

Educational Initiatives in India

(Based on – “*Education for All: National Plan of Action, INDIA*” by the Department of Elementary Education and Literacy, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India, New Delhi)

1. Andhra Pradesh – Enduring Initiatives for Achieving “Education For All (EFA)”

MAABADI (Our School):

The *MAABADI* scheme was formulated in order to give access to all children in the age group of 6-11 years, even in small habitations with a population of 100-200. Government provides assistance to local communities to engage community instructors wherever there are at least ten learners. Assistance is also provided for training the community instructors. So far 1200 *MAABADIs* have been set up.

Akshara Sankranthi Program:

In Andhra Pradesh, the most significant change is the strengthening of the self-help group (SHG) movement, and common interest groups have been formed around a variety of activities, ranging from thrift to management of forest resources. Keeping in view these developments, it was decided to take up a program of revitalizing Continuing Education Centers, focusing on SHGs.

A special drive was launched in July, under which SHGs that were interested in implementing this program were identified, along with the illiterates within the groups, as also a volunteer to teach them. A program of basic literacy was launched on 2 October 2000, initially with the objective of covering around 6 millions illiterates. The proposal was to cover the first primer before the *Sankranthi* festival in the middle of January under a program called *Akshara Sankranthi*. The program had been earlier in a pilot form in West Godavari district, where 60,000 women belonging to SHGs were covered. The program was taken up in all the districts and around 2.9 millions learners had completed the project by the end of March 2001.

The program has resulted in Andhra Pradesh recording a literacy rate of 61.11 per cent in 2001 as compared to 44.08 in 1991. This represents a 17 per cent increase over the figure recorded in the 1991 census and the highest decadal growth ever to be recorded in the state.

2. Madhya Pradesh – Head Start

The Rajiv Gandhi State Mission in Madhya Pradesh has introduced a project on a pilot basis for using computers to improve the quality of teaching in rural elementary schools through indigenous customized educational software. The idea is to integrate the use of computers with classroom activities to improve the child’s comprehension of difficult parts of each subject as well as to instill computer literacy. A syllabus mapping the difficult areas of learning has been developed and educational software on this for all subjects is being prepared for use in the academic year 2002-03.

Started in November 2000, 648 Head Start centers were operationalised in middle schools that have a primary section and serve as *Jan Shiksha Kendras* or school cluster resource centers for primary schools in a radius of eight km. A total of 2,358 teachers have been given training in computer-enabled education.

3. Himachal Pradesh – *Gyankalash*

The District Primary Education Program in Himachal Pradesh, in collaboration with All India Radio, Shimla, has started a 15-minute bi-weekly program called *Gyankalash* to provide academic support to primary teachers. The program helps in improving the teachers' access to knowledge, especially those in remote areas, as it is impossible to reach them through conventional means.

In the first phase of *Gyankalash*, topics were identified and radio scripts developed in workshops organized for the purpose. Resource persons, teacher educators from state and district level, practicing teachers in secondary and primary schools participated in the workshops. In the next phase, teachers and students from government primary schools were involved in the production and broadcast of the spots. In order to motivate teachers, certificates were given to teachers on the successful completion of the training under different phases of *Gyankalash*.

4. Karnataka – *Nali Kali*

The *Nali Kali* program in Karnataka was introduced in privately managed schools in 1999. Under the program, learning takes place in an interactive situation in accordance with age-wise competency. Children are divided into groups and they master one level of competency, then move to another group to learn the next level of competency. Children learn at their own pace and the move from one level of competency to another is not dependent on the whole group's learning achievement. All teaching-learning processes involve songs, games, survey, story-telling and use of educational toys. This method effectively eliminates the formal system of roll calls, examinations, promotions, ranking – all these now deemed unhealthy – at least between the ages of 5 and 14.

5. Uttaranchal – *Balwadis: An Innovative Approach for Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Community Empowerment*

Supported by the Department of Education, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India, the *balwadis* of *Uttarakhand Seva Nidhi Paryavaran Shiksha Sansthan*, Almora aim at providing a quality ECCE program to 3-6 years old children in remote, economically poor Himalayan villages in Uttaranchal.

Twenty-nine community based groups from 10 hill districts of Uttaranchal work with a common philosophy of education and development as they try to create and develop socially and ecologically sustainable rural communities through education. Starting with two villages in 1988, the program has now not only expanded to 321 villages catering to about 7,000 children, majority of whom are girls, but also evolved from being just a learning orientation to children to a forum for child development and community education.

