ADDITIONAL SUPPORT TO CHILDREN:
Improved learning and retention of children especially girls in schools - Learning from the field

SUMMARY

Oxfam India’s Essential Services (ES) - Education Programme works towards increasing access to quality, universal and inclusive elementary education in the mainstream public education system. It does so mainly by focusing on the realization of the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2009, with a focus on the marginalized communities like tribals, Muslims, dalits, and girls.

This note focuses on Oxfam India’s support towards providing additional academic support to marginalized and vulnerable children. It describes the experiences and lessons of partners namely Society for All Round Development (SARD) and Association for Promoting Social Action (APSA) in Delhi and Bangalore respectively. The significant aspect of these models, along with their achievements and lessons learned is presented in this note to inform and inspire future initiatives of Oxfam India or other organisations working in the realm of education.

INTRODUCTION

The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2009 guarantees the fundamental right to education of every child in the country. This ambitious step, meant to cover all children, recognizes that not all children learn at the same rate and in the same ways or in similar circumstances. Therefore, special consideration and additional academic support will be required for some children especially school dropouts and never enrolled children.

The RTE Act describes the way that school curriculum should be developed by stating that it should take into consideration the following:

a) Conformity with values enshrined in the Constitution
b) All round development of the child
c) Building up child’s knowledge, potentially and talent
d) Development of physical and mental abilities to the fullest extent
e) Learning through activities, discovery and exploration in a child friendly and child-centered manner
f) Medium of instruction shall, as far as practicable, be in the child’s mother tongue
g) Making the child free of fear, trauma and anxiety and helping the child to express views freely
h) Comprehensive and continuous evaluation of child’s understanding of knowledge and his or her ability to do the same
i) No child shall be required to pass any Board examination till completion of elementary education
j) Every child completing his elementary education shall be awarded a certificate, in such form and in such manner, as may be prescribed.

However, despite the prescribed norms in the development of curricula, some children still struggle and require more attention and support than others. For this reason, the Right to Education (RTE) Act also contains significant (if perhaps a bit vague) provisions for these students. For instance, section 4 (Chapter II) states that “provided that where a child is directly admitted in a class appropriate to his or her age, then he or she shall, in order to be at par with others, have a right to receive special training, in such manner, and within such time-limits, as may be prescribed...” Later, the RTE Act goes on to specify that one of the duties of teachers is to “assess the learning ability of each child and accordingly supplement additional instructions, if any as required...”

An effort to help students in need of special assistance was later explained in The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Rules, 2010. An entire section (part 5) was dedicated to Special Training.

(1) The School Management Committee of a school owned and managed by the appropriate Government or local authority shall identify children requiring special training and organise such training in the following manner, namely:

a) The special training shall be based on specially designed, age appropriate learning material, approved by the academic authority specified in.

b) The said training shall be provided in classes held on the premises of the school, or in classes organised in safe residential facilities.

c) The said training shall be provided by teachers working in the school, or by teachers specially appointed for the purpose.

d) The duration of the said training shall be for a minimum period of three months which may be extended, based on periodical assessment of learning progress, for a maximum period not exceeding two years.

(2) The child shall, upon induction into the age appropriate class, after special training, continue to receive special attention by the teacher to enable him to successfully integrate with the rest of the class, academically and emotionally.


Oxfam India recognizes the need for additional support to some children, and makes specific reference to it in its Annual Operational Plan 2013-14. One of the outputs they seek to achieve, is ‘Enrollment of hitherto out of school children ensured in mainstream government schools and retention ensured through remedial support for school going children in Delhi, Bangalore, UP, Bihar, Odisha.’

Oxfam India has partnered with grassroots level organisations to ensure that appropriate support is given to the children who need it most. In the following pages, strategies and initiatives implemented by two partner agencies in the cities of Delhi and Bangalore are described in detail.

- Partner SARD provides academic support through Remedial classes in Delhi.
- Partner APSA provides additional support through Learning centres in Bangalore.

SARD- ACADEMIC SUPPORT THROUGH REMEDIAL CLASSES

Society for All Round Development (SARD) aims at increasing the participation of minorities and disadvantaged communities in mainstream development processes. The organisation has presence in four states, including Delhi. It is actively works on development issues like health, rehabilitation, livelihoods, and education. To strengthen their presence and ensure impact and sustainability, SARD collaborates with a variety of important development partners including the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) and other development agencies.

One of SARD’s primary programmes on education called Delhi Education Initiative was launched in 2011 with a goal of providing equitable access to inclusive and quality education in MCD schools of project areas to all eligible school going children by 2014. SARD has partnered with Oxfam India and the latter has contributed the Delhi Education Initiative with not only financial, but also technical support during the implementation. The two main strategies for achieving this goal have been 1) Advocacy around the issues of the RTE Act 2009 2) Provision of remedial education. This note focuses on the latter strategy of provision of remedial education.

