

Ensuring Right to Education with Equity for Children in Bihar

Annual Report

September 2021 – August 2022



Submitted to:

UNICEF

Submitted by:

Mashal

Contents

Background	3
Progress and Results Achieved	4
Period 1: September to December 2021	4
Program Output 1: E-learning facilitated for students aged 06-18 in 45 Centres	4
Program Output 2: Learning is facilitated for OOSC and school-going children in the Non-residential Bridge Course Centres in 15 hamlets	5
Program Output 3: Parents and elders participate in the awareness creation seminars on the value of girl children and the importance of their higher education	6
Program Output 4: Parents participate in the interface meeting with the NRST team and strengthen "transitional schooling"	7
Program Output 5: Mothers/parents & community members participate in training in social security schemes and income generation programmes	9
Program Output 6: Flood Preparedness Training	9
Celebration of Events	10
Period 2: June to August 2022	12
Program Output – 1: Increased proficiency of children in foundational literacy and numeracy and out-of-school children from the most marginalized Mahadalit committees mainstreamed into formal school	12
Program Output – 2: Adolescent girls have increased understanding in life skills and can access various skill-oriented courses, financial literacy, career-focused web platforms and social security schemes	13
Program Output – 3: Parental engagement strengthened and positive behaviours demonstrated for promoting the value of girl child including their education and access to various social protection schemes.	15
Program Output – 4: Enhanced understanding of men and boys on violence against women and girls (VAWG) and gender equity.	15
Program Output – 5: SMCs of 30 primary schools strengthened and parents and teachers collaborate to ensure retention of children in schools and improve the quality of education, through interface meetings conducted in every project village	17
Celebration of Events	18
Human Interest Stories	19

Background

Bihar is one of the most backward and poverty-inflicted states in India. In 2020, it ranked lowest on Human Development Index¹. Be it the health indicators, economic indicators, or education indicators, the state lies at the bottom in the country. The situation is even grimmer when one considers the Dalit and Mahadalit communities (Scheduled Castes) of Bihar, who account for 15 percent of the state's total population². Of all the states, it is Bihar where the SC communities are faring most poorly in literacy. The literacy among the SCs in Bihar stands at just 48.65 percent³. It gets worse in the case of castes such as Musahar. The segment, however, that bears the major brunt is women belonging to Dalit and Mahadalit communities. If the state had to come out of this unfortunate illiteracy trap, it would be done by intervening through this segment. The Government in Bihar was taking several policy-level measures to address the issue of illiteracy, especially among the most oppressed. But in 2020, Covid struck, and the drive came to a standstill.

When in 2020, Covid took the world by storm and lockdowns were implemented, the governments came up with initiatives to broadcast the content through television and social media. Reaching the last mile, especially in a state like Bihar, where most people don't have television sets and smartphones, was not easy. Breaking the digital divide was posing a big challenge. In those tough times, UNICEF and its implementation partner Mashal came literally on board the bus to reach out to the poorest of the poor. UNICEF supported Mashal in implementing the project titled "Continuation of Learning and Mainstreaming out of School Students" in 15 villages of West Champaran and 30 villages of Sheikhpura districts.

Under the project, school-going children and those who were irregular, dropped out, and out of school were provided education through mobile learning Centres and Bridge Course Centres. The parents were engaged in promoting higher education of girls, interface meetings were held with service providers, events such as Children's Day and Teachers Day were celebrated, and training were provided for flood preparation. The New Delhi-based organization Language and Learning Foundation provided the teaching and learning material (TLM), and its staff trained the village-level animators to make them skilled at teaching using the TLMs. The project during this phase helped 1302 girls and 868 boys in the age group of 06 - 12 to attain basic literacy and numeracy and continue with the lessons taught online by BEPC through mobile learning centres. The final assessment showed that most of those who attended the Centres gained proficiency in reading and writing Hindi and doing basic Maths. The attendance at the centres and the schools also improved.

