Ranighat	Ratanpur	11	8,164.00
2	Jyoti	Ratanpur	12	3,030.00
3	Saraswati	Ratanpur	13	3,401.00
4	Gandhi	Ratanpur	10	2,105.00
5	Lakshmi	Kabad	10	3,555.00
6	Gayatri	Palasi	10	6,380.50
7	Savitri	Palasi	14	4,521.00
8	Krishna	Patrani	10	10,754.00
9	Dipak	Patrani	15	4,985.00
10	Ganga	Patrani	12	4,969.00
11	Shivshankar	Patrani	10	2,815.00
12	Rani Lakshmi	Harangaon	14	1,500.00
13	Saraswati	Kukdapani	13	9,343.50
14	Maya	Kukdapani	10	1,635.00
15	Yashoda	Churikhal	9	2,260.00
16	Krishna	Churikhal	10	7,432.00
17	Gayatri	Charua	10	8,740.00
18	Narmada	Bhanwardi	15	13,795.25
19	Durga	Bhanwardi	13	4,180.00
20	Singaji	Bhanwardi	17	3,691.00
21	Sharda	Morgadhi	11	8,178.00
22	Durga	Morgadhi	14	8,713.00
23	Santoshi	Morgadhi	15	4,677.00

24	Lakshmi	Morgadhi	13	3,247.50
25	Bhagyalakshmi	Morgadhi	12	1,350.00
26	Santoshi	Kanwasa	10	1,365.00
27	Durga	Bhilkhedhi	10	1,680.00
Total			323	1,36,466.00

The long-term objective of this programme is to facilitate social and economic empowerment of women through participatory strategies. In the first phase, we focused on bringing the women together through savings and micro-credit. In this phase, the SHGs evolved systems for holding regular meetings, computing interest rates, and training *munshis*. A simple manual has been prepared to help local youth, acting as *munshis*, and women leaders to play a larger role in managing the SHGs.

In the next phase, we shall focus on capacity building so that women play a more independent role in running the SHGs and also take up work in spheres like health, education and other social issues. In parallel, we shall also focus more on livelihood activities. We plan to raise the number of SHGs to 50 in the next year.

Weekly meetings

All the SHGs meet regularly every week. The women save Rs. 5 per week and lend money within the group on interest. They also discuss issues of social concern and have become more vocal and talk freely. They have learnt to count money and keep track of individual as well as group's savings, loans and interests.

In the Morgadhi cluster, many children were falling ill as a result of malnutrition and water borne diseases. The weekly meetings focused on health, hygiene, nutrition, safe drinking water etc and all the groups in the cluster were taught how to prepare an ORS and use it.

In the Harangaon cluster, the education of children, especially the girl child, was an issue of discussion at the beginning of the new school term. The SHG members in Patrani village conducted a household survey of the number of children studying in the village and the number of dropouts after Class 5. They then went to the office of the district magistrate to demand a middle school for the village.

Patrani has four SHGs and the women have started attending the gram sabhas regularly and putting up their demands. In Ratanpur, women regularly participate in meetings of the Village Education Committee.

Cluster meetings

Between April 2002 and March 2003, three cluster-level meetings were organised in both the clusters. All the women in the cluster of villages come together to discuss issues of common concern. In the Morgadhi cluster the meetings were held in a different village each time, with the local members playing host. In the Harangaon cluster, all the meetings were organised in Harangaon, which is central and more or less equidistant for the other villages in the cluster.

We organised trainings at some cluster meetings, including preparing and using ORS and ways to keep water clean and safe for drinking. We also conducted discussions on the benefits of growing rain-fed vegetables in the backyard, prevention of common diseases and problems related to group functioning.

The cluster meetings are helping women build up local regional networks. In the next phase we will decide on more formalised structures of support, and some joint programmes to be taken up by groups in one cluster. Some women are also emerging as natural leaders, resolving problems between members and approaching the local administration to solve community problems.

Growing awareness among women

Changes are visible in many homes as a result of the discussions in group meetings. For example, water is now filtered with a clean cloth and kept covered all the time. Members of the Morgadhi cluster purchased vegetables seeds and sowed them. At one cluster meeting, the women prepared a seasonal calendar showing their sources of employment in different seasons and months of the year. This helped them to understand how their concerns and priorities change from season to season, and when they could spare more time for group activities.

