

# Dissemination of Baseline Report

## 8<sup>th</sup> of February, 2019

**Venue:** Silk Route, The Panache Hotel

**Time:** 12:30 PM to 6:00 PM

### **Members present:**

**CBPS:** Jyotsna Jha, Niveditha Menon, Neha Ghatak, Anusha Iyer, Deepa Kumari Sahu, Achala S Yareseeme

**Advisory Committee and other guests:** Shri Vyasji, R S Singh, Geeta Menon, F A Jami

## Agenda

### 1. Welcome and Introduction to the workshop by Dr. Jyotsna Jha, Director, CBPS

The programme began with an introductory session by Jyotsna. She gave a brief introduction about Malala and spoke about the main objectives the Bihar Mentorship Project (BMP) that was focused on building critical thinking skills among adolescent children in schools, especially girls.

Jyotsna also provided a brief introduction of the Baseline including the various aspects of the survey that were included: the background of the students in school and at home, their attitude towards gender, their opinions about caste, and their environment in school. We also discussed the resources available at school, the availability of teachers, the kind of difficulties faced, and the lack of necessities students deal with during their education.

We also welcoming Shri Vyasji to the dias and spoke about his many contributions to the field of education.

### 2. Introduction of the Mentoring Model

A brief introduction by Niveditha was provided about the mentoring model. She mentioned how we set our objective for the model as improvement of their critical thinking skills by getting the students involved in extracurricular and sports activities, and the ways in which these activities can lead to certain forms of self-reflection. She mentioned how critical thinking helps link both empowerment and education and the current education system has made the students more of a listener and less participatory. Students are citizens in the making and hence it becomes it becomes important to make them more responsible towards their own self and be able to think about every issue with a critical frame of mind.

She also mentioned the necessity to work with schools as well as communities, as they are the primary pillars of socialisation where gendered attitudes are developed. She also discussed how the model would be dynamic and evolve differently in each of the schools. As it is an action research project, it will be modified based on responses from children, keeping in mind scalability of the model as well.

She also highlighted that the school is a good space to experiment as students spend a good number of hours in school and connections and social networks are built in schools, and explained our decision to work with adolescent children, as it is the critical age to shape and mould them.

Additionally, she mentioned the various process that has already been underway, including the baseline study, and the work that we intend to do on various subject areas such as technology and violence.

### 3. Release of baseline report

After this, Shri Vyasji along with other committee members - RS Singh, Geeta Menon, FA Jami – released the baseline report.

#### 3.1 Comments by Shri Vyasji:

Shri Vyasji extended his wishes to the team for working on the project on developing critical thinking skills. He spoke about how the societies are divided into classes and castes and that government schools are the last resort for people coming from lower socio-economic backgrounds. As the objective of our study and the model was to understand the cognitive abilities of the universe of adolescent students he suggested working with madrassas and private schools and not just government schools, to understand how such students think and react, and their abilities, and hence increase the sample size. He stressed on the need for education to promote critical thinking and not just literacy as it is measured now. Critical thinking in turn should also promote rational thinking. He spoke about the need to bring about changes in the curriculum to bring about larger changes in society. He spoke about the ills in society such as honour killings, declining sex ratio, gender related issues and the need for enlightenment of society. He finally spoke about the need for such models to bring about larger changes in attitudes in society by bringing about smaller changes in the form of improvement of critical thinking skills among adolescent students.

### 4. Findings of the baseline report

The team presented the findings from the baseline report. The team presented findings about the school based on our Baseline data as well as the field visits, data from the households based on the baseline survey, and on the gendered attitudes. In the last section, we highlighted the way in which we were able to measure attitudes related to issues such as physical strength and capabilities, career choices and division of labour, gendered attitudes, violence, shame, marriage, caste etc.

We emphasised that our model will be based on our findings from the baseline and will focus on critical thinking, self- reflection, reflection about society and the world The model will be developed to give that space to children which are now unavailable due to lack of child ready schools and poor household conditions which are not conducive for their development.

#### 4.1 Question and answer session

Some of the questions that were asked was related to the impact of children through social media, the gendered attitudes that children exhibited, the role of parents and schools in socialisation of children including attitudes towards education, the importance of mobile telephony in children's lives, and the primary focus of the baseline. In response, we did discuss that the only forms of information technology that girls are exposed to is television. In fact, girls

appear to be watching a lot of TV series, which depict highly gendered attitudes, and that they appear to be quite influenced by it, especially in the superstitions and belief systems that are prevalent. In the discussion, we also brought up the gendered dynamics of women's educational levels and the impact that it appears to have on the attitudes of the children as well as the relationship that it has on the socio-economic conditions of the family.

In the question-and-answer session, we also clarified that we had not presupposed the idea of a good student. Often, the idea is associated with students listening to teachers, so we wanted to also explore ideas related to what students could potentially do or be, apart from being silent and listening. We also let the audience know, based on the questions raised, that while we are not focused on delinquency, we did observe cases of drug addiction (post the baseline) and will be engaging with those concepts as they arise.

