Getting Girls Back to School:A Case Study ofUdaanProgrammein Chittorgarh[1]

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Abstract:*Girls under the category of out of school children denote the most deprived section of the children. There are multiple initiatives and constant efforts to provide education to them using formal or alternative methods. Now, this requires a systemic and comprehensive intervention. Udaan,much appreciated at various levels,is one of such initiative of administration of Chittorgarh district, which not only targets the last child among the out of school children but deploys all cost-effective and sustainable mechanism to address the issue of enrolling out of school girls in school. This paper attempts to explore the case of Udaan to identify the processes and approaches adopted under this initiative to attain the desired outcome.*

I. Introduction

SarvaShikshaAbhiyaan (SSA) focuses on four pillars of education - Access, Equity, Quality and Community Engagement. Under these four areas of SSA, many initiatives have been taken up at national, state and district level to attain the objectives. All interventions contribute to ensuring - (1) all children have equal access to education, which is free from socio-economic, gender and physical barriers; (2) All children who enter in the school complete their 8 years of elementary education with class appropriate learning achievement; and (3) community pro-actively participate in management to contribute in creating an enabling environment for children with differential learning needs. In a state like Rajasthan, progress is quite impressive in terms of change in perception of the community which reflects in enrolment and learning related education indicators. Though many critical gaps and challenges still exist, which need to be addressed. One such challenge is to identify and enrol out of school children, especially girls, as they are the last mile to reach.

The state identifies their target group through data collated under Child Trekking Survey and annual household survey. These data help the state to identify and list all out of school children up to the age of 14 years. Besides, to verify the volume of out of school children in the state, data from other sources are also used to triangulate and analyse, i.e. DISE data, Census data and Census studies, MHRD study[3] and other independent survey/studies.

Since a district is considered as an independent unit of SSA plan and of administration as well, district administration prioritises their agenda in education within the broad framework of SSA plan. With reference to the district Chittorgarh, the administration prioritises girls' education as their agenda in education for the year 2017. This happened in the backdrop of various innovation and on-going educational reforms in the state by the Government of Rajasthan. This triggered the district administration of taking call for most disadvantaged and vulnerable children, i.e. identify out of school girl and enrol them in school. In this initiative, though the focus was on girls, but out of school

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boys are also been covered. This initiative is one of a good example of an inter-departmental approach to achieve the results.

Context:

Universalisation of Education is one of the key areas of concern for GoI and the state government, which is mandated under SarvaShikshaAbhiyaan (Education for All). After Right to Education Act (RTE) 2009 SSA created a far-reaching change especially in the area of access to school education through formal and informal strategies. Today, education is the prime concern for policymakers, practitioners, administrators, and even in the academia circle, especially after the declaration of the Millennium Development Goals (Mishra, 2005)[4]. The consecutive years after MDG brought significant changes in the educational scenario, especially the education of girls. This accelerated the demand for increasing financial investment and policy focus on education provision (Herz, 2006)[5]. Now, girls' participation in education is considered a first step towards achieving equality. Education of the girls, as women in future, are seen as key to securing intergenerational transfers of knowledge, long-term gender equity, increase in annual income and social change (DFID, 2005)[6].

Consecutive years after the RTE, is witnessed of attention of international and national communities on issues of out of school children. UNICEF (2014)[7] under Global Initiative on Out-of-School Children (OOSCI) reviewed interventions for never enrolled and drop-out children in the region to further expand the knowledge base and evidence on effective interventions to reach out-of-school children. The study indicates that South Asia region has the highest number of primary and lower secondary school age children out-of-school globally with 36.1 million and 75 percent contribution is from three countries only - Bangladesh, India and Pakistan. (UNESCO-UIS, 2015[8])

In the realm of the girls' positioning in accessing education and continuing education, Sen (2000)[9] highlighted the capability approach and argued for access to 'adequate' education for both girls and both, to enable them to develop their capacities for informal and rational choices. Sen (2000) argued that this capability approach will enable girls to lead the lives they value.

All the studies including OOSCI regional study (2015) point out that conflict, gender discrimination, child labour, child marriage, language constraint, household poverty and disability are common barriers in girls' education and also contribute in creating barriers in access to completion of school education.

The recent document of SamagraShikshaAbhiyaan (SSA)[10], the joint framework of implementation for k-12 schooling, aligned with Sustainable Development Goal 2030, provides guidance on access, retention of children with special focus on girls under access and retention.

