



Uttor Chandipur Community Society
**Supporting a rural community:
creative solutions to education and health**
Newsletter Issue 21, March 2017



Suchana is a community organisation working since 2004 in rural West Bengal, focusing on education and health for adivasi and other marginalised children. Suchana runs 8 programmes at the Education Resource Centre (ERC) and across 29 villages:
• **The Pre-School • The Early Learning Group • The ITE Tuitions Programme • Computer Courses • The Library and Mobile Library • The Health Project • Activity Groups' • Supporting Adivasi Identity**

The ERC is open 7 days a week, and aims to support literacy and make learning relevant, enjoyable and accessible. Currently, about 520 children participate, facilitated by paid and volunteer teachers from within the community. Our Mobile Library works in 24 villages taking library books and basic health and hygiene care to a further 1000 children. If you would like more information, please contact us.
suchana.india@gmail.com

EVENTS UPDATE

So many events to report, so little space! Our regular programmes have rolled out happily. Each week, Suchana now teaches over 400 classes; carries out mobile library sessions in 26 villages; and visits 11 villages with primary health outreach.

Special events have also been many and varied: since the last newsletter (rather longer ago than intended), Suchana has held:

- Two annual sports days with fun for all age groups
- Two multilingual annual shows – with everything from dance, drama and songs to magic, circus skills and gymnastics.
- An 'ITE' Fair – showcasing the Integrated Technology in Education project to local schools
- A Science Fair – with hands-on interactive science activities for the young and old.
- A Children's Mela – with games for all the family, run by children.
- Four educational trips for students
- Published three more first language books written and produced by teachers and students:
 - 'Rimbil' a book of children's rhymes in Kora
 - 'Atutulariya Khilyot' – a book of traditional village games in Santali
 - 'Kutlu Kha Kha' – a book of children's rhymes in Santali

New Student Community Projects on youtube:

During the winter holidays, groups of students use computers and cameras to make 'community projects' on a subject of interest in their own villages, and using their first languages. Here is a selection of this year's projects (with thanks to Ilana-May Pattinson and Kamala Murmu for subtitling).

The Missing Traditions of Kutipara:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kYh99beYxzI>

Gender Equality in Uttor Chandipur:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OI9houqepZc>

Bandhlodanga Village:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dog9P7iymCM>

A New Road in Mohisdal:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m5Q6YD7B508&t=5s>

Vehicles and Their Uses:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uARBasrRx8Q>

APPEAL – HELP US KEEP THE MULTILINGUAL EARLY LEARNING GROUP

The Early Learning Group was Suchana's first initiative – giving after school extra curricular opportunities as well as core learning support to an average of 120 children every year for the last 14 years. Last year, a one-year grant from the Tata Trusts allowed us to extend this programme to two more village locations, and a further 130 children.

The new centres are vibrant and exciting – there is such a huge demand for child-friendly, hands-on learning. And we have clearly shown with our initial ELG that the approach really works to raise learning levels (see page 3).

But due to their changing policy on its focus states, the Trust will not extend this grant. West Bengal has a smaller proportion of adivasi children than the states that they have prioritised. But adivasi children in West Bengal remain as disadvantaged as they are in other states. Although they are only 6% of the population, there are 5.3 million adivasis in West Bengal; over a million of these are in the 5-14 age group. These school age children need Suchana to stay.

We need to raise £5000 to be sure of keeping these two external centres open for another year – that's £38 per child per year, or approximately 39p per session per child.

If you can help with any amount, however large or small, by standing order or by donation – we would be immensely grateful.

- Through JustGiving on Suchana's website – www.suchana-community.org
- By bank transfer – details here <http://suchana-community.org/can-you-help/donate/>

Spotlight on: The Multilingual Early Learning Group

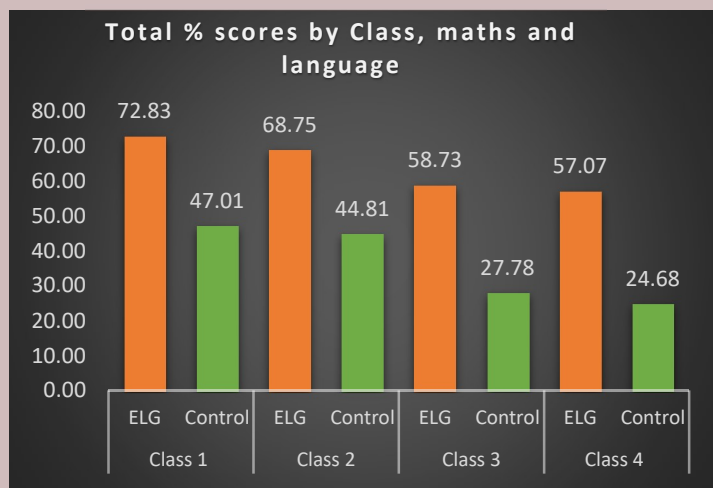
The Early Learning Group (ELG) was Suchana's first programme, starting in 2004 with 15 children. Over the years, the programme has developed a range of methods promoting hands-on, active learning. It has also become more clearly focused on first language support in early years learning, and on a multilingual environment throughout – because for 80% of the children attending, Bengali – the language used in schools – is not their first language.

