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Bridging the Gap: Enabling education

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Abstract

Access to education remains a major concern, especially for displaced populations. Eighty percent of migrant children across seven Indian cities did not have access to education near worksites even as 40% of children from seasonal migrant households are likely to end up working rather than being in school, facing exploitation and abuse, according to the UNESCO's 2019 Global Education Monitoring (GEM) report.

Such population movements affect access to and quality of education of migrant children also making them vulnerable to drug addiction, human trafficking and social abuse. The 2009 Right to Education Act is one of India's multiple national programmes which has made it mandatory for local authorities to admit migrant children. However, there are many implementation challenges. Mandatory requirements such as residential proof make it difficult for migrant children to enroll in schools. Those who are more vulnerable because of their gender or disability are even less likely to do so. They also face empathy and mistreatment due to stereotypes about them. Culture, language, lifestyle, cleanliness and clothing are major barriers between the teachers and the migrant community.

Very few states, in practice, have proactively facilitated migrant children's schooling, and only at a small scale where it has.

However, a mobile school in India's National Capital Region with the highest recorded in-migration, has been transforming the lives of migrant children. A mobile van with all the facilities of a school reaches out to their camps on construction sites and facilitates their learning process by also moving to their new abodes as and when their families shift, thereby retaining these children who would have otherwise dropped out. These learners are also certified through the government approved Open Basic Education Programme of the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS), enabling them to make an entry into mainstream education.

Introduction

Migration and education are multifaceted processes involving individuals, schools, communities, regions and countries in the modern times. Globally, 763 million people are living outside of their native place which imposes a huge effect on the education of their children (Global monitoring report (GMR), 2019). Migrant and refugee children in the world today could fill half a million classrooms, an alarming increase of 26% since 2000.

A variety of forces and contexts prompt migration: demand for workers in factories, agriculture or extractive industries; limited employment opportunities in specialized fields; colonial ties and political trade agreements; ethnic or religious persecutions; armed conflict and violence; political crises; and the impact of climate change. In low income countries, low wages, unemployment and underemployment in the agricultural sector (for example, due to seasonal crop production) influence the willingness to move in search of improved employment opportunities. Depleting natural resources, natural disasters and political crises also motivate large waves of migration from the less developed areas. All these do affect the demand for education. Increasingly sophisticated technologies alter the demand for more and less skilled labour in much of the world. Higher education is expanding and diversifying to meet the demand for high-skill jobs and simultaneously the students are moving accordingly. But many adults migrate due to the demand for unskilled jobs. This phenomenon has generated a 'migration industry' in human smuggling and trafficking. People in these migratory flows are often irregular migrants, who lack access to basic services, including education. Educational opportunities for vulnerable migrants are rare.

This paper therefore aims to address the following issues:

- *How does migration impact education?*
- *In what ways do innovative approaches improve the educational status of migrants?*

- *Can the voices of beneficiaries of such interventions improve our understanding of migration and education?*

Labour and Migration in India

Seasonal migration for work is a pervasive reality in rural India. An overwhelming 120 million people or more are estimated to migrate from rural areas to urban labour markets, industries and farms. Migration has become essential for people from regions that face frequent shortages of rainfall or suffer floods, or where population densities are high in relation to the land. Areas facing unresolved social or political conflicts have also become prone to higher rates of migration. Poverty, lack of local options and the availability of work elsewhere then becomes the trigger and the pull for rural migration respectively.

Some Indian states like UP and Bihar have been known for rural migration for decades - however newer states like Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and recently even the North East has become major regions of migrant manual labour. Among the biggest employers of migrant workers is the construction sector (40 million), domestic work (20 million), textile (11 million), brick kiln work (10 million), transportation, mines & quarries and agriculture. Managed in many cases by private labour contractors and fuelled by social networks, there are well formed patterns in movement of labour across hundreds of kilometres within the country. (Source: IIPS, Mumbai)

The total migrants as per the census of 1971 are 167 million , 1981 census 213 millions, 1991 census 232 millions, 2001 census 315 million and 2011 census 382 million persons. Migrant labourers are mostly employed in the construction sector. (Source: Migrant Labour-Problems of the Invisible: Punjab Human Development Report).

