

VISWA BHARATI VIDYODAYA TRUST

Gudalur, The Nilgiris

Annual Report
April 2022 – March 2023



Viswa Bharati Vidyodaya Trust



Adivasi
Munnetra
Sangam

Ensuring culturally relevant quality education for Adivasi children

Reflections on the year gone by

Last year was an eventful and meaningful year for us -- in many ways it was a catalyst year that contributed to substantial growth.

- The first cohort of 8 Adivasi Youth Teacher-Facilitator education initiative graduated, with renewed sense of purpose and commitment to continue learning and working towards quality education for children from their communities. We have also welcomed the second cohort of 7 more youth on this journey.
- As part of the Kootu Manai (Hostel) Initiative, we had 2 children attend their 12th board exams. Both of them passed and have enrolled in higher education of their choice. Learnings from the first year is informing our approach as we build this initiative.
- Work in villages and with parents from the teachers at school, in addition to the village classes done during the second wave of CoVid-19, strengthened the school's relationship with the villages and built trust. This resulted in an increase in enrollment from 90 children to 104 children.
- We undertook a research initiative with the community to understand their educational experiences and most importantly on how they envision an education system for their children and communities. The report was published and you can read it [here](#).
- We focused on consistent capacity building of our teacher teams and the community organizers towards building our perspectives, broadening our roles, and strengthening our existing work with children and communities.
- Our team grew bigger with 10 enthusiastic youth joining us. The team now consists of >80% of Adivasi leaders and youth making key decisions -- this is central in the efforts towards sustaining being a community-led organization.
- We had two new institutional partners joining us in this journey and extending their support for long-term.

Our Reach

These initiatives collectively enabled us to extend our reach to over 500 children across 101 villages.

The cornerstone of our approach has always been collaborative creation with community leaders and members – their voices, lived experiences, and visions ensure that the work is not only forward-moving but also deeply rooted in the needs and aspirations of the communities we serve.

2020 – 21

**300
Children**

**43
Villages**

**20
Adivasi
team
members**

2021 – 22

**435
Children**

**79
Villages**

**29
Adivasi
team
members**

2022 – 23

**565
Children**

**101
Villages**

**35
Adivasi
team
members**

Vidyodaya (primary) School

Demonstrating meaningful and culturally relevant education.

The vision of Vidyodaya Adivasi School is to provide and demonstrate what meaningful and culturally relevant education can look like for Adivasi children, with the active participation and ownership of people from the community.

We believe that education is a process and not a product and that the objectives must form part of the process itself. Given our objective is to be democratic, be community-led and create an education system that is meaningful and culturally relevant for the Adivasi community, what is being taught, how things are done and how decisions are made (structures and processes) reflect this.

- We have teachers from the community designing curriculum, facilitating, and managing the school. Last year, we had 3 young and passionate teachers from the community join the school. One of them, Viji, is also an alumnus of school who decided to join back to teach and contribute towards strengthening the school.
- The weekly school team meeting is a process where all matters related to the school are discussed openly with all teachers and decisions made through consensus. Discussions and decisions range from logistical/operational topics like school calendar planning, budgets to leadership topics like teachers' learning and curriculum, and planning review. When it comes to matters concerning children, discussions happen openly with children too, hence their voice and participation is also there in the decisions being made about them.
- Opportunities for contextual learning which brings out expressions of children's experiences, knowledge, and questions, are practiced in the everyday, thus leading them from the known to the unknown.
- As part of the school timetable, children learn subjects in the morning and crafts in the afternoon as part of their learning curriculum – thus enabling holistic learning opportunities for the children combining the head, hand, and heart.

