



## **Development communication strategies for the promotion of education: A study of Ranchi district**

**Shahnaaz Zabi**

Research Scholar, Department of Mass Communication, Aligarh Muslim University, Uttar Pradesh, India

### **Abstract**

India has failed miserably in providing quality education to rural children. The major reason behind this is the lack of communication. The research aims to create a communication strategy that will help build a strong education foundation in rural villages in India. Through this research work I aim at highlighting as to how communication can be utilised in improving the capabilities of students in the rural areas by making them more alert, aware and receptive. It is based on the observations made during preliminary field visits to Government sponsored schools within a radius of 30 kilometres of Ranchi. In this process, I came across few schools run by non-governmental organisations which make use of effective communication to change the face of education system in rural areas. It sheds light on the schools run by self-help groups which uses communication as a major tool to bring rural children to schools. The observations or findings of the study will bring forward the actual functioning of rural middle schools, the available resources, teachers and status of students. This paper presents a synthesis of the latest experiences in applying various communication approaches ranging from mass communication and entertainment education, interpersonal communication, participatory development communication, advocacy and social mobilisation that have been used in Jharkhand. This work suggests effective ways to plan communication programmes and presents lessons learned from the private sector. By no means does it suggest that there is a singular approach to strategic communication; rather, that strategic communication involves a mix of appropriate multiple and synergistic communication approaches that can foster individual and social change. Drawing conclusions from the visits, the paper identifies those aspects of rural education which could be improved with effective communication interventions.

**Keywords:** rural children, education

### **Introduction**

Since the creation of the State of Jharkhand on the 15th of November, 2000, the condition of the overall education has become a hot-bed controversy among the educationalist, administrators, media persons and social activists. The literacy rate of the state is just above Bihar, which is the lowest in the country. The issues of para-teachers, the depleted infrastructure facilities, poor quality of teachers, enrolment level and drop-outs present a gloomy picture of status of education in the state. The present paper envisages in bringing about the state of affairs of education in the state and bring about some strategies to deal with these communication loop holes in spreading knowledge about education.

Renowned sociologist Manuel Castells (1997) <sup>[9]</sup> says that the dependence on information and globalisation is now more than ever which has led the society to become exclusionary in nature for those who do not have access to information. In order to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, we need to change the traditional working modalities of international aid agencies and address the needs of the world's biggest neglected majority – rural people. This can be achieved through new multi-sectorial and interdisciplinary alliances and partnerships among aid specialists working in education and those working in agriculture and rural development.

However, as we talk of reform and development, let us not forget the particular qualities of education for rural people that could be exported to schools in urban areas and make the

latter richer – pedagogically, intellectually and academically – precisely by being more practical in orientation. Rural life has fertilized education in many ways and this rich heritage should not be ignored and lost, but nurtured and enriched. The issues and challenges in rural education can be categorized as external, internal, socio-economic and psychological. The external constraints are related to issues at levels of policy, planning, and implementation while internal constraints are with respect to education system, content, curriculum, pedagogy, and medium of instruction, et cetera. The other set of problems relates to social, economic, and cultural background of students and psychological aspects of first generation learners.

### **Objective of the Study**

Through this study I intend to assess the possibility of utilizing communication as the central resource in improvement of education in rural areas. The area within a radius of 30 kilometres of Ranchi district, the capital city of Jharkhand has been included under the study.

The main objectives of this study are:

- To sensitize rural students to join schools by making them learn the importance of education
- To improve the abilities of rural school students by making them more alert, aware and receptive.
- To make the parents of these children aware about the importance of education.

- To spread awareness about the importance of educating a girl child
- To improve classroom learning by better pedagogy training and effective teacher-student classroom communication.
- To make classroom learning interesting and exciting for rural students.

### **Importance of the Study**

There is a need for a working mechanism of fostering healthy lateral communication among rural students at school level in order to enable them to better understand, and therefore, take responsibility for their education. Once the children start opening up and communicating on relevant issues with each other, they will consequently develop more awareness and confidence. This will partly be because of increased and focused interactions among their own peer group and their partly happen as they would be developing a clearer thought process when they are asked to express their own thoughts out loud. This paper will help in recognising the problems in rural education and will help developing low cost interventions which can be implemented along with the academic curriculum at the school level so that the need to invest extra time or resources can be minimized while maximizing learning output through personal development of students.

### **Review of Literature**

Lack of motivation among rural students is not a problem exclusive of third world countries. Even in countries where rural schools are comparatively resource abundant, children lack the motivation for higher achievement in education. Despite the culturally different reasons, educationists have pointed out the significance of self-instruction and fostering peer group and classroom morale in motivating students in rural areas. Self-efficacy comes up as a crucial factor in most studies carried out in this area (Redding and Walberg, 2012)<sup>[8]</sup>. This is where communication can play an integral part, i.e. in garnering the feeling of self-efficacy among students from rural and under-privileged backgrounds.

