

Hundred Block Programme

The Next Phase!



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Hundred Block Programme

The Next Phase

A couple of years ago, the Hundred Block Programme was first proposed as a way for the Science Movement and NRI groups to work together on building a constructive action demonstration in a few thousand villages.

Over the last 2 years, this programme has grown on the ground – in villages in Bihar and Tamilnadu – slowly building up a momentum, and today it stands as a tribute to this unique collaborative effort.

We have a base today in more than 1500 villages in Tamilnadu and in 1000 villages in Bihar. Not just a contact – but an active programme with well trained volunteers in each of these villages.

We today have the strength and the ability to plan ahead – to grow roots and branches, developing new directions as we go along.

What has happened over the last two years in the Hundred Block Programme? What is the next phase? What should we work towards?

These are the questions that we face today...

Introduction

The People's Science Movements is a network of more than 30 state wide organizations. Each state organization (like the Tamilnadu Science Forum or Bihar Gyan Vigyan Samithi) works in several hundred villages. The PSMs have a long history of social mobilization in villages and slums all over India. Starting with science popularization in villages, they were responsible for the successful Mass Literacy Campaigns which drew in millions of volunteers and learners from the poorest sections all over India. Following the success of these literacy campaigns, the science movements initiated a number of intervention programmes in health, education and women's empowerment. The PSMs draw in most of their volunteers from the poorest sections.

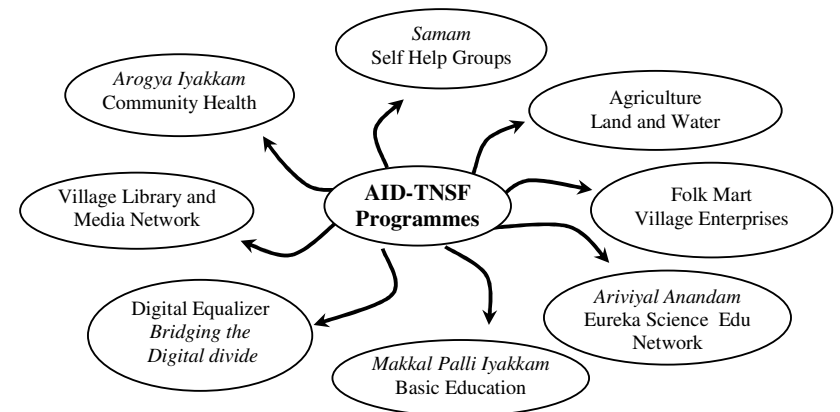
The early 1990s saw the emergence of a number of young NRI organizations in the US – Association for India's Development (AID), Asha for Education, Vibha, India Literacy Project (ILP). Led by students and young professionals, these organizations quickly expanded all over the US, began raising funds and supporting education, health and development projects in India. During the late 1990s, several volunteers from this group returned to work with people's movements in India.

Over the last few years, a unique collaboration has emerged between the People's Science Movements and these NRI development organizations. This note shares the enthusiasm and possibilities that have opened up because of this collaboration.

Today, in 1000 villages in Tamilnadu and 800 villages in Bihar, we have a strong intervention in children and women's health, and micro-credit (women's savings groups). In 200 villages in Tamilnadu we have an innovative primary education programme. In Chennai's government schools and slums we have an active science education intervention. We have recently started 1500 low cost village libraries. We have 20 village computer education and information centers. Our volunteers in IIT-Madras are developing an electronic data card for savings groups and health activists – taking IT services to the poorest.

All this and more has been made possible thanks to this coming together of two organizations with distinct strengths. One – TNSF – has a good base of field volunteers and a structure which brings together a large number of volunteers from poorer sections with high degrees of motivation. The other – AID – has a number of highly qualified volunteers who can raise funds, quickly convert ideas into action, provide creative inputs, focus on measurable results and coordinate a variety of programmes.

The main programmes we are working on can be classified into 8 categories – as shown in the diagram below.



The report that follows briefly describes each area – what we have done so far and what we hope to work on in the near future.

Finally, in conclusion, we look at the larger overall plan towards which we are working – where the Hundred Block Plan is leading us to.

Basic Primary Education Intervention

Goals

1. Enrollment of all children and prevention of drop-out in primary school. Stopping child labour and creating support networks for working children.
2. Identify and support weaker children and provide individual attention and thereby ensure measurable improvement in learning and confidence levels in these children – starting with basic literacy and numeracy skills, but moving on to other subject areas.
3. Improving the quality of education in primary school and ensuring consistent practice of activity based teaching-learning.
4. Improving school infrastructure and environment and children's access to resources.
5. Organizing teacher's networks and getting teachers to share academic and teaching experiences to improve quality of schools.
6. Building community support and community involvement in the daily running of schools.
7. Converting schools into a community education centers hosting large number of educational activities and events for children and adults.

Specific Programme Strategies

Makkal Palli Iyakkam (People's School Movement): This programme uses the existing school infrastructure to improve quality of school education, prevent drop outs and build community support for the school. There are 3 sets of activities which are central to this project:

- *The central fact of our education system is that more than half the children in most schools cannot read or write after 5 years of school!* Support centers run by village volunteers directly work with these children providing them with individual attention – helping them read and write, add and subtract. Good training and material support ensures these children significantly improve in a short time.
- A host of in-school activities to improve quality of education – particularly focused on activity based teaching techniques.

- A large number of community education activities – including libraries, adult literacy, classes, shows, melas and games for adults and children, magic shows, slide shows, health classes, etc – to build community support for the school.

Mop up programmes for working children or dropped-out children:

Non Formal Education centers for child labour provide basic education and get these children to the fifth or the eighth standard levels. Bridge Courses help dropped out children quickly catch up and join mainstream schools. In addition, we have programmes for working children – games and activities, libraries and reading programmes, and courses providing basic life and livelihood skills. And finally we need to organize support networks for these children.

Direct In-school quality and resource Intervention: These are activities that directly try to improve facilities and quality in schools. Providing computers, painting of schools, organizing toy and book libraries, producing and providing low cost materials, and improving school infrastructure directly, through community mobilization or by pressurizing the government to deliver is one kind of activity. Developing *a block level team of Education Activists* who directly go to schools and conduct training programmes, classroom programmes and help with improving quality is one important component of this programme. Creating *school based resource centers* which cater to a cluster of schools is another important component.

