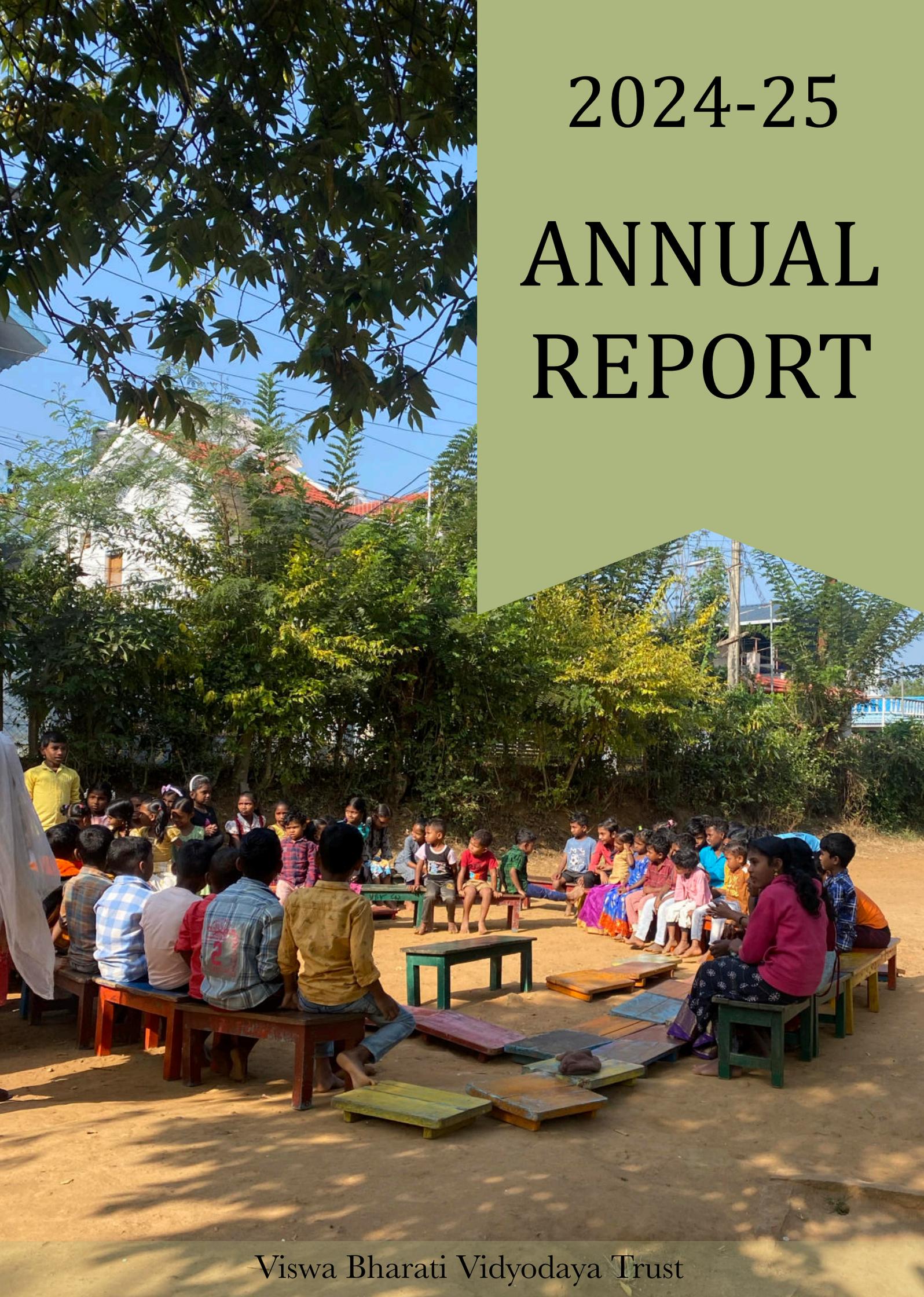


2024-25

ANNUAL REPORT



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Our Roots

The Viswa Bharati Vidyodaya Trust (VBVT) is a community-based organisation working with the Bettakurumba, Kattunayakan, Mullakurumba, and Paniya Adivasi communities of the Gudalur valley in Tamil Nadu. All four communities are recognised by the Government of India as Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs), reflecting both the depth of their Indigenous heritage and the systemic disadvantages they continue to face.

Founded in 1993 and reoriented in 1995 in response to a collective demand for an Adivasi-led school, VBVT is part of a broader movement for self-determination and dignity, led by the Adivasi Munnetra Sangam (AMS).