Solstad (2009)<sup>[11]</sup> discusses the importance of applying active learning approaches like topic or project work in order to promote general entrepreneurial qualities in students of small schools. He stresses on developing, creativity, curiosity, cooperative skills and tolerance for risk taking among students of remote communities in order to strengthen their standing in globalised world.

Ogili (2005)<sup>[7]</sup>, opines that communication is indispensable to the success of any development initiative, particularly education. Educational instructions call for effective communication, which can be used for instructional process alongside the teacher, textbook, and chalkboard. In order to achieve effectiveness in educational instruction relevant strategies for communication are widely important.

On similar lines, Ezeanya (2001)<sup>[10]</sup>, reiterates that effective communication in educational instruction is very necessary because it can supply a concrete basis for conceptual thinking, offer experience which stimulates self-activity on the part of the learner,

Melkote and Steves (2001)<sup>[4]</sup> refer to Paulo Freire who argued that individuals have the internal capacity to develop

themselves on their own terms, but need relationships to recognize and act on this capacity. Rationality is never instantaneous but requires a process of communication (or education). They also cite various examples showing that a mere inclusion of ICTs in development initiative does not yield results, on the contrary, they may even end up broadening the divide they intended to fill.

It is true that the long term issues viz. infrastructural requirements, policy implementation, teacher quality and accountability and socio-economic aspects of rural areas would need to be addressed. But as mentioned, these are long term issues and may take decades to be overcome completely. However, every year, millions of children are getting enrolled in rural schools and if they remained ignorant to their own problems, they stand to lose their chance of having a bright future.

Focus on providing required information, encouragement to discuss relevant issues and suggesting solutions may go a long way in developing the confidence, critical and analytical thinking and problem-solving skills in the students which would help them make their mark in today's globalised society.

### **Research Design and Methods**

#### **a) Research Methods**

This research is based on field visits to rural government run and non-government organisation run schools of different rural areas at a stretch of 30 kilometres around Ranchi district of South Chotanagpur region in Jharkhand which is dominantly a tribal state. Jharkhand was chosen as the area of the study as this is one of the most wanting regions in terms of rural literacy and development and I have familiarity with the socio-cultural set-up and tribal atmosphere of the region. For quantitative data, a questionnaire was prepared on the basis of the likert-type scale and coding was done on the basis of data collected. Personal interviews were also carried with the head of the schools in order to gain more knowledge about the problems and for the expected solutions to those problems.

#### **b) Field Setting**

There are 11 blocks within this region and three blocks were sampled by simple random sampling through lottery method. The blocks so chosen were: Kanke, Mandar and Ratu

I visited one village in each of these three blocks and spent time in the schools of that area. The village was chosen on convenience basis based on the cooperation of the school principal.

First hand observation of rural school functioning during the field study was crucial in gaining proper understanding of the system. It gave an idea about the available resources, infrastructural set up, students' behaviour in the school, teachers' abilities, general classroom environment, etc. Also, casual conversations with teachers, students and their parents helped in assessing the students' economic background, family set up and academic involvement. It also gave an idea about the problems that they came across, their thoughts, aspirations and attitude towards education.

#### **c) Tools of Data**

To collect more in-depth data, I also used stratified random

sampling. The sample consisted 50 respondents which included teachers and students of government aided schools and parents of these students. The questions were prepared on the basis of likert-type scale which has five alternations viz. strongly agree, agree, uncertain, disagree and strongly disagree. The coding was done on the basis of the data collected.

In this process of data collection to know the need of utilising communication for improving education in rural schools, I came across two non-governmental schools in two of these villages, Mesra and Brambe. These schools effectively used communication as a key tool to improve the education system in those areas. Some off-the-cuff conversations with the principal/s of these schools answered the major question of this study, that is, "Can communication change the face of rural education?"

### **Theoretical framework of the study**

Of all the schemes run by state or centre, none has communication as an approach in its objective. For rural people to know about the benefits of any plan or scheme the government should ensure steps to inform and educate them about those schemes. Communication strategies should be used to inform, educate and make them aware of their rights. Therefore, the government should put into action good communication strategies for social mobilisation.

Good communication strategies use concepts that range from psycho-social learning theories of role modelling communicated via the mass media to the use of advocacy and social mobilisation. Dialogue with and active participation of individuals are essential elements in communication for dissemination of education. Many communication programmes have for long focused much on the metaphorical "tree" and not enough on the "forest", i.e. the attention was on the individual as the focus for change. For behaviours to change on a large scale, however, societal norms and structural inequalities have to be taken into consideration. In short, child-centred communication interventions have to be engrained in a right- based programming framework.

Communication addresses the knowledge, attitudes and practices of individuals, while advocacy and social mobilisation contribute towards the creation of an enabling social and political environment that can support behaviour change at the individual level.

Depending on the programming context, communication strategies can begin at different levels. Behaviour change and social change are inter-related and need to occur across all participants for a programme to make a difference. Within the new development paradigm, the discourse of "behaviour change" is linked to "social change". While behaviour change implies individual level change; social change seeks to create an enabling and favourable environment for change

Programme communication strategies should provide a synthesis of the technical presentations and discussions from the experts' consultation on strategic communication for behaviour and social change. It should present an overview of the role of strategic communication, including concepts, definitions and different communication strategies.

