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Mainstreaming of Out-of-School Children with Community Support — A Study

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ABSTRACT

India has already missed the target of achieving education for all by 2015. There are many factors contributing to the present situation. Of these, high dropout rate at the primary level is one of them. About 18 per cent children drop out before completing primary education. Despite all the endeavours made by the government, the dropout rate continues to persist.

To address the issue of dropout children, the All India Primary Teachers' Federation conducted a study in 2014–15 to bring out-of-school children in the age group 6–14 years to the mainstream with the support of the community. The study was conducted in the states of Tamil Nadu and Odisha. In each state, two districts were selected. In each district two blocks, and in each block, five villages were selected. Investigators were selected to conduct household survey and were provided training. They visited all the houses in selected villages and identified out-of-school children in the age group 6–14 years.

In Odisha, the investigators identified 544 (283 boys and 261 girls) out-of-school children in the age group 6–14 years. Out of these 544 children, 325 (175 boys and 150 girls) in the age group 6–14 years were mainstreamed into schools in their neighbourhood with the support of community leaders. In Tamil Nadu, 46 (25 boys and 21 girls) out-of-school children in the age group 6–14 years were identified by the investigators. Of these, 43 (23 boys and 20 girls) were mainstreamed into class appropriate to their age in neighbourhood schools. This is remarkable outcome of the project. But for this project, out-of-school children both in Tamil Nadu and Odisha states might have remained illiterate throughout their lives. Many of them would have become victim of child labour due to the poverty of their parents.

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Another objective of the project was to bring about a change in the mindset of parents/guardians, community leaders, villagers, social activists, teachers, students, etc., regarding importance of education for all. For this purpose, multi-pronged approach was followed. Orientation programmes and rallies in all the selected blocks were also organised to bring about requisite desirable change in the mindset of all the stakeholders. Remarkable change was perceived in the mind of villagers, parents, guardians, community leaders, etc.

Access to Elementary Education — Existing Scenario

India has made significant strides towards increasing access to education. There has been a manifold increase in the number of schools at different levels over the years. As a consequence, the net enrolment ratio in Class I has risen to about 88 per cent. Only 12 per cent of the children at the age of 6+ are still unreached (NUEPA, 2014). These children primarily belong to disadvantaged sections of society and households of the poorest of the poor.

Though there has been an appreciable improvement in the net enrolment ratio, but the dropout rate of students both at the primary and upper primary level, though declining over the years, is still alarming. At present, it is about 18 per cent at the primary level. This means that of 100 children admitted into Class I, only 82 complete primary education successfully. The rest 18 drop out on the way.

Quality of Education

The above situation reflects that high dropout rate at the primary level is a stumbling block towards the achievement of education for all. Not only this, out of the children who complete primary education, some hardly acquire requisite knowledge and skills to become productive members of the Indian society. This is primarily due to the reason that the quality of education has not kept pace with the quantitative expansion of education. The UNESCO EFA Global Monitoring Report (2014) also highlights that the quality of education is low in India. The report further highlights that even after completing four years of schooling, 90 per cent of children from poorer households remain illiterate. This holds true for around 30 per cent kids from poorer homes despite 5 to 6 years of schooling. There is learning crisis in India. Mostly children from poorer households are worst hit by this low quality of education. The report also warns that the learning crisis would affect generations of kids if no corrective steps are taken.

Out-of-School Children

There is hardly any exact figure available about the number of out-of-school children in India in the age group 6–14 years. There are different estimates in this regard. One estimate is, there are about 30 million out-of-school children in the age group 6–14 years. A Centre-backed recent

survey has revealed a disturbing trend that in the six years since the Right to Education Act, around 60 lakh children between ages 6 and 13 years remain out of school in the country.

While children from Scheduled Castes and Tribes form 49 per cent (29.73 lakh) of the deprived kids, those from other backward classes constitute 36 per cent, which shows that RTE has brought little change in the lives of marginal groups. At 77 per cent, a majority of out-of-school (OOS) children are in rural areas. Besides, 15.57 lakh Muslim children too are out of school, comprising 25 per cent of unschooled children. In all, around 3 per cent of the total 20.4 crore school-going children are deprived of their right to education (*The Times of India,* 27 July 2015).