VBVT emerged from a historical moment when access to forests was curtailed, and education, like many modern structures, became a site of discrimination for Adivasi children. Schools ignored children's languages, cultures, and rhythms of life. From the start, VBVT sought to build an education system rooted in community ownership, one that honoured identity, upheld dignity, and responded to the lived realities of the people.

Over the years, this has included not only the creation of schools and hostels, but also reclaiming villages as sites of learning, and ensuring Adivasi leadership in teaching, governance, and decision-making. Today, a majority of the Trust's board is composed of Adivasi members, a reflection of an ongoing journey toward autonomy and structural change.

VBVT's work is not just about education, it is about reclaiming space, identity, and future. It is part of a larger arc of transformation, led by the community, towards their future.





Our Vision

Adivasi communities shaping their own futures through education that is rooted in their culture, responsive to their context, and grounded in their collective aspirations.

Our Mission

VBVT works to create an education system that is co-designed and led by Adivasi communities, reflects the realities and aspirations of their children, and enables them to thrive academically, socially, and culturally. Through schools, hostels, village-based learning centres, and teacher training, VBVT reclaims education as a practice of freedom - one that strengthens identity, deepens connection, and supports communities in shaping their own futures.

At A Glance

For over 30 years, Viswa Bharati Vidyodaya Trust (VBVT) has worked with the Bettakurumba, Kattunayakan, Mullakurumba, and Paniya Adivasi communities in Gudalur to reimagine education as a path to dignity, identity, and possibility.

Touching the lives of over 500 children and youth across 100+ villages through its core programs, VBVT's work is rooted in cultural relevance, community ownership, and lived experience.

In 2024–25, VBVT's core programmes reached:

Vidyodaya Adivasi School: 122 children from 32 villages, guided by 14 teachers shaped by care, culture, and strong community connection.

Koottu Manai: 37 adolescents from 22 villages, mentored by 11 facilitators combining academics, life skills, and cultural grounding.

Community Education Program, Makkale Keeche: 36 Learning Centres reached 350 children and 32 camps engaged 280 adolescent children across 78 villages. 210 scholarships supported.

Facilitator Training: 7 Adivasi youth trained and placed across all VBVT programmes.

Alongside its core programmes, VBVT supports nearly 2,800 Adivasi children to go to school regularly by working with their families, village Sanghams, and schools. Helping children access essential documents like birth certificates, AADHAR, and community certificates is also part of this effort.

Why: VBVT works to change the way education relates to Adivasi children by placing identity, culture, and community ownership at the heart of learning, ensuring their languages, values, and ways of life are respected while building the skills they need to navigate the wider world.

How: Our approach blends formal and informal learning through schools, hostels, village centres, camps and facilitator training, all led by Adivasi teachers and youth trained as facilitators.

Vidyodaya Adivasi School

Shaping Futures, Staying Rooted

The Vidyodaya Adivasi School is a nursery and primary school that has been working for over thirty years to create a culturally rooted and contextually relevant learning environment for Adivasi children. It emerged from a demand within the community to build an educational space that values their identity, language, and lived experience, one that supports children not just to succeed in school, but to thrive in life.



Key Features



Context-driven
Curriculum

The school's curriculum blends foundational academic learning with traditional Adivasi knowledge and culture, including the geography, history, and oral traditions of the Adivasi communities.



Grounded in Community,
Guided by Care

Trained Adivasi teachers lead through collaborative and democratic practices, shaping learning spaces grounded in trust and mutual respect.



Balanced and Holistic
Daily Routine

Children engage in a rich flow of academics, craft, play, and cultural expression each day, making learning both joyful and meaningful.



Connected Spaces of
Learning and Growing

The school actively engages with parents and elders to build a shared educational journey between home and school.

