

'ADHARSHILA'
A Primary Education Initiative

ANNUAL REPORT 2005



Kaliya Bai – a young student at the Adharshila school at village Agraa

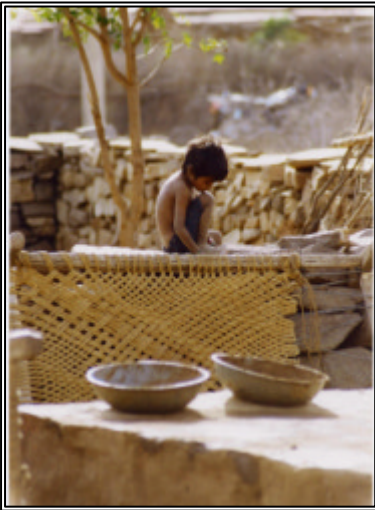


Samrakshan Trust
District Sheopur, Madhya Pradesh
Registered under the Indian Trusts Act, 1882

PART 1: INTRODUCTION

Background

The Asha education initiative was undertaken by Samrakshan Trust in 2002 to help young children from villages displaced from the Kuno wildlife sanctuary in district Sheopur, Madhya Pradesh, to access quality primary education. Its vision is to provide meaningful and joyful learning opportunities to the children living around Kuno wildlife sanctuary, such that they grow into adults that value nature and practice sustainable husbandry of natural resources, which are a vital source of livelihood for this community.



Access to formal education was one of the important benefits promised to the displaced villages after rehabilitation. However, in 2005, more than 5 years after the first village was relocated outside Kuno, the majority of children in these villages effectively have been unable to attend schools. At the beginning of the Asha initiative, virtually no operational schools existed in the relocated villages, and the government schools in neighbouring villages were located at such a distance as to be inadequate. In some villages (like Kheda) there were no literate adults or children, and in most other displaced villages, literacy levels were distressingly low. Even in villages that had access to schools, dropout rates were very high and enrolment and attendance of girl students was extremely low.

Literacy levels have historically been low among the Sahariya, an indigenous tribe that accounts for nearly 90 per cent of the population of the relocated villages. Samrakshan, which has been working with the displaced villages since 1999, began running makeshift primary schools ('Asha' schools) for children of nearly 15 displaced villages, and the Asha education initiative was formally launched on 7 January 2002.

The first few Asha schools (the schools of hope) were set up under makeshift shelters, trees, huts and in unused school buildings in 10 villages in the Vijaypur tehsil of district Sheopur, with a team of young men drawn from the local community working as teachers. The children who came to these schools had been displaced very recently from their homes inside the Kuno wildlife sanctuary. Since 1999, they had been facing a grim struggle along with their families to re-establish their lives and livelihoods at the relocation sites allotted to them by the forest department (which had carried out the rehabilitation programme). Samrakshan, which began working in this region as a bridge between the displaced community and the forest department, found that in village after village, the displaced Sahariya tribals wanted to send their children to school. They told us repeatedly that one of the reasons why they shifted out of the sanctuary was to allow their children access to schools, which they had never had the opportunity to attend.



Asha school in Village Ahirwani - 2002



The Asha School, Village Ladar, 2004

During 2002-04, the Asha schools grew and matured, as did the education team at Samrakshan, and by 2004, the Asha schools had become an integral part of the landscape of these villages. More than 500 children had passed through the portals of these schools, and around 60 children had been able to get admission to a regular government-run middle school and hostel, after passing their Class 5 examination as private students tutored by Asha schools. By the end of 2003, we had consolidated our Asha schools into 3 main centres, run out of unused government school buildings, with 2 teachers per school and a student-teacher ratio of around 40:1. The

girl-boy ratio in the Asha schools averaged around 1:3, and the attendance percentage (despite repeated droughts, distress migration, limited infrastructure and extreme weather conditions) remained between 60-80 per cent. This entire period threw up challenges, learnings and moments to remember almost every single day, and at the end of the day, gave us renewed confidence to dream bigger dreams.

New Dreams

In 2003, the education team began a process of collective introspection and perspective planning to create a vision of where we wanted the education initiative to go over the next few years. The most important issue that emerged was that we need a school campus of our own to bring into action a number of innovative approaches and activities that our collective experience had led us to evolve over 3 years. The government school buildings out of which the Asha schools were being run did not offer the scope for such innovations, since there were issues of ownership and security of the premises. We had not been granted any official recognition by the state education agencies to run the Asha schools in government buildings, although village level state functionaries regularly reported our activities to their higher authorities.

