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Visit to Gramin Shiksha Kendra : 2/5 to 2/7, 2013

\* 2/5 evening: discussion with Maneesh and Minu about the adopted govt school in urban SWM

There has been quite a bit of trouble from the adopted government school teachers in urban SWM - false cases being registered against Maneesh, Minu and other teachers from GSK by the govt school teachers resisting change. Some of these cases are of a serious nature, but given the good reputation enjoyed by GSK and Maneesh among the community and the authorities, most of these issues should get resolved favorably soon.

\* 2/6 morning: visit to Bodal school with Deep and Maneesh

Met Deep Rajini Rai, Vibha's project monitor for the region and we visited Bodal together. There are about ~80 children at Bodal. The students and teachers of Bodal are now using the adopted government school's facilities (since July) and when we arrived at 10.30, the morning circle had just begun. GSK's morning circles are very enjoyable events, and it was no different here even after the merger of GSK's and the government's resources. The only changes to the morning circle routines were an extra roll-call, a prayer (Saraswathi-Vandana) and the national anthem. GSK's hope is that these will go away from the morning circles in time as they establish processes here.

The facilities at the govt school are slightly more limited than at the GSK Bodal grounds, but since those grounds are adjacent, the children and staff are able to use the playground, library and offices from the other school. There are classes upto 5th grade here, and they follow the state board curriculum which is now activity based. However, teaching methods are GSK's. Continuous evaluation occurs with the teachers of GSK, but not with the government school teachers who balk a little at the extra workload. But from our discussions with the teachers, it seems they're on board with GSK's pedagogy and may in time reduce the structural nature of teaching and evaluation even further. Bodal is now an interesting experiment in how GSK's pedagogies merge with govt bureaucracies and inertia, however, the school is much further along than the urban school adopted and will likely be almost as good as the other model schools in Jaganpura and Faria. The teachers have accepted the new methods and work with GSK well.

\* 2/6 afternoon: visit to GSK office, discussion with Deep and Maneesh about Vistaar

We then spoke about our concerns regarding (a) the slight dilution in model at Bodal, and (b) evaluation of progress in the Vistaar program. The Bodal situation seems unavoidable, and there is hope that the remaining govt teachers will get onboard and in fact, there is the opportunity for the Bodal school to be an example of successful conversion and long term sustainability of GSK's quality model in a government school.

The Vistaar program is the outreach where GSK's teachers work with government schools to improve quality there. GSK is taking a more sustainable approach of working closely with the villages and communities the schools are in - the idea is that once a community is awakened to the potential and promise of quality education, they will bring pressure upon the school to maintain it through the SMC and direct petitioning. In this regard, GSK has enlisted more than a 100 women calling them Shiksha Dooths and giving them formal looking identity cards after some training. These women feel empowered to participate in the school's operations and there are some visible differences in the 14 schools currently in the program. GSK also works with the teachers directly, and they're seeing mixed results there with some teacher unions resistant to change, accountability and extra work. This is likely to be a long process, possibly taking upto 5 years at each school before they fully operate on their own with full participation from the community and the teachers. HKF is currently funding the 14 schools and will fund 40 schools starting in April. However, they have a short-term exit strategy with funding decreasing by a third every year. The focus being on quality, currently the way GSK assesses it's impact in each school is through SMC empowerment, increased participation recorded in SMC minutes and the teaching methods adopted in the school itself. We also discussed ways to introduce more quantitative assessments of the children directly (HKF is currently conducting one such assessment with the children on Hindi and Math). More discussion is required here with GSK.

\* 2/7 morning: meeting with Prithviraj Meena and Radhesham about local economy and Vistaar

Prithviraj is an ex- zilla pramukh and is on the GSK board. He may contest the local MLA election in November. Radhesham is a local villager, also on the board since GSK's inception, and coordinates the outreach into the villages. SWM's local economy has not made much progress since my first visit in 2005. The mainstays here are marginal farming on semi-arid land, livestock and tourism. The tourist industry around the Ranthambore national park is mostly controlled by outsiders and locals see little benefit. On the other hand, the park itself has had adverse effects on farming and livestock - farmers are afraid to use expensive seeds because animals from the park frequently graze on their lands and livestock is always in danger of being attacked by tigers, leopards or bears. Due to the stringent environmental restrictions because of the park, there is no other industry operating in the area. Unemployment is very high, reaching about 27% according to Prithviraj and there are more and more laborers per acre of arable land. Quality education takes on a very important role in future livelihood generation.

Radhesham spoke about his experiences working with the teachers reached out through the Vistaar program. He's hopeful they'll come around to working with GSK soon. The Shiksha Dooths seem to be doing well - he spoke about how they directly engage with the headmasters of the schools now about issues related to the government schools.

2/7 afternoon: discussion with Maneesh about Vistaar

We continued our discussion on assessing more quantifiably the progress made in the Vistaar program. The difficulty of using attendance and enrolment of children was mentioned. Giving standardized tests to children captures some of the progress made but it does not tell if the intervention will sustain itself after GSK leaves. This brings up the more crucial qualitative assessment of SMC empowerment and participation. The only way that we can create a lasting impact in a school is for the entire community to participate in the process. This is an important point about self-sustainability: funding organizations usually think only in terms of financial sustainability, but real change comes only from being able to sustain quality over a long period of time.