



# REACHING THE UNREACHED

Good Practices in Elementary Education



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**Good Practices in Elementary Education under the  
REACH India Project**



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## Foreword

*The REACH India project was designed to reach out to 200,000 at risk children in six geographical areas of the country through an array of innovative interventions that would supplement the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan. The interventions included strengthening of NGOs and expansion of their networks, building capacities of small and less mature NGOs, building linkages with the government, working with local communities and panchayat's, strengthening the role of parents and teachers in the education process, improving the quality of education, addressing issues of inclusive education, developing a strong monitoring and evaluation process and promotion of best practices.*

*The list seems to be endless... but as the project comes to and end, its time for retrospection, to evaluate the project as per the objectives and the achievable parameters and to learn from the successes and the mistakes.*

*But it is also the time to showcase some of the good practices that have emerged from this four and a half year old project. Featured here are some case studies of good practices, not necessarily the best or the most innovative among the 101 NGO that were involved with the project. But definitely, interesting and different approaches that were adopted by various NGOs to address the issues of reaching out and educating at-risk children.*

*I am sure that the various stakeholders in education will find these practices 'educative' and worth being replicated in their framework or area of application. The idea is to learn from experiences and to continually innovate to achieve the goal we are all geared to.... Universal Elementary Education!*

*Nandini Prasad*

Nandini Prasad  
Chief of Party  
REACH India

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# Acknowledgements

*Joining REACH India towards the end of the project was a tough decision. But the brief that my job would be 'documentation' made it exciting enough to take up the challenge.*

*I would like to thank all the project partners featured here for hosting me and giving me the required information and inputs to put together this document. It was really an exhilarating experience to travel to the projects and see the 'changes' happening at the grass root level.*

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# Education for Vulnerable Children: Scaling New Heights through REACH India

India has made major strides in the education sector in the last decade. Policy reforms in the mid eighties and nineties have led to increased access, enrollment, retention as well as improvements in the quality of elementary education. Today as India celebrates her sixtieth year of independence with the promise of emerging as one of the major economic superpowers of the world in the coming decade, the focus is again on education, especially primary education which is vital for the progress and prosperity of its future generations.

The National Policy of Education, 1986 which was revised in 1992, gave a renewed impetus to elementary education in the country. It focused mainly on three thrust areas (a) Universal access to enrollment (b) universal retention of children up to 14 years of age (c) substantial improvement in the quality of education to enable all children to achieve essential levels of learning. These objectives were addressed mainly through the tenth five-year plan with the launch of the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), the flagship programme of the Government of India being implemented in partnership with the states and Union Territories (UTs).

The focus was to work towards achieving universalisation of elementary education by 2010. These interventions were further strengthened with the 86<sup>th</sup> constitutional amendment act 2002 which made education a fundamental right for children in the age group of 6-14 years by providing that “the state shall provide free and compulsory education to all children in the age of six to fourteen years in such manner as the state may, by law determine”

## Making strides in elementary education

Today, about 98% of the country's rural population has access to and lives within one kilometer of an elementary school. The number of out-of-school

children in the country has shown a considerable decrease from about 320 lakh in 2002-03 to about 70.5 lakh as of March 2006. The gross dropout rate as reflected in the Selected Education Statistics of the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) also holds much promise. The gross dropout rate declined from 39.03% in 2001-02 to 28.49% in 2004-05. There has also been a marked improvement in infrastructure and teacher enrollment. Teacher enrollment has gone up from 113.61 million in 99-2000 to 131.69 million in 2004-05 while the number of primary schools in the country went up from 6.42 lakhs in 99-2000 to 7.67 lakhs in 2004-05.

With the introduction of education cess by the Government of India in 2004-05, the public investment in elementary education by the central government has increased significantly. The trend is set to continue with draft reports of the 11<sup>th</sup> five year plan indicating that the share of education is set to increase from 7.8% in the 10<sup>th</sup> plan to 18.2% in the 11<sup>th</sup> plan. It is projected that allocation to the education sector is likely to be around Rs 2,87,362 crores which is five times more than the allocation during the 10<sup>th</sup> plan. Out of this 58% is to be spent on elementary education initiatives.

## The role of NGOs

The Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) sector in India has varied experience of working in the education sector. The NGO community is extremely diverse in terms of member capacities and the scope of its activities. Some NGOs are relatively large and well established with their own structured interventions while the majority of them are working in the sector to meet the need for education for vulnerable children. Despite their good intentions many of these NGOs lack the technical know how and resources to run sustainable, structured, educational interventions.

The SSA in its macro scheme of things had identified a major role for NGOs in realizing its objectives and emphasized strong partnerships with NGOs who have demonstrated their capacities to reach out to vulnerable and out-of-school children in the field of elementary education. The SSA framework for implementation had proposed in detail a vibrant partnership with NGOs as the key players. The working group report on education in the Tenth Five Year Plan had emphasized the importance of NGOs and the need for their active involvement in the framework of the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan. The report pointed out that “NGOs have tremendous creative potential to contribute in innovating and implementing education programmes. The voluntary sector should be assigned a larger role by functioning alongside governmental sector in a significant manner”.

While SSA recognized the unique capability of the NGOs, the education officials were skeptical about the ability as well as capacity of smaller NGOs to deliver the required educational services to achieve the goals of Universal Elementary Education (UEE) by 2010. It was generally argued that NGOs who work in educationally backward and remote areas lacked the expertise to mount sustainable quality programmes.

### Rationale for REACH India

Taking the above said observations and constraints into consideration, USAID came to the conclusion that the quickest and the most effective and efficient way to attract out-of-school children, especially girls, into the formal system was through the NGO sector by complementing the existing government strategies. It was felt that the NGOs if provided support have the capacity to develop and implement innovative context specific strategies for parents and children. Thus, USAID in India designed a new education activity called Reaching and Educating At-Risk Children (REACH India) in September, 2003.

The objective behind REACH India was to improve access, enrolment and retention of at-risk children in schools by supporting non-governmental organizations to run programmes that complement the SSA goals. It was emphasized that achieving SSA goals needed a collaborative effort and required NGOs to coordinate with the government in such a way that their efforts avoid duplication and complement and reinforce the government initiatives.



It also demanded NGOs to coordinate among themselves to ensure that they use each others expertise and look for support from the government, the private sector and communities to sustain their educational initiatives beyond the timelines supported by REACH India's resources. Thus, the major goal of REACH India was to:

*Increase access to mainstream education through a variety of interventions*

*Improve retention of children in schools till they complete their elementary schooling*

*Improve the relevance and quality of education through various means.*

The basic interventions that were designed to achieve these goals were

- (a) Strengthening of strong performing NGOs to scale up their delivery of educational services to out-of-school children in urban and rural areas.
- (b) Building the capacity of smaller, less mature NGOs to carry out structured and sustainable interventions
- (c) Promoting the adoption of best practices within the NGOs and state/ district education committees.

It was decided that the geographical area of REACH India's operations would entail a mix of urban and rural including Delhi, Jharkhand, Chattisgarh, Kolkata, Mumbai and North Karnataka

### REACH India

REACH India was thus initiated in September 2003. The project was designed to reach out and educate about 200,000 at-risk and excluded children in the identified areas through a range of interventions and

approaches working with 101 NGOs. The aim was to reach out to children in the slums, vulnerable sections, children belonging to poor minority communities, deprived classes, tribal communities, the girl child and children with disabilities

The interventions included strengthening of NGOs and expansion of their networks, building capacities of small and less mature NGOs, building linkages with the government systems at various levels, working with local communities and panchayats, strengthening the role of parents and teachers in the education process, developing a shared notion of quality education, a strong monitoring and evaluation process, networking with various stakeholders and promotion of best practices.

### Strengthening of NGOs and building capacities

Enhancing and strengthening of NGO capacities to develop and implement innovative context specific strategies in mobilizing communities, devising alternative education programmes and enhancing formal school processes were the various strategies used by REACH India to reach out to at-risk children.

One of the unique methods adopted was by '**building capacities**' of small and less mature NGOs. These NGOs had good manpower, access to these vulnerable groups in remote areas but were not organized and did not have systems in place to run a structured programme. Some of the large and well established NGOs with proven track record were identified as Capacity Building NGOs who monitored and strengthened the core competencies of these smaller NGOs through (a) Organisational Development (b) Monitoring and Evaluation (c) Technical Know-how (d) Financial Administration.

These large NGOs were known as Capacity Building NGOs while the smaller ones were known as **sub-grantees**. Apart from this, REACH also worked on innovative models with established NGOs referred to as **direct grantees** to strengthen and widen their scope of work.

### Focus on mainstreaming

A major part of REACH India's interventions consisted of strategies for mainstreaming children into the formal schooling system. This

included bridge courses in which children are provided with education with the objective of mainstreaming them into formal schools. The process is to teach the children the basics and orient them with the school curriculum so that, when they have attained the required knowledge, they can be admitted to a formal school as per their age and ability to cope in a formal school set up. These initiatives are further supplemented by specific coaching classes known as remediation classes. These classes are run with the objective of providing supplementary education to children who are finding it difficult to adjust in school and are potential dropouts due to their inability to cope with the system.

Other initiatives of REACH India include running of pre-school centers or balwadis. The basic aim is to inculcate the need for education in the children and prepare them for schooling when they attain the right age for admission into the formal school system. In some cases, REACH India's partners also identify and enroll children who are drop outs or who are eligible for direct admission into school. As a part of monitoring the children who have been mainstreamed and keeping a track of their movements, REACH India has developed a unique Student Tracking Tool (STT) through which the children are tracked using a unique identification number and remedial measures taken if the child drops out-of-school.

While there has been no specific focus on children with disabilities in REACH India's targeted interventions, the focus on vulnerable and at-risk children naturally led REACH India to support some





NGOs working with Children with Special Needs (CWSN) and raise the issue of Inclusion. These interventions were focused at showcasing examples of inclusive education by adopting various strategies that would help in establishing and enhancing inclusive education models for the government and other stakeholders.

