Education Cannot Wait.

#ActNow!

A fact-finding study report on elementary education in Uttar Pradesh

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

The education of more than 1.5 billion students worldwide has been hampered due to the global pandemic. State governments and the Union Government had started many initiatives to engage children with education. But, due to the lack of digital resources or access, many children needed help to avail of these benefits.

To make up for the loss of studies in these two years, Sonbhadra Vikas Sangathan (SVS), Sonbhadra, a people's collective of Uttar Pradesh, with the support from the non-profit Atmashakti Trust, decided to conduct a fact-finding study, to understand how the state is faring in terms of providing opportunities for students to bridge their learning loss in a post-covid scenario. It was a part of a collaborative national education campaign titled, "Education Can't-Wait! #ActNow."

Why the study was undertaken

- To know whether the education department has taken any initiatives toward the learning recovery program.
- To implement a refresher course for the Hindi-medium students of Class I – VII in Govt. Schools / Govt. aided schools
- To minimize the impact of lost learning among the students.
- To boost the confidence level of students for mainstreaming in the current academic session.
- To share the recommendations to the concerned regarding the bottlenecks and the addressing mechanisms for the education system

Coverage, process and methodology of the studyof the study

The fact finding study was conducted between November and December covering 154 villages of Sonbhadra district of Uttar Pradesh 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 622 respondents on LRP, 167 respondents on RTE norms, 133 respondents on dropouts, and 109 on migration.

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.*

Respondents: Students from Class III-IX, Parents, SMC members & Other Stakeholders

Key findings

Learning recovery programme (LRP)

- The fact-finding report showed that 64.6%(402) of students feel completely lost in education, as they have lost their learning over the last two years. If students feel lost in their education, how long can they continue?
- 32% of students said they were not getting support from the teacher, whereas 3.1% said they had not asked teachers to help them resolve their learning-related issues.
- The report stated that 35.2%(219) of students feel completely lost in their current education, whereas 42.8% (266) of students feel lost sometimes. If students feel lost in their education, how long they can continue is a big question for all concerned.
- The fact-finding reveals that even if the schools have opened in the last seven months, there was no student assessment conducted to know the students' learning outcomes as per their standards.
- The report revealed that Uttar Pradesh government has no LRP program in place, which will force children to be at the periphery of education.

Right to Education (RTE) 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 & Upper Primary School) in India has to comply with norms to maintain a minimum standard set by the Right to Education Act. Following are the study findings on the status of RTE norm compliance in the surveyed areas in Uttar Pradesh:

- The fact-finding Report revealed that 18%(30) of 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 Uttar Pradesh, particularly in rural Odisha. Similarly, 28.7(48), 22.8%(38), & 9.6%(16) of schools are short of 2,3 and 4 teachers, respectively.

- Every school must have at least the same number of classrooms as the number of classes. Common classrooms for multiple classes impact the learning outcome on a large scale. The fact-finding Report uncloaks that 23.4% (39) of schools are short of 1 classroom compared to the number of classes in the school. Similarly, 27.5% (46), 19.2% (32), & 1.2%(02) of schools are short of 2,3,& 4 classrooms respectively.
- The Fact-finding Report also disclosed that 4.2%(07) of schools don't have drinking water sources on their premises. Where the government needs to take immediate action to resolve the issues may be through convergence with the allied departments.
- The fact-finding report unlocked that drinking water sources in 7.2%(12) of schools are fully damaged, whereas partially damaged in 39.5%(66) of schools. Firstly, schools lack Drinking water sources. Secondly, the existing water sources are often fully or partially damaged. So the an exact need for quick action by the concerned department towards addressing the issues.

- Lack of sufficient Drinking water facilities makes the situation worse in dry areas and during the summer. The fact-finding report reveals that 14.4%(24) of schools struggle with insufficient drinking water, whereas 25.7%(43) struggle partially.
- The fact-finding report showed that 29.3%(49) schools access non-drinkable water. 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 disclosed that 1.8%(03) of schools don't have separate kitchen sheds. The absence of a separate kitchen shed increases the risk of accidents on the school campus. 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, 1.2%(02) of schools are running with fully damaged kitchen sheds, whereas 27.5%(46) are partially damaged. Unsafe Kitchen-shed always increases the lifetime risk of cooks working in the school and other consequences.
- The fact-finding report affirmed that 4.2%(07) of schools don't have toilet facilities. Lack of toilet facilities heavily impacts the easiness and irregularity of students, especially girls.

- The fact-finding report discloses that 4.8%(08) of schools don't have separate toilets for boys and girls.
- The fact-finding report discovered that 49.7%(83) of school toilets lack water facilities. As per the statement given by parents, children can't use toilets due to the lack of a proper water facility.
- The fact-finding data revealed that 43.7% (73) of children were not using their school toilets due to hygiene issues or damaged structures. Then how can we expect sanitation awareness from the children?
- The fact-finding reports revealed that 55.7%(93) of SMC members never participate in monitoring school work. Lack of community involvement in school management is a severe concern for the overall development of the school.
- The RTE Act mentioned special provisions for special cases, but as per the fact-finding report, 80.8%(135) of schools don't have any special provisions for differently-abled children.
- A complaint lodging system is a sign of transparency and democracy, but the fact-finding report revealed that 92.8%(155) schools don't have to complain about lodging mechanisms in schools for the disabled.

