

Site Visit Report - NFE (Non Formal Education Centers/Shiksha Kendras) of Seva Mandir, Udaipur

August 9, 2017

Site Visit done with the help of Atul and Arun from Seva Mandir. Atul is part of the Resource Mobilization Unit of Seva Mandir and Arun manages the Non Formal Education Centers in the Badhgaon and Girwa region. He manages 22 NFE in badgaon and 13 NFE in Girwa.

We left Udaipur around 8:30am and drove about 30 mins to reach the first NFE. During the drive I asked Atul and Arun questions about Seva Mandir and its programs. Based on their responses this is what I found out:

Seva Mandir runs several programs in the villages. At the time of the visit they were actively working with about 1200 villages in Southern Rajasthan. From bal sakhhi (monitoring health of infants) to Dai maa (helping deliver babies) to vaccination camps to balwadi (pre-school for toddlers) to SHG- a cooperative bank (small micro loan facilitation within village groups) to Bal Pratinidhi (youth leaders in villages) to Natural Resource Development to Shiksha Kendras(Non Formal Education Centers) to Residential Learning Camps (for older children who never went to school), Seva Mandir believes in a holistic approach to providing solutions to the villagers.

NFE - Non Formal Education Centers (Shiksha Kendra)

We talked about NFE and how they managed NFE's. According to them Government schools were present in most villages closer to the city. The bigger problem was in villages in remote locations. We talked about Kothra block of villages - about 2 hours drive from Udaipur. They said that a lot of villages in that block were not accessible by road. So when Arun travels to Kothra, he goes to a certain point in a jeep, then has to take a bike for some distance and in some cases treks the last few miles. Monitoring such NFE's is a challenge.

They also said some villages are divided into hamlets - one on this side of the mountain and the other on the other side of the mountain. If both hamlets have about 25 kids, they can both be eligible for an NFE. One of the recent studies they did, they found that in the villages Seva Mandir works in, 90% of the children go to school. But in the villages Seva Mandir has no presence in, only 17% of the children go to school. The challenges are multifold - not only do they need schools, but they also need to motivate parents and children to attend schools. They mentioned that lot of people from Garasia communities in villages bordering Gujarat worked at BT cotton farms. Their children would also travel with them and pick cotton. These kids would not be sent to school as it was more lucrative for the families that they work. They then have only one option - the residential camps.

BADGAON Block

Badgaon has a mix community - gameti, mina and adivasi (tribes living in the jungle of aravali hills). Teenage pregnancies and polygamy are prevalent - leaving women to fend for themselves and their kids. Seva mandir has broken Badgaon into five zones wherein each zone has a zonal office. We passed the Dhar Madaar zonal office. Roads were broken and due to rains part of the road was under water.

NFE at BADHANGA village, GIRWA tehsil, Badgaon Block

Our first NFE was in Badhanga village. According to Arun, mostly adivasi's live here. There are about 150-200 homes with some homes over the mountain(2 km walking range). There is a government school a few kms from our NFE but both gentleman said that the teachers at the government school did not come everyday. They would come once or twice a week. So the villagers gave Seva Mandir a small one room building to setup an NFE.

Seva Mandir also dug up a tube well /hand pump behind the NFE, which is the main source of fresh water for the villagers living close by.

The teacher who manages this NFE is from the village itself. Her name is Pushpa. The class size is 28 with three groups/levels. Little kids start at level C and then slowly move to level A. The goal being to make them ready for middle school (government school). Pushpa said the timings were 7am to 1pm and in the summers they did only 4 hours due to the intense heat. The classroom was sparsely decorated but the children seemed to have school bags, books, writing material etc. There were story books on the rack and Pushpa was using a set of cue cards with animal pictures on it. She would pull one card up to level c students and they would identify the animal and list the traits. The class participation was outstanding. Children recited poetry and sang some songs for us. They seemed like a really motivated and good group of kids who had been nurtured and taken care of.

I took some pictures and videos of the children. (below link)

Then we walked around the village. The houses were built with mud and clay and had thatched roofs. There were some brick houses too spread out in the middle. We stopped at one of the homes that was renting the balwadi room to Seva Mandir.

As we were walking back from the village to our car, we saw Pushpa and her students on the road going towards the village. She explained they were taking a tea break.

NFE at Dhar Madaar, GIRWA tehsil, Badgaon Block

Our second NFE visit was at Dhar Madaar village. There are two hamlets Badi Dhar and Choti Dhar with 80 homes each. Badi Dhar has brahmin, jain, rajput and Choti Dhar has adivasi.

This NFE was setup in a room next to the village temple. It was furnished better with more rugs on the floor, more books, two teachers and a bigger group of kids. There were many A level kids sitting outside working on complex math problems. It seemed like a more intense program with different levels of classes and student participation. We could not spend more time due to constraints. But the overall impression was of a well run NFE.

While we were there an older gentleman from the village came to Atul and complained about the NFE needing repair due to rain damage. That is how I learned that the ownership of NFE is always of the villagers. They find a room/building and nominate someone from the village to get teacher training and Seva Mandir facilitates all this. This setup ensures accountability. Seva Mandir will help with small maintenance from time to time. But ownership and accountability rests with the villagers.

The teacher here told us how they take three pictures a day of the whole class. They showed me the camera with pictures. The timestamp on the camera is proof that the class was in session full day. At the end of the month, the memory card of the camera is deposited with the closest zonal office. They then review the timestamps and pay the teacher salary for the days the school was in session.

These teachers are not qualified. Most of them have only done 9th or 10th grade. But they are motivated to work with children and stay in their village. Seva Mandir trains them and continuously guides them as they work with the students.

Here is a link to all the photos and videos taken during the site visit.

<https://photos.app.goo.gl/qEwxbTLtH6aBKORj1>

Thank you

Naheed Quaisar

Asha For Education- Danbury Chapter