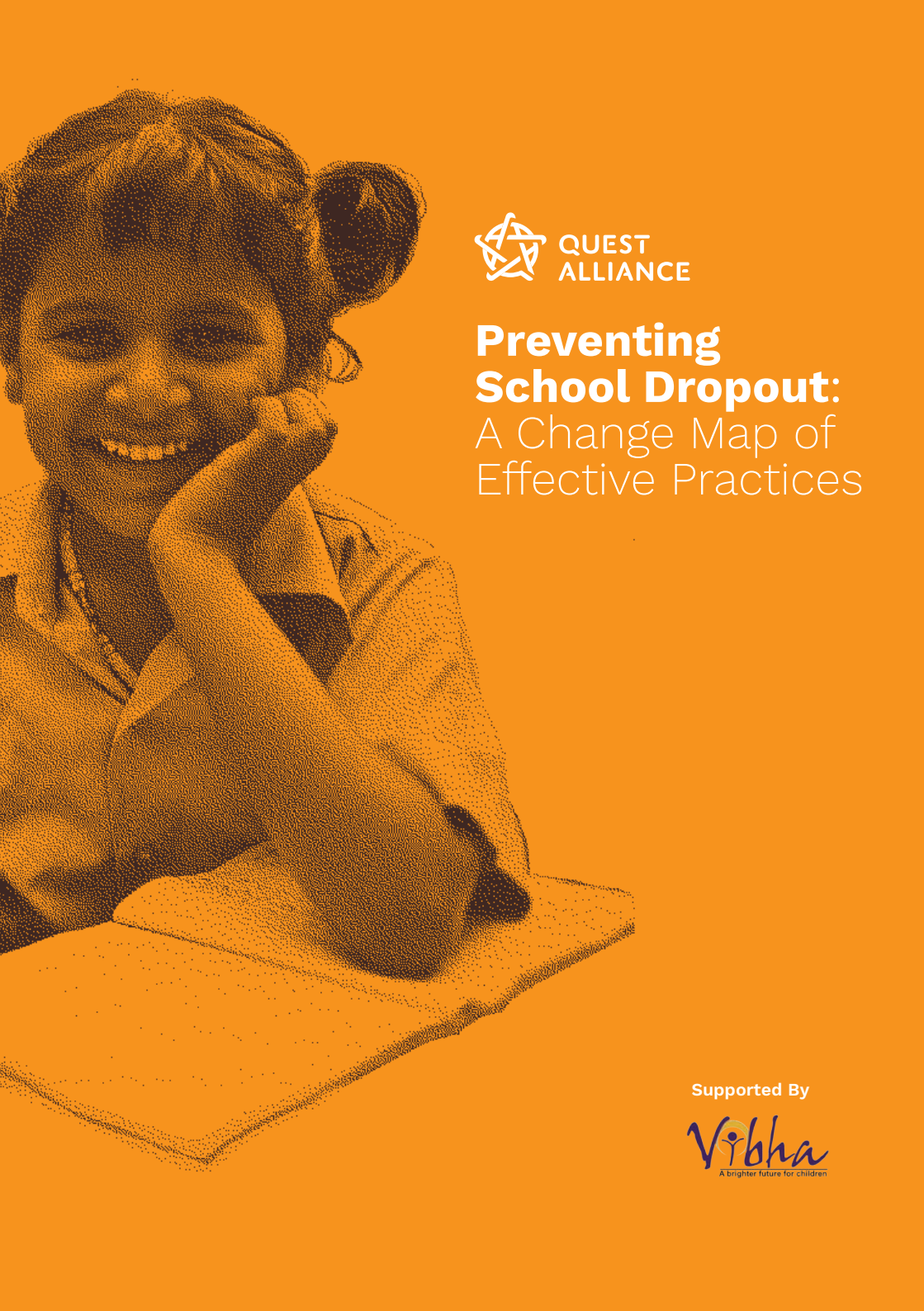




Preventing School Dropout: A Change Map of Effective Practices

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Introduction





THERE'S A LEARNING CRISIS IN INDIA

With a global consensus around the importance of education in attaining key individual and national development goals, universal access to education forms a priority concern for developing nations across the world. In India, where nearly a quarter of the country's population belongs to the school and higher education age bracket, quality education continues to be a state priority for consecutive governments. And while focused efforts in the form of policy reforms for universal access have ensured a national and state level consensus over the size of the problem, India continues to have a long way to go. **Unrelenting dropout rates and poor learning levels, for instance, continue to counteract the overall increase in enrolment; affirming the learning crisis in India.** And with more and more research highlighting the role of continued learning—versus school attainment—in impacting social and economic development, it is time that India began to looking towards designing and scaling innovative solutions for the dropout problem.

Despite several policy reforms, India, so far, has not seen a significant fall in the dropout rate for persons between 5 and 29 years. The dropout rate, as per the National Sample Survey 2014, stood at 33% for rural areas and 38% for urban areas. In fact, between 2008 and 2014, the NSSO also reported a marginal increase in the female dropout rate.¹

SOLVING THE DROPOUT PROBLEM; COLLABORATING OVER GOOD PRACTICES

In 2011, with support from USAID, Quest Alliance started working on mitigating student dropout in primary and secondary schools in Samastipur district, Bihar. Quest implemented the School Dropout Prevention Program, also known as Anandshala ('a place for joyful learning'), in partnership with the Bihar Education Project Council. Today, Anandshala continues to be focused on building a district wide replicable model that aims to increase collective ownership of all stakeholders in the learning experience at government schools to make these schools into joyful spaces where every child stays, engages and learns.

Vibha, since its inception in 1991, has been supporting programs focused on increasing and improving access to and availability of quality education. In response to the global evidence around the role of quality education in improving overall outcomes for vulnerable children, the last 10 years have also seen Vibha prioritize innovative initiatives focused on attracting children to schools, retaining them and motivating them to complete school education.

Over the last 7 years of working on dropout prevention, Quest continues to come across interventions that, if brought together through meaningful partnerships, can enable deepened impact in the space of dropout prevention. Vibha's work with its partners also highlights the need for collaborative efforts between key stakeholders to improve overall outcomes for vulnerable children. With this shared vision of enabling collaboration over successful models, both Quest and Vibha hope to initiate conversations that contribute to cross-learning and meaningful partnerships between organizations. As first step in the direction of this vision, this report landscapes the dropout problem in India and consolidates effective strategies from organizations working to solve the problem in different geographies of the country. It is hoped that the brief change map of solutions presented in the report, will trigger conversations that contribute to organizations coming together to overcome the dropout challenge faced by India.



The size and shape of the dropout problem

QUALITY EDUCATION: A GLOBAL MANDATE



Quality education is one of 17 Global Goals that make up the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The SDGs build on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), eight anti-poverty targets, that the world committed to achieving by 2015. The MDGs, adopted in 2000, aimed at an array of issues that included slashing poverty, hunger, disease, gender inequality, and access to water and sanitation. Despite the significant progress made on the MDGs, the indignity of poverty has far from ended, especially in India. The new SDGs, and the broader sustainability agenda, go much further than the MDGs and are based on the need to address root causes of poverty.