In places where there is more than one group, women are uniting and becoming more conscious of issues related to social justice. For example, in Morgadhi, two women complained at the group meetings that they were being beaten by their husbands. The other women intervened and put a stop to this. Women in Bhanwardi Raiyyat are demanding the opening of an anganwadi.

The Morgadhi women also took the lead to get about 25 children suffering from malnutrition admitted and treated in the district hospital. The villages in Morgadhi and Harangaon clusters, which are difficult to approach during the monsoon season, are planning to stock simple medicines for common ailments like viral fever, diarrhoea, vomiting etc. This way, families can save a lot of money that otherwise goes to village quacks. A beginning was made, with three groups in the Morgadhi cluster stocking ORS packets.

Two SHGs in Morgadhi and one in Kukdapani have opened savings accounts in the 'Kshetriya Grameen Bank' at Charua. Three more groups in the cluster are planning to do so. In the Harangaon cluster, two groups have bank accounts and talk is on in other groups about opening bank accounts.

Small scale business initiatives

After the soyabean harvest, many women go into the fields to collect seeds that are left as waste in the fields. This practice is called *sarva* and a woman usually collects up to 10 to 12 kg of seed. In the Harangaon cluster, the women decided to sort out the seeds collected and keep the best quality seed for sowing the following year; to lend seeds among themselves for the next sowing season and thus save on interest paid to seed suppliers.

In both Harangaon and Morgadhi clusters, the women have decided to take up collective marketing of *mahua* flowers. At present, *mahua* is sold at a low price of Rs 4 to Rs 5 per kg immediately after collection to meet urgent cash needs. However, if the flowers are stored for 3 to 4 months, they fetch Rs 8 to Rs 12 per kg in the market. Some groups are, therefore, planning to buy up the *mahua* collected by their members, stock it and sell it when the price is high.

Charua village in the Morgadhi cluster plans to take up *pappad* making on a small scale.

Formation of new groups

Members of the existing groups are now taking the initiative to form new groups. These new groups reach maturity levels faster than the earlier groups because they are able to learn from earlier experiences and work practices.

Major learnings

Past experience shows us that minor conflicts between group members often assume large proportions and sometimes even leads to the breaking up of the group itself. One factor that can arrest this process to some extent is having formal rules and regulations to govern the functioning of the groups. We are preparing a manual for the purpose. We have prepared a draft which is currently undergoing a process of discussion and analysis within the groups.

Another requirement is a standard accounting format for all the groups. What is required is a simpler accounting system so that village accountants are less prone to making errors. We have finalised the new accounting formats and put them in place in all the groups. Calculating interest on loans, which were taken in irregular instalments and returned in the same manner was a major problem for the village level accountants. We also prepared tables giving the interest for different loan amounts for different loan periods because interest calculations were beyond the village accountants.

A third lacuna was the lack of a systematic monitoring system. We have put in place such a system, with Eklavya staff maintaining daily diaries that will be consolidated into monthly reports. The monitoring will cover the financial aspects - observing how the group has fared in terms of regularity of meetings, attendance of members, regularity in savings, timely recovery of loans, errors made in financial record keeping etc. It will also cover the social aspects - observing how individual women are progressing, as well as the group as a whole, in terms of increased self-confidence and the ability to resolve conflicts; the quality of communication at the individual and group levels; and the issues and concerns being discussed in the group meetings. This will help us work out strategies for capacity building of members who appear to be lagging.

Another learning is that the number of groups in a village has a bearing on the initiatives taken. In Patrani and Morgadhi villages, which have five groups each, the women have come together and taken important initiatives. For example, there was a case of irregularity and possible corruption in the distribution of bonus for *tendu* leaves collection. The women filed a joint complaint and petition. Resisting pressure from influential people in the village, they gave their statements to officials investigating the case.

In future, a 'village saturation approach' will be taken in efforts to form new groups in the clusters. This means we shall encourage the formation of more than one group in a village and help them to meet on a common platform so that they can assert their opinions in a collective manner.