This should offer insights into various aspects of monitoring and evaluating communication programmes. It provides

relevant information and adequate motivation to impact on attitude towards education. It involves monitoring the changes in peoples' attitudes towards sending their child to school and keeping a track of what the child is learning at school. Also, the teachers' attitude towards the students and their academic performance.

In addition to this, evidence-based and scientifically planned and monitored strategic communication interventions have to be linked to service components of the programme.

Thus, for a programme to be effective both communication and service delivery components have to work in close synchrony. The artistic side of communication involves designing creative messages and products, and identifying effective interpersonal, group and mass-media channels based on the sound knowledge of the participants we seek to reach.

One of the major reason behind high drop-out rates is medium of instruction or language constraint where most of the rural children do not understand the textbooks, which are generally in formal languages (Hindi and English). Since Jharkhand is a tribal state, most of the students attending schools are tribal and hence they speak a different tongue. The non-tribal teachers in tribal children's school are another problem where teachers do not know the local language. This was also found in the study conducted by the Janshala Programme. The Commission after commission recommended that at least at the primary level students should be taught in their native language but recruitment of qualified teachers and determination of the appropriate language of instruction has always remained troublesome.

### **Action recommendations for changing school culture**

The planning process entails steps and processes that ought to be followed in the development, implementation and evaluation of communication programmes. The cube model, a prioritisation tool, informs where to begin a communication strategy in a complex programming environment.

Children in rural education should be made aware of their right to free and compulsory education. Teachers should be made more responsible towards their duty and trained to improve the educational system.

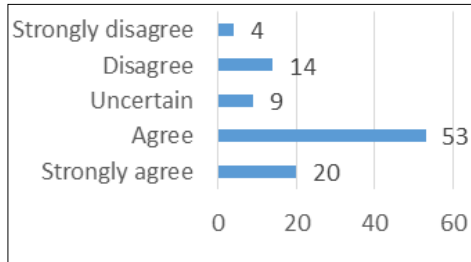
Some major tools to achieve the qualitative and quantitative educational structure in rural areas are audio-based learning, assignments, exercises and worksheets, behaviour management, self-instruction, instructional planning and classroom management, peer-to-peer learning, out of school activities, parents participation, computer/digital learning, training and professional development. They surely may not be the only tools of strategic communication for improvement of education but adding these actions to school culture will benefit the students in advanced learning.

### **Data Analysis and Interpretation**

Insights and opinions of rural teachers, students and their parents were gathered to know where the rural system lags behind in improving the face of education system. Rural communities and school personnel responded honestly to the questionnaire which was used to collect in-depth data on the subject. The analysis of the survey brought forward the real face of communication challenges in rural schools.

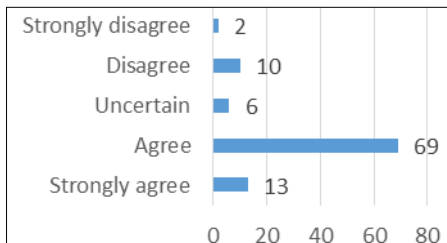
**Coding Analysis**

The first question stated whether people in rural areas were aware of the Right to Education Act or not. According to the RTE guidelines, every school should have 25% of the students from weaker socio-economic status. Through the survey, it was seen that very few parents knew about this Act and its guidelines. Those who knew did not send their child to private school due to various reasons. Either the schools were not following the RTE guidelines or their child did not qualify the required exam to get admissions or daily commuting to schools in urban areas was a very expensive. Only 18 per cent of the population on whom the survey were conducted knew about the RTE Act (As shown in fig.1.)



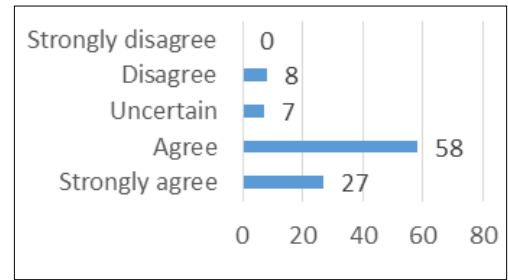
**Fig 1**

Following this, another statement “No steps are being taken by the government to awake and educate rural pol whether the government was taking any efforts to educate the rural population about the RTE norms.” 69 per cent of the respondents agreed to this statement which clearly shows the lack of communication in these areas (As shown in fig. 2). However, the efforts of government to educate people about the RTE norms cannot be denied.



