



# MUSKAAN

## Schooling with a Smile

The Story of how the Community Helped  
Ensure Child Friendly Schools in Uttar Pradesh



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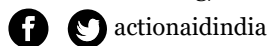


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# 1

# INTRODUCTION

Education is for improving the lives of others  
and for leaving your community and  
world better than you found it

– *Marian Wright Edelman*

The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education popularly known as RTE Act, 2009 is a landmark step in the educational history of India. According to the Act, it is the duty of the state to ensure that children between the age group of 6-14 years get free and compulsory education across the country. Laterally, it also poses a challenge due to the immensity of scale and complexity of social fabric in different states. The provisions for the duties of appropriate government, local authority, school, teachers and parents, in general and of protection of rights of the children and inclusion of the disadvantaged children in particular, need conscious thinking to bring systemic reforms for making quality education accessible to all.

In this regard, community participation is integral to improving access, enrolment, retention and reaffirming demand for child friendly education. Child Friendly School and Systems are the systems built in consonance with the RTE Act to ensure inclusion (especially to the disadvantaged classes), no denial of admission, safe and non-discriminatory classroom environment, appropriate pupil-teacher ratio, regular classes, no expulsion or detention, ensuring healthy and nutritious Mid-day meals, infrastructure as per the norms under RTE Act, role of community in monitoring school and a system of grievance redressal.

School being ensconced in a community, belongs to the community. This linkage is crucial to develop child friendly schools as there is a pedagogic link between the schools and the homes. Children bring their family beliefs, practices, knowledge and expectations to school. They take back new forms of knowledge, beliefs and attitudes to their

communities. They learn from both worlds and this learning is empowering when the communities have a co-ownership with school.

There is a socio-economic dimension too. Facilities like Mid-day meal, free uniform and text-books offer opportunity to children from economically disadvantaged families attending school. The Mid-day meal programme for instance, enables children from different social groups to sit and eat together.

The accountability mechanism is equally important to ensure its functionality. Indeed, community monitoring of schools ensures quality education. It places responsibility on the school as well as on the community. To ensure an enabling environment in schools, the convergence of these two key stakeholders is of great significance.

Muskaan (in collaboration with Action Aid and UNICEF) is a step in this direction which aims to strengthen the community which in turn takes the ownership of schools improving attendance, retention and transition of children. To ensure child friendly schools the project emphasized working extensively at the local level to strengthen communities through Panchayats (Village Education Councils), school teachers, School Management Committees and duty bearers.

Though the project adopted three pronged strategies to obtain the desired results but simultaneously it involved the Panchayats, the school administration, the District Elementary Education Department and other associated departments in each district Headquarter.

To ensure enrolment, attendance, retention and improving quality of education as per the RTE Act. The School Management Committees (SMCs) are the first line of mechanism. The demands are addressed at school level by including these within the School Development Plans prepared by the newly constituted SMCs and the local community.

Considering the above, the project developed strong community structures, active stakeholders' linkages ensuring the transparency, accountability and participation.

## The three pronged strategies of the project

The intervention adopted various strategies vis-a-vis methods at three different levels. The first strategy of the intervention was to engage the key stakeholders at village and block level. The convergence of community and Panchayat was the key to address the gaps and redress the grievances. Secondly, at the district level, it established linkages among various stakeholders and through strengthening and formation of district forums

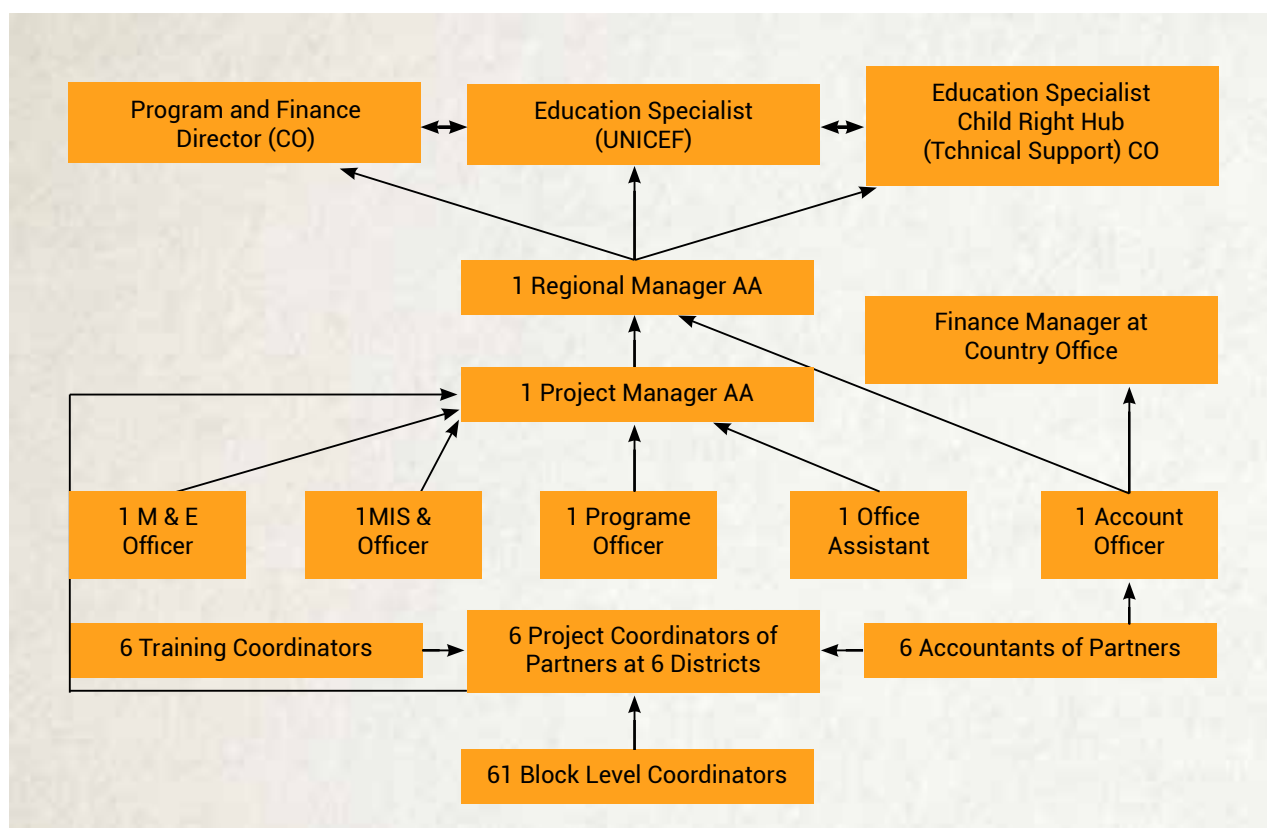
such as Zila Baal Maitrik Vidyalaya Sangathan and SMC federations the intervention successfully achieved its goals. Similarly, at the state level, the Muskaan interventions build alliances with various educational forums along with a strong Liaisoning with State Commission for Protection of Child Rights (SCPCR) to address the violations of educational rights of the children.

The project management structure was decentralized. The broad framework of the project was discussed at the central level. This was shared at the local level with partner CSOs, SMC *Preraks* and Education Volunteers (EV). Baseline survey, selection of sample schools and interventions were done at the local level and shared at the district and state level.

## The project management structure of the project was built as

Secondly, it focused on building networks among the community, school and government officials at the block, district and state level. This was to ensure establishment of child friendly schools and

The program structure of the project





systems. The Project employed various strategies for ensuring that the School Development Plans are taken to a logical end.

## Preparing School Development Plans as per provisions in the RTE Act, 2009

- **Sharing the SDP (School Development Plan) at district level forum:** This forum comprised of SMC members from various schools and blocks within a district (also called as SMC Federation). Another district level forum was the Zila Baal Maitrik Vidyalaya Sangathan which comprised of SMC members, CBOs (Community Based Organizations, CSOs (Civil Society Organizations) and members of the SMC federation.
- Convergence of various departments to form a District level forum for School Development Plan. The Heads and representatives from various departments such as District Elementary Education Department, Panchayati Raj, District Administration, Labor Department, Electricity Department, Jal Nigam, Food and Supply Department, Women and Child Development etc. attended the meetings and more importantly, the best practices, success stories, gaps, grievances and experiences of the project were also shared during the programme.
- The outcomes of the project were shared every quarter with key stakeholders.
- Capacity building of local community, SMC Preraks, members of the SMC and Education Volunteers on RTE and CFSS.

- Establishing Meena Manch (a platform for young girls to empower them) and efforts towards inclusion of the disadvantaged groups within the community.
- Consultations at the district and state level for sharing, building capacities and for redressal.

Thirdly, it ensured a transparency and accountability mechanism by discussing issues under RTE Act, concerns arising out of School Development Plans and by conducting Social Audits (Jan sunwai).

The first phase of the project was undertaken in the six districts of UP namely, Budaun, Balrampur, Mirzapur, Lucknow, Shrawasti and Sonbhadra. Uttar Pradesh was a specific choice as the state ranks 31st among 35 (28 states and 7 UTs) states and Union territories of India with respect to literacy. Despite its low literacy rates on a national scale, the Census of India shows that Uttar Pradesh has made significant improvement in the field of primary education. The average literacy rate of Uttar Pradesh is approximately 70%. The state made considerable efforts in enrolling 93% children in school. The government programmes and schemes like the SSA (Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan) and the Mid-Day Meal aided further the process.

## Districts under Muskaan intervention

In Uttar Pradesh, six districts were selected for the Muskaan intervention. This was a purposive sample. Lucknow, the capital city has better literacy rates and more allocated funds. Budaun has a very low rate of literacy for women. The population is mostly involved in agriculture

**Table 1. The status of literacy**

DISTRICT	TOTAL LITERACY RATE (IN PERCENTAGE)	LITERACY RATE MEN (IN PERCENTAGE)	LITERACY RATE WOMEN (IN PERCENTAGE)
Lucknow	77.29	82.56	71.74
Badaun	52.00	61.38	41.6
Balrampur	49.51	59.73	38.43
Mirzapur	68.48	78.97	56.86
Shrawasti	46.74	57.16	34.78
Sonbhadra	64.03	74.92	52.14

(Census of India 2011)



