

A REPORT

On

**Increasing School Participation and
Learning Enhancement of Children
through Activity Based Learning in
K. Nagar Block, Purnia, Bihar**



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1. Executive Summary

Embodied belief systems in schools influence how students connect academic content to real-life applications within and beyond the classroom. The agricultural cycle, growing of crops and harvesting of natural resources provides teachers in rural schools with possibilities to engage their students from agricultural communities by providing real-life contexts. By referring to the lived experiences of their students, teachers can help them to engage in experiential learning and apply what they learn in language, math and social studies. Thus, connecting content to real-world applications, students are able to experience greater learning achievements through Activity Based Learning (ABL).

The endeavours to increase the learning achievements by Deshkal Society began in April 2015 and its first phase concluded in March 2017 in K. Nagar block of Purnia district in rural Bihar. In the following year, from June 2017 to May 2021, the focus was centred primarily on the ABL process to enhance schools effectiveness and learning achievements among students from agrarian communities in the same block. This report details the outcome of the post-project evaluation based on the key findings and resolved challenges of the later period, i.e. from June 2017 to May 2021. Its aim is to facilitate and guide teachers and facilitators in implementing similar ABL projects in the future.

Deshkal Society fulfilled both a primary as well as a complementary role in the implementation of the ABL project. Its primary role was envisaged and duly enacted in the implementation of the project objectives, and the complementary role, on the other hand, was the outcome of ground level interactions and complexities that caused the Society to be in the forefront as a facilitator for the effective implementation of government schemes in the project schools. At the direct implementation level, there was concerted focus on 'child-centric classroom practices' through the provision of effective ABL teaching learning material and demonstration of these practices in class through a hand holding approach.

Developing teachers' skills for ABL based inclusive learning was another important aspect of the project implementation. The introduction of ABL inspired inclusive learning practices were based on teachers' preferences for teaching with the resources at hand and tailored towards the organizational limitations of the school. For this reason, the ABL Tool Kit and relevant training offered essential pedagogic approaches and strategies designed to address the belief systems of the teachers and the required behaviour changes needed to render their teaching truly inclusive. A very important aspect of teacher capacity building has been the teacher training and refresher courses that were conducted through the already existing CRC structure. Motivational strategies were also employed to further strengthen the mutually dependent relationship between parents and schools. In addition to these, regular PTMs, the SEC meetings, with significant representations from parents, were made more functional and active. In its role of facilitator, Deshkal Society continuously worked with the government machinery with particular reference to building infrastructure, drinking water, toilets, mid-day meals and the provision of free text books across the project schools.

The project explicitly created an enabling environment for delivering quality education to children from diverse socio economic backgrounds, in particular children from agricultural communities. It fulfilled the significant role of a catalyst in order to evolve and strengthen the positive disposition of parents towards the schools, a better parent-teacher relationship, the building of teacher capacity by inspiring behavioural changes and providing pedagogic training. The project also successfully sensitised government officials and thus helped facilitate the efficient implementation of promotional schemes to improve the educational system. All these project components helped transform dysfunctional schools into more active and functional centres of learning.

The project has served as a pilot programme for increasing the learning levels of children from agricultural communities and shows replicable potential in rural areas with similar social and economic conditions,. 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 exert a much larger impact, beyond its present limited scope, and help usher in much needed learning improvements through frameworks that are educationally both inclusive and qualitative.

2. Scope of the Assignment and Methodology

2.1. Scope of the Assignment

The objective of this assignment is to conduct an end-term evaluation of the processes adopted and results generated upon the implementation of the project. In addition, the aim is to evaluate, in accordance with the project objectives, the process and impact of the activities that have been realized in the field after one year implementation endeavors of Deshkal Society. This includes:

- u Understanding the interventions and their impact on:
 - Increasing learning achievements, particularly with regard to the introduction of the ABL process in classrooms
 - Class ambience and children's behavioral change on being part of the ABL process
 - Increased engagement of parents and community members with schools and their children's educational activities
 - Teachers' interest and motivation to be a part of the process
 - Streamlined school infrastructure and TLM availability
- u Document incisive observations and critical challenges
- u Record the recommendations that have emerged during various consultations, including meetings and workshops.

2.2. Methodology

The evaluation process consists of a methodological mix that includes both field based data gathering and secondary documents that have been provided by Deshkal Society. The field visit was carried out between 12 and 14 June 2018. Altogether 7 schools were visited during the process. In addition, two CRCs and the BRC were also consulted.

