

Strategies for Out of School Children

What are the groups of out of school children?

The group of out of school children is a heterogeneous one. The group includes children who have never been enrolled at school since no schooling facilities were available within a walking distance of 1 to 1.5 k.m. While there are children, who while living in habitations where schooling facilities are available, did not enroll because the family migrates every year in search of work or the children work with their parents in the family trade, take care of the household chores and also look after their younger siblings while both parents work. In the urban areas there are children who are living in slums on the streets on railway platforms, in the red light areas children working as domestic help, children working in shops etc. These children are sometimes living with their families while there are those who have run away from home and are now living on their own.

Such diverse conditions and differing needs of each group of out of school children cannot be addressed through a single strategy.

Formulation of strategies needs to address the heterogeneous character of out of school children and their differing needs. The strategies need to be need specific and honour the spirit of the POA(1992) of the National Policy of Education which states 'efforts will be made to evolve different models of non formal education programme and agencies will be encouraged to evolve and adopt the most suitable model depending on the requirements of the target group'.

For the purpose of planning the large numbers of out of school children can be categorised as follows:

Broad Categories

- ◆ Non-enrolled
 - ◆ Living in small, remote schoolless habitations
 - ◆ Living in habitations where schools exist
- ◆ Enrolled but do not attend
- ◆ Enrolled but left school before completing schooling

Based on the nature of the group, out of school children can be categorised as follows:

- children living in remote / access less habitations
- children of families who migrate
- children engaged in household chores
- children engaged in wage earning labour
- children from deprived urban communities

- children belonging to communities -- where access is restrained due socio-religious beliefs & practices
- adolescent girls

The EGS & AIE scheme has three thrust areas; first it focuses on providing schooling facilities to children living in small remote and access less habitations; the second thrust area is to mainstream those out of school children who are in habitations where schooling facilities are available and finally to adopt strategies for those groups of out of school children who are in specially difficult circumstances and mainstreaming them is not likely.

Children living in remote / inaccessible schoolless habitations

The issue of physical access has been addressed by a number of state governments. Madhya Pradesh, in 1997 announced the Education Guarantee Scheme, under which any community where there were 40 non school going children in the age group of 6 to 11 years and no schooling facilities were available within 1 km distance, the community could demand for schooling facilities in the habitation. The government would fulfill the demand for the school within a period of 90 days. The community would organise the space for the school and select and appoint a teacher from the habitation. This school is up to class V after which the learners are mainstreamed in the nearest government formal school.

States like Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan, West Bengal, have similar strategies to provide universal physical access to children living in small habitations. Maharashtra, Orissa and Uttar Pradesh have recently announced the scheme of Basti Shalas and EGS respectively. These schools are envisaged to be feeder schools for the formal government schools in case of Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh. These Basti Shalas or EGS are designed for up to class II, after which the learners would join the nearest formal school in class III.

Given below are the key features of the Education Guarantee Scheme of the Government of Madhya Pradesh.

EGS (Education Guarantee Scheme) Madhya Pradesh

- A school is set-up based on a demand for a school by the community. The government provides a guarantee to set up a school within 90 days of receiving the demand.
- There should be at least 40 children, in the age group of 6-11 years, out of school (25 children in case of tribal habitations) and no schooling facilities within a radius of 1km.
- The community has to identify and appoint a teacher (Guruji) for the school and also identify a suitable space for the school.
- The school is operational for 200-225 days in a year. The school is operational for 5 hours every day.
- The children will study upto class V in the school.
- Cost: Rs. 14,860 per annum

- Honorarium of Guruji -- Rs. 1000 p.m.
- Material & Equipment for centre -- Rs. 850
- Material for Learners -- Rs. 25 per learner
- Training of Guruji -- (20 days) -- Rs. 1010.

There are budgetary provisions for textbooks to all the learners. An amount of Rs3000 is provided for procuring books for each centre of 40 children. Each school also receives a School Improvement Grant of Rs2000 per annum for any repairs and providing for any additional material and equipment to the centre.

