

Samuhik सामूहिक पहल Pahal

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Working with the government:
Issues and perspectives – II

CONTENTS

Reflections & Opinions

- 03 बाल साहित्य की मदद से समझकर पढ़ने की शुरुआत
शीशपाल, सतीश, शीतल, वेदपाल एवं चिराग
- 07 **Aligning with the state education system**
The journey of Organisation for Early Literacy Promotion
Keerti Jayaram
- 15 **Collaborative horizons**
Makkala Jagriti's journey in government partnerships
Rohit Shetti
- 20 **Moving the needle, toward scale**
Pranjali Pathak and Annie Louis
- 22 **Working with the government as a nobody**
Ashish Kumar Shrivastava
- 29 **Three guiding principles for impactful government partnerships**
Madhukar Banuri and Aashima Jain
- 34 **Reflections on our journey of engaging with the government system in Gopalganj, Bihar**
Surya Prakash Rai
- 39 बिहार के सरकारी स्कूलों में किए गए प्रयोग एवं उनमें सरकार की सहभागिता
श्रीमती दिव्या सिंह एवं श्री अजीत कुमार

Interviews

- 42 **Learnings and challenges from working with governments**
Notes from the journey of Digantar
A conversation with Rohit Dhankar

बाल साहित्य की मदद से समझकर पढ़ने की शुरुआत

शीशपाल, सतीश, शीतल, वेदपाल एवं चिराग

एसवीएसएस संस्था द्वारा वर्ष 1997 से समालखा खण्ड में ड्राप-आउट और लेफ्ट-आउट बच्चों की शिक्षा के लिए वैकल्पिक पद्धति पर आधारित जीवनशाला कार्यक्रम चलाया गया। इस जीवनशाला कार्यक्रम के अनुभवों के आधार पर वर्ष 2016 में 8 राजकीय प्राथमिक स्कूलों के शिक्षकों और बच्चों के साथ भाषा शिक्षण का कार्य किया गया। इसके फलस्वरूप न केवल बच्चों की लिखने और पढ़ने की क्षमता बेहतर हुई बल्कि शिक्षकों की शिक्षण प्रक्रियाओं में भी बदलाव देखने को मिले। इस अनुभव से हमने सीखा कि पढ़ने-लिखने की प्रक्रिया को प्रभावी और जीवन्त बनाने के लिए बच्चों को बाल साहित्य पढ़ने के अधिक से अधिक अवसर दिए जाने चाहिए। इस समझ को आधार बनाकर वर्ष 2020 से समालखा के 36 स्कूलों में 'समझकर पढ़ने में बाल साहित्य की भूमिका' नामक परियोजना के माध्यम से काम शुरू किया गया और बाल साहित्य में शिक्षकों की रुचि पैदा करने के प्रयास किए गए। साथ ही इसके लिए भी काम किया गया कि वे शिक्षण में बाल साहित्य की जरूरत और महत्व को समझ सकें।

शिक्षा के क्षेत्र में बहुत सी संस्थाएँ नवाचार करती रही हैं। संस्थाएँ अपने विजन और मिशन के अनुरूप अपने वर्किंग मॉडल के अनुसार आसानी से काम कर लेती हैं लेकिन जब शिक्षा में व्यापक स्तर पर बदलाव के लिए इस वर्किंग मॉडल को सरकारी तंत्र में लागू करने की बारी आती है तो प्रक्रियाएँ और चुनौतियाँ अलग तरह की होती हैं। अधिकतर संस्थाएँ सरकार के साथ अनुबंध करके अपने वर्किंग मॉडल को सरकारी तंत्र में लागू करने की कोशिश करती हैं जबकि कुछ संस्थाएँ बिना अनुबंध के ऐसा करने की कोशिश करती हैं। दोनों ही परिस्थितियों में कुछ चुनौतियाँ तो एक जैसी होती हैं और कुछ अलग तरह की होती हैं। हम इस लेख के माध्यम से बिना अनुबंध के काम की प्रक्रिया और चुनौतियों की चर्चा करने का प्रयास करेंगे।

जब हम किसी भी स्कूल में अपने वर्किंग मॉडल के अनुरूप काम करने के मकसद से जाते हैं तो स्कूल में काम कर रहे लोग यानी

शिक्षक और शिक्षिकाएँ इसे निजता में अनावश्यक हस्तक्षेप मानते हैं। उन्हें लगता है कि बाहरी लोग उनके काम करने के तौर-तरीकों को देखकर उनके प्रति नकारात्मक छवि बनाएँगे। दूसरा उनको यह भी लगता है कि वे अपना शिक्षण कार्य ठीक तरीके से करते हैं। समालखा खण्ड के राजकीय स्कूल के अध्यापकों के साथ भाषा शिक्षण पर 3 वर्ष काम करने के बाद हमने फीडबैक फार्म भरवाया जिसमें शिक्षकों ने कुछ ऐसी ही बातें हमसे लिखित रूप में साझा कीं।

इस फार्म के माध्यम से हम जानना चाहते थे कि हमारी संस्था के प्रयासों से भाषा शिक्षण में क्या बदलाव आए हैं। साथ ही हमने यह जानने का भी प्रयास किया कि जब हम शुरुआत में स्कूल में आते थे तो उस समय शिक्षकों को कैसा महसूस होता था और वे हमारे बारे में क्या सोचते थे तथा अब वे हमारे बारे में क्या सोचते हैं। इस फीडबैक फार्म में एक शिक्षक ने संस्था के बारे में जो लिखा वह काफी रोचक है -



SVSS

“जो पहली धारणा बनी वो यह थी कि यह टीम एक एनजीओ की टीम है जो विद्यालय में मात्र खानापूर्ति के लिए अपनी उपस्थिति दर्ज करवाकर अपने जीवन निर्वाह के लिए सरकार से अनुदान राशि प्राप्त करने की अभिलाषा करती है व उसी पर निर्भर है। दूसरी बात जो मन में आई वह यह थी कि सम्भवतः एनजीओ की यह टीम विद्यालय में दाखिल बच्चों के मानसिक विकास व अधिगम स्तर का आकलन करेगी। इसके बाद अपने द्वारा जाँचे गए छात्रों की प्रगति का नकारात्मक दृष्टिकोण से आकलन कर यह शिक्षा विभाग के सामने विद्यालय व शिक्षकों की छवि को धूमिल करेगी। तीसरी धारणा यह थी कि यह टीम विद्यालय के पठन-पाठन के समय का दुरुपयोग मात्र करेगी। इसका परिणाम विद्यार्थियों के परीक्षा परिणाम के स्तर में कमी के रूप में दिखेगा।”

सरकारी तंत्र के साथ काम करते हुए हमारी संस्था को जिन चुनौतियों का सामना करना पड़ा उनको इस तरह से वर्गीकृत किया जा सकता है-

- शिक्षकों में गैर सरकारी संस्थाओं की नकारात्मक छवि को तोड़ना और उनमें एक सहयोगकर्ता के रूप में उनकी स्वीकार्यता एवं उनके प्रति विश्वास स्थापित करना।
- कुछ शिक्षकों के इस विश्वास को तोड़ना कि संस्था के लोगों को बच्चों को पढ़ाने का कोई अनुभव नहीं है। वे उनके काम में अनावश्यक हस्तक्षेप मात्र करेंगे।
- हमारी शैक्षिक योग्यता रहित स्वयंसेवी टीम की क्षमताओं के विकास की चुनौती। विशेष रूप से अनुभवी शिक्षकों के साथ भाषा शिक्षण की प्रक्रियाओं के बारे में संवाद कौशल विकसित करने की चुनौती।
- शिक्षा विभाग के साथ किसी भी तरह के अनुबन्ध के बिना अधिकारियों के साथ अनुभवों के आदान-प्रदान एवं काम के विस्तार की योजना बनाने में चुनौती।

उपरोक्त चुनौतियों के बावजूद हम कुछ शिक्षकों की धारणा बदलते हुए उनकी क्षमता संवर्धन के लिए कुछ काम कर पाए। इसका एक कारण यह था कि संस्था के गठन के समय से ही 4 से 5 राजकीय विद्यालयों के साथ हमारा परिचय था और शिक्षकों के साथ हमारा संवाद होता रहता था। हम समय-समय पर विभिन्न गतिविधियाँ जैसे— बाल-मेले, नाटक की प्रस्तुति, शिक्षकों के साथ शैक्षिक विचार-विमर्श एवं सेमिनार आदि करते रहे हैं। 2-3 विद्यालयों की स्कूल प्रबन्धन समिति में संस्था के साथी सक्रिय सदस्य हैं जो विद्यालय के कार्यों, शिक्षकों के समक्ष आ रही चुनौतियों के समाधान के लिए प्रयास करते हैं।

वर्ष 2020 में हमने विप्रो के सहयोग से समझकर पढ़ने में बाल साहित्य की भूमिका नामक परियोजना शुरू की। इसका एक महत्वपूर्ण लक्ष्य यह था कि शिक्षक समझकर पढ़ने में बाल साहित्य की भूमिका को समझ पाएँ ताकि वे बच्चों को सिखाने में बाल साहित्य का इस्तेमाल कर पाएँ। हमारा अनुभव बताता है कि बच्चों के साथ बाल साहित्य के माध्यम से शिक्षण करवाते रहने से लक्षित बच्चों का भाषा शिक्षण तो बेहतर हो जाएगा

लेकिन शिक्षक यदि इसको अपनी शिक्षण प्रक्रिया का हिस्सा नहीं बनाएँगे तो यह बदलाव स्थाई नहीं होगा। इसीलिए हमने कक्षा में शिक्षक की उपस्थिति में हाव-भाव के साथ बालगीत गायन, रीड अलाउड, मौखिक कहानी सुनना-सुनाना आदि गतिविधियाँ कीं। इन गतिविधियों के परिणामस्वरूप बच्चों का लर्निंग गैप कम होता हुआ दिखाई दिया और वे समझकर सीखने की ओर अग्रसर हुए। इसे देखकर शिक्षक भी प्रेरित हुए। इसके साथ-साथ हमने शिक्षकों के साथ शिक्षण में पुस्तकालय एवं बाल साहित्य की जरूरत पर संवाद शुरू किया और इसमें शिक्षकों को शामिल करते हुए स्कूली पुस्तकालय में बच्चों के स्तरानुसार पुस्तकों को छाँटकर पुस्तकालय को सुचारु रूप से चलाने के सम्बन्ध में शिक्षकों की समझ एवं कौशल को विकसित किया। संस्था की ओर से बाल साहित्य की 100 पुस्तकों का सेट भी विद्यालयों को दिया गया। जहाँ जरूरत थी वहाँ पुस्तकें रखने के लिए एक हैंगिंग बैग भी उपलब्ध करवाया गया। शिक्षकों के साथ विमर्श के पश्चात शिक्षकों ने कक्षाओं के टाइम टेबल में सप्ताह में एक या दो दिन लाइब्रेरी का कालांश लगाना भी शुरू किया।



जब शिक्षकों के साथ हमारा संवाद कुछ आगे बढ़ा तो हमें महसूस हुआ कि शिक्षक पाठ्यपुस्तक के दबाव से मुक्त नहीं हो पा रहे थे। वे बाल साहित्य और पाठ्यपुस्तक में दिए गए पाठों को अलग करके देख रहे थे। अभी भी वे पाठों के अन्त में अभ्यास के लिए दिए गए प्रश्नों को याद करने पर ही जोर देते थे। इस समस्या को ध्यान में रखते हुए हमने उन्हें शिक्षा और शिक्षण सम्बन्धी लेख और किताबें पढ़ने के लिए प्रेरित किया, जैसे—दिवास्वप्न, तोत्तोचान, पहला अध्यापक, बच्चे असफल कैसे होते हैं आदि। इनको पढ़ने के बाद शिक्षकों के साथ हमने इन पर चर्चाएँ भी की गईं।

इसका यह प्रभाव हुआ कि शिक्षकों की समझ एवं शिक्षण के तरीकों में बदलाव नजर आने लगे। अब से पहले अधिकांश शिक्षकों ने अपने जीवन काल में सिर्फ उन्हीं पुस्तकों को पढ़ा था जो पाठ्यक्रम का हिस्सा थीं। उन्होंने कभी-कधार प्रशिक्षणों में एक दो किताबों के नाम जरूर सुने थे।

इन सारे प्रयासों के फलस्वरूप वर्तमान में 100 के आसपास शिक्षक हमारे साथ विमर्श में जुड़े हुए हैं। इनमें से 40 से अधिक शिक्षक ऐसे हैं जो शैक्षिक गतिविधियों में ज्यादा गहराई से रुचि लेने लगे हैं। हमने सभी शिक्षकों के साथ एक साथ काम शुरू नहीं किया था। ये 40 शिक्षक उनमें से हैं जिनके साथ हमने वर्ष 2020

सकारात्मक बदलाव

“जब मैंने शहीद वीरेंद्र स्मारक समिति की शिक्षा में काम करने वाली टीम को पहली बार अपने स्कूल में देखा तो लगा कि ये अपनी उपस्थिति दर्ज कराने मात्र आए हैं। इन्हें हम शिक्षकों की चुनौतियों से तो कोई वास्ता नहीं है और न ही इन्हें शिक्षण का कोई अनुभव है। फिर भी मुझे लगा कि इन्हें एक मौका देना चाहिए, हो सकता है कुछ अलग अनुभव हो। यह सोचकर मैंने इन्हें अपनी कक्षा में काम करने का मौका दिया और मैं स्वयं भी इनके साथ कक्षा में रही।

“टीम के सदस्य ने कक्षा की शुरुआत बाल गीतों से की। व सुर-ताल, भाव भंगिमाओं के साथ बालगीत करवा कर रहे थे। बच्चे भी उनके साथ शामिल हो गए थे। अगले दिन मैंने देखा कि स्कूल आने के समय कुछ बच्चे पहले दिन करवाए गए गीत को हाव-भाव के साथ गा रहे थे। बच्चों में सीखने की लालसा को देख मुझे अच्छा लगा साथ ही कुछ ऐसा ही प्रयास करने के लिए मैं प्रेरित भी हुई।

“टीम का चित्र के साथ कहानी वर्णन और अक्षर की पहचान व शब्दों को जोड़ने का तरीका बहुत ही असरदार रहा। इनकी वर्ण सिखाने की विधि एकदम रुचिकर है, बच्चे तुरन्त चित्र व वर्ण में सम्बन्ध बना लेते हैं। इससे बच्चों के सीखने में सुधार दिखाई देने लगे। बच्चों द्वारा पढ़ना सीखने की शुरुआत करने के बाद, उन्हें कहानी की पुस्तकें दे दी जाती थीं। बच्चे इन्हें पढ़ने लगते थे और पुस्तक में बने चित्रों के माध्यम से लिखी हुई सामग्री का अर्थ समझने का प्रयास करते थे। मुझे ऐसा लगता है यदि हम शिक्षक बच्चों के साथ बाल साहित्य का उपयोग शुरुआती कक्षाओं में ही करें तो तात्त्व साहित्य में उनकी रुचि बनी रहेगी।