The number of out-of-school children is however uneven among states and regions. India has already missed the target of achieving the goal of quality education for all by 2015. The issue of out-of-school children needs to be addressed appropriately to achieve quality education for all.

Rationale for the Study

The high dropout is eroding the gains being made by increasing access to education. Therefore, there is a dire need to check the dropout rate at primary and upper primary education or to eliminate altogether the phenomenon of dropout. This is possible through educating the parents/guardians of children. They need to be sensitised about the importance of education for development of children. Education develops life and livelihood skills.

Poverty impels some parents to withdraw their wards from school when they are in Class III or IV and send them for labour to supplement the income of the family. They do so on the premise the income of their ward(s) would reduce their poverty. This is an erroneous notion. The child labour does not mitigate the poverty of the family, it rather perpetuates poverty. This is because children engaged in child labour are deprived of facilities for education. Many of them tend to remain illiterate throughout their lives. Since they are not able to develop proper livelihood skills, they end up as labourers throughout their lives. They suffer immensely for no fault of theirs. Parents need to be educated properly in this regard.

Further, there is a need to identify out-of-school children in the age group 6–14 years and enrol them in their nearby government primary/upper primary schools in classes appropriate to their age. It is possible to achieve this goal by educating and persuading parents/guardians of identified out-of-school children and with the active support of the community. In view of the above, it was decided to launch a study with the following objectives.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study were to:

- Identify out-of-school children in the age group 6–14 years in the selected area, with the support of the community leaders;

- Mainstreaming identified out-of-school children with the support of community leaders into government schools in their neighbourhood; and

- Orient parents/guardians, social activities, members of SMC, community members, etc., with a view to bring about a change in their mindset regarding importance of quality elementary education for all.

Design of the Study

Sample

The study was conducted in the states of Tamil Nadu and Odisha. In each of these states, two districts were selected for conducting delineated activities. In each district two blocks, and five villages in each block were selected. The selected districts and blocks in both the states are mentioned in Tables 1 to 3.

Table 1
Names of Selected Blocks in Vellore and Trichirapalli Districts

S. No.	District	Block
1.	Vellore	Anaicut and Katpadi
2.	Trichirapalli	Trichy Urban and Manaparai

Table 2
Names of Selected Villages in Anaicut and Katpadi Blocks

Villages in Anaicut Block	Villages in Katpadi Block
Vettuvanam	Arimuthumottur
Karungali	Virudhambat
Basuvanayini Kuppam	Sevoor
Kandaneri	Karasamangalam
Thippasamudram	Akkireddy Pudur

Table 3
Names of Selected Villages in Manaparai and Trichy Urban Blocks in Trichirapalli District

Villages in Manaparai Block	Villages in Trichy Urban Block
Maravanur	Kalnayakkan St. Solamanagar Annai Theresa Colony
Kallipatti	Venis Street, Antoniyar Kovil St. Gandhi Nagar
Podangupatti	Pudur Puthu St., Agraharam, Nagarathinam Pillai. St. Salai Pillaiar Koil St.
Perumampatti	Sengulam Colony. Palakarai
Servaikaran Patti	Thooku Medai, Thillai Nagar

In Odisha, two districts namely Bolangir and Boudh were selected. In each of these districts, two blocks were selected. These blocks are mentioned in Table 4.

Table 4
Names of Selected Blocks in Bolangir and Boudh Districts

S.No.	District	Block
1.	Bolangir	Turaikela and Belpada
2.	Boudh	Harbhanga and Boudh

Development of Tools

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

    Proforma-II: Consolidated Report of Out-of-School Children Admitted into Schools

2. Questionnaires
    i. Pre-test: Elementary Education
    ii. Post-test: Elementary Education

Description of Tools

Proforma I and II

This tool was developed to record particulars of identified out-of-school children. These particulars include age in respect of out-of-school child, gender of the child, name of the child and his/her date of birth, his/her father's name, name of the school and the class into which out-of-school child was admitted. Proforma II is meant for consolidated picture of out-of-school children admitted into schools.

