

# **Children, Schooling, and Crisis—What Recent Research Reveals**

**Delhi, 31 October 2011**



**Organized by: NEG-FIRE**

**Venue: Silver Oak, India Habitat Centre  
Lodhi Road, New Delhi-110003**

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# **Children, Schooling, and Crisis—What Recent Research Reveals**

Conference Report

31 October 2011

## **1. Introduction**

Universalization of elementary education has emerged as a significant concern in national and international policy discourse on education in the last two decades. However, despite the various initiatives taken up in India to achieve this, including the Right to Education, existing literature and statistics present a dismal picture of continuous exclusion of children from the socially marginalized communities in education in myriad and complex ways.

While a large part of the existing literature on exclusion of children from Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Muslims, and girl children from schools has focused on enrolment and dis/continuation of their education, their learning achievements and school experiences have received much less attention. How social and political crises, which manifest themselves in the form of agrarian distress, conflicts around caste, ethnicity, or between a section of the citizens and the state, and the daily struggle to survive impinge on the desire and efforts to receive education, have not been adequately addressed in research and policy domains.

To address these significant knowledge gaps that have implications for forming policy and practicing it on the ground and to conceptualize new ways of bringing education to marginalized children, NEG-FIRE supported and commissioned research studies in ten states (Andhra Pradesh, Orissa, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Bihar, Jharkhand, Manipur, Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra, and Karnataka) across India.

To discuss the findings of this research, NEG-FIRE organized a conference on, ‘Children, Schooling, and Crisis—What Current Research Reveals’, on 31 October 2011 in Delhi. The main aims of the conference were:

(i) Sharing and discussing these studies and their implications with different stakeholders ranging from the state to civil society and from academicians and researchers to practitioners from non-governmental organizations.

(ii) Building on the similarities in different conflict/crisis situations and focussing on the differences that demand specific, local solutions.

(iii) Taking stock of the situation on the ground and understanding the intersection of class, caste, gender, religion, and region with conflict and its subsequent impact on the education of children.

(iv) Receiving feedback from this diverse group to reflect on the focus, nature, and rigour of the researches undertaken so far and to reaffirm and/or revise the course of action/research by NEG-FIRE.

The focus areas of the studies are given in Table 1.

Table 1: Focus areas

<b>Sr. No</b>	<b>Thematic area</b>	<b>No. of researches done</b>	<b>Sates covered</b>
1.	Schooling in tribal and inter-state border areas	2	Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, and Rajasthan
2.	Education of children in conflict situations	7	Ethnic conflict in Manipur; the Naxal situation in Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand; the communal situation in Gujarat and Kandhamal; and caste conflict in Rajasthan and Bihar
3.	Children and schooling in agrarian distress situations	200 case studies	Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Chhattisgarh, and Maharashtra

In keeping with these broad areas, the conference was divided into six presentations covering the three thematic areas of:

1. Schooling in tribal and inter-state border areas.
2. Children and education in conflict situations.
3. Children and education in conflict and crisis situations.

While the studies mainly looked at basic literacy skills and other such outcomes, NEG-FIRE recognizes that education is to be looked at more holistically as the growth and development of an individual.

**Keynote address by Professor Thorat:**

In his keynote address, Professor Thorat focused on children from tribal, Dalit, and Muslim backgrounds in particular who face discrimination in schools. He added that while there was a

need to have general solutions for providing the Right to Education to every child, there was also a need to explore specific solutions for coming up with the right curriculum for groups like NT-DNTs, tribals, and Muslims.

Pointing to some other aspects of the lacunae that exist in our education system, Professor Thorat stressed on the need for having more research and local theory formation on such issues. Citing the example of the recent uprising by Jats demanding reservation, he said that the research fraternity did not respond to these demands because there is complete lack of empirical knowledge about the socio-economic situation of Jats; this is something which needs to be addressed.

Further, he also highlighted the in-built bias in the existing research system. According to Professor Thorat, Indian academia follows western parameters, western perspectives, and western knowledge systems. However, what is needed is developing and using indigenous knowledge systems.

### **Session I: Schooling in tribal and inter-state border areas.**

There were three research studies presented as part of this theme. The session was chaired by Dr. Minati Panda and the discussants were Ms. Anjali Noronha and Mr. Achyut Das. The presenters were: Ms. Meera Samson and Ms. Anuradha De from Collaboration Research and Dissemination (CORD), New Delhi; Dr. Nagendra Nagpal from CERP, Ms. Seema Mandoli from Dhaatri Resource Centre for Women and Children, Andhra Pradesh, and Fr. Robert Slattery.

The studies under this broad theme focused on the schooling experiences of children living in inter-state border areas, particularly schooling among children from marginalized communities (dalits, tribals, and minorities).

#### **Paper 1: Schooling of children in the inter-state border areas of Orissa/AP and Bihar/Jharkhand presented by Ms. Meera Samson and Anuradha De, CORD**

The hypothesis was that children in the chosen areas have many layers of disadvantages. They live in border districts (of economically less-developed states) and are given low priority because of their distance from the state capitals; these areas also lag behind in access to all basic services. They also face language issues because the language they speak at home may be a language of the neighbouring state, or a language different from the official state language. The latter is particularly true for children from tribal backgrounds. All children from marginalized communities in these areas, who are relatively new entrants into the formal school system, are likely to experience both alienation and discrimination within the school system. They are also under great pressure to work to meet the livelihood needs of their families.