“ये साथी हम शिक्षकों को भी कुछ कहानी व लेख पढ़ने को देते हैं ताकि हमारी भी पढ़ने में रुचि बने। इनकी कक्षा कक्ष प्रबंधन की शैली भी काफी प्रभावी व अलग है। इसके तहत ये बच्चों को स्व-अनुशासन सिखाते हैं। कुछ ही समय में बच्चे स्व-अनुशासन में रहना सीख लेते हैं। टीम के सदस्यों के कामों से प्रेरणा लेते हुए मैं स्वयं भी कक्षा शिक्षण को बेहतर करने का प्रयास कर रही हूँ।”

- सुशीला, शिक्षिका, राजकीय प्राथमिक विद्यालय, गाँव- छदिया

में ही संवाद, मॉडल शिक्षण, लेख पढ़कर उन पर चर्चा आदि शुरू कर दिया था। हमें लगता है कि समय के साथ शैक्षिक गतिविधियों में बाकी शिक्षकों की रुचि भी बढ़ेगी। इस काम को अंजाम देने के लिए संस्था द्वारा अपनाई गई कुछ प्रक्रियाएँ इस प्रकार हैं -

मॉडल शिक्षण : स्कूलों में साप्ताहिक आउटरीच के दौरान मॉडल शिक्षण के माध्यम से कक्षा में शिक्षक की उपस्थिति में दो तरह से कार्य किया जाता है। सबसे पहले उन बच्चों को चिह्नित करके उनके साथ टीएलएम के माध्यम से वर्ण पहचान यानी डिकोडिंग का कार्य किया जाता है जिन्हें केवल वर्णों की पहचान है और अन्य के साथ बाल साहित्य की गतिविधियों, बाल गीतों एवं कहानियों, के माध्यम से भाषा संवर्धन का कार्य चलता है।

जब शिक्षक कक्षा में बाल साहित्य की गतिविधियों के दौरान बच्चों की सक्रियता एवं जीवन्तता को देखते हैं तो वे बालगीतों एवं कहानियों पर काम करने के कौशल भी सीखते हैं। शिक्षकों के साथ हुए विमर्श एवं मॉडल शिक्षण के आधार पर कई शिक्षकों ने अपनी कक्षाओं में बच्चों की बैठक व्यवस्था को बदल दिया। इस तरह से कुछ शिक्षक बच्चों के और करीब आए। उन्होंने अपने पद जनित रुतबे को खत्म करने का प्रयास किया। प्रातःकालीन सभा में शिक्षक और बच्चों द्वारा बालगीत, कविताओं और कहानियों की शुरुआत भी दिखाई देती है।

सामुदायिक पुस्तकालयों/लर्निंग सेंटर की स्थापना: स्कूल में बच्चों को कम समय के लिए और सीमित मात्रा में ही बाल साहित्य से रूबरू होने का मौका मिल पाता है इसलिए हमारा लक्ष्य यह भी रहा कि हम लक्षित स्कूलों से जुड़े हुए गाँवों में सामुदायिक जगहों पर पुस्तकालय या लर्निंग सेंटर स्थापित करें ताकि बच्चों को कक्षा के बँधे-बँधाए ढाँचे से अलग अपने

आसपास ही स्वतंत्र तौर पर बाल साहित्य उपलब्ध हो। लर्निंग सेंटर में बच्चों को उनकी रुचि के अनुरूप वैविध्यपूर्ण साहित्य का आनन्द लेने के अवसर मिल पाते हैं। वहाँ हमारे साथियों को भी शिक्षकों की निगरानी के बिना बच्चों के साथ स्वतंत्र ढंग से गतिविधियाँ करवाने के अवसर मिल पाते हैं।

स्कूल स्तर पर शिक्षक प्रशिक्षण: हमने अपने अनुभवों से यह समझा कि शिक्षकों का सेवाकालीन प्रशिक्षण स्कूल स्तर पर ही ज्यादा प्रभावी रहता है। कुछ शिक्षक ब्लॉक या जिला स्तर पर आयोजित किए जानेवाले प्रशिक्षणों को बच्चों की पढ़ाई में नुकसान के तौर पर देखते हैं और इसे समय की बर्बादी भी मानते हैं। उनका यह भी कहना होता है कि स्कूल की विशेष जरूरतों के अनुरूप प्रशिक्षण नहीं दिए जाते हैं। समालखा खण्ड के स्कूलों में स्कूल स्तर पर प्रशिक्षण इसलिए भी सम्भव हो पाया क्योंकि इनमें औसतन 5-6 शिक्षक हैं। स्कूल में साप्ताहिक आउटरीच के दौरान मॉडल टीचिंग के बाद की चर्चाओं को हमने प्रशिक्षण की तरह से इस्तेमाल किया।

संस्था के वर्किंग मॉडल को टिकाऊ बनाने के प्रयास: संस्था के प्रयासों से शिक्षण प्रक्रियाओं में हुए बदलावों को स्थायी बनाने की जरूरत हमेशा होती है। ऐसे इसलिए ताकि स्थानान्तरण होने पर भी शिक्षक इन्हें लगातार जारी रह सकें। इसके लिए भी विशेष प्रयास करने की जरूरत होती है। इस दिशा में भी हमारे द्वारा किए जा रहे कुछ प्रयास इस प्रकार हैं :

- हमारे साथी साप्ताहिक आउटरीच के माध्यम से शिक्षकों के साथ मिलकर आने वाले सप्ताह की पाठ योजना बनाते हैं। अगले सप्ताह की आउटरीच के दौरान हमारे साथी की उपस्थिति में शिक्षक उस योजना के अनुरूप शिक्षण करते हैं।

कक्षा के अन्त में शिक्षक के साथ शिक्षण पर चर्चा की जाती है और अगले सप्ताह की पाठ योजना बनाई जाती है।

- स्कूल स्तर पर हम स्कूल के प्रधानध्यापक की उपस्थिति में होनेवाली मासिक बैठकों में भाग लेते हैं। इन बैठकों में हम उस माह हुए कार्यों का फीडबैक लेने का प्रयास करते हैं साथ ही स्कूल की शैक्षिक जरूरतों पर भी चर्चा करने की कोशिश करते हैं।
- शिक्षकों में से 10-12 शिक्षकों को चिह्नित किया गया है जो भाषा शिक्षण के स्रोत व्यक्ति की भूमिका लेने की प्रक्रिया में हैं। इसी तरह से 110 शिक्षकों को उनकी क्षमता के अनुरूप विभिन्न स्तरों में वर्गीकृत किया गया है ताकि उनकी क्षमता संवर्धन की योजना बेहतर ढंग से लागू की जा सके।

बच्चों एवं शिक्षकों के साथ किए गए इन कार्यों से शिक्षकों के साथ विमर्श के कुछ और बिन्दु व मुद्दे उभरकर आए। अब अधिकतर शिक्षकों ने स्कूली पुस्तकालय का इस्तेमाल करना शुरू कर दिया है। कुछ शिक्षक खुद भी साहित्य पढ़ने लगे हैं और बच्चों को भी पढ़ने के अवसर देते हैं। इस प्रक्रिया में बच्चों की साहित्य में रुचि बढ़ी है और उनमें समझकर पढ़ने की प्रवृत्ति भी विकसित हुई है।

शिक्षकों की समझ एवं व्यवहार में हुए बदलाव के बारे में एक शिक्षिका ने कुछ इस तरह से लिखा:

इन सकारात्मक बदलावों के बावजूद अभी भी हमारे सामने कुछ चुनौतियाँ मौजूद हैं। शिक्षा विभाग के साथ हमारा तालमेल बहुत बेहतर नहीं हो पाया है जिससे काम की निरन्तरता एवं स्थायित्व की सम्भावना कमजोर बनी रहती है। निष्कर्ष के रूप में कहा जा सकता है कि शिक्षा में व्यापक बदलाव के लिए यह जरूरी है कि संस्थाएँ सरकारी तंत्र के साथ मिलकर काम करें लेकिन यह

चुनौती भरा भी होता है। हमने शुरुआत में जिन चुनौतियों का जिक्र किया था, उन पर हम कुछ हद तक काम कर पाए हैं। अब शिक्षकों के साथ हमारा रिश्ता पहले से ज्यादा मजबूत हुआ है। अब हम उनके लिए बाहरी व्यक्ति नहीं रहे, वे हमारे साथ शैक्षिक एवं व्यक्तिगत जीवन की समस्याएँ भी साझा कर लेते हैं। यह शायद अनौपचारिक विमर्श, शैक्षिक एवं सामाजिक काम के प्रति संस्था की प्रतिबद्धता एवं स्वैच्छिक प्रयासों से सम्भव हो पाया है। एक महत्वपूर्ण पहलू यह भी है कि इस दौरान हमने शिक्षकों से बहुत अधिक सीखा है, इसकी तुलना में हम उन्हें थोड़ा बहुत ही कुछ सिखा पाए होंगे। हमने सीखने-सिखाने की इस दोहरी प्रक्रिया को हमेशा ध्यान रखा है तभी शायद हमारे साथी शिक्षकों के साथ विश्वास का रिश्ता कायम कर पाए हैं।

लेखक मण्डल

शीशपाल संस्था की शुरुआत से ही संस्था से जुड़े हैं। बाल साहित्य के विमर्श एवं लेखन में विशेष रुचि।

सतीश संस्था द्वारा संचालित जीवनशाला कार्यक्रम का हिस्सा हैं। संवाद एवं किस्सागोई का विशेष कौशल रखते हैं।

शीतल संस्था के जीवनशाला कार्यक्रम का हिस्सा हैं। बच्चों के शिक्षण में रुचि है व बाल गीत गायन में विशेष दक्षता है।

वेदपाल संस्था के पुस्तकालय कार्यक्रम का हिस्सा हैं व वर्तमान में कोर टीम सदस्य हैं। सामाजिक बदलाव के कामों में विशेष रुचि रखते हैं।

चिराग 2 वर्ष पहले एक स्वैच्छिक कार्य में संस्था से जुड़े। शिक्षा में सीखने-सीखने की प्रक्रिया एवं दस्तावेजीकरण में रुचि।

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Aligning with the state education system

The journey of Organisation for Early Literacy Promotion

Keerti Jayaram

This article tries to capture the experiences of Organisation for Early Literacy Promotion (OELP) as an organization, of working in alignment with the public education system, to serve the educational needs of underprivileged and underserved children. The first section discusses the evolution of our interventions in the early literacy space, and the ways in which we have tried to learn from our context to serve our communities better. The subsequent sections discuss how the unfolding of this work has been tied with the governmental school system and provides a contour of the processes of collaboration with the state.

The beginning and unfolding of OELP's interventions in early literacy

Beginnings in the early grade classrooms of Delhi's state-run schools: OELP was registered as a not-for-profit organization in 2008. Our work, however, began in 2006 as the Early Literacy Project (ELP) within Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) schools in Delhi's Najafgarh Zone. ELP was conceptualized as a sustained and ongoing engagement with the mainstream education system. Its work was grounded in classrooms. It included regular interactions with teachers, school management, education officials, and other stakeholders.

The idea was to engage daily with the complexities of classrooms, learners, teachers, and contexts. This engagement

was to allow conceptually sound pedagogies and classroom practices to emerge in an organic and grounded way. We also wanted the work to be aligned to the contours of the mainstream education system. The selected MCD schools catered mainly to children of migrant, daily wage workers, and others engaged in petty economic activities.

Our enthusiasm was, however, short lived. We encountered experienced teachers who were resistant, and at times threatened by our presence. We found that the prevalent rote learning practices were not effective in getting children to read. The general tendency of the teachers was to be dismissive and blame the children's home backgrounds for their low levels of achievement. For most teachers, reading was equated with decoding the script. Their major challenge was that during vacations the children forgot all that they had learnt, and it meant going back to square one, each time.

Through our initial engagements inside the classrooms, we identified a few motivated teachers interested in exploring more efficient reading practices for young learners with us. This became our entry point. We worked with these teachers' active involvement, inside their classrooms, to develop innovative pedagogies for meaningful decoding, and corresponding practices, which engaged the learners actively and meaningfully.

This gave a sense ownership to the teachers. Gradually, as the children began to respond

positively to the new approaches, more teachers got involved. We now began to experience the power of modeling impactful classroom practices and demonstrating corresponding learner achievements. We have subsequently used these as effective strategies for influencing changes in teachers' beliefs and practices. In fact, they have become the cornerstone of our approach.

Making sense of classroom practices, and their underlying principles of learning: In this context, we tried addressing the real needs of government teachers in terms of what they were teaching and how it was being taught. To make a difference, we must meet the learners where they are - both teachers and students.

Most early grade teachers, whom we have worked with, engage with traditional approaches to reading. This involves recitation and decoding of the Hindi *Varna Mala* and simple words and sentences. These processes are supposed to take place within classrooms, and are teacher directed.

To get a better understanding of the individual reading processes of young learners within these government schools, we conducted individual reading observations in Hindi of 1,300 early grade students. We were supported in this effort by 22 students from two DIETs (District Institutes of Education and Training). We arrived at the conclusion that many students from Grades 1 to 3 were struggling with decoding. Engagement with *matras* was a major impediment to fluent reading.

We used the above learning to rework the approach to beginning reading (decoding) using *aksharas* as the basic linguistic unit, as is the approach within the traditional *Barakhadi* (alpha-syllabic chart). Accordingly, the Hindi *Varna Mala* was regrouped into six (6) groups called *Varna Samoochas*, through trialing over two years with the active involvement of government teachers.

We then explored ways of making decoding meaningful. We enabled learners to create their own written words from their local languages. They were facilitated to do this by combining *aksharas* from displayed charts through a variety of game-like activities. This generated an enthusiastic response. It engaged the learners with beginning reading in meaningful ways.

A variety of games were developed for engaging learners with the displayed charts in active ways. This process resulted in much more learner-centric and active classrooms. Shifts in the learners' active engagement with meaningful decoding gradually brought in corresponding shifts in the teachers' beliefs, practices and motivation.

Most importantly, the learning materials, which were developed with the involvement of the government teachers, were simple. These allowed multiple usage at multiple levels. This addressed the challenge of multi-level and multi-grade situations to some extent. Therefore, it gained greater acceptance from a wider group of teachers.

