

Uttar Pradesh ranks 29 out of the 35 states in literacy. It has 70 percent literates as against the national 74 percent.¹ The literacy gap between men and women is at a high 20 percentage points. However, this is an improvement from the previous census where the gap stood at 27 percentage points.² The state education budget has increased consistently over the last few years,³ but it has failed to raise the quality of education. And the latest Comptroller Auditor General (CAG) report on 'Implementation of Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009' shows why.⁴

The CAG report for the period 2010-16, released earlier in 2017, reported serious flaws related to financial management and implementation of the Right To Education (RTE) Act.⁵ There is no separate budget allocated for the implementation of the RTE Act; it is subsumed under the Sarva Siksha Abhiyaan (SSA). Under the RTE Act, all children between six and 14 years are to be provided with free and quality education.⁶

The CAG report reveals that some of the larger states, including UP (one of the focus states of Oxfam India⁷) continue to hold large amounts of unspent funds for the period 2010-16 (see Table 1). The report shows that states have either diverted the SSA money to other unsanctioned budget lines⁸ or did not utilize all the funds allocated for key budget heads that determine the quality of curriculum, monitoring and evaluation, training of teachers, and community participation in elementary education.⁹

Grassroots evidence suggest that if attention is paid to developing child-centric curriculum and syllabi,¹⁰ evaluating their performances regularly,¹¹ and mobilising communities to ensure no child is left out of school,¹² it has a positive impact on the quality of education and retention of students. These were through partnerships that Oxfam India forged with local NGOs. As a founding member of the RTE forum, Oxfam India is working towards increasing peoples' access to quality, universal and inclusive elementary education in mainstream public education system, with special focus on Dalits, Adivasis, Muslims, and girls.

This is further corroborated by the partnership between Oxfam India and Lokmitra in Raebareli district in UP; here they work mostly with Dalits and Muslims.¹³ This partnership, to ensure quality education and subsequently the proper implementation of the Act, dates back to 2004.¹⁴ In many ways, Lokmitra was ahead of its times and was already implementing programmes along with Oxfam, to bring out-of-school children especially girls back to school and forming parents' association. The parents' association took the form of School Management Committees (SMCs) in the RTE Act. Lokmitra has been instrumental in regularizing SMC meetings in schools and federating them at the block and district level.

Since 2015, Lokmitra and Oxfam India have been working in 30 government schools in three blocks — Rahi, Salon and Raebareli Municipality— of Raebareli district. They have been working towards ensuring the proper implementation of the Act, increasing student retention, and increased community participation in monitoring and management of school. Lokmitra's innovative participatory pedagogy methods and involvement of parents through SMCs at the block and district level have shown positive results. Regular trainings and meetings have empowered these SMCs to monitor and manage the schools better and advocate for its improvement. (See Box 1: Lokmitra – Oxfam India Report Card)

TABLE 1: UTTAR PRADESH'S UNSPENT FUNDS ON IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RTE ACT

| BUDGET HEADS | FUNDS ALLOTTED (IN CRORES) | EXPENDITURE/ UTILISATION (IN CRORES) | UNSPENT FUND (IN CRORES) | UNSPENT FUND (%AGE) |
|--|----------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------|
| RESEARCH, EVALUATION, MONITORING & SUPERVISION | 34.59 | 18.40 | 16.19 | 46.80% |
| LEARNING ENHANCEMENT PROGRAMME | 118.86 | 85.74 | 33.12 | 28% |
| COMMUNITY MOBILISATION | 37.96 | 28.91 | 9.05 | 24% |

Source: Comptroller Auditor General (CAG) report on 'Implementation of Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009'. CAG Report No. 23 of 2017.