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

One of the approved activities of the project was to generate awareness among parents/guardians, teachers and members of the PTAs, MTAs, SMC, VEC, etc., about the need and importance of education for all. Therefore, two questionnaires — pre-test and post-test were developed to determine the effectiveness of orientation of the said personnel in changing their perceptions about the importance of elementary education. Pre-test comprised 12 items which were formulated to determine the existing perceptions about need for elementary education for all. The post-test comprised 14 items. These were structured to assess change in their perceptions about the need and importance of education for all as a result of their orientation.

Procedure of Data Collection

1. For identifying out-of-school children, investigators were appointed. They were imparted training with regard to the process of interaction with parents/guardians for identifying out-of-school children in the age group 6–14 years. They recorded the requisite information in Proforma-I. They also convinced them about the need and importance of education for all. They also had meetings with community leaders and sought their support in persuading parents/guardians to admit their out-of-school children into school for their better future.

2. For determining the impact of orientation programme upon participants' mindset regarding importance of quality education for all, pre-test and post-test were developed and administered to participants. Data resulting from these tests were analysed to gauge the impact.

Household Survey

The investigators went from one household to another in the selected villages in both the states and interacted with parents/guardians to identity out-of-school children in the age group 6–14 years. They later reported that some parents did not cooperate with them. They, on one pretext or the other did not provide the requisite information. However, most of the parents did provide the requisite information with regard to their out-of-school children. The entire work in this regard was completed in about two months in both the districts. This uphill task could not have been accomplished without the active support of community leaders.

Mainstreaming of Out-of-School (OOS) Children

Investigators visited all the 20 villages in all the identified blocks of Vellore and Trichirapalli districts of Tamil Nadu and identified out-of-school children in the age group 6–14 years.

Table 5 presents complete picture with regard to number of out-of-school children (both boys and girls) admitted into their nearby school in class appropriate to their age with the support of parents/guardians, community leaders and social activists.

Table 5 reveals that the investigators visited 3,634 households. Forty three out-of-school children (23 boys and 20 girls) were admitted into their nearby government schools. The number is very small due to the reason that the dropout rate at the primary and upper primary level is quite low in Tamil Nadu. This may also be due to the reason that some parents/guardians might have concealed the fact their ward(s) in the age group 6–14 years was out of school. They might have sent him/her to a household/factory/industry/eatery for work to supplement the income of their family. Though the number is small, but the outcomes of the project are of quite significance and have far-reaching implications. But for this project, most of these children might have remained illiterate throughout their lives. Besides, many of them would have ended up as labourers throughout their lives. Their education has an implication for their children also. They would see that their children get education to the level higher than their own education. This would reduce illiteracy and poverty in the country.

Mainstreaming of Identified Out-of-School Children in Odisha

Investigators identified out-of-school children from the selected villages in all the blocks — Harbhanga, Boudh, Tureikela and Belpada. The data in this regard is presented in Table 6.

Table 6 reveals that the investigators identified 544 (283 boys and 261 girls) out-of-school children in the age group 6–14 years. Out of 544 out-of-school children, 325 (175 boys and 150 girls) were mainstreamed in Odisha.

Table 5

Out-of-School Children Admitted into Schools in Four Blocks of Tamil Nadu

S. No.	Name of the Block	No. of households visited in the block	No. of children below 14 years of age in the household		No. of children below 14 years not going to school		No. of out-of-school children in different age groups			No. of out-of-school children re-admitted in school		No. of children admitted in different class							
			Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	6–8	8–10	10–14	Boys	Girls	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII
1.	Anaicut	813	277	267	5	3	2	4	2	5	3	0	1	0	4	1	0	2	0
2.	Katpadi	744	217	194	9	13	8	2	12	9	13	4	3	1	2	0	6	3	3
3.	Manaparai	1137	645	598	2	0	1	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0
4.	Trichy	940	546	541	9	5	3	4	7	7	4	1	0	2	0	2	4	1	1
	Total	3634	1685	1600	25	21	14	11	21	23	20	5	4	3	7	4	10	6	4

