POLICY BRIEF
Tackling education in a post-covid classroom

Executive Summary

- Poor quality education is mounting to abysmal learning outcomes in India, ultimately pushing children out of the education system and leaving them vulnerable to child labor, abuse and violence. Learning assessments show that many of these children who study in the school are not learning the basics of literacy and numeracy as specified under the Right to Education Act. For the first time in 10 years, reading and arithmetic scores have improved in government-funded schools in early grades (ASER 2016). Odisha with a large population of children from scheduled castes (SC), scheduled tribes (ST) and minority communities, has the lowest scores (1).

- Lack of adequate school infrastructure, lack of required teachers, awareness on the right to education among users and lopsided scheme implementation poses huge challenges to several determinants that impact school education in the state. Believably, there is a lack of a shared vision for the improvement of school education where specific and local problem-solving strategies are not being implemented. Subsequently, lack of awareness among parents and community members also is a barrier in their access to participation and taking decisions to improve school education.

- Following the outbreak of Covid-19, the use of technology in education became important. But there were several issues like lack of devices and internet connectivity, lack of preparedness of teachers in using technology, and lack of resources in regional languages(2). The media reports suggest that very few students (4.3%) have accessed digital learning in the state (3). Secondly, a considerable number of students (97 thousand) have dropped out from the government schools since 2020 where 60% of them are from the tribal and other remote areas (4).

Goal	Mechanism	Implementation
Ensure quality and sustainable education model for rural underprivileged children in Odisha	Community-led stakeholder engagement for school infrastructure development and providing supplementary education to rural children	Problem-driven iterative adaptation through community ownership where they deconstruct the problem and engage stakeholders to act towards a sustainable solution

Drivers of sustained challenges in education

The commitment of Government funding to Education remains underutilized year after year is leading to poor infrastructure and under-recruitment of teachers

Lack of knowledge and awareness among parents and SMC members pose a challenge in their active participation and engagement in school governance process

Socio-cultural norms also pose as a barrier that prevents children from attending schools as cultural tendencies impact the way children participate in education

The pandemic response was the primary responsibility of the Government. So, priority on education took a back seat. Further school closure during the lockdown also posed a massive challenge as this was the only avenue for many children to learn.
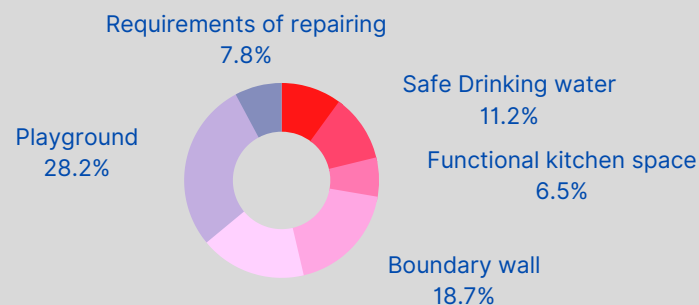
Key analysis and findings

School infrastructure: There is strong evidence that high-quality infrastructure betters instructions and improves learners' academic performance and reduces dropout rates.

Atmashakti Trust, with its allies Odisha Shramajeebee Mancha and Mahila Shramajeebee Mancha, Odisha conducted a study to assess the status of government-funded school infrastructure in Odisha using Basic infrastructure guidelines of the RTE Act. The study covered 10,043 schools/villages under 82 blocks in 18 districts of Odisha which is mostly represented by tribal, Dalits and other marginalised communities. The study findings are given in the chart:

Requirements of repairing
7.8%

Safe Drinking water
11.2%

Playground
28.2%

Functional kitchen space
6.5%

Boundary wall
18.7%

Schools lacking infrastructure in (%)

- Schools in rural areas
- Teacher vacancies
- Teacher vacancies in rural areas

0%   25%   50%   75%   100%

Teachers: India has made enormous strides in the education sector in the past decades where teachers have been integral in this progress. The National Education Policy 2020 recognizes and identifies teachers as the heart of the learning process However, the lack of available teachers has plagued the situation to worsen. The state has a total of 3,40,477 teachers in 68,717 schools of which 91% schools are in rural areas. About 11% of schools have vacancies and there is a requirement of around 28,816 teachers. Of the total positions, 67% are vacant in rural schools, according to the UNESCO report (5).
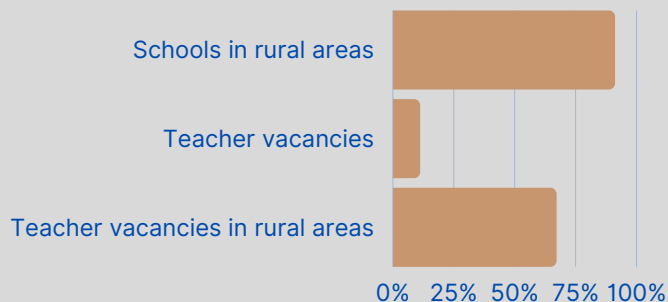
Learning loss and challenges in online learning platforms: To beat the challenges confronted by the education department because of the closure of schools and lack of access to online education, the state authorities made preparations for courses by radio, tv and Youtube. But this has not so far been successful.

