

First computer lab in Rahrai

During my visit to the *St. Anthony School of Rahrai* the previous year, the children of class 3 came to me, asking if they could have a computer lab. Though I didn't promise them, I had responded that I will think about it. And they have been patiently waiting for me this year !

Search for computers brought me to the Pi-top solution. The *Raspberry Pi* is a very known and famous computer produced by a UK Charity organization. Millions of them are used everywhere in the world for all kind of purposes. For the school of *Rahrai*, I wanted an integrated system providing easy setup and maintenance, that is why I choose the Pi-top solution which is integrating the *Raspberry Pi* smoothly inside it's box. The system has a nice screen and consumes low energy. As a preliminary test, I bought one to experiment and later made a deal with the company for 25 computers. We received concession and free 'Inventor's kits'. Those kits will help us initiate children to electronics.

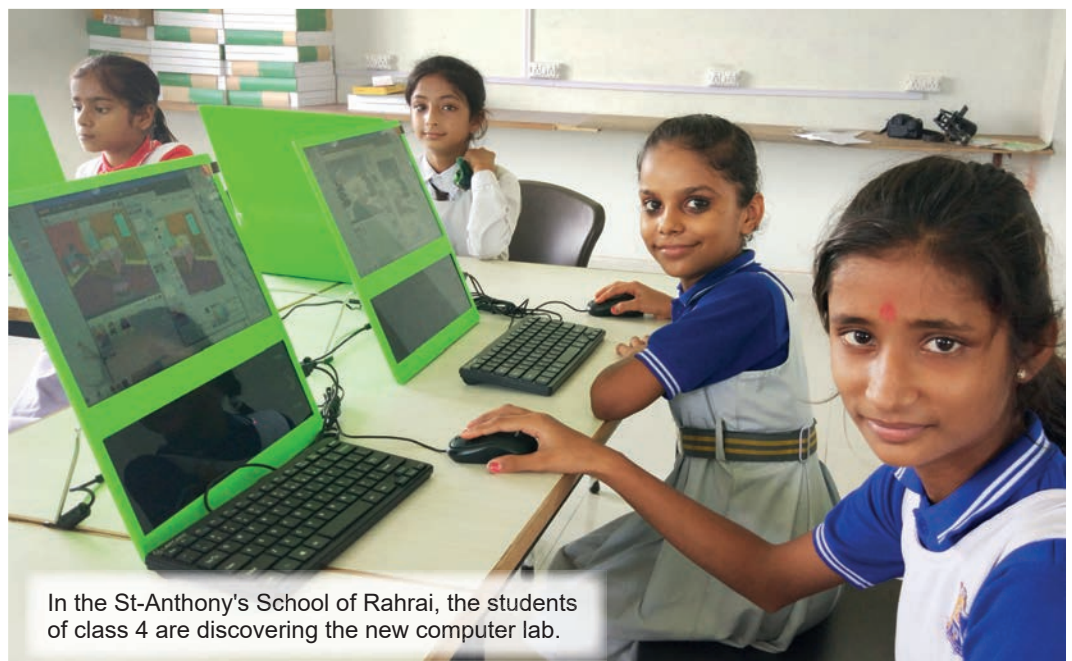
From our past experience we know that shipping to India is a nightmare. We never know what to expect from the custom services. Sometimes when the material is not well known, the customs keep it for weeks and ask for all kind of papers before they release it, charging high import tax. Same happened with our computers. After a month the computers were released and we managed to convince them to reduce the import tax.

Next step was to prepare the teachers to assemble these computers and setup the lab ! I have seen many teachers in our school. When they join, they just have the basic knowledge. Eventually they get trained and after a few years time they find a better job in the city and leave us. Now, with our own students graduated from *St. Anthony's*, it has become easier. I got in touch with

one of our ex-students who is doing graduation in computer science in *Moradabad*. He has a good experience of using the XO computers from primary classes and *Raspberry Pi* computers present in higher classes. I introduced the Pi-Top system to him and he understood how to set it up. He assembled and installed all of them



I was happy to share my enthusiasm about new technologies with the children.



In the *St-Anthony's School of Rahrai*, the students of class 4 are discovering the new computer lab.



Some of the computers we purchased in 2008 are still used today in the *St-Anthony's School of Dugawar* ! We are always trying to get the most from our equipment.

before I reached India in the month of July. It is always rewarding to see our own students growing up and becoming capable of contributing to our project.

