

CAMaL Ka CAMP¹

“CATCH-UP” CAMPAIGN: SUMMER 2023

(I) THE PROBLEM:

After being closed for almost two years due to the COVID-19 pandemic, schools in India opened just before the summer (May-June) of 2022. Available data shows that even before the pandemic, children’s ability to read or do basic arithmetic needed substantial strengthening across the country.² Prolonged school closure and economic disruptions in the family during the pandemic led to additional learning gaps among children.

Interestingly during the pandemic years, in July 2020, towards the end of the first lockdown (end July 2020), India’s new National Education Policy (NEP) was launched. The document puts a high priority on foundational literacy and numeracy. The policy states a clear goal and timeline – in the next five years or so, by Std III, all children should be able to read fluently and be comfortable with basic arithmetic.

Data on children’s basic learning after the pandemic indicates that only 42.8% of Std V children are able to read text at the Std II level (simple stories) (ASER 2022). However, this figure was 50.4% in 2018 (ASER 2018). Math figures show a decline too but less than in reading. Schools worked hard with children during the first post-pandemic year in 2022-23. The rollout of the NIPUN Bharat³ initiative across many states is aiming to ensure that foundational literacy and numeracy is possible to acquire while children are still in the early grades.⁴ Thus, nationwide, Std I, II, and III, are receiving focussed attention. Hopefully, the energy and enthusiasm for the program will continue to increase in the coming years. However, time is short for children who are about to leave primary school and enter upper primary/middle school.

(II) THE PROPOSED SOLUTION:

So, the question before us was: what can be done for children in Std V in 2022-23 and will be entering upper primary or middle school in Std VI/ VII this academic year i.e. 2023-24?

Based on our past experience and accumulated evidence, as Pratham believed that the summer break of 2023 provided a good opportunity to help children who have recently transitioned to Std VI/ VII to pick up basic reading and arithmetic skills. While such efforts were clearly needed in all states across India, Pratham’s major focus would be on **Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh**.

¹ CAMaL – Combined Activities for Maximized Learning aka Teaching at the Right Level. Also means ‘wonder/ amazing in Hindi.’

² NAS (National Assessment Survey) data and ASER data over the years point to the need for improving learning outcomes. All ASER reports are available on www.asercentre.org

³ <https://nipunbharat.education.gov.in/>

⁴ NIPUN Bharat is the government initiative that is operationalizing the foundational literacy and numeracy goals of the National Education Policy (2020). For details see <https://nipunbharat.education.gov.in/>

Our past work in communities suggested that even in a short period of time, community members, especially local youth volunteers, are able to provide strong support to younger children for achieving basic foundational literacy and numeracy skills.⁵ Our hope was that the 'Summer Catch-Up Campaign' also called "CAMaL ka Camp", will reinforce, reaffirm and demonstrate how communities can support children's learning and growth.

A six-week duration was proposed for these "Catch-Up Camps". While the focus would be on children who are either currently in Std VI or will enter middle school soon; however, any child in the village who is in Std IV, V or VI/ VII can join the camp.

(III) THE KEY ELEMENTS FOR THE SUMMER CATCH-UP CAMPAIGN:

- **WHAT was the goal?** All children who participate in the camp will be able to read a basic text fluently and with understanding by the end of the camp. They should be able to express their thoughts orally and in writing. Basic math activities will be done as well but reading and related activities will get priority.
- **WHO conducted the camp?** Two young and energetic volunteers from the same community conducted this summer camp in their village. These volunteers were from Std X or higher. Many had direct or indirect (via someone else) access to a smartphone.
- **WHERE was the campaign be conducted?** The large-scale summer campaign was focussed on Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. The ambition was to reach every village with the help of communities, panchayats, colleges, universities, civil society organizations and anyone else willing to join this effort.
- **WHEN was the camp conducted?** The total time for the camp was 6 weeks: One week for warm-up, mobilization and assessment, four weeks of instructional activity and the last week for celebration. Mobilization of volunteers began in April 2023. The actual 6-week campaign started between the middle and end of May 2023 in most locations.
- **WHAT was the focus area? What activities and assessments were used?** The summer camp was based on the tried and tested "Teaching at the Right Level" approach,⁶ adapted for large scale use by community volunteers. While the main focus was on developing reading skills as well as comprehension and expression skills, basic math activities were also included. Activities included one story a day and a set of associated engaging activities, including games, storytelling, and projects. As in all TaRL programs, at the start of the campaign, children were assessed one on one using the basic ASER tool and grouped by their current learning level. The selection criteria

⁵ Evidence from a randomized control trial in Bihar in 2008 conducted by JPAL showed that even a one month camp can lead to substantial increase in children's basic learning. In summer 2022, experience from 30,000 villages in the catchment area of Pratham's core locations showed similar results. The process and results encouraged us to try a larger scale campaign the summer of 2022.

