

Story of the Ensuring Children Learn Intervention

Naandi Foundation, Chhattisgarh

Documented by Sheshagiri K.M
2009/10

Contents

- 1. Acknowledgements (3)**
- 2. Naandi Foundation and Education (4)**
- 3. The ECL intervention and its documentation (6)**
- 4. Timeline of the ECL intervention (9)**
- 5. Communities (13)**
- 6. Teachers (23)**
- 7. Children (26)**
- 8. Government (32)**
- 9. Conclusions and a critique (34)**
- 10. Annexure (38 onwards)**

1. Acknowledgements

I wish to thank Aditi Tandon from the Hyderabad office of Naandi Foundation for inviting me to undertake this documentation of the Foundation's work in education in Kanker district of Chattisgarh state. The Kanker office team, led by Sushanta and supported by Kedarpati, Doman, Avdhesh and Kansari, took time from their hectic schedules to be a part of the documentation. Long hours of conversation with all of them both at their office and during visits to intervention sites helped me to understand the context, scope and experiences of the Ensuring Children Learn (ECL) program.

I also wish to thank all the Academic Resource Coordinators for sharing their views and experiences. Their notes were invaluable in capturing the key perspectives of the ECL program. Likewise, thanks are due to all the schoolteachers, children, parents and Gram Shiksha Sahayogi's who accompanied me in this short but enriching journey in Kanker during December 2009. I can only hope that this document reflects all the hard work, experiences gained and lessons learnt from a promising educational intervention in a challenging socioeconomic and cultural context.

The ECL intervention has clearly demonstrated the possibilities of making things happen within the government schooling system, even as it raises many more questions about scope, nature and sustainability of external educational interventions. If this document can contribute to further reflections on this intervention, and if these reflections can finally result in providing a meaningful education to all children, this small exercise will have served its purpose.

Sheshagiri K.M

Bengalooru

February/March 2010

2. Naandi Foundation and Education

A few documents relating to education have been made available for study/reference as part of this documentation – these provide some idea regarding the articulations made by Naandi Foundation (NF) on children's education. It will help if we identify the key articulations of these documents as we set out on this documentation, for NF's interventions on the ground broadly follow the thinking outlined in them. At the outset, it must be stated that there is no one document which can be stated to be the 'overarching' position paper of NF on educating children. The one document that comes closest to helping us understand how the organization views education is the June 2009 document titled *Strategic Framework for working in the education sector*. This was specifically prepared for entering into a partnership with the corporate donor Michael and Susan Dell Foundation. Other documents include the following -- *Concept note on teaching mathematics and science at the primary and upper primary levels*; *Promotion of science at the primary and upper primary level*; *Teacher training on teaching in the English language and teaching English as a subject at the primary and upper primary levels* and a note titled *Reading and Writing Program*. Barring the strategic document, the other documents mentioned above are not dated. It seems that they have been articulated at different points in time.

The *Strategic Framework for working in the education sector* document can be considered to be the 'overarching' document that outlines a certain philosophy and approach. We can briefly turn our attention to this document. The others mentioned are subject specific. NF's educational vision seems to be centered round the statement: 'Drive exceptional improvement in the learning levels (for what purpose, it is not clear...) of students within the public education system across the country in a sustainable and scalable manner.' Thus, learning outcomes are of primary concern, and the context is clearly India's government schools, where it is found in survey after survey that 'serious gaps exist in learning outcomes'. The paper cites the ASER reports as evidence of poor learning levels in children even after five years of schooling. 'Weaknesses in the teaching-learning process' coupled with the 'government's lack of focus on quality' are identified as key reasons for the current state of affairs. Further, the paper notes that even the best of teachers become demoralized, given the 'apathetic' environment in which they work. In such an environment, even if training is good, it does not become effective. This is however a contestable statement, for experience shows that meaningful and relevant training (a rare commodity) does make a difference to what teachers do in the classroom. Furthermore, the NF document observes that community participation and community monitoring of the teacher are missing in current large scale efforts at universalization of elementary education, such as the *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA)*. Though SSA recognizes on paper that this component is important, very little has happened on the ground to actually promote community's involvement in the education of children.

The strategy paper further notes that low income or poor families may not be able to academically support children at home, but there is greater awareness today even among poor parents of the importance of sending children to school, and of seeing schooling as an opportunity for individual mobility. Where possible, poor parents are often making both ends meet to send their children to low cost or 'budget' private schools that claim to teach in the English medium – English medium schools are thus seen as a marker of 'quality education'. The NF paper cites evidence of increasing enrolments in private schools over the years, to make this point. However, despite these trends, NF believes that the 'ultra poor' (those who suffer from greater instability and vulnerability) cannot afford private school education for their children. In such a case, their participation in markets (a key concern

identified in the paper as an outcome of education) becomes very limited. This, according to NF, is the ‘underlying logic’ for impacting schools run by the government. ‘Government role must remain central to the provision of education’ and the conviction expressed in the strategy paper is that ‘government is ultimately responsible and accountable for provision of quality public education.’

Based on this background, the paper identifies the following four areas for making its strategy operational – (1) undertaking remedial education, (2) developing expertise to deliver quality education in English, (3) promoting assessment of learning and (4) partnering with government to outsource the daily management of schools. In 3-5 years, Naandi envisages that in over 90% of the schools where it works, children will have achieved grade specific competencies in all subjects especially English. Further, the management of these schools should be outsourced in a public-private partnership. To achieve this, Naandi will embark on a rigorous and intensive process of organizational development in which strong leadership development, development of middle level teams, and the development of robust processes and systems will be focused upon.

It is not the purpose in this chapter to critically examine NF’s positions on education. Yet, these central ideas must be made clear, as these inform the design of activities on the ground. It is difficult not to miss out the rather instrumental notion of education, emphasizing the development of grade specific skills/competencies for active participation in the markets. This notion of learning and education strongly informs planning and activities on the ground, as well as measurement of outcomes, as we will later see in this document.

3. The ECL intervention and its documentation

Kanker

The southern district of Kanker in Chattisgarh (also sometimes known as North Bastar), where the ECL intervention of Naandi Foundation is located, was till 1999 a part of the erstwhile Bastar district. Kanker is hilly, with abundant forest resources, and with a predominantly tribal presence that constitutes about 56% of the total population (Census 2001). More than 95% of the population is rural. In terms of literacy rates, the male-female differential is quite high (83% and 63% respectively, according to the 2001 census for the district). With regard to the Human Development Index, Kanker district is placed at the 12th position out of 13 districts. The economy of the district is broadly based on agriculture and forestry. The prevailing languages in the district are Hindi, Chhattisgarhi, Gondi and Halbi. Kanker has a rich history that goes back to the Stone Age period. It also figures in depictions of epics like the Ramayan and Mahabharat as the 'Dandakaranya' forest region. This region also came later under the influence of Buddhism.

Select educational statistics

In Kanker, government agencies involved in the provision and implementation of educational plans include the Education Department, Tribal Welfare department, Rajeev Gandhi Shiksha Mission (SSA), DIET, Panchayati Raj and Rural Development Department, Municipal Office, and Women and Child Development Department (for Pre- School Education).

From statistics available, such as the District Annual Planning document (2009/10), DISE data (2007/08) and quantitative reports/surveys such as that of ASER, some data is available on the educational status of children in the district. There are 1701 primary schools and 603 middle schools in Kanker. Official statistics show that the Net Enrollment Rate (NER) at the primary is 98.99%, while at the upper primary level it is 98.52%. Taken together, this means that the district is well on the path to universal enrollment. According to ASER 2008, 95% of all children aged 3-5 are attending a pre-school (Anganwadi or private school). Further, according to official estimates, a total of 1583 children are out of school. The Teacher-student ratio stands at a healthy 1:34 at the primary level on paper. Of course, this does not mean that all classes are mono-grade. Interestingly, 16% of the schools in the district are single teacher schools (this is not a small number), which tells us that at least roughly 1/6th of the teachers face a multi-grade situation across the five grades. The official DISE 2007/08 also throws up another statistic worth pondering over – only 5.4% of the primary schools have girls' toilets, as compared to up to 34% at the upper primary levels and beyond. If toilets for girls are considered to be important from the point of view of their sustained participation in school (and there is enough evidence that this is a critical factor), then this number should be a matter of concern.

As far as learning outcomes of children at the primary levels is concerned, the ASER 2008 has something to say on whether children have learnt the basics in terms of the 3R's: 88.2% of standard 1-2 children can read letters, words or more in their own language (in Chattisgarh, this should mean Hindi, which is the school language, though the home language would be different and not all these home languages have a script of their own); 91.6% of standard 1-2 children can recognize numbers 1-9 or more; 82.5% of standard 3-5 children can read a standard 1 text or more in their own language; 85.5% of standard 3-5 children can do subtraction or more. The last two indices show that there is a significant lag in terms of achieving grade specific competencies.

The Kanker district Vision Plan for 2012 envisions universal elementary education with quality, quality being defined as the 'increase in learning outcome for each student', leading to education making children tomorrow's 'productive citizens'. Compared to MDG goals that relate to education the vision plan shows that the district is 'on track'. Apart from enrolment indices mentioned above, the vision document notes that in the academic year 2008/09, 99.37% of children who attempted the class V Board exams, passed. Further, this percentage was 97.83 in the case of those who class 8 exams. These results are a bit at odds with the ASER 2008 survey results, which show a lag in terms of what children learn in each grade. It can be argued whether examination results are the best indicators of learning outcomes based on the 3R's.

Finally, we must make note of the latest development on the educational landscape of Chattisgarh – that of the Multi-grade Multilevel program (MGML), which borrows from the Activity Based Learning (ABL) of Tamilnadu. The education department seeks to scale up this intervention across all schools in the state. Towards this end, teacher preparation as well as supply of materials is in progress.

The Ensuring Children Learn (ECL) intervention

The Ensuring Children Learn intervention in Chattisgarh state is located in the contiguous blocks of Narharpur (also known as Saraha), Charama and Bhanupratappur of Kanker district. Both male and female literacy rates of these three blocks fall below the district average (the difference is almost 10% on an average). Further, with 66.54% of the population being tribal, Narharpur has the highest tribal population among the ECL project blocks. The block of Charama has the lowest tribal population at 53.73% (all figures are from census 2001). Currently, the project is on in 116 villages across the three blocks (40 villages each in Bhanupratappur and Narharpur, and 36 in Charama) in a total of 163 schools (55 each in Charama and Narharpur, and 53 in Bhanupratappur) covering 8161 children across the primary grades.