An intensive classroom observation was conducted during the visit to study teachers and students engaged in the teaching-learning process based on ABL. Besides, the following stakeholders were also consulted to elicit their opinion and the additional information:

- Block Resource Center Coordinator
- Cluster Resource Center Coordinators
- School headmasters
- Teachers
- SEC members
- Parents and community members
- Students

3. Project Goal and Specific Objectives

3.1. Project Goal

- E Increasing School Participation and Learning Enhancement of Children from Agricultural Communities based on an Innovative Method through Activity Based Learning in K. Nagar Block, Purnia, Bihar.

3.2. Specific Objectives of the Project

- To facilitate child-centred classroom based on Activity Based Learning (ABL) for management of multi grade classrooms, peer learning and group activities of the children to enhance classroom participation and learning achievement.
- To increase schooling outcomes, such as learning achievement, enrolment, retention and attendance through developing engagement with the community, parents and teachers for interventions through the School Education Committees as well as Parents Teachers Meetings.
- To develop a constructive and effective engagement of the School Education Committees with the schools, Cluster Resource Centres (CRCs), Block resource Centre (BRC) and district level institutions for improvement of the quality of schools and enabling the schools to be successful.
- To facilitate effective implementation of the provisions for basic infrastructural facilities like drinking water and toilets in schools.
- To ensure that the enabling provisions such as the mid-day meal scheme, distribution of free textbooks and sports materials are effectively implemented.
- To substantiate and realise process documentation, end line assessment, evaluation and publication and dissemination of the final report.

4. Project Area and Coverage

The project was implemented in K. Nagar block of district Purnia in the state of Bihar. A total of 48,869 children of 165 primary and upper primary schools were introduced to the ABL process. The following table details the area and coverage of the project:

Table 1: Project area specifications

State	District	Block	No. of Primary and Upper Schools	No. of Children	No. of Teachers	No. of Cluster Resource Centres	No. of Block Resource Centre
Bihar	Purnia	K. Nagar	165	48,869	956	13	1