Thulir Demo Schools and a Growing Network of Alternate Schools:

Encouraging and supporting the starting of Thulir schools which demonstrate how much better quality education is possible even within the funds and infrastructure available to government schools. Encouraging and supporting existing schools that want to switch over the Thulir school approach (activity based learning) and to network all such schools to help share ideas and resources.

Teacher's Network: Debates with teachers on the need for changes in the education system. Networking interested teachers and providing training and workshops and a platform to share experiences and to discuss

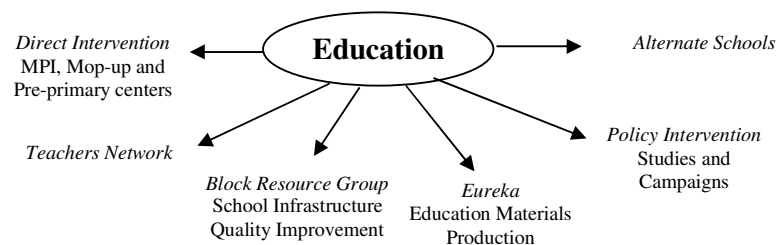
pedagogical and academic questions. The magazine, *Vizhuthu*, is a journal for this network. Other components of this programme are:

- Materials for teachers and teacher resource centers in each district.
- Reading circles encouraging teachers to read books on educational experiences and to discuss ideas.
- Intervening in curriculum and textbook revisions.

Pre-primary Education: Starting and helping existing pre-primary (balwadis) centers (both Govt and other NGOs) by improving the quality of education (games and activities) and support provided there. This programme will also be a part of the Arogya Iyakkam child health intervention.

Eureka Education Materials for Primary Schools: Producing a host of materials for teachers and students to use. These materials come in a variety of forms – books, cards, games, toys, experiments, pamphlets, comics, slides, videos, CDs, etc.

Studies, Campaigns and Policy Intervention: Detailed Studies of learning levels and status of children in each subject and in each class need to be done. It is sad that nothing of this kind exists! Based on these studies, problem areas will be identified and materials for improving learning levels in these areas will be developed. This will also lead to work on curriculum and syllabus revisions. Setting up a state education resource center and a network of district education resource centers will be part of this team's job.



Current Status and Plans for the Near Future

With financial help from Vibha, Asha and AID, we have been running the Makkal Palli Iyakkam programme in 200 villages. With support from Pratham we have been running 50 centers in Chennai. We are now trying to expand the programme to 1000 villages in rural areas and to 250 centers in the Chennai in the coming year (2004).

Recently, we did an analysis of improvements in the reading levels in the support center children. We found that 64% of the children had improved in a 3 month period. Those who were earlier unable to read letters, can now read words; those who were earlier unable to read words, can now fluently read paragraphs! And one must keep in mind that these are the same children who have been classified by the education system as ‘dullards incapable of learning’. What, well qualified teachers, have been unable to do in 4 years, poor 10th-standard-educated volunteers have been able to achieve in 3 months! *Thanks to their motivation and the individual attention they give to each child.*

And in each of these 250 villages and slums, we have also built up a good community support for the school and for our work by a host of exciting and educational activities over the last one and a half years.

In the area of child labour, we are running 4 NFE centers in Kanchipuram for about 80 children which have managed to bring up most children to the 5th std level. Several centers are also being run in Virudhunagar with government support. In school infrastructure improvement, we have provided computers to about 70 schools and have worked with many teachers trying to improve teaching methods. More work needs to be done in this direction. We are planning to set up 4 school level resource centers in Chennai corporation schools.

We are now running 4 Thulir Schools (3 in Vellore and 1 in Madurai). Every visitor to these schools comes back energized by the creativity and enthusiasm of the children. That such a high quality school can be run with so little money is an eye-opener! We are trying to expand the reach

of these schools and also to start a corpus fund for these schools. We also plan to start a few more such model schools.

We have been building up a teachers network and there are today about 600 teachers who are part of this network all over Tamilnadu. This network needs to be strengthened further and we are planning to start teachers resource centers in each district in the coming months.

We have not directly worked with pre-primary centers, though we are now closely working with Vidyarambam, an NGO already running more than 150 pre-primary centers across Tamilnadu. We will be helping them expand their centers to areas where we have a base as well.

We have started producing a lot of educational materials – in the form of activity books, pamphlets, games, story books, cards, experiment kits, etc. We have set up a separate book production unit called *Eureka Books*, to handle this production. All the materials we have so far produced have been enthusiastically welcomed all over Tamilnadu. This coming year we hope to produce 10 activity books, 20 story books, 24 pamphlets and several games for primary education.

We recently started a math learning level status study in government and private schools. The focus was 3rd and 4th standard children and an intensive study was launched. Volunteers spent a lot of time with each child trying to understand all the educational inputs the child gets – from school, at home from parents and siblings, tuition centers, etc. They then tried to understand the math level of the child and compared it with what was expected by the curriculum. This study is being done in village schools (both 1-teacher schools and 3-4 teacher schools), in city corporation schools, private schools and model schools. We hope to have a clear picture of the math education status in our schools from this study and hope to use this study to influence education policy and action at a larger level. We are also starting work on studying the levels in other subjects as well. Apart from these study based campaigns, we are also planning a campaign to stop corporal punishment in school and a campaign to enroll all children in 10,000 villages.

Children and Women's Health

Goals

1. To measurably improve the health status of women and children.
2. To improve the utilization of existing of government health services.
3. To restructure and redesign government health services and programmes to make it effectively reach the poorest.
4. To educate people on health, nutrition and sanitation.
5. To create a community health worker and a team of health activists in every village who can locally plan for health needs of the village.
6. To make people see that the struggle for health is a part of the larger struggle for social change and equality – for without these changes a truly healthy life is not possible.

Specific Programme Strategies

Arogya Iyakkam: This programme motivates and trains a village volunteer (typically an 8th std drop-out from a very poor family) to go house to house counseling mothers on feeding, nutrition, health and simple illnesses like ARI, diarrhea, worms and primary complex. She also counsels pregnant women on nutrition and delivery care. This counseling is very intensive and the activist spends 40 min to 1 hour with each family trying to understand the nitty gritty of feeding patterns, illness history and social causes leading to malnutrition and ill-health in the family. It is based on these multiple factors that the activist provides her critical and individualized advice for the child or the pregnant woman. Through such intensive counseling work, the activist tries to bring about a measurable improvement in child health status. The village activist maintains a register with health records of every child and pregnant woman in the village.

