

# Education Cannot Wait.

#Act Now!

A fact-finding study report on elementary education in Odisha



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## Massive learning loss in school children due to the Covid-19 pandemic

The world endured a huge learning loss in school children due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the subsequent lockdown. That substantial learning loss has occurred among students across classes and geographies have been made quite clear in many studies conducted by various agencies.

According to the Union Ministry of Education's National Achievement Survey (NAS), about 3.4 million students in 118,000 schools in 720 rural and urban districts were surveyed for NAS in November 2021, 1.5 years into the pandemic in India. The survey found that education levels across the country had decreased, more so in some areas and regions and among children of particular grades. Delhi, for instance, is among the five lowest-performing states for grade III but did much better for grade VIII. The average performance decreased from about 54% to 47% between 2017, when the last NAS was conducted, and 2021.

## Digital Divide Deprived Odisha's rural Children To access Online Education

In 2020, Odisha School and Mass Education Minister Samir Ranjan Dash, has admitted that, "Of the 60 lakh students, we were hardly reaching to 22 lakhs children. That is, only 33 per cent are attending online classes". As per the report by School and Mass Education department, Out of 67,128 government elementary schools in the State, only 27.68 per cent have initiated online education so far. The number of children who attend online classes through a smartphone was 31.95 per cent. The reports further says that at least 80 per cent parents of such children in Malkangiri, Kandhamal, Nabarangpur, Rayagada and Deogarh districts do not have a smartphone whereas 40 per cent of parents in Kandhamal and Malkangiri districts do not have a regular mobile phone.



## Learning Recovery Programme (LRP)

To reduce the impact of children's learning loss during the Covid-19 pandemic, the school and mass education department have decided to launch a 3-months long Learning Recovery Programme (LRP) in government and government-aided schools in the state for students of classes 3 to 9 from September 29. The OSEPA has roped in two private organizations, Subhadra Charitable Trust and Odisha Knowledge Corporation Limited, to implement the three-month-long program. Subjects like Odia, maths, and environmental science will be covered in Class III, while maths, English, and science will be covered in Class IV to IX. It will be conducted during regular school hours.





## What's working and what's not

To understand the effectiveness of this LRP, Atmashakti Trust decided to conduct a pilot fact-finding study in Nuapada, which saw the most dropouts of students (896) when schools reopened. The pilot study was conducted with school-going children in two blocks of the Nuapada district. Over 500 grassroots workers from 33 groups visited 68 schools of Komna and Nuapada blocks of the district and interviewed 115 children. The study report found that 54% do not know about LRP, 56% have not attended any class, 39% of students reported that the baseline assessment was not conducted, 55% of students said that LRP has not yet started in schools, and 38% of students said, they had not received any materials on LRP.



So, Atmashakti Trust conducted a field study between November and December covering 1404 villages of 74 blocks of 13 districts in the state to capture efforts of the state government towards the recovery of learning loss due to school closure during the pandemic. However, this time, the study was not limited to LRP but also migration, dropouts, and school infrastructure, which contributes to the overall learning performance of children. The study collected data from 5543 respondents on LRP, 1912 respondents on RTE norms, 244 respondents on dropouts, and 152 on migration.

## How was the study conducted

The fact-finding was conducted using online forms covering all the stakeholders who are part of the Learning Recovery Program & Right To Education, Dropout & Migration.

The sampling was done in the selected areas among the students, parents, SMC, and other stakeholders involved in the process to understand the ground reality of the implementation through a self-administered fact-finding form.