The Year in Numbers

122

Children

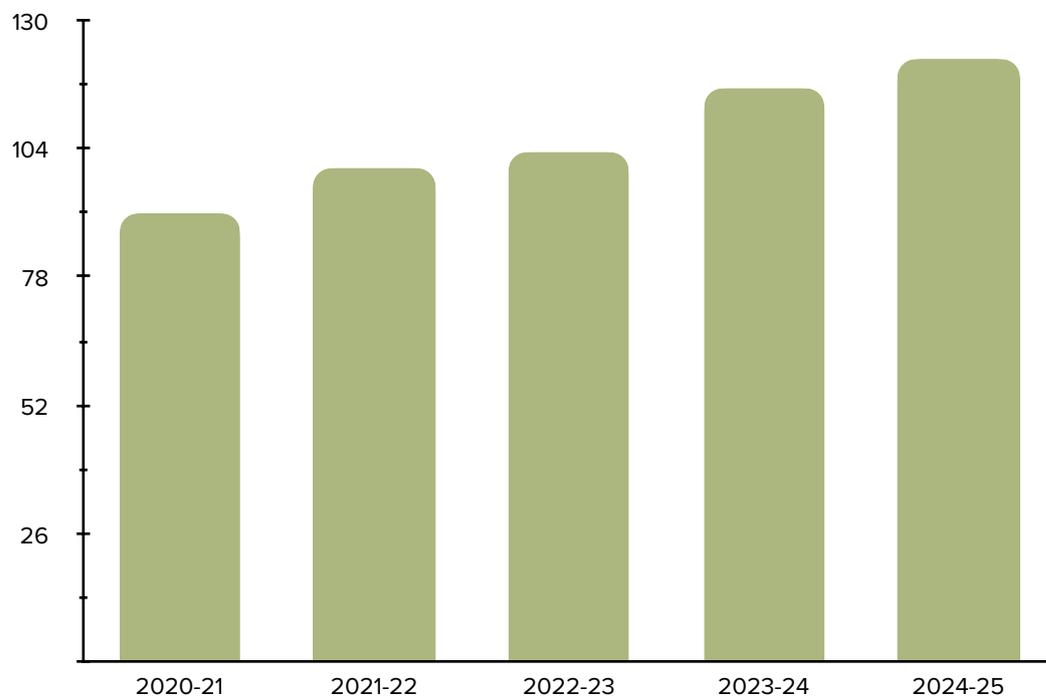
14

Teachers

32

Villages

Admissions Over the Years (2021-2025)



The steady rise in admissions over the past five years signals more than just numerical growth - it reflects the deepening trust that Adivasi families place in Vidyodaya's approach to education. The demand for admissions from the same set of villages reflects the strength of Vidyodaya's long-standing relationships with families and the continued trust they place in the school, while the sustained presence of Adivasi teachers at the heart of the teaching team strengthens its cultural and pedagogical integrity.

Together, these numbers mark a quiet but significant shift: a growing desire among families for learning spaces that affirm identity and ensure safety, and a continued community investment in shaping the school's direction. Even as the demand increases, the school remains mindful of scale, prioritising the depth of our engagement, and the wellbeing of children and educators alike.

Focus Areas of the Year



Strengthening the Teaching Team

New teachers joined our team this year, especially for Kindergarten and Science. Significant attention was given to orienting new educators to the school's vision, building mentoring structures, and supporting the professional growth of trainee teachers from the community.

Collaborative Curriculum Development

Curriculum planning emerged as a collective priority, with the team recognising the need to write, review, and refine teaching materials throughout the year. The focus was on ensuring alignment between what is taught, how it is taught, and why — with particular emphasis on cultural relevance and long-term learning goals.

Pedagogical Clarity and Purpose

Discussions highlighted the importance of clearly defined learning objectives, especially in subjects like Mathematics. Teachers began reflecting on how pedagogy and assessment can move beyond rote procedures to foster problem-solving, critical thinking, and real-life application. Internal feedback loops were strengthened through classroom observation and reflection circles.

Community Engagement

The school continued to nurture strong relationships with families through regular parent–teacher meetings that created space for meaningful dialogue about children's progress and challenges. Village visits focused on reconnecting with families of long-absent students, and the team actively supported parents in securing essential documents required for children's continued access to education.

Highlights of the Year



A Library That Grows With Us

This year, Vidyodaya was part of the Library Mentorship Support Program with Bookworm, Goa. The collaboration brought renewed energy to the space — from reorganising physical infrastructure to rethinking the role of the library in everyday learning. The library gradually transformed into a lively, welcoming hub that sparks curiosity, encourages exploration, and invites children into new worlds, both real and imagined.

