

Vibha Project Visits Template

Introductory Letter:

Dear volunteer:

We appreciate your visiting this project. This questionnaire is a guideline to help you through your visit. They are meant as a starting point, so please feel free to add any other observations / input that you may have from the project. We also do not expect every question to be applicable to all projects, so please fill the questionnaire as far as it is relevant. Also, please answer these questions in as much detail as you can provide.

The questionnaire is still under design, so your input on how it may be enhanced (through adding / removing any questions or sections) will be greatly appreciated.

Please provide any additional information (like pictures, documents, reports) that you may have collected during the visit.

Thanks, once again

Project Visits Team

Project Details:

Name of Project: Verala Development Society

Location (Town / City, State): Kolhapur, Maharashtra.

Date: 17th June, 2003

Project Coordinator Name: Ms. Anuradha Bhonsale

Project Coordinator Contact Information: Cell phone number: 0231-3656152

Project Status during time of visit (e.g. approved, first stages of review, etc): Approved, 1st and 2nd Qtr payment done.

Pre-visit Preparation:

Did you go through the following documents (if applicable) prior to the visit?

Project Proposal: Yes

Project correspondence: Yes

Project Summary: Yes

Financial requirements (may be a part of the proposal): Yes

Previous Project Visit reports: No

Please briefly describe any other pre-visit preparation: (this may include transportation, communication with the project coordinator, project lead, etc.):

Contacted the project coordinator only on reaching India.

Visit Details:

Please describe chronologically your visit. This may include your travel to the project, your visits with different components of the project or the coordinator. Please include timelines around the same:

1. Having contacted the director of the Verala Development Society Mr. Arun Chauvan, who lives in Sangli, a city an hour from Kolhapur. We decided to meet on the following Saturday at the project office in Kolhapur.
2. Mr. Arun Chauvan along with the project coordinator Mrs. Anuradha Bhonsale welcomed us (me and a friend of mine) at the office. The office building was on the premises of a Khadi Store offered to the project operators free of cost.
3. The project coordinator provided information about the project. Following are the important points from the conversation.
 - The objective of the project is to educate children in the age group of 4-14, and living in slums. The aim to educate the till grade 4 to make them capable of joining a traditional school from grade 5.
 - The society operates 24 such makeshift schools in the area in and around Kolhapur. The schools have between 15-20 students attending them, totaling to around 500 students.
 - Each school is held for 3-4 hours a day. The school is held in rooms rented on a monthly basis.
 - The schools provide formal education from grade 1 to grade 4 as specified by the education board.
 - The program was originally designed by the government and is called the Education Guarantee Scheme (EGS). The government has been unable to support the project and hence the Verala Development Society has taken up the project with support from Vibha.
 - The original government plan also includes a meal a day. Although that is not being provided by the society, it is expected to start soon.
 - The teachers in the school are mostly part time students attending college to major either in arts, commerce or in education. They are mostly in their mid to late 20's.
4. After the meeting, we decided to visit a few schools. Three schools were visited on that day. The first school visited was in a slum in a place called Kadamwadi. The slum dwellers were Muslims, working either as snake charmers and street magicians. The Muslim community there had their own rules and court (panchayat) and hence was a difficult community to convince to send their children to school. Most children there had learned magic tricks as well as "snake-charming" at a very young age. The school is being held in a hut offered on rent by a local. The inside of the school was decorated with teaching aids (cards, posters, etc). There were 16 children present at the moment at the school. While walking through the slum, I observed that the people all knew the coordinator and came up to her to tell about some problems and issues. She seemed to be a part of the community and the people seemed to value her effort at educating their children. It was a relatively new school hence the children were just beginning to learn.

They could count in English and Marathi and also knew the alphabets in both the languages. In addition, they also learnt poems in English and Marathi. I asked the students questions about how they like the school and the teacher. The informality of the school was appealing to the students and I believe that it is a good place to start and then have a more formal approach.

