



Photo: John Slaughter



The Uttor Chandipur Community Society

Annual Report 2008 - 2009



Photo: John Slaughter



THE UTTOR CHANDIPUR COMMUNITY SOCIETY

**Supporting a rural community:
creative solutions to education and primary health**



Photo: John Slaytor

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EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

August 2008

	Name	Village	Occupation	Description
1	Bhabini Baski	Bishnupati	Student	President
2	Rahul Bose	Uttor Chandipur (Khanjanpur)	Documentary film maker	Treasurer
3	Somnath Dolui	Subhashpalli	Teacher	Secretary
4	Gopal Saha	Ballavpurdanga	Artist	Vice-President
5	Jhuma Gonrai	Kamalakantapur	Teacher	Assistant Secretary
6	Taposh Majhi	Kamalakantapur	Student	Executive Member
7	Bishwanath Ghosh	Kamalakantapur	Farmer	“
8	Putul Hembrom	Uttor Chandipur (Khanjanpur)	Farmer	“
9	Putul Tudu	Uttor Chandipur (Khanjanpur)	Farmer	“
10	Lakshmi Konra	Ringdanga (Kamalakantapur)	Farmer	“
11	Kartik Konra	Ringdanga (Kamalakantapur)	Farmer	“
12	Santana Konra	Aliabad (Kamalakantapur)	Farmer	“
13	Meera Konra	Aliabad (Kamalakantapur)	Farmer	“
14	Kishor Mahato	Hanuman Mandir (Khanjanpur)	Farmer	“
15	Joshna Khan	Kamalakantapur	Artisan	“
16	Sushanto Ghosh	Khanjanpur	Farmer	“
17	Makhan Ghosh	Khanjanpur	Farmer	“
18	Santo Kora	Ringdanga (Kamalakantapur)	Student	“
19	Santana Konra	Ringdanga (Kamalakantapur)	Seasonal daily labourer	“

Overview

Our vision

Suchana believes that equality and social justice are key to a vision which can tackle the roots of poverty. We work with the least privileged to articulate and actualise rights: to quality education, to affordable healthcare, and to livelihoods which support and sustain our cultural identities and our humanity.

Suchana understands that priorities for development must evolve from within the community. We prioritise not simply literacy but education which helps build awareness and initiative to tackle local and global issues. Parents, teachers and other community members are closely involved in running the organisation and developing its future.

What we do

The Early Learning Group (ELG)

Suchana has been working since 2004 to make education relevant, enjoyable and accessible to very marginalised children. 82% of the ELG children are 'adivasi' indigenous Santals and Koras or in the lowest caste groups. Nearly 60% have parents who cannot read. Most do not speak the language used in schools – Bengali – when they start school. Many attend government schools irregularly and have poor learning outcomes. The ELG offers creative learning opportunities in literacy, numeracy, art and craft, music, drama and sports in a programme which runs alongside the government schools. 133 children attend three times a week. Younger children are taught in their first language by paid and volunteer teachers from within the community.

The Health Project

Health and sanitation are real challenges to maintain in villages with no toilets, where people and animals live close together in small spaces, where nutrition is poor, and where preventative health services are piecemeal. Although government health services are 'free' they are difficult to access and incur many hidden costs.

Since 2005 Suchana has been working on strengthening preventative health in the community and on making health care more accessible. Suchana employs health workers who visit the villages, offer basic care and referral advice, and support people with serious health issues in negotiating the government and private health systems.

The Library

Aside from school text books, the ELG children have virtually no access to any written text, much less 'literature'. To deepen literacy as well as the joy of learning, Suchana started a small children's library in 2006. The library runs on the principle of making the books as accessible as possible, so children browse and choose books freely. Library issues and story time are timetabled into the ELG schedule so each child uses the library once a week. This much loved resource has had visible literacy effects.

Support to Government Schools

In acting as an education programme and resource centre, Suchana set out to work constructively and positively with government schools in the belief that independent initiatives and the public system can work together to improve the quality of education for this generation of children. Suchana has helped the local Kamalakantapur Primary School construct and maintain a vegetable garden as a source of improved nutrition supplementing the government Midday Meals Programme. Suchana has also supported the school to run its own extra-curricula projects by funding a weekly dance teacher at the school. A teacher from the school regularly attends Suchana's exchange-oriented teacher workshops.

