

Gram Vikas (A):

Social Entrepreneurship in Rural India

02/2010-5633

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Scene 1: 8:30am, Monday, March 16, 2009 - Prologue

The scene is set on the head office campus of Gram Vikas, an NGO involved in rural development projects in the Indian state of Orissa. The campus is located in Mohuda, a village in Orissa's Ganjam District. (Appendix)

A man approaches the main office entrance. He is Gobardhan Sen. He is obviously unsure about his surroundings, and fiddles nervously with his watch as he waits for someone.

Gobardhan Sen is indeed feeling nervous. An MBA graduate of the famed Indian Institute of Management – Ahmedabad, he has recently made the career shift that has brought him to Gram Vikas. And today is his first day in this new job.

Ever since his time as an economics student in Calcutta, Gobardhan had been drawn to the idea of working in the field of rural development. However, after his MBA he had followed the path his family expected and got a good job with an IT services outsourcing provider to Western companies. But then the world-wide economic crisis struck and suddenly his future looked less secure. Rather than wait to be fired, as many of his fellow junior executives had been, Gobardhan decided to seize the opportunity to change direction and quit his job. Shortly after, a chance conversation with a former classmate at a party led him to Gram Vikas, a social organisation focused on developing water and sanitation projects in rural villages. Following a meeting with Joe Madiath, the charismatic (and persuasive) Executive Director, Gobardhan agreed to join Gram Vikas as Expansion Manager.

He arrived in Mohuda on Friday and spent the weekend getting used to life on a rural campus (Exhibit 1, below). Living in Mohuda was completely different from the life he left behind in the rich, busy city of Hyderabad. While he had everything he needed – food, a nice (if basic) apartment and some new friends – it was strange not to have 24-hour access to the internet, digital TV or to be able to eat in expensive restaurants. “Oh well...it's easy to adjust if you really believe in what you're doing,” Gobardhan told himself.

**Exhibit 1**

Picture of Gram Vikas Campus Main Entrance

Now it is Monday, his first real day at work. He is due to have breakfast with Abhimaniu Mohanty, one of Gram Vikas' most effective field managers. Gobardhan hopes to learn a lot about the organisation from him, and in particular get an idea of how exactly the field programmes work. After all, how can he help the organisation expand if he doesn't understand what he is trying to expand?

At that moment another man walks towards the main office, stops, looks at Gobardhan with a puzzled face and then smiles. He approaches holding out his hand. He is Abhimaniu Mohanty.

Abhimaniu Mohanty is a happy man, doing a job he loves. Every morning he wakes up eager to get to work. It will be a long day like so many others, but that doesn't matter to him. Today is no different. He has to visit a village that he is sure will sign up with Gram Vikas. He can't wait to have breakfast and get out on the road again. He walks towards the main building.

And then he remembers: there is a new recruit to meet and begin training. Abhimaniu has heard that the newcomer is a native of Calcutta, the capital of West Bengal, and a graduate of several prestigious schools. "An educated man for sure, but with no experience of village life," as a colleague told Abhimaniu. How will such a man adapt to doing this kind of work and to this way of life? Well, hopefully the training will be done quickly so he can make his field visit in the afternoon. He smiles and walks towards the young man standing nervously by the door.

Scene 2: 9:15am – The Initiation

After breakfast, the two men walk to the main office (Exhibit 2, below). They enter a workshop room on the second floor. It is a big room, but they are alone. Abhimaniu turns on an old projector and the first slide comes up on the screen. It is headed 'Gram Vikas – the early years'.



Exhibit 2
Photo of Main Office

Abhimaniu begins: So, Gobardhan, I think the best introduction would be to go through the history of Gram Vikas. I know you are keen to learn about our fieldwork, but you can't really understand that until you know where the organisation has come from – where its roots lie.

Gobardhan: Sure, I am here to listen and learn. All of this is new to me...

Abhimaniu: OK, we start almost 30 years ago in 1971. Our founder, Shri Joe Madiath, was actually a university student in Chennai then, but he took time off to lead a group of volunteers up here to Orissa to help deal with a refugee crisis. At that time, Bangladesh was fighting for its independence from West Pakistan. Refugees were flowing into India to get away from the fighting and at the same time, a huge cyclone hit Orissa and the Western part of the Bay of Bengal. Those two events created a huge humanitarian crisis. Over a million people were made homeless from the cyclone alone.