Our understanding of the critical concerns of women - such as mother and child health, children's education - is increasing and these will become focus areas in planning new programmes. Increasing confidence and ability among our SHG members means they will be able to raise such issues at village forums like the panchayat, and also play a more active role in monitoring village institutions like the school and anganwadi. This is already happening.

Community Health

During the course of our work, we found that the health conditions of people is poor. This results in loss of livelihood and increased expenditure on medical treatment, often at the hands of quacks and unethical practitioners. We also found an unusually high infant and child mortality rate. We could not ignore this state of affairs, since our interest lay in evolving strategies for integrated development. Therefore, we are currently initiating new programmes in the health sector with the objective of:

- Increasing the awareness and understanding among rural people about health issues, the causes of disease and their treatment;
- Providing social and community support to improve the health services and health schemes in rural areas.
- Achieving some tangible improvement in health indicators, such as infant mortality, death during childbirth etc through concrete efforts, thereby gaining insights into effective strategies for better health;
- Evolving alternative health schemes managed by the local community in areas not covered adequately by government health services.

To initiate the process, we plan to study the health status of the local people to understand prevalent disease patterns and the nutritional status of the people. We shall also survey the health services provided by the government in a district to identify the gaps and shortcomings. The next step would be to activate the village health committee and involve other villagers interested in health issues. This will lay the ground for the formation of a group of local persons in each village, who can take responsibility to plan, monitor or run health related activities. We will also work with existing village level organisations, such as the SHG groups, to create better awareness and understanding of health related issues.

Health survey

Our panchayat training teams have already given us sufficient information to launch a health programme. For example, an initial study was done in 10 villages in the two clusters to understand the situation at the ground level. The final compilation and analysis of the data is complete. We also identified the problems faced by ANMs and anganwadi workers. Some initial ideas on how to improve these services were also generated.

Monitoring shift in health sector policy

This six-month study is being conducted in collaboration with the Centre for Community Health and Social Medicine, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi in Khirkiya block of Harda District, with focus on one of its blocks, namely Khirkiya. Detailed observations at the ground level were made in seven villages in three panchayats. Data at the district and block levels has been collected and data analysis and report writing is currently underway.

The study will improve our understanding of the health status of the district as well as the structure of health services, from the district to the village level. We can thus better understand the role of the three levels of panchayats - district, block and village - have in making health plans and in implementing them. We would also get a better appreciation of the impact of this decentralised organisation on the quality of health services available in the district.

Study of malnutrition

Having observed dehydration and malnutrition deaths in the field area over the past two years, we organised a small study in one village, Morgadhi, of all children under ten years of age. This study gave an idea of the level of malnutrition and the related causes. The objective was to evolve a plan for preventing such deaths, but we realised the need for greater understanding and preparedness before taking up a sustained venture of this nature.

Village Health Committee

Initial contact has been established with members of the health committee in a couple of villages, and meetings have been organised. A programme is being evolved to activate the VHCs in a more organised form in the villages in our cluster.

Health awareness among SHG members

Interaction on health related issues has been organised at cluster meetings of the SHG groups. We have initiated work on a simple curriculum for women on health issues. This is currently being tested both in terms of content as well as technique of delivery and follow-up before it is used across all groups. Subjects taken up for discussion include malnutrition, hygiene, clean water, TB etc. Another initiative is keeping stocks of common general medicines with some SHG members. But no concrete decision has been taken as yet. We are also planning to visit some organisations that run similar programmes so we can learn from their experiences.

Natural Resources Management

The aim of our NRM programme has been to replenish the natural resources of the villages (land, water and vegetation) and to create income generation activities within the village. The larger goal is to enhance the skills of motivated people so that they can plan and execute such interventions at the local level with the panchayat institutions and community involvement.

This programme involves activities like the construction of earthen dams, gully plugs, composting, farm bunding and contour trenches. Organic compost and farm bunding provide direct benefits because they are done on private land. Other interventions like the earthen dams, gully plugs and contour trenches have direct as well as indirect benefits. The direct benefits are in the form of wages that go to individuals while indirect benefits that go to the village community as a whole include groundwater recharge and water availability for cattle.