Map of the block Krityanand Nagar in district Purnia

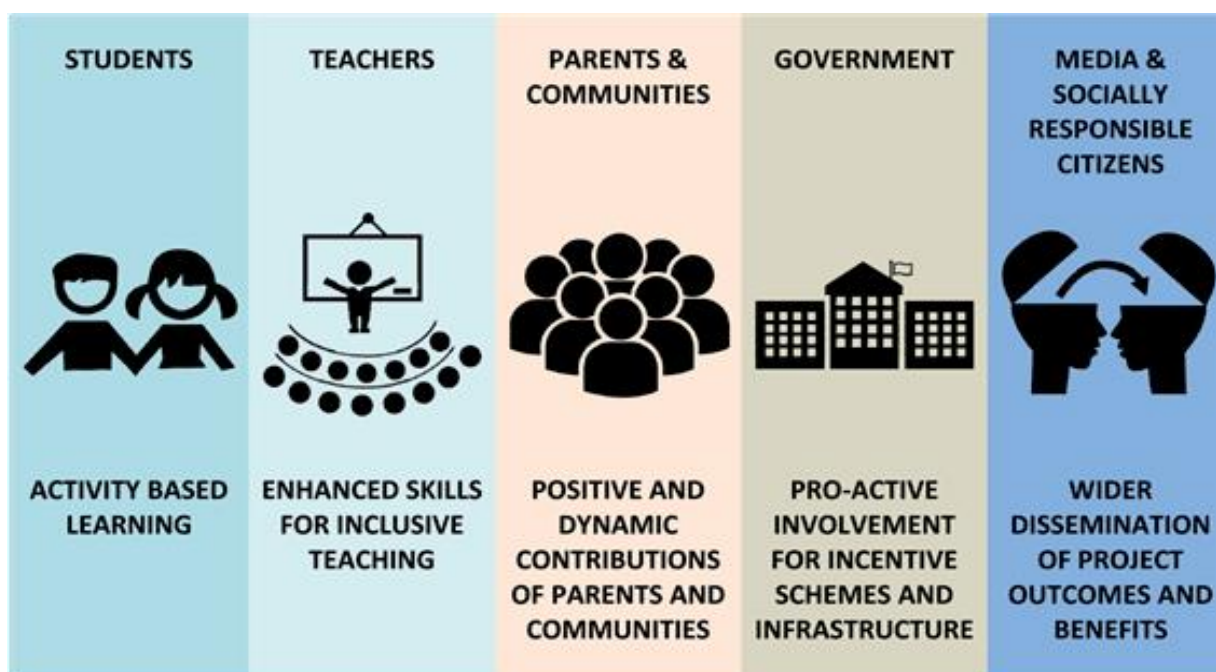


5. Project Implementation Process: Stakeholders and Symbiotic Strategies

Deshkal Society has carried out a three-pronged strategy in the project block: at first, it was involved in direct interventions to ensure quality education for children from mainly agrarian communities. Among other things, Deshkal Society introduced the ABL process in all schools of K. Nagar, and continued to improvise and strengthen it for the duration of the project. Secondly, Deshkal Society carried out intense advocacy and social mobilisation strategies to facilitate the effective implementation in the project schools of the government schemes that were earmarked in the project objectives. Thirdly, the society also disseminated its findings and challenges via various platforms (workshops, meetings and mass media) to ensure that the project outcomes have the potential of state-wide and nation-wide replicability and adaptability.

The project was implemented through the active involvement and generous support of a number of stakeholders, whose enduring and wide-ranging participation was vital to the success of the entire process. The following framework details the various stakeholders and specifies their respective arena of involvement.

Framework: Stakeholders and Symbiotic Strategies



5.1. Activity Based Learning: Traditional, Formulaic and Monotonous Teaching Mechanism replaced by Inclusive, Experiential and Enduring Learning Process



Students engaging in ABL activities

improvise and enrich not only their learning experiences, but also that of their class fellows, which in the traditional format remain distant and unreachable entities. Second, the project was intended to counterbalance the traditional method of teaching, which does not take the short attention span of most children into account. As a result, the traditional didactic lecturing method is not able to hold the students' attention long enough to prevent them from diverting their attention from the classroom proceedings to any other activity that captures their interest, whether it is within the classroom or beyond. The ABL tools that have been distributed in schools and employed in the classrooms are able to captivate the attention of children and continually engage them in the learning process with their teacher and other class fellow. The tools distributed by Deshkal Society, include alphabet, number and symbol kits and were aptly displayed in the classrooms. Third, schools in K. Nagar block, as in other parts of Bihar, face huge problem in acquiring and distributing text books among children at the appropriate time. Sometimes, text books arrive months too late. In these unfavourable circumstances, the presence of ABL kits helped the students immensely and was the reason that they could continue to take part in the studies. The ABL kits helped the children in learning to read and they deployed the flash cards with great enthusiasm. Mr. Pawan Kumar, teacher of Middle School Mazra, appreciatively commented that "these ABL tools bring interest (sarasta) to the learning process and you can see that children are happy and really enjoying the chance to express themselves in this way".

Right from the beginning, the project aimed to employ the ABL process and its tools as a novel and game changing method to replace monotonous rote learning classroom performances on three counts. First, the project was geared towards largely replacing the traditional method of passive learning by active and energised forms of learning which allow children to be at all times involved in the classroom proceedings and continuously discover,



A student's improvised and self created ABL tool

5.2. Teachers' Enhanced Skill to Decentre herself and Facilitate Inclusive Learning



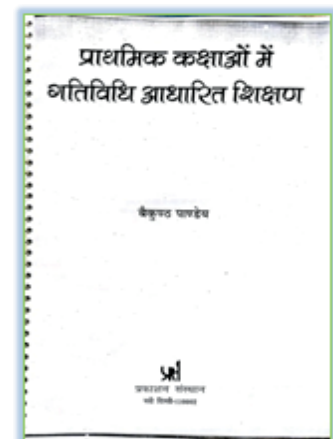
Children and teacher immersed in ABL activities

“The problem of the lecture mode of teaching is that the teacher herself becomes the focus of attention. It should be just opposite and that is what ABL teaches us to do: to make children the focus and the centre of activities”, said Mr. Dharmendra Kumar, teacher at Primary School Hardiya Rahika. According to Mr. Dharmendra Kumar, “when Deshkal Society first introduced ABL techniques and tools in our school, we employed these enthusiastically. On seeing the

results and the interest it generated among children we began to make our own ABL tools to strengthen the process”.

