Additional Information about the Sikshana project

1. Past experience of the organization in this area of work.

We built Sikshana Project around a few core concepts, which distinguish it from various other attempts in the field. Our attempt is just not towards improving the state of a few schools or a few children studying therein. Rather it is aimed at evolving a sustainable model, which will lend itself to replication on a larger scale. We operate in the facilitative mode in the field so that the local community does not start looking at us as a source of revenue but goes on to develop over a period of time adequate skills to manage the school on their own.

The program focuses on the child as the sole beneficiary of all efforts; in cases where its interests clash with those of others around it, the former prevails. We believe that the interest of the child can and should be served even if the Community and / or the parents are not adequately motivated in the initial stages towards this objective.

Mobilization and deployment of resources under our program is solely for the enhancement of the learning levels of the children. All proposals for expenditure are strictly judged against this criterion. The program is run on a "zero overheads" basis.

There are three major resource inputs which are essential for the success of any effort to improve the academic performance of the children. of these, the most vital one pertains to the nutritional needs of the child; hence we ensure that in all our schools, an adequate mid-day meal is provided to each child. The other two vital resources are: adequate space – physical and notional – around it to be able to concentrate on the studies and a 'dedicated' teacher exclusively available for the benefit of the group, to which it belongs. As a first step, the Trust is taking up with the Govt of Gujarat the issue of allotting and registering sufficient land for each primary school, initially at our Block and then at the State levels. Regarding the latter, additional teachers are being deployed, wherever required, by the Trust to augment the existing staff.

We believe that most of the management concepts that are applicable to other sectors such as Industry are equally valid for the educational sector as well. It should be possible to set quantifiable and measurable targets and deploy resources commensurate with them. Accordingly the use of the "return on investment" index is encouraged. Enhancement of performance is often related to non-fiscal/ quasi-fiscal measures such as motivation, training and low cost environmental upgrades. Co curricular activities such as library sessions, fine arts meets, educational tours, etc., are encouraged, as they are considered to be significant factors in enhancing the receptivity of the children to academic inputs.

The Program

The Government of Gujarat has a commendable program under which interested individuals or groups can adopt schools and carry out innovative ideas for their improvement. We have adopted so far fifteen schools under this scheme, with more than 2330 children studying in them. Being a child- centered program, we started by listening to them. We found that many kids get either breakfast or lunch, rarely both, which was a cause for lack of attention in the class room. Hence we started with a nutritional program, placed in position through a unique arrangement with the School Committee, by leveraging our funds and enabling the latter to get the facility. The class rooms were so cramped that jostling among the kids was seriously hampering their attention to the teacher. We have been assisting the School Committees to build additional class rooms, with our funds supplementing those from the Government. The third major factor for poor performance was the lack of dedicated' teachers, resulting in shared classes and 'part time teaching', which gives a strong negative signal to the kids – that strengthens a "nobody cares about education" syndrome. We have been providing these schools with additional staff from our resources to supplement the existing staff. With these basics taken care of, we were convinced that everything else thereafter is a matter of plain common sense and good management practices.

In this phase, we started by setting quantified targets for performance evaluation. However discredited, examinations, passes and marks or grades are still the best options available. The state run system has abolished many of these, with the result that the kids under the PES (Public Education System) do not have to face a serious test or grading till they reach 5th and no threat of detention till 7th. The non quantitative skill based progress reports under the present system are so complex that they cannot be expected to relate meaningfully to the semi-literate parents. In any case, the gross hypocrisy and the dual standards adopted by the elitist ruling class towards the schooling of the privileged children and the underprivileged are only too transparent. A lot is made out on the subject of possible trauma to the kids, ignoring the obvious fact that these same children will have to fight it out for their survival in a not-too-distant time frame without any protection from the system. We have reverted back to a meaningful and quantified system of evaluation which gives feedback to the kids and their parents. Not surprisingly, the community, the parents as well as the kids are overwhelmingly in favor of this and more such changes, including a strong start with a second language from Grade III. There are many indicators which show how successful this effort has been over a year. While at least 30% of the children even in the 5th Grade were initially unable to read and write Gujarati fluently, we now find that almost all kids in Grade 3 are able to do so! There has been a corresponding increase in the computational and cognitive skill as well at all levels. We get near 100% passes in 5th as well as 7th Grades, with some kids going beyond 90% - a very unusual situation in State run schools. On the resources front, we adopt standard management concepts like return on investment, accountability and physical budgeting, which are routinely practiced in other sectors like Industry but generally ignored in the Education. The school is encouraged to come up with proposals for expenditure, but they are screened for their relevance to our focus: improvement of learning levels of the children. The staff members were initially unable to come with such proposals as they were unable to link the poor performance

to lack of specific inputs and they needed external support and guidance to frame the proposals. We sent all the teachers for a one day program on TQM, a package designed and organized by CII specifically for primary school teachers in the PES. Besides making a deep impact on their 'status-quoits'' mind, this also equipped them to meet the changing environment, being brought in by us. With the children, the motivation started with 'group counseling sessions' run with the help of our volunteers, aimed at what they want to become in their lives and providing information and guidance on what they need to do to be able to achieve their goals. We were very happy and pleased to note that children, even from these strata, have a wide range of aspirations- many of them eminently feasible, given their circumstances. Their lingual skills were found to be skewed, with poor writing and reading abilities even in their respective mother tongues. The reason was obvious: they have little scope to practice these skills at home where reading and writing materials are scarce. The text books prescribed under the system are too unattractive to be of any use beyond the school hours. We launched on a library movement, wherein we sent selected children from each school with escorts to go shopping, browse and select books of their choice for 'their own' library. They were then encouraged to take these books home every week, read them and come back to narrate what they have read to their class mates. This gave such a boost to their lingual skills that even third graders could now stand up and not only read but also express themselves in Kannada fluently. Other techniques used by us for igniting the spark for knowledge include co-curricular sessions with our volunteers on subjects of interest, educational tours, growing of indoor plants, use of multimedia content and unlimited access to the Computers in each school. As a result, we have a situation, where the kids prefer to stay extra hours in the school and often insist on the volunteers and the teachers to do the same! The kids continue to hang around the school even on holidays to get a chance to play with the PC's! Just a year back, these kids had to be coaxed to come to the school on a normal working day. This goes to show that it needs little more than a few marginal improvements to the environment and some innovative motivational steps to get the kids back on line for higher learning levels.