Varna Samoocha - 1

Consonants and vowels

क प म ल न
अ आ ई

Akshar chart

अ	आ	ई
क	का	की
प	पा	पी
म	मा	मी
ल	ला	ली
न	ना	नी

Word wall

Thematic words

काका	काकी	काला	पीला
मामा	मामी	लाल	नीला

Rhyming words

काला	माला	नाला
पानी	नानी	कानी

Poem poster

माला लाना, माला लाना
नीली नीली, माला लाना

माला लाना, माला लाना
पीली पीली, माला लाना
माला लाना, माला लाना
काली काली, माला लाना

माला लाना, माला लाना
लाल लाल, माला लाना
माला लाना, माला लाना
माला लाना, माला लाना

Key milestones in our journey

2008 – Relocated to rural schools in Rajasthan: After engaging in selected MCD schools in Delhi for two years, the extension of our work got stalled. This was due to some bureaucratic impediments. We, therefore, began to look further afield. In 2008, we obtained permission from Government of Rajasthan (GoR) to work in select rural government schools in Ajmer District. It is important to note that OELP's interventions were relocated as a result of compulsions driven by delays, due to changes in the higher-level bureaucracy.

2008-2015 – Development of the Field Resource Centre (FRC) in Ajmer District: In this phase, we tried to develop knowledge building as a core area, with a focus on Early Literacy and Learning. The FRC's program components included demonstration classrooms for research, and developing and modeling conceptually sound and grounded high impact classroom practices and pedagogies.

It also involved offline capacity building and professional interactions with other stakeholders. These included teacher education institutions, GOs, and NGOs across a wide geography.

2014-2017 – Growing learnings as a resource organization: In this period, we were appointed as a resource organization for training key resource persons, master trainers and teachers by GoR. We were also invited to become members of MHRD's Advisory Committee on Early Literacy. During this time, we also made a shift from remediation to foundation building. We were nominated as a member of NCERT's Core Committee for developing Guidelines for the Early Years Curriculum.

2017-2020 – Scaling up the work: A major part of our work during this period involved scaling up across seven (7) districts and 14,000 schools in Rajasthan, at the behest of GoR. We also worked as a member of the Core Group for drafting the National Position Paper on Early Literacy and Language Learning, initiated by Care India, USAID and Azim Premji University. We were also invited to the UNESCO Asia Summit, to present our work to representatives from approximately 40 countries from the Asia Pacific region.

2020-2024 – Post-pandemic challenges and compulsions: The COVID-19 pandemic hit OELP hard. To stay afloat, we have been compelled to reinvent ourselves. There is now a greater presence in the digital space. This is because we were unable to support the on-the-ground scaling up. We had to withdraw from the districts.

We are exploring options for setting up the Ajmer Field Resource Centre as a mentoring and knowledge building site, with a focus on early learning/foundational learning. We also plan to enhance our online offerings through a digital resource centre housed within our website.

A modularized online course is also being planned. Its goal is to equip educators with conceptually sound and practical classroom practices. The strategy involves supporting high quality foundational learning, based on real-time classroom videos. It is contextualized to address learner diversity and inclusion.

The guiding principle of the course acknowledges that it is not enough to know what to teach. It is equally important to know how to facilitate high quality learning in the early grade classrooms catering to learners from diverse backgrounds.

Addressing learners' real needs: Over the last decade and half, as a country, we have made significant progress in enrolling our children in schools. However, enrollment doesn't ensure inclusion. OELP has tried to generate impactful classroom practices, which facilitate meaningful engagement with the mainstream curriculum, while being entrenched in sound learning principles.

Our on-the-ground practice has involved strategies that have been useful for building pathways for establishing foundations for high quality learning in young learner from low literate backgrounds. We discuss a few of these below.

Understanding the importance of recognizing learner differences along multiple dimensions has been important. We have found that classrooms within these schools are spaces which reflect the socio-cultural and linguistic diversities and the social stratifications of the larger context within which they are located.

We recognize the importance of identifying some essential elements of an enabling and conducive physical and social classroom learning environment for young learners, and the possible ways in which these could be adapted to the resource poor and low literate contexts of our work in practical and doable ways.

We have also tried to address difference in ways that has made success achievable for almost each young learner in the class. This has been essential to bring about a positive sense of self. We have tried to actively involve each learner, including those who had earlier preferred to remain as passive and mute spectators rather than risk failure.

Evolving strategies for engaging with learner diversity has also been a key part of our work. An effective strategy involves the innovative use of names and name cards through a variety of activities and games. Active

engagement with name cards gives each child a sense of belonging and acceptance while creating an element of fun.

By shuffling and pulling out individual name cards, teachers have been able to ensure the active involvement of each child. These name cards have also proved to be a stimulating and engaging tool for engaging children with reading and writing, while at the same time being used as a tool for classroom management.

Creating active learning classrooms through the establishment of planned, print-based corners, and their usage in multiple ways as learning tools by teachers and learners, have also been very useful. Thus, the displayed print material on the classroom walls provides low-cost learning material. This is easily accessible. It facilitates doable ways of providing multiple teacher-directed or learner-initiated learning experiences. This helps to build a sense of ownership and autonomy in both teachers and learners.

Planned strategies for engaging with the children's errors are essential to build up their level of confidence and create classrooms as non-threatening and cooperative spaces in which learning is a positive experience for each child.

If a child is struggling and unable to successfully engage with a task, she has the option of calling out a friend to help. Tapping into peer support has proved to be effective for creating a climate of mutual respect and cooperation within classrooms that honor learner diversity.

Working with the government for supporting the learning needs of underserved children

Addressing issues of context and marginality with rural government schools: Current literature on children in poverty has highlighted the desire of marginalized populations for formal schooling. It also foregrounds that the school, at the same

Major challenges in working with the government in education, and strategies for dealing with these

Major challenges

- Ensuring program continuity and sustainability in a constantly changing and dynamic field, with frequent changes in the education bureaucracy at all levels
- Engaging effectively in multi-level and multi-grade situations
- Bringing shifts in deeply entrenched traditional practices and teachers' beliefs
- Engaging with teachers who are grossly overburdened with non-teaching tasks
- Aligning with the changing programmatic mechanisms in the government system and the available resources
- Availability of minimal resources, for developing conducive learning environments with effective monitoring and support systems
- Addressing the specific needs of young learners from low literate homes, who have minimal support for school-based learning

Sustainable strategies

- Setting up demonstration sites for modeling high impact and doable classroom practices
- Mechanisms for building a resource pool for program mentoring and monitoring at the block and district levels
- Developing an ecosystem driven by teachers and mentors, supported with online options, for sharing best practices, and offering support
- Quarterly reporting at the state, district, block, school, and community levels

time, functions as a space that is inherently disrespectful of their present life situations.

Under macro programs like *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan*, we experienced large-scale initiatives being taken up by the State Education Department for building foundations in reading and writing at the levels of classes 1 and 2. Most of these initiatives were being implemented as predesigned packages.

These were located within a larger predetermined framework of Continuous Comprehensive Evaluation or CCE. These were being supported by some large-scale initiatives on reading, such as periodic "Reading Campaigns."

Our assessment of the context: Within the space of our limited "worm's eye" experience,

we found these centralized macro initiatives being implemented as de-contextualized, "one size fit all," target-driven programs. These were often mismatched to the particular, and often diverse, needs of specific groups of learners and teachers. The structured and predetermined content and processes tended to be somewhat mechanical. These were also largely ineffective in bringing changes in learner engagement and achievements.

We could see the challenges of the teachers. They often feel disempowered. They are ill-equipped to deal with the specific socio-cultural and linguistic needs of their learners. The teachers are also under the constant scrutiny of a target-driven system. It requires data quantification and reporting almost daily.

Matters are compounded by the social distance between the urbanized, and socially better off, government teachers and the learners. The latter are mostly from the lowest rung of the social ladder. They come from homes with minimal opportunities to actively engage with print.

Engagement at the cluster and block levels - letting the work speak: We were convinced that for any conceptually sound classroom practices to gain ground, we had to demonstrate success within these classrooms. Our intensive classroom engagements have allowed us to build deeper understanding of the learners, teachers and their contexts.

This has also allowed us to explore meaningful synergies with the curriculum and the mainstream education system. Our idea has been to align with and strengthen the system in ways that are doable, low-cost and scalable. We have not been interested in setting up a parallel system.

We began to share small successes with wider groups of teachers, and middle-level education functionaries, at the cluster, block, and district levels. This resulted in the training of teachers from 120 schools of the Silora Block in which we were working. These teachers also voluntarily acquisitioned our learning materials.

We invited district officials into classrooms to experience the shifts in learning for themselves. These interactions helped to build confidence and a sense of ownership within the teachers. They also generated a support group for OELP within the district education system.

It was important for these officials to experience learner achievements for themselves inside our classes. They could discover happy children making their own words or reading and writing each other's names or reading poems. The officials also

experienced shifts in the teachers' attitudes toward learning and learners.

This process was important. These officials began to compare our classes with those in other schools in which we were not working. They became ambassadors for the OELP program at block and district level meetings. They began to attend monthly teachers' meetings. We were also able to draw a pool of resource persons and mentors from amongst these middle-level education functionaries.

Small success stories began to emerge:

One such story is being shared here as an example. In Sri Ganganagar, after a district-level meeting, the DIET Principal showed a keen interest in the OELP program. We were able to convince him to visit three schools, along with a few DIET faculty members, to take stock of the situation.

On the 9th of October, 2018, the DIET Principal, the Vice-principal, and the OELP representatives visited three schools. These included Government Secondary Girls School at Sawatsar, Government Upper Primary School at Lalpura Odan, and Government Senior Secondary School at Ratewala.

They observed the implementation of the OELP pedagogies. They could also see the use of our resource kit inside the classrooms. They found that in the Lalpur Odan School, the teacher was active, the OELP material had been displayed, and it was being used effectively.

In the other two schools, however, the material had been partially displayed. The teachers also required support for understanding its purpose and proper implementation.

To address the needs of the teachers, the DIET Principal took the following actions after the school visits. An OELP demo room was setup in the DIET at Sri Ganganagar. This was used for displaying the OELP material, and for setting up learning corners.

This room was subsequently used for training pre-service student teachers. The room set up as a part of OELP's interventions also became a venue for several government trainings, workshops, and regular meetings.



OELP

Assessing impact, and scaling up work

Impact assessment by the government:

In June 2009, OELP presented the work of the Early Literacy Project to senior Faculty members of Regional Institute of Education (RIE), Ajmer, along with district-level government officials, SSA functionaries, and representatives of NGOs. This led to an Impact Assessment Study of OELP's Early Literacy Project (ELP).

This study was conducted as an external evaluation over a span of a year. It took place under the leadership of Professor K. B. Rath, HoD, Education, and the acting Principal of Regional Institute of Education (RIE) Ajmer.

The study included components for quantitative, as well as qualitative analysis. A presentation of the findings was made in the Academic Staff College of University of Rajasthan.

It was chaired by Professor Shantha Sinha, Chairperson NCPER. The presentation was well attended. The audience consisted of representatives of GOs and NGOs, academics, senior members of civil society, and students.

After the impact assessment study by RIE, our work began to receive positive feedback. We could receive active support from district and block level education functionaries and SSA officials within Rajasthan's Ajmer district.

Scaling up: After a surprise visit by senior bureaucrats to OELP's worksites in 2015, the OELP learning materials were reproduced and distributed to 14,000 primary schools across seven (7) Special Focus Districts through costs incurred by the State. These materials were made available free of cost by us.

In 2018, Government of Rajasthan signed a four-year MOU with OELP. The goal was to support the scaling up of our education innovations in 14,000 government primary schools across seven (7) Special Focus Districts.

Implementation process: By 2022, we planned to have a scale-up model, which could be replicated widely. OELP worked with PEEO clusters (each Panchayat Cluster has approximately five schools), with one demo school to be set up in each cluster.

Digital support was also provided. This was in the form of modularized and guided digital engagement with the Mobile App content through a Trainer App. Each Trainer App housed 2–3 PEEO clusters (10 to 15 teachers), with an experienced teacher and a district/ block RP appointed as mentors.

There was an overall positive response. Some interviews with government teachers from the pilot schools may be accessed through this [web link](#).

Reflective insights

After sharing details of our journey of collaborating with the government for making early literacy teaching learning in schools effective and equitable, I conclude with some reflections and insights drawn from this experience.



OELP

The program components have evolved through an organic process of sustained field engagement. This has helped us ensure that the program components are grounded in the complexities of the mainstream education system.

A bottom-up process of engagement has enabled us to identify and address real needs at various levels. It has also facilitated meaningful processes of building conceptually sound learning strategies by theorizing classroom practice.

These have included strategies for equipping children from diverse backgrounds for school-based learning, and addressing shifts from oracy to literacy for children from low-literate backgrounds. Addressing shifts from home language to school language and the developmental needs of young learners are crucial. So are enhancing higher order thinking for each child.

Modeling classroom practices, and demonstrating learner performance shifts, have proved to be effective strategies for


building support for the program at multiple levels. Sustained engagements with various stakeholders during the project development process have enhanced the sphere of program ownership.

This process has also facilitated greater teacher agency. Teachers respond positively to classroom practices and pedagogic approaches that address their real needs in simple and doable ways.

Keerti Jayaram is the Founder and Director of OELP (Organisation for Early Literacy Promotion). She has had more than 30 years of experience in elementary education as a teacher, teacher educator, curriculum developer, researcher and parent. She has interacted actively with the academic world, and with the multiple worlds of education practitioners as well.

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Collaborative horizons

Makkala Jagriti's journey in government partnerships

Rohit Shetti

Since social welfare, justice and development form the primary mandate of the government, reformative and/or transformative initiatives by civil society can be rendered lasting and sustainable only through governmental collaborations.

Grassroots NGOs often ensure effective last mile reach of government's welfare programs. However, the scope of civil society collaborations with the government is much beyond that.

From conceptualization to implementation, a healthy partnership between civil society and government at all levels can ensure that development initiatives yield the desired results in a much better and scalable way.

Ensuring education for all is a mission that the government has taken the primary responsibility of. Yet there are many private players, including NGOs, who are rendering services in facilitating or directly providing access to quality education, with varying levels of collaborations with the government.

In this context, Makkala Jagriti, has had its own journey of working with the government at different levels, which has been a learning experience in its own right.

Makkala Jagriti is an organization with 20 years of experience in facilitating holistic learning and development opportunities for children and youth from disadvantaged sections across age-groups. Our experiences of working with the government in this space brings valuable lessons for us to reflect upon and chart a path for stronger collaborations in the future.

What makes working with the government click

A significant amount of Makkala Jagriti's engagement with the government is at the grassroots level. The organization's goal has been to impact children in the institutions directly, which include Anganwadis, government schools and childcare institutions. Reflections on our experiences with the government show that there are some key factors that make the relationship click, and more importantly, make it work on a day-to-day basis.

Alignment with the policies and goals

of the departments: The primary factor to be considered while working with the government is the alignment with the policy ecosystem, intended goals and vision of government departments, and awareness of the opportunities for collaboration. Holistic development of children has been given due emphasis in the new National Education Policy (NEP 2020). One can find a significant alignment between Makkala Jagriti's work in government schools and the policy's objectives.