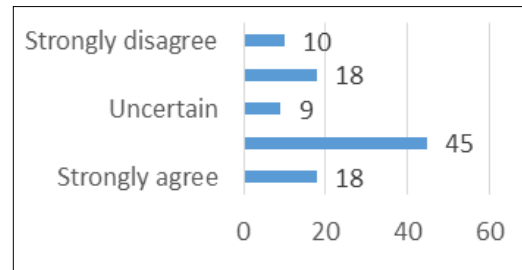
**Fig 2**

Promos and advertisements are frequently played on TV and Radio about universal primary education. The government should take efforts to reach the inner villages where there is no electricity. They should be made aware through posters, speakers, nukkad-natak and interpersonal or group communication. There is acute shortage of trained and qualified teachers, and high absenteeism among teachers. Jharkhand being a crucial state in the Red Corridor, has many areas that there is high risk of naxalite-maoist insurgency. Due to this menace most of the teachers recruited under the SarvaSikshaAbhiyan do not want to be posted in these remote villages. When this question was put in front of the rural teachers, 73 per cent of them agreed (As shown in fig. 3), saying that they do not want to be posed in areas under the Red Corridor as there is always a risk of life.



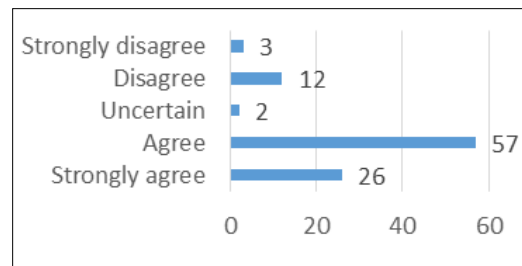
**Fig 3**

Maoists often target government schools for their operations. Those who are posted in these inner villages are generally of a nearby village. Recruitment of teachers is also based on written examination. They are not provided any first hand pedagogy training to pass on quality education. Where 60 per cent (As shown in fig 4) respondents say the pedagogy training are not enough for them to pass on quality education (mostly includes parents of rural children), 30 per cent say they have had sufficient training (mostly includes teachers in rural areas).



**Fig 4**

Because of poor education system, with no proper teachers, infrastructure and books, people in rural areas who can afford good quality education send their children to good schools in urban areas. It was also seen that the ratio of girls in comparison to the ration of boys in these schools are much higher, because parents think it is more important to educate boys than girls. They, therefore, send their boy child to better schools since the beginning. 83 per cent of the respondent (As shown in fig. 5) straightaway agreed to the fact that only children from the most underprivileged section of the society are enrolled in government aided rural schools.



**Fig 5**

Most of the rural schools in Jharkhand has a high student-teacher ratio, almost 7% of schools have a ratio equal or greater than 100 student per teacher (compared to the All-India average of 5%). This is largely due to an inability to recruit

the required number of teachers for approximately 40,000 schools in Jharkhand. Besides this, infrastructure is another issue that keeps classrooms overly filled. There are not sufficient classrooms to accommodate students of all grades in a different room and therefore, students of two-three grades are made to sit in a single classroom with either two teachers or a single teacher handling all the grades. This fact was supported by maximum respondents as the shown in fig. 6.

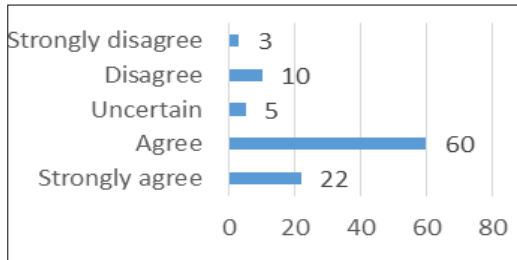


Fig 6

Poverty is a huge factor that brings children to school. Most of the children in these areas go to school with plates and spoons rather than books and notebooks. And 59 per cent respondents' agreement (As shown in fig. 7) to this statement is testimony to the fact that it is the mid-day meal that attracts rural children to school and not what they learn at school is of any importance. Be it any reason, the government is at least satisfied that the school dropout rate is steeply decreasing.

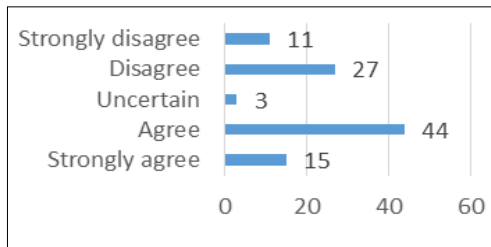


Fig 7

There is a fifty-fifty response to the statement that rural schools do not have enough pedagogy tools for improved student learning (As shown in fig. 8). Of course blackboard, chalk, duster, maps and calendars were seen in almost in every school. But dusty and unused since a long time. To make learning easy and interesting, there were no posters, wall writings, science learning tools, maps, atlas, globe, etc. this made classroom communication uninteresting and therefore, learning becomes tough.

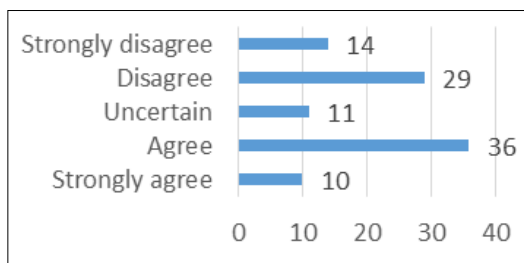


Fig 8

Peer-to-peer communication is extremely important for a

child's growth. Children learn a lot when they share their ideas and problems, and try to solve them at first. Since, students go to school more for khichdi than for studies, they hardly spend much time in school after lunch. More than 60 per cent (As shown in fig. 9) of the respondents agree to the statement that students do not have healthy discussion related to studies, at school. Due to poverty most of the children work after school. Hence, they do not have any out-of school activity too to discuss among peers.

