

THE SOCIAL SCIENCE PERSPECTIVE

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The Field Perspective: Education in Focus



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Samarpann is a non-for-profit organisation working in the government schools in rural India towards providing equitable access to healthcare and education to the children in remote hinterland. Samarpann has created a positive impact in the lives of more than 12,000 children in 61 schools across the states of Rajasthan, Uttarakhand, Maharashtra and Arunachal Pradesh.

In these very remote locations where Samarpann operates, the socio-economic indicators are very low when compared to the national average. For example, in Rajasthan, as per UNDP, the sex ratio (females per thousand males) is 926 as compared to the national average of 940 calculated based on Census 2011. The female literacy rate is 52.66 as compared to the national average of 65.46. Poor household incomes, alcohol addiction, unemployment and low literacy rates are some of the challenges that the organisation faces while working. Children often drop

out of schools for the sake of employment. Poverty as well as child marriages increases dropout rates of the girls.

Covid-19 has further worsened the poor socio-economic conditions for these marginalised communities. The aftermath of COVID has hit the marginalised the hardest, where their incomes have dwindled due to the loss of jobs or the deaths of earning members of the family. As per the CMIE report, there was a net loss of 7 million jobs between February 2020 and February 2021. Households experienced an average of 12 per cent loss in income during the last fiscal year. Due to the pandemic, schools have remained shut for extended periods. It is estimated that 64 per cent of kids in rural India fear they have to drop out if not given additional support. During the pandemic when schools had to be shut on account of the lockdown, private schools shifted to online mode of learning. However, government schools lacked the resources to make the transition. It has also been found that girls are discriminated against when it comes to online education. If a family has access to only one smartphone the male child is given access to it and not the girl child. Further, lack of access to smart-phones has not been the only detriment. Human interaction is of crucial importance for a child's overall learning and cognitive development and smart phones cannot be a replacement for it.

While the government has made tremendous progress in building new schools and getting children into classrooms over the past few decades, learning outcomes of the students have been disappointing and children in primary schools have failed to attain even the basic skills of reading, writing and arithmetic. The pandemic has exacerbated this crisis. 82 per cent of children on average lost at least one specific mathematical skill, and 92 per cent of children lost a specific language skill, reports a field study conducted by the Azim Premji Foundation in rural India in January 2021. As the schools reopen, the teachers have to develop newer and more enriched pedagogical skills as the children will be at different levels of forgetting and remembering due to prolonged periods of school closures.

Through the *Back-to-School* campaign, Samarpann is reaching out to government schools in rural and tribal India in the states of Rajasthan, Uttarakhand and Kota to ensure children do not drop out of schools. As per the Economic Survey of India, the second largest component of average expenditure on education is books, stationery, and uniform where an average student in the rural areas is spending more than 10 per cent points as compared to urban areas. With the loss of livelihoods due to Covid-19, the resources available with the family to support

children education have been depleted. Samarpann is ensuring that the students are not pushed back in the learning curve. We are providing them with *Adhyayan* (Study) kits enough to take care of a child's one year of educational needs.

Evidence from the past suggest that any crisis has disproportionate impact on women. There is a high possibility that the girls would never return to the schools as they would have been absorbed in household chores, agriculture activities or got married. Covid-19 provides an opportunity to rethink and formulate policies with a gender sensitive lens addressing the already the already existing inequalities and gender gaps. With the collaboration of district administration, school teachers and Schools Management Committees (SMCs), Samarpann has been reaching out to the girls to ensure that none of them drops out of the schools.

According to a UNICEF report, 1,300 children under the age of 5 die each day due to diarrhoea. Due to the lack of access to clean drinking water, many children fall sick by drinking contaminated water from unsafe sources like hand pumps and borewell pipes. This contaminated water can even transmit diseases like diarrhoea, dysentery, cholera and typhoid. Samarpann has a dedicated program for making clean drinking water accessible. Water purifiers have been installed in 55 rural and tribal schools of Rajasthan, Maharashtra and Uttarakhand. Water treatment plants are also installed based on the water quality of the particular area. Samarpann also generates awareness among school children about maintaining proper hand hygiene and the importance of using toilets which more critical than ever in the pandemic times.

Samarpann has, thus, adopted a multi-pronged approach to tackle the challenges in ensuring inclusive education to the marginalised communities during the pandemic and making sure that no child drops out in the aftermath of the pandemic.

