

Annual Report 2023-24



About Us

The Vishwa Bharati Vidyodaya Trust (VBVT), established in 1993, is a community-driven organisation committed to transforming education for the four Indigenous Adivasi communities in the Gudalur valley of Tamil Nadu: the Bettakurumba, Kattunayakan, Mullakurumba, and Paniya. The organisation was born out of the Adivasi Munnetra Sangam (AMS) movement, led by the communities for equality and justice in various spheres of life, including but not limited to livelihood, health and education.

VBVT focuses on creating an education system that is culturally relevant and contextually meaningful. By centring the community's lived experiences and aspirations, VBVT has worked to build an ecosystem of learning that empowers Adivasi children to thrive both academically and socially while staying rooted in their cultural identity.

At the heart of VBVT's mission is the belief in community ownership of education. The organisation collaborates closely with the community, involving them in decision-making processes and designing educational initiatives that reflect their needs and values. From establishing the Vidyodaya Adivasi School, which integrates Adivasi traditions into the curriculum, to running village-based learning centres, VBVT has consistently worked to reclaim education as a practice of freedom, enabling Adivasi communities to take control of their own narrative and shape their futures.

2023-24 IN REVIEW

Strategic Review and Planning Across All Programs

This year, all programs underwent a rigorous process of review and planning. These sessions provided each program with the clarity needed to identify priorities and develop actionable plans for the future. This reflective exercise ensured that the organisation is well-positioned to continue meeting the educational and developmental needs of Adivasi children and their communities in the coming years.

Vidyodaya School: Expanding Educational Outreach

This year, the Vidyodaya School launched a successful admission campaign, extending its reach to ten new villages. Teachers engaged with parents and village leaders, fostering trust and boosting enrolment, further deepening ties with the communities.

Koottu Manai Hostel: Growing Residential Support

With a near doubling of admissions, Koottu Manai continued to provide a nurturing environment for 37 adolescents. Personalised academic and life skills support helped students thrive, and the success in public exams highlighted the program's impact.

Developing Future Educators

The second batch of the Facilitator Training Program progressed through its three phases, focusing on self-awareness, community knowledge, and education skills. The seven trainees are now integrated into the school, hostel and community programs, honing their teaching abilities through hands-on experience.

Makkale Keeche: Strengthening Access to Education

Through collective efforts of the people, children received assistance with scholarships, school re-enrolment, and essential documents. Volunteers actively supported the children, ensuring a continuum of care and educational progress.

Building Youth Leadership: Community Engagement

A network of youth volunteers has been nurtured around the village learning centres, enabling them to take leadership roles within their communities. These volunteers have enhanced their own education opportunities, while fostering growth in the children they mentor.

Vidyodaya Adivasi School

“Schools must be like Vidyodaya. Teachers must be able to make the school feel like home.”

- A young Adivasi graduate

The Vidyodaya Adivasi school is a primary school that amplifies the possibility of a just and equitable society for Adivasi communities through education. By integrating elements from both the traditional Adivasi world and the modern world, the school provides a meaningful and culturally relevant education to Adivasi children.

Half of the teaching staff come from the communities, and the relationships between teachers and students are deeply guided by an ethic of care and compassion. Adivasi songs, dance, languages, and cultural practices are woven into the daily routines of the school, while the curriculum draws heavily from the children's everyday experiences, including their histories, folk tales, and traditions.



Decision-making at Vidyodaya is grounded in Adivasi values, with a non-hierarchical democratic approach that ensures all voices and opinions are heard. The school day is structured with three hours of academic subjects in the morning, followed by lunch, and then an hour each of craft and games in the afternoon, promoting holistic development and learning beyond academics. All these elements together strengthen the continuum between the school and the home, supporting the child in both spheres of life.

The last year has been yet another chapter of learning and growth for the Vidyodaya Adivasi School, enriched by meaningful experiences. From increasing enrolment to deepening community ties, each experience has contributed to the growth of both students and staff.

116

Children

11

Teachers

32

Villages

Highlights of the Year



Sharing stories and riddles in the morning assembly on a cold winter morning

Admissions

In April and May, the Vidyodaya School launched a campaign to expand its admissions by reaching out to ten new villages, in addition to those from which our current students come. The teachers adopted a door-to-door strategy, engaging directly with parents, village leaders, and potential students. These conversations focused on the importance of education and emphasised the school's dedication to providing a nurturing and inclusive learning environment. The campaign proved successful, leading to a significant increase in enrolment for that admission cycle, strengthening our connection with the communities and reaffirming the value of education for Adivasi children.



