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A BRIEF REPORT

Effectiveness of the Teacher Development Approach Through Cluster Resource Centres in Odisha and Uttar Pradesh (2016-18)

CARE India

THE PROJECT

Start Early: Read in Time is a CARE India Solution for Sustainable Development (CISSD) initiative in select districts of Uttar Pradesh and Odisha with an overall goal of improving “early grade reading skills of children (6-9 years of age), especially girls from marginalized Dalit and Adivasi communities, in formal primary schools in Odisha and Uttar Pradesh”. The project implemented a scale system based Early literacy initiative in three districts in UP and one in Odisha since 2014 and extended to two more districts in these states in 2016.



It reached 140,000 students in grades one to four across over 1000 government schools in Bahraich, Balrampur, Shrawasti, Gonda, Hardoi (UP), Mayurbhanj, Dhenkanal and Keojar (Odisha). Close to 2000 primary school teachers and 250 education functionaries were trained in the two states on early literacy approaches, instruction methods and assessment, monitoring techniques. The teacher development initiative was channelized through 96 cluster resource centres (CRC) in these two states by building them up as continuous teacher development resource centres and peer learning forums for teachers. The project was supported by USAID and other private sector partners.

FOCUS OF THE CONTINUOUS TEACHER DEVELOPMENT THROUGH CLUSTER RESOURCE CENTRE (CRC)

The intervention targeted teachers as primary drivers of change to enhance children's ability to read. Teachers' professional, social and emotional needs were addressed through annual in-service trainings, continuous teacher development initiatives every month at the cluster resource centre and through school onsite support. The CRCs were equipped with Teaching Learning Material (TLM), training and ICT resources; they functioned as a peer learning platform for teachers around teaching learning, planning, and to monitor learning of their children.

THE STUDY

About the Design: In 2015, under the Start Early: Read in Time Project, a qualitative study was initiated using Most Significant Change (MSC) methodology (Dart & Davies, 2003) to understand the processes and effectiveness of continuous teacher development through CRC. The MSC method was used to conduct in-depth study of a select sample through participatory monitoring and evaluation.

The focus of the study was to examine:

- (1) critical conditions and processes required to develop the CRCs into functional teacher resource forums,
- (2) impact of the teacher development forum in terms of change in perception and skills especially related to language pedagogy of teachers,
- (3) emergence of teacher development forum as a platform for reflection and cross learning for teachers and others,
- (4) changes visible in schools and teachers after their participation in the continuous development model, and
- (5) the processes and mechanisms that sustain vibrant teacher resource forums.

The MSC method was applied to examine selected CRCs depending on availability of resources, functionality and its impact on enhancement in teachers' competency. The method has been accompanied by observations, interviews and document analysis techniques. There was an attempt to study each sampled cluster and identify teachers in an in-depth manner by having one interaction/observation every academic session. Since the first phase of the study, same tools and inventories had been used to examine the above-mentioned identified indicators during entire period of the initiative.

This study synthesizes the change observed in CRC functioning and teachers' capacities during the three years of the project. The study covered nine clusters - two in each of the three districts of UP and three in Mayurbhanj district of Odisha. These clusters were selected based on three criteria:

Cluster organizes at least one academic-sharing meeting every month with the teachers,

Participation of minimum 60 percent teachers regularly in monthly meetings, and

Every meeting has a minimum of three-four hours of focused discussion on academic agenda.

TABLE 1.1: Clusters Covered in the Study

State	District	Clusters	2016	2017	2018
Uttar Pradesh	Balrampur	Budhipur	✓	✓	✓
		Gondipur	✓	✓	✓
	Bahraich	Gajadharpur	✓	✓	✓
		Soharwa	✓	✓	✓
	Shravasti	Kakandhu	X	✓	✓
	Sirsiya	✓	X	✓	
Odisha	Mayurbhanj	Badpathra	X	✓	✓
		Bautibeda	X	✓	✓
		Dhangera	X	✓	✓