⁶ In a 2023 report by the Global Evidence in Education Advisory Panel, "Teaching at the Right Level" is cited as one of the most cost effective approaches to improving children's learning. The panel is convened by the World Bank, FCDO, UNICEF and USAID. See 2023 Cost-effective Approaches to Improve Global Learning - What does Recent Evidence Tell Us are "Smart Buys" for Improving Learning in Low- and Middle-income Countries. <https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/099420106132331608/idu0977f73d7022b1047770980c0c5a14598eef8>

for the camp was that the child was unable to read a simple Std I level paragraph. Volunteers assessed children twice during the campaign. A simple baseline assessment using the ASER tool was done at the beginning of the camp and end line at the end of the camp.

- **HOW was data collected?** A comprehensive one-stop data system (web link) was developed for the volunteers, partners and Pratham teams during each stage of the campaign.
- **WHAT did the volunteer receive?** There was no financial remuneration or stipend for volunteers. In the past, Pratham has been able provide volunteers with simple opportunities to learn new skills. For example, since 2021, we have used our “Education for Education” (EfE) program to provide basic digital readiness skills and First Aid. These are courses on WhatsApp and were used in the summer camp with volunteers.

(IV) HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE SUMMER CAMP

Reach and coverage: In the three focus states – Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh, in 165 districts and 141,373 villages/communities, the campaign was able to mobilize 301,745 youth volunteers who in turn worked with close to 3.4 million children.⁷⁸

Mobilization and participation: The ASER report was released in New Delhi in January 2023. As part of the awareness building activity, Pratham and ASER team members visited government district officials (in the district administration and in education departments) and other influential people at the district level in all 165 districts in the three focus states. The discussion centred around understanding district and state level ASER results and thinking about possible solutions that could be implemented by ordinary people during the summer vacations. During February and March, based on discussions at the ground level, it seemed like the strategy was converging on focussing on basic skills for children going from Std V to Std VI. This broad based and wide spread discussions helped to start the momentum for the summer camp and build ownership at district level for the campaign.

Subsequent to the district level dissemination phase, there were state level discussions around the possibility of a summer campaign.

- Bihar government energetically entered the planning process by bringing in not only the education department but also skilling initiatives and most importantly, the state rural livelihoods mission (women’s self-help groups known as JEEViKA). Volunteers were mobilized across all of these different government organizations.
- In Madhya Pradesh, the education department declared that their block and cluster education officers would lead the training of volunteers. For each middle school, two or three volunteers from their alumni had to be mobilized to help the incoming cohort of children into the school.

⁷ The data for the camp is based on the information uploaded by volunteers on to the summer camp portal. This included volunteers own registration information (their educational background, access to smart phone etc) and data from each camp on children’s learning – baseline and end line.

⁸ From the Pratham side, roughly Rs. 2.75 crore was spent for the summer campaign (US\$ 334,000). This included print materials (small booklet for each camp, one poster and certificate), training and travel of the Pratham teams (approximately 956 full time people). Governments and other partners incurred their own costs.

Block and cluster officials were oriented by remote means and each then trained their volunteers in short in-person sessions.

- In Uttar Pradesh, most of the impetus for action came from the district. In all cases, no teachers were involved.

Pratham delivered the simple booklet of materials to all locations. The significant and deep involvement of the state governments in supporting a large scale community based youth volunteer campaign has to be recognized and appreciated.

