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National Gender and Child Centre

Silver Jubilee Special Issue



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*National Gender and Child Centre
Silver Jubilee Special Issue*



December 31, 2020
Volume 60, Number 3

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National Academy of Administration



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The Administrator
National Gender and Child Centre
Silver Jubilee Special Issue

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स्मृति जूबिन इरानी
Smriti Zubin Irani



मंत्री
महिला एवं बाल विकास और वस्त्र
भारत सरकार
नई दिल्ली

Minister
Women & Child Development and Textiles
Government of India
New Delhi



MESSAGE

Civil Service is one of the most important instruments of service delivery in a democracy. The Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration is an institution that does not limit itself to just training young administrators but also instills in them the right kind of values thereby making them sensitive towards the needs and concerns of society at large while contextualizing National priorities. I have particular appreciation for the service rendered by the National Gender Centre of the Academy which has been carefully curating and conducting courses for orienting civil servants towards issues impacting women and children thereby adequately equipping them to develop strategies to address societal challenges & eliminating malpractices.

India recognizes the centrality of gender equality and women's empowerment in all aspects of our developmental agenda. Women-led development is the cornerstone of inclusive growth. Hence, highest priority is attached to ensuring gender parity in all spheres of life while eliminating all forms of gender-based discrimination. Several of our legislations have been strong enablers of women empowerment and protection of children especially girls.

Honourable Prime Minister of India Shri Narendra Modi has stated that 'Good governance depends on ability to take responsibility by both administration as well as people'. It is, thus, important that we endeavour to continuously spread awareness and educate every individual towards creating a gender sensitive and inclusive Nation. The clarion call of *Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao* needs to be answered by all while ensuring that the theme of *Beti Badhao* becomes the very centre of our efforts in the years to come.

I congratulate the National Gender Centre and Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration on successful completion of 25 years of the Centre. I also extend my good wishes for future endeavours of the NGC & LBSNAA, for their pursuit of excellence will enable future generations of administrative leaders to better serve the cause of a New India.



(Smriti Zabin Irani)

डॉ. जितेंद्र सिंह

केन्द्रीय राज्य मंत्री (स्वतंत्र प्रभार)
उत्तर पूर्वी क्षेत्र विकास मंत्रालय,
राज्य मंत्री प्रधान मंत्री कार्यालय,
कार्मिक, लोक शिकायत तथा पेंशन मंत्रालय,
परमाणु ऊर्जा विभाग तथा अंतरिक्ष विभाग,
भारत सरकार



सत्यमेव जयते

DR. JITENDRA SINGH

Union Minister of State (Independent Charge),
Development of North Eastern Region (DeNER),
Minister of State, Prime Minister's Office,
Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions,
Department of Atomic Energy & Department of Space,
Government of India

New Delhi, 17th December, 2020



MESSAGE

Gender equality is enshrined in the Indian Constitution in its Preamble and has been ensured through the Fundamental Rights, Duties and Directive Principles. India has also ratified various international conventions and human rights instruments committing to gender equality. Key among them is the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1993.

In 2015, countries including India adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). With a dedicated goal of gender equality and gender indicators cutting through 11 other goals, there is a strong realization that gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls is essential to achieve progress across all the goals and targets. The government has taken some important initiatives to promote gender equality and welfare. These include the *Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao* campaign, the Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act, 2017, Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana, POSHAN Abhiyaan and the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana and changes such as inclusion of 'Transgender' as a separate category of gender, women getting family pension even in pendency of divorce and permanent employment in the Indian Army and Indian Navy.

National Gender Centre is committed towards creating a better India for and with women by recognizing the potential and power of building institutional capacities and those of elected women representatives as drivers of change. Our endeavour is to continue this work so that it reaches each and every department that is working towards the upliftment of women in India and bring about a transformational shift.

It is my pleasure to share that the National Gender Centre (NGC), Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration (LBSNAA), is bringing out a Special Issue of Administrator on the completion of 25 years. This special edition of the Administrator not only captures the different aspects of the Centre's journey but also includes the shortlisted dissertations by Officer Trainees of Phase II which were recognized by the Centre for their contribution in promotion of Gender Equality and Children's Rights.

I congratulate National Gender Centre, Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration Mussoorie, in this endeavour and support them to continue this work so that it reaches each and every official/department that is working towards the upliftment of women and children in India and bring about a transformational shift.



(Dr. Jitendra Singh)

MBBS (Stanley, Chennai)

MD Medicine, Fellowship (AIIMS, NDL)

MNAMS Diabetes & Endocrinology



From the Desk of the Chairperson, NG&CC

The National Gender Centre is completing 25 years of its journey towards mainstreaming Gender Equality and Children's Rights through capacity building, empirical research and quality publications.

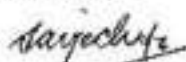
The present issue showcases the best of the research conducted by young IAS officers in areas of women's empowerment and entitlements due to children under various policies, programs and schemes of the government. The studies included in the issue not only critically analyze the socio-economic and structural inequalities based on gender, but also enumerate the challenges related to implementation. They also recommend practical ways and means of effecting change. I take this opportunity to congratulate the officers whose dissertation papers are included in this issue. The officer's zeal and motivation is matched with academic vigor.

I also take this opportunity to place on record my gratitude to the Union Minister for Women and Child Development (WCD), Ms. Smriti Irani for mentoring the Center, for her insightful address to the officers of NGC and for sharing her vision for women and children of the country. Based on her suggestion, the Center has been renamed as the National Gender and Child Centre (NGCC) in 2020.

Union Minister of Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT), Dr. Jitendra Singh has always been a source of guidance and support in all the endeavors of the Academy and the NGCC. Our gratitude to him cannot be expressed in words.

As the Chairperson of the Centre, I acknowledge the hard work and commitment of team NGCC led by Ms. Alankrita Singh for their sincere efforts and hard work in bringing out this special issue of The Administrator.

I am confident that this publication would serve as a valuable guide for a range of stakeholders working towards fostering rights of women and children.


(Sanjeev Chopra)
8th December, 2020
17 Agrahayana 1942

Note from Founder Executive Director

Sarojini Ganju Thakur

Congratulations to the National Gender Centre on its Silver Jubilee. It is indeed a tribute to the numerous Directors of LBSNAA and Executive Directors and staff of the National Gender Centre (NGC) that this institution is celebrating 25 years of contribution to gender responsive governance. As many of us in public service know, sustainability of initiatives taken individually is challenging. Therefore, as the person who sowed the seeds for the NGC and have remained associated with its activity from time to time, there is a tremendous feeling of satisfaction not merely at its survival, but also at its story of growth, adaptability and change. Its critical role and contribution to capacity building in gender and to policy implementation and monitoring of gender has been recognized by development agencies as well as the Government. Of all the centres at LBSNAA, the NGC is unique in that it is the only one which can boast of functioning for 25 years without being a scheme of Government. It has been self reliant, raising its own resources. Its very existence stands as a testimony of the vision, initiative and hard work of the NGC teams from 1995 onwards.

How did it all begin? Institutional history is often lost, and this jubilee is an opportunity to capture the past and contextualise the future. 1995 was epoch making for gender equality worldwide with the 4th International Conference for Women culminating in the Beijing Platform for Action. By a propitious coincidence the Gender Studies Unit (GSU) was established the same year at LBSNAA. This was at a time in India when the word 'gender', apart from it being a grammatical term, had not entered most people's lexicon. Several factors coalesced to enable this. First, after the successful conduct of 6 week long **Gender and Development Training for Trainers** courses for State and National level institutions under the Gender Planning Training Project (GPTP), a collaborative effort of DoPT and ODA, as Course Coordinator there was an imperative to institutionalize gender training both within the Academy and the Government system. The proposal for the Gender Studies Unit

emanated from that. However, the translation from idea to reality was only possible because of the whole hearted support and continuous encouragement of the then Director, LBSNAA, Dr. N.C. Saxena.

LBSNAA was blazing a trail - as a national level institute, an apex organisation, it would mainstream gender training in all its own courses and also for other national and state level institutions. The vision was strategic - to create a multiplier and impact in a cascading mode. In the initial phase under the GTP project we built capacity in 5 States - MP, Karnataka, UP, Maharashtra, Rajasthan. This formed the nucleus of gender trainers in the State. Recently, an assignment on Capacity Assessment of State level Training Institutions provided me with an opportunity to revisit some of these States. It was heartening to see that some of the initial trainees had set up units and ensured that gender was a regular part of the curriculum. In other cases they carried the gender expertise with them wherever they were posted. This modus operandi has characterized much of the work of the NGC. Recently, in 2016-2017, under the UN WOMEN **Gender and Governance** programme LBSNAA was involved in capacity building for gender in State Level Institutions of Rural Development and as recently as 2019 programmes were organised on **Eliminating Violence Against Women and Children; Developing a Multi-sectoral Approach**. The latter involved the judiciary, both a judges and trainers, and police and administrative officials . These are just a few of many examples of the capacity building programmes for various national and state level institutions, and in addition to the fact that gender is mainstreamed into all courses at the Academy. Going forward too, LBSNAA needs to continue to be involved selectively in trainings which strengthen the overall system of governance.

The second part of the vision was about the creation and dissemination of knowledge. As a result of some research work on Gender and the IAS undertaken in the GSU, DoPT supported a larger research work on Gender and the Civil Services. This led to NGC's first publication: **An Agenda for Action: Gender issues in the Civil Services**. It was a very detailed profiling of the differences between men and women in the civil services in terms of family and educational backgrounds, postings but also covered other issues, which today are talked about but which were then still not openly discussed or addressed - cadre based marriage, sexual harassment and stress. This was well before the Bisakha Guidelines and POSH! This study actually led to workshops being organised by DoPT in different parts of the country.

Much like this volume of the Administrator, the GSU in its first year as its contribution to the discourse on Gender and Development pre - Beijing brought out a Special Issue of the Administrator on **Gender: Looking forwards, Looking Back**. It aimed to assess what the previous 20 years had meant for gender and development in various areas - education, forestry, health, agriculture, governance. Contributions were by internationally and nationally renowned feminist economists, academicians, bureaucrats - Naila Kabeer, Nirmala Bannerjee, Govind Kelkar, Kirti Singh, Ramya Subramanian and Dr. N.C.Saxena.

The third element in the vision for GSU was that its strategic location at LBSNAA gave it a convening power, regionally and nationally. In 1995, in collaboration with the British Council, it organised a national conference in Delhi on **Mainstreaming Gender Training in Development Planning**. In 2012, it hosted a **SAARC Conference on Building Capacities on Gender Responsive Governance** at LBSNAA, Mussoorie which was attended by Ministers/senior bureaucrats from neighbouring countries - Afghanistan/Pakistan, Bangladesh/Nepal, Bhutan and Sri Lanka. It provided an opportunity to share experiences and learn from each other on various issues. In 2016 NGC hosted a **National Conclave on Gender Equality and Child Rights** which brought senior national and state level officers, policy makers, donors, civil society organisations together to share and exchange views on policy related issues.

The challenge from the very beginning was how to put the GSU on a sound institutional footing, while also ensuring its autonomy and self sufficiency. The model adopted was to coordinate and organize meaningful gender training programmes in response to a demand. Our first foray in this area was to do some courses on Gender issues in an Urban context in 1996 for ODA from which we started building up a corpus which has grown over the years. This mode of working has remained its leitmotif, but its implication has also been that it has remained a very lean organisation with minimal staff.

Another key to the survival of the NGC has been the string of continuity provided by its dedicated and committed staff - Anjali Chauhan, Associate Professor, who has been with NGC since its inception; and the support staff Chandan Singh and Sangeeta Bisht who have been NGC for 23 and 12 years respectively. They have worked indefatigably towards ensuring the success of the centre.

Looking forwards, there is no doubt that the NGC has great potential to grow and play a more significant role in mainstreaming gender for policy design, implementation and monitoring. The NGC has been limited in the nature and quantum of activities it can undertake as it is completely dependent on demand and resources it can raise. The focus has been principally on capacity building but could extend to more advocacy, research and dissemination of knowledge. To develop a long term strategic plan, assured untied funding would make a critical difference.

There have been several efforts to raise funds in the past but till now there has been little progress on this front. In the late 90's there was a proposal for external funding, jointly framed by the Director, LBSNAA and me in the capacity of Joint Secretary, Women and Child Development. In fact it was as a step in preparedness for this, to establish its independent and autonomous character, that GSU was registered as NGC under the Societies Registration Act. This proposal could have led to a very sizeable grant, but since some of the conditions related to personnel and infrastructure could not be met in a time-bound manner the proposal fell through. Support in the form of a corpus was also sought in the past from the Government of India. What would give the NGC a tremendous fillip would be for and/or DoPT or MWCD to go beyond the support of individual training programmes and strengthen the corpus with a substantial one-time grant. A RNS for 2021- 2022?

The world is committed to the Agenda for Sustainable Development by 2030, of which SDG 5 is achieving gender equality. With the gaps that exist between men and women in access to and control of resources, opportunities and participation in decision making there will be a role for the National Gender Centre for the foreseeable future. In recent years the NGC has added to its mandate by working on child related issues. Therefore as it celebrates 25 years of its existence, it is formally acknowledging this enhanced role and will in its new avatara be known as the National Gender and Child Centre (NGCC).

At the end I would like to reiterate my best wishes on this occasion to NGCC for the coming years, to the present Director, LBSNAA, Dr. Sanjeev Chopra, Executive Director, NGCC, Ms. Alankrita Singh and the staff of NGCC, and close with the firm belief that NGCC will continue to contribute to and enhance gender and child responsive governance in the country.

Note from Executive Director

Alankrita Singh

The NGC Silver Jubilee Special Issue of Administrator on 'Fostering Gender Equality and Children's Rights' is being published with two important objectives. The first is to mark the completion of 25 years of the National Gender Centre. The second is to encourage field officers to study and document implementation of government policies and programmes aimed at advancement of rights of women and children, including practical challenges and solutions.

The issue is inspired by and relies on the dissertation papers written by the Officer Trainees of the 2018 batch of IAS as part of their District Practical Training. Of all dissertations submitted in the year 2020, thirty five papers focused on issues of empowerment of women and children. Out of these, those adjudged as best by external independent evaluators have been included in this issue.

The Issue is divided into two parts. In Part A, dissertations focusing on women's rights and entitlements have been included. Part B has dissertations focusing on advancement of children's rights. Research methodology used in conducting these researches include action research, quantitative methods and qualitative methods like focused group discussions, interviews and case studies.

In Part A, Ms Pushplata takes a closer look at the impact of Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana in the tribal areas of Walia in Bharuch District of Gujarat. Ms Pratibha Rani studies the impact of Jeevika network on the empowerment of women in Purnea District of Bihar. Ms Saumya Sharma designs an intervention for married women of the Perna Community residing in Rewla Khanpur in South West Delhi (who are forced into sex work by their families) and conducts an impact evaluation study of the same. Ms Tapasya Parihar conducts an in-depth analysis of the representation of women in the Panchayati Raj System in District Ratlam in Madhya Pradesh.

In Part B of the issue, Shri Anand Mohan enquires into the factors responsible for high incidence of early girl child marriage in Tiruvannamalai district of Tamil Nadu. Shri Javir Rahul Suresh analyses the impact of a local intervention designed and developed by him in improving the student learning outcomes in government primary schools in Dhubri District in Assam. Shri Suresh Kumar Jagat conducts a stakeholder analysis of the mid-day meal scheme in rural areas of Dakshin Dinajpur district of West Bengal.

We extend our sincere gratitude to Union Minister, Ms Smriti Irani for extending her compliments and best wishes in the Foreword.

We are grateful to Union Minister of State, Department of Personnel and Training, Dr. Jitendra Singh for his encouraging words in the Preface.

We place on record our sincere thanks to Chairperson NGC and Director LBSNAA Dr. Sanjeev Chopra for his constant guidance and support in the publication of this issue. We also acknowledge the contribution of founder Executive Director of the Centre, Ms Sarojini Ganju Thakur, to this issue as well as to the Centre over the years.

The publication of this issue would not have been possible without the hard work and creativity of the NGC Team. Thanks are due to Ms. Anjali Chauhan for note tracing the 25 years journey of the Centre. Thanks are also due to Ms. Swati Yadav, Teaching Associate, National Gender Centre, who worked closely with all the authors for achieving a uniformity in structure and purpose across all articles included in the issue.

We also acknowledge the contribution of Mr. Anup Das, Officer Trainee of the 95th Foundation Course for painting a pattachitra-style composition for the cover of the issue and to Ms. Komal Kesarwani, Project Manager, CPSM for designing the cover and contents page of the issue.

Last, though not the least, we acknowledge and appreciate the sincere efforts of the seven officer trainees whose dissertations have been included in the issue.

We are confident that this special issue would be a guide for a variety of stakeholders and would inspire the future generations of Civil Services to undertake research and academic studies.

Twenty Five Years of the National Gender Centre : A Trip Down Memory Lane

Anjali Singh Chauhan

"A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step"

- Lao Tzu

These very words reverberate in my mind as I look back at the 25 years of the incredible journey of the National Gender Centre at Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration. From being the seed of an idea to an institution of national repute in the field of gender, the Centre has evolved from strength to strength under the visionary guidance of Directors who helmed the Centre as Chairpersons and the valued guidance of the Executive Directors, over the years. Having had the privilege of being part of the Centre's journey since its inception, I am filled with a sense of happiness and gratification to have witnessed first-hand how the Centre has grown and flourished and the wide-range of impact it has had through its activities in mainstreaming gender in various aspects of policy and implementation.

The genesis of the Centre dates to 1995, to the Gender Planning Training Project (GPTP) which was the first-of-its-kind, 6-week Training of Trainers course organized for state and national level institutions to mainstream gender issues in development initiatives and decision making. The project, organized by DoPT, in partnership with Institute of Development Studies (IDS) Sussex, was the trigger for the creation of the 'Gender Studies Unit' in 1995 under the visionary guidance and mentorship of Dr. N.C. Saxena as founding Director, Mrs. Sarojini Ganju Thakur as founding Executive Director and Dr. Sanjeev Chopra, one of the core group members.

The Unit, from the outset, was actively involved in bringing to life its objective of mainstreaming gender in policy, programme and practice and bringing gender into the forefront to enable a more inclusive and cohesive environment and society. The outlook of the objectives was two-fold: intrinsic which focused on building capabilities internally, through trainings, research and publications, under the aegis of the Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration; and extrinsic which centered around enhancing capacities in partnership with various national and international organizations. To capture

the history of the last 25 years, the activities can in broad terms be classified in three different phases:

STRENGTHENING THE FOUNDATION (1995 - 2003)

In the initial years, a strong foundation was laid by the founding and first Executive Director of the Centre, Mrs. Sarojini Ganju Thakur. Under her guidance, the Centre organized its first national conference on 'Mainstreaming Gender Training in Development Planning' in 1995 in partnership with British Council and its first training on 'Gender issues in Urban Planning & Development' in partnership with ODA in 1996. The integration of gender trainings in all courses at the Academy was also initiated to enhance gender sensitive decision-making among civil services officers. Groundwork was also laid for research led projects which saw the Centre's first publication 'An Agenda for Action: Gender issues in the Civil Services' in collaboration with DoPT. It was also during this time that VANI - a collective for working women employees of the Academy was formed to serve as a platform of knowledge-sharing and empowerment, which continues till date. A Springboard Training and Development programme in 1997 for the VANI members paved the way for development initiatives including leadership talks and wellness programs aimed at enhancing physical, financial and mental wellbeing for the members. The foundation was also laid for the National Gender Centre as a self-financing institution by Mrs. Thakur, the model which continues till today. These first few steps for the Centre became the very foundation on which Mrs. Vijaylakshmi Joshi and successive Executive Directors nurtured and further built the Centre.

1998 marked a series of milestones under the guidance of Mr. Sandeep Nayak with the Gender Studies Unit transforming into the 'National Centre for Gender Training Planning and Research', a registered society; growing collaborations with new partners such as UNIFEM (now UN WOMEN) and strengthening of relationships with MWCD and DoPT. As a result, the Centre's horizon expanded as it organized training programmes for key duty holders at state and national level on a wide range of gender and child centric issues. Over the next few years, trainings with a gender perspective on subjects such as health, population, nutrition, reproductive rights, gender-based violence, sexual harassment, flourished in the tenure of Ms. Geeta Mishra and Mrs. Arti Ahuja in partnership with MWCD, UNFPA and

UNIFEM. There was also an increased focus on integrating 'Training of Trainers' (ToT) programmes to build and enhance capabilities of state and national level institutions so as to widely impact on multiple levels of governance.

SPREADING WINGS (2004 – 2011)

This phase saw the Centre making forays into newer grounds through partnerships, collaborations and a diversified set of key focus areas. 2004 was a watershed as the Centre entered into a long-term partnership with UNICEF, with the guidance of Mrs. Rajni Sibal. Under the umbrella of this collaboration which continued till 2019, the Centre worked closely with Dr. N C Saxena (Retd. IAS) and Mr. Tejinder Sandhu (Retd. IAS), UNICEF on a wide range of gender and child centric issues. Joint Training Programmes with a focus on enhancing multi-stakeholder and multi-partisanship were rolled out with participants from across fields of administration, law enforcement, judiciary, medicine and defense services. Emphasis was also given on trainings promoting a sensitive work culture in public spaces and integrating social sector issues with a gender perspective in day-to-day policy making at all levels of governance.

This period saw the Centre focusing on various public policy issues such as declining sex ratio, integrated district approach, gender budgeting, child related issues, different types of gender-based violence and health under the valued guidance of Ms. Ranjana Chopra and Ms. Jaspreet Talwar. Besides the regular training curriculum, multiple training programmes were held with representatives of central and state level ministries and state training institutions to undertake GB analysis in their programme & enhancing the capacities of various state level training institutions. Multi-level programmes on Integrated District Approach (IDA) were designed for best practice sharing, capacity building of State and District officials involved with the sustainability and replicability of IDA and providing inputs for policy development for the Planning Commission and State Planning Commissions. The methodology of the trainings also kept evolving with thematic courses, case studies, role-play, movie screenings, becoming popular among participants.

The Centre also took the first step in the formation and running of a creche in the Academy premises in 2007, to provide an enabling environment for

working employees. The Centre ran the Creche for 7 years before it was absorbed under the aegis of the Academy.

During this period, the Centre brought out various publications in the form of handbooks and training modules/ manuals for targeted audiences. Some of the prominent works include the booklets on 'Sexual Harassment' to enhance knowledge related to the Sexual Harassment Act and 'Gender Sensitization towards a Sensitive Work Culture' in 2005, and the 'Manual on Gender Based Violence' in collaboration with UNDP which highlighted a training strategy for various stakeholders such as civil servants, PRI's and Parliamentarians in 2009.

EXPLORING NEW HORIZONS (2012- Present)

In the 15 years since its set up, the Centre was successful in carving a niche for itself on the national stage and was recognized as a centre of excellence in training & capacity building in the field of gender and children studies. 2012 was a defining year in this regard as the Centre conceptualized and organized its first international programme on 'Building Capacities on Gender Responsive Governance in South Asia' in partnership with UN Women, under the guidance of Mrs. Roli Singh. The programme attracted delegates from 8 South Asian countries (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan & Sri Lanka) and the programme culminated in a set of do-able action points which was formally put up as "Mussoorie Declaration".

Besides regular training programmes, the Centre was also entrusted with the task of developing modules on gender sensitization under the guidance of Mrs. Sarojini Thakur, in collaboration with UN WOMEN, child rights modules under the guidance of Ms. Enakshi Ganguly Thukral & Ms. Bharti Ali, in collaboration with National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) and UNICEF, were also developed for the sensitization and capacity building of young administrators and for officers of the mid-career training programmes.

In furtherance to the objective of developing a core group of gender trainers, flagship Training of Trainers programmes as well as joint training programmes for all-India as well as civil service officers were undertaken in collaboration with UNICEF in states such as Jammu & Kashmir, North-

Eastern states and Punjab. Mention must be made of the Policy Conclave on "Gender Equality and Child Rights: Sharing Knowledge & Developing an Agenda for Action" organized in 2016, in collaboration with UN Women. The Conclave brought policy makers, academicians, civil society organizations together and was successful in leading deliberations on policy approaches & challenges in realizing gender equality and child rights.

Under the guidance of Ms. Aswathy S., the Centre partnered with UN Women on a 3 year project (2016-18), 'From Opportunities to Capacities: A Multi-Sectoral Approach to Enhancing Gender Responsive Governance' aimed to strengthen capacities of national and sub national training institutions such as NIRD, SIRDs, NCW, SCWs, ATIs and STIs. This was preceded by a capacity assessment exercise of the various institutions which formed the basis of the design of the content for the capacity building programmes. The trainings were conducted in partnership with UN WOMEN with Mrs. Sarojini Ganju Thakur and Mrs. Suneeta Dhar as consultants who also wrote a 'Training Manual on Gender & Governance' which was published by UN WOMEN and National Gender Centre, Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration, in 2018.

There has also been an increased focus on strengthening the capabilities of District Magistrates in implementing flagship policies like Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao (BBBP), POSHAN Abhiyaan, Integrated Childhood Development Scheme (ICDS). 2018 and 2019 saw various collaborations with MWCD, NITI Aayog, NCW, International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) and UNICEF towards enhancing capacities of SCW members, District Magistrates and Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) of Zila Parishads besides representatives of related ministries. A flagship course on 'Health System Strengthening and Sustainable Financing' was held in 2019 in collaboration with Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Harvard TH Chan School of Public Health (HSPH) and Health Systems Transformation Platform (HSTP) to critically assess the performance of the healthcare systems in the states and to assist participants in designing a health system transformation plan that would address the needs and challenges of their states.

A special emphasis was given on enhancing the knowledge resource repository through publications including 'Handbook on implementation of Juvenile Justice Act, 2015' prepared in collaboration with Ms. Enakshi

Ganguly Thukral, 'Training Manual on Gender Responsive Governance' and a Handbook on Child Rights: 'Why Should We Care? A guide for Indian Civil Services on Child Rights' under the valued guidance of Mrs. Sumita Dawra IAS, who was working with UNICEF, and in partnership with UNICEF and Centre for Child and the Law, National Law School of India. These handbooks contain illustrations, case studies and best practices for ready reference for administrators. In addition, the Centre has developed several case studies on social sector issues in-house and have been utilized in various training programmes.

Over the course of the years, the Centre has welcomed several eminent personalities to grace the occasion including Mr. I. K. Gujral, former Prime Minister of India, Mrs. Suman Krishnakant, national president of Mahila Dakshata Samiti and wife of Vice President Shri K Krishnakant, Mrs. Sheila Dikshit, former Chief Minister of Delhi, Dr. N. C. Saxena (Retd. IAS), Mrs. Syeda Hameed, former member, Planning Commission of India, Justice Madan Lokur, former Supreme Court Judge of India, Mr. Wajahat Habibullah, (Retd. IAS), Ms. Kamla Bhasin, gender expert, Mrs. Rekha Sharma, Chairperson NCW, Ms. Vrinda Grover, senior advocate, Ms. Yasmin Ali Haque, UNICEF, Dr. Rebecca Tavares, UN WOMEN, Mr. P M Nair (Retd. IPS), Dr. Gita Sen, academician, Mrs. Flavia Agnes, senior advocate, Ms. Laxmi Agarwal, acid attack survivor, Mr. Vijay Anand Retd. IAS, Mr. Satish Agnihotri (Retd. IAS), Shri Alok Kumar, IAS, Dr. Arun Singh, Dr. Sabu George, academician, Dr. Neelam Singh, Vatsalya, Dr. Purnima Menon, IFPRI, and several senior civil service officers and experts, to name a few. In addition, the Centre has closely collaborated with civil society organizations over the years such as Breakthrough, Jagori, Akshara, Chhanv Foundation, Haq - Centre for Children's Rights, Save the Children, Prajwala, Vimochana, Arz, among others as well as survivors, zila panchayat leaders and role-models from different walks of life to interact with the participants in various training programmes to share real life instances and on-ground reality.

The Centre's most recent programmes on 'Eliminating Violence against Women and Children' were conducted in 2019-20 under the guidance of Mrs. Alankrita Singh, in collaboration with Bureau of Police Research and Development, (BPR&D), Department for International Development (DFID) and Initiative for What Works to Advance Women and Girls in the Economy (IWWAGE). In times of the pandemic, given the challenge of travel

restrictions, the Centre conducted the e-ITEC workshop in partnership with MEA with participation from 17 countries across the 5 continents. NGC has been consulted by the Criminal Reforms Committee, NLU-D in the drafting of reforms to the Indian Penal Code, Criminal Procedure Code and Indian Evidence Act. A pilot project on capacity building of multiple stakeholders for effective implementation of Juvenile Justice act has also been taken up in collaboration with MWCD.

The Centre has also led several National Consultation workshops from time to time with key government stakeholders and partners to identify key focus areas, develop and design training modules and ideate on training tools and techniques. The most recent being the Consultation Meetings held with Ms. Smriti Zubin Irani, Hon'ble Minister, Ministry of Women and Child Development and Mr. Jitendra Singh, Hon'ble Minister, Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT). As part of the meetings, several areas were discussed and identified wherein the Centre, in collaboration with MWCD, can play a pivotal role in strengthening capacity building of duty holders like DMs, NCW and SCW, NCPCRs and SCPCRs to enable a strong multi sectoral approach for coordination, convergence and effective implementation, primarily at the block and district levels.

The Centre has strived, consistently and arduously, to bring to life its objectives of mainstreaming gender. Over the last 25 years, the Centre has made significant in-roads in establishing gender and children's issues as a priority concern and key marker of development with a conscious effort to enhance multi-stakeholder approach through the diverse set of trainings and collaborations. The choice of participants is intentionally diverse and multi-sectoral to ensure an inclusive and multi-faceted approach. Over the years the training programmes have sought to utilize diverse teaching methodologies and pedagogical tools that have aided the participants in understanding key gender concepts. The trainings have been heralded as a step towards sharing ongoing initiatives and good practices as well as building capacity on promoting women's leadership and governance in India and South Asia.

I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude and thanks to Mrs. Sarojini Ganju Thakur, the Founding Executive Director, who has been a guiding light and played a pivotal role in mentoring and nurturing the Centre throughout its journey. I would also like to thank Mr. Sanjeev Chopra, Chairperson,

National Gender Centre, for his invaluable guidance and continued support in the Centre's growth. Over the years, every Chairperson and Executive Director has added a new dimension to the Centre which has nurtured and made the Centre what it is today, and I would like to place on record my gratitude to each of them. Last, but by no means the least, I would like to recognize and thank Ms. Sangeeta Bisht and Mr. Chandan Singh Rawat who have been the backbone of the Centre. I believe that the Centre will continue to break new ground in demystifying gender and lead the way in gender mainstreaming, sensitization and on-the ground implementation in the years to come.



Fostering Gender Equality

A Diagnostic Study on LPG usage in tribal areas of Walia in Bharuch District of Gujarat

- Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana

Pushp Lata

PM Ujjwala Yojana is a developmental scheme of government aimed at improving health and other socio-economic conditions of the intended beneficiaries. This scheme was launched with the intended objective of alleviating the condition of the women of the household who spend hours cooking food on traditional chulhas risking their health. However, there have been recent studies which have raised several questions regarding efficacy of the scheme under which the intended beneficiary household receives LPG on nominal charges. Thus, this study was conducted to analyse the impact of the scheme, on parameters like whether the scheme is able to reach intended targeted segment and serving its real purpose. Through direct data collection in rural areas the study focused at taking true data for impact evaluation. It provides a base to study effectiveness of scheme which removed initial impediments and provided easy and subsidized gas connection. Idea is knowing actual status whether behavioural or financial factors impact usage of clean fuel in tribal rural areas.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Around seventy percent of India's total population lives in rural areas and uses traditional fuels like dung cakes, wood and coal for cooking. Higher cost of petroleum fuel makes it difficult for poor people to switch from traditional fuels. To overcome this difficulty, government launched PM Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY) in May, 2016 to increase penetration of LPG gas connection in rural and poor areas. Under this scheme government provides 50% of total cost i.e. 1600 rupees as financial support to targeted beneficiaries to purchase gas stove. The ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas has been responsible for implementing this scheme to identified targeted segment.

Through Ujjwala Yojana, the government aims at providing gas connection to 80 million poor women in rural areas. Initially the intended beneficiaries of the scheme were below poverty line (BPL) families, as categorised as such in the socio-economic caste census 2011, but later the extent of the scheme was extended to Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) families, beneficiaries of Antyodaya Yojana, tribal and forest dwelling families.

The main objective of the scheme is to replace unclean traditional fuel with clean LPG. This will not only have positive impact on the environment but also reduce health hazards to women and children in the household. Smoke from burning of traditional sources of fuel is one of major causes of pulmonary and respiratory problems in children and women. Using clean fuel will reduce risk of such harm.

Another major feat attempted by PMUY is to ensure redistribution of fuel subsidy through policy reform. One on side, well-off people are nudged to give up their subsidy through "give it up" campaign. On the other hand, government targets poorer household and provides them subsidy through direct benefit transfer scheme. The Ujjwala scheme has reduced high upfront cost for purchasing LPG connection through subsidy and providing loan facility together. However, it is still a matter of study whether the scheme has been successful in convincing people to use clean fuel on daily basis after removing initial obstacle of higher cost. Thus, I conducted this study with the objective to ascertain the LPG usage by the intended beneficiaries, under PMUY, after providing them connection initially.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

With vision of providing universal coverage of cooking gas in country, government launched PM Ujjwala Yojana to provide free LPG connections to BPL households. In a report of 2012, the World Health Organisation had highlighted major health issues and problem caused by traditional *chulhas*. Report mentioned that globally in 2012 around 4.3 million deaths are caused by household air pollution in low and middle income countries. South East Asian and Western Pacific regions bear most of the burden with 1.69 and 1.62 million deaths respectively. Almost 6 lakh deaths occur in Africa, 2 lakhs in Eastern Mediterranean region, 99000 in Europe and 81000 in America. The remaining 19000 deaths occur in high income countries. Such reports are an eye opener towards need of implementing LPG gas for daily use. Hence, this project was launched.

As per statistics, in India around one lakh twenty thousand people give up their lives every year due to air pollution. To provide clean cooking fuel to households that cannot afford it and dependent on traditional sources of fuel wood like coal, dung cakes or firewood policy initiative was taken by central government in May, 2016. It is an initiative including redistribution of money saved from initiatives like 'give it up' campaign and 'direct benefit transfers' of subsidy and removal of ghost beneficiaries. Beneficiaries were taken on basis

of socio economic caste census survey 2011. Ministry of Petroleum and natural gas has been responsible in implementing Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana by using SECC 2011 to identify targeted beneficiaries. In policy making, ministry simplified enrolment process and introduced simple documentation requirements along with quick application process and outreach camps. By simplifying the process, aspiring beneficiaries of the scheme applied at dealer locations and camps. Scheme achieved exemplary success in meeting its goals and within a time period of 20 months around 38.5 million of beneficiaries got LPG connection. LPG penetration in country increased from 56% earlier than PMUY to 80% after the scheme.

As per reports, PMUY beneficiaries has challenge of low refill rates. Data from government's Petroleum planning and analysis cell shows that after launch of PMUY LPG connections have increased by 16.26% at all India level while LPG usage increased only by 9.83%. Thus, the number of 'inactive users' are on the rise.

Repetitively same question has been raised by media about usage of LPG by these beneficiaries. Question arises whether new connections under PMUY are translating into consistent use when cost of subsequent cylinders has to be borne by BPL family itself. According to Rangrajan Committee, those who live on income of less than Rs. 32/- a day in rural areas and Rs. 47/- a day in urban areas are considered to be a BPL family. This is very low if compared to the cost of a cylinder which is high even at a subsidized rate, supports that with this kind of income, a BPL family will not be able to afford refill of cylinders at market rate.

For Ujjwala beneficiaries, the upfront payment for LPG connections is waived off and they need not to pay the security deposit or other overhead costs. But there is no extra concession for second refill stage. It means they have to purchase second onwards cylinder on market rate which they simply cannot afford.

According to CRISIL study, commissioned by government in 2015 to understand why people were not adopting LPG cylinders over biomass fuels, revealed that after high initial cost of connection (86.3%), the high recurring cost of LPG refill was second biggest reason (83.4%). It also raised a question on both campaigns 'Give it Up' and 'PM Ujjwala Yojana'. It also proves that number of new connections alone is not yardstick to measure success of any scheme. For the success of any policy, it is important that it is affordable to those who are real beneficiaries. Beneficiaries of PM Ujjwala Yojana who got free connections under the scheme are not getting Kerosene under subsidized rates. It is a kind of double whammy on the poor who are already reeling under heavy prices of LPG cylinders.

As per studies by Nature magazine, after launch of PM Ujjwala Yojana there is rapid growth observed in enrolment of LPG consumes in rural areas but same is not matched by increase in LPG sales. Report suggested that LPG access has not induced a full transition away from using polluted solid fuels. Number of LPG refills among PMUY beneficiaries is less than half that of rural general consumers. There are no evidences regarding increase in LPG consumption among rural general consumers.

These studies suggest mid-course policy revisions are required to encourage regular LPG usage for both PMUY and general rural consumers. As per studies, *chulha* in Indian household is a preferable mode of cooking. It is considered successful technology which also satisfies several other important household needs. Targeting this device for obsolescence has profound implications that cannot be reduced to energy consumption or environmental hazards. Rural women even do not prioritize improved cook stoves. Addressing their priorities requires capital intensive investment or challenging powerful institutions.

In a case study by Prof. S. K. Barua, titled "lighting up lives through cooking gas and transforming society", mentioned that Ujjwala Yojana has been successful in bringing positive transformation in society and provides socio-economic inclusion. It is a win-win situation for all the involved stakeholders. He also added some innovative solutions should further have added up to make scheme more successful like innovative financing for refilling the cylinder, providing choice of filling as much gas as consumer wants irrespective of size of cylinder etc.

In Bharuch district around 31.5% of total population is tribal and mainly resides in three talukas Jhagadiya, Walia and Netrang. This population was also selected as beneficiary of PM Ujjwala Yojana. There is not any research done specifically about LPG usage in these areas regarding beneficiaries of PM Ujjwala Yojana. This research is a try to know about actual usage of clean fuel by Ujjwala beneficiaries and problems associated with these.

3.0 AN OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

The study was conducted in tribal areas of Walia taluka of Bharuch district. In Bharuch district around 31.5% of total population is tribal and mainly resides in three talukas Jhagadiya, Walia

and Netrang. This population was one of the intended beneficiaries of PMUY. However, no study was conducted in this area regarding LPG usage. Thus, through this study I attempted to answer following questions:

- How effective has PMUY been in reaching intended target segment i.e. tribal areas in Bharuch district?
- Have PMUY beneficiaries, who use LPG stoves, stopped using traditional fuels such as firewood or biomass completely?
- What are the barriers that impede the high uptake of PMUY refills? Are there any cultural biases, myths, or perceptions that obstruct the use of LPG by PMUY beneficiaries?
- What are the ways to improve and strengthen PMUY?

As it was quite difficult to cover all three talukas and all the tribal villages of the district. Thus, data was collected from geographically spread out villages of Wadia taluka. Snowball sampling which is also known as chain referral sampling was used to select beneficiaries. In this process the initial beneficiary told the researcher about other PMUY beneficiaries and like this via chain referral data was collected. Following this process, 50 samples were interviewed from five different villages of Wadia taluka.¹

The study uses mixed research methodology involving both qualitative and quantitative method of data collection and analysis. Data tools such as questionnaire, interviews were used to collect data. Data was collected after door to door visit to beneficiaries. No force or any influential method was introduced to avoid any kind of error in answers. Although there may be few or negligible errors in data collection due to varied interpretation of questions by beneficiaries. Chances also may be present where beneficiaries have modified their answers to government authorities as data were being collected about a government scheme.

4.0 FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Demographic profile of the beneficiaries

Targeted beneficiaries of PMUY are precisely defined. Under the scheme LPG is provided to that segment of the society which has low income and poor educational qualification. The parameters such as "monthly income of the household", "educational qualification of the beneficiaries" and "nature of the dwelling place" were used to draw a demographic profile of the sample size selected of 50 beneficiaries.

¹ Study provides an insight on uptake of PMUY scheme in tribal areas of Wadia taluka in Bharuch district and does not represent a national picture.

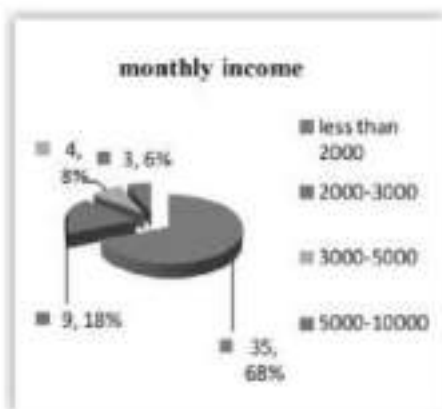


Figure 1: Monthly Income

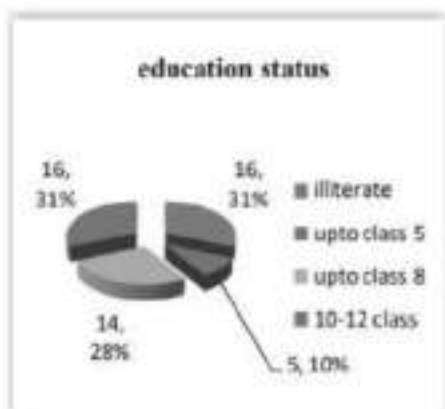


Figure 2: Educational Status

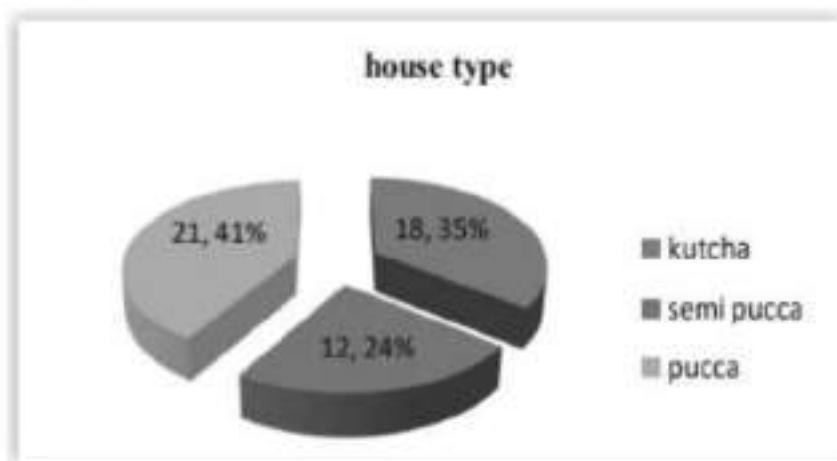


Figure 3: Condition of dwelling place

Thus, 68% of the beneficiaries have a monthly income less than 2000 rupees (Figure 1). Most of the beneficiaries are either illiterate or have poor educational qualifications.² Among the families who were interviewed around 60% live in 'kutchha' or 'semi-pucca' houses and were dependant on 'unclean' cooking fuel like firewood and cow dung cakes.

4.2 LPG usage by the beneficiaries

69% of the beneficiaries declared LPG to be more favourable fuel (Figure 5). However, they declared that they use it very rarely and save it for emergency like situations such as "rainy season", "wet firewood, cow dung" or "hosting a

² Education qualification of the men of the household.

guest". Most of the household rear animals who are fed food cooked in large pots which do not fit on the gas stove. Thus, families use traditional *chulhas* as a more convenient option. Also, families prefer traditional *chulhas* during winters to heat water.

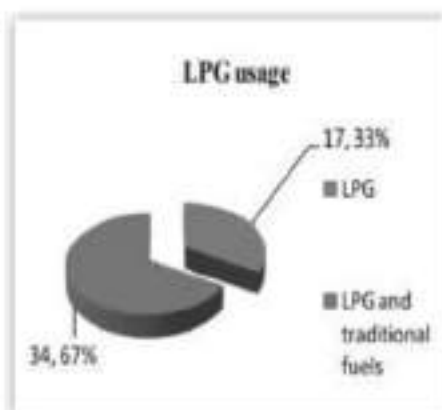


Figure 4: Daily usage of LPG and other fuels

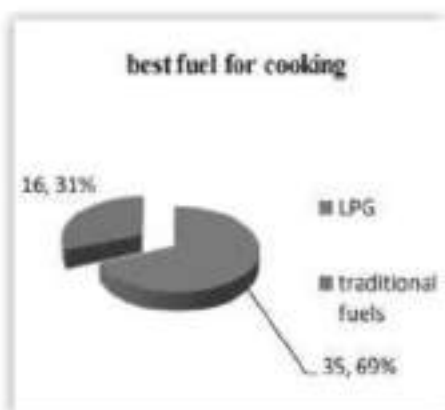


Figure 5: Preferred fuel

Figure 4 reveals that around 33% of families use LPG as cooking fuel while 67% still use traditional sources of fuel like wood, cow dung cakes, coal etc. along with LPG at occasional times. For these families LPG is a luxury and they use it very economically so that cylinder can last long for many days or months. Thus, difficulty in refilling LPG cylinder is one of the major reason the beneficiaries do not prefer this fuel.

The study reveals that although refill was done by beneficiaries but around 35% household gets one cylinder refilled in a year which reflects low LPG usage in their daily use. Out of the remaining, 40% gets two cylinders in a year and 25% gets three or more cylinders refilled in a year. This data is indicative of low rate of daily LPG usage for these families which creates a challenge in usage of 'clean fuel' for cooking instead of traditional sources like fire wood, cow dung cakes or coal.

