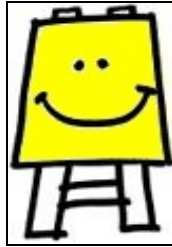


The Experiences with Out-of-School Children and their Mainstreaming

Pratham experiences in urban Uttar Pradesh



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Table of Contents

<u>BACKGROUND</u>	<u>3</u>
<u>UNIVERSAL ACCESS TO SCHOOL IN URBAN AREAS.....</u>	<u>3</u>
<u>B. PRATHAM'S WORK IN LUCKNOW UNDER JANSHALA PROGRAM 2001 TO 2003</u>	<u>12</u>
<u>EXPANDING URBAN COVERAGE IN UTTAR PRADESH: CHALLENGES OF PROVIDING ACCESS TO SCHOOLING</u>	<u>14</u>
<u>PLANNING, MAPPING AND LINKING SCHOOLS WITH CATCHMENT AREAS OR COMMUNITIES... </u>	<u>15</u>
<u>SUGGESTED SOLUTIONS FOR EXPANDING SPACE FOR SCHOOLS: INTERIM AND SHORT RUN OPTIONS: PRATHAM- MHRD PROGRAM AREAS IN LUCKNOW, VARANASI AND AGRA URBAN 2006-2008</u>	<u>17</u>
<u>CHALLENGES IN ENSURING LEARNING IN URBAN SLUMS.....</u>	<u>20</u>
<u>UNDERSTANDING THE ISSUES OF LEARNING.....</u>	<u>21</u>
<u>SUSTAINING THE LEARNING GAINS.....</u>	<u>24</u>
<u>CONCLUDING REMARKS : CHALLENGES AND ISSUES OF CONCERN:</u>	<u>25</u>

List of Figures

FIGURE 1: CONCEPT OF BSK.....	15
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The Experiences with Out-of-School Children and their Mainstreaming Pratham experiences in urban Uttar Pradesh

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Background

Pratham's work since its inception in Mumbai in 1994 has largely been in urban areas helping children to come to school and learn well. During these years the urban communities have not only been the context of our work but also a resource to achieve the goal of Universalisation of primary education. Over the years, Pratham has grown from being a Mumbai-based urban organization, to an organization with a nationwide presence. Pratham has also grown from being a 'service provider' organization to an organization that impacts policy by using its practical ground level experiences.

Universal access to school in urban areas

Universal elementary education is one of the eight Millennium Development Goals. For this goal to be achieved, every child in the age group of 6 to 14 must not only go to school, but also stay in the school through the primary stage of schooling.

One of the biggest problems of urban education is the isolation of the schools from their surrounding communities. In cities, especially in the case of municipal/government schools and school systems, this isolation is total. In spite of tremendous resources available in the urban areas, there is no mechanism that channelizes these resources to improve government schools beyond occasional donations by donors especially corporates to schools or NGO-run pilot programmes that are neither mainstreamed nor scaled up.

In-migration accounts for a large proportion of the growth of the population in the urban areas. Migrants come looking for better and more stable livelihoods from rural to urban areas. Proximity to economically backward states and drought prone states adds to overall migration levels. High growth rates and high in-migration, often of people with low literacy and income levels, lead to the growth of slums. The growth of population in urban areas is unevenly spread. Geographic units of planning are uneven in size, population and population density. Managing migration and providing adequate basic services to the rapidly growing population are challenges that local government in urban areas face constantly.

Major educational improvement initiatives in India over last 15 years have focused primarily on rural areas. Programmes and schemes for improving infrastructure, strengthening training and professional development catered mainly to schools and teachers in villages and rural districts. At the same time, it is worth noting that efforts at decentralizing rural governance and creating decision-making structures at lower levels have advanced further than urban decentralization efforts. The 73rd Amendment (1992) – rural decentralization – to the constitution has made India one of the most politically decentralized countries in the developing world. However, although the 74th Amendment – urban decentralization – laid the legislative framework for urban decentralization, structural reforms, functional reforms and financial reforms are slow in coming.

Who is responsible for the effective functioning of the primary schools in urban areas? In 1992, the 74th Amendment to the constitution added a separate chapter on urban local bodies, which sought to redefine their role, power, function and finances. Documents referring to the 74th Amendment, list a plethora of functions that, urban local bodies are supposed to perform; primary education does not appear in the list. In contrast, in all discussions of the 73rd Amendment that refers to devolution of power to panchayats, primary schooling figures prominently.

Urban poverty policies are also not integrated. Slum development, housing, sanitation, ICDS, schooling etc, all operate under different departments at the local, state and national levels. Without integrated planning, it may be difficult to make headway on the reaching the urban poor who suffer from multiple disadvantages. Thus, a comprehensive approach to universalisation of elementary education has to take into account that different departments of the government, need to collaborate first before the entire city can come together, or “societal missions” can be built.

This paper takes a reflective look at Pratham experiences with every child in school and learning well in urban Uttar Pradesh in recent years. In particular, it focuses on the issues of access and of learning in the context of urban slums. It attempts to analyze opportunities and constraints in working with communities and schools for universalizing quality primary education. A better understanding of the current gaps, inequities and inadequacies can result in a better tomorrow for children, for families, for schools and for communities.

BUILDING A BRIDGE : MAINSTREAMING OUT OF SCHOOL CHILDREN

A. FIELD EXPERIENCES FROM MUMBAI'S SLUM COMMUNITIES 1998-1999¹

Strategy for identifying out-of-school children²

From the balwadi network, from the slum communities of Mumbai came the demands for bringing out of school children to school. The question was how to estimate how many children between the ages of six and twelve were out of school in Mumbai? How were such children to be identified? What strategies would have to be designed to spread a "education net" that would find these children and prepare them for entering regular municipal schools?