One of the major aspects of the baseline that was covered (which was discussed in the question-and-answer session) was related to the aspects of child labour. We felt that the baseline provided us a very good understanding on the way children were spending gendered time working either at home or in their family farms. Exploring this aspect and finding out the implications of this on school attendance will be an important theme that we are focusing on in the next few months.

The conversation around mobile phones was around questions of agency and independence. When asked about the ways in which mobile phones are encouraging marriages, we were able to explain the ways in which we need to move the conversation away from 'elopement' to providing girls options to exercise healthy relationships. Instead of confinement, it would be useful to expand the space to girls and boys to make choices, whether it is about relationships or careers.

In concluding this session, we made a note of all the suggestions that were presented and decided to incorporate them into the evolving model.

## 5. Reflection by mentors:

After a short presentation provided by Niveditha on the process of the action research and the challenges therein, she introduced the mentors in the project who spoke about their first six months in the field experience.

### 5.1 Challenges

Some of the challenges that we presented were as follows:

- One of the first challenges that we faced was that students appeared to be very scared to speak or to talk about anything that was unstructured. So, the first six months was focused on ensuring clear and uninhibited articulation.
- Children were also often restless. So, a diversity and combination of games, activities and tasks were given so that children are constantly engaged with the class, instead of feeling restless and claustrophobic.
- Differences in resources were stark to see across the districts. This included explore to English, access to private spaces, or even basic amenities such as running water, chairs or electricity.
- There is a lot of gender segregation in schools and children were initially resistant to playing together.

- Teachers work under several resource and time constraints, and that while some teachers are invested in the process, they are not able to devote as much time as they'd like to.
- We are also finding that attendance of children is very erratic and cause for concern.

## 5.2 Experiences by the mentors

Both the mentors discussed the different ways in which children from all kinds of socio-economic backgrounds come to the school. They felt that over the course of six months that children have a lot of talent in them and that opportunities to give them room to shine was sometimes missing in the classrooms. Through activities, children can gain confidence that they can do or know something. Community and family engagement is extremely important for this next step.

Mentors also spoke about how with some space and time, children are able to develop analytical and introspection skills. For example, even for children who are not always expressing themselves openly in groups, they are able to do so via paintings. For many things, they have not been able to express emotions, so it can be really hard for them, but with time, they are able to make things (like objects of paintings) that capture the emotions that they are feeling. Children also feel underconfident about their own abilities, which is the primary reason for reluctance to participate. Once they start to get used to doing things, they are much more open to trying new things.

## 6. Panel discussion

The advisory committee that was specially formed for the project were part of the final presentation. The panel, composed of FA Jami, Geeta Menon and RS Singh, spoke about the significance of doing critical thinking frameworks within the government schooling system and provided their critical insights and suggestions, as summarised below:

- A theoretical model that is aspirations and forward-looking is very important. More importantly, a peer-led model where the teacher is the facilitator is more conducive to group-level activities as well.
- Activities should be designed in such a way that children can step outside of the schools, interact with new people, faces, or engage with a new situation. This will be useful for them. We can also create new challenges so that children know how to deal with them.
- Defining empowerment and how it looks like is the first step. The second step is to ensure that the children also have a right to know about where the model is going, so that they can choose to participate in it.
- Empowerment is, therefore, not just an enabling environment so that children can learn, but also that they can choose, and this ability to make decisions and awareness of their rights to choose their own paths is the first step towards empowerment.
- Empowerment is also not easy. It needs a lot of work and a lot of self-confidence on the part of the children as well. They will have to develop the capacity and strength to deal with their own thoughts.
- Defining what is not empowerment is as important as defining empowerment.
- Empowerment and collectivization are very deeply linked. Hence, a peer group is important, and how they behave in a group, agreeing with diverse views, or respecting diverse views becomes important.

### 6.1 Question and answer session

As with the previous session, the audience raised several questions related to health, social and moral lessons, children's learning capacities and willingness, incorporation of teachers etc. There were also questions that were discussed related to the importance of relationships that have to be built between the mentors and the students. One of the suggestions by an audience member was that new people could be introduced to the children so that they have new ideas to learn from and get inspiration. Additionally, it would also be useful to engage with inter-district exchange of students (and experiences). There was also discussion on the importance of scaling aspects of the model so that it could be distributed to other areas.

### 7. Concluding remarks

As part of the concluding remarks that were provided by Jyotsna, she thanked all the participants as well as the teachers for attending the workshop. She also emphasised that as much as we are working with girls, we need to work with boys too, and need to change the thinking around aspirations surrounding boys. She emphasised that our developing model will be dealing with adolescents as an entire group rather than just girls. She concluded the session by stating that in the coming days, all the suggestions coming from the participants would be incorporated in fine tuning and bettering our model.