Community Leadership

Suchana has an active 19-member Executive Committee which aspires to fully democratic methods and encourages pooling of ideas and sharing of responsibilities. Representation on the Committee was initially carefully constructed with a written policy on 50% representation for women and *adivasis*, and an informal

agreement that each village should have at least one Committee member. Literacy was not a criterion for nomination or election to the Committee, and several members are barely literate – but care is taken to make space for all views to be expressed and for all to contribute to discussion and decisions.

Progress towards the Education Resource Centre

Since 2007, Suchana has been working towards developing a full time Education Resource Centre (ERC) and Community Clinic on its own site next to the villages. In 2008-2009 we have made excellent progress, raising funds and constructing a substantial part of the building. Although the infrastructure is not fully complete, Suchana plans to operate out of this new location from July 2009. We will begin the new programme activities – additional pre-school education; curricula support for children in government middle schools; basic computer courses; and a full time library, supervised study centre and self initiated art centre - from September 2009.

Activities April 2008 – March 2009

Early Learning Group (ELG) programme:

Regular sessions

The ELG runs sessions three times a week: on Sunday mornings and Wednesday afternoons, younger children are taught Bengali (literacy), Maths (numeracy), Singing and Dance through a mixed medium of languages (Bangla, Santali, Kora). Older children are also taught English, Environmental Science and Creative Writing (Bengali). All children take part in art and craft activities every Sunday. Six paid teachers and five voluntary teachers conduct these sessions. 133 children attend these sessions, and are divided into six class groups based on Bengali literacy levels.

On Friday afternoons, Suchana holds a sports and games sessions in which village 'kela' as well as formal sports are taught and supervised. Sessions are conducted by one male and one female teacher, with a particular concern to encourage girls to participate.

Improving our teaching: Child centred active learning and teaching for learning difficulties

In addition to these regular sessions, the ELG continues to build skills in child centered, active learning approaches, and to deepen the programme's communication with parents. Teachers' workshops were held in April and December as part of our regular review and planning process. The April workshop also focused on deepening our work with children who are slower at acquiring literacy or who have specific learning difficulties. This followed an analysis and skills development workshop on approaches and methods for addressing learning difficulties. The timetable for the new session beginning at the end of April 08 was designed to allow more opportunity for one-to-one work with these children, and two new volunteer helpers from within the community came forward to help the regular teachers carry out this work.



Displaying children's art work

Photo: Pepe Zalba

The December workshop focused on reviewing this 'remedial' work, and on discussing methods for improving teacher attention to girls. Workshops are designed on a participatory troubleshooting format, with spaces for all teachers to identify strengths and successes as well as issues with room for improvement.

As inputs into skills development, three teachers attended an exhibition of children's art-in-education held by Shiksamitra, an NGO school working with slum children in Kolkata, and brought back several ideas for integrating art into teaching. Two teachers and a student also attended a three day toy making workshop in Santiniketan in November. They will be passing these new skills onto the ELG children in our regular art/craft sessions.

Communicating with parents

Three guardians' meetings were held, in April for new admissions, in May for discussion of the ELG programme, and in December for discussion of the annual evaluation conducted in November. Each meeting attracted nearly 100% attendance – meaning that nearly every child attending the ELG had at least one parent or other family member present. Guardians' meetings include a short opportunity for parents to take part in an art activity. This aims to keep the experience of engaged group-based learning alive and present in parent-teacher discussion. At the AGM in August, parents attending were invited to become formal members of Suchana. Although Suchana's committee has from the outset been explicitly accountable to parents of ELG children and Committee members have been elected by parents at informal AGMs, this step makes our accountability formal and clarifies who is entitled to vote for Committee representatives.

Creative writing and art

In an initiative to promote children's creative work and confidence, a book of ELG children's writings and illustrations 'Kokiler Bhasir Sur' was published and released in December. The writings and drawings had been produced over the course of six months of creative writing and art classes as part of the ELG curriculum. Each ELG family was presented with one copy. The remainder (200) will be sold gradually and locally, and this is intended to cover the costs of producing the book.