4.3 Challenges encountered in refilling of cylinder

Affordability: The refilling cost of a cylinder is around 750 rupees. For beneficiaries who are usually from low income household (**Figure 1**) finds it difficult to use gas cylinder on daily basis. The one-time cost of refilling cylinder is equal to their many days' wages. In order to save their hard earned money, they retort to cheaper alternatives. Besides refilling cost, transportation cost also add to their woes as home delivery of cylinder is not done. 60% of interviewed beneficiaries considered affordability as a major challenge behind regular refills of gas cylinder.

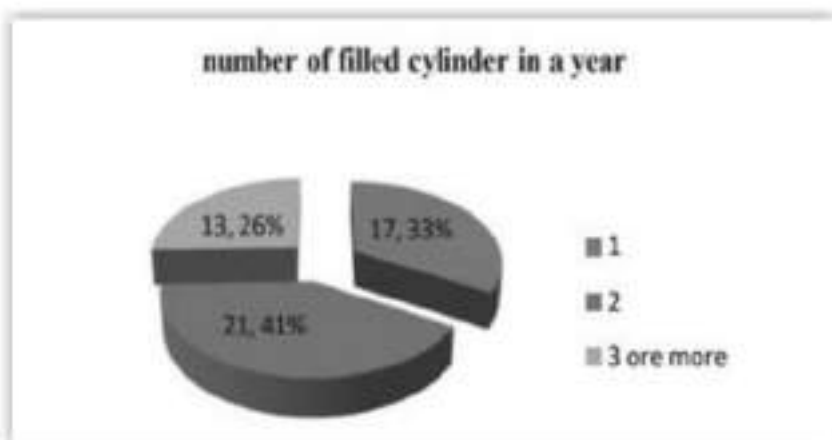


Figure 6: Refilling times in a year

For Ujjwala beneficiaries, the upfront payment for LPG connections is waived off and they need not to pay the security deposit or other overhead costs. But there is no extra concession for second refill stage. It means they have to purchase second onwards cylinder on market rate which they simply cannot afford. According to CRISIL study, commissioned by government in 2015 to understand why people were not adopting LPG cylinders over biomass fuels, revealed that after high initial cost of connection (86.3%), the high recurring cost of LPG refill was second biggest reason (83.4%). It also raised a question on both campaigns 'Give it Up' and 'PM Ujjwala Yojana'. It also proves that number of new connections alone is not yardstick to measure success of any scheme. For the success of any policy, it is important that it is affordable to those who are real beneficiaries.

Accessibility: 58% of population stated that non-delivery of cylinder at home is an additional constraint. Carrying a heavy cylinder from warehouse is a problem. In few villages (42%) door step delivery was being made which found it convenient and easy to access refilled cylinder.

Other beliefs: Myths and other beliefs were also a major roadblock in regular refilling of cylinder. Around 26% of families considers that food is better cooked on traditional *chulhas* and is healthier than food cooked on gas stove. Some beneficiaries did not consider smoke a major problem as they found traditional *chulhas* convenient to use as they have been using the same since a long time. Moreover, the area under study is a tribal area with easily accessible firewood without any additional financial burden. Also, most of the families use single cylinder which gets empty and it usually takes some months before a cylinder is refilled. Meanwhile the beneficiaries use traditional sources of fuel.

Around 60% of interviewed population live in *kutchas* or semi-pucca houses made up of wood and straw (Figure 3). They are unaware about safety practices to be followed while using LPG gas. Their houses have lower roofs and are mainly unventilated. It makes it riskier to use LPG for regular use. In few homes LPG gas stove was kept at ground without any base near cylinder and thus it becomes highly risky to use LPG in such scenario. Many homes do not have separate kitchen area which makes it riskier to use LPG. Few homes stack dry firewood sticks and cow dung cakes in near vicinity of LPG cylinder which has high chance of catching fire in case of leakage of LPG. Lack of knowledge regarding safety practices and proper usage is another major challenge, of which the beneficiaries are usually unaware, during LPG usage.

5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana was launched with aim of providing universal access to clean fuel, better health for women and children in households, gender empowerment by stopping drudgery of women in collecting fuel wood, environmental cleanliness and fulfilling commitment of reducing carbon emissions as secondary benefits. Although government removed initial impediments for poor by ensuring access to LPG gas connection but still intended goal of universal LPG usage is not achieved due to many restrictions.

With providing gas connection to 8 crore poor families LPG penetration has increased in country from earlier 56% to more than present 80%. While studying LPG usage by these beneficiaries some irregularities were noticed. India is an agricultural country where around 70% of population resides in villages. In such scenario people in villages have easy access to fuel wood in form of agricultural residue. Moreover, use of traditional fuels is in practice in villages since ancient times, they find it easy and convenient. Due to earlier discussed challenges, traditional fuels and *chulhas* seems irreplaceable in villages for poor people. Moreover, people are not aware about serious health hazards of smoke emanating from *chulhas* in deteriorating their health. Also, in tribal areas, proximity to forest area enhances accessibility to firewood. Thus, people prefer using fuel wood and cow dung cakes as those are sustainable modes of cooking.

Here are some suggestions to improve LPG usage amongst the targeted beneficiaries:

- Government should increase amount of subsidy given to beneficiaries of PMUY to make refills of gas cylinder more affordable. Government provides loan facility for initial gas installation connection to PMUY

beneficiaries. Although interviewed beneficiaries have not availed loan facility for taking gas cylinder as they were not aware about the same. On similar lines government can make arrangement with oil marketing companies to provide refilling of gas cylinder on loan facility. This can be recovered gradually from the beneficiaries in two or three instalments.

- Self-help group (SHG) model also can be helpful in making refill affordable for PMUY beneficiaries. Through SHGs loan can be provided for refilling and thus increasing affordability of cylinder. Time saved from collecting fuel wood can also be utilized in SHG activities. It will also create a source of additional income for families. Micro finance institutions can provide loans on behalf of these PMUY beneficiaries for refilling of gas cylinder and can directly credit the amount to oil marketing companies. On similar lines micro finance institution can have link ups with self-help groups and can recover the loan amount from that beneficiary's account. Like this affordability of refilling of cylinder can be made available to PMUY beneficiaries. If direct linkage is established on institutional level, beneficiary needs not to do many formalities like documentation or any extra arrangements. It will be convenient for beneficiary also.
- Government has provided options in getting refilled cylinder in varied options of 14.2 kg and 5kg. 5kg smaller size cylinder requires around one third amount to be paid which seems affordable for a poor family. But interviewed beneficiaries were not aware about this option of getting smaller cylinder. They told only large size cylinder is provided by gas agency costing around 750 rupees for refilling of gas. Smaller size cylinder can be a more affordable option and can be vital in increasing LPG and its refill usage. Besides this option, other customized option can be provided to PMUY beneficiaries for refilling of cylinder. One of which could be in form of giving flexibility to the customer to get it filled to the limit they want and can be charged on basis of per kilogram. This will remove additional burden of paying huge amount one at a time. The customer can get his gas cylinder filled according to his spending capacity. It will increase LPG usage and refill ratios.
- In few villages, home delivery of gas cylinder was being made while few had problems in transporting filled cylinder from gas agency to their location. This issue can be resolved by providing home delivery in remaining villages by oil marketing companies. Administration can ensure smooth functioning of this facility of delivering cylinders to all villages and making refilled cylinder easily accessible to PMUY beneficiaries.

- One common problem faced by beneficiaries was availability of only single gas cylinder. Usually user is not aware about amount of remaining LPG in cylinder and if suddenly cylinder runs out of gas, second cylinder is made available on an average after fifteen days. In such times traditional sources of cooking are used by beneficiaries. To reduce such problems, government can make arrangement to aware beneficiaries about availability of two cylinder options and they can be provided the same. Many beneficiaries were not aware about two bottle availability of gas cylinder.
- It is also important to reduce lack of awareness of beneficiaries about harmful effect of smoke and polluting sources of fuel on their health. Slowly behavioural changes can be brought amongst the targeted population if they are made aware about tangible effect of smoke from *chulhas* on their health. Indoor pollution results in diseases like tuberculosis and other chronic respiratory diseases. Making people aware about such diseases can bring behavioural change in people to some extent. They can consider health important while doing cost benefit analysis of using LPG as a cooking fuel. This cost benefit analysis can be made understood to these targeted beneficiaries in simpler terms for better acceptance of LPG. It is also important to make them aware about safety practices while using LPG which could eliminate mis-happening of any tragedy.
- Awareness can be spread through a combination of mass media such as TV, radio, newspaper and targeted promotional activities like video on wheels, road shows and street plays. All of this could be very helpful in reaching PMUY segment and can be used to increase awareness amongst others on related subjects. These can also be helpful in mitigating misconceptions about safety while using LPG.
- Affordability is major challenge that needs to be removed for increasing LPG usage in LPUY segment. Following a mixed approach of smaller size cylinder, option of filling gas as per requirement, subsidy on refills, loan facility on cylinder through SHGs and MFIs can be helpful to greater extent in removing this barrier. Accessibility is also need to be ensured when LPG refills are on lower side. Oil marketing companies can have franchisee at local level within a 5 Km radius that will be serving villages coming in that area. Home delivery is also a very good option being followed which makes filled cylinders easily accessible. Single cylinder and sudden running out was also a problem faced by PMUY segment and to overcome this they always ensure alternate source of fuel is available. To remove this barrier two-cylinder option can be given to customer so that if one-cylinder gas

runs out there is an alternate available and they need not to look at other options. Other than this sending reminder messages from company can also be helpful so that customer can make financial arrangement which they need while getting their cylinder refilled. As PMUY segment have lower income levels, so arranging money if cylinder suddenly runs out is also a challenge for them. Reminder will give them due time to make arrangements.

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ANNEXURE

Questionnaire

- Name: _____ Date: _____
- Age: _____
- Total number of family members _____
- Type of house: Kutcha/Semi Pakka/Pakka _____
- Occupation: agriculture /wage labourer/pvt. job/govt. job _____
- Family income monthly: _____
- Education: illiterate/up to 5th class/8th class/10th class/12th class/ graduate _____
- LPG Distributor: _____
1. Do you have gas connection under PM Ujjawala Scheme?
- a) Yes
- b) No

2. Have you taken loan to take PM Ujjawala connection:
 - a) Yes
 - b) No
 - c) Not aware
3. You use fuel for cooking and other household choices daily:
 - a) LPG gas
 - b) Coal
 - c) Cow dung
 - d) Firewood and other biomass fuel
 - e) Both LPG and firewood
4. You use LPG fuel for following:
 - a) Only for tea making
 - b) One time food preparation
 - c) Two times food preparation
 - d) Three times food preparation
 - e) For everything
 - f) Use only during rainy seasons
 - g) Use only in summer and rainy season
5. Do you refill your gas cylinder regularly:
 - a) Yes
 - b) No
 - c) Sometimes (1-3 times)
 - d) Never refilled after taking first
6. You refill your gas cylinder in how many days:
 - a) 1-2 months
 - b) 2-3 months
 - c) 3-4 months
 - d) > 4 months
7. How much is cost of refilling your cylinder again:
 - a) Rs. (Large)
 - b) Rs. (small)
8. You get gas cylinder delivery at your home:
 - a) Yes
 - b) No
 - c) Sometimes
 - d) At a common point
9. How much time it takes in getting refilled cylinder:
 - a) < 1 month
 - b) 1-2 months
 - c) > 2 months
10. Do you get your gas subsidy in your bank account regularly:
 - a) Yes
 - b) No
11. In how many days subsidy amount is credited to your account:
 - a) 1-2 months
 - b) 2-3 months
 - c) > 3 months

12. Any other problems in getting refilled cylinder:
 - a) Gas Distributor at a faraway place
 - b) No home delivery
 - c) Unavailability of sufficient money for refill
 - d) Other issue e.g. male member not ready for cylinder refilling
13. Issues in using gas as regular mode of cooking:
 - a) Affordability issue - financially expensive
 - b) Accessibility issue - gas distributor at faraway place
 - c) Old beliefs (food cooked on *chulha* is healthier)
 - d) Behavioral and man of family decides cooking on *chulha* is better for women
 - e) Single cylinder and sudden emptying of cylinder
 - f) Large pot size can't be used over gas stove
 - g) Cattle feed in large amount is cooked
14. How much time in collection of alternative solid fuel wood daily:
 - a) Up to 1 hour
 - b) 1-2 hours
 - c) > 2 hours
15. Do you save some time using LPG as a fuel:
 - a) Yes
 - b) No
16. Do you face any physical discomfort like cough while using solid wood as fuel:
 - a) Yes
 - b) No
17. Do your children or male family members also help you in collecting fuel wood at home:
 - a) Yes
 - b) No
 - c) Male member do all collection
18. Is using LPG gas as fuel been helpful in increasing your family income by working more in saved time:
 - a) Yes
 - b) No
 - c) Reducing family income by spending on gas
19. According to you which is better source of cooking fuel:
 - a) Firewood
 - b) Cow dung
 - c) Coal
 - d) LPG
20. Advantages of cooking fuel you are using:
 - a) Cheaper
 - b) Easily available
 - c) Comfortable as using it since long time
21. Have you ever sold your gas cylinder:
 - a) Never
 - b) Yes, Once
 - c) Several times

To study the impact of Jeevika Network in Empowering Women and addressing the Issue of Social Exclusion

Pratibha Rani

During my initial days in the district, a toilet construction campaign was organised and I was touring extensively to oversee if the toilets were being constructed in reality. During my visits in the villages, many times I found a group of 10-12 women sitting in a courtyard and writing something in a notebook. At times they were just gossiping and having fun. I got curious about what was happening and saw the books of these women at a few places. After a few days I discussed this with my District Collector, Shri Rahul Kumar and he encouraged me to study more about the JEEVIKA network and undertake this study.

This paper measures the impact of JEEVIKA network on the economic, social, domestic, civic and political situation of women in Bihar. It also seeks to expostulate inclusivity of JEEVIKA especially for women coming from SC/ST sections of society. Finally, the paper traces the factors which make the JEEVIKA programme a successful model for SHG promotion in underdeveloped states and also suggests some areas which can be improved for better outcomes under the project. Through this paper an attempt is made to highlight the capacity of small collective organisations to undertake profitable ventures and help improve living conditions of its members while enabling them to realise their strength in other aspects of life.



Figure 1: Honourable PM mentioning the success of JEEVIKA women of Purnea during his Man Ki Baat session.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

JEEVIKA is a World Bank aided Bihar Rural Livelihoods Project (BRLP) launched in 2006 in 6 districts of Bihar to spearhead socio-economic development among rural poor. It is run by an autonomous body called Bihar Rural Livelihood Promotion Society (BRLPS) under Department of Rural Development, Government of Bihar. The project was started with the aim to provide rural households with innovative, sustainable and scalable models for livelihood. It organizes women into self-help groups (SHGs) and enables them to undertake income generating activities through assistance in skilling and resource mobilization. Today, JEEVIKA is a strong network of around 8.2 million women, spread across the state of Bihar, and involved in ensuring reach of several government initiatives till the last mile in the state.

In 2006, when BRLP was introduced in 6 selected high poverty districts of Bihar, the poverty percentage in rural Bihar was approximately 44.6%. That time, around 36 million people were still living in conditions of abject poverty. This poverty was majorly among landless or near landless households which constituted around 70% of rural households in the state. In this scenario of abject poverty and deeply entrenched patriarchy, the status of women was even worse. This was evident from the skewed sex ratio of state which was 919 as per 2011 Census. The literacy rate amongst women was dismal with just 51.5% literate women in the state (2011 Census).

Thus, BRLP was launched with the colloquial name of JEEVIKA to spearhead rural transformation in Bihar. Under the project, women were organised into small SHGs who were then provided low - cost institutional credit to undertake farm or non - farm livelihood activities. The project drew lessons from Andhra Pradesh to promote livelihood projects relevant for rural women of Bihar and to develop strong local institutions. Organizing women into SHGs and enabling them to undertake livelihood activities has been tried as a method of poverty alleviation and empowerment across the world. [Dr. Joy Deshmukh-Ranadive]. The study "Women's Self-Help Groups in Andhra Pradesh - Participatory Poverty Alleviation in Action" analysed how SHGs act as a catalyst for increasing household income and alleviating poverty.

While rural transformations through SHGs have been a successful model in most of the South Indian states. There have been very few studies analysing impact of SHGs in bringing positive transformation in the lives of rural women in states of North India. Thus, this study analyses the impact of JEEVIKA project in transforming the lives of women living in rural areas of Bihar. Furthermore, it analyses if JEEVIKA or BRLP has been successful in its objective and identify the factors which have contributed towards its success.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Several studies have been conducted to assess the impact of women SHGs in promoting rural development and women empowerment. Women empowerment has been seen traditionally with respect to control over power structures and resources all across the world [World Bank, 2001]. [Savitha, V., & Rajashekar, H. ,2012] studied the role and contribution of SHGs in women empowerment and found that SHGs contribute significantly towards women empowerment. Therefore, any programme seeking to improve rural lives with a focus on women has to ensure provisions which allow women to gather some control over resources and eventually on the power systems of the society.

2.1 Economic Empowerment

The micro - credit framework has been found to be effective in improving the lives of rural women and giving them both income and identity. It has been implemented successfully in several countries and Kudumbashree from Kerala is a case to note in this regard in India. Even [Lakshmanan S, 2001] in his study found micro-finance as an important contributor towards women empowerment. [Avanish Kumar] in his work "Does micro-finance redefine identity, income and insecurity among rural women? A model of women's empowerment" studies how BRLP has given both income and identity to rural women in Bihar and as a result of that addressed their insecurities. He speaks particularly about how promoting few women as CRPs in an area in turn encourages other women to participate in group activities and raise income for the household and identity for the individual. He adds further that the project has been successful in improving the confidence levels of women and in turn allowing them to make choices and at times get those fulfilled also.

[Geetika Hora & Archana Tiwari] in their study also found that asset ownership has increased among rural women. Many women have bought assets in the form of land or mobile phones from their earnings through SHGs. This is particularly true for the CRPs who travel to different states for SHG mobilization and thus have avenues for regular increased income.

2.2 Social Empowerment

Meera Tiwari in her article "Didi of Rural Bihar: Real Agent of Change?" discussed the role of JEEVIKA network in empowering women and developing their agency to stand for themselves. She points out that the group dynamics in JEEVIKA model acts as a ladder of support for every woman and allows them to fulfil individual choices through group benefits. The women are able to effectively exercise their agency and this can be seen in better public

service delivery in schemes like Public Distribution System (PDS) and Mid-Day Meal (MDM). She further notes the shift observed in society wherein the women gain own identity and are referred with their name along with the suffix 'Didi' rather than someone's wife or someone's daughter. She also speaks about the realized social capital of women groups after coming together.

[Geetika Hora & Archana Tiwari] in their study observe how women have gained a voice in community through participation in SHGs. They also point out towards the increase in mobility in rural women for both professional and personal work like attending JEEVIKA meetings and visiting health centre or block office.

The role of SHGs has relatively been more pronounced on social issues than on the economic issues [Puhazhendhi, V, & Satyasai, KJS, 2001]. Over and above financial activities, the SHGs serve as a place for expression and exchange of ideas and experiences for women and thereby creating a social identity for women in particular and social capital for all the women in general [Tilekar *et al*, 2001].

2.3 Domestic Empowerment

Domestic empowerment of women starts from their income generating capacity in the household. The micro – finance available to JEEVIKA SHGs have enabled women to engage in income generating activities and thereby contribute to the income of the household. This income increases their say in the financial decision making in the family [Purnima, KS, & Bhagyalakshmi, K, 2000].

With access of money women are now contributing towards occupational decision making at household level. Along with micro – finance, the exposure to different livelihood opportunities enable women in promoting occupational diversification in household [Galab, S, & Rao, NC, 2003].

The involvement of women in family level decision making has improved with participation in JEEVIKA network. They get respect, affection and to an extent their rightful place in the family [Dadhich, CL, 2001]. The SHG system of empowerment has been found to be very effective in helping women acquire skills and protect themselves from exploitation and isolation [Durgarani, M, & Gokilavani, R, 2015].

2.4 Civic Empowerment

[Geetika Hora & Archana Tiwari] speak about the CRP Cadre deputed within the JEEVIKA model who mobilize, mentor and handhold other women. These

women have emerged as a strong workforce among the rural women and are engaged in several government schemes. [Stewart, M], 1990] in his work found that participation in SHGs facilitate people's participation in different government programs and thereby strengthen their position as rightful citizens. [Geetika Hora & Archana Tiwari] in their study point that the collective action of women increases because of SHGs and this eventually increases their participation in public institutions. In Bihar, they found that many women after benefitting from BRLP participated actively in public institutions like schools, PDS shops etc. This increased their reach towards government services and also increased accountability of service providers. The PDS shops run by these women were observed to be more transparent and efficient.

2.5 Political Empowerment

Involvement in JEEVIKA network enable women to emerge as social intermediaries and the exchange of ideas during SHG meetings induces both interest and ambition in local politics [Purnima, KS, & Bhagyalakshmi, K, 2000]. [Oommen, TK, 2008] found in his study that there is a correlation between SHGs and local politics; through membership of SHGs. [Geetika Hora & Archana Tiwari] in their study found that women SHG members evolved as an important political group in the state with active participation in the political process. The voter turnout was found to have a 12% increase from 44% in 2009 to 56% in 2014 general elections. Similarly, many of these women started participating in local panchayat elections and even won seats. Further, with deepening of JEEVIKA network, the election issues changed to more focus on development related matters. Finally, greater participation was observed in *gram sabhas*.

2.6 Social Inclusion

Promoting social inclusion was not the stated objective of BRLP. However, with the aim of ensuring poverty alleviation for all sections of society the project included provisions to break social barriers for the historically disadvantaged sections of society. [Geetika Hora, Prashant Krishna et al] in their study found that the project made inclusion of poorest households in the village mandatory and thus ensured that the most marginalized groups become a part of the JEEVIKA network. They also note that the provisions like financial incentives to CRPs for improving participation of SC/ST household helped in increasing their participation and thereby making the network more inclusive. [Avanish Kuma, 2016] also writes that the access to micro - finance under the SHG model is not only helpful in financial inclusion and income generation rather it adds more in social transformation by promoting

inclusive and sustainable livelihoods. BRLP has made inclusiveness as one of the criteria for evaluating the performance of VOs and this has also contributed in building JEEVIKA SHGs as inclusive community institutions.

3.0 AN OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

The scope of the study was limited to one block (*Kasba*) of the Purnea district where at present 1791 SHGs are functional covering 21,928 women. These SHGs cover around 13 Panchayats including total 57 inhabited villages located in the block. With these SHGs, 131 village organisations (VOs) have been formed at village level where each VO includes 10-15 SHGs within itself. Furthermore, by combining these VOs, 3 cluster level federations (CLFs) are formed and made functional in the block, namely - *Saheli*, *Sanskar* and *Satyam*. A pictorial representation of JEEVIKA structure in the state is given below.

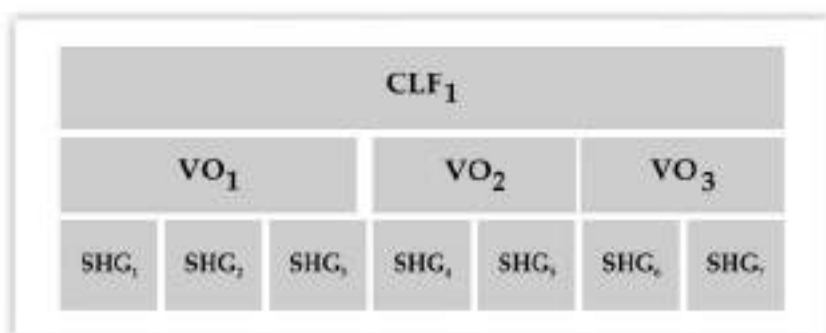


Figure 2: Pictorial representation of JEEVIKA structure

The study employs qualitative research methodology. For the purpose of the study, the data was collected from both primary and secondary sources. Primary source of data collection were the beneficiaries of JEEVIKA network, associated officials and so on. The secondary source of data collection were the official reports released by the JEEVIKA department. For data collection, data tools such as questionnaire, interviews, focus group discussions, observations and so on were used by the researcher. Furthermore, random sampling was employed to select 6 responses from each of the 6 VOs for analysis and impact assessment.

For conducting focus group discussions, 2 VOs were randomly selected from each CLF at the block level leading to a total of 6 VOs which were studied in detail. FGDs were conducted with all of these selected VOs. In these VOs a questionnaire was distributed to all the women who came up for the meeting. The responses from the questionnaire were then again sampled using

stratified sampling technique. One stratum consisted of women from SC/ST communities and the other strata consisted of the rest of the women. The number of samples selected randomly from the SC/ST strata and the general strata were 2 and 4 respectively. This was done to give adequate representation to women from SC/ST households. The responses in these 36 selected questionnaires were then studied for analysis and impact evaluation.

In order to study the effectiveness of BRLP in improving lives of rural women and thus empowering them, the study undertakes to answer following research questions:

- Does involvement in JEEVIKA network empower rural women?
- Has the JEEVIKA project helped in addressing the issue of social exclusion?

4.0 FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

It is a sad reality that in rural Bihar a woman has no identity of herself. The complexity of poverty, caste and patriarchy fuel each other to render a woman completely powerless and exploited. To alleviate this situation, BRLP was introduced to deal with rural poverty by utilising the agency of women. During this study, it was found that women have the capacity to develop a strong sense of own self and fight insecurities when given opportunity. Women empowerment is actually a process of self-actualisation wherein women realize their own hidden potential on being provided with a very small nudge often mocked as “das takiya system” (10-rupee system). This section details the findings of the study. Each dimension of empowerment and social inclusion is discussed separately and the variables taken into consideration are detailed followed by specific findings pertaining to it.

4.1 Economic Empowerment

The variables used to study economic empowerment of women post their participation in JEEVIKA network are engagement in productive employment, income, contribution in paying off household debts, ownership of assets, access to institutional credit and insurance coverage.

4.1.1 Employment, Income and Debt Closure

All the women who received credit support reported about doing an economic activity which has led to contribution towards overall household income. Most women are engaged in tailoring work and reported that they were earning close to Rs. 7,000/- per month. The second most popular enterprise observed was opening of grocery shops which contribute to a handsome income

of around Rs. 10,000/- per month on an average. Apart from these cow rearing, goat rearing, poultry farming and agriculture were other popular options.

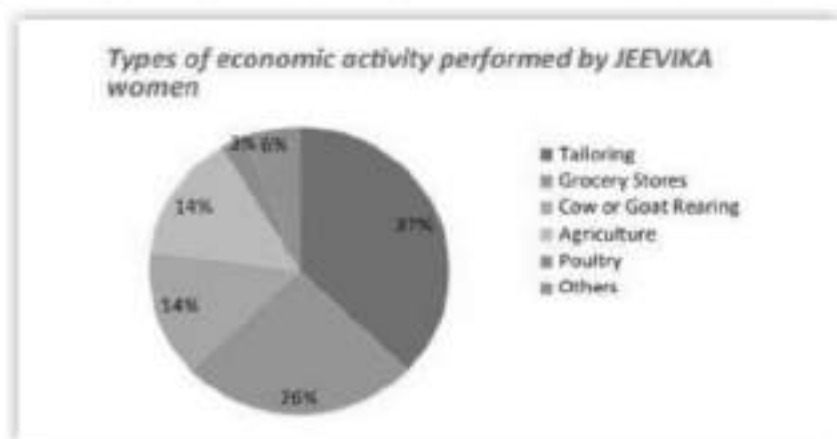


Figure 3: Economic activity performed by JEEVIKA Didis

The income from these activities has enabled women to enjoy financial independence and fulfil their basic necessities. Many women reported that they use a part of their income for consumption of things of need and choice like clothes, accessories like bindi and slippers for which they were earlier dependent on the male members of the household. Few women are getting sanitary napkins for their girl child from the money earned. These are strong indicators of economic empowerment of women in the rural setup.

Debt payment is another commonly observed objective behind credit demand in JEEVIKA. As per the registers maintained at SHG level where the purpose of credit is recorded reveals that around 15% of women use these for debt repayment. These women are even supported by JEEVIKA network through smaller instalments and longer duration repayment. It is one of the most humane aspects of JEEVIKA which has helped several rural households repay high interest informal loans in exchange of low interest formal loans.

The above observation is backed by other studies in this arena. Avanish Kumar in his study titled "Does micro-finance redefine identity, income and insecurity among rural women? A model of women's empowerment"¹ stated that BRLP has given both income and identity to rural women in Bihar which has enabled them to address their insecurities. Appointment of few women as community resource persons (CRPs) in an area in turn encourages other

¹ Avanish Kumar, *Does microfinance redefine identity, income and insecurity among rural women? A model of women's empowerment*, Enterprise Development and Microfinance, Vol. 1 Issue 1.

women to participate in group activities and raise income for the household. He further adds that the project has been successful in improving the confidence levels of women and in turn allowing them to make choices.

4.1.2 Ownership of Assets

Ownership of assets is a strong symbol of a woman's power and identity in society. It not only enables her to earn due respect in society but also makes her eligible for large loans from banks. Asset ownership is also a common investment for credit earned. During the study it was found that most women buy a phone as a first asset for themselves. Among the women surveyed during the study near about all of the women possessed a phone brought from their own earnings. Apart from phone, land purchase is another common area of investment among women in rural Bihar. Geetika Hora and Archana Tiwari in their study² also found that asset ownership has increased amongst rural women due to JEEVIKA programme. Many women have bought assets in the form of land or mobile phones from their earnings earned through SHGs. This is particularly true for the CRPs who travel to different states for SHG mobilization and thus have avenues for regularly increased income.

4.1.3 Access to Institutional Credit

Among the 1791 SHGs formed within the block 1642 (91.68%) have bank accounts. Apart from this from among 21928 women who are part of SHGs within the block 3101 (14.14%) women have individual bank accounts also. All of these women can access institutional credit either directly or through their SHG network.

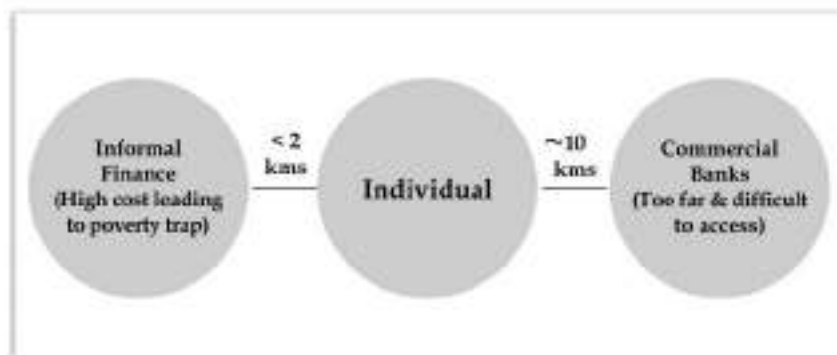


Figure 4: Situation before JEEVIKA

² Geetika Hora & Archana Tiwari, *Gender Equity and Women's Empowerment: Outcomes, Strategies and Lessons learnt from Bihar Rural Livelihood Project*. Available at http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/pt/298391515516507115/122290272_20180012031911/additional/122548-WP-P090764-PUBLIC-India-BRLP-Booklet-p.pdf.

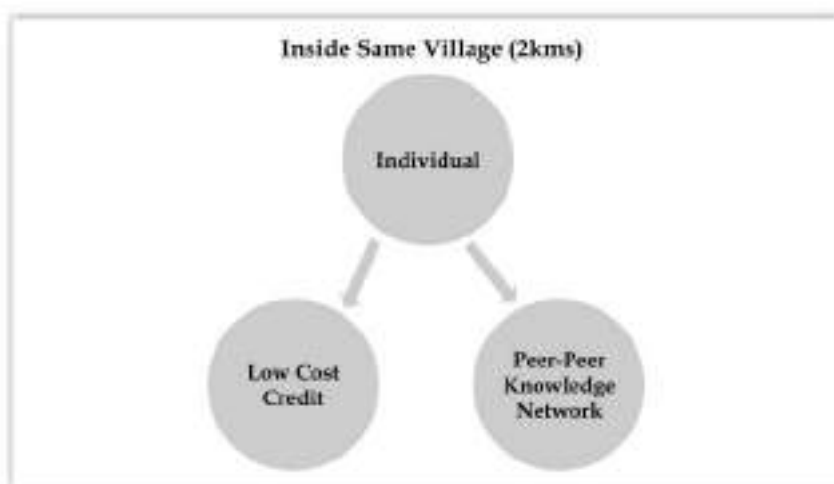


Figure 5: Situation after JEEVIKA

JEEVIKA has immensely improved the capability of rural Bihar to access low cost institutional credit and has also placed women in a knowledge network where they learn to utilize this credit effectively.

4.1.4 Insurance Cover

A unique initiative under BRLP which is identified as a very important factor behind economic empowerment of women in the household is life insurance and accidental insurance coverage provided under the project. Every woman in the network is provided insurance coverage and this adds to the economic clout of women in the society. This has contributed in shifting of the attitude with change in perception of the image of a woman from "burden" to a "resource".

This in turn indirectly fuelled investment in girl child's health and education. The families who have availed benefits under this provision reported to have utilized the money of insurance for education of children and agricultural mechanization.

4.2 Social Empowerment

The social empowerment of women in rural Bihar post participation in JEEVIKA network is studied through variables identified as mobility, identity and ability to initiate collective action.

4.2.1 Mobility

'Mobility of an individual' is an indicator of the independence enjoyed by that individual. Women in rural Bihar lacked this basic right to move on their own even at times of need. Today these women move freely both for needs and leisure. In the study conducted, mobility was one point which was mentioned

explicitly by each woman and this shows the importance woman attach to this freedom. Women quoted this as a symbol of relative superiority over other women who still are restricted within the boundaries of their homes and thus still dependent on male members of the household.

The 'movement' is primarily for works like attending JEEVIKA meetings, accessing government services by visiting Health Sub-Centre, Panchayat Office, Block Office, Anganwadi Centre etc. Apart from this women go out for leisure, to meet each other, attend fairs, local market and likewise. Many women reported that they are now allowed to go out and buy groceries and vegetables for the household. Another important aspect related to mobility was change in the behaviour of family about woman's movement. Earlier these women were seen with suspicion and stopped from going outside of the house. But, now this 'movement' is supported by their families. Many times men in the family drop the women to attend JEEVIKA meetings and provides her support to move. The most significant change which was found during the study was that women are now allowed to move to even distant places like other states without the escort of any family member. The CRPs identified in the project are moving to other states under National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM) to impart training to other women in mobilizing SHGs and livelihood generation. Some women have even travelled to Sikkim, Gujarat and Delhi on their own for this purpose and were clearly proud of the same. This is a monumental change from the times when a woman who stepped out of the home was automatically branded as characterless.

4.2.2 Identity

Women were identified with the names of the elder male members of their families and never had an identity of their own, JEEVIKA network brought all these women together and gave them distinct identities. Now, these women are called with their own names along with the suffix '*didi*' which is usually associated with an elder and is a symbol of respect. They can now speak in front of others, do signature and consult other women regarding any matter of concern. They see themselves as part of a network of change and prosperity which is a great progress from the state of absolute powerlessness. It gives them a sense of confidence and autonomy. A JEEVIKA *didi* understands her identity independently of her family and also realizes the power associated with this identity.

Apart from acceptance of the woman herself, the society is accepting this newly configured identity of women. This re-imagining is now seeing women as distinct from traditionally defined gender roles. Now women are seen as beings with their own identity and ability to bring positive transformation.

Other women call JEEVIKA members for help and advice for works like how to get AADHAR card, open bank account etc.

This identity at the societal level empowers women to raise their demands and realize the power of their opinion. The network has also contributed in breaking the hierarchical identities along the lines of caste, class or religion. Now all the women irrespective of their social standing are called “*didi*” who sit together and engage in productive employment. In this direction, JEEVIKA has been a great equalizer giving everyone an identical identity and also an equal opportunity to build this identity based on individual merit.

4.2.3 Ability for Collective Action

Social empowerment of any individual is best assessed by their ability to get their demands fulfilled at the societal level. By being part of JEEVIKA rural women of Bihar have attempted at times to get their demands fulfilled at the societal level. Sitting in groups and discussing their issues enabled women to identify their own problems and eventually chart out a method to solve them. The greatest example of this power is manifested in the state of Bihar through the actions taken by women against the local production and sale of alcohol. The women have come together to raise their demand of complete alcohol ban; organised anti-alcoholism campaigns; destroyed the equipment for manufacture of alcohol and vandalised the locations of manufacture and sale of alcohol. Their call for “*daru band*” (alcohol ban) in village.



Figure 6: Women of Kasba block destroying local alcohol manufacturing equipments

Apart from “*daru band*” women came together to fight other social issues like child marriage, dowry demand and domestic violence. JEEVIKA women participated in the human chain organised at state level against these issues showing both their solidarity and strong will against social evils. Women are giving equal attention to girl child health and education and thus no instance of child marriage was reported from surveyed JEEVIKA families in the block. Similarly, women organised in Panchayat meetings for raising demands with respect to public services and development work. Women try and ensure that the local committees take up development works raised by them and follow up these to ensure completion of these works. Their demands have increased the transparency and quality of services in schools and public distribution shops (PDS).

Meera Tiwari in her article “*Didi of Rural Bihar: Real Agent of Change?*”³ discusses the role of JEEVIKA network in empowering women and developing their agency to stand for themselves. She points out that the group dynamics in JEEVIKA model acts as a ladder of support for every woman and allows them to fulfil individual choices through group benefits. The women are able to effectively exercise their agency and this is reflected in the better public service delivery through schemes like PDS and mid-day meals (MDM). The study further highlights the realized social capital of women groups after they come together. A shift is observed in society wherein the women gain their own identity and are referred with their name along with the suffix ‘*didi*’ rather than someone’s wife or someone’s daughter.

4.3 Domestic Empowerment

The variables identified to study domestic empowerment of women, post their participation in JEEVIKA network, were decision making, ability to deal with domestic violence and food patterns.

4.3.1 Decision Making

The role of a woman in the rural household of Bihar was limited to her performing her gender roles and silently following orders. She is rarely consulted in any decision making in the house. Post JEEVIKA programme, this situation has drastically changed and now women are also active participant in the household decision making. This is particularly true for the households where women managed to repay old debts from the credit support provided under the project. Now, the women have decision making powers with respect to the household income and are able to direct it towards productive and developmental works like education of children, health etc.

³ Meera Tiwari, “*Didi of Rural Bihar: Real Agent of Change?*” EPW, Vol. 45, Issue No. 33.

Additionally, women learn occupational skills under BRLP and share this knowledge within the household which has led to occupational diversification in the household. Women's decision making power emanates from their income generating capability but is not limited to just this. Now women also share their opinion in matters of local politics and social issues. Women have helped enhance the value attached to development dimension in politics which was earlier heavily caste ridden.

4.3.2 Ability to deal with Domestic Violence

Entangled in a complex web of patriarchy, poverty and alcohol women were rendered powerless and an easy target of household violence and torture. Domestic violence was a household phenomenon in rural Bihar that has significantly been reduced with strengthening of JEEVIKA family. The realisation of self-worth and collective power enabled women in raising their voice against exploitation.

JEEVIKA has helped women in freeing themselves from the idea that they are dependent on men for their livelihood. Once this was realized, there was no looking back and women have closed doors for exploitative, abusive and alcoholic men. This was reported by many school going children mentioning how their fathers no more beat their mothers or create scene in the locality. Apart from individual initiatives, women also act collectively if any woman is beaten up in the village. This has led to a situation where women who are not part of JEEVIKA also come and seek help in cases of domestic violence. It was found that women get a declaration from the abusive man in writing for not repeating the mistake as last and final warning. Several women said that "now he knows that I am not alone" and therefore do not harm me. A group of women with brooms is a force to reckon with and has helped discourage domestic violence significantly.

4.3.3 Food Patterns

Usually the woman in the house is the last person to eat and mostly consumes whatever is left. The neglect towards nutrition of women is a well-known fact. JEEVIKA has been successful in altering this reality and ensuring nutritious food to women. The training modules under BRLP also impart education about vegetables and fruits which can be grown at home using organic fertilizers and enabled many women to cultivate kitchen garden at home. Women today are aware of the nutrition components of spinach, chillies, papaya, drumsticks etc. which can be easily grown at home. In *Kasba*, the cultivation of vegetable gardens is actively promoted and 2 villages- Bishnupur and Malhariya have been declared "*Sahjan Gaon*" i.e. all the

JEEVIKA households in these 2 villages grow drumsticks and are aware its nutrition value.

During the study all the women reported that they consume vegetables at home. Many could identify that spinach has iron in it and is very useful for pregnant and lactating women. Women also reported about increased consumption of milk and meat products because of promotion to poultry, dairy and goat rearing as livelihood methods. Thus, JEEVIKA women are today aware about what is nutritious food and more importantly has access to it.



Figure 7: JEEVIKA women showcasing their kitchen garden

4.4 Civic Empowerment

The variables identified to study civic empowerment of women post their participation in JEEVIKA network were- ability to access government services and participation in government schemes.

4.4.1 Ability to access Government Services and participation in Government Schemes

The ignorance about government initiatives hampers people's ability to access these services and make the government functionaries accountable. JEEVIKA enables women to venture out of their homes, learn about government services and access them. The Village Resource Person (VRP) cadre deployed under BRLP is tasked with spreading awareness among the members of JEEVIKA and thus helps women learn about their rights and privileges.

The JEEVIKA women studied reported that by being part of the network they now visit government offices and are able to get their work done on their own. All the women agreed they know the process of getting an AADHAR Card. It was also reported that these women are approached by others in village for getting information about government schemes and sometimes also for getting some work done. The knowledge about schemes and ability to speak gives these women confidence to raise their demands properly and thus they are also taken seriously by government functionaries. Many women also participate in government works. The cadre of "*Vikas Mitra*" in Bihar has many JEEVIKA women who act as link between the government and community with respect to several government functions. Apart from the *Vikas Mitra* Cadre mentioned above JEEVIKA women are involved in several schemes of government.

Some of the women have started PDS ration shops and are providing better services to the people. Similarly, women are involved in committees for monitoring the functioning of Schools, Anganwadi Centres, Panchayat related works etc. In few places the entire Swachh Bharat Mission SBM (Rural) toilet construction drive is run by JEEVIKA. This participation of women has increased the accountability of government functionaries and thus has improved governance at the grass-root level.

4.5 Political Empowerment

The variables identified to study political empowerment of women post participation in JEEVIKA network were- participation in political process and ability to enforce political action.



Figure 8: JEEVIKA women participating in awareness campaign for toilet construction

4.5.1 Participation in Political Process

JEEVIKA women are actively participating in political processes. The regular meetings within the network involves talks about local politics. This has considerably improved their understanding about 'what is happening' and 'what should happen'. Today, all of these women attend the *gram sabha* meetings and vote during elections and most of them vote as per their own choices rather than the directives of their husbands. Among the 36 women surveyed 29 reported that they are not directed by their families anymore about voting while all of them participate in elections.

Moreover, JEEVIKA women are also actively participating in politics by contesting elections. These women have shifted the election campaigns towards issues of pertinence and now ensures focus in on taking up projects which will make lives of people better in the locality.

The women leaders are more prompt in facilitating government work like collecting records from beneficiaries, updating of records and cashbooks etc. which make the systems more accountable, transparent and effective. Women leaders from JEEVIKA actively strategise during elections. During the period of study panchayat raj elections were announced and women could be observed charting out plans on which areas and issues to focus. During one of the FGDs women were observed to be clearly discussing issues to be taken up during the elections, voting patterns of people, the factors which guide voting and convincing women in the group to garner more votes. Therefore, it was observed that JEEVIKA women understands the importance of politics and

thus effectively engage in the same for their own welfare and the welfare of the society as a whole.

4.5.2 Ability to Enforce Demands

Politics is about power and political empowerment in true sense is realized from the ability to capture power and wield it eventually. The women in JEEVIKA who are contesting elections are upcoming as leaders of maturity who are able to identify issues of significance. Most of JEEVIKA women leaders are able to convert their promises into reality and thus gain trust of the people easily. Apart from this, at the state level, these women realize their capacity as voters. The greatest known success of women from JEEVIKA is in enforcing their demand on complete ban on alcohol announced in the state since November 2015. This impossible feat was achieved after widespread rallies, campaigns and meetings held by JEEVIKA women in this regard. This is indeed a great achievement for women who just 10 years back were the most marginalised section of the state who were completely voiceless, ignored and excluded.

4.6 Social Inclusion

As discussed above, JEEVIKA has been a great equaliser in the sense that it brings women from different backgrounds to a common platform and gives them equal opportunity to work together for their own welfare. The system of VOs and CLFs bring women from different SHGs together and thus mixes up women from different caste and communities in a group. The leaders who oversee the functioning of these groups are chosen by the women and thus all the women get equal opportunity. On observation of JEEVIKA meetings as an observer it was found that all the women sit at the same level in these meetings. There is no hierarchy enforcement in the form of chairs for upper caste/class and likewise. Similarly, all women are called with the suffix of "didi" and there is equal respect for everyone. Rather than discriminating along the lines of caste, religion or class, these women encourage and support each other.