We are presently working in three villages in Harangaon cluster, Dewas district and one village in Morgadhi cluster, Harda district. In three villages, the funds for the work are built up through contributions from the villagers. This village fund, managed by a village level committee - *gram hit samiti* - also provides credit to SHG groups to take up livelihood activities.

A quantitative profile of the work done is shown below:

Type of work	Details	Kukdapani	Palasi	Ratanpur	Total
Farm bunding	Beneficiaries	7	4	45	56
	Area treated (acres)	30	15	200	245
	Employment in person days	70	30	620	720
Earthen dams	Number	0	0	1	1
	Employment in person days	0	0	0	900
Contour trenches	Number	4,044	0	0	4,044
	Area covered (acres)	35	0	0	35
	Employment in person days	1,477	0	0	1,477
Gully plugs	Number	18	0	196	214
	Employment				

	in person days	282	0	538	820
Organic compost units	No. of units	2	0	0	2
Village fund	Amount in rupees	18,010	0	12,990	31,000

NRM committees

We first identify individuals in the villages in our field area who are interested in NRM activities and appear committed to thinking and planning for the whole village. Their commitment and the quality of their work is tested when they actually take up some NRM responsibilities. Many of them have acquired skills in building earthen dams, gully plugs and field-bunding. Some selected resource persons have also taken up responsibility for maintaining the accounts of the physical work. Groups of such people form the core of our village NRM committee.

Finding good people is a difficult task but we have now identified about 15 men from the three villages, who will also act as resource persons. One shortcoming is the lack of involvement of women at the resource-person level. However, we expect to overcome this shortcoming when we build a closer interaction between the NRM programmes and the SHG groups.

Ratanpur and Kukdapani have NRM committees. Palasi, a larger village with more complex dynamics, does not have a common village group so far.

Accounts and savings

The accounts and financial details of the work being undertaken is discussed and debated in the village meetings, so that an atmosphere of transparency and trust can be built up. This atmosphere is now affecting the quality of the public works done by the panchayat and the government, since people are learning to question them.

Through the NRM activities, voluntary savings have been collected and deposited in village accounts. These savings will be used to provide credit to the contributors and SHGs and production loans to seed-bank members. A total of Rs 61,000 is presently deposited in three village bank accounts. In Ratanpur, SHG members have already begun taking loans from the village fund.

Orientation visits

We undertook two exposure visits with a team of farmers. The first trip in April 2002 was to Bagli in Dewas district, where Samaj Pragati Sahyog works. The second trip was to Jhabua in September 2002, where we visited the work area of Sampark and Gramin Vikas Trust (GVT).

At Sampark, the team was exposed to a variety of activities and ideas ranging from land treatment and construction of earthen dams to community organisation, education and health programmes and the role of women in developmental activities.

The visit to Grameen Vikas Trust had a more technology based focus. The team saw a 'common property' resource plot, spread across a series of hillocks, which had been treated with contour trenches and *stylo hamata* grass plantation. It was also protected by social fencing and a self-imposed ban on grazing. In the next GVT field area the visiting farmers saw experiments such as seed priming, which helps crops resist moisture stress, supporting plant growth and accelerating harvesting. They also saw various techniques of field-testing new crops.

The farmers found these methods interesting and a number of them plan to try them in their own fields, such as 'mother and baby trials'.

Major learnings

The strength of the programme depends on the level of people's organisation. The time taken to build trust between 'outsiders' like us and the common villagers is long. An active role of local resource persons ensures that this time is reduced and more people are involved in the programme.

There are aspects other than NRM that have a higher priority for the community. If these are addressed, the organisation becomes stronger. But it requires an integrated approach to development, with close interaction between different programme teams, to achieve this. Also

things like exposure visits are helpful in challenging existing mindsets. An awareness of new concepts helps initiate changes.

We also need to intervene more actively in agricultural practices, to ensure assured productivity and income. After all, agriculture is the basic livelihood in both our field-areas and it is presently in a very poor state because of number of factors, including the low quality of inputs and poor practices.

Challenges before us

The participation of people in planning programmes is still below desired levels. Most villagers are more comfortable in generating demand lists, which they do at panchayat meetings, rather than taking up responsibility for village development. We expect the resource persons oriented by us in NRM and other village level programmes will help change this mind-set and bring about more proactive participation of the community.