Table 6

Out-of-School Children Admitted into Schools in their Neighbourhood in Odisha

Name of the block	Number of children below 14 years in the visited households	No. of children below 14 years not going to school from the household		No. of out-of-school children in different age groups			No. of out-of-school children who dropped out from school		No. of child/children from the household who were re-admitted in schools		Name(s) of the child/children, gender, date of birth who were admitted in the school
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Harbhanga	456	42	30	42	18	12	00	00	42	30	72
Boudh	1284	98	95	157	16	20	45	77	90	82	172
Tureikela	338	112	102	51	78	85	1	1	28	23	51
Belpada	1127	31	34	30	15	20	02	02	15	15	30
Total	3205	283	261	280	127	137	48	80	175	150	325

Orientation of Parents/Guardians, Community Leaders

One orientation programme was held in each block of the selected districts in both the states. In this programme, members of School Management Committee, parents/guardians, community leaders, teachers, social activists, etc., participated. The objective of all the programmes was to generate awareness among participants about the need and importance of elementary education for all and to help them to perceive their role in achieving the goal of quality education for all. Two questionnaires were developed to gauge the change in the perceptions of the participants regarding the importance of education for all. One of these questionnaires was pre-test and other post-test. The pre-test was administered to them before the orientation programme and the post-test after their orientation. As mentioned above, it was also intended to determine whether the participants perceived any change in their perceptions regarding child labour, need for quality education for all.

Outcomes

The following are the main outcomes of the study.

In the selected four blocks of Odisha — Boudh, Harbhanga, Tureikela and Belpada, investigators identified 544 (283 boys and 261 girls) out-of-school children in the age group 6–14 years. Out of these 544 out-of-school children, 325 (175 boys and 150 girls) were mainstreamed into schools in their neighbourhood with the support of community leaders. From four blocks of Tamil Nadu, 46 (25 boys and 21 girls) out-of-school children in the age group 6–14 years were identified by the investigators. Of these, 43 (23 boys and 20 girls) were mainstreamed into class appropriate to their age in schools in their neighbourhood. This is a remarkable outcome of the project. But for this project, out-of-school children both in Tamil Nadu and Odisha might have remained illiterate throughout their lives. Many of them would have become victim of child labour due to the poverty of their parents.

Another objective of the project was to bring about a change in the mindset of parents/guardians, community leaders, villagers, social activists, teachers, students, etc., regarding importance of education for all. This was to be emphasised that elementary education for all is absolutely necessary to develop the human resource and to improve the economic condition of the people. It was thought that the desired change in the mindset of stakeholders would improve enrolment in schools to facilitate the long cherished goal — Quality Education for All.

For this purpose, multi-pronged approach was followed. Orientation programmes and rallies in all the selected blocks were also organised to bring about requisite desirable change in the mindset of all the above stakeholders.

An analysis of data which flowed from administration of pre-test and

post-test revealed that orientation programme impacted the mindset of parents/guardians, community members, local level political workers with regard to need for elementary education for all. Four orientation programmes — one each in four blocks of Tamil Nadu were organised. In these programmes, 199 parents, guardians, community members, teachers, students, etc., participated. Of these, 198 participants reported that education for all is necessary. Besides, they perceived that they too have a role in achieving education for all and they would make necessary endeavours in this regard. They also expressed that they would meet parents/guardians and would impress upon them that they should not send any of their children for labour. This is because child labour perpetuates poverty rather than mitigating it. Before their orientation, only 18 participants had such a perception. This reflects the effectiveness of their orientation in bringing about a desirable change in their mindset regarding importance of education for all and that the child labour does not mitigate the poverty of the family and rather it perpetuates poverty.

In Odisha, 235 parents guardians, community members, etc., participated. Before their orientation, only 32 participants held the view that education for all is very essential. After orientation of the participants, this figure rose to 210.

Rallies were also organised in all the eight blocks of both the states. In each rally, about 300–400 persons participated. They were raising slogans regarding importance of education for all. But each rally was witnessed by more than 1,000 persons including villagers from the place of its origin to the terminal place. Coverage of the rally was much more than that of an orientation programme. Thus, both the orientation programmes and the rallies impacted the mindset of all the stakeholders.

Conclusion

The issue of out-of-school children in the age group 6–14 years has contributed significantly to the failure of the country in achieving the goal — Education for All by 2015. The study reveals that this issue can be addressed appropriately by seeking support of the community leaders in each village/habitation.

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