Table: Representation of SC/ST population in JEEVIKA

SL No.	Variable	Total	SC/ST	SC/ST Percentage
1.	Women Population*	91682	13058	14.2
2.	Women in SHGs	21928	2674	12.19
3.	Number of SHGs	1791	174	9.7
4.	Leaders	579	132	22.79

These figures indicate that SC/ST women are fairly represented in Jeevika network. Also, in leadership roles these communities are over represented because of the inclusive provisions of leader selection within the project. It can be fairly concluded that JEEVIKA network is inclusive in its functioning and women from all sections of society stand equal chance of becoming a part of the network.



Figure 9: All JEEVIKA women sitting at the same level during meetings

5.0 POLICY IMPLICATION OF JEEVIKA AND SUGGESTIONS

The JEEVIKA network has proved instrumental in bringing positive transformation into the lives of women in rural Bihar. The SHG model of transformative development has been applied successfully all across South India and have been effective in women led rural development and poverty eradication. However, this model could not be successfully replicated in north Indian states and even NRLM which was launched after observing JEEVIKA's success in Bihar could not achieve much success in north India. The reasons identified behind JEEVIKA's success are mentioned (Figure 10).

The success of micro - credit system in generating profits was one of the fundamental reasons which expanded the reach of JEEVIKA and attracted women to join the network. The lessons learned from Andhra Pradesh helped JEEVIKA take up livelihood opportunities which are relevant for rural Bihar. Besides this, the project ensured that women are given adequate support of training, hand - holding and resource mobilization for income generation. Such support system enabled many women to convert their micro - credits into profits and encouraged others to join the network.

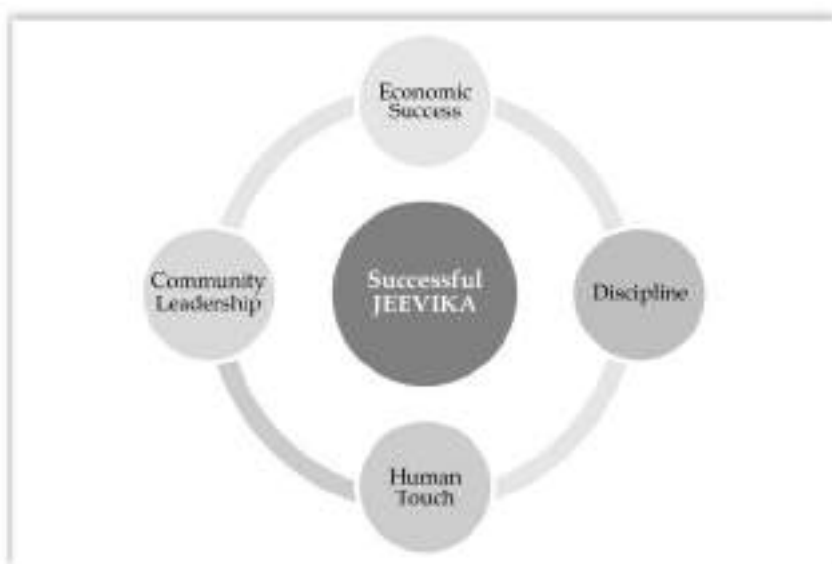


Figure 10: Pillars of success of JEEVIKA

For a successful SHG based model of development it is essential to promote livelihood options which are relevant for local people. It should understand the level of exposure and ability of women to take up livelihood. Very radical projects may not succeed at the outset and it must be a progression of moving slowly towards bigger projects. For instance, women in Pune could take up poultry or sewing work easily as it can be done from home and does not require radical change from the earlier lifestyle of these women. After these small initial successes, the projects like forming farm producer organisations can be initiated for greater profits.

Furthermore, JEEVIKA could enable women to come out stronger through its regular interactions. It has been made essential for all the members of SHG to meet regularly and maintain proper records. These meetings help women to venture out of their homes, learn to talk to outsiders, learn about new livelihood options, maintain records and transform into confident and self-reliant women.

In the SHGs which did not conduct the weekly meetings a lack of trust among the members was observed. These women could not develop a strong bond amongst themselves which would enable them to rely on each other, save and share together. Thus, they could not mobilize community savings effectively. Therefore, discipline in having meetings and interactions is a very important factor in the success of any SHG based development model. Here, they learn the importance of savings and repayments. The strong cadre of officers

deputed up to the block level under BRLP enabled regular verification of these activities and thus kept a check on women.

Women also learnt the importance of time during this process. Due to regular meetings they finished household work timely and engaged in JEEVIKA related work. During one of the interactions a woman beautifully explained that earlier they spent entire time in household work itself but now they understand the importance of time and make sure they utilize it effectively so that no task remains incomplete.

JEEVIKA was initiated in a society which is one of the most backward in the country and lacks even basic facilities. Therefore, it was important to understand the genuine basic needs of these women. The project allowed women to use the institutional credit for consumption related (non-income generating) activities like daughter's marriage or repayment of debts or construction of house or health emergency. Such women were even provided with smaller instalments and longer duration for repayments. This severely increased the trust and sense of ownership among women about the project. Herein, JEEVIKA understood the basic human psychology where we tend to only indulge in activities which bring us some profits. Therefore, a financial help in times of need gave women a reason to become a member of JEEVIKA and thus the network while helping these women could teach them about a range of things contributing towards their overall empowerment. CEO of JEEVIKA Shri Balamurigan D says that staying profitable is not the primary goal. JEEVIKA strives to fulfil the basic necessities of these women while enabling them to become self-reliant eventually.

JEEVIKA from the very start has supported community leadership. The strong and out-going women were identified and encouraged with the task of mobilizing other women. The examples of women leading groups from own locality gave strength to a lot of women to come forward and participate. While JEEVIKA was fulfilling the varied needs of these women, this aspect fulfilled their deep rooted desire of leading a dignified life which was denied to them for generations in the poor and patriarchal society of Bihar. Therefore, several women came forward to participate in this project.

The CRP cadre in JEEVIKA gets opportunity to travel to distant places in country for trainings, SHG mobilization and hand-holding other women under NRLM. These women serve as role models for women back in the villages who aspire to grow and travel to different places on their own (Figure 11).



Figure 11: CRPs from Kasba travelling to Statue of Unity, Gujarat

Despite all the above mentioned factors that have made JEEVIKA such a success in rural Bihar, there are some areas which can still be worked on to strengthen JEEVIKA.

- **Expanding reach among the Under-Privileged Sections of the Society**

The membership of JEEVIKA has steadily increased over the years and covers roughly 23% of the women in the block under study. But, the poverty estimates in the region is much higher. Therefore, there are still lots of women who are in need and are left behind. More efforts need to be put in to involve such women. This has to be particularly done among the backward sections like SC/ST groups where the reach is even lower (less than 10%). In these communities the prevalence of poverty is higher and thus more women need to be equipped with enabling provisions of JEEVIKA. More nuanced and targeted efforts are required to bring these women within the purview of this project.

- **Co-ordination with other government departments**

While JEEVIKA women are now able to reach for government services, the bureaucratic delays and underachievement hampers full access to benefits. It will be useful to link government welfare projects with JEEVIKA so that all the members are able to access the benefits like Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana, Swachh Bharat Mission, Sukanya Samriddhi Yojana etc. without any hassle. Such convergence can ensure better coverage of government projects while fulfilling the basic necessities of women. Therefore, it will allow the use of JEEVIKA credit for income generating activities rather than consumption.

- **More focus on Gender Sensitisation**

While the women are growing under the network of JEEVIKA, the JEEVIKA offices and overall society is still predominantly patriarchal and yet to accept this rising role of women in society. Therefore, women face severe backlashes at times which discourage their involvement and growth in the network. More gender sensitization drives should be taken up with the staff of JEEVIKA and the entire community at large to slowly support the change towards women empowerment.

- **Group Enterprises**

The support to individual needs and enterprise has given JEEVIKA a strong base by creating a cadre of trained and efficient women. While this is continuing to expand the reach of JEEVIKA, it is also essential to support more group enterprises among the trained women. This is essential to increase the profitability and contribute towards overall prosperity in a village. For instance, more Producer Group Organisations like the Aranyak in Purnea district need to be supported which can lead to a significant rise in income and wealth profile of the region. More diversification and value addition will further support economic transformation in society.

JEEVIKA has efficiently put up a structure to empower women in several aspects of life. Today it has innumerable stories of struggles, setbacks and successes from women. It has been a journey of self-realisation for the women who joined the network and gained a lot in the process. By supporting women from the community itself it has helped identify grass-root leaders.

Today JEEVIKA is expanding itself to align with innumerable opportunities available. Women are leading as "Bank Sakhis" to increase financial inclusion in their communities. These women will help in ensuring that all the women in society are capable enough to access all the available financial services. Women are also learning the modern methods of farming and building farmer producer organisations to collectivize and multiply their profits. The SRI (System of Rice Intensification) method of farming has been widely adopted by women farmers and increased the productivity and eventually profits for these women. Honey rearing, silk worm rearing, plantation drives are just a few other examples where JEEVIKA women are reaping huge benefits.

Today JEEVIKA is a vast network of capable and trained women who can take any given project to success. This strong network can be developed into a value chain which caters to multiple needs of modern society and thereby bring profits to rural areas. It can be helpful in checking migration to a great extent through its income generation capabilities. This story of learning and prospering together is a great learning experience for anyone who comes across JEEVIKA "didis". Today women have aspirations and are able to chart out a strategy to realise them. This is a great achievement for BRLPS - the implementing agency for the project. It must continue to come up with strategies to make JEEVIKA better for all the women and ensure rural transformation as a by-product. JEEVIKA has succeeded in an extremely diverse and difficult context of Bihar and thus a case study for governments across the world to learn and replicate.

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ANNEXURE

नाम :-

भाषा :-

- क्या आपने अपनी कमाई से घर का कर्ज चुकाया है ?
हाँ ☐ नहीं ☐
- क्या आपके पास अपना मोबाईल फोन है ?
हाँ ☐ नहीं ☐
- क्या आपने अपने लिए जमीन खरीदी है ?
हाँ ☐ नहीं ☐
- क्या आप कभी बैंक गई है ?
हाँ ☐ नहीं ☐
- क्या आपने बैंक में अपने नाम से खाता खुलवाया है ?
हाँ ☐ नहीं ☐
- क्या आपने संगठन की ओर से कभी ऋण लिया है ?
हाँ ☐ नहीं ☐
- क्या आप संगठन की बैठकों में नियमित रूप से भाग लेती है ?
हाँ ☐ नहीं ☐
- क्या घर से बाहर निकलने के लिए आपको घर से किसी की इजाजत लेनी पड़ती है ?
हाँ ☐ नहीं ☐
- क्या आपके पति आपका घर का कोई अन्य पुरुष आपको हमेशा बैठकों तक पहुँचाने जाता है ?
हाँ ☐ नहीं ☐
- क्या आपको घर एवं समाज में आपके नाम से पुकारा जाता है ?
हाँ ☐ नहीं ☐

11. क्या समाज में आपकी बातों एवं समस्याओं को सुना जाता है ?
हाँ ☐ नहीं ☐
12. क्या संगठन के साथ मिलकर आपने महिलाओं की किसी मींग को गाँव-समाज में मनवाया है ?
हाँ ☐ नहीं ☐
13. क्या आपने अपनी कमाई घर की जरूरतों के लिए कभी खर्च की है ?
हाँ ☐ नहीं ☐
14. क्या आपने अपनी कमाई अपने बच्चों की पढ़ाई में लगाई है ?
हाँ ☐ नहीं ☐
15. क्या घर में किसी कार्य से पहले आपकी राय ली जाती है ?
हाँ ☐ नहीं ☐
16. क्या आप घर में सस्त्रियों का सेवन करती है ?
हाँ ☐ नहीं ☐
17. क्या आपके पति पहले आपको पीटते थे ?
हाँ ☐ नहीं ☐
18. क्या आपके पति अब आप पर हाथ ठाते हैं ?
हाँ ☐ नहीं ☐
19. क्या आपने अपने घर में घरेलु हिंसा के विरुद्ध आवाज उठाया है ?
हाँ ☐ नहीं ☐
20. क्या आपने अपनी कमाई से घर का कर्ज चुकाया है ?
हाँ ☐ नहीं ☐
21. क्या आप सरकारी योजनाओं के बारे में जानती है ?
हाँ ☐ नहीं ☐
22. क्या आप ब्लॉक कार्यालय/पंचायत ऑफिस जाती है ?
हाँ ☐ नहीं ☐
23. क्या आपको आधार कार्ड बनवाने की प्रक्रिया मालूम है ?
हाँ ☐ नहीं ☐
24. क्या आपने किसी सरकारी योजना में कभी योगदान दिया है ?
हाँ ☐ नहीं ☐
25. क्या आपने अपनी किसी मींग के लिए रैली या प्रदर्शन में हिस्सा लिया है ?
हाँ ☐ नहीं ☐
26. क्या आप संगठन की बैठकों में राजनीति एवं चुनाव के बारे में चर्चा करती है ?
हाँ ☐ नहीं ☐
27. क्या आप वोट देने जाती है ?
हाँ ☐ नहीं ☐
28. क्या आपके पति/घर का कोई सदस्य आपको बताता है कि चुनाव में किसको वोट देना है ?
हाँ ☐ नहीं ☐
29. क्या आप या संगठन की कोई महिला ने चुनाव लड़ा है ?
हाँ ☐ नहीं ☐
30. क्या आप पंचायत की ग्राम सभा में जाती है ?
हाँ ☐ नहीं ☐

Untold Urban Economy: A study of sex work in the Pernas of Rewla Khanpur, South West Delhi

Saumya Sharma

As India enters the second decade of the 21st century, one community, namely the Perna, remains at the fringes of society despite having settled in the national capital for a period of almost four decades. Earlier notified under the Criminal Tribes Act, 1871, the community at present is recognised as a scheduled caste in Delhi. However, the fruits of developmental schemes focusing on education and women empowerment have not reached this community, with Perna women practising sex work as a matter of tradition. What sets the Pernas apart is that within the Pernas, sex work occurs after marriage and the husband acts as the pimp. Dowry is exchanged by the groom's side as 'purchase price' for the bride who will bring assured income to the family. This study is an attempt to understand the way of life of the Perna community residing in Perna Basti, Village Rewla Khanpur, South West Delhi by looking at functional details and hard facts. The practice of sex work makes the financial status of Perna households stable, yet with inflow of money the focus on education remains dismal. The study attempts to find the reasons behind the continuation of sex work in the Perna community generation after generation, and suggests a fresh policy intervention by the name of Project Swabhimani to break this cycle.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Perna community is one of the many migrant communities of South West Delhi, having migrated to Delhi from parts of Rajasthan and Haryana. Previously criminalised under the Criminal Tribes Act, 1873, the Pernas now reside in two underdeveloped pockets of the district, namely Prem Nagar and Dharampura. What sets this community apart is the practise of sex work by majority of its married women as a matter of tradition, with their husbands acting as pimps. Dowry is given by the groom's family as a purchase price for the daughter-in-law as the marriage brings with it an assured supply of income.

Educational parameters within the Pernas remain dismal, despite the Pernas having the opportunity to claim the benefit of affirmative action by virtue of being recognised as scheduled castes in Delhi. With Right to Education being guaranteed and schemes like 'Beti Bachao Beti Padhao' in place, it was a matter of study as to what causes community based sex work to continue in the Pernas across generations.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Sex Work as Economy

Every day, tens of millions exchange sex for money (World Health Organisation 2006). Traditionally, sex work has been studied as a matter of ethics or morality impinging on public health. Hughes mentions the different ways in which women enter sex work. The first is demand by people, mostly men, who seek to purchase sexual gratification. The second is the presence of profiteers of the sex industry, who generally are pimps and brothel owners. Their profit depends on them ensuring that women continue to enter sex work. The third is presence of a culture that normalises sex work and therefore indirectly creates a demand for it. This culture makes sex work so commonplace and acceptable that it becomes a 'victimless' trade and women engaged in it do not see themselves as engaging in something detrimental. Such women may also see sex work as a form of empowerment through economic means. (Hughes 2004).

Existing literature divides sex work on the basis of the 'trafficked' versus 'sex as work' dichotomy. The former involves victim hood being ascribed to the woman, while in the latter it is seen as an extension of the woman's agency to choose a livelihood of her choice. Scrutiny has been made on the question of whether sex work can be referred to as free labour (Sanders, O' Neill, and Pitcher 2009). Women who entered the sex market were found to have received very low incomes in other labour markets. Sex work was seen as a low-skill and profitable means to earn quick money (Sahni and Shankar 2011). Other literature has found sex work to be a system of domination or coercion (George, Vindhya and Ray 2010). The public health aspect of sex work has also been researched upon widely to understand and document the incidence of sexually transmitted infections through sex work and condom usage in sex work (Gupta *et al.*, 2013).

A perusal of the existing literature on sex work shows that the study of the economics of sex work is a recent phenomenon. The labour market aspect of sex work is not a dominant perspective in its study (Weitszer 2009). In response to the argument that the working conditions and other such aspects of sex work have not been written about, economists have started analyzing sex work as a market (Murphy and Venkatesh 2006; Sanders 2005). The recently published Oxford Handbook on the Economics of Prostitution (Shah and Cunningham 2016) compiles a range of writings from all over the world to understand the economics of sex trade in terms of demand, supply and working conditions inter alia. Recognising that oversight of looking at sex work from an economic angle is unusual, given that it has all characteristics of

a traditional market, the handbook gives fresh insight into the economics of sex trade. Studies have also been made to understand specific aspects of the economics of sex trade, such as whether working with a broker increases the earnings of a sex worker (Brady, Biradavolu and Blankenship 2015).

In addition to the economic aspects of the sex market, the sociological aspects of sex work have also been studied to understand the gender and social relations operating within the sex economy (Prenas 2011). Sociological studies have long contended that social relations often define economic actions (Krippner 2001). Sex work involves many of the processes that are a result of social relations mixing with economics: the search for jobs, recruitment, relations with clients, agency, compensation and organizational hierarchy (Chapkis 2000).

2.2 Community based Sex Work in the Pernas

Sex work is no stranger to India's cultural tradition. Historians have written about the Jajmani and Devdasi system prevalent in India in the past, which shows that tradition formed one of the ways through which sex work perpetuated. An interesting aspect of commercial sex work in India is the presence of community-based sex work. In community based sex work, women of the community take to sex work by virtue of being born in the community. Certain communities such as Nat, Bedia, Kanjar and Perna are engaged in commercial sex work for a long time (Swarankar 2008). While a significant body of literature exists on the Bedia community (Rana *et al.*, 2020), the Perna community has not been the subject of much academic research. The Perna community was earlier a nomadic tribe originating from the North West Frontier Province which was involved in various performing arts (Rose 1911). The community was clubbed under the category of 'Criminal Tribes' for the purpose of the Criminal Tribes Act, 1872. Later repealed, these denotified tribes were given scheduled caste/scheduled tribe status in independent India. Pernas have been given the status of Scheduled Caste in the state of Delhi.

What sets the sex work practiced by the Pernas apart from other communities is that here women are initiated into sex work after marriage, with their husbands acting as pimps. This aspect of the community is an aberration to the general narrative that failed marriages often act as a reason for entry of women into sex work. The socio-economic structure of the community is defined by economics of sex work with an internal code of conduct comprising of social mores that enable it to thrive and coexist. Therefore, this study is an attempt to delve deeper into the untold urban economy of the Perna community and add to the existing literature.

3.0 AN OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

This study was conducted to understand the underlying factors that drive and contribute to the economy of the Perna community which runs largely on sex work. A study of the hard facts and numbers driving their economy, along with the social factors at play was done to understand the reasons behind the continued prevalence of sex work by the Pernas for the last many decades. The scope of the study was limited to understanding the urban economy and social condition of the Pernas and the factors responsible for the continuation of sex work. The study did not concern itself with the widely researched issues of legalisation of sex work in India and the health aspects of sex work.

The study employed mixed method research, with both empirical research methods and analysis of secondary data to answer the research question- *what underlying factors drive and contribute to the sex work economy practised by the majority of the Perna community in Prem Nagar, South West Delhi?* Through this research question, an attempt was made to find whether the factors which are responsible for pushing women into sex work are applicable to Perna women too, or whether there is a special set of factors. Efforts were made to understand the economy of the Perna community through a study of practical factors and numbers. In addition, an attempt was made to understand the reasons behind the continued progression of community based sex work.

3.1 Geographical Limits of the Study

The Perna community in District South-West Delhi resides in two pockets, namely Dharmapura in Najafgarh sub-division and Rewla Khanpur in Kapashera subdivision. Gram panchayat land of village Rewla Khanpur was formally allotted to the Perna community under the 20-point program by the village *sarpanch* in 1983 through the office of the BDO (Block Development Officer). The locality is exclusively inhabited by 143 households belonging to the Perna community, all geographically located in a single pocket. Additionally, while the Perna community residing in Dharamapura has been the subject matter of research in the past, those residing at Rewla Khanpur have not been exclusively studied before. For these reasons, as per purposive sampling strategy, the Perna community residing at Rewla Khanpur was selected for the purpose of this study.

3.2 Primary Data

The empirical research was done through running a baseline survey for all 143 households of the Perna community residing at Rewla Khanpur. The questionnaire was answered by the head of the household, which in many cases was the

matriarch. The survey was conducted between 27th July to 3rd August 2019 with the help of volunteers. Apart from the survey, the method of observation and interview were the primary modes of collection of information. Three rounds of general discussions were held with focus groups of the members of the Perna community to understand more about their way of life.

The focus group discussions were in the form of unstructured interviews. The participants in these discussions were a part of the households whose baseline survey was done earlier. These rounds of discussion were held between July to September 2019. In addition to the baseline surveys and focus group discussions with the Perna community, semi-structured interviews were also taken with the local police. The NGO MRYDO, which has been working with the community for the last many years, was involved in the research through many unstructured interviews.

Prior to the commencement of the primary data collection through surveys and interviews, the method of participation observation was used to make the participants comfortable with the researcher and to build a relationship of trust. The Perna women who do not open up easily about their work were able to share their stories with the researcher due to the involvement of the NGO MRYDO in the study. In my initial visit, I did not initially reveal my identity as a state functionary to them and instead went as a volunteer of the NGO. Towards the end of the meeting, when sufficient level of comfort was established, the Perna women were told that I am an officer who would like to work towards their betterment. Thereafter, the women were quite comfortable in sharing their stories. They also eventually started coming to SDM office with their requests and complaints¹.

3.3 Secondary Data

A host of literature was reviewed to look into the prevalence of community based sex work in India. A review of the existing literature shows that not enough has been written about sex work as practiced by the Perna community.

4.0 FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Social Structure and Economics of Trade

The Perna community residing at Rewla Khanpur comprises of 143 households, with a total population of 664 persons. Out of these, 327 are female with 167 adult women and 160 girls below the age of 18. The female population forms 49.2%

¹ In one such visit, one woman confided that she had never visited a government office before and now she feels confident due to personal involvement of the State in her well-being.



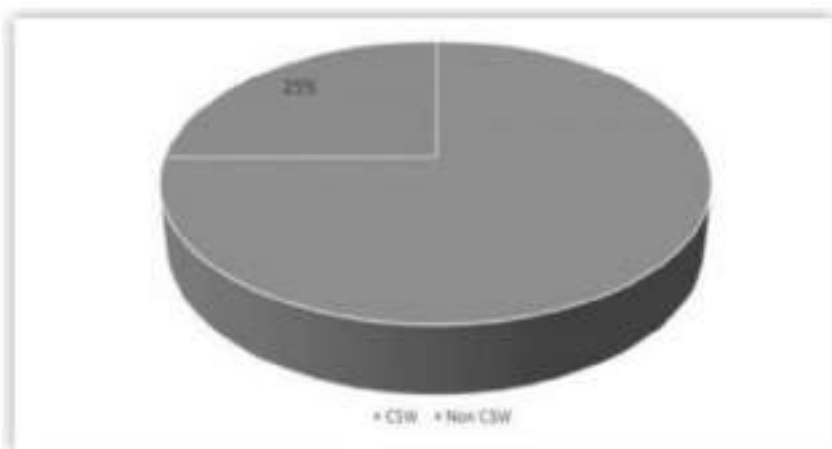
Ice breaking session with the Pernas of Rewla Khanpur

of the total population of the Perna Basti in Rewla Khanpur. Of the adult women, 125 women (75% of the total) are engaged in commercial sex work (CSW).

The community lives in built up houses on land allotted to them under 20 point programme in 1983. The elderly women of the community mentioned that the *pradhan* had relations with a Perna women, pursuant to which he put forth the name of the community for allotment of land. The community originally belongs to North West Frontier Province (NWFP), now in present day Pakistan. They have a characteristic look with sharp features, which sets them apart in South West Delhi. The Perna community retains its touch with NWFP by using Multani/Sairaki dialect frequently in conversations. The Pernas practice endogamy (although not within same gotra), and marry others Pernas residing in Delhi, Sohna, Jhajjar and Tikri. CSW is common to all such geographically dispersed Perna communities.

In a Perna wedding, the dowry is paid by the groom's side to the bride's parents as consideration/ 'purchase price' for the income the woman will bring into the family through sex work. A year after the marriage is consummated, the female is ready to be initiated into sex work.² For this

² The Perna sex worker cannot lose her virginity through sex work. As per societal norms, she has to first consummate her marriage and wait for at least a year before entering sex work.



Adult Perna Women Involved in CSW, Rewla Khanpur

purpose, basic 'skilling' of the prospective bride is done by other females of the community. The skilling aspects involve ways of dressing up, approaching and dealing with clients, what rate to charge and so on. In a focus group discussion, the elders mentioned that the community encourages young girls who start dressing up early on.

The average Perna woman practises street based sex work. Often, the husband himself acts as the pimp-cum-driver. Each evening, around 6pm, the dressed up Perna women are dropped off by at the 'workplace', which is mostly around the Najafgarh drain. In cases where the husband does not drive them, the Perna women take an auto to head to their workplace. The auto driver does not take any money for this service, but instead demands free sex in return. The husbands in turn solicit sex work at places such as the red lights on the Dwarka-Gurgaon road.

At the workplace, the Perna women find spots to perform sex work, usually around the bushes near the drain or inside concrete pipes used for construction work. The clients belong to the informal economy, such as vegetable sellers and truck drivers to name a few. An average session of sexual intercourse lasts for about 5 minutes and the sex worker charges anything between Rs. 500-1000 per session. The women confide that drunk clients end up paying more, as they feel happy and satisfied. On an average, the Perna woman earns around Rs. 30,000 per month. At the same time, there is a minority of young CSW with above-average looks and better networks who visit their clients in hotel rooms and have earned up to Rs. 1,20,000 per month.³

³ It is to be noted that the Pernas of Rewla Khanpur do not file any taxes.

The women work between 20-25 days every month. Work continues till late in the night. Alcohol is frequently consumed by the CSW while working. Years of efforts by the NGO MRYDO has ensured that there is almost 100% condom usage, which has resulted in negligible pregnancies as a consequence of the sex work. Interestingly, when asked whether the practice of CSW affects their marital and sexual relations with their husbands, an overwhelming majority answered in the negative.

The savings of Pernas are negligible. Around 70% of the 143 households are under debt of an average Rs. 1.5 lacs as a consequence of loans taken from Federal Bank located in Rewla Khanpur. This in large part is motivated by spending on goods such as TV, vehicle on the basis of their neighbours having purchased the same goods. At the same time, the women confessed that giving *hafta* to the police also reduces their savings.

4.2 Factors contributing to the practice of Sex Work

The unanimous opinion regarding the reason for the prevalence of sex work despite the betterment in the condition of the Perna community over the years is clear: the easy money flow. Sex work is a low skill, low input cost work with high returns. The earnings of the CSW allow Perna families to live in *pakka* houses, purchase vehicles and have other material comforts. Because of the easy money, the men in Perna community in Rewla Khanpur are dependent on the earnings of their wives to a large extent. The prevalent occupations among the men include buggy drivers for wedding processions, taxi drivers, shepherds, petty shopkeepers.

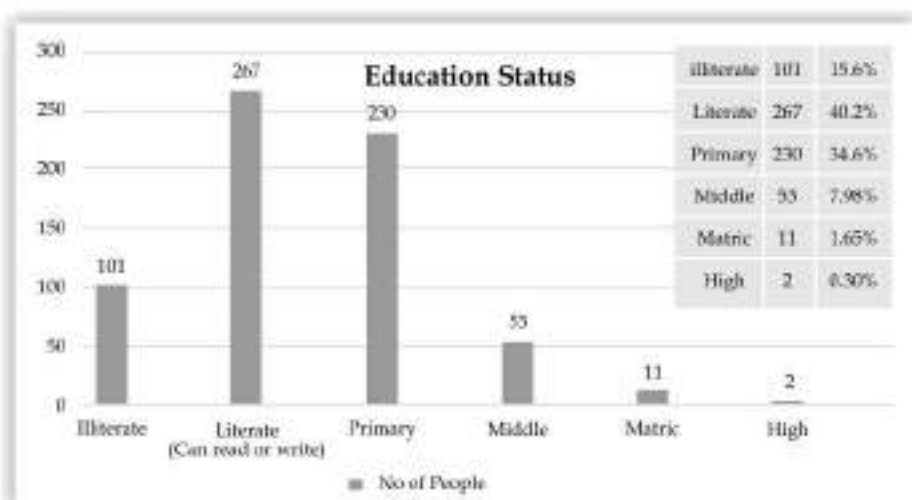
Another factor given by the Perna women about continuation of sex work is the agency and autonomy they gain by reason of being the sole earning member of their family due to which they are able to assert themselves more in their domestic life. However, it must be noted that the Perna community is essentially patriarchal in its nature. The Pernas have their own all-male community *Panchayat* which performs many regulatory functions, the main being resolving internal disputes in the community. The predominant way in which disputes are resolved is by imposing fines ranging from Rs. 500 onwards, at times extending to Rs. 10,000.

Another factor contributing to the practise of sex work is that there is not much interference by the police. As per police officials at the local Police Station Chhawri, the police does not interfere much in their activities as no complaints are received.⁵ An interesting belief of Perna women is that their sex work helps

⁵ Whether this can be attributed to the *hafta* taken by the police remains a matter of further research.

reduce rapes in the area, and therefore they are doing social service. This belief is backed by a study which found that removing criminal penalties for sex workers can play a role in reducing violence against women (Shah, Cunningham 2014).

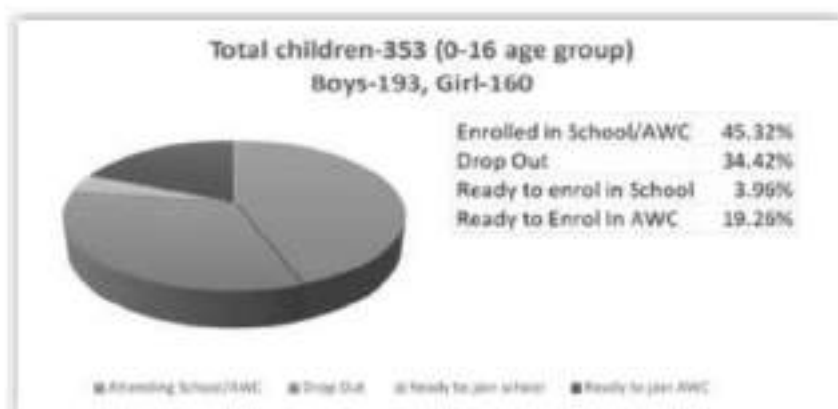
Importantly, the **dismal educational attainment** of the entire community turned out to be a major factor in Perna women continuing to pursue sex work. As a whole, the community places no premium on the value of education. Out of the total 664 persons, only 11 have completed their matric schooling and only 2 have completed high school. The break-up of their educational status is as follows:



Education status of the Pernas of Rewla Khanpur

Children of the age group 0-16 years comprise more than 50% of the population of Perna Basti in Rewla Khanpur, yet their educational status is dismal with no significant gender gap in the level of enrolment.⁵ Only 45% of the total children are enrolled in school/AWC. Around 23% await enrolment in school/AWC. Around 34% are drop outs, and those who attend school do not attend regularly. The break up is as follows:

⁵ For the purpose of the study, children have been defined as those in the age group 0-16 years. The cut off limit is kept 16 years so as to include children who can still be enrolled in schools.



Break up of Education Status of Children aged 0-16 years in Rewla Khanpur

Despite being conferred Scheduled Caste status in Delhi and 60% of the households possessing the SC certificate, the Perna community in Rewla Khanpur has not made use of this reservation to study and gain employment elsewhere. However, when the CSW women were asked about whether they will leave their sex work if they get alternate employment elsewhere through skill training or education, their responses were as follows:



Will Alternate Employment through Skilling/Education make you leave Sex Work?

This confirms the assumption that Perna women are not satisfied with doing sex work for a living.⁶ When asked the mothers were asked in focus discussion groups about whether they want their daughters to practice sex work, an overwhelming majority answered in the negative.

⁶ While the impact of sex work on the mental and physical health of the women is outside the scope of this research paper, it appears the toll it takes on one's health is a major factor behind not wanting to continue.

5.0 STORIES OF RESISTANCE

There are several stories of resistance from within the community which Perna women narrate with a tone of pride in their voice, showing their support for women who break free from the cycle by challenging the status quo.

Anita⁷, 22, is a 12th pass Perna woman who does not practise sex work. She entered into a love marriage with her husband who works as a bouncer in a nightclub. Before marriage, the couple mutually decided that Anita will not enter sex work. As Anita puts it, the husband can overrule the community in whether his wife will practise sex work or not.

Sunita⁸ left not only sex work but also Rewla Khanpur along with her family and shifted to Panchkula district, Haryana for a change of environment for her children. Having suffered sexual violence, she did not let her daughter to meet the same fate. Further, her husband was gainfully employed as a driver which made it easier for her to leave sex work. Now, both her children study in a private school in Panchkula.

Koel⁹, a Perna CSW was raped by her brother-in-law in 2010. With such incidents being usual, the Perna panchayat imposed a fine. However, Koel stood up and filed an FIR and the brother-in-law was eventually convicted and served time in jail. The woman now has given up on sex work and wants to educate her children. Perna women mention the above case studies with a tone of pride in their voice, showing their support for women who break free from the cycle by challenging the status quo.

6.0 PROPOSED POLICY INTERVENTION: PROJECT SWABHIMAN

It is evident that the assured flow of income and societal support are the prime reasons why sex work thrives in the Perna community. Juxtaposed with the question about whether they will leave sex work if they find alternate employment through education/skilling, one finds that if enabled through education in finding alternate employment, the community might slowly but eventually be able to leave the practice of sex work as a matter of tradition.

As the community places no value on the importance of education, the dropout rates for children are high and attendance in schools is irregular. While the girls know they will have to earn through sex work in the future, the boys are confident that they need not study as a stable source of income will be guaranteed through their wife. In the survey undertaken, more than 60% of the drop outs expressed no intention to join back into the fold of education. Further, many Perna men & women are involved in crimes such as bootlegging.

⁷ Names of the participants have been changed to ensure their privacy.

⁸ Id.

⁹ Id.

What we see here is ascription at play. The chance factor of being born into the Perna community decides the future prospects of the Perna children to a large extent. Their destination in life is determined by where they come from (Jodhka 2015). Further, there is a certain level of social disdain for the Perna community because of the sex work they practise.

Perna children are often called derogatory names by other communities, especially when they attend school, a fact which was confided in by a few children in the focus group meeting. The stigma attached to the Perna community prevents their intermingling with the rest of the society, which in turn reinforces a vicious cycle which disincentives any attempt to break free from tradition.

With the Right to Education being guaranteed by Article 21A of the Indian Constitution and backed by legislation, the results of the study cried out loud for the need of an urgent policy intervention. To achieve this end, the author helped in formulating "Project Swabhiman" to facilitate the Pernas to break free from this vicious cycle. Project Swabhiman⁸ converges the efforts of the district administration, the education department, the women and child development department and the NGO MRYDO. As children between age group 0-16 years form more than 50% of the population of Perna Basti at Rewla Khanpur, this provides a huge opportunity to up skill and counsel the children to join the fold of education and alternate employment, and prevent them from taking to sex work as a means of earning. Project Swabhiman has the following three intervention areas:



The aim of the project is to enable and skill people to take to other means of employment. Given the nature of Project Swabhiman, counselling and community involvement was key. A series of camps were organised by the district administration in association with the NGO MRYDO. To pull crowds, Aadhar enrolment kiosks were set up to allow people to have an Aadhar Card.

⁸ The main components of Project Swabhiman were to be implemented in March 2020 after the results of the previous academic year were out. The nationwide lockdown announced in view of the COVID-19 pandemic marred the efforts and has slowed the implementation of the project.

The different prongs of Project Swabhiman were worked out as follows after gauging community sentiment:

- **Pre-schooling**

Perna Basti in Rewla Khanpur does have an anganwadi centre. However, the building in which the centre is being run is small and the canter in charge is a member of the Perna community itself. It was decided to move the Anganwadi Centre to a new building and increase its appeal by using BALA¹¹ aids. Further, a fresh centre in charge from outside the community would replace the existing in charge. For this prong, the goal would be to have 100% enrolment of eligible children in the Anganwadis along with regular attendance.

- **Schooling**

The Education Department was roped in with Cluster Resource Center Coordinator (CCRC) under 'Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan' dealing with out of school/drop out children. Children falling under the ambit of the Right to Education were divided in groups of around 15-20 each for admission to nearby government schools.¹² In each school, there would be one guide teacher who will monitor the progress and performance of the Perna children. Special classes will also be organised to tutor the children better. For children above 14 years of age, option of admission in government or private school was kept.

It was decided that the performance of children will be evaluated after 6 months. Those who perform better will be transferred to the boarding school for socially disadvantaged children being run in nearby village Issapur by Kalinga Group of Institutes. Scholarship component will be announced under 'Beti Bachao Beti Padhao' scheme for girls who perform score distinction in their exams once enrolled. Further, hoardings congratulating the achievers along with pictures of their parents will be set up to further nudge the community to place a premium on education.

- **Skilling**

Finally, there were many, especially Perna women of ages 18 and above for whom returning to formal schooling is difficult. For them, admission in open schooling will be facilitated. Further, using the National Urban

¹¹ BALA- Building as Learning Aid.

¹² This was done to ensure that all Perna children are not sent as a group to the same school, as that would lead to them shying away from socialising with other children and sticking to their own ilk. With different schools, their chances of opening up and finding friends from outside their community increases.

Livelihoods Mission (NULM) machinery at the district level, training of the women in stitching/ tailoring will be conducted¹⁵, after which they will be encouraged to form a SHG with a revolving fund and take orders from the district administration for various items.

7.0 CONCLUSION

The presence of a community like the Pernas in the middle of the urban metropolis of Delhi speaks much about the reach and ground-level impact of government policies. Despite 'Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan' being implemented in the country, a community like the Perna has not been able to truly appreciate and realise the importance of education. For them, easy money glitters. With mass unemployment on the rise, the prospect of gaining education does not inspire in them the confidence that education will correlate into assured employment and flow of money.

One cannot dissociate the condition of the Perna community from the larger narrative of caste. Historically, the nomadic Pernas have found themselves discriminated against by law. The Criminal Tribes Act, 1871 applied to the Pernas. Although denotified, the effect of living on the fringes of society and being habitually discriminated against pushed the community to take to sex work to earn livelihood. As soliciting sex work remains illegal in India under the Immoral Traffic Prevention Act, 1956, the community excluded itself from the mainstream, seeking to remain unseen in order to escape harassment. As the returns from sex work continue to remain high, the community does not see incentive in education or taking to other means of employment.

In the absence of inter-caste mingling, the upbringing of Perna children is largely confined to their community. For any long-term change to sustain, it is necessary that change comes from within the community. Keeping this in mind, Project Swabhiman will target young children as a low hanging fruit and hopes that focusing on their education will lead to a change in the Perna community, with both men and women not taking to sex work as a matter of tradition and instead gaining employment elsewhere.

Affirmative action policies in India exist for the benefit of communities such as the Pernas. Even as the country debates legalisation of sex work, communities such as Perna need to be enabled and given the option of taking to other means of livelihood. As Amartya Sen put it, the capabilities of individuals of the

¹⁵ The Pernas are a very closed off social group. Almost every woman interviewed refused to go out of their vicinity for any skill training. Therefore, it became necessary to plan a skill training avenue within their locality itself.

Perna community need to be shaped. The young Perna girl child should know that sex work or marrying a man who earns is not the only way to ensure financial stability.

With schemes like '*Beti Bachao Beti Padhao*' in place, there is an even more pressing need of enabling women to study and contribute to legal forms of economy. Perna is only one such community. There are many other communities facing multi-dimensional exclusion such as the Perna requiring urgent and targeted government intervention. A special component in the '*Beti Bachao Beti Padhao*' scheme to target communities facing cross cutting disadvantages such as the Perna will do much good. This becomes more imperative as the formulation of Project Swabhiman is an outcome of personal interest taken by officers in their individual capacities. To ensure sustainability of targeted interventions, it becomes important to institutionalise them. With Project Swabhiman, this was sought to be done by institutionalising it through the CRCC (Cluster Resource Center Coordinator) under '*Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan*'. The actual implementation and outcome of Project Swabhiman remains to be studied.

8.0 LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

Due to the nationwide lockdown announced by the Hon'ble PM on 25 March 2020, schools in Delhi shut down and essential staff also stopped reporting to office and Project Swabhiman could not be implemented on a pilot basis as per schedule. With social distancing and lockdown restrictions in place, much of the ground laying work for community involvement could not be done. Further, with results of government schools being delayed, the Perna children could not be admitted in schools in April 2020 as per schedule. The lockdown also affected the efforts under NULM to source trainers for the stitching course for the CSW and school drop outs. This paper would have been more effective if it could document the actual implementation of Project Swabhiman, which was marred by the nationwide lockdown. Further, the debate on the legalisation of sex work is outside the scope of this paper. With communities like Perna, it remains to be seen whether legalisation of sex work will make their lives better off as the fear and harassment dissipates? It remains to be seen whether the overwhelming majority (90%) of women who said they will leave sex work if they get alternate employment will still answer the same if sex work was legalised. Further, due to constraints of word limit, this paper could also not document cases of sexual violence experienced by the women and the effect of menopause on the earnings of the women.

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ANNEXURE

Questionnaire prepared for Baseline Survey of 143 Perna Households of Rewla Khanpur:

1. What is your name, age and sex?
2. How many members are there in your household, and what are their names and ages?
3. Who is the head of your household?
4. What is the educational status of the members of your household?
 - a. Literate/Illiterate/Primary Pass/Middle School Pass/Matric/High School Pass
5. Do you practise commercial sex work? Yes/ No
6. What is the occupation of your husband?
7. Are you under debt? If yes, for how much rupees?
8. Do you have Aadhar Card? Yes/ No

- | | |
|---|---------|
| 9. Do you have the Scheduled Caste Certificate? | Yes/ No |
| 10. Do your children attend School/ AWC? | Yes/ No |
| 11. Will alternate employment through skilling/ education make you leave sex work? | Yes/No |
| 12. Are you willing to travel to nearby areas for the purpose of gaining skilling/ education? | Yes/No |

Focus Group Discussions:

Three focus groups created, where unstructured interviews took place. The majority of candid confessions and answers were received during these focus group meetings:

- **Focus Group 1:** Comprising of all women sex workers of Perna community
- **Focus Group 2:** Comprising of men, community elders including women who were earlier involved in the sex trade
- **Focus Group 3:** Comprising of children of the Perna community ranging from 6 year olds to 18 year olds

Semi Structured Interviews with Police of PS Chhawri:

1. Have you interacted with Perna sex workers?
2. Have you interacted with the Perna Panchayat? What is your opinion on their method of resolving disputes?
3. Have you received any complaints from Perna women or from the general public regarding the sex work practised by the Pernas?
4. Could you share a brief account of the activities of the Pernas?
5. What is your view on the sex work being carried out by the Pernas?
6. Have you planned any raids on the sex work operations by the Pernas?

Interviews with NGO MRYDO were fully unstructured due to the high degree of interaction with them during the course of the study

Women's Representation in the Panchayati Raj System: Reality and Concerns

-A Case Study of District Ratlam, Madhya Pradesh

Tapasya Parihar

Enactment of 73rd Constitutional Amendment, 1992, has given impetus to women empowerment and engendering of the Panchayati Raj System by providing for reservation of seats. This step holds significance in the backdrop of long absence of women from the political arena, paving way for their all-round empowerment. Recent evidence suggests that there are encouraging results of reservation which, besides creating space for them, has led to making them strong and active leaders, achieving great heights in developmental arena. However, with this positive impact, there are reports on women remaining merely proxies and formal heads. This is a matter of concern for the democracy as a whole as it undermines the aspirations and ideals laid down in the Constitution of India. This paper aims to study the effectiveness of women representation and the ground realities of their participation in the Panchayati Raj System. Through usage of qualitative and quantitative methods of research, an attempt has been made to study the causes of phenomenon of proxy and search for possible interventions to effectively deal with it. The result of this study shows that reservation has surely facilitated representation, but it cannot guarantee participation, owing to various social, economic, political, and structural reasons. To ensure participation it is essential to implement supplementary policies, to make democratic governance at grass root level a reality.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

"It is not merely that more justice must be received by the women, but also that social justice can be achieved only through the active agency of women. The suppression of women from participation in social, political, and economic life hurts the people as a whole, not just women. The emancipation of women in an integral part of social process, not just a women's issue."

(Dreze, 1995)

The Panchayati Raj System sets the foundation for the democratic setup the Indian Constitution advocates for. Local self-government has been a part of Indian society since the ancient times.

