# Reaching Out To the Unreached: A Study on Mobile Schools (Chalta Phirta Schools) Project under Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan

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*Abstract:* *'To the individual, education means expansion of cultural horizons and employment opportunities. To the nations, it means enhanced prospect of social and economic development.' The Declaration of Human Rights, 1948, stated that everyone has a right to education. Yet, even today, this right is being denied to millions of children'.[1]*
*Key words:* *chalta phirta school, mobile learning centre's, sarva shiksha abhyan, elementary education, civil society.*

## I. Introduction

With large school drop out in the city and large scale of migrants, the idea of bringing sarva shiksha to all, that is education to all, by the government bought in the innovative inspiration of education at the door step. To achieve the ambition of educating each individual, the abhyan began with focusing on the urgent need of elementary education for the age group of six to fourteen years. Despite being a fundamental right, the figures are abysmal as we see the young future of our nation out of the mainstream education.

UNICEF stepped into the realm in promoting this essential right of education to all. The **Chalta Phirta School (CFS)** or the mobile learning centre (MLC) aims at taking the education to the un-reached. Considering the targets set under the Millennium Development Goals this has turned out to be an innovative mechanism to disseminate primary education to children in the marginalized communities. It was conceived from the Cluster Resource Centre model, under the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan. The states policy that aims towards the universalisation of elementary education, as mandated by the 86th amendment of the constitution, bringing education to all in a particular time bounded manner. The principal test faced by the nation today is the absence of high rates of literacy rates in a growth oriented developing nation. "Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) is a programme for Universal Elementary Education. This programme is also an attempt to provide an opportunity for improving human capabilities to all children through provision of community -owned quality education in a mission mode. It is a response to the demand for quality basic education all over the country."[2]

### At the doorstep

Moving ahead with this marvelous goal, the concept of mobile school was introduced which aspired at bringing this basic right to every child at their doorstep. The government collaborated with two leading NGOS of Delhi to endorse this form of mobile education.

It was operated by two established Delhi based NGO's who acted as the endorsing agencies-

✓ **Salaam Baalak Trust** [3]- an Indian non-profit and non-governmental organization which provides support for street and working children in the inner cities of New Delhi, and Mumbai. SBT include repatriation providing education (formal education, informal education and open learning, basic literacy and schooling, full care facilities for the young (up to 18 years), drop-in shelters for older children, physical and mental health care, life-skills education, vocational training, sports, job placement and counseling in HIV/AIDS and TB awareness.

✓ **Butterflies[4]-** a registered voluntary organization working with vulnerable children, especially street & working children in Delhi since 1989. With a rights based, participatory, non-institutional approach the organization endeavors to educate and impart life skills to vulnerable children so that they become self-reliant.

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1 www.hindu.org
2 http://ssa.nic.in/
3 www.salaambaalaktrust.com
4 www.butterflieschildrights.org/

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It is an outreach programme providing educators with a versatile platform to advocate and facilitate children's educational development in the most marginalized areas of Delhi. The school moves to the student through a modified van which carries resource persons, facilitators, teaching & learning materials including information to community focus groups, the mobile vans are equipped with modern technologies that generate interest amongst the community members in order to have greater participation. UNICEF stepped in to develop these mini mobile learning centre's. These vans were endowed with computers, laptops, LCD televisions, audio visual equipment and a lot more to enhance the learning experience. This bus moves around the city everyday at designated locations, especially at the most disadvantageous areas such as the slum communities or those areas where access to formal education is unthinkable. The aims of such alterative initiatives are to bridge the gap between these marginalized sections of the society with the mainstream section of the society. "A special team of mentors in the mobile schools will spread awareness through the use of modern technology, including books, computers, educational exhibits, teaching-learning equipment, programmes and presentations, demonstrations, counseling, workshops, films, street theatre, training and the like.

Once a week, the MLC's will be used to spread awareness on health and hygiene, HIV/AIDS, drugs, dowry and other social issues, as well as to empower local leaders, educators and social workers to be more proactive on issues concerning the education of their children".[5] With the high concentrations of children dropping out of schools, Sarva Shiksha Abhyan with the support of UNICEF has tried to bring about a change in the lives of such children who are unable to access any formal education due to several unavoidable circumstances. Ranging from street children, to red light areas to construction workers, to ones making their livings out of menial jobs, or runaway children etc have been giving the opportunity to open the doors of knowledge. Delhi witnesses large number of invariably neglected vulnerable children on the roads who are deprived of all basic right to life. 'The preliminary indications of the survey are that there are 45,000 out of school children in Delhi. The data also indicates that there are 5,53,865 illiterate persons of which 1,96,913 are Males and 3,56,950 Females in the focus areas, this includes all illiterate persons above 14 years of age.'[6] The country has failed to achieve the target set under the 11th five year plan that is reducing the dropout rates from more than sixty percent to twenty percent, and this becomes more threatening when the drop out level is higher at the elementary level itself. More than fifty million drop outs in the country and 60% of the children lack the basic education. These inexcusable figures reflect the multidimensional effects that the nation as well as the society as a whole needs to undergo. "UNICEF has been collaborating with Delhi's Universal Elementary Education (UEE) Mission to develop innovative ways and means to reduce the number of out-of-school children in the National Capital Territory, through alternate education programmes, under SSA, to bridge learning gaps and prepare marginalised children for formal schooling."[7]

## II.    Methodology

The real success story of whether this innovation was a boom or bane involved both qualitative and quantitative research. Both the qualitative and quantitative methods complemented each other, whereby qualitative approaches led to the enlargement of quantitative research tools such as the use of focus groups. Whereby, the quantitative data could be analysed better keeping in mind the qualitative results that were achieved. Following were the techniques /research tools that were used to conduct the research.