Migrants form the largest part of India's vast unorganized work sector. Their entry into the labour market is marked with several endemic disadvantages. Devoid of critical skills, information and bargaining power, migrant workers often get caught in exploitative unwritten labour arrangements that force them to work in low-end, low-value and at times hazardous work. Lack of identity and legal protection accentuates this problem. The hardships of migrant workers are especially magnified when state boundaries are crossed and the distance between the "source" and "destination" increases. Migrants can also become easy victims of identity politics and parochialism.

Despite the vast numbers of migrant workers, the policies of the Indian state have largely failed in providing any form of legal or social protection to this vulnerable group. In a continuous state of drift, migrants are left out of the scope of state provisions at both ends - the "source" and the "destination". The urban labour markets treat them with opportunistic indifference extracting hard labour but denying basic entitlements such as a decent shelter, fair priced food, subsidized healthcare facilities or training and education. They are also usually out of bounds of government and civil society initiatives, both because of being "invisible" and for their inability to carry entitlements as they move along.

Economic growth in India today hinges on the mobility of labour. The contribution of migrant workers to national income is enormous but there is little done in return for their security and well-being. There is an imminent need for solutions to transform migration into a more dignified and rewarding opportunity. Without this, making growth inclusive or the very least, sustainable, will remain a very distant dream.¹

Eighty percent of migrant children across seven Indian cities did not have access to education near the worksites, even as 40% of children from seasonal migrant households are likely to end up working rather than being in school, facing exploitation and abuse, according to the United Nations 2019 Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Report.

In the period between 2001 and 2011, interstate migration rates doubled in India. Further an estimated 9 million people migrated between states annually between 2011 and 2016. 10.7 million children aged between 6 and 14 lived in rural households with a family member who was a seasonal worker. This is particularly common within the construction industry.

¹Aajeevika Bureau

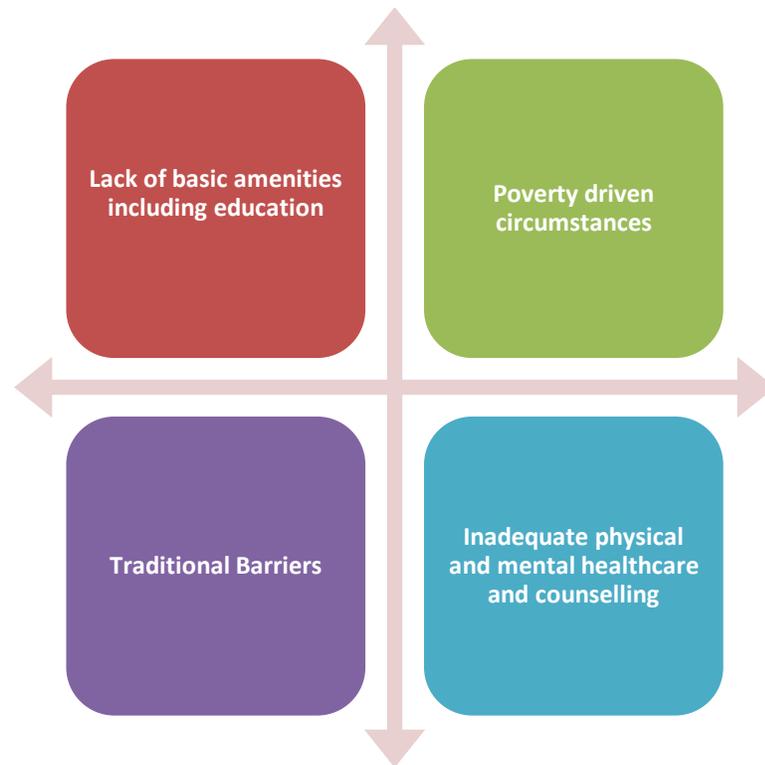


Figure 1 Issues concerning migrant children

India, along with China is home to one of the world’s largest internal population movements and the report highlights the steps India has taken to address it and challenges that remain.