BOX 1: LOKMITRA- OXFAM INDIA REPORT CARD (2016-17)



63 OUT-OF-SCHOOL CHILDREN FROM MARGINALISED SECTIONS IDENTIFIED AND PROVIDED SUPPORTIVE CLASSES. THESE CLASSES RAN FOR FOUR MONTHS. 27 OF THESE CHILDREN WERE MAINSTREAMED INTO FORMAL SCHOOLS



ACHIEVED 100% RETENTION AND PROMOTION. PROMOTIONS FROM PRIMARY TO UPPER PRIMARY – 254 BOYS AND 281 GIRLS; FROM UPPER PRIMARY TO SECONDARY- 120 BOYS AND 153 GIRLS



49 OUT-OF-SCHOOL CHILDREN (25 BOYS AND 24 GIRLS) IDENTIFIED BY SMCS AND ENROLLED IN AGE-APPROPRIATE CLASSES



87 NEW TEACHERS (RAHI- 27, SALON- 60) WERE APPOINTED IN THE BLOCK; SEVEN WERE APPOINTED IN SIX PROJECT SCHOOLS



LEARNING LEVEL OF 248 CHILDREN IN EIGHT SCHOOLS SHOWED DISTINCT IMPROVEMENT IN HINDI AND MATHEMATICS



30 SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT PLANS FORMED IN THE 30 PROJECT SCHOOLS



SCHOOL BEAUTIFICATION — PLANTATION AND LAND LEVELING — WERE CARRIED OUT IN 3 SCHOOLS



Parents attend the block level SMC federation meeting in Rahi

SCHOOL MANAGEMENT COMMITTEES

Lokmitra laid a strong foundation for SMCs in the parents' associations that they formed in 2002. These were meant to be a stronger alternative to the Village Education Committee in which only three parents were nominated from each Gram Panchayat or ward. After the Act mandated the formation of SMCs, several meetings were held with parents. These meetings were crucial to apprise parents of the importance of their participation in the monitoring and functioning of the school. Parents whose children were going to schools and who were keen to be a part of the SMC, made a pitch for their selection. This proved useful to assess their knowledge and awareness of their role in the SMC.

The SMCs were formed according to the Act, which mandates a 15-member committee. 11 SMC members are parents and the rest comprises head-teacher/ principal, elected member of local authority, a lekhpal (accountant), and Auxiliary Nurse Midwife (ANM). It is mandated that two-third members are from the marginalised section and women. The UP government has mandated that a woman should either be appointed as the president or vice president of the SMC. The SMC is elected every two years.

HOW SMCS FEDERATE

LEVEL 1 - SMCs are formed at the school level

LEVEL 2 - At Nyaya Panchayat Resource Centre (NPRC)¹⁵ (commonly called Cluster Resource Center (CRC) level), 4 SMC members are elected as Cluster level SMC Forum members. There is equal representation of men and women at all levels of the federation

LEVEL 3 - Block level Forum is formed of members from the Cluster level Federation. 4 members ARE elected in THIS Forum

LEVEL 4 - A District level Forum is formed; 4 members are elected from the Block level Forum. At this level Civil Society Organisation members and educationists also come together to form the Basic Shiksha Adhikaar ka Manch

HOW SMCS HAVE PERFORMED

The SMCs have played a crucial role in the getting out-of-school children to schools and ensuring 100 percent retention. Regular training of SMCs on the different aspect of the RTE Act and advocacy has empowered them to take up issues related to the monitoring and functioning of the schools, on their own.

This was evident during one of Oxfam India's visit to Rahi's block level SMC federation meeting (See: How SMCs Federate). The meeting, with nearly 50 parents in attendance, started with a round of introductions, followed by quick revision of key RTE rules, and finally drafting a list of issues that needed to be addressed at the district SMC federation scheduled for the next month. Some of the parents in attendance have been associated with SMC and the federation for a long time and continue to provide support at meetings.

Ram Mohan a pheri wala¹⁶ in Raebareli town Municipality area is one such parent. During one of his rounds, a few years ago, he noticed a few children engaged as rag pickers. On probing further he found nearly 100 such children who were out-of-school; a few had never been to school. They belonged to labourers working at brick kilns and living in Kanshi Ram Colony. His first instinct was to enroll them in schools; an instinct that came from years of training as an SMC member.