104	11	31
children	teachers	villages



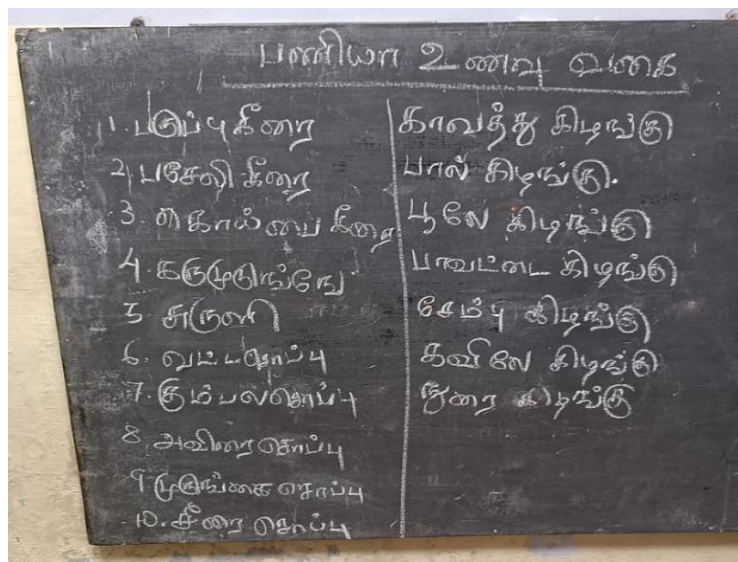
Morning assembly with children and teachers. Each day of the week they engage in various activities like songs, dance, storytelling, show and tell, riddles and discussions on solving issues among children.



Teachers facilitating differentiated learning support for children based on the child's learning level and interests.



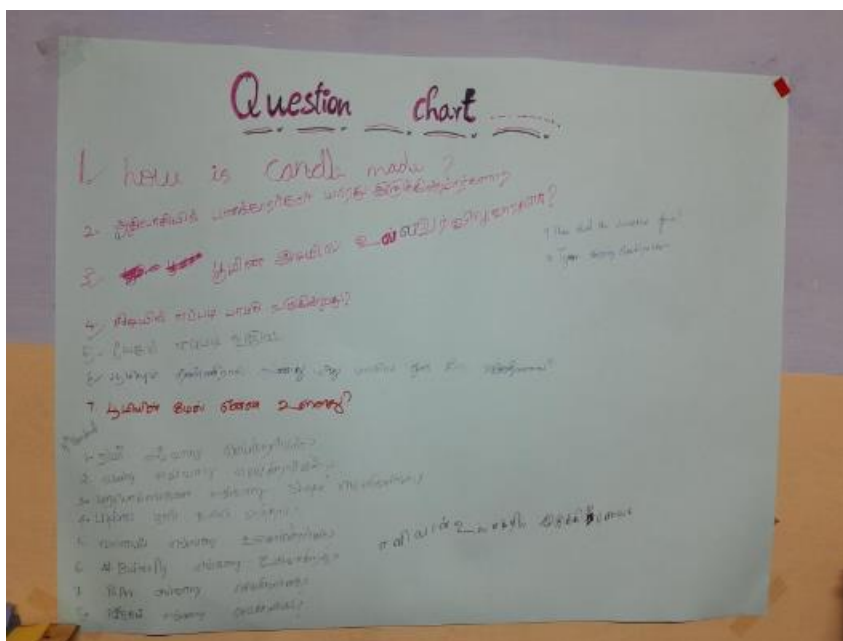
Group-based pedagogy in a multi-level classroom enabling children to learn at their own pace while also supporting peer learning.



Grade 4 Science class on 'Food and nutrition' where children are listing about their own communities' food and have discussions around its' nutritional properties.



Grade 2 Tamil class integrating art and language, where children are learning to write by constructing stories about a flower, they have thumb printed.



Towards building inquiry-based learning among children and to understand children's thinking and interests, we initiated a Question Chart activity. As part of the process, the questions (any question!) children are captured, and every week one question is explored in detail through activities. Both the children and the teachers enjoy this and look forward to both asking and exploring questions.

Chorian Anna was a coffee cultivating Paniyan farmer. He lived in Ayyankolly and was the owner of 0.4 hectares of land. Another local landowner who lived near Chorian's village cut a path through Chorian's land. He wanted to make a road to his paddy field. He did this without talking with Chorian Anna.

Chorian Anna was angry and very upset. He decided to seek justice. With support from the Adivasi Munnatra Sangam, he filed a police complaint. Chorian Anna got his land back.

This was the first time an adivasi filed a complaint and got their land back. Slowly, more and more adivasis people fought against landowners and the forest department who had taken their land. More adivasi people came together and formed the Adivasi Munnatra Sangam.

On December 5th, 1988, more than ten thousand (10,000) people participated in a protest at Gudalur Town. In this protest, adivasi leaders spoke about their problems and demanded for land to be given to them.

To celebrate the adivasi people, their courage and unity, December 5th of every year is celebrated as Adivasi Day. In this celebration, there is a lot of dancing and singing. In the villages, the people also raise the Adivasi Munnatram Flag.

