



## PROGRESS REPORT (March 2018)



**LIBRARY FOR LEARNING  
ADOPT A SCHOOL  
PENCIL TO POWER  
SAVINGS TO SECURE**

ENCOURAGE EDUCATION: CULTIVATE KNOWLEDGE: ENABLE DEVELOPMENT

EDITOR: VIJENDRA AGARWAL



### BY THE NUMBERS: IMPACT in Saharanpur (U.P.)

3 Blocks (Baliakhedi, Gangoh & Muzaffarabad)

~40 villages/govt. primary schools; ~ 100 educators and leaders

~ 3,000 students (Pencil to Power) ~ 650 girls (Savings to Secure)

One rural higher secondary school ~ 15 rural post offices

Please contact us with your ideas and suggestions, and to become a Vidya Gyan volunteer:

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**Editor's Note:** Little I had known that most of my energy and time during India visit (January—March) will be committed to implementing Adopt A School, forging partnerships, and visiting schools, and not as much on assessing our projects. In retrospect, it was time well spent. Our goal is to develop Partnerships that add up to 11 and not just  $1+1=2$ . This year, we adopted 5 schools engaging over 600 children. It was all due to our partnerships in earnest. We are pleased to have stood by our goal, "To make the adopted schools more inviting, dignified and conducive to learning." I visited about 25 schools to gauge student-teacher engagement and status of our Pencil to Power and Savings to Secure initiatives. Not surprisingly, there are winners and losers like anything we do. I got to hear plenty of excuses about the government not doing enough rather than people asking, "what I can do to improve the state of our school and the learning of our children."

I was truly impressed with the skillful writing and drawings by students. Nothing could be more pleasing than the opportunity to interact with students. They were curious about the United States but well informed about India for their age. They asked thoughtful and intelligent questions. Who says that the government schools lack quality instruction? You just must know which teachers are committed to students' learning and the profession of being a *Guru*. Yes, the truth be told that there are those who collect the handsome paycheck and deliver little.



Giving, in my view, is a state of mind and not necessarily how much or how little one has. Nor there is a better time of year for giving. I will be remiss without our sincere appreciation to Kenosha, WI community for their fundraising for Vidya Gyan in February.

Without a doubt, Vidya Gyan loves all donor anytime and anywhere for their trust in our causes because, "every single child matters and every single childhood matters." (*Kailash Satyarthi, 2014 Nobel Laureate*).

## ADOPT A SCHOOL: A Small Gesture with Big Impact

What makes a child happy? Why and how children get engaged? How learning in schools can be transformed? How you can make a difference? and what leads to empowerment? Perhaps the answer is rooted in a "Small Gesture" i.e. providing the CLASSROOM FURNITURE to five rural school children under Vidya Gyan's "Adopt a School" initiative. You, the believers in Vidya Gyan, are already making a difference, but you can do more.



Happiness may be the "state of mind," but your small gesture brought happiness and positive emotions for more than 600 underserved children in rural areas (Big Impact)? The readers might wonder- what is the big deal about furniture? Ask the 6-10-year old children who perhaps spent all these years sitting and sleeping on the floor. A small gesture is leading to a pleasant surprise- metaphorically speaking, "reaching from Earth to the Moon."

The adopted schools also received a steel cabinet for children books under Vidya Gyan's "Library for Learning" initiative.

It may not be an exaggeration that these students are better engaged and more motivated to be educated and thus empowered to succeed. The furniture is already proving to be transformative for the schools. For example, one adopted government school is highlighting, "uttam shreni ka furniture" (good quality furniture) to attract children, possibly away from a local private school. Reportedly, children who used to abstain are coming more regularly. The students feel respected and self-confident. The parents and village folks in general are joyously surprised with the small gesture.



If the Furniture (SMALL GESTURE) = Transformation+ Happiness+ Motivation+ Engagement+ Education+ Empowerment, what is it if not BIG IMPACT? I wonder, why the classroom furniture was not put part of the Right to Education legislation? A good deed and/or legislative action is never too late if it can do miracles.