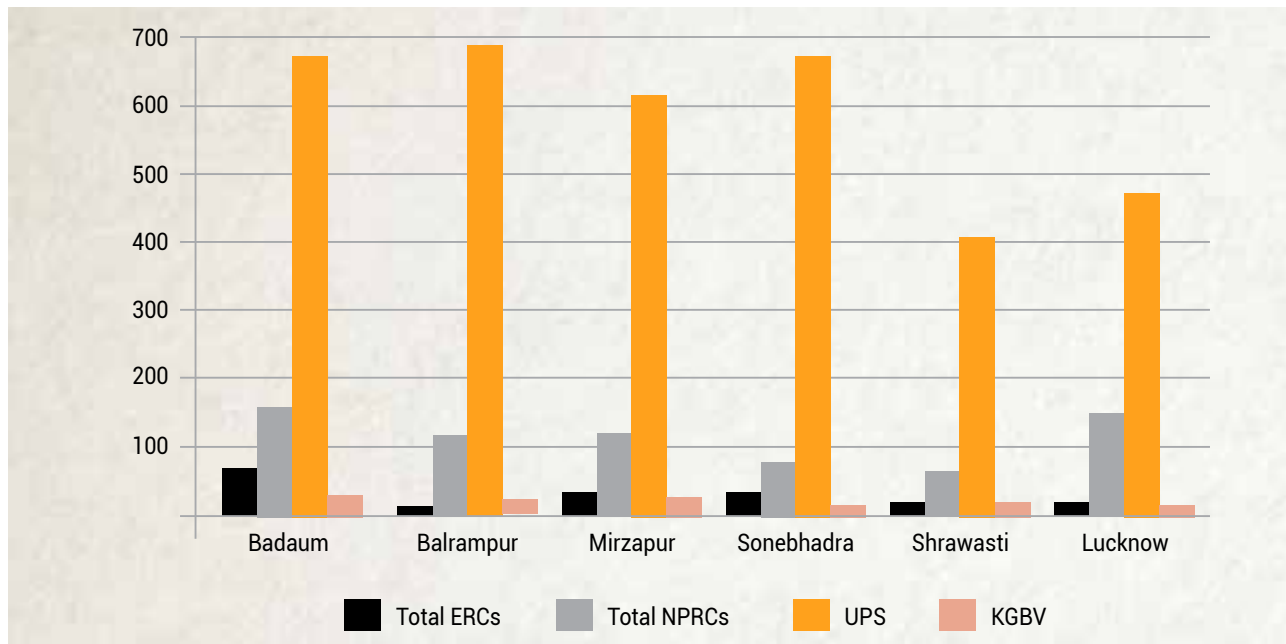
related occupations. Shrawasti is economically deprived. A large population subsists on labor and migrates to other places in search of work and employment. Sonebhadra is a red-district. It is economically backward. The population subsists on daily wage labor in mining industries. Mirzapur too is economically backward district. The population comprises a significant number of tribes like Koli and Gond and Musahar from Dalit population. Balrampur has an agrarian population. Here the socio-economically backward population is landless. They are agricultural labors and daily wage earners. Of the chosen six districts, five districts (Budaun, Balrampur, Mirzapur, Shrawasti and Sonebhadra) are among the most economically and educationally backward districts. It is found that in these districts the literacy rate among SCs,

STs and women is far low than the other social groups.

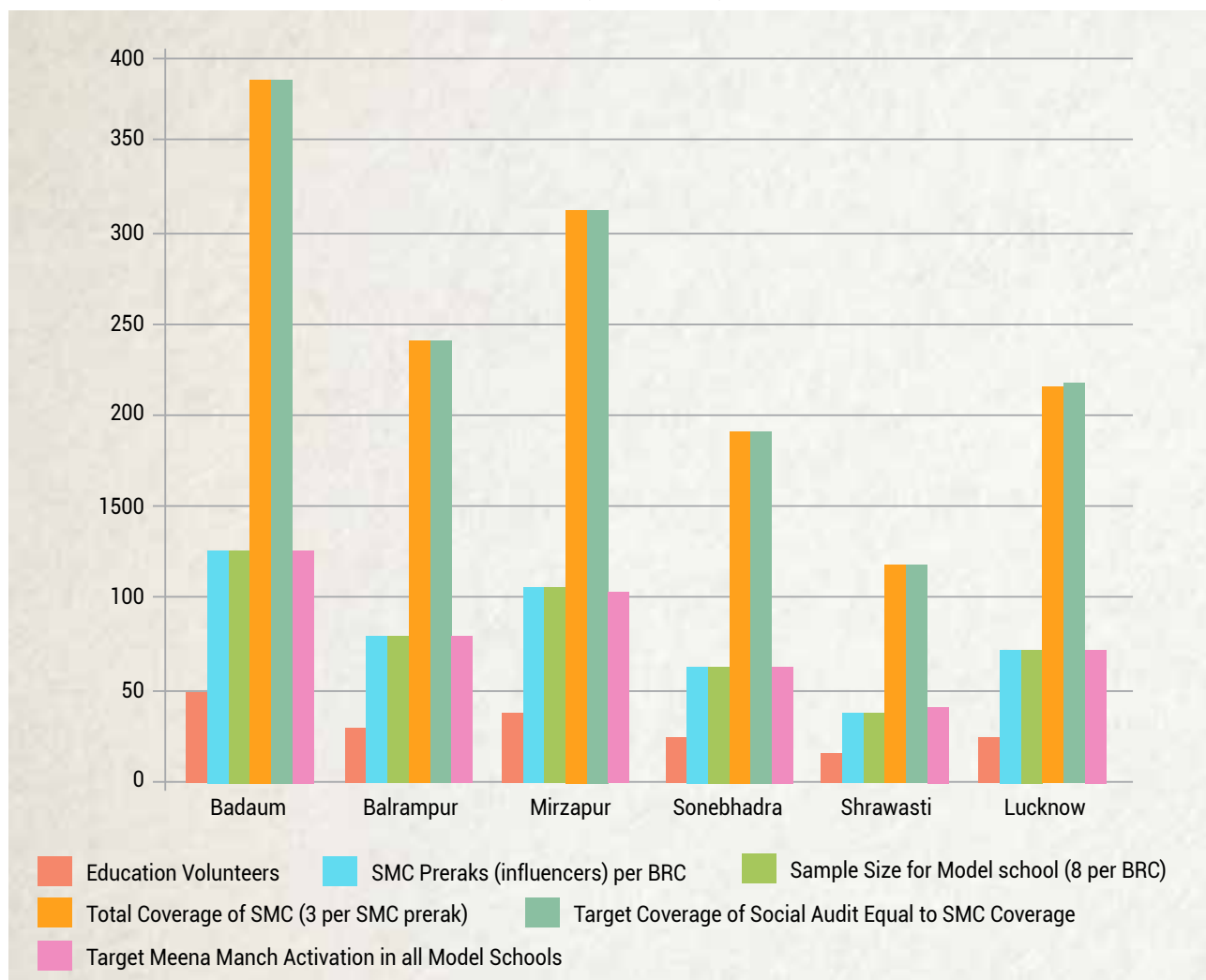
After selection of 6 districts, the project team collected the school lists from all the blocks from Elementary Education Department. After collecting the data the team conducted a baseline survey to understand the infrastructural development in the school, inclusion and discrimination of disadvantaged groups (specifically girls). The schools that were graded last in the survey were selected for intervention. 2 primary and 2 upper primary schools were thus selected in each block. All the KGBVs in the six districts were chosen under this intervention. One primary and one upper primary school were selected from each NPRC (Nyaya Panchayat Resource Centre).

A detailed project coverage is shown in the figures below:

**Fig 1.1 The project management structure**



**Fig 1.2 Targeted coverage**





# 2

## UNDERSTANDING THE FIELD: BASELINE SURVEY OF COVERAGE AREA

A baseline survey was conducted in all the elementary schools based on the eight indicators. The principal objective of the survey was to weigh the present conditions of selected schools and based on the findings to intensively work and advocate the issues for its redressal.

1. Toilet facility: separate toilet facility for girls is an issue for retention of girls in school (PROBE Team 1999). The baseline report too showed that there was no separate toilet facility for 49% and 43% schools in Sonebhadra and Balrampur respectively.
2. Functionality of toilets: 83% toilets were found functional in Lucknow whereas 74% toilets were found abandoned and non-functional in Balrampur district.
3. Cleaning of School Premises: this indicator was measured to study the discrimination practiced at schools. It was found that 57% schools in Sonebhadra were cleaned by students.
4. Cleaning of toilets: It was found that 30% school toilets in Budaun district were cleaned by SC students and ST students in Sonebhadra were made to do the same.
5. Water facility in toilets: 82% schools in Sonebhadra had no water facility.
6. School Management Committee (SMC): 78% elementary schools in Balrampur district had no SMC meetings.
7. Meena Manch\*: a forum for adolescent girls was not formed in 92% upper primary schools in Balrampur.
8. Pupil-Teacher ratio: RTE Act 2009 mandates 1 teacher for 35 students in upper primary school. A disparity regarding the pupil teacher ratio was found in the different districts. Whereas Lucknow has a pupil teacher ratio of 1:25, Sonebhadra has a ratio of 1:65, Budaun 1:42, Mirzapur 1:44 and Shrawasti 1:43.

*[Endnote: Meena Manch: The State Education Department of Uttar Pradesh established more than 19,000 girls' groups called 'Meena Manch' throughout the state. The process was initiated in 2002. Under the guidance of one facilitator/ teacher the Manch helps ensure age-appropriate enrolment, regular attendance and completion of primary education up to class five by all girls in the area.]*

The findings revealed that a comprehensive plan for building capacities of the stakeholders, community, school, parents and state was imperative and so was the monitoring of the progress. An important recommendation was that the collaboration of Panchayat and SMC would be crucial to ensure infrastructural and environmental change in the schools as involvement of community would lead to ownership and accountability. It laid out the importance of working for building infrastructure to make schools more accessible. It stressed the need for recruiting more teachers. The survey showed that plans were needed to make the government schools equipped and sufficient so there could be more enrolment in government schools. The transition rates of girls and boys between classes

5 to 6 and between 8 to 9 showed that the dropout rate among girls was more in comparison to the boys. It called for a strategy to increase retention of girls in schools. Meena Manch- a forum for adolescent girls would be an important step in this direction. The study revealed lesser representation of minority groups in schools. It was recommended that the SMCs be made more active in enrolling out of school children and children from minority and disadvantaged groups.

In its fourteen months intervention the project intensively involved the CSOs and the community through organizing capacity building programmes on various themes of education.

## **The CSOs engaged within the districts were**

- Shramik Samaj Shiksha Sansthan (SSSS) in Budaun
- Developmental Association for Rural Advancement (DEHAT) in Shrawasti
- AIM in Balrampur
- Ankur Yuva Chetna Shivar in Lucknow
- Shikhar Prashikshan Sansthan in Mirzapur and
- Jan Kalyan Gramodyog Seva Ashram in Sonebhadra

# 3

## OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGIES FOR SUSTENANCE

### 1. Development of Model Schools in 6 Districts

- a. **State level inception/workshop:** An inception workshop was organized at the very beginning of the project. All the project staff was present in the two day workshop organized in Lucknow. The objective, process and overall goal of the Muskaan project was shared with the project staff. Special training programmes on RTE/CFSS, Equity and Equality, Meena Manch, SDP, Social Audit etc. were also organized in the workshop.
- b. **State level convergence meeting of CSO forum:** This state level meeting was attended by state officials, CSOs, members of the SMCs, EVs and SMC Preraks from each district. The purpose of this meeting was to share the best practices as well as to build solidarity networks.
- c. **District level capacity building training on RTE and CFSS:** To increase enrolment and attendance of children especially the girl children from excluded communities was held in each district. The objective of this meeting was to capacitate the stakeholders on RTE/CFSS in order to ensure maximum reduction in dropout rate and to enroll maximum number of out-of-school children in elementary schools.
- d. **District level quarterly network meetings of Education Volunteers and School Management Committee:** 3 Education Volunteers (EV) and 8 SMC Preraks from each BRC were identified especially from marginalized communities and specifically the women to ensure their participation and leadership development. These meetings were a platform for sharing

experiences and capacity building at the district level.

- e. **District level quarterly convergence meeting with district administration:** The principal objective of this meeting was to provide a common platform to CSOs, CBOs, members of the SMCs, EVs, SMC Preraks and the district level officials. It provided a healthy coordination among stakeholders.

