

RISING FROM STONES

An NEG-FIRE initiative to Stop Child Labour in the
Illegal Quarries of Sasaram

Rising from stones

**An NEG-FIRE initiative to Stop Child Labour in the
Illegal Quarries of Sasaram**



RISING FROM STONES (2017)

NEG-FIRE Initiative to Stop Child Labour in the
Illegal Quarries of Sasaram

Documentation

Frank Krishner

Editorial Support

Rakesh K Singh, Ph.D
Sharon Ferdinands

Special Support

Siji Noorokariyil, Stephen Raj
Sandeep Tirkey, Ravala Vijay Kiran

Photo Credit

REAP, Sasaram



**New Education Group - Foundation for Innovation
and Research in Education. [NEG-FIRE]**

Published in February 2017

FOR PRIVATE CIRCULATION ONLY

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENT	4
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	5
INTRODUCTION	6
THE PROGRAMME - SUSTAINABLE EDUCATION AND EMPOWERMENT OF DALITS (SEED)	7
The Background	7
Operational Area	7
Aims and Objectives	8
FIRST STEPS	10
Planning	10
Selection and Training of Animators	11
Community Involvement and use of Folk Media	11
Basic Orientation of Programme Staff	12
Creating Interest in Learning	12
Capacity Building	13
Advocacy and Related Activities	14
THE JOURNEY	16
The First Phase	16
The Second Phase	17
The Third Phase	17
Challenges	18
OUTCOMES AND IMPACT	25
BEST PRACTICES	30
CONCLUSION	32



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Two decades ago, the National Education Group's (NEG) child labour strategy was driven by the position that poverty was the main factor that perpetuated child labour and since education was the core purpose, NEG supported non-formal education through a two to three hour class formula in the day and 'lantern light' study classes at night. NEG however ensured that there was no violation to the provisions of the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986 (CLPRA).

Since 2005, NEG, now New Education Group – Foundation for Innovation and Research in Education (NEG-FIRE), in the light of its own experience and in line with the discourse in education and child labour, has witnessed poor functioning of the education system to be directly responsible for child labour, along with other reasons. Despite the Right to Education Act, 2009 (RTE), schools are still not seen as worthy, safe and equitable spaces for learning at many places. NEG-FIRE is also sensitive to specific geographies and vulnerable communities, wherein poverty has a vicious pull of nimble fingers as some families still need very fourth or sixth hand, to satisfy their basic needs. NEG-FIRE has all along been strategizing to address these issues, while ensuring that children go to school.

From 2009 to 2014, we have supported around ten (10) partners in three states – Bihar, Andhra Pradesh and Rajasthan – to prevent nearly 11000 children from becoming potential child labourers, through diverse educational approaches and strategies. This report documents our effort and captures our journey, in partnership with Rohtas Educational and Associated Programmes (REAP), in eradication of child labourers working in 10 stone quarries of Sasaram block, Bihar, since the year 2008-09. It highlights the various phases of the project – the aim, process followed and achievements of each phase.

I would like to express my gratitude to all who helped in this effort - Mr. Frank Krishner, the documentation specialist; our local partner REAP, especially Fr. Siji Noorokariyil and Fr. Stephen Raj; the Education and Knowledge Management (EKM) and Programme Management and Development (PMD) teams at NEG-FIRE; our Finance, HR and Admin teams; and most importantly, our various stakeholders, children, parents, teachers and others from Sasaram and adjoining areas, who shared their experiences and views on the initiative to stop child labour.

Vengatesh Krishna
Executive Director, NEG-FIRE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

New Education Group – Foundation for Innovation and Research in Education (NEG-FIRE) in partnership with Rohtas Educational and Associated Programmes (REAP) has been engaged in eradication of child labourers working in 10 stone quarries of Sasaram block, Bihar, since the year 2008-09.

A significant breakthrough has been achieved in creating awareness on children's rights and working to ensure the effective implementation of the RTE Act and ICDS in 29 villages covering 30 schools and 31 Anganwadi in Sasaram block.

By 2015, with concerted efforts through various project interventions, of the 690 child labourers identified, 595 have stopped working in the quarry area and have been mainstreamed to the nearby government schools.

At present there is 100 percent enrolment in all the schools within the project area.

The first phase focused primarily on awareness building, campaign against child labour, enrolment, retention, providing children with supplementary education and bridging their learning to more age-appropriate levels.

The second phase continued the advocacy for quality education; the interventions were more focused on working with the government schools, AWC, and

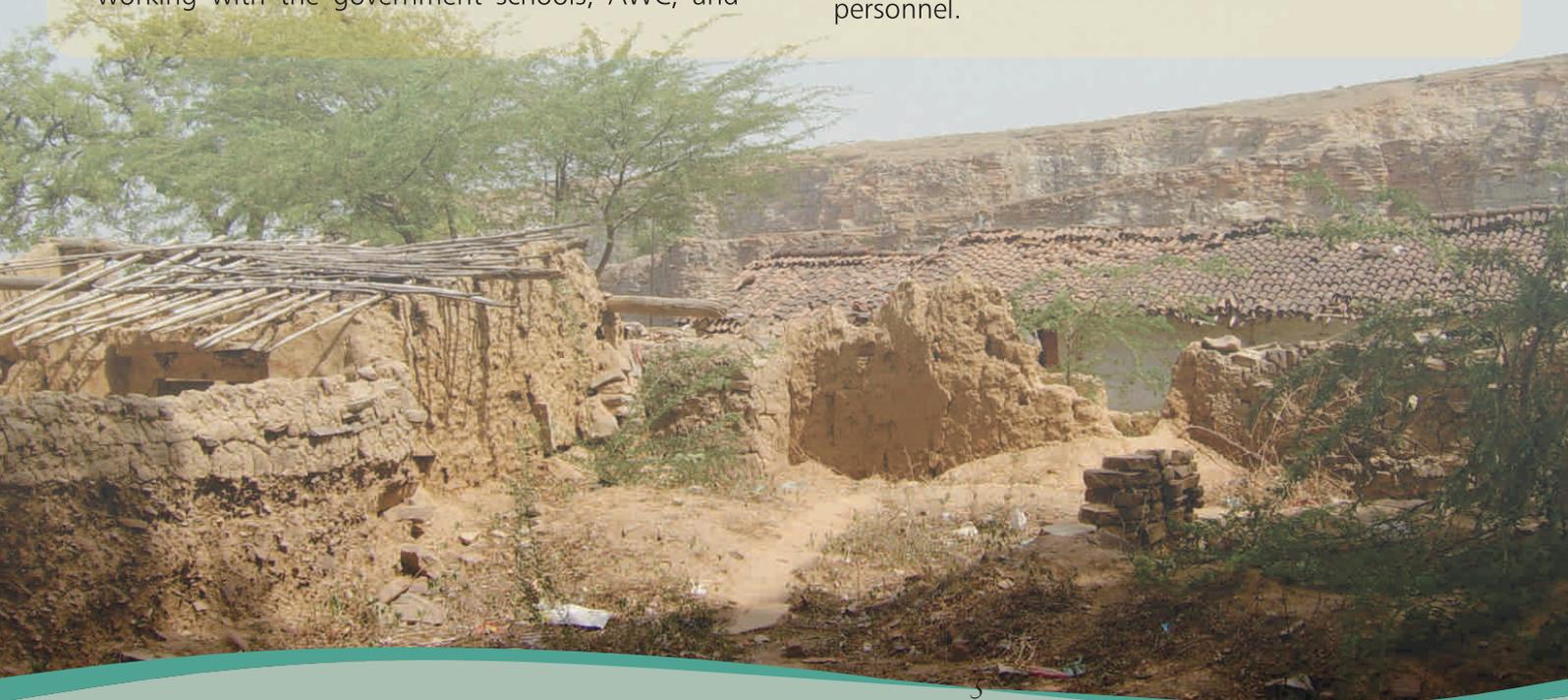
increasing the stake of communities within these systems through the formation and strengthening of Community Based Organisations.

There was consistent advocacy on child rights. Various stake holders such as children, teachers, parents, PRI and others were oriented on the rights of children and RTE: The Right to Education Act. The local communities began to monitor quality education interventions and take up grass root level advocacy issues. Through the next phase emphasis was given on further strengthening the community structures like Mata Samitis, Bal Mandalis and others.

The reduction of child labour catalysed a change in the overall environment. Mainstreamed and retained children with improved learning levels opted to go beyond the elementary education mark and go on to high school.

The latest phase of the project aimed at reducing direct interventions, fostering local leadership and handing over the entire responsibility to the community, thus ensuring sustainability and ensuring community ownership of elementary education.

This report documents the intervention, its outcome and impact and is based on desk reviews of documents and materials, field visits and discussions with stakeholders and project implementation personnel.



INTRODUCTION

NEG-FIRE promotes elimination of child labour through education. For it believes that education is an empowering instrument that ensures all children go to school and are out of work. Since 2009 it has partnered with 10 organisations to specifically work on elimination of child labour in select districts of Bihar, Andhra Pradesh and Rajasthan, using different approaches and strategies. Irrespective of the approach, the core of the intervention has been education, while the strategy has largely focussed on – a). Access and retention of children in schools, b). Improvement in the functioning of schools as per the RTE norms, and c). Creation of a network of communities, CBOs, the media and labour employers for awareness raising and action.

