

# OXFAM IN ACTION

## Community Engagement to Improve Implementation of RTE Act in Uttar Pradesh



ऑक्सफैम इंडिया  
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India is among the most unequal countries in the world<sup>1</sup>. Severe income disparities mean rising inequality; this consequently means slower poverty reduction, unsustainable economic growth and inequalities in health and education. Oxfam India is part of a global movement working to fight poverty, injustice and inequality, and believes that the right to education is important to close the gap between the 'haves' and 'have-nots'. A founding member of the Right to Education (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. In Uttar Pradesh, one of its six focus states, Oxfam India works with Samarth Foundation to create a conducive environment for implementation the RTE Act, 2009 and to enhance credibility of schools for inclusive and quality education, as well as increased accountability in the utilisation of funds.

India's literacy rate has increased six times since Independence from 12 per cent to 74 per cent in 2011 yet India has the world's largest population of illiterates<sup>2</sup>. This is significant because India will become the world's youngest country by 2020. This is despite positive changes in the last two decades – Sarva Siksha Abhiyaan (SSA)<sup>3</sup> programme aiming for universal coverage of primary education, education becoming a fundamental right, and RTE Act providing a legal mandate to educational rights at elementary level<sup>4</sup>.

According to the District Information System for Education (DISE, 2014-15) almost 20 crore (198 million) children were enrolled in schools<sup>5</sup> (government, private and madrassas); about 12 crore (119 million) children were enrolled in government schools<sup>6</sup>. Though the Act has reduced the number of out-of-school children, 60.6 lakh children continue to remain out of school<sup>7</sup>; of which 31.6 lakh are boys and 28.9 lakh are girls.

This could be due to the shrinking allocations to the education sector, and resultant cuts in spending on teachers and infrastructures. In 1996, the Kothari Commission recommended that public spending on education should reach at least 6% of the GDP in 20 years. Nearly after 50 years of accepting this recommendation, public spending on education is stagnant at 3% for the last 15 years<sup>9</sup>. The centre's budgetary spending on education has only reduced. Between 2012-13 and 2016-17, it reduced from 4.7% to 3.7%<sup>10</sup>.

The SSA, which is the vehicle for RTE got Rs. 22,500 crore in 2016-17<sup>11</sup>. Though this is a 2.2% increase over 2015-16<sup>12</sup>, the fact that only 9% schools

are compliant with RTE norms<sup>13</sup> indicates that the budget allocation is inadequate. Across the country, 800,000 teacher posts remain vacant; Uttar Pradesh is short of over 200,000 teachers<sup>14</sup>. Moreover, the quality of teachers too is poor. The allocation for teachers' training has been reduced from Rs. 558 crores in the earlier Budget Estimate (BE) to Rs 510 crore in 2016-17(BE)<sup>15</sup>.

Public spending on essential services like education has an impact on the literacy levels. Of the 35 states and Union Territories (UTs)<sup>16</sup>, UP is in 29th spot with 69.72% literacy rate<sup>17</sup>. In 2014, 16 lakh children in the state were out of school in the age group of 6-13 years<sup>18</sup>. This meant that 4% children were out of school<sup>19</sup>.

Oxfam India is supporting Samarth Foundation, since 2013, in 24 schools in 19 Gram Panchayats in two blocks – Kurara and Maudaha – of Hamirpur district. Together they aimed at bringing back children to schools by building a child-friendly environment in schools, and engaging the community by strengthening the School Management Committees (as is mandated under the RTE Act). During this period, SMCs appointed 45 new teachers; a few of them were felicitated for their pedagogic intervention.

Oxfam India—Samarth Foundation partnership facilitated decentralised planning; SMCs prepared three-year school development plans and engaged with the district administration and district education department for its implementation. It introduced child-tracking system, done by the students themselves, to bring back the out-of-school students; attendance has increased to 75% in six schools. It introduced extra-curricular activities, especially sports, in five schools; students (both girls and boys) have won competitions at the regional and state level sports events.

Further, this partnership also has worked towards influencing state both at the regional and the district levels. Oxfam India and Samarth Foundation are part of SCoRE or State Collective for Right to Education. SCoRE is a state level forum of Civil Society Organisations, activists, educationists and networks on education working on issues of child rights and effective implementation of RTE Act in the state Bundelkhand *Shiksha Ka Adhikar* Forum, which is a part of SCoRE, is a consortium of a collective of NGOs that oversee the implementation of the Act in seven districts of Bundelkhand region. Samarth Foundation anchors this forum, advocating for the effective implementation of the RTE Act.