The study used available secondary data and cross-sectional surveys of schooling facilities in 30 villages in a number of blocks on either side of the Vizag-Koraput border, and in 30 villages in blocks on either side of the Katihar-Sahibganj border, to get a macro picture. This was supplemented by village studies (3 villages in each of the 4 border districts of Vizag, Koraput, Katihar, and Sahibganj).

The study found that a large proportion of enrolled children in these areas were unable to access functional schools. The situation was the most drastic in Katihar in Bihar and Koraput in Orissa, where a majority of the 30 or more schools visited had no teaching activity when the team visited them unannounced. The situation was better in sample schools in Sahibganj, Jharkhand; it was even better in Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh.

It was found that schools did not have any teaching activity because a substantial percentage of the teachers were not in school. The percentage of teachers not in school at the time when the teams visited them ranged from 22-23 per cent in schools in Sahibganj and Visakhapatnam to 37-39 per cent in schools in Koraput and Katihar. Close to half of the missing teachers in Koraput and Katihar were reported to be on official duty elsewhere. In some cases, teachers were in school but not teaching. This was true for one-third of the teachers in Visakhapatnam and more than 60 per cent of the teachers at the other 3 sites. Teaching activity, where it existed, consisted of the teacher reading aloud from the textbook, and checking children's written work. Children were by and large made to repeat alphabets, numbers, poems, and tables. Multi-grade teaching was the norm.

The weaknesses of the school system which were apparent included a shortage of teachers, a situation aggravated by the use of teachers for other government duties. There was also no monitoring of the functioning of schools, whether it was teachers' attendance, the quality of teaching activity in the classroom, or the functioning of the mid-day meal scheme. Widespread corporal punishment for children was also ignored. Social relations appeared to play a role in teachers' lack of accountability. With both tribals and Muslims educationally deprived, a majority of the teachers were from more privileged Hindu backgrounds (upper castes and OBCs). This had implications on their interaction with parents and children from marginalized groups, as well as the extent to which they were able to communicate with tribal children, particularly in grades 1 and 2. Children appeared to be making limited progress in basic literacy and numeracy.

**Paper 2: Elementary education for children from Scheduled Tribes in India across four states—Rajasthan, Gujarat, Orissa, and Andhra Pradesh; Concerns, conflicts, and opportunities in their schooling presented by Dr. Nagendra Nagpal- Director, CERP and Ms. Seema Mundoli, Coordinator, Dhaatri Resource Centre for Adivasi Women and Children, Andhra Pradesh.**

The three studies included in this presentation covered the 4 states of Andhra Pradesh, Orissa, Gujarat, and Rajasthan with each focusing on a specific dimension of the education of children from Scheduled Tribes (STs). The study in Andhra Pradesh and Orissa was an analysis of the delivery of elementary education by state institutions in light of the Right to Education Act. In Rajasthan the study was an assessment of the status of ST children's education in one district, while the research in Gujarat assessed the impact of Sarva Siksha Abhiyan (SSA) on ST children, specifically their academic performance and achievement levels. This study was done by Dr. Ajay Dandekar.

Methodologies used for the studies included collection of data from primary and secondary sources. The sample sizes varied as per the nature of the study and ranged from a comparative analysis between villages to several districts across each state. For an analysis, qualitative and quantitative techniques were used and accordingly data was collected through structured and unstructured tools.

Some of the key findings were:

- ⇒ Access remains a major issue and its gravity increases from the primary to the upper primary level and further for the upper primary and high school levels;
- ⇒ Dropouts from the primary to the upper primary and further from the upper primary to the secondary level are very high in tribal areas. For girls, dropout rates were found to be directly linked to the availability or non-availability of services within the villages;
- ⇒ There was a great demand for residential schools in tribal areas. However, the major beneficiaries of these facilities were those who were well-connected and influential;
- ⇒ In most of the places the overall living conditions were not of the minimum desired level;
- ⇒ Achievement levels of tribal children were found to be lower than the even otherwise low achievement levels of all children in these states;
- ⇒ Teacher absenteeism, low teacher motivational levels, large shortage of regular teachers, and a highly politicized teacher fraternity were commonly found corresponding with low student performance, high dropout rates, and low transition levels from one stage to the next higher stage;
- ⇒ Capacities, qualifications, teaching skills, and training were limited among tribal teachers;
- ⇒ Tribal parents saw little relevance of education in their lives. The present education system where 'quality' has been neglected for long was perhaps further inhibiting parents from sending their children to schools;
- ⇒ The National Curriculum Framework (NCF) suggests a multi-lingual curriculum approach for supporting cultural pluralism wherever required. However, the NCF approach has not yet been applied for developing the curriculum;
- ⇒ Language was a barrier—the mother tongue was not the medium of instruction; compliance with the RTE Act for tribal areas for fulfilling universal primary education was

a huge challenge; enrolment of tribal children with special needs was almost negligible; and

⇒ There was a need for collaboration in the administration machinery. The education department, tribal board/authority etc. seemed to work in isolation and there was a need for collaboration and coordination among them.