### Emphasis on quality

Apart from focusing on reaching out to vulnerable children through education, equal importance was given to improving the quality of education in the schools by introducing various tools and strategies such as *Quality of Education Assessment Tool (QEAT)*, a unique tool developed by REACH India for NGOs to assess the status of the quality of their interventions in a number of critical parameters through observation, discussion and recording. Another intervention was the introduction of the Learning Classroom Series, an open learning method comprised of three workshops to enrich NGO personnel's in their provision of educational services. Another means aimed at improving quality of education was by introducing teaching learning materials wherein teachers are trained and encouraged to use simple teaching learning materials which are more interactive and interesting.

### Innovative interventions

One of the unique aspects of REACH India's interventions was the interesting array of approaches adopted by various NGO's to reach out to at risk and excluded children. There are many examples and models under REACH India that can be adopted and replicated by the government and various stakeholders to reach out to vulnerable children. To

begin with from the national capital, SARD, an NGO under the REACH India project is running a unique model of remedial centers known as 'Anandai Kaksh' within the premises of five Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) schools in Delhi. The objective behind this exercise has been to develop these MCD schools as model schools by sensitizing and enriching stakeholders including the administrators, students, teachers, parents and the community on the importance of holistic education and the various means of achieving maximum results by pursuing workable models.

In Kolkata, Vikramshila, an NGO under the REACH project is working on pedagogical improvements in government schools by unpacking the school curriculum and identifying and simplifying the core concepts for the benefit of children to make learning easy and joyful. Agastya, an NGO based in Karnataka is supporting education by promoting 'mobile labs' which go to village schools and the local communities generating an urge to learn, thus changing the mindset of local communities and creating a demand for education. Sahaara, an NGO based in Mumbai is working on educational interventions for children in remand and observation homes by emphasizing an approach based on care and understanding to break barriers and overcome prejudices. The organization also tracks students who are released from these remand homes and sees to it that these children are brought into the mainstream of the society through education

In the predominantly tribal state of Chattisgarh, Vanvasi Chetna Ashram is working among tribal children in 22 villages of the Dantewada block with the objective of enrolling and retaining all children in the age group of 4-14 years in primary schools and pre-school centers by adopting a holistic approach of sensitizing the local community and strengthening the capacity of teachers by exposing them to innovative teaching methods. In northern Karnataka, SVYM, an NGO under the REACH India project is adopting a community based approach to enhance education. The NGO is working towards reviving School Development and Monitoring Committees (SDMC) which consists of members from all sections of society. The SDMC's have been recognized by the state education board and monitor the educational interventions of the local schools which has led to

increased awareness and better quality education in these areas.

In the state of Jharkhand, Banvasi Vikas Ashram, an NGO supported by REACH India is running a unique residential bridge camp for disadvantaged and tribal girls reaching out to around 300 children by providing quality education with the aim of mainstreaming them into upper primary levels. The residential bridge camps are structured into 11 month academic sessions and have been hugely successful in reaching out to these at-risk children and providing them with education.

Deepalaya, an NGO based in Delhi is reaching out to vulnerable children in the remotest slums of the capital by building the capacities of six local NGO in running bridge courses and remedial centers and mainstreaming these children into the local government schools. Again in Karnataka, REACH India is supporting the interventions of Akshara Foundation, an NGO which has been focusing on an innovative approach based on 'Accelerated Programme for Learning'. Under this unique method, children are taught reading and math through short, intensive, remedial interventions that enhance their curiosity as well as their learning skills. The project directly reached out to more than 10,000 children in five districts of the state.

### Inclusive education

The REACH India programme is also addressing the cause of children with disabilities through strategic interventions. REACH India is working with four NGOs namely, AADI (Action for Ability Development and Inclusion), Digidarshika, Ummeed and Manovikas Kendra in this regard. REACH India's interventions are based on the belief that segregated schools are not feasible in developing countries like India with a large and growing population. REACH India through its interventions in inclusive education wanted to drive

home the point that financial resources are better spent by strengthening the capacity of local government and community schools to handle children with special needs rather than cater to special schools. These interventions were focused to showcase examples of inclusive education by adopting various strategies that would help in establishing this concept.

### Models for replication

The REACH India grant activities ended in December,





2007 having successfully attained the objectives of reaching out to at-risk and vulnerable children.

The project has been able to exceed its targets in certain areas of interventions like direct enrolment in schools. One of the notable achievements of the project is that out of the 200,000 at-risk children children targeted under various educational interventions, more than 79% have been mainstreamed into the formal schooling system, Monitoring and evaluation tools like the student tracking tool developed by REACH India show that the retention rate of these children who would otherwise have never gone to school has reached an all time high of almost 85% as the project nears its completion.

It would not be an under statement to say that

REACH India has been able to make the desired impact and showcase models which can be replicated by stakeholders including NGOs and government agencies. In the following chapters, REACH India has tried to profile some of these NGOs for their good practices and innovative approaches. These NGOs have been selected at random and are not necessarily better organized or more innovative than the other approximately 92 NGOs who have been working under the REACH umbrella. The idea here is to profile a few of the NGOs and document the unique methods they have adopted to reach out to vulnerable and at-risk children thus facilitating similar interventions as India moves towards its target of achieving Universal Elementary education by the year 2012. ■



# Agastya International: Redefining Educational Parameters through Interactive Learning

November Nineteenth is unlike any other day for this local government village school near Kukanoor in the backward Koppal district of north Karnataka. There seems to be palpable excitement among the students.... they are anticipating the arrival of this 'unique mobile science lab' being run by Agastya International Foundation to visit their school. After the initial buzz of excitement, there is pin drop silence as the two teachers accompanying the mobile vans lay their various science models on tables followed by a series of simple but telling experiments.

By rotating a model of the earth, moon and sun, children are taught about solar and lunar eclipses. With the help of a paper telescope, the principle of vision is explained while the whole process of the human breathing technique is explained using a conical flask, a balloon and a rubber pipe. Basic scientific concepts are brought to life through ingenious experiments developed with low cost materials so that children can learn easily. The whole process is interactive in nature; the children are called on to perform these experiments while the teacher explains the concepts and encourages questions. By the end of the day, about fifty experiments have been conducted leaving these children spellbound, awakening their young inquisitive minds to the mysteries of nature around them.

The basic objective behind this exercise of 'mobile science labs' is to make education more fun and engaging for children by making their minds more receptive, with an urge to learn more, explains Suresh, the young manager who is coordinating the project.

**T**he project supported by REACH India reaches out to 28 schools and also covers out-of-school children and the villagers living in four taluks of Koppal district in Karnataka. These mobile science labs which could be termed as a 'revolutionary' approach in these backward areas have been a huge success. Not only have these mobile labs been able to create awareness about science but have also been instrumental in attracting vulnerable and out-of-school children to schools by making education more attractive and need based. Equipped with ten foldable desks, a screen to show videos, custom designed exhibits and a computer, the mobile labs have the capacity to perform about a hundred and fifty experiments in Physics, Chemistry, Biology and Mechanics. The lab includes two instructors who have been trained to make teaching interactive and interesting thus

replacing boring lecture-style lessons in classrooms with a stimulating hands-on experience for children.

## **Integrated strategy**

Apart from these 'mobile science labs' which could be termed as the catalysts, the Agastya-REACH India programme also consists of periodic science fairs in select schools, teacher training and education workshops, hands-on experiments for children at the well equipped regional science centre in Kukanoor and bridge courses for out-of-school children in selected villages. The programme directly impacts nearly 100,000 children and 2,500 teachers apart from a fair number of out-of-school children who stay in the villages in the project area, but come to witness the mobile lab experiments that are conducted in the villages.

In fact, the whole idea of reaching out to children



through science education has been nurtured by inculcating the spirit of inquiry among children. Agastya International is a charitable trust established in 1999 with the objective of transforming primary and secondary education through interactive, hands-on learning. Founded by scientists, educators and executives, the organization believes that the spirit of enquiry and questioning should be nurtured in children if they are to be productive. The organization's educational initiatives are centered on the belief that didactic rote based learning, that typifies education discourages questioning, leading to dull boring classrooms with the "I speak you listen" attitude of the teachers' resulting in high drop-out rates and low standards of education.

The Annual Status of Education report, 2007, points out that 35% of the children in the age group of 7-14 cannot read simple paragraphs while 41% cannot do two digit subtractions putting a big question mark on the quality of education. Agastya believes that education should move from rote-based learning towards skill and creativity. The organization's goal is to empower the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children and teachers with creative life skills.

### Retaining children in schools

The objective of Agastya REACH India programme, apart from focusing on quality education is also aimed

at retaining children who could potentially drop-out-of-school in these four talukas of Koppal. While one 'mobile science lab' visits schools, the other mobile lab is exclusively meant to target out-of-school and at-risk children by going into villages and conducting science exhibitions. Agastya gets hold of the drop-out list of students from the principle of the local schools and targets areas where such children are concentrated. These exhibitions have been instrumental in attracting out-of-school children and exposing them to the wonders of nature and science and indirectly motivating them to attend school to learn more.

These 'mobile science labs' have been very popular in the villages

and a huge crowd gathers to witness these experiments. Apart from out-of-school children, these mobile labs also play a big role in sensitizing the local community and the parents of out-of-school children to send them to schools as they see good value in their wards going to the local schools and pursuing education.

### Hands-on learning experience

Apart from the mobile science labs which make almost eight visits in a year to the village schools, Agastya conducts periodic science fairs in the project areas. Children from neighboring schools and villages are encouraged to converge at a chosen place, mostly a village school and conduct experiments and learn from them. One of the unique aspects of the science fairs is the selection of 'young instructors' from amongst the children who have shown good aptitude. These selected children are encouraged to conduct experiments and teach and pass on their learning to the other children. By doing this, the young instructors apart from getting hands-on training also get an opportunity to raise their self esteem and develop their leadership and communication skills.

