

Vision of Gram Vikas – Education

Gram Vikas is currently working with approximately 20,000 families in rural areas of Orissa in an integrated development effort. In order to have an impact on the process of development in India, we believe that it is necessary to create sustainable models which can be replicated by other non-government organisations and government. To prove the feasibility of models and to show impact, it would be necessary for Gram Vikas to work with around 100,000 families consisting of around 500,000 people in Orissa by 2011. This would approximately be 1% to 1.25% of the projected total population of Orissa then.

Gram Vikas defined its mission and strategy in 1994. Following on from this process, the organisation has decided that the following areas should be the focal points of our strategy to achieve our mission by 2011.

- a. Formalised education for all children
- b. Ensuring sustainable secure livelihoods for at least one adult from each family.
- c. Adequate and acceptable housing for all families combined with improved environmental sanitation for all villages.
- d. Concentrating on preventative health specifically in relation to vaccination and immunisation and infectious diseases such as TB, leprosy and reproductive health for women.
- e. Continuing our existing programmes which are targeted at empowerment and community mobilisation.
- f. Making women the centre of all development efforts.
- g. Infrastructure development of villages to improve the quality of life in villages.
- h. Creation of employment opportunities in villages.
- i. Creation of a large enough corpus fund in each village, which will pay for all common services and maintain the institutions and infrastructure created.

Education

Gram Vikas' education programme to date has been based on providing at least minimal levels of literacy for all children through non-formal education. Intelligent children have been enabled to continue their education by attending one of our two residential schools. This process has largely been successful.

Our aim of imparting at least minimal literacy to children has been more or less achieved. However, in order to have a long-term sustainable impact in terms of literacy and education, it is necessary for Gram Vikas to focus on more formalised education post standard three. Only through formalised education will children be ensured alternative forms of secure livelihoods into the future and have equal opportunities as mainstream society.

Gram Vikas feels that it cannot be passive onlookers to witness any longer that the children we are working with are denied access to basic formal education. We now believe that we can wait no longer for the government to make accessible to children their basic right - that is to be able to reach a minimal standard of recognised education. If the government cannot

do it, it is the role of non-government organisations like Gram Vikas to prove that it can be done - the children's rights at least to education can be met.

The continued destruction of forests and with this the tribals way of life will result, in all likelihood, in many of the children with whom we are working becoming child labourers. Hopefully if educational facilities are in place, parents will be more easily convinced of the benefit of educating their children for a better future.

Our strategy for establishing formalised education structures in the villages we are presently working with is three fold :

- village based formal education
- day schools, where feasible, for children of a cluster of villages
- residential schools for children from especially isolated villages.

Village Based Formal Education

The best situation is for children to be educated whilst staying in their home (village) environment. Our strategy for ensuring this will be to place a married couple in those villages which have at least five school aged children.

Both of the couple will have at least high school proficiency and will be responsible for imparting formalised education to children of the village in which they are staying. They will teach children up to 5th class level and as teachers capabilities are enhanced, teach up to standard seven level, wherever necessary. Gram Vikas will give each couple training on teaching techniques in relation to the curriculum.

To ensure that children receive proper education, Gram Vikas will give a monetary incentive to the couples besides a retention fee of a fixed amount every month. A monetary incentive will be given to couples for each child that passes onto the next standard at the yearly examinations. A disincentive will be in place for any child that does not pass into the next standard. There will also be an incentive to each child, who can pass the exams.

The other task of this couple will be to impart literacy education to adults of the village. Literacy will be in terms of elementary reading and writing and arithmetical calculation. Again, incentives will be in place for the number of adults which become literate per year and as they progress as neo-literates and then become fully literate. Therefore, the couple has the possibility of earning more if they perform well and should they not perform well they stand the possibility of their income becoming less. The couple will be responsible for all developmental and promotive activities in the village and as per their performance in these spheres incentive structures will be built in.

Day Schools for Children of a Cluster of Villages

Gram Vikas will set up middle elementary day schools for children of a cluster of villages. As the children are older, they will be able to travel to these neighbourhood schools and attend classes. When the children reach standard seven, these schools could gradually be upgraded upto standard XII.

In isolated villages, where it will not be possible for students to travel to middle schools, the teacher couple would be such that they can teach the children upto class VII. Arrangements, then have to be made for these students to attend high school.

Residential Schools

Gram Vikas is currently running two residential schools to enable children from isolated villages, where the households are less than five to study. Any sort of educational effort in these villages is not at all cost effective and hence the only option is residential schools. One residential school per project has to be started to address the educational needs of scattered isolated households.

In all schools, vocational training and land based activities will be an integral component of education.

Ways will have to be examined and experimented with to take those children who do well beyond high school levels, so that these communities develop their own professionals, experts, educators, administrators and entrepreneurs.