KEY FINDINGS

Physical Space of the CRC as a Resource Centre

The first and most tangible impact observed in all the clusters has been the development of the physical space of the CRC as a resource centre which was accessible to teachers – vis-à-vis usability etc. The situation differed across the two states. In UP, where CRC space was left

unutilized before the intervention in 2014, the project helped revive these spaces. Using the government-allocated CRC funds, the project along with the respective CRCs renovated these spaces: they were cleaned and painted, equipped with basic stationary and materials (such as dhurries, tables, chairs, notebooks, etc.) to make them conducive to host monthly meetings, various kind of books for students and teachers were displayed on the shelves, the walls were arranged with charts, posters and picture cards. In Odisha, the initial situation was quite different. Separate physical spaces have been allocated in host schools for the CRC. Some of these spaces were in use by the schools for other purposes, and were vacated to function as a resource centre after 2014. Hence, the intervention did not require the initial investment of cleaning, repair or renovation of these spaces. The project provided support by way of equipping the spaces with additional materials such as extra chairs and tables, white board, projector, dhurries for the teachers to sit on (similar to the CRCs in UP). These meeting spaces were also arranged with print rich materials and equipped with various kinds of books and TLMs for the teachers.

Functionality of the CRC as a Resource Centre

In different clusters, basic structures and processes were developed for the space to function as a resource centre.

These included: (1) regular monthly meetings at the space, where teachers come together, shared and learned from each other (opportunities for teachers to develop their teaching skills, better

SNAPSHOT OF A CLUSTER MEETING

Demonstrating Structure and Relevance of its Different Sessions (Kakandhu, UP, January 2017)

SESSION: Sabha/Assembly

The teachers volunteered to take Assembly sessions, that is, do/ enact poems, songs and stories while the other teachers follow them. They then discussed how such sessions are useful for the students. The CARE staff and the teachers shared riddles and discussed how they can aid in student's development.

Relevance to school/classroom: These act as interactive language activities that they can do with their students during the morning assemblies or between classes. Teachers learn and practice new poems/songs/stories/riddles during this session.

SESSION: Review

Teachers reviewed and discussed the kind of activities, successes and challenges faced by them in their schools with grades 1-4. The discussion centred around the monthly plans created by them during the last meeting. Some of the teachers also shared innovative teaching methods used by them in their classrooms.

Relevance to school/classroom: This session acts as a continuous self-monitoring exercise for the teachers, an opportunity to share challenges they face with respect to teaching and managing the school, and support each other in finding solutions to these challenges.

SESSION: Fluency

A handout on "reading fluency" was distributed amongst the teachers; they read and discussed about the same. They discussed the components on ideal reading, and the importance of flow, modulation and stop-signs (full stops, commas) for fluency and understanding of reading. They then did an activity to show the difference between reading accurately without understanding and reading fluently with understanding.

Relevance to school/classroom: Firstly, it showed the teachers the way in which they should read text to their students to ensure it is understood and so that the students can model ideal reading technique. Further, the session illuminated on the minute aspects of reading that teachers need to develop and monitor their students on.

SESSION: Monthly Plans

Teachers created monthly plans of activities and goals for the grades 1-4 in their schools, for language and Math classes.

Relevance to school/classroom. This gives the teachers opportunity to create monthly goals for themselves, making teaching more goal-oriented, planned as well as realistic and lets the teachers monitor themselves on these goals.

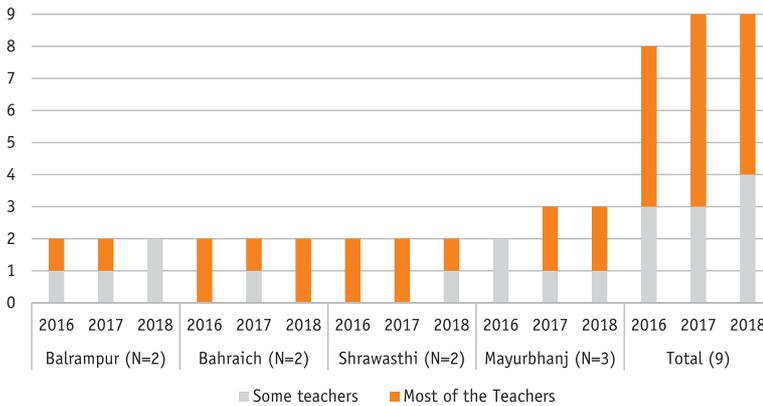
manage their classrooms and vent and network with other teachers in similar situations as them)¹ (2) time to develop TLMs that teachers can use in their classrooms, (3) time to develop monthly agenda, time-table, class-curriculum and other tools to better manage their teaching schedule in the classroom, (4) books at the centre that the teachers can read and/ or issue for their classrooms, and (5) TLMs that teachers can issue for their classrooms, or take inspiration from and develop themselves.

