

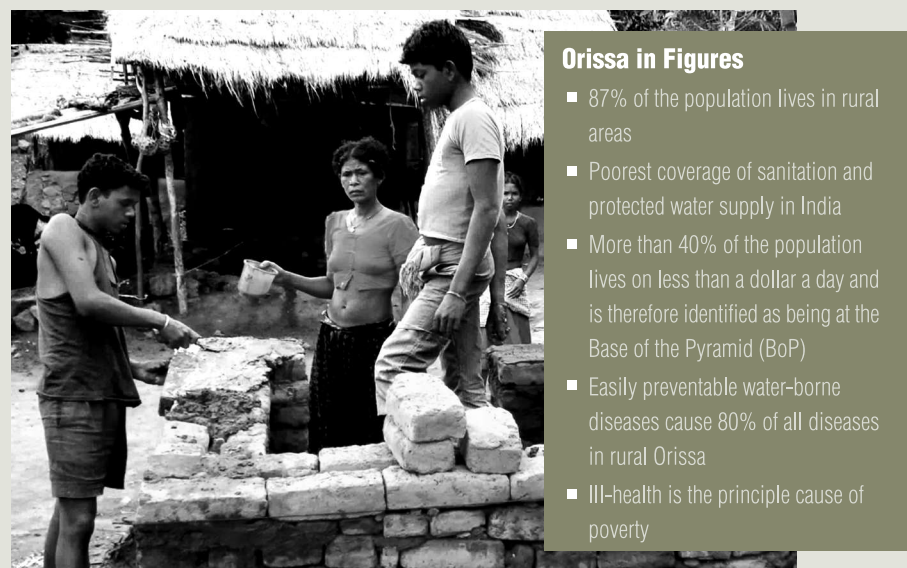
Gram Vikas (GV) is a rural development organisation working with the poorest and most marginalised communities, predominantly in the Indian state of Orissa. Much of our work is implemented under the MANTRA (Movement and Action Network for the Transformation of Rural Areas) programme, which is based on five core principles:

- **100% inclusion:** Every household in a village, without exception, must be involved
- **Gender equity:** Males and females must play an equal role in decision making
- **Social equity:** Everybody regardless of class or caste must share responsibility for the project and be involved in decision making
- **Cost-sharing:** Poor people can and will pay for truly beneficial development
- **Sustainability:** Mechanisms are put in place to ensure the longevity of the project after GV's withdrawal

Under MANTRA, Gram Vikas' core activities revolve around water and sanitation, enabling communities to construct facilities for a good quality sanitation system, as well as a supply of protected drinking water. Two important areas of intervention are livelihoods and infrastructure. An important activity under both of these sectors is skill-training; especially masonry training, where courses running for 60 days are offered.

Livelihood interventions and Gram Vikas' Approach

GV conducts training in five main areas, all of which are important to the construction industry, namely Masonry, Plumbing, Bar-bending, Stone dressing, and Painting.



The overall aim of the training programmes:

To improve livelihood opportunities for the BoP population; specifically younger men and women with no formal skills or qualifications by enabling them to develop skills that can be utilised for industries/ markets within and outside of rural areas.

Often, livelihood activities focus on the non-vulnerable or less-vulnerable poor, who possess a small degree of entrepreneurial and/or risk-taking ability. Hence, the tier above the Base of the Pyramid (BoP) is reached, but not the actual base.

The BoP population in Orissa accounts for 40-50% of the total population, who are generally characterised by the following features:

- They are landless
- Their main source of income comes from daily wage labour
- They possess an engrained attitude that they are unable to do any other kind of work.
- Even when offered training with a daily stipend equal to the daily wage, many consider themselves unfit to become masons or other skilled labourers

In India, lack of skilled labourers in the construction industry is a problem. Therefore, this is an area of intervention where the actual BoP population can be targeted, and helped to achieve a more sustainable and secure livelihood.

Characteristics of the Training

- GV builds a strong relationship and rapport with the communities and enters into deep and frequent dialogue, therefore understanding the issues that prevent participation
- Training programmes are organised during the off-season, ensuring higher levels of participation
- The training requires a very small outlay of resources and investment for both the trainee and GV. The trainees only need to invest 60 days of time to be able to gain a new livelihood, and GV pays the minimum wage, as well as the cost of materials.
- Masons are guaranteed work with Gram Vikas for a foreseeable future, but they are also free to take up any other assignment. Many go on to secure lucrative contracts in nearby urban areas, where they earn up to six times the monthly income they used to earn before training.
- To date, over 6,000 rural youth, both men and women, have been trained in masonry and are engaged in full time work.

