Site visit by Melli Annamalai, Asha Boston, August 11, 2016

VTTRC continues its work of training teachers in this remote area in the middle of a forest (it is located in a campus adjoining VTCL, the Viveka Tribal Center for Learning). VTTRC is a D.Ed college. The students need to complete PUC before they can apply. They have had the highest enrollment (number of students) in Karnataka in recent years. Last year they had 34 students enrolled.

This is a tribal area, and in addition to VTCL that was founded and is run by SVYM, there are primary government schools in the area for tribal children. These are “Ashram schools” (residential schools specifically for tribal children) run by the Social Welfare department (not by the education department). This means that the government appointed teachers do not have the advantage of the training programs organized by the education department (deficient though they are). The Social Welfare department does not have the expertise in running a good school. Also, there is a severe shortage of teachers both because of the location and because of inefficiencies of the government administration.

After primary school the tribal children move on to upper primary and high schools that are also attended by non-tribal children, and the difference in the level of education of the tribal children is painfully obvious.

A good goal is to create a pipeline for VTTRC graduates to help teach at these ashram schools, to improve the teaching at the ashram schools. These ashram schools are in the tribal areas around VTTRC. The ashram schools have a high number of vacancies, which are half-filled with temporary (contract) teachers. About 30-40% of the 53 contract teachers are VTTRC graduates. It gives VTTRC a real opportunity to influence the ashram schools in the area.

VTTRC students are all from rural areas, typically from government PUC colleges. 90% are girls. They are not used to having their own voices. They are not used to having their own opinions. They also tend to be weak in subject matter content and struggle with fundamentals in Math and other subjects. Many are PUC Arts graduates, so haven’t studied Maths and Science after class X. All of this has to be addressed in VTTRC. Sometimes Ramkumar, the education coordinator, feels that two years (the standard length for D.Ed) is not enough. The budding teachers program has helped - VTTRC students work in real classrooms with VTCL, working closely with the teachers there.

During my visit I spent time looking at the Teachers Learning Center (TLC), a resource center. This is funded by Oracle. VTTRC has created this resource center to help ashram school teachers. The resource center has various materials to help teachers when they teach, and also conducts workshops for the ashram school teachers. The resource center is also useful for the D.Ed students in the VTTRC classes.

I toured the various classrooms at VTTRC. I then addressed the D.Ed students. We discussed what they were learning, and I asked them whether they visited the library at VTCL, stressing the importance of reading. Last year, they had not shown much enthusiasm about voluntarily going to the VTCL library, but this year there were some nods, they said they use the library. VTCL has a good library and is a short walk from the VTTRC campus. I reiterated the importance of reading, asking questions, understanding...
the world around them. These would be the valuable aspects of their time at VTTRC. The students asked me several questions, including why I lived in the United States.

I also addressed the staff of VTTRC. We had a good discussion on education and learning, and I highlighted the key goal of education – learning how to learn. I explained how some other projects had achieved success in this by focusing on reading books and discussions on various topics, and once the students learned how to learn, they could go far in life. I also explained about Asha for Education (in response to questions).

Earlier the VTTRC staff gave me a presentation on various activities throughout the year.

Resource Center
Meeting with some of the students