

Final Report of the Project
'Educational of children of nomadic tribes in Gujarat'
Supported by TDH

Report Submitted by
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Introduction:

Vicharata Samudaay Samarthan Manch, initiated a school enrollment drive in January in 10 districts of the state. Community leaders of various settlements were given responsibility of identifying children of school going age and prepare a list. By month of April these lists were gathered consolidated and sent to more than 22 government supported residential schools and Ashram shalals all over the states.

(About VSSM: Vicharata Samudaay Samarthan Manch is a forum where nomadic and de-notified tribes of Gujarat have come together to voice their issues. This initiative is being supported by state level network called JANAPATH. Janpath has requested TDH to support to school enrollment drive. Many of the tasks were entirely completed by the community like survey, identifying children, reaching children to school, follow-up, visiting the school etc. Only in an exceptional case travel cost was reimbursed to the community leader or grass root organization. In school enrollment drive, the organization like Asag -Ahmedabad, Sarvangin Gram Vikas Trust – Sabarkantha, Motibhai Chaudhary Foundation – Mehsana, Sarvoday Mandal, shaishav, were important facilitators with leaders from each of the districts.

The main difficulties in school enrollment were following

Parent's point of view:

- The initial cost of purchasing educational material is high
- Feeling of insecurity to put children in residential schools
- Parents feel that children help them in earning livelihood. Children were sent for begging, or follow their parents in their work.
- Girl children help in household work and take care of younger siblings

Children point of view:

- Enjoy being free, feel school is a place where children are given punishment
- Feel insecure to stay in residential schools.

Schools point of view:

- Children come from worst background thus they will not be able to seek education.
- The children have lots of bad habits like stealing, chewing tobacco.

- Their habit will be adopted by other children thereby spoiling children's behavior
- Nomadic and de-nomadic tribes have criminal background, thus, communities do not have acceptance in the mainstream society. Teachers too have this perception and are reluctant to accept these children in school.
- Some of the nomadic tribes like Saraniya from Vadia settlement are forced to move into flesh trade to earn their livelihood. Teachers were reluctant to give admission to children from *Vadia*.

Why children were pushed out of schools?

More than 25% of the children who were enrolled in schools were pushed out within one month. At one point of time, community leaders were disappointed. However when we analyzed the reason for their pushing out of the schools, we realized that that we all need to change lot. The schools need to change to accommodate these children; teachers need to change, so that they can communicate with children. Children from Dafer Community are non-vegetarian. They stay in huts which has only roof. They do not have access to water, so hardly gets to bath, no proper clothing. Their settlements are always outside revenue village. The children have no interaction any children other their own settlements. Thus they find difficult to mingle. Thus when VSSM volunteers and community leaders visited Ashram Shalas, children said "Sukh Nath Avtu" (Means we do not feel happy here). These words have made us to think that we all need to change and it is our responsibility to create an environment where these children will feel happy.

Long term issues:

Providing a separate school for children from nomadic is not a viable option. The population of nomadic and de-notified tribes in Gujarat is nearly 8 to 9% of the total population. It is not appropriate to create parallel/separate schools or educational institutes for such a large number children. The most important that such separate structures will not remove social stigma attached with them.

The process of School Enrollment:

VSSM decided to have series of meeting with community as well as schools to clear the doubts and perceptions about each other. This created positive environment and many schools came forward to give admission to these children. Some schools gave sponsorships in educational material or other equipments which children has to get their own. The community leaders gathered children and reached to school. In many places, a woman from the settlement was allowed to stay with children for few days.

In one of the Ashram Shalas, 'BALSENA' Children from Bhavnagar came to our help. They conducted special camps and Balmelas for children.

Support of educational Material:

The material was to promote children to go to school. It was as per need. Where children were enrolled in village school (school from the village nearest to the settlement), it is always at minimum distance of 4 to 5 km. Parents suggested that school bag shall be given so that children will find it easy to walk this much distance.

