



Suchana is a community group working in rural West Bengal, focusing on education and health. The education project (the Early Learning Group) is a group of children and teachers which meets twice a week to participate in an activity-based learning curriculum aiming to support and encourage those children who attend regular school, and provide an introduction to literacy to those who don't. Currently, 106 children participate.

Our health project now works in all six of the Suchana villages, delivering primary health information in a participatory format and linking villagers in with locally existing health services.

If you would like more information, please contact us at milwardbose@rediffmail.com

Events update

Suchana continues to learn and develop. We have recently drawn up plans and a proposal for a major project expansion. We are trying to build a resource centre, where we will be able to increase our pre-school work, offer after-school opportunities to primary children more frequently, and make our health work more consistent (see over).

The Early Learning Group

Arranging admission for 40 new children in April was a major achievement which increased our capacity by 60%. Most of these children are Konra adivasis. To accommodate them, we reorganised the structure of the classes and our timetable. At the same time we welcomed **Santo Konra** to our teaching staff. Santo, from the same village as many of these children, is the village's first BA student. His work at Suchana has been invaluable in communicating to the younger ones in their first language and settling them in. He also works specifically with those children who have learning difficulties, giving them individual attention and identifying their particular needs.

The ELG **library** has been running extremely well recently. The books are popular and the children are proving very responsible at bringing them back. Through this system, story books are entering the children's home lives every week, and the literacy effects are tangible in the classroom. We plan to keep our book supply growing.

In July, we undertook a spontaneous school trip to the cinema. A local film



Suchana

Newsletter Issue 4, September 2006



In April we admitted 40 new children to the ELG, bringing our numbers to 106. More than half of these new children are of pre-school age: there is a great deal of interest in pre-school education amongst parents here. We have now managed to accommodate nearly all of the 4-11 age group children in our villages.

Our 2006 Christmas Cards are ready!

Suchana's only income continues to be from the sale of our greetings cards. This year for Christmas we have six designs, printed from the ELG children's own drawings, all with some glitterwork done by hand. Each design has a different photo of ELG activities on the back. Here are some (admittedly rather small) previews. If you'd like to see better previews, please contact Angela Stoddart at angela@cforstal.surfaid.org



The cards are priced at Rs 100 for a pack of 6 containing one of each design.
Size: 5.5" x 5.5"

Would you like to help us sell cards this year, at your workplace, school, or amongst your friends? If so, please contact Angela anytime soon. Thanks!

club had organised a special showing of Satyajit Ray's children's film 'Goopi Gayen Bagha Bayen'. It was a very exciting and successful morning – not least because many children had never been to the cinema before.

All the teachers also made a trip to Kolkata, to visit, amongst other work, an experimental school there working with slum children – Shiksha Mitra. We had an excellent cross-fertilisation session there, and returned full of ideas and with some excellent activity-based Bengali text books produced by the Kolkata school. These are otherwise very hard to find!

The Health Project

In April the health project took an important new step in recruiting **Krishna Konra** as our health worker apprentice. Krishna is from one of the Suchana villages. She has been accompanying Leena and Satya on home visits, and learning how to negotiate the hospital and primary health systems with them. We hope to be able to arrange some formal training for her later in the year, and to gradually increase her responsibilities.

Having found that many school-age children were not being properly covered by home visits – because they are at school – the health team arranged to make **health visits in the local primary school** once a week. A key advantage of being an organisation located amongst the people we work with is that we have the capacity and flexibility to identify and respond to gaps in our methods in this way.

Leena also conducted the first in a series of **village health workshops** for one Suchana village. While local health workshops are often directed at women – because the subject matter often relates to mother/child health issues – we took the step of inviting men to come too, on the basis that since most health decisions ultimately lie in the hands of men, they should not be excluded from health responsibilities and information. We have also designed a **child-friendly health workshop** to take into the schools during September and October.

Last week we held our second **eye camp** in conjunction with the subdivisional hospital, to diagnose and organise referrals for a variety of eye problems from cataract to night blindness. 84 patients attended the camp.

Project Expansion Proposal

After more than two years of work, we feel we are now in an excellent position with the capacity and vision to take Suchana forward. We plan to:

- **Build and manage a multi-function community building to house the Early Learning Group, a community clinic, a Suchana office, an expanded children's library and play area, an after-school reading room, a computer training and resource centre, an expanded pre-school, and meetings for livelihoods analysis and development.**
- **Develop the pre-school section of the ELG to cater to 60 3-5 year olds in four weekly sessions.**
- **Undergo an extended process of community-based social and livelihoods analysis to identify development priorities and meaningful, appropriate solutions.**

To build and equip the centre, to arrange training for its management, and to run these extended activities until April 2008, we are seeking Rs 15,000,00. We have developed a proposal document which explains our role in the community and these plans in more detail.

If you can help us, or know anyone interested in helping us, please contact us at milwardbose@rediffmail.com. We can send you this proposal document as a preliminary step.



Making 'chapati diagrams' for development priorities with groups of women from different villages.

Organisational Development

In May we underwent our first formal **audit** (copy available on request) and held our second **AGM**. At the AGM it was decided to retain the original committee for another year, to allow time for roles and responsibilities to develop and skills to mature.

We took the opportunity at the AGM to conduct an experimental, and preliminary **participatory village analysis**, working in groups according to village and gender. This experiment was very enthusiastically received, and it represents the beginning of a process which we would very much like to take further, with the goal of articulating a shared vision of village development.

In June, Suchana completed its first year since registration.

Working with Inequality

Suchana is an unusual community group in this area because it works with several villages incorporating a range of cultural difference. As in most parts of the world, difference is not innocent: it implies inequality. Caste and gender are both sources of particularly rigid ideologies which place people in unequal relationships with each other.

Within Suchana, there is a great deal of enthusiasm for addressing and redressing inequality, as well as a genuine interest in understanding how inequality happens and figuring out what can be done.

Structural inequalities such as caste and gender are very deep-rooted in any society. Suchana has had a number of small but important successes in challenging them. Girls play football with boys at our sports sessions (and the boys welcome this). Our policy of tiffin being served by all children on a rota system breaks important caste norms. Importantly, rather than showcasing Santal children singing Santal songs, we showcase all our children singing songs from all our communities. This small step constitutes a significant breakthrough, and was wonderfully reinforced when a Hindu girl from Suchana chose to sing a Santal song at her middle-school singing competition.

Suchana: The Uttor Chandipur Community Society

Regd. Office: 'Uttor Phalguni, P.O. and Village Khanjanpur, Via Sriniketan, Birbhum, West Bengal 731 236, India

Tel +91 (0) 3463 309278; email: milwardbose@rediffmail.com