SARD’S SUPPORT OF CHILDREN WHO ARE IN NEED OF ACADEMIC SUPPORT (CNAS)

STRATEGIES

The programme seeks to benefit CNAS, ensure their retention and enhance their academic performance in Mathematics and Languages as per their respective grades. Throughout the programme’s history, support to CNAS has taken the form of two main strategies:

1) Anandayi Kakshayen3 or remedial classes are provided to the identified CNAS from the schools in the project areas to improve their academic performance. Slow learners and children who need additional support are identified and suggested by teachers. SARD then conducts a baseline study to under their academic performance. Around 30 children are selected from grades third, fourth and fifth. Additional academic support, in the form of remedial classes, is provided to these children, a total of 90 children from each school. SARD strives to create a child-friendly learning environment that is conducive to learning and development. Classrooms are colorful and children-centred where peer-based learning is encouraged. In addition, the teaching practices followed are innovative.

3 Anandayi Kakshayen means ‘Happy/Joyful Classes’
and creative. SARD has developed supplementary teaching material to help teachers instruct children in new, unique and child-sensitive ways. For example, they have produced material on Mathematics based on Vedic Math. SARD’s pedagogical philosophy is based on three basic concepts:

- Learning by doing
- Concrete to abstract
- Simple to difficult

Each week, three 45 minutes classes are held for each batch of 30 students on the subjects of language and mathematics. The classes continue for one year and individual files are maintained for each child in order to track and evaluate their progress.

**TABLE 1: COVERAGE OF REMEDIAL CLASSES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of intervention schools</th>
<th>Number of student beneficiaries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2011-12</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012-13</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013-14</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1400</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2) Teacher training and demonstration classes are held to inform and orient the MCD teachers on the importance and best practices of remedial education. Over the years, different initiatives like, Workshops on positive discipline for remedial support teachers, training on pedagogical skills covering various aspects of education and remedial education have been conducted with the teachers.

It is important to note that SARD does not plan to run these classes permanently. In each school, their goal is to initiate important changes and empower the schools themselves to continue and sustain the progress that has been made. One significant example of this is the formation of ‘quality circles’, which are groups of trained MCD teachers who in turn train other MCD teachers in their respective school. Master trainers are identified by SARD and thereafter their capacities built on various aspects of education. One of SARD’s goals is to have at least 2 MCD teachers in each project school to demonstrate best practices and adhere to the aspects of quality teaching learning process. They will in turn form a quality circle and train other MCD teachers.

In schools where significant positive change is observed, SARD slowly decreases their support and allows the MCD schools and teachers to carry on their roles and activities. Rather than a direct intervention, SARD plays an advisory and guiding role.
RESULTS

SARD takes monitoring and evaluation (M&E) seriously and all of its activities are tracked through various means and assessed regularly. To measure children’s progress, three formal assessments are conducted—before the project initiation, at midyear and after project intervention. These assessments provide indicators for measurement of an individual child’s academic progress as well as that of each school as a whole. The results are correlated and validated with observations and feedback on classroom environment and children during school visits. Additional mechanisms include: individual files maintained for each child, regular visits by cluster coordinators to intervention schools, regular meetings with facilitators and other key actors within schools.

Results and progress can be seen quantitatively in terms of student coverage (see Table 1) and performance of most CNAS (65-80%), who received remedial classes, improved dramatically based on a comparison of baseline, midline and end line assessments. The initiative impact can also be seen qualitatively as capacity building within schools and with teachers has made significant positive changes. For instance, improved and innovative teaching practices have increased the effectiveness of teaching in the classroom. Also the increased capacity of local schools to carry out activities allows SARD to decrease its role to one of advice and guidance. In multiple locations, SARD has essentially withdrawn and the school and its teachers continue the initiative. SARD occasionally visits these schools to provide support, or provide training in the form of demonstration classes.

Over the course of its implementation, the programme has had to overcome some challenges. One of the main ones being the trifurcation of MCD\(^4\) and political changes thereafter has hindered cooperation with MCD. Awareness and rapport building with officials and office bearers was essential to the success of the programme. Therefore, efforts to ensure them must be continued with the changes in the socio-political environment.

APSA- ADDITIONAL SUPPORT THROUGH LEARNING CENTRES

Association for Promoting Social Action (APSA) is a rights-based child-centered community development organisation located in Bangalore. Founded over thirty years ago, APSA works with and in the community at the grassroots level to prevent and alleviate exploitation and marginalization of the underprivileged sections of society.

APSA has initiated a variety of programmes and projects aimed at improving the lives and living conditions of urban poor, specifically children. Initiatives are diverse and cover multiple themes including: vocational training, empowerment for slum dwellers, child labour, disability, creative expression, juvenile justice and education. In the area of education, APSA has partnered with Oxfam India for the last three and half years.

CONTEXT

Bangalore city has over a thousand slums and in which urban poor constitute 40% of the total population. APSA’s actions are evidence-based and guided by experience and research done at the local level. In 2010, a situation analysis study was conducted with regard to the education system available for the urban poor. The study included data from over 200 households, interviews with teachers and focus group discussions. The most significant findings of the study included:

- Lack of child-friendly environments in schools and an absence of basic amenities within schools.
- Overwhelming responsibilities and expectations at home that hinder children’s especially success at school or prevent them from going at all.
- Lack of supportive environments in to complete supplementary academic work outside the school hours.
- Insufficient follow-up system at school, poor quality of education stemming from inadequate, poorly qualified or poorly motivated staff.