"I enjoyed teaching my fellow mates and also got an opportunity to sharpen my understanding of the concept more clearly" is the usual refrain one hears from these young instructors who become the cynosure of more than 400 children who usually

attend such fairs. It would not be an understatement to say that these periodic science fairs go a long way in shaping the careers and future of these children who would have never been able to see a lab or perform an experiment. The confidence and curiosity of the young instructors increase manifold through this learning-teaching method and retention happens at a much faster rate than through the traditional chalk-and-talk method.

### Science centre

To facilitate this whole process of training and learning, a science centre has been established at Kukanoor. The Science Centre is the contact point and the coordination centre for the Agastya-REACH India project and serves as the fulcrum of this well linked science education process. The science centre with its well equipped lab facilities, 400 science exhibits and large space is also open for students to come and learn on a daily basis. The target schools in the project area are given schedules as to when they can send children for learning and hands on training. The children are accompanied to the centre by their science teachers who explain the concepts in their syllabus by demonstrating experiments.

One of the unique features of the science centre is the special way in which the knowledge of science is imparted to the visiting students. Mr. Suresh, who is managing the project explains that the students at times are given 'concepts' and are encouraged to use their knowledge and understanding to come up with scientific models. He says that apart from encouraging group activity these 'concept trainings' open student's minds to newer concepts and the thirst to learn and explore.

### Focus on building capacities of teachers

Mr. Ramji Raghavan, chairman of Agastya International drives home the point that the education system needs a massive infusion of the creative temper. He points out to the accepted fact that an average person learns 10 percent of what he or she reads, 50 percent of what he or she hears and sees, 70 percent of what he or she discusses with others and 90 percent of what he or she teaches and emphasizes the point of interactive learning. Agastya's teacher training programmes are centered around this philosophy and aims to diffuse and propagate creative thinking and problem solving skills.





Non-formal and exclusive methods are used to train teachers in holistic education practices of interactive learning. Specific training learning materials have been developed by Agastya which foster the spirit of enquiry among children and teachers are encouraged to use them. Teachers are also trained to use modules that integrate learning and knowledge across subjects, influencing children and parents to urge teachers to deliver better. Teachers are also encouraged to work with groups of children and raise their levels of interaction with children thus bridging the distance between teaching and learning. Apart from this, the teachers are introduced to scientific experiments as per the syllabus.

Besides its outreach science centers and mobile science labs, Agastya, runs a creativity lab at its campus near Bangalore. The Creativity lab is an interactive knowledge center which generates new learning models and pedagogies that Agastya “distributes” through mobile science labs and science centers.

### **Spreading the message of education**

The Agastya Foundation's vision is to create learning networks growing towards a 'tipping point' in the Indian education scenario. "A single spark can start a wild fire” goes the old Chinese saying and the Agastya model suggests that serious and interactive learning which is fun and engaging will make education spread like a raging wild fire in the country. The REACH India project has been a learning experience for Agastya and succeeded in building the capacity of the organization as well as building its technical resources and skills. The project has been well received by the district education authorities and various stakeholders and efforts are underway to scale up the initiatives in various districts of north Karnataka and other states of India. ■



## Sahaara Charitable Society: Educational Interventions in Children/Observation Homes

Fourteen year old Kavya Kamble, is a picture of poise and confidence. This young girl looking smart in her school uniform is all ready to go to her classes at the central school at Pawai in the bustling metropolis of Mumbai. She is about to board her cycle rickshaw for school as her mother comes rushing out of her cramped two room house and hands over her packed lunch for the day. A big smile lights up her tender face as she bids farewell for another hectic day at school.

Thanks to Sahaara charitable society, young Kavya has been able to forget her traumatic past. Today, all those dark memories have been forgotten and left behind as she aspires to pursue the profession of a medical nurse in the future.

Mahender, one of the tracker-cum-counsellors at Sahara Charitable Society has been instrumental in transforming the life of this young girl. Two years back, Kavya was a 'problem child'. She had fallen into bad company, had many boyfriends and had twice run away from home. The last time she ran away, she was caught by the police and was put into a children's remand home in Umerkhadi in Mumbai. Mahender came into contact with her the day she was being released from the remand home.

As a part of the tracking programme under the REACH India-Sahaara project which aims at educating and mainstreaming children who are released from remand homes, Mahender took her address from the remand home authorities and visited her house at Chaitnaya Nagar in Pawai. After initial resistance from her family, Mahender was allowed to meet with Kavya who looked quite aggressive and disturbed. She was confined to the four walls of her house and looked quite unhappy and was determined to leave her home again at the next available opportunity.

Slowly and steadily, he was able to win over the confidence of her family and her pathetic story unfolded. Kavya was the second of three siblings. Her father worked as a peon with IIT and had two wives. His second wife was very young and was almost of the same age as Kavya's elder sister. Amidst protests and resistance from his first wife and children, he brought home his second wife and her two children. This led to frequent quarrels and tension in the family. Her father turned to liquor and used to frequently beat up Kavya's mother.

All these unfortunate events plus taunts from her friends took a heavy toll on Kavya and scarred her psychologically. She became aggressive, stopped attending school and developed friendship with 'Taporis' or vagabonds. She was frequently out of home and resented any sort of interference from her family and finally ran away from home ending up at the remand home in Umerkhadi.

With much patience and determination after about five rounds of counseling sessions, Mahender was able to drive some sort of sense into her. Simultaneously he also counseled her father, her mother and step-mother and bought peace into the family.

*“I told then to reconcile to the situation and to work out differences for their own good”. Slowly things started changing. Situation at the home front improved considerably. Mahender arranged for her transfer certificate from the Municipal school she was studying at earlier and got her admission into Central School where no one knew her past. Slowly and steadily, Kavya was able to pick up threads and put her life in order.*

*Today the whole family is grateful to Mahender. Not only has Kavya mended her wayward ways, she has also emerged as a top student in her school. Moreover, the fortunes of the family have also changed for the better. Her elder sister has got a job in a retail chain while her step-mother has also found work in a garment factory. Today they are all one well-knit group.*

*Mahender continues to visit the family “The satisfaction this work gives you is tremendous” he says, his voice cracking with emotion.*

**S**ahaara Charitable Society (SCS) is an NGO working to improve the health and education status of marginalised groups such as women in prostitution, prisoners, orphans/semi-orphans, street children, persons with Hanson's Disease and visually challenged people in Mumbai.

SCS, established in 1994, initially targeted its efforts to improve the welfare of prisoners at the Central Jail in Mumbai's Arthur Road. Gradually, the organization started conducting health camps among the children of these prisoners who were sheltered in Observation/Children's homes. Today the REACH-Sahaara project reaches out to around 3,000 marginalised children in 10 slums and 6 children /observations homes in Matunga, Mankhurd and Umerkhadi. The project delivers quality education through remedial classes and balwadis and also by tracking children like Kavya who are mainstreamed into society.

### Reaching out to at-risk children

One of the major interventions under the REACH-Sahaara project is to reach out to the vulnerable and excluded children who are living in the remand/ observation homes in Mumbai. Sahaara's interventions are concentrated on four residential homes in Mankhurd ( one home exclusively for girls) and one observation home in Umerkhadi. The children living in the observation home are either law breakers who have indulged in petty to serious criminal acts while those based in residential homes are mostly destitute , abandoned or street children.

### Remedial education

The intervention in these children's home is two pronged in nature: providing quality education to these vulnerable children and helping them overcome psychological trauma through counseling and care. A majority of the children sheltered in these homes study at a special municipal school inside the premises of the Observation/Children's homes in Mankhurd while a few of them attend the local municipal school in the vicinity.

Sahaara, with the help of REACH India, is running remedial classes for the benefit of these children. Since many of the children in these homes are unable to read and write, remedial classes are provided to strengthen their foundational base. The children in the age bracket of 4 to 14 are classified under three levels and taught the basics. They are also provided support as per school curriculum demands. Rooms have been allotted by the authorities in the children's home premises for this purpose.



The remedial education teachers are encouraged to develop personal and individual rapport with the students and keep records of their progress. Apart from the remedial sessions, children who show behavioral difficulties are counseled and helped. The progress of the students is also continuously monitored by the initiative of the remedial teachers who stay in touch with the teachers of the municipal schools. The government teachers are sensitized to be patient in dealing with these children and their feedback is also factored in for effective remedial interventions.



### Emphasis on care and understanding

One of the highlights of Sahaara's intervention is the selection and training of its remedial teachers. A holistic approach is adopted in the selection process with emphasis both on quality as well as social skills. Generally the teachers are picked from the local community. This is done to ensure that the teachers are accepted by the students as well as the local community. After selection, the teachers undergo a week-long training process which includes both theory and practical classes. The teachers are sensitized to the background of these children and are taught to inculcate value-based education to these children.

The teachers are instructed to follow the Rubric System. They are trained to teach through an interactive process of story telling, lesson planning, use of teaching learning materials, inculcation of moral values and counseling. Lata Borulkar, one of the twelve teachers teaching at the children's home says that counselling is the most important part of imparting education at children's homes "A majority of the children deprived of parental love and affection display some sort of behavioral problems and it is imperative that we address these concerns before embarking on remedial education." The Teachers' Training programme is an ongoing process with monthly training classes wherein teachers are encouraged to share their experiences and learn from each other.

The children have shown remarkable improvement in their academic performance over the last two years. Many of the children have overcome their initial reluctance to a disciplined approach and have started attending school regularly. As a part of providing quality education, Sahaara has opened 2 computer centres consisting of ten computers each for the benefit of these children.