### 2. Establishment of Child Friendly Schools and Systems in 6 Districts

- a. **Need Assessment Study** was conducted in 6 districts to analyze quality of schools, understand gaps that existed in order to ensure plan specific interventions. The key indicators for this analysis were- status of schools as per RTE guidelines, emphasis on safety, protection, pupil-teacher ratio, markers of potential discrimination, number of functioning SMCs etc. The analyses helped address caste and religion based discrimination as well as gender disparities.
- b. **District level meeting to share the outcome of the study and strategy formulation in six districts:** This sharing was done with the government functionaries, CSOs, CBOs, SMC Preraks, EVs, etc. in order to invite opinions from different perspectives and to plan strategies further for intervention.
- c. **Six monthly BRC level orientations to the members of SMC:** The orientation programs were organized to capacitate the members of



the SMCs on RTE and child friendly education. In the orientation program apart from the members of the SMCs the local community too took keen interest in understanding the provisioning enshrined in Indian Constitution.

- d. **District level orientation with PRI members and education department functionaries held every six months:** Panchayat and the community is the key to this whole intervention. The association with the District Elementary Education Department is indeed the dividend. To garner the support of change, these two stakeholders aligned with the department for speedy redressal of the gaps duly recorded in the selected areas.
- e. **Workshop of parents on CFSS:** A three day workshop was held with parents on CFSS to enable them to understand what it means to have a safe and secure learning environment for children.
- f. **BRC level trainings on Social Audit with EVs and SMC Preraks:** These trainings were undertaken at the block level with the help of all 61 BRCs in the 6 districts.
- g. **Formation of 1464 Social Audit teams at the village level** to conduct Social Audits based on MHRD guidelines.

### 3. Public hearings in collaboration with SCPCR

Public hearings in the districts was one of the most important tools to reflect, record and document the gaps found in primary and upper primary schools. It indeed enabled a platform and juncture where the community people shared the gaps and grievances regarding appropriate functioning of schools before the District Magistrates and other key and

appropriate authorities. Furthermore, the registered cases were recorded for further course and plan of action.

### 4. Strong stakeholders' linkages

- a. **Formation of SMC federation through quarterly meetings-** Quarterly meetings of the federation pertaining to the SMCs were held in each district. The members shared their learnings and experiences as well as the challenges being faced by them to ensure an appropriate learning environment in the schools based on RTE Act.
- b. **Quarterly meetings of the Zila Baal Maitrik Vidyalaya Sangathan:** Establishment of Zila Baal Maitrik Vidyalaya Sangathan has proved to be as the true influencers in ensuring the educational rights of the children in all the districts. It also built a network of people working consistently in domain of child education.

### 5. Monthly meetings of Community based monitoring groups

Monthly meetings of community based monitoring groups were held in each district. The meetings aptly incorporated and reflected the faced challenges and more importantly the participants drew and chalked out local strategies to rectify the odds coming in the way.

- a. **Formation and functioning of Meena Manch in every school:** These meetings served as a platform to talk about adequate hygienic practices, gender equity and equality and the needs and essentials of protection issues of adolescent girls.

# 4

## IMPACT OF THE PROJECT

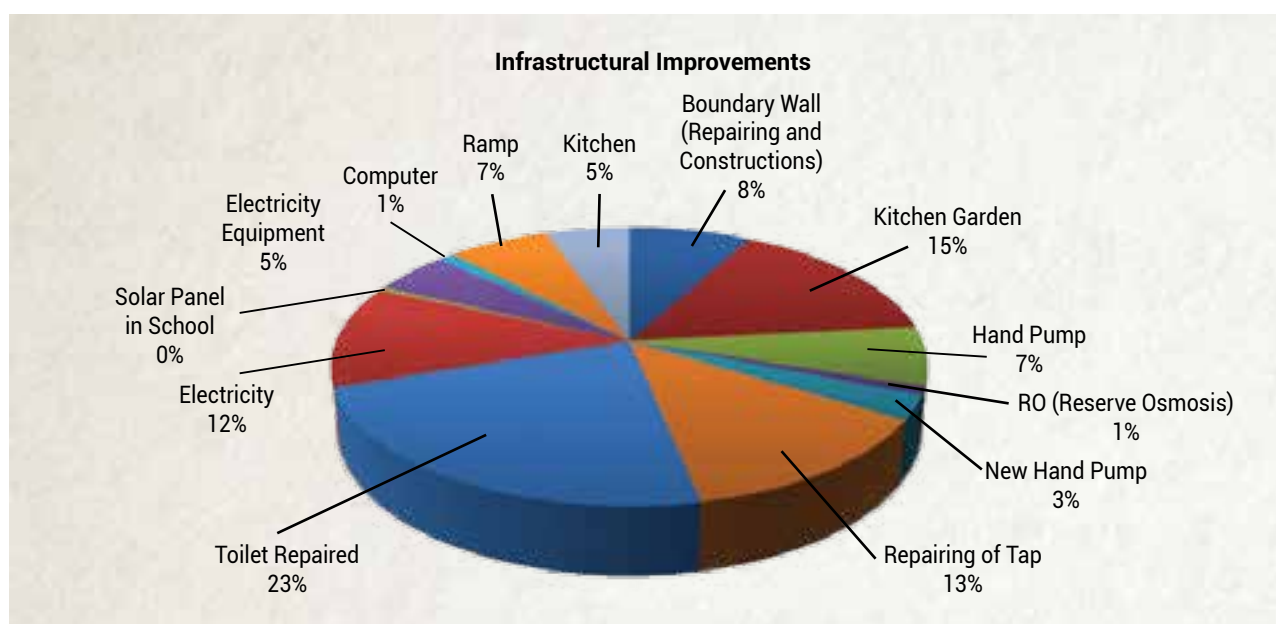
The project started with building linkages with the community as its core strength was to create community demand based child friendly school and system. The project strengthened their capacities by providing trainings on RTE and CFSS. Through regular and rigorous trainings and meetings the project successfully involved the members of the SMCs in non-project areas. Apart from it, the trainings related to SDPs and Social Audits also made significant changes in the mindset. The capacitated community members with active involvement of the Panchayat were able to raise the issues before the public officials. The intervention facilitated good relations with the district and state authorities to build an accountability structure for ensuring child friendly school and system. In order to bring changes in the elementary schools the project worked as a scaffolding framework to influence the SMC for preparing School Development Plans and conducting Social Audits. The community was empowered to consider issues of education as community issues rather

than only as problems of education. This helped in addressing the problems of access, retention and attendance at school. The networking with local authority aided in taking decisions related to school infrastructure improvements and the meetings with block administration, district administration, school and community ensured the process of school improvement, increase in enrolment and attendance. The fourteen months of intervention set in place a grievance redressal system through dialogues with the key stakeholders and pertinently that continues even after the project.

The project impact can be seen in two major areas:

### 1. Impact on School Development

The project intervention brought improvements in infrastructure. The crucial first step in improving the school environment was repairing the boundary walls and the school building, providing drinkable



water, repairing toilets and providing separate toilet facility for girls, installing solar panels and electricity supply to schools, repairing and construction of kitchen etc. The strategy to improve infrastructure was employed to make the learning environment safe for all children. Provisioning of separate toilets for girls enabled them to regularly attend the schools. Construction of boundary created a safe environment to the children. More significantly, the preparation of SDPs involved the members of the SMCs and the local community as well as the parents.

## 2. School Environment and Learning Environment

The project envisaged that a good school environment ensures a good learning environment. The concept of good school environment meant community support to the school to make school a safe and inclusive space. This included building ramps, leveling of ground, computer enabled smart classes, gardens, boundary walls and connectivity to school. The close involvement of community with schools made the children feel that the community cared for them.

### **Developing the school for their own Community**

*In the Islamnagar Block in Budaun, community meetings were regularly organized under Muskaan Programme in identified areas. Kareemayi is one such village in which teacher, Pradhan, SMC member and local community used to attend on regular basis. During meetings community and SMC members decided to do the best in their school so that they could encourage their children and ensure their regular attendance. As a result, the*

*members of the SMCs, teacher, Pradhan, and the local community members have taken joint initiatives and mobilized fund and constructed school boundary walls. The consistent small meetings with male and female SMC members proved to be the key changing agent and the desired results were visible in the primary school where the majority of the children belonged to the excluded communities. Leveling of ground was done with the joint efforts of community members and the wasteland was converted in to a beautiful playground. Saplings were also planted and now attendance rate is also increased.*

### **A Unique Experiment- Jan Pahal Radio Program**

*Shitkahwa is a Muslim dominated region under Sirsia block of district Shrawasti. The community is neglected and backward in terms of education. Muskaan project started its intervention in PS and UPS Shitkahwa. The project intensively worked to strengthen the members of the SMCs. The SMCs were given various trainings on RTE, CFSS, role and responsibilities of SMC etc. SMC Prerak, Mr. Mahkohli motivated the community. He ensured the SMC to listen to the radio program developed by SSA and to further plan to improve the functioning of school. This program was broadcasted twice in a week. The series of episodes dealt with empowering community and families to make schools responsive to children and to understand the role and responsibility of parents and school to provide education to all children. The SMC Prerak not only motivated the project intervention schools but also the non-intervention schools to listen to this unique radio program. Primary school Bandhusri and Godra are one of them. In these schools, though SMC were formed but it was not functional. The schools didn't have radio sets to listen to the SMC radio program. Mahkohli briefed the SMC members of the radio*



Private Schools closed



School Boundary Construction in Islam Nagar Block, Budaun

program and motivated the SMCs to purchase new radio set for schools. They purchased a new radio set for school and started following the aired episodes. After this, the SMC members took some initiatives to improve the conditions of school like ensuring cleaning of school premises, repairing of boundary walls, availability of radio for school with the help of Gram Pradhan, repairing of hand pump for drinking water facility, regularity of teachers in school, enrolment and regular attendance of children.

### **SMC takes Responsibility for School Infrastructure Improvement**

The elementary schools in Dataganj block of Budaun district were in dismal condition. In upper primary school of Dheerpur village infrastructural facilities were not available as per RTE norms. The upper primary school had no boundary wall and toilets for children. The hand pump for drinking water was damaged. The SMC was constituted in this school but the members did not understand their roles and responsibilities. The team of SMC Preraks held several meetings in the village. These meetings were attended by the SMC President, officials from the District Elementary Education Department, teachers and Gram Pradhan were present. In the meeting, the Gram Pradhan, Mrs. Omwati Pathak and SMC members assured they would put all their efforts to provide requisite facilities.

The SMC members along with teacher, Harish Chandra Saxena of upper primary school, Dheerpur strived hard to install new hand pump, a functional toilet and a boundary wall. The core strength of this dynamic change was the SMC that ultimately recognized and understood its responsibilities. Now they are aware of the RTE Act, 2009 guaranteeing

free and compulsory education to all the children between the age group of 6-14 years. The parents of the school going children are happy to witness this new scenario.

## **3. Enrolment and Attendance**

The number of out-of-school children enrolled under the Muskaan intervention is 14961. Many factors have contributed to the success of getting 14961 children enrolled in schools. These are improvement of infrastructure, recruitment of teachers, regularity of teachers, provision of separate toilets, provision of regular nutritious Mid-day meals etc. On the completion of its first phase the attendance of children improved by 30%. A few stories show how the community worked in all aspects towards ensuring maximum enrolments and attendance.

INDICATORS	NUMBERS
Enrollment of out of School Children	14961
Attendance:	30%

### **Improved Enrolment and Attendance due to Improved Mid-day Meals**

Bhanga-Kalan primary school is one of the schools of Tulsipur block in Balrampur district. In this school the enrolment and attendance was very poor and MDM food was not regularly distributed to the children. Though the School Management Committees are supposed to monitor the functionality of elementary schools but here SMCs was non-functional before Muskaan intervention. SMC was unaware about its roles and responsibilities.



