Gram Vikas

TRANSFORMING FUTURES:
Gram Vikas's Role in Intergenerational Development

FULL REPORT

Learning from the Past

In 2022-23, Gram Vikas initiated the "Learning from the Past, Reading the Present, Planning for Future" (LPRPPF) initiative to reflect on its legacy and chart a roadmap for the future. This four-phase exercise began with workshops to frame hypotheses about how change happens, followed by in-depth reviews and community interactions. We commissioned three independent studies that evaluated the intergenerational outcomes of Gram Vikas's education programme, the resilience of self-managed water and sanitation systems, and advancements in production systems in rural Odisha. The study findings document Gram Vikas's programmes, highlighting evidence and narratives that illustrate its role in fostering long-term social change in Odisha.

Full Report
Transforming Futures: Gram Vikas's Role in Intergenerational Development

July 2024

Nous Consultants conducted the study and authored the report. Neelima Khetan and Chandan Sarma led the study team, supported by Arjun Shatrunjay, Rukmini Datta, and Jayapadma RV.

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Gram Vikas commissioned this study as part of its "Learning from the Past, Reading the Present, and Planning for the Future'' (LP-RP-PF) exercise. This report, one of three in the Learning from the Past series, examines the Gram Vikas Residential schools' role in driving intergenerational change and impacts on education, livelihoods, and health, especially for women.

Gram Vikas is a rural development organisation partnering with Odisha's marginalised communities since 1979, driving sustainable change and impacting the lives of over five million people in more than 8,000 villages.

www.gramvikas.org

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FOREWORD

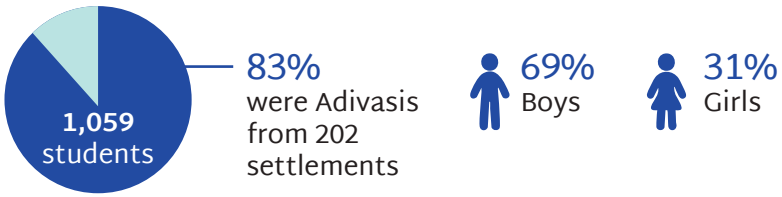
When one looks back over Gram Vikas's 40+ years of partnership with rural communities, one cannot but see the far-reaching changes that have taken place in society. One wonders, then, what the nature of this 'intergenerational change' has been. Gram Vikas was curious about this change. What does it tell us about the nature of intergenerational change, and what stances, including our own, have helped?

To examine these questions, Gram Vikas initiated Learning from the Past, Reading the Present, and Planning for the Future (LP-RP-PF) as an organisational learning exercise.

Gram Vikas believes it has been a friend to this process of change in communities; its legacy is one of development that lasts over a period of time: deergsthayi vikas, as it was referred to in our opening workshop on the LP-RP-PF exercise, with Gram Vikas colleagues and long-time associates.

To unpack this further, the exercise focused on the experiences of the Gram Vikas schools. Nous Consultants undertook this study.

The study covered three schools. The first-decade cohort comprised:



The team conducted 116 telephone interviews, 61 in-depth interviews (44 with Gram Vikas alumni and 17 with non-Gram Vikas alumni), and eight community meetings. It examined three generations:

- Gen-0: the parents of children reaching school-going age around the time the Gram Vikas schools were established;
- Gen-1: children who attended Gram Vikas schools or other schools during the same period; and
- Gen-2: children of Gram Vikas school alumni who are studying or have studied in Gram Vikas schools.

The study shows that changes in education have indeed been intergenerational. The educational attainment and consequent occupational profiles of the generation reaching school-going age in 1993–96 and 1986 in Koinpur and Konkia, respectively, appear to differ radically from those of the previous generation.

The element of 'parivesh' mentioned in the study refers to the programme's emphasis on building a child's personality. Besides reading and writing, it focuses on games, art, music, and expression. The Gram Vikas School graduate is distinctive in her or his behaviour from other children, and that itself has created more interest in and demand for a Gram Vikas education.

The study illustrates this through the reference to the first batch of Class 10 students to pass out of Kankia School. The Class of 1999 comprised 40 boys and girls, 17 of whom cleared the exam, and all of them have government jobs today. This was the class of Dasrathi Malik, with whom the study team met. It was a class that grew alongside Gram Vikas, with a new class added each year.

Gram Vikas responded with interventions in education, despite having limited expertise and skills in the field at the time. It required conviction in capacity building and a process of building on the positive results of the first few years, aided by a wider acceptance of formal education among the communities it worked with.

We examined the education programme to test our hypothesis that Gram Vikas initiatives are often ahead of their time. Was our education programme indeed ahead of its time when viewed in the context of the educational scenario prevailing in the country at that period? The study brings some aspects of this to our attention.

Firstly, all the students interviewed were first-generation learners. The study covered 15 per cent of the cohort from the first decade of each school. Gram Vikas built trust in children, encouraging them to come to school and stay in school, at a time when enrolment was low and dropout rates were high. In the first decade, Gram Vikas schools had less than 10 per cent dropouts.

The schools provided a foothold, an opportunity to diversify students' dreams, and an entry to explore other possible trajectories. The journey of Madan Mohan Nayak illustrates this; he studied at a Gram Vikas school for only two years, from classes 5 to 7, but it set him on the path to continue his education.

While this study is rooted in the experience of the educational interventions of Gram Vikas, it is as much about a long view of social change. It shows that this process of change is about values and behaviour change. It is about dignity—being able to think about the future with a greater sense of agency in one's life. The cases show that, in the process of this change, a little support at a time of vulnerability goes a long way in bringing about change.

Intergenerational development seems to be a process that is not a one-time fix. Development outcomes are not the delivery of something but rather somewhat unknown trajectories on which individuals and groups travel. These trajectories develop through the interplay of various factors. Lakshmikant Malik's journey illustrates this: he studied, dropped out, got appointed as shiksha sahayak, and is now a teacher.

The outcomes also seem to be complex, changing, and sometimes contradictory. Nivedita Majhi illustrates this: "The school has enabled me to be an independent person. My schooling inspired my sister to work hard in her academics. Many small Adivasi girls became serious about their studies." Nivedita herself went on to the nationals in weightlifting and now works as an Anganwadi worker in her village.

Perhaps Gram Vikas's role in intergenerational change could be understood as timely and adequate support at a time of vulnerability—like a hand supporting a candle when faced with a strong wind—important in helping to tide over difficult times. Gram Vikas can continue to see itself as an ever-standing, all-weather friend whom communities can count on.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This has been a very different assignment for all of us who were part of this study. It is not often that external consultants are invited to come in and listen to what communities and individuals have to say, without any lens of assessment or evaluation, and then to examine something as long-term and comprehensive as intergenerational change.

Most of us involved in development work know that real, deep-seated change takes a long time. But not often do we come across programmes that have continued in more or less the same form, in the same location, and over several decades. Gram Vikas's residential schools offer just such a space for learning about long-term change processes.

We spent the hottest part of the summer of 2023 visiting villages in Ganjam, Gajapati, and Kalahandi. Looking back, however, the memories that endure are not of the sweat and heat but of the people who opened their hearts to us, sharing their stories of success and, at times, struggle. Our deepest gratitude goes to each of those remarkable people we met.

Two of the study team members knew no Oriya, and one could just about get by. The three schools and their teachers were our guides through this unfamiliar territory—not just of language, but in multiple ways. They knew almost every student and their families, and any village we wanted to visit. They could instantly navigate through their network of current students to help us reach the alumni we were looking for.

Quite apart from all the help they provided in conducting this study, every meeting with the school alumni was a testament to the transformational power of good education. The dedication and respect that Gram Vikas teachers command among the villagers was uplifting to see.

Finally, we owe a very big thank you to the Gram Vikas Board for commissioning such a pioneering study, to the entire executive team led by Liby Johnson (especially Sarat Mohanty, Debendra Nath Dash, Arabinda Swain, Prakash Jena, Rama Chandra Nayak, Sharbani Chattoraj, Apurva Ghugey, and Sangita Patra) for their trust, transparency, and support; and, of course, to Vartika Jaini for constantly helping us interpret the intent and stay on course.

While everyone at Nous was partially involved in this study, it was front-ended by Arjun Shatrunjay, Chandan Sarma, and Neelima Khetan, with Rukmini Datta and Jayapadma providing much-needed backend support. Thanks once again from all of us for entrusting us with this unique exploration.

Nous Consultants

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Gram Vikas completed four decades of work in 2019 and has since undertaken a wide and deep internal exercise to reorient its work, based on changes in context and by taking stock of its achievements, experiences, and lessons learnt over the previous four decades.

This report presents our findings from the study on the outcomes of Gram Vikas's efforts in bringing intergenerational change, viewed through the lens of its education programme.

The study examines Gram Vikas's perspective of the education programme being 'ahead of its time' within the context of the geography of Gram Vikas's work. The 'ask' under the study, therefore, translated into two parts:

Chronicling: A detailed chronicling of Gram Vikas's education initiatives from their inception to the present day.

Contextualisation: Locating these chronicles within the educational context prevalent in the feeder areas of the three schools in the first decade after their establishment.

The study also delved into Gram Vikas's belief that a generational leap took place for those born in the 1980s and 1990s in the villages where Gram Vikas worked (Gen-1). The circumstances of Gen-1 changed due to choices made by the previous generation with respect to their education. Consequently, the life choices for Gen-1 broadened, and their networks expanded, resulting in far-reaching changes in these villages.

This part of the study relied on the collection of primary data, especially qualitative insights gathered through deep listening and conversations at the individual and community levels. The individuals we interviewed and the communities we visited were ultimately a purposive and feasible sample.

The studies of Gram Vikas High School, Kankia, Ganjam; Mahendra Tanaya Ashram School, Koinpur, Gajapati; and Gram Vikas Shikshya Niketan, Kumudabahal, Kalahandi, were undertaken in 2023 to assess the trajectories, relevance, contributions, and impact of the schools.

The need and the response

The education intervention of Gram Vikas was part of an integrated approach to address the educational and developmental needs of Adivasi communities in rural Odisha. Through community engagement and adaptive strategies, Gram Vikas enabled access to quality education and holistic development, thereby laying the foundation for better life outcomes for children from these communities.

The need for literacy came to the fore in the late 1970s, when Gram Vikas volunteers were mobilising Adivasi communities against exploitative moneylenders and liquor merchants in the Kerandimal region of Ganjam, Odisha. It became clear that without education, such social movements were impossible to sustain. Gram Vikas started adult literacy classes in many villages, but there were no schools for children. The remote locations of Adivasi habitations and the largely dysfunctional status of government schools pushed Gram Vikas to reconsider its approach.

According to the 1981 census reports, literacy among Odisha's Adivasi population as a whole was around 14%, and a mere 4.8% among Adivasi women.

In Digapahandi Block, where Gram Vikas worked, the rates were 11% and 3%, respectively. The work on education was a necessity, not an option.

At the time, education in rural Odisha, like much of the rest of the country, was plagued by limited access and poor infrastructure.

As late as 1990,

- **60%** government schools lacked drinking water facilities
- **90%** did not have toilet facilities

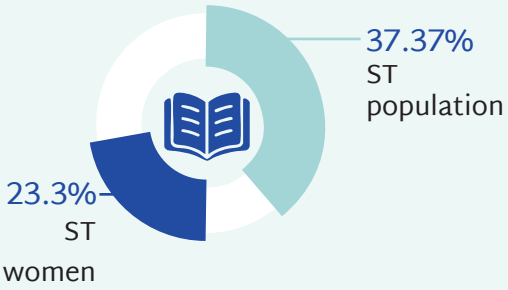
Gram Vikas persuaded the local community to understand the importance of education and helped set up a community institution, the Kerandimal Education Trust (KET), in 1982. The community decided to start a school in Kankia village. Children from their own village and nearby villages began attending this school. Each village took responsibility for feeding the school's children for a day. Teachers were selected from their own villages, trained by Gram Vikas, and a staff member was appointed to look after the school. Initially, these makeshift arrangements worked well, although the process of regular feeding and providing accommodation was challenging.

Thus, KET bought a small plot of land and set up the Kerandimal Middle Education School. Simultaneously, Gram Vikas started schools in all the villages they worked in as non-formal education (NFE) centres. Local facilitators were selected, trained, and paid a monthly salary of ₹50.

This worked up to Class 3, but after that, given the local resources, it was difficult to run village-level schools.

KET purchased more land and started classes up to Class 7 in the newly conceived residential school. Gram Vikas appointed staff and received permission from the government to run a middle school in 1986. This then became a formal school, with the NFE schools in the villages becoming feeder schools. Following government permission in 2002 to run high-school classes, the school came to be known as the Gram Vikas High School (GVHS), Kankia.

In 2001, the literacy rate among the ST population of Odisha was 37.37%, with 23.3% among the ST females.



With focused interventions through the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, literacy efforts received a boost, and by 2011, the literacy rate of STs in Odisha rose to 72.9% (compared to 52.2% at the national level), with the ST female literacy rate at 60.9% (against 41.2% nationally).

However, according to the 2005 Annual Status of Education Report, more than 67% of rural students in the 7–14 age group were unable to read a 'story' text with some long sentences of standard 2-level difficulty or divide a 3-digit number by a 1-digit number (Level 2). The overall Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) levels of students in schools presented a rather discouraging picture.

Teacher attendance was about 74% in primary schools; when middle schools were included, it fell to 64.5%.

The shortage of teachers was another factor: the percentage of schools with all teachers present for Classes 1–5 was 45%, and for Classes 1–8 was 26%.

Even as government interventions in education grew in Odisha, access to good quality and holistic education remained out of reach for large parts of the rural population, especially Adivasis.

In the course of working with other Adivasi communities across the state, Gram Vikas recognised similar challenges in education and set up three more residential schools: Mahendra Tanaya Ashram School (MTAS) in Koinpur village of Rayagada block in Gajapati district in 1992, Gram Vikas Shiksha Niketan School (GVSN) in Kumudabahal village of Thuamul Rampur block in Kalahandi in 1998, and Gram Vikas Vidya Vihar in Rudhapadar village, Jagannath Prasad block, Ganjam in 2001. These schools went up to Class 7, after which children had the option of either moving to the school at Kankia or enrolling in a government school[1].

[1] From 2023, MTAS Koinpur and GVSN Kalahandi have also extended classes to high school.

How were Gram Vikas schools different?

Gram Vikas's residential schools provided immersive educational experiences that incorporated both academic and life skills. The dropout rates in Gram Vikas's schools, after the first few years, were less than 5 per cent by the end of the first-decade journey in each of the schools, which was much lower than those of students in other schools who came from similar socio-cultural backgrounds during that period.

Gram Vikas schools did not just wait for students to enrol; they took education to the children. The Balwadi centres and non-formal education programme, operating in villages where Gram Vikas worked, showed a clear departure from conventional schooling. Special efforts were made to enrol children who had lost either one or both parents at an early age. The focus on sports, art, music, dance, and skills, including agriculture and carpentry, helped students evolve as better, well-rounded individuals.

The flexibility and adaptability to cater to the unique circumstances of communities, and the emphasis on holistic learning, were ahead of their time in many ways.

By involving the local community, particularly in and around the residential school periphery, in decision-making processes—from the construction of school infrastructure to teacher recruitment—Gram Vikas fostered a sense of ownership and commitment. Additionally, its emphasis on basic infrastructure created a safe environment for children, particularly girls. This critical investment in infrastructure—from drinking water (through gravity-flow systems), toilets, and school libraries—stands out at a time when most schools in the country, particularly in rural areas, were grappling with infrastructure issues.

Most importantly, however, what sets the Gram Vikas schools apart is the familial atmosphere created within the schools, thanks to the efforts of the teachers. From caring for the children's medical needs to building close relationships through activities such as gardening, singing, dance, and art, and, on occasion, protecting the children from abusive families, the teachers ensure that the children feel safe and protected within the confines of the school.

Access to uninterrupted learning and good-quality education resulted in consistently high pass rates. The low dropout rates underscored the efficacy of the schools, given the context of the area and the low literacy levels of the community. In receiving government scholarships, children from Gram Vikas schools consistently outperformed their peers in other schools. While in the initial years, Gram Vikas workers had to motivate parents to send their children to school, the demand for Gram Vikas schools has grown year-on-year, despite improvements in government schools in these areas.

		Enrolment at the Start			Current Enrolment (2022-23)		
	Est.	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
Gram Vikas High School, Kankia, Ganjam	1982	8	2	10	348	209	557
Mahendra Tanaya Ashram School, Koinpur, Gajapati	1992	55	14	69	329	196	525
Gram Vikas Shiksha Niketan, Kumudabahal, Kalahandi	1998	38	13	51	187	162	349

What changes did the schools trigger?

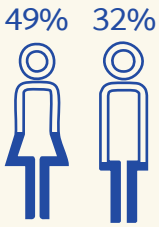
EDUCATION AND LIVELIHOODS TRAJECTORIES

The longitudinal and telephonic interviews, covering 15 per cent of the first-decade cohorts of the three schools, shed light on the enhanced academic achievement. All of them were first-generation learners who came to the Gram Vikas school because there was no school near their village, and their parents, though they themselves had not gone to school or, at most, studied at the primary level, knew and trusted Gram Vikas and were willing to send their children to a residential school. Many villages did not have road access or electricity until well into the 2000s.

Gram Vikas's close connections with the community ensured highly effective targeting in terms of bringing the most vulnerable children to the school, thus at least opening a new pathway for them.

Almost all the alumni spoke highly of the 'padhai ka mahaul' in the Gram Vikas schools, where teachers took the trouble to ensure that children used the after-school hours to catch up on their homework or solve difficulties. Given that most of these children came from homes where the parents had barely studied, this kind of environment and support made a huge difference to their learning outcomes and, more importantly, to the children staying on and not dropping out.

The addition of Class 10 in GVHS, Kankia, in 1999 was a game changer; 40 children sat for the board exam in the first year, of whom 17 cleared it. The truly incredible part of the story is that each one of the 17 children went on to secure a government job.



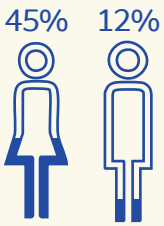
From our interviews, 49 per cent of the female respondents had gone on to complete their graduation or even post-graduation, while 32 per cent of the male respondents had completed their graduation, post-graduation, or other specialised degrees, such as engineering and law.

The firm academic foundation of their early years has helped an entire generation from marginalised groups move beyond traditional livelihoods like agriculture and labour to diverse livelihoods, including government service, private jobs, and micro-enterprises.

Among the women, 85 per cent are in some kind of non-traditional occupation or job, and 57 per cent of the men are too; 45 per cent of the female respondents are now teachers, compared to 12 per cent of the male respondents.

Non-traditional occupation or job

Teachers



The education interventions of Gram Vikas, while certainly significant in terms of a generational shift for men, led to a far more remarkable generational leap among women.

At the village level, the occupational profile over the last 30–40 years has shifted from forest dependence, agriculture, labour, and jobs (in descending order) to labour, agriculture, forest dependence, and jobs (in descending order).

BEYOND ACADEMICS AND DEVELOPING LIFE-SKILLS

Gram Vikas forged partnerships with diverse organisations based on shared values and complementary expertise, which enabled it to address a range of issues impacting children's well-being, from sports to computer literacy. Regular training camps in badminton, cricket, football, volleyball, and weightlifting enabled students to excel in sports and participate in district, state, and national events.

The Gram Vikas schools, while providing a 'padhai ka mahaul', also introduced the children to several other extra-curricular opportunities, such as painting, music, dance, vegetable cultivation, carpentry, etc. We met alumni from the first decade whose fondest memories of the school revolve around the extra-curricular initiatives. Several alumni reminisced about how the values of hard work and integrity became instilled in them during their years at school.

In the words of Nivedita Majhi of Kalahandi, "Weightlifting taught me how to live." It became, for her, a symbol of empowerment and a pathway to honour and self-confidence.

At the Gram Vikas schools, all castes eat together, which is an effort by GV to instil acceptance among children of different norms. The practices are, however, slower to shift in homes, though eating together in public, such as in the marketplace, has now become relatively acceptable.

NETWORK EFFECTS

Two kinds of networks have emerged through the sustained connection of the schools with the communities. First, upward/vertical spiral networks, through role models for professional and economic development—graduates from schools becoming teachers, government officials, representatives of local government, etc.—help first-generation school graduates navigate the relatively unknown world outside.