**Paper 3: Tribal children can learn Maths and English: A case study of Santhal children in Marsi Marsal School, and other schools in Jharkhand presented by Fr. Robert Slattery, Member, Jharkhand State Advisory Committee.**

This study was done in 50 Hindi medium mission schools in Hazaribag, Ramgarh, Bokaro, Chatra, Garhwa, and Latehar districts in Jharkhand. It covered 40,000 students of whom 8,000 were tribals. Though the study did not specifically concentrate on tribal students, as work progressed it became clear that the conclusions were especially relevant to them. The conclusions were:

**Attitude in the school:** This may be a key factor. In some schools it was found that the administration and teachers realized that even for Hindi medium students, English was an important subject and part of the curriculum. Therefore, the school had to appear not so much as a Hindi medium school but a bilingual one. Besides Hindi, English also had to be part of the atmosphere of the school through notices, school assemblies, and competitions. Teachers not teaching English needed to use some English words, particularly when they gave instructions to the students. Moreover, English teachers had to change their attitude towards the use of English. They knew English but did not use it enough. They needed to change from ‘I can use English freely in class’ to ‘I use English freely in class’. Schools with the right attitude were making progress whereas the situation in the other schools was dismal, especially because in some of these schools all that was needed was a change in attitude to make progress.

**Attitude of the state education department:** The state education department has not been encouraging students to learn English. The department has prescribed NCERT textbooks which were found to be unsuitable in the children’s context. In comparison, most of the other states have adapted their textbooks to their own situations. Fortunately, there is slow change now as a committee has been formed to produce state textbooks and English is to be made compulsory in the 2013 board exams.

**Self-esteem of the students:** As has been pointed out by Gordon Dryden and Jeannette Vos in *The New Learning Revolution*, self-esteem is a key factor in learning any subject. This is especially true for tribal students. Building the self-esteem of tribal students who are learning English is connected with the methodology that the teachers use. Depending on the methodology, students’ self-esteem can be built up or pulled down.

**Use of English:** It seems obvious that there should be maximum use of simple English in the English period. It is also possible to do this and if it is done, the message that goes out to the students is: ‘We can follow English. We feel good. Our self-esteem goes up’. This is happening in the successful schools. But the opposite is happening in many other schools. The teachers know English but they give even simple directions in Hindi. When they teach a text, they read the English sentence and then give its Hindi translation. This gives a clear message to the students: ‘You are weak, you do not know English so I am telling you everything in Hindi’. Further, instead of helping students write answers, the teachers write the answers on the board for the students to copy and memorize.

**Vocabulary:** Many teachers do not distinguish between active and passive voices. After each lesson, the teacher asks the students to write down ALL the new words that they have learnt. Pages and pages of words are written down, with their Hindi meanings. Very many are passive and irrelevant for active use. The students fail to learn them and again their self-esteem goes down. Their attitude understandably is: ‘English is too difficult. I cannot learn English’.

**Grammar:** Irrelevant grammar is ‘taught’, including types of pronouns, nouns, and adverbs. Time is wasted on this. Students cannot remember all the types and their self-esteem suffers. Time that could have been used on basic grammar is not utilized productively.

**Recommendations:** It may seem naïve but if there is an attitudinal change among those working for the education department and also among the teachers, and if teachers change from the translation method to a communicative, repetitive method, there is a possibility that tribal students, in fact all students, will gain competency in English.

*Through the presentations the following key issues were highlighted:*

**Neglect of issues due to distance from the center:** Children living in these areas have to face many layers of disadvantages. To begin with, they live in the border districts of economically less-developed states. These areas are given less importance because of their distance from state capitals. Hence, they also lag behind in access to basic services.

**The language issue:** Language is another significant issue as the language that the children speak at home is different from the official state language in which the schooling is done. Since children from marginalized communities in these areas are relatively new entrants in the formal school system, they are likely to experience both alienation and discrimination within the school system. They are also under great pressure to work to meet the livelihood needs of their families.

**Adverse physical conditions in the area:** One study in 30 villages in a number of blocks on either side of the Vizag-Koraput border, and 30 villages in blocks on either side of the Katihar-Sahibganj border found that the geographical terrain in these areas was making schooling difficult; conflict between the state and Naxals was also deterring teachers in areas like Koraput.

Poor connectivity within the districts and insecure means of livelihood were also adding to the problems of schooling in the area. Further, a large number of enrolled children were having problems in accessing functional schools, particularly in Katihar in Bihar and Koraput in Orissa.

Another study on elementary education for children from Scheduled Tribes across the four states of Rajasthan, Gujarat, Orissa, and Andhra Pradesh found that access was still a major issue—something which became more serious as one moved from the primary to the upper primary level and further in the upper primary and high school levels.

While there was a great demand for residential schools in the tribal areas, the major beneficiaries of these were the influential and well-connected. Little wonder then that the achievement levels of tribal children were found to be lower than the even otherwise low achievement levels of all children in these states.

Teacher absenteeism, low teacher motivational levels, a large shortage of regular teachers, and a highly politicized teacher fraternity were commonly found corresponding with low student performance, high dropouts, and low transition levels from one stage to the next.

**Dismal condition of education, especially for tribal children:** The objectives of the study conducted on tribals' ability to learn Mathematics and English in Jharkhand were to find out if tribal children were actually weak in these two subjects. If they were found to be weak, then there was a need to explore the reasons for this weakness. The study team interacted with over 7,500 tribal children in schools in Jharkhand. Workshops were also held with teachers, their ability to teach tribal children were observed, and an analysis of the exam papers done.

