

The new computer lab is better equipped and better organized. We always select the most cost effective solutions and make the best use of our equipment.



Summer 2022 in India

It has been a habit to visit our project in India each summer and the gap of last three years due to the pandemic put a halt to many regular follow-ups. I have been remotely working all the while, with all the computer labs, library lab and I updated the whole internet system remotely. However, there were still a lot to be done on the spot. Electronic devices go bad much faster because of the extreme heat and to avoid bad surprises I had prepared extra sets of computers and essential devices well in advance and the six weeks of stay during this hot summer was eventful, challenging and fruitful.

To set up a new computer lab for higher classes in *St. Anthony's School* in *Dugawar*, 33 new *Raspberry Pi* computers were bought in 2020. The lab installation was postponed and in May 2022, the setting up of the lab was done remotely from Belgium with the help of our computer staff in the school. In July, students could directly profit from the new environment. There are around 45 students in one class and we are running short of the computers for all. These computers were bought for around 40 euros per

piece in 2020 but at the moment you need to pay around 160 euros to get one. Also, nobody will accept to sell more than 1 or 2 at a time. The reason ? The worldwide shortage of components due to the pandemic. Though we wished to equip the lab with more computers, we will have to wait for the price to come down to a reasonable level, probably mid-2023. Meanwhile we are trying to reuse the old generation of computers even though they make the work more complicated.

In the past, underground cables were laid for the land line telephone connections and we were using this line for broadband internet. With the arrival of mobile phones, land lines phones are no more in use. The mobile phone network is however not good

I visited all the classes in our school of *Rahrai*. I was impressed by the students willing to learn and the work of the teachers.



I had the opportunity to congratulate *Neetiksha* and *Ritika* for their performance in the CBSE board exams.



for internet connection for a school. Recently a new network tower was installed by the JIO telephone company around 3 km from *St-Anthony's School Rahrai*. We installed dish antenna to get fast internet connection directly from the tower and I did the set up of the office with a similar network system as our school of *Dugawar*. The online supervision and communication brings better quality to our performance in the project.

The Board Exam results of classes 10 and 12 were published in early August. All our students of the school of *Dugawar* succeeded. *Neetiksha Dhariwal* was the topper of class 10 with 98% and *Ritika Yadav* topped class 12 with 95%. *Ritika* wants to become medical doctor and is preparing to appear for

the entrance exam. *Neetiksha* dreams of joining the *Indian Air force* and is doing her best in the last two years in *St. Anthony's*. They were invited to our *Jadwar* program (foundation stone lying of our third school) on the 13th August and both of them gave inspiring speeches to the audience.

The rush for the new admission continued even after the school reopened in July. We had 520 new students in *Dugawar* and around 200 in *Rahrai*. Currently the school is trying its best to bridge the academic gap of the pandemic period and to integrate the new comers in higher classes. Children who are weak in their basic subject knowledge are given special classes and those who can stay after school are asked to stay back for support classes.

Like each year, we had issues with teachers from south, not coming back after the vacation. It took more than a month to stabilise this situation. It was a big relief that we could fill the teacher's vacancy for smaller classes with our own passed out students.

We also had different visits and activities from government authorities. Having a bigger playground, many local government schools ask us to gather in our school campus for their sports day. The main person in charge of all the schools in the district was present on that day. He visited the library, labs, classrooms and was highly appreciative of our work and his support in any administrative matters under his capacity.

Marc Valentin

We organized the function under a big tent. Participants from *Dugawar* and *Rahrai* were brought in *Jadwar* using our school busses.



Foundation Stone Lying in Jadwar

The foundation Lying Ceremony of the *Jadwar School Project*, our third school, was organized not only to announce the beginning of the construction but also to meet a maximum number of people from the region. It was a platform where we



A big crowd attended the meeting and was curious to know more about the project.

could explain our plan for their future. The village leaders of the area, distinguished guests and members of the newly formed SHG (*Self Help Groups*) from *Jadwar* were invited to the meeting. Different cultural programs were performed by students from our schools of *Dugawar* and *Rahrai* as well as SHG members. Around 1000 people were present. We had the opportunity to meet the neighboring village leaders and the prominent people of the area. The lady *pradhans* were, however, not willing to mix with others,

Villages leaders and officials came as well.



Everybody enjoyed the songs, dramas and the dances performed by our students.



Bouquets are offered to the lady-pradhans...

In the village of *Jadwar*, we had a fruitful conversation with the *pradhan*.



they stayed on the side with the covered face. Women have the habit of covering their face in the villages. This cultural habit tends to slowly go away but in some areas it is still very strong.

We observe that many children from the nearby villages came by to see the programs and there was joy in the eyes of all !

Visit to the *pradhan* in the village of *Jadwar*

It was told that the village leader (*the pradhan*) was really busy and finding him at home was almost impossible. We were lucky, the day we visited *Jadwar* he was at home and gave us a warm welcome. He seemed to be a person open to change and is really happy that our project with the new school will bring opportunities to the villagers. For more than an hour, we discussed about the living standard of the people, their educational background, health care facilities, politics, etc. He stressed on the backwardness of the villagers, specially women. Currently the government is trying to empower women through micro-credit and self-help groups and under this program, there are job vacancies for women who know to read and write. He finds it difficult to fill these vacancies because there are not enough women who know to

read and write. The wife of the *pradhan* was sitting on the ground, at the side and I asked if she knew to read and write. He was so cool and responded that she is in reality the *pradhan* of the village and she doesn't know to read and write ! We tried to talk to her but found it difficult to communicate because she covered her face and her

language was difficult to follow. Unlike in many villages, in the *Jadwar* project area, when a woman talks to another woman she also keeps her face covered.

How did she become *pradhan* ? The seats for village elections are reserved for women in rotation based on two categories : the general category and the caste-based category. In caste based category seats are reserved for women from low caste. In villages with illiterate people, the wife contests and once elected as *pradhan*, it is the husband who exercises the real power.



The *pradhan* (husband) was very interested to come to know how we plan to develop the area and is ready to collaborate.