



Enhancing School Effectiveness and Learning Achievement of Children from Agricultural Communities in Govt. Primary Schools in Rural Bihar



 **DESHKAL SOCIETY**
Knowledge with Activism

MONSANTO 



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Executive Summary

Embodied belief systems in schools influence how students connect academic content to real-life applications within and beyond the classroom. The food, agricultural, and natural resources system provides vision and avenue for teachers in schools, largely populated by children from agricultural communities, to provide real-life contexts for students to engage in experiential learning and apply what they learn in language, math and social studies. Students experience greater success in learning achievements when they connect content to real-world applications.

Deshkal Society, with funding support from Monsanto, has successfully implemented such a project to enhance school effectiveness and learning achievement among children from agrarian communities. The project was executed in Korha and Mansahi blocks of Katihar district in rural Bihar that endured a period of three years from August 2011 to August 2014. The presented document is an outcome of the post-project evaluation based on the key findings and resolved challenges that may facilitate and guide in the event of impending implementation of projects akin to this.

It is evident that for the project implementation Deshkal Society has endured both a primary and complementary role. The primary role was envisaged and duly enacted in the implementation of the earmarked project in collaboration of Monsanto fund; the complementary role, however, was the outcome of ground level interactions and complexities that prodded Deshkal Society to be in forefront as a facilitator for effective implementation of government schemes in the project schools. At the direct implementation level, there was concerted focus on 'child-centric classroom practices' through provision of effective teaching learning material and demonstration of these practices in class through a hand holding approach.

Developing teachers' skills for inclusive learning was another important aspect of the project implementation. Inclusive learning practices were introduced based on how teachers prefer to teach with at hand resources within the organizational limitations of the school. For, the Teacher Training Tool Kit was specifically designed to address the belief system and behaviour change needs of the teachers towards this, in addition to essential pedagogic approaches and strategies. A very important aspect of teacher capacity building has been the trainings and refresher courses that were conducted through the already existing CRC structure. Motivational strategies were also employed to further strengthen the symbiotic relationships between parents and schools. In addition to regular PTMs, the SMCs meetings, with significant representation from parents, were made more functional and active. In the role of a facilitator, Deshkal Society continuously worked with the government machinery with particular reference to building infrastructure, drinking water, toilets, mid-day meals and provision of free text books across the project schools.

The project, unequivocally, had created an enabling environment towards delivering quality education to children from diverse socio economic backgrounds, more specifically children from agricultural community. It had played a significant role of a catalyst to evolve and strengthen positive disposition of parents towards the schools, better parent-teacher relationship, building teacher capacity through behaviour change and pedagogic training. It had also considerably sensitised the government officials for efficient implementation of education promotional schemes. All these components under the projects had ensured that the schools move from remaining dysfunctional to becoming active and functional centres of learning.

The project should serve as a pilot programme, with possible replicable potential in areas with similar social and economic attributes, for increasing learning levels of children from agricultural communities. Towards this, initiatives must be undertaken to lobby for inclusion of the emerging benchmark practices into the government policy framework. In this way, the project would eventually imprint a much larger impact, beyond its limited scope, and help usher in much needed learning frameworks that are educationally both inclusive and qualitative.

Project Goal and Specific Objectives

2.1. Project Goal:

- To promote quality education and enhance learning achievement for children in government primary schools in rural areas.