The overall objective of the ECL intervention (in line with the June 2009 strategy paper) is the following: 'All the school going children of standards 1-5 attain grade specific competencies.' Further, the specific objectives are:

- To make children attain grade specific competencies through the Academic Support Centre (which will run everyday before and/or after school hours)
- To energize the educational system in order to improve the quality of education
- To mobilize greater community participation and build strong linkages between the community and the school

The strategy is to work with children, teachers, teacher educators and with the communities to sustain the process beyond the project duration. The 163 villages project is managed by a project structure that is headed by a Program Officer and supported by Program Executives (one each for each for the three blocks). The Program Executives in turn have 5-6 Academic Resource Coordinators (ARCs) who in turn are responsible for 10-12 villages or communities and Academic Support Centers (ASC). The documentation of this intervention involved a seven day field visit in December 2009 (between 14th and 22nd) during which visits were organized to various settings of the project, such as schools/ASCs, community, teacher and staff meetings. This apart, the documentation draws from the

written contributions from selected staff members, along with key reference documents and presentations.

The document begins with a brief discussion about Naandi Foundation and its position/understanding of education (chapter 2). This is followed by setting out the timeline of the intervention (chapter 4), with chapters 5-8 devoted to a discussion of experiences with Communities, Teachers, Children and Government. Chapter 9 sums up the document as well as presents a critique. This is followed by the annexure.

4. Timeline of the ECL intervention

The following description is a narrative timeline of the ECL intervention from the day it started, till December 2009, traversing more than four years of interesting work, illustrating important developments as the project evolved to its current status.

August 2005 – MoU for the education intervention (Ensuring Children Learn, or ECL) comes into being between REACH India and Naandi Foundation (NF); needs to be made operational in Chattisgarh. NF is still in its infancy as far as education is concerned, with interventions in Shivpur (Madhya Pradesh) and Hyderabad (urban). For the Chattisgarh program, the decision is to set up office at Jagdalpur, where sub-grantees are located. Sushanta Kumar (currently DGM, Child Rights) joins NF; comes with a strong background in management and community participation.

September 2005 – Office established at Jagdalpur, and staff recruitment (under the REACH project structure) takes place.

October to November 2005 – meeting with the State Education Secretary takes place to explore partnership with the government to improve schooling system. The idea of first ascertaining ground level educational status arises out of these interactions. Permission letter to work in Kanker district is obtained in November. Other core team members (Kedar Pati and Doman Sinha), join Sushanta to take the program forward.

December 2005 to January 2006 – process of ascertaining educational status in three selected blocks (Bhanupratappur, Narharpur and Charama) of the district takes place – a sample of 15 schools is chosen for data collection. Detailed formats are developed to gather views from key persons, like children, teachers, community members, cluster academic coordinators etc. Data collection is followed by analysis and a district level workshop. Findings are disturbing, as in any paper-pencil testing exercise for acquisition of the 3R's by children across the country; there is little difficulty in agreeing (between NF and the education department, teachers and local community members/parents) that there is a problem which needs to be urgently addressed.

February 2006 to June 2006 – NF starts 60 days 'Reading Camps' in five communities in each block, based on the Pratham model during the summer vacations. Locally trained and paid instructors run these camps. Prior to this, there is a preparatory period (between February and March/April). Among others, biscuits, distributed by senior community members like the JBS president or Panchayat Sarpanch, act as points of attraction for children to come together at one place. Children, who are found to be 'weak' and are having difficulties in acquiring the 3R's, are selected for the camps. The reading camps clearly make a difference in the acquisition of the skills of reading, writing and arithmetic, as shown by the paper-pencil tests conducted in all villages after the camp.

In May the same year, the idea of the Bal Shiksha Panchayat (BSP) takes root. The idea is to provide children a platform for expression and participation in schools.

June and July 2006 – As local communities witness the difference the reading camps have made, they raise demands for the continuity of the program beyond 60 days. Further, the question arises as to why all children are not included in the program. Part of the demand from local communities is also as a response to 'Kala Jathas' conducted by NF during this period in 15 villages each of the three blocks. The Kala Jathas were seen as initial community mobilization activities to establish reading/writing centers in these villages.

August to September 2006 – reflections are underway in Naandi Foundation at various levels regarding the interventions thus far. The basic questions being asked are: Are children learning in 60 days? What happens after the reading camp if there is no further activity? Thus, the notion of a stable, continuous center emerges (later called the Academic Support Center, or ASC or Gram Sahayogi Shiksha Kendra, GSSK) from these reflections, a space which would ensure continuity of this input through a locally trained and paid instructor (later called the Center

Activist, or CA). Further, a decision is taken to include all primary school going children (grades 1-5) instead of restricting it to a few.

These reflections also raise the question of sustainability of the intervention – for how long will it continue? What will happen when external funds dry up? At this stage, it is realized that the local community has to play a greater role in educating its children. NF thus conceptualizes a ‘roadmap’ for engaging with the community – the steps conceived range from the initial sensitization, to final withdrawal of NF, leaving the interventions intact. This roadmap provides a reference point for the intervention. Further, the idea of developing a MoU with each village community also emerges – the MoU is to establish a partnership for the intervention, to ensure that local communities also have an active role to play in the task of educating their children.

September 2006 to February 2007 – development of MoU’s underway with local communities, along with the establishment of 45 ARCs (15 in each block); Center Activists are provided systematic training. On March 8, another important intervention, the ‘Nanhi Kali’ (or NK) starts. This is a scholarship program for the girl child.

March and April 2007 – preparation for Grade V board examinations takes place; an 8% increment in Grade V board exams is noticed – in 2006-07, 29% children have obtained the first division as compared to the 21% in the academic year 2005-06. These results are encouraging, and show that the intervention (though in its infancy) has started making a small difference. This leads to the belief and decision that the intervention must be expanded to many more villages.

May to June/July 2007 – the ECL expands to 150 villages, 50 in each of the three blocks. CAs are selected from the local community and trained. With the intervention picking up, the idea of rewarding successful children, center activists, Jan Bhagidari Samitis (JBS) and Bal Shiksha Panchayats (BSP), comes into picture (these awards are given every year). So does the concept of quarterly tests and pre-test before the final exams. The pre-tests are crucial to understand how children are likely to fare in the board exams. Initially, the pre-test was for class V children only; later, the exercise was to include children from grades 3 and 4 as well. In this period, two other members (Avdhesh Yadav and M.R. Kansari) join the core team of Sushanta, Doman and Kedarpati. M. R Kansari has been brought on board to specifically look at the Nanhi Kali program.

The position of ‘Academic Resource Coordinator’ (ARC) is also created during this period. Like the Cluster Resource Coordinator of the government, the ARC is expected to provide academic support to 10-15 ASCs in his or her cluster.

August to October 2007 – the 150 centers become operational, and start functioning by end October.

November 2007 to March 2008 – a number of important program related developments take place during this period. First of all, a baseline survey of all schools and children (class II to grade V) in the project area is undertaken. This helps in understanding the learning status of all children. During this period, a student tracking tool (called the Student Achievement Tracking Tool, or SATT) is developed to monitor progress in terms of achieving competencies related to the 3R’s. This has now become the main tool to monitor children’s learning.

Concerns on the prevalence of the multi-grade situation in many project schools leads to a piloting of a pedagogical intervention in two schools to address the same. However, it is realized that with all children from Grades 1-5 attending the ASCs, it may not be possible for one CA to cater to their learning needs through a multi-level approach with vertical grouping across grades. Hence, the CA’s settle into a routine where they work with each grade separately. Using the SATT, the progress, achievements and difficulties of each child are mapped continuously, and appropriate pedagogical reinforcement is then provided. The ratio of one CA to 40 children is the norm at the ASCs.

Another key development in this period is the CPC, or the Center Progress Card, which gives a picture of where each center is, with respect to how much children have learnt on the basic competencies. Also, evening classes for

grade V children begin – these are extra classes held at no extra cost in the evening between December and March every academic year; the objective is to prepare grade V children well for the board exams.

March 2008 to July 2008 – with the program well established, other efforts are on to strengthen pedagogical inputs – competency based workbooks are developed for Hindi, Maths and EVS. In the board exams for the academic year 2007-08, there is a significant jump in the number of children clearing the first grade – 64% of all children who appeared for the final board exam, got a first class, compared to the 29% in the previous year. The ‘backlog’ of children is addressed through another summer camp between April and June. Also, the SATT undergoes some changes as per the new textbooks developed.

During May-June, NF gets invited by the government to undertake a study on the impact of teacher training for SSA in four districts – Durg, Mahasamund, Kanker and Dantewada. This is an important development, which contributes to the strengthening of the linkage between NF and the state government. Based on the study, NF is further invited to undertake a 3-days training of teachers on various themes -- a sample of 100 teachers/district is chosen for the training, and a total of 400 teachers are trained on use of TLM and TLM development (in Durg); use of the government prepared ‘Bachpan’ workbooks for Hindi and Math (in Mahasamund); on error analysis in math and Hindi (for teachers from Kanker), and on multi-grade/multi-level teaching for teachers from Dantewada.

August 2008 to December 2008 – this is a period of consolidation of the intervention.

January and April 2009 – to deepen and further institutionalize the intervention, a Block Resource Group (BRG), consisting of active CAs, is formed. The BRG is seen as an academic support group at the block level.

The idea of conducting a ‘test for the best’ (that is, children who have consistently obtained beyond 80% marks) comes into being from February 2009. From this exercise, the potential ‘Top 10’ children are identified for additional technical support. The idea is to enable these children to finally access various government schemes. Meanwhile, the board exam results are even more encouraging this year – 80% children have secured more than 60% marks, up by 16% from the previous year. Other interventions as part of the program continue.