These and other factors lead to an alarmingly high dropout rates among urban marginalized children especially girls. Young girls are particularly vulnerable due to multiple factors including, increased household chores and responsibilities at home, different cultural expectations, discrimination and harassment at school.

STRATEGIES

In response, APSA’s education had initiated a project ‘Effective Implementation of Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009’ in Bangalore city. Some of the main actions aimed at improving access to quality education, specifically sought to reduce dropout rates and reintegrate children who have left the educational system by providing them academic and social support.

The main strategy is to identify children especially girls who are out of school or have dropped out through a

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\(^4\) In 2012, the Delhi Municipal Corporation was restructured into three smaller Municipal corporations - North Delhi Municipal Corporation, South Delhi Municipal Corporation, East Delhi Municipal Corporation.
Learning Centers are a platform for marginalized children. These are targeted to at-risk children who may be: slow learners, dropouts, orphans, or coming from a single parent or migrant family. Students learn from an alternative activity based module that

1.) Support current students keep up and stay at grade level

2.) Supports out of school children to re-enroll into the school system at an appropriate grade level.

In addition, students receive important coaching and awareness on topics that will help them succeed both in and out of school. These include: life skills, health and hygiene, dangers of addiction, computers and child rights.

baseline survey. These students then receive instruction and support through APSA’s Learning Centers.

The programme has been largely successful. Some of the most significant results related to additional support to students include:

- Identification of school dropouts and enrollment in schools in age appropriate classes.
- Increase in attendance rates of girls in schools leading to retention of these children in schools.
- Child friendly environment created in Learning Centers that helps build academic capacity, confidence and also understanding of the RTE Act
- Change in attitude and improved academic performance of at-risk students
- Increased self-confidence and self-esteem among slow learners children.

APSA’s efforts have not been without any challenges and obstacles. In some cases, schools are not cooperative and are usually unresponsive to APSA’s work. In addition, lack of community and political support can cause major hindrance to the implementation of the project activities. However, APSA has created a Risk Management Plan based on their experiences and with discussions from the ground to prevent such obstacles and/or mitigate their effects.

**LESSONS LEARNED**

The previous pages have described two different models that offer ‘additional academic support to children’. One model offers academic support within the schools. The other model though it operates in the school is independent of the system offering both academic support and general life skills.

**SARD**’s activities are based within schools themselves and target CNAS (Children who are in need of additional support) who are at risk of falling behind and/or leaving school. These children primarily receive academic support in the form of remedial education. Important elements of the programme that contribute to its success include:

- A two-pronged approach that benefits CNAS directly by offering them remedial classes, and indirectly through teacher training which builds their capacity in the field of remedial education can be effective in improving academic outcomes in a sustainable manner.
- Apart from implementation of project initiatives, monitoring and evaluation is taken seriously. This
includes the development of proper assessment methods for children, which give them the opportunity to express what they have learned. This not only has the potential to introduce alternative and appropriate assessment methods, but also creates evidence towards the effectiveness of the strategy. Examples of methods are baseline, midline and end line studies, and individual files for each child to track progress.

- Significant efforts are made to identify and engage all stakeholders. Rapport building with the local community and officials facilitates SARDs interventions in schools.
- To ensure sustainability and the long-term success of the program, in each intervention school, SARD has a long-term vision that sees their role decrease as the capacity of the school and its staff increases.
- A long-term vision is required to sustain the success of such a model. Beyond supporting children, what is significant from RTE Act, is that the special needs of children are recognized and alternative pedagogical methods are accepted.

On the other hand, APSA focuses not only on slow learners but those who have dropped out of school, with the goal of re-integrating them into the school system. Important lessons from this model include:

- A large-scale mapping of students who have dropped out or are otherwise out of school allows the organisation to appropriately scale and target its activities.
- An alternative space that provides a safe, comfortable and a friendly environment helps attract and retain children who may otherwise find the school environment threatening or unfriendly, or simply feel like misfits in formal school settings.
- Children in Learning Centers receive not only academic support, but also important information and awareness on health and hygiene, de-addiction, computers and child rights. Adding these complementary modules not only exposes them to topics useful in their day-to-day life, but also makes learning more interesting and useful for these children.
- Good relations with local communities and officials helped facilitate APSA’s initiatives by improving their effectiveness and reach.
REFERENCES

SARD


APSA

- Association for Promoting Social Action (APSA) website. http://apsabangalore.org


This learning note is prepared based on Oxfam India’s partners SARD and APSA experience, processes and lessons learned for providing additional academic support to marginalized and vulnerable children under RTE Act in Delhi and Bangalore for wider sharing. It was documented by Ms. Shirin Naseem during August 2014 to October 2014. We would like to thank the entire Essential Services team and Oxfam India’s Education partners for their inputs given during the process of documentation.

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