The main target population for the camp were children who were in Std V (last Std in primary school) and had just recently entered Std VI (the first Std in middle or upper primary school). However, Table 1 shows that while majority of children were from either Std V or VI, some children from Std IV and Std VII also joined the camp.

| Std | Uttar Pradesh | Bihar | Madhya Pradesh | Overall |
|-------------------------|------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------|------------------|
| Std III | 4,717 | 24,889 | 39,627 | 69,233 |
| Std IV | 3,57,378 | 56,694 | 1,85,090 | 5,99,162 |
| Std V | 4,58,005 | 1,68,955 | 3,18,382 | 9,45,342 |
| Std VI | 4,93,874 | 5,84,315 | 3,48,251 | 14,26,440 |
| Std VII | 921 | 3,84,955 | 18,777 | 4,04,653 |
| Std VIII | 315 | 26,605 | 9,984 | 36,904 |
| Total | 13,15,210 | 12,46,413 | 9,20,111 | 34,81,734 |
| % Children in Std IV-VI | 99% | 65% (remaining in Std VII) | 93% | 85% |

In mobilizing volunteers for the camp, a requirement was that volunteers should at least be in Std 10 or above. Table 2 shows the educational distribution of volunteers.

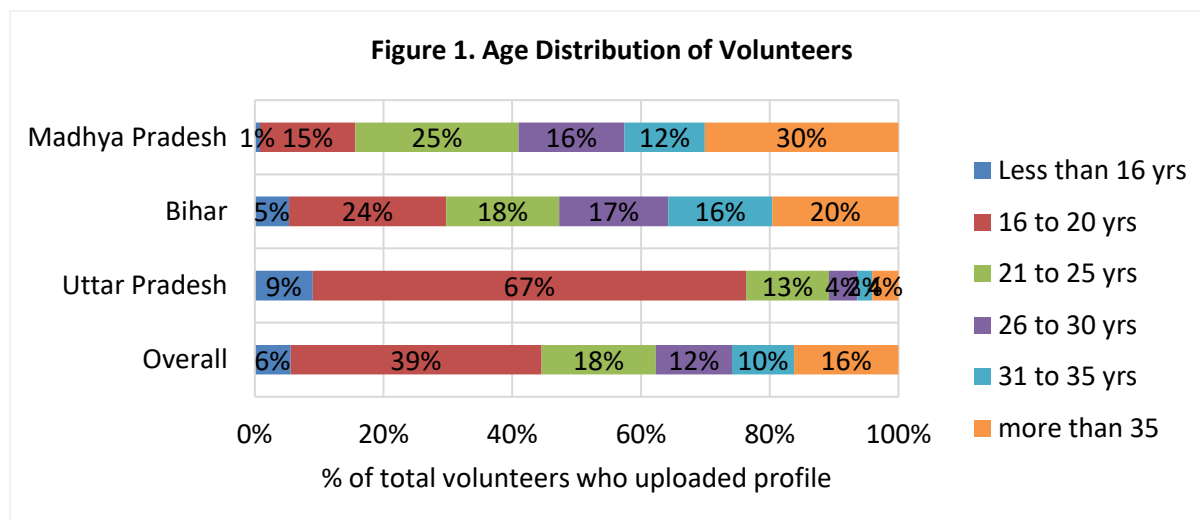
Table 2. Volunteer educational qualifications

| State | Age Group | Highest Educational Qualification | | | | |
|---------|------------------|---------------------------------------|--------|---------|--------------|--------------|
| | | (%age of those who uploaded profile)* | | | | |
| | | Below Std X | Std XI | Std XII | College (UG) | PG or Higher |
| Overall | Less than 16 yrs | 1% | 4% | 1% | 0% | 0% |
| | 16 to 20 yrs | 1% | 14% | 21% | 2% | 0% |
| | 21 to 25 yrs | 0% | 2% | 7% | 7% | 1% |
| | 26 to 30 yrs | 0% | 2% | 4% | 4% | 1% |
| | 31 to 35 yrs | 0% | 2% | 4% | 3% | 1% |
| | more than 35 | 1% | 3% | 5% | 5% | 3% |

Note: All cells in the table add up to 100%.

Figure 1 shows the age distribution of volunteers by state. Overall, 57% of all volunteers were either in the 16-20 age group or in the 21-25 age group. In Uttar Pradesh, 67% of volunteers were the 16-20 age group. The rest were older. Overall, roughly half of all volunteers were female but the proportion

of female volunteers was higher than males in Bihar and in Uttar Pradesh at 58% female. For such a large-scale campaign mobilization, targeting of children of the correct grade (Std) and learning level and criteria for selection of volunteers (based on educational qualifications) has more or less been adhered to.