The study found that a major problem in the state was an inadequate number of qualified teachers—93 per cent of those who were tested failed in the teacher eligibility test. The state is also heavily dependent on para-teachers who are not qualified enough to teach tribal children. Poverty, illiteracy, and language issues among the tribals and their children compound the problem of poor schooling in the state.

The study concluded that the way forward was through creating an environment that was conducive to learning, changing the teaching methodology, and providing suitable books and qualified teachers. The study also found that coming up with bilingual schools will go a long way in improving the learning abilities of tribal children.

*In the discussions which followed the presentations, the following points were highlighted by discussants Ms. Anjali Noronah, Eklavya, Mr. Achyut Das, Agramee, and the participants.*

1. Most of the issues which were identified as problematic and which had a bearing on education in border areas were seen as being common to the entire country. The studies

needed to point out how the specificity and distinctness of border areas shaped the conditions of education there.

2. Skills needed to be sharper so that the research could be documented in a methodical manner. For this it was important to focus on the process and actual classroom practices.
3. It was important to study issues like the knowledge system of a particular community and how it functioned. It was important to understand how this knowledge system was different from the mainstream one and what could be done to make children learn rather than merely saying that they were not learning.
4. Why was it that tribal children were unable to learn Mathematics? Was it because they have different skills and cultural ways of learning the subject?
5. The context of the studies needed to be specified. What also needed to be specified was why particular villages were chosen for the study.
6. Schemes like SSA foster a mono-culture. Hence, there was a need to capture and present innovations which were suited to local needs.
7. The approach and objectives of mainstream schooling and notions of learning need to be looked at critically.
8. Evaluation of teaching-learning instruments should be an important aspect of the case studies. Budgetary analyses and recommendations too were equally important.

Some of the other questions raised in the discussion included:

- Could Navodaya schools become an option for tribal students?
- Was there any research on madrasas; what opportunities were they providing for education?
- Were there any social, cultural, or economic reasons for children dropping out of schools? Did the teachers too play a role in this?
- Learning in one's mother tongue is a constitutional right but there was no effort to study education from this perspective. Was there any literature available in languages like Santhali or any other tribal language?
- Is there a provision for teachers' training in tribal areas?
- How to achieve 100 per cent literacy for tribals was another issue that was raised.

**Session summing up by Dr. Minati Panda:** Referring to the presentations made during the sessions, Dr. Panda said that there was a need to develop an attitude and a theoretical discourse which can use the data generated by these studies.

She added that one needed to study and understand the knowledge system of a particular community and understand how it functions before saying that 'children are not learning'. One

needed to objectively understand the reasons why children were not learning. Did this have to do with their cognitive abilities or was there some mismatch between the mainstream system of education or/and system of learning of that particular community? We needed to think why children could not use their own systems of knowledge. We should try and develop a theoretical/critical discourse around that. Referring to the issue of children learning Mathematics, she said that one first needed to find out what was Mathematics for them? If they were not learning Mathematics then where was the problem? Was there something wrong with them or was this cultural? Tribals might have different skills, different cultural ways of learning mathematics; one needed to explore those dimensions as well.

## **Session II: Education of children in conflict situations.**

This session was chaired by Dr. Bela Bhatia. Mr. Dayaram was the key discussant for this session.

### **Paper 1: Education in conflict societies—Ahmedabad, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Kandhamal, and Manipur presented by Dr. Pradeep Bhargava, Director, GBPSSI, Allahabad.**

The case studies presented in this session highlighted the situation of education for children in Ahmedabad and Kandhamal as also in the states of Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, and Manipur.

While there was a conflict between development and education in Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh, the conflict in Kandhamal and Ahmedabad was between education and communalism, while in Manipur this conflict was between nationalism and education.

These studies made various suggestions to help improve the situation on the ground. These included: addressing the trauma faced by children and how this could be dealt with, understanding the dynamics between conflict and education, and providing support to the endeavours taken up by the government for schooling in these areas at a larger level.

Some of the issues raised after the presentations included:

- The conclusion that Naxals opposed education needed to be revisited.
- There should have been more details on the nature of the case studies, their objectives, and what they had managed to achieve.
- The study was found to be too general in nature. What was needed was more specific findings and recommendations. Even suggestions like recruiting local teachers instead of appointing para-teachers were found to be too general.

### **Session III: Children and Education in Agrarian Distress and Crisis Situations.**

This session was chaired by Professor Krishna Kumar, Faculty, Central Institute of Education, University of Delhi. Mr. Bharat Bhushan presented the study on 'Impact of the Agrarian Crisis on Children's Learning'. The second presentation, 'Communal and Caste Conflict and its Impact on Children' was made by Ms. Gazala Paul from Samerth. For this session, the key discussants were Dr. Bela Bhatia and Ms. Annie Namala.

#### **Paper 1: Impact of the agrarian crisis on children's learning presented by Mr. Bharat Bhushan, Director, Centre for Action Research and People Development.**

Farm crisis is the biggest crisis in the country today which is increasingly pushing small farmers into debt, destitution, and death. The agrarian crisis which is primarily located in some pockets across the country has claimed around 250,000 farmers' lives since 1995. There are many more members from each of these families who are adversely affected. The problem is much bigger in magnitude than what official figures indicate as many farmers' suicides are not recorded.