In the table given below are the schemes of the different states to provide universal physical access to children living in small remote habitations.

Schools in Small and Accessless Habitations – An Overview Across States

State	Andhra Pradesh	Madhya Pradesh	Maharashtra	Orissa	Rajasthan	Uttar Pradesh	West Bengal
Issues							
Name of the Scheme / School	Maabadi	Education Guarantee Scheme	Bastishala	Education Guarantee Scheme	Rajiv Gandhi Swaran Jayanti Pathshala	Education Guarantee Scheme	Shishu Shiksha Karamsuchi
Current coverage (No. of Centres)	15,000	26,500	Yet to be started	Yet to be started	11,000	1636 proposed to be opened in 2000-2001	3000
Norm for opening of centre	Habitations with a population below 200 and no schooling facilities are available within 1 km. Minimum of 20 children. In case of Tribal sub-plan 10-20 children in the age group of 6-11 years	In habitations with atleast 40 children in the age group of 6-11 years and there is a demand from the community also there are no schooling facilities within a radius of 1km. In case of tribal habitations minimum 25 children	Habitations with about 200 population and no schooling facilities in 0.5 km radius. In case of Tribal and hilly areas this would be for population of 100 and no school within 1 km radius	In habitations with atleast 40 children in the age group of 6-11 years and there is a demand for a school from the community, also there are no schooling facilities within a radius of 1km. In case of tribal habitations minimum 25 children	In habitations with population 200 and above, atleast 40 learners in the age group of 6-11 years and no schooling facilities in 1km. radius, incise of tribal and desert areas habitations with population of 150and above and a minimum of 25 learners and no school in 1km radius	In habitations where no school is available in 1km. Radius and there are minimum 30 learners in the 6-11 age group. In the hilly areas the minimum number of learners is relaxed and is 20. The proposal for the school will be presented by the Gram Panchayat	In those habitations where 20 or more children in the age group of 5 to 9 years are either not enrolled in the existing school or if there are no existing schools available in 1 km radius or the existing schools infrastructure is not adequate to take additional enrolment
Minimum number of learners	20 and in case of Tribal sub plan 10-20	40, in case of tribal habitations it is 25	15	40, in case of tribal habitations it is 25	40, in case of tribal habitations it is 25	30, in case of hill areas it is 20	20 learners
Upto which class	Classes I and II	Class I to V	Class I to IV	Class I to III	Class I to V	Class I and II	Class I to IV
Minimum days in a year	10 months	200 days	200 days	200 days			200 days

State	Andhra Pradesh	Madhya Pradesh	Maharashtra	Orissa	Rajasthan	Uttar Pradesh	West Bengal
Minimum Educational Qualification of teacher	Class 7 pass	Higher secondary pass	Diploma in education or class 12 pass	Class 10 pass	Class 12 pass in case of desert areas class 8 pass	Class 12 pass	Passed Madyamik exam of State Board of Secondary Education
Honorarium of teacher	Rs.500	Rs.1000	Rs.1000	Rs.1000	Rs.1200	Rs.1000	Rs.1000
Appointing agency	Gram Panchayat	School Mang. Committee	Gram Panchayat	Village Education Committee	Gram Panchayat	Gram Panchayat	School Mang. committee
Duration of Training	10 days	20 days initial training following years 14 days		20 days initial training following years 14 days	Initial training of 30 days	Initial training of 30 days	Atleast 7 days in the first phase
Textbook/material used	Multi-grade learning kit	Books developed to cater to Multi level situation in the schools		Formal school books	Formal school books	Formal school books	Formal School books
Academic Support	Mandal resource persons	Cluster Academic Coordinator	Extension Officer to monitor the school	Cluster Resource Centre Coordinator, BRC and DIET		NPRC coordinator	Appointment of 1 supervisor for every 20 centres
Cost per centre	Rs.10,000	Rs.14,860	Rs.13,000	Rs.17730		Rs.16,350	