Deshkal Society has used three sites to inculcate the importance of the ABL process in teachers. First, its staffs visited schools of Purnia block to convince teachers to adopt ABL methods to teach children.

Second, the society utilised the CRC meeting venue in all 13 CRCs of the block to discuss all steps of the ABL process with teachers. Deshkal Society showed the teachers videos/documentaries and distributed guidelines pertaining to the ABL method and followed this with discussions to evaluate teachers' experiences and help overcome their hesitations in using ABL.



Distributed ABL guideline

Third, Deshkal Society invited 52 teachers from K. Nagar block to visit the Takshila school at Bodh Gaya from the 1st May to the 3rd May to gain more experience with ABL. The visit, which included 25 female teachers and 13 SC teachers, was to further expose teachers to ABL methods by means of demonstrations. Additionally, the visit also served to show the system of SMART classes and awareness about the history and heritage of the state. At first, classroom observations



Teachers during the exposure visit at Takshila school

were organised in primary and upper-primary classes, where the teachers of Takshila school used ABL methods to make lessons interesting and the students more responsive. Subsequently, an intense discussion followed between visiting teachers and host or demonstrating teachers. It became obvious that both the students and teachers of Takshila school were very enthusiast about the ABL tools and their benefits. The

discussion centred on three points: (1) the techniques of ABL and SMART classes, (2) the content of ABL lessons and SMART classes and (3) ways in which to implement these methods in other schools in Purnia. The visiting teachers appreciated the existing teaching-learning processes of Takshila school and realised that this kind of exposure could improve the same in K. Nagar block of Purnia district.

As is evident from the observation of Mr. Manish Kumar Srivastava, the CRCC of Parora cluster, that the visit proved to be an eye-opener for the teachers: “We have learnt a lot, but we have to see what we can do in our schools in K. Nagar, given our limited resources and ABL tools. Moreover, the backgrounds of children in K. Nagar are very different from those of the students at Takshila school. Therefore, there is a need to develop our own tools in addition to what have been provided by Deshkal Society”

5.3. Positive and Dynamic Contributions of Parents and Community



Parents voicing their opinions

Parents-Teachers Meetings (PTMs) were initiated as soon as it became clear that there existed a very strained relationship between the parent and teacher community of the project area. At the root of these strained relations, was the mismanagement of expectations from both sides. Hence, Deshkal Society implemented these activities with an eye to fostering a more positive relationship between the teachers, parents and community members by involving the latter two stakeholders in the

functioning and management of school activities. Another key insight gained during the project implementation concerns the relationship and confidence building exercises carried out by the project staffs with the parent community.

The PTM has been an important site for interaction between parents and community members on the one hand, and teachers, headmasters and CRCC on the other. During these meetings, these stakeholders gather information on the proceedings of the educational activities undertaken at school as well as at home. Parents and community members are briefed about the good results that students and schools achieve and also about the problems that they face. Teachers, headmasters and CRCCs also elicit information from parents about the students' activities at home and in the community. In the past, most of the schools faced many challenges in organising PTMs on a regular basis. Deshkal Society has been able to help schools in organising well-attended PTMs. The society's staffs not only encouraged headmasters to organise PTMs, but also visited parents and responsible community members at home to invite them to attend PTMs whenever they were organised.



A PTM gathering

As a result, the amount of PTMs organised and their attendance by parents and community members has undergone a change for the better. As remarked by community member Mr. Bhola Paswan of village Mazra: “This school organises PTMs very regularly and this has resulted in a perceptible change. Now, the parents not only ask questions about scholarships, uniforms or MDM facilities, but they also want to know about the learning performance of their children. Though most parents here are illiterate, they even so understand that it is important that their children should perform well. In addition, teachers have an opportunity to encourage these parents to ask their children to study at home by doing their homework.”

Deshkal Society staffs furthermore ensured that all members of School Education Committees meet regularly and discuss all aspects of school activities, including the learning achievements of the students.

