

PROGRESS REPORT

ENTER PROJECT TITLE: SIKSHAI HATIYAR

ENTER DISTRICT, STATE, COUNTRY: SOUTH 24 PARGANAS, WEST BENGAL, INDIA

Project duration: - 3 years (April 2009 – March 2012)

<p><i>Organisation name:</i> Nishtha</p>	<p><i>Reporting Period:</i> April 2011 – March 2012</p>
<p><i>Report prepared by:</i> Mina Das, Secretary</p>	<p><i>Title:</i> Shikhai Hatiar</p>

PROGRESS TOWARDS OVERALL AIM OF THE PROJECT

- Two hundred and fifty girls were supported with admission fees, tuition fees, learning materials, uniforms etc and have been retained in the schools.
- A few girls have made commendable performances in the Annual Examinations of their respective classes. Monalisa Gharani ranked 10th in her Annual Examination of Class VI, Salma Khatoon ranked 3rd in her annual Examinations of Class V. Beauty Gayen ranked 4th in her Annual Examination of Class V and Priyanka Mondal ranked 7th in her annual examination of Class VII.
- Against the 250 girls only two girls had dropped out during the reporting period and unfortunately both the girls had died.
- Two girls were married away during the reporting period out of the 250 girls supported. The families of five more girls were negotiating their marriages, but those were foiled by the intervention of Nishtha social workers, mothers' groups and adolescent groups.
- During the year, nearly 90% girls have gathered a fair knowledge on general health and hygiene and reproductive health.

MAJOR ACHEIEVEMENTS

- After three years of the project the rate of retention of girls in schools has gone up to 100% except for two cases of deaths.
- Out of 250, only 2 girls have been married early during the reporting period. Thus, in other words, the project protected the remaining girls from getting victims of early marriage.

- The women's groups and the Adolescent girls' groups are much aware and active on education and protection of girl children. These groups are now quite active and playing a significant role in this regard.
- Nearly 95% of the elderly girls have a general knowledge on reproductive health. Nearly 50% of them are practicing the knowledge particularly in respect of hygiene.
- The second half of the year had been very significant working season. It was significant in terms of the annual examinations which take place and the new session begins during the period November to February. Hence, during the second half of the reporting period, the Project had to keep a close eye on the performance of the children, their regular attendance on the verge of examination, pay sincere and full thrust on tuition classes and finally after declaration of the results, ensure admission of the students in the next class. The project has observed that the enthusiasm of the girls, their parents, involvement of the mothers' and girls' groups have been very significant and fruitful.
- The project has noticed that there has been a significant improvement in the retention of the girls in their schools and the average attendance has gone up significant. The mothers are now open and proactive. They are now organized and courageous to face and protest against any type of atrocities and discrimination against their daughters. The mothers' groups are continuing their efforts to fight against the factors that are contributing to dropouts or preventing the girls from going to schools. It is noticeably evident that there has been a generation of inspiration for the girl education and their rights.
- Nearly 70% of the girls have a general knowledge on reproductive health. Nearly 50% of them are practicing the knowledge particularly in respect of hygiene. They are now using use-and-throw napkins and have been successful to a great extent in maintaining hygiene during menstruation period. Many of them are now using homemade incinerators. It is perhaps for the first time in West Bengal that the girls and their mothers have realised the usefulness of homemade incinerators. Mothers of a few adolescent girls have felt the need, few of their mothers have felt the need and as a result, homemade incinerators are being used.
- One of the major and complicated hindrances of the project had been a cultural barrier. The social practice is to prevent the girls to keep them away from the light of development in the name of social culture. The mothers' groups have now understood the realities and evils of these cultural barriers and they are now slowly trying to make change in the practices. They are now asking the girls to be regular in schools and avoid absenteeism from schools in the names of cultural and social rituals.
- The mothers are now arranging their household work in such a way so that their daughters get more time for their studies. They are also helping their daughters to attend their trainings. As a result of this the attendance of the girls in schools, tuition classes and trainings has increased.
- There have been number cases when a girl has absented from school and the same has come to the notice of other mothers when they brought the case into the notice of her parents and discussed.
- Parents of three girls were reluctant to readmit their daughters in the school though they were promoted to the next class. The girls groups had insisted those parents to put their daughters in the school. The girls' groups with the help of the women's groups and local leaders had been successful to admit those girls in to school.
- The women's groups had stopped cases of child marriages. The information of these cases were collected by the girls and communicated to the members of the mother's groups. Hence, these girls too have a hand to it.

- They had advocated with the Local administration to discuss and explain about their problems and difficulties.