The diverse educational approaches and strategies have created good results. For example, Sadhna, one of our Andhra Pradesh partners, succeeded in getting 100 village panchayats to sign a resolution to ensure that their villages become child labour free. Others like MAHITA (Andhra Pradesh), CONARE (Andhra Pradesh), Kurnool Diocese Social Service Society (Andhra Pradesh), Sugam Jagriti (Bihar), and DEEP (Bihar) achieved success through embarking on a

campaign to get children into schools. Muzaffarpur Diocesan Society (Bihar) and REAP (which is the focus of this documentation effort) got children out of quarries, while others developed grassroots volunteers as cadres for education. Some partners have addressed the issue of migration of children along with their parents, by encouraging the elders of the villages to look after the children while their parents migrated, thus ensuring that these children stay in school and not join the work force along with their parents.

NEG-FIRE has also directly implemented its Elimination of Child Labour programme through education in the stone quarries of Bundi, Rajasthan, with a primary focus on education and strengthening of service delivery by the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS). The idea was to make all children school-goers on the path of learning and development, through improvement of schools, community awareness on the importance of education and working with varied stakeholders. Our interventions in Bundi, in collaboration with local partners, have enabled over 1,300 children to join school and continue their education.

The Goal

Moving away from child labour - All children (including child labourers) are accessing their rights and entitlements in an environment of quality education as per RTE, with strong and committed parent and community support.

THE PROGRAMME - SUSTAINABLE EDUCATION AND EMPOWERMENT OF DALITS (SEED)

Sasaram, Bihar and its people have bidden adieu to child labour! Thanks to the concerted efforts of NEG-FIRE and its partner organisation, REAP, under the project "Sustainable Education and Empowerment of Dalits (SEED)", a part of the larger 'Child Rights and Child Protection in Quarry Areas' programme, which aimed at complete eradication of child labour using RTE to ensure not only enrolment and retention but also quality education to Dalit, Tribal and Muslim children and victims of social and economic deprivation and religious exclusion in stone quarry areas of Sasaram block in Rohtas district of Bihar, within a span of 8 years (2008-2015).

The project was divided into three (3) phases. The first phase of the intervention (April 2008- March 2010) was implemented in 12 villages in 5 Panchayats. The second phase (April 2010 – March 2012) was implemented in 25 villages in 5 Panchayats. The Third phase (December 2012 – March 2015) was

implemented in 29 villages in 8 Panchayats. The phase-out process was initiated from April 2015.

During 2008 to 2016, around 890 out of 1090 child workers (82%) had been mainstreamed in schools, 204 out of 354 drop-outs (58%) were back to school and continuing their education, and 330 out of 699 left out children (47%) had been enrolled and retained in the school system.

THE BACKGROUND

The conditions of abject poverty, illiteracy and social exclusion in which the overwhelmingly large number of Dalit and Muslim children live in Sasaram, make it difficult for them to attain education. Therefore, Dalits and Muslims formed the main focus group of the intervention. On the one hand Government schools with insufficient teachers do not attract children or increase interest in learning, and on the other, the state Government measures to eradicate and prohibit child labour appear ineffective as are the measures for the rehabilitation of child labourers in the District.

Based on learning from past experience, it was evident that children who were out of school fell prey to child labour and unsafe migration. The approach towards eradicating child labour would primarily be through ensuring enrolment and retention of all children within the formal school system. This includes support to the government initiatives for the effective implementation of the Right to Education Act (RTE).

THE OPERATIONAL AREA

The area of operation covered 29 Dalit, Adivasi and Muslim villages situated in 8 Panchayats in Sasaram Block of Rohtas District, Bihar. Three Cluster Resource Centres (CRC) of the Bihar Primary Education Department, with (totalling 30 schools) serve these 29 villages. The area served by these three CRCs covers 10 clandestine 'quarry fields' where manual stone mining (basically illegal but controlled by powerful

September 2012- Survey in 56 villages

The Challenges

Illiteracy: 26 per cent of total target groups were illiterate. 10.37 percent children of 6-14 yrs. had dropped out of the formal school system. 25 percent of the children were involved in stone quarry work or forms of labour such as collecting firewood, rearing cattle, running shops etc.

Poverty: 75 percent of the target community were poor as per the state definition. They are also landless, and work either as agricultural labourers or daily wage earners. Many migrate on a regular basis to Punjab as seasonal agricultural labourers or to cities like Mumbai and Delhi to work on construction sites. Most live in poor conditions with no electricity and toilet.

Social Security: 43 per cent families benefited from Indira Awas Yojana Housing Scheme, while the rest remain landless. While 39 percent have MNREGA job cards, the scheme is hardly in operation, and there is a dependence on local landlords. There is limited access to PDS and other social security schemes, due to many not having BPL cards, and other forms of identification.

interests), stone chip processing and transportation occurs. At the time of the start of the intervention, Child labour was considered endemic to this area.

The quarry fields and blasting sites have sucked in the most needy and desperate: tribal migrant labourers from neighbouring states like Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh, and those from the Dalit settlements around. Children exist along with the adults, the older ones being drafted into the workforce alongside their parents.

Till recently, Dalit and Muslim children could be seen breaking stone at any time of the day. Migrant labours did not enrol their children in school, partly because they had no permanent documents and identification. The local Dalit and Muslim children were either out of school or had dropped out. Even those children enrolled in school were part time child labour, working alongside their parents after school.

Sun, dust, stone particles in the ambient atmosphere and lack of protective gear are the cause of widespread respiratory and pulmonary illnesses such as tuberculosis. Child earners in such conditions were prone to mimic adult habits such as chewing tobacco, consuming alcohol or smoking prematurely.

AIM AND OBJECTIVES

The aim of the programme was a complete eradication of child labour, and to ensure not only

enrolment and retention but qualitative education for the Dalit, Tribal and Muslim children, victims of social and economic deprivation and religious exclusion in all 29 villages.

The specific objectives were:

- **All school going children are in a quality learning environment** where their rights and entitlements under RTE are ensured to them.
- All 6 – 14 age group children in the project area **receive their school related entitlements and have access** to government schemes such as free uniforms, scholarships, learning materials, MDM, etc. every year.
- Children aged 0 to 6 years children have **access to and benefits from Anganwadi Centres** in the project area. All existing AWCs in project operation area are open and functional.
- All Pregnant and lactating mothers, children under 6, and adolescent girls **receive entitlements such as preparatory school (ECE), home rations and routine immunization support.**

Out of 30 schools in the project area:
Primary Schools : 12
Middle Schools : 15
Urdu Primary : 02

Over thirteen thousand people in the 29 project villages depend upon stone for their livelihood: 9,106 are Scheduled Castes, 1455 Scheduled Tribes, 2594 Muslim

- **Build and sustain a youth cadre to take leadership roles** in the community's future development. Emergence and participation of 58 young leaders across project area.
- **Formation of and functioning 29 Youth Clubs** with clear mandates, including educational development of project area.
- **Develop and promote 8 Panchayat Action Committees (PACs)** for ensuring state accountability, and social and economic intermediation. PACs monitor Panchayats to ensure entitlements, including quality education to disadvantaged communities.



FIRST STEPS

The genesis of the intervention dates back to the year 2008. The first programme started in the core area of 12 villages that housed 1,299 families. From the very outset, the planning relied on primary data collected through means of physical survey and door to door verification. This was carried out by project staff and partners. Participatory Rural Appraisal and the participation of the local community further strengthened the data collection and planning process.

The primary assessment of the ground conditions, issues, and challenges to be met in helping the children and communities living on the periphery of unorganised stone quarrying sites in Sasaram was achieved through a baseline survey and personal contact with the target population. From the outset, the local communities were involved and taken into confidence.

PLANNING

The initial planning incorporated the following activities and processes:

- Training in Nukkad Natak (street plays)
- Vidyalaya Chalo Abhiyan (Let's go to school campaign)
- Selection of Animator
- Training of Animators
- Village Level Survey
- Supplementary Education Centres
- Prabhat Pheri (Early morning rally)
- Formation of Child Upliftment Committee (Bal Utthan Samiti)
- One day workshop for parents/guardians of the project area

PROBLEM ANALYSIS BY STAKEHOLDERS DURING SURVEY 2012

Illiteracy: Lack of awareness about education and accessibility to schools, no relevance of education in terms of life skills, education is not a priority over poverty.

308 children found to be drop outs: Lack of accountability, commitment and vision; teacher absenteeism; lack of trained and skilled teachers; teachers from dominant caste groups and do not feel motivated to teach.

Child labour (Girls-522, Boys-670=1192) 25.8 per cent: Poverty; disaffection towards school system among parents; children work to support family income

Low attendance of children in schools: No proper classroom teaching, no teaching aid facilities and infrastructure, teacher absenteeism.

Lack of sufficient teachers in schools: Teachers used for non-teaching work, Govt. partially implemented RTE, Less teachers than stated RTE ratio.

Lack of coordination among Teachers and Parents: PTA/ SMC meetings not regular, accusations from both sides, parents not convinced of school benefits for their children.