<http://www.in.undp.org/content/india/en/home/post-2015/sdg-overview/>

<http://www.in.undp.org/content/india/en/home/post-2015/mdgoverview.html>

In this context, quality education, goal 4, forms a key strategy under the SDGs.²

SDG 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

Urged by global commitments under the MDGs and the Education for All goals that India pledged to at the World Education Forum(2000), in Dakar, the Parliament of India passed the Right to Education (RTE) act in 2009. The RTE went further than the reforms formerly introduced under the National Policy on Education (1986) to make education a right for each and every child in the age group of 6-14 years. Under this 86th constitutional amendment, the RTE Act made elementary education a fundamental right and provided the operational basis for elementary education to be delivered as a fundamental right.

STUDENT RETENTION, AN UNCEASING PROBLEM IN INDIA

While the above mentioned reforms have contributed to considerable improvement in enrolment rates in schools, retention of students continues to remain a worrying issue for the Indian government school system.

For instance, despite a fall in the absolute number of dropouts, India continues to have one of the highest number of dropouts in South Asia and the second highest in the world.³

In fact, according to the UNESCO e-atlas on out-of-school children (2015) 14% of dropouts from across the world are Indian.

Furthermore, considerable variations exist in enrolment and retention rates across both - elementary and secondary levels. According to the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), the national dropout rate in 2014-15 was 4.34 percent at the primary level and 17.86 percent at the secondary level. These variations, caused by a combination of factors, call for an improved understanding of reform required at different levels of the public education system in India.

Finally, according to 2011 census data, while overall literacy rates have improved considerably, wide variations continue to exist across different states. This is especially true for the four states of Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh, which continue to show some of the lowest literacy rates in the country.⁴ Several reports based on the 2011 census conclude that any educational reform in these states is likely to have the greatest impact for India.



SO, WHAT IS THE GOVERNMENT DOING?

In 2009, after passing the RTE Act, India became one of 135 countries to make education a fundamental right of every child. By making education free and compulsory, the Act cast an obligation on appropriate government and local authorities to provide and ensure admission, attendance and completion of elementary education by all children in the 6-14 age group.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Right_to_education

Following the RTE, existing norms of the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (operational since 2000-2001), a major flagship program of the government of India, were revised to make the program the main vehicle for the implementation of the RTE Act. Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, implemented in partnership with state governments embodies the Indian government's commitment towards reaching dropouts, to bring them back to schools and the importance of child-friendly, gender sensitive and inclusive classrooms.⁵

Some important efforts under SSA include the National Program for Education of Girls at Elementary Level (launched in 2008 to offer financial aid to girls in class 12, for better retention) and Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (launched in 2004, to set up residential schools at upper primary level for girls belonging predominantly to the SC, ST, OBC and minority communities). The KGBV scheme is being implemented in educationally backward blocks of the country where female rural literacy is below the national average and gender gap in literacy is above the national average.

In 2009, Government of India also launched the Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA). The RMSA serves adolescents in secondary schools, between the ages of 15 and 19. It encourages secondary school completion through measures such as making a secondary school available at a reasonable distance, improving the quality of existing secondary schools, removing socio-economic and disability barriers, providing universal access to secondary-level education by 2017 and enhancing and universalising retention by 2020 (Ministry of Human Resource Development).

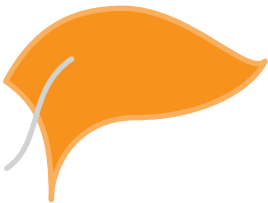
Apart from the above, India also has a number of remedial or bridge programs for children at risk of dropping out. The Education Guarantee Scheme, under the SSA, for instance, ensures the availability of centers or schools to young children in remote areas where there are fewer children than justifies a regular elementary school. The Alternative and Innovative Education Program (AIE), also under the SSA, offers interventions for very deprived children (e.g., street children, migrating children, and working children) to bring them back to school; these may be residential, if needed.¹

As mentioned earlier as well, a major improvement brought about by these reforms has been with respect to overall enrolment rates. Recent years have seen a significant increase in gross enrolment ratio (or GER, ie, student enrollment as a proportion of the corresponding eligible age group in a given year) at almost every level of the Indian public education system.⁶ In 2013-14, upper primary and secondary schools' GERs, for instance was marked by a rise of 13 % and 17%, respectively, in comparison to 2007-08.⁷





Despite these shifts, with data on attendance and numbers of out-of-school-children continuing to present a worrying picture, experts highlight the need for reforms in systems for defining and tracking student attendance and enrolment; to help address the retention challenge.



BUT FIRST, WHO IS A SCHOOL DROPOUT?



A major challenge to solving the dropout problem in India is related to the lack of a common understanding around the term ‘dropout’.

With no universal agreement over this definition, estimating numbers and types of dropout continues to be a major challenge that interventions, across the globe, struggle with.⁸

In India, the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) defines a dropout as a ‘pupil who leaves school before the completion of a school stage or leaves at some intermediate or non-terminal point of a given level of education (school stage)’. This is different from the larger category of out-of-school children (OOSCs) that also includes children who were never enrolled in schools. At an operational level however, government and non-profit interventions, in India often use the term ‘dropout’ and out-of-school children (OOSCs) interchangeably.

Following the RTE, several attempts have been made to build clarity around these categories. The Report of the Global Initiative on Out of School Children (UNICEF 2014), for instance, categorizes OOSCs as:

1. Visible, i.e., school children registered as out-of-school in education databases
2. Semi-visible, i.e., unidentified OOSC that can be identified by examining government or school records
3. Invisible, i.e., school age children who have never attended school and are not recorded in government database and are therefore the hardest to capture due to generally poor record keeping practices at the village level.

The SRI-IMRB,² classifies a child as out-of-school if s/he is either not enrolled in pre-primary grades or above or are enrolled but have been absent for more than two months continuously or has discontinued studies (officially dropped out), as revealed by the household.

The India report on Out-of-School Children,³ as a part of the Global Initiative on Out-of-School Children points out that both household and school level data sources should be considered to get a comprehensive picture of OOSCs in India.⁹

Apart from such variation based on different data sources, the definition of dropouts, in India, also varies across different jurisdictions and states. Karnataka, for instance, considers a child to have dropped out if s/he does not attend school for 7 days in a row but in Gujarat, the same child would have to miss school for 60 days, in a row, to be considered a dropout.

In 2009, with the RTE Act, the MHRD attempted to streamline these state wise variations by benchmarking a period of 45 days of continuous absenteeism as mandatory to classify a child as a dropout. Two important challenges continue to hinder the effective implementation of this guideline:

Firstly, with education being a concurrent subject in India, states have equal jurisdiction in implementing guidelines and do not practice this benchmark of 45 days.