The UNESCO Report also urges policy makers to strengthen public education for rural migrant children living in slums. The report shows that the scale of seasonal migration has a significant impact on education. Among the youth aged 15 to 19 who have grown up in a rural household with a seasonal migrant, 28% identified as illiterate or had an incomplete primary education.²

Leave no one behind. This is among the most aspirational global commitments of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Migration and displacement are two global challenges the agenda needs to address in achieving the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including SDG 4: ‘Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all’.³

The two new compacts on migrants and refugees recognize education’s role and set objectives aligned with the global commitment to leave no one behind .The Global Monitoring Report, 2019 has made the following seven recommendations that support implementation of the compacts:

- Protect the right to education of migrants and displaced people
- Include migrants and displaced people in national education systems
- Understand and plan for the education needs of migrants and displaced people
- Represent migration and displacement histories in education accurately to challenge prejudices
- Prepare teachers of migrants and refugees to address diversity and hardship
- Harness the potential of migrants and displaced people
- Support education needs of migrants and displaced people in humanitarian and development aid.

²The Times of India , New Delhi report dt. Nov. 20, 2018

³ Global Education Monitoring Report 2019

The ability of education systems and policies to address the socio-economic disadvantages and cultural and linguistic barriers experienced by migrants and their children – at all levels, at all ages, over lifetimes and across generations – has clear implications for the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development.

As the Indian capital, New Delhi, has grown in the recent decades, surrounding states have sprouted urban offshoots speckled with gated high-rise apartment complexes, glitzy office buildings, and fancy malls.

The most well-known example is Gurgaon, or as it likes to call itself, the “Millennium City”—a suburb often positioned as the future of urban India. It’s a metropolis created by private developers where companies, not local governments, serve the municipal needs of the residents. As people spilled out of Delhi in the early 2000s into Gurgaon, developers scrambled to build high-rise buildings to house them. But outside these structures, hardly any civic infrastructure was planned.

The result: haphazard urban islands housing the rich and aspiring—but no room for anyone else. The guards, maids, nannies, vendors, construction workers, and other working poor often live in makeshift shanty towns at the edge of construction sites or the city itself. As writer Rana Dasgupta observes in *Capital: The Eruption of Delhi*, “Gurgaon or Gurugram makes no pretense of being a public space: the great number of the poor who clean its offices and houses, for instance, cannot live there”.

While spending time in the area, French photographer Arthur Crestani noticed this disconnect between the migrant workers whose labor built the city and keeps it running are not amongst those who get to enjoy its exclusive benefits. The workers are at the margins of the margins. In his photo series, “Bad City Dreams,” he has focused on that stark inequality. -⁴

The reason for choosing Gurgaon to migrate was mostly because of their personal contacts, however, the construction workers mostly came with contractors. Most of the respondents had been working in Gurgaon for more than two years with some of them having as much as 10 years or more of work experience in Gurgaon. More work experience, however, does not guarantee employment, security or job stability. More than 55% of the respondents have changed/had to change their job more than thrice during their stay in Gurgaon. The workplaces are highly hierarchical and supervisors, floor in-charges act in authoritarian ways. Workers are also given punishments in the form of physical or verbal abuse or creating a fearful environment with the help of hired local goons. Most of the workers complained in the FGDs that even though they like the work they are doing, the work environment is not at all healthy and friendly.⁵

Birth of AICAPD and case studies

In a slum on the outer periphery of Gurgaon, recently renamed as Gurugram – far away from the all the trappings of luxury, lives Pooja – a young bright eyed girl who dreams of a better life. Pooja is not privileged to receive education at a private school. The 15 year old hails from a family of poor migrants, who have never witnessed the miracles of education. Children like Pooja are pushed into work for their own survival or their household’s survival. Cultural norms also view childhood as a time for work, rather than play or school. Pooja’s father Dharram says, that girls are not sent to school as they have to get married and leave their parents’ home. When they are around, they have to help in the household chores.

But Pooja who is firm in her resolve to study. “I want to become a teacher,” she says in a brittle voice. Her face glows with joy every time she talks about her school. Pooja’s school is no ordinary school. She receives education at a mobile school.

