

Mainstreaming Out of School Children with Community Support

A Success Story

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ABSTRACT

The persistence of poverty is the most complex problem in India. One-third of the world's 1.2 billion extremely poor are living in India. They are leading a miserable life. Education is the only weapon to eradicate poverty. But India has not been able to achieve quality elementary education. Of the factors blocking the achievement of quality elementary education for all, a high dropout rate of students is significant one. The present dropout rate at the primary level is 18 per cent. This study was undertaken to address this issue in the States of Uttarakhand and West Bengal. Out of school children in the age group 6–14 were identified and admitted into school with the support of community leaders in each village. The outcomes of the study were that 192 (112 boys and 85 girls) out of school children were admitted into schools in class appropriate to their age in both the states. An attempt was also made to bring about a change in the mindset of the stakeholders through awareness meetings regarding need and importance of quality education for all and evil consequences of child labour. An analysis of their response in the post test revealed that there was a substantial change in the mind-set of stakeholders regarding need of education for each child.

Persistence of Poverty

The most complex problem in India is poverty. Millions of people are living in abject poverty. Many of them do not have a roof over their head. They are seen sleeping in big cities on the roadside even in extreme winter with or without any blanket over them. It is estimated that out of 133 crore people living in India, “about

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30 per cent (40 crores) of them are living below poverty line” (*Times of India*, 4 July 2015). Having two meals a day is an issue for them.

The UN Millennium Development Goals Report (2014) highlighted that India is home to the largest number of poor with “one-third of the world’s 1.2 billion extremely poor living here”. The report further highlights that in India, poverty reduction has been sluggish. It, however, came down from 49.4 per cent in 1994 to 42 per cent in 2005, and 32.7 per cent in 2010. This means that about 30 per cent of the people are still very poor’ (*Times of India*, 17 July 2014). They must be leading a very miserable life. ‘The *Global Hunger Index* (GHI)’ report released in 2015 reported that about a quarter of the world’s hungry or 210 million are in India alone. Poverty contributes to under-nourishment of children, which in turn affects adversely their learning capacity’ (*Times of India*, 15 October 2013).

How to Eradicate Poverty?

Education is the only weapon to fight poverty. Education develops in an individual knowledge and skills essential for her/his economic development and that of the country too. Therefore, a quality elementary/secondary education for all is absolutely necessary to address the problem of poverty in the country. Since independence the Government of India has been making incessant endeavours to achieve quality education for all. The *National Policy on Education* (1986) envisaged that the country would achieve primary education for all by 1990 and elementary education by 1995. But the country could not achieve the goal. After Dakar Convention (2000), the country envisaged that it would achieve quality education for all by 2015. It launched its flagship programme *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* (SSA) in 2001. Despite the best endeavours, India could not achieve the goal.

Factors Contributing to Non-Achievement of Quality Education for All

There are two main factors; un-enrolled children in school and a high dropout rate. Over the period, there has been quantitative expansion of facilities for education. As a result, barring a limited number of inaccessible and extremely remote areas there is a primary and upper primary school within a radius of one and three kilometers from the residence of a child respectively. “As a consequence, the net enrolment ratio has gone up to 90 per cent. Only 10 per cent of children at the age of 6+ are unreached”

(NUEPA, 2015). Reaching them is a complex issue which needs to be addressed on a priority basis. This, however, differs across states and districts within a state.

Besides the unreachable children, the issue of high dropout rate particularly at the primary level persists. Out of 100 children admitted in Class I, all of them do not complete successfully even basic education which is highly essential to equip young children with requisite knowledge and skills to earn better livelihood in their later lives. The latest data which flow from DISE reveal that 18 per cent children drop out of school before completing primary education successfully (NUEPA, 2015). This percentage refuses to be abated significantly due to many uncontrollable variables. However, the dropout rate also differs across states and districts within a state. There is an urgent need to check and wipe out the phenomenon of dropout and bring all the out of school children back to school.

Quality of Education is Low

Besides, not achieving education for all, the quality of education has not kept-pace with the quantitative expansion of education facilities. Rather, the quantitative expansion has adversely affected the quality of education. As a consequence, the quality of education is quite low. The UNESCO in its EFA Global Monitoring Report (2013–14), highlights that there is a learning crisis in India. This is because the report further highlights that 90 per cent of children from disadvantaged sections of society remain illiterate even after four years of schooling. The report concludes that children from the disadvantaged sections of society are the worst hit by low quality of education.

India is now a signatory to the implementation of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. Under these SDGs, India is to achieve quality Secondary Education for all by 2030. It appears today that this is a herculean task. India cannot achieve quality secondary education for all unless it achieves quality elementary education for all. As such, the country needs to address on a priority basis the barriers blocking the achievement of quality elementary education for all.

