

# Gramin Siksha Kendra – Girirajpura Center Asha for Education, Austin Chapter

A Site Visit Report by

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I got the opportunity to visit a site project GSK – Girirajpura located at a small town Girirajpura 40 km from its district Sawai Madhopur of state Rajasthan in India. It was my first ever official site visit for Asha for Education after being a volunteer for more than 2 years in Asha-Atlanta chapter. I reached Sawai Madhopur in the evening of February 26<sup>th</sup>. I met Mr. Vishnu Gopal Meena, the academic coordinator at GSK center, which is in the district Sawai Madhopur itself, who arranged for my stay there for the night.

Next day, the community coordinator at GSK, Mr. Radhey Shyan Sain, took me to the site at 9 am in the morning, and we reached there at around 10 am after a little more than an hour of drive. First thing that I saw was the school ground and built classrooms fenced with one small gate for pedestrian entry and one big gate for vehicle entry. Other than previously existing forest service building, there were one fully built classroom (funded by Asha) and two classrooms in construction. The school ground was pretty big. There were no swings or slides, but some poles were there which could be used as a playground for sports e.g. football, badminton etc. The school had separate toilets for boys and girls.

By the time I reached there, classes had started already. So, I met Mr. Ashok Kumar Sharma who is the lead teacher at the school. He explained me the school schedule and its working in detail. All classes at school are divided into four groups: *Fulwari* (4-6 years age kids or pre-K class), *Jhilmil* (6-7 years age kids or 1<sup>st</sup> class), *Jharna* (7-8 years age kids or 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> classes), and *Sagar* (9-11 years age kids or 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> classes). I went to each class to interact with students. Details of total number of students and attendance are given in Table 1 separating the children in boys and girls to have a better idea. There were total of 5 teachers including one PTI (Physical Training Instructor) and I was told that there were total 85 registered students in school among with 52 are boys and 33 are girls. There were no books required/recommended at school for any class. Whatever teachers taught, children took notes of it and used that as their study materials. Teachers give little homework to reduce the load on children, so classes were intense and focused on learning with a lot of exercises but outside classes not much was expected from children in academic side. I felt it was a good strategy as children in the village wouldn't be able to do their homework properly due to the education level of their parents.

All classes have a mix age of children in classes. Children in all classes seemed happy and satisfied with the level of studies. They sure were very excited in interacting with me, answering my

questions and take initiatives to show their skills. Each class is given to one teacher to take a lead on its study schedule and syllabus. Pre-K class is handled by a lady teacher Mrs. Sapna Rajawat. Children had slates to write on. The teacher was teaching them how to make the meanings out of small words. She also asked a student to show me her Mathematics skills (simple addition) using a abacus. *Jhilmil* class group (elementary class) is handled by Mr. Amjad Khan. The class was able to read to a certain extent and children were very enthusiastic to answer any question asked by me or the teacher. *Jharna* class group is handled by Mr. Shalendra Kumar Singh. The students in upper classes had their own unique way to mark attendances, each child marked his/her own attendance by drawing a unique mark/symbol on the sheet which was replaced each month. Children in the class were able to read and write Hindi and English well, they were able to write a story by looking at a series of pics, and they also were able to do basic calculations in Mathematics. I was quite impressed with the intellectual level of children especially their story making skills using just a series of pictures/drawings. The upper most class group was *Sagar*. There are 8 students in the class who will be giving the 5<sup>th</sup> class board exam this year from this class group. Other than skills *Jharna* group showed, students in this class were very good at reciting English poems, reading any English paragraphs, doing Maths calculations, and knowing the synonyms in Hindi. Students were confident in answering any of my questions which impressed me the most and gave me a feeling that they should be able to do well in the board exam. I found students in all classes singing songs and poems in the last period of the school hours for which you can find a video I shared. Each class had a physical training period led by Mr. Arun Kumar Sharma, the Physical Training Instructor at school. I could see students playing football, running and playing other games during their play-period. Some students were roaming around the ground to inspect the plants as an exercise in their periods. All boys and girls were participating equally in all of these activities for which you can find some pics I have shared. Overall, students were happy, confident and satisfied with the study at the school.