For purposes of accessing content, participating in training, and uploading information it was essential for volunteers to have direct (own phone) or indirect (someone else’s phone) access to phones. Table 3 indicates that all volunteers had access to some kind of phone. The figures for “own phone” is relatively lower in Uttar Pradesh as the age distribution in the state is also skewed towards younger volunteers.

Table 3. Access to phones by state

| State | Access to phone by phone type | | | | Own phone |
|----------------|-------------------------------|---------------|-----------|-------------|------------|
| | Smart phone | Regular phone | Jio phone | Total | |
| Uttar Pradesh | 85% | 13% | 2% | 100% | 53% |
| Bihar | 88% | 10% | 1% | 100% | 90% |
| Madhya Pradesh | 94% | 4% | 2% | 100% | 94% |
| Overall | 88% | 10% | 2% | 100% | 76% |

For such a large scale volunteer campaign, it was difficult to provide widespread monitoring or academic support, however good efforts were made to reach wherever possible. Two mechanisms were used – in-person monitoring and remote outreach.

For in-person visits, a simple monitoring checklist was given to anyone visiting a volunteer-led summer camp class. Usually, 1-2 volunteers were visited every day. The monitor would check whether the class was running, what was the attendance on the day of the visit and ask some basic questions around the implementation. The monitor would also check if all relevant formats such as attendance and learning progress sheet/ chart were filled. Due to the scale of the summer camp and short duration, multiple visits to a single volunteer was not possible.

For remote outreach, each monitor (typically Pratham team members or sometimes government staff) would call 4-5 volunteers daily to understand more about the volunteers' class. These calls would usually be in the evening and would be in reference to the previous day's class by the volunteer. As the call was not based on observation but self-reported information from the volunteer, the monitoring questions were in the form of 'quiz-type questions', so that the monitor could accurately gauge whether expected activities were happening or not.

Table 4. In person visits and remote outreach (in the early weeks of the summer camp)

| State | No. of volunteers who: | | Visits as a %age of volunteers who have uploaded baseline | Calls as a %age of volunteers who have uploaded baseline | | |
|----------------|------------------------|--|---|--|------------|---------------|
| | Uploaded baseline | Uploaded baseline and verified at baseline | | | | |
| Uttar Pradesh | 1,10,964 | 9,983 | 21% | 22,882 | 34% | 38,232 |
| Bihar | 95,582 | 7,608 | 24% | 23,008 | 25% | 24,261 |
| Madhya Pradesh | 79,699 | 1,774 | 3% | 2,310 | 3% | 2,051 |
| Overall | 2,86,245 | 19,365 | 17% | 48,200 | 23% | 64,544 |

(V) Learning Progress:

Available data indicates that close to 3.4 million children participated in the Catch-Up Summer Camps. The table below provides details of the number of children who were tested in the baseline and end line by state. These numbers are based on the aggregate data uploaded by the volunteer on the summer camp web portal.

Table 5. Children tested in baseline and end line in summer camp

| Children Tested | Baseline | Endline |
|-----------------|------------------|------------------|
| Uttar Pradesh | 13,15,206 | 12,98,251 |
| Bihar | 12,46,413 | 12,06,842 |
| Madhya Pradesh | 9,20,111 | 9,00,362 |
| Overall | 34,81,730 | 34,05,455 |

