

BEST PRACTICES AND SUGGESTED DIRECTIONS FOR RESEARCH

What are the good practices which have a potential for process documentation, case studies and replication?

1. Holistic Approach to Addressing Child Labour and Education: A critical feature of M.V.Foundation's (MVF) programme for child labour and education is the conceptualisation and approach of the intervention model. MVF conceives of the problem holistically, making an overall consideration of the structural and socio-cultural factors that affect children's participation in labour and education. Thus the intervention model itself is not based on a set of overt indicators such as number of children enrolled in schools, pass percentages or attendance rates, as many other non-governmental intervention models do. Rather, the key target of MVF's intervention is social transformation and empowerment of the community to take ownership in addressing the issue of child labour and education. Towards this end the model is holistically conceived to address various aspects of the problem - such as empowering the community with knowledge and awareness about children's education as well as various laws and regulations; negotiating with employers, a powerful set of stakeholders, whose buy-in is important to address the problem; preparing out-of-school children to go to school through bridge courses and remedial material; addressing the quality of education itself through interventions within mainstream schools; and finally developing skills and initiative about community bodies to take charge of their community's problems around child labour, child marriage and education.

2. Local Volunteers: While part of their efforts to develop a sensitive model of intervention, another feature that needs special mention is MVF's strategy of enlisting local youth as volunteers. This has been critical to MVF's success and the respect they have earned from the community. This has also ensured that MVF mobilizers take on ownership and carry on sustained work, and also receive support from the community

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itself. As was pointed out by members of the community during fieldwork, having local youth as volunteers has instilled a confidence in them that MVF will remain both committed to their village, as well as sensitive to their needs.

3. Residential Bridge Camps: Central to MVF's model of intervention are also Residential Bridge camps (RBCs) to prepare children who have been out-of-school for long periods to return to school. The RBCs have been a huge success in building children's interest in education. However what is particularly noteworthy about the RBCs is that they go beyond simply preparing children to return to school through bridge courses. They provide a secure, warm and caring environment where children are mentored and supported academically and personally. They have also developed as spaces that have been successful in instilling confidence in parents and the community so that they are willing to allow their children, especially girls to spend long periods of time (up to six months or one year) away from home. This is noteworthy, particularly in the light of poor performance of other state run residential facilities such as ashram schools that have recently come into the limelight for a variety of issues such as poor quality nutrition, ill health of children and safety concerns (especially in Maharashtra).

Further, the RBCs have also been used by MVF as demonstration sites for other state and non-state actors working in the field of education. MVF has encouraged several other organisations in the field to visit the RBCs and has proved them with first-hand learning experiences to develop quality education initiatives.

4. Quality Improvement Programme: The conceptualisation of a small group of schools as 'quality schools' as a demonstration of the initiatives that add to quality is a novel and important feature of the project. The Quality Improvement Programme (QIP) seeks to ensure that certain significant features that add to improving the quality of education, such as regular teachers' meetings, support to teachers, children's committees, adoption of remedial training as per RTE norms, optimal quality of student-teacher ratio, and changes in pedagogy that is child friendly and integrates activity-based learning more fundamentally into regular classroom teaching, are in place. While many of these features have already received attention and are mandated by RTE and

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by NCF, MVF has sought to show the difference that can be achieved when these features are actually implemented.

5. Remedial materials: MVF's remedial coursework adopts certain sound pedagogic practices such as use of child-centred approaches, and activity-based learning. For example, MVF's approach to reading focuses on teaching children to recognise word-patterns for familiar words first, and then uses this as a way to teach children to recognise individual letters and then put them together to spell words. Such an approach is thus sensitive to, and recognises the difficulties that many non-native speakers of language such as English have in acquiring the relationship between sound(phoneme)-letter (symbol) patterns. Remedial coursework prepared by MVF has been a huge success in not only improving children's learning levels, but also bringing about changes to the pedagogic practices of teachers in these select schools. Teachers were also appreciative of MVF's material, which they felt had simplified teaching.

What are the potential research areas that we can take up as an independent exercise so that the learnings can be brought back into the programmes?

1. A critical mixed method study to understand the effects of MVF's interventions on enrolment and retention: An examination of secondary data to understand enrolment patterns in districts did not reveal any consistent trends. In order to understand more fully how MVF's intervention contribute to improvements in enrolments, and to examine the long-term impact of their programmes it would be useful to undertake a mixed-method study, which includes surveys (with collection of base-line, mid-line and end-line data on enrolments and retentions), supplemented by qualitative data which can examine the socio-economic and political reasons to explain these large-scale trends in enrollment.

2. Examination of learning levels/outcomes of mainstreamed children: A controlled study analysing the impact of MVF's bridge course / remedial curriculum and

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it's impact on children's learning can be undertaken. An independent learning assessments study comparing mainstreamed students with regular students at school on basic concepts covered by MVF can be undertaken.

3. Qualitative study to evaluate the impact of MVF's training and awareness programmes on social transformation: Social transformation involve long term processes of change, particularly through changes brought to tacit aspects of the individual self and group norms. Such changes include changes brought at an attitudinal level, changes brought to belief systems and social norms. Since MVF's primary intervention is also in the area of social transformation through community mobilisation it would be useful to understand the process of social transformation through a deep ethnographic study. Such a study can help in identifying key actors in the process of change, the pedagogy of empowerment, the critical variables required for change, as well as critical mass through which social transformation becomes possible.