Similarly, pre-school education is one of the essential services under Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS). It is one of the world's largest government schemes for early childhood development. Makkala Jagriti's interventions in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) are both supportive and complementary to the government's work in this domain. This commonality is an essential foundation to build relationships with the various government departments and institutions. Furthermore, designing programs such that the government's administrative

structure is leveraged to attain buy-in and sustainability is important. For instance, in the ECCE program, we work with the existing structure of ICDS Supervisors, CDPOs and DDs. This helps in making the collaboration smooth and optimizes our efforts.

A non-threatening, collaborative and empowering approach: One of the biggest factors that has worked for Makkala Jagriti in building good relationships with the government is the non-threatening approach adopted by the organization.

We do not approach the government with the identity of a 'giver' or an authority-figure with whom they must comply. We have rather approached government institutions with a view to co-own the goals of the partnership and co-learn through the process.

Co-learning or a shared learning process: This is an important part of our initiatives. Notable examples include our capacity building initiatives that go beyond knowledge sharing. These involve contextually

handholding and mentoring Anganwadi teachers and the staff of childcare institutions. Our capacity-building sessions with the staff of childcare institutions have evolved into an open and non-threatening forum to share their issues, practices that have worked (or not), and expectations from further sessions.

We have made it a point to be available to the government functionaries. We engage with them and address their unique challenges on the field. This has fostered a mutual learning process. Here both the NGO staff and government functionaries learn from each other, creating a culture of shared knowledge.

A part of our approach is also to make the government functionaries feel empowered as individuals. Toward this, we make sure that our capacity building initiatives are not just knowledge imparting sessions. These also function as opportunities where we value the unique qualities and strengths that individuals bring to the table. We try and make them owners of their own success.



Makkala Jagriti

Shared visioning

The organization's own values of freedom, trust and learning from mistakes extend to the realm of working with the government seamlessly. We see these resulting in mindset shifts. These processes also help create role models for others in the system.

We also work on building the self-esteem of government functionaries. This aids in instilling a sense of pride about their roles. Small initiatives like providing a badge that says "I am an Anganwadi Teacher" make such a huge difference.

Shared vision and alignment with departmental leadership

One of Makkala Jagriti's biggest collaborations with the government has involved the launch and implementation of the state-level program "Maneyali Oota, Maneyali Paata." This was undertaken in partnership with the Department of Women and Child Development (Department of WCD). The pandemic had forced the closure of schools and Anganwadis. There was a shared concern that children across the state were missing out on pre-school learning opportunities. It was this shared concern that made this collaboration happen.

Through this process, we reached out to 66,000 Anganwadis across the state. We delivered the learning content via the government's organizational structure. Our rapport with the Department of WCD at various levels, including the district and sub-district leaders of ICDS, was instrumental in the success of the program. However, credit must also go to the Directorate-level leadership, viz., Dr. B. Usha (Joint Director), who issued timely and clear directions for the implementation. An indicator here is the swiftness of communication and information exchange at all levels. We don't normally associate this kind of swiftness with the government.

Another state-level initiative of Makkala Jagriti was with the Directorate of Child

Transforming from a worker to a teacher

Shantala, is one of the most passionate Anganwadi teachers today. Like many others, she earlier believed that her role was that of just a worker in an Anganwadi. Learning about the importance of brain development in early years inspired her to ensure that her engagement with children provides all the stimulation they need. She is an advocate for early childhood learning among the community she works in. The mindset shift from looking at oneself as a "teacher" from a "worker," and her own realization that it indeed takes a lot of learning to be a good teacher is instrumental in her transformation.

Protection. In this collaboration, we launched a virtual learning program for children in Child Care Institutions (CCIs) across the state. We reached out to the children and staff of private and government CCIs with learning opportunities, during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond.

The organization's track record of creating learning opportunities for children in institutional care played a role. However, the Directorate-level leadership's clear vision and passion (in this case, Smt. Pallavi Akurthi), was also important in the success of this initiative.

Seeing is believing

How do government officials trust us with what we do and offer collaborative support? We can say this is primarily because of the quality of the work at the ground level. We bring key officials to our schools, Anganwadis, and events. When senior officials of the department witness how Anganwadi teachers lead *Anganwadi Habba* - a large community-level event where they showcase best practices in ECCE - they revel in the Anganwadi teachers' potential and think about new possibilities.



Makkala Jagriti

Library activity

When officials from the Education Department notice how government school children excel in events like *Kalika Habba*, they become aware of the ground-level work behind the children's performance. In many of the events, we make it a point to showcase the possibilities and opportunities for children's holistic development.

This awareness and exposure help us influence the system at different levels. These include aspects such as the way the CDPOs, CRPs or BEOs appreciate holistic development of children and create supportive environments. We have also seen greater involvement of the government functionaries in planning activities for the children and interest in appreciating the impact of our programs.

Leveraging existing schemes and mechanisms from the government

Makkala Jagriti's journey began with learning centers set up in urban poor communities in Bengaluru. The first center was located in Aduodi. It was in an area where not all children went to school. Those who did, mostly went to government or low-fee private schools. They were typically deprived of an encouraging learning ecosystem in their communities. In our learning center, they found themselves in a space that opened up new ways of learning for them. There was fun,

freedom, and respect for each other. They also had access to resources. They found a sense of belonging as well.

Makkala Jagriti was able to successfully institutionalize these learning spaces in government schools. A key factor that made it possible was an existing scheme in the government called "Shaala Dattu Yojane." This allowed NGOs to collaborate with Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan.

A rich process of engagement with government schoolteachers, and other leaders in the system, was also a critical factor in the institutionalization of the learning centers. This helped in developing a shared understanding of how the centers worked. It also aided in visualizing their replication in other schools. However, leveraging the existing scheme acted as an important aiding factor and catalyst in the process.

Organizational credibility, integrity and adaptability

A key factor in successfully working with the government is the organization's track record. Makkala Jagriti has been working consistently with the government in the institutions that have been part of the program. This has established credibility.

For instance, we work in CCIs and Observation Homes. Here situations can be very dynamic and unpredictable. Working in a steadfast manner in tough places such as these has helped the organization secure the reputation of being adaptable. It has also made us be seen as being with the government through thick and thin.

In other places such as schools and Anganwadis as well, we have seen that steadiness and consistency help overcome initial resistances, if any. It also leads to mindset changes. This is one of the most important tools to make an impact in a government institution. Makkala Jagriti was able to align its programs creatively and effectively to the needs of the COVID-19 pandemic, and partner with the government meaningfully. This has lent credibility within the government. It has enhanced our image as a knowledge partner as well.

The organizational and program leadership also needs to back the team to go through ups and downs in working with the government machinery. There is a multi-level trust factor at play here: the government trusting the NGO, and the NGO field staff

also feeling trusted by the leadership to take decisions based on the situation and learn from it.

In essence, the collaborative journey between Makkala Jagriti and various government entities has involved developing a shared vision and mutual respect. It has also entailed creating non-authoritarian partnerships for fostering meaningful change. There is much more engagement we seek to have with the government going forward. However, we feel confident that these principles will continue to be a foundation for further work.

With a 23-year career spanning the industrial and non-profit sectors, **Rohit Shetti** currently leads the programs at Makkala Jagriti in the position of Deputy Director – Programs. He is a strong advocate of collaborative partnerships between the government and civil society as well as among civil society organizations.

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Makkala Jagriti

Learning centre

Moving the needle, toward scale

Pranjali Pathak and Annie Louis

Through our journey of six years at Pi Jam Foundation, we have traversed a path of learning and collaboration. Our mission is to redefine education by instilling critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills in students. This has led us to some remarkable partnerships with government institutions.

These collaborations have been a profound learning experience. We have come to realize that governments bring unique strengths to the table. This can be leveraged for the greater good of education.

A shared vision for holistic education

One of the most profound lessons we have learned is the power of a shared vision. Collaborating with governments has allowed us to align our goals and objectives with the broader vision of holistic and inclusive education. With the introduction of NEP 2020, governments are committed to shaping the future of education by nurturing future-ready students.

Pi Jam Foundation is furthering these policy goals. It is also building awareness across multiple stakeholders. From district-level education bodies to the National Education Department, we are observing a renewed eagerness to bring in best practices in digital education.

Empowering educators: the heart of transformation

Our experience has shown us that educators are the primary catalyst of any educational transformation. By working closely with governments, we have been able to empower teachers with computational thinking and problem-solving skills. This collaborative teacher training is not just about improving individual teaching practices. It is also about

creating a community of educators who are passionate about fostering creativity and critical thinking in students.

A comprehensive systems approach

Partnering with government institutions has also reinforced our belief that education is not a standalone product but a comprehensive system. Governments bring with them structures, resources, policies, and networks. We can leverage these for change.

Our work goes beyond the development of a curriculum. It involves the creation of contextual toolkits and learning resources. It also needs partnerships that can have a far-reaching impact on education.

We have learned that a systems approach, with government support, is key to bridging the gap between policy directives and effective implementation.

Impact at every level: from grassroots to systems

Our journey has involved collaborative efforts in education to impact multiple levels of the ecosystem. We have worked with students, teachers, and policymakers, and this multi-layered approach has resulted in high-quality feedback loops.

We have adopted a learning mindset, akin to a sandbox, constantly adapting and evolving, based on the insights from our on-the-ground experiences. Government collaborations have allowed us to take our mission to higher levels, ensuring that the transformation of education is widespread and inclusive.

Democratizing education: the ultimate goal

Our goal at Pi Jam Foundation is to democratize computer science education and



commons.wikimedia.org/Biswarup Ganguly

Government Senior Secondary School - Durgapur, Naldehra

make it accessible to every child, regardless of their background. We believe that every child has the potential to be a creator and a problem solver.

Our journey has taught us that collaborating with governments at all levels can be a powerful way to challenge the status quo of education in India. By redefining learning environments, recognizing the ubiquity of computer science, and promoting creativity and critical thinking, we are making strides in reshaping the foundations of education.

In reflection, our experiences in collaborating with governments have been transformative. We have learned that a shared vision, a commitment to holistic education, and government resources and networks can activate existing resources and propel change. It is not just about what we can bring to the partnership, but also about what we can learn and achieve together.

The journey has been enlightening. We are eager to continue our collaborative efforts.

These will help us achieve our goal of revolutionizing education and empowering students for the challenges of the 21st century.

Pranjali is an engineer turned educator. Her passion lies in ensuring that the millions of students in our country, especially girls who leave behind harsh realities every day to attend government schools, gain an avenue to develop 21st century technological skills that will propel them to a better future.

Annie has a journalism background, and her interest leans toward public education and the intersectionality between gender, caste, culture and politics. Despite the challenges in the current public education landscape, she remains hopeful for a more equitable world and contributes her bits to that vision.

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Working with the government as a nobody

Ashish Kumar Shrivastava

The last decade has seen a shift in government priorities in education with the focus shifting toward quality instead of just access. This has given the system the necessary nudge toward processes, accountability, and delivery. Remote and adverse geographies like Bastar's Sukma, have been positively affected by this shift in mindsets and priorities. Bastar division in Chhattisgarh, comprising seven aspirational districts with some of the poorest HDIs, has been lagging behind in learning outcomes, as compared to the state and national averages over the past many years, as per the NAS and ASER reports.

With a few days on the field in the region, anybody would realize that the problem is complex. These relate to demographic, cultural, and socio-political factors. It needs a multidimensional approach, instead of an assembly-line, problem solving one. Despite

all the intent, even the administration struggles on multiple fronts. These relate to aspects such as access to human capital (almost 40% of the positions are vacant), infrastructure, and contextually relevant programs.

Shiksharth is a start-up focusing on children in an adverse and conflict-ridden geography. We have worked toward designing contextual solutions, leading to serving 50,000+ children and 500+ schools. This includes supporting 300 schools re-opened after more than a decade, after being destroyed during conflicts. We have also collaborated with the administration over multiple institutional partnerships. The experience has strengthened our belief in: i) being in proximity to the problem; ii) a bottom-up approach for sustainable change and iii) immersion over projects. In the last decade, we have worked with the government system at all levels from support staff of schools



Shiksharth

to secretaries in the state's Department of Education. We have had different experiences of hostility, encouragement, partnership, collaboration, and criticism. However, there have been a few things, which have been there all throughout - nurtured relationships, persistence, perseverance, and transparency.

Our journey of the last decade can be broadly classified in three stages. The first was about getting introduced to the system, actively listening, and building credibility. The second stage involved proving commitment, creating shared paths, and building hyper-local partnerships. The third stage has been about collaborating with a shared vision and becoming partners in the journey.

Introductions, active listening and building credibility

The first phase of our work with the government involved the first three years. We started working in Sukma with the goal of creating solutions based on multilingual-education and contextual pedagogy without any references, introduction, or financial support. However, the first response that we received was - "Who are you?" We pitched all the vocabulary that we would usually write on our resumes. However, it didn't really make any difference. Because, if we were so competent, what were we doing in Sukma?

So, the first thing we had to do was to build our credibility in ways and areas the local administration understood. We started listening without any authority. And the administrative staff came up with very interesting problem statements that we had not really thought of. The first one was how do we bring in optimized resources and processes and set up centers of excellence to cater to children in difficult circumstances.

The district collector (an IAS officer) was interested in promoting STEM education. He could see that the region was struggling to get good science educators. The children were not having much career opportunities to



Shiksharth

pursue after matriculation. Thus, he believed that we need to invest in STEM education.

While we had set out to work on multi-lingual education, we did have prior experience of working in STEM. However, as a team, it wasn't a priority at that moment. There was a dilemma of whether to go with our original plan or to work as per the administration. We were just four people in the team in the beginning. We couldn't afford to work in multiple projects. There was also a threat of delayed deliverables. However, another argument based on our conversations with teachers and administration was that they didn't think of foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN) as an issue. However, we humbly acknowledged the gaps in STEM education and availability of science teachers in the region.

Another point of discussion within the team, was that multi-lingual education will be a time-taking process in delivering the expected results. On the other hand, STEM parks and providing technical support to the administration could be a good opportunity for us to build credibility and relationships by delivering short-term, tangible goals. That's where Shiksharth pursued the opportunity and designed Chhattisgarh's first STEM Park.

Later, we contributed to designing the Education City-cum-Hub Model. This was later identified as one of the "Top 10 Innovations in Public Administration" by Government of India. The model is an example of institutionalizing collaboration with the government. It has served more



Shiksharth

than 30,000 children so far. It is going to be a crucial contributor for generations to come.

The experience gave us three primary lessons. We share them here.

- **Observation along with active listening** is a crucial first step to build relationships with the administration. Instead of proposing an idea, just spend time on the ground observing things and listening to the issues. And then come up with ideas around what can be done together.
- **Building credibility and proving competency** is critical. It is important to build your credibility first in a way that is relevant for the partners.
- **Co-defining the problem, and co-designing the solution**, are important. Shared partnership should be, from day one, a space where we listen, observe, and define the problem statement together.

Proving commitment, walking on shared paths, and building hyper-local partnerships

The second phase (lasting between the 4th and 7th years of our existence) was primarily

about building our core body of work, developing replicable products, and building a team of local community youth. We scaled up our operations from one school to 100+ schools. All this was done without a formal MoU. It involved just relationship building at the school and district levels.