After a hiatus of 5 months, the second phase of the programme began in June 2022 to not only further the past accomplishments but also transition into enhancing the learning outcomes for children, especially girls, by equipping them with both digital and life skills. And therefore, position them to be role models for advancing the education agenda in

¹ A report in The Hindu newspaper (<https://www.thehindu.com/data/data-how-bihar-fares-in-various-socio-economic-indicators-compared-to-other-states/article32744361.ece>)

² Census of India 2011

³ Census of India 2011

the state. The project is being implemented in 30 villages in Sheikhpura district. In the first quarter of this phase, from June to August 2022, a strong foundation was laid by establishing the flexible learning centres (FLC) and forming clubs in 30 villages of Sheikhpura. The girls from the clubs were trained in life skills at the state-level workshops. Parents were sensitized about the value of the girl child and their education. Men and boys were engaged in making them understand the importance of gender equality. Interface meetings were held with the parents and teachers. Even important days such as Day against Child Labour and Independence Day were celebrated with the villagers to further propagate the idea of education and gender equality.

As the project aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all, its successful implementation is taking us towards the Sustainable Development Goal 4; Quality Education. Though all the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) are equally important, the SDG 4 is one of the most crucial ones because it positively affects other SDGs. Therefore, the staff is implementing the project with full conviction to bring the people of West Champaran and Sheikhpura out of the menace of poverty and realize their full potential.

Progress and Results Achieved

Period 1: September to December 2021

Program Output 1: E-learning facilitated for students aged 06-18 in 45 Centres

MLRCs (Mobile Learning Resource Centres) were vehicles that were furnished with a television, books, and TLM. They visited each village every 15 days for 4 hours. These mobile centres went to far-fetched areas where a facilitator played the video lessons on TV and explained the concepts to make the students learn when the schools were closed. Since the e-learning materials were engaging, the children could concentrate for a long time.

Challenges: Finding a suitable place to station the vehicles, gathering children during harvesting season, and conducting classes in the hamlets of Musahar communities were some of the challenges.

Achievements:

- 668 students (Girls - 442 and Boys - 226) in 15 hamlets of Nautan Block in the West Champaran district attended the MLRC classes.
- 1502 students (Girls - 860 and Boys - 642) in 30 hamlets attended the MLRC classes.



Program Output 2: Learning is facilitated for OOSC and school-going children in the Non-residential Bridge Course Centres in 15 hamlets

While some children were dropouts in the hamlets, others were irregular. A survey in 2018-19 showed that their knowledge of basic literacy and numeracy was deficient. One could find children enrolled in high school who could not even read and write, a significant reason cited as the cause of the high rate of dropout. Hence our first approach was to make children from age 06 to 12 years learn to read and write class 3 level Hindi and Maths.

The TLM developed by the Language and Learning Foundation (LLF) and village-based animators' training played a crucial role. The LLF also conducted assessments and gave timely guidance. The classes based on TLM were conducted in Bridge Course Centres in the morning and evening for 2 hours. Apart from the fun-based learning, the sessions also involved physical exercises, singing, and storytelling.

Supervisors, Project Coordinators, and Project Managers constantly monitored the centres, guided the animators to follow the methodology introduced by LLF, and took demo classes whenever possible. The monitoring team met with the parents regularly and encouraged them to send children regularly to the centres. District-wise WhatsApp groups of all the staff were created. The animators used to post photos and videos of the classes.

Achievements:

1. 653 (Girls - 430 and Boys- 223) OOSC, dropouts, regular and irregular students attended NRBCCs in 15 centres in West Champaran district.

2. 1203 (Girls - 696 and Boys - 507 and) OOSC, dropouts, regular and irregular students attended NRBCCs in 30 centres in Sheikhpura district.



Program Output 3: Parents and elders participate in the awareness creation seminars on the value of girl children and the importance of their higher education

The facilitator conducted awareness-building seminars on the value of girls, the importance of their education, and prevalent gender-based discriminatory practices at the end of the MLRC class. Motivational films such as Shiksha, Muskan, and Hath se Nikal Jana were shown after the MLRC program to make people understand the importance of higher education of girls. Apart from these discussions, facilitators held informative sessions on schemes such as Right to Education, Sukanya Samriddhi Yojana, Balika Samriddhi Yojana, Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, and discussed issues as grave as child marriage and child labour.

No. of Participants:

475 women and few men participated in West Champaran and 910 women and few men participated in Sheikhpura.