We used these basic questions to guide our work. On a macro-scale, Pratham's efforts intensified in December 1998, as work began in earnest to bring "every child to school" in the six "lead" wards. The decision about where to focus immediate attention was based on a simple premise: start where the incidence of out-of-school children is visibly the highest. A simple strategy was followed in each of these wards. Areas in the each ward were categorized as either: (a) non-slum areas, (b) "settled" slums, and (c) "difficult" or "problem" areas. This simple categorization was based on Pratham's community mobilization experiences as the balwadi network was being built. In "settled" slums, homes were permanent structures, residents had photo-passes and often people had lived there for several decades. The "difficult" areas tended to be unauthorized slums, pavement dwelling communities, construction sites or other locations which had specific problems.

In non-slum areas, practically all children attend pre-school and go on to primary school. In "settled" slums, the awareness about education is high, the demand for pre-school is also high and most children in the primary school age-group are in school. For example, available data collected in 1996, from a random sample of over 5000 households from the Shivaji Nagar area in Gowandi (near Chembur) indicate that less than 10 percent of children between the age of 6 to 12 were not enrolled in school (Pratham M/East ward surveys 1998). As far as schooling is concerned, in the

¹ An earlier version of some sections of this chapter has been published in January 2003. "Revitalizing Government Provision". **Child Labour in South Asia**. Sage Publications volume. Edited by Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex and Zakir Hussain Centre for Educational Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi). This section has been written for a forthcoming book on Pratham's work in Mumbai. It was originally written in 2002 as part of a fellowship from Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago. This version has been edited recently.

² Reference – Banerji, March 2008 – Paper presented at National Seminar at NUEPA, New Delhi

population of “difficult” areas, the percentage of out-of-school children in the age group 6 to 12 can be as high as 30 to 40 percent.

Thus, the simple strategy in the six “lead” wards was to give high priority to the “chronic” pockets in each ward. The assumption was that the high incidence of children being out of school was concentrated in specific locations. Understanding the specific issues in location was crucial. Each location needed to be looked at one by one. The causes and consequences of children being out of school could be different in each location. If effective locally relevant solutions could be found in these pockets, then a large part of the problem of “every child in school” would be solved. The other areas in the ward – “settled” slums and non-slum areas - would be handled as a lower priority.

Approximate numbers of out-of-school children were needed quickly so that planning and action could start. We needed to know how many children to plan for. For Pratham, these numbers would be useful in terms of looking for community space to start “bridge courses”, for organizing training and orientation for the community-teachers and for bringing educational materials to the class. For the municipal school system, numbers were important so that forward planning could be done about where to accommodate children once they were “ready” to come to school.

Implementing the strategies:

Door-to-door surveys of relatively small “difficult” pockets of 50-200 households could be done by the Pratham team in that ward in a few days. But larger communities needed more planning; surveys in big slums needed bigger teams. In the six ward pilot we had Darukhana in E-ward or the thirteen sprawling slum communities in Gowandi in M-East ward. Here we needed to plan our strategies more intensively.

To begin with, a team of 2-3 people would spend several days, making a rough map of all the lanes and bylanes in that area. The sight of determined young women moving slowly down each lane drawing something in their notebooks usually raises the curiosity of residents. People come out and start chatting. So as the Pratham team made maps, they met many people in the locality, understood the realities about life in that area, heard people’s opinions, understood what had been tried before, what had succeeded and what had failed. From their acquaintances, they would recruit people who would help on the day of the actual survey, others would share information that

was already available in the area such as number of voters, numbers of households who were members of the residents' associations and local community organizations. The mapping team would usually get to know all influential people and get a sense of the available resources in the neighbourhood during the course of the two or three days that they spent in that area.

For the actual door-to-door survey, a much bigger team had to be assembled. Usually we spent one day in a big slum. The size of the team was assembled based on the size of the slum. We included balwadi teachers, all full time activists, students who may have been doing internships with Pratham and anybody who was available. In M-East ward, where thirteen big slums needed to be surveyed, one day a week was set aside for thirteen weeks for the survey work. Large teams of 75 to 100 people would assemble before the survey.³ Based on the rough maps, the area was divided up and sub-teams formed, and people would set off. The information that was collected was straightforward. Each household was visited and at least one adult in the household was spoken to. We asked each household the name of each child between 3 and 14, whether they were in school or pre-school and in which school.

The large scale campaign type of atmosphere had many benefits. Every one in the slum area was aware that something was happening. People in the community could see that serious action was being planned. The presence of a large team of people from the Pratham side made much of this possible. Although the data that would have been collected would have been the same, the impact of a few people going door-to-door for a period of two weeks would have been much lower. Potential teachers were informally interviewed during that day and potential spaces for running classes were identified. At the end of the day, each sub-team summarized and aggregated the data that they had collected. Lists with names and addresses of potential teachers in the community were assembled. Many decisions were taken in the field on that day itself. Typically training for these teachers was organized within a week so that "bridge courses" could begin in the community not long after the door-to-door survey had been completed.

³ See the description of a typical survey day in another paper that describes Rafi Nagar for more details. Also see sections in Learning to Be. p 267-279. Article in volume edited by B.G. Verghese. **Tomorrow's India: Another Tryst with Destiny**. New Delhi. Penguin-Viking (2006).

The quick planning and implementation of the program was important in building trust and confidence with parents and other community people. Also critically important was the fact that local resources were being mobilized to solve local problems. Each local team of teachers and supervisors was linked with each other through the larger Pratham network in the area so that experiences and support could be shared and lessons learned.

Understanding “difficult” areas

The “difficult pockets” in different parts of the city had very different characters.

Along the eastern sea, was a large unauthorized locality called Darukhana. This settlement on Port Trust land had been around for many years, people had been living there for a long time but the area was an un-authorized one. There was no school or health post anywhere near the area. Houses were built of semi-permanent materials but the construction seemed to be solid. There are many workshops, scrap metal dealers all dealing with boats and ships. Shaped in a long “u” with an inlet that harbored old boats, the area is picturesque in a strange sort of way. Small colourful flags fly along the masts of the boats, hulls are painted in bright colours. Majority of the population is Tamil, which further compounds the schooling problems for children. While the nearest municipal primary school is probably more than a half an hour walk, the nearest Tamil school is more than forty-five minutes by bus.