The second kind of networks are lateral/horizontal, for social support and solidarity, which provide an identity core. As happens with many mobile communities, one gradually begins to see these two networks overlap. For now, however, the rootedness of the lateral networks is indeed a source of immense strength for these communities.

Conclusions

This report presents the details of what we found, but if we were to summarise it, we can say with a high degree of confidence that, on the parameters of educational outcomes and occupational profiles, we heard and saw strong narratives of a more-than-generational leap having occurred among the first-decade cohorts who had entered one of three residential Gram Vikas schools (in the districts of Ganjam, Gajapati, and Kalahandi). While the leap occurred for both male and female alumni, it was far more pronounced among the women (some exceptions notwithstanding).

On health and social outcomes, some shifts have occurred—more visible in the health space and less so in the social space. However, health conditions have improved due to changes largely extraneous to the school interventions. The social shifts (such as caste boundaries), as would be expected, have been the slowest to move, but, happily, some of the changes we encountered appeared, at least in part, to have been triggered by what has been happening in the schools.

Finally, we would like to note that, in the trends we have observed, it is somewhat difficult to separate the influence of Gram Vikas from the influence of the Gram Vikas schools. Given the shifts in Gram Vikas's work over the decades, this influence may not be as strong for subsequent or future cohorts, but that remains to be seen.

We also felt a pressing need for the schools to engage in a visioning exercise (just as Gram Vikas is envisioning its fifth decade): the education context has changed, community and individual aspirations have changed, and the existing and emerging opportunities have changed. Gram Vikas schools should proactively position themselves to enable their students to make the most of these shifts, in order to continue building on this generational leap pathway.

01
Purpose of the Study

This study is part of an organisation-learning exercise initiated by Gram Vikas in July 2022.

LEARNING FROM THE PAST, READING THE PRESENT, AND PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE

The study seeks to document and understand the intergenerational aspect of Gram Vikas's work, within the specific context of its education work, especially as this intervention has run consistently across the four decades since Gram Vikas began working in Odisha. The programme, therefore, offers a rare opportunity to understand the long-term and intergenerational shifts that may have occurred around this initiative.

The nature of this study is not such as to establish any causality between the education programme and the changes taking place in communities/individuals, but more to observe and document what shifts have occurred.

At the end of the study, Gram Vikas (GV) wants to:

- Be able to articulate, substantiated with data, where and to what extent, the following two epithets can be applied to its education programmes – 'ahead of their time' and 'intergenerational change'; and
- Document cases of families and villages where this change has taken place.

The study had two distinct parts:

PART A Ahead of its time

PART B Generational leap

Its scope was to cover three generations of stakeholders/respondents who could be said to have been impacted by this programme:

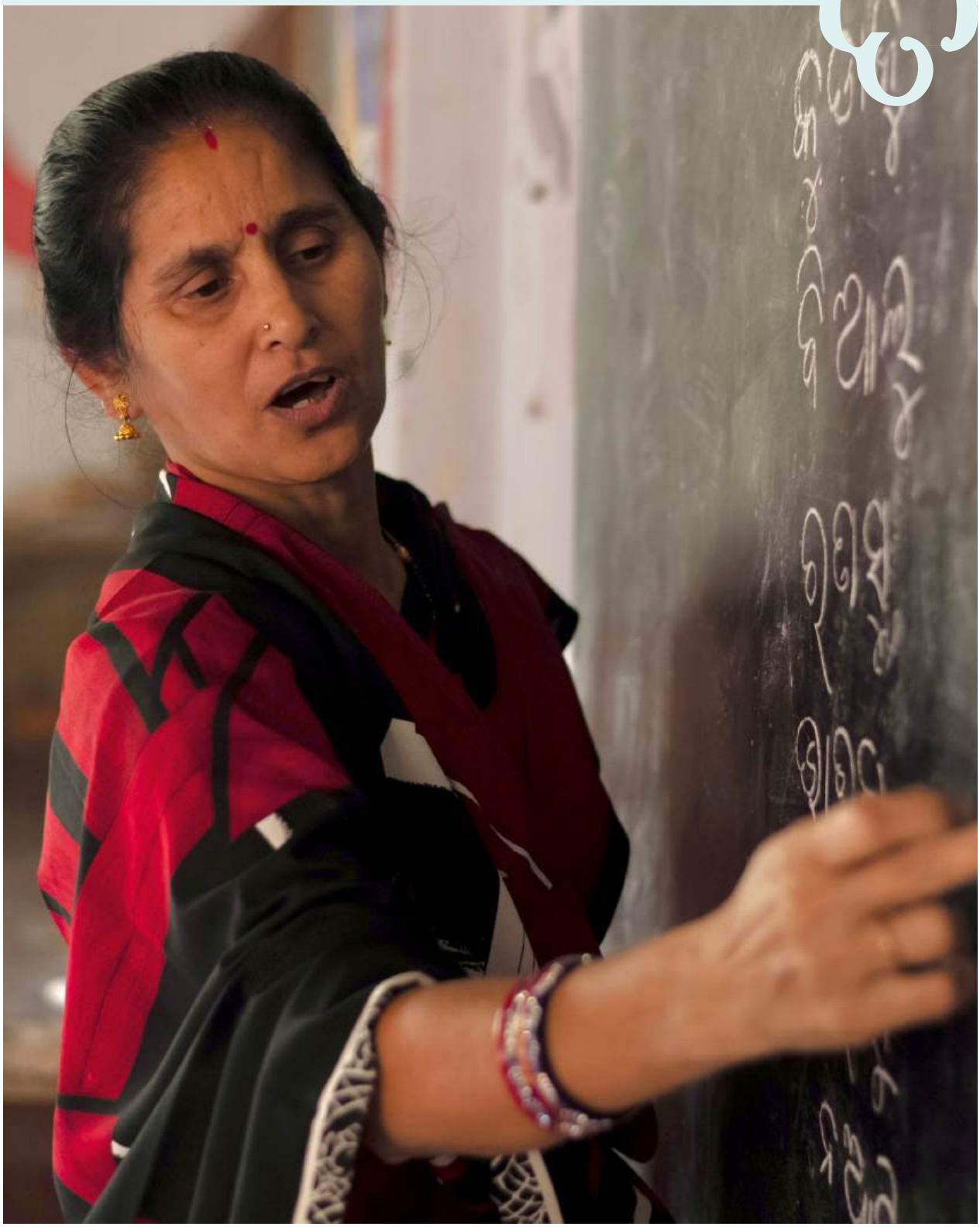
- **Gen-0:** Parents of children who were reaching school-going age around the time the schools started
- **Gen-1:** Children who attended Gram Vikas schools/or other schools in the same period
- **Gen-2:** Children of Gram Vikas school alumni who study/studied in Gram Vikas schools

For juxtaposition and context purposes, the study team also met with some Gen-1 who had not studied at Gram Vikas schools, and held community meetings in order to get a community- level sense of these intergenerational shifts.

Geographically, the study covered the three residential schools of Gram Vikas:

- Gram Vikas High School (GVHS), Kankia, Ganjam district; established in 1982
- Mahendra Tanaya Ashram School (MTAS), Koinpur, Gajapati district; established in 1992
- Gram Vikas Shikshya Niketan (GVSN), Kumudabahal, Kalahandi district; established in 1998

02
Approach and Methodology



2.1. Part A: Ahead of its Time

The 'Learning from the Past, Reading the Present, Planning for the Future' document shared by Gram Vikas speaks of the organisation's perspective on 'ahead of its time', and says that this phrase is not with reference to what may have been happening in other parts of the country, but has to be located and understood within the context of the geography of Gram Vikas' work. In other words, the 'ahead of its time' assertion emanates from the fact that there was very little demand for education from the community, and given Gram Vikas' own limited expertise in this field at that time, residential schools were an 'ahead of time' initiative for the area and for Gram Vikas.

The 'ask' under the study therefore translated into two parts:

a. Chronicling: A detailed chronicling of Gram Vikas' education initiatives from their inception to the present day.
b. Contextualisation: Locating the above chronicles within the educational context prevalent in the feeder areas of the three schools, in the first decade after their establishment.

The methodology followed by the study team, in consultation with Gram Vikas, was as follows:

Chronicling

The chronicling work was largely based on the following sources of information:

1. Gram Vikas Annual Reports;
2. Gram Vikas Trust Annual Reports;
3. Third-party reports on Gram Vikas' education interventions;
4. School-level workshops with past and current staff members, and some community leaders and alumni; and
5. Interviews (in person or telephonically) with key programme personnel.

The study has attempted to do a detailed mapping of the evolution of Gram Vikas' education interventions over the years within each of the three schools. This includes listing all the catchment villages, mapping how they have grown over the years, their intake over the years, etc. To the extent information was available, the chronicling work on the residential schools includes changes in infrastructure, enrolment, the catchment area, the socio-economic profile of children, and school curricula over time.

The chronicling covers the entire time period, from the inception of the education programme in Gram Vikas to 2022-23.

Contextualisation

This part of the exercise helps locate the above chronicles of Gram Vikas schools within the micro context of education (infrastructure, access, and status) in the region/districts, so that the study can comment on 'where and to what extent' the Gram Vikas interventions in education were 'ahead of their time'. The contextualisation exercise is, however, limited to the first decade after the establishment of each of the three schools.

The contextualisation work has relied on some primary data and mostly on the following secondary data:

1. Education facilities in the catchment area from government sources;
2. Other education facilities in the catchment area from GV personnel;
3. Teachers per school or teacher: student ratios (to the extent possible);
4. Enrolment, learning levels, and other achievements of the children; and
5. Cost of schooling over the years, from secondary government data or through conversations with Gram Vikas school staff and communities.

In this report, the chronicling and contextualisation are interwoven in order to understand the manner in which the education intervention was temporally and spatially located.

2.2. Part B: Generational Leap

Gram Vikas believes a generational leap took place for those who were born in the 1980s and 1990s in the villages where Gram Vikas worked (Gen-1). The circumstances of Gen-1 changed due to choices made by the previous generation with respect to their education. Consequently, the life choices for Gen-1 broadened and their networks expanded, resulting in far-reaching changes in these villages.

Gram Vikas had listed some parameters along which the generational leap could have occurred at an individual level, such as occupational diversity, health outcomes, marital choices, etc. These parameters were discussed with the Gram Vikas team during the inception workshop, and the following list was agreed upon. This was further fine-tuned during the piloting of the methodology in early May, after the inception workshop.

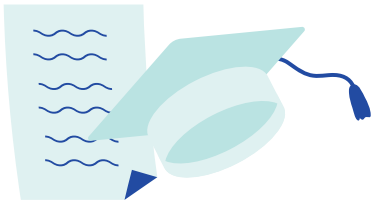
	Broad parameters	More specific parameters
1	Educational profile	• School education • College education • Formal skilling courses • Informally acquired skills • Distance travelled for acquiring education • Attainments in other fields – sports, music, dance, art, farming, etc.
2	Occupational diversity and estimated income	• Jobs/work done over the years • Income over the years (if data is forthcoming) • Asset profile (land, vehicles, phones, size of house, other)
3	Health outcomes	• Addictions (tobacco, alcohol) • Mortality, especial neonatal mortality • Health-seeking behaviour • Major illnesses
4	Marital choices	• Age at marriage (of self and spouse) • Education qualifications (of self and spouse) • Distance of spouse's village from own • Caste, religion • Dowry, wedding costs

5	Resilience	• Savings habits, insurance, financial literacy • Social security schemes being accessed • Disasters that affected them and how they coped
6	Caste	• Inter-caste marriage, eating, drinking, socialising • Inter-caste, inter-religion friendships
7	Political agency	• Contested elected office ever • Held an elected office • Attendance in gram sabhas • Position/attendance in GV VDCs • Access to MLA, BDO, Collector • Undertaken any government contracts
8	Family profile	• Siblings and their education/work profiles • Children and their education profiles • Parents and their education/work profiles

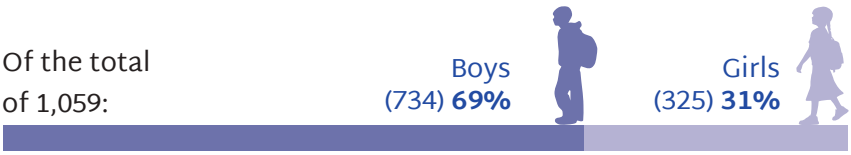
Some of the above parameters can be more easily impacted at the household or individual levels, while some other parameters are more likely to be tied to community or area-level shifts. At the village, the study team also tried to understand the emergence of any upward spirals in terms of access to support networks and role models for younger generations.

Community-level norms, networks, and narratives could have changed or been impacted by changes at the individual or household levels. Similarly, changes in the wider context/community would have contributed to household-level changes.

The entire Part B of the study relied on primary data collection, especially gathering qualitative insights through deep listening and conversations at the individual and community levels. The individuals we interviewed and the communities we visited, were ultimately a purposive and feasible sample.



We began by drawing up a list of all alumni (a total of 1,059: GVHS – 194; MTAS – 445, and GVSN – 420) who had attended a Gram Vikas school in the first decade after its inception, and then attempted to cover as much of a cross-section of these people as possible.



These came from 202 settlements/hamlets; 884 (83%) belonged to the ST category, while 123 (12%) and 52 (5%) were from the SC and other categories, respectively.

Some of the variables that we kept in mind while conducting the interviews were – alumni from all the years of the first decade, male and female respondents, all castes to be covered, distance of the village from the school, and a cross-section of current occupational profiles.

Our in-depth interviews comprised the following:

a. Gen-1: children who entered a GV residential school in the first ten years of the school's establishment. A total of 44 Gen-1 respondents were interviewed across the three schools.
b. Gen-0: parents of Gen 1. While we had initially hoped to meet several of them, to our dismay we found that many were no longer alive. Especially among the first decade alumni of Kankia (GVHS) school (the first school to be set up), we found very few Gen-0 survivors.
c. Gen-2: (children of Gen-1); the situation here was better and we were able to meet several Gen-2.
d. We also interviewed some peers of Gen-1 who did not go to GV schools (they either went to no school or to a non-GV school), had similar conversations with them, and asked about their parents and their children. In all, we met with 17 non-GV school Gen-1 respondents.
e. Finally, we held a few village meetings to understand the shifts that have occurred at the community level. We held eight such community meetings in different villages.

In order to offset the small number of longitudinal interviews that were going to be possible, we decided to reach out telephonically to as many of the first decade cohort as possible. The constraints in reaching out in this manner had to do with getting access to their phone numbers (apart from those who were no longer alive). In all, we were able to conduct telephonic interviews with 116 alumni across the three schools – the least success we had was among the GVHS (Kankia) alumni, which was expected given that they comprised the oldest alumni cohort.

Overall, we covered 11 per cent of the alumni in telephonic interviews and about five per cent through in-person interviews.

03
Ahead of Time

3.1. Historical legacies and influences

Throughout history, Indian education has been marked by elitism. In the traditional Hindu system, education was mostly intended for Brahmin boys, taught by Brahmin teachers, emphasising reading and writing skills. During the Mughal rule, Muslim education also followed elitist patterns, albeit influenced by economic factors rather than caste backgrounds. British company and crown rule further reinforced this elitism, by linking academic education to entrance and advancement in government service, favouring the privileged few.[2]

During the freedom struggle, driven by national ideals, the Indian National Congress did put in efforts to bring a sense of equity in the national education sphere, but it largely failed to shake the foundations of entrenched interests defending the existing elitist education system. In the early 1900s, Congress called for the nationalisation of education with an emphasis on technical and vocational training, but with little success.[3]

Access to primary education was limited to only a few in India. In 1901, less than 10 per cent of Indian males and less than 1 percent of females were literate.[4] In the case of tribal people, only 8 males per million and practically no females were literate.[5]

When it came to post-primary education, which is essential for social status and mobility through office jobs, Brahmins were, unsurprisingly, disproportionately represented. However, by the early twentieth century, other caste groups also began recognising education's value as a means to gain political power, and worked to access formal learning. However, the economically and socially deprived Scheduled Tribes (STs) and Scheduled Castes (SCs) continued to lag behind.

Even after a decade of independence, access to basic education for tribal and SC communities was very low. In 1961, the SC and ST literacy rates were 10.27 per cent and 8.54 per cent, respectively, as against the national average of 24 per cent. Two decades later, they were 21.38 per cent and 16.35 per cent, compared to 36.23 per cent nationally. The female literacy rate for both groups was less than 10 per cent in 1981. There was a progressive gap between the ST and SC groups, and the rest of the population in literacy outcomes in the first three decades after independence.[6] In 1961, the gap between the ST and non-SC/ST categories was 19 per cent, it rose to 25 per cent in 1981.

Consequently, even in the mid-1980s, the majority of students who progressed to middle school and from middle school to high school came from the higher castes and from middle- and upper-class families residing in urban areas.

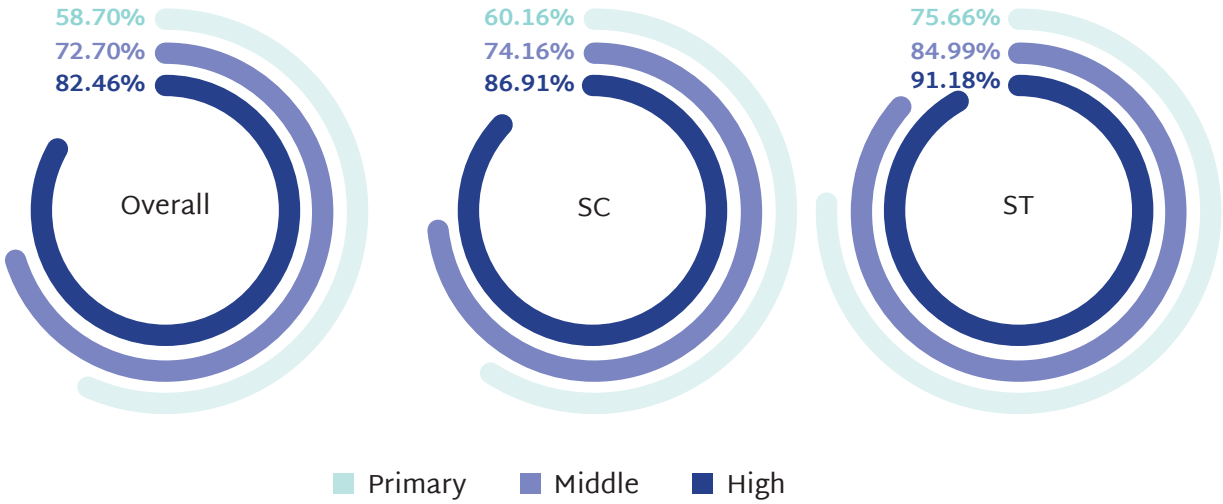
Moreover, schools, especially in rural areas and areas dominated by marginalised groups, suffered from chronic infrastructure issues. Forty per cent of primary schools were not constructed with masonry, resulting in substandard infrastructure.

[2] https://countrystudies.us/india/37.htm#:~:text=There%20was%20a%20high%20rate,the%20full%20course%20of%20studies.
[3] https://countrystudies.us/india/37.htm#:~:text=There%20was%20a%20high%20rate,the%20full%20course%20of%20studies.
[4] https://www.jagranjosh.com/general-knowledge/census-2011-literacy-rate-and-sex-ratio-in-india-since-1901-to-2011-1476359944-1
[5] http://lsi.gov.in:8081/jspui/bitstream/123456789/366/1/26501_1971_CEN.pdf
[6] https://ncsc.nic.in/files/ncsc/new1/221.pdf

According to a report titled "Challenge of Education: A Policy Perspective," issued in 1985 by the Ministry of Education (which was incorporated into the Ministry of Human Resources in 1988, and renamed the Ministry of Human Resource Development), drinking water facilities were absent in 60 per cent of schools, library facilities in 70 per cent, and a staggering 89 per cent lacked proper toilet facilities. As a result, 60 per cent of children dropped out of school between grades one and five. Out of 100 children who initially enrolled in grade one, only 23 managed to reach grade eight. This was across all categories.