Outcome:

- Parents became aware of the importance of education, especially of girl children, adverse effects of illiteracy, child marriage, and child labour.
- Most mothers started sending children to the centers regularly and on time.
- About 600 girls who were not enrolled or had discontinued classes were readmitted or enrolled in schools.

- 24 girls who had dropped out after class 8th took admission in BBOSE and appeared in examinations.
- In the Gahiri village of West Champaran, illiterate mothers came forward to learn to read and write.
- In West Champaran, 17 girls were admitted to a residential school for Mahadalits run by Nari Gunjan in Danapur.



Program Output 4: Parents participate in the interface meeting with the NRST team and strengthen "transitional schooling"

The Interface Meetings were conducted during the October - December 2021 quarter in West Champaran and Sheikhpura districts.

Topics of Discussion: The subjects of discussion during the meeting were:

- Sharing information about NRST centres and motivating parents to send students regularly to the NRBCCs.
- Taking the help of the officials and representatives to address and resolve the issues that emerged at the centres.
- Opening the children's bank accounts so that the Government's money for scholarships, dress, books, and mid-day meals could be deposited directly into the account.
- Raising awareness about the Aadhar card among the parents of children who did not have it already and assisting them in applying for an Aadhar card for their children.

Participants: BEO, KRP, Govt. School Teachers/Headmaster/Principal, Tola Sewak, Vikas Mitra, Mukhiya, Ward Members, Anganwadi Sevika, ASHA, Core Committee Members, Parents of the children, and villagers participated in interface meetings.

Outcome

- The participants promised that they would get the students admitted or readmitted to the nearby schools and assured cooperation for the smooth functioning of the NRBCCs.
- Parents became aware of the roles and functions of officials and representatives in resolving the issues related to the education of their wards.
- Parents became aware of their children's right to education and were informed about the mechanism to access the Government's fund for dress, books, and other provisions.
- The officers provided clear information regarding the rules and regulations of bank accounts.
- The officials and representatives promised to help get the benefits of Govt. schemes to all the children.
- According to the project, ten girl children from every center had to be selected and admitted to the NRST centres operated at nearby schools. After the interface meeting, around 1000 girls were shortlisted to enrol in NRST Centres in West Champaran and Sheikhpura districts. Unfortunately, no centres were operational in the project areas. The girl children were then admitted to the nearby school under the back-to-school campaign.



Program Output 5: Mothers/parents & community members participate in training in social security schemes and income generation programmes

Most of the mothers were members of the Self-Help Groups (SHG) being animated by Mahila Shikshan Kendra in Sheikhpura and Pragati Rural Development Centre in West Champaran. Many of these women have also joined the women's development programme animated by Jeevika, supported by the Government of Bihar. The Project staff conducted animation sessions with the mothers to inform them about various schemes and disseminate information on how to apply and follow up to benefit from them.

Government schemes such as Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana, Ayushman Bharat Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana, Right to Education, Sukanya Samridhi Yojana, Balika Samridhi Yojana, Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, Atal Old age pension, scholarship for students, schemes for the promotion of rural livelihood activities, schemes available through NABARD, and Jeevika program were introduced to the women.

Outcome:

- Women became aware of the schemes, and some approached the concerned offices to avail them.
- The supervisors provided guidelines and helped the women fill out the application forms.
- 302 people got Job Cards and MNREGA in West Champaran.
- 138 mothers of students got Rs.12000/- each to buy goats under the Jeevika programme in West Champaran.
- 11 families got ration cards with which they could get free food in West Champaran.
- 156 mothers got engaged in income generation activities in Sheikhpura.

Participants: Mothers and a few youths of the communities.

Program Output 6: Flood Preparedness Training

North Bihar is a flood-prone area causing massive crop damage and affecting over 30 lakh population. Nautan Block of West Champaran is one of those Blocks that gets flooded every year. While most of the aspects of loss and destruction are covered by the media and Government, hardly any attention is paid to the effects the annual floods have on the physical and mental health of children.

To ensure the safety and wellbeing of children during floods, awareness creation training was conducted on 29 October in Bishambharpur and on 30 October in Shyampur Kotraha, of Nautan Block, West Champaran.

Participants: 77 women and 32 men in Bishambharpur and 97 women and 17 men in Shyampur Kotraha and ward members, Vikasmitra, school teachers, School Management Committee Members, and villagers attended the training.