Vidyodaya teachers interacting with Pathashaala students about their culture and community

Pathashaala School Visit

From September 23rd to 25th, 2023, the staff of Vidyodaya School visited Pathashaala, a progressive school in Chennai, for an exchange of ideas and practices related to alternative education. The visit provided both schools with an opportunity to share experiences, learn from each other's strengths and challenges, and appreciate the diversity of approaches within the field of education. The collaboration was an enriching experience, fostering a deeper understanding of the unique cultural and contextual dynamics at play in both institutions. Moreover, the visit built a

sense of friendship and solidarity among the staff and students, opening up avenues for future partnerships and continued exchange of knowledge.

Adivasi Day Celebrations

Adivasi Day was celebrated with great enthusiasm at Vidyodaya School, as a tribute to the rich cultural heritage of the indigenous communities we serve. The day featured traditional dances, songs, and storytelling, led by both students and community elders, allowing the younger generation to connect with their roots. Adivasi Day not only deepened the students' understanding of their identity but also reinforced the school's commitment to fostering pride in their cultural legacy.



Village elders hoisting the AMS flag on Adivasi Day

Koottu Manai Hostel



All the boys after a craft session with young Adivasi facilitator trainees

Koottu Manai was started in 2021 as a residential initiative for adolescents from the community studying in mainstream schools, as many of them were unable to continue schooling post primary and middle school due to various constraints. Transcending the role of a traditional hostel, we strive to create a nurturing and inclusive environment to enable their growth as confident, competent and compassionate individuals who can be contributing members of their community and society at large.

Academic year 2023-24 marked the third year of the initiative and has been an enriching year for all of us involved. This year, we worked closely with thirty-seven adolescents, 15 of whom were new admissions, almost doubling from last year. The high number of applications during the admission cycle last year reaffirmed the need for a community-run residential initiative for adolescents.



Children



Teachers



Villages

The girls continue to attend Fathima Girls Higher Secondary School and stay at the boarding provided there, while the boys study at Puthurvayal Govt. High School till 10th and in GTMO Matriculation Higher Secondary School for 11th and 12th. A core team of eight facilitators lead the initiative, with six of them being members of the community. The facilitators engage with each individual student consistently to provide the various kinds of support they need to be successful in their learning journeys. During weekdays, the primary focus is academics and other foundational skills while on the weekends, they engage more with life skills, community engagement and other extracurricular activities that build exposure to various kinds of learning.

Highlights of the Year



Engaging with the library space

Academic Excellence on the Rise

Over the past year, our students have shown significant growth in their academic competencies. Last year, six students attended the class 12 public exams, five students attended the class 11 exams, and five students attended the class 10 exams. All students passed their exams with flying colours, and four of the class 12 students earned distinctions. This is a testament to their hard work and dedication, as well as the support and guidance provided by their teachers.

Connecting with Roots: Learning Through Heritage

This year, we implemented a blend of village visits, conceptual sessions, nature walks, and interactions with elders to deepen students' understanding of their cultural heritage. They explored the history of the Adivasi Munnetra Sangam (AMS), learned about herbal medicines, and immersed themselves in traditional songs, dances, and stories from their community. These experiences sparked curiosity in the children, encouraging them to learn more about their heritage and connect their personal experiences with the broader cultural and historical context of the four Adivasi communities.



The senior students engaging with the children at Kottaimattam village

Creativity and Play: Fostering Holistic Development

Throughout the week and especially on weekends, our students participated in a variety of extracurricular activities. They engaged in painting, gardening, needlework, carpentry, string art, and more, with each child focusing on at least two activities over the year. In sports, the boys enjoyed bi-weekly Frisbee sessions with the One-All team and played football fortnightly at a nearby turf, in addition to participating in school sports activities. These extracurricular pursuits not only provided a break from academics but also contributed to their holistic development by fostering creativity, teamwork, and physical fitness.