Installed Handpump in Dataganj, Budaun





Now the SMC members take initiatives and monitor the MDM quality and quantity. The SMC members have taken the responsibility of distribution of the MDM. They regularly come to monitor the quality, quantity and regularity of the food. They worked on the plan that a team of two or three SMC members depending on their availability would regularly visit the primary school in order to supervise its distribution. Now the quality has improved and the children are happy to eat the food provided. The attendance has become more regular due to improved mid-day meal regularity.

### **Improved enrolment due to the knowledge of RTE Act, 2009**

Chaugwa is one of the remotest villages of district Shrawasti. The primary occupation of the people is to work as a labor or are engaged in daily wages work (agricultural work, masons, carpet industry workers etc.) since they are deprived of government schemes and policies. Prathamik Pathshala, Chaugwa is the sole educational hub in this village. A village girl named Saakshi Paswan aged 7 years was unable to go to school because the school authorities told her that she was underage.

When DEHAT organization came to know regarding this, they told the SMC members about the norms of RTE Act 2009. As per RTE norms, the girl could not be denied admission. Then all the SMC members along with the SMC president met the school teacher and reminded him the RTE norms and told him to enrol the girl.

### **Separate toilet facilities improved enrolment of girls**

This story belongs to girls of Aant Gadi Saura upper primary schools of Mall block in Lucknow district. Toilet is very important component in schools' infrastructure upon which depends the retention of girls in schools. Before the intervention, this school did not have a separate toilet facility for girls due to which drop-out rate of girls increase after their puberty. They had discussed this with their teachers many times over but there was no action.

After orientation meetings with the project team, the Pradhan and SMC members jointly took initiatives to resolve the problem. A new toilet was constructed by Pradhan and attendance of girls also improved steadily.

## **4. SMC-Panchayat-Community-Local Authority Collaboration**

This was the main thrust of the project for bringing long-term and sustainable change in education. The collaborations between the community and SMC were the first line of influence and then were the collaboration with Panchayat and SMCs, between CBO, CSO and SMC federations. The SMC federation members met every quarter to study the impact of their work. This was the hub of idea sharing for bringing in sustainable change. The project consciously did not intervene in the day to day functioning of the school. Its aim was to develop structural mechanisms for grievance redressal for developing child friendly school systems. These structural interventions in the community were made by bringing together community members, SMC members, Panchayat in village education council meetings. It developed structures called CBO (community based organizations) comprising of community organizations like the micro-financing units, Samitis in villages, women's groups, farmer federation) and CSO (civil society organizations) who had a dialogue with the SMC federation members to learn about the provisions in the RTE Act and on ways to access and exercise the rights therein. The trainings on approaching levels of authority sequentially for accessing provisions and also important and connected Rights like Right to Information were shared in these forums. The strength of this collaboration was seen in all districts.

### **Community Action for SMC**

In village Gurauti, the panchayat Pradhan (village headman) did not support the school SMC. He did not attend the meetings nor did he assure extending support to the SMC. The community was skeptical of him, as he did not share the budgetary details for school spending. He did not even offer to extend support for the infrastructure or repair of school. The SMC, were aware of the budgetary provisions within the School Development Plan for the school through the trainings received under the Muskaan Project. They now knew that there was a provision of Rs. 8 lakh for school repair (boundary wall and leveling) but they did not see any ground work being done. They posed this question to the gram Pradhan and he averted the query. The SMC and community, in the Zila Baal Maitrik Vidyalaya Sangathan discussed this problem and came to a decision to file an RTI against

*the Pradhan. The RTI application required them to file pattas (land agreements). The printing and compiling costed 25,000 rupees. The community members collected this money and collected a sack full of land agreements to file the RTI stating that they wanted to know of the status of boundary wall construction and ground leveling work of the specified area. (Source: Interview with the District Project Coordinator-Qutubuddin)*

There were more levels of network developed for collaboration. The local authority network of education department, electricity department, water department, labor department were crucial to link resources for the school. The baseline report showed the dismal condition of toilets in all district of the project. These required the convergence of Public Works Department as well as the Water Management Department. Therefore a system of quarterly convergence meeting was planned at district levels in each quarter. The SMC and community posed their concerns at the meetings. They shared their work in these meetings. The attending department officials while addressing the people and offered solutions to take the work ahead. In these meetings the communities discussed strategies to resolve issues at the community level.

For instance, In Mirzapur, they discussed that the community was economically backward and they did not agree to send their children to school. They wanted to help the parents get livelihoods so their children could not study. The labor department officials suggested that the parents and youth from the area could be offered jobs. Thereafter the SPS, the nodal working organization working under the project approached the families and offered to employ them through the opportunities available from the labor department. This made a positive impact on children's enrolment. The families also started realizing that the youths are being employed as computer operators and the others are getting the jobs as paid labors. They were encouraged to send their children regularly to school. (Source: Interview with District Coordinator Sandhya)

The Elementary Education Department and its collaboration with the community strengthened the community taking steps and initiatives to establish child friendly schools. This could be seen in almost all districts where there was a shortage of teachers. The community and SMC wrote applications for recruitment of teachers and it was mostly received

well. In all six districts 1997 such applications were registered for deputing the teachers and 225 teachers were recruited with these applications. The ratio of pupil-teacher was appropriated in most of the schools based on the RTE provisioning.

## **5. Private School Reversal**

The private school and government school divide is glaring in India. It is a known fact that parents choose private schools over government schools. The reason being that the private schools have better infrastructure, pupil-teacher ratio and have regular classes. Given well informed SMCs and community support, the government schools in all districts became well-equipped and functional. The teacher recruitments increased and the classes were regularly held. The mid-day meals were regularized. There are several anecdotes from the field stating how parents were motivated to send their children to government schools with improvements brought about by the Muskaan Project.

### **A functional School Management Committee Closed the Private School in Budaun**

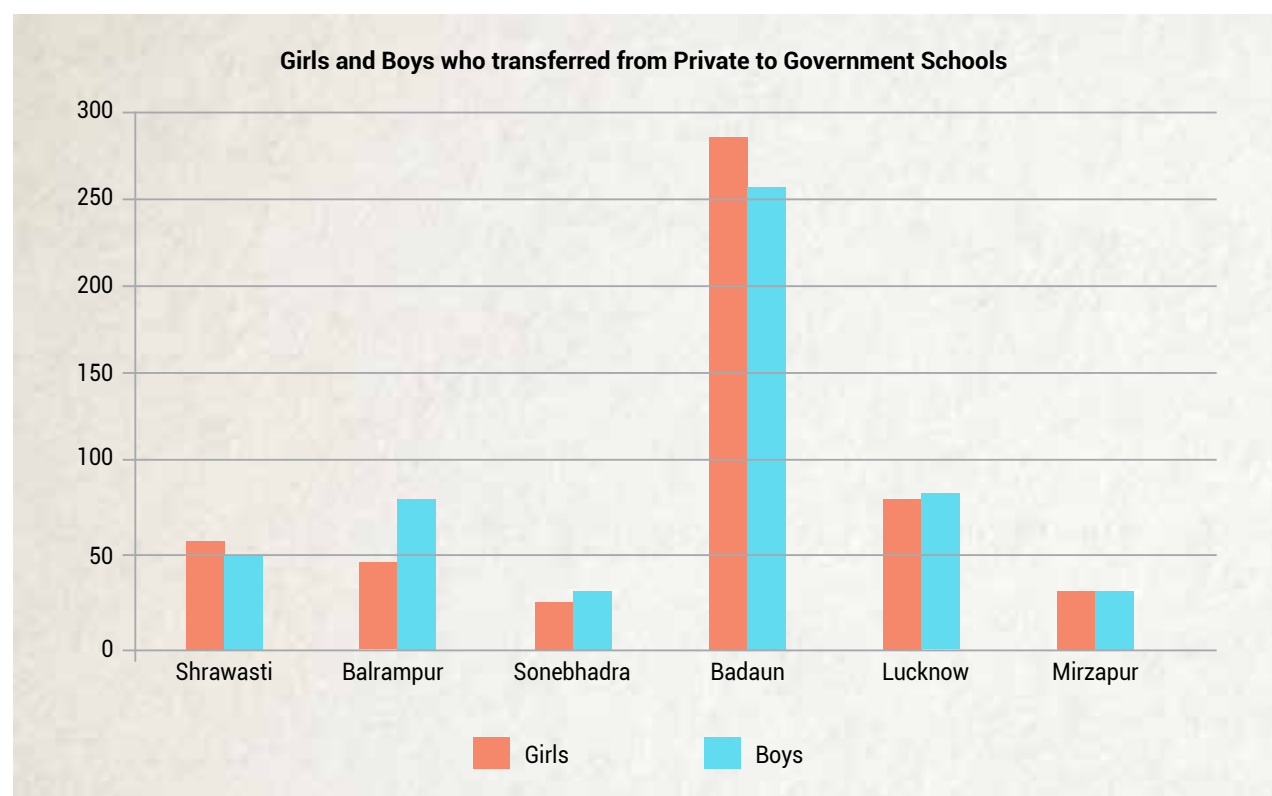
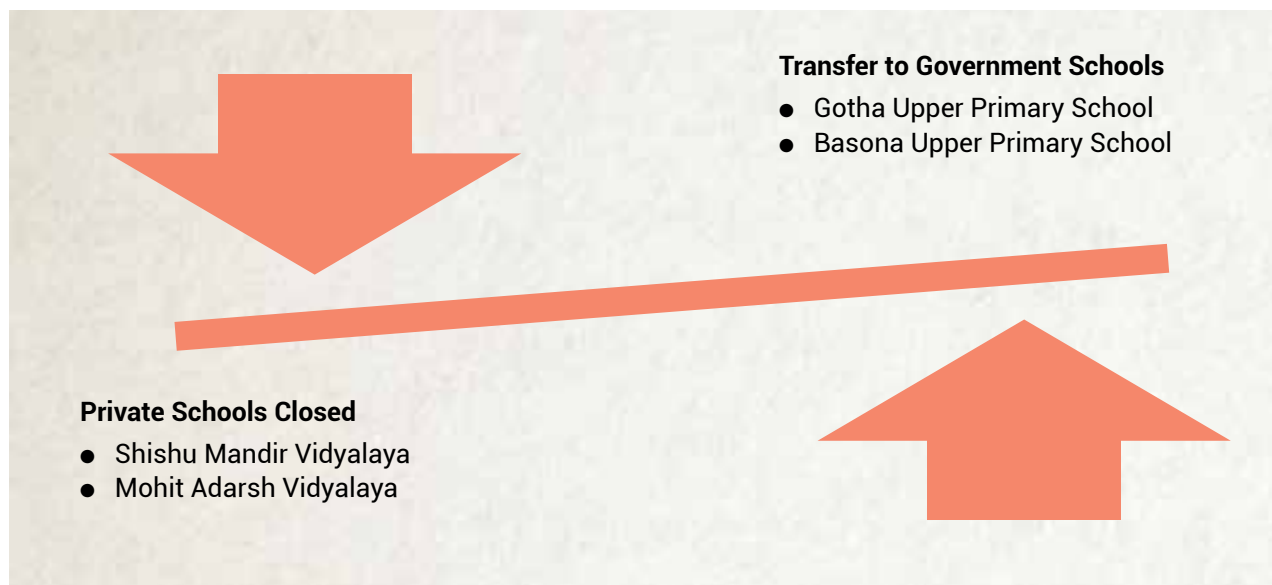
*Upper Primary School, Gotha (Wazirganj block) and Basoma (Ujhani) in Budaun district are one of the selected schools under Muskaan project. There are many other private schools in this village. The Muskaan team facilitated the formation of School Management Committee. The School Management committee (SMC) of this school is active and functional. The SMC conducted a survey in Gotha and Basoma village. The survey was related to the children going to school either in private or in government run. Out of school children were also identified in the survey. The survey revealed that 65 children in this village were going to various private schools. Upper Primary Schools in Gotha and Basoma are model schools. The SMC of this school went door to door, had series of meetings and communications with the parents of the children enrolled in Shishu Mandir Vidyalaya and Mohit Adarsh Vidyalaya, one of the upper primary schools in this village. The SMC invited their parents to the upper primary school and had an interface with the teachers and the children. Motivated by the learning and school environment, they decided to enroll their children in this UPS. Finally, 46 children left the Shishu Mandir Vidyalaya*



and enrolled in upper primary school Gotha and 26 children left Mohit Adarsh Vidyalaya and enrolled upper primary school in Basoma. The scenario has changed eventually. Shishu Mandir Vidyalaya and Mohit Adarsh Vidyalaya are closed now. The village head of Gotha enrolled his own child who was earlier studying in private school it also motivated

the other parents whose children were studying in private school.

