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The National Life Skills, Values Education & School Wellness Program

Healthy Schools ..... Healthy India

Education is not preparation for life...
Education is life itself

- John Dewey

Submission Guidelines

- All submissions should follow the APA 7th Edition style
- All submissions should have an abstract summarizing the main points.
- The submission should have a clear and informative title
- The submission should be original and should not be in the process of consideration by any other publication at the same time.
- The submission should have rigorous and reliable information and provide a deeper level of understanding.
- Submissions should be engaging and accessible to non-expert readers as well.
- Submission emails must contain an inline declaration stating that the research work is the author's original work and has not been submitted elsewhere for publication.
- Initial acceptance of any submission does not guarantee publication. The editorial board shall do the final selection.
- If necessary, the editors may edit the manuscript in order to maintain uniformity of presentation and to enhance readability.

Types of Manuscripts and Word Limits

1. Original Research Papers: These should only include original findings from high-quality research studies. The word limit is 5000 excluding references and an abstract (structured format) of not more than 250 words.
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9. My Voice: In this section multiple perspectives are provided by patients, caregivers and paraprofessionals. It should encompass how it feels to face a difficult diagnosis and what this does to relationships and the quality of life. Personal narratives, if used in this section, should have relevance to general applications or policies. The word limit is 1000 words.
10. Book/ Movie reviews: Reviews of books or movies relevant to school mental health and wellbeing may also be submitted. The word limit is 1000 words.
11. Announcements: Information regarding conferences, meetings, courses, awards and other items likely to be of interest to readers should be submitted with the name and address of the person from whom additional information can be obtained (up to 100 words).

Faculty members are invited to be the guest editors of the journal on a theme relevant to school health and wellbeing.

The Manuscripts for publication in the peer-reviewed and refereed Indian Journal of School Health and Wellbeing (IJSHW) are to be submitted via e-mail to journal@expressionsindia.org along with a copy of the email to the editor.

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Message from the Editors

Covid-19 is now the reality of our lives. Doctors and pharmaceuticals may take up some more time in developing vaccines and medicines for the virus. Covid-19 forced us to change not only ways of learning but also our lifestyle and social behavior. The spread of the virus is affecting even educational settings, from tools and resources for studying to how knowledge is imparted among students, the present education system, and the dynamics of a student-teacher relationship are likely to change shortly. With the way that countries have closed their borders across the globe and rural migrants returned to their villages, there might be a need to formulate new education policies. We do not know, the number of children discontinuing their educational journey during the pandemic!

Covid-19 has not only created health and economic challenges but education inequality may also see a rise in the country and globally. People working in formal and informal sectors in India have been facing economic hardships. The loss in earning could result in impacting the education of disadvantaged groups especially girls. Globally, the resources will be diverted towards healthcare and this might affect funding in the education sector. If this happens, the brunt of the negative impact will be borne by females and the physically disabled across the globe.

By the end of March in 2020, fearing the spread of the virus, 184 countries in the world have shut down their schools. As per UNESCO estimation, nearly 1,534,227,915 students (87.6%) had no choice but to stay at home for a few weeks. Does this mean that the traditional modes of teaching will change in great magnitudes? For government and semi-government schools, primary and senior secondary schools, this challenge is even greater. According to an assumption, only 60% of people in the world have access to the internet and the tools to use it. Many countries in South Asia and Africa do not have a digital infrastructure at the school level. Students and teachers already buried under mountains of debt and loans might face more problems as a consequence of the pandemic, and the world might see an even starker digital divide.

In case the threat persists for long, schools and colleges may take longer to return to normalcy. Now the question arises: How will students, teachers, and guardians cope with such a heavy loss in imparting knowledge and learning?

Malnutrition, social security, displacement, cyber security, livelihood are the other related challenges before the parents and children. Shutting down of schools has the adversely affected provision of cooked mid-day meal.

CBSE may postpone the board exams to a later date. Mode of examinations, start of new academic sessions and their subsequent evaluation and results will also be adversely affected. In this context, the Union Government, collaborating with the governments of different nations must come up with a unified strategy so that students standing at the lower rungs of the educational ladder do not become outcasts. Better healthcare along with quality education will take the country one step further. COVID-19 is a worldwide pandemic and humankind has to be unified against this common enemy, but one thing to be cautious of is that it doesn't increase the already existing inequality in the education sector.

The current issue of the journal aims to bring together the practitioner-scholars, who have been dealing with the challenges of COVID-19 and working towards a solution from the child a rights perspective. The authors of the papers in the journal include senior development and academic professionals. The papers in the current issue cover a wide range of papers focusing on Covid-19 and its implication on children.

I am grateful to all the authors for contributing their papers for this special issue of the journal. Working with you all has been a pleasure and insightful learning for me.

I thank Prof. Namita Ranganathan for her continued encouragement and support. My special thanks to Dr. Vikas Baniwal for his constant cooperation and patience. I hope that the readers will find this special issue insightful and inspiring! The editor expresses heartfelt gratitude to Dr. Jitendra Nagpal and his team at 'Expressions India' for their support.

Dr. Sanjeev Rai

Message from the Patrons

It is a matter of great happiness to note that the latest issue of the Indian Journal of School Health & Wellbeing published by the Expressions India is being released. It is a well known fact that Research publications and Journals in particular are the most authentic sources of verified knowledge and experiences. The sharing of such knowledge and experiences not only amongst the Researchers, Scientists, Policy Planners and Implementers, but also the Activists working in the concerned area and persons having special interest in that area benefits all. It is our privilege to reiterate that the Expressions India has been doing pioneering work since long, in the field of Health Education under its banner of "Holistic Health and School Wellness Programme" to enable the school education and teachers holistic facilitation in realizing the goal of Health Education in Schools. The present publication is a momentous indicator of this initiative.

The major bottleneck in the way of achieving the objective of Health Education has been the particularistic conceptualization of its transaction process. The goal of development of holistic health and wellbeing of young learners cannot be attained by making them gather certain information and rote-learn those. It can be attained only by a transaction process focused on experiential co-scholastic methodology that ensures active participation of learners and substantially contribute to the development of life skills enabling young children to manage their lives more competently and grow as truly empowered human resource of the nation and human society at large. To facilitate this process it is very critical to encourage and empower the teachers, so that they act like facilitators and mentors.

The formal school education system need to look towards interacting and taking the support from the initiatives like the one taken by Expressions India under its National Life Sills Education & School Wellness Programme aimed at realizing the Goal of "HEALTHY SCHOOL.....HEALTHY INDIA". It is pertinent to state that the Schools and other educational institutions that have been associated with such endeavours have strongly felt the need for such programs to be a adopted by all schools including Higher Education System.

It is this context the Journal of School Health has potential to reinforce the process of realizing the vision of Health Promoting Schools getting integrated into the education system in India. We are more than confident that the present issue of the Journal will strengthen this grand endeavour and empower all who are creatively engaged in the promotion of Health Education in Schools. With immense pleasure we would like to express our gratitude for Advisory group, Editorial Board and Members of the Executive Editorial Committee for their valuable contribution, ungrudging cooperation and keen interest and also for making available the benefits of their rich experiences and knowledge.

"If there is will, there is way, and if the will is reinforced by enlightened path-breakers, the way would lead to the destination at the earliest ".

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The COVID Pandemic Shocks, The Adolescents Girls, and the Labor Market

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Abstract

The COVID pandemic is the most unprecedented crisis that the human civilisation has witnessed in the last 100 years. It has done irreparable damage to every walk of human life, including employment opportunities. Though the nature of the pandemic has been non-discriminatory, its impact has been felt differently by different sections of the society. It is the most vulnerable and the marginalised who have been hit the hardest due to their socio-economic position and their inability to overcome it. This paper specifically explores how the young generation, especially adolescent girls who are between the ages group of 12 to 19 years, are being impacted by the pandemic. It also looks at the relationship between the adolescent girl and the labor market in a post-COVID pandemic context.

Keywords: *COVID Pandemic; Corona Pandemic; COVID-19; COVID Impact; Pandemic; Adolescents; The Labor Market; Economic Recovery; Humanitarian Crisis; Work & Employment; Inclusive Recovery*

Introduction

The COVID pandemic has had a never-before impact on the lives and livelihoods of people all over the world. It has impacted every section of the society, from the richest to the poorest, from the people living in swanky areas to people living in slums, people who are elderly and have medical conditions to people who are young and fit. In terms of its impact, it touches every aspect of human lives, right from health to education, from livelihoods to business. Some of the impacts have already unfolded and are evident, while others are still unfolding. The first pillar of the human aspect which has been severely affected is the health conditions, with people getting infected and medical conditions deteriorating. As time passes, the impact of the pandemic on other aspects of life is becoming more visible and pronounced.

The COVID pandemic has also raised huge concerns regarding the fallout on the global economy. Some of the estimates show that it has hit the poorest the hardest, with the World Bank (2020) claiming that it is pushing around 50 to 60 million people into extreme poverty. According to Inanc (2020), the ¨Stay at Home¨ and ¨Shelter in Place Order,¨combined with social distancing, had put the economy to a grinding halt. These restrictions have translated into partial or full closedown of the enterprises, loss of jobs, changing nature of jobs and migration of people (CCSA, 2020). Due to an exponential growth in the COVID cases, various states are taking different types of measures ranging from full or partial lockdown, restricted travel, social distancing etc. Though this might have slowed down the rate of the infection, it also has grave consequences on people's economic well-being. Though the economic crisis is yet to unfold, its impact is being felt across all sections of the society. The people who are more vulnerable and have less capacities and resources are the ones who are bearing the brunt of the crisis.

Impact on economy and the labor market

Though the pandemic is impacting every aspect of human lives, the impact on the economic well-being of the people is resonating across the board. People are concerned about business disruption, losing their jobs leading to underemployment or underemployment or totally becoming irrelevant to the emerging ¨New Normal¨ (FAO,2020). The COVID pandemic has put additional pressure on the job market, including the informal sector. This has given rise to poverty, inequality and other kinds of serious impacts on the lives of the excluded and the marginalised (Raihan, 2020). This has had an effect on the employment and labor markets, especially in the informal sector. The most at risk, due to the pandemic, are the people who are self-employed or employed in the local labor market related to construction and agriculture. There are ample evidences from the

field which prove that families are living under severe distress and retorting to negative coping mechanisms like taking loans at unfavorable terms & conditions, distress sale of assets, less food intake and some unethical practices like child labor, exposing themselves and their families to further risks.

Raihan (2020) further elaborates that people are trying to cope with the changing scenario with very high adjustment costs. Sometimes these adjustments are intra-households, wherein the senior citizens or the people with health complications are withdrawing from the labor market, forcing the younger generations to take up the larger responsibility of keeping the kitchen stove burning.

The pandemic and its impact on adolescents

The health shocks of the pandemic have been suffered more by the vulnerable sections of the population, such as elderly people, people with health complications, and people living in the marginalised areas. It has also been observed that elderly people and people with medical conditions are the first to voluntarily move out or to be forced out of the job market. In order to avoid becoming redundant from the labor market, these people might hide their medical and health conditions, which will make them more prone to the Covid virus. Though it is the adults, the people with medical needs, who have been largely affected because of the virus' impact on their health, adolescents between the ages of 10 to 19 years are also among the hardest hit victims of the pandemic. The first direct loss for the adolescents is their education. Though not all the schools globally are closed, most of them are. The less advantaged people do not have many options for education continuity as most of the options are online-based and these people are either not able to afford those or they don't have the access to them.

According to the UNDP (2020), the breakdown in the education system is not just keeping adolescents from acquiring education, but it is also a big impediment to their growth and to acquiring new skills, which ultimately might lead to them less competitive in the job or self-employment market. Some of the poor adolescents in the above age bracket also used to earn their living and complement the family income. It was mostly part-time work, such as taking tuition or supporting their parents in their business, which has been affected by the pandemic.

The pandemic might further exacerbate the inequalities in human development, which exist between the haves and the have nots (UNDP, 2020). While the parents of other adolescents are educated and help their children to continue their education, the poor adolescents do not have that kind of luxury as their parents are not educated enough to support their children with the education or they struggle with their livelihoods to focus their time on the education of their children. In the event of an adversity, it is the adolescent girls who are forced to drop out and discontinue with their education. This is further compounded by the lack of sufficient space for education for the people living in slums. With the closure of the schools, the adolescent girls are facing an additional burden of taking care of their younger siblings who otherwise attended the school during the daytime. Ria et al (2020) also argue that the situation has also been adversely impacted by the financial crisis due to the lack of a steady and regular income. She further contends that most of the time, the adolescent poor live in perpetual fear due to the lockdown, sometimes for themselves, and sometimes for their parents who are forced and harassed by the administration to remain indoors when they go out to earn their living.

The Pandemic has had a huge impact on the physical and mental health of adolescents. Because of the lockdown or the fear of getting contaminated or the non-availability of the medical practitioners, it has forced many of them to stay with the disease. Though there is not much of an evidence on the impact of COVID 19 related with GBV, there are various evidences which have shown that the incidences of violence against women increase during a crisis (UN Women, 2020). This can also be extrapolated to adolescent girls as they become more vulnerable and exposed to various types of risks. UN Women (2020) also argues that child marriages might have also increased due to the crisis. The harmful social norms in some of the countries might deprive the adolescent girls of proper food and nutrition. It is the women who normally eat last in these contexts, and the reduction in income leading to shrinking food baskets could have an adverse impact on them.

The adolescents and the labor market

According to ILO & UNICEF (2020), during the last two decades, there has been considerable progress in the elimination of child labor. But the development gains might suffer a huge setback and go back to where it was decades ago. It is also expected that more and more children and adolescents will be forced into hazardous industries. It might also lead to widening gender inequalities within the family, with girls expected to perform additional household chores, agricultural work and take the burden of sustaining the livelihoods of the family.

ILO and UNICEF (2020) also illustrates that there are several factors which can cause the aggravation or intensification of child labor such as poverty, social norms condoning it, lack of decent work opportunities for adults and adolescents, migrations and emergencies. On an average, around 55% of the people amounting to 4 billion do not have any social protection. It also states that the number of people falling to extreme poverty could soar by 420 million in extreme circumstances this year alone as the global economy contracts between 5 to 15%. There are also various social stigmas associated with the pandemic, which puts the adolescents in greater risks. This needs to be addressed and it should be ensured that the community has scientific knowledge and temperament to address the issues related with this disease. These factors have become more prominent during the COVID pandemic and have the potential to replace the adults with the adolescents and children in the labor market.

While there is no disaggregated data on the role of adolescents in unpaid care, it is the women who primarily take care of this responsibility. Women in Bangladesh, on an average, performed 3.43 times more unpaid domestic work (BBS Gender Statistics in UN Women, 2020). It is argued that the closure of schools for adolescents has put them under an additional burden of unpaid care work. UN Women (2020) also quotes another survey by the same agency that shows that the responsibility to take care of adults with health complications or who are not able to take care of themselves often falls on women. It has been explained earlier that these people are at a greater risk of COVID contamination, thus putting their caregivers at risk as well. There are high chances that the adolescents could be forced into the labor market as pandemic might turn them into the sole breadwinners. There could be several factors which indicate whether they enter the labor market voluntarily or involuntarily. It might lead to exploitation & protection related issues, underemployment, employment in hazardous industries etc.

Inanc (2020) argues that the pandemic could also have a huge impact on the youths and adolescents who were on the cusp of entering the labor market. The labor market requires acquisition of certain skills and expertise to get engaged in decent work and employment. The COVID pandemic has kept these facilities shut or sometimes operating at a very limited scale online. People who have access to online facilities could manage with a modicum of experience, however those who are less privileged remain under-skilled.

How is the labor market reacting to the pandemic

Based on past experiences, especially during the Ebola outbreak, UNICEF and IRC (undated) contends that these kinds of crises exacerbate economic hardships of those people who were already in vulnerable positions. The exposure of adolescent girls to sexual violence, harassment and other types of gender-based violence increases sharply. It provides opportunities to perpetrators to exploit those who need to attain basic services to survive. There have been examples from similar kinds of crises, where the adolescent girls have been forced to enter into prostitution, with the perpetrators grooming the families experiencing hardships to sell their children for a petty amount of money. Some of the researchers have also called the Ebola Crisis as a silent ¨epidemic of rape, sexual assault and violence against women and girls¨ (UNICEF, IRC, Undated).

One of the biggest casualties of the pandemic has been regarding work and employment. It has had a huge impact on the industrial and the agriculture sector, thus impacting a majority of the labor force globally. Various industries have come to a sudden halt, forcing millions of people out of work. CCSA (2020) estimates that there could be a global drop in the global work hours by 10.5% equivalent to 305 million workers full-time. It further states that by April 2020, around 81% of the workforce will be living in countries with mandatory lockdowns, which makes this

the worst global crisis after the second World War.

The drop in employment due to the impact of the pandemic also implies reduced income to families and pushing them further into poverty. A combination of reduced income and deepening poverty could have some direct consequences on the lives and livelihoods of the people, like their food & nutrition security, ability to afford education & health services and their resilient building measures.

The way forward for the adolescents in the labor market

In order to ensure that due to the socio-economic pressure the adolescents are not being forced voluntarily or involuntarily into the labor markets, The World Bank (2020,a) suggests that the policy makers should promote resilient or shock-responsive social safety net programs. The COVID pandemic brings in a different dimension to the vulnerable and the vulnerabilities, with new sets of people falling into it. It is also recommended to ensure that the Social Safety Net programs should have the scope to add in new vulnerables. ILO (2020) worker-specific and friendly protection measures would encourage the existing workers to return to work.

Young people and adolescents should be at the center of the economic & social recovery crisis that has been unleashed by the COVID Pandemic (Fine, Reichle and Lord, 2020). They should not just be considered as the victims of this crisis, but as people who can contribute to economic and social recovery. This pandemic is also affecting 2.7 billion workers, which is around 81% of the workforce globally. This could also impede youths from entering the appropriate job market. 'Educate, engage and employ' could be the key mantra. Education focusing on rebuilding the workforce should keep in mind the challenges and opportunities that the pandemic has created. Engaging the youth through proper counselling, handholding support and their immersion into the industry and employing based on their capabilities, needs and aspirations is necessary.

Save the Children (2016) elaborates about a multi-pronged focus on enhancing the resilience of the poor and the marginalised, which includes shock management & mitigation, building assets and capabilities, resilient & adaptive livelihoods and change in market systems. While the shock management & mitigation focuses on ability to cope and recover from external shock without negative coping mechanisms, building assets & capabilities banks strengthens income opportunities by focusing on skills and productive assets. Resilient & adaptive livelihoods has resilience as the overarching framework with focus on rights & entitlement, whereas the markets systems endeavor to enhance the access of the community to a fair and equitable market. It may also be noted that the participation of the adolescents in the process at every stage could be very crucial to incorporate their perspective and their needs & aspirations.

To ensure that the people out of the labor market do not have a drastic impact on their overall well-being, the government should come out with cash transfer benefits as well as compensation for income loss. Proper mechanisms like a ban on temporary eviction if people are not able to pay the house rent, concession on other support services like electricity and water should be started till the economy recovers and till people have the means to pay. These are some policy level decisions which need to be reinforced to ensure that people do not downslide further and become more vulnerable. It would be crucial to bring multiple stakeholders together and find out a durable solution.

Conclusion

The COVID pandemic has impacted every aspect of our lives, right from how we interact with each other, how we travel, how we eat & what we eat, and even to what livelihood options we chose. The pandemic, based on the experiences from the past and accumulated learnings from the current crisis, calls for a demand-led recovery and resilience building plans that keep the community, especially the common people, at the center of the discourse and planning process. The government should come out with policies and support the private sectors to encourage them to retain elderly people and people with health conditions in the labor market.

There is no second thought about the pandemic causing major disruptions in the skills and employment sector. An appropriate mechanism is recommended to ensure that the most

vulnerable and the marginalised youths, including adolescent girls, should have access to quality skill training, ably supported by counseling and job placement services.

To ensure psycho-social and economic well-being of the young entrants in the labor market, a proper tracking mechanism needs to be developed that captures the well-being of these new entrants. Possibilities for ¨Work from Home¨ options could also be explored for those people who are unable to move out of their home.

To sum it up, the COVID pandemic has the potential to escalate into a protracted crisis impacting every aspect of human lives. The early indicators point to a huge disruption in the market and market systems, including the job and the labor market. Complex crisis calls for long-term and sustained solutions, and this can only happen if various stakeholders come and work together with the people who are the most affected to find the way forward, based on the needs and aspirations of the people.

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COVID-19: Use of Internet for Studies and Internet Addiction

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Abstract

Schools in 165 countries around the world have closed due to the Coronavirus outbreak, according to UNESCO. We know that maintaining close friendships reduces stress and help children navigate difficult developmental experiences, but with so many children now unable to socialize freely, children are spending more time online to maintain these vital relationships. The sudden shift to online education has meant that a nine-year-old student - Sunidhi has been given a smartphone "way ahead of schedule" – as her parent explained – mainly to attend LIVE ONLINE classes and also to help her to keep in touch with friends on WhatsApp and Facebook. These indeed are trying times for the children, for their education, their online safety and mental health. These are difficult times even for the parents and teachers, as they have to keep themselves safe and healthy (physically and mentally) while also caring for their children in a situation of health pandemic. This is a task which most of them have not done before. They are facing a situation to which they have never been exposed before. And to make the matters worse, even the solution providers – the experts in the domain of cyber safety and mental health are very few in number and most of these experts too are facing new situations. These experts too do not have readymade solutions as the problems are new and the nature and type of problems are changing by the day. This paper discusses the usage of the Internet for studies and to what extent it has a role in causing any behavioural disorder/addiction. The research based evidences indicate the following – Supplemented by finding from qualitative research, it was found that when the Internet is used mostly for Studies and in a structured manner, it does not lead to an uncontrolled and/or excessive use. There is no reported instance of causing "Tolerance" or "Withdrawal" or "Mood Modification or "Conflict" when Internet is used for Studies and Teaching-Learning. Unstructured use of the Internet can make them more vulnerable to gaming addiction, sexual exploitation, bullying, and internet addiction. Not all children are aware of the risks involved in online platforms and don't have the required skills and knowledge to safeguard themselves. To prevent it, parents and children can work together construct rules for when, where, and how to use the internet. The most important thing is that parents should also practise what they preach.

