

OXFAM IN ACTION

ENGAGED TEACHERS:

Enhancing quality in education – Learning from the field



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“IF ANY SINGLE FACTOR CAN MAKE THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A POOR SCHOOL AND A SUCCESSFUL SCHOOL, IT IS THE COMMITMENT AND INITIATIVE OF THE TEACHER.”¹

SUMMARY

The Essential Services Education Programme of Oxfam India works towards increasing the access to quality, universal and inclusive elementary education in the mainstream public education system. It does so mainly by focusing on the realization of the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2009 (RTE Act), with a targeted focus on the marginalized communities like Tribals, Muslims, Dalits, and girls. It works along a range of themes through partners across the country focusing on the areas with low educational indicators.

Oxfam India's Programme Implementation Plan (PIP) 2010-15, highlights the issue of segmentation in the education sector in India due to a dual system in place, where the higher education and technical sectors are in a separate elite category with some of the leading institutions making efforts to meet standards of global competitiveness, and 'the elementary education sector, especially mass elementary education provided by the government school system, is not given the same preferential treatment'. The 'private schools that feed into higher and technical education institutions are encouraged and government schools whose students are unlikely to make it to these institutions are given short shrift almost replicating the caste-based hierarchies prevalent all around us.'²

Oxfam has been working to address this inequality of learning and education delivery in the country through its Essential Services-Education Programme. In the Annual Operational Plan 2013-14³, out of the four outcomes it intends to achieve is issue of quality in education. 'Government adopts improved learning and inclusive practices in schools demonstrating possibilities of government schools delivering high quality, inclusive education'. Oxfam and Partners are working towards achieving this, by building capacities and motivation of teachers, head teachers, administrative and academic support structures in their respective programme locations.

This practice note documents the initiatives undertaken with teachers in the government schools in two states. The focus of

these initiatives is to enhance capacities and motivation levels of teachers, subsequently improving the quality of education in schools. It describes in detail the processes adopted by two different partner agencies of Oxfam in two locations with in different contexts:

- ▶ Teacher Learning Forums in Uttar Pradesh- Partner Lokmitra
- ▶ Language Teachers in Odisha- Partner Sikshasandhan

The above models, along with the achievements, challenges and learning from them will be described in detail in the subsequent chapters to facilitate cross learning and replication across similar future initiatives of Oxfam India or other organisations working in the field of Education.

INTRODUCTION

It is a well-established fact that teachers play a central role in the process of inclusive quality education. Qualified, trained and committed teachers are an important factor in the ensuring access to education. Non-availability of the above is often described as the weakest link in the education delivery system. Teachers are the central figures in organizing and managing a school. Timely recruitment of teachers and their rational deployment in schools are essential to the smooth functioning of all school⁴.

HISTORY OF TEACHERS' ISSUES IN THE COUNTRY⁵

During the last few decades, the lack of motivation and accountability among Teachers in the government schools, have been under focus. Civil society and media have been regularly highlighting this at various platforms. The root of the problem of lack of accountability and poor motivation among teachers lie in the peculiar trajectory taken by the education system. Starting from the early 1950, education became a privilege a few could afford. Then came the process of democratizing, which made education universally accessible with larger number of children enrolling in schools leading to sharp increase in number of schools- government and private in the 1960s. This was also the period, where government schools started to be perceived as 'school for the poor' and the well to do children slowly started moving out of them. Then right through the 1980s and 1990s, the focus was on enrollment, with numbers becoming the primary tool for monitoring progress and teachers were expected to show this increase in their schools.

1 Public Report on basic Education in India; The Probe Team; Oxford University Press, New Delhi 1999.

2 Oxfam India Programme Implementation Plan, 2010-15

3 Oxfam India Annual Operational Plan 2013-14; Oxfam India; Feb 21, 2013.

4 Teachers and Teaching In India, CREATE India Policy Brief 5, January 2011.

5 Adapted mainly from Teacher Motivation in India, by Vimala Ramchandran et al

Moreover, the growing political polarisation based on religious and ethnic identities, fueled further disintegration of the education system in which aspirants on the basis of their community and caste identities were recruited. The teachers in the government schools, from being figures of respect and reverence in the community, got limited to the role of disempowered government functionaries relegated to the bottom few layers of the administrative hierarchy.