1) During the seminal research stage, the goal is to learn about the target variables or audiences as much as possible. Thus, the exploratory, descriptive research design was the initial conducting point whereby the earlier research done in the area of right to education, the innovative cluster models was analysed.

2) Focus groups- after a basic sampling, through the use of data from government records/agencies the key focus groups were targeted whereby the selected communities were analysed. Information gathered was used to decide upon the questions that had to be questioned to the target audience members. The main areas where the buses travelled every day were the key locations of research such as - ITO  Prasar Bharti area. Kali Bari Mandir Marg, Kalka Mandir grounds south Delhi, GB road (Red light areas ), Andrews Ganj etc.

3) Data collection- both primary and secondary sources were used.

    a) The primary fieldwork involved techniques such as, interviews (both structured and informal), questionnaires, key informants, participant observations  etc

    b) Questionnaires and Informal interviews- the target audience was interviewed to understand the basic of level knowledge within them. It was more of an informal type keeping in mind that these were more of the vulnerable segments of the society such as street children, red light areas, traffic children, runaways as well as their families. Questionnaires given were simple, more of scaling or ranking type, whereas

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5 www.unicef.org
6 http://edudel.nic.in/quick_report_

7 www.unicef.org

detailed informative ones were asked from the key informants (such as the government key actors , project head personnel's etc).

c)  Participant observation- was carried out whereby the researchers' were a part of the classes being taken by the mobile vans, interacting with the students, teachers and families as well. Observing the subject is more informative as the real experience leads to a more logical and methodological research.

d)  Further, secondary data was analysed by using existing data such as government reports, documents, annual reports, data bases etc from the concerned institutions or bodies. Example- The reports of the NGOs that are the implementing agencies both BUTTERFLIES AND SALAAM BAALAK TRUST, government policy data of Sarva Shiksha Abhyan etc.

e)  Historical archives in the form of previous statistics by the institutions or research carried out. They were all analytically and critically analysed.

f)  Case studies- earlier studies that were undertaken under the elementary education in India were investigated too.

g)  Net Mapping-a social network analysis tool that uses the mapping method to help people understand the situations, more visually. Further, the process helps in analysing the position of the individual actors within a given social structure and the various key components affecting them simultaneously.

**Key issues addressed by Mobile Learning (chalta phirta school)**

•  It aims to increase the participation and retention of all children up to the age of 14 in quality education programmes with a special emphasis on education of girls, working children, poor children and those with special needs.

•  Acting as a bridge between the hard to reach children and the formal educational institutions, it targets the high drop out rate.

•  By taking resources directly to the populations with a low access to education, it also aims at empowering the community to manage and support education.

**Innovative Strategies Used**

**Identification and motivation**: Through a situational analysis and base line study conducted by the NGO's, a data base of the beneficiaries is prepared. The role of the community motivator is then very crucial as he engages with the parents. He motivates the children to participate in the interactive learning sessions conducted regularly. Regular awareness sessions are carried out by the NGOs to build up greater participation.

**Innovative teaching learning:**  various curricular bridging programmes are integrated with interesting educational tools like Meena CD's, a library including NCERT books and story books and several mathematical games etc. The van is outfitted with a laptop and a 40" digital flat screen television and an on board generator along with a range of interesting interior exhibits and equipments to showcase knowledge and best practices in contemporary education. Moreover, a focused group strategy is followed by classifying children into illiterates, semi-illiterates and those who have completed primary education.

**External support to school going children:** Regular tuitions are provided along with regular follow ups for children attending schools. It also includes the financial support for essential documents like the affidavits.

**Additional attractions-**  the government has inculcated the concept of good nutrition for the children , through which large scale wakefulness is build up regarding  health issues. Meal is provided to all those children who turn up for these classes acting as an additional magnetism. Along with other stationary items , books , educational games, toys etc.

**Capacity Building:** Acting as a platform for capacity building at three levels; child, teacher and the community, it is empowering them to be proactive on issues concerning the education of their children. Regular in-service training workshops for the teachers e.g. the Jodo Gyan workshop for teachers at Butterflies. SBT on the other hand conducts awareness sessions on AIDS etc every Saturday for the community. Adding to this was building up the motivational levels of these slum areas through facilitating Community Motivator who spoke to the concerned families about the benefits of the programme. Thus the capacity building measures were holistically targeted.

**E governance:** Regular online maintenance of records like the daily attendance of the target beneficiaries, weekly and quarterly reports from the concerned NGO's, enrollment records of the children mainstreamed etc. Also each bus is monitored through a GPS system.