PROGRESS TOWARDS OUTCOMES

PROGRAMME	ACTIVITIES	INDICATORS	INTENDED OUTCOME
Sikshai Hatiyar (to ensure retention, stop early marriage and promote knowledge & practice of reproductive health & hygiene)	<p>The 250 girls provided with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Admission fees to 249 ▪ Book grant to 249. ▪ Education materials. ▪ School uniform. ▪ Tuition fees. <p>▪ Meetings with mothers were conducted to refresh their orientation child's right on necessities of children's education, life cycle, marriage and family, involve them in monitoring the performance of their girl child in schools, make them time to study at home, stop early marriage, and sensitise the other members of the families on girls' education and create an education friendly environment, etc.</p> <p>▪ Five training programmes were organized during the reporting period to build capacity of the Core Team members of the mother's groups. Similarly, 17 trainings were organized for the core team member of the adolescent girls' groups. The trainings for the adolescent girls included development of Leadership and Child Rights especially for Girl Child, general health, reproductive health, nutrition, water borne diseases, etc. The mother's trainings included life cycle, marriage and family, law, changes in the period of adolescence. The average attendance on core team training of mothers was 22 and same in the adolescent girls' group was 47.</p> <p>▪ Meetings with Mothers' groups were conducted on a regular basis. During the</p>	<p>A receiving register is maintained where the girls receiving the support signs. Money receipts of the admission fees are enclosed with the 'Tutor's fees Sheet'.</p> <p>Interaction with mothers and/or the girls.</p> <p>A photo identity card is issued to each student. The receipt is signed by them on the overleaf of the card.</p> <p>A sheet with signature of girls receiving this support has been maintained.</p> <p>A meeting resolution register is maintained.</p> <p>Interaction with mothers.</p> <p>A training register has been maintained.</p> <p>Interaction with the mothers and girls.</p> <p>Meeting register</p> <p>Meeting register.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The girls (vulnerable of drop out) will continue their education in formal schools. • Out of 250, only 2 were married early, and hence remaining 248 girls were protected from early marriage. Stopping early marriage in such a society will continue to be a challenging work. • 100 % girls (250 girls) have been made aware regarding their rights to education, right to protection, etc. and on reproductive health and hygiene.

	<p>reporting period 27 meetings were conducted in which various subjects were discussed in addition to their normal and day to day activities. Besides, bad effect of Child marriage, basic knowledge on child rights, Needs of girls' education, reproductive health, nutrition, etc. Average attendance of the mothers in these meetings was 19.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Meetings with adolescent girls' groups were organized regularly. During the reporting period 25 meetings were conducted in which various subjects were discussed. The subjects covered in the meetings were mainly right to protection, general health, Nutrition, right to education. Average attendance of the girls in these meetings was 22. ▪ 22 group leaders conduct recapitulation programmes on different subjects with their fellow members. ▪ The groups, when face with certain problems, sit with the core team members and discuss the problems there for sorting out those. They also discuss issues related to formal schools, tuition classes, etc. ▪ A pictorial story was developed by Nishtha which has printed and since been used as a training material. ▪ These core team members had organized four meetings in their respective groups in which their learnings in the training were discussed and shared. ▪ The mothers' groups had conducted a special meeting among themselves on the eve of the Annual Examinations of their children. In this meeting they had asked their members to keep a close eye on their daughters' education and studies and also observe the other girls of their villages so that they get full support and help for their Annual Examinations. ▪ The Core team have discussed among themselves and decided that they should now act to sensitize their fellow villagers on child rights and start sensitization of their family members to avail their rights. ▪ Under the leadership of the Core Group, the adolescent girls have taken up a number of programmes; e.g. they undertook 10 wall writing, poster in 120 walls (used from old newspapers and homemade colours). They made group home visits in five villages on atrocities against girl children; conducted 6 street theatres and conducted four rallies in four villages on Right to Education and 	<p>Site visit, photographs, interaction with mothers and community.</p> <p>Meeting register.</p> <p>Site visit, photographs, interaction with girls and community.</p> <p>Meeting register.</p> <p>Minutes of the meeting. Interaction with Group members, Core group members and community. Site visit and photos.</p> <p>The material</p> <p>Discussion with core team members.</p> <p>Discussion with the mothers' groups.</p> <p>Staff diary, register, MIS.</p>	
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	<p>Right to Protection.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The mothers groups had organized six meetings in their groups to disseminate and share knowledge and experience. ▪ Two special meetings were organized by the Core Team with 87 and 63 mothers on Child Marriage and child right respectively. ▪ The mothers (members of the women’s groups) are organizing small sessions and / or informal discussions with their fellow village women. In these sessions they discuss child rights, right to protection, gender based discrimination, etc. Thus this is a tool of campaign against violence against women. During the reporting period these mothers have arranged 27 informal discussions with groups. ▪ Every month one visit has been paid to the house of the 250 supported girls and discussions with their parents held. Depending upon the situation visit were also more in some cases. ▪ Fifteen tuition classes were visited to monitoring the teaching and students’ performance and interest and watch if they are facing any problem or difficulties. ▪ The project had guaranteed tuition support to the girls by the private tutors of their own choice. Their performance are monitored and continuously followed up both in the schools, at the tuition centres and through home visits, and had provided tuition fees, admissions fees, uniform and book supports to 249 students. ▪ The project had conducted as many ten visit to different schools, through these visits attendance, performance were monitored, to see their preparation for their Annual Examination. ▪ 157 informal small sessions were conducted with these girl students and their parents so that they become gender sensitive. ▪ Among all activities, the project had conducted regular home visits as usual, and in those home visits special attention were given to make the parents understand the necessities and usefulness of education so that they extends full support and frees them from household and other works to enable them to study. This would also ensure increased attendance in school, increased attendance in tuition classes and improve performance. 	<p>Staff diary</p> <p>Interaction with tutors.</p> <p>Relevant documents and accounts and discussion with the students.</p> <p>Staff diary, interaction with teachers.</p> <p>Staff diary and interaction with the community</p> <p>Staff diary and interaction with the community</p>	
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Six visits to the schools were made to monitor the performance of the students. Additionally at one point of time a few students were absenting from the school. So it was necessary to discuss the matter with the school authorities of the students and sort out the problem. ▪ The mothers are organizing campaign against violence against women and gender discrimination. They have arranged 41 informal small group sessions on gender discrimination 17 road side discussions on violence against women and girls and gender discrimination. The mothers have utilized these discussions as platform for generation of awareness on schooling and education of their children. On a case of domestic violence against a woman, they had organized a meeting with the influential persons of the community on protection of girls against violence. On an incidence of marriage of a child, they raised a protest in a village. They had thoroughly discussed with the mothers and asked them to properly follow up the studies and progress of their daughters. The mothers regularly encourage their daughter to sit and study at home. They visited tuition classes to see their daughters' progress. ▪ These mothers have grouped themselves in smaller groups according to the trades they are engaged in. This groups being organized based on common interest, their working has helped them a lot. They save some money as they purchase the raw materials in bulk; and they do marketing jointly. This also saves time for them as everybody does not have to get involved in all steps. All these are helping them to enjoy for more production. 	<p>Children's continuation of school, daily diary, MIS</p> <p>Interaction with Group members, Core group members and community, Attendance sheet.</p> <p>Discussion with the mothers, core group members and community.</p>	
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CHANGES TO PLANNED ACTIVITIES