Keywords: *Internet, Addiction, COVID-19 pandemic, Child safety, Online learning*

Introduction

Just like150 crore school children around the world, Malini, an 11-year-old middle school student in the DELHI-NCR area of India, has gotten used to going to school at home during the COVID-19 pandemic.

On every weekday, she wakes up slightly later than usual, at about 8:15 AM, turns on her laptop and quickly finishes her first onlineclass of the day which beginsat 8:30 AM, and goes to get breakfast at around 9:15 AM, to rush back to her laptop for the second class starting at 9:30 AM. Malini's 6-year-old sister Nandini, who is in Grade 1, has an even more interesting story of attending school at home – she moves around the house with her mother's smartphone while doing her onlineclasses, to get space for herself within the house, to sing, dance and jump, as that's what her class activities are mostly made of. She has to do all this exercise in the house, which is a typical 3 bedroom-hall-kitchen arrangement that also has to accommodate the work from home activities of the children's mother, and on some days the pre–office work that their father has to finish before he leaves for his office at 10:30 AM. After the morning rush and from the fourth or fifth online class of the elder child, there is calm at home. At this time, the children also engage in some other activities online such as visiting social networking sites and online gaming sites in order to counter their boredom.

Let us now look at the life experiences of Roshan, a 12-year-old middle school student in a small block town in the State of Bihar in India. His school teachers organise two onlinelive classes on the Zoom video conferencing app every day, which he has to attend, along with six other students of his class that stay in his

neighbourhood, on a single Smartphone that has been arranged for this use by the local NGO working in the area. When the lockdown began in March 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic, it took three months for Roshan's school to make this arrangement. Before that, him and his friends did not have access to theeducation imparted by his school. In the same small block town in the State of Bihar in India, a young 9-year-old girl, Sunidhi, got a new Smartphone all for herself with a high speed 4G data pack to attend online classes conducted by her school becauseSunidhi's father is financially well-off.Everything went well for two months, after which aproblem cropped up – the young girl got hooked to online games and would not let go off her Smartphone at all.

Schools in 165 countries around the world have closed due to the Coronavirus outbreak, according to UNESCO. We know that maintaining close friendships reduces stress and helps children navigate difficult developmental experiences, however without the option to socialise freely, children are now spending more time online to maintain these vital relationships.

The sudden shift to online education has meant that a nine-year-old student,Sunidhi, has been given a smartphone "way ahead of schedule", as her parent explained, to attend live online classes as well as to help her to keep in touch with friends on WhatsApp and Facebook.

These are trying times for children, for their education, their online safety and their mental health. These are also difficult times for parents and teachers, as they have to keep themselves safe and healthy (physically and mentally), while also caring for children in a pandemic. This is a task which most of them have not done before. They are facing a situation to which they have never been exposed to before. And to make matters worse, the solution providers like the experts in the domain of cyber safety and mental health are very few in number, and most of these experts are facing new situations as well. These experts do not have readymade solutions as the problems are new and the nature and type of these problems is changing by the day.

Use of internet and related problems during time of a global health pandemic (COVID 19)

This also raises an important question about online safety and problematic internet use: have students, especially those who are new to these online tools, been informed about how to identify fake news when researching for school projects at home or to keep safe online or to use the internet based devices and applications in a manner that it does not become problematic or addictive?

Although Internet use is usually beneficial and advantageous for most people (Howard, Wilding & Guest, 2016; Heo et al. 2015; Roy & Ferguson, 2016; Wiederhold, 2017), the increased availability and high penetration rates across the globe can facilitate the emergence of excessive and addictive behaviors related to Internet use. Furthermore, many people appear to display impulsive, narcissistic and aggressive personalities online, which can be nurtured by various Internet technologies (Aboujaoude, 2017).

Looking at the statistics in Figures 1 and 2, Overview of Global Internet Use in January 2020 and July 2020, we can see that due to Covid-19, there has not been any significant increase in global internet users or the average amount of time per day spent using the internet by each internet user. But we all know that the aggregate statistics rarely tell the true story.

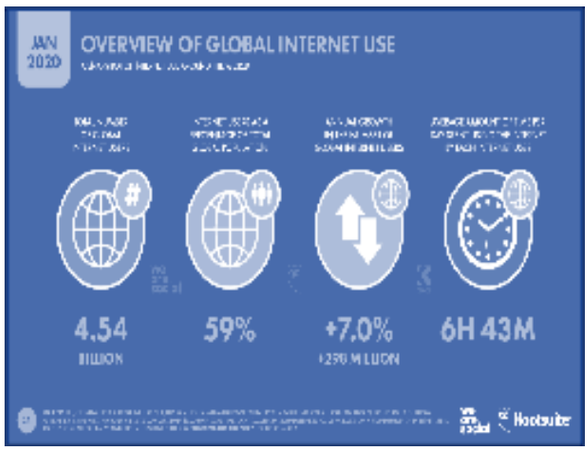

Figure 1: Overview of Global Internet Use (January 2020)

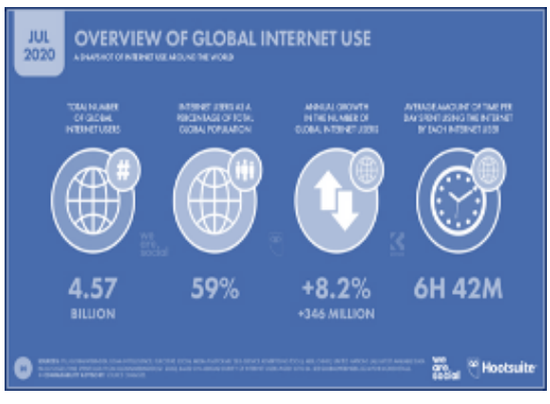

Figure 2: Overview of Global Internet Use (July 2020)

A study conducted by Jaipur-based JK Lone Children's Hospital has found that the lockdown restrictions, which were enforced from March 25 to contain the spread of the coronavirus disease (Covid-19) outbreak, have had an adverse impact on the physical, mental and emotional health of impressionable minds, resulting in an addiction to electronic devices, obesity, and an irritable behavioural pattern.

The study, which was conducted online across 30 Indian cities, has concluded that children's addiction to electronic devices during the lockdown increased up to three times, as they spend two to five hours a day on their favourite gadgets.

In another survey, conducted by Hammerkopf Consumer Survey that studied1,300 people in Mumbai, Bengaluru, New Delhi and Chennai, the following information was found -

i. Amid the lockdown, Indians have turned to social media to pass their time. In the first week of lockdown, Indians spent more than four hours every day on social media. This shows an 87 per cent increase from a week before lockdown.

ii. Before the lockdown, social media usage was on average 150 minutes per day. However, in the first week of lockdown, the figures jumped to 280 minutes per day, as shown bythe survey.

iii. The survey added that 75 per cent people were spending more time on Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp compared to the week before. In social media, people were largely consuming news and communicating with their friends and families as the country grappled with coronavirus.

iv. Besides television, internet browsing and streaming platform have also seen a rise in viewership, according to the survey. Internet browsing saw a 72 per cent spike during the first week of lockdown.

In a research based article, "Prolonged use of Internet and gaming among treatment seekers arising out of social restrictions related to COVID-19 pandemic", Susumu Higuchi, Satoko Mihara, Takashi Kitayuguchi, Haruka Miyakoshi, Madoka Ooi, Masaki Maezono, Kotaro Nishimura, and Takanobu Matsuzaki, (Department of Psychiatry, National Hospital Organization Kurihama Medical and Addiction Center, Yokosuka, Japan) wrote that empirical data showing an increase in Internet use due to social restrictions is scarce, with the exception of a small number of very recent studies.[12]This study explored the possible impact of these restrictions on Internet use and gaming behaviour among treatment seekers with gaming disorder (GD) or excessive use of Internet/ gaming (EUIG). The latter are those who use the Internet or games excessively and have related problems but have not been diagnosed as having GD.

Participants numbered 80 treatment seekers with GD or EUIG who visited our centre between 16 May and 12 June 2020. Almost all were male (78/80), the mean age was 18.9 years (SD, 6.4 years; age range, 12–44 years), and about 70% were school students. Seventy percent of participants were diagnosed as having ICD-11 GD, [3]20% engaged in excessive gaming but were not diagnosed as having GD, and the remaining 10% engaged in excessive use of other online applications. Participants were asked about changes in Internet use and gaming behaviour and the level of functional impairment between February 2020 (pre-stay-home period) and the 30-day period prior to the survey (stay-home period). Internet use for study or work activities was excluded from internet time for the purpose of this study. Mean daily hours spent on the Internet, smartphones, online and offline gaming, and video viewing were significantly higher for the stay-home period compared to the pre-stay-home period (Fig. 3). This was especially true for Internet and smartphone use and online gaming. Time spent on the Internet had increased between the two periods for 71.3% of participants, and 52.5% reported an increase in time spent on smartphones and online gaming. The most common reason for these increases

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[1] King DL, Delfabbro PH, Billieux J, Potenza MN. Problematic online gaming and the COVID-19 pandemic. J. Behav. Addict. 2020; 9: 184–186.

[2] Pal Singh Balhara Y, Kattula D, Singh S, Chukkali S, Bhargava R. Impact of lockdown following COVID-19 on the gaming behavior of college students. Indian J. Public Health 2020; 64(Suppl: S172–S176

[3] World Health Organization. ICD-11 for Mortality and Morbidity Statistics 2019, 2019. [Cited 12 June 2020.] Available from URL: https://icd.who.int/browse11/l-m/en

appeared to be 'having extended free time to use the Internet and engage in gaming due to the stay-home measure.' In cases where individuals had a high number of social withdrawal days in February, there tended to be a limited change in the time spent on the Internet between the pre- and stay-home periods. In fact, repeated-measures analysis of variance revealed that participants who were socially withdrawn for fewer than 20 days showed a significant increase in time spent on the Internet, but for those who were socially withdrawn for 20 days or more, the time spent was unchanged. 'Social withdrawal' is a state in which an individual stays at home, does not go to school or work, and has no direct contact with people other than the family.

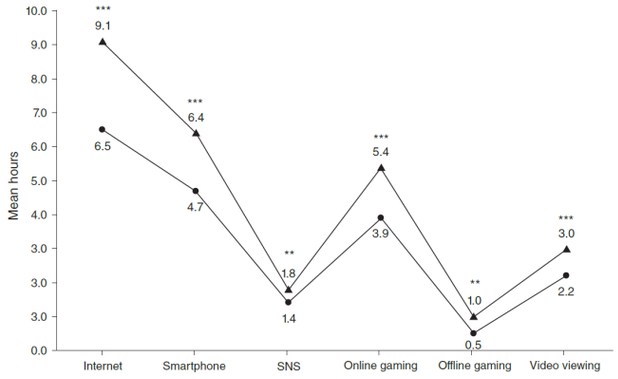


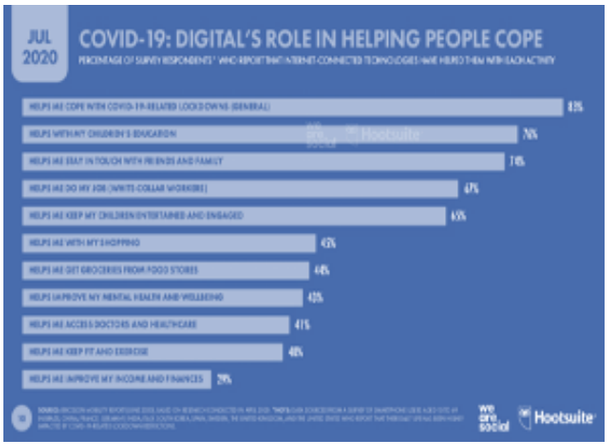
*Fig.3: Average daily hours spent on the Internet, smartphone, social network sites (SNS), online gaming, offline gaming, and video viewing in ( ) February 2020 and ( ) the 30-day period prior to the survey (stay-home period). The majority of participants used different applications simultaneously and so the figures for time spent on SNS, online gaming, and video viewing did not sum up to the time spent on the Internet. **P < 0.01, ***P < 0.001.*

In an initial investigation on the relation between the COVID−19 pandemic and addictive behaviours in China, a total of 6416 valid questionnaires were collected (male/female: 47%/53%, age [mean ± SD]: 28.23 ± 9.23).[4] The respondents included 47% males and 53% females, and the respondents' reported mean age was 28 years (SD = 9.2). A minority of responses were from Hubei (n = 330), but these responses showed no demographic differences from the overall sample and were also too few to be allowed for separate analyses.

Among the 6416 participants, 46.8% (47.6% for males, 46.1% for females, $\chi^2 = 1.8$, $P = .41$) reported increased dependence on internet use (IAT score), and 16.6% (18.8% for males and 14.5% for females, $\chi^2 = 28.84$, $P < .001$) reported longer internet use time during the pandemic. 4.3% (n = 274) (4.6% for male, 3.9% for female, $\chi^2 = 1.96$, $P = .16$) of the participants reported a severe internet addiction, which was 23% higher than the prevalence rate of severe internet addiction (3.5%) found before the COVID−19 pandemic (October 2019) among the 340 subjects (male/females 37.8%/62.2%, age 21.77 ± 4.52 years). Among those who were severely addicted to internet use, their dependence degree (IAT score) rose 20 times more often than it declined (58.7% [n = 214] vs 3.3% [n = 7]).

However, it needs to be noted that internet and digital technologies and mediums have also been instrumental in helping people cope with the negative impacts of Covid-19 (Fig. 4).

Figure 4: COVID-19: Digital's role in helping people cope



Understanding the usage of internet for studies and its role in causing behavioural addiction

When properly used, internet is an important technology that provides people with vital skills for the 21st century such as information access, problem solving, and self-directed learning. However, when internet is used unconsciously, it can cause anxiety or fear and negatively affect personal development (Colwell & Kato, 2003; Kerberg, 2005). In addition, excessive use of internet may have detrimental effects on the biological, physiological, psychological and

[4] Yan Sun, Yangyang Li, Yanping Bao, Shiqiu Meng, Yankun Sun, Gunter Schumann, Thomas Kosten, John Strang, Lin Lu, and Jie Shi, Brief Report: Increased Addictive Internet and Substance Use Behavior During the COVID-19 Pandemic in China

social development of the user (Caplan, 2002). In this context, internet addiction[5] has gradually become a serious problem.

Studies have systematically shown that excessive use of the internet can lead to an internet addiction (Durkee et al. 2012; Pontes & Griffiths, 2016a; Pontes & Griffiths, 2017; Lortie & Guitton, 2013), which comprises a heterogeneous spectrum of internet-related activities with a potential to cause problems for the individual, such as gaming, shopping, gambling, or social networking.

However, when the internet-related activity involves teaching-learning, it has not been reported to cause an addiction. The Internet, by itself, is not addictive. It is the purpose or activity for which the Internet is used which is the causative factor for the behavioural addiction.

In many areas of behavioural addiction, it has been debated whether some extreme behaviors can really be regarded as an addiction or not. Griffiths (2013) made an important contribution to this discussion by suggesting six essential components to describe a behavior as addiction. These six components are salience, tolerance, mood modification, relapse, withdrawal, and conflict (Griffiths, 2013, p.121). He states that a behavior can be defined as addiction if it has these six components. Then, the critical question becomes what does each of these six components mean? To make the subject or issue more understandable, Griffiths (2013) explains these six components as follows –

Salience: This occurs when social networking becomes the single most important activity in a person's life and dominates his or her thinking, feelings, and behavior. For instance, even if people are not actually engaged in social networking, they will be constantly thinking about the next time that they will be.

Mood modification: This refers to the subjective experiences that people report as a consequence of social networking and can be seen as a coping strategy (i.e., they experience an arousing "buzz" or a "high" or, paradoxically, a tranquilizing feeling of "escape" or "numbing").

Tolerance: This is the process whereby increasing amounts of social networking activity are required to achieve the former mood-modifying effects. This basically means that for people engaged in social networking, they gradually build up the amount of the time they spend social networking every day.

Withdrawal symptoms: These are the unpleasant feeling states and/or physical effects (e.g., the shakes, moodiness, irritability) that occur when people are unable to engage in social networking because they are ill, on vacation, prohibited etc.

Conflict: This refers to the conflicts between a person and those around that person (interpersonal), conflicts with other activities (social life, hobbies, and interests), or from within the individual himself or herself (intrapsychic conflict and/or subjective feelings of loss of control) that are concerned with spending too much time on social networking.

Relapse: This is the tendency or desire for repeated reversions to earlier patterns of excessive social networking to recur and for even the most extreme patterns typical of the height of excessive social networking to be quickly restored after periods of personal control.

Around the world, a number of studies have been conducted on whether the internet and its applications are addictive or not. In a recent study, Ajay Kumar Sinha et al, Online Safety and Internet Addiction, A Study Conducted Among Adolescents in Delhi-NCR[6], the role of the internet, its prevalence and associated factors were discussed in detail**.**

The study found that children do take help of internet in studies, but only 40 percent of them take such help in more than two ways, and only 26.2 percent of them take such help in more than three ways.

Among the boys, 44 percent take help of internet for studies in more than two ways, and 29.5 percent take help in more than three ways. Among the girls, the incidences of taking help of internet in studies is much lower as only 32.6 percent of them take help in more than two

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[5] Internet addiction has been defined as "excessive or poorly controlled preoccupations, urges or behaviours regarding computer use and Internet access that lead to impairment or distress" (Weinstein & Lejoyeux, 2010, p277).

[6] Ajay Kumar Sinha et al, Online Safety and Internet Addiction, A Study Conducted Among Adolescents in Delhi-NCR, CRY, FLAIR, February 2020

ways, and only 19.9 percent in more than three ways. See Figure 5.

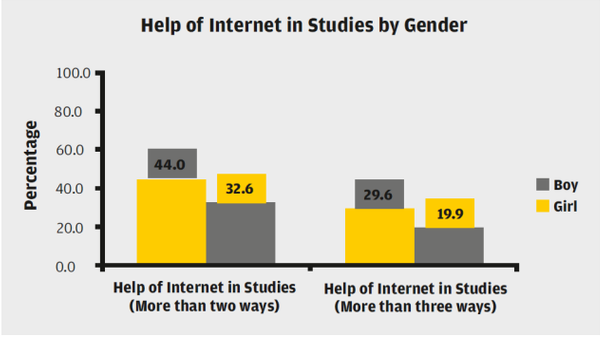

Figure 5: Help of internet in studies (by gender)

Following were the options for help of Internet in studies –

1. Online search for words, information etc.

2. Group discussion among friends online

3. Connected to school online education programme

4. Online tutorials (like Byjus, Cue math, Extra marks etc.)

5. Online books/Apps for various Olympiads and other competitive tests accessed free of cost

6. Online Books/Apps for various Olympiads and other competitive tests accessed on payment

Studying the effects of internet usage patterns and its socio-demographic factors on children taking help of internet in studies, it was found that the likelihood of children taking help of internet in their studies increases with the following factors –

1. When the Internet usage is more 4 hours daily;

2. When the child has their own room at home;

3. When the child has their own mobile;

4. When the child has their own mobile, their own room, and uses the internet for more than 3 hours daily, then 71.4 percent of the children take help of internet in studies;

5. The likelihood of children taking help of the internet in studies reduces considerably when both the parents are unavailable at home for monitoring and supervision (38.4%), and increases to 40.3% when at least one parent is available at home

Qualitative research found that when the internet is used mostly for studying and in a structured manner, it does not lead to an uncontrolled and/or excessive use. There is no reported instance of "tolerance" or "withdrawal" or "mood modification or "conflict" being caused by the internet, when it is used for studies and teaching-learning.

Unstructured use of the internet can make children more vulnerable to suffering from gaming addiction, sexual exploitation, bullying, and internet addiction. Not all children are aware of the risks involved in online platforms and do not have the required skills and knowledge to safeguard themselves. To prevent this, parents and children can work together and construct rules for when, where, and how to use the internet. The most important factor is that parents should set an example by practi what they preach.

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A Long-Term School WASH Programme and its Relevance in Minimising the Spread of Current and Future Pandemics through Improved Hygiene Practices and Basic Access to Water and Sanitation

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Abstract

Safely managed WASH (Water, Sanitation and Hygiene) services not only help in preventing and protecting human health during the Covid-19 pandemic, but will remain critical during the recovery phase. In this paper, an attempt has been made to reflect on the relevance of a school's hygiene education programme that aims to enhance a school's learning environment, promote behaviour improvement for safe hygiene and sanitation practices, and to encourage the adoption of key hygiene practices amongst school children. The three year intervention covered 3000 primary and upper primary schools across UP, Bihar, MP and Gujarat. The results reveal a positive outcome in terms of improved WASH access at schools and improved hygiene practices, especially the hand WASH behaviour with 89% students regularly practicing it. The assessment results also reflect that schools are the most effective vehicles for Behaviour Change in the community as students become hygiene ambassadors to inculcate improved behaviour. The findings related to awareness and hygiene practices bear out the effectiveness of the BCC(Behaviour Change Communication) activities during the intervention.

Keywords: *School, Wash, Hygiene, water, Sanitation, pandemic, Children*

Introduction

The world in 2020 has been gripped by a pandemic of a novel coronavirus. A virus to which the population at large has no immunity, which is highly contagious, and for which no vaccine exists, has forced countries to recognise the importance of foundational measures of disease control. The provision of safe water, sanitation and hygienic conditions is essential in protecting human health during all infectious disease outbreaks, including the COVID-19 outbreak. Ensuring good and consistently applied WASH and waste management practices in communities, homes, schools, marketplaces, prisons and health care facilities will further help to prevent human-to-human transmission of the COVID-19 virus (WHO/UNIECF-2020). A systematic review by Saunders-Hastings et al. (2017) shows frequent handwashing to have a large and significant protective effect against pandemic influenza. The importance of handwashing as a public health intervention is widely recognised, including for the control of respiratory disease (Rabie & Curtis 2006; Mbakaya et al.2017; Prüss-Üstun et al.2019). Therefore, handwashing with soap is a mainstay of the guidance for controlling the spread of COVID-19 (WHO-2020).