Through the 73rd Constitution Amendment, 1992, the Constitution envisioned people's participation in the process of planning, decision making, and implementation of policies at the grass root level. It acknowledged

absence of certain disadvantaged groups that had long been away from participation in the political processes of the democratic institutions. One such group has been women. The Amendment Act, *inter alia*, paved way for entry of women into governance structure by mandating a minimum of one third reservation for them. In pursuance of this the State of Madhya Pradesh enacted the MP Panchayat Raj *evam* Gram Sawaraj Adhiniyam, 1993¹ which went a step further and provided for 50% reservation of women in all three tiers of Panchayat, i.e., Zilla Panchayat, Block Panchayat, and Gram Panchayat. This was a historic step, in the view of low levels of women representation in the sphere of governance in the country and especially in the state of Madhya Pradesh (Tyagi, Mahor & Tyagi, 2010).

The foundation for entry of women into governance structures has been laid by way of reservations. However, various studies (Buch, Panchayats and Women, 2000; From Reservation to Participation; From Symbolism to Empowerment; Rai M., 2001) and my personal experience² suggests that the ideas of democracy³, gender equality⁴ and affirmative action⁵ envisaged under the Constitution are being followed and implemented only in letter, and not in spirit. While working as the CEO, Janpad, I had the opportunity to observe the functioning of Panchayats very closely. It was often noticed that Women Sarpanchas remained dormant, giving rise to a new phenomenon called 'Sarpanch Pati' or 'Sarpanch Putr' where the women Sarpanchas merely serve as proxies for the dominating male members who in turn exercise all her powers. This pseudo presence is misleading and is more concerning than the absolute absence of women in the political sphere owing to its invisibility.

It is against this backdrop of traditional notions of the subservient position of Indian women and the affirmative actions taken for their participation in the political arena, this research into reality and effectiveness of reservation for women was conducted with the objective of understanding ground realities in the district of Ratlam and finding the appropriate interventions.

¹ M.P. Act No. 1 of 1994

5. 13 Institution of Gram Panchayat (5) Not less than [half] of the total number of seats reserved under sub-section (4) shall be reserved for women belonging to the Scheduled Castes or, as the case may be, the Scheduled Tribes or Other Backward Classes. (6) Not less than [half] including the number of seats reserved for women belonging to the Scheduled Castes, the Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes of the total number of seats to be filled by direct election in every Gram Panchayat shall be reserved for women and such seats may be allotted by the prescribed authority by drawing of lots and by rotation to different wards in a Gram Panchayat in the prescribed manner.

² Working as CEO Janpad, Ratlam Gramin and Deputy Commissioner Municipal Corporation, Ratlam.

³ Preamble, Constitution of India.

⁴ Article 14, Constitution of India.

⁵ Article 15(3), Constitution of India.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

There have been conducted numerous studies on political representation of women and its significance. After coming into effect of 73rd Constitution Amendment, 1992, there have been attempts to study the impact of reservation on women empowerment, and how the Amendment has brought a change in increased visibility of women in the public sphere. the focus of this literature review is going to mainly on enquiring upon the need for political participation of women and how reservation has facilitated the same, what are the ground realities post reservation and what prevents it from being effectively implemented in spirit, how the phenomenon of proxy Sarpanch, Sarpanch Pati, Sarpanch Putr has come into existence, and last but not the least what have been the interventions recommended and applied from time to time and their impact. To understand the above issues, reference has been made to various empirical and theoretical studies, as well as various governmental and non-governmental initiatives. Women as a group have long been ignored/shielded away/neglected/shunned/denied participation in politics. The theory of representation entails existence of same opportunity to participate in political affairs irrespective of gender, race, and other identities. It has been submitted and argued time and again that the Constitutional provision for reservation for women is a welcome and a significant step as the same has widened and strengthened the base of participatory democracy (Mohanty DB; Baviskar, 2003). Reservation has opened the door to revolutionary changes of a political, social, and cultural nature by empowering women (Billava & Nayak, 2016) and had made democracy more representative of the constituent members of the society.

Women are a part of governance, irrespective of their economic, social, educational, and political backgrounds (Mohanty DB). Apart from this, there are certain added advantages of entry of women into political arena. It has been observed that entry of women in Panchayat Institutions have a positive impact on political knowledge of women with an increased interest in politics (Rai P). This goes a long way in women empowerment. Moreover, women representatives focus more on issues impacting women like, alcoholism, dowry disputes, divorces, girl trafficking, and also on welfare and developmental works like ensuring safe drinking water, clean air, proper ration distribution, village sanitation, etc. (Mohanty & Mahajan, 2004). It is also observed that they try engendering developmental activities, if given a chance (Chattopadhyay & Duflo, 2004) (Dutta MA, 1999). Having said this, there are arguments that reservation has changes nothing on the ground. The women representatives have remained merely formal heads and rubber stamps, and al the power is wielded by male members of the family, who are active into

politics (Malhotra, 2014). Terms like, proxy, token have been used by various authors to reflect the ground realities (Chattopadhyay & Duflo, 2004; Dutta M A, 1999; Gail, 2005).

Reasons for non-participation of women and merely acting as proxies for husbands or sons have been studied into (Sundström, 2008). Sometimes it is because the male members want to shield women away from the society owing to cultural and societal restriction placed on the women (Anand, 2017). Men also try to protect women from their lack of knowledge as there have been cases wherein women were implicated in corruption cases due to their negligent acts, and illiteracy. The husbands also want to protect their women from Panchayat Secretaries and BDOs, as they try to harass women representatives. In fact, in 2001 there were laws passed in UP and Rajasthan recommending women representatives to be accompanied by males while meeting with the higher officials (Malhotra, 2014). All these lead to weakening of position of women in the system.

There are other reasons cited as hurdles for women to effectively discharge their duties. Most women representatives are first timers and they suffer from lack of exposure. They are not always treated with respect, and their suggestions are not taken into consideration (Andrea & Goetz, 2005; Dahlerup, 2002). Other reasons include, traditional gendered believes of the role and position of women in family and community, caste and class inequalities, and lack legal knowledge (Sekhon, 2006; Jayal, 2006).

However, there are some encouraging data, and the picture is not so grim. There are evidences from Karnataka which suggest women have become independent in decision making. Women now are more visible in PRIs, and their presence has led to decrease in level of corruption, and increased self-sufficiency. Women representatives have become more politically aware (Neema, 2003).

In light of these issues, there have been studies on interventions required and experiments conducted. UNDP had conducted a Project, 'Capacity Building of Elected Women Representatives and Panchayat Functionaries', in collaboration with Ministry of Panchayati Raj. The study advocates for training, strategies for mobilization, and capacity building. Further, they conducted experiments in the district Dewas, MP (annexure), by roping in an NGO for awareness creation, which improved participation of women considerably. Further, there are case studies 7 of two women representatives, from Betul 8 (htt 1) and Hoshangabad 9 (htt 2) districts of Madhya Pradesh, respectively, which show how reservation can lead to improved participation, empowerment, and good work done.

There has been an experiment conducted by NGO Bal Vikas, focusing majorly on awareness creation and community mobilization by way of SHGs, which gave out desired results (Vikasa, ND). However, there have been found gaps in the studies, there are no studies in recent times. In Madhya Pradesh Panchayat elections are due as the term ended in January 2020, which makes now the right time to research the changes in capabilities of Women Sarpanches after one term. Also, there is not much focus on state supported training programs, especially with the rising use of IT in Panchayat work and increasing technicality in functioning. Further, all the studies talk about interventions, but no suggestions are made about their implementation. Moreover, there are examples of active and successful Women Sarpanches in the other blocks of Ratlam, which calls for a comparative study as to why the same has not been happening in the block Ratlam Gramin.

Thus, it is evident from the review of variety of literature that reservation is a good step for entry of women in the political space, but it alone cannot guarantee effective representation and participation, owing to various social, cultural, and political causes. This paper, therefore, tries to delve deep into the causes which are particular to Ratlam Gramin, and to find out the suitable and desired interventions to necessary to make representation a real one.

3.0 AN OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

The present study was conducted in the district of Ratlam, Madhya Pradesh. Out of six blocks, block Ratlam Gramin was selected for the study as during my tenure as Chief Executive Officer, Janpad, Ratlam Gramin, I encountered the phenomena of low participation of Women Sarpanches and wanted to find out the causal factors behind the same. Furthermore, I selected the Piploda Block for it has a few active Sarpanches, and as the conditions of the block are very similar it was easier to make comparisons.

For the purpose of study, a sample size of 30 Women Sarpanches was selected all from the Block Ratlam Gramin. Mixed method research design was employed to answer following research questions:

- How effective has been the implementation of 50% reservation of women in the Panchayats in Ratlam?
- What are factors leading to existence of phenomenon of Sarpanch Pati/ Putr in Ratlam?
- What interventions can be made to make the political participation of Women Sarpanches meaningful and real?

Data was collected using data tools such as interview schedule, interview guide and focus group discussions. In order to ensure diversity in the data

collected, Panchayat officials like Sachiv and Assistant Sachiv from the same Panchayats were also interviewed to get their perspectives on the same issues. Places of interview were Panchayat offices and homes of the Sarpanches. Sometimes the husbands wanted to accompany or answer the questions. Some interviews were conducted personally and some were conducted over phone. Moreover, data was collected from Zilla Panchayat Office and other secondary sources.

The difficulties were in regard to language, as Malvi dialect is spoken by people at a large scale in Ratlam. Also, I, being the Assistant Collector of the district, people were apprehensive of any action taken against them in case they point out discrepancies in the system. Moreover, no experiments based on interventions could be conducted for the local bodies were dissolved pending elections in wake of the COVID-19 crisis. Further, the study focused only on one tier of the Panchayati Raj System, i.e., the Gram Panchayat, which is less political than the other two bodies.

4.0 FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

The block wise distribution of number of Women Sarpanch in Ratlam:

Name of the Block	No. of Panchayats	No. of Women Sarpanch
Ratlam gramin	96	49
Piploda	52	26
Jaora	68	34
Sailana	47	24
Bajna	65	33
Alot	90	45
Total	418	211

Source: Zilla Panchayat Office

Category wise distribution of Women Sarpanch in Ratlam:

Category	Number of Women Sarpanch
General	69
OBC	28
SC	33
ST	81

Source: Zilla Panchayat Office

4.1 Demographic Profile

A demographic profile was sketched of the sample comprising of 30 Woman Sarpanches on following parameters:

- Age
- Caste
- Educational Qualification
- Family Size

It can be said that the factors such as age, family size, educational qualifications, caste, etc. plays an important role in affecting participation of Women Sarpanches. Figure 1 show the age wise distribution of the sample. Maximum women fall between the age group of 35-40 years. It was found that women in the age of 35-40 were more eager to learn new work and were more outgoing in nature. However, this was affected by their difficulty in understanding and learning the work. Whereas young age women were demotivated as they had to focus more on household work and also as told by one of the interviewers, "the old male members of the village don't want to pay any heed to them." The women above the age of 60 were disinterested in doing any such work and didn't want to contest again.

Caste (Figure 2) was also a dominant factor affecting fulfilment of responsibilities by Women Sarpanches. Caste is an important dynamic in Ratlam which finds a unique place in the Ujjain division as it has many well off farmers of the 'upper caste'. One of the Woman Sarpanch revealed that the, "the *Patidars* (a dominant caste) don't want to listen to me because I am from SC community." Thus, Women Sarpanch belonging to lower caste are rendered powerless owing to factors - gender and caste.

As visible from the (Figure 3), all the Women Sarpanchas are literate. However, we don't find any graduates. Also, the number of women who have studied till 10th standard and above are only 3 in number. But these three women are more inclined to work, and at present work with help of their husbands.

Family size (Figure 4) is another hurdle in the path of Woman Sarpanches. Family size of the Women Sarpanches ranges from 3 to 10. This has implications on dedication of time for Panchayat work by Women Sarpanches as majority of them are mostly engaged in household work. The bigger family creates hurdles for women when they are younger in age (having more responsibilities as a daughter-in-law) and becomes a boon for older women who have a family to look after household chores when she is busy working outside.

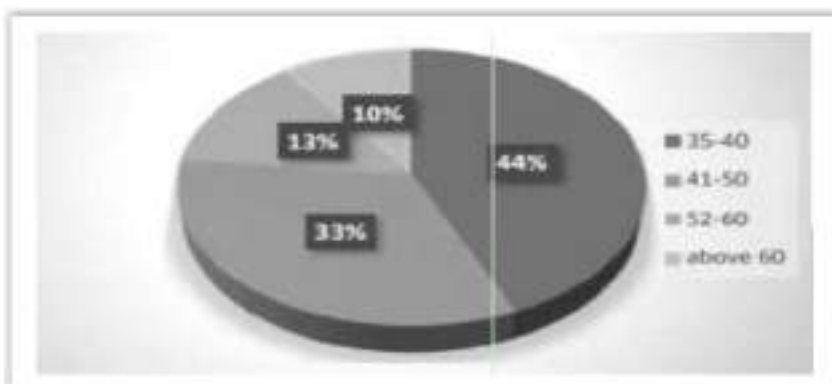


Figure 1: Age wise distribution

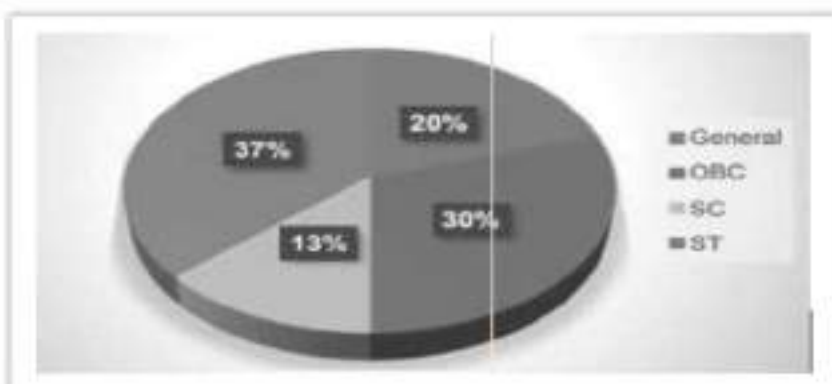


Figure 2: Caste wise distribution

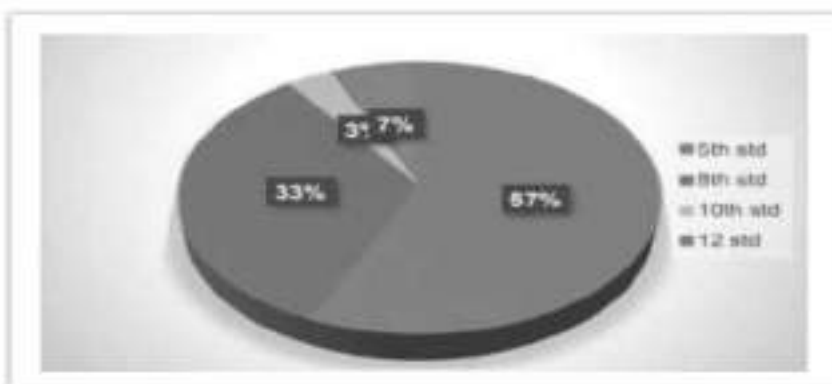


Figure 3: Educational qualifications

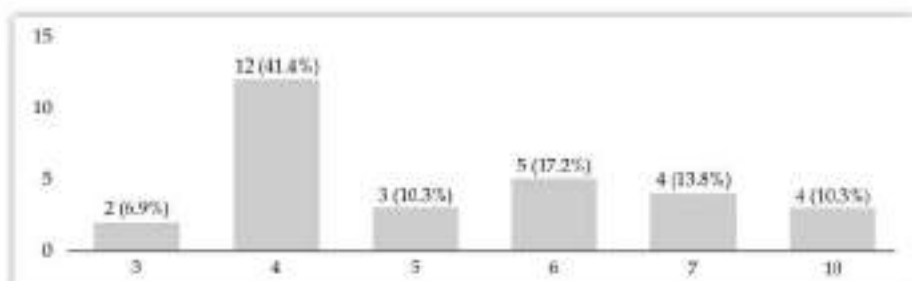


Figure 4: Family Size

4.2 Participation Indicators

The extent of participation of Woman Sarpanches was gauged on anvil of following factors:

- Reasons for Contesting of Elections (Figure 5)
- Participation in Panchayat Meetings (Figure 6, 6(a), 6(b))
- Organisation of Meetings in Consultation with Women Representatives (Figure 7)
- Consultation of Woman Sarpanches in Panchayat Work (Figure 8)
- Extent of Understanding of Woman Sarpanches of Panchayat Work (Figure 9(a), 9(b))
- Who actually does the work? (Figure 10(a), 10(b))

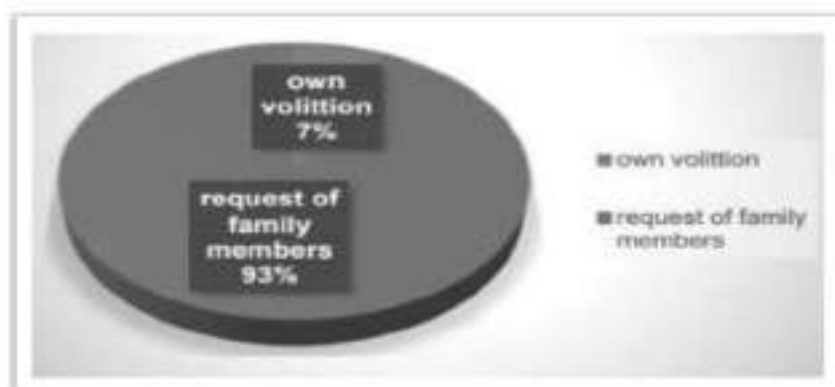


Figure 5: Reasons for Contesting Elections

Number of Meetings	Number of Sarpanch attending
Less than 50%	8
50-80%	19
80-99%	2
100%	1

Figure 6: Participation in Panchayat Meetings

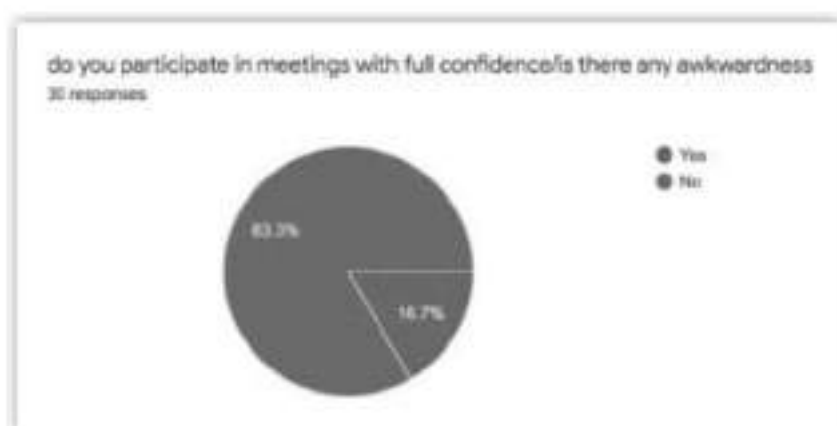


Figure 6(a): Participation in Panchayat Meetings (Sarpanch's response)

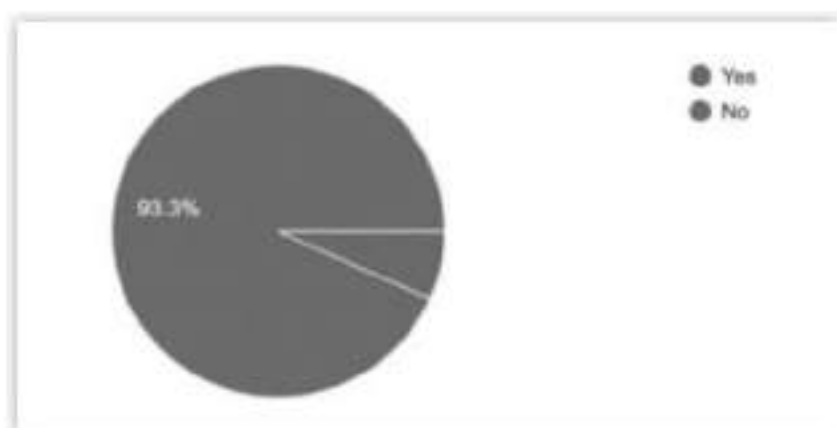


Figure 6(b): Participation in Panchayat Meetings (Sachiv's response)

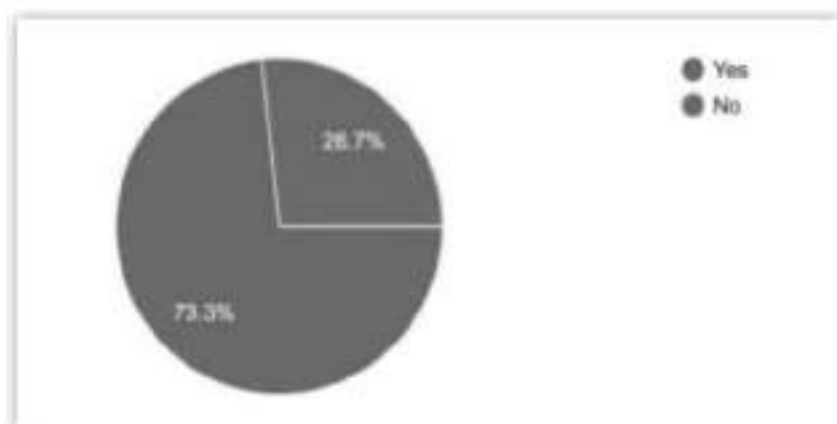


Figure 7: Organisation of Meetings in Consultation with Woman Sarpanches

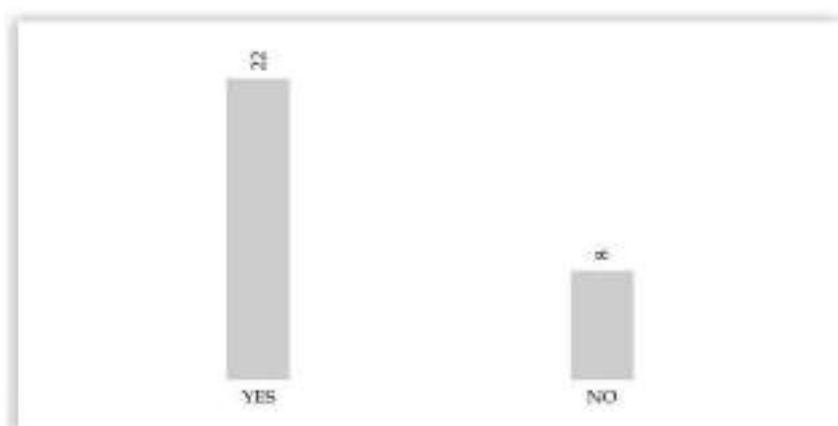


Figure 8: Consultation of Panchayat Work with Woman Sarpanch (Sachiv's response)

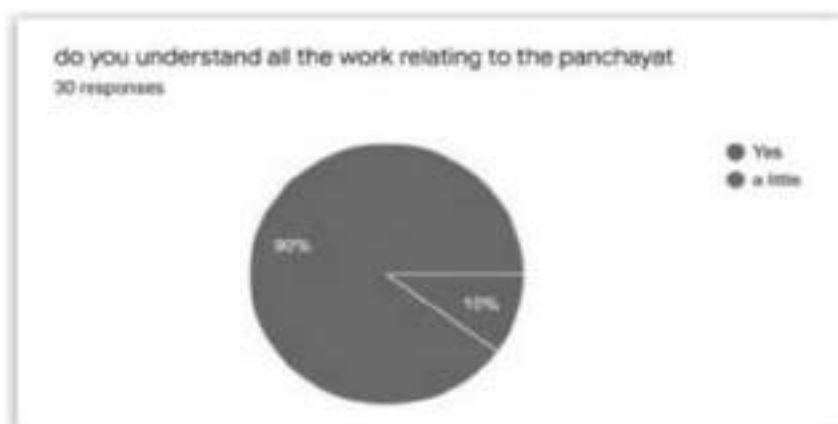


Figure 9(a): Extent of Understanding of Panchayat Work (Sarpanch's response)

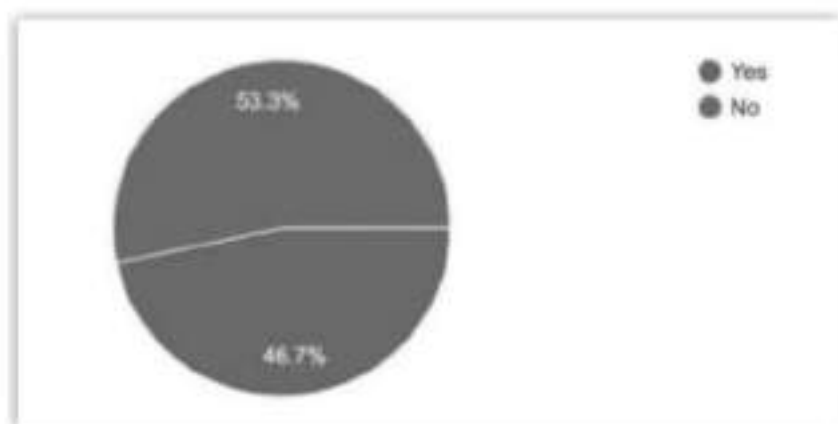


Figure 9(b): Extent of Understanding of Work (Sachiv's Response)

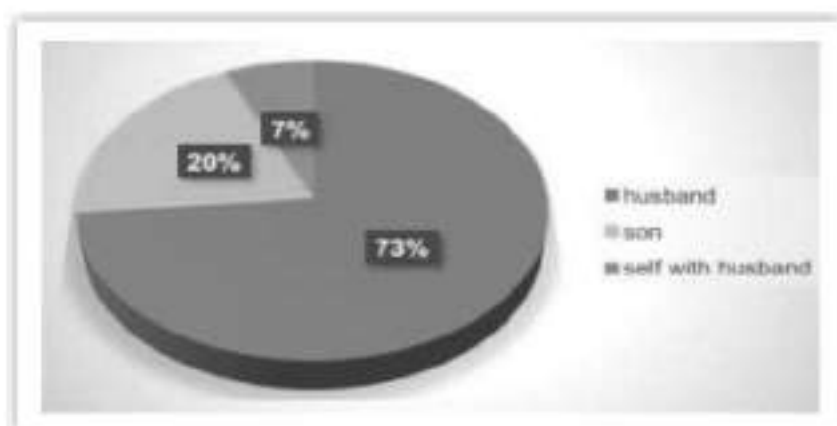


Figure 10(a): Who does the actual work? (Sarpanch's response)

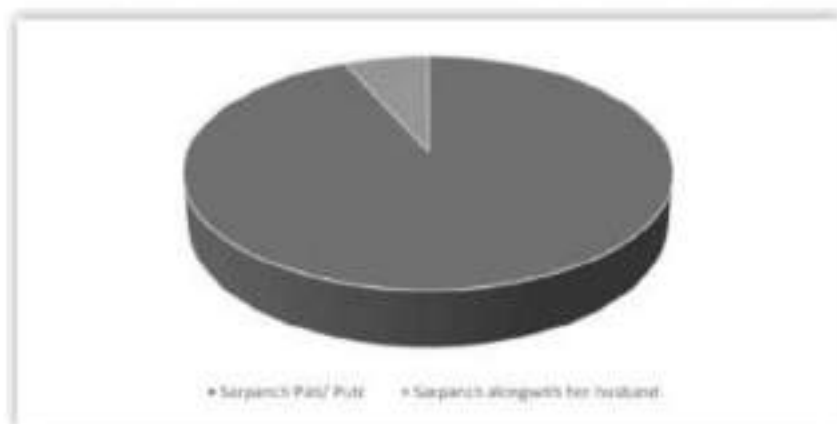


Figure 10(b): Who does the actual work? (Sachiv's response)

At the outset, I want to state that in my experience of two months as a CEO Janpad I have found only 3-4 Women Sarpanch who would work alongside their husbands. Others were just proxies for their male family members.

Only 2 women out of 30 participated on their own volition (Figure 5). Others contested because their family members had political aspirations and couldn't contest because the seat was reserved for them. This is a factor in hindrance because women very never interested in becoming a part of the public political sphere. So, they never felt motivated to participate in the work.

(Figure 6) Only 1 woman attended all the meetings. The meetings they attend are those that mainly require compulsory attendance, for instance the one during Independence Day, Republic Day, and during mandatory Gram Sabhas, i.e., on 2nd October. Moreover, response of Sachivs also reflects this sorry state of affairs (Figure 6(b)).

The responses of Sarpanch (Figure 10(a)) and Sachiv (Figure 10(b)) reveals that in reality the actual work is not carried out by the women. They don't perform the functions of the Sarpanch, and the same is performed by either the husbands or sons. In the study conducted only two cases emerged where the women did the work alongside their husbands. However, women were consulted before the meetings as revealed by (Figure 6) but this is mostly as they serve as formal heads whose involvement is required, for transactions, in form of signatures and one time passwords (OTPs).

4.3 Gender Specific Problems of Woman Sarpanches

The gender specific problems of Woman Sarpanches has been categorised as follows:

- Burden of Household Work
- Aspiration to re-contest election
- Problems Faced by Panchayat Secretaries in Working with Woman Sarpanches

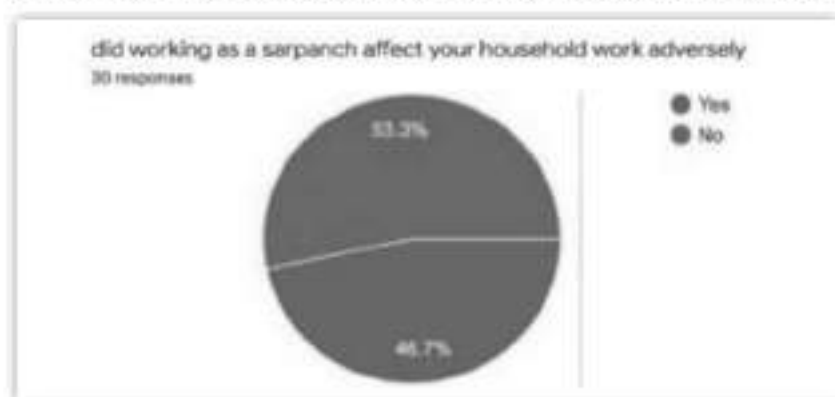


Figure 11: Burden of Household Work

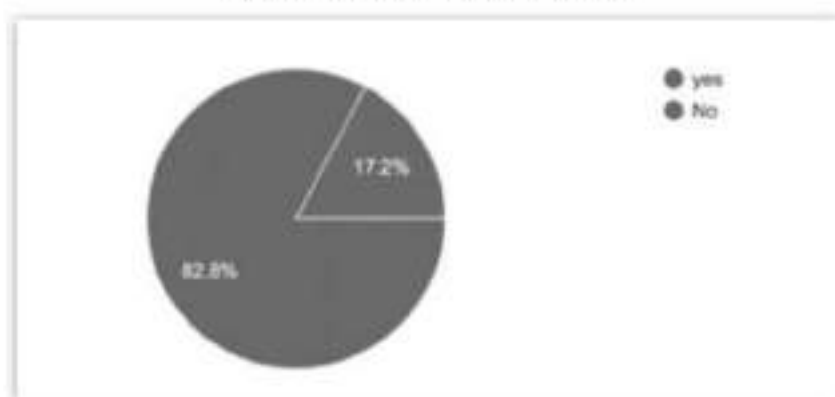


Figure 12: Aspiration to re-contest election

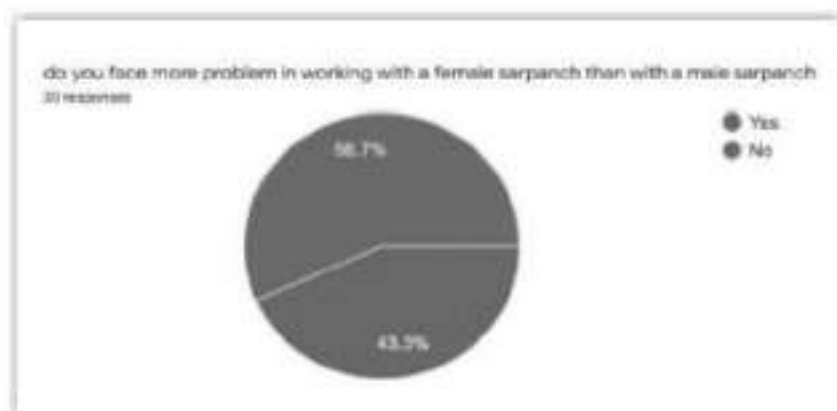


Figure 13: Problems Faced by Panchayat Secretaries in Working with Woman Sarpanches

Figure 11 reveals that at least 46 per cent women agreed that Panchayat work affects their household work. This is also one of the reasons that they don't attend meetings. One of the respondents said, "meetings are organized in the morning, when the workload is maximum. There is no one else to help me with it as kids also go to school."

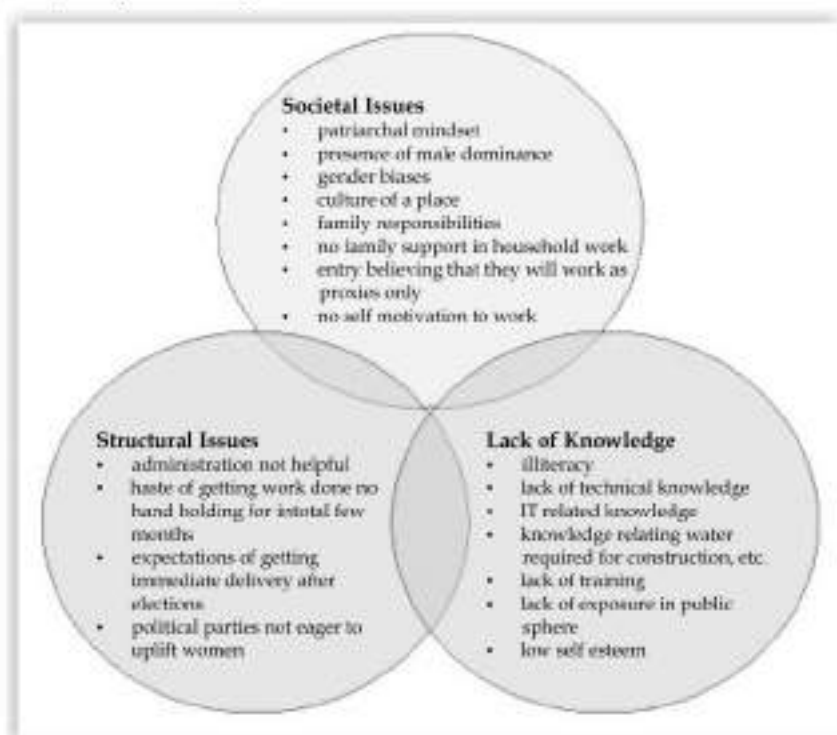
Figure 13 shows how not all Sachiv/Panchayat secretaries are comfortable working with Woman Sarpanch. They cite their lack of knowledge and experience, their working from home (as they have to visit their residences for signatures etc.) as the reasons. One Woman Sachiv said she feels uncomfortable in visiting the house of Woman Sarpanch, sometimes at odd hours. They also say that they don't understand any work, and this hampers decision making. Thus, they have to discuss it with their husbands or sons.

Interestingly, **Figure 12** reveals that majority of Woman Sarpanches wanted to re-contest elections. In the interviews conducted, women agreed to the fact that they felt good after becoming Sarpanch. It uplifted their stature in the society. They received opportunity to step out of their houses and attend meetings and deliver speeches on occasions. I noted that in spite of acting as proxies, they were involved in making their villages ODF, and were involved in activities by Women and Child Department. Many of them helped in creating awareness during COVID-19 crisis and making masks for the villagers. This sure suggests upliftment owing to their post.

5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A careful perusal of the data collected from the field and its analysis leads to the conclusion that there is not a single Woman Sarpanch in the sample who works on her own. 28 of them are mere proxies and act only as a rubber stamp.

Their *Sarpanch Pati* and *Sarpanch Putr* do all the work and wield all the powers. Reservation has facilitated their entry into the Panchayati Raj System, but their representation has not been realized. After intense interviews, it has been realized that there are following problems which prevent them from participating effectively.



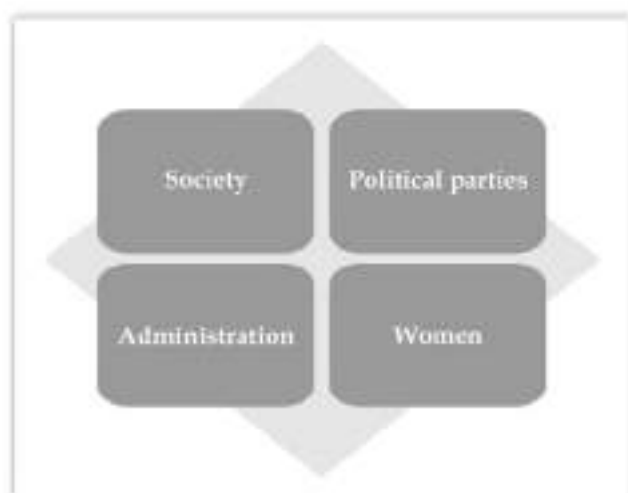
"since the seats are reserved, women get elected. And from the very next day they are supposed to perform their duties and implement schemes and give sanctions for projects. However, since they are illiterate and do not have any training of handling technical issues, and financial deals, they have no option but to take assistance from male family members. Also, family members are the only people she can trust for financial decisions. This is just a transitional phase. Once these representatives are trained, they will feel confident and empowered."

Shashi Shekhar Sharma, PS, Panchayati Raj Department, Bihar

Following interventions can go a long way in making participation of women in grass root level democracy truly effective:

5.1 Identification of Stakeholders

For any intervention, identification of stakeholders is necessary. Following figure shows the stakeholders in this case:



Intervention vis-à-vis Society

- There needs to be change in mindset of the people. Intense awareness creation activities need to be taken up. NGOs can be roped in, who can interact with all groups. They must be made understood that caste equations are not above development.
- Increase in visibility of women- conducting meetings with different age groups, women must be encouraged to attend meetings, participate in affairs of the Panchayat, elderly need to be sensitized with changing times.
- Family as a whole and husbands in particular must be made to understand by conducting discussions, showing movies, etc. to encourage women participation and share household responsibilities (Vikas).
- Young girls need to be motivated to engage more in public affairs. Graduates must be made aware of opportunities they can have if they ever want to become Sarpanch. There is want of graduates and educated in this field.
- More women must be encouraged to contest elections when they happen. Ratlam has a good window of opportunity in this area as elections are due. In times of COVID crisis, use of media can be made by the administration to undertake above activities.

Interventions vis-à-vis Political Parties

It is observed that political parties themselves don't encourage women to contest.

- Parties can educate politically wives, mothers, and daughters of their party members. Political education of women is always in their favor.
- Tickets must be given to active women from a Panchayat.
- After winning elections, they can train Women Sarpanch from their parties in works relating to Panchayats. The husbands and sons will also encourage this and participate along with the women.

Intervention vis-à-vis Women

It has been found that women themselves are not motivated enough to contest, and later to work.

- They need to be briefed with the opportunity they have got to empower themselves, their children, and ultimately to work for the villagers. The case studies from Piploda suggest the satisfaction from working for the people.
- They need to be encouraged to stop shying away and step out of homes and assert themselves.
- They can be made to meet the active Sarpanch. Workshops and meetings, and creation of mahila mandals can be created.
- Capacity building and awareness creation through NGOs, and political parties.
- Encouraged to study further.

Intervention vis-à-vis Administration

- Effective and useful training- Training modules are designed for this purpose and has been attached as Annexures. The modules are good and have actually helped the women in case studies to learn about administration. However, this was a one-time exercise. It is also evident that even all the women from sample attended this training, they still were unaware of the functions.
 - Training must be conducted at regular intervals. Master trainers must be chosen from amongst the Women Sarpanch - Training relating to use of computers, portals, transfer of funds must be given - Field training as to how to monitor and inspect registers, construction works can be done
 - Train immediately after a new scheme is introduced, or changes made in existing schemes - Experience sharing exercises amongst Women Sarpanch

- Use of different IEC activities for instance, movies, games, quizzes, debates, discussions
- Training on what kinds funds can be availed, and kinds of works that can be undertaken
- Encouragement by models like Popatlal Pawar, as to how a Sarpanch can change the village
- Provide extensive educational material in print.
- Adult literacy programmes
- Hand holding for a couple of months to be able to understand their works, alongside training.
- Administration must stop allowing Sarpanch *puti/putr* to attend meetings,⁴ and also involve women during field visits
- Meetings with higher officials- as sometimes the officials only ignore them
- Network creation between other Sarpanch, civil society and government by use of social media, WhatsApp and other ways
- Sensitive approach considering their lack of exposure
- Facilitating dialogues between Panchayat Secretary / Assistant Secretary and Women Sarpanch.

5.2 Other Recommendations

- State needs to go a step further than just facilitating entry. Participation of women, and their empowerment is in favor of the state and this needs to be recognized. Adequate policies to be made at state level for the steps to be taken by administration.
- Participation of women in general in Gram Sabha. Insistence must be made on it in circulars.
- Recognition to successful Women Sarpanch
- Dialogues with Sarpanchas by the state politicians.

6.0 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This research paper suffers from various limitations. The first one being it focuses on only one block of Ratlam, i.e., Ratlam Gramin which has peculiar social and cultural characteristics. Moreover, no experiments based on interventions could be conducted for the local bodies have been dissolved

⁴ In M.P. a letter has been issued by the State Government to prohibit sarpanch *puti/putr* from attending official meetings

pending elections in wake of the COVID-19 crisis. Further, the study focuses only on one tier of the Panchayati Raj System, i.e., the Gram Panchayat, which is less political than the other two bodies.

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ANNEXURE

महिला सरपंच

1. नाम – पंचायत (नाम) –
2. उम्र –
3. जाति – Gen/OBC/SC/ST

4. क्या कार्य करती हैं — धरेलू कार्य (अन्य)
5. कहीं तक पढ़ाई की है ?
6. सरपंच कितने साल रही ?
7. परिवार में कितने सदस्य ?
8. सरपंच का कार्य कौन करता है ?
 - 1) स्वयं
 - 2) पति
 - 3) परिवार का अन्य सदस्य
9. पंचायत कार्य संबंधी कोई ट्रेनिंग मिली है कभी ?
यदि हाँ तो कौन सी, और कब ?
10. सरपंच का चुनाव लड़ने के लिए कितने पैसे खर्च हुए ?
11. चुनाव खर्च लड़ना चाहती थी या घर वालों के आग्रह पर लड़ा ?
12. सचिव/सहायक सचिव आपसे पूछ कर कार्य करते हैं ?
13. सरपंच बन कर कैसा लगा ?
14. सरपंच बन कर आपके जीवन पर क्या असर पड़ा ?
15. क्या आप दोबारा सरपंच बनाना चाहेंगी ?
16. क्या सरपंच का काम करने की वजह से घर के कामों पर असर पड़ा ?
17. सरपंच क्या काम करता है ?
18. शासन की 5 योजनाओं के नाम बताएँ जो अभी पंचायत में लागू हैं
19. पंचायत का सारा कार्य समझ आता है ?
20. पंचायत का कार्य स्वयं करती हैं या अन्य किसी की मदद से ?
21. क्या meeting आपसे पूछ कर रखी गयी हैं ?
22. क्या आप meetings में खुल कर कार्य करती हैं ? (या कोई झिझक होती है ?)
23. क्या आप पंचायत के कार्यों की समीक्षा स्वयं करती हैं अथवा अन्य कोई ?

सचिव/सहायक सचिव

1. नाम :
2. पद :
3. पंचायत :
4. क्या महिला सरपंच के साथ कार्य करने में अधिक परेशानी आती है ?
5. क्या पंचायत के कार्य के बारे में महिला सरपंच को आवश्यक जानकारी है ?
6. क्या आप पंचायत के कार्य के बारे में आदेश/चर्चा महिला सरपंच से करते हैं या सरपंच पति से ?
7. क्या पंचायत की meetings सरपंच से चर्चा करके रखी जाती है ?
8. क्या महिला सरपंच meetings में खुल कर कार्य करती है ?
9. क्या महिला सरपंच कार्यों की समीक्षा स्वयं करती हैं अथवा सरपंच पति ?

PART B



Fostering Children's Rights

An Enquiry into the Causes of High Incidence of Early Girl Child Marriages in Tiruvannamalai District, Tamil Nadu

Anand Mohan

Early girl child marriage continues to plague rural India. While there is significant amount of literature on the problem of child marriages affecting northern India, not many studies have focussed on the prevalence of this problem in Southern India. This study tried to analyse the child marriages in Tiruvannamalai district of Tamil Nadu.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

'Child marriage is a phenomenon where girls or boys are married before they attain the minimum legal age for marriage that is enforceable in that particular country' (Kumar, 2020). According to UN Commission on Human Rights (1990), anyone who is below the age of eighteen is considered as a child. Therefore, a marriage between two people of whom at least one party is below the age of eighteen is considered as a child marriage. If the bride in the marriage is below the age of eighteen, then it is considered as a girl child marriage.

In India, The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (2006) defines child as a male who has not attained the age of twenty-one years and a female who has not attained the age of eighteen years. And a marriage in which at least one of the contracting parties is a child is considered as a child marriage. According to the Act, a child marriage is voidable at the option of the contracting party who was a child at the time of marriage.