As pointed out earlier, our second point of worry is the lack of women participating at the planning and resource levels in NRM activities. Since most decision making with respect to agriculture, land and related issues lies in the hands of males, we may be able to involve women in NRM activities through alternative channels such as vegetable growing, plantation and livelihood related activities linked with SHGs.

We find that existing dynamics between caste and class groups within the villages is not very conducive for effective group processes of planning and action. These differences and the resulting conflicts are historical in nature and will take time in creasing out. Our task is to find ways of accelerating this ironing out process and bringing village communities together on a common 'development platform'.

Community Involvement in Education

This programme is currently being implemented in two of the three clusters we are working in - Ajnas in Dewas district and Morgadhi in Harda district. We plan to implement the programme in the Harangaon cluster in Khategaon block from July 2003. Villages in the Morgadhi cluster are marked by greater poverty and backwardness, in comparison to the Ajnas cluster. The condition of the village schools, health and other services is poor.

Eleven Shiksha Protsahan Kendras (SPKs) have been set up, where weak students from primary schools come for academic and social education. The number of students enrolled is 467 and the average attendance at each centre varies from 25 to 30 students. The SPKs are essentially support centres to bridge the gap between rural government schools and poor rural families, which suffer from high drop-out rates.

Like the SPKs run in Shahpur block of Betul district, these are organised and managed by local 'people's committees' and function for two to three hours every morning in the verandah of a house, or a school building. The guruji's are selected by the village SPK committee and half their monthly stipend of Rs 500 is raised by the local community, and the other half is our contribution.

The oldest SPK has been running for around two years and the latest one in Churikhil village is six month old. We have received many requests to set up more SPKs in neighbouring villages. However, we do not wish to increase this number until the curriculum, guruji training package and monitoring system are firmly in place.

Objectives of SPKs

While the short-term objective is to check the drop out rate in schools and improve the quality of learning by students, the longer-term objectives are:

- To develop skills among the community to understand and monitor the educational needs of children in primary school.
- To enable the community to play a more effective role in running local (government and non-government) schools.
- To motivate rural school teachers to change their attitude towards students from marginalised communities.

- To make the learning process more interesting by introducing activity-based methods.

On an average, the local 'people's committee' managing the SPK consists of 10 to 13 members and includes both men and women. The combined strength of SPK committees in the two clusters is 135. Of this number, 12 women and 17 men are active members, playing the role of resource persons, meeting parents to ensure the attendance of children, discussing problems faced in running the centres and trying to find solutions. When new SPKs are opened, committee members help in organising different events and mobilising the villagers. Some also help the teachers in their classrooms and occasionally manage the centre when the guruji is not present.

This is the first phase of setting up SPKs. We have gained confidence in the ability and motivation of the local community to look after these centres. But the overall quality of SPKs, although much better than most local schools, leaves much to be desired. In the next phase, we need to address the following issues:

- Quality of teaching-learning strategies and materials;
- Exploring participation by local community in deciding strategy and content of teaching;
- Evolving content and curriculum to be used;
- Training strategies and skill development of the gurujis;
- Orientation and skill development of 'parent committees'.

The overall goal is to evolve a comprehensive strategy for improving children's education with community support. We believe the quality of education cannot be high unless it is a joint endeavour involving all the key-players in the field, including the community members, government schools and teachers.

How a new SPK centre is launched

Before opening a new SPK our team conducts 3 to 4 meetings in the village. Discussions are held on issues and problems related to the quality of education, what needs to change and how to change it. These meetings aim to gauge the awareness and motivation of the community to education. When we are certain the community is willing to take up responsibility we suggest opening an SPK. The launch is celebrated as a festival - called a *balak-palak mela* - and people from every strata of the village society participate. They include children, parents, youth, elders, government and Eklavya functionaries.

A total of five such melas, two in the Morgadhi cluster and three in the Afnas cluster were organised in the second year of the review period. The average attendance at these functions varies from 100 to 150.