2.2. Specific Objectives of the Project:

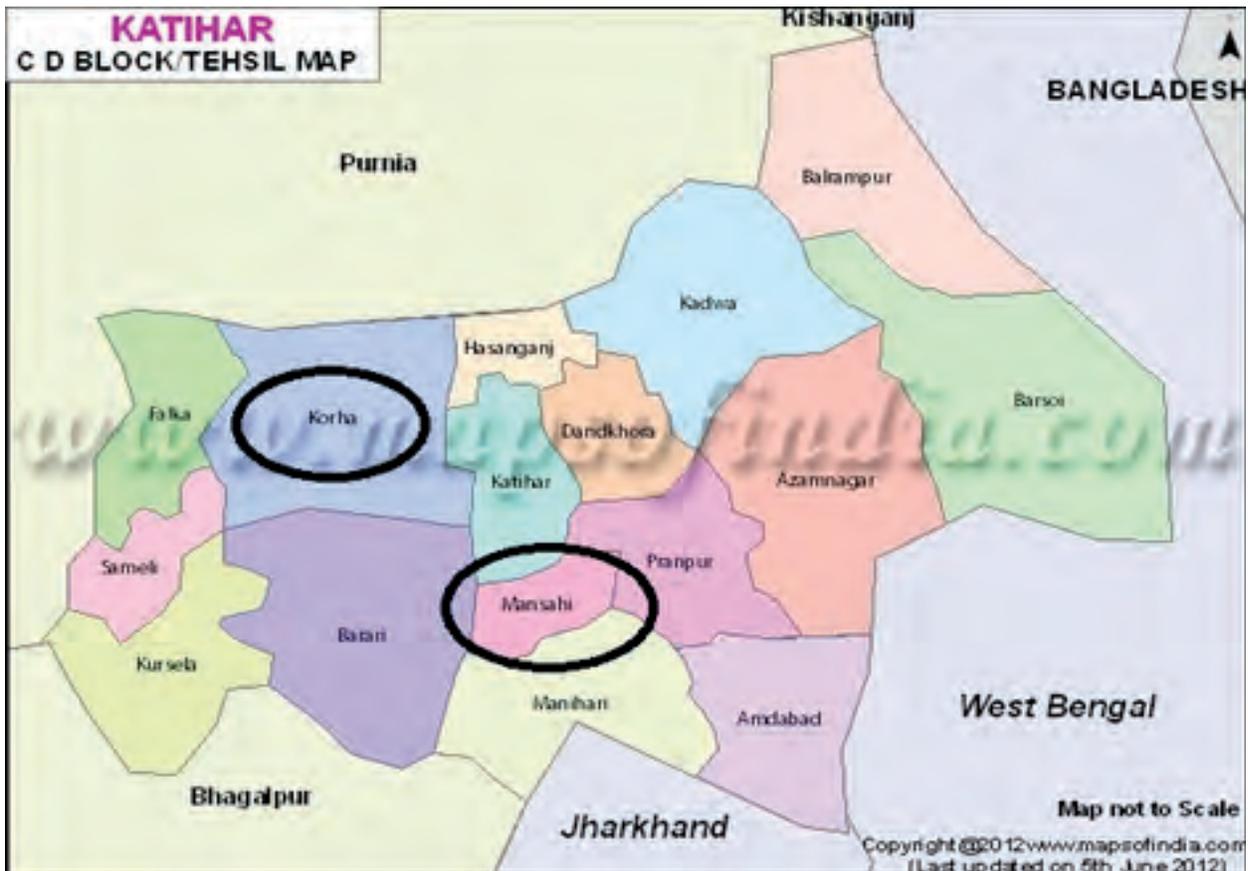
- To identify, link, and analyse the school based factors that affect the learning experience and achievements of children from diverse backgrounds;
- To facilitate effective implementation of the provisions for basic facilities like drinking water and toilets in schools, regular functioning of mid-day meals, and timely distribution of free textbooks;
- To facilitate child-centred, inclusive classroom practices and processes that could help enhance the effective classroom participation and learning achievement of diverse learners;
- To develop teachers' professional skills for inclusive teaching-learning practices and processes;
- To facilitate active involvement and participation of local communities in the functioning and management of school matters;
- To provide teachers a practical exposure to actual classrooms where child-centred and interactive teaching- learning methods which makes learning enjoyable for students are being implemented successfully; and
- To enhance motivation and commitment of the teachers in project location.

Project Area and Coverage

The project was implemented in Korha and Mansahi blocks of district Katihar in the state of Bihar. A total of 61,972 children of 193 primary schools were benefited from the process. Following table details the area and coverage of the project:

Table 1: Project area specifications

	State	District	Blocks	No. of Primary Schools	No. of Children	No. of Cluster Resource Centres	No. of Block Resource Centre
	Bihar	Katihar	Korha	142	48,184	11	1
			Mansahi	51	13,788	4	1
Total	1	1	2	193	61972	15	2



A map of the project area

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Programme Process Implementation

Deshkal Society had played a dual role: first, engaging in direct interventions to ensure quality education to children, especially from agrarian communities; and second, pro-actively involved in order to help effective implementation of government schemes in the project schools.