"As SMC members it is our responsibility to ensure that no child, in our vicinity, is out of school," he says. "The matter was taken up with the block level SMC federation. We held meetings with parents to convince them to send their children to school. The other problem was that there were no schools close by. The only school in their neighbourhood had been under-construction for a long time."

So first, nearly 60 children were enrolled in a school which was 3 kms away and across the highway. "Though students went to school, safety was a concern. The younger ones started to drop out," he says. The SMC members, then, approached the district administration with a petition to make the primary school at the Kanshi Ram Colony functional at the earliest. The pressure from the SMC federation elicited a commitment from the District Magistrate to complete the construction and restart the school; the school is yet to start though.

The federation members also approached the government regarding lack of teachers, especially in urban schools. The schools in towns were short-staffed; this led to combining of primary and secondary schools. This relocation of schools, increased the distances and forced children to drop out.¹⁷ Letters were sent to the district magistrate and state education minister regarding appointment of teachers and reinstating teachers from rural to urban centres. The pressure from the SMC federations finally paid off; a government order was issued approving the reinstatement of teachers from rural to urban schools.

At the block level, the SMC federations have been successful in getting school uniform for students, fans and lights fixed, toilets made, and sweepers posted. "When the SMC federations meet, the issues are listed and categorized into local, district, and state levels. This helps in planning the advocacy strategy better," explains Sanjay, project coordinator, Lokmitra.

At the school level, SMCs take up problems like mid-day meals, repair of toilets, monitoring teachers, and attendance. The SMCs monitor the performance of the school against the RTE norms. The SMCs are supported by Bal Manch (children's collective) to identify issues related to the daily functioning of the school. For instance, the SMC members of Balapur Primary School in Rahi block, on the day of our visit, discussed the unavailability of fruit and milk in the mid-day meal and a broken down flush tank in the toilet. The headmistress explained that this was due to lack of funds. The SMC decided that they would be writing to the block education officer and Child Development Project Officer (CDPO) regarding the two cases. "If this doesn't work, then we will take it up with the Block SMC federation," says Sangeeta Devi, president, Balapur SMC.



Students at Chak Ahmedpur Poorva Madhyamik Vidyalaya have a very active Bal Sansad

BAL MANCH (CHILDREN'S COLLECTIVE)

The Bal Manch or children's collective is critical to the proper running of the school. The role of a Bal Manch includes ensuring attendance, supporting weaker students, quality of mid-day meal, sports facilities, toilets, cleanliness of school premises, and cultural activities. Those interested to be a part of the collective, express interest, and are then selected as their representative by the students. At Chak Ahmedpur Poorva Madhyamik Vidyalaya in Raebareli municipality, the collective comprises of 18 students; nine boys and nine girls.

The collective meets weekly to discuss the problems; these are enlisted for the teachers. The teachers meet every fortnight to take action on these concerns as well discuss the Teaching Learning Material (TLM) requirements, the teaching learning gaps, and new methods of teaching. The collective members are present at these meetings along with the SMC meeting to ensure that their concerns are raised and discussed.

While each of them in the collective has their individual responsibilities, as a whole they are responsible for ensuring the attendance of the school. "In case a student is missing from school for more than a couple of days, a few members of the collective go to their house. If they are unwell, we share the class notes. But if it seems like they are on verge of dropping out of school, we talk to parents and convince them to send them to school. If they resist, then a teacher or our principal accompany us to talk to the parents," says Ramakant Dikshit, a class nine student and a Bal Manch member who believes that there is a need to increase the enrolment in the school.

In government schools, the unavailability of books in the beginning of the year is big problem for students. The members of Bal Manch ensure that books are made available; books from senior students are made available to the junior classes once they are promoted. This is important because when the new books do arrive almost half the session is already over and it has an impact on the students. Lokmitra and Oxfam India have provided textbooks for different classes in primary schools to fill this gap.

