



AKSHARA



## AKSHARA REPORT 2008

 UNITED WORLD COLLEGES  
COMMITTEE OF INDIA

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

The Concept.....	1
Objectives of the Programme .....	2
Approach.....	3
Programme Overview .....	4
Progress Report.....	5
Project Outreach .....	7
Appendix 1: Profile – Vrushali.....	10
Appendix 2: Profile – Yogesh .....	11
Appendix 3: Programme Budget .....	12

## THE CONCEPT

The lack of availability of qualitative education, rigid social structures, high levels of poverty, and the overall inability of the educational system to cater to the needs of rural Indian communities has led to several adverse situations. The lack of adequate educational facilities has resulted in financial difficulties due to the villagers' inability to participate in the market as well as emotional insecurities due to low self-esteem, lack of aspirations and a feeling of inadequacy – factors that are crucial for human creativity and growth. Breaking the vicious cycle of poverty and lack of access to opportunities is indeed difficult but not impossible.

The access to the opportunity to earn has been proven to be the fundamental stimulant for furthering the economic welfare of a community. Even with a significant growth rate, a large population of India remains disconnected from the new opportunities emerging in the country's economic environment. This population, therefore, continues to depend on subsistence living. Furthermore, the adults amongst this population are unable to provide education and guidance for their children leaving the children unable to compete for the opportunities that are created by India's economic growth.

Providing these children with vocational and professional education, as well as career guidance, will give them a way in which to make use of these opportunities. With proper support, they can become professionals earning enough to support the education of future generations. Furthermore, their success would be an inspiration to others. Finally, they would be able to provide education and career guidance to their relatives and friends

Akshara is focused on breaking the vicious cycle of poverty and lack of access to opportunities by creating conditions so that children in poor rural communities are able to receive a vocational or professional education. Once a participant has learnt a skill, Akshara will use its network to assist the participant in finding their first non-subsistence job.

Akshara is the first project of the Equal Access to Opportunity Programme (EATO). EATO works to change the deterministic role economics play in people's access to opportunities. The Akshara Programme derives its vision and clear operating principles from EATO, and serves as a model for starting similar projects in other parts of the world.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE PROGRAMME

1. To provide long term support to the selected schools and instances to improve existing educational systems.
2. To enhance the quality of education providers through the supplementary educational programme this draws on resources (both physical and human) provided by MUWCI.
3. To create awareness among parents on how to provide a conducive learning environment at home.
4. To enhance the skills of local school teachers and improve present education methodologies
5. To identify gender related issues and encourage the education of girls.
6. To provide career counselling and assistance to students and help them access opportunities in the market



## APPROACH

- The programme recognizes many partners from the Mahindra United World College of India to the parents of village children in the programme. Therefore, a participatory approach is the key element in designing, implementing and monitoring of the programme.
- Though the primary focus of the programme is education, the programme also aims to empower the local communities and to address issues which enable and aid the achievement of the programme's objectives.
- Instead of creating a parallel system of education, interventions in this programme are directed to improve the existing educational system. Thus, efforts are being made to enhance the capacity of rural school teachers which will also help with the long-term sustainability of the programme.
- In order to enhance the programme's self-reliance, locally educated youths are being groomed as Akshara teachers; with the long term goal of this instance being run by the local resources.
- A larger emphasis is given to enhancing the participation of girls in the programme.



## PROGRAMME OVERVIEW

Akshara focuses on the following activities:

- Providing long-term educational support to participants.
- Creating awareness among parents to provide a home environment conducive to learning.
- Enhancing the skills of local school teachers.
- Encouraging the education of girls in order to overcome gender related inequalities.
- Offering career counseling to participants, helping them to gain vocational or professional employment.
- Providing supplementary healthcare and nutritious food.