Bridge Courses

A significant proportion of out of school children are in habitations where schooling facilities are available. These children either did not join the school system or they left school before completing their schooling. If all these children were to be covered through alternative schools alone, given the large numbers we will probably require if not more alternative schools, as many schools as the existing formal schools. Any large system would tend to be rigid and in the process of standardisation would lose out the capacity to innovate and creatively address the needs of the heterogeneous group of out of school children. Also, there is the likelihood that while designing an alternative school for the different groups of out of school children, a design may be formulated which may be of a quality which is inferior to the existing formal school and these children would end up with a poor quality second-rate education. The EGS & AIE scheme states equity to be one of the non-negotiable of the programme. Therefore a critical aspect of the scheme is to design strategies with the objective to mainstream learners into their age appropriate classes in the formal school. Innovative strategies have been implemented by NGOs and in government projects to bring different groups of out of school children back to school. These strategies have been referred as Bridge Courses.

What is a Bridge Course?

Unfortunately all motivational campaigns and enrolment drives lead to a large number of children being enrolled in class I of the formal school. These children are enrolled in class I irrespective of their age and abilities. The school enrolment data starts to show more than half the children in the school to be enrolled in this class. It is this group, of children who are most likely to drop out of the school system and remain out of school. An intervention which enables learners to develop their competency levels as per their age through a condensed curriculum, in a short duration i.e. help the learners bridge the gap between them and their peers who have been attending school, are referred to as Bridge Courses or Back to School strategies. Bridge Courses or Transitional Classes are strategies designed for preparing out of school children to join the formal schools and be better adjusted to the school environment. The strategy enables the learners to achieve the competencies appropriate for their age in a short period, during which the children are allowed to learn at their own pace. The Bridge course also prepares the children to cope with the demands of the formal school system. The curriculum transacted to the learners is in a condensed form, the learners achieve equivalence with their peers in the formal school and join them in the appropriate class.

Bridge Courses could be of residential or non-residential nature. These could be of varying duration depending upon the age group of the children. These courses are usually run in close co-ordination with the local formal school whose headmaster is responsible for admitting these children into the school in classes for which they have achieved competency.

While most of the time the Bridge Courses are of the nature of preparatory classes, sometimes they also perform the role of remedial teaching centres for children who has been recently enrolled in a formal school especially for those children who are first generation learners. In case the centre is like a support system it is of a very short duration and it ceases to exist once children are settled in the school.

Remedial Education

Very often children admitted to formal schools after undergoing a bridging programme face problems of adjustment to the formal school environment. These children need to be helped for sometime through community-based volunteers. The scheme would support activities like home visits, weekly meetings with parents and children, remedial teaching of such children for a period of upto 4 months after their admission into formal schools.

Children enrolled in formal schools are unable to cope with the studies, because of irregular attendance or not getting sufficient attention at school or home. Centres for these children would need to function before and after school hours and hence the duration would be less than 4 hours. The honorarium paid to the volunteer should be commensurate with the number of hours of teaching at the centre.

Different Models of Bridge Courses

Age Group	Model
5-8 year old	Preparatory classes held for children in this age group to admit them into the formal schools. A Volunteer Teacher is appointed from the community. The duration of such a course is from 60-75 days and it is non-residential.
7-9year old non-enrolled children or drop outs from school	Short duration Bridge Courses of 2-4 months duration, mostly non residential in nature prepare the children for admission into the appropriate class in the formal school. The children are taught by a volunteer teacher, under the supervision of the Head teacher of the formal school.
9-11 year old working children	Bridge Courses in Residential Camps, of 4 to 6 months duration are organised outside the formal school. The children and the teachers stay at the camp throughout the duration of the camp. At the end of the camp the children sit for the class V common exam and join school in class VI. Sometimes the children are admitted into hostels at the end of the camp to enable them to continue with their studies.
12-14 year old working children	Long duration Residential Camps (12-18 months) take the child upto class VII or VIII where a common exam is conducted. The children at the completion of their exam either join a hostel to continue with their studies or join technical training institutes to learn a vocational skill.
9-14 year old girls	For the adolescent girls who have either never been to school or dropped out of the schooling system it is often difficult to bring them back to school. The intervention begins with bringing the girls to Motivational Centres. At these centres there are a variety of activities conducted to create an interest in the learners to complete their schooling. From the Motivational Centres the girls move to Residential Camps, sometimes the girls may directly go on to attend the camp rather than going from a Motivational Centre. At the Residential camp apart from being prepared for the class V or VIII common examination the curriculum covers issues related to empowerment of the girls. Issues related to their developmental milestones in adolescence, reproductive health, legal awareness and other areas related to developing life skills are addressed.