- The West Bengal State Assembly election held in May 2011 had affected the programme to some extent. There has been political turmoil this year because after 34 years the ruling party had changed in West Bengal. This time preparatory work for election had affected the work from April 2011 to June 2011. Although the affect was not quite significant, the turbulence did disturb our work to some extent. The situation at the villages in particular were very tensed and people confined themselves within their personal and daily life because of the village level political turmoil raised up as the after effect of the outcome of the results of the assembly election.
- The project had made a little change in the activities too with prior permission of The Karuna Trust. Instead of conducting the meetings of the tutors, the project had conducted meetings with the group members and leaders of the Adolescent girls' groups. On receiving subsequent approval from The Karuna Trust, the budget has been shifted to Core Team Training (Girls).

- On becoming the academic and financial years different from each other, the project has faced problems. The academic year was shifted to January 2011 to December 2011, whereas the financial year is from April 2011 to March 2012. Hence accounting for the January etc. bill has put the project in quite trouble. The matter has been settled with great difficulties, and from next year onwards the matter is streamlined.

CHALLENGES

- The project is still facing challenge from the minority communities while working on girls' education and against child marriage. We are sincerely trying to sensitize the community, but there is still a long way to go. The leaders of the community are being approached and the process of sensitization is on. Although the leaders agree to the fact that there is a need of girl child's education and stopping child marriage, his efforts of motivating the community is yet to yield result. It has been observed that the Caste Hindu families residing nearby to these minority families are belonging mostly to Scheduled Caste category. The incidence of child marriage, dropouts among these families is also extremely high. As a result it has been equally challenging to Nishtha to work with these categories of population.
- Gender discrimination is a deep rooted social problem. It is an extremely difficult task and challenging job to bring about and change in the situation and uproot this social evil. In order to achieve this, a sincerely and collective effort from all levels of the society is required. We all have to work for years together sincerely and collectively in order to achieve a tangible target and bring about a significant change.
- Gender discrimination is an age old tradition which is being practiced by the male dominated societies for hundreds and thousands of years. Even at the 21st century under the parliamentary democracy, no political leaders take any initiative to break the tradition for their vested interest and this is a tremendous challenging work.
- The girls and women are being knowingly and deliberately deprived of their rights and are being oppressed in the name of religion, culture and customs. Hence, this is so challenging and difficult that project had faced problems and difficulties in every step of project implementation.
- To demonstrate a change and development in the lives of the girls, it is necessary to help the girls to complete their school, then college and establish them in life. On seeing the achievements of these girls the community and the primitive minded mothers can be sensitized.
- The initiation of the awareness programme on reproductive health had faced barriers from the mothers and fathers in particular. In rural Indian society, the elders are hesitant to discuss sex education and reproductive health with younger generation. The project had faced tremendous difficulties at the initial stage, but slowly on discussion, the mothers were motivated and explained the need and importance of such knowledge. They were made understood they should help their daughters to learn the things and not face the consequences they had faced.
- The area is politically highly sensitive; one has to work very carefully and cautiously in the villages. Due to the change in the ruling party and power in the State Government in West Bengal, the situation in the area had changed.