In Uttaranchal, the geographical conditions make it imperative to have a centre flexible both in terms of the curriculum and admission procedures. Girls start attending the centre as soon as they are three years old and are enrolled in primary schools after they attain the age of 5-6. Over the years, universal primary education of girls in all villages having a pre-primary centre has been achieved. Primary school teachers welcome children from the *Balwadis* as they are more confident and articulate. Most of the girls, working as teachers, are now intermediate/graduates and want to pursue further studies. An offshoot of this trend has been that girls are marrying late in villages. A network of 412 women's groups called *Uttarakhand Mahila parishad* involving 12,000 rural women has been created as a direct offshoot of the *balwadi* program.

Environmental education, an important component of the *balwadi* curriculum, aims to foster children's awareness and knowledge about the local environment and helps develop skills to enable them to translate their knowledge into action. Children learn songs, stories, poems, games in the centre. They also plant their own flower and vegetable beds and take part in campaigns to clean the village paths and water sources.

The community owns each centre and this sense of ownership and commitment towards *balwadis* is the driving force for education and sustainable development:

- Communities provide a room for the centre. Villagers have donated land and provided free labor to construct small buildings called *bal bhavans*
- Members of the women's group maintain the centre. They apply mud plaster on the walls and on the floor, help in digging the garbage pit, and installing a temporary sanitation facility near the centre. The land for these facilities is provided free by the community
- Each year, the local NGO, the community, and the centre organize a *Bal Mela* jointly. Children display what they have learnt.

The strong link of education to communities through *balwadi* centers helps provide a secure framework of learning to children as well as the village people. In each village, where a *balwadi* centre is functional, a women's group is formed. The program is reviewed each month in village meetings organized by the women's group as well as by the local community based group. Regular meetings are held in USNPSS to review the program and to initiate new activities.

6. Tamil Nadu – Mid-day Meal Scheme

The Mid-day Meal Scheme in Tamil Nadu was started on a humble scale way back in 1925-26 by the Corporation of Madras to improve school attendance. Subsequently, philanthropists and voluntary organizations were urged to start free school lunch centers in villages and towns all over the state. In July 1956, the school lunch program was launched as a 'people's movement' for organized charity as part of the school improvement efforts. Impressed by the public response, the Government of Tamil Nadu (erstwhile Madras) took up the school lunch program in 1957 and issued detailed rules for running the program, which have been revised several times since then. In 1961, the state started receiving CARE (Cooperative for American Relief Everywhere) food commodities for feeding 500,000 children through the school lunch program. In 1978, 1.86 million children in 32,000 schools were covered, and this number increased to 2.03 million in 33,306 schools in 1980-81.

The state achieved another milestone in 1982 with the launch of the Nutritious Meal Program for schoolchildren in classes I to X. This program is being implemented through Nutritious Meal Centers located in schools, and all children who are willing to enroll are fed. During 2001-02, 5.80 million children were enrolled for the Mid-day Meal Scheme.

7. Uttar Pradesh – *Shiksha Mitra Yojana*: Calling Women Teachers

In order to meet the increasing demand for primary school teachers, especially female teachers, the Government of Uttar Pradesh has started the *Shiksha Mitra Yojana*, whereby local persons are recruited as teachers for primary schools by the village education committees. These teachers are called *Shiksha Mitras*. There is 50 per cent reservation for women in the scheme. A total of 18,147 posts of *Shiksha Mitras* have been appointed by the VECs of the *Gram Panchayats* and another 35,000 are currently under recruitment.

8. School-based Quality Improvement Programs

It has been found that a majority of primary school children do not acquire the basic language and maths skills even by the end of grade V. In the absence of these basic competencies, children find it difficult to engage with the course content of higher grades. The examination system fails to capture this fact as it tests only for memorization and recall, while learning deficits go on accumulating. A host of interrelated factors are responsible for this non-learning—some rooted in classroom practices, but many stemming from systemic inadequacies. Besides, it is also evident from various field reports and studies in DPEP states that macro inputs (in the form of text book renewal, mass teacher training, provision of TLM grant and setting up of block and cluster resource centers), while impacting the system substantially, are not sufficient to change the culture and pedagogy in the classrooms. They need to be supplemented with contextualized, school-based inputs.

Some school-based experiments: The answer to the quality issue seems to lie in working directly with schools. This idea was concretized in the form of small pilot projects in

district Hardoi, Uttar Pradesh; district Chamba, Himachal Pradesh; and district S.24 Parganas, West Bengal, which were initiated during 1999-2001. In these projects, work was taken up with a small number of schools for one academic year. Many school-based and systemic issues which act as obstacles to children's retention and achievement came to light, such as high PTRs, multigrade situation, poor physical conditions, excess of nonteaching tasks, high absenteeism, delays in material supply, ad hocism in school functioning, lack of academic support, mid-session teacher transfers, etc. The exact conditions varied from school to school, but it was clear that no single solution could work; each school had to be dealt with individually.