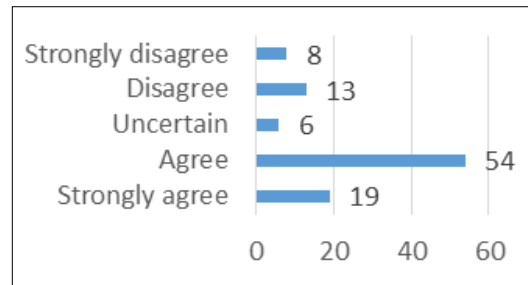


Fig 9

Where these learning tools are missing, dreaming of e-classrooms in these schools are tough. But almost 50 per cent (As shown in fig. 10) respondents disagreed to the statement that e-classrooms are impossible in these schools due to poor electricity conditions. There were no proper electric wiring and switch boards, no proper infrastructure and walls for installing an e-classroom. However, parents in these areas opined that if the funds that the government provided be utilised properly, children will have better facilities at school. Examples of H.H. High School was cited by a number of parents saying that if they can start computer learning with the same electricity status why can't other schools too.

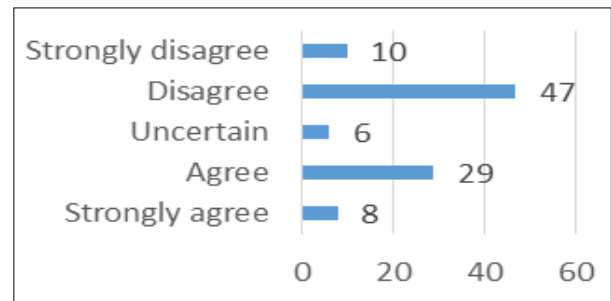


Fig 10

For better growth of a child, it is important that they are being guided equally at home and at school. In these rural schools, there is no parent-teacher interaction. This statement was supported by more than 80 per cent of the respondents (As shown in fig.11). Parents also do not bother to reach out to the school and update themselves from their child's academic performance. This shows that rural population do not know the difference between their child 'going to school' and their child 'learning at school'. NGOs and government organisations should first take an attempt to make the parents aware of this difference and improve the learning process at school.

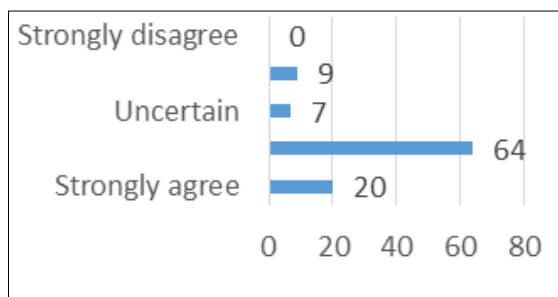


Fig 11

### Field Analysis

Observations made during the visits to Government aided schools

In order to corroborate my research study I made field survey of the proposed rural areas around Ranchi district relating to four major parameters namely: Infrastructure, teachers, students and academic activities for the government schools visited in each of the three districts are given below.

– Infrastructure –

#### Kanke

The school was just a single building with eight rooms of which six were used as classrooms. Both middle and primary school classes were conducted in the same building. Students of different grades studied in the same classrooms. One room was used as headmaster's room and one was used as a store. The school had no boundary wall. There was an open field which served as playground. There were dysfunctional toilets on one side and a mud road on the other. Classrooms had no lights but fans but they did not function, wall-blackboard and few desks and benches which were randomly kept. The rooms were dark and despite having windows – appeared to be very poorly ventilated.

#### Mandar

The upper primary section had a total of five rooms, out of which one was the principals room (one table, two-three chairs, one Amirah), three rooms served as classrooms for each class and one room was empty. The mid-day meals on the day of observation was prepared in the veranda at one end of the corridor. The structure of the school was that of the usual single-row schools. There were no electricity fittings or wirings in the school. The sitting arrangement was on mats, a single chair and table were kept in each class for the teachers. The classrooms were well ventilated and had a comfortable room temperature. Each room had a wall—blackboard, a duster and few chalk sticks. The school did not have a boundary wall or barricading of any sort. But the playground was defined. It was just a huge open area in front of the school – with a pond on the left of the school building.

#### Ratu

The school was a very small compound in the middle of residential area. Classrooms were built on all four directions with an open ground in the middle of the building. It had 10 classrooms of which four remained vacant even during class hours; due to low attendance at school. One room served as principal's room which was also used as staff room. The mid-

day meal was cooked at the open ground in the middle. There was no place for playground. Children played in the veranda. Classrooms had benches and tables in extremely poor condition. The only water facility in this school was a hand pump around which water clogged making the area unhealthy.

