GVT Bharuch Visit Report

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Background

Bharuch is a distinct in south-central Gujarat. I visited the Jhagadiya and Vagra blocks of the district, which have a high concentration of economically and socially underprivileged population. Low rate of child education is a big issue in these communities. Typically, both parents work on a nearby farm and require the elder child to stay at home and take care of the younger children. Parents also hesitate to send their daughters to the bigger village or town for secondary school if their village does not have one. This leads to a very high dropout rate among girls after primary school (7th grade).

GVT

Gram Vikas Trust (Village Development Trust in English) was started by Ramesh Kasondra in 2001 to help with some of these issues. GVT focuses on various social activities:
- improving child and especially girl child education
- spreading awareness about sanitation
- constructing sanitation facilities
- providing vocational training to young adults and school dropouts

Various Asha chapters (Atlanta, Central NJ, Sheffield) have sponsored GVT activities related to child education. Asha Atlanta supports the following activities:
- Bicycle program for girls: we give bicycles to girl students who need to travel to a nearby village or town to attend secondary school. This prevents a lot of girls from dropping out of school because their commute becomes quicker, shorter and safer.
- Shikshana program: Shikshana aims to improve the quality of education offered in government schools, thereby motivating children to keep coming to school. Resources are provided for various activities such as science fairs, intra class competitions, and hiring and training temporary 'para' teachers while the government fills up vacancies in teaching positions.
- Vocational training program: this program gets the major share of Asha Atlanta funding. GVT provides vocational training in the field of computers, sewing, handicrafts and beauty parlour operation to girls so that they can set up a small business of their own and become financially less dependent on others.

I visited locations for all the of these activities. Below, I describe my experiences and give recommendations.
Bicycle program

I visited a girls high school in Jhagadiya and interacted with 12 beneficiaries and their teachers. The beneficiary girls were cycling to this school from a couple of nearby villages. Most of the girls said that they wouldn't have been able to attend this school if they hadn't received the bicycle. This is because parents are often anxious about sending their daughters outside the village for long distances on foot. If a group of girls from the village has bicycles, they can commute quickly in a group, which also makes it safer.

![Beneficiary girls with their bicycles.](image)

Recommendations

- Increase spending for this program because it has a high impact and there are lots of other girls that still don't have access to bicycles for commuting to high school.
- Set aside some money for maintenance of the bicycles e.g. Cost of one in every 10 bicycles. The only complaint that I received about this program is that parents are hesitant to spread more than 10-20 rupees in case the bike breaks e.g. needs a chain replacement.

Shikshana program

I visited a primary school in Mortalav whose Shikshana program is being funded by Asha Atlanta. Overall, the kids and to be quite happy to be attending school and had developed reasonable skills for their age. They were able to perform a small skit in English and answer questions about it, and also solve age-appropriate maths problems. Note that I was not able
to visit a 'non-Shikshana’ school to see how much Shikshana specifically contributed to developing the skills of children. I met one para teacher hired to teach kindergarten kids and she seemed to have a positive impact on the kids and her government employee colleagues. This school has also participated in various science and sports competitions (although most of the science project work seemed to have been done by the teacher and not the students).

Children lined up to eat their midday meal.

Calculating a maths division problem.
Performing a skit in English.
Newspaper clippings showing children’s accomplishments in sports and science fairs.

Recommendations:

- Continue funding at current rate.
- If increase in finding is desired, funding para teachers is more impactful than funding learning activities.

Vocational training

I visited the vocational training center started by GVT in the Vagra area of the distinct. I saw the sewing and computer skills classes in action. The sewing class teaches how to sew dresses and blouses etc. while the computer skills class teaches basic computer theory, Paint and basic web navigation.
Sewing class

Computer skills class

I also had the opportunity to interact with a lady who had finished both the computer skills and beauty parlour courses, and talked to her about how she uses those skills now. She said that she earns about Rs 5000 during every marriage season by operating a small beauty parlour in her home, and finds the skills learnt in class quite useful. GVT helped her set this up by providing financial assistance to buy beauty products. She also said that the skills learnt in the computer class have not been useful to her after graduation.
Recommendations:

- Concentrate finding on more practically applicable skills. While learning about computer skills is nice, almost none of the girls that finish the course can get access to a computer afterwards. In contrast, there are cases of girls learning the other skills going on to start their own beauty parlour or sewing dresses and earning money. So I propose to shift funding from computer skills to the other 3 skills, and to the next point.
- Set up a fund that can help graduates to start their own business e.g. a fund that can buy sewing machines for greater of the sewing class, chair, mirror and beauty products for graduates of the beauty parlour class etc.

Overall recommendations

GVT is doing a good job. The bicycle program seemed to me the most impactful use of money so I propose that funding for that be increased by cutting down on funding for computer vocational training.