

**Lessons from the implementation of short-term non-formal  
education in a homogenous, time deficient migrant population**  
*A qualitative case study with diamond workers in Surat, Gujarat, India*

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<sup>1</sup> Note from the author, Nishant Shah, August 2019. I wrote this paper in 2006, at age 23, while on a yearlong Indicorps fellowship working with the NGO Sahas on non-formal education. Reading this 13 years later is a bit embarrassing. Some sections have not aged well. Still, I agreed to publishing it, with very few changes, because it does capture a moment in time. How did a younger, straight-out-of-college Nishant process and try to make sense of a formative experience? What mental models did I use to experiment, learn, adapt, and serve? I remember the process of trying to structure and write this paper as frustrating. Upon reflection, I'm very happy I did.

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## **Abstract**

This paper describes, using a case study approach, the main lessons learned during a yearlong (August 2005–July 2006) non-formal education (NFE) project with migrant diamond workers in the Varachha area of Surat, Gujarat. The resulting conclusions are based, for the most part, on my own personal experience and broader readings on the topics of adult education and development. It aims to give the reader a general understanding of difficulties arising from the implementation of NFE amongst a time deficient, ‘homogeneous’ migrant population and one way in which these difficulties may be addressed (the ‘new model’).

Migrant diamond workers in Surat face social and economic stresses arising from a new and alien environment. The influence of two different worlds—the village and the city—as well as the host of problems that are inherent to migrant labor in general, serve to create a very low level of self worth (a major antagonist to development). This, on a macroscopic level, continues on to propagate high-risk behavior leading to HIV/AIDS and STI spread and other public health problems. While sustained, innovative efforts/education are needed to truly serve as the solution to the aforementioned problems, in many migrant populations these types of efforts are difficult to sustain right away. The inherent shifting of migrants and socially reinforced mindsets that preclude the importance of devoting time to long-term continuing adult education, among other factors, causes this difficulty. A ‘preparatory’ program that fits into the context of the workers’ lives more directly is therefore necessary. Over the course of the year, it should be noted, my project did not end up sustaining itself, but from the numerous successes and failures, starts and stops throughout I became convinced of certain practices. Drawing from these, as well as other lessons learned from the various implementation schemes attempted, I propose that short-term NFE packaged in a form of ‘After-Work Entertainment’, with a small, paid, trained and committed group of peers, can be a catalyst for the identification of future leaders (peer educators<sup>2</sup>) and for further, more concentrated work with the population.

## **Introduction**

This case study documents the theory, process, results, and lessons learned during a yearlong service project dealing with the formation and implementation of non-formal education (NFE) amongst migrant diamond workers in the Varachha area of Surat, Gujarat. The focus here is on the importance of specifically tailored non-formal education as a tool towards achievement of a basal necessary level of comfort with ones’ environment, particularly within migrant communities, where this level of comfort is often sorely lacking. This may include familiarity with relevant laws, access to healthcare, knowledge of banking and savings, literacy, sensitization to HIV/AIDS and STIs, and other such topics. Time and time again, it seems to be the case in locations where migrant communities congregate outside of their ‘home base’, that with no perceived stake in the surrounding environment other than the purely financial, a lack of understanding on these issues converts itself into an absence of self worth. This unfortunately

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<sup>2</sup> The terms ‘peer educator’ and ‘peer teacher’ are used throughout the paper on an interchangeable basis. ‘Peer teacher’ is what the specific peers volunteering in the classes were termed.

propagates the proximate causes to the high-risk behavior that cause so many of the health problems in migrant communities, such as STIs and HIV/AIDS.

If the United States is a cauldron encompassing many different types of people, Shashi Tharoor (*India: From Midnight to the Millennium*, 1997) describes India, in turn, as a “thali”: many different groups of religious, cultural, political, ideological, social, and classist elements live and interact side by side, with defined positions, in a land area bursting at the seams under the population pressure. As such, the author understands that each migrant community, especially within India, is different from the next, and is cautious about making broad, sweeping conclusions about any populace. Different migrant groups abound in India, ranging from the more homogenous populations such as salt pan workers in the Rann of Kutch and the diamond workers in Surat, to more heterogeneous and widely spread populations, such as those working as hotel servers or rickshawallahs throughout India. The distinction I make between a homogenous and heterogeneous migrant population is important. Homogenous populations such as the one this case study is based on have a relatively large community in one location that has moved from another, or has a feeling of greater unity due to the profession (especially those that require artisan skill or apprenticeships). Heterogeneous migrant populations, such as those in the service industries (hotels, restaurants, etc) are more disparate and lack a sense of unity or common geographical focus.

The prior generalizations on problems faced by shifting communities are made only to give an idea of a common phenomenon that is worthwhile exploring, as it has very real consequences for those living in and around predominantly migrant areas. Thus, I would like to put forth certain qualities of these communities that seem to apply to a broad cross section of, though not all, homogenous migrant populations. This includes: 1) Considerable distance from land of origin and what may be called the ‘home base’; 2) Loved ones (wife, kids, parents, relatives) at a distance from the workers’ place of employment; 3) Frustrations with the ‘home base’ that caused the migration in the first place, often creating child labor as additional economic inputs become necessary for the functioning of the family; 4) A commonly unclear understanding of what the new area of work will be like, therefore leading to economic, social and sometimes sexual frustrations in the unfamiliar environment; 5) Lack of formal education (to different extents) due to the disruptive act of migration itself; and 6) Employers taking advantage of migrant workers due to their relatively more precarious existence and dependence, generally showing itself in the form of longer workdays (thus labeled ‘time deficient’ from the point of view of those trying to work with and act as facilitators for change in the community).

Based on these proposed commonalities, I strive to make a case study of the Surat diamond worker population to extrapolate those qualities and practices of short term non-formal education that may be used as one model for working with time-deficient migrant groups across the cultural spectrum in India. This is an important undertaking, as the use of non-formal education by civil society as well as other institutions, groups, and government programs is on the rise and is now seen as a necessary endeavor to supplement formal education and to reach groups that would otherwise not be reachable. Despite this method’s prevalence, there is not much guidance available dealing with NFE specifically designed for one of the most marginalized and at-risk populations in vast India: time-deficient migrant laborers. In fact, there does not seem to be enough literature on the details and processes of NFE implementation (from an organizational

and management perspective) in general. Lastly, *short term* NFE as a ‘preparatory’ method, in effect serving to ‘whet the appetite’ of workers for further future, more comprehensive and long term adult education efforts, is an idea that is not commonly embraced or imagined, nor is the idea of NFE as an identification procedure for peer educators. Therefore, the intended audience of this paper is field workers working with adult migrant laborers in the education arena, those seeking to train and prepare peer educators to become effective NFE facilitators, policymakers (whether at the state or civil society level) working with health and education issues in primarily migrant populated areas, and anyone else who is implementing or designing any sort of NFE curriculum or who is interested in doing so.

In view of this, the next section of this paper, “The Idea of NFE”, seeks to expound the theoretical principles necessary to understand the method. Following that chapter is “Context and Environment of the Project”, which describes the background and current status of the Surat migrant diamond worker community and those entities associated with it, the particular NGO with which I conducted this project (Sahas), and other important information. In the “Methodology” section, I spell out my role within this overall context, how the implementation and design of the project went forward, my personal biases and limitations, as well as obstacles faced during the process. “The Classes” expands upon the actual modules I experimented with, the strengths and weaknesses of the different approaches, and a description of peer educator training/selection. Once the actual curriculum and context and theory is understood, “Discussion” addresses the questions of why it did not sustain, a new model based on lessons learned, and future directions to take the work. Lastly, “Conclusion” will briefly summarize ideas of NFE going forward in the greater context of migration in general.

## **The Idea of “Non-Formal” Education (NFE)**

### *Why Non-Formal Education?*

The widely accepted “Millennium Development Goals” (MDGs), proposed by the United Nations, include a drastic reduction in extreme poverty, improvement of health, gender equality, as well as universal access to education<sup>3</sup>. These are ambitious targets, and to make significant progress on them by 2015 the current rate of forward momentum in India must be exponentially increased. There are two broad necessities (of the many) that I would especially like to highlight for achievement of the aforementioned targets in India: 1) behavior and mindset change and 2) knowledge of fundamental rights, services and the ability to use basic community resources. The question then becomes, how to go about stimulating both of these in a sustainable and long-term manner in as large a populace as possible?