Situation:

There is a consistent focus on education of girls and reduction in out of school children, gender disparities in India, especially in Rajasthan still poses challenges to the administration. Besides parents' educational level and their aspiration towards girls, limited access to early child education, lack of alternative methods for safe access to school, various gender-neutral infrastructure and facilities, gender-insensitive norms and stereotyped behaviour, explicit and hidden biases in pedagogy, lack of supportive and alternative learning pathways and non-participative school and classroom governance are other areas which push the vulnerable and marginalised child out of the school. Girls from socially marginalised and economically poor families constitute the majority of out of school children.

While analysing the data of the state government (Tables 1 & 2), out of school children seems to be high in certain blocks and districts. Chittorgrarh exceptionally coming under this category. Total 53 blocks of the state (out of total 301 blocks) are contributing to 57% of the total out of school

children in the state and Chittorgarh alone shares 11 percent of the total. While reflecting on the table, Chittorgarh's status in the share of out of school children and achievement in mainstreaming the out of school children,places the district different from others. It is the district's campaign which allowed to reach up to the hard to reach group; identifying them, mostly girls, and getting back them in school.

How a successful venture of the district administration helped in reaching to the vulnerable girls of their district and getting them back in school is explored as next point.

Table-1

District	Enrolment in elementary grades	OoSC Identified (7+ to 14 years)	OoSC enrolled	% achievement in enrolment of OOSC
Chittorgarh	1,46,145	8967	5943	66
Rajasthan	62,33,764	80724	31421	39

Source: Household Survey 2017-18 (estimated figures for children in an age of 7+ to 14 years) & UDISE 2017

Table-2

Districts	Total Blocks	No of blocks >500 OoSC
Ajmer	11	1
Alwar	14	1
Banswara	11	2
Barmer	17	1
Bharatpur	10	1
Bhilwara	12	3
Bikaner	7	4
Chittorgarh	11	10
Churu	7	5
Jaisalmer	3	3
Jalore	8	6
Jhalawar	8	1
Jodhpur	17	3
Nagaur	14	1
Pali	10	3
S Madho	6	2
Sirohi	5	4
Udaipur	17	3
TOTAL		**54**

Source: Household Survey 2017-18 (based on the estimated figures for children in an age of 7+ to 14 years)

A Case Study of Udaan in Chittorgarh

Realising that many children, especially girl are out of school but yet not covered under any programme under SSA, District Magistrate of Chittorgarh district launched a programme in 2017 - Udaan: "Shisha kidor, Navudaankioor (a thread of education, will take you to the new journey). The assumption is that if the strategy is useful in getting the most deprived child in school and gel them in the process of learning, then all other children who are out of school will surely be benefitted. Hence,

the target was out of school girls. The goal of this campaign-based-intervention was to make sure that all girls in the district are enrolled in schools by June 2018, reduce dropouts at upper primary and secondary levels, by the joint efforts of administration, public representatives, and community. This innovation aimed to upraise esteem of girl child in the society and ensuring the right to education be realised by them. The fundamentals of the campaign are based on following commitments -

(1) Every girl of the district must go to school
(2) Eradicate inequalities among boys and girls in access to education
(3) Ensure parity in opportunities for quality of education among boys and girls
(4) Sensitise and engage the community for educating girls

The approach of this initiative is to involve various departments and mobilise the community to achieve the desired results. RatriChaupal, schools and School Management Committees (SMC) are the platforms, which is used to reach out to the community and hold face-to-face dialogue. School teachers, Anganwadi workers, and volunteers formed the team of field (frontline) workers with whom a team of people, consisting of officials from various departments, is positioned to mentor and facilitate. The key officials for guiding and mentoring the field level teams and facilitate processes are SDM, ZM, DEEOs, BEEOs, DLOS, BLOS, CDPOs, and employees of health and other departments.

Besides using the existing platforms, schemes related to welfare of girls (including scholarships & incentives) are also been weaved-in to utilised effectively in favour of vulnerable girls and children. Infrastructural enhancement in schools is also adopted as a strategy to create a positive public impression towards the government schools, initially with the focus on Adarsh and Utkrisht schools. While focusing on vulnerable groups, residential schools e.g. KGBVs and sharde hostels are been promoted for girls' enrolment. Strengthening SMC is another strategy which is adopted to reach out to the community.

