

CAREZone



Quarterly Newsletter of CARE India
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Our Vision

We seek a world of hope, tolerance and social justice, where poverty has been overcome and people live in dignity and security.



Our Mission

CARE India helps alleviate poverty and social exclusion by facilitating the empowerment of women and girls from poor and marginalised communities.

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Challenges for Early Language and Literacy for Children from Marginalised Communities in India

Literacy is not only an end but a means to most other learnings as well as social and economic empowerment. Early language and literacy (reading and writing) development begins during early childhood. The interactions that young children have with literacy materials such as books and stories, and with the adults in their lives are the building



blocks for language, reading, and writing development. This understanding of early literacy development complements the current research supporting the critical role of early experiences in shaping brain development.

In India, several large-scale studies have revealed that a significant percentage of our young children fail to reach basic levels of reading achievement. The incidence of reading failure is higher within poor families, and among children from marginalised communities including *Dalits*, *Adivasis* and other ethnic minority groups.

Large number of Indian children grow up in non-print environment with little or no access to contextual reading materials in their mother tongue/first language. Classroom organisation and pedagogies adopted in the schools do not acknowledge and appreciate multilingual diversity that forms the basic fabric of Indian society. Classroom pedagogy does not ensure continuity between oral and written language and between mother tongue/first language and medium of instruction. The availability/usage of comprehensive diagnostic assessment systems related to early literacy to inform classroom instruction remains negligible. There is a lack of system level composite initiative to influence reading culture both at community and school level.



The main challenge for early literacy programming in India is to articulate conceptions of literacy that place a high value on children's oral language skills, and yet develop a strong foundation on reading and writing as part of the mainstream public schooling.

Conclusively, the key issues around early language development in India, especially where there is a substantial *Adivasi* and *Dalit* population lie in four main areas:

1. **Multilingual education context** in language learning remains one of the key concerns for children from diverse communities who are entering schools in large numbers post enactment of the Right to Education Act, 2009. In certain specific pockets of some states, there exist as many as four to eight different languages/dialects, which are different than the state language used for classroom instruction
2. **Curriculum, pedagogy and teacher education** issues exist with respect to teachers' knowledge, beliefs, approaches and strategies for teaching language, as well as teachers' attitudes towards capacities of *Adivasi* and *Dalit* children. Issues remain as existence of a blanket curriculum, discounting the child's home language and the competencies the child brings into the classroom, the primacy of the textbook over the child's experience and culture, the absence of the child's voice in the classroom and the absence of recognition that children come from non-literate environments

3. **Lack of continuum** in approach across pre-primary and primary years. The existing models of reading practiced in government primary schools do not account for their lack of prior access to early learning processes through pre-schooling to help them transit to school,
4. **Systemic issues** exist in terms of lack of a decentralized mechanism in the government education system at the state and district levels to understand and address reading deficits, insufficient technical capacity to design multi-lingual strategies, assessment protocols and provide support for reading instruction.

In this context, there is a need to understand and unravel the notion of early literacy for marginalised children and design an early literacy program that can be applied at scale to positively impact children's reading abilities. Since past few years, this domain has caught the much-needed attention in our country. The efforts in this direction have been focused on government, donors and other stakeholders to improve pedagogy, classroom process and pupil achievement. This conception includes giving high importance to oral language skills to develop a strong foundation in reading and writing. As most marginalized children access public schooling system in India, early literacy programs need to be cognizant of the diversity and accommodate the cultural and linguistic context of young learners, adapt an "integrated process" in classrooms, facilitate culturally sensitive and non-threatening learning environments allowing opportunity

for learners to follow their own learning trajectories within some broadly defined learning parameters.

The program must recognize and build on the following **key positions on early language and literacy:**

- Literacy is not an end but is a means to other learning, and social and economic empowerment.
- Oral language and literacy are overlapping domains used extensively, both inside and outside of classroom settings for communication, expression and knowledge generation.
- Listening, speaking, reading and writing develop concurrently rather than sequentially.
- Conceptions of literacy must build upon oral language skills of learners rather than just as a process of encoding and decoding of the script (with or without meaning).
- Young children should be provided with opportunities to participate as emergent readers and writers for an extended period (3-6 years of age) before being expected to develop into conventional readers and writers (6-8 years of age).