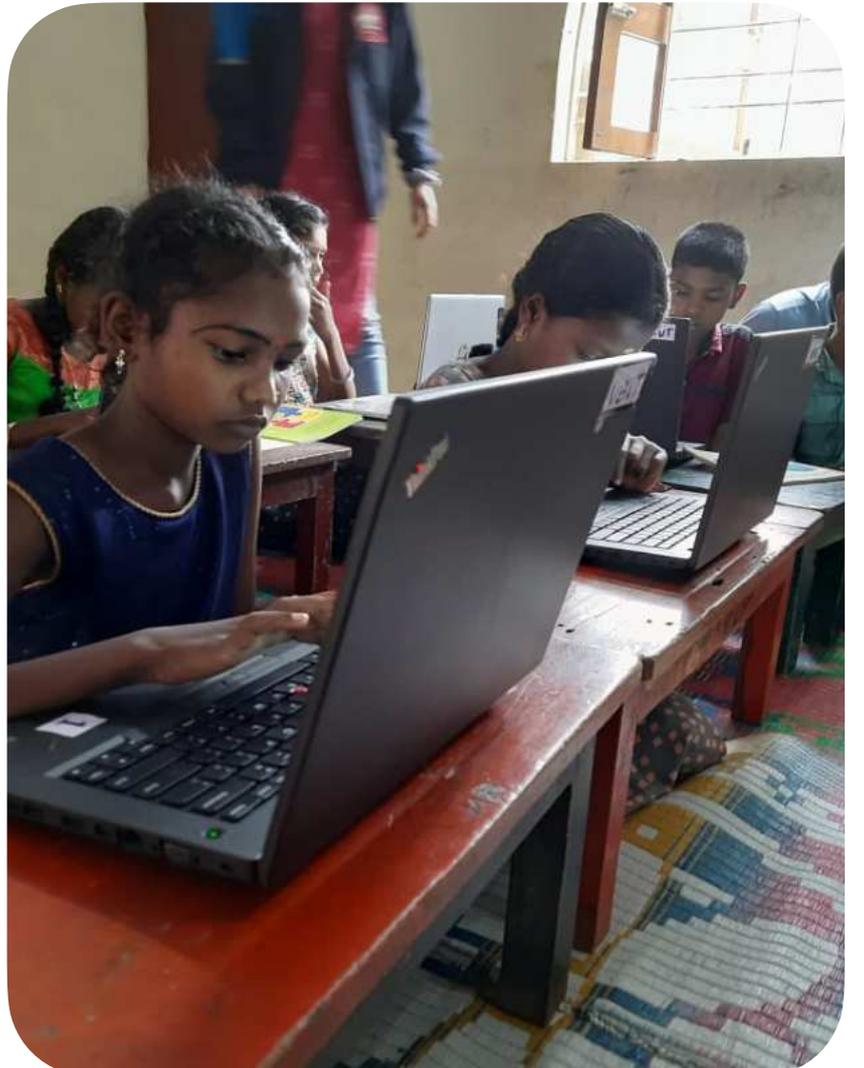
Celebrating Adivasi Values

December 5th, observed as Adivasi Day, remains the most anticipated celebration at Vidyodaya. This year, the entire campus was turned into an interactive exhibition maze with the theme: Adivasi Values — Coexistence and Community. Children and teachers co-created displays, videos, games, and learning experiences that invited visitors to reflect and engage. Around 450 people attended the celebration, including parents who stood proudly as their children spoke with clarity, confidence, and conviction about their traditions, practices, and the philosophies that guide their communities.



Learning Through Experience

From planting paddy in local fields to visiting Wayanad's vibrant flower show, teachers and children took part in learning journeys that extended far beyond the classroom. These experiential learning opportunities allowed them to connect with nature, culture, and new environments — strengthening both understanding and imagination in ways that written curriculum alone cannot.



Koottu Manai

A Residential Initiative Rooted in Care

Koottu Manai was established in 2021 to support Adivasi adolescents who often face significant barriers in continuing their education beyond primary school. Working in partnership with local schools and boarding facilities, the initiative enhances access to formal education while building the support systems young people need to thrive. The girls continue to attend Fathima Girls Higher Secondary School and stay at the boarding provided there, while the boys study at Puthurvayal Govt. High School up to 10th and in GTMO Matriculation Higher Secondary School for 11th and 12th.

Transcending a traditional hostel, Koottu Manai is a nurturing, community-rooted residential space where adolescents are guided to grow into confident, competent, and compassionate individuals. Led by a team of eleven facilitators—nine of whom are from the community—the program is grounded in a deep understanding of both the children’s cultural contexts and their educational journeys. Here, learning goes beyond academics to include life skills, creative expression, self-awareness, and a sense of collective responsibility.



The Core of our Work

Academic Support

Structured study sessions prioritise guided academic learning, foundational literacy, and numeracy support to help children navigate mainstream schooling

Learning Beyond Academics

Weekends include hands-on sessions in the maker space and life skills workshops that build practical abilities, emotional resilience, and confidence through joyful, self-directed learning.

Facilitator-led Mentorship

Each child is supported by a facilitator who provides consistent academic and emotional mentorship, ensuring a responsive and trusting learning



Community Engagement

Children connect with their cultural roots and community through structured activities, while facilitators build strong relationships with families and villages to

The Year in Numbers



37

Children



11

Teachers
(9 Adivasi)



22

Villages

Focus Areas of the Year

Consolidation over Expansion

In a deliberate move to prioritise depth over scale, Koottu Manai limited its intake to six new students this year. This allowed for closer mentoring, stronger integration into the existing community, and better preparation for the team to meet the growing aspirations of the children and the evolving vision of the initiative.