Creating art from nature



Visiting the Madras Christian College, learning about pathways in higher education

Broadening Horizons: Exploring Chennai

This year, we took our senior students from grades 11 and 12 to Chennai to expose them to life in a big city and expand their perspectives on the opportunities available there. During the three-day trip, they visited Madras Christian College, Puthiyador (an organisation working with the fishing community), and interacted with students from Tondiarpet High School. They also visited iconic landmarks such as St. George Fort and Marina Beach. The experience was enjoyable and eye-opening, challenging many of their preconceived notions about urban life and offering valuable insights into life beyond their community.



Interaction with 11th standard students from Tondiarpet high school

Makkale Keeche

Community Education Initiative

Makkale Keeche Community Education initiative's vision is to co-create systems and platforms through which Adivasi communities take ownership of their children's learning. We pursue this vision by organising and building a network of active youth leaders who in turn consistently engage and create spaces of learning and support for children from their villages and communities.



320

Children



24

Youth mobilised



122

Scholarships



42

Villages



6

Camps

Highlights of the Year

Strengthened access to formal education

In villages where volunteers have consistently engaged with children, we've observed that the children attend with genuine interest and actively seek support for their educational progress. They have reached out for assistance with scholarships, health needs, and obtaining important documents like birth and community certificates. Their challenges have been addressed in schools, they've participated in children's camps, and they've reported improvements in their learning. Most importantly, they feel supported, knowing that someone in their village cares and looks out for them. Children who had discontinued their education have, through these engagement spaces, either re-enrolled in school or accessed vocational opportunities.



A storytelling session at Chembakolli village

A network of youth being created and nurtured

For the youth volunteers, being part of this initiative has fostered a sense of belonging to a larger community, while also enhancing their learning. Through this process, their confidence and connection to their communities have grown stronger. Training sessions and meetings have provided spaces for them to raise personal issues and explore ways to address them. Some volunteers have accessed higher education, while others have secured better employment opportunities. Their active engagement and leadership roles in the initiative are contributing to their personal growth and development.



Keeche training at Vidyodaya

Organising Camps for Children

Over the last year, we have consistently been mobilising children and facilitating learning experiences for adolescent children in smaller clusters. In the month of May 2023 and Oct 2023, we brought them all together and facilitated 2 camps -- one on exploring the theme of Friendships and the other one on exploring and knowing more about higher education and career opportunities. We were able to mobilise 220 children in total.



Area camp at Srimadurai

Activities beyond Academics

We organised activities such as creating and staging plays, engaging with village elders, expressing ideas of healthy friendships through art, listening to professionals from various sectors share their experiences, and providing a space for questions and clarifications on higher education opportunities. Additionally, we conducted problem-solving activities and games. Through these activities children learnt about themselves, connected with growth opportunities and support systems, and most importantly had lots of fun and built friendships!



Playing frisbee during the summer camp

The Community Education Team is growing

We have 4 young people (from Paniya, Kattunayaka and Bettakurumba community) join the community education team. While they are still learning, young people joining the team have brought in energy and opportunities for sharing and acting on newer ideas and perspectives.

Capacity building of the team - shift in approach from 'education issues' to 'children's' issues'

In February 2024, we participated in reflection and planning workshops that allowed us to deeply explore ways to strengthen our work with children. These discussions not only helped us plan at a programmatic level but also enabled the creation of village-specific plans, identifying local challenges and developing tailored support pathways. This approach has brought clarity to the practical possibilities available and allowed our team to engage holistically with villages, addressing other important issues like access to housing, roads, and children's transportation to school.



Learning about various careers in the medical field

In Thirumangalam village, youth and children collaborated to establish a learning center.

In Kozhikolly village, elders and parents united to petition the Collector about the poor functioning of the Balawadi (preschool).

Scholarship

A total of ₹4,25,550 was raised to provide scholarships for 122 children across the villages. The funds were used to cover a variety of needs, including school fees, umbrellas, and bags, ensuring these children had the necessary resources to continue their education without interruption.

Facilitator Training

The FTP is an 18-month residential program which looks to enable young Adivasi adults to become facilitators of education and learning. Through the 18 months these young Adivasis are equipped with the necessary knowledge, skills and mindsets to become people who can contribute to the educational aspiration and needs of their communities in various spaces.



