

Annual Report 2014-15

By

Change Initiatives

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Introduction

Change Initiatives, an NGO based in West Bengal, India, does development research and works for sustainable development with communication tools such as ICTs, videos and print.

The aim is to promote sustainable livelihoods by facilitating communication, raising awareness, promoting knowledge and enhancing access to information in communities.

Activities are based on the principles of ethnographic action research, which allows us to reflect on the work during a project.

Development research is for better insights to social, economic and environment problems. Emphasis of research is on evidence-based policy recommendations, the aim being detecting good practices and formalizing experiences.

Kisholoy

April 2014 marked an important chapter for Kisholoy. We took in our fold 16 children of 6-8 years of age from the month. We have got involved in their complete personal development from studies, to extra-curricular activities and health monitoring, backed by the engagement of their mothers and data monitoring. The parents of the children — living in Madandanga and Kantabele villages in West Bengal's Nadia district — are poor and cannot give enough time to nurture them, which stunts their growth. From the very beginning, the children, therefore, will be exposed to the principles of entertainment education and joyful learning; they will participate in numerous activities such as drawing, dance, drama playing with toys and reading story books. The emphasis is both on mental enrichment and physical growth, for which an active mother-child health development programme has been envisaged.



April 2014 also marks half-a-decade of Kisholoy, Change Initiatives' child development programme. Since its inception in 2009, about 300 boys and girls have been involved with the project. Students have passed Class X and Class XII, gone on to study in colleges— very significant achievements when you consider their poverty and the fact that that are all first-time learners in their family.



Our latest programme for the young wards is a huge leap forward as it seeks to redress an important gap. Our earlier students have been with us from the age of 10 onwards (from class V). However by that age, normally, the poverty in their homes tends to leave a permanent impact on their minds, characterized by restlessness and attention-deficit, among other indicators. It was necessary to engage with the children from a much younger age.

The children face numerous other hurdles depriving them of proper education. Their secondary school is 10 kilometres from their villages, a distance too long and travel expenses high to go there and study. Their parents cannot afford books and are themselves often not educated enough to provide after-school learning. Besides, the children often have to do household work, and they cannot go to school.

Not surprisingly, the dropout rate and absenteeism in Kantabele and Madandanga are very high. An ethnographic research study by Change Initiatives and Bhubaneswar's KIIT School of Rural Management shows the number of dropouts reaching its peak in Class VIII, which means many students do not sit for their class X exams.

Kisholoy started in a small manner with a programme of book distribution. We identified 22 needy students to give books and writing materials. We then selected 8 from the 22, who were in class IX, and decided to give tuitions to them so that they can do well in their Class X public exam.

From this small beginning, we have extended our support to about 300 boys and girls. We provide remedial classes to students from Class V to Class VII and tuitions to Class VIII to Class XII students. For each class, we have an arts and a science teacher. We also involve them in mental enrichment activities such as drawing and dance classes.

In a significant innovation, some of our college-going wards are taking remedial classes from Class V to Class VII.



Our next goal is to set up a community multi-media centre for the women and children. The centre will have a library along with computers which will show multi-media content. The library will have story

books, magazines and books of general information. The human development centre will be a "learning-cum-entertainment" centre where the children will learn computers, play computer games, surf the internet, read story books, watch educational CDs, study during after-school hours and indulge in other recreational and learning activities. Women will come to the centre to read books and participate in awareness raising sessions. The centre will also be a meeting place for the women.

Like we started Kisholoy, work on the human development centre has started. The boys and girls have set up a circulating library. Every month the "librarian" among them brings books from a We For Hope-supported library in Ranaghat, which is about 20km from their village. The books are shared among the boys and girls, with the "librarian" responsible for their condition. By the end of the month, all the books have been read and they are returned to Ranaghat; and new books taken again. The programme has been so successful that mothers, too, are reading the books.

In the meantime, we have mapped all the students of the two villages. A database with photos has been created of 500 boys and girls that include all primary school students, Anganwadi students plus the Kisholoy students.

At our Niharika Primary School in Ranaghat, Nadia district, the library has got more books. Teacher training programmes have been taken up throughout the year, including training in Dutch pedagogical methods by the volunteers of Radboud University, Netherlands. The students were given leadership training, training in spoken English, health practices such as dental hygiene.

We strengthened our human development centre in Canning, South 24-Parganas. Remedial classes are being given to 50 students, whose parents are involved in aquaculture and in collecting honey from the jungles of Sundarbans. Some of their family-members have been eaten by tigers. We are planning to give residential teaching to the students, for which we are being actively supported by the state forest officer. The students are also given health check-ups by doctors of the local community hospital.

Funded by We For Hope, US, Community Foundation, US, & local funding. Project volunteers: Students of Radboud University, the Netherlands. Students of Calcutta University, Kalyani University.



Nabanna

Our gender development project is called *Nabanna*. Our mission is to expand the mental horizons of women through interventions in the areas of livelihoods, health, environment and gender rights. We seek to influence attitudes and change behaviour through mentoring, focused information dissemination and link-ups with service providers.

We have incubated a women's ICT enterprise project at Bishnupur Gram Panchayat called Digital Graphics in Bengal's South 24 Parganas. We have trained 1,000 women in computer basics in a Unesco project and worked and another 200 women on setting up micro-enterprises.

We have also worked with 140 self-help groups (SHGs) --- more than 1,000 women --- in Saguna gram panchayat, especially at Kantabele, Madandanga villages. We were involved in maintaining their accounts and organize learning sessions on different government schemes, health and gender issues.

We have worked with district resource persons, cluster representatives and SHG members of 3 districts - 24 Parganas North, 24 Parganas South and Howrah. We offered training in computer literacy and on using ICT tools for awareness programmes.

Digital Graphics with our active mentoring has set up a skill school under Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojana. It continues to increase its revenues from computer training and additional services.



Basudha



Change Initiatives promotes *sustainable environment practices* through activities such campaigns against plastic bags, noise pollution and air pollution.

As in every year, we took a lead role in the activities of environment platform *Sabuj Mancha*, comprising as many as 40 NGOs and green activists. We set up a helpline and were part of the vigilance squads during Dipavali to check sound pollution.

We initiated an intensive campaign against under 40-micron plastic bags in all the markets of Bidhannagar Municipality, with the support of the Bidhannagar Municipal Corporation. We trained SHGs in paper-bag making as alternative to plastic bags which we have sold to various shops.