Adequate access to water, hygiene and sanitation (WASH) is every human's and child's right. Ensuring WASH accessibility in schools is encompassed in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (UNICEF&WHO-2016) . The importance of adequate WASH services is reinforced by the COVID-19 outbreak as the pandemic places hygiene at the centre of disease prevention. However, there is a lack of understanding of hygiene behaviours and access to soap in low and middle-income countries (Guy Howard,2020). One in four persons worldwide did not have access to a handwashing facility with soap and water on premises in 2015; handwashing with soap occurred for about 26% after the events of potential faecal contact, globally. In regions with high access to handwashing facilities, handwashing with soap was performed by about 51%, and in regions with more limited access, by about 22% after the events of potential faecal contact (Wolf et.al 2019). Frequent and proper handwashing with soap can be used to prevent the spread of diseases and infections, yet recent statistics

demonstrate that 40 % of households lack access to a handwashing facility with soap and water. And 18 % of those households have no place to wash hands (USAID-2020). This also applies in the case of India, where communicating the importance of washing hands with soap to avoid the spread of Covid-19 is quite challenging, as the National Sample Survey's (NSS) 76th round report, 2019, reveals that only 35.8 per % of households in the country practise hand-washing with soap or detergent before a meal and in rural areas it is only 25.3%.' What is more alarming is that about 26 %people do not wash their hands with soap or detergent after defecation (NSS 76th Round-2019).

To build community resilience against current and future pandemics, it is critical for the country to improve the practices of hand washing with soap, at the household and institution level. To bring in long-term behaviour changes, consistent efforts are needed. In this paper, an attempt has been made to analyse the performance of a long-term school hygiene education programme and how the programme has ensured the achievement of consistent improvement in the key hygiene behaviours and practices, both at school and community level.

While India has made substantial progress in ensuring basic WASH facilities in schools (UNICEF, WHO-2018), in order to address the challenges of current and future pandemics, it is critical to also safeguard the rights of the vulnerable population, especially children including girls, children with disabilities and those who are left behind. A successful WASH-in-Schools programme not only improves health, but also fosters learning, contributes to dignity and gender equality, and enables children to participate as agents of change for their siblings, their parents and the community at large (UNICEF 2010).

The Aga Khan Foundation (AKF) India, in association with its network partners has been implementing an integrated WASH-in-school initiative, supporting the national Clean School Campaign, with the twin objective of enabling access to inclusive and gender-sensitive WASH facilities in schools as well as addressing mindsets and behaviours of children towards improved hygiene habits to enable them to become catalysts of change in their schools and communities. This intervention is also aligned with the Colombo Declaration of 2011, which advocates for the need to ensure functioning and child-friendly toilets for every new and existing schools, separate for girls and boys, with facilities for menstrual hygiene management. For the first time, the issue of functioning toilets and menstrual hygiene management were elevated for inclusion in an official statement. To date, the initiative has enabled more than 200 schools with improved infrastructure to address the needs of excluded children and the incorporation of operations and maintenance through innovative financing models and systems strengthening. Hygiene curriculum was introduced to ensure that, from a young age, children learn about personal hygiene and to empower them to demand equitable access to WASH services. Hence, to develop agency among children, the school hygiene education programme supported by Banega Swasth India campaign of Reckitt Benckiser, is an endeavour to equip children across 3000+ schools with the knowledge of critical hygiene behaviours and practices. This paper is based on the experiences of Aga Khan Foundation's WASH-in-schools' initiative and the objective is to examine the role of improved access to WASH facilities and hygiene education in schools and its contribution towards building a system both within schools and communities to promote preventive behaviour to minimise the spread of the COVID pandemic.

Key approaches adopted

The programme focuses on providing schools with adequate water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) facilities, with a reliable water system that delivers clean and sufficient water for hand-washing and drinking, sufficient number of toilets for students and teachers that are private, safe clean, and culturally and gender appropriate, water-use and hand-washing facilities close to toilets, and sustained hygiene promotion (Adams J et.al.2016). With this approach, the programme targeted outreach into the rural areas with focus on marginalised populations, through a comprehensive School Hygiene Education Programme. The aim of the initiative is to enhance a school's learning environment, to promote behaviour improvements for safe hygiene and sanitation practices, and to encourage the adoption of key hygiene practices amongst school children. The initiative has attempted to undertake a child-centred approach in improving WASH access and hygiene

behaviour in schools. Teachers' proactive engagement in introducing hygiene curriculum, the role of Panchayat and School Management Committees in WASH asset creation and maintenance, child parliament and soap banks were some of the key enablers. The critical barriers that were addressed thorough this initiative were social exclusion and gender norms, physical immobility to access WASH facilities, high student density and lack of awareness about personal hygiene. The programme also promoted linkage between the school and the community to ensure the sustainable adoption of hygiene practices. To promote better tracking of the WASH access, AKF also introduced real-time tracking tools in select schools. This programme approach is one of the most effective approaches to sustain hygiene behaviour during the current pandemic.

While the intervention has focused on the immediate WASH needs of school-going children, it has also prioritised the needs of the most marginalised and vulnerable communities, thus bridging the gaps in knowledge, behaviours and practices towards appropriate hygiene behaviours. The school-led hygiene promotion has been a cost-effective approach to reaching some of the most marginalised and excluded groups through the student cadre of Hygiene Ambassadors, leading awareness campaigns and drives into their communities to build their resilience against the ongoing pandemic.

The key Components and results achieved

Improvement in basic water sanitation and hygiene access

The Global baseline report on water, sanitation and hygiene in schools by WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme says that globally 69% of schools had a basic drinking water service, whereas 19% of schools had no drinking water service. In terms of sanitation, 66% of schools had a basic sanitation service, whereas 23% of schools had no sanitation service. And 53% of schools had a basic hygiene service, defined as a handwashing facility with water and soap available, whereas 36% of schools had no hygiene service (JMP 2018).

Considering the Joint Monitoring Programme framework for schools as a reference point, the findings from intervention schools provided good insights towards the basic minimum level of WASH access. AKF adopted an integrated WASH-in-schools' approach that fostered social inclusion and individual respect, protecting the human rights of girls to privacy and safety, as well as reaching out to young children. While promoting the inclusive design, accessibility audits were undertaken during the construction of facilities with students and key questions were asked about the drinking water accessible to those with limited mobility, accessibility of at least one usable toilet to those with limited mobility, and handwashing facilities accessible to smaller children and to those with limited mobility. Promotion of child-centred design principles should be a prerequisite to ensure that facilities should cater to all, including small children, girls of menstruation age, and children with disabilities (Jasper C 2012). With this principle, in more than 200 schools across four states, height-appropriate handwashing stations, segregated toilets equipped with menstrual hygiene management facilities for girls and barrier-free access to toilet facilities with western-style toilets were promoted. Nudges and colourful wall paintings helped to promote correct hygiene behaviours on handwashing and toilet use reaching first-generation learners in schools.

In terms of sanitation access across all intervention locations, almost all schools had a toilet, but around 30% toilets were not in regular use. This shows that substantial work is still needed to ensure improved WASH access across the schools. However, in terms of student's perception on the status of WASH facilities in schools, 75% felt they have access to better WASH facilities based on water and soap availability. Water was available in 92% schools for drinking, handwashing, toilet use, cooking and cleaning. More than 90% schools in Uttar Pradesh relied on handpumps, while in Gujarat, 41% had panchayat water supply. To ensure safe access of water, 34% schools adopt chlorination as the preferred mode of bacteriological treatment, whereas 20% schools have RO facilities especially in quality affected areas of Gujarat. Overall, 70% of the schools had some provision for wastewater disposal.

Effective handwashing requires access to facilities (water, containers, soap) that enable hygiene behaviours. (Wolf et al. 2019). In the intervention comparing the availability of water and toilets in schools, the presence of handwashing facilities was found only in 46%

schools with dedicated hand washing stations and access to soap, and in remaining schools, students depended on handpumps for hand washing. While these efforts have shown remarkable improvement, more work is needed to monitor the disability provision in basic services and to adapt sanitation design.

Inclusive systems for Operations and Maintenance in schools

Water, sanitation, and hygiene in school aims to make a visible impact on the health and hygiene of children through improvement in their health and hygiene practices, and those of their families and the communities**.** However, as indicated in a Water Aid India (2016) study, 83% teachers cited lack of dedicated funds and capacity of SMCs as the key reason for poor maintenance and management of WASH facilities. With this backdrop, the current initiative engages with School Management Committees with focus on developing a collaborative, supportive, and active platform to streamline inclusive and sustainable WASH-access. Over 10,500 membershave roles and responsibilities to ensure the school-level monitoring of sanitation status and upkeep of facilities, dissuading cleaning by children from disadvantaged sections, as well as prioritising the earmarked school fund for school cleaning.

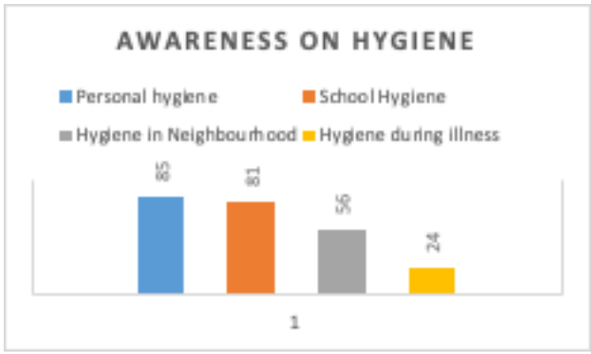
Schools serve as an amalgamation ground for children of various cultures, societal strands and gender to come together with the objective of inclusive learning. AKF has been working through the platform of Child Parliament Clubs in more than 1000 schools, which enables the collectivisation of children, regardless of their background, to develop systems for monitoring the upkeep of school sanitation facilities. The dedicated hygiene sessions have helped students on to adopt correct hygiene behaviours and user discipline for toilet use.

The study findings related to awareness and practice of improved hygiene bear out the effectiveness of the Behaviour Change Communication activities. Institutional strengthening such as the empowerment of School Management Committees is also prioritised to ensure inclusive access and better management of WASH facilities. As indicated in Swachh Vidyalaya guidelines, schools are required to prepare development plans. 83% schools prepared a plan, but only 57% schools said they have enough funds to maintain toilets. In an exclusive survey on Operation and Maintenance undertaken in 400+ schools, 63% reported having assigned a dedicated cleaner for the facilities utilising the school Operations and Maintenance budget. 97% children interviewed showcased knowledge on how to use toilets and ensure cleanliness after use and oversee that other students use it well too, thereby reinforcing personal hygiene management in schools.

Adopting and Sustaining hygiene behaviours

The improved hygiene education resulted in more demand for access to soaps for handwashing at critical times, and to ensure supply of soaps in schools, AKF initiated the soap bank pilots and more than 250 soap banks have been established through community and school management engagement. Efforts are also underway to create mechanisms to track the supply and consumption of soaps by training student bodies (*BalSansads* and Child Sanitation Clubs) on tracking soap donation and its utilisation. As noted in a large scale review of interventions by Celia McMichael (2019), the intervention has also demonstrated evidence of positive change among students with regard to changes in WASH knowledge, attitudes and hygiene behaviours, including hand-washing with soap.

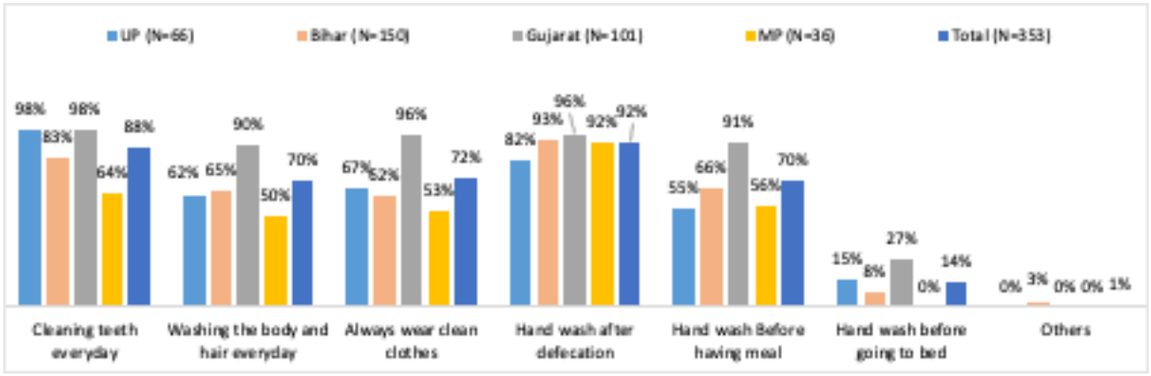
The study revealed that student's engagement through Bal Sansad (students club) and Meena Manch (a platform for adolescent girls) has emerged as an important platform for students to learn and internalise hygiene practices. This is evident from the fact that most students were found to be aware of the hygiene practices. In terms of improved hand wash behaviour, 89% students regularly practice it, 54% said they



learnt about the frequency and critical timing of washing hands. Other than personal hygiene, the intervention also helped to improve children's awareness and knowledge on hygiene within

school, in the neighbourhood and during illness. The efforts to empower teachers emerged as a key enabler in improved hygiene behaviour, as 96% students attributed teacher's role to improve knowledge on the benefits of health and hygiene.

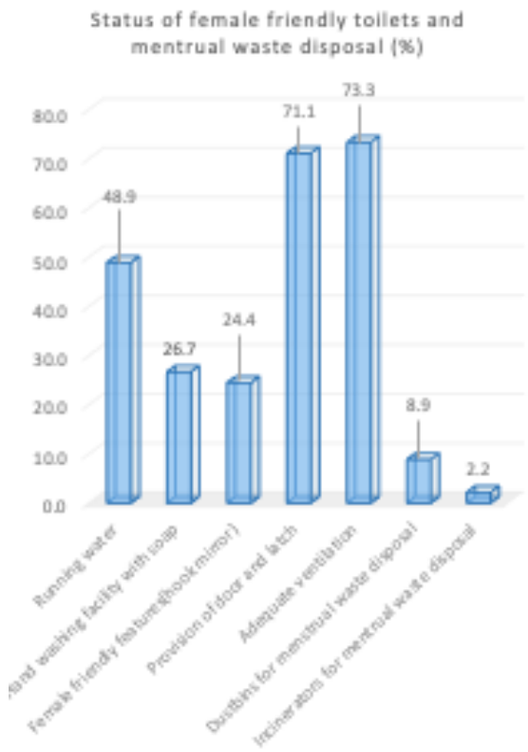
indicators across 4 key themes of safety, privacy, access to safe sanitation and cleanliness mechanisms. Of the 150 schools, 45 middle schools were further examined on indicators for menstrual hygiene management services in



: Hygiene practices by respondents

Ensuring MHM secure schools

While designing the MHM interventions in schools, AKF looked at equity issues, areas, and children from communities that are deprived and marginalised. The intervention has its focus on 15 dedicated sessions on MHM, including components on nutrition, hygiene, product use and disposal, and securing access to female-friendly facilities in schools to manage safe menstruation. A pilot study to examine the status of WASH facilities with a lens to ensure female-friendly services in schools was undertaken in 150 schools in the peri urban locations of Patna city. The schools were examined on 16



schools, in accordance with National WASH in School guidelines.

Insights from the assessment are shaping the strategy to inform investments in infrastructure improvements for safe menstrual management in schools.

Conclusion

Many factors may have contributed to the spread of COVID-19 around the globe, but handwashing culture alone appears to be an important factor in explaining why some counties have been hit harder by the outbreak. Countries where people do not have a habit of washing their hands automatically tend to have a much higher exposure to COVID-19. In the absence of a cure or vaccine, the current outbreak humanity to find ways of reducing the potential risk of infection. Frequent handwashing with soap for at least 20 seconds is widely advised as a preventive measure against COVID-19. It is possible to quickly influence individual hygiene behaviour in the short term, however, changing handwashing culture in a particular country or globally is a much more difficult task. (Pogrebna & Kharlamov-2020). This is an important observation as we have to find ways to change the hand washing culture, and the ongoing AKF WASH-in-Schools programme with focus on hygiene education has demonstrated approaches that lead to the empowerment of children and communities and integrate inclusivity in project design to achieve long-term improvement in hygiene behaviour at scale. This is evident from three-year programme findings, which reflect that improved hand wash behaviour is regularly practiced by 89%

students. The paper tried to present the case for long-term change in hand washing habits through sustained access of water, sanitation and hygiene facilities as well as hygiene behaviours among students. The intervention has also highlighted the fact that school-to-community led hygiene promotion models hold merit in reaching the remote and most vulnerable population, as well as create a future-ready generation armed with the appropriate understanding of hygiene behaviours. These efforts can go a long way in developing more cohesive systems within schools and communities, thereby developing community resilience towards current and future pandemics. The current Pandemic COVID-19 has reinforced the fact that drinking water, sanitation and hygiene are recognised as basic human rights, as they are indispensable in sustaining healthy lives and fundamental in maintaining the dignity of all human beings.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to acknowledge the immense support and guidance of Aga Khan Foundation Chief Executive Office, MS. Tinni Sawhney in strengthening WASH in school programme. They would also like extend sincere thanks to Mr. Ravi Bhatnagar, Director, External Affairs & Partnerships AMESA, Reckitt Benckiser for his unstinted support to build a strong school hygiene education programme. The support and cooperation of school children, teachers, Project teams as well as AKDN partners AKRSP & AHAH, in delivering an impactful programme on the ground is sincerely acknowledged.

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Will Substantial Gain on Reducing Child Labour Fail Due to Covid-19? School Closure, Economic Crisis and Child Labour during pandemic

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Abstract

Child labour is most prevalent among children from excluded social groups such as poor families, subsistence farmers, and landless households. These children work in different sectors such as agriculture, industry and the service industry. The COVID-19 Pandemic has aggravated the problem. Post the imposition of the lockdown in the country, huge population if migrants have returned to their home states, fuelling the risk of children being forced into labour or trafficking to make up for the lost income. A report released by the World Bank titled 'COVID-19 Crisis through a Migration Lens' recognized the impact of the virus on the livelihoods of a large proportion of the country's internal migrants. Migrant labour is a key driver of the urban economy; however, lock-down has forced many to return to their villages due to the absence of employment and a steady flow of income. Moreover, with a significant number of households' migrating with their families, children have been forced to discontinue schooling, engage in labour or home-based work upon return to their native villages. According to ILO Global Estimates in the last two decades, progress has been made to ensure that 9 out of 10 of the world's children are not in child labour, slavery or trafficking; however, ending the exploitation of the 1 child in 10 has proven to be a challenge, with the decline in child labour between 2012-2016 at a third of the rate of the decline in the 2008-2012 period. Unicef and ILO foresees that millions of children are at the risk of being pushed into child labour as a result of the COVID-19 crisis, which could lead to the first rise in child labour after 20 years of progress. With the vast impact of the coronavirus pandemic, the vulnerability is exacerbated for children to be forced into labour as schools are closed or inaccessible, there is economic downturn in household income, limited functioning of social services and greater demand for cheap labourers. Thus, it is unlikely that we will be in a position to achieve our target of elimination of all forms of child labour by 2025. Better efforts need to be made to prevent children from getting forced into labour. In India over half of the child labourers are located in the five states of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, and Madhya Pradesh – the same states that account for the majority of out-of-school children (with the exception of Maharashtra). The irony is that all these states have been very badly affected by COVID-19.

Keywords: *Child labour, Covid-19, Disaster, School closure, Child protection, Pandemic*.

Will world leaders be able to achieve the Sustainable Development Goal of Eliminating all forms of Child Labour by 2025 (Goal 8.7)? Will India, that holds the burden of having the largest share of world's child labours, stand up to meet the expectations, amid the turmoil created by the COVID-19 crisis? How will the COVID-19 crisis affect the world economy and education, as well as the rate of employment of children in agriculture, industry and services?

Ever since (2002), the International Labor Organisation and its constituent Members States started observing World Day Against Child Labour on the 12th of June every year, to renew their commitment and action to end child labour. However, the world has not faced an unprecedented catastrophic crisis like COVID-19 before which has shattered every aspect of life across the globe. Only 5 years ago, world leaders met and resolved to end child labour by 2025 from the world. This commitment is a part of the most ambitious and celebrated set of Sustainable Development Goals (Goal No 8.7) adopted by all United Nations Member States, including India. Now, 5 years down the line and 5 years away from the target, the whole world helplessly stares at an imminent defeat in this regard, and in fact for almost all other goals, due to the devastating impact of COVID-19 on world economy and health.

Unfortunately, children are the worst victims of any crisis or disaster, and the COVID disaster is believed to have pushed millions of children into labour. The Pre-COVID-19 child labour situation was already too frightening. 'Worldwide 218 million children between 5 and 17 years are in

employment. Among them, 152 million (almost 10% of all children worldwide) are victims of child labour; almost half of them, 73 million, work in hazardous child labour. Child labour declined, rather at a slower rate than before, during the period from 2012-2016 continuing the trend seen since ILO started publishing quadrennial Global Estimates of Child Labour'. India has been doing a fabulous job of reducing child labour in the country, especially after making education a fundamental right. As per Census 2011, there are 10.1 million child labourers (down from 12.6 million in 2001) in the age group of 5-14 years in India. There are 33 million (5-18 years) working children in India. In addition, 42.7 million children in India are out of school, although the Right to Education Act is in force. Together, Uttar Pradesh (21.5%), Bihar (10.7%), Rajasthan (8.4%), Maharashtra (7.2%), and Madhya Pradesh (6.9%) constitute nearly 55% of total working children in India, as per Census 2011. The irony is that all these states have been very badly affected by COVID-19.

We can directly correlate and forecast the magnitude of the child labour problem in the days to come in India and other developing and under-developed countries, if we look at the drivers of the issues and how these drivers are amplified by the COVID-19 crisis. The primary reasons behind child labour in India (almost same with other countries as well), apart from poor enforcement of child labour law and other related legislations and schemes, have been-children out of school, dependency of poor families on their small childrens' income (at the cost of their education and leisure), adult unemployment and the demand of cheap and submissive labour who surrenders their voice and choice. We are already seeing that whenever lockdowns have eased, children are already being trafficked for work.