The first and most obvious choice is to use the existing formal system. If we take education as one of the foundations on which to achieve reductions in poverty and improvement of health, then universal access to education becomes all the more important. Part of the point of formal schooling is to influence the youth’s mindsets in India and give them the basic skills necessary to be able to use and live in today’s society. Whether youth’s mindsets towards issues such as gender equality, sexuality, and other such topics are really influenced for the better by Indian

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<sup>3</sup> *UN Millennium Goals* official website, <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>.

schooling is a matter of much debate. However, what is generally agreed upon is that schools in India are unfortunately extremely varied in their effectiveness, spanning across class, caste, and ideological lines.

Those who can afford the better English medium and ‘International’ Schools are given much greater competitive status than those who attend the generally more dilapidated and underfunded government schools in the urban or rural areas. It is difficult to fire ineffective or absent teachers from the government schools, the high cost of the necessary accompanying ‘tuition’ is prohibitory for the lower economic sections of society, and the pedagogy itself is often called into question as a most ineffective and outmoded way to teach youngsters.<sup>4</sup> Education, then, at the moment, is mired in politics and ideological battles in addition to its classist features, and when combined with the need for many youngsters to work alongside their families, the unimportance of placing young females in school by their parents, and the lifestyles of migrant workers, formal schooling becomes unappealing and unnecessary in their minds. What, then, is the solution to this? As a State responsibility, it is obvious the education system needs to be reformed, and not circumvented, but that takes time and still does not account for all the other problems migrant workers face in receiving education.

An international conference in 1967, at Williamsburg, VA, USA, set out to address the perceived growing ‘world educational crisis’. In his *Informal, Non-Formal and Formal Education Programmes*, Fordham (1993) states: “The conclusion was that formal educational systems had adapted too slowly to the socio-economic changes around them and that they were held back not only by their own conservatism, but also by the inertia of societies themselves. If we also accept that educational policy-making tends to follow rather than lead other social trends, then it followed that change would have to come not merely from within formal schooling, but from the wider society and from other sectors within it.” The education coming from outside the formal system, as such, can be classified into two different categories: informal education and non-formal education. Informal education is more of a lifelong process of learning that comes from society, media, work, play, the marketplace, etc. Non-formal education, our topic of interest, is defined as “any organized educational activity outside the established formal system—whether operating separately or as an important feature of some broader activity—that is intended to serve identifiable learning clienteles and learning objectives.”<sup>5</sup>

At this point a contrast between formal and non-formal education is in order. Obviously, these two types of programs occur in every shade imaginable, but it is useful to compare and contrast their ‘ideal types’ to understand their basic differences and thus why NFE should be established in certain situations vs. relying on formal education. The following table, adapted by Fordham (1993) from Simkins’ Non-Formal Education and Development: Some Critical Issues (1976), and displayed on Infed’s NFE website, displays these differences clearly:

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<sup>4</sup> Lall, Marie. *The Challenges for India’s Education System*. Briefing Paper. Chatam House Asia Program, 2005.

<sup>5</sup> Coombs, P. with Prosser, C. and Ahmed, M., *New Paths to Learning for Rural Children and Youth*. John Hopkins University Press, 1973.

Table 1

Ideal-type models of normal and non-formal education		
	formal	non-formal
<b>purposes</b>	Long-term & general Credential-based	Short-term & specific Non-credential-based
<b>timing</b>	long cycle / preparatory / full-time	short cycle / recurrent / part-time
<b>content</b>	standardized / input centred academic entry requirements determine clientele	individualized / output centred practical clientele determine entry requirements
<b>delivery system</b>	institution-based, isolated from environment rigidly structured, teacher-centred and resource intensive	environment-based, community related flexible, learner-centred and resource saving
<b>control</b>	external / hierarchical	self-governing / democratic

The basic use of NFE, then, is in situations where a more flexible and community based approach is necessary once formal education has failed or is no longer an option for the targeted populace, or when the skill set to be presented is not addressed at all in the formal system. It is partially a tool towards human capital formation and economic growth.<sup>6</sup> It may include school equivalency programs to provide a second chance for those who have missed it, training in occupational skills or on-the-job training, agricultural farmer training programs, literacy programs, informal youth activities with educational ends, community instruction in nutrition, health, and family planning, etc.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, NFE is not encumbered by the same institutional viscosity that formal education is. Because of this, it can reform and change continuously, based upon student input and lessons learned.

<sup>6</sup> Leka, W., Mulugeta, E., Woldegerima, H. *Moving Beyond the Classroom: Expanded Learning Opportunities for Marginalized Populations in Ethiopia*.

<sup>7</sup> Bishop, G. *Alternative Strategies for Education*. London: Macmillan, 1989.

### *Top-Down Vs. Bottom-Up*

An enduring feature in the dialogue of ‘development’, spread over a multitude of issues and regions, is the question of power structures inherent to organizational practices. The ‘top down’ approach to NFE, at its most extreme, presents an individual, organization, or other such power source providing all the learning, planning, teaching, and curricula. The ‘bottom-up’ approach, on the other hand, presents as its ideal type planning, ownership, and implementation by the learners/target community. In other words, change from *within*, versus from *without*, the community.

Easily agreed upon is the fact that the education provided, in whatever form it takes, should be in the interest of the students. However, not so easy to agree on is *who* knows what is best for the community, especially if it suffers from extreme poverty. And who is in the best position to make the changes that need to be done? If the community asks for something but it is perceived as obvious to the implementer that it is not in their best interest, what is to be done? To what degree is a compromise needed between the ideal types of ‘top down’ and ‘bottom up’?

The general consensus is that the planning should preferably be undertaken in a bottom-up, decentralized manner by the community (the learners); this creates a greater sense of ownership, in addition to a greater likelihood of sustainability and more accurate and effective curriculum modules. The point is to have people critically identify their needs themselves, and to change their situation in the way they see fit, not just to try bringing them into the mainstream of society and therefore render them more ‘governable’. The top-down approach, on the other hand, often reinforces a structure of dependency that keeps power in the hands of the implementer instead of creating greater self-worth and confidence in the community. Despite this, the majority of NFE programs (especially if run by employers or the State) are solely top-down, including the innumerable such programs begun by NGOs in developing countries (India itself has over 1 million NGOs, and NFE is a popular tool among them)<sup>8</sup>. Of course, sometimes the target populace does not have the resources or the skills necessary to run such NFE; is a ‘top-down’ approach necessary in that case? This is on the whole a very complex issue that changes by region, issue, and subsequent environment, and one that I will indirectly comment on via the methods used in the ‘new model’ presented later in the paper.

### *General Principles Towards Effective NFE*

Outside the ‘top down’ vs. ‘bottom up’ debate, there are aspects of this process that are universally seen as best practices, no matter what the module or issue. Some of these are looked upon as common sense, but it is useful to have a list of basics to work from.

First, a sense of community ownership of the project is necessary. The more substantive involvement that arises, especially of women and marginalized groups, the greater the chance of success. As this is the case, a truly democratic environment is most helpful in creating the correct

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<sup>8</sup> Infed online encyclopedia on informal education, *Non-Formal Education*, <http://www.infed.org/biblio/b-nonfor.html>



atmosphere for success, as the voice of the community is more readily heard and decentralization is more prevalent.<sup>9</sup>

Second, the importance of skilled and able educators cannot be emphasized enough. Preferably these educators come from within the community itself, and are thus termed ‘peer educators’; they understand the intricacies and difficulties facing the population better than anyone else, and have the motivation to do something to change the status quo. They should be given opportunities for further training and other such factors that could sustain their level of motivation. Their selection must be fair, impartial, and with a long-term view of who will stick to the teaching and serve as role models. Often enough, however, a large selection of quality teachers may not present due to cultural, religious, and economic impediments.

Third is cost-effectiveness. Not all NFE models are meant to be replicated or scaled up, but the ability to do so is quite useful and a program’s budget is a key indicator of sustainability. Public-Private partnership, or linkages between civil society and the government, can be very useful in dealing with the issue of cost, as well as effectiveness.

