

Annual Report

April 2013 to March 2014

Banwasi Seva Ashram Govindpur was established in 1956 in the most isolated region in South Sonbhadra (then Mirzapur). Its aim is “to encourage a strong village culture, incorporating the positive values of traditional life and the benefits of modern knowledge in such a way that neither people nor nature is unduly exploited.” Banwasi Seva Ashram believes that village self sufficiency is vital for the country’s development.

The Ashram’s strategy of work is analyzing problems faced by the communities / finding out workable solutions for addressing their root cause and then their implementation. In this process the Ashram involves the community and other stake-holders, subject experts and also government officials.

The Ashram’s efforts have been to initiate action, foster confidence and hand over the responsibility of sustenance to the community. The Ashram’s main intervention areas have been soil and water conservation, agriculture, horticulture, animal husbandry, education (for adults and children), health, village industries, vocational training, women empowerment and rural entitlement.

Banwasi Seva Ashram’s direct work area covers 350 revenue villages of 4 community development blocks in the southern part of district Sonbhadra. The Ashram supports ideologically and economically some volunteers from other parts of the country for constructive work in the same direction. In its direct work area, the Ashram has 13 field centres (Gram Nirman Kendra GNK) and 2 centres in the nearest townships. Each centre covers 25 to 40 villages.

Main events in 2013-14

Long partnership and support of the main funding agency was completed in December 2012, so from the year 2013-14 the Ashram is conducting its activities with the support of individual donors and its own created fund.

The Central Silk Board organised a state level exhibition where Banwasi Seva Ashram exhibited its production and was awarded a certificate and a prize for excellent production.

The Indian Institute of Vegetable Research with Ashram’s support selected 10 villages in Chopan block for their intervention in the field of agriculture. The results are very encouraging.

We received funding from a local MLA to construct a room at Manbasa Jeevanshala. ‘Guru Ganga Envirotech Trust’ gave a fund for a vocational training room at Bakulia Jeevanshala.

The Ashram has decided to upgrade the hospital facilities and for that we approached funders and donors.

The area stands third among critically polluted areas in India. But a new thermal power station was proposed. The construction of a Kanhar dam had been suspended for a long time, but this year the U.P. Govt. has allotted the funds for it.

People's organisation

There are 445 Gramswarajya Sabha's in 230 revenue villages of 134 Gram Panchayats. In these panchayats, they resolved nearly 300 dispute among themselves, and worked as pressure groups for better implementation of Govt. Schemes: distribution of MNREGA wages, Public Supply system, selection of beneficiaries for various govt. schemes. In Devkud, the Gramswarajya Sabha elected unanimously their representative to run the shop of the public distribution system. The Govt. announced that the incomplete water and soil conservation work will be given priority. The Gramswarajya sabha got the sanction of the Gram Panchayat for its request about 20 incomplete works and submitted it at Block level. At 2 sites work has been started.

20 active villages were selected for a comprehensive approach by the people in the line of Gramswarajya. A survey was conducted in January-February-March 2014 to map the resources available in the villages.

Awareness Programme

The Ashram organised awareness meetings at different levels on relevant issues. This year the Ashram trained volunteers and propagated the schemes of the Labour Ministry for the labourers engaged in construction work. 400 labourers who had no paper to prove that they are labourer were assisted to get a record of work under MNREGA and to get registered with the Labour Department.

Prabodhan Yatra (dialogue campaign)

13 teams from 13 subcentres reached all villages, and made contact with the villagers. Messages were written on walls, small meetings were organised at 80 development forums, in all 2500 men and 1500 women participated. Main topics of discussion were effects of consumerism, migration of youth, and pollution in the area. In some villages a survey was conducted to assess the situation. In Tedhiten village of Kuldumari panchayat in Myorpur block, there is a population of 862 and the total number of families is 143. 111 youths migrated. Out of them 65 went outside the district. Of these 111 youngsters, 96 were aged between 20-30 years. Only 46 were working outside since more than 3 years, and had more or less satisfactory wages. One particular village, Ajaniya, in Gidhia Panchayat in Chopan Block, went through a very threatening experience: all 36 youngsters who had gone to Punjab for work, returned as T.B. patients and 24 of them died!

Gramswarajya Sammelan

On 6-7 November, an Annual Conference was organised. 728 people (525 men and 203 women) from 203 villages participated in it. 200 other friends also joined us the 2nd day.

‘Village self sufficiency’ was the main topic. Dr. Vibha Gupta was the Chief Guest. She is a member of KVIC and chief functionary of Magan Sangrahalaya. She explained the challenges of new economic development and put the solution in decentralized development in which everyone must be involved.

Farmers’ clubs

In 17 villages, a farmers’ group was formed and linked to the NABARD scheme. 17 village level awareness meetings on different Govt. schemes for farmers were organised and twice, a ‘meet with expert’ happening was organised. This region was the producer of ‘Urad dal’ but for some years the crop was not successful. Kisan club members purchased the developed seed suggested by a scientist, and since their yields were healthy and have increased.