Children who were enrolled to residential schools were given kit containing soap (washing + bath), hair oil, a small trunk, bucket, tumbler etc. along with pen, slate, pencil & notebooks. In all we could cover 243 children ([the list of the children is attached as Annexure I.](#))

Some Experiences!!

There were some bad/worst experiences where teaches and hostel rectos complaint that the children from nomadic and de-notified communities eat in large quantity and thus the food expenses will increase and so onHowever, here were many examples where teacher did their best to accommodate children. Like for example, a principal of Ashram Shala from Shiyal, block Bavla, Dist Ahmedabad Shri Vitthalbhai Raval, took special efforts to prevent children from leaving schools. He allowed them to bath twice under the shower; granted permission to visit their parents on week ends as special case, allowed home made food for few days. Their parents were allowed to visit Ashram

Shalas, Children have different food habit. The principal asked the hostel caterer to cook as per their food habits etc.

In another Ashram Shala known as Yoganjali Ashram from Siddhpur, (district. Patan), 'Balsena' children from Bhavnagar (Kumbharwada) organized special camps for newly enrolled children which help them to mingle with one another. The teachers from this school also learnt many interactive games through the camps.

Case Study:

1. **Meena Bhailal bhai Oad**, a girl from Oad community from Pisawada settlement of Dholka block of Ahmedabad district was good at studies. She passed std 7th from village school. Due to social pressure, Bhailalbhai has decided not to send Meena for high school studies. For past 8 to 9 months, Bhailalbhai is actively involved in VSSM meetings. With moral support from the organization, Bhailalbhai decided to send Meena to Uttar Buniyadi Ashram shala, Gundi. Meena was selected for an annual scholarship of Rs.5000/-. Today, entire settlement is proud of Meena. Oad communities have traditional skills of earthen work like constructing ponds, lakes etc. With time, this occupation became uncapable of earning daily living. Bhailalbhai is today making livelihood by selling vegetable.
2. **Sonal** has studies till 3rd std and lost her parents. She was living with her relatives in the settlement near Ahmedabad. Her relative initially were reluctant to put her in residential school. Today they are proud that Sonal is doing very good in her studies. "We have seen her happy after long time, she is happy in school, we will let her study as much as she wants to ...", says her guardian.
3. **Nine children from Vaadi community**, Tadav village, Vav taluka, Banaskanth district, (snake charmers) were not given admission in village school. The settlements was as old as 60 years, still school teachers, Panchayat were reluctant to give admission to children. After having detailed discussions with school

principal and positive role from PHC doctor, 9 children were enrolled for the first time in school.

4. **Chandra from Vadia settlement** wanted to study further. He did not want to go to Vadnagar village high school as everyone there knew that their mother is in flesh trade. Villagers use to make mockery at Chandra, which was humiliating. He was enrolled to Yoganjali ashram, School and doing well.
5. **20 families from Bharathari Community** reside in Prantij, Sabarkanth district. Traditionally they are artist and play an instrument called RAVANHATTA. This year 10 children from this settlement have been enrolled to school. Economical condition is very much poor amongst Bharathari community.

Supporting Initiatives from the community and other organization

- As the budget given by the government is not sufficient for giving nutritious food to children in residential school, every government supported residential school charge Rs.1000 from every child as additional expense in food bill. Sarvodaya mandal, a group of Gandhian individuals and organizations, supported 27 children by sponsoring their food bill of the year.
- KMVS Staff members and their associates gave their monetary contribution in school enrollment drive. for the Rs.40,000/-
- A youth group from Raval community of Prantij block decided to give coaching to children that are newly enrolled in school. Initially they started such informal coaching classes for children from Raval community. Today it is extended to other nomadic and de-notified communities in Prantij.
- Manikaka from Raval community is playing key role in promoting parents to put their children in schools. He does home visits, counseling of parents, monitoring etc voluntarily.