– Teachers –

#### Kanke

Apart from the headmistress, there were three other teachers in the middle school. All three were present on observation days though they came around 8:00AM instead of 7:00 AM because children also started coming only after 8:00. The younger teacher (today) was more attentive and smartly dressed, while the other two teachers (one lady and one gentleman) were dressed a bit too casually. The ladies, including the headmistress, were soft with the children while the gentlemen was uptight and aloof. The students showed not much interest in the classroom. Almost half the students went home immediately after the mid-day meal. Since students of different grades studied in the same class, the teacher had to be alert and attentive in the class. There was hardly any interaction between the teacher and the students.

#### Mandar

Besides the headmistress, there were three teachers, two female and one male, in the school. The teachers came a little late in the school (although before most of the students). Teachers were dressed properly and were attentive towards students. They seemed sensitive towards the inconvenience faced by the students outside the school. Teachers try to keep the studies on track during observation days and apparently studies were better than expected in these schools, but a lot more efforts were needed from the teachers. However, considering the extremely underprivileged background of the student the level was not good. The students, mostly girls, were very reserved in front of the teachers and mostly interacted with the female teachers only. Another thing to be noticed was on the days of observation one of the female teacher could not take the classes as she was busy with paper work related to election duty given to her.

#### Ratu

The entire administrative charge of the middle school and the primary school was on a single person – the headmaster who was on the verge of retirement. There were no other teachers in the middle school and only two Para teachers in the primary section. The headmaster appeared very tired and worn out and it was evident that he was not able to focus on teaching under the pressure of his administrative work. There was only one permanent teacher, the headmaster, in the school. None of the three classes were without a teacher during any part of the day. Classes started on time and ran as per schedule. All the instructor were young, articulate and polite. They dressed professionally and took their classes sincerely. The impact could clearly be observed in student as well.

– Students –

#### Kanke

The total strength of the middle school was 76 with girls out numbering the boys – this is because people in this village

preferred to send their children to private schools especially their sons. Students came late to school around 9 am in the 7 am school timing. Children mostly not in uniforms and their clothes were not neat either. Children had no sense of classroom discipline and they kept moving freely within the two open classrooms. The principal told the boys were mostly mischievous elements who were rusticated from private schools. Students were more open with each other, although there was scope for more communication between students and teachers and also among students themselves.

### **Mandar**

The total enrolment was 34. On an average 25 students were present on the day of observation. As they have to walk a distance of at least 2-3 kms to the school, Students usually get late. But this was majorly because these children worked hard even at their homes collecting firewood, taking cattle to graze or simply cooking and cleaning. Students did not look very enthusiastic towards studies or even to meet their friends. There was not much one-on-one interaction among themselves, and mostly their conversations sounded like aimless chatter. However, they did not restrained or was afraid with the school either. Very few were in uniform, that too very untidy. Although students appeared to be from poor families but they could surely be motivated to come in cleaner clothes. Girls were more in number than boys and they were also more attentive in the class.

### **Ratu**

The total enrolment of this school was out of which approximately 115 were present on both days of observation. Students were much more open and confident in this school than they were in previously observed schools. This could be due to the comparatively better economic condition of a semi-urban area. One thing which was common with the previous school was the fact that girls outnumbered the boys. The students were also a little more receptive during classes and some particular students even went to the teachers on their own to show their work. All the children, barring 1-2 were in proper clean uniforms. They did maintain a certain level of class discipline. It could be seen that the sense of being in school, i.e. in a formal environment, shaped their behaviour. There were a few students who were clearly bright – more articulated and aware than the others. However mostly students remained reserved, despite being disciplined, and the need for them to interact more openly with teachers and even among each other could be felt. Not unlike the previous schools, here also it was evident that children came from the poorest sections of the areas.

– Academic Activities –

### **Kanke**

On the days of observation, an average of four classes were taken out of the eight classes listed in the time table. The main reasons behind the classes not running regularly was the inability of students to come at 7 am and the mid-day meal distribution. Even among the classes being taken, the students remained extremely passive. The academic level was poor and sometimes in an entire class the teacher kept explaining on simple division or multiplication. The students did not seem

prepared for the subject matter and showed no interest. No interaction took place between students and teachers in any of the classes.

### **Mandar**

Not many proper classes were conducted on either days of observation. As and when the teacher got time, he assembled the present students and taught a thing or two. Students, mostly girls, were also least involved in studies. The school not only needed teachers but it required very good teachers who could motivate the students to take interest in their own education and make some positive effects on their own. Given the properly planned infrastructural setup, relatively better social-economic condition of the children and adequate manpower, a higher academic and motivational level could have been attained.

### **Ratu**

The village was adjacent to a semi urban market and also relatively closer to the main city than the previous villages. The urban exposure reflected in the personalities of children. They were more involved in their studies and interacted openly with each other. The situation, despite completely involving teachers, was not much better academically in this school either. An average of five classes was taken out of the scheduled eight during the days of observation even in the 10 am – 4 pm timing. Although, given the extreme poverty of the region the students showed a certain level of enthusiasm but they clearly needed more attention and exposure to realise their true potential. The number of one-on-one interaction between teachers and students were very limited. Students did not seem prepared for the topic being taught.