### IMPACT OF OXFAM INDIA - SAMARTH FOUNDATION

#### Facilitated decentralise planning

- \* SMCs prepared and engaged with dist admn to implement 3-yr School Development Plan (SDP)
- \* SMCs appointed 45 new teachers; a few felicitated for pedagogic intervention

#### Introduced child-tracking system

- \* Increased attendance to 75 per cent in 6 schools

#### Introduced extra-curricular activities

- \* Students, both boys and girls, have won at regional and state-level sports events

#### Influenced stakeholders

- \* At the state, through SCoRE; In the region, through Bundelkhand *Siksha Ka Adhikaar* Forum
- \* State made it mandatory for women to hold leadership position in SMCs

#### Monitored implementation of RTE

- \* 2 schools in the block 100% RTE compliant

# FACILITATING SCHOOL MANAGEMENT COMMITTEES



SMC and Bal Sansad members during a meeting at Pasun village

The heavy rains brought the much-needed relief to drought-ridden Bundelkhand. The showers, though brief, submerged the road leading to the primary school in Kusaulipurva village in Kurara block. The water from the canal, across the road, flooded the low lying road. The students had to be carted in by the teacher. This was 2013.

The School Management Committee (SMC)<sup>20</sup>, revived by Oxfam India and Samarth Foundation, took up the matter. They wanted the authorities to lay a proper road leading to the school – one that would not submerge during rains. The SMC drew an application and sent it to the Block Education Officer and Gram Pradhan simultaneously. The members followed up relentlessly with the officials at the block and the district level.

After three years, a criss-cross patterned brick road replaced the waterlogged road. This year when the rains came there was no waterlogging problem,” says Jai Kumar. He was the member of the old SMC that managed this feat. They also managed to get a toilet built in the school.

When Oxfam India and Samarth Foundation started working in April 2013, the SMCs were only on paper. The members were not aware of either their membership or their roles; they were neither consulted nor informed<sup>21</sup>. This was the case everywhere in the state.

Before the SMC elections in 2013 – they are elected for a two-year period – Oxfam India and Samarth Foundation, through SCoRE, advocated with the government to hold a just and fair election of SMCs and appoint women in leadership position in SMCs. In August 2013, the state education department issued a Government Order (GO) making it mandatory for women to be appointed either as president or vice-president. This remains unique to UP. Following the GO, SCoRE campaigned across 50 districts, to ensure that SMCs were formed as per the rules.

In Oxfam India-Samarth Foundation villages, SMCs were held following consultations with parents and in the correct composition<sup>22</sup>. For instance, in

Pasun village (Maudaha block) 11 parents<sup>23</sup>, a headmaster, a ward member, an Auxiliary Nurse Midwife (ANM) and a revenue officer (*lekhpal*) comprise the SMC.

“The initial reaction of parents was that nothing in the school works, teachers do not teach well, and that toilets are not functional because the teachers keep them locked,” says Devendra Gandhi of Samarth Foundation. Several meetings were held with teachers and parents to apprise them of their role in SMCs. “The members were trained to conduct school inspections, check school records, teachers’ regularity and punctuality, condition of water and sanitation, and ensure proper implementation of RTE Act. This kindled their interest in the day to day functioning of the schools,” he adds.

The Kusaulipurva SMC wants to build a school boundary wall and repair a broken hand pump. At present, coils of barbed wire placed at the entrance of the two-room school serves as a temporary barrier against animals and intruders.

Though SMCs are supposed to meet once every month, the ground realities are different. However, Samarth Foundation has ensured that SMCs, in their project areas, meet monthly<sup>24</sup> and all members are present. Meetings are held on the 15<sup>th</sup> of every month.

The first task of SMCs is to create a SDP at the beginning of its term; this serves as a reference for all subsequent meetings. The members are informed in advance and complete participation is ensured. In Kusmara in Kurara block, the *Pradhan* (village head) video-records the meeting to ensure proper follow-up of cases discussed.