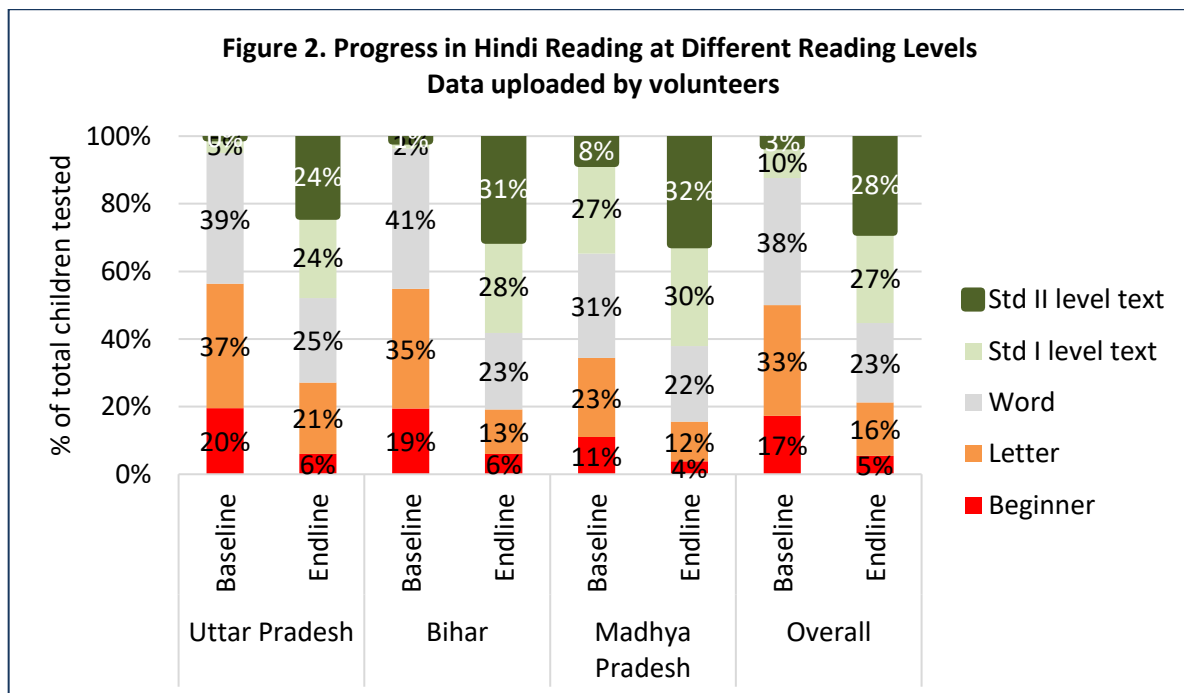
A small sample of volunteer camp data was verified via field visits by Pratham team members across states. Approximately 7% camps received verification visits during the baseline period and 80% children's learning level in the verification was correct.

Figure 2 below shows a summary of the results by state. Overall, there was a **25-percentage point (pp) improvement in the ability to read at least a Std II level text**. Bihar showcased the highest improvement in reading among the 3 states. Overall, at endline, there was a reduction of 29 pp in children at 'Letter level or below' between baseline and end line.

The data shows that the targeting and identification for the eligible group (those who cannot read a simple para at baseline) was done well. Baselines from all states indicate that it was indeed academically weak children who were included in the camp.

While questions of durability of learning gains need to be answered with further research and evidence, what the currently available data makes clear is that even in a short period of time like 4-5 weeks, significant increase in basic reading levels is possible even when done by youth volunteers. As a follow-up exercise, in the state of Bihar, on a sample basis, Pratham teams revisited selected children and volunteers who participated in the summer camp 1 month later. It was found that ~80% of the children who made progress in the summer camp i.e., moved from being non-readers (Word level or below) and moved to readers (Para or above), had retained their learning level even 1 month after the summer camp.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that youth volunteers also gained from the teaching experience – both in terms of actual instructional practice but also from the point of view of communication and project management experience.



(VI) Concluding Thoughts:

The experience of the summer camps of 2023 throw-up some interesting thoughts to be considered for way forward. Does an intensive of burst of concrete action at scale generate traction and momentum without getting caught in typical bureaucratic process? Do such efforts unlock energies for scale-up by changing perceptions of community members and government officials and sparking a movement? Apart from the massive scale and unprecedented volunteer participation across all three states, it is also likely that the urgency for ensure foundational skill development for Std III and above has now become a clear priority in the planning and practice at least in these states.

The note describes features that collectively contribute to the effectiveness and impact of community-led efforts, offering focused and personalized support to children during their school breaks, ultimately enhancing their foundational learning outcomes. Observing the substantial impact, both in terms of scale and outcomes, that volunteer-led camps have achieved, it presents an opportunity to gain insights into how the community-led expansion of Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) initiatives can complement the ongoing efforts within the formal school system. Examining the positive impact of volunteer-led initiatives in driving learning gains raises several important questions and considerations:

- **Learning improvement:** Children’s learning outcomes rise as a direct result of the camp but does the gain sustain over time?
- **Factors Driving Change:** What are the key factors that contribute to this positive change in learning outcomes? Identifying these factors is crucial for replicating success.
- **Resource and Practices:** What resources and practices need to be developed and refined to effectively execute community-led initiatives based on Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL)?
- **Scaling Up:** How can these initiatives be expanded and implemented at scale to reach a larger number of students and communities?
- **Volunteer Incentives:** What incentives are in place to motivate and retain volunteers who dedicate their time and effort to these educational initiatives?
- **Mindsets and perceptions:** Do teachers and others change their mind about what is possible and how “catch up” should be done?
- **Government Support:** What role will the government system play in supporting and collaborating with community-led efforts to improve foundational learning outcomes?
- **Sustainability:** How can the long-term sustainability of these initiatives be ensured, and what mechanisms should be put in place to maintain and enhance the quality of the education provided?
- **Community Involvement:** In the long run, what role does the community itself play in addressing the learning crises that exist in foundational learning? How can community participation be leveraged effectively? Does it continue in any form after the original burst?