To sustain and guide processes under this intervention, district and block level Udaan Cell is been formed. The block committees are made responsible for monitoring and mentoring of the campaign in the respective blocks and district committee took responsibility for planning, guiding, mentoring & monitoring. Effective use of volunteerism, social media, decentralised village-wise planning for each block and inter-departmental support are some of the key strategic approaches to this intervention and needs to be explored and understood to in detail.

Components of the initiative

The programme has six major components and linked with each other in a coherent manner, and hence, is significant to be explored and understood.

1. Identification of out of school girls
   While working on village-wise approach, the district administration worked two level. At the one level, the administration partnered with an NGO to use their expertise on working with OoSC for intensive execution of the planned programme in the field. Foundation to Educate Girls Globally (FEGG), was invited to support the Udaan Cell for preparing a team of volunteers on house to house survey and train them on tools of community-based survey. At the second level, the administration worked with various departments like PRIs, education department and ICDS, and prepared a village-wise team of volunteers and get the house-to-house survey done to identify out of school children.

2. Enrolment of children in school
   Drawing their mandate from the Right to Education Act 2009 and using directions issued by Department of Education under SarvaShikshaAbhiyaan, age-appropriate admission of OoSC in schools are being done. For effective implementation and monitoring, few meetings conducted with the Head of Schools at the block level.

3. Dialogues in every village during RatriChaupal

   Taking village as a unit of plan and execution, dialogues with community and parents of vulnerable girls is used as a tool to bring all OoS girls in school. This method is found effective in generating a positive support from the community for girls' education and regularity in school. To give focus on girls' education, RatriChaupal named as ShikshaChaupal and the issue of girls' education placed first on the agenda of discussion in RatriChaupal.

4. Creating positive environment by media

   The district administration used social media and print media as a tool to create an environment by sharing positive deviances, initiatives of schools, actions taken by officials, donations provided in schools, girls as role models, etc. An IT Cell of few dedicated people from Dept of education and district administration is established which worked intensively. The cell actively created a network of officials-teachers-volunteers and used the network to communicate information in both ways.

5. Foster enabling environment in schools and generate resource to make schools attractive for children and parents

   Since the community is key to reach OoSC, therefore Head of School is encouraged to involve the community in school management and mission for enrolling OoSC by using the existing platform of SMCs and PTA. Using the guidelines of DoE, head of school asked to create a network of community donors (bhamasha) and mobilise them to contribute in the school development either in cash or kind. The contribution from the community or individuals is been acknowledged and felicitated on special occasions by the school. This kind of community engagement helped in improving the school environment, the building and facilities, which is, in turn, created a positive impression among the parents and children.

6. Monitoring and data management

   The administration supported Udaan Cell to develop village-wise plan for every block. Subsequently, the administration identified a team of people from various departments and assigned them tasks. Data management is another area, where the district administration worked very well, which is been done by experts in MIS, already working in different departments. Udaan Cell at district and block level is entrusted the responsibility of monitoring & data management.

Take Away

The case of Udaanprogramme, Chittorgarh provides us insight to replicate its learning on scale to create a cooperative and collaborative environment in addressing the issue of out of school children. The key learning points of the initiative isvisualisedunder three areas -

1. Administrative - No additional human resource deployed but inter-departmental teams are utilised. The teams entrusted with specific tasks with defined role and responsibilities at district and block level. Performance of the team is being reviewed by DM and SDM. The most significant learning of this initiative is that the existing forums like SMCs, PTA, RatriChaupal, AWW, and programmesand child welfare schemes is used for all communication between service providers and the community.

2. Financial - No such activities planned out which requires additional budget for implementation. All planned activities are in-built with existing programme of various departments - ICDS, PRIs, DoE. Monitoring was also part of respective departmental plan & budget. Media team belongs to IT-friendly persons, which comes from the department involved. The whole process required only a planning to prioritised agenda in every sector which contributes to girls' education

3. Human resource - No separate human resource hired. The work plan is developed in a manner that tasks are assigned to an inter-departmental team. For field work, a team of volunteers created

which includes AWW, NGO functionaries and young people of the villages. Significant to note that partnerships with specialised NGO on out of school children is promoted for technical guidance.

1. The article is based on the information provided by the district administration and discussion with ACEO ZilaParishad, Shri Dipendra Singh Rathore, ADEO Shri MithoolalRebari, ADEO Shri GaneshlalVaishnav, School Principal Shri PramodDashora. Special thanks to Collector & District Magistrate, Shri Inderjeet Singh and UNICEF Education Specialist MsSulagan Roy to provide overall guidance and technical inputs.
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