### Tracking of vulnerable children

While it is easy to work on strategic interventions for institutionalised children while they are sheltered in the Mankhurd Observation/Children's homes, the same cannot be said of children residing in the Observation Home at Umerkhadi. Most of the children herein are released within a span of two months as their cases are resolved by the juvenile courts. An average of ten children are released from Umerkhadi Observation home every day. To follow up these children thereby ensuring they are mainstreamed into society, Sahaara adopts a unique method of tracking them once they are released from the home.

As per the agreement with the Children's Aid Society authorities, Matunga, Sahaara procures the addresses of the released children on a regular basis. These children are then tracked right down to their homes for the purpose of counselling, care and providing opportunities to pursue their education (as was the case with Kavya). Two trackers are continuously on



the job to ensure that the children released from this Observation Home are on their way to becoming positive contributors to society.

This holistic approach to mainstreaming involves sensitization of the parents as well as the community to accept the children back into the social fold. Some of these tracked children who had not pursued education earlier are referred to the balwadis/ coaching centers run by Sahaara; those children who return to school are provided with remedial education. More than seven hundred and fifty children have been tracked since the inception of the project and mainstreamed into formal schools or balwadis.

Balwadis are also an integral part of the REACH programme. Housed in makeshift *bustis* or rented

shacks, these balwadis function as regular pre-school centers in the morning and double up as remedial coaching centers in the afternoon. Each of these balwadis is manned by two volunteers who mostly hail from the local community. They identify out-of-school children, bring them to these centers and provide them education. The aim of this project is to mainstream them into the local government schools. The coaching centers further double up as centres of counseling and mainstreaming children released from the Observation home in Umerkhadi.

### Integrating the excluded

The REACH India project has been instrumental in reaching out to excluded children in the residential homes of Mumbai. These institutionalised children with no identity are the most neglected explains, Jude D'lima, who coordinated the successful implementation of the project. "It is imperative to reach out to them as they have been forced to lead a life without parental care due to the ills of the society. These children are an integral part of society like each and every one of us and can play a major role in the transformation and progress of the society" The interventions in Mumbai with Sahaara have emerged as a huge success story for REACH India as it underlines the genesis behind the establishment of 'REACH India' Reaching and educating at risk children! ■



# Akshara Foundation: Creating inroads in Education through Innovative Learning Methods

*The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan launched with the key objective of achieving universalisation of elementary education has been able to make remarkable inroads into the rural sector in India with enrollment levels touching 90% in the majority of the states in the country. The number of out-of-school children has fallen considerably and is estimated to be around ten million with more than 98% of the children having access to a primary school within a radius of one kilometer... but what about the quality aspect? Are we sacrificing quality education in our quest to achieve UEE!*

*The Annual Status of Education Report points out that 35% of the children in the age group of 7-14 in the country cannot read simple paragraphs, while 41% cannot do two digit subtractions! Moreover, the lack of providing quality education has a ripple effect, apart from being unproductive, it is cited as one of the main reasons for children dropping out-of-school as none of the stakeholders including the parents see any value in children pursuing an education.*

*One of the prime focus areas of REACH India's intervention has been to enhance the quality of education. Apart from designing the Quality of Education Assessment Tool (QEAT) and introducing innovative Training Learning methods in its interventions, the REACH project has been supporting special projects that work on enhancing the learning skills of children.*

**T**he REACH India-Akshara Foundation project 'Improving the Status of Education in North Karnataka' has been one such initiative which apart from reaching out to children in the backward districts of Karnataka has been focusing on an innovative approach based on 'Accelerated Programme for Learning'. Under this unique method, children are taught reading and math through short, intensive, remedial interventions that enhance their curiosity as well as their learning skills. The project directly reached out to more than 10,000 children in the Raichur, Bellary, Bagalkot, Gulbarga and Bidar districts of the state. Akshara Foundation is a Bangalore based public charitable trust working towards providing multiple solutions for universalizing elementary education. Akshara is part of the Pratham network, a twenty-one state education initiative that has reached more than a

million children in ten years. The basis of Akshara Foundation's approach is to create an effective network of local organizations and spread the message of education in the state through strategic interventions.

## **Revolutionary approach**

Accelerated Learning Programme (ALP) is an innovative teaching method that involves both reading and maths, the two prime interventions in the process of 'education'. The approaches adopted under ALP are the opposite of conventional learning methods. Conventional teaching in reading follows a slow progression from alphabet to word to sentences to paragraph. But the Accelerated Programme, starts with reading from the very first day. Children are given flash cards and imagine and try to make sense

of what they see. They stumble 'read' and guess what the words may be, try and make meaning out of it and eventually learning to read in the process. Teachers just facilitate the process and ask occasional questions to help the child correct himself or herself. The programme is run for a period of 45 days and the teaching materials consists of a set of story cards with illustrations, alphabet charts and alphabet cards.

The mathematics approach under the Accelerated Programme is an activity based method where concepts are taught using concrete tools such as the counting board and number grids, focusing on children and helping them see, do, learn and comprehend mathematics. The programme allows the child to imagine and creatively explore different ways to arrive at a solution.

### Emphasis on slow learners and out-of-school children

This approach has been used extensively by Akshara Foundation both for targeting out-of-school children as well as in school children who are academically weak and are slow learners. In regular schools, a survey is conducted to identify slow learners in the age group of 7-14. These children are then classified into three groups as per their abilities for the Accelerated Learning Programme. The aim and objective is to strengthen the basic education skills of these school-going children apart from strengthening their interpersonal skills and adding value to their education. For out-of-school children, Accelerated Learning Programme is used as a means of attracting them to school through joyful learning

Akshara Foundation's interventions under REACH India has benefited 10,009 children in five districts of North Karnataka. Many of these children, 3605 to be precise were non-school-going children out of which 2275 children have been mainstreamed with this innovative approach.

*Take the case of twelve year old Shiva Kumar, a school dropout who hails from a family of agricultural labourers. His parents at one time were keen that Shiva Kumar should attend the local school. His father Shanmuk even went to the extent of giving some money to the village school headmaster who in turn would give a rupee a day to Shiv Kumar, whenever the*

*young boy attended school. This was done as an incentive to coax him to attend school. Soon Shiva Kumar lost interest and stopped attending school. His parents had no option but to engage him in cattle rearing and Shiva Kumar proved adept at this task. It was at this time that Akshara under the REACH India project started its interventions at Kinniwadi village in Bidar district. One of the volunteers under the project persuaded Shiva Kumar to attend the village learning centre (dropout centre) and introduced him to the Accelerated Learning Programme. Slowly the young boy started enjoying his classes. He found learning joyful and interesting.*

*One day Shiva Kumar came home and told his father that he wanted to pursue education by joining the village school. This time his parents were reluctant as joining a regular school would mean that Shiva Kumar would have to give up cattle rearing and finding another person to do the job would put an additional burden on the family. Shiv Kumar was adamant, and refused to take any food from the house, a sort of hunger strike to force his parents to change their decision. Today Shiva Kumar who is in class four is one of the good students in his school. He has learnt to read and write and can even do two digit calculations.*



The Accelerated Learning Programme has been a **big** catalyst in these rural schools of North Karnataka. The children are seated in a semi circle and are encouraged to consult each other and learn. Moreover, the process also calls for children to enact the story that has been projected in the 'flash cards' which results in group activity and helps in building the confidence of the child. The children are provided with the flash card and a work book with the intention of going home and practicing their lessons. One of the best aspects of the programme is the periodic evaluation of the progress made by each and every child every fortnight and the remedial measures that follow.

### Involvement of religious 'Mutts'

While regular school-going children were targeted under the Accelerated Learning Programme conducted in schools for a period of 45 days, out-of-school children were targeted by adopting a holistic approach. At the beginning of the project a house to house survey was conducted to identify children who were not going to school. Akshara Foundation

adopted a novel way to attract these children. A ten day residential camp for out-of-school children was organized in partnership with the religious 'Mutts' of the area. This group which is highly respected in the region is involved in promoting various social activities. The emphasis of the camp was on 'overall development of the child' and involved, yoga, sports, basic education classes and moral discourses. The parents of these children were also invited to participate in the camp during the last two days so that they could gauge the progress of their wards in a disciplined atmosphere and be sensitized about the need for education.

The parents who attended these camps took an oath to send their children to school. Some of the children were enrolled in the residential schools run by these 'Mutts' while many of the children were enrolled in the Village Learning Centers established by Akshara foundation with the aim of teaching them the basics before mainstreaming them to regular schools. Fifteen religious Mutts were part of this process of sensitizing various stakeholders and attracting these out-of-school children back to school.

### Village learning centers

The Village Learning Centers were manned by trained volunteers who were selected from the local village community. These centers were the 'hub' of activity and consisted of two volunteers, one with the specific charge of catering to out-of-school children while the mandate of the other was to help the teachers of the Accelerated Learning Programme which was being run in the government schools. All the volunteers had the minimum qualification of passing 12<sup>th</sup> standard and were young and respected in their villages. The volunteers were given two week training on ALP and other extra curricular activities like sports, yoga and music. The basic aim behind these training exercises was to improve the communication and confidence level of these youths and young women. In fact, one the major reasons for the success of Akshara's interventions was the zeal, dedication and commitment shown by these young volunteers. They met the parents of out-of-school children and sensitized them to the importance of sending their children to school. There are many success stories in these villages and even children with disabilities after attending these centers have been mainstreamed into



regular schools.

The village learning centers are well equipped with charts and books to attract children. Apart from this, they also have cricket sets, football, carom board and other games to sustain the initial interest of children who have never been to school. The centers are operated in the evening to accommodate children who help their parents in the field or do other chores. Once the children are enrolled into the village learning centers, the volunteers make it a point to interact with the parents of these children to minimize the probability of dropouts. These centers have become very popular and many of the volunteers are running them as remedial tuition centers for a nominal fee, to coach school-going children in these villages.