The trainees interacting with children at a village to understand their experience of schooling

Highlights of the Program

Currently we are running our second batch of FTP. In our first batch 8 facilitators graduated the program. Currently we have 7 young Adivasis in our program. The second batch has finished two phases of training currently and they are in the final stage of the training now. The three phases are outlined below:

Phase I: Understanding myself, my community and the world

The trainees spent time looking into their life journeys, looking into their identity and how their identity affected their life. Then they spent time going to various villages and understanding how their community are currently and how the past affected their present. Finally, they learnt how their Adivasi world has interacted and influenced by the Modern world. Through this phase of training, the trainees could build a strong purpose about why they needed to work for their communities.



The trainees after a discussion with teachers from another alternative school

Phase 2: Understanding Education and the skills needed for learning

In this phase, the group spent time in understanding what is the purpose of education and the connection between education and their society. They delved into the field of education through a blend of lectures, classroom observations and interactions with experienced educators within and outside VBVT. This was crucial to building their understanding of the theories of psychology and pedagogy that influence learning and teaching, as well as comprehending how they translated to action within classrooms. Conducting classes for their peer groups also helped them hone their skills as teachers.



Phase 3: Experiential learning

The trainees spent time in each of our programs as assistants and interns for one month. Through this period, they were mentored by the teachers at the hostel, school and community program. During this time, they spent time teaching children, planning sessions, working at the village level. This was supplemented by reflection spaces.

The trainees have been divided into the three programs, where 3 of them are in the school, and 2 each in the hostel and community programs. They will spend the next few months building their skill set as teachers through practice.

Conducting library sessions at the village learning centre

Looking Inward, Looking Forward

The Research Project

In November 2021, we had undertaken a research initiative to explore the experiences of the four Adivasi communities here in the current education system and develop an understanding of the purpose of Adivasi education and alternative vision for the same as voiced by the people of the community. The research was supported by the UK-based Transforming Education for Sustainable Futures (TESF) network.

Seventeen Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), two workshops and several months of analysis later, we concluded the project last year with a research report, two articles and an illustrated book as the tangible outputs. The [research report](#) was published last year by TESF. The illustrated book has been completed and we are in the process of preparing it for publication. The research articles published this year are linked below:

1. [Looking Inward, Looking Forward: Articulating Alternatives to the Current Education System for Adivasis](#), by Adivasis. Contemporary Education Dialogue, SAGE publications.
2. [Taking Charge of Change: Building Community Ownership for Educational Change with Indigenous Communities](#). Global Social Challenges, Bristol University Press.

On the intangible side, we saw that new relationships were built, and old relationships were strengthened through the process of bringing people together to discuss about their children's education. The entire research initiative clearly demonstrates that the community has valuable insights regarding their children's education and creating spaces for deep listening that brings forth these insights is vital to building momentum and ownership for educational change.

The Cornerstone Project

For the last 30 years, we have been demonstrating that culturally relevant and meaningful learning spaces is central is enabling Adivasi children and youth to learn and grow into their ideals of a good life. However, in the current situation, we are only able to cater to a smaller number due to limited infrastructure. Hence, the Cornerstone project - an expansion of our space and dreams of the possibilities held by education. Over the past two years,VBVT has embarked on a project to construct and build a new campus which can serve to broaden and deepen our impact with the community.

The Cornerstone project was envisioned as more than just a campus for meaningful higher education for the Adivasi community. It is meant to act as an extension of the village and village-based spaces which can be a platform for their history and culture. Hence, the design process was facilitated in a participatory manner, ensuring that the children's and staff's visions of a dream school form the foundations of the campus design.

This year, we completed the land purchase, acquiring 3.15 acres of land. In December 2023, we concluded the design process and finalised the master plan. The next steps include obtaining permissions for construction, expanding and strengthening the project team, and commencing construction.