We wanted a dedicated space of our own to be able to provide our young students with opportunities to go beyond mere syllabus-based learning. We wanted them to have a school where they could play, create, experiment and innovate. We wanted to offer them opportunities to design and implement various project ideas, and to learn as many as possible of their syllabus-based lessons in the outdoor mode – using all of their senses and a variety of media. We wanted to expose them to cutting-edge methods of sustainable agriculture and non-farm livelihood while they were in school, so that adopting these ideas when they grew up came naturally. We wanted them to be close to nature and to a variety of living creatures, so that their natural compassion and care for the wild could get a keener edge. And to do all of this, we wanted a physical space that allowed us the freedom to build, innovate, and unleash our own creativity, so that we could create a school that each child will find joy in attending and will look back upon with fondness later.



The Process



The chosen site for the Adharshila campus

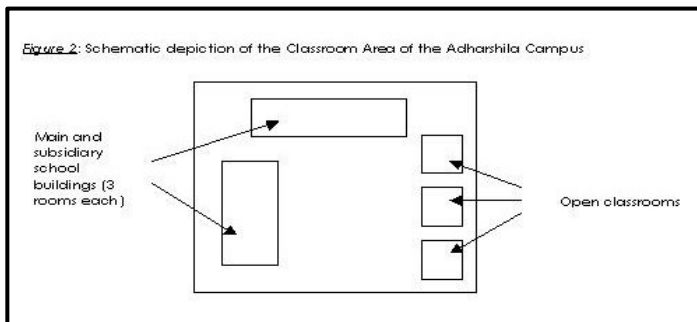
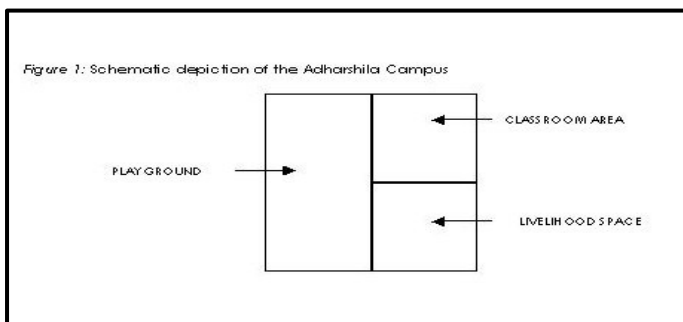
This is how the idea of the 'Adharshila' (Hindi for foundation stone) was born. However, to give this dream a real shape, many prosaic and mundane practicalities had to be dealt with and tackled, and many obstacles, some anticipated and some completely unforeseeable, had to be overcome. We began with registering an educational society under the MP Societies Registration Act, which would allow us to apply for government recognition for our school, as and when it got established. In October 2003, the Adharshila Shiksha Samiti was registered duly at the office of the Registrar of Societies at Gwalior. In June 2005, we have obtained permission from the district education officer to conduct government recognized classes till Class 5 (the primary school level).

The next challenge was trying to raise money to build the Adharshila school and campus. After a long process of negotiations, we received the go-ahead from Sir Dorabji Tata Trust, which agreed to support us over 3 years and to meet costs like building construction, creation of livelihood spaces, resource material for students, salaries of the education team and overhead expenses. We then went into overdrive in a highly personalized fundraising drive for meeting the cost of purchase of land for the

Adharshila campus. This drive was initiated after our complete failure to interest the district authorities in granting us a plot of land on lease for housing the campus. By June 2005, generous financial support had been received towards developing the Adharshila campus from Arun and Satish Mandhana (Delhi), Dr. Arun Goel Trust (NW Indiana, USA), Atul Kumar, Indian Wildlife Conservation Trust (NW Indiana), Dr. Amarnath Agrawal (NW Indiana), Kamal Nayan Kabra, Monica Sood, Dr. Nisha Singh, Dr. Sheila Rani, Dr. PN Sinha (all from Delhi) and other friends and supporters. We also entered into an MoU with a Mumbai based company, which agreed to provide support for purchase of land and establishment of a water supply system at the Adharshila campus.

The Adharshila Campus at Agra

By May 2005, the process of purchase of land and transfer of the land in Samrakshan’s name had been completed. There was a delay of almost a month after this, while we were unable to get the revenue authorities to complete the process of physical delineation of the land boundaries, but by early June this too was completed. The design of the Adharshila campus was prepared by Samrakshan’s field team, and was the subject of much debate and discussion in the preceding months. The final design (depicted schematically in Figure 1) consists of 2 buildings of 3 rooms each, 3 stand-alone classrooms, a separate livelihood space, and a large playground.