The SMCs are trained in filing applications. A detailed description of the problem, with photographs, and signatures of all SMC members is sent to the respective offices. The members maintain a register of every activity that takes place at the local, block, and district level; from the day a complaint is filed. It includes the follow-up meetings, subsequent applications, replies received, actions taken and finally, a letter of gratitude to the officials concerned on the completion of the job.

For the SMCs to keep a tab on the implementation of the Act, Oxfam India-Samarth Foundation developed a RTE tracking tool. The tool has a list of 25 parameters that the Act mandates for proper functioning of schools like tracking of children and teachers’ attendance, quality and availability of Mid Day Meals, and security. During monthly meetings, SMCs inspect and rank these parameters from one to ten (with ten being the best performance) and after due consultation, decide, and take requisite action. This is a monthly school audit that helps monitor the functioning of school and helps teachers run them effectively.



The RTE tracking tool put up at the school premises in Kusmara

For instance, in 2015 during the SMC meeting of the Girls’ Primary School at Kusmara, it came to light that one of the teachers appointed in the school was actually posted in the office of Basic *Siksha Adhikari* (BSA) at the block headquarters for the last 4 years. For a school with 116 students, three teachers were insufficient; with one teacher less it became even more difficult to conduct classes<sup>25</sup>. The SMC then filed a petition with BSA and State Commission for Protection of Child Rights (SCPCR) demanding the reinstatement of the teacher. The teacher was finally sent to the school where he introduced novel methods of teaching like computer-aided teachings etc. However, after seven months he was re-deployed at the BSA office. The new SMC plans to once again pursue the case and get a third teacher for the school.

Encouraged by the success of the RTE tracking tool, Oxfam India-Samarth Foundation advocated with the state government to include it in the SSA norms. The state government has accepted it, and Samarth Foundation has been identified as one of the committee members to oversee the implementation of the RTE tracking tool which will be introduced in schools in the 2017 session.

# BAL SANSAD AND CHILD TRACKING

While SMCs are key to community-based monitoring system, *Bal Sansad* (or Children's Parliament)<sup>26</sup> is a novel way to teach democratic processes and values. *Bal Sansad* comprises a Prime Minister (PM), a deputy, and a cabinet of ministers. The cabinet has their work clearly carved out. For instance, the Minister for Health and Sanitation ensures that students wear clean uniform, clip their nails and comb their hair. The MDM Minister checks food quality. Maintaining greenery in and around the school is the responsibility of the Environment Minister.

The *Bal Sansad* meets once a month and discusses issues related to students and functioning of school. "Apart from monthly meetings, the students can write down their complaints and deposit it in a box, that have been kept in classrooms. These complaints are discussed during meetings," says Durgesh Chand, project coordinator, Samarth Foundation.



*Bal sansad members of Kusmara girls' primary school*

The members of *Bal Sansad* also attend SMC meetings with their list of concerns. The SMC takes action on these complaints. For instance, in Pasun, the grounds approaching the school building, as in Kusaulipurva,

would waterlog after rains, inconveniencing the students. This issue was raised by the *Bal Sansad*.

"We explained our problem to the SMC. They met the *Pradhan*, who put bricks as a stopgap arrangement. But this is a temporary arrangement and we have requested them to pave the grounds around the school. We also filed an application for a boundary wall and a hand pump," explains Yash Sahoo, a class V student and the Prime Minister. The SMC members have sent an application for a boundary wall to the block officials.

*Bal Sansad* prides itself on child tracking i.e. keeping a tab on all the students so that they do not drop out of school. Boys miss school because they are sent to work in fields or to tend cattle. Girls are pulled out of school to assist in household chores. Children take care of younger siblings as parents migrate, leaving them in the care of grandparents or uncles and aunts. "If any child is absent for more than three days, we go to their house, talk to the guardians, and persuade them to send them to school. In case, they refuse or do not take us seriously we inform the teachers. We, then, go either with them or with SMC members. Of course, if the student is unwell then we make sure that they do not lag behind," explains Kiran, Prime Minister of the girls' primary school in Kusmara.

"Instead of penalising guardians of children who are irregular at school, we award those whose children are regular and don't miss class. They are felicitated at school functions. Child tracking and recognition given to guardians has helped improve the attendance. In some schools, the attendance is as good as 90%," says Devendra.