For more than 10 years, it has worked with 100-150 children in the Suchana Resource Centre building, and watched as the oldest of those children graduated into Suchana's tuitions programme as they started secondary school, many of them then completing secondary school and entering college. It now includes a morning and afternoon pre-school.

This year has seen the first major outreach by this programme. Two external learning centres now hold ELG sessions twice a week for an additional 100 children. With the permission of village leaders, these sessions are taught in available village buildings using the original ELG as the model on which to build. These new learning centres are in Uttor Sealah and Mohisdal villages.

Learning levels assessment

Early in 2016, Suchana undertook a learning levels assessment among a randomly sampled selection of 32 ELG students, and compared these with results from a 'control' group of 30 children with similar social profiles, and enrolled in government schools, but not attending any of Suchana's programmes. The test was based on Indian age-specific national standards as defined by the National Council of Educational Research and Training, and was designed by a education organisation in Kolkata, which also trained Suchana's teachers to carry out the assessment. The test is not based on text book knowledge, and therefore cannot be (rote) learned; neither was it based on any specific Suchana curriculum. To reflect Suchana's attention to first language difficulties, however, all tests were conducted with a teacher present who knew the child's first language and could explain the questions in first language where necessary.



Results were quite striking. As the table shows, children attending the ELG have considerably higher learning levels than children in the other group in all class/age groups from 1 to 4. Total scores for ELG children are between 25% and 33% better than the 'control' group in all classes. The difference between the scores of ELG and 'control' children is greater in classes 3 and 4 than in 1 and 2, suggesting that the learning advantage of the ELG increases the longer children stay in the programme, or in other words, that strong foundations in early years provide an 'exponential' type advantage because full benefit can be taken in this position from learning opportunities later.



Learning through play in the pre-school

Encouraged by these results, Suchana is now chalking out a plan to bring the ELG model to more adivasi (indigenous) children through the outreach sites already established by the mobile library, which now reaches 25 villages.

The ELG promotes a philosophy of holistic education, and therefore continues, alongside supplementary learning activities, to emphasise sports, music and art and to provide a basic primary health care service.



Friday sports session

Spotlight on: Partnerships with government schools

Suchana has made excellent progress this year in forging productive partnerships with government schools. Most local schools suffer from significant resource constraints, and work in difficult conditions with multiple language groups and very large classes. Since the Right to Education began to be implemented 3 years ago, children progress through the years without being 'retained' for poor performance. But many have very low learning levels as a result of poor conditions, and sometimes as a result of learning difficulties. Most teachers have no training in remediation strategies, or in responding to different learning styles with different types of activities, or addressing special needs. And even if they did, individualising learning in very large classes of 60+ is challenging even for the most highly skilled teachers.

This year, Suchana began working with three schools – one upper primary school, and two high schools – through three different interventions: the Mobile Library; the Integrated Technology in Education (ITE) project; and through remedial teaching methods developed in the Early Learning Group.

Bandnomogram High School – Mobile Library

Since April 2016 Suchana has added a weekly visit to our nearest neighbouring high school to its village visit routine. One class group chooses a book to borrow during each visit, so each of classes 5 to 8 get to see the library once a month. Each class includes about 60 children, so we see a high turnover of books through this activity.

It is very heartening to see the school welcome this initiative – a sign of real change that schools are looking for non-rote, non-textbook activities to add to their students' timetables. We are particularly encouraged that since Suchana started these visits, the school has also made its own small library which children are able to access more regularly. But Suchana's visits continue – making sure that every child has an opportunity to read a book beyond their text books.

Remedial Classes

As a result of the library visits, the school also asked Suchana to begin one to one remedial classes with children who were unable to follow ordinary lessons because of poor literacy skills. Suchana held special planning sessions to adapt for a slightly older age group the remedial courses we have been running for some time with younger children. Children put forward for special sessions were also carefully assessed at the start so that Suchana can be properly accountable to the school regarding students' progression. The first round of these 12 session courses is due to finish next month.