The project had involved various stakeholders at multiple levels. The strategic framework for engagement with various stakeholders is depicted in Figure 1 below.



4.1. Child-centric Classroom Practices: For inclusive quality education addressing multi- level, multi-grade learning environment

This intervention was based on the premise that every class in the project schools represents a mixed level of learning. It therefore became imperative for the teacher to adopt methods and techniques to elicit participation from each child. The project staffs worked actively towards ensuring availability of TLM, showcasing effective use of TLM, by the teachers, contextualisation of the subject and sensitization towards addressing specific learning requirements of children from diverse socio economic backgrounds and occupational groups.



Picture 2: Contextualised TLM bought and distributed by Deshkal Society

The framework for implementation followed by Deshkal Society to address challenge in this regard is presented as follows:

Child-centric Classroom Practices

Demonstration

- Grouping and Seating Arrangements in Mixed Groups
- Use of local stories and folk tales for improving listening and oral comprehension abilities of children
- Use of picture reading for improving reading skills
- Lesson planning and preparation of learning tasks for children with different levels of learning
- Use of examples from the local socio-economic context with which children can easily relate to

Provision of material

- Distribution of informative and attractive picture charts, maps, and other materials for use in classrooms demonstrations in 193 schools
- Distribution of sports materials in 193 schools

- School environment made print-rich and attractive for children
- Enhancement in participation of children in regular sports and games activities in schools
- Enhancement of fear-free and enjoyable school environment for children
- Improvement in classroom practices and processes relevant and responsive to the learning needs of children from different socio-economic backgrounds



“Deshkal Society staffs come and visit our school once in every 2 weeks and observe our teaching method in class and demonstrate us ways to better it.”



Headmaster, Upper Primary, School, Bhatwara, Korha

4.2. Develop Teachers' Professional Skills for Inclusive Learning

Since teachers are instrumental in delivering inclusive quality education, they naturally become the most important stakeholders. Deshkal Society had worked very extensively with the teachers, under the mandate of this project.



Teacher Training Toolkit with specific orientation on behaviour change towards children for diverse backgrounds and agricultural communities

The basic strategy had been to use the CRC platform to provide training to the teachers.

This was a prudent decision because it promoted alignment with the delivery structure formulated by the Government of Bihar.

The training was focussed on two key aspects:

- Building teacher capacity to understand pedagogy; and
- Induce a behaviour change by sensitising the teachers about the needs of students from diverse backgrounds and agricultural communities. A very important aspect of these trainings had been the development of the Training Toolkit, which differentiated itself from other comparable tools by virtue of building in the 'behavioural change' aspect in addition to the subject proficiency.

The implementation framework, followed by Deshkal Society, to address challenge in this regard is presented as follows:

Develop Teachers' Professional Skills for Inclusive Learning

Tool Kit Development and Use

- Behaviour Change and Pedagogy Capacity Building
- Workshop Style Training Content

Training and Refresher Trainings through CRCs

- Universal enrolment, retention and learning achievement of children.
- School and community/family based factors behind low attendance and drop-out of children from different socio-economic backgrounds.
- Concepts relevant to quality education and grade-appropriate minimum learning level of children.
- Learning needs and learning styles of children from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds.
- Teaching-learning methods for multi-grade and multi-level classrooms.
- Contextual use of local learning objects, symbols and words for language learning process.
- Use of the inclusive classrooms lessons from the Toolkits for teacher education.

- Improved Teacher Student Relationship
- Better Classroom Management Practices and Processes
- Change in Teacher Attitude towards children from diverse backgrounds
- Teacher Motivation

Additionally, Deshkal Society had also initiated the practice of exposure visits in the project. The objective was to provide a learning environment for the teachers by facilitating training of teachers on innovative/different pedagogy followed in other parts of the State/Country.

This initiative of Deshkal Society is captured in the Box Item below:



Teachers at Loreto Day School, Kolkata

Box 1: Introduction of exposure visits (Loreto Day visits for Teachers)

Loreto Day is a very innovative school in Kolkata. The speciality of this school is that while 50% of students belong to the general category, the balance 50% comprise of marginalised children from the slums, who are mostly first generation learners with little academic support at home. It is credible to note that by the time the students reach Class 5, the learning levels of children from these areas attain the learning levels of children from the general category. They achieve this through Bare Foot Teachers who go out to the slums and prepare these students for entry into Class.