⁴The Hidden Workers of New Delhi's Shiny Satellite City “ by Tanvi Mishra dt. 20 March 2018

⁵Exploring rural-urban dynamics : A study of Interstate migrants in Gurgaon conducted by the Society for Labour and Development

Even after seventy years of independence, millions of children in India are deprived of education. The country is confronting the peril of its failure to educate its citizens, notably the ones who need it the most.

The Right to Education Act, 2009 (RTE) in India recognises free and compulsory education for children between the age of six and 14, under Article 21a of the Indian Constitution. But it has been haunted by procedural inefficiencies and several gaping holes along the way.

When governments fail to deliver fundamental rights, people rise to help their communities. Sandeep Rajput in India is one such hero who runs a mobile school which is a free education facility on four wheels. Rajput is known for chasing illiteracy in decrepit areas of Gurugram in an old public bus. The discarded vehicle, once used by commuters is now reconfigured to serve as a classroom on wheels. It is equipped with small tables and everything else a teacher might need to run a classroom.

With limited resources, Rajput claims that his mobile school is self-sufficient and runs with the help of independent donors or funds provided by corporate organizations. He ensures that a school reaches the doorsteps of children like Pooja and that's where his mobile school plays a crucial role.

These mobile schools are set up at the place where the migrant families put up their temporary ramshackle dwellings. These schools will remain close to their settlements till the time the migrants stay in these temporary abodes. The schools will automatically move along, when the migrants shift their homes to new sites as their work demands.

Migrant children who are more vulnerable because of their gender or disability are even less likely to attend school. Had it not been for the mobile school, Bimla (15 yrs) could never have dreamt of studying. She was not only going for work with her parents who are construction workers but also had to take care of six of her siblings at home. Support from the mobile school has helped her to pursue her 10th class and she is equally keen to enroll herself in a skill-based programme which will fetch her a job.

Migrant children face empathy and mistreatment due to stereotypes about them. Breaking such stereotypes, nineteen year old Rahul was firmly determined to not become a construction worker like his father. He is pursuing the Senior Secondary programme of the NIOS with plans to join the Indian Army.

The idea of teaching children who could not go to school occurred to Sandeep Rajput, when he came across a large number of slum children in the area where he lived. He began by teaching about 50 children of migrant labourers in the night while he was busy at his job during the day. But soon he realized that he was not able to attract a good number of children as most of them went to work with their parents, to be able to contribute to the family income. As a result of this, parents were reluctant to send their children to Sandeep's home where he taught these children. Another reason was the timing of schooling. After working from 7 a.m to 7 p.m., it was not possible for these children to travel about 3-4 kms in the evening to attend classes. Thus came up the idea of taking the school to the doorsteps of these children in the form of a mobile school. Sandeep started his first mobile school in 2010 in Gurugram's Bhondsi area where about 30 families of migrant labourers from the state of Rajasthan lived. The average household size of each family was 5-6 people. The total number of children were about 60, out of which 80 percent were in the age group of 6-8 yrs. About 55% of their parents were illiterate. About 30% of the children had never been to school. About 40% were drop-outs and about 30% were attending school for the first time.

Soon an Innovation Night School was also set up in 2010 with 45 working children, who could attend classes after work. It was also convenient for a few volunteers of a Business School who were initially convinced by Sandeep to teach these children. Today, the number of volunteers has grown and they visit the school on a rotation basis to teach the children.

Rajput's three mobile vans visit the centres everyday. Each van has a blackboard, laptop and teaching material and is accompanied by one teacher and three volunteers.

But it was not easy to get people to contribute to this noble venture and he began to face financial hardships to run these schools. To overcome this, Rajput registered his school as an NGO, thereby formalizing his initiative under the name of All India Citizen's Alliance for Progress and Development (AICAPD) which is a national level non-governmental organization. It has been working towards the development of economically and socially underprivileged people, especially the children of migrant labourers whose nomadic life deprives them of a consistent livelihood and permanent habitat. The children of these disadvantaged groups lack facilities for basic education and live in utter poverty while their parents work as daily wage labourers in the construction sector.

AICAPD firmly believes that, providing systematic basic and elementary education upto class VIII and subsequently giving skill based vocational training to these children, can go a long way in helping them stand on their own feet and enable them to support themselves and their families.

AICAPD's prime objective now is to set up Innovation Mobile Schools across the country, to target the children of weaker sections of the society, especially children of migrant workers; initially in Delhi and NCR Region, and subsequently extend the programs to other states as more volunteers join the mission.

AICAPD volunteers also have played a significant role in counselling parents and motivating migrant children to join the mobile school. Such volunteers helped Mangal (22yrs) to enroll in the mobile school which led him to complete his tenth class. He has been selected in the Indian Air Force where is presently undergoing training.

Mandatory requirements of residential proof for enrolment in a regular school has been seen as a major hurdle being faced by children of migrant workers. 15 year old Kailash Kumar had given up hopes of studying due to lack of documents and had reconciled to assist his uncle, a vegetable vendor. An AICAPD volunteer came to his rescue by enrolling him in the mobile school. He is really proud to be able to run his own business today

Motivating fellow school drop-outs to join the mobile school and inspiring tyhem to study has been the mission of 23 year old Dinesh. Life has thus changed for 21 school drop-outs, most of them girls who have now successfully cleared their 10th and 12th exams.

AICAPD has so far set up six centres in different parts of Gurugram in which 550 children are being educated. So far they have been able to reach out to more than 4000 children who were left out of school (Figure 2).

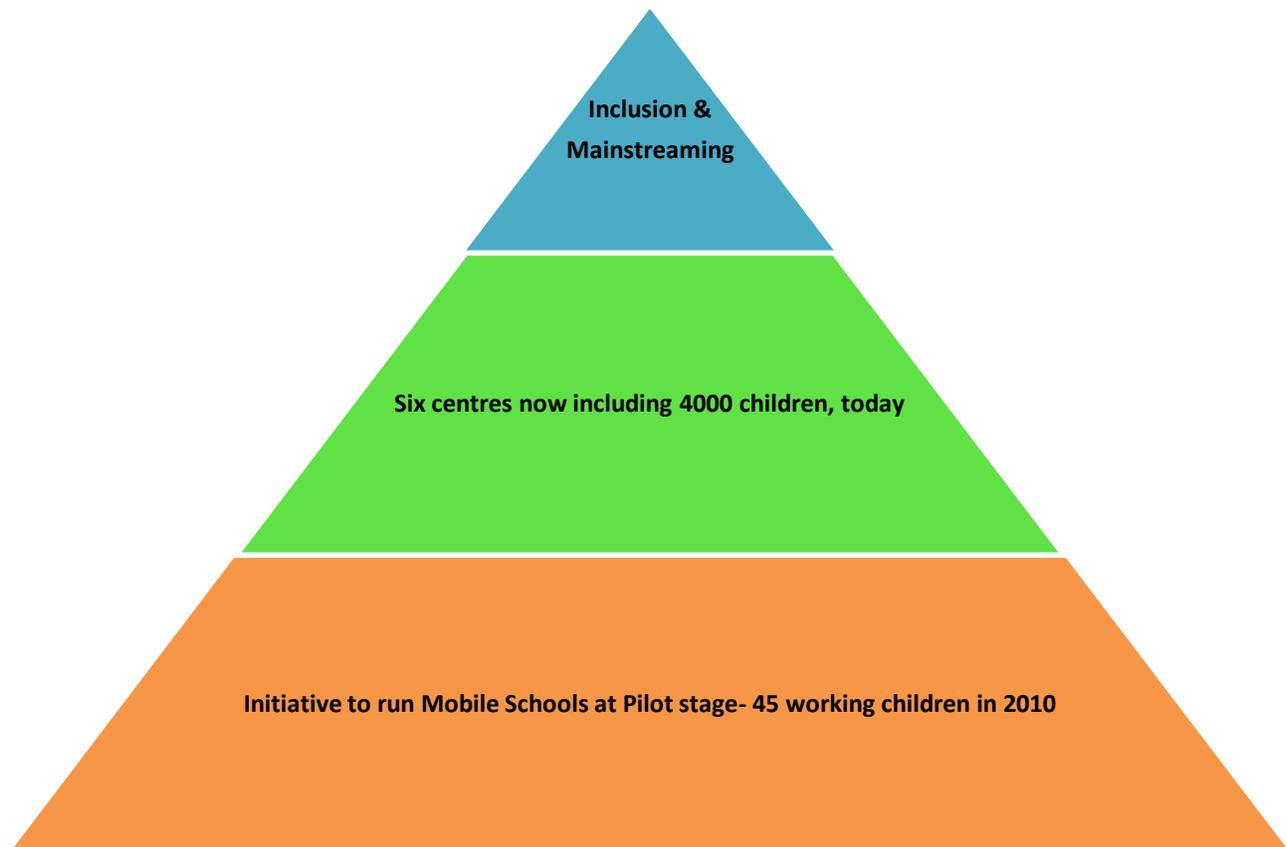


Figure 2 Growth of AICAPD over a decade

AICAPD has been accredited under the Open Basic Education (OBE) programme of the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) to enable its learners to get into mainstream education, after going through sufficient training in the mobile schools.

The National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) offers school level courses upto Class 12 through Open and Distance Learning and is a recognized National Board of the Government of India. Their Open Basic Education Programme (OBE) offers courses equivalent to Classes Three, five and eight.

Distance Education is growing as a popular medium in promoting education. And is one of the solutions of educational problems and deficiencies for the low income groups; Distance education is instructional delivery that does not compel the student to be physically present at the place of instruction. Distance education instruction requires that the student is able to study on his own.

Meenu is one such learner who will take exams through the NIOS and reap the benefits of the distance education system. Meenu's parents got her and one of her sisters who later died, married the same day because it helped save money and they had four daughters to raise. They also decided not to tell Meenu about the 'marriage'. The family moved to Gurugram eight years ago and the parents have been working at various real estate project sites ever since. The colony they live in has 80 hutments where families, all from Jodhpur (capital of Indian state of Rajasthan) live... Meenu's husband turns up at the camp very often to take her back and she refuses to accompany him. He loses his cool and others have to interfere.