According to ILO Global Estimates in the last two decades, progress has been made to ensure that 9 out of 10 of the world's children are not in child labour, slavery or trafficking; however, ending the exploitation of the 1 child in 10 has proven to be a challenge, with the decline in child labour between 2012-2016 at a third of the rate of the decline in the 2008-2012 period. Unicef and ILO foresees that millions of children are at the risk of being pushed into child labour as a result of the COVID-19 crisis, which could lead to the first rise in child labour after 20 years of progress. With the vast impact of the coronavirus pandemic, the vulnerability is exacerbated for children to be forced into labour as schools are closed or inaccessible, there is economic downturn in household income, limited functioning of social services and greater demand for cheap labourers. Thus, it is unlikely that we will be in a position to achieve our target of elimination of all forms of child labour by 2025. Better efforts need to be made to prevent children from getting forced into labour.

School Closure and lack of access to remote education

School closures carry high social and economic costs for people across communities. Their impact, however, is particularly severe for the most vulnerable and marginalised boys and girls and their families. The resulting disruptions exacerbate already existing disparities within the education system, but also in the other aspects of their lives. Increased exposure to violence and exploitation: when schools shut down, early marriages increase, more children are recruited into militias, sexual exploitation of girls and young women rises, teenage pregnancies become more common, and child labour grows. Evidences are already stating that child labour is rising as schools close during the pandemic. Temporary school closures have affected more than 1 billion learners in over 130 countries. Even when classes restart, families may no longer be able to afford to send their children to school. In India alone, around 320 Million learners are affected by school closures due to the pandemic.

Economic impact of the pandemic on family

From previous pandemics and epidemics, it is known that children's involvement in paid work increases due to the reduction in household income. The economic activities in vulnerable households, where people work as daily wage earners, have taken a big dip. The access to existing social protection schemes has been minimal. In a majority of households, there is not enough cash to sustain basic requirements for over a month. There are already reports and estimates that suggest a rise in poverty, and therefore, an increase in child labour because households employ this coping mechanism to survive. The studies also suggest that one percentage point rise in poverty leads to at least

a 0.7 per cent increase in child labour in certain countries. Thus, access to social protection schemes, direct benefit transfers and livelihood support to poor and vulnerable families would be crucial in preventing a large number of children being forced to work.

The COVID-19 crisis and its impact on socio-economic lives of people further aggravates the situation and adds fuel to all the reasons mentioned above. Factories, hotels, tourism, shops and establishments and other economic activities are shut down, with millions losing their livelihood and jobs, especially in unorganized sectors that constitute almost 90% of the labor force. Adult Unemployment and reverse (urban to rural) migration is at an all-time high in this decade. "About 400 million people working in the informal economy in India are at risk of falling deeper into poverty due to the coronavirus crisis which is having "catastrophic consequences", says ILO in its Report titled 'ILO Monitor 2nd edition: COVID-19 and the world of work'. Schools and colleges are shut right now and many private small schools will be shut forever. A majority of school children, especially those studying in government schools, do not have access to mobile/computer and internet connectivity to attend online classes during lockdown, and they are lagging behind their better off peers. Schools, once reopened post lockdown, would find it difficult to continue classes while maintaining hygiene and social distancing. Parents would be reluctant to send their children to school. So, experts fear that the school dropout rate among the poor and disadvantaged group would be increased significantly (though there is no estimation given). Marginal and poor families have lost their jobs and livelihood and might not mind stopping their children, especially girls, from attending school, and instead engage their children in economic activities to earn sustenance. There would be a heavy demand for cheap labour post lockdown to recover the losses made by companies and business houses. So these demand and supply factors, coupled with the relaxation in conditions and hours of work and in monitoring and supervision of certain factories, shops and establishments as per recent labour reforms in India, shall push millions of poor children into labour. We must not forget the relaxation given in the recently amended Child and Adolescent Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act 1986 for children to work in family enterprise and businesses. Many experts who study and work on the issues of child labour strongly believe that this relaxation in the laws is going to be grossly violated and misused by parents/guardians, middle men and the employers. Thousands of children are likely to be trafficked. Trafficking of children for labour has been going on unabated even amidst this covid-19 crisis. The whole scenario will push more and more children into a system of exploitation and abuse.

Due to the alarming situation created by this pandemic, there is a need for unprecedented, innovative and pro-active measures at scale from all quarters to save childhood and achieve SDG 8.7 by 2025. Expanding the outreach and quality of education with new tools and techniques, expanding the food and social security cover to include all poor and marginalised, providing jobs and employment opportunities to adult and securing household food security, making the labour laws more stringent, increased inspection of factories and domestic/small enterprises, strengthening Integrated Child Protection Scheme (ICPS) and District Child Labour Task Forces to check trafficking and to rescue and rehabilitate child workers, empowering Gram Panchayat with adequate resources to track and secure every child are some of the measures that can be suggested to bring India on track to achieve SDG 8.7. The Child Protection Committee, as mandated under ICPC, is well placed to monitor and track child labour and child trafficking and other child protection issues and respond appropriately in coordination with District Child Protection Unit and Child Welfare Committee. It is high time that world leaders, business houses, donors and civil society take a pledge to reinvigorate efforts to achieve SDG Target 8.7 to end all forms of child labour by 2025.

V.V. Giri, former President of India who was also the Labour Minister in his early years of political life, termed child labour as "a bad economic activity" and as an "overt social evil". India has to take a tough stand and a host of positive measures against the employment of children, as mandated under Article 39 of the Constitution which states that the tender of children must not be abused and that they are not forced by economic necessity to enter avocations unsuited to their age or strength.

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Exploring the Issues Faced by Children with Blindness in Pursuing Education During COVID-19

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Abstract

This paper explores the challenges and problems faced by children with blindness in pursuing education during the time of COVID-19 and makes certain suggestions in order to make education more meaningful, interactive and accessible to such children during Covid-19 and after schools are reopened once the situation becomes conducive. The paper employs an interview method with open-ended structured questionnaire, in order to collect data from the participants. The paper highlights that children with blindness are facing various challenges and problems such as the lack of availability of study material in accessible format, difficulties in accessing online classes, issues related to pedagogy and issues associated with the emotional well-being of the students. The paper concludes by putting forth the argument that the government should come up with expert guidelines to teach children with blindness during COVID-19; teachers should be trained in teaching children with blindness in distance mode education; teachers and children should use assistive technology available to them and proper training should be imparted to them to enable them to use such technology efficiently and the help of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) should be taken to assist the children with blindness to continue their education during these testing times.

Keywords: *COVID-19, children with blindness, Braille, accessible, online.*

Introduction

The Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) is a newly discovered disease which is caused by 2019-nCoV, also known as severe acute respiratory syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS−CoV−2). The disease is infectious and primarily spreads through "droplets of saliva or discharge from the nose when an infected person coughs or sneezes" (World Health Organization, n.d). Since the disease is infectious and there is no specific treatment or vaccine available as of July 15, 2020 (ibid), most countries, including India, have taken unprecedented measures such as putting severe restrictions on the movement of people, banning international travel, banning or limiting the gathering of people in public places and closing down or limiting the services of the places of worship, courts, cinema halls, restaurants, hotels, bars, shopping malls etc. Apart from the measures already outlined, most countries have closed down educational institutions such as pre-school centres, schools, colleges/universities and coaching-centres. Around 1.5 billion children and other students are affected by the closure of educational institutions (UNICEF, April 21, 2020). The government of India took the decision to close all schools in late March and since then all schools are closed from July, 15 2020 till now. The closure of schools has a disproportionate impact on children from low-income households, children with no or low internet access and children with disabilities/blindness (Alasuutari, 2020). This paper explores two key research questions:

I. What are the specific challenges/problems/ issues that children with blindness face while pursuing education during the time of COVID-19? And

II. What are some of the measures which can be taken in order to make the learning process more meaningful, interactive and accessible to such children during COVID-19 and after schools are reopened once the situation becomes manageable and favourable enough to do so?

Following this introductory part, the second section of this paper briefly discusses the research methods employed for research and outlines the limitations of this study. Section 2.1 highlights some of the limitations of this study. The third section discusses the challenges and issues faced by children with blindness in

accessing the study material, writing tools and issues regarding online education. The last section concludes by providing certain suggestions to make education accessible to such children.

Research Methods

This is an exploratory research which seeks to explore and understand the challenges and problems faced by children with blindness in pursuing their studies during COVID-19 and what are some of the measures that can be taken in order to make education more effective and accessible during the time of pandemic. The snowball sampling technique has been used for this research in order to recruit the participants for the research. The snowball sampling technique has been selected because the schools are closed and it is not possible to collect the data from schools about children with blindness studying in those schools. 20 participants from various parts of the country were recruited for this study, comprising of 10 boys and 10 girls. Further, the sample comprises of children with complete blindness and children with low vision. The sample also contains children from mainstream/regular schools[7] as well as from special schools[8]. An interview was conducted with the participants over the mobile phone and data was collected using the open-ended structured questionnaire. Apart from the primary data, the research also utilises the published literature on this issue. In order to find relevant literature on the topic, a search was conducted on Google with key words such as "Corona/ COVID-19 and education of children with disabilities/blindness", and the combination of the mentioned key words thereof. The search was conducted using the University of Delhi's wi-fi (the Delhi University has a subscription of various academic databases), so that the literature from the subscription-based journals could also be found.

Limitations of the Study

There are a few limitations of the study which are explored below:

Given the restriction on the movement of the people, the telephonic interviews were conducted with the participants, and therefore, the children who did not have mobile phones/ telephones could not be included in the study.

Since the snowball sampling technique was used to recruit the participants for the study, it is plausible that the sample does not completely reflect the targeted population.

Notwithstanding the limitations of the study, the study will contribute in understanding the specific challenges and problems which children with blindness face in the pursuance of their studies during COVID-19. The study will help the educators, parents of children with blindness and policy makers regarding what can be done in order to make education more meaningful and accessible to children with blindness during COVID-19.

COVID-19 and children with blindness

Education is arguably the most important contributor in human development and has a transformative effect, not only for the individual, but also for the whole society. The quality of education provided and the reach of effective education to various groups, i.e. persons with disabilities (PwDs), girls/women, members of Scheduled Castes (SCs), members of Scheduled Tribes (STs), persons from economically and socially backward classes and other historically disadvantaged people , determines the positive outcomes that education can have in the given society. Children with disabilities have historically been excluded from the educational opportunities, hence, the literacy among persons with disabilities remains low. According to the Census of India (2011), there were 45% persons with disabilities who were illiterate, compared to the 26% illiteracy among Indians. The government of India has taken various measures from time-to-time to make education accessible to children with disabilities. For instance, India enacted the erstwhile Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995, which provided for free education to children with disabilities. Under the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009, children with disabilities, just like other children, have a right to free and compulsory education. An amendment to the RTE Act 2009 in 2012

[7] Mainstream/regular schools are those where children with and without disabilities study together in one classroom in inclusive setting.

[8] Those schools where children with a disability or children with multiple disabilities study are called "special schools". For instance, a school for children with blindness.

included the children with disabilities in the category of disadvantaged children. In 2016, the government of India repealed the PwD Act 1995 and enacted Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act 2016, which provides for the right to free education to children with disabilities from the age of 6 till the child attains the age of 18. Furthermore, the Act provides that a child has the right to obtain education either in a special school or in a mainstream school of his/her choosing. National Policy for Children (2013) also reaffirms the commitments – affirmative, legislative and financial – of governments towards children including children with disabilities.

Despite the legislative and policy framework for the education of children with disabilities, they continue to face significant barriers in pursuing their education (UNESCO, 2019). "Significant gaps, therefore, remain, even though successive government schemes and programs have brought large numbers of children with disabilities into schools" (ibid). For instance, the physical environment being largely inaccessible to persons/children with disabilities, societal attitude continuing to be negative, inadequate funding for the education of children with disabilities, lack of information to the parents of children with disabilities and untrained teachers are some of the main barriers to the effective education of children with disabilities (Singhal, 2009; 2013). COVID-19 has created many problems for the education of children with disabilities in general, and for children with blindness in particular.

Access to study material and writing tools during COVID-19

There are a number of issues which children with blindness are facing during COVID-19 in furthering their studies effectively and efficiently. For instance, very few students are able to obtain the textbooks and other study material in an accessible format. 4 out of 20 participants interviewed for this study reported to have the required study material for this academic year. There are various barriers in obtaining the study material in an accessible and preferred format. For instance, children with blindness studying in special schools, and sometimes children who are studying in the mainstream schools used to get books in Braille format, but due to the closure of schools, they are unable to procure the Braille books. Most of the children studying in special schools use to reside in the campus of the schools itself. Since the schools are closed and students are back at their homes, they no longer have access to the Braille books. One student of class 12th studying in the special school said, “I have board exams this year. I am currently at my home and do not have Braille books with me so unable to focus on my studies as I prefer Braille books over any other alternate format of books - audio books and e-text.” He further adds, “Had I known that this school closure would last this much longer, I would have taken at least some Braille books with me so that I would have at least something to read at my home”.

Other children studying in special schools or those students who get the access to the Braille books also expressed similar preference for Braille books over any other format. For instance, another student of special school studying in class 11th said, "although I sometimes use audio books as well for my studies, I always read Braille books alongside them, otherwise I feel sleepy by just listening to audio books”. It is not just that students are unable to read in the absence of Braille books, there are also some associated challenges in the absence of them. "My classes are happening online and teachers sometimes give homework and ask us to submit the same through WhatsApp voice notes or any other medium, but since I do not have Braille books at my home, I find it difficult to do the given work as I do not have anything to read or refer to", said one student of class 10th.

The issue is not just limited to the access to Braille books. Some special schools also provide the books in large print for the benefit of low vision students. Since the schools are closed, they are also unable to procure the same from the school/institution. For instance, one student studying in 11th class in special school informed, "I am a student with low-vision, so I need books in large-print. The school/institute used to provide me the same but due to the closure of school owing to the spread of COVID-19, I am unable to procure the books in large print from the school.” She further added, "large-print books are not available in the book stores and I cannot read the normal printed books as it puts strain on my eyes”. "If the school is closed for long and I do not get the books in large-print, I fear I might get behind

from my classmates in the studies", she further added. Apart from the access to Braille and large-print books for those studying in special schools, children with blindness studying in mainstream schools have also not been able to procure the textbooks for this academic year. A girl studying in mainstream school in 12th class said, "I am a person with low vision and I need normal printed books, but I am unable to procure the same so far because my family is facing some financial issues resulting from COVID-19 induced lock-down and restrictions." Another participant who studies in mainstream school and resides in the hostel run by a non-governmental organisation (NGO) said, "my organisation used to provide me audio books for my course, but this time as I am away from my organisation at my home, I could not get the study material."

Although it is difficult to procure Braille books locally, there are various online platforms such as Bookshare[9], Sugamya Pustakalaya[10] and the website of National Council of Education, Research and Training (NCERT), from where children can download the textbooks in audio and e-text formats. But surprisingly, very few students were aware of such online facilities. For instance, only 2 out of 10 students studying in special schools were aware about such online platforms. One of them who is studying in class 12th said, " I have heard about such online facilities, but frankly, I have never used them. In fact, I do not know how to use them". Further, none of the 10 students studying in mainstream schools interviewed for this research were aware about such online facilities. In fact, one student studying in 9th class reacted when she was told about such facilities, "it is great that such facilities are available online from where I can download the text books as well as other study material. Why do they (teachers) not tell us about such facilities?" There could be various reasons as to why children are not aware of such online facilities: (I) before the COVID-19 pandemic, children could easily get text books in an accessible format, either provided by their school/institution or arranged by them, and therefore, they might have not felt any need to know about the alternate mediums to get the same; (II) teachers are themselves not aware of such facilities, and hence, cannot inform children about such facilities; (III) generally, there is low internet literacy among children with disabilities, and children with blindness in particular;(IV) the access to internet is itself a challenge in India and it becomes a bigger challenge for persons with blindness, owing to the inaccessible digital infrastructure and the cost associated with accessing the internet.

Apart from the unavailability of study material in an accessible and preferred format, most of the students who were residing in the hostels and who have now gone back to their homes also do not have equipment or tools to write Braille such as the Braille slate, stylus and braille paper. These equipment/tools are locally unavailable and can be found only in big cities or where there are schools for the blind. For instance, one student said, "like other students, I also did not carry Braille slate, Braille paper or stylus with me back home, but I am lucky that I reside in Delhi and my parents could procure these things easily for me from one institution for the blind." The importance of Braille writing tools for the blind can be gaged from the fact that most of the students agreed that if they had known that COVID-19 would force the school closure for so long, they would have taken their Braille writing tools with them. Furthermore, out of all the participants interviewed for this study, only one student possesses a laptop. All the other students either write in Braille or low vision students write in print. In the absence of any writing tools, students are facing challenges in making notes and doing homework. For instance, one student studying in class 10th said, "I find it difficult to complete the homework because I do not have anything to write. Teachers ask us to record the given assignment in our voices and send it to them over WhatsApp or any other platform. Since I do not have Braille tools with me, neither can I take notes while listening to teachers' lectures, nor I can write down anything for my reference while I am recording my homework." The unavailability of writing tools not only presents immediate problems, but has repercussions for this academic year as well. For instance, one student studying in 12th class

[9] Bookshare® (https://www.bookshare.org/) is an online accessible library for persons with print disabilities such as visual impairment, severe dyslexia, and cerebral palsy. The registered users can download the available content in accessible format and read the same on various devices.

[10] Sugamya Pustakalaya is an online platform of accessible books for persons with print disabilities.

having board exams this academic year said, "although the government has reduced the syllabus for this academic year, but I do not have writing tools with me which means I cannot prepare notes for my future use. This means that I will have to work very hard once schools reopen." Other students also expressed similar apprehensions regarding the unavailability of Braille writing tools and the future consequences it may have for this academic year.

Issues associated with online education during COVID-19

Since the closure of schools, the schools and various governments i.e. the Central government and state governments have taken various measures to continue school education in the country. The Government of India and various state governments are broadcasting educational content through television channels, radio stations and community radio. Some state governments also provide educational content and instructions, using online video-sharing platforms such as YouTube. Apart from the steps taken by the various governments, schools and teachers have also taken various measures to continue the teaching-learning process. For example, the classes have moved online and teachers are imparting education online through various platforms such as Google Meet, Zoom, Google Classroom, Microsoft Team, etc. In circumstances where it is difficult to take online classes, other measures such as sending study material, giving homework and providing appropriate instructions using instant messaging apps such as WhatsApp, Telegram etc. have been considered. Apart from this, the help of text messages and personal mobile/telephone calls is also taken when all the above-mentioned measures do not work.

Although most of the teaching is done using online conferencing platforms, the accessibility of such platforms remains a huge challenge for children with blindness (Rising Flame and Sightsavers, 2020). Further, the devices required to access such online platforms and the technical know-how to use them is another challenge altogether. Sensory and tactile inputs are impossible to provide online, and in the absence of such inputs for the children who require them, there can be an adverse impact on the education of such children. For instance, it is almost impossible to give them instructions online to the children who are learning reading and writing Braille. Similarly, those students who have just started learning mathematics may also find it difficult to learn online without any physical interaction. For instance, one of the main tools to teach mathematics to children with blindness during early childhood and primary education is abacus. It is difficult to deliver online instructions to such children. The teaching of abacus requires sensory interaction. In the absence of required support for such children, their education may suffer a big setback and they may lose precious time in their journey of educational advancement.

Video-sharing platforms such as You tube are also utilised by the governments to provide education and to give instructions relating to the lessons to children. For instance, Directorate of Education, Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi, is broadcasting the content based on the class 12th syllabus for the benefit of children through its YouTube channel. The content and instructions are not always accessible to children with blindness. One student of class 12th said, "sometimes, the educator uses the visual aids while teaching and keep on referring to them during the online class. I cannot understand the whole content since the educator/teacher sometimes does not explain the visual content for the benefit of those who find it difficult to see and understand such content."

One of the preferred ways to impart education during COVID-19 is to deliver the study material over any online service. For example, teachers are sending study material over instant messaging apps, but the material is not always accessible to children with blindness. For instance, the content could be in unreadable formats such as images, unformatted/badly formatted documents and hand written text. These kinds of files are not accessible to children with blindness who use a screen reading software on their mobile phones/computers. For instance, one student of class 8th studying in mainstream school and who uses screen reader on her phone complained, "although teachers are providing us the study material, I cannot access most of the material because the material is either in hand written text or in image format. The screen reader on my phone does not recognize and read such text." Not only children who use screen reading software are facing such difficulties in accessing the study material, but children with low-vision are also experiencing

such issues. If the quality of the document is not good and the text is not clearly legible, children with low vision find it difficult to read the same. One student of class 12th studying in mainstream school said, "my teachers keep sending me the study material on WhatsApp but I find it difficult to read most of them because the material is either hand written or scanned images of some text. It is difficult for me to read such text on my mobile phone because it puts extra strain on my eyes and I experience head ache if I read for long on my phone".

The students are also facing difficulties in obtaining education in vocational subjects such as physical education, music etc. One student studying in class 12th having vocal music as a subject said, "although we are having our music class on Google Meet and teacher is trying to help us out, it is difficult to learn subjects like music online and that too without any instrument to practice with at home." Another student of class 11th having vocal music as a subject said, "we are having online music class but I am not comfortable in singing alone, I prefer to learn by singing in group but that is not possible online because everyone does not have good internet connection." Not only this, students having music instrumental are facing more severe problems as they do not have those instruments at home and they cannot practice what has been taught to them in the online class. A student said, "I am learning Sitar as part of my music instrumental course. Without an instrument (in this case, Sitar) there is no use of online class, at least in music, because I cannot practice what I have been taught." Another student of class 12th having physical education as a subject said, "I have board exams this year and physical education has 70% component of practical examination. Since classes have turned to online, nothing much has been taught in physical education. I fear if the situation does not normalise soon and classes continue in online mode, my result can be impacted because of physical education".

Conclusion

It is clear from the above discussion that children with blindness are facing various difficulties in pursuing their studies during the COVID-19 pandemic. The difficulties range from the unavailability of study material in accessible and preferred formats to the unavailability of Braille writing tools to untrained teachers in distance mode education to the difficulties in pursuing vocational subjects such as music, physical education, computer etc. in which practical plays a crucial role.