Another concerning issue highlighted in the report was the prevalence of single-teacher primary schools. Moreover, it was not uncommon for teachers to be absent, or in some cases, for teaching duties to be handed over to unqualified substitutes.[7] The dropout rates by different social groups in 1981 are depicted in Table 1.[8]

Table 1: Dropout Rates by Social Group, 1980-81



The Fourth All India Educational Survey conducted in 1978 sheds light on the challenging state of tribal education in India. Its findings revealed significant disparities and limited access to schools for tribal communities, with more than 25,000 tribal habitations having no school at all, indicating a severe lack of primary education facilities in tribal areas.

Regarding secondary education, approximately 82.18 per cent of the tribal population lived within a distance of eight kilometres from a secondary school. However, access to higher secondary schools was severely limited, with only 18.8 per cent of the tribal population having access to higher secondary education.[9]

[7] https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000169142
[8] https://ncsc.nic.in/files/ncsc/new1/222.pdf
[9] http://jpg.net.in/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/T-Brahmanandam-and-T-BosuBabu.pdf

Systematic discrimination against students of the ST and SC categories was also rife. With a major chunk of the teachers coming from upper castes, these children faced both social/cultural biases and language barriers. The language barrier was more prominent for Adivasi children, with the language of instruction in schools often being the dominant regional or official language, most often not the native language of the Adivasi children.

As N.K. Singhi writes in Education and Social Change (1979): "a large number of teachers felt that SC and ST students are poorer in intelligence. Quite a large number of teachers consider them to be inherently inferior. A large number considered the atmosphere at home to be responsible for the inadequacy. Poverty was not considered to be an important factor."[10]

Some of the other significant systemic challenges were linked to the home environment, where factors like illiteracy among parents (particularly mothers), poverty, and inadequate nutrition levels could impact the brain's development and the mental faculties of SC and ST children.[11]

Since India's independence, both the central and state governments have implemented various schemes and programmes aimed at educating and improving the welfare of the country's tribal population.

The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), a flagship programme of the Government of India to achieve universalisation of elementary education, was launched in 2000 as a part of India's commitment to the Education for All (EFA) movement and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). It has led to significant improvement in education access for Adivasi children.[12]

Some other important initiatives that enabled Adivasi children to access better education are:

- Ashram Schools: Ashram schools, also known as residential schools, were initiated in the 1970s and are educational institutions primarily established in tribal and remote areas. They provide free education, accommodation, and other basic amenities to tribal students. The aim is to ensure access to education for children who may not have easy access to schools due to their geographical location.
- Ekalavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS): EMRSs are a special type of residential school designed exclusively for tribal students. Initiated in the 1990s, these schools are run by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Government of India. They focus on providing quality education and holistic development to tribal children.
- Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV): KGBV is a scheme aimed at providing education to girls from marginalised communities, including tribal girls, in rural areas. These schools, initiated in the early part of the millennium, focus on enhancing the enrollment and retention of girls in education and improving their overall development.

[10] https://books.google.co.in/books/about/Education_and_Social_Change.html?id=WemeAAAAMAAJ&redir_esc=y
[11] http://www.create-rpc.org/pdf_documents/PTA2.pdf
[12] https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/817351468267581164/india-primary-education-ssa-ii-project-sarva-shiksha-abhiyan-ssa-tribal-development-plan

Moreover, NGOs have made contributions to the education of tribal communities. Agencies like Vanavasi Kalyan Ashram have been running Ekal Vidyalayas, which are single-teacher schools aimed at providing basic education to Adivasi children in remote areas. Similarly, the Eklavya Foundation has been engaged with Adivasi communities in Madhya Pradesh since 1982 to create culturally relevant and context-specific educational materials, to provide teacher training, and increase community involvement. Other noteworthy contributions include the efforts of agencies like Adivasi Munnetra Sangam (AMS) and Seva Mandir.

3.2. The Odisha context

At the time of India's independence, Odisha's overall literacy rate was 15.8 per cent (1951) which marginally improved to 21.66 per cent after a decade in 1961. By 1981, it reached 33.62 per cent. Particularly concerning was the low literacy level among women, which stood at a mere 21.12 per cent. Odisha was considered one of the less-educated states in India, ranking as the 10th most backward state in the country.[13]

In 1947, Odisha had a total of 6,814 primary schools with an enrollment of 3,69,387 children and 16,529 teachers. By the Sixth Five Year Plan (1980-85), there were 32,027 primary schools with 75,900 teachers and 26.88 lakh students. By 1985-86, the state had made some progress in the education sector. The number of primary schools had increased to 39,593, and total enrollment reached 35.8 lakh. Despite this, there were still significant challenges; as the findings of the Fifth All-India Educational Survey indicated, 12,800 habitations in the state had no access to a school.[14]

To address the challenges in primary education in Odisha, the Operation Blackboard (OB) scheme was introduced during the academic year 1987-88, and completed in four phases by 1997. It covered a total of 34,178 primary schools in the state and aimed to enhance the quality of primary education.[15]

In Odisha, STs have accounted for 20-25 per cent of the population. An overwhelming majority of the STs still live in rural areas in the state, as is the pattern in the country as a whole. In 1961, in Odisha, the rural ST population constituted 97.93 per cent of the total ST population in the state, which decreased slightly to 93.79 per cent by 2011. While tribal literacy in Orissa was 7.4 per cent in 1961, it rose only marginally to 9.46 per cent in 1971 and finally reached a double-digit 13.96 per cent in 1981.

In 2011, the overall literacy rate of tribals in Odisha rose to 72.9 per cent (compared to 52.2 per cent literacy of tribals at the national level), with the female tribal literacy rate also rising to 60.9 per cent (41.2 per cent nationally). The push for education by the state and the introduction of SSA led to a noteworthy jump in a decade, from 2001 when the overall literacy rate among the ST population of Odisha was 37.37 per cent with just 23.3 per cent of the ST females being literate.[16]

[13] https://ijcrt.org/papers/IJCRT2211497.pdf
[14] https://www.yourarticlelibrary.com/essay/primary-education-system-in-orissa/44865
[15] https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/upload_document/npe.pdf
[16] https://repository.tribal.gov.in/bitstream/123456789/73964/1/SCST_2010_book_0119.pdf

These efforts have led to near-universal enrolment of children in schools by the first decade of this century. Less than 10 per cent of children (aged below 11 years) in Odisha had either never been enrolled or dropped out. However, according to the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2005 (which analyses data from all the rural districts of Odisha), this high level of enrolment did not lead to an improvement in foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN) of students in rural Odisha.[17]

More than half the children aged 7 to 14 years were unable to read a small paragraph with short sentences of standard 1-level difficulty, or do subtraction with borrowing (Level 1). Similarly, more than 67 per cent of students in the same age group were unable to read a 'story' text with some long sentences of standard 2-level difficulty, or divide 3 digits by 1 digit (Level 2). Overall, the FLN levels of students in schools present a rather discouraging picture.

Teachers' attendance was about 74 per cent in primary schools, and if middle schools were included it fell to 64.5 per cent.

The ASER Survey data (Table 2) for the state and three districts where Gram Vikas started its residential schools indicate the status of FLN in the state.

Table 2: ASER Survey Data for Odisha and Three Gram Vikas School Districts

District	% Out-of-school	% CAN read level – 2 (Class 5)	% CAN solve division and subtraction (Class 5)
Odisha	8.9	56.5	30.4
Ganjam	8.3	62.0	26.2
Gajapati	20.6	58.5	32.9
Kalahandi	15.0	48.7	19.6

Source: ASER, 2005, Odisha

[17] https://img.asercentre.org/docs/Publications/ASER%20Reports/ASER_2005/orissa.pdfm

3.3. The groundwork and the Gram Vikas school initiative

Gram Vikas's education project was a part of the ITDP (Integrated Tribal Development Programme), which is different from a completely separate programme of the government by the same name. Other activities undertaken by Gram Vikas under the ITDP included health, social forestry, village organisation, etc. Its first project was to start a dairy to supplement the nutritional requirements of the tribal community, which traditionally did not consume milk. Given the reluctance of the tribal community, the plan to promote dairying was soon aborted, and turned into a biogas programme to promote an alternative fuel and prevent deforestation. In the course of time, Gram Vikas made deeper connections with the tribal community.

Most of the tribals were bonded to moneylenders, as most of their land had been mortgaged to them for various reasons, including accessing credit during emergencies. Gram Vikas then tried to mobilise tribals who were working on their own land as bonded labourers, to release them from the grip of the moneylenders and return their lands to them. To that end, Gram Vikas organised several meetings, protests, and other forms of mobilisation, but it soon became clear that without education, such social movements were impossible to sustain.

It was felt that someone from within the community would have to take over the campaign that Gram Vikas had played a crucial role in facilitating. This gave the impetus to kick-start the education intervention among the community, as nearby government schools were barely functioning, and reportedly less than 5 per cent of the tribals had been educated. This was corroborated at community meetings in the three locations. The available Census report on tribal literacy in the block during that period also points to low levels of literacy.

Gram Vikas had to persuade the local community and help them realise the importance of education. It was felt that the need of the hour was to educate children, and to that end the Kerandimal Education Trust (KET) was established on 7 February 1982.

With the establishment of the KET, the community decided to initiate the education programme; the villagers of Kankia (in Ganjam district) volunteered to start the programme in their village. One of the villagers offered their verandah for the programme, and children from their own village and nearby villages started coming to the school. The food requirements of the children, it was decided, would be met by all the villages from where the children came, and that each village would take the responsibility of feeding the school for a day.

Teachers were selected from their own villages and were trained by Gram Vikas, who also dedicated one staff member to look after the school. In less than two years the school was up and running. Initially, the makeshift arrangements worked well, but Gram Vikas soon realised that providing food for the school was a huge responsibility that households could not meet. Moreover, accommodation for the children posed a challenge as well. So, the KET bought a small plot of land, which over time became the school it is today.

Gram Vikas started a school in every village, which was called the Non-Formal Education (NFE) programme, the earliest-documented instance of which is in the Gram Vikas Annual Report of 1988-

89[18]. Facilitators were selected, at a monthly salary of Rs 50, from each village and training was offered monthly for two or three days. What was conveyed during the training days would then be taught to the children by the facilitators.

After four or five years, it was found that there was a limit to this style of functioning, and the training programme. The technique worked up to Class 3, but after that it was not enough to run a village-level school, and Gram Vikas also did not have the resources to sustain the schools. It was then that KET purchased more land and introduced Classes up to 6 and 7 in a newly conceived residential school. It was run like a conventional residential school, by Gram Vikas's own staff. It was recognised by the government in 1986[19] after receiving permission by the government to run a middle school. This was then a formal school, with the NFE schools in the villages becoming a type of feeder schools.

In 1987, the ITDP expanded to the Rudhapadar, Koinpur, and Kalahandi projects, with the same emphasis on NFE. Following official government permission in 2002 to run high-school classes, the school in Kankia came to be known as the Gram Vikas High School. The primary section in the Kankia school began in 2006.

To sum up, in 1982 , Gram Vikas started its first residential school, Kerandimal Middle Education School, which later became Gram Vikas High School (GVHS) in Kankia village, with the objective of providing effective education to Adivasi (tribal) children in the Digapahandi block of Ganjam district. This was followed by the Mahendra Tanaya Ashram School (MTAS) in Koinpur village of Rayagada block in Gajapati district in 1992. The third school, the Gram Vikas Shiksha Niketan School (GVSN) in Kumudabahal village of Thuamul Rampur block in Kalahandi, was established in 1998.

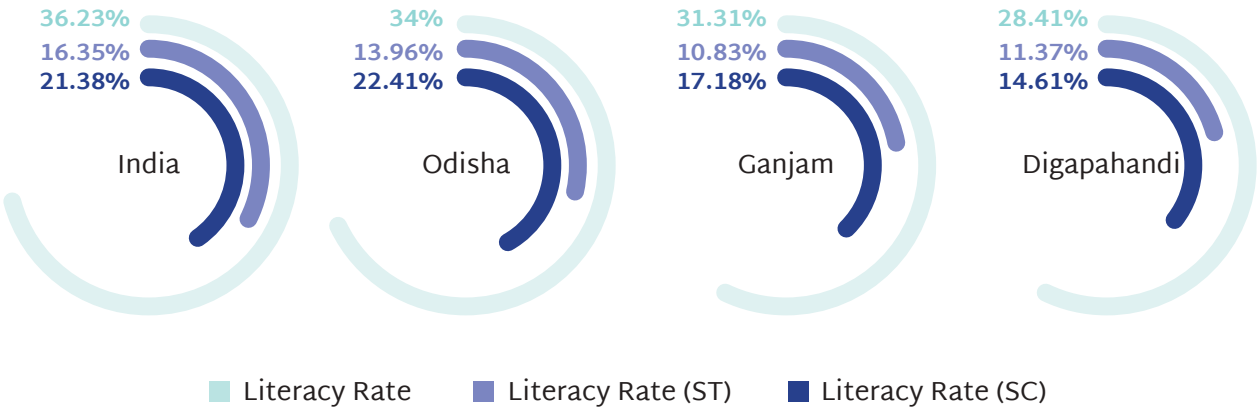
The establishment of the three schools by Gram Vikas, at different times and in different districts and blocks was in response to the poor literacy rates and educational outcomes of tribal children in those areas. The organisation recognised the critical need to address the educational disparities and challenges faced by marginalised communities, particularly tribal children, who had limited access to quality education.

[18] The report of 1984, the oldest report in our possession, mentions the establishment of alternative primary education centres on Page 7.
[19] The Gram Vikas Annual Report of 1988-89 mentions that the school was formally recognised [p. 11], without stating what a formal recognition entailed.

3.4. From decade 1 to now: Ganjam (1981 to the present)

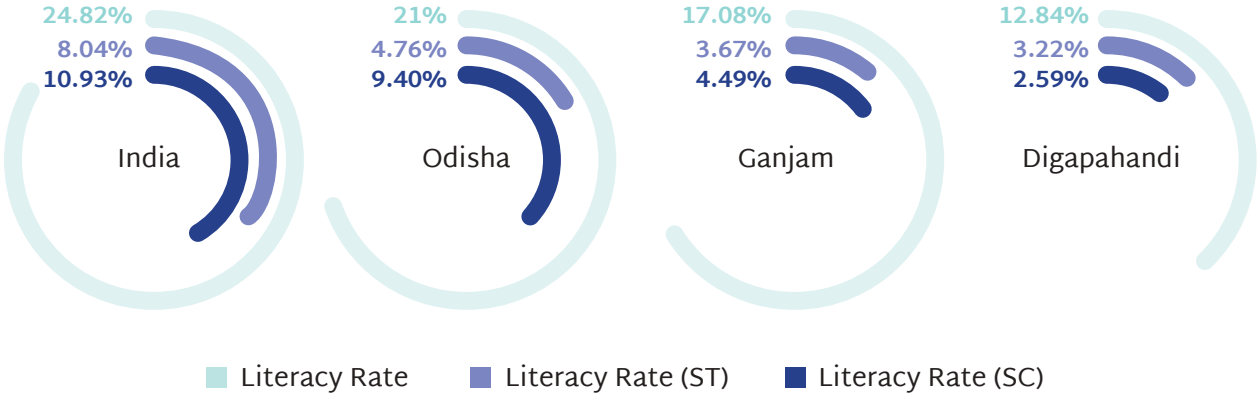
Ganjam is one of the oldest and most historically significant districts in Odisha. It is located in the southern part of the state and has a diverse geography, including coastal plains, fertile farmlands, and hilly regions. The literacy rates in 1981 of the different marginalised groups in the school block area, compared to the national and state averages, are given in Table 3.[20]

Table 3: Literacy Rates in 1981



A comparative analysis of the female literacy rate is given in Table 4.

Table 4: Female Literacy Rates in 1981



[20] Census 1981

While the overall female literacy rate in 1981 in the block of Digapahandi was 12.84 per cent, the female literacy rates in the ST and SC categories were less than 5 per cent.

When the Gram Vikas High School (GVHS) in Kankia started in 1982, there were no real education opportunities in the area. The residential school was fed by the NFE centres and night school children who sought education beyond class 3. At the time, there was no non-teaching staff, and everything had to be done primarily by the headmaster.

During the holidays, Gram Vikas vehicles would drop the children off at their homes, and would bring them back when the holidays ended. It was then felt that it made sense to collect some money from the parents, to take care of the students' clothing, food, etc.

When the school first started in 1982, GVHS was in the middle of the wilderness with no boundary wall, as a result of which children would often wander out and wild animals would frequently venture in. Children would get scared and homesick, and would sometimes try to leave the school.

Despite the challenges, the inaugural batch and subsequent batches did see some students becoming educated and skilled, being employed as government teachers, and so on. By 1988, the children slowly started to enroll, after significant improvements in the school's infrastructure. The villagers of Kankia were vital in supporting this entire endeavour.

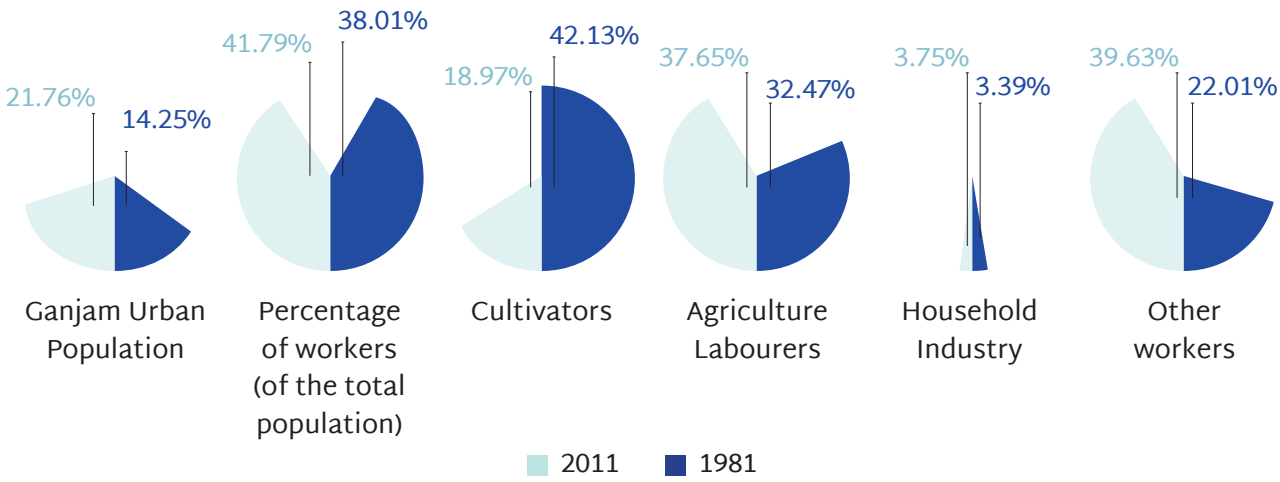
Key indicators of the district in 1981 compared to 2011 highlight changes in the socio-economic situation over time and are presented below:[21]

Table 5: Changes in socio-economic situation in Ganjam - 1981 to 2011

	1981	2011
Literacy Rate	31.31%	71.09%
Female Literacy Rate	17.08%	54.14%
ST Literacy Rate	10.83%	42.19%
ST Female Literacy Rate	3.67%	33.13%
SC Literacy Rate	17.18%	51.47%
SC Female Literacy Rate	4.49%	40.98%
Sex Ratio	1,033	983

[21] Census 1981 and 2011

Table 6: Diversity of occupation in Ganjam – 1981 to 2011[22]:



3.4.1. Quantitative Analysis: Gram Vikas High School, Ganjam

Much of Gram Vikas High School's (GVHS) enrollment is linked deeply to the history of the Gram Vikas's intervention in this region. Unlike in the other two regions, this school originated as part of a social movement, only one of whose foundational aspects was education. To that end, as it was motivated by a desire to empower the ST population, much of the student body was, in the initial years, tribal children.

The spike in the late 2000s, in 2007-08 for instance, happened apparently due to the increase in intake from the other two schools, in which some students who had completed Class 7 were encouraged to pursue their studies in the Kankia school. As the other two schools were also mostly composed of ST students, with MTAS being almost wholly ST in its composition, the overwhelming majority of ST students in GVHS continues to this day. The total alumni of GVHS in the first decade was 194.