Excursions and other events

In August, classes 3 and 4 went on excursion to see the animated film 'Ratatouille', an event organised by the local film club, Bikshan. This was followed in September with a trip for classes 5 and 6 to see a production of Tagore's classic play 'Tasher Desh' by the children of Shishutirta, a local orphanage. In January, the children prepared Saraswati puja celebration at Suchana over 3 days. Saraswati puja not only celebrates education and learning, but is also the only festival that all the ELG children in their different communities have in common, so it seemed particularly appropriate to bring the children together to share the festival at Suchana. A Santal ELG teacher performed the rituals.

The Library:

Accessibility and maximum use

The library continues to issue books to all classes, and is very popular and well used. About 80 books are issued each week. The ELG teachers attended Bolpur book fair in November to buy about 50 new books, and we also received some book donations, bringing our collection to about 800. Children and visiting volunteers have been helping the 'librarian' to selotape damaged or worn books up and keep the library tidy. The library is designed to be very accessible to all children, who are encouraged to browse and choose reading material. Reading library books is a popular activity during our 'free play' half hour at the beginning of each ELG session. Children also continue to help out with issues and returns.

Function/Annual show

Promoting extra-curricula skills development

From early January we stopped regular classes and ran our 'function timetable' during the regular ELG sessions. Children were split into mixed age groups to learn a skill which would be put into performance at the show. Groups included: Kora dance, Santal dance, English dance, Bangla dance, Gujarati dance, 1 Kora Drama group; 1 English Drama group, 3 Bangla Drama groups; Gymnastics; and Chorus songs. One Friday Sports teacher joined the Sunday programme to teach gymnastics; a volunteer/parent teacher taught the Bangla and Gujarati dance groups. Other groups were run by teachers who wrote scripts, choreographed dance and organised simple, readily available dress/costumes themselves.

Working on equality

As an important input into Suchana's work promoting inter-community communication and equality, all activity groups are mixed across communities. While some children learning Kora dance, for instance, were Kora children, others were from the Santal and Hindu communities. Similarly, the Santal dance group included non-Santals, and also, as an innovation, included boys.



During the regular programme, 'assembly' offers an opportunity to learn songs in each of the four languages in use: Bangla, Santali, Kora and English. All children learn various songs in each language. For the show, four of these – one in each language – are selected and presented as Chorus performances with all 150 children. This process ensures that the children have a minimal grasp of each others' first languages, as well as turning around the common situation in which only 'minority' language speakers are required to use the 'majority' language and not the reverse.

The drama groups are also sometimes used as opportunities to probe social inequality and other issues. This year, the Kora drama group presented a short play on the benefits of forming literacy support systems for small children within the village. The English drama examined gender roles and identities in a light-hearted way; some boys played girls' parts and the central girl character in the drama imagined a situation in which the restrictions placed on her were placed on her brother instead.



Backstage at the show

Photo: Pepe Zalba

Showcasing children's art work

Suchana's art teacher did an enormous amount of work with different groups of children preparing paintings, drawings, collage, terracotta sculpture, terracotta jewellery, masks, straw-and-paper sculptures and simple children's toys made from natural materials. The children then assisted in preparing these for display at the show. Suchana ran a full day hat-making workshop so all children and teachers had a hat which constituted the main 'costumes' for the event, in preparation for which there were also 2 full-day dress rehearsals.

Building teamwork and public performance

The event was held on 22nd Feb, and was attended by about 400 parents and well wishers from the villages and 60 visitors from Santiniketan and Kolkata. The children gave excellent performances and worked extremely well in co-operation with each other and with pride in Suchana, confirming that this kind of extra-curricula project can have significant and exciting learning outcomes. A 1hr 45 min DVD was made of the performances, available on request.