Observations made during the visits to non-government model school

Similar observations in non-governmental model schools in Brambe village were made. The four parameters namely: infrastructure, teachers, students and academic activities were used to describe the working condition of the school.

### **Infrastructure**

The school had three buildings. One was used as the middle and high school section, the other was used for primary section. The third building was the house of the owner of the school; the ground floor of which was used as the office for the school. The school had a total of 16 rooms which had asbestos roof but there was sufficient light and fans in the classrooms. The benches and desks were properly arranged by the students themselves. A make-shift classroom arrangement was also made under a huge mango tree since, as the principal of the school said, there were not enough classrooms to adjust all students. The school had a huge playground and a games room at one end of the building. Separate toilets for boys and girls were built behind the school building. Proper drinking water facilities were also made available there.

### **Teachers**

There were 13 teachers, of which 4 were male. The teachers were smartly dressed and mostly were middle-aged. All the teachers were highly dedicated and compassionate towards their work. This showed in the way they dealt with the

students in the classroom. Individual attention was paid to every student in the class of 30:1 student-teacher ratio. They tried to maintain discipline in the class and also were on time for school. The teacher interacted with students even during lunch break. Modern teaching methods like visual pictures, charts, graphs, maps and blackboard drawings were used to explain difficult subject matters. No classes went unattended during the two days of observation. The principal also took 2-3 classes in a day. He also moved across the school once in the whole day to ensure things were going smoothly.

### **Students**

The total enrolment in the school was 548 students. On both the days of observation, the school attendance was around 90% which was relatively good in comparison to the government aided school. The students enrolled were from extremely poor family backgrounds. They paid a monthly fee of Rs100 every month; 28 students studied free of cost extremely poor family conditions. However, their appearance did not let this be expressed. They were properly and neatly dressed in the school uniform. They behaved properly in the classroom. Healthy discussions about studies and new activities took place between the students. Students played badminton and cricket sports during lunch break. Certainly the ratio between the male and female students were balanced. Students interacted with the teachers in the classroom very frequently. Enthusiasm to learn and know about things clearly showed on their face. Thought they were from poor family background, proper guidance and awareness made them alert and passionate towards learning at school.

### **Academic Activities**

Students were asked to solve mathematical problems on board, learn chapters' loud in the class, and use computers. Students also remained looked active and enthusiastic to learn in classroom. They participated actively in every activity in the class. The teachers made sure the students are learning at school. Home-works were given in almost every class and prior day home-works were also checked by the teacher which was discussed in the class. All classes went on smoothly and on time. The students and teachers reached school on right time at 8am and the day started with a morning assembly. The principal maintained strict discipline in the school.

### **Interpretation**

Experienced rural educators and empirical evidence suggest insights and evidence for improving rural students' motivation and increasing their learning. Rural communities, by definition, are small and geographically remote, as are their schools. There is little evidence that community or school size militates against student performance, all else being equal. Geographic remoteness presents its challenges, but distance technology available today helps close the miles in ways not possible in the past. In many ways, rural schools are advantaged: conscientious governance by school boards with a vested interest in the well-being of their small communities, school personnel who assume broad responsibilities for their students' success, close-knit families, abundant social capital (or close social relations among area families), and the centrality of the school in community life.

Based on the observation made during the visits and open-ended conversations with the teachers and students, following conclusion could be drawn. All observed schools, even the most interior ones, were provided with basic infrastructure and separate classrooms for each grade, a teacher's room and a kitchen to prepare mid-day meals. Schools are also provided with maintenance funds every year for repairs, painting, etc. it show the problem is more of management of resources rather than scarcity in the rural education system.

Surprisingly, only children from the most underprivileged sections of the area were enrolled in government schools. As soon as a family is able to afford private schooling, they prefer to pay the fee and get their children into private schools. This is despite the fact that government schools provide free books, meals and their teachers are formally selected and trained, unlike their private counterparts. This is a testimony to the fact rural folk are not insensitive towards their child's educational needs, but they need to be guided better on this issue.

In all the observed schools, the girls outnumbered boys constituting almost 70% of the total strength. It was revealed during conversations that rural families are more serious about their boy's education and hence send them to private schools since the beginning. This revelation leads to two uncomfortable conclusions, firstly, families need to be sensitised towards taking the girls education equally seriously and secondly, and there is a need to restore the government schooling.

It was also observed that in government schools were majority is that of girls, female teachers made a better connect with students even if there was no conscious efforts of the teacher's part. Also, children showed much more enthusiasm in class conducted by a younger teacher as compared to an older teacher. The difference lies in communication style and energy level maintained during the classes. This shows that unlike usual perceptions, there were parents and children in such villages who were pro-educated and even a regular amount work could keep them satisfied.

The most worrying aspects among all observations was the inability of the children to comprehend or even understand their own long term problems. They remained passive listeners in most of the cases and did not realise the role of proper education in their lives. During conversations, barring a few expectations, most children could not even talk about what they wish to do for a living once they passed out of school. Clearly they need to be encouraged to think and think freely to be motivated to speak and more interaction with each other which in turn will lead them to think and discuss further.