The present study comprised of 242 case studies, including 194 case studies of households with farmers' suicides. It tried to explain the challenges faced by the children in the 'suicide belts' of Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, and Chhattisgarh. The case studies explained how children woke up to the sudden impact of their dreams being snatched and focused on the status of children affected by the farm crisis with regard to:

- \* School participation.
- \* Child labour.
- \* Child marriages among girl children.
- \* The role of schools in assisting the children to cope with the trauma.

The burden of the agrarian crisis is transferred to the children as a farmer's suicide does not end there, but triggers a larger crisis as his children and spouse are forced to repay the debt. Often the affected family has to clear the debt with less earning hands, and lesser social and familial support. Children from such families become child-farmers, wage labourers, or 'bonded' labour.

Grief and pressure due to the loss of a parent in 'unnatural' circumstances has a severe impact on the children. This also results in an adverse impact on a child's normal growth and well-being. Many girl children are forced into child marriages. Children from these families end up carrying inter-generational debt, liabilities, trauma, and distress. Teenagers are forced to support their families and repay the loan taken by the deceased parent. In some cases, children are also separated from their surviving parents and other siblings as they work in nearby towns or engage in 'bonded' labour in the village. These children are forced to become adults and major bread

winner much before their time; they often take up farming with lesser skills and experience owing to their age.

The research findings suggested that children affected by the farm crisis should be treated as a special category of vulnerable individuals as existing policies to assist households with farmers' suicides cannot address the issues confronting these children. Special measures are required to ensure that the crisis among small and marginal farmers does not deprive children of quality education as per the SSA norms and their entitlements and rights as children.

**Paper 2: Communal and caste conflict and its impact on children presented by Ms. Gazala Paul, Executive Director, Samerth, Gujarat and Mr. Vijay Parmar, ED, Janvikas.**

The other case study in this session focused on the impact of the caste conflict among Gujjars in Rajasthan who have waged a political movement to be recognized as a ST category and among Musahars in Bihar, who form the lowest strata in a caste-ridden society. Children's education in both these contexts suffered because the schools were located in areas inhabited by upper castes and hence Dalit children had less access to schools. They also had to face a lot of indirect discrimination in the form of comments and taunts from upper caste children; Dalit children were laughed at and made fun of. In many cases, even the teachers discriminated against these children and they were often scolded. There were also instances of physical chastisement.

The case study on communal violence and education in Kandhamal in Orissa showed that communal violence had increased instances of child labour. The study, which was conducted between January and March 2010, covered a sample of 100 household representatives, 100 child respondents, 10 schools, 10 sarpanches, 10 naibsarpanches, 2 block chairpersons, 2 block vice chairpersons, 2 BDOs, 2 ABDOs, 6 representatives of political parties, 20 CBO leaders, 10 peace committee members, 10 religious group members, 4 revenue inspectors, 4 school sub-inspectors, and 4 police officers from 20 Gram Panchayats of the 2 blocks in Raikia and Tikabali in Kandhamal district.

The study made a modest effort at reaching out to victims of communal violence and recording their sense of alienation and frustration. It also tried to capture the impact of large-scale displacement and violence on children and the imprints that this leaves on their innocent minds.

The condition of the children in Kandhamal has been traumatic and miserable. Apart from the trauma that they have had to face, they also missed school for one year. No attempts have been made by the administration to continue their education in relief camps. There were also several pregnant women in the camps who needed specialized treatment and good nutrition. There was also an increase in incidences of trafficking of children. A majority of the participants in the case study also said that communal violence had had a negative impact on the schooling of children.

An equally high percentage said that the violence had also led to adverse health impacts related to mental trauma.

*In the discussions which followed the presentations the following points were raised by discussant Ms. Annie Namala, NAC member, and Dayaram, consultant, and the participants:*

- There was a need to recognize ‘low intensity conflict areas’. Terms like ‘caste and class’ should not be used loosely.
- Most of the research was done from the mainstream perspective, while what was needed was a comparative study with the help of available data.
- The need to look at the role of the state and its accountability, particularly when it comes to Dalits and Muslims.
- A dominant perspective was used to understand the problems of the marginalized instead of using the perspective of the marginalized.
- Attempts were made to relate the impact of the agrarian crisis on children’s education with other issues like the conflict in Kashmir and dowry deaths and why these were highlighted more than the crisis in schooling.
- Why did farmers in some areas resort to suicides? What could be done to help them cope with agrarian distress, indebtedness, etc.?
- Was there a caste angle to the suicides being committed in Maharashtra?
- How had the lives of women changed after their husbands or earning members of their families had committed suicide? Did some of these women migrate to their parents’ families? Had some of them taken to sex work as a source of income?
- There was a need to differentiate between the objectives and purpose of research. Objectives were clearly stated in the research, but its purpose was the creation of new knowledge. These aspects needed to be fed into the curriculum. For example, why did the Ahmedabad riots take place? This is something that the children needed to study to prevent it from happening again. Similarly, the agrarian crisis and suicides were not only a village crisis as they affect all of us in cities too because if we destroy villages and agriculture we will all be destroyed soon.
- Was the agrarian conflict a state conflict, a societal conflict, or was it a conflict at the larger level of the nation?