School under construction

Construction work on the campus began in June 2005, and was completed in August. The Adharshila school and campus were inaugurated formally on Independence Day, August 15, 2005. All students from Samrakshan’s Asha schools at villages Ladar, Durreri, Jakhoda and Kirwara, along with the newly admitted students at the Adharshila School at Agra attended the inauguration ceremony. Later in the day, the children joined the grown-ups in a keenly contested kite flying competition, in keeping with the spirit of the education initiative and to commemorate the logo of the Adharshila Shiksha Samiti – a smiling kite.

PART 2: PROGRESS DURING 2005

HIGHLIGHTS	
Number of Schools	5
Number of Teachers	12
Number of children currently enrolled (primary level)	248
Students in Class 6	34
Current Girl/Boy ratio	1:2
Current Teacher/student ratio	1:25
Overall school attendance percentage	Approx. 70%
Medium of instruction	Hindi
Curriculum	MP state syllabus

By August 2005, the education initiative of Samrakshan had spread to include 5 schools (including the Adharshila school and campus at Agra) and nearly 300 children from 15 villages in the Vijaypur tehsil of district Sheopur. All the schools run earlier as the Asha shalas now function under the management

of Samrakshan's sister organization - the Adharshila Shiksha Samiti. Samrakshan Trust, however, continues to raise financial support for these schools from various individual and organizational sources in India and abroad.

Goal and objectives

- Providing access to elementary education to children not covered by the state education network
- Assisting older children to gain access to the state education network directly at the Standard 6 level
- Improving the quality of education in the schools through training, exposure and capacity building of teachers
- Incorporating locally relevant environment education activities into the syllabus to develop empathy towards and understanding of the local flora and fauna, and to encourage wise resource use
- Introducing into the curriculum various interesting and stimulating modules that provide exposure to locally relevant livelihood skills
- Providing primary health inputs to each student for prevention of common ailments; focusing on health and hygiene among the students

Facilities

Buildings: The 3 Asha schools in villages Ladar, Durreri and Jakhoda continue to operate out of government school buildings. No government teacher had been at Ladar and Durreri till December 2005, while the teacher appointed at Jakhoda was highly irregular, leading to gross underutilization of the building and facilities. The 4th Asha school at village Kirwara is located in an incomplete school building that had been sanctioned 2 years ago under the state Education Guarantee Scheme. However, the contractor did not finish completion of the building, and when we began negotiations with the villagers, the Kirwara school building had no roof and no flooring. However, sustained efforts by the education team and the community mobilization team have finally resulted in the villagers contributing voluntary labour to create a temporary roof for this building. Simultaneous, Samrakshan has been lobbying intensively with the government authorities at the district and state capital level for speedy completion of the school building at Kirwara.

All 4 school buildings have been painted in bright colours, to improve the working environment for children. Minor repairs have also been carried out in these buildings, wherever required.

Books and indoor games: This year, we have acquired more books for children from various educational material developers, including

- Books from Bal Niketan Sangh, Indore
- Books from NBT, CBT, and Eklavya.
- Games and other resource material from Navnirmitti, Jodo Gyan, Eklavya
- CDs from CFS, New Delhi
- Sports material (bat, cricket ball, football – one per school), birdwatching kits

The new additions include picture books, storybooks, activity books, poem collections, and science and nature-related publications. A number of charts and posters have also been put up on the walls at each school, for children to have continuous access to the information contained in them.

Resource Material

A range of resource material has been made available for use of students at the Adharshila campus at Agra. An **activity room** with a library, games and toys, and a film screening facility has been set up. The children from the Ladar, Durreri, Jakhoda and Kirwara schools make at least one visit each month to the Adharshila campus, mainly for screening of children's films.

Safe storage of resource material: A book cabinet and an open metal rack has been provided to each school for easy storage of resource material acquired over the years. The key to the cabinet is available with the teachers, who make the material available to children every day, but lock the stuff up after school to keep it safe from any kind of vandalization.

Blackboards: A number of children from the poorest families found it difficult to get their parents to buy them a slate or notebooks. To counter this problem, we have converted the entire wall of the school buildings into a continuous blackboard, upto the height of 3 feet from the floor. This has made it very easy for smaller children to write and draw wherever they please, and they donot need to bring a slate to class. A lot of children use this blackboard to draw pictures, write out their lessons or generally let their creativity loose by making random inscriptions!