Poor implementation of Schemes such as midday meal in schools: No proper monitoring of Govt. schemes, lack of duty-bearer accountability

Anganwadi schemes: midday meal etc. poorly implemented: Budget allocations and materials not reaching AWCs; multi-level chain of corruption

Pessimism and lack of cooperation from parents: Failure of govt education system to deliver; lack of awareness; prejudice and misconceptions, parents do not see tangible benefits of education



Photo : Wall writing: low cost but high engagement communication strategy

SELECTION AND TRAINING OF ANIMATORS

The process started with meetings in every village of the project area, as part of the village contact activity. The local people were asked to list women or men in their community who had completed their Intermediate (higher secondary) or Bachelor's degree, who would be interested in helping the children of the community get to school. These candidates were then invited to the project office for a written test and interview followed by a pre-training session.

There were a total of 12 candidates (one from each project village) who were selected through this process. This was followed by a three-day residential training and a 5 day capacity building workshop for the animators.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT AND USE OF FOLK MEDIA

Right from the first intervention, transparency and community

involvement have been the fundamental aspects of the process. To facilitate the survey, community meetings were conducted in the villages where the data would be obtained. These were often combined with street plays to highlight the present situation of the Dalit community and their lack awareness about the various schemes of government.

Using a range of PRA methods, such as Focus group discussions, preference ranking, mapping, semi-structured interviewing and seasonal and historical diagramming, the community were facilitated to assess their circumstances, articulate their problems and identify the factors that contributed to them.

Wall writing was yet another way to engage the local community. Animators and the local children brainstormed and came up with appropriate slogans and messages and the local community members were consulted on possible spaces

for displaying the messages, in many cases, the people readily offered spaces on the outer walls of their dwellings. Children and adults participated in the campaign.

Children as Community Mobilisers: This provided opportunities and generated enthusiasm among the children to motivate others towards education, by means of Prabhat Pheris or early morning rallies where children marched through their village raising slogans in favour of education and gender parity; involving school children in wall painting activities; children's participation in street plays on education, environment, and burning social issues. Children from Bal Mandalis were also encouraged to find ways to motivate grown-ups to participate in socially useful activity.¹

Formation of CBOs: Community based organisations such as Youth Clubs and Panchayat Action Committees were formed to ensure

¹The children of Fazilpur village got together, discussed the water shortage, and decided to clean up a disused well, so that the water could be used. The elders scoffed at first, but when the children and a few youths began the work, soon more of the community joined in and cleaned the well.

continuity and sustainability after the phase out. Capacity building and leadership development training activity was organised from time to time. Together with Mata Samiti and Kishori Dal, they serve to monitor the functioning of AWCs and schools and form a pressure group to ensure timely delivery of government services and entitlements to the children and community at large.

Creating Cultural Consciousness: Through workshop sessions and interactions, the young people and their parents were encouraged to examine the social reality and identify the factors that contributed to their present socio-economic conditions.



Children are active participants in events

A cultural troupe was formed, and the youth received training in acting and developing street plays. This 'Nukkad Team' gave performances in the villages, thus generating awareness about various issues that impacted their lives, including the violation of children's rights. The school children also performed skits and street plays from time to time to address issues such as protection of the environment, importance of education, evils of child marriage and so on.

Generating Critical Awareness: Several strategies were used to sensitize the community and to generate critical awareness on issues of education, gender, health and nutrition and other relevant socio-economic concerns. Awareness programs and street shows were organised. Meetings and 'Gram Sabhas' were conducted in the eight Panchayats from time to time, encouraging the participants to identify and

critically reflect on issues affecting them and encouraging their participation in searching for solutions.

BASIC ORIENTATION FOR PROJECT STAFF

The project staff received the initial orientation, and this was followed up by continual training and day-to-day capacity building, so that all aspects of the intervention could be addressed with confidence.

At the beginning of each phase of the intervention, a two-day orientation of the entire project staff was conducted at REAP. It aimed at motivating the staff towards the effective implementation of the project. The staff members were intimated of the goals and objectives, activities, respective responsibilities and accountability within the project, by means of group activity and discussions.

The participants explored the key concepts of the Children's Right to Education, the intricacies of child labour and reflected on the socio-economic and educational status of the target groups mainly Dalits, Tribals and Muslims.

The training also touched upon teaching at the Supplementary Education Centres and the importance of lesson-planning. Emphasis was laid on rapport building strategy with stake-holders, government teachers and Anganwadi workers, and on involving volunteers in conducting programs at field level.

CREATING INTEREST IN LEARNING

It consisted of creating opportunities for active learning through innovative methods such as play, art



and theatre both within and outside the school. The aim was to generate an enthusiasm for education not just among children and young adults, but in the larger village community as well.

Sports and extracurricular activities were conducted to promote the all-round development of school-going children and youth. Such activities engage the children's attention and ensure retention, while the parents and larger community are also involved as spectators, volunteers, guests, or supporters.

CAPACITY BUILDING

Capacity building is vital component for any replicable endeavour. Awareness, orientation and training activities were an integral part of the programme structure. Appropriate and need-based training modules were developed for the project staff, the stakeholders within the target communities, and the duty bearers in the government service delivery system. The most important and extensive capacity building would be of the children, who were mainly out of school, school dropouts and late entry learners.



Capacity building included a wide range of activities and exercises at various levels:

Nukkad Natak and Song Training for Children on Issues Linked to Education: At the very outset of the programme, sets of children from the project area were identified and trained in basic acting and music skills. Initially 39 children were trained in two groups and also learnt songs with themes on literacy, children's rights and other awareness songs.

Summer Residential Programmes: The programme went beyond mere enrolment. These short-term

courses helped children in the quarry areas remain in school and also to develop age appropriate competencies. The Summer Residential programmes helped the weakest children, helping them to access knowledge and bring their learning skills at par with children from better economic and social backgrounds. Sessions on Yoga, meditation, hygiene, personality development and leadership were part of the daily routine. Children attending the programme were given a free medical check-up, and helped address medical or health issues, if any.

Training for SMC Members: A series of one-day trainings on RTE were organised in government schools. To many, this training was a first of its kind and an eye-opener for several of the SMC members, most of whom were not aware of their roles and responsibilities in ensuring that the students receive the entitlements under the Act and the state rules.

Follow Up Sessions: The on-going strengthening and capacity building of SMCs were effected partly through follow up one-day training



Volunteers prepare TLMs at a training workshop

workshop. The workshop threw up discussions on the nature of gaps within the government elementary school system, and what measures could be taken to address them. The workshop culminated in a plan of action drawn up by the SMC members of the 30 schools. The main resolutions were [a] regular and consistent monitoring of the school activities [b] drawing up of the school development plan [c] ensuring that the government funds and resources were utilized judiciously for school improvement.

Training for Staff, Animators and Volunteers:

Project staff, particularly supervisors and SEC animators, needed to be updated on pedagogical skills and classroom transactions. Several short training activities were organised from time to time in order to enhance the knowledge and skill of the staff in their transactions with the children at various levels, and to keep them motivated.

Capacity Building of the Youth Volunteers: With the involvement of the youth from the local communities at the supplementary Education Centres, there was a need to build up their teaching-learning skills as well. The volunteers who participated learnt about the techniques of using available materials to teach Math and were given creative inputs on how to improve their English language skills. The volunteers from the local village communities are eager youngsters, mostly students who have studied up to higher secondary level, and products of the government schools.

Training on Use of TLM and Language Learning:

The aim was to help the volunteers develop teaching materials for English, Hindi and Mathematics and to practice using them. The volunteers learnt useful English rhymes and practiced how to use them. They had demo classes, and developed flash cards to use as TLM in the centres.

Legal Aid Training: Project staff member and animators benefitted from one-day workshops on Basic Legal Aid where relevant sections of IPC and CrPC, how to write FIR, different types of offences, bail-able and non-bailable offences, and so on were introduced and discussed.

Capacity Building for Community Leadership: The rights and entitlements that enable children to fully access the benefits of qualitative education can never be achieved unless the parents and the rest of the adults in the community ensure that the system delivers. Apart from developing a feeling of ownership towards the local government school, the members of disempowered communities have to learn how to engage with the teachers and other service providers without a sense of shame or inhibition. Towards this end, continual and consistent capacity building of leadership qualities within the group and the grooming of potential leaders is an imperative of this holistic approach to ensure that the children of the poor are not just enrolled, but actually receive life affirming education.

Parents' and Guardians' Meetings and Training:

The capacity building for the parents who were mainly marginal labourers and daily wage earners helped (a) build a rapport with them and decrease their apathy towards regular schooling for their children and to gain a sense of pride in their children's progress (b) help them negotiate in favour of their children's educational and other entitlements by providing information and awareness about RTE and the school system, (c) providing a space for reflection and discussion on social factors and issues relevant to their needs (d) disseminate information about government schemes.

Capacitating Anganwadi Centres ensuring pre-school learning and proper health of the 0-6 year olds enrolled in them. There are 31 AWC (Anganwadi Centres) in 24 villages. Five villages have no AWC, and the AWC has been closed in one village. A total of 1,036 children: 542 girls and 494 boys are enrolled at these centres. Animators and project staff visited the centres on a regular basis, helped the AWC sevikas acquire better skills in early education, and gifted AWCs with toys and EEC material.