Further down, on the eastern sea-board of the city is a long road called Reay Road. This important artery of Mumbai is lined on both sides with huts of pavement dwellers. Although demolition of hutments is not very common or frequent here, homes are of temporary construction; many of the families that live here are originally from Bangladesh. But because of fear for Shiv Sena reprisals they do not admit to being from Bangladesh. Children and parents are reluctant to speak to outsiders in Bangla. The main occupation of Reay Road pavement dwellers is linked to the large wholesale fish market in Bhau-cha-dhakka, where the large and small fishing vessels unload their catch. Men work as labourers, women and children sort fish and peel prawns and shrimp. The trawlers come in before dawn, and the fish has to be sorted and cleaned and ready for sale by morning. Women and children arrive for work around four in the morning. There is frenetic and feverish activity to get the work done. Cleaned fish leaves for retail markets by dawn. Bhau-cha-dhakka empties out by eleven in the morning. Families return home, children are exhausted and

fall asleep. The daily timetable of this community makes it hard for children to attend school in normal hours.

Mumbai is long and narrow. Staying on the eastern side of the island and moving north, there is an area called Kolsa Bandar. It lies between the railways tracks and the industrial areas. There is a big road that runs through there; many trucks coming to and from the industrial campuses. Trucks are also parked near the huts that huddle on one side of the road. Looking at the number plates of the trucks, you can see that the vehicles are from all over India. The inhabitants of the huts too speak many languages. There are curtains hanging in the doorways of the huts. Children mostly stay outside unless they are called in. Some of their mothers seem no older than children themselves. The nearest school is quite a distance away. It is an Urdu medium school. To go there, children have to cross a big road with a lot of truck traffic, railways lines, an overbridge, walk through the railways station, cross another busy road.

Around the time that Pratham's work with out of school children was picking up steam, the glistening towers of glass and steel were coming up in the Bandra Kurla complex. If you stood in the ICICI building and looked out straight ahead, across an empty swampy field, you would see a crowded densely packed slum called Rajiv Gandhi Nagar. This area was full of sheds dealing in metal scraps. Largely Muslim, families had built their sheds and shacks next to and on top of one another. Typically, the workshop of metal scrap was downstairs and up the rickety steps was another room covered with a tin roof. From a survey of about 350 households in this area, we estimated about 450 children who were not going to school. There was no place to have bridge courses – indoor spaces were dark and very small. Outdoor spaces, where twenty children could sit, were not to be found. Worse still, we could hardly find anyone who had at least passed Std 10 and had the time to teach children.

Like many other suburban locations, the area just outside Ghatkopar Station on the west side and a little to the north is crowded and bustling with commercial activity. This area is in N ward and is called Red Line. There are fruit-juice stands, STD-PCO booths, xerox shops, shoe and clothing stores. Just a little further down the road, the complexion of the commercial activity changes. Women from Nepal, from other parts of Maharashtra, from Tamil Nadu and many places are sitting outside their small huts. Some are very young and others are not so young but all are dressed just a bit too garishly. Although it is not yet late in the afternoon, there are signs that

business is picking up. No one has time to talk about schooling or education right now. Leading away from the front row of shacks through a very narrow galli is another row of homes that face the railway track. Children are playing behind the shacks. They seem accustomed to being on their own, moving in packs up and down the railway tracks and keeping themselves entertained and engaged.

We worked and we learned. Each area had a different complexion. There were not always two parents. Children often did not have what could be called a home. The daily time table of life in some areas was not conducive to regular school going. Language was a problem. Although Mumbai municipal schools have eight languages of instruction; not all languages are available everywhere. The solutions for each area would have to be crafted differently. But everywhere extra effort on the part of the children, the parents, the community and people like us was needed.

The Bridge Course model:

Once the basic identification of out of school children was done, we quickly began to bring them into “bridge courses”. We saw the importance of quick action following the estimation exercise. Too often, data is collected through surveys. Months pass before the data is analyzed and still longer till programs are implemented. By that time, the ground reality has changed. We did not want to go down this path. Using the gains from the campaign-style estimation exercise, we quickly brought in action that was visible in the community.

The basic “bridge course” model was a simple one, based on experience and common sense.⁴ As soon as children have been identified and a teacher found, the “bridge course” is started in a location close to where the children live. Often this space is a public space; it could be a community centre, a temple courtyard, a secluded spot under a tree, or the local office of an organization that is not using it for some hours of the day. However, more often than not, the class is conducted in the teacher’s home.⁵ The teacher is a local enthusiastic young person who is given training, continuous monitoring and support as well as some basic educational materials by Pratham . The timings for the class are fixed in such a way that it is convenient for the children

⁴ Pratham’s urban “bridge course” model was heavily influenced by the rural model that had been developed by MV Foundation in Rangareddy district of Andhra Pradesh.

⁵ In the initial stages, establishing the bridge course in the neighbourhood followed a very similar pattern to that of the Pratham balwadi.

and for the teacher. In keeping with Pratham's principles of replicability and universal coverage, and given the scarcity of resources for the pilot program, the budget for each bridge course (for about 20 children) remained low at about Rs. 1000-Rs 1200 per month.⁶

The main objective of the first two months of a bridge course is to stabilize attendance, get children and parents accustomed to the idea that the child must attend class on a regular basis at a fixed time every day. In "class", teaching-learning activities are extremely informal ; the teacher plays games with children, tells stories, teaches songs – all designed to get children interested in coming to the class. In the initial stages, very frequent visits to the children's homes and continuous daily dialogue with parents is essential. As the class stabilizes, time becomes more structured and teaching-learning activities become more focused on the regular school curriculum. Duration of the class is increased to three or four hours.

