

Dhaatri
Resource Centre for Women and Children

Annual Report

April 2013-March 2014



Dhaatri Annual Report April 2013-March 2014

Children's Education:

The main focus of the Trust during the year 2013-14 was to continue the work of the previous year in using the constitutional safeguards and entitlements provided to children in the Right to Education Act of India, 2010. We believe that as civil society and public charitable group, our role should be to work as a catalyst in strengthening the State responsibility towards constitutional mandates with respect to protection of children and women's rights. Towards this end, the Trust has taken the RTE Act as an important vehicle of protecting the tribal children's rights to elementary education as almost all the children are in government schools which have very poor performance indicators. Want to enable the tribal children to have access and quality in elementary education through the free and compulsory provisions of the Act with respect to government's role. As the Act gives a constitutional mandate to the parent community to be the first and critical level of monitoring actors in the implementation of the Act, it is important for tribal parents to take an active role in management of elementary schools. However, as tribal communities have been mostly excluded from any planning or implementation of school education so far, they are not aware of the entitlements under the Act, and neither do they have the confidence that their role would create an atmosphere of responsibility in the governance machinery. Yet, especially in these hill-top villages where internal monitoring mechanisms within the government are weak, and as tribal communities have never demanded for proper functioning of schools, there were several lacunae in We mainly concentrated on strengthening the role of the community and the School Management Committees RTE Act in tribal areas in Visakhapatnam district.

Marginalisation of adivasi children, particularly of the vulnerable tribal groups like the Khonds, is a most serious problem in Andhra Pradesh. This marginalization is reflected in the violation of the fundamental right of all children in India to enjoy free and compulsory primary education as laid down in the Right to Free and Compulsory Primary Education (RTE) Act of 2010. Visakhapatnam district in Andhra Pradesh which has 11 mandals demarcated as scheduled areas (tribal areas) has a large Scheduled Tribe (ST) population with more than 15 recognised tribes living in the forest and hill areas. Despite several progressive policies like single line administration for scheduled areas which includes the education policies like the policy of residential ashram schools and special schools for girls (KGBVs), special facilities for children of PTGs (primitive tribal groups) and de-notified tribes, recruitment of teachers from ST communities only, special allowances for government staff posted in these remote areas, etc, implementation of primary education is very poor. The historical neglect in governance and administration and the State exploitation and exclusion of tribal communities has left the latter feeling alienated from an education system that does not respect their involvement. The adivasis have historically displayed a nature of charitable tolerance towards State and mainstream systems of corruption, mediocrity and apathy. This experience with the State makes them

disbelieve in an inclusive and consultative process of education and hence the hesitation to demand for a quality and access in primary education.

This prevents tribal parents from demanding for their children's rights to education, health or safety. In the absence of any legal mechanisms or standards for quality in support of children's education, primary education has been delivered by the State without the due seriousness in ensuring access or quality. It has left parents from poor communities who depend mainly on state schools with no legitimacy in demanding for the same until the enforcement of the RTE Act which placed the accountability to provide access and quality in primary education in the hands of the State. While this Act is a result of the struggle of several civil society groups and educationists through a nation-wide campaign for the fundamental right of primary education for every child in India, the conviction that this Act can play a critical role in bringing State responsibility and transparency in education which is fraught with deep rooted problems has still not gained momentum it deserves.

However, this is a powerful legal weapon for poor tribal and dalit parents who can now rightfully demand from the State to invest in and manage primary education with the standards laid out under Act. As almost all the tribal children attend government schools, we felt this was a timely opportunity and an urgency to work towards bringing State accountability in primary education. The most critical link to making the law effective is the constitutional role given to the parents and the community in monitoring the implementation of the Act through the School Management Committees (SMCs). This is the first time that poor parents can engage with the teachers and authorities of the education department as legitimate partners in improving quality and access. Given time, the SMC's should be able to build their capacities and bring continuous pressure on the State which are now only partially and ineffectively being fulfilled by statutory bodies. With this objective, Dhaatri Resource Centre in collaboration with the local community based organization Adivasi Mitra, and with financial support from Sir Ratan Tata Trust (SRTT), Mumbai and National Education Group for Innovation and Research in Education (NEGFIRE), New Delhi, initiated a tribal community education project in four panchayats -Teegalavalasa, Mottujore and Thadigiri in Hukumpeta mandal and Salugu panchayat of Paderu mandal in Visakhapatnam district where majority of the tribal villages belong to the Khond, a PTG community which has the lowest development indicators in terms of primary education.