Further with the start of various government schemes and programmes, the pressure of universalization not being adequately complemented with required resources brought in a new generation of teachers- para teachers, contract teachers, volunteer teachers etc. These teachers were usually untrained and under paid, with some schools being completely run by them. A study conducted on Teachers Motivation, has aptly described 'The professional status of the teacher gradually eroded not only for the community of stakeholders but also in the eyes of the teachers themselves generating a sense of resigned cynicism in all sections of society'. The government could not provide adequate number of teachers in schools, could not ensure proper environment of teaching and learning, therefore it was difficult demand accountability among the teachers. Finally, the lack of transparency in the recruitment and transfer of teachers had resulted in the whole recruitment process itself being in a muddle.

Despite various commissions and programmes had suggested systematic reforms for teacher management, motivation and performance, not much has been done on the ground. The government schools continue to provide poor quality education with teachers being blamed for it. Through the years there has been a shift in the thinking and working of civil society, that until there is an active engagement with teachers and efforts are made to understand the reality of their issues, there cannot be meaningful access to education for all children.

RTE ACT AND TEACHERS

The RTE Act had brought in hope, as there was a greater focus on the issues of Teachers. It acknowledged that building the capacity and agency of teachers is critical to ensure quality of education in schools.

The Act provides a list of duties to be performed by the appointed teachers. These are as follows:

- ▶ Maintain regularity and punctuality in attending school;
- ▶ Conduct and complete the curriculum;
- ▶ Complete entire curriculum within the specified time;
- ▶ Assess the learning ability of each child and accordingly supplement additional instructions
- ▶ Hold regular meetings with parents and guardians and appraise them about the regularity in attendance, ability to learn, progress made in learning and any other relevant information about the child; and
- ▶ Perform such other duties as may be prescribed.⁶

Despite the Act having detailed functions and responsibilities

to be undertaken by a teacher, what it does not address are, the teachers' morale and the teaching-learning environment in the classrooms, which continue to suffer. While it addresses the administrative duties of the teacher, it does not have any provision for the 'quality of teaching', which as a parameter although very important, is difficult to assess. Further, while the Act insists on having qualified teachers, it allows a five-year period (after the passing of the Act) for the teachers to acquire the minimum qualifications; thus right now there continues to be an increasing number of schools run by teachers without adequate qualifications. All this has a negative impact on the quality of learning for the children.

Oxfam's Working Paper 'Elementary Education in India: Progress, Setbacks and Challenges' states two important aspects of the quality of a teacher, especially relevant in the schools in the rural areas. One is their role in the management of the school- maintaining records, implementing incentive schemes, maintaining infrastructure, as well as their regularity (attendance) and involvement in the school. The second aspect (which is considered as a more important aspect in the paper) relates to their role in 'enhancing or discouraging social accessibility of schools'. While trying to make education inclusive and universal in India, in the schools within areas where social fragmentation is glaring and obvious, the teacher, who is generally an outsider and from a more privileged background and socio-culturally alienated from the students and their parents, the 'social attitude of teachers has a strong influence on universalizing education'.

STATUS OF TEACHERS' VIS A VIS RTE ACT

Although it has been four years since the implementation of the Act, not much has changed on ground. The mandate for the provision of professionally trained teachers in all schools by the year 2015, in the current situation is unlikely to be achieved. Moreover, the fulfillment of several other provisions of RTE would be impossible without tapping into and supporting the agency of teachers. Despite this recognition and the efforts being made towards improvement, adequate steps have not been taken to ensure that the norms laid down are complied with.

