Site Visit Report Gramin Vigyan Vikas Samiti (GRAVIS)

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I visited several villages which have projects funded by Asha via GRAVIS. I went with Sanju-ji from the main GRAVIS office in Jodhpur. We stayed in a village about 1.5 hours away from Jodhpur and used that as our homebase for the 3 days.

Bhakari Village

Village Development Committee

The Bhakari Village Development Committee meets twice monthly. They are 50% men, 50% women and have 10 members. They discuss the needs of the village and relay any significant needs to GRAVIS to see if funding is possible. Some examples of family needs include: electricity problems, taanka building, or new home construction. The committee president is Damaram-ji and the other members of the committee were present as well.

Women’s Self-Help Group

Bhakari village has a women’s self-help group which maintains loans within the village families. Ten women meet monthly and bring INR 20 to each meeting. They pool these funds into a village loan bank and disperse them to families in need. At present they have INR 33,000. Examples of small loans may be: INR 1,000 for school supplies, small medical expenses, etc. Examples of large loans
may be INR 15,000 for starting a goat or stitching business. Families receiving loans then slowly pay them back to the village bank.

**Taankas**

Bukhari village built two taankas in 2021-2022.
Each taanka holds 20,000 L of water collected during the monsoon rains. This water supports a family of 4-5 and 2-5 goats for 6-8 months. Families use this water for cooking, drinking, and washing. Taankas significantly change the life of families because they give easy access to water (right outside their home) and alleviate women and girls from the daily task of carrying water. In this village, women and girls have to walk 5-10 km daily to collect water and carry it back on their heads.

One family was at home when I visited and I had a short talk with the mother, Rekha-ji (through an interpreter). I asked her, how is her life different now versus before she had the taanka? She said that her life is much easier now. Before she had to carry water for hours each day. Now she spends her days working and earning more money for her family. She also used to have head pain from carrying the water and how she does not. In addition, her daughter is now able to go to school because she is not helping with the water. I could see that she was very thankful to have this taanka right outside her door.
A Different Village

Vision Center
In one of the villages, I visited the site of a monthly pop-up medical clinic. It is held at a government school and once a month a medical team from Jodhpur visits to provide aid and advice. The team gives medicines, administers simple treatments, and gives referrals for specialists in Jodhpur for more serious medical problems. People in the nearby villages know that they can come to this clinic with their medical issues. Before this clinic, people were reluctant to get medical help because it required them to travel far and was unfamiliar. Now this clinic is becoming well known and people feel comfortable coming to get help for problems they are experiencing.

I met two women whom the medical team had referred to hospital for eye problems in 2022. One had a stye in her eye and the other woman had eye surgery. Both were referred to the GRAVIS hospital in Jodhpur and received treatment there.

Minokidhani Village

School

In Minokhidani village I visited a school. It has two classes: a lower (Pre-K through 2nd) and an upper (3rd through 5th). Students attend school Monday through Saturday but don’t attend in the rain. Teachers are paid INR 4,000-7,000/month and are local women who have their teaching certificates. The nearest government school is 4-6km away so students in the village attend this school through 5th and then are old enough to walk to the government school.
During COVID, Teachers went hamlet to hamlet and taught small groups of children so that they could keep learning. Now students are slowly returning to school but they are not back to their pre-COVID enrollments yet.

When I visited the students were studying Hindi (lower) and Maths (upper). Teachers asked the students to perform songs and poems they had memorized, which they did very nicely. One issue I observed was that reading levels are not as high as they should be. I spoke with a girl in class 4 (the teacher told me she was the brightest girl in the upper class and I could see that she was very bright). I asked her to read some words to me in Hindi and she could read some but struggled with some fairly simple 4-letter words. I mentioned this to Sanju-ji who said that they don’t want to push children too much because they want them to enjoy school and to come back each day. This literacy struggle seems like an issue that should be addressed as part of Asha’s mission to provide education. I have mentioned this to Sandeep Nain and Jasmine Sandhu (Project Stewards of GRAVIS) as an action item on which to follow up.
Samrao Village

Women’s Center

In Samrao village, I visited a women’s center which provides training to girls from 4th – 12th classes from local villages. Girls come to the center to take supplemental classes in: personal hygiene, confidence (removing hesitation about speaking in public), personal goals (thinking about what they would like to do in their lives), and stitching. The center also distributes health kits to girls from 8th – 12th classes in nearby villages. Several of the girls from the center have passed on to university and would like to become teachers. Some parents may not feel that attending classes at the center is important for their daughters, or may worry that it is too far a distance from their homes. Teachers and classmates at the school encourage everyone to stay engaged and to pursue their dreams.
Former trainees from the center who are now at university
Caretakers from GRAVIS homebase, from which we visited the villages, who made amazing Rajasthani food : )