

Project on

Pilot initiative to Promote Inclusive Education in Bihar through influencing the Teaching -Learning modules

1.1: How the need for the intervention was determined?

Gross Enrolment Ratio in the rural primary schools in Bihar is an impressive 143.6% but the retention rate is an alarming 58.7% and the dropout ratio in grade V is a depressing 18.9% (DISE, 2011-12, Elementary education Report Card, Bihar). Most importantly, these developments weigh heavily against children of socially excluded communities. In other words, a disproportionate number of children from marginalised communities either develop a habit of absenteeism or attain the status of dropouts. In essence, the prevailing primary education is not inclusive enough to infuse a sense of belongingness and fairness that could promote satisfactory learning attainment and school retention among marginalised children.

Recent studies and observations on government primary schools and classrooms indicate that the school curriculum and teaching-learning practices and processes are not sensitive towards addressing the learning needs and concerns of children from socially excluded communities, and prejudiced and discriminatory practices against these children still operate in classroom practices and processes. Children are often perceived as having ascribed learning potential and abilities, or lack of it, based on their socio-cultural and economic backgrounds. On the other hand, the school community also claims in public discourse to treat all children as 'equal', and views them in terms of a universal category. While the first is based on the ideology of caste hierarchy, the second denies children their individual identity and strength as well as their identities and consciousness formed as part of growing up as members of collectives.

As a result, children from socially excluded communities' find themselves excluded from the teaching-learning processes, and lose interest in the existing education system. Their gradual alienation with the system has profound impact on their overall learning status, which is generally developed in two stages: first, their learning attainment is adversely affected, and second, they develop high rate of absenteeism, and eventual dropout.

We have become aware of this process, which is an important factor, during our field-work. To be precise, a case in point is our pilot study conducted in two schools in block Wazirganj of district Gaya, which resulted in (1) a report on teaching learning effectiveness that aims to realise the goal of inclusive classroom, and (2) a development of teaching toolkit for primary school teachers. In this regard there is a need for such contextual and geographical outreach to our selected four blocks districts and further at the state level where our successful pilot project can also provide a source and guidebook.

1.2: The critical issue which the plan seeks to resolve

- ◆ **Problematic teaching-learning practices:** The prevalent teaching-learning practices are exclusionary, to say the least, towards the various learning needs and deprivations of children from socially excluded communities. In addition to basing their teaching technique on rote learning, teachers also disregard any specific learning requirement that a child from marginalised community may have. Learners' home and community experiences are not included in the learning process, and they are denied opportunities to construct their own knowledge on the basis of the cognitive awareness and abilities that they have developed as a member of the community.
- ◆ **Hidden curriculum and pedagogic violence:** The apparatus of hidden curriculum works to justify the social privileges and knowledge of the dominant section of the society, and it operates in instilling the conservative norms and value systems through pedagogic violence. More often than not, the prevailing social violence manifests itself through pedagogic violence in the form of various coercive methods including punishments, arbitrary rewards, and sometimes reinforcement of the belief of hereditary based educability.
- ◆ **Subjective interpretation of universal and parochial principles:** The universal principle of equality that merits all children to be treated uniformly deprives children from marginalised communities of special attention and support that they require in order to compete and participate with other children on equal terms. On the contrary, these children's particular social and intellectual characteristics are singled out and positioned, bracketing and debasing them and their community of origin. In both instances they find themselves in disadvantageous situations due to their caste, gender and/or religious background.

1.3: Nature of needs of the communities' vis-à-vis the proposed plan

Children learn in different ways owing to their community experiences, environmental conditions, socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. For primary education to be fully inclusive, it needs to be ensured that the curriculum is accessible to and relevant for all children in terms of what is taught (content), how it is taught (method), how children learn best (process), and how it relates to the life experiences of the children and the environment in which they live and learn. The teaching materials need to be made inclusive by making them responsive to the diverse cultures and socio-economic backgrounds of all the children and relevant to their learning needs and interests.

On the contrary, what is prevailing in the primary schools is a lack of sensitivity and awareness, as described above, towards the needs of children from socially excluded communities. And, moreover, this sensitivity and awareness deficit is vertically pervasive among not only in primary schools but also in institutions and organisations, both at district and state level, that maintain oversight over these schools and provide direction to the overall primary education system. Against this background, there is a need for a perspective building through consultative process in the state that constructs or betters the understanding of inclusive education among relevant stakeholders, including DIET, SCERT, BEP, SCPCR, Government B.Ed. training colleges officials and, consequently, the agenda of inclusive education is brought into the centre of the primary education discourse.

1.4. Salient Features of the Project

- ◆ Broadening the perspective, teaching-learning skills and capacity of teachers, CRC coordinators, BRC coordinators and Block Education Officer CSOs, and those who are actively involved in primary education in four blocks of sample districts through training and consultative processes.
- ◆ Building a perspective and practice through collaboration, critical engagements, knowledge and information dissemination with key officials of BEP, Department of education, Bihar, SCERT, District Education Officials and DIETs/PTECs/BITEs for making inclusive primary education a reality in Bihar.
- ◆ Training, advocacy and policy engagement with the Department of Education, Bihar Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and PACS partners at state, district and Block level through a sustained network.

- ◆ Creating a dialogue and partnership between schools and socially excluded communities through advocacy and consultative processes at the block level for strengthening the cause of inclusive education.
- ◆ Creating information and knowledge base in Hindi through perspective papers and resource materials on inclusive education for all relevant stakeholders.

1.5 Purpose of the proposed plan

To build and broaden the perspectives, policies and practices on inclusive primary education through teacher-training, advocacy and consultative processes with the Civil Society Organisations, PACS partners and the Department of Education, Government of Bihar for making the schools and classroom practices inclusive and friendly to children, especially from socially excluded communities.

1.6. Outcomes

- ◆ Introduction of ‘inclusive teaching practices in the class’ as part of teacher training modules in four BRCs in four districts reaching out to almost 200 teachers and 50 primary schools
- ◆ Increase in policy measures on inclusive education in terms of introduction of new government policies and government orders towards inclusive practice in teacher training
- ◆ Enhanced understanding of approximately 20 CSOs on inclusive education and practices through intensive networking and alliance building
- ◆ Sustainable and committed network of key stakeholders for advocating inclusive education at state and in four districts
- ◆ Increase in dialogue and partnership between socially excluded communities and school management committees for strengthening the cause of inclusive primary education in 50 villages

1.7. Proposed Strategies

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- ◆ Creating information and knowledge base in Hindi through perspective papers and resource materials on inclusive education for all relevant stakeholders.