Child Right Campaign

The Child Right Campaign is organised and supported by UNICEF Lucknow. The Ashram as a partner NGO worked to create a concern in the community about ‘Child Right’ protection of children against abuses in family, village and outside.

The programme focuses on behaviour change according to a 10 child friendly agenda (CFA), through 260 Self Help Groups (SHGs) and strengthening of a child protection structure: 178 Child Protection Committees (CPC) with 2840 members at village level and BCPC at block level. The Ashram capacitated adolescent members and promoted their active role in village CPCs.

In 178 villages, 250 distant hamlets were identified from where children were not going to school and we focused specially on these hamlets. 2610 women champions contacted families, convinced them about the importance of the 10 point Child Friendly Agenda (10CFA). 100% families started using iodized salt, vaccination. 23 child marriages were stopped and 13 child labourers were rescued and enrolled in school. 1310 Out of School Children were successfully enrolled.

Parents took interest in the selection of members of School Management Committees and the members are now active specially to ensure regular attendance of teachers and students and midday meals.

A Block level Civil Society Organisation involved different stakeholders and 3 Gram Pradhans took initiative for a Child Friendly(Bal Mitra) Panchayat .

Women Empowerment:

Even though the funds stopped, 84 Gram Sakhies were active and leading the women issues in the community. They raised their voices for justice.

8 women workers contacted nearly 8400 families in 80 villages and advised natural farming, kitchen gardening, home remedies, care of pregnant women etc.

98 SHGs are continuing in 74 villages. Their total saving was Rs. 10,24,128.00 and they earned 1,54,670.00 Rs. as interest. They conducted regular meetings, even common meetings with men on community issues.

In December, at 9 places women's fairs were organised in which 790 women and 115 men participated. The main subjects covered were gender equality, women's health and child rights. Group members came prepared and participated in games competition.

There were 28 'Mahila Mandal' village level forums. They organised regular meetings, specially against the irregularities in implementation of schemes and abuses against women. 85 meetings were conducted. 840 members participated in these.

In 9 villages, women workers organised monthly adolescent group activities. Separate classes for girls and boys were also organised to discuss their psychological and health issues.

Environment protection

The Singrauli Region is becoming a power generation capital. Pollution makes humans, animals and vegetation suffer. The U.P. Pollution Control Board has submitted an action plan to control the pollution in 2011. At that time, the area stood in 9th position, now it is in 3rd position among most polluted areas.

The impact of pollution is very severe, so people have started protesting against it. A writ was submitted to the National Green Tribunal by residents.

At Ashram subcentre level, environment committees were formed to discuss the local issues and to protect village level forest, water and soil.

On the issue of the Kanhar dam construction, people are divided in 2 groups: a group is opposing and the other one is supporting, as they think irrigation will reach them. The Ashram had put a demand that there should be a fresh Environment Impact Assessment before taking any further step, because the situation has changed a lot since construction was started some 20 years ago.

In Babhani, people protested under the name of 'Adivasi Sangharsh Samiti' against the new coming thermal power station and did not allow Govt. field workers to even survey the land. They have only one demand: they will not give their fertile land.

Life oriented Education

Banwasi Seva Ashram runs 5 Jeevanshala's (one high school and 4 junior schools). In this year, in total 1253 students were enrolled (624 girls + 629 boys). Among Ashram Jeevanshalas, 3 primary schools are managed by people's organisations and the Ashram is supporting them academically. In these Gram Swarajya Vidyalayas, 310 students were enrolled. Last year, the high school result was 84%, although 50% students join Ashram

schools only from 9th class. Along the regular curricula, Ashram schools organise different courses and programmes to orient students to life challenges.

Skill Learning

Jeevanshalas focus on education of life skills. Tailoring is the common skill in each school. Washing powder, chalk making, carpentry, agriculture are the other optional skills. Girls and boys are learning these skills, without any discrimination.

Children Science Congress

Under the network of the National Children Science Congress promoted by the Department of Science and Technology, the Ashram co-ordinates the district level Children Science Congress. We contact other schools also. This year 8 other schools other than the 5 Ashram schools participated in it. In total, 143 children participated. The main topic was 'Alternative Energy - its use and conservation'. 60 students worked on the 10 different related topics in Ashram Jeevanshalas.

Character Building Programme

An inter-Jeevanshala competition was organised on 1 and 2 March. 36 students participated in it. Two competitions based on poems of Sants and nationalist poets and an essay on Gandhiji's autobiography were organised.

National festivals and cultural programmes were organised in which parents also took part.