Through dedicated research and systematic investigation into the implementation of TaRL-based community-led initiatives, Pratham and its partners can not only establish the credibility of these efforts but also develop robust systems and processes to advocate for their adoption and expansion, both nationally and on a global scale.

(VII) ANNEXURE: DETAILS OF KEY ACTIVITIES IN THE SUMMER CAMP

The following major activities are done with/ for volunteers to support them in conducting the summer camps:

I. TRAINING/ ORIENTATION

With the help of partner organizations (State government education department as well as district administrations, other education focussed entities, NGOs etc), the word about the summer camps were spread in their respective networks at the district and sub-district level. In Bihar and Madhya Pradesh, the state government’s education department used government media channels such as social media handles, radio and newspapers, YouTube channels etc to share and encourage volunteers to participate in the campaign. Once enough volunteers were identified, dedicated venues at the district/ sub-district were identified. At these venues, with the help of Pratham field teams, batch-wise, short 3-4 hour training/ orientation sessions were held for volunteers on what is expected from them.

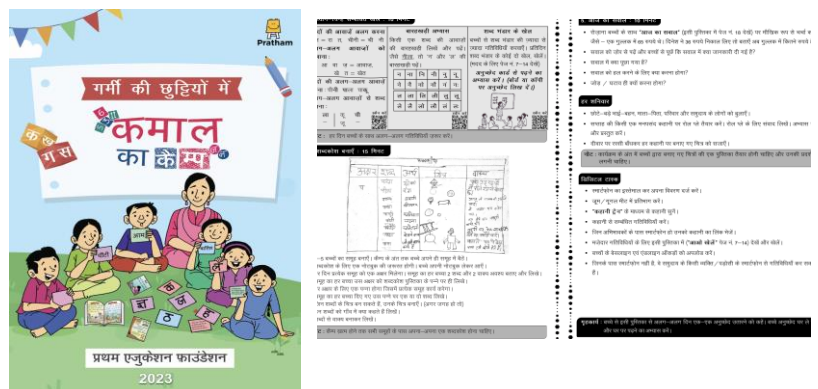


In the training itself volunteers are informed about the target group (mainly Std VI children who cannot read at least a Std I level text), the duration (at least 1-1.5 hrs) and the venue where they should be conducting the classes. The venue ranged from conducting the classes in the school itself, nearby community centres/ central areas of the village or locations close to the volunteer’s home.

II. TEACHING-LEARNING MATERIAL (Hard Copy)

Usually at the training session itself, during/ post the training a 36-page Summer Camp Booklet was given to each volunteer who attended the session. The Summer Camp booklet was designed to include:

- the objective of the campaign,
- the TaRL based key activities expected from the volunteers along with a suggested ‘lesson plan’ with duration of each activity,
- instructions pertaining to the language and math based activities/ games,
- 24 stories & short paras and how to engage with children on these stories and math problems of the day.
- Besides the instructions, Bara-khadi Chart (Alphabet charts), 2 samples of the reading assessment tools (ASER tool) and 3 data collection formats – learning progress sheet, attendance sheet and learning progress chart are included in the volunteer booklet.



All of the above was available in a single booklet to the volunteer to refer to while conducting his/ her class.

III. TEACHING-LEARNING MATERIAL (Digital)



To supplement the teaching learning activities in the camp, especially around story reading, volunteers also received audio stories via WhatsApp known as “Kahani Train” (story train) daily. Each audio story was between 3-4 minutes long and was narrated professionally. At the end of the story, the narrator asked some questions on the story which were meant for discussion and other activities for the children. Volunteers used the Kahani Train audio stories in a variety of ways ranging from playing the story on their phone for the children to listening to the stories themselves and reading aloud the stories using the booklet. Depending on the interest and skill of the volunteer, the Kahani Train audio story was used in different ways. All Kahani Train stories were available in the booklet and a pdf coloured version of each story with pictures was also shared with the volunteer via WhatsApp.