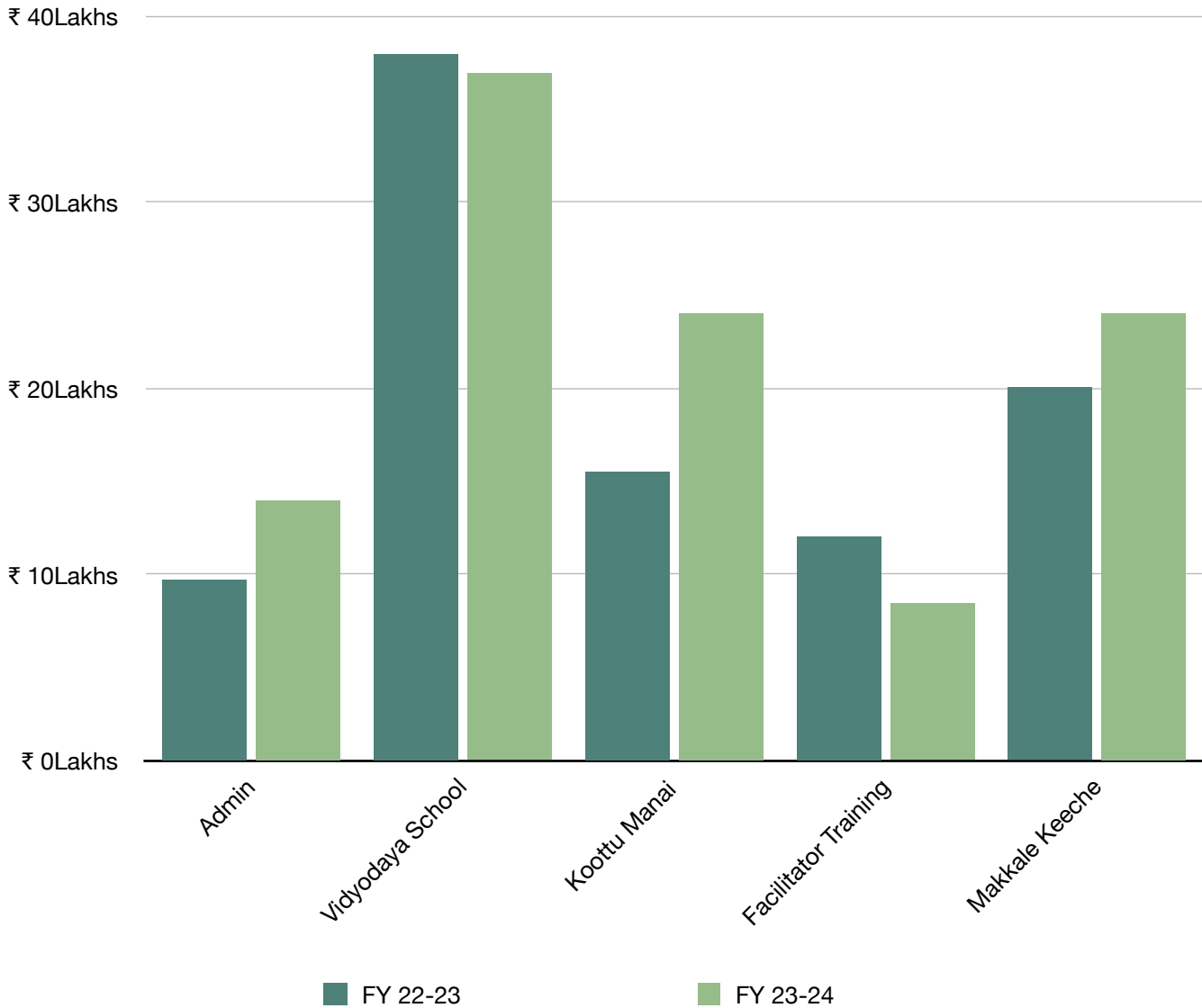
We hope to start the construction of this campus in the FY 24-25, and we hope to move to this campus by June 2026. You can find more updates about the work [here](#).





Financials

Program Expenses over the last two financial years



Our Detailed Financial Report can be found here in this [link](#).

As part of our internal processes, we have been able to get the services of A.R Raghunathan and Co from Chennai to conduct internal audits as well as support our Admin staff with training them to ensure our process remains transparent and accountable.

To further demonstrate our accountability, we have obtained certification through GuideStar India. We have been given their “Advanced Level- GuideStar India Gold Certification” for our processes.

Our Partners

Apart from strong community ownership a big part of our work is possible through the support of our many partners and donors. We thank them for their continued support which has made possible for our work to grow.



TVS Foundation



JSK Trust



Julius Bär



From Here to There



Adivasi-Tee-Projekt (ATP)



Friends of Hope

Hiltons International Development Trust



George Macdonald's Endowment Fund