As per the RTE Status Report of Year 4, the data from DISE 2012-13 shows that the average PTR (Pupil-Teacher ratio) in India as in 2012-13 was 1: 27, with the proportion of schools that comply with the PTR norms has increased from 38.9% in 2010 to 45.3% in 2013 (DISE 2012-13). 19.83 lakh teachers' posts were sanctioned, of which only 14.15 were recruited⁷ and 5.02 lakh sanctioned teacher posts still remain vacant.

Therefore, for a large proportion of our children, schools continue to be a poorly lit classroom, with more than one class being taught together by a Teacher who may not have completed his/her own schooling. The Planning Commission's analysis had listed teacher-related factors like teacher absenteeism, teacher engaged in non-teaching work, or who is intimidating or uses uninteresting methods of teaching as some of the reasons for

6 The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009.

7 CABE meeting- 10th October based on figures as on 19 June 2013

high drop-out rates among children.⁸ Five years later, the Twelfth Five Year Plan continues to mention the 'acute shortage of high quality teachers' in the schools, and lists teacher training as one of the greater challenges of improving quality of school education, along with enforcing of accountability in teachers' attendance.⁹

The landmark PROBE survey (Public Report on basic Education in India)¹⁰, which was conducted in the Hindi-speaking states of North India in 1996-97, listed two reasons for the widespread prevalence of teacher inertia- demotivating environment and lack of accountability. Ten years later, the situation has hardly improved. Oxfam India had resurveyed the same region in 2006 and two disturbing findings of this study, relevant to the present note, were- 'low teaching activity' and 'low learning achievements of the children'. In half of the government schools there were no teaching activity going on at the time of the unannounced visit in 2006 – similar to what was found in 1996. Two realities can be attributed to this, a major shortage of teachers as well as teachers' absenteeism. Moreover, the learning achievement of children in the schools was poor. 'Even in schools where teaching was going on, children were not learning much of what the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) assures them. Classroom activity was dominated by mindless rote learning, senseless chanting, and blind copying from the black board.'¹¹These alarming insights are true for almost all the government schools of the country, in which a vast majority of children study or aim to study.

STRENGTHENING TEACHERS' LEARNING FORUMS

Oxfam India supports Lokmitra under its Education programme in Uttar Pradesh. Lokmitra was founded in the year 1997 in Raebareli, working on education along with other development issues. From 2004-05 onwards, however, there was a strategic shift and education became their primary focus of work. Today, building on their experience and expertise of almost 20 years, Lokmitra works exclusively on education, extending its work into different themes with aim to bring about a positive change in the public education delivery system of the state.

Lokmitra has extensive experience of working with parents through School Management Committees (SMCs) and building forward alliances by federating SMCs at the district and block levels. Their engagement with the parents was aimed at bringing about ownership of the education process among the community and to support them take up advocacy initiatives at the higher

level. They had realized that to bring about an improvement in the quality of learning of the children, the initiative will essentially have to pass through the teachers, and will need their active participation. Thus in the year 2006, Lokmitra began its engagement with teachers. They work with teachers in six blocks and mainly involve the formation of Learning Forums with teachers to improve the quality of classroom practices. Out of these six blocks, three are part of the Oxfam Education Project-Salon, Rahi and Raebareli-Nagar Chhetra (urban).

Lokmitra has been working with the Oxfam since 2004, though their current education project with Oxfam India is two years old. Their strategy over the years with regards to education has remained similar and they follow the same with their other education projects as well. Lokmitra, as mentioned above, gradually shifted their focus from community advocacy to pedagogy, working towards ensuring quality of education in schools. This remains the main approach in the Oxfam supported project as well.

ESTABLISHING TEACHER FORUMS

Lokmitra works with teachers through the formation of Teachers' Learning Forum (Saikshik Samvad Manch). Saikshik Samvad Manch is a block-level peer-learning platform that brings together teachers from different government schools in the Block to discuss, share, and learn from each other. These meetings are held every third month, voluntarily attended by the teachers and facilitated mainly by a Lokmitra team-member.