In addition, the volunteer is also trained on simple curative care and maintains a medical kit. In addition this programme also organizes health camps on cholera, TB and women's reproductive problems. As part of the programme, there is also a constant attempt to work with the government health staff like VHNs, PHC doctors and ICDS workers, and to improve the utilization of government services.

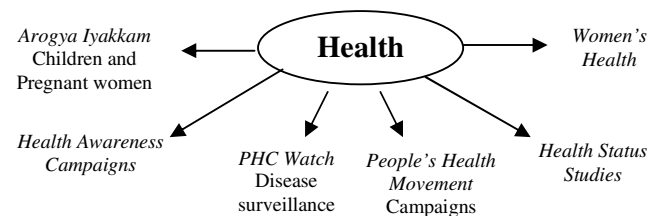
Women's Health – This is a new programme that is being initiated along the lines of Arogya Iyakkam. A village activist is trained on basic women's health issues and maintains a register with all the women and the problems they face. The activist offers them a package of simple solutions – both curative and preventive and monitors the effectiveness of these solutions. In case the support offered does not work, the activist refers the woman to a gynecologist nearby. As part of this programme, adolescent girl groups are created in each village and school and a series of classes on understanding their body, their health and life skills needed is organized. Gynecological camps are also organized in the village.

Health Awareness: Cartoon pamphlets, slide shows and books are mass produced and a health education and awareness programme is being organized in all the Arogya Iyakkam and Women's Health villages as well as through our women's Self Help Groups. Health Poster exhibitions are being prepared for a day-long village level *Samam Arogya Mela* in each village which will bring all the women in the village together for games, video sessions and health education classes.

PHC Watch, Disease surveillance and prevention: This is to monitor the health status of our people and to develop a surveillance mechanism, through local volunteers using post cards. Based on this surveillance, one can intervene to prevent epidemics in time and also use the information to plan for the local health needs. This same mechanism can be used for monitoring the working of the government health services!

People's Health Movement, Public outreach: This brings together a large number of NGOs on specific health policy campaign issues, and on monitoring of primary health centers and private health providers - On one hand the Government is pushed to improve services and provisioning and on the other the community and local health staff is mobilized to improve utilization of existing services.

Health Status Studies: Studies of the health status of children and women is being planned. Data from Arogya Iyakkam and the women's health programmes is also being analyzed. Together these studies can be used for policy interventions.



Current Status and Plans for the Near Future

With support from the Association for India's Development, we are now implementing the Arogya Iyakkam programme in 900 villages in Tamilnadu and in 800 villages in Bihar. In fact this has been the first step in launching the Hundred Block Programme – helping us get a significant base in a large number of villages in two states. We are now working in 23 blocks in Tamilnadu and 14 blocks in Bihar. In each block we have a fulltime team of committed activists who train the village volunteers. In each village we now have a well trained volunteer who keeps track of all the children and pregnant women in the village and goes house to house counseling mothers and pregnant women.

Sometime ago we did a study of the effectiveness of this programme. We found that 34% more children in our health villages have improved in their nutrition status – as compared with the other village where we have no intervention. *UNICEF also did a study of our programme and judged it as one of the ten best programmes in the world!* The Tamilnadu Government has also included this programme as a model programme in its State Nutrition Policy. Five years ago most health NGOs did not even know that we were working in the area of health. Today we are considered one the premier community health movements in the country.

We are now working on improving the quality of this programme further. We have developed a state team and a state office to help train and coordinate this programme better. We have also started producing a large number of materials – pamphlets, videos, cards and books to help reinforce the training. We will not significantly expand the programme to

newer areas – rather the focus will now be to consolidate the programmes in the current areas and adding more components like the Women’s Health component and the Poster exhibitions in the existing areas and integrating it with other programmes like libraries, SHGs, and education.

We have started the women’s health programme on a small scale in one block. We plan to build on this experience and to initiate a women’s health programme in all the 23 blocks in Tamilnadu in the coming months. A study on women’s health problems in Sivakasi block has also been started.

We have started producing a large number of cartoon health pamphlets which have been very popular. We will continue bringing out one pamphlet each month – as a wide spread health education tool. We have also developed the first set of health posters which will be used for village level poster exhibitions. We have just started the *Samam Arogya Melas* and hope to organize this exciting educational event in all the Arogya Iyakkam villages. Recently we started a post card based child death surveillance programme in 2000 villages in Vellore with support from UNICEF.

We were one of the main groups that initiated the People’s Health Assembly campaign in India. This large campaign touched 30,000 villages all over the country and involved over 2000 organizations. We prepared 5 campaign booklets which were translated into 9 languages and sold over 30,000 copies. The PHA campaign very successfully raised the issues of health care on a national platform. The network that was built up during this campaign continues today as the People’s Health Movement and we are active partners in this large national movement – leading the health action in Tamilnadu and Bihar. As part of this campaign, we constantly try to question government policies and to bring about changes in the public health system.

Our health programme works with the poorest of the poor in villages and tries to bring some immediate relief to them. At the same time it also tries to organize and empower them (particularly women) to change the exploitative social structure which is the primary cause for poor health.

Samam Women’s Empowerment and Self Help Groups

Goals

1. To organize women – through SHGs, adolescent groups, health etc.
2. To sensitize women and men to work towards gender equality
3. To support women victims of violence
4. To empower women – economically, socially and politically

Specific Programme Strategies

Women’s Self Help Groups: These are self-reliant women’s savings and credit groups. ***A sad fact: most poor women (and men) can only access loans at an interest rate of 60%-120% per annum!*** Once they face an emergency where they are forced to borrow at such exorbitant rates, they are forever repaying the interest and remain in debt. SHGs help poor women cope in poverty – helping them with access to loans at much lower interest rates and also offering them a safe avenue to save money. Many good NGOs today have started women’s SHGs. The salient difference between our groups and that started by most other NGOs is that our groups support themselves right from start. Twenty women come together, save and give out their savings as loans to group members at an interest of 24%. Half of this interest is used to pay the women an interest of 12% on their savings ***and the other half is used to run the SHG network*** – including coordinator salaries, passbooks and account books, etc. There is no need for external funding! But we see SHGs as much more than merely a monetary support system. We have regular reading material for the SHGs, use the SHGs to help the women build up a support network for themselves, use the SHGs for health education and intervention. In many of our groups, women have stopped wife beating, have thrown out illicit liquor sellers, started libraries and literacy programmes and fought with government PHCs for better services.