IV. INSTRUCTIONAL ACTIVITIES

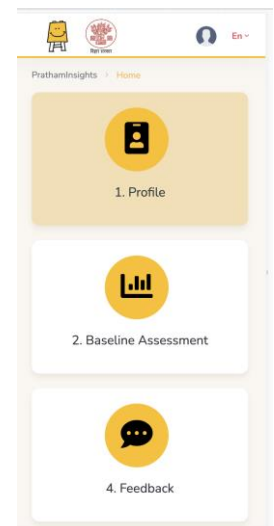
As detailed earlier, each volunteer followed a plan for conducting a variety of activities during each day. The sequence on activities are as follows:

- Volunteers start the class by playing any simple game with all children to warm them up for the class. The games are linked to the level of the children, hence there are letter & word games, word games, or word and story games. Math games using numbers and basic operations were also played.
- The next activity was around storytelling, discussion and reading practice. Stories in the manual and Kahani Train were utilized at this stage. Based on discussions on the story, children also did writing activities.
- After doing activities on stories, focus shifted to strengthening familiarity with letters and words and activities and games around the Bara-khadi (phonetic chart) were used.
- In continuation to this, based on the letters chosen in the Bara khadi for the day, a ‘dictionary’ activity was done with the objective of having a comprehensive dictionary made by the group of children which not only had a vast number of words but also examples of sentences and pictures associated with different letters.
- Finally, the class concluded by discussing a simple math word problem with everyone and solving it as a group and individually. 12 such word problems are available in the booklet and the volunteer was instructed to make their own word problems as well.



V. DATA COLLECTION MECHANISMS (Hard copy & Digital) by VOLUNTEERS

To effectively understand and track progress during the campaign, volunteers conducted a baseline and end line of all children in his/ her camp. On the formats provided they mentioned the level of the child at baseline and subsequently at end line. During the camp, daily, they also marked every child’s attendance. For a quick summary, the learning profile of the class was filled on the progress chart. Summary of the child-wise progress sheet was entered on a simple weblink accessible to the volunteer. The volunteer, usually during training, registered him/herself on the weblink and provided basic details about themselves and the geography they were working in. Besides, profile and assessment data, the volunteer also filled a feedback form based on his/ her experience and did a quiz on the Education for Education – First Aid course via WhatsApp that they participated in.



VI. MONITORING SUPPORT

To ensure volunteers got support in implementation of the camp, Pratham and partner organizations, including government personnel, routinely visited the volunteer-led camps. The mandate was not to do ‘inspection’ but to provide motivation, handholding and problem-solving wherever possible to the volunteer. To track their visits, on the same summer camp weblink, monitors logged their visits by filling out a simple form. To aid the monitoring of the program, partners were asked to conduct ‘remote monitoring’ by calling a certain number of volunteers who they could not meet in-person. Again, the goal was not to monitor, but to indicate to the volunteer that there is someone available to guide them and provide support.

VII. EDUCATION for EDUCATION (First Aid) – EfE

As part of the summer camp initiative and to provide other inputs to the volunteer, Pratham provided learning opportunities via the EfE program. Due to the large scale nature of the campaign (targeting 300,000 volunteers), the structure and process was kept very straightforward. In the last week of the campaign and 1 week after the campaign has ended, via WhatsApp, volunteers received informative WhatsApp messages on the course topic – First Aid. At the end of the course (10 days of messages), the volunteer took the EfE Quiz on the weblink. If successful they received an e-certificate on First Aid.

VIII. CELEBRATION & CERTIFICATION



The final week of the summer camp was dedicated to completing the camp activities i.e., doing end line assessment to understand progress and logging the same on the weblink. Once the data had been received, at different levels (block/ district) felicitation ceremonies were conducted for volunteers to appreciate their efforts and physical certificate of participation was be given to each volunteer by government officials and other partners.

In conclusion, the summer camp had been designed to ensure volunteer is equipped with all available resources which can help them in engaging with children whose foundational literacy and numeracy skills were weak. The campaign developed simple, easily useable systems and processes to aid partner organizations, including Government departments and Pratham teams to routinely track status and progress and have a general sense of key activities underway.