There were 1323 children (650 girls and 673 boys) who transferred from Private to government schools with the project intervention. This is depicted in the graph below:



## 6. Promoting inclusion and addressing discrimination

A strong impact of the project intervention was that it consciously and specifically addressed inclusion and discrimination. At the beginning of the baseline survey, the indicators on toilet cleaning, cleaning of premises by children was inserted to understand a causal link between discrimination and these practices.

The project intervention presented a mixed response to this assumption. Whereas in Balrampur the practice was not discriminatory, at Sonebhadra this was discriminatory for the lower caste children. In Mirzapur district it was discriminatory. But all district coordinators share that these practices have been stopped in the school. The reasons are to do with discussions regarding role of school and teachers in providing a safe environment to children to study, due to recruitment of cleaning staff, due to community involvement and improved awareness of the parents.

### Addressing discriminatory practices

*The interventions have led to curbing discrimination at school level due to improved systems and coordinators are hopeful that it will be carried back to the community. They share the incidences where teachers used to ask for water from the upper caste children but after the project intervention have stopped doing so (Source: interview with coordinators).*

*While addressing discrimination was a concern, making school inclusive was another. In order to include girls the Education Volunteers, SMC Preraks and Pradhan held regular meetings with the community. Door- to- door advocacy for enrolment of girls was taken up in all districts.*

### Muslim families mobilized to enroll the girl children

*In Balrampur district the Muslim girls were never enrolled in schools. The project team visited their home and talked to their parents. They were accompanied by the School Principal from the same community. This had a positive impact on the families who later enrolled 7-8 girls to school.*

## Active Meena Manch in all Schools

When the project began, there were hardly any active Meena Manch forums for girls. In these districts with lower literacy rates of women than men, these forums were a space to make schools more inclusive for girls. It was seen that girls dropped out of school when they reached puberty. These forums were a space to share and engage with issues around gender, discrimination and illiteracy. Led by adolescent girls, the forum decided of ways to help the community.

The Meena Manch met twice a week to discuss issues of enrolment and drop-out, to talk about issues of gender, adolescence and sexuality. Reports from Mirzapur suggest that school teachers did not talk about reproductive health issues in the classroom. They disliked distributing sanitary napkins in the classroom. And if it were a male teacher, he would ask the mid-day meal cook to distribute it on his behalf. The teachers, who distributed it themselves, never spoke about how to maintain personal hygiene and safe disposal of napkins. The girls did not know whom to ask and they were ashamed of their sexuality. The discussions at the Meena Manch helped them come to terms with their anxieties. They now knew why they felt anxious regarding themselves. They could understand that the legal age of marriage was 18 years. Now the girls started telling their families that they wished to study longer and get married at 18 years. Their families who would otherwise get them married at 14 years now get them married at 16 years. Sometimes they are married at 16 years and are sent to their husband's home (gauna: a tradition of sending the bride to grooms house) at the age of 18 years. It definitely has the adverse impact on the lives of young girls.

### 3 Drop-out Muslim girls enrolled in school

In Budaun district, the project team counseled the parents with help of the community. They were invited to discussions and forum meetings. As a result, 19 girls were enrolled in school.

MEENA MANCH	
Number of Meena Manch formed or functional	1812
Community meetings details	3672
Parents meetings details	3343
SMC meetings details	3617



Girl enrollment

## 7. Community participation creating demand for Child Friendly Schools and Systems

The mainstay of the Project Muskaan was to develop systems to facilitate empowerment of communities by building their knowledge base about the RTE Act, their roles and responsibilities given therein and possibilities of action given the existing state and civil structures. This empowerment was a powerful tool for bringing sustainable improvement to school system. It enabled the community to realize that the school is theirs- it is a joint responsibility. This understanding made the school system more accountable and open to improvement.

### **Ensuring accountability of teachers**

*The conditions of the schools in Kidyana village of Ikauna block Shrawasti district were extremely unsatisfactory where the opening and closing of the elementary school were not appropriate as per RTE norms. The teachers were not regular in attending school and Mid-day meal was also not regularized according to the decided menu. As a result attendance ratio was very low. In primary school of Kidyana village SMC was not formed as per RTE norms. Muskaan team sensitized the entire community by organizing several meetings in the village and aware them about the guidelines of SMC formation which has been passed by Education department for the formation of new SMC in every school of U.P. During the meetings role and responsibility of SMC members were briefed. Basically it was found that SMC members were unaware about their roles and responsibilities. With*

*the help of the Muskaan team they came to know about the norms and policy of RTE and also about their participation in school. They were motivated by the meeting. As a result SMC and community member jointly take initiative by the involvement of teacher and organized a meeting with Pradhan regarding regular opening and punctuality of teacher in school. A jointly written letter by SMC and Pradhan regarding this was submitted to ABSA. After relentless efforts a consensus was built and the community went to meet BSA at district Headquarter. As a result of consistent efforts, in the month of November major problem were solved. The entire village thanked the Muskaan team not only for changing the scenario but also for upholding the dreams and aspirations of their children.*

Another forum was the grievance redressal forum (*Jan Sunwai*) that built strong accountability systems and made state departments, education officers, local authorities and schools directly answerable to the public. These forums generated transparency and gave platforms for discussion of issues affecting school. These were addressed to the key stakeholders who had the power to take action. The presence of large public demanding quality improvement in schools became a powerful tool for SMCs to move beyond their scope of activity within the school. These hearings gave them directions and suggestions to make it possible for the SMC to get problems resolved. As this was done in presence of SCPCR, Education Department Officials, Panchayat members and District Officials, these officials became more responsive and due actions were taken on the demands raised.

An excerpt of the *Jan Sunwai* is given below to see the range of problems raised and consensus reached for their solution. More than building accountability, these forums were spaces for joint resolution of issues to make schools responsive to the demands of the children.

Apart from these open forums where problems were discussed and solutions warranted, there was system of consultation, discussion and writing applications to solve the issues. While the applications written for deputing teachers to the Block Education Officer (*Basic Shiksha Adhikari*) were 1997 (as on record), there were countless letters written for making improvements in infrastructure, securing electricity and water to schools, ensuring nutritious mid-day meals etc.



School, Budaun



School, Budaun



Functional Hand pump

Following are letters submitted to the District Administrators by the SMC President and SMC members of Block Ikauna and Jamunha in Shrawasti District. These letters were responded to and the hand-pumps requested were installed at the respective schools.

These forums also engage with drop-out children and never enrolled children to get them into

schools. They go for community visits with their teachers.

The impact of the project has reached 6 districts where communities and SMC members know how to approach state and civil departments in writing, through consultations and discussions to address the problems faced at school level.



5

# ACHIEVEMENT OF THE MUSKAAN

The overall achievements in six districts under Muskaan are shown in the table below:

April 2016-March 2017

Snap Shots From Muskaan Project	
Indicators	Numbers
Enrollment of out of School Children	14961
Attendance:	30%
Improving Infrastrurture and Other Facilities:	
Boundary Wall (Repairing and constructions)	355
Kitchen garden	689
Hand Pump	308
RO (Reverse Osmosis)	43
New Hand pump	125
Repairing of tap	579
Toilets repaired	1032
Electricity	532
Solar Panel in school	17
Electricity Equipment	223
Computer	46
Ramp	294
Kitchen	244
Mid Day Meal Regularized	1405
Teacher Deputation or Rationalisation	
Rationalization of teachers	225
Application registered for deputing the teachers	1997
Community Contribution for school	
Plantation	903
Fencing	143
Levelling of ground	360
White wash	1345
Playground	280
Road Repairing	255
MEENA MANCH	
Number of Meena Manch formed or functional	2176



Total 1323 children who have been studying in privately run schools have been enrolled in government run schools. Out of this strength, there are 532 girls and 538 boys. The table below reflects the district wise distribution of enrolled children.

## District-wise Achievements

This section presents a district-wise detail of Muskaan intervention and its impact on making child friendly school systems.

### Badaun

Badaun has a literacy rate of 52 %, the literacy rate of men stands at 61.38% while that of women is 41.6 %. The literacy rate amongst marginalized communities- SC- 48.98% and ST- 88.46. The district has a total of 2460 schools out of which 2397 schools are in rural areas. There are 1748 primary schools and 649 upper primary schools.

The major issues during the baseline survey were:

- 29.5 % primary schools and 11.6 upper primary schools didn't have teacher wise classrooms
- 30.7 primary and 31.3 % upper primary schools didn't have a ramp for children with disability
- 35.7 % primary and 52.5 % upper primary schools didn't have a boundary wall
- 95.8% of the total children who dropped out of the primary schools belonged to ST 102.4 % of drop out children in Upper primary were ST and
- 105.6% girls dropped out in upper primary school

At the end of the project classroom, boundary walls and ramps were constructed, The numbers of children enrolled increased. Attendance was improved to a large extent and retention of girls was seen. The achievements of Badaun can be seen as:

The success story of Badaun began with establishing linkages within the community in order to make the change sustained. The Shramik Samaj Shiksha Sansthan worked as a partner to improve access and quality of education. The organization's own strength of by working on issues of child survival, development, protection and participation, child labour and gender issues was helpful in transacting the ideas enshrined in the RTE Act 2009. The organization conducted a school chalo abhiyan with the school going children for 100% enrolment. It works with the community and parents to motivate them to be active stakeholders in education. A series of workshops with the community and panchayats led to gradual but certain changes. We will share two case studies from Badaun- Upper Primary School, Gotha and Primary School, Lahua to show the impact of the Muskaan Project. The two cases are discussed also because the ripple effect of one school brought changes in the other.