5.4 Pro-active and Beneficial Involvement of Government Agencies for its Incentive Schemes and Infrastructure Improvement Programmes



Streamlined Mid-day Meal

To ensure smooth and effective educational activities in schools, it is essential that all government schemes and programmes that cause students to flock to schools continue to be operated effectively. This includes the provision of school infrastructure, if inadequate, like the building of toilets for both boys and girls and keeping them operational, regular provisions of MDMs and the timely availability of free textbooks in schools. Deshkal Society staffs functioned

as catalysts to improve these facilities if they have not been provided or are in disarray. Sometimes a small nudge proved enough to make toilets functional and clean or to provide drinking water, mostly by repairing existing hand pumps. The regular visits by Deshkal Society members, and their cementing of a good relationship with the government officials, has been key to the successful implementation of aforementioned efforts in making available the necessary facilities .

The timely availability of free textbooks proved to be the most challenging problem to solve. However, Deshkal Society’s distribution and installation of ABL tools and storybooks in the government schools of K. Nagar did to a large extent help facilitate effective educational activities. The headmaster of M.S. Jotal Khay remarked: “In particular the distribution of storybooks has been very beneficial for those students who did not receive their textbooks on time.”

5.5 Continuous Evaluation and Dissemination of Input-processes and Output-results based on Feedback and Analyses

Deshkal Society undertook a number of project activities that resulted in a feedback-loop for continuous improvement of project results. Regular meetings with the stakeholders and periodical consultation drives received critical feedback that went a long way in improving the performance of schools in K. Nagar block.



One of the block workshops at AMS Parora

effective and entertaining engagement in the classroom; (2) the aspiration of society is growing and the government education system experiences the pressures of expectations with regard to delivery; and (3) when teachers are able to give their best, the enthusiasm and interest of the parents and community members was also enhanced.

A District Level Workshop on ABL was organized on 18th April 2018 at Hotel Ravi Vinay, Purnia. The workshop was attended by teachers, headmasters, CRC co-coordinators, BRC co-coordinators, university teachers, and other stake holders, including community members. In all, 49 persons participated in the workshop. In this workshop, a twenty minute video was screened on the ongoing ABL processes in various schools of K. Nagar block.



District workshop in Purnia

Stakeholders shared their experiences and noted that children are increasingly engaged with the ABL tools provided by Deshkal Society. A teacher remarked, “The way children are engaged in the classrooms has created a very positive atmosphere in the schools. Now it is up to the teachers to take it forward and make the schools children friendly and the most happening place”.



Participants at the state workshop in Patna

Two Block Level Workshops on ABL were organized on 14th April and 8th May 2018 in A.M.S. Parora and Kanya M.S. Majra respectively. The workshops were attended by teachers, headmasters, CRC co-ordinators and interested community members. The April workshop was attended by 42 participants and the May workshop had a total of 70 participants. A twenty minute video about ABL practice in various schools of K. Nagar block was also shown during both workshops. Participants noted that (1) the TLMs provided by Deshkal Society are of great use and helped the teachers to create an

A state workshop was organized on 27th May 2018 at AN Sinha Institute, Patna. It was attended by 83 persons. Participating stakeholders included key officials of the Department of Education, representatives of International Agencies, faculty members of SCERT, prominent educationists and representatives of civil society organizations, among others. The agenda of the workshop was: (i) dissemination of key learning and outcome of the project among the key stakeholders

of education; and (ii) presentation of the recommendations. Mr. Sanjay Kumar, Secretary of Deshkal Society, presented the findings of the project, which was followed by wide-ranging discussions by the participants. The workshop also put forward recommendations to Dr. Binodanand Jha, Director, Department of Education. These recommendations are: (i) scale-up of ABL in at least one district of Bihar; (ii) provision of the ABL tool in the schools and the relevant training to teachers; (iii) strengthening the institutions like SEC and PTM to ensure regular organization and strong participation in these meetings; and, (iv) introduction of School Dashboard reporting on a monthly basis. The workshop was widely covered in media, including reporting in the Telegraph and the Hindustan Times.

TWO-YEAR PURNEA PROJECT SHOWS ACTIVITY-BASED LEARNING CAN WORK WONDERS

Kids learn faster & better if class is fun, study finds



DEV RAJ

Patna: Activity-based learning can work wonders in ensuring better school education and learning outcomes, a two-year project in Purnea district has found.

The project, initiated by Delhi-based research-oriented civil society organisation Deshkal Society in association with schools and parents, has shown spectacular improvement in learning outcomes among 46,000 Class I to Class V students enrolled in 166 primary and upper primary schools.

Around 1,000 teachers were also involved in the project from 2016 to 2018 in Kirtanand Nagar block of

Purnea, around 200km east of Patna.