The function is organised to create a positive environment for education in the village and to mobilise the community. Parents, teachers and committee members get a clearer understanding of their respective roles and the overall concept of the SPK. Children are a major focus and different activities are organised for them, such as games, poetry and story sessions, singing, painting etc. Parents see how joyful the process of education can be and the respect and care with which children are treated. This helps create a different educational culture in the village.

Teacher training

With the objective of improving the quality of education in SPKs, we organised a three-day training programme in Khategaon in September 2002. A total of 30 persons, including SPK teachers, committee members and Eklavya staff, participated, with two resource persons from the Shahpur SPKs providing technical support.

The training focused on the practical aspects of language and mathematics teaching. The major outputs/gains from the training were:

- The teachers gained an understanding about teaching children in different groups, based on their respective levels.
- The community was able to see and compare the benefits of the new methodology and material used in SPKs with the traditional methodology adopted in government schools.

The community feels an increase in the sense of ownership of the SPK.

Monthly meetings of gurujis

Monthly cluster level meetings are organised for SPK *guruji*s. These meetings are held in different villages each month and are attended by all the teachers. Representatives from the village SPK committee also participate. A total of 20 meetings, 10 each in the two clusters were held during the review period.

Discussions are held on problems identified during classroom observations and problems faced by teachers. The previous month's work is reviewed and an action plan for the coming month is finalised. The *guruji*s learn to use new teaching material, new activities for children and also share their classroom experiences. The community is also familiarised with the teaching material and methodology.

Teaching methodology

We follow the state government syllabus and textbooks, but also use cards and other material developed in the Prashika programme. Children sit in groups and learning takes place through activities like songs, poems, games and *bal-sabhas*.

Presently, *guruji*s are not able to give individual attention to every child. One possible solution is using the multi-grade multi-level (MGML) methodology developed by Rishi Valley Foundation. We visited the rural education centres run by the foundation in Andhra Pradesh as well as schools run by Gramodaya Sansthan in Kanpur and Koshambi districts of Uttar Pradesh.

We then organised a five-day preparatory workshop for SPK *guruji*s. Two resource persons from Gramodaya Sansthan helped us in organising the workshop. From January 2003 onwards, we introduced the new package in four SPK centres, two in Ajnās cluster and two in Morgadhi cluster. Although three months is a short time to judge the effect of the new package, the children's interest and attendance has definitely improved.

Classroom observation

In order to identify problems affecting the functioning of SPKs and to improve the quality of education, we conduct regular classroom observations. A total of 285 classroom observations were conducted in the 11 SPKs in the Morgadhi and Ajnās clusters between April, 2002 and March 2003. The programme team conducts observations with the help of resource persons. SPK committee members and parents also help from time to time.

On an average two to four classroom visits/observations are conducted by Eklavya functionaries in each SPK every month. The observer sits through the entire class and takes notes on various aspects. The major points of focus are regularity of students; time period of teaching; sitting arrangement of students and teachers; quality of interaction between the teacher and students; methodology adopted by the teacher to teach language and mathematics and use of training material.

The findings are shared with the teachers and the community during the monthly meetings. Discussions are held and remedial action is taken. This increases the ownership of the community over the SPK.

Bal-melas

Bal-melas or children's fairs are organised regularly at the cluster level. The aim is to maintain the interaction between children and the school/SPK, create interest in studies and remove the fear in children's minds. During the period six bal-melas were organised in Morgadhi cluster - three in Kukdapani and one each in Morgadhi, Churikhal and Lafangdhana villages.

We organise *bal-sabhas* every week in both clusters. Children read and recite poetry and stories, paint and play games and puzzles. In addition to classroom teaching, students are taken to nearby farms and forests to gain familiarity with their surroundings. In centres where teachers show special interest in such activities, the children have lost their inhibitions. They speak more confidently and ask more questions. The teacher-student interaction has improved significantly.

Around 25 percent of the children studying in SPKs have been able to go out of their villages for the first time in their lives to attend the *bal-sabhas* and melas. Such activities have helped immensely in raising their interest in the SPKs. Attendance is high on Saturdays, when *bal-sabhas* are held. Also, retention of students has improved significantly after the introduction of *bal-sabha* as a regular activity.