In 2016, we launched the Shiksharth Rural Fellowship. We placed fellows in residential schools of Sukma, as Action Researchers. These fellows would teach in classrooms, design solutions, and contribute toward the school operations. The caution to be practised was to not become a watchdog and intimidate the school staff as representatives of the district leadership. Instead, the fellows tried to become collaborators with them.

This helped us forge relationships at the ground, instead of being dependent on permissions from the administration for everything. It opened up multiple doors to try innovative ideas in pedagogy, library, art-based approaches, and community engagement. This led to building a holistic perspective toward supporting children.

This process had government stakeholder engagement at three levels. At the school-level, we worked with school leaders and staff. We hoped that this would ensure we could operate with freedom and contribute to making the schools better.

At the district level, we worked with the district collector and the education department. Our innovations and models in schools were often represented as innovations at the district level. This gave us access to replicate the work with different clusters and teachers. This also provided opportunities for multiple collaborative interventions with the district administration. These included training teachers and cluster-level academic coordinators, representing the district at multiple platforms, and helping with annual work plans. Initially we used to sit in the Education Department. After 18 months or so, we started working from our own office. However, we would meet the officials formally and informally every alternate day.

At the state level, we were in constant contact with government officials sharing updates about our work. We met them at least once a quarter. This led to opportunities for us to present our work at multiple state-level conferences and gatherings. Here, we represented the region's issues with authentic, on-the-ground experiences.

By 2018, we had already completed three years in Sukma. Suddenly, everyone in the schools, and in the administration, was asking us about our exit from the district. We were often faced with questions like - "Where are you going now?" and "Where is the next project?" They had not anticipated that we are here without an exit plan, and that we were willing for long-term engagement. The assumption was that we are funded by somebody and doing a two-year project like most prior nonprofit interventions in the district, and then we would walk out.

While we are building relationships, and doing interventions together, somewhere in the

back of the mind of some of the stakeholders there were doubts over our commitment to Sukma and its children. For them, we were just a regular NGO, which was trying to execute some project and then go back. It was by the end of the second phase when the administration started taking us seriously as a genuinely interested organization. That's when we started getting acknowledged. We slowly became an unsaid part of the team.

An officer once told us, "If you really want to see any social change, you have to stay longer." And that kind of stuck with us. This opened many opportunities for us, not just in the district, but also in the Bastar division and with the state's education department. We started getting noticed at the state level.

In 2017, we also got into a situation where the leadership turned hostile against all the CSOs in the region. We were asked to go back. However, the second line of leadership was willing to have us in the schools. In such a situation, while we continued to work in the schools for almost two years, we didn't get much administrative support. We were very clear, however, that it is a long-term engagement. We had also come to realize that the graph is going to be low and high, and hence going out was not an option.

Being there, and working with the communities in any way possible, helped us.



Shiksharth

Persistence and perseverance were the key. We continued operating in the schools with little or no support from district leadership for a while. It was after some time that the district leadership noticed us, and we were back to contributing at all levels.

This persistence gave us the opportunity to support 97 reopened schools, which were earlier destroyed because of conflicts. We pitched in with field support, pedagogy, and school operations. To our surprise, we received positive remarks about our intervention purely because we were there, walking the talk. We were there working with the administrative officers and cluster coordinators, going on the field in the most difficult geographies in this country, passing by the actual line of fire, often facing multiple security threats. We started receiving kind words of appreciation for our work. Shiksharth started being perceived as a CSO that has gone on working in the field with the government or without the government.

This phase was all about dealing with uncertainty and adverse situations, reinforcing five key lessons. We share these below.

- A bottom-up approach is a difficult, time taking, but sustainable way to make the needle shift. The top-down approach will create some ripples and give initial momentum. However, it involves work that is authoritative in nature. The work is more sustainable, if it adopts a bottom-up approach.
- Dignity is the key at all levels. In a system where most of the things are done based on orders, it is important to express respect in actions rather than words. Just sharing the journey, being part of the emotions, acknowledging and sharing ones' vulnerabilities, and a human-to-human engagement beyond professional conversations, can be game changing.
- Communication and transparency at all levels is important. Any data, information, and analysis should simultaneously be shared with stakeholders at all levels,



Shiksharth

instead of just at the top. Communication channels should be bi-directional. In fact, CSOs can play a crucial role in facilitating relationships among multiple stakeholders in the system.

- Over-dependence on the top leadership may hamper the sustainability of the interventions. Usually, an IAS officer gets transferred every two years at any level in the system. And with the district leadership changing frequently, priorities also change. Then it becomes difficult to keep up. Designing the program with the second line of leadership can help in the long run. Keeping the core work independent is also important.
- Nurturing relationships with the second and third line of leadership is as important as with the top tier. Most CSOs follow the top-down approach. We learnt that it is important to have a stronger relationship with second line of leadership in the department. In 2017, we faced hostility from the administration, where most of the NGOs were not being entertained. We were being asked to move out. That's when we realized the importance of relationship building at all levels of the system. Because of this, we were able to continue our work. We survived despite all the hostilities because of our strong relationship on the ground with school leaders and with the second line of leadership. The work got slowed down and became difficult. However, we sailed through.

Collaborating with a shared vision and becoming partners in the journey

The third phase of our work with the government (from the 8th year of our existence onward) has been around collaborations for developing a shared vision and not for projects. Anyone from Shiksharth can now go and engage with the administration, depending on the requirement. The founders alone are not sharing the burden of building and maintaining relationships with the government.

School closures during the Covid-19 pandemic helped take the relationship to more stakeholders. This led to invitations from schools to work with us. When the administration was looking for ideas as online mediums were not accessible, our offline learning solutions opened multiple doors. We shared our offline learning solutions as a collaborative intervention.

From our experiences and continuous engagement with children in the armed conflict affected area, we realized that continuity of education is the most efficient medium for reducing the risks arising out of armed conflicts and community distress. As a response to the breakdown in children's education in the jungles and villages of Sukma, Shiksharth came up with the idea of

designing and developing a mechanism for effective offline learning involving learning kits.

The overall vision of these kits is to ensure that children practice key literacy and numeracy skills in a personalized and engaging manner. The goal is to minimize the widening learning gaps created by school closures. The initiative didn't intend to teach any new concepts, as it would not have been possible without the help of a teacher/facilitator. These kits comprise of both pedagogic content and resources developed in-house, and different resources created by various organizations available on the internet. Providing stimulus to children to become independent self-learners was a key part of the strategy. The kits comprised of foundation skills, project-based learning, stories, and material on STEM education, all printed in the form of engaging worksheets.

The intervention was pitched as an innovation by the administration to NITI Ayog and got recognized. And that built the momentum around collaborating for shared vision. We became part of the District Foundational Literacy and Numeracy Committee, and of many other teams. As of now, we are the go-to team for anything the education department needs help with technically. This has also



Shiksharth

given us opportunities to replicate our work in nearby districts, with a collective reach to more than 350 schools and 16,000 children directly. The administration appreciates our grassroots efforts. The relationship with the Sukma administration has also strengthened our credibility when we reach out to other districts.

We continue to gain insights from the third phase. Some of the key, relevant insights are the following.

Keeping a good balance between products and programs is critical. This gives the advantage of aligning to changing priorities, both in the short-term and in the long-term.

Proximity to the problem and the grassroots helps in the long run. This is important in developing understanding. It also helps in proving one's commitment for the cause.

During all these years, there have been multiple situations where we had to say no, and got into some difficult phases in our relationship with the administration as well. Because of our relationship, we were often invited to pick up initiatives which were not in alignment with what we wanted to focus on. For example - running shelter homes, doing livelihood or health-related interventions, and often, working on a horticulture project. We had to say no to many such opportunities.

Often, while collaborating on a district-level initiative, we would be asked to close all our existing interventions and place the entire team on the existing administrative priorities. Our message was clear – “Please don't disturb our core work in the schools. The leadership team would put in extra time. But please don't disturb the team on the ground.” Initially, this led to some frictions. However, eventually, this brought everyone on the same page about how Shiksharth could contribute to the district and the region in the long run.

In conclusion

We are starting the next phase of our journey. We look forward toward serving one million

children in conflict and adverse geographies, with positive childhood experiences. We understand that transforming the system without collaborations with governments is impossible. However, we believe that one needs to be mindful of having a balanced approach.

A top-down approach gives quick results. It is also low-cost, and gives a large-scale reach. However, it lacks connections, conviction, and grounding in lived experiences. On the other hand, a bottom-up approach of working with the government is slow. Therefore, it is also cost intensive. However, it is based on trust. This makes it sustainable and independent of uncertainties related to the leadership.

A balanced approach does not show fast results. Initially, it is also resource intensive. But it is sustainable and also allows you to explore pathways for creating deep and meaningful impact.

Ashish Kumar Shrivastava is the founder of Shiksharth Trust, a nonprofit organization working toward positive childhood experiences for children in conflict and adversity by designing contextually relevant solutions.

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Shiksharth

Three guiding principles for impactful government partnerships

Madhukar Banuri and Aashima Jain



Leadership For Equity

Working with government systems can be challenging, but rewarding too. Here is how nonprofits can foster sustainable and impactful partnerships with the government.

Over the last decade, for many education NGOs, working with governments has emerged as a critical lever to achieve sustainable change at scale. Several NGOs who continue to engage with governments have also realized that it requires a different kind of leadership. A lot of our work at Leadership for Equity (LFE) with school (Grades 1-8) systems from 2016, and CLR's (Centre for Learning Resources) work with ICDS (Anganwadis) systems from 2013, has centred around improving government systems and consciously building the capacity of system functionaries. Moving

forward, as much as we at LFE avidly delved into solving systemic problems in education with systemic solutions, more challenges of partnering with government systems became apparent.

While governmental bodies are now more receptive to collaborative partnerships, there were no standard processes or acceptance of framing such partnerships 10 years ago. A wide range of problems, ranging from complex application processes, to indefinite timelines, to incalculable agreements, probed us into adopting a more cohesive and tactical approach.

In our journey over the last 7-8 years, we have worked with many governmental systems spread across the district, state, and national

levels. Due to the absence of any standard processes for formulating such strategic partnerships, we were left to come up with our own coping mechanisms to navigate the complexity of the processes. In no way is this article an expert view. However, this is a view coming from years of failures, challenges, and successes of our field teams, who continue to strive to improve children's learning outcomes.

So, here are three principles we have found helpful, while working with governments for educational change.

Principle 1: Understand the governmental structure and decide the level at which one seeks to engage

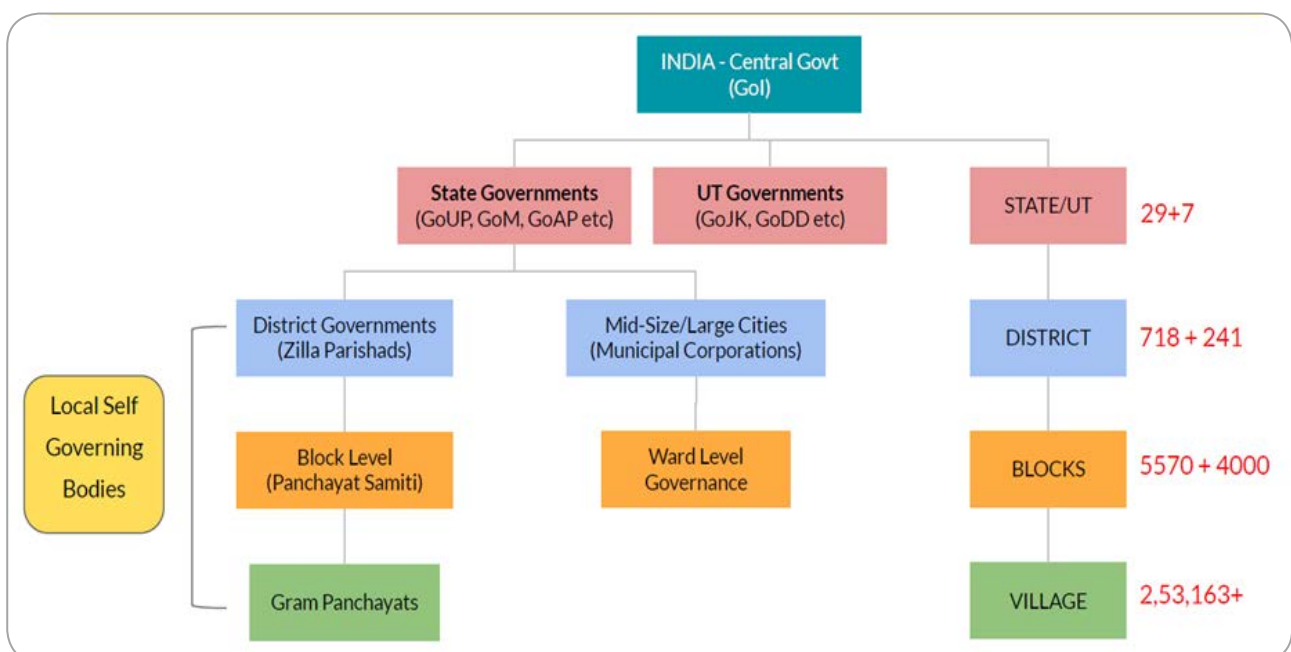
The government is not a monolith. It comprises of individuals, systems, and processes at multiple levels of governance. These play out with diverse power dimensions. One must keep three vantage points in mind while working with government systems: levels, government institutions, and people.

The top-down hierarchy of the government consists of the Central Government at the top, followed by the state governments. Then there are local government entities like

those at the levels of the district and the village, with intermediate bodies at the block, and cluster levels. The degree of autonomy each of these levels exercises varies depending on the responsibilities assigned to them. It is also a function of the specific constitutional and legislative frameworks in place. Governmental bodies across each level are composed of people (i.e., government officials) responsible for executing these leading bodies' functions and responsibilities.

After identifying the three major levels of governmental systems, it is also important for non-profits to understand the information flow in this top-down hierarchy. A perceptive and detailed understanding of the information flow will allow the organization to independently discern the pain points and take the necessary precautionary measures while moving forward. At LFE, we did have our fair share of experience in getting stuck at the state-level educational bodies.

We had a fantastic run with state-level bodies in Maharashtra during the period 2015-2019. However, this was followed by political shifts and changes in the administrative leadership. As a result, there were times when we were struggling to get our programs launched.



An outline of the governmental hierarchy

This led to significant delays in program commitments and delivery.

However, we do have a collective awareness of the district-level decision-making bodies. Approaching them in a timely manner worked in our favour to proceed with our work at the local level. Lastly, being aware of the levels of the governmental structure helps non-profit organizations plan proposals in a way the government would be receptive to.

Once one has understood the structural levels, one must evaluate one's programs and growth aspirations. Then one should decide from the onset, after careful deliberation, which level of the government one needs to engage with. The level of the government you engage with depends on the nature of interventions, intended beneficiaries, and the capacity in which the government bodies and officials will be approached.