School shops: The children often had to wait till somebody from their family visited Agra (around 4 to 5 km away) to purchase necessary books, notebooks, pencils, slates or other stuff for them. In the rainy season, the delay could be considerable, and the market at Agra usually does not stock quality school supplies at reasonable prices. To get over this problem, this year a 'school shop' has been set up at each school, where notebooks, pens, pencils, slate, chalk and books have been stocked from the wholesale market at Gwalior. The teachers are responsible for maintaining stock and sale records, and we hope to delegate this responsibility to the older children over the next year.

School curriculum

Children in the age group of 5 to 12 years are taken into Classes 1 to 5, or the primary school level. The students in each school are divided into different classes according to their current academic level, which is gauged through regular tests. The schools follow the curriculum designed by the Madhya Pradesh State Council for Educational Research and Training (MPSCERT). The subjects taught under this curriculum are:

- Standard I: Hindi, English (qualifying subject only) and Mathematics
- Standard II: Hindi, English (qualifying subject only) and Mathematics
- Standard III: Hindi, English (qualifying subject only) and Mathematics
- Standard IV: Hindi, English (qualifying subject only) and Mathematics
- Standard V: Hindi, Mathematics, Environmental Science, Social Sciences, and English (qualifying subject only)

For each of these papers, the education team has broken the syllabus down into the main topics that have to be covered during the year (we call this the Minimum Level of Learning or MLL). There are 20 MLL topics in each subject, for each class. If required, the sequence of lessons has been altered in the MLL list (compared to the way the lessons are structured in the syllabus books) so that each new topic builds on the lessons learnt in previous topics, such that there is a progressive rise in level of difficulty of the lessons taught.

In the course of a series of training workshops, the education team has designed a specific set of activities for teaching each of these MLL topics. These include the activities and pedagogy suggested in the syllabus textbooks, but also include a series of other activities designed by the education team. Thus, we now have a uniform methodology for teaching each topic in each subject in all our schools. The teachers have been trained in using a range of resource materials like flash cards, books, charts, globe, toys and so on, which are used to increase the child's interest in the topics being taught. This resource material has been sourced from reputed organizations like Eklavya, Jodo Gyan Educational Services, Navnirmitti and Bal Niketan Sangh, and made available at all five schools.

Attendance

Attendance was satisfactory by and large during the reporting period this year, but in specific villages, attendance performance of students has declined. Children attending the Ladar school from villages Ahirwani and Ladar especially showed decline in attendance, basically because of a severe economic and health crisis being faced by these two villages after displacement. Surveys by Samrakshan show that there have been more than 80 deaths in these 2 villages during the last year due to a variety of ailments that were triggered by extreme poverty and malnutrition. Most of the dead were children in the below-10 years age group, and a number of students of the Ladar school lost family members, or suffered long weeks of illness themselves. It was in view of this that the school health intervention has been planned for 2006.

Student evaluation system

A system of student evaluation was designed and put into place during the academic year 2004-05, under which exams were conducted at the end of every quarter of the academic year. Accordingly, the first quarterly (August 2004), half-yearly (December 2004) and annual (March 2005) examinations were held during the academic year 2004-05. The examinations were conducted with the help of the entire

Samrakshan field team, which helped with invigilation. The final examination was taken by 173 students, of which 151 passed and 23 failed. For the students taking examinations for class 5, the annual examination served as a pre-board preparatory exam, and they subsequently sat for the state-conducted board examination during March 28 to April 5 (please see details below). We have now modified the evaluation from a periodic test based system to a system of continuous and ongoing evaluation. This is to reduce the pressure of examinations among our students, and also to enable teachers to provide continuous corrective inputs for students who are performing below par. Under the new system, for each subject taught in a class, evaluation sheets are created based on the 20 topics to be covered under the Minimum Level of Learning (MLL). Each student is evaluated concurrently with classroom teaching, such that as soon as the child becomes competent in a particular MLL, this is marked on the evaluation sheet and the teacher starts focussing on the next MLL with the child. Thus, at any given point of time, the teacher and the education coordinator are aware of the exact level of learning acquired by each child, so that individual attention to each child is given according to her specific strengths and weaknesses. An end-of-year examination is conducted in each class to evaluate the child's learning, and depending on the child's performance, she is promoted to the next level.

