



Out-of-school Children



the
'abhiyan'



to bring them
to school



A collection of case studies of good practices adopted by States for different categories of out-of-school children under AIE component of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan

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Foreword

The 86th Amendment to the constitution of India has made Elementary Education a fundamental right for all children of the age group of 6-14 years. Scheme of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan is a flagship programme of Government of India to achieve the goal of Universalisation of Elementary Education (UEE) in partnership with States and Union Territories (UTs) in a fixed timeframe.

The foremost challenge to achieve this objective of UEE is to ensure universal enrolment and participation of all children in the 6-14 age group in regular schools or alternative education centres. Some children who are in very difficult circumstances e.g. older children (11-14 years), children who migrate with their families, street and other homeless children cannot be enrolled directly into regular schools.

The Alternative & Innovative Education (AIE) component of SSA allows States and UTs to take up a variety of flexible alternatives designed to cater to the needs of specific groups of out-of-school children.

This document is a collection of a few case studies of good practices adopted by some States for different categories of out-of-school children under AIE component of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan. The ten good practices presented here differ in strategies used and process of implementation but cater to the 'last children' remaining out-of-school.

Vrinda Sarup



Introduction

The 86th Constitutional Amendment Act 2002 makes education a Fundamental Right for children in the age group of 6-14 years by stating “*the State shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of six to fourteen years in such manner as the State may, by law, determine*”. The Act further provides under Article 51-A (k) that it shall be a fundamental duty of every citizen of India who is a parent or guardian to provide opportunities for education to his child/ward between the age of six and fourteen years. There has been an impressive reduction in the number of out-of-school children in the past few years. In 2001, there were 58.02¹ million out-of-school children. This number had been reduced to 13.4² million in 2005. The problems regarding education of these out-of-school children vary across the nation with different causes, factors and diverse obstacles to overcome.

The heterogeneity of out-of-school children makes the proposition of schooling even more complex. It is not only difficult to understand the issues regarding out-of-school children but also strategise ways to bring these children to school. The various categories of out-of-school children include younger and older children, rural and urban children, children who migrate, children working for wages and those who are engaged in household activities. It also includes children who are extremely vulnerable, for example, HIV infected children living with constant fear of death, children living day after day in heinous life conditions at brothels and those who work as domestic servants.



Adhi roti khayenge – phir bhi school jayenge – This not a mere slogan, enrollment drives like *School Chalen Hum* in Jharkhand has helped in making this a resolve for many marginalised children

in the country – they are now ready for schooling and their name is ‘today’ – they can not wait for tomorrow.

Strategies to mainstream out-of-school children:

The strategies for mainstreaming out-of-school children can be broadly divided into 3 major categories - (i) enrolment drives, (ii) universalising physical access and (iii) strategies for other out-of-school children.

Enrollment drives - The first step towards bringing them to schools:

Enrollment in a school, wherever available, is the first step towards mainstreaming out-of-school children. Enrollment drives under different names and nature are carried out in different states with the objectives of generating awareness about the mission, sensitising the masses about out-of-school children, and identifying the children who are not in school and enrolling them. The elected leaders from districts block and panchayat levels participate in the enrolment drives conducted by the State SSAs (Sarva Shiksha Mission), they visit houses and talk to parents of out-of-school children. The children are encouraged to participate in various cultural and sports activities and then enrolled in formal schools with fanfare. The enrollment drives creates an congenial environment to push forward the Mission's objectives of universal elementary education and in the process involve all stakeholders from every strata of the society. No doubt, these drives become a mission within a mission because of their massiveness in participation.

Deprived urban children

Cities have become the last residue of out-of-school children in the country, causes being (i) the very fragile nature of urban out-of-school children, (ii) complexity of identification and tracking out-of-school children in urban areas, (iii) structure of project management teams at state and district level, (iv) district based planning since the days of DPEP, and (v) lack of effective coordination between SSA and municipal authorities. About 4.3% of children in urban areas are out-of-school. These include children in slums, children on the street and working children. The tracking of urban out-of-school children is often a major issue due to shifting of slums, and frequent migration. Prioritisation on urban planning, replicating good practices on urban-based interventions, adopting flexible approach on setting up alternative education centres, involving NGOs and civic authorities and coordinated effort of education departments and municipal agencies have been the main strategies in addressing the issues relating to urban out-of-school children.

Universal Access:

Providing universal access to elementary education is the foremost objective under SSA. Unserved areas are provided with primary and elementary schools under DPEP (District Primary Education Programme) and SSA to achieve this objective. Still, there remain scattered and remote habitations in the country which are not accessible to the facility of

elementary schooling. As per the Seventh All India School Education Survey (2006 NCERT), 86.97% habitations are served by primary schools. 53% of these habitations have primary schools located within the respective habitations and 34% have the same within 1 Km radius. The same survey suggested that 78.12% habitations of the country has upper primary schools within the respective habitations or within a distance of 3 Km. Education Guarantee Scheme (EGS) has been instrumental in providing access to schooling to the unserved, scattered and remote habitations. The EGS centres usually have one teacher for every 30-40 children. An additional teacher is provided when the number of children increases beyond 40. Establishing EGS centre is a community initiated and managed temporary facility before providing permanent schooling facilities to the unserved habitations. In 2005-06, over 1.11 lakh EGS centres provided educational facilities to over 40.42 lakh children.

Strategies under the alternative and innovative education:

Since the days of DPEP, diverse strategies have been adopted under the alternative and innovative education schemes to facilitate the process of mainstreaming of out-of-school children. With the inception of SSA in the year 2001, the scope and range of applying these strategies have been widened so as to achieve the mammoth mandate of enrolling each child of the country in a regular school or provide an alternative arrangement with equivalent quality.

Educating the migrating children

A major challenge before SSA has been enrollment and continuation of education of children who migrate seasonally with their families. Mapping the migration pattern, identifying the sending and receiving places and locating the children and helping them to get enrolled or continue their education need specialised efforts. Measures have been taken in several States to provide educational facilities to the seasonally migrating children. These include seasonal hostels or residential schools for retaining children back in the villages while other family members migrate and worksite schools at the destination sites of migration. Since 2005, this category of children is receiving a renewed emphasis. Several NGOs have been working on the issues of seasonal migration and supporting the efforts under SSA.

Residential and non residential bridge Courses: Direct mainstreaming and providing access to schooling can take care of the younger children (6-8 years) to begin with. But the never enrolled and dropped out children in the older age group (8-14 years) need time for preparation to get mainstreamed in respective classes as per their age. The bridge courses provide facilities of accelerated learning through condensed courses to prepare the dropped out and never enrolled children of the older age group to get mainstreamed in regular schools. Short term (3-6 months) non residential bridge courses (NRBCs) are run for the children in the age group of 8-10 years who need shorter period for preparation to get mainstreamed in regular schools. The objectives of this short term courses are habit formation and learning and practicing basic skills in language, mathematics and science.

Short term NRBCs are also run for older children (11 to 14 years) who have recently dropped out-of-school.

Dropped out and never enrolled children in the age group of 11-14 years need much more time for such preparation, so bridge courses of longer duration (9-18 months) are run for them. Long term NRBCs are also run for the 'difficult to reach' children (e.g. working children, children with special needs, children of sex workers) who are available at a particular place throughout the year.

Residential bridge courses (RBCs), generally, are not run for short terms. They are adopted for children who need extensive and intensive care to be prepared for mainstreaming. RBCs are for 'difficult-to-reach' children, never enrolled and dropped out children (mainly from the older age group) from scattered locations, child labour rescued from employers, or bonded child labour, wage earning or non wage earning working children who stay with their families but bear the risk of dropping out even after enrollment in NRBCs or mainstreaming in formal schools.

Accelerated learning facilities to acquire academic skills within shortest possible time, condensed text books with lots of exercises, strong collaboration with regular schools, and regular monitoring & evaluations are some of the strategies adopted to run the bridge courses so that the children are able to prepare themselves for mainstreaming as per their age.

Other alternative schooling centres: Sometimes children facing multiple obstacles cannot attain even bridge courses or fail to achieve the required skills within the short period in which these courses are run. The working children, children from nomadic communities, the child domestic workers, never enrolled children of very small habitations, children of construction workers sometimes cannot join a regular school or even a bridge course during day or with rigid timings. Centre based alternative facilities with longer duration and flexible timing and curriculum are run for these specific categories of children. The ultimate objective of running these centres is to mainstream the learners from these centres in regular schools in the long run.

Alternative centres for children in Madrasas and Makhtabs: A small proportion of Muslim children are enrolled in Madrasas and Makhtabs. Many of these children do not attend a regular school. While the effort under SSA has been to mainstream these children in regular schools, it was a felt necessity that the general education component of Madrasas/Makhtabs could be strengthened wherever these institutions are willing to do so. Such Madrasas/Makhtabs receive assistance under SSA for funding extra teachers, teacher training, text books, etc. for the teaching of general subjects.

The present document tries to capture some of the good practices under the above mentioned strategies from around the country. The strategies and initiatives described in this document are diverse but are not representative of all initiatives taken in the country. The good practices described here are the result of need based assessment at the grassroots as

well as district and state levels. These experiences indicate steps that should be taken for mainstreaming of specific groups of children. It is expected that more such initiatives would be taken for the children who are still out-of-school.

Many things can wait. Children cannot. Today their bones are being formed, their blood is being made, their senses are being developed. To them we cannot say "tomorrow." Their name is today. – Gabriela Mistral (Chilean teacher 1899 - 1957)



Manav Vikas Kendra

...developing hidden talents of hard-to-reach children in Madhya Pradesh

There are a large group of children like Rani Bano (see box) who are unable to attend regular schools or bridge course or EGS centres as all these centres follow a particular time schedule. The school timings are mainly during the day, clashing with their work hours. Sometimes, despite the best intentions of children and parents, the children are not able to come to an education centre during the day or for more than two to three hours. Socio-economic conditions also hinder their access to these centres. They are not only deprived of education; but are far away from the mainstream and face multiple disadvantages.



Rani Bano is a very special child from the Muslim community of Tikamgarh district in Madhya Pradesh. She and all her family members are engaged in bidi making. Despite having a strong urge for education, she could never join a school. The school timings did not suit her bidi factory schedules. Ultimately she got an opportunity when a Manav Vikas Kendra (Human Development Centre or HDC) was opened near her basti. She could attend classes in the HDC in the evening and work during the day. Not only did she study herself, but also inspired two of her older sisters to join the same centre. Her teacher says Rani wants to be a doctor – we could at least help her sustain her dreams.

Children from many working communities have never enrolled in schools. These could be the children of Bangalore, Chennai and Kolkata, or the construction workers in Goa. They could be from the nomad communities of Shahdol or Ratlam district of Madhya Pradesh, the scrap pickers of Betul district or milkness in Dewas district of MP. Children from very small working communities in Assam have also never enrolled in schools

These communities have never attended any school, they are very poor and earning compulsions are utmost for the survival in their daily lives. These children are motivated to join the Alternative Schooling System to work towards creating opportunities to enjoy the fundamental right of elementary education. It has been a realisation of SSA authorities in different States that unless interventions are specially designed to provide them flexible educational facilities, they would be further marginalised.

The objective of the Human Development Centres is precisely to address this problem of mainstreaming hard-to-reach children like Rani Bano. HDCs were started in Madhya Pradesh in 2005 with the aim to cover the children of very specific groups/communities who are otherwise 'unreached' by existing facilities under SSA. Presently the HDCs are run in 34 out of 46 districts of the State, covering a total of 12211 children.

Enrollment in Human Development Centres (June 2006)

Centres	Boys	Girls	Total
303	6880	5330	12211

Establishing & running Human Development Centres:

- Hard to reach children, children of specific communities with specific socio-economic characteristics are identified through the mandatory annual survey by the State. They are also identified through qualitative feedback from the cluster and block level personnel.
- On the basis of objective evaluation of collected data and feedback, the districts or the State Project Office of SSA decide the most suitable plan to address the educational needs of these children. The priority here is not immediate mainstreaming or bridging, but bringing them under the fold of education.
- Justifications for starting such flexible centres should be strongly backed by qualitative data. When assured about the same, the district and state authorities design the structure of the centre, curriculum and most importantly extra-curricular activities. It is important to motivate and lure the otherwise uninterested children and parents. The temporary nature of these centres is pre-integrated in this design for implementation.
- In many instances, the responsibilities of running these centres are given to the NGOs (Non Governmental Organisations). The State SSA programme invites applications from NGOs, providing details of children, communities and geographical locations. Specific NGOs are selected for specific groups of children on the basis of expertise and other criteria.