So far, the government has not come up with guidelines regarding how to teach children with blindness during COVID-19. The government should formulate expert guidelines to teach children with blindness and make them applicable across the country allowing state governments to make suitable modifications according to the local conditions and prevailing circumstances. Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) and civil society can play a crucial role in assisting the children with disabilities/ blindness in the pursuit of their education during the closure of schools. The organisations that can assist and support children with disabilities/ blindness should be identified by the local administration and appropriate training should be imparted using digital platforms.

Most of the teachers are trained in teaching the children in physical classrooms and they are not equipped with any proper training or information regarding how to teach the children online in distance education mode. Furthermore, most of them are also not trained to use various digital teaching aids and appliances. The government should train all the teachers through various modes in teaching the children through distance mode education, using different technological tools and appliances. The teachers who are teaching children with disabilities in general, and children with blindness in particular, should also be trained in using the various assistive technology available to teach such children. Moreover, children with disabilities, including children with blindness should also be informed about the different assistive technology available for them in the market. There are various online digital platforms that are available where a lot of study material is available in an accessible and easy-to-use format. The children should be informed about these online digital platforms with proper training, guidance and demonstrations about using such platforms for accessing the available resources.

There may be many children with blindness who do not own any device such as mobile phone, tablet or laptop to continue their education due to the closure of schools owing to COVID-19. The government should identify such children with the help of schools, local administration and civil

society and should consider providing them the required devices through the Assistance to Disabled persons for purchasing/fitting of aids/ appliances (ADIP) scheme, to enable such children to continue their education during this unprecedented time. Our response during and after COVID-19 will ensure the extent to which we will be able to achieve the sustainable development goals (SDGs). One of the goals of SDG is to achieve equitable and accessible education to all, including children with disabilities.

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Nutrition Garden – A Route to Improve Diet Diversity in the Family Circle: A Lesson from a Field Experience of Bihar

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Abstract

This paper is an attempt to focus on the effects of establishing a nutrition garden or a backyard farm, with other sub-systems, for a regular supply of fresh and leafy green vegetables to the kitchen, thereby increasing diet diversity and reducing the micro-nutrient deficiencies of the family circle. The field experience is taken from a pilot project being implemented by State Rural Livelihood Mission/ JEEViKA in Bihar, with technical support from UNICEF. The pilot project has been implemented in two blocks and eight panchayats of Kasba and Jalalgarh Blocks of the Purnea district of Bihar.

The pilot focus upon three critical components: WHAT, WHY and for WHOM the nutrition garden is essential. It will try to highlight the importance of nutrition gardens and other sub-systems at a family-circle level, thereby increasing the diet diversity in the food plate of the family. It will also demonstrate low-cost recipes from the locally available food items.

Poor diet diversity of <2 food groups, with a large quantity of carbohydrates being consumed, high prevalence of micro-nutrient deficiency, anaemia in the state and in Purnea. There is also a high level of undernutrition in Bihar and Purnea.

The pilot is for those who are at the critical window of opportunity, target groups of the family circle comprise of pregnant women, lactating mothers having children below 2 years of age and adolescent girls (age group of 10-19 years), addressing diet diversity and nutritional micro-nutrient deficiency in the family circle.

The pilot has been designed on the basis of randomised control trial methodology over a period of four years. The surveys were conducted based on the tools designed, both qualitative and quantitative. The project has already completed its four-year cycle and is scheduled for the end-line findings.

The field-level experiences of the practitioners carrying out the practice of nutrition garden and the other sub-systems and getting benefits have been taken into consideration. At some point of time, it is also seen that after the self-consumption in the family circle, the produce also goes to the market and contributes towards raising the economic status of the family, thereby increasing the purchasing power and establishing food security for the family.

Keywords: *Nutrition, diet diversity, JEEViKA, adolescent girls, POSHAN ABHIYAN*

Background

Bihar, as per the data, is one of the most populated states of India, with 100 million [11]people living in the state. It is the third most populous state, with a population density of 1106 people living per square kilometre. The burden of undernutrition in the state is no less, with an average of 48.3%, and 51.8% in Purnea. Similarly, is the case of Anaemia, Bihar has 47.8 % and Purnea has 67.7% of cases. When it comes to the percentage of cases of Anaemia in the age group of 15-49-year-old women, the overall percentage in Bihar is 60.4%, whereas in Purnea it is 58.0 %.

The pilot project was designed to provide enough scope to women and adolescent girls, by engaging them through community-meeting cycles whenever they sat for their monthly contribution of the SHG. The adolescent girls were also engaged through a separate cadre for nutritional messaging during the meeting.

Intervention

[11] The data presented in the paragraph is from the census of India – 2011. NFHS -4 and CNNS survey conducted in 2018, fact sheet for Bihar.

A baseline study was conducted by the International Institute of Population Sciences, Mumbai, in the year 2016, to understand the actual status of diet diversity and the feeding habits of the family circle with different age groups of women (15-49 years). The midline of the pilot was also conducted in the year 2018, to understand the trends in the interventions carried out with the women at the family circle level, through the regular messaging on nutrition, practicing nutrition garden and the sub-systems at their backyard. The graphs below will reflect on the improved consumption patterns of various nutrients in the food palate of the family circle among the target groups (pregnant and lactating mothers with less than U2 children, and adolescents in the age group of 10-19 years).

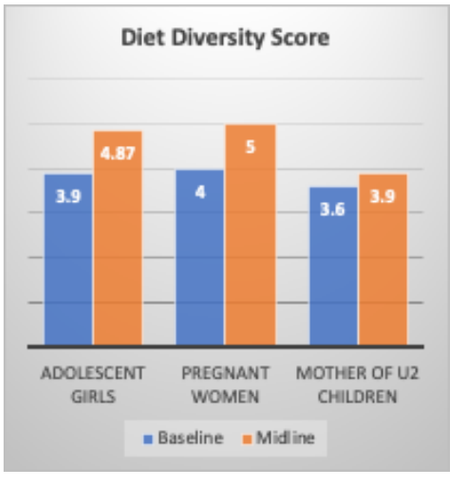


Figure 1: Diet Diversity Score of Target Groups

The above graph -1[12] shows a significant increase in the diet diversity score of the Target Groups as the diversity score in adolescent girls increased from 3.9 to 4.87, whereas in the pregnant women, there is an increase of one more food group in the food plate of the family circle.

The analysis of the graph-2 shows the different kinds of food groups eaten by the target groups, such as animal protein eaten from the backyard, poultry, eggs, meat, green leafy vegetables, lemons, fruits and the pulses from the nutrition garden, revealing that there is an increase in the consumption patterns of different food groups as they have been incorporated into the food plate of the family circle. Regarding the intake of pulses, the cropping pattern in the Purnea district is different as very few farmers grow pulses and generally people buy them from the market. Recently, the prices of the pulses in the local market have increased, thereby making a purchase for the vulnerable population difficult, and therefore we see very insignificant change in the consumption pattern of pulses across the target groups.

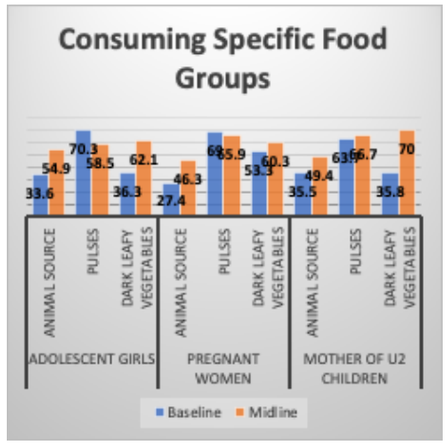
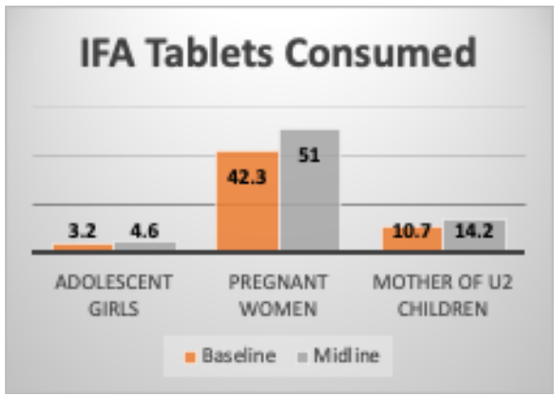


Figure 2: Consumption of specific food groups by target groups

Graph-3 reflects upon the Iron and Folic Acid (IFA) tablet consumption, in comparison to all the target groups of the pilot. The tablet is supplied at the VHSND sites or at the Arogya Diwas organised at the AWC in the village. The focus of the pilot and the government was on pregnant women, as a part of the 1K days life cycle approach. So, there is a rise in the consumption of the IFA tablets in pregnant women. The Weekly Iron Folic Acid Supplementation (WIFS) program for in and out-of-school going adolescent girls by the government started late in Bihar; it was launched in August 2019. Due to behavioural aspects, lactating mothers do not consume IFA tablets. However, the pilot project worked to overcome this barrier and hence there has been some increase in consumption.



[12] The reference to the graph can be seen from the table in annexure -1

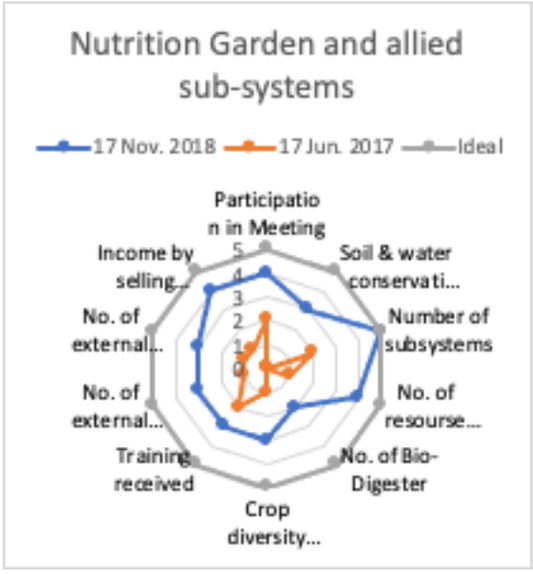
Figure 3: IFA consumption pattern among the target groups

Across every age group we see an increasing trend, whether it is on diet diversity score, consuming specific food groups, or on micro-nutrient supplementation. The increase is due to the varied activities carried out with women and adolescent girls. The intervention was in the form of messaging on nutrition, diet diversity and recipe demonstration by SHG members who were trained for it. Another factor is the development of the nutrition garden along with sub-systems and support of the cadres of SRLM's. Teachings were given on the diversification of diet and preservation of food. The meetings were in the form of awareness and various sessions on health and nutrition. The screenings of the nutritional at-risk category of target groups was carried out at the Village Health Sanitation and Nutrition Day[13] (VHSND) sites on Arogya Diwas, by the Auxiliary Nurse Midwife (ANM).

Maize is found in abundance in this part of Bihar and it grows throughout the season. It is considered as a cash crop because of huge storage warehouses store maize and then sell it to the food processing unit. Through the training by the SHG, women have learnt to make various food products, such as postik ladoos', snacks and jalebee. These items were mixed with supplemental nutri–mix and other ingredients of different food groups to make it more nutrient-rich. These are consumed by pregnant, lactating women and adolescent girls of the family circle. The ladoos are sold to pregnant and lactating mothers in and around the family circle locally on demand and they fetch money.

Case study

Sushma devi, a resident of the Jalalgarh Block of the Purnea district, was one to develop nutritional garden and its sub-systems. There were five sub-systems along with the nutrition garden. The sub-systems include backyard poultry, bio-digester, aqua-culture, fruit trees and birds. The web- diagram[14] given below was performed by Sushama devi in the field over a



period of one-year from November 2017 to November 2018.

The intervention of the nutrition garden and its allied sub-systems has shown results, as the graph shows that there has been an increase in the overall aspects. The family circle has introduced backyard poultry in the form of chicken and ducks to consume meat and eggs. They also developed vermi-compost pits to make organic compost for the nutrition garden. They introduced new crop varieties in the nutrition garden, such as French beans, broccoli, different varieties of spinach and seasonal oyster mushrooms. Plants like drumstick/moringa and lemon not only provide the required dose of nutrition to the body, but also fetch money when reach the market. The family also introduced bird's pigeon and quail for meat and eggs. A small pond owned by the family in the village transformed into a site of aqua-culture and various fishes like Rehu, Katla and cat fish were introduced.

When the activity was presented to the family, they had very little knowledges to use the land in an optimum manner. The different trainings imparted to the SHG women made this possible. The family is now earning an average of INR 5K, after self-consumption in the family circle. The intervention has benefitted the family circle in many ways by increasing the diet diversity, increase in consumption of various specific food

[13] VHSND – Village health sanitation and nutrition day is an activity that is organised once in a month at the Aaganwadi centre (AWC) to provide different kinds of health services to women, adolescent girls and children. This activity is being organised as a convergence modal between the various government departments, especially Health and Social Welfare department at the ICDS. It is a way to provide services to the target groups at their doorsteps by the Government.

[14] Web diagram- is a participatory tool used in the field, directly with the project participants to analyse the changes or trends in the changes happening over a period of time and then by plotting the same based on the desired indicators we get the changes happened on a five-point scale.

groups, especially meat, fish and seasonal green leafy vegetables. The enhanced knowledge and skills led to a better use of resources, such as turning waste from the sub-systems into dry leaves, and converting excreta and fodder into organic manure and pesticides. The extra income of the family circle brought food security, enhanced the livelihood of the family and increased their purchasing power that reduced their dependency on outside foods.

Conclusion

The crux of the intervention is that even less resources can yield good results, if you are aware of the know-how and its usage. This awareness can keep your family circle healthy and improve the quality of life. The nutrition garden has been widely supported by the SRLM/ JEEViKA through its cadres in the villages with the SHG's. It has also been seen that through POSHAN ABHIYAN's innovation funds, several AWCs in association with the regional Krishi Vigyan Kendras, have developed nutrition gardens at the AWCs. The pilot project area also witnessed 40 such AWCs with nutrition gardens to support the nutrition and well-being of the women living in the family circle.

An alternate model for the people who are landless can involve growing a few of the creeper plants using a gunny bag and tying the plant to the thatched roof to climb and bear fruits. This also provides seasonal green vegetables to the plate of family.

There have been multiple benefits of the nutrition garden as apart from providing a good nutrition dose of various food groups, the garden also has the potential to introduce many different varieties of crops and vegetables. Furthermore, it also paves way for the excess produce to the market and enhances the scope of livelihood for the family circle.

The whole world is facing a crisis situation due to the global pandemic of COVID-19, and India is no different. Even in the crisis state of lockdown and restricted movement, keeping and maintaining the required nutrition and diet diversity in the plate of the members of the family circle nutrition garden is a good option.

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Annexure- 1

Sl. No.	Key Indicators	Baseline	Midline
1	**Diet Diversity**		
1.1	AG's mean diet diversity Score (DDS)	3.9	4.87
2	**Adolescent girls consuming food from specific food groups**		
2.1	Animal-source food (meat, poultry, fish and egg) (%)	33.6	54.9
2.2	Pulses (beans, peas and lentils) and nuts or seeds (%)	70.3	58.5
2.3	Dark green leafy vegetables and other vitamin A, C & Fe -rich fruits and vegetables (%)	36.3	62.1
3	**Adolescent girls by number of food groups consumed**		
3.1	Adolescent girls with minimum DDS (5 or more out of 10) (%)	31.8	56.6
4	**Micro-nutrient supplementation**		
4.1	IFA tablets consumed	3.2	4.6
5	**Pregnant women Diet Diversity**		
5.1	Pregnant women's mean Dietary Diversity Score (DDS)	4.0	5.0
6	**Pregnant women consuming food from specific food groups**		
6.1	Animal-source food (meat, poultry, fish and egg) (%)	27.4	46.3
6.2	Pulses (beans, peas and lentils) and nuts or seeds (%)	69.0	65.9
6.3	Dark green leafy vegetables and other vitamin A, C & Fe -rich fruits and vegetables (%)	53.3	60.3
7	**Pregnant women by number of food groups consumed**		
7.1	Pregnant women with minimum DDS (5 or more out of 10) (%)	13.6	13.6
8	**Micro-nutrient supplementation**		
8.1	IFA tablets consumed	42.3	42.3
9	**Mother of U2 Children's**		
9.1	Mother of U2 Children's mean Dietary Diversity Score (DDS)	3.6	3.6
10	**Mother of U2 Children's mean consuming food from specific food groups**		
10.1	Animal-source food (meat, poultry, fish and egg) (%)	35.5	49.4
10.2	Pulses (beans, peas and lentils) and nuts or seeds (%)	63.7	66.7
10.3	Dark green leafy vegetables and other vitamin A, C & Fe -rich fruits and vegetables (%)	35.8	70.0
11	**Mother of U2 Children's mean by number of food groups consumed**		
11.1	Mother of U2 Children's mean with minimum DDS (5 or more out of 10) (%)	8.5	8.5
12	**Micro-nutrient supplementation**		
12.1	IFA tablets consumed	10.7	14.2

COVID 19 and The Magnified Learning Crisis

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Abstract

COVID-19 has thrown educations systems across the globe out of gear. This is when India and several countries are already in the grip of a learning crisis for over two decades. Children especially girls from marginalised background have also faced challenges in education continuity which require digital connectivity. Countries across the globe are adopting a host of strategies to combat the crisis. It is pertinent that India designs its own inclusive and equitable home grown solutions to face a protracted crisis like COVID-19 that threatens to turn back decades of advancement through pro education policies and programmes.

Keywords: *Covid-19, Learning Crisis, Curriculum, Teacher, Technology in Education*

COOVID 19 and the magnified learning crisis

Today we are living in what is potentially one of the greatest threats in our lifetime to global education, a gigantic educational crisis. School closures have left millions of children out of school, and as we learned with Ebola, once schooling is interrupted, there is a real risk that children will not return to school. Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, more than 320 million children and youth in 132 countries are out of school. This is 59.9 percent of the total enrolled learners in the world[15]. From amongst those out of school, marginalised girls are more at risk than boys of dropping out of school altogether following school closures. Data[16] from the Ebola epidemic in Sierra Leone estimates that approximately 743 million girls are out of school due to the COVID 19 crisis.

Learning Crisis a lived reality - For almost two decades, education systems around the world have been grappling with a learning crisis as many students in school were not learning the fundamental skills that are needed for life. The World Bank's "Learning Poverty" indicator – the % of children who cannot read and understand at age 10 – stood at 53% of children in low- and middle-income countries – before the COVID 19 outbreak started.

We stare at a future where the pandemic further worsens these outcomes even more if we do not act fast. Moreover, countries like India have very unequal education systems, and these negative impacts will be felt disproportionately by children from the bottom of the socio-economic stratum. Children in India are far more susceptible to struggle in such a situation with the insufficient financing for education, especially to support schools, teachers and students to fight re-emergence of the virus and to stay safe from the indirect effects of further outbreaks. In the wake of the global pandemic that we face today, the immediate impact on children and youth is a loss in learning and increased dropouts. Teachers are without the knowhow and experience of using digital skills, parent's involvement in children's education process is minimal and sporadic, and the government is also grappling with gaps and challenges in connectivity, hardware, integration of digital tools in the curriculum and teacher's readiness in using technology effectively.

Beginning the school year late has completely disrupted the lives of many children, their parents, and teachers. A low-income country like India has vast inequalities in terms of educational opportunities available for children from different socio-economic backgrounds. The pandemic has amplified these inequalities to have an even larger negative impact on children's learning levels. The first reaction of the Indian Government to this crisis is providing distance learning. There are several government agencies and private players offering online tutoring classes hurriedly launched to coincide

15 https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse

16 Ebola: beyond the health emergency. Summary of research into the consequences of the Ebola outbreak for children and communities in Liberia and Sierra Leone, Plan International, February 2015

with the school calendar year. But they act as fillers in the absence of face-to-face classroom learning. The media of transmission comprises different online platforms[17].

The International Telecommunication Union, UN's internet and telecoms agency, estimates that around 54% of the global population - or 4.1 billion people - use the internet. But only one in five people in the least developed countries are online. Data collated by World Economic Forum (2019) reveals that, in India, 75 percent population does not have a smartphone and only 40 percent have a mobile phone. Technology is yet to penetrate remote areas, and thereby relying exclusively on it would imply that we fail to reach the most marginalised children and their families. Alternative means (paper-based resources) require resources and political will which are yet to gain acceptance in India.

Furthermore, school closures have impacted social relationships and peer-to-peer interactions. The role of parents and families becomes critical in this scenario - a role they are ill prepared to play with the low education levels and economic and social distress caused by the pandemic. Support through some of the most common communication media (Radio, TV, SMS messages) is the minimal requirement in staying connected. Schools also provide children with their most nutritious meal of the day. The mid-day meal programme, essential for cognitive development and well-being of children, stands suspended in the wake of school closures.

Information about the likely path of the pandemic changes day by day, influenced by the uncertainty around which mitigation measures India is taking. The process of reopening of schools might be the last step the government takes as authorities will want to reduce agglomeration or the possibility of a second wave of the pandemic. If the reopening of schools is delayed, India needs to adhere to the Guidance for COVID-19 Prevention and Control in Schools and ensure to not use them as temporary health facilities. This will avoid the risk of contamination and delayed return to school. The mission of education systems is to overcome the learning crisis we were already living in and to respond to the pandemic that we are all facing. The challenge today is to try and reduce the negative impact that this pandemic will have on learning and schooling, and to build on this experience to get back on a path of faster improvement in learning.

A structured rapid assessment through tele-calling methodology is effective to gather information to design a response strategy[18]. The database can facilitate learning during lockdown and a recovery phase for parents, School Management Committees, and teachers. Disseminating COVID-19 related messages on social distancing, handwashing and ways of engaging with children, especially through SMCs, is important. During the recovery phase, there should be a *"Safe Return to Schools"* campaign focused on adherence to social distancing norms, and by supporting local bodies in disinfection of these spaces[19].

Common communication points (religious institutes and public distribution spaces) in community will have to be leveraged to display signage. Traditional mediums of communication such as community radio system, spreading messages through mobile units having audio-video system, need to be tapped into. The resources will also be cascaded to parents through frontline workers. During such an emergency, a child's normal protective support gets eroded and increases the risk of diverse and newer problems, and also amplifies preexisting problems (disruption of social networks, limited learning material, no access to friends, too much exposure to social media, and negative news, difficultly in adjusting in the course of events), including parents' inability to cope with children's behavior and reaction during the emergencies and recovery phase[20].