So as you see, Gram Vikas' roots were in the voluntary movement that sprang up in India in the 1960s and 1970s. Many students became social volunteers then and Joe led a group called the Young Students Movement for Development (YSMD) which came to Orissa. The group was highly motivated by the idea of social equity and wanted to do something for the countryside. In fact they were following the dream of the 1947 Indian independence movement when the slogan was 'Go back to the villages'. And that was what they did.

After the 1971 crisis was over, some of the volunteers, including Joe, decided to stay in Orissa and help with rural development activities in the state. For the next few years they experimented with various activities to help the poor, mostly in irrigation technology and agriculture. However, they felt dissatisfied because the underlying social conditions that kept the people poor remained unchanged. In the course of their work they spoke to all kinds of people throughout the state (villagers, government officials, business people), and came to realise that one of the major, unaddressed needs was the condition of the so-called *adavasi*, or tribal people of Orissa. So when the district authorities here in Ganjam invited Joe's group to set up a dairy co-operative for the tribal people, they accepted. Soon afterwards, in January 1979, they officially set up as a separate organisation, Gram Vikas. And Gram Vikas, as I'm sure you know, means 'village development' in both Hindi and Oriya, the local language in Orissa.

Gobardhan: So essentially Gram Vikas was founded to help tribal people. I guess Joe thought that the organisation would work on water and sanitation activities within a smaller population, before expanding to serve a larger group across the whole state?

Abhimaniu: Well, that would seem the natural progression but it's not how it worked out. Social entrepreneurs tend to focus on the most pressing problems of the populations they serve. So Gram Vikas at first focused on two major problems: alcoholism and the high levels of indebtedness among the tribal families. These problems were often interlinked, and Gram Vikas' staff members discovered that a health focus was useful as an entry point. They realised that over 95% of all tribal assets and property were mortgaged or used to pay landlords, liquor merchants and moneylenders. Even people were mortgaged! Often when tribal members had finished paying off their debt, their young sons and daughters were bound to work for these people for years and years.

So tackling these problems took up the first few years of the organisation's life. Then after a period of initial success in reducing alcoholism and indebtedness, yet another opportunity came up. The government of Orissa was set on bringing energy to the villages. Not electricity, which is quite expensive. Instead their goal was to develop a series of biogas projects as demonstrations. If these proved successful, they would scale up to the entire state. Coincidentally, Gram Vikas already had experience with biogas. We had a demonstration farm here in Mohuda and our staff members had built a biogas generator to power it, since there was no electricity. The plant converted cow dung and water mixture into gas – clean fuel – and staff used it for their own cooking and lighting needs. Interestingly, the plant also became a model for local people in the surrounding area. People from other villages would flock to see it when they heard about the plant. They asked us: “What is this? Why don't you come and do this in our villages?”

The Orissa state government knew it didn't have enough expertise in biogas and there were very few other organisations in the state with any experience, so Gram Vikas was lucky. Because of its experience, the Orissa government asked Gram Vikas to do the initial demonstration projects for the state. This was a critical moment in the life of Gram Vikas because until then we had not worked with the government on any large projects. But Joe and the other leaders had an ambitious vision and, even though they were a small team, they took up the challenge. They made an intensive drive to build biogas generators throughout the state, training a lot of people as the project progressed because it required a different skill set from the one that even most masons possessed. So as a result, one big stream of activity within Gram Vikas became biogas – highly technical projects. And then there was another stream that concentrated on tribal projects, including education, health, and so on. That is how the organisation moved into biogas a few years after its creation. For about a decade biogas was our main activity.

Gobardhan: This is fascinating... But why did Gram Vikas move into something outside its core focus on tribal people? We seemed to be very successful with the tribal work. We were making an impact on alcoholism and indebtedness. Why change focus?

Abhimaniu: You must understand that the perception of NGOs [non-governmental organisations] in India at that time was that they were small-time players in a world of huge challenges. The general feeling was that they showed “islands of excellence” but on a large scale were ineffective. And even if NGOs could implement on a large scale, government officials and business leaders believed they were a more expensive option than if government or private-sector agencies developed the project.