Lokmitra first connected with a few teachers through newsletters distributed on Teachers' Day and Children's Day in the year 2005. Soon after, a Lokmitra team member in the year 2006 met a teachers' group in Rahi Block, who were already working on writing, speaking and poetry. Further discussions with this group gave some insights to Lokmitra and helped them get some clarity in terms of the strategy to be adopted for engaging with teachers. Through these and many other discussions, the concept of the Forum evolved over the time.

An introductory meeting was held in February 2007, with the teachers in Raebareli at the district level, to initiate a Teachers' Forum. Twenty-one teachers from three blocks participated in this meeting, which was called "Sanyojak Mandal" (meaning coordination group). The name of the teachers' forum ("Saikshik Samvad Manch") as well as the framework of the Forum was decided by the teachers after many discussions. During the first few months itself, it was decided and to have a publication of the Forums to document the experiences for further sharing among the teacher community. Starting its first publication in April-June 2007, the Forum has regularly published their newsletter named "Pragya" (initially called "Spandan"). Teachers themselves write the articles in the newsletter. Lokmitra team-members and a few teacher members from the forum, support the selection and editing process, thus encouraging active participation of its members.

The primary aim of the Forum meetings is to discuss on aspects of 'Learning' so as to improve the quality of teaching (and consequently learning of the students), despite the constraints and issues in the schooling system and the influence of various

8 A.K. Shiv Kumar, PreetRustagi; Elementary Education in India: Progress, Setbacks and Challenges; Oxfam India Working Paper Series, OIWPS III; Sept 2010.

9 Faster, Sustainable and More Inclusive Growth: An Approach to the Twelfth Five Year Plan; Government of India, Planning Commission; Oct.,2011.

10 PROBE (Public Report of Basic Education) was based on the household survey of randomly selected villages in five states of India. It was a landmark survey, accounting for 40 per cent of the population of India and was supported by Centre for Development Economics (India) and published in 1999 by Oxford University Press.

11 A.K. Shiv Kumar, PreetRustagi; Elementary Education in India: Progress, Setbacks and Challenges, p. 23; Oxfam India Working Paper Series, OIWPS III; Sept 2010.

other negative factors. These meetings are generally held within the premises of the schools in the Block so that it is easily accessible to teachers and they feel a sense of belonging. The meeting is always held on a school-holiday, the date and time are fixed in advance and the teachers in all the schools of the Block are informed about it. The teachers, who are interested and available, assemble at the pre-decided place and time. Six meetings are held in a year, in each of the six blocks with an average of 15-20 teachers participating. Though most participants are regular and have been associated with initiatives from the beginning, you also have new participants joining during the meetings. All members attend the meeting at their own interest, with no travel allowance and any other incentives given.

The forum meetings usually last for duration of two to three hours, during which the main focus of discussion are the teaching and classroom practices. Members share the practices adopted by them and issues and challenges faced in the process. Solutions are arrived at in a participative manner. The meetings are usually attended by a Lokmitra team member, who tries to ensure that relevant pedagogical issues are discussed and addressed. The team members also try to encourage a productive dialogue by sharing any new or latest information about the education system, writings of educationists, information on new and improved teaching techniques.

In a usually top-down system, where the teachers' activities are controlled from above, the Forum has brought in certain amount of autonomy among the teachers. It aims to make them feel important and valued, increase their motivation, and most importantly support them in the process of teaching in the classrooms. Without losing sight of the demands placed on them and the administrative difficulties they have to deal with, the Teachers' Forum helps the teachers to support and motivate each other and make the most out of their situation. The teachers share their achievements and challenges, and use the forum as a platform of cross learning. In a situation, where the teachers often have to deal with the burden of school administration and teaching on their own, in areas where the communities are detached from them socio-culturally, the Forum helps give the teachers a sense of belonging. It provides hand holding support and promotes collective solutions to issues and challenges they all dealt with individually in isolation.

IMPACT AND ACHIEVEMENT

Most of the teachers, who are members of the Forum were taking back and using the learning from the Forum in their classrooms. There have been visible changes in the children but on whether this has had a huge impact on the classroom learning of the children, is yet to be assessed completely. The teachers reported using the insights gained from the Forum meetings, as well as from the publication in their classrooms with positive results.

As of February 2014, out of the 400 schools being supported periodically by Lokmitra, 30 schools were reported to have shown improvement in children's attendance and learning. Also, in many other schools the differences between the teachers and the parents are being bridged, and parent members of SMC and

teachers are working together on various aspects of school improvement like sanitation, enrolment, attendance, MDM (Mid-day Meal) etc.

CHALLENGES

For Lokmitra, gaining the cooperation of the teachers and more importantly gaining the cooperation of the *right* kind of teachers was a challenge. Lokmitra team spent a considerable amount of time building rapport with the teachers. They first went to the schools where they had some presence and thus certain amount acceptance had already been built. Further rapport building with individual teachers was undertaken. The team met with the teachers, and sometimes demonstrated certain teaching methods and then put forward their thoughts regarding the formation of the Forum. All this slowly sowed the seeds for the idea of having a forum and built their trust with the Lokmitra team members.

Once the Forum meetings started, one challenge was getting motivated teachers who want to work for the cause of the children, instead of using the Forum as a platform to raise their personal demands. Due to the large amount of administrative duties and pressures, the Forum meetings often led to discussions on departmental and administrative concerns and difficulties. To address this, rules to take forward the meetings were set beforehand so that only those concerns and issues related to learning and teaching were discussed during the course of the meeting. Once the framework of the meetings was set, one of the biggest challenges was ensuring the attendance of the teacher. Since the meetings were held on school holidays, it was difficult to ensure the presence of the teachers, especially the women teachers, because of their domestic responsibilities. However, as the Forum meetings progressed and the involvement of the members increased, most teachers regularly started attending the meetings.

The teachers found it difficult to write about their experiences, which to some extent hindered the process of disseminating the learning within the Forum to other teachers in the state. But as experiential writings were shared and discussed with them, their writing ability gradually improved.

Other minor difficulties like smooth facilitation of the meetings to avoid ego-clashes and domination by a few members were also faced, especially in the beginning. Another challenge was ensuring that the Forum meetings retain their individual identity and do not get identified as 'Lokmitra meetings'. It was ensured that the teachers retained their experience of ownership of the Forum, while the Lokmitra members were the facilitators.

LANGUAGE TEACHERS AS A SUPPORT SYSTEM

Sikshasandhan, established in the year 1995 in Bhubaneswar, Odisha and has been working in the field of education, especially for tribal children since its inception. From the years 1998 to 2008, the organisation functioned as a resource centre and undertook

an experimental project on tribal education. They covered around eight to nine districts of the state in this project, in which they tried to contextualize the curriculum, school timings and holidays based on the culture and daily schedule of the tribal community. This project achieved significant impact in the project area. However, with the RTE Act and specific provisions for every school in place, the project had to be discontinued. They initiated work in the tribal district of Mayurbhanj, trying to bring changes within the context of the RTE Act directly implementing their strategies on ground instead of working through other organisations.

With support from Oxfam India, Sikshasandhan aims to improve access to education for marginalised children in line with the Government Policy on the Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act in Nota Gram Panchayat (GP), Mayurbhanj district, Odisha. The project is called, Project Bisra- Palao Suder Lagid, which means Education for Change. The target groups are children, parents and teachers from 11 primary schools in 30 villages of GP. Besides the low level of literacy, tribal groups are also culturally alienated from mainstream education especially with regards to curriculum and medium of instruction, as they have their own languages, traditions and ways of living. This has further led to low enrolment and high dropout rates, as the local community cannot connect with the present education system. Although elementary education is now a fundamental right of every child in India, the reality for tribal children is that they are deprived of their educational rights, as well as other child rights.