Ideally, at this stage , the "bridge course" physically moves to the school so that children become accustomed to all aspects of the school environment while remaining under the care of the bridge course teacher. This step is very important in building the "bridge" to school, and is implemented wherever the school has available space. Once "bridge course" children are academically ready, they are tested by the school and then admitted to regular classes. In concept, these are simple ideas. In implementation, there were many roadblocks and constraints that we had to contend with over time.

Building the bridge

Following the campaigns for identifying children, bridge courses began to sprout in lane and localities. The look and feel of bridge courses during this time reminded me of fast -sprouting seeds. The stems of such nascent plants are slim, the colour a hopeful green. Some were too fragile to survive and others grew sturdily along. As always everything depended on the bridge course teacher and then nurturing environment around the new activity.

By the beginning of the school summer vacation in May 1999, children who had been attending bridge courses in their neighbourhoods, were moved to the empty school buildings closest to them.

⁶ While the municipal corporation was very supportive of Pratham's Bridge Course program and saw it as an integral part of the universalization plan, no financial resources were made available for this purpose from the municipal corporation. A substantial portion of this work was supported by a grant from the Ministry of Human Development, Government of India.

The schools were empty due to the annual summer vacation. This is where they would be enrolled in June. We wanted them to get used to coming and going to the building on a regular basis. We wanted children to be familiar with the physical layout of the school and get used to school facilities like classrooms, corridors, bathrooms.

The movement to the schools gave a sense of legitimacy to the project in the eyes of the parents. Children were excited to be in the school building, to be in real classrooms, on actual desks and chairs. We began to notice small but visible changes in parents' behaviour towards children: children were bathed before they left home. They left wearing "proper" clothes. (In the bridge courses in the community, children would often come unwashed, not bathed and wearing torn clothes). Many more children now wore chappals than we had seen before. Tiffin boxes, water bottles, school bags, pencils, notebooks all began to appear in children's possession. All these are part of the equipment of a school-going child.

B. Pratham's work in Lucknow under Janshala program 2001 to 2003 ⁷

Based on Pratham's experiences with mainstreaming out of school children in Mumbai and in Jaipur, Pratham was invited to mainstream out of school children in Lucknow in 2002. By December 2002, plans were finalized and proposals were approved. Funded by the Janshala project (a joint UN-GOI-UP government program), Pratham began to work in slum areas preparing children, parents, teachers and communities for bringing every child to school.

As in Pratham projects across the country, the approach was simple and replicable. Slums and low-income localities were identified where the incidence of out of school children was high. The strategy included finding a potential teacher from the local community and space close to the children's home. The teacher/instructor begins her work with the children who are not going to school. This instructor is given training and on-going support to prepare the children for enrollment into regular schools. In a few months, the instructor takes her children to the nearby government school and enrolls them. Apart from the school teachers, a local community volunteer or "balsakhi" (child's friend) is present in the school to ensure that the newly enrolled child attends

⁷ Reference – Brid, March 2008 – Paper presented at National Seminar at NUEPA, New Delhi

regularly, and is able to cope socially and academically with the demands of regular formal school. In Lucknow, as in other cities, Pratham worked very closely with the government schools and in the communities in which the children live.

The Pratham effort in Lucknow was initiated by two young Pratham activists: Avi Ghodke , a young man from the slums of Mumbai and Tasleem Bano who is originally from a resettlement colony in Delhi. Both had considerable experience working with Pratham projects in their own cities. Working together, they quickly identified slum colonies, identified teachers and out of school children and began organizing them into “Bridge Courses” that would mainstream children into the regular school system. Rapidly, a team of young, enthusiastic and energetic men and women of Lucknow was formed to spearhead the effort to universalize primary education in the city.

The creation of a community network was based on a simple model. The local resources of people and space for bridge courses came from the community, program implementation and ongoing support was provided by Pratham and funding, training and overall monitoring by Janshala. The program spread quickly. There were about 300 community based “bridge courses” in few months covering approximately 7000 out-of-school children by August 2002.

Young women from local communities had come out in large numbers to help mobilize communities and parents and sustain children in this large scale education movement across the city.

The success of the young Lucknow team in “mainstreaming” the first batch of out of school children was remarkable. Of the 7000 out of school children who were attending Bridge Courses, almost 4700 were enrolled in school by August 2002. 1161 children remained in Bridge Courses because there were no schools nearby and the remaining 642 children either left their neighbourhoods, or migrated from Lucknow. The “mainstreamed” children were enrolled into 62 government schools in Hasanganj and Wazirganj. Their community instructor “balsakhi” went with the children to the school and continued to work with them in the school. The continued presence of the familiar community instructor in the school helped to sustain the mainstreaming effort and ensure attendance on a regular basis.

Expanding urban coverage in Uttar Pradesh: Challenges of providing access to schooling

For Pratham, the next big push for the school-community interface in Lucknow came in 2006. Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), Government of India granted funds to Pratham for working in the urban slums of Agra, Lucknow and Varanasi to demonstrate universal enrolment and basic learning of children between 6 to 14 years in 300 slum communities across these 3 cities.