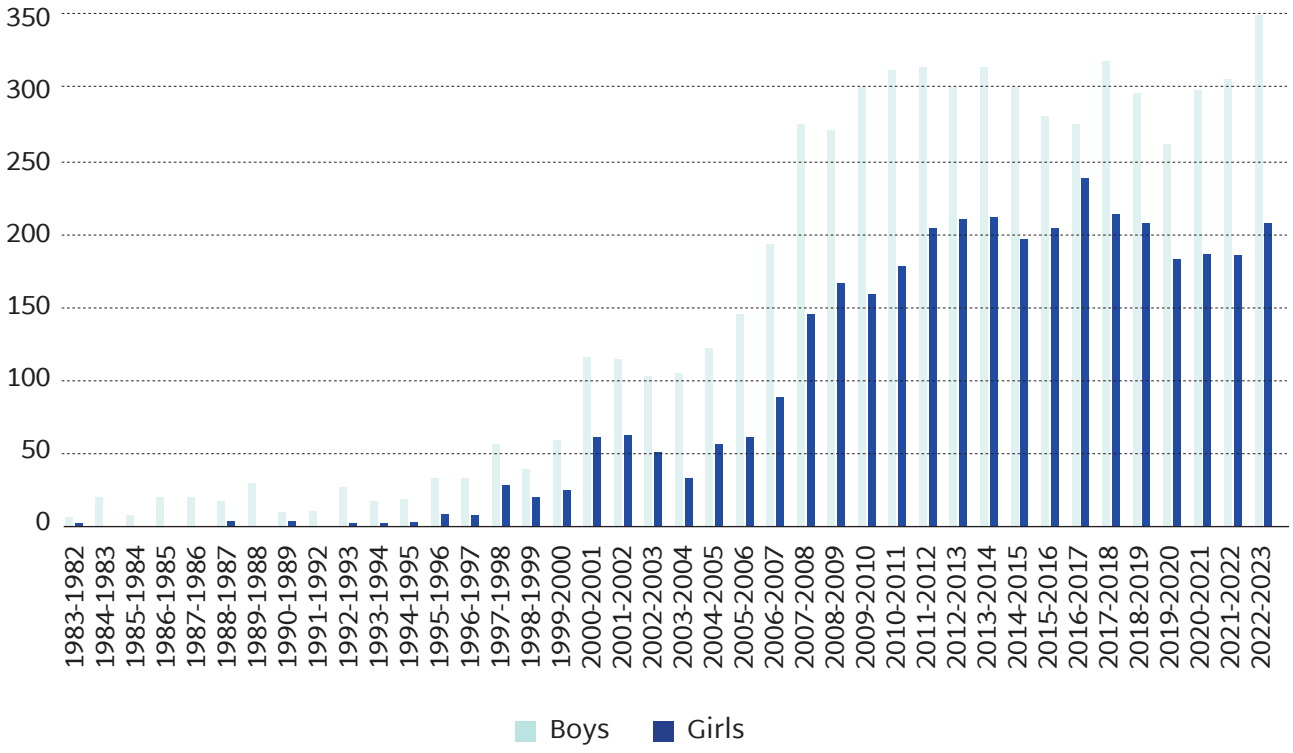
GVHS Kankia began classes, with an initial batch size of 10, in a thatched mud house in Kankia village. Having obtained formal recognition from the government in 1986, it was only in 1999 that the first batch of Class 10 was introduced. In 2000, 45 students from class 10 sat for the HSLC/matriculation exam, of which 17 matriculated. Since 2010, 100 per cent of the Class 10 students have successfully matriculated.

[22] Census 1981 and 2011

Table 7: Percentage of students who matriculated from GVHS (2000 to 2009)

Year	Class 10 Graduates (%)
2000	37
2001	
2002	
2003	47
2004	79
2005	
2006	86
2007	85
2008	91
2009	98

Table 8: Gender-wise enrolment, GVHS, Ganjam, 1981-82 to 2022-23



It is evident that in the initial years, female education was a real challenge, something that was somewhat mitigated over time with differential fee pricing for girls and boys to encourage female enrolment. To that end, the annual parental contribution for girls is at present lower by ₹1,000 than for boys. Moreover, the inability to pay these amounts does not affect students' access to the school's education services.

The differential fee for girls was combined with repeated village visits by the GV staff to convince parents of the importance of education, especially for girls. GVSN as a matter of school policy targets gender parity in enrolment, and this is achieved through greater emphasis on the enrolment of girls during the application process.

Over time, the education intervention and Gram Vikas's other interventions were bundled, and interventions in new villages within the catchment area were accompanied by an increase in enrolment from that settlement. This meant that access to Gram Vikas's schools was made more seamless if the village fell within the catchment area of the intervention-bundle. It also allowed Gram Vikas to have lasting, long-term relationships with those beneficiaries, building a network that relied on trust and good faith.

3.5. From Decade 2 to now: Gajapati (1992 to the present)

Gajapati district was carved out of Ganjam district in 1992. It is located in the southeastern part of Odisha and shares its border with Ganjam, Rayagada, and Kandhamal districts. It is home to the Mahendragiri mountain range, which is a segment of the Eastern Ghats. Being a part of the red corridor, the Gajapati district was affected by Left-wing extremism (Maoist insurgency) in the 1990s. However, over the years, efforts have been made to address these challenges and bring development and peace to the region. The literacy rates of different marginalised groups in the school block area as compared to the national and state averages in 1991 is given in the chart below.[23]

Table 9: ST, SC Literacy Rates in India and Odisha, 1991

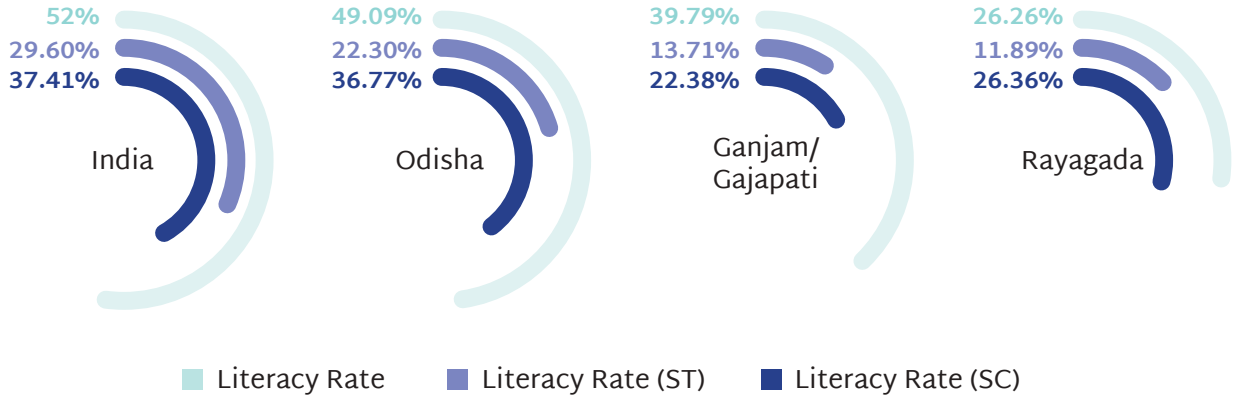
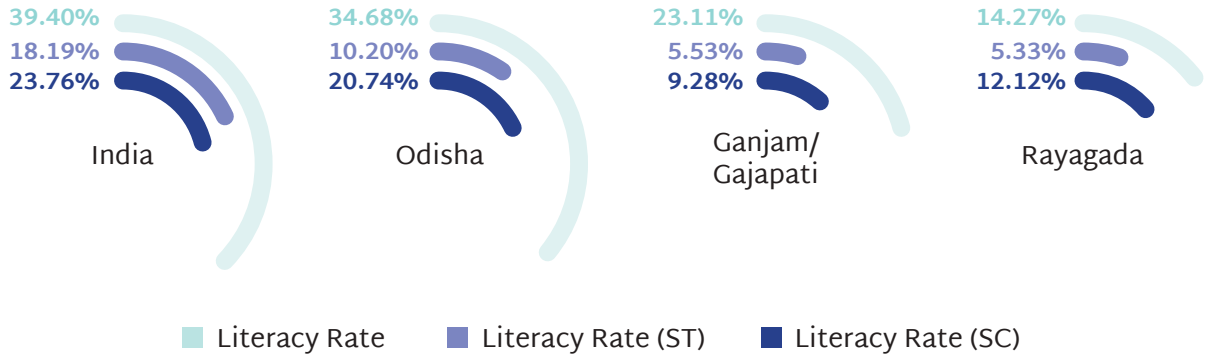


Table 10: ST, SC Female Literacy Rates in India and Odisha, 1991



[23]Census 1991

Gram Vikas made inroads when little infrastructure existed. While institutions like schools and health centres were present in some cases, roads and logistics were far from developed. In Koinpur (Gajapati), villagers often had to commute long distances by foot, and those who lived on hilltops lived very secluded lives. Pigs were reared as an income source, which worsened health outcomes due to the spread of diseases. There were no real markets and few public spaces, which meant that in some cases, villagers did not even know those from neighbouring villages. Electricity came to Koinpur and Tumbo only in 1984, and it was only in 1995-96 that the electricity situation improved significantly.

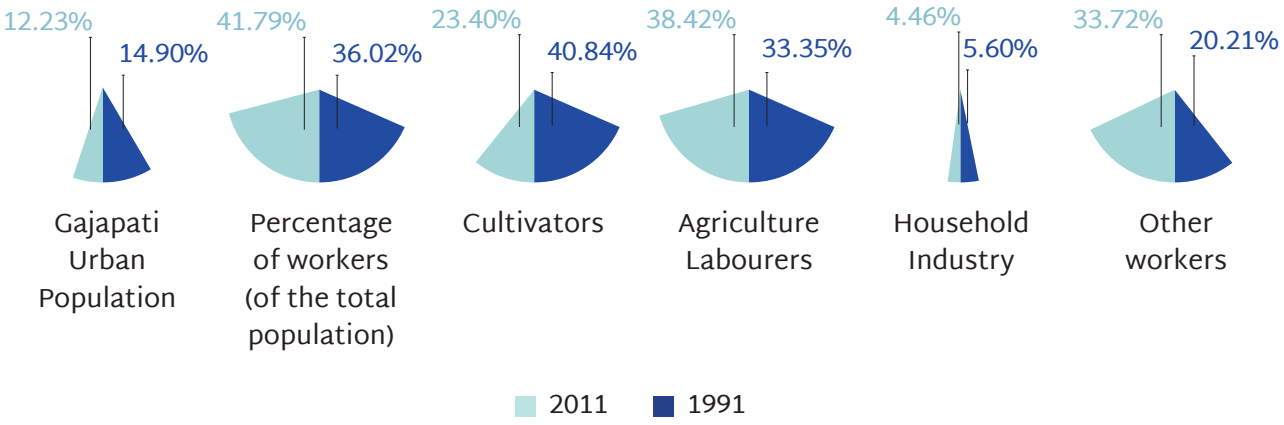
Often, Gram Vikas partnered with local youth to conduct meetings in the villages, to persuade them of the need for employment and education, which slowly increased Gram Vikas' reach to remote and distant villages as well. When it came to children's education, it was specifically the youth whom Gram Vikas had partnered with who toured the local villages trying to convince people of the importance of schooling. Most people did not respond immediately, because parents were unsure of the value of education. It took two months to collect 40 students for the first batch in MTAS, for instance.

Table 11: Changes in socio-economic situation in Gajapati - 1991 to 2011[24]

	1991	2011
Literacy Rate	39.79%	53.49%
Female Literacy Rate	23.11%	43.18%
ST Literacy Rate	13.71%	36.08%
ST Female Literacy Rate	5.53%	27.35%
SC Literacy Rate	22.38%	44.44%
SC Female Literacy Rate	9.28%	35.53%
Sex Ratio	1,020	1,043

[24]Census 1991 and 2011

Table 12: Diversity of occupation in Gajapati – 1991 to 2011[25]:



3.5.1. Quantitative analysis: Mahendra Tanaya Ashram School, Gajapati

In Mahendra Tanaya Ashram School (MTAS), Koinpur, Gajapati, there is still evidence of gender disparity, although it has decreased over the years. What is evident, however, is the overwhelming majority of ST population within the student body. This is primarily because all the other settlements within the GV catchment area are wholly populated by the Saura tribe, who historically have been involved in subsistence agriculture.

It is only in the recent past that occupational diversity has increased marginally, with several hamlets earning their livelihood through the sale of cashews harvested, and in some cases even processed, from the commons in the vicinity. This, combined with migration has led to increased prosperity and the broadening of sensibilities and attitudes towards education, which in turn has apparently driven up the demand for education.

Combined with GV's effective delivery of education, pioneers in several settlements inspired subsequent cohorts to pursue particular lines of work, like teaching in government schools, which has further driven up the demand for education.

[25]Census 1991 and 2011

The Koinpur village in the Koinpur Gram Panchayat is an outlier in this regard, composed of a more heterogeneous mix of castes and a significant migrant population, some of whom came as a part of GV's intervention and settled there, while others hope to exploit the increased revenues from tourism to the nearby Mahendragiri hill. Indeed, several upper-caste inhabitants of Koinpur evinced displeasure with the MTAS, arguing that it wholly neglected them in favour of the Saura tribe population in the region.

From small beginnings in tiny mud huts, lit by solar lamps and nothing else, with an intake into only Classes 1, 2, and 3, to becoming a full high school with the introduction of Class 10 in 2023, MTAS has risen in popularity since its inception. This is despite the presence of several government schools, including a boys' residential high school in Koinpur and a girls' residential high school in Lakhimpur, in addition to several high schools in settlements like Oya, Koinpur and Lakhimpur. It must be noted that not all MTAS students were residential; the campus in Gatida, where most of the primary school students study, is a day school. The total alumni of MTAS in the first decade was 445.

Table 13: Gender-wise Enrolment, MTAS Gajapati, 1992-93 to 2022-23

3.6. From decade 3 to now: Kalahandi

Kalahandi is a district located in the southwestern part of Odisha. It is known for its diverse landscape and tribal communities. Historically, the region has faced challenges in terms of development and its socio-economic indicators. Kalahandi is one of the districts in Odisha that has been identified as a backward region, and it is currently receiving funds under the Backward Regions Grant Fund Programme (BRGF) to support various development projects and initiatives. The literacy rates of marginalised groups in the school block area compared to the national and state averages in 2001 are given below:[26]

Table 14: Literacy Rates in India, Odisha and Kalahandi, SCs, STs, 2001

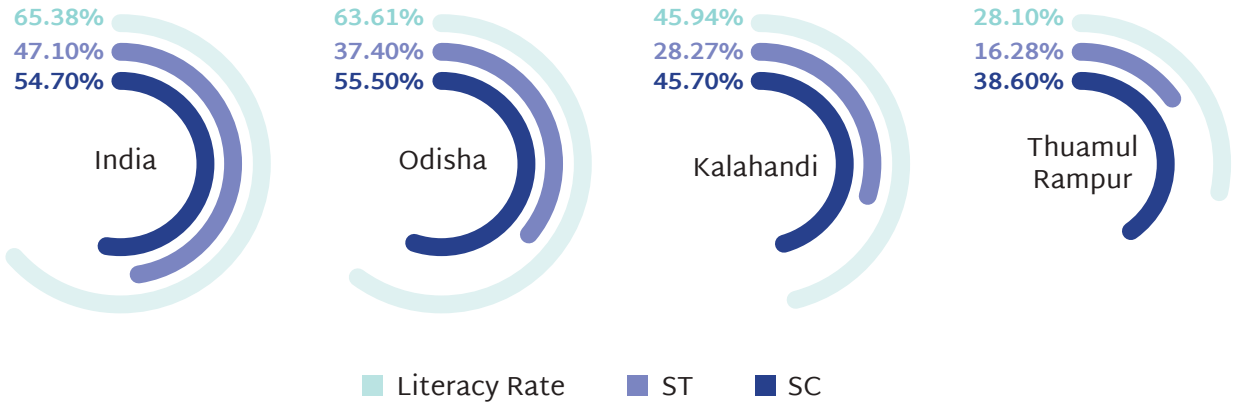
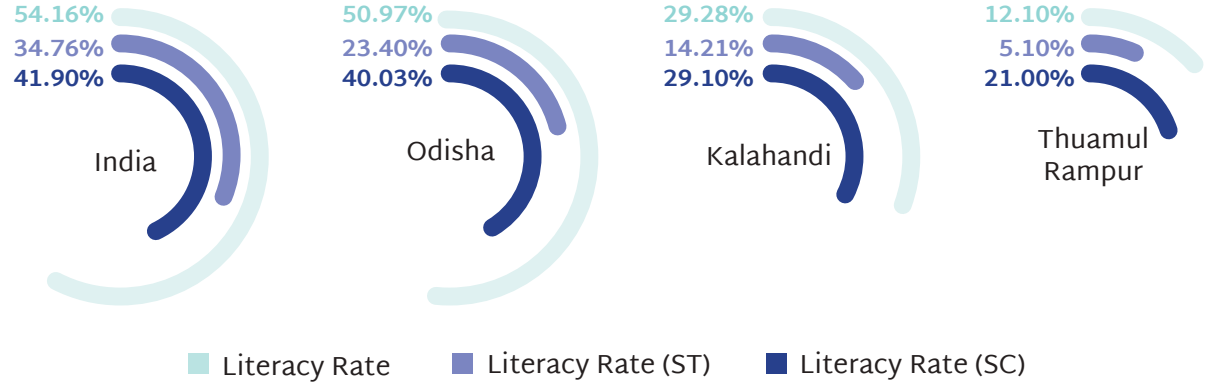


Table 15: Female SC and SC Literacy Rates, India, Odisha and Kalahandi, 2001[27]:



[26]Census 2001
[27]Census 2001

Before the start of the school in Kalahandi, significant community-level work had already been initiated. In 1986, when Meena Gupta was Collector of Kalahandi district, she invited Gram Vikas to set up their project in Kalahandi, in Thuamul Rampur. The condition of people in Kalahandi was very difficult, with rampant malaria and high alcoholism. It was very remote and inaccessible, with only a road from Thuamul Rampur to Bhawanipatna (the district headquarters of Kalahandi). It was also a drought-prone area, and under the Odisha Drought Action Forum (ODAF, a network that was started in 1986), some financial assistance was forthcoming, which helped set up the Kalahandi project.

In 1995, with the government's assistance, the NFE programme was introduced in Thuamul Rampur as well. After two to three years, the Kerandimal experience repeated itself and it was felt that Kalahandi also required a residential school. In typical Gram Vikas fashion, the project organised villagers into village committees, and they helped conceptualise the residential school intervention in Kalahandi.

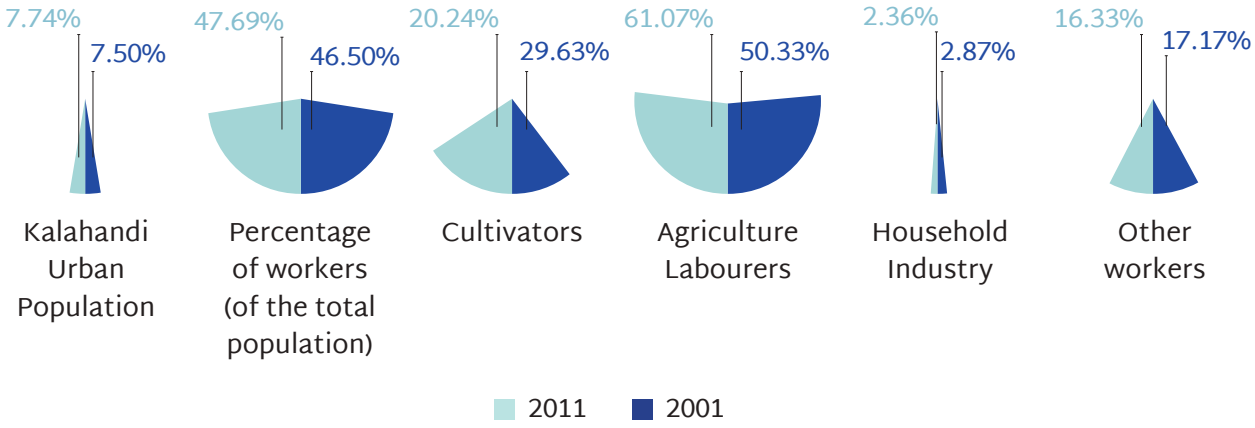
A small plot of land was purchased and two school buildings were constructed, with unskilled labour inputs from the villagers. In August 1998, GVSN Kalahandi was started. At the time it was felt that the support from government and funding agencies had to be supplemented with small contributions from the staff, so at least 1 per cent of the staff salaries was contributed to the school. This idea was then upscaled across several project locations. It was also in this decade that MTAS built a new girls' hostel, and the library was expanded with a grant from the Rajiv Gandhi Foundation.

