Equitable schools

If India’s education system must be a tool to overcome social inequalities, it must remove barriers to education of India’s marginalised communities, especially Dalits and Adivasis. These include more investment in teacher awareness on equity, mother tongue language intervention programmes, disability-specific accommodation and other interventions needed to level the playing field.

Building a schooling system for every child is a challenge but it is attainable in an era of robust economic growth. A robust school system is an essential prerequisite for achieving inclusive and sustainable growth. As India celebrates Children’s Day, it is time to reiterate what needs to be done to ensure that India’s schools deliver quality, equitable and safe education for all. Doing so is critical at a time when the Central Government takes the first steps in planning and budgeting for education in 2018.

The challenges of India’s education system are endemic and require systemic solutions. The Indian State must consciously focus on equity and inclusion. India is a grossly unequal country—a land of billionaires where starvation deaths still happen. If India’s education system must be a tool to overcome social inequalities, it must remove barriers to education of India’s marginalised communities, especially Dalits and Adivasis. These include more investment in teacher awareness on equity, mother tongue language intervention programmes, disability-specific accommodation and other interventions needed to level the playing field. However, it is important to focus on equity not just in relation to access but quality: poor or underserved areas require specific strategies to ensure the best quality of teaching and learning. At the very least, further closure of schools in remote Dalit and Adivasi locations as part of “rationalisation” must stop until the policy’s impact on the continuity of education of learners from marginalised communities has been investigated.
Recognise and plan for those that remain out of school - The 2011 census data revealed about 38 million children (in the 6 to 13 year age group) remained out of school. While the figures might have since changed, clearer strategies to identify, bridge and enroll children in age appropriate grade are necessary. These strategies need to be planned and funded commensurate with the scale of the problem.

Focus on holistic quality - Poor learning outcomes are symptoms of deeper problems in the education sector. Multiple studies have demonstrated that teachers - and the level of teacher knowledge about the learners - are critical determinants of education quality and learning outcomes. India must invest to ensure that there are sufficient teachers, they are trained and qualified, have good working conditions and address diversity and equity in recruitment and deployment. In contrast, one in six teaching positions in government schools in India is vacant, a collective shortage of a million teachers. Another million odd are untrained. Teachers are routinely pulled into non-teaching work. CARE India has worked with teachers in India’s educationally lagging states like UP and Odisha and our experience suggests that an enabling mechanism for teachers to provide mentoring, support and friendly advice is critical to improvement of quality education. Stronger investments in teacher support mechanisms, including the strengthening of the Cluster Resource Centre, are critical to bring quality education. Teachers must be having necessary tools like quality curricular, learning materials and frameworks for appropriate, formative assessment. While rich school libraries are critical to building reading habits among children, even school textbooks rarely reach schools on time. A more concerted focus on Early Grades is critical.

Strong public systems and governance - Legislations, policies and implementation frameworks must be backed by stronger accountability mechanisms to ensure that they have the necessary impact. Capacities of middle level administration officials must be strengthened. Given the growth of private schools, steps must be taken to regulate and enforce regulation of private schools.

Financing - While money alone does not guarantee successful education outcomes, adequate and well-allocated finances are essential. India has historically not invested enough. In 2015-16, India’s spending on education was less than other BRICS countries - India spent 3 per cent of its gross domestic product (GDP) on education, compared to 3.8 per cent in Russia, 4.2 per cent in China, 5.2 per cent in Brazil, and 6.9 per cent in South Africa, according to 2016 data from India’s Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation. Allocations to education must be enhanced to 6 percent GDP in line with the government’s own national commitments and international benchmarks.

As the government enters into the processes of annual plans and budgets, we hope that these aspects will be taken on board. After all, India’s government needs to address the challenges around education sooner rather than later.

Anjela Taneja, Technical Director, Education, CARE India
Changing lives through agricultural interventions

I recently visited our Technical Assistance and Research for Indian Nutrition and Agriculture (TARINA) intervention villages in Kalahandi, Odisha. At one point in time, infamous for a long history of famines, poverty and hunger, Kalahandi district in Odisha today is slowly transforming its history and image. The district is now reaping bumper harvests, and slowly establishing itself as Odisha’s granary. Once you enter the region you can see beautiful fertile plains and small hilly regions that rise starkly and are wrapped in green.

The CARE team in the region has been working since December 2015 towards providing technical assistance in redesigning agricultural projects to ensure nutrition outcomes at scale. During my visit, I got a chance to interact with women small-holder farmers who promote the cultivation of pulses, vegetables, legumes, dairy farming and kitchen gardening practices.

One of the farmers from the village, Ms. Mithila Putel, expressed immense happiness on having been able to master the nuances of year-round kitchen gardening in the most scientific way. She conveyed her heartfelt gratitude and thanked the TARINA project for equipping and training her towards better yields. She said that with the help of the TARINA project, diverse nutrient-rich vegetables and fruits have found a place in her daily diet. She also shared that her family has immensely benefitted through this intervention and health and nutrition level of all her family members have gone up. With the new intervention and greater yield, they now have surplus vegetables which they sell in the market. The net income has contributed towards accessing better health, education and healthcare facilities for her family members.