The approach that was taken was an “area approach”. Communities of approximately 200 to 300 households were identified and a complete household survey of all children in these households was done including an assessment of their current learning levels. Based on estimates from recent surveys done by Pratham in slum communities in cities of North India, the following broad picture emerges: The profile below is basically to provide a background picture against which program and strategy frameworks can be built and action plans formulated. On average: in a community of 250 households, there are approximately 400 children between the ages of 3 to 14. The average profile of the children in this kind of urban slum community (in percentage terms) looks like the following:

1 Basti = 250 Households = 500 children (3-14)

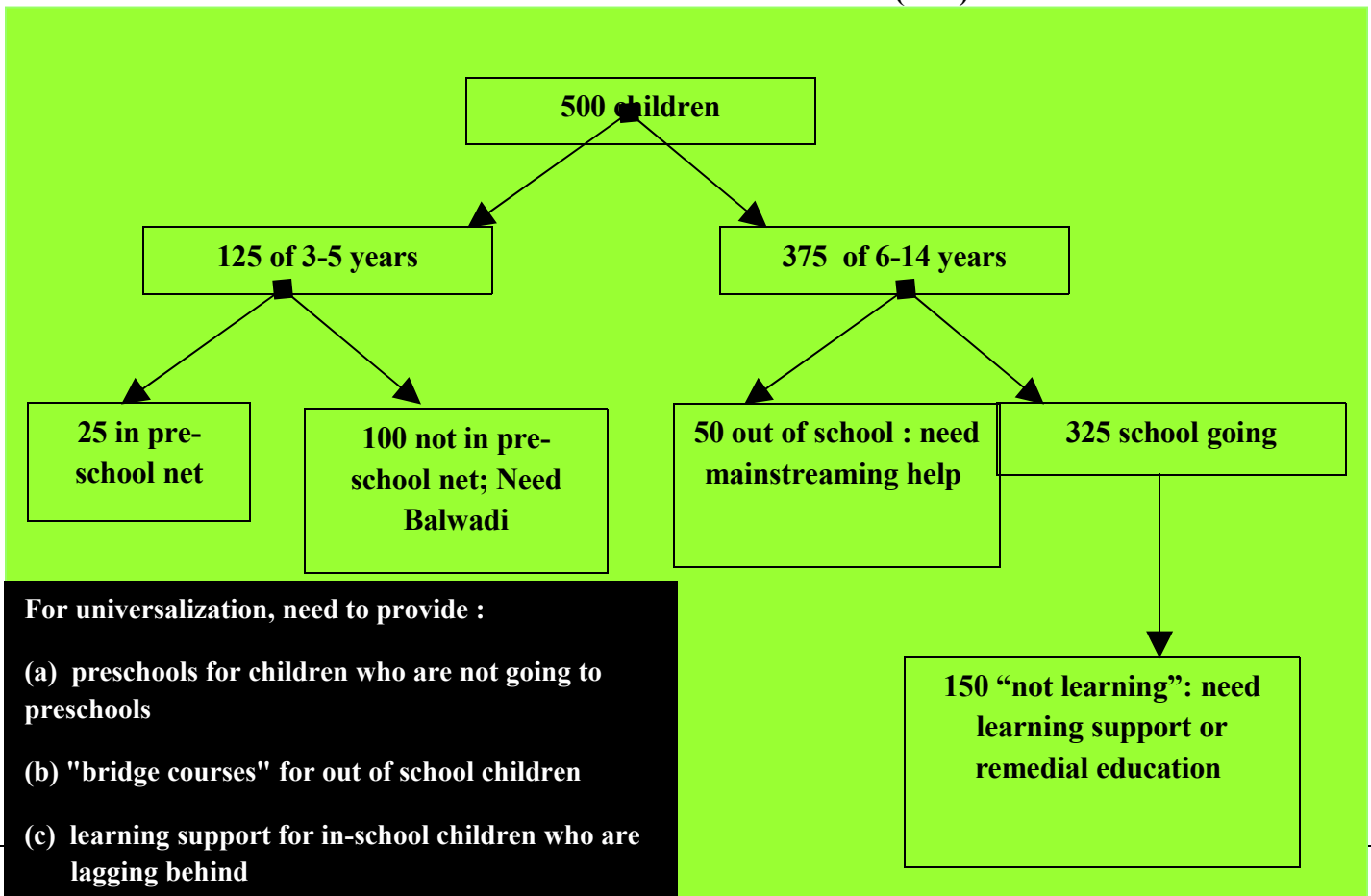


Figure 1: Concept of BSK

The concept of Basti Shiksha Kendra: Every city did its own surveys and planning. If the profile above were to be the case, then that slum community or basti would be covered by one Basti Shiksha Kendra. The concept of BSK is a Basti (slum area) where groups/classes would be run bringing out of school children into preparatory classes for mainstreaming and to provide supplemental learning support to children who were in school but lagging behind. There would be a community based children's library as part of the basti shiksha Kendra.

Planning, mapping and linking schools with catchment areas or communities

While starting off with the project implementation, the need assessment exercise was conducted at all three cities. City micro-planning was done. The main purpose was to identify areas not having access to school and clearly define the catchment areas of the existing government primary schools to ensure maximum enrollment & retention in schools. In most of the rural settings, the catchment area of the school is geographically clear. But in urban setting, it is not clear. So the mapping exercise was to match catchment communities with government primary schools in Agra, Lucknow and Varanasi cities in the selected zones where the project was being implemented.

While doing this educational mapping many interesting facts emerged. For example:

- In the city of Lucknow, 28 municipal wards out of 110 have no government primary schools;
- In the project areas in the selected cities, there were more than 100 slum habitations have no access to primary schools;
- In the cities of Agra and Varanasi, many schools have shifted from the original place and are running in one building but retain the names of the communities in which they were originally running. Merely shifting schools and running in the name of original place for

which the school was established does not mean that the school is covering children from those areas.

- There has been hardly any increase in the number of urban government primary schools since 1970s in these areas.
- In some of the schools, the Pupil Teacher Ratio (PTR) is as high as 200;
- Number of classrooms are also not adequate in many cases.

The Schools were matched with surrounding communities and the situation was analyzed by creating School Report Cards⁸ for each school in project area. The school report card became important tool to explain the correct situation of the school and the catchment area of the schools.