When Joe heard this he was determined that Gram Vikas would prove them wrong. Biogas presented the perfect opportunity. We had been invited in by the government and we knew the technology. Thus Gram Vikas began recruiting people and developing biogas projects across Orissa. Ultimately, with about 15% of the funds spent on biogas projects in Orissa we built 85% of all the plants in the state, while the government with 85% of the funds built 15% of the plants. So we went ahead doing this for about a decade until, at a certain point, the leadership realised that Gram Vikas had become an excellent implementing agency with the ability to scale up: if we wanted to prove an NGO could scale up these biogas projects effectively, we had done it. At this point, we began to wonder whether we would implement biogas all our life – or was there something else that we should do.

In the meantime, we lobbied the government to give out an incentive of as much as 500 rupees to anybody who would set up a biogas project and guarantee that it would work for at least five years. When the government agreed to implement this scheme, we felt we had reached our final goal. We went to our colleagues, employees and workers and said: "Well there is a government biogas programme now. You can remain with Gram Vikas but you will make much more money if two or three of you get together and go out and build some biogas units. Since we have some influence with the government, we can locate areas where you can implement the projects. You construct these biogas plants and you'll earn pretty good money." Initially, there were very few people willing to take the offer. So we gave biogas employees an option: those who went out would be *on leave* for two years – meaning no salary but the possibility of returning after that time. If someone did come back, they re-entered the organisation at the same level they had left. If they did not return after two years then they were on their own. Between 1992-3 about 600 people left to work on biogas projects, and only about six or seven ultimately returned.

Gobardhan: So in effect Gram Vikas spun off the biogas programme to its own employees! But...*(he looks confused)* that doesn't seem to make a lot of sense. It was your core activity!

Abhimaniu: That is absolutely true. By the time we decided to phase out the biogas programme we were working in about 6,000 villages and there was a general sense that Gram Vikas should continue to work in these villages. Our credibility was good, people wanted us, we were delivering results. So we thought long and hard before making a final decision.

Gobardhan: I don't get it. According to everything I have been taught, that is a flawed strategy! Imagine if my former company leaders said to their employees: "Here are all these profitable contracts awarded to us. Now you take them, go out and create little businesses and take the profits yourselves. And if it doesn't work we'll take you back if you wish." A manager needs to protect a company's core business – not give it away...

Abhimaniu: You really don't get it, do you? Look, you need to understand the mindset of social entrepreneurs, how they think about problems in society and their own role. Their aim is not to create a large organisation and capture value from its activities. Their aim is to identify a pressing and neglected societal problem which, if solved, can lead to many positive spill-overs for society. Then they devise a sustainable solution to the problem, demonstrate that it can be done and scale it up. This proves to society, to governments and large companies that it is an important problem that needs to be tackled, and that there are cost-effective solutions to it. Once social entrepreneurs achieve this aim, their goal is to deliver the solution to society for wider adoption and then refocus on the next neglected problem.

The thinking of Joe and other senior managers was that Gram Vikas' work in the biogas programme was done. It was successful; a solution was now widespread and subsidized by the government. It was time to move on since this problem was no longer neglected by society. We could have more impact working on other, more pressing areas.

Gobardhan: I think I am starting to get it... but it is so different from the companies I worked at, and from everything I learned in business school. The mantra was that business is all about focusing your efforts on a profitable set of activities, becoming the best in the world at doing it and then protecting what you have and using it to build the next set of advantages. You just don't go out and give your advantage away... But I see that here there is a direct goal of having an impact on society, which doesn't exist in the same way in for-profit firms.

Abhimaniu: Exactly! In addition, the biogas project did not allow Gram Vikas to work with the really exploited section of the rural population – the extreme poor. Our goal has always been about achieving social equality. The question Gram Vikas' leadership asked was: how do we address, on a larger scale, the issue of inequality in India? We did a study in 100 villages to find out what was the most pressing problem faced by rural people in Orissa. We found that it was the lack of proper sanitation facilities. When we looked at morbidity in rural areas we found that over 80% of diseases in rural areas were caused by the poor quality of the water. When we looked further, we found that this poor quality was due to our abysmal attitude to the disposal of human waste: raw human waste was often found in bathing and drinking water. Then it struck us that this might be an idea for the next phase of the organisation's life – a way to focus on social inclusion and equality in Orissa's villages. Because the waste disposal habits of even one person can affect the water quality of the whole village – it is the one area where we can argue for total inclusion of all village members, regardless of class or caste differences.

So that was the genesis of our water and sanitation programme – the Movement and Action Network for the Transformation of Rural Areas (MANTRA) (Exhibit 3, below).