Sports

Healthy bodies for healthy learning

Sports sessions on Friday afternoon have continued regularly and remain well attended despite their entirely voluntary nature. Suchana's use of the Kamalakantapur playing field once a week had been a source of some local tensions, which were successfully resolved by the Kamalakantapur primary school teacher and Suchana Committee member. Mixed sex football remains a popular activity, although mixed cricket has been harder to implement.

On 24th January Suchana held an annual sports day. Individual events are designed and chosen to test a range of skills from athletic ability to ball skills, and even maths. In order to counter the singular focus on individual achievement, Suchana mixes these individual events with team events for which the children are placed in 8 carefully balanced groups and in which the ability to co-ordinate a mixed-ability group is the recipe for success. Both aspects of these events are well appreciated by parents, and the range of abilities challenged means that 'winning' is distributed amongst a large proportion of children: this year 63 of 115 children won at least one prize. The sports day includes events for teachers, mothers, fathers, as well as elder brothers and sisters – in a reversal of authority roles,

these events are run mainly by the children.

Suchana was very pleased that one of the ELG children who attends sports sessions regularly, Urmila Kora, with the dedicated support of her primary school teacher who transported her to the various events, won several rounds of the inter-school district gymnastics competition held over the winter period.

Visitor Volunteers:

Supporting English language learning; building inter-cultural understanding

Suchana has welcomed seven visitor volunteers at different periods over the year, from UK, Spain and France. Visitor volunteers have made valuable inputs into English teaching and a variety of other tasks during their stay, and have contributed greatly to making English a living and meaningful language in ways that benefit the children's understanding of English as it is taught at school. They have also held informal conversation classes with Suchana's teachers whose communicative English has improved significantly.

Visitor volunteers have also brought the opportunity for insights on the part of the ELG children into other cultures and exposure to different kinds of people in a positive, co-operative framework. Visitor volunteers, in turn, have gained insights into and an opportunity to observe a grassroots development initiative operating in a rural setting.

As Suchana moves into running the planned extended programme, there will be increasing opportunities for visiting volunteers to teach English to older children. The most recent volunteer in March experimented with the planned model for these new classes, for which children were offered extra sessions in groups according to their government school classes. Teaching was consistent with the government English curriculum at each level. This experiment was successful for older children, and lessons have been drawn for full implementation in September 2009.

Health programme

Bringing health care closer to home

Two health workers have visited the villages regularly twice a week throughout the year: a qualified homeopath and an assistant trainee health worker. This team attends to minor illness, initiates health awareness ideas, and organises referrals to the hospital when necessary. The health workers also visit the Kamalakantapur government primary school and the anganwadi on a regular basis, for health check-ups and basic treatment. The health team arranges health camps twice or thrice a year, when doctors from the sub-divisional hospital or elsewhere are present to advise and prescribe. This is followed up with assistance in accessing the process for cataract and sterigium operations at the sub-divisional hospital.

One of the health workers is in the process of acquiring full accreditation from the Indian Government to assist in the government TB diagnosis and treatment system. As a result of this, villagers in the area have been screened for TB, and those diagnosed have been able to access consistent treatment.

A German pediatrician who is a regular visitor to the area has given two health check ups to pregnant women and babies/toddlers in April 08 and February 09. A neighbouring organisation has recently started a high-nutrition feeding programme for eight months in one of the ELG villages. Suchana also has a small health library, where villagers can access resources and information on health and nutrition.

The Education Resource Centre (ERC) Building

Infrastructure for a fuller and wider programme



Piggy Back Race

Suchana has been operating since 2006 from a borrowed building much too small to accommodate the 150 children of the ELG. As a result, the building is used essentially as storage space for teaching materials, and most classes are held outside under the shade of trees. This situation is pleasant in the months of November – March, but from April to October when the weather is in turn very hot or very wet, inadequate infrastructure has proved an impediment to learning, as well as, in some situations, to running the organisation efficiently.



The ERC construction, April 2009

Photo: John Slaytor

Having acquired a one-bigha plot of land next to the Santal village in late 2007, Suchana began work on planning and designing a new building and elaborating the new programme that would take place there. The foundations of a new resource centre building were constructed in May- June 2008, but building work was then postponed until the paperwork had been formally finalised and further funds were forthcoming.