During its early stages of conception, LFE was quick to recognize that no single actor would have a solution to address the problem with a systemic lens. As a result, we adopted a parallel ground-up and top-down approach. This flowed from a decision to try and exist in the hierarchical government ecosystem methodically.

In our experience, district-level bodies are typically the most receptive, because they are closest to the end beneficiary. They have specific responsibilities and understand what is required in their geography. They are also in a position to make decisions.

However, they are often flooded with priorities set by ministries at the state and national levels. As a result, district-level bodies often seek assistance with program implementation. They are also open to accepting support from nonprofit organizations. As one ascends to higher levels of the government, decision-making becomes more complex. This is often due to political interventions and considerations.



Principle 2: Avoid building parallel structures and interventions

The urge to build parallel structures and interventions to leverage existing systems' potential must be resisted. It is acknowledged that what exists may not be good enough to serve the needs of the beneficiaries. NGOs may also have access to seasoned experts who can come up with better models. However, one must see how this expertise can be integrated with existing governmental initiatives, rather than building standalone solutions.

A structural solution directly parallel to what the government is doing results in fragmentation. It also complicates the ecosystem. There is a risk of such solutions not being scalable as well. For instance, the State Council of Education Research and Training (SCERT) is responsible for training teachers in government schools. However, many nonprofits invest significantly in developing modules for training teachers, which they approach the government with.

Rather than extending a helping hand to the teachers, this confuses the teachers and students. This is due to information overload on the same topic from multiple sources. This attempt to replace the existing system, rather than complement the government's efforts, leaves the objective unfulfilled.

The solutions that nonprofits outline should instead be based on a need analysis. This must complement the gaps in the system. By integrating their interventions into existing



government programs, nonprofits can build stronger, sustainable, impactful, and more strategic partnerships.

In our experience, government bodies are efficient at strategizing and operationalizing a plan. However, they grapple with the problems of planning and implementing monitoring structures at a larger scale. We believe that a nonprofit can be a valuable partner to a government body by assisting them with breaking up a program goal into milestones, and setting up monitoring structures for each milestone. This is of course, additional to the support in educational, technical, and pedagogical expertise that the nonprofit sector brings in.

Principle 3: Adopt a tactful and empathetic approach while working with government officials

To identify the person who will champion their cause within the system, nonprofits need to establish an in-depth understanding of the numerous roles and responsibilities of government officials. Leadership positions within government bodies are occupied by either political or administrative heads depending on the functions these are responsible for executing.

Political heads are typically in charge of big-picture tasks such as setting up the vision. It is the administrative heads who ensure the

implementation of the government's vision through well-planned policies and programs.

Let us understand this with an example from the education sector. The Minister of Education is at the hierarchy's top. The minister leads the vision and communication of the ministry. However, the implementation at the state-level is carried out by a secretary or an official above the level of an IAS officer. Most departments follow the same structural systems.

Even at the ground-level of districts and blocks, this is so. Although closer to the field, it is more a matter of integration of several departmental priorities and not just one. In our experience over the last several years, a district administration (Zilla Parishad), is a classic sizable unit of change. There is enough power, influence and resources at this level to be able to drive change at the scale of the district.

If a nonprofit is working on policy interventions, it is more likely to work with officials in leadership positions. One would work with the Principal Secretary and Education Commissioner at the state level. If a nonprofit seeks to work on strategic implementation, it is recommended to work with district and block level officials. These administrators oversee the implementation of programs within the communities. However, even when a nonprofit is working at a policy level, it needs to be aware of the conditions on the ground, and offer adequately rooted suggestions.

For nonprofit organizations, it is imperative not to assume an authoritative stance. This may come across as presumptuous, if they are perceived as suggesting that they can instruct the government on how to operate. The preconceived notion of public departments as slow, lazy, and ineffective must be obliterated. This is necessary to work efficiently and impact the educational ecosystem effectively. It is often systemic

uncertainties such as delays in fund disbursement, changes in political and bureaucratic leadership, and extremely tight deadlines that result in the inconsistent performance of these departments.

Moreover, government officials working at the ground-level have developed deep insights into the communities under their charge, and how they can be helped, due to their extensive work experience. However, they need more resources to drive change in these communities.

Therefore, while attempting to work with government officials, it is important to be sensitive to the various challenges they have experienced while working on the ground in a close capacity with the communities. Their expertise, ideas, and a strong sense of autonomy can be leveraged to benefit all the stakeholders involved.

No formal regulations restrict nonprofits from approaching government bodies for collaborative initiatives. However, the attitudes of the officials leading these bodies significantly influence the acceptance of any proposals. Some may welcome collaboration. Whereas others may perceive the proposal of alternate solutions as a threat to their work. Recognizing their apprehensions and finding ways to alleviate these fears respectfully and empathetically can go a long way in setting successful and sustainable partnerships.

In the end, the success, or failure, of forging such strategic partnerships with governments depends upon a complex interplay of a variety of factors. Government hierarchies, levels, diversity, and officials' attitudes are multifaceted and highly sensitive to deal with. However, such complexities can be navigated with proactive and tactful strategies combined with mindfulness.

Keeping in mind the three workable principles outlined above, you can tip the odds in your favor. This would help foster a

more productive and harmonious working relationship.

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Leadership For Equity

Reflections on our journey of engaging with the government system in Gopalganj, Bihar

Surya Prakash Rai

About Prayog

Prayog started in 2013 as a response to demands for books from some children in a village in Gopalganj, Bihar. The initial days were a bit confusing for us. This was because we had aimed it to be a library initiative. However, we were working on multiple things for children, and our focus went beyond the library work.

In 2018, our journey started with Wipro Foundation. Two members became Wipro Education Fellows. This turned the tide, as we started to brainstorm to define our purpose as an organization. We began to focus on library work. Wipro Foundation enabled us with a diverse set of capacity building programs. Our engagement with the Foundation also gave us an exposure to what is happening in different parts of the country. We could interact and engage with educators working deeply in education.

Credit also goes to Bookworm, Goa. They helped us understand the meaning of a library. Our story would be incomplete without them. Our current library work is spread out in government schools and community sites. It reaches out to more than 4,500 children.

Last year, we set up a library cum learning centre in Gopalganj. We also engage with multiple partners, both governmental and non-governmental. We help them shape their library initiatives.

We envision that all children should have access to diverse children's literature. We want them to share a joy of reading and meaning making. We strongly believe in promoting a library culture.

“A lot many NGOs come with letters from the Secretariat in Patna also. They come and go. And so will you.” In the summer of 2016, this was the first response that we got from a headmaster, when Prayog reached out to a government school in Gopalganj, Bihar. We had just received an approval letter from the district administration, after several follow-ups and presentations showing the work done so far. We had proposed an initiative that had some degree of spark for the government system.

The District Collector was convinced and had given us a go ahead. However, the final letter

was to be issued by the District Education Officer. There was reluctance from his side. Back in 2016, there weren't enough examples of NGOs collaborating with the Education Department in Bihar, neither at the district-level nor at the state-level. So, there was a lot of distrust. But the letter finally was issued on the insistence of a young Program Officer in the Education Department. They somehow understood what we were trying to do.

One of the conditions, which we deliberately got added in our approval letter, was attending the monthly review meetings of the Education Department, chaired by the



Prayog

Pre activity in Prayog's school library program

District Collector. This helped us a lot in understanding the functioning of the system at the district-level. We ensured that we get at least 10 minutes for presenting our work in the review meetings. Unlike some of the other departmental meetings, which were data enabled and hence presentations were used, this one was all about reviews of the key pointers for that month.

We started to ensure that we took at least a two-pager progress update, and circulated this amongst all the officials attending the meeting. We realized that this gave our work some visibility, when everyone started recognizing our names. We also started getting some time for sharing.

This was very encouraging for us. Just after two or three meetings, our 10 minutes slot got extended to windows of 30 minutes for sharing. It was possible because of the background work that we were doing on the ground.

The headmaster's comment was an eye-opener and a challenge. We converted this into an opportunity. We tried to understand the genesis of the comment. We found that

noone stayed back on the ground to support the school system. This is where we started focusing and involving the school system. In the initial days, we were not that welcome. However, we got to run our library sessions during the school hours.

The sessions were engaging. We ourselves were learning and are still learning. Our work with children brought smiles in their faces. All of them started to enjoy the sessions. Within a couple of months of the beginning of our intervention, children started demanding for library sessions from their teachers. It was this demand that made the headmaster be at ease. This also made our relations very cordial.

We understood that trust is being built, and we tried to ensure that this continues for long. Because of this, the headmaster, and the other teachers at the school, started becoming our flagbearers, whenever they had their internal meetings. Gradually, the headmaster started sharing their observations on our work in their block-level review meetings at the BRC with the Block Education Officer (BEO) and other BRPs and CRCCs.

Each day was a learning for us. We were slowly beginning to understand that we need to strengthen our sessions and engagements at the school level. We also saw that we need to keep engaging with the officials at the Block and District levels and updating them on the progress. Challenges were galore. However, everyone in the system was working with these challenges. We decided that we will not highlight any loopholes.

More than us sharing our experience at the district-level forums, it was the BEO who started sharing our work. He would ask us to brief our monthly work to him, prior to the monthly review meeting. He felt a sense of pride in sharing the work. We knew that “ownership” was building up for our work inside the system, and we were no more outsiders.

The district-level officials, including the District Collector, started visiting to see our work in the schools. We always stood with the headmaster as a part of the school system, not as an NGO. In fact, we believe that whatever efforts we are making, it is possible because of the entire school system. This has been highly appreciated by many, as we always give credit to the system.

Engagement with other schools

Our work is limited to one block only – this being Kuchaikote block in Gopalganj district. By the year 2019, the District Program Officers (DPOs) started urging us to talk at the State Education Department. By then, they were introduced to some education partners in their state-level review meetings. They thought that an NGO representation from Gopalganj district should also be there.

Based on their suggestions, we met the then State Project Director (SPD) of Bihar Education Project Council, who reviewed our work. He said that we can continue our work in the district, as approval was already there from the District Collector. He suggested, we choose a few more schools and try out

our model there. His suggestion was very pinpointed, “Intervene in those schools where you find the HM and other teachers to be willing for association with Prayog.”

We realized that it was a wonderful input. When we had the capacity (people and financial resources), we presented our work to the HMs in a block-level review meeting. We shared that we wanted to choose some more intervention schools. To our surprise, many were inviting us.

However, we had several rounds of discussions and shared our own constraints. We let them know that we cannot scale-up in so many schools. We proposed to intervene in select schools in two clusters only. 2019 onward, we started intervening in eight selected schools.

We do face some challenges

So much was happening now. But we always were able to work closely with the school system. We faced, and still face, some challenges. We have found difficulties in navigating around these. However, these have not been insurmountable.

The government system at the upper level always demands for scale – to reach out to more schools. For them there are ~2,000 schools in a district, and we are intervening in only 25. We have continuously shared that learnings from our intervention schools can be taken up by the Education Department.

However, it becomes difficult, because of many reasons. There is little provision of capacity building around libraries. We feel that a library cannot become functional without educators being trained on engaging children through books.

There is also little scope for the school system to procure books on their own. Much of this process is centralized. Book supplies for libraries still happen from the department-level at Patna. This has also



Prayog

An art activity in progress in a library

urged us to keep engaging with the Education Department at the state-level as well.

Working with the governmental system also has had its issues with transfers of officials. New functionaries take some time to understand our work. There are some challenges in engaging with the newly posted officials. These relate to administrative matters like approvals, etc. Fortunately, the HMs are not transferred. They have always been appreciative. They have been extending their support consistently. This is also a learning for us that working on the ground matters the most.

Some key approaches that worked well for us

It has been a wonderful experience working in Gopalganj's government schools. We are engaging in 25 schools now, reaching out to more than 4,500 children through our library work. Whatever we are doing is a result of a long-drawn process and the strategy that we have undertaken. Some critical pointers that we think have worked for us are mentioned below.

Our work matters, nothing else: It is the groundwork that ultimately matters. We have always focused on developing our

understanding and enhancing our skills. Our work is limited to 25 schools only. We are learning immensely each day. Due to this learning, we are now being invited by many government institutions to strengthen their library initiatives. During the lockdown, Purnea district's administration engaged us to design their panchayat library initiative and build the implementation team's capacities.

In 2023, we were invited by Bihar Rural Livelihoods Promotion Society to design and facilitate capacity building sessions for their library cadre from 32 districts of Bihar. This year, we also executed a library setting-up initiative in an aspirational district (Kiphire) in Nagaland. Here we have an MoU with the District Administration and Piramal Foundation. This has been possible because we have been building our own capacities first.

Being humble, polite, and good listeners: We listen to all the feedback very humbly, which is assessed and worked on. We have always tried to integrate the feedback in our thought process, and bring in positive changes based on the feedback received. The feedback could be for our interventions or on our approach of engagement. There came a time when a District Collector was highly dependent on our support, even for the tasks to be done by the Education Department. There was a sense of discomfort in some of the District Program Officers. They shared their concerns with us. We realized that it was not healthy for a good relationship. We slowly changed our gears to be more enabling to the officers.

Always crediting the achievements to the school system: We realize that we are a part of the place where we are intervening, i.e., the schools. Whatever work we do, say supporting the process of setting up and running a library, is just a sub-component of the entire school system's work. If any shifts are happening, that is because of the overall school environment and the support that we are getting from the school system. So, credit goes to them and not to us!

In all the forums, our narrative has always centred around the schools. Many of our intervention schools have received accolades and recognition at forums at the block and district levels. This has always motivated the entire school system to support us. One of the benefits that we have had because of this approach is that the schools have started utilizing their resources for libraries.

In 2016, there was no separate library room. However, in 2023, more than 60% of our intervention schools have a separate library room. These spaces display a diverse collection of children's literature. Here we ensure that children are engaging with the books.

Visibility and sharing of the work in different forums: We have always used opportunities to present our work in different forums at the district level. Regular updates to the District Collector, and officials of the Education Department, have ensured that they are all aware of our work and intervention strategies. We have been invited to be members in some of the committees. Two of these are the district-level committees on the Central Library and on Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN).

Gopalganj now has a functional District Central Library. Much of the credit goes to the administration. However, we just nudged the need to re-start it and make it functional. In a recent visit of the Chief Minister in the district, we were given a space to create a stall on our library work. This was widely acknowledged by officials of many line departments. The turnover of youth at the stall was a cause for joy.

Being with the teachers and building their capacities as per their needs: Before the Covid-19 pandemic, we were routinely engaging with teachers at the CRC level. We were engaging them in designing and developing a shared understanding on library work and on engaging with children. After the pandemic, we have identified one teacher to be dedicated for library sessions. We engage



Prayog

An activity during a capacity building program

with them in the ongoing sessions. Capacity building of teachers is a component of our work that needs much deeper engagement from our side.