A story about Chorian Anna – a community leader – explored as part of Grade 5 English language lesson. Integrating relevant history and stories from their own community makes learning English more meaningful.



Every year December 5th is celebrated as Adivasi Day to remember and commemorate the people's struggle and victory through the land rights movement in 1988. Last year, the theme of the celebration was traditional Adivasi Food, where the children and teachers foraged, fished, and gathered food from their villages and nearby forests. With these food items, we prepared lunch together at school. It was a community event – with everyone helping out -- and through this process, there was better understanding of food gathering practices and recipes. Celebrating this day around food was an act of togetherness and acknowledgement of the community's knowledge and culture.



Viji, an English language teacher as well as the librarian at school, successfully completed her Library Educator Course as part of our collaboration with Bookworms Library and TISS. As part of her course, Viji conducted an action-research on ways to strengthen children's interest and engagement with story books. She has brought in a lot of ideas into her class and Library based on her learnings. The team from Bookworms Library also visited the school. They held a read-aloud with the children and facilitated a session on the power of stories for a group of community teachers and volunteers.



We facilitate various kind of exposure visits for children to learn about the outside world and to make connections to what they are learning at school. Picture descriptions from left to right

1. 17 children and 2 teachers from our school participated at Marudham Craft Wee held at Tiruvannamalai. They learnt various crafts and presented at the event.

2. We had volunteers Susie Knott, Dinah and Riya take storytelling and art sessions with children. Riya, worked with the children more deeply through stories to strengthen their expression. Here are student's responses after reading *Gone Grandmother* book which deals with death and grief.

3. Children of grades 4 and 5 from Vidyodaya school visited Eddakal caves. This was an opportunity for them to learn about new places and anthropology through experiences going beyond the classroom. The children made connections to what they were learning and discussions in school and asked questions "How would the people have lived inside this cave? What would they have done for their survival?"

4. 25 children from Rishi valley school came to visit Vidyodaya as part of cultural exchange. We shared our dances and songs with Rishi valley students while they shared the songs they learnt at their school.

Kootu Manai (hostel)

A residential space rooted in Adivasi culture – home away from home

Koottu Manai (meaning ‘the home where we are all together’ in the Kattunayakan language) was established primarily to address the issue of many children from the age of 12 - 18 discontinuing schools due to difficulties in accessing schools and various barriers they face within schools, lack of quality education and support being a critical one. Historically, residential spaces for children from Indigenous communities have been spaces of violence and injustice across the world. However, residential spaces are also one of the most effective ways to support children in accessing schools and establishing related support systems.

We hope to enable adolescent children to complete their schooling through providing necessary learning support -- academic, emotional as well as financial support -- through creating nurturing and culturally relevant learning environments. Hence this space is seen as an opportunity to engage and work with adolescents on issues and matters extending beyond their basic needs for accommodation and academic support. Koottu Manai is built on 4 pillars - Character, Confidence, Community and Career. At the hostels, all our work is guided by these 4 pillars. To build character and confidence such that they can navigate the worlds they are in; strengthen their understanding and relationship with their community; and to enable them to lead fulfilling and dignified career paths.

After school hours, the children engage in various activities apart from their studies, such as sports, learning to play musical instruments and coding, in addition to study time. During the weekends, the focus of our work shifts more towards socio-emotional learning and community engagement to build a solid foundation for life ahead as contributing members of their community and society at large. Ultimately, we want them to be able to navigate the modern world as well as their traditional world from a space of strength, hope and compassion.

29	6	14
children	facilitators	villages

1. Last year, a series of capacity building for the team in counselling by Sarah and Linda was organized. Sarah is a professional counsellor and Linda was a probation officer. Both have worked extensively in supporting adolescents and their sessions were helpful to the team on building our capacity to provide emotional support for the kids. Through role plays and case studies, collectively we learnt how to do active listening when children are sharing conflicts and what are some reflective practices creates safe spaces.

This session has informed the way the team responds to children in counseling spaces and situations -- approach is now more question based; child centric which enables children to share solutions to the issues they face rather than the team saying what they need to be doing.



Every day in the evening, the children and the teachers practice mindfulness and well-being activities like meditation, reflective writing on observations and experiences and sharing sessions. Socio-emotional learning sessions are also facilitated frequently, and regular craft sessions are also facilitated to create opportunities for children to work with their hands.