Many cases emerged from above planning at all three locations. While considering programmes for out-of-school children, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan framework divides city into two areas i.e. Served areas and Unserved areas. Entire planning for ensuring universalization of access to schools under Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan is based on the area classification as a) **Served areas** – where the government primary schools exists in one kilometer radius, b) **Unserved areas** – where there is no access to government primary school within 1 and half kilometer radius or if the habitation is having more than 300 households. The current situations due to negligence of urban planning in past several years are very pathetic. Depending on the pace of increase of population density in different parts of the city, schools are simply be unable to absorb more children, given their space and teacher resources. In all three cities, schools work in only one shift, and so for ensuring that all available space is used to the maximum, these schools can be run in double shifts provided enough teachers and other resources. It is generally true that the percentage of out-of-school children in the neighbourhood of an overcrowded school is relatively high. For example, Government Primary School *Naubasta* at Lucknow is the best example to explain the situation. There are 20 low-income communities or slums around this school. This is the only government school that caters basic education to this big area spread in 4 kilometer. There are two teachers and one head-teacher available for 150 enrolled children. Four rooms are available for teaching learning activities. According to our household survey of these 20 surrounding slums, there are around 4406 household in the catchment area of the school and around 2206 children between 6 to 14 years were identified as non-school going children (i.e. out-of-school). We started mobilizing volunteers,

⁸ Annexure 1 – Sample of School Report Card

parents and children for Basti Shiksha Kendras. But the school's infrastructure was not ready to accommodate all these children. So this situation has multiple issues like – overcrowded school, many out-of-school children in the catchment area of the school, long distance from home, problem of space in school, less teachers etc. Similarly, at the Primary School Taal Katora, around 144 children are enrolled and there is only single room which is also in the shabby situation, the only place available for teaching-learning activities. This is single teacher school and there are around 916 children identified as out-of-school in the catchment area of this school. Now suppose if all these children start coming to this school then this school building is inadequate to accommodate all these children. Such cases are high in the cities like Agra, Lucknow and Varanasi.

Although there may be schools within 1 kilometer of habitation, in many urban locations getting to the school may be difficult. Major roads, highways, drains and railway lines often impede easy access.

A variety of mechanisms and program strategies were used to bring approximately 40,000 children to school in the last two years. Yet major challenges remained in terms of providing schooling access to children in unserved areas or in areas where access was difficult. Pratham teams suggested a number of local interim solutions to city, district and state level SSA authorities. School-by-school catchment area micro-planning was done and suggestions for localized solutions were made.

Suggested Solutions For Expanding Space For Schools: Interim and Short Run options: Pratham- MHRD Program Areas In Lucknow, Varanasi and Agra Urban 2006-2008

Option / Strategy	Comments
1. Double shifting of schools	In many cities (other than mega cities) govt schools run in one shift. To maximize utilization of existing space, schools can be run in 2 shifts. If the city has enough regular teachers who can be rationalized, then separate sets of teachers can teach in each shift (as in Delhi, Mumbai). If currently regular teachers are not available then children in the second shift can be taught by EGS/AIE teachers. As soon as regular teachers become available, they will replace AIE teachers.
2. Temporary construction in existing school compounds for	Tents, portable units have been implemented in several cities (Delhi). If there is space in the current compound, this can be

expansion of space	an interim solution until longer run solutions are found. Expenditure on this count should be allowable under SSA norms and included in AWP.
3. Use of spaces built, owned or controlled by the municipal corporation or state government. Extension or branch of primary/elementary schools.	Spaces built or owned by the municipal corporation or state government located in slum communities (such as health posts, community centres) can be used during designated hours for schooling purposes. Early morning shift can be designated for this purpose. MOU between government departments may be needed to ensure continued access to these spaces during each school year.
4. Use of space in government aided private schools in second shift. Extension or branch of primary/elementary schools.	Any government aided private school should be able to provide space for schooling in the second shift – as an extension of government primary or upper primary schooling in the neighbourhood. Regular govt teachers or AIE/EGS teachers can teach children in the second shift. This can be made a condition of receiving govt aid. MOU between government departments may be needed to ensure continued access to these spaces during each school year.
5. Buses or other means of transport	Children, especially older children, can be taken by bus from overcrowded schools or from areas with no schools to less crowded schools elsewhere in the city. Question of special bus routes, free or lower fares for children, buses at school timings that may need to be discussed with city bus service authorities. MOU between government departments may be needed to ensure continued service during each school year.
<p>6. Satellite school/class policy as extensions of the regular local school</p> <p>VISTAR KAKSHA</p> <p>(THE CLASSES IN THE COMMUNITY NEED TO BE NAMED AS SCHOOL NAME : SECTION A)</p>	If there is no space in the existing school building or if there is no building in the area, create policy of “satellite” schools/classes. Children are enrolled in the main school register but actually attend and study in classes or buildings elsewhere in available spaces in the locality. These classes (extensions of the main school) can be mixed groups or grouped by grade level. Teachers can be EGS/AIE teachers. Children must get textbooks, midday meals and other facilities. Children must be allowed to participate in all school functions and take all tests. Periodic visits by school staff to these satellite classes/schools are needed to ensure that they are functioning well.

Despite of providing information and maps based on city educational micro-planning and surveys done by Pratham team and its continuous sharing & consultation with city, district and state level officials of basic education department and SSA, no proper solution for the situation came out. The

situation became worse this year than last year due to continued drop outs from schools because of the unchanged status.

Challenges in Ensuring Learning in Urban Slums

Increasing the accessibility of the schools does provide an opportunity for the children and their parents. However improvement in learning is crucial to sustain Pratham's effort of large scale mainstreaming of children.

Along with access, the goals of learning have to take into account circumstances that characterize the lives of the children. A large number of children in the slums lag behind from the standards expected of them in their age appropriate textbooks. In Lucknow and Varanasi many of the out of school children are migrants. Any goals set for these children have to be easily achievable and importantly visible in a short period of time.