Growing with Purpose

The team invested in its own growth through a series of intensive workshops and seminars on numerous relevant topics. Regular feedback sessions and peer learning further enriched the process, ensuring that facilitation remained thoughtful, context-aware, and grounded in the lived realities of the children.

Shaping Learning Resources

To support the expanding scope of learning at Koottu Manai, the team focused on developing relevant and contextualised curriculum for foundational learning for adolescents. In addition to creating new materials, they also collated existing academic resources, both from within the program and trusted external sources, to build a shared repository that could support ongoing learning.

Strengthening Team Structures

The school continued to nurture strong relationships with families through regular parent–teacher meetings that created space for meaningful dialogue about children’s progress and challenges. Village visits focused on reconnecting with families of long-absent students, and the team actively supported parents in securing essential documents required for children’s continued access to education.

Highlights of the Year



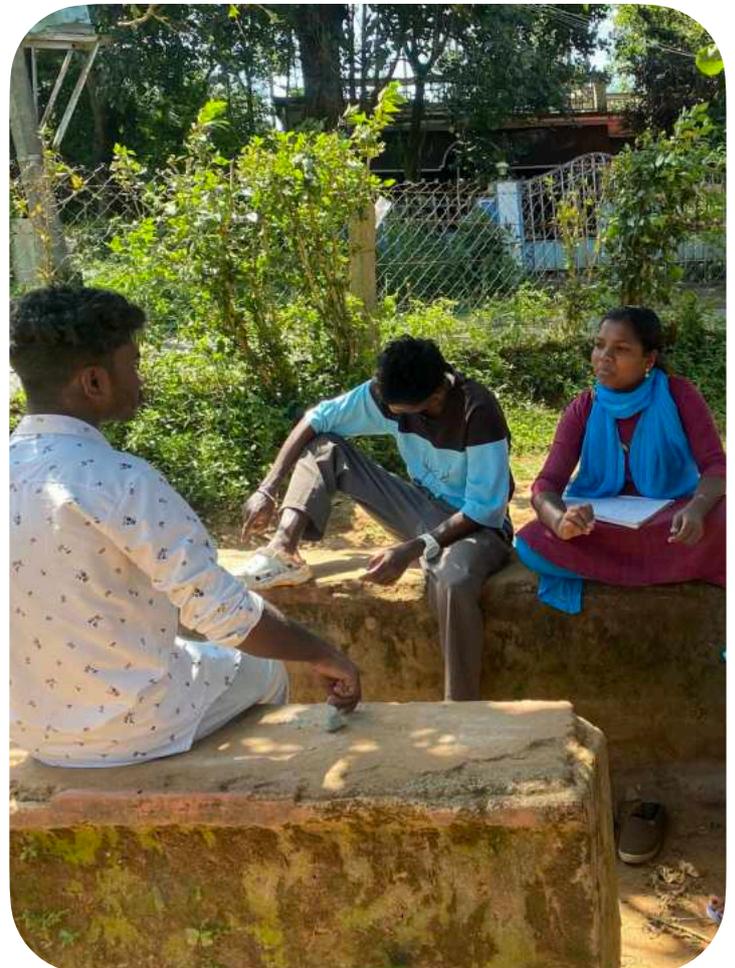
Broadening Horizons: Chennai-Gudalur Student Exchange

Senior students from grades 11 and 12 were taken on an exposure trip to Chennai to broaden their understanding of life beyond the valley. During the visit, they engaged in vibrant discussions and activities with peers from Tondiarpet High School. In April this year, those students visited Gudalur, enabling a rich cultural exchange that fostered mutual respect, curiosity, and new friendships.

Strengthening Facilitator Capacities

During the summer break, the team undertook intensive workshops to strengthen the following areas of their work:

- Curriculum development
- Adolescent psychology
- Gender workshop by the Katradi Trust
- Communicative English



Camps for Growth and Connection

Over the course of the year, three residential camps were organised at Koottu Manai, each with a distinct focus. The first camp centred on team building and goal setting, creating a strong foundation for the year ahead. The second offered an in-depth exploration of key life skills, with meaningful discussions on respect, initiative, and future aspirations. The third camp focused on community engagement - senior students learned from village elders about sacred groves, while juniors participated in traditional bamboo basket weaving. Each camp was a space for reflection, connection, and rooted learning.



