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# Ex-banker striving to change fortunes of MP Pench village

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Nagpur: People living in Mumbai often find peaceful village life too dull and return to the hustle and bustle of the metro. Sanjay Nagar (52) may be an exception. Taking voluntary retirement after stints in two top foreign banks, he has been finding solace in social work for the last five years in villages of Pench area of Madhya Pradesh, 95km from here.

It was his passion for wildlife photography that first drew him to the Pench National Park. Eventually along with a partner, he set up a resort at Kohka village near Pench, leaving the bank job and a comfortable city life at the age of 45 to pursue his hobby. After seeing the problems being faced by the local tribal population, he decided to volunteer as a teacher in the local government school. He started serving the local community and has been able to bring changes in the field of education, women's empowerment, health, community welfare and environmental awareness.

Two years ago, he launched an NGO called Kohka Foundation to bring in more help for the tribal communities in the villages in and around Pench in MP. The focus of the organization has been to improve the educational standards among the students of these villages. One of their flagship programme, Anando, for secondary students, has been able to raise the pass percentage of the local schools substantially. The foundation has been helped by Mumbai-based corporate houses and Light of Life Trust.

"Educational facilities are abysmal here and students from about ten nearby villages trek several kilometres daily to reach Turria where the only high school of the area is located. We have hired five teachers for providing free coaching before school time to students of STD IX, X and XI and prepare them for board exams. There is focus on mathematics and English that they find tough," said Nagar.

"The results are there to see. For years, average passing rate has been around 22% at Turria government high school. But now among students getting extra coaching under Anando programme, the passing rate has gone up to 80%," said Nagar.

"The next step is to provide these students computer literacy. It will help them avail more information than the school textbooks provide. The students will have better job opportunities. Computer literacy in India is less than 7%, and the condition is still worse in rural areas," said Nagar.

He is now setting up a computer laboratory with 15 computers in Turria government high school which is attended by over 400 children. Work has already begun and a crowdfunding campaign is underway on Crowdera (<http://crowdera.in/>) to raise funds. Through offline and online donations, Nagar has already bought 10 of the 15 laptops. More funds will be needed for accessories and doing civil work at the school. "Rains are posing problem in getting the room waterproof. Hopefully we will be able to get the centre inaugurated on August 15," said Nagar.

While his partner looks after resort business, Nagar concentrates on the Kohka Foundation. Starting another free coaching centre at nearby Amazari village, expanding activities of the women's self-help group are on the anvil. Periodically, health camps are also conducted for which he fetches doctors from Nagpur. "I am at Kohka for three weeks a month and then go back to Mumbai to spend time with family and raise funds for the foundation," said Nagar.