Village Meetings and Parent Contact

The teachers and the education coordinator held, on an average, between 4 to 5 meetings with the wards of the students during the year. The issues covered included discussion about low attendance of some students and ways of improving this, consent from parents for the proposed health programme, and discussion of examination results.

Main Achievements in 2005

Government recognition for the Adharshila Shiksha Samiti: A major achievement this year was the grant of government recognition to the Adharshila Shiksha Samiti, Samrakshan's sister organization that has been entrusted with managing the Asha schools as well as the Adharshila campus. On June 28, 2005, Adharshila received formal permission from the District Education Officer to conduct government recognized classes upto the primary school level (that is, till Class 5). This means, among other things, that next year onwards, all students at the Ladar and Durreri schools preparing for the Class 5 State Board examination will appear as students of the Adharshila school, instead of having to get special permission from the government to appear as self-taught students. After passing Class 5, they shall have the option of joining the state-run middle school at Agraa or Palpur, or seeking admission to Class 6 at the Adharshila school.

Mainstreaming and linkage with government: The Asha schools continued their critical task of linking students of Class 5 with the formal education system. This year, 34 students (including 2 girls) of the Asha schools appeared as private students for the Class 5 exams held by the MP state board. Special permission was obtained through due process for these students and each student was provided with extra coaching by their respective teachers to enable them to tackle the examination. The results of these examinations were declared in June 2005, and are a significant improvement over the 2004 results. All 34 students have passed this examination, and only 3 of them have been asked to appear in the supplementary examination for one paper. In June 2005, we succeeded once again in securing admission in Class 6 for all our students in the government schools at Palpur and Agraa. However, only 8 of these students have got admission to the hostel, and we are negotiating with the district education officer to secure admission for the rest in the hostel facility.

Creation of Livelihood skill development spaces: The Adharshila campus at Agraa has a dedicated area that is being developed as a livelihood skill training space. Here, the students will get exposed to fun-learning activities in areas like backyard vegetable cultivation, vermicompost, nursery raising and poultry farming, as part of their daily school activities. Each student will spend some time each week working with the Samrakshan team in maintaining these spaces and getting familiar with the livelihood activities. The modules for this are currently being designed, keeping in mind students of different age groups. Additionally, the activities slot in the student's timetable is also used for maintaining the Adharshila campus, caring for the trees and plants on campus, and overall cleanliness of the school, drinking water, sports and livelihood areas.

Health and hygiene interventions: This year, special efforts were made to focus attention on child health and hygiene, with emphasis on actions that were simple, low cost and high on impact. The children in our schools are encouraged to pay attention to personal cleanliness. Nearly all students now come to school with clean hands, faces, nails and clothes. Basic material like combs, hairoil, soap, mirror and nailcutters are available at each school so that those children who donot have these facilities at home can use them at school to maintain personal hygiene. All children are encouraged to maintain basic hygiene precautions like washing their hands before eating.

Preventive health interventions

A total of 310 children from the Asha and Adharshila schools had been targeted by the end of November 2005 in this preventive health drive, guided by Dr. AK Arun from Delhi and Dr. Balram Raje of Samrakshan Trust, MP. Preventive injections for tetanus were administered, and each child was given multivitamin tablets at school for 7 days each month. Other ailments that we are covering under this drive include common skin diseases, pneumonia, malaria and tuberculosis, which, in our experience, are the most common diseases afflicting children in this region.

Teachers' training: The education team is engaged in a continuous process of increasing internal capacity for more effective functioning. The entire education team underwent a 3-week in-house training during 1-24 June 2005, with the objective of refining and standardizing the teaching methodology of the Asha schools. The entire syllabus for each subject from Classes 1 to 5 was covered during the interactive training, and various innovative activities were designed by the team. A manual was prepared in Hindi where these methods were set out in detail and made available to our teachers. Since August 2005, the teachers spend 2 hours daily at the Adharshila campus at Agraa in sessions of self-study, guided study, preparation of new resource material, sports and rigorous discussion of upcoming activities in their respective schools. The teachers have also made significant progress in building their academic qualifications over the years, in addition to improving their classroom teaching skills through training.

Emergency medical support

Samrakshan provided financial and logistical assistance to students or their families in 3 cases during this year. Ramesh, an adivasi boy in class 4 of the Adharshila school at Agraa, was provided financial assistance to get anti-rabies vaccination after a vicious dogbite.

