

Vikasana Site Visit

I. Introduction

From May 19 to 20th I visited the Vikasana organization in the village of Tarikere in the Chikmalgur district of Karnataka. The purpose of my visit was to see the newly acquired land Asha had helped purchase for the organization and review their plans for making the project self-sustainable. In addition, I also visited an organic farm to see the produce that could be produced using basic, eco-friendly farming methods. I received a presentation on the entire workings of the organization in powerpoint format which I will include as an attachment. I will not summarize facts that previous reports have already documented.

II. Organic Farm

This was the first place we visited on the morning of the 20th. We met the farmer, his family, and viewed some of his produce. He produced a wide variety of crops and products ranging from Jack Fruit to sugar to cow urine. Photos of the various items are included. Everything was organic and the only pesticides used were non-toxic and completely natural. Organic waste was collected and used for a large vermite compost and cow droppings and urine were used for fertilizer. He grew many different herbs used for various ailments like diabetes and gout. Even cow urine was supposedly a traditional remedy. The farmer had a large expanse of land which held multiple types of crops. Jack Fruit, coconuts, sugar cane, coffee, and rice/grain were all produced. He used no heavy machinery and everything was done manually. Only five or six other laborers helped him on the farm. We slogged through the muddy fields and saw the majority of the farm. He was even constructing a road with rock he crushed himself. He had a hammer for rock-crushing specially made so that he could identify if anyone else were to take it. The farm appeared very productive and the farmer was quite proud of his accomplishments. He learned the organic trade from a Vikasana training session.

III. Wah Project

I will try and address Asha Seattle's questions one by one:

1. Physical location of land and accommodation of children

The name of the project I was sent to review is the Wah Project. The name Wah has no special significance (I asked about it). It is located roughly 8km from Tarikere on a state highway on a small plot of land measured at 3.21 acres. It is very close to Dugla Pura Village, the Tarikere Taluks and bus stand. It is also walking distance to several higher education institutes. I was told Asha contributed 6.5 Lakh to the project out of about 10.5 total cost.

The land is sand mixed with black soil and is adjacent to a good sized reservoir for irrigation. There are already about 25–30 coconut trees on the plot. The fence work is done and land leveling is complete. They are currently engaged in pit digging and horticulture. Vikasana is also building a temporary “shed” (their words, not mine), which will house the children until a full-size building can be constructed. They are currently looking for funding for the house they want to build. The shed is going to be very small for the some odd 25 children and two adults that will stay there, but they say they have no other option if they want to launch the project in June. There are also two bathrooms and a water tank being built.

2. Plans for growing crops

I was told that they will try and grow a variety of crops, most of which they will be able to sell. Like I mentioned earlier, there are coconut trees there already and they plan to plant more. Additionally they want to grow mango, banana, rice and other fruits and vegetables. They say they can sell the mango, banana and coconut in the market. They also have built a small pond adjacent to the reservoir where they plan to raise Kattla and Ragu fish, which can be sold in the market as well. The rice and small vegetables will be used for the children’s food supply and will not be marketed.

3. How the project will support the bridge school

They plan to support the school through agriculture. By selling the fruit they grow they believe that within five years the project can be completely self-sufficient. In fact, they expect to make a profit. They estimate that in 2011 they will raise at least 1 lakh from ag. and that this number will steadily increase. The maximum eventual profit is believed to be 2–2.5 lakh. The yearly cost of maintaining the project was estimated at about 1.5 lakh. They did not (or could not) give me percentages for the upcoming years.

4. How documentation will be maintained

They tell me the registration process for the land is complete and the final documents are in the process of being translated. They plan to keep all logs and receipts at their main office and then once the building is complete keep them at the school itself. Every three months Santosh (Vikasana employee directly under Varghese) will send a report.

5. Additional requests

During their presentation they also gave me a list of additional work/items they will need for the project. The prices are listed in the powerpoint presentation. These include a bore well, vegetable garden, playground and miscellaneous agricultural items. The most important of these is the bore well with an estimated cost of 60,000 RS. They also want continued funding for five years until the project will be able to sustain itself.

IV. Observations

From what I saw the plot of land looks very good. It is surrounded by other farms all of which appear to be doing very well. They will not need to worry about irrigation and the proximity of the school to other important places is good. Their estimates about revenue were rather vague and I believe this is because they really don’t know how much they will actually be able to grow and earn. I asked if they had done this sort of thing before with success and they

said, yes, they have and did not seem overly concerned. They were adamant they only wanted funding for five years. Having zero experience with farming I have no idea if their estimates are accurate or not. If Asha does decide to fund one of their additional requests I recommend the bore well because it is a necessity. The playground I saw at the training center had weeds growing in it and did not appear to be used.

I am concerned about the size of the building they are in the process of making. It will be very small, particularly with multiple adults. If a new building is ever constructed there special attention will need to be paid to the quality of construction. I stayed at their training center, which is an immense building paid for by KKS Germany and the European Council and despite its modern look and design there was major water damage in the room I stayed in. (I should note that building is not totally complete).

Other than these concerns, I am pleased with their efforts. All the children I met seem very happy and curious. The members of Vikasana are highly dedicated and I have no doubt the children come first. The teachers I met were very caring and patient. Overall, it is a quality organization making steady progress on the local issues.