## PROGRESS REPORT

### Major Achievements

1. All students are given bi-cycles which has not only reduced the cost of transport but also helped in enhancing confidence of children particularly girl children.
2. Two bright students were groomed to face UWC entrance interview. They were trained for six months for various different subjects which would help them to improve their analytical and language skills. Additionally, this would also help them to enhance their confidence in public speaking. They have appeared for the interview in the first of week of April. This is to note that this initiative has been a joint effort of Akshara team, volunteer and MUWCI students and selected faculty members. Hence, this was a golden opportunity to integrate Akshara efforts with MUWCI.
3. Rural schools seldom try to improve children's language skills. As a result, children are weak in expressing and articulating their thoughts even in their native language. The Akshara team realized that this could be the very important reason for their poor performance in exams. Additionally, this weakness has created mugging up culture which hardly helps them to understand the basic concepts of many subjects. Therefore, in order to improve their performance in other subject and language, teaching Marathi became very important part of the programme. This module is not based on language text but provides an opportunity to learn language without boundaries. Hence, this effort has more freedom for creativity and experimentations. This has resulted in more participation from children with lots of enthusiasms. Native language has been taught by incorporating events which are taking place in rural life everyday. This has created more interest among the children. For example, one project was designed by the children on rice cultivation. This has opened many avenues to show their skills. Children started working in group with harmony; they collected information from different persons from their villages and prepared a project. At last they also did presentation. Presentations could show their capacities to generate, compile and present information before the group with confidence. Each group had presented their project in different ways, through drama, songs, mono acting etc. This could create lots of confidence in children along with language improvements.
4. The Akshara team has generated many learning in the last three years. One of the objectives of the programme is to empower the Akshara children through education. Therefore, the teaching needs to be seen beyond completion of text books or getting good marks in the exam. This has motivated the team to develop a curriculum for the programme. Apart from this, the team also has consensus in integrating teaching. For example; we have been in process of designing modules where basic concept of different subjects can be taught with the same project at the same time the project could reflect life of a rural family which helps to integrate rural life with study. We have developed a project where students will be involved in different agricultural activities for learning different subjects. Students and the Akshara team have decided to do rice cultivation together. This activity will be a platform to teach different subjects. For example; while doing plantation, we are planning to teach about different concepts of science like resources, soil and its types, about plants, animal kingdom. This project would also have a space to learn mathematics. This would include concepts like – multiplication, volume, area, subtraction, factorization etc. writing their personal notes; reading and discussion would be included everyday in the programme. This would help in improving their language.

5. Participation of parents is very important in the programme. Their support and capacity building are also foremost agenda to support children in their study. There were many challenges expressed by the parents while dealing with their kids. Therefore, a workshop was organized for the parents where counselors gave many tips to the parents about adolescent behaviors and how to understand them. It was appreciated very well by the parents. A series of workshops were also organized for children to know their problems.
6. The programme believes in transparency at all the levels with all the involved stakeholders. Hence, the team shared the entire budget with the parents during parents- teachers meeting which opened a new avenue for the parents to get more involved in the programme. This sharing of the budget motivated parents to contribute 100 Rs. per month per student. This offer was also come from the parents. Therefore, we believe that this is also one forward step where parents are taking ownership of the programme.
7. As mentioned earlier efforts are always made to bring to gather MUWCI and Akshara students through many initiatives. One of the MUWCI students directed a play “Aladdin” for the Akshara student which was performed by the students in the last December, which was received very well by the audience.
8. Looking at the effectiveness of the programme, the rural school has given their school timing to the Akshara team for teaching 5<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> grade as well. As a result, now Akshara is teaching 5<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> grade.
9. External evaluation was done to assess the effectiveness of the team. Report of the evaluation led the coordinator to take few important decisions for improving effectiveness of the programme. For example; planning of each sessions is seen as a very crucial aspect of the programme, reflection and revisiting strategies have been made very important part of the programme.

### **Challenges**

- There are of course many challenges as the programme progresses. One of the biggest challenges is to retaining students’ motivation up all the time. Many times most of the energy goes into dealing with their motivation and enthusiasm.
- Gender discrimination is one of the most hidden hurdles for girl students.
- Though the programme tries to make the learning very interesting for the students, the current education system brings it to the very narrow objective i.e. mark or exam oriented performance which limit the scope of bringing students’ potential at optimum.
- Getting good human resources who understand the needs of the students also a big challenge.
- Time constrain for the programme is also a very big concern for the team.

## PROJECT OUTREACH

### **First Batch: 2005**

Enrollment: from 10th grade

Passing year of 10th: 2006

Total number of students: 20

Current status: they are in first year of university

### **Current Status of the First Batch**

- Maximum number of the students ( total 16 students ) could clear 10th grade in their school since its establishment
- Three students were selected to Study IB by MUWCI, currently they are studying in American universities with full scholarship
- Five students are perusing career in hospitality
- Two girls are getting trained in aviation
- One girl completed her nursing certificate course and working
- Two students who could clear 10th grade in 2005, were able to pass in 2006 currently they are in 12th grade
- Two girls gave up their studies ( migration)
- Three girls are in 12th again
- One boy is studying in computer science and also joined his father's business with whom we have lost our contact.
- One girl completed her 12th but we could not motivate her for further study.

### **Second Batch: 2005 – 2008**

Enrollment from: 8th grade

Passing year of 10th: 2008

Current status: studying 11th in different stream

Total number of students: 24

### **Current Status of the Second Batch**

- 20 students could clear their exam
- Two boys are studying in UWC – US
- One student is studying vocational course in automobile in 11th grade
- Four students are studying in office management vocational course in 11th grade
- Two boys are in diploma civil engineer

- One boy is in ITI automobile vocational course
- Seven boys and one girl have joined 11th in either science or commerce stream
- One boys are appearing for 10th again
- One girl has given up the study
- Two boys were from the rural hostel with which we have lost contact. The hostel does not provide boarding facilities to the kids after 10th so they go back to their village.
- One boy could not pass his 10th but joined a vocational training course which has been imparted by the Satara Bank in Pune.