Children in *Rahrai* were anxiously waiting for me and they were so excited as we set up the lab. No doubt, they are growing well !

This new lab set up in *Rahrai* reminded me of our first XO computer lab in *Dugawar*, in 2008. The children of *Dugawar* were also the same age as these children in *Rahrai*. Those XOs were considered inexpensive computers, intended to be distributed to children in developing countries around the world to explore, experiment and express themselves. I had managed to get 50 of them from different countries like USA, Australia, through people who wanted to donate them as well. Many of them are still working even after 10 years and we are still running a lab with it !

Signs of change

One day, I attended a meeting with a group of women in the courtyard of a house in one of the villages we are working. We started the meeting, with the members of our women's group and then slowly, people started crowding the area checking what was happening. Since I

do not understand Hindi, I spent this meeting hours, observing around.

It took to my attention when I saw one little girl carrying one bag half full, coming in through a broken road from one side. She came in and spread all what was in the bag on a « *charpai* » (bed used for multi purposes). Suddenly many small kids from around gathered together and started to play ! It was very interesting to see these children playing...

During the last 15 years that I have been visiting these villages, I never saw children playing together with toys which are for their age. Often we have noticed that the kids in *St. Anthony's schools* have very poor imagination and probably one of the main reasons might be that they hardly play with toys when they are small. Later on, they get involved into the household works, rearing the animals, going to the fields with their parents, etc. I asked myself, if it isn't the years of our work, that is bringing changes in these villages. We cannot rule out the impact of economic empowerment through our micro credit programs : many of them can now afford to get loans and buy even TV and care for their children in a better way. In the villages where we work, many government programs are being implemented effectively. Their drainages are made, roads are being constructed, women are



This is the first time I see kids playing with toys in the villages... it is very good for developing their imagination.

empowered and participate in social activities. They understand the importance of properly caring for their children, keeping them clean, sending them to school and now, they even start to play with toys ! All these progress indicate us of a new generation that will make their lives happier.

One year ago, I had mentioned about the meeting we participated in the village of

Ramnagar. The *Mahilamandals* of this village (group of women) had invited their village leader « *pradhan* » to this meeting and asked him to build their village road. The *pradhan* of *Ramnagar* has three villages under him and *Ramnagar* is not his main village. *Pradhan's* main focus is the development of his own village from where he gets maximum votes. And *Ramnagar* is also known to be a village with a poorer and less educated population, often neglected.

There was no sign of action from the side of *Pradhan* even after few months. It seemed that he was not ready to yield into the demand of these women. The situation was very frustrating to our women's group, and they met again to discuss and take further action. They went to meet him in his office and confronted him. He put them off by saying that he did not win the election with their votes, and that its not his priority. Our women really got offended and they challenged to make him do the work. They decided to meet the *Sub Divisional Magistrate (SDM)* in the city to complain about the attitude of this *Pradhan*. The *SDM* is the highest authority to solve conflict and in the past they had approached him for different issues and they had got the work done. They had confidence that the *SDM* office will understand them and



Welcome rituals in India are always amazing and inspiring...



The road, 'before' and...



... 'after' !

get the work done. As they expected, the *SDM* listened to them and agreed to do the needful without delay. Indeed, the *Pradhan* was forced to start the work.

Village roads in the past were made with mud bricks, but nowadays, cement bricks are usually used. They are stronger, cleaner and easier to wash. When the road work in *Ramnagar* started, everything went well till the preparation for laying the bricks. When the bricks arrived on site, they were shocked to see that it was mud bricks. *Pradhan* is responsible for preparing the budget and sanctioning it and they understood that he purposely chose cheap quality. The situation is causing now a lot of conflict in the village. Some of the villagers are happy to see the work being done, they think it is better to have the road than nothing. But our *Mahilamandals* really felt humiliated

and cheated by the *pradhan*. They don't want the work to continue until quality bricks are provided. They went back to meet the *pradhan* and he responded that it is too late, that he cannot modify the project as the budget is passed. The work can be completed with mud bricks or else they have to wait. At this point, part of the road is made with mud bricks and the remaining is undone. If they agree, the work will resume immediately with the same kind of bricks. Will our women yield in and let the remaining work be done ? If not, what will be their next move ?

Our field staff did not want to get involved into their dispute at this point and we are waiting for them to decide on their own.

Marc Valentin
President



Women went to meet the District Magistrate to complain about the 'pradhan' not starting the road work...