Outcome:

- Villagers became aware of the preparedness during, after, and pre-flood situations and what safety measures must be adopted. They also learned about the roles and responsibilities of the Govt. officials and public representatives during floods.

Celebration of Events**1. Constitution Day:**

Constitution Day was observed at every center on 26 November to develop the spirit of patriotism and citizenship among the students. The children sang patriotic songs, gave speeches, and recited the Preamble of the Indian Constitution. They were made aware of the values enshrined in the Constitution.

2. Teacher's Day Celebration:

Teacher's day was celebrated in all the Centres to appreciate and honour the role played by the teachers in the students' lives. The programme commenced with prayers, introductions, and a speech on the life of Radhakrishnan. It was followed by dance, poem, slogan, and drawing competitions.

**3. Sports Activities:**

Sports day was conducted in all the Centres. It was indeed an occasion where the children and parents had fun. The games played were passing the ball, pot breaking, rope pulling,

running, chain race, sack race, spoon race, and many more. Winners of the competitions were awarded prizes.

Participants:

- 669 students (224 boys and 445 girls) in Nautan, West Champaran.
- 1019 students (439 boys and 580 girls) in Sheikhpura.

4. International Girl Child Day:

On International Girl Child Day, 11 October, the NRBCCs organized various activities to press for girls' rights and speak about the challenges they faced in society. The objective of the celebration was to increase awareness of the importance of girls' higher education, health, and nutrition. Some cultural programmes and speeches by children marked the occasion. The programme organized on the occasion increased awareness about gender inequality, and that gender equality can help create an equal future for girls. The programme shed light upon schemes such as "Beti Bachao Beti Padhao" to empower girls and end gender-based discrimination.

5. Literacy Day:

To draw the attention of the communities to the importance of being literate, Literacy Day was observed in September at all the centres. The students presented slogans and delivered speeches spreading the message to educate more and more people. The animators emphasized education as the foundation to build a sustainable future for all. They appealed to all the villagers to focus on achieving total literacy.

6. Children's Day:

Facilitators, Supervisors, and the programme coordinators greeted the children on this special day. The parents were reminded of their duty towards bringing up their wards to attain their potential. To highlight the day's importance, impressive and informative cultural programmes were organized under the animators' guidance.

On 13 November, Children's Day was celebrated on the campus of Mariya Ashram, Sheikhpura, with all the children and animators of all the 30 NRBCCs. The children from the centres presented cultural activities and made the day enjoyable and memorable for all.

Participants:

- At Nautan, West Champaran - 660 students (208 boys and 452 girls)
- At Sheikhpura - 1119 students (474 boys and 645 girls)

7. Academic Quiz:

An academic quiz was conducted in both districts. General knowledge questions from different subjects were used.

- At Nautan, West Champaran, 90 students (34 boys and 56 girls) won the quiz and were awarded prizes.
- At Sheikhpura, 450 students (178 boys and 272 girls) won the quiz and were awarded prizes.

Period 2: June to August 2022

Empowering Girls to Lead the Way for Education in Bihar

The project, initiated in June this year, was conceived as a response to the previous phase's learnings, challenges, and achievements. The current project's objectives, picked up from the way forward section of the report of the previous phase, are - ensuring that out-of-school children are provided with special learning assistance to get mainstreamed and retained in schools, bridging the digital divide among girls to ensure continued learning, engaging with mothers and community members to further the education agenda and sustaining positive behaviour change, and create a gender-equal and enabling environment for boys and fathers to encourage their female peers. This way, the project intends to build upon and sustain past accomplishments.

Program Output – 1: Increased proficiency of children in foundational literacy and numeracy and out-of-school children from the most marginalized Mahadalit committees mainstreamed into formal school.

Flexible learning centres were established in June in 30 intervention villages of Sheikhpura district. Through these centres, the primary goal was to enhance children's proficiency in foundational literacy and numeracy. In the same month, animators, based on experience and interviews, were appointed to the centres after a basic orientation. Apart from playing the role of community mobilizer, they were to help identify children aged 6-8 years who are not in school, irregular to school, or drop out, get them enrolled in the FLC, and then teach them to build their literacy and numeracy levels. 1200 students – 40 in each of the 30 centres – from Dalit and Mahadalit communities were identified and enrolled in the FLCs.