A more comprehensive school-based quality improvement program was initiated in Andhra Pradesh, as the Learning Guarantee Program. The process began in a small number of schools in 2001-02, and expanded to 83 schools in two mandals of Rangareddy and Nalgonda districts in 2002-03. In the first phase, it was clear that a majority of the schools were struggling with the same basic functional problems as the ones mentioned above. In the second phase, an attempt was made to design an input framework that addressed the needs of individual teachers and schools. Support was provided in a time-bound manner from state and district to streamline the functioning of individual schools. Teachers also assessed the learning levels of each child in language and maths. A six-week remedial program was conducted for children of classes III-V to address their basic reading, writing and number skills of class I & II level.

At the end of the course, children across the schools showed remarkable improvement in the above abilities, and became better equipped to handle their grade level texts. Besides, a new classroom culture, a new teacher-child relationship, and also a new 'teacher' began to emerge. The same government school teachers who were earlier indifferent and disinterested in their work, now energetically facilitated children's learning, and the schools which were dreary, unattractive places began to buzz with excitement. A clear indicator of this was that children's attendance and punctuality levels went up significantly. Moreover, learning was no longer restricted to just a few; teachers were able to engage almost every child in class. Children produced a lot of work, which clearly displayed their improved reading, writing and drawing abilities. Teachers too began to independently design varied learning activities. The classrooms became challenging and attractive for both children and teachers. The level of discourse itself changed among the teachers. They now had personal stakes in improving their schools, and more specifically, the learning achievement of each child.

The next step in the program, subsequent to the remedial, is of linking children back to their regular grade level course. Some bridging would be required to enable children of classes IV and V to go to their grade level texts after the remedial (covering grade I & II competencies). This program envisages that while on the one hand the learning deficits of children of classes III, IV & V are being addressed through remedial and bridging measures, fresh class plans are to be introduced in classes I & II simultaneously, so that new entrants to school learn in a proper way right from the beginning. By the third year the regular plans would be functional in all five classes, and there would be no more need for remedial and bridging.

9. PRATHAM: “Every child in school and learning well”

Pratham was first established in Mumbai in 1994 as a public charitable trust by the Commissioner of the Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai, UNICEF and several prominent citizens. Since then the *Pratham* initiative has spread to 26 cities and five rural districts in 9 states around the country. On a daily basis, *Pratham* programs reach over 200,000 children. The *Pratham* concept is simple. The objective is to bring every child to school and help them to learn well. *Pratham* believes that its efforts must be replicable and the interventions must supplement existing government initiatives to universalize primary education. Based on an understanding of the local context, community- as well as school-based programs run by young women from the local community work towards achieving these goals. The organization is based on a triangular partnership: corporate sector and other funding sources, government and citizens. Corporate leaders and other funding sources take the lead in providing resources; the government responds by opening its schools, providing support and sharing its facilities; and community volunteers, mostly young enthusiastic women from the slums, implement the programs.

Pratham has been serving underprivileged Indian children through five main programs.

- Pre-school children: Such children are reached through community-based child-care centers, or *balwadis*.
- Out-of-school children (including those who have never been to school or dropped out): Bridge courses prepare children academically and socially to enter regular school. Those who cannot be mainstreamed are prepared to take the National Open School examinations for certification.
- Working children: Outreach program targets working children and children in difficult circumstances.
- In school children: These receive learning support and remedial education from a variety of community and school-based interventions. The *balsakhi*, or community volunteer, can be in a school or in a community, conducting daily classes and/or running community-based libraries. The Remedial Education Program provides support for the weaker municipal primary school children.
- Computer Assisted Learning Program: It strives to familiarize municipal school children with computers.

Since the beginnings in 1994, *Pratham* has been able to mainstream over 30,000 children and bring them to school and help over half a million children to learn better. Since January 2003, close to 200,000 children have participated in an accelerated learning program for reading. Given the extensive network of *Pratham* in the slum areas, it is easy to layer other services (health, computer education) at a minimum additional cost.

UNICEF parented *Pratham* during the initial three years. In 1997, ICICI Bank, a private sector bank in India, assumed the parental role. Since then, the involvement of corporate India has significantly increased. Today, the board of *Pratham* India Education Initiative consists of eminent leaders of the corporate world. The board oversees, supervises and

guides the progress of the *Pratham* Movement and the board members, through their respective companies, have also committed financial, infrastructural and human resources support to *Pratham*.