School enrolment festival

Every July, a large number of children in the villages enrol in school. Although it is an important event for the children, it goes unnoticed in the villages and, gradually, children drop out of school for one reason or another. So we planned to organise this 'school enrolment festival' in the villages. In July 2002, a large number of children in our work area joined schools among widespread celebrations. The entire village community participated.

We have now prepared and published a manual for organising the event, distributing around 1,000 copies to almost all the schools in the villages in our clusters and in Khategaon block. Villages and schools used the manual to organise enrolment festivals all over the region in July 2002. We worked together with government personnel and villagers to organise these events. In addition, many NGOs working in Dewas district, such as Jansahas, World Vision and Bharat Gyan Vigyan Samiti, also used this manual.

Parents and SPK committee meeting

To promote community involvement in the SPKs and to strengthen their quality, regular meetings are organised with parents and SPK committee members, the frequency being one to three meetings a month. The attendance of parents is around 25 percent on average. A total of 147 meetings were organised in the two clusters during the period.

The issues discussed during these meetings relate to the day-to-day running of the centres, attendance of children, problems faced by gurus, payment to gurus and benefits accruing out of the SPK. People have begun discussing the quality of education in SPKs as well as the local schools. They are getting familiar with the new teaching methods. They even help in preparation of educational material and sometimes play the role of resource persons. Some members have started comparing the achievement levels of students in SPKs and schools.

Resource persons

As a result of regular meetings, classroom observation and trainings, a number of teachers have come forward as resource persons for the programme. They not only teach in their respective SPKs but their interaction with the community is also good. These volunteers help in organising bal-melas, balak-palak melas and in administering tests to students at various centres. As of now, three teachers each in both clusters are playing the role of resource persons.

Coordination with other organisations

We are providing academic support to some NGOs like Nirmal Sadan, Khategaon and Jansahas, Dewas, who are also running similar programmes. In fact, Jansahas has decided to open SPK centres after observing the ones running in our village clusters. The representatives from these organisations participate in regular monthly meetings of teachers. They also attended the three-day teachers training organised in Khategaon and help in preparation of test papers, evaluation and preparation of training material.

Visits by other organisations

Teams from various organisations who wish to set up SPKs, visit our centres to observe their functioning. They interact with children, parents and teachers and hold detailed discussion with the programme teams. Teams from Indian Institute of Forest Management, Bhopal; Kasturbagram, Indore; Grameen Vikas Trust, Jhabua; Muskan, Bhopal and Jan Sahas visited the SPK centres.

Exposure visits for committee members

To maintain interest and enhance understanding of the programme, a group of SPK committee members and teachers from the three SPKs in the Morgadhi cluster visited Shahpur to see the functioning of SPKs being run there. In August, a team of 40 men and women belonging to the SPK community were taken to *Kali Ghodi*, a nearby tourist attraction, where they discussed measures to increase community participation in education and strengthening SPKs. A panchayat sammelan was also held in Khategaon in February 2003, which was attended by 2 to 3 members, including women, from all the SPKs. They shared their experiences with the people from other villages and the block administration.

The involvement of people in the SPK has spurred following these trips. Committee members and parents have started showing more interest in the day-to-day functioning of the SPKs and are helping out in various events and in mobilising the community in other villages.

The need for Corpus Funds

Eklavya's corpus fund grew from Rs 2.06 crore in 2001 to Rs. 3.31 crore in 2004. We have listed the individuals and organisations who contributed to this effort during the past three years in the enclosed annexure. Among them is noted writer Arundhati Roy, the recipient of the prestigious award of the Lannan Foundation of USA, given to artists who empathise with the underprivileged sections of society and give voice to their concerns. She contributed the award money to a number of social organisations in India, Eklavya being one among them. In addition, a major contribution of Rs. 50 lakh came from Sir Dorabji Tata Trust.

We are now also eligible to receive funds under the Foreign Contributions Regulatory Act (FCRA). We sought permission to receive such funds because Prof Noam Chomsky and the editors of his book, *The Architecture of Language*, decided to donate the royalties from the sales of the book to Eklavya. We felt it was a singular honour to receive these funds from the world-renowned linguist and scholar. The book is based on a series of lectures he delivered.