The Early language and literacy program must follow the **'principle based' approach** (Position paper on early language and literacy 2016, National Technical Core group, supported by CARE India and USAID)

1. Link oral language to literacy and teach it concurrently with literacy skills.
2. Emphasise on drawing and independent writing as forms of expression.
3. Develop multilingual capacities in children.
4. Integrate identified essentials for literacy instruction and learning into a comprehensive, concurrent model of literacy instruction.
5. Consider literacy instruction as a socio-culturally and socio-politically embedded set of practices.
6. Adopt in early literacy teaching, a gradual release of responsibility with teacher's responsibility shifting from I do, we do to you do.
7. Make contextual, level specific reading resources as an integral component of any early literacy classroom



The above principles must be engrained in a five-pronged strategy:

1. **Develop school as an enabling system** that promotes learning and equitable environment for all children. This can be achieved through working with teachers, head teachers and educational functionaries to ensure schools provide a caring, and a physically and emotionally safe environment for all children. Schools must be sensitive to social, cultural and linguistic differences of children, provide non-threatening expression spaces for teacher and children, create opportunities and forums to enhance children's confidence and self-image, provide a stimulating, print rich environment such as libraries and reading corners and a welcome space for parents and community in the classroom.
2. **Develop teacher as a catalyst through** building their teaching capacities, enhancing their sensitivity, and creating an enabling teacher support system, so that they are aware of children's diverse backgrounds, cultures and languages, and use these as resources in the classroom, understand literacy as a continuum across stages of development, recognise the need for differentiating instruction as per children's needs, effectively use and create learning resources from the immediate context.
3. **Continuous measurement of learning levels**, against a set specific indicators for different grades of primary schooling. must be integrated and used in the classroom processes to understand children's needs. Eight reading specific competencies to track are oral language development, print awareness, sound and symbol awareness, phonic awareness, phonemic awareness, comprehension, reading fluency and expression – writing.
4. **Development and use of bi-lingual contextual reading resources** to ensure access and exposure to a variety of print materials in schools and communities, based on the local culture and language of children. This allows for a smooth transition from home language to standard (school) language.
5. **Create reading culture in the community** through community libraries for both children and adults. Adults must be encouraged to read with and for children.

In addition to the above, equally important is to create awareness, understanding and collective voice to influence implementation of a strong early language and literacy program at the grassroots.

– *Technical Director Education, CARE India*

Beacon of Change: Seema Parveen

Schools are considered to be a pathway to knowledge, leading to social mobility, particularly for students who come from less privileged households. "Schools are the gateway for accessing knowledge, building confidence and overall development to be able to add value to the society at large."

The above statement reflects rightly in the efforts of Ms. Seema Parveen, an assistant teacher from Uttar Pradesh, determined to transform her school into an inclusive learning platform for marginalised children.



Seema works at the Primary School Kundaser, Kaiserganj block in Bahraich district. She started working as an assistant teacher soon after completing her M.Sc. and B.Ed..

During her initial days, she was pretty disappointed as her Grade-1 children showed no interest in staying inside the classrooms.

The deteriorating condition of classrooms along with poor learning levels among students, further affected her interest and motivation. However, her determination to improve the quality of education in the school never wavered.

As a next step, Seema participated in cluster level teacher development meetings organised by CARE India under the Start Early: Read in Time project. The training helped Seema enhance her technical knowhow and skills on Early Grade Reading, interesting classroom processes and strategies to engage multi-grade students inside the classroom.

Based on the training she received at the cluster, Seema initiated creative work with grade 1 children in the class. She also established a library within the classroom and motivated children to read books. She included different language activities in the school morning assembly which the children started enjoying, leading to a more productive day at school.

She then developed creative language TLM (based on poems, short stories, word charts, picture charts etc.) which helped link children's local context and local reference materials (i.e. local stories, local rhymes etc.) with their learning levels. Inside the classroom, she conducted theme based language activities and used learning materials to improve reading skills of children. She focused on oral language development (creative expression), word formation, use of different words in sentences amongst other tactics.

At school level, she made efforts to provide diverse spaces to children to be able to freely express themselves and participate with confidence, including the morning assembly, Children committees, and independent reading sessions. Because of these initiatives taken inside the classroom and the school at large, the students started attending the classes more regularly. Children who were not able to utter a single word earlier and were not ready to sit inside the classroom, can now recite poems.