Pratham strives to build a working relationship in the field of education between the people and the government. It seeks to make governance of education more effective through people's democratic participation and aims at a private-public partnership to address issues related to education and arrive at solutions to be put into practice.

10. Shree Ramakrishna Ashram, Kalahandi, Orissa

Shree Ramakrishna Ashram is a non-political, non-profit making voluntary organization engaged in the upliftment and welfare of the downtrodden, under the guidance of senior monks of the Shree Ramakrishna discipline. Significant activities of the organization include:

- mobile and outdoor allopathic and homeopathic health services,
- a students' home for 50 students (SCs and STs) studying in nearby schools,
- drug awareness, counseling and assistance centre for the prevention of consumption of liquor,
- an old age home for 50 distressed persons (free boarding and lodging),
- research for the promotion of national integration, and
- a mini agriculture farm to train inmates and rural youth for development of agriculture/horticulture.

Shree Ramakrishna Ashram started its innovative education project in August 1999 with MHRD funding. The project operates in Kalahandi district of Orissa, which is both tribal and rural, and targets fifty dropouts in the age group of 6-14 years. These children, who reside at the project centre, are provided remedial teaching, uniforms, study material and food free of cost, while their parents are provided Rs. 100/- per month as a stipend for admitting their children into the project centre. Value-oriented education is provided while following the textbooks of formal schools (Board of Secondary Education, Orissa). The subjects taught include language (Oriya and English), arithmetic, social studies, science and drawing. The children also have access to library and free medical facilities. The community is mobilised through public meetings and audio-visual shows using resource personnel. Community participation, in turn, enhances the knowledge of children on various aspects. The educational programme lays special emphasis on agriculture with the intention of enabling the children to earn their livelihood.

Some Facts:

- In India, as on 30-Sep-2000, approximately 35 million children still need to be enrolled.
- Those outside the school system are mostly SC/ST girls, working children, children of poor families, disabled children and children in difficult circumstances.

- Many children are not attending school because of poverty, high private cost of education, sibling care responsibility, household chores, work in the fields and factories, wage labor, work in family occupations, etc.
- A large number of children drop out of school because of school-related reasons like attitude of teachers, irrelevant curriculum, sub-standard teaching, teacher absenteeism, uninteresting teaching, corporal punishment, poor school infrastructure, inability to cope with the pace of learning, lack of parental support in the case of first generation learners, maladjustment in school, etc.

Table 1: Reasons for Children not attending School (Percentage of children of 6-17 years who have dropped out-of-school)

Main reason for not currently attending school (dropped out-of-school)	Urban		Rural		Total	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
School too far away	0.2	1.0	1.0	5.9	0.8	4.8
Transport not available	0.1	0.2	0.4	1.6	0.3	1.3
Further education not considered necessary	2.4	5.4	2.3	4.3	2.4	4.5
Required for household work	5.7	14.7	8.7	17.3	8.0	16.7
Required for work on farm/family business	4.7	1.6	9.2	2.9	8.0	2.6
Required for outside work for payment in cash or kind	11.3	3.0	9.9	3.7	10.3	3.5
Costs too much	15.2	17.0	13.3	11.4	13.8	12.6
No proper school facilities for girls	0.0	1.2	0.0	3.5	0.0	3.0
Required for care of siblings	0.2	1.5	0.6	2.3	0.5	2.2
Not interested in studies	42.5	30.2	40.0	24.8	40.6	26.0
Repeated failures	6.0	6.1	5.3	3.7	5.5	4.2
Got married	0.1	4.9	0.2	8.5	0.2	7.7
Other	5.8	8.2	5.3	6.2	5.5	6.6
Don't know	5.7	5.1	3.8	4.0	4.2	4.2
Total Per cent	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Number of children	1,852	1,747	5,475	6,121	7,327	7,868

Source: NFHS-2, India, 1998-99

Table 2: Why Children Drop Out

	Boys (%)	Girls (%)
a) Circumstances whereby children drop out		
Not allowed by school/ teachers to continue	5	2
Child did not wish to continue	35	16
Withdrawn by parents	47	66
Other circumstances	13	16
Total	100	100
b) Circumstances whereby parents withdraw *		
Child needed for other activities	50	68
Schooling is too expensive	54	29
School is too far	0	6
Poor teaching standards at school	8	18
Hostile school environment	4	6
Child fell ill	4	9
Child is not bright enough	0	6
Child is not interested in studying	8	6
Parents are not interested	8	27
Other reasons	8	22

Source: PROBE Survey

- Responses are not mutually exclusive

Statistics:

