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Mari Shala Project: Piloting an approach to promote Quality Education in Government Primary Schools of rural Gujarat

Executive Summary:

Research has shown that it doesn't matter how educated a teacher is or how big the classes are or how well designed the textbooks. What matters is how the teachers talk to and deal with the children. That's what makes an impact on learning outcomes.

Reach to Teach and CEE, in partnership with the Government of Gujarat, are piloting an approach designed to make a very real change in the way that teachers engage and teach primary school children from rural communities in Gujarat.

The REACH approach, which is at the core of the intervention, is a synthesis of research driven, higher order teaching skills, focussing on a teachers ability to communicate with and relate to children. This is especially effective for children who face barriers to learning.

Although it is still too early for formal outcomes to be established, the speed with which Government Teachers have accepted the approach has exceeded all expectations. They are already pushing to learn more and to be recognised for their involvement and skills development. Early indications also suggest that learning outcomes are being accelerated.

Mari Shala Project Overview:

Project Objectives:

- To promote high quality teaching and learning in the Standards 1 to 5 classes of government schools
- To ensure children of school going age in the project area attend school regularly
- To build the capabilities of the project SMCs to enable them to more effectively carry out their key functions more effectively

As well as a word-class classroom intervention, the programme focusses on building links between project schools and their communities through building the capabilities of the Schools Management Committees and by running programmes to increase awareness of the value of attendance and to enrol and retain children with Highly Irregular attendance.

Project Scope:

The project was launched in 30 schools across the Halvad Block of Morbi District, Gujarat in June 2015 and will run initially for two academic years. Approximately 3,800 children are direct beneficiaries of the project across Standards 1 to 5.

This project is one of several pilot projects across Gujarat supported by Reach to Teach's international donors

Project Approach:

Community & Attendance:

Benefiting from CEE's deep local relationships with stakeholders, Mari Shala has quickly built credibility in project communities through locally recruited Community Facilitators and the significant results of enrolment and attendance campaigns. Across project schools over 10 percent of additional children were enrolled as a result of the project's efforts and significant improvements in attendance are being seen.

Engagement of the community has also increased markedly, with Head teachers expressing thanks for the project bringing parents into schools and showing support for schools through project events and campaigns.

Work to directly track and follow up with children who attend school on a Highly Irregular basis has supported these improvements in attendance, as well as bringing to light some wonderful examples of the project transforming lives.

A child from a tribal village who was found at home addicted to alcohol has been brought into school where she spent the first month sleeping in a corner but is now bright, active and learning along with her peers. A migrant agricultural worker has been persuaded of the value of education and the quality of the local schools such that he has borrowed a bicycle and cycles his two daughters to school daily for the first time in their lives.

Formal involvement with schools management committees is just starting but aims to work with key members of the committee to support attendance initiatives and build strong relationships between Head teachers, schools and the community

Education:

Mari Shala works within government schools to support the existing government curriculum and the 'Pragya' activity based learning approach introduced by the State of Gujarat. Although the focus is on government classroom teachers, the project also works with Head teachers and local government education officials ensure the success of the project, to build capabilities in activity based learning and to support the continuing professional development of teachers

Taking a non-judgemental approach, Mari Shala aims to show government teachers a different way to work with children and to demonstrate the impact of on children's learning that this approach can bring

A group of qualified teachers have been recruited by the project and are being taken on a development journey focused on a distilled set of skills and attributes of the world's most effective teachers, as evidenced by global research... the REACH teaching method

They are then placed directly into classrooms with government teachers. Their role is co-teach within an activity based learning context, modelling the project's new and highly effective educational techniques.

They can then provide on-the-spot modelling of roles, approaches and behaviours day in, day out to instil the techniques of child-centred learning. In this way, teachers gain a better understanding of how children learn, what they've learnt and what's missing from their learning.

Our techniques mean that government teachers continually develop their skills around the children. In turn they learn to show their classes how to work together and help each other develop as a group.

By orienting government teachers in our methods, we help their skills evolve from a theory that is understood to a technique that is applied and eventually towards a habit that is instinctive.

Research shows that continuous professional development in a classroom context is significantly more effective in developing and embedding teacher's skills than formal training alone. Mari Shala believes that sustainability can be achieved when teachers understand and consistently apply pedagogical skills in their own classroom context.

This means that every child taught over the professional life of our project teachers will benefit from a teacher who understands the teaching and learning process resulting in improved learning outcomes for all.