Thereafter, teaching in class is done through engaging and employing contextualised TLM and pedagogy techniques. The teachers from the project schools came back excited and inspired to adopt best practices in their schools as well.

4.3. Ensure Active Involvement of Parents and Community

This activity was initiated and intensely strengthened due to the acute realisation that there existed a very strained relationship between the teacher and the parent community within the project area. This was on account of mismanagement of expectations from both sides. Hence, the guiding principle for Deshkal Society, behind implementation of these activities, had been to foster a healthy relationship between the teachers and the community members by involving the later in the functioning and management of school activities. Another key insight appropriated during the project implementation was with regard to the relationship and confidence building exercise conducted by the project staffs with the parent community.

Active Involvement from Parents and Community

- Arrange PTMs in various schools as demonstration of best practices
- Dialogue with community to convince them to be engaged with the school and their ward's performance
- Monitoring regular holding of meetings of School Management Committees (SMCs) & Parent-Teacher Meetings (PTMs)
- Raising and discussing the issue of regular meetings of SMCs & PTMs in block level and district level meetings.

- School taking initiative to hold SMC meetings and PTMs
- Pressure from block and district level officials on schools to hold regular meetings of SMCs and Parents-Teachers
- Increase in participation of parents during PTMs.



Gradual Increase in PTM attendance



Baseline school survey of basic facilities Madarsa Anjuman Islamia, Armara, Mansahi Block



Parents and Teachers Meeting

4.4. Facilitation for access to and implementation of Government Schemes / availability of infrastructure

Deshkal Society played the role of catalyst that helped to infuse a positive impact in making the schools functional. It facilitated for interventions which were critical to the project, yet were beyond the scope of this assignment. These were with particular reference to building infrastructure, drinking water, toilets, mid-day meals and provision of free text books. This had been achieved by building relationships and working with the government officials and sensitising them about the need of bringing in efficiency in the process of reaching schemes to the schools. The project staffs acted as mediators and moderators to get the job done.



Building being contracted in Upper Primary School, Bhatwara, because of facilitation by Deshkal Society

Project Area and Coverage

Table 2: Activities Conducted in the Project Period

Activities	August 2011- January 2012	February 2012- July 2012	August 2012- January 2013	February 2103- July 2013	August 2013- January 2014	February 2014- August 2014	Total
Orientation and Refresher training sessions	1	1	1	1	1	1	6
Development of a website for the project	1						1
FGDs with teachers	10	13	24	32	25	25	129
FGDs with parents	9	26	24	19	25	26	142
FGDs with children	6	13	24	32	25	25	125
Parent –Teacher Meetings in no. of schools	17	15	26	21	30	45	154
District level workshops	1	1	1	1	1	1	6
Block level workshops	1	2	2	2	2	2	11
classroom demonstrations in no. of schools	32	33	35	30	29	34	193
Development of Material for Preparation of Toolkit for Teacher	1						1
Teacher training sessions	X	78	156	143	182	171	730
Exposure visit to Loreto Day School, Sealdah	X	1	1	1	1	X	4
Best Teacher Award	X	X	X	X	1	X	1

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Key Performance Indicators

Three years of continuous, comprehensive and concentrated efforts of the Deshkal team have yielded substantial results. Following tables detail some of the significant achievements of the project that have both socially and educationally benefitted the children of 193 schools of the project area.

Table 3: Indicators of Baseline and Project Achievement: Enrolment, Learning Level, and Pedagogic/Community Support