- The EVs (Education Volunteers) are provided training on motivational skills, extra curricular activities and teaching learning processes. They are required to keep a regular and close contact with the families and children so as to ensure attendance, participation in activities and thereby enhancing the possibility of mainstreaming in the near future.
- The focus in HDC is to develop a habit amongst children to come to the education centre, and extend to them facilities to develop their latent talents and learn the basics of language and mathematics.

Addressing special needs of special children:

In Shahdol district, HDCs are run for the children of nomadic Billochi community. These nomads reside mostly in groups under tents. The children of Billochi never go to school.

In Dewas, one HDC is running in the DIET (District Institute of Education & Training) campus for the children who reside in a slum by the side of the national highway. Parents of this community are afraid of sending their children to school because they have to cross the busy road at least twice a day. In the same district, another HDC is running in an urban slum of Dewas district for 40 children of milkmen. Most of their children are dropouts due to their business and tough timetable right from milking the cattle and distribution of milk in the morning, grazing the cattle in the day time to distribution of milk in the evening. These children have been enrolled in the HDC and are attending classes regularly with flexible timings as per their convenience and will be mainstreamed in a lead school after evaluation. Children also take keen interest in vocational education.



Children in one HDC at Gwalior. In very HDC, children not only learn academics but adequate care is taken to develop their hidden talents, improve personal hygiene & desired social habits. The focus is on improving the overall personality. This has helped in motivating both children and their parents to increase their interest in education leading to greater possibility of mainstreaming.

In Burhanpur, one HDC has been opened specially for the Muslim girls involved in bidi making. About 25 dropout girls have been enrolled in the HDC and will be mainstreamed in the nearby lead school after evaluation.

In Rajgarh, there is a section of Mirasis among the Muslim community who are musicians by profession. The children of this section go to weddings and other such ceremonies, with their elders and beat the drums, etc., in entertainment. Mirasis are a very poor section of the society and the children usually pick scraps in the day time. The district has opened one HDC for 47 such children enrolled and attending classes, alongwith vocational training.

The Ojha community of Betul district is a group of scrap pickers and mostly identified as involved in criminal activities. They generally reside in urban areas. In the beginning, response to HDC initiatives was very weak here. But, through sustained community mobilisation, a PTA (Parent Teacher Association) was formed who in turn owned the centres and enrolled more than 100 children within a month. PTA members of these HDCs monitor attendance of teachers and students, punctuality, etc., very regularly. Apart from academic lessons, the children here also learn to make bamboo made handicrafts, chalk, candles and incense sticks.

In Seoni, one HDC is running in a Juvenile Home with 30 children who are in conflict with law. These children have come from different areas and are serving long sentences. Here also, apart from taking academic lessons the children learn handicrafts with great interest. Three other HDCs have also been opened in Juvenile Homes of other districts in the year 2006-07.

Academics at HDCs:

HDCs cater to only hard-to-reach children, the children who have otherwise little opportunity or motivation to be in school. So, specific measures have been taken to address the needs of these children. To give maximum emphasis on mainstreaming, the regular model of bridge courses has been adopted. The nine months course is stretched to twelve months as these children need a little more time for preparation. Regular vocational training and orientation is given to the older children so that they are able to connect education with better livelihood. However, 80% of teaching time is given for academics. Use of teaching tools is extensive to enhance the process of accelerated learning.

Mainstreaming & retention:

Children enrolled in HDCs are hard-to-reach children. As described above, they face multiple disadvantages. So, mainstreaming of these children in formal schools is a relatively difficult proposition. Assuming the level of difficulty for mainstreaming, a conscious effort has been made to be in constant touch with the parents of the children so as to motivate them of the realise the benefits of formal education. Parents and children are continuously counseled on the subject. Among the 100 Ojha children of Betul, 25 children have already been mainstreamed. In Dewas district, 86 out of 175 children are mainstreamed, 20 of 26 children of milkmen are also mainstreamed in this district. Similar success is being achieved in other districts too.

Parallel initiatives have been taken for retaining the mainstreamed children in formal schools. The school authorities are oriented, facilities for remedial teaching are being organised and

counseling of parents and children is in progress. The Education Volunteers of HDCs are instructed to follow up every child in school and remedial sessions.

Learning from the initiative:

- Children in difficult circumstances need customised and focused interventions. Arrangements are to be made according to local requirements. At the same time constant efforts should be to ensure that these children not only attend the HDCs but are also motivated and guided to be mainstreamed in the shortest possible time.
- Every child has some talent. Efforts to develop the hidden talents of the children helps in improving the confidence level of both children and their parents since a confident child is more likely to aspire for a better life and get mainstreamed in schools.
- Time bound targets should be kept even when we deal with hard-to-reach children. The regular 9 months bridge course is extended to 12 months for HDC children but emphasis on mainstreaming is given right from the beginning.
- Monitoring and follow up mechanisms should be in place to evaluate the progress of children and ensure that they remain in school after mainstreaming. Preparation of child wise profiles and child wise planning is extremely helpful in dealing with education of hard-to-reach children.

■ ■

Working together for a common
cause...

Orissa and Andhra Pradesh

...to ensure continuation of education
of migrating children

Ora kaaj karey Deshe deshantarey, Anga banga kalinger samudra-nadeer ghatey ghatey, Punjabey Bombai-Gujratey. Ora kaaj karey. Tagore, 1941¹ (They work. They work in the country and overseas. They work in all the seashores and riversides of the country. They work in Punjab, Bombay and Gujarat).

Debraj continues his education:

Twelve-year-old Debraj Gahir, a resident of drought-stricken Bolangir district in Orissa, can hardly believe that he can go to school again. 'My dream of pursuing education was shattered when my parents started migrating. I lost hope that I would be able to go to school again,' says Debraj. What adds to his problem is that he is physically challenged. Debraj's parents migrate to Hyderabad for about seven months a year to work in the brick kilns as drought has made their farm unproductive.²

Two years ago, SSA Orissa, SSA Andhra Pradesh and Action Aid India (a non-government organisation) started a collaborative project to address the educational need of children like Debraj and set up residential and non-residential bridge courses around the brick kilns. The primary aim of the project was to ensure that the children who were forced to migrate along with their parents would not lose the other half of their academic year. Teachers were brought from Orissa to teach the children in these bridge camps. Once the children finish their schooling here, they get a certificate of passing for the year, which is in turn submitted in their local schools ensuring promotion to the next class and continuation of education. One of these bridge camps was set up near the brick kilns where Debraj's parents were working. He was admitted in the Vth standard, which he had to discontinue. He was to pass the examination at the end of session and when he went back to his native village he was promoted to next class. Now Debraj is confident that his education will continue without any hindrance.

Migration to brick kilns:

Every year the poor from Western Orissa districts (Bolangir, Naupada and Kalahandi) migrate to work in the brick kilns of Andhra Pradesh. According a report by Action Aid, the number of such seasonally migrant labourers is around four lakhs. These labourers migrate in semi-bonded conditions due to acute shortage of sustainable livelihood options in their native places. Moneylenders and contractors further compound the socio-economic condition of these labourers because of exploitative practices. Middlemen or labour contractors emerged as a set of exploiters. Their job is simple: They coax the poor people

and farmers of these poorest areas of the country into migrating for work to other states where the rich industrialists, brick-kiln owners or road contractors savour the cheap but skilled labour. These labourers do not qualify as migrants under the Inter-State Migrant Workmen's (Regulation of Employment & Conditions of Service) Act of 1979, since they migrate on their own volition.³

The Labour contractors have a very strong nexus with the brick kiln owners. Advances are given with the condition that the labourers fulfill their obligation with the contractor by going to the pre-determined destinations where their labour is harnessed. Brick kilns around Hyderabad and Secunderabad are such destinations. The conditions under which these people live are far from satisfactory. Makeshift huts constructed in the kilns are so small that one has to crawl to enter these. Needless to say, basic sanitation is absent. . The worst affected are the children, for whom there is neither any amusement nor any form of recreation. They too help their parents in making bricks. The workers are never allowed to even take a day off, not till the end of their term.⁴

The beginning:

SSA Orissa, SSA Andhra Pradesh and Action Aid made a joint effort in the year 2004 to devise a plan to address the educational need of these migrating children to brick kilns. A survey was conducted in the same year in the brick kilns of selected blocks of three districts - Rangareddy, Medak and Nalgonda of Andhra Pradesh. Block level SSA officials, school teachers of the concerned villages and volunteers from SSA Orissa conducted this survey. Places to set up non residential and residential bridge courses (NRBCs & RBCs) were identified during the survey. A total of 2721 children in the age group of 6-14 years and 1535 children in the age group of 0-5 years were identified during the survey in six blocks of three districts.

The survey was followed by setting up of early childhood care centres for children of 3-5 years of age, non residential bridge courses for children of 6-9 years of age and residential bridge courses children in the age group, 9-14 years. SSA Andhra Pradesh instructed district officials to provide mid-day meals and learning material to the children of NRBCs and RBCs. By the 1st week of January 2005, NRBCs were opened in identified places.

Achievements:

By the end of 2005-06, the initiative was successful in enrolling 2721 children in the RBCs & NRBCs, 1943 of these children joined back in their original schools and 1306 were promoted to the next standard. The extent of migration to brick kilns and other industries is a large one. Presently the initiative is covering only 6 selected blocks of Andhra Pradesh. A larger coverage is needed to ensure continuation of education of all children who seasonally migrate to other states and districts.

The pedagogical complexities of education of migrating children:

Providing education to migrating children is a difficult as well as complex task, more so when it is inter state seasonal migration. Though still a difficult task, difficulties are better managed when seasonal migration is occurring within the state or, in other words, it is inter-

district. The following are some of the complexities faced by implementers while providing seasonally migrating children their basic right – elementary education:

The migrant children face the challenge of a different language, a different culture. It takes a lot of time and effort to adjust even in their daily lives in a relatively alien place. The complexities are compounded with immediate economic priorities of elder members. It would be very difficult for an Oriya child to learn Telugu, leave alone following the teaching learning process in that language. Teachers from a different culture - speaking in a different language – giving different sets of instructions make the friendliest ones of them unknown and unwanted.

Different textbooks and school calendars are followed in different states. The syllabus in Andhra Pradesh will certainly be different, if not entirely, from the syllabus followed in Orissa. Migrant children will not be able to follow different textbooks even if they get a chance for schooling at the receiving place. A different syllabus, examination system or certification will not be helpful for them to continue education after returning to their native places after migration season.

Examinations, certification and other related aspects are conducted differently by different state administrations. In the absence of formal collaborations, examinations and certifications of one state (especially of alternative schooling) are not recognised in other states. Thus they are not so useful for mainstreaming or promotion to the next class.

Working together to address the pedagogical issues:

Working together for a common cause has helped Orissa and Andhra Pradesh (with active participation of Action Aid), to overcome the initial hitches and address the pedagogical complexities effectively. EVs from Orissa were involved right from the beginning in conducting surveys in brick kilns of Andhra Pradesh to identify the children. The Orissa EVs also used the opportunity to generate awareness among parents and motivate them to bring their children to NRBCs and RBCs.

SSA Orissa, Andhra Pradesh and Action Aid devised the plan and initiated implementation jointly. Many pedagogical and other issues were assumed from related experiences and steps taken accordingly.

Instead of following the regular training modules, a special training module was developed and specific training exercises were adopted to train the EVs responsible for teaching in NRBCs & RBCs. Active involvement of block and cluster level officials and resource persons in these training programmes ensured that monitoring of teaching learning process is done accordingly.

Above all, textbooks from Orissa are supplied for use of children in RBCs & NRBCs. So, the curriculum and language followed are that of the sending State, making it easier for the children who are already in difficulty due to seasonal migration and subsequent discontinuation of education.