Sahodari Maiyems - Support center for victims: Women victims in villages are plenty and suffer in silence. A legal aid and support center at the district level with linkages to all our villages through the libraries and our other programmes can provide a lot of relief to these women.

Samam Microcredit: Our SHGs rotate their own savings and help each other in need. But the need for loans is such that their own savings satisfies only a very small part of the demand. So we have developed the Samam Microcredit System. This is a unique way by which the same money can help the poor three-fold – again and again! We collect revolving fund donations and zero-interest loans from friends and also get bank loans. This money is given as loans to savings group women – who return 24% interest on the loans (the norm for SHG loans). Half of this interest stays in the block to support the block level programmes. The other half is given to the state team to help sustain our various programmes. Donations can be collected for different programmes – health, education, libraries, SHGs, etc – and the interest used for the programme specified. This is like a sustenance corpus fund. But unlike a corpus fund, this helps three times over – first poor women use it for emergency needs, the block SHG and health/education programme is supported and it also helps sustain the state team and programmes!

Gender sensitization and Samam Libraries: This is a part of all our programmes. Though camps, games, activities, talks, seminars and books, we sensitize men and women on gender equality. Samam Library is part of the overall village library programme (*introduced later*). Materials are prepared and sent monthly to libraries on women’s rights and equality. These materials are also used in SHGs. In each village, a poster exhibition combined with a games and gender sensitization mela is also planned.

SHG to Enterprise Network: Training the SHG women in running enterprises and developing enterprises is the next step after building the SHG network. The programme has 3 components: training, marketing support and bank linkages for loans.

Studies: How useful really are SHGs? Who benefits? Are some women being left out? Why? What other micro-credit structures can be formed? How to help create productive assets that are controlled by women? What are the mathematics needs of different women? What management skills do vegetable vendors need? What are the continuing education needs of different women? Many such studies are in the pipeline.

Current Status and Plans for the Near Future

We now have a network of 4000 savings groups all over Tamilnadu and several hundred groups in Bihar. This network helps us reach out on a weekly basis to one lakh poor women – providing them basic savings and credit support and also literacy and educational support! In the coming months we will expand this network to more areas. We need to systematize training and coordination and accounting in these groups. We need to produce more reading material for these groups and expand the Samam libraries which have been started recently. A monthly SHG newsletter needs to be started. We need a few state fulltimers to help coordinate this SHG network. We have started the Samam Microcredit system. But the funds available is still much less than what is ideally required. We need to raise a lot more money (as grants and zero-interest loans) for this project – at least Rs. 50-60 lakhs. We need more systematic impact studies of our SHGs and need to document the successes and failures of these groups.

We started a Sahodari Maiyem support center in Ramnathapuram entirely run by local donations. But we were unable to sustain it for long – for lack of funds. In the period it did run, it was a major success, helping many women get out of difficult situations. The programme helped women victims of violence get a secure place to stay, found them jobs and got them legal support. In marital problems, a combination of threat and counseling helped set things right. A book was prepared on the success stories.

Deepam in Madurai and Malar in Kanyakumari have managed to start a large number of enterprises. Deepam in particular has gone about this in a very systematic way – identifying enterprises, doing market studies, organizing training, arranging loans and setting up the enterprises and hand holding. They have today a network of over 350 enterprises running successfully. More work along these lines will be done in the coming months. An enterprise network is the easiest programme to start and the hardest to run profitably in a sustained manner. We hope we can build an enterprise network without burning our hands in the process.

People's Library Movement

Goals

1. To create libraries for children and adult neo-literates and to generate monthly reading materials for them
2. To use the library to initiate activities in each village and also to use the library to reach educational materials to people.
3. To use the library to form a branch in each village and to sensitize the local population
4. To use the library to kick-start the large scale production of low cost, high quality educational materials.

Specific Programme Strategies

Basic Library Network: We start with 5000 libraries (basically a volunteer's house) at a total programme cost of about Rs. 20/library/month. We start with simple libraries (basically a volunteer's house) that are used by 50 people in the village. Each village is given 16 story sheets. One page with two colour printing on both sides forms one story! These sheets are circulated to 50-100 people (women and children) to read. To ensure these sheets are not torn on handling, they are inserted into 16 plastic covers before circulation. Every two months we send 16 new story sheets. The volunteer pulls out the old 16 sheets from the plastic covers and inserts the new 16 sheets and circulates it around. The volunteer also maintains an extremely simple library register. ***Keeping the library and the librarian's work simple is the key to success.*** The arrival of new material every two months generates periodic excitement to sustain interest in the library. The stories are written in simple language, with cartoons. They are stories of volunteers and activists, stories for children, stories for women, events, translations of good materials, etc. Some of the sheets are on health, agriculture and education. Every 2-3 months we add a free or subsidized book or a laminated story card, or a pamphlet to the library. Local donors who want to help the library can contribute 16 more plastic sheets, increasing the circulation band-width of the library.

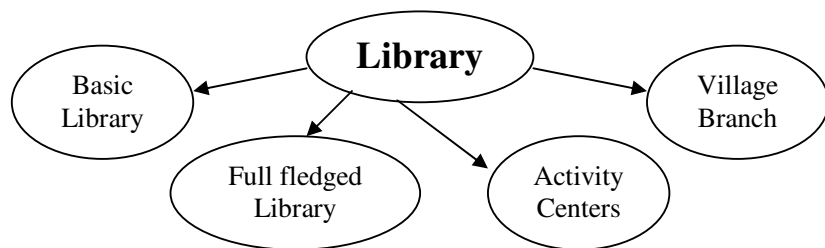
This basic library involves very little work at the village level – but has a lot of impact. The district or block organizers raise Rs. 20 for each library every two months – either from local sponsors or from Re.1 collections from library users – they pay Rs 10 for the new 16 story sheets and keep the rest for travel and coordination expenses. These libraries can be organized independently or as add-ons to existing programmes – health, SHGs, MPI, tuition centers, science clubs, etc.