Table 16: Changes in socio-economic situation in Kalahandi – 2001 to 2011[28]

	2001	2011
Literacy Rate	45.94%	59.22%
Female Literacy Rate	29.28%	46.68%
ST Literacy Rate	28.27%	48.88%
ST Female Literacy Rate	14.21%	35.33%
SC Literacy Rate	45.70%	60.82%
SC Female Literacy Rate	29.10%	48.91%
Sex Ratio	1001	1003

[28]Census 2011 and 2011

Table 17: Diversity in occupation in Kalahandi – 2001 to 2011[29]



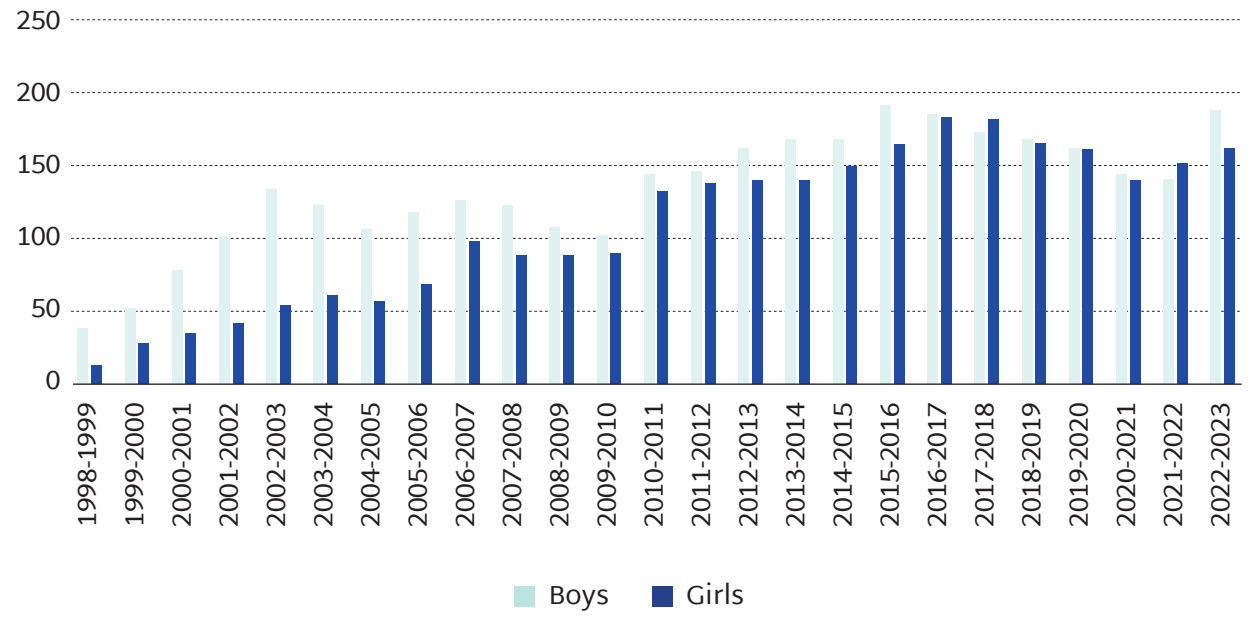
3.6.1. Quantitative Analysis: GVSN, Kalahandi

Unlike the other two schools which began with just mud houses as basic infrastructure, GVSN Kalahandi started as a fully fledged residential school with complete infrastructure for its time. Having one of the experienced teachers from GVHS Ganjam as its new headmaster, the Kalahandi school has seen the most stable, unchanging leadership with the principal continuing in that position to this day. Consequently, the headmaster, Mr. Arabinda Swain, has played a crucial role in its development.

Of the three schools, GVSN was the first to attain gender parity in 2016. The advent of the COVID pandemic, as elaborated in later sections, changed this to the present skew in favour of boys. Equally, unlike in the other two schools, the student body is considerably more heterogeneous when it comes to caste, with the caste-mix more accurately mapping the caste composition of the district as a whole. Yet, even here, STs dominate the student body followed by SCs, indicating GV's emphasis on reaching the most vulnerable population within the geography.

[29]Census 2001 and 2011

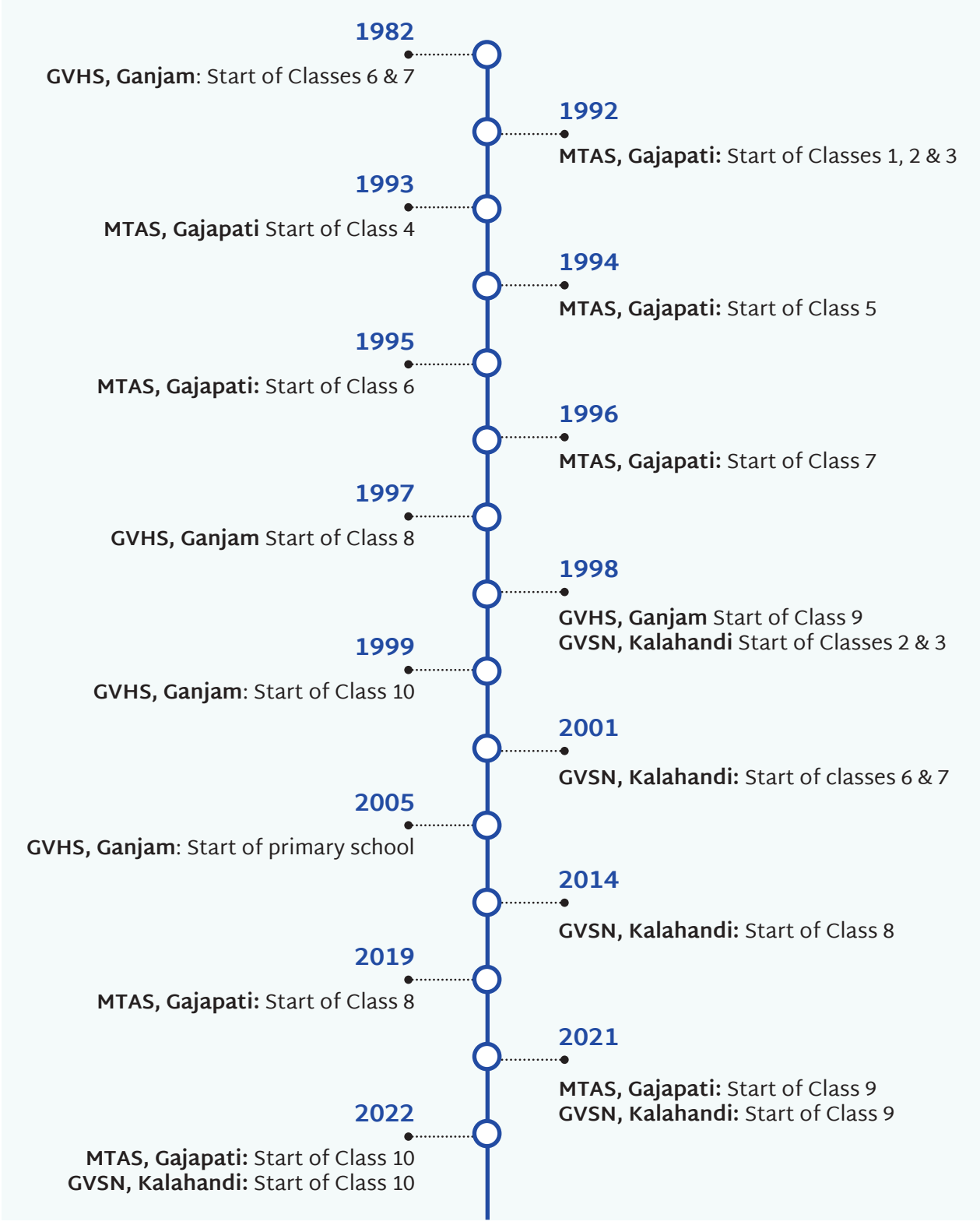
Table 18: Gender-wise Enrolment, 1998-99 to 2022-23



3.7. Growth of the schools and parents' contributions over the years

A closer look at the data shows that GVHS Ganjam's reach grew differently from its counterparts, influenced by timing, geography, and institutional history.

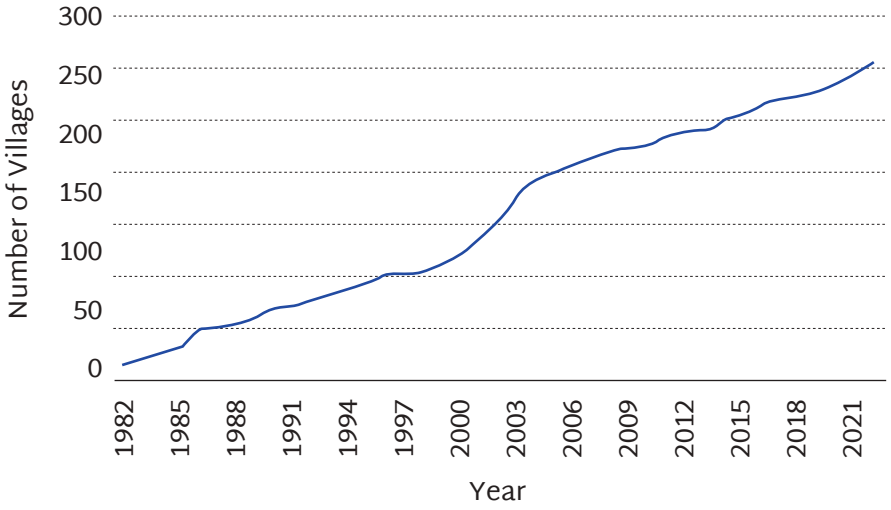
Table 19: Overall growth of the classes across schools



As is evident from the figure below, unlike in the other two schools, the growth of the catchment area of GVHS Ganjam peaked in the middle of the first decade, as Gram Vikas was still consolidating its position in the area. By virtue of being the oldest school, it also started with the most proximate villages, before expanding to more distant villages in later years.

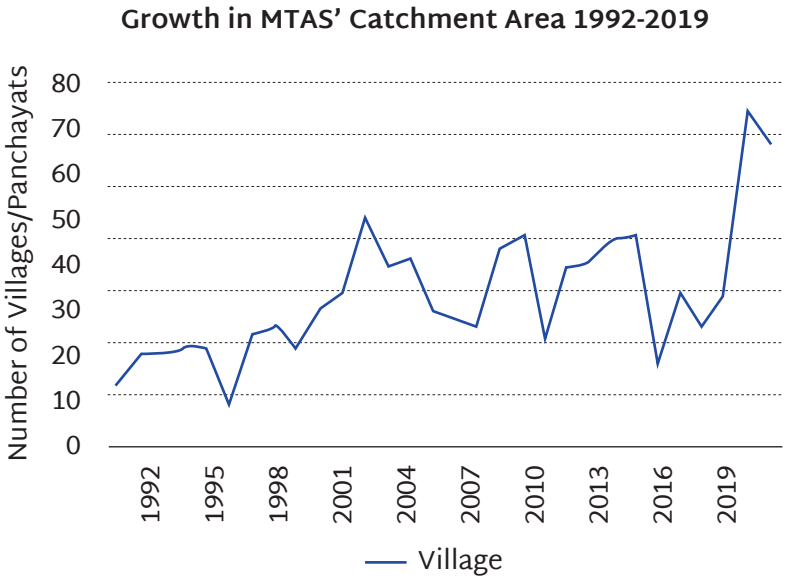
In what is a special case, Bikashpur, which was a village 'created' by Gram Vikas by relocating villages from scattered habitations from the Kerandimal hills, started sending its children to GVHS only in the middle of the decade.

Table 20: Growth in Village Outreach, GVHS Ganjam, 1982-2021



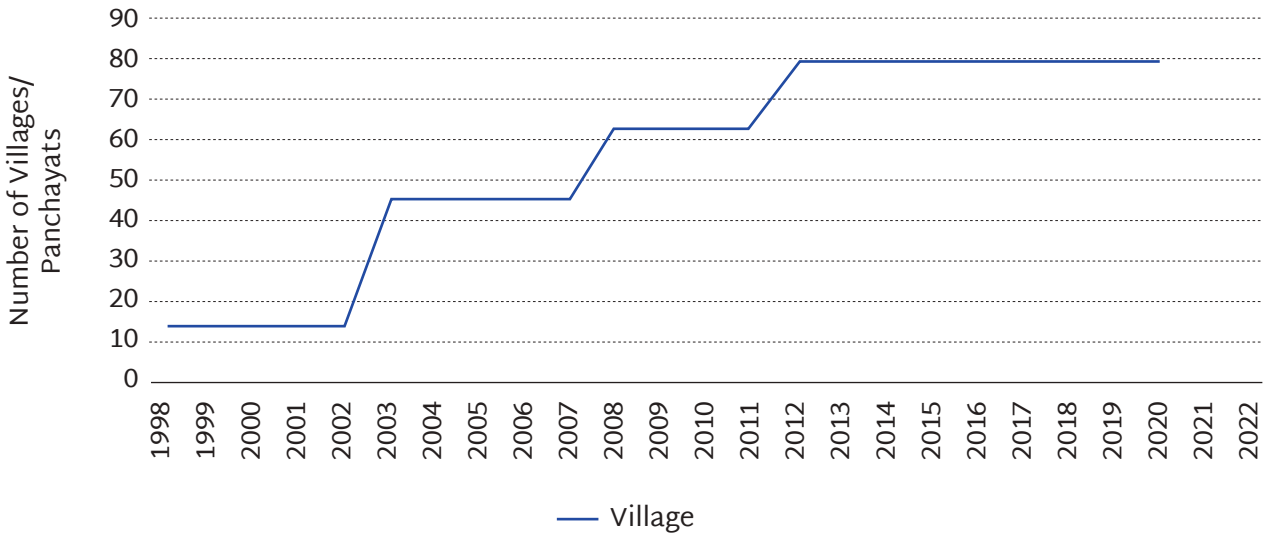
There is considerable volatility in the settlement-wise representation of the students at MTAS Gajapati, with recent years indicating a very healthy representation in that regard, further qualifying the increased demand for Gram Vikas education across the spatiality of the catchment area.

Table 21: Growth in Village Outreach, MTAS Gajapati, 1992-2019



Unlike in the GVHS Ganjam catchment area, that of GVSN Kalahandi spans a much larger area, with the increase in settlements showing a very steady, neat, stable increase. This would likely map well onto the increase of the catchment area of Gram Vikas' interventions as a whole, with education being merely one component of the bundle. This is because Gram Vikas frequently used the education initiative as a reward for having participated in other GV interventions. This is made most clear by the fact that the contribution structure heavily incentivises and prioritises intake from the catchment areas, as against those villages that are not part of the catchment area.

Table 22: Growth in Village Outreach, GVSN Kalahandi, 1998-2022



3.8. Parents' contribution structure

The initial years were free of cost, and only in 1988 was a simple parents' contribution structure introduced.

Table 23: Annual School Fees (Rs.)

Year	Boys	Girls
1988	10	5
1991	110	100
2001	2,000	1,500
2002	2,000	1,500
2004	4,000	3,000
2007	5,000	4,000
2011	6,000	5,000
2019	7,000	6,000

As evident from the table above, the minimum parental contribution to the schools has a gender differential to encourage the enrolment of female students. Equally, this contribution increases for applicants from outside the GV project area villages, and even further for applicants from outside the block. Preference is, therefore, given to GV catchment applicants, as the school initiative features in a bouquet of village-level interventions implemented by GV. The contributions are waived for orphans and struggling students on a case-by-case basis. Thus, the inability to pay these contributions does not affect their ability to access the school's education services, once the child has secured a seat in the school.

3.9. Building an ecosystem for education

Right from inception, across all schools, there was an emphasis on building the overall ecosystem to deliver quality education. This involved working with the community to address marginalisation, focus on holistic education, and invest in critical infrastructure like drinking water access, toilets, and a library. Each of these aspects is covered below.

3.9.1 Engagement with the community

Gram Vikas interventions span across strengthening women's self help groups (SHGs), community health interventions like training programmes on health schemes, partnering with ANMs, organising health camps, WASH initiatives, easing access to micro-insurance, livelihood initiatives like the WADI project, and water and food security projects. These engagements, in the three school initiative districts, helped build rapport, which deepened the trust and relationship between the organisation and the community.

Village Education Centres (VECs) were formed to actively involve families and community members. A NFE programme was started in the initial period. Later, bridge courses were conducted to raise the level of elementary education. Each course ran for three to six months and supported 30-40 students. This process was followed from 2006 to 2015.

The focus was on project villages as well as villages with high orphan populations and dropouts. This also enabled students from some of the more prominent feeder villages to enroll in Gram Vikas schools and government schools somewhat seamlessly. Since 2015, remedial classes have been held in situ on the school campuses to support academically weaker students.

3.9.2. Focus on holistic education

Sports as well as arts and crafts have been important areas of student engagement in the schools. Even in the initial days, in each of the residential schools, students were encouraged to be physically active. Sports and cultural meets were regularly held. Other extracurricular activities include plumbing, painting, mat-weaving, debates and quizzes, tailoring, and kitchen gardening.

Introduced in 2011 to further nurture an interest in sports, the schools organised Khel Vikas in partnership with a sports development trust called Pro4sport Solutions, which involved training camps in badminton, cricket, football, volleyball, and weight-lifting. A centre of excellence was established in GVHS Ganjam for weightlifting, and elite camps for competitive sports are conducted. Today there is a physical training (PT) teacher in each school. Children are also facilitated to participate in the block, district, and state-level sports meets.

Students are routinely encouraged to participate in art competitions, and plays are regularly organised. Kalpanadham, which was set up by SBI-YFI Fellow Shalini Krishnan as a creative centre for students to express themselves through art, played a transformational role in exposing students to different artistic sensibilities. Gram Vikas also sells the students' paintings from its Bhubaneswar head office. Former students sometimes teach art, but much of the skill is imparted by senior students, and practice is incentivised by the sale of art through Gram Vikas.

The schools had computers in the early 2000s, but these were mostly for administrative purposes. Supported by Oracle in 2014, GV has emphasised the use of ICT to engage students in e-learning. Attempts were also made to introduce coding using RaspberryPi in the schools. A pictorial computer manual has also been prepared, and is revised annually to help with computer learning. The result is that the challenges of the digital divide are better negotiated by GV students. The use of smart classrooms has further hastened the learning process.

Another feature of the schools is regular teacher training to keep teachers updated about latest developments in teaching methods and the use of materials. Workshops are occasionally conducted by external experts. In several workshops, however, GV teachers themselves present their findings based on their own experiences teaching students, from which other teachers can benefit.

Teacher training used to be conducted centrally, mostly during the vacation period. Gradually this has shifted, and now training is school-specific, with the participation of both teachers and students. In addition, training is held on specific subjects to build capacity in teachers throughout the year. Teachers also participate in block-level trainings organised by the government under the SSA.

> Most importantly, however, what sets the Gram Vikas schools apart, is the familial atmosphere created within the schools, thanks to the efforts of the teachers. From caring for the children's medical needs to creating a close relationship through activities such as gardening, and teaching them songs, dance, and art, and on occasion protecting children from abusive families, the teachers are responsible for ensuring that the children feel safe and protected within the confines of the school.

Moreover, these teachers have a deep connection with the parent community within the catchment area, which was made evident when much of this research was made fairly seamless and easy due to connections the headmasters had in the surrounding villages. Much of this research would not have been possible without enthusiastic and passionate support from the headmasters and the teacher community within these schools.

3.9.3. Investment in critical infrastructure

Infrastructure in rural schools plays a pivotal role in shaping the quality of education and overall development of children. Even as early as 1990, GVHS had six separate teaching rooms. In all three schools, access to clean drinking water and toilets were a priority; alongside separate kitchens and dining rooms were set up. Apart from tube wells and wells on the campus, the schools invested in gravity-flow water supply from nearby villages. Appropriate hostels were set up. The library was an integral feature of each school. By the early 2000s, GVSN, which had been established in 1998, had boundary walls and electricity connections (though erratic supply is still an issue).