Orientation on the RTE Act and project planning with Project team

The first step was to conduct an orientation to the project team on the RTE Act, entitlements of children under the Act and the role of the SMCs. A detailed training on the central and state Acts and Rules was given to the local team as community trainers for strengthening the School Management Committees and their constitutional role. The SMCs were trained as per the Act, in reviewing of school records, understanding the processes of conducting SMC meetings, and preparing complaints and petitions to be submitted at panchayat, state and national levels like the NCPDR. Preliminary meetings were conducted at the community level to train the team in training and awareness building on utilization of the RTE Act by the community leaders, SMC members and women members. The team was also given training in facilitating the SMC's to conduct social audit and to follow up with the authorities concerned.

Baseline Survey:

Initially, a baseline survey of the panchayat was conducted in 2012-13 which was reviewed in 2013-14 to understand the status of the schools and to track children's education in the panchayat, to identify the gaps and problems as per the RTE Act. Salugu panchayat has 29 villages of which 10 are PTG (primitive tribal group called Khond) villages and 19 are belonging to other tribes like Bagata, Kondadora, Nukadora, Konda kammara, Valmiki and Gadaba. There are a total of 870 families with a population of 3367 of which the female population is 1746 and the male population is 1621. Total Children in the age group of 0-5 years are 358 (178 boys and 180 girls) and in the age group of 6-14 are 623 (315 boys and 308 girls). There are 6 main centres of Anganwadis and 11 mine anganwadis, and the rest of the villages have no anganwadi facilities. Of the 29 villages, 13 have schools and the rest are attached to these schools. Of the 13, there are 5 GPS (Girijana Primary Schools which are under the management of Tribal Welfare Dept), 7 MPPS (Mandal Praja Parishad Schools managed by the Education Department), and 1 Alternate /satellite school managed by SSA (Sarva Siksha Abhiyan). There is one residential ashram school for boys located in the panchayat but caters to children of surrounding panchayats also. This has students from Class III to X. When the project began in November 2012, there were 315 boys and 308 girls in the age group of 6-14 years in Salugu panchayat. According to the baseline survey conducted by us, there were 505 children enrolled in school in all the 29 villages and 40 (29 girls) were out of school. Of them 8 children have special needs and are out of school.

Based on these gaps identified, village level meetings were conducted in all the 29 villages. Very few parents and community leaders were aware of the RTE Act and that they were SMC members. Not even in one school were SMC monthly meetings being conducted regularly and very few members reported to have attended the meetings.

Hukumpeta and Paderu mandals: 14 primary schools in 24 villages in Hukumpeta mandal and 18 primary schools in Paderu mandal were taken as our intervention area in this mandal and there were two hill-top hamlets which did not have any schools but we have lobbied for additional schools here.

Strengthening the role of SMC's in monitoring the implementation of the RTE Act and demanding for entitlements through:

- a) Community mobilization and capacity building on the RTE Act
- b) Capacity building of SMC's and training in social audit
- c) Providing additional training to women members and mid-day meal cooks
- d) Facilitation of follow up and lobbying with governance institutions concerned with primary education
- e) Facilitating the collective monitoring and pressure by SMC's through enabling platforms for federating of SMC's.

The main objective of the project was to use the tool of the RTE Act to strengthen the role of the School Management Committees in bringing State accountability and demand for all the entitlements of the children given in the Act. All project activities were essentially with the purpose of achieving this capacity of SMCs. Individual SMC level training, panchayat level training and women's trainings in understanding the RTE Act rules were conducted.