At Pratham we basic define learning in terms of the ability of a child to read a simple text, confidently perform basic arithmetic operations and write a few lines. Within the catchment area of the school, steps are taken to turn around the learning levels in the community. To do so a group of local women conduct a simple door to door baseline survey in the catchment area of the school. Going to each household the volunteers assesses if each 6-14 year old child has access to a preschool or a school and is able to read a simple text, do basic arithmetic and write a few lines.

Once the need is identified, these were discussed in the community. The discussions usually are the first step to understand the situation of learning in the community schools and also serve as a springboard for action to improve learning levels within the next few months. To an extent our goals and method of teaching learning were prepared based on our own experiences with the children in the community⁹.

⁹ For a detail description of Pratham's area approach in urban cities, please see- *Access to Education and Quality of Basic Learning in Urban Maharashtra* by Madhav Chavan et al in CITY CHILDREN, CITY SCHOOLS (UNESCO-Pratham Resource Centre 2005)

Understanding the issues of learning¹⁰

Support at home- Many of these children we work with are first generation learners and are coming to school for the first time. They require extra support. Pratham adopted a simple strategy to ensure this:

On the basis of the need identified in the survey of an area, a web of classes are set up to cover each child who cannot read. Pratham has been working with an accelerated learning technique that enables the children to rapidly become readers and confident in basic maths operations¹¹. Based in the schools or its adjoining area and using this technique these *Balsakhis* ensure that children who have been left behind reach a stage of reading and doing maths that is expected in the early stages of the primary schooling.

Retention of learning- A child's retention in schools and his continued progress in learning is dependent on the circumstances of his family. In many cases families spend only a part of the year in the city or has to frequently shift from one locality to another¹², this would mean every time the family shifted from one place, it has to ensure that child gets a chance to continue his studies both in school and at home. In the absence of this opportunity a child may slide backward in learning. While some schools may re-admit a child in middle of the academic session, he may not be able to cope with the demands of the curriculum. The cycle of Pratham's learning classes in a particular community is hence planned according to the pattern of movement of the community. Each cycle of classes run for a period of two months and a final survey is conducted at the end of it. Once the

Case study-1

Nishatganj primary school is tucked away in the lanes of Nishatganj, an old colony of lucknow. The school is a well known landmark in the area. By any consideration it is a large school. There are 10 rooms in the double storey building, a lawn in front-a teacher per class and 150 enrolled children. On a day around 50 come. The lane no 5 in which the school is situated leads out to a busy Nishatganj road. Across the road is the river Gomti winding through, shining brightly in the afternoon sun. The mosque situated on the banks, near Nishatganj Bridge looks serene and the adjoining small slum settlement is quiet, early morning and most of people, almost all the children in his small settlement are out to collect garbage with the men, many of them will return in the afternoon to rest and then again go back. Some of the women who are home are separating the plastics and the metals from the garbage dump. In this slum settlement, majority is of migrants from Assam and very few of them can understand Hindi. All their children are enrolled as per the school register. Zubin and Mallika are among the very few children we meet who talk to us. A ten year old, Zubin goes to the school but this his sister Malika does not go because there is no one to take her across the busy road. Sheela doesn't go because she has a small sibling to take care off. For the rest of the children and their parents, who do not even speak the language, the schools are just *too far*.

Understanding the specific needs of the child- Large scale migrations in recent times have resulted in much larger linguistic diversity in the cities. This meant that any effort to educate these children has to take into consideration the barriers of language that the children have to face. With very little contact with the outside world even adults are not able to communicate in the mainstream language. In our intervention in these areas, the first step has been to establish this *point of contact* i.e. a volunteer who can speak the language children are able to communicate in. For some time her main activities are limited to storytelling and games, gradually she moves to reading out storybooks using both language to ensure that the transition to the medium of instruction of schools is gradual. However it is not always possible to find a balsakhi who can speak the vernacular language of the children. In such communities a balsakhi's role help is to convince the school authorities to provide these children a space inside the school so that these children get some exposure to the mainstream language as they mingle with other children who could speak the language. While this strategy was effective for young children, older children needed much more. The language barrier and discontinuities in their studies severely hampered their chances of achieving the learning levels they are capable of.

Many needed a stronger reason to be in school other than academic learning for few months. We realized that the education has to be enriched with some vocational skills. A large number of local women in Lucknow were adept in traditional embroidery and these resources were utilized to introduce vocational skills in the academic content of the school curriculum.

Focusing on basic learning

While the need to build a good base of learning in standard one and two is not urban specific it is more pronounced in the urban slum setting. Parents work for erratic hours and there are few provisions of preschools. The school (nowadays) on the other hand provides monetary incentives and mid day meal. Hence a large number of young children are admitted to standard 1 even before they are ready for it. While this poses a big pedagogical challenge for both the children and the teacher; the teacher is never enabled/ trained to deal with such a scenario nor is this factor considered in the textbooks which expects much higher levels of learning. The challenge in such cases is to introduce preschool activities within the existing standard one. In 2005 Pratham started Pehla Kadam – a program to build the base for learning in smaller children who were in schools. The focus is on early literacy with children (4 and half and older) in which simple picture books with simple words and few sentences are used. The font size is large; often words on successive

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Case study-2

Situated across the Gomti river most of the families in Basmandi have a small embroidery workshops in their houses where majority of the children work after school. Walking door to door carrying a bunch of books, zarina a local volunteer reaches all of them each day. Salman is one such boy. Ten year old Salman, sits in a small dark room and sorts out different types of small, shiny objects used in zardosi. After sometime he puts these into a needle, so that when making the design *karigar* doesn't have to pick each particle. Engrossed in his work that he did not even raise his neck to see what the noise outside in the lanes was about; after sometime even his owner leaves his work and looks out to see what's happening but Salman continues to sit quietly in the corner. Seeing him one may think that he was doing this under compulsion, so i asked the elder man in the factory to send the child out for sometime. Seeing me Salman mumbles something, I urge him to come out and he said clearly and sternly- if you give me *Ichha puchha*, I will come. Suprised I show him the book and he grabs it. After finishing the book, he told me that he had only read a few pages the day before when the owner called him back to work. Today however he reads some more books, draws some picture and participates in a word game.