Makkale Keeche - Community Education Initiative

Reclaiming the Village as a Site of Learning

Our work is grounded in the belief that strong, community-led support systems can transform children's education, enrich their lives, and strengthen community ownership over learning.

Learning Centers and Camps

The Makkale Keeche Initiative works with Adivasi communities to create village-based systems of learning led by local youth volunteers and coordinators. Its work has two key strands: Learning Centers, which provide consistent, village-level spaces for academic support and mentoring; and Children's Camps, which bring together adolescents from multiple villages for collaborative learning, cultural sharing, and exposure to new ideas. Both strands are rooted in the community and aim to create safe, inclusive, and culturally grounded spaces where children can learn meaningfully, grow in confidence, and sustain their engagement with education.

Alongside its work with children, Makkale Keeche actively engages with parents and community members to discuss and plan for children's learning, address challenges, and build shared responsibility for education.

Scholarship Support

Lack of access to financial resources is one of the main reasons many Adivasi children and youth are unable to continue their education. To address this, scholarship support is provided in the form of travel allowances, tuition for children re-attempting exams, hostel or school fees, basic school supplies, umbrellas, and school bags. Requests are identified by community members and reviewed by a Scholarships Committee. Rather than being seen as passive beneficiaries, children are supported through a process that affirms their dignity and reinforces the community's collective commitment to their education.



Core of Our Work

Community-Led and Volunteer-Driven

The initiative is anchored in the leadership of young people from Adivasi villages who serve as coordinators and volunteers. Their deep understanding of local realities and relationships with families ensures that learning spaces are relevant, trusted, and culturally grounded.

Safe and Supportive Learning Spaces

Learning Centers are welcoming environments where children feel free to ask questions, share ideas, and learn at their own pace. The emphasis is on nurturing their confidence, sparking curiosity, and fostering a strong sense of belonging.



Consistent, Community-Responsive Support

Steady, village-based guidance through study circles, mentoring, and family engagement, combined with collaborative problem-solving with communities to address priorities like school transport, early childhood education, and resource mobilisation.

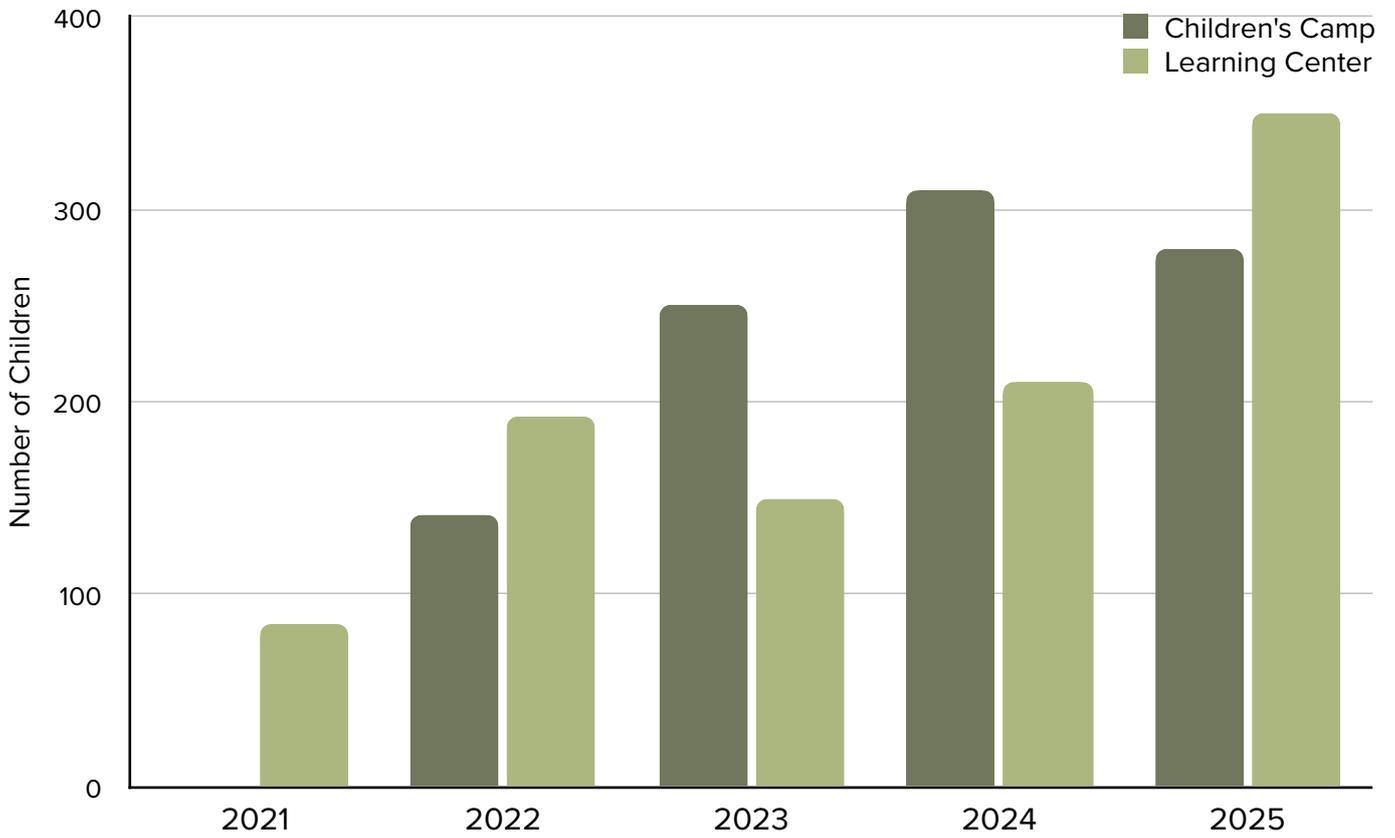
Camps as Spaces for Exploration and Growth

Regular Children's Camps bring together adolescents from different villages for collaborative learning, exposure to new ideas, and cross-community connection. These camps strengthen peer relationships and expand children's horizons beyond their immediate village context.



The Year in Numbers

Number of Children Engaged through Camps and Learning Centres



36

Learning Centres

32

Children's Camps

78

Villages

210

Received
Scholarship

Focus Areas of the Year

Strengthening Learning Centers and Camps

Supported children in 36 Learning Centers with school re-enrolment, essential documents, and public exam preparation through four village-based study circles. Continued regular Children's Camps with a stronger focus on quality, relevance, and adolescent engagement.

Expanding Reach and Strengthening the Team

Four new coordinators joined the initiative, receiving training and mentorship before establishing Learning Centers in seven new villages. Additionally, five new volunteers started Learning Centers in their own communities. In Gundur village, consistent weekend engagement by coordinator Vasu gradually built trust and encouraged wider participation from children and parents.

Building Volunteer Capacity

Focused training strengthened volunteers' teaching practices and renewed their commitment. Sessions covered foundational literacy in Tamil and English, story-based learning, arts and crafts, and play-based pedagogy. An exchange with Ms. Kaviarasi of Vidiyal Learning Center (Thirunelveli) inspired new approaches and deepened the team's long-term vision.

Community-Led Village Planning

Decentralised, village-level planning addressed interconnected challenges beyond the classroom, from transport and infrastructure to early childhood education. In Chembakolly, community advocacy secured a school bus for children. In Kozhikolly and Kadichankolly, efforts are underway to partner with the district government to appoint Adivasi women as Balwadi teachers and cooks — strengthening mother-tongue early learning and improving outcomes.



Highlights of the Year

Success in Public Exams

This year, 72% of children supported through Learning Centers and Camps passed their 10th exams, and 73% passed their 12th exams. These results reflect the consistent academic guidance, mentoring, and peer support the initiative provides, especially through study circles for public exam preparation in villages.

Children-Led Change

In Vellachal, children participating in the Learning Center voiced the need for a library during a village meeting. Their initiative inspired community members to prioritise this request, leading to the creation of both a Library and a Community Center — a powerful example of children influencing local decision-making.

From Dropout to Graduate

Hari Prakash from Chelakunnu village had left school in 11th grade. Through the encouragement and support of Devi, a local volunteer who started a Learning Center in the village, he re-enrolled in school and successfully completed his 12th grade this year — an inspiring example of the role of village-based support systems in bringing children back to education.

Deepened Engagement through Camps

Over the year, 32 Children's Camps brought together 280 adolescents from across the region. These camps created spaces for joyful learning, reflection, and collaboration, where children built confidence, improved self-expression, and found renewed motivation to continue their education.

Contextual Village Planning

Close collaboration with Graam Sabhas and parents led to tangible improvements in education access and quality. Notable outcomes included securing a school bus for Chembakolly village, raising awareness on Forest Rights Act provisions, and strengthening Balwadi (early childhood) services.

Facilitator Training

Growing Change-makers from within the Community

The Facilitator Training Program (FTP) is an 18-month residential initiative designed to equip young Adivasi adults with the knowledge, skills, and mindsets necessary to contribute meaningfully to the educational aspirations of their communities. Through a dynamic blend of theory, reflection, and hands-on experience, the program nurtures committed facilitators who are rooted in their identity and prepared to take on diverse roles in the education ecosystem.

Highlights of the Year

From Theory to Practice

In the final phase of their training, the trainees were placed across VBVT's three core initiatives—Vidyodaya Adivasi School, Koottu Manai Residential Program, and Makkale Keeche Community Education Program. For three months, they took on teaching and facilitation roles, supported through structured mentorship and regular reflection sessions. This final phase bridged theory and practice, allowing the trainees to translate their learnings into real-world impact.



Stepping into Leadership

The journey culminated in October 2024 with a heartfelt graduation ceremony attended by the entire VBVT team. The highlight of the event was the moment when parents handed over graduation certificates to the trainees—a powerful symbol of community pride, recognition, and ownership.

All seven graduates have now joined VBVT as full-time facilitators: three at the school, two at Koottu Manai, and two with Makkale Keeche. Their transition from learners to leaders marks not just a personal milestone but a collective step toward sustaining community-led education.

The Cornerstone Project

Laying the Foundations for a Shared Future

For the last 30 years, VBVT has worked to demonstrate that culturally relevant and meaningful learning spaces can transform the educational experiences of Adivasi children and youth. However, with limited infrastructure, our ability to enhance this impact has remained constrained.

The Cornerstone Project was envisioned as an answer to this limitation - an expansion of both space and imagination, of what education can offer and where it can take us. The Cornerstone Project is more than a campus. It is a vision for a learning space that mirrors the ethos of the village - open, rooted, collaborative, and aspirational. Designed as a platform for higher learning for Adivasi children, it aims to extend the spirit of the village into a physical space that honours community history and culture. From the beginning, the design process was participatory, incorporating the ideas and dreams of children, educators, and community members alike.

With strong foundations in place, both literal and metaphorical, the Cornerstone Project is poised to become a landmark space for Adivasi-led education. As we await final permissions and prepare to break ground, we carry forward the collective hopes, dreams, and resolve of the community into every step ahead.



Key Developments

Design Completion and Permissions

Last year, we completed the full campus design through a collaborative process involving children, staff, and community members. Given the site's location near the Mudumalai Tiger Reserve in a hilly region, acquiring building sanctions has required additional compliance steps. We are proud to report that all local approvals have been obtained, and the final clearance is underway. We expect to receive full sanctions by August 2025.

Community Governance

Staying true to our values of collective ownership, we established a Cornerstone Committee with most of the members from the Adivasi community along with Trustees of VBVT. This team brings expertise in construction, education, finances, and traditional knowledge and is central to decision-making and ensuring community participation.

Water Security

We successfully completed the construction of the first of two wells, located on the hostel site. With a 10ft diameter and 64ft depth, the well holds 45,000 litres even during dry months. It ensures water security both for the future campus and during the construction phase.

Contractor Selection

The Committee is leading a rigorous contractor selection process. We expect that the contractor can bring strong technical capability to meet the timelines as scheduled and a genuine commitment to involving local Adivasi members in the construction process, aligning with our goals.

Community Blessings and Ground Preparation

The first work on the site began in May 2024 after elders from Kothervayal village conducted a blessing ceremony. Following monsoon delays, work resumed and was completed by April 2025, including site clearing and formation level preparation.



Financials

Our Detailed Financial Report can be found here in this [link](#).

To ensure our process remains transparent and accountable we are grateful to the Chartered Account firm, M/s A.R Raghunathan and Co, Chennai, who have been conducting internal audits, as well as training for our Admin staff.

To further demonstrate our accountability, we have obtained certification through GuideStar India.

We have been given their “Advanced Level- GuideStar India Gold Certification” for our processes.

Our Partners

Apart from strong community ownership, a big part of our work is possible because of the support of our many partners and donors. We thank them for their continued support, which has made it possible for our work to grow.

ACE Designers Ltd
Adivasi-Tee-Projekt
Anand Murali
Anu Worles Solutions Pvt Ltd
Arivazhagan & Friends
ARTMA Foundation
Asha For Education
Association For Indias Development
Bala Arjun R
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Ravikumar Sattanathan
Sheela Sundaesan
Spende Direkt
Sri Kumar Tadimalla
Super Auto Forge Private Limited
TaeguTec India P Ltd
The Friends of Hope
The UK Online Give Foundation
Val Hawkin for the George MacDonald Endowment Fund

And to all those whose names don't appear here - friends, neighbours, well-wishers, and supporters who've given in so many ways - with time, materials, quiet encouragement, and trust - our deepest thanks. You are as much a part of this journey as anyone else.