## Highlights of the study

### Learning Recovery Programme

- The state government directed the LRP to be conducted in 54,446 Govt./Govt. Aided schools, among 37,97,830 students of Class III-IX, by engaging 2,29,799 teachers in the 30 Districts of Odisha. But the fact-finding report reveals that the program needs active intervention and monitoring for its success. The following are the significant findings of the program so far.
- The fact-finding report reveals that 14.45 % (801) of students do not know about LRP. Though the program started in September, even after 45 days, it has yet to reach the primary beneficiaries - the students for whom it is intended.
- As per the Letter circulated by Govt. of Odisha, a baseline assessment should be conducted for Class III - IX students. But after 45 days of implementation of the program, 8.93 % (495) of students interviewed said that the assessment did not happen in their school.
- The Letter circulated by Govt. of Odisha mentioned the baseline assessment of all the students from Class III - IX. Still, the fact-finding report disclosed that 11.26%(624) of students still needed still needed to attend their school's baseline assessment for LRP.
- The fact-finding report found that 8.84% (490) of students said that no learning recovery classes had started in their school. Despite the launching of LRP in September, lessons have yet to begin in many schools. A mid-term assessment is supposed to be conducted 25 days after the start of class, but even after 45 days of the program, lessons have yet to start yet start yet to start in many places.
- The fact-finding report highlight that 6.69% (371) of students have not received any LRP education materials. It is essential to ask how the student will follow LRP without receiving educational materials.
- Teaching methodology plays a vital role in the student's learning process. As per the Letter, teachers are supposed to attain separate training programs for LRP classes. However, the fact-finding report states that 0.88% (49) of students do not like the teaching methods, and 22.89% (1269) of students rate the LRP teaching methodology as average.
- An activity calendar is a vital instrument to enhance the learning outcome. Still, the fact-finding report discovered that 21.78% (1207) of students reported the absence of an activity calendar based on the Learning Outcomes (LO) in their school.
- The fact-finding report shows that 44.71% (2478) of students feel lost in education, whereas 8.5% (471) of students sometimes feel lost. If students feel lost in their education, how long can they continue?
- The fact-finding report shows that 49.58% (2748) of students interviewed found difficulty in coping with their studies. If students cannot cope with their studies, how will they cover their syllabus in their respective classes?
- The fact-finding reveals that 37% of students find the LRP learning unfriendly and difficult to read the LRP books provided by the school. In addition, 6.7% of students said that they had received LRP material at the time of the fact-finding.

### Right to Education norms

The Right to Education Act lays down norms and standards relating to Pupil-Teacher-Ratios (number of children per teacher), classrooms, separate toilets for girls and boys, drinking water facilities, number of school working days, working hours of teachers, etc. Each and every elementary school (Primary school & Middle School) in India has to comply with this set of norms to maintain a minimum standard set by the Right to Education Act. The following are the outcomes of fact-finding.



- The fact-finding report discovered that 23.80% (455) schools are short of 1 teacher compared to the number of sanctioned posts in their school. The lack of adequate school teachers enormously affects education in Odisha, particularly in rural Odisha. Similarly, 28.19% (539), 16.32% (312), & 6.64% (127) of schools are short of 2, 3, and 4 teachers, respectively.
- The fact-finding report found that 17% (325) of schools are short of 1 classroom compared to the number of classes in the school. Every school must have at least the same classrooms as the number types. Common classrooms for multiple classes impact the learning outcome on a large scale. Similarly, 26.26% (502), 24.95 (477), 11.09% (212), and 5.54% (106) of schools are short of 2, 3, 4, and 5 classrooms, respectively.
- The fact-finding report reveals that 11.66% (223) of schools don't have drinking water facilities. Therefore, the government needs to take immediate action to resolve the issue through convergence with the allied departments.
- The fact-finding report reveals that drinking water sources in 3.71% (71) of schools are fully damaged and partially damaged in 13.49% (258). Firstly, there is a lack of drinking water sources in schools. Secondly, existing sources are fully or partially damaged in multiple places. Therefore, there is an urgent need for the department to take quick action to ensure access to safe drinking water.
- The fact-finding report shows that 8.16% (156) of schools are struggling with insufficient drinking water entirely, and 15.90%(304) are struggling partially. Lack of sufficient drinking water facilities makes the situation worse in dry areas and during the summer.
- The fact-finding report shows that 15.01% (287) of schools are accessing non-drinkable water sources. Unsafe drinking water leads to many waterborne diseases that ultimately impact students' physical and mental health, and the same need to be resolved at the earliest.
- The fact-finding report discloses that 11.24% (215) of schools do not have separate kitchen sheds. The mid-day meal program is one of the essential elements of the school system; without a kitchen shed, it is affected.
- As per the fact-finding report, 5.07% (97) of schools run with a fully damaged kitchen shed, while 22.96% (439) run with partially damaged structures. Therefore, the absence of a separate kitchen shed and damaged kitchen sheds increases the risk of accidents on the school campus and affects the quality of food provided to the children.
- The fact-finding report affirms that 14.70% (281) of schools don't have toilet facilities. Lack of toilet facilities leads to irregular attendance in school, especially for girls.
- The fact-finding report declares that 20.61% (394) of schools do not have separate toilets for boys and girls. Almost all the offices and institutions have separate toilets for males and females. So why is it not there in schools even after 13 years of the implementation of the RTE? This is a primary need for the students.
- The fact-finding report reveals that 44.04% (842) of school toilets lack water facilities. According to the parents, toilets cannot be used without proper water facilities.
- As per the fact-finding data, 30.07% (575) of toilets in school are not used by the students. If students do not use the toilets in school, they can't understand the concept of sanitation awareness from a young age.
- The fact-finding report uncovers that 10.09% (193) of toilets in schools are fully damaged, while the partial damage case is 36.04% (689). Villagers pointed out two critical facts: schools lack toilets, and the existing toilets are fully or partially damaged in many areas.
- The fact-finding report discovers that 75.63% (1446) of schools don't have playgrounds. Playground serves a vital role in the physical and mental health of students. SMC members and parents are seriously concerned about the lack of playgrounds.



