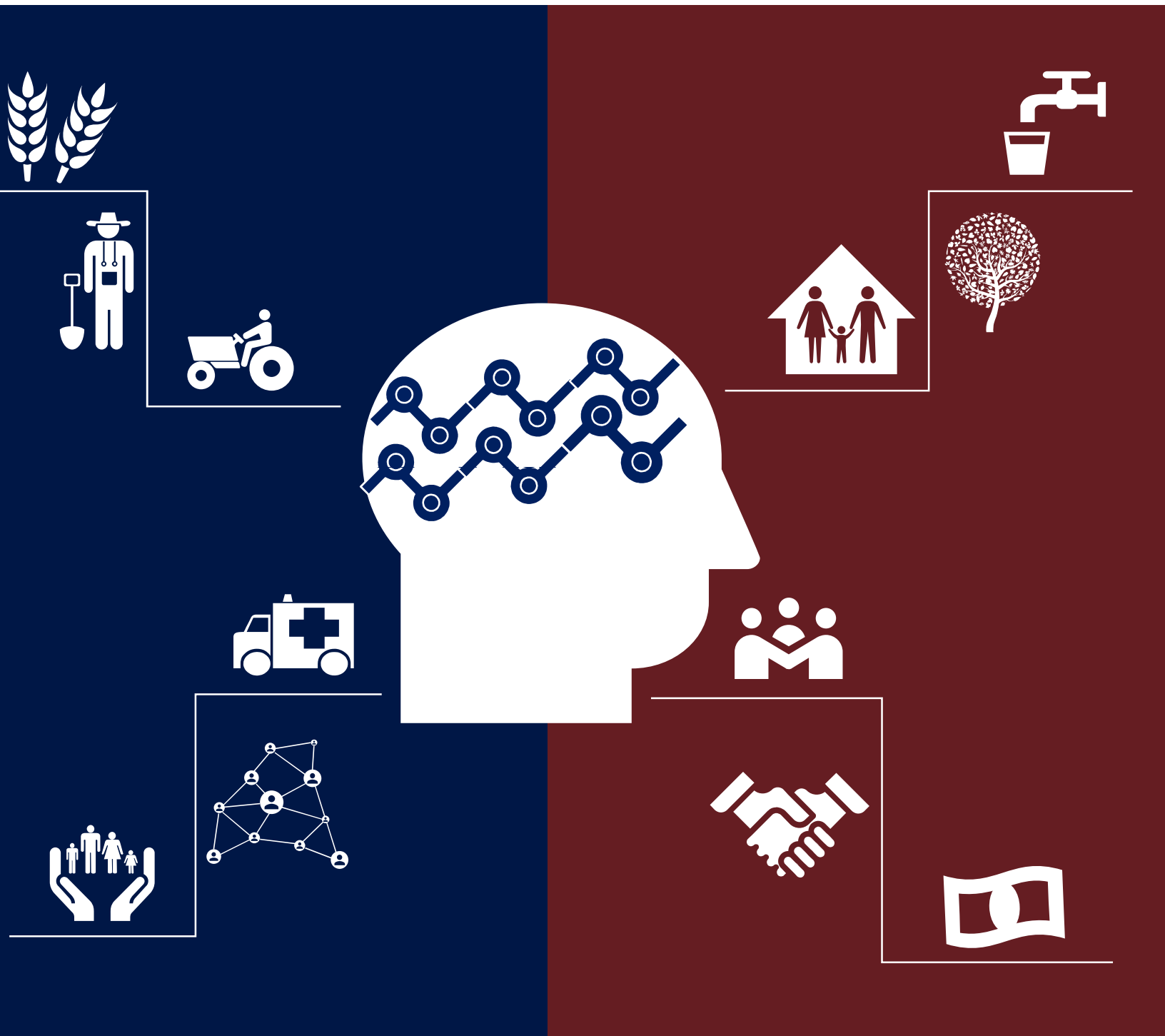


Learning Rural Management

- Cases and Caselets



Ministry of Human Resource Development
Government of India

The Curious Case of Kala Raksha Vidyalaya, Kutch

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Challenge

Ramesh Bhai is the newly appointed marketing manager of Kala Raksha Trust and has been asked to revive the Kala Raksha Vidyalaya which is facing a downfall in terms of artisan's community participation. Established in 1993, Kala Raksha Trust, has worked effortlessly towards preservation of traditional arts and crafts in Kutch, Gujarat. Marching with their vision of creating artisan's traditional part-time handicraft into economic parlance, Kala Raksha provided support to these artisans irrespective of community, caste and gender. Kala Raksha was formed to promote income generation as its priority among the artisan constituency. Kala Raksha facilitates the transformation of traditional arts into contemporary products. Kala Raksha also focuses on involving women artisans in the design, pricing and marketing of their products. In the initiative of preserving traditional arts and crafts, artisan participation serves as the strongest pillar of Kala Raksha's work. The trust seeks design education as a potent way to encourage artisan's innovation and creativity into their work.