District SSA authorities of **Andhra Pradesh conduct examinations** at the end of sessions and successful children are issued certificates. Schools in Orissa are instructed to recognise the certificates and promote the children to the next standards accordingly.

RBCs are opened for older children as there has always been a possibility of engaging them in helping the parents in their brick kiln jobs. The brick kiln owners also try to use them as labour without any extra cost.

Addressing the logistical issues:

Commitment to right to education for every child of the country and recognising the complexities of providing education to seasonally migrant children calls for logistical collaboration to the minutest level. Conducting surveys in worksites, motivating parents, planning for setting up bridge course centres, sending EVs, supplying text books, conducting examinations, issuing certificates and conducting follow up activities for mainstreaming and re-enrollment in sending areas – everything needs close coordination between all stakeholders. Other than arranging the same, the SSA authorities of the two States could also provide for essentials like mid-day meals and issue migration cards.

Action Aid played a major role as a facilitator to the whole process. The organisation also supported with required extra remuneration to the EVs, who leave their original place and work in another state for six months in a year.

Residential care at the sending end:

To counter the problem of educating the migrating children, SSA Orissa has started Residential Care Centres at the sending end so that while the parents migrate, children stay in these care centres and continue their studies. In the year 2005, 95 such care centres which catered to 2775 children. Through the annual child census, the State has identified 11 districts with high migrating population, the families who migrate, and the schools in which the children are otherwise enrolled and according to the needs identified established the care centres in these 11 districts.

Learning from the initiative:

- Migration is a complex problem and requires multi-pronged approach to ensure education of migrant children. Under this initiative not only RBCs & NRBCs were started in the receiving end but also residential camps were established at the sending end to check migration of children.
- In case of inter state seasonal migration, both the states have to take pro-active measures to deal with the situation and take appropriate actions in the utmost interest of the children. Logistical, language, text books, teacher issues are extremely important for effective programme implementation with the aim of mainstreaming and continuation of education. This can not be handled properly if the concerned states do not join hands.

- Even complex procedures like providing midday meals, conducting examinations and issuing certificates could be handled effectively if the concerned States join hands and coordinate in a structured manner.
- Civil society organisations are able to come up with innovations to deal with educational needs of children in difficult circumstances. But State authorities should be responsible in taking advantage of these innovations and expanding the same for ensuring the fundamental rights of children.
- Follow up and coordination between sending and receiving areas are very important. We need have change agents like EVs and other concerned personnel to carry out follow up activities accordingly.
- Norms for honorarium, etc., to teachers, etc., need to be more flexible as the challenge of educating seasonally migrating children calls for unusual efforts and highly motivated and sensitive teacher attributes.



Children at a residential care centre in Orissa. The children here stay for six months, they are provided with food, text books and other required facilities like notebooks, pencils etc. The teacher stays with the children and takes necessary care of them.



Bhonga Shala

...bringing the schools to the children

Bhonga shala is an innovation to provide education to children from brick kilns in Thane district of Maharashtra. In Marathi 'Bhonga' means temporary hut and 'Shala' is school. So Bhonga Shala is a 'school run in a temporary hut'. Vidhayak Sansad, a local NGO, started five Bhonga Shalas in 1995 in two blocks of the district. Today, with support from SSA, Maharashtra, there are as many as 250 such centres in 7 blocks of Thane district. These are catering to the educational needs of more than 5000 children from the brick kilns. Bhonga Shalas ensure that education continues, and is not hampered due to migration. For the entire brick kiln season (December to May), primary level (standard I-IV) education is provided at the brick kiln site through these centres. The syllabus covered is the same as in the mainstream schools, but taught in a non-formal, open atmosphere, using songs, dance and play-way activities.

A little background:

It is estimated that 25000 children migrate to the brick kilns of Thane district of Maharashtra each year. Most of them work in these brick kilns and some just accompany their parents. Maharashtra is the second most urbanised state in India and most of its 42 districts have hundreds of brick kilns. Unfortunately, no estimate is available on how many children in Maharashtra lose at least six months of education due to migration to brick kilns. However, in Thane the migrating population is predominantly tribals - the Warlis, Katkaris, Mahadeo Kolis, Malhar Kolis, Thakurs, and Kokanas. Among these six tribes the Katkaris are the most backward socio-economically and educationally. The literacy rate amongst them is a mere 9%, and female literacy is hardly 1%.

Debt and desperation:

Brick work starts around November, after the monsoon. In August, the tribal family takes an advance from the labour contractor or brick kiln owner, normally ranging from Rs. 2,000 to Rs.10,000/-. This advance is crucial for the sustenance of the labors, as in August and September, there is no work in the fields. Hence they are forced to take these loans to feed their families and also important festivals like "Gauri" and "Ganpati" puja fall during that period. Migration to brick kilns is a way of 'paying off' the advance. The brick kiln owner makes them work even for 14-16 hours a day at minimum (or less) wages. Money earned in this fashion by only one member of the family is not sufficient and thus, all the family members work at these brick kilns. The entire family works for five-six months to pay off the advance. Hundreds of families find themselves in this position each year.

Exploitation of small hands:

Children accompanying their migrating parents are compelled to work to supplement the family income. They are not counted separately and taken as part of the family's income because the payments made are based on the numbers of bricks produced. The children are

engaged in various activities like sieving the coal dust, preparing the dough for bricks and carrying as many as 10 to 12 bricks at a time. They work for 10-14 hours a day. The coal dust affects their skin, hair, eyes and lungs. To clean the mud, they have to stand in thigh deep water which is dirty.

Starting a Bhonga Shala:

Starting and running a Bhonga Shala is much more than opening an education centre in the month of December and closing it in April. The process begins with the recruitment and selection of teachers and is followed by conducting surveys of children in brick kilns. The sites for Bhonga Shala are decided according to number of children available. Construction of the schools begins after informing the brick kiln owners and requesting his cooperation. Enrollment of children and meetings with parents go hand in hand. Actual teaching-learning process begins after enrollment. During the survey, it is found that many children have never been to school, most of them do not remember what they learnt earlier in their schools. Preliminary examinations are conducted to find out actual abilities of the children and accordingly they are admitted in the respective standard or classes.

Multipurpose teachers:

Every morning, the teachers visit the homes of the brick kiln worker to collect the children. The teacher also takes initiatives in bathing them and combing their hair, before bringing them to school. They do similar rounds after the lunch break so that the children do not miss out the afternoon sessions of the school. Besides convincing the parents to send their children to school, the teacher also have to converse with and convince the brick kiln owners to allow these children to attend to Bhonga Schools, which is obviously the most arduous task.

To do all these tasks, the teachers reside in Bhonga Shalas for six months, though most of the female teachers come from nearby areas. Staying in the centre brings in multiple advantages to the teachers as they can be in constant touch with children, parents, brick kiln owners and administrators, though they lose out a lot on the personal front.

Teacher training:

Since they are supposed to have responsibilities much beyond those of any regular teacher, residential training for the teachers of Bhonga Shalas is intensive, diverse and motivational. Teachers are trained for one month in various topics including child psychology, use of teaching aids and various teaching learning methods.

Apart from training on usual school curriculum, the teachers are also given lessons on rights of the children, prevailing socio-economic conditions and day to day situations in brick kilns. Cultural programme every evening is an important aspect of training. The trainee teachers are required to participate in dramatics and singing and dancing sessions on socio-economic issues. During training, the teachers come out with interesting compositions on social and health issues. In this training programme, teachers are always treated like soldiers of social change. Vidhayak Sansad leaves no stone unturned to ensure that at the end of the training programme, teachers leave with high commitments for desired social change.

So, the teachers make Bhonga Shala a success:

Balu Diwa has no palms or fingers on his hands, same is true for his legs. Being from the most backward tribe of Katkaris he fought with several odds apart from abject poverty to continue his education till class 10. But he became uncertain about his future when he failed in class 10 and there were no means to continue. Fortunately his determination was recognised by Vidhayak Sansad and after a two months rigorous training, he was ready to teach in a Bhonga Shala. Things did not become any easy for him though. In his second year as a teacher he was deputed to Bhonga Shala at Medhaphata. As it was desired of him, he started with construction of the centre. He collected bamboos from brick kiln owners and villagers and completed the school. But during one night some unscrupulous elements destroyed the school. He could not believe his eyes when he saw his school in the morning. To construct the school again was a Herculean task but he accepted the challenge and started afresh. Balu went to the forest, cut wooden sticks, brought grass and collected other material and constructed the school again only to find it destroyed again the next morning. Such is the story for many teachers like him. The land grabbers do not want such centres to come up. For any other teacher it would have been the end of the struggle. But Bulu did not give up. Eventually, he had to construct the school for the fourth time before his enemies gave up.

Teaching learning in Bhonga Shalas:

The teacher uses various student friendly techniques like songs, stories and dance to teach the children the entire year's syllabus in 6 months. At the end of April, the exams are conducted under the supervision of Govt. school teachers as per govt. timetable. Govt. school teachers also do assessment and result preparation. Bhonga Shala teachers assist the government school teachers in conducting examinations. Certified mark sheets and a letter from Vidhayak Sansad are given to the children before they go back to their native places.

Following the children to their native place:

The follow-up process begins in the month of June. This includes going back to the native villages of the students enrolled in the Bhonga Shala and checking whether they are re-enrolled in their original schools. The teachers also provide lists of these students to the district education authorities and to the village schools to ensure that these children continue their education. The teachers of Bhonga Shala, officials from Vidhayak Sansad and district SSA authorities and the school authorities coordinate among themselves to ensure that the children from Bhonga Shalas are continuing their education. Parents are encouraged not to bring the children again next year but if they do, the children are enrolled in Bhonga Shala.

Result of follow up initiatives

Year	No. of students followed up	No. of students readmitted	Percentage
2002-03	3062	2215	72
2003-04	4058	2980	73
2004-05	3959	3043	77

Note: SSA, Maharashtra is supporting Bhonga Shala since the year 2003-04

Education beyond education:

The target community of Bhonga Shala is extremely deprived on all accounts. Leave alone rights like health or education, for years they have been denied their rights over their own land and forests. So, education in Bhonga Shala aims beyond primary or elementary education. It rather works towards a social change. Unlike the usual *namaste* or good morning/ good afternoon which you hear from the children in any part of India, the children in Bhonga Shalas would always greet you with *Zindabad* with their fists raised high. When you leave them, they do not say goodbye. They remind you of their rights by chanting slogans like: *Shiksha hamare haq ki, Nabi kisike Baap ki; Shiksha hame milinihi chahiye, Koun kabeta hai nabi denge, liye bagair nabi rahenge; Adivasi, Kashtakari, janwar nabi insan hai, insan hai; Insaniyat ki Bhik Nabi, Hak chahiye, Hak chahiye.* Their faces tell that they are determined, their raised fists tell that they ready to fight not only for education but to lead a dignified life.

Learning from the initiative:

- A right based approach is needed to work for education of difficult to reach children. The right to education has to be understood by all stakeholders, specially the teachers, implementers, parents and employers.
- The aim of education cannot be mere continuing in schools or passing examinations. It has to be directed towards attaining a dignified life.
- Teachers are the backbones of any initiative like Bhonga Shala. Only motivated and committed teachers can make such initiative successful. So, the selection, training and placement of teachers are very important and have to be carried out with extreme care. The right based approach has also to be taken for training and placement of teachers and in day-to-day dealings with them.
- Teachers of Bhonga Shala live in the centre itself. They leave their families and devote six months of every year to the cause of children of brick kilns. This is one single most factor which helps the teachers to fully concentrate and work for objectives which are otherwise very difficult to achieve.
- Migration is a complex phenomenon. Understanding this phenomenon itself is a difficult process. Identification of children, motivation of parents and employers and follow up at the end of migration season has to be planned carefully. Centres cannot be started abruptly.
- Continuation of education is not only affected when the children migrate to other districts or states. A lot of children migrate with their families within the districts. Initiatives like Bhonga Shala are very effective in addressing the educational needs of such children.
- One need not spend a lot of money in erecting temporary centres. Locally available material and support from employers ensure that centres are established with no or at minimum costs.