In July, TLM consisting of Hindi and Maths workbook prepared and provided by Language and Learning Foundation, notebook, pencil, eraser, and sharpener were distributed to all the 1200 students. A baseline assessment of all the students was conducted. The average score for 1200 students in basic Hindi reading writing came out to be 4.8 out of 60, while in maths, the average score is 7.5 out of 30. It was also found that there is a variation among students concerning their learning level and ability. When the animators started teaching the children, they realized that owing to this variation, they would be required to put in more effort to bring the students to the same level.

Achievements

1. Percentage of children (6-8 years) attending at least 75% of classes at the LCs

In July, 80 percent of 1200 students attended at least 75 percent of classes. There are three villages in which all the students attended more than 75 percent of classes, while in Bajidpur village, only 21 students out of 40 attended more than 75 percent of classes. When taking sex into account, the respective figures for girls and boys are 83 percent and 74 percent. In August, 953 students out of 1200 attended at least 75 percent of classes. In two villages, all the students had attended more than 75 percent classes. The percentage of girls and boys who attended at least 75 percent classes are 80 and 78 respectively.

2. Number of parents who actively participated in the functioning of FLCs

Meetings were taken with the parents and their viewpoints were heard. Most of the parents agreed about the importance of literacy for the children. The project staff and animators emphasized their role in educating their children and tried to make them understand the importance of their active participation in the functioning of FLCs. The number of parents who participated in the meetings held in June was 395.

3. Percentage of out-of-school children (6-8 years) mainstreamed into school

The process of getting the students enrolled in school has begun. The community mobilizers met with the principals of the schools to find out the requirements to get the students admitted. It was found that Aadhar card is mandatory for admissions and many of the students don't have them. Parents were given orientation about the importance of Aadhar cards for their children and were informed about the procedure to apply for Aadhar cards.



Program Output – 2: Adolescent girls have increased understanding in life skills and can access various skill-oriented courses, financial literacy, career-focused web platforms and social security schemes.

In this day and age, it is essential to have both life skills and digital skills. It is in this context that clubs were formed in 30 villages. The reason for choosing these villages was the felt requirement and demand of such activity in these villages. It also made sense from an operational point of view. The project staff and the facilitators identified and assessed the learning levels of the girls aged 9-14 years who would be the members of these clubs. The

girls who joined the club were not enrolled in FLCs as all of them already had the required level of proficiency. They have been trained in life skills. These girls also have access to tablets which have been provided to each of the clubs in the last week of August.

Achievements

1. Number of girls (9-14 years) provided with flexible learning opportunities and digital literacy and clubs formulated

478 girls were formed into 60 clubs in June. 40 clubs consisting of 312 girls were added in July. So, 790 girls from 30 villages of Sheikhpura will be trained in various financial and digital skills through the clubs once they receive the tablets. At present, the facilitators regularly conduct sessions with girls where they organize fun activities and discuss the subject topics taught in schools, basic details about computers and the internet, the importance of technology in the 21st century, and career opportunities.

2. Number of tablets distributed

A total of 115 tablets, were received in Sheikhpura in the last week of August, have been distributed among the clubs in the last week itself. The girls will now be given training on how to use the tablets.

3. Number of girls participated in the state-level workshop on life skill attributes

In July and August, 213 girls from 14 villages participated in a state-level workshop on life skills. They were trained in 8 batches. The 3-day workshop covered topics such as Understanding Self & Managing Emotions, Building Positive Attitude & Enhancing Self Esteem, Communication Skills & Relationship Building Skills, Social Media & Creative Thinking Skills, Goal setting Skills & Decision-Making Skills, Problem Solving Skills & Leadership Skills. Experts in life skills conducted the workshops. The workshops' activities were participatory and based on an experiential learning cycle. At the beginning of all the workshops, the girls were hesitant to open up. But as time progressed, they gained confidence and started participating.



Program Output – 3: Parental engagement strengthened and positive behaviours demonstrated for promoting the value of girl child including their education and access to various social protection schemes.