**Session summing up by Dr. Bela Bhatia:** Dr. Bhatia began by linking the issue of conflict to similar other situations, such as conflict and death in Kashmir and dowry deaths where while one type of issue gets more attention the other does not. Referring to the presentation on the agrarian crisis, she suggested that a historical angle could have been added to it and a more longitudinal view could have enhanced the quality of the study. She also pointed out some other questions that could have been covered in the research:

- Why farmers in particular areas are committing suicide but not the farmers in other areas who are also living in the same terrible, drought prone conditions and who too are extremely poor. What is it that helps them cope with similar situations?
- Is there a caste angle to these suicides, that is, to which caste and community did these families belong?
- How the lives of women had changed in the areas where their husbands or earning members had committed suicide? For example, some might have migrated to their parents' families.
- Had someone taken to 'sex work' as a source of living?
- Had someone from the community taken undue advantage of their miserable conditions? How were they sustaining themselves and their kids etc.?
- Was there any cooperative dimension attached to it?
- She also cited the example from studies done in Iraq and Rwanda and impact on girls.

Dr. Bhatia suggested that there was a need to recognize 'low intensity conflict areas'. She further commented that there the terms 'caste and class' were used loosely. Research was primarily done from the mainstream perspective so she emphasized that we should do a comparative study with the help of the data that had been generated.

#### **Concluding comments by Professor Krishna Kumar:**

Professor Kumar said that, 'Education means taking responsibility for oneself and for others in society.' With these words he appreciated the effort put in by the researchers. However, he said that while undertaking research of this kind, a few things should be kept in mind. 'Objective and purpose' were the key terms of any research and hence these needed to be clear and specific. These should be focused upon. He also drew attention to the division that exists in every society between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots' and the social cost of these..

Referring to the agrarian crisis, Professor Kumar said that one had to question whether such a crisis was merely a state conflict, a societal conflict or at a larger level was it a conflict of the nation? Continuing on the same theme he asked how these stories of the sorry plight of farmers could become part of a larger body of knowledge. There was no mention of farmers' suicides in textbooks in Maharashtra, while they had a full chapter on Shivaji. 'Wasn't this a matter of grave concern?' he asked. Professor Kumar said that attempts should be made to transform such findings into knowledge that could then be put to some use.

## 2. Implications and Suggestions for NEG-FIRE

Dr. Vimala Ramachandran provided the concluding remarks in which she discussed the need to differentiate between issues in inter-state areas and issues that affect all backward districts in the country. According to her, our priority had to be on areas of extreme deprivation, conflict, dislocation, and displacement.

Hence, it was important to list or map locations with vulnerable children because wherever children were in distress, their absenteeism was higher. Reports on various rural crises needed to be disseminated in a readable form through the media, and also in local languages. Dr. Ramachandran stressed the need for enhancing the research capacities of NGOs and building linkages between NGOs and academic institutions.

Some of the suggestions made by the participants included:

- NEG-FIRE should help build linkages between academic institutions and practitioners. It should help in alliance/trust building between practitioners and academics.
- It could hold similar meetings in different states and disseminate their findings.
- NEG-FIRE could explore working with private schools to make 25 per cent reservations a reality.
- It should do an ethnographic research of models of pluralism.
- One issue should be picked up and studied in say ten states. Dissemination of information in different languages, including sending articles for national multi-lingual newsletters should be promoted.
- Combining the research from different areas and writing articles for mainstream media and important journals.
- Some efforts need to be put in for bringing tribal and minority issues to the policy level. As an institution NEG-FIRE could provide a platform for raising such issues.
- As active agency in this field, NEG-FIRE can make recommendations and provide suggestions on primary education and also suggestions for developing curriculum to the states.
- NEG-FIRE should take its advocacy role more proactively. It should file PILs where it feels these would help.

While thanking all the participants, the researchers, chairpersons, discussants, and board and staff members, Executive Director, Ms. Marita Ishwaran stated that the 'Thank-you' was not a noun or a full stop, but a verb which indicated action and movement and exhorted all to be part of the mission of bringing about transformation in society through education.

**Annexure I**  
**Programme Schedule**

Time	Theme	Presenter/Speaker
9.30 am – 9.45 am	Registration and tea	
9.45 am – 10.00 am	Welcome and setting the context	Mr. Martin Macwan, Chairperson NEG-FIRE
10.00 am-10.25 am	Keynote Address	Professor Sukhadeo Thorat, Chairperson ICSSR
10.25 am-12.30 am	Session 1. Schooling in Inter-state Border and Tribal Areas	Chairperson: Dr. Minati Panda, Associate Professor, Zakir Husain Centre for Educational Studies, JNU
10.25 am-10.45 am	Schooling for Children in Inter-State Border Areas of Orissa/AP and Bihar/Jharkhand	Meera Samson and Anuradha De, Directors, CORD
10.45 am-11.05 am	Elementary Education for Children from Scheduled Tribes in India across four states—Rajasthan Gujarat, Orissa, and Andhra Pradesh. Concerns, Conflicts and Opportunities in their Schooling	Dr. Nagendra Nagpal, Director, CERP Ms. Bhanumati, Director, Dhaatri Resource Centre for Adivasi Women and Children, AP
11.05 am-11.25 am	Tribal children can learn Maths and English: A case study of Santhal children in Marsi Marsal School and other schools in Jharkhand	Fr. Robert Slattery, Member, Jharkhand State Education Advisory Committee
11.25 am- 12.20 pm	Discussants  Open Discussion	Mr. A. Das, Director, AGRAGAMEE, Raigada, Odisha  Ms. Anjali Noronha, Senior Fellow Eklavya, Bhopal
12.20 pm- 12.30 pm	Summing up and final comments	Chairperson
12.30 pm- 01.15 pm	Lunch	
01.15 pm-2.15 pm	Session 2. Children and Education in Conflict Situations	Chairperson: Dr. Bela Bhatia, Honorary Visiting Professor, TISS