Secondly, the MHRD benchmark of 45 days does not account for sporadic attendance.¹⁰

Several experts highlight this second challenge as critical because patterns of attendance vary significantly across cohorts often depending on the socio-economic background

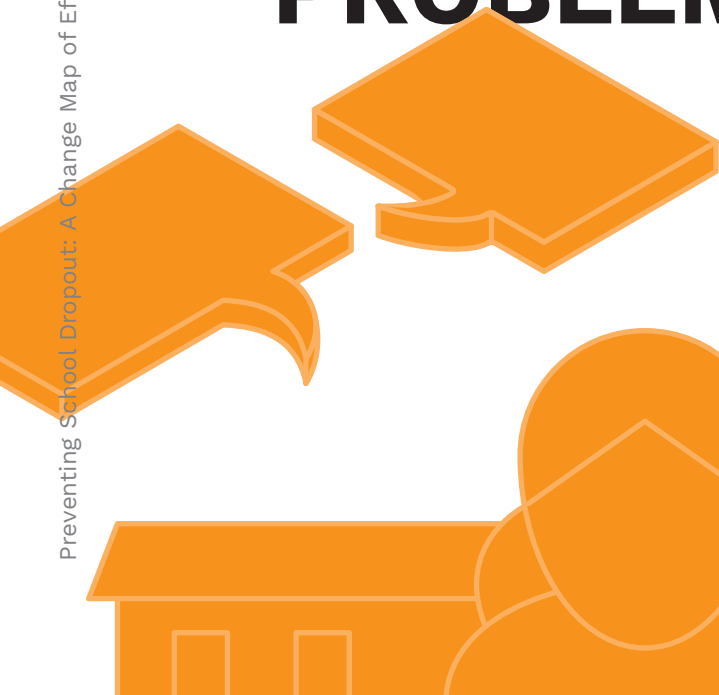
of children. And given this context, estimating dropouts based on methodologies that rely on cumulative presence or absence in schools does not give a sense of the extent of a child “being in school” and potential risk of his/her dropping out.”

Thus, recent research on dropout prevention strategies emphasizes the need to track and understand patterns of attendance, rather than year end accounting of cumulative attendance.

Understanding patterns of attendance also allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the risk factors that contribute to high numbers of OOSCs, and the interventions required to enrol or bring them back to schools.

The second part of this report draws from the above framework of identifying and defining dropout with a focus on tracking patterns of attendance. It presents interventions from organizations working to solve the dropout problem by improving attendance and through that, overall retention.

THE WHY AND HOW OF THE DROPOUT PROBLEM



Students at risk of dropping out, often exhibit certain patterns in terms of their behaviours and traits (such as poor motivation or academic performance). Most interventions in India, classify factors that cause these patterns into three interrelated categories, viz., individual, household and system:

Household level factors include the socio-economic background, and especially the income levels of the family. Both have been identified as chief contributing factors in most Indian states.¹² Household income is also related to **the size of the family** which in turn is an important predictor of dropout.^{13–18} An increase in family size by one, for instance, has been found to increase the chances of another dropping out by 1.7 times.¹⁹ This is often caused by the trade-off between family size and the amount of resources (e.g., time and money) which parents invest in each of their children; where the family size holds a negative effect on children's long-term educational outcomes.^{20, 21, 22, 23}

Research also shows that **parental education** is crucial to improving the chances of a child completing his/her school education.²⁴ In fact, chances of dropout have been found to be four times higher among the children of illiterate parents than that of literate parents.^{ibid}

An important feature of the school dropout trend in India is the high dropout rates among girls across both primary and secondary levels. However, several studies on the issue indicate a significant increase in the number of out-of-school girls, especially after the age of 14, when provision of free education under RTE ends.²⁵

According to a recent National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) report, in 2017, around 39.4 percent of adolescent girls in the 15–18 age group did not attend school or any other educational institution.²⁶ This report also found a vast majority—around 65 percent—of them to be engaged in household activities or living as dependents.

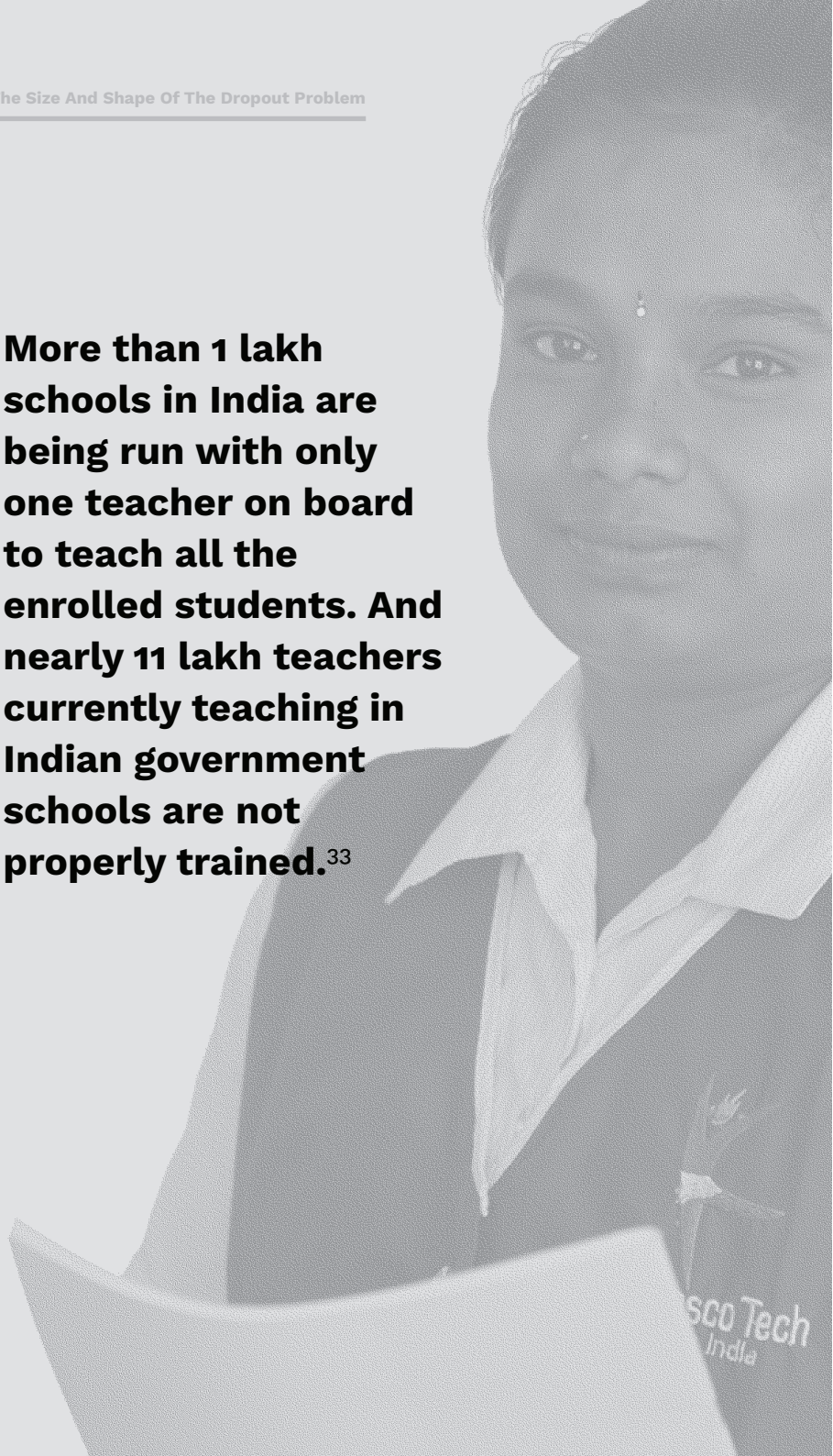
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This unceasing trend of high female dropout rates in India can be attributed to several household or community levels factors centered around the widely acknowledged fundamental **cultural bias against girls' education and participation in the workforce**. Thus, in several Indian states, the cultural perception of education as wasted expenditure on girls, leads to financially constrained parents pulling their daughters out of schools to help their mothers with chores around the house, take care of younger siblings, marry and continue taking care of domestic chores in their marital households.^{27, 28, 29}

Thus, gender constitutes a huge factor in trying to understand and solve the school dropout problem in India.