Often, girls are made to give up their education and get married at a young age. Lack of education and early marriage not only affects the mental and physical wellbeing of girls but harms the whole society. Hence meetings were held with the mothers to make them realize the importance of education, especially for girls. They were also informed about the social protection schemes of the Government and the ways through which they can avail the schemes.

Achievements

1. Number of mothers and fathers sensitized on the value of the girl child as well as the importance of education and made aware of livelihood options and social protection measures

In this quarter, 395 women were sensitized about the importance of a girl child, the role of education in their children's lives, and the harmful effects of child marriage.

Program Output – 4: Enhanced understanding of men and boys on violence against women and girls (VAWG) and gender equity.

Gender-based violence is still a widespread phenomenon in our society. It is vital to take preventive measures to stop this scourge. One way is to sensitize men and boys about the

issue through training of staff and meetings and campaigns among communities. A workshop was conducted with the project staff to build their capacity to deal with the communities on the issues related to gender.



Achievements

1. Number of men and boys who participated in the training to encourage gender equality

In August, gender sensitization training were conducted with 846 men in 24 villages. In 21 villages, Alka, a Ghaziabad-based external Gender Consultant and in the remaining three villages, the trained project staff facilitated the training. In all the training sessions, subject matter-based songs were sung to initiate the discussion. During the training, the participants were made to understand the different layers of gender discrimination, informed about how these discriminations arrest the growth and development of society, and equipped with ways to prepare to challenge the discriminatory practices. Training sessions were kept participatory and engaging by inviting their viewpoints, comments, or questions. At the end of the training, some community members said they became aware of many such issues that they never thought discriminatory. Umesh Paswan of village Pain said, “Girls are put to discrimination right from childhood. But now we need to change this.” Shiv Kumar of Village Gavay was more forthcoming. He said, “In our society, discrimination between girls and boys has been happening since times immemorial. We shall try to stop this. Through this meeting, all of us became aware of this fact. Such meetings should happen more often.”

2. Number of boys who pledge to delay their marriages to adulthood

During the training, men and boys were motivated to prevent early marriages. The boys were asked to come to the center to take a pledge to delay their marriages. A total of 60 boys from 30 villages took the pledge in August.

Program Output – 5: SMCs of 30 primary schools strengthened and parents and teachers collaborate to ensure retention of children in schools and improve the quality of education, through interface meetings conducted in every project village.

Interface meeting is a crucial component of the project. These meetings bring parents, teachers, elected village representatives, and government functionaries on the same platform where discussions are held on the quality of education in schools, retention of children, roles and functions of officials and representatives in resolving the issues in the context of the education of their wards.



Achievements

1. Number of Interface meetings held

During the quarter, interface meetings were held in 12 villages. The participants in the meetings, which facilitators of Mashal coordinated, include parents, teachers, public representatives, and government officials.

2. Number of parents (father and mother) and teachers participating in Interface meetings

A total of 483 people participated in the meetings held in 12 villages. They include 455 parents, 18 teachers, 8 public representatives, and 2 government officials.

Celebration of Events

1. World Day against Child Labour

The World Day against Child labour, which falls on 12 June every year, was run as a week-long campaign in 30 villages of Sheikhpura district. Children were the flag bearers in the campaign. With banners in hands and slogans on lips, these children covered every nook and corner of their village. A total of 771 children participated in the campaigns. Out of them, 379 were girls and 392 were boys. Some of the slogans raised by children are - 1). "Ham baccho ko padhana hae, Baal shram mitana hae". It means - we have to educate children and eradicate child labour. 2). "Ham baccho ka ek hi naara, padhne ka adhikar hamara". It translates into – we children have only one slogan that education is our right.

2. Independence Day

On 15 August this year, the whole country was celebrating 75 years of Independence. With equal enthusiasm, Independence Day was celebrated in 30 villages of the Sheikhpura district. During the celebration, the flag was hoisted and public representatives made speeches. The platform was used to build awareness about values such as freedom, citizenship, and, most importantly, why it is important for us to treat our fellow citizens equally, irrespective of their caste, creed, religion, and sex. 1528 villagers in 30 villages participated in these celebrations. Out of these, 960 were females and 568 were males.