ABOUT THE MODEL

Odisha has a large number of tribal communities (about 62), constituting about 23 per cent of the total population. A large proportion of this tribal population live Mayurbhanj district, about 53 out of the 62 tribal groups in Odisha of Mayurbhanj district. Infrastructure such as road, health and school facilities are negligible and diseases such as malaria are endemic. Around 65% of the population of Mayurbhanj live below the poverty line and for most months of the year depend on agriculture and forest resources for their livelihood. For the remaining months they migrate in search of wage labour. When Sikshasandhan began its work, it found that most children help their parents by working on their farm or collecting forest produce.

Besides the low level of literacy, the tribal community faces a language and cultural alienation, which Sikshasandhan realized is one of the biggest reasons for the high dropout rates among tribal children. The language of many of the tribal communities is very different from mainstream Odia, used in the schools. Further, the cultural context and way of living of these communities is often quite different from the context that the curriculum in the schools is based on. Most of the teachers in the tribal areas are non-tribal, with neither the knowledge of the tribal language, customs and history, nor the training to be sensitive to such contextual differences. Therefore, young children find it extremely difficult to understand and comprehend the concepts taught to them. This became core of Sikshasandhan's initiatives, that is to reduce the drop-out rates and ensure retention of tribal children in schools.

In the baseline survey conducted in the year 2011, it was found that language barrier was a main issue in the first and second grade, as young children are hardly exposed to the outside world where Oriya is spoken. As such many of children drop out at the early stage of schooling, and the ones that stay on either lack the basic concepts or have limited learning. Thus, the common obvious concern of parents' is that their children are not really learning anything in the schools. Education was of no real value for them.

Therefore, in the above context, Sikshasandhan, appointed 10 language teachers in the project schools. These teachers began conducting remedial classes support to the learning of the children who have left school early and to focus on their retention in school. These language teachers played an active role in bridging the language gap between the children and the teachers and act as models for stimulating child friendly practices in schools. In, the first year of implementation itself, there was huge progress made in the increase of the attendance rate of the children to 64% from the baseline figure of around 45%.

The language teachers are not only a bridge but also act as models for the regular teachers on ways of stimulating child friendly practices in schools. The duties of the language teachers often go beyond the classroom, as many of them go house to house to ensure that the children are being sent to schools and motivate and encourage parents to do so. They now also take an active part in the community development process due to the increase capacities as result of the mentoring and training received from Sikshasandhan.

The 10 language teachers went a thorough one-year training on the various aspects of education, some of which are:

- ▶ How to review the performance of the school,
- ▶ Issues in tribal children's education and how can they be addressed,
- ▶ Teaching methodology for the tribal children,
- ▶ RTE guidelines and SMC formation,
- ▶ Community mobilization strategies
- ▶ Development of contextual teaching learning materials.

A point to highlight is that while recruiting the language teachers, along with their academic qualification, their attitude, aptitude and competence was also given equal importance, which has helped in ensuring quality education.

Further, while Sikshasandhan demonstrated the importance and the positive impact of having teachers from the tribal community well versed in the local language, it had also simultaneously worked towards building the capacity of the government teachers. Teachers were oriented and trained on rich tribal history and culture, issues in tribal children's education and how can they be addressed and most importantly on child friendly pedagogy in a multi lingual context. These initiatives are aimed at sustainability of the impact achieved and mainstream the effort into the larger system.

IMPACT AND ACHIEVEMENTS

The most significant achievement of the above initiative has been the policy level change it has been able to achieve. The District Collector of the Mayurbhanj district adopted the model as an experiment took it forward in 4 blocks of the District. The success of the model couple with the advocacy efforts of Sikshasandhan, resulted in the Education Department of the Odisha, passing a notification for the employment of 3000 tribal youths as teachers in the Government schools on a contractual basis.