### Training of teachers

The effective sensitization and training of government teachers was another key aspect of the programme. Two teachers from each of the village schools with entrepreneurial skills and commitment were identified for the programme and were trained in the ALP methodology. The two-day residential training apart from ALP also involved lessons in child psychology, educational techniques and usage of training learning materials. These trainings were activity based and were very helpful in streamlining the teachers to new methods of teaching. A total of 271 teachers have been trained under the project.

### Capacity building approach



Interestingly, Akshara Foundations intervention in North Karnataka was carried out in partnership with local NGO's. These local NGOs known as sub-grantees were trained for these interventions by building their capacities. The seven local NGOs involved in this exercise were Prerana, Janakalyan and GRAMS from Raichur district, Prawarda from Bidar district, SIRE from Gulbarga district, BVV Sangha from Bagalkot and JSW foundation from Bellary. The capacity building of these NGOs involved strengthening of their organizational and management capacities, improving their technical know-how, upgrading of their financial management techniques relating to accounts and procedures and improvement of their reporting structures.

Apart from this, the NGOs were sensitized and trained on various aspects of the Accelerated Learning Programme. An integrated approach was adopted and a detailed schedule of training programmes involving project objectives, base line surveys, data collection, documentation, ALP teacher training programmes, capacity building of volunteers and organization development were drafted and

carried out. For the effective implementation of the project at the ground level, Akshara Foundation does a monthly review of the progress of the project with each partner. The partners are also encouraged to interact and learn from each other and share their experiences at the ground level. All the partners also generate data during these meetings which is fed into the project management information system. Each partner was provided with Laptops and 30 educational CD's under the programme.

### Widespread acclaim

The Akshara REACH India project has been widely appreciated by various stakeholders including the government. The project apart from successfully reaching out to 10,000 children in 132 villages in north Karnataka has helped in creating awareness and a nurturing climate in the region. The standard of teaching in the government schools in the region have definitely shown an upward trend. Most of the volunteers who are associated with the village centers are running tuition classes in the morning hours at a nominal fee and have become self employed.

An independent evaluation study conducted by Gulbarga University places the achievement level of the project in regard to its objectives at 80%. The study observes that one of the major success of the project has been the building of capacities of the seven local NGOs in these backward districts of Karnataka. A strong institutional base has been created at the village level and these local NGOs have emerged and established themselves as key agents of change in their respective regions with the expertise to execute projects on their own. ■

# SVYM: Community Participation for Achieving UEE Goals

One of the primary goals of REACH India was to complement the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan which is being implemented across the nation to achieve the long cherished dream of Universal Elementary Education by 2010, by following an integrated approach. One of the focus areas of SSA is to enhance the performance of the school system and to provide community owned quality elementary education.

*“The Success of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan will depend on the quality of the community based planning process. While SSA is formulated on the premise that the community can plan, it also accepts the tremendous requirement for developing capacities in communities to do so. The heterogeneity of local communities in many regions often poses problems of unanimity on proposed planning criteria. It is important to recognize a habitation rather than a village as a unit of planning as most habitations have a higher degree of community solidarity” (Para 2.2 Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan : Framework for implementation-2000)*

**T**he REACH India-Swami Vivekananda Youth Movement (SVYM) Project, 'Shikshanavahini' is an innovative approach in this regard to strengthen community participation in education.

Swami Vivekananda Youth Movement is a non-religious, not-for-profit development organization working in the field of health, education and community development. The organization which is based at H.D. Kote Taluk in Mysore district has a great deal of experience in running both non-formal and formal education programmes for the disadvantaged tribals in Mysore district. SVYM's work has been recognized by various awards at the national level including the National Youth Award coming its way. Under the REACH India project, the organization has targeted 8,000 out-of-school children with the help of eight local NGOs in the districts of Raichur, Bijapur, Bellary and Bagalkot districts in North Karnataka.

## Focus on community participation

One of the major objectives of the project, apart

from capacity building of eight NGOs in four districts of North Karnataka was to empower the local community representatives in demanding better infrastructure and quality education in these government schools. The other objective was to identify and pursue out-of-school children to attend local schools.

The key focus of the project was to reactivate the School Development Monitoring Committees (SDMCs) that have been set up under an act by the Government of Karnataka. Every school is supposed to have a SDMC which is responsible for the overall functioning and development of the school.

As per the Karnataka Panchayat's SDMC bye laws, 2006, the SDMC must consist of nine members and must meet once a month to monitor the progress of the school. The majority of the SDMC members are parents of the children while the headmaster of the school, the health worker and the anganwadi teacher will be ex-officio members. The maximum term of office members other than ex-officio members is three years, or it will be co-terminus with the term of gram panchayat concerned, whichever is earlier.

Under the bye-laws, the parents have an equal say with the head master or other members of the committee in the affairs of the school. The committee has been given powers to take steps to ensure the quality of education. The committees have been asked to supervise assets, funds and finances of schools, monitor and verify attendance of teachers, non-teaching staff and students, review performance of teachers, ensure enrollment of all children in schools, hold parents council meeting once in three months, implement the midday meal scheme, protect the school premises against encroachment and address the grievances of students parents and teachers. Apart from SDMC, the Gram Panchayath (GP) members also have control of allocation of funds to schools.

The SDMC members and GP members are generally not very well versed with their roles and responsibilities and lack knowledge of government schemes and policies. The school authorities also do not welcome their interference in the administration of schools which basically limits their role and makes them just figure heads on paper. The Shikshanavahini project focuses on reviving the SDMC and using them as a tool to ensure quality education and enrolment of out-of-school children in the project areas.

### Reviving the SDMCs

One of the major tasks at the beginning of the project was to sensitise the Panchayathi Raj Institutions on education and regroup the SDMC that were non existent. Many of the SDMC's who existed just on paper were re-activated and each member was sensitized about his/her roles and duties. A large number of training sessions were conducted for the benefit of the SDMC members to tell them about their powers, duties and responsibilities. Group trainings underlining the role and financial responsibility of SDMC's were held for the benefit of the members. Motivation workshops were also conducted for school teachers to sensitise them

about the role of SDMCs and the benefits of working together.

One of the major focuses under the 'Shikshnavahini' project was to get the SDMC members to identify the out-of-school children in their areas and bring them to school. Apart from this, they also monitored various issues like absenteeism of teachers, lack of infrastructure and quality of the food served under the mid-day meal scheme. The project has been able to achieve innumerable success stories in this area.

*Take for instance the case of the Malvi Government Primary School in the taluk of Hagri Bomannahalli in Bijapur District. As per the school records, it showed that only six children in the designated area were out-of-school. Once the SDMC members were sensitized, the onus of getting the out-of-school children was passed on to them. The SDMC members were allotted particular areas and streets in the village for this purpose. About 33 out-of-school children were identified by the SDMC. It was found that about 90% of these children were working in agricultural fields and could not make it to school. The SDMC members convened a meeting with the Gram Panchayath and visited the agricultural fields to sensitise the parents of these children. A three day motivation camp was held for these children at the school premises wherein these children were introduced to joyful learning and provided with books, pencils, crayons and work books. After discussion with the respective parents, all the children were enrolled into the school in classes as per their capabilities.*





## Focused approach

At the inception of the project, a baseline survey was conducted by each of the selected NGOs in the target area (fifty villages under each project) to identify out-of-school children. Once the children were identified, a series of advocacy and awareness activities were carried out. This included rallies, street plays and individual visits to the homes of these children. The

## Building capacities of local NGOs

The entire project is being implemented with the help of local NGOs by building their capacities and training them on organizational development and technical know how in education. Eight NGOs were identified for the project after an effective screening process. These NGOs were then sensitized about the objectives of the project and were given specific and result oriented training on organizational and managerial processes to undertake the project in the identified areas. The trainings included sessions on the state of general education in Karnataka, educational interventions, child rights, SSA objectives, community organization and SDMC bye-laws, community dynamics and working with the government.

Apart from this, general trainings were organized to improve the capacity of the NGOs in organizational development, administration and financial management. All the NGOs were motivated to have a proper Human Resources (HR) policy with guidelines for recruitments, trainings and leaves in place. These organizations were encouraged to keep files, maintain minutes of meetings, draft quarterly plans and come up with regular reports on the progress of their interventions. In financial transactions, transparency was stressed by insisting on maintenance of expenditure, supporting vouchers and delegation of financial powers.

local Self Help Groups (SHG) were roped into the campaign and asked to motivate the parents of out-of-school children to send them to schools.

Meanwhile the SDMCs were re activated in the schools and were also involved in identifying out-of-school children. A formal memorandum was signed with the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP), the District Education Officer (DEO), the local NGO and SVYM

To address the problem of dropouts, a programme called 'our favorite school' was initiated wherein children were encouraged to speak on what they liked about their school. This was followed by identifying students who were regular in attendance. These children were then appreciated and recognised and presented with badges. So far 46,000 badges have been distributed by the eight partners in their respective project areas. Statistics show that this particular intervention has been a big incentive in preventing children from dropping out of schools. District level children's melas (fairs) which included cultural activities, sports and music were also held in all the districts to create awareness of the importance of education.

To cater to the educational needs of out-of-school children 40 Evening Cemediation Centers were run in the project areas, while School Supportive Centers were run in the government schools to supplement the needs of school going children. Regular house visits were carried out to follow-up on children who were not attending classes while monthly parent

teacher meetings were conducted. The children from these camps were then gradually mainstreamed into the government schools.

### **Strengthening foundations for future interventions**

One of the major successes of 'Shikshanavahini' is the fact that the programme has been able to create awareness of the importance of education in the focus districts. The approach has been holistic in the sense that the project has been successful in reactivating 400 SDMCs and 60 Panchayathi Raj Institutions and sensitizing them towards educational interventions in the area. It would not be an understatement to say that community participation has led to marked improvement in access to and

quality of schools in these areas. These interventions have been able to identify 10,540 out-of-school children and help retain 8228 children in the schools into which they have been admitted. It has also been successful in controlling drop out rates in these districts to a considerable extent and generating a demand for literacy within the community. The SDMCs have also proved to be a catalyst by ensuring that government incentives actually reach the beneficiaries.