- The fact-finding report reveals that 41.32% (790) schools don't have a boundary wall. Parents mentioned that it is unsafe because of the absence of a boundary wall.
- The fact-finding report discloses that 28.35% (542) of schools do not have electrical connections rendering all electrical equipment, such as fans, bulbs, etc. It also found that 29.76% (569) of schools need electrical equipment such as bulbs, fans, etc.
- The fact-finding report shows that 88.13% (1685) of schools need repairing. Parents' statement also implies that schools are struggling because of delays in repairing work.
- The fact-finding reports reveal that 13.44% (257) of School Management Committee (SMC) members never participate in monitoring the school work. Lack of community involvement in school management is a severe concern for the overall development of the school.
- RTE Act mentioned the special provisions for specially-abled children, but as per the fact-finding report, 42.42% (811) of schools do not have any special requirement for the disabled.
- A complaint lodging system is a sign of transparency and democracy, but the fact-finding report reveals that 51.83% (991) schools do not have a complaint mechanism for lodging complaints for the disabled.

## Dropout of children

The past two years of the COVID-19 pandemic have been challenging for a large section of society, with students being the worst hit. The fear of getting infected and lockdowns meant that educational institutions, including schools and colleges, remained shut for regular classes for the better of 2020 and 2021.

Though education switched to online mode, only some were privileged enough to access it - the lack of a computer or laptop and poor internet connectivity meant many could not afford it. In addition, a large portion of the population suffered from financial hardships, resulting in high school dropouts. The following are the outcomes of the fact-finding.

- The fact-finding covered 1921 schools and found that 244 students (Class-III-VIII) had dropped out of school.
- The fact-finding report reveals that out of the total dropout cases, 61.7% of students belonged to ST, 10%, 24.2, & 10% are from SC, OBC, and general categories, respectively.
- The fact-finding report found that out of the main reason for dropouts, 33.8% of students said they got engaged in household work. 21.6%, 22.1%, 8.8%, 10.1%, 6.3%, & 6.7% dropped out because of difficulties in the curriculum, other reasons, parents aren't interested, engaged in labor work, & either parent have migrated or are not interested, respectively
- Teachers counseling for rejoining the school- The fact-finding report mentioned that 52.5% of students said no teachers came and counseled them to rejoin school. The rest, 47.5%, shared that though the teachers came and asked them to rejoin school - they did not.
- During the fact-finding, it was also found that 44.8% of the parents did not even try to send their children back to school. 50.2% of the respondents revealed that there were no from the SMC.
- 51.9% of students shared that they did not get any opportunity to read, nor did they have any scope for engagement in reading activities because of different issues during the pandemic.