School level factors such as **poor infrastructural facilities and class-room environments** have been widely acknowledged as exerting a powerful influence on dropout rates in India. This is aggravated by a **severe shortage in the overall supply of teachers**, and therefore consistently high student-teacher ratios—a conspicuous feature of government schools in India. High student-teacher ratios in turn, contribute to the problem of overworked **teachers who lack the training** or motivation to run engaging classrooms.³⁰ Thus, non-engaging teachers, ill-treatment and abuse faced by children, teacher absenteeism, often work as ‘push factors’ discouraging students from attending schools.³¹ Sen and Dreze³² also describe this as the ‘discouragement effect’ whereby, parents and children attach great importance to education but are discouraged by the abysmal quality of schooling and **choose to dropout**, to either take up wage work to support household income or support with household chores such as the care of younger siblings while parents are at work.

More than 1 lakh schools in India are being run with only one teacher on board to teach all the enrolled students. And nearly 11 lakh teachers currently teaching in Indian government schools are not properly trained.³³



The **gender based effects of school level factors** are important to note here as well. Several studies relate high rates of female dropouts to the lack of schools at safe traveling distance. Thus, fear of sexual assault on unsafe routes and poor availability of safe transportation contributes significantly to parents forcing their adolescent daughters to drop out of schools.³⁴

When accessible, schools often lack the infrastructure required to meet the needs of female students. The 2013 ASER (The Annual Status of Education Report) highlighted how more than half of the government schools in India did not have proper sanitation facilities for girl students. The same report also drew a strong relationship between lack of proper toilets and female dropout rates in India.³⁵ The national Swachh Bharat Swachh Vidyalaya (SBSV) was consequently initiated in 2014 to propagate the WaSH (Water, Sanitation and Hygiene) model for every school. However, ASER 2017 found only 68% toilets in government schools to be usable. While the SBSV led to an increase in the number of toilets across schools in India, the usability of these structures continues to remain low—making lack of proper sanitation, a key factor contributing to dropout among adolescent girls.

Both household and school level factors stem from system level factors. This refers to overarching systemic issues such as gaps in policy or poor implementation of existing government provisions. In India, critical policy level provisions and guidelines (for teacher capacity building, construction of toilets and maintenance of school infrastructure, for instance) often do not get implemented. These factors together cause school or household level factors (detailed above) and are critical to address to ensure sustainability of change enabled by government and non-profit efforts.

In detailing these contributing factors, the attempt is not to present a comprehensive picture of the dropout problem, but to underscore its extent and complexity in India. The following section presents a change map of some effective strategies, working to address one or more of the factors described in this section.

Solving the Dropout Problem in India; A Repository of Some Effective Interventions



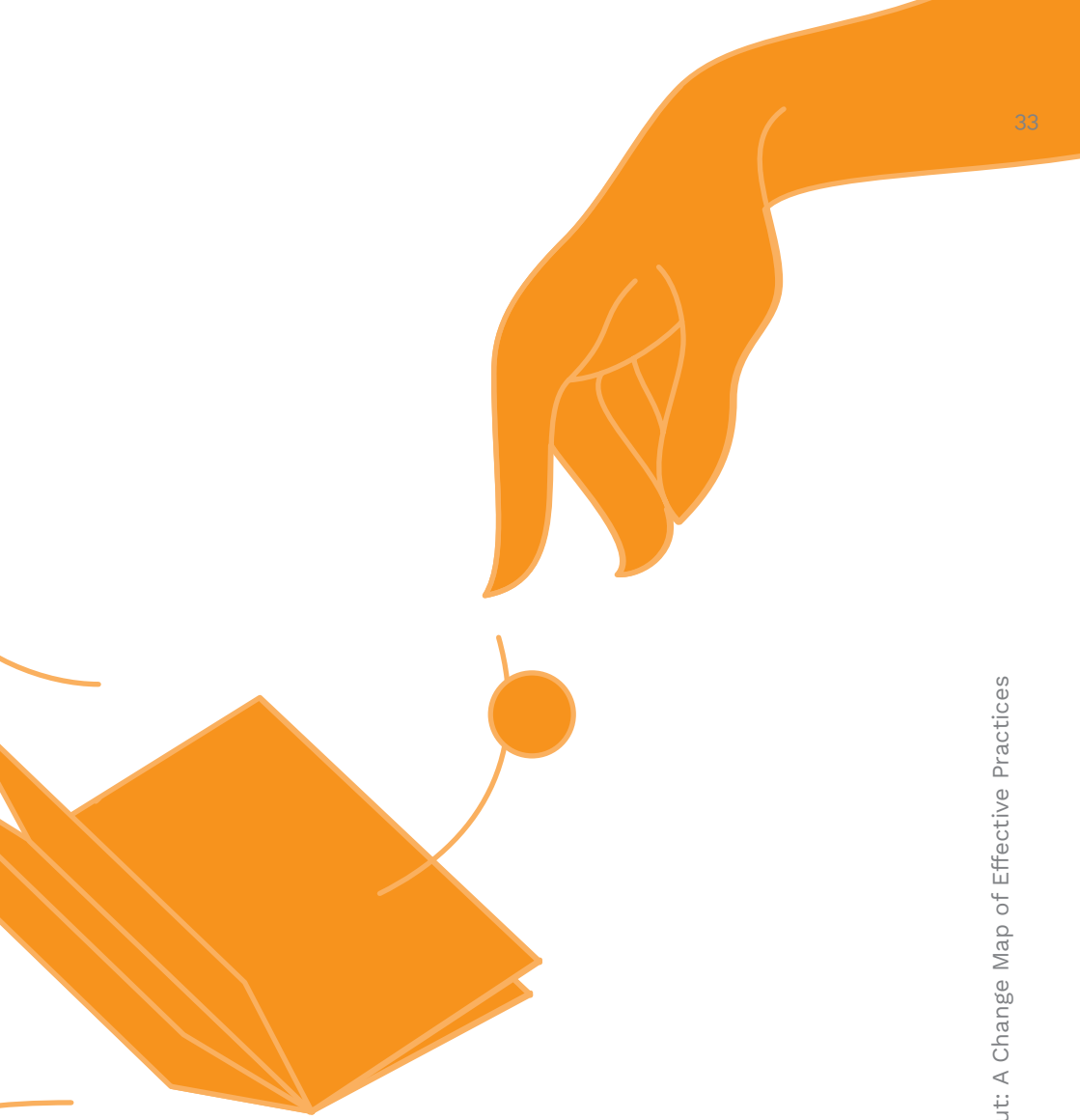


With the size and shape of the dropout problem in India being complex, interventions are often designed in response to the needs and challenges of the particular context in which they are being implemented. In this way, every intervention presents a unique set of strengths and challenges—with respect to the strategies it deploys and the form it takes over several implementation cycles.

Over the last 7 years of working on dropout prevention, Quest continues to come across such interventions that, if brought together, can enable deepened impact in geographies where it's most needed.

Given the challenge that the issue at hand presents, such collaboration is no longer a desired state, but in fact, an absolute need of the hour.

