THE CORNERSTONE PROJECT
An Adivasi Community-led Education Initiative

Viswa Bharati Vidyodaya Trust & Adivasi Munnetra Sangam
The cycle of poverty can be broken with quality education.

Working with this vision, The Cornerstone Project aims to establish a comprehensive education system with the Adivasis of the Gudalur valley, providing contextual education to enable them become self-reliant.

At the core, lies our belief in a community-led model of education. The initiative will be designed and managed with the active participation of the Adivasi community, making learning experiential and culturally relevant.
Context of the community and their role

~20,000 Adivasis belonging to the Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG) live in over 320 scattered hamlets in the Gudalur Valley of the Nilgiris Hills in South India. PVTG (earlier called as Primitive Tribal Groups) is a classification by the Government of India of tribal groups who have extremely low socio, educational and economic developmental indicators.

The Cornerstone Projects breaks the narrative of low expectations by placing the community at the centre, creating opportunities for them to take ownership and actively engage as partners.

“So much has changed in our lifetime. The forest is no more ours and our way of life has changed. We have no place to talk to our children, walk with them, share our stories and songs. Fortunately, we have Vidyodaya. Our children must learn to live in this world, but should never forget our culture and language.”

An Adivasi elder. His words serve as our inspiration.
Our approach is unique

Viswa Bharati Vidyodaya Trust (VBVT) has been working in the region since 1993 to provide quality education to the Adivasi community.

Our programs include;

**Vidyodaya Primary School (Since 1996)**
Reaches out ~100 children from KG to grade 5. It also serves as a training and resource centre to train Adivasi youth. We have worked with close to 400 children since 1996.

**Community Outreach Program (Since 1993)**
Covers all the Adivasi villages. It tracks the educational progress of ~3000 children through village level coordinators and volunteers. Where our focus is on enrolment and awareness.

**Residential Bridge School (Since 2014)**
Is run and managed in partnership with the government, catering to ~100 children who were school ‘drop-outs’ earlier. We work from class 1 to 8.

The model takes an integrated and holistic approach towards ensuring quality in education.

**Pedagogy**
- Facilitating experiential and collaborative learning in classrooms while also giving individual attention to all children.

**Academics**
- Integrating their culture by bringing their art, songs, dance and stories inside the classrooms.

**Adivasi Culture**
- Improving academic outcomes by creating culturally relevant curriculum and teaching in their language.
Our efforts have inculcated the value of education in the Adivasi community

**High Enrollment throughout the community**
From a mere 737 children enrolled in 20 schools in the year 1999, to over 3000 children in 60 schools now, enrollment has risen by 400% and we have now achieved **100% enrollment**.

**High Retention at Vidyodaya**
From a time when we had high drop-outs, today ~80% of our children complete schooling and few of them have pursued higher education from prestigious institutions with the support of scholarship.

**Improved community ownership**
Few children have also chosen to work for their own communities, as teachers, nurses and conservationists. All our programs are managed by the members from the Adivasi community.

**Partnership with the Government**
Vidyodaya school has evolved into a model of excellence in education innovation for the Adivasis, enabling us to partner with the government to replicate our approach and support them.
The Cornerstone Project is a game-changing education solution

While our programs have sparked a learning revolution among the Adivasi community, we have been able to serve only a small number of children coming from nearby villages. Higher education and employment opportunities available locally for the children and youth who complete schooling has become a major challenge. With the changing context arising due to COVID-19, there is an urgent need to establish a space which can cater to the larger community. Further, we have observed there is a rising number of dropouts in the community from government schools where the Adivasi children are alienated. Even those finishing education find themselves ill-equipped to face the ever-changing world outside.

Towards tackling these challenges, The Cornerstone Project proposes a comprehensive education system for the Adivasis, by the Adivasis:

> **Full-fledged School**
with classes from KG to grade 12 for ~400 children. With focus on enabling children to learn in a contextual and cultural manner

> **Hostel**
for 150 children travelling from remote and distant villages. To provide an enriched environment for students to learn

> **Community College**
a comprehensive vocational learning centre for the youth so that they are ready to participate in the local economic life. And further contribute to the development of their communities.
We need funding to expand the impact

We are reaching out to you to support us expand the impact through The Cornerstone Project. This is an opportunity for the Adivasi community to establish a comprehensive education system, dedicated to them and the success of this project could act as a template that can be replicated for other similar communities across the country.

We believe that this initiative will not only change the lives of hundreds of children and youth from one of the most marginalized groups, but also their families and the entire community.

The Plan Forward

Phase 1: Land and Relocation (2021-2024)
We have located a few viable land options for us to buy in Gudalur. The first phase will involve buying of the land and construction of a hostel and primary school for the short term.
Amount to be raised INR 6,00,00,000

Phase 2: Expansion (2024-2026)
This will be followed by the expansion of the school to a secondary school. And the creation of a community college and the required housing needs
Amount to be raised INR 3,00,00,000

Phase 3 Consolidation (2026-2028)
The final phase of the project will be to expand the school to a higher secondary school till 12th and increase the capabilities of the college
Amount to be raised INR 1,50,00,000
Viswa Bharati Vidyodaya Trust is registered under the Indian Trust Act with 80-G tax exemption status and FCRA approval status.