Today SVYMs role in education and strengthening of SDMCs has been acknowledged by the government and SVYM has been made a member of the state level SDMC-NGO coordination forum. The NGOs whose capacity has been built have become professional in their approach and are set to serve the cause of achieving UEE in these districts. ■



# Banwasi Vikas Ashram: Transforming the lives of Girls through Holistic Education

One can easily spot the happiness on sixteen year old Shahina's face as she walks into Banwasi Vikas Ashram. "I am thrilled to be back here" she says with a smile "It's like coming back home where I belong". Young Shahina's life almost reads like a fairy tale since she joined the residential bridge camp of Banwasi Vikas Ashram. Shahina had never been to a proper school till she was thirteen years old. Her exposure to education was restricted to a local 'Madrassa' in her formative years but she could hardly read or write in Hindi. Like many of the girls belonging to the minority community, she was helping her family in their household chores and waiting for 'marriage to happen'.

It was during this time that the volunteers from Banwasi Vikash Ashram, an NGO working in the field of education visited her locality and convinced the local 'Maulanas' (clerics) to send the children from the minority communities to the residential bridge school being run by the organization in the neighboring Bagodhar block of Giridih district in Jharkhand State. As fate would have it, the local cleric of Shahina's village, Kusmarja happened to visit the residential camp and was so impressed that he persuaded Shahina's parents to get her admitted to the one year residential course which she joined in the year 2005

Life was initially very tough recalls Shahina. "We had to get up in the morning, take care of our daily chores, attend classes and study our lessons. It was difficult getting used to a disciplined lifestyle". But as time went by, she emerged as a model student... good both in studies and cultural activities. The systematic training, the innovative methods of teaching coupled with love, care and understanding transformed Shahina's life. She was all prepared to take the world in her stride.

Shahina's new found confidence got noticed when she went to her village during the summer vacations. She was flooded with many marriage proposals and her parents were keen to get her married. But young Shahina had other plans. She passed her residential bridge course with 'grade five' achievements and during the annual get together, requested her teachers to persuade her parents to postpone their marriage plans. She then wrote the entrance test in the government-run residential school 'Kasturba Balika Vidyalaya' and secured admission in 5<sup>th</sup> class. Within a span of one year, she proved her mettle and was counted as one of the best students in the school. "It has been a dream run from the day I joined Banwasi" she says. In the year 2007, she got a chance to write the entrance exam of the prestigious Bandhkhara High School and got admission in class nine.

Today young Shahina is proud of her achievements. She is the cynosure of all eyes in her village and neighboring localities. This young girl is now determined that she will complete her high school education and will become a teacher. "I want to reach out to hundreds of children who are not fortunate enough to attend schools. Banwasi Vikas Ashram has been a god send in my case. It will always remain my second home, but how many children are fortunate like me?"

**T**he REACH India-Banwasi Vikas Ashram Project has reached out to more than 300 girls like Shahina in Giridih district of Jharkhand, providing these young girls with a fresh lease of life, a life laden with dignity, respect and opportunity. Almost 85% of these children who have been mainstreamed into government and regular schools would never have learnt to read or write or even see the inside of a school if the project had not empowered them. Most of these girls in the age group of ( 10-14 ) would have been married and would have been leading a life of imposed domesticity.....a common occurrence in these areas.

Banwasi Vikas Ashram is a grass root voluntary organization working in Giridih district of Jharkhand to improve the livelihood of vulnerable sections of the society through education, community organization and capacity building. Over the years, Banwasi Vikas Ashram has been involved in various educational initiatives including training, micro planning, capacity building of village education committees, running of non formal schools and Education Guarantee Scheme (EGS) centers under Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan. Giridih, where the organizations activities are concentrated is one of the most educationally backward district of the predominantly tribal state of Jharkhand.

Bagodar block where the Reach India- Banvasi Vikas Ashram residential camp school is situated has one of the lowest literacy rates in the state with female literacy rates at a shocking low of 29% (Source: Janshala 2001) Awareness regarding education is abysmally low in these areas and a large majority of the girls in these areas are denied access to primary education. Most of these girls are involved in domestic chores such as grazing cattle and looking after their siblings. With the introduction of the SSA programme, there has been a considerable increase in the number of school going children mainly due to the setting up of new schools and increased accessibility. But many of the earlier left out



children have not been able to adapt due the age mismatch and lack of grasping power. Moreover, the scope of enrolling these left out children in the age group of 10-14 years in secondary or high school classes is jeopardised due to their lack of adequate knowledge base.

The Reach India Banwasi Vikas Ashram is specifically targeting this group of children from very poor and minority communities by running an intensive residential bridge course where these young girls are taught the courses of all the classes ( class 1 to 5) within a span of one year by following holistic, intensive and innovative learning methods. About 100 girls are admitted to this residential course every year. At the end of the course, these young girls are mainstreamed into government and regular schools.

### Transforming lives

In fact, the transformation these young girls have undergone after completing their one year bridge course has to be seen to be believed. Most of these girls when they enroll for the residential courses cannot answer a query properly. A majority of them are shabbily dressed and have no awareness about personal hygiene and cleanliness (This writer during the course of his second visit was amazed to see the transformation.... the freshly washed and ironed school uniforms, neatly plaited hair and the confidence in their strides said it all!) One of the teachers of the centre, Radha Kumari recalls that most of the children when they join the camp have to be taught the basics like cleaning their teeth and cutting their nails. "We train them on every aspect

from taking a proper bath to making their beds. A sense of discipline and a sense of pride is the first lesson that is imbibed in these young minds".

The whole process of selection of girl children for the residential bridge course is done in a unique way. A micro planning exercise is conducted in the targeted area to generate educational

data. This is followed by an intensive two day Information Education Communication (IEC) campaign through wall writing, street plays and processions to sensitise the community to the importance of 'girls education.' In the meantime, the volunteers of Banwasi Vikas Ashram hold meetings with the members of the gram panchayath to



identify out-of-school children in the age group of 10-14 years. These children are then classified as per their economic and caste criteria. Out of the 100 seats available in the residential programme, 25% seats are reserved for tribals, 25% for scheduled castes, 25% for economically weak and 25% for children belonging to the minority community.

As soon as the child is admitted to the camp, a simple entrance test is carried out to assess the standard and capability of each child. These children are then classified into four different groups known as Kishlay A, B, C and D as per their knowledge and understanding. (Children who fall under Kishlay A lack even basic knowledge while children who are classified under Kishlay D can read words). The teaching patterns then start as per their level of classification. Apart from learning, a lot of emphasis is placed on cultural and group activities. As soon as the classes begin the children are also taught rhymes followed by prayer songs and inspirational songs.

### Intensive and structured approach

The whole programme is structured in such a holistic manner that a separate file is opened in the name of each child and their progress monitored on a day to day basis. The monitoring is done by their respective teachers through observation and also by assessing their verbal and writing capabilities. A normal day at the residential bridge course consists of prayers and yoga in the morning, regular classes during the day, games in the evening followed by English classes before they go to bed by 9 pm to start another

grueling day at 6 am in the morning. On the last day of the week, Sunday, the children are trained in vocational activities like knitting and painting. Moreover, children who are weak and are unable to cope are given special attention during this day. The parents of the children are allowed to visit them on this day.

The whole one year cycle covers five classes from class 1 to class 5 before the children are mainstreamed into class 6 of a regular school once they finish the residential course. At the end of every two months, a class test is taken to assess the progress. Children who do not perform well are taught the same lessons again and are put under the care of their 'brighter friends'. The teaching methods extensively involve rubrics and training learning materials, appropriate classroom activities and role plays that help these children learn at their own pace and complete the course within limited timeframe. Apart from curriculum based education, equal importance is also given to the overall growth of the child. To make the children aware of their responsibilities and infuse a sense of identity, a children's parliament 'Bal Sansad' has been constituted with a prime minister and ministers who are elected from amongst the children. These members are given responsibilities for health, cleanliness, culture and sports. Special committees have also been formed under the 'Bal Sansad' and given specific tasks for overseeing cleaning of premises, washing utensils and observing that a strict timeline is followed in their daily activities.

Apart from 'Children's Parliament', a cultural committee to oversee cultural programmes known as the 'Bal Sabha' has also been constituted. The group brings out newsletters and organizes cultural programmes on special days. These activities have helped these girls to break out of their shells and cocoon and gain the much needed confidence to take life head on. Further, to enhance awareness, periodic excursions are arranged to historical sites, state capital and government institutions with a view of

broadening the outlook of these girls who have rarely moved out of their locality.

One of the major reasons for the success of the residential bridge camp has been the commitment of the teachers. The teachers are in fact the central point or the 'backbone' of the residential camp. They are totally involved in every activity and stay with the children in the camp not only teaching them their lessons but also taking care of their personal and emotional needs. The teachers are graduates and selected with much care. A thirty day induction process is in place when they join, where they are introduced not only to various educational methods but also exposed to child psychology and behavioral patterns.

### **Involvement of Parents and the Community**

Total involvement of parents has been one of the key processes under the project. The parents of these girls are informed of their wards progress periodically and are called for parent teacher meetings every quarter. Apart from discussing the individual files of these children, the parents are also sensitized on gender issues, the need for educating the girl child and the various malpractices that exist in society like discrimination against the girl child and child marriage. Moreover, cultural activities are arranged during parent meetings and other special days like Republic Day and Teacher's day to drive home the capabilities and equal status of the girl child and also to inculcate a sense of pride in the parents and the community. The members of the local panchayats and other prominent persons of the community are also invited to these events.

Mr. Suresh Kumar Shakti, director of Banwasi Vikas Ashram points out that an attitudinal change is visible in the society with the advent of the residential bridge camp.

