

Report on BRC level training in the districts of Bhojpur, Gaya, Darbhanga, and Kishanganj

One day Teacher Training Programmes were being organised by Deshkal Society as part of the activities of Pilot Initiative to Promote Inclusive Education in Bihar through Influencing the Teaching- Learning Module supported by PACS.

The training was organised at the Block Resource Centres (BRC) of Bihiya block in Bhojpur, Tedagachh block in Kishanganj, Wazirganj block in Gaya, and Bahadurpur block in Darbhanga during the quarter of January-March, 2014. There were more than 100 participants in each training session in these blocks. Out of the total there were 30% female teacher participants. These included Head Masters, BRC Coordinators, CRC Coordinators, senior teachers.

Aptly recognising critical issues of teaching-learning processes, hidden curriculum, pedagogic violence, and subjective interpretation of universal and parochial principles responsible for exclusion, the training programme aimed at developing an understanding on these issues among the teachers and to gauge the attitude and treatment of stakeholders responsible for implementing the Right to Education Act, 2009 focusing the excluded communities. One major point that emerged during the training is the perceived failure and myth of Public education system in India.



The training began with a discussion on six myths that generally dominate the teaching-learning process in the classrooms leading to educational failure of many children and thus halting their educational journey. The persistence of discriminatory practices by teachers, educators, school authorities towards underachieving learners' socio-cultural identities, capabilities and potentialities are based on several problematic assumptions. Some of these pertain to pervading beliefs and common perceptions about the children's individual and collective identities and their capabilities and potentialities. These are often deeply rooted and shaped by varied socio-cultural contexts which have remained largely un-spoken but understood by those who believe in diverse societal norms. The six key myths that foregrounded the training programme are:

Confirming Myth 1, majority of the participants acknowledged that they believe that all children are equal and there they find no such difference among them. Sri Awadhesh Sharma, Headmaster in a school, Bihiya, Bhojpur says that in the eyes of a teacher there is no difference between children. Teachers do not differentiate among them. However, contradicting Sri Sharma, Sri Suryanath Yadav opines that children from unequal socio-economic and cultural backgrounds cannot be treated as equal. A teacher from a school at Tedagachh, Kishanganj finds all children to be equal up to the age of 6 years. This understanding

of equality of all children, which upholds the democratic ideals, silently lead to exclusion as diversity at individual level is lost in collective identity. Socio-economic and cultural backgrounds of the children have a major impact on their learning abilities. This needs to treat as reality by the teachers. To address the individual needs of the children demanding an enabling environment added Sri Rameshwar. He also raises the question if this can be possible and can it be expected to happen in a school where 8 teachers are to look after 1400 students?

Myth I: Children are Children After All... They are the same!

Myth II: Learning Achievements of Children are determined by Heredity.

Myth III: "School Kids" Are Different from "Street Kids"!

Myth IV: Boys are for Schools, Girls are for Marriage.

Myth V: Children Learn Only from Textbook Transactions by Teachers in the Classroom!

Myth VI: Inclusive Education Means Enrolment of All Children in School.

Lack of access to resources as a major cause for underachievement has always been misinterpreted as hereditary. However, some participants denied that heredity determines learning achievement of the children. \ But Sri Vijay Kr Das, a teacher, Tedagachh, Kishanganj relates the learning level of children with their family background. Sri Suryanath Yadav is also of the opinion that heredity, to some extent, and individual talent affects learning achievement. Participant's teachers seemed confused about the factors affecting learning level of children. Sri Shahnawaz Hussain, a young teacher-in-charge in a school of Tedagachh block of Kishanganj held parents responsible for the underachievement of children belonging to marginalised groups, thereby, supporting the notion of hereditary educability.

“School kids” are different from “street kids”-considered almost all participating teachers. The participants are unaware of the pain and sufferings street children undergo in making a daily sustenance, which make them much more experienced, more matured than their age, and thus, many a times, , deviant. Sri Shahnawaz Hussain said that street children should be treated differently in the alternative education system, as they can hamper in maintaining school discipline when allowed to interact with other children in the classroom. Street children grow with a different identity, and often find themselves neglected and situations of untouchability both by peers and teachers. Thus, they tend to develop aversion towards formal schooling. Most of these street children are from the nomadic families who are on the move from one place to another in search of living and hence it is really difficult for them to continue with the formal education process, added a teacher.

Boys are for schools, Girls are for marriage-this notion is now a past, finds all teachers as the statistics establish gender parity in enrolment in government schools in Bihar. The female participant teachers were totally against this notion and discarded gender discrimination in the society as a thing of the past. Ms. Anjum Ara, a teacher in a school in Bihiya block, added that Muslim girls are actively participating in school education. The barriers to school education have been broken and society has started recognising the importance of girl education. The girls are now enjoying the long awaited freedom to learn, thanks to RTE, she added.

Children learn only from textbook transaction by teachers in the classroom. It is a myth. Children learn in many places-in the lap of the mother, home, society, within the four walls of school, from the environment and the surrounding too, says Sri Deoshankar Tiwari, a BRC co coordinator in Bihiya. He also highlighted that

ability to learn is a gift to child from his/her family which is rarely recognized and respected in the schools by the teachers. The conventional teaching process and schools do not help the children in actualising their ability to do something extraordinary in life—the denial of a spontaneous growth.

Inclusive Education means enrolment of all children in school—this myth received a mixed response from the participants. Sri Awadhesh Sharma defined inclusive education as bringing children with special needs or physically challenged group into school. Whereas Sri Deo Shankar Tiwari and Sri Sarvesh Ram further extended the concept of inclusive education to include children that are not currently part of the school system. Sri Rameshwar Jee, headmaster of an upper primary school blames the system for non-implementation of the RTE, which has sabotaged the public education system in a panned manner. Further, the teachers added that everybody is responsible for the same—BLO, Census worker, enumerator, midday meal arranger, but certainly not teachers. And for these teachers, too, are responsible to a great extent as they have utterly failed to deliver. All educational incentives such as midday meal, scholarships, cycles, dress etc. have ensured participation of children in school temporarily, but where is real learning— it seems that “objective is lost in pursuit of means” laments Sri Rameshwar jee. How to ensure inclusivity and quality in education when 8 teachers are to take care of the diverse educational needs of 1400 children? Sri Rameshwar cites the example of Navodaya Vidyalay where PTR is 1:40, 2 toilets for 40 children and Rs. 30/child/day towards meal is available against Rs. 3.37/child/day under MDM in Govt. Schools. The approach of the government towards public education system is itself discriminatory, they added

Sri Anoop Kr. Das, Headmaster in a primary School in Tedagachh Block of Kishanganj asked how and why it is expected from the teachers to implement inclusive quality education, when they themselves are discriminated in terms of wage disparity among teachers. They themselves are struggling for parity and survival, and frustration never yields good results. He also questioned the selection process of newly appointed teachers as most of them are not fit for the jobs and are soldiers without weapon. Once placed high in the society, the teachers today have become the most ridiculous creature in the society, he frowned.