Social audit of schools is an important vehicle of monitoring the State's accountability in delivery of primary education. As a way of enabling communities and particularly women to be equipped with reviewing the status of the schools their children are enrolled in and in identifying violations that could be represented by them to the government authorities, we developed social audit tools. These tools/formats are to be used on a quarterly basis to track the participation of SMC members and to track the response of government with respect to complaints made, quality of changes brought about by the teachers and the progress in student performance. Each SMC was given training in utilizing these tools and a social audit was conducted for each of the 32 schools along with SMC members in the month of January 2014. This was earlier envisaged to be conducted at the beginning of the academic year in 2013 but due to schools being closed for large part of the year, we could not implement them as planned. The youth and literate members were trained in filling up the social audit formats which included assessment of teacher and student attendance and performance, physical infrastructure facilities, mid-day meals, corporal punishment, maintenance of records and school grants, responses from concerned authorities to grievances submitted and SMC's own participation in the management of schools.

The training programmes gave an impetus to the seriousness with which the SMC's participated in monthly meetings and the near equal participation of women members in most of the meetings. The social audit training and check list that was provided to the SMCs with which tool members undertook assessment of their schools and prepared the school development plans (SDPs), not only brought out the gaps in implementation of the Act but also helped in building an active representation of these issues to the government. As a result of these trainings, visible changes were seen in the following:

Impacts:

SMC's monthly meetings and the deliberations by members and parents traces the growth of their participation in management and monitoring of school performance. There has been a progressive improvement in participation of women in some of the schools and the issues raised by them range from concerns regarding school uniforms, drinking water, mid-day meals, condition of school buildings, teacher absenteeism, text books and monitoring of school grants. Mid- day meal quality and quantity have been one area most debated upon and monitored both with respect to reviewing grants and in supervising the quality of food. Due to this persistent monitoring and discussion by the members, almost all the schools had mid-day meals as a central focus of bringing accountability. However, it is also understood that this is a continuous process where constant monitoring is required in the absence of which there is always a lapse in quality and quantity.

Re-admission of children who have dropped out is another area effectively monitored by the SMCs and the project team. Both children who have dropped out of school and children whose parents wished to get admission in ashram schools were helped in re-admission, caste certificates and in tracking of student status after enrolment were support activities provided by the project team.

As a result of the intensive follow up with government authorities and SMC participation, the SMC's managed to get atleast single teachers appointed in all the 13 schools and new schools set up in a few villages.

Drinking water was never considered an important facility to be provided at the school. As this an entitlement under the RTE Act and was well within the authority of the SMC to demand from the schools, most schools today provide boiled drinking water on a regular basis after repeated discussions at the monthly meetings. Where there is no water facility, some SMC's managed to get bore-wells near the school (Chilakalagondi).

Another area that the SMC found easy to monitor is the facility of school uniforms and text books. These were promptly reported in monthly meetings and teachers were pressurized to communicate to the MEO office and provide them to the children.

SMC's have started gaining confidence to bring up the issue of school grants and expenditures with the teachers. Initially, they had no information that schools received annual grants of Rs.10,000 and that they had a right to ask for an account or to even have the power to take decisions.

SMC's managed to effectively represent and pursue with the government for either repairs or construction of new school buildings. Some of them were given new buildings and SMC's were asked to take responsibility for construction (Eedulapalem, Lolangipadu, Dallapalli). However, this has had its challenges as SMC's are finding the unit costs of construction unviable. Some have given these to individual contractors.

Some of the SMCs like in the case of Bidarigaruvu, have reviewed the school records and registers and found them to be incomplete. The SMCs and the project team asked the teachers to update the records. The same village also felt the need for a teacher of their mother tongue (Kui) and put up a petition to the MEO asking for a teacher from their community.

The biggest challenge facing the SMC's is bringing about a responsible discharge of duties by the teachers themselves as teacher absenteeism is a common problem across the tribal region. The erratic functioning of the government with delays in recruitment, appointment of teachers to fill up vacancies and the lack of monitoring mechanisms to ensure teacher performance continues to pose the biggest threat to bringing state accountability in implementation of the RTE Act. Almost all the schools in the panchayat are single teacher schools this academic year without even the support of vidya volunteers who were not hired quoting legal hurdles. The pressure being put on the teachers by the SMC's has started yielding some results in the form of improved attendance of teachers (eg-Lolangipadu, Salugu, Kakki, Eedulapalem, Rangasingipadu, Arlada, Chilakalagondi) to some extent, some schools still pose serious problems (Kapparamajji, Bidarigaruvu, Dabbagaruvu). We are working with the SMC's in strengthening more active participation of SMC members in monitoring teacher attendance and raising questions in the monthly meetings.