We are in the process of giving shape to the next phase in which we plan to consolidate the gains in the existing schools by encouraging self dependence in the various processes of planning, fixing of targets, budgeting etc., within a given set of guidelines. We also intend to expand the base through creation of additional nodes in the district and elsewhere, where the experiment will be replicated with local leadership.

Progress under Phase I

As at present, Sikshana project has 15 schools with about 2330 children in them. Our intervention has covered a wide range of activities such as:

- Providing mid-day meals
- Providing additional class rooms where space is critical
- Improving the environment in the existing class rooms
- Ensuring power, water supply and sanitation

- Posting additional teachers wherever required
- Supplying teaching aids, notebooks etc,
- Providing incentives for kids to excel through prizes and scholarships
- Re-orienting and re-training the staff
- Setting quantified targets and measuring performance at each stage and in each school
- Organizing a strong library movement

The first fifteen schools which have gone through one and half years of this program are showing significant improvement in the learning levels of the children in the various grades. A typical target and a bench mark has been to get every kid in the third grade to be able to read Gujarati fluently, not just from the text books but from newspapers and story books appropriate to their age. This is against an average of 60-75% being able to do so in the 5th grade of a typical school before the advent of Sikshana Project. Similar targets are being attempted for numerical and other skills.

The current phase of Sikshana is about getting a feel of the ground realties, motivating the kids, teachers and the community towards the goal of up-gradation, identifying the deficiencies in consultation with the schools, finding cost effective solutions and freezing the scope for volunteering/ external interventions.

Results from 2010-11 & 2011-12 academic year of govt schools under Sikshana Project

Performance of Sikshana Project in Primary Schools

As per ASER (www.asercenter.org), a child in class 7 should know how to perform a 2 digit division and also able to read fluently level 2 Gujarati. Data from 121 schools in two block of Bharuch district is shown below. The end of year results are way above the state and national averages and the schools are well on their way to getting a 100% which would mean that no child will enter high school without the basic language and math skills.

Sikshana Language and Arithmetic Assessment (based on ASER)				
Taluk	No. of Schools	No. of 7th Students	Gujarati (Level 2) Start -> End	Math (2 Digit Division) Start -> End
Jhagadia	15	2330	60.6% -> 92%	44.30% -> 88%
State Rural Avg. 2010			38.5%	24.35%
National Rural Avg. 2010			76%	57%

2.   Networking with other NGOs and government for implementation of this project.

Sikshana Project has presently 15 schools and about 2330 kids under the **program**. **...** Working in collaboration with the **Government** and from within the system. **...**

3.   Existing financial assistance for this project.

Nil   (Expansion of 100 schools)

The first phase of the project of 15 schools in second year has been supported by Vibha USA for five year duration.

4.   Long term plans for replication or up scaling of the proposed project..

Sikshana Project is essentially a program aimed at evolving a sustainable and replicable model for the public education system at the primary level. After the pilot program if the government feels that it is an effective program they could adopt the Sikshana methods in all its schools in the state and at that time Sikshana could act as a compliance or verification entity for a few years after which we feel the program will sustain itself.

Q & A with Atlanta Volunteers/Steward

Q1. In the Sikshana proposal you shared with us, on page 5, there is a work plan for the implementation of the project. In that plan, the first item is a TOM or Total Quality Management training for the teachers. We understand that the proposed program at Bharuch is targeting 30 schools. ***Do you have an estimate for how many teachers will be given the TQM training?***
Ans. In sikshana project we will provide TQM training to teachers in the begning of the new session start and after six month refresure training which will help the teacher to understand the project and accordigly they will plan for theri school. In each school we will take two teachers. for 30 schools it will 60 teachers in two batch.

Q2. In the work plan table listed on page 5, it is stated that a TQM workshop will be conducted between April-June where the teachers will need to draft their goals after which, the goals and milestones will be monitored between July-December.***Can you please provide us with the nature of the goals that are targeted for the teachers in the TQM training program. How are you planning to monitor the milestones?***

Ans. Each school prepares their goal based on the existing assessment status of the school. The school prepares goal in board and put in front of school where anybody can see the goal of the school. The first goal is each and every child should read, write mother toungage and do simple arithmetic problem. In a year the school will upgrade by one grade i.e. if school is in "d" grade than after end of the year the school will upgrade one level which is "C". No of children will participate in block and district level competition, No of children pass in scholarship exam, No of children appear for the exam of Navodaya vidhyalaya etc include in the school goal.

For monitoring we have each school wise details goal as well as monthly planning. Our mentor regularly visiting the schools and data will be updated. We have also details information of children who can not read, write or can not do simple arithmetic problem through MIS system where every month each children
 data will be updated. In the beginning we will take assessment test and after six month and after end of the year also take assessment to see the
impact of the programme.

Q3. We will get started on the funds transfer for the bicycle project for 20 girls.***Can you please provide us with a budget report for 2012-20t13 foran the bicycle project.***

Ans. A bicycle proposal for 20 girl children is enclosed here with.

I am also attached last year sikshana project report for your better understanding.

Once again thank you very much for your valuable support for under-privileged children.