

GRASSROOTS VIKAS IS THE WAY FORWARD FOR INDIA

Financial inclusion in its true sense is about knowledge and empowerment leading to 'vikas' or progress. **Harjot Kaur** writes about how Vadodara-based Zoher Doctor is changing lives of the underprivileged

That Vikas Trust would have been set up by a financial planner is clear from its very objective—not merely to make people self-sufficient through livelihoods, but to empower through every tool of financial planning available to the more educated and privileged people—access to credit, a savings plan, insurance, access to medical benefits and guidance in finding markets for products. Vadodara-based Zoher Doctor, a financial planner for over a decade, he decided that the best way to give back to society would be to provide 'real upliftment' to the underprivileged through a 'self-sustainable plan'.

And, in two years since 2010, his effort is attracting support from a cross-section of people and donors. The concept is deceptively simple—Vikas Trust provides financial and social resources to those who want to transform their lives. It provides self-employment through *gruh udyog* (home-based industry), upliftment through microfinance, medical aid and specific help for women and children. *Gruh Udyog* offers products like candles, pickles, bags, handicraft items and artificial jewellery. Vikas Trust helps to source raw material at competitive prices and help in marketing the final product through the internet and a display-cum-sales centre (inaugurated on 4th September).

For starters, Vikas Trust provides interest-free loans to avoid a debt-trap. Field workers visit localities of the underprivileged, talk to local leaders, meet families and assess credit needs as well as willingness to become self-empowered. Zoher Doctor says, "I need to understand the mindset of these people to help them come out of the vicious circle of poverty. If I want to help them, I need to know what work they would be interested in doing. Then I talk to government agencies and other NGOs, to generate financial and intellectual resources for them."

The original loan has to be repaid to recycle money for others' benefit. People are also taught about savings, investment and insurance to make them financially independent. The recovery rate so far has been 100%.

Since the concept was new, the founders made an initial contribution of their own funds; they also had a tough time convincing potential beneficiaries to understand their concept of empowerment. Shaiyar and Sahaj, two Vadodara-based NGOs, helped Vikas Trust in its outreach effort. Changing the mindset of people, used to government subsidies or doles from NGOs and religious trusts, was a challenge, says Zoher Doctor. But now that it has proven the concept, donations are flowing in from individuals, corporates and other well-wishers.



Another innovation of Vikas Trust is the 'Medicard' provided free of cost to beneficiaries. The card has been structured with the support of like-minded doctors and hospitals; it entitles a person to a significant discount in treatment. The Trust is also working on preventive healthcare. For instance, Wockhardt has supported a free eye-check-up initiative.

Other activities of Vikas Trust include, distribution of medicines and vitamin supplements under medical advice as well as clothes and foodgrains to the needy and counselling for education and family problems. Vikas Trust also runs a free library at its office premises for poor children. Mr Doctor plans to take the Trust's activities forward by adding businesses such as garment-manufacturing, jewellery-making, developing parks, distribution of foodgrains to disabled singles and a building a call centre.

If you want to extend financial or social support to Vikas Trust, contact the members at the address given alongside. ■

VIKAS TRUST

402, Bholesai Apt., Bh. Emperor,
Parsi Street, Fatehgunj, Vadodara 390002,
Gujarat Tel: +91 265 6553344 / +91 9227896902
E-mail: vikastrust1@gmail.com,
care@vikastrust.org | www.vikastrust.org