Moreover, uniforms were provided to students along with other essentials like soap and oil.

3.9.4. Teacher recruitment

The biggest challenge was that all the residential schools were in inaccessible areas. Also, malaria was very common, and several staff members and guests lost their lives to it. This diminished people's willingness to seek employment in the schools. At that time, it was almost certain that, after living there for about two weeks, they would contract malaria, and as a result, precautionary chloroquine tablets and mosquito nets were mandatory.

The salary package was also not competitive. It was a big challenge to find qualified local community members to staff the residential school, and it was equally difficult to convince qualified outsiders to join the residential schools located in remote areas as teachers. As there was no electricity, transportation, or even water (GV staff used to drink water from streams), it was all the more challenging to run residential schools with adequate staff. Working in the school also required regular visits to villages, often situated on hilltops and thus inaccessible, necessitating walking or trekking through dense forests.

The staffing needs were met through the personal networks of GV staff, who were persuaded and motivated by sensitising them to the prospect of working for communities that were extremely poor and remote. GV then had the target of hiring GV students after they had passed Class 10, and providing them with adequate training to become teachers in their own schools. The main criteria for hiring teachers, especially in the early years, were their willingness to work and their motivation to teach in remote, inaccessible areas.

In 1992, Gram Vikas realised the importance of recruiting teachers from the community itself. This was not a seamless process either, as the Annual Report of 1991-92 noted. Young teens and neo-literates, who otherwise lagged behind their elders in terms of environmental awareness and ecological consciousness, had somewhat better literacy and numeracy. Ensuring the literacy of the teachers themselves, GV realised, was a slow, painstaking process, as being the only literate in the village often meant that rapid learning was inhibited.

As a result of improvements in school infrastructure, the schools have started to take in students from Class 1 all the way to Class 10. But teacher recruitment has not kept pace, primarily because the Odisha state government is also actively recruiting teachers, especially post-covid. As a result, applicants do not commit to GV schools as teachers.

The staff recruitment process in GV schools is largely the same across the three schools, although it is localised. Recruitment takes place through the year. It is mostly through word of mouth, with no advertising, and starts with the applicant sending a CV. If it meets the standards for recruitment, then the candidate is called in to the nearest school (not the school they will be posted to). A senior teacher of that subject will sit in on a demo class in which the ability to communicate with students effectively is ascertained. If this criterion is met, then the school will write a report based on which the applicant is interviewed. If these are positive, the appointment is formalised and they are posted to a particular school. Sometimes they may be given a written

test, especially when the demo class has not been up to the mark, just as an added point of recommendation.

In recent years, however, teacher recruitment has been marked by an increased demand for permanent positions, something that is a real challenge as an increasing number of teachers prefer secure government teaching jobs over private ones, such as the ones on offer in the GV schools. This thus means that finding and nurturing leadership for the future of each of the schools becomes a real challenge.

3.9.5. Student-teacher ratio

The student-teacher ratio in GVHS Ganjam has remained steady at between 21 to 27 students to a teacher, in the last decade (based on available data). Female teachers account for more than 35 per cent. In MTAS, Gajapati, the student-teacher ratio has varied between 15 and 33 in the last two decades (available data). Female teachers account for more than 35 per cent. And the student-teacher ratio in Kalahandi has varied between 14 and 38 since its inception; unlike the other two schools, female teachers account for less than 35 per cent.

The all-India student-teacher ratio (in primary sections) was 42 in 2009.[30] This ratio fluctuates over the years. Moreover, teachers in government schools are also engaged with various types of bureaucratic work including election duty. Thus, the student-teacher ratios of the three residential GV schools compare favourably with the overall situation in government schools across the country.

3.9.6. Collaboration

Organisational collaborations take place almost serendipitously. During the COVID-19 lockdown, for instance, there was a collaboration between Gram Vikas and the Royal Society of Chemistry to conduct teacher workshops. Collaborations are often determined by the need to address problems and the emergence of potential avenues of solution. These avenues often open as a result of shared networks, and materialise due to Gram Vikas' trust and track record.

The collaborations are not always oriented towards children's education, they are more often towards their well-being, such as collaborations with Goonj for children's clothing and with Project Baala for environment-friendly menstrual products. Other collaborations are with PARI, the SBI Foundation, and The American School in Switzerland (TASIS) – all of which expose students to a much wider understanding of the world that goes far beyond the classroom curriculum.

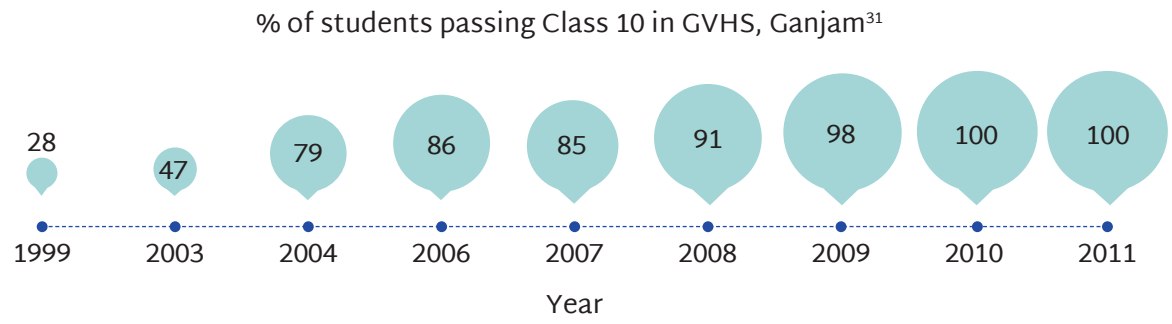
[30] https://mospi.gov.in/sites/default/files/Statistical_year_book_india_chapters/Education_0.pdf

As a result, not only do the children perform better than their government school counterparts academically, as is evidenced by the number of scholarships received by GV students, they also have a much broader understanding which is vital to their overall development. These collaborations have also resulted in improved facilities for the school, such as the computer labs in all the schools which were funded by Oracle. This emphasis on collaboration with external organisations allows for the GV education intervention to stay updated and remain ahead of the curve when compared to other schools in their vicinity.

3.9.7. Education outcomes and scholarship

The outcome for class 10 matriculation examinations is as below:

Table 24: Percentage of students passing Class 10



From 2010 , when class 10 was introduced in all the schools, every batch has had all the students successfully matriculating. Equally, dropouts have been near-zero, with the community often supporting the schools in ensuring that dropouts do not occur. For instance, in those rare instances when children run away from school, the community often voluntarily catches the students and brings them back to school. As a result, the GV school, over time, has become an institution that is renowned among the local community and commands considerable trust.

[31] Class 10 in MTAS Koinpur and GVSN Th. Rampur started in 2022

Conversations with several villagers revealed that the local community often feels that the GV schools control and channelise the students' time wisely, with classes starting early in the morning, and regular tuition and homework hours running past the school timings. This rigour often ensures that students do not wander around the village, something that students of other schools reportedly do.

As a result, Gram Vikas schools are known for shaping their students in a manner that the local community deems beneficial and vital. In all three schools, students outperform their peers in other schools of the block when it comes to obtaining scholarships, such as the National Rural Talent Scholarship and Pathani Samanta Math Talent Scholarship.

Though the team could not find old official or online records on scholarships, the Block Education Officers and Gram Vikas staff have confirmed the standout performance, particularly of MTAS Gajapati and GVSN Kalahandi alumni. The year-wise trend related to scholarships is given below:

Table 25: Scholarships Awarded in GV Schools, 2001-02 to 2020-21

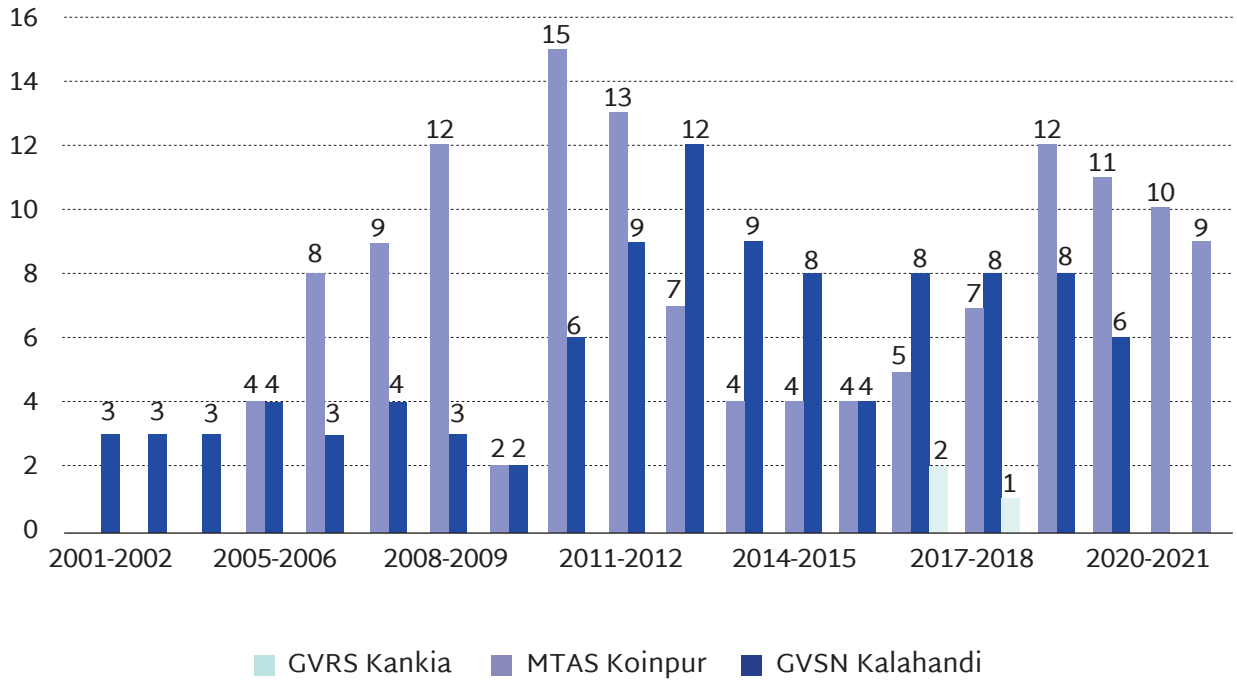
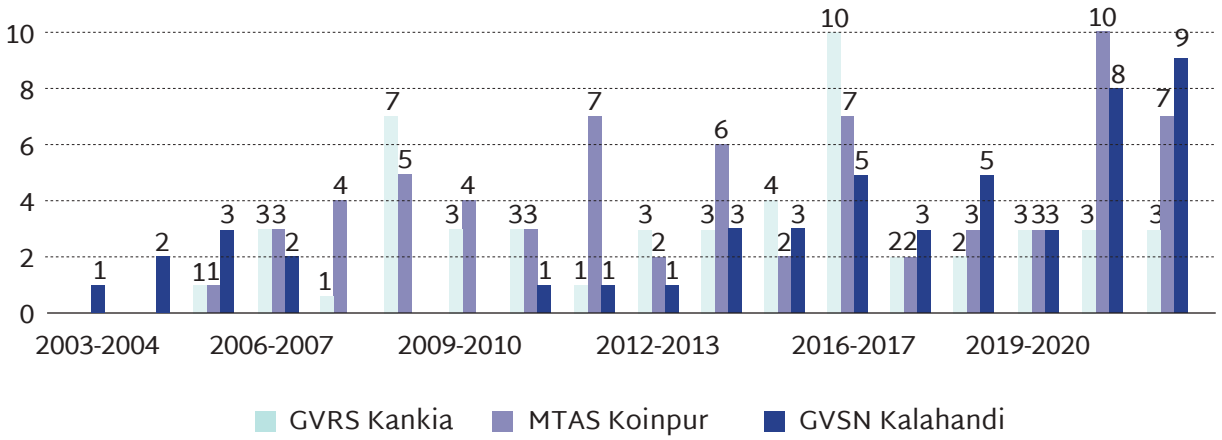


Table 26: Results of Navodaya scholarship exams across GV Schools, 2003-04 to 2019-20



The charts above show the performance of the students of each of the three schools. The first one lists the government scholarships that accrued to meritorious ST students, while the Navodaya results show the performance of the students in the entrance exams to the Navodaya schools. For the Navodaya schools specifically, as also for the NRTS, Pathani Samanta and other scholarships, the Gram Vikas schools have a separate tuition class at the end of the day, where they train and coach children to appear for and enter the Navodaya system.

As is evident, the results are often a mixed bag, showing considerable volatility that is driven not by the quality of the Navodaya training classes, but by the students' relative participation with respect to the rest of the applicant pool. More impressively, since 2005, there has never been a year when no student has made it into the Navodaya system.

Table 27: Snapshot of key events over the years

Year	Key Event
1982	Commencement of first residential school in Kankia village of Ganjam
1983	Community awareness drive on education
1984	Continued community awareness drives on education
1985	Increased teacher strength to three in GVHS
1986	Recognition of GVHS by the government
1987	Mobilisation of the community
1988	Increased acknowledgment of GVHS in the community
1989	Infrastructure expansion; six rooms in GVHS
1990	Groundwork in Koinpur village, Gajapati, for second school

1991	Initial infrastructure in place to start MTAS
1992	Commencement of second residential school in Koinpur village, Gajapati
1993	Uniforms provided to students in MTAS
1994	Critical investment in infrastructure including more toilets in GVHS
1995	Electrification in MTAS
1996	First scholarship from SC/ST category in GVHS
1997	Start of class 8 in GVHS
1998	Commencement of third residential school in Kumudabahal village, Kalahandi
1999	Start of class 10 in GVHS
2000	17 of the 45 in GVHS matriculate
2001	GVHS alumni qualify for engineering and ITI
2002	Student strength of 100 in GVSN
2003	First gravity-supply water flow to MTAS from nearby village
2004	Completion of girls' hostel in MTAS
2005	Matriculation of 18 students from first batch of GVSN from different schools
2006	Launch of the midday meal programme at GVSN supported by the government
2007	Start of orchard in the MTAS campus
2008	Seven students selected for Navodaya from GVHS
2009	Library expansion in MTAS
2010	Matriculation of 100% students from GVHS
2011	Setting up of Village Resource Centre to connect ISRO to the community in Kalahandi
2012	Start of weightlifting sessions in GVHS
2013	Jagriti Yatris visit GVHS
2014	Completion of central solar electrification in GVSN
2015	Selection of students from MTAS for state-level Kho Kho competition
2016	Gender parity of students in GVSN
2017	Start of "The American School in Switzerland" student visit in GVHS

2018	Start of smart classes
2019	Start of class 8 in MTAS
2020	COVID quarantine centre in schools
2021	One student from MTAS receives national-level award for climate action
2022	Student strength of more than 500 in GVHS
2023	One student from GVHS wins international weightlifting award in Albania

3.9.8. Impact of COVID

The impacts of COVID have resulted in three outcomes:

Reorientation: As a result of the lockdown, there was a huge gap in children's learning that had to be surmounted. Education up to Class 8 has become more 'basic oriented,' emphasising the fundamentals of reading, writing, and arithmetic, to provide a solid foundation when they pursue higher education in college. Thus, for instance, bridge courses were conducted for nearly half a year, in accordance with – and by extending – the government-mandated requirement for bridge courses.

Enhanced delivery: There has also been significant development in and increased capacity and quality of delivery. For instance, with the new infrastructure, there is space to have a science lab, a proper library, etc. This improved delivery helps students catch up with greater efficiency.

Reintegrating dropouts: With the onset of COVID, students of Class 6 pre-COVID, for instance, found themselves in Class 9 after the lockdown was fully lifted, without having gone through the classes in between. As the telecommunications infrastructure in these villages is not as developed as it is in urban areas, there was a huge gap, with several students forgetting what they had already been taught. This meant having to introduce a six-month course in the academic year just to get them up to speed. Thus, there was an emphasis on rebuilding these fundamentals for students up to Class 8. GV added to the basic courses set up by the state government and ran them rigorously. There was a very small number of dropouts, of which about 50 per cent returned due to interventions by GV staff. In order to reach out to the dropouts, the school management used its considerable network to contact families and evaluate further incentives, like the parents' contribution structure, on a case-by-case basis.

3.10. Reflections on being ahead of time

The intervention of Gram Vikas stands as an example of foresight that was ahead of its time in addressing the educational and developmental needs of marginalised communities in rural Odisha. Through its holistic approach, community engagement, and adaptive strategies, Gram Vikas has enabled marginalised communities access to quality education and holistic development, thereby laying the foundation for better life outcomes for students. In each of the intervening blocks, the ST literacy rate was less than 20 per cent when the schools opened. The female literacy rate among STs was 5 per cent or less.

At the time of the intervention, rural education in poverty pockets of Odisha and much of the country was often plagued by limited access and poor infrastructure. As late as 1990, about 60 per cent of government schools lacked drinking water facilities, and close to 90 per cent did not have adequate toilet facilities. In fact, enrollment of SC and ST students in government schools was very low, which is evident from their low literacy rates.

Gram Vikas recognised the pressing need to break the cycle of poverty and provide marginalised children with an education that went beyond traditional classroom learning. This led to the establishment of co-ed residential schools, an idea that was a departure from the norm.

These schools provided immersive educational experiences that incorporated both academic and life skills. The emphasis on sports, art, and dance helped students to evolve as better and well-rounded individuals. This was reiterated by the students, time and again, in the longitudinal interviews.

The dropout rates in Gram Vikas schools, after the flux of the first few years, dropped to less than 5 per cent by the end of the first-decade journey in each of the schools, far lower than for other students from similar socio-cultural backgrounds during that period[32].

Gram Vikas schools did not just wait for students to enrol; they took education to the children. The Non-Formal Education (NFE) programme operating in local villages was a clear departure from conventional schooling. It is this groundwork that helped bring the first lot of children from very remote villages and marginalised households to the residential schools. The flexibility and adaptability to cater to the unique circumstances of the communities and the stress on holistic learning by integrating sports, arts, and agriculture into the curriculum were ahead of its time in many ways.

By involving the local community, particularly in and around the residential school periphery, in decision-making processes, from the construction of school infrastructure to teacher recruitment, Gram Vikas fostered a sense of ownership and commitment.

Additionally, its emphasis on the provision of basic infrastructure created a much safer ambiance for children, particularly for girls. This critical investment in infrastructure right from drinking water through a gravity flow system, toilets, and school libraries stands out at a time when most schools in the country, particularly in rural areas, were grappling with infrastructure issues.

Gram Vikas also forged partnerships with diverse organisations based on shared values and complementary expertise. This open-minded approach enabled the organisation to address a range of issues impacting children's well-being, from sports to computer literacy. Regular training camps in badminton, cricket, football, volleyball, and weightlifting enabled students to excel in sports and gain priceless exposure by participating in several district, state, and national events.

[32] There was a more than 50% dropout of ST students from government schools even in 2001

The introduction of higher grades, such as Class 10, meant that students could pursue further education without interruption. This was a significant departure from where rural students had to change schools at different stages of their education, and it enabled access to non-stop learning and good quality education for largely first-generational learners. This is also reflected in a significant number of students who obtained scholarships; in fact, in regard to most government scholarships available in the blocks, the first-decade alumni and even later cohorts significantly outperformed their peers in other schools.

The success of Gram Vikas schools in achieving consistently high pass rates and low dropout rates, and the performance of students in scholarship exams underscores the efficacy of a more regimented approach in the form of residential schools, given the context of the area and low literacy levels of the community.

The longitudinal and telephonic interviews, covering 15% of the first-decade cohort, shed light on enhanced academic achievement: 42 per cent of the female respondents in the telephonic interviews had completed graduation; less than 30 per cent of the male cohort from the first decade who were interviewed identified themselves as farmers; the rest had diversified into other professions.

The firm academic foundation in their early years has helped an entire generation from marginalised groups to move beyond traditional livelihoods, like agriculture and labour, to diverse livelihoods including government service, private jobs, and micro-enterprises. Thus, the impact and consequences were certainly ahead of their time.