Apart from improving the attendance, *Bal Sansad* has helped boost the confidence of children, especially girls. They are much more vocal and take a lead in decision-making. Infact the children now contribute poems, jokes, stories, puzzles, and success stories of child-led advocacy for *Bal Jhankar*, a biannual newsletter for children published by Samarth Foundation<sup>27</sup>. Though the concept of *Bal Sansad* is not incorporated in the RTE Act, it's perhaps a good time to do so.

## SPORTS AND GAMES AS INCENTIVE

Oxfam India and Samarth Foundation introduced sports and extra-curricular activities in five schools in 2016. "In our school, we start the day with exercises and this is done on the beat of the drums. We were taught to play drums. Different students are assigned to lead the exercises every day. The students never miss this," says Kiran. She holds the additional charge of Sports Minister.

The *Bal Sansad* during their meetings with the SMC requested for games and sports equipment. The SMCs approved. In Kusmara they have received approval for badminton racquets, carom board, skipping rope and Ludo. Oxfam India and Samarth Foundation provided the sports material to these five schools for the last one year. Encouraged by the outcomes of this initiative, the state government, has revived it in all schools across the state<sup>28</sup>.

Sikhrodi village in Kurara lies in the middle of a scrub forest and is isolated from other villages in the Gram Panchayat. The village is dominated by the Kewat community<sup>29</sup> who are traditionally boatmen but have now diversified into farming. Children here, like most other places, dropped out of school to support parents in farming or household chores. School was not a priority. When Oxfam India and Samarth Foundation started work in this village school a few years ago, the first challenge was to get students to school. Since the boys' primary school was far from the village, they were accommodated in the girls' primary school. Kabaddi and kho-kho were introduced in the school, which became a huge draw for the students.

Then the parents had to be convinced. The first time girls had to go for a sports meet to the block headquarters parents refused. "We had to convince them to come with us. We assured them of their security. Some of the parents came with us. That was important. When they saw their daughters perform so well, they were filled with pride. The next time there was a sports meet, they were more than happy to let the girls go," says Durgesh.

"Our kabaddi and kho-kho teams participated in the block and regional sports meet. Our team reached the finals of kabaddi at the regional sports meet but we lost to Banda district in the finals as their team had older girls. Otherwise we would have defeated them," says an enthusiastic Priti, a kabaddi player.



*Komal (in black slacks) and Sadhna (in blue slacks) practising a wrestling bout*

Komal and Sadhna, wanted to participate in wrestling after watching a bout at the regional meet in 2015. "They weren't trained but they observed the other players and won the event in the meet. They even went up to the state level; Komal came second. This was despite not receiving any

formal training,” says Durgesh. Encouraged by their interest, Samarth Foundation started training the students in wrestling. Despite being a very physical combat sport, quite a few girls have enrolled for it.

Until a few years ago, girls hardly made it past the primary school; parents did not see any merit in sending girls to school. Moreover, the secondary school was quite far from the village. “These girls are bright students. For parents, the recognition their daughters have brought is a matter of great pride. They were felicitated by the district administration in a school function. This inspired parents to send their girls to school. Though the secondary school is far from the village, Komal, Sadhna and others have taken admission there and are determined to complete their education and compete in sports,” says Durgesh. Sports has instilled confidence in the students. The girls train along with the boys and outperform them. “We will train harder. We want to excel like Sakshi Malik and Dipa Karmakar,” says Komal.