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As a bunch of young men and women come to spot to run their library-some like Zubeid wait for them at the spot, others like Salman continue to work till the librarian comes to the spot, and few others like Nazma only wait to pick up books on their way back from Madrasa. Books and simple games have been become part of their daily routine since the time the libraries opened.

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Sustaining the learning gains

Within the community sustaining learning gains is important. Gains had to be visible – a community survey conducted by the Balsakhi and discussed in the community ensured that need is established but once children learn to read, how do we ensure that the children continue enjoy reading and learning? Local communities and slums where most families are first generation learners were unable to provide its children with the impetus to continue reading. Only a few schools where these children were mainstreamed had appropriate books for early readers. Hence, Pratham's libraries were started to ensure that the new readers, the uncertain readers and well versed ones- all had a book to read. These libraries were mostly mobile and were *set up* in different places in the community on different days.

Concluding remarks ¹⁴ : Challenges and issues of concern:

While the pace of universalization is rapid in rural areas, urban schooling remains a concern in many part of North India. In the domain of primary schooling, in the cities of North India, in the states of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, the local government is practically invisible. In most cases, urban schools are governed by the state government apparatus. City schools remain a small and often particularly problematic arena for the district officials, in addition to all the rural responsibilities that the already have. For urban schools, planning, allocations, governance, decision-making, implementation mechanisms not as well worked out. Access to school and infrastructure are severely constrained in some locations. Simultaneously, many families are migrants, uncertain livelihoods; uneducated adults are unable to provide learning support to their children.

In every city, there is a fraction of the child population that lives in the city without parents. These are the most vulnerable children, working in exploitative situations, and are the hardest to reach. Such children are often found in specific locations such as railway stations, red-light areas, religious spots, and in specific unorganized sector industries.

There are many questions embedded in the functioning of institutional structures and processes of “governance”. Both in concept and in practice, the relationship between “citizen” and “government” works two ways. If citizens’ rights and responsibilities are clear, and entitlements are known, then it becomes simpler to act with reference to the government. If provision of basic services is complicated, with different levels of government responsible for different functions, usage of funds, etc., establishing accountability is that much more complicated.

Weak infrastructure of the government schools posed a serious limitation in the mainstreaming phase. Schools with inadequate number of rooms, high existing student teacher ratios, shabby

¹⁴ See also the following books on urban issues. **Education for All in Mega-cities of India. Experiences of Mumbai and Delhi.** Funded by UNESCO. Publication of Pratham Resource Center. Co-authors: Rukmini Banerji, Rajashree Kabare, Harsh Shetty and Sharmi Surianarian 2005. And also the edited volume by Rukmini Banerji and Sharmi Surianarian: **City Children, City Schools.** Challenges of Universalizing Elementary Education in Urban India. 2005. Both publications were funded by UNESCO and published by Pratham Resource Center.

infrastructure clearly didn't have the capacity to intake more children. In some cases, such as in Varanasi, the student teacher ratio was as high as 200. Naturally, the school staff also resisted any further intake in such cases. Enrolling more children in such schools was not only difficult but also inappropriate. Improving the conditions of government schools remains indispensable to the successful accomplishment of the mainstreaming objectives of the MHRD project and indeed for universal enrolment in the country.

Private schools in urban areas: with a greater demand for quality basic education and a perceived decline of the public system of education, the demand for private school has been increasing but their establishment continues to be generally discouraged through an elaborate system of recognition by government managed bodies. The unexpressed fear is that such schools will disturb the concept of common school and a national system of education. In practice today, we have large number of children attending private unaided schools (often unrecognized) and more wanting to do so. In the public system also, demand for specialized schools like the Navodaya schools, Kendriya Vidyalayas, Sainik schools, special ability schools like Sarvodaya and Navyug schools, continues to be very high. Admission into a private school of their choice has become a nightmare for parents, especially in the urban areas.

Even after having above constraints, still there are few possible solutions available that can help in reducing the size of the problem, such as

- a) running schools in two shifts;
- b) construction of additional classrooms under civil work of SSA;
- c) create multistoried buildings for primary schools;
- d) run schools in rented places;
- e) tie-up with private schools;
- f) providing transportation

The 74th Amendment makes it easier to focus on the issue of governance including urban school education. It was expected from Urban Renewal Mission that this mission would come up with the comprehensive approach for urban development as whole. But unfortunately, it does not cover urban school education as part of the mission.

Youth in urban slums are a potent social group whose creative energies could be channelised for social development. Community monitoring acquires special significance in urban areas in order to reach entitlements to households. The cluster of houses becomes a natural unit for purposes of mobilisation. Oftentimes, slum clusters display solidarity that is hard to develop in rural settings. The reverse situation of getting the worst out of people, on account of a struggle in deprivation is also true. This is very important issue that how urban poor should voice their concerns about their children's schooling. Unlike rural structures where VECs do exist and can be emerged, their urban equivalents at least in Uttar Pradesh cities are missing even on paper. Urban areas require a holistic approach for the creation of community organization. The formation of *Basti Vikas Sangthan* or *Basti Shiksha Sangthan* in each such cluster is an effective starting point for community monitoring.

Universalisation of elementary education in urban areas is a tremendous challenge; to be successful it will need committed participation from citizens. To facilitate effective participation from citizens and improved delivery of primary schooling, practical solutions are needed. The urban context in India today presents many challenges and many opportunities. The policy frameworks in the urban sky can be of substantial use in thinking, planning and implementing the next steps in urban school education. At macro level, the 74th Amendment makes it easier to focus on issues of governance. There is high need for comprehensive approach to reforming urban structures and plans. Elementary education needs to be integrated into the policy frameworks and actions that unfold.