

Gram Vikas Trust Site Visit – May 26th 2018

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Snapshot of the Visit:

Visit Summary:

- Reached GVT office (A-8, GANESH Township, Near Shravan school, Shravan Chokadi, Link Road, Bharuch) from Ahmedabad around 10:20 am by car with father, Pankaj Shukla
- GVT founder and director, Ramesh Kasondra talked about his and GVT's background, current state and projects.
- Visited Vagra vocational training center to see sewing and beautician training in action.
- Met three girls in Vagra who were trained in the vocational training center last year.
- Stopped by a govt. school at Vagra to witness a meeting of 30 village coordinators employed by GVT under a Reach to Teach project.
- Stopped by at a hotel in Bharuch to witness training of GVT's teacher by Govt officials on NCERT syllabus.
- Went to Dabhal village in Jhagadia to meet bicycle beneficiaries.
- Visited GVT run Fullerton funded initiative in Bharuch on training youth on banking, English and computers, and employing them in industries.
- Left for Ahmedabad around 6:15 pm

Impression

- Dedicated and thoughtful work by GVT on various aspects of education in villages around Bharuch.
- Very motivated and dedicated staff members
- 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.

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.

Jhagadia Taluka is about 25 km from Bharuch and takes 50 minutes to reach by car. The bicycle program beneficiaries we met were in Dabhal village and the secondary school is in Rai Sing Pura which is about 5 km away. It took about 10 minutes to go from the school to the village by car. GVT has started the bicycle program in this village for the first time this year. 17 girls in grade 7th and 8th in the village were given the bicycles. All the beneficiaries in the village were gathered at the spot by the school's Social Science teacher. Parents of some girls also accompanied them. They had received the bicycles just a few weeks ago. The schools are reopening on 11th June.

The village had 100% drop-out rate for its girls after 6th grade until last year. None of the women there have studied until 12th. 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 parents said that their safety concerns for their girls are addressed well through the program.

Discussion with Mr. Ramesh:

GVT provides bicycles to the girls in only those villages where the drop-out rate for girls is more than 80%. Once they identify the villages, the primary school teachers are asked to give a list of girls in 6th grade (or the last grade in the primary school) who they feel are good and should be aided to reach the secondary school outside village. GVT field officers then visit all the listed girls to select among those based on financial background. The girls who are given the bicycles wouldn't have been able to attend the secondary school otherwise due to the distance and financial background. The ability to go to a school farther away from home builds confidence in the girls and their families to continue studies even after 12th, which also prevents early marriage.

Villagers see so many girls going to the school on bicycles daily and it becomes a norm after 5-6 years of providing bicycles. After that period, the girls who were given the bicycles first finish their schooling and give the bicycles to their siblings or other girls in the village. At this point, the villagers also become supportive to the idea of sending their girls to the school on bicycles on their own and GVT moves on to the next village.

Mr. Ramesh is also planning to work with the schools to get the schools manage handling of bicycles. Schools can retrieve all the bicycles back after the girls finish schooling and pass them on to the next batch of girls, to maximize utilization of the bicycles over years. GVT may still need to stay involved in the process of identifying the beneficiaries as the school officials may get biased and not give the bicycles to girls who actually need it.

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 5-10 kms from the center. They travel using govt. bus for which they have been given subsidized monthly pass by GVT. Most girls present then were 10th and 12th pass or fail students. Some girls were keen on learning beyond 2 months and many were hopeful in getting to earn or at least save money through the training.

We visit 2 girls in Vagra who had received sewing training last year. Taruna is a married woman whose husband is an industry daily wager. She manages to stitch a blouse per day, making around ₹150. This helps her meet all the household and personal expenses. Earlier, the family was barely making the ends meet through only the husband's salary. Taruna was very happy to have been through the training as now she can contribute to family income instead of just sitting and worrying. She gets most of her orders from the neighboring houses.

Raj Mousina Salim, also from Vagra, was from a relatively well to do family. She too went through the sewing classes last year and now she tries new things by herself and teaches other girls around her including her 4 siblings.

Trupti went through the beautician training last year and is now doing her business not far from the training center itself. She makes about ₹20,000 per month on an average. The marriage seasons are most profitable. Preparing a bride gets her about ₹7,000 to ₹10,000. She just gave 12th board exam and is waiting for the results. Mr. Ramesh encouraged her to pursue college studies and approach GVT in case she needs financial assistance in doing so.

Discussion with Mr. Ramesh:

GVT has very recently taken up Gurukul project on youth empowerment training which is being funded by Fullerton under Corporate Social Responsibility. The contract is to train 300 12th pass students in banking, english and computer in one year and at least 50% of them will be given jobs in Fullerton India company. The rest will be referred to other partner companies by Fullerton. The training period is one month, and each batch will have about 30 students. The program includes yoga, food, hostel, and coaching. (We visited the training center in Bharuch towards the end of the site visit)

Regarding the ongoing discussion on tweaking the vocational training program to target traits which make the youth more employable in the local area, Mr. Ramesh said that GVT had done a ground check 4-5 years ago and they may need to do that again to identify which skills are currently in demand by the local industries. There is clearly a gap between what skills the industries want, and the skills youth possess, hampering employment as well as industry output. GVT will do that study and identify which skill training should it take up. GVT does not need to provide all the training itself. It can direct the youth to local ITI centers and can give financial aid to those who can't afford. Mr. Ramesh also mentioned handicraft being one of the possible industry for decent income.

Para-Teacher training

The schools were closed until June 11th for summer and the para-teachers were gone for the vacation, hence a meeting with para-teachers could not happen. The school principals under whom GVT has put a couple of para-teachers were also not available then due to some district level meeting.

Discussion with Mr. Ramesh:

The para-teacher program is to aid the schools with acute shortage of teachers so that studies of the students do not get affected and the students do not drop out of school because of loss in continuity. GVT provides para-teachers to the schools with shortage of at least 2 teachers to make sure that the government teachers do not become work-free. The para-teachers are trained and paid by GVT, but they work just like regular teachers under the school's administration. Para-teachers are appointed for a period of one year but are not given to a school for the full year. They are shifted around in a block of villages based on temporary shortages due to govt. teacher resignations.

Govt. schools in remote villages struggle to hire and retain teachers as the teachers who have cleared the required exam do not like to stay in those villages as connectivity and infrastructure in those villages is generally poor. GVT has slowly reduced the number of para-teachers it provides to govt. schools over years, trying to build pressure on school administrations to get regular teachers.

Other Work by GVT

GVT has partnered with Reach to Teach, a UK based organization, on implementing best practices from schools in developed countries to rural schools. Reach to Teach worked with GVT for one year to train its staff and is now funding the program. The aim of the program is to promote activity-based learning in government schools and mobilize community to send all its kids to schools. The project seems impactful and the project manager claims that right now about 80-85% children in the targeted villages are attending schools, which they are trying to increase to 100%.

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 aware of the survey it needs to do to better tune its vocational training program. I do not have any recommendations for GVT as of now.

Photos:



1. *Bicycle Program Beneficiaries*



2. Left: Vagra Training Center with tailoring and beautician training students. Right: Tailoring training students with their work



3. Last year's tailoring and beautician training program beneficiaries (Taruna & Trupti respectively) in Vagra

ગિરાણીની અભ્યાસિક કાર્યવહી (ઓપરેટીવ વર્ક - ૩૧૪)
સીટીનંગ વર્ક ૨૦૧૭-૧૮

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વેસ્ટરન સ્કોલરશીપ પુસ્તક નામ કોલમ (૩૧૪) ની સહી

4. A record of school attendance of beneficiaries kept by GVT