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Child labour is an education issue

...convergence of liberating & educating the working children in Andhra Pradesh

1:30 p.m. 20th June, 2006, Uppal Municipality Market, Ranga Reddy district, Andhra Pradesh:

Mr. Vivekananda Murthy gives a hard look to the shopkeeper. 'This is your second time, isn't it?', he says in a suppressed but harsh voice. He pulls a stool, makes place for himself in the stuffy little room and without wasting a minute starts writing a penal notice to be issued to the shopkeeper. The bemused shopkeeper comes up with the usual arguments – the boy (working) in his shop is like his son, he is actually a family member and so on. Mr. Murthy is an Assistant Labour Officer posted in Uppal municipality of Rangareddy District.

The incident took place when a team of officers from SSA & NCLP (National Child Labour Project) of Ranga Reddy district accompanied Mr. Murthy to rescue child **labour** working in shops and dhabas in the streets of Uppal. This was the tenth destination where the team found child labour related offences within two hours of raids. The child rescued was from a distant village and used to go to his village school till two months back. The team decided that going back to the same school would be the best option for the child.

Within ten minutes, two notices were served on the shopkeeper, one from SSA asking him to ensure that child gets admission in a school, and another from the labour department citing legal sanctions. The legal sanctions were served under the Child labour Act and Andhra Pradesh Shops & Establishment Act. The shopkeeper was told to assist the child financially, besides re-enrolling him in school. This was his second offence, once earlier he was caught employing another child in his shop. He was warned that the third time, his shop would be closed by the authorities.

The fraternity of shopkeepers did not come forward to help or rescue their fellow traders, caught employing a child. The shopkeeper's organisation already had a series of meetings with SSA and NCLP authorities. The organisation has expressed their solidarity with the initiative of SSA and NCLP. 'But it is not always easy to keep commitments, when such cheap labour is available in abundance' - Mr. Murthy explained.

11:00 a.m. 19th June, 2006, Begampet, Hyderabad City, Andhra Pradesh:

Two children quietly get into the back of the waiting jeep. Two volunteers cross the road to visit a shop and two other volunteers get in the jeep and break into a conversation with the children. One child goes on insisting that he is going to school and studying in class VI. But the school he mentions does not exist, the location of

the school mentioned by him has no school at all. He is asked to write his name, he cannot, he is asked to do a two digit addition, he fails. After some time he gives in to the volunteers. He agrees he does not go to any school. He works in a nearby shop. The other child is visibly upset. 'What would I do with education when my family is starving?', he asks defiantly. He tries his best to put up a brave front but breaks into tears in no time.

'Does he understand his wellbeing? Can he decide whether to study or work?' asks Md. Afsar Ahmed from Hyderabad Council of Human Welfare (HCHW). HCHW is one of the three welfare organisations responsible for conducting raids in three different parts of the twin cities of Hyderabad and Secunderabad. Each one of his team members has a uniform with their identity cards hanging prominently on their chests. The District Collector of Hyderabad issues the ID cards giving the authority to enter any establishment and rescue child labourers. 'They say we have 80000 such working children in Hyderabad and we could rescue only 147 children in the last one month' - Mr. Ahmed continues in a pessimistic voice. 'We must realise that the Child Labour Act is not adequate for liberating the children and enrolling them in education centres. But we have no dearth of laws. If one law is not adequate, we apply another or several laws for the good of children. Indian Penal Code, Minimum Wage Act, etc., comes in handy when we confront complex situations.'

The district Scheduled Castes Finance Committee, district Minority Commission, etc., have come forward and joined the SSA initiative. Children and their families are helped with provisions available with these bodies. The rescued child's concern about the support he used to give his family is very valid to Mr. Ahmed and the district SSA authorities. Their first objective is to enroll the child in a residential bridge course and thereafter they initiate efforts towards possible economic rehabilitation. Other districts have other provisions like *Indira Kranti Pathakam* to support such causes. Everyday, Mr. Ahmed, his HCHW team, personnel from SSA Hyderabad, NCLP Hyderabad visit at least 50 establishments mainly shops and dhabas to rescue the working children. Earlier, a policeman used to accompany the team, but now they do not feel such need. An intensive media campaign by SSA Andhra Pradesh has helped generating awareness to support the cause.

12 p.m. 19th June, 2006, Railway Police Force Office (RPF), Secunderabad Railway Station, Andhra Pradesh:

Three children are waiting patiently in RPF Office. Mr. Ahmed first talks to his volunteers posted at the Railway Station and gets details of the children. His two member team rounds up children at the railway station throughout the day, and sends them to transit homes. The transit home is supported by the NCLP. Normally, after 2-3 days of stay in the transit home the children move to SSA run residential bridge course centres. One of the volunteer explains that the RPF here is very cooperative. They themselves have educational facilities for such children and support the initiative of SSA, NCLP and organisations like HCHW actively. It is difficult to find a secure place in this busy railway station to wait for the vehicle to take the children to the transit home. The RPF has given them a secure place. They have

also provided a guard to watch the children while the volunteers make their rounds at the station.

Factors contributing to effective convergence for liberation and education of child labour:

Through legislative actions and executive orders, the state of Andhra Pradesh has formally recognised that an out-of-school child is either a child labour or potential child labour. This has helped in mobilising efforts towards enrollment and mainstreaming of children in schools bridge courses.

State-wide intensive media campaigns have been carried out to generate awareness about the evils of child labour practices, legal provisions against the practice and the fundamental right to education. Print, electronic and other media carried out this campaign consistently .

There is coordination between SSA and the AP Labour Dept. The district NCLP directors, report to the SSA authorities in Andhra Pradesh. In many cases, the district NCLP director and Assistant Project Coordinators (district level head of SSA) is the same person. This has enormously helped in mobilisation of efforts towards liberation, enrollment and mainstreaming. There is no scope for lack of coordination between these two crucial project authorities and they are working in unison for a common objective.

Necessary changes have been brought out in the provisions of the NCLP project. The practice of a child attending NCLP centre getting Rs. 100 per month as an incentive has been done away with. This used to cause exodus of children from SSA run centres to NCLP centres only for getting the monetary benefit.

NCLP in the State has also started need-based schemes to (i) facilitate the process better and (ii) foster integration with SSA activities, and thereby ensuring continuation of education for the liberated child labourers.

Monthly meetings are conducted between SSA, NCLP, District Collectors and representatives of all line departments of the State Government, wherein the issue of child labour and education of deprived children gets prominence. Whenever required, immediate orders are issued by the District Collectors in favour of the initiative.

Identity cards are issued by the District Collectors to team members for conducting raids to rescue child labourers. This has not only given sanctity to the initiative but also helped the team members in approaching the concerned departments, including the police, whenever required.

Active participation from the civil society organisations is sought. As mentioned in this document, in Hyderabad and Ranga Reddy districts, NGOs are involved in conducting raids, rescuing children and making immediate arrangements for their educational

rehabilitation. The involvement of NGOs have also increased the probability of education beyond the age of 14, job oriented vocational training, etc.

Dedicated helplines such as '**Childline**', have been established to support the cause. Children and people in general have come forward with useful information and complaints using this helplines.

State level coordination: The task of rescuing the working children and enrolling them in education centres are, for obvious reasons, mainly happening at the district level. As described above, the district level stakeholders are working in coordination with each other to make the initiative successful. At the State level, the State NCLP coordinator, who is also the joint director for AP SSA, has the responsibility to convene bi-monthly meetings of district NCLP project directors and take stock. These meetings mainly focus on programmatic and financial issues. Problems are discussed and decisions regarding remedial measures are communicated to the concerned district officials. On occasions, due to shortage of time, etc., video conferences are also organised by AP SSA, to communicate with the NCLP Project Directors and discuss activities regarding education of child labourers.

4 p.m. , 19th June, 2006, State Project Director's Office, Andhra Pradesh:

'We have made **child labour an education issue**', said Mr. Chandramouli, Project Director, SSA Andhra Pradesh. 'What is the right of a child? It is education and childhood. The Labour department has limited scope in providing both. So, we have joined hands. Enforcement and education is now done jointly, immediately and simultaneously. Convergence with other related departments has contributed to bringing in the required thrust as well as support. The government officials in the State have taken a pledge that they will not employ any child labour in their houses. It might be a small step considering the seriousness of the problem but coupled with other related initiatives, we are sure it would result in a positive ripple effect reaching every corner - every concerned person of the State.'

Though the process of liberating every child labour and providing them education is a relatively new initiative, Mr. Chandramouli's words point to a beginning with encouraging notes and with lots of promises. Recently the State Legislative Assembly has passed a resolution saying a child not going to school should be considered a child labour thereby making it obligatory for the concerned authorities to take necessary steps. Today, Mr. Murthy and the team at Uppal do not think twice to raid the houses of even the high and mighty when they have definite information on employment of child labour. Today, a village pradhan directly calls up the State Project Office, to inform about a child who needs to be rescued.

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Sakhar Shala

...educating the migrating children in sugarcane fields of Maharashtra

Sakhar Shalas¹ are temporary schools in the settlements of sugar cane cutters, which intend to provide primary education to children of sugarcane labourers. The aim of the Sakhar Shala intervention is to help children continue their education, which is severely hampered due to migration. It also helps children to get back to mainstream education. Janarth, an Aurangabad based NGO in Maharashtra, started this innovative intervention of Sakhar Shalas in the year 2001-02 with 882 children of migrant labourers at two cooperative sugar factories in Ahmednagar district. Today, the organisation runs Sakhar Shalas in five districts of the state – Ahmednagar, Pune, Nashik, Sangli and Satara. Presently, there are 73 such temporary schools catering to 4256 migrating children.

Background: Seasonal migration in sugarcane factories of Maharashtra:

Maharashtra, being one of the most developed States in the country, is a hub of migration. The State provides a dynamic environment for both inter and intra state migration. Inter state migration are mostly semi permanent in nature, whereas intra state migrations are seasonal. The sugar factories in Western Maharashtra, the brick kilns in Thane district, quarries in Ratnagiri and various construction sites, form the centres of seasonal migrations.

Maharashtra is the country's largest sugar producing State. Sugarcane is known as a lazy man's crop since it does not require much care except watering at regular intervals. But harvesting sugarcane is a labour intensive process. According to official statistics issued by Maharashtra State Sugar Cooperative Federation, 1.6 million farmers in the State cultivate sugarcane on 0.7 million hectares of land. It has been estimated that a staggering 0.2 million children² of migrant sugarcane cutters below 14 years of age, accompany their parents to districts all over the state, every cutting season. Over half of them, in the age group of 6-14 years (54% boys and 46% girls), totaling 0.13 million end up being deprived of schooling facilities.

Life at Sugarcane fields & factories:

Life of the migrant labourers in sugarcane fields and factories is nothing short of abject misery. Lured by money and the chance of better lives, they come in large groups but ultimately are left with no choice but to accept whatever comes their way. There are major issues like non-availability of onsite facilities for housing, education, health and sanitation . Small tents made of bamboo and mats form their abodes. Long hours of work, inadequate sleep, lack of proper food, accompanied by poor hygiene and sanitation facilities at the sites lead to poor health standards. Younger children help in making bundles of sugarcane tops, which is used as fodder. Older children join other family members in cutting cane. Older girl children do domestic chores and look after their siblings. These children provide extra hands to their parents with no costs to employers and life goes on. They miss education from October to March, schools nearby the sugarcane fields and factories do not have the capacity

to absorb the extra load and the employers do not provide education, as they never employ the children directly.



She is Geeta. Every year her family migrates to the sugarcane fields for six months. Children like her get the opportunity to continue their education through interventions like Sakhar Shalas.

Sakhar Shala is a second semester school

Sakhar Shalas are temporary schools and do not function round the year. They function only during the second part of the educational year. Usually schools commence new classes in the month of June after the summer vacations. The children of sugarcane cutters migrate during the crushing seasons, which is in between October/November and March/April. The children attend schools in their respective villages before migration; obviously, during migration they cannot do so. When these children return to their villages after migration season, they are unable to restart education due to non-attendance and discontinuation of studies for six months and as a result drop out. Sakhar Shalas provide that vital opportunity to schooling during migration seasons so that the children can continue their education after going back to their villages.