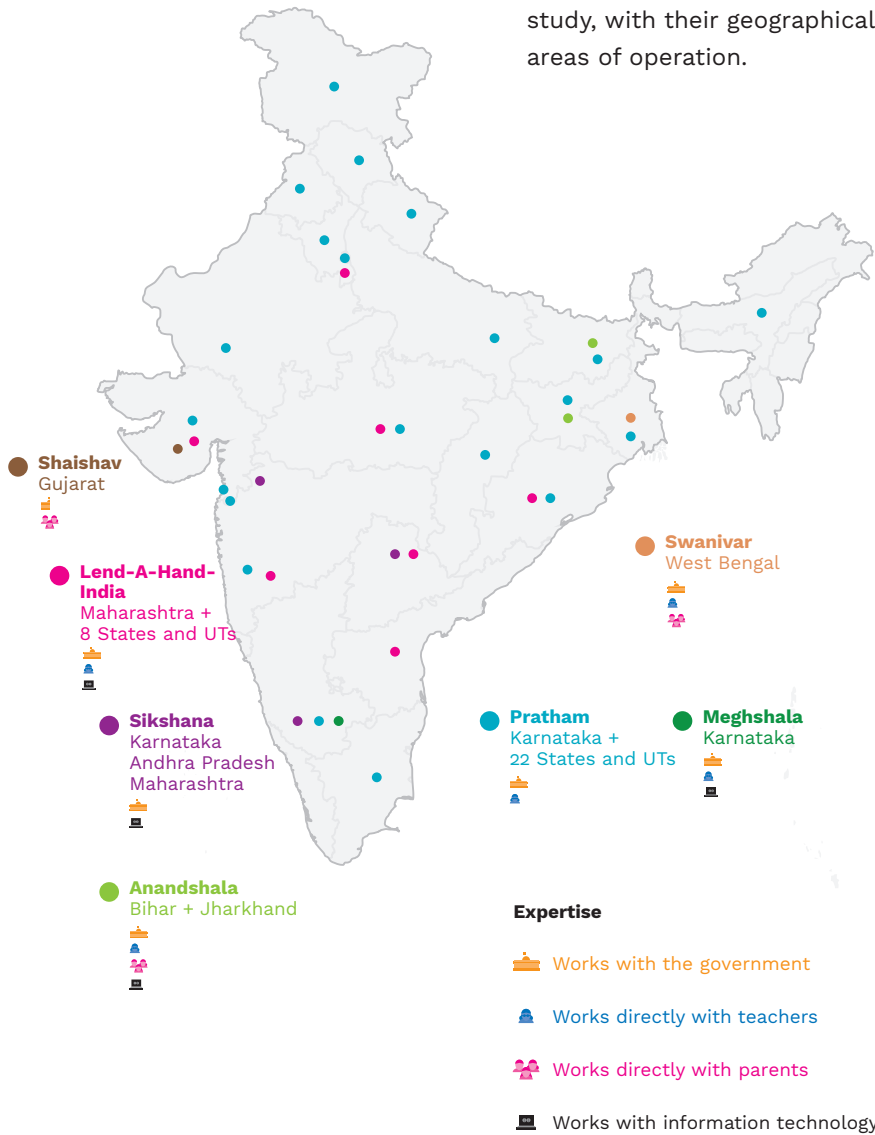
In this context, this brief change map of some effective interventions from across the country, consolidates a set of good practices. It presents stories of designing solutions and overcoming challenges from different organizations working towards the same vision, viz., an ecosystem in which young learners are supported to achieve their full potential. Driven by this vision, it is hoped that this landscape will enable cross-learning that lead to effective collaborations around solving the dropout problem in India.³⁶



A CHANGE MAP OF PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS

As an attempt at documenting learnings from different contexts, this section presents seven interventions that are solving a different face of the dropout problem in India. Each intervention presents learnings from a unique set of challenges and solution strategies. By no means comprehensive, has this landscape been envisioned as an interactive ongoing engagement, that Quest hopes to build on through critical collaborations with partners in the space.

Organisations discussed in the study, with their geographical areas of operation.



Anandshala

Expertise



Working with
Government



Working
with Technology



Working with
Teachers

Anandshala

Aim

Anandshala (literally translated: Joyful Learning) is currently present in Bihar and Jharkand. The program runs: 1 Trainings or capacity building workshops for senior government officials/ educators within the education system. 2 Supplementary activities in the last period of school, to engage children in creative exercises, and improve curiosity and interest levels among them. 3 Interactive Voice Response System (IVRS) to parents (between 2012- 2015) regarding the importance of education and IVRS broadcasts to relevant government officials (between 2016–2018), about upcoming training events.

Anandshala is driven by the vision that an ecosystem based approach, that is aligned closely with the government's focus areas, and engages all key stakeholders; can transform classrooms into joyful learning spaces where children stay, engage and learn.

Outreach

Quest is headquartered in Bangalore and works across 9 states of India.

The Problem

In 2010, when Quest began work in Samastipur district of Bihar, the region had a dropout rate of 33% - the highest in the state. Quest's research showed that a major reason for such high dropout was poor economic status of families with where the children either helping at home or in the fields. Poor income levels did not allow parents in Samastipur to value a school education for their child. This was further aggravated by a poorly running school system that could not engage students—contributing to an overall lack of trust between parents, teachers and the larger community.

Solutions Strategies

The Anandshala program of Quest works towards preventing student dropout rates by keeping students more engaged in schools. The program works towards this by running interventions that are focused on creating child friendly schools and building channels of positive communication and collaboration among parents and schools.

The program targets all the stakeholders within the ecosystem including students, teachers, parents, local government officials and the community at large. It is based on the core belief that sustainable impact is possible if existing provisions within the education system are implemented with full buy-in from relevant stakeholders. Anandshala currently runs in Samastipur (Bihar) and Deogarh (Jharkhand).

Key interventions under the program include

Early Warning System—As one of the primary interventions under this program, the Early Warning System focuses on identifying, tracking and addressing the needs of the

Anandshala Continued

children at-risk of dropping out from school. Enrichment Program –The Enrichment Program for children, encourages free expression and creative thinking to make the school a more interesting and engaging learning space for them. The sessions use language, arts-crafts, body movement and sports activities to help students build the attitude of imagination, questioning and articulation. Parent Engagement—This element of the program involves focused efforts towards engaging parents to help them realize their responsibility towards their child's education.

The above interventions are implemented through the following inputs and activities:

Trainings or capacity building workshops for senior government officials/ educators within the education system.

Supplementary activities in the last period of school, to engage children in creative exercises, and improve curiosity and interest levels among them. Interactive Voice Response System (IVRS) broadcasts to parents (between 2012 – 2015) regarding the importance of education and IVRS broadcasts to relevant government officials (between 2016 – 2018), about upcoming training events.

Key successes of the model

A key success of the program is the scale it has been able to achieve in a short period of time. Furthermore, in line with its vision, under this scale, the program has been able to ensure a system level outreach. Since 2012, for instance, Anandshala has empowered 1000 government schools, reaching out to over 400,000 children of grades 5th–8th in the Samastipur District of Bihar. The program has been able

to impact 4000 teacher and 1000 headmasters, engaged 250 government functionaries and developed a cadre of 20 resource persons.

Challenges faced by the organization

Anandshala continues to struggle with and work towards ensuring adoption of good practices by the system as a way of improving student engagement and retention in classrooms. To ensure sustainability of the change it is working towards, a major challenge faced by Anandshala is related to building a system level ownership of the problem in the district. The program is constantly strategizing and evolving its approach towards this end outcome.