Full fledged Library: Here we add much more substantial reading materials to the basic libraries. We print a large number of books (Rs. 2-5 per book) for children and adults and provide it to the libraries at a low cost. Every month, the librarian collects Rs.2 from each member and use it to buy books. We also produce a large number of low cost comics for children and provide to the libraries. Along with these, we produce educational cards and cartoon books. Other educational materials on health, agriculture, etc can also be added at this stage. To produce all this material we have started a separate unit called Eureka Books. We also set up a *block level issuing library* with about 800 books – each village library borrows 10 books at a time from this block library. This way a number of more costly materials can be accessed by the village libraries.

Village Activity Centers and Block Asset Center: For a cluster of 20 libraries, we train one resource coordinator who organizes monthly activities around the library. This person is trained on science experiments, magic shows, video screening, slide screening, book-reading, dramas, adolescent classes, debates on social issues, low cost toy making, organizing melas and festivals, etc. The block is stocked with assets – VCD players, posters, slide projector, camera, slides, VCDs, experiment kits, toys for children, sensitization materials on communalism, caste, gender, inequality, globalization. The resource person uses all these assets and materials to conduct monthly (or weekly) programmes in each library. A monthly wall poster series can be planned.

Branch in the village: This resource person also tries to initiate a volunteer group in each village and gets them to start tuition centers, adult literacy centers, support centers, SHGs, Science Clubs and other activities

in the village. Through the branch, larger village meetings and debates are held periodically. At this stage the block team uses the local media channels to reach out to a much larger section of the population.



Current Status and Plans for the Near Future

We just started this programme a couple of months ago and have already started almost 1000 libraries in villages and 90 libraries with activity centers in Chennai! There is already a demand for starting another 2500 libraries all over the state and we have plans to expand the library network to over 5000 libraries in the next one or two years. We have also started producing small low cost story books and comics for children in Tamil which are quite popular. We need to raise a fair amount of money as a revolving fund for Eureka Books that can be used for continuous production of books and materials. Then the books can be sold and pay for the printing costs – only the initial production cost has to be subsidized.

We have just started a posters programme as well – which uses the same plastic sheet idea – now a bigger one for posters! We are preparing a set of posters on different topics – health, education, science, gender and social issues – which will be given to the village volunteers to organize regular poster exhibitions in the village.

We are expecting this programme to grow and become an integral part of every programme that we are doing. These libraries will be the centers around which a number of new interventions can also be started.

Science and Social Science Education

Goals

1. Improve the quality of Science and Social Science Education
2. Make science organic to children's experiences and thinking process
3. Foster scientific and rational thinking in children
4. Encourage children to think rationally about society and social issues
5. Bring about a measurable improvement in the understanding of science concepts – both in children and teachers
6. Improve resources for science and social science education in schools
7. Organize teachers networks – for sharing experiences and materials, developing better teaching techniques and for enriching their skills.

Specific Programme Strategies

Arivial Anandam: This is a block level measurable improvement programme like the Arogya Iyakkam or Makkal Palli Iyakkam programmes. But unlike the other two, there are no block fulltime coordinators in this. Instead, in each block we have a set of 5 volunteer resource persons who work in 6-10 schools each. Every two months we have a training workshop where these 5 volunteers (50 for 10 blocks) are trained on *two* topics. Along with the training we provide to each block, on each topic:

- A questionnaire (and activities) to measure the current understanding in children and later to measure the understanding post-intervention
- A set of posters for display (two sets for each block + for school sale)
- A Concept Card – to be sold to all children in schools
- An experiment kit with experiments on the topic
- A dialogue class and discussion session
- A video CD on the topic and slides
- A festival or a mela or an exhibition plan with activities
- A book which explains the concept and is detailed reference.

The above materials together form a full package on the topic – for a thorough understanding of the topic. Each resource person visits each of the schools/villages twice a month and does these activities in school. The resource person involves teachers in these activities – training them in the process. The activities are basically of six types:

- **Experimenting & Questioning:** Experiment demos, dialogue classes
- **Visual Understanding:** Slide shows, Magic shows, Video shows followed by discussion, night sky watching
- **Classes:** Adolescent health classes, Meet the scientist programmes, science lectures, Book reading sessions with discussion
- **Events:** Science and social science festivals, quiz programmes, exhibitions, book fairs, metric melas and educational field visits.
- **Projects:** Science and social science projects, inventing things, questions about our society, learning data analysis techniques
- **Civic Action:** Based on projects/studies done and in causes they believe – organizing programmes and campaigns.

One can expect that through this programme, in a 2 year period, our block resource persons will become science education experts (with a set of materials) who can bring about a measurable change in the quality of science education in these 30-50 schools/villages in each block.

Teacher's Network: Science clubs are demos of what is possible. Ultimately teachers have to do these in schools. Many interested teachers don't have access to ideas, materials or even forums for sharing experiences. This network creates such a platform. Teacher training camps, experience sharing meetings, egroups to clarify concepts, monthly pamphlets on teaching techniques, discussing hard spots and syllabus changes needed, resource centers for teachers and low cost books, video and materials that teachers can buy are steps in this direction.

Eureka Science Material Production: Material production as part of other activities does happen in a limited way. But focused material production for science is a definite necessity. The Eureka team does exactly this. These materials are of different forms – Video CDs, slides, Books, pamphlets, Dialogue Classes, Project Ideas, Experiment Kits,

Toys, interactive CDs, websites, science magazines, etc. The team looks at material promotion programmes (VCD jatha for example), does usage studies and modifies the materials accordingly. There are 3 kinds of materials:

- **Regular Materials that seed a structure:**
 - Monthly Cartoon Science and Social science concept cards are being produced. These Rs. 2 booklets are sold to all the school children. The plan is to build a large reach out network using these – to sell at least 1-2 lakhs copies.
 - Monthly posters for schools and for village poster exhibitions
 - Newsletter for schools and teachers to help organize a schools network and a science teacher's network.
- **Stand Alone Materials that can be used independently:**
 - Low cost Science Cartoon Dialogue Books
 - Low cost science experiment kits

Science and Social Science Education Studies: We are also doing a number of studies on hard spots in science teaching and difficulties in understanding each topic. We are also experimenting with different ways of teaching and documenting these into books. We are also working on curriculum and syllabus revisions.

Nested Science Lab Packages: Most rural schools today do not have a lab facility. One reason is the lack of sufficient funds for lab set up and the second reason is a lack of good trained teachers who can make use of such a lab. Today the minimum lab set up cost comes to Rs. 1.5 to 2 lakhs. For many schools this is too much initial investment. So we are developing a series of low cost upgradable lab packages. A Rs. 5000 lab, Rs. 10,000 lab, Rs. 20000, Rs. 50000 lab, all the way up to a Rs. 2 lakh lab. This offers schools a whole range of options to choose from. Combined with an upgradation offer by which they can start with a cheaper lab and slowly build up their infrastructure, many schools can start off labs.

The Rs.5000 lab has to be functional – with the ability to do a large number of experiments that require no running materials and which can

illustrate a number of science principles that the children learn in school. The next level of lab facility should build on this initial package and go on to more refined experiments and measurement techniques.

The current labs that exist are very boring! There is too much focus on measurement techniques and calculations, but not on spectacular phenomenon. Before measuring or calculating things, it is very important for children to see, feel and appreciate the phenomenon. This requires time. It also requires careful observation of what happens. Experiments that excite children, surprise them and build on this surprise are what are needed as the first step. Once the children are excited by the experiments and have had time to observe and to think about the experiments, they will ask deeper questions about the experiment and test out their hypothesis and questions by simple measurements and calculations. More sophisticated measurements can come at the next stage. So the basic idea is that in the first phase the children are introduced early to a lot of interesting and exciting phenomena. Then in steps they can be introduced to finer measurement based experiments. Our nested lab is exactly suited to this – low cost experiments are usually good fun, but with little measurement possibilities.

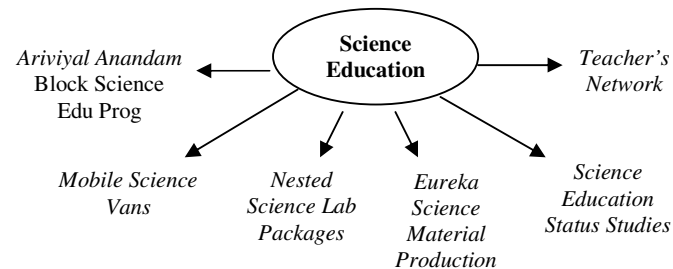
Mobile Science Vans: A van with a lab that visits schools without lab facilities. The van spends a month in each district and covers a number of schools. In every school, a mela is held, demonstrations are done and lab facilities used. Teachers are introduced to the low-cost lab options as well. The van is a demo as well as a mobilizer – it builds excitement and rejuvenates the local volunteers.

The idea of setting up a low cost lab is sold to school. The team sets up the lab in the school and a district activist trains the teacher in using the lab. The district activist also provides a service back-up for the lab and provides upgrading facilities to the school and organizes teacher-training workshops. The vans themselves move on to other districts.

The Mobile Science Van does 3 things:

1. Demonstrates to schools what is possible – with publicity to the idea.

2. Seeds a science club in the school and starts off (or strengthens) a teacher’s network.
3. Sells the Lab set up (and also other science educational materials)



Current Status and Plans for the Near Future

We have developed a lot of materials and tested a number of programmes on a smaller scale. The Ariviyal Anandam block science intervention will be started soon. The Mobile vans programme is almost ready to get going – except for the fact that we don’t have the vans yet! We plan to have 3-4 vans – some (cheaper and smaller vans) for one district and others covering for the entire state.

The Eureka material production unit has already generated a number of materials. Two round of concept cards have been circulated widely and has been well received. We have started a teacher’s email question answer system – but this needs more involvement from teachers.

We have developed a number of small science experiment kits and are working on the Rs.5000 lab facility. We did one round of *hard spots in science education* study. More along this line is needed. We have developed a number of science dialogue classes and one of these dialogues (on Newton’s Laws) has been created into a cartoon book.

Many of our science intervention programmes are in starting stages. But we have built up a committed and creative state team and this year we hope to regularize our science education intervention, expand it and to integrate it with our other block programmes.

Digital Equalizer

Goals

1. Developing low cost alternative technologies and products that help the poorer and weaker sections utilize the advantages of the electronics, computer and IT revolution.
2. Building systems and institutional arrangements that enable the poor to actually utilize these technologies and products on a large scale.

Specific Programme Strategies

Ganini: Block and Village computer education centers. We are already running about 20 centers. This is part of the All India AISECT programme which has already started 1500 rural centers all over India. The key idea in these centers is an entrepreneur model – it provides jobs and also provides computer education in rural areas. The course is designed in the local language and local teachers are trained and used. Collecting used computer parts from volunteers and companies, assembling these into functioning computers can help start many more centers. Apart from education centers, computers can also be provided to villages to train our village volunteers improve their skills.

Village Information Centers: Software and information packages for use in rural areas in computer centers and schools. These are either field programme support software or information packages on agriculture, health, education, bank schemes, etc. A number of our educational VCDs are also part of this package. We can also use packages developed by others. CERD is working on this programme and has brought out one CD for the Information center.

Linking up with other attempts: There are several attempts by people to bridge the growing digital divide – SARI and the WLL projects are looking internet reach into rural areas. The SIMPUTER tried to create a cheap multi-purpose computer. Some of our volunteers are working closely with the simputer team. The problem is that these attempts have not yet achieved a critical mass – more people need to work on them from different angles.

Data Cards: Most attempts start with a top down premise: “Computer Technologies are available. How can we use it for the poor? Let’s put a computer in a village and search for needs that it can satisfy.” But the investment required for a computer is too high and the current returns too low for most poor people to afford it. The scale therefore remains small, keeping the costs high. There is an alternate starting premise: “These are the needs in a village that I have identified. What are the possible technological solutions that can address this need? Let us search for the cheapest and best solutions for this need that we have identified.” The data card idea is a programme that has this perspective.