The community was encouraged to contribute towards a smart-class for their children. The children and teachers alike felt motivated to use technology in classroom. Shivam too heard about the developments and started coming to school. like him, other children also started pouring in. this was a motivation for the teachers who started taking interest in teaching active learners. The reciprocation led to an engaged learning experience. So much so that Shivam started doing very well at

#### ENROLMENT FROM PRIVATE TO GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS

Sl.NO	District	Enrolment	
		GIRLS	BOYS
1	Shrawasti	61	53
2	Balrampur	49	83
3	Sonebhadra	27	33
4	Budaun	280	251
5	Lucknow	82	84
6	Mirzapur	33	34
		532	538
Total enrolments- 1070			

## Gotha

Shivam, a young boy, lost his parents at a young age. He lives with his grandmother in Gotha. He lacked motivation to go to school. He did not want to attend school. Going to school meant following a routine of packing bags, reaching school and sitting in a dreary classroom. His non-attendance became a cause for concern for the community. They counseled him to attend school as it would help him get educated but he would not listen. His grandmother was worried too for she knew her grandson was intelligent. It took several days, collective planning and sensitive thinking by the community to make the school an inviting and engaging space. The education volunteers (preraks) talked of the child friendly school systems to the community. They assisted in bringing the SMC members and panchayat members together to develop the School Development Plans. The community realized that the school infrastructure was lacking. It did not have water supplies. The community offered a submersible pump to the school. Now the children did not have to worry about carrying water to school. Availability of water was a boon for the school garden could be watered now. The children started taking interest in weeding, sowing and maintaining their garden. They grow vegetables and are proud to share that their mid-day meal is cooked out of their school grown vegetable. The children plant one tree each on their birthdays. This is to encourage plantation of trees. A sense of environmental conservation is inculcated in the eco-club activities. The government contributed to develop this club. The club is active and managed by the children.



Gotha Upper Primary School

school. His attendance increased sharply and so did his learning level. He was happiest when he won the national level science competition. It was not his prize alone; it was everybody's prize. It was a testimony to the effort of the School Management Committee, teachers, local authority and the community. The collaborative effort to make the school a joyful place to be has made the children dreamers.

The functional school, smart classrooms, improved teacher-pupil ratio, motivated teachers and rising attendance of children made the SMC members certain that the government school enrolment would rise steadily and that it could be a model school of the village.

Three years ago there were 59 students in the school. Now the school has 124 students (59 boys and 65 girls). There are three teachers and one head master. The pupil-teacher ratio was not as per RTE norms. Therefore the SMC decided to engage two volunteers. An additional teacher was recruited from funds donated by a foreign official who came to visit the school and appreciated the community engagement with the school.

Few ex-students (girls) volunteer their time in the school library. Girls who volunteer their time in the

library have studied in the school. They share that they were encouraged to come to the school as there were special provisions for girls. They had a separate toilet for girls, a hand-pump with regular water supply where soap was always available. The community approached the PNB for getting the handwash facility installed.

The Meena Manch for girls was a space to share and engage with issues around gender, discrimination and illiteracy. Led by adolescent girls, the forum decided of ways to help the community. The Meena Manch at Gotha was actively engaged in literacy classes for adults.

Promoting inclusion, the community did a survey and got enrolled two specially abled children.

The library was built with the funds under Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan. The district magistrate made funds available for the repair of courtyard. The local administration has donated a science lab for the school. The children share that they like to attend the science lab sessions as they get to do experiments.

In the school, one can observe children eating together. There is no segregated seating. The children share that they like coming to school as they have friends, good teachers, facility for playing, computer classes, library full of books and activities and smart classrooms. They even appreciate the facilities of fan and tiled toilets.

Many of the children enrolled in the school are first generation learners. They were out of school. They are enrolled in the school after the SMC of Gotha did a survey to tabulate the number of out of school children and enumerate the children attending private schools. The survey revealed that 65 children in this village were going to various private schools.

The SMC of the school went door to door, had a series of meetings with the parents and children not enrolled or not attending and those enrolled in the private school (Shishu Mandir Vidyalaya. The SMC invited their parents to the upper primary school and had an interface with the teachers and children enrolled in Shishu Mandir Vidyalaya and Mohit Adarsh Vidyalaya (another private primary school in the area). The village head of Gotha shifted his own child from a private school to Gotha primary school. This motivated the other parents and very soon 46 children of Shishu Mandir Vidyalaya joined

गोथा प्राथमिक विद्यालय (गोथा प्राथमिक विद्यालय)			
क्र.सं.	नाम	वय	लिंग
6	1.6	18	13
7	17	24	11
8	15	23	13
9	53	45	53

## Lahua

The Principal of Lahua Primary School is a dedicated worker who is critical in bringing about a change in the school. The school is located a few kilometers away from the main road. This inaccessibility makes it difficult for the teacher recruitment and enrolment. However with consistent effort of the Principal and sustained efforts of Muskaan the school now has child friendly environment. This includes infrastructural facilities like fans in each classroom, a leveled playground, brightly coloured walls, group washing facility, safe drinking water, hand pump, tiled toilets and a kitchen garden.

The school has installed solar light panels with the help of community. When asked to share his experience of working at the Muskaan Project, the Principal, Shri Mukesh Kumar shares his initial hesitation at working with the team. He was skeptical and doubted the project. It was hard for the volunteers to convince him. It was when he heard of the project from the nearby village that it had a ripple effect. He too wanted his school to have 100% retention. He started engaging with the shiksha preraks who shared the plan and built the capacity of the school staff and the community. Once the Principal was convinced, the community became receptive and accepting.



The capacity building and networking of stakeholders influenced them to think of making school a child friendly place. Discussions about provisions of the RTE Act 2009, with the community have brought a positive influence on adults in general. The SMC members, specially parents share that engagement with the Muskaan has brought discipline to the institution. The divide between the school and community that existed before is no longer there. Now the community offers support in terms of material as well as developing plans. The community feels that all the children attending school are their responsibility. They discuss attendance at the SMC meetings and children who attain 100% attendance are awarded after the meeting. The average number

of children getting rewards for attendance is 15 every month. These rewards are arranged by the members of the SMC.



The children have a ownership of the school too. They take the keys to the class- rooms every morning, place their bags and do their prayers. They have learnt to follow the schedule of play and study. They enjoy the activities in the classes. They enjoy growing vegetables in the garden and proudly announce that these are



cooked for the mid-day meal. The mid-day meal is cooked in a neat and big kitchen that was built for the purpose.

The classroom pedagogy is suited to the age of the children. They play word games, sing rhymes and baal geet. They have a baal sabha (children committee meeting) where they conduct various activities for children. The community has contributed games and sports equipment.

The pupil teacher ratio in the school is 85:3- less than the RTE norm. The SMC members shared that they have communicated this to the Block Development Officer in a recent meeting and are hopeful that their need will be addressed.

primary school, Gotha. Similar results were seen in other parts of Badaun district. Data shows 280 girls and 251 boys shifted from private school to government school.

The community and the children want a secondary school in the village so girls can study beyond elementary school. They are hesitant to send the girls to schools away from the village.

### **Installation of Hand Pump**

Narokhar village has one primary and one upper primary school. The primary school has 131 students enrolled (52 boys and 79 girls) and the

upper primary school has 58 students (25 boys and 33 girls). Both the schools share their boundary and they had a common handpump. The water from the handpump was not safe to drink as the water had high iron content and the children fell ill after having the water. The basic infrastructural facilities of the school were lacking.

The block coordinator discussed these issues with the teachers, parents, SMC members and the panchayat members. The agenda for the meeting was- getting boring done for the hand pump and installing a new hand pump. The SMC president and vice-president took cognizance and asked the principal to take responsive action. The principal suggested that the task falls under the responsibility of the Pradhan (village headman). The village pradhan readily came for the meeting when called. He assured that the handpump would be replaced. Now the school has a new handpump.

### **Baburi**

Baburi village has one primary and one upper primary school. There are 104 students (41 boys and 63 girls) in the primary school and 60 students (32 girls and 30 boys) in the upper primary school.



## Sonebhadra

Sonebhadra, is a tribal district. It is bordered by four states- Bihar, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh. It is a part of the red corridor. The average literacy of Sonebhadra is 64.03 (74.92 for males and 52.14 for females). As per 2011 Census 83.12% population of Sonebhadra lives in villages. Literacy rate in rural areas is 59.60%.

The baseline report showed that

- Sonebhadra has the least number of playgrounds,
- Sonebhadra has the maximum number of students cleaning the school themselves.
- 49% of schools do not have a separate toilet facility for girls.
- Pupil teacher ratio was found to be 1:65.

The NCPCR conducted inspection in the naxal-affected areas of Sonebhadra shows major gaps in primary and upper-primary education. The large population is dependent on labor based employment. The families often send the boys to cities for earning at a young age. The social workers of the Kalyan Gramudyog Sewa Ashram work to prevent child labor and to provide livelihood to the parents to address this concern (source: coordinator of Shrawasti). The other major concern in Sonebhadra was lack of schools. Where schools existed, there was problem of inadequate pupil-teacher ratio, issues of non-receipt of scholarships, irregularities in the school with respect to mid-day meal, staff behavior, insufficient supplies of uniform, ill-maintained toilets etc. The report recommended an immediate restoration of services at schools, building new schools and mapping of out of school children.

In Sonebhadra, Action Aid partnered with Jan Kalyan Gramudyog Sewa Ashram to plan interventions in community and schools. Jan Kalyan Gramudyog Sewa Ashram works in the area of children, dalit welfare, education and literacy, health and nutrition etc. The organization, as per process built capacities of community for making the schools CFSS.

At the time of survey, the SMCs were established but they were unaware of their role and responsibility. They were created as the RTE had mandated it. When the Project began, the SMC members realized that the SMCs were not functional and needed support. The teachers who formed the SMC were apprehensive of opening it to public as they were afraid of being held accountable for. The interventions to build capacity of the SMC and improve its relation with the community took a while here. Initially the teachers did not want to show the budgetary allocations and planning of the School Development. It took consistent effort and meetings with the SMC and panchayat to improve this process.

With due efforts, some infrastructural additions were made to the school.



There are 2 teachers in primary school and upper primary school each. At the time of the baseline survey:

- The teacher student ratio in the primary school was insufficient.
- A large number of children attended private school.
- The basic infrastructural facility of the school was not good.

The members of the school administration, SMC prerak and the village education committee organized a meeting to discuss enrolment and attendance. All members committed that they



would mobilise families from their respective blocks to send their children to school. SMC President and Vice President took the responsibility to motivate parents of the 27 children in their block attending private school to get transferred to government school. They also got 4 out of school children enrolled in the government school. Now the primary school has 135 students (55 boys and 78 girls) instead of 104.

After the Muskaan initiative the enrolment in primary school Baburi increased but the number of teachers in the school remained same as before. There were two teachers for 135 students. The pupil-teacher ratio was 1:62 which was insufficient as per the RTE Act 2009. Of the two teachers, in August, one was transferred to another school and only one remained. The classes could not be held, as it was not possible for one teacher to hold classes for all 135 students. This prompted the project coordinator of Muskaan to draw the attention of SMC members to this fact. The SMC members responded by holding a meeting and taking this issue on priority. This was discussed at the meeting and the SMC wrote a letter to the Block Education Officer. The officer responded positively and two new teachers were recruited by September 2016. Now there are three teachers for 135 students which is below the RTE norms (of 5 teachers for up to 150 students) but it is a step in the direction of addressing the problem and also making the community accountable for the low teacher-pupil ratio.

## Shrawasti

Shrawasti's geographical position poses a challenge to its stability. It is frequently flooded every year due to lack of embankments at the River Rapti. During monsoon, many kilometers of villages are engulfed in the waters of River Rapti causing damage to life, property and land.

It is the minority concentrated backward district of Uttar Pradesh. According to a report of minority concentrated districts, Shrawasti is one of the most backward districts in eight indicators specified by Ministry of Minority Affairs (the eight indicators being electricity, toilet facilities in the houses, pucca houses, literacy rate, female literacy rates, safe drinking water, work participation and female work participation rate).