Young children working in a sugarcane field

Activities before starting Sakhar Shalas:

Education in Sakhar Shalas starts in the month of November but the preparations for the same start much earlier. This includes recruitment of teachers, training of trainers and the teachers. The teacher training programme is a rigorous exercise of one month which includes topics like how to create a positive environment, teaching learning methodologies, child psychology, preparing teaching learning material, school management, etc. A total of 160 participatory sessions are conducted during the training programme.

The teachers also do groundwork activities like meeting the parents and motivating them to send their children to school, meeting the factory management to make necessary provisions, etc. One of the major activities conducted before starting Sakhar Shalas is the survey of each family in the settlements to assess the number of children, who have migrated with parents. Coordination with State, district and block level Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan authorities are also done during this time. Networking with education department is two-pronged – (i) advocacy to institutionalise the model in all sugarcane factories in the state and (ii) programmatic – getting the model of Sakhar Shala work perfectly towards mainstreaming and continuation of education of children who migrate to sugarcane factories, getting the Block Education Officers to supervise the centres, conducting examinations and issuing necessary certificates.

Education in Sakhar Shalas:

The ultimate objective of Sakhar Shala is to improve the quality of life of the migrant labourers by providing quality education to the migrant children. The model focuses on (i) acquisition of basic reading, writing and numeric skills, (ii) imbibing a sound value system, (iii) physical fitness and (iv) preparing for higher education. The Sakhar Shalas concentrate on competency based teaching for the young children to enhance their capacities and potential and to have greater control over their lives. At the primary level, the competencies are defined for three subjects – language, mathematics and science.

Apart from developing these competencies, teaching-learning process in Sakhar Shalas emphasise on using scientific equipment and apparatus, using remedial methods, making education enjoyable and interesting and enhancing children's natural abilities of observation and thinking. Sakhar Shalas also aim at incorporating value systems in the students so as to help them become good citizens. Values imparted include nationalism, integration, gender equality, respect for physical labour, scientific temper, punctuality, and cleanliness.

Sakhar Shalas follow the formal school curriculum of the state. As mentioned earlier, the model pays more attention to training of teachers who are instrumental in facilitating the learning process among the children and the mode of teaching. Use of various teaching aids are also employed to make for a smoother learning experience. Examinations are conducted at the end of the session by Janarth and checked by the district authorities. Certificates are given after the examinations so that the children get re-enrolled in their original schools. When children leave Sakhar Shalas, Janarth send letters to all the schools from where these children have come. They also send a list of children and request the schools to enroll them.

Cooperation from the factory management:

The implementing organisation Janarth works closely with sugar factory managements as they are very important stakeholders in providing educational facilities to the children. The factory management provides space for erecting temporary structure for Sakhar Shala, helps in constructing the temporary sheds (in 18 cases they have made pucca construction) and provides basic facilities like drinking water, temporary toilets especially for girls and space for meetings with parents and other authorities. In some cases, the factory management has provided living space for the Sakhar Shala teachers, refreshment and medical facilities for the children and play material. Though there were problems in the beginning, constant advocacy from district SSA authorities and Janarth has improved cooperation from the factory management.

Follow up activities:

The supervisors of Sakhar Shalas visit the schools of 'sending' villages and discuss related issues with school authorities. They ensure that children from Sakhar Shalas are re-enrolled. Thus, continuation of education for the migrating children is ensured through this follow up process.

Learning from the initiative:

- Education of children might not be a priority for the families who migrate but awareness generation and constant community mobilisation help them in realising the same as a right of their children.
- No organisation, either government or non-government, is adequate to deal with problems like education of migrating children. The issue of seasonal migration is a complex one and needs active involvement of all stakeholders to provide fundamental rights like education.
- When parents see that even during migration their children are able to study and learn, they tend to take pro active measures in re-enrolling their children after going back to their original villages.
- It requires extra effort and use of innovative teaching learning methodologies and aids to teach the migrating children. So, training of teachers is very important. Unless the teachers are trained extensively and equipped to motivate parents and children – experiments like Sakhar Shala will not be successful.
- Follow up of children and ensuring that the children are re-enrolled in their original schools is very necessary. Facilities like Sakhar Shalas are to be seen as extension of existing schools. Resources, efforts and energies spent on Sakhar Shalas will be lost if the children are not re-enrolled in their original schools. It is very important to closely coordinate with authorities, especially school authorities, both at the receiving and sending ends.
- Both implementing organisations and local education authorities should be involved in monitoring and evaluating the progress made. Certification and issuing of migration

cards are important in facilitating the process of continuation of education for these children.

- The complexities of educating children who seasonally migrate become easier when the employers, are actively engaged and contribute to the process of providing education.



A typical Sakhar Shala



Vindam Chaduvukundam - Lets listen -
lets learn
...and lets go to school

A remote village near the shore of Bay of Bengal in East Godavari district in Andhra Pradesh; it is already dark and the village looks quite sleepy except the two room primary school. It seems some important function is going to be held very soon. Lots of children with mostly happy a few not so happy faces are trying to get a better place to sit on the floor of Primary School Verandah. A radio set is placed on a chair. A young lady is trying her best to organise things amongst whatever little space available to her. A few village adults are also around, patiently waiting for things to start.

*At sharp 5 a.m. the young lady switches on the radio. The children, by that time are sitting in perfect rows and the adults are leaning against the walls after a hard day's work. The radio programme starts with an announcement followed by several songs. A few ever enthusiastic children try humming along the songs and others listen carefully and there are a few who were less interested. After 30 minutes the radio programme comes to an end and the lady starts summarising whatever they heard that day. She explains a few things on the blackboard. They practice the songs they had heard a few minutes ago. It is followed by a question answer session. After another hour of talking, listening and singing, the children started going back home. This was **Vindam Chaduvukundam** – a radio programme for out-of-school children. Since the year 2005, the SSA Andhra Pradesh has been conducting this programme all over the State through the radio.*

The programme was conceived by SSA Andhra Pradesh to prepare the out-of-school children before mainstreaming or enrolling in alternative initiatives like bridge courses. Working children, children involved in household work, never enrolled and children dropped out for a long duration are generally considered for bridge courses. Traditionally Andhra Pradesh has large number of such out-of-school children. For them school is an almost alien place, education is not a priority and they seldom get opportunities to enjoy their childhood. It was experienced that even after enrollment, these children tend to drop out very soon. So, it is important that these children are readied first before even putting them in bridge courses.

Vindam Chaduvukundam has been planned after holding a series of consultations between SSA officials, All India Radio (AIR), DIET personnel and other academicians. Content and design of the programme has been designed by SSA Andhra Pradesh while recording, anchoring, songs, music and broadcasting is taken care of by AIR. By the end of March 2006, a total of 6321 centres covered 109274 out-of-school children through this radio programme. Beside these 6321 exclusive centres, 844 Residential Bridge Courses, 94 Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalyas and 1199 Non Residential Bridge Courses also made arrangements for the children to listen to the radio programme as per schedule.

Pre-programme mobilisation activities ensure that everything goes right in (i) organising the programmes for children, (ii) getting Vidya Volunteers (Education Volunteers), (iii) deciding

schools, panchayat buildings, community halls for children to gather and (iv) evolving a system of monitoring. Convergence meetings were held from state to village levels to decide about these factors. Orientation programmes are conducted for the Mandal Resource Persons (MRPs) so that they are able to implement & monitor the programme. On the other hand, newspaper advertisements, TV & radio spots are used to publicise the programme & generate interests among all concerned.

The role of the headmaster is crucial in implementing this initiative. The headmasters of local schools are supposed to arrange for the radio centre, create the facilities required, provide the radio set to the Vidya Volunteer and arrange for cells, provide guidance to the volunteer, submit monthly reports to the MRPs and ensure enrollment of children in formal schools or bridge courses in the month of April. The presence of headmaster during and after the programme and his active coordination with the volunteer ensures effectiveness in not only bringing the children to radio centre regularly but also help motivating them. Similarly, responsibilities of MRPs, MEOs (Mandal Education Officers) and district level supervisors are decided in advance so that everyone works in unison.

Everyday the Vidya Volunteer goes to the houses of identified out-of-school children, talk to the parents and ensure that the children attend the centre everyday. She has a copy of the programme schedule and content. Accordingly children are oriented beforehand, question answer sessions are designed and practice sessions for songs & recitations are held.

The continuous 90 days programme of Vindam Chaduvukundam is full of songs, recitations, stories and talks, carefully designed to address both academic and motivational issues. More than learning letters, numbers or simple arithmetic, the content is developed to prepare and motivate the children to learn these things in a structured way. Nevertheless children do start learning the basics from these songs and stories. Summarisation, recapitulation and question answer sessions by the Vidya Volunteer help in enhancing the process of learning. The Chief Minister, State Project Director and other well-known people have spoken to the out-of-school children through this programme to inspire them to join bridge courses and regular schools.

A major focus of this programme is to raise awareness on child labour issues as by 2006 the state had 4.5 lakhs out-of-school children, majority of them engaged in both wage earning and non wage earning activities. The talks, songs and dramas aired on the programme targeted primarily the children but also the parents, employers and other concerned to raise their voice against the child labour practices. Child help line numbers are provided during the programme so that anybody can contact the SSA personnel if they come to know of instances of child labour.

The headmaster and the Vidya Volunteer closely monitor each and every child and, at the end of 90 days radio sessions, decide which child is to be enrolled directly in formal schools and which ones are to join residential or non-residential bridge courses. The respective MRPs join in to help in this evaluation process and take further steps towards enrollment and mainstreaming. The team of headmaster and Vidya Volunteer takes the responsibility to

motivate the parents and children, especially in the case of children to be sent to far off residential centres.

Apart from learning basic and getting motivated, the radio programme has helped in inculcating a positive attitude among the out-of-school children, many of whom are hard-to-reach, to come to a centre. It prepares them for joining schools and education centres, motivates the parents, creates a positive environment amongst all stakeholders and provides ample opportunities to the implementers to plan the consecutive steps effectively. It has been observed that regular involvement of headmasters has brought out better results in mainstreaming after completion of this programme of listening, learning and getting motivated. The state SSA authority of Andhra Pradesh desires to implement the same programme next year.

Learning from the initiative:

- The children require preparation even before joining a bridge course. Motivation, learning the basics of language and numbers are part of this preparation. A radio programme with state wide coverage, facilitates the process of preparing the children.
- The parents also need motivation and encouragement to send their children for education. Apart from motivating the parents, the radio programme is effective in creating a positive mindset among all stakeholders.
- A 90 day continuous programme is packed with songs, dramas and talks focussed on issues regarding children in general and issues of child labour in particular. The children are able to instantly identify with the programme as one for them. Thus a committed listener community is created.
- A state wide media campaign and direct involvement of important personalities like the chief minister helped in enhancing the positive environment.
- Academicians as well as grassroots level implementers are engaged in designing the content of the programme. On the other hand, a monitoring structure is created from the state to village level which is not in isolation but in tandem with other SSA initiatives.
- Most important stakeholders like the headmasters of the schools are attached with the programme from very beginning with defined responsibilities. Responsibilities of each official at every level are also defined even before the actual programme is launched. This has resulted in avoiding any confusion about roles and responsibilities and achieving the desired results.
- The Education Volunteers and Headmasters play multipurpose roles. The objectives set for them was not only to implement the programme in identified centres but also work towards ensuring that children are enrolled in schools or bridge courses.
- Like any other successful programme, Vindam Chaduvukundam created offshoots like child help line –to establish an interface between the stakeholders and which would be an instrument in the continued effort towards ensuring abolition of child labour and ensuring right to education for all.

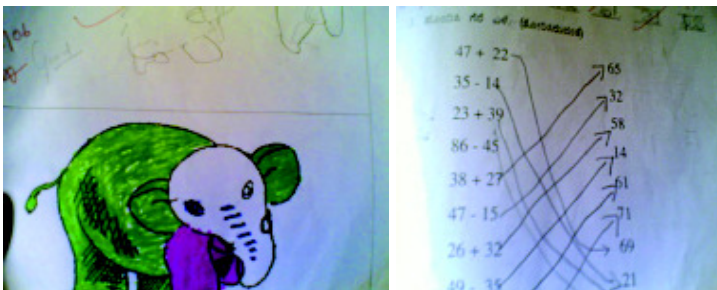
Tent Schools for the migrating children, Karnataka

Seasonal migration of children, with or without families, has added a large chunk to the already existing out-of-school children, many of them being never enrolled and some being dropouts. According to estimates, nearly 2-3 crores people seasonally migrate every year. The duration of these migrations depend on the nature of job in which they are engaged. Long term migration for 6-8 months happens for sugarcane cultivation and crushing and working in brick kilns, salt pans, charcoal industry and construction. Agricultural activities like paddy cultivation also attract short duration migration.