May 2009 to August 2009 – This is a period of consolidation and deepening of ideas. To begin with, the practice of conducting the Annual Bal Mela starts in two locations in every block. This is to bring children together from different locations, and expose them to a variety of activities/learning, going beyond what they learn in the four walls of the school. It will be held every year. This year, the District Collector invited the ECL team to undertake training for 360 teachers (Shiksha Karmis and Headmasters) in Kanker district. Following the training of 400 teachers the previous year, this is an important activity for the project with the government, one which is likely to further strengthen linkages between the two. The training proposal is sent in August; the overall objective of the training is to enable teachers (through the SATT) to work with each child, using appropriate TLM.

The idea of forming a Village Education Committee (VEC) emerges from the project’s experience. It is observed that existing committees (such as the Jan Bhagidari Samiti) are by and large defunct especially where it concerns education. There is thus a need to revitalize people’s organization for promoting the education of children – the formation of the VEC (or Gram Shiksha Samiti, GSS) is thought of as a viable response – the focus is on bringing young, interested and active people from the local communities into the VEC to make it vibrant and responsive.

September to December 2009 – As part of consolidation efforts, the idea of the SIP (School Improvement Plan) gains ground, initiated by NF. This idea will enable the systematic involvement of all key stakeholders (teachers, local communities, education department etc) in improving the educational situation. SIP is also intended as a means to focus on the issue of sustainability of the project, through greater community involvement. SIP, it is felt, is needed to ensure that interventions do not take place in isolation.

The idea of the SIP receives support from the government. Through a Government Order (GO) of September 2009, the administration wishes to apply/extend the idea all over the district. The GO further outlines 17 reference points for educational quality. It also mentions SATT as a tool that would need to be used for monitoring

purposes. The calendar year 2009 culminates with an invitation to NF by the government to join the District Level Advisory Committee on Education.

In many ways, the year 2009 has been important for the ECL project – reflections on sustainability of the intervention gather ground; the sustainability question is thrown open to the local communities. Ernst and Young Foundation, the current financier of the project, is keen on expansion of the project to cover other blocks as well as villages in the existing three blocks.

We will now move on to a discussion of various aspects of the ECL intervention as well as the experience and learning from the work of the past four years.

5. Communities

Background

The Operations Manual of the ECL intervention has this to say regarding work and approach with the community:

‘Naandi perceives the community as a significant stakeholder in quality education at the village level. Also, active participation by the community ensures sustainability of any initiative. Once the community develops a sense of ownership, they also become an effective monitoring forum.’

As Doman Sinha, the block coordinator for Narharpur notes:

“An important element of Naandi’s thinking from the beginning itself was regarding the scenario in which there would be no presence of Naandi in the villages after some time. In such a situation, we visualized the teacher and community being responsible for the outcomes and results that we are showing today. Indeed, it is with this in view that we are thinking about teacher training as well as formation and strengthening of village education committees.”

Thus, it was clear that the challenge of sustainability was always uppermost in the minds of the persons who established the ECL intervention in Kanker.

The process of interacting and engaging with local communities as part of the ECL intervention began in the first half of 2006. Nearly four years have elapsed since January 2006, when the first baselines were undertaken in a few villages. What are the experiences, and what is the learning so far? What should the next steps be? As part of the documentation process, there was an opportunity to attend a meeting that NF had organized in Kanker on December 17 with representatives from selected local communities of the project. This provided a good glimpse of the terrain that has been traversed over the past few years and also provided a platform for questions to be asked about the future of the intervention and the role of local communities in shaping that future. What follows is a brief discussion of the tone and tenor of this meeting – this will serve as a backdrop leading to more general observations. Before this, it will help to recall the background developments, experiences and learning.

Naandi’s first entry into the local communities of Charama, Narharpur and Bhanupratappur was with the activity of the baseline survey in 15 villages to ascertain educational status (December 2005 to January 2006). The survey resulted in the finding that learning outcomes in primary school going children were very worrisome, needing urgent action. This led Naandi to begin 60 day reading camps in each of these villages during the summer vacations. The camps made a quick difference in all the 15 villages. For instance, in the Dhanesara village of Narharpur block, all 17 children passed the test at the end of the camp, enough proof that the activity had worked. These developments were not lost on the local communities. They started demanding continuity in these efforts. Any educational intervention that focuses on the acquisition of the 3R’s and manages it well, has something tangible to show by way of results even with a short duration intervention. In the two month reading camps, people could see tangible results and improvements in a manner that they had not seen before. This activity, coupled with other awareness raising activities like the *Kala Jatha*, ensured the creation of an enabling atmosphere for education in those communities.

This encouraging response led to much reflection at various levels within Naandi. Many questions about the future steps were asked. Further, another question was regarding the coverage of the program. The 60 day camps had mainly concentrated on the 'weaker' children, those who had not, for various reasons, learnt the various competencies they were meant to learn in the primary grades. Now, following the 60 day camps, questions arose from the community's end about bringing *all* children under the ambit of such efforts. Naandi itself was keen to continue efforts, realizing that this intense but short duration activity had led to good rapport building with the communities. The big question, however, was about sustaining the gains made in learning outcomes of those children who had participated in the camps. Out of these reflections emerged the idea of an Academic Support Centre (ASC) for all children. This centre, with a locally selected instructor (later called the Community Activist, or CA), would function for 2-3 hours before and/or after school hours, facilitating children to acquire grade specific competencies through extra support. In particular, children with difficulties in learning the 3R's would be catered to.

The prospect of engaging further with the local community and with children looked exciting, no doubt. Yet, there was a clear realization that the effort should not end up as a one way affair driven solely by Naandi. From the beginning, local communities had to play some role. This was seen as crucial if the external intervention had to be sustained. This thinking led to a few more developments. First of all, there was an overall conceptualization regarding the 'roadmap' (a sort of typology) that Naandi's work with the local communities would take over a period of time. This roadmap included several stages (as many as nine), ranging from sensitization, to final withdrawal of Naandi presence from the community. Each of these stages is strictly not sequential; there is much overlapping and much depends on the initial conditions in a given local community (in terms of readiness to get involved, etc). The overall process of engaging with local communities is described below.

A typology for community participation

Sensitization – this involves meeting and establishing a working rapport with the community. In the process, Naandi explains its vision, mission and objectives; permission is obtained to undertake a baseline of children's learning; baseline is undertaken and results are analyzed and shared back with the community and parents; schoolteachers too are involved in the process. This is also a phase during which there is much reflection on the conceptual issues of education; such reflections continue throughout the remaining stages.

Demand creation – discussion about educational status results in many issues being identified; also, generally, results of the sixty day camps are enough to make local communities realize that improvements are possible and demand more such interventions for education. In other words, the local community should come forward with its demands and be prepared to take responsibilities as well.

Joint planning and negotiation – the ASC is seen as a way of improving children learning outcomes over a period of time; Naandi and the local community enter into a joint planning and negotiation phase which involves, among other things, the selection of the Community Activist (who will work with children before and/or after school hours and also work with the community), starting of the ASC, and the initial contribution of the community (at least 10%) towards the salary of the CA. Further, this is a stage during which the MoU between the local community and Naandi comes into play.

Resource mobilization – this is a phase where, apart from consolidation of earlier efforts, there is a focus on mobilizing local resources to ensure the financial feasibility of the ASC in the event of Naandi withdrawal. Resources are, or can be mobilized from individuals, local government and other sources. Also, there is much work on mobilizing the community for more action around the issues of children educational participation and learning in school.

Joint implementation – with the active participation and support of the community, the ASC is working; equally important is the nature of the interaction between parents, local community as a whole and the school – the

community takes more interest in what is happening inside the school; parent/community and teacher meetings have increased and have become regular, and the parent-teacher distance has diminished.

Joint monitoring and assessment – with joint implementation follows joint monitoring and assessment of progress towards objectives. While Naandi has a program structure in which the Academic Resource Coordinator visits each school at least 2-3 times a month, the community similarly establishes its mechanisms of interacting with the CA and the teacher to ensure that children's progress is tracked and supported on a continuous basis

Demonstration – as each cycle of an academic year gets completed, there is an opportunity to see results, identify gaps, reflect on experiences and lessons learnt, and plan for the next year. Increasingly, as possibilities are demonstrated and as new challenges crop up, the approach becomes more dynamic and robust enough to demonstrate results at scale. Local community groups and structures are now fully prepared to handle issues related to children's access and learning in schools; they are able to demonstrate their responsiveness to the educational needs of every child.

Follow up – this is essentially a consolidation stage during which the gains are documented and disseminated and shared to promote learning both within the program and elsewhere, where such interventions may be starting

Withdrawal – this represents the final stage of Naandi involvement. The community has accepted and realized the need for sustaining the intervention in a post-Naandi situation -- that the only way to sustain efforts and bring about lasting changes is to drive demand and establish a sound organization of the local community around the issue of children's education. External support from Naandi and other agencies may still be there, but it is the community which principally takes all the decisions and arranges resources and mechanisms to actualize those decisions.

While this typology of community participation perhaps is the 'ideal' one, what is it like on the ground? We will come to this question a little later.

The second idea that emerged along with that of a roadmap was that of developing a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with each community – this was seen as an instrument that would make both Naandi and the local community commit their respective efforts to ensure that all children would be provided quality education. Further, Naandi insisted that the community should contribute at least 10% of the Community Activist's salary. With the salary fixed at Rs.1000/- per month, this amounted to Rs.100/-. For Naandi, this contribution was crucial and was seen as a sign of the commitment and interest shown by the community to the idea of ensuring that all children learnt what was expected of them in the primary years.

The MoU*

The MoU begins with a few introductory statements about Naandi – its overall focus areas with respect to development, and its specific interest in promoting quality improvement in learning levels of children attending government schools. The MoU then states that the community has asked for Naandi's help in providing academic support to children apart from what is being provided in school (this is basically the 'demand' raised by the local communities that follows the sensitization phase). In response to this request, Naandi agrees, as part of the MoU, to meet the demands of the community, by setting up the Gram Shiksha Sahayog Kendra (GSSK) and by supporting the selection of a Gram Shiksha Sahayogi (GSS). Further, according to the MoU, the VEC as the representative body from the community is charged with the responsibility of selecting a convenient location for the GSSK, as well as fixing a suitable time (from the point of view of the children and the GSS) for the GSSK. There is also an agreement as to the amounts that will be paid as honoraria to the GSS by Naandi and the community. Naandi makes it clear that the community contribution has to increase over a period of time. Further, the MoU lists out the commitments of both Naandi and the local community vis-à-vis the GSSK. Naandi, for instance, will provide technical and academic support to the GSSK as well as the schoolteacher (in practice, however, the focus is on the GSSK...); regular monitoring of children's progress, etc. The community is expected to make a minimum contribution to the honoraria of the GSS; actively take part in the activities at school (such as meetings, etc; ensure attendance of all children, especially those who are 'lagging behind' in their learning; ensure all

arrangements are made for the smooth functioning of the GSSK and be responsible in an overall sense for children's grade specific learning.