Radheysyam, an orphan and one of our ex-students from the Durreri school, was taken to Gwalior for treatment of advanced malaria, complicated by very low blood pressure and severe malnutrition. *Unfortunately, the doctors were unable to save him and he died on November 17, 2005.*

Lakhan, an ex-student from Ladar, asked for our assistance in treatment of 2 of his younger siblings (his father and sister had died earlier this year due to fever). The Asha teacher at Ladar helped to transport his siblings to the Primary Health Centre at village Agraa, and got them treated. We are now trying to raise resources to help Lakhan continue his studies, which he has dropped to help his mother in earning for his family.

The 3rd Annual Bal Mela: The 2-day Bal Mela was held on December 3-4, with many new attractions like new fun sports and game stalls, an innovative hurdle track contest, a late night cultural programme by each school, great food, and numerous colourful prizes for all events. The Bal Mela was held at the new Adharshila campus of Samrakshan at village Agraa, and was preceded by a fortnight of hectic preparations and exciting rehearsals by children for the various shows they presented during the Mela.

Environment Education (EE): The EE package designed by the education team began to be implemented from July 1, 2005. A day has been set aside every week for activities like nature walks, film shows and games, all of which have been designed with local environmental concerns as the focus. Children from each Asha school have been for a nature walk to a forest area near their school for collection of leaves

for the school herbarium. They have also been to another nature walk where they learned about the different types of tree barks and fun shapes that can be made from tree parts. Another nature walk focused on birdwatching, for which binoculars and bird-guides (in Hindi) had been purchased by the education team. They have also seen 2 to 3 children's films on environmental issues, including Jungle Book, Finding Nemo and others, at the new Adharshila campus. Follow-up activities to each such EE module include discussions and write-ups by the students as well as the teachers.



Kirwara and Jakhoda schools on a nature walk



Preparing a herbarium after the nature walk



Water supply at the Adharshila campus,



A film show at the Adharshila campus, Agraa



Inside the Adharshila classroom – Std. 2



A view of the Adharshila campus at Agraa

Annexure I: The Team

The Madhya Pradesh Field Team:

S. No.	Name & gender	Designation	Responsibilities
1	Syed Merajuddin-M	Team Leader	Overall coordination of all programme activities
2	Rajesh Kushwah-M	Assistant	Administration and accounts
3	Er. Shailendra Pathak-M	Coordinator	Soil and Water Conservation initiative
4	Dayakishan Kushwah-M	Assistant	
5	Dr. Balram Raje-M	Coordinator	Arogya health initiative
6	Nawab Khan - M	Assistant	
7	Ganesh Naik-M	Coordinator	Community mobilization and livelihood training
8	Anil Malviya-M	Coordinator	
9	Ramlal Adivasi-M	Assistant	
10	Roshan Adivasi-M	Assistant	
11	Baikunthi Kushwah-F	Assistant	
12	Rakesh Prajapati-M	Assistant	Livelihood training
13	Santosh Kushwah-M	Teacher	Asha and Adharshila schools
14	Naresh Adivasi-M	Teacher	
15	Maniram Adivasi-M	Teacher	
16	Shrilal Kushwah-M	Teacher	
17	Baisram Adivasi-M	Teacher	
18	Dharmendra Sharma-M	Teacher	
19	Vijay Singh-M	Teacher	
20	Jagdev Sharma-M	Teacher	
21	Prafulla Minj - F	Teacher	
22	Durga Adivasi -F	Teacher	
23	Dileep Rathore-M	Teacher	
24	Bhanupratap Shrivastava-M	Headmaster	
25	Ummed Kushwah-M	Mess manager	Mess management and campus support

The Governing Board:

Asmita Kabra (Founder Trustee): Asmita is a founder-trustee of Samrakshan, and is engaged in planning, coordination, documentation, fundraising, networking, and advocacy aspects of the Kuno initiative of the Trust in Madhya Pradesh. She is a lecturer in Economics at Delhi University, and is presently researching the impact of relocation on poverty and livelihood security of forest dependent communities, with special reference to Kuno wildlife sanctuary in Madhya Pradesh.

Arpan Sharma (Founder and Managing Trustee): Arpan is one of the founder-trustees of Samrakshan, and as Managing Trustee, he is engaged in planning, coordination, documentation, fundraising, networking, and advocacy aspects for all field initiatives of the Trust in 4 states of India.

Videh Upadhyay (Trustee): Videh is one of the founding partners of the Enviro-legal Defence Firm (ELDF, Delhi), and is engaged in law and policy research as well as litigation on issues related to the environment.