Today there are more than 1 lakh women’s self help groups in Tamilnadu alone. And this network is growing every day. Many of these groups are federated at the district and the state levels. One typical example is our MALAR in Kanyakumari. This federation has about 2000 groups (40,000 women as members). Once a month, the women save Rs. 20-30 each and hand the money over to the group treasurer. The treasurer collects this money from the 20 members and enters it into her account book and deposits the money in a bank. The group also withdraws money from the bank and gives loans to its members. Repayment is done monthly with a small interest. In addition the group has monthly transactions with the district federation. Every month, the group treasurer has to keep track of 10 transactions (savings, group loans, repayment, interest, federation loan, repayment, interest, bank loan repayment and interest) for each of the 20 group members. For this she has a form which she fills in every month. 200 data pieces (and some totals) to fill in each month.

The district federation – with 1000 groups – has to handle 2,00,000 data pieces each month! Naturally a job for a computer. Most federations operate at a scale at which they can and often do afford a good computer. Even accounting softwares for these can be developed. AID-India itself developed an accounting package for MALAR to use. But entering 2 lakh data pieces every month is a big headache even with 4-5 computers networked together!

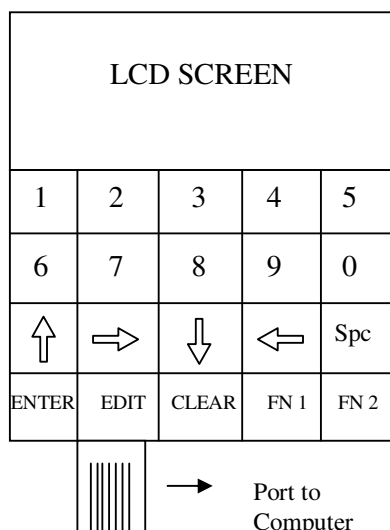
The data card is being developed to address this practical felt need.

Here is a practical need felt by lakhs of women's groups across the country and for which a technical solution is eminently possible. A computer for each group or even one for 10-20 groups where data is entered by the group treasurers and then transferred is a technical possibility – but economically too costly. Even a simputer (at Rs. 10-15000/- a piece) is too costly a solution. That is why we are developing a cheap data card. Below is a description of the data card.

On the left is a schematic diagram of a data card. This calculator sized object has a small memory with minimal processing abilities and a simple input keyboard. The data card has a 2 line LCD screen and a port which can be connected to a computer via a serial port.

The data card is initially connected to a computer that downloads the names of the 20 group members and the basic fields which need to be entered. Each group is given one card. Every month, the group treasurer (or coordinator) enters the transactions for each member into the data card. (This is something she anyway enters into a sheet and is not too much work). For this, she uses the scroll buttons to go from member to member. The group coordinators meet together once every month at the district office. The group coordinators bring this card to this meeting and transfer the data to the district computer. This transfer will take only a few seconds for each card. Once transferred, the data can be accessed by an accounting and management software and processed in different ways.

We have only described how the data card is used by the federation to keep track of the individual accounts and transactions. Once the data is in



a computer, one can think of several reports that can be generated – loan defaulters lists for follow up, problem groups, members who have not saved this month, interest calculations, etc. All of this can be done instantaneously – and as each group coordinator submits her group's data card for transaction update, she can be given a print out with details of her group or a check list of problems she needs to handle in her group. Banks can also use these cards.

At the current market rates, with off the shelf components, this data card can be produced at Rs. 500-700/piece. With some optimization and the development of a dedicated chip, this cost can be brought down further.

Savings groups is just one application for a data card. Community health programmes, ICDS and Govt PHCs and VHNs can use these cards to collect information from each village and enter it into a computer. Today, the inability to get this data into a digital form makes it impossible to analyze this large data effectively. With these cards, this becomes a clear feasibility – leading to better disease and nutrition surveillance and intervention. Similar monitoring system can be set up for the education system, ration shops, village level enterprise networks, etc.

Current Status and Plans for the Near Future

We have today 20 Ganini computer education and information centers. The information services part needs more working on. We have also provided 70 computers to village schools. Once we systematize the computer shipping programme, we can set up computer centers on a much larger scale.

A preliminary version of the data card is ready and is being tested out. The software has to now be developed and the data card field tested. After this we plan to test this on a district wide scale and make modifications. Once ready we can set up cottage industries for manufacturing and marketing these data cards. Once successful, we can think of similar low cost products that can address village level needs.

Village Enterprises and Folk Mart

Goals

1. To train SHG women, unemployed youth to start small enterprises.
2. To provide them with loans linkages and marketing support
3. To provide management support and handholding services
4. To provide product development and quality improvement support for village enterprises – both grants/loans and training - to set up a revolving fund for this purpose.
5. To create a wide marketing network for products made in villages, by self help groups, NGOs and disabled persons.
6. To create a distribution and sales network for low cost educational materials that we produce - experiment kits, VCDs, toys, books, concept cards, comics, etc.
7. To produce fast selling but progressive materials like T-shirts, planners, calendars and posters and to market them to sustain our marketing network as well as to generate awareness on issues.

Specific Programme Strategies

Block enterprise network: Deepam (our Madurai team) has developed a model in Sedapatti which now has more than 360 enterprises running successfully. There are agri-based enterprises, soap and washing powder, terracotta, etc. The programme involves market studies, looking at existing possibilities, identifying potential people who can run enterprises, arranging bank loans, organizing marketing and a lot of management and handholding.

Enterprises Training and Loans for Starting: We have started a lot of enterprises through our SHGs in different districts. In MALAR, we have arranged loans for women who have started or expanded their enterprises. This can be continued on a sustained and larger scale.