Suchana's 1-to-1 remedial programme at the local High School



Mobile Library members at Bandnomogram High School

Sealah Junior High School, Paruldanga Girls', Kapastipuri and Laldha High Schools and Behrgram School Hostel - ITE classes

As part of the Tata Trust's Integrated approach to Technology in Education (ITE) project, Suchana began early in 2016 to bring the approach to local schools. A group of teachers visit each school twice a week with 15 laptops and facilitate children to create projects based on their curriculum using computers, cameras and the internet. This way they get to learn how the technology works as well as having a taste of a new way of learning the same content that is normally rote learned from text books.



Girls in the ITE programme at Paruldanga

Teachers in the schools – usually with no or very basic computer skills – also become familiar with the technology and the approach and are supported to run the classes themselves. This programme now reaches 5 schools and about 300 students in classes 4-8.

Digital progress: ITE, ebooks and fantastic library software

New technologies – such as the internet – often seem to offer universal solutions but then fail to do so, instead reproducing existing inequality by being inaccessible and sometimes irrelevant to low status groups. Suchana has grappled with this over the last few years: how to harness the advantages of technology, making it not only accessible but also useful to poor, rural children.

Earlier initiatives

The first initiative was introducing simple hands-on computer skills courses for children and adults: these remain popular, especially among young people as they finish school, and among local school teachers.

These courses then evolved into the Integrated approach to Technology in Education (ITE) project, a brainchild of the Tata Trusts, which takes technology into classrooms and uses it to facilitate new types of learning processes, with a much more student-centred project-driven approach.

Mobile Library Software

This year saw the piloting and introduction of dedicated software for managing the ever-growing mobile libraries: using a computerised system for issues and returns means we are better able to keep track of books and identify and follow up members who have not been active for a while. Many thanks to Akash Milward-Bose for this bespoke software, developed as his A level coursework – and then for putting in the time to 'action' it in the real world.



Library management software in use in the villages

Ramping up production of first language learning materials: our story of StoryWeaver

In partnership with leading Indian NGO, Pratham Books, this year Suchana's Kora and Santali teachers have been using the StoryWeaver platform to translate a large number of simple children's stories into the first languages of Suchana's children. The formula is simple: the book layout and illustrations can be used by anyone (no copyright); our task is just to translate the text. This has dramatically increased the speed at which we are able to produce new material – this year, teachers translated more than 60 books. These are shown to children using computers in mobile library sessions. We have also started distributing them on mobile phones wherever these are available in the villages. It is fantastic to be able to produce these so cheaply thanks to the technology.



Stories in Santali via the StoryWeaver platform

Still, there is no denying that print books get into the hands of rural children more easily – that's why Suchana has also scraped together funds to print 20 of these stories for use in the libraries and local schools.

THANKS TO ALL THOSE WHO HAVE HELPED US

Thank you to everyone who helped with and came along to Suchana's Christmas Fair 2015 and the Autumn Fair 2016 contributing to the magnificent final totals of almost £1000 in 2015 and the Autumn Fair 2016 which also raised nearly £1000. Many thanks for all the many donations so generously given – often Gift Aided, including anonymous ones, and regular Standing Orders which are so valuable to Suchana. Thanks also to all those who attended the Touch of Complementary Therapies Day, including of course the therapists, which brought in £256. Efforts of people who have helped at stalls held throughout the year and the children of Sheldwich Primary School who raised funds again this year - are greatly appreciated, as are those of Ellie Calverly Young, Georgina Munday and Emily Stewart, students at Queen Elizabeth's Grammar School, who held bake sales for Suchana as part of their GCSE Citizenship courses. Thanks to Morrisons Supermarket at Faversham for allowing Friends of Suchana to hold a collection at the store. Friends of Suchana are grateful also to two people who gave payment received for their work to Suchana: Ruth Jones (making hats) and Nina Dhiman (teaching yoga). Elizabeth Thomas who, sadly, died recently was often generous to Suchana and held both a Lent Lunch and a very successful coffee morning in aid of Suchana earlier in 2016. Many thanks, as always, to the Mere Suchana support group for their commitment to continuing fund-raising throughout the year, and the people of Mere for their generous response. For donations in India, sincere thanks to Soumen and Manjusri Basu, Jhila Saha, Tom Kane, Indra Kumar Ghosh, Stever Roney, Dany Khan and Moutushi Mitra. Thanks also to Slater Harrison and The Physics Factory for a grant for this year's Science Fair, Maura Hurley, Mustard Seeds and helpers at Calcutta International School for the clothing drive, Gautam Basu and Soumya Chakravarti for their science guidance, Malini Basu and Izzy Binnie-Dawson for their research and communications work, and of course to Aid India and Tata Trusts for their grant funding.

Suchana: The Uttar Chandipur Community Society

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

Tel: +91 (0) 9474765997;

Email: suchana.india@gmail.com • Web: www.suchana-community.org • fb: "suchana community"