Under the project, the percentage of Class I to V students who could not read came down from 43.4 per cent in 2016 to 13.6 per cent in 2018.

The percentage of students who could read whole words more than doubled from 9 per cent in 2016 to 20.6 per cent in 2018.

And the percentage of students who could read a simple paragraph went up from 4.2 in 2016 to 7.1 in 2018.

Similar improvements were noticed in learning of arithmetic, by the students covered under the project.

The percentage of students who could not solve any sum came down from 54.6 per cent

to 16.4 in two years.

"We achieved these results by introducing activities-based learning during the project. These involved simple things like card based and chart based learning for numbers and alphabets, as well as use of stories for teaching purposes," said Sanjay Kumar, secretary of Deshkal.

Activity-based learning, he said, has three salient features — change in classroom teaching model, teachers not being used like preachers, and kids being given initiative to facilitate the learning process and for getting involved.

"We divided the classes into groups and competent kids (children with better

learning levels) were made group leaders. The groups were encouraged to get involved in the learning process by use of cards and charts, and teachers were assigned the role of facilitators," Sargay added.

Studies over the years by the National Council Of Educational Research And Training and the NGO Pratham have shown that the problems in primary education is not of enrolment of children, but of poor learning outcomes.

In Bihar, the gross enrolment ratio — the ratio of the number of students who live in that country to those who qualify for the particular grade level — in schools

among the 6-14 years age group is as high as 97.5.

The major challenge that remains to be addressed is how to develop teaching — learning practices for achieving the goal of higher learning outcomes among the children of various classes.

"On the basis of our research project, we have recommended policy level changes in the conventional method of teaching and learning in schools in two ways — providing minimum activity-based resource material to all classes, and bringing activity based learning in the course of pre-service and in-service teacher's education and training courses," Sanjay said.

A newspaper (The Telegraph) highlighted the project's achievements

6. Activity Mapping

Deshkal society employed a unified and organic approach to carry out the project activities as is evident from the performance indicators in the next section. Following table delineates the project's itemised quarterly activities from June 2017 to May 2018.

Table 2: Activities

Activities	First quarter	Second quarter	Third quarter	Fourth quarter	Total
	June 2017-Aug 2017	Sep 2017-Nov 2017	Dec 2017-Feb 2018	March 2018-May 2018	
Teacher training sessions	47	49	39	39	174
classroom demonstrations in no. of schools	82	83	79	86	330 ¹
Parent –Teacher meetings in no. of schools	410	107	251	262	1030
SEC meetings	405	110	248	266	1029
Exposure visit for teachers	0	0	0	1	1
Selection of best teachers	0	0	0	1	1
Best teacher award function	0	0	0	1	1
Block level workshop	0	0	0	2	2
District level workshop	0	0	0	1	1
State level workshop	0	0	0	1	1

¹ Classroom demonstrations were accomplished twice in the year.

7. Key Performance Indicators

The incessant, inclusive and intense efforts of the Deshkal team from June 2017 to May 2021 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 165 schools of the project area.

**Table 3: Indicators of Baseline and Project Achievements:
Enrolment, Learning Enhancement, Pedagogic/Community Support and Advocacy**

Indicators	June 2017 (Base Year)	May 2021 (End of the Project)
Enrolment (NER)	97.5%*	100%**
Retention rate	56.5%*	73.50%**
Learning level	<p>Reading*** 19.7% children enrolled in grade I-V could not read. Only 7.1% children could read a simple paragraph</p> <p>Arithmetic*** 16.5% children enrolled in grade I-V could not do elementary arithmetic. Only 12.5% children could do the process of division.</p>	<p>Reading** 8.9% children enrolled in grade I-V could not read Now 14.7% children could read a simple paragraph</p> <p>Arithmetic** 4% children enrolled in grade I-V could not do elementary arithmetic. Now 16.2% children could perform the process of division.</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.	A total of 174 sessions of CRC training programmes were conducted. The cumulative attendance of teachers in these sessions was 8,712.
No. of classroom demonstration and pedagogic support for implementation of inclusive practices and processes.	Not applicable	The total number of the classroom demonstrations is 330. It has been carried out twice in each school during the project period.
No. of schools with TLMs that helped in ABL process	In the beginning of the project there was no school with ABL tools or teachers with the relevant training.	During the project period all schools were equipped with ABL tools, and teachers were provided with the associated training.
No. and regularity of School Education Committees (SECs) Meetings.	Not applicable	A total of 1029 SEC meetings were organized during the period. The attendance of the members in these meetings was on average 90%.

