

Date: 01/28/2020  
By: Jyoti Gawade.

I left Pune by car at around 8:30 am and reached VA around 10:45 am. There I chatted briefly with Yogesh over tea and went out with Rahul Jagtap on a tour to show updates in the systems.

Yogesh mentioned the challenges with NIOS. Initially the fees were Rs 1600 and VA could keep a major portion while the NIOS org kept a smaller portion. Now fees increased to 8000, Need to be paid to NIOS in full initially and then half of it is reimbursed to VA after an uncertain amount of time. VA communicated to them that they won't be registering students unless the fees are reduced. The main purpose of the exam is getting third party evaluation. Secondary purpose is that the students can pursue further studies or jobs where the certificate is recognized. Since VA student's DBRT practical work speaks for themselves, recognition is not a critical issue. Their alternative is to go for a state level exam and certification.

Infrastructure updates: This year they got batteries by Selco which can be charged on solar or electricity. They can run single phase AC or DC motors. These batteries were installed by the students including 2 girls from MP. DC fans are installed which take less wattage.



Solar Batteries



Food Dehydrator

We then visited electrical section class. Rahul told that now they have started overlapping the sections a bit e.g. Electrical with Fabrication, Food processing and agriculture. Twice a week the students attend a session in the overlapped section. Since these sections are interrelated, learning a bit from the other section gives better context in the current section.



In addition to these 4 sections, students are required to attend sessions in one of the elective sections (Fablab, Soil Lab, Sewing) each week. That is helping the students hesitating to try this e.g. students weak in English hesitate to try fablab as the equipment instructions are in English. Sewing activity is creative and is liked equally by boys and girls breaking the stereotype.

VA now has CO2 welding which is superior as it has better finishing and no grinding is necessary.

I saw the nearby dam on the way. There is a pipeline from that Dam to the reservoir in VA. VA is adding gardening plots on the downslope nearing residential facilities to utilize the recycled gray water.



The new hostel has 1000 ltr water heater tank. Couple more building have 1000 ltr water heater and one with 500 ltr water heater. The old hostel had 4 boy's rooms with shared toilet. Now converted to 6 rooms each with a toilet. 2 people per room. 12 students.



They have purchased a new cow which gives 15-20 liters of milk. It fulfills VA requirements and rest is sold to dairy. Students were sent to sell milk to clients and got experience with the buyer's criteria like fat% of the milk.

DIC student engg grad Prasad Patil was in Manipal for 6 months studying plastic recycling using pyrolysis techniques. 8 runs of the cycle in a day. 70% to 90% oil yield. Oil can be fractionated later if needed. Charred byproducts can be sold. Gases can be used as fuel for the same machine.



I visited the microbiology lab which looked neat and clean.

Poultry has about 100 birds, upto 50 eggs a day. After a year, the poultry needs to be recycled. Old birds are sold to a butcher and new birds are purchased.

The Food processing kitchen is in a dome structure built inhouse and is used by students for ad-hoc cooking. Also evening snacks like paratha, rice, bakery products, eggs are given. Students can buy extra eggs. I saw bread making as on Wednesday they make bread for the evening snacks as well as Ashram. Half of the group including the instructor was wearing the head nets. Others put it on after seeing me recording them. Later I saw a student making chai in the food processing lab. He was cutting the milk packets with his teeth. I mentioned this to Yogesh who posted it in the whatsapp group of the instructor to address the issue.



I visited the new boys' hostel built from the one time funding from Asha. The underground rainwater harvesting tank has 70000 liter capacity. In addition to collecting rainwater, In summer it can be used to dump water from the water tanker. This monsoon season the rainfall was satisfactory so this summer they won't have water problems.

The student hostel has 6 rooms downstairs and 10 rooms upstairs. Each room hosts 2 students so this facility can host 32 students. There are more than 2 students in some rooms now (?) as with the old hostel hosting 12 students, the capacity is still not sufficient for the DBRT batch.

Since the plot is in slope, the upstairs rooms are on top ground level. The terrace has 2 water heaters with 500 ltr tanks.

Rooms are spacious, with fans, in-built cupboards, big glass sliding windows covered by a fine mesh screen for insects and a metal grill to protect the glass from rocks falling accidentally or thrown on purpose.

