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Sunanda Gandhi Memorial School Executive Summary

Background

For many children residing in rural India, the prospects of a safe and economically secure future are quite slim. Many are born into families struggling against challenging economic and social conditions, with parents working hard to keep their families fed and safely housed.

This situation creates conditions that make the children of these villages extremely vulnerable to the current crisis in human trafficking, where children are either kidnapped or sold into virtual slavery – girls as prostitutes, boys as cheap labor.

It is estimated that approximately 100M children in India, ages 6-14, live under these trying circumstances. Very few have access to education, or the training and opportunity to become contributing members of Indian society. These children represent untapped potential: by giving them an opportunity to channel their natural strengths into positive and purposeful lives, they will not only be in a position to help themselves, but will be in a position to help others like them.

This project focuses on local solutions to the human development issues associated with these challenging conditions.

Proposed Project

The Gandhi Institute, under the direction of Arun Gandhi (fifth grandson of Mahatma Gandhi) is proposing the establishment of a boarding/day school in the town of Kolhapur, focused on providing a free education and supportive community environment in which rural village children can experience a childhood of development and preparation for a successful life. The school is being built to honor the memory of Sunanda Gandhi (Arun's recently deceased wife), who dedicated much of her life to serving the needs of poor women and children in India.

The school is intended to serve as a model that can be easily replicated throughout rural India. Its primary objectives are:

- To impart functional literacy (3R's) to boys and girls aged 6-14.
- To provide extracurricular activities that support the whole development of each child.
- To promote vocational education and training (VET) that will increase employment prospects for each child.
- To provide a learning environment that places equal emphasis on the learning of the 3 R's, inculcation of social consciousness, and a sense of values.

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The school will be modeled on Gandhian principles of simplicity and self-reliance, will be built in an eco-friendly fashion, and will be structured to easily utilize the help of college-age volunteers from all over the world. The first phase of the school is intended to serve 100 boarding students, and 300 day students.

The vision for the school includes strong partnerships with local vocational training institutes, businesses interested in workforce development, and local social service organizations. In addition, it is envisioned that there will be a for-profit component of the school, initially focused on developing a handicrafts production line (hopefully in collaboration with the Khadi & Village Industries Commission (KVTC)), and expanding to other products and markets, depending on what the market research indicates. The development of a long term business model that can be duplicated (possibly based on franchising concepts), will be pursued.

The intention of the school and its local business partnerships is to create a set of local conditions and opportunities to enable village-based families to become self-sufficient as an intact family unit ---- without having to relocate to cities because of employment stresses. Rather than myopically focusing only on the needs of the children (and running the risk of alienating them from their families and feeding the shame associated with poverty), this project aims to serve children in a way that enables the uplift of the whole family. This will allow for the village community to become stronger, one family at a time, with dignity and self-reliance.

During the start up phase of the school, parents will be given opportunities for investing "sweat equity" into the school in lieu of paying enrollment fees for their children. An example would be a parent working in the garden to support the growing of produce used to feed the children.

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Financial Requirements

The project (activities and finances) will be managed in 3 phases (see attached overview), with Phase 1 focused on planning and acquisition of resources for Phase 1 and 2 of the project.

Estimates of the financial resources needed for Phase 1 include:

Land acquisition (4 acres)	\$ 70,000
Construction Labor	\$10,000
Buildings	\$ 80,000
Management Compensation (4 ED stipends)	\$40,000
Planning Consultants (details TBD)	\$20,000
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Total: Phase 1	\$220,000

Estimates of the financial resources needed for Phase 2 include:

Teachers, Social Workers and Enrollment Staff	\$50,000
Purchase of tools & equipment for vocational training programs	\$50,000
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Total: Phase 2	\$100,000

Estimates of the financial resources needed for Phase 3 include:

Establishment of Endowment Fund	\$500,000
Annual operating expense	\$50,000
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Total: Phase 3	\$550,000

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Budget Assumptions

- Cost for land is approximately Rs700,000/acre
- Currency Conversion rate: \$1 = Rs40
- Local village residents will be employed in the construction of the facilities
- Planning consultants may include educational experts, program designers, environmental consultants, business development experts, business plan consultants, fundraising consultants
- After completion of Phase 3, interest dividends from the endowment fund, as well as community-generated revenue, will support expansion and ongoing operating expenses

Current Status

Four leaders have come together to collaborate in the development of the Sunanda Gandhi Memorial School. The design and management of the school will be overseen by this team.

These four leaders are:

1. Mr. Arun Gandhi (Executive Director, The Gandhi Institute). The Gandhi Institute, a 501(c)3 organization based in Rochester, New York, is the initiator of the program. As a fund raiser and as an organization dedicated to promoting nonviolent social, economic, cultural and religious change, it will be the controlling organization ensuring that the school and the staff abide by the principles of nonviolence as expounded by M. K. Gandhi.
2. Mr. Tushar Gandhi (Executive Director, The Mahatma Gandhi Foundation). The Mahatma Gandhi Foundation, also a 501(c)3 organization registered in India, is a sister organization of the Gandhi Institute USA and will serve as a fund raiser in India and on-site overseer of the project during construction and afterwards.
3. Mr. Arun Chavan (Retiring Founder, Verala Development Society; Former Professor of English, Kolhapur University) will serve as a project advisor during construction as a chief formulator of the school's curriculum.
4. Ms. Anuradha Bhonsle (Executive Director, AVNI). AVNI is an organization dedicated to providing food, shelter, clothing and education to the poorest children in society. It was started a few years ago by Ms. Bhonsle under the guidance of Mr. Arun Chavan. Ms. Bhonsle, a graduate of the Tata Institute of Social Sciences in Mumbai, currently oversees a small school in Kolhapur, and will serve as Principal of the Sunanda Gandhi Memorial School. It is expected that Ms. Bhonsle's current students will become part of the student body of the new school.