ADVOCACY AND RELATED ACTIVITIES

A multi-pronged rights-based advocacy strategy was evolved that included rapport building with all groups and prominent forces, both state and non-state, within the project area.

Enrolment Campaign and Sustained Monitoring:

Working with parents and community representatives was important to ensure that every child of school going age is enrolled in a school, with regular morning home visits to make sure that the children get to the school on time.

Use of PRA Tools: Participatory Rural Appraisal tools such as village resource mapping, social mapping etc., were used in order to sensitize the community on the major problems and issues affecting them. Through the process of change of perception, situation and attitude, they were able to identify the issues that could be addressed through collective action.

Celebrations as Opportunities for Advocacy:

Celebration of national festivals and observances such as Independence Day, Children's Day, Republic Day, Women's Day, Ambedkar Jayanti, etc. helped build rapport with the local community and sustain their support of the programme.

Public Relations: Designated project team members and staff liaised with government functionaries and administration at block and district level. Representatives of the district administration attended functions, shows or events organised by the project from time to time. The print and electronic media regularly covered events and activities, and at times supported advocacy and actions related to the intervention.



THE JOURNEY

THE FIRST PHASE

The first phase of the project started in 2008. It covered twelve villages, and targeted some 576 out of school children (OOSC) of school going age. During this period the illegal stone mining was rampant, and the project area considered especially problematic, dangerous and volatile. Enrolment in the government primary schools was low, much of it being 'on paper', as was the regularity and attendance of teachers at the schools. Monitoring was low and service delivery was far from acceptable. Entitlements such as mid-day meals for the students were unavailable, or at best sporadic.

The aim was to mainstream the child labourers into the school system, and to work towards ensuring children's rights.

This phase laid the strong foundations for the

programme. It identified the local animators who would be the backbone of the intervention in the coming years, and gave them the much needed training, ensured they picked up the necessary pedagogical, networking, problem-solving, communication, and documentation skills.

The first phase served to forge a consistent and trust-based bond with the stakeholders in the intervention area. It introduced the idea of rights-based action, and awareness to a largely dispossessed, apathetic and illiterate constituency, encouraging them to shed a fatalistic approach to life and look towards a better future for their children.

It also started a series of engagements with the state, not just on matters relating to elementary education, but on the other pressing issues that were impacting the lives of children and their parents such as health, sanitation, and basic civic entitlements.

"I ALMOST FELT LIKE DROPPING OUT"

Priti Kumari from Badhaiya Bag village was one of the 576 kids outside the school. She was about 8 years old and accompanying her mother to the quarry site, where they would hammer rocks into stone chips. Priti says, "I wouldn't study. Then the 'sir'² from Gaighat came and started a centre here. Sir said 'Come and study'. We said, 'what's the use of school, even if we study we will still have to wield picks and hammers, the stone pick is our field!' Still sir insisted, 'study and grow'.

My mother sent me to the centre for tuition. So I began to study. It was really difficult to learn to write the alphabets and all, but the teachers at the centre encouraged us. It is because of this centre that I enrolled in school and today I am about to finish my class 10!

It makes me laugh that I would struggle to write the letter 'dha', now it seems so silly, but those days, I almost felt like dropping out because I felt that mastering that one letter was too much. The encouragement of the animators saw me through.

'I really discovered my abilities when I was selected for the residential camp. Here we learnt about how to live, how to be clean, how to speak politely. I discovered that I could act, and I acted in a skit for the first time.'



Priti Kumari was a child labourer in 2008, now a Secondary school student and in the Kishori Group

² 'Sir' or 'Didi' are the way the community refers to the project animators and supervisors. To many, they are the first teachers who led them to regular school. The older students refer to SEC sessions as 'tuition'.

WHERE CONTEXTUAL PEDAGOGY BEGINS ...

For a child working as a stone-breaker, we start with trying to find out why he wants to flee from school. The real reason is because the learning environment may not be there. Then we have to see how the school can be made relevant, attractive so that he wants to go. Are the children of the quarry shown kindness at the school?

It is to get the early education component of the ICDS functioning for a 3 year old child whose mother works in a stone quarry. Is the child getting the proper entitlement to nutrition so she can develop? – Nirmala Devi, Animator, Fazilpur, Sasaram

One of the highlights of the first phase was the involvement of the children themselves, and giving them participation and a voice in matters concerning their own best interests, in line with the provisions of the CRC.

The training of children with potential for theatre and song, and the active participation of the children themselves in these 'street theatre troupes', was an important sensitization and motivational force.

The '**Bal Utthan Mandali**' was one of the earliest 'community based groups' of the intervention. It was a village-level 10 member committee, 6 of whom were children: 3 boys and 3 girls, 2 parent representatives: a man and a woman, one teacher and one local 'people's' /local self-government representative. The Mandali's purpose was to involve children and parents in the creation of a child-enabling environment that enabled enrolment and retention. The Mandali members would organise at least one school awareness rally in their village every three months. The Mandali members received training on the four classes of children's rights: the right to life, the right to development, the right to protection, and the right to participation.

Youth Clubs: Eight youth clubs with a total of 107 members (initially) were formed. The members participated in cultural activities, spread awareness, and motivated themselves and others to complete their secondary education and go for vocational training. Later, these clubs grew, and were absorbed by the Nehru Yuva Kendra programme.

THE SECOND PHASE

As the Right to Education formed the bedrock of the intervention, it was decided to map the feeder areas of five Cluster Resource Centres (CRC) to which these quarries geographically belonged. The original plan was working in five CRCs covering 50 schools in 56 villages under 9 Panchayats.

The second phase between April 2010 and March 2012 now expanded outwards from the core villages and covered 25 villages in 5 Panchayats of Sasaram Block. The core objective was to use the RTE as a tool to move at least 400 children away from hazardous

labour and into the school system, which would also provide them with access to textbooks, uniforms, mid-day meals and any other entitlements provided by the state. People's advocacy and community involvement were an important part of the initiative. Further capacity building at community level, school and cluster level and project level also took place.

THE THIRD PHASE

Building upon the outcomes of the previous phases, the third phase, between December 2012 and March 2015, saw the focus of the intervention shifted from the villages towards the designated school 'clusters' as defined by the Bihar Education Project Council within the area.

Thus the area of intervention now covered three elementary school clusters, the 30 schools and 31 Anganwadi centres that spread over 8 Panchayats and 29 villages.

This phase saw greater involvement of local communities, active School Management Committees, and numerous youngsters from the core communities stepping forward to take leadership roles in RTE advocacy.

The Use of Contextual Pedagogy and Child Friendly Spaces

Learning barrier analysis, the creation and use of Teaching Learning Materials, inculcating elements of the children's experiences and culture, Trainings and assessment are integral to contextual pedagogy.



Edu-volunteer at Supplementary Education Centre

Third to fifth graders may require culturally relevant inputs and TLM to help them with Maths, Science, and language. Govt. school teachers may also require capacity building to better understand and empathize with children from marginalised circumstances.

“The child prefers breaking stones or collecting firewood to school, because the primary school is, in fact, an unattractive and unfriendly place. It's also because his mother and father also consider the school unfriendly. The parents have either been left out of the school system, or themselves have been pushed out after a year or two of schooling, and in their own consciousness, the school is not for them. So why would they be inclined to send the child to this unfriendly place? The child is at ease breaking stones and running wild because that is the only existence he or she knows. So our supplementary education centre must be attractive, we must ensure that it is a friendly place,” says Chandeshwar, a supervisor. The Supplementary Education Centre is a space where the child is accepted, and made to feel welcome. Moreover, the parents are made to feel welcome, and they are not discouraged from dropping in and observing the proceedings.

SUPPLEMENTARY EDUCATION CENTRES (SEC)

By April 2016, a total of 16 SECs were up and running, each with an animator supported by 'Edu-volunteers'. These volunteers, part of the youth groups were given training in the teaching techniques; joyful learning and play. The main content of the two-hour learning sessions are Language and Maths. Animators and Edu-volunteers use TLM such as charts, flash-cards etc. Children learn in competency-based groups. Animators are responsible for the SEC and to ensure real learning takes place. Evaluation takes place through a system of continuous comprehensive evaluation and a quarterly written assessment. On Saturdays and other occasions when the Animators are absent, the volunteers run the centres. Games, art and extracurricular activities are conducted on a weekly basis.

The real focus of the intervention was not just providing alternative friendly learning spaces for children, but to help the local elementary school develop into a child-friendly learning space where all children would blossom, regardless of caste, creed or social status. The project staff, after receiving a nod from the district education authorities, started

rapport building and maintained regular contact with the Cluster Resource Centre Coordinators in the three school clusters.

The SEC animators engage the school children using play and learn techniques in government schools twice a week, to support and encourage teachers to use these pedagogical practices which are in line with the resource manuals provided by the BEPC. At the schools, the animators and volunteers conduct drawing, painting, singing, general knowledge and sports competitions from time to time.