2. The team organized 3 camps where we worked closely on building their confidence, understanding their community, working together as a team, and developing creative thinking and problem-solving skills.

In one of these sessions, the children wanted to understand more about alcoholism in the community -- why it happens, how it affects the people and them and how it can be overcome. Based on their learnings and reflections from this session, they staged a drama at the parents' meeting. They drew a lot from their own personal experiences and through drama -- which is a creative medium -- they visualized the issue and expressed possible solutions. The approach taken was more empathy based rather than blame and was constructive and forward looking towards finding solutions.



- Children engaging in various kinds of learning as part of their learning camps and weekend learning sessions. From left to right
1. A theatre session being facilitated
 2. Children creating rules and processes for the hostel program through discussions and debates, thus enabling their ownership of the space.
 3. A session on possible career paths and how to create/ find career opportunities that aligns with their interests being facilitated.
 4. Children facilitating a game for younger children at the village as part of their community engagement module.

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3. The team organized 3 parents' meetings and through these spaces, information about what is happening in the hostel, philosophy and principles informing the approach and display of children's work was done. There were also discussions on how parents can also work together with the facilitators team on coordinating with school, ensuring procurement of government documents for children and in few counselling situations as well.



Children presenting their drama on alcoholism as part of a parents meeting followed by a discussion on what children are learning and how their day looks as part of the hostel.

Adivasi Teacher-Facilitator Education

Building effective social capital for future leadership.

The Adivasi Teacher Facilitator training initiative is run with the vision of enabling young Adivasis to work for their community as teacher-leaders. Through this initiative, we create a network of motivated and socially reflective youth while also parallelly creating learning experiences where they can equip themselves with the necessary knowledge, skills and mindset which can enable them to be facilitators of learning for their community.

There are three main modules in the curriculum

1. Understanding Self

Through this module, the learners learn about themselves, look into their own lives, and understand systems and forces that have shaped their life journeys and learn to be part of and work as a team.

2. Community Engagement

In this module, the learners learn experientially through engaging with their own community leaders, the histories of their communities and learn what and how their communities are being influenced. Through practical projects, they learn to see and analyze problems and arrive at solutions in a participatory and collective manner.

3. Teaching, Facilitation and Learning

In this final module, the learners begin their journey on understanding teaching and learning: looking into diverse topics ranging from philosophies on education, pedagogies, children's psychology and subject knowledge as well. They learn through experience (practically facilitating learning with children) and through reflection.

8

youth who
graduated from the
training

7

youth who have
joined the 2nd cohort.

In the month of February (2022) we celebrated the graduation of the first cohort of facilitators from this Program. Community leaders, children from the villages, friends and parents of the graduates participated. The graduation event allowed the community to see how young people wanted to work for their community. Usually during these functions, the parents are merely taking photos, but the fact that the parents handed out the certificates really gave them the respect they deserved.

Post graduation, the learners have chosen to work as teachers and facilitators with children at Vidyodaya Adivasi School and the Kootu Manai Hostel Initiative. They also actively participate in planning and implementing village level children camps.

Collectively they have worked with 250 children and have facilitated 6 children camps at the village level.

We are also witnessing the young facilitators getting motivated to pursue higher education (either complete their under graduation or their post-graduation). 2 of them have enrolled to B.Ed. (bachelor's in education) and 1 of them have completed their Library Educators Course certified by TISS.



Training facilitators along with the learners who graduated from the program at their graduation ceremony.



Listen to the learnings, experiences and aspirations of the youth who graduated from the program.

Click on the above to view the video.

ANM Foundation Course

Based on our partnership with ASHWINI, in the month of August, we facilitated a foundation course as part of the orientation for the new batch of Adivasi girls who have joined the nursing course. As part of the 21-day foundation course, the girls learnt about themselves, their communities and created/ strengthened their aspirations for their own futures. We received feedback from the group that this course enabled them to learn in meaningful ways which in turn strengthened their confidence and created a sense of purpose.

Community Education Initiative

Transforming the village as a site of learning.

We have been slowly yet steadily strengthening the Community Education Program with the vision to mobilize children and youth from the communities; create spaces for meaningful engagement and learning at the village level and bring about a meaningful change in the way education is understood and perceived by the communities.

Aligning with the overall philosophy of VBVT -- of community ownership -- interventions under the Makkale Keeche Community Education Program also aim to ensure the active participation of the groups of children, youth and village leaders and elders we work with. As part of this program there are two key, inter-connected initiatives that we are strengthening.