Last year 15 women were sent by the collector in Gadchiroli. They had got Mahua flowers from their area. It took some efforts to clean up dirt from the flowers. The cleaned flowers were dried in the food dehydrator and powdered. The powder was used to make mahua tea, chikki, Laddu and cake. The food processing lab has also been processing moringa powder and has successfully used it on making chikki, cake, laddu and nutrition bars. They also conducted a cake camp for the women in the village which had a good response. They have been using flaxseed oil in cookies and in chikkis. I tasted the date and peanut bars with flaxseed oil made by them. The texture was softer than the bars in the market but the taste was good.

There is a new international school opened nearby which is environment friendly and maintains high standards for quality. They have evaluated the food products at Pabal and now order from there. They send metal containers to deliver the products so as not to use plastic.

The students are working on making an electrical circuit breaker box where the master switch will be installed to power down all the facilities when needed. Currently fuse needs to be removed for any such work which will not be needed once this is installed.

Food processing lab has also installed an electric oven so the students get experience on that. They also have a DC fridge that is being operated on solar power.

They also got a desktop machine that runs on DC from Selco company. Selco batteries which can be charged on solar power as well as AC current can run all the appliances. The wiring has been done by the students.

Stitching lab is mandatory for all the students. Boys are also finding it interesting.

I visited the DIC class and interacted with the students including 3 girls. This was the new batch of DIC.



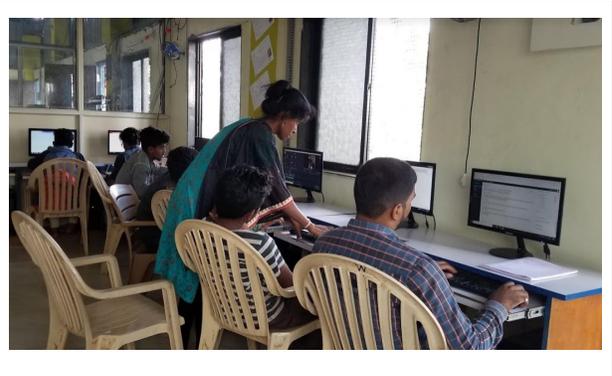
Rahul met volunteers of Parivar org in one of the events and told them about the DBRT program. They wanted him to come and talk to the students about it to see if there is any interest. They identified a group of boys to join DBRT. VA staff interacted with them over video conference. None of the boys wanted to come. Then they did the same with a group of girls. 8 girls decided to come. Those girls are from a community where parents work as labor breaking stones for new roads. Girls were in a local school and were taught sports like football. After completing their 10th standard they were destined to get married but getting admission here was a start of a new chapter for them. Those girls were malnourished when they got here and used to fall sick frequently. They were given a health checkup at KEM hospital in Pune and also a nutrition consultation. Their diet was adjusted with the help of the food processing lab. Now they are doing much better. When they went back on Diwali vacation, 6 of them came back before the holidays got over. 2 of them decided to stay back. The girls were shy in the beginning but now they are pretty vocal and their progress in learning is much better than expected. I talked to a few of them who were hesitant to talk in front of the camera but soon they started answering questions with enthusiasm and sharing their excitement. They told me they are from Mandala district and they work with a NGO called Pradhan. They have been demonstrating the learnt skills in completing client work without or with little supervision. They also participate in art club and sports club playing football and cycling etc. All DBRT students are supposed to present their weekly work in a review meeting with all the students and the teachers. That gave them confidence for public speaking as well.





They will be role models for the girls in their community and we are hoping we get more girls coming in for DBRT. It needs more involvement from another NGO who will take responsibility for the girls, accompany them to and from the campus when needed etc. VA may need to expand accommodation for girls if the number increases in coming years. Currently they have repurposed a residential complex with 1bhk flats into a girls hostel. There are 4 such units each hosting 4 girls. 8 DBRT and 8 DST\DIC girls and instructors stay there.

Wikipedia work has been going on in full swing. I chatted briefly with Komal Sambhudas who attended the course "Train the trainers" in Vizag and now is teaching at VA. They are working on digitizing articles and books by scanning the pages and running OCR software on that. Scanned pages cannot be indexed and searched. Converting them to text documents makes it easier to search.



After a round with Rahul, I chatted with Yogesh over lunch. After that I made another round alone to talk to the DBRT students and the staff.