There are fewer primary schools (57.82) and high school/intermediate colleges (2.55) per lakh of population, much lower than the state average (78 and 8 respectively). The literacy rate of the district is lower than the state average.

The literacy rate plays a crucial role in the development of overall socio-economic condition of the people in society. The data shows low level of literacy among all communities (41%).

The findings of the baseline report are:

- There are more number of girls than boys enrolled in schools.
- The pupil teacher ratio is inappropriate
- Low rates of attendance (50%)
- It has lowest enrolment percentage of girls as compared to other districts (48%) though the percentage of attendance of boys is high (52%).
- 68% of the toilets are non-functional
- Severe lack of water facility in toilets (88%)
- Meena Manch were not very active in Shrawasti

The poverty of community in Shrawasti poses the greatest challenge for enabling the children attend schools. A large number of children are sent to the cities for earning money. When the project team went to survey the community and motivate them to send children to school, the families asked them if they would get money in return. It took time to convince them of the Right to Free and Compulsory Education for all children and parents own responsibility to do so. The parents were convinced but they negotiated their children's time. Now the children attend school during the day and join their parents for work during the afternoons. The organization connected with the Sahri Ajivika Kendra official, Sudhir who helped the parents get employed as labor to help them sustain their families. This is the essence of the Muskaan. The project is not a single-minded intervention in school to improve school only. It aims to impact the community and make various authorities accountable to the people.

The coordinator shares that the initial capacity building sessions on RTE Act were very helpful for the community as they understood the system for getting things done. They knew the right authority to be spoken to for issues concerning electricity, water, employment, infrastructure, teacher deployment etc.

The awareness camps and surveys were first step to address the problem of children enrolment.

### **Children Enrolments at Kishunpur**

In upper primary school, Kishunpur Chorwabhari, SMC meeting was held where all members and head master discussed problem of student attendance and enrolment. SMC members decided to list the out of school children who were not attending school regularly or were never enrolled. They had a meeting to discuss





how to increase attendance and enrolment ratio. The vice president of the SMC took initiative and prepared a list by doing a door-to-door survey. He motivated the parents of these children and told them of the provisions under the RTE Act.

### **Retired Teachers fill-in as Shiksha Preraks**

There was a huge gap in the teacher-pupil ratio in Kishunpur. The vice-president of SMC, SMC members and head master took the initiative of calling all the retired teachers of the region. It was decided that each retired teacher would devote one hour daily for teaching children. Thus a pool of teachers was created. This was called the Shiksha Prerna Samiti. This creative and innovative effort emerged out of the collaboration and community support. The Samiti helped increase attendance and enrolment too. In the upper primary school there were 90 students but only 25-30 students attended school and in primary school 151 students whose attendance percentage was 35%. Now enrolment in primary and upper primary school is 187 and 117. The attendance in the two schools has reached 95%.



The SMC has started sending application to the district education authorities demanding teachers, boundary wall, electricity connection and drinking water facility. The SMC members have started motivating the members of other SMCs in the nearby areas.

### **From Private to Government Schools**

The upper primary school in Jag Dispur Village was in dismal condition. The attendance percentage was very low due to the lack of participation and awareness among the SMC members. The SMC members with duties to monitor the school neither were aware of their own responsibilities nor aware of the provisions of the RTE Act 2009. A majority of community works as daily wage laborers. They lacked motivation to send their siblings to study. Most of the children went to private schools to study as these schools had better infrastructure. The SMC was formed only on paper. There were no meetings and no community involvement. Under the Muskaan project parents, SMC and community was brought together and made aware of their roles and responsibilities. After a few regular meetings, the SMC meetings happened regularly. Now all members, pradhan and community members participated and discussed issues concerning school and education. The SMC members decided to list down the out-of-school children and children with low attendance. Regular meetings with parents were done to send the children regularly to school. The persistence of SMC members and community increased attendance from 35% to 66%. School's infrastructure facilities were improved due to pradhan's involvement. Teachers became motivated and started using activity-

based teaching methods. This encouraged villagers to transfer their children from private schools to government schools. There were 9 such transfers. Of these 4 are boys and 5 are girls.

The distribution of Mid-day-meals in schools is of serious concern in government school. Usually, the teachers' complaint that they are unable to teach the children since they are involved in its distribution. The quality time of the teachers are consumed in the management of the MDM distribution. The malpractices related to its distribution are a general feature found in schools. Here is a testimony of a school where community took charge of improving the mid-day meal system.

### **Community takes Charge of Distribution of Mid-Day Meals**

In Gilaula block of district Shrawasti, there is a school named Primary School Gilauli in Newariya NPRC. On dated 26th August 2016 open meeting was held with School Management Committee. Parents, Teachers and the School Management Committee members participated in the discussion. Several problems such as proper coordination between teacher and parents, between teacher and the students, between parents and their children, parents' trust on their children, their support to improve quality of education were identified in the meeting. It was decided and found out that the Mid-day-meal was the responsibility of teachers and they are supposed to check its regularity and quality. But the conventional thinking was discarded and the SMC took the hold in its own hands. Now the distribution of the MDM is the sole responsibility of the SMC members. They regularly come to monitor the quality, quantity and regularity of the food. They worked on the plan that a team of two or three SMC members depending on their availability would regularly visit the primary school in order to supervise its distribution. Now the quality has improved and the children are happy to eat the food provided.

SMC President Mr. Ram Sagar now continuously meets with all government functionaries and Gram Pradhan to ensure not only the MDM food but also the other key indicators of RTE compliant school.

### **Ensuring the Provision of No Denial of Admission under RTE**

Right to Education Act, 2009(RTE) has given the scopes and provision to children (6-14) who are lagging behind from education. Through this Act free and compulsory education is guaranteed for all 6-14 years of children but still children are there, who are not enjoying the benefits from the Act or on other side people are not aware about RTE. Dehat observed this in a school Hariharpurani where 5 girls were denied admission in admission in Satichoura Upper Primary School and Islamiya Primary School of this block. The reason was poor reading quality of the child, health and height issue etc. Teachers from these schools denied to enroll their name in school. When block level coordinator and other project staff meets with their parents came to know the problem and project representative (Dehat) explained about the provision under RTE Act 2009 and assured them for entire support in enrolling their children in government school. Block level

coordinator visited schools along with parents and children and enquired the reason behind not enrolling the children which was against RTE norms. After continuous effort under Muskaan project 4 children among 5 has enrolled in government schools and started their education and living happily with their parents. Madhuri and her parents are still waiting for getting enrollment in Government schools and Dehat colleague is regular trying and in touch with this children.

Children's detail which is being enrolled by the efforts of Dehat colleagues under Muskaan project is under the table:

S.NO.	CHILDREN NAME	MOTHER NAME	FATHER NAME	CLASS ENROLLED IN
1	Swati Sahu	AashaSahu	Siya ram Sahu	4
2	Mansi	AashaSahu	Siya ram Sahu	6
3	Neelam	Gudia	Ramkumar	6
4	Maduri	Ramadevi	LalluSahu	6
5	Mohini	Ramadevi	LalluSahu	1

## Balrampur

Balrampur has a literacy rate of 49.4%. Literacy amongst marginalized communities is as given: SC- 40.41 % and ST-50.81 %. There are 1543 primary schools and 662 upper primary schools. The highest enrollment rate was seen in OBCs- 138500 while the lowest in ST- 3995. Enrolment amongst is SC-49102, Muslims- 41309. The highest dropout rate is in ST- 16.6 % and Muslims- 17.7 %.

The findings of the baseline survey revealed that-

- 35.3% primary schools didn't have classrooms
- 54.2 % primary schools didn't have a boundary wall
- toilet facilities do not exist in 43% schools
- 74% of the existing toilets do not function
- SMC meetings in 78% schools have never been held
- In 92% upper primary schools Meena Manch has not been formed
- In 13% schools children cleaned toilets
- 44% school premises were cleaned by the students

Only 665 schools adhere to all the eight indicators/ norms under infrastructural facilities.

During the baseline survey the indicator on cleaning the toilet was specifically inserted to understand any discrimination in school on basis of caste against children. In Balrampur district, it was seen that children were cleaning the school premises. This was affecting the attendance as school did not offer much opportunity to study. It was a place to go and wait for teachers to take classes that seldom happened.



Though children were cleaning the school premises, it was not discriminatory on basis of caste. It was more to do with the practice of making children work rather than taking responsibility to teach them. This urged the Muskaan team to talk to the SMC at Baksariya Village School and the SMC agreed to call for a community meeting.

During the start of the project, the team realized that the SMC was formed in schools but the members did not know their roles and responsibilities. They considered the making of the School Development Plan as their only role and signing the cheques as their responsibility. This mindset took effort and energy to change. The school infrastructure required attention, the mid-day meal was not nutritious and irregular. There were problems related to its distribution as well.

Bhanga-Kalan primary school is one of the schools of Tulsipur block in Balrampur district. In this school the enrolment and attendance was very poor and MDM food was not regularly distributed to the children. Though the School Management Committees are supposed to monitor the functionality of elementary schools but here SMCs was non-functional before Muskaan intervention. SMC was unaware about its roles and responsibilities.

Block coordinator continuously engaged with the local community and the members of the SMC. During regular community meetings it was found that some children are enrolled both in private and in Bhanga-Kalan primary school and they occasionally visited primary school when there was distribution of dress and food. SMC member recognised those students and during meeting with community members it was decided that the name of such students should be cut from the primary school so that children from excluded communities should get a chance to avail the facilities of government schools. The SMC succeeded to engage, teachers, local community and Gram Pradhan to ensure this and names of those students have been removed from primary school and new children had been enrolled. The trend and the scenario have changed after Muskaan intervention.

Now the SMC members take initiatives and monitor the MDM quality and quantity. Now the distribution of the MDM is the sole responsibility of the SMC members. They regularly come to monitor the quality, quantity and regularity of the food. They worked on the plan that a team of two or three SMC members depending on their availability would regularly visit the primary school in order to supervise its distribution. Now the quality has improved and the children are happy to eat the food provided.

The project coordinator shared that the empowerment of the community to realize and act on their own was a critical step in developing string systems. He says that, "Our role was to tell them where do department officials sit, what is their time of meeting people and how do we approach. We also told them of people they need to approach. Then it was easy. The community and SMC members who could write would draft letters and submit. When they started getting response to their problems, they wrote more" (Source: Interview with the coordinator). That is how a system of posing problems and solving them for the school began.



### Local Authority being Informed of Roles and Responsibility

The SMC members as well as the pradhan of the village felt happy to come together to resolve the problem at school. The pradhan was happy to note that he had a role in the betterment of education status of their village. Parents were sending their kids nearby private school rather than government schools for lack of basic infrastructure, teachers and fixed schedule. In the community meeting Gram Pradhan sought support of the parents and SMC to make the school better. After conducting several meetings with SMC, teachers and parents success was achieved. Gram Pradhan took the initiative and called the sweeper and asked him to clean school premises on regular basis. Now children were happy and they attend school regularly. Parents felt happy to send their children in Baksariya primary school.

## Lucknow

Lucknow is peculiar for its position as a capital city and a politically active space where interventions have to be carefully planned with consent of political will. The baseline report showed Lucknow schools faring far better than the other districts in terms of enrolment, retention and facilities. The government schools in Lucknow had far more girls than boys due to the fact that the boys are mostly sent to private schools.