Capacity of the Cluster Resource Centre Coordinator (CRCC)

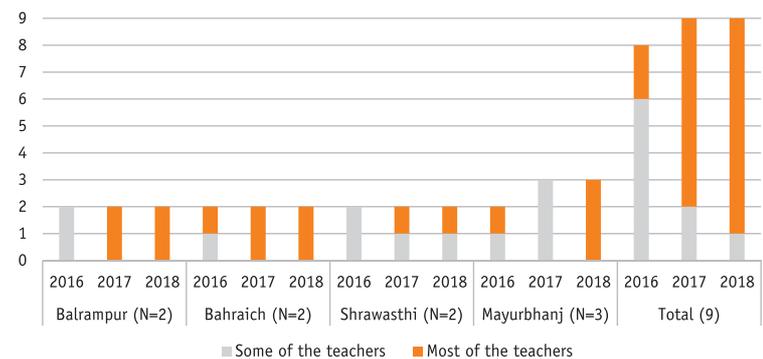
The intervention helped CRC Coordinators (CRCCs) understand their role in supporting and monitoring academic activities of the teachers. The intervention trained/capacitated the CRCCs in the theoretical and conceptual aspects of primary school teaching and EGR. The impact of such efforts is visible in all

¹In Odisha, there was an existing process of organizing monthly meetings/ gatherings at the CRC. To distinguish these from the meetings facilitated by the CARE India team, the latter were referred to as the "Monthly Sharing Meetings" or MSM. MSMs were unique in their specific focus on academic sharing, in comparison to the administrative focus of other CRC meetings.

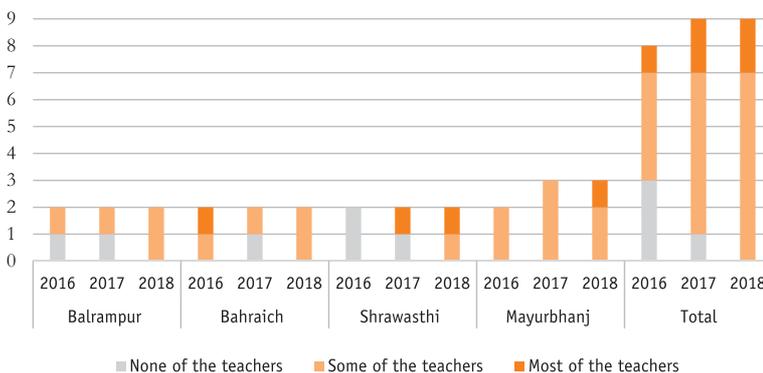
GRAPH 2.1: Number of Teachers Getting Opportunity to Reflect on Challenges During the Cluster Meetings Observed in 2016, 2017 and 2018²



GRAPH 2.2: Number of Teachers Showing Active Participation During the Cluster Meetings Observed in 2016, 2017 and 2018³



GRAPH 2.3: Number of Teachers Collectively Finding Solutions to Each Other's Challenges During the Cluster Meetings Observed in 2016, 2017 and 2018⁴



the clusters, particularly in the district of Mayurbhanj where the CRCCs were found to have a better grasp of the EGR concepts, initiate and facilitate academic sessions in the cluster compared to the clusters in UP. In UP, due to the additional responsibilities related to CRC functioning, the CRCCs could not manage to get enough time to engage with the theoretical aspects of the intervention.