The way ahead

The work we have been able to do is a result of our focus on building our own capacities on library work. We have always wanted to take a deep-dive approach rather than scale-up approach. This is the biggest risk that we have faced. This is because the government system has always urged us to scale, as 25 schools do not constitute a model for them.

However, we have persisted in our approach. Whenever there has been a demand, we have been able to convince people from the government of our need to stay focused on a limited number of schools. We have been fortunate to have received acceptance and support from the entire government system. We strive to take our learning further ahead.

Surya co-founded Prayog and has been shaping the organization by ensuring that all the team members are equally thoughtful and skilled in their engagements around reading and enabling children to read books. He is a Wipro Fellow since 2018.

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बिहार के सरकारी स्कूलों में किए गए प्रयोग एवं उनमें सरकार की सहभागिता

श्रीमती दिव्या सिंह एवं श्री अजीत कुमार

करुणोदय की शुरुआत अक्टूबर 2016 में सरकारी स्कूलों में गुणवत्तापूर्ण शिक्षा प्रदान करने के उद्देश्य से हुई थी। जिस समय करुणोदय ने बिहार में कार्य करना शुरू किया उस समय वहाँ बहुत ही कम गैर सरकारी संगठन कार्य कर रहे थे। कार्य के प्रारम्भ से ही सरकारी स्कूलों के साथ काम का हमारा अनुभव बहुत अच्छा रहा। करुणोदय की शुरुआत करने के लिए देश में विभिन्न जगह हो रहे प्रयोगों को आधार बनाया गया जिसमें मध्य प्रदेश के होशंगाबाद में हुए विज्ञान शिक्षण प्रयोग, अनिल सदगोपाल जी का नई तालीम पर प्रयोग, गिरीश महाले का पाण्डुरंग में प्रयोग, गिजुभाई बधेका का दिवास्वपन, अरविन्द गुप्ता का Toys from Trash, मनीष जैन के Creative learning Initiative के माध्यम से विज्ञान के प्रयोगों से लगातार सीखते हुए हमने बिहार के विद्यालयों के साथ एक का लम्बा प्रयोग शुरू किया जिसके अनुभवों और पढ़ावों को यहाँ पर साझा किया गया है।

सरकारी स्कूलों एवं समुदायों के साथ किए गए कार्य

हमने अपने काम की शुरुआत में दो तरीके अपनाए। पहला समुदाय के साथ सीधे तौर पर जुड़कर कार्य करना था। इसके लिए हमने बिहटा की एक छोटी सी अभावग्रस्त बस्ती को चुना। इस बस्ती में रहनेवाले लोगों का जीवन स्तर सामान्य से काफी निम्न था। यहाँ के लोग बिजली, पानी, आवास जैसी मूलभूत सुविधाओं से वंचित थे साथ ही यहाँ जातीय भेदभाव भी व्याप्त था। शुरुआत में करुणोदय द्वारा बच्चों को पढ़ाने से लेकर उनके आधार कार्ड बनवाने, सरकारी विद्यालयों में उनका दाखिला करवाने जैसे कार्य किए गए। इनमें से अधिकांश बच्चे पहली पीढ़ी के शिक्षार्थी थे। हालाँकि उनके माता-पिता शिक्षा के महत्त्व को कुछ हद तक समझते थे परन्तु शिक्षा की अनिवार्यता से अनभिज्ञ थे।

दूसरे तरीके के तहत हमने स्कूली व्यवस्था के साथ काम किया। इसके तहत शिक्षकों में गुणवत्तापूर्ण शिक्षा की समझ बनाने, शिक्षकों के साथ मिलकर के विज्ञान विषय पढ़ाने के लिए शिक्षण अधिगम सामग्री या टीएलएम बनाने, भाषा पढ़ाने के लिए गतिविधियाँ एवं गणित पढ़ाने के लिए गेम डिजाइन करने एवं कक्षाओं में उसके प्रयोग करके देखने जैसे कार्य किए गए। शुरुआत में मैं विज्ञान के प्रोजेक्ट्स के माध्यम से स्कूलों से जुड़ा। इस क्रम में मैंने मिडिल स्कूल अमहारा, मिडिल स्कूल राघोपुर, मिडिल स्कूल फुलवारीशरीफ के साथ कार्य प्रारम्भ किया। वर्ष 2017 में बेगूसराय जिले के साहेबपुर कमाल में चौकी गाँव में 2 मिडिल स्कूल एवं 1 प्राइमरी स्कूल के शिक्षकों को कार्य करने में हो रही कठिनाई को देखते हुए वहाँ पदस्थ कक्षा 8-1

के सभी भाषा एवं गणित के शिक्षकों को बुनियादी साक्षरता एवं संख्या ज्ञान का 3 दिन का प्रशिक्षण दिया गया और समय समय पर उनका सहयोग दिया गया। इस प्रयोग के बाद बच्चों में आए सकारात्मक बदलावों से इस काम को एक नई दिशा मिल गई और बच्चों के साथ साथ शिक्षकों के साथ काम करना भी हमारे काम का हिस्सा बन गया।

हमारे कार्यों के दौरान हमने यह देखा कि भवन, शिक्षकों और बच्चों की पर्याप्त संख्या जैसी सभी मूलभूत सुविधाएँ होने के बावजूद भी इन स्कूलों के शिक्षक सिर्फ दिखावे के लिए कार्य कर रहे थे और उनमें गुणवत्तापूर्ण शिक्षा प्रदान करने को लेकर उदासीनता का भाव था। जब हमने इसके पीछे के कारणों को समझने की कोशिश की तो पाया कि शिक्षकों में मूल रूप से प्रेरणा एवं कौशल की कमी थी। इसके साथ ही सरकारी नौकरी को आरामदायक नौकरी मानने की समाज की धारणा ने भी उन्हें उदासीन बना दिया था। इस सन्दर्भ में सरकार के प्रयासों की बात करें तो वह भी गुणवत्तापूर्ण शिक्षा में उतनी रुचि नहीं लेती और न ही इस दिशा में कोई खास प्रयास करती है। न तो शिक्षकों को नियमित अन्तराल पर सेवाकालीन प्रशिक्षण प्रदान किए जाते हैं और न ही उनके कामों के निरीक्षण के लिए स्कूलों में अधिकारियों के नियमित दौरे होते हैं। इन्हीं कारणों से ये स्कूल सरकारी योजनाओं को अमल में लाने का स्थान मात्र बनकर रह जाते हैं।

शिक्षा विभाग एवं डायट के साथ किए गए काम

हमारी संस्था द्वारा स्कूलों में किए जा रहे प्रयोगों से शिक्षकों के पढ़ाने के तरीकों में एवं बच्चों के सीखने में सकारात्मक बदलाव दिखने लगे। कक्षा तीसरी से लेकर पाँचवीं तक के कई बच्चे पढ़ना सीख गए। इसके साथ ही हमने स्कूलों में हुए इन बदलावों को टिकाऊ बनाने की जरूरत भी महसूस की। इसके लिए हमने क्लस्टर, ब्लॉक एवं जिला शिक्षा कार्यालय के साथ सीधे जुड़कर कार्य करना प्रारम्भ किया। स्कूलों तक पहुँचना हमारे सामने मौजूद सबसे बड़ी चुनौती थी और शिक्षा विभाग के सहयोग के बिना यह कार्य आसान नहीं था। हमें यह समझ आया कि स्कूलों में गुणवत्तापूर्ण शिक्षा सुनिश्चित करने के किसी भी प्रयास में जिले को एक इकाई के तौर पर मानकर कार्य करना जरूरी है और यह तरीका हमारे कार्य में बहुत प्रभावी साबित हुआ।

इसी कड़ी में जनवरी 2019 में हमने क्लस्टर स्तर पर शिक्षकों के लिए बुनियादी साक्षरता एवं संख्या ज्ञान पर आधारित कार्यशाला आयोजित करने की सोची। इसे आयोजित करने के लिए शासन से आदेश प्राप्त करने में हमें काफी चुनौती का सामना करना पड़ा।



Karunodaya

और जिला शिक्षा पदाधिकारी एवं जिला कार्यक्रम पदाधिकारी से बार बार मिलने के बाद भी जिला शिक्षा विभाग ने आदेश नहीं दिया। लेकिन इससे एक अच्छी बात यह हुई कि बार-बार जाने से शिक्षा विभाग के बहुत से अधिकारियों से हमारी जान-पहचान हो गई।

कोरोना अवधि में हमारे द्वारा किए गए कार्य

2020 में कोरोना की वजह से शिक्षा व्यवस्था काफी प्रभावित हो गई थी और लगभग सभी काम ऑनलाइन हो रहे थे। इसी बीच डिपार्टमेंट ऑफ साइंस एंड टेक्नोलॉजी ने इंस्पायर अवार्ड कार्यक्रम शुरू किया और छठवीं से लेकर बारहवीं तक के बच्चों से अपने आसपास की किसी समस्या के समाधान के लिए सुझाव माँगे गए। इसमें गया जिले से मात्र 15 पंजीकरण हुए एवं 38 जिलों में गया 32वीं रैंक पर था। इस पर प्रिंसिपल सेक्रेटरी ने क्षुब्ध होकर जिला शिक्षा पदाधिकारी को कारण बताओ नोटिस जारी कर दिया। मैंने जिला शिक्षा पदाधिकारी से इसके लिए काम करने के बारे में बात की और वे राजी हो गए। करुणोदय, जिला कार्यालय एवं 260 क्लस्टर रिसोर्स पर्सन ने मिलकर काम किया, 10 ऑनलाइन सत्र आयोजित किए और हम 5000 पंजीकरण प्राप्त करने में सफल हो गए। इस प्रकार गया पूरे बिहार में तीसरी रैंक पर आ गया। इसी प्रकार दीक्षा में भी पहलेपहल 1 प्रतिशत से भी कम पंजीकरण हुए थे और हमारे प्रयासों से पंजीकरणों की संख्या बढ़कर 90 प्रतिशत से भी अधिक पहुँच गई थी। इन सफलताओं से शिक्षा विभाग में हमारी अच्छी पैठ बन गई और अधिकारियों से विश्वसनीय रिश्ते बने। इन्हीं विश्वसनीय रिश्तों

की बदौलत हमें शिक्षा विभाग द्वारा आगामी समय में शासकीय विद्यालय में छात्रों एवं शिक्षकों के साथ कार्य करने की अनुमति लिखित रूप से दी गई। इसके साथ ही विभाग में APO/ CRCC की तिमाही बैठक में भागीदारी करने, शासकीय रीडिंग कैम्पेन का हिस्सा बनने, जिला एवं ब्लॉक समिति, स्कॉलरशिप समिति, स्वच्छ विद्यालय पुरस्कार, निपुण भारत 2030 की सदस्यता के साथ-साथ जिला कलक्टर की बैठक में व जिला शिक्षा विभाग राज्य एवं जिला स्तर पर होनेवाले नए-नए कार्यक्रमों में भी करुणोदय को शामिल किया जाता है।

करुणोदय फाउंडेशन ने निपुण भारत मिशन योजना के तहत चलाए गए 100 डे रीडिंग कैम्पेन में भी योगदान दिया। इसमें यह योजना बनाई गई थी कि शिक्षक बच्चों के छोटे-छोटे समूह बनाकर या व्हाट्सएप ग्रुप के माध्यम से बच्चों को शिक्षित करेंगे। इसके लिए गया जिले में करुणोदय फाउंडेशन को यह जिम्मेदारी सौंपी गई। हमने सबसे पहले शिक्षकों का एक व्हाट्सएप ग्रुप बनाया और उसमें साप्ताहिक कार्य योजना भेजनी शुरू की। इसमें पाठ्य सामग्री को नियमित ग्रुप में भेजा जाने लगा, जिससे शिक्षकों के लिए इस ऑनलाइन सामग्री के माध्यम से पढ़ाना आसान हो गया। इस अभियान में चार हजार से ज्यादा शिक्षकों को जोड़ा गया। गया जिले के सभी शिक्षकों ने व्हाट्सएप के द्वारा बच्चों की शिक्षा को बेहतर बनाने के लिए इस अभियान में हिस्सा लिया। जिन शिक्षकों के पास डिजिटल क्लास की सुविधा नहीं थी उन्होंने बच्चों के छोटे छोटे समूह बनाकर पढ़ाया। इससे बच्चों का शिक्षा से जुड़ाव बना रहा और बच्चे इससे लाभान्वित होने लगे।

कार्य करने के दौरान होने वाली चुनौतियों में से एक मुख्य चुनौती सरकारी विभाग में अधिकारियों के ऊपर कार्य का अत्यधिक भार एवं उनकी बदली है। यही नहीं एक आदेश को निकलवाने में सदैव अधिक समय एवं अतिरिक्त ऊर्जा की हानि होती है। इसके अलावा कुछ शिक्षक बीएलओ होते हैं और उन पर काम का काफी बोझ होता है जिससे वे पूरा सहयोग नहीं कर पाते हैं। इसके अलावा लिटरेसी एवं लाइब्रेरी प्रोग्राम में डेटा को एकत्रित करना बड़ी चुनौती है।

लाइब्रेरी एवं लिटरेसी प्रोग्राम

गया जिले के डीईओ राजदेव राम सर, आनन्द सर एवं बिनोदानन्द झा सर के सहयोग से अन्ततः शासन से प्राप्त आदेश का अनुपालन करते हुए करुणोदय ने लिटरेसी एवं लाइब्रेरी प्रोग्राम को अमली जामा पहनाया। इस कार्यक्रम के प्रारम्भ में अपनी क्षमता और यथार्थता को ध्यान में रखकर गया हमने जिले के 15 स्कूलों का चयन किया। इन स्कूलों में से ऐसे 25 शिक्षकों को चुना गया जिनमें अपने कार्य के प्रति समर्पण और सीखने की ललक थी और कार्यक्रम के प्रथम चरण में उन्हें तीन दिवसीय प्रशिक्षण प्रदान किया गया।

इसके पश्चात उन 15 विद्यालयों में पुस्तकालय स्थापित किए गए और पुस्तकालय कक्ष में प्रिंट रिच दीवार, अलमारी, बच्चों की पुस्तकों का चयनित संग्रह, दरी, चार्ट, स्टेशनरी का सामान आदि की व्यवस्था की गई। पहले तो करुणोदय की टीम द्वारा नियमित विद्यालयों में जाकर स्वयं समस्त गतिविधियों का संचालन किया गया, फिर धीरे-धीरे इन्हीं गतिविधियों को शिक्षकों के साथ मिलकर किया गया। समय के साथ शिक्षकों ने इन गतिविधियों एवं प्रक्रियाओं को आत्मसात कर लिया। दस महीने के पश्चात शिक्षकों को पुनः तीन दिवसीय प्रशिक्षण प्रदान किया गया।