Karnataka has high intra state and inter state migration. The State SSA authorities have realised that it is easier to provide NRBCs at the work sites and coordinate with the sending end for mainstreaming rather than running residential bridge courses. Low cost temporary structures are built at the work sites, mainly construction sites, mines and sugarcane fields, to provide bridging facilities to the migrating children. These temporary education centres are called Tent Schools. In 2005-06, a total of 216 tent schools were opened and 6699 learners were enrolled in these tent schools. Of these 216 tent schools, 140 were opened in five districts - Gulbarga, Bangalore (urban), Bellary, Mysore and Dharwad. Stone quarry, mining iron ore and building and road construction have been the major reasons for inward migration in these districts.

Education in Tent Schools:

It is assumed that children attending Tent Schools have already joined a regular school in their native places. But in many instances, never enrolled children also attend tent schools. The classroom activities differs for these two groups of children - regular school syllabus is used for the already enrolled children and bridge course material for those who are never enrolled or are long time dropouts. The children of the tent schools get support such as uniforms, text books and mid-day meals.



Work sheets like these are used for class room activities, especially when the learners are taught the bridge course material. Gradually, they start acquiring requisite skills like reading, writing etc. so as to get enrolled in formal schools.

The authorities regularly evaluate the performance of the children and accordingly mainstream them in formal schools. Since the very nature of the target population is migratory, mainstreaming poses the biggest challenge. Migration cards are issued to the children so that they are able to get admission in their native places or wherever they go next. The migration cards contain details of the child including his/her academic performance in the tent school.

District	Major reason for Migration	No. of Centres	No. of Learners
Belgaum	Sugarcane harvesting	6	377
Bijapur	Sugarcane harvesting	3	206
Haveri	Agricultural labour	8	167
Dharwad	Traditional work – Helbaru community	14	270
Uttar Kannada	Building and road construction	1	35
Raichur	Agricultural labour	2	353
Koppal	Stone quarry, agricultural labour	8	209
Bellary	Mining – Iron ore	17	781
Bangalore (Urban)	Building construction	35	1216
Bangalore (Rural)	Building and road construction	6	193
Davangere	Agricultural labour – cotton harvesting	2	60
Shimoga	Agricultural labour – paddy cultivation	6	173
Mysore	Sugarcane harvesting	15	249
Dakshina Kannada	Building and road construction	3	87
Udupi	Building and road construction	1	43
Hassan	Sugar cane and paddy cultivation	3	52
Kolar	Building and road construction	6	151
Tumkur	Urban labour	1	20
Chikmangalore	Coffee cultivation	5	67
Kodagu	Coffee cultivation	1	23
Mandya	Sugarcane harvesting	3	48

Gadag	Urban labour	5	77
Bidar	Building and road construction	1	33
Gulbarga	Stone quarry	59	1700
Chitradurga	Building and road construction	5	109
Total		216	6699



A tent school at a building construction site in Bangalore City. The enlightened residents of the area have convinced the builder to construct this school. But in most of the cases, the Karnataka SSA authorities are yet to persuade the employers to provide space for educating children.

Constructing a Tent School:

It is a major challenge to get space for tent schools, especially in the congested construction sites of urban areas. This is despite the fact that every employer has the legal and moral obligation to provide space and structure for running the tent schools. Efforts are being made in this regard though localised persuasion by block and cluster resource persons, volunteers and district authorities. About eight such tent schools have already constructed been by the building contractors in Bangalore (Urban) district. Strategies are being worked out to persuade more employers to provide such facilities in other districts. Presently wooden and metal rafters or polythene sheets are used to construct the Tent Schools, the maximum cost being Rs. 15000 per Tent School.



Children in many tent schools jostle and squeeze like this for space to sit and learn. Unavoidable presence of under aged siblings makes these centres more crowded. The problem is acute in big cities like Bangalore where massive constructions are going on and space is a constraint.

Materials used in Tent Schools like polythene sheets and metal rafters are movable. It helps in relocating the centres as per the need and convenience of the target population.

Space problem in urban areas lead to mobile tent school:

There is a severe space problem even to erect a small tent school for 25 children in some areas of Bangalore. And this problem gave rise to running mobile Tent Schools. Children from different areas, as distant as 60 kms , are collected by eight buses from their respective families and taken to a school where space is available for running such centres for few hours. A successful collaboration between Karnataka SSA & Bangalore Municipal Transport Corporation (BMTc) has resulted in BMTc donating eight buses to the state SSA to run these centres. The State SSA programme incurs the recurring expenditure, including salary of the BMTc drivers, in this collaboration.



The buses are redesigned to conduct classes while traveling or in cases where space is not available even in the nearby school. The education volunteers do not miss the chance to impart some lessons to the children while they travel to & from the centres.

The eight BMTc drivers deputed for this job are a happier lot. For them, serving the children is more enjoyable and interesting than their normal job of ferrying regular passengers. All of them double up as active volunteers – they collect children from their homes along with the teachers and other volunteers, help the children to take a bath before boarding the bus. They serve the mid-day meal and help teachers put the house in order, specially during extra curricular activities. Surprisingly, they do all these tasks happily and spontaneously without asking for extra money, overtime or without waiting to be asked.

Multiple disadvantages:

Most of the parents in urban areas do not want their children to graduate to a formal school from the Tent School. The Tent Schools are located near their temporary huts which have no door or locks. While attending these centres, the children are required to look after their belongings by intermittent visits, store water when the water supply comes and look after

their younger siblings. They cannot perform these important duties if they go to a formal school. The Tent School teachers and volunteers take a flexible attitude as they do not want their learners to drop out.



Dharmavati of Jyotipura Tent School is very bright, regular and a studious learner. But she has multiple responsibilities – looking after her kid brother when she studies in the centre, working as a maid servant in the evening and helping her mother who is also a maid servant. Despite braving all these, she is worried that she might have to stop coming to school. Her father is a construction worker and changes his work site very often as per the needs of the contractors.

Considering these dilemmas and hard realities, it becomes even more challenging for the teachers and supervisors to provide education to these children on a continuous basis. The teachers are instructed to adopt flexibility in classroom activities so as to keep the children and parents motivated. The block and district officials are instructed to keep track of these children and follow them to ensure that they continue their education. Every stakeholder here faces multiple disadvantages and the challenge of educating these children becomes tougher by the day.

State level and Inter State Task Force:

Like tent schools in Karnataka, other neighbouring states are taking different initiatives to address the issue of educating migrating children. Like Karnataka these States too are at the end of receiving migratory population. So, successes of experiments like tent schools will not only depend on inter district coordination within Karnataka but also coordination between the concerned neighbouring States.

An Inter State Task Force (ISTF) was formed between Karnataka, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Goa and Madhya Pradesh in May 2006 to coordinate efforts to address the problem of mainstreaming of inter state migratory children. The first meeting of the ISTF was held in May 2006 between the four southern States.

The ISTF aims to (i) to do a migration mapping, (ii) share resources like teachers/volunteers who can teach in the vernacular, bridge course materials in different languages, (iii) initiate coordination between block, cluster and school authorities to ensure that the migratory children get education on a continuous basis. Children attending Tent Schools are mainly

from Karnataka and they speak Kannada, but a large number of children are from the neighbouring states of Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. Some children in these centres are also from Orissa and Maharashtra. Though the State has developed bridge-course materials in six different languages including Tamil and Telugu, but due to lack of availability of volunteers and teachers in these languages, all children are learning in Kannada only. The State SSA wishes to resolve these problems through the ISTF initiative.

Replicating the experiment:

Tent schools is an experiment in providing educational facilities to migrating children and it has been successful in reaching out to them in difficult circumstances, both in rural and urban areas. Success in coordinating between the districts and States and extent of mainstreaming and continuation in formal schools would help determine the strategies for replication of the same experiment in other affected areas of the country.

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School on Boat

...is not a School

“School on Boat is not a school,” describes Mr. D. N. Murthy, APC (Assistant Project Coordinator) of East Godavari SSA Andhra Pradesh. For him, it is only a beginning to the process of ensuring education for all the children who live on boats on the ‘sea approaching canal’ at Uppalanka Mandi of Karapa Mandal, East Godavari District.

‘School on Boat’ is an initiative by East Godavari district SSA authorities for the ‘universalisation of education’ for the children of 180 odd migrated fishermen families in Uppalanka Mandi. Started in the year 2004, the initiative has already enrolled 92 ‘most difficult to reach’ children out of 238 in the age group of 5-15 years.

Living conditions of the target group:

Nearly 70 years back, a group of fishermen (exact numbers not known) from fishing islands Balusu Tippo, Yetimoga, Palasa, etc., migrated to Uppalanka Mondi with the hope of fishing in the sea and earning a livelihood. They could not do so in their native places as the condition (mainly high tide) of the sea there made fishing (and continued to do so) highly costly for these very poor fishermen community. But the local fishermen community denied these migrating families any right to either live on the main land or do fishing in the sea. However, they were permitted to stay on their respective boats (Donelu) and do fishing in the 4 Km long canal leading to sea. Life was so hard back home that the migrating families were compelled to agree on the difficult conditions though they continued with their demand to live on the main land which is denied till date. Over the years, they married mostly within the ‘Donelu’ families. A new married family started it’s own ‘Donelu’ and the number grew to 180. Ironically, they do not get any fish in the canal now and survive by collecting snails.



A typical day on ‘Donelu’ - 180 families spend their day on the boat, unless they intend to buy something from the local market.

They are not allowed to do any of their household chores on the main land.



A portion of the 'Donelu' is used for cooking. The district collector has recently agreed for providing 'Mid-day-Meal' to the children who were attending 'School on Boat'.



The other portion of 'Donelu' is used for storeroom and sleeping. The parents try hard to make a demarcation for their own sleeping place away from the others.



The instructor and local MRP (Mandal Resource Person) are collecting children from Donelus to 'School on Boat'.

The Process:

The process of educating children from 'Donelus' starts with i) motivation through 'School on Boat', ii) further motivation and bridging at short term NRBC on the bank of sea approaching canal, iii) bridging at nearby RBC Camp, iv) formal school education at Day/Residential Formal School, leading to v) meaningful vocational training.

But it would be fairly incomprehensive if we describe the process adopted in 'School on Boat' intervention by only mentioning the activities being conducted presently for enrolling and mainstreaming the children of this community. It is very important to know how this initiative has been conceived and how it has progressed over the months to the present state.

This community was identified as one of the 'most difficult to reach' during the process of identification of 'out of school children' through the mandatory household surveys under SSA. In the beginning, the surveyors and other officials of the district received very lukewarm response from the parents and the children when they tried to motivate them for education. Like any other poverty stricken community, day-to-day survival, and in this case, their demand for right to live on the mainland and fishing in the sea, were more important than anything else. Making the community understand the value of education towards aspiring for a better life was the biggest challenge before the East Godavari district SSA officials.

At this junctures the officials thought that they must do something new to attract these children and their parents to education. They zeroed in on a beautifully decorated boat, which they built, with play materials and a motivator cum instructor on it. The motivator went on collecting the children who used to loiter around the canal bank and the children who were helping their parents on their respective 'Donelu' boats. Initially only the younger children joined this 'School on Boat' – they played, listened to stories, sang local songs and danced as well. It took some time before the parents allowed the older children to join this 'School on Boat' for few hours in a day. By that time the 'School on Boat' had already emerged as an alternative.

Sensing this positive inclination of children and their parents, the East Godavari SSA built a thatched hut on the bank of the canal. Two motivators from the local fisherman community were appointed to teach the already motivated children the basics of letters and numbers. Neither the children from 'Donelu' boats nor their parents have ever been to school. The letters and the numbers were the most alien things in their lives. The constructive hours at the thatched hut were used to orient and prepare the children with the objectives of enrolling them in residential Bridge Courses and enrolling them in regular formal schools. The activities at this centre were also used to motivate the parents and attract more children who were still on the 'Donelus'. The materials from their day-to-day lives like dried snails,

etc., were used to teach them letters and numbers or telling the children a story. Certainly, they felt at home.