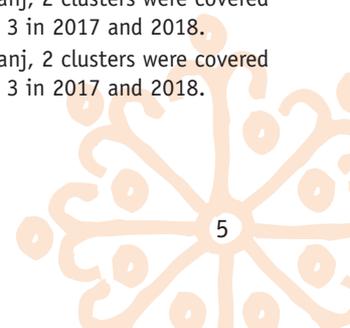
Trend in Participation and Ownership of the CRC

In all the clusters, a cluster resource group (CRG) was formed. This group is composed of proactive, regular and competent teachers from each school in that cluster. The CRG members are responsible for facilitating sessions during the monthly cluster meeting, preparing for these sessions, demonstrating model classroom and/or teaching activities during the meeting, and managing the logistics of the meeting.

² In Mayurbhanj, 2 clusters were covered in 2016; and 3 in 2017 and 2018.

³ In Mayurbhanj, 2 clusters were covered in 2016; and 3 in 2017 and 2018.

⁴ In Mayurbhanj, 2 clusters were covered in 2016; and 3 in 2017 and 2018.



Impact of Regular Teacher Development Forum on Teacher and Classrooms

Regular engagement with the cluster forums has capacitated teachers in moving away from a purely phonics and sequential approach⁵ to a balanced language approach using language continuum. In the latter, teachers simultaneously work with students' listening, speaking, reading and writing skills, provide them increasing opportunities to engage with printed material.

Continuous trainings and resource materials at the cluster forums further support the teachers to use reading resources other than textbooks in their classrooms.

Equipped with the language and the concepts of Early Grade Reading (EGR), the teachers have improved their way of viewing, teaching and assessing the students. The beginning of '90 minute language classes' in Mayurbhanj, have helped the teachers in Odisha to implement the Early Grade Reading concepts in a more focused manner. Teachers were found to be practicing 'gradual release of responsibility'⁶ in their curriculum with the different levels of students, helping them become independent readers and writers.

Using interactive teaching methods to break monotony in classrooms; Case of Shraddha Tripathi, PS Gujarwara, Kakandhu

Shraddha's participation in CRC meetings has entirely changed the way she teaches in the classrooms. She uses activity based learning, listens to and invites responses from all students irrespective of gender, constantly moves around the classroom to monitor the student, and uses different refresher and warm-up activities to sustain students' interest throughout the day.

Shraddha also keeps speakers in the school office and shows students animated YouTube videos, related to the lessons being taught, on her phone and laptop regularly. She is determined to increase awareness about world affairs among her students.. For this, she tries to give them exposure through downloaded videos or daily news via the internet.

Change in Teachers' Perception about the Students

The teachers observed made efforts to address all students in the classroom. They were able to reflect on their own tendencies to call out specific students every time, or give responsibilities to certain students, and not engage with some of them. In the student committees, the teachers made efforts to include both academically strong and weak students of both genders and were surprised by how some of the previously shy and underperforming students have outperformed others. From a meta-cognition point of view, these teachers were able to reflect on their own biases.

Impact on Teachers' Capacities to manage and engage with children

The trainings and interaction at cluster level helped equip teachers with practical skills to effectively manage and engage with the students, within their unique challenging school contexts. All

⁵ focus on letter based approach to comprehension based approach to language teaching

⁶ 'The gradual release of responsibility' is a particular style of teaching. A structured method of pedagogy, it is framed around a process devolving responsibility within the learning process from the teacher to the eventual independence of the students.

the schools in the study had student committees, and each of these schools found these committees very useful. Distributing responsibilities among students helped relieving the workload of the teachers, as also increased confidence levels and communication skills of the students. These committees looked after the day-to-day functioning of schools – from the library, morning assembly, health and cleanliness, mid-day meal, etc.