Folk Mart: There is a need to develop a number of marketing centers for all these village level products. To run these marketing centers self reliantly, we need to combine a large portfolio of products. If we combine village products with educational materials and products like T-shirts

which have a higher profit margin, it is possible to run these self-reliantly. The center needs a few full-timers who are supported by a team of volunteers. The center will also help in selling our books and other materials and also in reaching out to the public. Below are some marketing strategies we can follow:

- *Shop Marketing:* People buy the products directly from a shop.
- *Direct Marketing to interested people:* We call them periodically and find out what items they need and supply it to them. We can contact progressive individuals through movements, NGOs, unions, etc.
- *Sale Promoters:* Volunteers in companies, colleges, unions, NGOs, neighborhoods who are willing to sell our products to their friends and relatives and within their office/colleges.
- *Direct Marketing to general people* can be tried out once in a while and based on success rates followed up.
- *Daily Stalls:* We need to put up daily stalls at the Beach, in Bus Stands, at functions, marriages, meetings, public places. One full-timer and 3-4 volunteers (in turns) will manage the stalls.
- *Shop Distribution Channels:* Building up contacts with shops and supplying products. Using existing book distribution channels. This will help us reach a larger section through regular marketing systems.
- *Website:* Web based buying or gifting options. Designs for different items (T-shirts, Terracotta, Readymade) will be put up for people to select for bulk or single orders.

Current Status and Plans for the Near Future

The block enterprise programme in Sedapatti is running quite well. They have even set up a training center to help others start off enterprises. The Folk Mart has been running on a small scale in Chennai – regularly selling village products and educational materials. In the coming months, we will be expanding the scale and reach of Folk Mart. Next year we also hope to start expanding the Sedapatti model to other blocks.

Agriculture, Land and Water

Goals

1. Make agriculture for the poor peasant remunerative – cutting down input costs and improving yield and better prices.
2. Help farmers make a better, more informed choice of technologies and practices ensuring:
 - a. Sustainable, equitable, sufficient water access for all
 - b. Land use that is sustainable, equitable and improves its quality
 - c. Better farming practices – seed choices, inputs and pest management
3. Village institutional structures to make agriculture a more collective operation - sharing technologies, inputs and accessing markets – curbing the control exercised by a few powerful rural households.

Specific Programme Strategies

Farmer Experimenter Networks: Forming a network of farmers who are interested in experimenting with agriculture practices in a part of their farms and are willing to share their experiences. Educating these farmers on other experiments that are being tried out. Using the network to also educate farmers on the economic and technology policy implications and building up pressure for policies that favour the poorer farmers.

Tank and Water management: In Pondicherry, we are working in 20 villages on a tank rehabilitation programme. In Ramnad, we are working on low cost technology options for tank management. A combination of community intervention with participatory technology seems to be the way to go. These are relatively costly programmes compared to our health or education programmes – but they also generate a lot of income for the village by increasing agriculture output. Lessons from these experiences can be taken to other villages. Low cost options for a large scale programme on water management has to be planned.

Wasteland Development and institutional arrangements: We are working in Sedapatti on a small programme for wasteland development

which combines equity with technology. A small external investment in infrastructure and a revolving fund for wages is the basis for getting landless women to work on rehabilitating wastelands. This also creates a co-operative mode of working and builds assets for the poorest families.

Farming Practices: CERD - has done a lot of work in this area including developing organic farming options that can be tried out within existing constraints – without causing a loss to the farmer. We also have a working package for integrated pest management.

Current Status and Plans for the Near Future

Our Pondicherry team has already formed a farmer's network called 'Kalanjiyam'. A newsletter sharing their experiences is also being brought out. The tank management programmes are very successful and impressive – but are very costly and possibly need large government funding to replicate. Our work in agriculture is still in the preliminary stages and we need to develop low cost ideas for large scale replicability. We also need to work on building a mass movement around land and water and livelihood issues.

Public Education on the nature of our society

Goals

1. To educate people on issues facing our country – communalism, economic policies, caste, gender and anti-poor development
2. To educate people on the real causes of poverty and state structure and policies.
3. To build up a pro-poor popular consciousness

Specific Programme Strategies

There is no one strategy that can be used for this work. We need to constantly work through all our programmes to infuse this understanding in our volunteers and the people we work with. In addition, we need to organize special camps and discussion sessions, produce and sell books, organize poster campaigns, Kala jathas and public meetings.

Volunteer Motivation and Capacity Building

This plan requires a lot of commitment and time from our part-time and full-time volunteers. Many of these volunteers come from extremely poor backgrounds. Their families need their incomes. Often these volunteer forget their families in working for the movement. Particularly, many full-time volunteers – often spend 5-10 years on movement work and find their personal life in shambles. Of course they learn a lot from the movement, their confidence increases, they become leaders – but this comes at a large personal cost. One cannot change this situation fully – movements don't happen without such sacrifices, voluntarily given.

But as we plan the movement it is important to also plan the support strategies for these volunteers. Below are some strategies to do this:

People's University - The Institute for Open Education

We have been training volunteers on health, education and science education. What our volunteers have learnt by actually doing programmes is often much better knowledge and understanding than is provided by courses offered by colleges or diploma institutes. We also train many of our volunteers in presentation skills, in computer skills, web design, DTP, photography and poster designs, etc. With a good set of course materials and a rigorous course that has both theory and practical components, we can start offering good certification programmes. We initially start with our village volunteers and can slowly expand this into a People's University. Plans are underway to get this going. In a few years, all our volunteers should also have a qualification and certificates in hand!

Asset and Skill Building: We should also encourage and build structures to help our volunteers save money and build up some productive assets (land, tools for enterprises, etc). With this we should also build productive skills in our volunteers which can provide them with income generation options.

Loans: We should also set up a system to provide no-interest or low interest loans for their family and medical emergencies. We should also provide insurance and a pension scheme for fulltime volunteers.

Working towards a mass movement...

A state like Tamilnadu has 50,000 villages spread over 385 blocks in 30 districts. A village typically has a population of about 800-1000 people. There are about 50 towns each with a population of 1-5 lakhs and 10 cities with an average of 10 lakh people. Chennai has about 70 lakh people. Tamilnadu has about 6.5 crore people!

All NGOs and people's movements together manage to reach only a small fraction of this vast population. The Hundred Block Programme is a five step plan to reach out to at least 10,000 villages in each state – giving us a critical scale. The five steps in this plan are:

- A 1500 village (50 block) intensive integrated programme – with components like Arogya Iyakkam and Makkal Palli Iyakkam which bring about measurable changes in people's lives.
- A 10,000 village (100 block) low cost reach out programme built around village libraries, which touch people's lives and inspires and informs them.
- Action research in 1-100 villages which help us develop new programmes
- Studies that look at larger social problems and help us understand the factors better.
- Campaigns that bring together many different forces to push for policy changes.