5. The second school visited was a few miles from there in a place called “Sadar Bazaar”. Having lived in Kolhapur all my life, I know the slum there does not have a good reputation. I was surprised to see the level of enthusiasm of the children. The teacher was a full time tailor and a part time teacher. He lived in the same community and hence was very much a part of it. In addition, he had a bachelor’s degree in commerce. He also had the strong will to educate the children since he realized the importance. He is a well-known social worker in the area and also has been providing guidance to the community teens on career options. The level of the children in this school was very good. They knew basic mathematics, English and Marathi. There were more than 20 students. A student roll call was made and I asked the student to tell me their roll numbers. I was assured that this school is regular. The third school visited that day was in the same community and had 15 students registered.
6. After visiting the 3 schools, I decide to come back some other day again to go to more schools. The day was set for the following Tuesday.
7. On the scheduled day, I met with Mrs. Anuradha Bhonsale at 10 am. We decided to go to some schools on the outskirts of Kolhapur, which were in a rural setting. The earlier three schools were in urban areas since most of the areas came under the city limits. We decided to go to a town called Tamgaon, which is 30 km from Kolhapur and is the middle of an industrial belt (Maharashtra Industrial Development Corp MIDC, Gokul Shirgaon). The people in the community there were workers of the local industries. Three schools, which were just 2-3 kms apart, were visited. The people were mostly migrants from Karnataka and hence were a Kannada speaking population. Hence it was a challenge to teach them in Marathi and teach them Marathi. The teachers there were slightly fluent in Kannada and hence had accomplished the task. The living conditions of the children here were very unhealthy and necessitated providing food as agreed by the program (I believe the coordinator intends to start providing food in these schools at the earliest). The children were mostly under the age of 7. There were a total of 40 children present the day I visited the schools. I asked children similar questions on how often do they come to school and how do they like being in this school. What did they feel about the teacher, and the things they learnt? I also asked they if they would like coming to school in the future. The children liked it and were excited since they got to hangout with so many other children. The next school visited was in a village 10 km from Kolhapur, called Maner Mala. It is a community of women servants who mostly work in the city as housemaids etc. the project coordinator Mrs. Anuradha Bhonsale is also involved in the union of these housemaids and advises the union on their rights and helps them with their grievances. She was very popular in the village and hence there were more than 20 children in the school.
8. Most of the schools visited in the two days had similar characteristics: it was new for the children to go to school and hence they were basically lost but did their share enthusiastically. The teachers, although committed, lacked the vision and the direction of how to proceed in the future because of their inexperience with such a setting. Hence, I

requested the coordinator that I would like to come on one of the fortnightly held teachers meet and talk to all the teachers. I was invited for the same the following Saturday. I was told a social worker, who has been in the domain of child education for the last 30 years, was coming over to advise the teachers.

9. On the training day, I met the team at the society's office in the city where 20 teachers has assembled along with Mr. Arun Chauvan, Mrs. Anuradha Bhonsale and the social worker Mr. Datta. Mr. Datta himself has concentrated on child education for the last 30 years and has opened up two schools for such children who cannot afford school. He concentrates on nomadic tribes and has researched them for the last 30 years. He advised the teachers on how to identify with the children and techniques of teaching them. The highlight of his speech was to concentrate the things in nature that the students identify with and use them as teaching aids. He emphasized the success that he has had with such a philosophy. IN the later part of the day, I talked to the teachers on their approach and we had a 2 hr discussion on how it can be bettered. The teachers made suggestions while the coordinator and I reviewed them and advised on how best to use those. I used this session to emphasize on the teachers the importance of the program and how we at Vibha would like to see results.

Please briefly describe your perspectives of the project. This could include your perspectives on

- 1. The project coordinator**
- 2. Other employees at the project / of the NGO**
- 3. Your guide for the visit (if different from the above)**
- 4. The beneficiary children at the project**
- 5. Any other beneficiaries (parents, teachers, local community)**
- 6. Project documentation (at the project)**

The project on the whole seems to be very worthwhile.

1. The project coordinator Mrs. Anuradha Bhonsale is a committed person. She is a well-known social worker and has taken deep interest in this project. She seems to be efficient and guides the teachers very well. She has good people skills and I believe is very honest to her job. She also personally monitors the progress of each school knows a lot of children and their families.
2. The teachers had a mix of people from highly dedicated and committed to some who were just doing their job. They were a minimum of 12th graduates and a couple had master's in arts. They all got along well with each other and seemed very considerate individuals. I emphasized the importance of all the teachers talking to each other on a regular basis about problems that they face and how best to address them.
3. NA
4. The children in the project are do not have counseling or guidance from someone in their family or community. Hence they will typically follow anyone they like. The teachers in the project have made such a difference in their lives and hence the children seemed very charged up about educating themselves.

5. I visited the communities and although didn't talk to parents, I saw them while walking through the slums. They seemed very enthusiastic about their children being in school. A few parents did come over to greet and told me good things about the coordinator. The coordinator is also helping them resolve other social issues since she believe that unless the community does not rid itself of other issues, it will be difficult to get them to send their children to school. She wants to make the environment conducive for learning.
6. I had a chance to look at the attendance registers and a rough financial status of the project.

Please briefly describe the impact (quantitative, as well as qualitative data) that the project is having on

1. **The target beneficiaries of the project**
2. **Any other beneficiaries such as parents, local community, etc.**

If the teachers come together and share their experiences and knowledge in the teaching process, they will be able to handle and guide the children very well. I believe that this is a great project to support. It is the core development that is necessary in India today and it is like hitting the nail right in its head. The only concern is a proper and a more focused approach. This is different from a organized approach since most other schools that have a organized approach are not right for these children. The current informal way is the best way to educate these children the only important piece being evaluation, which is not being currently done in the schools.

Did you find the project implementation in tune with the project proposal? If there are any differences (enhancements, reductions), please list them in the order of importance and specify the reason for the differences.

1. Most of the implementation of the project was on track, I believe, except the part that the children are also provided one meal a day.
2. The proposal mentioned 24 schools but I could not visit all of them. Only 20 teachers were present for the teachers meeting and make me wonder if all the schools are really being conducted.

Please identify the financial needs / plans for the project. This includes how the funds being allocated by Vibha are being put to use at the project. Do you believe that they are being judiciously utilized?

The detailed balance sheet of the project has been provided only recently when I got back and I believe most of the funds are being utilized judiciously.

Is there additional scope for funding within the project? Or is there a scope for reduction in funding? If so, please provide reason (such as alternate sources of funding being available to the project, etc.)

No.

What are the strengths, opportunities within the project? What positives did you notice during your visit?

The project is a part of what I would say the most necessary core development of the people of India. The strengths of the project are:

- It is providing education to children who otherwise would only either beg or work to earn money for their family and stay illiterate.
- Motivates the children to aspire to go to real schools one day.
- Helps spread the importance and the value of education in the community and thus addresses some of the social problems.
- Provide employment for the social workers and college going boys and girls who would otherwise waste their time.

What are the weaknesses, risks within the project? Did you have any concerns during your visit?

Since this an informal school, there are no evaluations, exams, progress reports or even a proper calendar of things to teach. This is ok in the first year of inception but needs to change soon. This does not mean it should be organized but at least some benchmark achievements should be tried for.

If it has been approved, would you recommend any immediate changes for continued funding?

No.

On a scale of 0 to 5, with 5 being a strong recommendation and a 0 being a strong disapproval, how would you recommend this project for renewed Vibha funding after our initial commitment (if the scope permits the same)??

Verala is a brand new project and hasn't proven itself yet. But I believe a two year commitment is good to test out the concept. Future funding then should be based on the progress report and a thorough evaluation of the project. If then it is decided that Verala is not the best we could search for other social organizations interested in doing this but the work is great and needs to be done to really make a difference.

Can Vibha help the project in any other way (through providing materials, resources or any other support)?

I believe the only thing we could do is having an oversight committee that would communicate and identify ways to make things better. In addition, some health related products could help or even just making sure a meal a day is provided would be great.

Overall, please give your thoughts on

- 1. Your project visit**
- 2. The Project**
- 3. The Project coordinator, employees**
- 4. The beneficiaries**

The project visit was a rewarding experience. I believe as far as we live from India, we really are very distant from the realities. We pride ourselves in being Indian, a developing nation and all that, but this core groundwork is where we as countrymen fail. I believe that supporting projects like these is our civil duty. We cannot change the government and its fruitless operation but my participating in such a cause we can help people dream and achieve a better future.

Feedback:

Was the project visit a fruitful experience for you? Would you like to visit another project again?
Yes.

Was your experience with the Projects Visit Team and the Project lead satisfactory?
Yes.

Did you receive timely correspondence from the Project Visits team?
Yes.

Was the documentation provided sufficient?
Yes.

Do you have any suggestions around improving the project visits process?
NA