Planned family and intergenerational learning activities in education response and recovery period could contribute substantially to ensure

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[17] The Diksha National Teachers Platform for India by NCTE, for example, provides quality teaching learning and assessment resources. Teachers can also create their own content and upload it on the portal. The NROERs by NCERT are repository of freely available open resources for different subjects and grades.

[18] Digital Policy for a Lockdown: How Tech Can Help Us Adapt to a Radically Altered World, Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, April 2020

[19] Guidelines for Safe Return to Schools, State Education Department, Government of Karnataka, 2020

[20] Save Our Education, Protect every child's right to learn in the COVID-19 response and recovery, Save the Children, 2020

the quality of learning continuity as well as creating a literate environment at home and in communities in the long run. Countries are making use of a rich body of resources to sustain family learning by putting together useful open resources. Families in Schools Foundation in the United States has a dedicated webpage to COVID-19 resources, which also includes activities for children with special needs. The National Agency for Adult Literacy in Ireland has created a website with practical ideas for parents of children aged up to 12. In Australia, an online learning platform has been created for parents and caregivers to learn how to support children's learning at home. These resources greatly support families at a time when most countries globally have switched to a digital mode of education during the pandemic.

Take-home learning packages can contribute to reducing inequalities in access. To address the digital gap, countries such as Mauritania and Jamaica, have provided families with take-home learning packages, which include learning materials, play kits and practical guidance for parents[21]. Similarly, family literacy providers in Gambia distribute existing learning resource packages to families and, on request, provide one-to-one guidance to families in need.

The use of TV and radio, supported by media campaigns and guidance for parents, constitutes an effective tool to reach families[22]: In countries where comprehensive family-learning programmes did not previously exist, there is a growing recognition among policy-makers, providers and communities that families and parents play an important role in the implementation of remote learning programmes when broadcast through TV or radio or provided online. Some countries have already started integrating explicit instructions for parental engagement in their COVID-19 education responses. For instance, Kyrgyzstan has launched a public campaign on the reading family, in addition to the embedded daily instructions to parents to support their children's homework that are broadcast through TV programmes[23]. In Gambia, where basic and secondary education is provided through platforms such as TV and radio, parents are given instructions on how to monitor their children's learning at home as well as to communicate with teachers, regional education directorates and heads of school in order to have access to reading and learning resources[24].

In Senegal, through a UNESCO project, learning modules were provided through television, to support parents in teaching young children and also improve to parenting skills[25]. Combining adult literacy programmes with family learning strategies is necessary to reach the most disadvantaged homes. Solutions for parental engagement in children's home-based remote learning need to consider the learning needs of adults as well. For example, in Canada, online adult literacy programmes are offered along with family learning programmes[26]. Social media constitutes a powerful media channel for informal learning, and family and intergenerational learning happens informally as well. For instance, family members engage in reading storybooks, play fun activities and games, and tell stories. Health-related knowledge and skills are passed on to families and communities informally in countries such as the Philippines, where families use online chat groups through social media to post and exchange information[27]. Under the current lockdown, these types of informal learning practices complement remote school learning as well as build on existing knowledge and learning practices at homes and in communities.

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21 Children in a Digital World, State of the World's Children 2017

22 The role of mass media in facilitating community education and child abuse prevention strategies, Bernadette J. Saunders and Chris Goddard, NCPC Issues No. 16 — June 2002

23 Putting the 'learning' back in remote learning Issue brief, Office of Global Insight and Policy Andaleeb Alam and Priyamvada Tiwari, UNICEF, June 2020

24 How countries are using edtech (including online learning, radio, television, texting) to support access to remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, World Bank, August 2020

25 COVID 19: Senegal intends to ensure #LearningNeverStops, unesco.org

26 Family Literacy Programmes, Training, and Services, Canada, UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, June 2012

27 Children in a Digital World, State of the World's Children 2017

Each of the efforts discussed above are, however, only a drop in the ocean as every child has a right to quality and continuous education, irrespective of emergencies. One must also not undermine the fact that caregivers feel stressed and burdened to play with children during and post emergencies, and thus need psycho-social counselling and peer support. Stimulation needs to be given to parents on having a positive role in child's life, socialising with peers to communicate and mitigate immediate challenges. These steps are critical to ensure 'zero' loss of learning for children, more so during emergencies, and India still has a long way to go.

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Emerging role of "Teachers" and "Community" in school education during COVID-19 emergency for effective teaching learning experience

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Abstract

In the C0VID-19 context, education has failed to factor in the need for integrating community knowledge in building a resilient school system. Secondly, digital education is reducing education to a mere exchange of information. Without dialogue and engagement, remote learning loses education of its main meaning and purpose. Teaching learning experience through this mode reinforces traditional rote learning without connecting to the world view and lived experiences of teachers and students. In this manner, education becomes a hollow ritual and challenges the basic premise of free and compulsory quality education to all. Thirdly, role of community and their involvement in making education participatory and democratic is also getting challenged due to the COVID-19 situation The concern in this situation is meeting the purpose of public education for responsible citizenship. Children of migrant workers and other marginalised groups not to mention will bear the brunt in a big way and may add to the already huge number of out of school children. What is required now is building a resilient school system rekindling the role of teachers and community not only for school education but for the entire community.

Keyword: *Teacher, Community, COVID-19, Teaching Learning experiences*

Introduction

COVID-19 has become more of a humanitarian emergency and not just a health emergency. Social life has been transformed, even militarised, by new regimes of social distancing, face masks, self-isolation, alternative handshakes etc. States of emergency have been declared in many leading democracies ostensibly to protect the elderly, despite creating a range of other problems. What at first seemed possible only in a dictatorship has now become normalised in constitutional democracies everywhere (Delanty, 2020). Closing schools has been one of the preventives Covid-19 response measures. Such measures magnify the already-existing disparities within the education system. India has a significant number of children out of school, of which the majority belongs to vulnerable section of the population. The drop-out rate is high among SC/ST and girls. Owing to the digital divide, many children have minimal or no access to online learning. Furthermore, the pandemic-induced crisis of migrant parents may lead to the loss of education of children, and girls will be more vulnerable to the discontinuation of education owing to societal pressure of focusing on domestic work and early marriage. The risk of children falling prey to child labour and trafficking may also increase. Thus, the task of securing quality education for all and ensuring that the most vulnerable are not excluded in the 'new normal' in post COVID- 19 India is daunting.

Role of teacher and community for Quality in Education: A theoretical perspective

Education has an integral link to democratic practice. It seeks to give autonomy to the learner and her participation in the learning process. It wants the learner to think, interrogate, critique and question, and expects a more egalitarian relation between the teacher and student (Mannheim and Stewart, 1962). With the greater participation of students in the learning process, the incentives upon which learning will be built will tend to move from constraints, external awards like marks, prizes, ranking towards mobilising interest (ibid). Another critical theorist, Paulo Friere (1972), articulates through his writings that the school which we need is not where the teacher only teaches or in which the student only learns and where the principal is the all-powerful commander. On the contrary, the relationship between teacher and students should be such that through educational practice, an

access is established to the way they think, what they perceive, what they know and how they know. The spirit of learning lies in the pursuit of new ideas, skills, knowledge and developing the indigenous knowledge base of the community. Giroux (2010) emphasized on the need of an approach that focuses on creating centres of critical learning and the production of socially engaged citizens.

Recognising the importance of reestablishing school-community relationship, the NCF suggests five guiding principles of curriculum reform: "connecting knowledge to life outside the school, ensuring that learning is shifted away from rote methods, enriching the curriculum to provide for overall development of children rather than remaining textbook centric, making examinations more flexible and integrated with classroom life and nurturing an overriding identity informed by caring concerns within the democratic polity of the country" [NCF 2005: 5]. This was further reinforced through the coming of RTE Act 2009 which brought a normative framework to facilitate universal access, a teaching learning environment in school and basic infrastructure along with trained and educated teachers. In section 29, of the RTE Act 2009, it specifically mention "learning through activities, discovery and exploration in a child-friendly manner". The role of the school and the school itself is not complete without the experiences of transformation through the act of learning. The act of learning conform to the dominant culture or challenge it(Shor, 1986).

The agency of the teacher, community and the leaner/student is critical for an effective learning experience and for quality education as a whole. The outcome of such a learning process is transformative and constructive.

COVID-19 and the emerging role of teachers and community

The temporary closure of schools and confinement at home which came about due to Covid-19 preventive measures has transformed the teaching and learning experiences of children and teachers drastically. Besides the lack of infrastructure, preventive measures like digital education are changing the nature of education. These technological barriers are impacting effective learning as it not always a viable pedagogical option. Access to electricity is crucial for digital education, both for powering devices as well as for connecting to the internet. While the government's Saubhagya scheme to provide electricity to households shows that almost 99.9% of homes India have a power connection, the picture is less luminous if we look at the quality of electricity and the number of hours for which it is available every day. Mission Antyodaya, a nationwide survey of villages conducted by the Ministry of Rural Development in 2017-'18, showed that 16% of India's households received one to eight hours of electricity daily, 33% received 9-12 hours, and only 47% received more than 12 hours a day. While 24% Indians own a smartphone, only 11% of households possess any type of computer, which could include desktop computers, laptops, notebooks, netbooks, palmtops or tablets.

The deficient and limited access to online education will exacerbate the already existing inequalities in education. A factsheet released by RTE Forum in 2019 found that girls are twice less likely as boys to receive 4 years of schooling. 30% of girls from the poorest families have never set foot inside a classroom, and 40% of adolescent girls between ages 15-18 years are not attending any educational institution. There is a risk that these children will be doubly jeopardised in the current digital mode of education. Further children from SC, ST and minority families will also face similar difficulties if education continues in a digital mode. COVID-19 has shown how educational inequalities overlap with other form of inequalities, mostly social and economic. Children of migrant workers will bear the brunt in a big way and may add to the already huge number of out-of-school children. The second major challenge to digital education is reducing education to an exchange of information. Without dialogue and engagement, remote learning deprives education of its main meaning and purpose. Teaching-learning experience through this mode reinforces traditional rote learning without connecting to the world view and lived experiences of teachers and students. In this manner, education becomes a hollow ritual and does not fulfil the basic premise of free and compulsory quality education to all. The third challenge is the role of community and their involvement in making education participatory and democratic. In most cases, an online mode of education promotes individual-centred learning, where the child receives basic

information of the subject taught. The collective spirit of education and social transformation is not possible through this. This defeats the purpose of public education for responsible citizenship.

The challenges have emphasised the critical role played by teachers and the community in making education transformative and universalised. Digital education has reinforced and deepened the already existing inequalities in the country. If the country aims to align itself to the SDGs, particularly SDG 4, in achieving the universalisation of education from pre-school till higher secondary education, digital education cannot provide the solution. The role of the teacher and community is critical for universalising school education in India and for a transformative teaching-learning experience. The following section of the paper makes an attempt to discuss the role under the broad rubrics.

Creating both social and physical access to schools

Access to schools is equivalent to breaking both structural and systemic barriers for children belonging to marginalised families, particularly girls. This has been highlightedby the COVID-19 crisis. Only 12% of households in the poorest countries have internet access at home, and the access to mobile internet is 26% lower for women and girls over their male peers. In India, the gender gap in internet access is substantial. Schools are more than just learning centres for poor children. They provide social protection, nutrition, health and emotional support that offer life security for the most disadvantaged, and this applies to low to high income countries. 9.12 crore children are not receiving school meals during school closure. School meals serve as a safety measure, as economists estimate that 75% of the income is spent on food. Further, the virtualisation of teaching may impact the social relation between peer, teachers, and school and community on the whole. The social class gap between the teachers and students may widen after the school reopens post- disaster. This will prove to be a major hindrance to girls' education.

In the COVID-19 crisis, it is seen that the traditional challenges to access have resurfaced. The narrative towards the universalisation of education and reaffirmation of education as a human right brought a transformation in education towards an innovative teaching learning experience based on co-construction of knowledge. For the first time, the agency of teachers and students and their lived experience was given importance in the teaching-learning process. The RTE Act 2009 and the NCF 2005 was instrumental in this direction. This not only enabled physical access to schools for the girls and other marginalized children, but also led to the recognition of the knowledge of students, communities and their families in the school system. The School Management Committees represented the community, teachers and students in the first level of school monitoring and development process. This proved absolutely critical in the sudden surge in enrolment of children in schools, particularly from marginalized families.

The sudden confinement of children through school closures due to the Covid-19 crisis will raise challenges similar to those prior to the coming of RTE Act 2009. The pandemic has once again shown the overlap of education with the social economic realities of society. The children on the margin will be further marginalised due to the pandemic. In these situations, there is an emerging need of building a strong community led school system, through the agency of the teacher, student and community at large to rebuild social and physical access to schools, especially for children who are at risk of being pushed out of the system.

Dialogue for building linkages

A public good like school should provide public spaces in which diverse individuals have opportunity to debate, deliberate and acquire the know-how to be critical and effective citizens (Giroux 2001, 21). Dialogue and dialogical relation between the teacher and student is the basis of education. Without dialogue, students are disengaged in the school process as they fail to connect these values with their experiences. In the COVID-19 situation, the policy employed to address the educational need of children through digitalization has raised serious doubts in the effective teaching-learning experiences of students and teachers. The virtual community in which the students and teachers interact has led us back to rote learning and symbol interpretation. The subject matter is reduced to centrally prepared worksheets that fail to connect to the milieu of the child and his/her world view,

thus limiting the horizon of learning or any learning at all. Time and again, surveys (mostly done online so the respondents are mostly subjects of study and do nott participate actively in the process of research in such surveys) conducted have shown this limitation.

Integrating Community Knowledge

Integrating community knowledge has an integral link to democratic practice. It is based on the premise of giving more autonomy and participation in the learning process. With greater participation, the school is transformed into a social site for questioning the dominant ideas and knowledge and creating a new system of indigenous knowledge. Local knowledge has been emphasized on several occasions, however if it is not taught in schools, it will not provide the space to articulate and practice it within the school. This is also critical in a disaster situation, as centralised knowledge and resources may not be able to register the local needs for building back better in a resilient manner. This will facilitate the process of building the relationship between teacher and students so that through educational practice, an access is established to the way they think, what they perceive, what they know and how they know. This will further facilitate the process of developing the indigenous knowledge base of the community. Thus creating schooling and learning for democracy begins with creating centres of critical learning and the production of socially engaged citizens.

Teachers and Students are transformative agents

Virtualisation of teaching makes one ask where the agency of students and teachers has disappeared. Or has the changing definition of learning also changed the role of teachers and students? The impact of such a major change is likely to be felt by all children, and doubly by the children on the margins of society. The alternative measures adopted to ensure continuity of education in the light of school closures such as special television programming, radio broadcasting, and virtual and particularly online learning may serve to further marginalise under-privileged learners. This is on account of several factors; firstly, they have fewer educational opportunities outside school, secondly, owing to poverty and social exclusion, their nutrition and health is compromised; thirdly, parents with their limited education and resources cannot facilitate alternative means of ensuring continuity of learning; and fourthly, the lack of access to technology or good internet connectivity prevents access to digital learning (UNESCO)[28]. Due to the unprecedented nature of the COVID-19 pandemic in India, there is little empirical evidence to illustrate the impact on school education, however, frontline workers, civil society and rapid surveys have indicated that it has led to an individualised form of learning, which is reducing education to an information receiving mechanism rather than a transformative tool for social change.

Agency of teachers and the community in school education has been recognized across countries, including India. The NCF (National Curriculum Framework in India 2005) has taken the historic step of re-establishing the close relationship between school and society, and the central role of education in enabling social transformation (Batra, 2005). To address the current crisis in education due to the COVID-19 emergency, of access, lack of dialogue, risk of dropping out, it is extremely important to rekindle the agency of teachers and students for transforming this crisis into opportunity.

Education for transformation

An effective teaching-learning experience is at the centre of making education transformative. Including more online and e-learning options at the school level to make it more technology-oriented[29] may challenge the importance of dialogical relation between the teacher and student. It may also challenge the role that teachers and community play in engaging children in the school as a social site for learning, socialising and expanding their world view for enabling social transformation.

The bigger challenge which lies ahead is the shift in the National Education Policy, which has overlooked not only the previous policies on effective teaching-learning but, also neglected the learning from the COVID-19 crisis. Online education in few months have shown its major shortcomings. It is not only impacting equity in

[28] https://en.unesco.org/news/half-worlds-student-population-not-attending-school-unesco-launches-global-coalition-accelerate

[29] https://theprint.in/india/education/govt-plans-tech-savvy-additions-to-national-education-policy-to-adapt-it-to-covid-reality/432364/

education, but the quality of learning has taken students on a reverse gear to rote learning and symbol interpretation. Conceptual development through ed-tech platforms and apps is an advertising gimmick of a billion-dollar business proposition. In reality, conceptual development without any connection to the experiences of the learners is near impossible. Furthermore, the individualistic notion of learning which is promoted through these mediums also challenges the notion of learning through collective collaborative methods. It also recreates obedience, silence without critical thinking and behavior which leaves little or no scope for questioning the mainstream culture and the production and reproduction of dominant education discourse.

In lieu of a conclusion

The school is a social site, however it is not a neutral institution. School, as pointed out by Gramsci, plays both the role of 'covert' and 'overt coercion' (Gramsci, 1977). This has resurfaced in the COVID-19 emergency, where voices have been curbed and teachers and students have been confined to their private spaces and online education has been created to demonstrate continuity in education on record. Further, teachers have been assigned several non-academic works without any safety measures or equipment for protection from COVID-19. The COVID-19 disruption is normalised in many ways, and interestingly, the National Education Policy which has been passed by the Cabinet, has reinforced it instead of paying heed to the multiple voices of dissent emerging from the ground. In this race for legitimising the new normal, a new common sense is required to counter it so that the deepening inequalities are addressed and redressed. For this, it is important that the role of teachers and community for effective teaching-learning is brought to the core; instead of giving into the business proposition of the Ed-tech companies that want to turn education into a commodity, we need to focus on making education into a right for transformation.

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Sowing the seeds of Feminism through education in rural marginalised adolescent girls in India

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Abstract

Each society has its own norms and stereotypes as well as expectations which largely guide the process of bringing up children and hence their socialisation. This is targeted towards nurturing accepted persona, social and economic roles in the society. The process of socialization in India is extremely complex with the diversity that marks different contexts and the cultural mores existing across the country. However, the basic core remains the same, bounded by our historical ethos and traditional systems, which have lent a distinct identity to the Indian social system.

Keywords: *Feminism, Girls education, Adolescent Girls'*

Introduction

Focused explicitly on women, Feminism is defined as a range of socio-political movements and ideologies that work towards ensuring all rights for women, including their personal rights as well as political, economic and social rights [1]. The thrust of feminism is towards creating equitable opportunities (social, educational and professional) that help women to achieve these rights. In a way, feminism is a movement against gender inequality, especially against women and spells out approaches to address it. The feminist theory refers to constructing viewpoints about sex and gender and particularly focus on being feminine or masculine, reflecting an exemplified and sexually differentiated expression of human beings.

The evolution of feminist viewpoint can be attributed to the west in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, gaining momentum in the seventies. The perspectives related much to the west including issues centered around social, political, legal rights and rights to personal independence, right to abortion, safety and security from violence, including domestic violence, and other types of gender discrimination against women. However, these did not consider the context of women in the other parts of the world.

From the 1990s, the viewpoint was expanded to accommodate the voices of minority women. By this time, feminists argued that it is society that discriminated between men and women They concluded that the recognized differences amongst men and women are changeable. Thus, gender is a social construct, and can be altered and changed if there is intent and will from social and political spheres. They claimed that this is the only way to end the subordination of women.

However, there are several perspectives around the social practices that construct gender, how they do so and what kind of impact they bring on each gender. There is yet to be a consensus on one perspective.

In India, the first and second phase of feminism lasted from mid eighteenth century to the Indian independence in the year 1947. It is at this point that Mahatma Gandhi started the powerful Quit India movement, incorporating women's movements within it. This led to the emergence of independent women's organisations. Subsequently, in the post-independence period, the feminist movement started to negotiate for equal treatment of women at home, outside, in professional areas and politics. However, similr to the West, the feminists in India represented the interests and concerns of upper caste women and not of the masses. Over the past decade or so, the focus has shifted to embed feminism in the context of the existing diversity in the Indian social fabric, in order to address culture-specific issues within its patriarchal system and caste-based practices. The regional representation of feminism in India is thus impacted by the country's diversity and plurality.

Feminism in the Indian context

In line with the understanding that social learning is the main pathway for gender socialisation, in India, family is where a child first goes through the entire process of socialisation. Family is proclaimed to be the most universal and stable institution, the repository and transmitter of values, vital to the

physical, material and psychological well-being of all individuals. The primary role of a family is to give the first set of meaningful experiences to a child, to facilitate social duties and then help the child acquire 'beyond the home education'. These important roles are expected to be undertaken in an environment that is conducive to a child's growth and adaptation into society.

There are two ways in which this socialisation unfolds- firstly, by influencing personality through direct identification and communication, and secondly, by encouraging characteristics of personality by approving and disapproving the child's behaviour.

Each society has its own norms and stereotypes as well as expectations which largely guide the process of bringing up children and hence their socialisation. This is targeted towards nurturing accepted persona, social and economic roles in the society. The process of socialisation in India is extremely complex with the diversity that marks different contexts and the cultural mores existing across the country. However, the basic core remains the same, bounded by our historical ethos and traditional systems, which have lent a distinct identity to the Indian social system.

As Sachdeva (2016) puts it, "the diversity of communities in India render some people to be marginalised and powerless". These are the people who are unable to exercise rights or access any opportunities or resources in their communities. Girls are further marginalised within these sections owing to their sex. The marginalised families follow socialisation practices they have experienced to raise their girls. In addition, the common practice in Indian society is to prefer sons over daughters. The justification for this preference stemsfrom the belief that sons carry the family legacy forward, are the main breadwinners, and are able to look after their families. On the other hand, girls are seen as a burden, requiring dowry to get married and dependent upon their fathers and brothers for economic support and security.