All these points are followed by certain clauses that insure Naandi from developments that are beyond its control, such as sudden changes in Naandi's policy, change in government stance towards Naandi's work, etc.

**Translated from the Hindi version*

Interestingly, the MoU does not mention the schoolteacher beyond stating that Naandi will provide some training/technical support. One would have imagined a tripartite partnership, involving the school, as it is ultimately responsible for children's learning. From this, one can surmise that the schoolteacher has not been the primary focus of the ECL intervention, beyond the routine sharing of information on children's progress by the GSS. It is only now, with the idea of the School Improvement Program (SIP, discussed in some detail in the chapter on Government) that a more holistic and integrated approach is being considered.

The experience...

The situation that Naandi confronted in its work with the local community in the initial stages is summed up by Sushanta's statement: 'They (parents and others) would appear in the school only on two days of the year – 15th August and 26th January. At other times, they mostly stood outside the school at a distance. They never questioned what, if at all, their children were learning, and many could not be bothered if the teachers came on time or not.' Tarannum Khan, an Academic Resource Coordinator working in the Bhanupratappur block has reflected insightfully about the complexities and challenges of working across different communities:

'On my promotion to the post of Academic Resource Coordinator (ARC), I found that I was not responsible for just one school (which I was as a GSS), but 12 or 13 schools and communities, and many, many more children. As a result, I got the opportunity to understand the views and opinions of many more people. I also realized that the situation is not the same everywhere. There are some people who understand the importance of education. But there are many who wouldn't be interested in even hearing the word 'education' – they will remain disinterested, thus spoiling their children's futures. In my work, I have to encounter precisely these kinds of people. But when we persist, and we try to get them interested in education, when we see them beginning to understand what it means to formally educate their children, I can surely say that there is no other experience which brings me so much happiness...When working with communities, I have realized that it is important to get assimilated into their local contexts and situations. Further, one needs to approach them with a lot of love and affection. There are many difficulties, as I have mentioned. Sometimes, we fear for our lives even as we work and travel through Naxal territory. At other times, one gets very frustrated when no community member turns up for a meeting even after waiting for several hours. These experiences sometimes make me wonder why I'm doing this work. But I realize then that I'm doing good work...this requires patience.' (2009)

Tarannum's experiences point to the many challenges that the ECL intervention has faced in working with parents and others in the communities. Indeed, similar thoughts recur in the sharing of experiences by the ARCs. As Tarannum's experience illustrates, persisting with the education theme (more specifically, with the issue of learning of grade specific competencies) despite many challenges appears to have paid off – there is now greater awareness that children have to be sent to school, and that they should learn the basics.

Doman Sinha, the block coordinator for Narharpur block and a core team member, highlights how communities viewed Naandi's efforts in the early days with much suspicion:

“In the early days, both the community and teachers viewed us with suspicion. Teachers used to think that we belonged to some private company that was bent on collecting ‘wrong information’ which it would then pass on to the administration. They were afraid that the administration might use this information to initiate privatization of the schooling system! On the other hand, community members thought that Naandi was manipulating with people and engaging with conversion of the local population! We had to continuously engage with every community through visits and meetings. This changed their outlook. We also highlighted the rather poor levels of learning in children and put across the point that they needed much academic support to perform better. At this stage, we found that parents were interested in their children passing from one grade to another. Little attention was paid regarding the *actual* achievement of grade specific competencies. In the case of girls, all they wanted was for them to pass class V, and develop the ability to write their names as well as that of their village. We managed to convince them that their children could do much better, and that they could score more than 90%.”

Avdhesh Kumar Yadav, a program executive (earlier, an ARC in Charama block) and core team member based at Kanker, recalls his efforts of working with the community in Gidhali, a village in Charama block, and highlights the crucial importance of making information on children's learning public:

“In Gidhali, the tribal people depend on agriculture and quarrying for their livelihoods. When I first held a community meeting at the village, I observed that most people who attended the meeting were drunk! Yet, when we did manage to start a GSSK in this village, we faced indifference from the community, since they thought that this was another government initiative. But when the *Gram Patel* Mehangu Ram understood what we were up to, he convinced the others in the community, and the centre then started functioning. In the beginning, there was little community support for the local *Sahayogi*. Slowly and surely, the *Sahayogi* started winning people's confidence. When he started demonstrating improvements in children's results, parents started supporting him, encouraged by his efforts. All this meant hard work – keeping in regular touch with the community through monthly meetings, working hard on children's learning and sharing these results with parents. Once parents came to *get this information* in children's progress, things started changing – they began coming to the centre to see what was happening. Further, when they saw the vastly improved results from class V exams that year, interest in their children's learning outcomes deepened.”

The important point that Avdhesh seems to be making is that of access to information on what is happening with regard to children's learning outcomes. Before the ECL intervention began, there was much distance between the community and the school, and there was much indifference on both sides. In such a situation, most parents did not even know what was happening with their children at school. Children were getting automatically promoted to the next stage and teachers did not bother to track each child and keep meticulous records of learning progress. While some parents wondered if any learning was happening, they did not mobilize themselves to work out a mechanism of accountability for the teacher. The ECL intervention resulted for the first time in making information on children's learning outcomes transparent. Armed with this information (thanks to regular meetings), parents got closer to the school to see what was happening inside.

Most ECL project persons relate their achievements with improvements in examination results. Very often, examples of how many children have obtained beyond 60% marks are given; in some cases, those who have been associated with a child's distinction (such as securing the top ten position at the district level) recall their efforts with pride.

Another constant theme that comes up in the experiences of ECL project staff is the disinterest and the distance between the community and the idea of schooling for children. Parmanand Rangari, an ARC from Bhanupratappur, notes:

'In a place where people (who are themselves formally not educated and who do not know what it means to attend school) would not even come for a meeting or discussion on education, where the regular schoolteacher would not come to school regularly, we have managed to do good work. The proof is in the examination results. Now people are interested. When parents ask us who will do the household work if children are sent to school, we try and give examples of how schooling with help. This eventually leads to their agreeing to send their children to school. However, this change takes time' (2009)

Rangari further notes that in the initial stages, the GSSs had to visit the houses of parents and literally plead with them with folded hands (*'haath pair jodkar palakon se sambandh sthapith karna tha...'*) and other community members to attend meetings. This is interesting, given that most ARCs are members of the same local communities – when it comes to engaging with these communities regarding formal schooling of children, difficulties crop up. It appears that a strong tradition of community-school linkages does not exist in these communities – the school does not 'belong' to the community as such, distanced as it is from their day to day concerns. Traditionally, children (in both tribal and non-tribal societies) have always been socialized in informal settings such as the family, larger community etc. Organized forms of learning in institutions such as schools with centralized syllabus/textbooks which do not reflect community history, culture etc have only tended to distance the community and the school. It is this distance that had to be dealt with by the ECL intervention.

By showing 'tangible' results/outcomes especially in the board examinations, the ECL intervention shows that when the complex task of education is broken down into simpler elements, and when fewer elements (such as achievement grade specific competencies/outcomes) are focused (often to the exclusion of many other aspects), it is possible to get people's attention. They are able to understand the discussion of learning outcomes that are based on literacy and numeracy. The challenge, however, will be in engaging with the more intangible aspects and processes of educating children, particularly those that demand the child and the teacher's creativity and expression which cannot be easily measured through paper-pencil tests. We will return to this discussion in the last chapter.

In some cases, we have the interesting examples of how metaphors and similes have been used by those involved in the ECL intervention to win over difficult communities. Sahu, an ARC working in the Narharpur block notes how an entire village of 350 people would gather in the *Sheetla Mata Mandir* (Temple) for village meetings, but would not attend any meeting related to the school or the GSSK. Those who did not attend the temple meetings had to pay a fine of Rs.50/-; this was the rule in the village. Sahu used the temple metaphor and told a leader from the community:

'Look, there is this *Sheetla Mandir* where, if anyone does not come for a meeting, he has to pay Rs.50/-. Then there is also the *Vidya Mandir* (the temple of knowledge) whose meetings nobody is interested in attending even after repeated requests. Why don't we have the same rules for the other *Mandir* as well?'

One day, a village level meeting was organized at the *Sheetla Mandir* which was as usual attended by most people in the village. It was in this meeting that the *Gram Shiksha Samiti* was formed. With this, the issue of education received a religion like sanction. Sahu notes a positive change in attitude of the community towards children's education thereafter.

A key element of the ECL intervention with local communities is the mobilization of children through groups such as the *Bal Shiksha Panchayat (BSP)*. Every school has a BSP, which the district education department recognizes as an important structure that must be replicated all over the district. The chapter on children discusses the BSP in some detail.

By July 2007, the ECL intervention had spread to 150 villages across the three blocks. By and large, there was a general passivity towards children's education that Naandi that staff encountered as they started their initial spadework with the communities, gave way to readiness. In the second half of 2009, the idea of forming *Gram Shiksha Samitis* (or Village Education Committees) came up. The *Jan Bhagidari Samitis* that were in existence were, according to Naandi's observations, largely defunct structures. What was needed was a more vibrant body in which new faces and young blood needed to be infused. Thus the VECs were created. This also provided fillip to community contributions for meeting the costs of the GSSK. This aspect is briefly discussed in the next section.

Community contribution and sustainability

One way of ascertaining whether the local communities 'own' the ECL intervention is to find out the extent of their involvement in contributing to the honoraria of the GSS. In fact, for Naandi, this is a key indicator, and is stressed from the beginning itself – at least 10% of the honoraria of the GSS has to be contributed from the beginning by the community, if the GSSK has to be established in the village. The table below shows the status of this contribution as on December 2009. Most villages, as the table shows, fall into the 21%-40% category, indicating that there is still some way to go as far as financial contributions to the Sahayogi's salary are concerned.

Table 1 – community contribution for GSS's payment

Community Contribution for the month of Dec'09					
Blocks	Range				Total
	less than 20%	21%-40%	41%-60%	61%-100%	
Bhanupratappur	3	46	7	0	56
Narharpur	1	47	5	0	53
Charama	4	48	3	0	55
Kanker	8	141	15	0	164
%	5	86	9	0	100

Source: ECL project, Kanker (2009)

Coming now to the December 17 2009 meeting -- in many ways, this meeting was a culmination of a four year effort during which the intervention has passed through several stages. For the first time, the ECL team brought the issue of sustainability of the ASC in front of a group of community representatives who had gathered at Kanker. It was explained that Naandi plans to withdraw from the current villages and move on to adjacent areas. While some form technical support would continue to be provided to the ASCs, their payment would now have to be met by the community. There were two options available, going by the discussions at the meeting. One, that the communities would continue to support the ASCs and institutionalize this program in their villages and two, the ASCs would stop

functioning and the community would focus its attention more on working closely and supporting the regular teachers to perform better and show results in terms of enhanced children's performance.

As the months go by, it will be interesting to see the directions that local communities take in this regard. The mood in the Dec 17th meeting was one of continuity of the ASCs. Both community members and GSSK's seem to be divided in their opinion regarding the continuity of the GSSK/ECL intervention in its present form. Though a realization is gathering ground that Naandi's continuous support cannot be taken for granted, their fear is that the examination results as well as learning outcomes of children will dip immediately if the intervention is withdrawn, and may not pick up without external support. This view seems to suggest that teachers will not work as responsibly as the GSSKs. Linked to this view is the underlying sense of insecurity for many GSSK's, who fear that they will lose their jobs if the project moves out of their village. For the moment, they have been assured by Naandi that they will be given the opportunity to continue as GSSK's in other (new) project villages.

The counter view (which is entertained by a smaller group of people) is that with some external support to the schoolteacher and with active community involvement and monitoring of children's learning, teachers will be forced to work harder and maintain children's progress at current levels, and continue to demonstrate the kinds of results that the ECL intervention has been able to show in the past few years.

Some lessons from community engagement...

From the preceding discussions, it is possible to abstract the learning as described below.

1. Visualizing a typology of community participation in the beginning itself (described earlier in detail in this chapter) helps one to assess one's own position and progress along the long path of enabling local communities understand and eventually manage the education of their children. Not only does this typology help in assessing progress, it also enables the managers of the external intervention to decide on the kinds of activities that are needed to further deepen the engagement with local communities. Further, a typology helps to determine a differentiated approach – in a program that works across several communities and blocks, it becomes important to assess the levels of participation of different communities. The notion of a typology of participation then becomes important.

2. Continuous efforts with communities have helped. From the beginning, Naandi realized that its work with local communities would involve intensive and continuous work. During this documentation, one came across statements like *Satath Sampark Rakhna, Himmath Nahi Harna* etc which point out that the engagement was not sporadic, despite the many frustrations and challenges that were encountered. There was determination to make inroads and build strong relationships with parents and others in all the project villages. While the *Gram Shiksha Sahayogi* was entrusted with the task of interacting with parents, community representatives and organizing regular village meetings, the Academic Resource Coordinators (ARC) also played a key role in ensuring that these meetings furthered the agenda of quality children's education. The key principle that therefore emerges from this engagement is that of continuous involvement – a few interactions here and there will not be sufficient to make any lasting difference.

3. Breaking down the task of educating children into smaller, manageable units has helped. From a pedagogical point of view, the intervention has exclusively focused on enabling children attain grade specific competencies – this is an activity whose outcomes can be easily measured and shared with those involved (parents, teachers and children, as well as the government). From the point of view of working with local communities, this approach is useful, as it helps them to visualize the educational outcomes for their children in a more concrete way. Once ‘tangible’ results are shown, parents and others tend to get more interested in what children are doing and learning in school. This approach also enables the intervening organization to focus its efforts on achieving ‘do-able’ outcomes.

While this breaking down of the process and outcomes of education and focusing on those outcomes that can be easily measured has its appeal and advantages as well, there is the danger that other aspects of the educational process (such as the creativity, inventiveness and imagination of the teacher and learner, which are sometimes considered to be ‘nebulous’ areas since they cannot be measured or standardized easily) may not get the attention they deserve. Given Naandi’s plans to withdraw from the current project areas and move into newer ones, the indication is clear that the scope of the intervention is focused on attainment of the 3R’s. On the other hand, the challenge for the ECL intervention in the coming months and years may be to find a way to establish dialogue with parents, teachers and others on these deeper elements involved in educating children. Nevertheless, it can be stated that the current approach may be useful as a starting point for this deeper dialogue.

4. Communities respond positively once they are convinced about the sincerity and genuineness of external interventions. Indeed, this can be said to be the underlying experience of Naandi’s engagement with the local community, in village after village. We have seen examples of lingering suspicion on the part of the community with respect to the ECL intervention – often suspicion has bordered on the fear that Naandi would engage in conversion of the local population; in some cases, given the long years of governmental apathy and neglect, communities have taken time to believe that any external intervention will make a difference – there is a tendency to lump everyone together with the government and its style of functioning. Whatever may be the case, with much persistence, Naandi’s efforts seem to have paid off. There is increasing realization in the local community that Naandi’s efforts are serious and genuine – in turn, this has gradually led to their rallying behind the ECL intervention.

5. Activation of community structures is critical. A recurring theme in NGO interventions with local communities on the issue of children’s education is the observation that village level education committees constituted by the government are by and large defunct. In many cases, those who are part of these committees are themselves not aware that they are members. Further, these committees do not meet regularly, and stories abound as to how the teacher prepares the minutes of a monthly meeting and gets it signed by the members! As the ECL intervention began, Naandi realized that a crucial task was the revival of these committees. This would be one of the important ways of addressing the gap between the school and the community. However, there was also the realization that the existing committees could be energized only by bringing in new faces. This seems to have made the difference.

6. Demonstration of change is important to move forward and ensure greater community involvement. We have earlier seen how the breaking down of learning outcomes into measurable units makes it possible to focus on the achievement of those units. In turn, this enables the communication of progress made with respect to each child. Further, by using the examination results as another indicator of progress, the ECL intervention has shown that changes and improvements in

learning outcomes with respect to the 3R's are indeed possible, with focused effort. However, these changes have been made possible by the introduction of the *Gram Shiksha Sahayogi Kendras*. With the continuous and dedicated efforts of the *Sahayogi's*, the project has seen important improvements in examination results as well as improvements on the 3R's – more and more children are performing better in the annual exams (as we shall see in a later chapter); they are also showing improvement in their abilities to read, write and do basic arithmetic. Naandi believes that this demonstration of change is an important first step to involve local communities in a greater role in the education of their children. The next step is to get parents and others to demand the same improvements from the regular government teachers. The ECL intervention has reached a stage where local communities can put pressure on the educational system to perform better. They have seen results and are now aware of possibilities.

7. Creating space for children to participate and express their views and ideas is another area where much work has been initiated through the formation of structures such as *Bal Shiksha Panchayat* and spaces such as the *Bal Shiksha Darpan*. Though the functioning of the BSP may vary from centre to centre depending on the quality of facilitation by the GSS, an important space has been created to enable children participate in a democratic process and prepare themselves for the task of citizenry. These spaces, if properly facilitated, can create greater awareness among children about their own education, understand the challenges and issues that confront the provision of quality education in their communities, and prepare them to address these issues in multiple ways. In a later chapter, we will see how the BSP is already beginning to make a difference. With one generation of children going through such a process, it is possible that the next generation of more aware men and women will emerge from these local communities, who will address in even better ways the myriad challenges of educating their children in a difficult socioeconomic context...

6. Teachers

Background

In the initial stages of the ECL intervention, the focus as we have seen was more on two key aspects – dialoguing with the community about children’s education (often using the evidence regarding educational status that was collected from the baseline exercises as a starting point for discussion and also showing that the short term camps had made an important difference), convincing parents and other community representatives that ‘something’ had to be done, and eventually entering into MoUs with each local community to enable their active support and participation in the running of the Academic Support Centers (ASC). As part of these processes, a crucial activity was the selection and preparation of the Community Activist (CA) or *Gram Shiksha Sahayogi* (GSS) from the local community as the teacher at the ASC. In this chapter, we will discuss the ECL intervention from the vantage point of the teacher.

In the context of the ECL, there are broadly two sets of teachers, working with the same group of children – the Community Activist, and the Government Schoolteacher. Given that they both work with the same set of children in the same school and community, their roles become intimately linked. In the following sections, we will try and construct the picture of the CA and look at the multiple roles that the CA performs. This will be followed by a discussion on the links between the ECL intervention and the government schoolteacher. Finally, some critical observations will be made in the context of the intervention and the teacher.

The Community Activist (Gram Shiksha Sahayogi)

A snapshot

Aswant Sinha is a post graduate in history. She became a CA in September 2006, as the ECL program started expanding across the three blocks. Earlier, she had worked as a Shiksha Karmi in a government school, but family pressures led her to leave this position. Aswant works in the Vikas Khand (Pendrawan) primary school in Narharpur block (which has 24 children enrolled across the primary grades) between 7 and 1030 AM everyday. Her daily routine includes the maintenance of cleanliness of the school; checking of children’s homework and provision of academic support to children attending the ASC. Specifically, she is expected to address difficulties that children face in learning the content of the core curricular areas and provide feedback to the regular teachers regarding the progress of children. She uses tools and formats such as the Student Academic Tracking Tool (SATT) to ascertain progress of children regularly. Aswant also looks to the teachers for technical support, if she runs into some conceptual or pedagogical difficulty.

The Vikas Khand School has three other teachers – a headmaster and two Shiksha Karmis. ‘Shiksha Karmis are often on strike’, observes Aswant. ‘During such times, they do not come to school. That is when I am expected to manage the school in their absence.’ It is clear that Aswant’s mandate stretches beyond running the ASC for 2-3 hours every morning.

‘In the beginning, children were not confident – they would not even get up. Most of my efforts therefore went into developing a rapport with the children and in making them comfortable in my presence. Now they attend many competitions with confidence, and are more interested in what they learn in school.’ Perhaps this sums up her journey so far with the children. ‘Shalini didn’t come to school for nearly six months! After much discussion, I convinced her parents to send her regularly. Now, she has become an *Up-sarpanch* in the Children’s Panchayat. The ASC has made a difference.’ Aswant does not appear to restrict her interactions with children within the four walls of the school, where the ASC functions. I take them to the river, and sometimes to the agricultural fields as well. They learn as much from these activities...This approach was also emphasized during our training.’

Aswant is expected to also work closely with the Bal Panchayat and support its activities. Since she is from the same community, an important aspect of her work as CA is with the parents, who she has to meet regularly to discuss progress

of children. Specifically, this involves providing feedback about their academic progress and sorting out issues, if any, with respect to their attendance and participation in the ASC and school.

Over the years, Aswant believes that parents have become more aware about issues like children's learning in school. They are more focused on learning outcomes – whether children are learning what they are meant to, in five years of schooling. Part of the reason behind this increased awareness of the work of the CA. 'We constantly share information with parents. Once they become aware, there may not be a need for this ASC, because they will start asking teachers these questions.'

From the field visit notes, December 2009

Preparation of the Gram Shiksha Sahayogi

Selection of the GSS is quite rigorous. There is a test, followed by a personal interview. To be eligible for the position, GSSs should preferably come forward on their own, should have passed at least class 10, be from the same village and should have some teaching experience (this last criterion is not mandatory). Women candidates are encouraged. The schoolteacher and representatives of the local community are involved in this process, which is facilitated by Naandi staff. Once they are on board, the GSS's are provided continuous orientation and support. Much time goes into their preparation as far as working with children is concerned. Since children's learning outcomes is a key area of concern for the ECL program, this is paid much attention. Tools such as the SATT become the key foci of training of the GSS. This has been discussed in some detail in the section on children.

The GSSK's do not follow the same pace of covering the syllabus as the teachers in the government school do, since their primary objective is to ensure that children also gain a firm grasp of grade specific competencies – this takes time. However, they follow the overall sequence of the teacher. It is interesting that the GSS is also called the Community Activist (CA) thereby implying that the role goes beyond the teaching of grade specific competencies to children coming to the ASC. The term activist also implies that the GSS is someone who is fairly independent or autonomous in his or her thinking and action, who is a change maker. In practice, this would call for a different (perhaps even radical) orientation. We will return to discuss this briefly at the end of the last chapter. GSSs who show promise at work can become part of the Block Education Resource Group (BRG). While the BERG is primarily responsible for induction and training of new GSSs, it is envisaged that this group will play a crucial role in providing technical support to the ASCs or children and teacher even after Naandi withdraws from the area.

Working with government teachers

We have earlier discussed about the positioning of the ECL intervention vis-à-vis the government schoolteacher. Though the schoolteachers have been involved in key activities of the program, such as the selection of the GSS, the interface between them and the GSS seems to be limited. The ECL intervention has only recently attempted to rope in teachers through activities such as training. In the past few months (October 2009), training on competency based teaching, preparation of teaching-learning materials and usage of tools such as the SATT has been provided by Naandi to government schoolteachers. The overall response to the training is positive, if one goes by statements such as 'We liked the technique of training; we can teach children fast with this approach; the method is child centered; T-L materials help children get more interested; we prepared materials in this training unlike what we normally do (that is, purchase materials)'. There is thus recognition that the ECL approach may help. Yet, there are constraints as we will see next.

While it is part of the brief of every GSS that he or she should stay back in school to meet the teacher every morning and share information about the academic progress of children, it is not clear what teachers actually *do* with this information. Discussions with teachers indicate that they are pre-occupied with the completion of the syllabus and textbook content. The usual refrain seems to be that ‘We can’t give more time to children, as we have many non-teaching duties to do.’ That teachers are under much pressure from the state’s education department is clearly evident from the statements like:

‘The teacher is burdened by the state’s expectation. We don’t have time to make children understand, as there is always the pressure of course completion. There is a government order that the syllabus must be completed by January! We *do* realize that children are not understanding...’

That the teacher is further constrained by a centralized approach of the state where it concerns pedagogical matters is apparent in the way teachers look at the latest Multi-grade Multi-level approach (MGML), which the Chattisgarh state has adopted from the Activity Based Learning program of Tamilnadu (materials for the MGML are prepared centrally and supplied to the schools and teachers are expected to follow the methods prescribed):

‘The MGML is now on in classes 1-4. Kits are available. There are strict orders that we have to follow this card/ladder system...training of teachers is happening.’

It is thus clear that teachers are expected to do what the department has decided for them. In this regard, we must understand their observations regarding their interface with the GSS. In a discussion with headmasters in Charama block, they observe that:

‘If your Gram Shiksha Sahayogi’s and our teachers work together, it will be good. We don’t understand how the Sahayogi’s work. We also believe that children are studying for too long these days. If we add their school timings with the Gram Shiksha Sahayog Kendra timings, children are occupied for eight hours. It will therefore help if the GSS’s work during the school hours. They can teach innovatively...there is no need to follow only the department’s guidelines.’

These statements indicate that teachers do seek a greater interface with the GSS. Given the expectations from the department, this also implies that the GSS’s have to learn more about what is happening in the classroom, if they are to influence how children learn, since teachers are likely to have less space to try other methodologies beyond what is given to them. It may therefore help if there is an exploration with teachers as to how a greater convergence between efforts in the ECL interventions and their own work can be brought about.

Interactions in the course of the documentation throw some light on the experiences of GSSs working with government teachers. Invariably, a cordial relation has taken time to develop between the GSSs and the teachers. Initially, the GSSs hesitated to talk to teachers, given that they were expected to interact with them on a daily basis. Given differences in educational and socioeconomic backgrounds, GSSs perceived a hierarchy between themselves and the teachers. This has now given way to a more balanced working relationship. With regular (technical) support to the GSSs from Naandi, they seem to be more confident and determined. They are now at a stage where they feel that the teachers will need to find ways of ‘making things happen’ and that their role will be crucial in this regard. Yet, some GSSs report that the regular school teachers do not bother much about their work and also do not listen much to what they have to say. This is a difficult terrain, no doubt.

7. Children

Where it concerns children, this discussion will focus on their learning as well as other forums and activities that have been created in the ECL program for their participation. There will also be a glimpse of the rich and varied experiences that have arisen out of interactions with children, going beyond the work on their academic achievements.

Children's learning

The overall approach to learning in the ASCs encompasses the following:

Ensuring basic literacy and numeracy (i.e. ensuring 'Basic' competencies) – this is essentially a focus on attaining the 3R's (reading, writing and arithmetic). When each child enrolls in the ASC, a paper-pencil standardized test (called the baseline assessment) is given to determine if the child is below or at the grade specific level with respect to the attainment of the 3R's. This helps to determine the kind of support that needs to be provided to this child. This is followed later by an end line assessment.

Ensuring grade specific competencies – with the attainment of the 3R's as the basis, additional focus is to ensure that the content of the curriculum is learnt (using the textbooks as the main teaching-learning aid) as per the objectives of each grade.

Ensuring the above through an 'annual curriculum recap/revision' – this is to basically revise and reinforce what was learnt throughout the year. In the case of children in class V, this reinforcement becomes important from the point of view of their board exams. This apart, as part of internal assessments, there are quarterly and half yearly assessments.

Children in the ASCs sit in grade wise groupings. Given the often small numbers of children in each grade, the GSSs are able to manage working with these groups, usually giving tasks for one group, and moving on to another. Where individual children need support, this is provided by the GSS. In the initial days, a multi-grade/multi-level grouping was attempted, and children were grouped according to ability. But this soon gave way to grade wise grouping. While the government's textbook is taken to be the main source of content, ASCs also use other teaching-learning materials such as grade and subject specific workbooks, work cards, pocket board, flash card, number cards, counting pictures, action cards, alphabet cards etc.

Given that the overall objective of the ECL intervention is to ensure grade specific learning in school going children, and also given that the pace of learning is different for each child, the ECL program had to think of ways to track progress in children's learning. Two years after the ECL intervention began the Student Academic Tracking Tool (SATT) was developed (around November 2007). The *Operations Manual* makes the following note at SATT:

'SATT is a graphical representation of children's academic progress...where the recording of learning progress of children will be tracked regularly. It involves less paper work and the progress of the child is tracked in no time.'

Representation of data in the SATT is done in the following manner – the horizontal axis is basically the sequential list of competencies for two subjects (Hindi and Mathematics), while the

column/vertical axis consists of the names of the children. Thus, there is a grade wise and subject wise SATT format. This enables child wise tracking. To begin with, the baseline assessment enables the GSS to mark the child's ability or competency level on the SATT format. At this stage, achievements and difficulties are noted in order to decide appropriate academic reinforcement. After some time, as the child starts achieving the listed competencies, a test is again given to ascertain understanding – each test given as the child progresses along the competency sequence also has elements of the previous competencies achieved, to ensure that there is sufficient recall and application of earlier competencies. Again, if the child does not do well on the test, or has difficulties, practice sessions and extra support are organized. On the other hand, if the child is able to demonstrate the achievement of a particular competency, this is marked on the SATT against that competency, with the date. Thus, the SATT not only tracks progression in terms of competency achievement but also in terms of time taken. This entire exercise undertaken by the GSS is validated during routine visits to the ASC by the Academic Resource Coordinator. SATT data from all centers is digitized for analysis and follow up. Rangari's statement provides an indication of how the SATT is looked at by the GSSs:

'By using the SATT and catering to each child's needs, we have been able to bring about improvements...in the new ASCs, the challenges are enormous especially in the beginning. Children have not achieved the competencies they were meant to achieve in each grade. The SATT, along with other teaching-learning materials including the practice workbooks, helps.' (Rangari, 2009)

And Dharmendra Thakur says:

'I have faced many challenges in working both as a Sahayogi and now as an Academic Resource Coordinator (ARC). The first challenge is that of the *kamzor baccha* (weak child) – how does one bring them to the level of the *boshiyar baccha* (clever child)? The SATT is one tool which helps us regarding this.' (Thakur, 2009)

Having discussed the key pedagogical features of the ECL intervention, let us move over to another question – that of outcome. In its more than four year duration what improvements in children's learning has the ECL program contributed to? Since the overall goal is to ensure grade specific competencies, we must view learning outcomes from this vantage point. Naandi has collated examination results data for every year since the intervention began. The table below indicates certain trends, and the improvements are clear.

Table 2 – attendance and examination trends, ECL program

Dimension	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09
Average attendance	NA	65%	80%	85%
Promotion rate (class V)	86%	92%	97%	100%
% of children obtaining first division	21%	29%	65%	80%
No. of children appearing in the district top ten positions	0	0	3	9

Source: ECL program, Kanker (2009)

Disaggregated data is not available for further analysis – for instance, gender disaggregated data as well as data disaggregated caste wise are not available at the project level for us to comment about these outcomes in a more nuanced manner. However, on the whole, it can be seen that the improvements achieved are significant, if one keeps the examination results as a basis for comment. It will help if the project can prepare databases that are disaggregated as mentioned above. This will help in undertaking a deeper analysis.

Another point that must be mentioned is that when one looks at diversity with respect to children's learning, there are three key (interrelated) aspects that need to be taken into consideration – the first is that children learn at different paces; the second is that children may take different paths to learning; the third is that there may be a variety of learning styles that are based on children's multiple intelligences. The ECL intervention seems to have mainly considered pace of learning, while the other two aspects have not featured much in its calculus.

Understanding children's worlds

Though the ECL intervention focuses on helping children achieve grade specific competencies, the day-to-day interactions with children go much beyond this focus area. Often, GSSs and ARCs have had the occasion to observe and be a part of the richness of children's varied experiences, as is illustrated in the following excerpts shared by them. Perhaps these will serve as pointers to the as yet unexplored areas of engaging with children. To begin with, take Tarannum's observations:

'There are some children whose behaviors and actions are difficult to forget. When I remember these incidents, I can't help but laugh sometimes. There was a lovely young child, always with a running nose, who would always run behind red and black ants and catch them, and having done that, he would chew them up! One would always find him outside the class, busy going after these ants. Whenever I went close to him, he would look up, smile and then run into the classroom. Another child (Dileep) also has a peculiar habit. He always used to keep a small container containing powder in his pockets. After writing on his slate, he would spread the powder on the slate and then apply it all over his face! We all tried hard to take away his little powder box, but he scream and cry and would never let us do it. Each child has such peculiar and interesting ways of behaving...while they may seem peculiar to us, it is fun to experience them...we learn so much more about children that way.'

Or take this example of what it takes to win the confidence of a child:

'In 2006-07 when I was working as a GSS, there was a girl child who would not talk with any other child in the school. She was hesitating to even speak with her father! I tried talking with her, to help her become more confident. In the evenings, I would go to her house to meet with her parents and also to spend sometime with her. Slowly, she started speaking with me. I encouraged her to do things that she liked. Today, she is in class V and is so talkative that I wonder if this is the same girl! My efforts were later rewarded by Naandi, when I got the 'Best GSS award' in 2006-07 in Charama block. My efforts with the children in my GSS were also noticed by the parents in that village. This helped me to organize parent meetings more easily, as they came readily whenever I called them for a meeting.' (*Dharmendra Thakur, 2009*)

Lakshmi Sahu, the ARC from Charama block notes how she managed to win over Khileshwari and her parents, who were not interested in sending her to school. At the most, the girl would attend school for a few days in a month. During her visits to Chapeli (three times every month), she made it a point to visit Khileshwari's house and teach her for an hour every time. Later, she told the parents that Khileshwari could get a girl's scholarship from Naandi if they sent her to school, regularly. That seemed to change their minds completely. Khileshwari now attends school and has passed out of grade V with a second division.

It is interesting to see how the challenges of reaching out to all children are addressed in the ECL intervention. The ARC Narendra Kumar Sahu has used analogies and metaphors to drive home the point about education, both with children and local communities. We have already seen an example in

the chapter on communities earlier. In the village Pandarpuri (Bhanupratappur Block), a class IV child named Devlal Nishadh was very irregular in attending school and the GSSK. Sahu found out from his friends that he spent his time chasing and killing insects and rats in the village! Determined to win him over, Sahu once organized a women's group and village education committee meeting together in the village. Devlal was invited to this meeting with the temptation of getting chocolates, a ball for playing along with pencils. When he did come in, he was greeted with garlands and colors, like it happens during a *Holi* celebration. Seeing this grand reception had something to do with his attending school, he went speechless for a while, and then said, 'I didn't know that studying in a school would make me get this kind of a welcome and respect!' To which, Sahu told him as a matter of fact, 'Devlal, if you come to school regularly and learn, then take it from me that you will be respected throughout your life; otherwise you will only get to listen to the abuses of others.' Sahu notes that Devlal is now in class VII, and he attends school regularly.

Perhaps these examples and many more like them should be documented in greater detail -- they will surely help broaden and deepen the perspectives and experiences of working with children and help the project a deeper understanding of the worlds children inhabit.

Forums for children

Apart from providing support through the ASCs to ensure that children attain grade specific competencies, the ECL program has also attempted to create spaces for children's participation and expression, such as the *Bal Shiksha Panchayat* (BSP) and the *Bal Shiksha Darpan* (BSD). In a sense, these are ways to add on something to the existing focus on attaining grade specific competencies. It is interesting that these activities do not form part of the overall and specific objectives of the ECL program. However, the existence of such activities point out to other, deeper possibilities of working with children in enhancing their learning. From the Operations Manual of the program, we note that:

'The Bal Shiksha Panchayat is a student committee where the children take on responsibility for activities in the school. The objective of the BSP is to develop leadership, team work, peer learning, and promotion of hidden talents in children.'

The BSP consists of a core committee consisting of seven members such as the *Sarpanch*, *Up-Sarpanch*, Secretary, Discipline Secretary, Health Secretary, Education Secretary and Cultural and Sports Secretary. Each of these areas has a sub-committee which is responsible for activities and certain decisions. For the Sarpanch and Secretary positions, children (usually from class IV or V) are elected.

The BSP meets on every Saturday after school hours – this is the *Bal Sabha*, where all children are expected to attend. Typical activities in this meeting include singing songs, telling stories, and discussing matters related to each of the sub committees. Again, examples of how the committees function include the following – the education committee has as one of its primary objectives the regular attendance of all children in the ASC as well as the school. When a child becomes irregular, the Education Secretary along with other children usually visit the house of this child and speak with the parents and others in the family to find out the problem, and to request them to send the child regularly. In many cases, children report that this strategy works, and the child ends up coming back to the ASC and school. Likewise, the discipline secretary will, among other things inspect the nails of all children – if the nails are dirty or are not cut regularly, such children will be 'punished' in the BSP meeting – this usually involves singing a song, or squatting 10 times (*Uth-baith karna*) while holding

both ears! Indeed, this form of punishment is quite common for ‘deviant’ children, including those who come late to school. The child has to often ‘pay’ the penalty, even though there may be other genuine reasons for coming late to school, for instance.

The BSP publishes the *Bal Shiksha Darpan* which is a wall magazine to which children can contribute every month. There is also a corner for teachers as well as community members in the BSD. The Education Secretary is responsible for the BSD, and he/she is supported by a *Sampadak Mandal* (editorial committee). The various sections of the BSD include those for art, poems, stories, sharing of information etc.

From observations made during the process of documentation, not all BSP’s function in the same manner. Some tend to get more dominated by the GSS, who decides how the children’s Panchayat should function, how Saturday meetings should be held, and so on. In such cases, the space available for children to themselves decide what they want to do is much reduced. There are also cases where the GSS appears to be more flexible. In this regard much would depend on the orientation of the GSS as far as working with children is concerned. The approach of the GSS with respect to the BSP and the ASC cannot therefore be seen in isolation.

Interestingly, the schoolteacher is not part of the functioning of the *Bal Shiksha Panchayat*. It might help to find ways of involving the HM and other teachers – for instance, the BSP weekly meeting could be held during school hours to begin with. This might even help in the integration and convergence of the roles of the GSS and the regular teachers. Indeed, a recently issued GO of the district education office states that the teachers should take part in the activities of the *Panchayat*.

Apart from the BSD, the *Bal Mela* is a cluster level event organized by the BSP. The *Mela* has exhibitions put up by children, the *Jan Bhagidari Samitis* and even government departments. Prizes are awarded to the best exhibits. Other activities related to the BSD include Quiz competitions, sports and cultural events on days such as the Children’s Day (November 14th) and Republic Day (26th January). All these activities are designed to provide space for expression for all children.

The BSP’s are already beginning to make a difference, if one goes by the following description of Avdhesh Yadav on the situation in Gidhali village:

“The formation of the BSP in Gidhali village has resulted in some changes. First and foremost, with inputs from the intervention, there is a movement towards abolishing the practice of alcoholism in the village. Children and GSSK’s are in the forefront of this movement. They are also beginning to ensure the cleanliness of the school premises as well as individual hygiene. Because of these initiatives led by children, the village has now prohibited the practice of consuming alcohol.”

During the course of the documentation, there were opportunities to see two contrasting styles of working with the BSP’s. In Selegaon village in Bhanupratappur block, the GSSK was in complete control of the proceedings of the Saturday BSP meeting, directing children every now and then to follow a certain agenda for the meeting. The children were seen to be looking to her for cues very often. Spontaneity was lacking. In the neighboring village, one got to witness a different kind of interaction between the GSSK and the children of the BSP – she appeared to be far more informal and free with the children, allowing them to express themselves in their own unique ways. Perhaps this GSSK had it in her to become a good facilitator of the children’s group.

On the whole, it can be stated that the *Bal Shiksha Panchayat* is proving to be a space for children to get involved in democratic participation that will eventually lead to their shaping the kind of school and society they would like to see. However, in order to reach this goal, preparation of the GSSs and others involved will be the key, as our above discussion indicates.

8. Government

Strengthening linkages with the government

This chapter briefly discusses the trajectory of involvement of Naandi and the ECL intervention with the education department since the beginning of the ECL program. Since meetings with the government could not be organized, this section has been written on the basis of interactions with the ECL team.