Connect with them to learn about:

Engaging relevant stakeholders using an ecosystem based approach: Anandshala's model is based on an ecosystem approach, aligned closely with the government's focus areas. Accordingly, the program works on three priority areas—students, parents and school teachers. By engaging all key stakeholders; including school leadership, parents, teachers and students Anandshala is able to make curricula relevant, responsive and comprehensive.

Strategizing for cost-effective impact: Using the above approach, to strengthen already existing provisions within the system, the program is also able to keep costs low. This, in turn, makes the program extremely scalable.

Lend-A-Hand-India

Expertise



Working with
Government



Working with
Teachers

Lend-A-Hand-India

Aim

Lend-A-Hand India (LAHI) was founded in 2004, with the firm belief that an education system which is supported by real-life skills training can help a child transcend socio-economic barriers to move out of poverty.

Outreach

The organization is headquartered in Pune and works across 22 states of India.

The Problem

The government school system and curricula are often unable to meet the skill needs of students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. These students and their families are unable to see the relevance of a school curricula that does not equip them with skills they need to access or create income generating opportunities. This, in turn, contributes to the problem of high dropout rates, poor attendance and high absenteeism.

Solutions Strategies

LAHI works with the government school system, to refine and implement the vocational training curriculum as part of the mainstream academic secondary school curriculum. The organization's approach is premised on the belief that vocationalization of education can improve enrolment and retention in schools.

By integrating vocational education into the existing secondary school curriculum, to make it relevant to the skill needs of students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, LAHI builds students' ability to access income generating opportunities in the future. In doing so, LAHI is also able to demonstrate the value of school education to their families, which in turn strengthens community level buy-in for a completed school education.

The organization does the above by supporting the government secondary school system through a two-pronged model or approach:

In some states, LAHI partners with individual schools, where it deploys its trainers to deliver a life-skills focused vocational skill curriculum. This curriculum introduces students to theory and practice on subjects such as basic engineering, energy, environment, agriculture, animal husbandry, home and health science with the goal of preparing them for the job market or for further training once they leave secondary school.

The above version of the model provides critical ground level insights for LAHI's work at the state level. Under this second approach, LAHI works to support the government secondary school system to implement the already existing policy provision for vocational education under the centrally sponsored scheme of vocationalization of school education

Lend-A-Hand-India

Continued

under 'Samagra Shiksha'. With a major shortage of human resources in the system, the government struggles to execute and monitor the implementation of the vocational education scheme. LAHI addresses this gap by serving as a no-cost technical partner to the government. It undertakes specific processes of project management, annual planning, data gathering, monitoring & assessment, identification of other technical partners and overall management of the scheme to ensure its implementation in schools.

Key successes of the model

A major success of the LAHI approach to dropout prevention has been the sustained pace at which the organization has been able to scale its work with schools. In 14 years, the organization has been able to build a strong relationship with 22 state governments. It is now working with 4500 schools, under the indirect approach, through partnerships with state governments and in 150 schools, through direct implementation approach.

Having established the above footprint across the country, LAHI is now aiming to work with the government to expand the NSQF's reach to youth who have dropped out from the school system. The organization hopes to work with the ministry of skill development to evolve LAHI's outreach to out-of-school youth in areas around its intervention schools.

Challenges faced by the organization

Under the direct approach, LAHI struggles to build the school management's buy-in for its program. The process of building the school principal's support for the program is challenging, time consuming but critical to ensure effective

and smooth implementation of the program.

LAHI also continues to struggle and evolve its approach to building strong linkages between intervention schools, its program and surrounding communities. It is currently piloting strategies focused on enabling students' exposure to local micro and small-scale enterprises. This allows students to explore alternative and locally available careers on one hand, and enables the business communities' exposure to local youth and their potential, on the other.

Connect with them to learn about:

A key strength of the LAHI approach to scale has been its journey of working effectively with different state governments across the country.

Some critical learnings from this journey of scale include:

1. Ensure strong alignment of programmatic inputs with the existing policy landscape
2. Adopt a 'behind-the-scenes' approach that allows relevant government bodies to experience ownership over progress made and in doing so, also strengthens the organization's relationship with them.
3. Make sure to use every direct and indirect opportunity to interface with the government—through presence at local, regional, state or national level events, consultations, workshops etc.
4. Identify champions within the system, work with them to strengthen your access to all relevant levels within the government hierarchy
5. Build relationships at all levels; block, district and state, to mitigate the risk of frequent transfers of persons within the government system.

Meghshala

Expertise



Working with
Government



Working
with Technology



Working with
Teachers

Meghshala

Aim

Founded in 2014, Meghshala works to empower teachers to be instructional leaders in the classroom. It serves this goal by supporting government school teachers with “Teachkits”—designed by curriculum experts, for every chapter in every single grade. Teachkits provide support to the teachers in the form of instructions that are customized to the level of the teacher.

Outreach

Meghshala works with 180 schools across 13 districts of Karnataka.

The Problem

There is a major gap between enrolment and quality education in government schools. The primary reason for this is lack of teacher training and high quality teacher resources. Both of these factors contribute to low engagement, high dropout and poor learning

outcomes for government school students.

Solution Strategies

Meghshala advocates for the use of technology as a scalable approach towards building teacher capacity to make classrooms more engaging; reducing the overall risk of students dropping out. The Meghshala intervention;

1. Works with existing school curriculum to create engaging multimedia lessons (in the form of Teachkits) which are then uploaded on the Meghshala app (made available for every teacher on her phone)
2. Works with teachers to build their capacity to use the app to deliver lessons that are engaging in terms of content and are delivered using innovative pedagogical strategies.
3. Teachkits make the school curriculum more relevant and engaging in terms of the skills they impart to students. They allow students to learn and recall facts, understand concepts and processes, think about applications, analyze data, evaluate answers and envision creative solutions to authentic real-life problems.

Key successes of the model

Meghshala has been able to leverage the use of technology to achieve tremendous scale in a short span of time. Starting from a pilot program with 20 to 24 schools, it is now working with 17,000 schools in Karnataka.

The organization also uses the app to gather data on how the intervention is contributing to building engaging classrooms. By tracking and analysing data gathered through the app, Meghshala has been able to report strong

Meghshala Continued

connections between app usage, interest levels and therefore higher retention across grades.

Challenges faced by the organization

Working with technology and data management systems, at scale, is a process that needs continuous feedback loops and refining for further development. Meghshala continues to work towards improving user experience to improve uptake among teachers.

As it refines its systems and processes, the organization is also looking to simultaneously strengthen its capacity to work with state governments to scale the program beyond Karnataka.

Connect with them to learn about:

Mobilizing technology and data management systems as a strategy for scale

Pratham

Expertise



Working with
Government



Working with
Teachers

Pratham

Aim

Established in 1995, to impart preschool education to children from slums of Mumbai, Pratham today runs a range of programs focused on addressing critical gaps within the education system in India. The organization designs and implements both in-school and out-of-school programs, with a focus on improving overall learning levels and access to quality education.

Outreach

Pratham works across 23 States & Union Territories of India and has reached over 8 million children and youth.

The Problem

With growing concerns around teacher training, curriculum quality, poor infrastructure and efficacy of school management, an important gap area in the system today is the quality of learning taking place in schools. This gap is also evident from an increasing policy level focus

on quantifiable factors such as enrolment, attendance, teacher-student ratios etc. Pratham's research and efforts demonstrate that poor learning levels in early years increase the risk of children dropping out in upper primary and secondary grades.