इस कार्यक्रम का मूल्यांकन करने के लिए हमने अकादमिक सत्र की शुरुआत और अन्त में क्रमशः बच्चों का बेसलाइन टेस्ट और एंडलाइन टेस्ट लिया और इनमें हमें काफी सकारात्मक नतीजे हासिल हुए। जहाँ बेसलाइन में कक्षा 5-3 तक के मात्र %30 बच्चे वर्ग सापेक्ष पढ़ना जानते थे वहीं एंडलाइन में यह प्रतिशत बढ़कर %72 हो गया। इसके साथ ही शिक्षकों ने भी अपने स्कूल में पुस्तकालय का सेट अप करना सीख लिया व उनमें बाल साहित्य एवं कहानी कहने के कौशल भी विकसित हुए।

लाइब्रेरी एवं लिटरेसी प्रोग्राम की सफलता एवं करुणोदय के अथक प्रयासों के फलस्वरूप शासकीय स्तर पर भी कई बदलाव हुए और हमारे कार्यों को गति मिली। जिला मुख्यालय द्वारा हमें शिक्षक प्रशिक्षण का आयोजन करने के लिए आधिकारिक आदेश तैयार कर के दिए जाने लगे। राज्य सरकार की ओर से यह निर्देश दिया गया कि प्रत्येक कक्षा में एक सप्ताह में पुस्तकालय के दो कालांशों रखे जाएँ।

इसके साथ ही बच्चों में पढ़ने की आदत को विकसित करने के उद्देश्य से राज्य शासन द्वारा प्रत्येक विद्यालय में 200 -150 बाल

पुस्तकें एवं उनके रखरखाव के लिए 6000 रुपए रैंक खरीदने के लिए प्रदान किए गए। इस मुद्दे को महत्वपूर्ण मानते हुए विधानसभा में भी इस पर चर्चा की गई।

बुनियादी साक्षरता एवं संख्या ज्ञान के लिए स्कूलों में करुणोदय संस्था द्वारा अपनाए गए नए तरीकों और इनके फलस्वरूप स्कूलों में आए बदलावों से हमें काफी प्रेरणा मिली और हमने इनके बारे में डाइट के साथ चर्चा की। इसके पश्चात डाइट द्वारा हमें वहाँ होने वाले शिक्षक प्रशिक्षण में हिस्सेदारी का अवसर प्राप्त हुआ। इस प्रशिक्षण के माध्यम से शिक्षकों को पुस्तकों को इस्तेमाल करने के ऐसे कई नए कौशल बताए गए जो समझने में तो आसान लग रहे थे पर विद्यालय में प्रायोगिक रूप से करने में मुश्किल प्रतीत हो रहे थे। इसके साथ-साथ करुणोदय को दीक्षा एप पर कोर्स शुरू करने के अवसर दिए गए हैं व डाइट लेक्चरर के साथ कंटेंट बनाने, कंटेंट की समीक्षा के अधिकार दिए गए हैं। करुणोदय को इन पर्सन प्रशिक्षण, डाटा एकत्रित करने के अलावा वीडियो कॉन्फ्रेंसिंग जैसे महत्वपूर्ण कार्यों का हिस्सा भी बनाया गया है।

करुणोदय जिन शासकीय विद्यालयों के साथ काम कर रहा है उनके द्वारा व जिनमें कार्य नहीं कर रहा लेकिन जो करुणोदय के इस कार्यक्रम के बारे में जानते हैं उनके द्वारा नियमित रूप से करुणोदय से पुस्तकालय के संचालन हेतु सहयोग की अपेक्षा की जाती रही है।

करुणोदय के द्वारा संचालित किए जा रहे सभी कार्यक्रमों से न केवल बच्चों के सीखने के स्तर में वृद्धि हुई है बल्कि उनमें समझने, कल्पना करने, तर्क करने, चर्चा का हिस्सा बनने एवं प्रत्येक सह शैक्षणिक गतिविधि में आत्मविश्वास के साथ भागीदारी करने की क्षमता का विकास भी हुआ है। बच्चे अपने कक्षा के कार्यों में भी रुचि दर्शा रहे हैं और प्रगति दर्शा रहे हैं। इसके अलावा शिक्षकों के पढ़ाने के तरीके में बदलाव के कारण वे भी रुचिपूर्ण ढंग से बच्चों के पठन में भागीदार बन रहे हैं। इस प्रकार विद्यालय की इन इकाइयों (बच्चों, शिक्षकों, भवन एवं प्रबन्धन) में बदलाव से स्कूल के सम्पूर्ण माहौल में आए सकारात्मक बदलाव को स्पष्ट तौर पर देखा जा सकता है।

लेखक समूह

श्रीमती दिव्या सिंह वर्तमान रेवा, मध्य प्रदेश में माध्यमिक स्कूल की शिक्षिका के तौर पर कार्यरत हैं। इन्होंने टाटा ट्रस्ट की पहल पराग से लाइब्रेरी एजुकेटर का कोर्स भी किया है। इनसे divyasingh0617@gmail.com पर सम्पर्क किया जा सकता है।

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संपर्क करें:   

Learnings and challenges from working with governments

Notes from the journey of Digantar

A conversation with Rohit Dhankar

Rohit Dhankar is Founder-Secretary of Digantar, Jaipur. Digantar endeavors to nurture self-motivated and independent learners equipped with the ability to think critically. Rohit trained as a teacher under David Horsburgh in the Neelbagh School and taught at the elementary level for about 15 years in a Digantar school. He has also worked as a Professor of Philosophy of Education at Azim Premji University (APU), Bengaluru. Rohit has been part of many initiatives in developing material and curriculum through various committees and collaborative efforts across the country. His interest in the curriculum for school education and teacher education resulted in collaborations with NCERT and various SCERTs. His interest in education studies resulted in starting the Foundations of Education Program at Digantar in 2005, and collaborations with TISS and several NGOs in developing the MA Education (Elementary) program of TISS, Mumbai.

Samuhik Pahal: Digantar has had its own autonomous interventions in the education space. It has, however, also collaborated with governments extensively across the country. What have been some of the key milestones of this journey?

Rohit Dhankar: We have interacted and collaborated with the government system in a diverse manner. Some of these have involved the government supporting us to do something. In some other processes, we worked with bodies created by the Department of Education for certain projects.

When we started Digantar as an organization, we ran as a school for about 10 years. And

then when we got registered as a Society, we started Digantar Schools in a rural area. This region had a very low literacy rate. Girl children were not going to schools. Then the central government supported our project. This was in 1989. This was at a time when the central government was supporting innovative and experimental projects in education. Non-Formal Education (NFE) programs were then being supported by the central government through financial grants. Many of the volunteer agencies/NGOs working in education today were also supported through this process. This governmental support for our schools continued for about 13/14 years, till 2002.



Digantar

I will just mention two issues that we faced in this project. Their sanction letters came in around August/September. The new financial year starts in April. Their sanction letters never came before the end of July. Therefore, one never knew for one/two quarters about the exact budget, or if the government is going to support in that particular year or not. Verbally they always said “Yes,” that they have accepted our project, and that the

sanction letters, etc., will come. But we never knew the figures, the budget, etc. beforehand.

However, this was a very stable support. There were many meetings in which people interacted and learnt from each other. There were also some very sensitive people in the government who helped us, and tried to connect people with each other.

Now let me share the second set of challenges. Because of the delays in the communication regarding the sanctions, and the late release of the funds, some serious problems arose. A repercussion of this was that the first instalment was released sometime by the end of September. One was supposed to utilize these funds by that time. The second instalment came in March. The funds were supposed to be utilized by the end of the financial year, that is by the 31st of March. They expected that the organizations would have rolling funds, that the NGOs would spend their own money, and then this would be reimbursed at the end of six months. Now, for small organizations like us, who had just started and didn't have any money at all, and no other project, this was a serious issue. Twice it so happened that we could not utilize the funds because it came very late. Rather than carrying it to the next financial year, they cut down our budget.

Despite the above-mentioned difficulties, there was some financial stability in the operations in the initial days, because of our collaboration with the government. The government, from their own side, created workshops and consultations in which interactions with other people happened. There was a lot of learning from other people's experiences. We could also highlight our project among the relevant people. So, these were the benefits. However, financial flows were a serious problem. This seriously hampered the work in terms of development of ideas and in undertaking activities.

Samuhik Pahal: Digantar also worked extensively with Lok Jumbish, which is seen



Digantar

as a very interesting intervention in the social sector. How was that experience for the organization?

Rohit Dhankar: Lok Jumbish was an autonomous body created by the government in 1992. It had people from the government and people from NGOs. At that time, it was headed by Mr Anil Bordia. With Lok Jumbish, we had a very good experience of working. This was a vibrant body. At the policy level, we were involved in meetings, and deciding training modules, etc.

At one time, we also ran close to 300 Sahaj Shiksha Kendras. This was somewhat different from other NFE centers because Lok Jumbish agreed to raise the salary of the teachers to ₹450 per month, when other people were getting something like ₹200. They also allowed us to run the schools for four hours, rather than for two hours. In most of the places, we could decide the timings as well, in consultation with the communities.

This was, generally speaking, a very positive experience. When Pokharan-II happened in 1998, SIDA (Swedish International Development agency), which was financially supporting the program, ended its involvement. And then the government did not support the initiative with its own funds. Since the program was running, we didn't want to close our schools. We had to spend some money. So again, financially this hurt us. However, overall, this was a very good experience.

Samuhik Pahal: Thanks for sharing these very interesting set of narratives from an iconic



program. How did these initial experiences shape the organization's subsequent collaborations with the government?

Rohit Dhankar: Our third interaction/work with the government was in Madhya Pradesh (MP). We got an invitation to be a part of the alternative schooling initiatives of the DPEP (District Primary Education Program) in the state. There were several other - seven or eight - NGOs as well.

At that time, the person heading this was an IAS officer, Ms. Amita Sharma. We presented a conceptualization of teaching at the primary level, our pedagogy and material, and our concept of a school. They finally accepted this model, and we started working.

That was a very enriching experience. We had to conceptualize the school. They agreed with our proposal of paying, I think, ₹800 or ₹1,000 to teachers at that time, because we insisted on that.

They agreed to a pedagogy where the schools would not be divided into grades, but would be, in a certain sense, integrated schools. They also agreed to specially create material (which we developed), and to send about 45 senior DIET and SCERT personnel for a three-weeks long training. This was considered very long at that point of time.

We were able to create a group of supervisors to guide these schools in all the districts of the then Madhya Pradesh state. At one time, there were up to 550 Alternative schools.

Then, later they increased them to 5,000. So, in all these 5,000 schools, they were using material which we had produced at Digantar, in collaboration with them. There was a successful running of schools with a certain ideology, philosophy, and pedagogy.

Then, suddenly they started opening tens of thousands of schools based on that material. We thought that, although the situation was going in the right direction, they were diluting the idea and spreading it too thin. However, overall, this was a good experience for Digantar.

I do believe that we were able to do something for the children. There are people in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh (which was a part of MP then) even now, who remember this program. They think that the program influenced their ways of thinking and working in education.

Then we also worked with Government of Chhattisgarh, after the state was created. At that time, ICICI's Social Initiative unit was looking for organizations who could work with them. They went around meeting several organizations, perhaps 25 or 26 of them, throughout India. They finally picked up Digantar, Eklavya and Vidhya Bhavan. We became partners – four in number, with ICICI.

We (the three NGOs) negotiated collectively with ICICI. They created space for us in the way in which we wanted. ICICI provided the financial support. We were to work as their resource organizations. And if a government liked the plan, then ICICI would foot the bill. This ran quite well, up to a certain extent.

So, finally, Government of Chhattisgarh agreed to become partners in this process. We (Vidya Bhavan and Eklavya, with Digantar) worked on curriculum development and the development of textbooks. These were very interesting experiences.

The idea of curriculum was, sort of, vaguely understood in Madhya Pradesh at the time

of the Alternative Schools (1995-96), and in Chhattisgarh, at the time of our collaboration with them (around 2002).

A curriculum, which gives a vision of what you are trying to do in school education, was missing in both the places. What was called curriculum was syllabus, a list of topics in each school subject.

Fortunately, people were sensible. In both the places ideas of curriculum as a much more comprehensive route plan for achieving aims of education were accepted. However, agreements for collaboration, providing adequate number of people, etc., were often not honoured by government officials.

Sudden demands used to come as well. These were difficult to meet in a very short period. However, this was a good experience, in terms of understanding the government structure, and working closely with two other good NGOs.

Samuhik Pahal: This journey has spanned the last 30-35 years. Do you see any patterns with respect to how the State-NGO relationship has shifted during this period of time, especially in the domain of education?

Rohit Dhankar: I see two things, certain stable things, and certain patterns. We started interacting with governments sometime in 1991. So, earlier as an organization, we did not have much interface with the government. However, we have interacted with governments for the past 32-33 years now.

One thing is very clear to me, and it became clear in the first three years itself. In the government, assessment of the idea and understanding of education or the soundness of work is not the primary factor. If an organization reaches government officials through the right channels, then only it works.

Funds are always preferred over ideas. So, suppose you have very sound ways of

educating children. You propose something to the government.

At the same time, say some corporate foundation goes there with funding support, and they want to do something which might be very shoddy. You will be shunted out by the government, and that foundation would be given space. This seems to be a consistent pattern.

When we started as an agency, at that time there was an openness to collaborate with NGOs. The government thought that they can reach the ground level in collaboration with the NGOs only. They also thought at the time that if, say, there is a training program or scheme for running NFE centers for children in rural areas, then the government would provide the framework and the money, and the organization at the ground level will work freely on implementing this.

So, within the framework, you were free to act. And you were welcome to support the government program. Now two things have happened. Governments are not open to NGOs.

These days even most of the corporate foundations want to work on the ground directly. They want NGOs to implement their programs, which have been developed based on some sort of ideas of their own, or maybe by some consultants.

But the space for NGOs, and the acceptability of independent organizations



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for the government, has shrunk drastically. Similarly, the avenues for funding have also shrunk. This is because most of the large corporations have started thinking that they will work directly on the ground or that they will formulate the program and they want partners who can implement their programs on the ground.

So, the space for someone who may have sound ideas and can work very sincerely and may produce some results, that freedom has shrunk drastically. I am not saying that it is zero. However, this space has been shrinking.

Earlier, there were some government officials who understood the scenario, understood education, and were also concerned about it. However, you could count them on fingers. There were not many. I wouldn't be able to say much about the situation now.

There is one thing one consistently noticed in the government system. Officials, particularly at the secretary and commissioner level, always want to do something very quickly before they are transferred in two years, so that they get credit for doing something.

These days you don't succeed with the government unless and until you have funding assurance from an external, private source. There are also so many people working with the governments now with a very diverse set of agendas.

So, how to get a space in which something consistently could be done with the schools? That is another problem. Personally, I feel that people who want to work at large-scale should create a consortium in which there have to be both NGOs and funders. Then as a group they can approach the government and try to do something.

Another way to go for a small organization is to cultivate relationships at the local level, and then it is possible. However, the backing of funding would be required even for that. The government is unlikely to support anything of this nature with their own funds available in the budget.

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