

II. Early Childhood Development

An Initiative to Impart Moral Strength in Children and Their Parents

The Early Childhood Development Center promoted by Vikash, is a center of learning for children in tribal areas of Koraput District of Orissa. It helps the children to enjoy their childhood while receiving education before being integrated in to primary level of education. The center not only tries to teach the children in play-way method but also provides moral strength to the parents to seek a better future of their children.

Chapadi Sukri, a *Gadaba* (a tribal community of Orissa) woman of 40 years lives in Chapadiguda village of Pottangi Block with her husband and three children (two girls and a boy).



Agriculture is the main source of income, which cannot meet the livelihood needs of the family. Because of that the elder daughter could not access the primary education. She is just a helping hand for her parents in domestic as well as agricultural work. But the case of four years old son, Sunil is bit different. As girls' education is given less priority in tribal areas, both Chapadi and her husband were worried only about Sunil's education. But paucity of money did not allow them to afford the education for the children. The only son, Sunil was engaged in cattle herding.

At this juncture Vikash stepped in to initiate the Early Childhood Development Centers for pre-primary education for the children of this village. Volunteers advised the parents to send their children to the Center. "Madam came again and again to us and talked about Sunil's education. In the beginning we did not have any idea regarding this type of education, but afterwards we were convinced to enrol our son," said Chapadi. The parents were also

instructed to send their son in clean clothes, combed hair. In the beginning Sunil was not interested at all to go to the center. Chapadi said "It was too difficult to make him go to school in the beginning, but when he began to enjoy the teaching, there was no way to stop him."

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Sunil started learning many things seriously. He also began to prepare ahead of the class. The effort he put in started yielding results slowly. The outcome is now visible to everybody. He also enjoyed playing games that were taught in the school and won prizes in the annual sports. Sunil's change has had a great impact on his family. Chapadi realizes the change occurred in her family and summed it up aptly. She said, "Now we are aware of the importance of education and cleanliness and cleanliness. We are more conscious of keeping our surroundings clean and to use clean drinking water as much as possible." This also triggered unforeseen change in the family of Chapadi. Chapadi and her husband both are planning for their second daughter's education. "I asked my husband to send our younger daughter to the center and he agreed without a second thought" says Chapadi.

Now we are aware of the importance of education and cleanliness

The Early Childhood Development Centers have opened up a new world for the children to learn and acquire skills. More importantly it has worked as a social shock absorber whereby the children and their parents can gather courage to face the hardship in acquiring basic education. The process indeed has galvanized the community to undertake continuous conflict resolution and problem solving on their own with support of Vikash volunteers.