As far as status of basic services in schools is concerned, in 91% of the schools surveyed there was a separate room for principal, 45.5% schools had boundary as well as gate while the remaining had a boundary but the gate was missing. 82% school buildings were safe for all seasons. Ramp was installed in 64% of the schools, indicating that that infrastructure for differently-able children was present. 45.5% schools had separate toilets for boys and girls. Surprisingly, only 18% of the toilets were functional, 82% schools had drinking water facility, 91% of that being a hand-pump. 82% schools had water available all the time. 55% of the surveyed schools had a playground. Only 9% schools had a separate space for library with 18% having newspapers and magazines and 55% having books on different subjects. 55% schools had a book issuing system in place but a disheartening fact was that not a single school surveyed had story books in the library. As far as mid day meal is concerned, NGOs were providing it and 36% of the surveyed schools had proper and safe storing place for the mid-day meal.

The decrepit condition of infrastructural facilities (especially toilet) was one of the major factors in decreasing attendance, particularly in case of girls. Unavailability of toilet was one major problem in upper primary school Dona in Kakori block of Lucknow District. Due to this reason, the girl students either dropped out of school or their parents never sent them. SMC recognized this problem and organized a meeting with PRI members including pradhan in which the issue of toilet. Subsequently toilet was constructed and enrolments of girls increased in school.

## Increasing Enrolments by Improving Infrastructure

Mall is among one of 9 Blocks in district Lucknow. During the visit in the villages of Mall block, Ankur Yuva Chetna Shivir Staff member working under Muskaan project came to know through the community that in their village there are some children who are not going to school and some schools do not have proper boundary wall around the school campus as a result of which animals and unwanted elements affect the school environment adversely. In community meeting and parents workshop, Muskaan member discussed about the importance of education and free and compulsory education (according to RTE). In that meeting SMC president and pradhan were also present. After meeting SMCs assured that they would encourage children and parents for education. The SMC president motivated parents to send their children to school and as a consequence enrolled 15 children in school in the month of August. Simultaneously the pradhan took the initiative of repairing the boundary wall in 3 schools.

## Making Schools include the Disadvantaged Community

In primary school of Karauni village infrastructural facilities such as water and electricity were not available as per RTE norms. Our team sensitized the entire community by organizing several meetings in the village. In the meeting SMC president, the officials from the education department, teachers and Gram Pradhan were present. After meeting Pradhan and SMC members assured they would put all their efforts



to provide all the requisite facilities. The consistent small meetings with male and female SMC members proved to be the key changing agent and the desired results were visible in the primary school where the majority children belong to the excluded communities. The entire village thanked our team working there.



## Child Friendly School Motivates

Vineet Gupta, a 5 years old boy stays in Kakoli village of Chinhat block in Lucknow district. Vineet and his parents shifted from NOIDA to Lucknow a few months back in search of employment. Both his parents work as daily wage laborers. Vineet is enrolled in the nearby government run school but never attends the school on regular basis. On 12/01/2017 a community meeting in Primary school of Kakoli village was organized in which SMC and community members also participated. During the meeting, Md. Nasir, Training Coordinator of AYCS came to know about the story of Vineet from a community member. Md. Nasir with SMC members interacted with his parents to know reasons for his irregularity. His father shared that they work as daily wages worker. That they had to leave home early in search of employment therefore it is difficult for them to do regular monitoring of Vineet. Vineet did not want to go to school he used to stay with her grandmother. The School Management Committee took initiative and visited his house regularly to motivate him. After continuous counseling Vineet agreed to go school on regular basis. Now Vineet is regular students and he has many friends. The credit to this success undoubtedly goes to the local School Management Committee which continuously supported and motivated Vineet to attend the school on regular basis. The school has developed numerous advance facilities like activity based learning method adopted by teacher, regular school competition etc. With the help of SMC, Pradhan provided a submersible pump for the school for irrigating the school garden. SMC and school teachers collaboratively tried to make the school a joyful and learning place.



## Mirzapur

Mirzapur is known for its carpet industry. The population inhabiting this region are Gond, Musahar and Koli. This is a poverty afflicted zone and survives majorly on labor.

According to 1st Half Yearly Monitoring Report of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan for the State of Uttar Pradesh in 2014, it was noted that the primary schools were mostly within range of the habitations (57 out of 63 sampled habitations has primary schools within a range of 1 km).

As per the baseline report,

- The total enrollment in the sampled primary/upper primary



schools, classrooms were adequate in 15 (62.50 percent) primary schools and in 10 (76.92 percent) upper primary schools.

- Furniture was available in one primary school and in 3 upper primary schools.
- Ramp was required in 20 (83.33 percent) primary schools and in 10 (76.92 percent) upper primary schools.
- Separate toilets for boys and girls were available in 13 schools. Drinking water facility was available in 20 primary schools.
- As per the baseline survey conducted under the Muskaan project, student teacher ratio was 44:1.
- The number of enrolment for boys and girls are proportionately equal.
- 38% of toilets had no water facility.

The major interventions in Mirzapur were with respect to formation of Meena Manch where it was not constituted, reducing the pupil-teacher ratio, making water facility available in toilets.

## SMC Establishment for Betterment of Community

Aghauli is one of the remotest villages of district Mirzapur. It is a part of city block. The primary occupation of the people is to work as carpet worker. Carpet industry has predominantly and extensively been prevalent in this region. The majority of the population subsides on this industry. The villagers are socially marginalized, economically crippled, and politically excluded. Their cognizance as a voter is generally taken in to account when the elections are held.

Aghauli is in acute crisis. Aghauli is unheard, unattended thus under nourished. In primary school of Aghauli village SMC was not formed as per RTE norms and teacher on their formed the SMC. Muskaan team sensitized the entire community by organizing several meetings in the village and aware them about the SMC formation which was mandatory in every school of U.P. as per the Education Department. After this the community members noticed that SMC has been formed by the teacher of their own without the involvement of community members. They brought his to the notice of Muskaan team. The team sensitized the community to write an application regarding this BSA office. On 22.07.2016 a written petition was submitted by the SMC and community members. On 23 July a team from BSA office came to the village and SMC election was conducted again in front of Community and SMC members. The entire village thanked the Muskaan team not only for changing the scenario but also for upholding the dreams and aspirations of their children.





## Being Sensitive to Community Issues and making them Partners

Kodwari is one of the remotest villages of district Mirzapur. It is a part of Rajgarh block, the largest among all the twelve blocks of the district. The total population of this tribal village is 1150. Gond tribes are the original inhabitants in this village. No other caste or tribe is found in this village. The primary occupation of the tribal people is to work as mason worker. Rock cutting industry has

predominantly and extensively been prevalent in this region. The majority of the population subsides on this industry. The villagers are socially marginalized, economically crippled, and politically excluded. Their cognizance as a voter is generally taken in to account when the elections are held. Prathmik Pathshala, Kodwari is the sole educational hub in this village. More significantly, the Pathshala having enrollment of 250 children is without any regular teacher.



The sole Shiksha Mitra in the school expressed his helplessness and found none as responsible for this mismanagement.

The village Head of Kodwari Seeta Devi was also present in the community meeting. The president of the SMC Surshyam and Vice-president Rajkumari were also present in the meeting. The women members of the Gond community actively participated and put their suggestions forward for the betterment of school as well as the future of their children.

Muskaan team sensitized the entire Gond community by organizing several meetings in the village. The community stood alone and registered their complaints to the Basic Shiksha Adhikari (BSA). The meetings with the community were held in the hot summer months of May and June. After relentless efforts a consensus was built and the Gond community went to meet the BSA at district Headquarter at Mirzapur. The BSA promised to depute two regular teachers in the Primary School. As a result of consistent efforts, the month of July came not as a surprise to the community because not only two regular teachers were permanently deputed but also the enrollment of children increased in the Primary School.

With an increased number of schools, teachers and awareness of the Right to Education, more number of girls and children from musahar jati (dalit) started enrolling in school. Before the project, the musahars were a relatively closed community. They were afraid of interacting with the community. Regular meetings and improvements in accessibility helped them enroll in school. The schools now have a mix of gond, musahar and koli children. The community interactions have



helped mixing of people and it has had a positive bearing. There are no visible signs of discrimination within the school.

Another powerful impact of the Muskaan Project was in relation to girl education. The Meena Manch in this district was active and empowering.

## **Meena Manch-empowered girls**

Girls had a platform for educating themselves on gender, sex and adolescent issues. They realized that education gives them empowerment to speak and to question. When it started, the coordinator realized that teachers do not discuss adolescent health issues in class. They even distribute the sanitary napkin as if it were something awful. They never discussed how to use it, discard it and even how to take care of one's hygiene. This was discussed during the Meena Manch sessions. The sessions also talked about mental health concerns during this phase. The girls came to know that they should not get married till the age of 18 years. Most of the girls in the villages got married at the age of 14 years. Pinky from Kudi village in Rajgarh block, who attends Meena Manch, refused to marry before 18 years. She could delay her marriage stating she wanted to study. Her parents insisted she get married at 16 years but she negotiated that she would go to her husband's family only once she turns 18 years as that is the legal age to marry. (Source: Interview with Coordinator of Mirzapur)

## **Collaboration of departments**

The Project team, after consultations with the parents and community came to realize that the children were sent to work as laborer to meet the day-today expenses. A lot of families were the victims of bacterial infection aroused due to TB and it affected the major population due to extreme poverty. They could not access government schemes like MGNREGA and the local landowners and money lenders exploited their condition. They gave the poor people advance to run their homes and made them work for lesser wages due to which the families remained in poverty. Their illiteracy added to their woes as they could not access many government schemes. The project team decided to converge educational and livelihood issues. They collaborated with the Labor Department to offer employment to the parents so the children could get enrolled in schools. They even shared the wage differences between an educated and non-educated person. Thus, they were encouraged to send their children to regularly attend the schools. (Source: Interview with Coordinator of Sonebhadra)

# CONCLUSION

It goes without saying that if the members of the SMCs are strengthened on the lines of the RTE provisioning and the members of the Panchayat are involved actively, it may be obviously proposed that we may witness rapid changes in the functioning of elementary schools. More importantly, it requires a little investment. It is also learnt that the project has witnessed dynamic shift as compared to its findings under the base line study. Muskaan ensured maximum enrolments, retention and transition of the children with a special focus to the excluded sections of the society. Out of 1464 schools through intervention of Muskaan, a total 3420 out-of-school children have been enrolled in various primary and upper primary schools including the Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya.

The scarcity and abundance of teachers in elementary schools of Uttar Pradesh was a major hindrance in ensuring quality education to the children. Through the community demand and initiatives 102 teachers have been rationalised to meet the adequate pupil-teacher ratio (PTR) as per the Right to Education Act, 2009.


The project has also witnessed a meteoric rise in the functionality of the SMCs since its re-constitution. It has been able to conscientise the other members of the SMCs from non-project locations. There was a dearth of appropriate infrastructural facilities in the government run elementary schools. Not only this, the monitoring of these facilities too was an obstacle found generally. Through consistent strategic approaches and networks with key stakeholders such as parents, the Panchayat, members of the School Management Committees, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), Community Based Organizations (CBOs), teachers and the Education Department the various infrastructural facilities for instance-boundary walls, ramps for the disabled children, separate toilets for boys and girls, clean drinking water facilities, kitchen sheds, kitchen gardens, playgrounds and libraries etc. have been established within fourteen months drive of Muskaan intervention.

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