Teachers' Orientation

From 25 to 28 June an orientation workshop was organised and 39 teachers of Jeevanshalas and gramswarajya Vidyalayas participated in it. District Scout Commissioner, Mr. Ramakant Kushwaha, music teacher Mr. Vinod Shukla and Anna Maria De Witte (Anu Bahan), Shri Ajay Shekhar Ji, Vice Chairman of the School Management Committee and Governing Body member, were the main resource persons.

English and Science teaching were focused on. The Scout Commissioner gave special classes about scouting. Mr. Vinod set a special tune for our Ashram school prayer and he built 5 teams of teachers and students to teach the song in each school.

As a follow-up, Anu Bahan organised monthly English classes for teachers to improve foreign language teaching.

Orientation on RTE

On 29 June, special orientation was organised on 'Right to Education'. The UNICEF District Consultant for Education facilitated it. The Ashram organised orientation on RTE for SMC members at selected schools under the Child Right project. On their demand, the Ashram on

its own organised 4 one day orientations on RTE. 394 Government school management committee members participated in these.

Hostels

The Ashram runs 3 hostels: 2 in neighbouring towns and 1 at headquarters. In total 57 students took benefit of these.

Adolescent Camps

At 6 places, 3 days' residential adolescent camps were organised with the contribution of local people. 296 boys and 272 girls (in total 568) from different villages participated in these. The main topics were the impact of pollution, sustainable life style, gender equality and role of children in ensuring Child Rights for all.

In groups, participants worked on different topics. Discussions were facilitated by resource persons. The participants did Shramdan, played games, and expressed their views on social problems through street play.

Agriculture, Animal Husbandry and Crafts

The Ashram at headquarters runs a small milk producing centre (Goshala) with 14 crossbreed cows and 9 local breed cows. We support farmers in marketing surplus milk.

We are promoting a local breed. The Goshala proved that only proper care can increase milk production. There is a demand for our local breed calves. We also give services of bull, vaccination and treatment.

25 trained volunteers, with the support of the Ashram veterinary worker, do vaccinations and treat animals in good number.

Agriculture

In our demonstration farm we are practicing natural farming on 50 acres of land. Orientation workshops were organised for farmers. Three other organisations also brought their farmers' team for exposure.

The Ashram is working in a hilly dry area of Myorpur block (8 villages) under 'NAIP (National Agricultural Innovative Project) with partnership of Benaras Hindu University. This year 2 more villages and 200 farmers were included. Better management of water and short duration varieties of crops have been introduced. Thus the intensity of cropping is increased. Silk cocoon rearing, grain processing units, blacksmithy, candle making are other income generating units which were established. Nirbhik hen and Barbari breed of goats were introduced. The farmers' interest was boosted and they are accessing other Govt. Schemes. Most of them are engaged in their farming. Selling of firewood stopped.. Only few are going to industries for labour. Farmers have started regular marketing of vegetables. This year is the

concluding year of the project, so orientation workshops were organised for the sustainability of the activities. Farmers purchased seeds from outside collectively.

Promotion of Village Crafts

On the Ashram premises, there is a Khadi and Gramodyog production cum training centre. We produce Khadi cotton cloths, blankets and tussar silk cloth as well as readymade shirts, kurta's, jackets, bags etc. The turnover is nearly 26 lakh Rs.

In Gramodyog, we produce musterd oil, curry masala, turmeric powder as well as washing powder, soap, leather goods, wooden goods, blacksmithy... The turnover is nearly 16 lakh Rs.

The unit faces a problem because the new generation is not accepting such jobs, as wages in industries are 2 to 3 times higher. In spite of this, new spinsters started work on 18 eight spindle charkha's.

We organised training for candle making and scent stick making for rehabilitated people under the CSR programme of NTPC Bijpur. 40 girls and women trained under this programme.

Health Programme

The Ashram runs a clinic at its headquarters. This year, due to constraints of manpower, the Ashram had to close 2 of its centres. One health worker retired and one left the job. In total, 15000 patients were treated.

Dr. Vibha started working part time for a CHC and also supported the Ashram clinic but the mobile clinics were discontinued.

With the help of trained health friends, the Ashram promoted home remedies in 100 villages.

Dr. Ragini and Dr. Vibha participated in a national workshop organised by the Department of Science and Technology on Prevailing Malnutrition. They presented the situation in the Ashram work area.

Mahatma Gandhi Mission

Under this programme, the Ashram supports young people who want to work for Gramswarajya. 2 volunteers from U.P. and 1 from Orissa were supported for one particular activity.

Orientation Camp: From 15 July to 17 July, an orientation camp was organised. 'Village level initiative for village self sufficiency' was the main topic. 41 men and 6 women village leaders joined the camp. Mr. Ramdhiraj Bhai and Sukan Baranth from Maharashtra facilitated the discussion. Participants listed the main challenges that villagers are facing. Some actions were decided as: village level resource mapping, community level planning to conserve **Jal** (water) **Jangal** (forest) **Jameen** (land), and regular interactions with youth.