A child marriage has serious impacts on the health of the girl. But more importantly child marriages also lead to lower levels of agency and lower levels of empowerment for the girls involved. Child marriages also come with early childbirth and associated health risks leading to higher risks of maternal and child mortality (UNFPA, 2013). According to Malatyah, *et al.*, (2017), one in every nine female children are married off before they reach the age of fifteen and more than 70 million women are forced to marry before the age of eighteen. If this alarming trend continues an estimated 710 million women will be forced to marry before the age of eighteen by the year 2050 (Malatyah, *et al.*, 2017).

The enormity of the sheer number of women who are forced to enter into marital commitments at a very young age and the associated health and other

socio-economic deprivations they are forcefully subjected to, clearly shows the seriousness of the issue. India like many other developing countries grapple with this monstrous human crisis. According to Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (2015-16), 26.8 percentage of women aged between 20 and 24 years are married off before they attain the age of eighteen. The problem is more serious in rural areas with 31.5 percentage of women in the age group of 20-24 being forced to marry before the age of eighteen; in urban areas the corresponding figure is 17.5 percentage (Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, 2015-16). A far more worrying figure is evinced from the NFHS-4 report of Ministry of Health and Family Welfare according to which 7.9 percentage of women aged between 15 and 19 years were already mothers or pregnant.

In Tamil Nadu child marriage is a matter of serious concern. The data relating to child marriage pertaining to the state of Tamil Nadu is summarised in Table 1. It is also clear that the EPI Centre of girl child marriages are the rural areas. Thus, I decided to conduct this study with the objective to search for those factors which push parents and society in general to decide in favour of an early age marriage for their daughters in Tamil Nadu. An attempt was also made to understand consequences of such marriage on the overall well-being of the girl child.

Table 1: Marriage Data of State of Tamil Nadu Source: NFHS-4

Parameters	NFHS-4 (2015-16)			NFHS-3 (2005-06)
	Urban	Rural	Total	Total
Women age 20-24 years married before age 18 years (%)	13.4	18.9	16.3	22.3
Men age 25-29 years married before age 21 years (%)	10.4	7.2	9	8.4
Women age 15-19 years who were already mothers or pregnant at the time of the survey (%)	3.6	6.3	5	7.7

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Child Marriage is a serious problem across the world, especially in the developing world. There have been many estimates of the graveness of this issue. According to (Malatyah, *et al.*, 2017) millions of women are forced to marry at a younger age in the developing world. Worldwide there are more than 51 million adolescent girls aged between fifteen and nineteen who are

married off (Mathur, *et al.*, 2003). But before proceeding any further it is essential to define child marriage for the purpose of this study. According to (UN Commission on Human Rights, 1990), 'any human being under the age of eighteen is considered as a child'. So a marriage in which at least one of the participants of the marriage is less than the age of eighteen is called a child marriage, and when a young girl is married off before the age of eighteen, it is referred to as girl child marriage (Malatyah, *et al.*, 2017). For the purpose of this study as well as for this literature review, the term child marriage will be referring to girl child marriage as defined by Conventions on the Rights of the Child, 1990.

The psychological and physical impacts of child marriages have also been very well documented. According to Mathur, *et al.*, (2003) after child marriage, 'the girls are not considered as children or teenagers with potential, but are defined by social custom simply as wives and mothers. There are also studies which show that a higher community level prevalence of very early child marriage leads to an increased risk of women against physical, sexual or psychological aggression by a current or former intimate partner (Yount, *et al.*, 2016). There is also enough evidence to show that girls who are married off at a very young age has a higher probability of being subjected to domestic violence (Abdullah, *et al.*, 2015). Women who are married off at a younger age "are bound to accept a higher proportion of domestic violence and condemned to continued abuse due to early pregnancy, lack of education, inability to find earning opportunities, or being estranged from her paternal family" (Abdullah, *et al.*, 2015). Victims of child marriage also face increased economic inequality due to their reduced bargaining power (Abdullah, *et al.*, 2015).

Early age marriages of girl children will have inter-generational impact on the educational outcomes of their children. Girls who are subjected to early age marriages will have lower human capital themselves and this will subsequently result in the lower human capital of their children. 'A one-year delay in the marriage age of a mother will increase the probability of her children being able to perform higher level cognitive tasks by a 3.5 percent points' (SEKHRI & DEBNATH, 2014).

In this dissertation the reasons for child marriages in Tiruvannamalai district of Tamil Nadu is attempted to be studied. It is imperative therefore, to analyse the known reasons for child marriages. This study then hopes to analyse if there are any additional reasons or factors which lead to a very high prevalence of child marriage in Tiruvannamalai district.

Child marriage has been a feature of many cultures for a very long time. Mathur, *et al.*, (2003), argues that there are two historical reason for the

prevalence of child marriage in different cultures. The first of speed them being that, since high mortality, especially mother and child mortality, have existed for much of human history, marrying a girl off at near puberty was seen as a way of increasing fertility in socially sanctioned unions (Mathur, *et al.*, 2003). Secondly, marriage was never an affair between two individuals, and early marriage was an important means of securing social, political and economic ties between families, clans or lineages (Mathur, *et al.*, 2003). Even though these situations have changed to a large extent, for example the mortality rates have improved globally, but 'the established norms and social structures that encourage the marriage of young girls have been difficult to change' (Mathur, *et al.*, 2003).

Established gender roles have a role to play in deciding the marriage of young girls and boys (Mathur, *et al.*, 2003). In many societies during adolescence boys face social pressures to succeed in school, prove their sexuality etc, but these pressures do not essentially translate into early marriage for boys (Mathur, *et al.*, 2003). In contrast, girls during adolescence face social pressure to gain qualities like cooking, doing house hold chores etc, which will make them better qualified to become a wife and a mother (Mathur, *et al.*, 2003). The stronger these gender roles are entrenched in a society, the greater will be the pressure on girls to marry at a young age (Mathur, *et al.*, 2003).

Many societies attach a very high value to virginity, the associated fear of the family that young girls would engage in premarital sexual activity will increase the societal pressure on the girls to get married at an early age (Mathur, *et al.*, 2003). Another factor leading to propagation of the practice is that in many social settings child marriage is deeply entrenched in the culture, which has been passed on from generation to generation (Chandrasekhar, 1996).

In most societal settings marriage is often associated with an economic transaction, the under lying assumption which drives marriage age lower is that, lower the age, lower is the cost associated with marriage (Mathur, *et al.*, 2003).

Poverty is a very important factor which leads parents to opt for child marriage. In poverty ridden households a girl child is considered as a burden and marrying off the girl child at a young age is seen as a way of reducing this financial burden (Mathur, *et al.*, 2003; Pandey, 1984).

3.0 AN OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

The table below shows trend of child marriages across different districts in Tamil Nadu.

Table 2: Trend of Child Marriage in Different Districts of Tamil Nadu

S. No.	Districts	Percentage of women aged 20-24 married before the age of eighteen	Percentage of girls between the age of 15-19 who are already mothers or are pregnant
1.	Chennai	12.5	0.5
2.	Dharmapuri	27.9	3.8
3.	Dindigul	20.3	6.1
4.	Ramanathapuram	14.5	9.4
5.	Salem	19.5	6.5
6.	Tiruvallur	17.4	3.9
7.	Tiruvannamalai	19.8	9.2
8.	Tiruchirappalli	14.6	4.6
9.	Tirunelveli	6	2.2
10.	Vellore	12	3.4

From the Table it is clear that Tiruvannamalai is one of the worst affected districts in Tamil Nadu with 19.8 percentage of women aged between 20 – 24 being married before the age of eighteen. Even though child marriage is a serious problem in Tamil Nadu, there has been very few studies trying to understand the reasons behind this problem. Through this exploratory research, the data was collected from Tiruvannamalai district and analysed to answer following research questions:

- What are the social, cultural and economic factors which make early girl child marriages an attractive proposition to people in Tiruvannamalai district of Tamil Nadu?
- What are the mental, physical and socio-economic impacts an early girl child marriage will have on the woman involved in the marriage?
- What are the characteristics of a household which will make it more susceptible to resort to an early child marriage?

For the purpose of this study, the selected sample size comprised of 25 women in age group of nineteen to twenty-four years of age at the time of this study, who were married before they attained the age of eighteen years. They were selected because they would be best able to relate to the problems of a forced early marriage. The respondents were selected in such a manner that they are from all the eighteen blocks of the district. The number of respondents from each

block was decided according to the total number of child marriage cases reported from that particular block in the financial year 2019–20 (refer to Table 3).

Table 3: Number of child marriage cases reported in different development blocks of Tiruvannamalai district and the number of samples taken from each block

S. No.	Name of the block	Number of Child Marriage cases reported from April 19-March 20.	Number of respondents from each block
1.	Anakavur	4	1
2.	Arani	9	1
3.	Chengam	22	3
4.	Chetpet	13	2
5.	Cheyyar	5	1
6.	Jamunamathur	6	1
7.	Kalasapakkam	14	2
8.	Kilpennathur	8	1
9.	Peranamallur	0	0
10.	Polur	7	1
11.	Pudhupalayam	3	0
12.	Thandarampet	33	5
13.	Thellar	0	0
14.	Thurinja Puram	6	1
15.	Tiruvannamalai	32	5
16.	Vandhavasi	4	1
17.	Vembakkam	1	0
18.	West Arani	0	0
Total		167	25

For the purpose of the study, the data was collected from both primary and secondary sources. The primary sources for data collection were 25 women. Secondary source of data collection was literature available on this issue, surveys such as NFHS-4, reports of the District Social Welfare Officer, Tiruvannamalai, etc. The tools employed for the data collection were questionnaire, interviews, and focus group discussions. Questionnaires with close ended questions was administered to the sample size selected to understand the causal reasons and the social influencers which forced them to get married at a very early age. It was decided that responses would not be collected from children and hence no respondents below the age of eighteen were considered for the research. This questionnaire also tried to understand

the consequences an early child marriage has on the victim of the child marriage. Focus group discussions were conducted with women in the age group of 19 – 24 years who were married before the age of eighteen years.

4.0 FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Profile of the Respondents

The first section details the demographic and socio-economic details of the respondents (25 women) of the study. Mainly age of the respondents, educational attainment of the respondents, age at the time of marriage and community to which the respondents belong to are detailed in this section.

4.1.1 Age of the Respondents

Table 4: Age distribution of the Respondents

Age	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative
19	3	12%	12%
20	4	16%	28%
21	5	20%	48%
22	3	12%	60%
23	4	16%	76%
24	6	24%	100%
Total	25	100%	

The respondents for the study were selected in the age group of 19 to 24 years of age. Girls below the age eighteen years were not considered for the study.

4.1.2 Educational attainment of the Respondents

Table 5: Educational attainment of the Respondents

Maximum level of education attainment	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Never Attended School	3	12%	12%
Attended school till 8 th standard	13	52%	64%
Attended school till 10 th standard	7	28%	92%
Attended school till 12 th standard	2	8%	100%
Attended some from of higher education	0	0%	100%
Total	25	100%	

It was revealed from the data, on educational attainment of girls, in the survey that 12% had never attended school, 92% of the respondents had attained school only till 10th standard. Only 8% of the girls who responded to the survey had attended 12th standard and none had attended any forms of higher education.

4.1.3 Age of the Respondent at the time of marriage

Out of the 25 women who responded to the study, eight of them had gotten married between the ages eleven and fifteen years and seventeen had gotten married between the ages sixteen and eighteen.

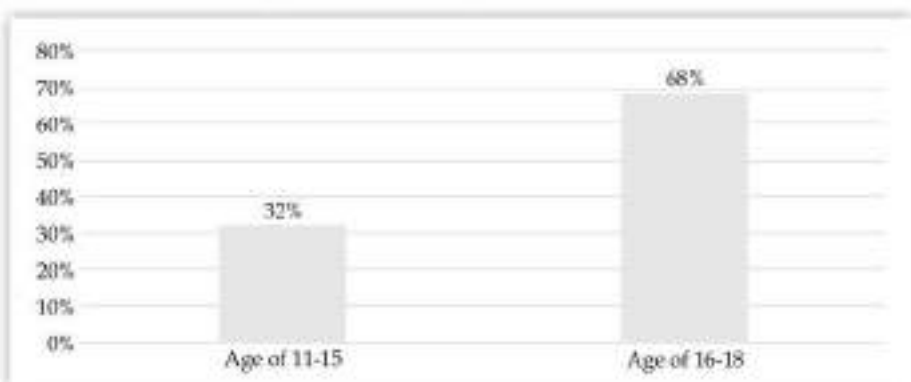


Figure 1: Age of respondents

4.1.4 Caste of the Respondents

Out of the 25 respondents, fifteen belong to the Backward Class community and ten belong to the scheduled tribes. Interestingly all fifteen who belong to the backward class community belong to the Vanniyar caste.

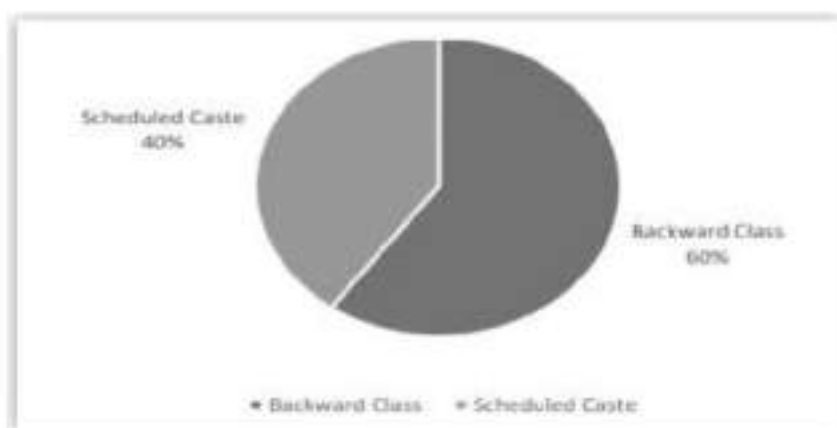


Figure 2: Caste wise distribution of the respondents

4.2 Causes of Child Marriage

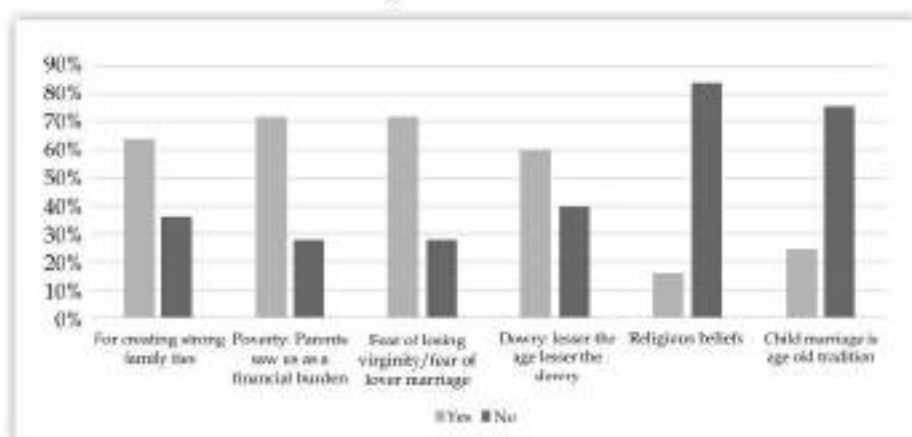


Figure 3: Causes of child marriage (on the basis of responses from questionnaire)

There are multi-dimensional factors which leads to a high incidence of child marriages in Tiruvannamalai. Majority of the respondents viewed early girl child marriage as a means of securing strong familial ties (64% of the respondents believed that an early girl child marriage was a means of creating stronger familial ties). Especially in the rural areas where the main source of income is agriculture and sources of production of that income are limited, it becomes important for a family to create familial ties. Marriages are seldom an affair between two individuals and instead are a way to bring two families together. Therefore, parents with a girl child finds it suitable to get them married off and create a tie with another family to increase their probability of generating a higher income. Moreover, there is a strong son preference which also leads to a daughter aversion in rural Tamil Nadu (Diamond Smith, *et al.*, 2008). A strong feeling of daughter aversion, coupled with the need to form strong familial ties makes early marriage of the daughters an attractive prospect for the parents.

Poverty is another important causal factor responsible for early girl child marriage. In poorer households, the girl child is seen as a financial burden which should be gotten rid of as soon as possible by marrying them off (Mathur, *et al.*, 2003). Marrying a daughter will end the financial liability on the girl's family as social customs dictate that the husband has to provide for his wife after marriage. Around 72% of the respondents believed that poverty was a factor which facilitated the early girl child marriage. On further analysis of the responses it was found that 100% of the respondents who belonged to the

scheduled castes believed that poverty was an important factor which led to their early marriage. This throws light on the fact that there is a caste angle to the problem of early child marriage as well. The scheduled castes families tend to be poorer and hence views early marriage of their daughters as an effective means to reduce their financial woes. At the same time only 53 percent of the respondents who belonged to the backward classes (vanniyar) felt that poverty was the reason for their early child marriage. While it is poverty which is the main reason for the prevalence of child marriage among the scheduled castes, it is not the main factor which affects this decision among the richer and more powerful vanniyar (backward class) community.

Out of total respondents, 72% felt that their parents' fear of them losing virginity, or falling into a love marriage was the reason for their forced early marriage. Among the respondents belonging to the vanniyar community, all of them believed that their parents feared that they would fall in love and lose their virginity before marriage, and hence ruin the family name and that this belief was the major reason which made their parents to get them married off at an early age. Only twenty percentage of the respondents belonging to the scheduled caste believed it was a major factor which facilitated their early marriage. When we analyse this trend together with the poverty analysis, it becomes clear that among the richer and more powerful vanniyar community it was the fear of losing the family honour if their daughters get into an illicit relationship which forces parents to decide in favour of an early marriage for their daughters.

Mathur, *et al.*, (2003) argues that the recent introduction of the system of dowries in southern Indian states might be an important factor in keeping the marriage age lower for women in these regions. The study corroborates this theory. 60 percent of the respondents believes that the dowry amount their parents had to pay for their marriage would have increased with their age and this fear of increasing dowry was an important factor which forced their parents into getting them married at an early age.

4.3 Other social-influencers responsible for continuance of the practice of child marriage

While analysing the social factors which leads to high incidence of forced early girl child marriages, it is also important to identify the social-influencers, who play an important role in keeping the marriage ages lower. Identifying these groups of people are important for targeted interventions. The abstract of the responses from the interview sessions are given below.

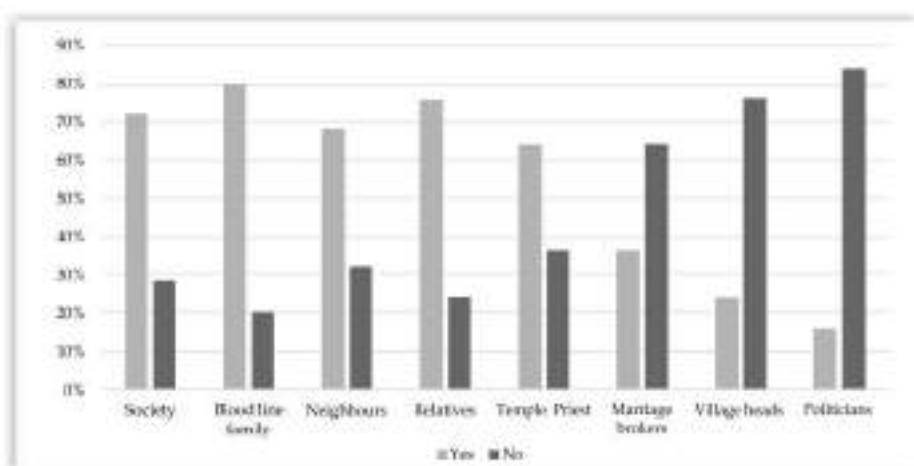


Figure 4: Social influencers responsible for keeping marriage age lower

From the responses 72% of the respondents believed that society had an important role in influencing their marriage age. Even though society is a loosely defined term, it was included in the questionnaire to analyse the general societal attitude towards child marriages. Most women who responded felt pressurised by the society to get married early. Early girl child marriages were not only societally sanctioned, but not doing so was also frowned upon.

Bloodline family and relatives are found to have an extremely important role in the reduced marriage age prevalent in Tiruvannamalai. It can be safely concluded that the single biggest actor who forces a girl child to get married early is the family. The family is able to exert undue influence on the child and have the power to get her married without her consent.

Two other important actors responsible for perpetuating the system of early girl child marriages in Tiruvannamalai are temple priests and marriage brokers. 64% of the respondents believed that temple priests were an important actor. Also, 36% of the respondents believed that marriage brokers are an important player. The importance of these two players are that, even though their sphere of influence does not extend to the girl directly, but no child marriage will happen in a village without their knowledge or active participation. So, these two players become important, as increased surveillance and targeted action against such players will have a high positive impact in reducing the incidences of child marriages.

Only 24% of the respondents felt that village heads had any role to play in forced girl child marriages. Only 16% of the respondents believed that local politicians had any role to play in promoting early marriage for girls.

4.4 Socio-economic conditions within the family which promotes girl child marriage

Past literature and the responses to this study has revealed that family is one of the most influential players when it comes to promoting early girl child marriages. Thus, it is imperative to understand what are the factors within a family which contributes to this effect. Below are some of the responses of the respondents to their actual family situations. Since, the respondents of this study are all victims of child marriage, it will give us an accurate representation of the family situation which is likely to promote an early girl child marriage.

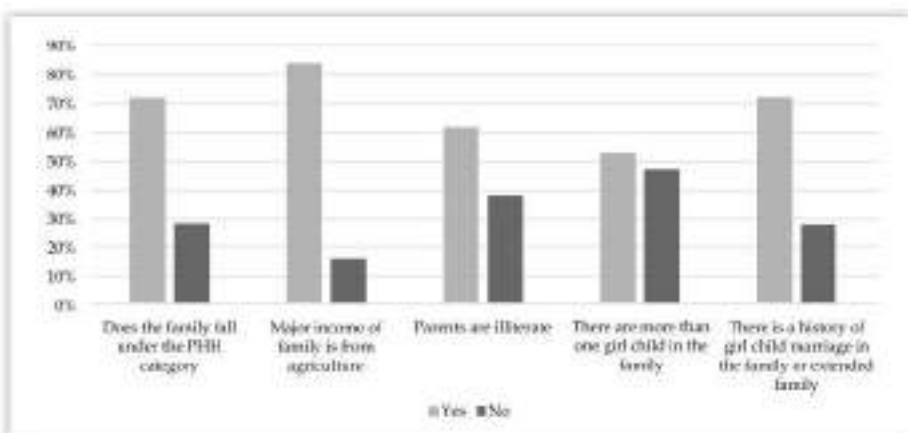


Figure 5: Socio-economic conditions within the family which promotes girl child marriage

The income level of the family clearly has a role to play here. 72% of the respondents stated that their parental households belong to the Priority Household Category as mandated under the National Food Security Act. This metric was selected as it was a good representation of the level of poverty in a household.

Agricultural households tend to be more prone to child marriages. In households where the major source of income is agriculture, owing to the high pressures on cultivable land per farmer in India, the factors of income necessary for generating the income is limited in most cases. In this scenario, it becomes necessary for the family to increase the source of production, and the easiest way to achieve this is to marry your daughter to another agricultural household. Marriage is seen as form of creating strong familial ties and thus marriage becomes all the more important in agricultural households.

There is a strong trend of daughter aversion in households in rural Tamil Nadu, which is often misrepresented as son preference (Diamond Smith, *et al.*, 2008). This daughter aversion is mainly due to the economic burden of

marrying a daughter off in the form of dowry. Greater the number of female children in the household, greater is the financial burden on the family. It is also an established phenomenon that lesser the age of the bride, lesser is the dowry (Mathur, *et al.*, 2003). Hence in families with more than one girl child, the preference for an early girl child marriage increases, as it is seen as a way of reducing the expenditure incurred on the child.

Households which has a previous history of girl child marriages was seen to be more prone to doing it again. The reason could be twofold, firstly, if the family had already opted for an early girl child marriage, there is a very high probability that they might have some of the characteristics already discussed above and hence are already at a higher risk of adopting early child marriage. Secondly, if there has been a child marriage in one of the extended families, then the familial pressure on the parents & the girl for an early marriage increases.

4.5 Consequences of early girl child marriage

In order to understand the consequences of an early girl child marriage, we asked the respondents to mark the problem which had the highest opportunity cost as a result of their forced early marriage. The abstract of the responses received as given below.

Table 6: Consequences of early girl child marriage (responses from the questionnaire)

Description	Frequency	Percentage
Couldn't complete education to the desired level	15	60%
Domestic Violence	5	20%
No financial independence	3	12%
Have no say in family decision making	2	8%

From the responses, 60% of the women felt that the single biggest sacrifice they had to make was that they could not complete their education to the level they desired. From the educational profile of the respondents (Table 5) we can see that 64% of the respondents had to leave school after class eighth. And none of the respondents had pursued any sort of higher education.

20% of the women responded that they had to face domestic violence at home and they believed that the early marriage was one of the reasons responsible for it. This is consistent with studies which reveal that in South Asian region women who are subjected to child marriage are at a higher risk of receiving 'Intimate Partner Violence' (IPV) and that in communities where there is a

higher prevalence of child marriage has higher risk of the women in the community being subjected to 'Intimate Partner Violence' (Yount, *et al.*, 2016). There can be another dimension to this problem as well, it is seen that women from poorer families are more prone to domestic violence in a child marriage arrangement (Abdullah, *et al.*, 2015).

12% of the women who responded to the survey felt that an early marriage has deprived them of financial independence and 8% were of the view that they have no voice in decision making in matters related to home. Both of these factors are complementary, without one the other cannot exist. This is also consistent with the studies which show that women in arranged marriages have a lower bargaining power and have lower levels of empowerment (Abdullah, *et al.*, 2015).

5.0 THEIR STORIES!

An attempt has been made to document the personal stories of some of the respondents to record the factors responsible for their early marriage and its consequences on their lives. These stories were narrated by the respondents during focus group discussions.

Jhansi¹, age 23 years, belongs to the Vanniyar community. She said that she was a good student in school and wanted to become a doctor but her father wanted to get her married off quickly. He feared that she will fall in love with a boy in her school from another caste. She says that in her community the fear of love marriages and the fear of the daughter losing virginity before marriage is so high that her father got her married off at the age of seventeen. Thus, she could not study after class tenth.

Gomathi², age 22 years, belongs to the scheduled caste. According to her it was the extreme poverty in her household which led her to be married off at the tender age of fifteen. She has an elder brother and a younger sister. She says that her parents preferred her brother over her and her sister. Her brother would get preferential treatment and was sent to school. Gomathi had to drop out of school after class eighth. She says that her parents are now trying to marry her younger sister also.

Balamani³, age 24 years, says that she was married at the age of seventeen. But she did not realise that it was child marriage until this study was conducted. Balamani's mother passed away when she was five years old and her father

¹ Name of the respondent has been changed to ensure her privacy and confidentiality

² Id.

³ Id.

left her for another woman soon after. She was brought up by her maternal aunt (mother's elder sister). All through her childhood she had to face a step motherly treatment and was married off at the age of seventeen because she was a burden to her adopted family and also because the older she grows, the higher would have been her dowry.

*Saratha*⁴, age 24 years, belonging to the vanniyar caste, said that she was married by the age of seventeen. She had to drop out of school. In her husband's house she receives no respect. She feels that she does not have any financial independence. She feels small and insignificant.

*Madhavi*⁵, age 23 years, belonging to the scheduled castes says that she had to go through a lot of mental trauma when she was forced into an early marriage by her parents. She says that she has been depressed since her marriage. Her husband, does not like it when she is moody sometimes as a result of depression and sometimes, he beats her up also.

*Sita*⁶, age 24 years, was married really young at the age of fifteen. She was pregnant three times and two out of the three times, she had a miscarriage. This has had a tremendous physical and mental toll on her. She says that she feels like a forty-year-old and is always tired.

These personal narratives corroborate the findings made in the previous section. Factors such as the poverty level in the household, especially among the scheduled castes, and the fear of the girl losing her virginity before marriage in vanniyar community are reiterated here. One new factor which comes to light is the lack of awareness regarding the child rights in the country. In the case of Balamani who was married at the age of seventeen did not realise that she has been subjected to child marriage until this study. This points to the lack of awareness regarding various laws and statutes in the country for protection of the rights of children. While analysing the consequences of an early marriage, we find that the victims of child marriage, feels less empowered and have lower levels of financial independence. They have to undergo physical and mental trauma on account of problems associated with early child birth. Many women also have to suffer psychological issues due to child marriage, and in the absence of any mental support or psychological care, many a times they fall into clinical depression. Women who are victims of child marriage also have a higher probability of being at the receiving end of domestic violence.

⁴ Id.

⁵ Id.

⁶ Id.

6.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Early girl child marriage continues to plague rural India. While there is significant amount of literature on the problem of child marriages affecting northern India, not many studies have focussed on the prevalence of this problem in Southern India. This study tried to analyse the child marriages in Tiruvannamalai district of Tamil Nadu.

Child marriages affect the lives of thousands of women in India and they lead to the creation of a vicious cycle of poverty, dis-empowerment, domestic violence and underdevelopment. More emphasis and stress have to be given to the issue. The study proposes the following suggestions for policy and decision maker which can have a positive outcome on reducing the incidences of child marriage.

Even though there are laws such as the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006 in place in India, the problem of child marriage still plagues India. The study shows the severity of the problem in Tiruvannamalai district of Tamil Nadu. Understanding the causes of child marriage is important in devising measures to counter the problem. The biggest policy lesson that can be learnt from the study is that there are different reasons for different sections of society opting for an early child marriage for their children.

In the case of Tiruvannamalai, while poverty is the major reason for child marriages among the scheduled caste communities, it is the fear of losing family honour which makes the vanniyar castes to opt for an early child marriage. It is imperative to understand the reason for the problem, before we design a cure for it. In case where poverty is the underlying cause for child marriages, a conditional cash transfer scheme might be a good intervention. There are two such schemes in Tamil Nadu, Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddy Ninaivu Inter-Caste Marriage Assistance Scheme and Moovalur Ramamirtham Ammaiyar Ninaivu Marriage Assistance Scheme both of which provides marriage assistance and one sovereign (8 grams) of gold to the newly married couple on the condition that the girl should be above the age of eighteen and the groom should be above the age of twenty-one.

However, in cases where saving family honour is the reason for increased incidence of child marriage, a conditional cash transfer scheme would be of no use. This case requires the administration to closely work with the concerned community to spread awareness about the cons of child marriage and also to

drive home the importance of a girl child. The problem of son preference has to be addressed through strong Information, Education and Communication (IEC) activities. Civil Society Organisations can be brought in to work closely with these communities to bring about a positive change.

Unfortunately, there is a trend for a strong sense of daughter aversion in rural Tamil Nadu (Diamond Smith, *et al.*, 2008). The major reason for this daughter aversion is the dowry system which is prevalent in Tamil Nadu. Higher the age of the bride, higher the amount of dowry the bride's family has to give to the groom's family (Diamond Smith, *et al.*, 2008). Therefore, stricter enforcement of Dowry Prohibition Act will also have an impact on reducing the instances of child marriage in rural Tamil Nadu.

There is also a requirement of extended support given to women who are already victims of child marriage. Presently the system focuses only on preventing the occurrence of child marriage. But the sad truth is that a lot of child marriages are happening outside the knowledge of the government. The women who are the victims of such marriages also needs protection. Under section 3 of the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006 every child marriage is voidable at the option of the contracting party who was a child at the time of the marriage. Even though this provision exists, it is hardly ever used by the aggrieved. Women who opt for this provision are an exception rather than the norm. In normal circumstances, the victims of child marriages are forced to endure in silence.

As discovered in this study, victims of child marriage undergo serious mental and physical trauma. They need regular counselling and hand holding to help them gain confidence and authority. Victims of child marriage are also often victims of domestic violence; such high-risk cases of marriage should be regularly monitored by government agencies with the help of civil society organisations. Many of the women also suffer from serious depression and are in need of psychological counselling.

Thus, immediate governmental intervention is needed in the case of women who are already victims of child marriage. Economic empowerment of women who are victims of child marriages is also extremely important. Access to credit through Micro Finance Institutions can be a step towards financially empowering these women and reducing the menace of child marriage (Abdullah, *et al.*, 2015).

Collective and concerted efforts of all stakeholders – administration, society, family members, civil society organisations – along with female victims is a

must to eliminate the practice of child marriage from the country. This study was a small step towards highlighting the plight of hundreds of women in this country who suffer in silence under the dead weight of unjust practices imposed on them at tender age.

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ANNEXURE

Questionnaire-1

Section I - Basic Information

1. What is your age?
2. What is your level of educational attainment ?
 - a. Never attended school
 - b. Attended school till eighth standard
 - c. Attended school till tenth standard
 - d. Attended some form of higher education
3. What was your age at the time of marriage ?
4. What is your caste ?
 - a. General
 - b. BC
 - c. MBC
 - d. SC
 - e. ST

Section II - Causal factors for forced early girl child marriages

5. In your opinion which of the following reasons might have led to your early marriage? (Select yes if you think that the statement was one of the causes for your early marriage)
 - a. For making strong family ties with your husband's family (Yes/No)
 - b. Parents saw you as an economic burden (Yes/No)
 - c. Parents feared that you will fall in love or loose your virginity before marriage (Yes/No)
 - d. In our community, higher the bride's age higher the dowry, hence my parents married me young to reduce the dowry burden. (Yes/No)
 - e. Early girl child marriage is a religious tradition (Yes/No)
 - f. Early girl child marriages are an age-old tradition in our community (Yes/No)

Section II - Social Influencers of Early Girl Child Marriage

6. Who are the people who influenced your parents (or pressured you) in the decision to get you married at an early age? (Select yes if you think they played a part in your marriage)
 - a. Society (Yes/No)

- b. Blood line family (Yes/No)
- c. Neighbors (Yes/No)
- d. Relatives (Yes/No)
- e. Temple priests (Yes/No)
- f. Marriage brokers (Yes/No)
- g. Village Heads (Yes/No)
- h. Local politicians (Yes/No)

Section IV-Family characteristics which promotes early girl child marriage

7. Which of the following characteristics accurately represents your family?
(Select yes if the given statement applies to your family).
- a. Belongs to the PHH category (Yes/No)
 - b. Basic source of income is from agriculture (Yes/No)
 - c. Parents are illiterate (Yes/No)
 - d. There is more than one girl child in the family (Yes/No)
 - e. There is a history of child marriage in the family or extended family (Yes/No)

Section V - Consequences of early girl child marriages

8. Which of the following most accurately describes the consequences of your early marriage? (Choose one which you think is the biggest problem)
- a. Could not complete education to the desired level
 - b. Have to face domestic violence at home
 - c. Does not have financial independence
 - d. No say in family decision making

Analysis of Local Interventions in Improving Student Learning Outcome of Children in Government Primary Schools of Dhubri District, Assam

Javir Rahul Suresh

Dhubri district is one of the Aspirational Districts in Assam as identified by the Government of India. The entire region is a flood prone region with high population density. The population is mostly dependent on agriculture for their livelihood. The literacy rate of the district is lower than the state's average. The seasonal migration and different linguistic backgrounds has created challenges for the schools, in the district, which are plagued by instances of absenteeism, dropouts and poor learning outcomes.

The present study aims to measure the effectiveness of interventions, implemented in the Dhubri district, to deal with the problem of poor learning outcomes of children in the primary government schools. The study employed purposive sampling technique to select the schools which have higher enrolment of students. In these schools an intervention program was introduced for a period of five months for the acquisition of basic reading skills of Assamese, Mathematics and other subjects in the course curriculum. Thus, this paper delineates the impact on the learning outcome of the students- pre and post implementation of the intervention program.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Geographically, the Dhubri district lies on the north bank of Brahmaputra flood plains. It is situated in the western most part of the state of Assam. The district is bounded by West Bengal and Bangladesh in the west, Goalpara and Bongaigaon district of Assam and Garo Hills district of Meghalaya in the east, Kokrajhar district in the north, state of Meghalaya in the south and Bangladesh in the south-west.

The District is among the 115 Aspirational Districts identified by the government of India initially. According to 2011 Census, Dhubri District has the highest population density in the country with 896 people per sq. km. The literacy rate of the district is around 58.34% which is lower than the national average of 74.04%. Economically, the people are mainly dependent on agriculture and forest products. The primary source of income is paddy which is usually grown in surplus; the other major cash crops grown are jute and mustard seed. Forest produce such as timber and bamboo are also sold by



Figure 1: Map of Dhubri district

people. Fish, milk, meat and egg also contribute to their economy. The main local language of this district is Goalporia, at the same time; Assamese and Benglai language are simultaneously spoken in the urban area.

The enrolments in primary schools have increased substantially in recent years due to the Universalization of Elementary Education (UEE) taken up by the Government of India (GoI). But the quality of learning outcome is still a distant dream. The seasonal migration of the labour during the non-rainy season and flood during the rainy season has both posed a hindrance to the development project in the district in general and education in particular. The poor Students-Teacher Ratio (STR) in rural areas of the district has also been a matter of grave concern. Often the children are enrolled in the schools in their locality but migrate along with their parents to their work place.

As per the data available with the Sarva Sikhsha Abhiyan (SSA) office, Dhubri there are about 3,442 primary schools in the district, with 2,51,108 enrolments. In the area under study, there are about 673 primary schools and about 81,288 students are enrolled in class 1 - 5 in different government schools in Bilasipara and Chapar Educational Block of Dhubri Distict in the Academic Year 2018-2019 (Govt. of Assam, 2019).

According to data released by the Piramal Foundation (PF), a co-partner of Niti Aayog, out of total primary schools in Dhubri district, a total 2,96,303 students joined public schools from class one to eighth in the current academic year that began in January 2019. This was an increase of over 45,000 enrolments compared to the last academic year 2018, which was around 2.5 lakh students joining public schools (Northeast now, 2019). Dhubri district has witnessed an increase of 18 per cent in student enrolment in public schools but the per capita quality of education received needs to be improved and requires immediate attention. As per the ASER Reports (2018), only 19.9% of students in classes III - V can read Std. II level text and only 40.2% can do subtraction. So it is a matter of grave concern that requires immediate intervention and rectification.

As ensuring quality education is one of the components of Goal 4 of the Sustainable Development Goals 2030. The state of Assam need to step up its endeavour to achieve this aim. The state has to come up with new strategies and interventions, to ensure quality education to the children. Inclusive education is an important aspect of the Right to Education Act (RTE) 2009. The Act casts a necessary obligation on Central, State and local governments to ensure enrolment, attendance and completion of elementary education by all children falling in the age group of (6-14). Thus, the state is bound to attract these children to schools and ensure that inclusive quality education is imparted to them, taking into account their linguistic, social and cultural backgrounds.

This study is a step in that direction as it provides useful inputs for developing a state policy for educating and improving the learning outcomes in children. As a part of this study, a specific intervention package was tried out in Dhubri district to improve the basic learning skills of the students. An Activity Based Learning (ABL) strategy (it helps children to grasp things faster) was thought of as the way out as part of the Accelerated Learning Program (ALP). Videos Learning Materials (VLMs), songs, pictures, games, and buildings were used as learning aid. The material relevant to the culture was taken to ensure familiarity and increased participation. Several teachers, Cluster Resource Centre Co-Ordinators (CRCC) and volunteers were involved to implement these interventions with the help of SSA and Piramal Foundation Educational Leadership (PFEL). The impact of these interventions were studied for a period of three months. The same has been documented in the paper in detail.

20 LITERATURE REVIEW

21 Introduction

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted in 1948, is the first international legal instrument that recognises education as a human right.

Article 26 states: 'Everyone has the right to education' although this non-legally binding instrument but with a great political and moral force. This Declaration influences the Signatory states to adopt its principles. It states that everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. (Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948). Education must fully assume its central role in helping people to forge more just, peaceful and tolerant societies- Ban Ki-moon, Secretary-General of the United Nations (Ban Ki-moon, 2018). Though major educational interventions have traditionally focused on getting children into school, nowadays, a lot of attention is being paid by researchers and decision makers towards interventions and efforts to improve learning for all [Pritchett, 2013; Robinson, 2011]. The 21st century skill, Emotional Intelligence are areas that modern education is slowly peaking up. It is of a growing international movement focusing on the skills in preparation for success in a rapidly changing world. The Sustainable Development Goals [SDG] 2030, has also acknowledge its' importance and in its' Goal 4 they stretched their commitment towards achieving this goal by 2030 (UNDP, 2015).

"By Education I mean all-around development, drawing out of the best in the child-man body, mind and spirit" (Harizan, 1937). The shift in the focus has been in Indian context to improving systems level performance and schooling outcomes which will be the emphasis of the combined Scheme along-with incentivizing States towards improving quality of education. Article 21-A and the RTE Act of the Indian Constitution has also backed the Objective of the Quality Education in India, in consonance with The Goal 4 of the SDG 2030.

As Assam has achieved 72.19% literacy rate it is still below the national average of 74.04% according to the 2011 census study. So as a state, Assam have a long way to go to achieve 100% literacy along with quality education (Government of Assam, ND).

2.2 Understanding the Scope of Problem

The children in rural areas gets admitted in nearby village schools in the beginning of the academic year but as their parents had to migrate to different states and even within the state. These children spend many months every year at work sites such as plantations, brick kilns, quarries, construction sites etc. in extremely difficult conditions. According to the United Nations Development Program, about 113 million children worldwide were not enrolled in school at the end of 2003 (IMF, 2004). The number of children below the age of 14 years is estimated as 9 million in India alone. Apart from this, most of the students stay out of schools during The Rainy seasons due to flood and

the farming seasons where they have to help their family in field or take care of their younger siblings (Smita, 2008). The students admitted in a particular class have a hard time to adjust to level of learning imparted in the class, as the students are still lacking the learning basic skill of even the former class. The average of 51% Indian student in class V can read class II text. In the Context of Dhubri District, although the pattern of distribution of primary schools in the rural area of the district is satisfactory, more than 50 per cent of the schools do not have *pucca* structure. About 40 per cent of them are semi *pucca* while the remaining buildings are *kutchra* normally with mud flooring and thatch roof. It is also worth considering that almost 50 per cent of the village schools have only one room and 20 per cent have two rooms. Therefore, adequate space in the schools is a critical gap which may discourage the children to attend school. Similarly, only about 37 per cent of the schools have provision for desk for the students who regularly come to the school and about 47 per cent can provide the same for some children. More importantly, 12 per cent of the village schools still do not have even black boards (Omeo Kumar Das Institute, ND page 22). The "National Achievement Survey 2017, in its ASSAM State Learning Report" With over 85 per cent of its students enrolled in government schools, the state of Assam had the participation of 27 districts with over 4,000 schools and 80,000 students. As per the data derived from the website of NAS, the performance from class 3 to 8 presents a visible decline. For instance, students of class 3 were able to answer 72 percent of the language questions correctly. However, the number declined to 60 percent for class 5 and 54 percent for class 8 (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2019).

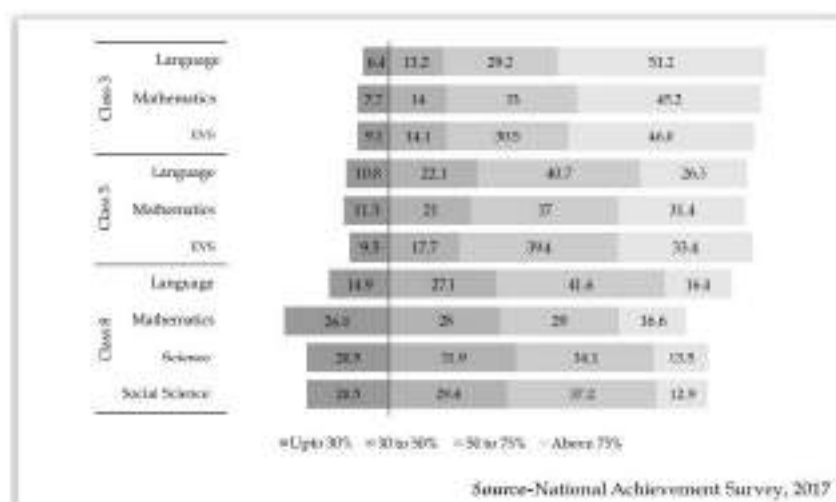


Figure 2: Distribution of students achievement by Classes and Subjects

The report throws light on the performance of students in Class 3 language, percentage of students achieving up to 30% is 6.4, between 30%-50% is 13.2, between 50%-75% is 29.2 and above 75% is 51.2, which indicates that almost half of the participating student could not attempt more than 75% of the Assessment task. The NGO Pratham in its 13th Annual Status of Education Report (ASER)- 2018 indicates that Overall enrolment (age 6-14): The enrolment of children for the age group 6 to 14 has been above 95%, since 2017. Children not enrolled in school has fallen below 3% at 2.8% in 2018. But Learning levels: Foundational skills in reading and Math in Std III the

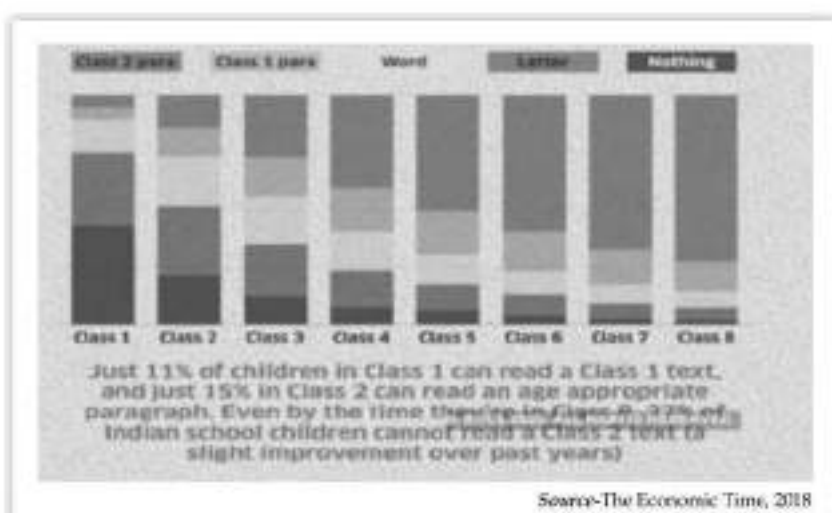


Figure 3: How much can school children read?