However, our group has decided to use the FCRA permission with caution and discrimination and to accept funds from foreign individuals and NRIs on a case-to-case basis.

We were unable to undertake an organised drive to raise fresh funds for the corpus over the past three years because we had to first stabilise our programme and institutional funding. This was a difficult period for us because the government decided to discontinue our collaborative education programmes in Madhya Pradesh. As a result, we had to take a fresh look at our work and visualise strategies and thrust areas for the future. Our funding situation, too, was under stress because we were facing major problems accessing funds sanctioned to us by the MHRD. This led to serious cash flow problems that were seriously hampering our work. So we focused on working out partnerships with organisations like ICICI Bank, Wipro and NCSTC to support our programmes in the coming years.

Our corpus fund served as a rock to stabilise us during this critical period when we were still negotiating with the funding agencies. We were able to utilise it in two ways - to bridge the shortfalls in our programmatic expenditure as well as buffer our surplus revolving fund composed of money to be reimbursed from sanctioned grants. Firstly, we could use the income earned on the corpus through interest accruals. Secondly, we were able to negotiate loans from banks against the corpus whenever we faced a cash flow crisis.

We had been reinvesting the entire interest from the corpus fund as a result of which the principal grew by Rs 35.11 lakh up to March 2002. In 2002-03, we utilised Rs 14.73 lakh from the total interest of Rs 26.15 lakh for our programmatic expenditure and Rs 10.02 lakh for our surplus revolving fund. Hence, only Rs 1.40 lakh of the interest for the year was ploughed back into the corpus.

Similarly, in 2003-04, Rs 9.98 lakh from the interest of Rs 21.47 lakh was used for our educational programmes, Rs 8.63 lakh was added to the surplus revolving fund, and Rs. 2.87 lakh was ploughed back into the corpus.

In addition, we negotiated a loan of Rs 14.41 lakh against the corpus deposits in 2001-02, and a further Rs 8.22 lakh in 2002-03. Repayment of the loans began the year after. At the end of 2003-04 we had an outstanding loan of Rs 11.84 lakh against our corpus fund.

The corpus fund thus eminently served one of the purposes for which it was set up – to help us overcome cash flow problems in times of need.

The funding crisis did have its fallouts. Although we were able to maintain the pace of our existing programmatic activities, we were not in a position to initiate new programmes, recruit new staff or implement new staff welfare measures. These were among the other purposes the corpus fund was meant to serve. However, we hope that in the coming years it will be possible to utilise these funds more constructively and imaginatively, once our long-term funding stabilises.

A Campus at Hoshangabad

Despite the trying times we were passing through, we took up the task of constructing an office-cum-training centre in Hoshangabad in earnest during this period. Construction is scheduled to begin from October 2004 and be completed by mid 2005.

The preparatory process took over two years. It started with a prolonged search and selection process for an architect to design the campus that covered several cities of the country. We eventually decided to choose Bhopal-based architects Shri Jai Singh and Purna Kothari of Design Atelier. They finalised the building design after intense discussions with the Eklavya staff based in Hoshangabad. The civil contract for the construction work was then awarded to Shri S.N. Wig, of Sri Mata Wig Bros. Ltd, Bhopal.

The built up area of the campus is about 9,000 square feet and the estimated cost of construction is Rs 55 lakh. The building plan includes classrooms, dormitories, guest rooms, dining hall, kitchen, staff rooms, caretaker room and a library-cum-documentation centre.

The Sir Ratan Tata Trust had sanctioned Rs 25 lakh for the campus in March 2001, a sum which swelled to over Rs 30 lakh by the time the construction got underway. We are raising the remaining amount through contributions and loans.

We have made special efforts to design an energy efficient building. It has an east-west orientation with minimum openings along the east-west walls to reduce heating. There are sufficient windows to reduce the electricity load for room lighting during daytime and compact fluorescent lamps will ensure further savings in this respect. Rat-trap cavity walls have been provided for all the eastern and western walls to insulate the insides from direct heating. The kitchen is so located that it can use parabolic mirrors for day and night-time solar cooking. A solar water heating system is also being set up. Other energy saving features like solar lighting of the campus grounds and a solar powered water pump are also being considered.