TREASURE HOUSE

Childhood builds up a treasure house of happy memories that lasts a lifetime. The children of the quarry areas have lost a great deal of their childhood to hard and hazardous labour. Rehabilitation goes beyond taking away the pick hammers and thrusting books into their hands. Restoring their childhood, or at least a semblance of it, must mean building of happy moments they can treasure. That is what the Treasure House concept is about.

The Treasure house is a safe space where children can meet and just be themselves. It could be a courtyard,

a grassy space under a tree, or anywhere. The treasure is in a trunk filled with books, board games, skipping ropes, throw balls, and other interesting stuff.

Once the treasure Trunk is opened, the children can help themselves to books and just read (their own library) or they can choose to play board-games in twos or threes, or get together for a variety of games. The treasure house is there for information sharing and meeting as well.

The Treasure Trunk is entrusted to one of the youth volunteers or Kishoris or to a responsible person from the community. The material is carefully put away and accounted for before the children go home.

"The Treasure House provides supplementary reading material. Most of the children do not own any books except the school text books. The colourful and easy to read story books will help them read better and give them a taste for reading. The board games help them with reasoning and motor skills and are enjoyable. They learn to play the same games that other more-well off kids have at home: Frisbee, chess, ludo, and so on. The children learn rules of the games, they get social skills," says Khushboo Kumari, an animator.

KEY TO A BETTER LIFE

Usha Kumari, the Anganwadi Sevika in Tarachandi village was ten years old and working alongside her father breaking stones in the quarry areas, when she first came in contact with an animator.

"I first went to the centre, but I also helped my parents in the quarry. When I began to read, I got interested in school. Today I have become an Anganwadi Sevika. I have a better life than I did as a child breaking stones. Even with a little education, I was able to get a better life. I am happy that I can look after small children and start them on the way to learning. I tell all the young girls, study as much as

you can, because one day you may be doing better things. Like me, there were other boys and girls in the centres who also enrolled in school. I know that somehow, they have profited much from the knowledge and skills we learnt at the summer camps and in the centres. In my work I try to be honest and give the small children the nutrition and other benefits that are available."



Usha Devi: from child labourer to care giver

MORE SONGS, HAPPIER CHILDREN

Jairam Kumar is the chairperson of the Youth Group in Jijwahi village and an accomplished singer, who has an album of Bhojpuri devotional songs to his credit. He is a role model of sorts for the youngsters. "I was roaming around my village one evening, and the SEC animator asked me what I was doing at present. I said that I was doing my intermediate of arts course. Then she said, why don't you spend some of your time on improving things in your village? Why not join the youth group?" The youth group holds regular meetings and try to do useful things. I have been given the opportunity to sharpen my talent and use my artistic skills to teach children in a joyful way. While being a cultural coordinator, I received valuable training that enables me to communicate well with all kinds of people. Youth group members help in teaching children at the SEC. I am always ready to help with getting the children ready for cultural shows and programmes.

People usually don't give importance to singing or dancing. They say it is 'time pass'. But in Reap, I understood that music, dance, and painting are not just hobbies, but they are an essential part of educational growth.

I learnt 'teaching by singing'. Children can learn much if the teaching is through songs. They are inspirational songs; social action songs, motivation songs, nonsense songs, rhymes and action songs, and all can be tools for teaching. The more songs there are in the school, the happier place it will be."



Jairam: Education can be a musical journey

EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION

Quality early childhood care and education promotes children's social, emotional, physical and cognitive development and helps them develop their full potential. Children who benefit from early childhood education programs are better prepared for primary school and will reach better education outcomes. Anganwadi Centres (AWCs) have been set up under the ICDS programme to implement ECCE for the children from economically disadvantaged families.

There are 30 functioning AWCs in the project area which cater to some 1,036 infants aged 0-6 years. At a functioning centre, one AWW and one AWH form the service delivery mechanism and are to provide (a) Pre-schooling (b) 'Poorak Poshar' or supplementary nutrition (c) Distribute take-home rations (d) Organise Health and Nutrition Day (e) Ensure Health Check-up and Nutrition, and (f) Provide Referral to Health Services, etc. as required.

The intervention sought to support ECCE in AWCs by capacity building of Anganwadi workers, and by providing age-appropriate play and learn material for use in the AWC. Supervisors and Animators visited the AWC from time to time to engage the children in play and learn activity. The Mata Samiti members, youth

groups, and PAC members also monitor the AWC, and interact with the Anganwadi workers.

ENGAGEMENT WITH GOVERNMENT AND STAKEHOLDERS

The main focus of the intervention was elimination of Child Labour in the quarry area, by working with the RTE framework. This was a key strategy and formed the bedrock of engagement as a tripartite project implementation where children, community and education/state stakeholders were bound together in a constitutionally valid relationship.

As per the NEG thrust on RTE, engagement, capacity building and skill development was a common element across the project. The freeing of children from hazardous labour and sending them to school must also be placed in the wider context of children's rights and human rights. One aspect is the implementation of a child rights friendly curriculum and atmosphere within the school campus, according to the spirit of the RTE Act.

The wider aspects cannot be ignored. The lack of access to benefits and entitlements suffered by their parents would also need to be addressed in the struggle to create an enabling atmosphere for

growth. Matters arising from the ground, such as birth registration, right to life and dignity, identity, access to health and nutrition and livelihood directly impact a child's capacity for educational growth.

Because the approach was a rights-based one, with the aim of getting the mainstream state-run government education units to deliver quality rather than set up alternative structures, continual engagement with the HRD system and the district, block, and panchayat level education and ICDS functionaries was essential.

At the start of the programme the District Commissioner sent an order to all concerned government officials: the civil surgeon, district superintendent of Education, District Programme

Officer, District Panchayat Raj Officer, and all block development officers to inform all personnel and officers under their jurisdiction to extend support to the programme.³

- At block level regular interaction with the Block Education Officer, with whose cooperation permissions and directives were obtained for a range of collaborative and capacity building activities, in and out of the school campus.
- Animators and project supervisors have regular contact with the CRC and CRC coordinators, who are the capacity builders and pedagogical trainers of school-teachers within their cluster. CRC level training programmes on RTE have been conducted by the programme staff.

BRIDGING THE TRUST GAP

Prabha Kumari, Teacher in Charge of Government Primary School Tarachandi evaluates the impact of the intervention since 2012.

Speaking about the relationship between the school administration with the villagers, says, "We have witnessed a progression from apathy, suspicion, and hostility to understanding and cooperation, and the animators and programme supervisors have been instrumental in the bridging of this trust gap.

"Most of the people are shifting and unskilled labour, and at the time had no real interest in schooling for their children. Even if they enrolled the children, the kids rarely came to school, and when they did come, they wore dirty clothes, used coarse language.

Often, we had to deal with an aggressive or a drunken parent whose main problem would be that the money for school uniforms had not been disbursed. So the teachers weren't motivated much.

"The real contribution of REAP and the animators has been to make these unruly, unmotivated, and unkempt kids teachable. Don't blame the teacher; we are here for only five to six hours. Greater learning takes place outside the school. If the parents were ignorant and illiterate, and apathetic as well, how could these kids learn to be sociable? The supplementary education centre and other activities with the children, groomed them, and most importantly taught them to speak politely.

"This change was our greatest motivation; we were helped to communicate better with the children. The kids became regular, cleaner, and at the same time, the parents, especially the mothers began to value education. REAP also worked with the parents, and possibly gave them some social skills as well.

"The turning point came, and it is good to be able to say with confidence that in Tarachandi village, every child of school-going age is enrolled. The parents interact much better with the teachers than they did five years ago."



³ Order no 3124/ Sasaram/dated 14.10.08 signed by M Sarvannan District Commissioner



Children with Former Bihar CM Jiten Ram Manjhi, then Minister for Social Welfare

- At school level, interaction with the teachers and school administration for learning and co-curricular activities. Animators trained groups of school children on Child Rights. Animators took on the role of para-teachers and engaged classes, using TLM and play-way methods of teaching language and Math.
- Once in six months, a sports competition for the schools in the clusters within the project area is organised, with the active participation of the local school administrations. Parents and youth volunteers actively support these events.
- A quarterly survey of the attendance status of the children and learning levels within the schools in the project area is done with the cooperation and goodwill of the school administration.
- Participation in block level and district level government organised events: project staff, volunteers and children have been invited to participate in several district level events, such as the tableaux on the Republic Day Parade, district and block level observances of various state and national days etc.

- District level DOTS programme for families in the quarry area was executed by REAP on the request of the District TB Officer and Civil Surgeon.
- Engagement with the Superintendent of Police and District Magistrate to address development and educational issues and at times, social conflicts within the project area.
- The project staff received a one day orientation and training by DRDA on the significance and use of 'smart cards' for the BPL segment.

The staff played a crucial role in disseminating information to the BPL population of the project area.

Engagement with Media: the local media has been effective and at times, the press, by covering the project events and activities, were able to throw light on relevant linked issues, causing the district administration to take note of the reports, and address the gaps.

In the wider context, the development and strengthening of community based organisations, facilitated interaction between the core stake holders within the community and the duty bearers and service delivery functionaries.