Happy faces of Children from the Eswar Colony RBC, Kakinada Rural Mandal, near Uppalanka Mandi. The brightest child in red is Bhaiyamma. She seldom visits her parents now, though her parents come to meet her once in a month. When asked, she said she would like to be a doctor. Her teacher is very happy with the interest she has been taking in her studies. It is remarkable that, unless told, no one would be able to say whether a child was from Donelu or any other family. They have already gone through a process of positive change in their ambitions, outlooks and looks! Barring negligible dropouts, the children here are very committed to continue their education.

After three months of orientation, a group of 'readied' children were enrolled in a nearby residential Bridge Course when the children themselves and their parents were ready for 'it'. Books, notebooks, clothes and other facilities were provided so as to make it most comfortable for the children. The EVs at the residential Bridge Course centres were oriented about the children, the difficulties they were facing, with a caution not to segregate them from others. These children were allowed to visit their 'Donelus' more frequently in the initial months and their parents also visited the RBCs as and whenever they wished. This has created a sense of belongingness as well as gave confidence among the parents who were otherwise, naturally, not enthusiastic about education of their children.

After successfully completing their courses at RBC, the children were enrolled in regular schools, all girls were sent to nearby APRPRP residential high school at Chollangipeta.

According to the district officials, the authorities are committed to sustain this effort towards reaching logical conclusions. To them the mission of '**Andaru Chadavali – Andaru Yedagali**' (Education for All – Progress of All) demands a continuous process which require a continuous chain of well intentioned, well monitored activities.

Achievements so far:

From 180 'Boat Families', a total of 238 children in the age group of 5-15 years have been identified through a 'boat hold survey'. Thirty six of them are attending 'School on Boat', 20 of them have been enrolled in local elementary schools, 17 girls entered the residential formal school and 19 attending residential bridge courses. However, 146 children still do not attend the school on boat. The Mandal and District authorities are hopeful that the slow but steady approach taken by them would certainly bring the remaining children to the system of education.



Girls from 'School on Boat' at Surya Rao Peta Residential High School. They would be completing their secondary education here along with around 300 other girls. The school provides every facility required for a residential school including uniforms, books, notebooks, pencils etc. Orientation to vocational skills is given in the school but no full-fledged vocational courses are run here. Close follow up is done by the MRPs (Mandal Resource Persons) to ensure that every enrolled child is continuing in the school. The schoolteachers, especially the headmistress who, along with many other teachers, lives in the same campus, provide necessary motivation, counselling and other support.

Uniqueness of the intervention:

Following are the unique characteristics of this intervention:

The living condition of the target group is the first uniqueness of this intervention. There might not be a parallel situation anywhere else in India. Though there are groups/communities which face similar difficulties in their lives, which make them 'most difficult to reach'.

This intervention shows that barriers to reach the 'most difficult to reach' groups could be removed with a sincere intention to do so. Proper planning and execution, strong upward linkage and a well established follow up process can go a long way in removing the obstacles. Not to mention, we need a well-motivated team – the members of which strongly believe that 'education for all' could be a reality.

The NRBC in the thatched hut does not follow a particular duration for enrolling a child to RBC. Whenever a child & her/his parents are ready, s/he is sent to the nearby RBC.

The experience of this unique intervention is already being used for groups with similar living conditions and thereby scaling up the whole process within manageable limits.

Not an epilogue:

Inspired by the results of this initiative, two more 'School on Boats' for similar communities, at Ktohapalem and Pallam of Katrenikona Mandal, have been initiated by East Godavari district SSA authorities. A visit to these places revealed that the fishermen communities in these places were not in as miserable conditions as they were in Uppalanka Mandi, as the families in these places were not compelled to live on the boats by respective circumstances but had small thatched huts on the banks of canal approaching the sea. But like in previous case, most of the children in these two places accompany their parents and thereby miss out on schooling. There were around 300 such out -of-school children in Pallam. The local primary school is overcrowded, and a plan for construction of extra classrooms had been sanctioned. The district authorities have also got the required sanctions for constructing a new secondary school, which would essentially cater to the children of these fishermen communities. By the end of December 2005, two new 'School on Boats' were ready and the recently appointed EVs were having play sessions with the children who were motivated. It was encouraging to note that the EVs like BTB Swamy and Rambabu at Pallam knew all children by their names. Swamy and Rambabu belong to the same fishermen community; they could not finish their studies beyond class X but wish to do so through open schooling. Best wishes to the children, Swamy and Rambabu!

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Reaching out to the 'difficult-to-reach'

...residential bridge course camps in Assam

Narmada Ghole is now the *centre of attraction* in her school. She is always smiling, active in participating in sports and cultural activities and getting very good marks in all examinations. She was one of the first learners to be identified in the year 2003 for enrollment in residential bridge course. She lost her father at an early age and was helping her mother and six other siblings before being enrolled in Sootea RBC of Sonitpur district of Assam. Being a daily labourer it was not possible for her mother to support a big family with meagre means and at the same time sending Narmada to school. In 2002-03, Assam followed a well thought out strategic approach to implement residential bridge courses. The strategy ensured identification of deserving children like Narmada, maximise accelerated learning, mainstreaming and retention. While doing so, the implementation process attracted community involvement at every stage of implementation.

Target group for RBCs in Assam:

Setting up an RBC and managing it requires both high human and monetary resources. Therefore, facility of RBC is not provided to all out-of-school children. Only most 'difficult to reach' children are catered through RBCs. RBCs are run for child labourers rescued from employers, wage earning or non wage earning working children who stay with their families but bear the risk of dropping out even after enrollment in NRBCs or mainstreaming in formal schools. . In Assam, highest preference is given for child labours of 10-14 years of age and children living with extreme poverty.



Meeting with the parents of RBC learners.

The other vulnerable groups commonly catered through RBCs are:

- Never enrolled or longtime dropped out children of older age group (11-14 years).
- Seasonally migrating children (at the receiving end).
- Children affected/infected with HIV/AIDS.
- Children living in scattered and remote areas without schooling facilities, specially the tribal children.

Identification of children and beyond:

Since the facility of RBC is only provided to 'difficult-to-reach' children, identification of the target group is very crucial. Assam follows a very structured approach towards identifying the children who need such service.

- Block level sharing on RBC intervention is done as the first step towards identifying the children. A five member committee comprising block mission coordinator, DIET lecturer, alternative schooling consultant and representatives from BRC and CRC (Cluster Resource Centre) is formed to finalise the list of children.
- The CRC Coordinator informs the concerned VECs (Village Education Committee) or WECs (Ward Education Committee) or TGECs (Tea Garden Education Committee) to prepare the initial list with details of age and nature of work. The VER is used as the primary source for such compilation.
- A meeting is held at GPEC level to discuss the list of names.
- After discussion at GPEC level, the list of 100 children is finalised by the 5 member committee at block level.
- House visits are conducted to inform the parents of selected children to come for a meeting at the RBC centre. An agreement is signed with the parents after explaining details of RBC intervention. RBC EVs start a simultaneous process of convincing the employers to release children from work.

The flip side of Residential Bridge Camps

The facilities provided in residential bridge courses have become an attraction for poor and not so poor families in various parts of the country. Its not only the food and prospect of a better life but also the care and quality of education which is attracting the parents to these centres resulting in double enrollment or dropping out from regular school and admission in the bridge course. State SSA authorities have taken care to avoid such incidents by conducting awareness generation programmes on the purpose of bridge courses, counseling of parents and taking administrative steps like certification by local administrative unit, Panchayat and head Master of the local school that the child to be studying in residential bridge camp is not enrolled anywhere else. While this phenomenon indicates a positive

aspect of residential bridge courses, the implementing authorities must take extreme care so as to reach the most deserving children.

Resource mobilisation through convergence

A maximum amount of Rs 6800/year/child is provided for RBCs. Since it is an intensive intervention, which needs larger space, it also requires resource mobilisation from external sources. On the other hand, if the expenditure on infrastructure, etc., is minimal, the amount saved could be better utilised for acquiring more inputs on training of EVs, creating monitoring facilities and providing better academic facilities to the learners. In Assam, exemplary convergence was done with various departments and civic bodies to achieve this objective. The vacant nursing hostels, unused buildings of the education department, unused school hostels and unused primary health care centres housed the RBCs. Various CSOs donated uniforms and slippers. The Indian Army donated computers, the district administration provided mid-day meals and Autonomous District Council of Karbi Anglong district provided cots, kitchen and toilet facilities.

Training of EVs:

The EVs play a much bigger role than the teachers of day schools or centres as they stay with learners for 24 hours and education of these children go beyond 6 hours of teaching learning in class room set-ups. In Assam, extreme care is taken for selection and training of the teachers. Selection of candidates with right kind of flair and attitude and training them with the help of a comprehensive module has always been considered absolute necessities. The training package for the RBC EVs (Shiksha Karmis in Assam) has three main components - a) child motivation, b) academics and c) management issues. Continuous 10 days of training is provided to each instructor before RBCs are started. Refresher courses are regularly organised on evaluation, mainstreaming and follow up process. Related staff like care takers of residential centres gets training on reporting management, stock keeping etc.

Teaching learning processes:

Apart from training the EVs on engaging participative leaning techniques, preparing and using TLMs (Teaching Learning Material), the learners in Assam RBCs are provided with extensive teaching learning material so as to enhance the process of 'accelerated learning'. This includes - a) bridge course books b) exercise books, c) exercise copies, d) self evaluation formats pencils, etc. Readymade charts, globes, etc. are also provided to the centres for the use of learners and EVs. The EVs follow child focussed methods of teaching. Bridge course books are prepared in Assamese, Bengali, Bodo and Garo languages for the benefit of learners who speak these languages. It is generally believed that the instructor is fluent with the mother tongue of the learners and able to instruct in the same. Formal school text books

are introduced to the children at the last phase so that they get adequate opportunities to acquaint themselves with formal school systems.

Co-curricular activities:

Focus on co-curricular activities has been one of the main aspects of RBCs in Assam. Planning for games, sports, cultural activities are made and executed accordingly. Children are trained in handicrafts, library is setup and exposure visits conducted for engaging children in creative activities and working towards overall personality development.

Evaluation:

External tools are developed for evaluation and stages of using these tools for evaluation are pre decided. Weekly progress records are maintained and the head teacher of the nearby formal school is responsible for grading the achievement of children as per this weekly progress report.

Evaluation of learners is done in three stages – weekly, mid term and at the end of session. Remedial actions are taken on the basis of the results of weekly evaluations. The head teachers, members of CRC and representative from block levels do a sample check of final evaluation papers. Representatives from State and District offices participate in this process.

Mainstreaming of RBC learners:

Child wise mainstreaming plan has been the most unique as well as effective aspect of Assam RBCs. This plan is prepared in advance with details on age, baseline competency level, academic achievements and targeted time for mainstreaming etc. Achievement in language and mathematics is considered most important in deciding whether a learner is ready for mainstreaming. The State Mission office supervises the evaluation and mainstreaming process very closely. Before mainstreaming parents meeting is held and they are briefed about the achievement of the learners and expected support from them for continuation of education. The children are provided with a set of formal school text books and some TLMs before they are mainstreamed. **Till September 2006, a total of 2424 children were enrolled in 10 RBCs and 1420 of them have been mainstreamed. Among these 2424 children, 970 are continuing their education in these RBCs. So, only 30 children could not be mainstreamed which implies a huge success.**

Follow up after mainstreaming: The following steps are taken retention of children in the school:

- Lead schools are properly oriented about RBC and specific responsibilities are given to headmaster and other teachers so that they are able to understand the difficulties of these children and take remedial actions whenever required.
- A report with details of attendance, achievement, etc., of mainstreamed children are submitted to the concerned CRCCs.
- The District Quality Managers of Alternative Schooling Units collect the same report and suggest remedial actions.

- The Shiksha Karmis of RBCs visits the concerned schools and report on the status of mainstreamed children. The mainstreamed children are also encouraged to visit the RBCs and participate in sports and cultural activities.