Dropout of children

The last two years of the COVID-19 pandemic have been challenging for all of us, and children were the worst victim of it. The fear of getting infected and the lockdowns meant that educational institutions, including schools and colleges, remained shut for regular classes for the better of 2020 and 2021.

Though classes switched to online mode, only a few portions of these children could get access to it. The reason was that neither they had a digital device to access online education nor the facility of internet connection in their areas which deprived them of learning in online mode. As a fallout, many children dropped out of school since they remained out of education for a prolonged period. Following are the study findings on the dropout of children from school in the surveyed areas in Uttar Pradesh:

- The fact-finding report revealed that out of the 133 dropout cases, 66.2% belong to SC, 25.6% & 8.3% are from ST and OBC categories, respectively.
- The significant reasons for dropout found from the fact-finding are 45.1% said because they are engaged in household work. 5.3%, 6.8%, 24.8%, 6%, 24.8%, & 12% have told their dropout reasons as because of difficulties in the curriculum, other logic, parents aren't interested, engaged in labor work, & either parent has migrated or not interested respectively.
- Teachers counseling for rejoining the school- The fact-finding report says that in the case of 61.7% of students, not any of the teachers came and asked them to go back to school, and the rest, 38.3% have shared the fact that though the teachers have come to them and asked them to rejoin the school, they didn't go..

- The fact-finding also found that 61.7% of the parents didn't even try to send their children back to school. There were no efforts from the SMC, said 96.3% of the respondents, to bring back dropout students.
- The fact-finding revealed that 83.5% of students had no opportunity to read, nor was there any scope for them to engage in reading activities because of different issues during the COVID-19 pandemic

Migration and its impact on children's education

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. ollowing are the study findings on migration and its impact on children's education in the surveyed areas in Uttar Pradesh:

- Out of a total of 109 students who participated in the interview, 98.2% said they were temporarily migrating. The rest, 1.8%, said they permanently migrated out because of insufficient livelihood opportunities in the locality. In addition, 73.4% of the respondents said they willingly migrated out, whereas the other 26.6% said they are migrating cogently because of no other options.
- Current engagement of the migrant students - 30.3% have said they are helping their parents in the household work, 1.8%, 39.4% & 1.8% have said working outside, supporting their parents at the work site, and due to some other reasons, respectively.
- The fact-finding revealed that 67.9% of the parents take their children with them while migrating because no one is left in their homes to care for them. Similarly, 23.9% and 8.3% said they needed their children's support at the worksite and more income, 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 or local languages wherever the Multilingual Education Scheme is implemented.*
- *A long-term approach is required to meet the gaps created. Therefore, LRP should continue until the students achieve the class-appropriate learning output.*
- *The state government should arrange a monitoring mechanism for LRP in the public domain for assessment from 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, proper classrooms, boundary, water, and separate toilets for boys and girls, different kitchens, playgrounds, etc., need to be fulfilled urgently as per the Right to Education norms.*
- *Additionally, there is a need for more benches & chairs for students in most schools. We recommend arranging some funds for the given reason too.*
- *The state government may conduct Social Audit to assess the implementation of RTE.*
- *The parents and school management committee should be proactively engaged in the Learning Recovery Plan. More sensitization is required for the parents on the immediate need for learning recovery.*
- *Teachers' training is crucial for the success of any program such as LRP.*
- *The student's assessment results and LRP, in particular, should be communicated to parents in time.*
- *Community awareness is required to resolve many issues, such as the engagement of students in household work.*
- *Only attending school will not help children to recover from their learning loss; 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. In many areas, only 1 or 2 sikhsamitra runs the school, and not a single teacher is appointed. Hence, the appointment of the teacher is a must to run any program effectively, such as LRP.*
- *Teachers are engaged in many non-teaching activities affecting the learning of students. Therefore, 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 Panchayats to meet the infrastructural requirement.*
- *To prevent migration & save children's education, the government can launch a few vocational programs/projects to provide financial support to poor people at the local level.*
- *In the context of Sonbhadra, water quality is inferior in many areas. We recommend installing filters to purify water & make it drinkable at all such premises for safe health conditions.*
- *Last but not least most of the parents and people here in rural Sonbhadra don't take much interest in children's education. So we need to launch some awareness & sensitization programs and campaigns to motivate & give opportunities to make them come forward & take an interest in their children's studies & send them to school properly.*

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 and Uttar Pradesh. Atmashakti closely works with Sonbhadra Vikas Sangathan in Uttar Pradesh, in a long term mission to bring the benefits of government programmes to the poorest of the poor with a focus on rights-based framework. It 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

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