01.15pm- 01.35pm	Education in Conflict Societies: Ahmedabad, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Kandhamal, and Manipur	Dr. Pradeep Bhargava, Director GBPSSI, Allahabad
01.35 pm-02.05 pm	Discussant Open Discussion	Mr. Dayaram, General Body Member, NEG-FIRE
02.05 pm-02.15 pm	Summing up and final comments	Chairperson
02.15 pm-03.40 pm	Session 3. Children and Education in Conflict and Crisis Situations	Chairperson: Professor Krishna Kumar, Faculty, Central Institute of Education, University of Delhi
02.15 pm-02.35 pm	Impact of the Agrarian Crisis on Children's Learning	Mr. Bharat Bhushan Mamidi, Director, Centre for Action Research and People Development
02.35 pm -02.55 pm	Communal and Caste Conflict and its Impact on Children	Ms. Gazala Paul, ED Samerth, and Mr. Vijay Parmar, ED Janvikas
02.55 pm- 03.30 pm	Discussants Open Discussion	Dr. Bela Bhatia, Honorary Visiting Professor, TISS Ms. Annie Namala, Director Centre for Equity Studies and Inclusion, Delhi
03.30 pm- 03.40 pm	Summing up and final comments	Chairperson
03.40 pm-04.10 pm	Tea	
04.10 pm-05.00 pm	Session 4.	Chairperson: Dr. Ranjana Srivastava, Vice-chairperson cum managing Director, Centre for Education Research and Development
04.10 pm-04.35 pm	What are the implications of these research studies for us as educators, administrators, researchers, activists, and for NEG-FIRE?	Dr. Vimala Ramachandran, ERU Consultants Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi
04.35 pm-04.50 pm	Summing up	Chairperson
04.50 pm- 05.00 pm	Vote of thanks	Ms. Marita Ishwaran, Executive Director, NEG-FIRE

## Annexure II

### List of Participants

Sr.No	Name	Organization
1	Abdus Subhan	Abhiyan - Jharkhand
2	Achyut Das	Aragamee - Orissa
3	Agnu Ram	Parivartan - Chattisgarh
4	Ajay Kumar Singh	Consultant - Delhi
5	Akshat Thakur	NEG-FIRE Staff - Rajasthan
6	Albiciya Kullu	NEG-FIRE Staff - Delhi
7	Aldo James Vaz	NEG-FIRE Staff - Delhi
8	Amardeep Banerjee	Times of India - Delhi
9	Ambaresh Rai	Member RTE Forum
10	Anjali Noronha	Eklavya - Madhya Pradesh
11	Anjela Taneja	OXFAM - Delhi
12	Ankur Choudhary	Consultant - Delhi
13	Annie Namala	Board Member - Delhi
14	Anuradha De	CORD - Delhi - Delhi
15	Aparna Dwivedi	Consultant - Delhi
16	Arambam Noni Meetei	Researcher - Imphal
17	Arun Anand	Swaraj Foundation - Jharkhand
18	Aruna Popuri	CORD - Delhi
19	Asha Gosain	NEG-FIRE Staff - Delhi
20	Asha Mishra	Bharat Gyan Vigyan Samiti - Bhopal
21	Asha Singh	Board Member - Delhi
22	Audrey Ferreira	Consultant - Pune
23	Avinash Kumar Singh	SCF - Delhi
24	B. Mohanaiah	Timbaktu Collective - Andhra Pradesh
25	Baby John	NEG-FIRE Staff - Delhi
26	S. Balaraju	Nature - Andhra Pradesh
27	Baliram Balsaraf	NEG-FIRE Staff - Maharashtra
28	Bhoomiputra B. Wagh	SVS - Maharashtra
29	Biswajeet Mukherjee	NEG-FIRE Staff - Delhi
30	C. Obilesu	Timbaktu Collective - Andhra Pradesh
31	Chanchal Yadav	CIE - Delhi
32	Chandrashekhhar Singh	Vedic Society - Jharkhand
33	Chittaranjan kaul	CLR - Maharashtra
34	Claira Noronha	CORD - Delhi
35	Claude Alvares	OFAI - Goa