In summary, Gram Vikas' intervention was ahead of its time by understanding that education is not a one-size-fits-all solution, and by tailoring its approach to meet the specific needs of marginalised communities in geographically challenging and isolated terrain. Its emphasis on holistic development, community engagement, adaptability, and collaboration showcased a vision that went beyond traditional educational models. This approach has also enabled education initiatives to stay ahead of the curve and is still strongly sought after by the community.

04
Intergenerational Change

What does Gram Vikas mean by intergenerational change?

The 'Learning from the Past, Reading the Present, Planning for the Future' (LP-RP-PF) document shared by Gram Vikas says the following about intergenerational change: "Like a staircase or a hand helping a candle glow when faced with strong winds".

The LP-RP-PF document goes on to say that an intergenerational approach draws attention to the depth and continuity of development processes and outcomes. It is another way of understanding deerghasthayi vikas (sustainable development). It implies that:

- Development is not a one-time fix. It is complex, changing, and contextual. Work is thus ongoing – though roles will evolve.
- Development outcomes are not just in delivery, but in trajectories – of individuals and groups – that develop due to the interplay of many factors.
- The nature of vulnerabilities that an individual or a community faces changes over time. Timely and adequate support at the time of vulnerability – like a hand supporting a candle when faced by a strong wind – is important in tiding over these events.
- Being concerned about how solutions will mature enables a more wide-angle view of an extant problem.
- A commitment to intergenerational change requires one to be vested and to think about the longevity of outcomes. Seeing our work as intergenerational also requires us to think deeply about the nature of our relationship with the community, as a long-standing, all-weather friend, that they can count on in times of need.

As mentioned in an earlier section, the parameters identified by Gram Vikas for capturing intergenerational change were to do with occupational diversity, health outcomes, marital choices, etc. After the inception workshop, and the pilot field visits, these were expanded and clustered around the following categories: educational outcomes, occupational diversity, health status, social outcomes (caste, marriage), and the emergence of new solidarity networks. Some of these were explored at the individual level and some at the community level.

The study TOR listed the following positions pertaining to the 'intergenerationality of Gram Vikas's education programme,' to which it is looking for validation through this study.

- The educational status of the generation which was reaching the school-going age in 1993-96 and 1986 in Koinpur and Kankia, respectively, seems to be radically different from their previous generation.
- Parents' trust in Gram Vikas enabled them to send their children to Gram Vikas schools. Teachers' visits to the villages and their remaining connected with parents boosted the confidence and interest of parents, which in turn shaped their behaviour towards schooling.
- Gram Vikas focused on building the child's personality; besides reading and writing, the schools emphasised games, art, music, and expression. The Gram Vikas school graduate was distinctive in his/her behaviour from other children and that itself created more interest and demand for a Gram Vikas education.
- Assured and good quality meals in the schools seem to have spawned health benefits for the children enrolled in the Gram Vikas schools.

- Support networks emerged for children in schools. Together with local role models, which created a positive and upward spiral, this made it more difficult for a child to fall behind.
- Schooling changed the employment profile of this generation. Gram Vikas school graduates would have made more of the opportunities that came their way.

We have attempted to explore some of these, based on both long and deep conversations, as well as through somewhat briefer phone interviews, which reached a larger number of the first-decade alumni of the three schools.

4.1. Insights from the phone interviews

4.1.1. Profile, Education Attainments and Occupation of respondents

All respondents were from Gen-1[33].

The phone interviews covered a total of 116 respondents from a total of 1,059 of the first-decade cohorts of the three schools (about 11%). The biggest challenge was to trace this cohort and obtain their numbers. We had the lowest number of respondents from the Ganjam school, since they are the oldest cohort; some are no longer alive, not traceable, and also the least likely to be using a mobile phone.

4.1.2. Gender composition

Of the 116 respondents, 28 per cent were female and 72 per cent were male. This is more or less the same as the female-male ratio in the first ten years across the three schools: there were 31 per cent girls in the first decade.

From the school-wise breakup of male and female respondents, only 20 per cent of the respondents were female in the case of GVHS, compared to over 40 per cent in the other two schools.

4.1.3. Caste composition

Of the respondents, 81 per cent were from Scheduled Tribes (83% in the actual cohort) and 15 per cent were Scheduled Castes (12% in the full universe). Other Backward Classes and General Castes comprised the remaining 4 per cent of respondents. This is in line with the caste composition of the first decade cohort.

While we had the most diverse caste profile among respondents from GVSN (Kalahandi), from the MTAS (Gajapati) cohort we could reach only the ST respondents.

[33] Gen-0: Parents of children who were reaching school-going age around the time the schools started. Gen-1: Children who attended Gram Vikas schools/or other schools in the same period. Gen-2: Children of Gram Vikas school alumni who study/studied in Gram Vikas schools

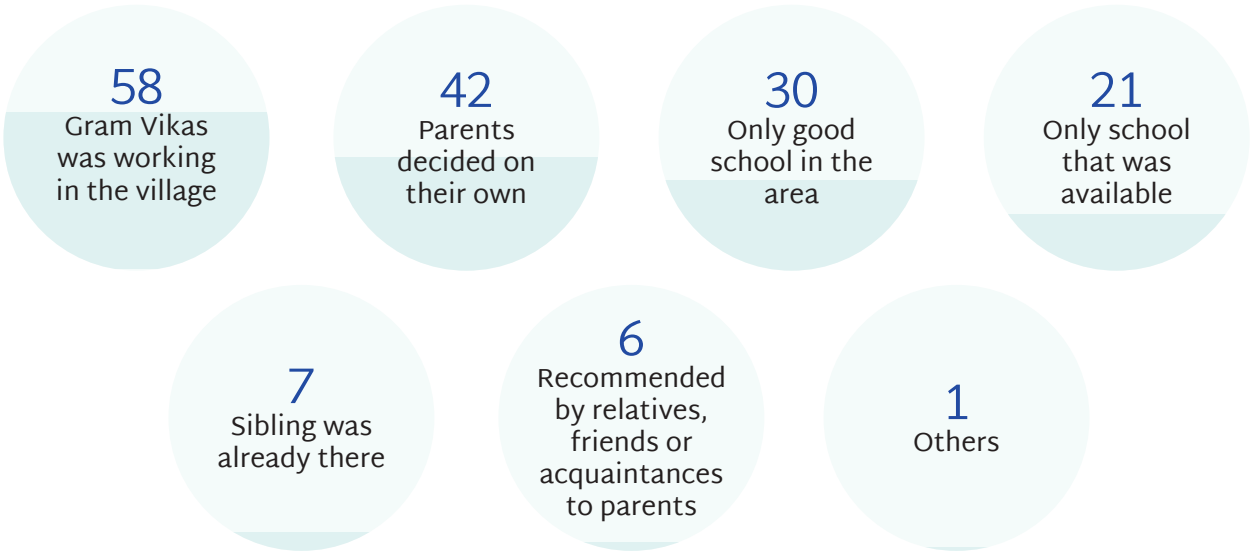
4.1.4. Age composition

Of all the respondents 60 per cent were in the age group of 26 to 35 years, while 22 per cent were in the 36 to 45-year category. We were able to reach only three respondents in the over-56 age group. These would be alumni from the very first years of the Kankia school. Overall, despite the limitations of telephonic interviews, we did get a sample that was fairly representative of the total universe of alumni from the first decade of each school.

4.1.5. Reasons for choosing to study in a Gram Vikas School

This was among the first questions (with multiple options) that we asked – why did your parents decide to send you to the Gram Vikas school, especially when it had just started and had not acquired a reputation for academic excellence.

Table 28: Reason for Joining Gram Vikas School



The overwhelming response indicated some sort of direct or indirect GV connection – their parents knew Gram Vikas since it was already working in their village and Gen-0 had sufficient exposure to and trust in the organisation. The other striking reasons given were that either the GV school was the only available school, or it was the only good school in the area, again suggesting an 'ahead of time' intervention.

4.1.6. Education Attainment of Gen-1

Of the 33 women in our sample, nearly 49 per cent went on to complete their graduation or even post-graduation. That is indeed a significant number, especially for the first cohorts, when studying till plus-2 or plus-3 would often require travelling a fair distance from home. At the other end of the spectrum, 20 women did not complete Class 10.

In comparison, only 32 per cent of the male respondents went on to do graduation, post-graduation or any other specialised degree (engineering, law, etc.). However, 40 per cent of the male alumni have completed either Class 10 or Class 12 (30% of the female alumni).

The difference between the men and women in terms of going on for higher education (graduation, post-graduation, etc.) is really striking and may suggest that given an opportunity, women are more likely to be tenacious about studying for longer. What makes this truly remarkable is that this difference is despite the greater challenges that women face in mobility.

4.1.7. Occupational Profile of Gen-1

We also asked respondents about their current occupations and found that only 15 per cent of the women fell into the traditional occupational categories (housewife, doing nothing, others), while 43 per cent of the men identified themselves as being in traditional occupations (farmer, labourer, migrant, not doing anything, and others).

This indicates that about 85 per cent of the women are in some kind of non-traditional occupation or job. For men, 57 per cent are in non-traditional occupations (this even including anyone who called themselves a painter, mason, etc., which could be a traditional occupation as well). Further, 45 per cent of the women respondents are now teachers and 12 per cent of the male respondents are teachers.

The differences between men and women on both the parameters of highest educational attainment and occupational profile are extremely marked, and suggest that the educational intervention of Gram Vikas, while significant in terms of a generational shift in the case of men, certainly led to a remarkable generational leap among the women. We say this only within the cohorts that attended the Gram Vikas schools, and the relative difference in outcomes that we see among the men and women.

We do recognise and qualify that for each child, these outcomes would get affected by a host of other variables as well, such as parental/family backgrounds, economic conditions, opportunities at a certain time, etc. But with all the caveats it still seems safe to say that while the Gram Vikas schools have led to a generational shift among their alumni, the shift has been much larger in the case of their female alumni.

4.1.8. Education Attainment and Occupation of Parents of Gen-1 (also referred to as Gen-0)

One large external variable is parental background, and we attempted to map the respondents' parents' education and occupation. This is what emerged: among the Gen-1 parents, 94 per cent of the mothers and 73 per cent of the fathers had never been to school. Of the mothers who had gone to school, none had cleared class 10, while only about 9 per cent of the fathers who went to school had cleared class 10 or class 12; none of the fathers had been to college.

Compared with their parental education levels, both the men and women from Gen-1 demonstrate a leap, with women of course having leapt farther.

If we look at the occupational profile of Gen-0, along the same classification as for Gen-1, then we find that all the mothers had been in traditional occupations (farming, labour, housewife) while only about nine per cent of the fathers had been engaged in non-traditional vocations (post office, mason, driver, police, veterinary, NGO worker). This again is in stark contrast to the Gen-1 data, where 85 per cent of the women and 57 per cent of the men are now in non-traditional occupations. Again, compared to Gen-0, the generational leap among Gen-1 women is far more pronounced.

4.1.9. Education Attainment and Occupation of Spouses of Gen-1

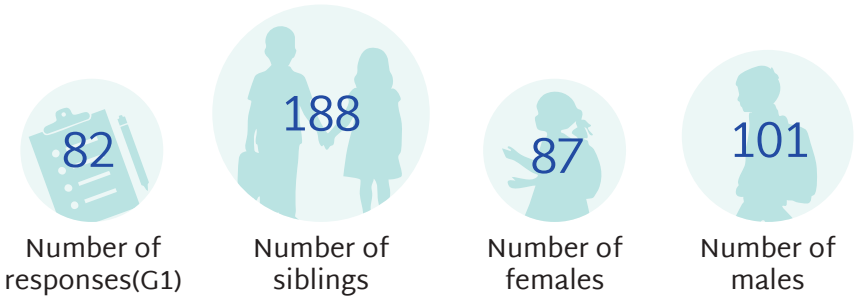
We looked at the profiles of the spouses of the alumni cohort, along with their education and occupation. Here too the pattern is interesting: 51 per cent of the wives of Gen-1 men have completed class 10 or above, whereas 74 per cent of the husbands of Gen-1 women have completed class 10 or above.

Of the Gen-1 women, 48 per cent are married to men who are in non-traditional occupations (business, police, teacher), while only 13 per cent of Gen-1 men have wives engaged in non-traditional vocations (ANM, ASHA, tailor, shopkeeper, forest guard, police, teacher). This is of course reflective of a traditional pattern of husbands being better educated and better employed than wives. But it is also reflective of family structures where someone is still needed to spend time looking after the land and the family (children as well as extended family).

4.1.10. Profile and School Choices of Siblings of Gen-1

There were 188 siblings for the 82 respondents from Gen-1. The following is a profiling of the Gen-1 siblings.

Table 28: Profile of G1 and Siblings



We asked our respondents about their siblings – whether they went to school and if so, was it only to a GV school. The data revealed that 32 per cent of these first-decade alumni from across the three schools said that their siblings went to a different school because of the cost factor; 34 of the 116 respondents (nearly 30%) said that either one or more of their siblings never went to school – which is not such a large number when we look at the education context prevailing at that time. This may be suggestive of the overall Gram Vikas influence in having persuaded communities about the value of education.

Among the respondents, 38 per cent said this was because there was no government school nearby, and another 30 per cent said it was because younger siblings had to be looked after. During our in-depth interviews, we did not come across even a single case of a Gen-2 child not going to school.

4.1.11. Education Attainment and Occupation of Siblings of Gen-1

Just as we had traced the Gen-1 educational attainments, we asked them about their siblings' educational attainments, and the following picture emerged: from among our Gen-1 respondent cohort, 49 per cent of the women had gone on to complete their graduation or post-graduation. In comparison, only 26 per cent of their female siblings completed their graduation or above.

In the case of the Gen-1 men, 32 per cent of our male respondents went on to do graduation, post-graduation or any other specialised degree. Among the male siblings, 33 per cent of them also completed graduation and beyond.

The difference in educational attainments of Gen-1 women who went to Gram Vikas schools and their siblings - the majority of whom did not attend a Gram Vikas school - is indeed very striking. About 49 per cent of the former completed their graduation versus only 26 from non-GV schools completing their graduation. In the case of the men, there is not much difference in educational attainment among siblings, regardless of which school they went to. Once again, it suggests that the Gram Vikas schools' differential impact on girls is much greater than on boys.

As compared to the occupational profile of Gen-1, the siblings have not done as well, with only 25 per cent of the women in non-traditional occupations, compared to about 85 per cent of Gen-1 women being in non-traditional occupations.

For men, 30 per cent of the siblings are in non-traditional occupations, while 57 per cent of Gen-1 men are in non-traditional occupations. While there is a difference between the Gen-1 occupational profile and that of their siblings, the difference is far more pronounced in case of women who went to Gram Vikas schools and their female siblings who did not.

4.1.12. Education Attainment and Occupation of Children of Gen-1

In 72 of the telephone interviews the respondents were parents, and we spoke to them about their children (Gen-2). Of the 107 Gen-2 children, 60 were girls and 47 were boys; 80 per cent of the children are of school-going age or younger. All the children, except one, in the above-15 year category, have completed class 10. Five from this category are between 25 to 30 years.

The school-going category of children (Gen-2) is increasingly going to private schools. Gram Vikas schools are still a preferred option for first-decade alumni despite the opening of other avenues. In the school-going category, 56 per cent of the children are going to private schools and 44 per cent are going to government schools. Of those who are going to private schools, over 63 per cent are attending the Gram Vikas schools – which is indeed a huge reaffirmation, if Gen-1 is preferring the Gram Vikas school for their children as well.

4.2. Insights from the longitudinal conversations

The longitudinal conversations offer a window into the long-term impact of the Gram Vikas model on students' lives. These conversations trace the arc of change experienced by students over time, highlighting both personal and collective shifts.

4.2.1 Choice of the Gram Vikas school

The first residential school that Gram Vikas started was in Kankia village in Ganjam district. The educational landscape at the time reportedly consisted only of government primary schools (till Class 5) in most villages. As mentioned by the communities, teachers in these schools were often irregular, but the physical infrastructure of primary schools did exist.

The challenge emerged when one cleared Class 5, as often the middle and secondary schools were far away. Hence when Gram Vikas opened their residential schools with Classes 6 and 7, it worked as a critical bridge between the village school and other farther-away schools.

The Kankia school, in fact, did not even begin as a residential school, which was added somewhat later. And most of the children who came in those very early cohorts came because their parents had some connection with Gram Vikas or because GV motivators came to their village and encouraged the parents to send their children to the GV school. At least for the first-decade cohort across the three schools, the decision to send their Gen-1 child to the Gram Vikas school seems to have been less to do with far-sighted parents and more to do with the presence of Gram Vikas and its relationship with the concerned village.

In the early years, Gram Vikas programmes were all encompassing and had a very strong element of community connect. It therefore enjoyed a high degree of trust amidst the communities, and parents often sent their child to the Gram Vikas school only because of that larger credibility and connection.

While it is true that fewer girls came to the GV schools than boys, in many other ways, the early years of the school were marked by very good targeting. The schools mostly catered to ST children, which was because these were tribal-dominated parts of Odisha and because GV mostly worked with ST communities; SCs and Other Backward Class children also enrolled in the schools, but general caste children were an exception. The one upper/general caste Gen-1 respondent we met in Kankia catchment came only because his father was a good friend of Joe Madiath.

However, the good targeting of these schools was most pronounced in terms of the reach to vulnerable children. Within our small sample for the longitudinal interviews, we met a large number of children who had lost either one or both parents at an early age, and but for the GV support and encouragement, they may not have been able to continue with their studies. Overall, across all three schools, one can say that Gram Vikas (GV) has ensured that the school reached out to, and was able to attract, those most disadvantaged.

However, now with GV schools gaining increasing recognition for their quality education and excellent infrastructure, alongside the move towards a fee-based model, there could be a change in the profile of children who come to the GV school.

The educational landscape in these areas has changed a lot, and there are now many more options for children – both residential and non-residential. The government's Navodaya Schools are considered the best option for a child bright enough to gain admission there. There are also many more Ashram Schools in the region, and given the fee being charged by GV, many of their own alumni (Gen-1) had/have chosen to send their children (Gen-2) to other schools. On asking why they had not chosen a Gram Vikas school for their children, the answers were at times straight forward: the child got into a Navodaya School, we wanted to stay together as a family; Gram Vikas changed its rules and put a cap on children from one family; Gram Vikas stopped taking children from our village; or the GV fees are now very high.

On the last point of high fees, we did probe further, especially given that GV fees are not very high (₹7,000/6,000 per annum per boy/girl as to date), and given the schools' reputation for quality school, it was hard to understand why parents would not make that investment. Most often we did not get a response to this question, and once of course we received a very philosophical response: 'the child will study if the child can study'.

In any case, it would be valuable for Gram Vikas to go deeper into this question, not because they lack enough children seeking admission[34], but to see if the profile of children coming to the GV schools is changing, and in what ways.

4.2.2. Educational outcomes

In the early years, the Gram Vikas schools had limited classes, up to Class 7. The schools therefore offered a critical connection between the neighbourhood primary school and the farther-away secondary and senior secondary schools.

[34] The problem is in fact the contrary, with the schools receiving many more applications than can be accommodated.

And yet, almost all the alumni we met spoke highly of the 'padhai ka mahaul' in the Gram Vikas schools. What specifically contributed to building this mahaul was the fact that these were all residential schools, and teachers would take the trouble to ensure that children used the after-school hours for catching up on their homework or solving their problems. Given that most of the children came from homes where their parents had barely studied till primary school levels, this kind of environment and support made a huge difference to the child's learning outcomes, and more importantly, to the child just staying on and not dropping out.

During our conversations, we found little evidence of any systemic gender bias against girls where education is concerned (which would of course be expected in a tribal community).

If we try and roughly map the changes in educational outcomes and context, from Gen-0 to Gen-2, across the three locations, one finds a fair proportion of men from Gen-0 to have studied up to primary school, with some exceptions going further to high school; fewer women from Gen-0 even went to primary school.

With Gen-1, a widening and deepening have both occurred – more children went to school, and more children tried to complete Class 10. And by the time we come to Gen-2, children going to school has almost become a universal norm, with Plus-3 now being the aspirational level.

This shift at the level of Gen-2 has occurred partly due to an increase in school infrastructure, both government and private. This increased availability has both been a push and a pull to raise educational aspirations (for all). The other contributor to improved educational norms and aspirations among Gen-2, has been the emergence of Gen-1 as role models for the community, through their diversified and improved occupational profiles.