1. Creating Learning Centers at the Village Level and Children Camps

Through these learning spaces, few people from the villages have been consistently facilitating an encouraging and meaningful learning space for children where they have access to holistic learning opportunities (academic, co-curricular, children's rights and life skills inputs) and support-systems. It is also through these spaces we build connections and relationships with children, enabling us to understand them and their contexts better. We hope these platforms enable and sustain interest in learning among children and strengthen their motivation/ ownership of their educational journeys.

These learning spaces are created and sustained through mobilizing and organizing a network of people -- young mothers, adolescent children, and youth -- who show interest and commitment to work with children and their communities. These spaces create opportunities to mobilize and involve the community members in the process of education, thereby building their critical awareness of what quality and meaningful education can look like for their children.

215
children

21
village
facilitators

7
children
camps
organized

27
villages



Young people from the villages facilitating learning activities with the children. Activities range from reading, doing their school homework, engaging with story books, math, and language games as well as art and craft.



Volunteers in training and learning sessions. Read below their reflections and learnings.

"When I am with children, I can learn about them and also about myself. I am also able to think about new things. When I teach, I am seeing that I learn about planning, the concepts, motivating people and communication skills."

Shanthakumari, Kottaimedu Village

"I can observe that children are learning here with interest. They are getting a free environment to choose and learn. Even those who have dropped out from schools are joining in these spaces, so over a period the enrollment of the children in these spaces are also improving."

Vasanth, Chembakolli Village

"First, I was scared, hesitant and doubtful about whether or not I will be able to do this, but now I am getting confidence. When the children themselves come and ask me to explain or teach them something, I am able to see that I am doing something well."

Asha, Thirumangalam Village

2. Providing scholarship and counseling support to children

Lack of access to financial resources is one of the main reasons as to why Adivasi children and youth are unable to pursue their educational journeys. Even though the Government has few scholarship schemes and travel stipend schemes to support Adivasi children, we are seeing that it is usually not provided because of implementation and bureaucratic challenges and even when at times its being given, the children and the parents have no idea about it.

Common understanding is that scholarships are towards school or college fees. But in the context here, when we say scholarship support, support ranging from providing umbrellas, school bags, travel allowance, tuition support for children who have failed exams as well as hostel/ school fees are included. Village level volunteers as well as community leaders children and families in need of support for scholarships which then get decided and processed through a Scholarships Committee which includes people from the community. This process enables people and leaders from the community to get involved and ensures dignity and agency through the process -- children receiving scholarships are not seen as mere beneficiaries or recipients of the program, but rather the process is seen as the community coming together to support their children and the youth.

In addition to securing scholarship support to children, we regularly facilitate counseling/ conversations with the children as a follow-up -- once every 3 months. Through these spaces we understand how the children are progressing and if there is further need for support. It is also in these spaces we have conversations and facilitate sessions with children on career and higher education opportunities.



65
children received
scholarship towards
their education.

12th graduates participating in a counselling session before college applications.

Looking Inward, Looking Forward

Articulating Alternatives to the education system by Adivasis, for Adivasis

In November 2021, we had undertaken a research initiative to explore the experiences of the four Adivasi communities here in the current education system and develop an understanding of the purpose of Adivasi education and alternative vision for the same as voiced by the people of the community. 17 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), two workshops and several months of analysis later, we concluded the project this year with a research report, two articles and an illustrated book as the tangible outputs. On the intangible side, we saw that new relationships were built, and old relationships were strengthened through the process of bringing people together to discuss about their children's education. The entire research initiative clearly demonstrates that the community has valuable insights regarding their children's education and creating spaces for deep listening that brings forth these insights is vital to building momentum and ownership for educational change.

The study was centered around the lived experiences and perspectives of 165 participants, of whom 151 participants were from the community. The study confirms that the current education system fails to accommodate the diversity of needs and aspirations of the Adivasi communities, meting out an education that alienates their culture and values. It puts forth the purpose of education, as demanded by the participants, and foregrounds the need for an education that enables their children to navigate their home worlds and the modern world with knowledge, dignity, and character, and lead contented lives. Since school alone is insufficient to meet these educational needs, there is a need to reclaim the village as a site of learning and strengthen the leadership in the villages. Finally, the study also outlined certain educational practices that will facilitate the creation of a meaningful and culturally relevant education system for Adivasi children.