In addition, the engagement with government education system has reached an important stage with Noto Panchyat being acknowledged at the government level for streamlining the school system, arresting dropouts and initiating a model in mother tongue based education.

The appointment of the language teachers in the government schools had led to a perceptible increase (more than 65%) in the attendance of children in school as they are now able follow what is being taught at the school. The classroom transactions in the schools have also been regularised. Sikshasandhan's work with the regular teachers, both in terms of direct training and role modeling through the language teachers, has also improved the government teachers' performance and regularity. Almost all teachers now use certain key words and are able to communicate to the children and a few government teachers have already started teaching in mother tongue. The attendance of these teachers has also improved (to the extent 80%) and 8 of them have been persuaded to stay either in the school campus or nearby to facilitate regular opening of school on time and smooth functioning of it thereafter.

Both the government school teachers and the language teachers have been sensitized on the issues pertaining to RTE Act. They have also been trained on multi-grade and multi-lingual education, contextualization of curriculum, and constructivism based pedagogy. Nine government teachers as on April 2014 are consistently using improved teaching methods and giving individual attention while teaching the children.

Further, since most of these schools were run by single teachers, who are burdened with other non-teaching work, the presence of language teachers provides a much needed helping hand to the Government teachers and help run the schools better.

Moreover, other than the direct impact observed, the language teachers' have also helped bridge the huge cultural gap between the teachers on the one hand and the child and their parents on the other. Since these teachers are from the local community itself, the parents who until now felt a certain kind of inferiority from the Government teachers who are outsiders and earning much more than they are, now feel proud as a community and experience a greater sense of ownership and say in the school activities.

CHALLENGES

The path to these achievements has not always been smooth and the Sikshasandhan team had faced various challenges in the process. Primarily, the appointment of language teachers

made many of the government teachers feel threatened in the beginning as they now felt pressured to come to the school regularly and stay till the end of the school hours. This made them defensive and even antagonistic to the programme. However, Sikshasandhan tried to moderate this, by working not in isolation, but in an inclusive manner involving the government teachers in their efforts as well. They provided training to both the government as well as the language teachers, and tried to explain the project and its importance to them in a sensitive way. But changing the attitude of the teachers, and getting them on board of the project, was difficult as they enjoy an important position within the schools and the community, unchallenged by the system.

Despite these difficulties, there have been many government teachers who were supportive and cooperative to the project initiatives. But the transfer of teachers posed a challenging problem. Many good teachers were being transferred in the teacher rationalization¹² process to other blocks and often these teachers were the ones with whom Sikshasandhan had developed rapport and a good relationship.

Overburdening of the language teachers was another issue. The language teachers were slowly being seen by many of the teachers as helping hands in a situation where most the teachers are compelled to run the entire school single-handedly and run multiple classes simultaneously. Also, due of their proficiency in 'Ho' and thus a better ability to communicate with the children, classroom transaction became increasingly dependent on the language teachers. Many classes and other school activities were given to the language teachers.

Despite the continuous efforts of Sikshasandhan and the hard work put in by the language teachers, while enrolment and retention of children have increased, seasonal absenteeism of the students still remains. Children's engagement in livelihood and domestic activities increases their absenteeism, further aggravated by lack of awareness of the parents who are unable to see the long-term benefits of education. Having culturally and language friendly environment in the schools, while important, is not enough to tackle with these factors completely.

Remoteness of the area poses the challenge of mobility to the language teachers. There is no regular public transport facility and hiring private transport is not cost effective. Therefore, travel to the different project villages has proved to be much more difficult than was anticipated.

CONCLUSION AND LEARNING

Experiences and lessons from the above models highlighting engagement with teachers, brings to light the disadvantaged situation of the teachers in the current education system.