### **Conclusion**

Communication is a major tool that can help improve the quality of education in rural India. Encouraging the genuine rural students who are interested in education and making them competent is the key role of communication. There are many examples of success in rural education in India like the Barefoot College, 8 Day Academy, and Gurukul School in Bihar. These are innovative and successful examples of schools running in rural India. Large number of such schools are required in rural India. It is also absolutely mandatory to evaluate the success of the schools and students at each and every level. Timely assessment will throw light on present



problems and achievements.

According to the Learning Lab project by Milind Pande, director of MIT School of Telecom Management, it has been indicated that communication devices like mobile devices, computers and television are scalable technology assisted with learning alternative to address the gaps and has helped to reduce 50% dropouts from primary education. Students learn more through visual pictures and graphics than word of mouth. These devices function as ubiquitous educational resource if graphing tools, language dictionaries, logarithmic tables, historical and geographical factoids are bundled along with the device. The launch of 3G and WiMAX services will play a key role in increasing rural telephony and options for rural education. Through m-learning and e-learning, we can easily overcome geographic barriers as it provides learning at anytime from anywhere. Another advantage is that it will remove the need to physically attend a course, eliminating travel time and costs. Also, with the increase in rural telecom density, m-learning will be the most feasible way to achieve government's initiative of education for all. This will benefit rural areas where even transportation is a problem. Offline learning is possible through CD ROMs and DVDs as broadband penetration is still a long way to go in rural India. The technology can be deployed rapidly in remote location and will be able to support the minimum capacity and speed requirements that will be laid down by the government in its national e-governance plan initiatives.

Sri Sri Ravishankar's Art of Living organization has also set up 115 free schools in tribal, rural and slum areas with the intention of standardizing the functioning and documentation of the school work and improving the teaching techniques. It organizes regular workshops around the country, including representatives of school teachers, Head Masters/Mistresses from different schools. The workshop provides hands-on training for the participants on new teaching techniques and methods to improvise their skills. It also provides the participants an opportunity to meet teachers from all over the country and exchange views and ideas. The Art of Living has made education accessible to various villages. The programs have enabled parents to understand the value of education and created harmony amongst diverse cultures. The schools believe in imparting education which not only help the students materially but also emotionally and socially.

Tata Steel through its focused interventions in education, emphasizes to improve quality of education, particularly rural education as well as promotion of female education that would contribute to Millennium Development Goals. Its initiatives in the field of education are designed to address the lack of quality education, comprise a gamut of interventions for different age-groups. Tata Steel is running Camp School programme in the rural schools of Jharkhand with the objective to enhance the educational interests of the school drop-out girls residing in core tribal villages. Girls in the 9-14 years age-group, who have never been enrolled in any school or are school drop-outs, are brought at the center, where they undergo a nine month bridge course. Recently, Tata Steel in association with Tata Interactive Systems (TIS) has introduced Tata Class Edge, an interactive learning and teaching solution in few schools of Jharkhand. It is a holistic classroom solution that not only makes the teaching process interactive by using

visual means but also enables teachers to create question papers and analyze student performance.

Rural Organization for People's Advancement (ROPA) is another organization which is using communication to spread the importance of education and good hygiene in rural areas. ROPA started a school in several villages of Jharkhand. The organization aims in reaching each individual sector/village panchayat within Jharkhand and raise public awareness, promote education, inculcate civic sense and hygiene, improve living conditions, and aid in agriculture development. With this in mind, in 1994, in those villages of Kurkuta panchayat, where schools do not exist, informal pre-school education for children has been initiated. This carried on for few months, after which public awareness programmes were conducted. This made the people in the district desire to have a school in their vicinity, which would enable children from the neighboring villages to study. With consent of the district administration and the desire of the people the organization obtained permission to start a school in 1999. At present, about 300 boys and girls attend this school from pre-school to junior high. Within 18 months, in a Panchayat district of 4000 people, 300 children have started their education.

### Suggestions

Considering the low literacy among rural students and high drop-out rates at elementary and higher levels, there is need of special focus on rural education, inclusive of context-specific traditional and innovative interventions. To enable comprehension of lessons taught, children should be taught in their mother tongue at least in the Classes I to III. A normative network of primary, secondary and high schools equipped with proper school buildings, hostels and other requisite infrastructure facilities should be worked out for all schools in rural areas. The norms should be minimum one functional residential high school for in each block, and at least one primary school in every Gram Panchayat. To prevent teachers' absenteeism in such areas, local and tribal teachers from local Panchayats should be given preference in employment, and the teaching and non-teaching staff of primary schools should be placed under the control of the village management committee or village education committee appointed by the Gram Sabha or Gram Panchayat. Finally, to make a substantial inroad towards attaining the goal of universal primary education, it is imperative that all interventions should have community participation as a core strategy. In order to ensure universal education and sustainable improvement in the quality of education it is necessary to bring the community closer to the school system and discuss with parents the benefits of educating their child.

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