In her words *"The cluster meetings were an ideal platform for me to reflect on my own skillset. It is a forum where I could interact with other teachers, get technical inputs, learn things, share my challenges, and seek solution for these challenges. Today, I am happy to see that children are taking interest in reading books, involving in creative work, participating in morning assembly and other co-curricular activities. every big or small initiative has helped in making our school environment more inclusive and vibrant. I am proud to share that both the attendance as well as the learning level amongst children has improved significantly."*



Addressing Food and Nutrition Security: Dream or Reality?



In this real complex materialistic and unequal world where resources are fast depleting, few people are enjoying the benefits and simultaneously, a large section of population is sleeping without food. It is a big question whether we would be able to become a Food and Nutrition Secure Nation or not. I feel dream keeps the hope alive, so let us move towards that.

In Indian context, though there are many critical issues related to the issue of food security but we also need to see the current context based on from where we started in the 1940's. Now India has come a long way since 1945 when it became one of the founding members of FAO as a low-income food deficient country. The country now produces over 260 million tonnes of food grains and has become self-sufficient in rice and wheat. We also produce 269 million tonnes in agriculture and 132 million tonnes of milk. Agriculture is the mainstay of the economy which needs to be strengthened as it is contributing to 18% of India's GDP. The Government has taken serious measures post-independence to address the issues of food security. Public Distribution System can at best be a Blood Transfusion exercise. It does not act as a permanent poverty alleviation measure. While it does provide some immediate relief, and should continue with reforms, it fails to provide enduring food security to the poor.

With this little background the much spoken about Food Security law eventually saw the light of the day through the promulgation of an Ordinance called the National

Food Security Ordinance 2013 (No.7 of 2013) in July 2013 followed by the National Food Security Act 2013 in September 2013, Act No.20 of 2013.

Food Security exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food which meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life. Household food security is the application of this concept at the family level, with individuals within households as the focus of concern. We can strengthen this further by the understanding that nutrition security is the bigger whole of which food security is a part. In simple terms, we may say that food security is about hunger and all that it implies while nutrition security is about hidden hunger and all that it implies and people need a security from both these onslaughts.

It would be more appropriate to focus on strategies that reduce poverty and stabilise price of food grains, talk about related issues which affects nutrition, issues related to bio-fortification and burden of diseases which impacts health.

Though the food security act exists but there have been many systemic challenges in terms of the implementation of this act and it does not talk about ensuring food and nutrition security for all. The Government should now review the implementation status of NFSA 2013 and bring about a revolutionary act which talks about FOOD and NUTRITION SECURITY for all. The government apart from the scientific evidences should also consider the wisdom from the traditional culture and indigenous people across the country. India should also learn from the experiences of Canada, Australia, Russia, Argentina, Thailand and Burma.

At the end of the day it is very important for any country to see that no one goes to sleep without food. It is not only the responsibility of the state but each Individual has to ensure and step forward to address and make **"Food and Nutrition Security for All"**.

Saibal Baroi
Director-Advocacy,
CARE India



Senthil Kumar - Executive Director for Program Operations

We are all here because there is a need

Senthil Kumar is the Executive Director for Program Operations, Quality and Learning at CARE India. Senthil has over 17 years of rich experience in social research and programming, spanning humanitarian and long term social development in diverse socio-cultural settings. Being part of CARE India since 2006, his work spanned areas of research, strategic planning, program design, and project management. Senthil wanted to work in the development sector ever since he started pursuing his doctoral degree in political science. His research focused on understanding the role and effectiveness of micro finance promoting institutions in advancing women's empowerment. Senthil speaks to CAREZone on what continues to drive his commitment to work towards the most marginalised in the society.

1. Tell us about your professional journey and what motivated you to be associated with the development sector?

I landed into this sector soon after I finished my academics. During my doctoral research, I got several opportunities to develop a deeper understanding of the development sector, and what role NGOs could play to advance the cause of women empowerment in the country. My biggest inspiration I think, came from my experience on-field, and the hands-on exposure on the ground during my research. For me, that experience settled a long-drawn debate in my mind - should I stick to academics or start working in the NGO sector? The fact that the development sector offered a space for application of knowledge, and directly contribute to change in the lives of the marginalised population was an idea that inspired me. And hence, I naturally chose to begin my journey in the sector. There has been no looking back since then, and 17 years later today, I continue to work in the sector, and learn and enjoy the work I do every day!