GV firmly believes that there is no other way of generating livelihoods for the people in such a cost-effective manner.

General characteristics of Trainee Masons

- Age Group of 20-25 years old
- 81% are below the age of 30
- 90% have not done their matriculation, therefore have no formal qualification
- 3% are completely illiterate



Impact of masonry training on livelihoods

This is based on a survey carried out in 2009 with masons who completed their training between 2005 and 2007. This training directly strengthens all five capital assets necessary for a sustainable livelihood; Human, Social, Financial, Physical, and Natural.

The **Human Capital** of the trainees is improved and strengthened through skill-building and providing more options to them in terms of income generating activities.

The **Social Capital** of the whole community is strengthened by enabling people to work in the local area instead of having to migrate, often to other states for menial jobs, which means families can stay together and need not be separated for long periods of time. This leads to a more cohesive and economically independent community. In addition, the trainee masons gain respect from their family and the community, leading to increased self-esteem and overall satisfaction. In turn, with increased self-esteem, other common social problems such as alcoholism and domestic violence also reduce dramatically.

The impact on **Financial Capital** is the easiest to measure, as trainees are able to earn about three times their wages prior to training. This figure varies from 1.5 times, to nearly 7 times the salary prior to training! The training also increased the number of work days of the masons from around 11 days to more than 20 days per month.

During the training, the trainees learn to build the sanitation blocks and water towers needed, thereby improving the **Physical Capital** of the village. As a result, villages not only have these important structures in place, there is also a skilled workforce to ensure extension of the sanitation blocks to every house.

A number of activities to improve the use of natural resources are also taken up. Watershed activities like tree planting and soil conservation practices are implemented. Only water from sustainable sources, and those which can be recharged naturally are used. In addition, better agricultural practices are promoted, strengthening the **Natural Capital** of the area too.

By strengthening all five capital assets to, the masonry training not only benefits the 25 individuals who take part, but also the villages they come from, thereby truly benefiting the whole BoP population.

Women and masonry training

Women are a sub-group within the BoP, who are often left out and find it even harder to take advantage of potential opportunities that are available.

Of the 210 masons surveyed, only 7 (3%) were women. Further work is needed to understand what is preventing women from participating in skill training, and what is needed to enable more women to take advantage of these opportunities.

Possible reasons may include:

- Stigma attached to females taking up masonry
- Parents or husbands of the women not allowing it
- Inability to attend a residential course away from their village



Areas needing further research and next steps

One of the biggest issues is:

- How to involve more women?
- What are the current barriers preventing women from participating?
- What can be done to remove these barriers?

These are not just questions that need to be answered specifically in relation to the masonry training, but they are important questions to be considered when designing any future BoP model, particularly based around a service provision.

The next step and challenge for Gram Vikas and other skill-based training programmes is to start organising trained masons into guilds and cooperatives, so that they are able to meet and take on large contracts. Corporate sector collaboration on this issue would provide invaluable input and suggestions as to the best way to organise these. Construction companies specifically could have a very important and useful role in explaining what large construction companies look for, and what their decisions are based upon when deciding who to award large contracts to.


Key learnings which can be applied to policy development and for developing future skill-based training aimed at the BoP population

- To successfully target the Base of the Pyramid population and not the tier above requires an inherent understanding of this sector of the population
- It requires a clear understanding of what contributes to a sustainable livelihood, what makes people vulnerable, and unable to take risks
- Seek advice from grassroots organisations who work with the poorest sections of society, and understand their needs and issues in order to take advantage of entrepreneurial opportunities
- Constant dialogue with the communities is crucial
- Regular surveys of trained masons to analyse the benefits, understand areas of weakness within the programme all add to the ongoing success and ensuring it is the poorest and most vulnerable who are able to take advantage of the opportunity



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Skill building for
Sustainable Livelihood
Generation of the
Base of the Pyramid
Population
Gram Vikas' Experience