No. of Parent-Teacher meetings (PTMs)	Not applicable	In all 1030 PTMs were organized during the project period.
ABL oriented Exposure visit	Not applicable	52 teachers were taken to the Takshila school at Bodhi Gaya for ABL and historical-heritage exposure.
Project outcomes dissemination efforts	Not applicable	4 workshops (Block level: 2; District level: 1; and State level: 1) were organized, which were generously attended by important stakeholders.
Policy recommendations that have been accepted by the state government	Not applicable	Altogether 9 policy recommendations were suggested to the government. 3 recommendations have already been accepted, and remaining 6 are in the process.

*DISE Data, April 2017.

** Random Samples of selected schools in the project block K. Nagar, May 2021. For the sampling details please see the enclosed document on endline survey.

*** The end-line survey of February 2017 becomes baseline for the present project under evaluation.

The following table details the improvement in the provision of MDM, availability of infrastructure and extra-curricular facilities.

**Table 4: Indicators of Baseline and Project Achievements:
MDM, Infrastructure and Extra-Curricular Facilities²**

S. No.	Indicators	Baseline Assessment, February 2017		Endline Assessment, May 2021	
		Number of schools out of 165	% of schools out of 165	Number of schools out of 165	% of schools out of 165
1	Regularly of Mid- Day Meal	120	73	136	82.5
2	Availability of toilets for both boys and girls	124	75	151	91.5
3	Drinking water facility	115	70	154	93.5
4	Availability of Sports items and equipments	100	60.5	165	100

² Both baseline and endline assessments are done by means of a random sampling process.

8. Critical Challenges

While there is a shift in the positive direction, the study also pointed out some significant challenges which need to be addressed going forward.

- 1. Sustainability of motivation and improvisation:** ABL tools, documents and classroom training provided by Deshkal Society have created a positive environment in the classroom for children, and they are responding enthusiastically. Teachers also have enthusiastically adopted their newly acquired skill and the result is an improvement in the learning achievement. But, the question remains, as is the case in other interventions, how far and how long this positive change will last without an active presence of an external agency.
- 2. Misunderstood conception of CRC:** During the discussions with the CRCCs and BRCC, it became evident that the teachers are not happy with the earlier trainings being provided by the CRCs. They expressed the opinion that these are facades where no real learning happens and that most teachers attend them due to compulsion. Bringing behavioural change and transforming attitudinal practices appears to be a critical challenge.
- 3. Immense MDM responsibilities on Headmaster:** The headmaster is the most vital driving force in a school to streamline and strengthen the academic environment. All the more if a school is trying to implement a novel and attention consuming concept like ABL. But it is often the case that the operational aspect of MDM is so complicated and time consuming that it corners most of the attention and energy of a headmaster. This unresolved issue remains a challenge.
- 4. Insufficient or lack of academic home support:** While the teachers would want parents to be involved with their children's learning and expect them to coach them at home; the reality remains that the parents are uneducated. The teaching-learning processes need to adopt practices which minimise the necessity of home support.

9. Possible Steps and Recommendations

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 56.5% (February 2017) to 73.50% (May 2018). Likewise, the reading and arithmetic skills of children have also considerably improved due to the overall 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.

These considerable improvements have visibly brought about changes in the overall classroom ambience of the schools of block K. Nagar. Nonetheless, a number of pedagogic and infrastructural steps are still required to reach the threshold of an inclusive education based on activity based learning. Generated, modified and adapted experiences of the project team have led to a number of recommendations that have been put forward to the state government. Some of these recommendations have been accepted and some are in the process of deliberations. Details of these are given below:

A. The state government has accepted and implemented the proposed recommendations

- I. Timely distribution of free textbooks to all children:** One of the most important recommendations of the project was the mandatory availability of textbooks for all children in the project area. It was emphasised during the project period that textbooks coupled with ABL process will work wonders for the students. The school administrations in the project area have appreciated this and vigorous efforts are in the play to provide textbooks to children at the start of the academic session, which begins in the month of April.
- II. Preparation and development of profiles (Bal Panjika) of children:** Child profiles are needed to develop teachers' understanding of the socio-economic backgrounds (age, enrolment, social category, reason for drop out etc.) of the children to promote inclusive classroom practices. At present, there is a provision for preparation of Bal Panjika by teachers in each and every school.
- III. Regular Assessment of Children's Learning Achievement by way of Chhatra Pragati Patrak:** The Chhatra Pragati Patrak helps teachers in monitoring the progress of children in their achievement in learning. It also assists in identifying children, who lag behind in the learning process and require special and tailored attention. On the basis of the suggestion of the project team, the education administrators of the department of education (Government of Bihar), while appreciating the project's concept, have introduced a format 'School Dashboard' in which the leaning assessments of children are conducted bi-annually in all schools of the state, including the schools of the project area.

B. The recommendations still to be implemented

- IV. All weather drinking water facilities in all schools of the project area:** Though the government had made a provision for providing drinking water to children in schools, it is often found that hand pumps are not functional due to poor maintenance or disrepair. The government needs to ensure proper maintenance and timely repair of hand pumps so that drinking water is regularly available to children. Moreover, due to low ground-water levels, many schools require extra deep boring for hand pumps. In this regard, there is a need for a regular coordination between the representatives of District SSA and PHED to ensure the timely and efficient installation of deep boring in schools where it is required.
- V. Clean and maintained washroom facilities in all schools of the project area:** Washroom facilities in many schools, even available, lack regular maintenance. Some schools still do not have toilets at all, despite government's mandatory provision for them. The government needs to ensure that construction of washroom facilities in the remaining schools are done on a priority basis. The schools also need to be provided adequate fund to carry out a regular and proper maintenance of the washroom facilities.
- VI. Increment in Annual School Development Fund in all schools of the project area:** There is a current provision of an annual school development fund of Rs 6,000. It is supposed to cover expenses like blackboards, dusters, chalks, school registers and other essential stationeries. It also covers the maintenance and repair of drinking water and sanitation facilities. Rs 6,000 in a year are too meagre an amount to carry these tasks. The Bihar Education Project Council (BEPC), therefore, should do an assessment of the average annual expenses in schools through a study of a sample of schools, and take necessary steps on the basis of the findings.
- VII. Strengthening the professional development of teachers through In-service Training at CRCs:** There is an urgent need to revive and strengthen Cluster Resource Centres (CRCs) into basic centres for regular in-service training and academic support to teachers. Currently, there is a provision for scheduled fortnightly meetings of teachers at the CRCs, which are aimed to promote peer discussion and learning. But these meetings have become mere rituals. In order to make CRCs effective, there is a need for outside academic support to orient and facilitate the fortnightly meetings into becoming participatory sessions for the professional development of teachers. In this regard, the government needs to make provisions for necessary resource persons and other facilities. The child profiles and learning assessment discussed above can be used as a tool during these participatory sessions to sensitise teachers to the different learning needs and constraints of children from diverse socio-economic backgrounds. It is hoped that these acquired and enhanced professional skills will motivate teachers to experiment with and adopt context specific inclusive classroom practices and processes responsive to the different learning needs of these children.
- VIII. Introduction of Activity Based Learning for increasing school participation and learning enhancement:** The experience and outcome of the project decidedly approved the introduction of ABL method in the classroom. It has enhanced both quantitative and qualitative participation of the children. Moreover, such teachers who have taken to the ABL process have also begun to realise their teaching worth. Therefore, there should be a mandatory ABL oriented teaching process in schools that should be earmarked in the curriculum.

- IX. Regular provision of special and tailored class/bridge courses for children who remain absent in the school during the peak season of agricultural activities:** Absenteeism among children during the sowing or harvest time is a common phenomenon in rural areas. Therefore, schools should be given a guideline and proper support mechanism to provide additional help to such children when they return to school after this periodic absence.

In a nutshell, it must be reiterated here that it is critically important that similar projects should 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.

The evaluation report critically details the efforts of the project, which explicitly created an enabling environment for delivering quality education to children from diverse socio-economic backgrounds, in particular children from agricultural communities. The project vigorously employed Activity Based Learning (ABL) methods to inspire inclusive learning practices that were based on teachers' dispositions and orientations for teaching with the resources at hand, and also was emphatically informed by children's experiential learning backgrounds and capabilities. The project has served as a pilot programme for increasing the learning levels of children from agricultural communities and shows replicable potential in rural areas with similar social and economic conditions.



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