The youth groups, Panchayat Action Committees, Mata Samitis, Bal Mandali, and Kishori Dal have also engaged with government duty bearers from time to time, in face to face meetings or through petitions and memoranda.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT TO ACCESS EDUCATIONAL SERVICES

Parents Meetings' and 'Village Meetings', usually held at or near the local Primary school, bring valuable feedback for the programme implementers and are

also opportunities for advocacy and action on vital local development issues that can impact the quality of life of the children and their parents.

The project over the span of eight years, worked alongside the target communities as they progressed through the entire gamut of socio-psychological attitudes: from resistance, apathy and helplessness, towards acceptance, cooperation, and hope. Community engagement has been an imperative from the inception of the project.

- Animators and project staff regularly visited the work sites to engage with parents and pitch for their children's enrolment and attendance at the Supplementary Education Centres.
- Youths were trained to form a street theatre troupe that performed a powerful nukkad play 'Gram Sabha ek Hathiyaar'⁴ near settlements and worksites. This play created such an impact that the troupe had to give more shows than originally planned.
- Animators sensitised and oriented parents towards enrolment; informed them of entitlements available in the neighbourhood school and encouraged them to visit the schools to enrol their children.
- Project staff and supervisors held regular meetings with parents and guardians at the project site, and also invited them for day long awareness and capacity building sessions at the project office and training centre.
- Capacity building and support to the parents to engage with the school administration and address gaps in the functioning of the School Management Committee.⁵
- Capacity building of mothers and formation of 15 member 'Mata Samitis' to monitor the state mandated facilities and entitlements applicable to their children in schools such as provisions for uniforms, textbooks, and mid-day meals.
- Capacity building of youth and formation of Youth Clubs which would also be proactive in

ensuring that children in the area are retained within the school system through mentoring the children and interacting with the teachers.

- Capacity building and formation of eight 5-member Panchayat Action Committees to engage with local self-government functionaries for inclusion and delivery of government schemes and entitlements, and to monitor schools, AWC centres, while taking active part in gram sabhas and other community meetings and hearings.

CHALLENGES

The major challenge that faced the intervention at inception stage was the opposition from the mining interests who would try to thwart the process, seeing that it might pose a threat in some way to their illegal activities. These were such powerful interests that the state government at the time seemed unable to shut down their activities.

This challenge was addressed in the very beginning, through PRA activity in the area, so that the message reached those who ran the quarry: the focus is on the education of children, getting them in school and away from the mines. Those who ran the illegal mining were wary at first, but then got the idea that if the small children went to school, the child-labour officials wouldn't come snooping around the area. So, the quarry interests did not oppose the intervention.

The schools and community dynamics posed various kinds of challenges such as:

- Unwillingness of the school teachers and school administrations to cooperate with project staff and animators. At times the teachers threatened the animators with dire consequences if they entered the school premises. This was addressed by showing them the order allowing REAP access to schools and directing all block level functionaries to offer cooperation.
- Disaffection towards education in general and school teachers in particular

⁴Translation: 'Village Meeting: A Weapon'

⁵Also referred to as School Education Committee

- Disaffection towards teaching and pedagogy by the school teachers
- Disaffection towards the local SC and Dalit community by service providers
- Non-functional School Management Committees and arbitrary usage of school funds
- Trust deficit between teachers and local community
- Reluctance of the local community to engage with the school administration.
- Lack of knowledge about the services and entitlements provided by the government school.
- Community members, even if articulate, lacked communication and soft skills.
- Lack of cohesion and unity among the target groups
- Caste based prejudices and animosity
- Drudgery, Extreme poverty and lack of self-worth
- Heavy liquor consumption among males often led to violence, discord
- Sense of resignation and helplessness among women
- Most felt that children were more useful as wage earners than non-performing assets at school.
- Older children (especially males) preferred to earn rather than learn.
- Local community lacked basic entitlements and amenities
- Sickness and ill health was a major issue, respiratory diseases, anaemia-impacting school attendance and growth.



OUTCOMES AND IMPACT

MAIN OUTCOMES

By the end of the first phase in March 2010, a total of 198 children (108 girls and 90 boys) had been enrolled in schools. The second phase extended to 25 villages in 5 Panchayats with the target of mainstreaming 400 child labourers into the school system. At the end of the phase 289 (or 72 percent) of these children were enrolled and attending school regularly.

By 2012, the project area covered 29 villages in 8 Panchayats and threw up a total of 1167 out of school children (OOSC). Of these, 690 were child workers, 153 had dropped out, and 141 had never been enrolled in school.

In the period between April 2008 and March 2016, some 890 out of 1090 child workers (82%) had been mainstreamed in schools, 204 out of 354 drop-outs (58%) were back in school and continuing their

education, and 330 out of 699 left out children (47%) had been enrolled and remained in the system.

The success of the intervention can be measured in terms of the objectives met and indicators achieved, and also in terms of lasting changes that have taken place, where the activities and processes adopted served as catalysts of change.

PANCHAYAT ACTION COMMITTEES

As the phase out period unfolds, eight Panchayat Action Committees are in place in the project area. Each of these five member committees are comprised of men and women with leadership qualities and a sense of community service. The PAC monitors the functioning of schools and Anganwadi Centres in its area, keeps it touch with the local ward members and Panchayat to ensure communication and feedback on local educational, health and development matters. The PAC, in partnership with youth groups

A NEW UNIVERSE DISCOVERED

Sikander, a young man from the village of Gaighat is an enthusiastic edu-volunteer. "I was around eight years old, and I would work, breaking stones at the quarry site. I would also go to school sometimes, but really, I didn't care for studies. Then in 2008, the SEC opened in my village, and I got interested. Then, on 14 April, 2009, it was Ambedkar Divas, and our animator Nirmala Didi, told us the story of Bhim Rao Ambedkar, and I felt that Ambedkar ji had to face a whole lot of difficulties, but he made it. Just like him, I too wanted to become something like him. I too decided to study hard and do something good in my life. Then I got an opportunity to attend the residential training camp at REAP. There were 50 of us. There were opportunities to learn singing, music, painting and so on. I decided to try drawing and painting. I learnt how to draw and paint for 10 days.



Sikander: Inspired by Bhimrao Ambedkar

When I held the paintbrush in my hand, I felt so happy. It was a new universe for me. At that moment I knew I wanted to paint. The teachers and animators recognised that I was good at it, and encouraged me to do better. I also want to help other children from my area discover their creative side.

Along with practicing art, I am finishing my intermediate degree. I am also an edu-volunteer and teach the children regularly at the SEC. I really want to become a painter. After my intermediate, I will try to enter the Government Art College at Patna, if I can".

APRIL 2010- MARCH 2012

1. Kohl Community receives caste certificates
2. Mahadeva reservoir work begins with community cooperation
3. A bridge constructed at Wazirganj
4. Improvement in the public distribution system
5. SMC and villagers collaborated for removal of a house built on encroached land, restoration to MS Medinapur for construction of school building
6. Youth raised voices against irregularities in AWC, following which AWC began to receive entitlements for disbursement.

DECEMBER 2012- MARCH 2015

7. Children and youth successfully raise voices and put a stop to illegal collection of money for school transfer certificates and enrolment.
8. Mata Samiti successfully lobbies for construction of AWC.
9. SMC successful monitoring and action ensure regularity and quality improvement in MDM in schools
10. SMC and village community network to provide space for a village primary school building

and mother's committees also forms an effective pressure group for affirmative action. Some members of the PAC also happen to be ward members, or former panchayat members.

MATA SAMITI: MOTHERS' COMMITTEES

Mothers' Committees are monitoring and support systems for the various aspects of early childhood care and education (ECCE) and the elementary school system. 27 such Mata Samiti are in place with a total strength of 322 women. With an average of 15 articulate, motivated women with awareness on children's rights, each Mata Samiti contributes to making the village safer for children, addressing in addition to education and retention, issues of potential child migration, trafficking and unsafe marriage. Some members of the Samitis are also SMC members.

SCHOOL MANAGEMENT COMMITTEES

Functional School Management Committees (also known as School Education Committees in Bihar) are in place in all 31 government run elementary schools within the project area, with a total strength of 336 members.

YOUTH GROUPS

The intervention has thrown up 26 youth groups (Kishor Samooh) with a combined strength of 322 teenaged boys and young adults channel their energies to affirmative and creative pursuits. Apart from providing the youth a platform to develop individual skills and talents, these community based groups, in tandem with the Mata Samiti and PAC play a significant role by offering voluntary service and physical support. There is a possibility that these youth groups may be incorporated into the Nehru Yuva Kendra structure in the future.

KISHORI SAMOOH

Adolescent girls and young women in the project area form Kishori Samooh. There are eight Kishori Samooh in the project area with a total of 93 members. The group performs an important advocacy role for the education of girl children, ensuring that adolescent girls get their entitlements for supplementary nutrition and anaemia from the AWC, and in opposing social malpractices such as child marriage, dowry, gender discrimination, and domestic violence.

BAL MANDALI

The Bal Mandali (Children's Troupe) is for children of school-going age, who come together under the supervision of an animator for sport, recreation, meetings, and socially useful work. Bal Mandalis, active in 30 school catchment areas of the project, boast of a combined strength of 1,256 members. Bal Mandali members have initiated and participated in neighbourhood cleaning drives, school enrolment drives, given performances and taken part in sports and special activities at block and district level.