Local level management of RBCs:

A local Advisory board is constituted for each RBC for better running and management of the centres. This advisory board comprises a) officer of the local police station, b) doctor of the local PHC/hospital, c) president and two members of the gram panchayat and d) local VEC/TGEC president. The Local Advisory Board advises the RBC coordinator on security, treatment of illness, liaison with other departments, etc. The RBC coordinator convenes meetings with the Advisory Board every month and this process ensures that most of the problems are solved at the centre level.

Learnings from Assam experience:

- Assam established and ran only 10 RBCs but the State focussed only on most 'difficult-to reach' children. All other children were catered to by other interventions like NRBCs. The extensive and structured identification process ensured that only deserving candidates gets enrolled in these centres.
- The State was successful in involving various departments in mobilising resources and managing RBCs. It has ensured very high level of participation from all stakeholders.
- Convergence with other departments ensured resource mobilisation to the maximum benefit of children. This improved the scope for using available resources under approved budget for the maximum benefit of the learners.
- The parents were oriented properly and their involvement with the process was at a very high level. It is not easy to motivate them to release their earning children from work and sending them to far away places. But it was far more difficult to engage them with the process of mainstreaming and retention. Their commitment for the same was ensured.
- Linkage with formal schools, adequate learning material facilitating 'accelerated learning' and participative teaching leaning processes ensured a higher level of academic achievement.
- Weekly, monthly, quarterly and final evaluation was designed properly. Children in RBCs are often low on basics. It is always absolutely necessary to monitor their progress regularly and take timely remedial actions so that they learn maximum within a short period.
- Training and orientation on RBC was not only done for the EVs and coordinators. Such programmes are also conducted for concerned personnel at CRC, BRC, district and state level.
- The children in RBC are engaged in various sports and cultural activities thereby facilitating the process of overall personality development and improving confidence level.

- Effective local level management ensured that the district and State authorities are not needed in mobilising required resources and solving day to day problems.

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Non residential bridge courses

...accelerated learning for mainstreaming



Ten year old Priya lives in a Raipur slum. She was a never enrolled child before joining an NRBC centre in Raipur City. Her teacher from NRBC centre (in the evenings) says she is one of the most sincere and regular learner in her centre. Her father is a gardener and mother earns some money by sewing. Both her parents are illiterate and cannot help her in studies. So, it's all her effort. Ask her what she does, she would say -'bachhe palti hun (I take care of small children). Yes, *the child* Priya takes care of other children, from well-to-do families, for her family's living but that hasn't dampened her spirit to learn.

Children like Priya are helped to prepare for mainstreaming through non residential bridge courses (NRBC) throughout the country. Since the beginning of DPEP and consequently in SSA, both residential (RBC) and non residential bridge courses have been the most important strategy to mainstream the never enrolled and dropped out children. Never enrolled and dropped out children of 6-7 years can be mainstreamed directly in class I. But the never enrolled and dropped out children in the older age group (8-14 years) need time for preparation to get mainstreamed in respective classes as per their age. The bridge courses provide facilities of accelerated learning through condensed courses to prepare the dropped out and never enrolled children of the older age group to get mainstreamed in regular schools.

While residential bridge courses are mainly long term and for older and most 'difficult - difficult-to-reach' children, the non residential bridge courses are usually run for shorter duration for preparing all dropped out and never enrolled out-of-school children. But NRBCs are also run for 'difficult-to-reach' childrens like Priya and older children as per local needs. In case of Priya, she cannot attend a day-school since she works during that time. It is expected that by the time she prepares herself for attending formal schools, her parents will

also be supported and motivated to release her from her present income earning responsibilities.

Short term NRBCs

Short term non residential bridge courses are generally run for 3 to 6 months for the following groups of children:

Children of 7 to 10 years of age who are either never enrolled or recently dropped out:

Many States are running these short term courses for both recently dropped out children and younger never enrolled children. The objectives of these short term courses are habit formation and learning basic skills of the early primary classes especially in languages and mathematics before mainstreaming for the never enrolled children and helping them in recapitulating the things which they forgot. Short term NRBCs are also run for older children (11 to 14 years) who have recently dropped out-of-school.

Children who have dropped out 1-2 years back but are assessed as able to cope with the required academic abilities as per their age:

NRBCs for these children are run when a very structured evaluation process is adopted for categorising the identified out-of-school children for different types of interventions. Such evaluation is conducted to understand the exact level of abilities of never enrolled and dropped out children.

Seasonally migrating children at the sending end are also provided with the facility of NRBCs so that when they go back to their original place they are able to catch up what ever they have missed. Tent Schools in Karnataka are instances, where children of construction workers, agricultural labours and mine workers are provided with bridging facilities.

Children who are to be prepared for joining residential bridge courses: Short term NRBCs are run for children who are to be prepared for enrollment in residential bridge courses. In Boat School intervention in Andhra Pradesh, before enrolling the children in bridge courses, the children are provided with a two months short term NRBC facility as the learners here are first generation ones and there is a high probability that even the homely residential bridge camps would appear too alien for them.

Long term non residential bridge courses:

Long term non residential bridge courses are run for 9 to 18 months for the following groups of children:

- Children of 10+ to 14 years of age who are either never enrolled or dropped out for more than 2 years.
- Children of the above category who stay with their families and are available at a particular location throughout the year. Priya from Raipur belongs to this category.
- As the second best option for children needing residential bridge courses but could not be provided with residential facility.

Andhra Pradesh runs long term NRBCs for various categories of out-of-school children including the disabled and hard-to-reach children. Tamil Nadu also runs long term bridge

courses for various categories of hard-to-reach children. Uttar Pradesh has a large number of out-of-school children in the 11-14 years of age group. Many of these children were mainstreamed in the past through enrollment drives but they repeatedly dropped out for various reasons. The state is now initiating long term bridge courses in every Gram Panchayat so that each out-of-school child identified is given adequate time to prepare and acquaint himself or herself before mainstreaming. Long term NRBCs are also being implemented for hard to reach children who are available in a particular locality through out the year. In Jharkhand and Punjab too, long term bridge courses are run for the older children.

Strategies adopted for running non residential bridge courses

Accelerated learning: Bridge courses are run for children who are never enrolled or dropped out. Within a short period of time, the child has to acquire the abilities which are otherwise learnt by a regular school child in 2-4 years so that s/he can be mainstreamed as per her/his age. So, learning in bridge courses has to be an accelerated one.

The teaching learning process, reading materials, workbooks in bridge courses are specially designed to facilitate this process of accelerated learning. The normal curriculum can never be followed for bridge courses. State SSAs have collaborated with institutions like SCERT, NGOs and individual educational consultants to design this process of accelerated learning, developing specific reading material and workbooks for specific groups of children and training of educational volunteers.

Flexible learning material: Children are required to practice and learn in NRBCs. Since the time available for learning is short and the children are required to acquire skills and abilities as per their age, learning materials with lots of exercises and flexibility are considered important part of the strategy followed for accelerated learning. These learning materials are more of workbooks in which children can learn a few new things and practice whatever is taught by the EVs. Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Orissa and Jharkhand have made such learning materials for bridge course children to facilitate the process of accelerated learning.

Learning medium: Ours is a country of many languages. Children speak different languages, at home and in the school. Educationists have time and again proved that learning is accelerated when it is in the mother tongue. Out-of-school children have generally migrated from different states and thus speak different languages. A brick kiln worker in Punjab or the agricultural labourer in Haryana would, by all probability, speak Hindi not Gurumukhi. A child from the iron ore mines of Bellary district in Karnataka or construction site of the ever expanding city of Bangalore might speak Tamil, Telugu or Marathi, whereas the language spoken locally or the language in which class room transactions are made Kannada.

Considering these aspects, State SSAs have prepared bridge course material in different languages, for example, Karnataka has prepared bridge books in as many as 7 languages, Jammu & Kashmir has prepared it in Hindi and English, Assam has bridge course books in 4 languages – Assamese, Bengali, Bodo and Garo. Some States like Andhra Pradesh has also used tribal languages side by side the Telugu text in text and workbooks of bridge courses so that teachers are able to give examples in that language while teaching in Telugu.

Collaboration with formal schools: It is absolutely necessary that bridge camps, specially the NRBCs, are associated with the nearby formal schools. The ultimate objective of running a bridge course is to mainstream the children after they attain the abilities as per their age. Thus, they should be oriented with the schools (especially if they were never enrolled before joining bridge course), and the school should be ready to enroll the children.

Additionally, care is taken towards (i) being sensitive and patient to understand that the learners who graduate from bridge courses might be slightly behind the regular students, (ii) the headmaster or other teachers should be associated with the monitoring and evaluation process of bridge courses. Best results in mainstreaming and continuation of education have happened when the bridge camps were closely associated with the school, for example, running the bridge course centres within or nearby the school premises.

Management of NRBCs : Best when done locally

Bridge courses often run in scattered areas. It is not always possible to have centralised monitoring of these centres from state or district level. In Jharkhand, the Mata Samitis (Mother's Groups) are authorised at the habitation level to take care of overall management and control of bridge course centres. Mata Samitis have elected presidents from among the parents and the Head Master of the nearby school is the member secretary, in which the learners are to be mainstreamed. The body has its own bank account; accountabilities are fixed with different persons with different responsibilities. Since the mothers of the learners are involved in monitoring, it is expected that they become active stakeholders rather than being mere signatories. In Tamil Nadu a very strong cadre of Self Help groups (consisting only of women), the VEC and the local NGO is involved in management of bridge course centres. Similarly PTAs in Madhya Pradesh are the local level management body for implementing and monitoring bridge course centres.

Special training to Education Volunteers: The objective of NRBCs, for that matter any bridge course, is to mainstream a child in a formal school, and thus teaching in bridge courses calls for application of special techniques. So, the EVs engaged for teaching the learners should be provided with special training to acquire these techniques. The training material and sessions should be designed in this direction. In Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh and Assam, special training programme is designed for the EVs so as to enable them to conduct the specialised teaching learning process in bridge courses.

Preparing the learners for bridge course: Working children, children involved in household work, never enrolled and children dropped out for a long duration are generally considered for bridge courses. For them, school is an almost alien place, education is not a priority and they seldom get opportunities to enjoy their childhood. So, it is important that these children are readied first before even putting them in bridge courses. Many States have got better results when they adopted different strategies to prepare the identified children before starting a centre for them. To give a few examples here, Assam has organised cultural and sports activities and Andhra Pradesh has run a 3 months course through radio.

Follow up after mainstreaming: Children face multiple obstacles even after successfully completing bridge course and mainstreaming in formal schools. To explain a few, (i) many learners attending the bridge courses and their parents lack motivation to continue their education, (ii) the academic abilities of the learners are not always at par with that of the regular students and (iii) sometimes the learners feel out of place when they start attending regular schools. The implementers have realised that only providing the bridge course is not

enough. They have to be provided with a conducive environment for learning. In Assam, the bridge course is being implemented through a multi-pronged approach. The state government has initiated a number of measures to support the bridge course. These include providing stipends to the learners, providing uniforms and books, and providing a conducive learning environment. The state government has also initiated a number of measures to support the bridge course. These include providing stipends to the learners, providing uniforms and books, and providing a conducive learning environment. The state government has also initiated a number of measures to support the bridge course. These include providing stipends to the learners, providing uniforms and books, and providing a conducive learning environment.

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Abbreviations Used

BMTC: Bangalore Municipal Transport Corporation

BRC: Block Resource Centre

CRC: Cluster Resource Centre

DIET: District Institute of Education & Training

DPEP: District Primary Education Programme

EGS: Education Guarantee Scheme

EV: Education Volunteer

GPEC: Gram Panchayat Education Committee

HDC: Human Development Centre

PTA: Parent Teacher Association

PRI: Panchayati Raj Institution

NCLP: National Child Labour Project

NGO: Non Government Organisation

NRBC: Non Residential Bridge Course

MEO: Mandal Education Officer

MRP: Mandal Resource Person

RBC: Residential Bridge Course

RPF: Railway Police Force

SCERT: State Council of Educational Research & Training

SSA: Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan

TGEC: Tea Garden Education Committee

TLM: teaching Learning Material

VEC: Village Education Committee

WEC: Ward Education Committee

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