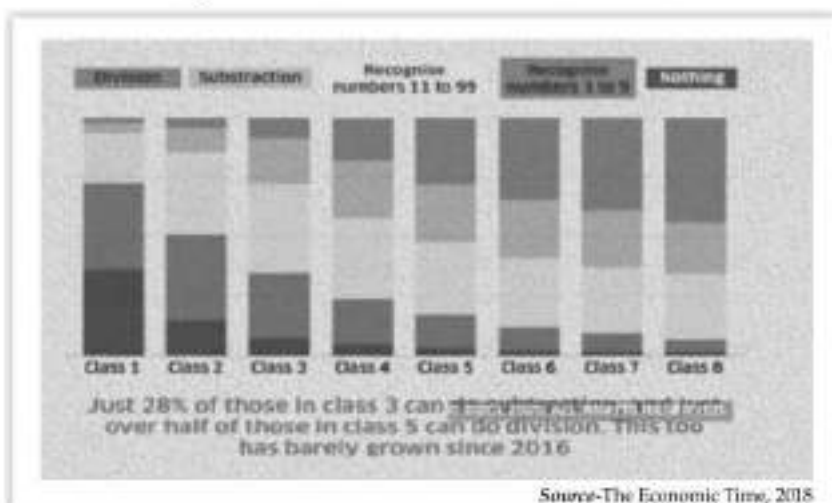


Figure 4: What is the level of arithmetic competency ?

percentage of all children who can read at Std II level has increased from 21.6% in 2013 to 27.2% in 2018 and in Std. V in 2018, 50.3% of Children enrolled in Std V can read at least a Std II level text. This figure has inched up from 47.9% in 2016. In the case of Mathematics, Std III- The all India figure for children in Std III who are able to do at least subtraction has not changed much, from 27.6% in 2016 to 28.1% in 2018. For government school children, this figure was 20.3% in 2016 and 20.9% in 2018. Std V- The proportion of children in Std V across India who are able to do division has increased slightly, from 26% in 2016 to 27.8% in 2018 (ASER, 2019).

IN the Context of Dhubri, as per the reports published by the Pratham NGO in its ASER Report 2018, Dhubri's performance in comparison to other Aspiration Districts in India, only 40% of students in class 3 to 5 can do simple subtraction, and just 20% students can read the level II text. The chart in Figure 3 show the comparison of the Study District and the Other Aspirational District in India for the year 2018.

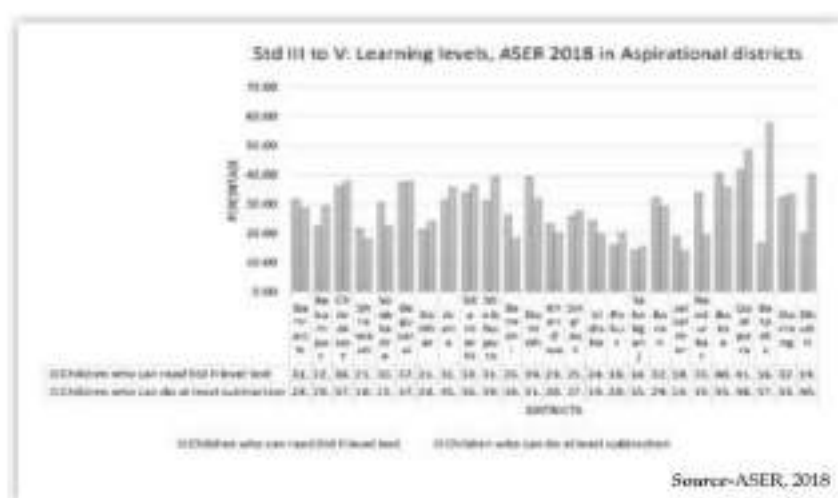


Figure 5: Std III to V: Learning levels, ASER 2018 in Aspirational districts

2.3 Planning and Suitable Interventions

Although there is extensive literature on the relationship between socio-economic status of family and the academic performance of children, the factors that may affect learning outcomes due to lack of basic skills in language subject, especially reading and doing simple arithmetic has not been carried out extensively. As we have seen in case of ASER Survey, it is based on house hold survey by random sampling technique with smaller sample size in connection with the District under the study. The contribution of the local

community towards this goal has not been extensively studied. Efforts made by various agencies, including government and locals towards the enhancement of learning of basic skills of the children in the Government Schools of the Chapor and Bilasipara Educational Block were examined despite the various struggles that they have faced during the campaign.

2.4 Planning Intervention through Activity Based Learning Strategy

In Assam, Assamese language is the medium of teaching in government schools and the school timing 9.00 a.m. to 1.45 p.m. but most often the schools functions from 10:00 am due to various reasons like distance of travelling to schools for teachers, location of the schools etc. in the context of Dhubri District, due to the location of schools in CHAR areas, classes may even begin from around 11:00 am. As the district is a flood prone region and the study area in particular, it is almost without classes in most of the schools in the two educational block during the season of rain. To carry out the program of ensuring of basic skills in children from classes 1 to 5, convergence of various agencies and government organisation were made, which was spear headed by the Local community under the campaign name of Prayas. The whole campaign was carried under the supervision of the District Administration of Dhubri. The program was launched by the District Administration of Dhubri by the Honourable Deputy commissioner. Accelerated Learning Programme (ALP) was formulated to address the need of the students who are not able to retain the pace with the teaching-learning process in a normal classroom situation (the Sentinel, 2019). This program continued for a month but the study progressed along with the involvement of the local volunteers to continue with the program.

The steps involved in the process can be explained as follows:

- On boarding of local youths into the program through online and offline application
- Orientation of the volunteers for the program through workshop in each Educational Block of all the 6 educational blocks.
- Coordinating with the Sarva Shiksha Abhiya (SSA), Dhubri Cluster Resource Centre Coordinators (CRCC) for the placement of the volunteers in various schools in their respective clusters.
- Conducting of baseline assessment of the students from classes II to V. to take stock of the learning level of the student at the current time. At the end of the program an endline assessment was conducted to access the effectiveness of the intervention.

- The volunteers will be teaching the basic language and mathematics in all the classes from classes II to V.
- The content will be that of level 2 text in terms of Language and basic carryforward subtraction of two digits in case of mathematics.
- The Volunteers were to be provided the engagement certificate at the end.

2.5 Role of Activities in Improving Learning

The traditional teaching method gave boredom to the learners. Activity Based Learning (ABL) method is an example of such learner centred technique and it provides activity oriented and joyful learning. Traditional method of teaching in which teacher dominates can no longer be used as an effective method for better learning. The concept framed by Learning by doing and Self-learning will result in a learning which will be retained for a longer period of time (Bhuvaneswari, 2013). Further, active class participation provides 'time on task' i.e. "learning will be enhanced when the student has enough time to master the task" (Bloom, 1976).

As the Teachers were involved in teaching the regular class curriculum to catch up with the syllabus, the volunteers were engaged in teaching the students in ABL format with the help of TLMs, Worksheets and Games intended for Identification of Alphabets and Numerical.

As the schedule was placed after the Mid-Day Meal is served, the children could actively participate and as is activity based, all student participated in the process will full enjoyment. To the contrary, after the meal break is over most of the classes become in active or even classes are dismissed.

2.6 Measuring Learning Outcomes

The volunteers and CRCCs in the Schools conducted a pre- and post-assessment for the very purpose of examining the outcome of the intervention. For measuring the Learning outcome of the student the ASER Tools were used for both Mathematics and language (Assamese).

2.6.1 ASER Assessment

The testing process addresses the ASER's central questions, are children acquiring the foundational reading and arithmetic skills. The process is designed to record the highest level of that each child can comfortably achieve. The testing is conducted in Sampled schools of Bilaspur and Chapur Educational Blocks of Dhubri District.

Children group of 5-16 age groups are sampled for the survey using the same tool irrespective gender, grade or schooling status.

The testing process incorporates the various measures to ensure that it captures each child can do. Testing is conducted in the local language of children.

Task Reading Task:

All children are assessed using this simple reading tool. The reading has 4 tasks:

- Letters: Set of commonly used letters
- Words: Common, familiar words with 2 letters and 1 or 2 matras
- Std. I Level Text: Set of 4 simple linked sentences, each having no more other than 6 words. These words are (or their equivalent) in the Std 1 textbook of the state.
- Std II Level Text: Short story with 7-10 sentences. Sentence construction in straightforward; words are common and familiar to children. These words are (or their equivalent) in the Std 2 level textbook of the state.

Sample: Reading Test (Assamese)

Std II level text

জোন আৰু বুবু দুয়ো ককাই-ভাই। জোন
পঢ়াত আৰু খেলাত বুৰি ভাল। বুবুৱে
পঢ়িবলৈ আৰু লিখিবলৈ ভালমতে
নাভাৱে। বুবুক যদি জোনে পঢ়িবলৈ কয়
সি খেলিবলৈহে যাব। সেইবাবে জোনে
আৰু এটা উপায় উলিয়ালে। শিহুনিয়াৰ
পৰা সি আৰু লগত খেলিবলৈ আহিলে।
খেলাৰ মাজেৰে সি বুবুক পঢ়িবলৈ আৰু
লিখিবলৈ শিকালে। ইয়াৰ ফলত
সঁচাকৈয়ে বুবুৱে বৰ্ষ আৰু সংখ্যা তিনি
পেৰা হ'ল।

Std I level text

জুমিয়ে গাখীৰ খায়।
গাখীৰ দেখিবলৈ বগা।
গাখীৰৰ পৰা মাখন হয়।
তাই মাখন ভাল পায়।

ঐ	ফ	ম
ড	ব	
খ	য	ক
হ	জ	

কাশ	খালে
বুজ	খেল
হীলা	হাখী
মুই	পানি
মুগ	চেনা

Start Here

How to test the reading?

Ask the child to read either of the two paragraphs.

Let the child choose the paragraph itself. If the child does not choose, give him/her to read any one of the paragraph.

Start Level Test (Paragraph)

The child is not at "Paragraph level" if the child:

- Reads paragraph like using a word, rather than sentences.
- Reads the paragraph haltingly and stops very often.
- Reads the paragraph very fluently but with more than 3 mistakes.

The child is at Paragraph level if the child:

- Reads the paragraph like she is reading sentences, rather than a string of words.
- Reads the paragraph fluently with 4 or less, even if she is reading slowly.
- Reads the full paragraph with 3.

If the child can read paragraph level then ask the child to read the story.

Start Level Test (Story)

Word Level

If the child is not at Paragraph level then ask the child to read these words:

Words:

- Ask the child to read any of the 3 words from the list of words.
- Let the child choose the words itself. If the child does not choose, then point out any 3 words and let the child to read.
- The child is at correct level if the child reads each of 3 words.

The child is not at "Paragraph level" if the child:

- Reads paragraph like using a word, rather than sentences.
- Reads the paragraph haltingly and stops very often.
- Reads the paragraph very fluently but with more than 3 mistakes.

Ask the child to read the story.

The child is at story level, if the child:

- Reads story like he/she is reading sentences, rather than string of words.
- Reads the story fluently and with ease, even if she is reading slowly.
- Reads the full story with 3 or less than 3 mistakes.

If the child can read story level, then mark the child at story level.

If the child is not at story level then mark the child at paragraph level.

If the child does not recognizes 4 out of 5 letters then mark the child at Beginner level

Arithmetic Task

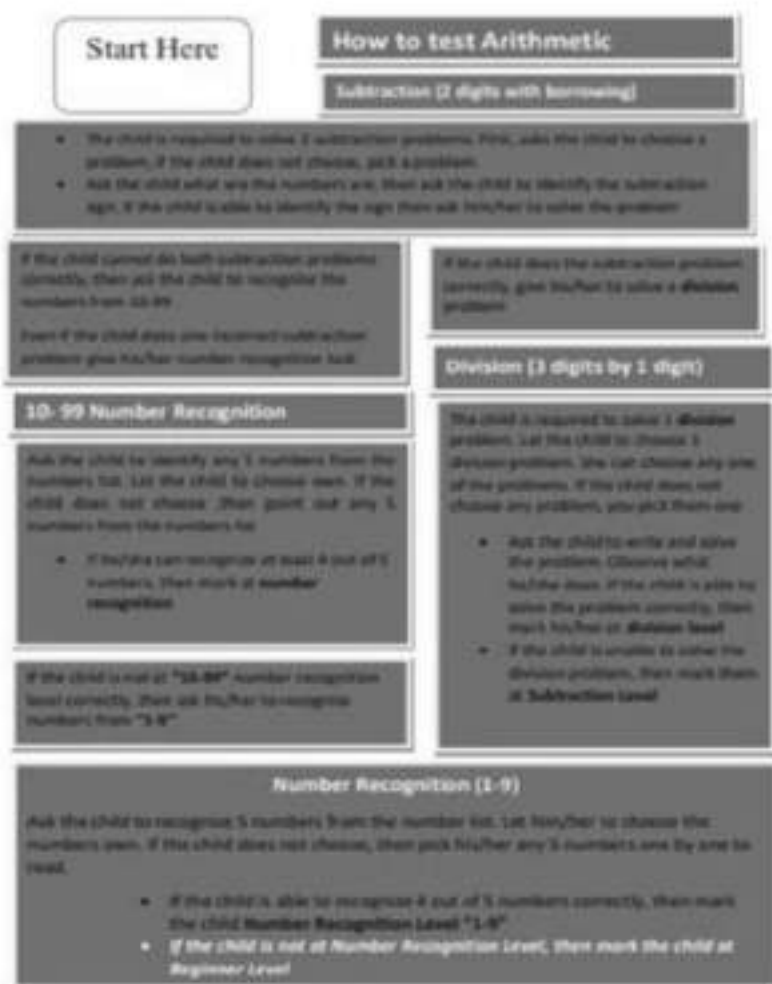
All children are assessed using a simple arithmetic tool.

The arithmetic has 4 tasks:

- Number of recognition 1-9
- Number of recognition 10-99
- Subtraction: 2 digit numerical subtraction problem with borrowing
- Division: 3 digit by 1 digit numerical division problems with remainder

Sample: Arithmetic Test

one-digit (1-9)	two-digit (10-99)	three (100-999)	four (1000-9999)
14	58	34	45
15	59	35	46
16	60	36	47
17	61	37	48
18	62	38	49
19	63	39	50
20	64	40	51
21	65	41	52
22	66	42	53
23	67	43	54
24	68	44	55
25	69	45	56
26	70	46	57
27	71	47	58
28	72	48	59
29	73	49	60
30	74	50	61
31	75	51	62
32	76	52	63
33	77	53	64
34	78	54	65
35	79	55	66
36	80	56	67
37	81	57	68
38	82	58	69
39	83	59	70
40	84	60	71
41	85	61	72
42	86	62	73
43	87	63	74
44	88	64	75
45	89	65	76
46	90	66	77
47	91	67	78
48	92	68	79
49	93	69	80
50	94	70	81
51	95	71	82
52	96	72	83
53	97	73	84
54	98	74	85
55	99	75	86
56		76	87
57		77	88
58		78	89
59		79	90
60		80	91
61		81	92
62		82	93
63		83	94
64		84	95
65		85	96
66		86	97
67		87	98
68		88	99
69		89	
70		90	
71		91	
72		92	
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2.7 Parent's Contribution to Children's Learning Outcome

Other prominent factor which effect the student academic achievement is "Parents' concern towards education of their ward, level of parental education, and their investing in resources that promote learning such as quality child care, educational materials and visits to museums etc." (Shonkoff and Phillips, 2000) 'Initiatives that assist parents in providing appropriate psychological and educational support for their children should therefore be encouraged' (Considine & Zappala, 2002). it is acknowledged that learning ability of a child is to some extent innate and hereditary. Besides cognitive ability, environmental features like family and school are also important. Parents are the central figures in their children's lives; therefore, they have the potentials to sharpen their children's approach to achievements (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000).

3.0 AN OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

The study employed action research design studying the transformative change through the simultaneous process of taking action and doing research. Purposive sampling technique was used to identify the schools for the study. This is a method to select the sample units that conform to some predetermined criteria. The sample population under observation are school going children from classes 2 to 5 of the 44 schools in Bilasipara and 12 in Chapor Educational Block in the district of Dhubri. From each cluster of the two blocks government schools were selected to better represent the Block of the Study area. The schools with decent enrolment, infrastructure and STR were selected upon the recommendation of the CRCCs from their respective clusters. This will help in better understanding the performance of the clusters on a whole as the better school performance will highlight the performance of the other schools in each clusters.

The data was collected from both primary and secondary sources. Primary source of data collection were 56 government schools in which the intervention program was implemented. Data tools employed to collect this data were questionnaires, interviews, participant observations and so on. The secondary sources of data collection were Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) reports, other government reports and studies conducted by ASER.

The collected data was analysed using Microsoft Excel 2016. Gender statistics and inferential statistics for the data were examined. The statistical tools were applied such as correlation analysis, regression analysis and t-test. Correlation analysis was used to measure the strength of relationship between the interval scaled variables. Regression was used to understand the causal relationship of one variable to the other. T-test was used for comparison of arithmetic means. Furthermore, the study was conducted to find answers to the following research questions:

- Has the intervention program helped in improving the learning outcomes of the children in Government Schools?

The parameters evaluated with this research question are a) Are the students able to read standard two level Assamese language? b) Are the students able to solve two-digit Subtraction of Arithmetic problems? c) Are the local interventions programs in schools helping improve overall academic performance of the student?

- Are the different stakeholders of the school helping in improving the learning outcome of the students academically?

The study began with the below given formulated hypothesis to seek answers to the problem statement in relation to the above research questions:

"There is a significant relationship between basic learning capability of students in comprehending Assamese language and Mathematics and academic performance of the students".

4.0 PREPARATION OF THE INTERVENTION PROGRAM

The district administration of Dhubri, under the leadership of the District Collector, initiated the intervention program. The intervention program commenced in the chosen government schools under the tag name "Prayas". The entire program was carried forward by Educational Department SSA, Dhubri in collaboration with Piramal Foundation Educational Leadership Dhubri Team and under the supervision of the Deputy Commissioner, Dhubri. The entire operation was carried out with zero investment and all the expenses were borne by the individual volunteers. They were provided with the material for the intervention and introduced them to the schools through the CRCCs. They were promised to receive an engagement certificate in the end but not any monetary benefits.

4.1 Identifying the schools for Intervention

Purposive Sampling method was adopted for the selection of schools for the study. The sample population under observation were school going children from classes 2 to 5 of the 44 schools in Bilasipara and 12 in Chapor Educational Block in the district of Dhubri. The government schools from each cluster of the two blocks were selected one each to better represent the Block of the Study area. The schools with decent enrolment, infrastructure and STR were selected upon the recommendation of the CRCCs from their respective clusters. This method helped in saving time, energy, money and scaling of the project. As the CRCCs are the individuals who are the resource person of their clusters which indeed helped in selecting the suitable sample school for the project. The list of selected schools for the study from both the block are listed below:

**List of Sampled Schools from Bilasipara Educational Block
and the number of Students enrolled in class 1 to 5 for the Year 2019 (SSA, 2019)**

Sl. No.	Dist. Code	SCHOOL NAME	BLOCK NAME	Class 1-5 Enrolment
1	18020435401	2152 NO. BAPUR S.P. LP SCHOOL	BILASIPARA	105
2	18020443001	1711 NO. KURSHAKATI LP SCHOOL	BILASIPARA	134
3	18020410403	HALDHARI MV SCHOOL	BILASIPARA	103
4	18020432101	1446 NO. PASCHIM UDDHARI LPS	BILASIPARA	126

5	18020405902	2194 NO. AMKATI LP SCHOOL	BILASPADA	185
6	18020431605	KHODIGAON G.JNAR LPS	BILASPADA	102
7	18020433103	2154 BHARABGANI LPS	BILASPADA	84
8	18020412502	1448 NO. DIPORKUTI L.P.SCHOOL	BILASPADA	169
9	18020405001	382 NO. BANGALIPARA MAITAB L.P.SCHOOL	BILASPADA	263
10	18020423901	2183 NO. TU/SIPARA L.P.SCHOOL	BILASPADA	154
11	18020411902	893 NO. KAJARATA LPS	BILASPADA	275
12	18020442206	D. NAYER ALSA LPS	BILASPADA	96
13	18020404702	138 NO. SANDAL LP SCHOOL	BILASPADA	102
14	18020471404	1903 NO. U. BAHIR SALAPATA LPS	BILASPADA	105
15	18020422206	882 NO. SALMARA PT V AP	BILASPADA	107
16	18020428001	2438/B NO. TAMARA LP SCHOOL	BILASPADA	108
17	18020407901	1775 NO. BOALKAMARI LP SCHOOL	BILASPADA	120
18	18020415003	BAKTIABHANI LPS	BILASPADA	122
19	18020458903	JANATA MF MADRASSA	BILASPADA	35
20	18020471406	1903 NO. U. B. SALAPATA LPS	BILASPADA	135
21	18020425106	1883 NO. SURPER KHATA PUL LPS	BILASPADA	136
22	18020412101	KATARA TALUK N.V. SCHOOL	BILASPADA	44
23	18020401001	2406/B NO. BHOBAN PAR LPS	BILASPADA	136
24	18020417001	2404/B NO. PAZKANI PT R LPS	BILASPADA	138
25	18020417902	BAALIPARA M.F. MADRASSA	BILASPADA	96
26	18020411302	3030 NO. KACHUNGON LP SCHOOL	BILASPADA	141
27	18020441008	676 NO. CHAL DHARA LPS	BILASPADA	144
28	18020422005	PASCHIM KATHUL PARA LPS	BILASPADA	148
29	18020445201	3838 GAON N.V. SCHOOL	BILASPADA	82
30	18020454201	1985 NO. BAHAR SALAPATA LPS	BILASPADA	127
31	18020413902	1460 NO. BAGRISARI BANGLA LPS	BILASPADA	158

90	18020402001	BAMUNI CHOTOGRAH ME SCHOOL	BLASPADA	65
91	18020434001	BLASPADA ME SCHOOL	BLASPADA	102
92	18020416001	1802 MAJARA LP SCHOOL	BLASPADA	176
93	18020401501	1176 NO. GOMER CHAR IPS	BLASPADA	152
94	18020413001	118 NO. BAGRIMAR LP SCHOOL	BLASPADA	137
95	18020403201	7118 NO. PURBANA PARA IPS	BLASPADA	201
96	18020412301	NEURABARI ME SCHOOL	BLASPADA	118
97	18020411001	SANARISEVM V S	BLASPADA	110
98	18020420001	SUNLAKANEI ME SCHOOL	BLASPADA	128
99	18020418001	SACH PAK ME MADRASSA	BLASPADA	115
100	18020444001	104 NO. DLF TOWN L.B. SCHOOL	BLASPADA	203
101	18020400201	858 NO. RATIPOTA LP SCHOOL	BLASPADA	246
102	18020433001	KAYNBARI CHAUTARA ME MADRASSA	BLASPADA	116

List of Sampled Schools from Chapor Educational Block and the number of Students enrolled in class 1 to 5 for the Year 2019 (SSA, 2019)

Sl. No.	DISE Code	SCHOOL NAME	BLOCK NAME	Class 1-5 Enrollment
1	18020511101	975 NO. ANJAPUR GIRLS LPS	CHAPOR	27
2	18020501802	VEER SHAH ME SCHOOL	CHAPOR	89
3	18020514001	1113 NO. CHIBARI MAJEGAON LPS	CHAPOR	109
4	18020511001	ZANBARI LPS	CHAPOR	113
5	18020503001	1095 NO. SHALABARI LP SCHOOL	CHAPOR	95
6	18020500902	30 NO. BAHAL PUR L.B. SCHOOL	CHAPOR	129
7	18020515401	1111 NO. CHAPOR JB SCHOOL	CHAPOR	130
8	18020513401	3006 NO. HARKATA LP SCHOOL	CHAPOR	137
9	18020503701	1443/B NO. TALIMARI LP SCHOOL	CHAPOR	173
10	18020513201	1411/A NO. NATERAGA LPSCHOOL	CHAPOR	178
11	18020512601	173 NO. TIKKARANDHA LP SCHOOL	CHAPOR	187
12	18020511702	2410/B NO. DHINGHAT BARDOLLA LPS	CHAPOR	207

4.2 Developing the Content

As per the Assessment Tools, there are four levels each in Language and Mathematic. So, level wise content was developed by the teachers, CRCCs, and Gandhi-fellows from Piramal Foundation Educational Leadership in the form of Worksheets and activities. The content was developed in such a way that it is basic in nature and from their surroundings. To develop a pedagogy suitable for teaching in the level based children, advice of experts was solicited.

4.3 Recruiting Volunteers

Both the option of online and offline application was explored for the recruitment of volunteers into the program. In order to teach the basic reading skills in Assamese language and basic Arithmetic in level wise mode to children, special volunteers proficient in native language were recruited with help of SSA, Dhubri. A list of volunteers has been shown in the (Table 1) below:

Table 1: Volunteers recruited in Dhubri District in PRAYAS

Sl.	Block Name	No. of Volunteer	Column 1	Column 2	Subject like to teach	Column 3	Column 4
		Total	Male	Female	Assamese	Mathematic	Both the Subjects
1	Agomoni	156	110	46	83	10	63
2	Bilasipara	152	100	52	78	17	57
3	Chapor	54	40	14	19	2	33
4	Gauripur	297	156	141	155	60	82
5	Golakganj	149	91	58	68	12	69
6	Mankachar	2	0	2	2	0	0
7	S.Salmara	201	122	79	57	11	133
Total		1011	619	392	462	112	437

4.4 Training of Volunteers

A two-day workshop was organised at Bilasipara Educational Block Office for training the volunteers, teachers and CRCCs of the two blocks of Bilasipara and Chapor Educational Blocks. The program was organised from September 18 and 19, 2019. Training on level wise facilitation to children through activities and games and most importantly by creating conducive environment for children was organised to ensure their participation.

4.5 Parent Teacher Meeting

Before the Program initiated in the schools, meeting with community members, school management committees and parents were conducted to

encourage them to send their children to schools and assist them to learn post classes. This was an effort to build a strong partnership between community, parents and teachers. During the meeting it was that poor learning outcome in school, language issue, multi-graded children in class, STR in rural areas, multiple engagements of teachers especially in NRC duty.

5.0 INTERVENTION PACKAGE

The intervention program was rolled out to bring about a real time change in overall learning outcome for the kids. The first set of interventions focussed on improving the participation of the children in the classroom while the second part focussed on basic learning skills of the kids.

5.1 Remedial Classes

Volunteers, teachers and CRCCs were involved in the remedial classes to improve the Assamese comprehending ability and basic mathematics. They initiated remedial teaching through multi-grade teaching. The class process started by creating conducive environment in the class. As the instructors were advised to act as facilitators and also changed the sitting arrangement of the class. The classes were conducted in circular form with the facilitator sitting on the floor with the children instead of the regular traditional pattern of teacher standing in front. The slow learners were identified and provided with the necessary help and guidance to help them overcome their problems, after identifying their areas of difficulty.

5.2 Introducing Innovative Pedagogical Methods

There was usage of Video Learning Materials (VLMs), pictures, placards, games to better explain the regular subjects such as Maths and Assamese to the students. This helped in overcoming the language barrier.

5.3 Group activity in Classroom

Classroom teaching was conducted through group activity. Groups were formulated by mixing the slow learners and fast learners to encourage learning through participation. Group activities were also conducted during the process through peer learning model. Extracurricular activities were introduced for the holistic development of children. Story writing competition was conducted during the process for encouraging the development in Assamese language.

5.4 Special Workshops during Holidays

Workshops were conducted during the holidays to help children to catch up with their class curriculum. It was especially beneficial for slow learners. The trust of the community was also rebuilt through the process. As one village

headman from Bilasipara remarked that, "the children are not seen playing around the village during the holidays". Moreover, as the classes were activity based, the children were engrossed and attended classes all along the process. The other positive outcome observed was the rebuilding of relationship between the local youth and the government schools in their vicinity, which increased respect for volunteers in the eyes of villagers.

6.0 IMPACT OF INTERVENTION PROGRAM

For assessing the performance of the children in the intervention program, grades were assigned to determine the learning levels of the participating students. The baseline assessment and end line assessment data were analysed for the realistic conclusions. The grading for the performance of each student were devised according to the levels identified during the assessment process according to the ASER assessment tools.

The four levels of the assessment tools were Alphabet level (Level A), The Word level (Level W), the short paragraph level (Level P) and the Story level (Level S) in case of the Language (Assamese) assessment grading. For the grading of the mathematics, the four levels were 0-9 Level (single Digit Level), 10-99 Level (Double Digit level), Subtraction Level and Division Level. When the children were not able to qualify in either of the initial levels, they were placed in the category of beginners. It is to be noted, that the sample size of children was 4,177 during Assamese Language Assessment and 4,148 in Mathematics Assessment for pre-intervention data collected. However, the sample size reduced to 3,700 children post intervention. The reason for the differences in the sample are varied, some on-ground causes revealed by the teachers, communities and volunteers were the cultivation seasons, migration of parents for work and so forth.

6.1 Impact of Intervention Program on ability of children to read Assamese language

Total number of students who participated in the baseline assessment from the two blocks are given below (Table 2):

BASELINE STUDENTS ASSESSMENT CLASS WISE

Table 2 : Total Students Assessed from classes 2-5

Class	II	III	IV	V
Bilasipara	744	782	743	817
Chapor	263	256	263	309
Total	1007	1038	1006	1126

The ASER reading assessment tool consists of 4 levels: letters, words, a short paragraph (Std 1 level text), and a longer "story" (Std 2 level text). The child is marked at the highest level, which he/she can do comfortably (ASER, n.d.). The assessment of the students from classes 2 to 5 were conducted on basic Assamese language, consisting of Standard 1 and 2 level text as shown in the following table. In case a child was not able to perform even in the first level, they were placed in the Beginner Level.

The Assessment details of the Bilasipara and Chapor Educational block is placed in the following (Table 3):

Table 3 : Assamese Language Assessment of Bilasipara & Chapor Education Block

Levels	Pre-intervention		Post intervention	
	No. of Students	Percentage	No. of Students	Percentage
Beginner	393	9.41%	209	5.65%
Alphabet	718	17.19%	715	19.32%
Word	772	18.48%	480	12.97%
Short Paragraph	927	22.19%	1029	27.81%
Story	1367	33%	1267	34.24%

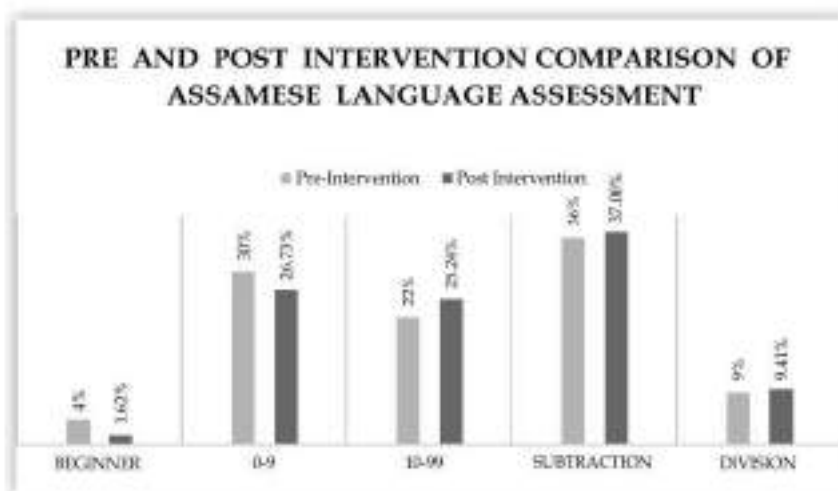


Figure 6: Comparison of Assamese language assessment of Pre & Post Intervention

6.2 Impact of Intervention Programme on ability of children to do Basic Mathematics

The ASER math tool consists of four levels: the four levels are 0-9 Level (single Digit Level), 10-99 Level (Double Digit level), Subtraction Level (two-digit

subtraction with borrowing) and Division Level (three digits by one-digit division). When the children were not able to qualify in either of the initial levels, they were placed in the category of Beginners.

Table 4: Mathematics Assessment of Bilasipara & Chapor Education Block

Levels	Pre-intervention		Post intervention	
	No. of Students	Percentage	No. of Students	Percentage
Beginner	148	4%	60	1.62%
0-9	1229	30%	989	26.73%
10-99	903	22%	934	25.24%
Subtraction	1514	36%	1369	37.00%
Division	354	9%	348	9.41%

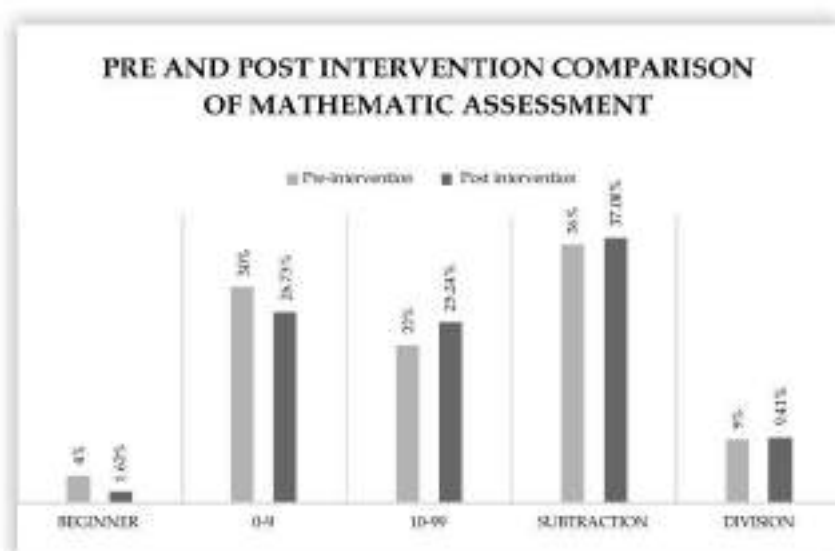


Figure 7: Pre & Post Intervention Comparison of Mathematics

6.3 Pre-intervention class-wise performance

Assamese language performance of the students from classes 2 to 5 before the Intervention: A table consisting of class-wise no. of participants and levels of their current performance.

Classes 2 to 5 before the Intervention: A table consisting of class-wise no. of participants and levels of their current performance.

Table 5: Pre-Intervention Class-wise performance

Category	Class II	Class III	Class IV	Class V
Beginner	163	96	63	71
Alphabet	336	175	101	106
Word	273	215	167	117
Paragraph	169	236	264	258
Story	66	316	411	574
Total	1007	1038	1006	1126

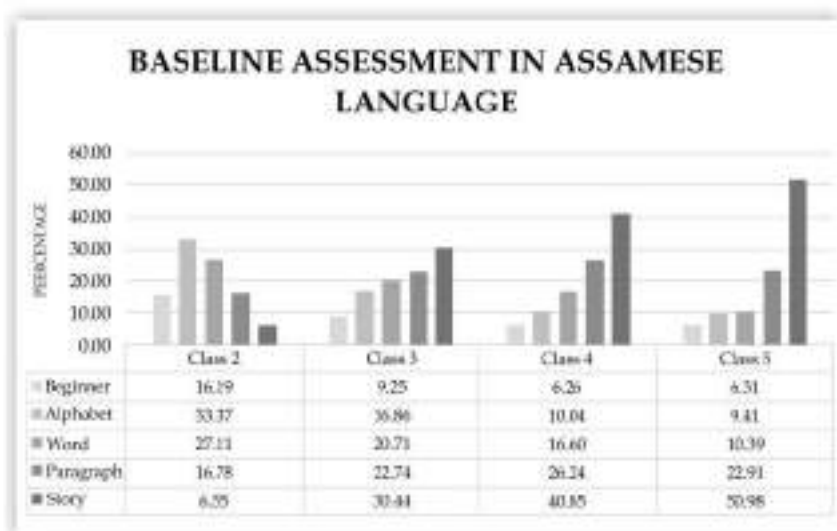


Figure 8: Baseline Assessment in Assamese Language

Table 6: Baseline Assessment in Mathematic

Category	Class II	Class III	Class IV	Class V
Beginner	45	24	71	8
(0-9)	472	297	309	151
(10-99)	187	261	231	224
Subtraction	307	410	399	398
Division	0	47	65	242

Mathematics performance of the students from classes 2 to 5 before the Intervention: A table comprising of no. of participants' class wise and levels of their current performance is given below:

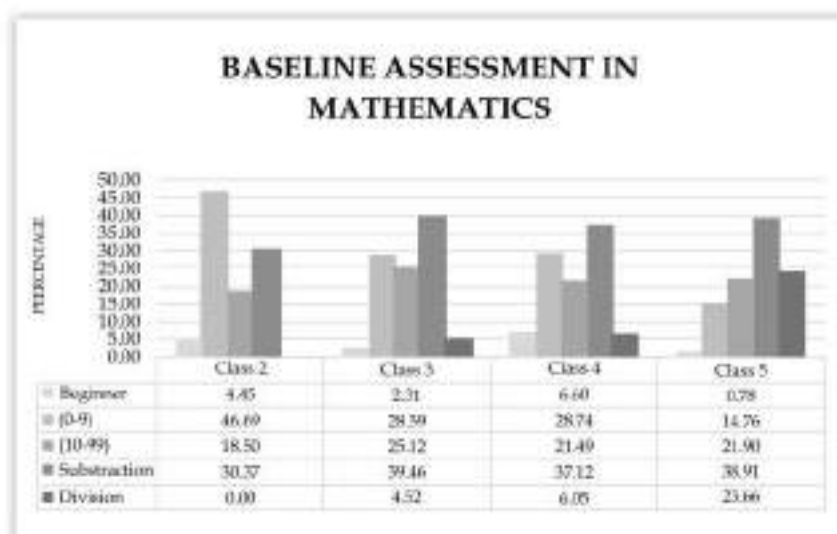


Figure 9: Baseline Assessment in Mathematics

6.4 Post-Intervention class-wise progress

ENDLINE STUDENTS ASSESSMENT CLASS WISE

Table 7: Endline Students Assessment Class Wise

Class	II	III	IV	V
Bilasipara	644	682	699	709
Chapor	228	223	247	268
Total	872	905	946	977

6.4.1 Performance of students' post-intervention in Assamese language

Table 8: Endline Students performance in Assamese language

Category	Class II	Class III	Class IV	Class V
Beginner	105	42	42	20
Alphabet	280	157	140	138
Word	142	130	121	87
Paragraph	267	287	283	192
Story	78	289	360	540
Total	872	905	946	977

Classwise Distribution of Students in the 5 levels of grading in Assamese language

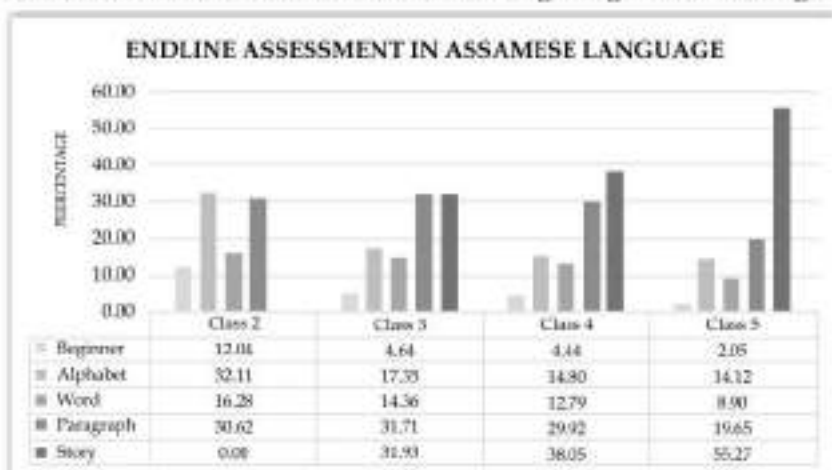


Figure 10: Endline Students performance in Mathematics

6.4.2 Performance of students post-Intervention in Mathematics

Classwise Distribution of Students in the 5 levels of grading in Mathematics

Table 9: Endline Students performance in Mathematic

Category	Class II	Class III	Class IV	Class V
Beginner	23	10	25	2
(0-9)	375	215	259	140
(10-99)	189	302	238	205
Subtraction	285	341	363	380
Division	0	37	61	250

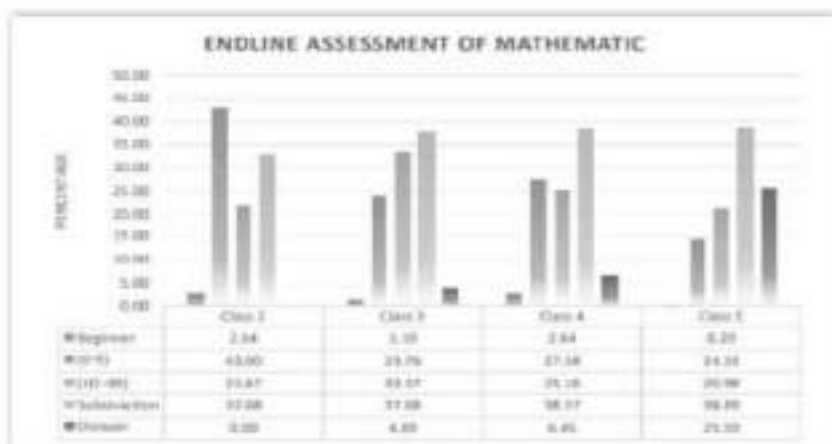


Figure 11: Endline Assessment of Mathematics

As per students enrolled, the exercise conducted in the school were very entertaining and joyful. Referring back to the information collected during the exercise of the study, it is seen a remarkable progress was visible in the ability of students to read Assamese language by. There was an incremental increase in number of children who could understand their own class text books.

6.5 Impact of Intervention program in improving class participation of children

To understand the children's classroom participation, the pre and post intervention assessment of the participants' attendance were analysed. Additionally, random interaction with the children, teachers and volunteers suggested that children experienced a shift from regular classroom environment during intervention program. The responses of the volunteers were recorded to analyse shift in the children participation. It can be inferred from table given below that there was a considerable change in class participation post implementation of the intervention program. Around 35% of students excelled in class participation, compared to 5% earlier.

Table 10: Classroom student participation response

Respondent	Pre-intervention Response			Post intervention Response		
	Yes	No	Can't say	Yes	No	Can't say
Teachers	120	90	10	150	40	30
Volunteers	75	100	26	110	60	31
Total	195	190	36	260	100	61

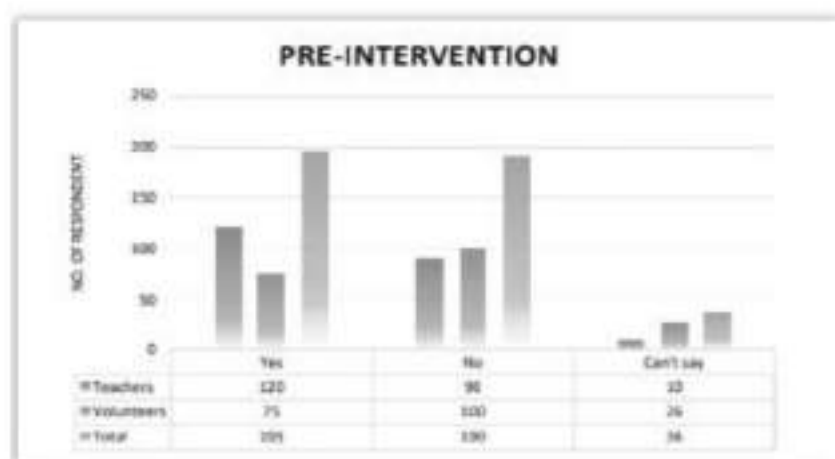


Figure 12: Pre & Post Intervention Classroom participation

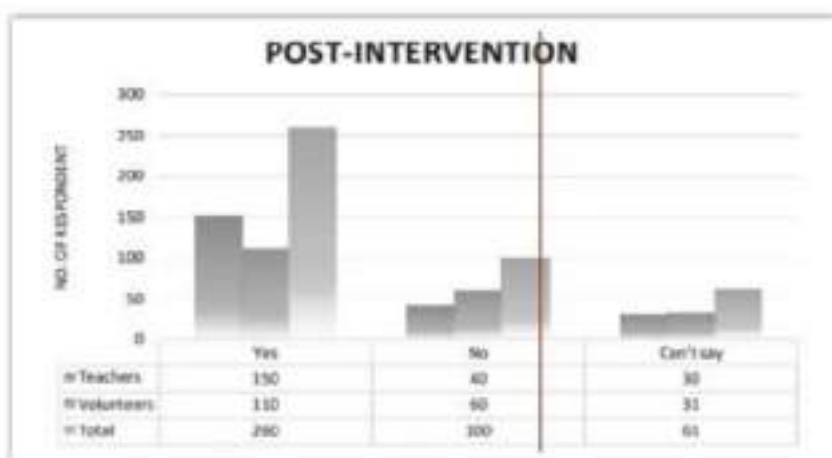


Figure 13: Comparison of Pre & Post Intervention Classroom participation

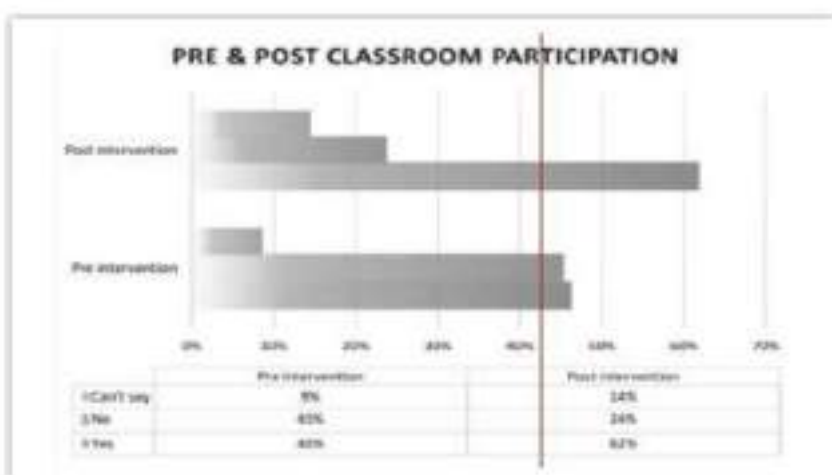


Figure 14: Pre & Post Classroom participation Comparison

6.6 Inferential Statistics

"There is a significant relationship between basic learning capability of students in comprehending Assamese language and Mathematics and academic performance of the students".