Children of Migrating Families

Landless families from backward areas migrate in search of work during the agricultural seasons when labour requirements are high. Also there are certain communities who by their nature migrate from one place to another or are nomads. There is a third kind of group who due to extreme seasonal variations migrate to areas where living conditions are better and then return to their village only after the weather improves. In most cases this is a seasonal activity and the duration of migration can be predicted. In some cases the families migrate to a particular site and continue to stay there till the end of the activity while at other times the families may move from one place to another. Children from these families either never enroll at school as they do not know how long they would be in a particular place or lead a nomadic life, or leave school during session to accompany their parents.

With such variety in the nature of migration, strategies have been designed for this group of out of school children, which are implemented at different points. The different kinds of strategies are described below:

- Projects like Lok Jumbish and DPEP Andhra Pradesh set up hostel facilities for children, while their parents migrated, in the same habitation as they lived. The children either stayed in the homes of the families that migrated. A local community volunteer was entrusted the responsibility of looking after the children. Sometimes the parents either contributed money or dry rations for the children. The hostel facility ensured that the children did not have to discontinue their studies because they were going to accompany their parents during migration and secondly it took care of their boarding lodging needs. The community volunteer also provided coaching to the children after school hours.
- In a situation where a fixed group of families migrate together from one place to another it also possible to provide a teacher to the group of families. This teacher would move with the families from one place to another. The school would be like a mobile school. This is possible incase of nomadic communities.
- When families migrate together to a fixed site and would stay there till the end of the activity, it is possible to set up schools at those work sites so that the children do not discontinue with their studies. Schools can be set up at such sites like brick kilns, construction sites, sugarcane and cotton fields, salt farms etc. One person from the community could be identified who could accompany the families or a suitable person may be found among those who migrate, to teach the children. After the children return to their village they should get admitted into the formal school.
- When families from a village migrate to different areas it maybe difficult to either provide them with a mobile teacher or set up a school at their work site, a condensed course can be designed for the children, which can be implemented after they return to their village. The condensed course would cover the curriculum children would have missed during the period of migration.

Deprived Urban Children

This group of out of school children includes children living in slums (authorised and unauthorised), children living on streets, children living on railway platforms, along railway lines, children on construction sites, children engaged as domestic workers, children engaged in household chores and sibling care, it includes children working for wages in dhabas, mechanic shops, as rag pickers, shoe shine boys, children of sex workers and children involved in sex trade. This is not a complete listing, one might come across many other groups of out of school children in the urban areas, who belong to the most deprived sections of the society.

Strategies for these children have to build in activities to gain the trust of both the children and their families and sometimes the local influential persons in the community. The children have to be met at their places of work and activities have to be conducted for them there itself initially rather than expecting them to come to a designated place.