PEDAGOGY

These textbooks also serve another purpose — they help bind the interest of the students. The textbooks for Math and Hindi have been planned in such a way that it is easy for students to understand and practice at home. Priya Bharti, programme director at Lokmitra, writes

in a preface of one of the textbooks that while the textbooks are designed to meet the requirements of every child, it is also important to club it with a constant monitoring of how the child is performing. This will not just help to understand the child's progress but identify the teaching and learning gaps. Teaching methods can then be improvised.

Lokmitra and Oxfam India have also developed TLM to enable students to understand better. These include number and word cards. Some other TLMs include locally available objects like ice cream spoons, plastic cups, paper, sticks, and stones. These show-and-learn methods are simple and effective especially in taking Math lessons.

Lokmitra and Oxfam India, through support teachers appointed by the former, take extra classes. "These extra classes are held for students who have taken admission — in sixth, seventh, and eighth class — from other schools but are lagging behind in terms of learning level. Lokmitra uses innovative methods of teaching for the support classes. Questions and answers are debated; a lot of time is given to children who are slow in grasping the basics. When some of these students joined school they were shy and introvert, now there is a marked difference in them. And it is a positive change," says Nirmala Upadhyaya, principal, Chak Ahmedpur Poorva Madhyamik Vidyalaya in Raebareli municipality.

Lokmitra works closely with the state government, this unique intervention has helped improved the way teachers teach and schools are run. In collaboration with resource centers (NPRC and BRC), and District Institute of Education and Training (DIET), Lokmitra engages school teachers for promoting inclusive, participatory and activity based methods which is interesting for children and teachers as well. This helps teachers in promoting all round development of children through scholastic and non-scholastic activity based interventions. Although government allocates very small amount of money per teacher (Rs 500 per teacher), it needs to be used in innovative way so that teachers can develop learning materials for children in innovative ways by using locally available materials; and this can then be different for different schools.

For instance, Lokmitra and Oxfam India have promoted interaction of teachers from different schools. "This has provided us the opportunity to learn new methods of teaching and this requires no money. I can use two sticks and take a whole class on geometry and the children will remember those lessons for their entire lives," says Nirmala. The National Curriculum Framework (NCF 2005) recommends students involvement with local industry, service, and skill-based work. Gyan Melas are organised regularly in schools. Children learn by doing and are inspired by their interaction with artisans and experts.



Lessons are not rushed through; ample time is spent with each student to ensure that they are brought up to speed

TIMELINE

- 2002** – Lokmitra promotes the idea of cluster and block level parents' association for Raebareli district
- 2004** –
 - Oxfam partners with Lokmitra
 - 13 cluster and 1 block level parents' association formed in Dih block
- 2006** – Parents' association federated into School Management Committees; formed in 36 schools
- 2009** – RTE Act mandates SMCs under section 21
- 2010** – Basic Siksha Ka Adhikar Manch and SCoRE formed
- 2015** – Lokmitra and Oxfam India start working in 30 schools in 3 blocks in Raebareli district
- 2016** – All 30 schools have SMCs. All SMCs have drawn up their School Development Plan

WAY FORWARD

Lokmitra and Oxfam India have shown how community participation and innovative teaching methods can improve attendance, retention and promotion of students and improve the quality of education. To a large extent the SMCs have been successful in making inroads within the government to tackle issues related to the proper functioning of the schools. Community participation through SMCs should thus be promoted and hailed by the government to ensure better quality in schools; something that the government is unable to do on its own. SMC members need to be strengthened and engaged for planning, monitoring and effective implementation of RTE Act and taking a lead in redressal of grievances related to school management. These are good strategies to adopt, especially for a state that has only 7 percent of its schools RTE compliant.

In addition, there is a strong need of commitment from the government to allocate and utilize resources for effective implementation of RTE Act. A strong commitment will ensure that we work towards fulfilling three of the Sustainable Development Goals i.e. universalization of education, achieve gender equity and reduce inequality.