Fourth is the huge emphasis on participatory pedagogy. Awareness by itself is not enough to change behavior—a change in mindset for the majority will only come once they are able to place the behavior being changed as immediately beneficial to their context. For example, there is a high level of knowledge about HIV/AIDS in South Africa and the related sexual health risks, yet condom use is still dismal.<sup>10</sup> Engaging and participatory dialogue and activity allows the individual (especially adults, who are not easily rendered into a captive audience) to place learning in the context of his/her everyday life, and to be treated with respect during the program.

Lastly, the specific areas of literacy and livelihood skills training within NFE are important and prevalent enough to mention separately. Based on literature evidence with country studies of programs for extremely poor and rural women, one case study makes a strong argument that livelihood skills training is more adept at teaching literacy, rather than the other way around.<sup>11</sup> It further states that using two cadres of instructors, one for livelihood skills and the other for literacy skills, is more prudent than relying on lay persons to teach both sets of skills. As these are two topics often put in combination, this finding is important to note as a general principle.

### *NFE in Global Context*

NFE is much more prevalent as a tool in ‘developing’ rather than ‘developed’ countries, where a lack of economic development, poverty, and less access to education is relatively more pronounced. NFE implementation by the State, after recognition that its formal education structures may not be up to par, is a growing phenomenon. In Cambodia, for example, 37% of people over 15 years of age are illiterate, especially among Khmer Rouge resettled communities, demobilized soldiers and their families, and children and adolescents in slums. It has, therefore,

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<sup>9</sup> *Moving Beyond the Classroom.*

<sup>10</sup> Campbell C. & MacPhail C. Peer education, gender and the development of critical consciousness: participatory HIV prevention by South African youth. *Social Science and Medicine*, 2002.

<sup>11</sup> Oxenham J, Hamid Diallo A, Katahoire R, Petkova-Mwagi A, Sall O. Skills and literacy training for better livelihoods: a review of approaches and experiences. Africa Region Human Development Working Paper Series, World Bank. 2002.

implemented a decentralized NFE program to address its lack of adequate educational coverage, using assessment indicators such as quality of access (enrollment patterns of targeted groups, completion rates), quality of learning (core competencies acquired, relevance of learning), and quality of institutional development (effectiveness of staff training, needs assessments, planning/design).<sup>12</sup> In India, the National Policy on Education (1986) outlined a three-pronged approach for the eradication of illiteracy, one of which was a ‘systematic programme of non formal education in the educationally backward states.’<sup>13</sup> Though it has made some progress, India is still extremely far from its goal of eradicating illiteracy, but it too recognizes the role that NFE can and should play in reaching otherwise marginalized populations. Overall, illiteracy is the biggest target of NFE throughout the world.

In turn, Africa is one of the world’s most emphatic users of NFE, and has many examples from which we can learn. Its Working Group on Non-Formal Education provides a model of an agency that can provide linkages and partnerships between all stakeholders of NFE—a necessary endeavor to spread best practices, facilitate scaling up of successful curricula, create more awareness on the method of NFE, reach the ears of policy makers, and map out future strategy.<sup>14</sup> Some countries, such as Ethiopia, with extreme illiteracy and a large impoverished population, have very low completion rates of NFE programs (especially amongst women), due to cultural, economic, and religious constraints, epidemics, drought, distance of NFE centers from participants’ house, household responsibilities, and pregnancy. Indeed, according to one study, the “non-formal education system, which has been in existence since the start of modern education in Ethiopia, lacks proper direction and appropriate organization. It is also not well coordinated with the formal system, resulting in inefficient utilization of facilities and inputs.”<sup>15</sup>

Failures and successes in African NFE, then, are very important to acknowledge when working in the Indian context as well. One important instance for our use is the Government of Nigeria’s case study on access and equity in basic education for nomads and migrants, published in June 1999. With a 39% female literacy rate, there is obviously some failure in this ‘access’ to education. Thus, this program went on to begin radio listening groups for educational material on air, establishment of community schools in areas where no school previously existed, creation of ‘nomadic cooperative societies’ to have the migrants gain a greater say in their own needs, and other such policies. All these things did not work as planned, with teacher retention inadequate, too little funding, sub-par education materials, and especially an uncondusive political climate with frequent clashes between farmers and nomads. However, it was a start—as large sections of the nomads were mobilized and sensitized as to the existence of this idea of ‘NFE’, decentralized decision making, and relatively effective coordination.<sup>16</sup> This shows that NFE can be implemented, and improved upon, even in an extremely populated, relatively corrupt, and

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<sup>12</sup> Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport, Kingdom of Cambodia. National Policy on Non Formal Education. <http://www.moeys.gov.kh/en/education/nfe/index.htm>.

<sup>13</sup> Department of Secondary and Higher Education, India. <http://www.education.nic.in/adledu.asp>.

<sup>14</sup> Working Group on Non-Formal Education website. <http://www.adeanet.org/wgnfe/>

<sup>15</sup> Transitional Government of Ethiopia, *Education and Training Policy*. Addis Ababa: EMPDA, 1994.

<sup>16</sup> Government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. *Ensuring Access and Equity in Basic Education for Nomads in Nigeria*. June 1999.

sometimes violent environment such as in areas of Nigeria.<sup>17</sup> The use of technology, such as radio, television, and other such avenues, should also be considered as a medium by which to spread NFE to different areas. Successes of NFE in the African sector, then, should be emulated. For example, in Somaliland, a scheme that provided learners with vouchers to enable them to choose both what they learn and from whom proved extremely motivating.<sup>18</sup>

### **Context and Environment of the Project**<sup>19</sup>

The city of Surat, Gujarat, with a population of approximately 3.2 million people, is the 12<sup>th</sup> largest city in India. After a public health scare in 1994, the city was motivated to clean up its extensive unhygienic areas, terrible drainage systems, and widespread illegal encroachments, and is now often cited as the second cleanest city in India.<sup>20</sup> Its two major industries, textiles and diamonds, provide the city with many additional jobs and economic inputs, and opportunities for high wages and employment are common. Nonetheless, despite these vast improvements, Surat is not without many of the ailments that major expanding business-oriented cities normally face in India; indeed, it has the largest number of recorded HIV cases in Gujarat.

One of the main causes of these ailments is the uniquely large migrant population that Surat attracts from all over India, especially rural Gujarat, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Orissa, Maharashtra, and Rajasthan. Though their income levels have seen a rise, living and working conditions of the migrants, whether in the power-looms, textile factories, diamond units, service sector or in other unorganized areas, are amongst the poorest in Surat. A closer look at our community of interest, the diamond migrant workers in the Varachha area of Surat, shows a male between the ages of 17-35, working 10-14 hours a day in tight, hot, cramped conditions doing repetitive diamond-polishing work. Benzene, a carcinogen whose fumes can cause aplastic anemia, thus depressing bone marrow function, was once used extensively to clean diamonds and posed a grave risk to workers' health. Though that has since been outlawed, a few areas continue (mostly outside of Surat, in Sourashtra) to use the chemical. Other health problems such as occupational thermal alopecia, respiratory problems, skin diseases, back problems and eye ailments are quite common, due to the nature of the work, poor hygiene, and close human proximity.

Overall, there are approximately 400,000 diamond workers in Varachha. This population includes a roundabout figure of 1600 female workers, who are especially marginalized, and a very large child labor force. The conditions vary widely for the workers: some work takes place in larger, more comfortable environments, but the vast majority are employed in the more cramped small to medium sized diamond units. The average male has very little education (most until 7<sup>th</sup> standard or so), and many are illiterate. They come mostly from Sourashtra, which occupies southwestern Gujarat, and so culturally (Khatiyavali) and religiously (Hindu) they are a relatively homogenous population, and many of the societal customs and beliefs from Sourashtra are replayed in Surat (caste and class structure are extremely well pronounced and enforced, with

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<sup>17</sup> For the moment, we are more interested in the spread of, problems within, and potential successes of NFE, rather than the specific pedagogy itself, which is why I do not explore in more depth the Nigeria project's specific teaching methods.