The experience made Meenu, now 15, realize the importance of her education all the more. "I want to study and get a good job. We have been promised that we will get skills training and a stipend, after we pass Class X, she says of

the programme under which she is enrolled. She likes social studies and drawing but it's knowledge of 'angrezi' (English) that Meenu believes will truly give her an advantage in the job market.

Meenu's family has shifted locations within 5 kms in the past eight years. The fact that Sandeep's mobile school has been following them has worked in Meenu's favour. Meenu of course, hopes that she can go on studying!

Almost similar is the case of Mamta who has shown courage to deny marriage to complete education by studying in the mobile school camp for the last eight years. Sixteen year old Mamta. Is preparing to appear in the exams to qualify for the tenth class certificate from the NIOS. Like Meenu, she also lives under the threat of being taken away anytime by the man she has been engaged to be married. The enormous support provided by her parents who are both migrant workers has been encouraging her fulfil her mission. Mamta has two sisters and one brother studying in the same camp.

Conclusion

Educators like Sandeep Rajput have been experimenting with a variety of innovations to enrich learners' academic, social and economic growth. These innovations include inclusion and mainstreaming in order to be able to reach out to all learners, especially those at risk. These at-risk learners benefit from instructional activities that are carefully planned and mutually supported by the learning facilities.

To successfully reach out to diverse learners, however, educators require substantial support. This may be in the form of efforts which are sensitive to the emotional frustrations and problems associated with instruction. This further helps the educators to more effective when carrying out worthwhile innovations that increase the learners' potential for success.

At-risk learners are more likely to be successful when learning centres provide them with congruent goal, resources, strategies and skills.

Provision and access to good quality education over the lifetime is nowhere more relevant than among vulnerable migrant populations seeking just the opportunities for better lives and more inclusive societies education affords. Equipped with the right skills, values, competences and abilities, all people touched by migration in the context of education may realize their aspirations and their full potential in life and ultimately benefit from the migration experience. For this to happen, a shared vision for a more effective educational environment for migrants should be created. This requires coordinated actions of all the actors involved, including governments, local communities, civil society and humanitarian aid agencies. The extent to which migrant voices are heard informs the effort too.

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