Kala Raksha Vidyalaya in 2005 has been established to provide design education to these artisans in Tundavand. It is one of its charitable initiatives that stepped in India. The Vidyalaya is a long-term solution for ensuring the sustainability of craft as the livelihood. It aims to empower artisans from around the region of Kutch, which is prone to drought, earthquake and cyclone. The first institute of its kind, Kala Raksha Vidyalaya is an educational institution with a direct marketing link, open to working traditional artisans of Kutch, estimated at 50,000. While the Vidyalaya began with the advice and support of design professionals, today, it is driven by artisans themselves. The Vidyalaya's environment, curriculum and pedagogy are and customised as per the artisans' needs and their vast existing body of traditional knowledge. They are taught in the local language and arranged to accommodate cultural and livelihood schedules.

The Vidyalaya's goal is to promote respect, social status and capacity as well as promote increased returns. The effectiveness of the education provided tested in the regular market meets with the commercial sector. The Vidyalaya aims to honour and strengthen the creative, conceptual aspects of traditions, in addition to utilising skills, to enable artisans to target new markets directly. The trust performed a social audit of Kala Raksha Vidyalaya from artisan's perspective to get an insight into the social impact Kala Raksha Vidyalaya made in the lives of these artisans. They came out with a new set of findings. The artisans feel more educated about the work that they are employed. They feel more confident about their work and design. These artisans have access to market, and they also have the knowledge about which segment of the market to cater and which is the target market for their product. However, the new group of young artisans are not motivated enough to join Kala Raksha Vidyalaya to pursue the design education and seems disinterested in the field of handicrafts. They aspire to join modern-day courses related to engineering and commerce. This has led to a sudden decline in the overall creativity and handicraft output of Kutch.

Ramesh Bhai is seeking a solution to motivate new artisans and motivate them to engage in the traditional arts and crafts of Kutch achieving the ultimate aim of Kala Raksha trust to preserve the handicrafts of the geography.

Response

To increase the reach and lucrative offer that Kala Raksha Vidyalaya provides to the artisans, Ramesh Bhai has thought of the following alternatives:

Engagement through Advertisement

Ramesh Bhai has decided to follow the conventional medium followed every year by Kala Raksha Trust to publish advertisements in the local newspapers. The ad is further supported with one success story of an artisan who graduated from the school and made a fortune out of skills and knowledge he or she nurtured during his/her design education. Refer to Exhibit 1 to read one such story published in the newspaper (the story was published in Gujarati. It has been translated to English for the case analysis.) The newspaper is circulated in every village of the district and has a readership of nearly 2,00,000 readers.

Engagement through Field Assistants

Kala Raksha Trust has one field assistant assigned in every village of the district. The primary work of the field assistant is to collect the handicrafts from the artisans and bring it to Kala Raksha main office from where they are dispatched to various retail centres and outlets. Ramesh Bhai engaged each field assistant with a target of delivering at least one artisan per village to enroll in the Vidyalaya. The personal connection of a village to another villager would yield better conversion rate.

Organizing Artisans Fair and Fashion Show:

Kala Raksha organizes one fair and fashion show at the graduation of the artisans from KALA RAKSHA VIDYALAYA. The event is attended by significant designers, faculties and design students across the world. This year Ramesh Bhai brought all the young artisans from different villages to witness the grand event. The intention was to introduce the young artists to the appreciation and reach the arts and crafts have in the world. The expense concerning staying, roundtrip and meals were covered by Kala Raksha Trust.

The following three attempts were made to anticipate a set of curious response from the artisans further inducing them to enroll for the school. However, the story sailed far away from the shore. In total, 15 participants enquired about the program, while only three promised to join next year. The concern that shadowed their decision to join the school revolved around better employment prospects in a metropolitan city. Moreover, as most of these artisans were female, they feared to start something of their post-graduation. Though Ramesh Bhai offered them to become an artisan at Kala Raksha Trust, all went in vain.