A major achievement was to get schools sanctioned for some of the hamlets which have no access to primary school. Buruguchattu and Turumamidi (combined school for Turumamidi and

Buradapadu). The schools have technically started functioning with single teachers and are run from the houses of the village elders. The MEO has committed that school buildings for both schools have been sanctioned and will be constructed in the next academic year.

At times, the SMC's have been frustrated as they have actively started participating in the monthly meetings, making representations at the MEO and ITDA levels on the various complaints and needs in each school but the response from the authorities has been very slow. In addition to this, the state wide agitation for and against bifurcation of the state of A.P has caused deep stress to the delivery of education as schools were closed for most part of the year. The months preceding and subsequent to the agitation were ineffectively used by the education department as there were huge shortage of teachers due to which even schools that had two teachers became single teacher schools as the second teacher was deputed to schools that had no teachers. The administrative procedures and delays in appointments, deputation, identification of schools, etc led to children not having classes conducted properly for most part of the year. Therefore, even where gaps were identified and the SMCs were prepared to lobby with the administration, officials were mostly on strike and not available.

Building collective pressure of the SMCs on government:

As the issues related to improving the access and quality of primary education are very challenging due to poor response from the government machinery, we have started working with the SMCs in building their collective actions and lobbying capacities. We organized mandal level workshops and meetings at Paderu where SMC members from Hukumpeta and Paderu mandals participated to discuss the problems related to ensuring state accountability. They felt the need for planning collaborative actions like organizing public meetings and 'vidya sadassus' by inviting officials to participate in SMC meetings, taking grievances together to ITDA and education department, organizing public events and follow up on the representations made from time to time. The first vidya sadassu was planned for January-February but officials were not available due to preparations for upcoming elections to local bodies and general elections. However, a system of follow up was developed with the SMCs and the project team where SMCs themselves come to the mandal headquarters to submit their complaints and the project team would follow up on the complaints every month and would report to the SMCs on the responses from the government. This has helped individual SMC's in taking forward some of the complaints made with some positive results like getting sanction of school buildings, teachers, sanction of schools, uniforms and text books.

In order to develop a stronger rapport with the teachers so as to motivate them in improving the quality and approach to teaching, we have been having regular meetings with them at the school complex level. Every ashram school has the responsibility for monitoring a cluster of primary schools through monthly review meetings with the teachers and imparting training in class room transactions. We have participated in these monthly meetings to establish our relationship with the teachers, conducted orientation workshops with them on the role of the SMC's and how we could collaborate in improving the quality and access through the monthly SMC meetings, school development planning. This year the SDP's were prepared in collaboration with the SMC's. We also organized a workshop with primary school teachers including teachers from Salugu panchayat on class-room teaching methods and improving the quality in education

through sensitizing and motivating teachers. This helped in building a rapport with the teachers in the panchayat and in more regular interaction at the school level.

Training of field animators of KALIKE for strengthening the role of the SDMCs to monitor the RTE Act in government schools in Karnataka:

The current project included a component of training to field animators of KALIKE organization, Yadgir, Karnataka, as per request from SRTT. The training was to be conducted in two phases for all the field animators on the rules of the RTE Act and utilizing the entitlements to children by SDMC's. The first phase of training was conducted by our team in May 2013 at Yadgir for the team of KALIKE and SAKHI. The training covered a detailed orientation on the central and Karnataka state RTE Act, the SDMC rules, social audit and grievance redressal. Social audit formats were also translated into Kannada and given to the participants. The school animators reported that they were not aware of most of the entitlements under the Act, nor were the parents or SDMC members. So far they had not utilized the provisions under the Act to demand for facilities although the animators have identified several violations and gaps in implementation. They expressed that as this was the first time that they understood such specific areas of entitlements that should be provided by the education authorities, they had not so far made complaints, petitions or grievances directly or as SDMC's at any levels of the governance machinery. They felt that they needed a few months of time to build the capacities of the SDMC's in conducting social audit, identifying gaps and enabling the SDMCs to submit representations to officials concerned. We were asked to conduct a review workshop to follow up on the experiences in social audit and grievance redressal through using the tools at the different levels of concerned departments and their experiences with follow up on grievances and strategies of pressure building. However, we did not receive any feedback from KALIKE and could not conduct the second phase of the training. Perhaps the organization is more comfortable with providing supplementary inputs for class-room transactions with the teachers for improving quality of education than with community mobilization and strategies of pressure building to use the RTE Act.