Komal also plays for the Kabaddi team

## NOTES

- 1 Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Odisha, Uttar Pradesh, and Assam
- 2 Census 2011; [http://censusindia.gov.in/2011-prov-results/data\\_files/india/Final\\_PPT\\_2011\\_chapter6.pdf](http://censusindia.gov.in/2011-prov-results/data_files/india/Final_PPT_2011_chapter6.pdf) (as viewed on Jan 19, 2017)
- 3 SSA has been operational since 2000-2001 to provide for a variety of interventions for universal access and retention, bridging of gender and social category gaps in elementary education and improving the quality of learning. SSA interventions include inter alia, opening of new schools and alternate schooling facilities, construction of schools and additional classrooms, toilets and drinking water, provisioning for teachers, regular teacher in service training and academic resource support, free textbooks, uniforms and support for improving learning achievement levels / outcome. With the passage of the RTE Act, changes have been incorporated into the SSA approach, strategies and norms. <http://mhrd.gov.in/sarva-shiksha-abhiyan> (as viewed on Jan 19, 2017)
- 4 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)
- 5 Elementary Education: State report card, 2014-15. [dise.in/ElementarySRC-2013-14.htm?ay=2014-15#](http://dise.in/ElementarySRC-2013-14.htm?ay=2014-15#) As viewed on October 20, 2016
- 6 Elementary Education: State report card, 2014-15. [dise.in/ElementarySRC-2013-14.htm?ay=2014-15#](http://dise.in/ElementarySRC-2013-14.htm?ay=2014-15#) As viewed on October 20, 2016
- 7 Pg 31. Annual Report -2014-15; Department of School Education & Literacy, Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India
- 8 RTE Forum Report 2015-16 [http://www.rteforumindia.org/sites/default/files/report%20text%20final21\\_6.pdf](http://www.rteforumindia.org/sites/default/files/report%20text%20final21_6.pdf) (as viewed on Jan 19, 2017)
- 9 <http://www.thehindu.com/features/magazine/leading-from-within/article7088674.ece>
- 10 <http://www.cbgaindia.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Connecting-the-Dots-An-Analysis-of-Union-Budget-2016-17.pdf>
- 11 Budget estimates
- 12 Revised estimates
- 13 RTE Forum Report 2015-16 [http://www.rteforumindia.org/sites/default/files/report%20text%20final21\\_6.pdf](http://www.rteforumindia.org/sites/default/files/report%20text%20final21_6.pdf) (as viewed on Jan 19, 2017)
- 14 RTE Forum report 2015-16; pp 63-64
- 15 <http://www.cbgaindia.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Connecting-the-Dots-An-Analysis-of-Union-Budget-2016-17.pdf>
- 16 This is according to Census 2011 when there were only 35 states
- 17 Census 2011; [http://censusindia.gov.in/2011-prov-results/data\\_files/india/Final\\_PPT\\_2011\\_chapter6.pdf](http://censusindia.gov.in/2011-prov-results/data_files/india/Final_PPT_2011_chapter6.pdf) (as viewed on Jan 19, 2017)
- 18 This was out of 4,13,28,812 children in the same age group; *Draft report "National Sample Survey of Estimation of Out-of-School Children in the Age 6-13 in India"* EDUCATIONAL CONSULTANTS INDIA LTD. (EdCIL) & Social & Rural Research Institute
- 19 *Source: Draft report "National Sample Survey of Estimation of Out-of-School Children in the Age 6-13 in India"* EDUCATIONAL CONSULTANTS INDIA LTD. (EdCIL) & Social & Rural Research Institute
- 20 The SMCs are mandated under section 21 of the RTE Act. The SMC comprises of teachers, parents, social workers and local authorities (like Panchayati Raj Institutions and Urban Local Bodies). The Act obligates inclusion of 50 per cent women and proportionate representation of
- 21 These Committees mandated under the RTE Act are key to the community-based monitoring system of schools. The SMC comprises teachers, parents, Auxiliary Nurse and Midwife (ANM), revenue officer (Lekhpal) and one nominated representative of local authority (like Panchayati Raj Institutions and Urban Local Bodies). The Act mandates 50 per cent representation of women and proportionate representation of marginalised communities
- 22 These Committees mandated under the RTE Act are key to the community-based monitoring system of schools. The SMC comprises teachers, parents, Auxiliary Nurse and Midwife (ANM), revenue officer (Lekhpal) and one nominated representative of local authority (like Panchayati Raj Institutions and Urban Local Bodies). The Act mandates 50 per cent representation of women and proportionate representation of marginalised communities
- 23 There is a fair representation of mothers (50 per cent) in the Committee.
- 24 As mandated by the RTE Act, 2009
- 25 The pupil-teacher ratio for primary schools, stipulated under the RTE Act, is 40:1
- 26 Though not mandated by RTE Act, Bal Sansad was proposed under the *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan* and it remains the prerogative of the state to organise these in the schools
- 27 In every issue of Bal Shankar, government official, district magistrate, Basic *Shiksha Adhikari* give their message to the children through this newsletter
- 28 This was stopped in schools by the state government five years ago but has now been revived
- 29 This community belongs to Other Backward Castes

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