Solutions Strategies

Pratham runs a range of interventions focused on improving quality of education and reducing risk of dropout. These interventions run through both in-school and out-of-school programs:

Their in-school interventions focus largely on grades 1 to 5. They are informed by the premise that improving learning levels and foundations skills at the elementary level reduces risk of dropout due to exam failure in higher grades. With these grades, Pratham works on imparting and improving foundational skills (basic numeracy, arithmetic, reading, understanding and writing skills). Under the direct version of the intervention, Pratham instructors, trained in modules and interactive teaching-learning methods designed in-house, deliver the program directly in government schools. Under the indirect version of the intervention, the organization works with block and cluster level academic coordinators who go on to train government school teachers to enable them to incorporate and integrate Pratham's assessment techniques and teaching-learning methods.

The out-of-school intervention by Pratham is run through its program, Second Chance. Under Second Chance, the organization supports school dropouts who could not complete their secondary education to clear the grade 10 exam. The program focuses on enabling learners to clear the exam and access further education/ training or employment related opportunities in the future. The intervention runs

Pratham Continued

through a direct approach, where learners are taught at Pratham centres over a year long academic and life-skills training focused engagement. Second Chance program uses innovative teaching methods, to provide accessible and affordable learning opportunities very close to where the students live. This is one of the major reasons that the program sees a large proportion of young women learners who dropped out-of-school at the age of 14. Most of these learners are women who dropped out due to the lack of a secondary school at safe travelling distance or poor academic performance in lower grades.

Key Successes

Since 2011, Pratham has been able to achieve rapid scale in a short period of time. The organization has worked in collaboration with various levels of governments in 16 states with partnerships continuing for multiple years in many locations.

Under Second Chance, Pratham has been able to reach close to 18,000 dropouts. Of these, 11,134 students completed the program to appear for grade 10 examinations and almost 75% passed the exam successfully.

Challenges faced by the organization

A major challenge of the Second Chance program, despite its proven impact, is its resource intensiveness. Unlike the in-school programs that leverage the existing public education infrastructure, Second Chance runs through Pratham centres that form a major cost under the program. Moreover, to be able to work with students who have been out-of-school for several years, requires the organization

to identify and train faculty who belong to the local context, understand the needs and challenges of students who stand at different stages in terms of their learning levels and still be able to deliver the program effectively.

Connect with them to learn about:

Evidence based programming and advocacy: Pratham's interventions are informed by rigorous research and evaluation for program design. This focus on data also led Pratham to establish a research and evaluation unit, viz., the ASER Centre, in 2015. Through ASER (Annual Status of Education Report), Pratham has been able to produce intensive evidence around the status of learning outcomes and corresponding gaps in the Indian education policy.

Context-responsive programming: Given the spread of Pratham's interventions across different geographies and different stages of student learning, the organization has been able to consolidate learnings from various contexts to customise its solution strategies. Thus, Pratham has been able to contextualise its overall approach and vision to the needs of the particular contexts in which interventions are being implemented.

Shaishav

Expertise



Working with
community

Shaishav

Aim

Shaishav was founded in 1994, with the aim of addressing the high prevalence of child labour in Bhavnagar, Gujarat. Today, the organization runs several programs that focus on marginalized children, to bring them into the education system, develop critical life-skills and build an improved understanding of their rights and needs.

Outreach

In the past 25 years, Shaishav has had a direct outreach of 62,900 children and an indirect outreach of 4,78,700 children.

The Problem

In the 90s, Kumbharwada area in Bhavnagar, where Shaishav works, was characterized by high incidence of child labour across 106 different farming and non-farming occupations. This was also one of the major reasons for a high dropout rate in the area. This led Shaishav to work on child rights, using education as a tool, to rehabilitate children from child labour and bring them back into schools.

Solutions Strategies

Shaishav's programmes are defined by a holistic approach of working directly with children to build their agency and simultaneously working with the community to ensure that children are protected and supported in their schooling. In this way, Shaishav's approach to dropout prevention empowers children to exercise agency around their needs and challenges. Their key interventions include:

Balsena, a participatory children's collective, designed to help children become aware of their rights, develop leadership skills and exercise agency in decisions that govern their lives. Through Balsena, Shaishav works with children to:

1. Build their capacity to manage their own finances;
2. Conduct child right audits in schools and communities;
3. Draw support from a strong peer network to negotiate for their rights

Balsena, therefore, is based on a preventive approach where member children are empowered to exercise agency and negotiate for their right to a completed school education.

The Lokshala is a before and afterschool program, that helps children cope with course work. Through these community centres, Shaishav facilitators work to address any subject specific challenges that often discourage children from attending school. Lokshala operates on multi-grade multi-level approach where children from different classrooms sit together and level wise classes are conducted. Apart from coursework, facilitators also conduct life-skills focused sessions with children.

Shaishav Continued

In Parents Samiti, Lokshala facilitators and Balsena members organize meetings with parents and community groups to emphasize the importance of a completed school education and encourage them to make visits to the school as well.

Key successes

In the communities where Shaishav is currently working, most children are now going to primary schools. Furthermore, almost 90% of the children that Shaishav has engaged with in the last 25 years have successfully finished their schooling and gone on to pursue higher education.

Challenges

A major challenge that Shaishav faces is related to working with the state government. In the past, under direct intervention efforts towards dropout prevention, Shaishav has struggled to ensure state education authorities' support for its schools. The organization continues to evolve its model around these learnings, to strengthen its capacity to work with the state government.

Child-centered programming: A key strength of the Shaishav approach is its child-centric approach to program designing and implementation. For instance, the organization works in close consultation with Balsena members to develop annual organizational and program plans. It involves members in the decision making process, especially with respect to changes in program design, planning of milestones and introduction of new program components. All activities under the program are also planned and schedules in accordance with the local school calendar and timings.

Sikshana

Expertise



Working with
Government



Working
with Technology

Sikshana

Aim

Sikshana Foundation was founded in 1996, with the aim of improving the quality of learning outcomes in government schools. With a strong belief in sustainable and scalable solutions, Sikshana's approach is centered on preventing dropout by enhancing students' intrinsic motivation to learn, engage and stay in schools.

Outreach

Sikshana works with over 50000 government schools across Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra

The Problem

The public education system in India currently lacks the motivation to drive change at all levels. With several interventions focused on improving overall education related outcomes, very little attention is being given to improving student motivation to learn and engage. This gap in efforts towards improving outcomes leads to continued challenges of poor student engagement and therefore high dropout rates.

Solutions Strategies

Sikshana believes that for a systemic transformation in the public education system of India, all stakeholders need to be driven by an intrinsic motivation to enable change. Through its program Prerana, Sikshana works to address the systemic problem of motivation, by starting with students. Prerana's model is based on the core belief that motivated students are the key to motivated parents and teachers.