### **Third Batch: 2007**

Enrollment from: 8th grade

Current status: in 9th grade

Total number of students: 30

#### **Current Status of the Third Batch**

- very enthusiastic batch
- ever ready to learn
- very conscious about cost and many suggestions from them to reduce the cost so we can have more number of the students in the programme
- during cultural exchange programme with American guests of MUWCI, taught folk dance
- very bright in studies- many promising candidates for UWC once they pass 10th
- learnt science through rice cultivation
- learnt few concept of mathematics by participating diwali mela

### **Fourth Batch: 2008**

Enrollment from: 8th grade

Current status: 8th grade

Total number of students 34

#### **Current Status of the Fourth Batch**

- extreme range of students - very bright and very weak students
- forces us to have a very special programme for weaker students
- they could acquire spoken English very fast
- performed “Aladdin” play before MUWCI community

*Hence, the programme has contact with 100 students till March, 2009.*

### **Future Plan**

- A special curriculum is aimed to design for weaker students where more emphasis will be given on the vocational training than the academic performance.
- Grooming local rural youths would the priority of the programme to bring sustainability for initiated efforts
- One more grade will be taken from June, 2009.
- More project based methodologies will be developed for teaching

## APPENDIX 1: PROFILE – VRUSHALI

*In this profile, Vrushali talks about herself and what she thinks about the Akshara programme.*

### **Brief Information**

**Name**

Vrushali Dyanoba Bharam

**Age**

13 years

**Grade**

9<sup>th</sup> Grade

**Village**

Asade

### **Family Description**

Vrushali belongs to a Maratha family. Both her parents are into farming. They are four brothers and sisters. Two of her sisters are in the 12th standard and her brother in the 10th standard.



### **Personal Profile**

#### **About Myself**

I'm very tall, and very proud of it, but some people think that we are tall but we are useless. All of us in the family, my brother, my father, my mother, my sister, all of us, we are tall. My family is tall, and I'm very proud of it.

#### **What I like about Akshara**

I like Akshara because Akshara is not a college for us but it is like love showered by a mother; the way mothers give us blessing and teach us to fight against enemies in the field. Akshara group makes us study and makes us fight the exam. I would say Akshara should love us like this and it should become like a shadow of a tree on us. That's the only thing I want.

#### **Which subject I like and why?**

I like sports. For example: relay, running, long jump, kho-kho, and khabadi. At the same time, I like History also. I like to study ancient sculptures, ancient thoughts, ancient qualities, and the heroes of the past and their power. All this gives us sympathy (understanding). We understand how ancient people used to live differently from today.

#### **What I want to become**

I don't want to become old and I don't want to remain young. Because when you become old you become greedy for money. Since childhood, I have had a small dream. I want to come first in long jump and I want to participate in Olympic competition because people feel that I'm tall and I don't like them telling me that. I'm going to take advantage of my height to get first place. I have this confidence within me, if I get the Gold medal, I would join the military and take training according to my level. And I will protect my country as long as I'm alive, and that's the only dream I have. God please fulfill it.

## APPENDIX 2: PROFILE – YOGESH

*In this profile, Yogesh talks about himself and what he thinks about the Akshara programme.*

### **Brief Information**

**Name**

Yogesh Dinkar Bharam

**Age**

13 years

**Grade**

9<sup>th</sup> Grade

**Village**

Asade

**Family Description**

Yogesh belongs to a Maratha family. They are basically farmers. They have a joint family and still do not have land of their own. Grandfather didn't give property up till now. Their main means of livelihood is working as labourers. Yogesh is the youngest in the family.



### **Personal Profile**

**About Myself**

My name is Yogesh Dinkar Bharam. My mother's name is Nathabai and my father's name is Dinkar. I help them in their work. They love me. They help me in my studies. If I make a mistake they explain it to me. I like to play.

**What I like about Akshara**

I like Akshara very much because they take up different projects which are very good. This gives us a chance to study as well as get other information about things. It's not like teaching but they do things the way we like it. And all the teachers love us that are why I like them.

**Which subject I like and why?**

I like different subjects. I like to play, solve mathematical sums, I like to discuss different things, and gather knowledge. I want to learn to speak in English and I'm going to try for it.

**What I want to become**

I haven't decided anything, but once I decide I will definitely do it with all my heart.

## APPENDIX 3: PROGRAMME BUDGET

### Expenses for the Akshara Project

	<b>2008 Actual Expenses</b>	<b>2009 Projected Expenses</b>
Salaries	Rs. 1,133,500	Rs. 1,194,000
Food	Rs. 250,500	Rs. 390,000
Transport	Rs. 525,000	Rs. 456,000
Miscellaneous	Rs. 150,000	Rs. 120,000
Cycles	Rs. 177,000	--
Sat Admission	Rs. 43,000	--
Laptop	Rs. 50,000	--
Curriculum Development	--	Rs. 72,000
	<b>Rs. 2,329,000</b>	<b>Rs. 2,232,000</b>