FIRST TIMER



Rupa Kumari from Tarachandi village is the first girl in her community to reach higher secondary school.

“Had it not been for REAP, and the supplementary education centre, who knows where I would be today? Maybe breaking stones or married, who knows? When I was a little girl at the quarry, I didn't have a future. My mother sent me to school. Now I can teach others. REAP not only taught me how to learn, but later on trained me how to teach small children. I enjoy teaching. But, after I complete my inter exams; I will try to join the police. There are many opportunities for girls in the police force. I want to be the first girl policewoman from my village”.

YOUTH VOLUNTEERS

The responsibility of running the Supplementary Education Centres and providing the manpower for the continuation of activities in the project area can rest on the shoulders of some 159 trained and talented men and women. The youth volunteers have, throughout the duration of the project, provided assistance in different ways to the supervisors and animators, and have been groomed to be able to sustain the work and ensure that children continue to remain in school and away from child labour.

CHILD RIGHTS FESTIVAL

In the first phase, the focus was on child rights in a very big way. The Bal Adhikar Mahotsav marked the culmination of the first phase of the intervention. A three hour programme attended by the then Social Welfare Minister Jitan Manjhi, projected all the child rights in song, dance and drama performed by children. This programme drew an audience from the surrounding villages and received ample media coverage.

IMPACT

Better Parenting Skill

At the start of the intervention, in 2008, one of the intrinsic challenges thrown up by the target population was ignorance about the factors that endangered the lives and futures of their children. There was a general lack of cleanliness and personal hygiene. “The quarry workers worked long hours. Usually the men would get drunk, and the women would just about manage to fetch water and prepare the food before dark. The men had no role in taking care of the children, and as soon as the boys would become old enough, they were put to work and became earning members. Even the little children would be exposed to the hazards of the quarry,” says Nirmala Devi, an animator. Today, most of the children of school going age are in school. The children are better looked after. Fathers and mothers encourage their children not to miss school.

Young People as Game Changer

An indicator of the success of the intervention is the increase in demand for services. An even better indicator is not just the growing awareness of the young people that every child has a right to free and compulsory education that must be provided by the neighbourhood government school, but the capacity to unite and organise in order to ensure that provisions of the Right to Education Act are honoured by the local duty bearers.

At the end of the school in April 2014, when the headmaster of Badhari Middle School, did not disburse the school leaving certificates to 58

AWARENESS AND ORGANISATION IS POWER



BudhaniKunwar: empowered and confident ward representative

Budhani Kunwar, local representative of Ward no. 13, Fazilpur village, is both the chairperson of the SMC of the Government Primary School, and a member of the Panchayat Action Committee.

“We are helpless if we do not have information. The project staff and animators brought information that opened our eyes. If we are united for a cause, and understand things we can do things. Our school was not running well. Teachers were not teaching and coming regularly. Then when in the meetings with the animators, we women began discussing how to get the school on the right track. The head teacher would ignore us at first, but when the Mata Samiti and the SMC stood together, she realised that she had to work, because the school management committee knew its role.

When we demanded that the school run according to the rules, and that the mid-day meal should be cooked, the teacher realised that we could not be fooled. So things

improved greatly. Recently we women from the Mata Samiti and PAC members managed to secure the release five of our boys who were wrongly put into the police lock-up over some brawl. The police just rounded up any one whether they were connected with the incident or not. When we went in a group and protested, and the policemen came to know that we knew our legal rights, they released the boys.

Thanks to REAP and the different training, I am confident, and I am contesting the ward elections. I know that many people appreciate the work I have done, and I am sure they will vote for me.”

students⁶, the youth of the village, supported by the parents staged a one-day 'lock out' at the school,

LAND STRUGGLE OF THE KOHL TRIBE

Nestling against the hills in the Amri Panchayat of Sasaram Block, the village of Badhaiyabag shelters 150 settlers of the Kohl tribe who have lived here for the past 30 years. They are dependent on the mountain; they have been providing the labour for the stone quarries for over two generations. This deprived community cannot have access to Indira Awas shelters because they have no land. This instability and lack of dwelling – they live in temporary hutments made of sticks and straw – adversely affects the schooling and learning ability of their children.

In August 2014, the community came together to discuss their situation, and under the leadership of Ramesh Kohl, decided to petition the district administration. It was just over a year ago that their efforts to obtain a valid caste certificate from the Bihar government bore fruit. The caste certificate

⁶This malpractice was going on in dozens of schools, with students being asked to pay between Rs.50 and 500, including schools within the Amartala and Karbandiya clusters in the intervention area

⁷As result of this, the headmaster was subsequently transferred in July 2015 when the community and SMC brought to light other issues such as mismanagement of the MDM scheme.

eased their children's enrolment in school and gave them access to other entitlements available to BPL

⁸ Interview with REAP staff

⁹ News clippings Dainik Jagran 9 March 2009/ 22 March 2009

BEST PRACTICES

The core objective of this eight-year long intervention goes beyond the stated target of removing a certain number of children from deeply hazardous and exploitative labour in the stone quarries of Sasaram, and to send them to school. The project sought to eliminate child labour within the project area for all time to come. The approach to the issue was different. Rather than force the children out of the quarries (thus removing them from child labour) and then sending them to school, the intervention sought to use education itself as a tool to pry the children away from the stone quarries.

REALISTIC APPROACH

The approach was realistic rather than idealistic. It acknowledged the unpalatable reality that the children were hammering away at stone in the quarry, mainly because the neighbourhood school had virtually nothing to offer them. While it may have been that many of the parents weren't sending their children to school, and preferred that they do something economically useful like working at the quarry, no matter how dangerous, the simple fact was that the children were not enthusiastic about going to school as well.

Therefore, the intervention started with getting the child to experience learning as something more fulfilling and enjoyable than hammering at stones and running about aimlessly. The supplementary education centre served two purposes: it gave the children a taste for learning and socialised them so that they could fit into a formal school environment.

The existing school environment in the project area could not be termed as 'joyful' or 'welcoming', and so alongside the SEC, activities and processes had to be initiated within the elementary schools in the area, so they provided a quality of learning and services that would encourage the children to stay in school and not run back to the quarry.

LOCAL ANIMATORS AND RESOURCES

The project trained eligible people from the intervention area as supervisors and animators and used local human resources to the greatest extent

possible. The supervisors and animators were deeply aware of the possibilities and the challenges, they could converse in the local dialects and idiom, and they also knew the people and their families. The children would respond better to a known face than to a strange one.

CONTINUOUS CAPACITY BUILDING OF PROJECT STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS

Capacity building of animators and project staff was a consistent and continual process throughout the phases of the intervention. The range of training and inputs ensured their all-round development. There were sessions for social analysis and awareness, art and craft, pedagogical skills, reporting and documentation, orientations and training on child rights, gender rights, civic issues, dealing with the local administration and communication procedures with government, basic legal aid, and development of language skills.

IDENTIFICATION AND USE OF SPACES WITHIN THE SCHOOL SYSTEM

The use of the school campus and premises for various activities helped forge a rapport with the government elementary school teachers and administration at school and cluster level. Supplementary Education Centres were opened using the schoolrooms or school campus where available.

Training programmes for Bal Utthan Samiti, SMC etc., were conducted within the school campus. Sports and co-curricular activities were organised in and around schools, often with the active cooperation of the teachers and cluster resource centre.

EARLY ENGAGEMENT WITH DISTRICT ADMINISTRATION

The most significant part of the process has been the rapport building with the State Government and District Administration. At the outset of the programme, in 2008, even though it was not mandatory, we obtained a written order from the District Commissioner that clearly granted permission to the project staff to enter schools and instructed

district and block level officials to extend cooperation. This letter helped smoothen out several pockets of resistance put up by teachers or local duty bearers.

CAPACITY BUILDING OF PARENTS AND GUARDIANS

The project recognised that the target population were extremely dispossessed and disadvantaged, with low literacy levels. Their use of language was limited, and they had low communication and social skills, and low self-esteem. For such men and women to take their places in school management committees, and interact on an equal footing with school staff and administration who were of much higher economic and social status, comprehensive and continuous capacity building was required. The project team therefore went the extra mile, continually engaging with the local community to give them access to useful information and to help them organize.

TRANSPARENCY AND TEAM WORK

Throughout the intervention, lines of communication were kept open. All stakeholders, be they the children and parents at the intervention site, the supervisors and animators, or the service providers within the educational system, had access to information.

The members of the stake-holding communities were consulted and kept informed about all activities and processes being implemented in their respective areas.

Project staff, animators, volunteers, the various CBOs such as PAC, Mata Samiti, Bal mandali, Youth and Kishori groups were provided ample opportunities to interact, and would work as a team, facilitating and organising most major activities, be they events, campaigns or protests.

CLOSE AND REGULAR MONITORING

There was close and consistent monitoring of the child labourers, to ensure their regular attendance in the classroom as well as at the Supplementary Education Centre. The monitoring was carried out by animators, Bal Utthan Samiti and Bal Mandali, Mata Samiti, and Kishori and youth groups from time to time. The monitors made rounds of the village just before school hours or during the first hour of school. They would visit houses and enquire after children,

and accompany the stragglers to school to prevent their slipping away to the quarry site.