Rationale for the Study

A study was conducted to address the problem of out of school children in the age group 6–14. It was felt that education for

all cannot be achieved unless all children seek admission in a school. Further, education for all will be possible only if parents and guardians realise the need and importance of education for each child to acquire knowledge and skills essential to earn better livelihood in life. This knowledge and skills help an individual to eradicate his/her poverty. It was also felt that parents need to be sensitised that child labour does not mitigate/eradicate poverty at all. It rather perpetuates poverty.

It was further visualised that the task of identification of out of school children and their mainstreaming in schools is not possible without the support of the community leaders, parents and guardians. Therefore, the support of these personnel was visualised to be of utmost importance to realise the objectives of the study. The study was launched in the states of Uttarakhand and West Bengal which are relatively educationally backward States.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study were to:

- Identify out of school children in the age group 6–14 in the selected area of the project;
- Mainstream identified out of school children into their nearby school; and
- Bring about a change in the mindset of parents/guardians of students, community leaders, villagers about need and importance of quality education for all through organising rallies and awareness meetings.

Design of the Study

The study was implemented in the states of West Bengal and Uttarakhand. The operational area of the project in both the states comprised two districts in each state, and two blocks within one district. In each block, a number of schools constituted the operational area of the project. The operational area in each state is mentioned below:

West Bengal

The names of the districts and blocks in West Bengal which formed the area of operation are mentioned in Table 1.

Table 1
Districts and blocks covered in West Bengal

District	Block
North 24 Parganas	i) Barrackpore-I ii) Barrackpore-II
Bankura	i) Ranibandh ii) Raipur Circle

In each block, six villages were selected.

Uttarakhand

The districts, blocks and villages which constituted the operational area of the project are mentioned in Table 2.

Table 2
Districts and blocks which constituted the operational area of the study in Uttarakhand

S/N	District	Block
1.	Dehradun	i) Raipur ii) Doiwala
2.	Haridwar	i) Bhadrabad-II ii) Narsan

In each block, 10–11 villages were selected. These villages constituted the operational area of the project.

Tools Developed

The following tools were developed for collecting the requisite data for the study.

- 1. Proforma – I**, Recording particulars of identified out of school children admitted into schools in their neighbourhood
- 2. Proforma – II**, Consolidated report of out of school children admitted into schools

Questionnaires

- 1. Pre-test** — Elementary education
- 2. Post-test** — Elementary education

Questionnaires – Pre-test and Post-test for Elementary Education

One of the approved activities of the study was to generate awareness among parents/guardians, teachers and members of

the PTAs, MTAs, SMCs, VECs, etc., about the need and importance of education for all for alleviating poverty by developing life and livelihood skills in children. Therefore, two tests — pre-test and post-test were developed to determine the effectiveness of the orientation of the said personnel in changing their perceptions about the importance of elementary education.

Training of Resource Persons

To facilitate smooth process of identification of out of school children in the selected area of the project/study, a body of resource persons was created in both the states — Uttarakhand and West Bengal and provided the necessary training.

Training of Surveyors

Training programs were organised for training of surveyors in both the states. The resource persons sensitised them about the objectives of the study, its need and importance in the present day context and their role in the household survey to be undertaken for identification of out of school children in the catchment area of the project with the support of community leaders. They were advised to have a meeting with the community leaders and seek their support for the identification of the out of school children in the age group of 6–14 years. They were provided necessary guidelines to be followed for the household survey for seeking the cooperation and support of parents/guardians. In West Bengal, 15 surveyors and Uttarakhand 22 surveyors were appointed for door-to-door survey to identify out of school children in the age group of 6–14 years.

Identification and Mainstreaming of Out of School Children

The trained surveyors went from door-to-door in selected villages of both the states — Uttarakhand and West Bengal with a view to identify out of school children in the age group of 6–14 years. They contacted community leaders in each village and sought their support in the identification of out of school children before undertaking the survey. The identified out of school children were admitted into nearby government schools in the class appropriate to their age.

West Bengal

The data with regard to identified out of school children in all the four blocks of both of the selected districts are presented in Table 3.