36	Dayaram	Board Member - Delhi
37	Dina Ganvir	Parivartan - Chattisgarh
38	Dr. Bela Bhatia	TISS - Mumbai
39	Dr. John Kurian	CLR - Maharashtra
40	Dr. Minati Panda	Centre for Education Studies, JNU - Delhi
41	Dr. Pravin Kale	Dilasa - Maharashtra
42	Dr. Umesh Jha	University of Delhi
43	Farh Faroqui	Jamia Milia Islamia - Delhi
44	Fr. Anand Kerketta	REAP - Bihar
45	Fr. Francis Turkey	Purnea Social Service Society - Bihar
46	Fr. John V.X.	RDSS - Madhya Pradesh
47	Fr. Marcus Garacia	Udaipur Diocesan Society - Rajasthan
48	Fr. Robert Slatery	State Education Advisory Committee - Jharkhand
49	Fr. Thomas Kunnel	JDSSS - Madhya Pradesh
50	Fr. Virendra Kumar	Prabhat - Bihar
51	Gazala Paul	Samerth Trust - Gujrat
52	Govind Raj Y desai	State Quality Coordinator - Goa
53	Hyder Rizvi	Board Member - Bhopal
54	Jacob Thundyil	PREM - Orissa
55	Jitender Singh	Consultant - Delhi
56	Joachim Sabhasundere	ATMA - Orissa
57	Joseph Sebastian	IGSSS - Delhi
58	Joseph KD	KDSS - Andhra Pradesh
59	KamalChand Kypotta	Domestic Workers - Delhi
60	Kameshwari Jandhyala	PAC Member - Andhra Pradesh
61	Kiran Bhatta	NCPCR - Delhi
62	Lalita Bhengra	PECUC - Orissa
63	Latika	Lady Irwin, Student - Delhi
64	M.A. Salem	Conare - Hyderabad
65	Madhukar Das	Dilasa - Maharashtra
66	Mahendra Kumar Dwivedi	NEG-FIRE Staff - Lucknow
67	Mamadi Bharath Bhushan	Center for Action Research and People Developmnet - Hyderabad
68	Manish Jain	Ambedkar University - Delhi
69	Mansi	Ambedkar University - Delhi
70	Marita Ishwaran	NEG-FIRE Staff - Delhi
71	Mastan Biradar	CDF - Bangalore
72	Meena Narula	Consultant - Delhi
73	Meena Srinivasan	Consultant -Pune
74	Meera Samson	CORD - Delhi
75	Minakshi Mishra	State Project Director, Representative - Bhubaneswar

76	Mohd. Faiyaz	Jamia Milia Islamia, Intern - Delhi
77	Mridula bajaj	Mobile Creches - Delhi
78	Murali Mohan	Sadhna - Andhra Pradesh
79	N.A.Shah Ansari	Young India - Orissa
80	Naaz Khair	Consultant - Delhi
81	Nagendra Nagpal	CERP - Jaipur
82	Neha Gupta	CORD - Delhi
83	Nisha Varshney	Consultant - Delhi
84	Nivrita Durgavanshi	NEG-FIRE Staff - Bhopal
85	Nyla Coelho	OFAI - Goa
86	Padmini	Lady Irwin, Student - Delhi
87	Prabir Basu	CACL - Kolkotta
88	Pradeep Bhargava	GPSSI - Allahabad
89	Pradeepta Sundaray	CSDI - Orissa
90	Pramod Zinjade	MPSSM - Maharashtra
91	Pratidhanya Dongre	Dilasa - Maharashtra
92	Prof. A.B.L. Srivastava	EdCIL - Delhi
93	Prof. Cherian Joseph	Board Member - Delhi
94	Prof. Joseph Bara	Board Member - Delhi
95	Prof. Sukhadeo Thorat	ICSSR - Delhi
96	Rahul Mehta	Consultant - Jharkhand
97	Rajaram Bhadu	Samantar - Rajasthan
98	Rajendra Jaiswal	Prakriti Foundation - Gujrat
99	Ramakant Rout	Parivartan - Chattisgarh
100	Ranjana Srivastava	Board Member - Delhi
101	Razia Patel	Indian Institute of Education - Pune
102	Rekha Dey	Magic Bus - Delhi
103	Robert D'souza	JNU - Delhi
104	Ronald Pinto	Consultant - Delhi
105	Samarpan Mahila Vikas Kendra	Samarpan Mahila Vikas Kendra - Madhya Pradesh
106	Sanat Kumar Sinha	State Advisor- Patna
107	Sanjana Das	Childfund India - Delhi
108	Sanjib Mantry	Catholic Charities - Orissa
109	Santosh Samal	Dalit Foundation - Delhi
110	Satish Girija	NBJK - Jharkhand
111	Satish Kaipa	Timbaktu Collective - Andhra Pradesh
112	Seema Mundoli	Dhaatri Resource Centre for Adivasi Women and Children - Andhra Pradesh
113	Shilp Shikha Singh	Consultant - Jaipur
114	Shruti	Lady Irwin, Student - Delhi
115	Sneha Lal	I-Thought - Delhi

116	Sonal Bakshi	Bhasha - Gujrat
117	Sr. Harsha Sukhveer	Catholic Diocesan of Jhabua - Madhya Pradesh
118	Sr. Leona	Domestic Workers - Delhi
119	Sr. Sudha Varghese	Board Member - Patna
120	Subhash R. Mandrekar	SCPCR - Goa
121	Sugandha Upasani	NEG-FIRE Staff - Pune
122	Sujeet Kumar Jha	GPVS - Patna
123	Suman Sachdeva	Care - Delhi
124	Suryakant Kulkarni.	NCPCR - Maharashtra
125	Swaroop Kumar	Mahita - Hyderabad
126	Swati Sahni	EdCIL - Delhi
127	Swayam Panda	Consultant - Delhi
128	Tara Naorem	EdCIL - Delhi
129	Tushita	Lady Irwin ,Student - Delhi
130	Umeed Singh	NEG-FIRE Staff - Delhi
131	Urvashi Nangia	SRTT - Delhi
132	Vasavi Kiro	Consultant - Jharkhand
133	Vijay Kaul	Chetanalaya - Delhi
134	Vijay Parmar	Janvikas - Ahmedabad
135	Vimla Ramachandran	ERU Consultants Pvt. Ltd. - Delhi
136	Yamini Agarwal	Jamia Milia Islamia,Student - Delhi