Students accessed online education
4.3%

Total students in the state
95.7%
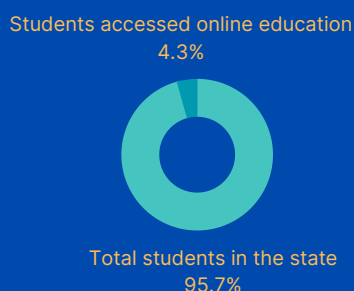
Digital devices- To understand the underlying challenges of students who were deprived of online education and challenges subsequently revealed by the government of Odisha, we did a survey of 10575 students in 18 districts where we found that 87.44% of the students did not have a smartphone and other devices to attend online classes.
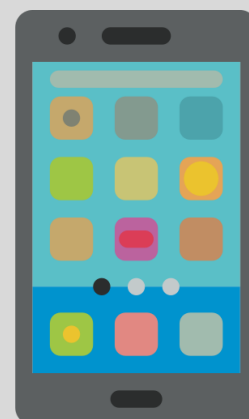
Component of an improved education strategy
(green-which is there, yellow-somehow in action and can be modified/rectified, red-not there, have to adopt)

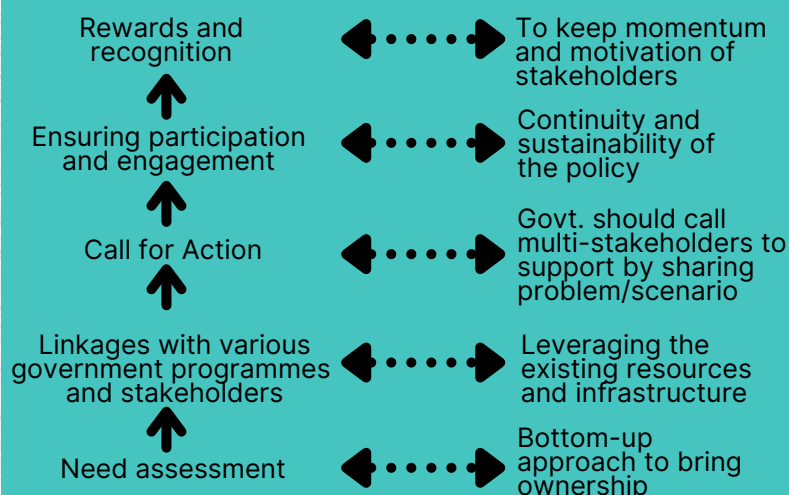| Component	Status
Awareness among the various stakeholders on the Right to Education Act and its entitlements	red
Effective and continuous remedial education to bridge the learning gaps - in the school/ after school	yellow
Infrastructure- toilet, classroom, playground, safe drinking water, functional kitchen space, etc.	yellow
Active role of School management committees/parents in participation, implementation and decision making	red
Evidence based strategies (need/performance assessment and resource mapping/allocation)	red
Collective learning - Play Way methods, Child friendly environment,counselling for their better mental health	red
Plausible teacher student ratio	yellow
Core stakeholders (Parents,students,teachers) engagement,participation and connection	yellow
Bottom up approach in strategizing and implementing education programme	red
Remedial education modules/ tools/piloting of the modules	green
Complying to provisioning aspects as per RTE Act such as Implementing structure/human resource/ systems /mechanism in place	green

Implementation- a cutting edge solution model

Why do we need a different model?

What we are using so far	How the new model is different from our current approach
Online education without considering its feasibility and last mile delivery approach	Introduces local-for-a-local strategy with the inclusion of local volunteers/parents for in-person learning arrangements
Skipping stakeholder engagement/decentralised decision making -Most of the traditional response from the government has been a centralised effort- closing out the space of community to take part in the decision making who will be impacted by the decision	Proposes a Bottom up approach
Inactive local self-governance: Lack of priority in knowledge transfer to communities, that disempowers	Calls for activating and assigning specific roles and incentivization of contributors (reward and recognition)
Universal approach-Missing out on area and challenge specific solution to each and every issue	Advocates need-based solution by conducting survey/assessment/measuring effectiveness
Inadequate infrastructure and lack of resources/under utilization of resources	Focuses on a multi-sectoral engagement to address physical and resource barriers by Integrating and layering up with other government schemes/department to build assets

Policy Recommendation

- Creating models of "Dream Schools" in remote rural areas where the Infrastructure ensures a safe, healthy and hygienic environment for teaching and learning. Post-Covid Lockdown bringing appropriate changes and repairs in the school building, classrooms, playground, boundary walls and toilets and Kitchen. This will be done in convergence with other Government schemes liKe MGNREGA

- Community (SMCs) selects and recruits two voluntary teachers per school at the primary level who assist them in teaching to supplement effort towards bridging the learning gap due to COVID lockdown and pre-existing learning difficulties among children.

- For the overall improvement of school education, there is a dire need to strengthen school governance. This can be done so by building capacities and empowering School Management Committees and PTAs in the day-to-day management of schools as mentioned in the RTE Act. Further, it is recommended to ensure transparency related to budget allocation and fund utilization and building a community of involved stakeholders which includes teachers, parents, local self-governance and students.

Process of Cutting-edge solution model

Rewards and recognition ⟷ To keep momentum and motivation of stakeholders

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Ensuring participation and engagement ⟷ Continuity and sustainability of the policy

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Call for Action ⟷ Govt. should call multi-stakeholders to support by sharing problem/scenario

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Linkages with various government programmes and stakeholders ⟷ Leveraging the existing resources and infrastructure

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Need assessment ⟷ Bottom-up approach to bring ownership

Model components

Infrastructure/ resources	Awareness/ engagement	After-school programme

References

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2. The Times of India, 2021, https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/bhubaneswar/state-scores-big-in-school-infra-low-in-edu-tech/
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5. UNESCO, 2021, https://en.unesco.org/news/unesco-launches-2021-state-education-report-india-no-teacher-no-class