NOTES

- ¹ State of Literacy, Census 2011. http://censusindia.gov.in/2011-prov-results/data_files/india/Final_PPT_2011_chapter6.pdf (as viewed in September 2017)
- ² *ibid.*
- ³ The state increased the budget allocation for education by 34% from the 2016-17 (RE) to 2017-18. State budget allocation for education: 2015 (actuals)- Rs 40112 crore; 2016 (revised estimates)- Rs 46442 crore; 2017 (budgeted)- Rs 62351 crore. Source: PRS Legislative Research- UP Budget Analysis 2017-18
- ⁴ Comptroller Auditor General (CAG) report on 'Implementation of Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009'. CAG Report No. 23 of 2017. http://www.cag.gov.in/sites/default/files/audit_report_files/Report_No.23_of_2017_%E2%80%933_Compliance_audit_Union_Government_Implementation_of_Right_of_Children_to_Free_and_Compulsory_Education_Act%2C_2009.pdf (as viewed on September 26, 2017)
- ⁵ *ibid.*
- ⁶ The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009, guarantees eight years of free, quality education to all children aged 6 to 14 years. The Act represents the consequential legislation envisaged under Article 21-A, means that every child has a right to full time elementary education of satisfactory and equitable quality in a

formal school which satisfies certain essential norms and standards <http://mhrd.gov.in/rte> (as viewed on Jan 19, 2017)

- ⁷ Oxfam India works in 6 states in the country – Assam, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Jharkhand, Bihar, and Uttar Pradesh
- ⁸ The state also diverted funds, to the tune of Rs 183 crores, from SSA to the National Programme of Education for Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGEL) between 2010 and 2016, even though the funding for NPEGEL had stopped in 2013-14
- ⁹ Research, Evaluation, Monitoring and Supervision (REMS), Learning Enhancement Programme (LEP), and Community Mobilisation funds are some of the heads under which UP has unspent fund. Comptroller Auditor General (CAG) report on 'Implementation of Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009'. CAG Report No. 23 of 2017 http://www.cag.gov.in/sites/default/files/audit_report_files/Report_No.23_of_2017_%E2%80%933_Compliance_audit_Union_Government_Implementation_of_Right_of_Children_to_Free_and_Compulsory_Education_Act%2C_2009.pdf (as viewed on September 26, 2017)
- ¹⁰ Misra, Savvy Soumya (2015). 'Promoting Multi Lingual Education in Odisha's Adivasi belt'. Oxfam In Action No. 8. September 2015. <https://www.oxfamindia.org/Oxfam-in-Action/Promoting-Multi-Lingual-Education-in-Odisha%E2%80%99s-Adivasi-belt>
- ¹¹ Misra, Savvy Soumya (2016). 'Mobilising Civil Society towards Right to Free Public Health and Education in Jharkhand'. Oxfam In Action No. 14. May 2016. <https://www.oxfamindia.org/Mobilising-Civil-Society-towards-Right-to-Free-Public-Health-and-Education-in-Jharkhand>
- ¹² Misra, Savvy Soumya (2017). 'Community Engagement to Improve Implementation of RTE Act in Uttar Pradesh'. Oxfam In Action No. 22. Feb 2017. <https://www.oxfamindia.org/Community%20Engagement%20to%20Improve%20Implementation%20of%20RTE>
- ¹³ Oxfam India focusses on working with the marginalised communities; this includes Dalits, Muslims, Tribals and Women
- ¹⁴ From 2004-2012, Oxfam Novib supported Lokmitra. From 2012, Oxfam India continued to support its work in Raebareli
- ¹⁵ Nyaya Panchayat Resource Center (NPRC) or 'Cluster Resource Center' (CRC) are resource centers having a group of 10-20 schools in its periphery. The responsibility of CRCs or NPRCs is to provide pedagogical support to teachers.
- ¹⁶ One who goes about on rounds to sell wares and goods
- ¹⁷ The RTE Act defines the limits of neighbourhood schools to be 1 km walking distance from the habitation of a child at the primary level (class 1 to 5) and within 3 km walking distance for upper primary level (class 6 to 8)

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