Bridging the Gap for Neha

Neha, a 9-year-old girl from Abgil village of Sheikhpura district, comes from a poor Dalit family. Her father, Rampravesh Sao, is a migrant labourer who lives in a distant city to make ends meet. Mother works on farms on a daily wage basis. Neha's elder sister goes to school and her younger siblings need care at home when no one is around. Hence, Neha had to stay home during the day to look after the younger one. Demota, a project staff in Mashal, found out about it through one of her acquaintances in the village. She reached out to Neha's mother to convince her to send Neha to Bridge Course Centre, which UNICEF funds. Interface meetings were held to which she was also invited. She listened to the teachers and representatives talk about the importance of education. She was still apprehensive about enrolling her daughter in the center, but after days of deliberation, she gave in. When Neha joined the center, she did not even know how to read and write. At the center, she learned the Hindi alphabet and started writing. The facilitator from Mashal helped Neha's mother get Neha admitted to the school. In Neha's life, the Bridge Course Centre proved to be a Bridge between illiteracy and the school.



Breaking the Brick-kiln Barrier

Kalyug Manjhi and Gorki Devi live with their five children in Firangibigha village of Sheikhpura district. Kalyug, for a long time now, is not keeping well and stays at home for most of the day. The responsibility of earning the bread, therefore, lies with Gorki Devi. She works in a brick kiln. Among all this, their children were bearing the brunt of poverty. Their daughter Chanchal used to go to school, but she dropped out when her father got ill. Chanchal's mother started taking her to the kiln where Chanchal was helping her mother with work. The ground team of Mashal convinced the mother not to take her daughter to the kiln. Chanchal was then enrolled in the Bridge Course Centre. According to Manju Devi, an animator of the center, Chanchal was a fast learner, and she liked studying. Within a short span, she learned to read and write words. It was now time to get her admitted to the school. Due to the fear of her dropping out again, the headmaster was not in favour of giving her admission. The animator then talked to the headmaster and assured him that Chanchal was not returning to the brick kiln. She regularly goes to school now, studies at home, and looks after her sick father.



Education is the only way out

Saurabh Kumar is a 9 year old boy from Girihinda village. He has 3 elder siblings. The household is very poor. His father is ill and bed-ridden and mother works in the farms as daily wage farm labourer. The house in which the family lives tells the whole story. The walls are made up of mud and straw and for roof, they have placed banners.



No one in the family is educated. Saurabh, although enrolled in class 3, was never a regular student. He could not even read and write. His mother one day while talking to Sonali, who is an animator based in the village, explained the whole situation and expressed her desire to get Saurabh educated. Sonali then told her about the flexible learning center. Her mother got Saurabh admitted in the center and since then Saurabh is a regular student. He can now read and write. He says that he wants to get educated to pull his family out of poverty.

It takes a fight sometimes

Kiran Kumari, a resident of Purankama village, is a 13 year old girl. She lives with her father Baudhu Manjhi, mother Sonkhi Devi, 4 sisters, and 2 brothers. The financial situation of the family is bad which led them to migrate to Punjab to work in brick kilns. The parents used to take their children along where they stayed for 8-9 months in a year. This hampered their education. Kiran had to leave her studies to accompany her parents. But after the lockdown due to Covid-19, the parents did not go back to brick kilns. Now, the father works as daily wage farm labourer and mother takes care of the home.

Kiran expressed her interest in studies to the mother but her mother refused to entertain her wish. Seeing other girls go to school, she cried to her mother, but to no avail. One day, when the animator and project staff at Mashal were doing a survey for Digital Learning Program in the village, they came to know about the plight of Kiran. They went to her house, explained the importance of education to her parents. Kiran was there, listening the whole

conversation. Her parents were still hesitant but this time Kiran was adamant about going to school. At last, her parents gave in. She got enrolled back in the school and is a regular student now. Recently, when Kiran found about the digital education program which is being funded by UNICEF, she requested the animator to make her also the part of the club. She attends the sessions regularly and also makes sure that all the girls in her club do so.



Conclusion

On behalf of the beneficiaries, Mashal team would like to express deep gratitude to Unicef and to the donors for the generous support that has enabled the boys and girls of the marginalized communities to look at a brighter tomorrow.

Thank you,

Prepared and submitted by Mashal Team, Patna, Bihar