LESSONS LEARNED AND ADJUSTMENTS TO PROJECT

- Even if the progress of the project is quite satisfactory and deriving desired results, the project faces tremendous barriers and problems when a village economy faces a setback due to a natural calamity or some other reasons.
- The initial main focus of the project was to retain the vulnerable girls in formal schools. Now at the end of two and a half year, the project has realized that it is necessary to monitor the performance of the students. The students will appear for their Annual Examination in November 2011; and the project has decided to monitor the result cards / performance reports of the students as soon as their results are declared. The project is however, yet to decide the exact future course of action on monitoring the performances. This will definitely include involving the mothers in the process of monitoring.
- It is natural and obvious that if the problems and difficulties can be anticipated beforehand implementing a project, it become much easier to proceed with the activities and many problems could be avoided and made null and void. The groups formed in some of the villages had helped the project activities to be much smoother. They being local residents, they can anticipate many aspects and affects of any initiative. This has helped the project in tackling different issues.

CASE STUDY

Purnima Das, a young and sweet girl of 15 years now is one from among the most unfortunate girls of our society. She lives in Sibsuti village of Shikarbali Gram Panchayet of Baruipur Block. Her father is Shankar Das and mother Bespati Das and her elder brother who does not do any work except for spending time gossiping with friends is 18 years now.

Three years ago, Purnima had to dropout from schools when she was in class VII. Her mother Bespati was very keen for her daughter's education and Purnima too was very enthusiastic about studying. But the irony of fate is that her father was dead against his daughter's education. Shankar is a rickshaw puller by profession, but he spends all his money drinking wine with his friends. Every day he leaves home early in the morning and returns home in the evening and on returning he takes his food and goes to sleep. The worst case is that, every day after coming home, Shankar beats his wife. This is his daily routine and without beating his wife he does not any work. As a result, Bespati was slowly becoming weaker and weaker and ultimately she became so weak that now she cannot do any work and is completely bed ridden. The villagers were quite aware of the situation but they could hardly improve the situation. Rather Shankar had insulted some of his neighbours on the ground that they must have some interest behind their interference.

Since Purnima's childhood, Shankar was dead against education of girls. Naturally he did not want to send Purnima to school. This led to a conflict and a difference of opinion with his wife. But at the initial stage Bespati could manage to send Purnima to school; but when she was in Class VII, Bespati has to withdraw her from the school as there was no other alternative to her. Moreover, since Purnima was going to school, she too became Shankar target and he then too started beating his daughter every now and then. Thus, leaving school was the only alternative to the mother and daughter.

Shikhai Hatiar progamme then was started and the social workers of Nishtha then found that Purnima who once was going to school is now not going. On enquiry the fact was revealed. The villagers and neighbours explained the whole situation and about the mentality and behaviours of Shankar, but they all refused to extend any help as they have been insulted by Shankar on a number of occasions. A repeated and a number of discussions were held with Bespati, but the mother and daughter did not want to go against the decision

of the head of the family. With continuous discussion and motivation, Bespati agreed to put back Purnima into school but also decided that it should be done exclusively secretly without the knowledge of Shankar. Purnima was then readmitted into school. It is a morning school and since her father leaves house early in the morning, Purnima does all household work in the morning and goes to school after her father leaves house. She completes the school and comes back home and does remaining household work. Shankar returns home late in the afternoon completely drunken and goes to sleep. Purnima then goes to the tuition class in the evening. The whole thing is arranged in such a way so that her father does not come to know about her studies..

Things continued this way and now in the year 2012 Purnima is in Class X and attending school and tuition classes regularly besides doing all household work. There are women's and girls' groups in their village and both the groups are very strong. Now all the group members regularly keeps a close eye on the family and especially on Shankar.

Bespati and Purnima have done an incredible job. It is absolutely unbelievable that a girl is studying in school, doing her studies at home and attending tuition classes without the knowledge of her father and that too for more than two years!!!!. It's amazing. Hats off to them.