Table 3
Out of school children admitted into schools in North 24 Parganas and Bankura Districts

Name of the district	Name of the block	No. of house holds visited in the block		No. of children below 14 years of age in the house holds		No. of children below 14 years not going to School		No. of the school children in different age groups			No. of the out of school children re-admitted into schools		No. of the children admitted in different classes							
		Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	6-8	8-10	10 to 14	Boys	Girls	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII
North 24 Parganas	Barrackpore-1	4,067	849	817	8	10	4	9	5	8	10	3	5	5	3	2	-	-	-	
	Barrackpore-2	4,005	662	641	12	6	1	8	9	12	6	1	0	7	9	1	-	-	-	
Bankuara	Ranibandh	3,887	1,302	1,223	14	6	9	10	1	14	6	3	5	6	6	-	-	-	-	
	Raipur	3,807	886	865	5	7	3	7	2	5	7	3	1	3	3	2	-	-	-	
		15,766	3,699	3,546	39	29	17	34	17	39	29	10	11	21	21	5				

Table 3 manifests that 68 (39 boys and 29 girls) out of school children were identified. All of them were admitted into the class as mentioned in the said table.

Uttarakhand

In Uttarakhand, two districts Dehradun and Haridwar were covered. The data with regard to out of school children in blocks of Raipur and Doiwala of Dehradun district is presented in Table 4.

Table 4
No. of out of school children identified and admitted into schools of dehradun district

Name of the block	No. of house holds visited in the block	No. of children below 14 years not going to school		No. of the out of school children in different age groups		No. of the out of school children readmitted into schools		No. of the children admitted in different classes									
		Boys	Girls	6-11	11-14	Boys	Girls	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII		
Raipur and Doiwala	1,568	63	42	97	8	28	21										

Table 4 manifests that 105 out of school children were identified from 1,568 households. Of these, 97 children were in the age group 6–11 and eight children in the age 11–14. Of these, 49 (28 boys and 21 girls) were admitted into schools in the class appropriate to their age. The rest could not be admitted as most of these children were from families of migrant workers.

Haridwar District

In Haridwar district, two blocks — Bahadrabad-II and Narsen were selected. In the selected villages of these blocks, surveyors went from door-to-door to identify out of school children in the age group 6–14 and admitted them into nearby government schools in class appropriate to their age. The data in this regard are presented in Table 5.

Table 5
Out of School Children Identified and Admitted into Schools

Name of the block	No. of house holds visited in the block	No. of children below 14 years of age in house holds		No. of children below 14 years not going to school		No. of the out of school children in different age groups		No. of the out of school children admitted into the school		No. of the children admitted into different classes							
		B*	G**	B*	G**	6 to 11	11 to 14	B*	G**	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII
Bahadrabad-II	2,661	1,983	1,687	44	32	59	17	28	21	15	19	10	4	1	0	0	0
Narsan	3,754	2,529	2,124	18	14	31	1	17	14	3	11	9	7	1	0	0	0
Total	6,415	4,512	3,811	62	46	90	18	45	35	18	30	19	11	2	0	0	0

Note: * Boys, ** Girls

Table 5 manifests in both of these blocks 108 out of school children were identified. Of these, 80 (45 boys and 35 girls) were admitted into schools in the class appropriate to their age.

Awareness Meetings for Bringing about a Change in the Mindset of Stakeholders Regarding Importance of Quality Education for All

Awareness meetings were organised in all the four blocks of both the states — West Bengal and Uttarakhand. Dates and venue of these meetings are mentioned in Table 6.

Table 6
Awareness meetings held in both the states

State	District	Block	Venue	Date	Number of Participants
West Bengal	24 Paragnas	Barrackpore-I	Naihati Municipal Hall	14.09.2016	About 85
		Barrackpore-II	Khandola Art Gallery	13.09.2016	About 95
	Bankura	Ranibandh	Rudra High School	15.09.2016	About 160
		Raipur	Raipur High School	18.09.2016	About 100
Uttarakhand	Dehradun	Doiwala	Cluster Resource Centre, Majri Grant, Vikas Khand	08.11.2016	48
		Raipur	Cluster Resource Centre, Nangal, Vikas Khand Hatnala	09.11.2016	49
	Haridwar	Bahadrabad-II	Government Primary School Alipur	6.12.2016	43
		Narsan	GPS Gopalpur	07.12.2016	40

In all these meetings, participants comprised parents/guardians of students, members of School Management Committee (SMC), teachers' members of the Parents Teachers' Association (PTA), Community Leaders, etc. Leaders of the association, Block/District Education officers addressed the participants.

They requested the parents/guardians to desist from sending any of their children for working as a labourer or a maid-servant in any household. This deprives them of education which is highly essential for their all-round development. It was also intended to remove the myth that child labour reduces poverty of the family. They were sensitised that child labour in fact perpetuates poverty in the family. This is because many child labourers end up to be a labourer.