Action Taken

After receiving a futile response over the activities planned by Ramesh Bhai, he comes across the idea of using collective action to attract the young artisans. He carefully planned a community engagement activity to engage the older artisans of the village and the graduates from the Vidyalaya. The idea was to engage the young artisans in existing handicrafts project. The final output from the collaboration will be specially labelled as the work of a particular group and then sold in the market. It was done to help the young artisans understand the peculiarity of the art and how unique it is when it gets in the market. Moreover, it was to help artisans associate their own identity with their work, which is not only unique but also valuable.

Lessons Learnt

1. It is essential to consider the aspirations and vision of the beneficiary before you plan and implement a rural development intervention.
2. To promote Rural Development through education, it is crucial to understand the dynamics of society and the social identity of each individual. It helps in better understanding the roles that each one of them plays in building a better community.
3. An income-generating intervention should present some immediate output and have a clear overview of the long-term goals of an individual.
4. Forming collectives is not a good idea when a group has a heterogeneous employer, and there are multiple income sources.
5. Institutionalization can help only when it is serving to the higher needs of an individual in a group. Merely fulfilling the necessities cannot form a strong foundation to sustain the institution model.
6. An indigenous resource like arts and crafts can only be preserved when it can serve to fulfil the gap between artisans and their future aspirations.

Questions for Discussion

1. Starting a collective group all the time is not a solution to a community-oriented problem. Do you think Ramesh Bhai was right in forming the collective groups in each village? Discuss from the angle of Social identity model?
2. Why did the conventional method used by Ramesh Bhai fail?
3. What are ways to manage the problem associated with the aspirations of young artisans?
4. If the government (handicrafts commissioner) is brought into the scene, then how should he or she seek a solution to the problem? Should the government promote initiatives like Kala Raksha Vidyalaya?
5. In what ways can existing graduates from KALA RAKSHA VIDYALAYA help in attracting the young artisans to the Vidyalaya?

Annexures

Exhibit 1

Ramji visited Kala Raksha in 2007 and met Judy Frater to whom he presented his work but could not bring Judy to confidence for his work. The reason was not his design but the material of cloth that became a hindrance to his dream of becoming a well-defined traditional weaver and designer. His journey began when Judy offered him a fellowship at Kala Raksha Vidyalaya, popularly known as Kala Raksha Vidyalaya. Ramji used to visit Kala Raksha Vidyalaya mela to see the way the artisans used to learn at school and transformation that they went through during their fellowship.

As described by him, Kala Raksha Vidyalaya was the turning point of his life. Ramji came across a process of learning which took him through understanding the importance of colours to finding patterns and conceptualising the same to finishing and presentation. The pedagogy was highly effective and new to him, adding continuously to his knowledge and art of traditional weaving. He was supposed to learn for a fortnight at the institute and then work back at his place for another 15 days. This learning process went on for a year which ended with a KALA RAKSHA VIDYALAYAMela, where all the fellows of different batches represented the kind of work they did in one year during their fellowship. Exposure to learning from faculties from institutes like NID, Srishti and Kutch University added to a change Ramji observed in his professional as well as personal life. His life took turns in making of a new innovative and creative weaver of Maheshwari family. What he found most helpful and insightful in terms of their profession was studying and understanding market and presentation. Ramji went to different trips to Ahmedabad and researched shops, local street market and malls to understand his customer and need of the market. They were also taught to create and work on their brand, and that is where Tana Bana, a brand by Ramji Bhai came into existence.

Kala Raksha Vidyalaya has been not only influential but also critical in moulding and creating more professional and artistic weaver who not only possess knowledge of their products but also the market where they will be channelising their masterpiece.

Course Positioning

The case is an interesting one and is based on a real situation that was experienced by KALA RAKSHA VIDYALAYA. The case can be resourceful to subjects like Rural Planning and Development, Collective Action and Cooperative, Non-For-Profit Management, Public Policy and Livelihoods. The case involves multiple sets of problems which can be analyzed from a different perspective.

About the Author

Avi Jain is currently pursuing Post Graduate Diploma in Rural Management at the Institute of Rural Management Anand. He came across the problem during his engagement with Kala Raksha Trust as Rural Development Consultant. He has prepared the case solely for class discussion and does not indicate the performance of any organization. Furthermore, the author would like to thank Kala Raksha Trust for hosting and sponsoring him during the engagement.