As a part of rearing children, parents tend to apply stricter rules on their daughters, inhibiting their free movement as they grow older and placing restrictions on their autonomy. The main emphasis during childhood in India is not on the encouragement of the child's individuation and autonomy, but a pre-occupation with teaching social and cultural compliance. This is the stance that is followed and varies across rural or urban context, regions, and in communities. As the child becomes an adolescent exhibiting physical and reproductive maturity, stricter or flexible norms are applied in terms of social standards to either of the sexes. Being an adolescent in Indian society is a very challenging and critical phase in a girl's life.

In rural India, the challenges faced by girls become even more complex as they are are not sent to school so they can take care of their younger siblings and/or do household chores, causing them to miss out on learning time and being unable to achieve age and grade competencies. This widens the gender gap in learning, leading to further low accordance to their education. The social hierarchies are even more rigid in rural areas and offer little or no psycho-social support to girls. Married early and entangled in family and pregnancy, most of them get caught in poverty, exhibit poor health, and have restricted development. Denied rights and access to information, they fail to understand their rights and entitlements, and are unable to pursue them.

Feminists have been particularly concerned about the situation of girls in India, and over the past ten years, this has strongly influenced the feminist movement in India demanding equality for women and girls in treatment, opportunities and rights, taking into account the existing diversity in the country. They have identified significant parameters for this empowerment:

- strong sense of self and identity not tied to social norms or stereotypes
- life-skills such as critical thinking, problem solving and empathy to cope with disasters at personal, familial and community level
- language and communication skills to express with confidence and clarity
- professional or vocational skills to be economically independent
- awareness of legal and human rights and ability to make informed decisions.

Furthermore, with the belief that education is a powerful tool that can help to achieve this empowerment, Indian feminists have been demanding for policies and programs to be aligned to this vision, with a clear focus on helping girls and addressing evil social practices,

stereotypes, restrictive attitudes and constraints towards their empowerment.

Sowing Seeds of Feminism: Case studies from the Grassroots

In the context described above, feminism has the potential to be a change maker, empowering girls to build a nuanced understanding of feminism, identifying the issues pertinent to them and applying the solutions to their immediate context. It is not an exaggeration to state that the strategies that work in the most marginalised situations have a significant probability to be successful for women and girls who are situated inless-challenging communities and situations.

This paper describes three case studies of planned interventions, applied in three different marginalised contexts in rural India, that have worked towards sowing the seeds of feminism in the participant girls and facilitating the transition of girls into womanhood within the empowerment perspective.

UDAAN: Flight

This model particularly builds on those aspects of feminism that focus on the rights to education, to reproductive, political, civil rights and equality for all girls and women. This approach brings in two key components together. The first is a strong accelerated education intervention for those girls who have been out of school due to social, pedagogic and systemic barriers. The second is the integration of life skills in the education intervention, through a social learning curriculum.

The model was first initiated in 1999 in the remote area of Hardoi district in the state of Uttar Pradesh, known for its dismal developmental indicators on maternal and infant mortality and female literacy. The low educational participation of girls in the district was linked to the parents /society‘s perceptions of low economic returns of education, as there were limited employment opportunities available in the environment and thus the cost of education was considered high, especially when there were low gains envisaged. Involvement of girls in domestic chores and household responsibilities was another cause of their low participation in education and in poor awareness of their rights. Coupled with this problem was the parents’ perception of the low quality and relevance of education. Another issue was related to the lack of access to an adequate number of middle/upper primary and secondary schools. As the parents did not see any forward linkages of primary schooling, they did not even send their girls to primary schools.

Safety and violence against girls and women was another barrier. Girls would not be enrolled if they had to travel long distance, and if the parents did not know/trust the teacher or if there was no woman teacher. Other barriers included schools having inadequate infrastructure, lacking sanitary facilities, having poor quality of teaching, teacher absenteeism etc.

Udaan was thus conceptualised as an approach to provide quality education to those girls who could not access education in time, and who were facing issues of gender inequity and exclusion in their communities. The objectives of Udaan as a bridge strategy were aligned to bring in change at the social, systemic and agency levels, to break barriers, to create an enabling environment and to support girls to complete their primary education. As Ranganathan points out, “Udaan was targeted to develop independent and critical thinking, analytical skills, and a spirit of inquiry, to provide girls with relevant information, skills and attitudes that would enable them to deal with the world from a position of strength”.

In this endeavour, Udaan applied two key theoretical/ ideational positions: Social learning Theory[3] to negotiate gender stereotypes and acquisition of values, and ii. Rousseau’s idea of learning through experience. Using the main idea of the social learning theory, Udaan created a difference in the thinking, behaviour and attitudes of girls by providing varied non-stereotypical and equitable experiences and models that challenge girls’ subjugation in society.

Udaan used Rousseau’s ideas in the delivery of the pedagogical content. The chief supposition supports the use of our senses to gain knowledge and learn. Discarding the use of books, Udaan used the concept of nature and our own body/ senses as instruments for knowledge creation.

The Udaan experience

The initiation and eventual setting up of ‘Udaan’ rested on a strong community interface involving their mobilisation and support for educating their girls. Once their support and trust was received, the camp enrolled around 100 girls from the

most marginalised communities in a residential camp for 11 months.

Away from the responsibilities of home, this group of girls lived together, participated in educational and social processes, and got an opportunity to share, discuss their issues and understand their lives better- in many ways a place for catharsis for most of them. Learning to live together gave them an opportunity to negotiate their identities and understand the different ways of addressing their issues, moving beyond biases and inequalities. The enabling environment of the camp promoted non-stereotypical and non-alienation centric experiences for the girls.

The thrust of the Udaan experience was on building the agency of the girls with respect to their identity and learning. The principles underlying the identity construction process included: considering every person to be equal and having a right to be involved in all activities, irrespective of gender, caste, creed and culture; addressing inequities and gender stereotypes that the girls face, fostering identity building in a fear-free environment to practice non-stereotypical behaviour; implant an "I can do it" approach to have faith in oneself so that the girls believe that it is possible for "all to learn" even if the pace of learning may be different.

The principles on which the learning experiences of the girls were visualised considered the following: individual attention as most important in addressing the differences in the pace of learning; use of the local medium of language in learning, increasing the complexity in tasks over a period of time; using different techniques to foster learning; making learning meaningful by relating it to one's context and following a sequential and general progression approach.

The early literacy and basics of primary education were considered as the foundation for grounding feminism in the marginalised girls. In this context, the objective for a 11 month Udaan programme was to enable the school drop-outs or never enrolled girls to complete their primary education (grade 1 to 5) through an accelerated learning program.

The curriculum for language, mathematics and environmental science was in sync with the state curriculum. The structure included meticulous planning of weekly and session plans, with respect to time allocation to various curricular objectives, general progression in learning, horizontal linkages across subjects and flexibility. It was integrated with co-curricular activities including sports, cultural activities to work on life skills and on breaking gender stereotypes.

Activity-based pedagogy was followed, creating situations for the girls to learn, arouse their curiosity, help them experience the joy of creating and playing and relate the content to their context. The activities included playing mathematical games, creating a story, song, singing, discussing, reading a story etc. The teacher's role was that of choosing and introducing the task, helping the girls with the activity and to reflect in order to enable learning, abstraction, linkages with other aspects of curriculum.

The life skills component, including a set of skills, was specifically implemented by providing opportunities for experience and enlarging girls' world view. This was done through the Social Leaning Package (life skills curriculum), especially designed to orient girls towards their rights and responsibilities and to provide them opportunities and space to understand their issues and look for solutions together. The larger aim focused on providing an external and larger view of the world to the girls, support them to pitch their context within this world and seek to fulfill their rights and responsibilities by taking action. The curriculum focused on the skills around self-awareness, learning, citizenship, and employability, looking to nurture self-esteem, communication, critical thinking, problem solving, conflict resolution, resilience, negotiation, and decision making. The idea is to support girls to use these skills to identify their own problems and issues as well as those that their communities are facing, and to look for solutions together. The onus is not only on girls to solve these problems, but also on identify supporters and others who can do so. This was done in a joyful and interesting manner by establishing various platforms in a safe and enabling environment such as girls cabinets, food & nutrition committees, sports, cultural activities, arts and drama and a specific allocated 'My time" for their informal discussions.

The process of providing the experience critically rested on the educators/mentors who were from the local community itself to best understand and handle the real situation and

challenges that the girls faced. They resided with the girls for the entire period of the intervention and were duly incentivised for the enormous challenge of empowering the girls who belonged to the most discriminated communities. Therefore, the capacity building of the educators was the most essential ingredient in their own empowerment and involved strengthening/ building their personal, professional, and social competencies. This essentially built on the principles of feminism that are aimed at addressing equity issues for the disempowered girls that they worked with.

The process entailed a rigorous pre-intervention training program of a month's duration, followed by short-term support programs spread over the entire year. These programs supported improving teaching learning processes, strengthening teachers' capacity in subject teaching and in facilitating life-skills based pedagogy, developing sensitivity in teachers around respecting the girls' context, identity, their lived experiences and applying this understanding to nurture skills. The knowledge of what to teach, how to teach and when to teach was very important for the educators to understand and follow in their curriculum transaction process. A critical part of their work involved enabling the girls to garner support from their respective families and community, even in the face of conflict and resistance.

Learning was continuously tracked by teachers through the assessment indicators developed to evaluate cognitive and non-cognitive skills such as girls' attitudes, their changing beliefs and practices.

For the girls from the rural marginalised and discriminated communities, the Udaan experience brought in significant information and awareness for the first time in their lives. This included having the right to information, understanding diversity, gender and sexuality, experiencing the principles of equity and justice in some small ways at least, and building a positive sense of self. In addition, skills around critical thinking, problem solving, communication, resilience, negotiation were nurtured so that they could take action for themselves and in their communities. All this was a part of their training in psychosocial empowerment.

Ultimately, what was seen was that the girls were able to apply life skills in their real contexts and use their voice.

Evidence of success

Over the years, evidence generated clearly showed that the Udaan girls were more confident, could negotiate with their parents, took decisions about their lives and had communication skills. These supported many of the Udaan alumni to seek a more productive life for themselves.

Ranganathan (2005) showed that Udaan succeeded in promoting psychosocial empowerment in various ways[4]- "A comparison of Udaan girls with their non-schooled age-mates and girls undergoing formal schooling, all from the same villages on the dimensions of their sense of self and personal identity and their construction of gender identity, showed that Udaan girls had a more holistic sense of self and identity andwere able to combine societal expectations with personal wishes to spell out their ambitions, aspirations and goals. They also wanted to contribute to the village community. They had hope for a better future".

The study also showed "a very striking feature which figured only for them was their ability to transcend the desire to be 'good girls' in terms of a societal definition of the idea. Their self and identity were thus based on dimensions of personal satisfaction and personal meaningfulness, rather than experiences external to them, or desired by others for them".

Farzana, a 2002 pass out, takes pride in taking decisions at home. Her mother seems pleasantly surprised, and that is vivid in her narration, "my dear daughter, you must not forget the education given in Udaan. It will be of tremendous use for you in your life."

Udaan has not been very revolutionary, but it has attempted to address the girls within their own societal setting, wherein they can get better lives for themselves. This involved creating facilitative structures that helped to reduce their age of marriage, age of becoming mothers and shedding other evils such as dowry etc. Many Udaan girls have been able to negotiate with their parents and delayed their marriage at least till the completion of their higher education. In many ways, the Udaan experience is as an effort towards gender empowerment.

An unimaginable achievement for Pinki, who is now a graduate, has been negotiating with her parents to delay her marriage plans. She wants to contribute to the income of her family and takes pride in her capacities to do so.

Pinki expresses how hesitant she was when she had joined Udaan.

"I did only household chores and did not know how to talk to others, cycle etc. After Udaan I went back to my village and completed my schooling from a government school. I decided to pursue graduation and then want to do my masters and be a teacher".

Kalpana class VIII confidently says,

"I will go by what my parents say about my marriage, but I will question my bridegroom as well as to what he does and what are his thoughts about our life together. I will also challenge any dowry that is asked by my would-be-in-laws."

One of the achievements of Udaan has been that the graduates have been encouraging their siblings and other girls in the village to join Udaan. They have become the ambassadors of Udaan in their own village. Sudha, who passed out in 2002, used to feel too shy to talk to people but not anymore. She says, *"I love to study here. Here teachers are more sensitive and friendly. I coaxed my father to send my older sister to go to school. My mother supported Prema to join school."*

Ruhana has been getting other girls to join Udaan. She, in many ways has been a role model for them as she is now pursuing her graduation.

"I was too old when I started to study and have still gained a lot, but smaller children should start studying now and will be benefitted much more."

Babli, Class VIII, got inspired by other Udaan graduates. Sandhya has 5 sisters, and her mother does not keep too well, due to which she had not studied earlier. However, looking at the Udaan graduates, her mother got inspired and sent her to school. She thinks she can now take care of her mother better by using the education that she has been given.

Gender equity in Udaan has been addressed through providing opportunities to the girls to perform non-stereotypical roles or those which were supposedly "masculine" roles and responsibilities, for example, cycling, talking to shopkeepers, going out to buy grocery, going to open bank accounts, going to post office etc.

Farzana continues,

"I love to cycle and move by myself. I loved to participate in a 10 days survey and mapped Hardoi and other places. I remember visits to bank. I was earlier shy to go to shop and whatever he gave back, my mother used to say you never check what is given to you. Now I can negotiate and bargain to fix prices.".

Some girls have even negotiated a space for themselves after marriage. Poonam, who is pursuing graduation, continued studies even after marriage and now teaches in a non-formal school programme in her village.

Power within: Adolescent girls' Groups (Kishori Samooh)

A Global Campaign called 'The Power Within', best understood as a leadership initiative, was started in remote and extremely poor communities in the State of Uttar Pradesh in 2009. The goal of the campaign was to empower adolescent girls (10-14 years) by nurturing leadership skills in them. These leadership skills comprised of a set of attitudes and competencies, that had the potential to enable girls and young women to lead more informed, pro-active and empowered lives in their personal, social and community contexts. The communities experienced caste-based discrimination within which the girls were the most discriminated. Many girls were either never enrolled or dropouts, considered a liability and were ready to be married. A few who were participating in education were potential dropouts and showed poor attendance and learning. Issues of security and mobility were most prominent for them.

'Power Within' provided the space to integrate leadership as part of the empowerment initiative for girls. The objective of the intervention was to cultivate leadership skills in the girls, while ensuring that they access and complete primary education. The premise on which the program was built clearly articulated the feminist approach to empowerment.

Two platforms to foster these skills were the 'in-school' and 'out of school' environment. Various forums in-school were established to cultivate these skills, wherein the mode or tools used were the curriculum, activities inside and outside the

classroom and children's committees. It was assumed that the skills that the children cultivate will be useful for them to live a fulfilling life, to make use of the available opportunities in their environment and to contribute to the society by making it a better place to live.

The intervention primarily used a Grounded theory approach, instead of one single theory, adapted to the Indian context and ground realities. The theoretical premise which guided the approach is the work of Bass (1990)[5] on nurturing leaders:

Existing personality traits: assuming there are girls with natural leadership traits, opportunities were provided to them where these traits come to the fore.

Situational personality traits: those which come to fore due to a crisis, calamity or an event that needs leadership. In a situation of crisis, girls were encouraged to step into leadership roles. These may revolve around raising pertinent issues, taking civic actions etc.

Learnt personality traits: the transformational journey helps girls to inculcate leadership skills. Girls were motivated to take on leadership roles and then provided opportunities to do so.

The Behaviourist approach was used to achieve the theoretical premise. This approach shows that socio-cultural conditioning shapes our behaviour and personality. Thus, acceptable conditioning, reinforcing, and modelling lead to cultivating leadership skills. This is reinforced through trainings, discussions and providing opportunities to girls both in-school as well as out-of-school.

The grounded theory approach recognises three preconditions for rural girls to cultivate leadership skills and build positive feminism.

- Empowerment reflected as high self-esteem and positive psychological changes
- Need for space and opportunities to exercise empowerment
- Expression of voice and resistance to a person or aspects that impacts negatively on personality

The five major traits pursued as leadership development in girls were confidence, assertion of voice, decision making, organisation and vision.

- Confidence was contextually defined as the ability to express oneself without hesitation, analyse one's strengths and weaknesses, participate actively in family and peer group contexts, and be able to go to friends' houses and the market area without any escort.
- Voice was defined as the ability to express one's opinions with their underlying rationales, ask questions in the community and peer group meetings and to be able to facilitate discussion on a given theme in a peer group context.
- Organisation refers to being better informed about self, local issues and significant others, the ability to collect and collate information, manage one's schedule and time to incorporate all pursuits and activities and to be able to plan and conduct small group activities.
- Vision was contextually understood as the ability to formulate a simple life plan with short term goals for oneself. The capacity to motivate group members to take up collective action and be able to guide one's siblings and younger peers.

These traits were fostered through activities within the school, outside the school and in the community. The underlying idea was to create cross linkages in order to build leadership.

Contextual curriculum with a view to inculcate leadership skills

The curriculum was specifically developed to respond to the context, the challenges and the needs of the girls to nurture their personality development positively. Only identifying the content is not enough, therefore, the curriculum also focused on how to transact this content to strengthen learning. In this respect, the aim was also to strengthen capacities of teachers to deliver this empowering content in an inclusive and joyful manner. The goal was to particularly focus on developing leadership skills in girls. A number of factors that were taken into consideration included creating a safe and free environment and spaces for girls to interact, share and discuss their issues; providing a world view to enlarge their thinking and experiences; orient them on rights as well as the responsibilities expected of every citizen, empathy towards fellow beings. Thereafter supporting them to critically think about the issues that concern them individually or in their communities and how in their own way they can contribute to address them. That they needed to

work with all in their immediate environment, family, communities and significant others was impressed upon. The strategy was to bring about a change in the thinking of girls and to support them to be powerful in taking decisions and action about their lives.

Sachdeva (2012) very highlights the role of platforms in nurturing personality- "Morning assembly, an activity carried out in most schools, is generally ritualistically organised. As a part of leadership education, it was used as a whole group planned activity of thirty minutes, involving activities like reading the newspaper, bringing in stories from home, reciting poems, asking riddles, sharing interesting experiences by children from all communities".

Further, the importance of this platform is recognised by Sachdeva (2015) to "foster a fearless school environment, while providing opportunities to children to learn from one another, develop confidence and a sense of achievement, enabling them to overcome their hesitation and inhibitions in order to perform in front of an audience. Teachers facilitated but also participated in the assembly, gradually melting away barriers between them and the students, by being friendly, expressive and informal". Girls were provided ample opportunities to participate, raise issues and even discuss solutions to some extent, given an opportunity for creative expression and developing self-confidence.

The leadership skills were also addressed through the co-curricular activities
that are normally integrated as part of the morning assembly. In addition, the participation of girls in sports, especially football and cricket was encouraged, with a hope to break gender stereotypes and establish some lived experiences of equity.

Beyond school, yet linked to the entire process, was the forum created at the Community level, wherein girls groups called 'Kishori Samoohs' were formed. These were networks of girls who could have been in-school or out of school, with the objective to provide them a space in the community and facilitate those opportunities and events that foster leadership skills. This was a very important component of the leadership strategy. There were around 25-30 girls in each group, facilitated normally by a female adult, but with a clear view of grooming one or more girls to take on the facilitation responsibility in the future. This forum followed a strategically defined process, wherein the girls were provided a space to discuss their issues as well as the issues of their communities, were made aware of their rights and responsibilities and were prompted to look for solutions to their own problems as well as to those of the community, in a joint manner, including civic action like environment, water, cleanliness etc. .

The frequency of these forums to meet was flexible, varying from once a week to once in a month for 3-4 hours, depending upon the convenience of the members and the situations that they lived in.

Added to this were the community seminars (structured meeting/interaction with the community at regular intervals-monthly/ quarterly), wherein the importance of education and relevance of leadership efforts in girls were discussed along with the issues that emerged from adolescent girls groups. The intention was to build community support, ownership and sensitivity to the issues of girls and get the community to address certain negative or rigid prevailing norms in the society.

Similar interactions and open sessions with boys and a targeted strategy to get them involved in the cause of girls, especially to challenge the rigid cultural norms and stereotypes that prevailed in their homes as well as in society, were also planned and conducted.

Evidence of success

The initiative was implemented in 245 villages/ model cluster schools of Bahraich and Balrampur, two of the lowest performing districts in the state of Uttar Pradesh in India, as per the Human Development Indicators. A total of 245 Girls' groups (Kishori Samooh) were constituted, one per village, with over 6000 girls being members. At the end of two years, 56% of the groups had started functioning actively, with 25 percent out of these being extremely active and vibrant. Separate interactions outside the school were held with over 1000 boys through organised interactions. In-school intervention reached 18000 children in grade 4 and 5 (8436 Girls, 8306 Boys).

Visible changes were witnessed in school towards girls, in the girls themselves, and even in the communities that they live in, attributable to the initiative.

Rashida Bano, Head Teacher, Badholi Primary school of Jarwal block notes,

"the most important change in my school that I witness is the increase in participation of girls in sports. We teachers always thought that the girls cannot play games like cricket and football. But now our perception has changed and even we are playing cricket and footballs with girls".

The girls are enjoying participating in non-stereotypical games for the first time in their lives.

Gulapsa, 15 year old, member of Rapti Kishori Samooh, Village- Sisai, District-Balrampur, proudly shared,

"We learnt playing cricket and even were able to defeat boys one time)

Important changes were observed in "Sohani Balai", one of the committees, in which children managed food distribution. They cleaned the sitting place, made sitting arrangements and then guided the distribution of the food. The students also started asking each other about their committee's function and waited for their turn to handle the same. It was also found that all children worked together for the assembly, food and cleanliness committees. The most striking change was in the boys who also started talking about their roles in household chores such as cleaning. Members of the students' committee, including boys, started washing their school uniforms on their own. Girl's involvement in the committee helped them in learning organisation, system, team management, coordination, and ownership building. (Case study by Ranganathan N, 2011)

Currently, girls do not face any kind of resistance from their respective families or from the immediate community to join a girls' collective or to participate in its activities. In the male dominated social context of U.P, it indicates that now there is a general acceptance of seeing girls in non-traditional and non-stereotyped roles. Most girls admitted that they usually share their intimate feelings and personal matters either with peer group members in girls' collectives or with their mothers. (Ranganathan N, 2011)

Slowly and steadily, girls started getting attracted to the small but sure spaces that they had been able to get for themselves in their communities. From a meagre 8-10 girls getting together in the initial phase, the membership has grown to 30-35, comprising not only of school-going girls, but also attracting those who are out of school. When asked the reasons behind joining these groups, most felt that it seemed like this is their 'own' space, where they were able to shed their inhibitions and share their views on various issues including the sensitive ones.

