

General Information

- a) **Organisation Name**
BGVS(Bharat Gyan Vigyan Samiti)
- b) **Program Name**
Vatara Shale
- c) **Nature of the intervention**
 - a. Learning programs for children
 - b. Awareness and education for the community
- d) **When did the intervention start** – July 2020
- e) **Location and demographics** –
Rural areas of Gulbarga division, Karnataka. By August 2020, around 33,000 Vatara Shales were functioning in the 6 districts of Gulbarga division.
- f) **Extent of pandemic in the area (if available)**

Nature of the education intervention

- g) **Age of children**
6-16 years
- h) **Duration of intervention**
Started post the first wave and expanded across locations between 1st and 2nd wave

Detailed narrative (suggested pointers)

When the first lockdown was imposed in India on 24 March 2020, we were very sure that it was a situation that would be for the long haul, that the disruptions in education would not be only temporary and that they would heavily impact children's education.

These disruptions had 3 major components as we understood it:

- One is the disruption in terms of educational services, and by that I mean the classroom transaction, the teacher-student interaction and everything that happens in the school related to academics.
- Second thing that was under severe threat and exposed the vulnerability among children was nutrition, specially in India where we have a large mid day meal scheme that was going to be impacted and this was another point of concern
- The third thing was the social conditions and atmosphere of the children. This refers to the learning that happens through peer interaction in a school atmosphere. With the schools closed, children didn't have the company of other children around which is very important for their development phase and even in general among people.

At around April in 2020 there were discussions on whether classes should start and when, there were also suggestions to reach people through TV and other media, using both synchronous and asynchronous methods and using digital methods. So we did an analysis looking at the 75th round of the NSSO survey where there was data about the household access of computers and internet, how many were using the internet in the last 30 days, the duration of internet usage by different people and so on. We also looked at the 68th round of the survey which looks at the household expenditure

on education. We found that in rural Karnataka only about 2% of the households had access to a functional computer. We presented our findings to the GoK in the May-June period and suggested there cannot be just one single method of reaching out to children and multiple different ways of reaching out should be considered. Based on recommendations by several organisations and experts, one of the initiatives that the govt. came up with during August 2020 was the Vidyagama program. At that point of time, teachers of Karnataka government schools who were involved in the people science movement started something called *Vataara Shaale*. There was a lot of discussion among teachers in BGVS and also outside BGVS about how to reach children in the pandemic situation, amidst lockdowns and fear among people. It made sense then that children engage locally with the guidance and supervision of a teacher in a small local area. The teachers were very keen as well and because there was also the support from the government, and because of Vidyagama which allowed exploration of different ways, teachers had some sort of support from the department. They tried out different ways, through synchronous and asynchronous methods, physically meeting in small groups, etc., and realised that it was meaningful. In the then 6 districts of Gulbarga division, there were around 33,000 Vataara Shaales that were running by August – September.

We felt that these efforts of the teachers and the public education system should not go unnoticed because generally there is a lot of misinformation, slander campaigns and strained public perception about government schools. Often these are directed at the government school teachers, saying they are not efficient, they are not doing their jobs, they are always absent, etc., which we know is an outright lie. There are several studies that reveal that teacher absenteeism in government schools is in fact very low. This pandemic also showed us the resilience and the response of the teachers.

a) Why did we take this up? What did we want to address?

b) Who did we work with?

Teachers of Karnataka government schools who were involved in the people science movement

c) What are the actual learning areas we worked on?

Numeracy, literacy, science, social science, health, reading,

d) Who were the beneficiaries (intended and incidental)?

Students, mostly from govt. schools in the districts of Gulbarga division

e) What methods/ strategies did we use? Were there any convergences with other programs/ relief measures in the area?

Several strategies were used by the teachers, some distributed the activity sheets to the homes of the children, some sent it over Whatsapp, some spent time with the children everyday for a certain amount of time, activities that allow the teacher to assess the children using learning indicators were deigned, teachers also came up with project-based learning activities where a group of children from an area were given a task to do together, or some even did a consultation or collaboration with the children.

f) What are the kinds of logistic arrangements that you made? How did you manage the COVID precautions?

Vatara Shales happened in small groups where teachers engaged with the children living in the same neighbourhood as them. So the risk of exposure and spread was minimal.

g) What kinds of resources were developed/ used by the program?

The teaching-learning process began with the activity sheets but over time the teachers developed several learning activities on their own to cater to the needs of the children

they engaged with, keeping in mind the curricular framework, the context of the children and what would be interesting to students.

In Karnataka, we focus on publications in English and Kannada which are of various types - books, songs, magazines, leaflets etc. ; a collection of resources, activities and so on. During the pandemic we continued the publications of books and published 13 books primarily to support the reading campaigns such as Ooduva Belaku and panchayat library started by the Rural Development and Panchayat Raj(RDPR) department. These books were meant for different age groups and has science related stories and resources.

We also have a monthly Kannada magazine that we have been publishing for the last 20 years called "Teacher" which focuses on science and education. It is circulated across rural and urban districts in Karnataka.

h) How did the community participate?

When Vataara Shaales started, parents got involved because they have to take the children to the teacher who is doing something and parents got to know more about what is happening with their children. There was a more cordial relationship that had developed between the teachers and the parents/community, and it was visible too. The teaching-learning process and the effort of the teacher became very visible to the parents and the communities and they were very appreciative of it.

i) What was the program cost?

j) What were the outcomes? Were you able to address what you wanted to address?

One of the main things that the program was able to achieve was that children, who would have otherwise been left out, were reached out to by the teachers in their locality and were engaged in learning. Teacher-student interaction continued and it was more meaningful for both teachers and students because the engagement was in small groups and the teachers designed activities, worksheets appropriate to the learning levels of the students. Teachers were also able to continuously assess the children based on learning indicators and realized why assessing children solely based on tests and exams can be ineffective.

k) What were the challenges?

Ensuring stability of the initiative. When GoK had started Vidyagama, it gave teachers some sort of support from the department and the option to try out different ways, through synchronous and asynchronous methods, physically meeting in small groups, etc., and so they used this option and started with the engagement and when they did, they realised that it was meaningful. But the Vidyagama program was then discontinued and this also affected the efforts that teachers were putting in.

During December-January period the government started gearing all the machinery to ensure that class 10 and 12 exams happen, going back to the obsession with exams. All they were concerned about was whether they will be able to conduct an exam, it was a test for the government. They did not take into account the trauma that the children had undergone. When schools started in January 2021, it began for class 10 students who were coming to school everyday for half a day, in batches. The focus then was only on finishing the syllabus because there will be an exam

l) And what would you do different now, if you had to do it again?

m) How can your intervention be adapted to the formal school system, if applicable?

Initially there were apprehensions about how such an initiative can be undertaken at a large scale since it was mainly a teacher initiative. But the Gulbarga experience showed

us that it is possible with department support and that it can be much more meaningful if it is done by the government and undertaken at the department level. They have the necessary reach, infrastructure, and expertise within the education department.

The core component of teaching learning i.e., the method of teaching-learning has to be given more focus - what is being taught, looking at learning indicators, what children are learning, etc. Once teachers find this method reasonable and exciting, it would be meaningful and would bring in newer ideas in the education system. Vatar Shale experiences allows us to understand practically a method of teaching-learning where there is importance given to learning indicators and continuous and comprehensive evaluation, as suggested by the NCF

n) Any other aspect of the intervention not captured above

There is an unprecedented disruption in the teaching learning process and the govt. must come up with relevant policies for addressing the disruption in teaching- learning process, ensuring stability of the process, ensuring nutrition of children; no child must be left out, and lastly, give some space for teachers to do these experiments like how the Vidyagama 1 had done, so that there is opportunity to do new experiments from which the department can also learn, organisations such as ours can also learn from it, and other teachers can also learn from it. I would like to emphasize that what happened in Karnataka during the last 6 months, particularly the Vatar Shale experience, was not trivial. I don't know if such a thing happened at this scale in other parts of India. So we must encourage such efforts.

Based on what we have seen and based on the data available, in the Jan – Apr period when schools were open, a large section of children were not actually coming to schools. So just opening the schools and then closing it down again if the disease spreads is not going to be helpful for engaging children in learning. There needs to be micro-planning for a particular cluster/area/panchayat where children are assigned to a teacher or a teacher is assigned a group of children. There should be reaching out to children, we cannot assume that if schools open, it will automatically happen. There should be a conscious effort to ensure that all children are reached out to and engaged. Just opening schools with business as usual and bridge courses, etc would be meaningless.

There have been a lot of media reports in Kannada and English as well that have covered the Vatar Shale initiative. Some of the reports can be read here:

<https://indianexpress.com/article/india/lockdown-lessons-rain-gauges-to-sprouts-a-new-way-of-learning-through-community-schools-6557773/>

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/Mangalore/in-a-new-experience-teachers-take-the-joy-of-learning-to-children/article32186724.ece>

<https://www.etvbharat.com/kannada/karnataka/state/kalburgi/vathara-school-in-kalaburgi/ka20200926211701265>

<https://kannada.news18.com/news/state/30-thousand-out-door-schools-in-kalaburgi-division-after-lock-down-1g-460311.html>

<https://tv9kannada.com/latest-news/kalaburagi-kamalapur-taluk-okali-village-teachers-engage-students-in-corona-times-90175.html>