- **Residential Camps:** In a large number of cases children are engaged in wage earning labour and therefore it is important to take them away from the work situation so that they are not compelled to go back to work while they get an opportunity to study.
- **Bridge Courses:** Children living in the slum areas are those who have permanently migrated with their parents to the city and most of these children are first generation learners. These children will need to attend Bridge Courses which are preparatory centres and help them to get enrolled at a formal school. An initial support will have to be extended to them after they join the formal school, to get adjusted to the demands of the school.
- **Short Stay Homes / Half Way Homes:** Many of the children living on the streets especially in the large cities, are on their own and living without their parents. These children have run away from their families or do not have either or both parents. They do not have any shelter, they live on the streets, at railway platforms, parks or other public places. A short stay home provides shelter to these children where they are fed, their health looked after and also counselling services are available. The caregiver at these homes also motivates the children to join a Residential camp to complete schooling.
- ★ **Contact centres** for children at or near their place of work for e.g. at railway stations, in parks, in street corners, on pavements. These contact centres would be like motivational centres. Children from here could be sent for attending bridge courses or residential camps.
- ★ **Drop in centres / Half Way Homes / Short-Stay Homes** amongst these deprived urban children there is a large group of those children who have run away from house and living on the streets etc. such children will have to be provided care and shelter along with ensuring their education. These drop in centres / half way homes will need to address basic needs to these children provide them with physical care and emotional support. Services of a doctor may be required to address the health needs of the children, a counsellor may be required to provide emotional support, since the children may have undergone physical, sexual or emotional abuse.
- ★ **Remedial teaching** may be organised for those children who have been enrolled from a Bridge Course or Camp to a formal school. The Remedial teaching centre would help the children get adjusted to the formal school environments and cope with academic requirements of the school. Remedial teaching may also be organised for those children who are irregular.
- ★ For older girls contact programmes may be organised to motivate them to join the mainstream formal education system or complete their education by attending a bridge course on a longer duration Residential Camp.

Education of Children attending Makhtabs & Madarassas only

In certain sections of the Muslim community there is a strong influence to send children to Makhtabs and Madarassas where children only learn the religious text and get no inputs of the mainstream curriculum. Education for these children can be organised through the following ways:

- **Building Linkages with the Formal School:** Children attending these institutions could be provided formal education in Urdu medium government schools after taking them through a Bridge Course to help them achieve competencies appropriate to their age.
- **Strengthening of the Makhtab or Madarassa:** An additional teacher from the same community could be appointed in the Makhtab / Madarassa, with the consent of the management committee of the institution, for teaching the mainstream curriculum to the children. Honorarium and teaching learning material for the learners and teacher could be made available. In case the teacher of the Makhtab / Madarassa has the required qualifications then he could be imparted training and paid an additional honorarium to teach the children the formal school curriculum over extended hours.
- **Changing the medium of instruction in the formal school:** Wherever there is a need and a demand from the community, the medium of instruction at school could be changed to Urdu.
- **Setting up Bridge Course centres for non-enrolled and drop out girls of the community:** Separate centres for girls could be set up in the mohallas/within the community where either a condensed course could be transacted after which the learners could be admitted to formal schools or the learners could study till they complete their elementary education

Adolescent Girls

Older age groups of girls 10-14 years, who have either never attended school or dropped out of school during the early years, it is difficult to just take these girls through preparatory centres and enroll them in formal schools. The strategies for older girls have to be in the form of Residential Camps. At these camps the girls not only achieve competency levels equivalent to the formal schools they also learn life skills, about reproductive health, legal awareness etc. The camp does not only achieve the objective of ensuring the education of the girls, it is also a process of empowering these young girls. Lok Jumbish-Rajasthan, M.V.Foundation-Hyderabad, Mahila Samakhya project, Sarvodya Ashram and CARE Uttar Pradesh-Hardoi Uttar Pradesh are some programmes who have successfully implemented this strategy and have had satisfactory results. The duration of these camps has been from 6 months to 18 months.

M.V.Foundation has organised Motivational Centres for short duration (2 months) to prepare girls who have never been to school, to enroll them into residential camps

A large number of girls are unable to attend school as they are entrusted with the responsibility of taking care of their younger siblings. While planning strategies for a target group like this it will be crucial to converge with other programmes through which ECCE centres can be set up for the under six year olds so that the older girls are able to complete their education.