For studying the above hypothesis, grades/scores for 3700 students in overall performance in Basic Assamese Language and Mathematics was considered. For assessing the learning outcome, a system of grading the performance of children as B, A, W, P, S Levels for Assamese Language and 0-1, 10-99, subtraction, division levels in case of Mathematics were adopted. As both dependent and independent variable are on interval scale, Pearson Correlation was applied.

6.6.1 Correlation between student's performance and basic learning skills

Correlation Analysis

	Basic Learning Ability	Classroom Participation	Subject wise Performance	
			Assamese	Mathematics
Person Correlation (r)	1	0.67875	0.9365	0.9863

The correlation suggests that there is a strong correlation between intervention and children's academic performance.

6.6.2 Children's performance in Assamese language

Hypothesis testing in case of Children's performance in Assamese language

Type of Hypothesis Testing	Null Hypothesis (Ho) Mean	Sample Mean, \bar{x}	Standard Deviation	Sample Size	Significance Value
Two tail Test	1525	740	527010	3700	5%

The null hypothesis is rejected and alternative hypothesis is accepted. The z score of -90.59 is within the rejection area. The 2 critical values (cut off points) are -1.96 and 1.96. Since -90.59 is outside of this interval, we reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis.

6.6.3 Children's performance in Mathematics

Type of Hypothesis Testing	Null Hypothesis (Ho) Mean	Sample Mean, \bar{x}	Standard Deviation	Sample Size	Significance Value
Two tail Test	1525	740	527010	3700	5%

The null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative hypothesis is accepted. The z score of -113.22 is within the rejection area. The 2 critical values (cut off points) are -1.96 and 1.96. Since -113.22 is outside of this interval, we reject the null hypothesis. We accept the alternative hypothesis. Since the z score are well within the rejectable limits, we can accept the alternative hypothesis.

6.7 Exploring community and parent's concern towards children's education

In the survey conducted at the beginning of the project, it was observed that 45% of the teachers and volunteers observed that students were not

participating in classroom activities. This was a common concern of the villagers and the parents. At the least, 46 % of the respondent revealed that less than half of the total children population participated in the activities. The post- intervention survey of volunteers and teachers shows the student participation rose from 46% to 62% and non-participation remarks reduced from 45% to 24% of the total respondent.

7.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The entire intervention program was carried out by the local community and was implemented at a zero cost target. The only cost incurred during the program was in respect of distribution of certificate of engagement for all the participating volunteers. The Piramal Foundation Educational Leadership Dhubri took up the cost incurred.

Sl. No.	Purpose	Cost per Unit	Total Amount	Remarks
1.	Certificate Printing	15	1011x15 = 15165	For Distribution of Certificate
2.	Lunch pack	20	1011x20 = 20220	Lunch Pack during workshop
Total			35385	

The intervention was conducted for a period of 4 months and its positive results was witnessed by bringing positive changes in the learning outcomes of the children in the participating schools of the two Educational Blocks of Bilasipara and Chapor. Therefore, expecting high performance change from this time frame will not do justice to the exercise. However, considerable positive changes were achieved from the intervention in improving the learning ability of the students in the primary schools of the two Educational Block in Dhubri District.

It cannot be denied that local participation in any intervention in any area is crucial for its success. Moreover, youth participation and especially educated youth's contribution surely leads to success of any intervention taken up. This intervention witnessed positive changes in the attitude of the community. It changed their attitude towards education of children.

This intervention reflects that the collaboration of administrative machineries and local community can pave the way for cost-effective sustainability of an institution. This study has shown that local youth were ready to contribute to the cause without any monetary benefits. In the long term, interventions like this would help ease the burden of teachers and multi-level multi grade problems in the schools. The knowledge of the unemployed educated population can be harnessed through such projects.

Another positive takeaway was in form of expanding of its scope and reach as it was extended to the rest of the government schools in the district. The program was further carried forwarded by the CRCCs in their respective clusters in each Blocks. Since the program was taken up in two Educational Blocks and in 56 government schools in the district initially, the exercise was extended to other schools in the district. Now currently till the writing of this paper, nearly one fourth of the volunteers are still engaged with the schools even after the program concluded and this can be attributed to the positive effect of the exercise.

Following recommendations are forwarded to further strengthen the program and ensure quality education to children:

In beginning of any academic session in primary school focus should be on acquiring basic learning skills and abilities. Irrespective of the classes, the students can be categorized into the levels of their ability to read and write. The categorized students need to be taught according to their levels at least for an hour every day. Independent assessment from the district administration can be carried out at the end of the academic year to access the learning abilities of the students. The assessments could also be carried out in three phase model, viz. Base-line, Midline and End-line. This will also strengthen the project's objectives. The projects of youth empowerment empowerment program can be linked to teaching ins primary schools. Such teachers can be engaged in dealing with multi-graded multi-level student's remedial classes. The recruitment can be given preference to the youth residing near the schools. Such recruits can be engaged in project and target based engagements and their training can be in line with those engagements.

Furthermore, the decentralization of the monitoring process can lessen the weight of the administration. CRCCs can take up the responsibilities can have direct representation to place the issue to the administration. Flood is an unavoidable yearly phenomenon in the Dhubri district, so the academic calendar need to be redesigned keeping it in mind. As local context plays an important role in improving learning outcomes of the students. Thus any education curriculum or intervention program should be designed keeping in mind the local context. As the study was conducted in a district with unique geographical challenges (flood, riverine islands) challenges are multiple and require a multi-sectoral approach.

7.0 LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

The main aim of the study was to analyse the effect of local interventions in improving School learning outcomes of students from government schools.

Although the study conducted extensive research with ample amount of sample size, the researcher faced some shortcomings. These limitations may be helpful for future researchers to avoid shortcomings. Some notable mentions are as follows. Biasness of the Assessor: The Biasness of the Examiner could not be addressed, as it was based on their discretion. But to minimize the effect, the school teachers were prohibited from the examination room. Limited parameters: More parameters could have been taken into account for addressing the problem statement. But as the resources and time were scarce, those parameters were not under taken. Academic results could have been attached for validation of the academic performance but those were avoided to maintain the fairness of the results and reports. Time is the factor that could decide the fairness of any longitudinal research. In this research, more time could have been given to better understand the relation between the input and feedback. Impact study on most of the children could not be studied as the winter vacation started and cultivation time in the area started. Due to which most of the students were not turning back to school. As most of the study area are flood prone, it is high time for the villagers to rebuilt and stock up for the next season.

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ANNEXURE

Questionnaire for Primary Data Collection

Baseline Survey Format

1. Block:
2. Cluster:
3. School:
4. DISE code:
3. Name of the student:
4. Gender:
5. Standard:
10. Volunteer's Name:
11. No of Teachers in School:
12. Is the Students' Participating in Classroom?
 - a) Yes
 - b) No
 - c) Can't Say
13. Total Number of Students-Enrolled:
14. Total Number of Students-Assessed:
15. Students Performance in Assamese language Pre Intervention:
 - a) Beginner
 - b) Alphabet
 - c) Word
 - d) Paragraph
 - e) Story
16. Students Performance in Assamese language Pre Intervention:
 - a) Beginner
 - b) 0-9
 - c) 10-99
 - d) Subtraction
 - e) Division

Questionnaire for Primary Data Collection

Endline Survey Format

1. Block:
2. Cluster:
3. School:
4. **DISE code:**
3. Name of the student:
4. Gender:
5. Standard:
10. Volunteer's Name:
11. No of Teachers in School:
12. Is the Students Participating in Classroom?
 - a) Yes
 - b) No
 - c) Can't Say
13. Total Number of Students-Enrolled:
14. Total Number of Students-Assessed:
15. Students Performance in Assamese language Post Intervention:
 - a) Beginner
 - b) Alphabet
 - c) Word
 - d) Paragraph
 - e) Story
16. Students Performance in Assamese language Post Intervention:
 - a) Beginner
 - b) 0-9
 - c) 10-99
 - d) Subtraction
 - e) Division

Analysis of the Stakeholder's Approach and views for the Successful Implementation of Mid-day Meal Scheme in Rural Areas of Dakshin Dinajpur District, West Bengal

Suresh Kumar Jagat

Dakshin Dinajpur, a district in West Bengal, is located at the international border shared with Bangladesh. The district is surrounded by international border, of length more than 250 km, from three sides. It's an agrarian district with less employment opportunities in industrial and service sectors and high poverty rate. The district is also adversely affected by poor food and nutritional status of children. In such a situation, the mid-day meal programme acquires immense importance.

This study assesses the implementation status of the mid-day meal programme in the Dinajpur district, Balurghat block. Further it studies the feedback, level of awareness and participation of various stakeholders in the programme. It also points out important gaps in its implementation followed by some valuable suggestions. The study is partially based on fortnight long mid-day meal inspection programme organized by the district administration to assess the ground reality in the month of September, 2019. The study analyses those responses and draws conclusions based on responses of questionnaires by stakeholders and outcomes of focus group discussions.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

For decades, the poor literacy rate has been a major challenge for India. During the first census, in 1951, the literacy rate was only 19% which rose significantly to 74% during 2011 census. Improved enrolment and continued attendance at the schools are attributable to interventions such as mid-day meal programme. It also strengthened India's vision to ensure healthy and nutritious food to children. The mid-day meal programme in India has a long history. It was introduced in Madras Municipal Corporation in 1925. By 1980s, it started functioning in three other states i.e. Gujarat, Tamil Nadu and Kerala and also in the union territory of Pondicherry. It was also started for tribal population in Madhya Pradesh and Orissa. By 1990-91 mid-day meal programme was started for many states like Goa, Madhya Pradesh, Kerala, Sikkim, Tamil Nadu, Tripura, Maharashtra, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh.

The programme was implemented with international assistance in many states like Karnataka, Orissa, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh and Rajasthan National Programme of Nutritional Support to Primary Education (NP-NSPE), 2006 governs and runs the programme in the country. Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009 enlists a provision for kitchen in every school for mid-day meal programme.

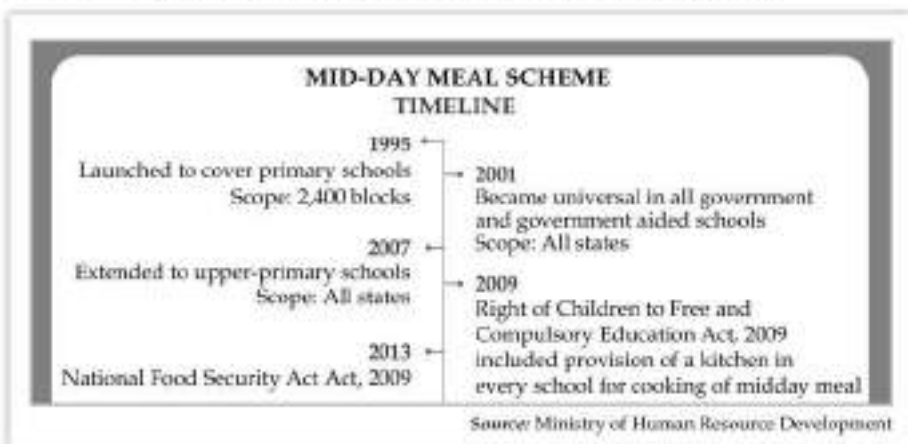


Figure 1: Timeline of Mid-Day Meal Programme

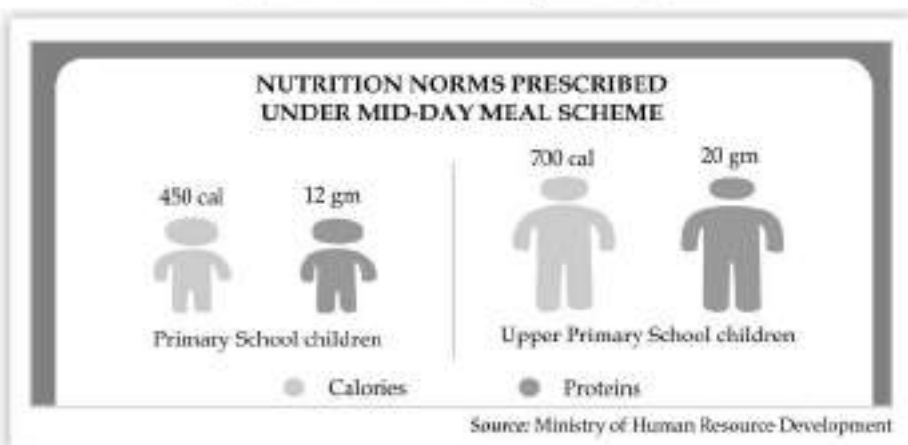


Figure 2: Nutrition provided under Mid-Day Meal Programme.

As per the nutrition norms, 450 calories and 12 gm proteins have been prescribed per child in primary school. For upper primary school children, it is 700 calories and 20 gm proteins. Similarly, other ingredients like pulses, food grains, vegetables have been prescribed as per the requirements of children of different age groups.

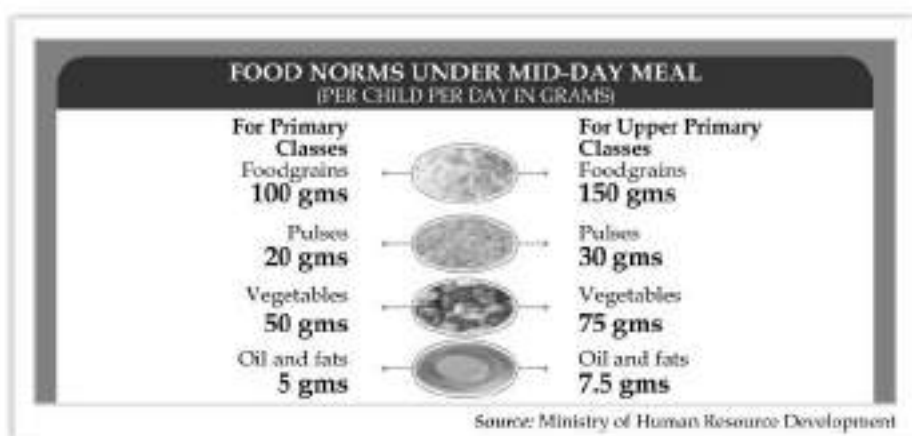


Figure 3: Food norms under Mid-Day Meal Programme

According to Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), 11.98 cr children are enrolled in primary and upper primary schools in India. Out of this total, 9.58 cr children are approved for MDM and 9.17 cr are availing MDM scheme, so 76.56% of enrolled children are getting mid-day meal in India. Maharashtra, West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh are large population states which are performing better in terms of number children availing mid-day meal out of total enrolled. Kerala, Mizoram and Tripura have performed better in terms of literacy rates. If we calculate the overall performance of states then Assam, Kerala and West Bengal are the best performing states in mid-day meal coverage with more than 90% coverage. Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Jharkhand are worst performing states with coverage of mere 60%.

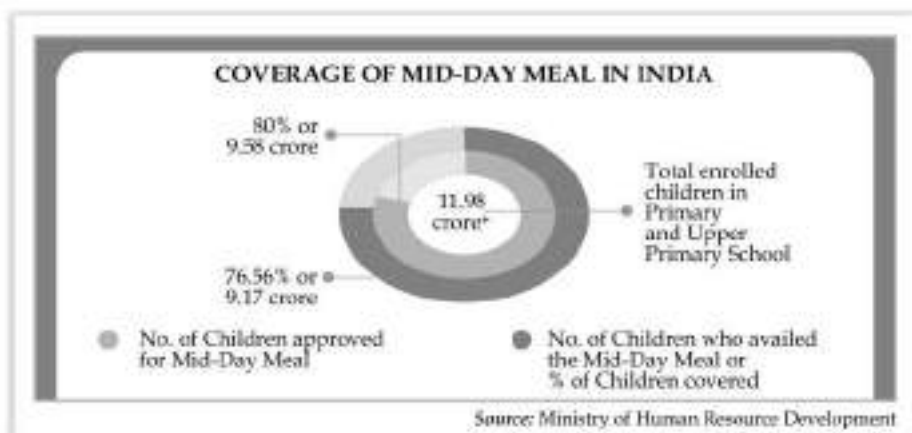


Figure 4: Coverage of Mid-Day Meal Programme in India

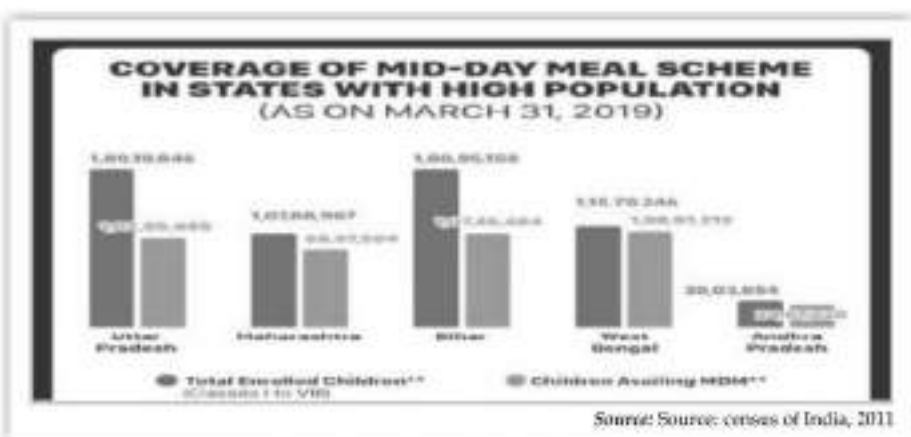


Figure 5: Mid-Day Meal and Population



Figure 6: Literacy Rate and Mid-Day Meal Coverage



Figure 7: Best and worst performing states

1.1 History of Mid-Day Meal (MDM) Programme in West Bengal

As per MDM Annual Work Plan and Budget 2018-19, MDM Scheme was launched on 15th August, 1995 with a view to enhance enrolment, retention, attendance, reducing dropouts and simultaneously improving nutritional levels among primary children in class I to V. Initially the students were served uncooked food but that did not help the scheme achieve its intended objective. The cooked food under MDM was introduced in 1100 schools of six districts of West Bengal in January 2003. Gradually all the districts were brought under the purview of the programme. It was further extended to the upper primary schools (class VI to VIII) in 2007-08.

1.2 Mid-Day Meal Programme in Dakshin Dinajpur District

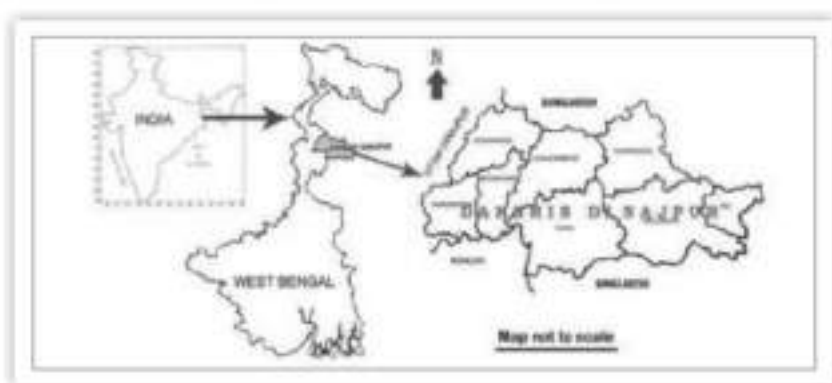


Figure 8: Geographical Location of Dakshin Dinajpur District in West Bengal

In Dakshin Dinajpur district more than 6 lakh students are covered under the programme. The programme Dakshin Dinajpur district is one of the most backward districts in West Bengal. In such a scenario, this programme becomes instrumental in ensuring healthy, nutritious food to children, ensuring enrolment and attendance in the classroom.

Initially the programme was launched in 2787 schools covering 4,89,980 students in 2005. It was well-adopted and massively successful. However due to high migration rate in the district, the dropout ratio was around 27.20% (as per cohort study 2004). Moreover, Dakshin Dinajpur is an agrarian district with literacy rate below national level so the role of MDM becomes even more crucial. Limited employment opportunities, low family income does not support proper education and nutritional demand. In such a scenario, MDM is crucial to increase the school enrolment as well as lower down malnutrition.

However, the infrastructure, coordination and awareness among various stakeholders are the main challenges for successful implementation of MDM

in the district. Recently, the district administration started MDM inspection programme in mission mode to assess the scale of implementation of the programme. This study is an attempt towards understanding the approach of various stakeholders with respect to the factors of its effective implementation - such as infrastructure, hygiene, supply chain, awareness, implementation, monitoring mechanism, financial flow etc. The main stakeholders such as students, parents, teachers, village community, the district administration and policy makers were considered within the circle of study.

1.3 Category wise distribution of schools and enrolment of students:

Coverage of school under cooked Mid-Day Meal Programme for the financial year 2015-16 (up to 30.04.2015)

Table 1: School information in Dakshin Dinajpur

Category of Schools	No. of Schools	Students Enrolled
Primary	1,191	1,36,152
Upper Primary	307	97,493
SSK	646	19,015
MSK	40	2,157
Madrasah/Maqtab (Pry. & Upper Pry.)	20	10,222
NCLP	40	2,000
Total	2,244	2,67,039

Table 2: Category of schools in Dakshin Dinajpur

Category of Institution	Total no. of Schools	Total Children	Schools Covered under CMDMP	Children Covered under CMDMP	Not Covered Schools	Not Covered Children
Pry. Schools		1473	297052	1473	297052	00
SSK+SSP	1012	119514	1012	119514	0	0
Total	2485	416566	2485	416566	0	0

II: NCLP Schools

Category of Institution	Total no. of Schools	Total Children	Schools Covered under CMDMP	Children Covered under CMDMP	Not Covered Schools	Not Covered Children
NCLP Schools		40	2000	40	2000	00
Total	40	2000	40	2000	0	0

III: Upper Primary Schools

Category of Institution	Total no. of Schools	Total Children	Schools Covered under CMDMP	Children Covered under CMDMP	Not Covered Schools	Not Covered Children
High Schools	317	134570	317	134570	0	0
MSK	107	30319	107	30319	0	0
Madrasah	58	19520	57	19102	1	418
Total	482	184409	481	183991	1	418
Grand Total	3007	602975	3006	602557	1	418

1.4 Mid-Day Meal Programme: Structure and Management in West Bengal

(As per Mid-Day Meal in Schools (MDMS), Annual Work Plan & Budget 2018-19 of West Bengal State)

Table 3: MDM Management Structure in West Bengal

Level	Structure
State Level	i) Project Director - Officer of Jt. Secretary Rank ii) Administrative Officer - On contract iii) Dy. Director (Civil) - On contract iv) Dy. Director (Food) - On contract v) Officer on Special Duties - On contract vi) Accounts Officer - (In-service Officer) vii) MIS Coordinator - (In-service) viii) Accountant (one) - On contract ix) Head Assistant (one) - On contract x) UDC (2 no's) - On contract xi) Data entry Operator (5 no's) - On contract xii) Gr.-D (one) - On contract
District Level	A) <i>In-Service Officer and Staff:-</i> i) Additional District Magistrate - In-charge of MDM ii) 1 Deputy Magistrate - Officer in-charge of MDM cell iii) 1 Accounts Officer iv) 1 Dealing Assistant v) 1 MIS Coordinator

	<p>B) contractual Staff:- vi) 1 Accountant/ Accounts knowing Person vii) 1 Data Entry Operator/Computer Assistant</p>
Block Level	<p>A) In-service Officer and Staff:- i) 1 Assistant Inspector of School/Extension Level Officer of the Block</p> <p>B) Contractual Staff:- ii) 1 Supervisor iii) 1 Assistant Accountant (Accountant or Accounts knowing person) iv) 1 Data Entry Operator</p>
Municipal corporation Level	<p>A) In-service Officer and Staff:- i) Joint Commissioner of the corporation (In-charge) -In service officer</p> <p>B) Contractual Staff:- i) 1 MDM Coordinator ii) 1 Data Entry Operator</p>
Municipality Level	<p>A) In-service Officer and Staff:- i) Executive Officer of the Municipality - (In-charge)</p> <p>B) Contractual Staff:- i) Assistant Accountant ii) Data Entry Operator</p>

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Pratichi Research Team (2005) found that the cooked Mid-Day Meal programme, though have a limited coverage so far, has yielded some very positive results. It has clearly been reported that the programme is playing a definitive role in combating the problem of attendance of the children. Apart from influencing the rate of attendance in a positive manner, the programme has also shown some other important impacts, which include, combating malnutrition, reducing absenteeism of the teachers, improvement in teaching and learning, and above all creating larger scope for peoples' participation in primary education.

The other important aspect of the programme is the potential to involve the parents and other local people in the running of the primary schools lying in it. The inescapable role of public participation in the implementation of the cooked meal programme has largely been acknowledged not only by parents,

teachers and other local people but also by many government officials concerned with the programme. The realisation of this acknowledged role could bring forth a major change in the primary education sector as a whole; as such participation would surely encompass the other areas of primary education besides the programme of cooked meal.

Samal Janmejaya and Dehury Ranjit Kumar (2016) explains that besides promoting nutrition and primary education Mid-Day Meals (MDMs) have a great socialization value. By this certain level of erosion of caste prejudices and class inequality is expected as the children sit together and share a common meal. To tackle issues in India a convergence among the district administration, community leaders, school boards, chief man of the caste, and civil society is highly desirable. Harmony could only be established by amicable discussion and understanding of the core issue by the community members. If required law enforcing agency could take steps for the unruly sections of the society. As the students are at receiving end and they are the future of the society their interest have to be safeguarded against any odds. It is always advisable to discuss such issues before rolling out of MDM program. Community participation is very important in Mid-Day Meal Programme. Dr. Kaushal Savita (2009) says that one of the good practices of MDM is the participation of community members in MDM of the school. It is noted that sometimes the parents and community members oversee MDM while cooking and at the time of serving. Sometimes they do taste the cooked food before serving the food to the children. In a few cases it was noticed that Sarpanch was frequently visiting the school and at times having mid-day meals with the children.

Jalal Priyanka and Sareen Neena (2018) says that Majority of school children (78.5%), parents (80.0%) and teachers (70%) had medium level of knowledge about Mid-Day Meal scheme whereas maximum no of respondents had less knowledge about year of start, launching state, dietary requirement of a child per day and revised guidelines of GOI. Also majority of the school children (78.5%) had medium level of knowledge about Mid-Day Meal Scheme followed by 13.0 per cent of school children having high level of knowledge whereas only 8.5 per cent had low level of knowledge.

Society for Social Audit, Accountability & Transparency (SSAAT-RD) (2013), Andhra Pradesh conducted a Pilot Social Audit of Mid-Day Meal Scheme (MDMS) to find out and understand the Mid-Day Meal Scheme implementation structure, fund flow and role played by convergence departments, search for 'best practices' in the implementation of the scheme, evaluate the impact of Mid-Day Meal Scheme with respect to the primary

objectives of (a) increase in school attendance, (b) improvement in socialisation among castes, (c) addressing malnutrition & (d) empowerment of women through employment. The conclusion states that the monitoring of Mid-Day Meal Scheme requires stringent and rigorous ongoing processes. An effective Social Audit can be conducted only if information is shared. Independent Social Audit mechanism for MDMS should be promoted by MHRD in all States.

Satish Y. Deodhar, Sweta Mahandiratta, K.V. Ramani, and Dileep Mavalankar and Sandip Ghosh and Vincent Braganza (2010) attempted to explain and justify the Mid-Day Meal Scheme (MDMS). They visited to several government schools and observed the food quality. They also considered other various aspects like hidden food quality attributes, nutrition, food safety, etc. In their study they observed the fact that in a developing country like India, the general level of awareness and cleanliness is low and it is not specific to MDMS alone. Nonetheless, in our opinion, there is a potential for general increase in hygiene and cleanliness at the schools and kitchens.

Sinha Nidhi (2019) came with Correlation matrix showing relationship among indicators and with MDM:

	Availing MDM	Single classroom school	Single teacher school	Drinking Water	School with kitchen shed	Schools with no building
Availing MDM	1	-0.34	-0.18	0.20	0.48	-0.05
Single classroom school	-0.34	1	0.58	-0.62	-0.05	0.01
Single teacher school	-0.18	0.58	1	-0.45	0.03	-0.06
Drinking water	0.20	-0.62	-0.45	1	0.13	-0.43
School with kitchen shed	0.48	-0.05	0.03	0.13	1	-0.04
Schools with no building	-0.05	0.01	-0.06	-0.43	-0.04	1

As per her correlation matrix the school with kitchen shed have positive and significant correlation with MDM. But increase in number of kitchen shed is result of implementation MDM programme at state level. For successful carrying out programme Government of India sanctioned funds to states for establishing kitchen shed. Single classroom school have weak and negative correlation with MDM which was found to be insignificant. This may mean that MDM availing by children became less where there is occurrence of single

classroom as this lead to multi dimension problems (as discussed earlier). Single teacher school too have weak and negative relation. When relationship among indicators is studied, it showed that single classroom school is positively and strongly related with single teacher school and negatively and strongly related with drinking water facility. Even single teacher school is negatively and strongly related to drinking water facility. Even school with no building is found to be negatively related with drinking water facility.

Rani Rekha and Sharma Darshana (2017) found in their survey that during the survey (97.50%) told that MDM work is problem for teaching work. According to similar survey done by them:

Percentage Teachers	Response
92.50%	Mid Day Meal Scheme hampers the teaching & learning time.
6%	They are satisfied with the funds received by the government.
92.5%	They are not satisfied with the funds received by the government.
92.5%	Workload increased due to MDA
90%	Less remuneration to cook cum helpers, sometimes they have to pay from their pocket
93.5%	Face problem in lifting the ration due to distance and fund
82.5%	No separate kitchen cum store room
86%	Not satisfied with quality of ration

Dr. Sengupta Pradip Kumar (2018) found in his study that:

- 57% of teachers said that the students from general caste are not taken meal under the present mid-day-meal scheme.
- 33% of headmasters/headmistresses reported that the students are not regularly checked for health.
- 17% of students said that they bring plates from their home, although as per provision of mid-day-meal scheme it should be provided by schools.
- 32% of students reported that they take mid-day-meal separately from the other students as for caste barriers.
- 31% of student said that they did not take Mid-Day Meal every day.

The literature review in the field of MDM Programme reveals that there is lack of development in the various factors of the programme.

- The stakeholders do realize the importance of these factors
- A comprehensive feedback from these stakeholders are missing and this study will try to fill this gap in the literature review.

- Also specific interventions from district level administration is missing in the available literature so there is an opportunity to go through that aspect also.

3.0 AN OVERVIEW OF STUDY

The study used both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection and analysis. The data was collected from some selected gram Panchayats of Balurghat block in Dakshin Dinajpur district. This data was collected during mid-day meal fortnight inspection conducted by the district administration of Dakshin Dinajpur district.



Figure 9: Balurghat Development Block with Gram Panchayats

The data was collected from both primary and secondary sources. The primary source of data collection were grass-root level stakeholders such as teachers, students, cook, parents, Block officials, District officials, state officials, Gram Panchayat and so on. These stakeholders are interlinked, dependent and responsible to each other. Failure of one may lead to failure of others.



Figure 10: Stakeholders of Mid-Day Meal programme

The sample size was selected using random sampling technique. The sample was selected from Gram Panchayats of Balurghat block from where the district administration received maximum number of complaints. The data was collected from following sources:

Primary data (interaction)	Secondary data (records)
Schools	Collectorate
Panchayat	Schools
Households	Office of Director of schools
Community gatherings	SI of schools office
Government offices	Block office

The data was collected using data tools such as questionnaire, interviews, focus group discussions, and so on. The data was collected and analysed to answer following research questions:

- What are the factors for effective implementation of Mid-Day Meal Programme in the district?
- What are the approaches and views of stakeholders with respect to the factors of effective implementation of Mid-Day Meal Programme in the district?

4.0 FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

4.1 A profile of schools visited for the purpose of inspection in Dakshin Dinjapur District.

4.1.1 Types of schools inspected

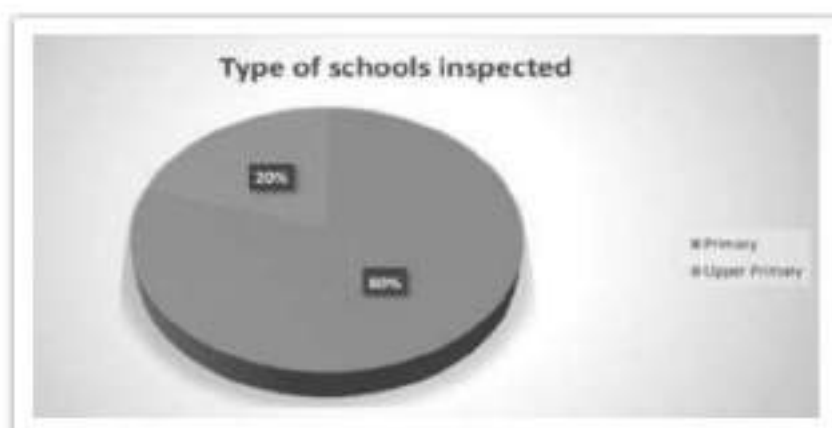


Figure 11: Types of schools inspected

80% schools visited were primary schools and 20% schools were upper primary schools.

4.1.1.1 Attendance in schools visited:

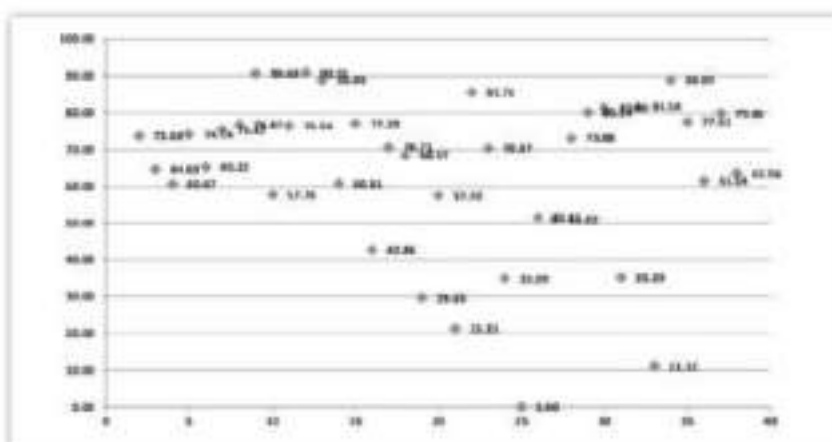


Figure 12: Attendance in the schools visited

The above graph shows the total attendance in the schools visited. The average attendance recorded was 75%. In schools where low attendance was recorded the reasons were either festival, parent's disinterest in sending their children home or were engaged in jute removal work.

4.1.2 Status of MDM programme running in different schools:

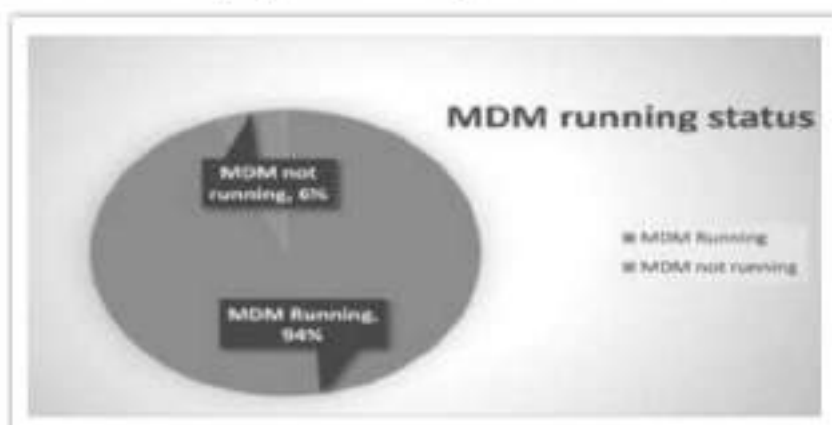


Figure 13: Status of MDM programme

In 6% schools the programme was not being run on the day of visit due to reasons such as holiday on account of festival and so on. In rest of the schools MDM was being prepared as per schedule.

4.1.3 Status of rice stock



Figure 14: Status of rice stock

91% schools maintain rice stock of one month which is expected to be maintained in future also. So most of the schools store grains in advance and any shortage is not expected. So in terms of buffer stock the schools are in better position.

4.1.3.1 Rice requirement v. rice availability for one month

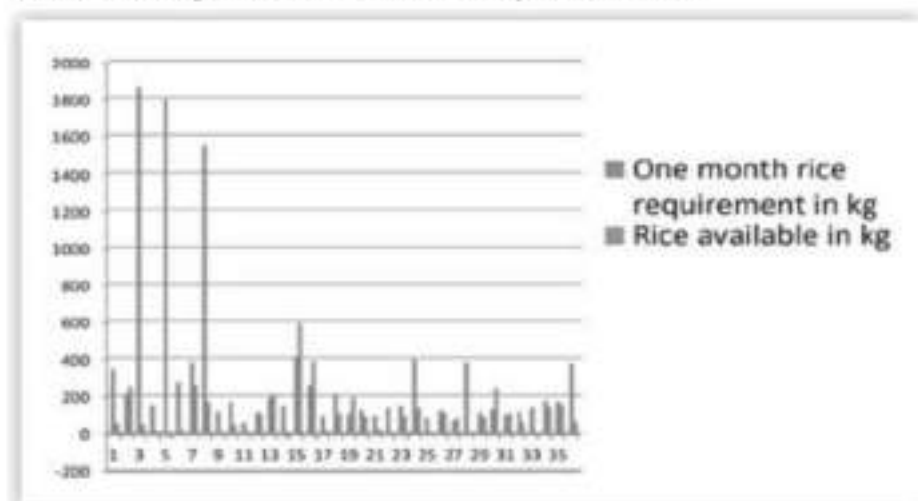


Figure 14: Rice requirement versus rice availability for one month

4.1.4 Status of cooking

4.1.4.1 Cooking cost

Cooking cost availability for one month was checked and it was found that 94% schools have the fund which is good to run the scheme smoothly.

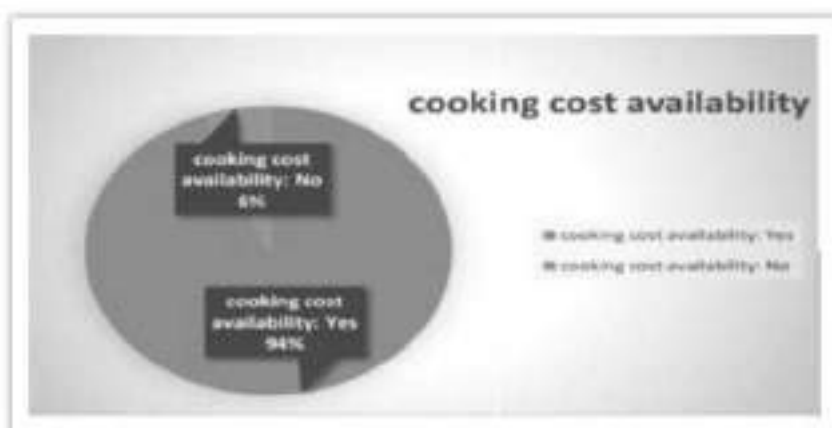


Figure 15: Cooking cost

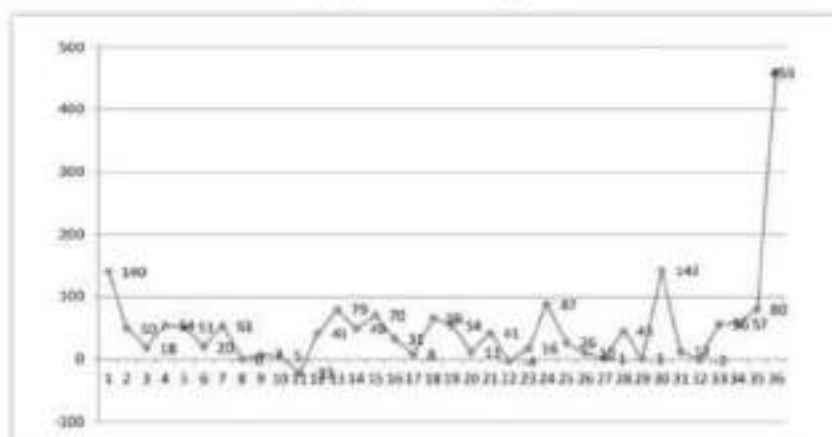


Figure 16: Cooking cost availability in number of days

4.1.4.2 Honorarium paid to each cook



Figure 17: Honorarium paid to each cook

97% cooks get their honorarium on time, rest encountered problems such as bank account default and so on. So, the timely payment of salary is not a problem in the district.

4.1.5 Toilets and urinals availability

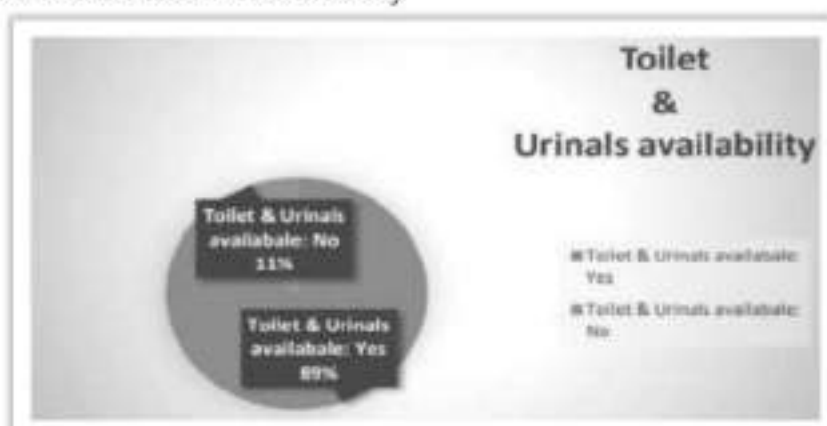


Figure 18: Toilet and Urinals Availability

89% schools have arrangement of toilet and urinals but maintenance is an issue. Rest of the schools have damaged or kuccha facility.

4.1.6 MGNREGA manpower deployment in the schools

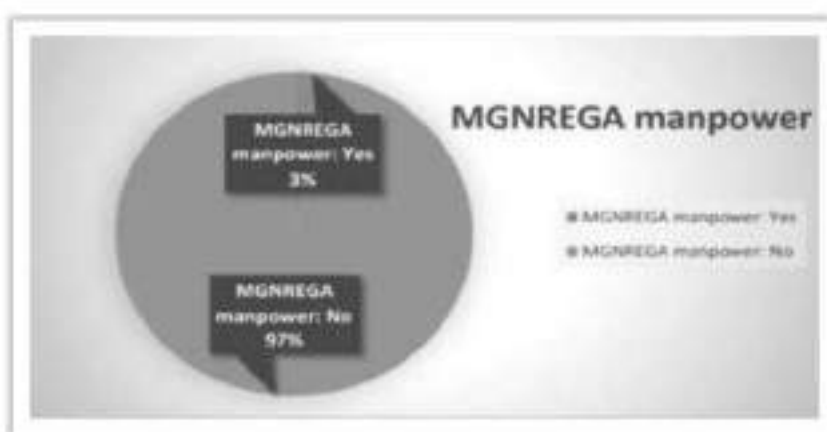


Figure 19: MGNREGA manpower deployment

Earlier there was provision to engage MGNREGA workers in conducting cleaning work in schools but later it did not garner much interest. So only 3% schools have still engaged the workers.