INCORPORATION OF WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND LIVELIHOOD ISSUES

The project did not look at children's right to education in isolation. It recognised the sterling role that empowered and motivated mothers have in the development of their children. Capacity building and training of the women and girls would not only contribute to the effectiveness of the intervention, but constituted a recipe for sustainability and continuance of children's education in the area long after the phase over period.

In this context, the project supported the state government's 'Akshar Anchal' programme (Literacy for Mothers), with animators and project staff offering to teach the women in the school; observed Women's Day ; and initiated small savings and self-help group activity.

CONSISTENT RAPPORT WITH LOCAL MEDIA

A strong point of the intervention has been the abundant coverage of its activities by the local press. A positive rapport with local correspondents of the leading Hindi newspapers not only ensured publicity for the activities, but helped the local correspondents get a better understanding of core issues and do follow-up stories on their own. The coverage of irregularities or gaps ensured that the district and state administration were made aware of ground conditions, and often prompted district officials to undertake remedial follow-up action.

DOCUMENTATION AT ALL LEVELS

Regular and consistent documentation was achieved. Animators and Supervisors filed reports and case studies from the field. A record of all letters and related documents is maintained. Photos and videos of events were digitised and available for access. The office staff made a survey of all local newspapers on a daily basis, and filed clippings of news reports and issues related to the intervention. The documents in Hindi, originally handwritten, are typed and stored on computer.

The intervention published a quarterly report called 'Quarry Times' which carried highlights of activities and case studies.

CONCLUSION

The phase over ceremonies took place on 12-13 March 2016 at REAP project office in Sasaram. A symbolic handing over of the responsibility for education to community representatives and youth took place, supported by a pledge.

The parents and local community would now have to ensure that the school systems continue to function, that midday meals are served regularly and that supplementary education centres remain open.

ENSURING SUSTAINABILITY

The SECs as such are 'low cost-no cost' affairs, being run in the school premises or on spaces provided by the community. There are a force of young people, already trained, who were the edu-volunteer helping the animators run the centre. Every centre has an edu-volunteer in place, willing to take on the responsibility. The question who would pay the new 'community appointed animators'. At village meetings and Mata Samiti meetings in all the villages of the project area, it was decided that each child attending the SEC would be charged a fee between Rs. 20 and rupees 50 a month. Each community was free to decide on what should be paid.

The positive development is that the quarry communities, who kept children away from school so they could earn, are now willing to invest money to provide 'tuition classes' for their children at the SEC. The Mata Samiti and the School Management

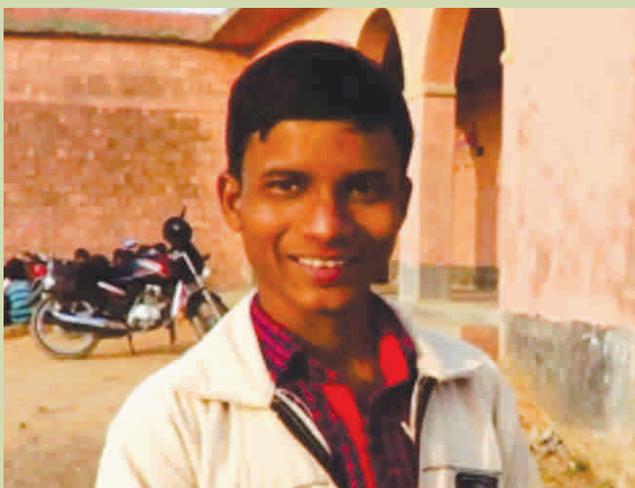
Committees have been successfully performing their roles so far. The assumption is that once the momentum has been gained, the organisations will continue to function.

The youth volunteers and youth groups will provide mentorship for the Bal Mandalis and the treasure houses. The PAC, youth groups, and women's groups have already the potential to engage with local self-government, block level and district level functionaries. They can always fall back on REAP for help to sort out complicated situations if the need arise.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Former animators and trained youth could be encouraged to form a registered association or voluntary organisation which could then seek funding and carry out ground based activities on similar patterns. REAP could provide the technical assistance and hand-holding.
- Continue following up and supporting those children from the project who have shown promise. REAP in collaboration with other partners under the PJS umbrella could try to follow up the deserving children beyond class 12 up to a Bachelors' or vocational degree.
- The youth groups could be encouraged to link up with Nehru Yuva Kendra if viable.

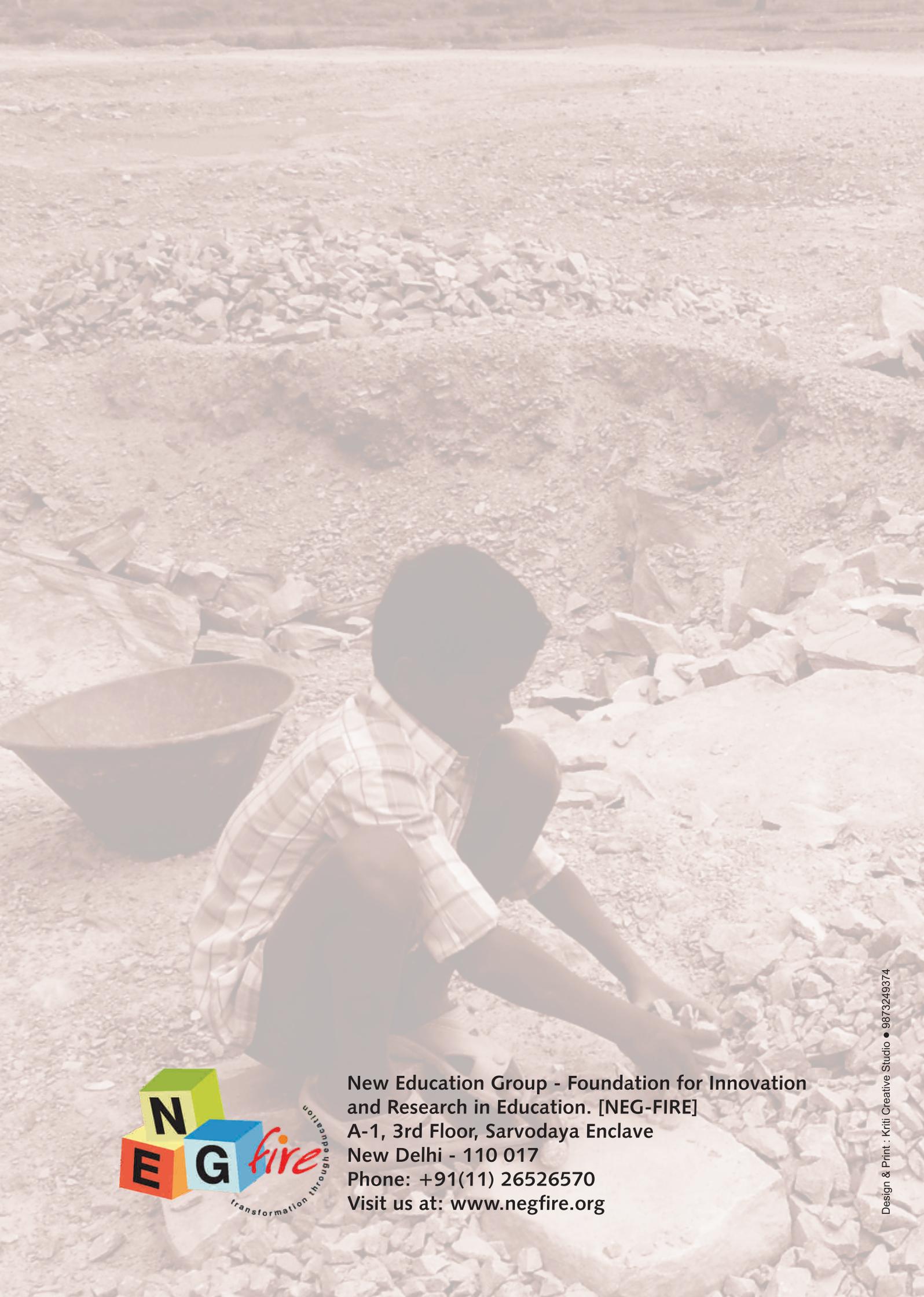
CHANDAN KUMAR: GIVING BACK



"I was a little kid breaking stones in 2008. Today I am finishing my high school; I am known and respected in my village. I owe everything to REAP, the animators and staff who showed me and other kids the way to school.

"I want to study further, learn computers, and become a good teacher. I love to read and to teach as well. I won't migrate. I will give back to Fazilpur. I already earn a bit by giving tuitions, so it doesn't matter whether I will get more money teaching in the centre or not. I believe that I will be here for two years at least, and you can come here anytime and see that the community, the Mata Samiti and the youth will keep this centre running, so all our kids can study."

-Chandan Kumar, Edu volunteer Fazilpur Village



New Education Group - Foundation for Innovation
and Research in Education. [NEG-FIRE]
A-1, 3rd Floor, Sarvodaya Enclave
New Delhi - 110 017
Phone: +91(11) 26526570
Visit us at: www.negfire.org