As a part of my visit, I also met a group of women from Tulapada, Boringpadara and Balisingha villages under Narla block who are working on the Nutrition Gender Tool Kit as an effective means of social behaviour change communication. Along with the tool kit, our team works on creating nutrition awareness programs focusing on enhancing the diversity of agricultural production as well as the importance of diet diversity for all members of the household, particularly for pregnant women, mothers and children.

As a part of this initiative, we have introduced behaviour change interventions that enable greater gender equity in food distribution and nutritionally appropriate child feeding practices in the community. It was a very fulfilling feeling to see how the lives of people in the village have changed with CARE India’s intervention. The visit gave me perspective, as well as an opportunity to further understand the complex interplay between subsistence agriculture and nutrition outcomes.

Rajan Bahadur, MD & CEO, CARE India
16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence

From November 25, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, to December 10, Human Rights Day, marks the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence. As a part of the initiative this year CARE India launched a campaign to make people aware about the current situation where violence against women is becoming endemic in the country. The campaign urged people to question themselves on how each of us can contribute towards preventing violence against women. Participants talked about the change they have brought in or the change that they will bring in towards preventing violence against women. The CARE team shared blogs on gender-based violence faced by the community and how the environment is changing. Rallies and workshops where conducted in state offices and many took pledges which we shared on our social media pages. Here is a snapshot of various activities that we engaged in.

School students in Bahraich pledge against gender-based violence as a part of our girls education programme.

Adolescent girls from rural Mihinpura, Nawabganj, Balha, Chittora and Shivpura blocks of Bahraich visited Women Power Line 1090 centre in Lucknow. They learnt to break the silence and fight against eve-teasing, stalking and gender-based violence.

Street plays on gender-based violence by the community members in Dakibundel, Pyremal, Sargiguda, Budhidar, Tentulikhunti, and Kutpadar in Kala handi district, Odisha, as part of the 16 Days of Activism initiative in the TARINA project.
Girls Education Programme team in Lucknow took a pledge against gender-based violence.

Our team in Bihar conducted a training session on gender-based violence for the community as part of 16 days of activism.

CARE employees pledge towards a gender neutral India

As part of 16 Days of Activism against gender-based violence, our team in Bihar raised awareness amongst school children and the community.
Challenges of the informal sector around livelihoods

This year, CARE India Solutions for Sustainable Development (CISSD) supported the Livelihood Asia Summit being organised by ACCESS on 13th and 14th December 2017 in New Delhi, as their Country Anchor Partner. The Summit has evolved and emerged as a platform for diverse stakeholders to discuss and dwell over critical issues that impede and afflict the sustainability of livelihoods for the poor.

At the Knowledge Market Place in the Summit, we showcased our, learning and knowledge products in the “Clean Energy” space, primarily leveraging work within the BACHAT project which is evolving a women-centred extension model in clean household cooking energy, which contributes to the greater clean energy agenda.

The project aims to increase the awareness of women on clean energy options for household use, facilitate acquisition of improved cook stoves (ICS), financial and technical interventions, and influence men and other stakeholders in the ICS ecosystem to be supportive of women’s endeavours for clean energy transition.

Showcasing our learning and knowledge products in Clean Energy
The State of India’s Livelihoods (SOIL) report was released at the summit. This comprehensive report documents recent trends and challenges faced in the sphere of livelihoods. The summit also organised ‘The Livelihoods Asia Case Study Competition’ which is an initiative to bring together sector experts to help assimilate innovative solutions, breakthroughs and best practices to help form new partnerships towards providing gainful employment to a large number of youth in countries in the Asian region.

Representing CARE India, Shashank Bibhu, Technical Specialist, Economic Development Unit, moderated the session ‘Enabling Livelihoods in Informal Sector’. The speakers in the panel were Rana Alok Singh, Regional Lead, South Asia at Ethical Trade Initiative India; Shalini Sinha, India Country Representative from Women in Informal Employment: Globalising and Organising (WIEGO); Janhavi Dave, International Co-ordinator, HomeNet South Asia (HNSA) and Lesley Abraham, Impact Growth Strategy Coordinator, CARE Asia Regional Office, Vietnam. The session focused on the challenges being faced by workers in the informal sector, as well as, informally engaged workers in the formal sector in India, sharing stories and experiences, exploring the emerging legal and political environment for promoting empowerment of this set of the Indian workforce. The panelists threw light on issues pertaining to the existence of a huge majority of informal or unorganised labor employment, work being less remunerative and the conditions inferior to that in the organised sector. The discussion also centred on lack of economic security and legal protections for the workers in this space, growth of informal sector activities, further deterioration in the quality of employment, weakening of worker organisations and collective bargaining institutions, and marked decline in social security. The session ended with stakeholder specific suggestions and way forward.
Festive season celebrations at CARE India

Photo Gallery