4.1.7 Maintenance of hygiene

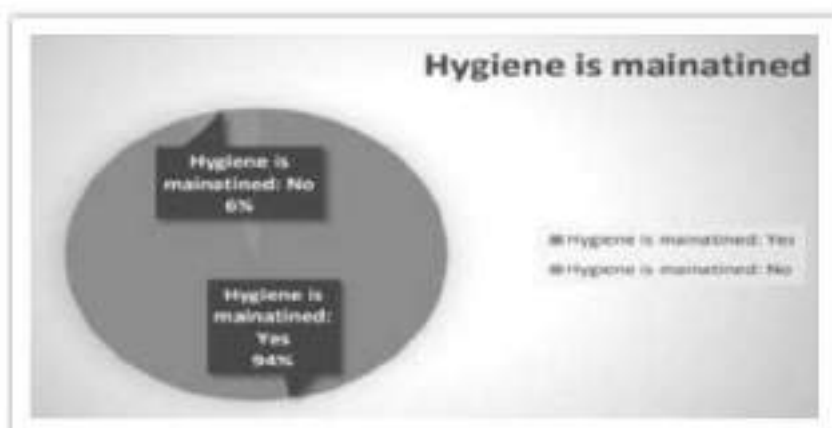


Figure 20: Maintenance of Hygiene

Basic level of hygiene is maintained in 94% schools but if standard is set at a considerably higher level than most of the schools will fail the test.

4.2 Factors responsible for assessing effective implementation of the MDM programme

4.2.1 Problems encountered in the schools vis-à-vis number of schools

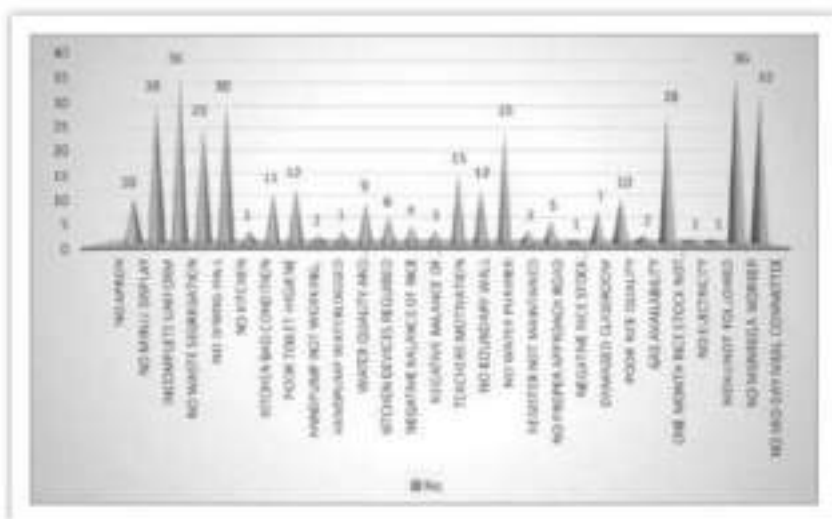


Figure 21: Problems encountered in schools vis-à-vis number of schools inspected

The factors responsible for assessing effective implementation of the mid-day meal programme can be enumerated as quality of food, availability of safe drinking water, physical infrastructure, quality of food material, timely delivery and payment, and community participation.

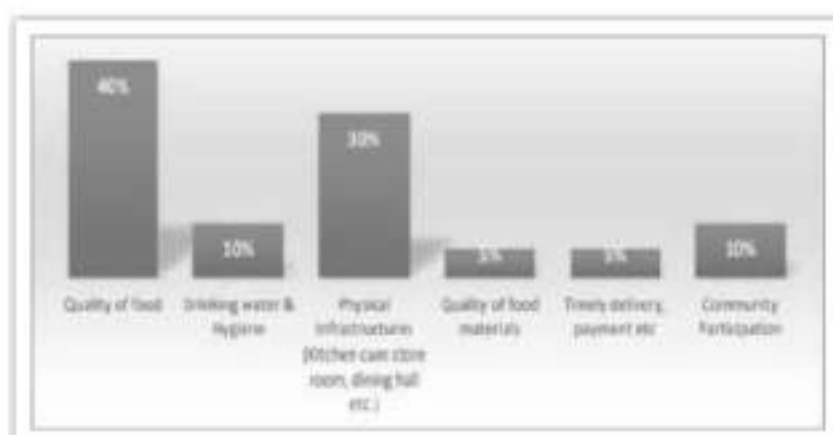


Figure 22: Factors responsible for effective implementation of MDM

The present study revealed that besides quality of food, the lack of physical infrastructure (kitchen cum store room, dining hall etc.) emerged as one of the biggest roadblock in effective implementation of the MDM programme. It was observed that the schools with good infrastructure revealed improved learning outcome and also better performance in MDM. The community participation was also better in such schools.

Another major challenge in Dakshin Dinajpur district is safe drinking water. The water available in the district possesses high content of both iron and arsenic. Red water is a common problem in school hand pumps. This was experienced during school visits also. The community at large is not aware of the problem with water but certainly have complained about the matter. Providing water purifier in schools is a step in that direction. Around 20% schools have purchased water purifiers but rest of the schools are yet to purchase. Hygiene is a major issue which is related to both physical infrastructures and general health awareness. So training and awareness camps are also important to impart health awareness among children, teachers, parents, cook and community members. Manpower is another issue which has been a matter of concern for a long time. There is a dearth of manpower for tasks such as cleaning, sanitation, cooking, teaching etc. In most of the schools, teachers do these tasks.

4.2.2 SWOT Analysis of schools inspected in Dakshin Dinajpur district

Strength:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• High attendance percentage• Satisfactory quantity and quality of foodgrains/meal• High percentage of LPG usage• Satisfactory levels of hygienic practices
Weakness:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Below par quality of toilets• Low percentage of pucca dining halls• MDM display boards missing/not updated in many schools
Opportunity:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cooking with both LPG and firewood in many schools, may be turned to LPG only• All kitchens are pucca, asbestos roof may be replaced with cement• High Pupil- Teacher ratio, which is good for overall progress
Threat:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• More girls' toilets are usable than boys', but few actually use them• High percentage of Mark-II tubewells not working• Waste separation and recycling mostly absent

4.3 Responses of various stakeholders

This data was collected from following stakeholders using tools such as questionnaire, structured interview and focus group discussion:

1. Children
2. Parents
3. Teachers
4. Cook cum Helper
5. Panchayat Representatives
6. District and Block Officials
7. School Management Committee

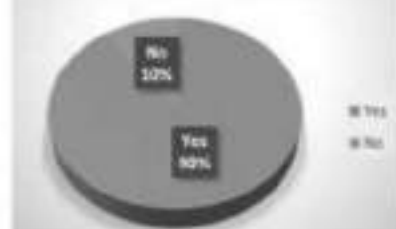
An analysis of their responses is tabulated below:

Responses of Stakeholders

Analysis

1. Children

Do you take food before coming to school everyday?



Most of the children (90%) eat something before going to school however the nutritional value of these food at home are low as the various survey reveal that most of the families in rural India do not support nutritious food to the children. So that importance of Mid- Day Meal Programme can be seen here. Also there is need to give something in the morning also so that the rest 10% children do not go hungry.

Regularity in Schools



As per our discussion with the children and subsequent discussion with teachers, 90% children are more or less regular in the school. Those 10% irregular children have problems other than MDM as revealed by children and teachers as well. Health issue, work at home, indifference to study are some of the reasons of not attending classes regularly.

Which are the things you like the most in...



MDM is most liked by the children whereas study and sports carry equal preference. Teaching quality should be improved so that children remain interested in studies

In what form do you get Mid Day Meal?



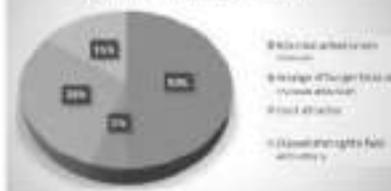
The cooked meal is served to children, so that they have to sit in the school for the meal. No dry ration at all except during Covid - 19 pandemic.

Reasons behind disliking the cooked mid day meal



Bad quality of meal remains a concern as appears from the views of the students. This needs a serious lookout for improvement as hygiene of a child is of utmost importance. Bad quality may include problem in menu, faulty storage or lack of skill in cooks.

Reasons for liking the food



Children like the food as they start from home hungry and getting a meal is relieving for them. Some children also find the food attractive. The socio economic condition of family is revealed here. The most of the children find the meal at schools better than their homes.

Do you participate in the cooking of the...



It's good that children do not participate in cooking as it is not safe and the objective of the scheme will be defeated

Do you like to sit together while...



Yes
No

Children were found to love eating together and enjoyed each other's company while eating. It also reflects that society do not pressurize the children for any kind of discrimination.

Do you like to eat Mid Day Meal daily in the school?



Yes
No

Most of the children gave positive reviews about the food they get in MDM. They daily take interest in the meals being served at school. Some may not find interest in the menu of particular day and it is obvious also.

Do you sit in a clean place while eating Mid Day Meal?



Yes
No

The cleanliness is very important and it appears that it is maintained well. Few children do complain and that should be looked into during inspection. Some children may not understand the concept of hygiene.

Who cleans the sitting place?



cook
teachers
students
other

No children or teacher do the work of cleaning the place of eating. The cook himself sets up the dining area. Here is the need of sanitation worker and helper in the school which is big problem as highlighted by others also.

Where do you get plates for eating...



80% of the students get the plates from school itself while 20% said that they bring it from home. May be their parents are concerned about the cleanliness of the plates at school.

Do you have drinking water in your school?



It appears that most of the students are satisfied with the drinking water facilities of the school. A quick ground check must be done for verification as some children do feel it inadequate.

Have you ever checked up by health department?



There seems to be regular checking of children by health officials. That is good to keep in check the health status of a child. The health check- up schedule need to be rationalized and other aspect of modern health issues need to be checked.

Satisfied with quantity of meals?



Most students were satisfied with the quantity of meal served. Few children may not be getting enough food due to the fact that either their diet is different or they may be late during lunch.

Satisfied with timely distribution?



The timing of serving of meal does not appear to be an issue here. Some children may not eating anything before coming to school and they will be finding the timing little late. This was verified during school visits also.

Proper Handwash before and after eating meal?



Children do proper hand wash after the meals and they should be regularly encouraged to bring this mark to 100%. Some schools have hand wash materials and teachers show them how to wash hands properly. Some schools also have display board of handwashing.

RANKING FACTORS FOR MDM



For children it is important that food is tasty and water is clean. Also separate dining hall makes children happy.

RANKING OF PROBLEMS FOR MDM



Almost every child was amazed with separate dining hall which is still not been prepared in some schools.

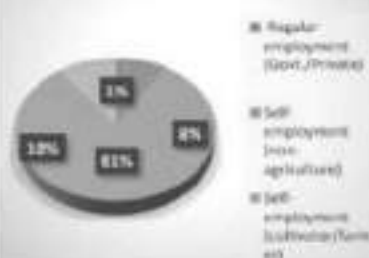
2. Parents

Number of school going children?



Most of the parents have one school going child. Some have two or three also.

Main Occupation of Parents



Self-employment like farming is the most common occupation of the parents. Just 1% gave a government or private job. As stated earlier Socio economic condition and MDM scheme has strong relationship. This shows the need of the scheme at present.

On an average how many days a week your child gets cooked meals served in the...



100% of the parents responded that their child gets cooked meal at school every day. That shows the good regularity of the MDM in the school. Some schools could not give MDM due to holiday or festivals.

Do you feel that, your children are able to get adequate food through MDM?



Most parents feel that their child gets good amount of food in school under MDM and that keeps them relieved for their child's nutrition needs.

Do you think that while cooking/serving, hygiene is maintained?



Yes
No

Hygiene is one of the most important factor in MDM and gets a positive review from the parents.

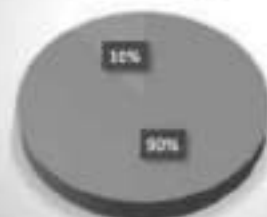
Do you have any objection to children...



No
Yes

No parents had any problems regarding their child eating in school. This shows confidence towards MDM and the need of the programme for the parents.

Whether school has got safe drinking water arrangement?



Yes
No

Parents also said that school has good quality drinking water and that is a great positive review. Iron rich and arsenic rich water is a problem otherwise water issue could not be found.

Has it ever happened that your children developed any kind of health problem after...



Yes
No
Can't say

No parent complained about any health problems being developed in their children due to MDM. It shows confidence of parents in the scheme.

Is there any sort of health improvement in your child after having MDM?



Most parents believed that their children had health improvements from the MDM scheme.

Whether MDM scheme has encouraged people to send their children...



MDM appears to act as a motivator for sending the children to school. It is a success of the scheme.

Is there decline in child labour in the village due to MDM?



Parents feel that child labour has declined due to MDM as children started going to school. Not all were able to comment on this.

Whether there is a Parent Teacher's Association to manage MDM?



Parent Teacher association is important to keep in check the progress of the child. Half of the parents did not have any awareness or not attended any PT Association.

In case irregularity of MDM, do you refer to officials?



This is a concern as 60% of the parents do not complain to officials regarding issues in MDM.

How often do you or other members of the family visit to the school regarding...



Parents visit to the school are mostly monthly and annually. No one goes daily to school to check the MDM. School visit will make teachers accountable and they can verify whether their children are getting quality food or not.

Do you feel that MDM should continue?



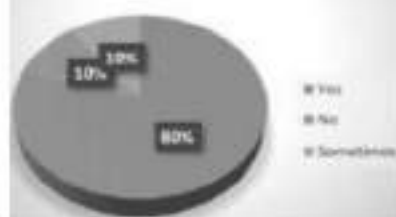
All the parents felt that MDM is a must and should continue. The scheme has won the trust of parents with respect to its continuity.

What according to you are the other benefits of mid-day meal scheme?



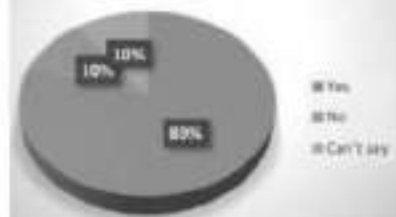
Parents felt that MDM's best outcomes is nutritional supplement followed by educational advancement.

Do you child talk to you about MDM scheme?



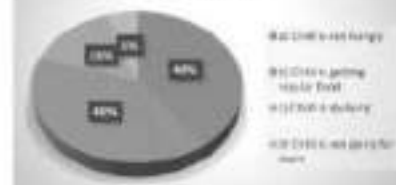
The children do talk to their parents about the food served and the discussion is healthy and act as a review from the parents side.

Has MDM reduced your house expenditure?



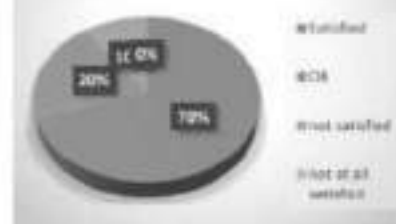
MDM is felt to have decreased the overall house expenditure as a good nutritious meal to the child is served at school itself.

Mid-Day Meal is good because?



Satisfaction of hunger is the biggest benefit according to the parents. It shows that socio economic condition of most of the families is supported by MDM in one way. One of the objectives of MDM is fulfilled here.

Level of satisfaction with the functioning of MDM?



70% responders seemed satisfied with the scheme and others too felt OK about the scheme. The satisfaction level of scheme appears good.

Ranking of Factors



Parents are mostly concerned about the food quality and quantity. They think that if hunger is arrested properly then other objectives of MDM will also be fulfilled.

RANKING OF PROBLEMS



As the quality and quantity of meals served are satisfactory, the main problem for which parents are concerned is the hygiene related problem like dining hall & drinking water which is actually a big concerned in study area.

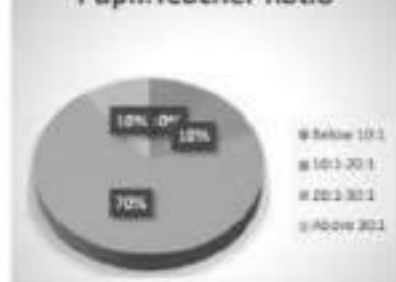
3. Teachers

Number of classrooms the school has



Only 40% schools had more than 3 classrooms. All the rest had less than 3 classrooms. The impact of less number of classrooms is that the MDM work takes 1 or 2 rooms and there is no room for teaching purpose. Here dining hall or additional classrooms are necessary.

Pupil:Teacher Ratio



The survey experience says that the PTR is not equally distributed. 70% schools have PTR in the range of 20:1-30:1 which is average but around 10% schools have very less PTR which affects the MDM process also.

**Are you involved in
MDM work in school?**



The teachers are involved in MDM work as supervising work. They are also entrusted with the work to handle cooking cost expenditure. At least one teacher is actively involved in the work.

**How would you rate
the quality of the grain
received for the
MDM?**



It is very good that only 5% food grains received are poor though that needs to be improved. During inspection also it was seen that the quality of food grains is not a big problem in study area. It shows that supply chain mechanism is satisfactory and timely.

**Where the food is
served?**



Only 30% schools have separate dining hall. The government provides additional fund for this purpose but the progress is not satisfactory. The children are forced to sit in Boarding or class rooms for eating.

**kitchen facility for
MDM?**



90% schools have constructed kitchen but the problem here is that no money has been provided for its repair. So maximum such kitchens require maintenance. Rest 10% schools have temporary sheds. The hygiene is directly related to condition of kitchen building. So here hygiene is affected.

Who cooks the MDM food?



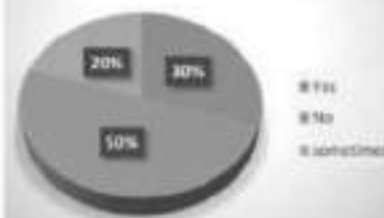
One good thing came out during survey was that all schools have cook cum helper from local SHG groups. At least two SHG members (all women) are cooking in a school. So children or teachers are not involve in cooking work.

Hygienic condition of cooking area?



As the condition of kitchen shed or temporary shed is not good the hygiene is very difficult to maintain. Almost 50% teachers say that hygiene is good in cooking area. 10% say that it is poor and need immediate intervention. This can be done only by creating infrastructure and training of cook and teachers.

Do you think that MDM disrupts the teaching work?

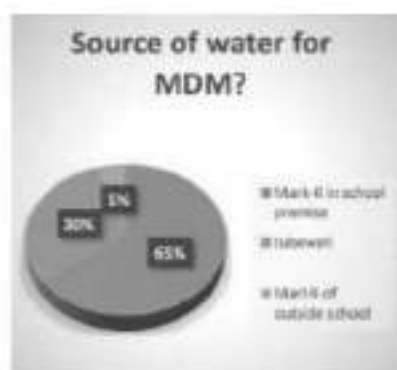


50% teachers say that the teaching work is not affected by MDM scheme. These are those schools where PTR is good and separate teacher is working for MDM work. Rest 50% teachers are affected by MDM work. Lack of manpower, too much reporting and lack of infrastructure lead to disruption in studies.

Where the grains & vegetables are stored?



As most of the kitchen cum store rooms are unrepaired or temporary shed the storing facility for grains & vegetables are not satisfactory. Apart from that in 40% schools the the class rooms are used to store. This results in disruption in teaching, poor hygiene in class and affects food quality.



Only 30% schools have tube well water according to teachers. The piped tube well water is very hygiene but mark -II are not that hygienic as the area around it is not maintained thus results in mosquito breeding zone. Surprisingly 5% schools do not have their separate mark -II within premises. This need urgent attention.



Most of the schools (70%) are running with LPG gas connection and rest will be connected very soon. Some remotely located schools have not been connected with LPG connection. Some schools have been connected but refilling is not done. The smokeless chulha is very essential as it benefits not only the cook but also the children and community around.



Cooking cost provided is not sufficient considering the high fluctuations in market price of food materials. The result is the poor quality of meals and thus defeating the purpose of MDM. Recently the cooking cost has been increased by centre to Rs 4.97 (from Rs 4.48) for Class 1 to Class 5 and Rs 7.45 (from Rs 6.71) for Class 6 to Class 8.

Do you normally receive cooking cost money on time?



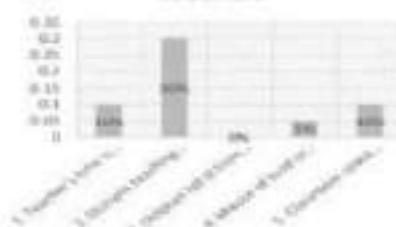
Cooking cost is provided by block account. Barring few incidents almost it is timely released to the account of teachers. However advance release is required so that preparation can be made. The utilization certificate is required for the release of this amount.

Benefits of MDM by % of teachers



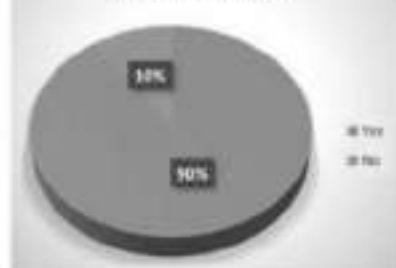
Teachers believe that hunger and nutritional demand of children are two important aspects covered by MDM scheme. Rest of the benefits follow these benefits. Remaining 30% which have different opinion is due to the quality and quantity of meals provided.

Demerits of MDM by % of teachers



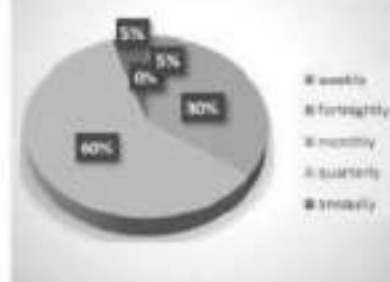
Cumulatively 30% teachers think that teaching is disrupted due to MDM work. Here the manpower issue and lack of infrastructure is the main reason for such opinion of teachers which need to be corrected.

Is there regular record of inventory?



Almost 90% teachers say that regular record of inventory is made. This record is mandatory for further release of grains by officials. This is also one reason for disruption of studies as shared by some teachers. Too much record work defeats the purpose and results in delay or poor supply of materials.

Visit of officials?



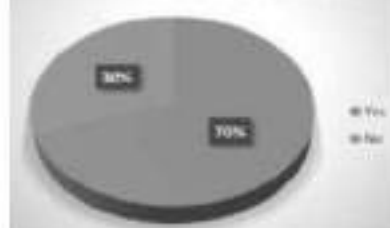
Visit by officials are necessary to check the fair process of MDM. Around 90% teachers thinks that officials do visit MDM work either monthly basis or quarterly basis. This makes system accountable and smooth functioning. The modern practice of monitoring should be done to make the process little easy and fast.

Increase in enrollment due to MDM?



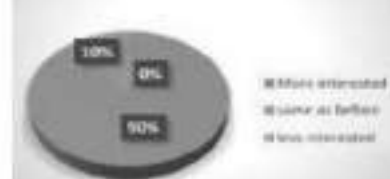
90% teachers think that there is increase in enrolment within the range of 0-20% due to Mid-Day Meal scheme. However, this can be related to cumulative increase in say last 5 years and not annual. So clearly visible that MDM scheme do have positive effect in enrolment of children.

Decrease in drop out due to MDM?



Majority of teachers feel that due to MDM scheme the drop outs is decreased. This decrease is different for different classes. More dropout happens after Class 8 so the recommendation is to extend MDM up to Class 10. This will arrest the child marriage issue.

Effect on learning due to MDM?



As many children do not take meal before coming to school so the MDM makes their learning easier and their focus level is also enhanced. 90% teachers agree to this point.

Do you get proper support from officials and parents for MDM?



This question is very crucial as it not only maps community participation but also cooperation from those who are decision makers. 80% teachers have positive response from parents and officials. The MDM is not possible by only one stakeholder since more work is required to integrate all these stakeholders.

How often do you meet with officials for MDM related problems?



The meeting point for teachers and officials include inspections, meetings, awareness programmes or applications/ deputations. The block level officers like BDO, SI, SEO, DEO are more approachable for them. However effective & easy communication system is yet to be established.

Do you ever get any orientation or training on MDM?



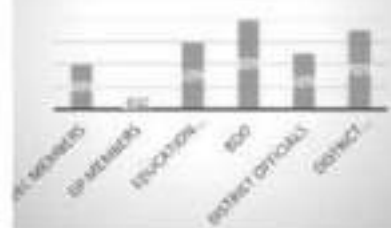
Teachers are divided on the issue of training and orientation issue. Some teachers who are proactive get more trainings. Schools nearby HQ also get more trainings. So the rational and scheduled training programme, if possible locally, is very important to be devised.

Do you takes initiatives to bring community together in solving various...



This is very difficult work for the teachers but those who are active can do. Locally residing teachers find it easy to bring local parents and public representative. So surprisingly 80% are accepting that they try to bring community in MDM work. Role of SMC is very important here.

Who inspects the MDM programme (% of teachers)



Importance of DM office and BDO office with respect to the MDM scheme is well known to the teachers. It has been seen that local stakeholders take very less interest in inspecting and monitoring. Only 10% teachers say that GP members inspects the work. The community participation and local accountability looks irresponsible here.

Ranking of Factors



Teachers think that hygiene has major role in implementation of MDM followed by kitchen infrastructure and drinking water.

Ranking of Problems



Kitchen cum store room is one thing which directly affects hygiene and food quality. This is the biggest problem as per teachers.

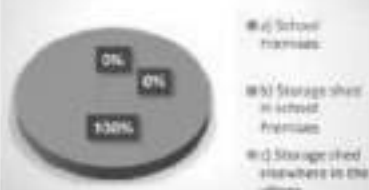
4. Cook cum Helper

Where the meal is cooked?



According to cook cum helpers 100% cooking is done inside the kitchen cum store room. The kitchen is both pucca and temporary. Open space cooking has been denied by them. If it is true then its positive for MDM.

Where the food materials are stored?



Storing food grains is big problem in schools. Though it is stored inside shed but the container/bins quality is not good that was revealed during inspections. These results in quality deterioration and health issues among children.

Hygiene condition of cooking area?



Overall hygiene condition in cooking area depends on the condition of kitchen cum store room. Only 80% cooking area are hygiene as per cooks. 20% is not a lesser number because hygiene affects everyone around and not only children.

Fuel used for cooking?



Only 70% schools run solely on LPG connection. 30% schools have connection sometimes use firewood. As per government instructions all have to use LPG. The impact of firewood burning on health especially cook are affected.

How often does it happen that some food is leftover after the children have...



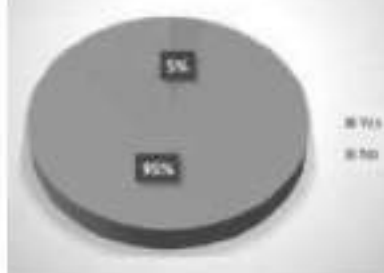
It can be seen here that 80% of the time the food is left. Overall we can say that the quantity of food cooked is sufficient but need to prevent wastage.

How often does it happen that food is short?



In 10% of the cases there is shortage of foods which is worrying. This is because of poor communication between head master and cook and also due to sudden fluctuations in attendance. As both shortage and wastage can be seen, the proper communication required. Attendance system need improvement. Any corruption should not be tolerated.

Do you have helper to assist you?



Only 5% cooks get help in cooking work. They are temporary arrangements from either from Panchayat or from BDO Office. Some schools have enrolment more than 500, there helper is required. SHGs should be given freedom to deploy more women in cooking work. Extra fund is needed for the same.

Do you think helper is required to assist you?



80% cooks think that they need helper for cooking work. Extra fund arrangement is big hurdle here. Local level arrangement may be more sustainable. Cook remuneration is so low that keeping helper will become a problem.

Are children involved in the cooking process?



The objective of the MDM to give nutritional support to children and not to get them involve in work other than education. Cooks' response is a good sign that no children are engaged in cooking work. However reality need to be checked.

Are remuneration due?



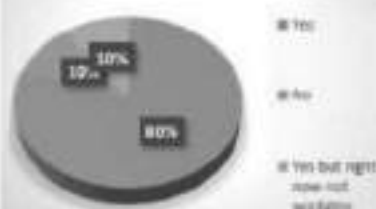
Fund released to cooks' bank account is satisfactory here since the process is online and fund is sanctioned in advance.

How much remuneration increment is required for satisfactory work?



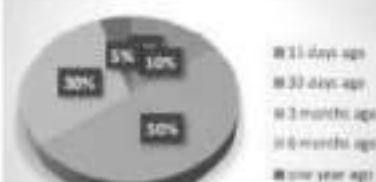
Recently government has increased honorarium of cook and helper. Now they are getting Rs 3000 per month. However considering the pressure of cooking it is less so the cooks think that at least three times increase in honorarium is required to satisfactory perform cooking duty under MDM.

Safety apron provided?



80% cooks have apron with them wearing during cooking. Their safety is of utmost importance. This is something where government is trying to rope in SHGs to design the apron. Hopefully it will be 100% very soon.

Last training given:



Training and orientation is very important to keep update on changing guidelines and updating skills. Most of the cooks have got some kind of training at least 3 months ago. However fixed schedule is not possible but whenever required skill development and hygiene maintenance training is required.

Ranking of Factors



The cook cum helpers think that kitchen is the place which should be suitably built, cleaned and maintained to make the MDM scheme a success. Followed by the water facility and dining hall.

Ranking of Problems



As expected the kitchen is the biggest problem according to the cook cum helpers.

5. Response of Panchayat Officials

Interview area	Responses
Do you visit MDM programmes in schools?	Yes-70% No-20%
Do you discuss about MDM in Gram Sabha?	Yes-50% No-50%
Do panchayat get complaints about MDM?	Yes-90% No-10%
Does Village Education Committee work?	Yes-50% No-50%
Any intervention for facility augmentation by panchayat	Yes-70% No-30%
Does panchayat money is used for MDM related work	Yes-100% No-0%
Do your children talk about MDM in their school	Yes-80% No-20%
Any resolution in Gram Sabha for MDM	Yes-50% No-50%
Any caste discrimination complaint in schools?	Yes-0% No-100%
Any conversation with block officials regarding MDM?	Yes-80% No-20%
Does sansad level discussion happen regarding MDM	Yes-20% No-80%
Do you think that MDM should continue?	Yes-80% No-20%
Worst problem in MDM of your gram panchayat	Drinking water quality
Best in MDM in your panchayat?	Dining hall
Ranking of problems	Water quality>kitchen>hygiene
Factors of successful implementation of MDM	Food quality>water>hygiene
Any health issues observed due to MDM	Yes-0% No-100%
Performance of teachers	Good-30% Fair-40% Poor-20% unsatisfactory-10%
Complaint against teachers	Yes-20% No-80%

6. Responses of District and Block Officials

Interview area	Responses
What is the frequency of MDM inspection?	Weekly-30% Fortnightly-50% Monthly-10% Quarterly-10%
How many officials engaged in MDM work of the district?	Approx. 20
Worst problems	Quality of drinking water
Best in MDM	Quality of food grains
Ranking of factors	Food grain quality>water quality>kitchen hygiene
Ranking of problems	Water quality>kitchen>dining hall
Complaints received	Teacher corruption-20% Water problem-30% Kitchen shed damage-30% Less quantity- 10% Menu not followed-10%
Major actions	Notice to teachers Tube well connection Dining hall construction Water testing purifier
Corruption charges if any	Yes, against teachers
Are you aware of the new guidelines on MDM	Yes
Frequency of discussion with MDM stakeholders with officials	Weekly-5% Monthly-50% Quarterly-45%
Food grain delivery delay	Very rare
Cooking cost delay	Very rare
Quality of rice	Very good
Quality of food	Good
Menu followed	Mostly
Percentage of schools with pakka kitchen	80%
Percentage of schools with dining hall	60%
Water facility	Arsenic and Iron
Hygiene maintained in	Mostly

Medical check up	Regularly
Sanitation workers at schools	20%
Salary of cook cum helpers	On time
Motivational action by administration performing schools	Appreciation of best
Daily reporting status	Almost 100%
Do you feel that the MDM works hampers the learning	Not observed
Do you feel that the MDM works hampers the main work of teachers	Sometimes
Separate cadre of teachers for MDM?	Not yet
Awareness generation of MDM	Monthly action

7. Responses of School Management Committee

Point of Discussion	Responses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Specific functions of SMC with respect to the MDM? 	Some of the members were aware of the functions of SMC with respect to the MDM but all had the general awareness about the programme.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Co-operation from the administration regarding the scheme? 	During discussion it was revealed that administration does cooperate but the system is slow. Also since the reporting mechanism is not systematic so delay in grievance redressal is normal.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Any short of problem regarding implementation of the scheme? 	The SMC told that physical infrastructure is the single biggest problem. Apart from that manpower issue and cleanliness are hurdles in effective implementation.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Any problem like caste, gender, etc. while sharing MDM? 	No such problem was encountered by SMC. It's a good sign that social harmony is not disturbed during MDM process.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How do you resolve any MDM related problems? 	They talk the issue with themselves and inform Samity Education

	officer or SI of schools at block level. Depending upon the urgency and importance of the issue they also meet BDO, SDO and sometimes DM.
• Role of the Panchayat in the issues of MDM?	Panchayat is the first platform where they discuss the issue and based on resolution/decision the further action is taken.
• MDM as children's right to food?	Everyone acknowledge the right to food matter and they try to provide the right to all children
• Suggestions to improve MDM?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cleanliness and beautification of schools by MGNREGS fund • Regular monitoring by officials • Purifier supply to arrest iron and arsenic problem in drinking water

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations are clubbed under two categories – general and specific.

5.1 General Interventions:

- During survey the lack of awareness among stakeholders were observed. New guidelines of MDM are difficult for common citizens to understand so awareness generation workshop, meetings, gatherings should be regularly organized.
- Community participation is key to success of MDM. Accountability and responsibility should go hand in hand. The need of community participation was felt during discussion with parents, teachers and PRIs. Children are central point for the community participation.
- The physical infrastructure is one of the most important factor in MDM. The stakeholders not only understand its importance but also demand a good infrastructure. There is lack of basic infrastructures in the schools of study area. The kitchen cum store room, drinking water facilities, dining hall are the main physical infrastructure.
- Increase budget for meal per child to enhance nutritional value and encounter inflation

- Hire more staffs for cooking, cleaning and distribution of meals.
- Use MGNREGS for providing work inside schools especially for innovative ideas such as kitchen gardens.
- Better record keeping is necessary. IT supported ideas should be roped in.
- Children should be actively involved in decision of menu, design of kitchen and dining hall and the way MDM is processed.
- School Management Committee and MDM Committee should be made functional
- Involvement of Bal Sansads to monitor the quality and quantity of MDM should be made compulsory in all schools.
- Any problems in running in MDM should be addressed proactively. A system to monitor real time shortage, demand and any other problems should be started at block level itself.
- Separate cadre of school staffs should be recruited for MDM purpose such as cooking, sanitation, counselling, supply chain management etc
- A training programme of the Cook-cum-helpers may be organized to acquaint with the latest scientific methods of cooking MDM food with a view to making it tasty and cost effective. From each block/ municipality 10 cook cum helpers may be nominated to obtain training as Master Trainers. The expert teams on different fields are engaged to impart training as per training modules based on Govt. guidelines to the Master Trainers. These Master Trainers are to impart training to the Cook-cum- helpers and other stakeholders. Maintenance of roster of parents, community for the presence of at least two parents in the school on each day at the time of serving and tasting of mid-day meal
- One accredited laboratory may be engaged to collect samples and test cooked MDM. Samples of cooked foods are randomly collected from schools maintaining the norms of collection by surprise visits. Those are carried to the laboratories maintaining the norms of cold chain and are tested in the laboratories both chemically and microbiologically with the following parameters viz. energy and calories, protein, fat, carbohydrate, moisture and ash etc. & standard plate count, E-coli, Salmonella, S. aureus, Y&M, coliform etc.
- NGOs/ Trusts may be engaged for serving of MDM through centralized kitchen in urban areas covering the schools situated within 1/2 km from the cluster kitchen taking 20-30 minutes.

- Display of logo, entitlement of children and other information at a prominent visible place in school.
- Self-declaration on Food Safety may be collected the schools for sending report on quarterly basis.
- Some schools were found to send SMS, but these are not stored and reflected in the Server due to some technical glitches. The Block/ Municipality MDM Section officials may look into the matter of the shortlisted schools who are genuinely sending SMS regularly
- In some of the school, students may be motivated to produce the vegetables by making use of available land in the school premises. This will not only make the school self-sustainable but would also inculcate the habit of self-reliance amongst the students.
- All school authorities should plant at least five types of fruit bearing trees within the school compound keeping nutritional value in mind, in consultation with the Forest and Horticulture and Food Processing Department.
- Two days Mid Day Meal Mela-cum-Workshop & Training programme with a view to improving the quality of cooked MDM. Representatives from reputed institute in hospitality sector may be invited to impart training to the cook-cum-helpers.
- The cooking cost is very insufficient in consideration of the present high market price. As a result, it is very difficult to maintain the quality of cooked food. It may be brought it to the notice of the department.
- The practice of Tithi Bhojan in some local name is in vogue. But it is not accounted for the year 2018-19. The matter may be taken up with the district officials under MDM section and ask them to introduce this immediately. This will increase community in the MDM system.
- Introduction of MDM in class IX and X may be considered.
- Construction of a separate dining hall in each and every school may be considered for the Mid-day Meal takers to ensure a safe and clean place.
- Remuneration to the Cook-cum-helpers may be paid for 12 months instead of 10 months in a financial year.
- There is no provision to provide fund for repairing kitchen sheds which were constructed long ago. Considering the urgency, the department may be requested to think over the matter.
- Supply Chain Mechanism should be strengthened so that right materials

are reached at right time with right quantity and quality to right place. Integration of all manpower engaged in MDM supply chain with innovative IT platform should be done so that real time tracking, communication, demand and supply is established.

- Frequent changes in price of food materials should be considered and resolved.
- Sufficient number of kitchen and store room materials such as utensils, storage boxes, bins etc. should be supplied in advance.
- There should be online grievance redressal mechanism separately for MDM purpose. Immediate action should be taken based on priority of grievances.
- Monthly/ quarterly inspection programme should be adhered to.
- Revision of cooking cost is required as per current price condition.
- Introduction of MDM in class IX& X should be considered as the dropout rate after class VIII is increasing.
- Rs. 5000 annually for kitchen devices are not sufficient. It should be enhanced.
- Remuneration of cook cum helper should also be enhanced with all 12 months' remuneration.
- Mandatory dining hall construction in all schools.
- Mandatory LPG connection for MDM cooking.
- A team of motivated and proactive teachers should be made and they should be asked to suggest other teachers about effective implementation

5.2 Specific Interventions



- Hand pump plate form construction and preventing water logging nearby.
- Coloring/painting of schools/kitchen etc to make it noticeable and hygienic.
- Ensure functioning of Mid-Day Meal Committee in the school.
- Renovation of kitchen (including ventilation and lighting) and toilets, converting corridors into dining hall.
- ICT materials such as Menu display in all government places including schools.
- Drinking Water/eggs/vegetables /food quality check by experts/govt labs and actions based on it.
- Mandatorily Basic water purifier at each schools.
- Ensure early distribution of uniform and their cleanliness from SHGs and parents respectively.
- Distribution of kitchen devices, rice storage bins, mats and hygiene kits should be provided.
- Weekly cleaning of toilets/urinals/kitchen/dining hall /store room/classroom etc. should be made compulsory.
- Contact no of all concerned officials should be displayed in the schools.
- Training of children on how to use toilets/basins/hand wash and Gas cylinder handling training to cooks cum helpers.
- Team of motivated teachers to suggestions/inspections.
- Teachers' and cooks' training/awareness programme required for mid-day meal programme, monitoring, hygiene and proper register maintenance. SHGs and Suppliers should know the rights of children and their duties.
- MGNREGA workers should be engaged for cleanliness.
- Approach roads to all schools.
- DM/BDO talking to one school every fortnight over phone (teachers/children/staffs) and Monthly recognition of best schools/teachers in mid-day meal via DM's talk/ official publication/appreciation letters.
- Students of different schools should visit to some good schools and learn from them, this could be done once in three months.

- Mid-day meal Complain boxes at schools, BDO offices, SDO offices and Collectorate
- TIC should be chosen on rotation basis for 2-3 years.
- Involvement of parents in meal inspection, cleanliness and extra-curricular activities
- Rationalised and planned health check-ups of school students.
- 1st working day of each month, all officers at one school each at 11 am to taste MDM.
- GP wise cooking competition among Cook Cum Helpers.
- Separate kitchen and dining hall in each school.
- Kitchen garden and terrace garden (In new buildings) can be developed with the convergence of MGNREG, Krishi Vigyan Kendra and Horticulture department (Gardening kits). 5000 rupees per year in Flex fund component for innovative interventions under MDM scheme can be utilised.
- Boundary walls in each school for security purpose.
- Linking of school mid-day meal programme with ICDS centre to rationalize fund.
- Sprouts in mid-day meal to improve Haemoglobin (Driven by parents and children) and POSHAN Abhiyan scheme of government of India can be followed for nutritional purpose.
- Providing bio fortified staple foods (WHO-FORTIFICATION AT THE TIME OF LANT GROWTH).
- Fruits/breads/sprouts/biscuits/milk/curd items can be given once a week.
- Voluntary funding by the interested villagers/businessmen/officers/parents/pensioners etc. in the local schools (important for financial accountability).
- Centralised Kitchen (Akshay Patra and Naandi Foundation).
- Capacity enhancement of SSK/MSK teachers is very important.

6. LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

The survey was done the festival of Durga Puja so some data of school visits such as attendance may be little different from actual one.

- The biases and presumptions of both respondents and researcher comes into picture during the qualitative interview.
- Leading questions have its own limitations.
- The lack of proper knowledge about the schemes lead to incorrect response.
- Children especially studying in primary schools are not much aware about concepts like hygiene, community participation.
- Focus Group Discussion often turns into personal accusation which brings error in responses.
- The difference in responses of same question by different stakeholders of different age group and different level of understanding may lead to over simplification of the survey.
- Covid-19 pandemic was a major limitation in field research work as schools were closed and dry ration was being distributed. But it only impacted Phase-3 research work as other two phases had already completed before Covid-19.
- Officials directly involved in MDM work may not give correct responses.

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ANNEXURE

District Administration Format for inspection of Mid-Day Meal in Schools:

Name of District: Dakshin Dinajpur Name of Block/Municipality:

Date of visit:

1. Name of School:
2. Management: Govt/Govt. Sponsord/Govt. Aided/Municipality Body/P&RD(SSK/MSK)/Govt. Madrasah/Govt. Aided Madrasah/Minority Affairs & Madrasa Education(MAME) Department (Govt. Aided SSK/MSK)/Special Training Centre (NCLP etc.)
3. Student Enrolment:
4. Number of Students availed MDM on that day (If yes):
5. Maintenance of one month's buffer stock (Rice) : Yes/No.
6. Availability of Cooking Cost :
7. Whether Cook-Cum-Helpers get Honorarium regularly : Yes/No.
8. Whether the School sends a daily report by SMS : Yes/No.
9. Whether there is adequate source of drinking water facility in the School : Yes/No
10. Whether Toilet & Urinals available : Yes/No.
11. Whether proper hygiene is maintained: Yes/No.
12. Whether manpower tie up has been made in the School under MGNREGA (Inspection report of MGNREGA be jointly signed by the TIC/HM and the Inspection officials) : Yes/No.
13. Whether School level MDM committee has been formed : Yes/No.

14. Whether WIFS Tablets are being administered on regular basis : Yes/ No.
15. Present stock of WIFS Tablets (Category wise i.e. upto Class IV and upto Class VIII):
16. Medical Check up is done on regular basis : Yes/No.
17. School Uniforms have been distributed : Yes/No.
18. Whether Kitchen Shed available : Yes/No.
19. Whether Dining Hall available: Yes/No.
20. Whether Apron distributed among Cooks : Yes/No
21. Whether Boundary Wall available : Yes/No.
22. Whether Utensils distributed: Yes/No.
23. Whether Menu Chart displayed : Yes/No.
24. Whether iron contaminated water used : Yes/No.
25. Whether land encroachment made by the villagers : Yes/No.
26. Whether roof treatment required in class room : Yes/No.
27. Whether dilapidated Kitchen Shed : Yes/No.
28. Whether incomplete construction of class rooms: Yes/No.
29. Whether L.P.G cylinder distributed : Yes/ No.
30. Whether separate girls Toilet available : Yes/No.
31. Whether land encroachment made by the villagers : Yes/No.
32. Number of benches in School :
33. Whether complain lodge on different issues by the parents : Yes/No
34. Whether poor attendance of the Students noticed : Yes/No
35. Whether stock of poor quality of rice : Yes/No
36. Whether School running on rent : Yes/No
37. Whether repairing of School Building required : Yes/No
38. Whether registers maintained properly : Yes/No
39. Whether Electric Connection available : Yes/No
40. Whether ACR required : Yes/ No.
41. Remarks(Any other issue) :

Name & Signature of the TIC/HM Name & Signature of the Inspection official

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She is an IAS officer of 2018 batch borne on Gujarat cadre, currently working as assistant collector Bhavnagar. She completed her Masters in Zoology from Kurukshetra university, MBA in Finance from Guru Gobind Singh Indraprasth University and Masters in public management from Jawaharlal Nehru university, New Delhi. She was born and brought up in a small village named 'khushpara' in Rewari district of Haryana. She personally witnessed violations of women rights in many forms. She feels that women do not get equal opportunities and there is often comparison with the other gender that is responsible for their lower social status. This motivates her to work for women's empowerment.

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She belongs to Ranchi, Jharkhand. She worked for Samsung in Android Application Development post her Engineering in Computer Science from BIT Mesra. In 2018 she qualified for the IAS and is currently posted as SDM in Jamui, Bihar. She has also done Masters in Public Management from JNU.

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