“Initially, it was tough to get families to send their wards to attend the residential bridge course, but for the current batch (2007-2008) we had more than 500 applications with recommendations letters from



district officers to local members of the legislative assembly.” A remarkable achievement indeed. (This current batch which began in December, 2007 is outside Reach India Project and is supported by SSA).

### **Acceptance and Sustainability**

Apart from the widespread acceptability of the project among the local communities, especially the minority community, the district and state government authorities have also recognised the effectiveness of the project. The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan has take over the onus of running the project for one year as Reach India's support to the residential programme ended in November 2007. The learning's from the project are being documented and used in Quality Education Package for capacity building of SSA bridge course educators in Jharkhand, and micro planning for district SSA educational plans. The REACH India educational inputs to Banwasi have been successfully transformed in SSA bridge course curriculum in Jharkhand where Banwasi along with Jharkhand Education Project Council (JEPC) and another non-profit institution, Children in Need Institute (CINI) has developed a Quality Education Package. Today there has been a noticeable change in the communities approach towards education, especially girl's education and consistent growth in literacy status is being observed in these areas. ■

# Deepalaya: Building Capacities to Reach out to Excluded Children

*One of the major objectives of the REACH India project was to reach out to at-risk and vulnerable children who were basically first generation learners and would never have gone to school under 'normal circumstances'. These children would never have got the opportunity because neither they nor the community they lived in were sensitized to education. Pursuing education made no sense and was meaningless.....*

*The difficulty was to reach out to these unfortunate children, sensitise the community often living in deep isolated pockets of cities and rural India and communicate the value and transformation education could bring in their lives. It was difficult for 'outside agencies' to enter the localities, gain acceptance and the confidence of these communities and sensitise them. One had to tap local talent... People who knew them, people whom these communities would trust and listen and accept.*

**T**his is exactly what the Deepalaya-REACH India project (DRIP) has achieved. They have been able to build the capacities of six non governmental organizations working in these remote areas by streamlining their organization development, enhancing their technical know-how, strengthening their management skills, bringing in transparency and accountability to their financial transactions and enhancing their confidence to take up challenging tasks and play a formidable role as change agents in transforming the society. These organizations during the project period have been successful in mainstreaming 4932 children who would otherwise have never gone to school in West Delhi.

*Ten year old Komal Singh would never have gone to school but for the DRIP project. The seventh child of Sahib Singh and Lakshmi Devi, she is the first person from her family to attend school and to learn to read and write. Staying in the remote 'Tikri Khurd' in the sprawling slums of Swarna Jayathi Vihar in West Delhi, little Komal had seen the darker side of life at a very tender age. Her parents who migrated from western Uttar Pradesh worked as temporary laborers and were struggling to feed their seven siblings when her father suddenly died and the family was pushed into penury. Her mother along with her other siblings worked day and night to sustain the family while Komal added her bit by taking care of the household chores.*

*It was during this time that Nirmana, a small NGO whose capacities were being enhanced by Deepalaya under the DRIP programme opened a learning centre near her shanty. The volunteers of the NGO after much persuasion got her mother Laxmi Devi to let Komal attend classes in the evening. Komal's sharp mind and learning abilities surprised everyone and after six months she was mainstreamed into the local Municipal Corporation School of Delhi. In the annual examinations, young Komal secured third position in her class making her mother and siblings proud. Currently pursuing her studies in class four, Komal wants to become a teacher when she grows up*

As Mr. T.K. Mathew, chief executive of Deepalaya points out "It is not just these children like Komal who have benefited, the capacities of these six local NGOs have been built to such an extent that they can now reach out to tens of thousands of children in the coming years on their own with out any external hand holding thus reaching out to the underprivileged and at risk children in society".

## Taking up the Challenge

For Deepalaya, the largest operational NGO in Delhi which has directly reached out to more than 50,000 children, capacity building was a different act. The status of being recognized as a 'Resource' NGO was a challenging and learning experience. The

organization with its vast and varied experience decided to deliberately opt for the role of a capacity building grantee when funds from REACH India came its way. Recalls Mr. Mathew, "It was a crucial decision. It called for gearing up on the part of those in the organization with varying years of practical experience and know-how to put their heads together and take it as a team work"

Under the capacity building process, Deepalaya was expected to facilitate identifying, enrolling, coaching and mainstreaming, a minimum of 3000 non school going children of 4 to 14 years of age. As soon as the contract was signed with REACH India, Deepalaya adopted a systematic and transparent process to shortlist 11 NGOs out of which six were selected for implementing the programme. Out of these four NGOs, Alamb, Dr A.V. Baliga Memorial Trust, Nirmana and URIDA were selected for the entire duration of the programme while NGOs ASRA and Karmath Charitable Trust were selected for a phase of six months, reassessed and then taken on for the entire programme

### Series of capacity building workshops

One of the major tasks at hand was to build the overall capacity and capabilities of these NGOs in running the project in an efficient and 'professional' manner. A series of training and capacity building programmes were undertaken to achieve this objective. These workshops which began from October 2005, with 'Basics of Pedagogy' were a continuous process continuing till July 2007. In all, 42 capacity building workshops with an array of interesting and strategic topics were conducted for the benefit of 1292 personnel's from these selected NGOs. Some of the topics that were covered in

these training sessions included minimum level of learning and class management, quality education, logical framework approach, principals of learning and lesson design, curriculum development, resource mobilization and financial management among others.

As the capacity building process was continuing at one end, Deepalaya conducted a series of exposure visits for the DRIP partners to learn and imbibe from first hand experiences. Groups consisting of programme coordinators and teachers of these selected NGO were taken to the Model Nursery School of National Council for Educational Research & Training (NCERT) at the IIT campus and to the Patashala of Katha at Tuglakabadh in Delhi in August 2005. This was followed by an exposure visit to Bodh Shiksha Sansthan, Jaipur in October, 2005.

In the meantime, the DRIP partners went ahead with the task of identifying non school going children in the areas earmarked for the intervention. Proper mapping and Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) exercise were carried out and a total of 11,931 children (5923 girls and 6008 boys) were identified from 26 locations in West Delhi out of which 8415 (4309 girls and 4106 boys) were enrolled in newly started bridge course learning centers by these DRIP partners.

### Model 'Learning Centers'

In fact, one of the key aspects of the learning centers was the rapport the teachers and the volunteers were able to establish with the local community. This resulted in large numbers of excluded children being enrolled into the learning centers. Alamb, one of the DRIP partner's which was working in transit camps enrolled large number of girls from the minority community after convincing the local clerics (maulavis) to change the time in the local madarasas (religious schools) so that these children could attend the classes. A.V. Baliga Memorial trust enrolled 52 children who were begging in the streets into their centers while Action for Self Reliance and Alternatives enrolled 38 differently abled children in their various learning centers.

Many of these partner NGOs also tied up with external agencies to provide additional benefits to these children. Karmath, tied up with hotel 'Taj Residency' to provided snacks to the



children in the learning centers twice a week while Nirmana provided free health check-up facilities to the children and their families in their bridge course centers. Moreover, all these partner NGOs were able to raise fairly good amount of funds from the local communities which in itself speaks for the confidence and good will they had among these disadvantaged groups.

Deepalaya had a well oiled monitoring system in place to streamline the functioning of these bridge course learning centers. Evolved in consultation with the partner NGOs, all the centers maintained students attendance registers, periodic home visits register, register and record of holding community meetings and parent teacher meetings, display of teaching learning materials, visitors remarks book at the centers, regular monitoring and evaluation and frequent assessment of the children for mainstreaming into regular schools.

Deepalaya saw to it that its coordinators visited the NGOs and its centers at least twice a week. A computer generated 'grid' was developed at the coordinating office which indicates the number and address of the learning centers visited along with time, date and the number of students present during every visit. The coordinators during their visits to the centers scrutinized the various registers and interacted with the students and teachers and discussed constraints if any. The coordinators also interacted with the local community and visited the homes of students who had been consecutively absent for several days.

### **Uniform syllabus for accelerated learning**

One of the unique features of Deepalaya's intervention has been the introduction of a uniform syllabus to accelerate the learning process at the bridge centers. Following up on the 'learning classroom series' trainings conducted by REACH India in which Deepalaya and its partners had participated, a series of seven brainstorming meetings were undertaken by these partners and Deepalaya to evolve a new separate syllabus based on NCERT guidelines for subjects, Hindi, English and Maths and Environmental Science (EVS) up to level 2.



This syllabus was then reviewed and improved upon by experts of the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT). The final version was then published in book form and was used successfully and to great advantage by the DRIP partners at their respective learning centers. The aim was to facilitate speeding up of the learning process for children through simplistic and joyful learning methods.

Regular assessments of the children were carried out at all the bridge course centers and deserving students were mainstreamed into regular government schools run by the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD). To facilitate the process, meetings were organized with principals of MCD schools in the target area. Various issues and topics were discussed and modalities were worked out for smooth mainstreaming of children.

### **Sharing of experiences**

The importance of frequent sharing of experiences was highlighted by Deepalaya among the DRIP partners. Regular review and learning meetings were organised under 'DRIP implementation experiences'. At these meetings the partners shared their learning's and observations and learnt from each other. There were instances where the partners helped each other in overcoming obstacles and constraints by offering their services as per their strengths.