Discussions with the education department in Chattisgarh began in October 2005, when a meeting was organized with the state education secretary. The idea that a baseline should first be undertaken to ascertain the ground level situation, arose from these meetings. These meetings paved the way for Naandi to start its work in Kanker with the baseline activity (December 2005 to January 2006) and later the short duration reading camps (April to June 2006).

As the Kanker intervention took root and expanded to 150 villages by late 2007, interactions between Naandi and the education department continued and got established further, with the result that the latter invited Naandi to undertake a study of the impact of teacher training in SSA in four districts – Durg, Mahasamund, Kanker and Dantewada. This was an indication of the perceived importance of Naandi as a player in the educational scenario at the district level. The impact study was followed by teacher training, again at the request of the government in these districts. Naandi was asked to develop a 3-day module based on teacher needs, which varied across the districts -- a total of 400 teachers were trained on use of TLM and TLM development (in Durg); use of the government prepared 'Bachpan' workbooks for Hindi and Math (in Mahasamund); on error analysis in math and Hindi (for teachers from Kanker), and on multi-grade/multi-level teaching for teachers from Dantewada.

The next important break for Naandi at the systemic level was during July in 2009. The District Collector invited the ECL team to undertake training for 360 teachers (Shiksha Karmis and Headmasters) in Kanker district. Following the training of 400 teachers the previous year, this was an important activity for the project with the government, and Naandi saw this as an occasion to further strengthen linkages with the education department. The training proposal was sent in August; the overall objective was to enable teachers (through the SATT) to work with each child, using appropriate TLM. For Naandi, this was the first opportunity and mandate provided by the system to share its ideas related to monitoring children's learning, such as the SATT. The training was undertaken in October 2009. It is too early to say if teachers are beginning to use tools such as the SATT in their work; we have already discussed the issues related to this in the chapter on teachers earlier.

Meanwhile, 2009 has been an important year from the point of view of reviewing the ECL program as well as rethinking the interventions from the point of sustainability as well as comprehensiveness. For one, the ECL team is now beginning a dialogue with local community structures like the VECs and the *Jan Bhagidari Samitis* about the sustainability of the program. At the same time, the notion of overall School Improvement has gained ground. So far, the intervention mainly focused on providing supplementary support by way of the ASCs (through dedicated *Sahayogis*), in order to bring about improvements in grade specific learning. While teachers were expected to take on board the ideas of promoting children's learning from the ECL intervention (since there is a regular interaction between the GSS and the schoolteacher), the link at best has been weak, given that the GSSs work outside

school hours. Teachers are expected to ‘complete’ the syllabus and are constantly under the instructions of the department to follow a particular approach. With the MGML approach coming in, teachers seem to be more under a structured regime of functioning.

Realizing that a broader, encompassing intervention is necessary to look at the school as a unit of change, and involve teachers and local communities more fully in the overall development of the school, the idea of the School Improvement Program (SIP) seems to have gained ground in the strategic level thinking of the ECL. SIP is expected to strengthen multi-stakeholder involvement, look at the issues related to greater teacher and community involvement, and promote the idea of sustainability.

The idea of the SIP has received fillip through a government order issued in September 2009, in which the education department seeks to introduce the idea all over the district. The SIP has overall 18 indicators that span children attendance, achievement of grade specific competencies, establishment of the Bal Panchayat (referred to as the *Bal Cabinet*), involvement of parents etc. The emphasis of the GO is on monitoring and promoting children’s learning by catering to the learning needs and difficulties of each child and maintaining progress of every child (tools like the SATT are likely to be emphasized for this purpose, though they have not been mentioned in specific in the GO). Further, this progress is to be shared on a regular basis with parents and local education committees. The GO also emphasizes closer community-teacher-school linkages by stating that there should be regular meetings between the parents and teachers. Interestingly, the GO does not mention anything about the MGML approach which is now expected to be implemented in all primary schools of the state, deriving from the ABL approach currently followed in Tamilnadu. It may help to consolidate/converge the pedagogical approaches of the ECL intervention as well as that of the MGML for better impact. Lastly, the GO talks about setting targets for especially with regard to children’s learning and performance in the annual examinations, along with other aspects such as creating space for forums such as the *Bal Cabinet*. On the whole, two key ideas from the ECL intervention – that of catering to differential pace of learning of each child, as well as the need to promote an create space for children’s expression and voices through the *Bal Panchayat*, have found mention in this district level communication from the education department to all blocks, clusters and schools/teachers.

The purpose of tracing this trajectory of Naandi’s involvement and linkages with the government is to show how over the years, the ECL program has come to play an important role in influencing decisions about educational quality at the district level. Further, by getting invited to be a member in the District Level Advisory Committee on education (a very recent development), Naandi has only consolidated its linkages with the education department. Perhaps the next step would be to take this forward and influence happenings at the state level.

9. Conclusion

This quick documentation presents an overview of an educational intervention that has attempted to improve the learning outcomes of children in a Chattisgarh district which is mostly populated by tribal people. In this study, we have tried to capture the processes and experiences of various stakeholders – staff of Naandi Foundation, teachers, and the local communities. The short time available for the study has meant that we have not been able to do an in-depth exercise. It was also possible to meet with key government officials to understand their perspectives on the intervention. Nonetheless, it has been possible to study the key elements and principles underlying Naandi’s approach in Kanker. What have we found? A focused intervention, emphasizing learning in the form of achievement of grade specific competencies, has taken firm root on the ground. The intervention has shown important improvements in children’s learning outcomes, if we go by their performance in the class V board examination, year after year. Further, the intervention has expanded to cover 163 locations as of today – about 15 local communities have come forward on their own to demand programs like the ASCs. We have also seen how the intervention, through sufficient demonstration, has gradually influenced the thinking at a systemic level – ideas that have been tried and tested in the intervention are being recognized by the government, which is now seeking to take them to scale. Further, the intervention has also shown that it is possible to dialogue with parents and local communities about the idea of children’s learning even if it is currently focused on grade specific competencies – this can provide a starting point for deeper dialogues about the notion, purpose and approach to education. Also, these interactions with the local communities have resulted in a gradual narrowing of distances between the community, teacher and the school.

Annexures

Annexure 1 -- Interactions in the course of this documentation

Dec 2009/January 2010 -- E-mail correspondence with the Naandi Foundation Hyderabad and Kanker offices (i.e. throughout the documentation)

14 Dec 2009 – meeting at the Naandi Kanker office (for briefing about the ECL project)

15 Dec 2009 – meeting with ECL project core team at the Kanker office; detailed discussion about the project

15 Dec 2009 – meeting with Academic Resource Coordinators at Lakeview Hotel

16 Dec 2009 – visit to the GSSK at the primary school (Vikas Khand, Pendrawan, Narharpur Block)

16 Dec 2009 – interview with Aswant Sinha, GSS, Vikas Khand

16 Dec 2009 – participated in a Naandi meeting with Headmasters of Charama block

17 Dec 2009 – Visit to GSSK, Charama Block (Village Manji Para)

17 Dec 2009 – meeting with GSS's at Junwani

17 Dec 2009 – participated in a meeting with community representatives, ARCs, and GSSs at Lakeview Hotel, Kanker

Dec 18 – participated in a staff meeting at the Naandi Kanker office

Dec 19 – observed a Bal Panchayat meeting at village Selegaon

Dec 19 – participated in a cluster meeting of GSSKs in Bhanupratappur block

Dec 21 – visit to the GSSK at Patelpara Ghota, Bhanupratappur Block

Dec 21 – participated in a community meeting at Piparpara Ghota, Bhanupratappur Block

Dec 22 – meeting at the Raipur office of Kanker

Annexure 2 – written contributions (acknowledged, and from which we have translated and quoted in the document)

Lakshmi Sahu -- ARC, Charama

Narendra Kumar Sahu – ARC, Narharpur

Dharmendra Thakur – ARC Bhanupratappur

Tarannum Khan – ARC Bhanupratappur

Yuvraj Kumar Nagaraj – ARC Bhanupratappur

Anil Kumar Pipariya – ARC Bhanupratappur

Parmanand Rangari -- ARC Bhanupratappur

Arun Kumar Sahu – ARC Charama

Jailu Singh Yadav – ARC Narharpur

Santu Ram Sinha – ARC Narharpur

Doman Sinha – Block Coordinator, Bhanupratappur Block

Avdhesh Yadav – Program Executive, Narharpur Block

M. R. Kansari – Block Coordinator, Nanhi Kali Program

Annexure 3 – terms used in the document

ABL – Activity Based Learning	NF – Naandi Foundation
ARC – Academic Resource Coordinator	NGO – Non-governmental organization
ASC – Academic Support Centre	NER – Net Enrollment Ratio
ASER – Annual Status of Education Report	REACH – Reaching and educating at risk children
BSD – Bal Shiksha Darpan	SATT – Student Academic Tracking Tool
BSP – Bal Shiksha Panchayat	SIP – School Improvement Program
BRG – Block Resource Group	SSA – Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan
CA – Center Activist	TLM – Teaching Learning Material
DIET – District Institute of Education and Training	3R’s – <u>R</u> eading, <u>W</u> riting and <u>A</u> rithmetic
DISE – District Information on School Education	USAID – United States Agency for International Development
DGM – Deputy General Manager	VEC – Village Education Committee
ECL – Ensuring Children Learn	
EVS – Environmental Science	
GO – Government Order	
GSS – Gram Shiksha Sahayogi	
GSSK – Gram Shiksha Sahayogi Kendra	
HM -- Headmaster	
JBS – Jan Bhagidari Samiti	
MDG – Millennium Development Goal	
MGML – Multi-grade/Multilevel	
MoU – Memorandum of Understanding	
MLL – Minimum Levels of Learning	

Annexure 4 -- references

- Operations Manual of the ECL intervention
- Formats such as the SATT, etc
- Power point presentation of the ECL and Nanhi Kali intervention in Kanker
- Strategic Framework for working in the education sector document (June 2009, Naandi Foundation)
- DISE data (2008) for Kanker, Chattisgarh
- Kanker district level planning document (2010-11)
- Vision 2012 document for Kanker
- Notes compiled by the Academic Resource Coordinators and Core Team, Kanker