The process and findings of the research are documented in detail in [the research report](#). We are in the process of publishing two articles that look at certain key aspects that emerged from the research which caters to the academic audience. Lastly and most importantly, we are also developing an illustrated book that reflects the lived experiences of youth from the community through a story. There is a lack of resources that depict the contradictions and dilemmas faced by the Adivasi youth here that is relatable and non-prejudiced. We hope that the illustrated book will contribute to filling this gap and enable us to take the findings of the research to the field in an accessible format.



Chinmayi, the Principal Investigator, presenting insights from the research at the TESF conference in Bangalore; Focus group discussions with members and leaders from the community.

Cornerstone Project

An integrated campus projecting the future of Adivasi education

For 30 years now we have been demonstrating the idea and belief that meaningful, culturally relevant learning systems do enable Adivasi children and youth to learn and lead good lives. Currently, we are limited in the sense that our school is only till Grade 5 reaching 100 children. With the new educational campus, we will be able to expand till Grade 10 -- the Cornerstone Project will establish a full-fledged educational campus which can cater to K-12 education as well as vocational education and culture research and resource center. This will enable the community to see their children get a complete education which was designed for them.

Towards this we have taken one critical and major step by raising a significant part of the fundraising for the educational campus: purchasing the first two plots of land 1.98 Acres. We have further finalized the purchase of the rest of the remaining land in the first half of the FY 23-24. We have brought in a full-time architecture and program manager to lead this project. We hope to have the first phase of the new campus open by January 2026.



School Designing Workshops together with children and teachers

As the Cornerstone Project is taking shape, a core approach towards designing has been to involve as many stakeholders as possible in the process – the most important of those being ‘our children.’ All children, from grade 2 onwards, participated in a series of designing sessions where they expressed and articulated their aspirations towards their new schools.

They answered one important question: If we were to build our own school, what would it be, feel and look like? These are what the children are sharing.

“We need many trees for us to climb, swing and eat from.”

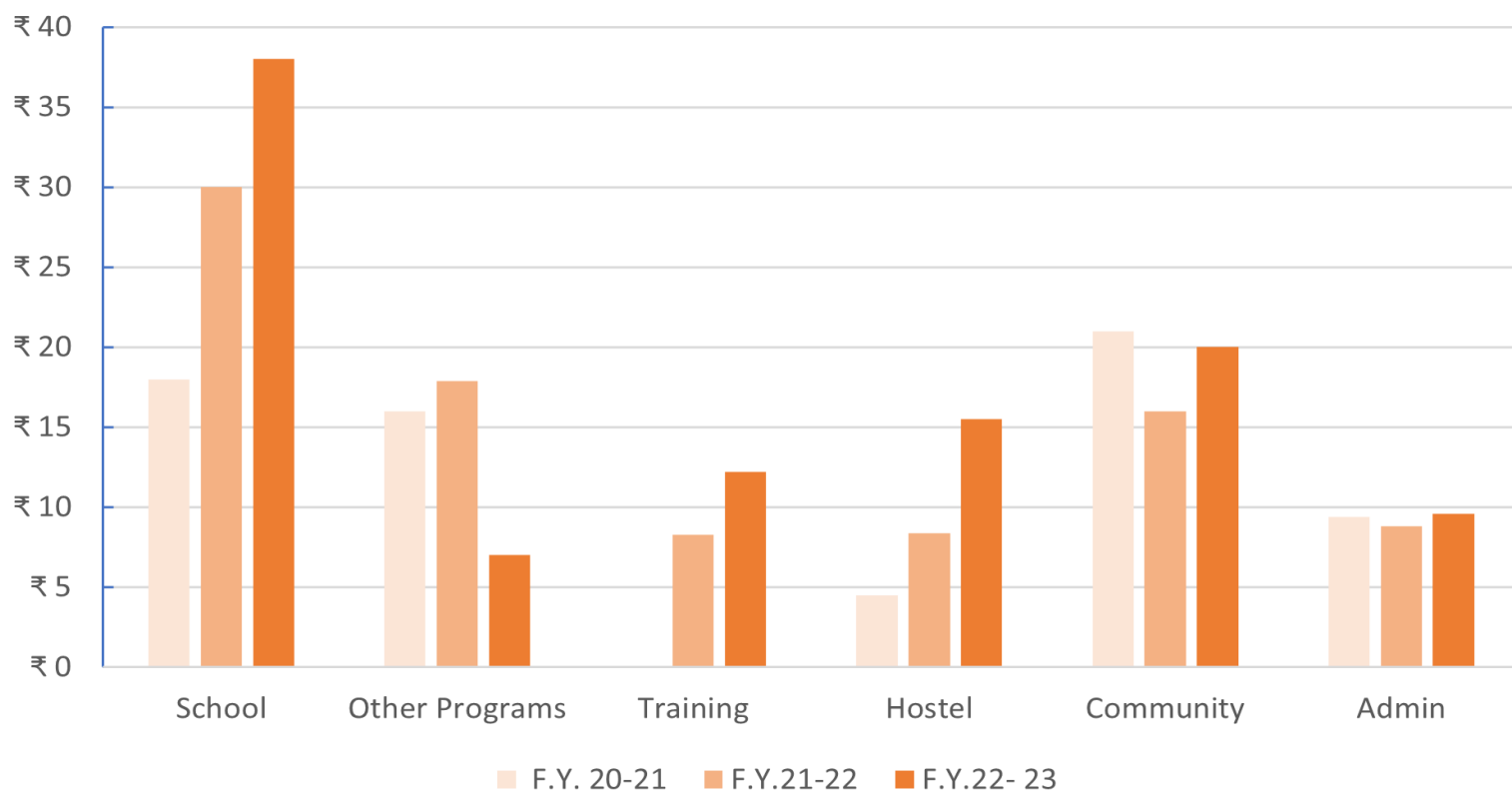
“All classrooms should be inter-connected.”