Indicators	2011-12 (Base Year)	August, 2014 (end of the Project)
Enrolment (NER)	100%*	100%*
Attendance (Retention Rate)	59.60%*	73.50%**
Drop out (NER-Retention Rate)	40.40%	26.50%
Learning level	<p>Reading*** 29.79% of children enrolled in grade I-V could not read.</p> <p>arithmetic*** 10.50% of children enrolled in grade I-V could not do elementary arithmetic.</p>	<p>Reading** 11.50% of children enrolled in grade I-V could not read</p> <p>arithmetic** 2.9% of children enrolled in grade I-V could not do elementary arithmetic.</p>
No. and regularity of participation of teachers in CRC training	Dept. of Education, Govt. of Bihar mandates fortnightly training programmes at CRCs for ten months in a year. There were skips and lapses, however, in thus mandated twenty training programmes.	Except June and March training programmes were conducted regularly at CRCs. Except those on leave, all teachers participated in training programmes.
No. of classroom demonstration and pedagogic support for implementation of inclusive practices and processes.	No activities and programmes were carried out in schools prior to the project implementation.	Classroom demonstration and teacher-support are provided for 10 days in each school by a member of the project team. Thus, all schools have been covered for classroom demonstration.
No. and regularity of School Management Committees Meetings.	Out 193 schools 126 (65.28%) schools had School Management Committees.*** However, only in 37 schools (23.56%) School Management Committees meetings were being regularly organised.***	185 (95.85%) schools have constituted School Education Committees. Meetings are held regularly.**

*DISE Data, 2011-12.

** Random Samples of selected schools in the project location (Korha and Mansahi Blocks), 2014.

***According to the baseline school survey conducted during November, 2011 to January 2012 as part of the project activity.

**Table 4: Indicators of Baseline and Project Achievement:
MDM, Infrastructure and Curricular/Extra-Curricular Facilities**

S.N.	Indicator	Baseline assessment, August, 2011		End of Project August, 2014	
		Number of schools out of 193	% of schools out of 193	Number of schools out of 193	% of schools out of 193
1	Mid- day meal Served Regularly	116	60.10	186	96.37
2	Drinking Water Facility	160	82.90	193	100.00
3	Distribution of Free Textbooks	185	95.85	193	100.00
4	Availability of Basic TLM (Grade II)	170	88.08	193	100.00
5	Availability of Basic TLM (Grade IV)	169	87.56	193	100.00
6	PTM	38	19.69	148	76.68
7	School Education Committee (SEC) Meetings	126	65.28	185	95.85
8	Availability of Outdoor Sports Facility	56	29.02	180	93.26
9	Availability of Indoor Games	123	63.73	185	95.85

Table 5: Indicators of Baseline and Project Achievement: Shift in pedagogic choices and strategies

S.N.	Indicator	Status at the beginning of the Project, August 2011	Status in current assessment Period August 2013 to January 2014
1.	Reduction in punishments to children in the classrooms.	Corporal Punishment was a common practice in the project location schools, which was evident by the use of stick, severe reprimand, and forcing children to stand outside or inside the classrooms during the learning activities.	Use of sticks by the teachers and the practice of forcing children stand outside or inside the classroom have been abolished in all project location schools. Created awareness about Right to Education Act, 2009 among teachers was instrumental in achieving this target. However, scolding as a part of punishment during teaching- learning activities is still practiced to some extent in the project location schools. <i>Measurement tool: Classroom Observations, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with parents, children and teachers, and participatory sessions with the teachers at Cluster Resource Centres (CRC)</i>
2.	Enhanced Teacher-Student Interaction.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers' behaviour towards children was based on the notion of hereditary educability, especially for children coming from poor agricultural households. Traditional lecture method without students' participation was the common practice in the classrooms, where children passively received the information provided by teachers. Fixed and linear sitting arrangements in the class rooms. 	As mentioned above corporal punishment has been abolished. Lecture mode teaching pattern is still a challenge to overcome in many of the schools. The schools in project location have begun practicing child friendly sitting arrangement, focusing on rotation in sitting places of the children. <i>Measurement tool: Classroom Observations, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with children and teachers, and participatory sessions with the teachers at Cluster Resource Centres (CRCs)</i>

Conclusion and Possible Steps

The project has been immensely beneficial to school going children of the project area, especially those from agrarian communities. Parents and community members realised that even so called manual or agrarian activities require skills that can only be cultivated with the support from educated children. And, that realisation reflects in increased attendance rate from 59.60% (base year) to 73.50% (project conclusion year). Likewise, the reading and arithmetic skills of children have also considerably improved due to the all around project activities which encouraged teachers and parents to provide more academic support to children. The project team is confident that the undertaken activities would maintain self-sustainability because of the incremental awareness generated by project activities and processes.

It is critically important that similar projects ought to be implemented in other regions of the state that are populated by children from socially diverse backgrounds, especially from agrarian communities. This will not only enable these children to become socially and educationally empowered but also promote the region's economy that is dominated by agrarian occupations.



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