This model, implemented by mentors who work at school level, follows FOUR steps that culminate in improved engagement, learning outcomes and therefore overall attendance and retention:

1. Building incentive; by offering non-financial rewards for basic good behaviours such as regular attendance, class participation, participation in sports and extracurriculars and good personal hygiene. Rewards are in the form of coloured star shaped badges, with different colour for each type of good behaviour.
2. Building a 'safe-space' for failure; by creating group situations, assignments and tasks that allow students to experience the risk of failure and learn from it. An important format through which this is done is 'peer-teaching groups', that create a collaborative environment and allow students to complement the efforts of the teacher, while increasing their overall learning time beyond classroom hours.
3. Enabling structured learning; through an incentive based format in which students are asked to work through a series of workbooks. Each student receives the next booklet in the series after he/she completed the one in hand. The student is given the next booklet in the series only if he/she asks for it. This serves as a test of improvement in their motivation-to-learn level.

Sikshana Continued

4. Enabling self-directed learning; through deliberate practice; whereby children are helped to identify their strengths and weakness, areas of improvement, goals and path towards those goals. At this stage, students begin to acquire grade level, English and critical thinking skills.

Key successes of the model

1. Building evidence for scale: Sikshana began formalizing its approach and strategy under Prerana in 2012. Since then, the organization has been able to demonstrate a robust evidence based strategy for scale across the state of Karnataka. For instance, the organization is able to track patterns of attendance and usage of inputs to show overall improvement in engagement and learning levels. In 2017-2018, the organization was able to show 13% improvement in learning levels across all its intervention blocks.

2. Scaling through partnerships with the government: The Sikshana story of scale is rooted in effective strategies of working with the government at all levels—from the blocks to the state—to make the latter co-owners of the Sikshana approach to dropout prevention. Through a program that is simple in terms of its operating model and strongly aligned with the state government's thinking and priorities, Sikshana has been able to scale Prerana to 34 educational districts of Karnataka.

Challenges faced by the organization

1. Managing operations while delivering at scale often comes with challenges of ensuring effective last mile delivery of all program components such as key physical inputs,

trainings and monitoring. Sikshana continues to strive for programmatic efficiency to ensure quality and rigour based scale.

2. The organization also continues to strategize around challenges of working with the government to scale operations effectively. Some of their key challenges include the absence of a government run MIS platform and delay in critical approvals.

Connect with them to learn about:

1. Using robust evidence to design and scale a model that is cost-effective, sustainable and need-responsive
2. Engaging the state, at all levels, to enable government ownership over the problem of poor student engagement and high dropout

Swanirvar

Expertise



Working with
community



Working with
Teachers

Swanirvar

Aim

Swanirvar was founded in 1992; to improve learning outcomes for vulnerable children from West Bengal. It works with government primary schools, using a comprehensive community focused approach, to ensure delivery of quality and context relevant education to in-school and out-of-school children of Baduria, a district bordering Bangladesh.

Outreach

Swanirvar works with over 6000 children in more than 60 schools across Baduria district.

The Problem

Baduria houses several migrant communities from Bangladesh and neighbouring states of Bihar and Jharkhand. While most families come to Baduria to find employment as seasonal agricultural labourers, several also take up daily wage work in nearby brick and jute industries. As first generation school-goers, children from these communities face a unique set of challenges that contribute to high dropout rates and poor learning outcomes among them.

Solutions Strategies

Swanirvar uses a comprehensive community focused approach that engages all direct stakeholders of the local education ecosystem of Baduria. It believes that a focused multi-stakeholder engagement based intervention is critical to enable 1st generation learners from vulnerable communities to overcome poverty.

Swanirvar engages relevant stakeholders in the following ways:

1. At the teacher level, the organization trains teachers to follow CCE guidelines to ensure timely delivery of syllabus in classrooms. The organization also works to build innovative teaching aids to support teachers with effective classroom management techniques. These aids are made using locally available materials and help teachers make the syllabus engaging and more relevant to the contexts of students.
2. At the school level, facilitators from Swanirvar support government schools with organizing engaging Bal Sabhas (school assemblies) and need based remedial coaching sessions. In some primary schools, it also runs a library program that engages students and parents in bookkeeping and library maintenance skills. For secondary schools, facilitators from Swanirvar support schools to organize livelihood focused workshops, to enable students to build skills that can help them identify or create income generating opportunities.
3. At parent level, Swanirvar organizes parent meets, to increase their engagement towards their child's academic progress. The team works with parents to involve them around the year during school events and through awareness sessions on child health, growth and nutrition related needs.

Swanirvar^{Continued}

4. Finally, Swanirvar also works closely with local government and law enforcement bodies to build their support for quality education for the children of Baduria. It does this by inviting education officers to important meetings and hosting workshops in close partnership with them. The organization also works in close cooperation with local police officers to identify cases of dropout, approach families to organize paperwork and re-admission into schools.

Key successes of the model

The Swanirvar model has been able to demonstrate how a community based approach can contribute to building an ecosystem of quality education for children from vulnerable communities. The organization has been able to work with local stakeholders (such as the police, teachers and parents) to make them into champions of quality education in the community. These stakeholders today front Swanirvar's program in Baduria. With these efforts, the organization has been able to reduce overall school dropout rate in Baduria to 5%.

Challenges faced by the organization

The organization is looking to build its capacity to scale its model in effective and sustainable ways. It hopes to overcome challenges of working at the state level, with the government, to take its program to vulnerable communities in other districts of West Bengal.

Connect with them to learn about:

Innovative context-responsive strategies for addressing the dropout problem among children from vulnerable migrant communities

How working effectively with communities, using a multi-stakeholder based model can bring about long-term sustainable change

Insights for a Strengthened Movement





With a rich history of government and NGO driven reforms, the education landscape in India has seen important shifts in policy—driven by an improved understanding of challenges that contribute to the continuing problem of high dropout. **Nonetheless, there is still a long way to go and learnings from this trajectory of reforms suggests the need for continued effort towards documenting failed strategies, successful solutions and stories of overcoming challenges.** With this intention, this section draws from the above interventions to suggest insights for a strengthened movement against the dropout problem in India.

- ▶ **Systems-focused approach; a need of the hour:** The dropout problem in India is clearly characterised by a strong interdependence between demand and supply level challenges and calls for a systems focused approach to solutions. For instance, exam failure and absenteeism are equally symptomatic of poor teacher motivation or capacity on one hand and lack of parental support for uninterrupted education on the other. In this context, interventions need to root themselves at the centre of the parent-student-teacher triangle to enable change that is owned and driven by key stakeholders demanding overall improvements in the system.
- ▶ **The government; as a partner, stakeholder and beneficiary:** To enable reform that is systemic, it is critical that interventions strategize to serve as partners that help the government execute existing policy provisions—as a strategy for scale that is both, cost-effective and sustainable.
- ▶ **Collaborating for scale:** A systems focused approach relies on multiple interventions working simultaneously with all relevant stakeholders that make up the system. In this context, identifying partners whose work

can strengthen the impact of your work (or vice-versa) can help enable scale that is extensive in terms of its geographic reach and comprehensive in terms of its impact in every geography. Although challenging in the short-term, collaborations, of any scale, can contribute to significant longer term gains.

- ▶ **Building platforms for knowledge-sharing:** A major challenge to effective collaborations is the absence of platforms that enable easy access to and exchange of information between partners working in different geographies. Investing in creating or contributing to platforms that allow formal and systematic opportunities for exchange can help address some of the challenges associated with initiating important collaborations.
- ▶ **Innovate-implement-document:** Most reforms introduced in the education policy in the last two decades have been driven by learnings from extensive research around large-scale pilot programs. It is critical that non-profit interventions draw from this history of learnings as they design and execute new program strategies; while continuing to document their learnings from these innovations as well.

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