Many of those who were out-of-school got inspired and motivated to go back to school seeing their peers in the group, determined to make a better life for themselves.

Brijmala, a 14-year-old, member of Nanhi Kirane Kishori Samooh, Village Gaura Pipra, Block –Mihinpurwa, District Bahraich, UP, shared that:

"Now I have also started thinking about myself. I have to study and became something in my life".

Ujjama, 13-year-old member of Indira Kishori Samooh, Village- Badholi, block- Jarwal, District- Bahraich stated,

"I have gone back to school and I am happy".

Sonu 12-year-old, member of Indira Gandhi Kishori Samooh of Nautalwa viilage of Mahsi block of Bahraich district reflects,

"Earlier I was not able to express myself in front of anyone but now I can communicate clearly".

Re-enrolment and new enrolment of school drop-outs and non- school going girls was possible due to the negotiation efforts of the girls' collectives. There were many non- school attending girls who joined or re-joined the school. They are continuing with their studies till date.

Girls also got exposure to the outside world when they ventured out of the village and visited various institutions, such as a bank and a post office. The quality and active participation, enthusiasm, and high confidence levels of children indicated that the girls' collectives as a forum were able to generate a high amount of enthusiasm among the girls for demonstrating their skills and talents in public. It also showed their involvement and interest in extracurricular activities. (Ranganathan N, 2011)

Active Participation in extra-curricular activities and public performances was visible when girls' groups showcased and demonstrated their special talents and skills through a wide range of activities, such as plays, recitations, songs, solo acts, jokes and puzzles.

In the Kishori Samooh meetings, the upper caste girls used to treat the girls from the marginalised social groups with utter disdain. The social mixing in the activities undertaken by girls' collectives enabled them to educate and sensitise upper caste girls to listen to the views of the lower caste girls with respect. The large presence of girls in the girls' collectives and their regular participation in its activities put some kind of social pressures on the parents of the members of girls' collectives to redefine and refine the existing roles of girls. (Ranganathan N, 2011)

Many of the girls have even raised their voices against discriminatory practices that they encountered either in their families or in the society at large.

Improved social awareness was visible in most girls as they became fairly conscious of the ill effects of early marriage and were ready to put up a fight on this issue with their elders, although some non-school going girls (15-16 years) were under tremendous pressure from their families to get married. It is extremely difficult to support less skillful girls to resist their early marriage without any external support. The girls' collectives enabled them at least to initiate a dialogue and discussion with their parents on this issue. All school-going girls expressed their interest in completing their school level education before getting married.

Of equal significance are the striking changes in the thinking and support for the cause of girls, in the community, with many getting gender-sensitised.

When the girls became aware of the new provision of free education, introduced in the Right to Education (RTE) bill[6], they confronted the teachers at the Schools in Gaisara blocks who were charging admission fees from the students and forced them to return the money to the girls who had already submitted their fees. Because of the girls' protests, the teachers had to return not only their money but also return the fees of the entire class.

The girls in Tishar village recently had an opportunity to meet the education officials in their schools and were bold enough to ask them for any assistance that they could provide for their girls' collectives

Shabbir Ahmad Mansoori, a 63-year-old resident of Gaura Pipra village of Mihinpurwa block of Bahraich district, notes:

"Initially boys escorted their sister for Kishori samooh meetings but now girls go alone. This is not a very small change".

Another remarkable change was noticed when a 12 year old girl was supposed to get married in Shivpura village, but due to the efforts of the members of the girls' collective of that village who convinced the girl's parents, the wedding was postponed. In another case, the members of girls' collective assisted a minor girl in getting her *Gauna* ceremony cancelled and the parents were convinced to negotiate with her in-laws. The girl later took admission in a school. The girls' collective convinced the parents of a girl (of 13 years) of Arrai village in Jarval to join class 1. She never attended school before, though her younger siblings were attending senior classes. Also, some of the girls in the village have got their age reduced to get admission in the classes desired.

The girls of Devravan village attended a session with the ANM on the medicines needed for women's health and hygiene. During the session, some girls who earlier could not dare to utter a single word before inquired about stipulated entitlements under the National Rural Health Mission and demanded services as per the scheme for them. (Ranganathan N, 2011)

Some of the groups started to raise the issues of their communities with those who can help in resolving them.

Karimunnisha, 38-years-old, Pradhan Sisai village of Balrampur district, shared,

"We have not seen girls to interacting outsiders in this village but after formation of Kishori Samooh drastic changes reflected on girl's attitude, they came to my place and asked me to provide Panchayat Bhavan for their monthly meeting".

Arvind, a 32-year-old, mentor of Indira Gandhi Kishori Samooh of Nautala village of Mahsi block of Bahraich district, shared,

"Girls are now able to express themselves more confidently, earlier they don't talk everyone but now they are going to Village head's home to make demands".

Conclusively, CARE India's leadership model, its experiences and approaches to girls' empowerment by developing key leadership competencies targeting girls (and boys) between the ages of 10-14yrs, and within that addressing

the needs of younger and older girls separately, without following a blanket approach for all, was recognised as a powerful approach.

The program emerged as a strong gender transformative approach for girls' education and leadership development, especially in the context of India where girls' grow up with entrenched stereotypes which are very difficult to break. The example also shows ways to understand how to address the issues of gender equity and exclusion in our communities, by providing an extra element in the education of girls and through an integrated approach. It clearly contributed to the process of sowing the seeds of feminism in the minds of the girls who came from deprived communities.

It also narrated an actual experience on how to address the cause of girls in the most marginalised communities so that they are better equipped to help themselves to get a secure future, participate and take decisions and improve their life opportunities. India's scenario being complex in terms of caste, class, tribal divides, provides a rich insight into the possible strategies that could be adopted in such a situation.

Adolescent Girls Learning Centres (AGLC)

This model was implemented in the most backward district of Kutch situated in the state of Gujarat. Kutch, with 70 percent of its population residing in rural areas, is vulnerable to disaster and shortage of water resources. Due to the lack of viable employment opportunities, there exists widespread poverty in this region, which poses a special challenge to the development indicators of children, especially girls belonging to marginalised communities, specifically with respect to girls' rights to education, health and equality.

Considering that feminism promotes equality in access to all rights, and that education is not just a right but also a means to promote the philosophy of feminism, it becomes critical in a region like Kutch, where the parents did not allow educational access to their daughters due to socio-cultural customs and beliefs factors. Early marriages, traditional domestic work relegated to girls, traditional role of the son as care-taker of parents, tradition of girls getting married and leaving their parental home- all acted as barriers to girls' education. In addition, there were also caste barriers. Socio- economic hardships also compelled the parents to involve their girls in taking care of their siblings. There was the entrenched tradition that denied girls an education and kept them from contributing economically to their families and to their country. Thus, many girls dropped out around the 4th, 5th or 6th grade.

In Kutch, girls were growing up with deep-rooted stereotypes which were very difficult to break. The issue of marriage was real for them and inhibited their education. It was more of an inhibitor for them than for the boys. This was particularly true for families living below the poverty line and communities that had to migrate in search of work. Children's participation in work – both within the household and outside – was another barrier to participation. Low attendance and seasonal absenteeism prevailed. In the case of girls, the burden of work before and after school was a major deterrent to effective participation. While there has been an significant increase in participation in primary education, inadequate coverage of upper-primary, middle and high schools (it is well known that on an average the ratio of primary to middle and high school is roughly 3:2:1) and non-availability of schools within the walking distance remained a major issue. Similarly, in the absence of backward and forward linkages in the form of pre-school education and post-primary education, the effectiveness of primary education went down. Overall, the problem was one of accessibility, quality, and relevance of education.

Adolescent Learning Centres (AGLC) were thus conceptualised to address the needs of the girls in these communities, especially that of education and economic productivity.

Intensive community mobilisation in all villages, supported the establishment of AGLC in every village. It helped to break the stereotypes and beliefs that existed in the community about education being irrelevant for girls. Massive campaigns, Information, Education and Communication (IEC) activities, mass rallies, street plays, group discussions and interpersonal communications spread awareness about the importance of education and helped in convincing communities to send their adolescent girls to AGLC. Regular home visits, involving key stakeholders such as the village head, religious leaders, school head; sharing the learning progress of the adolescents; the monthly mother– teacher association (Matru Mandal)

meetings supported in building the community as the biggest asset of the AGLCs and the illiterate mothers as the champions for their girls education and empowerment.

Keeping in mind the challenges of the formal education system and the diverse needs of adolescent girls, a flexible approach to provide basic literacy, life skills and avenues for economic productivity were linked in this intervention that was targeted towards the never-enrolled or drop-out adolescent girls.

The intervention particularly focused on peer interaction and a space to connect, justifying the appropriateness of its local name 'Bal Sakhi Kendra" (children's friendship centre), where girls were provided basic literacy, and had a peer-based forum to come together, interact, share problems, nurture their relationships and reclaim the joys of their lost childhood. This was the first step in sowing the seeds of feminism, where girls started to understand what they have been missing with respect to other gender and communities and how they were being discriminated against. The approach overtly as well as covertly addressed various forms of empowerment for girls.

The three-pronged strategy towards empowerment focused on transacting and building three kind of skills-learning, life skills and employability, with the purpose to package an entire approach aimed at reducing vulnerability and supporting girls in becoming empowered. In this way, this intervention differs from the other two with its added focus on the employability skills.

Flexible and contextualised learning opportunities were organised at a pace, time and place convenient to the girls. This was important for the girls involved in family chores and economic responsibilities to attend as per their convenience. The timings varied from afternoon to evening, in discussion with the community, and in the space provided by the community itself, thereby taking community and family into confidence and garnering support. As looking after younger siblings was a major responsibility for most of the girls, they were allowed to bring ther siblings to school, where they were involved in play activities while the girls studied.

The course was packaged as an accelerated curriculum, transacted for three hours every day, covering four grades within a period of 2 to 3 years. Pedagogy involved group methodology, peer learning, individual competency based and joyful activities, wherein each girl was taken to the next level only after they acquiring what was expected of them, and not according to the time required to achieve it. Literacy and numeracy were focused for basic literacy.

Classroom transactions used mother tongue (Kachcchi language) and slowly transitioned to Gujarati, the state's official language. Guajarati was taught for language proficiency, using an approach of moving from simple recognition and writing of alphabets to complex processes of reading and writing simple sentences with comprehension, with a thrust on building expression of their opinions and thoughts in vocal or written form. This is where the thinking process around feminist issues was put in motion. Numeracy, being of utmost importance in their daily life and as a path for economic empowerment, was integrated strongly into the curriculum. This involved building capacities to engage in simple mathematical calculations to basics of transactions and how to apply numerical skills in their daily life, using a prominent game called "*Businesswoman*". No formal examination was held, but a year-end simple assessment was conducted to move the students to the next level of learning.

Gender stereotypes were addressed in the social learning curriculum, with support given to girls to turn into confident individuals, take their own decisions, solve problems and become conscious of their social responsibilities. The emphasis was on the exploration of the self and its interdependence with society. It covered various themes like the relevance of education, status of women, understanding of local resources, understanding community and civic awareness, utility of public services and institutions, cleanliness, understanding diversity, and analysing social issues. The themes were continuously supported through action-oriented participatory projects which helped girls in perceiving, noting and discussing important happenings in their communities, building and narrating stories of change, newspaper-reading and exposure visits to important places and services in their communities such as the post office, bank, credit services etc. Exposure Visits for experiential learning and exploring the larger world helped in knowledge generation, understanding the educational and employability

opportunities available outside their communities, and made them more confident to have a voice. The curriculum also focused on key adolescent issues such as health and personal hygiene, reproductive health and laws relating to women.

Several platforms used to build life skills were sports and games, wherein the girls could participate in badminton, volleyball, along with indoor games, speech, arts, drama, singing, dancing and other creative activities. The centres provided space and opportunity to pursue creative activities which were either considered to be a taboo or were not facilitated in the home environment. They used this approach to build the agency of girls, especially their voice, confidence, creativity and conflict resolution skills. Teaching the girls to ride bicycles, a male privilege, had a major role to play in breaking gender norms, and supporting their safe mobility.

The AGLC intervention had a strong integration with the employability skills and it had a focus on nurturing and strengthening those local and indigenous crafts that have a tremendous market potential in the state, country and even outside of India. While many girls knew the basic art, they had never used it for commercial purposes. This was structured and transacted meticulously based on the orders that were brought in by local NGOs who liaised with the market vendors. The approach was built on delivering quality, adhering to strict demands and specifications expected from the product, and thus involved teaching craft meeting commercial standards, ethics of work and business. Numeracy skills were applied to negotiate and understand profit and loss. The approach helped the girls to understand issues around equality in wages and ethics of work, in line with the feminist perspective. In many ways, this component linked well with learning and life skills, and became an entry point and a motivator to participate in education, gain life skills and opened avenues for employability, other than the home chores or agriculture.

In addition to the craft, linkages were made with the existing government-run employability schemes, such as kite-making that fetched girls a modest stipend during training period and a skill to employ to generate income. Sewing, a much-expressed demand from the community was also encouraged to support households and market needs.

The AGLC rested on an all-women fleet of local, passionate, and dedicated teachers who became role models for adolescent girls. Being from the same villages, the compromised educational qualification of grade 7th was supplemented with pre-intervention week-long intensive training, followed by subsequent follow up trainings and onsite support. The content of the trainings was based on the accelerated curriculum, life skills, teaching methodology and their modification to suit each child, individual pupil assessment. In addition, support involved community interface, motivating parents to send adolescent girls to AGLCs and girls who do not regularly attend to be a friend and a guide to the adolescent girls.

Evidence of success

The intervention led to perspective building among the adolescent girls on issues of significance to their lives. The discussions and debates about their social conditions, their status in a family and other social groups supported their critical thinking skills and reasoning abilities. Their changed aspirations with the learning of new skills reflected decision-making and goal-setting. They also understood the importance of learning and the value of social skills in nurturing positive relationships with all. The opportunity to sing, dance and debate developed communication and self-expression skills in them.

The opportunities to interact with people from different spheres helped the girls in overcoming shyness and developing their interpersonal skills. A platform to spend quality time with their peers helped them in enhancing their relationships. Emotional skills, including self- reflection, enabled the girls to understand values, goals, strengths and weaknesses. The enhancement of knowledge and skills led to an increased self-confidence. Their physical appearance and cleanliness levels improved. In some cases, the ability to contribute to the family income increased their value in the family. All these changes in their lives contributed to better self-image and self-esteem among the girls. Skills like cycle riding and playing non stereotypical sports broke their notions of stereotypical gender roles and made them more aware of their strengths.

The knowledge of basic literacy, enhancement of life skills, skill building for livelihood options, awareness about the society and ability to

analyse their own status developed the inherent leader hidden within these young girls.

Many girls started expressing their opinions in their family matters, taking initiatives to explore their dreams, contributing to the improvement of family economy, which was previously unimaginable in the patriarchal society.

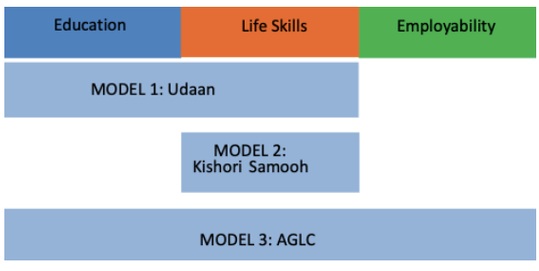
"*Earlier I was unable to express my opinions, but now if there is a quarrel in the family, I am able to express my views with logic in front of my parents & siblings*." Julekha, Kharai AGLC

Amita Ben, an AGLC teacher remembers Daksha's evolution from a shy girl with no voice to an empowered girl who has taken the decision of not only completing her education after dropping out in class 3, but also making a living for herself by employing the vocational skill of sewing that she learnt in the AGLC. This journey has transformed her life by delaying her marriage and converting her into a productive member of her family by becoming an entrepreneur. She is gainfully employing her math skills to stitching clothes as they help her in taking measurements; and she is looking forward to repaying a loan of Rupees three thousand that she had taken to buy the sewing machine.

The intervention was able to exhibit clear signs of feminism in several girls who displayed high levels of self-confidence and visible signs of leadership. They showed voice assertion, the capacity to display resistance, and had a clear view on most aspects of society like gender, governance, development etc. They also showed boldness and potential to hold office in local governance (Panchayati Raj Institutions), where women can be represented.

Conclusion

The case studies captured above present three different models implemented in three diverse locations in India, in the most marginalised rural communities. The illustration below shows the focus of each of these models:



The goal of the first model Udaan was to provide formal education to out-of-school adolescent girls. This was done through a specially designed accelerated curriculum, which compacted five years of primary education into a one-year programme, offered as a residential programme. At the end of this programme, girls could pass the class 5 exam of the formal school system and then transit to regular mainstream schools for the remaining part of their education. In the year spent there, efforts were also made to empower them by expanding their understanding about societal issues through a social learning curriculum and develop in them some elements of leadership by giving them different duties and responsibilities in the camp. Issues related to patriarchy, gender stereotypes and social practices which required re-thinking, were all discussed in the quest to develop a voice and agency in the girls. During their stay at Udaan, girls are seen to exhibit a strong sense of self and identity and envision personally and professionally successful lives for themselves, as made evident by the Evaluation Studies carried out in these areas.

Follow up studies of the Udaan programme showed that almost all the girls continued their education and some from the early batches in Hardoi even completed their graduation. However, the Scoping Study (2016) conducted with Udaan alumni at Hardoi presents a rather bleak picture of their life post Udaan. The study reveals that despite better educational status only 28.75% among them were engaged directly in income generating activities, while 71.25% were unemployed. Among those employed, 60.87% were involved in agricultural activities, and 30.43% in precarious jobs of tailoring and embroidery. Few others were engaged in seasonal work with unstable income. Moving on to the world of work or even bringing about social change in their villages was not easy for them. The skills acquired in Udaan were useful, but a different skillset and training was required for the adult years. For instance, skills of communication in the local language and English, soft skills in ICT, economic and legal literacy and how to conduct oneself in professional settings, among others, became important to know. They had been touched very peripherally in the Udaan curriculum.

This calls for a serious deliberation upon the need for a sustained focus on the empowerment of girls and women from a feminist perspective.

The second model focused on empowerment in the form of leadership training, through setting up girls' collectives in backward villages. The idea was to develop voice, agency, and resistance abilities in them, so that they could become change-makers in their communities. The programme was once again guided by concerns of equity and enabling girls to take on leadership roles to fight restrictivecommunity beliefs and practices and replace them with more gender-just attitudes.

In the third model AGLC (Adolescent Girls Learning Centres), learning centres were set up for out-of-school adolescent girls in remote village habitations. These operated for three hours a day, wherein the girls were taught basic language and mathematics skills for functional literacy. Topics related to health, hygiene, nutrition, cleanliness, preservation of the environment, understanding public services (hospitals, banks, post offices), conserving natural resources like water, were also discussed through a Social Learning Curriculum. An important component of the programme was integrating employability skills of local craft (embroidery), as a move towards linkages with the market. Collaboration was done with local NGOs working in the sector of handicrafts, who brought orders for the girls and paid them for their labour. It was felt that this would then become an institutionalised process and empower the girls for life. However, after the exit of program, the girls could not negotiate and sustain orders with the NGOs and handicrafts collectives on their own. They did not have the requisite skills for this.

As validated by the evaluation studies of these programs, what was common to all of them were clear benefits while they were in process, but not enough long-term benefits in terms of preparing the young adult women for the job market and for entrepreneurial or leadership opportunities.

The three models reflect concerted efforts to sow the seeds of feminism in the girls who have participated in these programs. However, these efforts further need to be sustained and institutionalised at the three levels of agency, structure, and systems to have equitable societies.

Positioning Women's Empowerment in a Theory of Change

The analysis of some select powerful case studies in India confirms that a deliberate attempt has now been initiated to sow the seeds of feminism, even in the most marginalised communities. The target population is girls and women, and the enablers are the family, boys, and men. It has been understood that while education is a powerful tool to open the world of knowledge to girls, enhance their awareness on rights and responsibilities; education alone, legitimised through schooling, cannot ensure that the sprouts of feminism will be sustained for long time. The demonstrable positive changes in behaviour, attitudes and thinking are best sustained if, in addition to education, psychosocial empowerment is also targeted. A distinct sense of self and social identity achieved through psychosocial empowerment leads to significant long-term gains. It enables women and girls to apply what they have learnt, impact significant family decisions and community-change initiatives.

However, as the community continues to be resistant of threats to its power structures within their local context, especially with respect to gender equity and social justice, they need to be consistently and continuously challenged, and negotiated with. This is where the feminism perspectives in girls and women become important.

The case studies have also shown that their intervention approach rests on the assumption that education, with gender equity and social justice as its integral components, will empower the girls and improve their life chances and options. Gender equity and social justice support changes in attitude and facilitate reconstruction. However, it is only when the interventions support transition from girlhood to womanhood, factoring in what empowerment means in adulthood, that the girls will be able to use the principles of feminism to foster equitable societies.

In light of the above discussion and aforementioned parameters of an empowered woman, the existing approach to establish feminist approach in rural communities of India will not hold strong for long. For empowerment, which is growing and sustainable over a period of time, a new theory of change is required

which provides long-lasting solutions to problems and adequate scaffolding periodically to enable women to become fully empowered and become agents of social change. The new theory of change needs to be envisaged that not only helps women find a voice, but also creates a ripple effect, which further helps other women in similar situations.

This approach holds the vision of encouraging and promoting the empowerment of women belonging to backward and marginalised communities in economic, social, legal and political spheres, which can give rise to greater gender equality, equity and social justice. Designed along a developmental perspective, the approach envisions helping in sustainable capacity building, leadership, and life-skills development. Through the convergence of various dimensions, the approach will be able to promote the psychosocial development of girls and women by fostering a strong sense of self and identity.

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