<sup>18</sup> Skills and literacy training for better livelihoods: a review of approaches and experiences.

<sup>19</sup> Most this information is based on my observations and interactions with a wide cross section of the Varachhan community and those working with the community over the course of the one-year project.

<sup>20</sup> Desai, Darshan. "KhoobSurat secret: No Cellphones." *The Indian Express*, Jan. 8 2006.

the most powerful group being the Patel caste). In addition, many return to their homes in this arid region for approximately a month or two during the holiday of Diwali, shortly after the monsoons have passed.

A large percentage live highly stressful lives due to the presence of sexual, economic, and social frustrations arising from an alien environment, certain cultural norms, and often a lack of support structure for individuals. Together with peer influence, these lead the worker to resort to high-risk behavior (sex workers, etc.) for fulfillment and facilitate HIV/AIDS and other infectious disease spread. Years of repetitive diamond polishing work leaves many workers unable to think beyond that sector, and lack of schooling and using the mind leaves most attention spans short. Beyond Varachha, many segments of Surat's people attribute negative stereotypes to the population—lazy, untrustworthy, unruly, and unintelligent—and Surtis will often refuse to do business with them. Overall then, many of the migrant diamond workers' lives involve two distinct and different worlds: dusty, rural Sourashtra and urban Surat. It is in the meeting of these two that many social ills become more pronounced.

Who are the actors in Varachha? The society here is run foremost by the diamond industry, and it is the organizations run by this industry that carry the most power and influence, whether they be political, economic, or societal. It is said that 7 out of every 10 diamonds sold in the world are polished in Surat, which says something about the size of the industry in this port city. Some of the more powerful owners of the larger diamond units are often involved in politics as well as ventures for improving development efforts back home in Sourashtra or in Varachha. Groups such as the Surat Diamond Association cover various activities, from publicizing certain diamond related commercial interests, regulating practices, offering low cost life insurance, etc. Thus, it is overall the private sector and its offshoots, as well as community-based organizations that play the largest role in Varachhan life, in addition to religion. A telling saying used by many in the society states that three things run Varachha—religion, money, and cricket.

As this sector is largely outside the formal system, many workers do not have ration cards, driver's licenses, election cards, or other necessary government documents, nor bank accounts, insurance, and other such common services, as they do not see a need for them nor the knowledge of how to go about getting them. Indeed, there is no formal record, in most cases, of how much bosses pay their workers (making it impossible to get a bank loan), and often the workers are not educated enough to know if they are being cheated or not. Women are hard to reach for outreach projects, as they are fiercely relegated to the home life. In fact, a troubling trend has long shown women in vastly smaller numbers in Varachha than are men, a legacy of families preferring male children to females, creating difficulty in finding wives for the workers and thus influencing the sexual behavior of young men. Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) also play a part in Varachhan affairs, though to a tiny extent as compared to the previously mentioned actors. NGOs active in the area span numerous issues, from targeting sex workers and their grievances to HIV/AIDS awareness to education improvement. It is in this NGO context where my work fits in.

'Sahas' was founded by a group of women in 1998 who wanted to do something health-related for society. At that time, NGOs were rare in Surat and NGOs begun by women even rarer. The woman with the largest role, Dr. Vibha Marfatia, eventually went on to establish the NGO as one

of the first and leading HIV/AIDS and sexual health NGOs in the city; it is supported by funding from a wide variety of governmental, international, and private sources including, but not limited to, the Gujarat State AIDS Control Society (GSACS), ActionAID, UNICEF, UNAIDS, and UNDP. Sahas currently works on a diverse list of projects ranging from condom dispersal and sensitization amongst migrant diamond workers, adolescent and teacher trainings on HIV/AIDS throughout Surat, HIV/AIDS counseling, advice, and care giving/support, serving as an advocacy resource for other organizations, livelihood training programs, and others.<sup>21</sup> To achieve all this, Sahas relies on a professional staff of outreach workers, counselors, and project managers, as well as peer educators, who have been recruited from the community and trained to give information on HIV/AIDS. Its ‘target based’ approach, like in many other organizations, sometimes proves antithetical to its purpose—stifling creativity for numerically based accountability. Turnover is high, a problem endemic to many small NGOs throughout the world as workers gain experience and then move on to jobs with better pay due to a lack of powerful incentives. It is thus through Sahas, a continuously evolving NGO with its strengths and weaknesses like any other, that I conducted my educational experiments in the Varachhan community.

## **Methodology**

I came to India wishing to explore my potential as an agent of change and empowerment in a new community. I had one year of experience in a previous National Science Foundation-directed science curricula reform fellowship in the inner city schools of Boston, quite a bit of coursework on India, a background of Gujarati culture, as well as a public health related internship, and so wished to convert theoretical perspective to a grassroots approach in a relatively resource poor setting. Indicorps, which selects young men and women of Indian origin from throughout the international diaspora (especially the US and UK), places them with different NGOs throughout the country, and provides bimonthly trainings and constant support, served as the platform for this endeavor.

The name of ‘Sahas’ is relatively well known in the Varachhan community (the staff often referred to as “the AIDS people”). Thus, to become acquainted with the geographical, cultural, and workplace environment in the diamond polishing world, for the first month I shadowed different Sahas outreach workers and counselors as they gave information to different units. I spoke with the bosses, workers, panwalla owners and Sahas peer educators to get their perspectives on different issues, and observed as the Sahas staff held puppet plays and poster presentations spreading HIV/AIDS and condom awareness. Outside my time in the community, I spoke with workers in different education and health NGOs (such as Pratham, Ganatar, Navsarjan Trust, and others) to get an idea of what work is already being done in the community, and for potential ideas I could use in my own endeavor so as not to reinvent the wheel. Professors and academics provided more insight into the diamond industry and how my proposed classes could fit in. Finally, once ready, with the help of the outreach worker staff, I began conducting a few weeks worth of focus groups with groups of diamond workers to understand if 1) ‘classes’ in some form or another were really necessary in Varachha; 2) what the

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<sup>21</sup> All information on ‘Sahas’ is based on my own experience with the NGO, interviews with Dr. Marfatia, and Sahas’ Bi-Annual Report 2003-2005.

student reaction to potential classes was; 3) ideas for subject matter to include in the modules and means of presenting this subject matter; and 4) to research the ideal time and structure the future curriculum would take. Soon thereafter, I left for a stay with one of the peer educators in rural Sourashtra, to understand better the workers' background and the power structures present in it. I realized that the classes I intended to facilitate with a participatory, bottom-up approach would be a relatively new idea in the community, with all other NFE attempts quickly turning abortive. The ones that did last slightly longer were mandated programs by diamond bosses that taught in a very lecture based format, and from my talks with students in those classes it seems information was not retained. Thus, I proceeded without any preexisting program to serve as guidance.

Once returned from Sourashtra, I began a process of recruitment and training of peer educators, concurrently with the translation of a large body of materials into Gujarati.<sup>22</sup> These aims proved more difficult than I had anticipated, and due to running the process less rigorously than I should have during that period, and having a strong language barrier further barring me, I continued that process until the very end, continuously looking for more motivated peers. Once I had enough peers and had set up the initial structure/theory for the classes based on my prior observations and focus groups, I finally started the experiments in the community itself, and sought to reform, change, and metamorphose with the needs of the community and the realities it presented, as well as trying different methods of peer teacher retention and training.

### *My Biases and Limitations*

Of course, like all individuals who perform service work for the community, I have my own biases and limitations. Some of these were quite major, and affected the way I went about this project. The largest of them all was my Gujarati language ability, which improved slowly as time went on, but never got to the point where I was able to speak fluently and technically with the community. This made trainings, written translations, common interactions, speeches, and actual teaching itself vastly more difficult and time consuming, and in the beginning limited me to doing work when I had a translator available to me (the Sourashtran 'Katiyavali' dialect sounds quite different from more common, vernacular Gujarati), or the guidance of a field worker. Cultural differences were obvious and clear, though I tended to blend these relatively easily with my own background and upbringing, and friends, peers, and co-workers in Varachha were always quick to point out cultural norms I should take into account. Another limitation was time period—I had a year—to complete and carry through with the project, and most workers could be reached only during the two hours free at lunchtime and after 8:30 PM, when they were understandably tired and ready to relax. Gender barriers made interaction with female diamond workers almost impossible, and so I had to be content with targeting only male diamond workers during my time, even though I became convinced the females are in even greater need of this type of NFE than the men. Furthermore, general critiques of international volunteers weighed heavily, and I strove to transcend them as far as possible. My limitations, then, speak of the limitations of this paper. Despite the non-sustaining nature of the classes, I believe that in the end I was able to integrate different notions of development and education, and combine them to design a program of NFE appropriate for this migrant community, but in its implementation my own limitations and those of the environment shone through. I critically analyzed all my actions

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<sup>22</sup> All discussed further in "The Classes" section.

throughout the process, but I leave it to the reader to judge to what extent all this may have biased my conclusions.

### **The Classes**

The classes evolved and changed continuously with experimentation throughout the year, as the peers and I learned more about what works in the community, what does not, how to more effectively present things, how best to attract more students and keep them coming back, and the modules that are most important for them to truly understand. Nonetheless, there was a broad base of theory on the Varachhan population that stayed constant throughout the year in our work. The goal was always to make available to the workers social services, public health resources, value based discussion opportunities, awareness on issues and concepts they wish to learn more about, and alternative entertainment options in a manner that is self-sustaining (though the sustainability aspect did not materialize).

As we went on, it became apparent that all these goals were difficult to fit into one curriculum, as making a formal, organized structure that met at specific times and for specific purposes did not fit into the reality and personality characteristics of much the Varachhan population. Arriving ‘on time’ to a class or at all, does not have the same importance there as it does elsewhere, and a long workday makes a class right afterwards a very unattractive option. Plus, workers ate and left the units at different times, some slept far away, some slept in the unit itself, and some worked erratic hours. Many would promise to come to a class or to a training session, and reiterate that promise when I would call again an hour before the event, and then not show up. It seems that due to the fact I am an American, and the idea that conjures up in the minds of the society (despite my attempts to dispel any myths), many did not want to say ‘no’ outright to my requests or ideas, and would just not follow through in action when the time came. Thus, several variables surfaced that proved to be the most important things to change up and experiment upon—the helpfulness of the unit boss, the number and quality of the peer educators, the number of students in a unit, the size and area of the class venue, the time we meet at night, the subject to be presented, and the sort of ‘entertainment’ offered. This ‘directed trial and error’ method of testing things may seem random, but in fact it is the only way to truly see and exhaust what options will work in the community, to steer clear of the frustration that comes when one option does not work out, and to eventually hit upon a combination of all the variables that works, given enough time.

### *Peer Training and Selection*

The original intention was to pick a group of voluntary peers, about 15 or so, and train them extensively and form them into an enthusiastic group that takes ownership of the classes designed and continues them even after initial project implementation, changing it in any way they see fit. My assumption was that enthusiasm was the sole important factor in this recruitment phase and that anyone could be trained with some effort; that, however, turned out to be a major flaw in strategy. I assembled all the peers together after speaking to each individually, and we had a group dinner with icebreakers, games, and then a talk on the future of these classes and each peer’s responsibilities. They seemed quite enthusiastic about where this could go, but words

do not mean action, as would soon become clear. Next, we continued with individual meetings exploring the further details of the peers' classes, and gave each peer a translation in Gujarati of his particular module. We had a brief run-through of each module so the peer could have a bit of practice, and I went over with them all the theory behind the class and asked for their suggestions and input at all stages. We convened again as a group to go over a teaching strategies lesson, and how to take on the role of 'facilitator' in a class.

Throughout this time period I realized that enthusiasm was not enough as a choice for peer teachers. Some natural inclination and mindset towards the 'service' mentality needed to be present for volunteerism in this program to work, as well as a bit of faculty with speaking in front of many people, as our training resources and ability to teach these things extensively, as well as money, were limited. Peers began to drop off, or not to show up to classes, or to arrive extremely late and thus lose the interest of students and speakers. Many professed a strong commitment to the classes, yet still exhibited these characteristics. The modules continued to evolve in such a way that I tried using less and less peers to make it more easily sustainable and to free up more time to spend per peer educator, and to rely less on one or two great ones to make up for the whole group. The idea of paying peers was impossible due to budget reasons, and was an idea I had ruled out either way, as even if the money was available there was a chance it would not always be so, and therefore a peer educator group must be recruited that is doing the work solely for the reason of benefiting his society.<sup>23</sup>

Eventually, the peer teacher pool was small, focused, and driven, and it was possible to spend more time training the peer in other endeavors such as computers, more in-depth teaching techniques, outside things of interest to the peer, etc. This, we felt, would allow us to more easily keep peers motivated, as they felt they were continuously learning new things as well, and to have more success with the classes. However, numerous factors at that point prevented this strategy from being successful and eventually led to a shutdown of the curriculum.

### *Class Progression and Aborted Attempts*

At the outset, it is important to note and to understand the abortive attempts at classes that we tested out in the community. There were numerous versions of these, and for one reason or another, they failed in either attracting students, keeping students, or really teaching in such a way as the individual will remember what is being taught through the interactive process. The descriptions that follow are only the main trials we followed through with; other more random and one-time classes, intermediate attempts, numerous trainings, and outside exercises/events held for the students are not summarized.

The first class structure formed was a broad, seven-week curriculum meant to cover as diverse an array of topics as banking, insurance, first aid, social privilege and responsibility, sexuality, the "ideal man", addiction, unity and social networks, fundamental civil rights, and ration cards/driver's licenses. It met twice a week, once on Sunday, once on Thursday. Sundays were a day off for the workers so it was a slightly longer class, where a speaker came on a given subject and where entertainment and food was provided in different formats. Thursdays were held at

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<sup>23</sup> The debate between paid and voluntary peer educators will be discussed in a later section, and is one that I changed my mind on as the year progressed.



night, and were a time reserved for value-based discussions. We had decided to adopt a format in which we would hold the class in one constant venue, and recruit students (approximately 25 or so) to come on their own accord. In addition to this, we hoped to develop the students into a tight body that we would unite through outings, cricket tournaments, etc, and in the end develop into a network of people that we would add to all those who finish the class; a binder would be available with all those who have gone through the curriculum, their interests, their dreams, and their contact information. We would take attendance, give out pre- and post-tests to have markers for evaluation, and have each class planned out to the minute. In the end, we ended up shifting locations more than once due to forgetfulness of building owners, maintained a class size of only 7, and had classes cancelled due to speakers not showing up. The class thus lasted for approximately a week and a half before we decided to scrap the format and regroup. From this attempt, we learned that we would have to bring the classes to the workers rather than vice versa, that incentives like snacks given before the class may be useful, that more frequent games and energizers were necessary, and that recruiting students from throughout Varachha for one class was much too difficult as they would not come consistently, did not all have phone numbers where they could be reached, and one consistent location for the classes was unreliable.

After a period of speaking with more peers and other community members, we decided to shorten the classes to a five-week curriculum meeting three nights a week (after work) instead of two, and designed it so that we would go to the individual units of the workers and target one medium sized factory at a time.<sup>24</sup> These major changes turned out to be quite worthwhile. We reasoned that this would allow more modules in less time, keep the classes fresh in the workers' mind, make it easy to retain students (as the place of meeting is familiar), groups of friends would bring their own, and the amount of people we could reach would increase. Furthermore, targeting one diamond unit at a time would allow us a method of knowing what we have covered and how to logically progress from one area to another. Slowly, as Varachha works strongly on word of mouth, knowledge of the classes' existence would spread, we would be able to get more speakers and bosses on board, test out more modules, and evolve the class structure accordingly. While all this happened, we would put the network, pretests, and posttests on the backburner for a bit to first establish the classes without scaring students away by the paperwork. Indeed, by this time, we had 'launched' the class publicly (mostly so the peers would feel legitimacy and renewed vigor, and to satisfy the donor for the project) and had gotten publicity from a popular Varachhan publication called "Diamond City"; the new given name to the project was 'Naya Daur'.

The class was conducted at a unit called Ambica Diamond, which was accessed through an existing Sahas peer educator, Dhirrubhai. Dhirrubhai was tireless in his efforts to spread word of the night classes through the unit, and it paid off: we had 30-50 students at each class for a week and a half. However, by that time, attendance began falling off unexpectedly. The first entertainment session we had was a 'laughing club' performance, an extremely invigorating and popular way of getting the whole room moving, interacting, and happy. When forthcoming entertainment sessions did not match the 'high' feeling of the laughing club, interest began to wane, and it became a struggle to consistently get students to come. As the classes were at night, speakers would have to come and wait a while before enough students were gathered; due to this, many decided not to come again or took out their frustration on the workers by lecturing and

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<sup>24</sup> Refer to Table 1.

forgetting the interactive method which was supposed to be employed. By the end of two and a half weeks, we decided that it was again time to regroup and reform based on what we had learned.

The next attempt began after a period of examination of our past trials, what went wrong, and what went right.<sup>25</sup> We wanted to keep what worked as the control, and change one or two major things that did not as the variable. We found, for example, that food was unnecessary and useless as an attractant, as most the workers were just coming from having had dinner. We decided that the module was still too long, and that workers' attention spans were just not long enough to warrant a month-long class schedule; therefore, we shortened once again to a three-week experiment. This would require less peer educators (thus giving us more time to train a few in a more quality manner), less necessary entertainment options, and allow us to make the curriculum more focused. The previous amalgamations of subjects were meant to give breadth and variety in scope of general skills learning, but retention was poor. Thus, we would make two different 3-week modules: one on Health and Image, the other on Law, Money, and Government. We hoped to improve retention in this way and also to give a choice to the bosses and students as to which subject they wished to learn more about. Further training was given to the peer educators and the classes were gone through once again with them, focusing on how they could make 'Naya Daur' more interactive, participatory, and enjoyable for the students to keep them coming back.

The first implementation of this new scheme we attempted was in a communal dining hall for diamond workers. We hoped that, because peers would most likely come on time to the dining hall to eat, and that they would at least be there for an hour or so, it would be a good place to experiment with. However, the area ended up being too small, the owner too uncooperative/forgetful, and students came at extremely staggered times, making the location unproductive. As a result, we targeted another area, on top of a terrace of a group of much smaller units. We bought a bulb to light up the whole area, made sure the security guard was there to keep the power on every night, and spent a couple hours talking to all the workers in the surrounding units about the program we would hold that night and to give it a shot. Again, we opened with Mr. Kamlesh's Laughing Club and paired it with a session entitled "Men, Gender, Health, and Hygiene." This time, the classes lasted for two more sessions, with the topics of HIV/AIDS and Addiction covered. Same pattern again: many students the first class, a few less the second class, and a nominal number the third. The mystery, this time, was that the students professed to really enjoy the class after we finished the first two, and they emphatically asked us to come back the next day when they would "bring more friends." A few became excited about the yoga lessons we said we would set up on their request (to which no one showed up) and a couple others wanted to be trained in the Laughing Club by Mr. Kamlesh (none decided to follow through). When I visited the units the next day before the class was to begin, the boss told me about the buzz surrounding the class and how excited students were afterwards. Incredibly enough, I prepared the third session for a large turnout—and only about five people showed up from the original 35. There was no large event that night, nor anything else going on out of the ordinary, but this forced us to stop once again, frustrated and confused.

After some follow up with that unit, and some changes in our thinking, we decided to stop the classes completely once further tries proved ineffective as well. Many basic questions were

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<sup>25</sup> Refer to Tables 2 and 3.

asked once again: Are the classes possible in the community? Does the community *really* want them? How can they be restructured, and the modules made more digestible to the workers? Most importantly—how can the peer teachers we had been relying on as volunteers be improved and made more effective? It was decided to try a whole new approach. The goal was to recruit a group of around 20 people and form them into a tight-knit body, all trained in all the classes, and to shorten the classes to weeklong seminars. A month of pure training would be given to the peer teachers at times convenient to them, on topics they were interested in learning about as well. This way, a group would be present with someone always available to teach even if one or two were absent, and the endeavor being made even more informal than before. Quite unfortunately, time in the fellowship ran out before this could be attempted well, and it became obvious soon that the peers we had worked with most of the year were simply not as interested anymore and working further with them would have been fruitless. This is where this portion of the project ended.

Many modules were developed in the course of the year for use in the classes, spanning subjects that seemed to address the powerful ultimate causes underlying much of the sexual, economic, and social frustration in the community. However, the specifics behind their methods will not be included here. It must be stated that for the purposes of this paper, more important than the module methods themselves (which as an interactive pedagogy are spelled out in the form of best practices in many different publications, and were an adopted amalgamation of what was seen to work in similar programs) is the subject matter in general and its organization, provided in tables 1 and 2 that follow. They are kept as originally written for their very specific purpose, as to preserve context.

**Table 1. ‘Naya Daur 5 Week Curriculum’**

<b>Week/Peer Teacher</b>	<b>Monday</b>	<b>Wednesday</b>	<b>Friday</b>
1. Ashish, Harshad	“ <u>Fundamental Civil Rights</u> ” Speaker: Rilesh -- <b>Laughing Club</b>	“ <u>Ration Cards, Election Cards, Driver’s Licenses</u> ” -- <b>Yoga</b>	“ <u>Unity and Social Networks</u> ” *Use human knot game to show unity in action
2. Mahesh, Rajesh	“ <u>Banking</u> ” Speaker: Dena Bank guy, look for more -- <b>Musician</b>	“ <u>Money</u> ” -- <b>Comedian</b>	“ <u>Addiction</u> ” Speaker: Mahendra from AA
3. Nareshbhai, Dineshbhai	“ <u>Insurance</u> ” Speaker: Jignesh from Tata Insurance	“ <u>Ideal Man</u> ”	“ <u>Gender and Sexuality</u> ”

4. Urvesh, Kunal	<u>“First Aid”</u> Sahas Doctor	<u>“Fitness/Nutrition”</u>	<u>“Eye Care for Karigars”</u> Speaker: Dr. Priti Kapadia
5.	<u>“HIV/AIDS and STIs”</u> Speaker: Amudaben	<u>Right to Information</u>	<u>“Privilege and Social Responsibility” and Conclusions of the Class</u>

**Table 2. ‘Health and Image 3 Week Module’**

<b>Week/Peer Teacher</b>	<b>Monday</b>	<b>Wednesday</b>	<b>Friday</b>
1. Ashish, Harshad	<u>“Men, Gender, Health and Hygiene”</u> <b>--Laughing Club</b> Give introduction at end of the program’s purpose	<u>“HIV/AIDS”</u>  <b>--Yoga</b>	<u>“Addiction”</u> Speaker: Mahendra from AA <b>--Musical Chairs</b>
2. Dinesh, Naresh	<u>“Ideal Man”</u> <b>--Comedian</b>	<u>“Nutrition &amp; Fitness”</u>  <b>--Q&amp;A abt. USA</b>	<u>“Sexuality”</u>  <b>--Antakshri</b>
3. Rajesh, ?	<u>“First Aid”</u>  <b>--Follow the Leader?</b>	<u>“Eye Care for Karigars”</u>	<u>“Unity, Social Networks, and Responsibility”</u>

**Table 3. ‘Money and Basic Skills 3-Week Module’**

<b>Week/Peer Teacher</b>	<b>Monday</b>	<b>Wednesday</b>	<b>Friday</b>
1. Ashish, Harshad	<u>“Fundamental Civil Rights”</u> Speaker: Rilesh, look for more <b>--Laughing Club</b> Give introduction at end of the classes’ purpose	<u>“Ration Cards and Driver’s Licenses”</u>  <b>--Yoga</b>	<u>“Unity and Social Networks”</u> *Use human knot game to show unity in action  <b>--Musical Chairs</b>

2. Dinesh, Naresh	“ <u>Banking</u> ” Speaker: Dena Bank guy, look for more -- <b>Comedian</b>	“ <u>Money</u> ”  -- <b>Q&amp;A abt. USA</b>	“ <u>Insurance</u> ” Speaker: Nalinbhai’s insurance friend or Jignesh from Tata  -- <b>Antakshri</b>
3. Rajesh, ?	“ <u>Election Cards and Voting</u> ”  -- <b>Follow the Leader?</b>	Right To Information	“ <u>Privilege and Social Responsibility</u> ” and <u>Conclusions of the Class</u>

## Discussion

### *Why classes did not sustain*

The reasons behind why the classes never permanently caught on are numerous, and impossible to spell out in their entirety due to confounding of many factors—the community and the environment are complex systems. However, based on the numerous aforementioned experiments and the broad themes emerging from them, some analysis can be made. What follows, then, are the factors of most importance in contributing to the classes’ failure.

- Timing and environment. The Varachhan population is a homogenous migrant group of workers, who are paid per diamond they polish. Due to this fact, they keep extremely long workdays, approximately 12 hours normally and 14 hours per day closer to Diwali to earn more money. This includes a two-hour lunch-break, which for a host of reasons was not possible to employ for the classes’ purpose. This left only the time after around 8:30 PM or so, and even then, most would go off for an hour at least to eat dinner, and it was not assured they would come back. Some slept in the units, but even they did not sometimes come back until 10 PM or so. Thus, we had approximately an hour window period to hold the program, at a time when most workers were understandably tired. On top of this, the infrastructure is not the strongest in many parts of Varachha—light at night is not always guaranteed, and finding a location that could fit all the students was not always possible.
- Workers’ nature. Combined with the difficulties posed by the timing and environment in Varachha were common characteristics exhibited by many Varachhans. Most did not have mobile phones and many did not have landlines, so it was difficult to get in contact with students when necessary. Only an hour was available, more or less, for the classes, but since time is not held in the highest of esteem in the society, most would stroll in late and allow even less time. This would especially bother the speakers who came, most of whom had to leave Varachha to go back to their homes in other parts of Surat late at night. As most workers had very little education, anything that seemed to suggest ‘classes’ of any sort was automatically ignored. Most the community would readily agree that they *wanted* to learn the information, presented in an engaging manner, and that they would be better off with the knowledge, but most were not willing to give it a chance to start out with, or to continue on.

Those who did come stayed for a short while due to the novelty, but even that wore off soon. This especially made longer classes an impossibility.

- Peer teachers. The selection and training of, teaching by, and motivation of the peer teachers was quite lacking. This was partially due to my own language barrier (though later that was resolved and those without a language barrier found it just as difficult), partly to lack of resources, and partly due to the pool of workers being recruited from. Many of the peers proved unreliable, and it would sometimes be the case that a room full of students would be ready and excited, and none of the peers would show up. This would happen in training sessions as well, and the peers would conversely not be ready to efficiently facilitate a class once the time came to do so. Obviously, this did not apply across the board, but often enough to make it a big problem. Two or three very reliable and able peer teachers were thus used beyond their capacity to make up for the others', and when they could no longer continue, the program had to be stopped to recruit more.
  - The debate of volunteerism vs. paying peer teachers is necessary to bring up at this point. At the outset of the project, it was a foregone conclusion to use only volunteers, as we believed it was the only sustainable method (funds would not always be available) and thought that enough people could be found that would do the work for the 'advancement of the community'. Our experience over the course of the year proved this maxim to be false, and was one of the main reasons the classes did not sustain. People need incentives in order to do work, whether that be money or otherwise. If incentives in whatever form could be given to volunteers, then it is the best method. However, in Varachha, as well as in many other informal migrant sectors, very few other incentives (professional advancement, etc.) are possible to offer, and therefore money is necessary. Many point out that volunteerism exists to a broad extent in places like the USA, and that therefore it would be possible in India as well. Furthermore, some observed that Sahas pays its other peer educators working on its HIV/AIDS projects, and its peers are still very unreliable and don't often show up except for a core few. The problem with these lines of reasoning is that even in the US, volunteering often has benefits for the volunteer, such as being recognized by professional agencies, leading to potential jobs, and helpful in gaining entrance to schools at all levels. Relying on an idea of 'altruism' as the main motivation for an education project is thus problematic at best, and when money is given, the receivers must be held accountable afterwards.
- Bosses. It is very difficult to do outreach work in the diamond units without the blessings of the unit boss or supervisor. They have great sway over the workers; some use this sway to take advantage of them, while others truly do care about their informal employees. The most successful classes we held were in cases where the boss believed deeply in what we were trying to accomplish and notified much of his unit about the time and subject of the class, urging workers to come. Unfortunately, most often this was not the case, and without the bosses unwavering support, the classes wavered and stopped.
- Entertainment. A key difference between this NFE curriculum and many others was the combination of interactive pedagogy, carefully selected topics, and an 'entertainment' portion meant to draw students, keep the novelty factor alive, and expose them to things to do

for fun that could serve as alternates to high risk behavior. This included yoga, Laughing Club (a huge success), games of antaakshri (an Indian game based on singing), garba/raas classes, martial arts, a comedian, musical performances, and numerous other smaller games. The problem ended up being this: either we could find no ‘entertainer’ to conduct that portion, the students would lose interest in even the ‘fun’ portion quickly (though it was all run through with them earlier), we could not find an appropriate space, or our lack of time combined with students coming late would cancel out that part so we could fit in the actual class module. We came to rely, then, too much on people from the outside who could provide the entertainment.

- Reliance on speakers. Like relying on entertainers, the class relied upon speakers for its technical components—banking, insurance, first aid, eye care, and many other topics. We believed the speakers would be another novel component of the classes, getting people the students respected to come and teach them and providing them with useful contacts. This did have the desired effect when both the students and the speaker came, and the speaker used the interactive format we prescribed. However, too often, there would be only a couple of students and the speaker would feel he/she was wasting his/her time in coming all the way to Varachha to teach only a few people, or the speaker would come late, and the students would leave. Other times, students would take a long time to come and it would become too late for the speaker, as he/she had to go home. Thus, we relied too much upon speakers as well who we tried rotating and volunteering from outside of Varachha, so as to connect diverse segments of society.
- Pedagogy. The pedagogy we designed and intended to implement and that which was actually used were two different things. This is due to the other problems just mentioned: they combined to create a lack of time, absent teachers, and other obstacles that made us change the class and adapt to rapidly changing circumstances, making adhering to a longer, very interactive approach difficult. Furthermore, it was very difficult for the peer teachers to understand the idea of ‘facilitation’ vs. ‘lecturing’, and even more difficult to become proficient in its use. This led, eventually, to boredom amongst the students at points.
- Free Status of the Classes. We were told again and again by those within Varachha that we must charge for the class, as it is only then that people would feel invested enough to actually show up on time. We intended to do this eventually, when the peer teachers, modules, and method was honed to the point where it became a product that could legitimately, and nominally, be charged for. However, in the meantime, we had to get to the point of proficiency without charging either the boss or the students, and get the name of the class in print so its legitimacy would be established. In the time allotted, unfortunately, this could not be achieved. The idea here is the same as that of paying peer teachers or not...the students themselves needed incentives to come, beyond that of entertainment and what they will gain from the classes (to make them initially sit). A stipend would serve well as that incentive.

### *The New Model*

A body of information and experience regarding what went right, and what went wrong, in the implementation of ‘Naya Daur’ is now at hand. I would like to advance a potential ‘new model’

of NFE, then, geared specifically to Varachha that builds upon this collected experience, combining its best aspects and how they can be improved upon. Taken more broadly and theoretically, this schematic can be applied towards homogenous migrant populations elsewhere, with the parameters of class subject and time adapted to the new circumstances. It must be stated that this ‘new model’ has not yet been tested, and is the theoretical outgrowth of the experience of the past year. Future workers in this field may find it to be useful when implementing their own programs, as a comprehensive program to test and utilize.

- Structure. The structure of the new model is a weeklong program presented as ‘after work entertainment’, which meets in the diamond unit every night of the week. The week time-period was shown to work in the past experiments, as in that time period a large body of peer teachers and novel items are not necessary. It is just within the limits of the majority of workers’ attention span, and a short enough period to cover many different units. The focus of the classes would be highly specific, and three broad options would be offered to the boss and workers of the unit, and the boss by necessity and as a precondition must be actively and fully supportive of the classes. The first option would be “Health”, the second “Government and Social Values”, and the third “Money and Spending”. Examples of the “Health” module would include a class on eye care for workers and a subsequent brief eye checkup (as eye conditions among workers are common), strategies for avoiding lower back pain through yoga and other stretches (as this is a common complaint due to the nature of the work), a session on STIs and HIV/AIDS, and a class on first aid. For “Government and Social Values”, the modules would be geared more to fundamental rights, how to get ration cards/election cards/drivers’ licenses, discussions on “the Ideal Man”, “Sexuality”, etc. The “Money and Spending” option would have sessions on banking, insurance, saving money, etc. For these weeklong modules, a fee would be charged to the workers at the beginning of the program, and half returned at the end to those who come on time to every module, to ensure attendance. Potentially, a nominal fee could also be charged to sensitized bosses to make sure they encourage students as well. This would all be achieved by publicity in the form of funny plays presented during lunch hours outside of areas where many workers congregate, by convincing major leaders in the community of the cause and using their influence to get bosses to host the classes, and by any other means possible. Potential linkages with already successful groups such as Art of Living in Varachha would be useful to provide volunteers or a forum by which to spread knowledge of the classes’ existence.
- Peer Teachers. The peer teachers would go through a rigorous selection and training process well before the class implementation is begun, all run by the NGO or community organization that is organizing the whole NFE project. They would be asked to go through exercises on public speaking, facilitation, and other techniques before selection, and be a paid group. The pay would be relatively nominal, and an incentive system designed to supplement motivation by money. The group would be taken to movies, restaurant dinners every for monthly meetings, and every so often on outings to strengthen and build bonds between the peers. They would be given access to meet many of the leaders of the community, such as the CEOs of the major diamond units, religious heads, and others to reinforce the legitimacy of their work. Publications such as “Diamond City” and local Surti news channels could be easy ways to publicize the work the peers are doing, and provide yet another form of motivation. The training process would incorporate teaching methods, active practice in their chosen



module, computer knowledge, and the art of facilitation, in addition to other outside topics they express an interest in learning about, as yet another incentive. A group of teachers will be trained in one of the three weeklong modules, and two other groups the other two. Though we would give an option of which class to pick to the potential students, we would make sure that all three are gone through in a month and a half period, and pay the peers for their training time as well as for when they are actually teaching. A system of contacts within the peer group would be created so they could notify each other of important announcements, and a leader selected from the group who is paid slightly more, but is responsible for the group and also for training new peers once current ones drop out.

- Speakers and Entertainers. The reliance on speakers and entertainers would be almost entirely taken away. This would be achieved by training the chosen peers in specific endeavors. For example, those who would do the banking class would meet with a sensitized banker in the Varachhan community who would impart to the peer teacher the basics. The teacher would be given time to absorb this information, and be given the opportunity to practice, with the other peers, presenting it and teaching it. Only very specialized classes such as “Eye Care” and others would continue with a speaker. The peer teachers would learn how to conduct the entertainment sections as well. For example, the current Laughing Club speaker will train two or three peers in that skill, and the same for yoga and other topics. Mostly, local games such as antaakshri would be relied upon to provide the entertainment. Once per weeklong session an outside entertainer, such as a musician or comedian, could be recruited if available, and once or twice a year a cricket tournament consisting of current and prior students can be held to further spread awareness of the classes.
- Pedagogy. The pedagogy would remain an extremely interactive method of teaching, making extensive use of role-play, games, energizers, etc. Making sure the peers are ready to teach in this way, at first supervised by one well experienced in such a program, would be key. This may even reduce dependence on entertainment. Classes would be started exactly when advertised, and a student would be chosen to make sure most their co-workers come on time. It is hoped the fact that they would be paying a bit would make them come on time, but making a very strong positive impression the first class is key in keeping students coming on time and energized to attend.
- Linkages. The workers will only act on information if it is made easy for them, in most cases. For example, in the past, it was seen in ‘Naya Daur’ that giving information verbally and in a written format on something such as obtaining a driver’s license would be absolutely ineffective in motivating the student to do so. Thus, concrete contacts and steps must be facilitated for the workers as part of the curriculum. This would best be achieved by creating linkages with sensitized institutions. For example, a manager at of a bank in Varachha could be told about the curriculum and what it is trying to achieve, and persuaded to give ‘special help’ to those workers that come and mention the name of ‘Naya Daur’ in opening an account. This ‘special help’ would be no more than guiding them through the process, which they would do anyhow, but telling students that the bank will respond to the class name will create favorable circumstances in their minds. This way, *orkhan* will be established (a form of introduction to a person important in India) and the worker will feel more comfortable in actually carrying through on information. These linkages would be established as widely as

possible, hopefully extending to many of the class units, including insurance, ration cards, election cards, driver's licenses, etc.

### *Future Direction*

Though a potential 'new model' has been spelled out for an organizational method for NFE that could meet success, it remains to be asked, where can this model be applied? Who would it target most specifically? And what can a week of NFE *really* do?

Short term NFE can be an excellent precursor to further adult education. We must remember that most homogenous migrant communities have very little education and often very low self worth. Migrant diamond workers are an excellent example of a population that is not poor by any means, but often live as if they are. The biggest lesson from a year of experience with NFE is that one cannot thrust adult education onto members of a community that very often have very pessimistic outlooks on their future, short attention spans, and therefore very little interest on 'furthering themselves.' A short weeklong program however, that serves to whet ones' appetite for more information, to show them that there are people who do care and believe in their potential, that stays within the bounds of their attention, and where they can have fun as well, may serve as a powerful motivator for further learning. Thus, this new model may be most effective when paired with more extensive education offered after its completion to those who are interested.

Out of a larger class of students, normally a very small percentage have the motivation and interest to truly take it further. Over the past year, I have found these students extremely easy to recognize, and have been struck by how much work they are willing to do to improve their condition. Thus, this short term NFE may be an excellent method for organizations towards identifying peer educators, and in the beginning NGO workers can be trained in teaching the classes rather than peers. The difficulty, often, in choosing peer educators for work in the community is evaluating whether motivation is genuine or directed only towards the stipend; a short term NFE curriculum, especially such as the previously described "Government and Social Values" weeklong module, could uncover such talent and interest in service naturally. Sahas uses peer educators to spread HIV/AIDS awareness in the community, while this class structure uses peer teachers to teach the modules, and both could serve to gain from recruiting workers whom training would truly be beneficial for.

Taking this idea further, upon identification of those 'leaders' in the classes, additional classes could be designed to turn these leaders into resources for their unit, permanent people for their co-workers to turn to when in need of help in the issues discussed. Most units already have one or two individuals many of the workers use to mediate disputes and give advice; further training and knowledge could keep the process of knowledge exchange alive long after the class has ended. The year's experience suggests that workers new to Varachha without much family in the area, as still not totally under the influence of peer pressure and the prevalent social system in the area, seem to be the best targets for such 'leadership recruitment', and most receptive to short term NFE.

## **Conclusion**

In the end, short term NFE using the ‘new model’ can be a powerful method towards identifying leaders for knowledge dissemination in the diamond units as well as for use as peer educators within NGOs in Varachha. Though this case study has examined lessons learned from a year of experience in implementing NFE among migrant diamond workers in Surat, many of the lessons can be generalized for homogenous, and some cases heterogeneous, migrant groups in India. The end goal, in all situations, is to increase self-worth and self-capacity within the populations in question via a participatory and interactive approach.

Migration from the villages to the cities is one of the biggest problems India faces, as infrastructure and earning opportunities in rural areas continue to lag far behind that of the cities. The cities, in turn, continue to burst under the seams of population pressure, and the slums grow every year. This causes vast social, economic, and health-related consequences. NFE is a way to address deficiencies in the infrastructure to handle this shifting of humanity, but it is only a microscopic bandage addressing ultimate causes without the ability to fix them. The need of the hour is to concentrate on improving infrastructure and water access in rural areas, and creating traditional as well as modern markets in the areas to encourage job growth there.

The story of the migrant in India goes back as far as its entire history, and it is a tale of much pain, sacrifice, and ingenuity. Understanding the migrant means understanding numerous worlds, and NFE must be tailored to these worlds, not presented in a vacuum without context.

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