Vidya Gyan could not do it alone. The colorful furniture is made possible by collective efforts of Vidya Gyan and several non-profits working together (Vidya Gyan India, Pragati Foundation and Dr. Dash Foundation), the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) funding from Sahasra Electronics Pvt. Ltd. In Noida, India, and hundreds of generous donors worldwide.





## SMART PARTNERSHIP (SP) for Greater Community Impact

Vidya Gyan is all about education, empowerment, and engagement through continuous learning. We are also about expanding our outreach and strengthening communities. For years, we visited many schools but suddenly realized that the school children are from the village, school bears the village name, the government funds are mostly disbursed and managed by the village Pradhan, yet the local elected body (*Panchayat*) has played little or no role in the nurturing and education of children. Something is amiss!!



Thus, the idea of Smart Partnership (SP) with *Gram Pradhan* was conceived requiring the latter to contribute for the cost of classroom furniture with Vidya Gyan. The SP is not just about money, but a strategic move for responsible governance and engaged leadership for nurturing and valuing one's own village. The SP is another form of SCR with far reaching impact and outreach in the local community. All politics being local, it is our belief that the *Pradhan* should want to do it for the betterment and development of the village. What could be more important for any village *Pradhan* than educating the future generation to lead the village. While all partnerships are

dearly valued by Vidya Gyan, the SP is expected to be very impactful

The idea is catching up steadily since the first SP became reality in February. We are in discussions with several rural schools at the time of this writing. In retrospect, SP should have been in place for decades to positively impact, involve, and enhance the supervision and care of schools by the local leadership/community. The SP is also a step forward and a precursor to bringing good governance in our rural communities. Vidya Gyan has had meaningful conversation about good governance with the Sehgal Foundation.

## OTHER PROJECTS IN PROGRESS for Improved Learning

While all five adopted schools received the classroom furniture and library for learning, a generous CSR funding by Sahasra Electronics Pvt. Ltd. also allowed us to offer many more things. This included playground equipment and a projector in one school and installation of fans and an inverter in another. Schools also received instructional aids such as wall posters for learning alphabets, numbers, geography etc., math kits, and globes. Vidya Gyan will be ordering books for all adopted schools.



**Pencil to Power:** This year's Pencil to Power initiative will begin in earnest in July when 10,000 notebooks, 5000 pencils, and erasers, the most basic tools for writing, will be distributed across 25-30 schools reaching as many as 3000 students. The draft of the notebook cover has been given to the designer and a firm order has been placed. Once again, this year's campaign will ask the teachers to use one of four notebooks in grades 3-5 in which students will write short stories, essays, poems etc. on national holidays, festivals, prominent public figures etc. They will be mentored to focus on writing skill as a critical mode of communication in real life.

**Competitive Activities:** In a Memorandum of Understanding with District Administration affirming Vidya Gyan projects for the past three years, the new addition is Vidya Gyan's commitment to sponsoring competitive activities across all government primary schools. The following examples for competitive activities include, Spelling bee, General Knowledge bowl, Posters/drawings, Mathcount, Geographun, Science Olympiad, Social Studies, Writing, etc. Vidya Gyan and the District leadership are working on the implementation details.

**Vidya Gyan India:** Other accomplishments of India trip included meetings with the respective government officials on two counts. First, Vidya Gyan India is now approved for TAX EXEMPT status under 12A. We will now proceed to the next step called 80 G which will enable the donors to claim exemption in their personal taxes. Second important accomplishment is that its FCRA (Foreign Currency Regulation Act) application is in the last stages of approval process. The approval will make it easier to expand and undertake new projects.

## Photo Gallery



**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:** Our individual/family donors are from many parts of the globe. Their unflinching support has been critical in our work. We acknowledge the corporations offering matching funds for their employees (our donors) such as McKinsey, Apple, Microsoft, Roche, Optum, Abbott, Am Fm. The support has also come from Delta Airlines, PayPal Giving Fund, Amazon Smile, Culture Dabba, and Desi Foods. The Sahasra Electronics, Dr. Dash Foundation, and Pragati Foundation have been our valuable partners in Adopt A School.

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