¹² A process by the government to relocate teachers where there is a need and/or to provide a full fledged or in-charge head teacher in every primary school. This is part of the process of making the state RTE compliant. Also government needs to transfer teachers who have completed ten years in a particular school as part of transfer policy. The project unfortunately has no control over this process but one positive outcome could be that trained tribal sensitive teachers would use skills acquired from project trainings elsewhere in another school.

The system is controlled and managed from the top, alienated from the ground reality in which schools operate. This is one of the contributing factors leading lack of accountability and low motivation of the teachers. Moreover, the expansion of the elementary education and high enrolment of children in schools was not supplemented with an increased number of teachers.

Despite a high salary and job security, there has been little impact on teachers' performance and regularity. As the teachers are not directly accountable to the community and at times have a superiority feeling because of belonging to higher socio-economic strata, there hasn't been much positive engagement between them. Furthermore is the burden of the administrative and non-teaching responsibilities. There are still many schools that continue to be run by single teachers, sometimes not even adequately trained.

Oxfam India's partners initiatives, have addressed some of the above listed issues to a certain extent in their areas of operation. While Lokmitra's, Teaching Learning Forum helped build the capacity and motivation of the teachers, Sikshasandhan's language teacher initiative helped tackle the over-burdening and socio-cultural alienation of the teachers. Most significantly, both the models have helped bring focus on the ground realities and have tried address the diminishing sense of accountability of teachers. Rather than confronting and taking the teachers to task, they have first tried to sensitise them on their responsibilities and the local context in which the school is operating.

Experience from these models demonstrates that any educational programmes should adopt collective dialogue among the key stakeholders as an important strategy. Any initiatives implanted and controlled from outside, or carried out as add on; will not serve the purpose of addressing the issues on the ground. Further, the system itself needs to be sensitive to the local contextual realities, especially in the tribal areas. Teachers and books alienated and not sensitive to language, history and realities of the students they are catering to, isolates children and discourages them for being active participants in the education process. And most importantly, it is vital that the policies for education not lose sight of the primary goal of education, which is enhancing the learning and reasoning ability of a child. This is possible only when certain non-negotiable like a qualified and motivated teacher, a child-sensitive learning environment, teaching practices that address the unique needs of the child are in place.

Gender, is another important factor to be taken into consideration. Though, the overall trends across the country show an increase in number of women teachers, this is not the case in tribal areas. Tribal girl children feel doubly alienated and there has been an increase in the reporting of cases of abuse and harassment in the schools. Therefore, it is important a conscious effort is made to encourage and recruit more number of women teachers in the schools.

In addition to the above, there are some policy level changes that need immediate action to bring a change in the situation on the ground in both the areas. Some of which are as per RTE Status report are-

- ▶ Prioritizing teacher recruitment to ensure PTRs are met in all schools. Likewise, prioritize recruitment of head teachers. Further, Pupil Teacher ratio needs to be substituted as Pupil Trained Teacher Ratio so that all children have access to a trained teacher.
- ▶ Teacher working conditions require more focussed attention to ensure long term commitment of teachers to the teaching profession. Focus on ensuring a career path for teachers is imperative.
- ▶ Teachers need to be freed from all forms of non-teaching work, leaving them to focus on classroom activities. Administrative support needs to be provided to schools to enable them to maintain records and do other necessary clerical tasks.
- ▶ Efforts to improve pedagogy, classroom experience and learning outcomes, should invest considerably in the training design, preparation of resource persons, quality of teacher training materials and, assessment of impact of training as a rigorous process -this needs to be made in order to realize the goal of quality education in a comprehensive and holistic manner.

Further there is a need for improved teacher management systems with a transparent process of recruiting, posting and promotion of teachers.¹³

Finally, the above initiatives have reiterated the need for having 'teachers' for 'teaching' in the classrooms. Teachers can be a natural ally and can contribute meaningful to the improving the educational status of a community. Improved and child friendly classroom practices and relevant pedagogy can further accelerate the process. Thus with affirmative efforts and actions, it is possible to make teachers more responsible and accountable towards the education of all children, especially from the marginalized communities.

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