Impact of Orientation on the Mindset of Participants

All the participants of the programme were administered questionnaire pre-test elementary education before the commencement of the programme and post-test elementary education towards the end of the programme. The objective of administering these tests was to determine whether the programme brought out any change in participants' perceptions/mindset regarding the importance of quality elementary education for each child. The responses of participants with regard to pre-test and post-test questionnaires were analysed. The findings in this regard are mentioned below:

In Raipur, Diowala, Bahadrabad and Narsan blocks of Dehradun and Haridwar districts in Uttarakhand before training 89 (63.5 per cent) out of 140 participants reflected their concern about the need to increase the enrolment rate and to check the dropout rate at the primary level. After training 128 (97.7 per cent) out of 131 reflected their concern in this regard. This change in the mindset of stakeholders reflects the outcome of training. Similarly, in all the four blocks of Dehradun and Haridwar districts, there was a change in the perceptions of the participants regarding the role of child labour in reducing poverty of the family. Before training 72 (51 per cent) out of 140 participants expressed that child labour reduces the poverty of the family. After training 126 (96 per cent) out of 131 respondents reported that child labour does not reduce poverty of the family. Only five participants reported that it does reduce poverty of the family.

West Bengal

Before the orientation, 112 participants (77.7 per cent) reported that child labour does not reduce poverty of the family. The remaining 32 participants (22.3 per cent) reported that it does reduce poverty. After their orientation, all of them reported that child labour does not reduce poverty of the family.

In West Bengal, before the orientation, all the 144 participants reported that they do perceive their role in achieving quality education for all. But only 12 participants (8.3 per cent) specified categorically that they were doing something in this regard. The rest 132 participants (91.7 per cent) simply mentioned that there is a need to generate awareness among parents and guardians about the importance of quality education for all and the ill-effects of the child labour. After this orientation, a substantial change was observed in participants' mind-set. Almost all, i.e., 129 (89.6 per cent) specified that they would educate parents and guardians of their students in this regard and organise rallies to eradicate the child labor.

Rallies

Rallies were also organised in all the selected blocks in both the States West Bengal and Uttarakhand. The objective of these was to sensitise parents/guardians, teachers', social workers, community leaders and villagers about the need and importance of quality education for all. Besides, it was intended to sensitise parents/guardians to desist from sending any of their children for work either in a factory/industry or as a maid servant in any household. The rallyists carrying banners and play cards and were raising the following slogans. In Uttarakhand, these slogans were in hindi language:

- Quality education for all.
- Each child has a right to quality elementary education.
- Education is the only vaccine to eradicate poverty.
- Child labour increases poverty rather than reducing it.

Main Findings and Conclusions

The following were the main findings:

In Uttarakhand, 129 (73 boys and 56 girls) school children were admitted to schools. In West Bengal 68 (39 boys and 29 girls) out of school children were admitted to schools. In all, in both the States of Uttarakhand and West Bengal 197 (112 boys and 85 girls) out of

school children were admitted into schools with the support of the community. But for this project many of them would have become victim of child labour and ended up as labourer throughout their lives. The project has been a boon for them.

In Raipur, Diowala, Bahadrabad and Narsan blocks of Dehradun and Haridwar district in Uttarakhand state before orientation 89 (63.5 per cent) out of 140 participants reflected their concern about the need to increase the enrolment rate and to check the dropout rate at the primary level. After orientation 128 (97.7 per cent) out of 131 participants reflected their concern in this regard. This change in the mindset of stakeholders reflects the outcome of orientation. Similarly, in all the four blocks of Dehradun and Haridwar districts, there was a change in the perceptions of the participants regarding the role of child labour in reducing poverty of the family. Before training 72 (51 per cent) out of 140 participants expressed that child labour reduces poverty of the family. After orientation 126 (96 per cent) out of 131 respondents reported that child labour does not reduce poverty of the family. Only five participants reported that it does reduce poverty of the family.

Before the orientation all the 144 participants reported that they do perceive their role in achieving quality education for all. But only 12 participants (8.3 per cent) specified categorically that they were doing something in this regard. The rest 132 participants (91.7 per cent) simply mentioned that there is a need to generate awareness among parents and guardians about the importance of quality education for all and the ill-effects of child labour. After this orientation, a substantial change was observed in the participants' mindset. Almost all, i.e., 129 (89.6 per cent) participants specified that they would educate parents and guardians of their students in this regard and organise rallies to eradicate the child labour.

Conclusion

The following conclusions were drawn from the implementation of the project:

- Community plays a pivotal role in persuading parents/guardians to admit their out of school children in the age group 6–14 years into school.
- State authorities at different levels should seek community support to enroll all the children at the age 6+ and above into school. This step would facilitate the achievement of the goal — Education for All.

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