Additionally, children will also learn to work together and interact with each other. By teaching youngsters to get along regardless of gender, class or appearance, we create the seedbed for a more cohesive and cooperative society. This matters because schools are, in a way, a microcosm of society and children develop skills to enable them to interact with their environment in a more sustainable way, developing a foundation for higher order skills such as critical thinking and problem solving, as well as self-belief. If children are able to develop these skills they will be active participants in developing a sustainable future.

The effectiveness of this programme is consistently measured both by the skills demonstrated by teachers and the progress made by pupils. Initial feedback suggests that the effectiveness of our Specialist Teachers in the classroom is resulting in teachers voluntarily adopting new skills and techniques.

The REACH teaching method:

An education system is only as good as its teachers. Unlocking their potential is essential to enhancing the quality of the learning experience they provide. Evidence shows that education quality improves when teachers are supported – and deteriorates when they are not.

The Reach to Teach **REACH** methodology is a unique approach based on global best practice and the latest research.

The Mari Shala project helps young children from remote communities to read and write in Gujarati and to achieve basic maths skills. This is the foundation that makes further achievement possible, whatever the talents and inclinations of the individual pupil.

However, these children need a certain amount of special attention and understanding.

Learning always takes courage and openness, which is not easy for a child in an unfamiliar and alien environment. These children need to know that no harm will come from opening up to what they are hearing.

Teachers must learn to treat children as individuals through regular eye contact and the use of their names. We believe that every child has the right to be welcomed into a school where they are accepted and can learn in a way that's free from fear.

The core values of the REACH approach are applicable for both teachers' dealings with children and for children in their interactions with each other:

- **R** = Relate & Respect
- **E** = Engage & Enquire
- **A** = Accept & Acknowledge
- **C** = Check & Clarify
- **H** = Honour & Honesty

This simple model, symbolised by the 'open hands' gesture at the beginning of each class is an important part of our approach. It reminds teachers of their obligations towards the children and teaches children to have respect for themselves and for others and to expect it in return. This is a fundamental life skill as well as a learning skill, assisting with peer learning - a feature of many of today's educational models.

In addition, all Teachers need to understand how learning happens and to identify whether or not each lesson is understood. This requires skill in questioning each child, listening to their response, recognising any problems and understanding what to do next. Only by ensuring there are no gaps in understanding can a teacher accelerate their class through each learning stage.

At the same time, we need to identify any gaps in their learning and act on them. Education is cumulative with each lesson building on what was taught before. By filling the gaps in a child's prior learning we can accelerate their progress.

We're picking up intelligence all the time about how to improve our methods and sharpen teacher skill sets. Our research shows that it can have a huge impact on children's educational attainment.

Project Next Steps:

With just one of the project's four semesters completed, the focus for the project is on consolidating successes to date, gathering robust data to support outcomes and a relentless focus on professional development for the project teams, teachers, their government colleagues and the local government teams.

Initial feedback shows that the presence and demonstrated skills of the Mari Shala teachers has had a significant motivational effect on Government teachers. The project has seen demand for training on the REACH skills come from both Government teachers and Head teachers, as well as from local government officials with Government teachers pushing for recognition of their involvement and skills development.

With all the signs of improvement in children's learning already visible, the project looks set to meet its objectives of improving outcomes for children and to validate the effectiveness of the **REACH** approach on the ground

Thanks:

Thanks must go to the project school Head teachers and Ministry of Education officials in the Morbi district for their openness and support.

Founded in 2003, Reach to Teach is a leading educational charity meeting the needs of disadvantaged children in rural areas of India. It's mission is 'to transform the lives of children by bringing effective and sustainable primary education to remote and rural communities'. R2T provides funding and our team of leading primary educators work with local NGO partners and the State to develop and deliver rural education programmes

It brings a unique approach based on global best practice and the latest research in education, focusing on Teacher Training, Teaching & Learning Skills development and School Governance & Pupil Attendance

Additionally, R2T believes that rather than trying to replace existing state structures, they can support them from within, implementing sustainable programmes and strengthening local capacity

Centre for Environment Education (CEE) was established in August 1984 as a Centre of Excellence supported by the [Ministry of Environment and Forests](#), Government of India. CEE, a national institution with its headquarters in Ahmedabad, has a mandate to promote environmental awareness nationwide.

CEE is affiliated to the Nehru Foundation for Development and inherits the rich multi- disciplinary resource base and varied experience of Nehru Foundation for Development.

CEE is committed to ensuring that due recognition is given to the role of education in the promotion of sustainable development. CEE develops innovative programmes and educational material, and builds capacity in the field of education and communication for sustainable development. It undertakes demonstration projects in education, communication and development that endorse attitudes, strategies and technologies that are environmentally sustainable.