Follow up actions:

The project has enabled the active participation of SMCs in Salugu panchayat where members are aware of their roles and are actively monitoring, representing and demanding the entitlements of children in primary schools. It is one of the few panchayats where monthly SMC meetings are being conducted on demand and teachers and education department officials are under pressure to deliver. Otherwise, the RTE Act is not known or used as a vehicle of bringing state accountability. Especially, this is one panchayat where the PTG community is actively taking interest in school activities. However, the historical neglect of primary education and the legitimate rights of parents and communities to demand for standards and quality which have been deliberately prevented from articulation, would require a very sustained and intensive work at the field and at district and state levels. Individual SMC's are finding it challenging to demand for teachers' performance, departmental action where needs are identified and in even making schools accessible. Small hill-top hamlets with less number of children are still not considered important enough by State authorities and there is more justification on grounds of costs not to provide school facilities. Primary education so far has not been considered a fundamental and critical right of children by all quarters, including civil society which has not campaigned

intensively enough in this area. Unless there is a combined force of engagement with the State by communities and the civil society, on demanding for accountability it will be difficult for individual SMCs to put adequate pressure. Hence, we foresee our work of bringing more villages and panchayats together on this platform of RTE Act entitlements as critical to building effective pressure and lobbying capacity to bring State accountability. One of the main activities since the social audit training has been to prepare communities for placing education as an important point of agenda for local body and general elections. We are making efforts to bring together SMC's at panchayat and mandal levels to dialogue with the government and build a platform for grievance redressal and effective representation of issues at field and policy level. For this we continue to support SMCs in conducting monthly meetings, follow up on problems with the government and motivating SMC's to build creative strategies of demanding for access and quality. The demand from our field area in neighbouring panchayats for strengthening the collective action to monitor RTE Act is not important for the panchayat but for building a stronger collective pressure on the State machinery. We plan to intensify this community collective pressure at the panchayat and mandal levels by the field team and at the state level on tribal education policy and implementation.

Tribal Cultural Knowledge:

Science Congress cum Summer Camp for school drop-out children

Adivasi Mitra and Dhaatri Resource Centre conducted a Science Congress cum Summer Camp for children of the 12 primary schools and 24 villages of Tadigiri and Mottugore panchayats from the 9th of May to the 23rd of May 2014. The programme was conducted with 49 children who were either out of school or were studying in classes IV and V in the 12 schools of our project area (list of children enclosed). The programme was conducted in Allamput Boys' Ashram High School which is the nodal school for the area and has been very supportive of all our programmes.

Need for the programme:

The current project has a focus on improving the quality of primary education in two panchayats through bringing State accountability and integrating cultural knowledge of adivasi communities. In order to achieve this in 12 schools and 24 villages so as to ensure that all children in the age group of 6-14 years are enrolled and retained in school, that academic and infrastructural standards and entitlements are provided as per the RTE Act of 2010, we have been working with SMCs, children and teachers. Yet, the process of bringing quality in content of class-room transactions is very slow and children's performance levels are far below their age specific requirements. Besides, those re-admitted in ashram and residential schools have been dropping out due to the hostile environment of teaching in these schools. It has been a frustrating experience for our team in the last two years where we have put in a lot of energy in motivating children and parents to join residential schools again, but found that they drop out very soon due to the intimidating nature of imparting education in these schools. Team reflection on this activity led to the idea that we should prepare the children for entering ashram schools, especially those who have been out of school for some time and those who are far below their levels of classes IV and V in the primary schools. It was felt that this school preparedness should be conducted through summer camps where academic inputs through the approach of cultural knowledge and practices would bring out children's latent interests and capacities. Hence the science congress cum summer camp was conducted with the following specific purposes:

- To prepare children of classes IV and V in the 12 schools, who would be joining the ashram schools, with improving their academic levels and to emotionally give them confidence and support to face their new life in ashram schools.
- As we are unable to give inputs to out of school children in the school activities, to provide an opportunity for these children in improving their academic levels and motivate them to re-enroll in ashram schools
- To strengthen the cultural knowledge and practices of adivasi life through a practical learning approach to education
- To involve parents and elders of the community in participating in the process of education and motivation of children to continue their education without dropping out
- To make an assessment of the levels of learning of the children through this camp and to submit the report to the government for dialogue on improving teaching quality in government primary schools
- To engage with the SMC's in bringing more participation from them for improving school management in the 12 schools

The Camp was conducted by the resource team and volunteers of Adivasi Mitra and Dhaatri Resource Centre.

Methodology:

The camp was conducted for children of classes IV and V as they would be leaving for ashram schools without the academic skills of their level. Hence an initial academic assessment was done for the participating children through a format prepared by the team. The assessment revealed that they were at two levels –those without abilities of basic language and numeracy and those who had some competencies but not sufficient for the classes in which they were studying. A team of five resource persons and one university volunteer from Germany conducted the programme in which they shared the teaching work according to a lesson plan prepared for the two levels. The objective was to cover, within the short period of 20 days, basic language and arithmetic levels through themes like:

- Village and family mapping
- Started the day with songs in mother tongue and writing these songs
- Measurements through traditional measures and modern measurements
- Participating in the MNREGS work on elders to teach measurements and improve writing skills
- Participating in the podu (hill-slope/jhum) clearing and cultivation activities with elders learning to measure the land, write about traditional crops and seasons
- Hiking into the forest for medicinal plants with the healer and identifying plants and their properties
- Traditional festivals through stories and writing sentences

- Biodiversity mapping to teach measurements, writing and speaking
- Traditional sports and dance in the evening as recreational activities every evening
- Life in residential ashram schools-preparing them for maintaining hygiene and collective living in dormitories with children of different temperaments
- Using art as a form of expression and lesson narration

Through the above topics the children learnt:

- Reading and writing numbers
- Alphabets, forming words and stress words
- Forming sentences and reading lessons
- The four processes of counting
- Ascending and descending order
- Story-telling and sequential order of narration
- Factors, place values, fractions to some extent

A detailed assessment table of each child's level of performance and learning in the camp were made at the end of the camp. This was presented to the parents, SMC members, government teachers and to the MEO on the last day of the camp. The children also demonstrated the activities they learnt and displayed their work to their parents and department officials.

Follow up:

The resource team and VEV's with the help of the SMCs are consulting the parents and enrolling these students in ashram schools. Their performance will be tracked through quarterly visits to these schools.

Adivasi women farmers and traditional seed preservation:

Dhaatri Trust aims to build a strong platform of Adivasi women farmers to strengthen their land and forest rights and food security. We have started working with women's groups through organizing community level meetings and with elected representatives, first on women's role in understanding the RTE Act and developing a dialogue on land and food security. We organized several village level meetings and have initiated a seeds preservation programme where women are collecting seeds of traditional millets and exchanging within their own villages. We could not take this programme forward in a full-fledged way due to lack of resources.

Medical aid and education scholarship:

This year we have continued to sustain our support to a HIV/AIDs patient and her children through financial support for purchase of medicines and school fees and material for the children. We have provided education scholarship to her daughter.

Training to Mid-day meal cooks on improving the quality of food, measurements & nutrition



Training with women SMC members and priests on cultural knowledge and RTE Act implementation



Training to women SMC Members on social audit

Review of Social Audit at Nakkalput school with SMC members



Workshop with SMC's at mandal level on using RTE Act collectively for building pressure on the government



Training to women members of SMC's on social audit



Workshop with Teachers of 2 panchayats at school complex level on RTE Act



Training for Primary school teachers on improving class room interactions and using creative methods of teaching



Training to VEV's on their role in monitoring the RTE Act and follow up with government



Training for Project Resource Team

On developing lesson plans and class-room activities