**Monitoring and Evaluation:** Well planned outcomes, detailed outputs, activities and lesson plans along with verifiable indicators are prepared in advance. Regular visits are done by head CFS, Mr. R.M. Mohla, CRC, DORC and the state financial audit team. There are regular reports prepared for each location along with details of progress against the indicators and names of all those on board. Regular evaluation keeps a check on the positive results under the initiative and also regular appraisals of the coordinators, supervisors etc involved builds up their confidence to achieve higher results.

**Project Outcomes:** The research provided us a greater insight to the wonderful achievements under the CFS. The following key outcomes have been discussed below-

**Increase in enrollment and retention rates:** 70+22 children were enrolled into the mainstream education by Salaam Balak Trust and Butterflies respectively in the year 2008-2009. In the year 2009, till June, 40+15 children have been enrolled into the Government school and National Open school respectively by Butterflies. On the other hand SBT has enrolled    children into a government and Guruduara school. There has not been even a single drop out case till date.

**Increase in the enrollment of girls:** Many girls particularly muslims who had dropped out have been mainstreamed into the schools through this programme. Also, a large number of girls from the G.B. Road area have been admitted or linked to the SBT home for girls- 'Arushi'- at Gurgaon.

**Documentation of Best practices in contemporary education and a data base of the targeted beneficiaries.** For example incentive based education such as the use of Sony PSP.

**Increased awareness:** amongst the children as well as the community. Parents are taking initiative to get the affidavits and birth certificates for their wards made, in order to take admission in schools or avail schemes like Ladli. An increased amount of trust between the parents and the community motivator gets reflected in the parent teacher-motivator meetings. The Ngos play a crucial role in building up the trust amongst the communities vis a vis the government.

**Lessons Learnt/ Key Challenges ahead:**
**An effective Partnership:** Well networked agencies of planning and implementation are essential for a goal oriented approach. An effective partnership between the department of education, NGO's – SBT and Butterflies, Government of National Capital Territory, UNICEF, YUVA, transport department, Teach India Campaign launched by the Times of India and the department of social welfare ensure a smooth and effective implementation. However, the government-NGO partnership has to be strengthened financially with more investment by the department of education thus raising it from currently 30% of the entire project cost to at least 50%.

**Transparent feed back mechanisms:** Online attendance and progress reports by the concerned NGO's regularly along with monitoring reports by the concerned government departments with a clear mention of the successes, failures, slippages in implementation and names of the dignitaries on each evaluation panel creates transparency and accountability in the process. Moreover clearly laid out plans, verifiable progress indicators and outcomes strengthen the provided mechanisms.

**Sustainability and replicability:** The project has been a great success in achieving the intended objectives. Moreover, the plan to launch 30 more buses on the basis of this pilot project is in the pipe line. However, the same could also be replicated in rural areas in coordination with the local governance institutions and civil society organizations.

**Successful outreach:** The programme has been able to reach out to targeted beneficiaries from diverse areas stretching from G.B. Road to Kalkaji Temple. However, it needs to be stretched to include adolescents as well. Moreover, the number of locations each day could be reduced in order to increase the efficiency in terms of community awareness and sensitization programmes.

**Formal links between the Government schools and departments like transport, SDM and the NGO's** have to be strengthened in order to reduce the structural bottlenecks for renewal of license, parking space, admissions, schemes like Ladli, income certificates and fitness clearance, maintenance of the vehicle etc. Also, the coordination between the concerned NGO's has to be strengthened in terms of educational and implementation strategies.

## III.  Conclusion

Mrs. Sheila Dikshit, said, "Whilst I am confident that this pace-setting pilot initiative will achieve the results envisaged … for ultimate success, we will need many more than the two vehicles we are currently deploying and I am confident that we can look forward to the participation of other private sector partners when we are ready to take the project to scale."[8] The ultimate success, of this project could be estimated with the increasing number of students undergoing the elementary education. Adding to this was the increase number of girl child admission in schools .The capital has varied demographic influx of migrants from all over the country. Majority of these families are in search of employment for their livelihoods , ranging from daily wage earners, construction workers, laborers etc who are on the go and do not have any dwelling place. As a result the common inclination is to avoid the need for education for their children leading to a disadvantageous growth for the children. The research tried to look into this partnership by the government with the representatives of the civil society. It was clearly evident that both the main implementing agencies were fulfilling their roles to the best possible depite lack of resources at regular intervals. "In less than three years, about 70% of Delhi's out-of-school children were persuaded to join Alternative Learning Centres run by NGOs. Over 25,000 children underwent bridge courses and qualified to join formal schools, where they have since been mainstreamed."[9] But the government needs to realise that its role in achieving the targets has to be much more in a responsible manner, It should act as the guardian of the CFS and look ahead for better measures to improve the participation rates at a faster rate.

The mobile learning centre's access tried its best in universalizing and enrollment of children's, and to a large scale a great deal of community mobilization. The abhyans major responsibility was to build in the capacity of the community so as to make it more proficient and build up the future of the children. The concentrated efforts led to the accomplishment of universal access, universal enrollment, universal retention and universal achievement.

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