*Table 1: Attendance of all classes*

| Group   | Total Number of Students |       |       | Attendance |       |       | Class Teacher       |
|---------|--------------------------|-------|-------|------------|-------|-------|---------------------|
|         | Boys                     | Girls | total | Boys       | Girls | total |                     |
| Fulwari | 11                       | 6     | 17    | 11         | 3     | 14    | Mrs. Sapna Rajawat  |
| Jhilmil | 13                       | 10    | 23    | 12         | 10    | 22    | Mr. Amjad Khan      |
| Jharna  | 14                       | 7     | 21    | 14         | 6     | 20    | Mr. Shalendra Singh |
| Sagar   | 14                       | 10    | 24    | 13         | 10    | 23    | Mr. Ashok Sharma    |
| Total   | 52                       | 33    | 85    | 50         | 29    | 79    |                     |

*\*PTI – Mr. Arun Kumar Sharma*

Other than students, I interacted with teachers. Most teachers stay within 5 km radius of the school and commute either by 2-wheeler or by foot. For a new teacher, GSK starts its salary at 8000/- with 10% raise every year which is not a lot but is much greater than what public schools pay in the area. Teachers had to stay back at school at least 2 hours after school to discuss and finalize the next day teaching schedule, so everyone was involved in determining the school dynamics to a good extent. I asked about last teacher training at GSK and I was told that all teachers have two trainings every year – a 15 days training in winters and a 30 days training in

summers. I found teachers satisfied with their jobs. They could associate themselves to the cause they are working towards and were very enthusiastic about future possibilities.

I also met with parents of the children studying at the school. Mr. Puniya Ram is a community worker at school who works towards interacting with parents at the village to encourage them to send their children to school and to solve any problem parents have with the school system. He took me to meet some parents at the village. Because it was afternoon, and all were busy in their fields, I was able to meet only a couple. Parents I met were illiterate but enthusiastic to educate their children. They seemed very happy with the school and supportive towards the education of their children. They wish the school to upper classes so that the education of their children can continue after class 5<sup>th</sup> without trouble. Right now, they have to send their kids to another village to attend schools after 5<sup>th</sup> class and they are not satisfied with the education there, also the public school in the area is too expensive for them. So, in most cases, the girls generally have to drop their education after class 5<sup>th</sup> due to unavailability of upper classes at school. I could see that parents consider the school as their own and are ready to put efforts to make it bigger which is in sync with their expectations in the matter.

In the end, I got the opportunity to meet a village elder, Shri Kalyan Hiranman Ji, who is also a founding member of GSK and father of Mr. Puniya Ram. The discussions with Hiranman ji (and Mr. Vishnu Gopal Meena later in the evening) were very helpful for me to know the history of the displaced villages, their conditions as of today and the situation of the land entitlement case. I could see that everyone in the village respected Hiranman ji and his vision towards the school. In one sentence, he was the inspiration of this project and he visions to get this school up to class 12<sup>th</sup> as his life goal. His ideas about the children education were so clear and amazing that I found myself inspired and learned during the discussions. The meeting with him was a treat for me on that day, for sure. In his own words, he requested at the end that we all should try our best to fulfil the vision an old man and he trusts the team to make it possible. It was clear that villagers' respect for him played a crucial role for the education to gain popularity in the village and not severe problems were faced to convince parents to send their children to school in this project, unlike many other projects Asha for Education funds. That also clarifies the role of the community worker at the school, which I found an important element for the success of the project.

### **Future needs and challenges**

The most crucial need the school has right now is building more classrooms as they are trying to expand the school to class 8<sup>th</sup>. Everyone including academic coordinator, teachers, community worker and parents are looking forward for the school to go for higher classes and classrooms are the main obstacle in the process. Also, many more families have started relocating nearby as the government is displacing more villages for the tiger reserve, so the number of students is increasing significantly and is expected to increase more in the next years. That is another reason that building new classrooms is at the highest priority of the project.

There are a few things that can accelerate the learning process at the school and make it a better educational institute, according to the lead teacher at the school Mr. Ashok Kumar Sharma. That included a laptop and a projector for educational movie/video screening, more books in the library and RO for purified water.

### **Conclusions**

GSK – Girirajpura is a project at its early stages but has done very well in a few years. The level of education at the school, satisfaction among students and teachers, and enthusiasm in the community are the evidence to support the first sentences. In summary,

1. The school has classes from pre-K to class 5<sup>th</sup>. The school has 3 running classrooms, a playground and separate toilets for boys and girls.
2. There are total 5 teachers at school including one PTI. At a time, there are 3-4 classes and one physical training period running in parallel.
3. Asha money has generally been used for operating expenses of the school and construction of one classroom.

Overall, the progress and the status of the project is very satisfactory, and I will wholeheartedly recommend continuing the funding for them for the upcoming years.

### **Pictures and Videos:**

Here is the link-

<https://photos.app.goo.gl/LgQ45DG1V91xjoj32>