While almost all families acknowledge the value of the educational parivesh at GV schools, cost is still a primary factor in deciding where to educate their children. Families, who can afford, choose to even shift to an urban centre with better educational infrastructure (Berhampur, Chikiti, etc.) so that children get a better education.

The addition of Class 10 in 1999 at GVHS Ganjam was a complete game-changer. In that school, 45 children sat for the board exam in the first year of which 17 cleared it. The really incredible part of the story is that each one of those 17 children went on to get a government job.

From the first-decade co hort, 49 per cent of women and 32 per cent of the men[35] went on to do graduation or post-graduation. These are exceptionally high educational attainments for those times, and almost all those interviewed attributed this to the foundation laid at the Gram Vikas school.

4.2.3. Extra-curricular and value system

The Gram Vikas schools, while providing a 'padhai ka mahaul' also introduced the children to several other extra-curricular opportunities, such as painting, music, weight-lifting, vegetable cultivation, etc. We met alumni from the first decade whose fondest memories of the school centre around the extra-curricular initiatives.

In the words of Nivedita Majhi of Kalahandi, "Weight-lifting taught me how to live." It became for her a symbol of empowerment and a pathway to honour and self-confidence. While Nivedita may be an exception, and even though the extra-curricular dimension of GV schools was still getting established in the early years, several of the alumni shared happy memories of these avenues. For some, it was also a skill (such as improved ways of vegetable cultivation) that stood them in good stead later in life.

And then about the value systems. Several spoke about how the values of hard work and integrity got instilled in them during those few years at the GV school. However, some of these value systems are possibly easier to influence at an early age than some of the prevailing social norms, say around caste, on which we will speak in a later section.

4.2.4. Occupational diversity

At the village level, the ranking of the occupational profile over the last 30-40 years has shifted from forest dependence, agriculture, labour, and jobs (in descending order) to labour, agriculture, forest dependence, and jobs (in descending order). A formal sector job is what brings about the biggest leap in overall family well being, in terms of providing a consistent, steady source of income. It enables a family to plan and invest in their children and their future, but its occurrence, while better than before, is still limited to only a couple of households in any village we visited. The biggest shift in the occupational profile has been from farming to labour.

[35] Data from the phone interviews.

There are other opportunities in urban spaces which are somewhere in between the migrant informal labourer sphere and a formal sector job. These are new avenues opening up in avenues like hospitality, retail, etc., and some, especially from the younger cohorts, are moving into these spaces.

We often heard how reserved category jobs, especially for tribals, continue to lie vacant in government departments in the absence of qualified candidates. This window is among the most significant opportunities for the communities, for making the generational leap. Currently, the demand (vacancies) is more than the supply (suitable applicants). But with increasing education among tribal children, there will gradually be greater supply and greater competition for these positions.

Our rough sense is that in another decade this window of opportunity may no longer be as easily accessible. Given the role that a formal sector job plays in leading to overall family well-being, GV may like to think about actively making use of this pathway towards long-term family-level impact, which even adds to a community-level impact. The other emerging window is of course the globalising economy and the new kind of jobs and work opportunities it creates.

While making attributions is neither the intent nor feasible, we did see that more of the Gen-1 has moved into the tertiary/service sector, than the normal trend we observed at the community level even during this brief study.

The phone interviews show that 85 per cent of women and 57 per cent of men from the first-decade cohort are engaged in non-traditional vocations. This is indeed a most impressive leap and an unbeatable validation of Gram Vikas' 'ahead of times' investment in these schools.

Of course, we also encountered stories of individuals who have been exceptions to the above statements. For example, the story of Sumitra and Chandrama, both from the same age cohort, but Chandrama could not make it to the GV school despite her mother being very closely associated with Gram Vikas. However, Chandrama comes across as a fighter and a born leader. She is an Anganwadi worker in her village and each of her three children are studying well. Sumitra, on the other hand, did go to the GV school, but has a subdued personality. She is now an ASHA worker, but only after much persuasion from Chandrama. The story of these two friends is a very good study in how much else, other than the school, impacts life's outcomes.

On the other end of the spectrum is the story of two other friends, Bana and Raju, where the dice rolled differently for Bana who went to the GV school and Raju who could not.

The specific stories aside, the larger data set from the phone interviews is stark – indicating a huge generational leap in the area of occupational outcomes among the first decade cohorts from the three GV schools, and especially for the girls.

4.2.5. Health and well-being outcomes

The original study had been planned such that we would meet Gen-0 and understand from them the reasons for their choice of the Gram Vikas school, at a time when few knew about these schools.

However, much to our sad surprise, we did not find too many Gen-0. In case of the Kankia school cohort, almost all of the Gen-0 had passed away. In fact, the Kankia school cohort also had possibly the largest number of orphan or single-parent children, though we found similar instances in the other two school cohorts, too. We did not ask about the age at which Gen-1 lost one or both parents during the phone interviews, and hence we do not have a bigger data set to substantiate the above statement.

Apart from coming face-to-face with the stark reality of the high number of orphans in those early years, when we asked communities about what has changed in the last 30-40 years, improved health conditions are what almost everyone spoke of. While better health is hard to judge, the communities were certainly speaking of it in terms of the absence of the large killers of yore – malaria, cholera, tuberculosis, etc.

Health-seeking behaviour was reported to have shifted in all the households, with an increasingly greater comfort with allopathic treatments, even as adherence to traditional medicines continues in parallel.

However, on the downside, almost all the villagers spoke of the increase in addiction among the younger generation – alcohol in Ganjam and Gajapati, and tobacco in Kalahandi. These parts of Odisha have traditionally brewed liquor locally, and there has been no stigma on both men and women drinking.

However, communities spoke of two changes – far fewer women now drink, while young men are drinking much more. The regularity with which this issue arose in our community meetings certainly points to an area of grave concern, and maybe Gram Vikas would want to look further into this – especially as it is committed to dirghsthayi vikas.

4.2.6. Social outcomes

Outcomes under this category are the hardest and slowest to move. The bonds of solidarity within communities can also impede generational shifts or changes in individual behaviour – unless the whole moves, it is difficult for the part to move. The age of marriage in a community can be a good illustration of this phenomenon, even though the law could hasten that process somewhat. Despite this, we still attempted to understand and look into any shifts that may have occurred on social dimensions.

Given that this is a tribal area, early marriages have never been the norm. According to Bhagat and Unisa (1991, 17-22[36]), the median age for marriage among ST women in 1971 was 16.1 years, which rose to 16.8 in 1981. This was higher than the median age of marriage among general caste women (15.3 and 16 years for 1971 and 1981, respectively). Further, marriage practices here are not characterised by the systems of dowry one encounters in other regions, though one respondent did say that he has not been able to marry his daughter yet due to financial reasons.

However, the one area around which we did have extended conversations was inter-caste relations. In this, after speaking with individuals and communities, we felt that inter-caste relations, at least around roti (eating together) and beti (inter-caste marriages) have hardly changed in Kankia and Koinpur, over the last 30 years. In any case, these are among the toughest social norms to shift, and in several cases the children stay at the Gram Vikas school for just a couple of years. Hence we were not looking for major shifts on this metric, but to see if any small slivers of hope were visible in this hardest of domains.

[36] Bhagat, R., & Sayeed Unisa. 1991. "Religion, Caste/Tribe and Female Age at Marriage in India: A Study Based on Recent Census Data," The Journal of Family Welfare, Vol. 37. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/258511624_Religion_CasteTribe_and_Female_Age_at_Marriage_in_India_A_Study_Based_on_Recent_Census_Data

At the Gram Vikas schools, all castes eat together – an effort from Gram Vikas to instill acceptance among the children of different norms. However, while the children ate together in the school, and the parents did not object to this, the same different-caste friends would not eat at each other's homes once they were back in the village.

The marketplace is an economic space, and eating together there among castes is now relatively accepted. This has of course been aided by the emergence of throw-away/disposable cups and plates. However, this marketplace behaviour does not extend to homesteads. Eating together during social bhojya (community feasts during weddings, etc.) happens, but the upper castes will eat first, and only if the food has been cooked by a Brahmin.

A more complicated picture emerged out of Kalahandi, where before a marriage, inter-caste dining and drinking was permitted, even extending to within the homestead. But this cannot be continued after the marriage. Happily, three of the 13 GV first-decade alumni, we met in Kalahandi, said that they do not discriminate on matters of mobility, eating, or dining even after marriage.

The 'beti' or inter-caste marriage category is the toughest to change, even among much- better educated populations. However, while discussing this, we were told that the first inter-tribe marriages (with Sauras) in Ganjam happened due to the GV school. While people did find it a bit odd initially, this was not a radical shift and the communities accepted it. During all our interactions, we did not encounter any other instances of inter-caste marriages.

4.2.7. Networks

One of the briefs given to the study team was to look for the existence or emergence of networks that may have helped the first-decade cohorts in finding their way. In almost all our interviews, we tried to explore this, both in the context of people who advised them in their work choices or in terms of solidarity/support networks.

Based on our interactions, we would like to distinguish between two kinds of networks – the upward/vertical spiral networks, and the lateral/horizontal networks. The former seems to be used more for professional and economic advancement and the latter for social support/solidarity. The latter provides an identity core (or even a bedrock), and the former helps one chart the (relatively) unknown outside.

Gram Vikas, Gram Vikas schools, and alumni connections helped strengthen the vertical mobility networks. In Kankia's early years, there is not much evidence of this having happened either deliberately or even accidentally. While Gen-1 itself has emerged as a role-model for Gen-2, they themselves hardly benefitted from any such networks. In fact, as several case studies showed, the first-decade cohorts received very little career guidance from either the school or the larger Gram Vikas family, and missed important opportunities which they could have accessed.

> Gram Vikas's close connections with the community did ensure good targeting in terms of bringing the most vulnerable children to this school, and thus at least opening a new pathway for them.

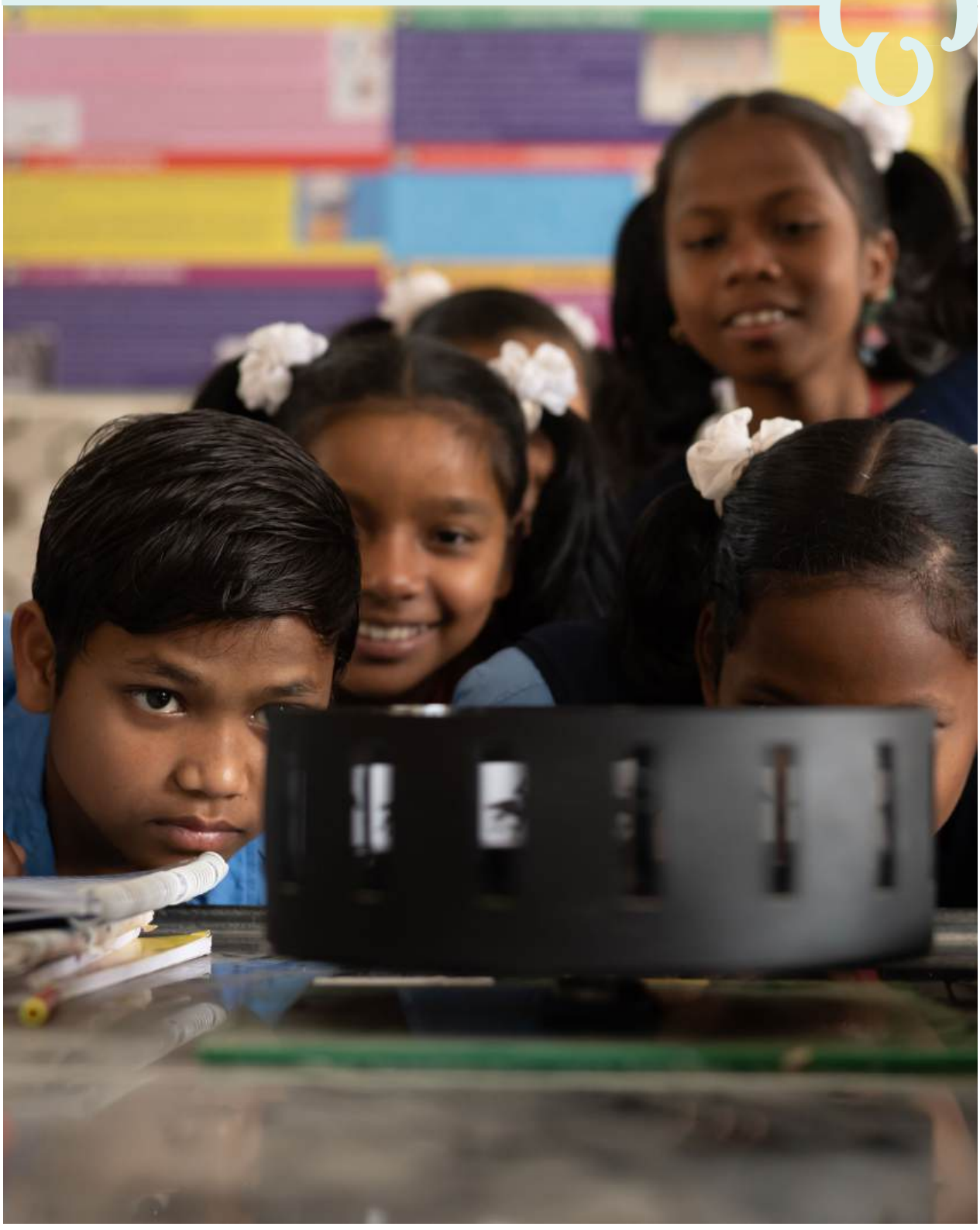
The Gen-2 is luckier in this respect. Not only do they now have enough role models from among the Gen-1, but with easy access to phones and internet, Gen-2 is actively forming their own peer networks – they are well connected with each other and it is possible that these new networks will grow as new solidarity networks even. However, Gram Vikas does not seem to be playing a proactive role in aiding or strengthening such formations.

We met people from Gen-2 who would benefit from better counselling on how to realise their aspirations of alternate careers. While the value of building such networks is obvious, it is also time-consuming and Gram Vikas can decide, depending on its overall bandwidth and priorities. We can only feel that a GV-supported network may be able to provide a different kind of value-add than just a peer-only network.

Lateral networks are what families rely on in times of need, and for all social purposes. When it comes to expanding/strengthening the lateral network, for all our respondents, it almost seemed a betrayal of the immediate local/village community, to even think of reaching out to someone beyond the immediate family and village for any support.

In Koinpur, one sees a stronger emergence of a role-model-led professional upward spiral, while in Kalahandi there are even traces of enhancement of the lateral network due to the GV school. As happens with many mobile communities, one gradually begins to see these two networks overlap. But for now, the rootedness of the lateral networks is indeed a source of immense strength for these communities.

05
Conclusion



The study team has no hesitation in concluding that the Gram Vikas schools were both 'ahead of time' and had led to significant 'intergenerational leaps', the latter being even more pronounced in the case of women. Even if we look at just one data set – the percentage of Gen-1 moving into non-traditional occupations (which are not just labour) – it is striking to see how many of the GV alumni have done so (49% of women and 32% of men).

The kind of investments that Gram Vikas made in education for (mostly) tribal children was an act of belief, and in meeting the old alumni and their families, one could not but be moved by the impact one saw.

The following remarks are being made in that same spirit of further building on that foundation and maybe doing some kind of a reset, given what has been achieved till now, the changes in context, and some of the opportunities as we saw them.

5.1. Gram Vikas and the schools

As mentioned above, the close connection with Gram Vikas ensured the schools' penetration among the most socio-economically deserving segments of the population in the past. However, it has also meant that any issue between GV and a village – on some other programme intervention – has at times impacted the children's entry to the school.

With Gram Vikas now not being present in these villages in the same intense way as it had been in the past, given the earlier-mentioned equivocation among parents about the GV school, it will be interesting to see how the student profile shifts over the coming years (or may have already shifted), and it should be seen if Gram Vikas is still able to target the most vulnerable.

This actually brings one to the first question that Gram Vikas needs to ask – what is its objective in running these schools? In the beginning, given the context, just the objective of promoting education among tribal children would have been adequate. But the context has now changed – there are enough educational facilities available to suit parents and children of different profiles.

At the same time, there appears to be an opportunity to help tribal children access government jobs in reserved categories, many of which we were told are vacant because suitable candidates are not available. There are also new kinds of job opportunities being created due to economic growth, signs of which are evident even in remote parts of Odisha.

The last two decades have seen a massive shift in the occupational profile among rural youth – but the shift has been mostly from forest-based livelihoods to labour work at the very bottom of the secondary sector. Agriculture continues to provide an identity, even if not income. People who have steady jobs (whether government or private), mostly in the tertiary/services sector, still continue to be very few.

On the other hand, it was obvious that the life trajectories of families, with a member in a steady job, tend to move into a different orbit.

The Gram Vikas schools can help these communities move faster (or even leap) along these trajectories of shifting from the primary to the services sector – especially given the enablement provided by reservation in jobs for tribals. This is an opportunity that may exist for another decade at the most, till education penetrates further among tribal communities, and enough applicants become available.

We heard from most school managements, about how the addition of plus-2 would help provide children continuity and a better chance in the job market. In the process of leaving the Gram Vikas school after class 10 and finding another school/college for doing plus-2, there is a significant attrition, which could be checked if the GV schools themselves provided that option. We also heard from Gram Vikas about the challenges of adding the plus-2 component.

However, there could be other options between these two binaries. If there is unanimity on the larger purpose of these schools, then finding those other pathways could be simpler. Examples of such pathways could be coaching classes, support in clearing various government job entrance exams, and so on.

Hence, one of the most immediate suggestions from our end would be for Gram Vikas schools to do visioning for the next ten years. The context and opportunities have both changed a lot in the last four decades and a reset would help enormously.

5.2. Networks of growth and of solidarity

Gram Vikas was very keen to understand how schools may have led to the formation of networks which would be both a source of inspiration and support for a child to navigate the educational and professional terrains. During conversations with Gram Vikas, we had agreed to look for the manifestation of such networks in professional trajectories and also in 'times of need' or 'distress'.

Very quickly into our longitudinal conversations we realised that these are two distinct kinds of networks, at least for strongly rooted rural communities, and especially for tribal communities. While large disasters (such as a cyclone) would affect all equally (and external support may be required), for any other distress, all of our respondents were very clear that they would fall back on their village and community networks.

As mentioned in the section on responses from phone interviews, a large number of the Gen-1 cohort did go on to explore non-traditional occupations. However, the role of any networks that may have supported them in these journeys, did not emerge during the longitudinal interviews. Hence, at least for the first decade cohort, one cannot say that they benefited from such networks. In fact, at times, it was painful to see the opportunities missed by that cohort given that there were few guiding networks.

The current generation is creating those networks on its own. And while these are better than not having any network, it may be a good idea for the schools to proactively think of investing in building such networks – not merely to enable older alumni to guide younger alumni, but maybe also to become a platform for bringing in counselling support through the Gram Vikas extended networks across the country.

This could be a relatively low-cost investment with potentially strong returns for the children studying at Gram Vikas schools, and maybe even beyond.

5.3. Data management systems

While the previous two points do not really need significant financial investments from Gram Vikas, setting up data management systems is likely to. Most good schools nowadays rely on a good student database management software for the maintenance of records, as well as for setting up timetables, monitoring attendance, communications, etc. Even if the Gram Vikas schools are not yet ready to use all these software features, at the very minimum they can use the software for keeping records.

During the course of this study, our biggest struggle was in getting data from the schools. Every time we needed something, the schools had to manually pull out the information, feed it into an excel format and give it to us. Quite apart from this being time-consuming, the data was incomplete. It was certainly not complete for the past, but we would not be surprised if the data is not complete even for the present.

We also saw that the school personnel are not tech-savvy and they seem to have one or two young people to assist them with computer work. Given this kind of staff profile, it becomes even more important to invest in software which does not need highly skilled people at the point of interface. There are several off-the-shelf software available in the market, such as Gradelink, Academia, Vidyalaya, etc., and Gram Vikas should explore these on an urgent basis. The point made on 'networks' above cannot take off in the absence of such data infrastructure.

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Gram Vikas Shiksha Niketan (GVSN), Kalahandi

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