In November 2008, Prior Permission was granted by the Government of India to receive foreign donations from the UK Trust, Friends of Suchana, which had been formally set up in early 2008. This authorisation enabled

Suchana to receive funding, as available to Friends of Suchana, to continue the construction work.

Building upwards from the foundations resumed in January. By April 2009 the ground floor of the main building and the veranda has been completed except for the roof which will be completed by the end of the month. A 140' deep tube well has been dug, and funds have been raised for an electricity connection. Finishing work on this part of the building is expected to be completed by mid May 2009, and Suchana plans to shift the ELG, health work, and administration work to this new site by the end of May. The new programme activities will begin in September.

Administration

Regularising Suchana's public status

Suchana has made excellent progress this year in making the transition from a very small, informal and somewhat ad-hoc community group to a formal organisation with a recognised public identity and ready to scale up. This has involved building realistic internal systems and skills to respond to the need for formal bureaucratic communication as well as adjusting to the responsibilities of balancing public, internal and community accountability.

- An audit was conducted for the 2007-8 financial year in May 2008. This was presented to and passed by the AGM in August. The AGM also decided to formally expand the Executive Committee from the previous 15 members to 19 to accommodate changed representation needs in Ringdanga and Khanjanpur villages. One inactive Committee member was also replaced. These 5 new Committee members were nominated and endorsed.
- The details of the new Committee, along with an annual activity report for 2007-8 and the audited accounts were submitted, as required, to the Societies' Registration Office in Suri, Birbhum, in August.
- An application for Prior Permission to receive foreign funds for the project of constructing the Education Resource Centre and Community Clinic and for running the existing ELG and Health programmes and the

planned extended activities, was submitted to the Government of India in May 2008. After due security checks by Government of India officials, the permission was granted in November 2008.

- An application for registration as a non-taxable organisation was submitted to the Income Tax Department, Bardhaman in September 2009. After due checks by income tax inspectors, Registration under 12AA of the IT Act 1961 was granted in February 2009. At the same time, an application was made for the status under which tax benefits are available to Indian tax payer donors under 80G of the IT Act 1961, which was duly granted during the same process.
- During September – November 2009, various applications were made to Sattor Panchayat Office, under whose administration Suchana's working site falls, and to the Bolpur Land Registration office to finalise permission for land use conversion to 'residential' property and for the ERC building.

Committee and sub committees:

Executive Committee meetings were held in May, August and November 2008 and March 2009 to communicate progress and decide on next steps. In the November meeting, 4 temporary sub-committees were formed to organise:

- Sports day: this committee met twice during January to support the sports teacher responsible for the event.
- The function/annual show: this committee met frequently as part of regular ELG sessions during January and February to organise the logistics of the event.
- The annual picnic: this committee met once to decide that the picnic should be cancelled this year to save funds for the ERC building.
- Building decisions and implementation: this committee has met regularly to finalised building design, troubleshoot construction issues, and review budgets and income to guide decisions about building scheduling.

Although the sub-committee format proved effective and efficient at implementing small and larger projects, there were concerns that these arrangements can lead to sidelining the Executive Committee. In future, better arrangements will be in place for communication with the whole Executive Committee and reviewing the decision-making boundaries of sub-committees.

Outlook for April 2009-March 2010

Suchana plans to:

- Complete the ground floor of the ERC building, install electricity and basic furniture and 'move in' during May 2009
- Run the existing ELG, Library, and Health programme from the new site from July 2009.
- Begin the extended programme in phased start ups beginning September 2009 and completed by December 2009.



'Tutions' classes for students of classes 6-8 in government schools



Pre-school sessions for 4-6 year olds



Basic computer classes for middle school students



Full time library, supervised reading/self-study area, and art facilities



Library membership expansion in partnership with neighbouring organisations

- Reassess potential for completing the upstairs of the ERC building and the Community Clinic building in January-February 2010
- Further develop a Visiting Volunteers programme to support middle school English tuitions and other activities
- Develop a sponsorship programme in liaison with Friends of Suchana to support individual students at the ELG whose families have extreme financial difficulties and for people with specific health issues