## Migration

India's 2011 Census recorded 453 million internal migrants in India, forming a significant 37% of the total population. One in every five migrants is a child, resulting in an estimated 92.95 million migrant children. Children whose parents migrate accompany them to work sites or stay back in the source village left behind without one or both parents. In addition, the generally fixed nature of the schooling system makes it difficult for children who accompany their parents to continue their education during their movement to and from work sites and stay therein. The following are the outcomes of the fact-finding:

- During the fact-finding, 152 students were found to have migrated multiple times because they were out of school.



- During the fact-finding, 152 students were found to have migrated multiple times because they were out of school.
- Regarding migration patterns, it was found that 84.2% of the total respondents migrated temporarily, while 15.8% migrated permanently because of insufficient livelihood opportunities in the locality. 76% of the respondents said they migrated because they wanted to and willingly, whereas the other 24% said they migrated because they had no other livelihood options.
- Current engagement of the migrant students - 16.4% of students said they are helping their parents in the household work, 15.8%, 11.8%, & 27.6% said they were working outside, supporting their parents at the work site, and other reasons, respectively.
- The fact-finding reveals that 55.5% of the parents take their children with them while migrating because no one is left in their homes to care for their children. Similarly, 17.6% and 26.6% said they need their children's support at the worksite for more income and other reasons, respectively.

## Recommendations

*Taking into account the issues found during the survey, a series of discussions took place with teachers, parents, SMC members, PRIs, academicians, and local education administration to address the current situation. After discussion, some broad recommendations came up, which are mentioned below:*

- *Students found the LRP teaching materials interesting. The material should be distributed and made accessible to all students.*
- *The LRP learning materials could also be prepared in tribal languages wherever the Multi-Lingual Education Scheme is implemented.*
- *The two years of learning losses cannot be recovered with a short program of 3 months only. A long-term approach is required to meet the gaps created. LRP should be continued until the students achieve the class-appropriate learning output.*
- *The monitoring mechanism for LRP should be put in the public domain for assessment by the general public.*
- *A visible transparency board in the school informing the compliance status of RTE norms shall be made on the premises.*
- *The infrastructural requirements, such as the appointment of teachers, classrooms, boundaries, water, separate toilets for boys and girls, separate kitchens, playgrounds, etc., need to be urgently fulfilled as per the Right To Education norms.*
- *Community Driven Social Audit may be conducted to assess the implementation of RTE.*
- *The parents and school management committee should proactively engage in the Learning Recovery Plan. More sensitization is required for the parents on the immediate need for learning recovery.*
- *Teachers' training is significant for the success of any program such as LRP.*
- *The student's assessment results and LRP, in particular, and LRP, in specific and LRP, should be communicated to parents in time.*
- *Community awareness is required to resolve many issues, such as the engagement of students in household work.*
- *Learning losses can't be recovered only by going to school; hence; hence students need to spend time on their studies during off-school hours. School teachers or volunteers can facilitate the classes during those hours for faster recovery.*
- *PRIs need to be sensitized to RTE norms and LRP. The government should ensure the participation of PRIs in LRP implementation and fulfilling the norms of RTE.*
- *A shortage of teachers hampers the quality of learning imparted in school. Hence, the teacher's appointment is a must to run any program effectively such as LRP.*
- *Teachers are engaged in many non-teaching activities affecting the learning of students. Teachers should be only entrusted with teaching and engaging with the students.*
- *Lack of funds at the panchayat level results in the delay in completing infrastructure building/repairs of schools. Hence, adequate funds should be with the Panchayat to meet the infrastructural requirement.*

N.B. We give all credit to the original authors, media houses, organizations and government reports for the secondary data used for compilation of the report.





## About Us

Atmashakti is a right-based catalyst organization that coalesces Tribal and Dalit people for their socio-economic and political empowerment. For more than a decade with a consistent focus on collectivizing the community, Atmashakti has facilitated the process of formation of more than 23 collectives in 17 districts and 84 blocks of Odisha. Atmashakti has a mission to reach out to eight million underprivileged families in Odisha, Uttar Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and other poor states within India. To know more about us, please visit [www.atmashaktitrust.com](http://www.atmashaktitrust.com)

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