“We need to see what friends are doing all the time” “All learning spaces should be grouped around common : like community hall, library etc.”?



Financials

Program Expenses in past 3 years (in INR Lakhs/100,000s)



Internal Audit Processes

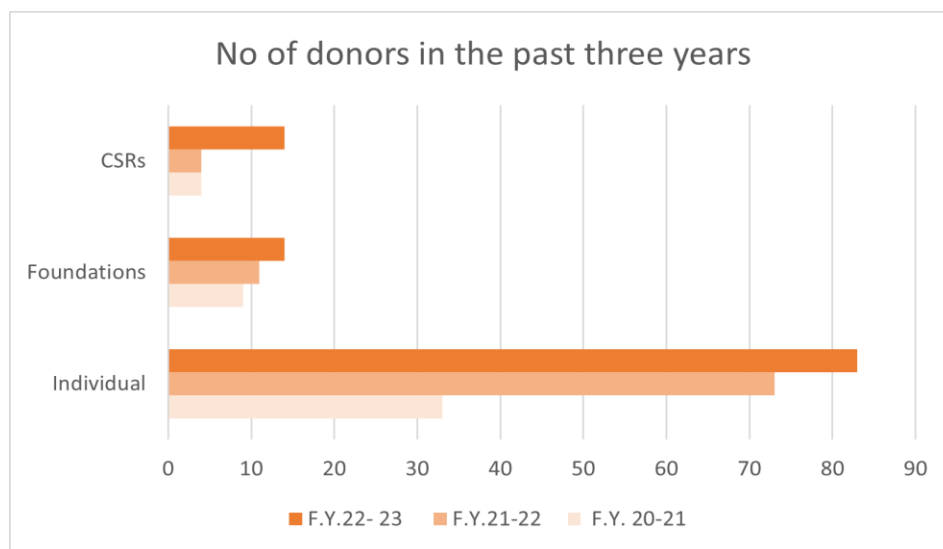
As part of our internal processes, we have been able to get the services of A.R Raghunathan and Co from Chennai to conduct internal audits as well as support our Admin staff with training them to ensure our process remains transparent and accountable.

Further for to exhibit our accountability we have undergone certification through GuideStar India. We have been given their ***“Advanced Level- GuideStar India Gold Certification”*** for our processes.

You can find our audited reports from John Mathew and Co for the Financial Year 2022- 23 [here](#) on our website.

Partnering for social change

Our work is possible only through the continuous, long-term support from many partners. Because of their trust and belief in the team and in the work, we have been able to consistently strengthen existing programs as well as take on new projects such as the Cornerstone project. We are extremely grateful that the partners that engaged with us in a manner which allows us to still ensure the community voice is at the center of the work.



JSK Trust

George
Macdonald's
Endowment Fund

From Here to There



Adivasi-Tee-Projekt (ATP)