*ASRA, one of the DRIP partners running bridge courses for girls from the minority community was faced with the problem of non attendance due to the clash of timings between the bridge course and the local madrasa*



*(religious school). Alamb another partner who had experience of working with minorities offered to help. The head of the organization, Mr. Rustam Ali visited ASRA's area of intervention and met with the local clerics and managed to shift the timing of the madrasa to facilitate smooth functioning of the bridge learning centre. A great example of mutual cooperation!*

### **Transparency & Accountability**

Deepalaya's interventions were not confined just to capacity building and mainstreaming of non school going children. A lot of emphasis was placed on these organizations emerging as 'professional organizations' with values of transparency and accountability in place. Deepalaya facilitated introduction of sound systems and practices such as constituting a purchasing committee, securing quotations from more than one source, getting an expenditure proposal prepared and passed before incurring expenditure, ensuring that financial transactions exceeding Rs. 500 are carried out through account payee cheques. Deepalaya also stressed the need for and helped the DRIP partners to put together proper HR policies. To gauge the impact and effectiveness of the project, an independent evaluation was carried

out Ms Nishat Farook, an expert in literacy and continuing education who retired from Jamia Millia Islamia in Delhi. The survey which included focus group discussions with teachers and parents in various locations has rated the programme very highly, especially in terms of introducing transparency in dealings

“The most useful and effective aspect of various trainings was that all the six partner NGOs accepted the fact that these measures have led to improved transparency and accountability in their organizations”

The Evaluation report also points out the attitudinal and behavioral changes that have taken place among the children. These include getting up early, bathing regularly, behaving respectfully to elders and teachers and an eagerness to pursue their education.

### **Applause and recognition**

The DRIP programme has been an unqualified success. This can be gauged from the fact that 4932 children have been mainstreamed into regular schools from the original target of 3,000 children, a whopping sixty percent more than the set target. Apart from numbers, the project has succeeded in building capacities of DRIP partners and has brought in transparency and professionalism into their day to day activities. The role of a capacity building NGO or 'Resource' has been a learning experience for the organization as well and has been recognized by other stakeholders. The success of the Deepalaya-REACH India project can be gauged by the fact that the AXIS Bank Foundation has come forward to support a similar programme for capacity building with a new set of ten NGOs while other organizations such as Education Trust of USA has assured support for providing remedial education to children mainstreamed under the DRIP programme. ■



## SARD: Creating Exclusive Models of Learning for Replication in Government Schools

*The MCD School in Mahavir Enclave, situated in Najafgarh, one of the sprawling resettlement colonies in West Delhi is like any other government school .... but as one enters the model class room christened ' Ananddayi Kaksha' which has been developed by Society For All Round Development in this school, the difference is glaring and obvious. The walls of the classroom are awash with colorful charts, paintings, poems and cards which have been developed by the children and proudly displayed catching ones attention. Various training learning materials with charts and models which is an integral part of the curriculum of this model classroom is also displayed adding to the energy and vibrancy of the class.*

*In fact the whole approach to teaching in this model remedial class is startlingly different and innovative. The children attending these remedial classes are classified into various grades and grouped together based on their levels of learning and the degree of teacher facilitation required. These children then as per their levels are put through different learning phases starting from free play classes to group activities followed by concept based learning activities and proper curriculum based learning. The activities undertaken in this model classroom consists of group songs, picture based story telling activities, word based games, letter formation activities, creating alphabet trains, matching of numbers and learning mathematics with marbles.*

*On of the most strategic aspect of the classroom is that it caters to only 40 students at a time which gives the class teacher ample scope to address the needs of each child. The teachers see to it that the classroom is child friendly and interactive and each child is addressed by his/ her name. Under the learning pattern adopted, the teacher is required to step out of the 'box' and re-look and asses the strategies and make necessary modifications whereby each child enjoys learning and achieves the required cognitive and non- cognitive milestones appropriate to their age. The emphasis at Ananddayi Kaksha remains on creating a friendly and free atmosphere for the children to learn in the ways that they enjoy the most.*

*The strategy adopted for teaching is quite innovative and interesting and addresses the holistic development of the child. Each and every child is assessed as per his/ her learning competencies and grouped into small manageable units. These groups are then sequenced into comprehensive learning ladders. The learning ladders include activities like craftwork; puppet shows, pictorial symbols and flash cards which enable the child to independently trace his/her progress in studies.*

*The emphasis is to develop the basic skills and competencies of the child rather than the completion of the syllabus. Basic working knowledge of languages, (both English and Hindi) social studies and mathematics is provided. But life skills education remains an integral part of the curriculum enabling children to develop and realize their full potential as an individual with the ability to think, question and judge independently.*



**A**nanddayi Kaksha' is one of the initiatives that is being undertaken by Society For All Round Development (SARD) under the SARD- Reach India project called Programme to Enrich Primary Education (PEPE) The project reached out to approximately 10,200 vulnerable children aged 3-14 years living in 30 resettlement colonies that fall within Najafgarh zone of west Delhi.

Mrs. Phulmati Dabas, headmistress of the MCD School, Mahavir Enclave acknowledges the impact of the Ananddayi Kaksha. She was especially appreciative of the approach of the teachers in creating the “right atmosphere” by the beautification of the class and the use of Training Learning Materials.

*In the Mahavir Enclave MCD school, about 40 children who were academically weak from class 3 and 4 were selected for the remedial class under Ananddayi Kaksha. Ten year old Aarthi was one of them. Aarthi was very weak and found it very difficult to grasp what was being taught in the class. She had no interest in studies and used to sit in one corner and not utter a single word. Six months of remedial classes at Ananddayi Kaksha transformed her. She opened up considerably and started partaking in group activities. Within a span of six months, this young girl could read and write with confidence. Today she is counted as one of the better students in her class.*

The Prime objective of the 'Programme to Enrich Primary Education' was to improve access to quality basic education for vulnerable children, especially girls, children from lower castes and children with special needs in the resettlement colonies of south

west Delhi. The strategies adopted to achieve these goals have been diverse and multifaceted. The various methods that were adopted included running of bridge courses, remedial centers, EGS centers, balwadis and development of one MCD school in each cluster as a model school.

SARD ran fifteen bridge schools for dropouts and children who have never been to school and five balwadis for preparing pre-school children for entrance exams to government schools. The stress has been on 'capacity building' of teachers and various community stakeholders and creation of gender sensitive education modules. The project aimed to establish a child friendly learning environment and pedagogy characterized by the principles of equity, equality and quality in all government primary schools and education centers in the targeted area.

### Stress on stakeholder participation

One of the key aspects of the PEPE was the involvement of all stakeholders in the project. The PEPE team was clear that there should be no clash and duplication of work with the SSA initiatives. Meetings were held with SSA officials and the Directorate of Education during the finalisation of the project. Meetings were also held with the Assistant Education Officer of Najafgarh, regarding the formation of an Education Steering Committee and the other formalities that needed to be done for enrollment of children from the nearby slums. This was followed by sensitization and involvement of the community in all its activities. SARD believed that the support of the community was imperative in running learning centers. Parent Teacher Committees (PTC's) were formed at all the centers and regular meetings were held.

The PTC discussions came out with positive feedback from parents on the running of the learning centers, bridge courses and balwadis. At many places, the PTC took an active role by contributing money for rented accommodation. A key achievement of the PTC and its meetings was that the people in the community recognized the existence of SARD and realized the role education can play in improving the life of their child.

Regular meetings were also held with various stakeholders including MCD officials and pantheist representatives to apprise and share information of the progress of educational interventions under the PEPE project and coordinate and plan activities.

Efforts were also made to sensitise the government authorities and advocate for school reforms. A team comprising of 'key opinion leaders' which included like minded and supportive people from the community was constituted. The idea behind this exercise was to develop ownership of the community to SARDs interventions and garner feedbacks from the community regarding various programmes.

## Pravesh Utsav

Enrollment drives were organized in every learning centers by SARD volunteers and MCD teachers. These drives known as 'Pravesh Utsav' was aimed at creating awareness in the community about the importance of education as well as sensitising them about the admission procedures in MCD schools as well as the learning centers. The SARD staff made elaborate preparations for these Pravesh Utsavs by mobilising children from the learning centers and communities to organize colorful rallies with banners, posters and play cards. All the stakeholders including SARD and MCD teachers participated in these rallies. The awareness rallies were followed with delegation of roles and responsibilities to various community stakeholders and PTC members. Baseline surveys and micro planning exercises were conducted with the various stakeholders to improve enrollment strategies in the target areas.

## Training of teachers

Training and sensitisation of teachers to child friendly methods and innovative education strategies was another key area that was stressed as a part of the project. Capacity building trainings were conducted for the benefit of the teachers keeping in mind the need to develop clarity on pedagogical aspects and interventions. The

training methodology was designed keeping in mind the basic needs of the teachers. To make the training sessions more interactive, group sessions and other fun filled activities were introduced.

One of the innovative and interesting initiatives under teacher training was the maintenance of a daily diary by the teachers. The teachers were asked to write their daily experiences to reinforce their learnings and voice their feelings. The basic idea behind this exercise was the belief that teachers can bring quality to learning centers by reviewing the daily teaching-learning process. At least half an hour is devoted by every teacher to note down his/her experiences every day. The issues raised in the diaries are discussed during monthly teacher trainings and experiences shared for possible solutions.

This exercise is basically a self assessment tool where the teacher can review his/her performance over a period of time and take corrective measures.

The other major intervention under the project was to develop a 'curriculum for children' based on their levels of understanding and the creation of a module for its implementation. The development process of curriculum and teachers module consisted of collective work of teachers and cluster coordinators on mathematics, language development and environmental science. During the project period extensive training sessions were organised for MCD





and SARD teachers covering various aspects including the use of training learning materials, curriculum, classroom teaching, pedagogy, participatory methodology and child centered education among others. To utilise local knowledge and expertise, puppetry workshops were organized

to make teaching more creative and participatory facilitating the 'Play Way' method and incorporating effective skills for communication.

Exposure visits were also organised for MCD teachers to AKESI Diamond Jubilee School and DRF Hyderabad to sensitise them about the best practices in school management, use of TLMs, innovative learning practices, child friendly learning environment and pedagogy.

### Models for replication

SARD's interventions and model have been highly appreciated by various stakeholders. The PEPE project apart from reaching out to children and families in 30 resettlement colonies has won a lot of acclaim for its innovative approach. The 'Ananddai Kaksha' experiment has been widely welcomed and many organization including the government have evinced keen interest in expanding this programme to other schools. ■

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