

## **School of Excellence for Tribal Students in the district of Jhabua, India**

### ***Background***

Jhabua District in the state of Madhya Pradesh had the lowest literacy rate (19%) of the entire country in 1991. While ten years later, it had overtaken 15 other districts of a total of more than 600, it still has the lowest literacy (37%) in Madhya Pradesh and of all districts in the three states which Jhabua borders (Rajasthan, Gujarat and Maharashtra).<sup>1</sup> This may be due to the fact that more than 85% of its chiefly rural population belongs to the Scheduled Tribes of which roughly half live below the poverty line, making it the area with the highest concentration of tribal population in Western India.<sup>2</sup> Education could potentially be one of the motors to drive development in Jhabua, which has been among the poorest districts of the country.<sup>3</sup>

Jhabua has over 1.2 million inhabitants belonging to the tribal community, which in India has the status of a minority with far worse health than the general population.<sup>4</sup>

The district is remote and rural, and sees regular episodes of drought and infectious disease outbreaks, especially malaria.

The Catholic Church is the most successful of developmental agencies in the district given their network of boarding schools and dispensaries throughout the area. There is an unmatched discipline and dedication among teachers and healthcare personal of the Church institutions, which run the only two English-medium schools in the district which have been ranked for many years among the top performing schools.

In the spring of 2005, His Grace, Bishop Chacko Thottumarickal of the Catholic Diocese of Jhabua had the vision to start a “School of Excellence”, in which the most talented students from the mission schools were selected through a competitive exam. Twelve girls and 22 boys, who had passed fifth grade exam of elementary school, started the new school year in July 2005 being taught in English and living in the boarding schools of the Don Bosco Congregation in Alirajpur.

While the students are in a rigorous academic program, they enjoy plenty of opportunities to play sports and games, work in the garden and go on field trips.

The next round of 36 students will join the current 34 students in July of 2006. A total of 70 children will then have to be accommodated in the Don Dosco Compound in the town of Alirajpur. With plans to run the program up to 12<sup>th</sup> class of high school, there will be a need to build a new hostel.

<sup>1</sup>Education for All, India. 2003. <http://www.educationforallinindia.com/page157.html>

<sup>2</sup>Jhabua: Statistical profile. National Informatics Centre, Madhya Pradesh. 2005. <http://jhabua.nic.in/factfile.htm>

<sup>3</sup>Sainath, Palagummi. Everybody loves a good drought: Stories from India’s poorest districts. New Delhi, Penguin Books. 1996.

<sup>4</sup>NFHS 1998-99 in: Project Implementation Plan for Vulnerable Groups under RCH II. Government of India, Department of Family Welfare, Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Dec 2004



The HIV counselors at a workshop in Jhabua being instructed by Dr. Bharadwaj (center), a senior faculty member of WHARF (Wockhardt-Harvard Medical International HIV/AIDS Education and Research Foundation) which runs many awareness programs in the slums and redlight districts of Mumbai. The counselors were previously trained in Mumbai in September 2005.

### ***Goal***

The School of Excellence provides students from the tribal community the opportunity to study from 6<sup>th</sup> class throughout high school to eventually become leaders of their community. The brightest students are selected from different schools in the district after they passed the fifth grade board exam in Hindi, and then study the curriculum in English. In July 2005 the first batch of 34 students studied in sixth grade. This July, another 36 will enter sixth grade. A total of 70 students will then be enrolled in a rigorous academic program which follows the Government's standard curriculum in English language. This project will continue through tenth grade and eventually will encompass grades 11 and 12, the pre-college years in India, in which students may choose arts, mathematical and biological sciences as well as commerce as their focus.

While a new boarding school will need to be built over the next two years to accommodate the growing number of students, the children currently enjoy life at the Church's Alirajpur campus, located in the Southern part of the chiefly (85%) tribal district of Jhabua. Coming from rural communities where most of their parents are employed in agriculture, the School of Excellence introduces them to an academic environment where they feel safe and can concentrate on their studies. Their parents, many of them illiterate, are very of their daughters and sons and support them very much.

**Real Medicine Foundation/ Catholic Diocese of Jhabua**

**Budget for the School of Excellence, Alirajpur, Jhabua district, Madhya Pradesh, India for the academic year 2006 - 2007**

Particulars	Amount (INR/USD)
(Amount in Indian rupees INR/ USD at a rate of 43 INR/1 USD):	
<b>Student expenses</b>	
Expenses per student per month 1,500/ \$34.90	
Current batch of 34 from March 2006 through April 2007 (May and June holidays) INR 1,500 x 34 x 12 months	612,000/ 14,232.60
Batch of next 36 students from July 2006 through April 2007 INR 1,500 x 36 x 9 months	486,000/ 11,302.30
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1,098,000/ 25,534.90</b>