Gram Vikas Trust Site Visit – April 27th 2019

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Snapshot of the Visit:

Visit Summary:

- Reached GVT office (1/2 Chaitanya Park Society, Dahej Bypass Road, Bharuch, Gujarat - 392001) from Ahmedabad around 12:30 pm by car.
- GVT founder and director, Ramesh Kasondra and project coordinator, Jaypriya accompanied for the site visit to the nearby villages
- Visited Vagra vocational training center to see sewing and beautician training in action.
- Met beneficiaries in Vagra and Pahaj who were trained by GVT a few months ago.
- Went to Badalpura village to meet bicycle beneficiaries.
- Returned back to Bharuch around 3:30 pm

Impression

- Dedicated and thoughtful work by GVT on various aspects of education in villages around Bharuch.
- Stress towards self-sustenance. Serious efforts in getting the village community support education of the children and getting them to demand more out of government schools.
- Past and current beneficiaries of vocational training satisfied and happy. Some of them also passing on the learnings to their other friends and relatives.

Background

Gram Vikas Trust was founded in 2001 and its aim is to help improve the social and economic conditions of the population in drought prone Bharuch and Narmada districts of Gujarat through education.

The three GVT projects being funded by Asha are:

1. **Bicycle Program**: GVT is providing bicycles to village girls after they pass 6th/7th grade so that they can travel 2-4 kms to attend high school in the nearest town so that they do not drop out due to safety concerns and inconvenience.

2. **Para Teacher Program**: GVT employs "para teachers" who work in nearby rural government primary schools to fill regular teacher spots in case of short or long-term shortage of teachers to ensure uninterrupted, and acceptable quality of education. Asha is supporting 4 such teachers.

3. **Vocational training program**: GVT provides driving lessons, handicraft, sewing, and beautician training to underprivileged youth and girls in remote coastal villages of Vagra block of Bharuch district to make them financially independent.
Bicycle Program Beneficiary Visit.
We met three bicycle program beneficiaries in Baldalpura which is about 40 km from Bharuch. The nearest secondary school is in Ochhan village which is about 4 kms away. The parents and the girls were very happy receiving the bicycles last year as the travel time got cut down from an hour to about 15 minutes. A girl had even nicely decorated her bicycle and seemed to be taking good care of it. The girls were in 7th grade.

The girls seemed motivated to continue studying. GVT keeps track of attendance of the beneficiaries through the school and reaches out to the girls who drop more than three consecutive days without notice. The girls were encouraged to study until graduation and contact GVT in case they need any financial assistance.

Vocational Training
The Vagra vocational training center has 5 sewing machines and about 15-20 girls per batch. The classes are 2 hrs long and they go on for 2 months. The training center gives primary training compared to 9 months full course but it is enough for the girls to serve the local market. The girls can learn more later by themselves if they need to. The girls we saw were from villages 5-15 kms from the center. They travel using govt. bus. Many girls were hopeful in getting to earn or at least save money through the training.

Karishma, a past beautician training beneficiary living in Vagra, briefly visited the center to meet us on her way to her customers. She was accompanied by two more girls who were learning the trade from her. She completed her beautician training at the training center about 2 months ago and makes ₹1500 - ₹2000 a month through her work. She had three orders that day.

Rasida is a sewing trainer at Pahaj village supported by GVT. She teaches 15 and 20 student batches daily. We met Rubina, Karishma, and Yasmin who were trained by Rasida. Each of them now earns about ₹1500 - ₹3000 a month. This extra income earned by working during afternoons helps cover household expenses. The past students also learn some new designs by watching videos on their phone. The beneficiaries are now keen on taking up more work to earn more and are seeking some assistance for that as the larger production houses in cities ask for some safety deposit before they can give consignments.

Discussion with Mr. Ramesh:
GVT is planning on creating large groups of their sewing/tailoring training beneficiaries and getting them the work of making school uniforms for local schools. This will serve as a sustainable income source for the girls. Some additional training may be needed before this. GVT will also need to support some initial expense on raw material before the business becomes self-sustaining. Mr. Ramesh is hopeful of getting this started in the next couple of years.
Para-Teacher training
The schools were closed for vacation as the final exams were done, and hence people related to the para-teacher project couldn’t be met. GVT is planning on discontinuing the para-teacher program as it thinks that its new program, (in collaboration with Arti foundation) which focuses on students with difficulty in learning at the usual pace, is more meaningful. The program will hire teachers to assist such students.

Other Work by GVT
Mr. Ramesh also talked about a new project GVT has started on sanitary pads. Rural women will be trained and supported to manufacture and sell low cost sanitary pads to rural women. This addresses women hygiene as well as employment issues. The project is being funded by Desai foundation.

GVT’s initiative with Reach to Teach on promoting activity-based learning in government schools and mobilizing community to send all its kids to school has resulted in an increase in the percentage of children going to school from 55% to above 95% over past few years, and hopes to get to 100%. Out of 100 villages being assisted by GVT under this program, more than 30 villages do not need any more intervention as the communities have started taking ownership. This reflects that the impact is long lasting.

Concluding Remarks
GVT is doing almost everything in its capacity for rural development and education and it has a good hold on the local community. It is seen to be working extensively with government to make its efforts sustainable and impactful in the long term. GVT is also good at partnering with other organizations and taking variety of initiatives. I do not have any recommendations for GVT as of now.

Photos:

Bicycle Program Beneficiaries in Baldalpur
1. **Left**: Vagra Training Center with tailoring training students.  
   **Right**: Beautician training students

2. Tailoring and beautician training students showing their work at Vagra training center

3. Past beneficiaries of tailoring training showing their work