Exhibit 3
The Elements of MANTRA

With MANTRA it is clear that water and sanitation are the entry points for our work on social inclusion. Under MANTRA we ensure there are toilets, bathrooms and a supply of piped water to all the families of a village. Water is pumped from a safe source, mostly deep tube wells (Table 1 and Table 2, Appendix) and stored in an overhead water tank (Exhibit 4 and Exhibit 5, below). Every family can access this source and is given

three water-taps: in the toilet, bathroom, and in the kitchen. Every family has to contribute to a village fund to ensure the maintenance and growth of the system in perpetuity as the village population grows.



Exhibits 4 & 5

Photos of Completed Overhead Water Tank & Tank under Construction

Gobardhan: In perpetuity? Paid upfront by such poor people? Those are very stringent conditions. Surely many people cannot afford it and will be left out of the system?

Abhimaniu: No, listen carefully because these are the two non-negotiable conditions in Gram Vikas' MANTRA approach. The first is there must be 100% coverage involving all families in the village. The second is that the village must raise a corpus fund made up of on average 1,000 rupees [approximately €15 in July 2009] from each family to sustain the system in perpetuity. We may compromise on other issues, but never on these core principles. They are there because they ensure the social impact and sustainability of our solution.

By now, Abhimaniu is becoming very excited. He points at Gobardhan with the pointer he is using to emphasise key words in the slides and continues.

And it is doable! We have already achieved these goals in over 500 villages. Adult men and women are motivated to come together at the start of the project and they form a village general body. They then elect a representative executive committee with an equal number of men and women. The amount collected towards the corpus fund is placed in a savings account, with the President, Secretary and Treasurer of the elected committee as signatories. The interest earned by the corpus fund is reserved for supporting the future building of toilets and bathrooms for new families in the village.

So we have proved it can be done... but it is true that it is a long process. In fact, it can take a few years for MANTRA to be up and running in a village from the first meeting when we tell villagers about our work, to when we consider that our work there is complete.

Of course, we would like water and sanitation to be just the entry point. We are interested in carrying out other programmes – aiding health, education or economic development. But in reality MANTRA ends up being such an intensive and demanding programme that it is difficult to plan for the next stage. So in most cases we are not able to go beyond water and sanitation. We want to do more, but it can only happen step by step. And keep in mind that we have been focused on scaling up the programme locally, mostly within Orissa. Even to this day less than 20% of the rural population in Orissa has access to protected water, less than 1% to a piped water supply, and less than 5% to sanitation facilities.

Gobardhan: Ok, now I think I understand how MANTRA works, at least in theory – but, in practice, how do you get villagers to join up with such a scheme? Caste barriers, class differences, poverty – these are really powerful forces in the villages.

Abhimaniu: Oh yes... you are absolutely right. I could talk about that for ever. But I have a better idea – why don't we go out and see how this works in practice? There's a meeting scheduled this afternoon in a village that is considering joining our network. It is near my project office at Rhudapadar. You should come with me and see how we do it.

Gobardhan: That sounds great – let's go!

Abhimaniu: Good! It's a long drive, five hours from here. Let's make an early start now and have our mid-day meal when we reach the project office at Rhudapadar. From there we can go straight on to the village.

Scene 3: 4:00pm - The Village Meeting

Abhimaniu and Gobardhan reach Rhudapadar after a long, hot and dusty drive. They stop at the project office for a hasty lunch and then continue on, by motorcycles now instead of a jeep, towards Bahalpur Village. They travel for about another hour, mainly bumping over dirt roads. Finally they reach the village main square. Many of the villagers have already gathered and there is a hubbub of noise as people greet each other. The women and men sit separately. (Exhibits 6a & 6b, below).



Exhibits 6a, 6b

Photos of a Village Meeting in Progress

Village headman: I'll open this meeting with a few very brief remarks. As you know, Mr. Mohanty from Gram Vikas has come today to speak to us about his organisation. Mr. Sen, who is standing next to Mr. Mohanty, is a new member of Gram Vikas and he is here to learn about our village.

The reason that I have invited our guests today is to explain their project and how it can improve our lives. When I visited one of our neighbouring villages, Vikaspur, some months back, I was amazed! It is not much bigger than Bahalpur – they have 60 families, and we have 50 – but in every household they have clean water for bathing, cooking, and using the toilet. They don't have to go and get water far from their houses, and the fields around the village are clean. It was all a very big surprise to me. When I spoke to the headman there he told me that they had been working with Gram Vikas for several years. Gram Vikas has shown them how to install the water system, helped them maintain it, and are now involved in several other activities in the village as well.

This made me think: why can't the same thing happen in our village? So I invited Mr. Mohanty to speak to us and explain what is involved in joining the Gram Vikas network. Please give him your full attention.

As Abhimaniu stands up and begins, the villagers listen attentively:

Abhimaniu: Thank you very much, dear Sir. We are all gathered here today at Bahalpur Village to discuss something very important. As your village headman, Jagdish Pradhan, has told you, my organisation, Gram Vikas, wants to work with you to bring running water supply and toilets to every household in Bahalpur. This means that you won't have to walk more than a few metres from your home to get water, and that you will have both privacy and cleanliness any time of the day when using the toilet. As I understand it, most of you don't have toilets in your houses and use the fields surrounding the village as the common toilet (Exhibits 7a and 7b, below).



Exhibits 7a, 7b:

A Village without Access to Clean Water and Sanitation Facilities

A young woman in a brightly patterned sari puts up her hand. The village headman motions her to speak. She clasps her hands together and addresses Abhimaniu.

Young woman: Oh Sir – I think this would really help us so very much. At the moment it is difficult for me as a young woman to even use the toilet. As you know, we are modest people. A woman going out of the village during daylight can be seen by anyone. So we prefer to go at night, when we will not be noticed. But this is not always easy.

A second village woman is too excited to wait for permission to speak. She rushes in:

Second woman: Yes, it is very, very difficult for us women, whatever our age. In the morning I have to walk a long way to get water for cooking and washing and carry it home. Sometimes I have to do it again in the evening. Having water at our home would really help me and my family.

Abhimaniu nods to them and replies: These are indeed important reasons for installing the water and sanitation system that Gram Vikas has in mind. But you should also think about other serious health concerns: defecating in the fields is very unhygienic. It can lead to the spread of disease and contaminate your water supply. It is very important to have a clean, reliable, source of drinking water. The source of the water should not be close to any place where people are bathing, cooking, going to the toilet and so on.

As he finishes, one of the male elders of the village, who has been frowning during Abhimaniu's explanation, stands up to speak.

Village elder: Mr. Mohanty, what you are saying is quite correct. Most of us in this village don't have our own source of water – we use the local well. You are also correct that we don't have private toilets, but rather use the big fields surrounding Bahalpur, as our ancestors did and as we have always done. But I don't think this change is a pressing need, and our experience with such schemes in the past has shown that they are not always useful.

As an example, let me tell you the following story. About ten years ago there was a government effort to introduce toilets into the village – much as you are doing. One day out of the clear blue sky, a group of officials, masons, and construction men appeared in Bahalpur. They decided that we should have four toilets for our village of 300 people and then they built them. They were not as complicated as the ones you suggest with running water and all, but they were built quickly. And do you know what happened? After a few months no one was interested in using them any more. They were dirty. A terrible smell came out of them. We can show you those toilets if you like – they are still here, though I don't think anyone has used them in years. It is much nicer to use the fields. Why do you think it would be different with your scheme?

Abhimaniu replies quickly over the noise of the villagers nodding and agreeing with the village elder:

Abhimaniu: Sir, I am glad you have brought up these points as they bring me to the most important part of my explanation – the difference between our scheme and the one you experienced in the past. Let me tell you loud and clear – it is the comprehensive nature of our actions. We are not just going to come and build you these toilets – no, not

at all! There has to be some very active involvement in this project by all the village members. In fact, it is more correct to say that the village will own the project, and that the people of the village must decide if it is right for them. We at Gram Vikas will just act as facilitators.

When the government constructed the four toilets for your village, I don't think they consulted you very much. It was a technology they just 'dropped' into Bahalpur. And, not surprisingly, after the novelty of the new technology was gone and the inconveniences associated with it were apparent, people stopped using it.

This can never happen with the system Gram Vikas is offering you. First of all, this system is integrated. There will be water to flush your toilets so they will remain clean, as will the water for bathing, water for your cooking and even for irrigating your fields if you need it. We will not just jump in and construct a toilet without considering the system which has to be built around it for it to continue to function properly.

Secondly, for sanitation purposes we insist that 100% of families in Bahalpur – all 50 households – participate in the programme. Without 100% involvement it cannot go forward. This is a MUST!

This means that not only will all families have toilets and running water in their households, but also that every family must contribute to the construction of these facilities in their own household, and in the village at large. The village as a whole must source the local materials – the bricks, cement, mortar, etc. Villagers must also work towards the construction of the facilities. If there is a local mason, we will train him to do the specific construction required for the water tank, toilet and running water facilities. Village leaders must also ensure that a *corpus fund* is raised to support the ongoing maintenance of the system once construction has been completed. This amounts to an average of 1,000 rupees per household. If some families are richer, they may contribute more. Poorer families can contribute less, but they must make up the difference by working on the construction of the facilities. But in the end we must raise an average of 1,000 rupees per household for the fund, which means 50,000 rupees for Bahalpur village.

In this way we will be sure that the village is really committed to the project. We will provide the technical expertise and bring in materials that are not available locally to aid the construction projects. Local staff from our field office in Rhudapadar will visit regularly and make sure things are going well, and help you with any problems you might have. I, too, will be available for you any time you need me. But ultimately the responsibility will be yours – each and every household in Bahalpur must be actively involved to make this programme a success.

By the time Abhimaniu has finished, the village elder is once more on his feet.

Village elder: What you have said makes things much clearer now. It is a far bigger undertaking than I thought. But I am not sure that we can do all that you ask, and I am especially sceptical about the 100% requirement. You know, I think we will have no problem getting perhaps about 45 families to agree to your scheme. But there are some families who will be very hard to get involved in the project. They have never taken any

interest in these kinds of communal schemes, and indeed there is no one from any of these households at this meeting. They are just not bothered about any improvement. But we cannot sacrifice the wishes of the majority of the village just because some people are not interested or willing to participate, Mr. Mohanty.

Abhimani: With all due respect, Sir, this is where I disagree with you. The 100% requirement is the most important part of our programme. We cannot have health and proper sanitation for the village unless everyone is involved! Just take one example: if 45 households get toilets and running water facilities, and five households continue in the way they have always done, there will be no reduction in the spread of disease through contaminated water and similar routes. Indeed, transmission of disease in this way could actually increase! Because although most families will have clean water and toilets, other families will still be defecating in the fields and using sources of water which are subject to contamination, bringing the danger of cross-contamination. The waste from the fields, produced by this minority, may seep into the water sources of the majority and thus help spread disease.

At this, the village elder begins to nod his head.

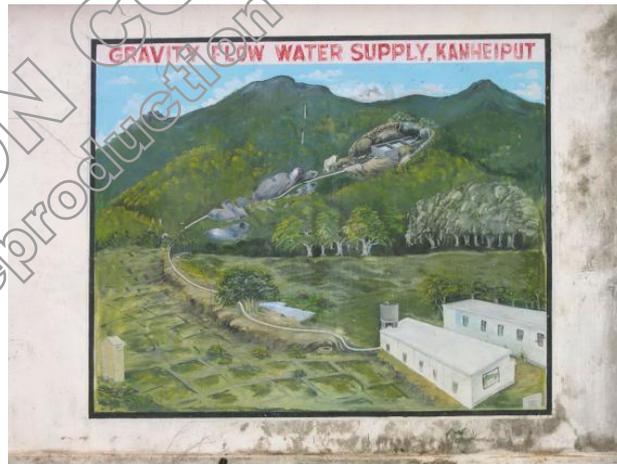
Village elder: I see... I wasn't aware that it was so easy to spread disease when only a few people are not involved in the sanitation scheme.

Abhimani: Yes, most definitely it is true.

He turns to address the whole village.

For all of you in Bahalpur, we want to construct one of the most advanced water supply systems available; one that will be free from contamination. In some of our villages, where feasible, we have established water supply systems powered by electricity. However, I know that Bahalpur does not have access to electricity. While alternative power generation is possible, based on an initial survey of the area around the village we think that a gravity flow supply of water is most appropriate for your village.

Essentially, we will use the water from nearby perennial springs via a pump that will be built at the water source. Water will then be diverted through pipelines using the principles of gravity flow and siphoning to traverse the small hills along the way and reach an overhead water storage tank in the village. From there it will go to individual homes. (Exhibit 8, below). This system has proved successful in many villages in this area, some not very far from Bahalpur.

**Exhibit 8*****Schematic of a Gravity Flow Water Supply System***

In total, Gram Vikas has successfully implemented this system in nearly 80 villages, covering over 3,000 families. Of course the village will take full responsibility for maintenance of the entire water supply system, including safety of the pipeline. Although the initial investment is high, due to the length of pipeline to be built and the size of the storage tank, the recurring costs will be small because gravity flow eliminates the need for a pump and its associated maintenance expenses.

The village headman gets up, looks around at all the assembled villagers and speaks.

Village headman: Mr. Mohanty, thank you very much for this information. It is a lot for us to think about. I don't think we are ready to make a decision yet about joining the Gram Vikas network. That will happen after much discussion amongst ourselves. But we appreciate that you have come here with other Gram Vikas staff members such as Mr. Sen to discuss your project with us.

Abhimaniu: It is no trouble at all, Sir. When you are ready, we will be available to help. If for one reason or another you decide not to join us, that is fine too. We just ask that you take into consideration that the system we are offering, though it will certainly require much work and effort, is ultimately for the benefit of everyone. If you would like to visit some of the other villages, apart from your immediate neighbours, who have joined our scheme, don't hesitate to ask. We will gladly come on our motorcycles and take you to see some of these projects.

The meeting finishes and the villagers gather in small groups and chat excitedly amongst themselves.

Scene 4: 9:30pm - The Debriefing

The two men are back in the Rhudapadar project office. They are drinking tea and discussing the meeting. (Exhibits 9a and 9b, below)

**Exhibits 9a and 9b**

Photos of Rhudapadar Project Office

Abhimaniu: So, Gobardhan, I think that you've now got a pretty good picture of what Gram Vikas is about, isn't it?

Gobardhan: Yes, Abhimaniu, that was a very enlightening discussion with the Bahalpur villagers. But something is puzzling me. This is so difficult, this MANTRA thing – the demands that you impose on the villages, the corpus fund, providing the materials etc. Gram Vikas could easily go to the government or donors and ask for the necessary resources. This way you could implement water systems in each village much faster. I am afraid that, to my mind, the Gram Vikas model does not seem very efficient... maybe because it is an NGO and competitive pressures are weaker.

Abhimaniu: You are quite wrong there. Completely wrong! It is not about the resources or about efficiency. It is about empowerment and engagement. It cannot be OUR solution; it has to be THEIR solution! Only then will they believe in it, invest in it, make sure everyone adopts it, and maintain it with as much care as they maintain their own homes. You heard the story about the government toilets... It just does not work if something is given from the top. It is not sustainable. And these people don't need our charity. They are poor but have dignity. And they are smart and resourceful. They just need the right framework, some training, someone to show them the most technical parts. Our goal is not to give them anything. It is to provide a framework that empowers them to take full control of the solution. Empowerment is the key concept here. If we do our job well, in three years our staff can leave this village and never return because the villagers will have taken the solution into their own hands. They will have a functioning system, used by everyone and capable of growing and being maintained forever. Our system will be so embedded in village life that there will be no turning back for them. That leaves us free to focus our attention on the next village or on the next pressing

problem. Again, this is the spirit and the approach of the social entrepreneur. You need to understand and assimilate it to be able to do your job well.

Gobardhan: I am amazed... this is so different from what I expected. I thought: “Well Gram Vikas is an NGO so the pressure from any competition will be less and the concern for social impact higher. But the rest will be the same...” I mean, how you implement projects, how you manage people... But this is so different. It is a totally different approach to business and management. You are not trying to build a strong, enduring organisation – you are trying to build sustainable solutions for your beneficiaries. Then you give it away. And then you start from scratch in another area. It’s insane!

Abhimaniu: Well, we never start from scratch. Gram Vikas is infinitely more credible and wiser as an organisation than it was 10 or 20 years ago. We know how to implement these community empowerment projects. We use a similar approach each time, just focused on a different type of problem. But yes, it is a different approach to business. If you ask me, it is a better approach; one focused on creating value for society, not capturing value for the organisation.

Gobardhan: You have given me a lot to think about. All of this is new to me and seems so different. I thank you very much for the time you spent with me. I feel I learned more today than in a whole year at school. And, by the way, I think you did a great job at the village meeting. It seemed to me that by the end, they were all interested in joining Gram Vikas.

Abhimaniu: Yes, it looks like it, but I think there are still significant barriers to overcome. This village is a small one, only 50 families, and the caste differences aren’t so great. We have had greater difficulties in larger villages where the caste differences between members can be quite strong. Often the higher caste members don’t want to share water facilities with the lower caste groups or Dalits – who, as you know, have traditionally been called upon to do tasks which other caste members consider “dirty”.

Our MANTRA model offers a way for everyone to share the same technology. But even then there is resistance – some people think: “Why should I, a rich and high-caste person, have the same facilities as lower caste and poorer groups?” This kind of thinking is still entrenched and we are trying to change it. We are trying to promote greater equality. But saying this directly isn’t necessarily the best policy. When everyone has the same facilities there is at least some degree of equality.

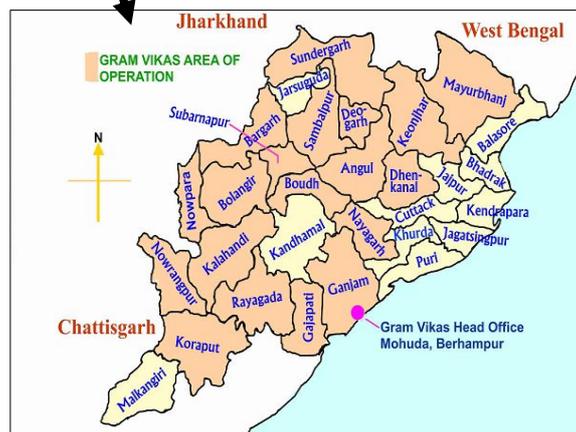
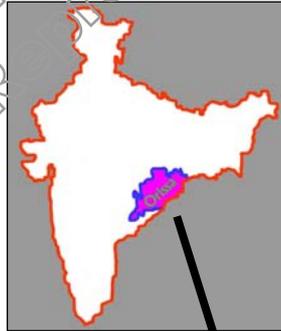
Gobardhan: Yes, I see what you mean. After the meeting, I spoke briefly with some of the village members and I got the sense that they were receptive. I hope that the village will agree to join our programme. But I also got a sense that these barriers are not just particular to Ganjam District, or to Orissa State in general. Indeed, I know they are India-wide. It is something I will have to deal with in my role as Expansion Manager, I imagine.

Abhimaniu: Having spent the day with you, I do believe you are equipped to do this job. You have come here and seen how we work, how we operate. I hope you will spend more time in the coming weeks studying our programmes in depth. Do this even as you

visit other organisations to discuss whether or not they are interested in adopting MANTRA in their own regions.

Gobardhan: Thank you, that's good advice. My first assignment is to visit the Comprehensive Rural Health Project (CRHP), in Maharashtra, on the other side of India. I am scheduled to go there in a month's time, and I understand they have already started to implement MANTRA. I'm very keen to see how it is going!

Appendix
Map of India and Orissa



Source: Gram Vikas

Table 1
Water and Sanitation Coverage under MANTRA

Period	State	Villages Covered	Households Covered	Toilet and Bathing Room Units Constructed	Water Tanks Constructed
1992 – 1998	Orissa	40	3089	3127	40
1999 – 2002	Orissa	27	2074	2089	26
2002 – 2003	Orissa	38	3021	3034	38
2003 – 2006	Orissa	184	14214	14216	122
2006 – 2007	Orissa	72	4452	4452	12
2007 – 2008	Orissa & Madhya Pradesh	160	8572	8572	58
Total		521	35422	35490	296

Note: Total toilet and bathroom units constructed includes common units in schools, community halls, and individual village households constructed after the withdrawal of Gram Vikas.

Source: Gram Vikas

Table 2
Sources of Water Supply to Villages under MANTRA

Period	Villages Covered	Bore Well	Dug Well	Gravity Flow Water System	System to be Identified
1992 - 2002	101	97	4	0	0
2003 - 2008	699	214	40	173	272
Total	800	311	44	173	272

Source: Gram Vikas

Note: Source for Exhibits 1 to 6 and 9 is Imran Chowdhury (2009)

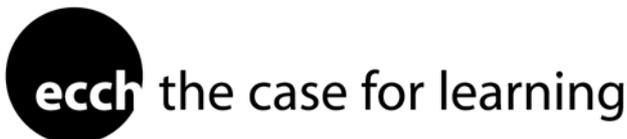
Source for Exhibits 7 and 8 is Gram Vikas.

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