In multi-grade schools, teachers were also experimenting with different seating arrangements to better engage with the students. The schools in Budhipur have started using the U-shaped seating arrangement, such that the teacher was able to look at and engage with each student from her/his position in the centre or in the front of the classroom. In Badpathra, the teachers made students sit in small grade-wise circles in the classroom. In some of the other clusters, like the schools of Soharwa, the teachers did not impose any seating arrangement, and let the students sit in unstructured rows/ columns, as per their wish. In Bautibeda, teachers were found to be more deliberate in their efforts to make students sit/ stand in mixed-gender groups during the classroom or co-curricular activities.

Teachers also were using the TLMs provided by the project to engage students during high-workload days or in classrooms without teachers, the TLMs and Teacher Handbooks were also used for guidance.

Classroom Interaction demonstrating teacher's increased capacity take language classes for early grade students; Case of Soniyam James, PS Samasa Tarahar, Soharwa

GRADES: Four and Five

SUBJECT: Hindi

The teacher first divided the students in groups, giving each group a picture and a few key words from the picture. She then asked each group to create a story from those words and the picture. One person from each group then read out the story while the others enacted it. While being a fun engaging activity, this helped develop multiple faculties of the children -their ability to reason and think creatively, write, express and perform in front of an audience. This also gave them the opportunity for vocabulary development by forcing them to use different words to create the story. Further, the teacher grouped the students such that each group had a mix of weak and better performing students, which provided them the opportunity for peer learning.

Increase in Teachers' Motivation and Accountability for Teaching

The teacher forum meetings had a noticeable impact on the teachers' sense of motivation and accountability. Teachers started reporting on the students learning and tracked learner's progress, and started planning group-wise lessons accordingly, which was not the trend previously. Teachers also shared efforts taken by them regularly during the monthly meetings and also in their WhatsApp group especially created for teachers of a cluster forum. This created a sense of healthy competition between them and also encouraged them to share experiences with each other.

Change in School Environment

A positive gradual change in the learning atmosphere of schools and classrooms was noticeable. There was greater interaction between students and teachers and also classrooms projected a fear-free participatory learning environment. The trend analysis marked three significant changes over a period:

(1) regularity and participation of children-centered daily morning assemblies has helped students to overcome their hesitation and fear to express themselves, (2) increase in use of participatory classroom methods has helped students overcome their hesitation and fear of the teachers, and (3) Participation of all children through student committees gave students a sense of belonging, importance and confidence.

The project has also been successful in inculcating a print-rich and reading environment, with displays of posters, stories and children's work in most of the classrooms. Schools also have reading corners and libraries. It was found that the library periods vary in its structure, frequency and implementation in different schools across the clusters. In Mayurbhanj, the schools have incorporated a library period into their time-table and every day post-lunch, the period is managed by the library-committee members.

In the schools where students were encouraged to speak and engage with each other be part of the decision-making, teachers were also found to value and display student-made materials on the walls of the schools.

KEY LESSONS

In Odisha, the program was found to be very successful in creating environment for teacher development. This has happened primarily due to

- a) robust integration of the program functioning structure i.e. from district, block, cluster to teacher-level support provided under the initiative, and has been the primary reason for facilitating this environment.
- b) ability of CRCC to support and monitor teachers on academic matters has led to creation of reading environment in the schools, consequent increase in students' confidence and ability to express themselves.
- c) development of few teachers as change agents or role models has helped in capacitating other teachers with the creation of participatory fear-free spaces.
- d) focus on improving assimilation of the students from oral and tribal language to the printed and standard Odiya language at school level.

In UP, despite challenges, the program has been successful in terms of facilitating environment for teacher development. This was mainly due to the following:

- a) active and regular participation of some of the CRCC,
- b) having dedicated and regular teacher who find value in the intervention,
- c) greater resource input at the cluster,
- d) CRCC acting as a role model,
- e) support from the district administration,
- f) Repeated visits of CRCC to school,
- g) use of social media in sharing ideas among highly active and motivated teachers.

However, the study points to certain important considerations that hamper continuous teacher development initiatives to be impactful: transfer and demotion of teachers, lack of teacher development structure, personnel and resources at cluster level, inadequate capacity of CRCC and heavy burden on non-CRC duties, differential gender representation and relation at the CRC, continuous teacher development inadequately followed up by onsite school support and school level monitoring.



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