2. Tell us about your journey with CARE India so far. Any highlights you would want to share with us?

I joined CARE India back in 2006 as a research officer for one of the Projects in Chennai. I moved on to manage that project gradually. Even in that role, I was supporting other projects in the livelihood sector. I then moved on to the CARE Headquarters in New Delhi to play that role more

formally, and slowly and gradually I moved on to my current responsibilities.

Even as there are countless memories at CARE, I think some of the most pivotal moments professionally came in when the organisation offered me the freedom to deal with diverse challenges head-on. I clearly remember the days when I was supporting other projects in Chennai, apart from the one I was managing. That experience gave me a lot of exposure, which I wouldn't have otherwise got in my project.

CARE India continues to give me space to tackle challenges and work on opportunities every step of the way. It is in these moments, that I have learnt and grown most as a professional, alongside my peers and colleagues. Every day I have spent with this organisation has been a significant learning experience.

3. What do you think is CARE India's differentiating factor in the development sector?

I really believe that one of the key differentiator is "What we want to achieve and how we want to achieve it" as an organisation. That is what still motivates me to come to work everyday even after 11 years of being with this organisation.

Our worldview on complex issues like poverty and social exclusion is formed by the world around us. We work towards addressing the underlying causes of poverty and social exclusion by aiming at social change at the grassroots. We have evolved tremendously as an organisation over the last decade, and we continue to attach a lot of value to adapting to context to reach our goals.

The second dimension is what we do as an organisation to reach our goals. We offer lot of space to our colleagues to think, analyse and come up with relevant solutions to social problems. The creative freedom to analyse and adapt to situations at-hand, leads to a stronger programmatic approach and better results. This is much needed in our context which is dynamic and fast changing. Also, the learning opportunities that come to our colleagues within such a professional framework adds immense value to them and to our work as an organisation, which I think is another big differentiator.

4. Is there anything that you would like to convey to the staff of CARE India?

I would just like to say that we all are here because there is a need. It's always important to keep reminding ourselves why we do what we do. It's important to be aware and committed to work for the betterment of those who are marginalised. We need to constantly reflect on what we are doing and come up with meaningful strategies that can best serve those in need, both collectively as an organisation and as individuals.

CARE India Introduces Process Enhancement in PromptHR

Process improvement and enhancement is the proactive task of identifying, analysing and improving upon existing business processes with an organisation for optimisation of resources and to meet new standards of quality. Following this, the Human Resources team at CARE India underwent process improvement and enhancement and brought in various modifications in the existing promptHR module which is an online user friendly employee platform.



PROMPT HR



User Name

Password

Enter 

[Forgot Password?](#)



**ENHANCED AND
MORE USER FRIENDLY
PMS MODULE**



EXIT MODULE

Launch of CARE Insite

CARE-Insite, an **integrated internal knowledge portal** designed to provide a complete technology solution for CARE India employees was introduced in the month of June. CARE Insite brings together document repositories, collaboration components and back-end applications, enabling easy and timely storage, retrieval, sharing, and usage of CARE India's knowledge-based assets.



The screenshot shows the CARE Insite portal interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with 'Office 365' and 'SharePoint' links, the CARE logo, and settings/help icons. Below the navigation bar, the main content area features a search bar, a 'CARE Insite' header, and a central image of two women holding documents. A grid of icons represents various categories: Health, Livelihoods, Education, Disaster, Gender, Governance, Resilience, and Others. On the right side, there are sections for 'About' (describing CARE India's mission) and 'Quick-Start Guide' (with a download icon).

Health Talk

A health talk on "Depression" was organised in April at CIHQ by Dr. Swati Mittal, MBBS, MD (Psychiatry) from Fortis la Femme Hospital.



Coaching and Mentoring Workshop

CARE India, in alliance with International Coach Federation, Delhi Chapter organised a "Skill Building session" for line managers at CIHQ in the of May. The session was conducted by external trainers and was facilitated by the HR team.



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